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**REASONS
NOT TO
FALL IN LOVE**

**KIRSTY
MOSELEY**

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Аннотация

Right Man, Wrong timing! Young mum Bronwyn Reynolds is devoted to her little boy Theo, but she's married to a not so devoted husband! Juggling two jobs to make ends meet, Bronwyn's self-esteem is at an all-time low. Enter Harrison Baxter. Harrison is confident, flirty and breathtakingly handsome – and everything Bronwyn's husband is not! What's worse is that she knows every sexy thought about him is forbidden, which makes him all the more tempting. The only woman that ladies' man Harrison has ever wanted is one he can never have. Bronwyn has left her mark on him, and he can't get her out of his mind no matter how hard he tries! Bronwyn and Harrison have every reason not to fall in love, but are they brave enough to break all the rules? For fans of *The Boy Who Sneaks in my Bedroom Window*, this short story is unputdownable!

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Reasons Not to Fall in Love

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ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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An imprint of HarperCollins *Publishers* Ltd.

1 London Bridge Street

London SE1 9GF

First published in Great Britain by HQ in 2014

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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E-book Edition © June 2014 ISBN: 9781472096388

Version date: 2018-06-20

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Kirsty Moseley lives in Norfolk, England with her husband and son. Kirsty has been a passionate reader since she was a little girl, devouring books overnight, barely sleeping and paying for it at school the next day. She first started writing after stumbling across an amateur writing site where writers could share their work and get instant feedback from readers. Finally plucking up the courage, she shared her first story. Seven million reads later, she decided to try her hand at self-publishing and has never looked back. Much to her delight, what once started out as a hobby now provides for her family.

If she had to sum herself up in one word, it would probably be 'daydreamer' – but unlike most of her school teachers – she doesn't necessarily view that as a bad thing. After all, she read somewhere once that books are like waking dreams...

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[Acknowledgements](#)

First off, a *huge* thank you to Anna Baggaley, my editor at HQ Digital for believing in me right from the very start of my career. You'll never know how much that belief means to me. Secondly, for the HQ Digital team for making this whole process so easy. And thirdly, to everyone that has followed me and continues to read my work. You all rock my world, so thank you.

[Dedication](#)

For three people whom I've never met but consider dear friends: Irvana, Hilda and Rebecca. For Irvana, because of her never-ending support and encouragement; for Hilda, because of her beautiful soul; and for Rebecca, who still smiles through adversity and is one of the strongest women I know. Love you all.

Bronwyn

June 2006

Wriggling my toes, I let my cheap white plimsoll drop off, trying to relieve the ache that was getting worse in the ball of my foot. My eyes fluttered closed and the sounds of the busy café washed over me. The smell of burnt bacon lingered in the air as I leant against the counter waiting for Dave, the fry cook, to finish plating up the order for table seven. I could have done with not working today, if I was honest. I'd been bartending at my local pub until just before midnight last night, so the five o'clock wake-up to come and serve food to hungry patrons wasn't something that I needed. Right now it was the mid-morning brunch rush at the greasy spoon café that I worked at, so I still had another three hours to work before I could go home and wash the fried lard smell out of my hair. My tiredness was only going to get worse as the day went on. The thing was, as a mother of a five year old child, my duties didn't even stop once I clocked off.

"Order up," Dave announced, setting down four plates onto the serving counter.

Without speaking, I slipped my foot back into my shoe and picked up the orders, balancing the four plates along my arms.

I sighed deeply, pushed myself away from the counter and struggled across the busy café towards the table. As I got halfway to the desired table, a pinch to my behind had me gasping and whirling in shock, almost dropping the customers' food all over the floor.

“We’re ready to order when you are, little darlin’,” Rex purred, winking at me.

I forced a polite smile even though I wanted to grab the greasy fry-up I was holding and shove it into his face. Rex was a regular; he also left a nice tip, so I couldn’t afford to be rude to him. “Sure thing, I’ll be right back,” I replied, sidestepping his hand that was dangerously close to my backside.!

He smiled his predatory smile and I tried not to cringe at his teeth – permanently stained a yellowy-brown colour because of too much coffee and smoking. Before he could say anything else or flirt with me again, I turned on my heel and delivered the food to the waiting family in my section.

