Summary

Brooke Davis left the Upper East Side thirteen years ago. Now; 30, designer of her own fashion line, and owning her own Enterprise, Brooke is living in LA, and in the process of divorcing her lying cheater of a husband. Brooke is called back to run her Manhattan office while her mother is on her honeymoon. Brooke only ever came back to NYC for Fashion Week - but now she had to stay in the city for an extended period, leaving the comfort of LA and being 2,797.9 miles away from the man who broke her heart and was the reason she left the Upper East Side thirteen years ago; Carter Baizen, who she hates and refuses to even say his name. But now she’s back in Manhattan, and Carter doesn’t intend on staying away.

Notes

If there are any typos or mistakes, I apologize. My mind works faster than my fingers can type. Sometimes I make spelling errors/use the wrong word/or forget a word completely, but I’ll try and go back and do a read-through and fix mistakes if I see them!
It had been thirteen years since Brooke Davis left New York. She had no intentions on ever returning but with her career and New York being known as one of the many fashion capitol of the world, she did have to return occasionally. But her home was now in L.A, a home she had shared with her lying cheating scum of a husband (soon to be ex). Now, she lived in the large home with her publicist/friend; Rachel Gatina. Rachel had moved in with Brooke six years ago after the two met
on one of Brookes visits back to Tree Hill, and when the red head spoke about her interest in working in the fashion world. Brooke gave her a shot. Modeling had been the first – but that world was too much for Rachel to handle. When Brooke saw that her friend was spiraling, she was quick to offer her a new position. A publicist for herself and her company; Davis Enterprises, that had sprung to life after her fashion line; C/B started to become popular. (It was technically named Clothes over Bro’s, but her mother wanted to reach a different market and the name was changed to C/B [C over B]. Brooke didn’t mind. She had outgrown the name anyway.)

When Brooke had been dating her soon to be ex-husband two years after Rachel move in, the read head had decided to get a place of her own and give Brooke her privacy with Julian Baker. He moved in shortly afterwards and Brooke had thought that she had finally found her happily ever after.

Cut to three nights ago when Brooke finally signed her divorce papers.

For the record – it was Brooke who filed for divorce. Because she was just so fucking done with the men she fell in love with using her heart as a damn punching bag.

Fool me once? Shame on you.

Fool me twice? Shame on me.

Fool me three times? I’m a fucking moron.

Brooke wondered if she should have gotten on her ex-boyfriends who had broken her heart to let Julian Baker join the; ‘Brooke Davis is an idiot who only ever gives her heart to assholes, cheaters and liars’ club.

She just didn’t fucking care anymore.

Meaningless sex was all she would ever commit herself to having. No more relationships – no more falling in love, she was just done.
Brooke put her phone away, choosing to go back inside of the airport instead of waiting outside of the terminal at JFK for Nate to show. She really didn’t want to be here. For the last few years she had Julian come with her to NYC for fashion week, feeling the security of having her husband by her side. And before that she had Rachel come with her along with her. She had strict rules at her fashion shows and a very an even stricter guest list. She did not want anyone she didn’t have to see to try and get in contact with her.

Not that he ever tried.

Victoria was always there as well. She ran the Manhattan building for Brooke, knowing that it was very important to have as many locations as possible for Davis Enterprises and that it would be ridiculous to not have an office space there. She agreed, reluctantly, to buy the building in Manhattan. It was good for Victoria. She and Brookes father had finally finalized her divorce and she didn’t know what to do with herself. And Victoria, being a smart business woman had convinced Brooke to let her run things from Manhattan, and that if she didn’t, Victoria would simply move to LA and move in with Brooke.

But Brooke only ever stayed ten days in New York for fashion week.

That was all she would allow herself to stay. She didn’t want to get sucked into the drama of the Upper East Side, so she’d always find a new place to stay in Brooklyn, occasionally visiting Dan and Serena, who were married now. To be honest, Brooke was shocked that Dan have convinced Serena to move into his Dads old Loft in Brooklyn and leave the white-collar streets of the Upper East Side. But he had. And it was better for Serena. She was happier, back to being a free spirit again. She had been invited to Dan and Serenas wedding but opted out of going, not wanting to fly out to New York twice in one year. And she really didn’t want to have to sit with people she hadn’t spoken to in thirteen years.

It was only because she wanted to support her mother and soon to be step-father that she agreed to come to New York for the second time this year. And for a much longer visit than she normally took. Brooke would be in New York for 17 days. Victoria said she didn’t trust anyone other than Brooke to run the NY office while she was off on her honeymoon and Brooke had protested, but Victoria had mastered the guilt trip over the years of working with her daughter.

Her relationship with Victoria was…different.

Yes, she her mother still drove her absolutely crazy and could be quite rude at times, but she was different. After Brooke came to her begging to live with her grandparents in Beverly Hills, Victoria had shown concern for her daughter’s wellbeing for the first time in Brookes entire life. She had agreed, talking with Brookes father and they hired movers to ship her things to her grandparent’s house, the rest they gave away. Brooke had wanted every single part of her to be rid from New York.
Brooke had finished high school online and went to a design school in LA that she had been accepted into. And after that, she never left California. It had become her home. But every time Brooke felt herself truly becoming content and comfortable – shit hit the fan.

California didn’t feel like home anymore, and all her friends from Tree Hill had moved away from the small basketball obsessed town.

Peyton was still living in Savannah with Jake, Jenny, and the newest addition to the Jagielski family; Sawyer, a four-year-old who’s middle name was Brooke. Sawyer Brooke Jagielski. A sweet little girl with curly blonde hair just like her mother and the same smile as her father.

Haley and Nathan had moved to Seattle when Nathan got drafted to their Pro-NBA team and been living there for nearly ten years now with their son Jamie and daughter Lydia.

Lucas was living with his girlfriend Lindsey Strauss in New Jersey and their two years old son.

Her Tree Hill family had moved on from the small town and made a home in different states over the years. And Brooke wondered if it was time for her to find a home somewhere else as well.

Paris was a fashion city…but then she’d have to learn French.

Milan?

Eh, her Italian wasn’t that good either.

She could move to London?

Brooke didn’t know – her head was all over the place lately.

She really shouldn’t have been so surprised that Julian had cheated on her and then left her. For the last year and a half, they had been trying to adopt – but the young girl who had chosen them for a family to raise her daughter, had changed her mind at the last minute and kept the child. And only six months ago they had met with another pregnant woman who was in the process of picking a family for her child to go to but ended up picking a different couple.

It had been devastating when they had lost their chance at having a baby the first time – the second time just made Brooke pull away and distance herself from Julian. Eventually she told him that she didn’t want to try for a third time – that it was too hard to go through again.

He had been upset but agreed with Brooke that they didn’t have to go through it again.

When Brooke had told Julian that she couldn’t have kids after a year of dating him, he hadn’t been too upset. He told her that it didn’t matter to him and that he loved her. But during their first year of marriage, Julian had started to get baby fever. Brooke wanted to please him and agreed to look into adoption. It had been great at first – especially when they were chosen. Brooke had never been happier. She and Julian put together the nursery, bought everything they’d ever need, went overboard on absolutely everything. They were going to be parents! Brooke was going to be a mom!

But that hadn’t happened and the nursery was put away and turned into an office space for Julian to work in. And now it was just a room that Brooke and Rachel painted all white, painting over the nasty baby poop green color Julian had chosen, that they kept some of their clothes in that they no longer had space for in both of their separate walk-in closets.

Her phone began to ring and Brooke answered, seeing that it was Nate calling.
“Are you here?” She asked.

“I’m outside – where are you?”

“I went inside.”

“I’m headed in now – oh, there you are.”

Nate now stood in the across the area from Brooke next to the exits, a big grin on his face. Brooke smiled, hanging up her phone and putting it back in her back pocket. Nate walked over to her, opening up his arms for her to move into once they made it to each other. “I’m really glad you came.” Nate said, hugging onto her tightly.

Brooke laughed, patting Nates back. “Come on, I wouldn’t miss the day we officially become siblings.”

“Step.” Nate stressed, still wanting to have it known. They had slept together once (twice, but that was in one night, so Brooke counted it as just one time) and Nate still was skeeved out that Broke would be his sister (step) soon.

She rolled her eyes, pulling away from, “How’s your Dad? Any cold feet?”

Nate laughed now, “He’s actually the calmest I’ve ever seen him in my whole life.” Nate admitted. “Thanks to your mother.”

Brooke made a face, “I never met anyone who spent time with Victoria and felt calm.”

“Come on, I’ll drop you off at your hotel so you can get settled.” Nate said, grabbing Brooke luggage and motioned for her to follow after him. She did. When they were in the limo and Brookes luggage was safely in the back, Nate looked over to his soon to be step-sister and frowned. “You know, you don’t have to stay at a hotel, Brooke. Caroline and I have three guest rooms.”

Brooke began to fidget with the hem of her shirt. “No, I wouldn’t want to intrude. You guys just got engaged!” She said, nudging him in the side. “You should have your alone time.”

Nate chuckled, shaking his head. “We got engaged nearly three weeks ago, Brooke. You wouldn’t be intruding – in fact, Caroline had asked me to bring up you staying with us while you’re in town,”

“I said no, Nate.” Brooke snapped at him.

Nate sighed, looking away from Brooke. “It’s been thirteen years, Brooke.”

Brooke bit the inside of her cheek, “I am aware.”

“So – stay with us!” Nate huffed in irritation.

“No!” Brooke looked over at him and he looked away, shaking his head in frustration. “Look, it has nothing to do with Caroline, I promise. I am so happy for you guys – I just don’t want to run the risk of having to see…” She didn’t finish.

“Carter,” Brooke glared at Nate when he said his name and he sighed, rolling his eyes. “He doesn’t even come around. Caroline hasn’t heard from him for three months. He didn’t even call to congratulate her after we made our engagement announcement. He’s too busy running his fathers law firm to ever bother dropping by.”

Brooke closed her eyes and shook her head, “I’m sorry, Nate…I just…I can’t. This year has already
been hard enough…I just…I’m sorry.”

Nate sighed, reaching over to grab Brookes hand. “I know, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought it up.” He squeezed her hand. “God, I love Caroline but I would give anything to punch Carter in the face again.”

“Nate, please.” She pulled her hand out of his hold. “Just…stop saying his name. I never want to have to hear his name again for the rest of my life.”

Thankfully, Rachel had stopped their conversation from continuing on by calling Brooke to make sure she had landed. She only stayed on the phone with Rachel for a few minutes and then quickly changed the topic to Howard and Victoria and the dinner rehearsal tomorrow night and all Brooke had to do to make sure it was perfect for her mother.

“I can’t believe you’ve managed to set this whole thing up from across the country.” Nate said with a laugh.

“Oh, come on, Archibald. You’ve always known I’m incredibly Impressive.” She smirked.

“How could I ever forget? You constantly remind me.” He teased and Brooke stuck her tongue out at him. “But honestly, everything you’ve done – it is very impressive and very much appreciated.”

“Well, Caroline helped a lot.” Brooke said, “If I didn’t have her to e-mail all the information and things needed I would have had to rely on you – and you know that would have been a disaster.”

“Oh, yes. Of course, it would have been.” He said sarcastically. “I am incapable of planning things – oh wait, I just pulled off the best proposal any would could ever think of!” He playfully glared at Brooke.

“Well, having experiences with being proposed to – I do admit that yours was very well put together.” Brooke said, looking out the limo window at the city. “You must be growing up, Nathaniel.” Brooke said, looking back at Nate with a smile.

“Well, Caroline would have said no if I hadn’t grown up.” He chuckled.

Brooke put on a fake smile and tried not to have her mind start re-living her past. “I actually got you and Caroline an engagement gift.” Brooke said, “I’ll give it to you guys at the rehearsal dinner.”

“You didn’t have to get us anything.”

“Shush.” Brooke pointed her finger at him. “Yes, I do. I am so happy for you guys. It took you long enough to pull your head out of your ass and see what was always standing right in front of you.”

“I was an idiot.” Nate said, running his hand through his hair. “I wasted so much time…. nine years! Ridiculous.”

“Don’t dwell on it, Nate. You’re together now and you’re going to get married!” She grabbed his arm, shaking it playfully. “I have a serious question though,” She said, looking up at Nate with a blank face.

“Uh, oh.” He smiled.

Brooke raised her eyebrow at Nate, “Can I be the flower girl?”

Nate laughed, “Yeah, hate to have to break the news to you, but my cousin’s daughter is going to be
the flower girl.”

Brooke scoffed, “Whatever. I bet the bitch can’t even walk.” She said, pretending to be mad.

“Brooke, she’s three!” Nate laughed.

“Exactly. I bet she pees while walking down the aisle.” Brooke smirked.

Nate had playfully pinched Brooke’s arm and the two went on to talk about other things, mostly about Brooke and how she was doing with the divorce and Brooke answered all of his questions honestly, telling him that she was better off without Julian, but she could see that Nate was still worried about her.

The limo pulled up to Brooke’s hotel and Nate grabbed her luggage, making sure she was all checked in and that there were no problems and then brought her luggage up to her suite for her. They made plans to go out for dinner later in the evening and Nate hugged her goodbye and headed back home to Caroline, who would be joining them for dinner.

It had been so long since she had seen Caroline.

The last time Brooke saw Caroline was on hers and Julian’s wedding day. It was uncomfortable for Caroline to be there, Brooke could see it in her face. But she was dating Nate and where he went, she followed. It had been the first time Brooke had seen Caroline in person since Brooke left New York. It was too hard talking to Caroline after everything that happened.

Evening being back thirteen years later…it was hard. And Brooke prayed that she’d make it through these next few weeks.
She was back.

He had seen it all over twitter.

Picture taken of her coming out of the terminal and leaving in a limo with Nate.

Brooke was back.

Carter sat at his desk, looking down at his phone, swiping through each picture that had been taken of her at JFK.

It had been thirteen years.

The first year that Brooke had come to NYC Fashion week for her clothing line, Carter had gone to see her, hoping to get into the white tents to just... just see her. He knew she’d never talk to him again but just being in the same room as her – it was enough for Carter. He missed her so badly and he’d have done anything to be near her.

But when he had tried to go to her show, he wasn’t let in. He wasn’t on the list of people who were allowed access to the show. He had been annoyed, telling them who he was, that was when they told him that he, specifically, was on a list of people to not let in. And that if he didn’t leave, they would call the authorities.

She hated him.

She had reason too.

Carter had tried to move on over the years – but he never settled down with anyone. He’d go on dates, fuck the occasional woman at the bar, even made himself a Tinder profile. But other than that? No none. There was no one who could ever compare.

Brooke had moved on. She had gotten married.

Carter really went on a bender when he saw the engagement announcement all over every social media platform. And her actual wedding day? He ended up in the hospital with alcohol poisoning. Caroline had gone to her wedding with Nate and Carter had been furious, calling her a bitch, a trader, and many awful other names and Carter was almost positive he’d get punched in the face by Nate again. But Caroline told Nate that her brother wasn’t worth it.

He wasn’t.

And he had already been punched by Nate years earlier when he had fucked everything up. Because that’s what Carter was good at doing.

But he cleaned up his act.

He was running his Dads law firm, had a penthouse in Manhattan and had some of the wealthiest people around the country as his clients. But was he happy?

No.

Carter hadn’t been happy for a very long time.

Sex and booze had helped for a while.

Sex still helped. But that’s all it ever was. Sex. Random women he met on Tinder or a bar – and
booze, well, that didn’t help anymore. It just left him feeling worse and would cause him to hit the bottle even harder.

Caroline had flown back early when their parents called her telling his little sister that he was in the hospital after having needed his stomach pumped. She had sat with him, crying, begging him to stop. “It’s over, Carter. She’s married and she’s happy. Please…stop living in the past – it’s going to kill you.”

But Brooke was getting divorced.

He and Caroline had actually gotten into a fight three months ago when news first broke of Brooke filing for divorce. Carter had called her asking what had happened, if Nate had told her anything and she was vague about it all. Carter had asked for Brookes phone number and Caroline had gotten angry at him. “You’ve been doing so good, Carter! I’m not going to let you spiral into another hole again – because even if I gave you her phone number, she’s not going to want to talk to you! She hates you and that will never change!”

It was harsh and he knew that Caroline was just trying to stop himself from doing something stupid that would only send him into a depression again – but it pissed him off and he hadn’t spoken to her since.

She had tried calling him but he ignored her calls.

He hadn’t even called her to congratulate her on her engagement to Nate.

He didn’t particularly like Nate. But Carter could see how happy he made Caroline so when they started dating, he put aside his dislike for the man and just let his little sister be happy. And now they were engaged and Carter was, as always, an asshole.

Carter looked down at the picture of Brooke. She was smiling while Nate laughed, her dimples deepening, long hair blowing in the wind. She had changed her hair a few years back (not that he was a stalker or anything). It was no longer a dark shade of brown. It was a lighter brown. He had seen it in a paparazzi picture of her running around in LA.

That’s the only way he was able to see her.

She had blocked him on every social media platform and he wasn’t pathetic enough to create a fake profile just to follow her on Instagram or Twitter. So, he would occasionally go on gossip websites and search her name. Which was equally pathetic.

Carter set his phone down on his desk and leaned back in his chair, hand going to his face, rubbing at his beard. Brooke had always liked when he’d have scruff – maybe she’d like it if…no, idiot, she will never like anything you do because she’s going to hate you forever.

His phone rang and Carter damn near jumped out of his chair.

Caroline Baizen calling…
He answered but didn’t say anything. He heard Caroline sighed, “So, you’ve been on Twitter.”

“Yeah.”

“I would have told you earlier if you had answered any of my calls or messages.”

“Yeah,” He said again, but this time with guilt.

“I just…I know it’s going to be tempting to try and reach out to her but please, Carter… for her sake and yours…just stay away.”

Carter licked at his lower lip, looking out his office windows where he had a view of the city.

“I miss her.” He admitted.

“I know you do.” Caroline said softly. “But with everything she’s going through right now, I really don’t think you going to try and see her is going to be a good thing.”

“Why is she back in the city?” Carter asked his sister.

“Howard and Victoria are having their rehearsal dinner tomorrow night. And then their wedding is next week. But…Brooke is going to be here for a while, Carter.”

He sat up in his chair, “Is she moving back?”

“No. She’s just staying to run her New York office while Victoria is out of the country for her honeymoon.”

He wanted to know how long. How long would she be staying in town and where and a million other questions and his pulse was pounding in his ear that he barely heard Caroline speaking again.

“Carter,” She said his name in a warning, “Don’t do this.”

“I’m not doing anything.” He lied. Caroline scoffed, “I got to go across town to meet with a client but…congrats on the engagement, Care. I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you, Carter.” Caroline said back.

“You and Nate should come to the penthouse for dinner tonight. I can order from your favorite Greek restaurant.”

The line got quiet.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’d love for us to come tonight but…we have dinner plans with Brooke tonight. Nate already made the reservation.” Caroline said and Carter was now quiet, “I’m surprised he even got one – it takes weeks in advance to even get a table!” She tried to joke.

Weeks in advance to get a reservation? That could be any restaurant.
“Yeah, but what kind of food is better than Greek food? You salivate whenever you smell it!” He said in a light tone, hoping Caroline wouldn’t catch on that he was digging for information. It was a thing he learned while in law school, how to get people to talk without them realizing you were doing so.

“Greek food is better than Mexican food, I will say that. But Brooke loves it. Plus, they make this special drink that Brooke had a few years back when she came here for Fashion Week that she has been dying to have again.”

A Mexican restaurant that Brooke had gone to a few years ago during Fashion Week.

“Tequila?” Carter asked, chuckling a bit hoping that Caroline would think he was just reminiscing a little about Brooke and the love she had for tequila.

Caroline laughed, “Yes. It’s called a Piña Para la Niña. Brooke says it’s her favorite drink now. And she said that the restaurant makes the best she’s had so far.”

“Well, are you and Nate going to be in the city? Maybe you guys can stop by after? Unless you have plans with her afterwards…”

“Well…no,” Caroline had said, “I mean, we’re not going to be in Manhattan. But, we can stop back on our way back – it’s on the way.”

“Caroline, don’t worry about it, okay? Just…have fun. And…just,” He sighed, “I’ll see you soon, okay?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Now I got to go, I’m walking out of the office now,” Carter lied, still sitting at his desk. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay…bye, Carter.”

“-Caroline, wait.” He said before she could hang up.

“Yeah?”

He sighed, “I’m sorry.”

He heard her chuckled a little, “It’s not the first time you’ve been a dick to me and I doubt it’ll be the last. I’ll talk to you soon.”

She hung up.

But that wasn’t what he was apologizing for.

He typed in all the information Caroline didn’t know she had given him and figured out what the restaurant was and where it was located. The biggest give away was when Caroline told him that they could stop by after they eat because it would be on the way back to their place, and since it wasn’t in the city, he figured it had to be across the bridge in Queens.

He was right.

He found the pictures of Brooke from a few years back and saw that the Mexican restaurant Brooke had gone to was in Astoria.
“Fucking stalker.” Carter said under his breath at his behavior.

But he was desperate to see her. To look into her eyes and hear her voice.

Caroline was going to be fucking pissed.

But Carter was going to crash their dinner.

She was right, it wasn’t the last time he was going to be a dick to her. Crashing hers and Nates dinner with Brooke was pretty dickish.

But, as previously mentioned, he was fucking desperate.

Brooke smiled as she watched Nate beam at Caroline as she laughed. She had seen how happy they were at her wedding to Julian – but her mind was preoccupied. Brooke remembered her wedding to Julian pretty well. She had been sitting in a private room, looking down at her phone just waiting for it to ring. It never did. Haley had found her and took the phone away.

“You are about to marry a wonderful man.” Haley had said as she took Brookes phone away.

It was stupid for her to do what she did – to sit in a room waiting for a call to come from someone who had hurt her more than any other person ever had in her entire life.

Maybe it was because Nate brought Caroline – maybe seeing her face again stirred up old memories of them all sitting around her kitchen island in her loft when Caroline had been staying there, a time where everything was so good and she was so unbelievably happy. When Brooke looked at Caroline she saw him. Or, the ghost of the man she had stupidly given her heart too.

Brooke wouldn’t leave the room and Haley had to go get Nate, who reminded her of what had happened and that she deserved to be treated better than that. “Julian loves you, Brooke. And I know you love him…you’re just scared and given everything you’ve been through, I understand why. But I
Too bad he was.

Maybe it was harder to see Caroline on her wedding day than it was now because she had had cold feet that day. It was easy to be in her presence now though, watching her smile at Nate like he was her entire world. Brooke had seen her look at Nate the same way, only shyer about it, on her wedding day. Caroline had left before the reception started, Nate never explained why, just said that she needed to get back to New York earlier than she had expected.

“Do you guys have a date picked?” Brooke asked as their drinks came to the table, so happy to finally be able to taste the drink she had been craving since she first had it a few years ago.

Nate looked at Caroline and smiled, nodding his head to tell her to share something with Brooke. “Three months.” She said causing Brooke eyes to widen in surprise.

“Wow.” Brooke took a long sip out of her straw of her drink. She cleared her throat after swallowing, “That’s really coming up.”

“I think we’ve already wasted enough time.” Nate said, picking up Caroline’s hand and pressed a kiss to her knuckles. “We were actually wondering if – since you have shown how impressive you are at setting things up last minute,” He tried to butter Brooke up. And it was working, she shrugged her shoulders innocently, smiling. “-You’d consider helping us plan the whole thing. Seeing as it’s happening so soon.”

“Of course, I’ll help.” Brooke said, smiling softly at the two of them. “I mean, I’ve always been team Naroline.”

Caroline laughed loudly, shaking her head. “I hate that you still call us that.”

“Still?” Nate said in confusion.

Brooke and Caroline shared a look and both burst into laughter.

She sobered up when her phone started to vibrate on the table, Rachel’s face flashing on the screen. She answered it, “Hey Rach, you mind if I call you back in a bit?” She said, still chuckling.

“No.”

Brooke frowned, Rachel sounded scared. “Is everything okay?”

“Brooke, hi, it’s Kara Jones,”

Her personal lawyer was with Rachel. Oh, God. Did Rachel get arrested? “Am I going to need to send some bail money?” Brooke asked quietly, turning a bit away from Nate and Caroline.

“I’m sorry to do this over the phone, Brooke – but Ms. Gatina says that you will be in New York for the next few weeks.”

Brooke kept quiet, trying to brace herself for whatever horrible thing her lawyer was about to tell her.

“It appears that the prenup agreement that you signed a few years ago missed a few crucial details, including Mr. Bakers share and investment towards Davis Enterprises and the house in LA.”

“-What do you mean?” Brooke said, sitting up a bit. “Rachel, you said you went over those papers!”
“I did. I think. Brooke, you have me go over so many things sometimes I get distracted!” Rachel said in a quick voice. “But Julian’s mom is a sneaky bitch and put in things that we didn’t see. I am so sorry.”

Brooke got up from the table and Nate called her name, “Is everything okay?”

She waved her hand at him, letting him know that she needed to step out for a bit to take the call. Brooke walked over to the front of the restaurant for some quiet.

“What does this all mean?” Brooke asked once she was alone.

“Unfortunately, it means that you are going to lose your house to Mr. Baker.” Brooke’s lawyer told her. She opened her mouth to argue but Kara went on. “And in the prenup, you agreed to give back the investment money Julian put into Davis Enterprises as well as pay him the share he has collected over the years.”

“We took out his share when we started the process of adoption!” Brooke said loudly, “-I don’t owe him jackshit! He spent that money because he wanted a family!”

“I’m sorry, Ms. Davis. I really am. I thought you knew all about this.”

“Why would you ever think I’d agree to all of this!” Brooke shouted now.

One of the staff walked up to Brooke, “Ma’am, would you mind taking your call outside?”

Brooke glared but went outside, putting her finger to her free ear so she could hear over the traffic. “-I’m not giving him the house!” Brooke told her lawyer. “My name is on everything – I bought it before I even met, Julian!”

“Brooke, we can try and fight this.” Rachel suggested.

“She signed the prenup, Ms. Gatina.” Kara said to Rachel.

“What kind of fucking lawyer are you, Kara?” Brooke shouted, “It’s your fucking job to protect me from this kind of shit!”

She knew it wasn’t Kara’s fault. That technically it was her own for overworking Rachel and taking advantage of her when it came to going over contracts she signed – but Brooke was just told that she was about to lose her fucking house! And that she now owed Julian all the money he had invest into Davis Enterprises (which was a fuckton). Not to mention that she had to pay him for his share – even though he had spent it.

“I apologize, Brooke.” Kara began to say but Brooke cut her off.

“Well that’s too fucking bad because you’re fired!” She yelled. God, she sounded as awful as Victoria in that moment. “I’m calling Julian, Rachel, start looking for an apartment for us to get.”

“Wait…I’m not fired?” Rachel said in confusion.

“No, Rachel, you’re not fired. My incompetent lawyer is fired!” Brooke said, hanging up and scrolling through her call log to find Julian’s new cellphone number. She heard it ring twice before she was sent to voicemail and Brooke couldn’t help but let out a little sob, covering her mouth to try and muffle it.

Why was this happening?
Carter stood a bit away from Brooke, her back facing him as she cried.

He was frozen. He had heard most of her conversation and stood absolutely still as he listened to her try and cover up and sobs. Carter quickly turned when he saw his sister walking out of the restaurant, she thankfully hadn’t seen him.

“-Brooke…what’s going on?” She asked, pressing her hand to Brookes shoulder.

“Julian.” Brooke cried his name, “He’s- he’s taking the house and I have to pay him back all the money he-“ She hiccuped, “-he invested into Davis Enterprises and,” She let out another sob and Caroline was quick to pull Brooke into her arms, hugging her tightly. “He’s already taken so much from me, Care.” Brooke sobbed. “Why does this keep happening?” Her voice was so broken that Carter couldn’t help but turn to face where Brooke and his sister stood in front of the restaurant. “Why does every guy I give my heart to-”

“This is not your fault, none of it is-” Caroline said, still holding onto Brooke, but she stopped and he watched as his sister’s eyes widened when she saw him standing there, her mouth forming into a thin line as her nostrils flared in anger and her eyes narrowed at him. GO, she mouthed.

He took a step forward but Caroline gritted her teeth as she began to talk, “Let’s go inside,” Caroline moved Brooke and brought her back into the restaurant. He watched as Caroline sent Brooke back to the table, waiting until she was there and then she came storming out.

“You are such an asshole!” Caroline said loudly, shoving her brother hard against his chest.

“I just,” He breathed out, “I wanted to see her – I miss her, I miss her so much.” He went on, “I just needed to hear her voice, I, I haven’t heard her voice in person since everything happened —”

“You have yourself to blame for that, Carter!” Caroline shouted at him, probably finally letting out thirteen years’ worth of anger towards him. “You chose to do what you did now fucking live with it!”
It was the first time she had ever truly cussed at him, if it were any other situation he would have laughed or teased or. But “It was a mistake,” He tried to justify. “I was hurt and angry – I asked her to marry me and she said no, I wasn’t thinking right-”

“Do not make excuses!” Caroline yelled. “You asked a seventeen-year-old to marry you because you didn’t want her to go away to school – and when she said no, you went and fucked her cousin. She was my best friend, Carter.” Caroline shoved against his chest again, causing him to stumble back. “And you BROKE her!” She shoved him again. “You knew how important she was to me – you ruined everything!” She shoved him another time, harder. “Because you couldn’t stay and have a grown up fucking conversation about why she was saying no to you. And for the record – right before she and Chuck went up and found you with Blair, she had told him that when she found you she was going to tell you yes.” Caroline seethed, “That she was going to turn down her LA offer and stay and marry you because she loved you so fucking much that her dream career didn’t even compare!”

Carter stood, frozen in place as he breathed hard, taking in everything Caroline was telling him.

“I lost the best friend I ever had because of you!” Caroline yelled.

He felt his vision start to blur, seeing double of Caroline as he felt like the ground beneath him was sinking and that it was taking him down with it. “Why didn’t you tell me?” He shouted now, feeling his heart pounding hard against his chest, pulse so loud in his ears that he barely heard Caroline’s response.

“-Because you didn’t deserve to get her back. And Brooke still loved you enough back then to take you back. And she didn’t deserve to end up with someone as selfish and thoughtless as you!”

Caroline shook her head in disgust at Carter and walked back to the doors of the restaurant. “Stay the hell away from her, Carter!”

She went back inside.

Carter stood there, feeling like he couldn’t breathe. His mind went back to the day he had proposed to her.

They had gotten into a fight the night before over her wanting to go to LA for school since she didn’t get excepted to the NYU program. He had told her that he’d go with her and she told him no, that he couldn’t break the deal he made with his father. And he got scared, thought she didn’t want him to come because she wanted to get away from him.

So, he went out and drank himself stupid until in his drunken state he finally knew what he had to do. He needed to propose to Brooke. Ask her to marry him – that way they could still be together if she left and surely, she wouldn’t want to be away from her husband and wouldn’t fight him when he moved to L.A with her. They would be happy and could truly start their life together.

He went back to the loft, Brooke was still asleep in bed and he climbed in next to her, pulling out the diamond ring he had bought and pressed a kiss to her neck.

“Hmm, Carter?” She mumbled, eyes opening as she turned on her other side to face him. “What – what are you doing here?” She asked, sitting up and rubbing her eyes. He set the velvet box down on her knee and she kept her eyes focused on it for a good forty seconds before she looked back up at Carter.

“I love you so much, Brooke.” He whispered. “I can’t imagine spending my life without you.”
Brooke started to shake her head, trying to stop him, “-Carter,”

But he didn’t let her. “Marry me?” He asked.

Brooke looked down at the box when he opened it, her eyes taking in the large diamond ring he had gotten. Her eyes filled with tears and she licked at her lower lip. “…Carter…I’m only seventeen.”

He had frowned. “You’ll be eighteen in a few months. I don’t mind a long engagement.” He took the ring out of the box and held it in his hand. “I just want to be with you forever…marry me?” She took the ring and he smiled, feeling so happy in that moment. But it all disappeared when she placed the ring back into the little black box and shut it. “I don’t understand…”

“Carter, why are you asking me to marry you?” She asked him.

“…Because,” He said, not understanding how she could even ask that. “Because I love you and I want to be with you forever. I don’t want to lose you-”

“You’re asking me to marry you because you don’t want to lose me…are you only proposing to get me to stay in New York?” Her voice grew angry. He shook his head but didn’t say anything. Because, yeah, he was. But it was also because he loved her. “-Carter, you don’t ask someone to marry you because you’re afraid of them leaving – or you’re scared of losing them, you-”

“Are you saying no?” Carter said, standing up and off the bed.

“Carter,” Brooke sighed.

“Are you saying no?” He asked again, voice hard this time. She looked away from him and closed her eyes.

When she finally looked back at him, she licked at her lower lip again, “Yes…I’m saying no.” He grabbed the box and started to leave but Brooke followed after him. “-Carter – wait! You know this isn’t the right time!”

He had left, slamming the door shut and shoving the ring in his pocket. He had called Caroline but she didn’t answer. So, he went out, stayed out the entire day and finally, that night, Blair walked into the bar he happened to be at. He still felt the sting of Brooke breaking his heart, his anger and pride taking over and he walked up to Blair, taking a seat next to her. “Hello, beautiful.” He had said, falling back into his old patterns. Carter would have never expected Blair to go along with it – maybe he just went to her because there was chance she’d say no and immediately tell Brooke and he’d get her back for saying no to his proposal.

“Carter…” Blair had said his name, “What are you doing here?”

He smirked, eyes raking over her. “Buying you a drink.” Carter had moved his hand to her leg and Blair hadn’t stopped him. He bought her a drink and then went home with her.

It could have been anyone- he could have picked up any woman, but he saw Blair and knew that she was the perfect choice. Brooke had mentioned to him earlier that Blair was spiraling a bit after not getting accepted into Yale. Apparently, she was spiraling enough to sleep with him.
The look on Brookes face when she came with Chuck to check on Blair only to watch him walk in, shirt unbutton and hair still a mess from the night before and watched as he moved his head down to Blairs and kiss her – it made him smirk back then. He had won. She felt the same hurt he did. He had won.

And now, when he remembered the look on her face it made him feel like he was dying.

Caroline was right.

He had broken her.

Carter had ruined everything.

Chapter End Notes

So, I waassss gonna drag out how Carter broke Brooke heart but I figured I'd get to it right in the first chapter. Hopefully you all won't hate me for it. But I promise, there are BIG things that happen. Listen to the song if it helps; The Wreck of Our Hearts by Sleeping Wolf. Kudos and comments are appreciated! I'd love to here some feedback!
Forgive me for making any typos/mistakes/errors - I think faster than I type and sometimes things get jumbled.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Brooke’s back was pressed against the wall, watching with a soft smile as her mother and Howard
danced together in the middle of the large room. Never, not even once, had Brooke ever seen her mother smile at Ted Davis the way she smiled at Howard Archibald. She was glad they found their way back to each other, even if it had taken decades and two divorces, and a fraud case.

Nate had been arrested years ago on a fraud case that Bart Bass (who apparently had the ability to raise from the dead) had against him and Brooke, once she found out, had reached out to Howard to help his son. The whole Bart coming back from the “dead” thing was just too much for Brooke to even pretend to care about, she was so done with the Upper East Side and their bullshit drama by then. Nate had explained it all to her but she didn’t care. The only person she cared about was Nate and what was happening in his life. He and Howard had a falling out after he was released from jail and Brooke knew it was risky calling Howard for help – but she couldn’t let Nate rot in prison because of Bart Bass.

Howard had apologized to Nate for everything he had ever done, every horrible thing that had happened because of his actions and Nate forgave him. Because he was Nate. The guy was still best friends with the guy who took his girlfriend’s virginity while they were still technically together. And who had gone behind his back and continued to hook up with her when Blair and Nate had ended things for good. He forgave Dan Humphrey for being Gossip Girl. Which, was still a shock to Brooke.

Not that Nate had forgiven him, because as previously mentioned, Nate is an amazing guy – but Brooke just couldn’t believe that Dan was Gossip Girl. He had posted awful things about all of them, revealed secrets that were not his to reveal. Dan Humphrey, the boy she had literally ran into in the hallways on her first day at Constance – no, it wasn’t possible.

He came to visit her in L.A a few years ago and apologized for everything. Brooke asked him why he did it and Dan didn’t really have an answer. She forgave him, but she’d never truly trust him again.

Brooke laughed as she watched Howard dip her mother as they danced, watching her mothers face flush bright red as she laughed.

When Brooke had told Victoria that she had called Howard to help Nate, she began to ask many questions about him. Howard, not Nate. Brooke laughed and texted her mother Howards phone number, as well as his e-mail. She had been divorced from Brookes father for over two years and Howard had been divorced for some time now too – it couldn’t hurt to get in touch with him, would it?

It hadn’t.

Victoria and Howard fell back in love (not that either had ever fallen out of love) and their whirlwind romance continued on.

Howard was a wonderful man, and yes, he had made many mistakes in the past, but so did Victoria. They made each other the best versions of themselves and that’s what mattered, it’s what all relationships should be like.

Brooke spotted Nate and Caroline across the room and smiled, waving at the two. Brooke had snuck in late, not wanting to be seen. Everyone knew she was back in town – she just didn’t want to be the center of attention when the focus should be Howard and Victoria. They had seen her and both of them had kissed her on the cheek and told her what a wonderful job she had done setting everything up and Brooke gave most of the credit to Caroline and Howard began to go on about how happy that his son was finally settling down and that he couldn’t think of anyone better for him than Caroline.
Brooke agreed.

Blair, Vanessa, Jenny, Vanessa again, Blair again, Serena, and many other women who Brooke had forgotten their names – none of them had ever stuck with Nate. Even Serena, who Nate was proclaimed to be the love of his life – hadn’t stuck around. She chose Dan. Blair chose Chuck. The others went on their own paths without Nate. But Caroline was always there. She was a friend who would listen to his problems and offer him advice, someone Nate could go to about anything and not be embarrassed because Caroline never judged him.

It had taken years but finally Caroline worked up her courage and kissed Nate.

And now, here they were. Engaged, getting married in three months, completely happy.

While Brooke was in the process of a messy divorce, now homeless, and would soon be out nearly 6 million dollars. Julian Baker, the man she thought she’d spend the rest of her life with, was truly the worst. His lawyer had contacted Brooke saying that if she needed to speak to Julian, it would have to go through him and since Brooke had fired her lawyer, she didn’t have anyone representing her or helping her through this, making sure she didn’t say or do anything stupid. She really needed a lawyer.

Howard had offered, but he would be leaving for his honeymoon soon and Brooke didn’t want him to have to miss it and with a court date looming, he would have to stay in the states. She should just hire Kara.

Brooke drank the last bit of her champagne and walked over to Caroline and Nate. She could see Caroline looking around the whole area, as if she were trying to find someone. But when Brooke was in front of them, Caroline quickly loved at Brooke and forced a smile. “Brooke, you look beautiful,” She motioned to Brooke’s dress.

Brooke smiled, doing a little spin causing Caroline to laugh and Nate to groan, “It’s from the C/B spring line.” She smirked at Nate who shook his head, laughing. “What? A little promotion never hurt anybody.”

“It would be promotion if you talked to someone other than us tonight.” Nate said, looking down at Brooke with an amused smile.

“I can’t help that you two are the most interesting people at this thing.” Brooke said, looking around.

“You created the guest list!” Caroline laughed.

“Yes, and some people showed up even when they weren’t invited.” Brooke said, looking a few feet away from Nate and Caroline with a glare.

“She’s your cousin, Brooke.” Nate reminded her. “You invited your aunt.”

Brooke hadn’t spoken to Blair Waldorf in thirteen years. She blocked her number - burned the letters she had sent Brooke, deleted every e-mail and denied all forms of social media friend requests sent her way from that woman. Finally, Blair took the hint after Brooke didn’t invite her to her wedding to Julian.

She was married to Chuck Bass, which didn’t surprise her. The two were equally fucked up – why wouldn’t they end up together? They had a son together and blah, blah, blah. Brooke could care less. Was it petty to hold onto her anger for the past thirteen years when Blair had apologized numerous time? Yeah. But did Brooke care? No. Because what Blair had done was unforgivable.
Brooke looked back at Nate, no longer wanting to look at Blair, “-She’s family.” Nate added.

“-Blair Waldorf stopped being family to me thirteen years ago.” Her eyes met Caroline’s briefly who looked upset. Brooke frowned, “Caroline, come with me – we’re going to discuss your bachelorette party.” She said, grabbing Caroline’s hand and pulling her away from Nate.

“Does that mean I get to have a bachelor party?” Nate shouted, watching them leave.

Both Caroline and Brooke looked over their shoulder, “No!” They shouted back, laughing and went to take seat at one of the tables across the room. Once they were alone, Brooke grabbed Caroline’s hand. “I’m sorry, Care.”

“For what?” Caroline laughed, “-Don’t tell me this is my bachelorette party and a bunch of strippers are about to bust through the doors.”

Brooke chuckled, “No. It’s not. But, there will be strippers at your party – I can guarantee that.” Caroline chuckled as well and Brooke smiled at her softly, moving her hand to rest on top of hers. “I shouldn’t have cut you out.”

Caroline took in a deep breath, and looked away from Brooke for a moment, shrugging her shoulders at her once their eyes met again. “I get it.”

“No, I don’t think you do.” Brooke said, wanting to explain why she had done what she had done.

“My brother broke your heart, you hate him – I know being around me was a constant reminder of what he did to you.” Caroline said, shrugging again. “I get it.”

“Your brother did break my heart.” Brooke agreed, “And I do hate him…but being around you or talking to you wasn’t a reminder of what he did to me…it was a reminder of nights where we stayed up watching murder docs, forcing him to watch with us or eating take out at 3 AM and Ca-” She stopped herself from saying his name, “-And your brother…” Brooke took in a deep breath, not wanting to reminisce. “I do hate your brother, but back then, as angry and hurt as I was by him…I still loved him. And I knew that if I stayed in New York, I’d forgive him and let him back in and that was terrifying to me…that I would so easily let someone back in who had…broken me.” She sighed, “So, I left New York and I cut off contact with you because every time I talked to you I remembered that I still loved him and I…I didn’t want to anymore. I deserved better than going back to a guy who cheated on me with my cousin because he was mad at me.”

Caroline nodded, understanding.

“But it shouldn’t have taken me thirteen years to get to this point – to finally have you back in my life – and it was not fair to you.”

Caroline frowned, and squeezed Brooke’s hand. “I don’t blame you.” She told Brooke, “I blame him. Always have, I just never admitted it to him until recently.”

Brooke frowned. “Recently?”

“It doesn’t matter – the point is, everything that happened was because of the choice he made. You made your choices to protect yourself and he made his out of pettiness. Because that’s what he is – he’s petty. Always has been. And I am so sorry I ever pushed you two together – I thought he had changed and grown up but…I was wrong and I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t put a gun to my head to get me to go to him, Caroline.” Brooke said with a little laugh, “I was just blinded by charm and blue eyes and trust me – I learned my lesson.” Caroline frowned
again and Brooke stood up, grabbing her hand and Caroline got up from her seat, letting Brooke pull her into a hug. “I’ve missed you, Caroline.”

Brooke could hear Caroline take in a shaky breath and then laugh, “I missed you too.”

They chatted for a while, going over ideas Brooke had thought of for their wedding, as well as dress ideas – Brooke may or may not have started designing a wedding dress for Caroline the day Nate called her and told Brooke that Caroline had kissed him. Caroline laughed, saying she couldn’t imagine any other wedding dress than a dress designed by Brooke Davis. She had gone back to Nate though and Brooke stayed at the table, watching as her mother and soon to be step father mingled with all their friends.

“Brooke?”

She closed her eyes, tensing at the voice.

When Brooke opened her eyes, Blair Waldorf moved to stand in front of her. “It’s been a while,” she smiled politely, pulling a chair out to sit at the table with Brooke, but Brooke quickly gripped onto the chair, pushing it back so Blair couldn’t sit.

“Yeah. I haven’t seen you since I walked into your penthouse and saw you lounging on your couch post-coitus with my boyfriend.”

Blair pushed her hair behind her ear, swallowing hard as she looked away from Brooke. “I should have never done that.” She admitted, looking back at Brooke, “Believe me – if I wasn’t in the middle of a literal mental breakdown – I would have never,” Brooke stopped her from continuing on, “Well, you did.”

Blair took in a deep breath, “I know that…and I so sorry – if it helps, I still haven’t forgiven myself.”

“-And you shouldn’t.” Brooke said, standing up from her seat. “Ever.” She stressed the word and walked away from Blair.

She needed some air. How the hell was she going to handle the wedding on Wednesday? She was already in the midst of a breakdown and it was only the dinner rehearsal. Brooke had not invited Blair for a very good reason.

Brooke grabbed a glass of champagne before she walked out the door, walking through hotel until she was outside. The Palace.

Chuck still owned it and since she had the worst luck in the world – the Palace had the only ball room that wasn’t booked out already. Chuck had even offered to lower the price for her to barely anything but Brooke refused.

It wasn’t Chucks fault – Brooke knew that. But she couldn’t understand how he could have ever forgiven Blair for sleeping with Car- don’t even think his name.

Brooke leaned against the building and began to drink, keeping her eyes closed while she swallowed nearly half of the champagne in the glass in one long chug.

When she opened her eyes, she wasn’t alone.
This was a mirage, right?

She blinked, seeing it the person would go away.

Nope.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me.” She said in harsh laugh, looking away from the man who was standing in front of her now.

“-Still able to handle your booze, I see.” He commented, his tone light.

“Go away.” Brooke said, pushing herself up and shoved past him. But he followed her.

“You look beautiful.” He said, a few steps behind her.

Brooke scoffed, rolling her eyes.

“I like your hair.” He jogged up to her, moving so he was in front of her again. Brooke took in a deep breath to try and keep herself calm and looked into the blue eyes of the man who she once loved. “You look good.” He smiled down at her.

Brooke took a small sip of her champagne before she looked up at him, “And you look like you have something on your face.” She told him, watching as his hand went to his face, trying to feel whatever she might see. Brooke smirked and threw her drink in his face.

He licked his lips, laughing as his jaw tensed. “That was a good one, Davis. You were always clever.” Brooke rolled her eyes and began to walk away again, but of course, he followed after her.

He had changed, physically.

But he still had those same blue eyes she used to get lost in. However, seeing them now didn’t ignite lust in her belly – just hatred. Because now, when she looked into his eyes, she remembered the way he had looked at her before moving his head down to kiss Blair. Which didn’t only leave her feeling angry – but nauseas’ as well.

He had a beard now – which not a lot of people could pull off (her soon to be ex-husband included) and Brooke hated more than anything that Car- he was one of the few who could grow one and not look like a friggin’ yeti.

“I meant what I said – you do look good.” He said again.

Brooke spun around to face him, “And you look like you can’t take a hint. Was my drink in your face not a clear enough signal that I want nothing to do with you? Because I can make a bigger scene if you’d like.”

He reached for her hand but Brooke yanked it away like she was about to be burned by fire. “Can we please just…talk. Five minutes, that’s all.”

“No, we can’t.” Brooke motioned between them. “Because there is no ‘we’ anymore.”

“Brooke,” He said her name softly.

No tingle up her spine, no flutter in her stomach. Just blind rage. “Go away or I will call security to escort you off the property. This is a private party.” She glared.

“I was invited.” He told her and she let out another harsh laugh at that.
“By who?”

“Howard.” He smirked and Brooke felt sick, “Sometimes our firms collaborate together. I took over my dad’s firm, I don’t know if you heard—”

“No, I didn’t. because I don’t think of you enough to ask someone how your life is going.” Brooke spat out. She watched as the smirk fell from his lips and she didn’t feel the least bit of guilt for her cold words.

He cleared his throat, “Well I’ve heard a lot about you.” He told her. “Word around the city is that you are in need of a lawyer.”

“Nope.” Brooke lied. “I don’t. I have one already.” She continued to lie.

“Really?” He smirked again. “Who?”

She glared, “You probably have never heard of him.”

“Because he’s not real?” He said back, chuckling under his breath. “Come on, Brooke. Let me help you – it’s the least I can do.”

Brooke felt her stomach drop and her eyes water as she took a step back, “The least you could do?” She echoed his words, not believing he’d actually say something like that to her, “The least you can do.” She said again, anger in her tone, “The least you could have done was not fuck my cousin!” Brooke seethed, eyes still blurry from tears. “The least you could have done was not walk out when I said no. The least you could have done-” She stopped herself, shaking her head to try and fight off the uncontrollable anger she felt in that moment. “Right now – the least you can do for me is to stay the fuck away from me.” She spat out, glaring up at him. “Forever.”

Brooke pushed past Carter and instead of going back to the rehearsal party, she left the Palace and went back to her hotel, where once she was safely inside her room, she opened up her mini fridge and drank the night away.

It’s the least I can do.

You have got to be fucking kidding me.
Carter woke up on his office couch the next morning, head pounding from one too many glasses of scotch. He had spent half of the night going over each one of his lawyer’s cases and seeing who might be best to represent Brooke. She sure as fuck wouldn’t allow him to be her lawyer. But he wanted to help her. Even though she made it very clear to him that she wanted nothing to do with him.

He shouldn’t have said it, *the least I can do,* fucking idiotic words. For someone who graduated law school at the top of his class, he sure could be a fucking moron when it came to Brooke Davis.

She never said his name.

That was something he had noticed.

Brooke hated him so much that she refused to even say his name now.

Carter rubbed his eyes, running his hand through his hair. He had sent his assistant Joshua home last night after the young man asked if Carter would need him to stay. He could tell that he really didn’t want to. He had heard him on the phone earlier with girlfriend making plans for the night and though Carter could have used an extra set of eyes to go over every file with him - he sent Joshua home to be with his girlfriend.

The door to his office opened and Carter sat up a bit more, seeing it was Nate.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Nate said, clearly angry.

“Working.” He deadpanned.

“I tried to let go of everything because I love your sister – I even tried to get her not to be angry at you for showing up to the restaurant because you didn’t go in – but showing up to our parents wedding rehearsal? Why the fuck can’t you just leave her alone?” Nate said, voice raising. “Haven’t you done enough?”

Carter sighed, rubbing his hands over his face again. “I want to help her.”

“How the *hell* could you ever help her, Carter?” Nate spat out.

He stood, grabbing an old business card out of his desk. “Sheryl Myers. She’s a hell of a lawyer.” Nate shook his head, refusing to take it. “She doesn’t work for me.” Carter told Nate.

After trying to go over each file of his lawyers, he realized that Brooke would still never agree to let
anyone represent her who worked for Carters firm.

So, he looked up the lawyer who had the most case record wins against his own people. Sheryl Myers. The woman was a beast when it came to divorce cases. She had even won a case against Carter himself. The woman was in her late fifties, short silver hair, an a ‘fuck authority’ type of attitude. She’d be perfect for Brooke.

“If it helps – Myers despises me.”

Nate looked down at the card in Carters hand.

“I just want to help her. I was an idiot last night – I just…she’s just so…Brooke.” He breathed out her name, shaking his head. “I really didn’t want the first time I ever talked to her involve her throwing her drink in my face.”

Nate licked at his lips, the corners of his mouth twitching up as he tried to hide his amusement. “She’s Brooke – you’re lucky she didn’t break the glass over your head.”

Carter chuckled, nodding his head in agreement. “I just want her to be happy.” He finally admitted, “And yeah – I’d love if she were to be happy with me – but I for now, I want her to be happy and rid of her loser ex-husband. I heard the conversation she had with her lawyer outside of the restaurant – and then I heard Brooke tell Caroline what Julian is trying to take from her. Myers is the best out there – with her as Brookes lawyer, Julian Baker will be leaving with less than he even had, I guarantee it.”

Nate took the card from Carter. “I don’t know…she signed a prenup.”

“Myers.” Carter said again, tapping the business card. “She’ll fix everything.” He watched as Nate debated over taking the card or not. “You don’t have to tell her that I was the one who gave the card to you. Say it was your Dad – just…if you want to help Brooke – Myers is the lawyer she’ll need.”

Nate left his office and Carter felt a little weight off of his shoulders.

He had helped Brooke.

But he wasn’t done. Carter was going to continue helping Brooke in any way he could without her knowing he was. He’d stay away from her, that’s what she wanted. But he was going to do everything in his power to help Brooke out. Which meant writing a very large check. Carter would take it out of his trust fund. It wasn’t too much. Brooke was more important to him than money. Even if Brooke hated him for the rest of her life, he’d always love her and do his best to protect her. Carter had heard around from a few business associates just how much Brooke would owe her ex-husband for his cut of C/B and the money he had invested and decided that he would pay it.

He did truly believe Myers could get her out of this – but in case she didn’t, he was sending the check along with a letter telling Julian that Brooke no longer owed him anymore money and to not even try to ask for alimony.

His parents probably wouldn’t be happy when the bank informed them that Carter took six million out of the trust fund – but he was over thirty and had all control over his money now. They were allowed to monitor his financial decisions, but they no longer had the right to interfere with it.
He’d pay Julian the money he thought Brooke owed him (anonymously) and then take out three million from his personal bank account and donate it to Davis Enterprises. Brooke would be able to keep the money Julian was going to take from the company and get more on top of that.

Carter knew if she found out she’d probably castrate him – but he was going to be careful and make sure she didn’t find out where the money came from.

*She was going to tell him yes.*

If he had just gone back home to the loft – she would have said yes to marrying him. They could have been married and Carter would be happy and Brooke wouldn’t be going through what she was going through now.

…but, if Brooke and Carter had gotten married, she would have stayed in New York and not pursue her dream in becoming a fashion designer and she wouldn’t own a multi-million-dollar company and would likely end up resenting him.

Did he believe that him cheating on her was a good thing because she had achieved her dreams? Fuck no. It was the biggest mistake of his life and he had made a *lot* of mistakes over the years. He’d regret it until the day he died. Carter had lost the love of his life by his own doing. She loved him, he still loved her, and he had still broken her.

Carter wanted to make things right. He wanted her to yell and him, scream until her voice was raw and pound her fists against his chest while saying awful things to him. To slap him in the face, punch him even – kick him in the balls, he deserved all of it and more. He wanted to feel her lips against his and smell her skin, feel her hand in his, just touch her skin and hold her in his arms – he wanted to hear her say his name.

Those things?

He did not deserve.

The beatings? Yes. But he knew Brooke, he knew that no matter how much she hated him, the worst she’d ever do is throw a drink in his face. And she had already done that.

There was a knock on his door and Joshua peeked his head out from behind the door. “Mr. Baizen?”

“Yeah?”

“Howard Archibald is on the phone for you.”

Carter nodded, telling Joshua he’d take it. He walked over to his phone and picked it up, “How are you, Howard? I’m sorry I didn’t make it to your rehearsal dinner last night,”

“Drop the act, Baizen. I know you showed up. What I didn’t know was that Brooke was unaware that you had been invited and that you two hadn’t spoken in thirteen years. Because when I ran into you yesterday morning you had said that you had just seen Brooke the night before.”

Carter sighed, “Technically, I did see her that night. I planned on crashing her dinner with your son and my sister but…I didn’t.”

“I’m sorry, Carter – but you can’t come to the wedding. I know I invited you – but that was when I thought you and Brooke had talked things over.”

“I understand.” Carter said back to Howard. “Listen, I gave Nate the name of a lawyer who can help
Brooke with the whole divorce case. Sheryl Myers. That woman has won cases against my top lawyers, myself included.”

Howard was quiet for a moment but soon began to talk, “My firm has been trying to offer her a deal to work for us for years.” He admitted, “She’s a hard-ass.”

“That’s what makes her a good lawyer. I told Nate to tell Brooke that he got the name from you if she asks – if she finds out I’m helping she won’t work with Myers and she’ll be out six-mill – and I really don’t think your wife-to-be is going to be happy about that.” He heard Howard sigh, “I just want to help her, Howard. Please let me.”

“I’ll tell her I gave the name to Nate.” Howard agreed.

Carter had thanked him and they hung up.

He couldn’t turn back time, he couldn’t make her fall in love with him again, but he could help her. And if that’s all he could do – he damn sure was going to do it.

“What do you think?” Victoria asked as Brooke looked at herself in the mirror.

She huffed, “I think I look great – you know why? Because I designed the damn dress! Are we done yet, mother?” Brooke whined, tired of wearing her bridesmaid dress. Yes, it was beautiful and stylish and she looked hot as hell in it – but Brooke had barely got any sleep last night and was incredibly hung over and still had to go to her Manhattan to meet some of her staff that she would be working with while running things from that building.

Victoria had shown up to her hotel room hours ago, Brookes bridesmaid dress in hand, but absolutely livid at Brooke for leaving the party. So, she explained what happened and her mothers face and turned into a scowl and she stepped out of the room (likely calling Howard to yell at him)
and then came back in and told her daughter that until Brooke left to go to the office, they would be talking wedding plans.

Brooke had ordered room service and took a few aspirins and went over things she had gone over hundreds of times already about the wedding.

She knew that Victoria was only doing this so Brooke wouldn’t be alone – and as sweet as it was, Brooke just wanted her mother to leave.

“Oh, quit acting like a child!” Victoria said, swatting Brooke’s hip. “I just want to know if you want anything else added – if you think it needs anything that I might not see – are we sure about the color?”

“Mom,” Brooke drew out the word. “The dress is beautiful. And it doesn’t need anything added because as I told you earlier – I designed it.”

“Oh, well, let’s talk about how you’ll wear your hair.” Victoria began.

“You don’t need to be worried, Mom.” Brooke told her mother.

“-Of course, I have to worry, what if the way you style your hair is hideous!”

“-That’s not what I meant, mom, and you know it. I’m fine, okay?” Brooke said.

Victoria pointed at the many empty mini bottles of alcohol on the floor. “Doesn’t look like it.”

Brooke sighed, “Last night was hard – but it was bound to happen eventually.”

Victoria frowned, walking over to where Brooke was. “That night you came to me asking to leave Manhattan…I had never, in my life since becoming your mother, seen you cry like that – not even when you were a new born. I never thought it was possible that anyone could ever cry so hard and the fact that it was my daughter? Brooke…I don’t ever want to see you that upset again. I don’t want you to have to go through that pain.”

Brooke smiled softly, pressing her hand to her mother’s arm. “I’m okay. I don’t want you to worry about me, okay? Your big day is coming up and you’re marrying the love of your life! You should be celebrating with me right now with mimosas!” Brooke joked.

“Well, you are going into the office later and you already smell like a bar – so I’m going to say no to the mimosas.” Victoria smirked and Brooke rolled her eyes as she laughed.

“Well, you better leave so I can go clean up,” Brooke smirked back at her mother, finding a way to get her to leave her hotel room.

“I can take the hint – I took the first thirteen you threw my way earlier, I just chose to ignore them.”

Victoria and Brooke hugged and then she left, leaving Brooke to wash up.

Brooke spent a long time in the shower thinking – so long that her finger tips looked like prunes and the water had stopped being hot long ago. She wasn’t thinking about her company, her mother’s wedding, or even Julian and their divorce.

She was thinking about Carter.

Yeah, Carter. She was able to say his name. Well, think it. It might take a while before she was able to say it herself out loud.
Caroline was about to become her sister in law in a few months. There would be a wedding and Brooke truly doubted Caroline wouldn’t invite her brother. And Brooke didn’t want to have to put Caroline in the position where she felt like she had to do something like that. Carter would want to support his sister just as much as Brooke wanted to support Nate.

And the city was big but so small at the same time. She and Carter were bound to run into each other again while she was staying to run things from her Manhattan office. Brooke couldn’t yell at him and throw drinks in his face every time she saw him. Though, it was a nice thought.

Brooke would never forgive Carter for what he did to her – she’d never have a friendship with him. But, for the sake of Nate and Caroline, she was willing to not make the wedding incredibly awkward. Which meant letting go of her anger while she was in the city and at the wedding.

So, instead of going back to the office. Brooke went to where she had heard his business firm was located in. She only knew that because she was willing to go great lengths to avoid him while in town – not because she cared.

Brooke walked into the building, going up the elevator until she reached his law firm. Baizen & Co.

He had done it. He had actually gone through with the deal he had made with his dad and became a lawyer – even took over his firm. Carter had sworn up and down that he’d never work with his father while they dated. But Brooke never really believed that. Back then, Carter had wanted to please his father just as badly as Brooke wanted to make her mother proud. They hadn’t deserved it back then – but because of their mutual need for mommy and daddy’s approval, they had become incredibly successful.

And yeah, she knew that Carter had been on the Forbes 100 most wealthy in New York City and she knew he was living in a penthouse and lived a luxurious life, blah, blah, blah – but it wasn’t because she ever looked him up. It was because of fucking Julian leaving his magazines out after reading them. When that article had come out, he was clean shaven and his hair had been shorter. He had a fuller head of hair now and a beard and seemed to have hit the gym since the article (She did not check him out last night, it wasn’t her fault that he wore an extremely tight suit that showed off his physique. Someone would have to be blind not to notice the significant change.)

Brooke walked up to where the receptionist desk was, an older woman with red hair was typing something up. Brooke waited at the desk until the woman looked up at her. “You have an appointment?” She asked.

“Uh, no.” Brooke, a bit startled by the harshness of the woman’s tone. “I was just wondering where uh,” She swallowed, trying to find courage to say his name. “-I was wondering where Mr. Baizens office is located?” It was progress. Kinda?

The woman pointed to an elevator behind Brooke. “He’s on the top floor, I’ll let his receptionist know you’re on your way – what’s your name?”

Carter had his own personal assistant? A leggy blonde with huge tits, Brooke assumed. She licked at her lips, trying to convince herself that the thought didn’t make her jealous. Because it didn’t. Carter could go and fuck his receptionist all he wanted to – she did not care about what he did anymore or even him for the matter. “Brooke Davis.” She said, licking at her lower lip.

“Brooke Davis?” The woman said, tilting her head. “Oh! I knew you looked familiar!” She said, picking up the phone and putting it to her ear, “Sweetheart – yeah, its Cathy. Brooke Davis is here to see Mr. Baizen.” She hung up and looked to Brooke. “I just want to say that I love your clothes and honestly, if you’re looking for the best divorce lawyer, Carter is your guy!”
Brooke looked down at her hands.

For a moment she had thought the woman had recognized her from something other than the tabloids – that maybe Carter spoke of her before.

Stop.

“I actually just hired another lawyer that my mother’s fiancée recommended.” Brooke told the receptionist, walking towards the private elevator when it opened.

“Well, good luck with that!” The woman hollered just as the elevator doors closed.

Brooke paced around the elevator, going over what she would say to Carter, when the elevator doors opened, Brookes back was facing the door, she turned only to stop when she saw that Carter was already standing there.

“Brooke…” He said in surprise, his eyes wide – as if he didn’t actually believe she was here standing in his private elevator. “I uh, I-” He took in a deep breath to compose himself.

Brooke took that time to step out of the elevator, moving past him. At the receptionist desk stood a short man, who watching them as if he were in suspense. Was the man the receptionist? Where was the leggy blonde? “is that his office?” Brooke asked the man who nodded his head. Brooke left Carter still standing at the elevator and waited for him inside his office.

She heard the door shut a few moments later and waited until Carter was standing in front of her. “What are you-” Carter said, finally able to get his words out – but Brooke cut him off.

“We need to talk, Baizen.”

Brooke watched as he frowned and told herself over and over that she wasn’t affected by that.

They did need to talk. Brooke had a few things to say to him, to get off her chest so that she was able to be civil to him for the sake of Caroline.

For Caroline.

She’d do this for Caroline.

It was the least she could do.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments are always appreciated! I'd really like to know what you guys think of this story, it helps me stay motivated!
Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/mistakes/errors - I'll try and go through this chapter again to see if I missed anything in my read-through! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Carter watched her from across his desk, Brooke Davis, sitting with her legs crossed and her purse sitting on her lap. It was almost as if she was protecting herself from him with her purse, her own little shield that would protect her from the asshole who broke her thirteen years ago. Carter didn’t think it was possible to hate himself any more than he already did – but just looking at her and the way she was protecting herself from him? Oh, his hatred for himself piled on even more. Carter remained seated, eyes on her as she had her face turned away from him, taking in his view of the city instead. Brooke couldn’t even look at him. He didn’t blame her. After she told him that they needed talk, still refusing to say his actual name, Carter pulled out a chair for her to sit in. Brooke, being Brooke, wouldn’t sit down until Carter stepped away and walked over this his side of the desk.

And then she was just quiet. Silence. All her heard was her breathing. She still avoided his eyes, looking directly out the window while she covered herself up more with her purse. Brooke wore a black pant suit, a white button-down shirt, and a black blazer. There was a necklace just below her neck that she was wearing. He remembered the necklace he had given to her thirteen years ago only to have it be given back to him by Nate Archibald – along with Nate’s fist slamming into his nose. Carter had laughed, trying to ignore the pain as he stumbled back into his apartment. Nate threw the necklace at Carter and, Carter being Carter, made a snide comment about how Brooke had no problem rejecting his proposal but couldn’t even return the jewelry he had given her in person. That’s when Nate told Carter that Brooke had left New York and was not coming back.

He remembered the way his stomach had dropped but bile managed to rise into his mouth. She’s gone and she’s not coming back.

Brooke didn’t go back to Tree Hill.

She had moved in with her Grandparents. The Grandfather whom she called Gampie. And once the next fall came she started classes at the L.A fashion and business institute. All those years Carter never tried to make contact because he was still bitter over her refusing his proposal. He hadn’t known back then that Brooke had been searching for him the entire night and next morning so that she could tell him the one word he desperately wanted to hear her say; yes.

So, he stayed bitter.

But, he was still stuck with the deal he had made with his father to stick school out so his trust fund wouldn’t be taken away (because once he was done with school, he was going to need that money to waste away on booze, drugs, and hookers.)

Unfortunately, Carter had thought about Brooke all the time. Constantly. And no matter how hard he tried to fight it, she was always on his mind. And when she wasn’t on his mind, she was in the back of it, just a little whisper telling Carter that he was a goddamn idiot.

And now she was here, sitting in his office, coming to him to talk. We need to talk, something Brooke had told him a long time ago was never a good thing, ‘we need to talk’ only ever led to something bad.

Carter watched as Brookes tongue swiped over her lower lip before she turned her head to look at him. “For the sake of Caroline, I am willing to not throw any more of my drinks in your face.”

The corners of his mouth began to twitch upward, Carter had to fight hard to not smile at what she was saying. He just nodded, keeping his eyes on her.
“I’m going to be in town for a while,” Brooke told him and Carter couldn’t stop himself from opening his mouth and asking her how long she’d be staying. But Brooke had glared at him, “That is not a privilege you get to know anymore.” Her words were harsh but he again, simply nodded his head and let her get out what she needed to say. “My friendship with Caroline is important to me – it should have been more important to me from the beginning and believe me, I would change a lot of things to fix that if I could. But I can’t. I can only be here for her now.”

I would change a lot of things to fix that.

He understood.

Brooke would have chosen Caroline over him. They would have never continued on with their relationship behind Caroline’s back and it would have been the permanent end to them.

“I am going to be staying longer than I previously planned and will continue to run my business from New York and while I am here, I will be staying with Caroline and Nate. I am going to make this crystal clear from the beginning – I do not want to see you unless it is absolutely fucking necessary.” She looked at him with cold eyes, “No showing up to their home unannounced for a surprise pop-in. The only times I will see you is when it has to do with the wedding – other than that, I don’t want to see you.”

He licked at her lower lip, hand going to his chin as he began to rub at his beard, “And I suppose you’re not giving me a say in any of this?”

“You don’t get a say.” Brooke glared.

