Pink, white and Baby Blue. (A sequel to The First Royal Family.)

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Summary

This is a sequel series to my work A Royal First Family, this story will focus on at least 4 of our favorite characters and their journey to parenthood, be it for the first time or the last or anywhere in between. (The start of chapter 1 is set a year before A Royal First Family, and then times move forward from there on.)

Through this story we get to see Henry, Alex, June, Nora, Zahra, Shaan, etc. become parents one way or another, be it through fertility treatment, 'natural' conception, surrogacy or adoption. We also get to see Bea as the favorite Aunty to the children of both sides of the Royal Family.

Notes

Hello lovely people!
Thank you once again for all your love and support on the prequel to this story, it's given me great joy and great encouragement to continue with a sequel. I can't promise that my uploads to this story will be as fast and as frequent as they were with the first, but I will try my best to update as often as I can!
And before we jump into this story, I need to give a huge trigger/content warning.

***TRIGGER/CONTENT WARNING***
This story, particularly this first chapter, contains heavy talk of miscarriage, pregnancy loss, baby loss and infertility, and has scenes of miscarriage and pregnancy loss. I will put another TW/CW on the next chapter that deals with these issues, too, but it will be prevalent through the whole story, so please be very careful in choosing whether to read this or not.
I also want to clarify that I have never been pregnant and never had a miscarriage, so I thankfully do not know what it is like to go through this, but I have done my research and I am handling this concept as delicately as possible, but if you feel that I have misrepresented miscarriage and pregnancy loss in anyway, or said something offensive, please let me know and I will fix it straight away, and the same stands for the subject of infertility.
It is a cold October day in 2023 when what started out as a normal day for Zahra Srivastava, turns into one of the worst days of her life.

It has just gone 2:00 P.M. and Zahra and Ellen have just finished going over the itinerary for Ellen’s visit to a local youth shelter tomorrow, that is specifically for young parents and their babies. There will be no big fuss, it’s not been announced to the media, there will be no cameras (except for one professional photographer who will be coming along to take pictures if the parents would like.) and hopefully no paparazzi, Ellen just wants to go and talk to the parents and listen to them, and hopefully snuggle some cute babies, snuggling cute babies is a must.

“Alright, that’s everything.” Zahra declares, looking over the piece of paper in front of her, one last time.

“Good, now get out of work mode and into friend mode and tell me how you’re doing, you should get the test results back soon, right?” Ellen asks, closing her folder over and looking at Zahra expectantly. Ellen is one of the few people who knows that Shaan and Zahra have been trying to have a baby for the past year, and seem unable to conceive on their own, so they have now turned to IVF. The process was and is very difficult on them both, but mostly Zahra who had to take all the hormones and have bi-daily ultrasounds. In the end they only wound up with 3 embryos, 3 chances to have a baby before starting IVF all over again, or giving up. Zahra had gone in for a blood pregnancy test a little over three weeks ago, and the results usually take about 2 weeks to come in.

“Oh, yes actually I got the results last week.” Zahra calmly says.

“And?” Ellen prompts eagerly.

“I’m pregnant.” Zahra says in an uncharacteristically soft tone, laying her hand over her stomach. She’s not a religious person but over the last week she has found herself praying to any and every deity to please let the pregnancy stick, to please let her not have to think about doing this again for years, until she and Shaan decide to have another baby.

“Oh Zahra that’s absolutely wonderful! How are you feeling? Any symptoms yet?” Ellen asks. Zahra shakes her head.

“No, not yet, the doctors say it’s too early to feel much of anything, physically anyway. Mentally I’m trying not to get my hopes up, I know the chances of miscarriage in the first trimester are pretty high, so I’m trying not to get attached, hopefully that way if I do lose it, it won’t hurt so bad.” Zahra quietly admits.

“Zahra.” Ellen gently says. “Have I ever told you about my second pregnancy?” She asks, baffling Zahra who has heard plenty about Ellen’s pregnancy with Alex, which was complicated and scary and ended in an emergency C-section and a stint in the NICU for Alex.

“Yeah you tell me about your pregnancy with Alex all the time.” Zahra says in a confused tone.

“Alex was my third pregnancy, I don’t think I ever told you about my second.” Ellen says, a hint of sadness in her tone.

“I... don’t follow.” Ellen takes a deep breath, and then looks Zahra right in the eye.
"When June was 10 months old, I found out I was pregnant again. I was elated and nervous at the same time, nervous about the small age gap between June and the baby but elated to be having another. Oscar was thrilled to bits too. Everything seemed to be going fine, until I went in for my first scan at 6 weeks.

The doctor told us that the baby was very small for six weeks, and it was either a case of me mixing up my dates, or a missed miscarriage. They told me to come back in a few weeks and they would be able to tell for sure if it was a mix up of dates, or a miscarriage.

So I tried to continue on as normal over the next two weeks, juggling my job, being a mom to June and knowing that I might have a miscarriage at any minute.

We went back two weeks later and sure enough the baby hadn’t grown anymore at all, and there was no heartbeat, I ended up miscarrying later that day.” By the time Ellen has finished her story, her throat is tight and she is on the verge of tears. It’s been 25 years since her miscarriage, but it is still something that brings her pain and grief, all the time.

“Oh... Ellen I had no idea, I... I’m so sorry.” Zahra quietly replies, not quite sure how to process this or what to do or say. What do you say when you’re sitting in front of The President telling her your fears of miscarriage, and she tells you her own story of her own miscarriage, 25 years ago?

“The thing is Zahra, it hurts whether you get attached or not. I wasn’t attached to that baby, not in the same way I immediately attached to June and Alex, when I found out I was pregnant with them. I didn’t immediately start thinking of names, and buying little bits of baby stuff here and there, but when I lost the baby it still hurt like hell, the most painful thing I’ve ever been through. When you get pregnant with a baby that you want, whether your get attached or not, and then you miscarry, that’s bound to hurt, and that’s okay. It’s a good hurt, it’s natural and normal and healthy to grieve for your baby.” Ellen gently explains, as Zahra blinks back tears.

“But it’s not a baby yet, it’s not even a fetus, and there are people out there who have lost babies at a way later stage in pregnancy, or at birth or shortly after. I feel like I would be foolish to grieve an embryo, when people are out there grieving full grown babies.” Zahra admits. Ellen shakes her head and places her hand over Zahra’s.

“I have never lost a child, thank god, and I imagine that losing a child is much more painful than losing a pregnancy, but losing a pregnancy in the early stages still hurts, it was still your baby, someone you loved and carried, for however short a time. If you do have a miscarriage, ever, you’ll have every right to grieve, no one gets to dictate how you mourn and feel about your pregnancy and baby, no one but you.”

Zahra nods and wipes at her tears, before taking a deep breath and pulling herself together.

“We should start heading to your next meeting now.” She says, smoothing back some fly-away wisps of hair that have escaped her ponytail. Ellen nods, and starts to gather up her things.

Zahra picks up her folder and stands up, about to head for the door and wait there for Ellen, when she hears Ellen gasp. She quickly turns around, to see Ellen looking at her with devastation written all over her face.

“What’s wrong?” Zahra asks, ready to call security, thinking Ellen has seen something or someone outside the window, behind Zahra.

“Oh Zahra, you’re bleeding.” Ellen quietly replies, sending Zahra’s heart racing.
“What? No I’m not!” Zahra says, turning to try and see the back of her trousers.

“Look at your chair.” Ellen tells her. Zahra looks down, and her heart sinks into her stomach when she sees the cream white leather chair she had been sitting on, stained with a large pool of blood.

“No.” Zahra quietly says in a breathless tone, one hand flying to her stomach.

“I’m taking you to the hospital.” Ellen declares, coming out from behind her desk and slipping an arm through Zahra’s.

“But your meeting!” Zahra protests.

“Screw the meeting, you're my friend and you're bleeding and in pain, I’m not leaving you.” Ellen firmly says, guiding her out of the room and down to the garage, calling the Chauffeur on the way. As they drive to the hospital, Zahra calls Shaan and he agrees to meet them there.

Zahra is taken straight to an ultrasound room when they arrive, and Shaan goes with her while Ellen waits in the waiting room, talking to the kind nurses at the front desk and playing with the little children who are there with their parents or guardians. Needless to say this earns her a lot of stares, it’s not everyday you see The President crouching in the waiting room of a hospital, playing with little kids.

Meanwhile, in the exam room, a doctor has finished the ultrasound and right away, by the look on her face, Shaan and Zahra can tell it’s not good news.

“I’m very sorry but there’s no heartbeat.” The doctor gently tells them. Zahra bites her lip to hold back the tears and squeezes Shaan’s hand tightly.

“Can you tell why this happened?” Zahra asks in a tight tone.

“We can run some tests if you like, but most likely it was due a chromosomal abnormality or defect which simply made the pregnancy nonviable, such as the baby not having the correct number of chromosomes or their chromosomes being damaged, more than half of miscarriages in the first 13 weeks of pregnancy, are caused by chromosomal abnormalities.” The doctor quietly explains.

“What happens now?” Shaan asks.

“Well, the best course of action for now is to go home, rest up and wait for it to finish, then you’ll need to rest for a while after that, bleeding can last up to 3 weeks after a miscarriage, if the bleeding becomes very heavy or the cramps become very painful, please contact us immediately or come back here immediately and we can help you. I have a pamphlet here for you, about early miscarriage that has some wonderful advice and resources, and of course if you have any worries or questions you can contact us at anytime.” The doctor picks up a leaflet from one of the countertops and passes it to Zahra. “I’m going to leave you now, but please feel free to take your time and don’t feel rushed to leave.”

“Zahra...” Shaan places a gentle hand on his wife’s shoulder, but she shrugs him off and adjusts her blazer.

“Don’t Shaan, just don’t. I’m going to get dressed, then I want to go back to work.” Zahra calmly says. She wants to try and forget about this as quickly as possible, to forget this pregnancy and miscarriage ever happened, and continue on as normal. Keep working and in a few weeks they can try again.

“Work? But Zahra you heard the nurse, you need to rest.” Shaan protests.
“Ellen needs me, they all do, with Alex planning on proposing to Henry soon, the media is gonna be a shit storm, I have to be there to help manage it.” Zahra replies.

“They can find someone else to help out for a few weeks, you need to rest.” Shaan gently says, trying to convince Zahra to take it easy for a while, for her own sake.

“Don’t tell me what to do, Shaan.” Zahra snaps. “I’m the best person for the job, no one else can handle it like I can, there’s a reason I’m Ellen’s deputy chief of staff and not someone else. Come on, I want to get back.” Zahra marches out of the room, leaving a very concerned Shaan behind.

When Zahra steps out into the hallway, Ellen immediately sees her, from the waiting room, and rushes up to her.

“Are you alright? What did they say?” She asks in a tone of concern. Zahra shrugs.

“It’s a miscarriage, can’t do anything but wait for it to finish.” Ellen’s heart breaks for Zahra, she knows exactly what she’s going through, though it must be a lot harder for Zahra, since she and Shaan have tried for so long, she and Oscar hadn’t even had to try for the baby she lost, they tried for June, and then the second pregnancy and Alex, were surprises.

“Zahra I’m so sorry.” Ellen says gently, placing a hand on her friend’s arm.

“It’s fine, I just have to stop at home to change, then I’ll be back at work, can’t very well wear these leggings that Shaan brought, around the white house.” Zahra attempts a cheery tone.

“Work? Oh no Zahra you can’t work, you need to go home and rest.” Ellen tells her, shocked that she would even think about coming into work right after being told she’s having a miscarriage.

“You need me, especially with Alex planning to propose to Henry later in the week, once the media gets wind of that it’s going to be a shit storm, paparazzi everywhere, rumors, speculations, all the usual crap but intensified.” Zahra tells her, hugging her elbows. Work will distract her, she really needs the distraction now, and despite what others may think, she is fond of Alex and would very much like to be around this week to celebrate he and Henry’s engagement, with the rest of the family, she’s watched him grow up from a tiny little five year old kid who clung to his mother’s legs and told everyone just how much he wanted to be like his mommy, to a wonderful, intelligent, kind young man. (Who still clings to his mother and tells everyone how much he wants to be like his mommy.)

“Zahra no, you’ll make yourself sick, you could end up getting sepsis or something horrible like that. You need to go home and rest.” Ellen insists.

“But I need the distraction.” Zahra quietly admits, earning a sympathetic look from Ellen.

“Zahra remember what we talked about earlier, how it’s okay to grieve an early loss, how it’s healthy and essential to be able to move on eventually, coming back to work right now will not only affect your physical health but your mental health too. I understand the need for distraction, I do, but work is not the solution. I have to insist, as your boss, as your president, and most importantly as your firend, that you take at least 3 weeks off, more if need be. Maybe after the first while we can discuss you working from home for a bit, but for now you need to go home and rest, and grieve and do whatever you need to do to cope with this, alright?” Ellen tone is loving and gentle, and makes Zahra feel safe, and cared for.

“Alright, thank you.” Zahra says in a wobbly tone, as Shaan comes up and slips his hand into hers. Ellen smiles and squeezes Zahra’s free hand.
“It’s what friends are for, Zahra.”

Over the course of the next few weeks, Zahra allows herself to cry, to be sad, and angry and unsure and so many other things, she allows herself to cry and grieve for the baby she so desperately wanted but never got to meet. It takes a while, almost a month, but soon things don’t seem so dark anymore. She will never, ever forget her first pregnancy and how it ended and a part of her will always ache for the child that never was, but eventually she is able to start to see the good things in life again, return to work, etc.

3 months after the miscarriage, they go through another round of IVF, to implant another embryo, but it doesn’t take. Nor does the last one, leaving them with no more embryos at all.

After a lot of pain, suffering, heartache and a lot of long discussions, she and Shaan agree to try another round of IVF from start to finish, so they do, and at the end of it all they have 4 embryos. They attempted to implant them all, one at a time. The first didn’t take, the second did but ended in another miscarriage, so did the 3rd and the 4th didn’t take.

Once again, after further heartache, pain, grief and discussion, Zahra and Shaan agree to try one last round of IVF from start to finish, if it doesn’t work out this time, they’ll turn to adoption.

The last round of IVF ends with only two embryos. The first one doesn’t stick, and the second one ends in a fourth miscarriage, and that’s it. Zahra completely gives up her hope of having a biological child, of carrying a baby. She’s done, she can’t do it anymore, no more hormone shots and ultrasounds, no more blood tests, and no more bleeding and hospital appointments, time off work to let the miscarriage happen, no more.

6 months after the last miscarriage, Zahra and Shaan begin the adoption process, with Ellen, Henry and Amy all happily providing references, Ellen and Henry as both people who Shaan and Zahra have worked for, as well as their friends.

It takes a further 6 months to complete the paperwork, then 4 months to be matched with an expectant mother in Virginia. They meet the expectant mom (A young woman named Molly) a few times, and all 3 of them instantly click, becoming fast friends and looking forward to being in each others lives forever, since the adoption will be open.

One day, 3 weeks before Molly’s due-date, Zahra gets a phone call from their adoption agent. Her heart flutters with excitement when she sees the number, knowing that at this stage the only likely reason their agent is calling, is to say that Molly is in labor.

“Hello?” Zahra eagerly answers.

“Zahra, do you have a minute to talk?” The adoption agent gently asks. To talk? That can’t be good.

“Uh yeah, of course.” She replies.

“Zahra I’m so sorry to have to tell you this but... Molly has changed her mind, she wants to keep her baby.” Zahra feels as though her heart has just shattered into a million pieces, and all she can think is ‘No, not again.’ She can’t be losing another child, even if the baby wasn’t hers yet in anyway, she had stupidly allowed herself to get attached, to be hopeful and assume it would all work out.

She feels the phone slip from her grasp and land on the floor, as she drops to her knees and begins to sob. She doesn’t know when, but at some stage Shaan appears at her side, pulling her close and asking over and over what’s wrong.
“She changed her mind!” Zahra cries. “Molly’s keeping her baby.” She sobs into her husband’s shoulder. Shaan sighs sadly and holds her close and tight, stroking her hair and rubbing her back.

It takes months for Zahra to be able to get through the day without sobbing, without feeling pain, and like she’s been robbed, and by the time she does, she’s completely given up on her dream of being a mother, she’s had 4 miscarriages, 5 failed IVF implantations and a failed adoption, it’s clearly not meant to be.

One day several months after the adoption fell through, Shaan approaches Zahra with a very sensitive subject.

“Zahra... I think we should start presenting for adoption cases again.” He straight out tells her, knowing she hates it when he beats around the bush. Zahra gives him a disbelieving look, then laughs bitterly, shaking her head.

“No, no Shaan I’m done, I’m done, I’m not doing it anymore. I’m tired of all the pain, the loss, the heartache, I can’t do it anymore. I’ve had 4 miscarriages, 5 failed IVF implantations and a failed adoption, I think it’s quite clear that I’m not meant to be a mother.”

“Zahra...I know and understand how you feel and how horrible the last few years have been for you, I wanted those babies just as much as you, I want to be a dad as much as you want to be a mum. We can’t give up, love, we could be matched with a baby or expectant parent tomorrow, and it could all work out.” Shaan gently says in a quiet tone, placing a hand over Zahra’s.

“Or we could have another failed adoption or wait years and year to be matched only for it to never happen, I can’t take anymore pain or loss, I know Molly’s baby was never ours, he never would have been until he was born, but I loved him like my own, I couldn’t help it, I got attached and I fell in love and now I’ll never get to see him, or hold him or anything.” Zahra replies in a tight tone, her heart aching for all her losses.

“I know, and that pain is going to take time to heal, like all pain, but it will eventually. Maybe we should take a break from presenting for a few months, then give it one last try?” Shaan hopefully asks. Zahra is quiet for a minute before nodding.

“Allright, but if we aren’t matched within six months, or have another failed adoption, that’s it, we’re done, we’ll just have to accept the fact that we’re never going to be parents.” Shaan hates to hear those words, but he nods anyway, understanding that Zahra can’t face the prospect of heartbreak after heartbreak, again.

They take a 4 month break from presenting their case, they both grieve for their latest loss and throw themselves into work.

Four months after the failed adoption, they start to present again, though with very, very little hope. It takes 5 months for them to receive even one call from their agent, telling them about a little boy who was born just a day ago, only a few hours from them, who has been placed for adoption, closed adoption.

The difficult part, is that the birth mom has two days to change her mind. Zahra is terrified to bond with this new baby, to love him and hold him and think of him as her own, only for his birth mom to change her mind and take him back. The baby could go into short-term temporary care for those two days, but it wouldn’t be fair on him, if the adoption goes through he will lose his bond with his birth mother, which will be traumatic, he doesn’t need to lose a bond with foster-carers and then possibly have to connect with Zahra and Shaan. After thinking it over for a while, Zahra decides she’s prepared to be hurt and heartbroken again, if it means saving the baby from any further hurt
and trauma, and Shaan is in total agreement.

So, a day after receiving the phone call, they pack some bags, borrow a car-seat from Henry and Alex, who’s twin girls recently outgrew their baby carriers, and they drive the two hours to the hospital, where they’ll be able to pick the baby up. Before Zahra knows it she and Shaan are walking through the halls toward the nursery, where the baby currently is. Soon they walk into a bright and cheerful room, filled with rows and rows of babies in plastic cribs. When they step in, the nurse smiles softly at them, and quietly says

“Reception called to say you were on your way down, Baby is in the last crib on the fourth row, I’ll give you a few minutes.” She then quietly and quickly steps out of the room.

“Shaan.” Zahra says in a shaky, breathy tone. “I... I’m scared.” She admits, clutching to his hand tightly. She’s not someone who is easily frightened, there isn’t much she can’t face or come back from, but now she's here, she’s not sure that she can hold and love this baby, and possibly have to give him back at any moment.

“It’s alright.” Shaan softly replies, pressing a kiss to her head. “Wait here a second.” Normally Zahra would snap at him for ordering her around, but this time she doesn’t mind, she kind of needs her husband to take the lead right now.

Shaan lets go of Zahra, and makes his way to the last crib on the fourth row, where a tiny little boy with dark skin, curly dark hair and big green eyes, lays, looking all around him at his surroundings. Shaan carefully and gently picks the baby up, and then turns and makes his way back across the room and carefully places the baby in Zahra’s arms. Zahra’s breath hitches in her throat at the sight of the baby, and all at once her fears both intensify and fade away, a small part of her is still terrified of loving this baby and having to hand him back, but a bigger part of her feels honored and privileged to be able to love him at all, whether it's for a few hours, a few days, or forever, she will always feel grateful to have gotten to care for and love this baby, however long it may last.

“Hello.” Zahra says in a soft yet tight tone. “I hardly know you and yet you are already the greatest thing ever to happen to me, well you and Shaan.” She adds with a laugh, as the tears of joy begin to fall.

Over the next few days, Zahra and Shaan take it easy, both taking the two days off work and simply spending the time with each other and the baby. It’s not often they take time off work, the last time was 2 years ago for a brief honeymoon, after they got married. It’s nice for them both to be able to just relax for those two days, no stress for Zahra about chasing off tabloids and paparazzi, who are forever trying to spread nasty rumors about Alex and his family or June and her upcoming wedding to Nora, or trying to snap pictures of Henry and Alex’s twins, who have never been in the spotlight, there’s a total of three pictures of the twins since they were born, that the public have access to. One is of Henry and Alex each holding a twin on the steps of the birthing center, just after the twins were born, the second is a sweet family shot of Henry and Alex sitting on their living room sofa with two month old Charlotte and Sophie, in their arms, and then lastly a beautiful photo of Alex with Charlotte on his back and Sophie in his arms, as he leans in to kiss Henry, both girls faces lit up with joy.

Exactly 48 hours pass and there is no call from their adoption attorney to say the birth mom changed her mind, meaning that Zahra and Shaan are officially parents.

“I can’t believe he’s ours.” Zahra quietly says, just a few minutes after the revocation period ends, as she sits on her and Shaan’s bed with the baby propped up in her lap, looking at him in awe. She was so sure his birth mom would change her mind, and Zahra would get her heart broken again and never get to be a mother.
“I know, after two years and so much loss and hurt it’s hard to believe we’re finally parents.” Shaan softly replies, placing a hand on Zahra’s shoulder and leaning in to kiss her cheek.

“What should we name him? I’ve had a girl’s name picked out for years, but I could never settle on anything for a boy.” Zahra asks, stroking her son’s beautiful dark and curly hair.

“Well I’ve been thinking of names for him for the past couple days, and I quite like Max, Max Aahva Srivastava. Aahva means ‘beloved’ in Indian, and that’s exactly what this little man is, beloved.” Zahra almost tears up at Shaan’s suggestion and explanation, sometimes she forgets just how romantic and sweet her husband can be.

“I love it, it’s absolutely perfect for him. Max Aahva Srivastava, our beautiful boy. Welcome to the family Max, we love you.” Zahra quietly says, leaning forward to kiss her son’s cheek.

A few hours later they drive back home, Zahra insisting on sitting in the back with Max, the whole time.