After a round of pleasantries and telling them if they needed anything to call me, I headed back to Rex’s table and tried not to act like I would rather be shovelling horses’ poop than working here. Rex was with his brother and his friend today, they all had the same flirtatious smiles on their faces as I stopped at their table and pulled out my order pad.

“What can I get you today?” I asked, trying not to let any of the frustration leak into my voice. I put on a smile, pretending that I didn’t resent waiting tables in a pink uniform that was made from

cheap, scratchy polyester, and that I didn't think I had wasted my life.

Instantly I was pulled down into the booth next to Rex and his heavy arm slung across my shoulders as he smiled at me. "When you gonna accept my offer to take you out, Bronwyn?"

I laughed and secretly tried not to envision grabbing his face and smashing it onto the table. "I'm married, Rex. Not gonna accept any time soon. Maybe you should stop asking?" I suggested.

He grinned and shook his head confidently. "Nah, one day I'll ask and you'll say yes."

Yeah, and one day pigs might grow wings and fly off! "So, what can I get you guys today?" I repeated, pushing his arm off me and standing up, straightening my awful pink uniform.

Rex sighed, and the guys he was with reeled off their orders to me one at a time. I really wasn't in the mood for this today. I shouldn't have even been at work today at all, Fridays were my day off from the café because I worked at the pub on Wednesday and Thursday nights, but a shift had come up this morning and I'd needed the money too badly to refuse.

After I'd put their order in to the cook, I smiled at Marina and motioned with my head that I was going to take my break. On the way through to the back room, I poured myself a strong black coffee and then almost fell onto the uncomfortable iron chairs because I was exhausted. It just seemed never-ending; every day was so long that, by the time I got home, all I wanted to do was

go to bed. That couldn't happen though, I had responsibilities after all. No one ever told me that life was supposed to be this hard; even if they did I'm sure I would have thought they were exaggerating.

While I sipped my coffee, my mobile phone buzzed in my apron pocket. I frowned and pulled it out, hoping it wasn't going to be Finn, my husband, telling me that he was going out gambling with his friends again tonight. I was pleasantly surprised to see my mum's picture on my screen.

"All right, Mum?" I greeted, taking another sip from my mug, letting the caffeine seep into my system.

"Bronwyn, guess what?!" she chirped without even saying hello.

I raised one eyebrow, curious about what had put her in such a happy mood. "What?"

"You're now an auntie!" she practically screamed.

My body jerked as my heart leapt in my chest. A little squeal escaped my lips at the news that my older sister had given birth. "Oh my God! What did she have? When? Is Skye OK? What time, weight?" I jumped from my seat, grinning from ear to ear. It was a little early for this, Skye was only just over eight months pregnant, but they had told her she was carrying low last time she went for her midwife appointment.

"Little girl. She went into labour in the early hours of this morning, but there were some complications, so she had to go down for an emergency caesarean. She's such a dear little thing;

she's only six pounds and two ounces. They've called her Evie Lou. Skye's awake already and laughing so she's all good too."

A happy sigh left my lips at the news. "Evie Lou Hanklin," I tested out the name. "I love it!"

My mum giggled like a giddy little girl. "I know, it's perfect!" she agreed. "So, when are you coming? They're going to be in the hospital for a few days at least. Why don't you all come stay with me for a couple of days? I haven't seen you and Theo for months."

My mind was already whirling with thoughts of that. I had to go there as soon as possible, visit the baby and give my big sister a hug. But that meant I had to get tomorrow off work at the café. It shouldn't be too hard though, after all, it *was* extenuating circumstances. It wasn't every day that your big sister gave birth to a baby that she'd been trying for five years for.

"That sounds great. I'll definitely come tonight. What time's visiting?" I could barely wait. My heart ached with happiness and excitement. Being an auntie was something I was going to kick arse at for sure. I loved kids.

"Seven until nine."

I nodded, committing it to memory. "I'm so excited I can barely stand still!" I laughed at myself and bit into my bottom lip. "I'd better go call Finn and get things arranged. I'll speak to you later and see you tonight up the hospital." I ignored the distasteful little sound my mum made in the back of her throat at the mention of my husband's name.