He couldn’t help but chuckle, he didn’t find any of this funny or amusing – he was just uncomfortable. “Is that another privilege I’ve lost?”

God, shut the fuck up? Have you not learnt anything from your previous asshole ways?

Brooke shook her head, air blowing out her nose and she moved to stand and Carter quickly stood too, stopping her from leaving. “Please, don’t go.” He breathed out, “I’ll…shut up.”

She looked at him for a long moment before she sat back down. But she didn’t speak, Brooke just looked down at her hands, thumb running over her ring finger.

Did she miss Julian? Was Brooke still in love with him?

Brooke breathed in deeply but finally started speaking again, however, she did not look up from her hands. “Seeing each other is going to be unavoidable at times, but in the times that we can avoid it – I’d like you to stay away from me.” Brooke looked at him now, waiting for him to respond. He didn’t, he just swallowed hard and looked into those green eyes of hers. “I’ve said what I need to say.” Brooke said and stood up, walking over to his door.

Carter got up too, taking a few steps to follow after her, “Were you going to say yes?” He said, causing her to stop at his door, hand already on the door handle ready to make her exit. “Caroline finally told me…you were going to tell me yes. That you wanted to marry me.”

Brooke slowly moved her head, just barely looking over her should. “I was.” She admitted.

“Brooke,” He moved forward but she opened the door and walked out saying, Thank God I never got the chance.

She was gone.
Carter closed his eyes and tried to think back on a time where Brooke didn’t hate him. He did and he remembered the way it felt to hold her in his arms, the tickle of her hair against the crook of his neck, and the feather light kisses she’d trail up his jaw.

He remembered a time when Brooke was in love with him.

And after talking to her just now…it felt like a lifetime ago.

Tomorrow was the wedding, so Brooke was starting to run things at the office earlier than planned so Victoria could focus on her big day and while Brooke was working, she’d be going over last minute fixes or additions for the wedding and pass them along to Caroline would run out and take care of things since Brooke was stuck at the office.

“-Wait, repeat that please.” Serena said, sitting in Brookes (Victoria’s) office as they ate lunch together. The blonde woman looked stunned by the words that had left her friends mouth. “You went and talked to Car-” Brooke narrowed her eyes at Serena and she had to roll her own, “Him.” She corrected herself.

Yeah, she was getting there – but after talking to Carter, she really didn’t want to hear his name for at least a week.

“I did.” Brooke took a bite of her sub sandwich.

“Why?” Serena raised her brows. “I mean, the last I heard you threw a drink in his face.” Brooke opened her mouth to ask how Serena knew that and she shrugged, “Word travels fast in the Upper East Side, you know that.”

“Yes, unfortunately, I do.” Brooke set her sub down and grabbed her drink, taking a long sip of her ice tea. “Things don’t need to be any more awkward than they need to be – for Caroline, I told him that I would not throw my drink in his face anymore.”
Serena laughed, “Very mature.”

Brooke smirked, “I think so.” Serena then bit down on her lip, obviously wanting to say something to Brooke. “Spit it out,” Brooke told her friend.

“Does this whole…rising above it all thing involve forgiving Blair?’ She asked slowly, knowing it would upset Brooke.

The brunette sighed, running her fingers through her hair, “Look, I get that Blair was going through a hard time back then, but…I’m sorry, it doesn’t excuse the fact that she slept with him knowing we were together – and, yeah, I know that in his mind we weren’t technically together because I said no – but Blair knew how much Car- he meant to me, she knew how much I loved him and she slept with him anyway.”

“You forgave Peyton.” Serena said, trying to remind Brooke that once upon a time ago, Peyton had an affair with Brookes boyfriend at the time.

“Peyton didn’t sleep with Lucas.” Brooke made sure to remind Serena.

“But they snuck around behind your back.”

“Yeah, I’m aware.” Brooke said in a sharp tone causing Serena to sigh, “But the love I thought I felt for Lucas was so miniscule compared to how much I loved…” She took in a deep breath and shook her head. “It doesn’t matter. I’d like to say that I can forgive Blair for what she did but I’m sorry, I can’t. He was the love of my life and she was my family. I couldn’t think of a worst person for him to chose to sleep with. And the fact that she went along with it…” Brookes teeth scraped across her lower lip. “Anyway.” She cleared her throat, not wanting to get emotional. “I have to see him. Caroline is about to become my sister-in-law in a few months and since he is her brother…I can’t avoid that.”

Brooke looked at Serena and could see that was wanted to say more, but Brooke gave her a look, causing the blonde to back down. It was a look she learned early on in L.A when dealing with the fashion industry when they’d fight her on the models she chose to advertise her clothes, when she would refuse to hire anyone who looked sickly skinny. Or when the board members of C/B and Davis Enterprises tried to put their two cents in on Brookes designs and would try and change it – Brooke put her foot down and they learned quickly that she would not stand down, that the look she gave them meant; enough.

“You called him the love of your life.” Serena said before she left.

“I said he was.” Brooke corrected the blonde woman.

“…But you married Julian?” She didn’t understand why Brooke could refer to Carter having been the love of her life after she had married someone and had started to plan a life with said person. “Did you still consider Carter ‘the love of your life’ while you were married to Julian?”

She didn’t glare at Serena for using his name, Brooke simply frowned, because yes. Carter had been the great love of her life – just like Howard Archibald had been her mothers. And the day of Brookes wedding to Julian she had waited and waited and waited for Carter to show up or call – even when she hated him! But he hadn’t. And then when she and Julian had started looking into adoption, she remembered Carter saying how he would be a better father than his own and wondered what if might have been like to raise a child with him. She had loved Julian. Yes, she had.

But Carter…was different. And even while she was married to Julian – she still referred to Carter as,
the love of her life, or the man who had been the love of her life. Rachel had brought it up a time two as well. “Why do you still call him that?”

Because that’s what Carter had been. He had been the love of her life.

“But isn’t Julian the love of your life now?”

No.

No, she had already met the love of her life and he had broken her heart.

“Well, Julian, as it turns out, was never going to be the love of my life.” She held up her bare ring finger and changed the subject away from Carter. “The paperwork goes through next week and I will officially have Baker taken off my name.”

Serena frowned, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Brooke put on a false smile, “It’s not your fault that the only men I fall for turn out to be lying cheating bastards. I should actually have a divorce night out. Me, you, Caroline, I can have Rachel fly to New York.” Serena laughed and Brookes smile became genuine. “Oh, it’s going to happen now. While I have down time from planning Nate and Caroline’s wedding and running the company from New York — I will also be planning my divorce party.”

“No, no, no!” Serena refused. “Please allow me that honor. I will throw the best divorce party/girls night that anyone has even thrown before!”

“Perfect!” Brooke laughed, clapping her hands.

Serena had hugged her and Brooke had smiled, hugging her back. Being around Serena was like being in the sun. Happy, warm, it left you feeling like you were glowing. Serena was an optimist. For a while that had changed — but Serena was back to being the bubbly girl Brooke met when she was seventeen.

Brooke was alone in her office again, looking down at her ring finger and remembering the ring Carter had given to her thirteen years earlier. She pressed her thumb down hard against her ring finger and closed her eyes, refusing to even think of what it might have been like if she had just said yes when he asked. Brooke had spent years wondering and dreaming about what could have been, and it never ended well. She would just see the look Carter gave her before he bent down to kiss Blair, and she’d feel her heart shatter all over again.

Nate called her a half hour after Serena left her office and he and Caroline told her that Nate had managed to book the venue that Brooke had sent him the day before, but that the first opening wasn’t for another seven months. Nate had told her she didn’t have to stay in New York for that long — that they could figure it all out by themselves (because he knew how hard it was for Brooke to be back in New York) but…she told him she’d stay. It was only seven months and she had laid down ground rules with Carter. He would just need to follow through with them and respect her space.

They had thanked her over and over, telling Brooke that she was still welcome to stay in their house for those seven months but Brooke told them she’d stay for the next month or so but would be looking for a place to rent so she wouldn’t be in their hair all the time.

“I can’t stay with you guys for seven months! You guys are getting married — no one needs their step sister staying with them for that long.”

“-Brooke, it’s not a big deal.” Caroline tried to tell her.
Brooke had laughed at that and had said, “-I don’t want to have to listen to you guys having sex in the next room.” They had both laughed at that, “-and seven months without sex is no fun. Trust me.” Yeah, it had been a while since she had sex. Even before she found out Julian was cheating on her. They had just stopped having sex after the last adoption didn’t go through, “-I’ll be fine finding a place. I’ll just rent it out once I go back to LA.”

If she could get back to L.A. She didn’t exactly have a house there anymore.

Rachel had called later that evening, taking Brookes mind off of Carter and her housing problems by giving her a whole new set of problems to stress out about. “Sooo, your bank accounts are completely frozen.” Rachel told Brooke and she instantly started to feel a tension headache start.

“Well, not yours – but the company’s. And we can’t pay anyone until it’s fixed.”

“How the hell is the company account frozen?

“One guess? Julian or his she-devil of a mother.”

Brooke was quiet, she kept her eyes closed and breathed in and out to try and calm down. But, she couldn’t form words at the moment, and Rachel kept saying her name over and over, asking what the hell she was going to do to fix the problem and Brooke didn’t have an answer. Because the lawyer that Howard had recommended was currently out of town until next week – and Brooke really doubted that she had cell signal in Honduras which was where she was currently helping out anyone who may not be able to afford legal aide.

“Brooke! Are you there or did you have a stroke?”

“I’m here.”

“You need to fix this. Or, call in Victoria.”

“No, her wedding is tomorrow – she has other things to stress over, like dresses fitting and flower arrangements or someone bringing a plus one who hadn’t said so on their RSVP. She doesn’t need the fact that Davis Enterprises’ bank accounts are frozen on top of the stress she is already having.” Brooke huffed, going over in her head who she might know who could help her out of this situation. “I think I know someone who can help.”

“Who?”

Brooke took in a deep breath, trying to come up with some sort of game plan. But, she finally answered Rachel and said, “I’ll call you when things are fixed, okay? Just – keep me updated by text with everything going on, okay?”

They hung up and Brooke pulled out her phone and called Chuck Bass. He was always pulling strings, even back in high school. Surely, he’d have a lawyer on hand to fix whatever problem he may run into.

If anyone could help Brooke fix this – it was Chuck Bass.
He remembered their last kiss.

It had been quick, a little greeting as she had walked into the loft. Chaste and innocent because Carter hadn’t known that that would be their last kiss. If he had known it back then, he would have never let her go.

Carter sat in his town car where his driver was taking him home to his penthouse, thinking back on the way her lips had barely touched his in that moment and how he had laughed when she had run past him because she needed to pee. That was it.

That was their last kiss.

Her mother’s wedding to Howard was tomorrow. Brooke would be the maid of honor and Nate would be the best man and Carter would be at home drinking, trying so hard to remember what her lips felt like against his in that moment. Their last kiss.

Carter wanted to kiss her again, but he knew that was not something likely to happen. And as much as he wanted to just grab her face with his hands, press his mouth to hers and help her remember just how much he loved her – have her feel how much he still loved her – Carter wouldn’t do that. It’d be crossing the line and he had done that enough when it came to Brooke.

Kissing Georgina.

Sleeping with tons of women that summer when he had thought she and Nate were together.

 Fucking Blair Waldorf when Brooke had turned down his proposal.

He crossed all those lines and she had forgiven him for most of them. He didn’t blame her for not being able to forgive him for Blair – he didn’t forgive himself either.

Carter had decided after talking with Brooke that he would wire the money to Julian, (instead of simply writing him a check) Brookes soon to be ex-husband had answered his calls after Carter told him his plans. He took the money after going over the agreement Carter had written up saying that Julian would not demand any alimony and drop the annulment he had tricked her into signing. Julian faxed over his signature as well as his lawyers and by the end of the day, Carter was out a couple
million dollars. But he didn’t care. Because now Brooke was out of her jam and she could be free of Julian.

“Do you think buying me off is going to make Brooke fall back in love with you?” Julian had chuckled once the money was already in his account. “It won’t.”

“That’s not why I’m doing this. Brooke has had men shit on her for her entire life – today that stops. You’re going to rip up that annulment, buy you and your baby-mama a nice home in the Hills, and fuck off.”

“You do realize that you were one of the men who has shit on her, right?” Julian reminded him. But he didn’t need to be reminded, he knew that. “Brooke doesn’t know that you’re doing this, does she?” Julian asked and then laughed, “When she finds out that you paid me off – she’s going to hate you even more. I think she’d rather sell her company than take your help.”

“That’s why she won’t know. You had a change of heart. You realized that you’ve already been dragged her through the mud enough – that she doesn’t deserve that. And then you’re not going to try and contact her ever again.”

Julian had scoffed, “Whatever. I’m sure I’ll see her around when she comes back to LA.” Carter had frowned, and yet again, Julian laughed, “You really don’t think things through, do you? You just got Brooke her house back – you really think she’s going to continue staying in New York?”

Carter had hung up and mentally kicked himself for being such a goddamn idiot. Yes, he realized that he was getting Brooke her home back – but it never occurred to him that she’d leave New York – why hadn’t it? What the actual fuck did you think was going to happen? Carter pulled out his phone and called his sister, who surprise, surprise, didn’t answer. But he needed to talk to her – get things off his chest. And when it came to Brooke, Caroline had always been the one he’d talk to – well, thirteen years ago. He texted his sister and waited for her to call him after hitting send.

**Carter Baizen (7:27 PM):**

Brooke told me not to show up to your place unexpectedly. So, either you call me back or I’m headed to your place.

Caroline called him back less than a minute later. “What do you want?”

“Are you alone?”
“Yes? Why?”

“Where’s Nate?”

“He’s still at the office – why?”

“And Brooke?”

“Oh my god, none of your business – now tell me why you are asking.”

“I uh, did something kind of stupid.”

“What’s new.” Caroline said a in flat voice.

Carter rolled his eyes at her snark.

“What did you do?”

“I spoke with Brookes ex-husband. And…kind of paid all the money he was asking Brooke to hand over in the divorce.”

“Oh. My. God- Carter he was asking for more than 6 million dollars! Why would you do that? Did you think that Brooke would find out and show up at your place and forgive everything? You’re so damn delusional!”

“I didn’t do it because I thought it’d make her want to get back together with me,”

Caroline laughed at his words, “Yeah- because that will never happen.”

Carter continued on, ignoring Caroline’s words. “-I did it because she doesn’t deserve to be going through all of this. When I saw her that night outside the restaurant after she spoke to her lawyer…I couldn’t not do anything. And she wouldn’t accept my help so I told Nate to recommend her new lawyer – but I just…I wanted to make sure that there was no chance of Brooke getting screwed in the end. This isn’t me trying to make Brooke fall back in love with me, it’s me…trying to help her not get screwed over by yet another stupid guy who did not deserve her.”

And also, maybe make her want to stay in New York. But, he couldn’t tell his sister that. Because it was stupid – he had paid off Julian so her home was her home again and why wouldn’t she go running back to LA? He was sure everything about New York reminded her of what happened. What he had done. Carter didn’t regret paying off Julian, no, he was glad he did that. And who cares if his trust found was down to 86 million after paying Julian off – the money didn’t matter to him, Carter had plenty. He just wanted to help Brooke and this was a way he could.

But if she were to ever find out…

He heard Caroline sigh, “If she finds you that you paid Julian off – she’s going to be furious.”

Yup.

“Like – break into your penthouse and castrate you while you sleep, furious.”

“I know – and I’m pretty sure Julian plans on telling her it was me. That’s…why I need your help.”

Caroline groaned, “I really don’t like the sound of your voice right now – because it sounds the way it always does when you’re about to ask me to do something I’ll regret.”
He took in a deep breath, preparing for his sister to laugh at what he was asking her to do. “Julian will end up telling Brooke eventually – I need you and Nate to tell her that you guys paid him.”

“*Are you kidding me?*”

“No.”

“*Carter!*

“-If she finds out it’s me she’ll try and pay me back.” Carter stated the obvious.

“*And you don’t think she’ll do the same for me and Nate?*”

“No, I know she’ll try. But Nate won’t let her. If…you get him on board with this.”

“*Carter, this is not fair.*”

He knew he was asking a lot by asking Caroline to get her soon to be husband on board with lying to his step sister if Julian ever decided to tell Brooke that it was Carter who paid him off. But he was still asking.

“-Look, I have nothing to gain from this – she finds out? She hates me. She doesn’t find out? Guess what, Care? She’s still going to fucking hate me. And it’s not like she’s even going to stay in New York after Julian says he doesn’t want the house or money – she’ll be on the first flight back to LA.”

Caroline was quiet.

Oddly quiet.

“What?” Carter said slowly.

“She’s staying in New York until after the wedding.”

“I know – to run things from Manhattan.”

“No…she’s staying until after mine and Nates wedding. Which we pushed back to seven months.”

“What?” Carter said, sitting up a bit in the backseat of the town car. “-I thought you and Nate were getting married in three months.”

“That had been the plan – but Nate found a place for the ceremony and it’s beautiful and…adding four more months to our three didn’t seem like such a bad idea.”

“She’s staying?” His voice was full of hope that he shouldn’t have.

“*Not forever. Just until after the wedding.*” He could hear the irritation in his sister voice – needing to remind him yet again that Carter fucked up and would never get Brooke back.

“Does she know you pushed the date back?” He continued to ask more questions anyway.

“*Of course, she does, Carter.*”

“When did you tell her?” Is that why she had come to see him this morning? Because she knew that she was staying longer? But why was she staying? Caroline had mentioned to their mother (when she didn’t know he was listening) that Brooke was singlehandedly planning Victoria’s wedding from LA. She could do the same for Nate and Caroline – but she was choosing to stay in New York.
“Why?”

“I’m not going to play twenty-one questions with you, Carter.” And then she paused. “-Wait…did you already wire the money to Julian?” She asked, sounding worried.

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Earlier this afternoon – is it your turn to ask twenty-one questions now?”

She ignored his comment, “But…how…” Caroline trailed off. “That doesn’t make sense.”

His didn’t sound good, the way Caroline was acting – almost as if she were worried. “What doesn’t make sense?” Carter asked, growing worried now, too.

“Brooke is going to go meet with Chuck and his team of lawyers because Davis Enterprises bank accounts are all frozen. Brooke thinks that Julian is the one who did it – if you paid him…why are her accounts frozen?”

Damn him.

“Is she meeting Chuck at his office?”

“Yes.”

“I’m heading there now,” Carter told her and Caroline sighed but didn’t stop Carter from going. Because she knew that Carter was one of the best lawyers in New York and if anyone could get Brooke out of this situation – it was him. They hung up and Carter told his driver to turn around and head over to Bass Industries main building. Carter had called Brooke’s new lawyer leaving her a detailed message about everything that was happening (including him paying off Julian) and that he was stepping in to help while she was out of the country. The woman never replied to him, but that wasn’t surprising. She was in Honduras after all. But it’d help to have her back him up once she did get the message so that Brooke wouldn’t refuse his help.

He knew she would.

But Julian was fucking with her now. And she didn’t deserve that.

He was going to crush that motherfucker.
Chuck had gathered his lawyers together to help Brooke out when she had called him asking for his help. He had been through this before – Jack had tried to ruin him and then his father had as well. He was prepared for things like that happening in the future and this time, it wasn’t him who needed all his lawyers. It was Brooke.

He had talked to her once since she left thirteen years ago.

Chuck had flown to LA and showed up at her office after he and Blair had their son and invited her to his baptism. Brooke had told him no.

He understood.

Chuck could still remember the look on Brookes face that morning when they had gone to Blairs penthouse and found her with Carter. He had gone to try and win Blair back, apologize to her and be there for her while she was going through her problems. Brooke was already at the penthouse, her phone to her ear and was leaving Carter a voicemail. He had asked her if she wanted him to wait for her and they could go up together. Brooke had said she was going to try and call Carter one more time.

Brooke had walked out of the elevator and into the room he and Blair were in just as Carter had walked in, shirt unbuttoned as he smirked at Chuck.

“It seems to me that your only problem is having a party all by your lonesome.”

Carter had come in, “Except she’s not alone.”

He had bent down and kissed Blairs cheek just as Brooke walked into the room to witness the whole thing. Chuck had looked back at Brooke, her eyes wide, shock written on her face. She was breathing in and out, swaying a little bit as she watched Carter smirk and move down to kiss Blair again. “Go downstairs.” Chuck had instructed her. He would deal with it. But she didn’t move. Brooke just watched as Carter kissed her cousin. “Brooke…go.” Chuck had finally got her to look away. She looked back at Carter one more time before leaving.

When he left the penthouse, he didn’t find her in the lobby – she was outside holding onto the building as she threw up. Carter had destroyed her in less than two minutes. As did Blair.

That was the last time Chuck had seen Brooke until after Henry was born.

And he hadn’t seen her since that day until now.

Brooke sat next to him as his lawyers tried to explain to Brooke what was happening.

Her soon to be ex-husband denied going into her companies account – but it was closed after an unauthorized user tried to take over ten million dollars from the account, therefore, the bank froze the account.
account. Now his lawyers were just trying to figure out who had done it and dealt with the bank to try and get them to allow Brooke access to the money.

"-I have to pay for fabric shipment from Paris – not to mention pay my team in LA – Thank God Victoria has already paid my New York people." Brooke said, a pair of glasses perched up on her nose as she went over the paper work Chucks lawyers had given her to go over so she knew everything they’d be doing. Chuck was helping her as well. "God, I wish Rachel were here – she’s always goes over this kind of shit for me."

Chuck had wanted to say something along the lines of; isn’t she the one who got you into this mess in the first place by not seeing that Julian had changed the annulment papers?

“We’ll get things worked out, Brooke. Don’t worry.”

Brooke closed her eyes and nodded her head, and while he eyes were closed, Chuck looked up to see someone walking into his conference room. He glared, pointing to the door that Carter had just come through.

"-I’m just here to help."

Chuck looked over to Brooke whose head snapped up at the sound of Carter’s voice. "-Are you kidding me?” She scoffed, taking off her glasses and looked over at Chuck. “Did you call him?”

“No.” Chuck assured Brooke, "-I wouldn’t do that."

Brooke then looked back at Carter, “You need to leave.”

"-Baizen, you might actually be helpful in this.” One of Chucks lawyers said and both Chuck and Brooke looked at the older man with a glare. "-He has experience in this type of case that Ms. Davis has found herself in.”

Chuck raised his brow, before, the lawyers had no idea what they were dealing with. They were still trying to figure out why the account was closed – but now it seemed like they had some sort of lead. "-You know what’s going on now?” He asked.

He looked to the other lawyers who nodded their heads to him, allowing him to explain. “Someone within the company tried to withdraw ten million dollars – but it was not Mr. Baker.” The man then looked to Brooke, “You told us that you were informed of this situation by your publicist; Rachel Gatina?”

“Yes,” Brooke said slowly, obviously not understanding the question. But Chuck understood. And it seemed that Carter understood too.

“It’s not uncommon for an employee who is also a friend or is trusted, tries to skim a bit of money from their employer without them knowing.” He began to explain and Brooke shook her head, ready to protest but Chuck placed his hand on top of hers to allow his lawyer to continue, “And it seems in Ms. Gatina’s case – she had been doing that slowly over the years. Only taken out enough that it would go unnoticed.”

“-This is a joke, right?” Brooke shot back, pissed off.

“Ms. Davis – you divorce is obviously something that frightened Ms. Gatina, she knew will have to pay Mr. Baker over six million dollars – it’s not surprising she’d do something risky like this. I’m sure you’ll have someone going over the financials of your company to see if you’ll be able to afford Mr. Bakers payoff – but when they dig into your funds, they’ll see some inconsistencies.” He pulled
out a piece of paper and handed it to Brooke and Chuck.

Five hundred dollars had been taken out every week for the last couple of years and paid to, what his lawyers told Brooke, was a bogus company. And Rachel was the one to sign off on the checks being sent.

Brooke took in a deep breath and said quietly, “She’s been stealing from me?” Chuck watched as Brooke seemed to try and mentally calculate just how much money Rachel had taken from her over the years of working for Davis Enterprises. Brooke looked up, but not to Chucks lawyers. Instead, to Carter, who stood by the door still. “What do I do?” She asked in a whisper.

“I don’t want to press charges against Rachel.” Brooke told Carter. Chuck and his team of lawyers had left at her request – they had said that Carter had gone through this type of situation before. And even though she hated the idea of being alone in a room with him – she needed his help. Because she didn’t want Rachel to get in trouble. Rachel was her best friend, she was someone Brooke constantly leaned on for support – there had to be a reason why she did this. Rachel wouldn’t do that to her without there being a legitimate reason.

Carter was sitting next to Brooke as he read through all the files Chucks lawyers had given him, as well as digital copies on his laptop. Brooke preferred going over the papers in front of her, the thing she could see that couldn’t be changed (like her annulment. God, did Rachel do that on purpose too?) at the last minute.

He looked over to Brooke just as she took off her glasses, setting them down on the table so she could put her hair up. When Brooke looked back at him, he quickly looked away and cleared his throat. “In my experience – if you don’t end up pressing charges and forgive the person – they’ll just do it again.”

Brooke had to let out an amused scoff at that. He did realize how ironic his words were right now? Brooke had forgiven him for so much and ended up getting fucked over by him in the end too. She listened as Carter sighed, “Just because I don’t want to press charges against her doesn’t mean that
I’m going to let her continue to work for my company.” Brooke turned her chair a bit so she could be facing him, “I’m not naïve anymore.”

Carter closed his eyes and licked at his lower lip, “I don’t think you’re naïve.” He opened his eyes and looked at Brooke. “I just think you’re…too trusting.” Brooke raised kinked her brow up and Carter shook his head, lips twitching up a bit, “Yes. I hear what I’m saying and yes, I hear the irony.”

Brooke pursed her lip and turned her chair to face the table again and placed her glasses back on to go over the files one more time.

“When did you start wearing glasses?” Brooke side-eyed him and his comment. “You didn’t have them before...unless you hid them from me.”

“I didn’t have glasses back then. I didn’t need them – I was seventeen. Not thirty.” She replied, her eyes focusing on the company that Rachel had been sending checks to. “Is there a way we can find out about this company?” She asked.

Carter shook his head when Brooke looked to him for answers, “It’s fake.” He reminded her.

“Yeah, but the checks were being cashed.”

“By your friend.” Carter said.

“-I don’t think so.” Brooke disagreed. “Rachel wouldn’t do that – I’ve known her for years, she’s been with me through everything. She was one of my bridesmaids – she wouldn’t do this to me unless she had a reason. Unless she had to do it.”

“You think she was being forced to do this?” Carter asked, he sounded skeptical.

“I know that loyalty is foreign to you – but it means something to a lot of people. Rachel is loyal to me. She goes above and beyond with her job.” Brooke said, “She’s the best publicist I’ve ever had. I trust her.”

“Brooke,” He sighed.

But she didn’t let him say anything else, “Rachel has never given me a reason to distrust her – not once. I don’t believe that she would do this to me.” Carter opened his mouth but Brooke raised her hand, stopping him, “-And yes, I am aware that there is evidence that proves that she has done it – but there’s got to be a reason.”

Carter closed his laptop and moved in his chair to face Brooke. “Has she called you back yet?”

Brooke shook her head, “No. Not since she called me earlier this evening to tell me what happened.”

“And how long after was it that the bank called you?” Carter asked.

“Thirty minutes, maybe? And yes, I know that looks suspicious.” She said when Carter made a face.

“She tried to take ten million dollars from your company.” Carter reminded him, “And whether or not is was for a reason – she still did it. And the banks know about it now. It doesn’t matter if you don’t want to press charges against her – once your bank tells your board members, it’s over.”

“Okay, well how do I get them not to?!?” Brooke said, voice panicked. Because she did not want Rachel to get in trouble – that was the last thing she wanted. Rachel had always been loyal – so
Brooke refused to give up on her. Brooke flinched when Carter moved his hand on top of hers, pulling away instantly.

He sighed, “You can lie. You can tell them that you had asked Rachel to take the money out for whatever reason and the blame will be off of her. But…then you will be under investigation.”

“-Well, who’s to say that I didn’t take the money out to pay Julian what I owe him.”

“-Because she took ten million, not six. Why take more than you needed?”

“I don’t know, beca-” Brooke paused, looking at Carter. “How the hell do you know how much Julian is asking for?”

He shrugged, “World travels fast.”

“-Did Caroline tell you?!”

“No!” Carter quickly denied, “No, it wasn’t Caroline, I asked around.”

“Why?” Brooke said, not understanding. “Why?” She asked again when he wouldn’t answer.

“I wanted to help.”

Brooke shook her head, “I told you that I didn’t want your help.” God, he really didn’t listen to thing she said, did he? She wanted to scream. After all these years he still had no respect for her or her wishes. Brooke started gathering up her things in anger but Carter stopped, grabbing onto her wrist so she wouldn’t leave. Brooke yanked away from him but he didn’t let go. She looked up at him, eyes blazing with anger as he looked down at her. “Let go of me.” She seethed.

Carter did, slowly dropping her wrist from his grip. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?” She said, eyes filling with angry tears.

“For everything.” He whispered. “God, Brooke – you don’t know how sorry I am!” His voice began to waver and Carter inhaled deeply.

Brooke wiped away a tear, “And if Caroline had never told you that I was going to tell you yes – that I was coming to accept your proposal? Would you still be sorry? Or would you still be that hateful, spiteful little shit you were back then?” She shook her head, “You had years to apologize, Carter! You had over a decade to try and make things right and you choose to do that now? When I’m my most vulnerable? God, you really are a piece of shit.” Brooke grabbed her purse and headed towards the door.

In her angry state – she hadn’t even realized that she had said his name. Or, cry his name. And she ignored him calling out her name.

She just left.

Brooke went back to Nate and Caroline’s place and climbed into bed, and when they came to her door to ask her if she was okay, she didn’t answer. Instead, she played her favorite playlist and closed her eyes, refusing to let anymore tears fall.

There were so many things she wanted to say to Carter. She wanted to scream at him until her voice was raw and shove him in the chest and kick him in the balls and make him feel the pain he had caused her. And she had the chance to – but…she hadn’t.
Because she didn’t want to feel all that pain again, she didn’t want to have to look him in the eyes and tell him just how much he had fucked her up – just how badly he had broken her. Because she’d see the guilt in his eyes like she had earlier and Brooke fucking hated that she felt bad for causing him that guilt.

He deserved to feel that guilt! He deserved to feel that pain! So why the fuck hadn’t Brooke just let it all out?

*Because. He was the love of your life. Nothing has changed that.*

And she fucking hated that the little voice in her head was right.

Brooke would go to his work after the wedding and finish going over their plans on how to avoid Rachel getting into trouble and then she’d be done with him until the wedding neared. And once she wedding was over, she’d leave New York.

*You said his name.*

Shut the fuck up.

Chapter End Notes

You guys still liking the story? So much more is about to happen! Better buckle up! Comments and kudos are always appreciated.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/mistakes/errors, my brain runs faster than I can type.

Brookes bridesmaid dress

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Brooke was running on maybe two hours of sleep.

She blamed Carter and also the Moulin Rouge soundtrack she had on her Spotify account, a playlist of all of her favorite songs from some of her favorite musicals (which she blamed Haley for. Because Haley was a Broadway nerd and had Brooke watch her favorite musical movies as well as go to one Broadway show each time she was in New York for Fashion Week. And then Brooke started to get hooked on it.). She stayed up listening to ‘Come What May’ on a loop for the majority of her time in bed, and then the next few hours she played covers of ‘Come What May’ because she was thirty-year-old woman who could totally handle her own emotions in a healthy coping way.

Yeah, right.

Brooke had finally fallen asleep, and then her phone had started ringing, waking her up – and Brooke had expected it to be Victoria to go over last-minute wedding details – but it was not her mother. It was Julian. He told her that he was ripping up the annulment papers and that he wasn’t going to make her pay him, that he had done what he had done and regretted it. Julian told her that he still loved her, not Alex, and that he had only been with her because Brooke had pulled away from him after the last adoption lett down.

And Brooke really wished that Rachel would answer her calls because she was the only one who would kick some sense into Brooke for buying into his excuses. But she had. Brooke thanked him for ripping up the annulment and apologized (I shit you not) for pulling away from Julian. That it wasn’t fair to him to do that. Are you for fucking real? He asked her to come up. Julian told her that he would leave Alex and that all he wanted was her back.

When Brooke was with Julian, she had been happy. And it was fun and exciting because Brooke had thought that she’d never find love again after Carter. She had slept around, went on a few blind dates, but nothing ever worked out. But Julian had been different. He was charming and funny, and a bit nerdy. He had been a mathlete while in school – she wouldn’t have had to worry about him ever stepping out on her. But, he was, as previously mentioned, charming, and funny, and very handsome. And Alex Dupree managed to sink her claws into him to pull him away from Brooke.

She didn’t know what to say when he asked her to come home.

At the moment – she had to stay in New York to run her mothers company. And, she supposed she could help plan Nate and Caroline’s wedding via text/phone/facetime/skype. Brooke did miss L.A. She missed the constant sun and the palm trees and the foothills. The traffic? Not so much. But New York was bad too. LA held memories of her trying to start a new life – of her building her empire.

But…New York?

There was something about New York, the bright lights, the atmosphere, the city was just… refreshing. Being in New York, Brooke was able to see first hand what young women wore daily, what worked and what didn’t and it inspired her. Brooke had sketched more drawings since she got to New York than she had in the last three months. New York was apparently the inspiration she had been lacking these past few months.

And she liked her New York team – she liked her assistant Millicent who was so kind and clearly
terrified of Victoria given that whenever Brooke would say her mothers name, the young woman would flinch. But she was funny and made Brooke smile when she was feeling overwhelmed and always got her coffee order right. The young woman had even made a list of potential bachelors she might want to take to the wedding (Brooke was sure her mother had something to do with that, but it was sweet) – but Brooke was just going to the wedding by herself.

She had thought about going with one of Howards younger lawyers at his law firm, tall, broody, dark green eyes. He was handsome, that was for sure. But after talking to Julian this morning – Brooke thought it might not be a good idea to take a date to her mothers wedding.

Julian wanted to work things out.

Fool me once…

“Victoria and Howard, please join hands.”

Brooke smiled as she watched her mother hold onto Howards hand as they stood up in front of all their friends and family. She looked past Howard to see Nate smiling as well. They were both so happy for their parents finding their way back to each other. They had not been the very best versions of themselves in a very long time – but when they were together? Oh, it was like they were two completely different people. Victoria was loving and nurturing and patient (something she never was before) and Howard was happy, and calm, and just as loving as Victoria.

Victoria slowly but surely started becoming the mother Brooke longed for after everything with Carter had happened. When Brooke had fallen down on her knees crying, begging to leave New York, her mother had felt the motherly instinct to protect her in that moment and she had continued to do so from that day forward. Victoria helped Brooke create her empire, she spent countless nights going over plans and flew back and forth from LA to New York whenever Brooke needed her. Victoria was not just her mother or friend now, she was her partner. And Brooke was so thankful for her mother.

Howard Archibald changed as well, clean and sober for over a decade, always there for his son when he needed him, finally a father that Nate deserved who didn’t push him into things Nate did not want. Howard accepted Nates choices and encouraged him to make his own. Howard faced his problems head on instead of hiding from them and God, did he love Victoria. He affectionately still referred to her as Monty, the name he had called Brooke when he first met her and thought he was seeing a ghost from his past.

They were perfect for each other.

And Brooke couldn’t help but be so happy yet so envious at the same time.

They were having their happily ever after and Brooke felt so god damn alone lately that it ached. But she’d never be bitter that her mother finally had her true love back – no, she was thrilled. It just reminded Brooke of her failed relationships and how each ‘Great Love’ she had had ended up hurting her in the end. Victoria had hurt Howard by choosing Ted – but now they were together again.

Maybe Julian was Brookes Howard? The one she was destined to come back to even after everything they had been through together.

You know that he’s not your Howard.

Ugh, shut up.

“Please look at one another now and remember this moment in time,” The man officiating the
wedding said to Victoria and Howard. “Howard, please repeat after me.”

And then Howard repeated after the man, “Monty,” He had said, causing the room to chuckle when he referred to Victoria by her nickname and not her actual name, “I take you as you are, loving who you are now and who you are yet to become. I promise from this day forward to be grateful for our love and our life. To be generous with my time, my energy, and my affection. To be patient with you and with myself. To fill our life with adventure and our home with laughter. To encourage you to grow as an individual and inspire you to do so. To love you completely. These things I pledge before you, our friends, and our family.” Howard had looked to Brooke and then over his shoulder at Nate.

Nate chuckled when he looked over at Brooke and saw her eyes filled with tears already, always such a sap at weddings.

It was Victoria’s turn to the say the words, “Howie.” She smiled at the man, “I take you as you are, loving who you are now and who you are yet to become. I promise from this day forward to be grateful for our love and our life. To be generous with my time, my energy, and my affection. To be patient with you and with myself. To fill our life with adventure and our home with laughter. To encourage you to grow as an individual and inspire you to do so. To love you completely. These things I pledge before you, our friends, and our family.”

“Howard, do you take Victoria to be your wife?” The man asked Howard.

He beamed at Victoria. “I do.”

Brooke sniffled, wiping a few tears away, “And Victoria, do you take Howard to be your husband?” The officiant asked Victoria now.

“Yes,” Victoria breathed out, “I do.”

They exchanged their rings, Nate jokingly pretended that he had forgotten Victoria’s ring causing everyone to laugh, Victoria included. And Brooke gave Victoria Howards ring and squeezed her hand, trying to show just how happy she was for them in this moment.

“Howard and Victoria, you have come here today of your own free will and in the presence of family and friends, have declared your love and commitment to each other. You have given and received as ring as a symbol of your promises. By the power of your love and commitment to each other, and by the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now share your first kiss as husband and wife. Congratulations.”

The room was filled with clapping and Brooke and Nate whooped and hollered and Brooke even playfully gagged when the two kissed.

“Friends and family, I now present to you the newly married couple. Let’s hear it for them!”

Brooke laughed as Howard kissed her mother again, dipping her and their friends and family all stood up and cheered. Brooke smiled, looking out at the crowd. Serena and Dan were there, Eleanor and Cyrus, and though Brooke had fought her mother on this, Blair was in the crowd as well with her son and Chuck. Howards work colleagues were there, Millicent and some of the board members of Davis Enterprises as well as old family friends and the friends Victoria had made while living in the Upper East Side. Lily van der Woodsen included.

And then Brooke saw someone she hadn’t seen in years – not since she left Manhattan. Vanessa Abrams. She smiled, waving to the woman Nate used to have an on and off relationship with. But Vanessa didn’t seem as happy to see Brooke as she was to see her – in fact, the woman looked like
she had a gun pointed at her head as she forced a smile.

Yeah, Brooke didn’t really stay in contact with any of her friends from New York after she left but none of them ever held a grudge against her for that. They all understood. It seemed like Vanessa did not understand.

Brooke felt someone nudge her and looked up to the side and saw Nate waiting for her at the aisle, arm waiting for her to hold onto. She smiled and they walked down the aisle together. While taking family pictures, Brooke leaned in and whispered to Nate, “Soooo, are all of your ex-girlfriends at this wedding? Should I be on the look out for Catherine?” She teased. He looked at her in confusion. “I saw Vanessa – who did not look happy to see me, by the way.”

Nate cleared his throat awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck, “Uh, you, uh – yeah. You should talk to Caroline about that.”

Yeah, that just left her with so many more questions that Nate didn’t seem to want to answer.

When the reception started, Brooke sat next to her mother at the head table and watched as Caroline hugged Vanessa tightly, both of them laughing. Vanessa and Caroline had been friends, Brooke remembered that. But it seemed that they had grown even closer in the last thirteen years. Brooke decided to go over and break the ice – apologize to Vanessa about ghosting her. But when Vanessa saw Brooke coming their way, she quickly walked in the opposite direction.

“Okay, she hates me.” Brooke said as she stood next to Caroline now, “I mean – we were friends but it’s not like we were besties. If anyone should be treating me that way it should be you.” She nudged Caroline, hoping to get a laugh but Caroline cleared her throat in that awkward way Nate had earlier, “Okay- what’s going on? Why do I feel like there’s an elephant in the room that I don’t know about?”

“Um,” Caroline pulled Brooke a bit away from everyone, “Vanessa, she’s uh, she’s going to be my maid of honor.” Caroline admitted.

Was Brooke supposed to be offended? Did she really think that Caroline would want her to be her maid of honor after so many years of silence? No. She didn’t even expect Caroline to even want her in the wedding, and that fact that she was a bridesmaid was great, but Brooke knew it was because of Nate.

“…Okay…but why is she avoiding me like I’m carry the zika virus?” Brooke said with a chuckle, still not understanding, “I hope she doesn’t think that I would be upset about her being the maid of honor – you two have obviously grown close over the years and I didn’t even think you’d want me in the wedding, to be honest. You can tell her that I’m totally okay with it – I don’t hold any grudges.”

Caroline shifted, fidgeting with her necklace. “That’s…not why. I uh, Vanessa and I didn’t really stay in touch either until a few years ago, actually.” Okay? That didn’t matter to Brooke, if that’s what Caroline was worried about. “We uh, we got back in touch through Car- my brother.”

Oh.

They had dated.

Cool.

That didn’t bother her.
It’s not like she hadn’t gotten married – Carter was free to date whoever he wanted to. Even Vanessa. *What if they’re still dating? Does. Not. Matter.*

“They dated, I assume?”

“No -no!” Caroline said quickly and Brooke couldn’t help but let out a little chuckle at how Caroline was acting, “-I mean, they didn’t *date* – Carter was pretty clear about that.”

*They were fuck buddies.*

Caroline looked mortified and Brooke had to laugh again, “-Caroline,” She placed her hands on her friend’s shoulders to have her look at him, “I don’t know if you remember this – but *you* were Nates date to me *wedding.*” She chuckled, “-I got married.” Brooke reminded her old friend.

“-Yeah, I know, but-”

“Honestly, Caroline, it doesn’t bother me. You should let Vanessa know that it’s no big deal. I don’t care if they sleep together.” Brooke told Caroline.

“They don’t. I mean, they did. But not for a few years. Vanessa wanted more from Carter and he uh…”

“-Is a man-slut who can’t keep it in his pants? Yeah, I know.” Brooke tried to joke.

But Caroline frowned, and then shook her head. Brooke could see that she was getting irritated now. “No, he just made it clear what it would be up front and Vanessa fell for him and he was still in love with you – so, it ended.”

*He was still in love with you.*

A few years ago? Carter had still been in love with her? *He* had cheated on her – he had fucked up their relationship. He *never* loved her. That was complete and utter bullshit.

Brooke didn’t want to start a fight – but she needed to make things clear. “Carter did not love me.” Caroline opened her mouth to protest but Brooke went on, “The reason he couldn’t give Vanessa what she wanted was because he is selfish and as you have referred him as *many* times – a man slut. Don’t drag me into him not wanting a relationship with her by saying that he was still ‘in love’ with me because Carter *never* loved me.” She stressed, feeling herself getting angry now. “-If he loved me, he wouldn’t have done what he did. So, stop.”

Caroline scoffed, “-Do you know why I had to leave your wedding to Julian early?” She asked, head tilted as she looked at Brooke. “Because Carter was so fucked up that you were getting married that he nearly drank himself to death. I left *early* because my mom called me from the ambulance after finding him alone in his apartment choking on his own puke – I left because he on his way to the hospital to get his stomach pumped because he was so wrecked that you married someone else. He loved you Brooke. Still does, stupidly.”

Brooke had to take a step back from that verbal blow.

“-The reason why Vanessa and Carter never worked was not because he is a man-slut or selfish – it’s because he is still in love with you and always will be.” Brooke opened her mouth to speak now but was interrupted by the sound of Nate asking for everyone’s attention. Brooke went back to the head table and sat, listening as Nate when on about how happy he was that Howard had ended up with the woman he had loved for so long – and that he wished them a lifetime of happiness.
And then it was Brookes turn to give her speech.

Brooke pulled out her notecards and took a big swig of her champagne, causing the room to laugh. “I uh, I’m not the best at speeches.” She admitted, looking down at her cards. It didn’t seem right anymore – what she had written. So, she set them down. “So, I’m gonna wing it.” More people laughed, and Brooke just spoke from the heart. “I don’t think I ever truly knew my mom until Howard came back into her life.” Brooke said, looking down at her mom, “I knew who she was when she was married to my Dad and I knew who she was when divorced from him. And…none of those versions of her were her best…because she wasn’t happy.” Brooke took in a deep breath.

The best version of Victoria was with Howard.

And Brooke realized in that moment that she was never the best version of herself with Julian. Brooke constantly sacrificed her own wants and needs to make Julian happy – she went along with whatever he asked her to because for the first time in so long she felt loved. And Brooke was still under the impression that Carter had never loved her so the love that Julian had showed her, Brooke clung onto. And she knew she could not do that any longer. Because she was not the best version of herself when she was with Julian, and if she were to give him another chance – it would end the same way.

He was going to be a father to another woman’s child. Did he think Brooke would just forget about that? Did he plan on not being a part of that child’s life for her sake? No, no. That wasn’t going to happen. He would use her to get out of his own responsibilities when that wasn’t something Brooke wanted. Would it be nice to never have to see Alex’s face again for the rest of her life? Yes. It would be very, very nice. But she would never ask Julian to not be in his child’s life for her sake. And that’s what she realized that he was trying to do. Julian was trying to use Brooke as a scapegoat.

And she refused to let that happen.

“Howard makes my mom so happy. The love he has for her and the love she has in return for him has made both of them the best versions of themselves. And that’s what real love should do. It shouldn’t be about compromises – it’s about two people…” Brooke paused and closed her eyes. “People that are meant to be together always find their way in the end.” She said softly and opened her eyes, “-And Howard and my Mom are proof of that.” Brooke looked down at her mother and step-father, “And I am so happy that I’ve got to witness what real and true love is. They give me hope. And…we all need hope sometimes. So, thank you, Mom.” Brooke smiled down at Victoria. “And thank you, Howard, for giving me the hope I need. I love you guys.”

Brooke left the room a little bit after she gave her toast and pulled out her phone to call Julian with her answer to his question.

He was not happy with her answer.

“You don’t want to work things out?”

“No.” She told him.

“Why?”

“Because…I’m done making the same mistakes I always make that leave me in these kind of situations – I’m tired of putting someone else above me and what I want. And I refuse to let you use me as an excuse so that you can break up with Alex without looking like a dick.”

That’s what Carter had done to Vanessa.
“You are going to be a father, Julian – you do not get to run out on her because you’re scared. And I know that’s what it is. I know that you’re scared and that’s why you want to try and work things out with me. But I’m not going to be someone else’s scapegoat again. Own up to your own feelings and fears and just grow the fuck up.”

“-Brooke, I love you.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

Maybe Carter did love her? Maybe it was possible that while he did what he did, he was still in love with her – but that didn’t excuse anything. It was easier for Brooke when she told herself that she hadn’t mattered to Carter, that he had never truly loved her – because it saved her from realizing that even if someone did love you, they could still break you like you were nothing to them. And that was terrifying to her. Carter had loved her. Maybe he still did. Maybe Julian still loved her – but Brooke really didn’t give a fuck anymore.

In a week she would be Brooke Davis, no longer Brooke Davis-Baker. She would be free to live her life and sleep with men she held no emotional attachment to and Julian Baker will just be one of the mistakes she had made in life that she would learn from.

“Goodbye, Julian.” Brooke said, hanging up on him.

And she couldn’t help but laugh afterwards, feeling giddy. “Did you have his tires slashed?” Brooke turned around, still smiling from he realization that she did not need Julian any more. It didn’t matter that the person talking to her was Blair, because Brooke was finally at the point where she just didn’t give a fuck about anything anymore. “Maybe take a hit out on his baby-mama?”

Brooke laughed at that, “Slashing his tires would be satisfying – but I wouldn’t go as far as having Alex murdered…I might have him murdered.” She joked causing Blair to smile, her cousin looking so happy in that moment that Brooke was even talking to her. “I feel like getting drunk tonight.” Brooke decided, “You want to join me?”

Blair grinned now. “Yes. I would like that.”

They walked back into the reception hall together, arms linked, both laughing. Did Brooke forgive Blair finally? Or did she just not care anymore? It didn’t matter. Today was about celebrating Howard and Victoria and she planned on getting fucked up on booze and happiness.

They stood at the bar and Brooke was getting them shots when Blair took her hand in her own, “Brooke…I really am sorry.”

Brooke didn’t pull her hand away, just shrugged her shoulders. “I think thirteen years of cutting you out of my life is enough.” She decided. “I mean – its not like me continuing to not talk to you will ever change anything.” She handed Blair a shot of tequila. Blair gave her a guilty expression and Brooke laughed, “-Blair, drink the damn shot and stop feeling bad for fucking Carter so that I can stop hating you for fucking Carter.”

“Brooke,” she sighed.

“-Drink.”

Blair did.

Brooke decided she was letting go of the past when it came to Blair. She was her family after all. And thirteen years of silence was something Blair would do – not Brooke. IDGAF!Brooke Davis
was a lot easier to deal with than uptight/holding grudges/forever angry! Brooke Davis. And, as it
turns out, she was a lot more fun.

She danced with the guy Howard had wanted as her date and at the end of the night she gave him
her number and waved goodbye to Howard and Victoria as they left for the airport, taking her
mothers house keys so she could crash at their place tonight.

Because she was drunk and Caroline was mad at her and that would be awkward.

But she didn’t end up going back to her mom’s house.

Instead, she gave the driver Carters law-firm address.

They still had to work everything out with the whole Rachel fiasco and who cared if she was slightly
drunk – she’d just make him get drunk too. She’d tell him that he owed her and he’d have to do what
she told him to do.

Brooke like the idea of being in charge again.

Of her own life and of her own happiness, and it did help that she was going to be able to boss
Carter around on top of all that.

Carter had been leaving his office when Brooke walked into the lobby of his building, pointing at
him and telling him that they had unfinished business to attend to. She had clearly been drinking
which wasn’t surprising seeing as she was still in a bridesmaid dress from her mothers wedding to
Howard Archibald. And he couldn’t exactly tell her no and to go home – because she walked right
past him and start pressing all the buttons on the elevator and he groaned, knowing that he couldn’t
leave her alone and drunk in the building.

They didn’t exactly end on the best terms the night before – he actually didn’t think he’d ever see
Brooke again. And yet, he was, sitting on the floor of his office pouring him a glass of scotch
that she had stolen out of his desk along with just a cup for him. He had tried to object, but she had
looked at him and smiled, telling him that he ‘owed’ her, something he had said to her at the
rehearsal dinner.

He sat across from her on the floor of his office and watched as she moved forward and handed him
his second glass of scotch since she had gotten to his office.
“You do realize that I can’t help you figure this all out while I’m drunk, correct?” He said to her, watching as she threw her head back and laughed at his words.

She seemed different. Carefree, the way she had been the very first time he met her.

“Well,” She drew out the word, “I couldn’t be the only one of us who is drunk – so, do your best and keep drinking.”

Carter chuckled, taking another swig of his scotch. “Your dress looks beautiful.” He told her.

“Of course, it does – I designed it. Did you expect anything less than perfection?”

“Nope,” he laughed.

“Oh, you know who was at the wedding?” Brooke said to him and he smiled, shaking his head no. Just glad that she was in such a good and happy mood. (And he was sure that had to do with the alcohol she had consumed earlier.) “-Your fuck buddy, Vanessa Abrams.”

Carter nearly choked on his drink, surprised by what Brooke had said, his throat on fire as he tried to breathe, eyes wide as he looked at Brooke who fell on her side laughing at his reaction. “-Did she tell you that?” He coughed hard but was able to get his words out.

Brooke stayed laying on the ground, looking up at him. “No. Caroline told me. Because Vanessa hates me now because she wanted to be with you and fell in love with you but youuuu,” She sang now, chuckling a little, “Still loved me – blah, blah, blah. Petty fucking high school shit.”

Carter swallowed hard, cleared his throat and set his drink down on the ground. “Caroline said that?”

“Yup.”

“What else did she say?” He asked, the alcohol finally kicking in as his body grew warmer. Or maybe it was because Brooke was on the ground and he was looking down at her, like he had so many times before – and he knew what that always led to.

“I mean, other than blaming me for you not wanting a relationship with Vanessa? Not much. I mean, she said you’re still in love with me and when I told her that you never loved me she got mad at me and blah, blah, blah.” She moved her arms above her head, her face tilting to look at him. “A lot of women you fucked were at that wedding.” Brooke said with a snort of a laugh. “There was me, and Vanessa, and Blair.”

He looked away, feeling guilty.

“Oh, don’t feel bad, Baizen.” Brooke laughed, her hand slapping down on his leg causing him to look back down at her, “I should be used to it by now – besides, Blair and I got drunk together. If Vanessa had joined us we could have been a trifecta.”

He was quiet. There was nothing he could say.

“Julian called me this morning.” Brooke told him, stretching her arms like a cat.

*Oh, fuck. He told her.*

“He wants to get back together – want to give our marriage another try.”

Carter felt his heartrate quicken, a fire inside his belly of pure hatred and anger towards that son of a bitch. “And?” He asked, voice rough.
“Oh, I’m not going to be another man’s excuse to not move forward in a different relationship.” Brooke said, moving so she was sitting up a bit, hands pressed against the floor to keep her up right. “You aren’t still in love with me, Baizen – you just have commitment issues. Apparently, Julian does too.”

“Why do you do that?” He asked, ignoring what she said.

“Do what?” Brooke said in a strained voice as she pushed herself up fully, leaning against his desk.

“You refuse to say my name – you’ve only said it once and that was when you were yelling at me.” Carter reminded her. “And I honestly think it just slipped out.”

Brooke pursed her lip, leaning over as she took off her high heels. “It’s easier to not say your name.” She admitted, throwing her heels across the room. “Because when I say your name I’m reminded of other times,” She wiggled her brows as she smiled, “that I’ve said your name and I just don’t want to remember that.” Brooke laughed. “I don’t want to remember how I would say your name after I told you I loved you or how I’d say it while laughing because you wouldn’t stop pinching my side or when I called you crying, saying your name as I begged you to just come home.” She shrugged again. “So – I try not to say your name.”

God, he had even ruined his name for her. Carter groaned, and laid down on the ground, covering his face with both of his hands. He really shouldn’t have drunk so much scotch and he really should have called Caroline or Nate to come pick up Brooke.

“But, I am getting better at it.” She told him, “I mean, I don’t flinch when someone says your name and I can even say it in my head – and like you said; I said it the other day.” Carter moved his hands off his face and saw that Brooke had moved closer to him, her hair falling to the side, her green eyes hazy.

Carter couldn’t help himself, he moved his hand up to her face, thumb stroking her skin as she kept her eyes glued to his, “Will you always hate me?” He asked her.

Brooke smiled, “Yes.” She answered.

And he couldn’t stop himself. He moved forward and pressed his lips to hers, wanting just one last kiss with her that wasn’t just a quick little greeting. One where he poured his very soul into it. And he had, but Brooke was kissing him back and then she was on top of him, mouth still moving against his as she bunched up the skirts of her dress and fiddled with his buckle and then his zipper. And Carter knew they were both drunk and he should stop her but he didn’t.

Because he was selfish and he loved her and he wanted nothing more than to be inside her again, to hear her cry out his name in passion, not hatred. He just wanted that. And that’s what he got, mixed with messy drunken kisses and sloppy sex that was still able to blow his damn mind where Brooke yanked at his hair and bit his lower lip and dragged her nails against his chest as she rode him to the point that she drew blood. Carter finally had her again.

But when it was over, she left.

Brooke got off him, grabbed her things and walked out of his office, leaving him panting, still coming down from his high, completely alone. She didn’t say anything. Just left.

Carter knew she’d regret this – she probably already did. But he did not. Because he had Brooke Davis again and it was the best feeling in the world. And he realized why no other had ever been able to compare – because she was the best, his best, the one no one would be able to live up to. And
not just in bed. But in his heart. God, he knew he was still in love with her – he just didn’t realize just how fucked he was over her.

There was no getting over Brooke Davis.

Thirteen years of missing her and living with the biggest mistake he had ever made in his life should have told him that. Carter had told her that he would always love her all those years ago – and it was true. He was still head over heels in love with Brooke Davis and always would be and she…hated him. He got to have her again, but he didn’t have her heart.

And when he realized that, that’s when the pain started, that’s when he felt his eyes water and his chest swell and his stomach churn.

He was in love with Brooke Davis and she’d never feel the same way towards him ever again.

“I fucked up.” Brooke said, unlocking her mother’s front door with her phone pressed to her ear. “Like – I royally fucked up.”

Peyton groaned, “Do you have any idea what time it is?”

“No, you sound fucked up.”

“Peyt, I fucked up.”

“No, you sound fucked up.”

“Yeah, well I’m that too.” Brooke agreed, walking into the home barefoot. She had left her goddamn heels in Carters office.

“What’s going on? What happened?” Peyton said in a yawn.

“Julian called me and asked me if we could work things out.”

“-Please tell me that you did not tell him yes!” Peyton said, voice raised and Brooke groaned, her head pounding already. “I swear to God, Brooke Davis, I will fly to New York right now and kick some sense into you.”

“No, I told him no.” Brooke said, sinking down on the floor once she closed and locked the door. “I am not going to get back together with him.”
Peyton sighed in relief, “Okay, so how did you fuck up? Oh,” She started to chuckle, “Did you bitch slap Blair? Please, please, please tell me someone taped it! If I go on to twitter is there going to be a gif of it?”

“I fucked Carter.”

Silence.

More silence.

Even more silence.

But Brooke knew Peyton hadn’t hung up.

So, she just said, “Yup.”

“Yes, you fucked up.” Peyton agreed.

“Mmm-hm.”

“Okay – so that last we talked you had throw your drink in his face and now you what…sat on his face?”

Brooke had to laugh at that, “No!” She moved her hand down his face, “Just regular old sex. No foreplay.”

“That’s too bad. You always raved about how good he was at giving head.”

“Peyton! Shut up! You are supposed to be telling me what a fuck up I am and how dumb I’m being and that I’m stupid and need to be executed.”

“Okay, you’re taking it a little far there.” Peyton chuckled.

“…What’s wrong with me?” Brooke said with a sad sigh, “I felt like such a new person after talking to Julian – I told myself that I was done getting screwed over by men and done being excuses and all this independent shit – God, I even forgave Blair! And what do I go and do? I go to Carters office and get him drunk and then don’t stop him when he kisses me and then go full on sophomore Brooke Davis on him. I’m thirty years old – what the fuck am I doing?”

“Brooke…you were just at your mothers wedding to her first love, a man she has spent decades missing and regretting letting go of – And Carter was very much your first love, Brooke. And I know you’ll deny missing him but honey, I was at your wedding to Julian. You hid away waiting for him to call you or show up to tell you not to marry Julian. You love him.”

“No,” Brooke shook her head.

“Yes. And I know that sucks, Brooke. I know you don’t want to love him or even have anything to do with him – but you got to face the facts. He’s your first love. He’s the one you let go of and the one you always wanted to come back. And now you’re around him again and he’d be an idiot not to still be in love with you…”

“He broke me, Peyton.” Brooke said softly.

“I know.” She agreed. “And your mom broke Howard…and now they’re married. So – don’t you see why you’d do something like that? The alcohol probably didn’t help anything either.”
“I hate him, Peyton.” Brooke said.

“No, you don’t, sweetie.”

Yeah, she didn’t believe her own words either.

“I know.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Avoid him. Move to Antarctica? I mean, Caroline is mad at me – I doubt she’ll still want me to plan her wedding or even want me invited – so, I don’t have to stay in New York as long as I planned on staying.” Brooke droned on. “I don’t want to move back to LA – maybe I could go somewhere like uh, Australia. Yeah. Get me a fine ass Australian.”

Peyton laughed at that. “Are you okay?” She asked, probably wanting to know if after they hung up Brooke would be okay.

“Yeah. I’m good. I’ll call you in the morning.”

“It’s already 4 AM, and I highly doubt you will be up anytime before 2 PM. So, call me when you’re not hungover and bitchy.”

“Boooo.” Brooke said.

“Go to sleep, Brooke.”

“Goodnight, Peyton.”

Brooke fell asleep slumped against the door and it wasn’t until around 10 AM that she moved to the guest room and slept until 4 PM when someone pounding on the front door had woken her up.

She was still dressed in her bridesmaid dress and her makeup was likely smeared. Brooke might as well have ‘HOT MESS’ written across her forehead. She opened the door and someone came pushing through and into the house so fast that she didn’t even see who it was.

Brooke turned to look at who it was that came barreling into her mother’s house and saw that it was Rachel. “I’m not letting you go to jail.” Rachel blurted out.

Brooke’s head was pounding and her mouth was dry and she really needed to vomit so what Rachel was saying right now was just as confusing as her actually being in the house with her. “What?” Brooke croaked out.

“Carter left me a message last night – which, by the way, he’s your lawyer? I have so many follow up questions – and he told me that you want to take the blame, that you’ll tell the board members that you took the money to pay off Julian and that you’d face jail time and God, Brooke – you can’t even handle camping do you really think you can actually go to jail?” Rachel finally took in a deep breath. She then squinted her eyes at Brooke and walked forward, moving her hand to crane Brookes neck so
she could look at something, “Um, love bites – did you fuck Carter?”

“No,” Brooke said, her voice high and fake.

“You did! You slut! You owe me $1500.”

“Seriously?” Brooke laughed, “You tried to steal ten million dollars from my company – not to mention all the money you’ve been taking for the last few years and now you want fifteen hundred dollars for a bet I didn’t even agree to?” Rachel had bet Brooke that she’d end up sleeping with Carter and that if she did, Brooke would owe Rachel fifteen hundred dollars. But Brooke had never agreed to it because it was just a ridiculous thought that she would ever sleep with Carter again.

Apparently she was a fucking idiot.

Rachel looked down at the floor. “I’m sorry. I had to.” Rachel explained to Brooke how she owed a really powerful man from Tree Hill named Daunte a lot of money and that she had managed to pay him back by taking the money from Brooke, but that when her debt was paid, Daunte told Rachel he would go to the cops and tell them that Rachel had been stealing money from Davis Enterprises unless she continued to pay him money. And that when Rachel had fucked up with the prenup and Julian was demanding all that money, she got scared and tried to take enough to make the guy leave her alone and to pay him off for good.

“Why didn’t you come to me?” Brooke asked her, upset that Rachel didn’t think she could come to her when she was in trouble.

“Because I was scared. Not just of Dante, but of losing you. I was scared that if I told you that I had been taking money from you that you’d hate me and I…I didn’t want to lose you.”

Brooke groaned and shook her head, “Go make coffee. I’m going to go shower, throw up in the shower, and get dressed. When I come down, I want that coffee and whatever kind of bread my mom has hidden in her house – and then we are going to Carter to fix all of this.”

Rachel moved forward and hugged onto Brooke tightly, “Thank you…for not giving up on me.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Brooke hugged her back. “You’re my ride or die.” Rachel laughed, still holding onto her.

“Oh, god. You smell like booze, sex, and regret.” Rachel said as she pulled away. “Go shower, please, before I puke.” Brooke flipped off Rachel as she headed up the stairs. “Also – I want details about sex with Carter – if you don’t I’m going to blast Shakira for the entire day.” She yelled.

Brooke smiled.

She knew she could trust Rachel, that she wouldn’t ever truly betray her.

Brooke just wished that by helping Rachel out of this mess – she didn’t have to go see Carter. Especially after what had happened between them.

Ah, fuck. Rachel fucking owed her.

Chapter End Notes
Brooke, Brooke, Brooke - look at your life. Look at your choices.

What did you guys think? There's so much more to come! Comments and kudos are always appreciated it!
Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes! My brain moves faster than my fingers can type!

Date night dress

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Temptation

Sinners

I Fucked Up
“So…” Rachel drew out the word as they sat in the back of the Uber that the red head had ordered for them. Brooke looked over at her and Rachel smirked, “How was it?”

Brooke rolled her eyes, Rachel didn’t need to elaborate – the look on her face was obvious. “Not talking about it.” She said, going through her messages from the night before. Nate had called her a couple of times while she was at Carters office and she had sent him to voicemail. Caroline had texted once. Chuck had even texted asking if Brooke was alright (she figured Blair had something to do with that – or Nate.) The last text she had gotten from Nate was around 3 AM when he had texted saying that he spoke to his father who told him that she would be staying at the brownstone, and how much he appreciated worrying all night thinking she was dead. Yup, he was pissed at her too. Great way to start their first official day as step-siblings.

“Oh, come on, don’t be a prude! Was it as good as it used to me or has he lost his stamina with age?” Brooke couldn’t help but laugh at Rachels words, shaking her head as the red head smirked.

“You do realize that we’re on our way to his office, right? And that constantly trying to get me to tell you about the sex I had with him is going to make things even more awkward for me.” Brooke looked to Rachel who rolled her eyes, “What do you want me to say? It’s not like I went to his office expecting to sleep with him – I went over so I could save your ass.”

“Yeahhh,” Rachel drew out the word, not believing Brooke. “You went over to his office drunk thinking nothing would happen. Sure. Keep telling yourself that.” Brooke scoffed and Rachel shook her head, “Oh come on, the thought didn’t cross your mind at all? You didn’t once think that by going over to Carters office drunk, and then proceeding to get him drunk – it wouldn’t end in sex.”

“No!”

“Bullshit.”

Brooke huffed, crossing her arms over her chest, “Whatever. It was a one-time thing anyway – just…a way to get him out of my system.”

“Mmm-hm.”

Brooke decided to change the subject. “Julian called me asking if I was willing to try and work things out with him.”

Rachel turned her head sharply to look at Brooke, “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Nope. He said he ripped up the annulment because he wants me back.” Brooke told Rachel, shaking her head. “And the dumb part of me actually considered taking him back – like? He knocked up Alex. And I was debating getting back together with him – how stupid am I?”

Rachel sighed and reached for Brookes hand. “You’re not stupid, you’re lonely.”

“No, I think I’m just stupid.” Brooke said, pointing to where a hickey was now covered up with foundation. “Contemplating getting together with the husband who cheated on me – having sex with my old boyfriend who cheated on me. I’m literally the worst.” Rachel chuckled and Brooke glared. “And you are not allowed to make any comments once we get to his office, do you hear me? The only time you are going to speak is when he asks you a direct question. No remarks, no snark, no talking.”

“Fine,” Rachel huffed. “I won’t…if you tell me if it was as good as you remember it being.”

Brooke didn’t answer, she just looked out the window and shook her head, hoping to hide the blush
making its way to her cheeks. Because yeah, even though they were both drunk, it was still very good. And she couldn’t help but wonder what it’d be like to have sex with him now while she was sober.

No. nope, nope, nope.

Don’t go down that fucking road.

They got to Carters building and it took Brooke a moment to even get out of the Uber. She still felt awful, hungover as hell (which at thirty was literal hell), and incredibly embarrassed. Brooke should not have crossed the line yesterday – she was drunk, yeah. But you’d think she’d have enough self-control not to sleep with the man who broke her heart thirteen years ago by cheating on her with her cousin. Who the fuck does that? And it didn’t matter if she was lonely, or drunk, or was finally feeling free. It shouldn’t have happened. And she really needed to make that clear to Carter.

“Are we just going to sit in the car or are we going inside?” Rachel asked Brooke and the thirty-year-old fashion designer grabbed a pair of sunglasses out of her purse and put them on. It was the evening and the sun was setting but she knew how bright the lights were in Carters building. They got out of the car and Brooke had to give herself a mental pep talk on the elevator ride up. The receptionist on the first floor of Carters firm recognized her and sent her right up. “You nervous?” Rachel asked as Brooke tapped her foot anxiously.

