

# Daddy's Babies

## Fasmine's Story



Rosa Mink

*Daddy's Babies*

*Jasmine's Story*

Rosa Mink

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Rosa Mink

Visit me on Facebook and Instagram, or email me at [rosaminkwriting@gmail.com](mailto:rosaminkwriting@gmail.com)

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# *Chapter 1*

## *Jasmine*

The little jingle of the bell tells me someone is here, and I slip out of my office and towards the showroom space. I have sections set up that honestly, makes it seem like we're a home furnishing shop, but that is not my forte. It does happen to be my sister-in-law Serena's though, so the space looks amazing even without the party additions I add and rotate through the spaces to give people an idea of what something might look like before they book me.

I love my job. Honestly, I can't believe I get to do this as a job—get paid to do this because I'd seriously do it for free. Hell, I do do it for free for my family and a few charities that we love and support.

I have a few people that work for me just in the showroom, but one called in sick today and the other had to leave to pick up her kids from school, so it's just me today. The rest of my staff are more part-time helpers for when we set up a space, or a few that work from home, to locate and order items, find new spaces that fit clients' requests, or come up with new ideas to offer. Things that can be done on their timetable from anywhere rather than here in the office.

I've only been in business a little over two years. After graduating from college, I didn't know what I wanted to do. Instead, I helped out some at Cartwrights, my family's construction company. Well, it started out as just a construction company by our dad, but it's now turned into a huge corporation. So much so that it takes four of my older siblings to run it.

My brother Jesse is the Chief Executive Officer of Operations while our oldest sister Julie is Chief Executive Officer of Construction Projects. Jude is the Chief Operating Officer and Johnnie is the Chief Financial Officer.

They're not the only ones in the family that work there though. My older brother Joe is one of the in-house architects for that newer branch of services, while Jamison is now designing furnishings. He's my twin so while the others might not like me to admit it, he's my favorite brother.

He designs not only his own stuff but has also been working with Julie's wife Serena to create models for some of her new furniture items. She's started to incorporate more furniture into the company's most popular home décor line under her name, in addition to creating interior designs for clients. So yeah, it's for sure a family business.

It brings in more money than ever, so my siblings have no issues with raising their families. All of my older siblings are married except for Joe, and that's saying something since there's a total of thirteen of us. Seven are older than Jamison and me while the other four are younger. Jamison and I will be twenty-five in a few weeks but neither of us are married or even dating right now.

Our family was already big but add in all the babies that have been added to it over the years, and it's grown massively. My first sibling got married just a few months after Mom had Jillian, on Dad's sixtieth birthday. It wasn't any surprise that Jackie and Ethan had their oldest Andra soon after. She'll be seventeen just before Jillian turns eighteen in May.

The newest additions to the family are Jesse and Maddie's little Tessa, along with Jude and Eden's twins—Elsee and Everlee. They'll all be turning one this summer.

I think it's hilarious that out of all of my brothers, Jude currently has the biggest family. Okay, it might only be because he and Eden are raising her quadruplet brothers and sister as theirs. Her Mom died from complications due to a car accident which led to them being born that day. Eden was doing her best to support all of them with just the insurance money and met Jude when she went to the health club he secretly owned to find the babies father.

We were all shocked when Mom told us that the babies Eden was carrying were Jude's when he found her back. She was staying in a house the company owned after saving Maddie from a scary fall outside the doctor's office. Jesse found her being illegally evicted and moved her into the house and Mom instantly was there to help with the babies.

Jude stopped by one day to drop off diapers and Emma latched onto him, kind of like how Julie latched onto Mom when she first met Dad. I think it's sweet that he already was bonding with the babies before Eden was even there, so the second he found her back, he tied her to him.

Even knowing they would soon have six babies with the twins on the way, he wouldn't let her go. I think that's what's most shocking to everyone. Jude was adamant that he wasn't getting married and having kids until Eden and the babies came into his life.

That's what I want but haven't found...not with any of the guys I've dated. There's never been this just knowing that they're meant for me feeling it seems the rest of my siblings, at least those that are married, have experienced.

Hell, even Jennie and Troy were pretty instant and she's the least like the rest of us. I didn't really deal with her during her apparent worst phase, Jackie and Julie had to deal with that. Mom said it was just because Jennie felt left out. Julie was her first baby, even though Jennie was the first one she carried, and so much like Dad that Jennie felt Mom loved her more out of the girls. Jackie is Mom's mini-me entirely, so in Jennie's mind, Dad doted on her and loved her more.

Then came the four oldest boys, but of course she was still the 'middle' child in her mind and ignored. I don't get how she ever thought that because even with us younger ones, Mom's never made us feel left out or ignored, or simply not special.

Jennie and I aren't close. Not the way I am with Jackie and Julie. Part of it is the age difference. She was almost fourteen when we were born, out of the house in college when we were only in preschool, so I get it—somewhat. Julie was

going on sixteen and Jackie was twelve when we were born and they've never made us feel like they didn't love us, weren't going to be there for us. They were my big sisters and I loved how they treated me since the others were all boys.

Hell, I was surrounded by boys until Jaime was born. I was six so it was like I had a baby doll at home to play with, and then a little over a year later, Jillian rounded out the family, so I had another one to help Mom with. And the next year Jackie had Andra, and the year after that Abby. I love my nieces, and nephews of course, but being young when they were born, made them extra special to me.

Now, I have two brothers-in-law, Ethan and Troy, and four sisters-in-law, and I love all of them. I also love their kids and helping to plan birthday parties for them.

I'm actually helping Julie and Serena come up with ideas for their, fingers crossed, adoption day of Grace and Matt. They've been fostering them for almost two years now and have the actual paperwork filed to make them Cartwrights as well. They're just waiting on a court date at this point.

Anya, their adopted daughter, is four years younger than I am, she's in college still, a lot like I was, unsure what she wants to do afterwards, but Julie and Serena aren't pushing her to choose a major. They keep telling her if she needs to explore classes in different areas to find what speaks the most to her, then they'll gladly pay for them, and that is a hundred percent, my family.

She helps me out when she has free time, or with family parties, such as the one we're putting together for Serenity. She'll be ten at the beginning of June and she's been begging to have a spa day slumber party. We're still coming up with ideas for it since it's just over two months away still and have the time.

She of course wants her cousin Amelia to be there as well as friends from school, even if Amelia is a year younger than she is. They're both extremely girly, something Julie doesn't quite get so we love to tease her about it.



We throw a lot of parties, individual ones that may be more for just friends with the kids that are in school, along with others that are for family. If we did something for everyone's birthday, we'd likely spend half our time at parties, so Mom suggested several years ago that we do one party a month to celebrate that month's birthday people that's just for family rather than a normal family dinner. That way, no one feels they have to change their schedules to make it to every single party.

It's worked well since in total there's almost fifty of us. That's not including our aunt and uncle plus their kids. Heck, we also would have to count Ethan's sister Kathy if we counted them. They don't have any other family to celebrate with after their aunt died unexpectedly, so of course Mom counts her as ours. Including Kathy's husband and two kids. She met him through Ethan when she came to town for college, wanting to be closer.

Counting the fifteen of us, plus Ethan, Serena, Troy, Maddie, Carly, and Eden we're already at twenty-one. Add in the twenty-six, soon to be twenty-seven grandkids with Carly pregnant again, and we're nearly at fifty already. That doesn't include any of the future grandkids that might come from me or the other unmarried siblings, let alone the married ones like Jude that have said they're not finished just holding off for now.

Johnnie's over the moon with having another baby. Their oldest will be almost four when the new baby's here, twin boys that when together are little terrors, but in the best way.

I suppose if I had favorites when I was little, I definitely have favorites now when it comes to the new babies. Andra and Abby are more friends now than just nieces with them being teenagers. I love Tessa, Emma, Elsee, and Everlee to pieces, but Johnnie and Carly's little Ruthie has an extra special place in my heart.

She'll only be twenty-two months when the new baby arrives, but her personality is so adorable already. If you wake that poor girl from her nap, be prepared is all I can say.

It's not really that surprising that Ruthie's my favorite though, not with Carly being her mom. She was a year behind me in school, but we took English Lit together and she helped me power my way through it. I wasn't a rock star in school by far, but I did okay in everything except for English.

When we came home to meet Johnnie's new girlfriend, I was shocked to find Carly there, but so happy and glad that Johnnie helped keep her safe. I met her dad a couple times when I went over to her place to work on our term papers together, and he seemed slimy to me. Especially since Carly told me that he didn't like her going to other people's houses, which was why we always went to hers.

Seeing them together, it was clear that the Cartwrights definitely fell hard and fast. I really want to experience that for myself. I just feel like it'll never happen and it's making me hate being a romantic.

I turn the corner, my feet faltering a step finding the hottest man I've ever seen heading my way, his hand is wrapped around a little girl's, while my heart runs away from me.

*Holy shit...not like this*, I groan silently as my entire body tingles. I do not need to be attracted to a married man—a married *father* no less.

I love kids, want them, will take them however they come into my life, but really...this? I'm not a homewrecker—no matter how much I want to slip my hand into his free one and never let go suddenly.

## Chapter 2

### Adam

**B**ased on reviews, this place is the best at putting together parties, and that's what I desperately need. Cleo's tenth birthday is in a few weeks, and with everything's that's happened the last two years, I need to do something to make her happy.

I'm nowhere near to being a perfect parent. Shit, until five years ago, I barely even knew Cleo. She's my sister's daughter and we didn't have the best relationship. She lived out of town when she had Cleo. I was busy with the company here, so we didn't socialize much—at all really. I got the occasional photo or FaceTime, but that was really it.

Then I got a call from Marcy that changed everything. She was diagnosed with stomach cancer and our mother wasn't being helpful when it came to watching Cleo while she was having treatments. I offered for them to come stay with me, hired a nanny to also help out, which was a huge mistake.

After going through five in less than two years, we decided to just get a housekeeper who was older but could keep an eye on Cleo when she got home from school if Marcy wasn't feeling well or was at the hospital.

Two years ago in January, she passed away, leaving guardianship of Cleo to me. Her father ran for the hills the second Marcy told him she was pregnant, so there was no one else to take her. Our mother wasn't the warm and caring sort, so her taking in a heartbroken seven-year-old was not going to happen.

I haven't spoken to or seen the woman since I came back to town almost sixteen years ago, taking over Thompson Manufacturing when my father passed away. I'd just finished college, hadn't intended to even take a job at the company, but when my father died, I was worried what would happen to everyone else that worked there.

My parents had an awful relationship. They were both cold, with each other, with me and Marcy, and I never wanted that type of relationship.

I was thirteen when they divorced after my father's umpteenth affair. It wasn't his first by a longshot, but it was the first that my mother cared enough about to leave him over. I understood it back then. He did cheat on her with the woman she thought was her best friend, the woman that'd been our godmother.

We left town and I rarely saw my father unless he came out to visit. Coming back here to his company, well, my mother felt that was a betrayal and cut off contact with me.

I said the hell with it and dove headfirst into the job, determined to do better than my father if I ever met a woman I could see myself with at balancing work and family. Coming up on sixteen years later now and I'm still single, haven't met a single woman that I'd want to take out more than once, let alone bring into Cleo's life.

I love that little girl more than anything, would love to be able to be the parent she needs, but I don't have a clue how to do it. I'm failing epically hence us coming to *Celebrations by Jas*.

My sweet niece has been moping around ever since she learnt she wasn't invited to any of the birthday parties for the girls in her class. I guess they were talking about one that just happened while having indoor recess because of the rain on Monday, and she overheard all of the girls going on and on about how fun it was. Which prompted one of the others to say her party this coming weekend was going to be even better.

I hate that Cleo's being left out, especially being the only one that's left out. I guess that's what I get for not showing up to any of their class events, letting the other parents know I'm the Thompson of Thompson Manufacturing and Cleo is mine now.

I'm sure a lot of them would gravitate towards her if I pulled that card, but I know how fake those people can be, and

don't want Cleo to deal with that either. At this point, I'm wondering if sending her to another private school would be better for next year.

I paid for her to attend a private preschool and grade school up until the end of last year. There was an issue with a woman there that the staff wasn't doing anything to resolve, making Cleo scared to even go to school.

How they could let that woman continue to volunteer when she was scaring Cleo I can't begin to understand. And the police...they were no help whatsoever. One of them threatened me with a restraining order if I spoke to the nut again even.

I sat Cleo down at the end of the year, asking if she wanted to go to a different school for fourth grade. She threw herself into my arms, hugging my neck so tight I thought she was going to hurt her arms. Her yes and the tears were all it took, and I had the ball rolling to get her into the public school when she said she didn't want to wear another uniform.

It was Marcy that'd wanted her to go to a private school, so I did what a good uncle who could afford it would do and paid for it to comfort my sister. Cleo's safety and wellbeing are more important than Marcy's desires for a private education, and in this instance, the public school was safer than the private with that woman freely walking around it.

Cleo's eyes widen as I push open the door, a smile I haven't seen in a while on her face as she looks around what at first glance, looks like a furniture showroom. Upon closer inspection, I can see the spaces are set up to resemble rooms decorated for parties, and I'm honestly impressed.

I glance around, looking for someone, then head towards the sign that says office when no one immediately comes out to meet us. A woman turns the corner, a smile on her face as she sees Cleo, and my heart nearly pounds out of my chest when she turns her attention over to me. She's the most gorgeous thing I've ever seen, and all of me wants to get to know her better.

She has the silkiest dark hair and as we draw closer, I can make out smoky gray eyes that I want to get lost within. Her lips sparkle with gloss and all I can think about is kissing it off, seeing if her plump lips swell more as I devour her mouth.

“Hi there, welcome. I’m Jasmine, how can I help you?” she asks, her smile not quite as bright my way as when she turns it towards Cleo, and I swear, I’m fucking jealous of a nine-year-old. I want her to smile just for me, not my niece.

“I’m Cleo, this is my Uncle Adam,” Cleo pipes up with before I can get myself under control enough to speak.

“Uncle Adam?” Jasmine says, her gaze flowing up to me, and all jealousy fades away as little flashes of delight fills her gorgeous eyes.

“Yes,” I manage to get out without sounding like a bullfrog somehow. “Cleo’s been stuck with just me the last two years.”

“I’m not stuck with you, Uncle Adam. I’d be stuck with Grandma if it weren’t for you,” she adds, warming my heart and I pull her into my side for a hug, as my eyes go back to Jasmine.

Her eyes are softer, her smile fuller as they meet mine, and I’m wholly relieved to see that I’m not alone in this interest. “Then I’d say we’re all happy you’ve got your Uncle Adam. So, what brings you all into my store today?”

“Your store? Oh, Jas—Jasmine,” I stupidly connect a hint too late as she nods. The blood is rushing to the wrong brain right now, making me more than a fraction slower than normal. “Then I guess we’re here to see you. Cleo’s birthday is in three weeks, April sixth. She’ll be turning ten. I realized I’ve been a bad uncle and missed doing anything for the last two and don’t want to make it three without doing something that Cleo will enjoy. I don’t have the first clue as to what that might be, which is why she’s here with me, nor do I know how to put together a party like this. I rarely attend anything beyond a business dinner and the extremely rare dinner party, and I’m pretty sure that won’t work on ten-year olds.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Jasmine agrees, giving me a beautiful laughing smile.

“I can really have a party?” Cleo asks and I nod, squatting down to see her better.

“I want you to know how special you are, honey. I thought we’d invite your whole class if you want, or maybe just the girls from your grade if you’d rather do something girly. I know the other girls haven’t been the nicest, but maybe they just need a chance to get to know you better,” I tell her, earning a hug that I love.

“Sounds like we’re going to be having an amazing party. I think I’m going to need some help from the birthday girl to get started though,” Jasmine states, when Cleo pulls back, looking up at her with the biggest smile I’ve seen in years.

“With what?” Cleo asks bouncing on her toes and I can’t help but smile seeing her slip her hand into Jasmine’s when she offers it to her.

“A theme to start,” Jasmine tells her, moving us towards the front left of the showroom. “Your Uncle Adam will have to help me with some of the rest, so why don’t we sit him down here,” she suggests, leading us into a cozy space that has comfy chairs and a couch set up, but isn’t decorated beyond some spring décor.

She opens the cabinet, taking out a tablet with a grin. “You can fill out your information here,” she tells me, handing it over. “I put in the date as the sixth already, but if you want to do it a different day, you can choose something else on the calendar. I don’t have anything scheduled that weekend currently and only a couple small parties the next, so we could always add in something there as well.”

I glance through the questions and see it’s easy stuff, budget, size, length, in-home or venue preferences. All things I can at least put guesses on even if we need to adjust later. “This I can handle.”

“Good, I’m going to take the star of the party with me to look at some ideas if that’s okay?” Jasmine asks me, and

Cleo's little head bobs so fast I'm worried it'll fall off in her excitement.

"If she gets too wild, just give me a holler."

"I have several nieces and nephews that are around or have been this age, we'll be fine," Jasmine assures me, and Cleo slips her hand into Jasmine's moving away with her easier than she's ever gone with someone new.

I shamelessly watch them go, my eyes on the sway of Jasmine's hips and the sweet curve of her backside making my cock pulse with awareness. I came in here to make my niece happy, but I know I'm the one that's going to end up the happiest. I fully intend to spend as much time with sweet Jasmine as I can and do my best to sway her into acting on the attraction flaring between us.

I'm hoping her tight smile at the beginning was just her being upset that I was likely taken. The look in her eyes when Cleo called me Uncle Adam was surprise. With how she behaved with Cleo, I'm hoping that's as far as it went. I can't possibly be with a woman that won't accept Cleo as part of my life and love her like I do.

I've never felt anything close to this before, and I don't want to lose it. Cleo and I are a package deal. I'm really hoping Jasmine can handle that.



## Chapter 3

### *Jasmine*

**H**oly crap. Thank you god, fate, the stars for aligning—whatever it was that brought Adam into my store. I seriously was about to cry with how much my heart was aching just looking at him. The way Cleo held his hand, looked at him like he was her hero...it reminds me of us girls and Dad.

I'm ninety-nine percent sure he's single. He said it was just him and Cleo, and surely if he was with someone and it was serious, he'd have her helping with this instead of coming here for it—or at least bring her along.

This is something parents should do as a family really. More often than not, it's the mom coming in, desperate for help because she can't pull off another birthday party on top of everything else she has to take care of on a daily basis.

I like being able to take some of that pressure off moms. I saw the way Mom handled a million things to make sure all of us were able to enjoy our birthdays, while not letting the others feel like they were being neglected or overlooked. Even with a housekeeper around to take care of the bigger things, it was still a lot to handle. The way Dad stepped up and helped with whatever was needed is what I want out of a relationship, let alone a marriage.

I take Cleo towards some of our kids party areas to look over them first, and my heart melts more when she doesn't just give them a momentary glance and go on. She studies them the way I did setting them up, before tilting her head, a thoughtful look on her face, or shaking her head at something before we move onto another.

I can see the thoughts bouncing through her head and move us into my favorite room of the store. It's a mini-library for basically every party theme we've put on, are working on,

or just thought up. The scrapbooks are massive, and I put several on the table to get us started.

“These are some ideas we haven’t fully put together yet, just preliminary things that we work on in our down time,” I tell Cleo before taking out my two favorite books of them. We sit there, going through them and the entire time, I can see ideas starting to come together inside her mind.

When I get to the Wonderland Tea Party Maze idea, the smile on her lips grows tenfold. “Do you like this one?”

“I like the maze but not really Wonderland,” she tells me a bit shyly.

“So what sort of maze would you like?” I ask, watching her mouth twitch to the side, serious thoughts flowing through her.

“I don’t know.”

“I promise, no matter what you say, I won’t laugh,” I tell her when it seems she’s hesitant to tell me.

“Well, Uncle Adam and I went to see the new Polly Adventure movie a couple weeks ago. I really liked it, but I don’t think I want it to be a character theme,” she admits, and I can’t stop my smile.

“What if we did Cleo’s Grand Adventure? We can create a maze to get to the treasure, that takes you through a jungle area, a desert, and a temple to find the treasure chest. We can fill it with goodies, chocolate coins, candy necklaces, rock candy for crystals, and ring pops for jewels,” I suggest, and the way her eyes light up, tells me I’m onto something.

“You’ve seen the movie?” Cleo asks excitedly and I give her a nod. “I loved it, especially the part where they found the mermaids.”

“What if we did a mermaid cake then? It doesn’t have to be an actual mermaid or even have a picture of one on it, but how about the colors swirled on it, or make the sides look like scales with the different colors?”

“Oohhh, that would be awesome,” she agrees, giggling happily with me.

“What would be awesome?” we both hear, turning towards the door in surprise to see Adam there. “I heard excitement coming from in here, so I thought I’d stop in and see what you lovely ladies were up to. I mean, you left me all alone out there,” he adds, and another giggle slips from me, drawing dark eyes my way.