“Bye, Bronwyn, see you soon.”

My coffee and the much-needed caffeine boost were long forgotten as I practically skipped out to speak to Dave. I was going to need to flutter my eyelashes a little to get the day off tomorrow.

As I leant on the counter and grinned over at him, he looked up at me and raised one eyebrow in question. “What you giving me that sweet smile for? You can’t have another advance on your wages; you’re already two weeks ahead. Sorry, Bron,” he said, shaking his head apologetically.

I grinned happily; nothing was bringing my happy mood down right now. “No, no, I don’t want an advance,” I assured him. “My mum just called. Skye had her baby!” I chirped excitedly. He grinned too. “I really need to go there. I’m supposed to be working the morning shift tomorrow. Is there some way I could get the day off so that I can stay over with my mum?” I asked, pleading with my eyes. Dave was a bit of a soft touch, so I was praying that the begging would work.

He sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. “I need a waitress.”

I winced. “What if I asked someone else to cover?” I begged.

He frowned and then rolled his eyes. “As long as I have a waitress then I don’t care who comes in and who doesn’t. Just sort it out amongst yourselves then, all right?”

I squealed and nodded, immediately grabbing my mobile and calling Karen to ask her to trade shifts with me, tomorrow for Sunday instead. It took a little convincing, but finally she agreed,

so I was now free to go.

Next, I put in a call to Finn to tell him the good news. “Hey, buttercup,” he greeted as he answered. The sounds of a video game in the background only meant one thing – that he was round his friend Doug’s place. I sighed. Sometimes, Finn was like an overgrown man-child.

“Hey, where are you?” I enquired, leaning up against the wall of the staff room.

He laughed. “You keeping tabs on me again? I’ll be home later, don’t you worry about that,” he replied, skilfully deflecting my question.

I sighed and closed my eyes. I hated my life. It was so hard not to resent Finn, it really was. I was holding down two jobs, on my feet all day practically every day, and yet he was still ‘looking for a new job’ after he got laid off a couple of months ago. I knew jobs were hard to find, I knew that he tried, but that didn’t stop me from getting angry with him that he was sitting at his friend’s house fooling around instead of doing something practical. Even just something small like running the Hoover around our small, tired flat would take some of the pressure off me. But no, things like that didn’t happen.

“Skye had her baby. A little girl. She’s called her Evie,” I announced.

Finn, as I expected, wasn’t overly bothered by the sound of his response. “That’s nice.” He was still playing the game in the background; I could hear guns blazing and Doug shouting things

at the TV.

I frowned, trying not to let him ruin my happy mood. “Yeah. So, can you go home and pack up some overnight things for the three of us? That’ll save some time. I finish work at half past two so I’ll go pick up Theo from school, and you can meet us just outside the school gates. I’ll snag us some food to eat in the car. It shouldn’t take more than an hour and a half to get there.”

“What, car, what you talking about?” he asked, now obviously tuning in to what I was saying.

I sighed deeply. “Visiting hours start at seven tonight. Mum said we could stay at hers for a couple of days, but I’ve just switched shifts with Karen so I need to be back here for Sunday morning. We can stay there tonight though and then drive back tomorrow or something,” I explained.

“That sounds like a great plan,” Finn replied. I smiled and nodded, but the smile fell from my face as he continued, “But I’ve been drinking so I can’t drive.”

My heart sank. “You’ve been drinking? Seriously? It’s not even lunchtime!” I stated incredulously.

“I’ve only had two beers, but I’ll be over the limit. I can’t drive. Plus, I have plans tonight anyway,” he answered.

I scowled down at the floor at the word ‘plans’. I didn’t need him to tell me what his ‘plans’ were, I would bet last week’s pay cheque that it involved him getting drunk, losing money at cards and, if he was drunk enough, sleeping with some slut who happened to look in his direction. I tried to keep my cool and not

shout at him. I was used to things like this; he'd been cheating on me with anything that moved for the last four years. At this point, I genuinely couldn't care less. I was with him because I didn't want to be on my own and because Theo deserved a dad.