Brooke looked over at Rachel who was smirking at her and she jabbed her in the side with her elbow saying, “Shut up,” with a little chuckle. The doors opened and Carter was on the other side of them waiting. He was breathing hard, as if he had just sprinted from his office to the elevator, and Brooke really hard not to be amused by that.

“Brooke,” He breathed out, his eyes intense on her. But when Rachel began to clear her throat, trying to gain the attention, Carter looked away from Brooke and to Rachel next to her. It wasn’t long until Carter was looking back at Brooke with a raised brow. “Um, what can I help you with?” He asked, his eyes still on Brooke and not Rachel. He looked concerned now.

“This is Rachel,” Brooke said, causing Carter to break eye contact to look at the red head. “– apparently you called her last night saying that I was going to go to jail. Care to explain?” Brooke said, taking off her sunglasses and raised her brow. Carter looked back at Brooke and licked at his lower lip, fighting smile. As if everything were falling in place for him. Brooke had to roll her eyes at that, “So, here she is. Let’s get this over with.”

Brooke’s words seemed to really amuse him, and she knew that Carter was always able to tell when she was the most uncomfortable. So, he held out his arm, telling them to come forward. “Brooke will lead the way, she’s pretty familiar with my office.” He said with a smirk and Brooke had to repress the need to smack him across the face for his comment. Little asshole.

If he was going to be dickish, so could she. “Unfortunately, yes. I am.” Brooke said with a catty smile before looking back at Rachel, motioning for her to follow. “Rachel, follow me.”

Rachel did follow but kept looking down at the ground as she tried to keep from laughing. They were in the office and instead of going over to Carters desk, she decided that standing was the best option. Even when Carter moved to stand by his desk, still smirking.

She needed to get the fuck out.

“Okay, Rachel is here – you two can work out whatever needs to be worked out and I’m going to head out.” Brooke said, turning to face the door.
“You’re actually needed here, Brooke.” Carter said, causing her to drop her hand from the door knob. She threw her head back a little and bit down on her lower lip – really not wanting to be in his office right now. But she turned around and gave him an incredibly forced smile. “Have a seat.” He grinned, pulling the chair out right to the spot where they had found themselves in earlier. He was smirking, eyes in tense on the brunette who refused to move forward.

Brooke glared, “I’d rather stand.”

“Oh my god,” Rachel said in a groan, grabbing Brookes hand and pulling her over to the desk, making her sit down on the chair Carter had pulled out for her. “You are grown-ass adults.” She muttered, “Now – ex-boyfriend of my bestie,” Rachel looked at Carter, “-are you done eye-fucking Brooke/re-living last night for your spank bank? Because I’d very much like to figure out how the hell you are going to get me out of this mess.”

Carter looked to Brooke, very amused. “You told her?”

Rachel scoffed, “She didn’t have to tell me – I’ve been in Brookes life long enough to know when she’s just had sex – that’s one thing she’s never been good at hiding. Plus, marked her pretty good.”

“-Rachel!” Brooke hissed, glaring at the red head. She looked back up at Carter who was smirking again, tongue dashing across his lower lip as his eyes locked with Brooke’s. “—Okay,” Brooke breathed out, “Let’s just get this out of the way – we had sex last night and it’s not going to happen again.”

Carter nodded his head, moving to take a seat behind his desk. He looked to Brooke and smiled, “You sure about that?”

“Incredibly sure. Now, are you going to help my friend or should I just go find a different lawyer in this building? I’m pretty sure I can get quite familiar with one of their offices too.” Brooke glared and Rachel covered her mouth when she couldn’t help but snort at what Brooke had just said to Carter.

Carter didn’t respond to Brooke, he just looked to Rachel now, “Ms. Gatina, would you like to explain why you tried to take ten million dollars from Brooke?”

Rachel explained everything and when Brooke would feel Carters eyes on her, she’d pull out her phone and pretend to be too busy doing something else to pay attention to his gaze that was literally burning a hole into her. Was he even paying attention to what Rachel was saying? He was literally staring at her the entire time.

“Do you have proof that this Daunte has been threatening you over the years?” Carter asked Rachel and Brooke finally looked up once his eyes were no longer on her.

“I do, I mean – nothing with his name on it. Just notes I got sent to me.”

“Emails?” Carter asked.

“No.” Rachel answered, shaking her head.

“Call logs? Voicemails?”

“I mean, he calls from a private number that changes each time and he never leaves voice messages – just sends the notes if I don’t answer. But, I always answer because…” Rachels voice drifted off and Brooke frowned, moving to place her hand on top of Rachels to show support. “If do go to jail – I’m scared that it won’t matter. He stops getting money from me – what’s to say he doesn’t start threatening Brooke?”
“Rach,” Brooke said softly.

“I won’t let that happen.” Carter said and Brooke looked up at him upon hearing the seriousness in his voice. “-If Daunte even thinks about trying to contact Brooke for money,” He swallowed hard and closed his eyes. Brooke knew that face. It was the one Carter would make when he was feeling overwhelmed with anger. She hated that she had to fight the urge to move forward and place her hand on his too, in hopes to calm him down. When they were together, Brooke would take his face in her hands and make him look her in he eyes to help him calm down. It always worked.

Almost always.

“I’ll be fine.” Brooke said, looking to Rachel. When she felt Carter’s eyes on her again, she looked back at him. “I will. And let’s remember that we are speaking figuratively right now. This is all hypothetical because I am not going to let you go to jail.” Brooke said, her attention on Rachel again. “We can fix this.” She said to her friend. “Right?” Brooke looked back at Carter.

He ran his hands down his face and inhaled deeply. “I’ll do everything I can to help you out of your mess.” Carter said to Rachel. “And…I won’t let anything happen to Brooke.” He told Rachel but focused his eyes on Brooke. “I promise,” He swore. Brooke looked away, trying to fight away any emotion she might feel in this moment, anger, warmth, comfort, fury. Carter didn’t get to make promises like that anymore. His voice forced her out of her own head, “We can pick this up tomorrow – I have an opening at noon that I’ll have my assistant write you in for. In the meantime, I want you to get your hands on everything Daunte has ever sent you, send me screenshots of the call logs – if he’s sent any texts, I want those too.”

“Okay.” Rachel nodded. “The notes are in LA, but I can fly out and get them.”

“No,” Carter shook his head as he got up from his chair. “I don’t want you leaving New York.”

Brooke heard Rachel scoff, “Do you honestly think I’m going to run? That I would do that to Brooke?”

“Carter,” Brooke said his name softly, (which was odd, being able to say his name without wanting to vomit or breakdown in tears) hoping to get him to understand that Rachel would never do something like that. She had come to New York when Carter called saying that Brooke could potentially go to jail – did he honestly think that no longer mattered to Rachel? Yeah, he didn’t know her and her track record wasn’t that great in his eyes – but Rachel was loyal. And she wouldn’t betray Brooke by running.

“I don’t want you left alone in the city.” Carter said, looking only at Brooke. “Caroline called this morning saying you never came home. I assume you’re staying at the brownstone?”

“Yes.” Brooke told him, not that it was any of his business. “-And Caroline and Nate both know that now. I’ll be fine, Carter.” He shook his head, telling her no. “You are not my lawyer – you are hers.” Brooke reminded him. “So, you do not get to tell me what to do.”

Carter was irritated with her, she could see that. But she was irritated with him too. “Okay,” He then looked to Rachel, “-You aren’t to leave the city or Brooke. That is me, as your lawyer, telling you what to do.” Brookes jaw tensed and she closed her eyes – why the hell did Carter think he still had a say in her life?

“Okay.” Rachel agreed and Brooke turned her head sharply at Rachel, shaking her head. “He’s my lawyer – I’m taking his advice.”
“No, you are both being ridiculous worrying about something that has yet to even fucking happen! And, again, who’s to say it’ll even happen?” Brooke looked between the both of them, “-This Daunte guy has no idea what’s going on, right?”

“No, he doesn’t,” Rachel said quietly. “But the end of the week is coming up…and that’s when I send him his money.”

“How much?” Both Brooke and Carter asked.

“A grand.”

Brooke opened her mouth to talk but Carter took her off, “-I’ll take care of it.”

“Um, no, you won’t. I can handle this.”

“Rachel, can you give us a minute?” Carter looked to Rachel.

“No, she can’t.” Brooke glared at Carter.

“I’m just going to go step outside.” Rachel said, excusing herself causing Brooke to hiss her name, turning around in the chair as Rachel left Carters office.

“You don’t get to do this.” Brooke said, looking at Carter once Rachel shut the door. “You do not get to have some sort of claim on me again because I had drunken sex with you.”

“I just want to protect you, Brooke.”

Brooke let out an amused laugh, shaking her head. “Protect me? You are not my boyfriend – you’re not even my friend. You are Rachel’s lawyer. That is all.”

Carter walked over to where Brooke was sitting, looking down at her. “So why did we have sex last night?” He asked her.

“Because I was drunk.” Brooke shot back.

Carter laughed, “You’ve been drunk before and were very capable of telling me to literally go fuck myself when you weren’t in the mood. But you didn’t. You could have told me to fuck off at any point last night – you could have slapped me after I kissed you, you could have said no. But you didn’t. Why?” He asked her, “Because I don’t believe you for a second when you say that the only reason you had sex with me because you were drunk.”

Brooke licked at her lower lip, feeling overwhelmed. “It was a mistake and it will never happen again.” She told him, getting up from her chair only to have Carter step forward, invading her space causing her to stand completely still. Carter looked down at her, his hands going to move down her arms, fingers skimming against her skin. She closed her eyes, trying to remember the way he looked at her after kissing Blair. It had always helped her before when she missed him. To remember the look on his face – the look that had devastated her and broke her heart. But she couldn’t remember it in that moment.

“Are you sure about that?” He asked her again, his voice low.

Her phone went off and Brooke took a step away from Carter and looked down at her phone to see that Howards co-worker, Jeff, had texted her. She felt the strength she needed to leave Carter and make him believe that she’d never have sex with him again. “Yes.” Brooke said in a steady voice as she looked back up at Carter. “-Because I have a date tomorrow night. Jeff Andrews, he works with
Howard.” She held up her phone, showing him the text. His jaw clenched and Brooke felt the power again, “-So why don’t you go find someone to fuck so that you can get your anger at me out. You were always best at doing that.” Brooke reminded him with a glare, she was going to add something that would sting, but he deserved it. “And Vanessa is in town.” She smirked, knowing it’d piss him off. Brooke felt proud of herself as she walked away from him and headed towards the door.

But Carter always needed to have the last word. “I’ll see you after your date with boring Jeff.” He said, his tone cocky, not hateful.

Brooke left, flipping him off on her way out of the office.

“That was fast.” Rachel said, waiting for Brooke at the elevator. “Must have been one hell of a quickie.”

She was angry with Carter and his cockiness and his absurd idea that she’d come to him after her date with Howards co-worker, who he referred to as boring Jeff, but Rachel always found a way to make her laugh. “Shut up,” Brookes voice rasped as she tried not to laugh.

Brooke was not going to have sex with Carter again.

Ever.

That was fact.
Fish and chips?

They were about as bland as Jeff. Brooke sat in the loud, crowded pub and listened to Jeff drone on, pushing the basket of food off to the side and listened as Jeff continued on saying how lucky he was to work with Howard, and about how he graduated first in his class, or how he had accomplished so much for someone so young.

It was too much.

Brooke had spent the whole day with Rachel trying to figure out what to wear. Rachel understood that her friend was nervous – the last first date she had gone on was with Julian. And they both knew how that story ended. Divorce. Brooke had no idea what she was doing or why she had spent so long getting ready, trying to look her best – because as handsome as Jeff was, Brooke had no intention to go home with Jeff. And as she listened to him talk about himself for the last hour and a half, it was very clear to her now that there wasn’t even the slightest chance of her sleeping with this man tonight.

He was just so goddamn boring!

And he had yet to ask a single question about her. Brooke was pretty sure she had said less than three sentences in the last hour and a half. And two of those sentences was her ordering her food. The next sentence she planned on saying was asking the waitress for the check.

Or were they supposed to pay at the bar?

Who the fuck knows. If he didn’t stop talking in the next five minutes she was going to excuse herself to the bathroom and have Rachel call her to come up with a fake emergency that would have to take her away from her date with Jeff. Oh, what a shame.

“So, you lived in New York as a teenager?” Jeff said, surprising Brooke that he was directing a question at her.

Brooke had to clear her throat, after not talking for so long, her voice was barely able to be heard over the noise of the bar. “Um, did Howard tell you that?” She asked, taking a sip of her beer.

“Oh, no. I mean – I looked you up.”

“The stunt you pulled at the White Party when you were in high school must have pissed off your aunt royally.” He chuckled. But Brooke made a face, stunt? It wasn’t a stunt – it was statement. But she quickly smiled when he looked back at her, hiding her annoyance.

“Yeah, it took a while for Eleanor to be able to trust me again.” Brooke said honestly.

“And then you started up your own fashion line and became her competition.” Jeff laughed. “Has she forgiven you for that, too?”

Brooke was no longer smiling, she just looked at Jeff. “Why would I need her forgiveness for something she pushed me to do? Eleanor was always supportive of me going after my dream of having my own fashion line someday – she let me intern for her,”

“I mean,” Jeff chuckled, starting to bring up the White Party again.
“Wow.” Brooke took a large swig of her beer.

“Oh. No, no – no, I didn’t mean to offend you, Brooke.” Jeff said quickly, “I just – I thought.” He closed his mouth and inhaled through his nose, “I don’t really know how to talk to you.” Jeff admitted. “All I found online was a bunch of paparazzi pictures – I’ve never really interacted with someone who has such a large following.” Brooke frowned, “It was either bring up your squabble with your aunt or ask you about your relationship with that tool; Baizen.”

Yeah, there were still paparazzi pictures on the internet of her and Carter from when she was seventeen. Nothing ever died on the internet, unfortunately.

“I mean, your taste in men must have changed – otherwise you’d probably be here with Baizen and not me. And, by that, I mean, you have good taste now.” He grinned.

Jeff probably meant for it to be cute. But Brooke just found it annoying.

Brooke took one last swig of her beer and grabbed her purse, standing up. “Whoa, where are you going?” Jeff asked, standing up as well.

“I’m not feeling this,” Brooke gestured between them, “At all. I tried to stay as long as I could because I wanted to prove a point – but fuck that.” She pulled money out of her purse and set it on the table. “For the terrible fish and chips and my beer. The beer, by the way, was the only enjoyable part of this date.”

Jeff scoffed, his true colors showing. “Yeah, well I wouldn’t want Carter Baizen’s sloppy seconds anyway.” Brooke laughed at that. “You’re probably riddled with diseases.”

“Yeah, you’d think that – but I’m clean.”

Well, you were. But you just had unprotected sex with Carter.

Whatever. If she did have some sort of STD, she’d just go sleep with Jeff and pass it along.

“This has been lovely, Jeff. I can’t wait to tell Howard all about it.” Brooke said, grinning when she watched the color drain from his face. He opened his mouth to probably beg for her forgiveness, but Brooke turned away from him and walked out of the bar.

And she’d probably hate herself in a few hours but when she got in the cab and the man asked her where she was going – she gave Carters address. His law firm. Because she didn’t know where the hell he lived and didn’t plan on knowing. Brooke walked into the building, looking at the time. It was nearly 10 PM. But, knowing Carter, he would sleep in his office waiting for Brooke just to prove to her that he was right about her showing up after her date. Brooke really didn’t give a fuck because she was annoyed and sexually frustrated and Carter was like a goddamn fix to her.

He broke you heart. He cheated on you with Blair. He’s awful. He’s the worst. He’s the reason you have so many trust issues.

There was a front desk man, security, maybe? And he sat at a large desk in the lobby of the building. The man looked to Brooke and frowned, “Sorry, sweetheart. Everyone has gone home for the night.”

“She’s with me,”

Brooke wanted to book it out of the building when she heard the voice. Carter Baizen had surprised her by coming down as soon as she walked into the building. But she turned to face him, brows
raised up, “Did you wait this long to see if I’d actually show?”

He smirked, now standing at her side, his hand moving to her lower back and he began to guide her to the elevator. They didn’t speak on the way up to the floor where his office was on and they didn’t speak when they were in his office. Brooke just walked over to his desk and leaned against it.

He walked over to her, “How was the date?” Carter asked, still smirking.

“Wonderful.” Brooke smirked back.

Carter chuckled, rubbing at his jaw. “So – it wasn’t boring at all? Jeff didn’t drone on about himself the entire time?”

Brooke smiled, looking away from him. “Nope.” She lied. “He asked me questions all night.”

Carter was standing in front of her now, hands going on his desk, trapping her in place as he towered over her small frame. Brooke leaned back a little, looking up at Carter. “You realize that I’m a lawyer, right? That I can catch a person in a lie before they even tell it.”

She simply shrugged her shoulders, “I guess it’s a good thing you’re Rachels lawyer.”

“How was your date?” He asked again.

“How was your date?” She admitted and watched as Carter grinned, “You’re right. He talked about himself all night long and the name you gave him was justified.” Brooke smirked, “I’ve never met a more boring man in my entire life.”

Carter moved his hands to Brookes hips, smiling down at Brooke. “Well,” He lifted her up onto his desk. “Allow me the pleasure of making you forget about what a dull night you had.” Carter smirked before lowering himself as he pushed up Brooke dress.

Did she expect to end her date night with her ex-boyfriend’s head between her legs and her back pressed onto the desk as her fingers gripped tightly onto his hair? No.

But was it enjoyable?

Fuck yeah.

And it made her forget about what an awful time she had last night. And when it was over and her breathing had calmed down, Brooke got up off the desk and pushed down her dress. Again, leaving Carters office without looking back. Except this time, Brooke was not barefoot or drunk. Barely even buzzed. She was sober and completely aware of her choices – which probably wasn’t good. Because Brooke had let Carter between her legs again (mouth this time) – and she did not have the alcohol to blame.

But it made her think…maybe that’s all it should have been between them from the start – just sex. Its what Carter was best at. It was what he had before her with every woman he was with, and apparently after as well. Brooke didn’t plan on getting married again, dating? Perhaps. But for now? She’d continue to have sex with Carter with no attachments.

Brooke was sure that he wouldn’t object to that.

But no one could know.

God, if Nate and Caroline found out she was sleeping with Carter again they’d lose their goddamn
mind. Peyton and Haley too. Rachel might tease but she would never judge her. Not only was Rachel incredibly loyal – but she was never one to judge someone for their actions. Even if they were incredibly stupid.

Having a ‘just sex’ ‘no attachments’ relationship (nope, not relationship. Situation*) with Carter was probably not the smartest thing because he apparently still had feelings for her and he did break her heart. Good lord, she sounded like a broken fucking record. But she was single, sexually frustrated after months of not sleeping with her husband and feeling incredibly independent for the first time in years.

If she wanted to have a casual fling with someone she knows can satisfy her – why shouldn’t she? Who cares if he broke her heart or claimed to still be in love with her. It was just sex.

It’s what they should have stuck to in the first place.

Brooke would call Carter’s office in the morning and offer him her proposition and if he was okay with it – great. If not? Well, Brooke was sure she could find another handsome man to satisfy her.

---

Brooke woke up to the sound of her phone going off. She groaned, rolling on her side to reach for her phone that was charging on the dock station. Brooke squinted at the screen, not recognizing the number. Normally if she didn’t know the number, she simply wouldn’t answer. But it was an LA area code and if it was someone from work trying to get ahold of her – the right thing to do would be to answer it. She was running things on her own without the help of her mother while she was off on her honeymoon. So, Brooke unlocked her phone and put it to her ear. “Hello?” She asked, her voice raspy and rough.

“Hi, Mrs. Baker,” The person said over the phone.

“-Davis.” Brooke corrected, a bit snippy. It was still dark out so whoever was calling her in LA must comprehend that there was a time difference – but, that was giving them too much credit. Most of the people who worked for her were morons.

But they were smart enough to know not to call her Mrs. Baker.

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry. This is Sharon O’Hara, I was the adoption worker assigned to yours and Mr.
Bakers case.” Brooke was silent – why was the adoption case worker calling her? She did realize that Brooke and Julian were about to be officially divorced, right?

“Well, the family that the mother chose for her daughter to go to,” Daughter? Brooke and Julian hadn’t known the sex yet. It had been too soon in the pregnancy. But it hadn’t mattered to Brooke (Julian was dead set on having a boy.) “Well, they have decided that they can not take on the financial burden that comes with raising the baby.”

“Financial burden?” You got to be fucking kidding me? A child was not a financial burden. Fuck them.

“The infant is only two months old, but she suffers from a heart defect called VSD.”

“VSD?” Brooke echoed back.

“Ventricular Septal Defect.” The case worker clarified, explaining exactly what it was.

“The baby has a hole in her heart?” Brooke said, shocked.

“Multiple holes.”

“What’s going to happen to her?” Brooke asked, voice squeaking with worry.

“Well, as of yesterday, she was placed back into the system.”

Brooke shook her head in anger, “Fucking assholes.”

“That’s why I’m calling you, Ms. Davis.”

Oh shit.

Holy shit.

Was this happening?

“As I said, I am aware of your divorce to Mr. Baker – but given how extreme this situation is with Angie,”

Angie? Her name was Angie? Oh, Brooke loved her already. Please, please, please, please don’t let me down, Brooke prayed. I can’t take anymore heartbreak.

“We need to place her in a home that is willing to raise a child with a heart defect. She will need surgery and it will be extremely expensive…now, I know that you are a successful business woman and that money probably would not be an issue,”

“I’ll do it.” Brooke said, the words blurring out of her mouth. “I’ll take care of Angie, I’ll…raise her.” Brooke breathed in sharply, needing to pinch herself to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. “I can
do this.”

“Well, that would be wonderful – but since you are still technically married to Mr. Baker,”

“No.” Brooke said. “No, he does not get to take this from me.” She stood her ground. “We will be officially divorced by the end of the week – he’s taken so much from me already!”

The woman chuckled, “I was only saying that we would have to wait for the divorce to go through. It’s fantastic that it will be done so quickly so that Angie can come home with you in LA.”

Oh, fuck.

“I’m uh,” Brooke swallowed. “I’m not currently living in LA at the moment. I am in New York running my company while my mother is away on her honeymoon.”

“Well, do you plan to permanently relocate to New York?”

Well…Brooke didn’t really know. She had planned on staying until after Nate and Caroline’s wedding but they were pissed off at her at the moment. Julian had ripped up the annulment so her house was hers to keep…but…a part of her wanted to stay.

Is it because of Carter?

No! Absolutely not!

Right?

“You being in New York is actually quite a good thing – they have some of the best pediatric hospitals in the country so Angie would be getting the best care there.”

Well, that settles it.

“Yes, I’m moving to New York.” Brooke said, the words seeming absolutely crazy. Brooke never thought in her life that she’d ever move back to New York. Like, ever. “I’m in the market for a place right now, but I am staying at my mother’s brownstone for the next few weeks – lots and lots of bedrooms.”

The case worker chuckled, “Ms. Davis, we have a few things that you’ll need to sign and it will have to wait until you are divorced from your husband but…I want you to know that you are saving Angies life.”

Brooke felt tears swell in her eyes, her lower lip trembling as she sniffed. “Is this really happening?” She whispered.

“It is.” The woman told her. “Ms. Davis…you are going to be a mother.”

“Brooke,” She said, tears of happiness rolling down her cheeks. “You can call me Brooke.”

This was happening.

I’m going to be a mother.
SAY WHAAAAAAAAT? Is Brooke about to get everything she's ever dreamed of? Or is she bound for another heartbreak? Comments and kudos are always appreciated!
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes! I'll try and read through it again later!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Five days.

It had been five days since he last saw or talked to Brooke.

It was the reason he called in Rachel to go over things – he had nothing new to give her, but he wanted to see Brooke. And he had thought she’d come along with the red head.

She hadn’t.

So, now Carter was trying to come up with things to tell Rachel, who constantly was checking her phone since she had walked into his office. He asked her more about Daunte, writing in a notepad useless information that he didn’t even need. Carter just needed to make sure that Rachel believed that he had called her in for a legitimate reason, and not because he wanted to see Brooke.

He really wanted to see Brooke again.

He didn’t know which was worse – her hating him and dropping all contact, or that fact that he finally had her again twice, and now he felt like a damn junkie needing his fix. He had half the nerve to show up at Howard and Victoria’s brownstone. But he had already crossed so many lines when it came to Brooke – he wasn’t going to do that again. If she wanted to see him, she’d come to him. And did that drive Carter fucking insane? Yup.

Rachel’s phone dinged again and Carter wondered who she was texting. Daunte?

“I really hope you’re not in contact with Daunte.” Carter said, setting down his pen. “All contact with him goes through me now so I can pay him the money you owe him.”

Rachel looked up from her phone and to Carter, “It’s not him.” She looked back down at her phone again when it dinged once more. “Daunte won’t contact until tomorrow – that’s when he’ll give a number to wire him the money.”

If it wasn’t Daunte – could it be Brooke?

“Did you get your job back?” He asked, trying to be tactful when it came to his questions. Where’s Brooke? Is that Brooke you’re talking to? Did she say anything about me? Pathetic. But Brooke had always been able to throw him off his game. Other women had been so easy for Carter – but Brooke? She challenged him. And yes, they fell into bed together the very first night they met – but it had been Brooke who initiated it. That had never happened before. The girls he’d go home always acted so shy, so innocent, not Brooke. She knew what she wanted and she took it.

Brooke was the first girl he had ever asked to spend the night. He should have known he’d be fucked after asking her that – after breaking his number one rule about casual sex. But he liked the way she felt pressed against him and the way her skin felt, and her scent, he liked the way her hair tickled his face when he buried it in the crook of her neck. He did something he had never done before – he had fallen asleep holding someone in his arms.

He had tried to feel that way again that summer in the Hamptons after they had broken up the first time. He’d let the woman spend the night but he stayed up the entire night, hating himself for what he had done – hating the fact that Nate had taken what was his (even though Nate hadn’t), he’d stay up and walk around his room. There were times he’d even go sit on the couch in his room and go through his phone, looking at the pictures he had taken of Brooke on the first few times she had
spent the night with him, the pictures of them together sitting on his couch, her lips pressed against his, the pictures of Brooke lounging in his kitchen while eating a slice of pizza. They were mostly all innocent.

Carter would stay up all night and let the women he brought home sleep it off before sending them on their way, never intending to call them back or invite them over again. He had called one of the women again once, the night he had gone to the bar and saw Brooke. But she had never answered. So, Carter went to the bar to find someone to bring home and get his frustration out. She wasn’t Brooke, her mouth didn’t taste the same and her nails were too rough against his scalp. Her hair smelt like cigarettes and her perfume was nauseating. But she wasn’t Brooke – so he’d take her home. Because he needed to get Brooke out of his system. And sleeping with women who were nothing like Brooke was the only way he knew how.

Until the sex was over and ‘not-Brooke’ was still in his bed and he would stay up looking at pictures of actual Brooke.

He ended up going home alone that night after running into Brooke at the bar. She had been devastated, angry – so hurt. But she forgave him. And they were happy.

Until he fucked everything up.

After Brooke, after what he had done to her, he didn’t let women spend the night at his place. Not even Vanessa. He knew it was an awful thing to do to her – she was a friend. But there was only one person he wanted sleeping next to him in his bed. And it wasn’t Vanessa. They’d have sex and Carter would roll off her and leave the bed, gathering her clothes and setting them down on the bed.

“You sure know how to make a girl feel cheap,” Vanessa had jokingly said, but he could hear the embarrassment and hurt in her tone. And he knew he should have felt guilty because Vanessa was a good woman, but she wasn’t who he wanted. So, he’d tell her, “You knew what this was.” And she’d be quiet and change into her clothes and tell him she’d see him around.

He only ever called her when he was feeling lonely – when there was a new story about Brooke or new paparazzi pictures of her living her life happily in L.A. Vanessa would come over and urge him to talk to her about how he was feeling, but he just wanted sex. Carter didn’t want to talk about his feelings or how he had royally fucked everything up by cheating on Brooke with Blair – he just wanted to fuck out his frustration. And Vanessa was always willing.

Carter should have figured that she’d develop feelings for him – when he slept with someone more than three times, that tended to happen. And he had been having sex with Vanessa for a few months (maybe three times a month – sleeping with other women when he wanted a change), and she had started to invite him to hang out to places that weren’t his or her apartment. Vanessa would try to get him to go to art shows at Dan Humphrey’s fathers art studio – or concerts. Sometimes he’d humor himself (or her, really) and go. And he’d have fun and laugh but then she’d kiss him and he’d realize that she was not Brooke. And it’d frustrated him so he’d kiss her back harder and fuck out his anger – and it was absolute mixed signals and completely fucked up.

He had called her over when news broke that Brooke was engaged to Julian, she had frowned when he opened up his door, arms crossed over her chest. Vanessa must have seen it on social media too. Maybe she was realizing that the only times Carter ever called her over to his place was whenever a story about Brooke came out.

He tried to act like he was fine, that he just wanted her to come over, they had take out and Carter tried hard not to compare it to all the times he and Brooke would have takeout in his apartment, or her loft – and he tried to smile and act like nothing was bothering him.
But then when they were having sex and he reached his end, he said the name *Brooke*.

Carter always did a good job not saying *anyone’s* name while having sex. It was easier (mostly because sometimes he’d forget their names) – but it would also help him dissociate from the person under him and pretend she was someone else. But he’d never say her name – he would just curse. But that night he couldn’t help himself – and Vanessa had left his apartment in tears. That was the last time they hooked up. He knew that she was in love with him, she had told him. But Carter could never return those feelings. Vanessa was beautiful, and kind, and funny – but he wasn’t in love with her. And it’d just be even worse of him to pretend or try to force those feelings when he knew that they’d never be true.

“No,” Rachel said, still texting. She didn’t look up so she hadn’t seen Carter space off into his own thoughts, “-Victoria would legit murder Brooke if she gave me my job back.”

“-Victoria knows now?” Carter said, surprised.

“God no!” Rachel said in a cackle. “Brookes waiting until after the honeymoon – she hopes that when she tells Bitchtoria that she’s going to be a g-” She quickly stopped herself from saying anything else. Carter looked at Rachel, brows raised.

“A what?”

Rachel narrowed her eyes at Carter and glared. But before she could say anything, her phone rang. She inhaled deeply and then answered the phone, putting it to her ear. “Hello?”

Carter leaned forward a bit, trying to eavesdrop.

“*I am freaking out!*”

It was Brooke. She didn’t sound scared – just panicked. And when Rachel saw that Carter was eavesdropping, she got up from her seat and walked a bit away from him.


He couldn’t hear what Brooke was saying but whatever she was saying was taking a very long time – and if he knew Brooke, she’d only stop talking until she was out of air.

“Who cares about finding a purple monkey, Brooke!” Rachel whispered in a hiss.

“I care!” He heard Brooke yell.

He had to smiled, when Brooke got angry she got loud.

“But Brooke, I can’t. Yes, I know that you have to stay at the office – oh my god, Jesus – you do remember where I am right now, correct?” Rachel said, looking over her shoulder at Carter, who was no longer seated. “-Mmhmm. Yes.” Rachel said next. “Because you are loud.” Rachel hissed. Carter grinned, knowing that Brooke had likely asked Rachel if Carter could hear her. “Oh my God, I will find you a goddamn purple monkey – just calm the fuck down.” Rachel hung up and looked over at Carter. “I have to go.” She announced.

He waited until she hung up and walked back over to his desk. “Why is Brooke looking for a purple monkey?” He asked. “A new design?” Carter had to chuckle. But then he remembered something she had told him long ago. When she was baby, her grandfather had given her a purple – it was her favorite thing in the whole world for such a long time.
“Oh yes, because who wouldn’t want to wear a Brooke Davis original design that has to do with a purple monkey.” Rachel said in annoyance as she grabbed her purse. “This meeting seemed pointless and a waste of my time – next time you want to see Brooke, just ask. Don’t run around in circles to try and get her to come to you.”

Carter opened his mouth to deny her accusation but Rachel scoffed as she rolled her eyes. The redhead left his office and Carter was left alone. But he left shortly after Rachel did.

He was going to go to Brookes office.

(thanks to Rachel he knew she’d be there)

So much for letting her come to him.

“I said three bedrooms!” Brooke said in anger, pacing around her office as she listened to her real-estate agent. “Not one. Not two, three.” She stressed the number. “You can’t possibly tell me that there are no three-bedroom apartments in Manhattan?”

The real-estate agent sighed, and Brooke knew that she was being difficult and hard on the woman – but she needed a place ASAP. Angie would be coming in a few days, the adoption agent delaying the move a few more days so that Brooke could get her own place. “In the area that you are wanting? No. There’s penthouses – there’s condos – but there are no three-bedroom apartments. The most I can give you is a two-bedroom apartment that overlooks central park.”

“-What part of three bedrooms do you not understand? Three people are going to be living in this apartment – I need three bedrooms!” Yeah, she knew she sounded like a spoiled little bitch, but Brooke wasn’t going to leave Rachel homeless, and she needed a place now.

She had put her LA home up for sale – received a bunch of nasty e-mails from Julian saying that he hadn’t let her keep the home just for her to sell it. Brooke didn’t care, she blocked his number and e-mail because she did not have to deal with his shit anymore. They were officially divorced. Brooke was Brooke Davis again – not Brooke Davis-Baker. And the property was hers and her money was hers and Julian walked away with nothing but a party-girl-baby-mama. He was not her problem any longer, that was a job for Alex Dupree.

Brooke was free and she was on the verge of getting everything she ever dreamed of and she fucking refused to let this real-estate agents ruin it for her! Rachel needed a room in her new apartment;
Brooke did not want her moving back to LA to find a place – Brooke needed to know that Rachel would be somewhere safe.

“I know I’m being difficult, but I need to be moved in by Monday. And this is the neighborhood I want to live in.” Brooke said, hearing the door to her office open but kept her back faced to the door, looking out at the New York skyline. It was Millicent, her assistant. Brooke had asked her to run out and get her coffee and boy did she have perfect timing because Brooke was starting to get a major caffeine headache.

“You’re staying?”

_Uh oh._ That voice did not belong to Millicent.

She tensed, not looking behind her to the door.

Brooke closed her eyes and spoke to her real-estate agent again, “Please – just…try and find something. Three bedrooms, okay?” She hung up and slowly turned to face Carter.

“You’re staying?” He asked again.

She sighed, walking over to her desk and took a seat in her chair. “This has nothing to do with you.” Brooke wanted to make that perfectly clear.

Carter walked over to her desk, taking a seat in one of the chairs so he was sitting across from Brooke, the large desk creating a barrier between them. _Brooke was thankful for that._ “–Where are you looking?” He asked, not seeming to hurt by her words.

Brooke frowned, not knowing if she wanted Carter to know anything about the move, where she was looking, or why she was moving in the first place.

“You know that building that I loved so much?” She asked, “The one by Central Park?”

“Oh course.” He smiled and nodded his head. They had talked about it so much whenever they were in the area. Brooke would point up to the building and tell Carter that when she made it big with her fashion line she’d get a penthouse in the building and every morning she’d look out at the view. She didn’t know why it made her stomach clench that he remembered how much she loved that building.

“I wanted an apartment in that building but they don’t have any three bedrooms for sale and I guess even Brooke Davis can’t convince someone to sell her their apartment.” She shrugged.

“Why do you need three bedrooms?” He asked and Brooke avoided his eye. “I mean, one room is for Rachel, I assume. The other for you – who will the third be for?”

She could have lied – told him that it would simply be a guest room. But Brooke was currently freaking the fuck out and _really_ needed to talk to someone other than Rachel about the opportunity she was just given. Haley and Peyton didn’t know, Victoria and Howard didn’t either. And even though everything was back to normal with Nate and Caroline (minus the fact that Brooke had yet again slept with Caroline’s brother and was keeping it from her) – but they had been there for her when each adoption she went through that would fall apart. They had been so helpful and considerate – but Brooke just couldn’t handle another let down.

If this adoption didn’t go through – if she wasn’t able to find a place to move in to by Monday and Angie could not stay with her – Brooke would be crushed. Her hopes and dreams would yet again be crushed and that was so much goddamn weight on her shoulders that she didn’t want to burden her family and friends with.
Carter wasn’t her friend.

He was just someone she slept with a few days ago – just the man who broke her heart thirteen years ago who she was currently thinking about starting up a ‘just sex’ type of thing with. (She refused to call it a ‘just friends’ type of relationship – because she was not going to put her and Carter in the same category as the world ‘relationship’)

It would be like telling a random stranger on the streets – a taxi driver – that she was almost a mother. Obviously, she’d make him keep it to himself, that was a given. Brooke just needed to tell someone or she was going to explode! She couldn’t keep it in any longer and why not tell someone she had no emotional attachment to (anymore).

“For Angie.” Brooke finally looked at Carter.

He raised his brows, waiting for her to continue on.

“I,” She closed her mouth and tried to figure out what to say. *I’m going to be a mom* might not be the best way to start off this conversation. “After Julian and I were married, he admitted that he wanted kids.” Brooke told Carter. She knew that Carter was very aware of the fact that she couldn’t have kids. “We tried fertility treatments and when those didn’t work – he convinced me to look into adopting a child.” Brooke went on, “We were picked by a teenage girl but after holding her baby and looking into it’s eyes, the mom changed her mind.”

Carter frowned. “I’m sorry.” He told her.

Brooke shrugged her shoulders, trying not to think of how hard that day had been on her. “-I wanted to stop – after being so close to having a baby and then to have it snatched away…” She swallowed hard, “Anyway,” She cleared her throat. “Julian still wanted to try. A couple months ago we were one of the top picks for a pregnant woman who was giving her baby up for adoption – but she didn’t pick us in the end. She went with another family.”

Carter shook his head, looking irritated. *Tell me about it,* she wanted to say.

“The baby was born and went to live with the family and they realized that the baby had a heart defect and apparently that was too much of a financial burden for them with all the doctor visits and surgeries she would need so the baby was put back into the system…so mine and Julian’s former adoption agent called me,” She bit down on her lower lip as she smiled.

Carter shook his head, looking irritated. *Tell me about it,* she wanted to say.

“Carter blinked, processing everything. “You’re going to be a mom.” He said, now smiling. And it was true smile, Brooke was still able to recognize each of his smiles.

Brooke nodded her head as she smiled and Carter got up and walked over to her, pulling her up from her chair and hugged her tightly. She laughed, hugging him back, finally able to breath clearly with all the weight off her shoulders of keeping Angie a secret for everyone.

She was going to be a mom.

*If* she could find an apartment to move into by Monday.

Brooke pulled away from Carter, taking a few steps back until she was sitting back in her chair. *And just like that – all the weight of stress was back on her shoulders.* “I mean, I had to wait until after Julian and I were officially divorced so he’d have no claim to Angie – and if I don’t find a place to move into by Monday,” Her words trailed off, not wanting to say out loud that if she didn’t find a home for them that Angie would be ‘officially’ put back into the system for someone else to adopt. Brooke had asked if it would be possible for she and Angie to just stay at Victoria and Howards
brownstone – but the adoption agent told Brooke that the agency needed to see that Brooke was a responsible adult (because the fact that she would be raising a baby alone already had them on high alert – mostly because of her career) who owned her own place and could provide a nice, family-oriented home for Angie.

“I bought an apartment in the building.” Carter admitted, looking down at Brooke.

She looked up at him, confused by what he was saying to her. There was only one building he’d refer to that way. “-The central park building?”

He nodded his head, “I got it a few years ago after I took over my father’s law firm. It was… hideous.” He smiled and Brooke couldn’t help but give into a little snort. “I don’t know who designed the interior but they should have been fired.” He trailed off, “But, I bought it and renovated it completely – Caroline even helped.”

Why was he telling her this? He had an apartment in the building she desired, the building she had dreamed of living in since she was seventeen years old – something he was very aware of.

“You can move in.” Carter finally said.

Brooke shook her head, “I am not moving in with you.”

He grinned, shaking his head. “I never lived in that apartment, Brooke.” Carter informed her.

“So, why’d you get it?” She asked him.

He scratched at his jaw that was covered by his beard. Carter didn’t answer. Brooke understood. For you.

“There weren’t any penthouses available at the time.” Carter said with a shrug.

Brooke licked at her lower lip, looking away from Carter. It shouldn’t be a shock – Carter had convinced his father to buy the apartment on Brookes loft floor so that he could be closer to her thirteen years ago – but after all these years? Why did he buy it? Why did he keep it? Carter didn’t live in the apartment – so why not sell it? Brooke had never planned on coming back to New York permanently. Did he hold onto hope all these years?

“I can’t,” Brooke said, shaking the thought away.

“Three bedrooms.” He said, gaining her attention again. But she shook her head again. You can’t do this – you can’t let him give you an apartment. He is not your boyfriend. He is not even your friend. He broke your heart. “Look,” Carter moved so he was crouching in front of her, looking up at her as he grabbed her hands. “I know that you’re a proud woman, and incredibly stubborn, and I also know that you hate handouts – especially when they’re from me.” His thumb rubbed circles against her skin. “But if you want to be a mom, you’re going to need to set aside your pride. I know you know that.”

Brooke looked down at him, hearing his words and knowing they were true. But…it was wrong. This man broke her thirteen years ago and she may have had sex with him but that didn’t mean she forgave him. It just meant that Carter knew how to get her off and Brooke had really wanted sex. And she still wanted sex – and with him just handing her an apartment the tables would turn. Brooke wanted to be the one to initiate when they’d have sex – she wanted to be in control because if she was in control, Carter couldn’t hurt her. Because everything would be her decision.
“I,” She began to protest again but Carter stopped.

“You were always meant to be a mom, Brooke.” His voice was safe. “Don’t let my stupid decisions and our past be the reason why you miss out on this opportunity.”

Brooke closed her eyes and inhaled deeply.

“Do it for the kid.”

She licked her lower lip, smiling a bit as she shook her head in amusement. Brooke opened her eyes and looked down at him, Carter was still holding her hands. Her face grew serious. “I don’t forgive you, Carter.” She let him know and she watched as he smiled up at her sadly. It was his defeated smile. “Giving me this apartment is not going to change anything – it won’t change the past or make me forget, it won’t make me forgive you.”

“I know.” He whispered.

“Do you?” Brooke asked, needing to make sure that he knew she was serious.

“I do.” He nodded his head. “I fucked up with you, Brooke. And if I could change the past I would – but I can’t. And I don’t think I could ever make you forget what I did to you, God knows I’ll never forget or forgive me either. But this isn’t about me or some scheme to get you back – it’s because you deserve to be a Mom. And that baby deserves a chance. I mean, the apartment was always meant for you, you know that.”

Brooke frowned. Yeah, she knew.

“I mean, I’d offer up some bedrooms in my penthouse but I really don’t think you would want to live with me.” He smirked. “And if you were to ever move in with me by some miracle – I wouldn’t want to be roommates with Rachel.”

Brooke had to laugh at that, shaking her head. “Well, that’s never going to happen – so don’t worry about it.” She told him, chuckling lightly now. Brooke looked at him for a long moment, still trying to make her decision.

This wasn’t about her or Carter or their messy past.

It was about Angie, the baby girl who was already going through so much and Brooke wanted so badly to help.

“No strings attached?” Brooke asked Carter.

“No strings.” He agreed. “Giving you this apartment isn’t me trying to get in your pants, Brooke. I mean, as much as I’d like to bend you over this desk right now – any type of sexual advance will always be initiated by you – if you were to ever want to be in that kind of situation with me again.” He smirked up at her.

Brooke smiled, looking away from him and shook her head.

“I just want to help you.” Carter said, causing her to look back down at her again.

She bit down on her lower lip and inhaled through her nose. “Okay.” Brooke said and watched as Carters eyes lit up, “Carter,” she said his name in a warning, seeing clearly how happy her answer was making him. “No strings attached.” She reminded him.
“I know,” He stood up, still smiling. Brooke stood up as well and walked around him and he followed after her.

Brooke pulled on her jacket and grabbed her purse. “Alright,” She looked at him. “Give me your phone.” She held her hand out so that he could give it to her. Carter unlocked his phone and handed it to Brooke. He watched as she began to type something and then handed it back to him. “Leave, text me the address, and I’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

He grinned, taking his phone back and looked down at the screen, seeing that Brooke had programmed her contact info into his phone.

She had never thought there would be a day that she’d give Carter her phone number again – Hell, she didn’t think she’d ever speak to Carter again for the rest of her life. But here she was, giving him her number, accepting an apartment from him, not to mention thinking about when it’d be the appropriate amount of time to have sex with him again. Again. Having sex with Carter Baizen was something she never ever planned on doing after what he had done to her.

I mean, she already had sex with him when she swore she wouldn’t – why did she need to stop now? And after he went down on her after her date with Howard’s co-worker; why would she want to? That man was still skilled at everything she loved.

“You don’t want to be seen leaving together?” Carter smirked, walking up to her.

“No, I absolutely do not.” Brooke said in all honesty. “Too many people in my life hate you for what you did to me and I really don’t need them calling me over and over again because paparazzi snapped a picture of us together.”

Brooke was glad he didn’t ask her if she still hated him – because right now she couldn’t tell him that she did. Because he was doing such a big thing for her – he was helping her become a mom. How could she hate him in that moment?

Later on? Yeah, probably. But right now? No. She did not hate him right now.

“I’ll see you in twenty minutes.” Carter told her, smiling softly at her before he walked past her and headed out of her office.

Millicent came into her office with her coffee seconds after Carter left with wide eyes. “-Was that?” She squeaked.

Brooke took the coffee from Millicent and stopped her from saying anything further, “Yes. And that little tidbit of information is just going to stay between the two of us. Victoria will never know, got it?”

Her assistant nodded her head quickly and left Brooke alone in her office.

Her phone dinged and Brooke couldn’t help but smile. But when she saw who it was from, her smile disappeared.

Caroline Baizen (10:42 AM):
Can we meet up for lunch?
Brooke replied back,

**Brooke Davis (10:42 AM):**

*Sure. How about 1pm?*

---

**Caroline Baizen (10:43 AM):**

*Perfect. I'll meet you at your office.*

---

Brooke replied with a ‘thumbs up’ emoji and just as she hit send, a text from an unknown number came through. It was Carter, he had set her the address and told her that the place was already furnished and that all she would need was to get things for Angie's bedroom.

She smiled, replying to him that she’d see him in twenty minutes.

*No strings attached.*

That’s what she had to keep telling herself.
Nate had been worried about Brooke, he told Caroline that she had been acting squirrely but wouldn’t open up to him about whatever she was going through. He was worried that it had something to do with Julian and Brooke was keeping it from him – that’s why Caroline had texted Brooke asking her to lunch. Maybe her once best friend would open up to her about what was going on?

When she had told Nate that she was having lunch with Brooke, he had wanted to come. But Caroline told her fiancée that it might be easier for Brooke to open up to her if Nate wasn’t there.

Caroline laid next to Nate in bed, both of them having the day off and deciding that instead of doing anything responsible and adult like – they’d simply stay in bed. She snuggled up to him and listened to him snore lightly. She smiled, remembering now the first time that Nate had asked her out on a date.

He had been so nervous – Caroline had thought it was because the night before, she had made the first move and kissed him. But he was only acting so nervous because he had planned out a whole speech to say to her when he asked her out. Caroline had listened to his entire speech with a smile on her face and instead of giving him her answer, she moved forward and kissed him again.

There were times Caroline had to pinch her self, not believing that she and Nate were actually engaged, that after all the women he dated, it was her that he wanted to settle down and start a life with. It was her wildest dreams and sometimes when he looked at her she still felt her breath catch in her throat. It had been years of Caroline waiting for Nate to make the first move and open up his eyes and see that she was standing in front of him – he was her best friend, and he had told her many times that she was his. But Caroline had loved him, she had since junior year. And it didn’t matter if she dated someone new, because she always found herself being drawn back to Nate. But he was blind to her feelings and she had to watch him fall in love with Blair and Serena, and countless other women – and when she felt like her heart couldn’t take one more introduction of whoever Nate would date next, she worked up the courage and kissed him.

And his eyes opened and he could see her and Caroline now had everything she ever wanted.

Caroline had dreamed of a love that would completely consume her very being, one that would never compare to any other – her northern star. She remembered telling Brooke all those years ago when they were seventeen that Carter was Brooke’s northern star. Caroline would watch her brother and Brooke and feel envy (not because she was jealous that Carter was hogging her best friend) but because they had been so in love. She had seen the way Brooke would light up whenever Carter was in the room and she saw Carter look at Brooke like he had never looked at a woman before – or after.

Nate stirred a little, moving his face to look down at Caroline who was smiling up at him. And gave her a lazy smirk, “Am I drooling?”

“No, not this time.” Caroline grinned, moving up a bit to press her lips against his in a quick kiss. “But, you were snoring like a chainsaw.” She teased. Nate never snored too loudly, just quiet little snores. But Caroline liked to tease him and say he snored like a rhino.

“I sleep like an angel.” Nate said, sitting up and rubbing at his eyes.
“An angel with sleep apnea.” Caroline retorted and Nate laughed loudly.

Nate leaned over and grabbed his phone off his nightstand and looked down at his phone. “You heading out soon?” He asked her.

“I’m meeting Brooke at her office around 1pm,” Caroline sat upward, stretching a bit and cracking her back as well. “I should probably start getting ready.” She spun a bit so she could get off the bed only to have Nates arms circle around his waist and pull her back, she laughed. “-Nate, I got to get ready.”

“You know Brooke is always running late.” Nate pressed a kiss to her shoulder.

“Yes, but I never am. You should know this – you’re marrying me.” Caroline said, escaping Nates hold. She smiled when he fell back down onto the bed and lightly slapped at his leg causing him to chuckle. Caroline went to shower and get ready for her lunch date with Brooke and she could hear Nate fiddling around in their bedroom with the TV, probably trying to find something to watch while she was going to be gone. “-Hey, is there anything you want me to ask Brooke?” She hollered from the bathroom.

The TV paused, or, the sound went off, and Caroline heard light footsteps coming to the bathroom. She looked over and him and saw he was frowning. She found herself frowning too.

“She just,” He inhaled. “Brooke and I have never kept secrets from each other and I feel like she’s hiding something from me – something she’s worried about me knowing. Brooke said that Julian tore up the prenup but…what if she just didn’t want me worrying? Or telling my Dad and then him telling Victoria? I just want to know what’s going on in her head.”

Caroline smiled softly and walked over to Nate, pressing her hand to his cheek and stood on her tip toes so her lips could reach his. “I think that if Julian was still coming after her she would have come to you, Nate.”

“If he’s fucking with her – I swear to God, I will fly out to LA and kick his five-head ass.”

Caroline laughed and kissed him again quickly. “I love you.” She smiled.

Nate grinned down at her too. “I love you too.” His grin turned into a smirk and Caroline pressed her hand against his chest.

“Nope. Leave.” She spun around and walked back over to the mirror.

Nate laughed. “-I didn’t even do anything!”

“I know your bedroom eyes, Nate.” Caroline stated. “And I am not going to be late to meet up with Brooke – so you just go watch Netflix or something. Because it’s not going to happen.” Caroline said only to squeal when she felt Nate move his arms under her legs and pick her up bridal style.

“You can be ten minutes late.” He told her as he carried her to their bedroom, Caroline laughing the entire way.

She loved this man. For him, she was willing to be a little late meeting Brooke at her office. I mean, who could resist Nate Archibald’s bedroom eyes?
Carter pressed open mouthed kisses against Brookes back once he was finally able to catch his breath, she chuckled under him and his lips formed into a smile against her skin. Finally, he rolled off Brooke. He could still hear her muffled laugh as her face was pressed against the pillow at how worked up he had gotten. After she sobered up, Carter watched as Brooke rolled onto her back and then sat up so she could put her clothes back on while he stayed laying on the bed, watching her.

“So,” He said, inhaling deeply as he looked around the room. “What did you think of this room?” He asked, a smirk playing on his lips.

His tour of the apartment had turned into a way for Brooke to figure out which bed she liked the best. He called her Goldie Locks and she had smirked and grabbed him by his tie and told him that she wanted him to help her test out each bed. They had only made it to one bedroom (the master) and Carter was spent. He couldn’t even imagine even being able to go another round.

Brooke shook her head and chuckled a little. “I like it.”

Carter laughed and sat up, moving so he could get off the bed to put on his boxers. Brooke was nearly dressed when he walked over to her, hands moving around her middle and his head pressing against the crook of her neck, his lips pressing soft kisses to her skin. And some reason, her body went stiff.

“Carter,” She said his name slowly before she pulled away from him. “I appreciate everything you’re doing for me and Angie – but,” He watched as she bit down on her lower lip and looked down at her hands before finally looking back up into his and motioned between them. “This is just sex.”

He knew that, but it didn’t mean he didn’t hope that one day he’d be able to prove to Brooke that he was still the guy for her – that he was still so madly in love with her that it hurt at times – it didn’t stop him from hoping that someday she’d be able to forgive him and they could be together again. He knew that what was going on between them was just sex. But he hoped that some day it could be more.

“I know,” Carter replied, nodding his head.

Brooke stepped backwards and reached for her purse that had been kicked across the bedroom, “I mean, you’re free to have sex with other women – even date other women!” Brooke said when she spun to face him.

He shook his head, looking away from Brooke. “Yeah, I know.” Carter told her. He then looked up
at her and started to walk over to where she now stood. “But I’m not gonna.”

Brooke closed her eyes and shook her head, “-Carter,” She began to argue but he silenced her with a kiss. It took a moment before she finally pulled away from him and shook her head. “A long time ago, I might have believed that.” Brooke said quietly. “But not anymore.” He swallowed hard. Carter knew he deserved that. “Just because you don’t plan on having sex with or dating other women, does not mean that we are in a relationship. We are not together, we will never be together again, do you understand that?”

He didn’t answer, he couldn’t. Because even as she was saying it – he didn’t believe her words. He didn’t believe that she had no emotional feelings for him, Carter knew he sure as hell didn’t deserve those feelings from Brooke – but he didn’t believe there were none. Carter didn’t say anything because he didn’t believe her, or maybe he didn’t want to believe her. But he nodded his head.

Because if Carter didn’t nod his head, telling her he understood (which he didn’t) – the thing between them would end. And he couldn’t let her go again. Carter would not let go. He would not sleep with any other women, he would not date anyone else – he was Brookes. She may not want to be his, but he was forever hers.

“I have to go meet your sister.” Brooke said, looking up at Carter.

He nodded again, “I’ll have paperwork drawn up for you to sign – you can stop by my office tonight to sign everything and I’ll give you the keys.”

Brooke nodded in agreement. She left and Carter sat down on the bed and ran his fingers through his hair roughly. She’d never trust him enough to be in a relationship with him ever again – it’s your own damn fault.

Carter would keep his word – he would not sleep with or date any woman while he was still sleeping with Brooke. He wasn’t that immature kid anymore – he would be jealous that Brooke might date other people, but he wouldn’t go out and fuck some random woman to get back at her. He’d fuck her into realizing that no man could ever make her feel the way he did in bed.

Brooke may not be his anymore.

But he sure as hell was still hers.
Brooke waited for Caroline outside the shop. After leaving the apartment, Brooke decided that instead of going to lunch with Caroline, she would have her old friend come along with her to pick out things for Angie's room. And Hell, it was quite the way to tell Caroline that Brooke was about to become a mom. It was terrifying, but after telling Carter about Angie, Brooke felt comfortable to share the news with the important people in her life.

“Brooke!” She turned and saw Caroline waving to her a bit away. Brooke smiled and waved back. Once Caroline was standing in front of Brooke, the soon-to-be-mother began to ramble out everything that had to do with Angie and how she was about to be a mom. Caroline looked at her with wide eyes, in complete shock, but then finally started to grin as her eyes filled with tears and she pulled Brooke into a hug. “I am so happy for you, Brooke!” She sniffled as they hugged. “God, you had Nate and I worried sick this whole week – we thought that maybe it had something to do with Julian.”

Brooke laughed and pulled away, wiping her own tears of happiness away. “God, no!” She shook her head, “The divorce went through and I won’t ever have to deal with him again. I just…I guess I had been let down so much when it came to adoption that I was scared if I told my friends and family about it – it wouldn’t happen. But I sign the papers tomorrow and Angie will be flying out with my adoption case worker and then she’s mine.”

“Does that mean you’re staying in New York?” Caroline asked, her voice hopeful.

Brooke nodded her head and then explained to Caroline why she was staying in New York, about Angie’s heart condition and the surgery she would need and how some of the best pediatric surgeons were based out of hospitals in the city. Caroline looked worried, and Brooke was just as worried about Angie’s condition. But she put on a brave face, so Caroline did as well.

“Will you help me pick out stuff for her room?” Brooke asked.

“Of course!” Caroline said happily. “But…can you please call Nate and tell him what’s going on? He’s so worried about you and when he finds out about Angie he is going to cry – for sure.”

Brooke laughed, “Well, in that case, we’re going to FaceTime him.”

They did. And Nate did in fact cry. He also made them for him to go on the baby shopping spree. When he got there, he engulfed Brooke in his arms and told her how happy he was for her, how much she deserved it. While the three of them shopped, Brooke left with the manager of the store to look in the back for the crib she wanted. When Brooke returned, Caroline and Nate were standing at the counter, Nate had Brooke’s phone in his hand looking pissed, and Caroline was trying to calm him down.

“Please tell me you and Carter aren’t together again.” Nate said in a huff when Brooke was with them at the counter. Brooke’s eyes widened at Nate in confusion. He rolled his eyes and held up her phone and where she saw a text from Carter.

CARTER BAIZEN (2:46 PM):
“No!” Brooke said, grabbing the phone away from Nate. “I’m going to his office to sign some papers he had drawn up so that I can move into my new apartment.” She put her phone into her purse, “Do you honestly think I would ever get back into a relationship with Carter after what he did to me?” Because they weren’t in a relationship. It was just sex. And if Brooke found a good guy later down the road, the sex would stop. “Also, it’s rude to read other people’s text messages, Nate!” She glared.

Caroline spoke up before Nate could, “Why is Carter even involved in any of this.”

Brooke groaned, she really did not like being interrogated when she was thirty years old. “He’s Rachel’s lawyer. Rachel let it slip about Angie and how the adoption agency would not let Angie live with me unless I had my own place, he offered up an apartment he renovated.”

Nate and Caroline shared a look.

Brooke glared. “What?”

“The building by Central Park?”

“Yes.” They both shook their head with a sigh. “Oh my god, what?”

“Brooke,” Caroline started to say but Brooke’s phone began to ring. Caroline motioned for Brooke to take the call and Brooke walked away from the two of them.

It was Serena.

“Hey,” Brooke answered the phone, feeling suddenly exhausted.

“For someone who is officially divorced – you sure do sound awful.”

Brooke couldn’t help but snort out a laugh. “Long story.” She said.

“Well, I just wanted to call and remind you that tomorrow night is the divorce party. We’re going to be having dinner at one of the hottest new restaurants in Manhattan – and then we’re going drinking!”

Brooke frowned, not knowing if that was a good idea. “Okay, but – no pictures on social media.”

“What? Why? That’s half the fun in a divorce party! How else are you going to rub it in Julian’s face?”

Brooke didn’t have time to explain everything to Serena at the moment but told her she’d call her back around 5pm. When she went back to the counter, everything she had picked out was being bagged and ordered to ship out.

“Whoa, whoa, wait!” Brooke said, Nate and Caroline were gone, but the lady who had helped Brooke was telling some of the men from the backroom where the orders needed to go. “What are you doing?”
“Your friends gave me the address of your place after paying for everything.” Brooke opened her mouth to tell the woman she must have misunderstood, but the woman handed Brooke a slip that had her new address, and the apartment number. Brooke frowned – it wasn’t odd that Caroline knew where it was, Carter had told her that she had helped. But why they left without saying goodbye (and also paying for everything) was what left her confused. “-The woman also said that you should move into the apartment for Angie – but that you should know that Carter,” She crinkled her nose, as if she were making sure she got the name right, “-Lives in one of the penthouses in that building.”

Brooke felt her stomach drop.

-You can’t move into Carters building – that’s insane!

-He got the penthouse you’ve always dreamed of living in one day.

-No, no. That doesn’t matter – what matters is that there was no way you can move into that apartment when Carter is living in the same building. That’s too much.

-You don’t have a choice! Angie will be here soon and if you don’t have an apartment they’ll take her away!


“Should I change the address?” The woman asked.

Brooke closed her eyes and threw her head back dramatically. “No, don’t change the address.”

She was going to have to have a serious talk with Carter about boundaries. But there was no way she wasn’t moving into the apartment – because she refused to have Angie put back into the system.

Suck it up, buttercup.
Comments/feedback/kudos are always very much appreciated! Hope you guys enjoyed this chapter!
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes! I'll try and do another read-through to see if I missed any mistakes! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Well,” Rachel said after taking a long swig of her drink and then set it down on the table in front of them. “This is awkward.” Brooke narrowed her eyes at the redhead and shook her head, begging her to not say whatever she was planning on saying next. “So, who here hasn’t slept with Carter Baizen?”

“Oh my god,” Caroline said as she covered her face with her hands as she leaned over a bit. “I mean, obviously Caroline hasn’t unless there’s some deep dark family secret you’re keeping.” Rachel said, and Brooke closed her eyes, shaking her head at her best friend’s words. “Serena, have you slept with Carter?” Jesus, Rachel! “I mean, we have the guest of honor here who happened to be his girlfriend, we have the woman he cheated on her with,” Rachel motioned to Blair, “And for some reason, one of his fuck buddies.” Rachel looked directly at Vanessa.

“Can we not do this?” Brooke asked, “Isn’t this supposed to be about me celebrating my divorce?”

“Well, that had been my plan – but you failed to mention to me your guest list.”

They all looked around at the table, and the three women who had slept with Carter quickly grabbed their drinks and took a very long sip. Brooke held her hand up when the waitress walked by, signaling for her to bring another bottle of wine.

It was going to be an incredibly long and awkward night.

NINE HOURS EARLIER
“So, Blair wanted to double check that she was still invited to the party tonight.” Serena said as she handed Brooke yet another dress option for the night. They were at Brooke’s new apartment, everything for Angie had been delivered and Serena had even helped set up the room with Brooke, though – they did need to call Dan and Nate to help them move the mattress that had already been set up in what they had turned into Angie’s bedroom. Serena had squealed happily when Brooke told her about Angie and the adoption and when Brooke explained to the chipper blonde why they couldn’t be posting pictures on social media, she completely understood.

There could be no videos of Brooke letting loose and drinking an obnoxious amount of alcohol because if the adoption agency saw that – they might change their mind about Brooke becoming Angie’s adoptive mother.

“Yes, she’s still invited.” Brooke said, looking at the dress Serena had handed over. It was one of her own designs, it had been a contender for Victoria and Howard’s wedding rehearsal, but at the last minute she had changed her mind and wore a different dress.

“Well, you guys had been drinking when you invited her.” Serena pointed out.

She sighed, setting the dress down on the bed. “I usually do really stupid things that I ultimately regret the next morning when I’m drunk, but inviting Blair was not one of them. You’re the one who wanted me to forgive her so badly, remember?”

Serena frowned but nodded her head, “…But,” She began to say and Brooke groaned, “oh, come on, Brooke! I just got to know…do you actually forgive her? I mean, clearly you’ve forgiven Carter.” She motioned around them; the apartment.

“Just because I accepted this apartment from Carter does not mean I forgave him – let’s just make that perfectly clear.” Brooke said, picking up another dress. “-It just meant that I was desperate for an apartment and he happened to have one available.”

“In the building that his penthouse is in?” Serena said, smirking a little as she kinked her brow up at Brooke, who rolled her eyes at the blonde.

“He failed to mention that little detail which is why I sent Rachel over to get the papers from him and then after I signed them, had her deliver them back – there’s only so much of Carter I can take.”

-That’s not true. Seeing as not even twenty-four hours ago in this very bedroom…

-Shut up.
“Had I known he had a penthouse a few floors above my apartment I wouldn’t have taken the apartment.” Serena gave Brooke a skeptical look. “I wouldn’t have!”

“Fine, I believe you.” Serena said in a tone that clearly sounded like she didn’t believe Brooke. “I just needed to make sure that I don’t have to get in the middle of any catfights tonight, you know Blair is a hair puller and if you have extensions in; she’ll snatch them.”

Brooke laughed at that, “Good to know.”

“Who else is coming tonight?” Serena asked, “I know it’s me, Blair, Caroline, and you – but didn’t you say to add two more people?”

“Yeah, Rachel.” Brooke said, holding the dress up to her body as she looked in the mirror.

“And who is the other?”

“Vanessa.”

“Vanessa?” Serena choked when she tried to say the name, “I’m sorry, did you say Vanessa? You do realize that she,”

“And Carter were fuck buddies? Yeah, I know. But I’m going to be living in New York and Vanessa had been a good friend when I first moved to the Upper East Side. When I saw her at my moms wedding she acted so awkward and ran away from me – I just want to work things out with her and let her know that things don’t have to be so weird between the two of us.”

“That’s very adult of you, Brooke.” Serena said and when Brooke looked over her shoulder, the blonde was smiling at her.

“Yes, well, I’m thirty now so I figured I had to start acting adult at some point. Why not start with my divorce party guest list?” Serena laughed at Brookes words, she still had the childish giggle that made every man swoon over her at how innocent it sounded. “-You wouldn’t happen to know where Vanessa lives or works so I can invite her in person, do you?”

Serena sent Brooke the address of where she knew Vanessa was currently working; a café she owned after getting a business degree.

“I mean, it couldn’t be too awkward, right? Vanessa is going to be Caroline’s maid of honor – need I remind you that Nate and Vanessa were pretty hot and heavy back in the day? If it’s not awkward between Caroline and Vanessa why would it be awkward for us to be friends, too?”
“You’re right. You two are both adults and it’s not like either of you are sleeping with Carter again.” Serena said, standing up and picking up a dress and moved behind Brooke, not noticing the way she swallowed hard at Serena’s words or flexed her fingers involuntarily, trying her hardest to not show any sort of emotion that might give away the fact that she was having sex with Carter again. “I think you should wear this one.” Serena said, holding up the dress to Brookes body while looking in the mirror.

Brooke nodded her head quickly, “Yeah, I think I’ll wear that one.” She said, grabbing the dress from Serena and went to go hang it up in the bathroom so it could be steamed before dinner. When she walked back into the bedroom, Serena was looking down at her phone. The blonde’s brows were furrowed as she quickly typed on the phone. “You okay?” She asked.

“Yeah,” Serena said, tucking her phone away in her purse and looked back at Brooke, “You blindsided me with the whole adoption thing and I forgot to cancel something I had planned for tonight.”

Brooke smirked, kinking her brow up. “Strippers?”

Serena laughed, nodding her head. “Strip club. It was going to be this whole Magic Mike type of thing – but there’s no way there wouldn’t be people taking pictures of that.”

Brooke frowned, feeling bad that Serena had gone through so much work to make tonight something memorable for Brooke only to have to cancel things that might cause unwanted attention or press. “I’m sorry, S.”

“No,” Serena stood up and off the bed. “Do not apologize, no last-minute cancellation fee is a bigger deal than the fact that you are going to be a mom soon!” Brooke smiled at Serena’s words that were filled with so much happiness that Brooke could feel tears start to swell in her eyes. “Oh no! Don’t cry!” Serena laughed, hurrying over to Brooke and pulling her into a hug. “Because if you
cry, I’m going to have to cry and then we’ll be a mess before the celebration even starts!”