The last thing in his gaze is anger. Oh no, it’s just hot, hungry need and for once, I want to indulge in it.

I take the tablet from his hand as he joins us at the table, seeing what I’d expected in the budget section. I’d usually roll my eyes at the word ‘unlimited’ but this time, it just warms my heart. Knowing that Adam is willing to spend whatever necessary to do something special for Cleo is amazing. That he can afford to doesn’t bother me in the least.

I’ve had more than one guy with money hit on me while we worked on a party for them, and I hated every last one of them. If Adam started blatantly hitting on me, I guarantee I’d be saying yes—likely to anything with the man, which is so not me.

“We were coming up with some ideas for Cleo’s Grand Adventure Party,” I tell him, enjoying the surprise that lights his eyes hearing that. “We were thinking about setting up the space as a maze, which would likely work better indoors than out,” I add seeing the spot where he lists outside at his place or a venue as preferable.

I can understand that. I hated when we had things at the house and people tried to go snooping around. Dad had the place set up specifically so one of the downstairs wings was just for that alone.

When Julie moved into the east wing, which was where events would take place, Dad put a door up to block off access to the upper floor. It’s where I’m living now, and even being in the same ‘house’ as my parents and younger siblings, I don’t see them every day. There’s a small kitchen in the east

wing originally set up for caterers to use during events, but I use it so I can eat and make what I want, when I want it.

Jamison was living in the room across the hall until he finished building his place. It's further out from even Mom and Dad's from the city center, in a wooded area. He had just enough room cleared to put in a driveway and security fence—a necessity considering some of the women that go after my brothers to get their hands on the Cartwright money. Then cleared some land for the house which Joe helped design while Jamison built all the cabinetry and furniture himself.

“I have a space in mind that should work, and it won't be outrageous in cost,” I offer, making his brow lift a hint which only makes me warmer.

“Doesn't matter how much it costs to me,” he says, and Cleo lets out a little giggle.

“Uncle Adam's house is huge. It used to be hid dad's house, but he had it...”

“Remodeled?” I offer seeing her trying to come up with the right word.

“Gutted and rebuilt,” Adam says, pulling my attention back to him. “I didn't want to live with the old memories of the house I grew up in. They weren't all pleasant. I'm happy with the way it turned out, especially with having Cleo with me now. I don't entertain from it much though, which is why I thought a venue might be better if we're doing something indoors that's not a sleepover or such.”

“I completely understand. The building I'm thinking about is actually one that I own. I had it built last year to help host events that were too large to fit elsewhere. We've hosted several charity events there so it should be able to handle a birthday party with ease. There's plenty of bathroom spaces, along with areas that we can set up for parents to stay and relax. I've got some ideas for a maze running through my head I'll need to get down on paper first, but I definitely think it's something we can handle even in just three weeks. Getting it all put together might take a bit longer than we'd have with

most venues and I wouldn't want to disrupt your home to do so either."

"Alright, that sounds perfect then," Adam says, looking to Cleo with a grin that's sweetly parental. "Did you think about who you want to invite to it, honey?"

"If we invite my whole grade maybe some of them will actually show," Cleo says, her lips turning downward, and it makes my heart hurt.

"We can do that, honey. I think even some of the boys might like to attend with as much fun as it sounds we'll be having," Adam tells her, and I smile as she gives him a hug. "I know it's been a change moving to a new school and not seeing your old friends as much. If you want to invite any of them, just let me know and I can send messages to their parents."

"They won't talk to me anymore, not since I said I didn't like Ms. Tina," Cleo says softly and the hard look that covers Adam's face tells me he's not just mad, he's pissed at the people hurting his little girl. She might not be his daughter, but she's his, and it just makes me want to be his even more.

"You changed schools this year?" I ask and Cleo nods, a bit of a smile coming back.

"I really like my teacher this year. Ms. Mason is really nice. I wish she were going to be my teacher next year too."

"Ms. Mason from Rickman Elementary?" I ask and she nods, making me smile. "My nephews Archer and Alex both had her and loved her. My niece is in Ms. Wallace's class this year. Serenity like her."

"Serenity's nice to me at lunch," Cleo states, her eyes brightening more. "The girls in my class don't like me though."

"They just don't know you, honey. Hopefully with this party they'll get to know you more and see how fun you are, and they should be inviting you to do things with them," Adam assures her, tugging on the end of her ponytail that's about to fall out.

“I agree with your Uncle Adam. They’ll be begging to come to this party and to be your friend afterwards, I’m sure,” I promise, giving them both a smile. “For now, how about we figure out the rest of what we want to do with the party and then I’ll get to work on those ideas. Hopefully I’ll have something worked up for you to see by Friday afternoon,” I add, and Cleo’s little smile is everything my heart needs.

I don’t bother telling them that most people see the words party by *Celebrations by Jas* and immediately accept, even if they didn’t want to originally. Most people know who I am when it comes to throwing parties, and the parents of Serenity’s classmates definitely do, so I know they’ll come regardless of how amazing the party is going to be.

“Sounds great,” Adam agrees, and we settle in, planning out the rest of the potential cake idea, food and snacks, and getting Cleo’s favorite colors to make sure the cake includes them.

“I will say I know a couple of the kids in Serenity’s class have food allergies, so I’ll include some allergy free versions for them as well for food and cake choices,” I tell Adam as Cleo skips ahead of us towards the door as they get ready to leave. “We’ve done the same with some of Serenity’s parties where the entire grade’s been invited, and we’ve never had an issue with the kids being upset with it.”

“I never even thought of that, so thank you for it. I put my cell number on the info sheet, if you need something, you can call or text me. For anything,” Adam adds stopping us a few feet away from Cleo. “If I’m not reading things right, you can tell me, but to me it feels like there’s something going on here. Cleo is the only thing besides work in my life right now, but I wouldn’t mind if there weren’t more with the right person.”

“I feel the same,” I admit, smiling more when his deep green eyes sparkle, lighting up, making my heart flutter. “I didn’t want to feel this way when I thought you were married, but now...I’d like to see you again for sure.”

“Somewhere we’re not talking about work or my niece’s party?” he asks, and I nod, my eyes fluttering shut when he slips a piece of hair back behind my ear. “Are you free Saturday night? I’ll see if I can find a sitter and we could go out to dinner, see if we still feel the same?”

“I’d like that,” I agree, giving him a grin. “I’ll text you, so you have my number.”

“I’d kiss those tempting lips, but I don’t want my niece looking on for the first time,” he whispers before stepping away and over to Cleo. The look he gives me as he slides through the door wraps me in a wave of warmth, and I never want to forget it, or this. Not ever.

## Chapter 4

### Adam

The ding of my phone brings my attention straight down to it. I can't fight the grin that hits seeing it's Jasmine. I swear my heart was going to jump out of my chest when I got the first one from her. I felt like a teenage boy asking their crush out when I threw caution to the wind and asked if there was any way she was feeling what I was Wednesday when I met her.

It seemed like a million hours went past before she said she felt it too, confirmed that her reaction to me at first was thinking I was married. Hell, if the shoes were reversed, I'd have been ready to murder someone, so the only man alive that knew how heavenly her kiss, let alone anything else was, was me.

Shit, I'm still tempted to track down every last man she's seen to take them out for even getting to spend time with her.

Warmth floods me seeing the message that Jasmine has plans to show to us and I shoot back one telling her we'll be there after I pick Cleo up from school. She's been going on and on about Jasmine as well, even with spending barely an hour with her. It seems she knows as well as I do that Jasmine belongs with us.

I watch the clock move slowly until I can leave the office without looking like I'm slacking off. I've prided myself with being one of the crew. I know every job in this company, done most of them myself at some point to help out, so the last thing I want is anyone thinking that just because I've made this place more profitable than my father ever did, that I'm better than them now.

I'm not. I wouldn't be anywhere close to where I am without them, and to show them that, every employees gets a percentage of the company's profits after a two-year investment period. Some of the positions take a bit longer to



train and get up to quota than others, and it can cause turnover, which only slows us down further.

It doesn't usually take too long to get new employees in here to start training them when it happens, it's just the hassle of losing those months of investment. That's what had me choosing the two-year marker to have employees earning their percentage.

Although, if we make the upcoming deal with Cartwright Construction to manufacture the hardware for the new furniture line they're starting, I'm looking at needing to hire on a third shift rather than just the current two that work for me. Hell, if they choose to let us handle the production of their ready-to-assemble furniture entirely, I'll need another building to use for storage.

I have the machinery to handle it all, just not the staff and space to hold the inventory prior to shipping it this second. It's all in the proposal I finished this morning, ready for the meeting next week. I'm looking forward to it, but not nearly as much as seeing Jasmine again.

Cleo's face lights up when I tell her we're going to stop by to see Jasmine before heading home. I know she's down that the other girls in her class are going to some party tomorrow, so hopefully, this will make her feel better. I already intend to take her to see a new movie after brunch, which will still give me plenty of time to take Jasmine out to dinner.

The second I open the door, Cleo takes off towards Jasmine who's talking to another woman. She doesn't begin to scold or ignore her, instead she kneels down, still talking to the woman before giving Cleo a hug in return. It hits me right in heart seeing that.

Even before Marcy got sick to the point that she had no energy to do things, she was never like this with her. Hell, she reminded me more of Mom than anything with some of the ways she's shoo Cleo away if something more 'important' was happening. Jasmine is nothing like that, and it amps up my desire for her immensely. I'd love to be able to rush over to

her, have her arms wrap around and hold me the way she is with my niece.

I guess I didn't realize until now how starved for affection I've been. From the day Cleo came into my home, she's given me little hugs. At first, I think it was because Marcy told her to do it to be socially polite, but now, they're real hugs.

With everything that happened with that Tina woman, I made sure Cleo knew she didn't have to hug anyone she didn't want, as well as that she didn't have to let others touch her even in a friendly way, like with a touch to the hand or shoulder, unless she wanted them to. Or if someone tried to touch her in any other way, she was allowed to scream and fight and I'd never punish her for it, regardless of what the school policy said.

If someone hurts my girl, they'll pay. And I'm pretty sure that now applies to Jasmine as well with the way these feelings are hitting me.

"Hi there," Jasmine says as I reach them, her hand resting on Cleo's arm, keeping her close.

"Hi," I reply, my eyes sliding over to the other woman who's giving Jasmine a huge grin.

"Adam, Cleo, this is Tonya. She works here with me so if you stop in, you'll likely see her around," Jasmine states, introducing us before showing us to the side room again. There's a table in the back of it that's full of items and she leads us straight to it, looking as excited as Cleo is, and I love it. Fuck it...I love these girls.

I knew I loved Cleo with everything inside me, but Jasmine somehow snuck her way in there and I can't imagine not having her as part of my life after this party.

"Let me make some room," Jasmine says, stacking a few things to give us all room to sit around the end of the table.

Cleo climbs onto the far seat, and Jasmine sits next to her, leaving me the last one, but I don't mind in the least being able to sit next to her. In fact, it's the best seating arrangement ever I think.

“Okay, so this is the idea I came up with for the maze,” Jasmine tells Cleo before opening a tablet to an illustration of what looks like a regular door. She flips to the next one and it looks like one of the rooms in the shop, just scaled down much more. There’s a treasure map on the table though, and it points them towards another door that’s marked off with ‘caution under construction’ tape.

Cleo’s excitement grows with every scroll of Jasmine’s finger through the illustrations, and no matter how much it costs, I’ll make sure that they can make it happen. Hell, even if only two other kids show up, Cleo will be happy enough with it by herself to make it worth it.

“Oh my gosh, it’s so cool,” Cleo gushes when the ‘waterfall’ is revealed to be a doorway to the area that’s set up with the cake and food. “What if people get bored with the maze though.”

“It shouldn’t take anyone that long to get through it, but I thought we’d put in ‘magic’ entrances and exits to each area that’ll be shown on the maps. That way if someone gets tired or lost in it, all they have to do is find the magic exit to get back to the main area. Those magic exits will also allow anyone to go back and enjoy a space again if they want as well,” Jasmine explains, and I nod in amazement at her creativity. “Each area will have a little fun activity they can do within them. I thought the jungle area we could do a monkey bar. The floor will be covered with gym type mats throughout to make sure no one gets hurt,” she adds to me.

“Smart.”

“Yup, and there will be a monitor character in each space. Jungle explorer, desert traveler, mountain guide, and temple guardian to keep an eye on them as well,” she says and damn if this girl doesn’t think of everything.

“Do you really think you can get all this done in three weeks?” I ask her quietly while Cleo looks at the ‘camel ride’ idea Jasmine thought would work well for the desert area. The little mountain wall the kids can climb will be great, and it leads to a slide into the temple that is certain to get plenty of

use. There's hidden little spots to crawl through to get in and out of the temple's treasure room, and damn, if I were a kid, I'd love this.

"Yeah, I have plenty of help that will get it done. Plus if parents see that their kids are burning up energy, they won't argue nearly as much about the treats and cake. They can also send them back through the play areas if they want to wear them down more before going home as well. Since it's my building, there's no time limits or need to get everything taken down quickly to rush them out."

"You're amazing," I state, lifting her chin up a bit more to see her eyes are a glittering silver twinkle today but a hint of that stormy desire is pushing in on the edges, and I love both equally. Seeing her joy and cheerfulness makes me feel good but knowing that she's also feeling this intensity that's rushing between us, makes me want to feel even better.

"Thank you. This has been one of my favorite ideas to put together. I had to scale this back big time because what I saw in my head pretty much rivaled a movie. Remembering Cleo's eyes lighting up as we talked about things made it really hard to pull back, so I hope you don't think it's too over the top," she says, her eyes the tiniest bit worried and I shake my head no at her.

"Not at all, she'll love every bit of it. I take it that these are some of the things you've got to use," I add nodding towards the stacks that Cleo was happily digging through.

"They are ideas I had to use for it, yes," she says, before explaining what she thought where they might be most useful in to me and Cleo.

"This is going to be so awesome, Miss Jasmine. I love it. Thank you," Cleo gushes as we get ready to leave.

"You're welcome, sweetie. I want you to have the best day ever. Between you and me, I think people with April birthdays are the best," she adds with a wink to Cleo that makes my brow lift curiously.

“We are,” Cleo agrees with her, laughing happily as she heads for the exit, a skip in her step that I love seeing.

“What’s that about April birthdays?” I ask Jasmine, sliding a hand onto her waist, stopping her from following my niece out the door to follow her.

“I may have mentioned that she’s not the only April birthday girl around here,” Jasmine says with a little shrug and a grin. “My brother and I also happen to have April birthdays.”

“Which are?” I ask, lifting a brow her way she she shakes her head no at me with a little laugh.

“He’s my twin so just one. It’s the ninth,” she adds when I simply lift my brow higher.

“And do you have any plans for your day I can help you with?” I ask, wanting to be with her on her birthday for certain.

“No, I know it’s weird, I plan parties for everyone else, but for mine, I just like to do something low-key. My brother and I usually go out to dinner together on the day and then we celebrate ours and my niece Abby’s with the rest of the family at our birthday family dinner. We haven’t done anything big since we were sixteen because my brothers caused all sorts of issues with some of the boys that attended. So I just prefer something low-key now.”

“So that’s a no to letting me take you out to dinner for it,” I muse making her brow lift a bit in surprise.

“No, I just...we haven’t even had one date let alone know what’ll be happening three weeks and some change from now.”

“Ah, I guess I’ll have to wait for you to catch up then. Maybe by the end of tomorrow night you will be,” I tease, brushing a finger over her bottom lip before moving us from the room to get Cleo and head home.

I’ll be with her in just over twenty-four hours from now, I can last that long surely.

## Chapter 5

### *Jasmine*

I can't stop my smile from falling seeing the text from Adam about his babysitter cancelling on him for tomorrow night. I've been anticipating it from the second he asked, and even after seeing him earlier, I'm just as eager for it. I've never felt like this in my life, and it boggles the mind just how hurt I feel.

"What's wrong, Jas?" Jaime asks, pulling my attention over to her and off my phone.

I didn't plan to have dinner with them tonight, but Mom and Dad are over at Jude and Eden's watching their kids for them to have date night. It's something Mom and Dad were adamant about having themselves, so when Jaime came over to see if I wanted to join her, Jillian and Jeffery in ordering pizza and watching Jordan's NBA team playing I thought it'd get my mind off my wait for tomorrow night.

Jordan's twenty-three now, in his first year with the NBA, and he's been able to play at least a few minutes most games. We haven't seen much of him since season training started. The team he's playing for is based three hours away from us, so it's not so simple to get to see him.

"I uh...have a date tomorrow night. Or I guess I had a date tomorrow night," I tell her, making her brows scrunch in question as Jeffery yells at the ref on the TV about a stupid play.

"He cancelled?"

"Not exactly," I sigh. "He's got guardianship of his niece. Her mom died two years ago when she was seven. His babysitter cancelled and he's trying to find someone else, but he's already checked with all his normal sitters and they're busy."

"So she's what, nine now?" Jaime asks.

“Almost ten, yeah,” I answer.

“I know he doesn’t know me, but I could do it,” she says, and my eyes widen in surprise. Jaime gladly will babysit for any of the family, but usually doesn’t do it for anyone else, not wanting the hassle of dealing with crazy parents, and it’s not like she needs the money.

“Really?” I ask, anxious to text Adam back to let him know she’ll help before she even answers.

“Yeah, really,” she says, and I can’t stop the smile that hits. “And that’s why,” she adds confusing me. “I’ve never seen you look that sad or that happy just now. I swear, seeing the way you looked reading that message was like seeing Mom when Dad’s not at home at night. So yeah, I can watch the niece and you all can go out on your...”

“First date,” I admit, blushing when she lets out a loud laugh, drawing Jillian’s attention our way.

“What’s so funny?” Jillian asks looking between us suspiciously.

“Looks like another Cartwright is about to be off the market. I mean, if the idea of having to reschedule a first date makes Jas so sad looking, it’s definitely love,” Jaime says, and my heart stops for a moment before pattering away with my emotions.

Holy crap, that’s impossible right? I mean, I’ve only seen him twice and both times he had Cleo with him.

“Ooo-la-la, do tell,” Jillian teases but I shake my head no at them with an attempt of a stern look. “Okay, don’t get your panties all twisted, Sis. If you do, you’ll be squirming for the wrong reason on the date.”

“Jill!” I gasp.

“Oh come on, Sis. I’m almost eighteen. Mom was barely older than me when she got the hots for Dad.”

“She was already nineteen so cool it and behave, Jill,” Jaime says, rolling her eyes at the sister who is definitely the opposite of her, but they love each other to bits. They’re just

under two years apart in age, but only one year separated by school with Jaime's August birthday not having her start school until she was six already and Jillian's May one letting her start at five.

"Just teasing her, so want to tell us all about him since this game is boring," Jillian says and I shake my head at them, before shooting back a text to Adam with Jaime's offer.

'Hey, I'm sorry about your sitter. I'm with my sisters right now though and Jaime offered to babysit if you're okay with it. I promise she's been around babies and little kids her whole life. She was two when my older sister had her first baby, and my sisters-in-law just had a few more last year who aren't even one yet and she's helped out with all of them and watched Serenity for my sister recently. She's quiet and responsible.'

I wait nervously for his response and the smile that hits makes the girls giggle at me.

*Cleo says if she's your sister then she's got to be awesome as well, and I don't want to have to reschedule, so we'll gladly take her up on that. Just let me know her normal rate and I'll make sure she gets it.*

'Normally she only sits for family, and we give her Amazon gift cards because the girl loves books and her Kindle. Twenty should be fine and maybe some money for take-out for her and Cleo?'

*Twenty for at least three hours? That doesn't seem like enough, baby.*

'I was going to handle the rest since I kind of pushed her onto you all, but I'm sure Cleo will have fun with her. She can bring her Kindle that has just the kids stories, and they can read something together if nothing else.'

*I asked you out, so I'll pay for the sitter. I'm sure Cleo would love to go through her books because she loves reading as well, and I take it by the way you wrote it that she has more than one Kindle?*



‘Yeah, she has one that’s set up to be kid-friendly since we have a lot of nieces and nephews around that she reads to, and the other one is just hers. Not necessarily spicy books on it, but definitely more YA than pre-teen approved on it. She’ll eat pretty much anything so if Cleo has any requests for dinner, she’ll be okay with it.’

*Cleo asked if they could order from the Japanese place she likes. They have sushi, hibachi, and even pho on the menu if that’s okay with her.*

“You okay with sushi or hibachi for dinner tomorrow night?” I ask Jaime. The smile on her face deepens and I chuckle, wondering why I ever questioned it in the first place.

“Well, as long as it’s not from Turo’s, that place was gross,” Jaime states and I nod in agreement.

“They don’t do delivery so it shouldn’t be,” I muse before shooting the text back to Adam on it.

‘She says no Turo’s and she’s game.’

*Cleo would be wholly in agreement. We tried that place and even she disliked it. I’m not a sushi fan so we normally go to Bamboo’s or order delivery from there.*

‘Perfect.’