Of course, I'd broken it off once. Three years ago I got it into my head that I didn't deserve to be treated like that, and I'd left him. I was strong for a while, and Theo and I coped on our own for almost a month. Then the unthinkable happened. One night, while Theo and I slept, a man broke into the poky little flat that we lived in. I'd woken to find him raiding my living room, looking for cash or anything that he could pawn to buy drugs if looking at him was anything to go by. He hadn't hurt us; he'd actually looked just as startled as I had felt when I stumbled upon him with my handbag in his hand and my mother's china figurine in the other. He'd run out of there as fast as his legs could carry him, barely getting away with anything – but that encounter had struck a deep terror into my heart because I knew, deep down, that if he'd *wanted* to hurt us, he could have done. If hurting us had been his intention, I would have been powerless to stop him. I hadn't slept right for days after; nightmares of me being unable to protect my defenceless young baby plagued my mind. That was when I made the decision that I regretted almost every day – I took Finn back. But, admittedly, having a man there at night time gave me that safe feeling back that I so desperately needed after seeing someone force their way into my home. Having Finn there kept me and my son safe, and stopped me worrying about

things that would have played on my mind otherwise.

There was no longer any love between us; hell, we barely even tolerated each other at times. Sometimes I even struggled to remember what it was that I saw in him the first place. Usually I convinced myself that it was his looks that I fell for, though even those had lost their appeal to me because I knew he'd rather be off sleeping with other girls than me. Ours was a marriage of convenience, even though it was inconvenient most of the time. Another reason I was with him was because I didn't have the energy to find anyone else. I'd been young when we'd gotten together, merely seventeen, and I knew that the dating scene had moved on pretty rapidly since I was last a part of it. In my opinion, I was too old to be single again, so I'd just have to suffer and grin and bear it. Many women went through their lives in an unhappy marriage. I was no different to any of them. Not everyone found their Mr Darcy and lived happily ever after, some people just had to take what they could get and be thankful. Clearly I was one of those people.

"But I need to go there tonight. That's my sister and my niece," I grumbled, kicking the toe of my shoe against the wall in anger.

Finn sighed dramatically. "If you really have to go there tonight then take a train or something. It's a waste of bloody money but just do what you want. I guess I can cancel my plans and have Theo."

I recoiled, shocked at his words. He never usually did anything for me, but now he was offering to cancel his plans and stay home

with our son? “Seriously?” I hadn’t considered a train, but I could easily do that.

“Yeah, whatever. You’ve been banging on about this baby for months. I honestly can’t take the pouting and whining you’ll do if you don’t get to go there. I’ll get the blame all night long because I had a couple of beers to unwind.”

I smiled weakly. So he wasn’t suggesting that I go for me, he was suggesting that I go because I’d be complaining and blaming him if I didn’t. Typical Finn, something that benefitted him again.

“Will you come tomorrow and pick me up? Bring Theo so he can see my mum?” I asked hopefully. My mum would be upset if she didn’t get to see her grandson too.

He groaned loudly. “Can’t you just buy a return ticket?”

“Finn, please?” I begged. “My mum would love to see you two.” That wasn’t strictly true, she would probably rather not see Finn. “Please? If you come and pick me up in the morning we can spend the day down there or something?” Finn’s relationship with my family wasn’t exactly a good one – they were amicable enough, but it was a polite front that they all kept up. My parents had never thought he was good enough for me after he accidentally got me pregnant when I was seventeen. When my father had died two years ago of cancer, Finn hadn’t even bothered to go and say a final goodbye, and had been drunk at his funeral. That hadn’t gone down well and would probably never be forgotten.

“Ugh, fine! I’ll spend three bloody hours in a car tomorrow, just to see your flippin’ family, does that make you happy?”

I gritted my teeth in frustration. “Yes, actually,” I admitted. “Thank you.” Silence rang out as I struggled to find something to say to diffuse the tension. My happy mood was now gone. “I’d better go see about a bus ticket or something. Make sure you pick up Theo from school at half past three because I won’t be here to do it.” I frowned, praying he wouldn’t forget to pick up our son. “And don’t drink any more if you’re going to be in charge of him,” I added as an afterthought.