For the first few weeks, they cocoon at home with baby Max, Ellen is more than happy to give Zahra another few weeks off and Catherine has no issue giving Shaan more time off, either. He still technically works for the royal family, even though he’s based in America now, he’s now in charge of making sure any of Henry and his family’s public appearances go well, and keeping the snooping public away from Henry, Alex and their daughters.

Zahra has never felt happier than she does in the weeks after Max’s adoption, she could not possibly love her baby boy anymore than she already does, and completely understands now, why Ellen is so fiercely protective of June and Alex, if anyone ever tried to hurt her baby in anyway, Zahra would stop at nothing to make them pay for it.

One day, a month after adopting Max, two weeks before going back to work, Zahra decides to take Max for a visit to Ellen and Leo’s new home, about 20 minutes from where she and Shaan live, to meet Ellen, who Zahra hopes will be a big part of his life, she’s always been such a good friend to Zahra and has been a total rock for her through her infertility journey, there was never any doubt in her mind that the person she wanted Max to meet, outside of she and Shaan, is Ellen.

Soon Zahra finds herself in the living room of Ellen and Leo’s new home, with just her, Max and Ellen, watching proudly as Ellen holds Max and fusses and coos over him.

“He’s so beautiful, you must be so happy.” Ellen says in a joyful tone, gently bouncing Max and smiling at Zahra.

“Happy is an understatement, he’s my miracle, I didn’t know love like this was possible, or happiness like this.” Zahra replies in a tone filled with love.

“I remember the feeling, I thought I loved June when I was pregnant with her, and of course I did, but then when she was born and I got to hold her, I just fell in love with her all over again and my heart seemed to grow so I could love her more, and it was the same with Alex, I thought because I had June I knew exactly how I would feel when I held him for the first time, but it took me by surprise again, My kids might be giving me gray hairs in my 50s but I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Ellen says in a fond tone, being brought back to those first moments with June and Alex.

“I can understand why you haven’t killed them by now.” Zahra laughs.

“There’s a reason you love them so much and they’re so darn cute, it prevents you from getting mad at them, god the things Alex and June use to do when they were little, they were thick as
thieves, I use to tell Oscar ‘it’s a good thing they’re so cute or I would be so mad right now.’” Ellen replies, remembering all the things June and Alex did as kids that drove her and Oscar mad.

“Ellen.” Zahra’s voice is suddenly serious. “This is completely changing the subject, but there’s something I want to ask you.”

“Ask away.” Ellen says in a confused tone, wondering what’s going on.

“So Shaan and I are going to have a naming ceremony for Max in a couple of weeks, and give him guide-parents in lieu of godparents, and I want to ask, if you’ll be Max’s guide-mother?” Ellen immediately feels a warmth in her chest and her heart lift with pride and honor.

“Oh Zahra, I would be absolutely thrilled, what an honor to even be asked!”

“There’s no one else we would want, you’ve been such a rock for me these last few years, especially when I had my first miscarriage, I’m glad it was you with me when it happened, and nobody else. You’ve been there through every miscarriage, every negative pregnancy test, every hormone shot, everything, and now I finally have my beautiful baby I want you by my side again, by his side.” Ellen feels herself beginning to well up with tears of joy, she’s never been asked something so big and special, but she couldn’t be more thrilled to have been asked.

“Zahra I will always be by your side no matter what you go through, that’s what friends are for, and it would be my absolute honor to be Max’s guide-parent.”

The next year is a perfect and beautiful mixture of work and parenthood for Zahra and Shaan. With encouragement from June, Zahara sets up a YouTube channel and on there she shares her experience of infertility and loss, and their journey to Max. She is surprised when her channel garners millions of views and subscribers, receiving praise and love from others who have been through or are going through the difficult journey of infertility and adoption.

Zahra posts monthly updates of Max, on her channel, which is a beautiful thing for she and Shaan to have as well. She doesn’t talk about how Max came to need a second family or anything about his birth mom, that’s his private story to choose to either share, or not share, when he’s older. Shaan even sometimes joins her in filming a video or two for her channel, and they always have a lot of fun filming together, and when you add Max to the mix, it’s complete chaos, but a joyful one.

One year and two months after Max’s birth, on a rainy, humid day, Zahra approaches her husband, while he cleans up in the kitchen after lunch, and Max plays with his toys in the living room.

“Shaan?” Zahra’s tone is laced with shock and disbelief. Shaan turns around and gets what is possibly the biggest shock of his life.

There, standing in front of him, is Zahra, holding what is clearly a pregnancy test.

“Shaan, I’m pregnant.”
Alex and Henry

Chapter Summary

2 years after adopting their son Arthur, Alex and Henry decide they would like another biological child, and with another generous offer from Nora, they attempt to use their two remaining embryos, to conceive a second child, but what happens when all doesn’t go according to plan?

Chapter Notes

**TRIGGER WARNING***
This chapter contains talk of miscarriage and has scenes/a scene depicting miscarriage, if this topic affects you in a negative way, I encourage you to click off this story, and be safe and care for you and your mental health.

It is a cold October day in 2028, when Henry and Alex make the decision to add to their family for the fourth time. It’s been four years since the twins were born, and two since they adopted Arthur, and though having 3 very young children is quiet a challenge, Henry and Alex couldn’t love their lives more, and both feel an intense desire to be parents again, just as they felt with the twins, they feel Arthur is growing up far too fast, before anyone knows it he’ll be driving and going to college.

They still have two frozen embryos left from when they did the IVF that got them the twins, and they both do want to unfreeze them and have more biological children at one point, but they also want to adopt again, and yet at the same time they can’t see themselves having anymore than 5 children. They eventually come to the agreement that they want to try for another biological child for baby #4, and if they decide to have #5, they’ll adopt.

A few years ago, before Catherine brought in the rule that allowed adopted children to become heirs to the throne, Henry and Alex had approached Nora and asked if she would be willing to carry for them again. At the time she had said no, two years on and she was still feeling and seeing the effects of her twin pregnancy and didn’t feel ready to go through another pregnancy, however she did tell them that ‘no’ would not always be her answer, and if they were to ask again in a few more years she may say yes. So now that it’s been 4 years since the twins were born and Henry and Alex are feeling the desire for another child and want to try and use at least one of their frozen embryos, they decide to ask Nora again, one day while they and the three kids are visiting her and June, just a few months after their wedding. (The twins made the most adorable flower girls and Arthur was the cutest ring bearer in history.)

Currently, the four friends are sitting at Nora and June’s kitchen table, while the twins are curled up on the sofa in the nearby living room, with their ipads, and Arthur has conked out in Henry’s lap, poor little chap just can’t quiet keep up with his sisters just yet, he always tires himself out after running around after his sisters.

“Hey, can you guys give us the number of the adoption attorney who helped you adopt Arthur?”
June asks Henry and Alex, when they’ve finished talking about Henry and Alex’s recent trip to England, for the anniversary of Queen Mary’s death. Long-haul flights with two energetic four year olds and a cranky two year old, are not fun.

“Of course, are you going to start the adoption process soon?” Henry asks, clicking open his phone to find Ashley’s number, knowing that June and Nora want to start a family of their own soon.

“Nah not for another year or two, but we want to have a contact in the adoption community, someone on the legal side of it all, we know what it’s like for the adoptive parents, having seen both you two and Zahra and Shaan go through the adoption process, but we don’t know anything about the legal side, and both Max and Arthur’s adoptions are closed, we want to know more about other types of adoptions.” Nora explains, as Henry hands his phone to June so she can copy Ashley’s number into her own phone.

“Speaking of having kids, Henry and I decided we want another kid, the twins and Arthur are growing up way too fast, we both miss having a little newborn baby around, and we just love everything about being dads, we want to do it again.” Alex tells them, reaching out to carefully stroke Arthur’s dark curls. It feels like just yesterday they met him for the first time.

“Oh yeah? You gonna adopt again or use the embryos you have frozen?” June asks.

“Well if it’s okay with you Nora, we do want to use at least one of the embryos we have frozen, but if you’re not comfortable with that, it’s absolutely fine, they’re half yours too so if you don’t want us to use them we won’t.” Henry tentatively asks, not wanting to upset or offend Nora in anyway.

“Don’t be stupid of course I don’t mind, I’ll even carry for you again if you want.” Nora says in a casual tone. Though her pregnancy with the twins wasn’t exactly easy because no twin pregnancy is, she did really like being pregnant and had a relatively smooth and healthy pregnancy, sure the pain of birth was a bitch, but looking at the twins now and getting to see them grow up these last 4 years, Nora knows it’s more than worth it.

“Really?” Alex hopefully asks, wondering if this could really be this easy.

“Yeah, It’s been 4 years since the girls were born and June and I aren’t planning on starting our own family for another year or two, I’d be happy to do it.” Nora tells them.

“Obviously I’m all in support of this, but I just want to know, what happens if neither of the embryos take or they don’t make it through the thawing process? Will you do the whole IVF thing all over again?” June curiously asks. Henry, Nora and Alex all exchange a look, none of them had thought about that.

“Look I can’t say I liked the actual IVF process itself, I liked being pregnant, but all the hormones and everything before that weren’t fun, but I’ll do it again if you want me to, I’d do anything for you guys.” Nora offers, selfless beyond all words.

“I don’t know how you’ll feel about this H, but to me, it’s not a big deal that we have another bio kid, none of our kids are biologically mine and I still love them more than I ever knew possible, and I know you love Arthur just as much as you love Lottie and Sophie, H. If for whatever reason these embryos don’t survive, yeah it will suck, but we can move onto adoption then, I’m happy to give it a chance with the two embryos we have but I don’t think we should do the entire IVF process again.” Alex says in a calm voice. He can’t deny that he loves seeing the similarities between Henry and the twins, and would love to see it with another biological child, but he also loves seeing the habits Arthur picks up from Henry, or him, or the habits that the twins have picked up from him. Arthur smiles and laughs like Henry and is fiercely loyal to his sisters, like
both Alex and Henry. Charlotte has Alex’s sense of humor, and his dramatic nature. Sophie talks to David in a very serious tone, like he’s a real person, like Alex does, no matter whether they’re biological or not, all three of their children have picked up habits from both fathers.

“I agree with you love, I’d like to try and have another biological child, but if it doesn’t work out I’m more than happy to adopt again.” Henry’s reply is much shorter and precise than Alex’s, as usual.

After a bit more discussion with Nora, they call up the same fertility clinic they went through to have the twins, and organise to have one embryo defrosted and prepared for transfer, the whole process in total will take about 3 weeks.

Nora first has to take estrogen pills to prepare, then a week later along with pills she starts progesterone shots, and this time she only has to take them for 5 days, unlike the last time when she had to take them for weeks.

The transfer goes smoothly and easily, just as it had with the twins, and then the two week wait begins. Same as last time, Nora is extremely conscious of every little shift in mood, twinge of pain, etc. It’s nerve wracking to say the least.

When the call with the results of the pregnancy test come in two weeks later, Nora is once again with Henry and Alex, at the park with Arthur and the twins.

When her phone begins to ring, she immediately picks it up and sees that it’s the fertility clinic calling.

“It’s the fertility clinic, it’s got to be the pregnancy test results.” She quickly tells Alex and Henry, before answering the phone. She doesn’t say much, or give anything away in her facial expression, while Henry and Alex eagerly wait for her to hang up and tell them the results.

“So?” Alex excitedly asks when Nora hangs up. She frowns slightly and shakes her head.

“It was negative, I’m sorry.” She softly says, reaching out to squeeze both their hands. If she feels disappointed (which she does) she can’t fathom how Alex and Henry feel.

“Oh.” Henry quietly says, having not expected this after having no failed attempts when conceiving the twins, he was certain it would work right away, this time too.

“That sucks.” Alex adds. Nora nods her agreement.

“Yeah, it does.”

“Nora, you don’t have anything to be sorry about, it’s not your fault.” Henry says, having just caught on to the fact that Nora apologised to he and Alex.

“Oh my god no! Nora don’t you dare blame yourself, this is no one’s fault.” Alex firmly says, horrified that Nora would even think to apologise.

“No I know it’s not my fault, I don’t blame myself, I’m just sorry you’ve had such a disappointment.” She replies,

“It’s okay, we still have another embryo, if you’re still willing to carry that is, you can back out at anytime.” Alex assures her, not wanting her to feel pressured at all, or like he and Henry are using her.
“Of course I’m still willing, I want to do whatever I can to help you.”

So after taking a while to get over the disappointment, they start the process again, albeit more nervously this time, and the two week wait for the pregnancy test and the results are even more hellish.

“God I wish they would just hurry up and call, if they don’t call soon we’re going to have to wait till Monday and if that’s the case I’m going to crack and go buy a home pregnancy test, it’s taking all my restraint not to go get one right now.” Nora huffs, as she, Henry and Alex sit around Henry and Alex’s kitchen table, waiting for the clinic to call with the results. It’s almost 4:00 P.M. on Friday, and the clinic shuts at 5 and doesn’t open on the weekend, they said they would call with the results today but it’s taking forever.

“I say you should do it, they’re probably deliberately not calling, just to piss us off.” Alex grumbles, folding his arms over his chest.

“Don’t be bloody stupid Alex, of course they aren’t doing it deliberately, you’re being paranoid. They’re probably just busy.” Henry soothes his husband, understanding how nervous he is, and how ridiculous he can be when nervous.

“Okay you know what? I actually bought a pregnancy test yesterday and almost took it, but June stopped me before I could, but June’s not here now, so I’m going to go take it and then we won’t have to wait on this stupid phone call.” Nora decides, shoving her phone away while scraping her chair back. “Here Henry, you watch my phone on the off chance they do call.”

“Nora you know a home pregnancy test could give a false result, negative or positive, we should wait.” Henry urges.

“No don’t listen to him, go Nora, go take the test, put us out of our misery!” Alex protests, just wanting to know.

“I’ll call June, tell her you’re going to do this.” Henry threatens, trying anything to stall Nora, certain the clinic will call any minute now.

“So? What’s she gonna do? She’s in Texas, she can’t get here in time to stop me.” Nora says with a shrug.

Before Henry can retort and threaten to call Ellen (Who he knows will talk sense into Nora, the woman could talk sense into absolutely anybody, she’s able to make the twins eat their vegetables and get Arthur to stop being such a reckless little daredevil.) Nora’s phone begins to ring, with the number for the fertility clinic flashing up on screen.

“Here! I told you they’d call soon, this is why you two should listen to me!” Henry says, passing the phone to Nora who eagerly answers it, again not saying much or giving much away with her facial expressions. When she hangs up a few minutes later, she breaks out into a hug grin and exclaims

“Positive! It’s positive! You’re going to have another baby!” Henry and Alex engulf her in a huge hug, and soon all three of them are laughing and crying in delight, just as they had been when they found out Nora was pregnant with Charlotte and Sophie.

Just like last time, with Nora’s permission, Henry and Alex almost immediately tell their friends and family (apart from Arthur and the twins, they want to wait a while longer to tell them.) who are of course thrilled, Ellen loves being a grandma and getting to spoil her grandchildren, and
Oscar and Leo adore being grandfathers, Leo never had any children so it’s nice for him to get to see the twins and Arthur grow up, and be involved with them, and the girls love to brag at school that they have two daddies and a bonus grandpa.

They agree not to tell the public until Nora is out of the first trimester, which is also when they’ll tell the twins and Arthur, who will hopefully be excited at the idea of another little sibling.

Things progress smoothly for Nora, until week 12 when she starts to feel different, and not in a good way.

It starts with little cramps here and there, and a little bit of spotting, but nothing out of the norm for pregnancy. This has been going on for a few days, when things really start to go down hill.

Today is chilly February day, and Nora and June have just arrived home after going out for lunch, when June notices Nora putting her hand on her belly and wincing.

“You okay?” June gently asks her wife, placing a hand on her arm. Nora nods, though she doesn’t look okay.

“Yeah, just a bit crampy and queasy, maybe I ate something that didn’t agree with me.” Nora replies, her hand still on her stomach, concern growing now that the cramps have started to get stronger. “I’ll be back in a minute.” She tells June, as they step inside. She gives her wife a quick peck on the cheek before heading the bathroom. With trembling hands she pulls her jeans and underwear down, and takes a few deep breaths before looking down. And there it is, blood, bright red, fresh blood. And far more than just a few spots, there is blood all over her underwear, and when she wipes with a shaky hand, the tissue comes back completely soaked in blood too.

“June!” Nora calls in a wobbly tone, trying to steady her breathing, trying to think what she has to do. A few seconds later June appears in the doorway of the en-suite bathroom, looking very concerned. “I need to go to hospital, I’m bleeding.” Nora tells her in a breathy tone.

“Okay, I’ll pull the car round, do you need help getting changed or anything?” June gently asks, always able to remain calm in a crisis, just like her mom. Nora shakes her head.

“No, but can you call Alex and Henry, please?” She asks.

“Yes, of course.” So while Nora gets changed and puts a pad on, June grabs her phone and dials her brother’s number.

“Hey Junebug, what’s up?” Alex answers a few minutes later.

“Alex.” June says in a steady tone. “You and Henry need to make your way to the hospital, I’m taking Nora in, in a minute.”


“She’s bleeding, quiet a lot, she’s been having pains for a while too.” June informs him, trying to keep the pain out of her voice, her heart-breaking for her beautiful wife and her sweet brother and brother-in-law.

“We’ll be there as soon as we can.” Alex quickly says, before hanging up.

Half an hour later, Nora finds herself back in the same ultrasound suite she was in when she had her first scan with the twins, with Alex, Henry and June with her. This time it’s not such a happy
occasion, she’s already had a blood test which has come back to say her HCG levels are lower than they were last time (not a good sign) and now they’re doing an ultrasound just to be sure.

After what feels like hours of the OB moving the ultrasound probe around Nora’s stomach, she finally sets it down and turns to face the four of them.

“I’m so sorry.” She softly begins. “The low levels of HG were almost a certain indicator of miscarriage, and the ultrasound has confirmed it, there’s no heartbeat.” Though they were expecting this news, it still absolutely shatters all four of them in the room, especially Henry, Alex and Nora.

June pulls her wife into a tight embrace, as she sobs into her shoulder, and Alex and Henry hold onto each other for dear life, both trying to remain strong for Nora.

“I know it’s likely no comfort to you at all but I think you’ll be able to manage this miscarriage from home, I don’t see a need for medical or surgical intervention. I have information for you on early pregnancy loss, and Nora if you experience any very heavy bleeding or extremely painful cramps, please come right back in to us and we’ll help you. The pamphlets with the pregnancy loss information and resources, are here on the counter, I’m going to leave you now but please take all the time you need, don’t feel any rush to leave.” The OB kindly tells them.

“June.” Nora sniffs a few minutes later. “Can I have a few minutes alone with Alex and Henry?”

“Yeah, of course, I’ll be right out in the waiting room if you need me.” She softly says, pressing a kiss to Nora’s forehead, and giving her brother’s hand a reassuring squeeze, before stepping out.

“Oh Nora.” Henry in the first to speak up. “Is there anything we can do for you?”

“A hug would be nice.” Nora quietly says, wiping at her tears. Henry gives her a tight hug, pouring all his love into it, feeling his heart break in two. Alex soon joins the hug, no longer bothering to hold back the tears.

“This isn’t your fault, okay? I don’t want you to blame yourself.” Alex firmly tells her, when they pull back from the hug.

“I know.” Nora sniffles. “I don’t, I just... well losing a pregnancy whether it’s your baby or not, is horrible. I’m devastated that you won’t be having another bio baby, and I’m sad that I won’t be getting another niece or nephew, and most of all I’m scared about having to pass everything.”

“You can stay with us if you like, or we’ll come stay with you, I’m sure my mom can watch the kids.” Alex offers.

“No, no you can’t be away from them at a time like this, I’ll be okay, I have June, I won’t be alone.” Nora replies, knowing Henry and Alex are going to want to be with their babies at this time.

“Well we’ll come see you everyday, and you can come over to ours at anytime, okay?” Henry says. Nora smiles weakly and nods, knowing that she’ll be able to eventually get through this with her loved ones by her side.

A few hours later, while June and Nora head back to theirs, an exhausted Henry and Alex drive to Ellen and Leo’s, to pick up the kids. They don’t say much on the way, both trying to process everything and both eager and desperate to see their babies.

When they arrive, the door is slightly ajar, a clear invitation for them to come in. When they step
inside, they see Arthur curled up asleep on the sofa, and Sophie and Charlotte playing in the backyard.

“There’s my baby, come here little chap, I missed you.” Henry quietly says, making his way over to the sofa and scooping Arthur up into his arms, holding him close and kissing his forehead.

“How did everything go? Is Nora okay, what did they say?” Ellen gently asks Alex, as he puts an arm around Henry’s waist, holding him and their son close.

“Nora’s okay, but she’s having a miscarriage.” Alex quietly replies.

“Oh sugar, I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do to help?” Ellen asks. Alex shakes his head.

“No, thanks but no. June is taking good care of Nora, and right now Henry and I just want to get home and spend some quality time with the babies we do have.”

“I’ll go call the girls in.” Leo says, giving Ellen a kiss on the cheek before stepping out of the back door and calling to Charlotte and Sophie.

“I’m here if you need me, any of you. And if any of the 3 of you need to talk to someone who has been through this, I’m certain Shaan and Zahra will be willing to talk to you, they’ve been in this position four times.” Ellen tells them, remembering how she had comforted Zahra after all 4 miscarriages, she was with her when the first happened, before a meeting at the White House, and the other two times she had been the first person Zahra called, which meant Ellen saw a new and vulnerable side to her friend that she had never seen before.

“Thanks mom, but like I said, right now we just want to take some time to process this, make sure Nora’s okay and spend time with the kids.” Alex says, his heart lifting when Charlotte and Sophie run through the back door and straight to he and Henry.

“Missed you!” Charlotte exclaims, reaching up for Alex to lift her. He does and manages to scoop Sophie up with the other arm, having two clingy twins who like to be held a lot, usually by the same person, is a way better workout than anything a gym can offer.

“We missed you too, all 3 of you.” Henry softly says, pressing a kiss to Arthur’s dark curls and smiling warmly at the twins. “Ready to go home?” The twins nod eagerly, and Ellen and Leo help them get the three kids out to to car and strapped in, the twins are at that age where they insist they’re old enough to buckle themselves in, but actually aren’t and can barely reach the buckle from their seats.

That night, Henry and Alex tuck the twins and Arthur up in bed next to them, wanting them close tonight, after the day they’ve had, they may have lost their 4th baby but they are so incredibly lucky to have 3 other beautiful and healthy children with them every single day.

“Daddy?” Sophie’s quiet little voice pulls Henry from his thoughts at some point that night, while Alex, Arthur and Charlotte sleep soundly.

“Yes love?”

“Why you sad?” Sophie curiously asks, a hint of sadness in her own tone. Henry had hoped the girls and Arthur hadn’t picked up on he and Alex’s heartbreak and sadness, but they mustn’t be as good at hiding it as they thought they were.

