Moving Forward

by Sembell

Summary

Gillian and David try to make the best out of the last shift in their relationship.

Notes

Hello dear X-Philes, I'm Sarah and this is my first FanFic. I desperately wanted to write something nice and sweet and fluffy... at least for Gillian and David, while their characters Mulder and Scully seem to struggle in the Revival of The X-Files. I don't mean any harm to Gillian, David or their families. This is just my headcanon. English is not my native language.
"And?", he asked expectantly, his eyes wide as he sat in front of her, waiting impatiently for an answer.

She looked down at her hands, slightly fumbling the little plastic stick between her fingers before she swallowed and looked up again.

"I'm pregnant," she answered simply, her expression unreadable.

He clenched his jaw, took a deep breath and let the air out with a soft groan.

"Oh Jeez," David exclaimed after a long pause.

She nodded her head, put her arms up in the air defensively and turned around to walk to the other side of the room where her overnight bag had been thrown to the floor carelessly the other night. She picked it up and started to look for something.

"You know what, I'll deal with it when I get back home", she replied, retrieving her black toiletry bag before she turned around to head to the bathroom again.

His gaze followed her and his mouth formed a silent "what" before he got up to follow her in the bathroom.

"What do you mean you will deal with it when you're back in London? What do you even mean with deal with it?", he asked confused and tried to get in front of her to look her in the eyes and to search her face for an answer to what was on her mind.

Her eyes were on her hands which opened the zipper of her bag, starting to rummage through it. The little plastic stick with the two blue lines on it disappeared while she fumbled for her powder and make up brush, threw them in the sink to retrieve her hair brush.

"You know, I have to catch this flight and-"

"Wait a second, hey, what are you doing? Could you just stop for a second?", he asked, trying to stop her hands with his and finally got a hold on her bag. She didn't let go of it.

"Let's just talk about it later, okay? Would you mind?" She glanced at the door, pointing to it with her left hand and pulled on her bag to get it back again.

He's speechless. Shock and numbness left him without any words he would, under normal circumstances, have used to calm her down and talk about this like adults. Like fucking 45 and 53 year old adults. This wasn't like her and he certainly had never seen her like this before, not even
when she told him one cold night a good 19 years ago that she was pregnant with her first child, while they were in the middle of filming the first season of what would become a part of their legacy. Maybe her own shock had subsided when she walked in his trailer with swollen, tired eyes and told him silently but conscious of what she was saying. He asked her if it was a good thing. And she said yes.

This time, it was a whole different experience. This time, it probably wasn't such a good thing.

As he was walking out of the bathroom, through his bedroom and in the living room to look out of one of the big windows with a beautiful view over central park, he was thinking that this was something he thought he would never have to experience again. Not that fatherhood was bad news for him before. Not in general, anyway. He had been beyond happy when Téa happily announced her first and second pregnancy, both news wrapped like little presents and handed to him in form of a tiny baby shoe, a pacifier and a shirt that said "big sister". But he would lie if he said that before that, there had never been a woman who thought she was pregnant with his child. The first one being Hanna Larker in his first year at Yale. He was always panicked and shocked, but for totally different reasons than this time.

This time, he had to face the news with the women he loved for 20 years. And with whom he had just established some kind of a serious relationship. Or something like that at least. It was 2013, exactly 13 months after Gillian made her split from Mark public. And he was still not divorced, despite being separated from Téa for almost 2 years now. Before March, when he and Gillian revived their intimate relationship, he didn't even seriously think he would file for divorce. Ever. As long as Téa wouldn't mention it, he certainly would not either.

The last six months werepure bliss though and it only dawned on him for the last couple of weeks that this was not like it had been in 1993 or between 1996 and 1997, when he and Gillian enjoyed themselves on the beds, tables and walls in their trailers. This was commitment. And this was something he would refer to as a future. It was coming together in private with the kids to make pizza in the evening. All five of them enjoying each other, the girls laughing and talking about stuff on vine and instagram and the boys playing cards about cars and climbing the trees on Gillian's property an hour away from London. Followed by a little get together a few weeks ago for a whole week in Vancouver, where they both celebrated their birthdays in Gillian's new house on the beach. It was when West held Felix's hand to walk in the pacific together for his first time, when she put him in a lifejacket and sat him on her surfboard to paddle a little bit, one of her arms always protectively around him, while Oscar and Miller played soccer on the beach. It was all sweet and technically too good to be true. It felt like family 2.0. It was okay for Téa. It was okay for Mark. But it wasn't like they had told them directly that they actually got quite cozy and domestic there. It was more like a vacation between old friends, at least for their ex-partners and probably for the boys too. He knew they couldn't fool the girls anymore, even though they did not show any serious intimate affection in front of the kids.

But not matter what it was, it probably was the beginning of what they had to face now.

He ran a hand through his hair and was just about to walk in the kitchen when she came out of the bedroom with both her overnight and handbag in her right hand while typing something on her phone with her left.

"I'm calling a cab to get to the airport. Plane leaves soon", she said without even looking at him.

"Your plane departs in three hours, Gillian. And I can get you a driver, it's a service that comes with the apartment"

She looked up and bit her bottom lip. "Umm, yeah. Okay. Thank you"
He walked over to a display on the wall, typing something on the touch screen and got an immediate response. Putting down her bags, she watched him as he talked to the person on the other end quietly, typed again and turned around to look at her.

"Driver's waiting for you in the parking garage. Someone's coming up to get you"

She nodded. "Okay"

He took a step in her direction and opened his mouth while breathing in. "So, you're running away now? Just like that? Without talking about it?"

"What's that supposed to mean? I had already booked this flight when I landed here. And it's not like I have a choice. I have to be in Belfast on Monday!" Her response was a lot more harsh than she had intended it to be. But her brain was empty. She was cold, her skin felt damp. Her stomach was in knots. She just had to get out of there to sort this out on her own.

"And when are we going to talk about this?"

Shrugging her shoulders, she replied, "I don't know"

"Gillian-

Someone knocked on his door. "Mister Duchovny? It's Albert Krump to bring you to your car"

"Just a minute", David answered, closing the distance between him and Gillian and grabbed her by her shoulders. "Please, we can talk about this."

"Yeah. I gotta go." She opened the door, greeting the young man who introduced himself again as Albert. She showed him her overnight bag, grabbed her handbag, turned around, looking David briefly in the eyes and plainly said: "Goodbye". Then she's gone. And with her every ounce of love and happiness that had filled the walls of his apartment for the last couple of hours.

She arrived way too early at JFK International Airport, checked in, bought herself a coffee and nipped at it slightly disgusted while sitting in the first class area of American Airlines. At least she knew now why coffee tasted so bad these days.

It was the messiest of messy situations. As if it would have ever been any different. She seemed to draw messy situations to her like a magnet. Fucking hell, she thought. Getting knocked up at the age of 45 by your ex-co-star. It was like she hadn't learned anything from the past.

Having her first child just 10 months after a rather crazy and rushed wedding in Hawaii, right between two episodes to prevent herself from getting fired.

Only two people, beside a doctor, knew about her second pregnancy in the early days of 1997 that ended rather tragic and soon. Herself and her mother, who cared for her the days after she had the miscarriage. Right after that, she began to detach herself from David once again and lost herself in alcohol, other men and shopping as much as her daughter was not around to see her like this. He married, became a father and eventually left their show.

After the show ended, she met Julian on her trip through South Africa. He convinced her to pack her things and her daughter to move to London and marry him. It was a good time, mostly. A lot of free time for her child, for charities and for theatre. She did a play, miscarried another child and got pregnant for the fourth time just a year later. This time, they had to remove her left ovary due to an ectopic pregnancy. She lost herself in alcohol again, paid the price for a few harsh words on a plane directed to a steward and another passenger and fell down the stairs in her London home. After that,
she and Julian never got on the same page again. Between all that, a nice young man moved in right next to their house. Mark was sweet and understanding. His bed was warm and his arms were open. It was a shock to her when she found herself pregnant again, still married to a man who was not the baby's father. The divorce wasn't really pretty, or friendly. They moved to Notting Hill a few weeks before Oscar was born and made themselves a nice home. She was happy. She had a beautiful and healthy son, her daughter had a bunch of friends now and Mark was caring and loving all three of them. She took her time with the baby and started to work again just before his first birthday. At this time, Chris contacted her about a second X-Files movie. It seemed to be a good idea at the time and she agreed to take a part in it. She hadn't seen David for over two years and was shocked when she saw him and when he told her about his problems with Téa and his life on their first meeting. He was in a bad place and she thought she could make a difference by spending the first months of 2008 with him while filming. She couldn't. He withdraw himself from her and didn't let her in anymore. It was a good thing that Mark was with her all the time. They successfully tried for another baby, went to the premieres of the movie together, while David got worse and eventually went to rehabilitation. After that, she and Mark never went back to the genuinely happy couple they were before. In November, she gave birth to her second son, told Mark that she did not want to marry him and started to look for new projects pretty soon. In 2010, she surprised both David and Téa by coming to his play. They reconnected after that, had an event in 2011 and started to meet more frequently. She was the first one he told that he and Téa were about to separate again, for good this time. She spent a few days at his house in Los Angeles, visited the Set of Californication a few times. When she came home, Mark accused her of cheating on him with David. She didn't cheat on him, but found herself entertaining that thought more and more.

He moved out in June 2012. On David's birthday, she made their separation public.

After wrapping the first season of The Fall, they started to talk about Conventions they both could join together to celebrate the 20th birthday of The X-Files with the fans. After the Emerald City Comic Con in Seattle, he waited for her in her hotel room, wrapped her in his arms, kissed her thoroughly and spent the next two days in bed with her. That's where it all started. She fell hard for him all over again. With the way he made her laugh, how he touched her and how he cared for her, even though she wasn't entirely sure what this was all about. She didn't need to ask him though. She saw it in his eyes and got her answers when he smiled at her in the morning. But it wasn't real life. It wasn't everyday life. It was a precious time without responsibilities and without the need to tell anyone else. She didn't allow herself to think beyond that.
Until the next month, a week before she headed to Calgary. She was sitting on her sofa at home, Piper lying next to her while they watched an episode of the first season of Breaking Bad. It was one of a few things that distracted her mind from thinking about David over and over again. It was already dark, the boys sound asleep, when her phone disturbed the silence of the living room while Walter White sat in his car on a highway, panting. Piper looked up and hit the pause button on the remote.

"Sorry, gotta take this", Gillian said when she looked at the display and saw David's picture on it.

"Hi."

"Hey, G-woman. What's up?" He seemed to be in a good mood.

"Oh you know, laying around, binging on Breaking Bad with P. What are you up to?" She looked at Piper who grinned at her. Her girl was way too smart to not know what was going on the last few weeks. If mom was constantly on her phone, writing messages while grinning from one ear to the other, it probably had to say something after all.

"Well, it's a little cold outside, even though it really was one beautiful day today. And I was wondering if anyone was at home and if I could make some ladies happy with some Sushi."

She raised her brow. "Huh? What do you mean you-" A knock on the window to her right interrupted her and she jumped. There he was. A huge smile on his face, waving with one hand while holding up a huge takeout-bag with the other. "Oh my god!", she cried out, jumped to her feet and pointed for him to come to the front door. He followed her and was greeted with the most beautiful smile he had ever seen.

"Oh my god, what are you doing here?" She fell into his arms and when he was just about to answer, got on her tiptoes and kissed him on the lips.

"Hmm, I kinda hoped for that reaction", he said into her mouth and pulled her close to him.

"Come on in, it's freezing!"

"I told you so", he laughed, stepped inside, closed the front door and followed her into the living room where Piper was sitting on the edge of the sofa. Seeing her for the first time in almost 3 years, he pushed the takeout-bag in Gillian's arms, approached her and lifted her in his arms as she wrapped her arms around his neck and laughed.

"Ohhh, I've missed you baby girl!", he said as he hold her tight.

"I missed you, too."

"Normally, I would say 'Wow, you've gotten so tall', but I guess all hope is lost after all."

All three of them laughed and Piper slapped him lightly on the back, clicking her tongue. He put her on her feet again and looked at her face. She was beautiful, just like her mother. He loved that girl with his whole heart, knowing her since she was only a few days old. She was the one who made all of them laugh during long and exhausting days on set. Her kind and positive spirit could wash away every bit of a bad mood immediately.
"Mom didn't say that you're in England, David!"

"Well, Mom didn't know herself", Gillian said and looked in the takeout-bag. "But as long as you bring Sushi with you, I guess we'll cope."

He laughed and said: "Yeah, I didn't tell her. I wanted it to be a surprise. West and Miller are here, too. They spend the night at my sister's house and I'll get them tomorrow. They would love to see you all again."

"That's so cool! We were just talking about spending some time outside with the boys tomorrow in the sun and making some pizza in the evening. It will be fun! How old are they now?"

"West's almost 14 and Miller's almost 11. We don't want to interrupt your plans, I was just thinking that it would be nice to get together again.", he said cautiously, looking at Gillian.

Gillian looked up at him, smiling. "Don't be silly, it's a wonderful idea! And now let's eat this Sushi, I'm starving!"

"Yeah, let me put it on some plates", Piper offered, took the bag and left for the kitchen.

Still not entirely convinced that she was happy with his plans, he looked down at her, furrowing his eyebrows. She knew that look so well.

Gently stroking his arm, she tried to calm him. "It's a very nice surprise, actually. I'm happy you're here and I can't wait to see West and Miller again." He grinned at her reply and sat down beside her on the sofa when she let herself fall onto it, stroking her upper tight.

"So, finally watching Breaking Bad?"

"Have you watched it already?", she asked suspiciously. Both of them were absolutely not into television series and have never been. But all of their kids were. She always liked to think of how great it is for families to sit together to watch something. She had discovered just recently that it actually was a lot of fun, more so than just to talk about it.

He shook his head no. "No, but Vince filled me in a couple of weeks ago when we had breakfast in Los Angeles. He was quite... well, disappointed that we hadn't watched it already."

"We're on episode four, you wanna watch the rest of the episode with us?"

"Yeah, sure.", he leaned back and rubbed his eyes with both of his hands.

"When did you fly in?"

"Umm, just this morning. Laurie picked us up and we spent some time in the city, riding on the Eye and all that stuff. They went to the movies and for a Burger when I left.", he replied.

"Does she live here now?", Gillian asked when Piper came back with two plates, three sets of chopsticks, a bowl full of soy sauce and a bowl with ginger. They helped her setting it all on the table.

"Thank you, Sweetie."

Sitting down beside David, Piper reached in the pocket of her pants and pulled out to packages of Wasabi and put them on the table next to the plates. "You're welcome."

"Um, just temporarily. She and her husband got a huge assignment to design the bathrooms of a new hotel. Their boys hate the school uniforms here." They laughed.
"Can we watch the rest of the episode or should I turn it off?", Piper asked, reaching for the remote.

"No, let's watch the rest of it. I'm curious now!", he said while dunking a California Roll in the soy sauce before putting it in his mouth.

Happily pushing the play button, Piper grabbed a pair of chop-sticks while her mother still watched the man sitting beside her, smiling.

"Thanks for dinner by the way."

He grinned at her. "You're welcome."