“I just…” Brooke sniffled, “Sometimes I think I’m still dreaming – that I’m going to wake up and face a reality where I’m not going to be a mom and that’s terrifying.”

Serena let go of Brooke but kept her hands on her shoulders, “You are going to be a mom, Brooke. And Angie is the luckiest little baby girl to have you as her mother. Nothing is going to go wrong, okay? I’ll curse anyone who messes with you!”

Brooke laughed, wiping away her tears. “Curse? Are you a witch now?”

Serena laughed, too, and shrugged her shoulders. “I’ll become a witch just so that I can curse someone for you!”

“You are such a good friend!” Brooke teased.

The two thirty-year-old went over the final details for their plans tonight and then went and sat in Angie’s bedroom. After an hour, Serena had left, and Brooke sat in the rocking chair she had picked out, holding a purple monkey in her arms as she rocked back and forth. The monkey had been at the front door when she first got to the apartment, Brooke figured that it was Rachel, who was busy today going over things with Carter on how they were going to get the money she owed to Dante.

Everything was working out.

Everything was going to be okay.

Brooke looked down at her phone to check the time and then clicked on the address Serena had sent her to Vanessa’s café. This shouldn’t be too awkward.
“Why are you just now telling me this?” Rachel snapped at her best friend’s ex-boyfriend.

He sighed, rubbing at his jaw. “Because before you walked in here; we hadn’t set everything in stone. This is the first time you’ve told me that you don’t want to go after Daunte which puts you in quite the jam, and not just you, but Brooke too.” Carter said, leaning forward in his seat a bit. “You tried to steal ten million dollars – I fixed it by reaching out to Davis Enterprises legal team explaining that you had tried to take that money out, so it could be moved to the account where Brookes employees money is kept for each paycheck, but there had been a typo for the amount you were supposed to put in that account and you mistakenly took more than you were supposed to. Just a little error. But you still lost your job because of it.”

Rachel rolled her eyes. Yes, she was very aware that she was no longer working in the business department of Davis Enterprises. But Brooke had told Rachel that she could model C/B – it was what Rachel had wanted when Brooke had asked her what she might want to do other than working for Davis Enterprises. Brooke had been hesitant about giving Rachel a modeling job, but Rachel got the job.

“—But now I’m a model for C/B and can make enough money to payoff Daunte, why the hell are you telling me that I can’t live with Brooke?”

“Because if anyone ever tipped off the adoption agency that Brooke was living with someone who was paying money to a criminal, they would take Angie away.”

Rachel felt her stomach drop, a feeling of dread coming over her, she couldn’t do that to Brooke. She didn’t want to leave Brooke – not one bit. But she couldn’t risk Angie getting taken away. If Daunte ever asked for more money and she said no, Brooke was the target he would use as blackmail. Rachel would not let that happen.

“And what would happen if I pursued a lawsuit with Daunte?” Rachel asked, and Carter made a face, one that was clear to read. Brooke would still be in danger. “You know, for being my lawyer – you sure are looking out for Brookes interests over mine.” He rolled his eyes at that and Rachel smirked. “You really do still love her, don’t you?”

Carter inhaled deeply, his eyes going wide as he smiled. “If I told you that I never stopped would you run to Brooke and tell her?”

Rachel shook her head, “Hell no. I do not want to get my head bitten off by her. No one was even allowed to say your name for years– I didn’t even know you personally and she still wouldn’t let me say your name! Anything that has to do with whatever is going on between the two of you is none of my business, and that’s a direct quote from Brooke. And honestly, Baizen…I really doubt she’d believe me if I told her that you never stopped loving her.”

“Why?”

“Because she doesn’t believe you ever loved her in the first place.” He made a face, not liking her answer. Carter opened his mouth to protest but Rachel cut him off, “You cheated on her with her cousin out of spite, dude. That’s not something someone does to a person they truly love.”

Carter groaned, running his hands down his face. “I was an idiot back then,” He admitted, words muffled by his hands, but he finally let them fall to his desk. “-But I loved Brooke. I did, still do. Brooke was the only real thing in my life and when she told me no…I lost it. I went to a dark place and…” He sighed, “You know the rest.”

Rachel was not going to pity him. She was Team Brooke 100%. It didn’t matter that he was her
lawyer and that Brooke was having a sex with him again – she was not going to sit with him in his pity party.

“I do know the rest.” Rachel told him, her tone sharp. “-Which is why Brooke doesn’t believe that you ever loved her. And I don’t blame her.”

He didn’t glare, he just looked away from her and Rachel could barely hear him mumble, *I did. I do.*

Rachel remembered the nights Brooke would drink too much and end up in her bed crying for a man she claimed had never loved her. And here he was, sitting in front of Rachel telling her that Brooke had been wrong. That he did love her all those years ago, and that he still did. There was a time Rachel swore that if she ever saw Carter she’d murder him. God, Rachel wasn’t even Brookes friend during the disastrous relationship – but she had been broken for so long and Rachel blamed Carter for that. And Brooke could deny it all she wanted; but Rachel knew that Carter still had a hold on her. Whether it be her vagina or heart – he was still something Brooke had a hard time letting go of.

He didn’t deserve her.

But Brooke was so carefree and happy these days, and yes, that probably had a lot more to do with Angie than it did Carter – but she was not longer a grumpy horny bitch who was getting any. So, she was less exhausting to be around with her sharp words and angry glares.

That department he had definitely helped in. It didn’t mean he was worthy of Rachel’s best friend, though. Just because he could get her off didn’t mean that he hadn’t destroyed her thirteen years ago.

“-You know Brooke is going to be pissed when she finds out I can’t live with her,” Rachel told him, “-and that her anger will be directed towards you, right?” Carter sighed at Rachel’s words, nodding his head.

Do not pity him. He broke Brooke, he does not deserve your pity no matter how pathetic he looks right now, like his whole world was destroyed at the thought of Brooke hating him again, afraid of losing her yet a-fucking-gain...Dammit.

“Which is why I’m telling her that I’m not moving in with her because I’m not ready to give up my youth,” *Yeah, she was thirty which some might not consider ‘youth’, but whatever, “-And a living with a single mom and her baby would cramp my game.*” Carter raised his brow up, clearly surprised by Rachel’s words. She narrowed her eyes at him when he started to smile, getting ready to thank her. “-I am not doing this for you, Baizen. You destroyed my best friend, and I’ll be damned if I’m going to let you do that again. *She* calls the shots when it comes to whatever you two are doing – got it?”

He nodded his head.

She got up, grabbing her purse off the empty seat next to her and pulled out her phone. “Wish me luck.” Rachel said, turning to leave Carters office.

“Rachel,” He called out her name.

But Rachel kept walking, “I’m doing this for Brooke – not for you.” She reminded him again in a holler.

And Brooke was going to be fucking furious.

As she walked home, Rachel’s phone dinged, alerting her of an e-mail letting her know that Daunte had gotten the money Carter gave her to wire to him.
He had just handed the money over without even blinking, as if it were no big deal…which had her starting to think…Julian would never just drop that prenup, Brooke may think that Julian had a change of heart and was still the good guy that she had once loved and had done the right thing – but Rachel knew what a little weasel Julian truly was. There was no way he was willing to let go of the money he dropped on Brookes company – not without a fight.

Which meant someone had paid him off.

Someone who, I don’t know, would be willing to pay off the debt Brookes friend owed, or just give Brooke an apartment free of charge, someone who was willing to go the lengths to protect Brooke. One that was terrified of losing her again.

Oh my God.

Brooke was going to be fucking furious if she ever found out that Carter had paid off Julian.

_Fucking livid._

Okay, this was actually very, very, very awkward.

Brooke stood in Vanessa’s office waiting for her to come in to talk. A part of her thought that after the way she had all but run away when she saw Brooke at the wedding, Vanessa would slip out a back door or something instead of talking with her.

And then the door opened.

“Brooke,” Vanessa said in surprise, seeing that it was her.

“Hey.” She said, giving her an awkward little wave.

“Um,” Vanessa cleared her throat, walking around Brooke to get to her desk. Once she was seated, Brooke walked over to the desk as well, and took a seat. Vanessa still looked stunning, her once curly dark hair was now straight in a layered bob with light brown ends. She looked wonderful, there
was no denying that. She still had that Brooklyn Hipster look she had always rocked so well, and her lipstick shade was a dark pink, almost purple looking. “What can I do for you?” Vanessa asked.

“Well, I wanted to talk with you.” Brooke said, for some reason feeling incredibly self-conscious in just jeans and a light sweater compared to Vanessa’s trendy hipster business look. If Brooke had actually gone into the office today she would have put more effort into her look – but she was trying to get everything ready for when Angie came. “When I came up to you and Caroline at my mom’s wedding,”

“-Look, I’m sorry about bailing like that.” Vanessa cut Brooke off, apologizing for her abrupt exit. “I just thought it might be a little…”

“-Awkward?” Brooke smiled, and Vanessa nodded, but her face was pinched in worry. “Caroline told me that you and Carter were a thing,”

“I wouldn’t even call it a thing!” Vanessa blurted out. “It was just…”

“-Sex.” Brooke finished for Vanessa again. And Vanessa audibly gulped. It made Brooke chuckle a little, it made her feel less nervous to have this conversation because it clearly wasn’t easy for Vanessa either. Brooke didn’t know what she was expecting coming into this – would Vanessa tell her to fuck off? Blame her for Carter not wanting to pursue a relationship? She just didn’t know. “- Vanessa, I moved on from Carter – hell, I married someone else.”

Vanessa didn’t look like she believed Brooke, or maybe it was because of what Caroline had said; about how Vanessa had loved Carter and he didn’t love her back (which was somehow Brookes fault because Caroline had the absurd idea that her older brother was still in love with Brooke.)

“It’s just,” Vanessa started to say, “When I saw you,” She stopped, “I guess…because of Carter I feel a little inferior to you. For reasons that you probably wouldn’t want me to go into detail about.” She said, her eyes widening as she looked down at her hands and Brooke couldn’t help but chuckle. “I shouldn’t have run – we’re all adults and the sex stopped after you got engaged.”

Brooke raised her brow up at that but didn’t push it.

“I’m sorry I ran.”

“Don’t even worry about it, V.” Brooke said, calling her by the nickname she had when they were seventeen. “I just want to make sure that things between us aren’t going to be awkward anymore. I mean, you’re going to be the maid of honor at my step-brothers wedding.”

“-That’s so weird, isn’t it?” Vanessa leaned forward, whispering the words like it was a secret.

“That Nate and I are siblings now or that you’re the maid of honor at your ex-boyfriends wedding?” Brooke said with a little chuckle causing Vanessa to full on laugh.

“Both!”

They talked for a long time. Vanessa told Brooke all about her life after Brooke had left Manhattan, skipping the Carter details of course. And Brooke told Vanessa about her life in LA, about Julian, about Alex Dupree (who Vanessa referred to a total skank hoe, which had made Brooke cackle). Brooke told her about moving back to New York (she did not tell her that it was in the apartment Carter owned) and even told her about Angie.

She really had to tell Haley and Peyton soon before the whole world knew before her oldest friends did.
“Serena is planning a divorce party for me and I’d really like you to come.” Brooke said, finally saying what she had come for.

Vanessa winced a little, “Divorce party? Isn’t that a little insensitive?”

“Oh, God, no!” Brooke laughed, “-This is a celebration, not a mourning.”

“Are we going to burn your wedding pictures?” Vanessa raised her brow, clearly intrigued by the idea.

“Oh, honey, I burnt those the day he told me he knocked up his mistress.” Vanessa laughed but quickly covered her mouth, probably worried she had offended Brooke, “-I also burnt my wedding dress, and the good china that was given to us that had our names engraved on it… which was probably an asshole move because it had been a present from my Mom but I don’t care.”

“To Hell with the china!” Vanessa said with a laugh. Once they had both sobered up, Vanessa agreed to come to the party later in the evening, “-So who all is coming to this divorce party?”

“Well, me – Caroline, Serena, my best friend from LA; Rachel, and Blair.”

Vanessa looked shocked, like she could choke on air at any second. It was the kind of look Serena had given her when Brooke told her she was inviting Vanessa tonight, “-I’m sorry, did you just say Blair?”

“We buried the hatchet.” Brooke said, waving it off. She didn’t really want to discuss that she had forgiven Blair for sleeping with Carter all those years ago and then went to Carters office and had sex with him – because she really didn’t want to have to talk about Carter with Vanessa.

She wasn’t jealous that Carter had slept with Vanessa. The girl was amazing, beautiful, funny, talented – she understood. But it felt too awkward. Was it because Vanessa had fallen in love with Carter? Or was it because Brooke was currently having sex with Carter in secret? Either would be justified.

“Fair enough,” Vanessa didn’t push the subject. “So, where and when is this party?” Vanessa asked.

“I’ll have Serena text you the details because she’s in charge of this whole night but before I go I want to ask that any pictures you take tonight, if you take any, don’t go on social media, okay? I don’t need anything messing up my chance of bringing Angie home and if the night gets wild…”

“I get it.” Vanessa chuckled. “I won’t even turn on my phone tonight.”

Brooke smiled, “I appreciate that.”

They hugged goodbye and when Brooke was out of the café and inside a taxi, she saw the string of text messages she had missed.

Rachel Gatina (1:15 PM):
I have some news...
Uh oh, what the hell happened now? Brooke went to the next text thread and saw a new message from Carter.

CARTER BAIZEN (1:30 PM):
*How’s the apartment looking?*

She didn’t know what to reply. Brooke was avoiding him a little bit. After she found out that he had bought the penthouse of her dreams – it was just…weird. They hadn’t talked like Brooke had swore to herself that they would – but what the fuck was she supposed to say? *Hey, so Caroline told me you bought my dream penthouse? Did you do that out of spite or out of hope that someday I might come back?* It was too weird. But if she didn’t answer him, Carter might do something stupid like show up to her work or her new apartment. He sure as hell knew where it was now seeing as he owned it! Brooke went with a safe option and replied to his text with a thumbs up emoji and then quickly left the thread and went on to her next messages.

Victoria Davis (1:56 PM):
*You are oddly quiet lately. Is everything alright?*

Brooke couldn’t help but laugh at that. A decade ago if you told Brooke that her mother would text her to check in because she was worried about her? She would have laughed in your damn face. It just seemed out of the realms of possibilities. And yet, here they were.
Brooke Davis (2:30 PM):
I'm all good, mom.
I’ll call you tomorrow morning to check in!

The next message was from Nate.

Nate Archibald (2:15 PM):
I am highkey insulted that I’m not invited tonight

Brooke laughed, shaking her head. They had worked things, Caroline included. Brooke told them that she had no idea that Carter owned the penthouse but that having a place for Angie to live was too important to Brooke to just give up because Carter had failed to tell her that very big detail. Caroline was worried – about Carter or Brooke? Brooke didn’t know. But the three of them agreed that Angie was the priority now. It was generous of Carter to give her the apartment but that didn’t mean that all was forgiven or forgotten.
Brooke Davis (2:31 PM):
No boys allowed, darling step-brother.

Brooke was about to go to her other messages, but the phone rang.

CARTER BAIZEN Calling…

Brooke inhaled deeply wanting to decline the call – but she had literally just texted him back. So, she answered.

“Hey,” She said, keeping her voice even.

“I hear you’re having a divorce party tonight?”

She could hear the amusement in his tone. “Yup.”

“Are guys allowed or is it girls only?”

Brooke licked at her lower lips. God, this was so awkward! Why was he calling her? They weren’t friends, they were just fucking! This was not a relationship and the lines were clearly blurring for Carter. “It is only girls for the party,” She had to say something that would make him cool off of her for a bit, “But it’s a bar and I’m sure there will be a lot of fine eligible bachelors there.” He was quiet, “I mean, who knows – I might meet my next husband there.” Her voice sounded lighter, like it was a joke and not a way to make Carter stop thinking that they were something more than they actually were.
“Anyone you meet at a bar probably isn’t husband material, Davis.”

Brooke bit down on her lip, trying not to laugh. “-Do you forget how we met?” He chuckled and Brooke panicked. Oh shit. Why did you say that? Why bring up how they met and marriage in the same topic? What the actual fuck?! What if he thinks that Brooke thought he was husband material – she had to fucking fix this fast. “-I mean, I guess you have a point then.”

She listened as Carter cleared his throat, “Well, have fun tonight. I’m sure you won’t get many nights like that when Angie gets here.” He didn’t sound angry or bitter. He just sounded sad. And Brooke hated that it affected her.

“I intend to.” Brooke said, not wanting to get soft.

“Bye, Brooke.”

“Bye.”

They hung up and Brooke felt incredibly guilty.

-Don’t feel guilty. He’s probably already on his way to a bar to fuck someone.

-Or he’s gonna call up Vanessa…

Ouch. Why did that sting? Brooke did not believe Carter when he said he wasn’t going to sleep with or date any other women – he was who he was. And when he was angry he would lash out and fuck someone else. That was a good thing now…right? It was casual, Carter was free to fuck anyone he wanted and so was she! So maybe she would meet someone tonight! And maybe he would end up being the love of her life.

Take that, Carter.
The first stop of the night was for food. Serena set up a reservation at a beautiful reservation that she said served some of the best meals she had ever had – and after having the wine they served? Brooke could not wait to try the food she ordered next.

They sat at the table quietly, sipping at their wine. Caroline sat next to Vanessa on one side of the square table, Blair and Serena were at the head and end of the table, and Brooke sat on the other side of the table with Rachel across from Vanessa and Caroline.

Quite the group of people.

Blair wasn’t talking, and Brooke was sure that she still believed that the invite was a pity invite or a drunken mistake Brooke had made. Vanessa was quiet, only really speaking quietly with Caroline. Serena kept looking at Brooke to break the awkwardness, but it was Rachel who ended up doing that.

But she didn’t break the awkwardness. She only created more.

“Well,” Rachel said after taking a long swig of her drink and then set it down on the table in front of them. “This is awkward.” Brooke narrowed her eyes at the redhead and shook her head, begging for her to not say whatever she was planning on saying next. “So, who here hasn’t slept with Carter Baizen?”

“Oh my god,” Caroline said as she covered her face with her hands as she leaned over a bit. “I mean, obviously Caroline hasn’t unless there’s some deep dark family secret you’re keeping.” Rachel said, and Brooke closed her eyes, shaking her head at her best friend’s words. “Serena, have you slept with Carter?” Jesus, Rachel! “I mean, we have the guest of honor here who happened to be his girlfriend, we have the woman he cheated on her with,” Rachel motioned to Blair, “And for some reason, one of his fuck buddies.” Rachel looked directly at Vanessa.

“Can we not do this?” Brooke asked, “Isn’t this supposed to be about me celebrating my divorce?”

“Well, that had been my plan – but you failed to mention to me your new guest list.”

They all looked around at the table, and the three women who had slept with Carter quickly grabbed their drinks and took a very long sip. Brooke held her hand up when the waitress walked by, signaling for her to bring another bottle of wine.

The table was quiet until Serena spoke up, looking to Brooke, “I haven’t slept with Carter, if that matters.”

It made Brooke spit out her wine as she laughed, taken off guard by it. Which made the whole table laugh. Brooke wiped away the wine that had dribbled down her chin as they all continued to laugh. The people in the restaurant were glaring at them which only made the table laugh harder.
The waiter came back with another bottle of wine and their entrees.

Blair talked about Henry and found a way to discreetly ask if they were allowed to mention Angie and Brooke told them all that Vanessa knew but that it stays between them because she hadn’t told her Tree Hill friends or her mother and Howard. The topic changed to Caroline and Nates wedding when Blair asked if they had started planning for the big day and Caroline had looked to Brooke and smiled, saying that they had booked the best wedding planner she had ever met.

“Me!” Brooke had laughed, feeling a little tipsy after finishing her third glass of wine.

“Oh, of course you are!” Blair laughed. “You’re the only one who can match my excellence when it comes to party planning.”

“Oh, I loved Brookes parties!” Vanessa agreed. “Do you remember the one you had on the roof of your lofts building?”

“Oh! That was the one where Nate threw up in Brookes Jimmy Choo heals!”

Blair made a gagging noise and Serena laughed loudly, pressing her hand to her stomach to try and settle her laughter. “I’m sorry, ever since having Henry I have the worst gag reflexes. Anytime anyone mentions something gross I…” She started to gag again, and the table laughed.

“Oh my God, we are getting old.” Brooke drew out the word while laughing.

“Speak for yourself!” Serena said, flipping her hair over her shoulder dramatically.

“Since we’re all in such a good mood, I have something to say.” Rachel said, standing up a bit.

Brooke looked at her, still chuckling a little but focused on the red-head. “What is it, Rach?”

“Well, I know I told you I was going to wait to tell you until after the night but since we’re all in good moods…I’m not moving in with you, Brooke.”

The fork she had been holding her hand fell out of her grip and clanked against the table. “Wait…are you serious?”

The table got quiet as Rachel nodded her head.

“I found an apartment in SoHo that I love and…you’re about to be a mom, Brooke…you don’t need me butting in on that.”

Brooke shook her head, thinking that it was absurd for Rachel to think that way, “-You wouldn’t be butting in, Rachel. I want you to live with us! It’s the whole reason I even took the apartment from,” She quickly stopped herself, remembering that Vanessa was there. “-It had three bedrooms so I took it because the plan had been for the three of us to live together.”

“-Did any of you see the art up front?” Caroline asked, looking to Vanessa, Blair and Serena.

“Oh…no,” Blair said. “Let’s go look at it.”

The four of them got up and left Brooke and Rachel alone at the table. “They’re subtle.”

“-What’s going on, Rach?” Brooke said, not wanting to beat around the bush.

Rachel sighed loudly, clearly uncomfortable. “Do you want to know the real reason?”
“Yes!”

“You want to be a mom, Brooke. You. I don’t. I’m only thirty and I want to live my life and I can’t do that when I live with a single mom and her baby.” Brookes eyes widened at Rachel's words. “That came out wrong.” Rachel sighed, “You are starting a family…and I love you, Brooke, I really do – but I don’t want to be your roommate. Stinky diapers? Screaming baby? Baby formula in the fridge next to my protein shakes? I love you so much and I know I’ll love Angie too but…I don’t want to live with you guys.”

Brooke understood. If Rachel lived with them it would force her into a role she wasn’t ready for. “Why didn’t you say something earlier? I mean…the only reason I took the apartment from Carter because it had three bedrooms – do you know how hard that was for me?”

“I know, I’m sorry.” Rachel apologized. “I should have told you sooner.”

She couldn’t stay mad at Rachel. It wouldn’t be fair to her. “What’s the building?” Brooke asked.

She made a little face but answered. “Soho court.”

Brooke laughed, “I showed you that place and you told me it was gross!”

“Yes, well – it won’t have a crying baby in it!” Rachel stuck out her tongue and Brooke playfully rolled her eyes. “I really am sorry, Brooke…but don’t think you’re alone in this whole Angie thing, okay? You’ve got so many people here who love you and are willing to help.”

Brooke smiled and pressed her hand on top of Rachel's. “You’re still my ride or die.”

“Damn right, slut.” Rachel winked. “Should we go get them so that they can stop pretending that there was art up front?”

“I think Caroline just panicked and said the first thing that came to her mind.” Brooke chuckled.

“What do you think they’re doing?”

“Awkwardly staring at a wall?”

“Let’s go get them.” Rachel laughed.

Brooke was about Rachel not living with her – but she already started to think of ideas for what to do with Rachel’s bedroom. A little office so she could work at home on somedays? Or a playroom for Angie when she was old enough? She was leaning more towards the office but someday she could make a play room for Angie.

They all returned to the table and ate their dinner. The night was young and apparently, they had three other places to go to. What started out as an incredibly awkward night out was turning out to be very fun. And Brooke was so thankful for that.

But she could not imagine what else Serena had planned for tonight.
Carter sat on the couch in his penthouse staring blankly at the TV. He had thought putting on a show would distract him from thoughts of Brooke going out tonight and possibly bringing another man home. A man who was marriage material. It had stung when she said that, but she had the right. Carter had debated on calling her but he just...he wanted to hear her voice.

After years of not talking to her – going just one day without talking to her was driving him crazy. He missed her, he missed her voice, he even missed her harsh words and cold glares. Because he was still so absolutely in love with her. She could lash out at him and scream until her lungs were raw about what an asshole he was – but at least he’d hear her voice.

Thirteen years ago, if Brooke had gone out to a bar Carter would want to one-up her. He’d go to a bar too and bring a girl home out his bitterness and anger. But he wasn’t in his twenties anymore. And a lot of good that did him! He lost Brooke when he had slept with Blair after Brooke turned down his proposal and guess what fucking happened? Brooke cut off all contact with him for thirteen fucking years. She fell in love with and married another man! He had missed all her successes and her lows and every aspect of her life because he got his feelings hurt and lashed out.

He took another drink from his beer and looked down at his phone seeing that there were still no messages from Brooke. He thought that maybe she would call him after the night was over and ask him to come over. She hadn’t. Brooke probably took someone else home with her.
Carter ran his free hand through his hair and sat forward, setting his beer down on the large glass table. He looked around at the penthouse and looked towards the large glass windows that showed him the view of central park and parts of the city. He dropped his hand and leaned back, thinking about how Brooke would rave on and on about what a beautiful view they’d have when they got their penthouse.

“Very top floor.” Brooke said, looking up at the building. Carter chuckled, holding onto her hand as he listened to her over the busy sound of the city. “That’s the one I want.”

“Really? I wouldn’t mind living in your loft for the rest of our lives.”

Brooke had laughed at that, shaking her head, “I love my loft, but it doesn’t scream… ’I made it’… a penthouse does. Especially one with a view of central park and the city.”

“Tell me more.” He had urged her when she moved so that they could continue to walk, looking back at the building briefly as they walked down the streets.

“Well, I want a big island in the kitchen.” Brooke began to tell him. “And a long dining room table so that we can have dinner parties all the time.” Carter had chuckled at that, the very thought of Brooke cooking something without it burning. “Shut up,” She had laughed, jabbing him in his side with her elbow as they continued to walk. “And I want a California King bed and a huge shower with glass doors!”

“You just want to watch me shower naked.”

It had always been a hypothetical dream – one they only ever spoke of when they were near the building. But Carter had always held onto it.

“Well, that would be a bonus.” Brooke had said while smirking up at him. He had to stop walking and pull her to him, pressing a kiss to her lips. “But remember – it has to be huge that way we can shower together and do more than shower together.” She had wiggled her brows and Carter had felt his stomach clench in a good way, the kind that Brooke always created when a fire would start to burn inside him.

“Huge shower. I’ll remember that.”

He had.

He remembered the shower and the California King bed and the big kitchen island as well as the long dining room table. He had done it all with the hopes that someday she’d come back to him.
Even while he was still angry with her about the fact that she had said no to his proposal – he still got all those things because he was still in love with her and wanted her back.

He bought the penthouse on the very top floor of the building she loved and added everything she had said she wanted and even went and bought an apartment in the building to renovate with her on his mind the entire time. And now she was living in that apartment.

*Probably fucking some guy in it, too.*

Carter closed his eyes and tried to block out the images he was conjuring in his head of Brooke naked in someone else’s’ arms. He wanted another drink, but he wasn’t going to. He had limited himself to just one beer tonight because if he had anymore than that he might do something stupid like search the city for Brooke or sit outside her apartment door. Just one beer and at 3 AM he would go to his California King bed and sleep.

He opened his eyes and grabbed at his phone, looking down at the lock screen. No new messages. **2:56 AM.** *Fuck, you’re pathetic.*

And then there was a knock at the door.

He groaned, really hoping it wasn’t some random booty-call he had brought to the penthouse once upon a time ago. Carter stayed sitting on the couch and listened as the knocking continued.

And then his phone dinged.

**Brooke Davis (2:57 AM):**

*Open your damn door.*

He instantly scrambled to his feet, dropping his phone on the ground in the process as well as knocking over the remote controller. Carter stood at the door, taking in a deep breath before he opened it.

Brooke stood on the other side of the door with one hand on her hip and her other hand holding onto her high heels. “You bought my penthouse.” She narrowed her eyes at him.

Carter swallowed hard, just now realizing that she was here. At the penthouse, a place he hadn’t thought she knew about. He knew she knew he lived in a penthouse, but he hadn’t told her where it was. *Dammit, Caroline.* “I did.” There was no point in lying to her.

She shoved past him, dropping her heels on the ground on her way in and began to walk around. “Big island kitchen,” She pointed over to where the kitchen is, “Long dinner table,” She was shaking her head in irritation but walked forward and over to the windows, “A view of the city and central park.” She spun on her heel and headed up the stairs. Carter quickly followed her. She wasn’t in the
hallway once he made it to the very top of the stairs, but he heard her, “California freaking King bed!” She yelled from inside the master bedroom. When he walked into his bedroom she wasn’t in it, but he knew where she’d be next. So, he went to the master bathroom where she was now sitting on the floor right in front of the shower.

But she didn’t say anything, she just looked at the large shower with glass doors.

“You cheated on me.” Brooke finally said, not looking at him, only staring at the shower. “You made that decision – why do all of this?” She motioned around, and Carter understood that she meant the penthouse. He couldn’t answer; because if he told her it was because he was still in love with her she would leave. If he told her that it was because he hoped someday she’d come back to him and they could start their lives together again. Because she would leave, and he probably wouldn’t hear from her ever again.

So, he didn’t answer. That’s when Brooke let out a little cry, her head falling in her hands as she moved her knees to her chest. He felt his heart shattering hearing the sound of her crying and Carter moved so that he was in front of her, moving down to sit on his knees. “I’m sorry.” He whispered, and Brooke moved her hands away from her face, tears were flowing down her cheeks and Carter had to take in a quick breath at the sight. His mind flashed to the look in her eyes when she had watched him with Blair. Brooke looked at him for a long moment before she moved forward slowly, pressing a soft kiss to his lips, so feather light he almost didn’t feel it.

It caught him off guard. Brooke kissing him was the last thing he expected – but she grabbed his face in her hands now and pressed a much harder kiss to his lips. Out of instinct, Carter’s hands moved to her hips and he lifted her while he stood up, her legs wrapped around his hips while her fingers skimmed along his scalp gently. He took her to his bed, the bed she had told him that she had wanted, he undressed her slowly and took his time. She didn’t stop him, didn’t tell him to hurry up or fuck off. Brooke went along with it. It was gentle and slow, and his heart raced as he listened to her let out small moans. His hips picked up more speed to their matched rhythm and instead of burying his head in her neck, he continued to kiss her, one hand keeping him up while the other gripped onto her hair. Their eyes locked when they both came to their end and afterwards Carter pressed soft kisses to the corners of her mouth, down her jawline, and then pressed soft kisses right where her heart was. It wasn’t just a fuck like it had been the last few times they had sex – no, this was very different. It was something Carter hadn’t done with anyone in a very long time, not since Brooke. They had made love and he was terrified.

Because he knew this was something Brooke probably had never wanted to happen.

And that because it did happen – she’d try to pull away from him.

And that’s exactly what happened.

When he pulled out of her, he watched as her body tensed and her head rolled to the side, a way to avoid looking at him. Carter sat up and Brooke did as well, covering herself with one of his pillows.

He stayed quiet just staring at her, but she refused to look at him.

“That was a moment of weakness.” Brooke whispered.

He nodded his head. Because at least she was still in his bed, she hadn’t run out the door screaming at him what a terrible mistake it was.

“If this…thing is going to continue to happen…we can’t have another night like this.” She told him. “-If it happens again…I’m done.”
“Okay.” He agreed but felt his heart aching at the mere thought of not being able to be with Brooke like that ever again.

“Can you hand me my dress?” Brooke finally looked back at him.

Carter got up off the bed and walked over to where he had tossed her dress after discarding it. He walked over to Brooke and handed it to her. Her eyes met his briefly before she took the dress from him and quickly pulled it back on. Carter put on his boxers and watched as Brooke stood up, the zipper to her dress undone. “Do you need help with that?” He asked her, his voice quiet, almost shy.

She nodded, turning her back to him. He gently moved her hair over her shoulder once he was behind her and began to zip her up, he did it slowly to try and have a little extra time with her before she would leave. But you could only zip up someone’s dress so slowly.

“You’re good.” He said, dropping his hand once she was all zipped up.

“Thanks.” She mumbled, moving to grab the rest of her things.

Brooke headed toward the door after she had gathered everything that belonged to her and Carter couldn’t help himself, he called out her name. “-Brooke,”

She stopped, her head hanging low as she looked down at the ground. “Goodnight, Carter.”

She left.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos/Comments/Feedback is always appreciated! Hopefully you guys enjoyed this chapter! I loved writing it!
Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes! I'll try and look through it again to see if I missed anything! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
She hadn’t meant for it to happen.

Brooke had been having the best night – it had been so long since she had a night like this. She had been happy and was having so much fun with her friends, she had even danced the night away with some handsome twenty-something year old named Craig. But when it came time to leave, and he asked her if she wanted to go back to his place; Brooke had declined. Instead, she took a cab home and went to the very top floor of the building. Carter had a penthouse in the building – the building she dreamed of having a penthouse in. She had wanted the very top floor thirteen years ago, so, Brooke had to assume that Carter had bought the one she wanted. But why?

He had cheated on her. He had broken her heart, he had ruined their relationship! Did he buy the penthouse out of spite? And then she had gone inside and saw that everything they once talked about having in the penthouse was there. Carter had done it all and she was so confused. When she asked him why he didn’t give her an answer, he only apologized. And her emotions were overwhelming, and she wanted to quiet the noise in her head telling her that maybe Carter did still love her. And Brooke knew that there was always one solid way to get the voices out of her head. So, she kissed Carter. It was so soft and gentle and when she pulled away from him, his eyes were big and wild. And before she knew it, she had surged forward and kissed him again.

Swept up in the moment.

That’s what she told herself it was. Because she couldn’t lie to herself and say it was because she was drunk because she had sobered up quite quickly on her ride back to the apartment building thinking about Carter and the penthouse and the never-ending string of ‘Why’d he buy the penthouse?’, questions running in her head, getting louder and louder each time they got closer to the building.

Swept up in the moment, that’s why she didn’t object to him taking his time, it’s why she didn’t hide her face or look away when his eyes would lock with hers and didn’t turn her head so that his kisses wouldn’t reach her mouth. Brooke kissed him back just as soft yet eager as he kissed her. Brooke hadn’t urged him to pick up the pace because if felt so nice and familiar and she knew that soon enough the pace would pick up – because they had done this so many times before.

(thirteen years ago)

When they had sex recently – it was not like that. It wasn’t the sex they had when Brooke was so in love with Carter she could feel it throughout her entire body.

But she didn’t stop it.

Because if felt good and she liked hearing him moan out her name while they kissed.

Mistake. That’s what it was. And it wouldn’t happen again. She wouldn’t let it happen again. Ever. Because it left her feeling vulnerable and somehow even more naked than she already had been, like Carter had seen a part of her she hadn’t shown anyone in years – the part of her that only he had ever
seen. And he didn’t deserve to see that side of her again! Not after what he had done!

Brooke could have told him right afterwards that she was done. That they would no longer be having sex. But the words failed to ever leave her mouth, they only stayed in the back on her head and were so quiet now it was barely a whisper. Because Brooke didn’t want to stop having sex with him because it was fun and felt good and relieved her stress and why shouldn’t she enjoy herself? This one time would not change things – it wouldn’t make her question how she felt about him because she didn’t feel anything. Brooke felt nothing for Carter. He was a warm body she could use whenever she needed to. And if he was okay with that – she would continue to use him whenever she pleased.

She pressed her back against the cushioned headboard on her bed and frowned. It was nine in the morning and Brooke had wanted to sleep all day – but her mind was buzzing and would not shut up. So, she moved forward a bit and grabbed her iPad and facetime Peyton.

It was nine in the morning and with Peyton on the east coast too, she knew that she wouldn’t be waking her. But it was 6 AM in Seattle, and when Brooke conferenced called Haley into the facetime call – she knew that Haley would be a bit grumpy.

Peyton’s face appeared on her screen, “What up, B. Davis.”

“Hold on, okay?” Brooke said, and Peyton nodded, not asking any questions when Brooke’s screen went gray abruptly.

Thankfully Apple had advanced over the last thirteen years and had finally added group FaceTime calls to their iOS system.

Her face was on the bottom of the screen now as they picture broke into two; Peyton on once side and the other side read…Calling Tutor-Girl.

“Brooke, it’s 6 AM! Haley is gonna be pissed!” Peyton said.

And then Haley’s face appeared on the screen and she did not look pleased.

“One of you better be getting murdered right now and I’m your only hope you have to save your life otherwise I’m going to be furious that you are calling me on a morning that I am kid free and get to sleep in.” Haley grumbled.

“I have to tell you guys something.” Brooke blurted out.

“Oh God – what did you do now?” They both said.

“I’m uh,” She paused, trying to figure out how to tell them. “I’m gonna be a mom. Or, I am a mom.”

“Qu’est-ce que c’est?” Haley said.

Brooke groaned, “-Hales, I don’t know what you’re saying!” She complained.

“And we don’t know what you’re saying, Brooke,” Peyton said for both her and Haley. “What do you mean you’re going to be a mom – or that you already are one?”

“The adoption agency is flying out on Monday with a baby. Her name is Angie, she’s five months old.”

“Holy shit.” Peyton breathed out.
“Are you joking?” Haley asked.

“-Like, the paperwork has been signed, right?”

“Yes, I signed everything – and when the adoption agent is in New York, we’re getting a notary to go over the documents and then…Angie is mine.”

“Holy shit.” Haley now said.

“We have to fly out!” Peyton said in a laugh that sounded more like a sob, “We have to be there for you when she gets to New York.”

“How do I minimize this without hanging up? I’m getting us tickets, Peyton.”

“Guys,”

“Dammit, how the hell do I minimize this screen. Fuck it, I’m getting my laptop.”

“You guys!” Brooke said louder, a smile on her face. “Stop.”

“What? No! We have to get tickets!” Peyton argued.

“I love you guy so much for wanting to be here to help me but…I’m going to be doing this alone. Not just bringing her home for the first time – but raising her. I’m going to do it alone.”

“But you don’t have to, Brooke.” Haley said softly, “You’ll never be alone in this. You are a part of our families and we damn well better be apart of yours!”

Brooke couldn’t help but laugh, wiping a tear that had fallen. “Of course, you are!” She assured them. “-But I need to learn how to do this on my own – without relying on you guys to help me. You can’t fly out every time I don’t know how to do something…I got to do this on my own. And plus, yknow, Rachel is here. She’s living in Manhattan now, so she can always help.”

“Ugh.” Both Peyton and Haley groaned, and she narrowed her eyes at them both. “Sorry if I don’t think that Rachel is the best person to help you raise a baby, Brooke.” Haley said.

“And if you think for a second that Rachel is going to be Angie’s Godmother, I will sue you.” Peyton said.

“Yeah, because everyone on this call knows that Godmother belongs to me.” Haley added.

“Um, I object.” Peyton said and the two began to playfully picker over who would be Angie’s Godmother.

But she didn’t have the heart to tell them that she had already chosen a Godmother and Godfather. Nate and Caroline.

“Girl,” Brooke laughed, watching them on the screen, “-The only thing I need from you is advice, like – Hales, you used cloth diapers, right?”

“I did. And it saves on money but you will constantly be doing laundry.” Haley told her.

“Yeah, and we all know that you are shit at doing laundry.” Peyton added.

Brooke ignored Peyton’s teasing and went back to her questions, “Okay – well, what about baby
monitors? I already have one in the room but I-"

“Show us the room!” They both yelled in excitement.

Brooke laughed and got out of bed and walked out of her bedroom and down the hall to where Angie’s bedroom was. “-Nate is coming over in a bit and we’re going to be painting the room.” Brooke told them.

“Brooke – you can’t do that!”

She turned the camera so it was front facing again and looked at Haley, who had been the one to tell her should couldn’t pain. “-Why not?”

“Angie is coming tomorrow, Brooke. It’s too dangerous to have a baby sleep in a room that was just painted.” Haley explained.

“Hold up, I’m googling this.” Peyton said, “There is a paint brand that is safe. You can paint the room and sleep in it that night. But, it’s expensive.”

Brooke scoffed at that, “Did you see the crib? I clearly don’t give a shit about spending money, Peyt. What’s the name of the paint?”

“It’s Zero-VOC. I’ll text you the places you can get the paint in your area.” Peyton sent the stores as well as the information about the paint that she would need to give the guys who worked there and make sure that they gave her the right kind of paint. “This is so big, Brooke.” Peyton said with teary eyes.

“I am so happy for you.” Haley added, tears flowing freely out of her eyes.

Brooke began to tear up, too. “I keep think I’m dreaming.”

“You were born to be a mom, Brooke.” Haley said.

They hung up shortly after and Brooke texted Nate telling him to meet her at the address Peyton had sent her.

---

**Nate Archibald (9:43 AM):**

I am so sorry, Brooke. I can’t help today

I’m swamped with work

I can send my intern
Brooke frowned but texted him back telling him it was okay and that she’d ask Caroline to come help, but he texted her back quickly after she had sent the message.

**Nate Archibald (9:44 AM):**
*Caroline is in Brooklyn all day*
*em>What about Serena and Dan?*

She frowned again. Because Serena had been the first person she had asked to help paint Angie’s room but she and Dan were in the Hamptons visiting Lily.

**Brooke Davis (9:46 AM):**
*Don’t worry about it, Nate.***
*I’ll be fine.*
Brooke thought about calling Blair but she knew that Blair would simply send Dorota. She doubted that either Blair or Chuck had ever decorated/painted a room before.

Vanessa?

No, that would be weird. Especially after last night with Carter.

-You are a strong independent woman. You are going to be a mother and you can do anything you put your mind to. You are capable of painting a bedroom by yourself. You’ve done it before-

But Brooke wanted everything to be absolutely perfect.

And she really dreaded the fact that she had to move all of Angie’s furniture out of the room after she and Serena had set it all up because at the last-minute Brooke decided that she wanted the room to be a lavender purple. FML.

She kind of wished that she had let Haley buy tickets for her and Peyton that way she’d have some help. Victoria and Ted were still out of town and she hadn’t heard from her actual father since two Christmas’ ago and that was just a holiday card of him and his new twenty-something year old bimbo girlfriend.

-You’re about to be a single mom, you’re going to have to learn how to do this shit! You don’t need anyone’s help!

She left the bedroom and went and got dressed, wearing black leggings and an old t-shirt that she didn’t mind getting paint on, she called the store that Peyton had sent Brooke the address to and ordered the paint, they told her that it would be ready within two hours and she pulled her hair up into a messy bun and got started.

Brooke Davis was a capable woman. She could do this on her own! There was nothing she couldn’t do!

That’s what she kept telling herself.
“I feel bad.”

Caroline frowned as Nate continued to talk about how he completely bailed on Brooke because of work. She knew that Brooke would understand – she was running one of the biggest fashion lines in the world and understood that sometimes work came first, whether they liked it or not.

“Babe, there’s nothing you could do. You’re in charge – they need you at the office. Brooke get’s that.”

“I know – but I also know how anxious she is about all of this and you know he starts to stress out over the littlest things and when someone isn’t there to calm her down she just-”

“Does something drastic? Yeah, I know.” Caroline sighed. She was stuck in back to back meetings all day in Brooklyn, her only break was right now and she was using that to check in with her fiancé. She wished that she could be there to help Brooke – but there was no way that she could miss these meetings. Her job depended on it. “Is there no one else that can help?” Caroline asked.

“When I called her to suggest reaching out to someone to help her she told me that Blair would only send Dorota, Serena and Dan are visiting Lily, and Vanessa is busy.” Nate told Caroline.

“What about Rachel?”

“She’s looking at an apartment in SoHo today and Brooke said that Rachel is shit at painting and would only cause more work than get any done.”

And then she had an idea.

One that was extremely stupid and would probably bite her in the ass later. But Nate was worried about Brooke, and so was she – and unless Brooke was willing to call into Davis Enterprises and tell her interns to help her – there was no way Brooke was going to get everything done which would cause her to freak out and question her ability to raise a child.

She could almost hear Brooke now; How am I going to be able to raise a baby if I can’t even put
“Carter?” Caroline suggested.

Nate laughed.

“I’m serious.” She said, “-I mean, maybe it can kind of be a test run? I know that we both want Brooke to be one of my bridesmaids and I would really love it if Carter was one of your groomsmen…so,” She drew out the word. “…Nate?”

He sighed, “I don’t think this is a good idea.”

“It’s our only option right now.”

That wasn’t exactly truthful.

Because Brooke could call in help from her interns or let Dorota help. Though, Caroline really doubted that Dorota would be able to move furniture and reach high enough to paint the walls (even on a ladder) and Caroline had gone to C/B to have lunch with Victoria and her interns were incredibly stupid. Like, insanely stupid. Caroline had thought that Victoria had been over exaggerating but them bitches were dumb.

“Well, for starters; Brooke might murder Carter. And even though you two have your moments, you would miss him if Brooke killed him and I don’t want Brooke to go to prison.” Caroline had to laugh at that. “And…the two of them alone?”

That made Caroline laugh harder, “I really doubt Brooke would ever have sex with Carter again. I mean, she’s moved on. She got married!”

“And now she’s divorced, Care.”

“-Yeah, because her husband cheated on her. Something that Carter did. I don’t think Brooke would get into bed with Carter again after everything that happened with Julian. She doesn’t trust anyone – she had the opportunity to go home with an incredibly hot guy last night and didn’t. Brooke is not ready to have sex with anyone.”

“First, I want to tell you how much I love that you’re comfortable enough with me to talk about how hot other guys are-”

“Incredibly hot.” Caroline smirked,

“Yes, how could I miss the word incredibly.” He chuckled, “-And as for Brooke taking a break from men right now – it’s Carter.”

“He is not dumb enough to try and sleep with her.” Caroline said, “He bitches when he gets a paper cut, I doubt he’d be willing to take the risk of getting stabbed if he tried to make a move on Brooke.”

Nate laughed at her words, “Okay.” He reluctantly agreed, “-if you think it’s a good idea go ahead and call him. But you’re also in charge of telling Brooke that he’s going to help her.”

Hmmm. Maybe she could just skip that part.

“Okay, bye babe! Love you!”

“-Caroline, call her-”
She hung up.

Brooke and Carter and their history was so messy but Caroline also knew that Carter was one of the few people who really knew Brooke (still – because despite what she said; Brooke was still the same person she had always been, just a bit older) and he also knew when to say something to Brooke and when to shut up. And that’s what she needed today. Someone who knew how to calm her down or take her mind off of things (NOT SEX) and to keep their mouth closed when need be and say something when she needed to hear it.

So, she called Carter.

“Hey,” Carter answered the phone.

“Hi.”

“I know that tone. What do you want?”

She sighed, “Your help?”

“With what?”

“Brooke?”

He was quiet.

“Carter?”

“You’re asking me to help you with Brooke?” He asked, almost needing her to say it again.

“-Angie is coming tomorrow and at the last minute Brooke decided that she wants to paint the room and so she’s moving all the furniture out of the room and you know that she’s not the strongest woman, and she’s not exactly the tallest either so when she does start to paint it’s not going to be pretty and you know how she get’s when things aren’t going her way – she freaks out and starts questioning everything and she’s already got enough anxiety that she’s holding in and doesn’t need more-”

“Okay.”

“-Stress and…wait…did you say okay?”

“Yeah.”

“…Won’t this be weird for you?”

She could hear him shifting on whatever he was sitting on. Caroline knew that Carter had Sundays off and had become a bit of a homebody so there was a good chance that he was at home. “I want to help Brooke.”

Caroline knew he did. It’s all he had been doing since she got to New York, Brooke just didn’t know it.

“Okay.”

Crap.

Now she was going to have to tell Brooke that Carter was going to help her with the nursery.
“Um, can you give me like ten minutes and then I’ll call you back?”

He chuckled, “Talk to you in ten.”

Caroline thanked him and then hung up and called Brooke.

“Please tell me that you got out of your meetings and you’re on your way to my apartment to help me?” Brooke said in a rushed tone. Caroline could hear the sound of people talking and sirens in the distance. She wasn’t at her apartment. “-Because I am freaking the fuck out. I just left to get the paint and all of the furniture isn’t even out of her room – not to mention that I don’t have that weird tarp thing people use to cover the carpet while they paint.”

“I am not on my way to your apartment, but I am sending reinforcements.” Caroline told Brooke.

“Oh, thank God! Who are you sending to help?”

She bit down on her lip, bracing herself from getting an earful from Brooke. “Carter.”

Brooke was quiet but after a moment she started talking again, “Whatever,” Brooke said, causing Caroline to blink in surprise. “-I just need help. If you told me that Georgina was on her way to my apartment right now I would still accept the help. Just let him know that I’m not at the apartment right now and to wait for me.”

“Really?” Caroline said, still surprised.

“Yes, I got to go. I’m running into the paint place.”

Brooke hung up.

She had taken that surprisingly well. Caroline had thought that Brooke would have screamed at her seeing as not too long ago; no one was allowed to utter Carter’s name around Brooke. And now she was accepting his help a lot. Legal help. The apartment. And now she was okay with him helping her paint and set up Angie’s bedroom.

…maybe Brooke had…forgiven him?

Or she was desperate.

Either way, it kind of worked out in Caroline’s favor because she did really want both of them to be in the wedding party. Vanessa would be her maid of honor and Brooke would be her other bridesmaid. Chuck would be Nate’s best man and Carter would be his other groomsmen. They were also considering asking Serena and Dan to be in the wedding too, but Caroline wasn’t too keen on having three bridesmaids that have slept with her soon to be husband. Maybe it just being Vanessa, Brooke, Chuck, and Carter would be easier.

Awkward. But easier for Caroline.

*The bride was allowed to be selfish on her big day – Brooke had said that.*

Caroline called Carter and told him to wait for Brooke at her place and then went back into the boardroom for the next meeting she had.

*Please, please, please don’t kill my brother, Brooke.*
Carter had moved the last of Angie’s things out of the nursery and covered the carpet with the large tarp Brooke had bought. She was sitting in the middle of the room looking at the wall in front of her, absolutely still. He didn’t say anything; he knew that she was thinking and not over-analyzing. When Brooke would over-analyze something, she was very vocal and bounce off the walls with pent up energy. He began to open up the cans and poured them into the roller tray after stirring the paint.

Brooke had gotten everything. Literally. Double what she needed.

He had already set up the blue painter’s tape on the very bottom of the wall where the crown molding started, and the very top to protect it. He did the same with the wall that had the large window that looked over Central Park.

She still sat in the middle of the room looking at the wall, her leg now bouncing.

“What wall first?” Carter asked, moving forward to stand next to Brooke. Her leg stopped bouncing was he was standing in the middle of the room, where she was still seated. “I think we should start with the one that has the window – it’ll be the easiest one.”

He looked down at her and she nodded her head, now looking at the wall with the window.

“Alright,” Carter said, extending his hand for Brooke to grab a hold of to help her stand up. She took it without any hesitance and was soon walking over to the roller tray and took the paint roller that he had set aside for her. “You take the left side, I’ll take the right.”

Brooke didn’t say anything, she just grabbed the tray of paint and motioned for him to grab the rollers and follow after her. He did, and soon after, they started painting the first wall.

The first wall actually wasn’t the easiest and Carter knew that – but if they did it last, Brooke would get stressed out and discouraged after everything had been going so smoothly and freak out and start to question herself. But, she was taking it very well. In fact, Brooke was taking it on like it was a challenge.

“When we were ten, Peyton and I painted her room without telling her Dad and he was so mad.”
Brooke said with a little chuckle as they painted the second wall. “We got paint all over her carpet and her Dad had to tear it up after spending days trying to get the paint out.”

Carter chuckled, listening as she spoke. Brooke was always chatty. And a good way to keep her mind off of what was stressing her out (other than sex) was to get her talking and stay quiet and listen.

“The last time I had seen him that angry was when we were making cookies,”

“Brookies,” He said with a chuckle, not able to stop himself. *Fuck.*

Her past, *their* past. Brooke had told him about growing up and her friends and he could still remember how red her face got when he teased her about *Brookies* and told her that she should go into marketing. He remembered how Brooke had finally jumped at him and pushed him down on the couch and pinched at his sides until he was laughing so hard he could barely breath. Carter had surrendered, hands raised up in defeat. And Brooke had smiled happily at him and then pressed her lips down against his in a sweet kiss. *That* had been before anyone even knew they were dating. It was while they were sneaking around and getting to know each other. And he remembered how green her eyes looked while she smiled down at him and he knew without a doubt that he was in love with her.

Carter quickly cleared his throat and focused on the wall instead of saying anything else. But he could feel her eyes on him.

“Yeah,” She said quietly.

And now she was uncomfortable. He inhaled and tried to think of a way to change the subject. “-I hired people to paint my penthouse.”

*Shit. Shit. Shit.* God! Shut the fuck up! Why the fuck would you bring up the penthouse? *Fuck!*

“-That’s not surprising.” Brooke chuckled and Carter exhaled in relief that it hadn’t upset her, the mere mention of him buying the penthouse, (the one they dreamed of having together) “I mean, I never saw you as a hands-on type of guy when it came to décor.”

He laughed, “I wasn’t.” Carter admitted. “But I pissed off the painters and they refused to finish the job,” He shook his head and chuckled again, remembering how the older man with a thick New York accent had called him a jagoff and a spoiled trust-fund baby, “-They even gave me back the money that I had already paid them for the job.”

“Diva.” Brooke said with a little laugh.

It was odd.

They were talking and it wasn’t after sex or before – they were just…talking. And he had started it as trying to keep Brooke’s mind off of her worries. But now she was teasing him and her tone was light and it almost felt like they were…friends?

“Well, since I am such a diva,” He smirked over at Brooke, “-It left me with insanely good painting skills, as you can clearly see.”

Brooke laughed, “Obviously, I’m not blind.”

He was grinning so hard his cheeks were starting to hurt.
“What did you do to piss them off?” Brooke asked.

“I don’t remember,” He lied. “I probably was just being a diva.”

She looked over at him and smiled before turning her attention back to the wall.

Carter had pissed them off because he threw a fucking fit when they had put a chip in the long dining room table that he had bought. The one that Brooke had wanted. One of the painters had knocked into it with a paint can and that was the breaking point for Carter. He had bought the penthouse after Brooke got engaged to Julian. After things with Vanessa ended for good (you don’t come back from calling the girl you’re sleeping with by your ex-girlfriend’s name in bed) he had decided to finally do it. To make an offer on the penthouse. Carter remembered every single thing Brooke had wanted in the penthouse, every single specific last detail. And when one of the painters had chipped his table he lost it. Because there was a reason he got the penthouse. And it was Brooke. And if someday she came back to him she would have everything she had ever wanted.

“Are you hungry?” Brooke asked, breaking him away from his thoughts, “I’m starving.”

Carter smiled, “I could eat something.”

Brooke set her roller down and wiped her hands on her pants, “I had planned on going grocery shopping when Nate was here because I was going to have him do everything,” She confessed with a guilty smiled that caused Carter to full on grin as he set down his roller, too. “-So, I don’t have food. But we can order take-out.”

“Thai?”

Her smiled disappeared. Carter looked away from her; the last thing they ate together was Thai food. Carter hadn’t forgotten that – he just knew that it was one of Brookes favorite take-out meals. But she obviously remembered that the last meal their shared was Thai take-out. They had Thai food together, fought about Brooke going to school in California, he had left, he came back and proposed, Brooke turned down his proposal, and then Carter made the worst mistake of his life by going out to get drunk and then ended up cheating on Brooke with Blair.

“Or pizza? Indian?” He began to list more. “Or, yaknow what – you can go get some groceries and I’ll just finish everything.”

Brooke pulled out her phone and tapped her finger against the screen and began to scroll with her finger, “I’m not going to make you do all of the work, Carter. You’ve done enough for me.” He blinked in surprise, not expecting it. “-You still like Pad Thai?” She asked, tapping down on her phone and then put it to her ear. That had surprised him, too.

“I’m good with anything.” Carter told her, still in shock that she hadn’t kicked him out yet.

She ordered their food and then left the room, telling him that she was going to go online and virtual grocery shop so she can have it delivered to her apartment later tonight. He continued to paint while she ordered her groceries online. About twenty minutes later there was a knock on Brookes door and Carter moved across the room over to where he had set down his wallet, getting money out to pay for the food. He walked out of the room and down the hall until he heard Brooke let out an awkward laugh.

“Vanessa!” She said loudly, “I, what are you doing here?” She asked, still pretty loud.

“Caroline told yesterday about you re-doing Angie’s nursery and I know that she’s in meetings all day and that Nate is stuck at work so I figured I’d offer you my help!”
What the fuck was Vanessa doing here?

“Um,” Brooke said, “-That’s so sweet.” She told her, “But the room is done and I’m about to go out and buy some groceries so that when the adoption agent comes to inspect the house she will see that I don’t just live on take-out food.”

Vanessa chuckled, “Yeah. That’s probably smart.” She agreed. “-Well, do you want some company?”

Holy fucking shit. Was this actually happening?

Brooke was quiet for a moment and then said something surprising, “Yeah! Sure, uh, let’s go!”

And then the door shut.

Carter walked out of the hallway and saw that the apartment was now empty and Brookes keys and purse was gone. And then his phone buzzed in his jeans.

---

Brooke Davis (1:14 PM):

Do not eat all the Thai food
I’ll pay you back for the food and groceries
sorry.

Wow. That really fucking happened.

Carter was shocked but went back and finished painting Angie’s nursery.

The Thai food came, as did the groceries Brooke had ordered. Carter put away Brookes groceries and put the take-out food in the fridge so it wouldn’t go bad. He cleared out all of the paint supplies and the tarp out of Angie’s bedroom and then went and sat in it in case Vanessa came back to the apartment with Brooke. He hoped that she would at least text him a heads up so he could leave before they showed up.

It had been two hours and Carter stayed in the room, sitting in the rocking chair Brooke had gotten. He had brought it back in the room and placed it in the center of the now lavender colored bedroom and waited, his phone glued to his hand in case Brooke texted him.

“Hey,”

Carter jumped a bit in surprise and turned around to see that Brooke was now laughing at his
response to her sneaking up on him. “-When did you get back?”

She cleared her throat, sobering up, “Just a few seconds ago. Vanessa wanted to help me bring the groceries up but I only bought two bags worth of stuff so I told her I could handle it.” Brooke walked in and began to inspect the painted walls.

Carter stood up, walking over to where she was standing. “Told you I’m good.”

She let out a huff of a laugh and shook her head at his cockiness, “It does look nice.” Brooke then turned to face him, “Please tell me that you ate some of the Thai food.” He shook his head and she threw her head back and groaned, “Damnit. Vanessa and I went out for lunch.” He bit down on his lower lip to hold back his laughter, “-I felt weird texting you while I was at lunch with her but I had a feeling you were going to wait,” She said the word in annoyance, “-I should have trusted my gut.”

Carter ginned, licking at her lower lip now. “It’s fine.” He said, “-I like take-out when it’s cold, anyway.”

“I know,” She said with a smile and then quickly looked away from him, probably realizing that she had said it out loud. “Um,” Brooke was at a loss for words apparently, “Food. Let’s…get you food.”

Carter watched as she hurried out of Angie’s nursery and maneuvered her way past the furniture that was still in the hallway. He followed after her and walked through the living room until he was in the kitchen, leaning against the counter as Brooke grabbed the Thai take-out from the refrigerator and then grabbed a plate so that he could dish up.

He took the plate from her, noticing that she was doing everything in her power to avoid his eyes. He couldn’t help but smirk a little, seeing that the tables had turned. Carter constantly was having to watch what he said around Brooke, fearing that he’d bring up the past and she’d close herself off to him again. Because he couldn’t take another thirteen years of not having Brooke in his life.

“-I’m going to go change out of these clothes,” Brooke told him, finally looking up at Carter, “-Because apparently walking around downtown Manhattan with paint stains on your lazy day clothes is the best way to get caught by the paparazzi.”

Carter nodded, chuckling his head. “Okay.”

She nodded her head and left him in the kitchen.

For once, the tension between them wasn’t awkward…it was something else entirely. Not sexual tension, not anger – it was just…different. A good different.

He ate his food but Brooke never came out so when he was done eating, he washed his dishes and headed towards the hallway and found Brooke back in Angie’s bedroom sitting on the rocking chair while holding the purple monkey to his chest.

Carter swallowed hard, he had searched every fucking toy store to find a purple monkey for Brooke, he even went through the back rooms of the store to see if they had any in back. He had finally found an old second-hand shop in Queens and found it. The purple monkey. Carter had blinked at it in disbelief, nearly pinching himself to make sure that he wasn’t actually passed out somewhere from looking for the monkey all over the city. But he was awake and it was right in front of him so he grabbed the monkey and paid the owner of the shop one hundred dollars for an eight-dollar purple monkey because it was worth so much more to Brooke. He had left it on top of the boxes out front of Brookes apartment door while things were being delivered and went back to work.

“You want to start moving furniture?” He asked, causing her to look up at him.
She nodded her head, looking like she was lost in thought even while looking right at him.

It left him feeling like his entire body was on fire.

Brooke laid on the floor of Angie’s nursery and took in a deep breath, they had finally moved the last of the furniture to where it needed to be and Carter was now unloading the boxes full of baby clothes Brooke had bought for Angie. “I need to start working out again,” Brooke huffed, using her hands to push herself up a bit. Carter laughed and shook his head, disagreeing with her. “-I can barely catch my breath. That changing station was so fucking heavy!”

Carter moved to stand over her, grabbing her hand and lifting her up off the ground, “Come on, I know how particular you are about what goes where.”

Brooke couldn’t help but smirk a little, letting him pull her towards the box of clothes that he had placed on top of Angie’s dresser, “That’s an awfully polite way of calling me neurotic.”

“What can I say, I’m a lawyer.” Carter said with his own smirk once they were standing in front of the dresser. “-You do realize that you are only adopting one baby, right?”

“Ha!” Brooke laughed as he pointed out how many outfits and onesies Brooke had gotten Angie. “-Dude, do you have any idea how messy babies are?”

“Yes, dude,” He teased her choice of word causing her to roll her eyes as she smiled. It was odd how comfortable she felt right now with Carter. They weren’t fighting, and they weren’t tip-toeing around the other like they had been earlier, they were just having a good time. And sex wasn’t even involved! Which was the only time Brooke actually enjoyed Carters company.

-He broke your heart-
She ignored the voice and listened on as Carter told her that buying over a hundred baby onesies ranging from various sizes was a ‘bit much’. Which only made her laugh harder. “Oh my god, have you ever even been around a baby?”

He scoffed, “Of course I have. Babies fucking love me, Davis.” Carter said, matter-of-factly.

Brooke couldn’t help but snort at that, “I’m sure.”

“You’ll see.” He told her.

If he had said that a few days ago she would have lashed out at him and told him that he was going to have no part in Angie’s life – that he was nothing to her except a body to use. But here she was, putting together Angie’s nursery, most definitely not having sex with Carter, and actually enjoying herself. Brooke wasn’t telling him to get the fuck out or feeling like her world was crumbling whenever she looked at him (usually the only way to get rid of that feeling was to have sex with him). She felt…content.

They put away the rest of Angie’s clothes (well, Brooke did, because as Carter had pointed out earlier; she was particular about certain things and he was totally folding the onesies wrong) and then they set up the crib and Carter had hung up the curtains that Brooke had bought while she laid out the rug on the floor and then went to work on organizing the bookshelf with all the books she had bought. Haley and Peyton were sending a few of their favorite books that they had read to their kids but gave her a decent amount of book recommendations.

Everything was perfect.

“Hey, did you get baby food or formula?” Carter asked as he emptied out the large box of diapers into the drawers of the changing stations.

Brooke froze.

“Fuck!” She said loudly as it dawned on her that she had bought everything Angie might possible need except for fucking food! “Holy fuck.” Brooke quickly ran to her phone and check the time. The sun had already set and thankfully most places in the city were twenty-four hours but Brooke had really wanted to get a decent amount of sleep before she had to meet the adoption case worker and Angie at the airport tomorrow morning. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!” She yelled. “How the actual hell could I forget to get that?!” She paced around the nursery.

“Hey, hey,” Carter said, moving in front of her and gently placing his hands on her arms. “I’ll go pick some up, okay?”

Brooke felt his thumb gently rubbing against her skin and felt her heart rate finally slow down to its normal pace and her panic slowly leave her body. “It’s a brand and it has to be that brand because with her heart condition—”

He was in front of her again and caught her by surprise by moving his hands to her cheeks and pressed his lips to hers in an agonizingly slow kiss that literally took her breath away. He pulled away slowly, pressing his forehead against hers while his hands still cupped her cheeks.

“Why’d you do that?” Brooke whispered, licking at her lips, eyes still closed.

“Because,” He whispered back and she could hear the smile in his voice, “It’s always been a sure
way to shut you up.” Carter told her, “-And you’re about to be a mom so I figured…this might be my last chance to kiss you. And I wanted it to be one that I’d never forget.”

His hands dropped from her cheeks and Brooke felt a breeze of air from him quickly taking a step away from her. But she still kept her eyes closed.

“-Text me the information and I’ll go get it. Go to bed.”

“But,” Her eyes now opened and saw that she was alone in the room, but still, Carter managed to cut her off from saying anything further.

“-I’ll lock the apartment up after I put everything away and then slide the key under the door. Don’t worry.”

Brooke blinked, still in complete shock from what had just happened.

-You shouldn’t have let that happen

-He was just doing it because he knows you and knows how to get you to stop freaking out

-He is still in love with you

-He never loved you

-He did…he does.
-Do you still love him?

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos/Comments/Feedback are always appreciated!
Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes - I'll try and look over it again after publishing it! Quick note: Yes, the Lafayette in the beginning is the same one from True Blood. Why? Because I love him. Are there vampires in this story? No. But it does have Lafayette.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“I need an unbiased opinion.”

“Oh God,” Rachel groaned in annoyance as she sat in the chair next to Brooke who in return
narrowed her eyes in a glare at the red head.

They were at the hair salon where Brooke was getting her hair cut and colored. She was tired of the color she had chosen for her wedding to Julian, besides, most of the blonde had grown out leaving her in more of an ombre style color. She was going back to her natural color of brown and cutting her hair to just above her shoulders. Both Haley and Peyton had told Brooke that long hair and babies don’t mix. There was the pulling of hair and the baby’s messy hands that might get in the hair – Brooke wasn’t really sure if Angie was still in the spit up phase but apparently having you kid throw up in your happened at least once or twice to a parent.

“Sure, baby.” The dark-skinned man said as he colored Brookes hair. “Lay it on me.”

It was 7 AM. Brooke had managed to have Rachel convince one of the hottest hairstylist in Manhattan to open up early so that Brooke could have her hair done before she went to pick up Angie at 11 AM. She had wanted to come at 6 AM, but Lafayette said he’d only agree to a 7 AM appointment. He was the best, so Brooke agreed.

“What have you ever had casual sex with an ex?”

Rachel scoffed at Brookes words. “Casual,” She mocked.

“Hush!” Brooke glared.

“That depends on the ex, honey. Are we talking an old fling who you sadly couldn’t work things out with, or is this a hatefuck type of situation?” Lafayette asked Brooke as he ran his fingers through her hair to make sure each strand was colored. He would touch it up later if he missed any pieces, but for now this would have to do. He had wanted to bleach her hair to make it easier to just dye her hair a shade of brown, but Brooke didn’t know if it was safe to have her hair bleached hours before Angie arrived.