“Do I seem sad?” Henry gently asks, brushing Sophie’s hair back from her face.
“Uh-hu, why?” Sophie repeats. Henry takes a minute to think, before quietly saying

“Well papa and I had some not very nice news today and it’s made us a bit sad and upset, but don’t worry it’s absolutely nothing for you to worry about, it’s a grown-up problem and won’t affect you in anyway, your papa and I will be okay in a few days, I promise.”

“Are you sad cuz Aunty Nora is sick?” Sophie asks. The twins had wanted to go see Nora and June today, after Henry and Alex picked them up from Ellen and Leo’s, Henry and Alex had to come up with a reason for not being able to, so they told the twins that Nora is a bit sick and not up for visitors.

“Yes love, that’s why I’m sad.” Henry replies, so glad that Sophie is so oblivious to all the pain going on around her.

“But she’ll be okay soon right? Then you won’t be sad anymore?” Sophie’s little voice is so inquisitive and hopeful, and her concern for her dad and Aunty, simply melts Henry’s heart.

“Yes sweetheart, Aunty Nora will be better soon, and I’ll be happy again soon, I promise.” Henry replies, pulling her closer and pressing a kiss to her forehead.

“Okay, love you daddy.” Henry smiles to himself and presses another kiss to Sophie’s forehead.

“I love you too my sweet Soph.”

The next day, Henry and Alex send the twins to school as usual, to keep up a sense of normality for them. They take Arthur and go visit Nora and June, after dropping the twins off at school. Nora is doing well, still cramping and bleeding but nothing out of the ordinary. She feels so heartbroken for Henry and Alex, all of her sorrow is for them, they’ve been dreaming of this baby for so long now and now there is no baby anymore. Spending time together feels good for all three of them, they’ve always been such close friends and though this miscarriage is heartbreaking and devastating, it won’t change their friendship, in fact it’s seemed to make it stronger already.

Later that day once they get back home, Alex is called into the office of the Law Firm he works for, for a few hours. He’s reluctant to leave but Henry encourages him to, the twins won’t be home for hours yet and he and Arthur will be just fine on their own.

At noon, Henry puts Arthur down in his crib for a nap, then decides to go lie down himself, take some time to relax. As Henry lies there on his side, scrolling through old photos of the twins and Arthur, he hears the front door open and close, and assumes it’s Alex, but a few seconds later he hears a feminine voice call his name, the voice of his sister. He gave her a key for emergencies, but last he knew she wasn’t even in America.

“Bea?” Henry calls out in confusion. The door to the room creaks open, and Bea steps in. She gives her brother one look before kicking her shoes off and climbing onto the bed next to him and engulfing him in a hug.

“Hello baby brother.” She quietly says.

“Hi, what are you doing here? I didn’t know you were even in the country.” Henry asks in a confused tone, as Bea lies down next to him, the way she use to do when they were little and Henry would run to her in the middle of the night, terrified of a storm.

“I was coming over to surprise you, Alex and the kids, but then I got talking to Nora and she told me what happened, I’m so sorry H.” Bea softly says, pushing her brother’s hair back from his face.
“It’s alright, it’s rather shite but I will move on, we all will.” Henry responds. “If it’s alright with you Bea, I’d rather not talk about the miscarriage at all right now.” He adds. Bea nods understandingly.

“Okay. Where are Alex and Arthur? I know the girls are at school, but doesn’t Alex work from home?” She asks.

“Yes, usually, but he got called into the office for a few hours today, and Arthur’s having a nap.” Henry tells her. There is a comfortable silence for a minute, before Bea asks, in an excited tone “D’ya want to watch a movie? They added loads of new stuff to Netflix at the start of the month.” Usually, Henry is not one to lie in bed in the middle of the day and watch a movie, but right now he can’t think of anything he’d like to do more, than curl up next to his wonderful big sister and take his mind off everything by watching a movie.

“I’d love to.” Henry agrees. Bea beams in delight and flips the T.V.

“Do you want to watch the Hamilton movie? I haven’t seen that in ages!” Bea asks, knowing that Hamilton is her brother’s favorite musical (and Alex’s of course, though she suspects he more so has the hots for the entire OBC, and she can’t blame him, she does too.)

“Yeah, an old favorite sounds good right now. And Bea?” Bea turns to look at him expectantly. “Thanks for this, you’re the best big sister I could have ever asked for.” Bea beams and leans down to kiss her brother’s cheek.

“I’m glad we didn’t trade you for a dog.”

A few weeks later, Nora has pretty much completely recovered from her miscarriage, and Henry and Alex are healing and moving forward too. They’ve decided to take a year or two before trying to adopt again, after the miscarriage they don’t feel ready to add to their family, anymore, not yet.

“How are you feeling today, babe?” June asks Nora, as she walks into the bedroom with a cup of coffee for her wife. Nora gratefully accepts the mug as June sits down on the bed next to her.

“Pretty good, I had a couple of cramps through the night but nothing much, and the bleeding has pretty much stopped.” She says.

“Good I’m glad, do you want to go out for lunch today or just stay home?” June asks.

“I feel okay to go out, but there’s something I want to talk to you about June.” Nora says, her tone turning serious as she grasps her wife’s hand.

“What is it?” June asks in a fearful tone, afraid that Nora’s got more bad news.

“I... well, this whole miscarriage experience has made realize a lot of things, and one of those things is, well... June, I want to have a baby, soon, I want to start the adoption process, now.”
June looks at Nora wide-eyed and astonished for a few seconds, before asking

“Are you sure?” Nora nods.

“I am, over the last few years seeing Henry and Alex with their little family has made me so eager to start our own, but I knew you wanted to be married before we had kids and I didn’t want to have kids of our own until I was sure I was done with surrogacy, which I am now. Obviously you might feel differently and I would never pressure you into having kids before you ready, so if you still want to wait another year or two, I’m happy to wait.” Nora tells June. Though she enjoyed her pregnancy with the twins and enjoyed those few weeks she was pregnant with the baby she lost, she knows she couldn’t be pregnant while simultaneously going through the adoption process or raising a child of her own, it would be too much for her, but now she’s done with pregnancies and eager to have children of her own.

“No I... I don’t want to wait any longer either, I’ve been ready to have kids for a while now, but I knew you wanted to be done with pregnancy before we had kids so I didn’t bring it up once you offered to carry for Alex and Henry again.” June replies, her heart racing at the thought that she and Nora could really be about to start their own family, it could take a long time to be matched with an expectant parent or baby, but just starting the process will be thrilling.

“Yeah? Well how about we go out for lunch and then when we come home, we sit down and call the adoption attorney and figure out everything we need to do to get the ball rolling?” Nora asks eagerly. June smiles and nods.

A few hours later after an excellent lunch and refreshing walk through the park, Nora and June call Ashley, the adoption attorney and gather all the information they need to start the adoption process. The first thing they need to do is get a home study done, something they’re both familiar with from Henry and Alex needing some help gathering the necessary documents, when they were in the process of adopting Arthur. Then they’ll need at least 3 references from friends and family, which
shouldn’t be an issue at all, both Nora and June provided references for Henry and Alex when they were adopting, no doubt they’ll return the favour, and any of their other friends and family will only be too happy to give them a 3rd reference, Ellen would probably be the best person to ask, nothing looks more impressive than a reference from a former President of The USA.

All in all the whole process of the paperwork, background checks, etc. will take 6 months, then they can start presenting their file to expectant parents and birth parents.

It has now it’s been 4 months since they completed the adoption process, and they are eagerly and impatiently waiting to be matched, Nora has cracked, no longer able to resist the urge to buy baby clothes, and has started stocking up on adorable onsies, blankets, stuffed toys, etc. June held off a bit longer, but then when she was out shopping with Bea one day, she spotted a tiny pair of shoes for a newborn and just couldn’t resist, even though they may be matched with a baby a bit older than a newborn, they won’t go to waste, Amy and her wife are expecting their second child so if Nora and June end up adopting a slightly older child, they can gift the shoes to Amy and her wife.

Today, Nora and June are watching Arthur for a few hours, while the twins are at school and Henry has a meeting with his publisher (he completed his first book last year and now it’s going to be published in a few months.) and Alex is with a client in court, the case isn’t anything huge or serious, and Henry’s meeting is just about some minor details, so they should be back in time to collect Arthur before heading to the school to collect the girls.

As June and Nora sit on the floor together, playing with Arthur, June’s phone starts to ring, and her heart skips a beat when she sees it’s the adoption attorney. Since Arthur is being relatively quiet, not making a lot of noise while he plays with one of his baby dolls, June opts to put the phone on speaker, so Nora can hear everything first hand, too.

“Hi Ashley.” June begins the conversation.

“Hi June, is Nora with you? Is now a good time to talk?” Ashley asks in a cheery tone.

“Yeah I’m here, we can talk.” Nora calls, shifting closer to her wife.

“Great, well I have some good news for you. You remember the case you presented for last week? The young expectant mom just 20 minutes away from you?” Ashley asks.

“Yeah.”

“Well she got back to me with her choice today, and I’m thrilled to tell you she’s chosen you and Nora as her baby’s adoptive parents!” Both women bite back screams of delight, and instead hug eachother tightly, Nora tearing up.

“Oh that’s so great! Where do we go from here?” June asks.

“Well the mom, Xia, she wants to meet with you both, I told you this already but she’s looking to do an open adoption with a lot of contact with baby, so she’d like to get to know you both before baby comes along and you all become part of each other’s lives forever.” Ashley tells them.

“That’s fine, we’d love to meet her too, where and when?” June asks.

“Well Xia would like to arrange that herself, she wants to get in contact with you and set up a time and place to meet, after speaking to you for a bit, is it alright if I pass your contact information on to her, and she’ll be in touch with you soon?” Ashley asks, as Nora stands up and scoops Arthur up into her arms, before starting to spin around the room with him, quietly telling him how excited and happy she is. Arthur is thoroughly confused for a minute, but soon joins his Aunty Nora in
smiling, laughing and clapping his hands.

“Absolutely.” June says with a laugh, watching Nora and Arthur spin around the room, getting increasingly louder.

“Wonderful, I’ll pass on your contact info and Xia will be in touch soon, and then we’ll speak again when we next need to, is that alright?” Ashley asks.

“Yeah that’s fine, thanks Ashley, bye.” Just as June hangs up, there is a light rap on the front door that leads into the hallway just outside the living room, and it opens a bit to reveal Alex, with Henry standing behind him.

“Junebug it’s your favorite brother come to save my son from you and your ridiculous wife!” Alex calls out in a teasing tone.

“Hey, her ridiculous wife donated her eggs to you and carried your twins for nine months before giving birth to them- still haven’t lost all the baby weight from that pregnancy- so I’d be careful with my words, Aleandjo.” Nora teases, as Henry and Alex step into the house.

“What’s got you so happy little chap? What so funny?” Henry asks in an amused tone, when he notices Arthur still laughing and smiling widely.

“He’s excited because his Aunties got some amazing news!” Nora exclaims, handing Arthur over to Henry when Arthur reaches for his dad.

“Did they finally make being straight illegal?” Alex jokes.

“If only, nah we got a call from Ashley, we’ve been chosen as adoptive parents, by an expectant mom!” June tells them in an excited, high-pitched tone.

“Seriously?! That’s awesome, congratulations!” Alex exclaims, giving his sister and Nora a hug, remembering the feeling of being told you’ve been matched with a baby, though of course Henry and Alex were only matched with Arthur after he was born, they’ve never had the pleasure of meeting his birth mom, she wanted the adoption to be closed and so it has been, but they think of her everyday and the amazing, brave and selfless sacrifice she made and they make sure Arthur realizes that his birth mom did not abandon him or anything like that, rather placed him with his family because she knew she couldn’t give him the life he deserves, and that is an amazingly brave and selfless thing to do.

“That’s wonderful news, are you going to meet her before the baby is born?” Henry asks, shifting a now sleepy Arthur, in his arms.

“Well she apparently wants to meet us, so we gave Ashley permission to pass on on our contact information to her and she’s going to get in touch with us to arrange a time and place to meet, she wants the adoption to be open.” Nora explains.

“So does she know what kind of family she’s potentially placing her kid into? Does she know that you’re the June and Nora Claremont-Diaz-Holleran?” Alex asks in an amused tone.

“Yeah I would imagine so, dummy, not many other Nora and June Claremont-Diaz-Hollrean’s, are there?” June asks, rolling her eyes at Alex’s stupid question. Even now she’s in her thirties and Alex is in his late twenties, he still drives June absolutely mad.

“Does she also know what a smart ass you are?” Alex retorts. June narrows her eyes at him.
“I hate you.”

“I know sis, I know.”

A few hours later, Nora and June receive the call they’ve been waiting for. They speak with Xia over the phone, for a good 20 minutes, before agreeing to meet at a restaurant 10 minutes away from June and Nora’s, in 2 days time, at 2:00 P.M. Xia is still in school, so she can only meet up later in the day or on weekends, and weekends work better for June and Nora too, they’re less busy with work then.

2 days later, Nora and June are sitting at a table in the agreed upon restaurant, their eyes fixed on the door, just waiting for Xia. They don’t know exactly what she looks like, but there aren’t many pregnant 16 year olds in this area, so it should be easy enough to spot her.

Approximately 10 minutes after Nora and June arrive, in steps a tall girl, with brown skin, gorgeous straight black hair that just brushes the tips of her ears, she has asian features and most noticeably of all, a baby bump.

She spots June and Nora almost straight away (she recognizes them from their picture in their adoption file) and her face lights up at the sight of them, and she quickly rushes over. Both women stand up to greet Xia not sure if they should go in for a hug or stick with a simple handshake, or maybe Xia doesn’t want to have any physical contact at all.

“Hi! It’s so good to see you and meet you!” Xia exclaims, beaming at them both and holding out a hand to Nora, who is closest to her.

“Hi, I’m Nora, it’s good to see you too.” Nora says, shaking her hand.

“And I’m June, it’s really good to meet you.” June says a few seconds later, when Xia turns to shake her hand.

“And as you know, I’m Xia, and I can’t believe I’m standing in front of the daughter of my favorite president and the granddaughter of my favorite vice-president.” Xia gushes, as she takes a seat across from Nora and June. June and Nora both grin proudly.

“Yeah my mom’s pretty great, though absolutely terrifying when you get on the wrong side of her.” June laughs, though Ellen was never violent or angry with she and Alex growing up, she and Oscar were very gentle parents, though firm too, there was never any yelling and screaming, if Alex or June did something wrong, their mom or dad explained firmly why it was wrong and then they were either sent to their room for a while, lost t.v. privileges for a while, or something of the same nature, and it clearly worked, June and Alex have both turned out great.

“Oh I can imagine, I’ve read all about what she did to expose Richards after he outed your brother, I wish my mom was that loving and accepting.” Xia says with a hint of hurt in her tone.

“What is it she doesn’t accept, if you don’t mind me asking?” Nora gently asks, hating to hear of a mother not sticking by their child.

“My sexuality, I’m gay.” Xia replies, which leaves June and Nora a tad confused.

“Oh, but if you’re gay then... how did you get pregnant?” June asks in a confused tone.

“I only figured out my sexuality recently, for a while I thought I was bi, a guy I knew from school was always flirting with me and wanted me to sleep with him, so I figured, why not? Give it a try. I did, and I hated it, I thought I came out of that experience knowing my sexuality, and I did, but
that’s not all I came out of it with.” Xia laughs, laying her hands on her belly.

“Oh, so is the father going to want to be involved?” Nora asks, not recalling Ashley mentioning anything about the birth father. Xia shakes her head.

“Nah, we were nothing serious and when I told him about the baby he was straight up and honest and told me he didn’t want a kid and though he respected whatever choice I made, he didn’t want any involvement at all, he offered to pay half if I wanted to have an abortion, and offered to pay child support if I kept the baby, but I decided on adoption and he agreed to that too.” Xia explains. She holds no grudge against the baby’s father, she appreciates that he was upfront and honest with her, instead of stringing her along or ghosting her.

“Oh well that’s good that he was honest with you. You said your mom doesn’t approve of you and isn’t accepting of your sexuality, is anyone in your family accepting?” June asks in a tone of concern.

“Well my grandma was, but she passed away a few months ago.” Xia tells them, a slight wobble in her voice.

“I’m so sorry.” Nora quietly says.

“Do you have somewhere safe to stay, Xia? I know it’s probably not ideal but if you need somewhere to go my brother-in-law and his bestfriend own and run a homeless shelter for young people, multiple shelters actually, but there is one here in D.C., if you have nowhere else to go there’s always a bed there for you, and I promise it’s not like other shelters, not from what I’ve heard from kids who stay there and from the research Henry did before opening the place, you’ll be safe there.” June offers. She would offer to let Xia stay with she and Nora (she knows Nora would approve) but they’ve only got one spare room that’s currently hosting all the baby stuff they have, and will be the baby’s room when they’re born.

“Really? That would be great, actually. My parents didn’t kick me out or anything but life at home is not pleasant, they’re always pushing me to keep the baby and telling me I’m being selfish and cruel by placing them for adoption, I’d do anything to do get out of there.” Xia says with a sigh. She spends as much time away from home as possible, but at the end of the day she does always have to go back there and listen to her parents crap about keeping the baby, finding someone to marry, and give up on her hopes of going to college to become a midwife.

“Oh Xia what you’re doing for your baby is the very opposite of selfish, it’s the most selfless thing you can do.” Nora firmly tells her, holding back from telling her about how she carried the twins for Alex and Henry, she doesn’t think of herself as some brave and amazing hero for doing what she did (Though there would be nothing wrong with that if she did) but she does know how kind and selfless she was to go through all that for Alex and Henry, even more so now she’s had one failed IVF attempt and a miscarriage. She wishes she could tell Xia all this, let her know that she knows what its like to be pregnant but not getting ready for a baby, but much as she wants to, she can’t trust that Xia wouldn’t leak the fact that Nora was Henry and Alex’s surrogate and is technically the twin’s biological mother, to the press, unfortunately some NDAs are going to have to be signed before much can be said.

“I’ll call Henry after dinner, and arrange a place for you at the shelter, I’m sure we can have a bed and everything ready in a few hours, you could go there tonight if you want.” June offers. Xia’s face lights up.

“Really? Oh, but what about my stuff? It’s at my parents house and they won’t let me take it, not without a fight, normally I wouldn’t be scared of them but I have the baby to think about now.” Xia
says in a weary tone, her hand still on her belly. The fact that Xia seems use to the idea that one or both of her parents could physically harm her, absolutely appals Nora and June.

“Would you feel safer if one of us came with you, and someone else? I have a friend in the secret service I can ask to help you.” June asks, knowing Amy will be only too happy to help Xia out. A lot of people think Zahra is June’s scariest friend, but compared to Amy, Zahra is as harmless as a fly.

“Seriously?” Xia asks, her eyes wide in astonishment. June nods.

“If you want, we can have dinner, get to know eachother some more, then I’ll call Henry to set up a place for you at the shelter, and then call Amy to ask her to go with you to get your stuff.” June suggests, wanting to make Xia as comfortable with this whole plan, as possible. They only met 10 minutes ago and now June is calling up a secret service agent, to protect Xia from her abusive parents.

Xia agrees to the plan and so, after dinner and after getting to know more about Xia, June calls up Henry and organises a bed for Xia at the shelter, then calls Amy to ask for her help. Amy agrees right away. They decide that Xia will give Amy and June directions to her parents house, and they’ll go collect her stuff and tell her parents Xia is moving out, while Nora takes her to the shelter and help her settle in for a few hours.

Everything goes as planned, June and Amy get all of Xia’s things with hardly any issues, and within a few hours Xia is comfortably settled in one of the rooms at the shelter, that she she shares with two other people, one girl and one non-binary person. Xia was thrilled and honored to meet Henry at the shelter, she felt the same way when Alex arrived to help out for a few hours, after dropping the kids off with his mom and Leo.

Xia is much more comfortable and happy at the shelter than she had ever been at home, she quickly makes friends with a lot of the other residents there, and gets plenty of help juggling her pregnancy and schoolwork. June and Nora happily pay for a midwife to come out and visit Xia and check up on her, every week, seeing as her being only 16, makes the pregnancy high-risk. They’ve also happily paid for a private suite for her at the local hospital. They were both thrilled when Xia asked them to be in the delivery room with her.

The rest of Xia’s pregnancy progresses smoothly, and bit by bit as she gets to know June and Nora, and they get to know her, she gets to meet their family and learn more about them, like the fact that Nora’s been pregnant twice before, as a surrogate, though only one pregnancy resulted in healthy babies. She’s had to sign some NDAs (Courtesy of Zahra of course, who has a soft spot for Xia, as she does all birth/expectant mothers, who make the brave decision to place their child for adoption, without it she wouldn’t have her beautiful and perfect son Max, her miracle baby, well first miracle baby technically, seeing as when Max was 1, Zahra somehow fell pregnant with her and Shaan’s daughter.)

One day, 4 months later, just days before her due date, Xia wakes up early in the morning to a very powerful and very intense pain in her lower stomach, accompanied by an immense pressure down below. She pushes herself up in the bed, gasping at the pain. She pulls the covers back, only to see the sheets are soaked, and so are her underwear and pajama pants. When she stands up, more of the water soaking the sheets, gushes from between her legs, down her pajama pants leg, and out onto the floor.

“Oh my god!” Xia gasps, trying to make sense of what’s happening and why it’s happening so fast. She rushes to the door and throws it open, about to rush downstairs when another pain grips her, causing her to swear and double over, gripping the door frame tightly. A few seconds later she
hears a familiar voice call her name, and lifts her head to see Henry rushing toward her.

“Xia are you alright? What’s going on?” He asks in a panicked tone, placing a hand on her shoulder.


“Shit.” He swears under his breath. “Okay, it’s okay, come on I’ll drive you to the hospital and we can call Nora and June on the way.” He says. Xia shakes her head.

“No!” She exclaims. “There’s no time this baby is coming now! I have to push!” This panics Henry even more, is he going to have to deliver this baby himself, here in the hallway? He knows absolutely nothing about birth, why couldn’t Bea be here instead?! She knows at least something about birth, she studied as a midwife for a year before deciding to drop out and instead focus on charity work and opening rehabs and de-stigmatizing addiction.

Luckily just then, he hears the front door open and hears the familiar voices of June and Nora, along with the voice of the midwife, who must’ve been coming to do Xia’s weekly check-up.

“Thank fuck.” Henry sighs in relief, before rushing to the foot of the stairs. “We need help up here! Xia’s in labor and she says she has to push!” This wipes the smiles from the women’s faces and the midwife bolts up the stairs with June and Nora behind her. By now, Xia has sunk onto the floor, her back against the wall as she tries desperately to breathe through the pain.

"Right, I’m going to need hot water- not too hot mind!- an empty bowl or pan of sorts, and towels and blankets.” The midwife orders, setting her bag down and kneeling in front of Xia, wasting no time in getting her bottoms off for fear of the head coming out at any second.

“I-I’ll get that.” Henry stammers, eager to make himself useful. At least when the twins were born he knew Nora wanted him there, but he’s sure Xia doesn’t want him seeing her give birth.