When they finished eating and the credits for episode five, who all three of them wanted to see after the end of episode four, rolled, Piper collected the dishes, put them in the dishwasher and went to her room, wishing both her mother and David a good night. It was when Gillian suddenly realised that he probably wanted to spent the night.

"Oh, didn't you bring things to sleep in?", she asked.

"I did. It's still in the car. I can get it if you allow me to stay", he grinned and put his arm around her shoulders.

"You drove here by yourself?", she asked, knowing that he wasn't used to drive on the left side and actually hated it.

"Yeah. And before you're asking, I got here safely, everybody survived and I took my time. It was actually pretty cool this time!", he replied nodding.

"Ahh-", she nodded back. "So, should we get your stuff then?"

"Mhhmm-" He leaned slightly into her, pulled her closer to his shoulder and looked her in the eyes with a tenderness that took her breath away and made her stomach flip. Her eyelids closed on their own and only a few moments later, she felt his soft lips nipping at hers. His kiss was slow, tender and intense. She had memorized all of his different ways to kiss her at different times, but every kiss always felt different. He had a talent to kiss her in a way that the kiss suited the situation and her mood without an exception. It had been this way since day one.

"Hmmm, I have to tell you something", she said while he continued to kiss her.

"What's that?"

"We can't sleep in one bed."

He stopped, opening his eyes to look at her. Her gaze was suddenly worried. "I know-" He dipped his head in the crotch of her neck and breathed in. "God, you smell like heaven."

She lifted her right hand to brush her fingers through his hair. "David-"

"It's okay, I know. The boys don't even know I'm here and Felix is probably still sneaking in your bed when the birds begin to sing."

She smiled. "You remembered."

"When do the birds begin to sing around here anyway?", he asked, kissing her neck, making her
When he woke the next morning, laying in the soft sheets of Gillian's guestroom, it was already a little bright outside. He untangled his legs from the blanket and got up to look out of the window briefly before checking the time. 5:42 am. He could squeeze a little run in before breakfast. He changed quickly into his running gear, got out in the hallway and went straight to Gillian's own bedroom to take a quick peek in it. The door was slightly ajar, he pushed it further open and smiled. When he left the room last night after a few very nice kisses, only one blonde was laying on the bed, sleeping peacefully. Now, Gillian laid on her side, both of her arms tightly wrapped around a tiny body with blonde hair. He couldn't blame him to sneak into his mothers bed every single morning to be held in her warm, safe arms. But he sure hoped the little dude wouldn't be too jealous as soon as he was allowed to stay in bed himself. Snapping out of his thoughts, he got out of the house and started running along the street that led in town.

She was already showered when he walked past her bedroom, sweat running over his face. With a towel wrapped around her head, she pulled a blue t-shirt down her tummy and smoothed it over her tight, dark blue jeans and realized that he was watching her.

"Hey, good morning! You already went out for a run?"

"Yep, good morning. Do you mind if I take a shower before breakfast?"

"No, go ahead. I actually thought about going out for breakfast. There is a nice, private café in our town", she suggested.

"Sounds great. Where are the boys?", he asked and stepped forward to take a better look in her room.

"Getting dressed in their rooms", she answered, walking towards him, recognizing the expression on his face. "Don't be nervous. They adored you, wouldn't stop talking about you playing b-ball with them for days!"

He looked shyly on the floor and smiled. In January, she brought them to New York and introduced them to David for the first time. She wasn't worried, they had accepted Ruby, Mark's current girlfriend, from the moment she stood before them with a honest smile on her face. Oscar already understood the concept of separated Mommies and Daddies who had new partners in their life's. But David still just was an old friend of hers to them. It wasn't like she could explain their current relationship to her two young boys while she didn't really know herself what to think about it. In New York, David conquered their hearts by playing basketball with them in the gym and buying them fries while she had a meeting with Jeff Rovin. When Oscar came to her room half an hour ago to wake her and his brother, she told them that David was there. Both of them were absolutely excited to see him again.

"Go take your shower", she said, grinned and wiggled her eyebrows.

"Oh my god, what a day!", she groaned, letting herself fall on the bed.

And what a day it was. After a rather quiet breakfast in a very small town near Gillian's home with the boys, the four of them headed to central London to pick up West and Miller from David's sister Laurie. They spent some time at Hyde Park to give the kids a chance to get warm with each other,
which turned out to be a great idea since all of them were pretty active and had a lot of fun with the boys scooters. At midday, they drove back and picked up some things for dinner at a supermarket. West and Miller loved Gillian's huge property and asked if they could explore it before making dinner. The result was that all seven of them hiked through the fields and woods for over 3 hours. The kids and David climbed trees, threw stones into a near stream and got themselves covered in mud from head to toe. It wasn't a typical day for her, but it was the best day in a very long time. After a much needed bath and nap, they started to prepare dinner. Making pizza for seven people turned out to be super messy, but super fun. The kids crashed way after midnight. The boys sleeping on mattresses on the floor of Oscars room, cards and cars everywhere around them. Piper and West watched a movie before they went upstairs, giggles coming out of the room for quite some time.

"It was a perfect day", he replied, pulling off his socks after he had stripped down to his boxer shorts. "And it was really nice that your hair didn't need to get straightened every five minutes for at least fifteen minutes"

She laughed. "Oh my god, you were so pissed on these days"

He climbed on the bed and pulled her to him. "I just always sympathized with your curls"

"Yeah, sure-"

"Fine. Whatever", he said, silencing her with a kiss.
The 7 hour flight from New York to London lasted forever and felt like hell. She couldn't sleep because she felt nauseous the entire time. She couldn't eat because the smell made her stomach turn. She even had to ask a man to change his seat with hers because she couldn't stand another man's aftershave, even though she loved it under normal circumstances.

The young woman next to her was attentive and mindful enough to ask her if she needed a bag, while she already nestled for it and held it under her mouth just in time. It was the second worst flight she had ever had and she just wished for his shoulder to lean onto.

When she arrived at Heathrow at 1 am, her personal assistant Alison was already waiting for her, smiling happily as ever.

"Hey, I'm here!", she hollered, waving like a excited child.

Oh god, Gillian thought. She couldn't handle an overly excited and happy Alison tonight. Knowing her for almost seven years, Gillian knew that she had the best assistant in the world, loving her positive nature and her reliability. She was discreet and always honest, but sometimes too curious for her own good. And sometimes very, very chatty.

"You don't believe who I met here just a few minutes ago! Wait, don't say anything!", she raised her hand and grabbed Gillian's bag with the other. "Tom Maxwell!!"

"Hi yourself. Who's Tom Maxwell?", Gillian replied tired.

"The guy that left me in the middle of a date a few years ago! He picked up another girl that was sitting on the bar, took her hand and just left the damn place while I was sitting there like a total idiot. Can't you remember?", she asked incredulously, starting to walk towards the parking garage.

"Um... yeah. I remember", she lied and rubbed her temples.

"And you know what? He looks absolutely bad. He probably gained over 50 pounds and his suit didn't fit him at all. I said Hi to him and he couldn't even look me in the eyes! Ha, serves him right! Did you have a good flight by the way?", she asked while she fumbled for the car keys.

"I guess"

"I'm driving?"

"Yeah, please", Gillian answered, sitting down on the passenger side. Alison put the bag in the trunk and hopped in behind the steering wheel.

They just joined the motorway, Alison talking about her uneventful meeting with Mark the other day, when Gillian started to fidget on her seat, breathing in deeply. She changed her position two times, straightened her back and laid her hand on her collarbone, belching silently. Her stomach gurgled, upset and hungry at the same time. She tried to calm herself by breathing in through her nose and breathing out through her open lips. It didn't help.

Looking at the left side mirror, she finally said "Please take this exit, Alison"

Quickly glancing at Gillian with a worried expression, she set her turning signal to leave the motorway. "What is it?", she asked, concentrating on the street while she left the motorway and drove towards a little town.
"Just pull over for a second, okay? Look, there", Gillian pointed to her left, where she discovered a little parking lot. The car had barely stopped when she opened her door and got out in a hurry, only getting a few meters before she started to heave on the ground.

"Oh god!" Alison got out of the car herself and hurried to stand beside Gillian. After a few more heaves, she calmed. Her stomach was absolutely empty and released only a little water. Her throat burned like fire and her stomach muscles already hurt from getting sick for the fourth time in the last 8 hours.

The steaming cup of tea warmed Gillian's hands immediately. After they had entered the little café, to which the parking lot belonged, Gillian went straight to the restroom to splash some water in her face and rinse her mouth while Alison ordered two cups of camomile tea and a bagel. She felt absolutely bad for ignoring the fact that Gillian looked like hell and missing the signs of her discomfort. When she stopped heaving, Alison had to support her on their way to the café's entrance before she assured her that she could make it to the restroom on her own.

"I'm so sorry, Gillian. I was so ignorant-", she started, looking at Gillian with an apologetic face.

"No, I should have said something. I'm feeling unwell for hours now", Gillian interrupted her and took a sip of her tea. Warmth flooded her stomach immediately, it was a very good feeling. Maybe she could try to eat a little bit of the bagel.

"You had to throw up on the plane?"

"Yeah. And everyone around me witnessed it", she said plainly, taking another sip.

"So you caught the stomach flu? You want me to call Allan to tell him that you can't come to work on Monday?", Alison asked, nipping at her own cup.

"No." She hesitated before she continued, "I'm pregnant"

At that, Alison involuntarily snorted out a mouthful of tea. The waitress turned around to look at her, shaking her head in disgust.

"What?", she asked out loud, taking the napkin that Gillian offered her to dry herself. "You're kidding!"

Gillian shook her head and ate a piece of the bagel, chewing on it carefully.

"I didn't even know you were seeing someone!"

"David-", she replied and looked Alison in the eyes. She had never seen her assistant this shocked.

"What?!", she shrieked.

Signing Alison to lower her voice with her left hand, Gillian cleared her throat and looked around uncomfortably. She then told Alison quietly about the morning she took the pregnancy test in David's bathroom, while he waited patiently outside. When she arrived at his apartment the evening before, she had already bought the test but wanted to wait until the next morning to see if she got sick again or if her period had finally started. She wasn't really surprised when she woke up with severe stomach pain and hardly any time to get to the toilet. Of course he was right behind her, looking over her with a worried expression.

She told her how everything went downhill as soon as the second line appeared on the stick, too.
"And you haven't talked to him since then? You just left like that?", she asked, frowning.  

A pang of guilt went through her once again. It was the worst thing she could have done, she knew herself. Leaving with the words *I'll deal with it* was absolutely inappropriate and selfish. She nodded and felt herself tearing up, her gaze drifting toward the ceiling.  

"I just needed time to clear my head"  

On Monday, when she arrived on the set of The Fall in Belfast, her head was everything else but clear. She used the rest of Saturday to sleep and to have a few good cries before she finally started to pack for the week that lay before her. Sometimes her head cleared up enough for her to be able to ask herself rationally why she was weeping like a baby over something she once wanted so badly for herself. And him. For both of them. But these moments were rare and she couldn't even bring herself to call him. And he didn't seem to bother, too.  

The first day of filming after their little hiatus was exhausting for her. Allan noticed her constant discomfort and offered her to take a break for a nap. She declined and dozed off later, sitting on the sofa of Jamie's trailer, while they were going over their lines.  

"Gillian-", she heard someone saying through a fog that clouded her mind and felt a hand on her shoulder. "Gillian, are you okay?"  

She opened her eyes and saw Jamie sitting next to her, his expression as worried as Alison's and Allan's. God, she had to get a hold on herself again. "Mmh yeah, I'm awake"  

"Something's wrong, isn't it?", he asked carefully. She gazed at the floor and swallowed. "Maybe you need someone with an open mind, who's not judging", he offered, taking her hand.  

Looking at him again, she said, "Do you think that some things come too late in life? That something that should have happened a long time ago isn't meant to be at a particular time, let's say a few years later, anymore?"  

He furrowed his brow. "Isn't it the other way around?"  

She tilted her head and he cleared his throat. "If something happens or if nothing happens, it's always meant to be exactly this way. I believe we don't have control over certain things, because some things just come when the time is right"  

"Mhmm-"  

"*Maybe sometimes nothing happens for a reason, Mulder*," he said, grinning at her.  

"But what if the universe is mistaken? What if it's never the right time for some things?"
If you love someone, set them free. If they come back they're yours; if they don't they never were. - Richard Bach

Chapter Summary

Finally... some smut :)

August 9, 2013

"You know, not that I'm complaining, but we could take our time. The kids won't wake up for another seven hours", he said chuckling, looking down at her. She seemed to be too busy with the zipper of his jeans to register his words.

She had jumped him the second he closed the bedroom door behind them, kissing him fiercely and whispering bed in his mouth. He stumbled over some shoes when he tried to carry her over to the bed, holding her with one hand around her waist, the other hand fighting with the first buttons of her silk blouse.

"Ouch", he mumbled and let himself fall on the bed on his back, holding her tightly to him.

She giggled and moved herself down, brushing his erection, until she sat on his upper tights and stroked the length of his penis through his jeans. He successfully opened two buttons of her blouse and squeezed her breasts together, the fabric of her bra felt soft under his hands. He sat up abruptly and started to suckle on the silky skin between her breasts. She put her hand on his chest and pushed him down again, grinning. He groaned when she started to open his jeans, brushing against his cock once again. He started to open the buttons on the bottom of her blouse until he saw her navel piercing. He ran his hand over the exposed skin of her flat belly and moved it up until he reached her right breast, squeezing it. When she put her fingers around the waistband of his pants, he lifted his hips so she could pull them down. Suddenly, his cock was exposed to the air and jumped slightly, it's head looking straight to the ceiling. She lifted her own hips and pulled his pants and shorts even lower down his legs until he was able to kick them off with his own feet. When she sat down on him again, he tried to push her short, black skirt even higher to caress her thighs, but she immediately pushed his hands away.

"Nuh-uh. Keep your hands to yourself", she ordered with a serious face.

Oh god, this woman was driving him crazy.

Tucking the loose strands of her blonde hair behind her ears, she lowered herself and blew warm air directly at his penis. Looking down at her, he groaned her name and earned a smile.

Looking up, she held his gaze when she opened her mouth and put her lips around the head of his engorged penis, sucking on it slightly. His eyes closed involuntarily, his right hand starting to fondle her neck. She rebuked him by biting down on him just a little bit, but it only encouraged his moans. She then took him in her mouth almost completely and his hands grabbed the sheets on his sides. She smiled and swirled her tongue around his cock before releasing him again with her lips wrapped tightly around him, sucking at the same time.

"Ohhhh goooouuuud-" She had always been the best at this. She had a talent to suck the life right
out of his penis.

She started to stroke him with her right hand while swirling her tongue over his head, only stopping to watch a few drops of precum coming out of it before she sucked it off. He tasted salty and uniquely like himself. Nobody tasted better.

He opened his eyes again to look down at her, her eyes still on his face. She kissed the tip of his penis softly and released him from her grip. Sitting up, she started to caress his belly with her fingertips, stroking his sides and kneading his breast muscles. It sent little shockwaves straight through his whole body and made him shiver.