“Well,” Brooke pinched her lips together as she tried to pick which category she was currently in. “I mean, it’s not exactly a hate fuck. The first time I was drunk and finally feeling like I was free from my now ex-husband,”

“Mmhm.” Lafayette nodded his head, telling her to go on.

“-And we had sex but right after I left. Like, no post coital snuggling, I didn’t even acknowledge him, really. Like, I got the fuck out of there – I even left my high heels.” The hair stylist laughed at Brookes words.

“And then Brookie here went to his office after an actual date,” Rachel spoke up, not letting Brooke continue on. “-And he went down on her on his desk.”

“Damn, baby.” Lafayette teased with a little chuckle.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t really count as sex.”

“Did you preform on him?”

Brooke opened her mouth to answer but she didn’t get the chance, “-No, she did not. Because she pulled up her panties and left again.” Rachel said and Lafayette hooted in amusement.

“You are cold!” Lafayette continued to laugh. “Baby, this doesn’t seem like a hatefuck kind of situation, though. Why’d you two break up?”
“-Because he fucked her cousin while they were dating.”

“Rachel!” Brooke hissed and the red head shrugged innocently. When she looked at Lafayette he was frowning at her in the mirror. “It was a long time ago – I was seventeen and we were moving a lot faster than we should have and it was just…one big mess.”

“You loved him though, right?”

Yes, of course she did. But it still stung sometimes when she remembered just how much she had loved Carter and how he had done what he had done like she had meant nothing to him.

Lafayette winced when she didn’t answer. “That’s what I thought. Look, baby, if you want my opinion – you should try and find yourself a good man. I don’t know who this ex of yours is – but I’ve learned that people never really change. The whole being in charge of the sex, which I’m assuming that you, when it comes to this kind situation, can only ever protect your heart so much.”

Brooke hadn’t told Rachel about how she had gone to Carter after the divorce celebration and how the sex was so much more intimate than it had been the last times, and worst – she didn’t tell Rachel that when Carter came back to her apartment last night with baby food and formula for Angie, she had been waiting up for him and used her nerves as an excuse to ask him to spend the night with her.

“You…want me to stay?” She could still hear the shock in Carter’s voice when he had turned around and looked at her with wide eyes, his hand still on the doorknob as he stood in front of her apartment door.

Brooke had been mortified to even ask, “Please…don’t make me beg, Carter.” She had said, avoiding his eyes. “This is already hard enough for me to even ask…” His hand had dropped from the doorknob and he shrugged off his jacket and slipped out of his shoes and walked up to Brooke. “I just…need you to take my mind off of everything.” She had whispered, her eyes still cast down to avoid looking into his gorgeous blue eyes.

“Do you want me to leave afterwards?” Carter had asked.

She had finally looked back up and him and shook her head, “No.”

It wasn’t like the last time they had sex which Brooke was glad for – she was already confused enough about her own feelings when it came to Carter and that would just complicate it even more for her. But she did have sex with him and afterwards they lay in bed together both on their own sides of the bed. Carter was smart enough not to try and cuddle her and she was thankful for that because she didn’t want to snuggle up to him afterwards, she just…didn’t want to be alone. Brooke had been terrified, so terrified that it made her sick to her stomach whenever her mind would run a hundred miles and hour with thoughts of how she might not be a good mother.

But when she woke up around 5 AM this morning, her body was tucked into Carter’s with her head resting against his chest as he slept soundly with his arms wrapped around her. And for a moment she had forgotten everything – she forgot about the past thirteen years that she had spent absolutely hating him and the reason she hated him – she forgot it all because she was tangled up in his arms and it was such a comforting feeling that she didn’t want to let it go.

“I don’t think anyone is going to want to date a newly single mother.” Brooke said with a huff, mostly annoyed because she knew that she was right. Even if she were to start dating someone – who the fuck would want to date her with everything she had going on? Brooke was still running the company from home while getting everything ready for Angie and would be the first few days of having Angie and then Caroline and Nate told her that they’d watch her while Brooke spent a few
hours at work just so word wouldn’t get back to Victoria that she had been in the office maybe seven times since Victoria had left. Brooke would have to take a couple week off after Angie had her surgery but by then, her mother would be back in Manhattan with Howard to take things back over.

Speaking of work…

Brooke frowned at the sound of her phone going off – the ringtone she had assigned to Millicent so that she knew to answer was going off. Brooke motioned for Rachel to grab the phone out of her bag and put it on speaker after putting in her password. Rachel had been her publicist for years, of course she knew all of Brooke’s passwords.

“Yes, Millie?” Brooke said once the phone was on speaker.

“Ms. Davis,”

“-Brooke.” She corrected her.

“Yes, Brooke. I’m sorry. I uh, I’m calling because you were supposed to get back to the Raphael about the design changes-”

“Shit,” Brooke whispered, completely forgetting that she was supposed to get in touch with one of her designers about the changes she needed him to make to one of their spring line dresses. “Yeah, I meant to call you last night – I just blanked.” She looked at Rachel briefly who had kinked up her brow and was smirking, somehow knowing that she had been with Carter. Rachel knew that he had helped her re-do Angie’s bedroom but that was it. “-Tell Raphael that the belt for the black dress for our spring line needs to be a quarter inch wider and the hem a little lower.” She explained. “Also, I am also going to send you the sketches I have been working on this week in a pdf and I’m going to need you to reschedule the conference call with Macy’s.”

“Brooke, you’ve already rescheduled that call three times.”

“And now it’s four times – Millie, I don’t have time to walk you through this, okay? Please just do it.”

“Yeah, of course – but uh, that’s not the only reason why I called.” Millie said and Brooke waited for her to answer. “Victoria has been trying to reach you at the office since you haven’t been answering her calls on your cell and,” She stopped talking.

“Millie?”

“She’s on a private jet back to New York as we speak. But I didn’t tell her anything about Angie – she has just heard rumors that you haven’t been coming to the office and I tried to tell her otherwise but she didn’t believe me and I’m technically fired.”

Brooke let out a long sigh, “You’re not fired, Millie. In fact, you are now my personal assistant. Congrats.”

“Really?”

“Yes. I’ll handle Victoria you just gather your things and I’ll call you tonight.”

“Thank you so much, Brooke!”

Brooke saw Rachel rolling her eyes. For some reason, the redhead did not like Millicent, but Brooke knew that Millie was a good worker and would do well as her personal assistant. Maybe Rachel
didn’t like her because aside from doing all of her publicity; Millie was essentially about to take Rachel’s job. “I’ll talk to you tonight.”

Rachel hung up the phone before Millie could thank Brooke again which made the soon to be brunette playfully glare at Rachel, “You’re doing a very good job at hiding your jealousy, Rach.”

“-Don’t try and change the subject. Lafayette, go on.” Rachel motioned for him to continue. “Tell Brooke that there are plenty of eligible bachelors out there that would totally go for a single mom.”

Lafayette shook his head, “I’m sorry, honey – but I’m not gonna lie to her. She pays me the money.”

Brooke snorted, liking Lafayette’s answer.

“Whatever,” Rachel huffed, “Brooke – I am going to find you a man. You need to get off this dirty old habit you have and stop being such a damn masochist. He fucked Blair because he was mad at you – do not let the sex cloud your mind.”

Brooke frowned. “I’m not letting it cloud my mind.” She tried to argue but both Rachel and Lafayette gave her a skeptical look.

“You’re being nostalgic.”

“No, I’m not!” She denied.

“-Okay, so then there’s only one reason why this thing between you and him is still happening and that is because you are still in love with him.” Rachel didn’t beat around the bush.

She opened her mouth but closed it. *No,* she didn’t…love Carter, right? No. That would be ridiculous – foolish absolutely insane for Brooke to ever love Carter again. No, it – no, she didn’t even have feelings for Carter! The fact that Rachel was insinuating that Brooke could possibly still love Carter was fucking absurd! That was…just out of the realm of possibilities.

Yes, she enjoyed having sex with him and he wasn’t the worst company and he always knew the right thing to say to make her forget about her worries – but that didn’t change the fact that Carter had completely and totally betrayed her trust and broke her heart! It didn’t change that AT ALL. Thirteen years of growth and change did not mean that Brooke could just…forget, right? And it definitely didn’t mean that she could ever love him again!

…I’m not?

“I don’t still love him.” Brooke finally spoke up, “I stopped loving him the day I saw him with Blair.”

“Lies.”

“-Rachel, enough!” Brooke spat out, her tone sharp. “I don’t still love him!”

The rest of the hair appointment was incredibly quiet and only Lafayette would speak, making small talk just to try and ease the awkwardness. *It didn’t make things any less awkward.* Mostly because Brooke was short with him too, out of her anger at Rachel. At the end of the appointment Brooke had apologized for her behavior and tipped him a lot more than was necessary.

“After hearing everything…If you do want my unbiased opinion,” Lafayette said quietly, looking over to where Rachel was now standing outside of the salon. Brooke smiled softly when he looked back at her. “-Listen to your heart. I know your head is probably loud right now reminding you of
the past…but if he’s changed…don’t be so quick to dismiss the idea that old feelings have stirred up. And if I’m wrong, I do know a few men. They might now all look like Carter Baizen,”

Brooke raised her brow up at him and grinned, she hadn’t told him who the ex-boyfriend she was sleeping with was.

“Girl, I’m born and raised in Manhattan, I was around during everything. You were in ever tabloid and anytime I went on social media I saw your face – with him. And you both looked pretty in love. I don’t know what happened to make him think cheating on you was a good idea – but I do know how someone looks at the person they love. And he sure as fuck loved you.”

She frowned, hating the fact that right now she believed that Lafayette was right.

“My point is – you won’t ever be able to figure out how you feel if you keep letting him in your bed. Try and date and if you want to go home to Carter after each date…you know your answer.”

Brooke closed her eyes, shaking her head as she chuckled lightly, “I feel like I should tip you even more now.”

Lafayette laughed, “Go ahead, baby. I got bills to pay.” He joked.

Brooke laughed, moved forward and hugged Lafayette. “Thank you.” She whispered as he hugged her back. “For the hair and for your unbiased opinion.”

She felt his chest rumble as he laughed, “No problem, honey.”

Rachel stuck her head in the door and shouted for Brooke to hurry up. Brooke thanked Lafayette again and left the salon, meeting Rachel on the street. “Hey,” She said softly.

“You still mad?” Rachel asked.

She smiled, shaking her head. “No,” Brooke said back, “I know you’ve only ever looked out for my best interests…you’re just trying to get me to admit how I really feel.”

“And that is?”

Brooke inhaled deeply, “That I need to end things with Carter before I get anymore attached. My focus needs to be on Angie. She is my priority now.”

Rachel pressed her hand to Brooke’s shoulder, “I’m sorry…I know how much you like having sex with him.”

“Shut up!” Brooke laughed as she shoved Rachel away. “We need to get back to my apartment so I can change to go meet Angie and the caseworker at the airport.”

They linked arms and hailed a cab that took them back to Brookes apartment building.

Did she truly want to end things with Carter?

That was an answer she could not answer right now. She knew that it what she needed to do – and Brooke also knew that Angie would be her man priority but…

Dammit.
Carter moved his hand across his now shaved jaw, the beard he had been sporting for the last few months was shaved off and the sharp line of his jaw was finally visible. He pressed his finger to the dimple in his chin, smiling as he thought about all the times Brooke had done the very same thing.

When they were together; Brooke had always pressed her index finger to the dimple and then lift her own chin up, and that’s when he knew she wanted a kiss. It was the most adorable thing he had ever seen anyone do in his entire life – that and the way she crinkle her nose when guess wrong about what the outcome of the murder doc they had been watching would be, or how Brooke nostrils always flared whenever she was lying. The way she’d kink her eyebrow up when she was trying to be cute or how her laugh sounded when she truly thought something was funny. Or how she smiled against his lips every time they would kiss.

She had done that last night.

And it was almost like he had her back.

They hadn’t fallen asleep together like they once used to, but when he woke up in the middle of the night after Brooke had stirred in her sleep. She must have moved herself closer to him while they were sleeping and he subconsciously pulled her closer to him. Because her cheek was pressed against his chest and her arm was resting on his stomach and he could feeling her breathing against his skin and worried that his heart rapidly beating would wake Brooke up and she’d move away from him. He moved his arms around her middle, pulling her tot him and she stirred even closer against his chest and Carter felt like he had to pinch himself just to make sure he wasn’t dreaming – that the day had actually happened.

Brooke had asked him to *stay*.

Carter washed his face, briefly checking his phone to look at the time. Brooke had an hour before she would have to leave and meet Angie at the airport – which probably meant she was freaking out. But when he woke up that morning he could hear Brooke talking in the living room and she wasn’t alone. Rachel was with her talking about a hair appointment she had made for Brooke the day before and that they needed to leave. Brooke had come back into the bedroom and closed the door behind her, pressing her finger to her lips when she saw that Carter was awake.

He smiled, nodding his head and quietly got up and began to get dressed. They didn’t talk about what had happened the night before they just quietly got ready.

“I have a spare key in the second drawer by the sink in the kitchen – just slide it under the door after you lock up.” She whispered and he nodded his head letting her know that he would do just that.
Brooke left with Rachel and Carter waited about ten minutes before he left Brookes apartment, locked up, and slid the spare key under the door.

He rode the elevator up to his penthouse and got about two more hours of sleep before his phone alarm forced him to get up and get ready for his work day. Carter had a meeting he had to attend at 1 PM. But other than that, he had made sure to leave his day wide open in case Brooke needed him.

It was obnoxious of him to assume that if Brooke needed help she’d go to him rather than Caroline and Nate, or Serena and Dan, or even Blair and Chuck. And it seemed like she was buddy-buddy with Vanessa too, so Carter was sure that Brooke put Vanessa as someone to call in an emergency over Carter. Which he tried to not feel too bitter about.

*Why was Brooke hanging out with Vanessa anyway?*

He knew they had been friends back when Brooke first moved to Manhattan. Kinda. She wasn’t Brookes *best* friend. That was Caroline. Even Blair and Serena were above Vanessa. Well, Vanessa had helped Brooke whenever she needed help with her Spanish class – but they weren’t best friends. More like, acquaintances. *Did Carter first choose to have sex with Vanessa because he knew it probably would have pissed Brooke off?* Yes. Because he was young, dumb, and bitter. And he hadn’t known that Brooke had been planning on saying yes to his proposal – goddammit. He was such a fucking douchebag. Why couldn’t he have just kept it in his pants? Why did he have to fuck Blair out of revenge? Why was he such a goddamn fuck up?

He just wanted Brooke back. Carter wanted to be able to apologize for everything he had done and tell her that she was the love of his life and that fact would never change. When he woke up with Brooke in his arms it was the best feeling in the world – sex with Brooke was always amazing, there was no denying it. But Brooke had been leaving right after they had sex recently but last night…they feel asleep in the same bed and he woke up with her in his arms. It was the happiest Carter had felt in a very long time.

Carter hadn’t felt this happy when he graduated from Columbia or Law School, he hadn’t felt this happy when he had bought the penthouse and fixed it up, and he hadn’t felt this happy with any other woman he had been with since Brooke. *Just her.* She was his happiness.

Even when she hated him – at least she was there, standing right in front of him, he could reach out and touch her and look into those green eyes that he loved so much.

He loved *her*.

Carter Baizen had never told anyone (other than family) that he loved them. Ever. Except for Brooke. Because she was the first person he had ever fallen in love with and he didn’t want to be with anyone else. Ever. For the rest of his life. And if she wanted to continue on just having causal sex with him, he’d be okay with that because again, at least she’d be in his life.

He was so fucked.

Carter would literally do anything to be with Brooke – and he knew that she’d never want to be with him in the way that he wanted to be with her. But he’d try and convince her that he was not the same guy who broke her heart thirteen years ago. *Somehow,* he’d convince her.

His phone rang and Carter quickly reached for it in case it was Brooke but was met with the name Nate Archibald on his screen. He frowned and answered the phone.

“What’s up, Archibald?”
“Oh, good. You’re alive. Caroline, he’s alive.” Nate said and Carter could briefly make out Caroline yelling ‘I told you so’

“Yes, I’m alive.”

“I didn’t think Brooke would be dumb enough to kill you when Angie is coming today – but you never know with her temper. And I wouldn’t blame her if she did murder you.” It could have been meant as a joke – but Carter wouldn’t blame Brooke either for murdering him. He sure as fuck deserved it.

“Do you need something, Nate?” Carter asked, wanting to change the subject.

“Uh, yeah.” Nate said quietly followed by silence and then Nate let out a long huff, “Sorry, I had to make sure Caroline won’t hear me.”

That was suspicious. And a bit intriguing.

“I need you help picking up Caroline’s wedding ring.”

“You already gave her a ring.”

“That was the engagement ring. I need the wedding band – and since Brooke didn’t kill you yesterday I was wondering if the two of you would go together to look at the band I picked out.”

Carter couldn’t help but laugh, “Why not just ask Brooke?”

“Because I know she’d feel overwhelmed with the baby – at least having you there to help might take some of her stress off of her. I already asked her and she said it’d be fine.”

The corner of his mouth twitched up and a large grin formed on his face. But Carter would have to pretend that he wasn’t ecstatic about spending more time with Brooke and Angie now, too – because Nate might change his mind about wanting Carter to go with her. “Okay, when and where?”

Nate gave him all the details and just before they were about to hang up, Nate added something that Carter most definitely did not like.

“Oh, also – Vanessa will be going as well.”


“Brookes knows rings and Vanessa knows Caroline’s style.”

“So again, why am I going?”

“For Angie. And to pay for it. I’ll wire you money after Caroline and I get back from London for her conference – but if I took that much out now Caroline would be furious.”

Carter couldn’t help but scoff, “So, I’m there to be your personal bank?”

“Yes.”

“-Does Vanessa have to come?”

“Yes. She is Caroline’s best friend. It’s not fault that you have screwed both Brooke and Vanessa – and I really don’t care if it’s awkward for you. And with Vanessa there, there’s a third party to keep you from trying to win Brooke back. It’s Vanessa or Blair.”

God fucking dammit.
“Fine. But I really fucking doubt Vanessa is going to be down for this.”

“I’ve already spoken with Vanessa. She’s fine with it.”

Seriously? For fucking real?

“Fine.”

They hung up and the happy feeling that Carter had been feeling since he woke up this morning with Brooke in his arms vanished.

*Great.*

Brooke had told Rachel that she wanted to do this alone – to meet Angie at the airport on her own.

She was fucking terrified. So terrified to the point that her hands were shaking and so sweaty that Brooke was afraid that when the adoption worker handed Angie over to Brooke, she’d drop the baby because of how slick her hands currently were. Brooke wiped them on her red dress again, trying to calm her breathing.

This was a good thing – she was about to be a mom! But even mothers who were about to give birth were terrified, right? Surely, they went through a phase of thinking ‘holy shit what if I break my baby’, right? The worry was normal, right?

God, maybe she should have told Peyton and Haley they could come. But they’d be coming to New York in a few weeks to visit Brooke and Angie and hopefully by then Brooke would have a routine down and she’d be a fucking pro at this whole mom thing. It didn’t mean she didn’t wish that they were her with her right now to hold her gross sweaty hands and assure Brooke that she would never be a mother like Victoria had once been to her. Because it was a genuine fear.

Victoria had changed – and for the better. After everything happened with Carter, Victoria slowly
started to become the mother Brooke had always longed for. When Victoria and Ted divorced, she
became and even better mom. And when she and Howard started up again – Victoria was like a
brand-new person. She wasn’t exactly a Karen Roe type of mother but she was always doing her
best to be the mother that she said Brooke deserved.

Having Victoria as a business partner was also very helpful. If it hadn’t been for Victoria, Brooke
didn’t think she would have been able to get C/B up and running and as successful as it was today.
And when it came out that Julian was having an affair, Victoria had flown out and told her daughter
that from the start; Julian had never been the guy for her.

But who was?

Dammit. Do not think about Carter right now. Angie needed to be her focus.

And then the world got slower and every noise around her became a buzz when she saw the baby
girl held in the adoption case workers arms. Brooke felt her heart beating hard against her chest and
her breath catch in her throat. Angie had light brown skin and black hair that was already starting to
curl at the end and deep chocolate eyes. The small baby looked just as scared as Brooke had felt.

But not anymore. All she felt was the overwhelming need to hold Angie in her arms and whisper to
that beautiful baby girl that she was safe and that she was home. That Brooke would never let
anything bad happen to her and that there was nothing in the world that would ever compare to her.
Brooke career was no longer the most important thing in her life – and her friends weren’t either. It
was Angie.

“Hello, Brooke. It’s good to see you.” Sharon O’Hara said with a smile while holding Angie
and pulling a carry-on bag and a diaper bag on her free shoulder.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Sharon – I would have called ahead and asked for someone at the airline to help
you with your luggage!” Brooke apologized, absolutely horrified that Sharon had to struggle from
the terminal all the way to baggage claim.

“Oh, don’t worry, Brooke.” Sharon smiled as Brookes eyes drifted down to Angie who was looking
at her with wide eyes. “Do you want to take her?”

Her breath caught in her throat again making it difficult for Brooke to speak, instead, she nodded her
head eagerly and Sharon laughed while maneuvering Angie into Brookes arms.

Brooke looked at her, dark chocolate eyes gazing up at her in wonder. “Hi.” She whispered, finally
able to speak. Brooke felt her eyes start to water and suddenly Angie became incredibly blurry which
only made Brooke laugh. “Oh, you are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.” She said quietly
while Angie moved her hand up to press against Brookes mouth. She laughed while a tear escaped.

“She seems to have already taken a liking to you.” Sharon said, but Brooke didn’t look away from
Angie. In fact, Brooke stayed looking down at Angie for the next ten minutes when Sharon walked
off to get hers and Angie’s luggage. It wasn’t until Sharon returned and said her name that Brooke
finally looked away from Angie. “I’m ready when you are.”
Brooke nodded her head and they walked out of the airport together with Brooke carrying Angie close to her, still in absolute shock that she was real. That all of this was real! Angie’s head rested against her chest once they were in the taxi cab and her fingers tugged at the necklace Brooke had chosen to wear today. Brooke held her tight as the taxi drove away from the airport and back to the city.

Sharon went over a checklist of things that Angie would need, things that Brooke had already boughten and taken care of. Brooke’s fingers moved softly against Angie’s back while she slept peacefully, all the while telling Sharon about the doctor appointment she had booked with Dr. Copeland.

“I have e-mailed with him back and forth giving him all Angie’s medical information and I’ve spoke to him over the phone as well, but he wants to see Angie to be able to see everything in person and not just scans from previous doctor visits.” Brooke explained to Sharon.

“That all sounds very good, Brooke. I’m sure she’s in good hands.” Sharon said as she looked through Angie’s paperwork. “And you have a room set up for her, yes?”

“Yes, it’s lavender.” Brooke said with a smile, “To go with the purple monkey theme.”

Sharon looked over at Brooke and raised her brow, “Purple monkey?”

“It’s a stuffed animal – I had one when I was a baby and I always said that when I had a child of my own I would want them to have a purple monkey as well.” Brooke rambled on, “There’s not like, giant purple monkeys on the wall or anything – just the small stuffed animal.”

Sharon smiled and went on to talk more about Angie’s heart condition and the special care she would need. Sharon suggested that Brooke take at least a month or two off after Angie’s surgery was done and a week off from work before the surgery.

She never wanted to go back to work ever again! Brooke just wanted to stay inside her apartment holding Angie and looking into those beautiful big brown eyes and sing to her (even if she was a terrible singer) and hold her in her arms forever. Victoria would probably want to strangle Brooke for not wanting to come into work – but once she looked into Angie’s eyes, oh she would understand.

The taxi cab pulled up in front of Brooke’s apartment building and Brooke got out of the car with Angie in her arms to get the doorman to help her with Sharon and Angie’s luggage. When she was walking into the building, Carter was walking through the lobby, stopping in his tracks when he saw Brooke.

Brooke smiled, not being able to hide how happy she was in that moment. He stood there for a moment before he grinned and slowly walked over to where Brooke was standing. He had shaved his beard off and Brooke couldn’t help it when her eyes moved directly to the dimple in his chin. That had always been her most favorite of his features. That and his eyes. And his lips. And his hands. Okay, so she liked a lot of his features.

“It suits you.” Carter said with a big smile.

Brooke kinked her brow, “What suits me?”

Carter chuckled and bit down on his lower lip before speaking next, “Motherhood.”

She took in a deep breath and nodded her head. “Thank you, Carter.” Brooke whispered. “Uh, I’d introduce you but it looks like you have somewhere to be and I have to get the doorman to help with Angie’s luggage and the adoption case worker as well.”
“I can help,” Carter said but just as he did, the doorman came over to where they stood.

“Do you need help, Ms. Davis?” He asked her.

“Yes, thank you, Jerry.” Brooke said with a smile. She then looked to Carter, “After you.” Angie began to stir in her arms and when Brooke looked down, Angie was blinking up at her. “Hi there, sleepy head.” Brooke said softly which only made Angie snuggle in closer to her and close her eyes once again. Brooke sighed happily and when she looked back at Carter he was looking at her in a way that she had never seen him look at her before – even when they were together.

Carter had always looked at Brooke like she had placed all the stars in the sky and created the sun but this was different. It was almost as if he were in pure awe of her. It almost reminded Brooke of the way he had looked at her at the White Party after she had given her ‘zero is not a size’ speech. But more intense, like he believed she was capable of anything and everything and it made Brooke feel like her heart would burst from the amount of pride in his eyes.

She had to break eye contact with Carter and walked forward with the door man following after her. When they were out of the building, Sharon was talking with the taxi driver and pulling cash out of her wallet. “Oh, no! Sharon, don’t you dare!” Brooke said, trying to stop her from paying anymore money than she needed to. “I’ve got that.”

But before she could even try and maneuver Angie so that she could get into her purse, Carter was walking over to the cab with money in his hand telling Sharon that he’d cover the cab fare.

“-Carter, no.” Brooke said as she hurried over to try and stop him. But it was already too late. The money had been exchanged and Carter moved forward to open the door to the cab so he could get in.

He stood next to the door, his body hidden behind it as he smirked down at Brooke. “I’m paying for my ride in advance – he can’t break my hundred so I figured I’d pay for your fair as well.” Carter smirked as he got into the car.

He rolled down the window when Brooke leaned down a bit, “I’m paying you back!” Brooke shouted and Carter laughed and shook his head. She couldn’t help but smile and then said something without even thinking, “I did like the beard. But this suits you, too.”

He grinned and gave Brooke a little wave goodbye as the cab pulled into the street and took off.

“I did not know that you were on speaking terms with your ex-boyfriend.” Sharon said, moving to stand next to Brooke on the sidewalk. Brooke knew that Sharon had done research on both hers and Julian’s past when they first started to talk adoption with her. Sharon had brought up Carter and asked why the relationship had ended and Brooke had gotten extremely defensive, not understanding why it was even a question that needed to be asked when it came to adopting a child – but Julian had told Brooke to just tell Sharon so they could get things started.

So, she told her all about hers and Carter’s epic failure of a relationship.

Or, that’s what she had called it. Mostly for Julian’s sake.

He had always been jealous of Carter. And she didn’t exactly make it easy for him to not be jealous seeing as she refused to let anyone even say the name Carter for years. Or how she’d shut down when a certain song was on or they were flipping through the channels and a show they had once watched together happened to be on.

Julian knew that Brooke had been very much in love with Carter and that was not something he
liked. He hated Carter and said it was because Carter had once hurt Brooke. But Brooke knew it was because Julian felt inferior to Carter.

“Oh,” Brooke said, turning to face Sharon. “I mean, he lives in the same building as me but we’re not friends or anything.” She wanted to make sure Sharon knew that she and Carter were not together.

*Sleeping together.* But not *together.* They were no in a relationship and it didn’t matter that her belly instantly warmed when she saw him in the lobby with a shaved face and that sharp jaw line and that goddamn dimple in his chin.

Sharon gave her a skeptical look, “I’m not judging, Brooke. I just want to make sure that Angie is your main priority.”

“Of course, she is!” Brooke assured the woman. “Absolutely. Carter is just my neighbor.” Sharon didn’t seem to believe that Carter was simply just her neighbor but she didn’t press the subject any further. They went upstairs with Jerry the doorman following after them with their luggage and once they were inside the apartment, Sharon looked around to make sure that Brooke had everything she needed and once that was done, they waited for the notary to arrive so that Brooke would officially be Angie’s mother and Sharon would go to her hotel Brooke was paying for and then leave tomorrow afternoon back to L.A.

*This is real.*

It was finally happening.

---

Nate had lied to Carter.

Vanessa didn’t know that Carter was going to be going with her and Brooke to pick out the wedding band because if she did know that Carter was going, there was no way in hell she would agree to go. But when he said that Brooke was going she had been pretty excited to go as well.
If he had brought up Carter, Vanessa would say no and then Brooke and Carter would be alone.

That was not something Nate wanted. He hadn’t wanted them alone together yesterday either but they obviously finished the job fast because Vanessa had told Nate that she and Brooke had gone out to lunch that afternoon after picking up some groceries that Brooke would need for when Angie arrived. So, they obviously didn’t have sex.

He shouldn’t have thought that Brooke would sleep with Carter again – she was too smart to do that.

*He hoped.*

No, Brooke wouldn’t put herself in that kind of situation after what he had put her through.

*-She waited for him to show up at her wedding…let’s not forget that.*

*-No. Brooke was just incredibly vulnerable that day.*

No, Brooke wouldn’t sleep with Carter again. There was too much history and pain and heartbreak. The only reason why she was okay with Nate helping her was because she said that she was going to be civil with him for Caroline’s sake. They weren't *friends*. They were just ex's who happened to have their siblings dating the others siblings. Which sounds incredibly weird and incest-like but it wasn't. His phone went off and he looked down at the screen and saw a picture from Brooke. It was a beautiful baby girl. He grinned, somehow already loving the baby girl. 

"-Care!" Nate shouted as he sat on their bed.

"Nate?" Caroline said as she walked into their bedroom, tears were forming in her eyes.

He instantly dropped his phone and got up to move over to her, moving his hands to her face. “Hey, what happened? What’s wrong?” Nate asked in concern.

She laughed, shaking her head as tears fell from her eyes. *They were happy tears?* “I just got off the phone with my doctor…we’re pregnant.” Nate’s eyes widened in shock – he hadn’t even known that Caroline thought that there was a possibility that she was even pregnant! “I didn’t want to say anything until I was sure because I didn’t want you to get your hopes up because I hate when you’re sad or disappointed.” Nate cut off her rambling by kissing her deeply. Caroline smiled against his lips as she kissed him back, her arms moving around his shoulders as he pulled her body closer to
his.

Their lips separated and Carter pressed his forehead against hers, “They’re 100% sure?” He asked, needing to know that this wasn’t just a dream. Caroline giggled and nodded her head and his head nodded as well with their foreheads still pressed together. “God, I love you so much, Care!”

“I love you, too.” Caroline sniffled as more tears began to fall. Nate was secure enough with his masculinity to admit that a few tears fell from his eyes as well. “We’re gonna be parents, Nate!” Caroline said happily. “You’re going to be a Dad!”

He grinned. “And you’re going to be a mom.” He whispered.

After they were done celebrating Nate showed Caroline the pictures that Brooke had sent of Angie and they sat on the couch together with Caroline’s head laying in his lap and his hand resting on her stomach. They decided that they wouldn’t tell anyone until they were at least twenty weeks just in case anything might happen (miscarriages tended to happen before twenty weeks - they had done the research) and also because Nate really didn’t want to steal Brookes thunder by telling everyone anytime soon. Not that Nate would ever think that she’d be mad at him for that, he just wanted the attention to be on Brooke and Angie for now. Brooke was going to be thrilled when they finally told her.

_They were going to be parents._

Holy shit.

He was going to be a dad. What if he was a terrible dad? What if Caroline thought he was a bad dad and would leave him? What if Caroline has a miscarriage and he won’t even get a chance to be a dad! What if their baby had a heart defect like Angie's? What if, what if, what if...

The panic set in like a blazing fire.

Chapter End Notes

What did you all think? Comments/feedback/kudos are always appreciated!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Please forgive any typos/errors/mistakes! I'll try and look over it again after publishing it! Hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Her hair was back to its normal shade of brown. The same shade of brown that it had been when they first met at the bar thirteen years ago. Carter felt his breath catch in his throat when he saw her standing in the lobby. It was like he was back in the past and he had woken up from an awful dream where for the past thirteen years he had been without her. But it hadn’t been a dream and he was looking at Brooke in the present with her brown hair and a baby in her arms.

Angie.

She was the most beautiful baby girl Carter had seen and he knew it was very odd to feel an attachment towards the child already when he didn’t even know if Brooke was going to allow him to be a part of her life; but he did. Those big brown eyes and little hands that had clutched onto the necklace Brooke was wearing, and the dark curly hair – Angie was an angel and so was the woman holding her.

“Baizen?”

Carter looked up at one of his colleagues as they snapped him out of his thoughts, “Hm?” He responded.

“-What’s the status with your current client? That Gatina woman, will she be going through with the lawsuit?”

Carter shook his head, “No, she doesn’t want to.”

“Well, that’s unfortunate because we got a call from the LAPD asking about Ms. Gatina and her involvement with Daunte Jones.”

Carter blinked in confusion and sat up in his seat, “What? How do they even know about Jones?” He hadn’t made any calls regarding Daunte Jones, he only asked a few of his co-workers if they had heard anything about him that might help in an extortion case.

“He’s a wanted man, Carter – notoriously known for drug trafficking and according to the LAPD, they’re ready to call in the FEDS to take over the case because they might soon have proof that he’s involved in human trafficking as well.” His colleague Martin said, “As soon as I typed his name into our systems there were alerts.”

He shook his head, not understanding what was going on, “Rachel said that he was just a loan shark type of man – nothing this serious.”

“She lied.”

Carter narrowed his eyes at Martin. Rachel was Brookes best friend – she would tell him all about this if she knew, right? If she knew how dangerous Daunte was she would have told Carter for Brookes safety, right? No, she didn’t know.
“I don’t believe that.”

“Oh, come on!” Martin laughed, along with a few more of his colleagues. “You can’t be fooled by a nice pair of legs and great tits, Baizen – this shit is serious. You need to drop her as a client if she’s not telling you the truth. No matter how good in bed she is.”

He felt his temper flare, “I’m not sleeping with her.” Carter said in a deadly serious tone. “-She is a friend of a friend.”

“A friend you’re sleeping with?” Jeb, a hefty man who had worked with his father before Carter took over the firm, said with a smirk. Carter glared and the room laughed.

He hated most of the people he worked with – mostly because the majority of them had been working there since Carter was a teenager and his father still ran the firm. They still looked at him like he was a child. It didn’t matter how many cases he won or how much good press the firm had gotten because of him; they just saw him as a reckless child.

Martin’s next words were proof of that, “Don’t let a woman come between your career, Baizen. The only reason why we all stayed on with this firm was because your father wanted us to watch out for you.” The older man told Carter,

“There is no case,” Carter reminded Martin with a snappy tone, “If you had come to me with this information earlier you would have known that Ms. Gatina does not want to go through with pressing charges.”

“Well, LAPD has pictures of Ms. Gatina with Mr. Jones exchanging money.”

His brows furrowed together. Rachel had told Carter that she only ever wired the money to Daunte. “When?”

“A month ago.” Martin answered Carter’s question. “But phone records have shown that she’s been in touch with him for the past few weeks.”

There had to be a reason why Rachel had lied about not knowing Daunte’s number or how to reach him – there had to be a reason why she would not tell Carter just how serious this situation, how dangerous Daunte truly was. And there had to be a reason why she was keeping all this information from both him and Brooke…or…what if Brooke already knew?

“I’ll get in touch with Ms. Gatina,” Carter said, feeling his anger swell.

“You might want to do it fast, LAPD called because Daunte Jones is on his way to Manhattan now. They’ve been tracking his cards and he bought a one way ticked to the city.”

Carter felt his pulse quicken at the thought of Daunte being anywhere near Brooke and now Angie. What was Rachels part in everything? Was this some sort of long con to screw Brooke over in the end? Dammit, he should have done more research, he should have checked Rachels phone records – everything that might trace her back to Daunte and he hadn’t because he was so focused on trying to get Brooke to just…see him! To want to be with him again. Dammit! God fucking dammit!

Carter got up and left the room that the meeting was being held in and grabbed his things from his office before hurrying out of his office on his way to his apartment building where he knew Brooke was with Angie.

No, he wasn’t going to go try and find Rachel. He was going to go to Brooke and make sure that she and Angie were safe. He knew that his priority needed to be getting the truth out of Rachel so he
could fix this whole mess and get her name out of any records before the FEDS were going to be involved – but he just needed to make sure that Brooke was safe.

In the cab ride to his building, Carter called Brooke but was sent to voicemail on the third ring. He ran his hand through his hair and felt the panic rise, worrying that the reason that Brooke wasn’t answering because Daunte had her at gunpoint, rather than the more the fact that Brooke probably wasn’t answering because she was wanting to bond with Angie.

So, he called again.

And she sent him to voicemail after the first ring.


“I’m sorry, I can turn my phone off.” Brooke said, sending Carter to voicemail for the third time. Jesus Christ, could he not take a hint? She obviously had other, more important things, to deal with right now than to talk to him! Even though she kinda really wanted to talk to him because Sharon would be leaving soon and ever since Carter had gotten into his cab Angie had not stopped screaming.

And while Brooke tried to soothe the baby nothing was working. She totally broke her, Brooke knew that would happen! But Sharon told Brooke that Angie was likely tired from the plane ride which only caused Brooke to panic, thinking the worst about Angie and her VSD. When she asked Sharon if she should call Dr. Copeland to check up on her, the woman told Brooke that a cardiologist cleared Angie to fly before they had left LA and that she would be fine.

But Angie was still crying and there was nothing Brooke could do that would make her stop. And when Brooke had given Angie the purple monkey, the baby girl had puked on it. Which again, scared the shi t out of Brooke because throwing up was never a good sign! But Sharon told Brooke that it was normal and that Angie was only two months old and it was completely normal for babies to spit up after a feeding.

Brooke felt like she was completely failing at this whole mom thing already and really wanted someone to tell her that she hadn’t made a mistake in doing this and Carter was too afraid to piss her off by saying the wrong thing so he’d totally tell her that she was killing it at this whole mom thing and that she didn’t need to worry about a thing.

No, you are trying to distance yourself from Carter to avoid catching feelings! Or, anymore feelings – that’s what Rachel said, though! Brooke still refused to admit that she may or may not feel something towards Carter that wasn’t just sexual attraction. She used the word ‘attached’ instead of saying she had any sort of feelings for Carter when she talked to Rachel earlier that morning but…it was feelings she had been feeling since after her divorce party.
“Oh, don’t worry about it, Brooke.” Sharon said, answering Brookes previous question causing the brunette to snap out of her head. Brooke watched as Sharon wrote down a few things she might need to know or how to reach her at her hotel.

Sharon wasn’t staying long. The adoption case worker just wanted to make sure that Angie was settled before she went back to L.A. In fact, she had a flight tomorrow night to go back home – but Brooke really wanted to ask Sharon to stay for like a week or two (only because Sharon was motherly and was good a reassuring Brooke that Angie was fine and semi-calmed her nerves whenever Angie let out a painful sounding cry).

Brooke had the notary come to her house about an hour ago so that Brooke could officially sign everything. Angie was now Angie Ana Davis, and Brooke Davis was her mother.

She had decided to give Angie the middle name of her birth mother. Because despite the fact that she had given Angie up for adoption (and hadn’t chosen Brooke and Julian to be her parents – thank fuck), Brooke had Angie now. Everything was lining up and without Ana, Brooke wouldn’t have Angie. She wouldn’t be a mother.

And as sweet as that all was – Brooke was already failing at it according to Angie who had yet to stop screaming.

“Alright, so here’s my info. My plane is leaving at 1:50 PM tomorrow evening but I would like to speak with some of your close friends, or perhaps your mother. Is she in town?”

“Yes!” Brooke said suddenly, forgetting that Victoria would be in Manhattan soon. “I will set up a brunch for us tomorrow, does 8 AM sound good?”

Sharon smiled and nodded her head, “Brooke, you don’t have to go through all that trouble. I can just meet her here.” Brooke frowned at that, “You can even still do brunch – you sounded pretty excited about that, so I don’t mind!” Sharon told Brooke. “Though, can I technically be called brunch if it’s at eight in the morning?”

Brooke forced a smile and nodded her head, “You can have brunch at all hours of the day.” She tried to joke. “But of course we can still do it, I’ll make something.” I’m a terrible fucking cook! Brooke was supposed to have months’ worth of practice before Angie was able to eat solid food – not a day to learn how to make a fucking brunch feast! “Do you mind if I invite my step-brother and his fiancée as well? I can also invite a few friends.” She frowned, wondering why it was so important for Sharon to meet Victoria. What if Victoria was a bitch to the woman? It was too late, she supposed. The papers were signed, Angie was her daughter now. But it still nagged at her, “Quick question,” Brooke said, “Is there a reason you need to meet my mom? I mean, we already signed everything – I thought that maybe you would have waited for all of that before I signed everything.”

“Usually I do. But I can see that Angie and you are a good fit.” Brooke had to chuckle, looking down at Angie who was still crying. Sharon chuckled too, “It’s okay. My oldest screamed for the first three months after he was born. I think Angie is just tired from all the excitement today. As for why I want to meet your friends and family, I guess that’s just for my own assurance. Angie and I have become friends and I’d just like to know that even when you’re not around Angie that she will be around good people and will always feel loved.”

Brooke smiled for real this time, “She will be around a lot of good people.” She assured Sharon.

Sharon’s phone rang and the woman stood up, “I need to take this.” The woman said before answering the phone and walking into Brookes kitchen.
Brooke looked down at Angie and sighed in relief when she saw that the baby had stopped crying and was in fact asleep. So, she took that time to take Angie to her nursery and set her down for a nap only to have the baby let out a blood curdling scream when someone began to knock on the door loudly. “Fuck!” She hissed, “Shit!” She said next after realizing that she had just sworn in front of Angie, “I mean…never mind.” Brooke picked up Angie out of the crib and hurried out of the bedroom, down the hallway, through the living room and to the door and swung it open angrily only to see her mother on the other side.

“Oh God,” Victoria said upon seeing Brooke holding a screaming baby, “Please don’t tell me you’ve stolen someone’s baby.”

“Mom!” Brooke breathed out, shoving her mother into the hallway so Sharon wouldn’t hear her and then find out that Brooke hadn’t told her own mother that she was adopting. “Um, no.” Brooke said in a whisper after closing the door. “She’s mine, I just signed the papers but if you don’t act like you’ve know about this for at least a week this crying baby is going to be put back on a plane and taken away from me – so please go along with this and I will explain everything after Sharon goes home.” Okay, so she was being a bit dramatic. She really doubted that Angie could be taken away because Brooke lied about Victoria knowing about it…right?

Victoria blinked, trying to take in everything but then snapped her head down the hall when she heard someone yelling Brookes name.

“Are you kidding me?” Victoria said in anger, snapping her head back in Brookes direction as she glared, “Really? Brooke!” She hissed.

“Are you okay?” Carter said as he came up to Brooke, breathing hard. He was sweating too and Brooke was pretty sure that she hadn’t heard the sound of the elevator opening and only heard the sound of a door slamming.

“Did your run all the way up here?” Brooke said, making a face in confusion.

“Are you okay?” He asked again.

“Yes, despite Angie cry-” Brooke paused, realizing now that Angie was no longer crying. In fact, she was gazing up at Carter. “-Ing.” She finished the word as she looked at Carter, “Um.”

“Why is he here?” Victoria snapped.

Brooke looked away from Carter and over to Victoria, “-He lives here.”

“With you?!” Victoria said in outrage.

“No!” Brooke hissed. “Can we tone down the dramatics, mother! Please, just…let’s go inside and go along with the plan, okay?”

Victoria rolled her eyes but grabbed Angie out of Brookes arms, “Fine. Only because this baby is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen – by the way, she’s not ever calling me Grandma.” Victoria moved to go inside but then stopped, “-Wait…what’s her name?”

“Angie.” Both Brooke and Carter said.

Victoria glared at Carter but walked away and into the apartment to put on a show for Sharon.
When the door was closed Brooke looked over to Carter, “What is going on? Why are you freaking out?”

He took in a deep breath, the first one Brooke thought he might have taken since he was in front of her. “Daunte is on his way to Manhattan.”

“-What?” Brooke whispered, instantly fearing for Rachels life. “You need to find Rachel – you need to tell her to come here now!”

“I can’t.” Carter said only angering Brooke.

“-You can’t?!” Brooke spat out.

“She’s been in touch with Daunte for about a week. And there’s a lot of shady stuff that I can’t explain but I’m sure Rachel can come up with some excuse for but…Brooke, she’s been lying to us. The LAPD has pictures of her and Daunte meeting up several times and phone records saying that they’ve been talking,” Brooke shook her head, not believing him. “Dammit, Brooke! This is serious! Look, I will go try and find Rachel but I need you to stay in this apartment, better yet – go get your mom and stay in my penthouse.”

“No!” Brooke argued.

“Brooke, this is not just about you anymore, this is about keeping Angies safe too!”

Brookes brows knit together, he sounded like he truly cared about Angies safety.

“The adoption worker is still here, I can’t just up and leave and say I’m going to be staying with you.”

“Okay, fine.” Carter pulled out his phone and texted Brooke the code to his private elevator. “-When she leaves you and your mom need to stay at my place and when I get in touch with Rachel I will let you know. But I am not telling her where you are and you do not answer any phone calls from her, do you understand?”

Brooke opened her mouth to argue but then heard the sound of Angie crying in the apartment. She looked back at Carter who was looking at her with pleading eyes. “Okay.” She agreed.

“Thank you.” Carter breathed out.

He then did something that surprised Brooke and literally took her breath away. He moved forward and pressed his mouth to hers in a kiss that nearly swept Brooke off her feet. One of his hands rest on the small of her back and the other caressing her cheek as he kissed her and Brooke stupidly found herself kissing him back. When Carter pulled away, he pressed his forehead to hers for a moment before he turned and walked away, not even looking back at Brooke.

She watched him get inside the elevator and heard the doors closed and then whispered to herself; “What the fuck just happened?”
“No, of course not!” Rachel lied as she picked at her nails while keeping Carter on speaker phone. “-I would have told you if I knew Daunte was coming to Manhattan.” Sitting across from her was the man she was referring to; Daunte Jones, the man she owed a shit ton of money to. He watched her with cold eyes, just waiting for her to say the wrong thing so he could strike at her. “-Should I go someplace else – I don’t think he knows where I live now, maybe I should get a hotel or something.”

“Drop the fucking act, Rachel. Both Brooke and I know that you’ve been in touch with Daunte in the past week.” Carter said, his voice sounded irritated, but there was a slight worried undertone. “Not to mention that there are pictures of the two of you together – where it shows you exchanging money with him.”

Rachel took in a shaky breath when Daunte squared his jaw and narrowed his eyes at her. Lie. He mouthed.

“Look, yes. I lied to you.” Rachel said and Daunte cocked his head to the side. “-I have been in touch with Daunte because…I wasn’t exactly honest with my actual relationship with him, or, my previous relationship with him. He would come to L.A and we’d fuck and yeah, that’s why there are pictures of the two of us together,” Rachel looked at Daunte who was motioning for her to press on about why there were pictures taken of the two of them, “-How the hell do you even have pictures of us together? And when?”

“I don’t have the pictures. LAPD does.” Carter stopped speaking suddenly and Rachel feared that he was finally realizing that Daunte was at her apartment and would blow this whole thing and she’d be dead within seconds, “-They think you’d be stupid enough to press charges against Daunte for extortion, which we both know you’re not. You wouldn’t risk it. It’s clear that you’re loyal to Daunte seeing as you’ve been lying to us to protect him.”

He knew. But he was also protecting Rachel. She took in another deep breath, “He’s not a bad guy. I just over-exaggerate. You know that.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed.” Carter said in a light tone, playing along with Rachel. “I’ll call the LAPD and say that Daunte never made it to Manhattan if that’s what you’d like?”

Rachel looked to Daunte who was nodding his head slowly, “Well, he’s not in Manhattan so it wouldn’t be a lie. But I appreciate you willing to do that for me.”

“I’m not doing this for you.” Carter reminded Rachel. It’s for Brooke. He was going along with this all for Brookes safety and she was thankful for that. But once Daunte left Rachel really doubted that Carter was going to be as kind as he was on the phone right now. Or Brooke.

Rachel had to sit them both down and tell them the real reason she had met with Daunte in LA and why she had been speaking with him on the phone the past week and also why she had lied to Carter about not knowing how to contact the man.

“Well, I still appreciate it. Um, why is the LAPD looking into Daunte?” Rachel asked and got a nod and smile of approval from the man. “I mean, they obviously know about the money thing but…is that all?”

“Apparently someone from North Carolina went to the cops telling them about Daunte and how he was extorting them and when the LAPD saw you exchanging money with him they knew he must be getting money from you as well. But, as I said, you’re not dumb enough to go to the cops about this.”
Rachel watched as Daunte closed his eyes, almost as if he was relieved by Carter's answer, “Alright, well. Tell Brooke that I’ll see you guys at Davis Enterprises to look over my modeling contract one more time before I sign anything. I am not budging on what I want my salary to be. I know that will probably upset Brooke but, hopefully she’ll be able to look past it. I’ve done a lot for Davis Enterprises and even after my mistake with the money transfer, I should be paid for the hard work I’ve put into the company.”

“Brooke’s stubborn, but I’m sure she’ll understand. Look, I have to go. I’ll see you at 1 PM on Wednesday. Do yourself a favor and don’t call Daunte on your phone anymore – they’re tracking his calls and I don’t want your name on that list.”

“Of course,” Rachel said, watching as Daunte looked down at his phone with a glare. “I’ll see you on Wednesday at 1 PM.”

“I’ll talk to you later.”

“Yup, bye.” Rachel said, hanging up quickly as Daunte got up from his chair and dropped his phone on the ground and smashed it under his foot. “You need to leave the city.” Rachel told him, “Better yet, the country.”

“No.” Daunte snapped at the red head, “I have business to handle in Brooklyn.”

“Daunte, it’s not safe for you to be here!” Rachel got up from off of her couch and walked over to stand next to him. “If the LAPD catches word that you’re here-”

Daunte moved at her, grabbing her by the neck and squeezing tightly. “They won’t. Because you are not going to tell them. If you do the whole world will know why you’re really paying me and I don’t think that would be a very good look for Davis Enterprises with you being a model for C/B.” He let go of her neck, pushing her away as he began to pace around the room.

Rachel grabbed at her neck, trying to soothe the pain of being choked as she breathed in and out, in and out over and over again, “Fine.” She finally agreed with a huff, “But you can’t stay here. Brooke could come by and I don’t want to risk her finding out you’re here.”

“It’s too risky to get a room somewhere. If the LAPD are watching me I’m sure they’re tracking my accounts.”

Rachel just wanted him gone. “I can get you a room.” She told him.

“You don’t think they’re watching your accounts, too?”

“I’m sure they are – but I’m not going to be using one of my cards. I’m going to use the Davis Enterprises card that I’ll swipe from Brooke – just, let me handle this, okay?” Rachel said which caused Daunte to stop pacing and turn and face her.

Daunte raised his brow at her words, “You still know the company account information?”

No, she was going to get Carter to pay for the room. “Yes,” She lied. “Brooke still trusts me. I’m her best friend.”

“Good.” Daunte said with a smile, “Because you’re going to drain the account and that’s how I’m leaving the country. Forget the room – you’re going to Brooke.”

Rachel took in a shaky breath and nodded her head in agreement.
Dammit! Why couldn’t she have just said she had money tucked away! Why did she bring up Brooke and the company card (that didn’t even exist, by the way!) – now Brooke and Angie were in danger! Rachel had to find a way to get in contact with Carter to warn him.

“If I go in looking like this Brooke will know something is up,” Rachel said, referring to her smudged make up and the angry red handprints on her neck. “Let me change and clean up.”

Daunte narrowed his eyes and her and then held out his hand, “Give me your phone.”

Rachel grabbed her phone out of her pocket and watched as Daunte dropped it on the ground and then proceeded to smash it with his foot.

*What Daunte didn’t know was that Rachel had at least six of her old cellphones in some of the boxes in her bathroom. Brooke had called Rachel a hoarder for keeping all of her old phones but this might just save her best friends life so, ha!*  

Rachel walked away from Daunte only to have him follow her. She stopped and turned to face him, “Am I not allowed privacy?”

“I want your laptop, iPad, and anything else that you might be able to communicate with.” He demanded.

“Daunte, I’m not going to turn you in! If you go down, I go down! And I not someone who could survive prison – I don’t even like camping!” Rachel tried to argue but Daunte wouldn’t budge. So she let out a loud sigh and made a show out of giving him every single one of her devices, even went as far as to grab an old kindle she hadn’t used in years just to be over the top. “You happy? Or should I go kill all the pigeons on my roof so I won’t be able to send word to someone that way.”

The back of his hand connected with her cheek causing Rachel to stumble back, eyes burning with tears as she held onto the forming bruise.

“Clean up.” Daunte ordered her with a glare. “Like you said, Brooke might know something is up. And if she does realize that something is wrong – I’m going to take her out.”

Rachel swallowed hard and nodded her head, “She won’t.”

Daunte motioned for her to go into the bathroom and she ran to the shower and turned it on, making a show out of slamming the shower door shut loudly after she stripped out of her clothes. Rachel began to wash her hair just as Daunte peeked his head through the door.

She glared at him, covering herself, “Privacy, please?” She snapped at him.

“Don’t do anything stupid, Rachel.”

He closed the bathroom door behind him and Rachel waited a while before she carefully opened the shower door so that it made no sound and crept over to one of her boxes that had her make up in it. She knew that in one of the makeup bags there were her old cell phones while she kept looking over her shoulder to make sure that the door stayed closed.

Rachel found the phone and turned it on. It had about 14% battery left so she sent a text to the one number she knew by heart.
The phone died just as she hit the send button and Rachel prayed to a God that she didn’t even believe in that the message was delivered.

She shoved the phone back into the bottom of the box and quietly got back into the shower and washed the suds out of her hair. Just as she began to lather her hair with conditioner, Daunte came into the bathroom again.

“What?” She hissed as she covered herself again.

He looked around the bathroom and then back at Rachel. “Hurry up.”

“Do you want Brooke to believe that nothing is wrong? I don’t go anywhere without looking like a certified hottie. So, I’m sorry if I’m taking too long!” Rachel snapped. Daunte glared and walked forwards so that he was leaning against the wall by the shower. “Seriously? You’re going to stay in here?”

“Yes.” Daunte replied.

Rachel huffed but didn’t argue. She just continued to pray that the message was delivered.

Sharon had left after meeting with Victoria, who had insisted that the brunch be at the Brownstone seeing as Brooke had invited more people than she could seat at her table. Sharon had agreed, saying she was looking forward to meeting Howard and once she was gone, Brooke waited ten minutes before packing up a bag for Angie and telling her mother to gather some of her clothes so that she
could bring it to Carters penthouse.

Victoria had made a fuss about the whole thing telling Brooke that they needed to call the police and fire Rachel, she had even said that Brooke should throw Rachel under the bus for the sake of protecting Angie. But, Brooke would never throw Rachel under the bus, and she also knew that Carters place was safer. Victoria wanted to call Howard to get Caroline and Nate involved but Brooke had convinced her not to. The less people to know the better.

And then her phone went off.

Brooke grabbed her phone off Angie’s changing table to see if it was Carter giving her any new information. But it wasn’t from him. In fact, it was from an unknown number.

UNKNOWN (1:43 PM):

daiunte coming to you
Company card
Tell carter

Brooke looked down at her phone and checked the time. It was nearly 2:30 pm already! Why hadn’t she gotten the message earlier.

She swiped out of the message and quickly pressed down on Carters number in her missed calls and gathered Angie’s things at the speed of lightening.

“Are you okay?”

“-Daunte is on his way over.” Brooke breathed out, “-Rachel texted, I think it was from one of her old phones – she said something about a company card and to tell you.”

“Are you at my penthouse?”

“No, I’m still at my place. It took a while to get Sharon to leave.”

“What time did she send the message?”

“1:43,” Brooke answered.

“-Brooke, get out of your apartment! I’m on my way with the police.”

“Did you talk to Rachel?”
“Yes. A while ago. I should have called you, I’m so sorry. I was down at the station talking with the police.”

Brooke felt her heart drop at the sound of someone knocking on her apartment door.

“Brooke?”

Brooke breathed in deeply, trying to calm herself down. She grabbed Angie out of her crib kicked the bags in the closet and met her mother in the hallway. “Mom, take Angie and hide in my bathroom, okay?”

“-What? Why? Who is that?” Victoria whispered.

“Mom, please. Just take Angie, okay?”

Victoria took Angie out of Brookes arms and pressed her hand to her daughter’s cheek with tears in her eyes, “Brooke.”

“Mom, go.”

She did as her daughter told and Brooke wanted nothing more than tell Victoria that if anything happened to her to protect Angie and that Nate and Caroline were the Godparents and she wanted Angie to go to them if anything happened to her but there wasn’t any time. One day as a mother. Not even one day. Only a couple of hours.

“Brooke!”

She closed her eyes when she heard that Carter was still on the phone. She picked it up and put it to her ear, “I’m muting you.”

His words were a mumble of panic when Brooke pressed the mute button and slid the phone in the pocket of her dress, smoothing the fabric down as she made her way to the front door.

When she opened the door, Rachel was standing in the hallway. Her hair was soaked and a bruise was forming on her cheek while her makeup was smudged under her eyes as tears ran down her cheeks. And she wasn’t alone. Rachel was standing next to a man who Brooke assumed was Daunte, seeing as Brooke could see that he had a gun pointed at Rachels back.

“I take it you’re Daunte.” Brooke said, there was no reason to pretend she didn’t know who he was or the fact that he was clearly pointing a gun at Rachel.

“Brooke, I’m so sorry!” Rachel cried.

Brooke didn’t say anything, she just grabbed her keys and wallet off of the table next to the door and stepped outside of the apartment.

“Hey, hey, hey.” Daunte said, moving his gun away from Rachel and pointed it at Brooke. “Don’t do anything stupid like your friend here.”

“I’m getting my stuff so that I can take you to Davis Enterprises.” Brooke lied, “But the actual card is not with me – it’s up in the penthouse of the guy I’m sleeping with.”

Daunte narrowed his brows. “Is this a trick?”

“No.” Brooke said.
“Where’s your phone?”

“In my apartment – do you really think I’m stupid enough to bring it with me?” Brooke challenged him. “I’m a business woman, Mr. Jones. I know how these kinds of things go down. I also know that the only way you’re going to be able to get out of this country, which I’m assuming that’s what you’re trying to do, is with my money. So, I’ll lead the way. But feel free to keep pointing that gun at my back if you’re that afraid of a woman.” Brooke said as she walked past Daunte and over to the elevator.

The three of them walked down the hallway, Daunte gripped onto Rachels arm and kept his gun hidden low, the pistol pointed right at Brookes back.

She tried to remain calm, tried to pretend that she wasn’t scared shitless right now because she needed to be brave. Brooke needed to be brave because there was a two-month-old baby girl waiting for her to come home and be her mom. Brooke would be brave for Angie. “-For the record, Carter texted me.” She decided to say. “He’s said that the NYPD is heading to your apartment, Rach.” Maybe Rachel would take the hint that she had been able to get in touch with Carter in time and that he was coming with police while Brooke tried to stall, “You guys got out just in time.”

“Shut up!” Daunte snapped as they stepped into the elevator, following after Brooke.

Brooke stood in the elevator and moved to press the floor she needed to be on but stopped when she felt the pistol being pressed to the middle of her back. She gasped a little, trying to hide her fear and punched in the floor number where all the private elevators to each penthouse was located. Carter had told Brooke which one to take and gave her the security code to get inside of his penthouse but Brooke could barely even stare straight with the pistol pressed into her back.

Be strong. Be strong for Angie.

“So, Victoria is back,” Brooke told Rachel, acting causal even as Daunte pressed the pistol into her back harder. “I swear, she never sleeps. Victoria is already at the office, I hope she’s back at the Brownstone before we go to Davis Enterprises.”

“Yeah, me too.” Rachel agreed. “Your moms a bitch and I’d rather not have to deal with her today.”

Please, please, please, Carter – please understand that I’m trying to tell you to get in touch with my mother so she can get Angie the hell out of the building!

The elevator doors opened and Brooke led both Daunte and Rachel to the private elevator that would take them to his penthouse. “What the hell is this? I thought you said we were going to someone’s penthouse!” Daunte hissed and Brooke closed her eyes when she heard him take his gun off of safety.

“These are the private elevators to the penthouse,” Brooke said, her voice raspier than usual. “You might want to hide your gun, there’s cameras in this elevator.”

There were cameras in the other elevator but this was a way to let Carter know that Daunte was armed.

“As much as I enjoy having a pistol pressed into my back – I doubt you want security being called.”

Daunte removed the pistol from Brookes back and shoved it in the back of his pants before letting his jacket cover it so that the cameras wouldn’t pick up on it. Brooke typed in the security code once they were in Carters private elevator and Brooke kept her eyes forward and at the door the entire time. The doors opened and Carter and the police weren’t there.
She knew it was a long shot that they’d get to the penthouse before they did – but she had hoped they would.

“I see your sugar daddy is doing well for himself,” Rachel made a comment as they walked into the penthouse.

“Will you two shut up?!” Daunte snapped. “Go get the fucking card!”

Brooke walked over to Carters coffee table upon seeing that it was covered with papers and files from work. It would be easy to slip one of her cards in the piles of paper and pretend that it was the company card for Davis Enterprises. She made eye contact with Rachel briefly once she was at the coffee table and Rachel thankfully was able to understand what Brooke was wanting to do and said something to Daunte to gain his attention as Brooke continued to move the papers on the coffee table around to ‘look for the company card’ – which didn’t exist. Davis Enterprises would not be a stupid to have a company card for these exact kinds of reasons. They were a multi-million-dollar company and they took precautions for situations like this. When Daunte looked to Rachel, Brooke took a card out from her wallet quickly and slipped it under some papers.

“There,” Brooke said causing Daunte to turn and face her. She held up a black key card that she used for Victoria’s private elevator at Davis Enterprises. Thankfully, it had the company name engraved in it. She was just about to tell Daunte that the only way she could get the money out was by doing some over the top security protocol type of shit that she hadn’t thought of yet – but she was interrupted by the sound of her phone going off. A reminder she had set to alert her that it was time to give Angie her medicine.

Daunte face turned red in anger as he came stomping over to Brooke, yanking the phone out of her pocket and seeing that it had been connected the whole time to Carters phone. “-You stupid bitch!” He cursed before smashing the phone on the ground. He raised his hand and hit Brooke across the face, knocking her down. Brooke watched in horror as he reached for his gun that was still tucked away in the back of his pants and watched as images of her life played on a loop. But then Daunte’s body spasmed and his large frame landed on top of Brooke.

Rachel stood above them both holding one of Carters bookends that now had blood and a bit of Daunte’s brain on it.

“Get him off, get him off get him off get him off!” Brooke said in a panic, feeling the blood from his head wound getting on her dress.

Rachel dropped the book end and sprang into action, “Is he dead?” She whispered as she rolled Dante off of Brooke.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure.” Brooke swallowed hard as she inched away from him. She sat there for a moment before she got up and smoothed out her dress and used her hand to wipe away some of the blood from her neck, only smearing it around. Brooke moved forward and headed towards the penthouses front door.

“Whoa, where are you going?” Rachel asked, scrambling after her.

“I need to give Angie her heart medication.” Brooke said as she walked out of the penthouse saying to Rachel, “Stay with the body,” just as she left.

Brooke took the elevator back down to her floor and looked at her reflection on the way down. A bruise was already forming under her eye, more red than black and blue and more blood had gotten on her than she had thought it did. Brooke stepped off the elevator and went to her front door just as
Victoria swung the apartment door open and gasped in horror upon seeing her daughter.

“Is that your blood?” She cried.

Brooke took Angie out of Victoria’s arms and walked into the apartment. “I’m glad Carter wasn’t able to get in touch with you – Angie needs to take her medicine.” She said, acting as if nothing had happened, as if she didn’t just have a dead body on her minutes ago.

“He did, I was about to leave when I heard someone at the door and saw through the peephole that it was you!” Victoria said, her voice panicked as she followed Brooke into the apartment. “-Brooke, tell me that’s not your blood!”

Brooke maneuvered Angie in her arms and put the medication in her bottle of formula and after managing to put the lid back on tightly, she shook the drink.

“Brooke!”

She ignored her mother, only paying attention to Angie who was looking up at her with those beautiful big brown eyes as Brooke put the bottles nipple to Angies mouth, watching as she eagerly opened her mouth to suck on it, “Good job, baby girl.”

Brooke could hear her mother speaking to her but only smiled while watching Angie eat and then walked away from her mother and went to sit in Angie’s bedroom, lulling her to sleep as she sat in the rocking chair.

She no longer felt panicked about motherhood in that moment. Brooke just felt unconditional love and knew that she would never let anything bad ever happen to Angie.

_Ever._

Carter spoke with the police who were standing in Brookes apartment talking with Rachel. He pulled one of the detectives aside and left the living room and stepped into the hallway.

“Look, if there’s a way to keep Brookes name out of this – she’s about to finalize paper work tomorrow to officially adopt the kid.” He kept his voice light, trying to sound empathetic and not desperate. “The kid has got a heart defect and Brooke is able to afford the surgery that she’ll need to save her life and if the adoption agency takes her back…that baby is probably not even going to make it back to L.A.”

Brooke had already signed the papers and everything was finalized, but Carter was willing to lie to try and guilt the detective to looking the other way when it came to Brookes involvement in this
The detective frowned and looked down the hallway where they could both hear Brooke reading a book to Angie. “Fine.” He said, “She’ll be off all the official records – but we do need to take a statement from her.” Carter frowned, rubbing at his jaw, “-It’ll be anonymous. I mean, it’s not like the FEDS are going to have a case now. Jones is dead.”

Carter nodded his head in agreement, “Alright, well can we finish this all down at the station?” He asked and the detective agreed to that as well. Carter didn’t want the police at Brookes apartment on the off chance that Sharon might randomly show up.

He told Rachel to go to the station with the detectives and that he would send one of the best attorneys from his firm to represent her but that he would be staying with Brooke. When Rachel left, Victoria walked up to Carter and told him that she wanted him to file a lawsuit against Rachel for putting Brookes life in danger as well as Angies, but Carter reminded Victoria that if any papers were filed documenting that Brooke was involved in any of this; Angie could possibly be taken away.

Victoria was pissed and had told Carter to get the hell out of the apartment, and just as Carter was about to argue, Brooke walked out of the room with Angie in her arms and told her mother, “No. He’s staying.”

Carter blinked in surprise. He had planned on staying, but he didn’t think that Brooke would actually want him to stay. He opened his mouth to say something but Brooke turned around and walked back down the hallway to Angie’s nursery.

He listened as Victoria sighed, “I think she’s still in shock.” Carter nodded his head, agreeing with Brookes mother. “She’s not processing this and as much as I would like to have you murdered and your body thrown into the Hudson for what you did to my daughter, it’s clear that she feels more comfortable with you here. So…call me if she finally breaks down.” Victoria grabbed her purse and looked back to Carter, “Try and get Brooke to shower, and you’ll need to bathe Angie as well…some blood got on her.” Victoria said in a shaky voice.

Carter nodded his head, telling Victoria that he would take care of them and that he would call if anything went wrong or if Brooke asked him to. Victoria left and he was alone in the apartment with Brooke. He walked down the hallway and went to Angie’s nursery.