Nora and June drop down on either side of Xia, June grabbing her hand and giving it an encouraging squeeze, while Nora helps her get her hair out of her face.

“Well this little one is eager to meet you all, the head’s crowing, I think you just need to give me two or three massive pushes, Xia, alright?” The midwife calmly and gently asks, pulling on a pair of plastic gloves and gently taking the baby’s head in her hands. Xia nods, and bears down with all her strength, doing her best to push everything else out of her mind and focus solely on the pushing. She grips June’s hand tightly, and only a few seconds after the last contraction, she feels another one, and bears down again, unable to hold back a shout of pain. Seconds later she feels a weight lift from her, and is soon rewarded by the sharp cries of a baby.

“Well done Xia, well done!” The midwife exclaims in a happy tone. “It’s a boy.” Nora and June tear up at this news, a boy, they have a son. “Would you like to hold him, Xia?” The midwife asks, taking a towel from the radiator beside her. Xia nods and holds her arms out for the baby. She hasn’t changed her mind about the adoption, but she wants to see andr hold her baby for a few minutes, before giving him to Nora and June.

The midwife carefully places the baby in Xia’s arms. She takes his little hand in hers and just looks at him for a few seconds, so many thoughts and feelings swirling around her mind, she adores him with all her heart already, and so desperately wishes she were in the right position to raise him, but she’s not and so he’s going to have his best chance with Nora and June, and it’s not like Xia won’t get to see him, he’ll know her and know she’s his birth mom and that she loves him and that’s why she placed him for adoption.
Xia presses a kiss to the baby’s forehead and quietly says “I love you.” before turning to June and asking “Will you take him now? I want to get off this floor and get changed and stuff.” June nods and gently takes the little boy into her arms, holding him like the most precious treasure in the world.

“Do you want one of us to help you get changed or anything? Or would you like us to bring baby in once you’ve freshened up a bit?” Nora offers. Xia shakes her head.

“No, thanks, after I get changed and cleaned up I want to go back to sleep, I’m wiped out, you take him home and start bonding with him.” Xia says.

“Are you sure?” Nora asks in a weary tone. She had thought Xia would be eager to spend as much time with the baby as possible, but it seems right now she doesn’t really want to see him at all.

“Yeah, I’m sure.” Nora and June exchange a worried glance, but both know that pushing Xia to spend time with the baby will only harm any bond they might develop, they need to let her process this herself and be there to support her, not push her or make choices for her.

“Okay, well you have our numbers so call anytime for anything, and we’ll send lots of baby pictures in the meantime, okay?” June softly says, placing one hand on Xia’s arm. She simply smiles and nods, and then lets the midwife help her up and back into the room.

“Well, that was a dramatic morning.” Henry breaks the silence after a few seconds, having arrived with the towels and water a few minutes ago.

“To say the least, you’re going to have your work cut out for you cleaning up this mess.” June sighs, moving away from the puddle of blood on the ground, right in front of where Xia had been sitting.

“I know, and I’ll have to get it done before the others come back from school and work, guess Pez and I are going to be cleaning up blood before we go for lunch with Alex and the kids.” Henry says in an amused tone, just picturing the look on his friends face when he tells him he needs his help cleaning up, Pez is very squeamish about blood, years ago Henry had gone with him when Pez had to get his bloods drawn, and he gripsed Henry’s hand so tight he was tempted to ask the nurse to check that Pez hadn’t broken it.

“Have fun with that, can June and I use a bathroom to get the baby cleaned up? Also could you please do us a huge favour?” Nora asks.

“Yes you can use the bathroom, and maybe I’ll do you a favour.” Henry replies.

“Hey man don’t forget the favour I did for you, giving you my eggs to make babies and then carrying and birthing two of said babies, it’s been 4 years Henry and I still haven’t lost the baby weight and I still have to use the bathroom about a hundred times a day.” Nora points out, knowing this will (as usual) get Henry to cave in and do her a favour.

“Ugh fine, what do you want me to do?” He asks.

“Could you drive to ours and grab a carseat and some clothes for the baby? Please?” Nora asks, knowing he won’t refuse, Henry’s too nice to refuse.

“Fine, gimme your keys.” He sighs. Nora grins, takes her keys from her pocket and tosses them to Henry.

A few hours later, after washing the baby down with warm water and dressing him in a deep green
onsie with a matching hat, then swaddling him in multiple blue and white blankets, Nora and June arrive home with the baby and immediately kick off their shoes, get changed into comfy clothes, and curl up in bed with the baby tucked inside June’s shirt, for skin to skin contact, to help them bond. June insisted on getting to do this first, and Nora can never say no to her beautiful wife.

“So what should we call this beautiful little guy?” Nora softly asks, stroking the baby’s fuzzy black hair.

“Well we’ve agreed that Michael will be his middle name, after your grandpa, and he’ll have a hispanic first name, right?” June asks. Nora nods. “So how about Jaime Michael Claremont-Diaz-Holleran?”

“Oh, June that’s perfect!” Nora softly says, immediately knowing the name is right for her son. “My sweet Jaime, mommy loves you.” She whispers, pressing a kiss to his little cheek.

“And your mamá, we both love you with all our hearts.” June adds, laying a hand over Jaime’s back.

“We’re the luckiest women on earth.” Nora says, snuggling into June’s side, sighing contentedly. If this is how Alex and Henry have been feeling for 4 years it’s no wonder they’re always so cheerful and happy and willing to go to extreme lengths for their kids, Nora’s only been a mother for a couple of hours but already she knows she would do absolutely anything for Jaime, without complaint.

“Yeah, we are, and I love that we get to keep this from the press and only have it to ourselves.” June agrees. She and Nora have a similar agreement that Henry and Alex do, in that their kids aren’t going to grow up in the spotlight, they’re considering doing an interview and photoshoot for People Magazine, like Henry and Alex did with the twins, but are more so leaning toward posting a picture of Jaime on instagram from a position where you can’t see his face, and announcing the new member of the family that way, like Henry and Alex did with Arthur.

“Me too, I can’t wait to see the girls and Arthur with Jaime, they’re all going to be such amazing big cousins.” Nora softly says, already able to picture her two nieces and nephew fussing over their new baby cousin. Charlotte still adores babies, and so does Arthur, Sophie doesn’t mind them but she’s more interested in dogs, she and David are best pals, he’s practically become her dog now, which is extremely sweet.

It doesn’t take long for the little family of 3 to drift off into a peaceful sleep. It’s the first of many nights that the three of them cuddle up together, Jaime doesn’t stop crawling into bed with his parents until he’s 11, some would say that’s too old, but neither Nora or June would have it any other way, their family is perfect.
Martha and Philip.

Chapter Summary

Two years after the birth of her son George, Martha Fox-Mountchristen-Windsor finds out she's pregnant again, with her second child, and just like her first pregnancy she suffers immensely with Hyperemesis Gravidarum, even worse than the first time around, and this time it leaves a great impact on her mental health.

Chapter Notes

***TRIGGER WARNING***

TW/CW for talk of PTSD, anxiety and general mental health issues, as well as medication for mental illness.

It is a cold winter’s morning in London 2024 when 28 year old Martha Fox-Mounchristen-Windsor finds out she’s expecting her second child, in the most unpleasant way.

When Martha awakens in her warm bed, curled up next to Philip on this cold winter morning, she is immediately greeted with a horribly familiar pang of nausea, so intense she can’t move an inch for fear of it getting worse, and making her throw up.

The sensation is so familiar and fills her with dread, because this is exactly how she felt two years ago when she was pregnant with her son George, she had taken a home pregnancy test when she was two weeks late on her period, and it came up positive. She was thrilled, and so was Philip when she told him, but the joy only lasted for a week, because the moment Martha hit 7 weeks pregnant, she was hit with severe and intense nausea and vomiting, she couldn’t get out of bed and had to be hospitalized for a period of time, so she could be given a cocktail of medicine combined with an IV for fluids and a PICC line for nutrients, because she couldn’t keep any food or water down whatsoever. It was during her first hospital visit that she was diagnosed with Hyperemesis Gravidarum. She was in and out of hospital for these same treatments all through her pregnancy, then went into labor 3 weeks early, thankfully delivering a safe, healthy and beautiful baby boy, her sweet George William Edward.

After her first pregnancy both Martha and Philip were weary of having another, and decided to at least wait 2 or 3 years before trying again, maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if Martha were older. They had only recently begun trying again, after talking at length with the best healthcare professionals the country has to offer, and put a plan in place to try and help Martha if she ends up suffering with HG again.

Now, feeling this severe and intense nausea, Martha knows without a doubt that she’s pregnant, but how she’s going to get up to care for George or tell Philip how ill she feels, she has absolutely no idea.

Just then, she feels Philip slip out of the bed, but the sudden movement of the mattress lifting when
Philip stands up, is too much for Martha. She desperately tries to scramble out of the bed and to the bathroom, but she only manages to push herself onto her elbows on her side, when she knows she’s not going to make it to the bathroom, and ends up violently vomiting all over the floor.

“Maz?” Philip’s voice is full of concern, and seconds later Martha feels his hands pulling her hair back and rubbing her back, and talking to her in a quiet and soothing voice. “Maz are you alright?” Philip gently asks, once the vomiting has finally stopped.

“I’m pregnant.” Martha groans.


“No Pip, this is exactly how I felt with George, this extreme and intense nausea and vomiting, and I missed my period, I’m definitely pregnant and I definitely have HG again.” Martha tells him in a sullen tone, wiping at her mouth and carefully and slowly lying back against the pillows behind her.

“Do we need to go to hospital?” Philip asks, slipping his hand into Martha’s, his eyes so full of concern for her. He couldn’t love her more and it kills him to see her so ill, and fills him with guilt, afterall it’s his baby she’s carrying, he’s the one who got her pregnant, if not for him she wouldn’t be so dreadfully sick.

“I don’t know if I can get up to get out to the car.” Martha says in a gravelly voice.

“I’ll carry you, you need medicine and treatment.” Philip says.

“Oh but what about George? Who’ll look after him?” Martha asks, feeling guilty for having forgotten about her baby boy, even for just a few seconds.

“I’m sure mum could look after him, or Bea, or Henry and Alex got in last night, I’m sure they’d love to watch our little chap.” Philip softly tells her, brushing her hair out of her face.

“Alright, can you bring me a basin or something before you call your mum, please? And don’t let George see me like this.” Martha pleads, closing her eyes against the harsh winter sun, feeling a headache coming on, something else she suffered with when carrying George.

“Of course love, I think George is still asleep but I’ll take care of him if he wakes up, just call me if you need anything.” Philip bends down and presses a kiss to Martha’s cheek. “I love you.” He tells her, before grabbing the basin they use to use to wash George’s bibs, and placing it on the bed beside his wife. He then grabs his phone off the nightstand, steps into the hall and dials his mother’s number.

“Hello?” Catherine answers a few seconds later, in a cheery tone.

“Hi mum, it’s me.” Philip begins, rubbing the back of his neck as his mind fills with worry for Martha and their unborn baby.

“Hello?” Catherine asks.

“Oh hello darling, everything alright?” Catherine asks.

“Uh, not really no. We think... actually we know, Martha’s pregnant but she’s severely ill again, she vomited all over the floor just a few minutes ago, couldn’t get out of bed quick enough, we need to get her to the hospital and I was wondering if you could possibly watch George today? I’ll be back to take care of him tonight of course, but I need to be with Martha during the day.” Philip tentatively asks, hating to bother his mother, who is so very good to he, Martha, Bea, Henry and Alex, as well as everyone else she meets, she’s going to be an amazing Queen soon.
“Oh of course love, don’t you worry about getting him up and dressed or anything, I’m coming right over to Kensington to watch him at yours, you just worry about getting Martha to hospital.” Catherine orders, and Philip can hear her picking up her keys, on the other end of the phone.

“Thanks mum, you’re a life saver.” Philip tells her in an appreciative tone.

“No need for thanks Pip, it’s what mothers are for, I’ll see you in a minute.”

10 minutes later Catherine arrives and Philip greets her in the hall with a hug.

“Hello mum, thanks again for this.” He says, as they pull back from the hug. Catherine smiles and squeezes his hand.

“Like I said, no need for thanks, how is Martha now?” Catherine asks in a concerned tone. Philip sighs.

“Still very ill, she’s been sick twice more since I called you, violently sick. I called the hospital to let them know I’m taking Martha in, so hopefully they can get her on a drip and some medicine soon.” Philip responds. “I’m just glad George hasn’t woken during all this, though I do miss the little chap already, even though I only saw him when Maz and I put him to bed last night.”

“I understand Pip, I was the same when you, Bea and Henry were little, I hated being away from you, that’s why I was never one to go on Royal Tours or anything, I would’ve missed you three too much.” Catherine softly says. “Now, you go get everything sorted with Martha and once you’re gone I’ll get George up and dressed, give him his breakfast and all that, does he have nursery today?” Catherine asks. Philip shakes his head. He and Martha send George to nursery 3 days a week for a few hours, so he can socialize with other children and make friends, so the only other children in the family are Henry and Alex’s 6 month old twin daughters.

“No, not today.”

“Alright, well I’ll keep him entertained, go on, you go, and keep me updated.”

Half an hour later Martha has been admitted to hospital and is now lying on her side in a hospital bed with two IV lines in her hand, one delivering fluids and another delivering medicine, they haven’t put in a PICC line yet, but if Martha still can’t keep anything down in another day or so, they will. Philip is sitting by his wife’s bed, holding her hand that does not have the IV lines in it, his heart breaking for her. He had hated seeing her like this when she was pregnant with George and he hates seeing her like this again.

“Did you tell the others that I’m in hospital?” Martha asks in a hoarse voice, opening one eye to look at her husband, who nods.

“Yes, I did. Henry, Alex and the twins are going to extend their stay here until you’re better, possibly until the baby is born. Bea is very worried about you and sends all her love, and I won’t even tell you what Gran said.” Philip replies, scowling as he remembers the brief conversation he had with The Queen, not long ago. When he called his grandmother to tell her that Martha is pregnant but severely ill again and has been hospitalized, the evil witch had the audacity to accused Martha of over-exaggerating for attention and so she could ‘Get away from her motherly responsibilities and duties’ as if Martha is not the most adoring and dedicated mother in the world, who loves nothing more than to spend time with her son and hates being away from him for even a matter of hours. Philip has been cross and upset with his Gran since Charlotte and Sophie were born and she refused to acknowledge them as her great-granddaughters or have their births announced outside the palace, but this just makes it all so much worse and Philip is seriously
thinking of cutting contact with her.

“Pip.” Martha softly says, reaching up to lay a hand on her husband’s cheek. “Don’t let her stress you out, she’s not worth it. You have enough to worry about with me and the baby, you don’t need to worry about whatever offensive bullshit your Gran is spouting now.” Philip laughs lightly, Martha always appears so very sweet and innocent, so when she curses it’s quiet funny.

“i love you.” Phillip softly says, pressing a kiss to the back of her hand.

“Love you too.”

Two more days pass by and unfortunately Martha is not getting any better, the medicine isn’t working and she’s still being violently sick at least 30 times a day, needless to say she can’t keep anything down, so on day 3 of her hospital stay, they place a PICC line and try another cocktail of medicines to help the HG.

On the fourth day of her hospital stay, Philip has to leave for a few hours to take George to the doctor for his two year check-up, so while Bea agrees to watch the twins, Henry and Alex are more than happy to come sit with Martha for a few hours.

When they walk into her room five minutes after Philip leaves, they hardly recognize her. Martha is usually a slim faced woman who likes to wear makeup and style her hair most days, but now her face is completely bloated and swollen, there are dark circles under her eyes, her hair is haphazardly braided over one shoulder, and of course she isn’t wearing a scratch of makeup. When she smiles weakly at Henry and Alex, their hearts just about break for her.

“Hey Maz, you’re not going to puke on the floor again, right? These are my favorite shoes!” Alex asks in a light tone, taking a seat next to her bed, pleased when she lets out a faint laugh.

“No I’ve got my trusty basin here with me at all times now, I don’t think this will be leaving my side for the next 8 months.” She sighs.

“Are you feeling any better?” Henry tentatively asks.

“No, not at all. I don’t know how I’m going to get through the next 33 weeks or so.” Martha tells them.

“You’ll do it the same way you got through your pregnancy with George, you’re strong Maz, really strong, if you did it once you can do it again.” Alex assures her in a kind tone.

“He’s actually right for once, you’ll get through this, and we’re all here to support you. Is there anything we can do for you right now?” Henry asks.

“No, nothing much, I’m just glad you’re here to keep me company, how are the twins?” Martha asks, wishing she was in a fit state to see her nieces, she and Bea are in a competition to see which one of them can get one of the girls to say ‘Aunty Bea’ or ‘Aunty Martha’ first, like how Bea and Henry had a competition going on whether George would say ‘Uncle Henry’ or ‘Aunty Bea’ first. (He said Aunty Bea first, and of course Bea has never shut up about it since.)

“Absolute menaces now they’re crawling.” Alex laughs.

“But they’re our menaces.” Henry adds, smiling softly as he thinks about his daughters.

Henry and Alex’s visit cheers Martha up a bit, and when Philip surprises her a few hours later by bringing George in for a visit, it lifts her spirits even more, and makes her more hopeful that she’ll
get better.

Just like when she was pregnant with George, Martha is in and out of hospital constantly throughout this pregnancy, the only highlights for her and Philip are when at 10 weeks they find out they’re expecting a little girl, at 5 months when the baby starts kicking and Philip is able to feel it, and at 6 months when Martha has 3 good days and is well enough to attend Charlotte and Sophie’s 1st birthday party.

Despite these highlights, the pregnancy is still extremely difficult on Martha, and she is mostly very miserable throughout her pregnancy, being unable to remember what it was like to feel normal or to be able to enjoy food, to not throw up at least 30 times a day.

One day at 37 weeks, while at home with Philip and George, Martha starts to experience pains in her stomach, and when she gets up to find Philip and tell him it may be time to head in to hospital, there is a sudden gush of water from between her legs.

Martha curses under her breath, before slowly making her way out of the bedroom and toward the living room, where Philip is watching a movie with George. Martha had wanted to join them in watching the movie but bright lights trigger her HG, even watching just a minute of a movie would cause her to be vomiting on and off for the rest of the night.

“Pip.” Martha says in as calm a voice as she can manage, once she reaches the doorway to the living room. “We need to go the hospital, my waters have just broken.”

“Are you alright to wait 5 minutes while I fetch Bea?” Philip asks in an equally calm tone. Bea lives in another part of Kensington Palace, as most Princesses or Princes do, and a while back she offered to take care of George when Martha goes into labor, that way they won’t have to worry about getting him to Buckingham so Catherine can watch him, or wait for Catherine or Alex and Henry to get here to Kensington, to watch him.

“Can you put the movie on the Ipad for George before you do, please? I can’t come in unless the lights are down and the t.v. is off.” Martha asks in a guilty tone, hating to have to disrupt her son’s enjoyment of the movie (Frozen II, his favorite, he keeps asking for a Reindeer for pet, and telling them they should name his little sister Anna or Elsa, it’s rather adorable.)

“Of course.” Philip agrees. He quickly gets the movie up and running on the Ipad for George, before hurrying off to fetch Bea.

“Mummy, you watch?” George hopefully asks, as Martha sits down next to him. It breaks her heart to have to say no to him.

“Normally I would very much love to my darling, but looking at screens like that makes mummy feel very sick.” She gently explains.

“Why?” George curiously asks.

“Well because my body has to work extra hard to keep your sister safe and healthy in my tummy, and when a body works extra hard it can sometimes make a person feel very sick, and I’m one of those people. But once your sister is born, I should start to feel better.” She calmly tells him.

“Then you watch Frozen wif me?” George hopefully asks. Martha smiles and brushes his hair back from his face.

“Yes my love, I promise I’ll watch Frozen with you when I feel better.”
A few minutes later Bea walks into the room, dressed in a plaid jumper and black leggings, her hair hanging long and loose around her shoulders, and as always, a smile lighting up her face.

“Aunty Bea reporting for duty!” She announces, throwing Martha a salute, making her smile.

“Thanks Bea, we’d be lost without you.”

“It’s what Aunties are for!” Bea exclaims, leaning down to peck a kiss to her sister-in-law’s cheek. She then flops down on the couch next to George, putting one arm around him. “Hey Georgie, what’re we watching? Ooh Frozen II, good choice bud!” Knowing George is happy and content with his favorite Aunty, makes it a little bit easier for Martha to leave him.

It only takes them 10 minutes to get to St. Mary’s hospital and be escorted to The Lindo Wing, and of course there are already Paparazzi and fans camped outside, so no doubt the whole world will know that Martha is in labor, in a matter of horus.

Martha is quickly admitted and greeted by her midwife, the same midwife who delivered George and cared for her through her first pregnancy and now her second.

Philip helps Martha change into her hospital gown and then into bed, parking himself by her side, his hand in hers. Martha refuses an epidural, knowing that she can’t sit up and sit still long enough for them to place the needle, without vomiting. Instead she accepts a shot of pethidine, though by the time she is ready to push, it’s worn off.

The pushing has lasted for two whole hours for far, Martha has chosen to lie on her side, gripping Philip’s hand tightly with one hand and using the other to scrunch up her pillow, or push her hair back.

“Okay Martha I can see baby’s head, you’re nearly there now.” The midwife says in a calm and encouraging tone. Martha groans, takes a deep breath and pushes down, feeling the sweat drip down off her forehead.

“I can’t believe I said no to a bloody epidural! I’m so stupid!” Martha wails, as another contraction washes over her and she begins to push again, letting out a low groan as she feels the familiar ring of fire that means the head is almost out.

“With how sick you’re feeling and how jittery you’ve been, I doubt we would have been able to place it anyway.” The midwife gently says. “I’ve got baby’s head now Martha, just one or two more and you’ll have her.”

“You can do it Maz, I know you can, you’re the strongest, bravest woman I’ve ever met.” Philip quietly encourages her.

With one more almighty push, Martha brings her baby into the world, sighing in relief when she feels the weight lift off her, and hears her baby start to wail. Philip and a nurse help Martha onto her back, and then a blanket is placed on her chest and the baby is then placed on the blanket, covered in blood and mucus, howling and wriggling around, until Martha puts her arms around her, then she quietens down and snuggles into her mother.

“Hello.” Martha coos softly, as Philip brushes a hand over the baby’s hair. “Hello Annabelle, Miss Annabelle Victoria Beatrice Fox-Mountchristen-Windsor, oh your poor thing with such a long name.” They had settled on a girls’ name almost the minute they found out they were having a daughter, Martha had suggested Annabelle and Victoria and Philip had suggested Beatrice, after his sister, because of how much she does for them and how wonderful she is with George.
“She looks like you Maz.” Philip softly says, smiling as the baby grips onto his finger.

“She has your dark hair though.” Martha replies in a hoarse voice, resting her head on Philip’s shoulder. Philip and Bea have dark hair like their mother, while Henry got his blonde hair from their dad.

“Yes but she has your mouth and nose, just like George.”