“He said Cleo’s favorite takeout is from Bamboo’s,” I tell Jaime and her grin makes me laugh fully.

‘Pretty sure from her response that alone would be payment enough.’

*I’ll make sure to leave them plenty to order a smorgasbord. I can’t wait to see you, baby. I can pick you up at six-thirty if you want to give me your address.*

‘It’s hard to explain so the easiest way is basically to say that I have an apartment at my parent’s place so I can come over with Jaime and we can just go from there.’

*A gentleman picks a lady up for a date, but I’ll let you off this time. You can tell me the rest of it tomorrow at dinner. I need to get someone into the bath and then into bed if I hope*

*to get any sleep tonight. She's excited for her party and hasn't stopped talking about the ideas since we left you earlier.*

'I'm really glad she's excited. I am too...'

'For tomorrow night,' I add with a winking emoji before putting it away to finish the game.

"Oh yeah, she's done for," Jillian teases but I don't care, because I think they're right.

Saturday is the longest day to get through and I'm ready by fifty-thirty and pacing around my room. I looked up his address and it's located not too far from Jesse and Maddie's place. It's in another neighborhood, but it's just as impressive with huge houses.

It takes about twenty-minutes to get to Jesse's, so I give myself another ten to get to his, which means we still have thirty minutes before we need to leave. I swear the clock's stopped moving. It had to have because there's no way it can still be this far away.

A knock on the door makes my brows bunch but I open the door, smiling seeing Mom there. I don't know how, but she can always calm us down without making us feel dumb or bad or foolish for feeling what we are I need that right now.

"Jaime said you were likely to wear your shoes out waiting for time to leave for your date," Mom says, and I groan into my hands that she told her. "Want to talk about it?"

"I don't know what's going on with me. From the second I saw him everything felt different, and when I learnt he wasn't taken it all just kind of consumed me, you know?" I tell her as she settles me into a chair.

"I know, honey. I felt the same way when I learnt that there wasn't a woman in Daddy and Julie's life. I knew they were meant to be mine and it filled every bit of me with joy and longing to have it already. I know you hate waiting for what you want, and it seems like this man is the same if you've just met him and he's already agreed to your sister sitting for him without ever meeting her."

I can't help but laugh a bit, realizing the bits of similarity in how I felt meeting Adam and how Mom felt meeting Dad and Julie.

"Didn't see it until now, did you?" Mom teases and I shake my head. "It's how I know what you're feeling. This need to get back to him, be with him...and his niece if I'm not mistaken."

"She's so sweet and been through so much already. Something happened at her old school to bring her to Rickman, and you know how kids are with new people, especially when they're that age," I add and Mom nods. "They have their friends picked out and think they'll never change, so someone new and I'm thinking shy because of whatever happened before, isn't going to just barge in and demand to be friends. Being with her for just a little bit of time, I don't think she's usually shy, but something happened to make her hesitant now."

"That makes sense and who knows, maybe she just needs you to pull her out of that shell and things will be better. Now, I'm guessing based on the fact that she'll know if you do, you won't be staying over tonight?" Mom asks, her smile making me blush which is crazy because she's always been open and honest with us about sex and that it's always our choice of who and when, no matter what a boy might say.

"No, not that I wouldn't but..."

"Maybe not on the first date with a nine-year-old around, not to mention your daddy," she adds, and I laugh because for sure, Dad would want to throttle Adam if I stayed over tonight.

Mom's visit leaves me calmer, and I head down to the car, smiling when I see Jaime already in the passenger seat. She hates driving and prefers to live life as a passenger princess. Right now even with her in college here in our hometown, she has to drive more than last year because Jillian loves to drive and would gladly take them wherever they wanted to go.

"Well, I guess that's one thing Dad can't argue about," she says when we pull up to the gorgeous house. It's not as big as

Mom and Dad's, not many in town are, but it's definitely rivaling the one Jesse built for Maddie. "He's got his own money so won't be after yours."

"Hush," I tease, rolling my eyes at her.

The front door opens before we get to the sidewalk. I parked in the driveway away from the garage doors so we wouldn't block his car, and seeing Cleo hurrying down towards us makes me smile. She hugs me first before smiling up at Jaime and I introduce them, laughing when Cleo squeals before pulling Jaime towards the door.

"I take it that went well?" I ask Adam when I reach him. He's watching Cleo pull Jaime into the front room a smile on his face before turning back to me.

His eyes darken and it sends warmth through my entire body. I want to slide into his thick arms and hold tight, and it takes everything inside me not to do it.

"Looks like they're going to have a good time, but I definitely am getting the better evening of the two just for being with you," he says, his hand sliding up to cup my cheek, and everything inside me latches onto him as mine.

A shiver washes through me, and my eyes close when his breath whispers over my forehead. He's probably about Dad's height because he's just a hint taller than Jamison is, and he's an inch shorter than Dad's six-three. That would make Adam nine inches taller than my five-six, although it's only seven right now with my heels. He still feels a lot taller than me, and I like it—a lot.

I don't know what he does for a living, but I don't think it's working outside, even if he is nearly as thick as some of the construction workers I know. His hands are a little rough as well, telling me he uses them. Whether that's just from working out or working in the yard I don't know, but I like the feel of them.

He's built strong and sturdy. Like I'd be safe with him if out and problems arose. He doesn't look like he'd run, but stay and fight, protect me and I don't care how that makes me

sound. It's something I want thanks to Dad and Jamison always being there to look after me.

“I could stand here just looking at you all night, but right now, how about we get Cleo and Jaime settled, and then head out for dinner?” he suggests, and no way am I saying no to that.

## Chapter 6

### Adam

I didn't think Jasmine could get more beautiful but fuck if I was wrong. She's wearing a soft cream colored dress with her gorgeous hair down and it blows me away that I get to sit across from her all night.

I was almost pacing to work out all the anticipation I felt until I saw the car pull up. It was easy to tell that Jaime's her sister. She's a little paler than Jasmine, her hair lighter, but the facial similarities were staring me right in the face. They had the same nose, same jaw, and cheekbones, but Jaime's eyes are a bluer gray compared to Jasmine's pure gray ones that I keep dreaming about.

Cleo was already excited to have Jaime babysit her after I told her they could order Bamboo's and that she might bring her Kindle with books to look through, but then meeting, wow. It's so close to how it felt when she and Jasmine were walking away hand in hand, but seeing Jasmine hugging Cleo, that hit me in places seeing my niece with her sister didn't.

"I'm really glad that Cleo and Jaime seemed to be having fun when we left," Jasmine says after we've ordered, and I can't stop myself from reaching out, taking her hand in mine just so I can touch her, hold her in some way.

"So am I and thank you for letting me know she offered. I don't know what it took to get her to agree...what?" I ask when Jasmine laughs a little and a hint of color creeps into her cheeks.

"She offered to do it after asking me what was wrong when I read your text about your sitter cancelling and none of your others being available. I told her we were supposed to be going out tonight and she said she's do it if it was okay with you."

“No cajoling at all? A college freshman willingly gave up her Saturday night to babysit someone she’s never met, so her sister could go out with someone she’s met?” I ask in shock and the soft look that hit her gaze pulled me in further.

“Yeah, I...my family’s close. Jaime, Jillian and I were the only girls in the house after my older sisters moved out. They were teenagers when I was born,” she says at my look of question and that’s a little shocking since she said her youngest sister will be eighteen soon. “Add in my not only my twin brother but two others younger than us, and it was a bit of us three girls against those three boys.”

“Okay, let me get this straight, you have including your twin brother, seven siblings?” I ask and her little giggle makes my cock completely hard, wanting to make her giggle happily before sinking deep into her sweetness.

“Twelve actually,” she answers, and I shake my head in amazement. “I know it’s not normal, especially in this day and age, but my mom only had an older brother, a much older brother,” she adds making my brow lift. “He was sixteen when she was born so he was out the door two years later. Mom moved here to get away from her mother who was absolute garbage, bringing home guys left and right while she was growing up, and the last one was only a few years older than her at that time.

“Mom had a scholarship to Presley, a full-ride, but she hated school. All she really wanted was the family she didn’t have growing up, and when she met Dad, things just fell into place. Dad had my oldest sister Julie who was fourteen months old at the time, her mother was worse than my mom’s was, so he had sole custody of her. My uncle worked for him, which is how they met,” Jasmine adds with a grin at me.

“So your parents met because of your uncle and your dad had a little girl that your mom fell for, while falling for him?” I ask, hope filling me entirely that the look in her eyes is telling me to piece it together.

“Yeah, Uncle Aaron and Mom were out at dinner, getting to know each other as adults. Dad needed him to stop by for

something to do with work, and he took Mom with him since it was closer to the house than Presley. They walked in together and Dad was jealous that Aaron was out with a woman like our mom, and Mom was jealous that he and Julie had a woman in their life.

“Only there wasn’t, and they quickly cleared that up. Dad was a bit hesitant still, not knowing how Uncle Aaron would react to him claiming Mom as his since he was a few years older than Uncle Aaron even, but he was just happy there was someone to take care of Mom. They were married a month after meeting and were expecting my second oldest sister already. Mom told Dad that she wanted a dozen kids, and Dad always gave Mom what she wanted.”

“And now her daughter met me, because Cleo’s uncle wanted her to have a wonderful birthday and went to your store. Where you thought she was my daughter, and I had a woman already?” I state making her blush a hint more. “Thankfully, Cleo cleared that bit up quickly and I let you know it was just the two of us, leading us here.”

“Yeah, Mom stopped by before we left and took note of the similarities. But just so you know, I don’t want a dozen kids,” she says and the beast inside my pants wants nothing more than to give her at least one—right now preferably.

“No? What about a niece that’s like a daughter and maybe one or two more?” I suggest running my thumb across the top of her hand.

“I’d be willing to compromise at two or three more,” she replies and if we weren’t in a crowded restaurant, I’d be devouring her instead of the appetizer that is delivered to us.

“So you’re saying it’s negotiable are you? Two at least but open to more?” I ask, lifting a bite of the gouda-stuffed mushroom to her lips.

She hums happily as she chew it, taking a sip of the wine before answering me, making my skin tingle with the anticipation of her response. “Five would definitely be my limit. Although if twins are involved, I might say four.”



“I can work with that,” I assure her, falling further and further for her as we eat our meal.

I curse myself for bringing her somewhere that doesn't do dancing, because I know I have to let her go when we get back to my house. With Cleo, having Jasmine spend the night this fast wouldn't be right, but I wish I could keep her, never let her leave my side.

At least if we were out dancing, I'd get to hold her right now.

“Do you want to go for a walk down to the fountain?” I ask her when she declines any more wine, coffee or dessert. “We still have at least an hour before we said we'd be back, and I don't want to let you go just yet.”

“I'd like that,” Jasmine says, giving me a grin, and we head out after I pay.

I start to offer to do something else when we get outside. The balmy seventy that came out today has cooled significantly, and I don't want Jasmine to be cold. The words die on my lips when she pulls out a swatch of fabric from her clutch, amazing me that it fit when she unfolds it, showing off a shawl.

I take it from her as she starts to lift it, and drape it over her shoulders, lifting her hair gently from beneath it, as she drapes the length over her arms. I take a moment, resting my head against hers, while my hands linger on her shoulders, and I can't stop the smile that hits when she leans back into me further.

As much as I want to just stay like this, we're just outside the restaurant and I want a bit more privacy with her. I slip my hand into hers, then start moving down the sidewalk towards the fountain at the north entrance of the park. It's a gorgeous fountain, funded by the same Cartwrights that I'm meeting with next week, and I love to come sit at it whenever I've had a stressful day and need a break.

Everything inside me settles when Jasmine leans a bit more into my side, and when we reach the fountain, I can't

resist any longer. I pull her into my arms, wrapping one around her, the other sliding back behind her head, holding her closer. Her little sigh as her eyes shut, her hand sliding onto my waist fills me with pride and relief that she's not resistant to my hold, my touch.

"You should probably know that I'm big on touch so if you're not..." she starts to say and I cover her lips with mine, needing to taste her, unable to resist another moment.

Her arms slide under my jacket and around me, her hands holding onto my back as far as she can reach, and for the first time in my life, I feel like I've discovered what home truly is. It's Jasmine, in my arms, hers around me.

Her kiss is heaven, and I let it linger, my tongue stroking hers until there's no breath left in my body, and I have to break it off. She shivers in my arms, but I don't think it's from the cold. I hope it isn't at least, because I don't want to take my arms from around her anytime soon.

I rest my forehead against hers, listening to her little pants of breath, and it simply makes my dick harder still. It should have calmed down with the cold air on our walk here, but it didn't and now, it's likely obscene. If I pulled Jasmine's hips just a few inches closer to me, she'd see just how much I want her, but I don't want to scare her off.

"I take it that it's okay if I hug you then," Jasmine teases, and I open my eyes, seeing her gorgeous gray orbs filled with hunger but also softness which completely fits her.

"You're more than welcome to hug or touch me whenever you want, baby," I assure her. "I've been craving it since I saw you hugging Cleo. Was jealous that she was getting your affection. Wanted it more than you could know."

"Good, because I really like being able to hold hands. Sit next to someone with their arm around me, or mine on them. Hug someone randomly if the mood strikes," she says, smiling up at me and I pull her closer, lowering my mouth to hers once more, showing her how okay with all of that I am.

She lets out a soft sigh, but the shiver running through her isn't one of bliss or hunger, it's from the cool air, and I pull back, cupping her cheek before pulling her in for a full hug. Her head rests perfectly on my shoulder, and I kiss her nose before taking a step back.

"I don't want you to get cold, so as much as I want to keep kissing you until I have to take us back, I think it's a good time to press pause for the night."

"I'd argue that we don't have to if Cleo weren't waiting for us to get home," Jasmine says, tucking herself up against my side and it all floods me with longing for her words to be entirely true. That her home was with me and Cleo. It won't be long before I make it happen. I won't be able to deal if it does.

"Little minx aren't you, baby?" I tease, dropping a kiss onto her lips before we start to head back to the car. "If your sister wasn't the babysitter I'd sneak you inside after she left and see how true I could make those words."

"You probably wouldn't have any issues with it. Another guy...well, I've been waiting for something special my whole life," Jasmine says, and I have to stop. Her words fill me with the biggest hope yet, and I stare down into her eyes, needing the truth.

"Waiting for what? Someone to love you, because believe me, baby, I'm damn certain that's what's happening here with us," I admit and the warmth in her eyes just grows, turning them smoky dark again, but with heat and hunger, not hurt or annoyance as when we first met.

"Adam..." she whispers, her cheeks flushed, her lips swollen from my kisses. She's so gorgeous it hurts to simply look at her without touching her, holding her, or kissing her.

"I know it's fast, baby, and I'll go however slow you need or want, especially if..." I stop, waiting for her to tell me herself.

"I've never done this before, any of it," she confirms for me. "I rarely date, all of the guys were after one of two things,

and I didn't want to give them either. With you it just feels right, my entire body, my whole world lit up when I saw you and it hurt thinking I'd finally found what I've been wanting, but that you were out of my reach. When I knew you weren't and you asked me out, all I've wanted was for tonight to be here to spend time with you, be with you. You touch me and I want to live in your arms," she adds, and what the hell can a guy say to that but thank the fuck.

"I want the same, baby. You light up my world, mine and Cleo's and I want you to do so for the rest of my life—our life together. When you're ready for more, all you need to do is tell me and I'll be eagerly waiting here for you," I promise, kissing her forehead when she smiles.

"I don't think I'll be able to wait that long," Jasmine says, and it shoots a jolt of electricity straight to my hard cock, making it jerk against her.

"Sorry," I mumble seeing her cheeks flush.

"Don't be, I like that I do that to you, that the guy I'm falling madly in love with wants me just for being me, but also wants more than just to sleep with me," she returns, and if there was even one ounce of doubt before, it's now gone. This girl is mine, and I'm keeping her—for good.

## Chapter 7

### Jasmine

I keep sneaking peeks at my phone as family dinner continues. Cleo stole Adam's phone earlier, sending me a photo of her hair, asking if it would look okay to wear to school tomorrow or if she had to take out the braid and wash it like her uncle said. Jaime put it in a French braid after her bath last night, but it looks like Cleo slept hard and a lot of it was falling out already.

It was so hard to pull myself away from Adam last night, and I'm already missing him. I sent back a message asking her what time they left in the morning which had Adam taking the phone, sending me a message back simply with the time. No questions, just when they left the house in the morning for him to drop Cleo off at school.

'Tell Cleo if she washes her hair tonight without arguing, I'll be there thirty minutes before you're going to leave tomorrow to braid her hair if she wants,' I send, smiling at what Carly says to Mom when she asks how her she's been feeling the last few days.

*You don't have to do that, baby, but I'll gladly take seeing you before I have to go to work after missing you all day.*

'Me too. Now tell Cleo I'll see you both then,' I reply, my heart fluttering when two messages pop up, one from Cleo based on all the thumbs up and heart-eyed emojis.

*Someone's excited and Cleo is too if you can't tell. See you in the morning, baby.*

'See you in the morning,' I return, then sneak my phone away when Jillian wiggles her eyebrows at me with a grin.

"Am I going to have to tell Mom you were on your phone with your boyfriend at the table?" Jillian teases and I shoot her a warning look as it draws questions from the others here tonight. Mom does family dinner every Sunday, only one a

month is a ‘mandatory’ for everyone living in town, and the others are for those who can make it that week with their schedules.

Tonight, that’s Carly and Johnnie—plus kids, Jamison, Jeffery, Jaime, Jillian, Joe, Julie and Serena—plus kids, Jesse and Maddie—plus kids, and me. Jennie usually only comes on the mandatory nights and the ones where she has something to brag about.

Jude and Eden are home with the babies. The twins are teething and since they had a night out Friday, they didn’t want to have six crabby babies here and the rest of us feeling like we have to look after them.

Jackie and Ethan have three sick ones at home, so they didn’t want to risk spreading it to anyone else. I get that and appreciate it, even if I don’t have kids to worry about yet.

Jordan gets a pass since he lives out of town of course, but that’s still seven sets of eyes that have slid over to me, not to mention Dad’s. I guess Mom didn’t tell him about my date last night or it wouldn’t be quite the surprise.

“I’m sorry, did you just say boyfriend?” Jamison asks, his brow lifting my way and I know he’s pissed I didn’t tell him anything. I just didn’t want him running Adam off before we went on a single date.

I don’t see him running now, but I don’t want to risk it either.

“She’s just playing around,” I state with a shrug at him. “I had a date. A single date last night, that’s it.”

“Uh huh, and you’ve been smiling at your phone for the last twenty minutes because?” Jillian questions, resting her chin on her on the table, staring at me.

“Be nice or we’ll start asking about all your dates, Sis,” Julie tells her and it’s cute watching Jillian’s face brighten.

She’s probably the most outgoing of any of us girls, had the most dates, but they’ve all been singular dates. I don’t think she’s seen the same guy twice, which is fine with Dad

because it means he doesn't have to worry about the boy doing something stupid.

"I don't look like a googly eye loon reading the messages from them before I block them though," Jillian says with a shrug, before returning to staring at me. "So, was it him?"

"A couple of the message were from him, yes," I state with a sigh, rolling my eyes at her. "The rest were from his niece he has guardianship of, and who I'm putting together a birthday party for in three weeks. Speaking of which, I'm going to need some help to create and put together the idea."

"What kind of help?" Julie asks as I look from her to Jamison to Joe knowing they'll likely be my best options.

"Well, if we're done eating, I can show you the drawings I did, and you all can probably help me figure out what's going to work best. We're going to have it at my place so there won't be issues with set up and since I had you all put in those anchors throughout the space to hook things onto, should be plenty to support things," I tell them with a growing grin.

"How old is this niece?" Jamison asks when we're in the living room and I've dug out my tablet.

"She'll be ten," I admit, giving Serenity a smile as her eyes light up. "She said you're nice to her at lunch."

"Who?" Serenity asks, leaning into Serena's leg with a grin as her moms press kisses to her temples.

"Cleo," I answer making her eyes widen a bit more.

"She has funny hair and she's really quiet. I never see her at recess to play," Serenity says, and I nod, giving her hand a little squeeze.

"Well, her hair looks funny because her uncle isn't used to having a little girl to look after, hasn't quite learnt how to do hair. Kind of like Uncle Jamison," I add making Serenity giggle because with as amazing with details in woodwork as my brother is, he's a terror with a hairbrush. "Her mom died two years ago so it's just been her and her uncle since then. She just started Rickman this year. There was an issue with one of the mothers that volunteered at her old school. She

would follow her all around the school, telling her she'd be happier living with her, and scaring her by coming up and touching her out of nowhere. He complained to the school and the police, but they just told him if he tried to talk to the woman again, they'd file a restraining order against him."

"Typical for the cops around here," Julie huffed, and I nodded as Jesse's eyes darkened in anger.