“I’ll be there. Call me later.” He hung up before I even got to answer and drum into him how important it was for him to arrive at the school on time. Deep down, I knew that Finn would be there on time – although he was a terrible husband, he actually wasn’t a bad dad.

By the time I finished my shift, cleared my section after a particularly rowdy group of teenagers had been in, and clocked out, it was past three in the afternoon. I was now running late. The train that I needed to catch to Bath left in just over half an hour – and I hadn’t even packed yet.

After a mad dash home, I threw a few things into a bag, and then scribbled a note for Finn telling him that I’d put some beef casserole into the fridge from the café for them to have for dinner. After I’d written my note, I practically ripped off my work uniform and changed into jeans and a black, stretch t-shirt. Before leaving my flat, I headed over to the food cupboard, going

up on tiptoes and reaching into the back. My hand closed around the jar of money that I kept there. As soon as I picked it up and heard the pitiful tinkle of the change in the bottom of the jar, I knew something wasn't right. When it came into view, I groaned. It was supposed to be our emergency money, something I put into each week from my wages in case something went wrong. It looked as though Finn had had a few emergencies and had neglected to tell me.

After unscrewing the top and tipping the meagre contents out onto the kitchen counter, I counted out thirty-seven pounds and seventy-two pence. I'd already been told over the phone when I called about the trains that it was forty two pounds for an off-peak ticket from Paddington to Bath. I ground my teeth, picking up the crumpled notes and change, shoving it into my purse, before stomping over to the sofa and thrusting my hand down the back of the cushions, looking for anything that might have dropped out of a pocket by accident. I needed another five pounds for the train ticket. The clock on the wall suddenly caught my eye and I gasped. If I didn't leave this very second, I wouldn't even need to worry about being short on cash because I'd miss the train.

After swinging my overnight bag onto my shoulder and picking up my handbag, I ran the whole way to the station. Sweat trickled down my back by the time I arrived. The whole time I'd been running, I'd kept my eyes peeled on the floor, searching for any cash or change that someone might have accidentally

dropped. Just my luck though, it seemed that the streets were clean for once.

Once I got to Paddington station, I got in the queue to buy the ticket from an actual person rather than the automated machine. My mouth was dry as I tried my best to come up with an excuse why I didn't have enough money to pay. This was going to be embarrassing, to say the least. I gulped as I got to the front; the haughty-looking woman eyed me expectantly as I stepped forward. As I expected, when she rang my fare through the price was forty-two pounds exactly. I didn't have enough.

Time to bring out the bad acting...

I opened my purse, pulling out the money I had, and then gasped, pretending to be shocked. "Damn it, I swear I had another ten in here," I lied, shaking my head and pulling open all of the sections.

"Ma'am, do you want the ticket or not?" she asked with no compassion in her voice at all. She'd probably she'd seen this act thousands of times before.

I nodded eagerly. "Yeah, I really need the ticket. My sister just had a little baby, and I need to go and see them. I don't get to see them very often; I need to get on that train. Is there some way you could let me off of the five quid?" I asked, looking at her pleadingly.

She sighed and shook her head. "It doesn't work like that. My till would be wrong at the end of the day; I need all money accounted for. If I discounted your ticket I'd have to discount all

the people in the queue,” she stated, waving her hand behind me for dramatic effect.

“Please? I really need to get on that train. Maybe I could drop in the other six quid tomorrow night when I get back?” I suggested. I would do it, I wasn’t one to lie.

She raised one eyebrow as if I had suggested something ridiculous, and I felt my heart sink as my eyes prickled with tears. I desperately wanted to see my sister and niece tonight. I didn’t want to be the last one to see her.

“Bronwyn?”

I turned curiously, wondering who had called my name. Rex stood there in his black security guard uniform with his little shiny gold badge pinned to his breast pocket. I smiled weakly. “Hi, Rex.” I’d forgotten he once told me he worked security at the station.

“Something wrong?” he asked, walking to my side and looking from me to the ticket lady.

“She doesn’t have enough to pay her fare,” the lady stated heartlessly.