“Hey uh, you should take a shower.” Carter said causing Brooke to look up from where she sat at the rocking chair. She looked back down at Angie and shook her head, “Brooke – you have blood on you.”

“I can’t leave her.” Brooke told Carter. “The last time I left her I almost died so…I can’t leave her.”

Carter sighed sadly and walked over to where Brooke was sitting, sitting down on the foot rest and pressed his hand to her leg. “What if Angie and I wait in the bathroom while you take a shower?”

Brooke was quiet as she looked at Carter for a long moment and then back down at Angie. “Okay.” She agreed. “But…don’t go anywhere else. You have to stay in the bathroom with us.”

“I’ll stay in the bathroom, I promise.” He got up and it took Brooke a moment to get out of the rocking chair. It took her even longer to actually hand Angie over to Carter. Her hand grabbed a hold of his arm and Carter knew that he would have to take the first steps in order to get Brooke to leave the nursery as well. So, he walked forward and Brooke followed him. Carter had to help Brooke out of her dress as best as he could while handing Angie but managed to do it without waking the
sleeping baby. Brooke got into the shower and Carter moved to sit on the floor and softly began to rub Angies back as she was pressed against his chest.

Carter felt his heart warm at the feeling of holding the baby against his chest. He felt a sense of purpose and closed his eyes, gently pressing her cheek to the top of her head, carefully not to put any weight on it. He hadn’t known how long he stayed that way, and he hadn’t even heard the shower turn off, but the sound of Brooke talking caused him to open his eyes.

“Hm?” He asked.

Brooke had her towel wrapped around her body and her short brown hair slicked back. The blood was gone but she still had a vacant look in her eyes, like she might still be in shock from everything that had happened. It wasn’t even dark out, but he could see that she was exhausted.

She walked up to him and stood right in front of him, “What time is it?” Brooke said, repeating what Carter hadn’t heard her ask him.

Carter moved his arm up a bit to look at his watch. “It’s 4:40.” He told her.

“I need you to set some alarms on your phone.” Brooke said, sounding almost robotic. “It’s each time Angie needs her formula. She takes her medication twice a day and will need another dose in the morning.” She explained and then looked down at her hands instead of at Carter, “Daunte destroyed my phone and I had every alert set up on it…” Her voice drifted off and Carter nodded his head.

“Ohkay.” He agreed, pushing himself up a bit while still holding Angie to his chest and got up off the ground. “My phone is in the living room.”

“Ohkay.” Brooke said, too. “The list of instructions that Sharon left are on the kitchen counter.”

He nodded, “I’ll go do that now.” Carter said, moving forward to walk past Brooke so that she could have privacy to change. But she grabbed at his hand, stopping him from leaving. Carter frowned as he looked down at their now clasped hands. He looked back up at her and saw the fear in her eyes. Carter understood that she did not want to be alone. It’s probably why she had told Victoria that he was staying – because Brooke hated being vulnerable in front of her friends and family. But he had seen her completely vulnerable before. Perhaps she felt more comfortable being vulnerable in his presence. So, he said; “You’ll probably be better at programming everything – Angie and I will stay in your room with you until you’re done getting dressed and then you can program everything in my phone, does that sound good?”

Brookes eyes locked with his and nodded slowly. He squeezed her hand and led her out of the bathroom and into her bedroom. He sat on the edge of the bed with Angie while Brooke dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. She moved to sit down next to him and Carter carefully placed Angie in her mother’s arms. He moved to get up and Brooke quickly grabbed at him again.

“I’m just getting my phone.” He told her, “You got to set those reminder alerts in my phone, remember?” He said in a soft tone.

Brooke slowly let go of him and allowed him to get up off the bed. He all but sprinted down the hallway once he was out of sight and grabbed his phone and charger before running back only to stop just before the door so that Brooke couldn’t tell that he had been running.

He walked not the bedroom and saw that she had moved herself further up her bed, sitting with her back pressed against the pillows as well as her headboard. “I don’t think I can do this, Carter.”
Brooke said in a whisper.

Carter shook his head, not believing her words. He walked over to where she was sitting and sat at her feet, holding onto her leg. “Yes, you can.” He assured her.

“The first day of being her mom and I already put her life in danger.” Brooke’s lower lip trembled at her eyes filled with tears. “Not even 24 hours with me and-” She inhaled deeply, not being able to say anything else.

“Hey,” Carter said, grabbing onto her leg tightly so she would look at him. “-You protected her.” He reminded Brooke, “You put your own life in danger so your mom could get a chance to get Angie the hell out of the building. That’s what any mother would have done.” Brooke closed her eyes and Carter moved himself so that he was sitting next to Brooke, practically hanging off the edge of the bed but still pulled her against him. “You are already an amazing mother – how many moms can say that they put their child’s life before their own within the first twenty-four hours of knowing her?” He listened as Brooke gave into a little sniffle as she lay her head against his chest when he wrapped his arm around her shoulder, pulling her even closer to him. “Hell, you didn’t even clean yourself up before you were back in your apartment making sure that Angie got her medicine.”

“I probably traumatized her with all the blood on me.” Brooke sniffled again as she spoke.

“No,” Carter disagreed. “She was just happy to see her mom. That’s all that mattered.”

He listened as Brooke sighed deeply. “I was supposed to put some distance between us.” She admitted. “And now I don’t ever want you to leave.”

Carter chuckled, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. “I’m here as long as you want me.” He whispered.

“Will you stay with me and Angie for a while?” Brooke asked him. “And come to brunch tomorrow at my mom’s?” She asked and Carter was surprised by the last part.

“Of course,” He agreed. Though, it would probably be odd seeing as he was sure that Nate and Caroline would be at the brunch as well.

“Thank you.” Brooke said in a tired whisper.

He tapped her shoulder a bit, “Hey, no falling asleep. I need those reminder alerts set.” He had grabbed the list off the counter too when he had run to grab his phone and charger. He listened as Brooke gave into a little him and held out her hand for him to set his phone down in. He did and watched as she typed everything in without even looking at the list. She handed him the phone back after everything was put in and the snuggled back up to him.

“She’ll need another bottle in about three hours.” Brooke mumbled sleepily.

“Okay.” Carter said back quietly.

“Thank you.” Brooke whispered. “For always being here for me.”

Carter pressed another kiss to her head. “I will always be here for you. Both of you.” He promised. And he couldn’t be certain, but he could have heard Brooke mumbled under her breath quietly; I love you.

Finally.
Finally, he felt like he belonged again.

Right here, right now, in bed with Brooke and her daughter.

And he never wanted to let either of them go.

Chapter End Notes

What did you guys think? Did you love it? Hate it? Want more? Comments/kudos/feedback are always appreciated!
Angie hadn’t stayed asleep long. And Carter was glad for that. Mostly because he knew that the baby needed to be bathed. Brooke had pushed herself off the bed when Carter got up with Angie and told her that he was going to clean her up. “No, I can do it.” She told him. But Carter told her that he didn’t mind helping. So, she allowed him to help her and watched as she changed Angie’s diaper (mostly so that if she needed to be changed later on, Carter could offer to help with that as well). Angie had woken up crying at least six times until around 6:30 AM when the baby girl refused to go back to sleep.
“How am I going to get through this brunch?” Brooke said as she sat on the couch, Angies head resting against her chest. “How am I supposed to act normal after everything that happened yesterday? Sharon is going to see right through my bullshit.”

Carter walked out of the kitchen holding a cup of coffee and brought it to Brooke, taking a seat next to her on the couch. “You’ve been in the public light for a long time – you know how to lie by now.”

She rolled her eyes, letting out a little huff of a laugh before bringing the cup of coffee to her lips and taking a long sip. “You’d think that would be true.” Brooke said after swallowing the coffee. “But you know I’ve always been a shit liar.”

He chuckled, “That’s true.” Carter agreed, “-so, I’ll tell you what I tell my guilty clients to say while being questioned. If Sharon asks how everything went after she left; only talk about the basics.”

Brooke kinked her brow at him, “The basics?”

“Angie had her medicine, she ate, you bathed her, she woke up a couple times during the night but that was expected – the basics. You don’t have to give her every single detail about what happened after she left. Sharon will want to know about how Angie’s night went. Not yours.”

Carter watched as Brooke bit down on her lower lip, clearly going over what he just said. “But what if she does ask about how my night was…”

He moved his hand to rest on her knee, “Tell her that you’re a little tired, that yesterday was a pretty big day and a bit of an adjustment. But having Angie is a gift. Because that’s the fucking truth.” Carter squeezed her knee and Brooke closed her eyes and smiled softly. “I uh,” He moved his hand off of her knee and rubbed at his knee awkwardly. “Do you,” Carter let out an embarrassed laugh and shook his head, “Things have settled down a bit and I was wondering if you still want me to come with you to this brunch?”

When he looked back at Brooke, she was smiling, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “Are you trying to get out of it?”

“No!” He said loudly causing Angie to fuss and Brooke to laugh. She handed him her cup of coffee and adjusted Angie a bit. “I mean…no, I’m not trying to get out of it. I just know that Nate probably won’t be happy to see me there, or Caroline for the matter. I actually don’t think anyone at that brunch is going to be happy about me coming.”

Brooke shrugged, “This brunch is about Sharon meeting the people in my life – the people who will be in Angies life and…you’re included in that.” She told him and Carter felt his heart beat speed up. “I’d like you to be there, Carter. Only if you want to.”

He smiled, inhaling through his nose. “I’d love to come.” Brooke nodded her head and tried to hide her smile but Carter could see it, which only made him smile harder. “Should we go together or…”

Brooke bit down on her lip and chuckled, “Well, I need your help bringing some of Angie’s things – so we can just say that you offered to take a cab with me so that you could help.”

Carter nodded his head in agreement, “That sounds like a solid plan.” He licked at his lower lip, “And…what about when the brunch is over and Sharon is back in LA?”

She shrugged her shoulders, “I guess we’ll just come home.” Brooke said in a whisper. “Just you and Angie?” He asked, needing to be sure that Brooke actually wanted him to come home
Brooke swallowed hard and shook her head, “No.” She whispered again. “Not just me and Angie.”

He full on grinned, “I really want to kiss you right now.” Carter spoke honestly.

Brooke laughed, “That’s not going to happen.”

Carter raised his brow, “You sure about that?” Her cheeks turned a deep shade of red and Brooke turned her head to try and hide the blush. Carter chuckled and got up and off of the couch.

“Where are you going?” Brooke asked as he headed to the front door. “You’re leaving?”

“Grabbing some things from my penthouse to keep here.” Carter said nonchalantly.

“Oh, is that so?” Brooke huffed out a laugh. “That’s a bit bold, don’t you think?”

“Nope,” Carter said as he opened the door. When he looked back at Brooke, he could see the slight panic in her eyes at the thought of being alone. “I have the spare key, I’ll lock up.”

Brooke nodded her head, “Just…don’t take too long. I have to get ready for the brunch, too.”

“We can save time by showering together.” Carter suggested with a smirk and Brooke rolled her eyes and laughed, telling him to go. He felt better leaving her for a bit knowing that he had made Brooke laugh before he left. Hopefully it’d be enough to tide her over until he came back.

Carter didn’t want Brooke worrying anymore than she had to. And he knew that she was scared after what had happened yesterday but he needed a few things if he were to stay with Brooke.

If he were – Nah, he was staying with her. No matter what.

He was a damn good lawyer, so if Brooke told him she wanted him to leave…maybe he’d persuade her otherwise?

---

By the time that Carter got back to her apartment with a large bag of his things, and his work briefcase tucked under his arm, Brooke had already gotten Angie dressed and ready for the brunch.
She had handed the baby over to Carter and stressed that he try not to spill his coffee on her outfit to which he had laughed at. Brooke had narrowed her eyes at him, serious about the coffee thing. Carter smiled and promised Brooke that he wouldn’t even hold coffee while holding Angie.

So, she went to go get herself ready. Brooke tried hard to focus on the facts of last night when it came to Angie. She was ready to answer Sharon’s questions and only focus on how Angie’s night went. Carter told her to focus on the basics – Angie had her medicine, she woke up a few times during the night, they gave her a bath; no, she gave her a bath. Brooke couldn’t let Sharon know that Carter had spent the night.

She had to lie about that, too. Not just to Sharon, but to her family as well. And on the topic about lying about Carter – Brooke realized that she could no longer lie to herself.

Brooke felt something for him again. Perhaps it never went away? She had tried years to forget him, to push him so far back in her mind that her feelings would gradually go away. But they didn’t. And that was terrifying to Brooke – because he had hurt her so bad, he had broken her. How could she still have feelings for the man who had crushed her heart in his hands out of revenge? How the fuck was Brooke able to sleep next to him in bed, head against his chest feeling warmth build and her stomach to flutter after what he had done to her?! Brooke preached about feminism and how women who were cheated on should never go back to the man who did that – but… Carter. Why did she still have feelings for him? Intense feelings? Why did she imagine a life where they both raised Angie together and Christmas’ together with their families and Angie’s first birthday party that they’d throw? How could she ever think that it would be a possibility? He had cheated on her with her cousin – with Blair! How could she just…let that go?

But the more time she spent with him the easier it was to forget the look in his eyes when he had kissed Blair – it was easy to forget about the heartbreak she had suffered and all those nights she had cried herself to sleep. It was easy to forget that she swore to herself that she’d never let him in again – that he’d never have her heart.

She had tried so hard to lie to herself and say that their arrangement was because she was horny and that when she met someone else the thing between them would end – but Brooke didn’t see that happening. Brooke saw herself (maybe) going on a date with someone and then at the end of the night she’d come home to Carter. Because she didn’t want to go home to anyone else. Just him.

And that was fucking terrifying. Opening herself up to the possibility of him breaking her heart again was absolutely fucking petrifying! What the fuck was she doing?

Brooke applied her eyeliner carefully, trying to quiet all the chatter in her head by focusing on doing her make up instead.

And then her phone rang.

INCOMING CALL…RACHEL GATINA
It was from one of her old numbers and Brooke hit the ignore button and pressed her hands to the vanity, taking deep breaths in and out. She couldn’t do this right now – not after everything that had happened yesterday. Because if she spoke to Rachel before she left for this brunch – she wouldn’t be able to make it through it.

Her phone beeped and Brooke looked down to see that she had a new voicemail message. She inhaled deeply before picking up the phone to listen to it. What was the harm in checking the voicemail? It’s not like she had to discuss what had happened last night. She could be completely mute on the other line while listening.

“Look, I know you probably hate me and I don’t blame you. God, Brooke – I am so sorry! I just didn’t have any other choice! You have to know that I would have never put your life; or Angie’s in danger unless I thought I was going to get killed! Whatever, that’s not an excuse! I shouldn’t have gone to you, I should have just...found a different way to lure him some place else. But I knew Carter would above all check in on you and...I’m sorry. I’m leaving to go stay with my parents for a while...I understand if you don’t want to talk to me or have me in your life...just know that I love you and you mean everything to me and that I am so sorry.”

Brooke felt her eyes swell with tears when the voicemail ended.

Rachel had been her must trusted friend for so long! And now Brooke felt like she didn’t even know Rachel anymore – yes, Brooke understood that Rachel had been scared but...Angie’s life and safety was the most important thing to Brooke right now. That’s where her focus needed to be.

“You okay?”

Her body relaxed at the sound of Carters voice. She looked in the mirror and watched as he slowly made his way to her, Angie asleep against his chest. Brooke nodded her head and wiped away a stray tear and fixed her make up. “I’m good.” She lied.

“You look beautiful.” Carter told her causing her to briefly forget about Rachel. She huffed out a laugh and shook her head, “You do.” He insisted.

She turned and looked at Carter, her body now pressed against the counter. “Well, you don’t.” Brooke said, trying to lighten up the moment. She pointed to the spit up stain on his shirt and Carter laughed.

“Yeah, I don’t think she likes my cologne.”

Brooke laughed at that. “Or, it could be because you overfed her.”

He shrugged lightly and walked over to where Brooke was. “Could be.” He smirked down at her. She titled her head to the side and licked at her lower lip as she smiled. “Or maybe that was just an excuse you came up with because you don’t want me to change my cologne.”

Brooke rolled her eyes and looked away from Carter, “You’re so full of yourself.” She said in amusement.

He chuckled, nodding his head in agreement and then handed Angie off to Brooke. “I’m going to
“Change my shirt.” Carter told her.

Brooke had noticed that when Carter came back from his apartment that his hair was wet and he had cleaned up a bit. She didn’t know how he managed to do that all so fast – when they had dated; Carter took the worlds longest showers. But, then again, he had done that so Brooke would eventually get fed up and join him in the shower since he was using up all the hot water.

“You good?” He asked Brooke and she nodded her head with a smile.

“I just have to get dressed.” She told him.

“I can wait to change my shirt,” Carter smirked. “That way I can stay with you while you change.”

Brooke laughed at that, “You do realize that all your things are in my room – and that’s where I’m headed, right?”

He grinned, “Just wanted to offer my services.”

“You’re ridiculous,” Brooke said and chuckled. She walked past him and out of the master bath and into the bedroom. He, of course, followed after her. Brooke set Angie down in the middle of the bed, putting pillows on either side of her so she wouldn’t roll off the bed.

When she turned around, Carter was standing right in front of her. Brooke looked up through her lashes as she felt her heart beating rapidly against her chest. Carter’s hand pressed softly against her cheek and then down the slope of her neck and Brooke felt herself leaning into his touch, eyes closing as she relished in the feeling. “You sure you want me to come?” Carter asked again. Brooke didn’t open her eyes, just nodded her head slowly and moved forward to press her head against his chest, her arms wrapping around his middle. His arms moved around her too, pulling her closer to him.

It wasn’t until Angie let out a little gurgle that Brooke and Carter pulled away, their focus now on the infant. “Alright, alright.” Brooke said with a chuckle, “I’ll go get ready.”

Angie gurgled again and Carter laughed, “She means business, Davis. Already a lot like her mama.”

“Damn straight.” Brooke smirked and went into her closet to pick out a dress to wear to the brunch (or, breakfast, really). She settled on a dark navy-blue sun dress. Brooke walked back into the bedroom once she had put the dress on, motioning for Carter to help her zip it up. He did, fingers skimming up her back as he zipped her up. When she turned around, Carter was dressed in a light blue work shirt and a pair of tan khakis. She smiled, “And here I thought you only ever wore suits now.”

“Oh, come on now, Brooke. You saw me in jeans the other day.” He referred to the outfit he had showed up in to paint Angie’s nursery. Brooke bit down on her lower lip as she chuckled. “I forgot to tell you yesterday when I first saw you with Angie,” Carter said causing Brooke to look up at him. His fingers pushed back her hair behind her ear and Brooke watched as Carter’s chest rose and fell quickly. “I really like your new hair.” He confessed. “Much more…you.”

Brooke looked down again and breathed out his name, “Carter,” she moved her hand to rest on his wrist. “You can’t say things like that to me.”

“Why?” Brooke knew he was smirking, she could hear it in his voice.

She looked back up at him, “You know why.” Brooke said slowly.
Carter sighed out and nodded his head. “Okay.” He agreed. Carter then leaned down low, his lips hovering over Brookes, “-even though I know you really, really want me to kiss you right now.”

Brooke fought the urge to push up on her feet and meet his lips in a kiss. Thankfully, Angie started to fuss and saved Brooke from crossing that line once again.

She needed her sexual urges to catch up with her heart. And that meant she could not kiss Carter, she could not have sex with him, she could not have any sexual thoughts about him. Brooke pressed her hands against Carter’s chest and pushed him away slowly and walked over to Angie.

“You ready to go, baby girl?” She asked in a coo.

Brooke picked up Angie, grabbing the car seat she had bought and strapped in the infant. Once she was safely tucked in, Brooke turned around and went to leave the room. But before she could exit, Carter came in holding the diaper bag Brooke had bought. “I think I overdid it with the diapers.” He said with a sheepish grin.

Brooke chuckled and grabbed Angie’s car seat and walked over to him. “Wipes?” He nodded, “Baby butt cream?” Carter chuckled but nodded his head, “Angie’s formula?”

“Yes.”

“What about her medicine?”

“I packed it even though she already had her morning dose and the next one isn’t until the evening.” Carter smirked and Brooke playfully rolled her eyes.

“Hey, you don’t know when some sort of apocalyptic shit might happen. Better safe than sorry.” Brooke told him as she made her way over to him, patting his chest goodheartedly and then motioned for him to follow her. “-Pacifier?” Brooke asked as they walked down the hall.

“Yes.”

“A change of clothes in case she blows out?”

Carter let out a groan as laughed, “Three outfits.”

When they made it to the front door, Brooke turned and looked at Carter, “Purple monkey?” She asked her final question.

“Really?” He raised his brows, “Did you actually think that I would forget the purple monkey?” Brooke shook her head as she laughed, “Underestimating me, Davis. Come on, you know me better than that.” Carter teased.

Brooke took in a deep breath, grabbing her purse and keys off the table by the door and looked back at Carter. “Alright, let’s lie our way through this thing.”

He smiled, “You’re doing great, Brooke.”

Conceal. Don’t deal. Dammit. She totally still loved him.
Caroline reached for her fiancée’s hand, giving it a quick squeeze to try and calm him down as they sat next to each other at the dining room table in Victoria and Howard’s Brownstone. None of them had expected Brooke to show up with Carter, especially not his sister. Were they together? Or were they friends? Of course, Caroline knew that Carter was still in love with Brooke – but did she have feelings for him, too? Would this turn into a big shit-show like it had the last time? Had Caroline made a mistake by sending Carter over to help Brooke paint and set up Angie’s bedroom?

Nate was burning holes from his glare at Carter and Victoria matched his look as she looked to Carter, too. Howard didn’t seem too bothered by it. He was mostly trying to distract the adoption case worker from all of the tension in the room by reciting the script Victoria had him memorize.

Yes, a literal script. Caroline and Nate were well aware that Angie would be coming; but Victoria had been completely blind-sided. Brookes mother was upset with Brooke, Caroline could see that, but she also seemed like she was hiding something. Something big. So, did Howard for that matter. Caroline knew that Nate had sensed it, too. But until Sharon left, they were just going to pretend to be a big happy (dysfunctional) family sipping their mimosas.

Nate had made sure that he was the one making the mimosas each time someone wanted a refill. He would mark Caroline’s cup and only fill it with orange juice only while filling everyone else’s with orange juice and champagne. They were not planning on telling anyone about this pregnancy for a few weeks at least.

“So, Nate,” Sharon brought her attention to Nate and smiled, “Brooke tells me that the two of you were very close even before your parents got married.”

The sound of Carter choking on his drink caused all eyes to land on him. Except Brooke, who was looking down at her plate with an amused smile while she closed her eyes. Clearly, they had both thought of the same thing after hearing Sharon’s words. To be honest, probably everyone in the room was thinking the very same thing: the Hamptons before senior year when Nate and Brooke had sex.

“Sorry,” Carter apologized, clearing his throat. “I haven’t had champagne in a while and forgot how bubbly it can be.” Caroline rolled her eyes at his excuse.

“To answer your question, Sharon. Yes. Brooke has been my best friend for a very long time.” Nate said, taking the attention away from Carter. “We got really close the summer before our senior year after she was going through a bit of a hard time. Brooke really needed a shoulder to lean on.” Nate looked back at Carter and glared.

“Yes,” Victoria interrupted, causing Sharon to look away from Nate and Carters exchange. “Brooke
was interning for my sister, Eleanor Waldorf, I don’t know if you’ve heard of her—"

“Oh, no, I am a big fan of Waldorf Designs.” Sharon told Victoria with a smile.

“-Actually, Waldorf Designs is now run by her daughter now, Blair Waldorf.” Nate put emphasis on the name and when Caroline looked over at Brooke, she gave Nate a look that Caroline had never seen her give him – a look of disappointment and a bit of betrayal. But Nate wasn’t looking at Brooke, he kept his focus on Carter. “It’s so funny to see both Brooke and Blair excel at the same career, they shared a lot of dreams in common – they shared a lot of things in common.”

“Enough.” Brooke said and Caroline watched as Nate looked over at his step sister, his face instantly falling when he saw her expression. She looked away from Nate and back to Sharon, “I’m sorry, Sharon – Nate is trying to remind me of that fact that while Carter and I were dating, he cheated on me with Blair.” The sound of Angie crying caused Brooke to get up from her seat, “Which is completely uncalled for and a cheap shot.” Brooke looked right at Nate. “If you’ll excuse me.” She left the table and room and went to where Angie was napping in the small playpen Victoria had bought the day before.

Victoria had bought a lot of stuff for Angie, it was impressive seeing how last minute it all was.

Caroline looked at Carter who was looking down at his plate and avoiding everyone’s eyes. She looked to Nate and let go of his hand and got up from the table. “I’m going to go see if Brooke needs help with Angie.”

She heard Nate sigh but didn’t look back when he called her name.

“Sharon, I have to show you the play room I’ve been working on for Angie!” Caroline heard Victoria say, trying to change the subject entirely. “-It’s upstairs, let me take you.”

“Oh, okay.”

Caroline left just as Howard began to scold his son for behaving so rudely in front of Sharon, seeing as she had the authority to deem Brooke unfit to parent Angie. The papers may be signed, but one wrong thing and Sharon could have Angie taken away from Brooke and put back in the system.

“You okay?” Caroline asked as she walked up to Brooke, she was sitting on the couch in the living room and had Angie pressed against her chest, running her fingers down the infant’s back to soothe her.

Brooke huffed, shaking her head. “Nate is a dick.”

“Can’t argue with that,” Caroline said, moving to sit next to Brooke on the couch. “But…come on, Brooke,” She said quietly, “You show up here with Carter – how do you expect us all to react?”

“Well, I would hope that one of you wouldn’t bring up the fact that Carter fucked my cousin while we were dating – I didn’t expect your reactions to be super happy, but I expected no one bring up that.” She spoke bitterly.

“Why don’t you want it brought up?” Caroline pressed. “Because you and Carter are dating again?”

“No!” Brooke said in a yell whisper. “Because I don’t want one of the worst things that has ever happened to me be brought up while Sharon is here to basically evaluate the people who are going to be in Angie’s life!”

Caroline frowned, seeing now that Brooke was just afraid of losing Angie and not about the Carter
and Blair part of it all. Which, to be honest, was a bit unsettling. Brooke suddenly was just willing to what? Forget? There had to be a reason that Brooke was suddenly okay with just forgetting the past – something big. “What’s going on, Brooke? Between you and Carter.” She clarified.

“We’re friends.” Brooke said to Caroline who shook her head, not believing her. “-You know what, I don’t need to defend us being friends – you all don’t get to pick and choose who I get to spend my time with. Carter has been incredibly helpful, especially yesterday – God, he’s the whole reason that I was even able to adopt Angie.”

“Brooke, he did all of that because he’s still in love with you!” Caroline said in low tone. “-And showing up here looking like a damn family is not fair to him!” Brooke closed her eyes and pressed her lips together as she inhaled deeply through her nose. Caroline knew that she was pissed. “I’m sorry – okay? I just want you to know where Nate was coming from.”

She licked at her lower lip and opened her eyes. “Well thank you for that, Caroline.” Brooke said in a sharp tone before walking past her, still holding Angie to her chest. Nate was walking in right as Brooke walked out, trying to get her to stay so they could talk but Brooke ignored him and went back into the dining room.

“So,” Nate drew out the word. “Out of everyone here I’m the biggest douchebag…and your brother is here, so that’s saying something.” Caroline tried to fight her smile but, in the end, she lost that fight and gave into a smile. Nate sighed and walked over to where Caroline “Did she say why he’s here? Are they back together?”

“She says they aren’t but…I think they’re both keeping something from us.” Caroline told him. “Brooke said that Carter as been helpful, especially yesterday – so I don’t know. Maybe something happened between them yesterday – maybe that’s why Victoria and your dad are acting so strange?”

They went back into the dining room and saw that Sharon was gathering her things. “Brooke, I can see now that Angie will be surrounded by people who are incredibly protective of you.” Her gaze drifted to Nate, “And I hope that the protectiveness they have for you will be something they feel for Angie, too.” She smiled softly at Nate.

He let out a sigh of relief, Caroline could tell from the look on his face that Nate had been worried that he had ruined the whole thing after the Blair and Carter comment.

“Brooke,” Sharon focused back on Brooke, “Please keep in touch, I’d love to know how each doctor visit goes, and I’d really like to know when the surgery happens so I can send love her way.” Caroline watched as Brooke smiled and handed Angie to Carter with ease.

Victoria, Howard, Nate, and Caroline all looked at Carter in shock who only payed attention to Angie, gently pressing a kiss to her head. WTF.

“Thank you so much, Sharon.” Brooke said, hugging the woman. “You have made my dreams come true…I owe you everything.”

“I’m just glad that we finally found a good fit for Angie.” Sharon hugged Brooke back. Carter handed Angie back to Brooke and offered to help Sharon with her bags and she thanked him, taking him up on his offer. “Can you come to the airport with me, too?” Sharon joked, “-This suitcase is a pain in my ass.”

Victoria and Howard laughed, “Oh, trust us, I know.” Howard told Sharon, “Traveling with Victoria on our honeymoon actually caused me to pull my back lugging around all her bags.” He said causing Victoria to laugh and Sharon to smile.
“I’d love to help you out, Sharon – but I have to get back home after this.” Carter picked up her bags and walked past Nate and Caroline with Sharon as they walked to the door.

“It was lovely meeting you, Nate, and you, too, Caroline – I expect pictures of Angie at your wedding.” Sharon waved goodbye to them and walked out of the Brownstone with Carter.

“Howard, will you grab Angie’s things?” Brooke asked while looking at Nate.

“First, I think we all need to have a little discussion.” Victoria told the room.

“I am not going to defend inviting Carter here again!” Brooke said in anger.

“No, you’re not.” Victoria agreed with her. “But I am going to explain to them why you probably felt the need to bring him.”

Caroline listened on in horror as Victoria told them what had happened yesterday with Daunte, the man who Rachel owed money to, how Brooke had protected Angie by going with him even though she knew there was a chance that she could die – and how Brooke came back downstairs covered in blood but the only thing that mattered to her was making sure that Angie had her medicine in time. “Carter was the one who warned Brooke, he was the one who showed up with the cops – he did everything he possibly could to protect both Brooke and Angie – so you can’t really blame Brooke for wanting to include him in this today.”

Caroline looked at Brooke who was looking down at Angie, eyes not willing to look up at them.

Both her and Nate turned around at the sound of Carter clearing his throat from behind them, Angie’s car seat in one hand and her diaper bag slung across his shoulder. Howard hadn’t gotten around to grabbing it, he had stayed with Victoria while she told everyone what had happened to Brooke yesterday.

“You ready?” Carter looked to Brooke who finally was looking away from Angie.

“Yes.” Brooke said and walked past them all.

“Brooke,” Nate said but she ignored him and left with Carter. He grabbed Caroline’s hand and she gave it a squeeze. “If I had known,” He started to say.

“Hey,” Caroline moved to stand in front of him. “You didn’t know.” She smiled softly, “And that’s probably a good thing because if you had known about this before the brunch, you would have babied Brooke the whole time and Sharon would know something was up.”

Nate sighed and Caroline pulled him into a hug, resting her head against his shoulder as he hid his face in the crook of her neck.

“Brooke will be alright.”

“She will.” Victoria agreed with Caroline, walking over and pressing her hand to Nate’s shoulder.

No one knew if she would be.

But they had hope.

And if Carter had a role in helping her through this? Caroline wouldn’t stand in the way. Nate on the other hand? He might protest a bit.

But it wasn’t up to them.
It was up to Brooke.

“I’m sorry.”

Brooke looked up and towards her bedroom door to see Carter standing outside of it. He had put Angie down for a nap and told Brooke to get some rest. But she couldn't find the will to close her eyes. Brooke was just so angry at Nate - at everyone! She wasn't an idiot; Brooke knew that the fact that she bringing Carter to family events was incredibly confusing for them to understand - but she didn't understand it either! And Caroline was right, it wasn't fair to him either. And Brooke knew that she should tell Carter to leave and stay at his own place but she just didn't want him to go. Brooke wanted him to stay and to sleep in bed next to her so she could fall asleep with her head against his chest like she used to thirteen years ago. Brooke wanted to forget every single bad thing that had happened in their relationship and start new with him - she wanted to forget every bad thing that had happened in the last twenty-four hours. But she knew that was impossible.

Just like it wasn't possible that she'd ever be able to forget what Carter had done to her.

“I knew it was a bad idea for me to come but I went anyways because…I,” Carter stopped and looked down at the ground. Brooke frowned, seeing he was struggling. She opened her mouth to say his name but he looked back up at her, “Because I love you. Still.” He confessed, eyes on Brooke as she inhaled deeply, trying not to get too worked up. Why did he have to tell her this now when she was so confused about everything? “And I know you don’t believe that I ever loved you when we were together because of what I did but I did and I still do.”

“Carter,” Brooke closed her eyes, not able to look him in the eyes. He cheated on her - he broke her heart - so why did she still want him? What was wrong with her?

“And I know this is shitty timing and I should have got on a plane thirteen years ago and told you this in person but I am incredibly insecure.” Carter admitted.

Brooke smiled softly at his words, she knew this already. But it was the first time Carter ever really said it out loud to her. Brooke knew that he was deeply insecure growing up with a father who put him down every chance he could - it wasn't new information to her. “You don’t say?” She said back, causing him to sigh out in relief, probably relieved that she wasn't telling him to stop making excuses.
“I am.” He agreed, walking into the room now. “And when you said no after I asked you to marry me I…did what I do best. Fuck up. Ruin things. I did the wrong thing. But you said no and I thought that…you didn’t love me. Because I was young and dumb and listened to ever doubt I’ve ever had about myself and I know that’s not an excuse. I know that being insecure won’t make you forget it or forgive me but I needed to say it. Because I should have said it thirteen years ago. I should have told you that I love you and that I don’t ever want to be without you and that I’ve been miserable these last thirteen years without you and no matter how hard I tried to forget you – I couldn’t. You’re always right here.” He placed his hand over his heart.

Brooke felt a single tear roll down her cheek, her eyes blurry from the tears that she had been trying to keep in but was failing incredibly. She bit down on her lower lip to try and force her tears to stay put but lost that fight. More tears fell and there was nothing she could do to try and stop them now.

“I love you, Brooke.” Carter whispered and moved to kneel at the side of her bed where she was sitting. He took her hand in his and continued on, “I have never loved anyone else – it’s always been you and it always will be. And I understand why you don’t trust me and why you probably can never love me again because I’ve hated myself every day after what I did but…I love you. And I need you to hear that because I can’t go on with life knowing that you believe I never loved you. Because I did. I still do. And I always will. I love you.”

Brooke took in a deep breath. What the hell was she supposed to say? How was she supposed to explain to him how she was feeling in that moment - what she had been feeling since she showed up at his penthouse after her divorce party. “You hurt me, Carter.” She said in a whisper. “More than any other person has ever hurt me in my entire life and I…I think I convinced myself that you didn’t love me to try and ease that pain a bit.” Brooke admitted. “Because the thought that you would do something like that to me even though you loved me – that’s just devastating.”

He closed his eyes, dipping his head and pressing his forehead against the back of her hand. She felt his tears hot against her skin and bit down hard on her lower lip again. Because what she was about to say next was going to change everything. There was no going back.

“But despite all of that. I love you, too.” Carter looked up at her, eyes wide in shock. Brooke shrugged her shoulders, tears still falling. “I never stopped.” Her voice broke and Carter moved forward but Brooke stopped him, pressing her hand against his chest. She shook her head and looked at him sadly. “But I don’t trust you with my heart, Carter.”

Carter moved so that he was sitting across from her on her bed. “What can I do to fix that?” Carter asked, voice breaking.

“I don’t think you can fix it, Carter.” Brooke spoke honestly. “I will always remember what you did and I will never forget and as much as I love you and always will…I can’t let it go right now. And I don’t think I can move forward with you until I do.”

Carter closed his eyes, nodding his head. He wiped away his own tears and cleared his throat so that his voice would be strong. “I’ll wait.” He told her.

Brooke frowned - would he really be willing to wait? Or was he just going to hurt her again? “It might be a while.” Brooke whispered.

Brooke frowned - would he really be willing to wait? Or was he just going to hurt her again? “It might be a while.” Brooke whispered.

“I don’t care.” Carter looked back at her. “I’m not letting you go again.” She gave him a watery smile and was actually grateful when the baby monitor came through letting her know that Angie was fussing. Brooke got off the bed and Carter followed her to Angie’s bedroom, his eyes on her as she picked up the infant and then sat down in the rocking chair to try and help her sleep. “Do you still…”
Brooke knew what he was asking, “Selfishly…yes, I still want you to stay here.” She admitted. “But I understand if that’s going to be too hard for you. So, the choice to stay or leave is yours.”

Carter shook his head. “I’m not leaving again.” He assured her. "Ever."

Brooke felt her heart rate quicken and stomach clench at the fierceness in his voice.

*You may have told Carter that you still love him but that does not mean you can start having sex with him again.*

She bit down on her lip and had to look away from him only causing Carter let out a tiny chuckle. “What?” She said, head snapping back in his direction as she glared in annoyance.

“I know that look.” He smirked.

Brooke blushed. “Shut up!” She hid her face. “We are not having sex anymore or even kissing! Just because I told you I still love you does not mean that you have free access to get inside my pants again, got it?” Brooke said in a serious tone after looking back to Carter. “I need to figure things out and sex just complicates everything.”

“And kissing does, too?” He walked forward and Brooke felt her cheeks flush again.

“Yes!” Brooke laughed. “Because it’s never just kisses with us – our kisses always lead to sex.”

Carter shook his head, “I disagree.” He challenged her as he now stood next to rocking chair. “I’ve kissed you a couple times in the last few days and we haven’t had sex.”

“Um, wrong.” Brooke corrected him as she looked up and into his stupid blue eyes. “You kissed me and then left to go get Angie’s formula and what happened when you came back?”

"Would you like me to remind you?” Carter smirked again.

Brooke scoffed at his words and shook her head, “You are lucky I am holding Angie right now and not something I can actually hit you with.”

He chuckled and leaned down a bit, hovering over Brooke as she continued to look up at him. “One more kiss?” He asked and Brooke involuntarily licked at her lips to wet them causing Carter laughed. She instantly looked away from him, denying his chance at one more kiss. “You so want to kiss me.”

He continued to laugh as he crouched down a bit so their faces were level. Brooke shook her head, denying his accusation. *No.* She did not want to kiss his stupid kissable lips. “Just let me prove to you that we can kiss without it leading to sex. We can have safe words – we can have a ‘pause’ word. Come on, Brooke – you can’t expect me to just not want to kiss you anymore.”

“I don’t expect you to stop wanting to kiss me – I just expect you to…not.” He grinned and Brooke knew what was going to happen next and she didn’t pull away to try and stop it. Carter kissed her and proved his very good point that it wouldn’t just be him wanting to kiss her and not being able to – it’d be her wanting to kiss him, too, and not being able to. Which was kinda of like torture seeing as he was a *really good kisser*. When he pulled away, Brooke kept her eyes closed, smiling a little. Angie made a gurgling noise and both of them turned their attention to her and saw that she was smiling happily at them.

“Uh oh,” Carter said. “I think Angie wants us to still be able to kiss.”

Brooke laughed and looked down at Angie, “Is that so, baby girl?”
Angie made another gurgling noise while smiling and Carter laughed now.

“Fine.” Brooke agreed. She looked back up at Carter. “But we need to lay down some rules, okay? No kissing in public, only in my apartment.”

“What about mine?”

Brooke reluctantly agreed, “Fine. Your place, too.” She said causing him to grin. “-And we aren’t telling anyone about this – you saw how judgey they all were today.” Carter nodded his head in agreement. “And when we’re out in public together you can’t look at me like you are right now.”

Carter grinned, “How am I looking at you right now?”

“Like you always look at me.” She smirked.

“Well, if I started to look at you differently people might become suspicious.”

He was way too good at arguing. Brooke blamed law school.

“It’s a valid argument.” Carter smirked. Brooke chuckled and Carter moved forward and kissed her softly. “You want take-out?” He asked as he pulled away.

Brooke gasped happily, “Yes, please. I don’t think I ate a single thing at breakfast I was so nervous!”

He chuckled, “I know.” Carter grinned.

He left the room and Brooke listened as he ordered from her favorite pizza place and try to calm her rapidly beating heart.

*Take things slow.*

*Just take it slow.*

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hopefully I didn't make too many mistakes or spelling errors! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Wait – I thought that you guys were going out of town?” Carter said when his little sister walked into his office. He had to run into the office really quick that morning before he would pick up Brooke and head over to the jewelers to pick out a wedding band for Caroline. He was dreading that but that was only because Vanessa was coming too. God, that was going to be fucking awkward.

Caroline sat down on the chair across from Carter’s desk looking paler than usual with dark bags under her eyes – to be honest, she looked like absolute hell. “Nate is out of town.” She said while pulling a bottle of ginger-ale out of her purse and putting it to her lips. “I just haven’t been feeling very well so I stayed home.” She said after she swallowed the liquid.

He opened his mouth but at the sight of Caroline making a very obvious face that she was about to get sick, Carter backed away from her in his chair. “If you have the flu I need you to leave.” He told her after his mind had instantly gone to Angie.

Caroline inhaled deeply and her face relaxed and no longer looked like she was on the verge of puking. She then looked at Carter with a glare, likely pissed that he had told her to leave. “What?” She scoffed. “Why?”

“I don’t want to get sick.” Carter told her.

It wasn’t a lie. If he got sick that meant Angie might get sick and he didn’t want to take the risk of her getting sick with her heart condition.

“Relax, Carter.” Caroline said as she took another sip from her ginger-ale but just as she put the cap back on she lurched forward and grabbed Carter’s coffee mug and proceeded to get sick in it.

“What the hell, Care?!” He said as he jumped out of his seat to get away from the mess she was making all over his desk now (seeing as the coffee cup wasn’t very big.)

“I’m sorry.” She cried after she was done puking.

“That it, I’m taking you to the doctors.” Carter said as he made a face while he moved to grab the coffee mug out of Caroline’s hands to set down on his desk. “Come on, get up.” He said as he moved his arm around her to help her out of her seat.

“-Carter, no. I’m fine.”

“I beg to differ, Caroline.” Carter said as he led her to the door.

“-Carter, stop!” Caroline fought him.

“You’re sick!” Carter argued. “-You’re going to the doctors!”

Caroline yanked out of his grip and shoved Carter away from her. “I’m not sick, Carter!”

He was about to argue with her more but his eyes had landed on where Caroline was resting her hand on her stomach. But not in a way that someone might do when they felt sick. It looked like she was…caressing her stomach and it all became clear to him. “You’re pregnant?”

She quickly moved her hand away from her stomach and shook her head. “No!” Caroline’s voice grew higher causing Carter to smile. “I’m not!”
“You are knocked up.” Carter chuckled.

“No, I’m not-” Her argued again but soon her eyes widened and Caroline quickly ran to the door where there was a waste bin against the wall and proceeded to get sick once again. Carter laughed but walked over to where Caroline was and held her hair back for her while she got sick. He kicked his door open and shouted for his assistant to bring a glass of water for his sister and continued to hold Caroline’s hair back until she was done puking.

His assistant came into his office and instantly made a face at the stench of the room now. “Joshua can you get the custodian to come clean this up?”

Joshua nodded his head and quickly left the room.

Caroline groaned and Carter rubbed at her back before moving her away from the waste bin. “When’d you find out?” He asked his sister while walking her back over to his desk.

Caroline let him help her back into the chair but instead of going back to his side of the desk, he sat in the chair next to her. She huffed and leaned back in the chair. “A couple days ago.” She told him as she closed her eyes. “I got a call from my doctor the day that Brooke got Angie, actually.” She admitted. “But Nate and I wanted to wait a few weeks to tell anyone so Brooke could have her time with Angie.”

Carter had to laugh at that. “Seriously?” He said once Caroline opened her eyes to look at him. “-You’re not telling anyone because you’re…what? Afraid of stealing Brookes thunder?” He shook his head and laughed again. “That’s fucking stupid, Caroline.” Caroline rolled her eyes at his words but Carter continued on, “-If you think Brooke is going to be anything other than absolutely thrilled for you and Nate – you obviously don’t know her very well.”

She scoffed, “-Oh, because you know Brooke so well now.” Caroline said sarcastically. “What is going on between you two?”

He smiled and shook his head, “Don’t change the subject, Caroline. What’s the real reason you aren’t telling everyone?”

Caroline sighed and looked away from her brother. “I don’t know.”

He frowned. Carter could hear the real reason in her voice. She was scared.

“What are you afraid of?”

Caroline sat up and inhaled deeply. “You know that Mom had a couple miscarriages after I was born.” She reminded Carter.

He sighed, “-Care, mom was in her forties when she had her miscarriages.” He told her. “You’re only thirty.” Caroline didn’t seem to be listening to his words, only the fears in her head. “Caroline, you are young and healthy and you need to stop stressing out over this because it’s not good for you and it’s not good for my future niece or nephew.”

Caroline smiled a little and looked back to Carter. “I kinda hope it’s a boy.”

He smiled now. “You really want another male Baizen running around in the world?”

“No.” She shook her head while smiling softly as she laid her hand on her stomach. “I want a little Archibald running around the world.”

“Oh God.” Carter groaned causing Caroline to laugh.
“Listen,” Caroline said after she stopped laughing. “I don’t know what’s going on between you and Brooke and if you’re really just friends – but I really do want to keep this pregnancy a secret until I’m past twenty-weeks.”

He frowned but nodded his head and agreed to keep it a secret. Carter looked down at his phone after he got a text message alert.

_Brooke Davis (12:15 PM):_

*Are you on your way?*

He smiled and quickly texted her back saying that he was leaving his office in a few minutes. When he looked back up at Caroline she was narrowing her eyes at him suspiciously. “What?” She shrugged innocently and he rolled his eyes. “Spit it out, Caroline.”

She chuckled, “If you want to be more covert about whatever you and Brooke have going on right now – you might want to stop making it so obvious that it’s her when you try to hide your texts from me.”

He opened his mouth to deny Caroline’s accusation but his phone went off again and when he looked down at it again he saw that Brooke had sent him a picture of Angie.

_Brooke Davis (12:16 PM) [

[1 IMAGE ATTACHED]

_She’s all ready for her first trip to the jewelers. I’m thinking about getting her a tiara._

There was absolutely no fucking way Carter could not grin down at the picture while beaming with happiness.
Oh God, it was so sappy and corny but Carter couldn’t help it.

Caroline cleared her throat and Carter looked back at his sister to see her smirking in his direction.

“It was just a text from my accountant Larry.”

“Mhm.” Caroline said with a snort. “Whatever you say, big brother.”

He rolled his eyes, “Get out of here. I have errands to run.”

Caroline got out of the chair and Carter bent down to grab her bag and walked her to the door. Caroline stopped once they were at the elevator and looked at her brother. “I don’t know what’s going on between you two but…if something is happening…don’t fuck it up again, Carter. You’re lucky she’s even speaking to you – not to mention that you’re keeping quite a few secrets from her.”

Carter knew what Caroline was referring to.

*The money he had wired to Julian.*

He knew he needed to confess to Brooke eventually before someone else blabs about it but he didn’t want to fuck everything up again by her getting pissed off at him.

Because Carter was sure that when or if Brooke found out about the money she was going to be fucking livid.

“Okay, so I’m going to go in the shop first and then you come in five minutes later.” Brooke told Carter as they sat in the back of a taxi on their way to the jewelers. “You don’t really need to make
an excuse as to why you’re late because you’re always late.”

Carter had laughed at that, “-You’re the one who’s always late.” He playfully argued with her. “In fact, it would be more convincing if I was the first to arrive seeing as you now have a baby.”

She looked over at him and cocked her head to the side, “Are you saying that you want to be alone in the jewelers with Vanessa while I’m running late?” Brooke smirked.

Carter made a face and shook his head, “Yeah, you should probably be the first to arrive.”

Brooke laughed and looked to Carter with a warm smile. “I’m sure it’ll be fine, Carter. In fact, to make everything more realistic – I can act like a major bitch to you the entire time.”

He chuckled and reached over Angie’s car seat, his hand pushing Brooke’s hair behind her ears. “I actually find it incredibly sexy when you’re a bitch to me.”

Brooke laughed and shoved his hand away. “You’re ridiculous.” They pulled up to the building and Brooke instantly began to panic when she saw that Vanessa was already there and waiting outside of the shop for them. “Fuck.” She whispered and Carter looked out her window and saw what Brooke had cursed about.

“We live in the same building, Brooke.” Carter told her as he tried to calm her down. “And you have a baby – I’d be a fucking asshole if I didn’t offer to help you.”

Brooke took in a deep breath but unbuckled herself and Angie’s car seat and got out of the car. She carried the car seat Angie was in up to the building and watched as Vanessa’s face contorted at the sight of Carter getting out of the cab too.

“-What the hell is he doing here?”

Brooke looked over her shoulder at Carter and then back at Vanessa. It seemed like she was only pissed at the fact that Carter was here – not that he had come with Brooke. Okay, that was good. Kinda.

Carter stood next to Brooke and she saw that he had Angie’s diaper bag slung over his shoulder and she wanted nothing more than to elbow him in the gut for making them look so goddamn domestic in that moment. “Nate told me you knew I’d be coming.”

Vanessa scoffed, “You really think I’d agree to going shopping with you and Brooke?” Brooke frowned. She didn’t like how Vanessa had said her name like a curse. “I’m leaving.” Vanessa made a move to go but Brooke stopped her.

“Look, we’re all here with the same goal in mind – help Nate with Caroline’s wedding band.” Vanessa looked away from Brooke but didn’t walk away. “I know diamonds and you know her style and Carter has a very large bank account that can afford the wedding band so that Caroline won’t see a big hunk of hers and Nate’s savings is missing until after the wedding.”

Vanessa folded her arms over her chest and glared in Carter’s direction before looking back over at Brooke. “You two came together?”

Yeah, you just saw us pull up.

“You know that I live in his building, V.” Brooke reminded Vanessa. “We were headed to the same place and I kind of have my hands full with Angie so I didn’t turn down his offer to help.” Brooke could see that Vanessa was trying hard to repress an eye roll. “Come on…if I can put aside the past
for an hour for Caroline…can’t you?”

Vanessa sighed heavily but eventually nodded her head. “Fine.” She agreed and walked past Brooke and over to the shop.

Carter walked up to Brooke and blew air out of his nose. “Well, that was awkward.”

She let her anger get the best of her. “Yeah, well if you knew how to keep your dick in your pants and not fuck my friends we wouldn’t be in this situation.” Brooke said bitterly and immediately regretted it when she heard Carter inhale sharply. “I’m sorry.” She whispered and looked back over at him. Brooke looked over to the shop and then back at Carter. “-I shouldn’t have said that it’s just…hard.”

He nodded his head. “I know.” Carter said softly. “I’m sorry.”

“Just…” Brooke shook her head, “Don’t say anything to piss her off, okay? Because I’m sorry, but I am really not in the mood to have to defend you right now.”

He looked down at Brooke and nodded his head slowly. She looked back up and saw the sadness in his eyes. “I’m sorry.” He said again.

“It’s…it’s just going to take some time.”

“I know.”

“And for the record – if you weren’t late to picking up me and Angie we would have beat her here. So, I did not make us late, you did. So, my argument was valid.”

Carter smiled at her words, his entire body seemed to relax. “I’ll hang around in the background with Angie while you two look at the rings Nate set aside. Just come get me when it’s time for me to pay.”

He was true to his word. Carter spent the entire time with Angie not speaking to Brooke or Vanessa while they were going over the four rings Nate set aside for them to pick which one would be the best fit for Caroline.

“Oh, I love this one.” Brooke cooed as she picked up the ring and looked at it. “God, Nate really hit the mark when it came to picking rings.”

“Except he picked too many.” Vanessa said with a little snort. “Now we’re stuck making the decision.”

“Ugh, what a douche.” Brooke said causing Vanessa to laugh. “-But we have to be objective here! I can’t just choose the ring that I am in love with – we have to think like Caroline.”

“Well I hate to break it to you.” Vanessa said as she took the ring away from Brooke. “But Caroline would not go for that ring.”

“Boo!” Brooke complained as she watched Vanessa hand the ring back over to the owner of the shop. “Oh well.” She sighed as the man put the ring away.

“Nate probably would have been pissed if we had picked the one that was nearly 10 grand.”

Brooke raised her hands playfully, “Hey, he put it out as an option.”

Vanessa laughed. “What did your wedding band look like?”
She tensed a little. *Awkward.* “Um, just a plain silver band. The engagement ring he got me was this obnoxiously big rectangle cut diamond so nothing else really went with it.”

“He let you come with him to pick out the band?” Vanessa said in surprise.

Brooke let out a little huff of a laugh, “Julian didn’t even go. I did. And I bought it.” She said for the first time out loud to anyone. “I also paid the rest of the money he owed for my engagement ring.” When she looked over at Vanessa she watched her shift uncomfortable in her seat. “I know – shocking that we got divorced, right?”

That seemed to lighten the moment. But Brooke could feel Carters eyes on her so she knew that he had heard the whole exchange between the two of them.

“Anyway,” Brooke cleared her throat, “Back to thinking like Caroline.”

They went over the rings a couple more times before coming to their final decision. Brooke was glad Vanessa knew Caroline’s taste so well because she could *not* concentrate.

All she could think about was her engagement ring.

But not the one Julian had given her.

The one Carter had given her thirteen years ago. She thought about how her heart had sped up when he opened the box and she saw the beautiful diamond and the way his eyes shined as he asked her. *Does he still have the ring?* She wouldn’t blame him if he had thrown it in the Hudson.

Something had happened when Carter tried to buy the ring – it seemed like his card had been declined. He had left the building to go see what the problem was leaving Vanessa and Brooke standing awkwardly at the counter.

“If it comes down to it,” Brooke dug into her purse. “You can put it on my bard. It’s barely even six-grand.” She tried to justify as she handed him her card.

“Nate is going to be pissed if he finds out you are the one paying for it, Brooke.” Vanessa said to Brooke, but she already knew that. “What the hell is even going on?” Vanessa then said as she looked out the store window to see Carter pacing around outside as he yelled at whoever he was talking to on the phone. “Last I heard; Carter was one of the richest people in New York. I mean – I saw that article they did about him and his penthouse – he can’t seriously be having money troubles right now, can he?”

*This doesn’t feel right.*

“Hey, can you do me a favor and watch Angie for a moment?” Brooke asked Vanessa and handed the car seat over to the dark-haired woman. Vanessa nodded her head and Brooke headed to go see what was going on with Carter.

When she was outside Carter had his back turned to her and was visibly pissed off.

“You have no authority to freeze my accounts!”

Someone had frozen his accounts? Was it his banks?

“That is my trust fund – once I hit thirty you lost all control over it!”

Trust fund? He must be speaking to one of his parents.
“-Who cares if I took out over 9 million dollars!”

9 million dollars?! Jesus! What the fuck did Carter buy?

“It’s none of your damn business where the money went.” Carter was quiet for a long moment before he sighed and started to talk again, “Her ex-husband was demanding she pay him that money in the divorce – it would have ruined her company.”

Holy fuck.

“Because I love her and I caused her enough hurt in the past and I’m not going to let that fucker cause her pain, too – she doesn’t fucking deserve it!”


Yup. He had paid off Julian.

Fucker. (Julian – not Carter.)

Julian made this big deal out of saying that he was not going to put her through all that trouble and that he had been the one to cheat so she didn’t owe him anything – and then he tried to get her to fucking take him back! That motherfucker!

“Whatever, Dad. Freeze my fucking account. All my shit is paid off in full.”

Oh God! She needed to go to Gregory Baizen and pay him back the money Carter had paid off Julian. Because she sure as shit knew that Carter would never take the money – but Gregory? He would. And once she paid him the money she would make sure that Gregory gave Carter full control over his trust fund. Jesus fuck. How did she get herself into such a huge fucking mess?

She hurried back into the shop and told Vanessa that she didn’t know what was going on and waited for Carter to be done with his phone call.

“I can’t get the money today but can you keep it on hold a little while longer until I can fix things with my bank?” Carter said when he walked up to the man at the counter.

“I texted Nate and he said that he wants me to do it, actually.” Brooke lied causing Vanessa to turn her head sharply to look at Brooke. “I don’t mind, Carter. It’s not that much.”

She wanted as Carters brows furrowed and he shook his head. “No – that’s not happening.”

“Sir,” The man interrupted them. “I can’t hold the ring any longer it needs to be paid for today.” He told Carter and then looked to Brooke. “I have your approval?” He held up Brookes card and she nodded her head.

“Yes.”

“No!” Carter argued.

“Yes.” Brooke walked past Carter and over to the man at the counter. “Here’s my information for when it’s ready to be picked up.”

She could hear Carter huff in anger but it was already done. The man had charged her card and was handing it back to her. “Have a nice day.”

“Why did you do that?” Carter said as he grabbed Brookes arm and pulled her away so that Vanessa
wouldn’t be able to hear them.

She sighed, “You heard the guy – he couldn’t hold the ring. And Caroline deserves that ring!”

“I’m paying you back.”

“No, you’re not.” Brooke argued with him. “And neither is Nate – just…let it go.” She said softly and watched as Carter furrowed his brows again only to have his face fall. It looked like he was just now figuring out that Brooke had heard his conversation with his father.

“Brooke,” He started to say but she stopped him. “Carter, let’s just go home, okay?”

He blinked at her in surprise but after a moment he finally let it go and told Brooke that they could leave.

The taxi ride back to their building was awkward and Carter didn’t bring up the phone call with his father or asked if Brooke had heard what he said – he just held onto Brookes hand that was resting on the top of Angies car seat. When they got back home they had put Angie down for a nap and sat together on the couch watching something that Brooke wasn’t even paying attention to because…nine million dollars.

That had been more than Julian had asked for in the divorce – why had Carter paid him that much money? Why had he paid him in the first place? Carter had never told her about the money and a few weeks ago she would have been absolutely fucking livid with him doing something like that for her. She would accuse him of only doing it to try and win her heart back but…he never told her and somehow still managed to steal her heart again.

Brooke moved to rest her head against Carters shoulder and the man next to her moved his arm so that she would be more comfortable. He pulled her closer and pressed a kiss to the top of her head as Brooke grabbed at his shirt. Things had changed now.

Brooke still might not fully trust Carter with her heart but he had proven just how far he was willing to go to protect her from getting hurt again.

Not just with paying Julian but with the whole Daunte situation. Carter had done everything he possibly could to make sure that Brooke was able to adopt Angie and never asked her for anything in return. No matter how many times she had closed herself off to him or tried to push him away he never left.

That scared her.

Because what if there was a day she pushed him away again and he went back to his old ways? It was easy to fall back into old habits – shit, that was obvious seeing as Brooke was snuggled up against Carter in that moment – but that didn’t change the fact that Brooke might never be able to trust Carter fully again when it came to not breaking her heart.

It was risky and no one would understand why she was willing to risk it all – but she still loved him. And her love for him outweighed all the hurt he had caused her. It always had, she had just been to hurt and stubborn to admit that.

Before she could get too in her head about everything, Angie had begun to cry and Carter moved his arm from around Brooke and offered to go get the crying infant. When he was gone Brooke pulled out her phone and texted Caroline.
Brooke Davis (3:45 PM):
I need to talk to you.
Can we meet up tomorrow?

Caroline Baizen (3:46 PM):
Of course.

Brooke had set up a breakfast date with Caroline – she knew Carter had work to do and if she told him that she wasn’t going to be around the apartment in the morning he’d feel better about going to work. Afterwards, she’d go to Davis Enterprises and ask for her mothers help.

She needed to make things right for Carter.

Nine million dollars' worth of making things right for Carter.

Caroline smiled happily when she saw Brooke and Angie sitting in the restaurant. Brooke had Angie in her arms and was soothing her as the infant fussed. It was working because Angie’s noises turned into happy gurgles. It made Caroline involuntarily move her hand to lay on her own stomach as she watched the whole exchange. But as soon as Brooke looked up to where Caroline was standing, Caroline quickly dropped her hand from her stomach and walked over to the table.

“Hey,” Caroline said and took a seat across from Brooke.

“The hostess is a little bitch.” Brooke said in an irritated that surprised Caroline. She had gone from soft and sweet to pissed off in a matter of seconds. “She tried to tell me that this restaurant is a kid free zone and that Angie might upset the other guests who are trying to enjoy their breakfast.”
Caroline raised her brows in shock and snapped her head in the direction of where the hostess was. She was ready to get out of her seat and go scream at the young woman (damn you, hormones) but Brooke stopped her.

“Oh, don’t worry. I sweetly let her know that the owner of this restaurant and I are good friends seeing as I designed the suit he wore for the restaurant opening and that I was sure he’d be upset that his employees were turning away a paying customer just because she has a baby.”

Caroline blew air out of her nose and shook her head. “What a bitch.”

Brooke shrugged and rolled her eyes. “It’s not her fault, I know that. I mean, the owner is a total asshole so what she said probably was true. But I am in no fucking mood.”

She frowned. “What’s going on?”

“Did you know that Carter paid Julian the money he asked for in our divorce.”

Oh…crap.

Brooke kinked her brow when Caroline didn’t speak. “Your silence is answer enough.” She sighed. “Did you know that he paid more than Julian asked for – over nine million?”

Caroline inhaled deeply and nodded her head. “Yeah, I knew.” She confessed. “I thought he had done it to try and win you back but…”

“But?”

Caroline sighed, “Carter told me he did it because you didn’t deserve to be going through what Julian was putting you through. I never told you this but the first night we went out for dinner when you came back to Manhattan…Carter had showed up.” Brooke looked at Caroline in shock. “He heard your conversation with your lawyer and saw how upset you were and he…wanted to help. And he knew that you wouldn’t let him help you by being your lawyer – so he did the only thing he knew how to help someone. He used his money.”

“I would have figured everything out.” Brooke said in a whisper.

“Carter said that he just wanted to make sure that there wasn’t a chance that you’d get screwed over in the divorce – I’m sure you’ve noticed that Carter in incredibly cocky so he just assumes that no other lawyer than himself can win a divorce case.” Caroline smiled when she saw Brookes lips twitch up. “He wasn’t trying to get you to fall back in love with him – it was just his way of making sure you didn’t get screwed over by yet another stupid man who didn’t deserve you.” She quoted Carter in her own way.

Caroline could tell Brooke that Carter had gone through the trouble to ask Nate and her to cover for him if Brooke ever found out about Julian being paid so that she wouldn’t try and pay him the money back – but Brooke had enough to be pissed off at Carter at for a lifetime.

Not that Caroline wanted Carter to ever have another chance with Brooke – but she knew how much he loved Brooke Davis and if Caroline told her one more thing it might send her over the edge and this ‘friendship’ they have started would end for good.

“How’s your parents still live in your old family Brownstone?” Brooke asked and Caroline nodded her head, not understanding why Brooke was asking. “Will they be home today?”

“Yes,” Caroline said slowly as she drew out the word. “What are you doing, Brooke?”
“Your father froze Carters accounts after the bank told him about the nine million Carter had taken out of his trust fund and now your father is control of all of Carters funds and won’t unfreeze his accounts.”

Caroline’s brows furrowed together in frustration. “He can’t do that! Carter is over thirty – they have no control over it anymore! They told us that as soon as we turned thirty that our trust funds will be in our complete control!”

“Yeah, well, that was obviously bullshit.” Brooke said bitterly.

“-How do you even know about this? Did Carter tell you?”

“No, I overheard him having a conversation after his card had been declined.” Brooke said.

Normally, Caroline would press her for more information like; why were you in earshot when Carter was having a conversation on the phone? Do you guys hang out regularly? Are you back together? But she didn’t. Because she was too pissed off at her parents.

“Grab your stuff – we’re going to my parent’s house and confront them about this bullshit.” Caroline sat up.

“Wait, no.” Brooke stopped her. “I have to go meet with Victoria at Davis Enterprise to make sure I have the funds to pay back your father so that he can unfreeze Carters accounts.”

It shouldn’t have surprised Caroline that Brooke wanted to pay back the money – but the fact that she was wanting to pay it to Gregory Baizen was surprising. Carter had paid off Julian to keep Brooke from having to suffer any more hurt from a man – and now Brooke was planning on paying that amount of money to Carter’s father so that Carter would be able to access his trust fund again.

“Why not just pay back Carter?” Caroline asked in confusion.

“Because once I pay Gregory the money he is going to sign over complete control over Carters trust fund to him. And now I’m adding your name to that as well.”

“You’re trying to pay off my father?” Caroline blinked in shock.

“If I had known that Carter was planning on doing what he did – I would have stopped him. But it’s too late for that. Carter was only doing what he thought was the right thing to do and he shouldn’t be punished for that. Your Dad can choose to keep the money or put it back in Carters account – but I want to make sure he knows that I would never take advantage of Carter by asking him for that money.”

Oh.

Oh my.

Brooke still loved Carter.

She could keep saying that they were ‘only friends’ – but Caroline knew what Brooke looked like when she was in love with Carter and that look was written all over her face. Brooke was willing to go to her mother to help her find funds to pay off Gregory Baizen and then do something that would probably be humiliating to her – but she was doing it all for Carter. To protect him the way he had protected her from Julian.

She still loves him.
“Okay.” Caroline agreed. “We can go to your Mom before.”

Brooke seemed surprised by that but quickly stood up and set Angie down in her car seat and gathered her things so that she could leave. “Can we not tell Carter about this yet?” Brooke asked once they were on their way to Davis Enterprises.

“I won’t.”

*Brooke was still in love with Carter…wtf.*

---

Victoria had refused.

But after Brooke told her mother that she’d simply take the money out from her own personal account Victoria begrudgingly agreed to sell the men’s line Brooke had been working on to an Australian fashion company that was willing to buy the line for over ten million dollars. *Both Brooke and Victoria knew that the men’s line was worth so much more than that and that the money they would make if they kept the line would be in the billion – not millions.* But that didn’t matter to Brooke.

Brooke signed over the rights to all the designs she had come up with and after the paper work was done, Clothes for Bro’s was now *Aussie Bros.* She also agreed to send them more designs for the men’s line and Brooke also agreed to take conference calls from the head designers of the fashion line to help them anytime they needed it.

And now she had the money to give to Gregory.

Gregory had been happy to see Caroline when she arrived. And then he saw Brooke standing next to her. “*What is she doing here?*” He said in disgust.

Brooke rolled her eyes but before she could smart-off to him, Caroline stepped in and saved her from saying anything that she might regret later. “Enough, Dad. She’s here for a reason.”

Gregory huffed but allowed Brooke, Caroline, *and* Victoria inside.

Victoria had surprisingly stayed quiet. She was probably still pissed off that Brooke had sold the men’s line and the money they were losing because of it – but Brooke didn’t care. All that mattered was getting Carter his trust fund back.

They sat down in the living room and Brooke couldn’t help but feel a little nostalgic as she looked around the area. They hadn’t changed a single thing in the house – same furniture, same paintings, the only things that really changed were the pictures in the room that now included Nate.

“What can I help you with today, Mrs. Baker?”

Victoria let out a scoff but Brooke only corrected him. “*Ms. Davis. You know damn well that I got divorced.*”
I’m sorry – I suppose I only remember the wedding seeing as that night my son nearly drank himself to death.” Gregory snapped at her and Brooke had to repress her need to start crying at the image of Carter in a hospital bed while she and Julian shared their first dance. She closed her eyes and tried to think of something that calmed her.

Angie.