"If you know which cops, I'll tell Chief Davidson to make sure they get on his radar," Jesse says, and I smile knowing he definitely will. He's been fuming about the cops in town since one of them tried to threaten him when he was trying to protect Maddie and her younger sister Kayla from their abusive father.

"I'll let him know. Right now, I need help figuring out how to build this," I tell the group, showing some of the drawings to give them a general idea. "In the jungle area, I was thinking monkey bars, we can bolt them using the anchors in the floors, so they'll be sturdy, right?" I ask Julie.

"More than, we put them in commercial grade concrete, so they'll hold," she assures me. "Are you wanting to do more than one story on anything?"

"I was thinking maybe in the temple area, something where they might go up and down a bit, not far but enough to make it fun. Then in this area, do a small climbing wall, kind of like the ones on the playsets, just a little wider and with more spots for hands and feet, and when they're at the top, a slide into the temple area."

"Doorways and the archway for the waterfall would be easy to do with wood I've got," Jamison said giving me a smile seeing the rest of the drawings. "This is going to be one massive party."

"Cleo deserves it, and hopefully, it'll let some of the other kids in their grade get to see the real Cleo and not the scared one that came in last August."

"I think a lot of this we could put together using scaffolding really," Joe says after looking through the ideas.



“You’d just want to wrap and pad it, but it should work. We could probably even set up some mid-levels on them by using shorter poles. It would let them move up and down levels but not be too high that way.”

“That sounds great. I figured we could put the mats down throughout, so if anyone trips they’ll be cushioned,” I tell them, and they all agree it’s a must with the concrete floor.

“Do I get to come, Aunt Jas?” Serenity asks as Joe and Jamison start making notes about possible dimensions.

“Cleo is going to invite your whole grade, so yes, you absolutely get to come. I think she’ll really enjoy if you do, sweetie.”

“But no spoiling the surprise for her or the others,” Serena warns her.

“Cleo helped me come up with the theme and she approved the designs Friday afternoon, so she knows what it’ll look like,” I tell them. “We’ll hopefully be getting the invitations out this week for April sixth.”

“Is that her actual birthday?” Julie asks and I nod. “So three days before yours?”

“Yeah, it is.”

“So more April birthdays. I think someone needs to have a March baby around here,” she jokes, and I swear, my belly flutters as though it’s in agreement.

“I wouldn’t be against it,” I tell her, smiling as her eyes widen in shock. “We’ve had one date, but the second I saw him...it was everything I’ve been waiting for, only I thought he was married.”

“With a kid, like Mom thought when she met Dad and me,” Julie guesses and I nod. “How quickly did he clear that one up?”

“Cleo mostly did when she called him her uncle in introduction. Then he said she’d been stuck with just him the last two years so, pretty quickly. Jaime babysat for him last night after his had to cancel on him, and Cleo loved her. Jaime

braided her hair, and she was asking if she really had to take it out to wash in the bath. It was falling out so it wouldn't have lasted her another night."

"Is that your way of saying you're heading over there tonight to 'help' and will then just stay the night because it's such a long drive home?" she teases, and I shake my head fighting off my blush.

"No, I said I'd stop by in the morning because I don't want Cleo finding me there before this is more and hopefully about to be permanent."

"Notice she didn't deny wanting to stay the night in there, baby girl," Julie says to Serena, giving her a wink.

"What do you expect? She's a Cartwright, of course she's going to know who the right one is from the start. And don't think you have room to talk unless you want to explain what happened on our first date—heck not even a date date. You brought over coffee after meeting me just hours before and never left," Serena counters making me giggle.

"You weren't arguing about it though, were you?" Julie whispers to her, giving her a kiss.

"Never," Serena assures her.

They make me grin and sigh happily watching them. They've been together for seventeen years and are more in love now. The same with Mom and Dad. They're coming up on forty years and adore one another entirely still. That's what I want. That connection that just gets stronger with time—with Adam.

The house empties with my siblings assurances they'll look into getting my vision created, and I slip over to my room, settling in for the night. I expect to toss and turn, but I'm out fast when I focus on the fact that I'll get to see Adam and Cleo in the morning.

My alarm goes off and I hurry out of bed, smiling the entire time I'm getting ready. I'm out the door ten minutes before I really need to be, but I can't help myself. The lights

are on downstairs when I pull in and I laugh when Cleo hurries out the door, still in her pjs and hugs me tight.

“Good morning to you too, sweetheart,” I tell her, pulling a giggle from her before ushering her inside out of the cool morning air.

“Hi beautiful,” Adam says, coming over to us, and I sigh happily as he gives me a soft kiss. I like that he’s not hiding us from Cleo. Not our date the other night or this simple greeting this morning. I don’t want to sneak around with him and this. Not now, not ever.

I’m glad for the ten extra minutes as it takes most of them to get Cleo dressed before I do her hair, making sure it’s untangled before braiding it. I make two separate braids, loving how thick her hair is. It’s a soft butter brown with dimensional color that goes perfectly with her rosy complexion and green eyes. She and Adam have the same eyes, and I love seeing them light up with joy.

When I get to the ends, I check with her, wanting to know what she’d like. “Do you want to leave them out like this, or I can put them into a bun?”

“I like this way,” she says with a giggle as the ends slip over her shoulders. Each braid is thick enough it could honestly be one braid for a lot of people. There’s no need to fluff them out to make them look thicker, so I leave them tight, hoping they’ll stay all day. “Thank you, Miss Jasmine. I love it.”

“You’re welcome sweetheart. I know that not all boys can get their fingers to work the right way for girl’s hair, so anytime you want some help, just let me know,” I tease her, and the hug she gives me before we head off in different directions, seals it for me. This is the start of my new family. I won’t let anything come between us.

## *Chapter 8*

### *Adam*

I move off the elevator and surprise hits hard when I hear how quiet it is. It's completely opposite of my office where people are always coming and going, the shops so close the hum of machines surround you. Most of the desks and office I pass by are empty despite being ten o'clock in the morning.

The last I checked, Cartwright was the leader in all things construction along the western half of the US, so this is a little strange.

"Hi there, I'm Joan. You must be Mr. Thompson," the woman behind a desk says when I reach the end of the hallway I was directed towards downstairs. "Mr. Johnnie will be right up, his wife is expecting again so he was late leaving after getting their twin boys up and fed. Mr. Jamison and Ms. Serena are already in the conference room, just to your left there," she adds, and I glance down the hallway seeing more empty desks behind windows. "Don't let the emptiness fool you. Ever since these boys have started settling down and having babies, they've taken the office jobs to hybrid positions. The ones that can work from home and still complete all their duties can do so at least two days a week. I like getting out of the house so I don't mind handling the stuff that can only be done here."

"Wouldn't work for my company. Even my office staff end up taking trips down to the manufacturing floor to get what they need. It's hard to hear a phone ring around there," I tell her, feeling immensely better to learn the place isn't hitting a rough patch and this is a last-ditch effort to pull themselves out.

I don't have to expand. We'll be just fine staying as-is, but when I see something that can help the community, I want to do it. Expanding my company will give a minimum hundred more people jobs between the additional floor staff and added

office personnel to handle the increase of billings and invoices. Not to mention, if we get the whole process, employees to handle inventory, packaging, shipping, and potentially delivery to locations. That's a lot of jobs for people right here in Oak Grove.

I give the door a knock and it opens almost instantly, a man likely an inch shorter than me there. He's probably ten to twelve years younger than I am, but it's not going to intimidate me with having to do business with someone younger.

I looked into Cartwrights information after seeing the open bid for their new manufacturing request. I've heard about them before, hell, I even used them to redo my house but that was twelve years ago, and I didn't even deal with any of the Cartwrights. I hired them because they were the most recommended, and it turned out to be the right choice.

I know the original Mr. Cartwright has handed the company off to his kids, but it definitely didn't slow them down any, in fact, it's only been in the last six to seven years that things have really taken off for them, which is saying something considering they were already the highest grossing construction company in the state, let alone the town.

"Hi there, I'm Serena Cartwright," the woman in the room says as the guy steps back to let me enter. "This is my brother-in-law Jamison."

"Adam Thompson," I add shaking both their hands.

"Hope you don't mind if we're a bit informal in here," Jamison says motioning towards the seats. "It gets confusing in here with the Mr. or Ms. Cartwright stuff."

"That's fine with me, everyone at my company calls me Adam. There's a few that will only go so far as to do Mr. Adam, but they've been there since my father ran the place and he was always Mr. Thompson with them. I don't run things the same way he did," I tell them as another man comes through the door. He's a bit older than Jamison, but it's obvious they're brothers with the same dark hair and facial features.

“Sounds like you’d fit in around here then,” the newcomer says before proffering his hand to me. “Johnnie... Cartwright.”

“Pretty sure he figured that one out,” Serena says rolling her eyes at him and I have to fight to control the laugh that hits me in the chest.

“Where’s Julie?” Johnnie asks glancing around the space.

“She had to go out to the Merrit site,” a third man says as he comes through the door. His resemblance to the other two says it’s yet another brother and I’ve got to say, it’s shocking at just how similar they all look. Not quite a copy and paste of one another, but close to it. “Hi, I’m Jesse,” he adds holding out a hand to me.

“Adam,” I tell him, and he gives me a nod before settling down into a chair next to Serena, his hand giving her shoulder a little squeeze. It makes me curious to know if they’re together, because while the woman is stunning, she’s more than a bit older than him. Hell, I think I’d say she’s older than me and I know I’m several years ahead of all these men.

“Julie’s fine, just dealing with permit issues,” Jesse tells Serena, and she relaxes, giving him a smile in return. “Julie is our CEO of Construction, she handles that side of the company’s oversight and while finding a new manufacturer isn’t necessarily construction since it’s Serena’s line, she likes to be involved. She’s sat in on all the other meetings and conference calls rather than me, so I was getting up to speed on them. I’m CEO of Operations, while Johnnie is our CFO, Serena our Chief of Design, and Jamison’s one of the company’s carpenters and helped Serena create these items. He also helped to take the pieces they came up with and turn them into ready-to-assemble items. The goal is to offer them to a wider array of customers at an affordable price for a higher caliber piece that won’t fall apart in a few weeks or months like some.”

“With the Cartwright quality of work behind it,” I guess, and he nods. “Thompson Manufacturing can certainly create all the hardware for your pieces. Currently we run two shifts

and that is necessary to produce all of the items we're contracted to make, but, we have the capability to create a third shift to add in the new productions."

"But it would require new staff that's untrained to run it," Jesse says.

"Getting new people in will be no problem. I have a filing cabinet full of applications of people looking for jobs. Some of them would be brand new, yes, but others have experience elsewhere that sit at the top of the stack for when we do have a vacancy come up. In the last eight years, turnover has decreased to mostly retirements only. We have the occasional individual that just can't handle the work, but those are far fewer than other companies in the industry."

"How's that?" Serena asks, putting a smile on my lips.

"I took over when my father died almost sixteen years ago now. I knew nothing about the business and hadn't seen the man other than the occasional visit in nine years and honestly, didn't want anything to do with the place. It was left to me in his will, and I didn't want the people that worked there to be hurt by me shutting it down or selling it to someone that wouldn't look out for them. So I learnt the place hands-on, saw the people that were leaving, saw the resources that went into training someone, and decided to make some changes," I explain with ease. "The first was to give employees incentives to stay so the resources we put into their training didn't go to waste. Now, employees once they reach their second anniversary are vested in the profit sharing program I created. Every year of employment, they receive an additional percentage of the profits. Most employees look forward to that year-end bonus and it create loyalty. They know if they stay, work hard, we make more profits, which increases the amount they receive. It's reduced turnover by two hundred percent in the last ten years."

"Impressive," Johnnie says. "We give bonuses to the crews that manage to complete jobs on time and under budget or ahead of time and on budget, and it's helped keep crews together."

“It’s why I know that if we add in a third shift, I can take a third of the first and second shifts to fill it, so no shift has more unseasoned workers than the others. I have a handful of floor workers that are ready for promotions with nowhere to go, so this also gives them that, which will keep them with me longer. The machinery can be run twenty-four/seven, and it won’t break. My mechanics keep them running at peak performance to avoid delays and missed deadlines,” I add handing over the estimates I put together on costs to take over their hardware manufacturing.

“Definitely impressive,” Johnnie says looking through the proposal. “Are you eating the costs of the new hires? Their salaries would increase your overhead, but this still seems low.”

“It’s factored in, but so is the fact that all of the machinery is already paid for, so there aren’t those added costs built in, only the cost of continuous maintenance. We don’t need to bring in anything to produce just the hardware beyond staff to run the machines.”

“You said to produce just the hardware,” Jamison says, and I nod. “Are you saying you would only be able to produce the hardware then? A couple of the other companies we’ve met with said they could produce and assemble the entire kits in one place, which would help to keep up with potential inventory issues if something did happen with machinery. If someone else is waiting on the hardware, or if we only have hardware, it could cause issues between the two companies handling the process.”

“I have the machinery to produce the wood for the ready-to-assemble items. I have employees that know how to run them that have been doing other jobs around the company since Jeb’s went out of business two years ago. I didn’t let them go when we stopped those productions because it wasn’t on them. We only run those machines when someone needs wood processed for the odd job but, they could be back up and running as well with ease. A couple of the men that did leave after the line was stopped have let me know if I ever need them back, they’ll be there in an instant.”



“But you would need something else before you could take on the full process?” Jesse asks and I nod. “What is that?”

“A new warehouse to store items, raw wood materials as well as finished products. If you want everything to be packaged, ready to send to store or distributors, that would need a separate assembly line as well, which would require more space than we currently have.”

“And how long would it take to get that built and ready do you think?” Jamison asks.

“Depends on if I can find a construction company that would be able to put something new up timely,” I reply, pulling a few chuckles from them. “Since the open bid didn’t include specifics, it’s hard to estimate the exact costs that might go into getting the wood ready for easy assembly. It would depend on how many pieces, how many dowel holes, screw holes, spaces for cam bolts, whatnot that they need, but I did include in the back the approximate prices we charged Jeb’s for their quantities as an estimate, along with the different potential sizes for a new warehouse that would be needed dependent upon the stage of finish you’d like the items. If someone else is going to package the things together, it wouldn’t be as large as if you’d prefer to be able to come to the warehouse and pick up a box for delivery to the customer.”

“We’re not looking to have things ready to ship for another six months,” Serena says to Jesse who nods. “It would be a bonus to have them manufactured in the same town, especially during the preproduction stage.”

“It would, if there are changes to the pieces and placements that need to be made due to the manufacturing process, it’d be a hell of a lot easier to get there to review things,” Jamison agrees.

“Noted,” Jesse says, giving me a nod. “We have one more bid to hear but hope to have a decision made in the next few days as to whom we’re going to share the details with for a more comprehensive bid. It was good to meet you Adam.”

“You all too,” I tell them, shaking hands before Jesse leads me back towards the elevator.

“We’ll be in touch,” Jesse says when we reach it surprising me. “This line is Serena and Jamison’s babies. Julie will choose whatever Serena wants because she just wants her wife to be happy,” he adds, and my brow lifts a hint more that the bottom dollar isn’t going to be the leading factor, making his jaw tighten. “That’s not going to be an issue is it?”

“Sorry?” I return confused at his change of mood so fast. “I’m just surprised with a company this size you’d choose something based on feeling rather than the costs. It’s why the wood manufacturing line has been down the last two years.”

“Oh, no, I thought you were surprised with Julie and Serena,” he states, and I can’t stop the chuckle that slips out.

“My assistant at work would poison my coffee if I ever said a word out of turn about another female couple and if she didn’t, her wife would,” I explain. “It doesn’t matter to me who wants to be with whom, with very few exceptions. Mostly being age and marriage related.”

“Your father?” he says making my brow lift once more in surprise.

“We left town when my parents divorced. I was thirteen and his latest affair partner was my mother’s supposed best friend, so yeah, I don’t play around when I’m in a relationship. Not that there’s been one until recently for more than a few years.”

“Always good to meet the one that steals your heart,” Jesse states and that it the whole truth for certain. “I met Maddie just a few blocks from here almost six years ago. She was attending a pride function at the park with her sister, and some guys were hassling her, so between that and stuff with my sister being hassled because of her relationship with Serena, we don’t work with bigots. It’s family first here, no matter what that does to our profit margin, and our dad would be the first to agree. Being a family company, we can set the tone so if we find our partners aren’t aligning with our beliefs, we walk.”

“I get that, it’s also why I’m here. I could work the rest of my years without expanding the company with ease and not hurt for money. An expansion offers up a whole lot of opportunities for people in this town to find jobs that not only can support them, but also a family. That’s what’s important to me, helping this community. Maybe if we do that, then we can make other changes around it.”

“Such as?” Jesse asks me as we get onto the elevator.

“Getting rid of some of the ‘old money’ from power positions in the town council, the mayor’s office, not to mention police headquarters. They think that just because they have the cash to throw around that it makes them more important. It doesn’t. Makes them worthless, especially when they back the opening of a strip club not even a block from a school and family neighborhood,” I add, still ticked that there’s one going up near Cleo’s old school.

“Town laws mandate they can’t be located within ten blocks of a school,” Jesse states looking at me oddly and I wonder how he knows that. “We spent over two years trying to get Club One shut down, finally made it happen with the FBI’s help. One of the partners was a human trafficker that was in bed with a man that was after Johnnie’s wife. He officially met her when she was supposed to go there to meet with her father’s boss, Brent Ellis,” he adds, and I nod in understanding. The man’s name was in papers all across the country a few years ago so it’s not surprising that the club’s closure was related to the man.

“Old money buys influence though, and that law was removed from the town’s statutes eight months ago,” I tell Jesse and if the look he wore earlier when he thought I might have an issue with Julie and Serena was intense, this is enough to make even the biggest man cower.

“We’ll see about that. Where’s this place supposed to be at?” he asks, taking out his phone.

“Johnson and Tenth. Keep going down Johnson and the Allington Private School is just a block away, and just a couple blocks from it is the Laurent Subdivision.”

“I’ll see what we can do about that. I’m sure we’ll be speaking soon,” Jesse states and I give him a nod before heading back to work, wondering if working with the Cartwrights isn’t just as much fate as meeting Jasmine was.

## *Chapter 9*

### *Jasmine*

A tingle rolls down my spine and I look up, seeing Adam watching me through the mirror as I finish with Cleo's hair. She's been all smiles since she came home Monday night and it's something I really want her to keep.

She told me Tuesday morning all about her new friend Serenity who asked her if she wanted to play with her during recess when they were at lunch. So of course I had to share that with Julie and Serena. I'm sure Julie would have asked more questions if she hadn't been dealing with some issue that popped up with one of their new work site. Apparently some permit went missing with the city and she was raising hell with them because she had the official copy of it to prove it was issued.

I had a phone call from Cleo and Adam last night and we decided to FaceTime so I could see her happy face instead of just listening to her gushing about the other new friends she made with Serenity asking her if she wanted to play again. It prompted her to ask if I was coming over this morning and my only answer was of course. Which then turned into her asking Adam if I could have dinner with them tonight and the way Adam looked at me...no way was I going to say no to that.

I give Cleo a kiss to the cheek, making her giggle, and watch her hurry out of the room to get her things, barely stopping to give Adam a hug as he heads my way.

"Can I just say that I really like having you here in the mornings," he states, pulling me into his hold and I slip my arms around his waist, resting my head on his chest with a smile.

"I like it too," I tell him, a little sigh escaping when Cleo shouts up to us that she's ready.

“I was thinking,” Adam says as we move down the steps, “if you brought a bag with a change of clothes tonight, Cleo wouldn’t necessarily know that you stayed overnight. That is, if you’d like to of course,” he adds dropping a soft kiss to my lips making my heart melt. “We don’t have to do anything but sleep if you’re not ready. I’d be fine just holding you all night, baby.”

“What if Cleo would realize it?” I ask, more than ready to say yes but not at that little girl’s expense.

“Then I’d tell her that I love you far too much to be away from you, and that I hope you’ll become a permanent part of my life quite soon. Which means you’ll be part of her life for good quite soon as well,” he states and holy crap, it’s everything I’ve ever wanted. The look in his eyes, his words, it all fills me with warmth and peace and a desire that’s begging to be sated.

“I’ll stop back by my place and grab some clothes before coming to dinner then,” I state, smiling when his eyes light with a bit of surprise while the rest is intense need that just makes mine deepen.

“If you’re teasing me right now, Jasmine, I swear, I’m going to lose it,” he growls at me, pulling me flush against his body, letting me feel every single inch of him and it’s incredible.

“My parents taught me to never run from love, but to embrace it and hold onto it, no matter how fast it happens or when it happens. You came into my life at the exact right moment I think, for me, for Cleo, and hopefully for you,” I add as his head descends my way, his hand cupping my cheek.

“Absolutely the perfect time,” he agrees before giving me a kiss I’ve been wanting since our date. It fills every bit of me with need and I reach up on my tiptoes wanting more.