Martha and Philip spend another few minutes fussing and cooing over Annabelle, before allowing a nurse to take for a minute to clean her up, weigh her, etc. Then Martha is able to feed her for the first time and when Annabelle is taken for her tests, Martha is able to sleep and rest after such a long night.

When she wakes up the next morning, it’s the first time in almost 9 months that she doesn’t feel severely ill and nauseous, the nausea is still there but nowhere near as intense as it was the last 9 months, Martha imagines this is what regular morning sickness feels like, and though it’s not pleasant it’s something she can absolutely deal with, though at the back of her mind there is always the worry that her HG will return.

Later that day, Bea brings George in to meet his sister, and he is absolutely infatuated with her, wanting to hold her all the time, giving her lots of kisses and cuddles and constantly calling her ‘My baby’. There’s no doubt he’s going to be a wonderful big brother, he reminds Philip of himself at that age, he was only 2 when Bea was born so doesn’t quite remember meeting her for the first time, but he was 4 when Henry came along and does have a few blurry memories of meeting and holding his baby brother for the first time, along with countless photos that his parents took.

2 days after giving birth, Martha is discharged from the hospital along with Annabelle. She and Philip have agreed to a brief appearance on the steps of The Lindo, as is tradition among the Royal Family, however she has decided to forgo the hair styling, the makeup, the stylish dress and the high-heels. It’s only been 48 hours since she gave birth, today is the first day in almost 9 months that she has been able to eat anything and isn’t relying on a PICC line and IV for nutrition and fluids. Her face is still swollen from the pregnancy, and the steroids she was given to try and combat her HG, everything hurts and she is absolutely exhausted. So even though she knows it will infuriate Queen Mary, Martha steps out onto the steps of The Lindo with her hair pulled back in a bun, dressed in a comfy jumper that still shows off her postpartum bump, flat shoes and plain black leggings.

They only stay on the steps for a few minutes, before Philip helps Martha to the car and gets Annabelle buckled into her seat, before they begin the short journey home.

Over the course of the next few weeks everyone in the family gets to meet Annabelle, and of course everyone adores her. Philip and Martha decide to ask Alex and Bea to be her Godparents (Henry and June are George’s) and they are both thrilled and happy to accept.

About a month after Annabelle’s birth, everyone around Martha begins to notice how unlike herself she is acting. She tries to avoid talking about her HG as much as she can, and often gets irritable and snappy when someone brings it up, on the off chance she does talk about it, she frets about it happening again, even if she isn’t pregnant, and often wonders if she did something wrong to make it happen, or if she could have done anything to prevent it.

Philip notices that she’s not sleeping very well, and one night she confides in him that she’s having a lot of nightmares about having HG again and being so severely ill.

In the end, a month after Martha starts to act differently, it’s Alex who encourages her to get help.
He and Martha are sitting in the gardens of Kensington Palace, out of view from the public, with George playing a few feet away from them and Annabelle asleep in her stroller, at Martha’s side, when Alex decides enough is enough and his sister-in-law needs to get professional help.

“Are you alright Maz? You don’t look so good.” Alex asks in a concerned tone, noticing her pale complexion, the dark circles under her eyes and her constant yawning.

“Yes, I’m just not sleeping well at night.” Martha says through a yawn.

“Annabelle keeping you up?” Alex asks, remembering those first early days with the twins, when he and Henry were up all hours of the night, and then grabbing minutes of sleep here and there throughout the day, he was extremely thankful he had a good year of paternity leave, he would never have been able to work while so sleep deprived.

“Not really, she only wakes up about 3 times every night, and even then it’s mostly for a feed so I don’t actually have to get up, I just take her into bed and feed her, then place her back in her bassinet, I just struggle to switch my brain and off and actually get to sleep, and whenever I do manage to, I end up having horrific nightmares about my HG.” Martha quietly confides in him.

“Maz, you’ve been through something really hard and tough and it’s clearly impacted your mental health, you should see a therapist, they can help you, you can’t go on like this.” Alex softly says.

“I-I know, in reality I know I need to see a therapist but I almost feel ashamed Alex, I know it’s not so taboo now but when I was growing up we never spoke about mental health or therapy, we just had to get over it. I’m afraid people will think I’m a rubbish mum, if I go to therapy.” Martha quietly admits in a teary tone.

“Maz, by ‘People’ do you mean The Queen?” Alex asks. Shortly before he and Henry got engaged, Alex encouraged Henry to go to therapy to deal with everything he went through with losing his father, his mother being absent, etc. and Henry told him that he’s wanted to for a while, but has been afraid of the dressing down he’ll get from his Gran. When Bea began therapy for all her issues, back in 2020, Queen Mary was extremely disapproving and kept telling Bea she was being dramatic, an attention seeker, she needs to just get over it, leave it in the past, etc.

“Maybe.” Martha’s tone is tight and wobbly.

“She doesn’t have to know, when Henry started therapy he decided not to tell his Gran and still to this day she doesn’t know he sees a therapist once a week, so if you don’t want her to know she doesn’t have to. Going to therapy to deal with what you’ve gone through will not make you a rubbish mom, it will do the opposite and help you be a better mom.” Martha is quiet for a moment, trying to hold the tears, before she nods and quietly says

“You’re right, yes, I’ll go to therapy.”

So after doing some research and having some NDAs signed, Martha begins to see a therapist once a week, who almost immediately refers her to a psychiatrist who in turn diagnoses her with PTSD and anxiety. For treatment, Martha is prescribed 10mg of Zoloft, daily, as well as weekly therapy.

After about 3 weeks of medication, weekly therapy and constant love and support from her family and friends, Martha begins to feel better, not cured, but better than she had been feeling. It will likely take a very long time to completely heal from this, if she ever will, but with her medication, therapy and support and love from family and friends, Martha is able to manage her anxiety and PTSD pretty well.
Over the next 2 years, Martha keeps her struggle with PTSD and anxiety a secret from The Queen and the public, though over the years when she hears stories of other mothers struggling with PTSD and anxiety, she wants to reach out to them, to let them know they’re not alone and there is help out there, however she knows that Queen Mary would never allow that.

So, when Queen Mary passes away a few months after Annabelle’s 2nd birthday, and Catherine is crowned just a few months later, with support and permission from Catherine and everyone else, Martha makes the decision to use her platform as a public figure, to speak out about postpartum mental illness and her struggle with anxiety, PTSD and HG.

Just a few days after getting the go-ahead from Catherine, while Philip plays with the children in the gardens, Martha sits down at her vanity table, in front of her phone which is open and streaming an Instagram live, Martha hasn’t even said anything yet and there are already millions of viewers, comments and likes.

Martha takes a deep breath, smiles into the camera and says the words she’s been longing to say for 2 long years.

“Hi everyone, as I’m sure you all know, I’m Martha Fox-Mounchristen-Windsor, I’m 28 years old, I’m married to the most wonderful man on earth, Philip Fox-Mountchristen-Windsor, I’m a musician, I’m a proud mummy to two beautiful children, George and Annabelle. I came on here today to tell you all something very important, during both my pregnancies I was severely, severely ill with extreme morning sickness, Hyperemesis Gravidarum, and as a result, for two years now, I have suffered with PTSD and anxiety, I take medication for it and I go the weekly therapy for it, and I am telling you this, to let every other mummy and parent out there that is also suffering with mental illness know, that you are not alone.”
Shaan and Zahra Part 2.

Chapter Summary

Following on from the end of Chapter 1 of this story, Zahra and Shaan have just found out that after years of struggling with infertility, that they have unknowingly conceived by themselves, without any medical intervention. All seems to be going well for Zahra while she is pregnant, however at one point in the middle of her pregnancy a huge secret is revealed to the public about Henry and Alex's family, and Zahra is desperately needed to help with damage control.

Chapter Notes

Hi lovelies!
Just want to let you know a few things before jumping into this chapter.

1. This is set right after the end of chapter 1, I don't know why I didn't post this as chapter 2, it would've made more sense, but I stupidly didn't.

2. Though this is not the last chapter or part of this story, it may be the last one uploaded for a few days or more, I'm really struggling with my mental health at the moment, and finding it very difficult to write or do anything bar sleep, so while I will try my best to keep updating as frequently as I can, just know from now on there is likely going to be a few days or weeks between chapters.

***TRIGGER WARNING***

TW/CW for talk of miscarriage, infertility and pregnancy loss, please be careful if you choose to read this and those subjects affect you negatively!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shaan looks between Zahra and the pregnancy test in her hand disbelievingly for a few seconds, before stammering

“H-h-how?” After all the trouble they went through to get pregnant, and all the loses they had over the years, they assumed one if not both of them were infertile, they never had an official diagnosis from a doctor but it just made sense. As a result of this, they never bothered with protection, it never crossed their minds that they would end up conceiving on their own, without medical intervention.

“I don’t know.” Zahra replies in a breathy tone. “I just... I really don’t know, after all the trouble we went through with IVF and the miscarriages and everything, I have no idea how this is even possible right now.”

“We shouldn’t get our hopes up though, right? At least, not until after the 12th week?” Shaan cautiously asks, hoping Zahra won’t get upset with him for bringing up the possibility of
miscarriage.

“That’s the thing Shaan, I’m already 4 months, this is the 4th test I took, one of the other ones tells you how far along you are and according to it, I’m about to be 5 months pregnant.” Zahra explains in a disbelieving tone, still trying to wrap her mind around all this.

“Are you sure?” Shaan asks. Zahra nods.

“I was shocked at first too, so I checked my period tracking app and I haven’t had my period in almost 5 months, sometimes that’s normal for me, I don’t have a regular period, you know that’s one of the reasons I struggled to get pregnant, so I didn’t think anything of it, the only reason I took a test was because I’ve been feeling kind of sick and tired lightly and I noticed I’m gaining weight.” Zahra explains to him, her hand resting on her stomach. Shaan is quiet for a minute, before breaking out into a huge smile and embracing his wife tightly.

“This is amazing, we’re going to have another baby, Max you’re going to be a big brother!” He exclaims, when he pulls back, keeping one arm around Zahra’s waist and smiling over at his son, who is paying no attention to them, absorbed in his toys.

“I’m going to call the hospital today and book in for a scan and check up as soon as possible, and I want to pay for those extra scans, after everything we went through before Max, I want to be as sure as possible that this baby is okay.” Zahra tells Shaan, looking down at her stomach, still hardly able to believe that she’s actually pregnant, and made it farther than she has in any of her other 4 pregnancies, they all ended before 12 weeks, now she’s almost 17 weeks along and has even felt some movement from the baby, that up until now she didn’t realize was movement.

Shaan smiles and kisses the top of her head.

“Of course, whatever you want.”

Since Zahra is out of the first trimester (and well into the second) and the risk of miscarriage has greatly decreased, along with the fact that she’s really starting to show and won’t be able to hide it anymore, especially when she usually wears tight shirts and blazers for work, they decide to tell their friends and loved ones, as and when the opportunity arises.

One day a few weeks after finding out about the baby, Zahra finds herself sitting in Ellen’s office at her home only about 10 minutes from Zahra’s (She and Leo decided to stay in D.C. after her second term as President and after they left The White House, because all their family and friends are in D.C. and they want to be close to them.) going over some paperwork with Ellen, when the smell of coffee wafting over from the mug on Ellen’s disk, hits her and makes her feel nauseous.

“Are you alright, Zahra?” Ellen asks, when she notices her friend pale and cover her mouth with the back of her hand. Zahra nods and when the wave of nausea passes a few seconds later, she takes her hand away from her mouth and sighs in relief.

“Yes I’m fine, thanks, just the smell of the coffee is making me feel a bit sick.” She says, sitting back in her chair. At this, Ellen raises an eyebrow.

“Oh really? That’s a strange thing to make someone feel sick.” She says in a knowing tone.

“Not if that someone’s pregnant.” Zahra replies, a smile tugging at her lips.

“Zahra, are you...?” Ellen trails off in a hopeful tone, leaning forward in anticipation. Zahra breaks out into a full smile and nods.
“Yes, yes I am, I’m pregnant, 5 months.” She joyfully says, resting a hand on her stomach.

“Oh Zahra! I’m so thrilled for you, congratulations!” Ellen exclaims, squeezing her hand in excitement, thrilled beyond words for her friend.

“Thank you, Shaan and I are thrilled too.”

“It must have come as a surprise.” Ellen says. Zahra nods.

“Yes, definitely, but the best surprise I could ask for, I couldn’t be happier, I can’t believe I’m going to be lucky enough to have two children, for the last year I could hardly believe my luck in being Max’s mom, now I get to be this one’s mom too.” Zahra softly says, running a hand down her bump, eagerly anticipating meeting her baby and holding them for the first time, getting to see Shaan and the baby together, and Max and the baby.

“Do you know the sex? When are you due?” Ellen curiously asks, already forming a mental list of all the gifts she wants to get for Zahara, Shaan, Max and the new baby.

“I’m due at the end of August, or rather she is due at the end of August, it’s a girl.” Shaan had been completely stunned when the OB told them the sex of the baby, he had been so certain they were going to have a boy, and it’s not often he’s proved wrong.

“Oh Zahra I couldn’t be more thrilled for you, there’s no one more deserving of this than you. You don’t worry a bit about work for the next 5 or so months, okay? You leave that up to me and take all the time off you need, both before and after the baby is born, I remember what it’s like working while heavily pregnant, it’s not fun.” Ellen says in a stern tone, giving Zahra one of her ‘Don’t argue with me’ looks, that she’s so very good at giving.

“I’m surprised Oscar stood for you working while you were pregnant, from what you tell me he was so protective of you while you were pregnant.” Zahra replies, recounting Ellen’s stories of how Oscar would hardly let her lift a finger during her pregnancies. Zahra can tell Shaan is also not eager for her to do much during the pregnancy, but he knows better than to argue with his wife.

“He didn’t love the idea and frankly neither did I, but we needed the money, especially when I was pregnant with June, I worked right up until I went into labor, when I was pregnant with June, I’ll never forget standing outside the courtroom getting withering and judgemental looks for my massive bump, then feeling my waters break just seconds before we were meant to go in.” Ellen replies, wincing at the memories, of how she was never taken seriously at work while she was pregnant and how June was almost born in a Courthouse in Texas, because Oscar got stuck in traffic on the way to get Ellen and take her to the hospital.

“Ellen I always think I couldn’t admire you more and then you go and tell me stories like that and my admiration for you skyrockets, my god you’re the strongest person I’ve ever met.” Zahra says in admiring tone. Still after all these years, she sometimes finds it hard to believe that she is best friends with and works for the Ellen Claremont.

“Oh you flatter me.” Ellen laughs, “Come on, let’s get the rest of this paperwork done and then I want to see that adorable little boy of yours and get my due cuddles with him!”

2 weeks later, while Zahra and Shaan are at home with Max, both on their day off, Zahra’s phone rings while she is watching T.V. and indulging in a pregnancy craving, while Max naps curled up by her side, and Shaan scrolls through social media on his Ipad.

“Oh shit!” Shaan says, just as Zahra picks up the phone. She gives her husband a confused look,
before answering.

“Hello?” She softly asks, so as not to wake Max.

“Zahra.” Ellen’s familiar voice comes down the line, though there’s an unusual hint of worry in her tone.

“What's wrong? I can hear it in your voice Ellen, what’s wrong?”

“I hate to ask you, but we kind of need you to come to the house, we need you for damage control.”

“Ellen, what happened?” Ellen sighs before saying

“Someone has leaked it to the press that Nora is this twins biological mother and that she was a surrogate for Henry and Alex, they know she carried the twins for them, had a failed IVF attempt and a miscarriage, they know everything and they’ve published it all in an online article.”

“Fuck.” Zahra swears, wincing at the harshness of her voice, and laying a hand on Max’s back and glancing at him to make sure he’s still asleep. “I’ll be there in 5 minutes.” She hangs up before Ellen can respond, and gently slips away from Max’s side, standing up and grabbing a jacket.

“Where are you going?” Shaan asks, setting the Ipad down and looking at Zahra.

“Work, Ellen needs me, someone leaked it to the press who released it in an article to the public, that Nora is the twins’ biological mother and carried them for Alex and Henry, and that she had a failed IVF attempt and a miscarriage, as their surrogate, they know everything, I have to go help out, damage control.” Zahra explains, grabbing her car keys.

“I just read the article, whoever leaked it has access to the twins’ medical records because there’s a photo of the twins’ medical records and it’s listed that their biological mother is Nora Holleran.” Shaan says in a quiet tone. “Whoever did this must be very sure they won’t be caught because they broke HIPPA laws.”

“Fuck, can you send me a link to the article?” Zahra asks, pulling her hair free from the collar of her jacket.

“Already did.”

“This is why you’re the best husband ever, see you later, love you.” Zahra says, leaning down to give him a brief kiss, before turning to kiss Max on the cheek and quickly slip out the door.

20 minutes later she is standing in Ellen’s living room, along with Ellen, Leo, Oscar, Henry, Alex, June and Nora. The twins and Arthur are in the garden with Pez, who has recently come over for a visit.

“So we know that the person who did this has access to the twins’ medical records, do you have a list of every doctor, nurse and other healthcare professional that’s cared for the girls, since they were born?” Zahra asks, trying to keep her stress levels down, for the sake of the baby.

“Yep already sent it to you.” Alex tells her.

“Nora what are the chances we find the person who leaked this information?” Ellen calmly asks.

“I’d say about a 30% chance, whoever did this was smart in not leaking it themselves, I probably
could have traced their IP address if they had.” Nora replies.

“And they didn’t blur out anything on those medical records, just circled Nora’s name listed as
their biological mother, the whole world knows their medical history now, private information,
they know about Charlotte’s chronic ear infections, they know Sophie had croup, that both girls
had chicken pox, that Sophie is allergic to bee stings and Charlotte is asthmatic, everything that
should be private isn’t anymore, that bloody page even had fucking pictures of the girls, Alex and I
have worked so hard for years to keep them out of the spotlight so they could have normal
childhoods and not be recognized every time they go out, and now that’s all gone down the drain!”
Henry’s voice is full of rage and anger, no one has ever seen him so angry.

“I can’t deal with this.” Zahra groans, running a hand over her face. “I’m almost 6 months
pregnant, I’m growing another person, I can’t deal with this stress.”

“Hormones getting to you?” Alex asks in what is meant to be a joking tone, but is not taken that
way. Zahra glares at him, making him wish he had never opened his mouth.

“Hey you little shit, don’t speak to a pregnant woman like that, I taught you better!” Ellen scolds,
giving her son a hard stare that makes him want to never, ever open his mouth again.

Before anyone can say anything else, the door bangs open and Amy rushes in, a look of fury,
delight, pride and strangely, joy, on her face.

“I know who did it, I know who leaked the information!” She declares, shocking everyone in the
room.

“What?! How?” June asks.

“Long story but bare with me. Claud went into labor last night, and so we went to the birthing
center, everything went great, we have another daughter, I’ll tell you more about her later because
believe me she is the most amazing new baby on earth.

So about an hour ago, just minutes after this all leaked, I went back to the birthing center to be with
Claudia and Jessie— that’s what we named the baby, Jessie— after checking on Maya who was
staying with my mom. I was just about to go into Claud’s room when I heard two nurses talking in
the room next door. One of them was telling the other how she had assisted at Charlotte and
Sophie’s birth, and how she had been so excited to meet Henry and Alex, but turned out to be
extremely disappointed because she asked for a photo at one point during Nora’s labor, and Henry
and Alex said no.

Then she went on to say she saw them again recently, while they were there with Arthur getting
him up to date on his vaccinations. She said that she asked for a photo again but Alex and Henry
said they were sorry but they were in a rush and had to go, she didn’t believe them though and
thought they were just making an excuse not to have to take a photo with her.

Well apparently she got so mad she decided to take revenge, and one night while she was on night-
shift she went to the filing cabinets and found the twins’ medical records, took a photo, circled the
part that listed Nora as their biological mother, then using an anonymous email sent it to all the
tabloids she could think of.”

There is a stunned silence for a few seconds, after Amy finishes her speech, until Oscar speaks up.

“Did you get the name of the nurse?” He asks. Amy nods.

“She came in to take Jessie for some tests, she told us her name is Nurse Robin Doyle.”
“So what happens now?” Henry asks, still worried sick about the twins’ now compromised privacy.

“I think the best course of action is for Amy to confront this nurse, Amy, can you get a confession out of her? And record it?” Ellen asks, even though Amy is technically meant to be on maternity leave.

“Absolutely, and don’t worry about the twins’ safety and privacy, Nora you can help me get those records off the internet, right?” Amy asks, looking to Nora who is clutching June’s hand tightly, secretly worrying about all the comments about her and her status as a surrogate and egg donor, that are surely coming her way.

“Yeah absolutely.” She says with a nod.

“And I’ll do what I can to stop anymore copies of those magazines and tabloids being sold and printed, and try and get rid of any existing copies.” Zahra adds.

“I’ll help you, you need to make sure you aren’t stressing yourself out Zahra.” Ellen says in a stern, no-nonsense tone, the way Zahra has heard her talk to June and Alex and even Nora and Henry, before. Normally Zahra wouldn’t stand someone talking to her like they’re her mother, but with Ellen it’s different.

“And I suppose we better just tell the whole story to the public, if that’s alright with you Nora.” Alex sighs, hating that this has to happen at all.

“Yeah, fine by me, I’d rather we just get it all out in the open then have people speculate, I’m sure there are already rumors flying around that Alex and I cheated on June and Henry, with each other, and that’s how I got pregnant, not IVF.” Nora says in an irritated tone. Everytime she and Alex are photographed together, the media goes wild speculating if they’re having an affair, it’s stressful for them both, why can’t the media just accept and understand that they’re nothing but friends?

“I’ll help you write the address, we should probably get started on it as soon as possible.” June quietly says, squeezing Nora’s hand assuringly. Poor Nora has been through so much lately, she’s only very recently recovered from her miscarriage, she doesn’t need this shit now.

It takes Henry, Alex, Nora and June 2 days in full to write an address to the public, telling the whole story start to finish, of how Nora offered to be Henry and Alex’s egg donor and surrogate, and how they went through IVF and conceived the twins.

Two days later the address is broadcasted live from a news studio, with Henry, Alex and Nora taking turns to tell the story and explain everything, as well as agreeing to a brief interview about the whole thing, afterwards.

After that, it all dies down within a few weeks, there are of course still some obsessed with the scandal and who keep speculating about the whole thing, but for the most part it has all died down within a month or two.

3 months later, with only 4 weeks to go until her due date, Zahra is officially on maternity leave and she and Shaan are busy preparing for the baby. Max is very excited to meet his little sister, he always loves to curl up next to Zahra and rest his head on her bump and and talk to the baby, he loves to feel her kick and is always talking about everything he’s going to teach her and what a great big brother he’s going to be.

On one sunny August day, Zahra gets a text from Ellen while she is waiting in an exam room at the
hospital, waiting for the doctor to come in and do her check up, which occurs weekly now.