She scooted up to sit directly on his cock, leaned down and kissed him softly. He stroked her soft hair and caressed her cheeks with his thumbs. When they broke their kiss, she laid her forehead on his, catching her breath for a second and locking her eyes with his.

"I love you", she whispered.

He smiled at her, rubbing his nose slightly against hers. "I love you, too"

Reaching down between her legs, she pressed his cock against her crotch and began to slide forward and backward over his length. He could feel her wetness through her panties.

"Take your panties off", he ordered.

"No", she replied plainly, grinding faster.

"Gillian-" He was already so close. If she wouldn't stop, he would come like that.

"Mhhmm" She reached between them again and pushed the fabric of her panties aside, took him in her hand and rubbed his cock through her folds.

"Oh God, you're wet", he panted. "So soft, baby" He tilted his hips and glided into her. She was so hot and tight inside he couldn't stop himself from thrusting upwards and lifted her almost entirely off the bed. She shrieked in surprise and steadied herself with her hands on his chest.

"Sorry-", he mumbled, his hands gripping her at the hips.

"No, feels good", she whispered, closed her eyes and began to rock against him.

He finally opened the last button of her blouse and traced the outlines of her bra with his fingers. He pushed the blouse down her shoulders and began to work on the front of her bra, opening it like an expert and pushing the straps down too.

Her breasts were perfect. Full, round and soft, her nipples pink and ready for his mouth. He sat up and started to suck on her right nipple, biting down on it softly while swirling her left nipple between his thumb and index finger of his left hand. She arched her back and pulled his head closer, the nails of her left hand digging into his shoulder.

Her hips began to rotate and he put his hands around them again, releasing her nipple to suckle on her throat. He pulled her little ass flush against him while she was grinding her clit against his pelvis erratically. With each stroke, her inner walls tightened around his cock. He knew that she was just on the edge of release, working towards it ambitiously. She whimpered softly, another sign that she was close. Despite her curiosity and enthusiastic attitude towards different ways of having sex, she was a quiet one and spared her moans for very few occasions. He usually had to rely on her breathing and whimpering, and on the quivering of her legs when it came to her climax.
"David-", she panted. Ah, definitely a good sign.

He raised his knees and the head of his cock suddenly nudged against her cervix.

And then she came, moaning in his ear, holding him tightly against herself. Her walls pulsated around him in waves and gripped his penis tightly. One more stroke was enough for him to cry out in pleasure, emptying himself into her.

They sat like that for quite some time until they stopped shuddering and panting against each other, before she raised her head to look at him shyly. Her face was flushed and her lips were swollen. She was the most beautiful women on this planet.

"Welcome back", he said, grinning.
A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn to glorious success. - Elbert Hubbard

On the evening of Friday, September 27, she was sitting on the examination table in her OBGYN's office, waiting for her Doctor to perform a transvaginal ultrasound. Both her doctors pregnancy test and the examination of her cervix had confirmed that she was indeed pregnant. Not that she had any doubts about that anyway.

"The results of your blood work should be back tomorrow, I'll call you then, okay?", Dr. Pisal asked, sitting next to her, writing something down on her chart.

Gillian nodded and looked down on herself. "Yes, that's fine"

The Doctor shuffled a little bit and Gillian heard her snapping on some latex gloves before she scooted over to sit between her legs.

"I'm going to insert the ultrasound probe now, okay? Relax and breath in", she said and carefully inserted the device before asking her if she was okay.

Only a few seconds later, the first picture appeared on the huge flat screen on the ceiling in front of her. In the middle of all the grey and white lay a tiny black spot with a even tinier white spot in it.

"Oh god-", Gillian breathed out. There it was. Reality.

"Yes, there it is", she pointed her finger to the smaller screen on Gillian's left side.

"That's the sac, this is the head and you can even see a tiny bit of what's going to be an arm there. You see it?", she asked, smiling. She probably thought she had the best job ever.

"Yeah. Wow-" She caught herself thinking about how good these pictures were nowadays, before she snapped back and felt a lump grow in her throat. The denial was over now.

"The size matches the calculations we did before. You're about seven weeks along. And-, let's see", she pushed a button and the room was suddenly filled with the sound of fast beating heart. "That's the heartbeat. 151 beats per minute, strong and perfect"

Finally, Gillian started to smile. Seeing and hearing all her babies heartbeats for the first time had always been one of the best moments of her life. Witnessing it for the fourth time, she thought that this could never lose it's magic. God, she was such an idiot for not letting him participate.

"I really need a picture of this!"

Walking out of the building, she closed her coat around herself. She paused a second to take a deep breath, her heart was still beating fast in anticipation and anxiety. After her ultrasound, they had talked about the risks of being pregnant at the age of 45. The odds weren't exactly in her favour, but Dr. Pisal encouraged her to continue a healthy and active lifestyle.

Until now, she didn't even realize that they hadn't talked about the option of abortion at all. Wasn't that something a doctor had to talk about, she wondered.

Shaking her head slightly, she pulled her cell phone out of her pocket. 4 missed calls. David. Her
heart jumped as she typed in her pin number.

No, Alison had called four times and had left a message on her mailbox over an hour ago. Trying to suppress her disappointment, she listened to the message her assistant left her.

"Gillian, where are you? Please pick up!", her tone was nervous. "Gillian, we're in the meeting with the execs of Young Vic and Ben and Vanessa, where the hell are you?" Whispering. "Shit, Gillian. They set the date for the premiere on June 3rd. I uh- I kinda calculated your due date and figured that you would still be round and heavy when the rehearsals would start on, uh-" Shuffling. "April 14th. Look, they're pissed as hell but I suggested to-, oh please don't hate me-, uh, to postpone the date of the premiere to at least mid July. They discussed it for a while but now we are about to agree on July 23rd. Please pick up. Or call me back as soon as you hear this. Shit, I'm so sorry, but I had to tell them" End of message.

Shit, the meeting. She had totally forgotten about that. Hurrying to her car and jumping in the driver seat, she dialled Alison's number. She picked up at the second ring.

"I'm so sorry, Gillian. I know we haven't discussed how we're going to handle this, but I couldn't just sit there and let this happen, I-", she rambled, her voice higher than usual.

"I love you, Ali", she tried to interrupt her.

Silence. "Really?"

"Yes. Thank you. You did the right thing and I'm glad you did this for me. Sorry for leaving you hanging. I've been at the doctor's", she apologized.

Alison audibly breathed in. "So, you're doing this, right?", she asked carefully.

"Yes. Baby's due on May 1st", she paused and continued "It's the size of a blueberry right now"

"Oh my god. It's going to be the sweetest thing ever!"

They agreed to meet the next morning for breakfast to discuss everything else before she hung up.

She pulled the white envelope that her doctor gave her out of her bag, opening it carefully. Putting her bag on the passenger seat, she laid the picture down between her knees and took a clear picture of it with her phone.

Inserting the picture into the text messages, she wrote: I'm so sorry. We love you.

It's now or never, she thought, pushing the send button.
Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions. - Dalai Lama

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all your encouraging words! It means the world to me :)

It wasn't the easiest thing to stop herself from checking her phone at least every five minutes for a message from David. She actually thought he would answer right away, or even call, because he was as anxiously awaiting something from her as much as she was waiting to hear something from him.

But that didn't seem to be the case. What did she expect anyway? It was typical for them to ignore each other in similar severe situations. They've done it a million times in the past, not talking to each other for days or even weeks. And this time she'd probably gone too far by running away and not telling him what she intended to do about all of this.

After her appointment, she met up with her good friend Samuel in a bar near Piccadilly Circus. For the last six months, he had been working in Cape Town for SA-YES as a trainer, and she was dying to hear what he had to say about his experience. They had planned his trip for months and she couldn't wait to start working with his results, hopefully able to improve the trainings.

The four hours with him had provided a good and much needed distraction, she realized when she arrived home way after midnight.

But there was still no reply from David and she couldn't even see if he had seen her message or not. It was frustrating beyond words. He wouldn't just ignore her altogether, would he?

She decided to go to sleep and to stop thinking about how she was supposed to go to the New York Comic Con with him in a little over two weeks.

She washed, made herself some tea to settle her grumpy stomach and lay down in the middle of her bed, propped up on some pillows, sipping at her tea, replying to Pipers text messages. She had celebrated her birthday in Vancouver with her father and stepmother and had sent a bunch of pictures of her party with old friends. Gillian sadly realized that she was about to have another child that she had to share with someone she didn't live with.

Tears welled in her eyes again. These hormones were driving her nuts. "Oh fuck you-", she murmured into the silence of her bedroom, throwing her phone on the blanket, not knowing if she was referring to David or to herself.

The ringing of her phone sent her heart racing immediately. She sat up wide eyed, trying to see something in the dark room, patting her blanket for the phone. Shit, she could feel it's vibration but couldn't find it. Frantically, she lifted the whole blanket and could hear how something fell to the floor to her right. Turning to her side, she reached down and finally got a hold on it.

"Yes", she answered, sitting up straight in her bed.
"Uhhmm-, it'ssssoooohhhh beautiful"

She arched her brow. "David?"

"Yeaahh, it's muuuuee. And this is you, right?"

She recognised this voice. It was his low, drunken, bedroom voice.

"Are you drunk?" It couldn't hurt to ask, right?

"Yeah, yeah. Absolu-, guilty as charged. I did drink a little... more, and maaaaybe got a little high, he he. Good ole times with good ole Evan ya know", he paused for a second. "But without the girls. Yeah, noooo girls!"

She was quiet for a moment and glanced at the clock. 5:47 am. 0:47 am in New York.

"I got the picture!"

"Yeah?", she whispered.

He sighed before saying "Well, here's the thing... the situation may suck. Nonononono-, no. Let's just say it dooooes suck. Big time. But I can't think of anything else but wanting this. All of it" He did sound pretty sober all of a sudden. "I didn't get drunk because you're pregnant. I did get drunk because-, you know. I-I was angry with you for running away and for not calling for a whole fucking week. Or texting. And I was fucking angry with myself for giving you the impression that this was the worst thing that could've happened. I'm angry because I said Oh Jeez, and I'm angry for letting you go like this and for not having the guts to call you" He huffed out a breath. "And I love you, I-I love both of you. And I don't want us to make the same mistakes we have made decades ago ever again. Some things should be sorted out together. And I want to sort this out... with you"

Gillian wiped at her wet cheeks and smiled to herself.

"You're still with me?"

She snapped back. "Yes, I'm here" She cleared her throat and breathed in soundly. There was no doubt that he could hear that she was crying, the suppressed emotions finally coming in. "Oh god, it has been such a hellish week. I was so scared I ruined everything and you would never talk to me again. I almost had to cancel my play next year because I was too caught up brooding over all of this, just because I was too much of a coward to call you. Work was exhausting, I'm constantly tired and nauseous, throwing up at least four times a day and-" She gasped. "I have to pee all the time"

"You know, chicks with small bladders are hot", he quoted his alter ego Hank Moody.

"I'm sorry, I should stop complaining. It would be fine if you were here to assure me that it's going to be okay. That we can do this. That this is meant to be and that we're not too fucking old for this" He chuckled slightly. "As long as I'm still young enough to have to get drunk to figure out a mess like this, I can assure you we're not too fucking old. Does this even make sense?", he asked.

She laughed in response. "I guess it does. I'm just overwhelmed. I'm a fucking hormonal mess"

"Mhmm. Is, uh-, other than that-, is uh, everything okay with you?"

"Yes, everything's fine. I've lost a little weight due to the constant vomiting, but I guess this is just temporary. The baby is fine though. Strong heartbeat and yeah-. I wished you could've been there"
He sighed. "Me too"

She was quite on the other end.

"Would you do me a favour?", he asked softly.

"What's that?"

"Let me talk to our offspring"

She huffed "David-"

"Come on, Gillian. Humor me"

"Okay, just a second" She put him on speakerphone, pulled the blanket down and laid the phone on her shirt, just above her navel. Getting a good dose of mobile phone radiation from early on probably wasn't the healthiest thing. "He's all ears", she said a little louder.

"Hey baby, it's me, your old man. I know your Mom is listening, so I make this short and appropriate-"

She snorted with laughter.

"I love you. And I'll make sure you'll always know"
Assuming that it couldn't get any worse than the last week, she was looking forward to the last one and a half weeks of filming in Belfast with Jamie. After that, she would collect the boys in London and would fly to New York with them, where she would spend three days at Comic Con with David. But everything turned out to be a little more difficult.

The nausea worsened every day, she couldn't keep anything down despite a little tea and some soup. The constant vomiting left her throat and stomach sore and her skin in a lovely greyish tone. The heartburn that started on Wednesday didn't help either. The exhaustion was crucial though. She wasn't able to make it through a whole day and to put up with her schedule. Allan made some accommodations and tried to adapt the script to the current situation, due to the lack of time. On Thursday, she experienced some cramping in her lower abdomen for the first time, just as she thought things were finally getting better.

On Saturday night, his phone rang when he was laying in bed, glasses on, reading a book. He smiled to himself when he saw who it was.

"Hey, Babe. I thought you'd already be asleep", he said softly.

"David-", she started in a tone that alarmed him immediately.

"What? What is it? You okay?" He sat up and pulled his glasses off. The other end was silent. "Gillian?"

She breathed in. "I'm not asleep. I'm in the hospital"

"What happened?"

"I kind of... collapsed. And-"

"What?", he hollered through the phone. He knew she was feeling like crap for the last two weeks now, but he thought she knew how to take care of herself properly. Or that things would get better soon. Or weren't that bad.

"I-, uh, I was experiencing some cramping today and you know-. Uh, the vomiting the whole week and stuff... left me quite dehydrated. And I have a very low blood pressure... so I kind of-, blacked out", she stated, her voice annoyingly dry.

"What do you want to tell me?", he asked, anxiously. God, please don't let this happen after all, he thought.

"Everything's okay. Pretty much. They say I have, uh, Hyperemesis, which pretty much is severe nausea and vomiting, causing dehydration and all that. I'm hanging on an IV and I need to take some medication now"

"And the-, uh, the cramping?"

"Most likely due to the growing of the... uterus. There's no bleeding, no contractions or anything like that. I'm sorry for scaring you, but I thought you might want to know"
"Jesus, Gillian. I admit I didn't expect it to get this serious, but-"

"Well, you're not here", she sighed.

"What's that supposed to mean?", he asked, keeping his voice low. He really didn't want to argue with her now, or distress her any further.

"I didn't mean it that way, I'm sorry" She breathed in. "I didn't expect this either. I wouldn't even believe it if I hadn't been the one puking the life out of myself"

They both went silent for a few moments.

"I'm taking the next plane"

She huffed out a laugh. "Nooo, don't be ridiculous. You can't do anything anyway"

"Cooking my mother's chicken soup? Holding your hair back? Drawing a bubble bath? Making you feel better?", he asked.

"Mhmm. Okay, obviously you could do something..."

Chuckling, he lay down again, the anxiety leaving his body slowly. "Tell me everything"

He heard rustling, she was obviously getting comfortable too.

"I have to stay here till Monday. And I have to tell Piper what's going on, because she's got a call from Allan-."

"Well, it's not something you can hide forever"

"My belly's shrunken so much, I can already see it"

"Shrunken?"