“Whoops,” a giggling high-pitched voice shouts, breaking us apart and I can feel my cheeks flushing seeing Cleo staring at us.

“Have everything, honey?” Adam asks her and she nods, her eyes dancing between us as she smiles brightly.

“So when can I start calling her Aunt Jasmine?” Cleo questions us and I turn my face into Adam’s chest, laughing softly to stop from telling her now and never leaving here.

“Soon I hope,” Adam states, pulling my gaze back up to him and the longing there has me nodding in agreement.

“Yes! This is going to be so cool!” Cleo shouts before hurrying out to the car while we follow a bit slower.

Adam stops me when I start to walk towards the open garage door, putting something in my hand and I glance down at it in surprise, seeing the garage door opener there. “This way you can park inside the garage and come in anytime you want.”

“Anytime?” I tease, lifting a brow at him in surprise. “So I could come over this afternoon and snoop through things and you wouldn’t mind?”

“Not at all. In fact,” he adds, taking out something else and my heart flutters seeing it’s a key. “The new alarm code is zero three one three.”

“New?” I state glancing from the key back up to him with a grin.

“I changed it Sunday. My most recent housekeeper seemed off, so I let her go and changed the code to something important I’d remember.”

“Which was what?” I ask confused by that.

“The day I met you,” he whispers into my ear making my heart soar, before giving me a last kiss to get Cleo to school on time.

My morning is spent thinking mostly about Adam, the other part on Cleo’s party, but by lunchtime, I can’t stand it anymore. I let the girls know I’m heading out but can be reached on my phone, then head home to get some things.

It’s not entirely unusual for me to sneak in and grab something in the middle of the day, but I deftly avoid going

over to the main part of the house, and not simply to avoid the questions of what I'm up to. The rest is so there's no chance of walking in on Mom and Dad doing something I so do not need to see. Dad might be almost seventy-eight, but you'd never know it the way he goes.

I pop into the grocery store on my way over to Adam's and grab the ingredients for lasagna and tiramisu. It's one of my favorite meals but I know Cleo likes it as well and I want to make something special for us tonight.

I pull up to the house, opening the garage door then stop seeing a woman at the front door peeking in through the window. She's so intent on it that she apparently didn't even hear the garage opening, which is odd.

I close it quickly then grab the bags, taking them inside wondering what the woman's up to. Adam has a doorbell camera along with others in the front of the house, so I know if she does something stupid, it'll catch it, but I don't like her being here. It feels extremely off, and I decide to ruin the surprise and call Adam now.

"Hi baby, don't tell me something came up and you can't make it tonight. You'll have two very disappointed Thompsons if you do."

"No, I'm not cancelling. Kind of the opposite in fact," I tell him as I finish putting up the cold items in the barely stocked fridge. I'll have to get by the store again if I'm going to be here more often. "I wanted to do this as a surprise for you and Cleo originally, but something strange is going on here."

"Here? What do you mean by here, baby?" Adam asks, his tone concerned, and it makes me feel a million times better.

"I left work early, went by my place to grab a bag, and stopped at the store to pick up something to make you all for dinner. I wanted to have it cooking when you all got home, but when I pulled in, I noticed a woman at the front door looking in the windows. She didn't turn when I opened the garage, so I don't think she heard me, but since I don't know



who it is, I didn't want to confront her or open the front door," I explain.

"Don't open the door for anything, baby," Adam says after a dark curse that makes my stomach churn. "That's the woman that was following Cleo around at school last year."

"Are you serious? That's crazy, Adam. She needs to be arrested for trespassing," I add, furious the woman would show her face anywhere near that sweet girl, especially when she's just now finally getting over her shyness. If she sees this broad, it's all going down the drain I'm sure.

"I've tried. Her father has sway downtown and no one will do anything about her. I'm going to come home and get rid of her."

"Okay, drive safe," I warn, letting him go but I don't put my phone away. Instead, I dial a number that will hopefully be able to help.

"Jasmine, is everything okay?" Doug asks after answering. His company's provided security for events before, but I always email first with the details before calling so it's not surprising that he's concerned.

"Not really," I admit, explaining what's going on with the woman and her history with Cleo.

"I agree, don't open the door. I can be there in less than ten minutes. I'll detain her until this Adam gets there," he tells me, and I feel like I can finally breathe again. It'll take Adam at least twenty to get here, and the sooner the woman isn't a threat, the better.

A scream is the first indication that Doug is here, and I breathe out in relief seeing him holding onto her arm. She's attempting to fight him, but his hold is stronger, and he doesn't release her until a police officer arrives to take over.

Adam pulls in just after them, stopping outside the garage and I come out the front door to meet him, seeing the confusion in his eyes.

"Sir, you are the owner of the house, correct?" one of the officers asks and he nods. "We were called by Mr. Jones

stating there was a trespasser on your property. All we need is your confirmation that this woman does not have the authorization to be on your property or in your home and we'll handle the rest."

"No, she doesn't have the authorization to be on my property or anywhere near my home, my girlfriend, or my niece, who she was stalking at Allington Private School last year. Neither they nor the police that were called out to handle it did anything about it then," Adam says, pulling me into his hold and I smile a bit at the woman's outrage.

"She's my daughter and you can't keep me from her!" the woman screams, trying to pull out of the cops' hold.

"We didn't meet you until last year. My sister was her mother and she died, leaving Cleo to me," Adam adds for the cops' understanding. "The only thing you are is an annoyance to me and a danger to my niece."

"We would appreciate it if you could send us a copy of your report. My client intends to file a restraining order against this woman, and it will go a long way in helping our cause," Doug tells the officer who gives him a nod before they escort the woman to the police car and put her in the backseat.

"What is going on, baby?" Adam asks, glancing from me to Doug.

"Let's take this inside so the cameras don't pick up anything," Doug suggests, and he nods, letting us head inside as the cops drive away with the woman. "Jasmine explained the situation with that woman, how she was frightening your niece, the cops and school's refusal to do anything about it, wanting to know if I could help."

"Doug's helped out my family with some pretty serious stuff before, you can trust him. No matter how much money or influence her father has, he can't own everyone," I add to Adam as he sits us in the living room on the couch, keeping me next to him.

"I can understand your hesitation to get into it me since I'm a total stranger to you. You don't know if you can trust

me, or if I'd understand, so I'll just tell you that I do. I met my wife thanks to Jasmine's family, got a son out of it as well, so I'm not after anything, just to help. I also understand your hesitancy to go against someone with power and connections that could possibly make your life hell, and further frighten Cleo.

"Your first instinct is to protect your niece, that's what we're all after here. I'm not afraid to go up against someone with money. I've done it before, dealt with plenty of criminals as well, so I'm not going to bail on this the way others might. I also know the right people at the police department to send things through to make it stick. The chief of police and I play poker and if there's anyone that doesn't let money grease his office, it's Davidson," Doug states and Adam relaxes next to me, his hold still as tight, but I love it.

"Alright, what do you suggest we do?" Adam asks Doug, dropping a kiss onto the top of my head, making me smile.

"Give me all the information you know about her, and I'll start digging further into her past as well as her father's to find their weakness. As long as I know who isn't in their pocket, I can steer things through them and there's nothing they can do to stop it. Until then, I'd like to put a man on Cleo's school. He won't be seen unless necessary. Which means Cleo needs to know what he looks like, have a safe word so if he comes to get her and says it, she knows it's okay to go with him. That would only happen in the event that the woman tried to snatch her, or one of you sends us a message telling us to get Cleo to safety."

"She's at Rickman," I tell Doug and he nods. "There's already a man that watches the school," I explain to Adam. "He keeps an eye out on the family's kids because there have been some issues with threats because my family has money."

"She's in fourth grade, Ms. Mason's class," Adam offers. "I don't have but a couple of people that have the authority to pick her up from school. My assistant at work and my old housekeeper. She had to retire last year after being in a car accident and needing a hip replacement, but she's getting

around well enough that she picks up Cleo when I'm running late. She wouldn't go with just anyone else."

"Knowing Jasmine's family, I'm guessing you two are a little more serious than just dating?" Doug asks and I can feel the flush that hits my cheeks at that. "Believe me, I didn't buy the whole insta-love, knowing when you met the right one, until I found my wife. Sure as hell believe it now, and after hearing about how her brothers claimed their wives, the fact that she doesn't have a ring on her finger yet is what's surprising."

"I guess I'll have to fix that shortly, as well as add you to the list that can pick up Cleo," Adam tells me, and I can't stop the smile that hits, letting me snuggle more with him while he and Doug go over everything he knows about Tina Walsh.

## Chapter 10

### Adam

The giggles coming from Cleo's room makes me want to just stand here outside the door and listen to my girls get along. I was pissed when I pulled in, seeing a man far too close to my woman, while cops were holding onto Tina. That she was at my house in the first place was enough to have me seething, but watching the footage of her going around, knocking on the doors, peeking in through the window while she had headphones in, drove me to the brink.

I texted Doug my recent ex-housekeeper's name to have him look into her as well. I fired her Saturday before my date with Jasmine after finding her here when Cleo and I came back from the movies. She had no reason to be in my house on the weekend, and now with Tina showing up here, I need to know if they're connected or not.

The fact that Jasmine called the man to help me just made me fall even harder for her, and now, there's no turning back. Jasmine's mine and I'm keeping her. Cleo loves her as well which simply makes it easier to give into it this fast.

"I think it's past someone's bedtime," I state, moving into Cleo's room, seeing her tucked in with Jasmine next to her, reading her a story.

"Can we finish, please Uncle Adam?" Cleo begs, giving me big puppy dog eyes and I nod, leaning against the doorjamb just watching them.

"Night sweet girl," Jasmine whispers to her as she's almost out, and I drop a kiss of my own to Cleo's cheek, before tucking her up the rest of the way then turn off the lamp.

I take Jasmine's hand to guide her from the room and turn back her way when she stops short. "What's wrong, baby?"

"Do you have a nanny cam set up in here?" Jasmine whispers to me and I shake my head no. "How long has that

bear been on her shelf,” she adds, nodding her head towards it, speaking so quietly that I can barely hear her.

“I don’t know, a week, maybe two,” I admit giving it another glance.

“Go call Doug, he’ll send one of his guys to come get it,” Jasmine says before taking one of the pillowcases I hadn’t put away yet from the stack sitting on the bench at the end of Cleo’s bed and slips it into it.

I drop a kiss onto her lips, thankful for her, but also curious how she knew about the bear.

“How did you know what it was?” I ask her once I’m back upstairs. Thankfully Doug’s guy was apparently watching the house in case Tina comes back for a car if released so it didn’t take nearly as long as expected.

“I have a ton of nieces and nephews,” she says sliding her arms around my waist as I come over to her, loving that she’s in not just my house, but my room—our room now. “Some of my siblings set them up just so they could check in on things during the day if they were at work. Some of them were set up as nanny cams for when there’s a babysitter that’s not family around. I’ve seen probably ten to twelve different varieties of them over the years. That one isn’t new, it’s an older model that was discontinued because you could easily make out the camera in one of the eyes. If it’s the first model of it, it only records to a SD card as well.”

“I don’t know if I’m hoping that’s why that woman was here today or not, either way it’s massively disturbing,” I state, just holding her to calm down. I don’t want this between us when I make her mine, claim her body with mine.

“I know,” Jasmine says, letting me hold her for long, quiet moments.

I curse when my phone rings, but the name on the screen has me answering it on speakerphone. “Doug, what is it?”

“Just wanted to let you know, my tech guy was close, so he stopped and got the bear from Dean. It’s the old model that’s a closed circuit, you can only see what it recorded with the SD

card. We've got her and your ex-housekeeper with placing an illegal surveillance camera in a child's room. We're going to take this to the chief of police and let you know if there's anything else you need to do or know. Based on the recordings it did, it's been there about two weeks, and the first part that recorded showed Tina setting it up in what looks like her home, then a car ride to your place before your old housekeeper let her inside. She's clearly on video placing it in Cleo's room. It was still recording when Jasmine put it into the pillowcase so there's no way she could deny it was tampered with or planted there to make her look like the victim. We scanned through the recordings, and it doesn't look like anything more than Cleo playing and sleeping was recorded on it."

"Thank you, that makes me feel a lot better," I tell him, agreeing to have his guy come do a sweep of the house tomorrow just to be safe.

"It's been a long day, why don't we go to bed?" Jasmine says after I put my phone up, her eyes warm and hungry, but understanding as well, and it simply makes me want more.

"I couldn't agree more, baby," I state, picking her up then carrying her into the bathroom with me. I put her on the vanity and take a long look around the space. Nothing seems out of place, calming me enough to focus all my attention on Jasmine.

My hands lift to her face, giving her a chance to say no or not yet, but she doesn't. She leans into me, returning my kiss until I'm about to burst.

"You make me want so many things all at once, baby. I want to just take you, claim you as mine right this instance, but I also want to draw this out, enjoy every moment of it too," I tell her, brushing little kisses over her face.

"Why not both?" she says, nearly blinding me as desire pulses through my veins.

"You shouldn't be saying that, baby," I groan as her fingers play with the button of my shirt. "You should be telling me to

be nice and gentle with your virgin pussy, to take care of it and you.”

“Or you can just claim it and if it hurts, kiss it better,” she replies, making stars dance in front of my eyes trying to hold back now.

“Careful baby, you’ve no idea what you’re about to unleash,” I warn but her little smile just pushes me over the edge.

I claim her lips with another kiss before working on the buttons of her shirt, stripping it off her as my hands roam over her bare skin. A guttural moan falls when I pull back, seeing everything beneath the baggy blouse she changed into after Doug left is bare. Her sweet breasts are tipped with mauve pebbles and my mouth begs for a taste.

“You okay there big guy?” she asks, her smile beautiful enough but with the flames of desire flickering through her eyes, she’s the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever seen.

“Why don’t you see for yourself, baby,” I tease, lifting her from the vanity before moving towards the shower as she wraps her legs around my waist. Her breasts press against my chest, and I curse myself for not removing my shirt already.

The water pours out, warming quickly, as I force myself to put Jasmine on her feet. She doesn’t want to let go as much as I don’t want to let her go, but I’m dying to be inside her.

I strip off my shirt, letting my pants fall to the floor leaving me in the boxer briefs I’ve been wearing since meeting this girl. They’re the only thing that remotely has helped keep my cock in check. Any control I had is shattered when Jasmine lifts her leg from the black leggings, revealing her bare pussy to my watering mouth.

I catch her leg before she can set it down, sliding it over my shoulder and slide a hand up her other leg, pulling her closer to my mouth with a hand on her sexy little ass. My face falls between her thighs, inhaling her delicious scent, and I can’t stop.



My tongue swipes along her lips, getting the tiniest bit of her taste, and it's the sweetest heaven ever. Better than even her mouth and somehow, making me ravenous again.

"Adam," she moans, her hand sliding into my hair when I dive in, licking up every drop, before suckling on her hard little nub that's glistening with moisture.

"Delicious, baby," I tell her before diving back in, teasing her slit with my tongue before going back to her clit. I delve between them as steam fills the room, lifting my eyes to watch as she shudders against my mouth, letting out a soft cry, before sweet nectar hits my tongue as she comes for me.

It's the sexiest thing I've ever seen, and I pull her leggings off her other leg, kicking my boxers away, as I carry her into the water. Her long legs wrap around me again, settling her core right up against my straining cock. It would be so easy to simply push her up against the wall and take her. One day I will, but not tonight.

"Adam," she sighs as I settle onto the bench, keeping her straddled over my lap, my hands running up and down her body as she presses her chest into mine. Her nipples are little spears against it, branding me as hers even more with every spot she touches.

"You are so fucking beautiful, Jasmine. Watching you come for me, makes me want to see you do it every night for the rest of time."

"That might be a bit much, but I'm willing to try," she states, making my cock harden even more as she rubs against it slightly.

"Good, I'd hate to hear the word no from you, but I'm going to have to spank your little ass if you don't stop moving on my dick right now baby. Be a good girl for me," I groan when her hips rock against me again.

"I don't know, being spanked by you might be fun. Might make me want to be a bad girl."

"You can be bad with me whenever you want, baby. Just not right now. I'm on edge and I don't want your first time to

be rushed. I want to savor every moment and remember it for the rest of my life. Taking you, making you mine is something to remember but hurting you isn't something I'll want to recall, ever."

"Okay, I'll your good girl, daddy," she whispers against my ear, her hips barely rolling against me again, but it sends me over the edge, splashing cum on both our bellies pulling a soft moan from her.

"Fuck Jasmine," I growl, tremors running through me as her hand swipes over the cum on my belly, a little purr falling from her throat. My hand dives into her hair, holding her head so I can steal her lips, teasing them with little nips, until her tongue comes out to play. It tangles with mine, teasing and twisting around it, until my cock is just as hard once more.

When I can stand, I move us into the full stream of water, washing away the traces of cum for now. I had plans to prolong this, but that's flown completely out the door now.

I turn off the water, wrapping a towel around Jasmine, then take us into the bedroom. I take my time drying her off, then use the towel to dry myself as I check the lock on the door, not wanting Cleo to walk in and see this.

I stalk back towards Jasmine, watching her breathing pick up, her nipples hardening again, and I lick my lips as she rubs her thighs together. My girl isn't shy with her body, and that simply makes me want to explore every inch of it more.

I don't stop until she's plastered against my front, sliding a hand behind her head, tilting her face up my way. "You used a name in there you'd best be careful using, baby. You've no idea the beast you'll unleash if you don't. I already want to own you as mine, for all of your needs to be met only through me, and if you start tossing that out, it's just going to get worse."

"Okay," she says, giving me a smile but I shake my head, knowing she doesn't truly understand. She can't possibly know the depths I'd go to make her happy, please her if she gives me that control.

“Baby, you have to know what you’re in for,” I warn, my thumb brushing over her bottom lip, and my cock pulses when the tip of her tongue comes out teasing it.

“Pretty sure I do,” she tells me with a smile. “You’ll protect me, from everything bad that could hurt me. Give me everything I want because I’ll give it back to you. You’ll take care of me, all of me. Not just with material things, but everything I need. You’ll want me to come to you with it all, to give it to you to help me through it, to make it better or go away if you can,” she adds, every word hitting me deep inside. It’s entirely true and something I’ve denied myself for a very long time.

“Every last thing you need or want will go through me, be vetted by me to keep you safe. That goes double in bed, baby girl. You ready for that?” I ask cupping her face as her eyes darken with desire into stormy gray globes.

“I’ve been ready for a long time for that, just had to find you, daddy,” she answers, and I slam my lips onto hers, kissing her long and hard as I scoop her up once more, then lay her down on the bed.

She’s never going to be free of me now. I can’t possibly restrain myself any longer. From here forward, she’ll have to deal with not just her man, but her daddy taking care of her as well.

# Chapter 11

## Jasmine

**M**y body lights up, every nerve ending awake as Adam pulls back from the ravishing kiss. It's all consuming and I cling to his shoulder as his mouth moves down my jaw, along my neck, still moving south, until he captures a hard peak. His teeth nip at my skin there and I let out a low moan, stretching out beneath him, wanting to feel more of his body against mine.

"Daddy, please," I cry when he nips the other nipple a bit harder. His hips are raised, not giving me any pressure where I need it most, and my nails dig into his muscles needing it.

"So damn pretty. You make me hungry to kiss every last inch of you, baby girl," he grunts, his teeth nipping my skin once more, but this time, his dark nearly black eyes are focused on my face as he does it.

"Faster," I plead lifting my hips his way. "Please daddy."

"You want daddy to kiss your sweet pussy again, baby?" he asks, his tongue trailing lower on my stomach, stopping just inches from my mound.

"Yes, please. Kiss me there, daddy," I urge, my back coming off the bed when he doesn't deny me it, doesn't tease me with it. He goes straight to my clit, licking and suckling it, as he pushes my thighs open further. His thumb teases at my slit, pressing into me and I can't stop the little cry that slips out at the incredible feelings that wash through me with it. "Oh god, yes, right there, daddy."

Adam suckles on my clit, his thumb giving way to two fingers, and the second he curls them against my g-spot, I come apart.

His body is pressed against mine when I come down, his mouth claiming mine in a wild kiss as he lifts one of my legs over his, and the head of his thick cock teases my opening. He

fills my opening completely, his size stretching me, and I let out a little moan as it starts to burn.

“Be a good girl and let daddy in to claim that sweet pussy, baby,” Adam says softly, his eyes holding mine and every hint of pain fades as I cling to the look of love pouring from him.

“I love you, daddy.” The words tumble out just as Adam presses forward, breaking through the last bit of resistance keeping my pussy from him. The pain of it doesn’t begin to register at all, as this thickness fills me tight, his length going and going, deeper into me, as he holds me close.

“I love you too, baby. You did so good giving that pussy to daddy, such a good girl,” he whispers against my ear, and I swear, every sweet utterance of praise makes me teeter on the edge.