Heat crept up my neck and over my cheeks because someone that I knew had witnessed my shameful attempt to beg my way onto the train. “I thought I had another ten in my purse, but Finn must have taken it or something. I’m just under five quid short,” I muttered, snapping the clasp of my purse shut angrily. I would just have to go tomorrow morning with Finn in the car; there was no alternative because I didn’t drive so I couldn’t get there any

other way.

Rex smiled and shoved his hand in his pocket before holding out a ten pound note to me. “Here. Call it your tip for the next couple of weeks, huh?” he offered.

My heart leapt in my chest at the gesture. “Seriously?” I gasped as he pushed the money into my hand.

He nodded and smiled. “Seriously,” he confirmed.

My shoulders relaxed as I grinned in thanks, turning and sliding the total through to the lady at the ticket booth. “Oh God, thanks so much, Rex. I really, really appreciate it,” I gushed. *Maybe he isn't such a bad guy after all!*

He laughed and pulled out a set of keys, unlocking the door to the ticket office. “No worries. Maybe next time I ask you out, you’ll consider it for a split second before you turn me down,” he joked. I laughed, knowing it wouldn’t happen because I was married. He winked at me playfully before heading into the ticket office and settling himself into a chair.

“Rex, you’re a star! Dessert is on me next time you come to the café, OK?” I grinned happily as the lady slid my ticket across to me. “Thanks again. See you next week!” I called over my shoulder as I sprinted for my platform.

The train ride was long, but luckily I had found a magazine on one of the empty seats so I kept myself amused by perusing that. To keep myself busy I made a call to Finn, double-checking that he’d picked up Theo and that he’d feed and bathe him before bed. He agreed to leave London the following morning early, so

would be at my mum's house a little after ten in the morning. That would give Theo a fair few hours with his grandmother.

When the train finally rolled to a stop, I couldn't keep the ecstatic grin off my face. It felt nice to be going home. Bath was where I grew up as a kid. We all moved away when I was in my early teens, but in the last few years my sister and mother had moved back to be closer to other family members. I'd elected to stay in London with Finn. As I stepped out of the train and onto the platform with my overnight bag on my back, I wasn't expecting to see my mother standing there with a huge grin on her face. My heart leapt into my throat as my eyes prickled with happy tears. It had been way too long since I'd seen that smile.

A squeal escaped my lips as I ran the five steps to her, engulfing her in a hug that was sure to have crushed her ribs against her lungs, but she hugged me back with the same intensity. The smell of her hair wafted up my nostrils, and the feeling of being a child again washed over me making my stomach clench as a contented sigh left my lips.

"Oh, Mum, it's been way too long," I croaked as the emotion bubbled over. I spoke to her often, of course, but it wasn't the same.

"It certainly has. I've missed you." She pulled back, smiling over at me as she stroked my hair down for me, her eyes soft and caring. "Come on, let's get to the hospital. Visiting started ten minutes ago," she suggested, looping her arm through mine and tugging me towards the car park out front.

“I’ve missed ten minutes of baby hugging time?” I gasped, faking outrage. She chuckled and started gushing then about baby Evie and how beautiful she was. In fact, she didn’t stop gushing for the whole car ride.

When we arrived at the hospital and Mum led us up to the maternity ward where Skye was, the haughty-looking nurse stepped in front of us and shook her head. “Sorry, but it’s limited to three visitors at a time. One of you will have to wait outside and then you’ll have to swap in after,” she stated firmly.

I frowned. I remembered visiting hours rules when I was in hospital having Theo, but I’d had a lovely midwife, and she’d allowed us to break the rules providing we were quiet. It looked like Skye’s ward had different staff to the one I gave birth in. Mum groaned and nodded, waving towards the door. “You go in, you haven’t seen her yet. Tell whoever it is in there that I’m waiting and we’ll all take turns, swapping in every ten minutes or something,” she suggested, giving me a little encouraging push towards the door.

I wasn’t going to argue with that, I could barely wait another second without seeing my sister and niece. As I stepped through the door of the room, I looked around hesitantly. The room had six beds in, all occupied by the look of it. On first glance I couldn’t see Skye or her husband Brandon, so I walked in, peeking around the curtains, hoping for the right one, muttering an apology to each new mother as they looked up to see who I was. When I got to the last curtain, my heart started to pound

in my chest. The sound of my sister's tinkling laugh caught my attention. As I stepped around the corner, she looked up and a huge smile crept onto her lips.