"Yeeeaahh, you know, the fluid in the tissue and all the fat... just gooone"

"All the fat? What exactly are they giving you?", he asked, laughing.

"I feel so much better. I haven't felt this good in weeks. The fruit of your loins really was giving me a hard time here", she whispered.

"Is that so?", he grinned.

"Mhhmm", she murmured sleepy.

"Go to sleep, Babe. Little Duke's just got started"

"Mom, I'm home! I brought Dad", West called out after she opened the door to the apartment, her father walking right behind her.

"I'm in the kitchen", Tèa called back.

He wiped his hands off on his shirt, suddenly feeling pretty nervous. He was absolutely not ready to talk about what she needed to hear sooner rather than later. After the last conversations with Gillian, he had finally decided that it was time to let Téa know. The denial about the nature of his relationship
with Gillian was finally coming to an end. Hoo boy. He had to think about Hank for a second. Telling your Baby Mama that she would no longer be the only Baby Mama felt-, not so good.

It was Sunday evening and he usually just dropped the kids off in front of the apartment door. She would be surprised to see him.

"Look who showed up!", Téa said, looking at David when they both entered the kitchen, pulling her daughter tightly towards her.

He raised his arms defensively and approached them. "That would be me"

"Did you have a good time?", she asked West, who nodded.

"Yes. I'm going to bed, okay? I'm tired"

"Yeah, sleep well", Téa replied and patted her daughters back softly.

"Goodnight, Sweetheart" He kissed his daughters forehead before she left for her room.

"So, you're alone?", he asked, grimacing. She leaned back against the countertop and crossed her arms in front of her.

"David-

"No, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. That's not the way I wanted to say Hi. So-", he offered her his hand and she took it, smiling but shaking her head at the same time. "Hi"

"Hi yourself" Shaking his hand, she pulled him towards her and embraced him in a friendly hug.

"Why aren't you showing up anymore? I haven't seen you in almost two weeks! Are you okay?", she let him go and looked at him worried.

"I'm actually pretty good at the moment", he nodded enthusiastically.

"You do look pretty good. What is it?", she asked, curious.

"I don't know what you mean", he laughed and leaned beside her on the counter. "I'm just my usual, happy self"

"Are you... seeing someone?"

"Jesus, Téa-"

She nudged him with her elbow, giggling. "You want some wine?"

"Yeah, sure", he nodded.

She grabbed a bottle of red wine and two glasses, and directed him towards the living room. He opened the bottle and filled their glasses before they sat down on the sofa next to each other.

God, this was harder than he had expected. How the fuck could he do this properly?

"I wanted to ask you if I can take the kids to Washington D.C. next week", she said, sipping at her wine.

"For how long?"
"A week. We would fly there on Monday and would come back on Sunday"

"With Tim?"

"Yes, David. With Tim. We have to go into some negotiations, meet with some people and do some research with a part of the crew. You're at Comic Con anyway, aren't you?"

"Yeah", he nodded.

She went silent to look at him. "Seriously though-" she paused for a moment. "How's Gillian?"

He breathed in deeply, not sure if it was a good thing or not that she brought it up.

"Umm, okay. She's okay"

She looked at him, expectantly. She had denied it for months now, but she knew something was going on for sure. Spending time with her together with their and her kids was nothing he had ever done before. Not to her knowledge at least. "So, you're still saying there's nothing?", she asked, smirking. She knew she wouldn't get an answer if she would take this too seriously. He had always needed a reassuring smile and with that the promise that she wouldn't kill him in an instant from her. She didn't understand the problem anyway.

"I didn't say that-"

"Then what's the problem?", she asked, really pushing him to the limit. He would either get up and leave or talk about it now.

Rubbing his hands on his tights, he sighed and finally started to talk. "We're seeing each other for a few months now. I know-, I know, you asked me a hundred times and I didn't tell you. I didn't want to, because... at the beginning, it wasn't really serious"

She arched her brow. When has it ever not been serious with Gillian, she wondered. He was devoted to this woman for 20 years now.

He sensed the question on her mind and continued "It was just sex"

"Are you talking about recent events or things that happened 20 or 15 years ago?"

"March, this year. But after that, things changed pretty quickly. I don't know what to say, but-"

"You both fell in love-, again", she stated.

Rubbing his forehead, he nodded. "I guess. Yes"

They were silent for a moment, before she said "You know, it's not like I didn't know that already. You're spending a lot of time together lately. You bring our kids and you're with her kids. You wouldn't do that if it wasn't serious. I know what you feel for her and I know things changed. Not only between the two of you, but between us, too. I just don't get why you wouldn't tell me!"

"We agreed to keep our relationships with other people private until the divorce"

"Yes. But I thought you would at least fill me in. And of course you can tell West and Miller. They deserve to know what's going on!"

"Yeah, I know. I didn't handle it very well"
"We're still family, David. I trust you and I hope you still trust me"

He cleared his throat. "There's more"

She sipped at her wine again.

"She's... pregnant"
Finally Thursday, he thought as he hopped on his feet in anticipation, waiting for a beautiful little blonde goddess coming through the security area. He was standing there for half an hour now, staring at the screen that displayed the arriving flights. She suggested to meet up in his apartment, but he insisted to pick her up, explaining that he didn't care if anybody would recognize him tapping her cute little ass.

The last three weeks had been nerve-racking, to say the least. Each of them having to deal with a good pile of shit on their own, it was about time for some togetherness.

The first people walked out through the sliding doors, some greeted by loved ones who waited for them, some walking away alone. He couldn't see through the doors milky glasses and started to chew on his bottom lip impatiently.

When she finally came out, her eyes found his immediately and her whole face lit up.

He mentally chased himself for noticing this first, but her breasts were definitely bigger than the last time. To his delight, they stretched her crème coloured shirt very much. But no noticeable bump, as far as he could tell. She was as tiny and slim as ever. Except for her breasts.

She sped up slightly and pushed the cart with her luggage through the crowd to reach him. He on the other hand walked towards her in long strides, smiling broadly and finally wrapped her tightly in his arms, breathing in her scent. She wrapped her arms around his waist and did the same as she pressed her nose in his shirt. She then lifted her head and found him looking at her briefly before he bent down slightly and kissed her intensely, pulling her even tighter against him. They stood like that for a few moments before looking at each other again, both flushed from their kiss.

"Hi", he said gently and lifted his hands to run his fingers through the soft, blonde curls that framed her face.

"Hi", she replied, stroking his lower back gently.

"You look so beautiful"

Her belly tingled fiercely. "Well, thank you" Wearing dark grey chinos and a nice, petrol shirt, she thought that he was looking smoking hot himself. She got on her tiptoes and kissed him again chastely.

"How was your flight?"

"It was pretty good, I slept most of the time"

He nodded. "I hope you're hungry. I bought everything to make my famous sandwiches!"

She opened her mouth in anticipation. "I've been craving a good sandwich for days!"

"I know, you've always craved them in the first trimester", he said smirking.

Sitting next to each other on David's sofa, they shared the last one of the three sandwiches he had
made for them. She faced him, sitting cross legged while he balanced the plate on his right thigh, facing forward, his back leaning against the backrest. Soft music was playing in the background and the living room was dimmed with most of the lights turned low.

Looking at him, she wondered if it finally was the right time to talk to him about the recent events and the conversations they both had with their former partners and decided to give it a try. "So, are you finally going to tell me how your conversation with Téa went?", she asked carefully. He refused to talk about it on the phone for the whole week. She imagined how hard it had been for him to tell her, probably much harder than it had been for her to tell Mark, who had at least tried to stay calm and slightly disinterested when she told him on the phone.

He chewed on the sandwich slowly and stared at the coffee table. "It wasn't very pleasant"

She grimaced. "Well, I gathered that much"

He swallowed and put the sandwich down on the plate in his lap. "Essentially, she wasn't angry or something-, umm... she was shocked, yeah. There was definitely shock on her face. And pity, which was even worse. And she expressed that it worries her how we're going to handle this... with the distance and all. And I told her that we haven't figured it out yet, but that it wouldn't change anything regarding West, Miller and even herself" He took a sip from his water and cleared his throat. "Otherwise, she was really calm... basically"

Gillian nodded and looked down on her hands. "The last thing I want is this coming between you, your children and Téa", she said quietly, tears welling up in her eyes.

He turned his head to look at her and took her left hand, squeezing it gently. "I know. And it won't. We'll make it work. The kids are all that matters. It's only seven hours. All I have to do is to get accustomed to the cold, since I won't be flying to LA so much anymore", he said, laughing gently to lighten up the air.

"Yeah, probably"

He patted her thigh. "Hey, I'm actually pretty nervous about the weekend!"

She cleared her throat and wiped a single tear off her cheek. "Aw, come on. You had a blast in San Diego. You're great with the crowd!"

"They're terrifying!"

She started to giggle and took the sandwich of the plate. "You know, I thought we could do something for Chris' birthday on Sunday with them. They could sing and you could film it with your phone and send it to him!"

"That's a nice idea! He would love that!"

She nodded enthusiastically and took a big bite.

She was lying peacefully on the bed, propped up on some pillows, her feet tucked in underneath the blanket, eyes closed. Her hand lay on her belly, her thumb stroking gentle circles on it. Sitting down beside her, he began to caress her hips and thighs with his hands and she opened her eyes.

"I like that thing", he said and grinned, pushing the fabric of her black nightgown, that ended right above her knees, up her thigh.
"Why's that?", she slurred sleepily.

"Ah, let's see. It's soft, but not as soft as your skin. It's short enough to get some ideas. And I certainly like that your breasts seem to get too big for it"

"What?", she squeaked and raised her head to look down on herself. "Oh"

In response, he just nodded enthusiastically and grinned while caressing the skin of her belly just above her panties before tucking his fingers underneath the waistband in attempt to pull them down.

She lifted her hands and grabbed his wrists under her gown, stilling his movements.

"Umm, what are you planning to do?"

He chuckled. "It is my plan to go down on you, actually. If you really want to now"

She stuck her bottom lip out and shook her head.

"What? No? Not a good plan?", he asked confused.

"Unfortunately, no"

He moved his hands up to rest them on her bump and arched his eyebrows.

"Everything's just a little... sensitive. Too sensitive, actually", she said gently.

Realizing what she meant, he smiled softly. He climbed over Gillian and settled beside her on his side, wrapping his right arm around her middle, nuzzling her hair with his nose, breathing in deeply.

"I'm sorry"

"Oh come on, don't say that. It's not like you're obliged to or something"

"No. But... I'm sorry for me, anyway"

They both laughed simultaneously. He kissed her temple and lingered there for a moment before he planted soft kisses on her cheek and down her jaw. She turned her head and their lips found each other, kissing softly. She surprised him by intensifying the kiss, darting her tongue out to lick over his bottom lip before she plunged it in his mouth to caress his tongue.

"Hmm, and what's your plan here?", he asked as he began to grind himself softly against her hip.

"Just checkin' how much you missed me"

"Don't check too hard. I really don't want to embarrass myself by coming in my pants"

She started to say something, but he stopped her by laying his index finger on her lips.

"Let's wait until you feel comfortable with this again, okay?"

She looked at him briefly and smiled before she started to kiss him again.

"God, I missed the fucking hell out of you", he said in her mouth. He then pushed her gown up to her navel with his right hand, breaking the kiss to look down. His eyes widened slightly. "Wow, there really is a bump already!", he observed, running his hand over the slight swelling of her lower abdomen.
"Mhm", she replied nodding.

"Or is this one of those two huge sandwiches you practically inhaled?", he teased, making her laugh.
On Saturday, at the Paley Center, she had a brief moment of fear when the Interviewer started the Conversation with a "Alright, so the biggest mystery out of the way first", and was relieved when she realized that he’d actually referred to David’s red Speedo. But these kind of moments kept coming over the whole weekend. Every time someone looked at her intensely, she already heard them saying "You're pregnant with David's child!", as if it was written on the tip of her nose. It scared the hell out of her and she found herself clinging to him for protection even more. And he seemed to be very happy to reassure her with little touches or by wrapping his arms around her waist to hold her tightly against him. It was too easy for them to have fun out there together, but very hard not to show too much of the intimacy that came so naturally for them these days.

They spent the evening at a Comic Con Party hosted by Fox in Long Beach. It was one of those Events to either bore yourself out of your mind alone or have someone to have fun with. They met a few people they knew from the Parties in the 90ies, but most of the guests were very young people who probably had no idea why Gillian and David were even invited. One young woman, apparently one of the leading actresses of a series that had just got picked up, came up to them and asked for an autograph for her mother.

"I guess we're getting old", Gillian pointed out as the young woman made her way back to the other 19-something people.

He shrugged his shoulders "I don't want to go back to a time where we were the centre of those parties, standing around the entire evening to talk to hundreds of boring people. Now we have time to enjoy the food, grab a blanket and sneak out to snuggle up on this nice sofa on the patio", he wiggled his eyebrows and guided her to the buffet.

"Ah, I detect a very good plan here", she grinned and grabbed a plate. She filled it with a variation of cheese, seafood, vegetables and fruits and asked David to bring more bread for her before she stepped out on the patio. The sofa was placed in front of a large, illuminated swimming pool and provided a lovely view over the pool and at the beach. He emerged right after her and sat a tray with two plates and two glasses on the sofa table and pointed for her to do the same with her plate before putting a soft blanket over her body, sitting down next to her to wrap himself in the remaining fabric.

"This okay? Warm enough?", he asked and put his right arm behind her to caress her right upper arm.

She smiled at him softly, a pleasant warmth filling her body. "Very nice. Now the food" She reached for a plate, placed it between them and started to eat. "What?", she asked when she noticed that he was still looking at her intensely.

"I just can't get over how stunning you look"

Chuckling, she fed him with a cube of cheese. "You really like my comfy look these days, don't you?" After the Paley and a hot shower, she just settled with a comfortable black jeans and a loose white blouse and tucked her hair partly back with a clip so that a few loose strands fell in her face. She wouldn't have felt sexy at all if he wouldn't been there to make her feel so.

"I love all your looks", he answered and lay his head on her shoulder.

"I had a lot of fun today. Remembering everything that happened, the good and the bad.-." She shook
her head, absorbed in thought.

"Having fun remembering the bad?"

"Yeah. You know-, some bad things turned into some pretty fucking good things-"

"Such as?"

"Having a baby with you" She chewed on the rest of the bread and took a sip of her water.

After a moment of silence, he raised his head slightly to look at her. "This is the first time you verbally expressed that this might actually be a positive thing for you", he stated.

"I know. I'm sorry"

"You don't have to be sorry. But you can't blame me for wondering" She looked at him and nodded. "So, is it a good thing?

"It's a very good thing", she said nodding. "Right?"

"Yes. It is a very good thing indeed" Smiling, he leaned in to kiss her. "Speaking of very good things-, I can think of something else you might like"

"Shoot", she replied and continued eating.

"San Juan Island, Washington. You, the boys and me. Seven days. Next week"

"What?"

He started to nibble on her neck. "Mhm, I got a beautiful little cot on the shore. You'll love it"

"Next week-, like... next week?"