Adam pulls back and my pussy clutches at him, not wanting him to leave. He feels too good inside me to let him go.

“Greedy little pussy, but that’s okay baby girl. I like it,” he teases, his lips pressing soft kisses over my face as he thrusts back into me, pulling a moan from my throat.

Nice and slow, he thrusts, my hips lifting to meet it, wanting it even more now that I know what he really feels like inside me. His hand slips under my head, holding it, his eyes on me, and my pussy flutters around his cock, loving the look in his eyes.

“Look at you, taking all of daddy’s cock the very first time, making it feel so good. Such a good girl for daddy,” he says, and it sends me over again, pulling a grunt from him as his hand tightens in my hair.

“Daddy,” I shout, my body tensing fully, heading straight back over the edge when his pace increases, his thrusts strumming my clit while rubbing my g-spot, sending me wild.

“That’s it, baby. Come all over daddy’s fat cock like a good girl. Keep coming, daddy’s right behind you. Your little pussy is going to make daddy come with you because it’s so good,” he warns, and it simply sets me off again.

The warmth of Adam's breath on my neck, his hand tightening in my hair feels mild compared to the geyser erupting inside me. Warm liquid floods me as sweet heaven cradles me close, and I shiver in his hold, relishing every moment of what just happened.

"Fuck I love you, Jas," Adam says softly to me, his cheek pressing against mine, and I sink deeper into the mattress, as it all washes over me.

"I love you too, Adam." A little whine sounds in my throat as he starts to pull out of me, and his lips feather over my face, sipping at my lips making it better.

"You need to let daddy up so I can make sure that sweet pussy is taken care of, baby girl. Daddy's going to be hungry for it again before morning, so it needs to be pampered now," he says and shit, that makes me smile more than I thought possible.

He slips out of me, giving me a kiss, before placing one on my pussy, making it clench hard in memory. I want it full of him now, not just before the morning, and it simply grows when he comes out with a washcloth and gently washes me with it. He wipes up his cock, and seeing it now, has me amazed it fit inside me at all, and it's not completely hard.

The little streaks of red on the white washcloth put a blush in my cheeks as he stares at it. A smile crosses his face that should make me want to smack him, but I can't possibly find the desire to do so.

"Come here, baby," he says after tossing the washcloth into a hamper and pulling the cover down on the bed. "Daddy needs to hold you right now."

"Please," I sigh happily, snuggling into his side and his hand strokes down mine, sending me into sleep faster than ever.

It's his lips that wake me. They wrap around a hard nipple, suckling on it, and his teeth nipping it pulls me the rest of the way there.

“My good girl kept her pussy nice and wet for daddy to slide right in, didn’t she?” he teases as he settles fully inside me with a single thrust, and my hips lift wanting more.

“Just for daddy,” I agree, clinging to him as he sends me up and up.

“Be a good girl and come for daddy. Take us there,” he urges me, and I shatter, coming apart again, but this time, Adam doesn’t leave me.

My eyes close as I rest on his chest, his hands holding me close, his lips kissing my temple softly, and I know it’s the best way to possibly sleep.

Light is filtering through the window when I wake, smiling as Adam’s rough cheek grazes mine. His body is hard beneath me, and I sit up a bit, finding his eyes as they fully open.

A little giggle slips out when he stands up, and I wrap my legs around his waist again, loving how he carries me wherever he wants. It’s amazing, and I want more of it.

He starts the shower, moving us into it, but before I can begin to speak, I’m pressed against the wall, getting what I’d asked for last night.

“Fuck baby. Your pussy knows just how to make daddy happy, doesn’t it? I know it does because you’re such a good girl,” he grunts at me, his hips pumping into mine, sending the breath out of me with his hard thrusts. “Yeah, it is. Such a good pussy, taking daddy whenever he needs it. Coming when he demands,” he adds, meeting my eyes and I fall entirely into his hands. “That’s it, baby girl. Keep coming and let daddy fill you.”

That makes my pussy grasp at him all over again, and he turns us, settling onto the bench. His hands grip my waist, bouncing me on his cock while his eyes hold mine. “You’re going to let daddy fill you up like a good girl. Let daddy breed you...just like this,” he groans, his cum exploding inside me as he holds me down on his cock, sending me over into my own bliss yet again.

We stay like that for several minutes, my heart racing as my head rests on his chest over his, listening to it beat in synch with mine. His hands and lips are soft on me as we come down, and I can't stop the smile that hits when he groans in almost agony as he lifts me off him.

It's a sound I have to return when he takes his time washing every inch of my body, but it turns to muffled screams as he eats me to orgasm twice. The second time from behind, and he pulls me onto his cock, filling my pussy once again, as I go off.

There's a permanent smile on my lips when we get out, and I rummage through my things to get ready before Cleo wakes. It takes over twice as long with all the kisses Adam gives me, but I will never complain about them or the time. It feels utterly perfect. Everything I've ever wanted and more.

"What are you doing today?" he asks me when I'm finally dressed and he's finishing buttoning his shirt. I like that he doesn't wear suits to work. Not saying he didn't look amazing in the dinner jacket the other night, but a three-piece suit is so not the type of guy I pictured coming home to me. I guess I was looking for someone more like my dad, so it seems I'm more like Mom than just with the way Adam and I met.

"I have to sit down with a couple clients. I have one event this weekend that's pretty big so we're going over any last minute adjustments. Then I have one with a client whose event isn't until this summer, but it's for a charity so we need to get donations lined up so we can bring in more donations to help them out with the event."

"Which charity?" he asks, making me smile because I can see he really wants to know.

"The Erikson Shelter. It's a women and children's shelter here in town. The address is kept quiet, because the women that run there don't want their husbands or boyfriends finding them at it. Mom and Dad always made donations to it when we were growing up, but now, I offer to put together the event to help them raise even more funds."



“So sweet, no wonder the Thompsons fell at your feet, baby,” he teases, and I grin as we leave his room and I sneak into Cleo’s to wake her while he goes and starts breakfast.

“Wakey, wakey, sweet girl,” I whisper into Cleo’s ear, dropping a kiss onto her cheek before she rolls onto her back, stretching.

Her eyes open, then shut, before popping open as she quickly sits up, a huge smile on her face. “You’re here!”

“I’m here, sweetheart,” I tell her, indulging in her hug until I know we need to get her up and ready.

I laugh softly when Cleo asks Adam if she can ride with me, finding out I’m following them to the school so Adam can put me on Cleo’s approved and emergency contact list. He gives her a fake pout before kissing the top of her head, then giving me one, telling us he’ll follow us there, but his girls owe him some cuddles tonight to make up for it.

I give Cleo a kiss as she hurries down the hallway while we go to step into the office, but I stop hearing several excited ‘Aunt Jas’. Adam give me a little kiss as he moved towards the desk, Pamela looking between us before giving me a wink as he reaches her.

“Hi girls,” I say giving Serenity a hug, then one to Amelia and ones to Alicia and Allison. “You all feeling better?” I ask them, but their eyes slide over my shoulder and my head turns, landing on Adam. “All done already?”

“Seems that Pamela knows all your information, so she was able to add it without me having to fill her in,” he says, glancing towards the girls who are giggling as Serenity whispers something to them.

“Is he your boyfriend Aunt Jas?” Amelia asks and I nod, smiling as they all giggle more.

“Are you gonna get married?” Serenity asks, bouncing in anticipation. “We wanna be flower girls cause we never get to go to weddings.”

I fight to control my laughter because my brothers weren’t about to let Carly or Eden plan a big wedding. Neither of

them wanted one either. Serenity and Amelia were too young to recall Jesse and Maddie's wedding so it's not too shocking that they're asking.

"I promise, all of you and Grace will get to be my flower girls if I get married, okay?" I tell them, earning more hugs I love before they hurry to their classes as Adam walks me to my car.

"I guess that rules out a run to the court-house to make you mine already," he says, keeping me from opening the door to get in.

"Pretty sure my dad would object to that."

"And how much would he object to his little girl walking down the aisle pregnant, because I'm pretty sure you're not on anything, and your pussy was begging to bred."

His words make my pussy clench, proving just how true they are, and I lean up, kissing him before patting his chest with a grin. "I guess you'd better hurry up then. My dad might try to take you out if I have a baby belly with my wedding dress. He's likely to take a swing just knowing you've corrupted me since he warned my sister Jackie's husband about not touching his little girl before they were married after all."

"I guess we won't have to worry about hiring someone to plan the wedding and with all your contacts it shouldn't take long, so start thinking what you want, baby. I'm not going to last long. I want your last name to match mine, soon," he says, and shit, if I didn't have to meet with clients, I would so be going home with him now.

## Chapter 12

### Adam

I let out a groan as the doorbell rings. Jasmine's laid out on the couch under me, her sweater hanging off a shoulder, baring all but her tight little nipple that's poking against it. Today's been a damn good day, and not only with having woken with Jasmine in my arms the last two mornings.

I also got the call from Cartwrights, and a visit from Jamison to check out our wood processor to see about getting a prototype done so we'd all know the costs to expect. The last thing I want is some random person showing up unexpectedly and interrupting me just as I'm about to get another taste of my girl.

"Go, we don't want Cleo waking up," Jasmine says, giving me a grin and quick kiss as I grumpily crawl off of her. She sits up, straightening her sweater and I head to the door, opening it to a complete stranger which only makes me feel like growling more at him.

The man's wearing jeans and sport's coat and has to be at least five years younger than my thirty-eight, but that means absolutely nothing to me right now, except he's keeping me from Jasmine's pussy.

"Can I help you?" I question, giving him a hard glare which seems to only make the man smirk in return.

"Ah, Bryan, good you're here," Doug says coming up the steps and I run a hand down my face hating the interruption has to do with Tina, even more than that we were interrupted at all.

"Want to explain what's going on?" I ask Doug when he stops behind the other man.

"This is Detective Taylor, he's helping with the Tina issue," Doug says, and I groan silently but let the two into the house.

I slide in next to Jasmine, pulling her onto my lap and holding her close as the detective's eyes linger on her for a moment too long. She curls up on it, her head resting on my shoulder, her hand on my chest and it calms me immensely.

"Sorry to interrupt your night, Jasmine," Doug says, and she nods, patting my chest.

"Better now than when Cleo was awake," she says and at least that's true. Our girl doesn't need to deal with this. "So what's up?"

"This is Detective Taylor, Chief Davidson assigned him the case when we brought it in," Doug says and I can feel her nod his way, but she doesn't offer him her hand, keeping me from losing my shit.

"I just need to ask you a few questions to wrap up the report for the DA. I've heard that the judge issued a restraining order against her to stay away from Cleo and your home, so if you see her around, just give us a call and we'll handle it," the man says and I nod, my hold on Jasmine tightening a bit until the two men stand to leave.

"The DA is going to be filing additional charges beyond the trespassing she was hit with yesterday afternoon. She is out on bail, so be careful," Detective Taylor warns. "We hope to have the arrest warrant either this weekend or Monday for stalking, illegal surveillance of a minor and harassment. They're also charging your ex-housekeeper with the illegal surveillance in hopes she'll flip on Tina because the DA is willing to make a deal with her for no jail time. The first recommendation for Tina is psych evaluation. If she would show up, she'll be taken straight to jail, even if the arrest warrant for the other charges isn't filed yet."

"Thanks," I state, sliding Jasmine off my lap to follow the men out. I press a kiss to her lips smiling down at her and her sweet beauty.

"So when's the wedding going to be?" Doug asks after the detective leaves, patting my arm when I simply glare in return. "Give the kid a break. Those girls are gorgeous, and men appreciate beauty."

“As long as it stays at just appreciation and doesn’t go any deeper it’s fine,” I grumble, before closing the door on him to get back to my girl.

“Now, where were we?” she asks with a grin, and I tug her down onto the couch, baring her shoulder, before nudging her sweater down further to capture her tight tip.

“Right about here,” I answer, claiming it with my mouth, before claiming her with everything else. I hold her tightly, wrapped up in a blanket as we lay on the couch, my fingers running through her hair. “Are you going to introduce me to your dad so I can put my ring on your finger without him coming in to fight me?”

“You think you’re ready for my family’s craziness?” she asks, turning over to look at me and I nod. “Well, Mom does family dinner every Sunday. This week is her ‘mandatory’ one so everyone that’s in town should be there. I’ll warn you, it’ll be loud and intense most likely.”

“I can handle it. I’ll do anything to keep you as mine, anything,” I promise, pulling a grin from her that has my cock waking up once more.

“Why don’t we go soak in your nice big tub and you can show me exactly what you’ll do to keep me,” she suggests, and I barely stop to grab our clothes before hurrying up to our room with her.

Her skin is all wrinkled by the time I lift her boneless body out of the tub, and I tuck her in next to me, knowing she has a busy day tomorrow. I’d love to go to the event to help her, but that would mean a babysitter for Cleo and until I know Tina isn’t going to be an issue, I don’t want her away from me, or Jasmine, except for school.

I know my girl will protect her with her life. I’ve seen it with the way she called Doug and got things rolling. She’s not about to risk something happening to her, which just makes me love her more.

Jasmine gives us both kisses before she heads out to get the event decorating started, and I squat down, giving Cleo a

serious look.

“Think you can help me out with something really important?” I ask her.

“What’s that?” she returns, her brows scrunching a bit as her mouth purses adorably.

“Picking out a ring for Jasmine,” I tell her, glad I did it here and not at the store when she dances around for nearly ten minutes, shouting ‘oh my goshes’ over and over and over.

She’s squirming so much I can barely buckle her into the car, and she skips and twirls around as we move into the store. She’s even happier than when we gave her the invitations to hand out to her grade yesterday morning. Ms. Mason was out collecting the kids from cars, and it was obvious that she recognized Jasmine by the smile she gave us, promising she’d see that everyone received one.

There were already ten RSVPs by the time Cleo went to bed last night. The first from Serenity which made Cleo’s entire night.

“Welcome,” a woman says, giving me a full, come-hither smile and I know I want nothing to do with her. “How can I help you today?”

“Is Reggie here?” I ask, relieved when I hear his chuckle before his bulk comes out from a hallway.

“If it isn’t Adam Thompson. What brings you in here today with this little gem?” Reggie says, making Cleo smile but cling to me a bit more.

“We’re looking for an engagement ring for the most incredible woman ever,” I answer, taking out the little piece of string I tied around Jasmine’s finger last night after she was out. “This should be about the right size.”

“Sneaky, well now, come on back and we can look through some of my prettiest diamonds,” Reggie says, and I slow him down as we head back towards his private showroom.

“Actually, I was thinking about an opal as the main stone instead. Something with more of a gray or smoky tint, but

with lots of brilliance to it,” I tell him, making the man’s brow rise for a minute before he nods.

“Not just any girl is she?” Reggie asks.

“No, she’s not. She’s amazing and we love her to bits.”

“We do,” Cleo agrees, climbing onto my lap while Reggie goes to pick out some rings for us to look over.

None of them are quite what I want, but one of the raw stones he lays on the mat is the perfect starting point. It’s the exact color of Jasmine’s eyes when she’s completely sated, and the urge to have it on her finger grows exponentially with it being a shaped like a raindrop. Reggie calls it a teardrop, but it definitely plays into our first kiss by the fountain.

He plays around with some designs, until it’s perfect. It’ll have a small halo of diamonds surrounding the opal, on a split shank band, that will have more diamonds on it. The two bands curve and cross, one going under the main stone while the other flows around the end of it, giving it another smaller halo effect. The wedding band will top the point part in similar fashion to the edge halo, and I think the stone looks perfect against the platinum.

“So when do you think it’ll be ready?” I ask as he rings up my deposit on it.

“For you and since I have a band that should work for most of it two weeks,” he says and I nod, wishing it were sooner, but I want Jasmine to have the perfect ring.

“Alright, I guess I could give it to her on her birthday then,” I tell Cleo who grins wildly. “That means you can’t tell her anything about it.”

“Eek,” Cleo gulps but she nods, and I press a kiss to the top of her head before another ring in Reggie’s display catches my attention. It has two diamonds on either side of a sapphire, and I motion to it making Reggie’s brow rise in question.

“What size is that?” I ask him.

“A six, why? You’re changing your mind after I just spent two hours coming up with that masterpiece?” he says looking

at me like I've lost it.

“No, but my girls' birthdays are in April, mine's in September, so it's perfect for a promise ring so to say,” I state, and with it in hand, Cleo and I head home to wait for Jasmine.

Sunday morning we sleep in then spend a lazy day at home, and I drop a kiss to her lips as she comes down the stairs with Cleo, both of them dressed for dinner with her family. She looks stunning in a pair of comfy jeans and another of her sweaters that hangs off the shoulder. This one at least doesn't go nearly as far, which is a good thing since we'll be around her family, and I don't need a hard-on the entire night.

I'm a little speechless when she directs me to the biggest house I've ever seen. My place is impressive to most, but this one makes it look like a pauper's.

“Do you live in a hotel?” Cleo asks as I park where Jasmine directs.

“No sweetie, my dad wanted a big family even before he met my mom, so he built the house for just the right woman to come along. He also had part of it constructed to be able to have events here and show it off,” Jasmine tells us as we head through what appears to be a back door. “This part of the house is the east wing, down here are the party rooms as we always called them. My rooms are up on the second floor over here, while my parents, and younger brother and sisters that still live here, use the other wing.”

“It's so big,” Cleo whispers and my eyes slip down to Jasmine, silently asking the unspoken question.

“I liked that you weren't interested in me just for my money. A lot of guys I dated were hoping to live off my trust fund or ask for stupid expensive presents,” she tells me, and I stop us, cupping her face, kissing her to show all I want is her. This means nothing to me because I know I can support her myself if she ever wants to quit her job.

“No more keeping secrets, okay baby?” I state and she nods, resting against my side before leading us further into the



house.

I hear them before I see the group, but my feet stop when I find several familiar faces looking back at us.

“Jas, what the hell?” Jamison says looking from her to me then back to her, his tone is angry, and it raises my hackles. I slip my hand onto her hip, turning her further into my arms not about to let him near her.

“Well, I guess we don’t have to worry about things going wrong with the contracts now,” Johnnie says, pulling chuckles from Jesse and Serena who’s sitting with a woman that looks a lot like Jasmine and Jaime. The same chin and cheeks, and I know they’re sisters.

“Contracts?” Jasmine says, glancing up at me and I brush a knuckle across her cheek dropping a kiss to her forehead.

“I met with them earlier this week to bid on doing the manufacturing of the new furniture line. The one I told you about Friday over dinner,” I add, and she nods.

“You met with the carpenter which is why you asked me to pick up Cleo from school,” she says, and I confirm with a nod. “That was Jamison?” she adds with a little laugh before turning to her brother. “So you all have already met?”

“Yeah, didn’t think he was going to try and use my sister to get a bid,” Jamison grumbles.

“Well that’d be kind of hard to do since he didn’t know who you all were until we walked in here,” Jasmine says drawing more looks at us. “I never told him my last name or talked about the company.”

“I was about to ask her for it Thursday when we stopped in at the school so I could add her to the approved list to pick up Cleo. She was stopped by some of her nieces on their way in, but I didn’t have to interrupt them since the secretary already knew her information,” I add rubbing Cleo’s shoulder as she leans back against us.

“Really? So you just happened to go into my sister’s place and just happened to start dating her right as you were putting in a bid to the company?” Jamison asks, stopping when a hand

comes down on his shoulder. The man has to be Jasmine's dad and a bit of nervousness hits me.

"Jamison, look at your sister," he says, and it pulls my eyes to her as well, as she curls up in my side more. "Now look at the way he's looking at her and tell me he's trying to pull something over on us."

"But..."

"We get it, she's your twin and you're never going to like anyone she's with, but hey, we've already seen what kind of guy he is, so give him a break," Jesse states and looking from him to his father the resemblance is remarkable, but it's nothing when a couple women move up and it's like looking at one twenty years in the future or the past.

"Dad, this is Adam," Jasmine says smiling up at me before her hand rests on Cleo's shoulder, "and this is his niece Cleo."

"It's nice to meet you son," Jake says, shaking my hand before crouching down to Cleo. "I think you might already know someone here, why don't we go find Serenity and the other girls and let Jasmine introduce your uncle to the others? I think we can find some cookies if you don't tell anyone," he adds making Cleo smile, taking his hand with total ease. "I'm Jake, but you can call me Pop-pop, Papa, or Grandpa if you want, I suspected you'll be my grand-niece soon based on the way your uncle's looking at my girl after all."

Cleo lets out another giggle, her eyes dancing with our secret as she hurries out with him.

"Seriously, that's all the inquisition he gets?" the younger of the two that look nearly identical says pulling a chuckle from the older one.

"You were his first little girl to get married, of course he was harder on Ethan, but it worked out better than you anticipated thanks to your momma, didn't it?" the older one says and Jasmine laughs, before filling me in on how Jackie introduced Ethan to their dad, and how they announced their engagement the same day Jillian was born.