"Bronny!" she cried happily.

I didn't even realise I'd been holding my breath as I'd stealthily intruded on everyone else's intimate moments, but seeing my sister for the first time in three months, and knowing that my big sister now had the one thing she always dreamt of, made the air rush out of my lungs.

Somehow, my legs carried me across the room to the side of her bed and I engulfed her in a hug. I was so happy for her that I didn't even feel the need to scold her for calling me Bronny even though she knew I hated it. I was so pleased for her that it was a little overwhelming. "Congratulations," I whispered, kissing the side of her head as my eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you!" she chirped. She looked so thrilled to be a mum that it was practically bursting from every pore. "Want to hold her?"

I nodded, pulling back and wiping my tears away quickly. "Heck yeah I do! Where is she?" I turned and came face to face with my brother-in-law, Brandon. "Hey, Daddy!" I greeted, pulling him into a hug too, patting his back proudly.

"Hey, Auntie," he replied.

I giggled excitedly and pulled back, immediately seeing the little clear plastic cot that was on the other side of Skye's bed. I'd walked straight past it without even noticing. As I stepped to

the side of her cot, I could practically feel the ‘broody’ building inside me. The little bundle in there made my eyes widen as I chewed on my lip and looked over the edge of the cot. Evie was beautiful, stunning even, and love built in my chest so much that I thought I would burst with it. *I will definitely be a kick-arse auntie*, I vowed.

The tears were full-on flowing down my face now as I looked down at the perfect little bundle. She was sleeping peacefully and still had the slight discolouration to her face where she’d been inside the womb for so long. Slipping my hands under her body, I picked her up, carefully cradling her in my arms. She didn’t even stir. Through the material of her baby grow, I could feel her tiny heart thrumming against my hand. I was lost in the beauty of a new-born baby. She was so precious that it made me want to cry, and she was so lucky too because she was going to grow up with amazing parents.

I felt the goofy happy smile stretch across my face as I stared at her. “Hi, beautiful,” I greeted.

“Hi yourself.” It was a male voice, and it came from behind me. I frowned, looking over my shoulder to see a man with dark blonde hair and dark brown eyes. He was breathtakingly handsome. His jaw was lined with short stubble, his hair was longer than I would normally like for a guy and curled slightly at the nape of his neck where it needed a trim and tidy-up, but strangely, it suited him like that. He wore a dark grey suit that fitted him perfectly, showing off his strong shoulders and small

waist. He'd paired it with a white shirt underneath and a red tie, which hung loosely around his neck. As his chocolate coloured eyes met mine, a smile twitched at the corners of his full lips.

A lump formed in my throat for some reason, but I didn't know why.

Skye cleared her throat dramatically. "Er, Harrison, don't even think about hitting on my little sister," she warned. "Besides, she's married," she added rather smugly.

I blinked a couple of times, trying to come back to reality because looking at him made me feel a little weird inside. Harrison. I'd heard of this guy. He was the one who was in business with Brandon. The two of them had both been made redundant from their advertising jobs last year and had decided to go into business together instead of looking for another job. Skye and Brandon had become extremely good friends with this guy over the last year, so I'd heard. I'd never personally met him, but now that I knew who he was, I knew to stay away. Harrison Baxter was a ladies' man and fancied himself as Bath's answer to James Bond, apparently.

One of the gorgeous stranger's eyebrows rose. "Married, really? Damn, all of the hot ones are always taken or gay. Why is that, do you think?" he mused, cocking his head to the side playfully.

His voice did funny things to my insides. I was lost for words. Nothing was coming out of my mouth at all, so I just looked back down at Evie who was nestled comfortably in my arms.

“You happily married?” he probed, stepping closer to me. The heat emanating from his body to mine was making me feel a little jittery and I couldn’t stand still.