"Yeah, you wanted to get away for Felix' birthday. And I happen to know you planned to book something but couldn't decide yet. So I kinda took care of it, knowing how much you love a private place with lots of water around" He paused for a moment to lick her throat. "You can always disinvite me, but-"

Catching her breath, she cleared her throat and started to caress his jaw line with her thumb. "Of course you're invited. But-, please look at me for a second" He raised his head slightly. "Who are you and why are you doing this?"

Chuckling, he leaned back and took a sip of her water. "You wound me! Isn't it the thing to do when you're in love with a woman with two young, adventurous boys who are in desperate need of some quality time with Mum? What you do when you're starting with the best of intentions and you know you're just not going to fuck this up?!" He watched her looking down and detected a tear rolling down her cheek. "God, these hormones really turn you into a sensitive little flower" They giggled.

"Hey, give a girl a break! You transformed into a fucking romantic"

Nodding, he breathed in. "We're having a baby, Gillian"

"Yes"

He nudged her arm gently. "William or Samantha?"
She laughed out loud. "Ah, I don't know. Do you see me chasing after another boy who's too curious for his own good?"

"Do you see me running after another beautiful girl in order to protect her from all these sly, hideous and stupid boys?"

She arched her eyebrow. "Well, it seems like we're in trouble no matter what"

The Panel on Sunday was hilarious and Gillian couldn't be happier at the end of the day as the auction of her shirt was a great success.

She was sitting on David's bed while he was downstairs in the Gym, already wearing her nightgown, texting with Piper when her phone rang. Taking the call, she lay back against the cushions.

"Hey Alison"

"Hi, Gill. How are you? You had a nice time the last two days?", she asked in a teasing voice.

"Uhm, yes-, yes. Thanks for asking", she giggled, knowing very well what her assistant was referring to. "How did we do? What's the word out there?"

"Well, there's a nice pic of you caressing your-, uh, bump. A lot of pictures of you holding onto his jacket. Then of course the hand holding during the Panel. The media is full of Are they, or aren't they? and Gillian and David - Together, for real!, which is a statement and not a question. Um-. Yeah, well, it was so intimate, nobody would be surprised after all", she said plainly. "Conny's going to call Melanie soon, I guess. You should talk about how to do it"

Gillian sighed. "It has to wait for a few more weeks. I have to talk to Piper in person, and to the boys. And David has to tell his children. Things need to settle down first"

"But Gillian-

"It can wait. We're taking care of the kids and give the three of you a green light when they're okay with the whole situation"

"Okay, I'll tell Connie"

"Thank you"

"Um, the boys are ready for the next two weeks. Erin made sure they bring everything they need. You just need to be on time to pick them up because Mark has to catch his connecting flight to Chicago"

Ah, yes. She'd almost forgotten about that. Seeing Mark for the first time after a rather unpleasant conversation was not necessarily something she looked forward to.

"Great"

"Okay, then-. Enjoy the next two weeks, Gill. You really deserve some time off, I'll take care of everything else"

"Thank you, Ali. Oh, would you schedule an appointment with Doctor Pisal in November? And please tell her that I don't want the Amniocentesis"
"Will do"

"Thanks. See you in about three weeks. Take care"

"You too. Bye"

Hanging up, she sighed again and closed her eyes. This was the most annoying part about that job, or lifestyle, or being a celebrity. Giving the media and public account about almost everything in her life was freaking her out since day one. She knew David wasn't too eager to make this public either. Once the news were out there, there would be practically no privacy for a few months in a row, which was exhausting and absolutely terrifying for the kids.

Getting up from the bed to put her phone on a drawer next to the bathroom door, she noticed a white paper with the letters Week 7 on it. She took it and turned it around. It was the ultrasound picture she had sent him two weeks ago. He must have gotten it developed since then. Smiling, she turned it around and put it back again before grabbing her phone, picking out a picture she took of her belly two weeks ago and sent it to him with the caption Week 7.
At the end of Monday, he knew he had done at least some things right in his life. When he went over to Téa's apartment after lunch, he had the best intentions of telling the kids about him, Gillian and their new sibling. Pacing the room nervously while he waited for them to get home from school, Téa offered her help and encouraged him. At the end, she sat with them the entire time and supported him by reassuring the kids that the situation would not change anything regarding his feelings and his time for and with them. Both kids were surprised and excited and wanted to be involved in the whole process and in the baby's life. Sitting there with his family, all of them supporting him and his choices, he was overwhelmed and deeply touched by their reactions and love for him. He loved Téa even more for being such an amazing mother who stood up for another woman in his life.

Coming back home to Gillian and her boys, they decided to tell them right away. Their reaction was quite a surprise as well, as both of them claimed to have known about Mummy loving David and David loving Mummy for quite some time now. But having a new Baby and becoming big brothers was the real deal for them. Both of them kissed and hugged Gillian fiercely, wanted to see, touch and talk to her belly and started to pick out names for a brother, until Felix decided he would rather like to have a little sister. They asked for pizza and a movie to celebrate the news properly.

Entering his almost dark apartment, much later then he'd anticipated, he could hear laughter coming out of the master bathroom. Closing the door, he put the two pizza cartons on the dining table and shed his jacket and laid it over the backrest of a chair before he walked towards the illuminated bathroom, whose door was ajar, and peeked in.

The boys were sitting in a bubble bath, between them pitched and tossed a gigantic pirates ship while they loudly simulated a sea fight. Gillian was sitting in front of the bathtub on her knees, trying to rinse Oscars hair with a plastic cup full of water while she shielded his eyes with her right hand.

The beauty of this moment was overwhelming and he just stood there for a little before he opened the door.

"Hey guys", he greeted into the room and three heads turned to look at him standing in the door.

"Hi David, look we brought our ship!", Oscar said while he tried to get away from Gillian's hand.

"Yeah, look how big it is!", Felix added as he tried to lift the ship out of the water.

He entered the room and sat down on the toilet seat.

"Wow, it's huge! How did you get this through the airport security?", he asked and chuckled, looking at Gillian who smiled up at him.

The boys exchanged a quick look, before Oscar replied "Daddy put it in a suitcase with lots of paper"

"Yeah, because these two can't go anywhere anymore without this enormous thing here", Gillian pointed out and grimaced. She filled the cup again and poured it over Oscars head.

"Mum!", he cried out, rubbing his eyes.

"Now you're done, kiddo. Time to get out, boys"
Later that evening, when the boys were already sound asleep, she stood on his balcony in fresh pyjamas and her bathrobe, her arms resting on the handrail, enjoying the view of a bustling Manhattan.

She heard the balcony door open behind her and turned her head.

"Hey, is everything alright?", he asked, closed the door of the balcony behind him and stepped beside her.

She nodded slowly and sighed. "I received a text from Allen. He wanted to let me know how much he loved what we've done in the last two weeks and that it looks amazing, especially the scenes I had with Jamie. And I just remembered how bad I felt, both physically and emotionally. So, Stella being upset all the time must look pretty realistic now"

He chuckled slightly and looked at her. "That's something I always loved about acting. Looking back, you always remember certain scenes and how you felt that day. And why you felt that way. And you can remember your exact thoughts in that moment, and feelings, or pain, discomfort, happiness. And sometimes people come up to you, complimenting you for your acting in specific scenes, and you think to yourself It wasn't just Mulder crying there, it was me, too"

She turned her head and smiled up at him. "We have a lot of these scenes"

"Yeah", he breathed out. Both of them turned their heads to look forward again and fell silent for a few moments.

"You know, I realize you probably never wanted to get this domestic with me, ever. I know you weren't hoping for all of this. It has never been easy for us. And-, I'm scared that it might be too much. And I feel like I'm losing control", she said, her voice slightly shaking.

"Losing control of what?", he asked gently.

"My heart, my mind-. You know how hard I had to work for my independence. I was happy with where my life was at and where it was heading. I was happy with myself for being strong and self-confident..."

"And now you're not happy anymore?"

"The funny thing is, I am. I'm even happier than before-", she turned around and closed the distance between them. "You make me happy. But I'm wondering if I'm hoping and expecting too much. If all of this is just happening because of the circumstances, that you feel obliged to be with me now. So I wonder-, how long it's going to last-

"I haven't been this happy in many years, Gillian. I know we have to find our way to navigate through this, but as I told you before-", he cupped her cheeks with both his hands. "I love you. I sincerely and truly love you. I am in love with you, madly. And I feel like I'm finally mature enough to accept people for who they are and to make an effort for it to work, despite our peculiarities, our different hopes, expectations, and dreams. I know what you expect from yourself, what you need for yourself and what you need from me. I know you can't promise me a lifetime, and I can't promise it to you. But I promise you that you have lost nothing of your independence and you won't ever, not with me. I won't take it from you and you won't take that from me" He let go of her face and put his arms around her, pulling her close. "We're strong on our own. And we weren't at that place before"

She sighed and put her arms around his waist.
"I think we're on the same page about the most important things. I can see us becoming a family. Not a traditional one maybe, but-", he sighed and kissed her forehead. "After all this time, Gillian, after all we've been through, don't you think it means something that you're standing here, letting me kiss you? I've done some pretty fucked up shit and I hurt you more than I've ever wanted. And still, you're here"

"That's where I want to be", she whispered before capturing his lips with hers, kissing him softly. "Take me to bed"

"My pleasure", he chuckled and picked her up so she could wrap her legs around his hips.

He stepped inside again and let her close the door before he crawled on top of the bed on his knees, his hands under her butt, and laid her down carefully on the pillows, positioning himself between her legs.

"You wanna try?", he asked, rubbing her thighs with his hands.

"Oh yeah", she replied and pulled him down by the collar of his shirt.

They kissed slowly for a while, taking their time and enjoying different angles, until both of them breathed hard. His hands began to roam over her body and fumbled with the front of her robe, sliding it off her shoulders. Underneath, she was wearing white cotton pajamas with little pink stars all over it. He grinned, loving how warm and cozy she looked in them. Opening the buttons of her top, he started to kiss his way down from her face to her throat, pausing at her collarbone to suck on the soft skin there. He opened the rest of the top and pushed it off her shoulders too. Tucking his right arm underneath her back, he lifted her slightly and pulled both her robe and her pajama top from underneath her, tossing it on the floor. Laying her down again, he breathed in deeply, looking at her naked upper body.

"Wow", he whispered, licking his lips.

Her beautiful, soft breasts were at least one cup-size bigger, her areolas definitely darker and her nipples stood out eagerly. Looking down further, he watched her little bump rise and fall with each breath she took. It was the most amazing sight ever.

"You like what you see?", she teased, grinning.

He cleared his throat. "I have trouble focusing all of a sudden"

She snorted in laughter and cupped his cheek, stroking it softly with her thumb. Slowly, he began to caress the outside of her left breast, sliding his fingers over her skin in circles, each time closer to her nipple. She sucked in her breath, the sensation was almost overwhelming.

"Still good?", he asked quietly, searching her eyes.

"Yeah"

She closed her eyes and he leaned down, taking her nipple between his lips, teasing it gently with his tongue. She arched her back and moaned loudly. He chuckled against her skin, surprised by her reaction and continued his ministrations on her breast, eventually giving her right breast the same attention while she massaged his scalp with her fingers. She wrapped her legs tightly around his hip.

Laughing, he stopped sucking on her nipple and pulled his shirt over his head. She eased her grip on him and he started to open his fly, pulling both his pants and boxers down in one swift motion, adding them to the pile of clothes on the floor. He was already hard as a rock when he fumbled with
the waistband of her soft pyjama pants, easing them down her hips. He couldn't find any panties.

"Oh god, you can't do this to a guy. Wearing this innocent, sweet and soft pyjama and nothing underneath? You dirty little thing you", he said and they chuckled. Leaning down, he slid his fingers through her soft hair, looking at her intensely. "Tell me, babe"

She bit her bottom lip and inhaled. "Slow and gentle, okay?"

Smiling, he kissed her softly until she parted her legs further for him to settle himself between them. She jumped and hissed when his dick poked at her clit.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry", he whispered and lowered himself gently, avoiding further contact between his dick and her clit. "You sure about that?"

"Yes", she panted. "I'm so aroused and wet. Can you just-, work your way around it? Keep pressure away from it?"

"I can try. But will this be... enjoyable for you like that?"

"Yes. I just want to feel you inside of me"

He nodded and sat up on his knees, pulling her towards him by her hips. He grabbed his dick with his right hand and stroked it a few times before bringing it slowly to her centre. She was indeed very wet and he had no trouble entering her. He moaned at the sensation, she was incredibly hot and tight inside.

"Ohh my god, you feel amazing", he panted.

"So do you", she whispered and closed her eyes.

Slowly, he began to move, pulling himself almost entirely out of her and gliding in again. He kept his pace slow for a while, but the sensation soon became too much and he sped up, keeping his eyes on her face. He wasn't sure how to make this good for her without touching her clit or grinding against her too hard. She was so fucking beautiful lying there, panting softly with her eyes closed, her forehead slightly wrinkled.

He couldn't reach her breasts in that position, so he began to stroke the skin underneath her ribs and around her bellybutton. Just as he laid his hands on her bump to caress the soft swelling, she arched her back again and exhaled with a low moan. Her hips rotated slightly and she contracted around his cock, her inner walls getting unbelievably tight while she dug her nails into the flesh of his upper thigh. He slowed down, watching her in awe until she opened her eyes, smiling up at him.

"Wow", he said, stilling his movement completely to give her the time she needed. "That was fast and pretty fucking intense"

"Yeah", she nodded. Her whole body was flushed and her legs still trembled around him.

"This has never happened before", he pointed out and caressed her thighs.

"No", she shook her head slightly.

"You okay?"

"I think so", she said and laid her right hand on her bump. She swallowed and raised her hands to touch his abdomen. "Feels so good"
He started to move again. With his eyes closed, he fucked her deeper and faster this time, his strokes becoming more frantic. He moaned with pleasure when she flexed her inner muscles around him and sped up once more, thrusting into her until his balls tightened and he came hard, emptying himself inside of her.

Panting, he slipped out as he leaned back slightly, climbing over her legs to lay down beside her. He fumbled for the blanket and covered both of them with it, wrapping his arm around her middle and pulling her close against himself.
Sitting down on the tan armchair beside Jay, he was exuberantly applauded by the audience of The Tonight Show. It's been a whole week since they had gone public with expecting a child together and the resonance had been unbelievably insane. It was annoying beyond words and absolutely wonderful at the same time. He had received tons of good wishes from friends and old friends, former and current business partner and people he had worked with. And it was actually increasing his own excitement. Seeing her and her lovely baby bump everywhere had really aroused some primal feelings of pride and possessiveness in him.

A few days before they'd released the news, Gillian was photographed by a paparazzi in a park in central London. You couldn't see Felix' face, but the photo showed him clinging to her hip, kissing her bump, while she smiled down at him sweetly. Unfortunately, she had just taken off her coat after chasing them around and her tight white shirt had revealed that there was indeed more than a little pouch from too much food. Melanie had informed him at the same day that multiple websites were announcing Gillian's fourth pregnancy, paternity unknown. Their teams debated briefly about the next steps and suggested to reveal nothing more than that she was actually pregnant. In the end, both of them insisted to come out with the whole truth, everything else just felt absolutely wrong. He wouldn't hide his connection to this child for the rest of his life and he certainly could not deny his paternity when asked.