“Not your boyfriend, hmm?” a younger girl asks Jasmine as she pops up from behind us, and while it’s not as shocking to see the resemblance of the girls, it’s still amazing, and explains entirely why Doug said all the girls were gorgeous.

“This is Jillian the little brat,” Jasmine states, making me chuckle because the love flowing between them is something amazing that I certainly didn’t have with Marcy. This family though...it’s definitely what Cleo deserves and at least now she’ll get to be part of it.

“You went to Hadley, didn’t you?” one of the women asks after introductions were made, and I’m not entirely sure I have everyone’s names correct.

“Why does it matter, Jennie?” Julie says, rolling her eyes at the other woman. “You can ignore everything she says and does, we only tolerate her because she’s family.”

“Be nice,” Serena states, and the look the two of them share is seen around the room by all the couples and I’m very happy to add to it with Jasmine.

“Just wondering because he looks familiar. Pretty sure he’s around my age so just curious,” Jennie says, rolling her eyes at Julie in return and I can hear Jasmine laugh beside me.

“Actually I did, graduated sixteen years ago in May, then came here to take over my father’s company when he died,” I state, not bothered by the fact in the least that she might remember me. I wasn’t wild even in college so it’s not like I did something with her and forgot.

“You were roommates with...Arthur Dale,” Jennie says, and I nod. “I dated him for like two minutes.”

“You lucked out because he was a creep and more,” I state, before turning my attention to the one person I’m here for—my girl.

I’ll hopefully get a few minutes with Jake to tell him my plans, ask his permission, and I’m sure I’ll be able to bring Jamison around to me. Eventually at least. When he sees how happy Jasmine is with me, I’m sure he’ll be cool with it.

## Chapter 13

### *Jasmine*

The last two weeks have flown by, and I honestly can't believe we got all of this done. The center looks amazing. My brothers and Julie knocked it out with getting the structures set up and my team's decorating of them is outstanding.

I lift my hands to my lips to stifle the happy little squeak that bubbles up and the light hits on the ring on my finger, making me warm entirely. Adam slipped it on my finger after we got home from him meeting my family, and I was speechless, even more so when he said it was more of a promise ring than my engagement ring, but to start planning our wedding because I was sure to have it soon.

I'm so anxious for him to actually propose. I pretty much already have the wedding planned, beyond the actual date and his attendants. Hell, I even have a dress picked out. It was from a trunk show, something that wasn't part of a normal collection and I fell entirely in love with it last week.

I went into the store to buy a new dress for an upcoming event, but when I saw that one, I knew it was mine. It's hanging in my closet at Mom and Dad's right now.

I'm a little sad that we won't have to worry about a baby bump just yet, but I'm sure it'll happen when it's supposed to, just like I met Adam when I was supposed to. I won't mind having an extra month or two of just us and Cleo.

She loves the family dinners even more than I do, especially playing with Serenity and Amelia, and even Alex who's only a year older than her. He turned eleven in December so they're all close in age and coming to the party.

"This looks incredible, Jas," Jackie says, and I grin, seeing her headed towards me sans kids. "Serena's with them, didn't want to spoil the surprise if you wanted Cleo to see it first."

“So what are you doing with the rest of your day?” Julie asks her wiggling her brows at Jackie making her blush slightly. “I heard that Andra and Abby are watching the others and Ethan might have asked for the keys to the apartment he stayed in before you all got married, so?”

“So, we might be having an afternoon just the two of us. It’s been a while but with Aiden older now, it’ll be nice to spend some one-on-one time together again and I may have teased him about us never getting to do it while he was there,” Jackie admits, and I give her a hug, before ushering her on her way. I’m sure if places were reversed, she’d be doing the same for me and Adam.

By the time we get the kids inside to show it off, it’s nearly time for guests to start arriving. I smile seeing Cleo’s face beaming with joy when the first few girls come in with books rather than gifts.

After the first few people sent in their RSVPs, I got questions for gift ideas from a couple of the girls’ moms. That lead me to asking Cleo if there was anything she really wanted, but she said she got everything with just the party already. She had Serenity as a friend, along with Amelia and Alex, and she just wanted to hopefully make some more with the others coming.

I knew most parents didn’t want to send their kids to a birthday party empty handed, so I asked if she wanted to have them donate to a charity for her or collect some money to donate to something. Her little face lit up when she asked if she could donate books to their school library, because she couldn’t ever find some of her favorites in it.

I said of course and we posted on the RSVP site that in lieu of gifts for Cleo, she’d like to share her love of reading with the school. That she preferred for anyone that wanted to bring a gift, to bring books to donate, or a few dollars to give to the library to buy new ones instead.

Adam is greeting people with Cleo as they put their books or donations in the boxes, and I see a woman with a little boy that’s scuffing his feet outside looking shy. I catch Julie’s

attention and let her know I'll be right back, before heading out to meet them.

"Hi there, are you here for Cleo's party?" I ask as the woman looks my way.

"We are, Eric isn't sure about coming in though," the woman says, and I give him a smile when his head pops up.

"Everyone's having a great time inside, you don't want to join us?" I ask as the woman rubs his shoulder gently.

"I don't have a present to give," he says quietly, his eyes downcast, and I kneel down letting him see me.

"That's okay. You know why?" I state getting a headshake of a no. "What Cleo really wants more than anything from the party is to make some new friends. She just started school at Rickman this year and she was a little shy about it. We all thought a party for your whole grade would be the best way for her to let everyone see that she's not always shy and what makes her happy. So we came up with this really cool adventure story for everyone to join in on. No present necessary to come. In fact, she asked for people to only bring books or some money to donate to the school's library if they did want to bring a present, she won't be opening any at the party."

"Really?" he asks, glancing from me to his mom.

"Really, so, want to come join in on the fun?" I ask, offering him my hand.

"I..." He stops, looking back to his mom and she nods.

"Why don't you add this to the donation as well," the woman tells him, handing over a worn five-dollar bill that makes his eyes widen in shock.

"Really?" he says, his smile huge when she nods, and we move inside together, letting him put in the donation before saying hi to Cleo.

"This is Eric," I tell her smiling when Serenity, Amelia, and Alex hurry over to join us. "This is my nephew Alex and my nieces Amelia and Serenity. She's in your grade as well."

“You were in Miss Dorfman’s class last year with me,” Serenity says, and he nods, still a bit shy until Amelia peeps up.

“Want to come play? Aunt Jas says we can go through as many times as we want,” Amelia tells him and his eyes light up as he settles his hand into hers before the group moves over to the doorway for the first room. Jillian is entertaining the kids there, giving them the little maps to help them through the maze, while limiting how many go on through the magical portal so they’re not all on top of one another.

“Thank you,” the woman says, giving me a smile. “He’s been a bit lonely since we moved here last year. My husband’s mother and father were in a car accident last year. We lost my father-in-law and my mother-in-law ended up paralyzed from the waist down, so we moved here to help out. It’s been rough, physically, and mentally, but also financially. I mostly have been taking care of her and my husband’s only been working part-time jobs as a mechanic and janitor, so going to or having parties isn’t something we’ve been able to do. Since the invitation said the entire grade was invited, I hoped it wouldn’t matter but Eric was still worried about it.”

“I understand and believe me, I know how kids react when someone doesn’t bring them a gift or doesn’t bring them something they deem good enough,” I tell her. Her brows scrunch a bit and I add, “I run *Celebrations by Jas*, we do party and event planning. It’s how I met Cleo and her uncle.”

“Oh, I thought you were family at least. You don’t look quite old enough for a ten-year-old,” she adds, and I nod.

“Adam and I hit it off and we’re almost engaged,” I admit. “So I’ll hopefully be her aunt soon. Her mom passed away two years ago, and Adam became her guardian. She was in a private school but there were some issues with the mother of another student that scared her, which is why Adam switched her this year. With that, it left her a little shy around others. She’s started to come out of her shell though, and it’s been amazing to see.”

“I’m hoping that will be Eric soon. We haven’t been able to afford for him to play baseball, which is something he loved doing back home, so he’s been quiet. I keep hoping his dad will find a job like he had with Bowman’s Manufacturing, because he really liked it and it paid well, but so far he hasn’t had any luck,” she says, and I can’t stop the smile that hits.

“What did he do?” I ask.

“He was a machinist there. He could run and fix any of them and was a shift lead. If we could have moved his mother up with us it would have been easier, but her insurance wouldn’t cover it, since it’s across the state line, so we came down here. I’ve been picking up shifts at the diner now that his mom’s a bit more mobile, but there’s not much extra for fun things, so I’m really grateful for this. I’m Renee by the way, I don’t think I said that,” she adds with a little laugh, and I shake her hand.

“Jasmine, and there’s someone I want you to meet,” I tell her, leading us over to Adam who is extracting himself from two moms that Julie’s rolling her eyes toward.

“Hi baby,” he says, giving me a kiss and I love that it’s not solely to show the women he’s taken. No, I see the reason in his eyes and it’s the same as mine. He can’t last long without needing my taste on his lips, even if it’s just through a kiss.

“Hi,” I sigh, sliding into his hold before looking to Renee. “This is Adam Thompson, Cleo’s uncle.”

“It’s nice to meet you, I’m Renee Marsten. My son Eric is in the same grade.”

“Nice to meet you too,” he says, shaking her hand.

“I think you should give her a business card to take home to her husband,” I tell him, seeing the questions in his eyes as he glances back down at me. “He was working for Bowman’s until last year when they moved here to help his mother.”

“Really? How long was he with Bowman’s?” Adam asks, his hand squeezing my hip gently.

“Fifteen years, he started there just after high school, was a machinist for them,” Renee says, looking at me curiously.



“What’s he doing now?” Adam adds taking out his wallet and a business card.

“He’s working as a mechanic at a garage part-time, and as a janitor at nights. Why?”

“Because I’m getting ready to hire about a hundred new people to help handle the new workload that’ll be coming our way. The more that I can find that are skilled, won’t need much or any training, the better my days will be,” Adam tells her as he hands her the card. “Tell him to give me a call Monday, we’ll be running three shifts and will have openings on all of them so there will be options with what works best for your all’s schedule.”

“Are you serious?” Renee says, her eyes bouncing between us in shock.

“Completely. I just signed contracts to manufacture the new Cartwright ready-to-assemble furniture line, so there will be a lot of possibilities for him. If he worked for Bowman’s for that long then I know he has the skills we need,” Adam answers her. “I pay livable wages as well as offering a profit-sharing program with my vested employees. That profit will be going up with the introduction of these new products, so it’s definitely the right time to get on board.”

“Thank you, so much. If I don’t get to see you later, please know how much I really appreciate all of this. We can only stay an hour,” she adds glancing around the space, “but I know Eric will be glad he came. I have to get to the diner for my shift and my husband won’t be finished with his job until an hour after the party ends.”

“We can keep an eye on him if you’re okay with it,” I suggest. “We’ll be here at least an hour afterwards, getting the food and other items put away so that’s not a problem. My niece’s moms are here with us as well,” I add pointing towards Julie and Serena who give her a wave in return. “My younger sisters are helping out in the maze too, so there’s plenty of us to do so.”

“Are you sure?” she asks, and I nod, getting a hug in reply that makes me incredibly happy. “Thank you again. I’ll let

Eric know when I find him and make sure he's okay with it.”

“Of course,” I muse, moving over to Julie and Serena with Adam to fill them in.

“If I'd known they were struggling I'd have found him something to do that worked around his schedule,” Julie says with a sigh. “I knew they came here to help out his mom but didn't know it was that bad. I met him at the end of last year when I went to pick up Serenity one day. We could have easily hired him on to do maintenance on the equipment.”

“Sounds like this is more his speed and won't make him feel like he's getting a handout though,” Serena says and Julie nods, giving her a kiss before we move on, making sure the party goes smoothly and everyone enjoys themselves.

Based on the smiles on faces, the kids had a blast, and I've handed out even more business cards to the moms as Eric comes over to us with Amelia holding his hand. Alex is giving him a little glare from behind him which is hilarious, and Julie must see it too because she lets out a little laugh before catching Serenity up as she enthuses over everything they did.

Cleo comes straight to me, and it makes my heart really happy to indulge in that hug, and my belly flutter with longing when she rests her head on Adam's shoulder when he picks her up. I can't wait until they're all mine, and we have a baby on the way.

## Chapter 14

### Adam

I move into the restaurant, my palms a bit sweaty but beyond ready for this. Cleo loved her birthday. Jasmine made it incredibly spectacular and I'm so glad that I went to her company to make it happen.

Cleo was just as happy last night when I got home. Jasmine took her to school with the donations and that alone made it even better, let alone the recognition she got for the donations from the librarian. Cleo was telling Jasmine all about the announcement they made at the end of the day telling the students that there would be over a hundred new books in the school library thanks to the generosity of the fourth graders, and to celebrate, they were going to have a pizza party.

I'm pretty sure Jasmine donated a bit to make that happen since it seems it's going to be a school-wide pizza and reading celebration. All the kids will be able to bring a blanket and/or pillow, a book of their choice and read for the entire afternoon if they want next Friday instead of having lessons.

Between that plus the news that the DA is going forward with the charges against Tina, it's been a really good start to the week. Add on bringing Eric's dad Jim on-board and my Monday was awesome.

I'm thankful that the DA didn't accept the offer from her father's lawyer for one-year unsupervised probation and agreement to stay away from Cleo. She agreed it wasn't nearly enough with her putting a camera in our house. Her psych evaluation came back that she was mentally competent to stand trial but that she wasn't mentally stable, which we already knew. It does, however, give us the ability to monitor her whereabouts as the psychiatrist did deem that she appeared to be a danger to Cleo.

Jim was an incredible find. Today he worked with Jamison and I, helping us get the settings right on a few pieces we were having issues with. I moved him over to helping with the setup of the new lines with a raise over what I offered yesterday already but it'll be worth it for certain.

Today is Jamison and Jasmine's birthday, so they had plans to go out to dinner tonight. I asked Jamison for permission to crash it, then similarly to my discussion with Jake two weeks ago, I let him know I was proposing and would take care of her forever.

He agreed, which I'm thankful for, but either way, I was getting my ring on Jasmine's finger tonight. Reggie had it ready last Friday, but I wanted to wait until I had Jasmine's undivided attention, since she was so busy with Cleo's party prep Friday night.

I don't know why I'm nervous to ask her. I know she'll say yes. She's mentioned little things about what we might do at the wedding, so I know she's thinking about it.

I just don't want her upset that I'm butting in on time with her twin. I've seen during the family dinners just how close they are, so I'd never want her upset on losing out on one-on-one time with him.

I easily spot them at the table, giving the hostess a nod before heading their way. Jasmine's back is to me, and I slip my hand onto her shoulder bringing her face up in surprise.

The delight in her eyes reassures me. The look on Jamison's face must reassure her when she turns back towards him, because the smile she gives me is gorgeous.

"Happy birthday, baby," I say, dropping a kiss onto her lips.

"I didn't know you were coming," Jasmine states, resting her head on my shoulder for a moment when I take a seat.

"I wanted it to be a surprise. I discussed it with Jamison earlier and he was okay with me joining you," I explain, and Jamison gives me a nod.

“I guess he’s not that bad. At least I know he wasn’t playing with you trying to get to us now,” Jamison states, and that is all it takes to get us moving on and enjoying the night.

Jamison leaves after we finish dessert, dropping a kiss on Jasmine’s cheek, and I let her linger over her cappuccino until she’s ready to go.

“I’m guessing you have a babysitter for Cleo that we need to get home to,” she says, and I drop a kiss onto her lips as we leave the restaurant and head to the car.

“She’s having a very special sleepover with Serenity tonight, so I can celebrate your birthday with you,” I tell her. “I have one more stop before we go home to enjoy the house all to ourselves.”

“Lead the way then,” she replies, giving me a gorgeous smile and I drive us across downtown until we’re close to the park. There’s only one place I can even begin to think of doing this, and I walk us down the sidewalk to reach the fountain.

“Even before we met, I would come here on lunch for days when work was getting to me, or I just needed a break. I didn’t understand why I loved it so much until we met, until I learnt that this was your design. Your family built it, but you designed it,” I state, and she nods snuggling into my hold as I cup her cheek. “Being here with you that first night, I knew I was going to spend my life with you, and so, I thought this would be the perfect place to ask you this.”

“Adam...” she gasps when I pull back, settling down onto a knee in front of her.

“I love you more than anything, more than I ever imagined possible, and I don’t want to spend another day without being able to say that you’re at least my fiancée. My beautiful Jasmine, will you make me the happiest man alive and marry me? Be mine, my wife, Cleo’s aunt, mother to the babies I want to fill you with,” I state, loving the look that hits her eyes hearing the last part. “Marry me, baby, make your life and my life, our life together.”

“A million times yes. I love you so much,” she says, laughing as I slip the ring onto her finger. “Does this mean we can set an actual date now because I was thinking June fifteenth and might have reserved the date with a florist and baker?”

“Whenever you want, whatever you want, baby. I just want you as mine,” I assure her.

“Thank you, this is gorgeous,” Jasmine whispers to me after a peek at her ring. “I love the other too, it’ll remind me always of when it was the three of us, but this...”

“It’s you, the color of the opal reminded me of your eyes, the brilliant colors in it the different bits that make up your personality, and the diamonds to show how bright you’ve made my world. I adore you and I’ll never stop,” I swear, before scooping her up into my arms to take home. It’s time I show my girl how much I love her again.

I barely get us inside before I’m dropping to my knees, sliding my hands up under her dress to find her delightful smelling core. I’ve been hungry for a real dessert since dinner, my dick hungry for it as well, but I needed my ring on her finger first.

I give a jerk to her panties, and they fall to pieces in my hands, pulling a moan from her that’s sexy as hell. My arms wrap around her thighs, lifting her as I stand, pulling another little moan from her when I settle her onto the kitchen counter, pushing the bottom of her dress out of the way.

“Give me your hand, baby,” I tell her, shaking my head when she slips her right one forward. “Other one.”

“This one?” she teases, wiggling her fingers letting my ring sparkle under the lights.

“That’s right, give me it,” I state, and she places it in mine with a smile.

I move it down to her pussy, using it to part her lips as I pull her further to the edge, pushing her skirt out of the way. “Keep them right there, baby girl. I want to see my ring on your finger while I show you just who owns this pussy now.”

“Please,” she moans, her fingers opening her up to me and I lean in, taking a long lick of her sweetness.

That’s all it takes to stop any of my intentions to take it slowly. I latch onto her pussy, drinking down every drop of her desire until she goes off, coating my mouth with more of her goodness while her ring twinkles in front of my eyes.

I can’t wait another minute to be inside her now, and I quickly ditch my pants as I stand, teasing her opening before thrusting in. Her pussy clamps down around my length and I can barely breathe as the orgasm begs to be released from inside me.

“Fill me, daddy,” she whispers, pulling my eyes open, meeting her gorgeous gaze, and I can’t help from going over seeing the need for it in her eyes.

“Fuck baby girl, that’s it. Squeeze my cock, get every drop of it,” I groan, letting her coax it all out.

“I’d say it’s a good thing Cleo wasn’t home now,” Jasmine teases when I pull back, and her smile fills every bit of me with warmth.

“I agree,” I muse, picking her up from the counter to head up to our room. “It means I can kiss every inch of you tonight, make you come as loud as I can without anyone interrupting us.”

“Well then, sounds like it’s time for you to get to work,” she counters, her teeth nipping at my neck, and I pick up my pace.

Tossing her onto the bed, I kick off the rest of my clothes. Then pounce on her, undoing the zipper of her dress, leaving her just as bare, her tight nipples tempting me first.

My cock is dripping by the time I slide back inside her, my mouth and fingers pulling three more orgasms from her. I need another from her, want to feel her coming all around me while I fill her again.

“You’re going to be daddy’s good girl and give me one more, aren’t you baby?” I question as her legs wrap around my

waist, her arms around my head as her fingers tighten in my hair.

“Yes, please daddy, I’m so close,” she moans, her pussy flexing around me and it puts me on the ledge.

My hips piston harder and faster in and out of her, and with a little bite to her nipple, she goes off, pulling me along with her. Her shout of daddy making me come harder and longer wanting to be her everything, always.

I press kisses over her face as she lays on my chest, my arms holding her close, her body melting into mine. “I love you, so much.”

“I love you too, baby,” I promise, holding her tight as we both drift to sleep.

We’re up bright and early, heading over to see Cleo, tell her the news officially so she’s one of the first to know, and I laugh when Julie’s surprised that we already have a date planned.

“Dang, how long have you been planning this?” Julie asks when Jasmine tells her all the things she already knows she wants to do for it.

“Since I brought him home to the first family dinner. We knew it was going to happen, and I didn’t want to waste time with a drawn-out engagement,” Jasmine tells them.

“More like you know your dad would flip if you were pregnant before engaged,” Serena teases as Cleo, Serenity, Matt and Grace come downstairs.