No, not at all. I gulped and nodded in answer to his question, trying to ignore the feelings of lust and want that were battling inside me. It was wrong for me to feel like this. I knew it was. I was married, and although Finn cheated on me occasionally, I would never do the same. “Happy married with a child,” I confirmed, nodding. Only part of that sentence was a lie. I did, in fact, have a child – I had just never been happily married. The lie came easily to me though; it always did in front of family. I never told them how hard things were for me, no one knew what my life was truly like. From the outside I played the perfect little loved-up wife, even my sister didn’t know about Finn and what went on between us. They all knew he’d cheated once, three years ago when I left him, but no one knew that it continued after I took him back. I’d often wondered what my life would be like if we hadn’t reconciled, but the answer was always the same – my life would have been exactly as it was now, only I would climb into a cold bed every night and not have anyone to wake up when I got scared of a stupid noise in the middle of the night.

Harrison sucked in a breath through his pearly white teeth. “Bugger. Oh well. Never mind then,” he replied, reaching up and running a hand through his already messy hair.

Turning my attention back to my niece, I smiled. I could still remember Theo this tiny. It was almost as if he had been born

yesterday. I was so broody that it was unreal. I already knew that I would want another baby for weeks after this.

After fifteen minutes of me cuddling with the tiny little bundle and talking to Skye about the birth, the curtain pulled back and someone peeked in. “Sorry to interrupt, but you have two more visitors outside itching to come in. Could you maybe stagger your visitors so that you only have two at a time?” the nurse asked.

I winced. I’d been so carried away and lost in the moment that I’d forgotten that my mum was outside. I was supposed to have swapped with her so she could have a cuddle too. “Oops, Mum’s going to kill me! I was supposed to have swapped after ten minutes.” I chuckled guiltily and dipped my head, planting a soft kiss on Evie’s forehead before holding her out to Skye. “I’ll swap back in with Mum again in a little while,” I promised. I didn’t want to leave but with the restriction on visitors, only two people were allowed in plus the baby’s dad.

Harrison stood from the chair that was by the side of the bed. “I should probably get going anyway. Give me a call when you’re home, and I’ll come for a longer visit then. I only came to bring my present,” he stated, grinning.

Skye made a half scoff in her throat and shook her head. “Yeah, thanks for that. At least her Halloween outfit is already sorted.”

“Halloween outfit? That’s a coming home outfit if ever I saw one,” Harrison replied with mock hurt.

I frowned, wondering what his present was – until my eyes

settled on the baby Yoda outfit that was hanging over the back of a chair. It even had a soft toy lightsaber sewn to its belt. I gasped. “Oh God that’s awesome! Did you get that? I love it!” I chirped, laughing. I was a huge *Star Wars* fan.

Harrison grinned and nodded rather proudly. “Yep. Saw it and had to get it.”

The nurse cleared her throat dramatically behind us, signalling for us to get a move on. I grinned at the outfit again, already wondering where he got it from and if I could get one in Theo’s size. “I’d better go. I’ll see you in a little while.” I turned and walked towards the curtain, knowing my mum was probably biting her nails down to the quick while waiting for me to come out. Behind me, I could hear Harrison saying his goodbyes.

“About time!” Mum announced as I walked out. Brandon’s mother stood next to her, both looking just as eager as she was to take my visitors place. Neither of them wasted any time darting in there as soon as I stepped out of the room.

I eyed the clock. It wasn’t even half past seven yet, so I would get plenty more baby snuggling time before visiting hours ended. Instead of leaving, like I’d assumed he would, Harrison stopped at my side. “So, how old is your son or daughter?”

“He’s almost six.” I smiled at the thought of Theo; he was the only good thing that had ever come from his jack-off of a father.

“Skye talks about you a lot. You live in London, don’t you?” I nodded in answer to his question. “You driving home tonight or...?”

“No, I’m staying at my mum’s, and then my husband and little boy are coming tomorrow to see Evie.”

“That’s nice. You, er, want to get a coffee or something while you wait for your turn to go in again?” he offered, nodding at the maternity ward door.

At the mention of coffee, my mouth watered. I hadn’t had anything to eat or drink for the last few hours, and was actually ravenous. “Sure,” I agreed, following him along the hallway and out of the ward. “You not got anything to rush home for?”

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