So they wrote a brief statement together and posted it on their websites, from where it went viral. They had expected this to become a thing people would probably talk and write about, but they hadn't expected a worldwide response from both fans and media. He'd received hundreds of requests for interviews and was suddenly followed by a bunch of paparazzi all around town.

Right after the news had gone public, she had attended a Charity Event in London, looking absolutely stunning, soft and glowing, even though she had just started to show a little bit. He was sitting in front of his iPad that evening, staring at the pictures for an eternity, warm feelings filling his chest. She was handling all of this like a pro, as always. While he got grumpy and annoyed being questioned pretty fast, she always kept a kind and friendly attitude towards people asking too many private questions for his taste. She never got into details, but she was quite open, even on her feelings towards late motherhood. A topic he had asked Jay not to talk about, besides his separation from Téa and her feelings towards Gillian, the kids in general and his struggles in the past.

And now he was sitting there alone, feeling absolutely unprepared and tense. He had lived with that feeling for quite some time now and thought he got it pretty much under control after a few slip-ups in 1998.

"So, last week my wife was surfing the internet-", Jay started after he welcomed David, obviously not wanting to waste any time on less exciting subjects. "And she is a huge fan of The X-Files by the way, and at some point, she suddenly squealed so loud and yelled Oh my Gaaaawwwd, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson are having a baby!"
He cringed a little when some girls in the audience screamed terribly loud in response, followed by loud applause by the rest of the crowd.

"Mhm", he smirked and nodded before taking a sip of his water.

"That's absolutely fantastic news! Congratulations!"

"Thank you"

"And how is she doing? How are you doing?"

"Um, she's doing pretty good, actually"

"You know, I don't want to hint that I'm a little jealous or something, but I have a pretty long and hot history with that woman, too", Jay pointed out, nodding.

"You do?"

"Yeah. We shared a pretty nice kiss once, and she knows the sounds I make while making love"

The audience and David started to laugh simultaneously. "That's... intriguing"

"Yeah, yeah. But-, she is an awesome woman and I'm really happy for the two of you!"

"Yes, thank you-, thank you very much"

"And-, I almost forgot, but I was probably the first one she told she was having a girl in... what was it, 1994?"

"1994, yeah. Really?"

"Yes! So I wondered, if this time I'm the first one hearing it from you?!"

The audience screamed and clapped loudly and both of them laughed before David took a sip of his water. He put the glass down and cleared his throat. "Ahem-, well. I don't know if I'm supposed to tell, actually"

"So, you already know?", Jay asked excited.

David opened his mouth and waited a few seconds to answer the question to keep them in suspense a little longer. Closing his mouth, he shook his head and answered "No"

Jay and the audience murmured "Aww, you got me all excited here!"

"Well, it's still a little early for this and I think some things should not be revealed prematurely", he said nodding.

„You don’t want to know?“, Jay asked, raising his hands in disbelief while David just shrugged his shoulders.

When Jay finally went over to David's current projects, he felt the tension leaving his body, relieved to finally relax and enjoy the conversation and be able to make some jokes, making this whole thing not a total disaster.
Coming home in the early hours of the next day, he went for a shower and changed in some fresh pyjama pants. He was just about to pour himself a glass of juice in the kitchen when his phone rang, a familiar name showing up on the display.

"Hey", he answered tiredly.

"Hey, how was your evening?"

"Um, it went, I guess"

"Are you okay? You sound pretty beaten"

"Yes, I'm wasted. Spent too much energy on not being tense, causing me to be tense as fuck for the entire time and-, I don't know, I was monosyllabic, evasive and probably arrogant"

"Haven't you read my messages?"

"Um, no. I didn't have time to check my phone yet, sorry"

"Hmm. Doesn't sound like you had a lot of fun", she stated.

"No, I didn't. And you will probably get a lot of questions about whether or not you're sure I'm happy about this, too"

"Oh, so you're grumpy, too?!, she asked, her voice filled with a hint of amusement.

He sighed. "I don't want to hurt you, but I can't seem to control myself in these situations. It's like there's a gate in my brain that shuts down and then I'm not capable to behave normally anymore"

"What would you've liked to do different?"

"I wanted to be more open about everything, show some sincere feelings. You did so great at that Event last week and now it'll seem like you're the only one being excited, while the actual father is a total pain in the ass"

"It doesn't matter. It'll pass"

"No, no", he said vehemently. "It does matter. It just sucks and I don't want to go through that again. I don't want you to go through it again"

"You know, the difference between now and then is that you're your funny, adorably and lovable self to me these days. I don't really care what you do or say in an interview or a talk show, and I never really did. There may have been a time where I've found it very hard to bear with you being cranky and arrogant to me in private, but that's not the case anymore"

He was silent for a moment before he sighed. "I'm sorry, I didn't want to have this kind of conversation tonight. Tell me about your day!"

"Well, the day just started, actually", she pointed out.

"Oh, yeah"

"Mhm. I'm still in bed and I think I'm going to stay here most of the day"
"Why?"

"It's raining incredibly hard. And it's just cold and sad and lonely. I'm getting the boys after breakfast to watch some movies with me in here today, so they can keep me warm and entertained"

"Sounds like a job I want to apply for"

"Just four more days"

"I want to take you out"

"Huh?"

"Would you like to go on a date with me?", he asked seriously.

She giggled. "You're asking me out?"

"Yes. I want to dine and wine you properly-, in public. Well, cut the wine, but-

"Dinner is fine"

"Great. Thursday evening, 6 pm your time"

"But-

"No, 6 pm. I'm going to be already showered and I'll be wearing something fancy, so be ready when I pick you up"

"Okay", she whispered.

He paused for a moment before he continued. "I love you"

"I love you, too. Sleep well, honey"

"Give the boys a kiss from me"

"Will do, bye"

He was about to hang up, when another thought crossed his mind and he called out her name. "You're still there?"

"Yes"

"Do we want to find out whether we're going to have a girl or a boy?", he asked.

"Of course we do!"

"Ugghh-", he sighed and laughed.

He took a sip of his juice before lying on the bed to check his phone. He'd received a few messages from a few different people, but searched for one of Gillian with purpose. He smiled when he realized she'd sent him a whole of six.

_Hey good-lookin', hope you have the best evening! Don't be so hard on yourself. G_
Just woke up thinking about you. Miss you so much.

He smiled to himself while butterflies filled his stomach.

Melanie just sent me a picture of you from this evening. Looking smokin' hot, huh?! Hope all these girls around you can keep their hands off my man.

He laughed out loud.

I like to refer to you as my man. The man in my life. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Sounds amazing, he thought.

My significant other.

Not bad, either.

The One
Lust is temporary, romance can be nice, but love is the most important thing of all. Because without love, lust and romance will always be short-lived. - Danielle Steel

Chapter Notes

Smut ;-) 

Slipping his black Hugo Boss suit jacket over his light blue dress shirt, he stood nervously in front of the mirror, checking himself out from head to toe. He'd just realized that he had never taken her out on a real date before. Not even between 1996 and 1997, when their private get-togethers were mostly filled with frantic lovemaking after long and exhausting weeks of filming. She'd always left right after that, giving them no time to think or to talk about what was happening together.

He really hoped for a nice, relaxing evening in each other's company and therefore he'd made reservations at a quiet restaurant near her house and not in central London, where they would've had zero privacy.

"Hey, big bro, everything alright?"

He snapped out of his thoughts and looked at the door. Smiling, he nodded at his sister and took a deep breath.

"You look absolutely handsome!", Laurie stated and walked in to stand beside him.

"I feel like I'm 14 again, going out on my first date"

She reached up to adjust a loose strand of hair on his forehead. "Isn't that a positive sign?"

"Hopefully"

"I'm downstairs, okay? If you need anything, just call for me"

"Thanks for having me, Laurie"

"You're welcome, David"

After she left, he used a little of the perfume Gillian loved on him and checked if he had everything he wanted to take over to her house once more. He said goodbye to his sister, who kindly allowed him to stay the day at her house to prepare himself for the evening, and her sons, before he headed to his rental car and drove the one hour drive to Gillian's home.

When he arrived, it was already dark and cold, even after such a warm and sunny day. The house was illuminated and he could hear laughter coming from inside when he stepped up on the front door to ring the bell.

He was greeted by a smiling Piper, who ushered him in before hugging him tightly.
"Wow, you look fancy! How are you?"

"Nervous", he smirked.

She giggled in response. "Well, Mom is standing beside herself, too"

He smiled shyly and looked down at his shoes. "Are the boys home? You're um-, you're babysitting today?"

"Yes. Don't come in the kitchen, though. I'm trying to keep them away from Mom and we're painting with water colours right now. It's a huge mess"

"Where is she by the way?"

"I'm coming", Gillian hollered down the stairs before she emerged above, making her way down slowly.

She looked absolutely breathtaking, wearing a black, knee length coat that was slightly longer than the dark blue dress she was wearing underneath. She was also wearing black, transparent thigh highs and black high heels, making her a few inches taller. She'd curled her hair slightly, so that it fell around her face in soft waves, making her look almost angelic, if it weren't for her dark, dangerous eyes.

She fixated him with her eyes and he just thought she smiled the most adorable smile he'd ever seen on her, when he remembered the last time he thought the exact same thing in exactly the same place just a few months ago.

"Hi", she smiled broadly.

"Hey" He grabbed her by the waist and pulled her towards him. "You look beautiful"

"You really do, Mom", Piper added.

"Thank you", she said, looking at him and then at Piper. "Just call me if something's wrong, okay baby?!"

"Yes, Mom. Everything will be fine. Go and enjoy your evening"

"Thank you", both of them said at the same time and Piper left for the kitchen.

They turned their heads to look at each other again before he leaned down slowly, capturing her lips with his for a soft kiss.

"So, where are you taking me?", she broke the kiss.

"Oh woman, I'm kissing you at the moment, don't interrupt me!"

"I'm hungry!", she whined while he kissed his way down her throat. "Where are we going?"

"Hmm, you smell nice. I'd rather stay here and move to dessert straightaway"

"Oh David, stop it! I mean it!", she grabbed him by his hair and pulled his head up.

"Ow! Man, you must be famished!"

"Well, yes! So?"
"A place that's famous for its fish", he answered and looked her in the eyes.

She opened her mouth and knitted her brows and he immediately burst into laughter.

"Relax, relax. Of course that's not where I'm taking you. I know what you need, want and would currently kill for, so calm down. Garlic bread, spaghetti and tiramisu"

Her face lit up and she pulled him down for a passionate kiss.

After helping her out of her coat, he walked her to their table, adjusted the chair for her and sat down across from her. Getting the first good view at her cleavage, he tilted his head. No, definitely no bra. As if she could read his minds, she smirked and blushed slightly.

"Sorry", he said shyly, grinning like a little boy caught in the act.

"I'm pleased you like it"

"Oh, you bet I do"

Getting into her car later this evening, they were still laughing loudly after having the absolutely best time together. It had been a wonderful evening filled with good food, some wine for him and lots of laughter.

He slumped down on the passenger seat, holding his belly and groaned satisfied.

"I can't believe they didn't kick us out", he said, grinning.

"I can't show my face there ever again!", she laughed. "It's a shame, the bread came straight from heaven"

He leaned back and turned his head to look at her while she was adjusting the driver seat.

"Thank you for this wonderful evening"

She looked at him and smiled before grabbing his hand, squeezing it gently. "Thank you for making it wonderful. I felt like a teenager again", she giggled, put his hand on her upper thigh and turned on the engine.

They sat in silence for a while, enjoying the quiet drive, letting the events of the evening settle in. Despite knowing each other for more than 20 years, all of this was still so new and even unfamiliar in some way.

Once in a while, she turned her head to watch him dozing beside her. The jet lag had finally kicked in and the two glasses of wine he had made him sleepy as well. His thumb stroked her thigh occasionally and he hummed comfortably, making her smile contently.

It was quite the challenge to wake him enough to get out of the car, upstairs and out of his suit before he laid down on her side of the bed in the darkened bedroom while she disappeared in the bathroom to wash and change. Unlike him, she was wide awake and had hoped for a different ending of the evening. But knowing him for such a long time had its advantages after all. She changed into her new black negligee and made a short trip to the kitchen before laying down beside him a few minutes later with a bowl full of banana slices and peanut butter.
"Hey, sleepyhead, look what I got for you", she said in a seductive voice and used the fork to dip a slice of banana into the peanut butter.

He groaned and opened one eye, then the other. His eyes darted between the bowl and her soft, milky white breasts.

"What exactly are you offering here?", he asked and opened his mouth for a bite. "Oh, that's-", he licked his lips and closed his eyes in satisfaction. "That's just-"

"Mhm", she murmured and captured his lips, tasting the sweetness of the banana and the peanut butter on his tongue. The kiss deepened and he took the bowl from her, putting it on the nightstand beside him and rolled over to face her again.

"That was good, but this is better", he whispered and kissed her again, pulling her to him, caressing the smooth skin on her neck and back with his fingertips.

"Why did you bother hiding this beautiful, soft skin of yours with this thing here?", he asked and let his fingers slide underneath the straps to move them aside and down her shoulders.

"You don't like it?"

"I do like it, but I'd rather like to feel your skin on mine now"

"Oh"

She started to fumble with his boxers and pulled them down his ass in one swift motion before he grabbed the end of her negligee, bunched it over her hips and finally pulled it over her head after she raised her arms to help him out. Reaching down, he removed his boxers and tossed them on the floor.

She opened her legs for him to settle himself between them. She could feel his hard penis pressing demandingly against her thigh.

"Oh!"

"Look what you do to me", he smiled down at her.

She caressed his face with the back of her fingers and he slightly leaned to the side to reach down between them, his right hand stroking the inner side of her thighs up to her centre. Dipping his index finger carefully into her opening, she hummed and gripped his neck. She was wet, but not ready for him yet.

He leaned down again and started to kiss her collarbone while squeezing her left breast with his right hand, teasing her nipple with his thumb. He licked his way down to her right breast and sucked her nipple into his mouth, his tongue swirling over it in a swift motion. She hissed and covered her eyes with her left hand.

"Hm, they fit perfectly in my hands now", he observed, squeezed a little harder and bit down gently and carefully, making her arch her back. He tilted his head and licked over her whole breast and down her ribs, moving to the middle until he reached her belly button and plugged his tongue in. He pushed himself down on the bed and looked at her baby bump in awe. It was still pretty small, but so much bigger than the last time he'd seen it, almost 4 weeks ago. He moved his right hand over it and looked up at her. She had a content smile on her face.

"God, this is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen"
She snorted and lay her hand down beside his. "It grew so much in the last two weeks"

"It's hard, too", he said and leaned down, placing a lingering kiss on her skin. "I think I have never told you, but I've always thought you're the most beautiful pregnant woman out there. Getting all soft and round."

"Since when is soft and round your thing?", she teased and grinned.

"I don't know, I-. Can a guy even answer this question correctly?" He knitted his brows. "It's you. I love what it does to your body. Your lips get fuller, your eyes moister, cheeks constantly flushed. I don't have to talk about your breasts, do I?!"