Howard had already been at Davis Enterprises and offered to watch Angie while Brooke, Caroline, and Victoria dealt with everything. Brooke would have felt more comfortable bringing Angie along simply to have her in eye sight, not that she didn’t trust Howard with her child but she was still so little and Brooke didn’t want to leave her – But she also didn’t want to show up with a baby and have Carter’s parents (Thankfully Gregory was the only one home) accuse her of trying to trap their son. Because that was not what Brooke was doing – Carter had a choice in all of this. If he did not want to be a part of Angie’s life, Brooke wouldn’t hold any grudges against him.

It would break her fucking heart – but it was his choice.

Brooke pulled her phone out of her purse and logged into her bank account where she had the ten million dollars moved and ready to be wired (once she was able to get Gregory’s account information) and slid it over to Gregory. “This is the money that Carter paid my ex-husband to leave me alone.” Gregory put his glasses on and picked up Brooke’s phone and looked down at the screen. “I am more than willing to wire you that money,”

“-Me?” Gregory scoffed. “It was my son you took advantage of.”

“-She didn’t know Carter paid Julian off!” Caroline snapped at her father.

Brooke placed her hand on Caroline’s knee to let her know that she could handle herself.

“I will give you the money he spent and you can keep it for yourself. But if you agree to this – Carter’s going to get his trust fund back. And you all are going to go over a lot of legal shit – which you son is amazing at – and you guys are going to make sure that you are never again allowed to freeze Carters funds because you won’t have any control over it again. It will be his alone.”

Gregory laughed at her words. “You think paying me ten million dollars is enough to stop me from keeping my son from making absolutely horrible financial decisions? I knew you weren’t exactly clever, Brooke, but I didn’t know you were stupid.”

“Do not talk to my daughter that way.” Victoria seethed.

“Enough!” Caroline cut Victoria off from saying anything further. “You’re going to give Carter his trust fund back and give him complete control over it – and you are going to sign over complete control over mine as well or you will not be a part of your grandchild’s life, Daddy.”

Brooke looked to Caroline in confusion.

Is she talking about Angie?

Yes, Carter was in their life and Angie adored him – but…he wasn’t her Dad…right? No. that’s ridiculous! They only recently started things up again (well, they had been having sex again for longer than that but that was on a halt while they were seeing how things went), Brooke was still incredibly vulnerable and didn’t know if she could trust Carter and even though he was great with Angie…Brooke didn’t know if Carter was going to stick around.

“Grandchild?”
Brooke watched as Caroline placed her hand on her stomach and nodded her head.

_Holy fucking shit._

“Caroline!” Brooke said happily as she grabbed her hand. “You’re pregnant?”

Caroline nodded her head again and smiled at Brooke. “We wanted to wait until after twenty weeks but,” She glared at her father. “-I want my father to know just what he is going to be missing if he doesn’t hand over control of mine and Carter’s trust funds.” Caroline then pulled something out of her purse and handed it to her father. “-Sonogram. In case you think I’m lying.”

Gregory Baizen swallowed hard and then looked to Brooke. “Have Carter draw up some paperwork and I’ll sign anything he wants me to. And you can keep your money.”

Brooke blinked in surprise. “What?”

“You heard me.”

“You sold the men’s line to pay this idiot!” Victoria hissed, absolutely livid that Brooke had convinced her to sell the men’s line so she could get this money and now Gregory was refusing it. “-And he won’t even take the money?!”

“Quiet.” Brooke shushed her mother. She then turned her attention on Gregory again. “If you won’t take it I want it transferred into Carter’s trust fund account.” Victoria groaned at her response and Brooke glared in her direction. “Enough, Mom!” She huffed in frustration. “I never asked Carter to do this for me and he knows that I would have never let him do it if I had found out his plans. I am going to pay him back the money he gave to Julian and extra because…” Her words drifted off.

_Because I love him and he’s an idiot but he’s an idiot I’m still in love with…_

“Okay.” Gregory agreed.

“You know that Carter is going to be pissed that you’re doing this, Brooke.” Caroline said quietly.

“Well, I’m pissed at him for paying Julian the money in the first place.” She told Caroline who only smiled softly at her in return. “What?” Brooke asked, confused as to why Caroline was looking at her like that.

“Nothing.” She said with a shrug but continued to smile. Gregory had asked Caroline to stay for lunch and she had agreed and as Brooke and Victoria went to leave, she grabbed Brookes hand and pulled her aside while Victoria left the brownstone.

Brooke figured Caroline wanted to talk about the fact that she was pregnant and would likely ask Brooke to keep it a secret from Carter. “Don’t worry, Care. I won’t say anything about the little Archibald growing inside you.” She teased.

Caroline chuckled. “Actually – that’s not what I want to talk about.” She admitted.

Brooke kinked her brow up at that. “What do you want to talk about?”

She saw the way Caroline smiled hesitantly before taking in a deep breath and said, “I know you’ve gone through such hell in your life and that some people might think they know what’s best for you but…if you are happy…be happy.” Brooke looked down at the ground to hide her face. “Don’t let anything stand in your way. Me, Nate, our friends, your mother…the past…don’t let those things stand in your way because in the end we all just want you to be happy.”
Brooke looked back up at Caroline and gave her a quick nod. “I should get going.” She didn’t want to talk about Carter and the way she was feeling until she knew that her heart was safe with him again. “I’ll talk to you later.” Brooke said and hugged her friend before leaving the Baizen family brownstone.

When they were back in the cab Brooke and Victoria didn’t say much until they were getting closer to her mother’s brownstone. “I suppose I am technically a grandmother of two, now.”

“Yeah.” Brooke chuckled. “But this is not public knowledge yet so…don’t go blabbing to anyone.”

“Oh, please, Brooke – I am able to keep a secret. Though I still don’t want to be called Grandma.”

“Grammie?” Victoria scoffed at Brookes suggestion. “Nana?”

“No.”

“Nona? It’s Italian.”

“Your father was the only one who cared about our Italian heritage, Brooke.”

“Fine – what do you want to be called?”

Victoria was quiet until they pulled up to her brownstone. “Gran.”

Brooke smiled. “I like it.”

“So, don’t teach Angie any of that Nana nonsense.” Victoria told Brooke. She laughed and agreed not to and together they got out of the car after Brooke had paid their cab-fair. “Do you and Angie want to stay over for lunch?” Victoria asked Brooke once they were inside.

“Thanks, but I have to go to Carter’s office and tell him what I did.” Brooke told Victoria. She followed the noise of Howard humming and Angie gurgling and when Brooke saw her daughter she grinned happily. “There’s my big girl!” She said as she took Angie out of Howard's arm carefully. “Did you have a fun morning?” She asked Angie but Howard answered.

“She sure did. We watched the Rocky movies and she took a nap – I changed some really stinky diapers and Angie did a very good job drinking all of her formula.” Howard said as he smiled down at Brooke.

Brooke smiled up at him, “Thank you, Howard. I really appreciate you watching her.”

“Well, I am her grandfather.” As soon as Howard said the words he looked horrified that he had, “Step-grandfather!” He corrected. “I know I’m not her actual Grandfather – I wouldn’t try and take that from Ted.”

She couldn’t help but smile softly at Howard. “You’re her Grandpa, Howard. My Dad has been absent for most of my entire life and I really don’t think he plans on coming back anytime soon just because I have a child now.”

Howard frowned and then surprised Brooke by pulling her into a hug. “It’ll be my honor to be her Grandpa.”

Brooke chuckled and hugged him back, making sure that they didn’t squish Angie. “Yeah, Mom already decided what she wants to be called so you two can work out what you want to be called too.” She said once they pulled apart.
Howard looked at Victoria and grinned. “Papa?”

Brooke looked to Victoria to get her approval. She playfully rolled her eyes and smiled up at Howard. “Papa and Gran.”

Brooke said her goodbyes to them and laughed as Howard and Victoria followed her out of the brownstone making cooing noises at Angie as she slept peacefully in her car seat. When she was back in yet another cab, Brooke gave the drivers the address of Carters law firm and took the rest of the ride there to try and figure out what she was going to say to him.

Getting his trust fund back had seemed totally easy – but telling him about how she got it back?

Eh, not so much.

When his assistant, Joshua, had called Carters office to let him know that Brooke was there, he told him to let her into his office. Carter rubbed at his jaw, the smooth clean face he had now covered in stubble but when he had told Brooke he would shave it again she pouted and said that she liked the feeling of his stubble scratching against her skin as they kissed. So obviously he didn’t shave. And since he and Brooke were only allowed to be kissing for the time being – he wasn’t go to deny her what she wanted by shaving away the stubble. So, he kissed her and she’d let out little moans at the feeling and Carter had to try really hard to not rip her clothes off and kiss all over her body until he was at his second favorite part of her body to kiss to elicit more moans from Brooke and drive her over the edge.

Just kissing.

It was like he was a teenager not being allowed to go past second base (though, that had never happened to Carter while he was a teenager – he was able to persuade the girls he dated to go much further than second base.)

But Brooke wanted to take things slow – and shit, she hadn’t even wanted them to kiss at first but Carter had thankfully changed her mind on that so he wasn’t going to push it and lose that privilege that she was allowing him.

“Hey,” Brooke said slowly as she walked into his office. Carter had already got up from his desk and met Brooke halfway, grabbing Angie’s car seat and diaper bag before bending down to press a soft and quick kiss to Brookes lips. “Can we talk?” Brooke whispered after his lips left hers.

Carter swallowed hard, fear of what Brooke wanted to talk about causing his stomach to clench up. Maybe he shouldn’t have greeted her like that? They discussed boundaries and how she only wanted them to kiss in her apartment or his – but he couldn’t help himself! It was instinct! He saw Brooke walking in and she looked so damn beautiful lugging in all of Angie’s things and he couldn’t stop himself from kissing her.

“Yeah, sorry.” He apologized as he pulled Angie out of her car seat and brought her to his chest. “I broke the rules.” Carter thought that if he brought it up right away that Brooke might see that it had
been a simple mistake and not want to end things between them.

He looked at Brooke and saw her eyes widened in surprise. “Wow.” She chuckled, no longer looking nervous. “I didn’t even realize you did.”

“You didn’t realize I kissed you. Ouch, Davis.” He smirked.

She smiled and Carter watched as her cheeks flushed. “Maybe I just didn’t care.” Brooke said in a whisper and Carter squared his jaw while smiling at Brooke.

“Are you trying to kill me, Brooke?” He asked. Her words had caused a fire to burn inside him. *She didn’t care that he had kissed her in public? Or, some place other than their apartments? Good lord – if she kept talking like that he was going to do a lot more than just kiss her in public.*

She licked at her lips and chuckled. But after a moment her smile disappeared and her eyes connected with Carters again. “I need you to draw up some paper work.”

Carter furrowed his brows together but nodded his head and walked over to his desk and sat down. “What do you need?”

“A…contract of sorts.” Brooke told Carter. “Or, an agreement.”

Carter looked at her suspiciously. “In regards to?”

She bit down on her lower lip before looking back at Carter. “In regards to you and Caroline being in complete control over your trust funds – this time for real.”

Angie began to fuss in his arms but Carter only continued to look at Brooke. “What did you do?”

“Your Dad said that you can draw up the paperwork yourself so that there won’t be a chance that he added something in that you might have missed and would screw you in the end.”

“-Brooke.” He said only to have her continue.

“And once those papers are down he’ll sign over full authority of your trust funds to both you and Caroline.”

“I knew you heard.” Carter muttered in frustration.

“You do not get to be mad at me for this, Carter.” Brooke stressed her words. “I never asked you to pay off Julian and the fact that you’re being punished for it is not okay.”

He shook his head and moved Angie a bit to soothe her fussing. “You shouldn’t have done that. I could have handled it.”

“And that’s exactly what I would have told you if I had known what you did. But it’s too late.” Brooke told him and he furrowed his brows in frustration. “So, you can be pissed at me for getting you your money back or you can let it go like I have let go of the whole Julian thing.” She said and walked over to where he was holding Angie and carefully took her out of his arms. “Either way – draw up the damn paper work because it’s not only you involved in this mess now, Caroline is too and she’s gonna need that money soon.”

He raised his brow at that but Brooke had already turned around to place Angie back in her car seat. She didn’t say anything further, just grabbed her stuff and left his office. **Caroline is going to need that money soon?** Did Brooke know that Caroline was pregnant?
He rubbed his temples in frustration as he heard Joshua tell Brooke to have a nice rest of her day and Carter kicked himself in the ass for Brooke finding out about him paying off Julian.

He grabbed his phone and called Caroline. 

“Let me guess. You’re mad at Brooke.” Is how Caroline answered.

Carter rolled his eyes. “I’m frustrated.”

“And you don’t think she was when she found out about you paying off Julian?” She retorted.

“No, I’m sure she was pissed but—”

“But nothing. Brooke knows that what Dad did was fucked up and she was not going to let that happen. She did not want you to lose your trust fund because you did something she never even asked you to do in the first place – so ignore your stupid pride and let it go. Because your pride is what got you in trouble the last time you guys were together.”

He closed his eyes. Damnit. Fucking A. He fucking did it again. Carter let his pride get in the way and now Brooke probably thought that he was off getting drunk somewhere or fucking some random woman. “I got to go.” Carter got up and hung up with Caroline.

Carter grabbed his laptop and a couple of files and shoved them into his briefcase and left his office. Joshua was watching him from his desk when Carter walked through the small lobby area of his private office. “I’m working from home today, Joshua.” He told his assistant and hurried to the elevator.

Brooke needed to know that he was serious about them. That he wasn’t that idiot twenty-two-year-old who cared more about his own pride and insecurities and did shit out of spite. He was not that guy. And Brooke needed to know that. Carter needed Brooke to know that he was putting her above everything now. Even his ego.

Brooke had spoken with Dr. Copeland on the way back to her apartment and the man had told her that he would like to see Angie sooner than they had scheduled. Dr. Copeland had some free time open and the sooner Angie is seen and has the surgery the better.

But Brooke was fucking terrified.

On top of Carter being upset with her by going behind his back to get his trust fund back – God only knows how he’d react when he found out that he had 10 million more than he had before in that trust – and the way her heart ached at the thought that Carter would do to her what he had done thirteen years ago the last time she bruised his ego…

Brooke took in a deep breath as she laid next to Angie in bed. Her daughter was sleeping peacefully with a pillow supporting her while Brooke gently trailed her fingers up and down Angie’s little belly. Doing that always seemed to get Angie to fall asleep easily, the action calming down Angie
She felt tears fill her eyes as she looked down at Angie. *She was so small.* Brooke moved to rest her hand on top of Angie’s chest and felt the quick beats of her heart. The tears fell as Brooke imagined her small little heart that had multiple holes in it. Dr. Copeland had told her that they’d go over surgical options once he met them in person in the morning but Brooke didn’t know how Angie, this tiny little thing with a tiny little broken heart, would ever survive a surgery.

Brooke had just gotten everything she had ever wanted and now if the surgery didn’t go well…she’d lose her. She pressed her lips against Angie’s forehead as the tears fell uncontrollably now and whispered just how much she loved this little girl. It wasn’t until she felt the weight of the bed shift that Brooke realized they weren’t alone in the room.

She closed her eyes as Carter laid down next to her, pulling her closer to him as he pressed his face to her neck after pushing her hair over her shoulder. “I’m sorry.” He whispered as he pressed a kiss to the side of her face. “You did what you did to protect me.”

Brooke sniffled and moved to grab his hand, pulling it to rest on Angie’s chest. “They want to meet with us tomorrow.” *Us.* Because Brooke couldn’t imagine doing this with anyone but Carter. “So that the surgery can be moved up.”

She listened as Carter let in a shaky breath and then pressed a kiss to her neck. “She’s a fighter, just like her Mom.” He reassured her. “We’ll get through this, baby, I promise.” He whispered. “Our girl will be fine.”

*Our girl.*

Brooke hated just how happy that made her feel. She moved his hand off of Angie’s chest and brought it up to her mouth and pressed her lips to the back of his hand. “I love you.” She whispered. “And I know this is all moving so fast and it’s probably more than you asked for.”

He moved his fingers under her chin and moved Brookes head so she was looking back at him. “I love you and I’m not going anywhere.” Carter promised her. “I love you.” He told her again. “Both of you.”

Brooke moved her head up a bit and kissed him softly before she turned to face Angie again. Carter didn’t move he stayed with Brooke and moved both of their hands to rest on Angie’s stomach as she breathed in and out. They stayed that way until Angie woke up and began to fuss for her dinner.

“Can I ask you something?” Carter said as Brooke handed him Angie’s bottle. She nodded as she took a seat next to him and snuggled into his side while he fed Angie. “Will you be my date to Caroline and Nate’s wedding.”

Brooke chuckled and said “Yes.” He pressed a kiss to the top of her head and hummed happily at her answer. “I do have to talk to Vanessa though.” *That* caused Carter to groan. “She doesn’t deserve to be blind-sided, Carter.”

“I know.” He sighed.

*Hopefully Vanessa would understand.* She and Carter weren’t even really together – they had just been fuck buddies. And yeah, Brooke knew that Vanessa cared more about Carter than he did her but…Brooke was still in love with Carter and life was too short. Everything that happened with Daunte and Rachel and now Angie’s surgery? Brooke was not going to waste another minute denying her feelings for Carter anymore. People would judge her and tell her that she was making
the wrong choice but…

Brooke really did not give a fuck.

Chapter End Notes

THEY'RE A CUTE LITTLE FREAKIN' FAMILY, AREN'T THEY?! Ugh. I love writing for them! Hope you guys loved this chapter as much as I loved writing it! Comments and kudos are always appreciated!
“I’m going to throw up.”

Carter gave Brookes hand a reassuring squeeze but he couldn’t help the feeling that he was going to get sick too. They were waiting in the office of the doctor who would preforming Angie’s surgery and the only thing keeping Carter from emptying his stomach in the waste basket next to him was the fact that he was holding onto Brookes hand.
The door opened and a man walked into the room wearing a white coat, tan slacks and a button down light blue work shirt. His eyes didn’t even meet theirs as he walked over to his desk, he only looked down at a tablet that had (what Carter was assuming) Angie’s medical records on it.

“Hi, sorry if I kept you waiting.” The doctor said when he finally looked down at Brooke. He smiled, seeming friendly enough. “I’m Dr. Copeland.” He extended his hand for Brooke to shake and the brunette did so as he said. “You must be Brooke Davis.”

“Mnhmm.” Brooke said. She didn’t actually speak but even that slight hum was obvious to Carter that Brooke was absolutely fucking terrified.

Dr. Copeland dropped Brookes hand and walked over to sit behind his desk. “Clothes, right?” He smiled while looking over his shoulder briefly at Brooke.

“Yes.” Brooke nodded her head.

“I thought you looked familiar.” He said with a little grin and Carter, though he tried not to seem jealous, cleared his throat loudly gaining the doctors attention.

Dr. Copeland looked to Carter who leaned forward and extended his free hand, the one holding Brookes was still softly squeezing hers. “Carter Baizen.” He introduced himself.

*You’re not that jealous twenty-two-year-old. You’re a grown ass man and Brooke loves you – this guy is only here to help Angie – not try and take Brooke away.*

“It’s nice to meet you.” Carter did his best to smile without it looking forced.

Dr. Copeland shook his hand and sat back down. “Am I wrong in assuming that he’s the adoptive father?” He asked while looking at Brooke.

Carter looked over at Brooke as well and watched as she opened and closed her mouth a couple of times. “He uh,” *Is the boyfriend? Kinda-testing-out-the-waters-maybe-boyfriend? The ex-boyfriend who she had been recently sleeping with but is now taking things slow with? The cheating bastard that broke her heart thirteen years ago? “Carter’s,”*

“Moral support.” Carter answered for Brooke who looked at him and smiled softly. It was her who squeezed his hand gently this time. Her eyes sending him a clear message of thanks.

He understood that this whole thing was confusing to Brooke and he wasn’t going to pressure her to put a label on it. Carter knew that Brooke was in love with him and that was enough.

“Nice to meet you.” Dr. Copeland said before looking back at Brooke. “So, I just wanted run through the surgical procedure so you know what to expect. Am I right in assuming that you are familiar with your adoptive daughters condition?”

“Yes.” Brooke said causing Carter to look over at her. She had moved her free hand to rest on Angie’s chest while she was in the stroller next to Brooke.

“That’s good.” Dr. Copeland said. “Angie has a number of holes in her heart but I have no doubt that we won’t be able to fix her up.” He told both of them now. “We’ll put Angie under a general anesthesia, we’ll stop her heart, and then I’ll do the repairs.”

*We’ll stop her heart.*

Both Carter and Brooke had inhaled sharply at his words.
“You have to stop her heart?” Brooke rasped.

“For how long?” Carter finished.

“Two hours, maybe longer depending on the extend of her condition.”

Brooke gripped onto Carter’s hand and he looked over at her and saw the fear in her eyes as she looked back at him. “Two hours?” She whispered.

“Angie will be on a heart and lung machine which will keep blood and oxygen circulating in her body.” Dr. Copeland informed them causing them both to look away from each other and back at him. “During that time, I will graft skin from another part of her heart and use it to fix the holes.”

“And once she’s off the heart and lung machine…how are you going to restart her heart?” Carter asked.

“After the repairs are complete we will use an electric shock and once she is stabilized we’ll take her to the ICU.” Dr. Copeland said and Carter felt bile rising from his stomach. Be strong. Brooke needs you.

“This…” Brooke inhaled sharply again. “I know that Angie needs this surgery but this seems so dangerous – is there any other way?”

Dr. Copeland frowned as he looked to Brooke. “Uh, I'm sorry but...no.” He answered. “There’s no other way to correct Angie’s condition.”

“What’s Angie’s prognosis if she didn’t have the surgery?” Carter asked.

Dr. Copeland licked at his lower lip but made a point to look at Brooke before he answered. “A year. Maybe two.”

“And then what?” Brooke whispered.

But they both knew.

“She’ll die.”

Angie began to coo and Carter closed his eyes as Brooke gripped tightly onto his hand. “Carter,” She whispered. He opened his eyes and let go of her hand and got out of his chair to pick up Angie before placing the infant in Brooke’s arms. He knew Brooke was frozen in place right now and couldn’t move – but he heard the way she said his name and knew that she wanted to hold Angie.

Carter sat back down but moved his chair closer to Brooke and moved his arm to wrap around her shoulders as they both looked down at Angie.

“Look, Brooke, it’s okay to be nervous.” Dr. Copeland told Brooke causing her to look away from Angie and back to him. “But...I want you to focus on what a great thing you’re doing for Angie. I know that the previous family who intended to adopt Angie sent her back into the system after finding out she had a heart condition and they didn’t want to take on that responsibility...what you’re doing for her is...amazing. You’re giving her a chance at life. And because of that she’ll grow up and know just how much her mother loves her. You’re saving her life, Brooke.”

Angie moved her tiny hand up towards Carter and he moved his hand to rest on her chest, letting her hand wrap around his index finger as he listened to Brooke take in a shaky breath before agreeing to the surgery.
It was the right thing to do.

Angie needed the surgery or she’d die and…Carter couldn’t imagine his world without that sweet little baby girl in it.

Brooke couldn’t sleep. How the hell was she supposed to sleep after the day she had? Angie was having her surgery in the morning and the surgeons were going to stop her heart. Literally stop her heart. And Brooke understood that this is what had to be done but…she was so little. And Brooke was so scared.

Carter was, too.

He was just hiding it better than Brooke.

He tried to take her mind off of the upcoming appointment all day by cooking her favorite meals and sitting through her favorite documentaries on Netflix – he even let her ramble on about work stuff and the wedding planning for Nate and Caroline’s wedding. But when they were in bed together with Angie on a large pillow between them all they could do was just stare at the little girl and watch as she slept peacefully in silence but God it was so loud in the silent room from the panic radiating off of them.

Carter was lying on his back but Brooke stayed facing Angie, her tiny hand wrapped around Brookes index finger as she slept.

“I’m scared.” Carter finally voiced out loud.

Brooke licked at her lower lip and nodded in silence.

“I love her, Brooke.”

“I know.” She whispered as a tear rolled down her cheek.

Carter rolled on his side so he was facing both Brooke and Angie. “I’m trying to be brave for you but…I’m terrified. I can’t stop thinking about how they’re going to stop her heart – I, I feel sick to my stomach I can’t even see straight when I think about her hooked up to machines.”
He needed to get this all out – Brooke understood that. And shit, he was voicing everything she was feeling in that moment, too. But it was hard to hear nonetheless.

Brooke swallowed hard and moved her free hand to grab hold of Carters. “Do…you want to leave?” She asked him, dreading hearing the answer. “If this is all too much for you – if you can’t do this,”

He gripped onto her hand tight. “I’m not going anywhere.” Carter said fiercely. “I love you, Brooke and I love Angie, too. And I know things are up in the air with us and with everything that’s happening I understand if…this, us,” He motioned between them. “Is too much for you but…I’m not leaving. I don’t want you to ever think that I’d leave. I can’t lose you again…I,” He inhaled sharply and Brooke felt tears fill her eyes.

She didn’t get the chance to say anything to him because Angie began to fuss a bit. Brooke sighed and moved to pick her up. She felt Carters eyes follow her as she got off the bed with Angie and walked out of the room. But he didn’t follow her. Brooke set Angie down in her crib in the nursery and pressed a kiss to her forehead before going back into the room to find Carter sitting on the edge of the bed.

She sighed and walked over to him, moving her fingers under his chin to make him look up at her as he sat on the bed. “You’re not going to lose me, Carter.” Brooke told him. He moved his hand up to her wrist and gripped onto it. “And you’re not going to lose Angie, either.”

He took in a shaky breath and stood up, his hand let go of her wrist and quickly moved both of his hands to cup her face and capture her lips in a kiss. Brooke gripped onto his shirt before moving her arms up to loop around his neck. She moaned happily when he opened her mouth with his tongue and soon got so lost in him that she hadn’t even realized that she had moved one arm off of his shoulder and began to tug down his boxers.

“Pause.” Carter said in a pant causing her to realize what she had almost done.

“Oh God!” Brooke pulled away from him in embarrassment and covered her face with her hands. “I told you!” She said in a whine causing Carter to chuckle. “When we kiss it always leads to sex!”

He smirked and walked forward. “I think I handled the situation pretty well – I am the one who said pause.” Carter stood in front of her now. He removed her hands from her face and when she looked up at him he saw him biting down on his lower lip. “Even though I really didn’t want to.”

Brooke took in a shaky breath and pressed her hands to his chest. “I don’t want to pause either but…we have to be up really early tomorrow to get Angie to the hospital and it’s already midnight.”

“That’s true.” Carter nodded his head and let his fingers push back Brooke’s hair while smiling down at her. “But…do you really see yourself sleeping tonight?”

Brookes mouth hung open and she playfully narrowed her eyes at him. “I am going to go make you sleep in your penthouse.” She told him and Carter pulled her closer to him by her hips. She closed her eyes when he dipped his head and began to press kisses to her exposed neck. “Carter,” she moaned his name. “You’re making it really hard for me to -oh- to, fuck, to focus!” Brooke said as she bit down on her lower lip at the feeling of Carter sucking on her pulse point.

“I don’t hear you saying pause.” He mumbled against her neck causing her skin to vibrate.

“You’re the devil.” Brooke whispered before grabbing his face and pulling it up from her neck and smashed her lips against his in a series of heated kisses that, surprise surprise, most definitely led to sex.
Afterwards, Brooke was snuggled up to Carter with her hand on his chest smiling as she played with his chest hair. Carter had his hand running up and down Brookes side as he told her about law school and the first case he had ever won – about taking over his fathers’ company and all that came with it. “My dad likes to take credit for where I’m at now but…it was you.” Carter whispered against her hair.

“Me?” Brooke said back. “Why?”

“At first it was because of the deal I made with my dad – but after you left New York I realized that I stuck with it because I wanted you to…be proud of me. To see that I actually did something with my life and that I wasn’t as much as a fuck up as everyone knows I am.”

“You’re not a fuck up.” Brooke said while pressing her lips against his chest.

“Maybe not right now but I was. I mean, look what I did to us-”

“Carter, there’s no changing the past. All we can do is move forward.”

“But…” He hesitated. “You still don’t trust me with your heart.”

Brooke pressed her lips to his chest again but didn’t pull away. No, she didn’t trust him with her heart, but; “I want to.” She admitted in a whisper. “I do.” She told him as she craned her neck up to look at him. “Because you did fuck up in the past Carter but since I’ve been in New York you have done every single thing in your power to prove that you’re not the guy who fucks up anymore. You’re not a fuck up, Carter. I never thought you were – you just did fucked up things.” She said in a teasing tone.

He closed his eyes but Brooke saw his lips twitch up. “You’re a fucking saint.” Carter finally spoke.

“And as I’ve previously said – you’re the devil.” She teased but moved a bit to press her lips to his. “But I am still in love with you.” She whispered against his lips. When she looked back at Carter he was staring at her with such intensity that it made her heart skip a beat. “What?”

“I,” He bit down on his lower lip for a moment before speaking again. “I still want to marry you.” Carter confessed. “I always have but after you said no…I,” He looked away from her. “This is so fucking stupid – I don’t even know why I’m bringing it up.” He said as she pulled away from her and sat up.

Brooke frowned and followed after him, moving on the bed to sit next to him with the sheets wrapped around her upper-half.

“You were going to say yes.” Carter whispered.

Brooke looked down at her ring finger and imagined that the ring Carter had proposed to her with thirteen years was on it. She moved to rest her head against his shoulder. “We can’t change the past, Carter.” Brooke said again.

“Our lives would have been different.” Carter pressed a kiss to the top of Brookes head. “You would’ve stayed and resented me and…it wouldn’t have worked. You wouldn’t have your fashion line and this empire you’ve built…you did the right thing saying no to me.”

Brooke frowned again. “I didn’t want to say no to you, Carter – God, if you asked me any other time I wouldn’t have even let you finish because I’d be saying yes so fast.” She said looking up at him and saw his lips twitch up a little in amusement. “But I knew that the reason you were asking me was because you didn’t want me to go to LA for school – because you didn’t want to lose me and God, I
didn’t want to lose you either, Carter…but,” Fuck. She hated thinking about that day – or the morning after when she found him at Blair’s penthouse. “I knew you were only proposing to me because you were scared.”

He looked down at his hands. “I did want to marry you though.”

“I know you did.” Brooke said in a whisper and pressed a kiss to his shoulder. “But…we can’t change the past.” Brooke said for the third time now. “And look at where you are now, Carter! You are one of the most successful lawyers in Manhattan, probably the country, you followed through with school, you bought the penthouse! Those are all things you should be proud about.”

He took her hand in his. “No.” Carter disagreed. “Because you weren’t there to see it all.” He whispered. “And I wasn’t there to see all your dreams come true…”

“No.” Brooke disagreed and pulled away from Carter, tugging at his arm. He looked over at her and she could see the pain in his eyes. “You were there when my dreams came true.” She smiled. “Carter, you were the first person I saw after I picked up Angie from the airport. That is when my dreams came true. Not my fashion line or the success that came with it – it was Angie. And you have been with us every single day. You’re here and you’re witnessing my dream come true.”

He took in a shaky breath and moved forward slowly and pressed a soft kiss to Brookes lips. “Thank you for letting me be here with you while your dreams came true.” He said quietly after pulling away and pressing his forehead against hers.

Brooke smiled and pressed a quick kiss to his lips before she got up and pulled her pajamas back on. “Put your boxers back on.” She ordered him.

Carter chuckled. “Why?”

She kept her back facing him. “Because we actually do need to get some sleep and I won’t be tempted by you again.” Brooke said causing Carter to laugh loudly. “I mean it, Carter – I want to be awake and alert for everything tomorrow and I most definitely won’t be if I have to try and sleep next to you while you’re naked.”

Brooke listened as he got off the bed and after a moment he moved behind her and she could thankfully feel the fabric of his boxers against her. “You have no self-control, Davis.” He smirked before pressing a kiss to her cheek from behind.

“I have no self-control?!” She spun around to face him. “So, if I stripped down to nothing right now you would be totally fine – you would be able to just sleep?”

Carter smirked and moved his hands to her hips and tugged her forward. “Let me prove it to you.”

Brooke laughed and wiggled out of his arms. “Nice try, Baizen.”

Angie crying caused the both of them to pause, their playful demeanor now gone and the room filled with their worry. “I’ll go get her.” Carter told Brooke.

She nodded her head and moved to the bed. She pulled the covers over the bed and grabbed a large blanket from her closet and placed Angie’s pillow in the middle of the bed where she could sleep in between Brooke and Carter. Carter came into the room with Angie in his arms and smiled as Brooke made the bed up for them. He walked over to his side of the bed and carefully climbed in while still holding onto Angie. Brooke followed his lead and moved the pillow up closer to where their heads would be and smiled softly as Carter set Angie down gently on the pillow. Brooke pulled the blanket over both her and Carter and pressed her hand against Angie’s chest once she was settled.
“Everything is going to be okay.” Brooke whispered as she looked over at Carter. He gave her a soft smile and nodded his head before he moved his hand to rest on top of Brookes.

She closed her eyes listening to the sound of Angie breathing and before she knew it, she had drifted off as well.

A year ago if someone told Brooke that she would be in bed with Carter Baizen with an infant between them she would have laughed in their face and called them crazy because back then Brooke had no intention of ever speaking to Carter again for the rest of her life.

But now?

She wanted nothing more than to have Carter laying next to her in bed for the rest of her life. Brooke loved him and people would tell her she was crazy and remind her of everything he had done and what he had put her through but…you can’t help who you love.

Did she trust him with her heart again?

She was getting there.

Brooke just needed to get through tomorrow and the next few weeks that followed until she knew that Angie was healthy and safe before she made any more decisions when it came to Carter.

But who was she kidding? She loved him. Always had and always would. And if someday in the future he asked her to marry him again…

She’d say yes.

““This whole situation is absolutely bizarre.”

Caroline listened as Blair spoke quietly to Serena.

“I mean – I understand us being here for Brooke during Angie’s surgery but him.”
She had to roll her eyes at Blair’s comment.

“They’re friends now.” Serena whispered to Blair.

Serena and Blair were sitting a few chairs away in the waiting room while Caroline chose to sit next to Carter, who could clearly hear the two best friends talking as well. But his attention was on Angie who was holding onto his finger with her little hand and gurgling happily up at him.

“How could she ever forgive him?”

“She forgave you.” Serena reminded Blair.

“I was having a literal mental breakdown – and let’s not forget the thirteen years she iced me out.”

*Brooke didn’t speak to Carter for thirteen years either, Blair*

Caroline didn’t say it but she really wanted to.

Nate was on his phone a bit away and Vanessa was standing next to him. Caroline noticed that Vanessa had kept her eye on Carter and Brooke since she had gotten to the hospital. Vanessa looked a little hurt as she watched the two interact but was putting on a brave face to support Brooke in this scary time.

Caroline looked away from her husband and Vanessa and over to where Brooke was standing with Victoria and Howard speaking with one of the nurses. Brooke had gotten up at least ten times in the past half hour to talk to any nurse who would give her the time of day and usually Carter went with her but this time Victoria had told Carter that she’d go with Brooke to speak to one of the nurses. And of course, Howard went with this wife.

Nate walked back over to where Caroline and Carter were sitting a took a seat next to his fiancée. “Chuck picked them up.”

Caroline let out a breath of relief at Nate’s words and squeezed his hand. She heard Carter let out a little breath as well. “Are they on their way?” Carter asked as he shifted in his seat to look at Nate.

He nodded. “Yes. They’re about fifteen minutes away depending on traffic.” Nate told Carter. *He wasn’t exactly happy that Carter had been the one to arraigned the whole thing – but it was probably Nate just being jealous that he hadn’t thought to get Brookes high school best friends on a redeye so that they could be there for her today.*

It was extremely thoughtful of her older brother but Caroline knew that Nate still didn’t trust him.

“Has Rachel gotten back to you?” Caroline asked Carter.

He shook his head. “Last Brooke heard from her she said she was leaving town to stay with her parents but other than that she hasn’t heard anything else.”

They quieted when Brooke came walking over to them with Victoria and Howard following closely behind them. Carter didn’t hesitate to hand Angie over to Brooke who was quick to press her against her chest and press a kiss to the top of her head. “Has Sharon texted back at all?” Brooke asked Carter.

“She texted right after you went to speak with the nurses.” Carter told Brooke and it was then that Caroline saw he was holding onto Brookes phone for her. “She says she’s sending her love our way.” *Our way?* Nate huffed, clearly hearing what Carter had said. “And to please let her know
when the surgery is done and how it went.”

Caroline listened as Brooke inhaled sharply through her nose. “Okay.” She said quietly. “What about Haley and Peyton? Have you heard anything from them?”

“Not yet.” Carter lied.

“Why not?” Brooke asked in irritation.

“It’s only 7AM here Brooke, you know there’s a three-hour time difference.”

“Not in Savannah!” She argued only to let out a soft sigh moments later. Caroline moved forward a bit to see what had seemed to ease her worries and saw that Carter was now holding onto Brookes hand, their fingers laced together. “I just…I really need to talk to them.”

“I know.” Carter whispered.

“Caroline?” Caroline looked away from Brooke and Carter and saw Vanessa standing a bit away. Caroline got up and followed Vanessa.

“What’s up?” Caroline asked once they were standing in the hallway.

“They’re together again, aren’t they?”

Caroline sighed. “I don’t know.” She admitted. “What I do know is that Brooke needs all of us here as a support system.”

Vanessa looked down at her hands, “After seeing that Brooke had forgiven him…I thought that maybe I could get past everything that went down, too. I was actually planning on asking Carter to be my date to yours and Nates wedding but…it’s clear that he still has feelings for Brooke.”

“V,” Caroline frowned. “I love you, please know that but…you and Carter? You guys weren’t together. You slept together every once in a while, but you weren’t in a relationship – and I know how much you cared about him but we both know that he never stopped loving Brooke. I’m sorry.”

Vanessa took in a deep breath and nodded her head. “I know.” She admitted.

“I understand if it’s hard for you to be around them but Brooke needs us today. All of us. And I hope that you won’t let Carter come between you two.”

Vanessa let out a little huff of a laugh. “There’s no use in fighting Brooke over a guy who clearly has no feelings for me…or ever did.” She trailed off.

Caroline frowned again, “He did care about you Vanessa – he just,”

“Was always in love with Brooke…I know.”

“Let’s go back, okay?” Caroline said and moved her arm to wrap around Vanessa’s shoulder. “And dude, the hospital is full of hot rich doctors – I’m sure we can find you a date for my wedding.”

Caroline teased causing Vanessa to laugh as they walked back into the waiting room.

Caroline sat back down and Vanessa took the empty seat next to Nate.

She grabbed Brookes leg and gave it a squeeze causing the brunette to look over at her. “Don’t forget to breathe.” Caroline reminded Brooke with a warm smile.
“Easier said than done.” Brooke said, her voice extra raspy on this morning. Her attention was placed elsewhere causing Caroline to look over her shoulder and see a nurse passing by. Before Brooke got the chance to harass yet another nurse, Caroline stopped her by pushing down on her leg gently.

“They’ll let you know when everything is ready.” Caroline assured Brooke.

“They’re just taking forever!” Brooke huffed. “They surgery is set for 7AM and it’s,” Brooke checked her watch. “7:07 now.”

“Well, if you and Carter hadn’t called everyone and told them to meet you two at the hospital at five in the morning – it wouldn’t seem like it was taking such a long time. I’m sure they’re just prepping everything. You remember binge watching Grey’s Anatomy together, it takes some time.”

“Do not even bring up Grey’s Anatomy – the patients on that show always die.” Brooke said in a grim tone and Caroline couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Brooke, come on. It was a TV show. Things that happened on that show never happen in actual hospitals.” Caroline continued to chuckle.

“You don’t know that.” Brooke said as she held Angie closer to her.

“Brooke!”

Both women looked towards the hallway and saw Brookes two best friends from Tree Hill hurrying down the hall with Chuck following behind them.

Brooke gasped and then turned to look at Carter. “You?” She whispered and he smiled softly at her.

“Go on.” Carter whispered while still smiling at Brooke.

Brooke got up from her chair and carefully walked over to Peyton and Haley while still holding onto Angie.

The three friends hugged and Caroline watched as Peyton and Haley finally met Angie.

Caroline then looked back at Carter who was looking down at his hands. “You okay?” She asked, taking the seat Brooke had just been sitting in.

He shook his head. “No.”

She understood. He was terrified.

“She’ll be fine, Carter.” Caroline assured her older brother, moving her arm to wrap around his shoulder. He inhaled deeply but didn’t speak. She frowned but then leaned in closer to Carter. “I’m okay with it.” Caroline whispered. Carter moved a bit to look at her causing Caroline’s arm to drop from his shoulder. “If you and Brooke are or want to be together again…I’m okay with it. I won’t judge and I definitely won’t be someone who stands in the way.”

Carter let out a bitter laugh. “You’re about the only person.”

Caroline shoved against his shoulder. “Don’t be bitter.” She told him. “It might take some time for other,” she motioned to Haley and Peyton, “people to warm up to the idea of you and Brooke being together again but…they’ll get there.”

“And how about your fiancée?” Carter asked Caroline.
“You know that Nate has always been overprotective of Brooke – but you also know that the only thing that truly matters to him is Brooke’s happiness. So, if you’re the person who makes Brooke happy…Nate will begrudgingly accept it.” She teased. Caroline smiled as Carters lips twitched up. She then jabbed him in his side with her elbow. “So, are you finally going to admit it to me?” He winced and then looked to Caroline with a raised brow.

“Admit what?”

“That you two are together again.” He rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Oh, come on! I just gave you my blessing!” Caroline complained.

He sighed, “I know that I love her, I know that she has a lot on her plate right now so I’m not going to push her into anything she’s not one hundred percent certain about or ready for, but when all of this is over and things are settled and if Brooke wants to give it a real go with me again, I will be ready. I’ve been ready for thirteen years.”

Caroline smiled softly at Carter and then moved to rest her head on his shoulder. “I’m proud of you, Carter.” She admitted.

“For?”

“Not rushing her.” Caroline said. “I know how much you love her and want to be with her but I’m glad you’re letting her call the shots. It’s very mature.”

Carter laughed. “Pregnancy has made you soft.” He said quite enough so that only Caroline could hear.

“Oh!” Caroline said to Carter. “That reminds me – Brooke knows.”

He looked over at her with wide eyes. “She knows?”

Caroline nodded her head.

“I can’t believe she didn’t tell me!”

Caroline laughed. “You didn’t tell her!” She reminded him.

He opened his mouth to argue but ended up laughing. “You have a point.”

“You guys,” Brookes voice caused them both to look over at where she now stood. Peyton and Haley were on either side of her. “You remember my best friends from Tree Hill, Peyton and Haley?”

Nate got up first and hugged both of the women and thanked them for being able to make it. Caroline followed after him and hugged them both as well. Serena came over and greeted them but Blair lingered in the background.

“B.” Brooke said causing everyone’s eyes to fall on Blair.

Brooke squared her shoulders and took in a deep breath before walking over to the three women. “Haley. Peyton.”

“Blair.” They both said in a flat tone. They then looked over at Carter but surprisingly smiled at him. “We really appreciate you getting us here so quickly.” Haley thanked Carter. “With the surgery being so last minute we were afraid we wouldn’t be able to get here in time…so…thanks.”
Carter smiled and gave them a quick nod of his head.

Brooke then walked away from her old friends and took her spot next to Carter. “I really do appreciate you all getting up so early and being here for us.” She said as she looked down at Angie. 

*Us?*

Was Carter included in that ‘us’? Or was Brooke just referring to herself and Angie?

“Ms. Davis?”

The waiting room grew silent as one of the nurses walked up to them.

“Can you and Angie come with us?”

Caroline looked back to Brooke who was taking in quick shaky breaths. The brunette then looked up at Carter who placed his hand on her back and led her to follow after the nurse.

“Are they together?” Blair asked the waiting room once Brooke and Carter had disappeared with Angie.

Caroline looked to Vanessa who was avoiding look at anyone in the room.

“Seriously – are they together?” Blair then looked to Nate for an answer. When he shrugged his shoulders, Blair looked to Caroline. “Well?”

“Blair – seriously? Why are you trying to start drama?” Vanessa spoke up before Caroline could come up with some lie. “We’re not here to find out the status of their relationship – we’re here to support Brooke.”

“He cheated on her!” Blair said in anger.

“With you.” Peyton sneered at Blair.

Blair glared at the blonde. “Oh, I’m sorry – remind me again why Brooke and Lucas broke up, Peyton?”

Peyton scoffed and rolled her eyes. “You really want to go there, Queen B?”

“Enough!” Victoria hissed, stopping anyone else from saying anything further. “If anyone should be upset about Brooke and Carter being together it’s me!” She said quietly. “You really think I want Brooke back together with the man who broke her heart thirteen years ago so badly that it took her nearly a decade to open herself up to anyone again? No! But he’s helping her through this right now and I’m sure Brooke will come to her senses when the surgery is over and Angie is healthy – until then, we all keep our opinions to ourselves!”

“Come to her senses?” Caroline quoted Victoria in anger. “Are you joking? Brooke is a grown ass adult and whatever is going on between her and my brother is her decision. And the fact that you’re insinuating that Carter is merely helping her out through all of this is insulting. He loves her and if you all took two seconds to pull your head out of your asses you’d realize that he always has.”

“Caroline…he cheated on her with her cousin.” Haley said, skeptic of Caroline’s words. “Look, I know he’s your brother and you feel the need to defend him but…he’s kind of taking advantage of Brooke right now. She’s so vulnerable and–”

“You really need to choose your next words carefully, Haley.” Caroline said in anger causing Nate
“Everyone needs to stop.” Nate said and looked between everyone. “As her friends and family – we should all know that we have never had a say in Brookes love life so why anyone thinks that has changed is ridiculous.” He looked to Peyton and Haley. “I’m not Carters biggest fan when it comes to Brooke but he went out of his way to make sure you two were here for Brooke today – he didn’t have to do that. If Carter really only was taking advantage of how vulnerable Brooke is do you really think he’d fly you two out here? Do you really think he’d call us all here to be with Brooke? He could have been the only person here with Brooke today but he knows her friends and family are important to her and knew that she would need them – he got us all here even though he knows we fucking hate him.” He looked to Caroline, “Most of us.” He corrected himself.

The room got quiet again as they all thought on what Nate had just said.

“Am I too late?!”

Rachel Gatina came running into the waiting room, her was a mess and she was makeup less, not to mention that she was wearing large sweatshirt and sweatpants – not something Caroline had seen Rachel in while knowing her.

“Where’s Brooke?” Rachel looked around the room. “Did they already take Angie?”

“What the fuck is she doing here?” Victoria said loudly as she looked to the redhead.

Well, at least Carter wasn’t the most hated person in the room now.

Dr. Copeland was walking over to them and Brooke started to feel dizzy. Thankfully Carter had his arm wrapped around her waist and was holding her closely to him as she gently bounced Angie as the little girl fussed. Brooke had no idea how the hell she would have been able to go through all of this without Carter – even with all of her friends surrounding her, Brooke didn’t think she’d be as strong (if that’s what you want to call it) without Carter being with her every step of the way.

“My Davis,” Dr. Copeland stood in front of them now. He smiled softly at Brooke before looking to Carter and greeting him as well. “Mr. Baizen.”

“Hi.” Brooke said in a little rasp. She took in a deep breath before trying to lighten the moment. “Big day, huh?”

Dr. Copeland smiled politely and nodded his head. “How are you holding up?” He asked.
“Terrified.” Brooke admitted in a quick breath. “Puke on your shoes kind of terrified.”

He chuckled and then looked to Carter. “How about you?”

“About the same.” Carter answered and tugged Brooke a little bit closer to him and moved his hand to gently smooth back Angie’s thick black hair. “But,” Carter looked to Dr. Copeland. “I know she’s in good hands.”

“You guys don’t have to worry about Angie, she’s going to do great, okay?” Dr. Copeland told the both of them as a few nurses made their way towards him. “You both will do great, too.”

Brooke moved her head to rest against Carter’s shoulder and his hand squeezed her hip.

“Dr. Copeland,” One of the nurses said, gaining the man’s attention. “We’re all set.”

Dr. Copeland looked at the nurse and gave her a quick nod before looking back at Brooke and Carter. “Okay,” He inhaled deeply. “This is going to take a little while but as soon as I’m done, I will come out and let you know, okay?”

“Okay.” Brooke whispered.

“The nurse is going to take Angie now, okay?”

“Okay.” She whispered again as tears filled her eyes. Brooke shifted a bit and looked down at Angie. “Hi sweet girl.” Brooke said as Angie looked up at her. “The nice nurse is gonna take you for your surgery now, okay?” She knew it was ridiculous to be having a conversation with an infant but it helped Brooke feel a little bit at ease – to go over everything that was about to happen and say it out loud. “But nothing is going to happen to you. I promise. Okay?” Brooke’s voice broke as Angie moved her hand up to press against Brooke’s mouth causing her to let out a sad little laugh and give the small hand a kiss. “They’re just going to take you and make you better.” Angie moved her hand to touch Brooke’s nose now, her little fingers getting wet from Brooke’s tears. “You’re going to be all better, okay?” She whispered and pressed a kiss to the side of Angie’s head.

Brooke inhaled deeply and then looked to Carter. He nodded and bent down to press a couple of kisses to the top of Angies head and whispered something so quietly in Angies ear that Brooke couldn’t hear him. But that could also be from the fact that Brookes heart was beating so loudly in her ears that she couldn’t even hear herself think. Carter pressed one last kiss to Angies hand when she began to grab at him as he pulled away and sniffled before letting go of Brookes waist and stepping aside.

Brooke knew she had to give Angie to the nurse but for the life of her, she couldn’t let go of her child. “Mommy loves you.” Brooke whispered. She then turned to face the nurse who gave her a warm smile before Brooke finally handed Angie over to her.

Once Angie was out of her arms Brooke pressed her hand against her chest right above where her heart was aching as Angie began to cry. When they turned to walk away Brooke called out for Dr. Copeland, her way of trying to buy a little more time. “Dr. Copeland…what’s your name? Your first name?” She asked him.

He smiled softly at her, “Just…try to relax, Brooke, okay? Carter said it so himself; Angie is in good hands.”

Brooke’s lower lip quivered and she whispered, “Okay.” As she watched Dr. Copeland and the nurses walk away with Angie. Brooke felt more tears fall as Angie kept her eyes on her as they walked down the hallway. The infant had tears streaming down her face as well and moved her little
arm up and in Brookes direction.

Was she scared? Did she think that she was never going to see Brooke again? Did she know just how much Brooke loves her?

The second Carter wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against his chest Brooke finally let out a sob she had been repressing, clinging onto his shirt as she cried hard. “She’s strong.” Carter whispered with his lips smothered against Brookes hair. “She’s so strong and so are you.” He pressed a kiss to her hair. “You’re so fucking strong, Brooke.”

“If anything happens to her,”

“Nothing is going to happen to her.” His arms circled around her a little tighter. “She’s going to be fine. She’s a fighter.”

Brooke continued to cry for a while until Carter let go of her and moved his hands to cup her cheeks and pressed a kiss to her lips, both of their trembling and Brooke could feel his face was wet with tears as well. But Brooke kissed him back while gripping onto his shirt as their tears fell together. When their lips broke apart and Carter moved to hold Brooke to his chest again, Brooke finally started to calm down, finding comfort in his arms.

She sniffled. “What did you say to her?” Brooke asked in a whisper.

Carter smoothed down Brookes hair while holding her and hugged her tightly. “I told her I loved her.” He admitted. “But the rest is between me and her.”

That made Brooke laugh a little. She looked up at him and lifted her chin a bit and Carter, like always, knew what she wanted. He bent down and pressed his lips to hers again in a soft kiss as his fingers ran through her hair. Brooke slowly pulled away and licked at her lips. “Thank you, Carter.” She opened her eyes and saw him smiling down at him, eyes red and puffy from his tears. “I don’t think I could have ever done this without you.”

“Brooke?”

They both turned their heads in the direction of the voice and found Rachel standing a few feet away.

“Am I too late? Did they already take her?”

Brooke looked to Carter as more tears filled her eyes and he gave her a soft smile and motioned for her to go to Rachel as he let go of her. I love you, Brooke mouthed before she hurried over to Rachel and flung her arms around her friend.

Rachel hugged her back and began to cry. “I’m so sorry, Brooke. God, I’m so fucking sorry!”

Brooke didn’t say anything. She only continued to hug Rachel. For the past couple of years Rachel had been Brookes rock. And not speaking to Rachel was eating away at Brooke more and more each day. She knew it was Carter who likely reached out to Rachel to let her know what was happening and asked her to come and God, Brooke loved him so much for that. Because now Brooke had all her family with her (Aside from her father and a few other friends from Tree Hill) – and with them all, Brooke would get through this.

She had to get through this. She had to be strong. No more crying. Because if she continued on crying she wouldn’t be able to stop.
Be strong, Brooke.

Everything is going to be okay.
Chapter 14

It had been two hours. Two hours and Dr. Copeland hadn’t come out to talk to them. He told Brooke that he’d see her in a few hours – did that mean more than two? Because Brooke had the two-hour
mark set for when she believed Dr. Copeland would come out and explain to them how Angie’s surgery had gone. But he hadn’t.

“Something went wrong,” Brooke whispered.

Carter grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze. But he didn’t speak.

“Sometimes surgeries are long, Brooke.” Haley reminded her friend. “And this is a big surgery and they’re taking their time to make sure that Angies heart is perfect. Just focus on that.” She suggested.

“Yeah, exactly.” Peyton agreed. “You can’t think so negatively.”

Brooke snorted in amusement. “Coming from someone who would lock herself in her room listen to emo music while sketching sad drawings all day.”

Peyton made a noise that sounded like a laugh and Brooke was glad she hadn’t taken her words the wrong way.

“How much longer do you think it’s going to take?” Rachel asked. Her leg was bouncing up and down at a rapid speed and Brooke could see how uncomfortable her friend was with Victoria glaring at her the whole time.

Rachel sat on the other side of Carter and Brooke moved forward a bit to look at her. They had spoken earlier and Rachel had apologized profusely about what had happened and how she was so sorry that she put Brooke and Angie’s lives in danger and how much she loved them both and how she’d never do anything to hurt either of them but Brooke told her friend to shut up and simply hugged her.

She had always been Brooke’s biggest support system. And without her, Brooke at times felt so lost. Rachel had helped Brooke through so much and she should have never shut her out. But she had been upset and scared. And to be honest, whenever Brooke looked at Rachel she would see Daunte’s face or feel the weight of his body on top of hers. Not anymore though. She was just glad to have her friend back.

“Thank you for coming, Rach.” Brooke said softly.

The redhead smiled softly and nodded. “I’ve been with you for all your other huge life changing moments. I wasn’t going to miss this one.” She smirked and Brooke huffed out a laugh.

It was true. Rachel had been there for Brooke for a lot of her big milestones.

Brooke looked up and saw Nate and Caroline sitting across from them with Howard and Victoria. She saw the look on Nates face and the direction his eyes were. He was glaring holes into hers and Carters linked hands. But she didn’t pull her hand out of his to ease Nates anger. Because today was not about Nate. It was about Angie and Brooke found comfort in holding Carters hand and she knew he probably felt the same way. They were just as scared.

Blair, Serena, and Chuck had all gone to the coffee stand to bring everyone some coffee but only Rachel had asked to have a cup of coffee to which Blair glared and told her to get it herself. Brooke had sighed in annoyance but didn’t say anything.

Because, again, today was not about anyone else but Angie. Her friends could hate one another and all together, including her family, could hate Carter – but none of that mattered to Brooke anymore. She didn’t care what anyone thought. She cared about Angie and was going to focus all her energy on waiting for Dr. Copeland to come back and afterwards when things were settling down, she’d tell
her friends to shove it up their asses.

If they didn’t want Carter to be a part of her life – too fucking bad. He was. He always had been. God, Brooke snuck away to hide on her wedding day before walking down the aisle to Julian with the hope that Carter might call or he might show up. He had always been in her heart – even when she tried to desperately to hate him.

When Julian proposed she had thought about Carter – about how she should have said yes to him.

It was fucked up and Brooke pushed those thoughts away quickly and immediately said yes to Julian. Because if she married him, surely, she’d finally be over Carter, right?

Nope.

“Brooke?”

Brooke looked up and saw Vanessa standing a bit away from her.

“Can I talk to you for a second?”

She nodded and got up only to realize in that moment that she had sill been holding Carters hand from the slight tug of her arm when she moved to quickly. Brooke took in a deep breath as she let go of Carters hand and gave him a soft smile before walking a bit away with Vanessa.

“Hey,” Brooke said awkwardly.

“Hey.” Vanessa said back with a little smile.

Brooke closed her eyes. “I should have told you.”

When Brooke opened her eyes again Vanessa simply shrugged. “It’s fine.”

“It’s not.” Brooke disagreed. “When it started it was just…it wasn’t anything I saw furthering into something more. I was still mad at him and hurt but,” She sighed. “I…”

“Love him?”

Brooke pressed her lips together and nodded her head, avoiding Vanessa’s eyes.

“I knew what it was going into things with him. She really didn’t want to her hurt. “I know you two have a past,”

“Nothing compared to your past with him.” Vanessa told her. “I’ve known that for a long time – I guess I was just…I don’t know. Maybe I was afraid to open myself up to someone else after what happened with Carter and because of that I held onto the feelings I had for him. If I believed that I loved Carter – that I still wanted to be with him, I wouldn’t get hurt by anyone else.” Vanessa let out a laugh and shook her head in frustration. “That makes no sense, I’m sorry. I just – I don’t know how to explain my feelings.”

Brooke frowned. “I’m sorry he hurt you.” Because she was. Brooke knew what it was like to have her heart broken by Carter Baizen.

She shrugged again. “I knew what it was going into things with him. I knew he still loved you and I thought I could ignore it but,” Vanessa made a face.

“What?” Brooke quirked her brow up.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. “This is really fucking awkward.” Vanessa huffed out a
laugh. Brooke didn’t understand. “I ended things for good the day it was announced that you and Julian got engaged.”

Brooke opened and closed her mouth. What? “Why?” She finally managed to ask. She knew that Carter had nearly drank himself to death on her wedding night – but what had happened the day her engagement was announced.

“He said your name.” Vanessa said. Brooke made a face, still not understanding. “He said your name.” Vanessa said with wide eyes, trying to get Brooke to understand. Oh. Oh fuck. Oh. Brooke closed her eyes and shook her head. “I’m sorry – I shouldn’t have told you that. That was so fucking awkward.”

Brooke opened her eyes upon hearing Vanessa’s distressed tone. “V, it’s…it’s fine.” She spoke honestly. “I’m not upset – I, I just am sorry that it happened. I’m sorry that you got hurt.”

“Yeah, well,” Vanessa chuckled. “I learned my lesson. Don’t ever fall for a guy who has been in love with Brooke Davis.”

Brooke couldn’t help but laugh at that which made Vanessa laugh as well.

“I hope you guys are happy.” Vanessa said with a soft smile after their laughter died down. “If you two are together or want to be…don’t let anyone stand in your way.”

“Are you joking?”

Brooke looked away from Vanessa and over her shoulder to where Blair stood. She held a plastic cup of coffee in her hand and was glaring daggers at Brooke and Vanessa.

“No, seriously? Are you fucking joking, Brooke?”

She sighed and turned around to face Blair, arms folding across her chest. “Now is not the time.”

“Oh, so you’re only able to have a heart to heart with Carter’s ex-fuck buddy but not your cousin?” Blair scoffed. “You shut me out for thirteen years, Brooke! Thirteen years! You missed my wedding, the birth of my son!”

“Blair,” Serena walked up to them. “Let’s sit down.”

“No!” Blair shouted. “This is wrong! Because of one mistake I made while I was literally spiraling, I lost one of my best friends – but what? Carter gets inside you once and suddenly all is forgiven with him? Thirteen years, Brooke! I have carried that guilt around me for thirteen years. Did you forgive me before or after you started sleeping with Carter again?”

“B,” Brooke said softly, feeling tears swell in her eyes.

Rachel walked over to them only to be stopped by Serena who stood in Rachel’s way from getting to Blair. “You better shut her up, blondie, or I’m going to break her nose.”

Blair shook her head and squared her jaw as she looked at Brooke. “I slept with him to make myself feel better – not because I wanted to hurt you. I was fucked up over Yale and I made a mistake. But he,” Blair thrust her finger over to Carter, who was walking over to where the two women were standing. “He fucked me to get back at you! He told me that much! He said he wanted to break your heart like you broke his!”

Brooke felt like she was going to get sick.
“Enough.” Carter said, his tone filled with anger and hate. “What the fuck are you doing Blair?”

“She deserved to know the truth before she throws her whole life away by being with you again!”

Brooke walked away from them both and covered her mouth with her hand.

Another hour had passed.

Carter watched as Brooke sat two chair rows away from him. She had Haley, Peyton, Rachel and her mom all gathered around her speaking quietly so that no one else could hear them. Brooke had yet to make eye contact with him – she didn’t even glance in his direction.

Fuck.

Fuck, Blair! Why the hell did she have to ruin everything?

Chuck had taken her home and Serena had left with them to try and calm Blair down after her outburst.

Howard and Nate sat across from Carter and Caroline sat next to him.

He shook his head as he felt tears fill his eyes. “I lost her again.” Even saying the words made him feel like he was moments away from throwing up all over the waiting room.

Caroline moved her hand to rest on Carter’s knee.

“I was so fucked up that night – I said shit I didn’t mean to try and…ease my fucking ego or my insecurities and it was awful and wrong and a mistake but…I did it. I said them and now she knows and…she’s going to hate me again. I lost her. And not just her, I lost Angie too because Blair fucking Waldorf.”

“She was mad at Brooke – we all have said things out of anger that we shouldn’t have. I mean,” She bumped her leg with his. “You know that better than anyone.”

Carter shook his head and moved his hands to run down his face, wiping away tears that had fallen. “What the fuck was I thinking?” He whispered, his voice hoarse. “Why do I do this shit?”

“You didn’t do it today, Carter – it was thirteen years ago. You were an idiot and you said it yourself, you said it because you were hurt and insecure. Look, today is stressful for both you and Brooke and,” Caroline sighed. “What Blair did was wrong. She shouldn’t have aired all that out today…but it’s out. And if you and Brooke truly love each other…fix your shit. Work things out. Fight for her.”
She was right.

Carter wiped at his eyes again and got up. He walked over to Brooke and was met with glares from Haley, Peyton, and Victoria. Rachel surprisingly gave him a sympathetic look. But Brooke was looking down at her hands, still avoiding his eyes.

“Can I talk to Brooke, please?”

Victoria scoffed but Haley was the one to agree. “Come on,” She told Peyton was quick to follow Haley. Rachel got up too and grabbed Victoria by her arm, dragging her away from Brooke.

Carter stood in front of Brooke but she still made no effort to look at him. So, he crouched down on the ground and grabbed her hands in his. Brooke sniffled but finally looked down at him. “Did you hate me that much?” She whispered brokenly.

He shook his head. “No.” Carter told her honestly. “I hated myself. I knew I didn’t deserve you and I thought you were starting to realize that too. Hell, maybe you’re realizing it now.” Brooke closed her eyes and a tear fell. He squeezed her hands. His own eyes started to fill with tears again. “I love you.” He whispered. “I love you so fucking much. What I did was wrong, it was awful, and it wasn’t fair to you. I didn’t deserve you. I still don’t but,” He inhaled deeply. “But I still love you. And…” He shrugged, lips pressed together tightly as a tear rolled down his cheek. “I’ll never stop loving you. But,” Carters lower lip began to tremble. “If you can’t be with me after hearing what Blair told you…I wouldn’t blame you. I wouldn’t blame you for hating me because…you wouldn’t be alone in that department.”

She didn’t say anything. He didn’t expect her to. Carter let go of her hand and stood up straight. He looked down at her one more time before he turned to walk away. But he didn’t get the chance.

Brooke grabbed his hand and tugged him back.

Carter looked over his shoulder at her, she was standing now and her eyes were filled with tears. “Don’t go.” Brooke whispered. She tugged at his hand and Carter turned around to face her. “I hurt you that day and I’m sorry.”

He shook his head, “Brooke, no,” Carter tried to tell her but she interrupted him.

“It hurt to hear what you said to Blair. I won’t lie. But…I still love you.” Brooke said honestly, tears still in her eyes. “And,” She looked away from him and took a deep breath. “I don’t want another thirteen years to go by where I try and deny that I love you.” He moved his free hand under her chin, using his fingers to move her chin so that she had to look him in the eyes. She sighed and pressed her lips together. Carter held his breath, waiting for her to talk again. “I love you too much to lose you again.”

He moved forward and pressed his lips to hers, not caring who was watching or judging. Carter Baizen fucking loved Brooke Davis and she loved him too.

“Don’t ever blame yourself for my idiotic, terrible choices that I made thirteen years ago.” He whispered once he pulled away from her. “You didn’t deserve what I did to you and I’m going to apologize to you for the rest of my life.”

She pressed her hand to his cheek and stood on toes and her lips gently touched his. “The rest of your life?” Brooke whispered, smiling slightly.

He chuckled and nodded his head. “Yes.” Carter said back.

She smirked. “The rest of my life?”
Carter grazed his lips over Brooke. “The rest of our lives if you’d let me.” He whispered.

He grinned when Brooke lowered her head and bit down on her lip. “I think I like the sound of that.” She said in a whisper once she was finally looking back up at him.

Carter moved forward to kiss her again but stopped when someone walked up to them. “Ms. Davis?” Dr. Copeland was making his way to where they stood and Carter grabbed Brooke’s hand, both of them bracing themselves for whatever Dr. Copeland was going to tell them. His scrubs were slightly damp and they could both see that the man had been sweating from the ring around the scrubs collar. “The operation went very smoothly. Angie did great.”

Brooke let out a little sob of happiness and Carter pulled her to his side, kissing the top of her head.

“So, she’s going to be okay?” Brooke said through tears.

“She’s in recovery now and we are assisting her breathing, but she’s stable and all indications are she’s gonna be just fine.” Dr. Copeland said and Brooke pressed her hand to her chest.

“Thank you.” She cried as her family and friends gathered around her. “Thank you so much!” Brooke said to Dr. Copeland before she moved herself into Carter’s arms and hugged him tightly, crying tears of happiness against his shirt. He took in a couple shaky breaths as his arms wrapped tightly around Brooke and his own tears of happiness fell.

And then suddenly multiple people were hugging them causing them both to laugh. They all laughed and cried and hugged each other until one of the nurses came and got Brooke and Carter to bring them back to go be with Angie while she was in recovery.

By the end of the night, Angie was breathing on her own and Brooke and Carter were snuggled up on a twin-size mattress they had brought in so they could sleep next to her. But neither of them slept. They just watched in wonder at the strong little girl in front of them.

As her adoptive mother, Brooke was the only one allowed to be with Angie after hours. But Dr. Copeland had spoken to the ICU nurses and told them that Carter would be allowed to stay the night as well. He was grateful Dr. Copeland was willing to let him stay – but mostly he was grateful for the man who saved the little girl who he hoped would call him “Daddy” in the future. He hoped that Brooke would call him husband and he would call her wife. He hoped that he’d look down at Angie and say “that’s my daughter.” The surgery was over, everything had gone well. And Carter never wanted to let go of Brooke and Angie for the rest of his life.

And if he wasn’t worried that Brooke might freak out or say no because of the timing, he’d get down on one knee this very second and ask her to marry him.