*Lunch at mine today? Leo’s at work and I miss my best friend!*

Zahra smiles at the text and quickly replies

*Sounds great, be there in about 30 minutes.*

A few minutes later the doctor has finished her physical exam and is now asking Zahra some questions about how she’s been feeling since the last time she saw her.

“Have you had anymore headaches since last time I saw you?” The Doctor asks. Headaches have been the bane of Zahra’s life these last few weeks, as well as swollen ankles so bad that she can hardly get her shoes on anymore and has resorted to wearing just her socks around the house, and some slip on pumps she’s had for years, whenever she goes out. It’s a good thing she doesn’t have to worry about work anymore, because there is no way she could fit in her high-heels.

“Practically all day everyday, and it doesn’t help that Max has discovered a love for music, and recently received a very, very loud toy guitar from his Uncle Alex, who I am going to murder next time I see him.” Zahra replies in a tired tone, one hand resting on her bump, the other pinching the bridge of her nose. She’s glad Max is discovering his interests and passions, but of all times to discover a love for guitar, he had to do while his poor mother is almost 9 months pregnant?

“Huh, your ankles look really swollen, how long has that been going on?” The doctor asks in a concerned tone.

“About 2 weeks now, I can’t take Max for walks anymore because I can’t fit in my shoes.” Zahra tells her. The doctor bites her lip.

“Zahra, I’m going to ask you for a urine test and take your blood pressure, from what you’re telling me it seems very likely that you have preeclampsia, and if that’s the case I’m going to suggest we admit you and start you on pitocin to induce your labor.” This news absolutely terrifies Zahra, so she does exactly what the doctor asks, and an hour later is being told the news she was dreading.

“I’m sorry to say there was definitely protein in your urine, it’s preeclampsia alright. I’m going to go have your room setup on the maternity ward, then I’ll have a porter come take you down there where I’ll meet you to get everything started, in the meantime I suggest you call or contact whoever you want and need, and ask somebody to bring your bag if it’s packed, and stuff for the baby, because you’re not going home without your baby in your arms.”

It takes Zahra a few minutes to process all this, and after a few minutes the ringing of her phone pulls her from her thoughts. When she looks at the screen she sees that it’s Ellen calling, so she answers without hesitation.

“Hey, Ellen.” Zahra answers in a shaky tone, trying to pull herself together.

“Hey, is everything alright? You said you’d be at mine for lunch in 20 minutes, but that was an hour ago, is everything okay?” Ellen asks in a calm and gentle voice.

“I... I’m in the hospital and... they just diagnosed me with preeclampsia, they’re going to induce me.”


“I...well now that I think of it, Shaan and I need someone to watch Max, my mother was suppose to
be flying over in two weeks to watch him while I’m in hospital, but she can’t get here on such short notice and I need Shaan here with me.” Zahra replies, hardly able to believe that the next time she sees Max, he’ll be a big brother

“Oh Leo and I will watch him.” Ellen quickly offers, lifting a weight from Zahra’s shoulders. There’s not many people she trusts with Max, but Ellen is at the top of the list of people she does trust with her baby boy.

“Really? That would help a lot, I know Max would be happy and safe with you.” Zahra’s tone is full of relief.

“Absolutely, I can pick him up if you need me to, or Shaan can drop him here on the way to the hospital, either works for me.”

“I’ll have to ask Shaan what works for him and get back to you.”

So within the next 20 minutes, Shaan is up to date on everything that’s going on with Zahra and the baby and is on his way to the hospital, but he’ll stop off at Ellen’s and drop Max off first.

By the time Shaan arrives, Zahra is already set up in her hospital room, working through the first couple of contractions. Luckily the pitocin worked right away, and there’s no doubt this baby is coming soon.

“Hey, I’m sorry I didn’t get here sooner, Max was a bit clingy so it took a while for me to able to leave.” Shaan explains, taking a seat next to his wife on the bed and slipping his hand into hers.

“He was? Was he okay when you left?” Zahra asks in a concerned tone. Shaan nods.

“Yeah completely fine, when I left he was helping Ellen water the plants in the garden, cheeky bugger attempted to pour the watering can all over me.” Shaan laughs. Zahra smiles but the smile soon vanishes when another contraction hits, gripping her with it’s pain. She can’t believe she felt jealous of Nora when she saw her in labor with the twins, can’t believe she ever actually wanted to do this, the pain is horrible and she’d like to just fucking have her baby now.

“Fucking hell this hurts!” Zahra exclaims, squeezing Shaan’s hand tightly.

“Do you want me to get the nurse or someone, to give you something for the pain?” Shaan asks. Zahra shakes her head.

“Not yet, believe me I do want an epidural, but... not just yet.” Zahra grinds out as the pain peaks.

Things go on like this for a few more hours, and Zahra almost begins to think she might be able to do this drug free, until the doctor comes in to check the position of the baby, and finds out that she’s breech, feet first. Luckily this particular OB is happy to avoid a C-section (something Zahra very much does not want, looking after a new baby and a one year old while recovering from major surgery? No thank you.) unless it’s absolutely necessary, but does insist on Zahra delivering in the OR, in case they need to do an emergency Cesarean, being right there in the OR if things take a turn for the worse, will be much safer for both Zahra and baby. Zahra is fine with this arrangement, though is not about to do it without an epidural, if she does need a Cesarean she wants to be awake and aware for her baby’s birth and get to hold her right away.

After another 6 painful hours of labor, it’s finally time to deliver and before Zahra knows it she’s in the OR with a few nurses, her OB and Shaan, two nurses holding her legs, Shaan holding her hand and the OB delivering the baby. Pushing is much harder than Zahra ever thought it would be, especially when the baby is breech.
After a solid hour of pushing, the OB gives Zahra an encouraging look and gently says

“Almost there now Zahra, but we’ve come to the tricky bit. Baby’s out as far as her tummy, I’m going to need a few more really big pushes now, give it everything you’ve got.” Zahra takes a deep breath, lets go of Shaan’s hand so she can hold onto the back of her legs, and pushes down again with all her strength, groaning in pain and discomfort.

“That’s it, baby’s out as far as her chin, just one more!” The OB encourages. Zahra gathers all her strength and energy and puts it all into the last push, and before she knows it a loud wail is ringing through the OR, and the doctor is holding the baby up for she and Shaan to see. Zahra laughs lightly, and then lets her head and shoulders relax back down onto the operating table. She feels Shaan press a kiss to her forehead and quietly says

“You’re amazing babe, you did so good, I married superwoman.” Zahra laughs and pulls him down fora brief kiss. Seconds later, the baby is passed up to her and the joy Zahra feels when holding her daughter for the first time, is indescribable. She had loved her so intensely while carrying her, and now she’s fallen in love all over again. Her little scrunched up red face with Shaan’s nose and mouth, Zahra’s bone structure and eye shape and a few wisps of dark hair, is the most beautiful and perfect face she’s ever laid eyes on, alongside Max’s of course.

“Hello.” Zahra sniffles. “HI baby girl, my Hope, it’s so good to finally meet you.” Zahra has had a girl’s name picked out for years now, and is thrilled to finally be able to use it. Hope Karishma Srivastava.

About half an hour later, Zahra and Shaan are back in the room Zahra labored in, this time with Hope in Zahra’s arms. Zahra hasn’t been able to stop looking at Hope since she was born, and Shaan has also fond it difficult to look away, he couldn’t love his girls more and can’t wait to get home to Max and be with his 3 favorite people.

With Zahra’s permission, an hour after Hope is born, Shaan snaps a picture of Zahra sitting up in the hospital bed with Hope snuggled up inside her hospital gown, and posts it to Instagram to update thier friends and family, as well as those who follow their YouTube channel, where they still post about parenthood and their journey with infertility, and now their miracle baby. Shaan isn’t a poet or writer like Henry or Alex, so he goes with a more simple caption for the photo.

Zahra and I proud and thrilled to announce the healthy birth of our beautiful baby girl, our Hope Karishma Srivastava.

Almost right away the texts and comments and well wishes from their family and friends flood in.

The first baby in our friend group not to have a ridiculously long name, way to go Hope! Congrats to my favorite mean friend and my favorite not mean firend! is commented by Alex.

What a cutie! Congratulations on your beautiful miracle! Is commented by Henry.

LKADDJGIORHTEioh, she’s so cute, I cannot cope! Congratulations! I can’t wait for my snuggles and kisses with her! Such a very in character comment from June.

Brb, adopting all the babies, Hope this is your fault for being so damn cute! Typical Nora.

Congratulations! A very simple commnet from Oscar, who only uses instagram to show off pictures of his grandkids, to his co-workers.

Congratulations to you both! Hope is so beautiful and perfect, and what a fitting name she has!
I couldn’t think of two people more deserving of this happiness than you and Zahra, congratulations again! A very kind and heart-warming message from Ellen.

“She’s not even a day old and she’s already extremely popular.” Shaan laughs, after reading out some of the comments and messages to Zahra, who has been contentedly resting in bed with Hope snuggled up on her chest, for a good few hours now. She may be just a few hours post-postpartum but Shaan doesn’t think he’s ever seen Zahra look so radiant and there’s certainly nothing he loves more than seeing her holding one of their babies, the screensaver on his phone is a photo of Zahra holding a beaming nine month old Max.

“No surprise there, she is the most perfect baby girl in the world.” Zahra softly says, pressing a kiss to Hope’s cheek.

The next day Ellen brings Max by, to meet his sister, and just like Zahra and Shaan thought, he absolutely adores her, never wanting to leave her side for a second, talking softly to her and telling her it’s okay, whenever she cries, he’s only been a big brother for less than a day but he’s already so wonderful at it.

2 days after Hope’s birth, Zahra and Hope are discharged from the hospital and able to go home. So the family of 4 have spent the day curled up in bed, snuggling, eating good food, watching T.V. shows and movies, and Facetiming some of their family and friends.

It is now just gone 5 P.M. and Zahra is just coming back into the bedroom after taking a much longed for bath. When she quietly steps into the room, she sees that Max is curled up to Shaan’s side while Shaan cradles Hope with one arm and has the other around Max, and is quietly telling Max the story of how he and Zahra met.

Zhara is not usually a very emotional person, and most certainly isn’t one to cry from either joy or sadness, but as she stands in her bedroom doorway, years after all her miscarriages and failed IVF attempts, and a failed adoption, watching her husband, son and daughter, she can’t help but shed a few tears, both for the joy she is experiencing right now, with her beautiful and perfect family, and also for the pain and struggle she went through for so many years, to get to where she is today, and most of all she sheds a tear for the 4 babies that she carried for such a brief time before losing them, because they were her children too and unlike Max and Hope, she never got the chance to meet or love and raise those babies, but they will always hold a special place in her heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! While I was writing this part, I thought I might write a story similar to this but focusing on Ellen, Oscar, Catherine and Arthur when they were young and becoming parents, I think it would interesting to explore Ellen and Leo’s marriage and how they juggled their careers while being new parents, and how Catherine was before Arthur died and how The Queen reacted to Catherine's pregnancies. Please let me know if you would also be interested in a story like that!
Rafael meets The Royal Twins.

Chapter Summary

One day a week after the birth of their twin daughters, Henry and Alex are relaxing with the babies when they get a very unexpected yet welcome visitor, Rafael Luna.

Chapter Notes

Hi lovelies!
Just want to jump in here quickly to mention that this chapter takes place just a week after Charlotte and Sophie were born, I've decided that some of the chapters in this story won't be in chronological order, so from now on I'll make sure to add either at the top of the story or here in chapter notes, when the chapter takes place.

It is a stormy February day in 2025, when there is an unexpected knock on the front door of Alex and Henry’s brownstone. They aren’t expecting anyone today, they’ve let their families and friends know that they’re going to take a few weeks to themselves with their new twin babies, before welcoming visitors.

“Did you order something?” Alex asks Henry, carefully getting to his feet, with Sophie cradled in his arms.

“No, and I take it you didn’t either.” Henry says, gently bouncing Charlotte when she starts to fuss. The twins are only a week old and yet they already hate being separated, and will fuss and cry when the other isn’t around, though Henry and Alex are sure that in no time they’ll be at each other’s throats, like most siblings.

“No, maybe it’s a letter we have to sign for or something.” Alex guesses. When he opens the door, he has to do a double take, the person standing before him is the last person he was expecting, but he couldn’t be more thrilled to see them.

“Rafael!” Alex exclaims in delight. “I thought you were out of town for the next few weeks!”

“I’m meant to be but I came back for a few days after I was in California working with your dad, then I was meant to go back for more campaigning, but my flight got canceled because of the storm. I know you’re not accepting visitors right now, but I was hoping you wouldn’t mind if I called around for a while, seeing as I’m flying out again the second the storm is over and then won’t be back for a few more weeks.” Rafael calmly explains.

“Oh no of course we don’t mind! Come in, it’s so good to see you!” Alex happily
says, gesturing for Raf to come in out of the cold. “Henry! Look it’s Rafael!” Henry grins at Alex’s joy and momentarily stops scratching David’s ear (which makes David very upset) to wave to Rafael.

“Hi Raf!” He says in a cheerful tone. Rafael smiles.

“Good to see you Henry. So, Alex, I hear I missed out on some pretty exciting things while I was away, mainly you becoming a dad.” Rafael says, turning his attention back to Alex, who beams proudly and nods.

“Yeah, to twins no less! This is Sophie and Henry has Charlotte, I’ll tell you their full names if you want but it’ll take a hot minute.” Rafael laughs and scratches David’s head as the dog runs up and jumps up for pats and scratches, since Henry didn’t give him attention for two seconds.

“Bloody drama queen, I don’t pet him for two seconds and he hates me now.” Henry laughs.

“Two new babies and a dog? Must be a lot of work.” Raf notes, as he and Alex join Henry on the sofa.

“Like you wouldn’t believe, we’ve been up for hours with the girls, since what time Henry, 5:00?” Alex asks, leaning in to his husband and stretching an arm above his head.

“Yeah about that, they slept a bit earlier but then David wanted to go for a w-a-l-k so I had to take him while Alex tried to get some cleaning and tidying done.” Henry answers, pulling the blanket around his shoulders closer. He still hasn’t gotten use to the extreme heat and extreme cold here in America, he thought it was cold back home in London but it’s nothing compared to here.

“Which as you can see didn’t happen, but it’s fine because I have the most brilliant mother in the world who brought us over a ton of paper plates and plastic cutlery so we don’t have to worry about doing dishes for a while.” Alex says in a grateful tone, still so glad his mom came up with that genius idea.

“Hey at least you have an excuse, having two new babies, I just don’t do my dishes half the time because I really hate doing dishes.” Raf laughs, though dreading going back to his apartment where he knows there’s a stack of dirty dishes waiting for him.

“See, this is why I like you so much Raf, you make excellent points.” Alex says. “Right Soph? Doesn’t Rafael make great points? Henry, I swear she’s smiling!” Alex exclaims, blindly hitting Henry’s arm to get his attention. Even though she’s only one week old, Alex has been convinced for days now that Sophie has started smiling, Henry knows this is utter tosh.

“Alex it’s physically impossible, she’s too young, babies don’t smile till they’re about 3 months, at the earliest.” Henry sighs, having had this argument many times with his husband.

“I’m gonna ask the doctor next week when we take the twins in for their checkup.” Alex says.

“Oh brilliant, then you’ll finally see I’m right.” Henry retorts. Alex just rolls his eyes.

“Hey Raf, do you wanna hold one of the babies?” Alex asks eagerly. Rafael hesitates for a second, having very little experience with children, he has one sister who has chosen to not have children, and he himself would like to have kids someday, but not for another while, he’d like to foster once he’s able to retire from politics, and focus on helping children in need.
“Oh, I’m not sure, I haven’t held a baby in a really long time.” Raf says in a hesitant tone.

“Raf, I don’t think Nora had ever held a baby at all before the twins came along, but she was able to hold them without breaking them or dropping them.” Alex assures him.

“Well... alright, I suppose it would be nice.” Rafael agrees. Alex beams and helps Rafael position his arms correctly, before carefully lowering Sophie into them.

“This is Baby B, younger by two minutes, Princess Sophie Ellen Rosa Claremont-Diaz-Windsor.” Alex proudly says, sitting back once Raf has a good hold on Sophie. Raf chuckles.

“That’s a long name, but your mom must be really happy to have her name in the mix there.” He says.

“Oh yeah she’s always bragging about it, she loves being a grandma, or rather an abuelita, she hates when we refer to her as grandma, says she’s too young.” Alex laughs.

“Your dad is very proud too, he brags about the twins at any chance he gets, anyone he meets is treated to a tirade about his wonderful granddaughters, and pictures of course, he’s a very proud abuelo.” Raf says in an amused tone, picturing the looks on interns faces when they meet Oscar for the first time, only to be ambushed with stories of Oscar’s grandkids and pictures of the babies, it’s rather sweet actually.

“Yeah he told me, he’s a softie at heart, my old man.” Alex smiles.

“Must seem to him that you were only this size yeseterday.” Rafael comments. Though he knows Oscar just loves being an abuelo, it must be hard for him to believe this his kids are grown up enough to have their own kids.

“It’s actually June who says that the most, like she’s not just 3 years older than me.” Alex says, rolling his eyes. As if June can even remember when he was a newborn, she forgets everything.

“Bea is the same, she’s practically my second mum, has been since dad died.” Henry lightly chimes in, smiling at the thought of Bea and her constant fussing and loving, while also aching for his dad, who would have been so proud of him, who would’ve stood by him when he came out, who would’ve loved the twins and been as much as a doting grandpa as Oscar is, if not more.

“My sister was and is the same, she took me in when my parents kicked me out after I came out at 16, she can be a total pain in the ass sometimes but I wouldn’t trade for the world, she saved my life.” Rafael quietly says.

“She must be proud of you now.” Henry says. Rafael smiles and nods.

“She is, and I’m so proud of her, I just wish every kid who is in the same situation I was, had support like I did.” Raf sighs, knowing that so many young LGBTQ+ people are left with nowhere to go when their parents turn their backs on them.

“That’s one of the reasons Pez and I opened the LGBTQ+ youth shelters, unfortunately we can’t help every single homeless queer person- though we will try- but we can help a lot of them, make
some sort of a difference.” Henry says. Much as he’s loved spending these last few days and weeks tucked up here at home with Alex and the babies, he misses visiting and helping out at the Youth Shelter every day, the kids there are great, so full of personality and passion and joy for life.

“I think I’ll pay a visit to the shelter before I leave, I could help out for a few hours, I don’t have anything else to do, might as well make use of my time, I hate being idle.” Raf says, smiling as Sophie grips onto his finger and blinks up at him with her wide blue eyes. She’s one of the most awake and aware newborns that he’s ever seen. (Not that he’s seen many newborns.)

“Really? The kids there would love that! A lot of them look up to you, just like I did and still do.” Alex says.

“Oh kid you shouldn’t be looking up to me anymore, in fact it’s me who should be looking up to you, you’re brave and strong and a great role model for other young queer people out there, an openly bisexual brown man in a same-sex relationship in a high up position in the world? Not something you see a lot, unfortunately. And now you’ve got two kids on top of all that, and I have no doubt you’re gonna be a great dad, you don’t need to look up to anyone anymore Alex, you’ve made a good life for yourself vato, and I’m proud of you.” Alex blinks back the tears of joy and pride and in a tight tone he says

“Yeah whatever man, don’t make me feel stuff, you know I hate it when people make me feel stuff.”

Rafael’s visit lasts another hour, during which time he gets to also hold Charlotte and feed Sophie her bottle (Charlotte will not eat unless Henry or Alex are feeding her, they’ve tried letting Ellen, Nora, June, Bea, Leo, Pez, and a lot of other people feed her, but she refuses to eat unless it’s her daddy or papa feeding her.) He also ends up with baby-spit up on his shirt, but he doesn’t mind, the twins are far too cute to be anyway annoyed with them, and the stain will come out in the wash.

When Rafael leaves he promises to make his visits more frequent now the babies are in the picture, and promises to keep in touch while he’s out of town, working with Oscar.

“That was a nice surprise for you.” Henry says in a fond tone, as Alex closes the door after Raf leaves, and leans back against it, utterly exhausted. He loved seeing Raf again, but all that social interaction on such little sleep has left him completely drained.

“Yeah, it was.” Alex agrees, groaning when David runs over and starts jumping up at him, a clear sign he wants to go for a walk. In fairness he had been very patient when Raf was here. “Ugh I better take you for a walk before you piss yourself huh bud?” He sighs, rubbing David’s back. “Okay, okay, give me a second you goofy dog.” Alex crosses the room and carefully passes Sophie to Henry, careful not to wake Charlotte sleeping in Henry’s lap. “You’ll be okay on your own with the girls for half an hour, right?” Alex asks.

“Yes love, I am their dad, I know how to look after them.” Henry replies in an amused tone.

“I know I know; I just know how fussy they can get sometimes and how hard it is to calm them even when we’re both trying. ”Alex replies, pushing his hair out of his face.

“If it gets too much, I’ve got super-aunty Bea’s number ready to dial and she’ll be here in two minutes flat.” Henry assures him. Bea really has been wonderful with the twins since their birth, she’s a wonderful Aunty already.

“Okay, back soon, I love you.” Alex says, giving Henry a brief kiss before grabbing David’s lead.
“Love you too.” Henry says.

“Come on David you goofball, let's get this over with.” Two minutes later Alex and David are out the door and on their merry way.

Henry smiles down at the sleeping babies in his arms, his heart so full of love for them, and for Alex, and the rest of their family.

“We’re very lucky to have him, aren’t we babies?” Henry softly says. “He’s the most wonderful man in the world, your papa, and I am the luckiest man in the world to love him, to be his husband, and to love you cuties and be your dad.”
Rafael meets the new Prince

Chapter Summary

Two months after Henry and Alex adopt their son Arthur, they take he and their twin daughters to The Senate Building to visit Oscar at work, and are surprised and thrilled to see Rafael there, where they get to introduce him to Arthur for the first time.

It is a cool September day in 2026, when Rafael Luna is pulled from his work by Oscar Diaz knocking on the door of his office in the Senate Building.

“Rafael.”Oscar eagerly begins, stepping into the room. “Did I show you the latest picture Alex sent me, of the twins and Arthur? Oh and did I tell you Sophie can climb the stairs by herself now? Alex sent me a video!”

Raf smiles and laughs lightly. For the past two years he’s been kept up to date on Alex’s little twin girls not by Alex himself, but by Oscar, who is an extremely proud Abuelo and will tell anyone and everyone about his granddaughters,(and now his grandson, little Arthur who was adopted last month.) and is eager to show off pictures and videos of the twins. Rafael has seen every photo and video that Alex and Henry have sent of the twins or Arthur, about a hundred times over, but of course he doesn’t mind, it’s sweet to see Oscar turn to mush around his grandkids, and to see how happy and proud he is, Rafael can only hope to be that happy one day.

“Yeah about a hundred times now, Oscar.” Raf laughs, taking his glasses off and setting them down on the paper in front of him on his desk, as Oscar takes a seat in front of Raf’s desk. He smiles sheepishly.