“My Jas,” Cleo says, hurrying to her first with a hug and I chuckle a little not only that she ditched me for Jasmine, but also that she’s now calling her ‘my Jas’ instead of Miss Jas even.

“You can call her Aunt Jas soon, honey,” I state, pulling a little squeal from her that makes Jasmine smile more, and I know, this right here, is the best thing that ever happened to me. Cleo led me to Jasmine, there’s nothing on earth that I could do to truly express how much that means to me.



# Chapter 15

## *Jasmine*

Adam slips up behind me, his lips pressing a soft kiss to my neck, and I sigh happily watching everyone here celebrating with us. It was everything I ever wanted and more. The best part is that I can officially call him my husband, call Cleo my niece.

With work obligations and Cleo, we're not taking a honeymoon right now. We decided to simply settle in and wait until the right time to do something special. I have events all summer, Adam has the new warehouse going up along with all the new staff they're training. Combine that with Cleo and it's just not something we're comfortable doing right now.

Cleo hasn't been apart from Adam except the couple of sleepovers with Serenity the last two months. Even with that woman in jail for violating the restraining order, we don't want to leave her even with my family for long.

"Ready to go home, Mrs. Thompson?" Adam whispers to me, and a rush flows through me hearing that name.

"Definitely, except..." I stop, glancing up at him and the concern that immediately sweeps over his face warms my heart. "Something started just before the ceremony."

"Doesn't mean I can't hold you all night if you don't want to do more," he tells me, and I sigh again, loving this man entirely.

It takes forever to get away, but I give Cleo another hug, knowing she's safe with Julie and Serena for the night. Jamison gives me a long one when we reach the car. I know getting married will change our relationship some, but there's nothing that is going to come between us in the end. When he meets the right woman, he'll understand this, know why I didn't want to wait before getting married.

My feet ache as we get home and I sigh, knowing I should have broken in the heels better, but the white shoes don't go with many of my dresses. I slip them off, then let out a little squeak when Adam picks me up, carrying us up to our bedroom.

The closet is full of my clothes, my things all over the room and bathroom, and I grin when he sets me on the bathroom vanity, turning on the tap for the tub, before coming back to me. His hands dig into my feet, making me moan, and I don't begin to argue when he undoes my dress. It falls to the floor without the corset support, leaving me bare beyond my underwear.

He drapes the dress over the vanity chair, then tosses his clothes aside, divesting me of my underwear before we sink into the hot water of the bath. His arms around me are the sweetest thing ever and he kisses my cheek holding me tight. "It will happen when it's meant to, baby. Don't worry."

A little sigh falls from me, glad I don't have to say the words. I know he's right but with the way my brothers and sisters have all fallen pregnant so easily, most of me figured I'd already be today rather than not.

"I love you, Adam. You and Cleo are the best things that have come into my life. I just want someone we can share that with, show Cleo what it's like to be a sister. Let you be a daddy from the start with all the baby snuggles," I muse, and his lips press kisses along my cheek, down my neck before his face settles there.

"And we will, to all of it, baby. When the time is right, we'll get that. It's only been a few months, so stop stressing and comparing us to anyone else. How much older is Joe than you after all?" he adds and that calms me entirely, letting me simply enjoy the sweetness with my new husband.

He's right. Joe is a month shy of being five years older than me. Mom and Dad never did anything to prevent another baby, it just didn't happen until she got pregnant with me and Jamison, followed by four more babies, so it's not like I need to dwell on it right now. Until I met Adam, I hadn't felt

anything close to baby fever as well, so I'm not sure why it's stuck in my head.

I push it all aside, focusing on him and us tonight, and it helps, especially with my upcoming events schedule. Most of the events are for charities and businesses, rather than personal ones, and it's a lot of work to get everything done, but my staff is great.

Staff that includes Renee now. She's amazing with people and loves being in the showroom. In fact, even her mother-in-law Betty has been helping out in it the last two weeks and it's done her a world of good.

I think the only one that's had an issue with Renee and Jim joining us—well, not really them joining us but Eric, on a few occasions including the wedding has been Alex and Ethan. That may simply be based on the fact that Eric and Amelia are pretty much inseparable. Jackie finds it adorable and so do I.

The next few weeks race past, putting us in July already and I'm relieved when the fourth is over. I still have two more big events this month, but they're not until the last two weekends, giving me a chance to hang out with Carly and the kids, while Cleo is with Serenity at an all-day art program they really wanted to do. Serena took them as thanks for the party I put together for Matt and Grace. They're officially Cartwrights, have been since May twentieth, and we're all extremely excited to know they can't be taken away.

"Looks like married life suits you," Carly teases as I come in with our favorite frappes. The café is just down from Adam's office, and I might have spent his lunch hour with him eating something other than food.

"Never been happier," I agree, my brow lifting in surprise at the silence of the house. "Should I be worried?"

"No," she says with a laugh, pointing to little playard where Ruthie is sleeping. The new baby, Robert, or Bobbie as they've been calling him is out in his bassinette explaining the silence. "Johnnie took the boys to a playgroup to see how they'd do with other kids. They're good with the other kids in

the family but not sure how that will translate to the part-time preschool they're starting this fall."

"Ah, so you got a little extra peace while these two rest," I tease her.

"I'm so glad he's here and sleeping a little more. Much as I like being pregnant, I don't like not seeing my feet to put my shoes on," Carly says, and I can't help but laugh a bit. She knows Johnnie will gladly help her with them. He loves doing things for her whether she's pregnant or not, a lot like Adam does for me. I really can't wait for him to have that opportunity as well.

Ruthie wakes up just after three, and I snuggle with her while Bobbie nurses until Johnnie comes home with the boys, and I get some more hugs in before heading home myself. Cleo can't wait to tell us all about her program at dinner and I smile happily letting it take me into the next few weeks.

"Okay, that's enough" Adam says, his arms circling me, pulling me away from the clean up as the event ends. "Your staff can handle this. You've been here for eighteen hours now. It's time to go home and get some sleep."

"He's right, Jasmine," Dana says, taking the tablet from my hands. "You look exhausted, which I'm not surprised about since you've been on the go since six o'clock this morning. Go home with your hubby. We don't want to see you until at least Tuesday. Nothing big is on the calendar for the first weekend of August, so relax a bit, we've got this."

"Alright," I state seeing the look in Adam's eyes. I honestly don't mind leaving early tonight. I feel exhausted, more so than usual.

My eyes flutter shut in the car on the way home, and I can feel Adam carrying me inside, but I can't seem to open them. "Mmm," slips from me when his arms pull me close. The coolness of the sheets under my nearly naked body a sharp contrast to the warmth of his hold.

"Go to sleep, baby girl. Daddy's got you," he whispers to me, and I drop under instantly.

Sunlight fills the room when I finally wake and I sit up, stretching before seeing the time on my phone as ten thirty-two. I never sleep in that late.

*Late*...the word rebounds through my mind and I can't stop the little gasp that falls. I can't believe I didn't realize it before now. Hell, Adam and I had a dinner date for our one-month anniversary and spent the entire night indulging in each other—when something else technically should have interrupted us.

I get up quickly, moving into the bathroom and pull out one of the tests I bought, hoping for the need to use them. I can barely breathe as I finish up in the bathroom, before slipping on a comfy lounge set waiting for the timer to go off on my phone.

We don't have plans for anything today. Family dinner is tomorrow night, and with last night's event, we just wanted to have a quiet day at home. Adam's been working most Saturdays helping with training new staff, but today he took off to spend with me and Cleo.

My heart stops for a moment when the timer goes off, and my hand shakes as I start to reach for the test.

"Morning, baby," Adam says, stopping me and I turn around seeing him in the doorway headed my way. I slip into his arms with a smile, giving him a kiss that turns a bit hotter than we can indulge in thanks to the time. "I'd say you're feeling better, aren't you?"

"Definitely than I was when we got home last night," I tell him, before returning my attention to the test on the counter. "I was just going to check and see what that says, but I think together is a better way."

"Check what?" he asks, looking over my shoulder to see the thick stick with the blue cap. "Is that..."

"Yeah, I realized that I'm late. Like two weeks late," I add and his eyes crinkle as a smile spreads across his face.

"I love you, baby, always no matter what," he states, giving me a soft kiss. I turn in his hold, picking it up to see

the screen.

I barely can comprehend that it says ‘pregnant’ on it before Adam has me up in his arms, laughing happily as I cling to him.

“Best day ever,” he says, and I nod.

“Do you think we should wait to tell Cleo? I don’t know how long we’ll be able to hide it from her let alone my family,” I warn knowing they’ll spot morning sickness in a heartbeat. The only one that ever was able to hide theirs was Maddie’s first since she had no real morning sickness, just issues with anemia which finally outed them.

“It’s your choice, baby. If you want to wait we will. If you want to tell her she’s going to be a big sister, and your family there’s going to be another baby on the way, I’m good with it.”

“Let’s tell at least Cleo so she doesn’t learn it from anyone else,” I suggest, and he gives me a hot kiss first before nodding.

“Tonight you’re all mine,” he warns before we head downstairs, finding Cleo reading one of the books Jaime bought her when they went to the bookstore last night. She babysat for us so Adam could come with me. I’ll have to tell her thank you tomorrow, especially since I was asleep when we got home.

“Hi sweetie, can we talk for a minute?” I ask Cleo and she nods, giving me a hug as we settle onto the couch with her. Adam sits behind me, his hand on my leg, and I can’t stop the smile that hits. “We wanted to tell you something, so you hear it from us first.”

“Is it about that lady?” she asks, her eyes widening, and Adam tells her no, calming her fears.

“She’s still in jail and will be until everything’s settled,” I add, hating that she’s still an issue even a bit. She was in jail for a week for violating the restraining order the first time. It wasn’t five days after she was released that she showed up again, but thankfully this time, the judge wouldn’t let her out.

Remanding her into custody until trial due to Cleo being a minor and the severity of the delusions the psychiatrist had uncovered. We're hopeful that she'll be sentenced to jail rather than merely psychological care since she was determined to still be mentally competent, merely delusional.

"I'm glad," Cleo says, and I nod in full agreement.

"So are we, honey," Adam adds.

"So what is it?" she asks with a grin at the two of us.

"You know we love you more than anything," I start, "that even though I'm not your mom and Adam's not your dad, we think of you as ours. Which is why we wanted you to know that you're going to be a big sister," I finish, barely catching Cleo as she launches herself at us.

"I get to be a sister!" she exclaims excitedly when she pulls back and I nod, smiling with a silent laugh at her happiness.

"You do and I know you'll be the best big sister ever," I state, enjoying our family hugs for long moments.

"We haven't told anyone else, so for now, we'll keep it our secret until Jasmine wants to tell," Adam adds and Cleo's eyes twinkle with delight.

"Like when we kept Aunt Jas' ring secret?" Cleo asks and my jaw drops a bit in surprise at that news.

"Like that, honey," Adam agrees, and while it's hard not to tell everyone the next day, I want to confirm it with the doctor first.

Two weeks later, we're at Mom and Dad's, celebrating the August birthdays and I lean into Adam's side incredibly content. I don't even think of what I'm doing when I shake my head no at the glass of champagne.

"Don't tell me you're pregnant," Jillian says with a laugh taking one for herself. It's a family rule that you can have one glass at family events once you're sixteen, so we all enjoy it. I don't think I've ever not had one since our sixteenth birthday in fact.

“Well...I wasn’t going to say anything since it’s the birthday dinner,” I admit as all eyes turn our way, “but yeah, I am.”

“Oh my god!” Jaime gushes, hugging me around Cleo who’s sitting between us. “Best birthday present to know we get another niece or nephew.”

“It definitely is,” Julie agrees making me smile more.

“How about two?” Jackie states, and I can’t help but laugh when she nods at the curious looks her way.

“You just couldn’t stand being in the single digits, could you?” Julie teases her and she shrugs while Andra and Abby shake their heads a bit at them. “You’ll love having another sibling, no matter how much younger. After all, we love Jaime and Jillian just as much. Even Jeffery when he’s not being a grump.”

“True,” I muse, earning an eye roll from him. I understand his frustrations the last year and a half. It’s been rough on him but one day, he’ll find someone that loves him as much as I love Adam, and it’ll all work out.

“You’re going to be an awesome mom, Sis,” Jamison says, hugging me before shooting a dark look at Adam that makes me laugh.

“Thank you,” I tell him, seeing the honesty in his eyes that he’s really, truly happy for me.

“Congrats Jas,” Carly says, hugging me around little Bobbie. “It won’t be long before you have one of these in your arms.”

“A little longer than not. It’s early still but we couldn’t wait to tell everyone now that I’ve been to the doctor.”

“No more secret,” Cleo adds pulling surprised looks from the family. “I’m going to be a big sister.”

“You are going to a great big sister,” Jaime tells her, and that is definitely the truth.



# *Epilogue*

*Adam*

**M**y hand slips to Jasmine's belly protectively when more than a few eyes turn towards my wife. She's so beautiful on a normal day, but right now, she's nine-months pregnant with our third little girl, and fuck if she's not breathtaking.

I want her more than ever when she's pregnant and I seriously can understand why Jake was happy to give Annie all the babies she wanted. There's nothing quite like making love to her while her belly is big with our little girls.

I'm definitely not going to argue if she doesn't want to stop with this one. Or if it ends up being another girl.

I might get some shit about it at work, but honestly, having a houseful of girls doesn't bother me one little bit. It still won't if none of them are interested in the company either. I want them all to be happy, the same way Cleo is.

We'll have four girls in total when the new baby gets here. Cleo is an incredible big sister just as much as Jaime predicted. She'll be fifteen next month, which is hard to believe, but since Daisy will be four in a week and a half, I know it's true.

Jasmine's been mine for five years now. Today is the first anniversary we celebrate, to remember our first date. The first time I held her in my arms and knew she was my forever.

March is a busy month for us for sure. Not only with Daisy's birthday, the little one on the way due any day, but also our second little girl's birthday was last week. Faye came four days before the anniversary of the day I met Jasmine, but also one month exactly before Jasmine's birthday.

There's now not a single month that the Cartwrights don't celebrate a birthday dinner, and I'm damn glad to be part of that family. After spending years on my own, then just a few

with my sister and Cleo, leaving our family as just the two of us, I don't take for granted the new family we gained.

Cleo and Serenity are still best friends. Half the time we don't know whose house they're going to spend the night at, but at least we don't have to worry about someone being after her anymore.

Tina was sentenced to three years in jail and five years' probation after the trial because she refused to take the deal the DA offered of just two years of jail time. She said she didn't do anything wrong, but a jury said otherwise. Her father moved out of town with her boys, which ended up being a good thing as he was part of the people that were illegally overturning city statutes.

Jesse wasn't lying when he said he'd look into the new club that was going up. Not only did he help put an end to it, but also found the group that was making up the rules to benefit themselves.

Tina ended up serving all three years due to her continued attempts to get information and photos of Cleo in to her, but the guards were warned that she was obsessed with a minor and they thankfully didn't turn a blind eye for a few extra bucks. When she got out, her father had to take her in, and while she was on probation in a new town, she did the same thing to another little girl. Only that time didn't work out too well.

The girl was a drug dealer's daughter, and while part of me thinks the girl would be better off away from someone like that, Tina wasn't the one to help her. She was shot while trying to sneak around the man's place and died at the hospital. It was a waste for sure, but at least it means Cleo's safe from her.

Jasmine turns her face to me, giving me a smile and I drop a kiss onto her lips, before we follow the hostess to a table for dinner.

She doesn't have to ask where we're going afterwards. She already knows. We never end a date night without a visit to the fountain unless there's an emergency. Since she's

pregnant I drive there, parking as close as possible, and we walk the rest of the way with my arm around her.

Just being here with her calms me, it always does, especially when I'm stressed. Tonight though, I'm remembering our first date. How much I wanted to take her home and make her mine, and tonight, I get to.

"I love you baby, more than anything," I tell her, leaning down for another kiss. I can barely last a few hours without one.

If she doesn't stop by while she's out working, I run home at lunch to see my girls. Get my kisses in before heading back. Jasmine still runs her shop, but she's mainly down to just coming up with ideas and overseeing things now. With the girls, she likes to be with them more than at the store. She still stays on top of everything but with her job, she doesn't have to be in an office to do that.

Makes me understand the Cartwright's decision to have a hybrid schedule more. Wouldn't work for us, but if it keeps employees motivated, I'm all for it for places where it does work—especially for my wife.

The furniture line with Cartwrights pulls in more revenue than any of us expected, resulting in a need for an additional expansion. I thankfully have an in with the family and get discounts but even without it, our profit-sharing program would still earn my employees some hefty bonuses at the end of the year.

Jim is now my manager over the entire line, handling all the problems so I don't have to, and he loves it. Which makes Renee happy, which in turn makes my wife happy because she's still working for her. They came up with a program to give kids whose parents are having a hard time a fun birthday party. Jasmine gets donations to fund it at the events for the Cartwright Safe Homes Foundation.

It wasn't too long after we announced our pregnancy with Daisy that Jasmine and Carly met a young expecting mom at the store, looking at the prices for things. She was distraught at how much it all cost and they sat down with her at the café,

calming her down, only to find out that her rent was being raised ten percent and she didn't think she could afford it. Her new husband had walked out on her when they unexpectedly became pregnant, and she was trying to do it all on her own.

That led to the family deciding to make more changes to the apartment complex where Eden was living before Jesse moved her into the house that's now Eden and Jude's. They already owned it after seeing the asshole landlord attempting to evict another mother.

They had a few open units and let the woman have one, but then also decided to add another building that would be solely for expecting and new moms. They also added in a day care center that was free to use so the moms could find jobs without worrying about the cost of day care.

The foundation pays for the day care workers, all maintenance, utilities, and upkeep, so donations are extremely helpful. Serena suggested that they use a percentage of the new baby décor line she created to fund scholarships to parents that need a little extra help with day care costs as well, and the family immediately said yes.

Jasmine puts together all the events for it and they're always amazing. Brings in more money than expected so they're able to help more people every year. It feels really good to be part of it, but even better to be Jasmine's man.

"I love you too, Adam," Jasmine says, resting in my arms as we watch the fountain gently bubbling. I'm about to pick her up and carry her to the car, take her home and make love to her all night when she lets out a gasp.

"What's wrong, baby?" I ask, looking down at her, as her hand goes to her belly.

"My water just broke," she says with a laugh, nodding at my shocked expression.

It's not the way I expected to end the night, but I scoop her up and hurry us back to the car while she laughs. "Stop that or you're liable to have her popping out, baby girl."

“She’s not that close, daddy,” she teases in return, texting someone on her phone.

“Cleo or Julie?” I ask as we pull into the lot.

“The girls’ chat,” she tells me, and I nod, knowing that means everyone will be aware of where we are now.

Carly and Johnnie’s youngest Cammie is a few months younger than Faye is, but with six kids, it’s hard for Carly to be here with Jasmine as she was for most of hers.

Julie is at our house with Cleo, Serenity, Daisy and Faye for us to enjoy tonight. Serena was home with Matt and Grace, who had the stomach bug that was going around the school or we’d have taken the girls over to their place.

I know someone from the family will be with our girls so I can be with Jasmine without worrying.

It’s not long after we’re in a room that Annie comes in, and I give her a hug in return when she gives me one after Jasmine. I never had a mother until her. I may have been a grown man, but she treated me the same as her sons, Jake as well, and it’s helped me be a better father. A better husband.

Just before midnight, I brush a kiss to Jasmine’s forehead, telling her softly, “That’s it, baby girl. You’re doing so good, just one more push and she’ll be here. Daddy will get to meet his new princess.”

She lets out a grunt, squeezing my hand hard, and pushes. A little cry sounds just as Dr. Miller tells us, “It’s a girl.”

She’s absolutely gorgeous, just like my wife, and I can’t stop from giving Jasmine a long kiss once we’re alone. “Thank you for the last five years, baby girl. For everything you’ve given me and Cleo. You made us a family instead of just Uncle Adam and Cleo. You made me Dad to her and Daddy to our babies...and you.”

“We love our daddy to pieces,” she says, returning my smile. “Cleo was meant to be ours but so were Daisy, Faye and Becca. I used to hate March. It seemed like it took forever to get to April for my birthday but now, March is one

of my favorite months because of all of you coming into my life during it.”

“And this one on our anniversary,” I tease, kissing Becca’s little head as she sleeps content against Jasmine’s breasts. “She might get all your attention tonight, but just wait until our wedding anniversary. You’re going to be all mine, so she’ll have to share.”

“Deal,” Jasmine states, her smile gorgeous, and I steal it from her lips before holding my girls close while they rest.

Six weeks will feel like forever, but these babies and my wife is worth every long anticipatory minute of it. With all the joy she’s brought to my life, she’s worth everything I have and more.

## *Thanks*

Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed. If you did, please leave a rating so others can find and enjoy as well.

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