She smiled and shook her head slightly.

"And yes, I even like that you're getting bigger, and I'm not just talking about the bump" He shifted a little to lay between her legs again, his face at the same level as her belly. "Pregnancy just suits you very well", he added and moved down further to kiss her inner thighs.

She closed her eyes again, enjoying the impact of his words on her body and the pleasure he was giving her with his mouth.

He traced her skin with his tongue and sucked on it, leaving little marks here and there. She wiggled underneath him in anticipation and reached down to guide his head to where she needed him most, making him laugh. Slightly, he began to rub his nose against the soft material of her panties, smelling her delicious scent. He felt himself grow harder and pressed his hips into the mattress. Grabbing the hem of her panties, he pulled them down, lifting her legs to remove them entirely and leaned down again to place a soft kiss on her clean waxed mons pubis.

"You like it?", she asked. He wasn't used to her being completely hairless, but she had always liked it better during pregnancy.

"Yes, it's so soft"

"Yeah", she said and stroked his hair.

He continued kissing her, licking and nipping over her labia and finally lifted his right hand to part them. He supported his weight on his elbows and dipped his head down to trace the length of her opening with his tongue. She gasped and squeezed his head with her thighs.

"Oh god, David", she moaned.

He grinned and sucked her clit in his mouth completely.

"Oh god!", she cried out loudly, making him laugh.

He licked her for a while, swirling his tongue over her clit repeatedly before carefully inserting two of his fingers to fuck her slowly. She moaned louder and started to tremble.

"Please", she whimpered.

"Please what?"

"More"

"More of that?", he asked and sucked her bundle of nerves in his mouth again. "Or this?" His hand sped up while he continued licking and teasing her with his tongue. He knew she was close and he
desperately wanted to make her come this way.

Her legs started to tremble and she lifted her hips slightly from the mattress. She raised her hands and squeezed her breasts together. With his free hand, he reached up to pinch her left nipple a little. With that, she tumbled over the edge, crying out his name once again.

When her body seemed to have calmed down, he pulled his fingers out of her carefully and scooted up to lay beside her again. Her eyes were still closed and she nibbled on her bottom lip.

"I have missed this", he pointed out and caressed her flushed cheek.

She nodded and opened her eyes. "Oh yes, me too"
"Do you realize that this is a surprise like no other? You won't be disappointed no matter the outcome! How many surprises can you think of that provide something like that? None? Yes, none!", he said and turned the page of his book.

"Hmm", she murmured and fondled his scalp with her fingertips, holding her own book with the other hand.

His head was resting in her lap and his long frame was stretched out on the rest of the sofa. He had lid the fireplace and had turned on some blues before they both got comfortable in the living room after a wonderful day at the indoor playground with the boys.

"And you don't have to listen to people talking shit about stupid stereotypes, the names you picked or how sorry they are that you're having a third boy although a girl would fit in a lot better, or not. Or they're asking if you're going to try for a little sister for this boy, because that's how things should be" He heard her sigh. "You can get really creative with that baby room, as you don't have to go with pink or blue. And you'll be so excited when the time has come to finally find out!"

"David, you just like to piss people off. You don't want to go the regular way, you want to buck societal norms and make people uncomfortable when they ask what we're having", she said and laid the book down beside her.

He made a wounded face. "Hey, that's not fair! I just want what's best for you, and I think it will reduce your disappointment"

"Excuse me?"

"Maybe you're hoping for a certain gender and if we find out it's not what you're hoping for tomorrow, you'll have another 23 weeks to be disappointed. If you're going to find out at birth, this beautiful little boy or girl will lie in your arms and there will be no room for disappointment anymore", he said gently.

"So, you think I prefer a certain gender"

"I'm just getting some vibes here..."

"What happened with No matter the outcome, you won't be disappointed?"

"I think that's just the case when you're waiting for the right time"

"So, if we're going to find out tomorrow that we're having a boy and you had wished for a girl, you'd be disappointed?"

"I don't prefer a certain gender"

"Oh, you liar" She giggled and ruffled his hair.

"It's not like that"

She nodded and leaned down to kiss him.
"Knowing the sex has always helped me with the bonding. With my fantasies and dreams for this human being. Pregnancy has never been easy for me, emotionally and psychologically. And knowing who I'm doing this for made it bearably-, enjoyable"

He groaned.

"What?"

"How could I deny you to enjoy this pregnancy?"

"To be fair, this pregnancy has been pretty easy so far, at least for my psyche. No panic attacks, no nightmares. I'm enjoying it, I really am"

"What are you hoping for, Gillian?", he asked and turned his head to look at her belly.

She thought about his question for a moment before answering. "I think a boy, because I know how to handle them pretty well"

"Oh yes, you definitely do know how to handle boys"

She smirked. "But I always see you with a little girl, and it's melting my heart"

"She's going to have me wrapped around her finger", he said and started to caress her belly with his right hand.

"Yeah" She smiled down at him and started to fondle his cheek. "You know, if we're not going to find out, we have to pick out names for a boy and a girl. That's a lot of work"

"Yeah, with you, I think this is going to be a lot of work indeed", he said calmly.

"Huh?"

He laughed. "I'm just curious how we're going to manage this. I'm curious what kind of names you're suggesting"

"I can think of one or two cute names for a boy, actually"

He arched his eyebrows and looked at her. "Shoot"

"Hunter", she said.

He grimaced "Wow, this is going to be harder than expected"

"Hey", she slapped him playfully on the chest and laughed.

"Okay, next name"

"Rufus"

"Oh brother", he said and rolled his eyes.

"So, how are you doing?", Dr. Pisal asked, turning off the lights and eventually sat down beside the examination table, on which Gillian was lying with her belly exposed.

"Great, actually. The nausea is completely gone, no more sickness, a little heartburn sometimes"
"Good, and how are things for you emotionally?", she asked, familiar with the struggles Gillian had in her past pregnancies.

"I guess I'm stable at the moment. No major ups and downs-. Well, I have quite a lot of ups lately, but really good ones", she answered, smiling in David's direction, who was sitting beside her on the other side.

"Have you seen your therapist lately?"

"Yes, last week. I'm going every other week as a precaution"

"That's great, I was about to suggest something like that" She started to go through Gillian's file.
"There are no results of the amniocentesis. You didn't want to do it?"

"Um, no", she shook her head. She had made that decision pretty early without talking about it with anyone, not even David.

"I'm sure you thought about this thoroughly. I see you had a nuchal translucency scan done in the US at 12 weeks"

"Yes"

"The results were very good, nothing that would indicate an abnormality"

Gillian nodded.

"Okay, let's see how things are doing in there, okay?"

"Yes!", David called out in anticipation, making both woman turn their heads in surprise.

Dr. Pisal smirked. "So, do you want to find out what you're having?"

"Yes"

"No"

The doctor knitted her eyebrows and applied the cold ultrasound gel on Gillian's belly. "So, you want to know if it's a boy or a girl, Mr. Duchovny, and she doesn't?"

"No, he doesn't. He's just saying yes because I want to know. But we won't find out today. Please don't tell us"

"Um, okay"

"Are you sure?", David asked perplexed.

"Yes, it's fine. We can always find out later if we really want to", she replied and grabbed his hand, smiling at him.

The doctor glided the ultrasound transducer over her lower abdomen and a grey and white picture appeared on the screen.

"God, I'm so excited now, I think I don't want to wait anymore, I want to know now", David said and stared at the monitor.

"Oh David, stop it", Gillian muttered.
"Wow, look at that!"

"Yeah, this is the belly, and there's the heart, beats 151 times per minute, which is perfectly fine"

"Wow", Gillian whispered and he squeezed her hand gently.

"Look at that face!", he pointed out.

"Let's take a closer look", Dr. Pisal said, pressed a button on the machine and the picture suddenly changed into 3D.

"Oh my god, he's so cute!"

"Well-", he tilted his head. "At least it's a cute Alien"

"Yes, it still looks kind of alien to us at 17 weeks, because there is barely any fat tissue and the head is really huge", she replied and continued with her regular examination while David and Gillian kept staring at the monitor in awe. "This one's actually on the heavier side with about 6 ounces"

"That's all the pasta from last week", David added.

After the ultrasound, they were handed a few pictures and she went into a few more examinations before sitting in Dr. Pisal's office to go through the results.

"I am very happy with how well this pregnancy is going so far. Baby's development is excellent and you are in great health. The next goal is reaching 24 weeks and then we can talk about your options regarding the birth. Do you have any more questions?"

"No, sounds good"

"Um, could you actually see what we're having?"

"David, you don't want to know!", Gillian sighed.

"Maybe I do now"

Dr. Pisal laughed. "Okay, let me suggest something. Some people feel like the doctor's office is not the right place to learn about their baby's gender and I can totally relate to that. Yes, I know what you're having and I'm offering you to write it down and put it in a closed envelope that you can open whenever you feel like is the right time"

"That's a nice idea, thank you"

With the closed envelope in one hand and her handbag in the other, she left the building to walk to her car with David hot on her heels, catching up to her.

"Hey, are you angry now?", he asked cautiously and looked down at her while walking beside her.

She sighed. "No, of course not. But I desperately want to know and it would have been a lot easier for me if you just hadn't changed your fucking mind!"

He grabbed her arm and stopped her. "I'm sorry, I just got so excited in there", he apologized and pulled her closer to him. He could see her face softening under his touch and grinned impishly.
She got on her tiptoes and kissed him chastely. "You're just lucky you're handsome. If you're going to buy me food now, I might forgive you"

"So, you got this envelope and it's just going to lie around, unopened?", Piper asked in disbelief, crossing her arms and looking down at David and Gillian sitting on the sofa.

Gillian shrugged her shoulders in response and placed a soft kiss on Felix' forehead, who was sleeping in her arms with his head resting on her chest.

"This is the craziest thing I've ever heard"

"Why's that?", David asked, biting in his sandwich.

"Are you planning to open it anytime soon?"

"Well, maybe"

"Oh come on, you can't be serious!"

"Come on, pull off that jacket and sit down to look at the pictures we got there too", David said and patted on the free spot between Gillian and him.

Piper sighed and threw her jacket on the armchair next to the fireplace and sat down between them. Gillian leaned into her to lay her head on her shoulder as David started to hand her the pictures.

"Wow, this looks a lot better than the ones we got when you were pregnant with Felix", she noticed and Gillian nodded in response.

He handed her the 3D picture and she arched her right eyebrow just like her mother.

"Wow! Oh my god, that's amazing! Is she just sitting there with her legs crossed?"

"Yeah", David beamed and Gillian smiled at him.

"It slightly looks like she's pouting. No wonder, she probably couldn't believe you didn't want to know her gender. Even though she already knows she is a girl, of course"

"She was asleep during the ultrasound" He handed her the next picture.

"He was not pouting. He just inherited Daddy's bottom lip", Gillian said, shifted Felix slightly in her arms and rubbed his back gently.

"I can't believe you've wanted an envelope and now you refuse to open it", Piper murmured. "Makes the thing with the name a little harder"

David scoffed and leaned forward to be able to look at Gillian. "That's absolutely true", he said, grinning.
True love cannot be found where it does not exist, nor can it be denied where it does. - Torquato Tasso

Chapter Notes

Thank you SO MUCH for your nice comments! They mean the world to me! This is a short chapter because I had a pretty busy week, but the next chapter will be a long one again, I promise :)

When he woke up, warm and comfortably tucked under a soft blanket, the room was still dark, but he could hear the first remaining birds from the outside, announcing the beginning of a new day. He lay there for a while, on his side, not moving and just waiting. He could feel the heat of her body and knew she was lying right next to him under his blanket, even though their bodies did not touch. He could hear her steady breathing clearly and figured that she must be facing him, too.

It had most likely been the last night for him in this bed in 2013 and his heart somehow felt very heavy on this particular morning. Being here with her, living somewhat approaching a normal life outside the big city in a rural house was something he could get used to. Definitely. A few days ago, he had wondered for a brief moment if she would suggest to spend a few weeks in New York with him before Christmas to write her book. But he knew she wouldn't do it, and she never did. And he didn't mind, not in terms of being sad or disappointed about it. She had grown into an independent woman who knew what she wanted and how to take care of herself. For them, it was the most important part in their relationship. Being able to simply be themselves and to respect the other person's freedom. It was strange how fast things could change after a very long time in which things didn't want to change at all. He smiled to himself thinking about the conversation he had with Gillian one night in New York, after the Comic Con. They had watched the episode she had written and directed, All Things, in bed together. He had never been a person who pondered too much about fate and life's paths. It had never made sense to him until recently, he realized.

He sighed and snapped back into reality, noticing that it had gotten bright enough for him to see the outlines of her petite frame beside him. Her hair was draped all over her pillow in soft waves. He watched her for a few minutes and enjoyed to wait for the sun to shine through the curtains, giving him a clearer view of her face with every minute that passed. Her face looked soft and relaxed, and absolutely beautiful. He raised his arm and traced her jawline gently with his index finger back and forth. In response, she inhaled deeply and smiled, keeping her eyes closed and scooted closer to him. He wrapped his arm around her warm body and pulled her against him as she nestled her head in the crook of his neck.

"I dreamed about Los Angeles. Walking on the Pier with you and the kids on a warm summer evening. Building a sandcastle while watching the sunset. Eating burgers", he murmured into her hair and stroked her back.

"You miss it, don't you?"

"I have a lot of good memories of this city, but I never got to do these things with you. And I want to do my favourite things with you"

She raised her head to look at him. "I'd love that"
He smiled and leaned in to kiss her softly on the lips. "So, just tell me a bit about your plans for the next weeks, because right now, I feel terrible thinking about not going to see you until New Years Day"

"Oh, I'll be busy", she answered and grinned impishly.

"Yeah, I bet you will"

"I have a few meetings for the play and for some other things I originally wanted to work on next year. We'll see how these turn out since I already said that I'm not going to work after the play, other than on charities"

"You're not?"

"No. It will be hard enough to do Streetcar with such a little baby at home. I have no fucking clue how this is supposed to work-. Well, after that, I need a long family vacation, that's for sure"

He nodded and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. "I'm not going to work on anything during your play, at least not in the US. I'm planning to be here most of the time", he said and sighed. "I know we haven't talked much about it yet, but I don't want to come over once in a while to see you and the baby for a few days. I'd like to spend the majority of time together. And-, as long as you're working on the play, I think she would like to have her Dad around to take care of her"

"I think I know what you're worrying about, but it's not going to be like that. I won't keep you at arm's length and limit your time with your child. I want to have you around me, too", she said and stroked his cheek gently. "And we will figure out a way to spend time not only here, but in New York as well"

It wasn't like he'd really doubted her, but he felt relieved hearing her say what he had only hoped would be her opinion on this whole situation. He really didn't want to have two different life's, one in New York with West and Miller and one in London with Gillian. He knew it wouldn't be easy to work things out in order to have something approaching an everyday life, but it was good to know that she wanted this to work as much as he did.

"I love you so much", he said sincerely and she smiled at him.

"I love you", she replied and kissed him.

He moved his hand over her back again and under her shirt, tracing the line of her spine with his fingertips.