“Ah, sorry Raf, I’m just so proud of them and eager to show them off.” Oscar says, smiling fondly at a picture of his three grandkids, on his phone.

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“They’re coming here today, for a visit and so I can take the girls on a tour of the place, Charlotte is starting to get curious about where her abuelo works so I thought it would be nice to show them around the place.” Oscar says, his face lighting up when he thinks about seeing the kids.

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“But then they both turn to see Alex and Henry in the doorway, Alex with Arthur in a sling around his chest, and Henry with a twin on either hip.

“Well I’ll have to make sure I’m in your office when they get here, I’d love to see the twins and meet Arthur.” Raf says, mentally working his schedule around so he can have a while off to catch up with Alex and his family.

“Abuelo!” Sophie squeals, wriggling to be set down. Gladly Henry sets both twins down, his arms already aching from carrying them from the car, up 2 flights of stairs and down a long corridor, he
has no idea how Philip makes it look so easy, when he carries Annabelle and George at the same
time.

“Hey there’s *mi sol y mi pajarito!*” Oscar happily exclaims, kneeling down and holding his arms
open as the twins run to him for a hug.

“Hey Raf! I didn’t think you’d be here today, it’s good to see you!” Alex happily exclaims, as
Oscar hugs the twins tightly.

“Just got in from visiting my sister, last night, I wasn’t planning on coming in originally but you
know me, I hate to be idle. It’s good to see you too, and you Henry, and the kids.” Raf replies.

“Soph, Lottie, you remember Rafael, right? He’s been my friend for a very long time, and he’s your
papa’s friend too.” Oscar gently asks, looking between the twins.

“Uh-hu!” Charlotte exclaims, nodding enthusiastically. “Hi! Like your pin, pretty!” She cheerfully
adds, pointing to the rainbow flag pin on Rafael’s shirt. Raf smiles, Charlotte gets more and more
like Alex everytime he sees her.

“Well thank you *corazón,* I’m glad you think so.” He softly replies.

“Soph, are you gonna say hi?” Oscar gently encourages the shyer of the two twins. Sophie looks
up at Rafael for a second and quietly says

“Hi.” Before turning and burying her face in Oscar’s shoulder, bless her she is painfully shy, like
Henry was as a child.

“Ah, afraid she got that terrible shyness from me.” Henry explains, feeling a little guilty for passing
that on to Sophie.

“Ah it’s okay, I was really shy when I was a kid, too.” Rafael says.

“Hey girls, how about you and *abuelo* go on your tour of the building, and daddy, Arthur and I will
stay here with Raf, okay?” Alex asks, wanting some time to catch up with Raf and introduce him to
Arthur. The twins happily agree and head off with Oscar.

“God they’ve gotten so big since I last saw them, it’s crazy!” Raf says in a disbelieving tone, as he,
Henry and Alex each find a place to sit.

“Yeah at this age it feels like they’re growing a foot a day and developing at twice the normal rate,
I feel like they’ll be off to college soon.” Alex sighs, getting a laugh from Raf and an endearing
eye-roll from Henry.

“So they’re big sisters now?” Raf asks. Alex grins proudly and nods.

“Yeah, Arthur here joined our family two months ago, and next month we go to court to make it all
completely official, we can’t wait.” he says, lightly bouncing Arthur and smiling down at him,
while Henry reaches over to stroke their son’s cheek.

“Well congratulations, Queen Catherine had no problems passing the new law allowing Royals to
adopt, I take it?” Raf asks. This new law was big news all over the world, it was a huge change to
the system and Monarchy, and Arthur being the very first adopted member of The Royal Family, in
history, was even bigger news, like his sisters he’s already very famous, one of the main reasons
Henry and Alex have chosen not to share any pictures of Arthur where you can see his face, the
same way they haven’t shared any pictures of the girls where you can see their faces, since they
were 1.

“Non at all thankfully, it’s all changing now mums in charge, but for the better of course, she’s only been Queen half a year and she’s already absolutely amazing, nothing at all like Gran, our kids and Philip and Martha’s two won’t grow up like Philip, Bea and I did, having it constantly drilled into us that we must serve our country and we must produce heirs and that there’s nothing more important in life than those two things.” Henry answers, thankful his children will have a far better grandmother than he ever did, Catherine already encourages all 5 of her grandchildren to go after what they want in life, to do what makes them happy and be good, honest and kind people.

“Yeah I heard from Alex that old Queen Mary wasn’t the nicest person going.” Raf says, leaning back in his chair and grinning at Alex, who ranted and raved about what an awful person Queen Mary was, to Raf, many, many times.

“She was evil, simple as, never really cared about mum or me, Philip and Bea, or anyone in her family, all she cared about was public appearance and keeping the royal bloodline ‘pure’, that’s why she hated dad so much, he was just a lowly, common actor to her.” Henry rolls his eyes.

“Your little boy is named after your dad, Henry, right? And yours, Alex?” Raf asks, recalling Oscar excitedly telling him that Henry and Alex had named their son after he and Arthur Fox, Henry’s dad.

“Yeah, his full name is Arthur Oscar Mateo Claremont-Diaz-Windsor, obviously Oscar and Arthur are after our dads, and Mateo is just a name we both liked, since his first name and first middle name after his grandpas, we figured it would be nice to give him at least one original name of his own.” Alex lightly says, smiling as he remembers those first days with Arthur, during the two days when his birth mom could have changed her mind and kept him, when in the dead of night when he and Henry were up feeding Arthur or comforting him when he got fussy,and they would discuss names for him, it all feels like so long ago now, not just two months ago.

“You have a theme going on there of naming your kids after loved ones, am I ever gonna get a kid named after me?” Raf jokes.

“I think if we don’t name the next one after Pez or June or Bea, they’re gonna kill us.” Alex replies, though if he has his way and he and Henry have at least 10 kids, they could definitely name a kid after each loved one they have.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking but your dad never mentioned it, is Arthur’s birth mom in the picture?” Raf curiously asks, curious as to how it all works.

“No.” Henry says. “His birth mum requested the adoption be closed, her information is with the adoption agency, if Arthur ever wants to find out about her after he’s 18 or if we need it for medical issues, the only thing we know about her is that she picked us as Arthur’s parents, not the agency, and she has Hypermobile Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, which can be genetic so Arthur may end up inheriting it, so we’ve got to keep an eye out for that. Not that we would love him less if he does have EDS, we just want to be able to get him the right care as soon as possible, if he is ever diagnosed with it.” Henry explains. He and Alex wouldn’t trade Arthur for the world, no matter what happens, good or bad, he is their son and they are extremely lucky to be his parents.

“We talk openly about his birth mom around him though and always will, the girls know about his birth mom and we talk about how brave and selfless she was and how thankful we are for her, I think it was easier for us since we’ve already been raising the girls telling them that Nora carried them and is technically their biological mother.” Alex adds.
"You’re right, it is a really selfless and brave thing to do, and I’m thrilled for you two, I know how much you’ve wanted a third baby.” Raf tells them.

"Yeah, we’re pretty lucky alright. Hey, what about you? Do you have a life outside of work? Have you been on a date since you were my age?” Alex teases, knowing that Raf is extremely devoted to his job but also someone who would like to settle down and have a family of his own someday.

"Wouldn’t you like to know, Vato?” Raf replies with a smug grin.

"Aw come on you can’t keep me in the dark, I’m your friend you have to tell me these things!” Alex protests. “Come on, I told you when I fell in love with Henry!”

"Don’t get over excited kid, don’t start planning my wedding, yeah I’ve been on a couple dates with a guy I met but it’s nothing serious at all.” Raf calmly replies, though hoping that the relationship will turn into something more serious soon, he really likes the guy he’s been seeing, at 45 he feels ready to maybe take a step back from work and focus on his personal life and hopes for the near future, marriage, kids, that kind of stuff.

"Okay 1. It’s not me who’d be planning your wedding, it’s June, and yes I am going to tell her all about this guy you’ve been seeing and no you can’t convince me not to. and 2. You need to tell me more! Who is he? Do you really like him? Does he really like you?” Alex hurriedly asks.

"Alex leave him alone, don’t be so nosy.” Henry chides. He of course knows Alex is simply curious, but as someone who has grown up with rumours and speculations about him and his family constantly in the media, Henry is defensive of his and other’s privacy. Right now, for example, Martha and Philip are in the process to adopt their 3rd child, having decided that being pregnant is too dangerous for Martha, her pregnancy with Annabelle destroyed her mental health, a 3rd pregnancy could kill her. They have told the public that they’re planning on adopting, but not why, and now the media is constantly speculating as to why they’re not having anymore biological kids, and whether or not George and Annabelle are actually their biological kids, maybe they’re adopted too and Martha faked her pregnancies. It’s absolutely ludicrous.

"Ah it’s fine, I’m use to Alex’s constant questions, and before Alex, I dealt with Oscar always asking me about my life, I don’t mind, but I’m afraid you’re not getting anymore details about my dating life, kid. If things get serious then I’ll tell you more about him, but until then you’ll just have to wait.” Raf calmly replies. “Now this visit is about you and your kids, not me and my dating life. What do you say to letting me have the honor of holding the new little prince, eh? You trust me not to drop him?” This earns a grin from Alex.

"Eh you never dropped the twins, I think it’s okay to put my faith in you.” Alex says, leaning over to place Arthur in Raf’s arms.

"Do you know, Bea dropped me when I was a baby? I just found this out, mum told me, granted it wasn’t far or anything, she dropped me on the couch, but still! I always knew she was out to get me.” Henry tells them in a disbelieving tone.

"Isn’t Bea only 3 years older than you? Why was a 3 year old holding a baby?” Raf laughs.

"Because she’s a bloody menace that’s why.” Henry grumbles. Then he sighs and smiles. “But I love her anyway, she’s impossible not to love.”

"June definitely dropped me a few times as a baby, Zahra says that’s why I’m such a dumbass.” Alex laughs. Henry smiles and reaches over to lace his hand through with Alex’s.
“Zahra’s always right, love, and she’s especially right about this.”

“So how are the girls liking being big sisters?” Raf asks, smiling back at Arthur when the little boy smiles widely up at him. Oscar always said Arthur is a very happy and friendly baby, but Raf didn’t realize to what extent, until now.

“Oh they love it, they love him. Whenever we put Arthur down somewhere, the twins will be at his side in seconds, they love helping to feed him and tell him stories and just love showing him their toys and favorite movies and T.V. shows.” Alex says in a gleeful tone, his face alight with joy, as he talks about his kids.

“Our house has been non-stop Peppa Bloody Pig for weeks now, I honestly don’t know if the girls are picking up an English accent from me and my side of the family, or from that bloody show.” Henry sighs, hoping the twins will move on to another show soon, because he is sick to death of Peppa Pig playing all day.

“Yeah sometimes I hear Sophie say ‘Charlotte’ they way Queen Mary would, and worry she’s being haunted by the spirit of her evil great-grandmother.” Alex laughs, earning a light shove from Henry.

Ignoring Alex’s daramtics, overall the twins adore being big sisters, and Arthur clearly adores them, he’s always looking around for them and responds to their voices, he does not like when they go to nursery and he stays home with us, I dread to think how we’re going to handle it when they start school in 2 years and Arthur will only be 2.” Henry sighs, hoping Arthur won’t react like Alex apparently did as a kid, when June left for her first day of school, when he cried and cried all day until June came back, Henry has no idea how he’ll cope if Arthur reacts the same way when Charlotte and Sophie go to school.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine, you have lots of time to prepare them for it.” Rafael assures them.

Henry, Alex and Raf end up talking for another half an hour, before Oscar and the girls get back, then they all spend a further 20 minutes listening to the twins telling them all about their tour of the building and how they got to sit at their abuelo’s desk and see the pictures he has of their papa and Tía June, etc.

By the time Henry and Alex are ready to leave, it’s been almost 2 hours since they got there, and all 3 kids are very tired. Raf promises to come visit soon and Oscar of course assures them he’ll be out for a visit very soon, and then helps Henry and Alex get all 3 kids down and into the car, since both twins are too tried to walk, Henry or Alex could carry them both while the other carries Arthur, but Oscar is more than happy to help out.

One year later, when Sophie and Charlotte are 3 and Arthur has just turned 1, a single cream white envelope made from thick paper with swirling patterns around the border, is posted through Henry and Alex’s mail box, just as Alex is coming downstairs. He immediately picks the envelope up and carefully opens it and pulls out the contents.

It’s a small, cream white card, with the same pattern around the borders as is on the envelope, the text is small and neat in plain block letters, and reads the following.

**With great pleasure,**

**Rafael Luna and**

**Oliver Westbrook**
invite you to join them at the celebration of their marriage

Wednesday, October 14th, 2027

at three O’clock in the afternoon

Embassy Suites Old Town

1900 Diagonal Road, Alexandria, VA

reception to follow.

“What’s that?” Alex hears Henry ask, and turns to see his husband standing behind him, with Arthur on his hip. Alex grins.

“Our invitation to Rafael’s wedding.”
Martha and Philip Part 2.

Chapter Summary

After a year of trying, Martha and Philip find out they are expecting their first child, but their joy is short lived when Martha begins to suffer with HG and other pregnancy complications. This leaves Philip more vulnerable and afraid than he has ever been, and he finds himself turning to his siblings for comfort.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone, I just want to jump in here and say a few things. First I want to give a few TWs/CWs.

***TRIGGER/CONTENT WARNING***
Bleeding in pregnancy.
Anxiety.
Trauma.
Addiction.
Alcoholism.
Medication for anxiety.
Fat/body shaming.
Shaming someone for having a C-section.
Loss of a parent.
Depression.
PPD.

I think that's all the CW/TWs needed but if you think anything else is needed please let me know.

Secondly I'd just like to say that the negative views on Cesareans, expressed in this chapter are absolutely not mine, I have nothing against Cesareans, they are totally valid forms of birth whether it's elective or emergency, the best way to deliver a baby is what you and your health care providers feel is best for you and baby.

And thirdly, I quickly want to add that this chapter was inspired by the lovely and wonderful HMS_Chill and their story 'A Channel of Peace' which you should most definitely check out!

One of the best and one of the worst days of Martha Fox-Mountchristen-Windsor’s life happen only 1 week apart.

One of the best days of her life occurs on a warm spring morning in April of 2024, in the ensuite bathroom in her and Philip’s room in Anmer Hall.
Martha and Philip have been trying to have a baby for about a year now, they had initially planned on trying right away, but then everything with Alex and Henry happened and Philip realized he needed to re-connect and re-establish his bond with his siblings and learn how to really be a good brother, before he could be a good father. Martha was happy to wait too, glad to see Philip moving away from his grandmother’s toxicity and trying to learn and grow and be a better person.

Things are still not 100% better between Philip, Bea and Henry, maybe they never will be, but they’re far better than they were 4 years ago, and getting better everyday.

In mid 2023 Philip and Martha decided to not actively try for a baby, but to stop trying to prevent a pregnancy. After 5 months of this with no results, they actively started trying, tracking ovulation dates, etc. It’s now been 7 months of actively trying, and Martha has only started to feel different in the last 2 weeks. This morning she had woken up early to some slight nausea for the 3rd time this week. That’s when she decided to get up and take a pregnancy test, so she can know one way or another.

And that is where Martha is now, standing in the medium-sized bathroom, in her pyjamas and dressing-gown, trying to avoid looking at the pregnancy test until the 3 minutes are up.

The second the timer goes off, Martha spins around and grabs the pregnancy test off the windowsill, and her breath hitches in her throat when she sees the two pink lines. As she begins to process it, tears of joy start to well up in her eyes and she becomes a bit overwhelmed by it all, she was beginning to worry that she and Philip wouldn’t be able to conceive on their own, and would have to turn to invasive and difficult procedures like IVF.

A few seconds later, Martha is pulled from her thoughts by a light knock on the bathroom door.

“Mazzy.” Philip calls. “Are you alright? You’ve been in there a while.” Martha quickly pulls the bathroom door open, wiping at her tears and beaming at her husband.

“Pip.” She says in an excited tone. “I have a surprise for you.” Philip raises an eyebrow.

“A surprise from the bathroom? Do I want to know what is it?” He asks, wrinkling his nose up at the thought of what Martha might find in the bathroom to surprise him with. Martha laughs.

“It’s not bad I promise, close your eyes.” Philip gives her a suspicious look, but complies and closes his eyes. Martha takes one of his hands in hers and lays the pregnancy test in it, face up.

“Okay.” She says. “Open.” Philip opens his eyes and is instantly met with the sight of the positive pregnancy test in his hand. His jaw drops while a smile starts to spread across his face.

“Mazzy.” He softly says in a breathy tone. “Is this for real?” Martha grins and nods, looping her arms around the back of his neck.

“Yeah it’s for real, we’re having a baby!” She exclaims. Philip laughs in delight and leans in to kiss her, before picking her up by the waist and spinning in a circle with her.

“We’re having a baby!” He laughs, then a look of horror crosses his face and he immediately sets Martha down and looks at her with concern. “I probably shouldn’t have done that, could I have hurt the baby?” He asks.

“No Pip.” Martha laughs. “This little one is tucked up safe and sound in there, spinning around won’t hurt them, but it might make me throw up.” She brings her hand to her chest and tries to breathe deeply when the nausea washes over her.

“No I’ll be alright in a minute... although, could you maybe get me a ginger biscuit from the kitchen please? They say ginger is meant to help with sickness.” Martha asks in a shaky tone, as the nausea intensifies. Philip nods eagerly.

“Yes, absolutely, ginger biscuit, coming right up.” He pecks her on the cheek, before hurrying out of the room and downstairs into the kitchen. Martha smiles to herself and lays a hand over her stomach.

“You are one lucky baby to have him as your daddy.”

That was one of the best days of Martha’s life.

One of the worst days happens just a week later, almost on the dot.

It’s 4:00 A.M. when Martha is pulled from her sleep by a severe and intense feeling of nausea, a hundred times worse than anything she has ever felt before. She tries to take a deep breath in, but this just makes it so much worse and Martha has to quickly scramble out of bed and dash to the bathroom, barely making it on time before she collapses to her knees in front of the toilet and vomits violently, feeling as if her whole stomach is trying to escape via her throat.

“Martha.” She hears Philip’s voice full of worry and concern, just a few seconds later. In a flash he’s kneeling beside her, pulling her back and softly rubbing her back.

The vomiting continues for at least another 5 minutes, by which point Martha is sure she has nothing left to throw up, and now she is a sweaty, exhausted mess. She closes her eyes and slumps against the wall behind her, trying to catch her breath and waiting for the burning sensation in her throat to pass.

“Mazzy are you alright?” Philip anxiously asks, slipping his hand into hers.

“I... I don’t know, I just woke up feeling severely ill and everything and anything seemed to make it worse, I barely got to the toilet on time.” She says in a tired voice.

“I’ll call the doctor and ask her to come and check you over.” Philip says, looking around for his phone. Being Royals, he and Martha have access to a medical professional at all times, someone is always on call for them and will come out here to Anmer hall for any and every reason, they’re paid good money for it so Philip doesn’t feel one bit bad, calling the doctor at 4:00 A.M.

“Oh no, Pip it’s alright I_” Martha begins, but is cut off by another severe wave of nausea. Seconds later she is hunched over the toilet bowl again, vomiting violently.

This goes on for weeks, initially the doctor said Martha just had some bad morning sickness and it would clear up by 12 weeks at the most. Of course Philip was not satisfied by this answer and got a second opinion, but that doctor said the same thing.

It’s not until 2 weeks later when Martha is 9 weeks pregnant, now vomiting pretty much all day everyday, hardly sleeping, losing weight, unable to eat or drink anything, that the doctors consider that this could be more than bad morning sickness, and finally diagnose her with a condition called Hyperemesis Gravidarum, or HG for short, which is basically severe morning sickness. It’s rare, but not unheard of. There are a few things that can be done to attempt to treat it, both homeopathy and medical, but there is no guaranteed cure.

They try and cure it with a number of drugs and medications that are commonly used to treat HG, for about two weeks, but it soon becomes apparent that they’re not doing anything and that Martha will need to be hospitalized so she can be given steroids and some fluids through an IV.
When at 12 weeks pregnant Martha is admitted to hospital, and the doctors there discover she hasn’t been able to eat more than a few bites of very plain food, in about 5 weeks, they tell them that Martha is going to have to have a small operation to have a PICC line placed, so she and the baby can receive nutrition.

Though the procedure is pretty simple and minor, Philip is not allowed to be in the room while it happens, and is sent out to pace the halls just outside Martha’s room.

He’s been out there for about 20 minutes, pulling at his hair and worrying out of his mind about Martha, when he hears footsteps and hears a familiar voice calling him.

“Philip!” He turns to see Henry, Bea, Alex and his mum hurrying towards him. Henry reaches him first and places a hand on his arm. “Philip oh my god we just your message, is Martha alright, what’s going on?” Henry asks in a concerned tone.

“I-I don’t know if she’s alright. They’re doing some sort of operation that I’m not allowed to be in there for, they’re placing something called a PICC line because Martha can’t eat, and she needs to get nutrition.” He explains in a teary tone.

“Oh Philip, it’s alright, it’s going to be okay, we’re here now, we’ll wait with you.” Henry softly says. Philip then surprises Henry by embracing him for a moment, something he never really does.

“Thank you.” Philip says in a teary tone. “You really are the most wonderful brother I could ask for.” Henry smiles and pats his arm.

“’S alright Pip, you’d do the same for me.”

“Is Martha going to lose the baby?” Bea asks in a frightened tone, the last time she had been around someone so sick they needed to be hospitalized, was when her dad was dying.

“No I don’t think so Bea, the doctors say the baby looks good and healthy and strong.” Philip softly says. Catherine puts an arm around her daughter to comfort her.

“Babies are resilient little things my love, and Martha is tough as nails too, they’re both going to be fine.” Catherine gently says.

“My mom had the same thing Matha does, when she was pregnant with me.” Alex adds in, speaking up for the first time since everyone arrived.

“Really?” Philip asks, wondering if Ellen will be willing to talk to he and Martha and give them some advice, Oscar too.

“Yeah, not as intense or severe, but yeah, she had a really difficult and complicated pregnancy with me, I was born a month early by emergency C-Section and then had to spend a few weeks in the NICU, but hey look at me now, I’m not just fine, I’m amazing!” Alex’s tone turns from soft and quiet, to loud and brash, his arms spread out to the sides and a proud smile on his face. Philip can’t help but laugh.

“Alex for fuck’s sake we’re in a hospital! On a bloody maternity unit, you’ll wake all the babies!” Henry protests, lightly shoving his boyfriend.

“Oh please the babies are blessed that my amazing voice is one of the first things they hear!” Alex replies.

“Alex.” Philip interuputs, as Henry rolls his eyes and Catherine and Bea just laugh at Alex’s
dramatics. “Do you think your mum and dad would be willing to talk to Martha and I, about HG? Maybe they could give us some advice on how to cope, your mum might have some ways to help Martha since she’s physically gone through it, and perhaps your dad could give me some advice on caring for Martha when she’s so sick?” Alex nods.