FOUR MONTHS LATER...
She didn’t want to get up. Brooke was just tired. So tired.

The feeling of a hand running up and down her back caused her to stir slightly in her sleep. Brooke made out a little noise and pushed her face deeper into her pillow.

“You gotta wake up, babe.” A male voice said softly.

“No.” Brooke groaned in annoyance. “I don’t want to.” Her words were muffled by the pillow.

“Your mom is going to kill you if you push back your meeting with Macy’s again – not to mention that if you don’t show up they’re probably going to go with another designer.”

Gurgling and giggling caused Brooke to smile softly and roll over. Carter was sitting on the bed with Angie on his lap, her little arms immediately reaching out for Brooke once she finally saw her mother. Brooke sat up in her bed and playfully narrowed her eyes at Carter who smirked, knowing he had succeeded in getting Brooke out of bed.

“Good morning, sweet girl.” Brooke cooed as Carter handed Angie over. The baby smiled a gummy smile, drool dribbling down her chin while her hands instantly went to touch Brookes cheeks. “Now I really don’t want to go.” Brooke said in a pout.

Angies surgery was a success. Their little girl was healthy and perfect and Brooke loved her so much. The hours of stressing, panicking, just waiting for Dr. Copeland to come with news about Angie were fucking torturous. And Brooke swore that when Angie came out of it, she would never spend this much time apart from her. That only lasted for a few months. She had taken off the first few months of work after Angie’s surgery but Victoria was pushing Brooke to get back to it. It wasn’t like Brooke was sitting on her ass all day. When Angie was napping Brooke would sketch new designs and send them to her mother, she’d take phone calls from Paris or Italy and FaceTime with her investors during meetings to let them know how the new line was coming along.

She had been with Angie every day, every hour, for four months. And now she had to leave her. Brooke really did not want to leave her. She might have felt better if Carter was staying home with Angie, but he had to go back to work a lot sooner than Brooke had.

Brooke continued to pout as she looked at him, lower lip jutted out. “Don’t make me leave her.”

Carter laughed. “You promised Caroline and Nate that they could watch her today – they have to get some practice in before they have one of their own.”

Angie let out a happy noise and Brooke couldn’t help but let out a little whine. “But she’s so cute!”

“The meeting is for an hour.” Carter reminded Brooke. “And your designs are amazing, Brooke. They’re going to take one look at your sketches and sign you on and before you know it you’ll be with Angie again.”

Brooke shook her head. “My designs are amazing but they’re expecting a new women’s line from me – not infant and toddler clothes. I’m taking a big risk by blind siding them with my idea for Baby Brooke.”
Carter moved his hand to rest on her leg. “Your work speaks for itself. And if they say no, I’ll sue them.” He smirked and Brooke rolled her eyes as she laughed. “Now, get up. Angie’s already been fed and I’ve got about thirty minutes before I have to drop her off with Nate and Caroline.”

Brooke sighed and nodded her head. She pressed a bunch of kisses to Angies little cheeks before she handed her off to Carter and hurried to the bathroom to get ready. Normally she liked to wake up when Angie did, but she had been completely exhausted when Angie’s cries woke her up this morning and Carter had rubbed her back and whispered that he’d go get her.

Carter was so amazing with Angie, and God, did Angie love him. The little girl lit up whenever Carter would come home from work or when she’d wake up from a nap and realize that she was in his arms. It made Brookes heart ache in the best way possible and there were times she felt herself holding her breath as she’d catch Carter whispering to Angie how much he loved her as he would play with the infant.

Brooke *could* do this alone. She could raise Angie by herself, she didn’t doubt that. But she didn’t *want* to. She wanted Carter by her side, she wanted him to always be in their lives. Her friends didn’t understand it, her family *definitely* didn’t understand it and it took a month of silence on Brookes part for them to finally accept the fact that Carter was going to be in Brookes life again. Or, to *tolerate* that Carter was going to be in her life again.

The first time they went out together in public with Angie and the paparazzi had caught them, Julian had called Brooke screaming at her saying that *he* should be Angie’s father *not* Carter. But, Carter wasn’t Angie’s father. He was Brookes boyfriend (but, come on. Brooke would never tell Carter that he wasn’t Angie’s father because if he wanted to be – she had no objection to that.) And the fact that Julian thought he had some sort of claim to Angie was absolutely absurd. They were divorced when she adopted her and Brooke knew that the only reason why Julian was pissed off was because it was *Carter* by her side. That Carter was helping raise a child that Julian and Brooke had been in the running to adopt.

But the mother hadn’t chosen them. Julian had an affair and got his mistress pregnant. They divorced. Brooke had a clean slate when she started the process of adopting Angie and she made sure that the divorce went through as soon as possible so that Julian wouldn’t try anything.

*Surprise, surprise.* He tried to sue Brooke and the adoption agency. But the case would never hold up in court, Carter made sure of that. *That* was when Julian told Brooke about the money Carter had paid him. Brooke calmly told Julian that she was well-aware of Carter wiring the money and reminded Julian how he had made this big show out of saying he no longer wanted the money and how he wanted them to be together. *After* Carter had wired him the money. He was fake and Brooke said that what Carter had done was out of a place of love.

Julian called her a bunch of nasty names and threatened to go to the press and tell them all about his ‘*whore of an ex-wife*’ who stole ‘their’ baby from him and wasn’t letting him see her.

*He wasn’t the fucking father.*

On Angie’s new birth certificate, the fathers name was empty.

…For now.

Because…if Carter someday wanted that role, she would happily get the paperwork ready for him to sign. She loved him. God, she loved him so fucking much. And after everything they had gone through, all the heartache and pain and betrayal – they were able to get past it and start at a new future.
Once Brooke was cleaned up and her hair was dried and styled, Brooke quickly went through her closet to find something to wear. But the sound of Carter singing to Angie while she giggled caused her to stop. She smiled at the sound. *Dammit. She really didn’t want to leave either of them.*

She sighed and forced herself to continue looking through her wardrobe.

*Dress or women’s pant suit? HBIC business woman or fashionista business woman?* Fuck. This was harder than she had thought it would be. Brooke pulled out two options and laid them down on the bed and stood in front of them. She inhaled deeply and closed her eyes only to jump slightly at the feeling of arms being wrapped around her middle from behind and Carters lips pressing against her neck.

She smiled and closed her eyes. She could hear Angie cooing in the living room and figured that Carter must have put her in her bouncer. “I got to get going, Brooke.” He whispered, still pressing soft kisses to her neck.

“No,” she whined. Carter chuckled and the vibration of it against her skin caused her to giggle. She turned around and moved her arms to loop around his neck. “We can stay home today and have sex every time Angie falls asleep.” Brooke suggested and wiggled her brows hoping it would entice Carter.

He chuckled and moved them in a little sway. “As amazing as that sounds,” He smirked. “I have a client coming in and it’s bound to be a pretty high-profile case. Which means I’m going to be getting paid a lot. And I thought maybe we can spend that money on remodeling one of my guest bedrooms in the penthouse and turn it into a nursery for Angie?”

Brooke gaped at Carter. They hadn’t spent the night in the penthouse – not once. They only ever stayed in her apartment. Carter basically lived in that apartment with them. Was he…

“Are you asking me to move in with you?” She said in a soft tone.

He nodded his head slowly and bit down on his lower lip. Carter looked nervous – and why wouldn’t he be? Brooke had said no to his proposal thirteen years ago. She had rejected him and now he was putting his heart on the line again by asking her and Angie to move in with him. “Will you?” He asked.

Brooke didn’t answer. She only grinned and nodded her head.

“Really?” His face broke out into a grin. Brooke nodded her head happily and Carter surged forward and captured her lips with his own. “I love you.” Carter breathed out between kisses and then groaned when Brooke dropped the towel that was covering her body. “Brooke – we can’t stay home today.” He said but continued to kiss her.

“Yes, we can.” Brooke tugged at his hair. “Angie doesn’t need a nursery – she can just sleep in our room.”

“Fuck.” Carter groaned again and gripped her hips. “You’re killing me.”

Brooke laughed and pulled her lips away from his. “How so?” She challenged him with a smirk.

A noise emerged from Carter that sounded like a primal growl and it made Brooke grin, feeling victorious. “You called it our room.”

“Oh, are we going to be sleeping in separate bedrooms?” She teased.
He shook his head. “No fucking way.” He then reached around behind her and picked up one of the outfits she had laid out. “You should wear this one.” Carter suggested.

Brooke quirked her brow up. “Why?”

He licked at his lower lip as he handed her the outfit. “Because when you come by my office after your meeting, it’ll be easier for me to get off you.”

She bit down on her lower lip as her cheeks flushed. Carter walked away from her and hollered for her to get dressed quickly so that she could say goodbye to Angie. Brooke chuckled and slipped into the dress that Carter had picked for her. *He was right. Easy to slip in and easy to slip out.*

She slipped into a pair of high heels that would go with the dress and put on a jacket to wear on her way to work. Carter called her name just as she was walking out of the bedroom.

“I’m coming, I’m coming.”

But when she walked out into the living room, it wasn’t only Carter and Angie in the bedroom. Julian Baker, Brooke’s ex-husband, stood in the living room with his arms crossed over his chest and a scowl on his face.

“Seriously? Are you living with him now?”

Brooke was frozen. She just stood there in shock that Julian actually had the balls to come to her fucking apartment!

“Get out.”

“No.”

“Leave, Julian! Now!”

“I just want to talk to you.”

“She told you to leave.” Carter said in anger. He was holding Angie in her car seat as he watched the ex-spouses interact. “Get the fuck out.”

“How about you get the fuck out?!” Julian yelled at Carter.

Carter took a step forward but Brooke stopped him. “Julian, if you do not leave my apartment right now I will call the police.” She threatened.

He shook his head and looked down at the ground before he finally looked back to Brooke. “Alex cheated on me – the baby isn’t mine!” Julian spit out.

“Not my problem!” Brooke told him.

“Brooke…please, come on.”

She had to laugh at that. “Are you seriously wanting to me to feel bad for you right now? Are you fucking kidding me?” Brooke shook her head and then changed her voice to a mocking tone. “-Oh, Julian. I am so sorry that the woman you cheated on me with ended up being a skank hoe and was cheating on you the whole time you were cheating on me. Gosh, how sad you must be!”

“Brooke,” Carter said her name and Brooke focused on him. “I got to drop Angie off at Nate and
“-You’re not going anywhere with my daughter.” Julian seethed at Carter.

“Young daughter?” Carter scoffed. “Are you fucking high?” He yelled. “You and Brooke were already divorced by the time she adopted Angie! You have no fucking claim to either of them.”

“Yeah, well neither do you.” Julian shot back.

“Yes, he does!” Brooke shouted, stopping them for saying anything further.

Both men looked at Brooke and shock.

“He might not legally be her father – but he’s been here every single fucking day with us. He stayed up with Angie all night when she first came back from her surgery to make sure she was still breathing, he made it possible for me to even have Angie! He loves her and she loves him. That beautiful baby girl is his and don’t you dare say otherwise.” Brooke glared at Julian.

Julian glared at Brooke and then looked at Carter. “You’ll fuck up again. She’ll piss you off and you’ll fuck any woman who opens her legs for you. And I’ll be there waiting for her and Angie when you do that.” Julian looked back at Brooke. “I’ll be back in LA. You can come home anytime you want.”

He walked away and Brooke felt sick to her stomach. The door to the apartment slammed shut and Brooke pressed her hand to her stomach to try and calm herself down. “Carter, I am so sorry.” She whispered, terrified to look him in the eyes.

Carter set Angie’s car seat down on the table and walked over to Brooke. “He’s wrong.”

“He’s a dick.”

“Brooke, he’s wrong.” Carter stressed the word. She looked at him in confusion. “I am never going to hurt you again. I don’t care if you piss me off – I don’t care if you say no to me again if I ever propose, I am not going to do anything to hurt you. I swear it on my life. I fucking love you and I want to be with you forever. You’re right. Angie is mine. She’s ours. And I’ll fight for you every fucking day.”

“You don’t have to.” Brooke moved forward and pressed her hand to his face, rubbing her thumb against his stubble. “I’m yours. Forever. We both are.”

Carter opened his mouth to speak but his phone started to ring. “Fuck.” He groaned. Carter closed his eyes and pulled his phone out of his pocket. “That’s work, I have to go.” He told Brooke. But he leaned forward and pressed his lips to Brookes in a kiss. “We’re going to talk about this more tonight and I’m calling a mover as soon as I can because you’re moving in with me by the end of this week.” He smirked, kissing her again.

Brooke smiled against his lips. “Damn right.” She agreed.

She gave Angie kisses and then kissed Carter again before he left and once he was gone Brooke called her mother and told her to cancel the meeting with Macys. She was pissed. But Brooke had some business to take care of.

Julian could go fuck himself.

Angie was hers. And she was Carters. And Brooke was going to make certain of that.
Chapter End Notes

Two chapter update! I was going to keep it as one but it ended up being realllllly long if I kept it as just one chapter update! So, keep on reading! But let me know what you think! Kudos/feedback are always appreciated!
“Holy shit. Are you serious?” Nate said in shock as he bounced Angie on his leg. Carter was pacing around the living room, dragging his fingers through his hair in anger.

“-You have nothing to worry about, Carter – Brooke loves you. Not Julian.” Caroline tried to assure
him.

“I’m not worried about whether or not Brooke loves me, I know she does – I’m worried that somehow Julian is going to find a way to take Angie away from Brooke.” Carter huffed as he continued to pace.

Nate looked over at Caroline and watched her frown. “You’re one of the best lawyers in the state, man – I doubt Julian could ever pull something on you that you won’t see coming.”

Carter shook his head. “I can’t lose her.”

“Carter, you’re not going to lose Brooke.”

But Nate saw that Carter was not referring to Brooke in that moment. His eyes were glued on Angie when he had said those words. After a moment, Caroline seemed to pick up on who Carter really meant as well.

“Oh,” Caroline said in a sad tone. “Carter – you’re not going to lose Angie. Brooke would never let that happen, she knows how important she is to you. And how important you are to Angie!”

“Julian is a fucking scumbag, Brooke might not have a choice in that. What if a court grants him custody? What if when that happens Julian says that he doesn’t want me around Angie?”


Carter licked at his lips and shook his head. “I just want pack all of our stuff up and run.” He confessed.

Caroline stood up and walked over to Carter. Nate couldn’t stop himself from smiling softly at her bump. It was getting bigger every day and with each passing day Nate got more and more excited for them to welcome their child to the world. Her hand was resting on her bump as she stood next to Carter, moving her free hand to grab his arm to stop him from pacing. “You aren’t going to run.” She told him. “You two will figure this out – we all will help.” She looked to Nate for reassurance.

He looked at Caroline then down to Angie who was gurgling as she tried to grab Carters attention. Angie really did love him. Nate looked to Carter. “We have your back.” He told him.

Carter moved his hand to his hips and looked down at the ground. Caroline frowned again. “Maybe…” She stopped herself from saying anything further.

Carter looked over at her. “What?”

For once, Nate didn’t know what his fiancée was thinking.

Caroline inhaled and then looked back to Carter. “You already have the ring.”

What?

“Care,” Carter shook his head. “No.”

Wait. No? He has an engagement ring for Brooke but he doesn’t want to propose. What the fuck? Nate had no fucking idea what was going on.

“Why not?” Caroline argued. “You plan on proposing this year anyway – why not do it now?”

“Because the last time I proposed to Brooke it was out of fear of losing her!” Carter argued back.
“You really think that if I go home tonight and get down on one knee she won’t think that I’m only proposing because I’m scared of losing Angie? No, fuck that. I’d end up losing both of them. I’m not going to do that again. I’m not going to propose out of fear.”

Nate frowned. He had blamed Carter for all these years for breaking Brooke’s heart but…Brooke had broken his heart too. So much that he was terrified to propose to her because of the current situation they were now facing. Nate knew Brooke, he knew that she would think that Carter was simply proposing to fix a solution – she wouldn’t believe his intentions were true. But…maybe if he spoke with his step-sister he might be able to get her to understand that Carter had been planning on proposing for a while now – the fact that Julian came into town was only speeding up the date he was choosing to propose.

No, she’d still think he was only proposing out of obligation or out of fear.

Carter groaned when his phone started to ring. He looked down at his screen and shook his head. He then walked over to Nate and picked Angie up from his lap. “I’ll see you when I get home.” Nate heard Carter whisper before pressing a kiss to Angie’s chubby cheeks. “I love you.”

It took Carter a moment before he handed Angie back over to Nate. He looked at him briefly and Nate gave him a reassuring nod. “Everything is going to be fine, Carter. You two aren’t alone in this.”

Carter forced a half smile and walked over to Caroline. “Call me if you need anything. Brooke is in a meeting but will come afterwards.”

“I know.” Caroline smiled at her brother.

When Carter left, Nate looked over at Caroline. “When’d her get the ring?” He asked his fiancée.

Caroline chuckled at his question, seemingly knowing he was going to ask it as soon as Carter was gone. “A few days after Angie’s surgery.” She told him as she walked over to where he was sitting with Angie and reached for the infant. “He had to, he promised Angie he would.”

“What?” Nate chuckled as he handed Angie over to Caroline.

“Before they took Angie to surgery, he and Brooke got to say goodbye to her. When it was his turn he told Angie that she had to make it through the surgery because he was planning on proposing to her Mom, and he really wanted her to be there when it happened. So, she had to be strong.”

Nate didn’t know what to say.

“I know your skeptical of them, Nate – but he loves Brooke. Have you ever doubted that?” Nate gave her an obvious look and Caroline rolled his eyes. “He fucked up. But if Brooke is willing to put that past in the past – we all should, too. She loves him.” Caroline shrugged. “And as you said, none of us have ever had a say in her relationships.”

He had been right when he said it four months ago and Caroline was right when she said it now.

Nate’s phone began to ring stopping him from saying anything back to Caroline. He looked down at his phone and sighed when he saw that it was Victoria calling him.

“Hey, Victoria.” He answered.

“Is Brooke with you?”
Nate scrunched his face in confusion. “No? I thought she was supposed to be at the Macy’s meeting.”

“She never showed up. Brooke sent me text telling me she emailed me all her designs and the pitch – if she doesn’t show up in five minutes I’m left leading the meeting and the people at Macy’s are not going to be happy. And if they’re not happy – they’re not going to sign Brooke on to a new line!” Victoria huffed. “Do you know if she’s with Carter?”

No, she wasn’t.

“No. Carter just dropped Angie off with me and Caroline. Listen, I don’t know if she told you but Julian showed up to her apartment this morning.”

“What?!” Victoria said in a shrill voice.

“Yeah.” It was all he could think to say.

“Why?”

“He wants Angie – says he has a claim to her because they had been candidates to adopting her while they were married.”

“That fucking prick!” Victoria cursed. “He has no rights – they were divorced! And not to mention he already has a child with that whore Alex Dupree! Is one child not good enough for him?”

“Actually,” Nate got up from where he was sitting and walked out of the room. “Julian told Brooke that the baby isn’t his. I guess Alex was cheating on him while he was cheating on Brooke with her.”

“Ha!” Victoria laughed. “Serves him right!” She soon went back to business. “But just because Julian is not the father of Alex Dupree’s baby does not mean he can be the father of Brookes. I need to find her.”

“Don’t call off the meeting – just go through with it and I’ll search around for Brooke, okay?”

Victoria sighed but agreed. “Call me if you find her.”

“I will.” Nate promised.

They hung up and Nate walked back into the living room where Caroline was playing with Angie. He went through his contacts and pressed on his father’s name.

Howard Archibald answered after three rings. “Hello?”

“Hey. I just wanted to give you a heads up; Victoria might call you freaking out.” Nate told his father as he grabbed his coat. “Julian is in town and is saying he has rights to Angie.” He explained as he put on his coat. “And now we can’t find Brooke and I’m going out to try and look for her.” Nate said and walked over to where Caroline to give her a quick kiss goodbye.

“You don’t have to do that, son. Brooke is with me.”

Nate stopped moving, standing a few feet away from where Caroline and Angie were playing. She was looking up at him in confusion and Nate didn’t blame her. He was just as confused. “What?”

“We’ll talk later.” Howard said and hung up.

Nate dropped his phone from his ear and looked down at it in his hand. “…What?” He whispered.
“What’s going on?” Caroline asked, picking up Angie and walking over to Nate.

“Brooke…is with my Dad.”

But why?

---

“Are you sure about this?”

Brooke nodded her head.

“This is a big step, Brooke.”

“I know.” She told her step-father.

Howard nodded his head and smiled softly at Brooke before he drafted the last of the paper work. Once her step-father was done with all the paper work, he slid the papers over to Brooke. “Alright – all you need to do is sign here and then the rest is up to him.” He held out his pen for her to grab.

Brooke took in a deep breath and smiled before she took Howards pen from him and signed her name on the document.

She sat in Carters office going over what she would say to him. He was still in a meeting with some of the other lawyers from the firm. Apparently, some young socialite was suing a handsy photographer who had groped her during a photoshoot she was on. That’s what Carters assistant had told her, anyway.

Brooke hadn’t been there too long. Maybe fifteen minutes or so. But it felt like she had been sitting at his desk for hours. And then finally, and thankfully, the door to his office opened. Brooke looked over her shoulder and watched as Carter walked in, a panicked look in his eyes.

“Is everything okay?” He asked her and hurried over to where she was sitting.

Brooke nodded her head, swallowing hard. “Hopefully it will be.” She said in a whisper.

Carter made a face of confusion. “W…what’s going on?”

Brooke decided to rip the Band-Aid off. “Here.” She handed him the manila envelope.

His brows furrowed together as he took the envelope from her. Carter took a seat next to Brooke and looked down at the envelope. “What’s this?”

“Open it.” She told him, feeling her palms sweat. She felt her heart speed up in anticipation.

Carter looked at her for a long moment before he opened the envelope and pulled out the papers. He read over them for a long time before he finally looked back to Brooke. “What is this?” He
asked.

She smiled softly and took in a shaky breath. “What does it look like?”

Carter looked down at the papers again and then back up at Brooke. “It looks like a marriage license.” He didn’t sound happy – he just sounded confused. And weirdly, a little sad.

“It’s…well, it’s a mock marriage license.” Brooke said quietly. “I mean, I had Howard get us a real one but I thought that…” She looked down at her hands.

She had signed it **Brooke Baizen**. How did he not know she was trying to propose to him right now?

“Um,” Brooke bit down on her lip.

“Why are you doing this?” Carter asked, surprising Brooke.

She blinked. “Why…why am I doing this?” Brooke couldn’t help but let out a laugh. “I mean – I did it…I thought it was a cute way to…propose.” God, she felt fucking humiliated.

“Why?”

“I just told you.”

“Why are you proposing?” He asked, his voice was sharp.

Brooke blinked again. **Why was she proposing?** “I,” She started to say but Carter stopped her.

“Because of Julian?” Carter asked, but it felt more like a statement. “Because you don’t want him to get the chance of getting Angie – you’re asking me to marry you so that Julian can’t claim Angie as his. You’re doing it for my signature on her birth certificate.”

Holy fuck.

What?

I mean, kind of. But she wanted to marry him – that was the truth. But if they wanted to keep Julian from somehow claiming Angie, they needed to speed things along.

She shook her head, still stunned by his reaction. “Yes, but…I thought that…we’d get married eventually so it wasn’t a big deal to rush it. For me, at least.” Brooke said in a whisper. She then looked at Carter. “Were you never planning on proposing to me again?”

Carter rubbed at his brow and closed his eyes. “Dammit, Brooke.” He grumbled.

**Oh.** He wasn’t. Brooke licked at her lower lip and grabbed her purse. “I’m sorry.” She breathed out as she stood up.

Carter didn’t go after her when she walked away from him. He didn’t call after her when she walked out of his office. He did nothing.

Brooke felt sick to her stomach.

She had just…**sort of** proposed and he…**sort of** said no.

He didn’t want to marry her.
Her eyes filled with tears the minute she was in his private elevator. She quickly wiped them away when she was in the main office of the firm and forced a smile at the receptionist before she got into the elevator that would take her to the ground floor.

Brooke texted Rachel on her second elevator ride.

Brooke Davis (10:45 AM):
I’m coming over.
I need to talk to you.

Rachel Gatina (10:46 AM):
Are you okay?

No.

No, she was nowhere near okay.

Brooke didn’t reply. She just got out of the elevator and left the building and hailed a cab. She gave the Rachels address to the driver and tried to quiet her mind. Rachel was waiting for her outside of her apartment building and Brooke collapsed into her arms sobbing once she was in front of her.

Rachel managed to get her upstairs and into her apartment and Brooke cried for another ten minutes before she finally told Rachel what had happened.

Rachel looked at Brooke with a blank face. “Seriously?”
Brooke inhaled deeply and nodded her head.

“Idiot.” She huffed.

“Yeah.” Brooke sniffled. “He is.”

“Not him, dumb-dumb. You’re the idiot.” Rachel stated.

Brooke looked at her in shock. “What?”

“Brooke!” Rachel shook her arm. “You did the same thing he did to you thirteen years ago!”

W-what? No! “No, I did not!”

“Uh, yeah. Ya did.” Rachel argued. “You proposed to him out of fear!” Brooke opened her mouth to argue but there was no use in lying. “See, you can’t even deny it. You were scared that Julian was going to somehow find a way to make it so that he’s Angie’s adoptive father so you proposed to Carter so that he’d have to be her father.”

“Have to b- you, I didn’t do it to trick him, Rachel – I, you’re,” She was getting frustrated and couldn’t even get her words out. “I want Carter to be Angie’s father – I thought that someday he would be. I just…when Julian came over this morning I got scared that Carter might never get that chance and…I want to marry him. I thought he wanted to marry me to but,”

“-Bitch, don’t even finish that sentence.” Rachel said with a dramatic eye roll. “Of course, he wants to marry you – but he wants you to actually want to marry him. He doesn’t want you to only want to get married so Julian can’t be Angie’s father.”

Brooke huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. “It’s both!”

“But he doesn’t know that.” Rachel reminded Brooke. “If you really want to marry Carter – propose to him again but don’t bombard him with a fucking marriage license like you two are about to go down to the courthouse immediately after. Let him know that this is more than wanting him to be Angie’s father – it’s because you love him and want to spend the rest of your life with him.”

Brooke frowned. “And on the off-chance that he just doesn’t want to marry me?”

Rachel rolled her eyes. “Well, then he is the idiot.”

Brooke felt her lips twitch up a bit and shook her head. She then sighed. “Can you help? Apparently, I’m shit at proposals.” She groaned.

Rachel laughed and nodded her head. “Of course, I’ll help you.”
Carter had picked up Angie soon after Brooke had left his office.

The look on her face…it was the same look she had when she saw him with Blair thirteen years ago.

He sat on the couch in the living room with his hand balled into a fist. Carter had broken her heart again – he, in a way, turned down her proposal.

It wasn’t to get back at her or anything. Carter just…he wanted to make sure that she wanted to marry him for the right reasons. That it wasn’t because she was scared Julian was going to somehow get custody of Angie – but because she truly wanted to marry him.

Brooke Baizen.

That’s what the signature read on the mock marriage license.

Carter closed his eyes, tapping his foot against the ground as he thought over everything that had transpired earlier.

And then he heard the sound of the apartment door being unlocked and instantly sat up off of the couch. He turned around to see Brooke walking in with her arms full of large bags. She nearly dropped them when she saw him standing in the middle of the living room.

“Carter,” She said his name in a whisper. “W-...what are you, I,” Brooke stammered. “I didn’t think you’d,”

“Stop.” Carter interrupted her. He walked over to where she stood and watched as she inhaled deeply and then visibly held her breath. “I’m talking now.” He told her. Brooke nodded her head slowly. “I, I was taken by surprise earlier.” He explained. “And, I still don’t know that if you actually wanted to marry me or if it was just about Julian,”

“-Carter,”

“I’m talking.” He told her again. Brooke pressed her lips together and furrowed her brows. It was clear that she was frustrated with him. “I thought that the only reason why you were proposing was because you were scared of Julian getting custody of Angie somehow. That, you thought if we were married – Julian wouldn’t get the chance to fight for any claim to Angie. I didn’t know if you actually wanted to marry me.”

Brooke dropped the bags on the floor as she glared at him. “How can you think that I don’t want to marry you?!” She said in anger. “After everything we have been through – I’m still here!” She reminded him. “I’m still stupidly getting my heartbroken by you because…I don’t know, because I’m a fucking idiot I guess. But I’m still fucking here. I wanted to marry you thirteen years ago! If I had found you that night before you were with Blair, I would have told you that much! I loved you enough back then to marry you and I still do.” She stressed. “And yes, I asked today because I don’t want Julian to have any claim to Angie but it’s because I don’t want him to be her father. Because he’s not – you are!”

Carter inhaled deeply, hand still in a fist by his side.

“I love you, Carter. I thought eventually you would propose – clearly I was wrong.”

The look.

It was on her face again. The same one she gave him when she saw him and Blair together.
Carter walked over to Brooke. “Follow me.” He told her and walked away from her. Carter walked out of the living room and down the hallway to Angie’s nursery.

It took her a moment, but Brooke finally walked into the nursery. She paused, eyes wide and mouth hanging open slightly.

The room was empty.

“What the fuck.” She whispered, panic in her voice. “Carter – what the fuck?!” Brooke stomped over to him.

He couldn’t help but chuckle. “Relax.” Carter told her.

“Relax?!” She echoed dramatically.

“We still have to paint her nursery up in the penthouse but for now I don’t think she’ll mind not having the purple walls.”

Brooke took a step back and blinked. “Hu?”

“She fell right asleep when I put her in her crib – I don’t even think she noticed she was in a different room.”

Brooke opened her mouth to speak but no words came out.

“Nate and Caroline are up there with her now in case you’re worried I left her to herself.” He walked over to where Angie’s closet was and opened it. Brooke still stood in the middle of the room frozen. Carter motioned for him to follow her. “I had an idea where I’d make a t-shirt for Angie to wear when I asked you.” He told her. “Mommy will you marry Carter, that’s what the shirt would say.” That made Brooke walk over to where Carter was standing.

She let out a little gasp when she looked in the closet.

“My problem was; I didn’t know when I was going to propose – when the right time would be. So, I got a bunch of onesies.” He pointed down at the pile of onesies. “But then I thought that maybe I’d have her be in a dress that – or, have her in a cute little jacket. I even bought her a little tuxedo, I don’t know why I thought that would be a good idea.” He chuckled. “But, my problem again was when I was going to propose to you. How many months would she be? What size clothing would I need to get her – which is how I ended up with all of these.”

Piles and piles of clothes (and a couple baby tuxedos), onesies, dresses, jackets, in various colors and sizes – different fonts and font sizes with the words written on them; Mommy will you marry Carter?

Carter turned to face Brooke. He lifted his hand that had been balled up in a fist and opened his palm. Brooke turned with him and her eyes fell on the engagement ring and wedding band combo that was in the center of her palm.

“I was always planning on asking you to marry me, Brooke. I just wanted to make sure it was what you wanted.”

Her eyes were filled with tears but it wasn’t the face she had on when she saw him with Blair. This face was so breathtakingly beautiful that Carter could barely catch his breath.

Carter swallowed hard. “I heard you and Vanessa talking at the jewelers when you were looking at the rings picked out – I went to the shop after Angie’s surgery and asked the man which wedding
band it had been that you had fallen in love with and which engagement ring would go with it.”

A tear rolled down Brookes cheek as she smiled happily at Carter.

“It’s not the exact ring. But, I designed one with the jewelers that matched its…uniqueness.” He used the word the jeweler had chosen. “Same diamond set, just…with a few personal touches.”

Brookes breathed in shakily as Carter picked up the engagement ring. “I know you said that the engagement ring Julian got you was a big obnoxious rectangle cut but…I thought a big round diamond might be more your taste.”

Brooke gave into a sniffle as more tears fell while nodding her head in agreement. “I think so, too.” She whispered followed by a little chuckle.

Carter grinned at her words. “Well, that settles it.” He chuckled too. Carter looked at Brooke for a long moment before he got down on one knee. “Brooke Penelope Davis,” He smiled up at her. “You’re the love of my life. I’ve always known it – it’s a fact. And it will never change. I’ve wanted to marry you for so long but I wanted to give you time, I didn’t want to pressure or rush you – I just…I wanted you to be ready. Because I promised myself that I wouldn’t propose again unless I knew that it would end with you being my wife…so,” He gently grabbed her left hand. “Brooke Penelope Davis…I’m asking you again…will you marry me?”

Brooke smiled brightly at Carter and nodded her head, more tears falling. “Yes!” She laughed, “Yes, of course I will, yes!”

Carter quickly slipped the ring on Brookes ring finger and was stood up, pulling Brooke closer to him and pressing his lips to hers. A long, agonizingly sweet kiss followed by hundreds of little kisses. But he had stop Brooke when she began to undo his belt. She whined and threw her head back.

Carter chuckled. “Everyone is waiting for us up in our penthouse.”

Brooke pouted but failed to hide the happiness in her eyes. “You really expect me to wait until tonight to rip your clothes off?” She then smirked as she looped her arms around his neck. Carter shook his head and chuckled. But then she rolled her hips against his and Carter bit down on his lip hard to stop from giving into a low groan.

“Brooke,” He warned her.

“What?” She said innocently. “Why can’t everyone wait just a while longer?” Brooke whispered. “It’s not like they even know I am at the apartment – we can say I showed up in,” She pursed her lips. “Thirty…forty minutes?” Brooke said with a mischievous grin.

“That could work,” Carter smirked down at Brooke. “But, I called Rachel while you were out with her and she’s upstairs in the penthouse too. Which means that everyone knows that you are here.”

Brooke opened her mouth as she smiled. “That explains a lot!” She laughed.

Carter raised his brows. “What?”

“She was supposed to help me plan this epic proposal for you and but while I was buying a bunch of candles someone called her and she suddenly that she had to go and would help me with the rest later. I didn’t even get to go to the flower shop to buy the rose petals.”

“Cliché.” Carter teased and Brooke swatted him. “Come on, they’re all upstairs waiting. We’re
celebrating quickly though because we have to get down to the courthouse,” Brooke blinked in surprise but smiled softly at Carter. “I think we’ve waited long enough.”

Brooke grinned and pushed up on her feet to meet him in a kiss. When she pulled away, her looked up at Carter. “Are you sure?” She asked him. “I know you were worried I only asked because I didn’t want Julian as Angies father—”

“He is not her father. I am. And we’re going to make that official. Angie will be Angie Davis Baizen and no one can ever say differently.”

Brooke closed her eyes and smiled. When she opened them, she looked into Carters eyes, “Angie Baizen.” She corrected him. “Brooke Baizen and Angie Baizen. No hyphens.”

Carter felt his body ignite and surged forward. “I think they can wait another fifteen minutes.” He said in-between heated kisses. Brooke giggled when he lifted her up, legs wrapping around his waist as he carried her out of the nursery and down the hall to the bedroom.

They were getting married today.

Brooke was going to be his wife.

He was going to be her husband.

They were going to be husband and wife.

And Angie would be their daughter.

He would be a father.

(But who are we kidding here? He was already Angie’s father.)
LAST CHAPTER, YA’LL.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Maybe she said no.” Chuck said with a drawl as he sipped his scotch. Nate rolled his eyes when Blair gave into a little snort only to be swatted at by her mother.
“There’s no way she said no to his proposal – she was planning on asking him again.” Rachel said as she sat on the couch in Carter’s penthouse. Well, Nate supposed he should be referring to it as Brooke and Carter’s penthouse now. Rachel scoffed when no one said anything and said next, “Seriously? We all know that they’re having sex right now, no one has just been grown up enough to say it out loud.”

Nate, Caroline, and Victoria groaned. Serena tried to hide her laughter but Chuck made no effort to hide his amusement.

“Well they better hurry it up.” Howard said as he looked down at his phone again. “I’m having one of the judges stay late as a favor so that they can get married today and if they don’t wrap things up quickly, he’s leaving to go be home with his family for the rest of the weekend.”

“Does she even have a dress?” Blair questioned, walking over to stand next to Nate. “I mean, Carter set up this whole thing but didn’t think about the important details. Dress, flowers, rings?” She crossed her arms over her chest and huffed. “He really does suck at proposals.”

“Shove it up your ass, Blair.” Rachel dead panned causing Victoria to laugh loudly. Nate smiled knowing that the redhead and his mother had squashed their beef for the sake of Brooke.

“I’m just saying,” Blair glared at Rachel. “Brooke is not the kind of girl that is just going to get in an Uber and head to the courthouse for a quickie wedding.”

“Well,” Chuck walked over to his wife and wrapped his arm around her waist and tugged her closer to him. “It’s a good thing I have a limo waiting for all of us downstairs to avoid the travesty of taking an Uber.”

The elevator doors opened to the penthouse and Nate stepped away from Blair and Chuck to see if Brooke and Carter had finally come upstairs, everyone in the room waiting to give their congratulations and show their support of the couple.

But it wasn’t them and the group all groaned when they saw it was only Vanessa and Ethan Copeland, the doctor who had performed Angie’s surgery. The two had been dating steadily for quite some time now and Nate had never seen Vanessa happier. Vanessa seemed to frequently visit Brooke and Angie at the hospital during the little girl’s recovery and even offered to go with Brooke to post op appointments but it was clear that the woman’s interests were really aimed at the handsome doctor. Finally, Brooke made a very bold step for Vanessa, without speaking to Vanessa about it beforehand, and asked Dr. Copeland if he was single. Brooke had laughed recanting how the dark haired woman’s cheeks flamed tomato red when Dr. Copeland informed Brooke that he was single, and Nate’s step sister told him that Vanessa was single as well.

Brooke was great at setting people up. And given the way Dr. Copeland and Vanessa looked at each other, it was a perfect match.

“Are we too late?” Vanessa asked as she rushed in, one hand holding onto Ethan’s and the other holding a bag that Caroline had her pick up.

Caroline walked over to Vanessa and took the bag from her. “You’re not late.” She assured Vanessa. “They are.” Caroline said as she walked away from Vanessa and headed up the stairs to Angie’s nursery to get the baby girl dressed for the ceremony.

“I mean,” Vanessa began to chuckle, “Did anyone actually believed they’d come up right away? They are totally boning.”
“Thank you!” Rachel pointed to Vanessa before looking around the room. “Finally! Someone who isn’t embarrassed to say what we all know what’s going on!”

Howard huffed in irritation as he looked down at his phone. “Judge Richardson just texted me and told me that we have thirty minutes to get there before he goes home.”

Nate sighed, seeing his father’s frustrations. “Well, if the Judge leaves, one of us can just go online and get ordained and marry them.” He suggested.

“I already am ordained.” Chuck informed the room.

“Ew.” Rachel scoffed. “Who would want you to marry them?”

Blair made a face at Rachel, offended by her words. “Me?” She sneered at Rachel.

“Charles, you are not going to marry Brooke and Carter.” Victoria stated. “Because I’m about to go downstairs and yank the two away from each other so we can all go to the court.”

“Just give them a couple more minutes,” Rachel told Victoria. “This has been a long time coming.”

“In more ways than one.” Chuck smirked and the room groaned.

Five minutes passed and Caroline came down holding Angie in a light purple dress and they were all surprised to see that the baby girl had not instantly thrown off the crown of flowers that was placed on her head. Nate grinned as he saw his wife to be holding his niece, her pregnant belly very large in the dress she had chosen to wear for the event. Nate loved her in that dress, he loved the way he could see the shape of her belly because whenever he looked at her stomach, he knew that their child was growing inside, and that each time her stomach grew larger, meant the closer they were to finally meeting her in person. He walked up to them and plucked Angie out of Caroline’s arms and looked down at his niece. “Angie, you must be the most beautiful girl in the whole world.” He cooed and Caroline laughed. Nate looked back to Caroline and smirked. “Aside from your Aunt Caroline, of course.”

She smiled softly at Nate and pressed a sweet kiss to his cheek. “They still haven’t come up?” Caroline said after pulling away and looking at the room to see that the guests of honor still had yet to arrive.

“I’m sure they’ll be done soon.”

Not here soon, done soon. Because yes, they did all know what those two were doing right now.

And like magic, the private elevator opened and Brooke and Carter walked in together holding hands. Brooke was beaming up at Carter and Nate smiled when he saw that she was wearing a white dress with lace on the hem, as well as the very ends of her sleeves.

His step mother huffed. “That was supposed to be your White Party dress!” Victoria complained when she saw Brooke.

Brooke rolled her eyes as she looked at her mother before looking back up at Carter and smiled. “Well, now it’s my wedding dress.” He grinned down at her and pressed his lips to hers in a quick kiss.

Nate held Angie in his arms as he walked up to Carter and Brooke once they pulled apart and watched as Brookes eyes filled with tears as she saw the dress that Angie was wearing. “She looks beautiful!” Brooke said happily as she reached for her daughter.
Nate handed over his niece and smiled down at Brooke. “Took you guys long enough.” He teased.

“Yeah! Ever heard of a quickie!” Rachel added.

Brooke ducked her head and blushed as Carter laughed while rubbing his hand up and down her arm. His attention was then focused on Angie when her chubby little arms reached out for him.

“We can all talk on the way,” Chuck said. “The limo waiting for us downstairs.” He told the group. “-Unless we go with Blairs suggestion and grab an Uber.”

Blair rolled her eyes as she walked over to Brooke and Carter. “A limo will be fine.” She then proceeded to fix Brookes hair, pushing her hair back behind her eyes. “My cousin deserves the best if she’s not getting an extravagant wedding.” She smiled.

Brookes eyes filled with tears as she smiled back at Blair only to have Carter ruin their moment. “Didn’t you and Chuck have a quickie wedding before he got arrested?” Carter smirked at Blair and she rolled her eyes. Brooke playfully jabbed him in his side and Carter chuckled.

“Whatever.” She turned her attention back to Brooke. “What I’m trying to say is…I’m happy for you.” Blair then looked to Carter. “The both of you.”

Nate kept his eyes on Brooke and Carter who were smiling at each other, Brooke still blushing from Rachels earlier comment. Carter held Angie and one arm and his other arm was wrapped around Brookes middle, the bride to be fitting perfectly into his side. It was something Nate had noticed a long time ago; just how well they fit together. Not just physically. But emotionally as well. They mirrored each other in a lot of ways. He supposed it was what brought them together in the first place. Well, that and a drink at some bar and Carters shameless flirting (Brooke had told Nate a long time ago how they first met. She said that he tried to pick her up, Carter said that it was actually Brooke who was the one to sweep him off his feet.)

“Let’s get this show on the road!” Howard said, clapping loudly and ushering everyone out of the penthouse.

They all got into the elevator, all thankful that it was large enough to hold the large group. But once they were finally out of the building and heading to the limo, Brooke abruptly stopped. “Wait!”

They all looked to her. Had she changed her mind?

She then looked to Carter. “You don’t have a wedding band!”

Carter chuckled and shook his head. “We can get one after.” He told her only to have her pout in response. He pressed his lips to her pout. “Do you really wanna wait until Monday?” He asked and Brooke playfully narrowed her eyes and him but squeezed his hand and let him pull her to the limo.

Nate sat next to Caroline who had stolen Angie from her brother and was currently bouncing the baby girl on her lap. He watched as Carter leaned forward a bit towards his sister so that she could hear him over the chatter of everyone talking. “Have you heard from them?” Carter asked her quietly.

Caroline frowned and shook her head. “I’m sorry, Carter.”

He inhaled deeply and his eyes went down to Angie on her lap. “Screw them.” Carter said. “I have all the family I need right here with me.”

Nate looked away from Carter and over to Brooke who had heard the exchanged too.
She sat up a bit. “Baby, we don’t have to do this today if you want to wait for your parents.” Brooke said, running her hand up and down his arm.

Carter looked over at Brooke and shook his head. “I don’t need them.” He told her. “All I need is you and Angie.” Brooke smiled at him sadly and he chuckled, pressing a kiss to her lips to remove any trace of sadness. “I love you, Brooke. That’s all that matters.”

Nate watched as Brookes facial expression grew hopeful when Carters phone started ringing. Carter chuckled and then tapped on it and Nate watched as Brooke grinned happily down at the screen when she saw who was calling.

It was a split screen of Haley and Nathan and Peyton and her husband.

Nate smiled happily as he watched Brooke lean into Carters shoulder as she chatted with her friends, telling them that as much as she loved them – she was getting married today. They had laughed and told her that they would be there via skype and were just fine with that. It all was very last minute after all.

The limo pulled up to the courthouse and Nate watched as Brooke looked up at Carter smiling softly. “You ready?” She asked.

“I have been for a while.” He smirked and pressed a kiss to her lips before handing the phone over to Nate so he could hold it during the ceremony.

This was happening.

Brooke and Carter were about to get married.

Holy shit.

All the people she loved were in this small little room. Normally, it would only be the bride and groom to be, one witness and the judge allowed to attend the ceremony – but Howard being friends with the Judge, was able to convince the man to fit everyone in the small room. Brooke smiled happily as she looked around the room, her mother was holding Angie with Howard standing next to her, Eleanor, Blair, Chuck, Serena, Rachel, Vanessa, and Dr. Copeland were standing a bit behind them. And of course, Caroline and Nate stood on either side of Brooke and Nate as maid of honor and best man. Shit, even Haley, Peyton, and their families were there via skype. Brooke felt like her heart could burst with happiness in that moment.

But there was only three people missing.

Three very important people.

1. Richard “Ted” Davis
2. Gregory Baizen
3. Lydia Baizen
Brooke didn’t expect her father to miraculously show up at the last minute rushing into the room and apologizing for being so late – Ted didn’t even go to Brooke’s first wedding. She doubted he’d make the trip for this one. But Carter deserved to have his parents at their wedding. Brooke knew how hard he fought to earn their respect, and sadly, their love. And she also knew that by them not being at the small little wedding, Carter was hurt.

Carter had told Brooke that he had called them but that his parents had never returned his call and it had caused Brooke’s heart to break for her husband-to-be. She remembered how much it hurt when Ted didn’t show up to hers and Julian’s wedding.

But now she was marrying Carter and she didn’t give a damn if Ted was there or not – because she was marrying the man she was meant to be with and that’s all that mattered to her. But Carter, she knew him well enough to know that he really wanted his parents there. Perhaps to show them that he wasn’t an idiot kid anymore, or maybe just to show them how truly happy he was.

Brooke was aware that he Baizen parents didn’t exactly love her after everything that had happened. But she’d hope they’d be able to put aside their anger and come. Victoria was still angry with Carter, so was Nate! And not to mention Blair! But they were all here to show their support because they knew that this was important to Brooke. Why did his parents have to be so damn stubborn?

“Second thoughts?” Blair asked as she walked up to Brooke and began to fuss with her hair.

She laughed and shook her head. “Not at all.” Brooke smiled. When Blair met her eyes, Brooke grabbed her hand. “Thank you for being here, B.”

“Well,” She inhaled. “When Carter first called, I declined it.” Blair said and Brooke couldn’t help but chuckle at that. Of course, she did. “But then he called Chuck and I knew it was important.” She then frowned. “I’m really sorry what I said at the hospital…I guess I was just feeling…angry.”

Brooke nodded her head, she understood. “I get it.” She squeezed Blair’s hand. “I spent too long being angry at you and I shouldn’t have. We’re family and I shouldn’t have shut you out – I should have talked to you.”

Tears filled Blair’s eyes. “I am so sorry, Brooke.”

“I know.” Brooke said. “And I forgive you.”

Blair swallowed hard and quickly wiped away her tears. “You’re going to make me look like a mess in your wedding pictures!” She huffed dramatically and Brooke laughed.

“Are we ready?” The judge asked. “Because I have dinner reservations with my family in twenty minutes and I’d like to hurry things along if you all don’t mind.”

He did not look amused.

Maybe the second quickie was a mistake. But when Carter had seen her in her dress he had damn near ripped it off. And Brooke had no intention of pushing him off or telling him they had to go – that was on her.

Carter walked over to Brooke and held out his hand. She smiled and placed her hand in his and together they walked over to where the judge was standing with Nate and Caroline following after them.
“Please rise,” The judge said even though everyone in the room was already standing. He chuckled a little and shook his head before clearing his throat. “Who gives this woman to be married to this man?” He asked.

“We do.” Victoria said as she grabbed onto Howards hand. She then looked to Nate. “And he does as well.”

Nate chuckled and looked to Brooke as he stood next to Carter.

“Who stands with this couple to express the good wishes of their families and friends?”

Brooke laughed when she heard Haley and Peyton shout ‘we do!’ over skype before anyone in the room could say it.

The judge smiled and looked to everyone. “You may all be…” He looked around the room and then frowned. “You all can stand where you are.” Both Brooke and Carter chuckled at that. “I’m not use to having this many people in the room.” The judge said as he cleared his throat again. “I do solemnly declare that I do not know of any lawful impediment why Brooke Davis, may not be joined in marriage to Carter Baizen.” He declared.

Brooke smiled up at Carter as he grinned down at her.

“Rings?” The judge asked.

Carter pulled out Brookes wedding band and she frowned as she looked to the judge. “This was all kind of last minute and I don’t have a wedding band for him yet.”

The judge looked around the room before his eyes landed on something. He reached forward and grabbed it, handing it to Brooke. It was a black sharpie. “This will do for now.”

Brooke looked up at Carter with a quirked brow and he shrugged her shoulders as he laughed. “Go ahead.” He told her.

“Repeat after me,” The judge told Brooke as she took off the sharpie cap and reached for Carters hand. “With this ring, I wed thee. I shall love you, honor you, and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This is a symbol of my undying love for you.”

Brooke smiled as she drew a thick circle around Carters ring finger while repeating, “With this ring, I wed thee. I shall love you, honor you, and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This is a symbol of my undying love for you.” Her eyes watered as she looked up at Carter and saw he had tears in his eyes as well.

“Carter,” The judge said, causing Carters eyes to break away from Brookes. “Repeat after me,” Carter nodded and moved to hold Brookes hand. “With this ring, I wed thee. I shall love you, honor you, and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This is a symbol of my undying love for you.”

He slowly slid the wedding band on Brooke ring finger and Brooke smiled as the two rings connected. “With this ring, I wed thee. I shall love you, honor you, and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This is a symbol of my undying love for you.”

Brooke moved forward to kiss Carter but the judge stopped them, “Hey, hey,” He chuckled. “I’m not done.”

Brooke ducked her head and laughed, as did the room.
“I, Judge Samuel Richardson, by the power vested in me by the Marriage Act, pronounce Carter and Brooke to be married.” He smiled at them. Both Brooke and Carter looked at him, waiting for him to give them permission to seal their marriage with a kiss. He laughed and nodded his head. “Go on, kiss your bride.” He told Carter.

Brooke felt her breath catch in her throat as Carter pulled her against his chest in one quick tug, his mouth pressing against hers in a long kiss.

Their friends and family clapped as Brooke moved her arms to loop around Carter’s neck and she kicked her foot up in the air.

The judge cleared his throat and Carter groaned when Brooke pulled away. “As I said, I have dinner reservations so we’re going to need to get all the paperwork filled out.”

There was a soft knock at the door and the room all turned to look at it.

Lydia and Gregory Baizen stood on the other side of it, dressed in their best clothes and looking rather sheepish. “We didn’t want to interrupt while the ceremony was going on.” Gregory said as they walked through the open the door.

Brooke had kept the door open on purpose in hopes that Gregory and Lydia might show up. God, she was so glad she did.

Carter blinked in surprise as he looked at his parents. “Hey.” He said slowly and Brooke smiled, knowing he didn’t know what else to say.

“We would have gotten here sooner but your father insisted on changing his tie four times.” Lydia said with a smile as she walked up to Carter, pressing a kiss to his cheek. She then moved over to Brooke and did the same, surprising her. Lydia had been a fan of Brooke when she was simply Caroline’s friend – she was not a fan of Brooke dating Carter, though.

“Well,” Gregory said as he walked up to the bride and groom. “It’s not every day my son gets married.” He held out his hand for Carter to shake. “Congratulations, Carter.”

Carter took his father’s hand and gave it a firm shake. “Thanks, Dad.”

Gregory then looked to Brooke. “You make a beautiful bride.” He told her in a sincere voice. When Angie began to fuss, both Gregory and Lydia’s heads turned in the direction of the noise.

“Is that Angie?” Lydia asked in a hesitant tone.

Brooke smiled and walked over to her mother and took Angie from her. She gave her mother a soft smile seeing the worry in her eyes and then turned back in the direction of the Baizens. “It is.” She moved to stand next to Carter again and laughed when Angie instantly reached for Carter.

Brooke handed Angie to Carter and watched as she smiled when he pressed a kiss to her small head. “She’s like her mom.” Caroline said with a chuckle and Brooke playfully glared at her. It was true. Whenever Carter was near, she felt the need to be held in his arms. Apparently Angie felt that way too.

“Do you,” Lydia cleared her throat. “Do you think I could maybe hold her?”

Carter looked to Brooke and grinned as she smiled up at him. He then looked back at his mother. “Of course.” He smiled, handing Angie over.
“Oh!” Lydia said with a smile as Angie instantly snuggled against her. She chuckled and looked back to Carter and Brooke. “She’s beautiful.”

“Oh!” Lydia said with a smile as Angie instantly snuggled against her. She chuckled and looked back to Carter and Brooke. “She’s beautiful.”

“Um,” Judged Richardson said loudly. “Hate to interrupt but,”

“You have a dinner reservation.” Carter said with a chuckle. “You ready?” He asked Brooke.

Brooke felt her stomach flutter and her chest warm at his words. Brooke nodded her hand and walked over with Carter to begin filling out the paperwork.

When it was all done, Brooke and Carter posed with the judge and took their wedding pictures. The rest were taken outside the courthouse and then, at Blairs insistence, the rest were taken in Central Park just as the sun was setting.

“We did it.” Brooke smiled up at Carter as they stood in front of Bethesda fountain.

Carter cupped her cheek in his hand and leaned down, pressing a heart stopping kiss to her lips. “I love you so much.” He whispered against her lips.

She grinned, pulling him down by his collar for another kiss. “I love you too.” Brooke whispered after pulling away slightly. She then slowly frowned. “I just realized that we didn’t have our own personal vows.” She said and Carter grinned.

“I’ll say my vows to you tonight.” He whispered before picking her up bridal style causing Brooke to squeal with laughter.

“I love you, Mr. Baizen.” Brooke whispered as she pressed her hand to his cheek.

“I love you, Mrs. Baizen.” He grinned before kissing her again.

“Alright, we’ve had enough with the two of you!” Blair shouted causing the two to chuckle. Carter set Brooke back down and they both looked over at Blair, who was standing next to their very last minute, but very talented photographer, Vanessa.

“What next?” Carter shouted.

“Care, bring them Angie.” Vanessa shouted over the noise of everyone watching Brooke and Carters wedding pictures.

Chuck had managed to clear the area when he promised each person $100 dollars to get out of the way so that Brooke and Carter could take their wedding pictures. He owed over 3500 hundred dollars and when Brooke told him that she would pay him back, he insisted that it was his wedding gift.

Caroline walked up to Brooke and Carter and handed Angie over to them. The little girl squealed with excitement to be with her parents. Parents. That’s what they were. They were married and would raise Angie together. The adoption case worker who had been in charge of Angie’s placing was already working on the paperwork for Carter to become Angie’s legal father, and a last name change as well.

“Who is that?” Brooke said as she looked down at Angie while she smiled up at Carter. “Is that your Daddy?” She heard Carter inhale sharply at her words and quickly looked up at him to see if he was alright. He laughed and shook his head, bending down to kiss Brooke as Angie smiled happily while watching them.
Victoria insisted that they get professional pictures for the entire family at another time seeing as none of them were really dressed for the occasion.

(That was bullshit. Victoria didn’t like the lighting.)

But Brooke didn’t put up a fight with her. Because she and Carter were finally married. She’d take a million pictures in a hundred different locations with different lighting and angles because she had everything she wanted now.

Her little family.

They were the Baizen family.

And there wasn’t a thing or person who would ever tear them apart.

Carter lips twitched up when he felt Brooke’s eyes on him, but he kept his eyes closed. “Already?” He chuckled as Brooke’s fingers traced patterns against his chest. When she pressed a feather light kiss to his chest Carter opened his eyes and turned his head to look over at her.

“This is real.” Brooke whispered as her eyes looked into his. “We’re married.” He smiled and pressed his hand to her cheek and Brooke moved her hand on top of her and squeezed. “I used to dream about this.” She admitted in a whisper. “About...what it might be like being married to you.” Brooke moved his hand to her mouth and pressed a kiss to his palm. “I’d watch you sleep all those years ago back in my loft and wonder what it would feel like to marry you. To be your wife. I even dreamt about it everyday for a month leading up to my wedding to Julian…” She chuckled a little. “I guess I should have seen that as a sign that I never stopped loving you and that marrying Julian was the wrong choice.” Carter frowned, knowing this was hard for her to say. “But this,” Her eyes filled with tears. “It’s unlike anything I’ve ever dreamed of - I feel...whole.” Brooke pressed her hand to his cheek. “I feel complete.” She gave him a watery smile as tears fell. “And I am so happy that when I came back to New York that you didn’t let me push you away - that you gave me my space but didn’t disappear from my life. Because now is the right now. It’s our time.”

Carter moved forward and pressed his lips to her, gentle tracing her bottom lip with his tongue causing her to open her mouth for him. He tried to hide his own tears as he kissed her deeply, her words meaning more to him than she would ever know. “God, I love you so much, Brooke.” He moaned out between kisses.

Her fingers trailed through his as he moved himself on top of her, finger tips scratching lightly at his scalp. It was his favorite sensation - only one that Brooke could give him. He pulled away and looked down at Brooke, both of them breathing hard.

“I have to tell you something.” Brooke breathed out, fingers still scraping at his scalp.

“After?” He asked but moved his face to the crook of her neck and began to press sloppy kisses against her skin.
“It’s important.” Brooke said, a moan escaping when Carter sucked on her pulse point. “It’s about our future.”

Carter moved his face from her neck and looked down at Brooke. He watched as she breathed in deeply and her eyes grew worried. “What’s going on?” He asked her, cupping her cheek with his hand.

“Before we came back to the penthouse...Ethan pulled me aside.”

“I know,” Carter said. He had seen it and for the first time didn’t feel jealousy. Because Brooke was his. He had no doubt about that now. He knew that they’d be together forever and no one would ever stand in their way. His eyes then grew wide when a terrifying thought ran through his head. “Did he say something about Angie - is she okay?”

“No, no, no!” Brooke said quickly, pressing kisses to his face to try and calm him down. “Angie is fine, she’s healthy as can be.” She assured. Carter breathed out in relief and let his head drop down to hers, foreheads pressing against each others. “He wanted to talk to me about an experimental trial that one of his colleague is working on.”

He moved off of Brooke and sat up. She did as well. “What kind of trial?” Carter asked her.

“Vanessa told him why I had been looking into adoption before I got Angie.” Brooke confessed. “She told him about my... problems.” She looked down at her hands and Carter could see the shame flash in her eyes.

He was quick to grab her hands and bring them to his lips. “You are perfect.” Carter told her. “There is no problem about you.”

Brooke looked back to Carter and he saw the tears in her eyes. “His colleague can fix me, Carter.” She whispered. “9 out of 11 of their trial patients who had a damaged uterus have since conceived. One woman just gave birth.”

He didn’t know what to say. “Brooke,” Carter said her name softly. “You told me how hard it was for you going through fertility treatment.” He shook his head. “I don’t want you to have to go through that emotional, or physical pain. I love you, you and Angie are enough for me. I don’t need you going through all of this because you think it’s something you should do.”

“I want a child with you, Carter.” Brooke told him.

He moved forward and cupped her cheek. “You already do.” He reminded her.

“I want another - I want a brother or sister for Angie.” Brooke said with a smile. “I want to have your babies, hundreds of them if possible.” Carter could help but chuckle as he shook his head. “I never thought i’d be able to carry a child of my own. I had let go of that dream a long time ago but...i’m with you right now in our bed as your wife...this dream did come true. Maybe...maybe the dream of having your child can come true too.”

Carter sighed as he looked to Brooke. “What’s this...experimental trial?” He asked, wanting to know all the details before he and Brooke made this decision. Because, yes, he did want Angie to have a baby brother or sister and he’d love to help Brookes dreams come true of being able to carry her own child. But he needed to know all the risks.

Surgery.

That terrified him.
The surgery could either go successfully and they would get pregnant - or it would damage her uterus even further and there would never be a chance of Brooke ever being able to get pregnant again. That, or the very scary risk that everyone who goes under the knife for surgery - she could die. He did not want to lose her but he knew Brooke well enough that when it came to her own body - it was her choice.

“I want to do this, Carter.” Brooke told him. “But...I won’t unless I know you have my back.”

“I will always have your back.” Carter assured her. “If this is something you want...i’m with you one hundred percent.” He told her. “Because I love you and I want to do everything in my power to make your dreams come true - even if the risk of losing you is so overwhelmingly terrifying that i can hardly breathe.” He admitted.

Brooke smiled and crawled over to sit herself on Carter's lap. “You will never lose me, Carter.” She told him. “I won’t ever leave you.”

“Promise?” He looked in her eyes.

She smiled. “I promise.”

He sighed. “Alright.” Carter agreed before he picked Brooke up and gently tossed her down on the bed causing her to squeal.

“Carter!” She laughed as he hovered over her.

“Let’s start practicing how we’re gonna make our baby.” He smirked and Brooke raised her eyebrows at him with a smirk mirroring his own.

“Let’s get started.” She challenged him causing Carter to laugh before he pressed his lips down to hers.

He didn’t know if the surgery would work. He didn't know if he and Brooke would ever have a baby of their own. But he had hope. He believed in miracles. Because after everything he did, all the pain he caused Brooke, all of the mistakes he made - she was underneath him right now as his wife. He was her husband. They were married and they were raising a child together. If that miracle could happen - he had no doubt in his mind that there was a chance that Brooke might be able to get pregnant some day. That they’d have more children and Angie would have lots of little brothers and sisters.

They’d have a large family and would grow old together, spending their lives together watching their children grow - watching their grandchildren grow.

All of his dreams had come true.

And nothing would stop him from making all of Brooke's come true as well.

He loved her. He had always loved her. And he always would.

“I’ll love you forever, Carter Baizen.” Brooke told him.

“I’ll love you forever, Brooke... Baizen.”

She smiled and it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

She was his miracle.
And he was never letting her go again.

It was two years later that Brooke gave birth to a set of twin boys with Carter by her side the entire time, coaching her through it and assuring her that everything was going to be fine. And it had been.

Brooke held one of their sons in her arms while Carter held the other, sitting in the small hospital bed next to her. Nate and Caroline brought had finally arrived with Angie and her cousin; Penelope (Brooke was a babbling mess of tears when Caroline and Nate told her that they were naming their daughter after Brookes middle name). The two little girls walked in holding hands taking little steps with their chubby little legs with Caroline and Nate following behind them closely to make sure they didn’t fall.

Angie smiled when she saw her parents and let go of Penelope's hand and clumsily ran to Carter who stood up to greet her. “Daddy!” She hugged his legs. Brooke laughed when Carter looked at her with a panicked expression and she knew he wanted to pick up Angie but hadn’t exactly figured out to hold two kids at once.

“You gotta get your practice in, babe.” Brooke told him as she nudged her head down at their other boy in her arms. He smiled and Brooke watched as Carter carefully crouched down and let Angie wrap her arms around his neck and slowly stood back up with a smile of victory that he had done both.

Brooke laughed. “Don’t give me that look until you’ve mastered both of the boys at once.”

“Did you name them?” Caroline asked, walking over to stand next to Brooke and looked down at Baby Baizen #1.

“We’re still working on it.” Carter told his sister as Nate walked over to him while holding Penelope. “You already want another?” He teased Nate when he saw his eyes light up after seeing Baby Baizen #2.

“I wanted another one as soon as Penelope was born.” Nate chuckled.

“-Yeah, yeah.” Caroline said to her husband. “We’ll get on making one soon - I want our kids spaced out a bit.”

Nate grinned at his wife and Brooke looked at Caroline and smiled softly.

*Because she knew something that Nate did not.* Caroline was already pregnant. But she wanted to wait to tell him until after the boys were born.

It seemed that there was a pattern - each time Brooke was about to have a child, of her own or through adoption, Caroline ended up getting pregnant around the same time. And Brooke loved that.
Caroline gave Brooke a little wink before opening up her arms to hold Baby Baizen #1.

“Mommy!” Angie called out when Brooke placed her son in his aunts arms. “I wanna hold brothers.”

They both chuckled and Caroline gave Brooke the baby back as Carter moved so he and Angie were in the bed with Brooke. Angie wiggled her way between the two of them and they carefully put each boy in her little arms, both of their hands helping hold up their boys heads.

“I like them.” Angie said.

Each adult in the room laughed at her response.

“What do you think we should name them, sweet girl?” Carter asked his daughter.

Angie giggled and looked up to her father. “Brothers!”

Brooke and Carter laughed again. “We’ll pick names eventually.” Carter told his wife. Brooke looked at him with all the love in her heart and he smiled, moving forward to kiss her on the lips. “I love you.” He whispered to her.

“Baby, you have on idea how much I love you.” Brooke said back to him. “You made all my dreams come true.” Carter smiled and kissed her again only to pull away with Caroline awkwardly cleared her throat.

“Nate, maybe we should give the family a bit of privacy.” She suggested and Nate pouted. “I haven’t gotten to-”

“You’ll get plenty of chances to hold them, Nate.” Caroline chuckled. “Besides, Penelope and I have a surprise for you back home.”

Brooke smiled, knowing what the surprise was.

Nate pressed a kiss to Brookes head and clapped his hand against Carters shoulder. “Congrats, guys.” He told them. “Let me know when you settle on a name.” He then looked at Brooke and smirked. “Nate is a pretty good name.”

Brooke laughed and rolled her eyes. “Get out of here!” She grinned while shaking her head.

When they were gone, Brooke looked at Carter with a smile. “I think I came up with their names.” She said happily.

“No,” She looked down at their boys in Angie’s arms. “Fitz,” She pointed to Baby Baizen #1. “William.” She pointed to Baby Baizen #2.

“Fitzwilliam.” Carter chuckled.

“Seems fitting since he gave Penelope my middle name, don’t ya think?” Brooke smiled at Carter.

Carter grinned back at her. “Okay.” He agreed and then looked down at his children. “Fitz and William Baizen.”

“I like those.” Angie looked at Carter.
Carter chuckled. “That settles it.”

Slowly, all of their friends and family came to visit the little Baizen family and Brooke felt so much love that she could hardly breathe.

All of her dreams came true.

This was her happily ever after. Her dream come true.

“We did it.” Brooke said once everyone left and it was only Brooke, Carter and their twin boys in the room.

Carter grinned. “We did it.” He agreed. Carter held her in his arms that night as their boys slept peacefully next to them in their cribs. “I love you so much, Mrs. Baizen.” He whispered as Brooke slept.

Even in her sleep, Brooke mumbled her love for him too.

They were meant to be.

They always had been.

It was all just about timing.

And though he’d never forgive himself for hurting her, the past couldn’t be changed. And because the past couldn’t be changed, he now had a family. With Brooke! She had her dream job, they lived in their penthouse and had three beautiful kids. He had thought he lost her forever all those years ago. But she was here. And he felt whole.

Brooke was the love of his life.

And he was hers, too.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed this story as much as I enjoyed writing it. Follow me on tumblr @ohhitherekate so you guys will know when my next Brooke/Carter story is out! That or subscribe to this page! I appreciate everyone leaving their kind thoughts on this story as well as the kudos! Hopefully you all liked the ending!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!