“Yeah sure, they’re both pretty busy so I don’t know when they’ll be free to call but I can ask them and give them your number or something?” Alex suggests. Philip nods.

“Thanks, I’d appreciate that.”

“Yeah, no problem.” Alex says, still not quite sure what to do with a nice, appreciative Philip.

By the time Martha is 14 weeks pregnant, the violent vomiting has eased and she seems to able to keep down small portions of very bland and plain food, as well as water. The steroids seem to have lessen her vomiting, but the intense nausea is still there, and Martha is really struggling and unsure of how she is going to cope for the next 6 months.

One day just a week after Martha was discharged from hospital and able to go home, she is sitting on the couch in the main living room of Anmer hall, smiling to herself as she watches Alex’s Instagram stories, which today mainly consist of he and Henry being soppy and in love, he and Henry taking David for a walk, a photo of a very proud looking June holding the final copy of her memoir which is set to release next month, and finally a picture of he, Henry, Nora, June, Bea and Pez in a theater, with Bea looking very excited while holding up a Programme for Heathers The Musical, which is opening In The West-End tonight. All the Super Six are here in London for the next few days, specifically for this event. Martha and Philip were meant to go too, but of course they can’t, now Martha is so ill.

She’s also received a private message from June asking for an address so June can send her an ARC of her book, which Martha thinks is incredibly kind and sweet. She is just about to reply to her, when she feels something warm trickle down her thigh. It’s way too early for it be her waters, so what the hell could it be?

Martha gets to her feet so she can go to the bathroom to check what’s going on, only when she stands up, the throw for the blanket that she had tucked around her for warmth, falls to the ground, and when Martha goes to pick it up she freezes when she notices the red stain on the back. That definitely wasn’t there before. She touches her hand to the back of her trousers and immediately finds that they feel damp and sticky and when she pulls her hand back, her fingertips are smeared with blood.

“Oh no.”Martha quietly says in a breathy tone. “No no no no, Philip!” She isn’t usually one to shout but this is an emergency.

Philip runs in a few seconds later, looking panicked and disheveled.

“What, what is it is everything okay?” He asks in a panicked tone.

“I’m bleeding.” Martha tells him in a shaky tone. Philip does nothing for a few seconds, just stands there staring at her in disbelief, before he snaps out of it.

“Hospital?” He asks, grabbing the car keys. Martha nods.

“Yes, but I’m going to need a change of clothes and some pads.” She says, wondering if she should quickly go grab some things and stuff them in a bag or should they get to the hospital as quickly as possible.
“I’ll ask mum to drop some stuff off for you, okay?” This sounds like a good idea, so Martha nods and lets Philip help her out to the car.

When they arrive at the hospital there is little to no media presence thankfully, and Martha is quickly admitted to a room where a doctor is already waiting to do an ultrasound.

It is quickly revealed that Martha is having subchorionic bleeding, which means that a pool of blood has formed between the placenta and the uterus, but thankfully it is not harmful and poses no risk to the baby. The OB says it should resolve itself but they will keep Martha in overnight for observation and then have her come back for routine ultrasounds until the bleeding stops.

This news is a huge relief to Martha and Philip, but Philip is finding that he isn’t calming down, his anxiety feels like it’s getting worse and he can’t calm his thoughts down, worrying that maybe something else will happen to Martha or the baby, or something will happen during the birth, or after. Much as he wants to be with Martha right now, he needs to be alone for a few minutes.

“I’m just going to pop out for some fresh air for a moment love, won’t be long.” Philip softly says, leaning in to kiss Martha’s forehead. She’s practically asleep anyway, exhausted after the stress and panic she’s just been through, so she won’t mind Philip slipping outside for a few minutes.

He quickly makes his way outside, finding a bench to sit on. By now it feels like his chest is being crushed, his heart is about to burst out of his chest from beating so fast, and his throat is closing up. He tries to breath deeply but it feels like he can’t get anything into his lungs, which just makes him panic more.

He’s just considering running back inside and telling them he thinks he’s suffocating, when he hears a familiar voice right in front of him.

“Pip?” He hears Bea ask, her voice full of concern.

“Bea.” He says in a breathless tone. “What are you doing here?” He hadn’t called or contacted anyone to tell them about Martha’s bleed, he had been far too concerned about her.

“I’m bringing some thank you gifts to the nurses and doctors who helped dad when he was sick, I do it every year around the anniversary of his death. What about you, are you okay, is everything with Mazzy and the baby okay?” Bea gently asks, taking a seat on the bench, next to her brother.

“Martha had a bleed, she’s okay, the baby’s okay too, everything is fine with them, it’s just... I feel like I can’t breathe Bea, it feels like my throat is closing up and my chest is being crushed, my heart is going about a thousand miles an hour and I can’t stop thinking about what if something else awful happens to Martha and the baby, what if we lose the baby or what if I lose Martha? I-I couldn’t go on without her Bea, I-I don’t know what to do.”

“Oh Philip.” Bea softly says. “It sounds like you’re having a panic attack, the crushing weight on your chest and not being able to breathe? That’s what I feel like when I have a panic attack.” Philip looks at his sister surprised, unaware that she had panic attacks.

“Y-you have panic attacks? regularly?” He asks. Bea nods.

“I’ve never told you this, but I was diagnosed with anxiety when I went to rehab, and I’ve been on medication for anxiety since then, 5mg of lexapro a day. They’re not a cure, I still get frequent panic attacks and days where my anxiety is off the charts, but they do help a lot, they make me able to function and use the tools I’ve learned through therapy, to cope with my anxiety.” She calmly explains.
“Henry has anxiety too, doesn’t he?” Philip asks, wiping at the tears that have started to form. Bea nods.

“And trauma from how Gran treated him, forcing him to stay in the closet and stuff, but it’s also genetic. Grandad had addiction problems and depression too, he was an alcoholic, mum had a pretty rotten childhood because of his drinking and Gran’s toxic behaviour, and that as well as the genetic factor led her to having depression, then losing dad and having to deal with Gran lead to me having addiction issues and anxiety, and Henry having anxiety and trauma.”

“So, do you think I have anxiety? Is it inevitable that I’ll get it, and that I’ll pass it on to the baby?” Philip asks in a concerned tone, terrified he may have doomed his child to a life of mental health issues.

“Do I think you have anxiety? I’m not sure, I’m not a therapist, you can have panic attacks without anxiety and vice versa, as for if you’re definitely going to pass it down to the baby, no, there’s every chance the baby won’t have any mental health issues at all, but if it’s something you’re really worried about you should speak to a therapist about it.” Bea tells him.

“I don’t have a therapist.”

“That’s alright, I’ll help you find one.” Bea offers. Philip smiles and nods. It’s then he notices that he’s able to breathe again, his heart rate is back to normal and the weight has lifted from his chest.

“I-I feel much better now, I think you calmed me down.” he tells Bea in an incredulous tone. She grins.

“Yeah I’ve got a lot of experience with panic attacks, what works for me is distracting myself from it if I can, so I tried that with you, and it worked!” She happily exclaims. Philip laughs lightly and hugs her.

“Thanks Bea, I love you.” Bea is slightly taken aback by this, but also very pleased. She pats her brother’s back then leans forward and plants a kiss on his cheek.

“Love you too, even if you are a bit of a dickhead sometimes.”

Over the next few months, Martha is constantly in and out of hospital with her HG, the setrids seem to only last for a few weeks at a time, so just when things are starting to look up, it all goes downhill again. When Martha is admitted for the fourth time at 6 months pregnant, she and Philip decide to stay in Kensington for the rest of her pregnancy and for a while after the baby is born, so they don’t have to continuously make the long trip from Norfolk to London, to get to the King Edward VII Hospital.

Martha’s mental health takes a toll during the pregnancy too, beforehand she was a very confident, upbeat and optimistic person. Now, she has lost so much of her self-confidence and upbeat personality and positive outlook, because she is constantly either being violently ill, or is severely nauseous, she can hardly leave the bed and hardly leaves the palace, much as she wants to, and the steroids have caused her to gain so much weight, her face is so bloated and swollen she hardly recognizes herself.

Thankfully she does have a lot of support, from both her family and friends as well as Philip’s family and friends. Unsurprisingly of course, Queen Mary is not so supportive, she believes that Martha is overreacting and being dramatic, and almost forced her to make a public appearance she was scheduled for in October, it was only when she came to Kensington and saw how weak and ill Martha was that she backed down, and even the it turned out that she still didn’t actually believe
Martha was sick, she let her out of the public appearance because she’s gained so much weight and looks so pale and ill, even makeup couldn’t cover it up.

One day in December, an entire month before Martha’s due-date, she starts to feel aches and pains (mostly cramps) in her back and stomach, which she at first puts off as new side-effects of the steroids.

A few hours after the pains begin, Martha is sitting in the living room with Henry and Alex and Philip. Alex and Henry have just gotten engaged, so Martha and Philip are listening to the story of how Alex proposed, and admiring Henry’s ring.

“Wait wait wait, so you used the dog, to propose to Henry?” Philip asks in a confused but amused tone, after Alex explained his unique proposal. Alex laughs and slips an arm around Henry’s waist.

“Yeah, I made a really cool colorful sign that said ‘Will you marry my dad?’, tied it to David’s collar along with the ring, and sent him into Henry’s office where he was writing.” He explains.

“What happened then?” Martha curiously asks.

“Well I heard David come in to the office and bent down to pet him, and noticed the sign and ring on his collar. Of course I got the shock of my life, I took the sign and the ring and went out to Alex and asked him what was going on. He just smiled, got up, took the ring, got down on one knee and asked me to marry him. I was in shock for a second before I said yes!”

Martha is about to comment on how sweet and original the proposal was, when another pain washes over her, causing her to wince slightly and hold on to her back.

“Are you alright Martha?” Henry asks in a concerned tone, noticing her wince and grab at her back.

“Yes... I think so... maybe not though.” Martha says in an unsure tone, as the pain builds and builds.

“What is it, Maz?” Philip asks, looking at her with worry written all over his face.

“My back, I’ve been having pains on and off in my back all day, but this one is really bad.” She tells him, grabbing his leg with her free hand, as the pain peaks.

“Do you want to go to hospital?” Philip asks. Martha nods, and lets Philip help her up.

“Henry could you tell mum and Bea what’s going on, please? I’ll keep you updated, then perhaps you could keep mum and Bea updated?” Philip asks, looking at his brother pleadingly. Henry has never seen Philip so vulnerable and afraid, it’s like he’s become a completely different person the last 7 or so months.

“Yes of course, no problem.” Henry agrees, slipping his hand into Alex’s and pulling him up off the couch. “Come on Alex, let’s go find mum and Bea.”

When Philip and Martha arrive at St. Mary’s hospital, they are relieved to find that there is no media presence or any fans camped outside, waiting to catch a glimpse of Martha and Philip going in, as people usually do when a new Royal Baby is about to be born. People often start camping out a few weeks before the baby’s due date, but an entire month before is slightly too early.

It takes hardly anytime at all for Martha to be admitted and checked, and for her pains to be confirmed as labor.
Over the next few hours the pains remain painful, but just about bearable, and of course they improve when Martha receives her epidural.

5 hours into her labor, Martha receives some not so great news, during a routine check of the baby’s position.

“Ma’am.” The doctor calmly begins, but Martha stops her right there.

“Oh no, please call me Martha, I hate being called M’am or Miss, just call me Martha.” she says, while breathing through a contraction. The doctor nods, even though it goes against everything she’s been taught as someone who often attends to the Royal Family.

“Martha, I’m afraid that baby has flipped positions and is no longer head down, he’s actually flipped transverse, which means he’s lying sideways, which is an impossible position for birth. I can try and flip baby again if you like, but I can’t guarantee it will work nor that he will stay in the correct position, seeing as you do have a few more centimeters to go.”

“Is the baby in danger?” Martha asks.

“Well transverse position is dangerous to both you and the baby, there is a risk of uterine rupture and harm to the baby, in my opinion it’s best for you both if we take you for a C-section right away and get the baby out as fast as possible.” The doctor tells them. Martha and Philip immediately know the answer to this predicament, there’s no doubting it.

“Then I want the section, I want what’s best for my baby.” Martha says, while Philip nods in agreement.

“Alright, a porter will be down very soon to take you to theater.” She then turns to look at Philip. “Your Royal Highness, you can accompany your wife right up to the OR, then a nurse will take you to get scrubbed up and then take you into theater once everything is ready.” Philip is reluctant to leave Martha, but he knows that he has to follow proper health and safety procedures, for the sake of Martha and the baby.

Just 20 minutes later, holding on to Philip’s hand while she lies on the operating table, Martha is overjoyed to hear a baby’s cry fill the OR. She laughs in delight, as does Philip, before he bends down to kiss her cheek.

“Is he okay?” Martha anxiously asks the nurse closest to her. She nods.

“Yes Ma’am, perfectly well.” A few seconds later the baby is passed up to Martha, who right away pulls him to her chest, relieved that her pregnancy is over and she has a healthy and beautiful baby.

“Hello baby.” Martha softly says, kissing her son’s head. “Sweet boy, it’s so good to meet you, you are every bit as perfect as I knew you would be.”

“Oh Mazzy.” Philip sniffs, wiping at tears. “Mazzy he’s so perfect, I can’t believe he’s here and that we made him, I love you both so much.”

“Would you like me to take a photo?” A nurse kindly asks.

“Oh yes please.” Martha agrees.

“I-I only have the camera on my phone, is that alright, is that allowed?” Philip asks, scrambling to get the phone out of his pocket. The nurse smiles and says
“Yes Your Highness, that’s perfectly fine, take your time, there’s no rush.”

A few seconds later Philip has managed to get his phone out of his pocket, pull up the camera and hand the phone to the nurse. He then bends down by Martha’s side, so he can be in the shot. The nurse takes a few photos before handing the phone back to Philip.

“Thank you.” Philip says in a breathless tone, still trying to process everything that’s happened in the last 40 minutes or so.

“You’re welcome, and congratulations.” Philip smiles at the nurse, before turning his attention to the photos, which are all the same, the only difference being minor things, like whether the baby’s eyes are open or closed.

The photo consists of a headshot of a very tired but very happy looking Martha and Philip, grinning widely as Martha holds her baby close to her.

“Oh I love it.” Martha softly says, already picturing where she and Philip will hang that picture up, at home in Anmer.

“Me too.” Philip agrees, before kissing her cheek and pressing a kiss to their baby’s forehead. “And you little one, little George, I love you.”

Martha and little George are kept in hospital for three days, before finally being discharged.

As is customary, they exit through the front door of the Lindo Wing at St. Mary’s hospital, making a brief stop on the steps to smile and wave at the crowd and allow the world the first glimpse at the new Prince, whose first full picture and name will be released later in the week, on Instagram. They haven’t run the name past Queen Mary yet, and don’t intend to, they will tell their friends and family the baby’s name and if Queen Mary gets wind of it so be it, but they aren’t going to seek her approval of the name.

It’s now been 2 days since Martha and George left the hospital, and they are just about to upload the first photo of George to Instagram, as well as his name, but they are having some trouble picking which photo to use, though luckily they’ve got Bea, Henry, Alex and Catherine here to help them decide.

“Ooh what about this one Mazzy?” Bea asks in an excited tone, turning her phone to show Martha the photo she was looking at, the first photo taken of George, the one of he, Philip and Martha that the nurse took in the OR.

“That is my favorite but it’s not exactly a traditional photo is it?” Martha asks, holding little George against her shoulder and patting his back.

“Who says it has to be traditional? I think it will be really well received because it shows the reality of a C-section, people are tired of staged, photoshopped, perfect pictures, they want something raw and real and this is exactly that.” Bea tells them.

“You think so?” Martha asks. Bea nods.

“What do you think mum? You and dad went the more traditional route for Henry, Bea and I’s first photos, didn’t you?” Philip curiously asks.

“Mostly, your first photo was taken at your Christening, Pip, Bea yours was a picture your dad took of you and Philip meeting for the first time, which we then allowed to be published in the paper and magazines, and with you Henry we took your first photo when you were only 2 days old, still
in the hospital, and like with Bea and Philip we allowed the papers and magazines to publish it.

I agree with Bea, I think you should use the picture of the three of you in the OR, I know I would have been grateful had anyone shared in the realities of birth and the postpartum period when I had you three, especially after Philip when I was totally in over my head, being a first time mum and suffering with post-natal depression.” Catherine replies, wincing slightly as she remembers her awful struggle with PPD, she suffered with depression for a very long time as it was, and had very few bad days during her pregnancy, but then Philip was born and PPD hit and it took her years to fully recover from.

“Well one thing I really want to do as a mum in the public eye is help other mums and parents in anyway I can, so if this will help others I’ll do it. Do you approve of this one, Pip?” Martha asks, turning to her husband, who smiles lovingly at her and nods

“Absolutely, perhaps it will humble me a bit having the world see me in surgical scrubs.”

Martha grins and picks up her phone, quickly opening instagram, selecting the picture and uploading it with the following simple caption.

*Philip and I are absolutely thrilled to announce the birth of our sweet and healthy baby boy, George Edward William Fox-Mounchristen Windsor.*

*Welcome to the world sweet boy, you are so loved.*

Little George is named for three very important people in Martha and Philip’s lives. George was Martha’s father’s name, he passed away when Martha was 18, but they had been very close and she always knew she wanted to name her first son after him. Edward is one of Henry’s middle names, and Philip wanted to honor his brother by naming his son after him, while also hoping George will grow up to be as brave and strong and kind and amazing as his uncle. And last but not least, William was Philip’s grandfather’s name, Catherine’s father. Philip never met him, he died from liver failure when Catherine was 14, just a year after Queen Mary was crowned, but Catherine adored her father, and when he wasn’t drinking he was a good parent, far better than Mary, so Philip and Martha decided to add his name to George’s list of middle names.

About an hour later when everyone has left the living room, Philip is the only one remaining, sitting on the sofa and just watching George sleep, letting himself just feel the love he has for this little boy, and how deeply grateful he is for him.

As he sits watching his son, Philip hears the door creak open, followed by a quiet and soft voice.

“Pip?” Henry asks. Philip turns and smiles softly at his brother.

“Hello Henry.” He says.

“Hi, what are you still doing down here? I thought you and Martha were going to sleep while George sleeps?” Henry asks in a confused tone, walking to his brother’s side.

“We were, Martha conked out, but I couldn’t sleep so I took George down here so Martha could get a proper rest.”

“He’s so cute.” Henry softly says, reaching out to stroke his nephew’s cheek.

“He looks like you did as a baby.” Philip says, smiling up at his brother.

“You think so?” Henry asks in a surprised voice. Philip nods.
“He got Mazzy’s blonde hair, and you had a mop of blonde hair too, when you were born, and you and I have the same nose and eye shape, we’ve got dad’s nose and eye shape, and so does George.” Both Henry and Philip feel a little ache at the mention of their dad, who would’ve loved to have been here today and loved being a grandpa.

“He would’ve been proud of you Pip.” Henry softly says.

“And you H, I know I am. You know, I feel closer to him now, H, since George was born and I’ve become a dad, I know what that unconditional love and fierce urge to protect is like, dad may not have cared about family legacy or anything but I can see now that he cared about us, so much.”

“You’re going to be a great dad, Philip, you already are.” Henry softly says, tentatively laying a hand on his brother’s shoulder. Philip smiles and reaches up to squeeze his brother’s hand.

“Thanks H, I love you.”

“Love you too.”

It doesn’t take long for Queen Mary to get ahold of the first picture of George that Martha posted on Instagram, and when she does she is not happy and wastes no time in making her way to Kensington to lecture her grandson and his wife.

“This is precisely why we have employees to handle things like this! This picture is meant to represent the next generation of the Royal Family, you are meant to be composed and put together, not dressed up in some ridiculous hospital getup in an operating room!” Queen Mary yells in an angry tone, slapping down a printed copy of the picture in question, onto the coffee table separating her and Philip, Martha and George.

“It shows the realities of childbirth, as Bea said, the public are tired of poised, staged and photoshopped perfect images, they want the real stuff, to know that we Royals are humans too, other new parents may be envious of me but I’m ten times more envious of them, they get to take it all as easy and slow as they like and wear the comfiest clothes they can find, and leave the house not looking 100% perfect, whereas I was up, getting my hair and makeup done, having to wear 4 inch heels and a designer dress, three days after having my stomach cut open, which was after 9 months of all day nausea, violent vomiting and constant doses of steroids.” Martha quickly replies, probably not in the wisest way, but she is not in the mood for criticism.

“Surgery! That’s another thing! It’s one thing that you didn’t have a natural delivery, but it’s another altogether to flaunt it to the public!” Queen Mary rages.

“Well why would I lie about having a C-section?” Martha asks.

“Because Martha it is the lazy way out of things, you have given off the impression that you are too lazy to even birth your own child!” Queen Mary curtly responds, really shocking Philip and Martha who had no idea she could be so ridiculous.

“Cesareans are not the lazy way out, they’re a major surgery, nothing easy about them. I had to have one because George was lying sideways and likely wouldn’t stay in position if the doctor turned him, and his unusual position put him in danger, and me.” Martha calmly says, looking the Queen dead in the eye.

“Oh Nonsense you just didn’t try hard enough, you should have insisted they move him into the right position and continue to move him if need be, but no, you took the lazy way out, completely
“Stop it!” He yells, startling both Martha and Queen Mary. “How dare you speak to my wife like that? Martha is the most amazing woman I have ever met and she went through hell to bring our baby safely into the world, you may just see the weight she’s gained from the steroids, but I see the fight she put up against her own body, to keep our son safe and healthy, and give him life.

And Martha agreed to an emergency Cesarean, once again for the sake of our son’s health, can you imagine what that was like for her Gran? Thinking all the complications and nastiness were over, only then to be told both you and your baby are in danger and the only sure way to stop anything happening, is for you to have major surgery after which you will be expected to get into heels and a dress and perfect hair and makeup, and make a public appearance, while also caring for a preemie baby? That’s what Martha has been through in just a week, if you ask me everything she’s done if the very opposite of lazy.

So stop with your judgement and your assumptions, because frankly you know absolutely nothing about Martha and how wonderful and strong she is.

I’ve changed a lot in the last few years Gran, I’m no longer the scared and lonely little boy you could manipulate into believing everything you believe, I’m a dad now, and a husband, and a better brother and son than I’ve ever been, and I won’t stand for you insulting anyone I love, not anymore.”

The room is totally still and silent for a minute after Philip’s rant, then the Queen simply turns on her heel, stalks out of the room and walks out of Kensington without another word.

“Philip.” Martha breaths in a disbelieving tone. “That was.... that was amazing.” Philip relaxes and smiles at his wife.

“I love you so much.” He softly says, cupping her face.

“I love you too.” Martha tells him, before leaning in to kiss him.

About half an hour later, Philip’s phone buzzes with a text, and when he checks it he sees it’s from his mum.

Heard you stood up to your Gran, If he were still here today your dad would be so proud of you, but know that I’m proud enough of you for us both,

I love you Pip, I’m always here if you need me, xx.

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