"I'm going to fly out to Belfast next week to go through some stuff for The Fall that will take a few days. After that, I have a few photoshoots and interviews here in London and then I'm going to narrate an audiobook for BBC radio", she paused to give him another kiss, this one more lingering.

"So, you're busy"

"Yep, I am. And I can't wait to spend more time with the boys in between", she stated and he nodded in response. "But I'll miss you so much"

He grinned and they went silent for a moment before he gave her a quick kiss and entangled himself out of the sheets to get up.

"Wait a second, don't move!", he ordered and started to go through his suitcase in her dressing room. He came back with a little black box in his hands and sat down on the bed beside her again. She sat
up too and drapped the blanket over their feet.

"What's that?", she asked and looked at the box in his hands.

"It's a little something for you", he answered and handed her the little box.

She furrowed her eyebrows as she took it from his hands hesitantly.

"Don't worry-", he said, noticing her slight discomfort. "It's not an engagement ring", he joked and grinned.

She smirked and opened the box, lifting her right eyebrow at what she saw in there. Well, it was a ring, but not quite what she had expected. She retrieved it carefully to inspect it. "A criss cross ring"

He laughed. "Well, I would call it a X-ring! Try it on!"

She did as he said and slipped it on her left ring finger. It fit perfectly.

"For you, G-woman", he said and wrapped his arms around her when a single tear fell from her eye.
Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. - Henry Ford

It had been a wonderful evening, Gillian thought as she pulled the key out of the ignition and climbed out of her car, feeling content and absolutely proud of herself for being proactive and ask Mark if she could spend Christmas Eve with him and the boys instead of sitting at home alone, soaking in self-pity and crying for the whole evening. After Piper had told her she would be spending Christmas with her father in Hawaii, she had called her mother and sister and wanted to invite them over. Unfortunately, she had forgotten about their trip to Alaska over Christmas and New Year's. So she briefly thought about the idea of spending the evening in London with some friends, who were, by any chance, free from any familial commitments, but that wasn't how she wanted to spend the evening at all. Instead, she called Mark, who had invited her over instantly. Although she had regretted her decision the moment she was standing in his living room, realizing his parents and brother were there too. Surprisingly though, everything turned out less awkward than she feared it would be, sitting there with her ex’s family on Christmas, obviously pregnant with a child from another man. But Mark's kindness didn't come from nowhere. His whole family was a blessing and to see the boys happy was in their best interest.

She climbed the stairs from the garage to the kitchen and just as she was about to open the fridge to look for something sweet, her phone disturbed the silence of her empty house. She pulled it out of her coat and looked at the screen. She smiled and tapped on the screen to accept the video call.

"Hey!", she called out, smiling broadly. David's face appeared on the screen as well as some voices in the background.

She must have appeared on his screen too, because his serious face turned soft and he started to smile. "Hey young lady, are we catching you at a bad time?", he asked and suddenly Miller flopped down beside him, waving furiously into the camera. "Hi Gillian, merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas! And no, it's not a bad time! I just arrived back at home", she said, shed her coat and looked at the screen. She smiled and tapped on the screen to accept the video call.

"That sounds delicious!"

"Did you have a nice evening?", David asked, smirking. After she arrived at Mark's house and was greeted by his family, she had locked herself in the bathroom and sent David a message, telling him she would hide in there the whole evening. He replied almost immediately that she should enjoy the evening with her sons rather than being afraid of something that hadn't even happened yet.

She smiled and nodded. "It was very nice. The boys opened your presents, I will send you a video how they opened them later. They were absolutely happy and said thank you!"

Miller laughed. "That's cool! I hoped Oscar would like this Lego set!"

"He does! Thank you very much, honey!"

David looked to his right and held out his hand before someone grabbed it. He pulled slightly and West appeared on the screen, sat down beside her father and smiled shyly.

"Hey Sweety, merry Christmas!"
"Hi, thanks, merry Christmas to you too", West replied and leaned her head against David.

"When are you coming?", Miller asked.

"He can't wait to see you again", David laughed.

"In six days, kiddo. Can't wait to see you, too", she winked.

All of a sudden, Téa walked in the picture, standing behind the sofa the three of them were sitting on, wearing an apron. "Merry Christmas!"

Gillian raised her eyebrows in surprise and she felt her heart starting to race. This evening was indeed utterly awkward, she thought and smiled. "Merry Christmas!"

"Mom, don't leave the Lasagna, it'll burn before you know it!", Miller complained and looked up at his mother, who sighed quite annoyed.

"Sorry, got to make sure the "Christmas roast" doesn't come out burned. I hope I see you next week!", Téa stated and was gone almost as fast as she'd appeared.

David briefly looked after her and shrugged before he turned his eyes on the screen again. "She is kind of pissed that there is no real Christmas roast"

"No, kidding. Who's having vegetable Lasagna on Christmas?", Gillian chuckled and relaxed against the cushions.

"Dad", Miller and West said at the same time, both making a face.

"Hey, it's cool to be different!"

"Whatever", West muttered.

"Okay, we just wanted to see you before you headed to bed and-", David said before Miller interrupted him, hollering See you next week and ran off. "Yeah, we're looking forward to next week"

"We are too", Gillian said softly.

"Goodnight, sleep well"

"Enjoy the Lasagna!", she said smiling and ended the video call, putting the phone down on the coffee table.

Sighing contently, she looked down on herself and laid her right hand on her round belly. She couldn't wait to see his face when he would see her again. And she couldn't wait for him to feel his child kick against his hands, something Piper got to experience last week for the first time. God, she wanted to share this experience with him again so badly. The longing for him was getting really unbearable.

Her phone vibrated and she grabbed it once again to open the message she had received.

You went to Mark's house looking like a bombshell? That's not fair.

She snorted with laugher. Well, she had done a pretty nice job with her hair and make-up today. And she would certainly bring that black dress to New York next week.
She smiled mischievously. It would be a damn good New Year's Eve.

"Shit", she muttered while trying to pull her dress over her belly. It had been a little tight on Christmas, but her belly couldn't possibly had grown that much over the last six days, could it? She tried to wiggle herself into the dress and pulled once again, this time with more force. Realizing that it wouldn't work, she sighed and let her arms fall to her sides in defeat.

Walking out of the bathroom, drying his hair with a towel, he noticed her standing in front of the mirror with a black dress around her hips. "What's wrong?", he asked and approached her.

She looked up and saw the concerned expression on his face. "It doesn't fit over my belly anymore, it got too big", she replied and pouted her bottom lip.

He inhaled deeply and a smile formed on his lips. He knew that situations like this should be handled with care, especially by a man. Don't play it down, but do not go with it too far, he thought and grabbed her shoulders gently, drawing small circles on her skin with his thumbs. She wouldn't believe him if he told her that she was the most attractive woman with the most beautiful body on this planet. But she was, and he couldn't think of anything else to say but this. Her skin was glowing and looked incredibly soft. Her belly was the cutest thing he'd ever seen. And her golden hair fell over her shoulders in soft waves. He tucked a strand behind her ear and leaned down to kiss her forehead. "I know you would've looked absolutely sexy in it, but you don't need to squeeze the little Duke in this tiny piece of clothing", he said and put his hands on the sides of her belly. It was warm, smooth and pretty hard. "So, I presume you're starting the new year naked?"

She smirked and slapped his chest. "No-", she wiggled out of the dress and laid it on his bed carefully.

He sat down on the bed beside it to watch her go through her luggage. He remembered how uncomfortable she always felt while pregnant with Piper. She had been extremely self-conscious about her body and the way she had to dress for the series and he didn't know if she still was or would be.

She retrieved something that appeared to be black leggings and a white, silk blouse. As she turned, she noticed him watching her and tilted her head. "I didn't have time to buy a lot of maternity clothes yet. And since I wasn't expecting to get pregnant again, I have donated everything I had a few years ago", she said and started to put on the black leggings, that now looked more like stockings. He squeezed his eyes. Yes, definitely stockings.

He nodded and leaned back on his hands. "I heard it's every girls dream to go shopping in New York". She turned her head to look at him wiggling his eyebrows.

After she had buttoned up her blouse, she bent down again to retrieve another black piece of clothing and climbed in. She pulled the zipper of her skirt up and looked at herself in the mirror.

He got up and pulled her to him from behind, looking at both of them over her shoulder. "Well, Stella. I think you're ready for the new Year now", he said and kissed her neck.

It turned out to be a really good plan to spend New Year's Eve at David's apartment with all five kids. They ordered Pizza and Pasta, played board games and a karaoke and dancing game on their
Xbox. At midnight, they had a great view over the city to watch the fireworks from his balcony, before David took the kids to lighten some little firecrackers outside together. When they came up again, they were greeted with a bowl of ice cream for each.

David looked at Gillian, who sat beside him on the sofa eating her ice cream. The kids were sitting all over the floor of the living room, eating contently and quiet for the first time this evening and morning.

"Wouldn't it be great to have the envelope now to start the new Year with a nice surprise?", he asked and grinned at Gillian.

She stopped eating and looked at him with a regretful face. "Yeah, that would be nice now"

"Why didn't you bring it?", West asked.

"Oh, Mum!", Oscar whined and raised his arms in the air in disbelief.

"I'm sorry", Gillian shrugged and ate another spoonful of ice cream.

"Well-", Piper started and got up to put her bowl on the sideboard. "Isn't it a good thing that I took the liberty to take it with me?!", she pointed out and headed for the room she shared with West to come back only moments later. With the envelope.

Gillian and David quickly exchanged glances and smiled at one another. "Okay, I'll skip the part where I'm complaining about you going in my bedroom to steal my stuff and just say Thank you", Gillian said to Piper, who smiled broadly, and took the envelope from her hand. The kids scooted closer to them and rubbed their hands in excitement.

"Do we find out now if we're having a boy or a girl?", Felix asked confused.

"Yes buddy, we will find out now. Last guesses?", David asked.

"Boy!", Oscar and Miller hollered at the same time.

"No way, girl!", West replied and Felix nodded, climbing on her lap to get embraced in a gentle hug.

"Okay, do you want to open it?", David asked, looking at Gillian, who looked at her trembling hands and nodded.

She started to open it and peeked in before she looked at David once again and inhaled deeply. He smiled at her and lay his arm around her shoulder reassuringly. Slowly, she reached into the envelope and pulled out the little folded card inside. She glanced at the kids one last time and opened up the card to see another ultrasound picture on one side and three short, handwritten words beneath it.

"Oh my god", she raised her hand to lay it over her mouth, tearing up immediately, while David smiled broadly and chuckled.

"Guys, guess what. Some of you guessed right", he teased and kissed Gillian's temple, while she was still staring at the little card in her hands.

The kids groaned and started to fidget on the floor.

"Stop teasing, Dad!", West called out.

"Okay, so we are having... a little girl"
"Yeah", the girls and Felix cheered loudly while Miller and Oscar had kind of fallen into a shock stare, looking at one another to figure out how to deal with the news.

Gillian and David laughed, looking at the kids different reactions.

"Boys, are you okay?", Gillian asked, chuckling.

"Yeah", Miller replied and sighed. "We're okay, right?", he asked and Oscar nodded.

"Yes, we kinda prepared ourselves for this", Oscar added, making David and Gillian snort with laughter, before both boys joined the conversation the girls already had with Felix about their new sister.

David looked down at the picture in Gillian's hands and smiled before he turned his head to look at her. "I love you", he said and leaned down to kiss her softly. "Are you happy?"

She smiled under his kiss and nodded. "I'm beyond happy"
Once all struggle is grasped, miracles are possible. - Mao Zedong

Chapter Notes

Thank you again for all your nice comments! I'm glad you're happy with my decision and you're enjoying this little fic!

On January 2nd, Gillian had woken up from her late evening nap with her heart racing. She hadn't felt their daughter move since New Year's Eve and she demanded to go to the hospital in the late evening, to find out what was wrong. After he'd tried to convince her that everything was probably just fine, he finally gave in, asked Piper to babysit and loaded her in his car to drive to the hospital, but stopped at Starbucks first to try one last thing to get this baby to move again. He bought her a chocolate frappuccino and a jelly donut and made her eat and drink it, even though she first refused to.

He'd tried to stay as calm as possible, even when they were already standing in the hospital's elevator to reach the floor of gynaecology. He was looking at her with a worried expression and he knew she was expecting the worst, when she suddenly jumped and reached for her belly in surprise. She looked at him briefly with her eyes wide open and was in his arms just moments later, clutching at him and starting to sob heartbreakingly. He held her tight, millions of emotions running through himself while he whispered soothingly in her ear and caressed her back. The doors of the elevator had closed again when she finally calmed down and stepped back a little to reach in her pocket for a handkerchief to dry her face and blow her nose.

He smiled down at her gently, splayed his hands over her belly and felt a kick against his right hand immediately. "So, the sugar finally kicked in?", he whispered.

She chuckled and nodded, relieve flooding her body. "Yeah"

"This little lady is already as stubborn as her mother"

Gillian laid her hands beside his to feel the now pretty forceful kicks with her hands, too. "She scared me to death"

He pushed a button to open the elevator doors and guided her out with his hand on the small of her back. Although everything seemed to be fine again, the doctor ran a few tests, examined her belly and cervix and did an ultrasound before he gave her and the baby a clean bill of health. There wasn't an exact explanation to why the baby hadn't moved in the last several hours, but it wasn't that uncommon, the doctor reassured both of them. In fact, the baby seemed to have had a growth spurt in the last several days, measuring a few days ahead in length and weight.

She was exhausted when they arrived at his apartment again in the middle of the night and she was barely able to keep her eyes open, let alone walk from the car into the elevator and into his apartment. He guided her to the bedroom and helped her change in comfortable sleepwear before he tucked her in. He changed and washed and lay down beside her. She was covering her face with both of her hands.

"How are you feeling?", he asked quietly.
She didn't respond for a few moments before she sighed heavily and dropped her arms to her sides. "I'm embarrassed"

He tilted his head slightly and furrowed his eyebrows. "Why embarrassed?"

"I feel like I lost control", she answered and shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't really have control over this"

"No. What I mean is-, I lost control over myself. I didn't handle this very well"

"You were scared. We were both scared. You're not the only one who lost it there for a moment"

"I was so sure that this was it. That I lost her. Finally, after all"

He supported himself on his elbow and lay his head in his hand, looking at her. "She is fine. You're taking good care of her. There is no reason to be afraid"

She looked down at herself and nodded. It took some effort to suppress the tears that welled up within her. "God, I'm such a mess"

"No-, no", he whispered and took her hand in his, squeezing it. "You're a mother. And I know we didn't ask for this to happen or expected it-, but we're already so in love with her. And we're absolutely entitled to feel the way we feel right now. You know me, I hate to say those cheesy things and I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it, but this is our miracle"

She turned her head and her eyes met his.

"We don't know where we would be right now without her. And it doesn't matter. We're here and we're going to do this. Please, honey-", he scooted closer and lay his forehead against her temple. "Don't try to suppress your feelings"

She whimpered slightly and lay her hand on his face, stroking his cheek gently with her thumb.

"You are not alone, Gillian. I'm here for the whole journey with all its ups and downs. Just-, don't back off, don't hide yourself from me. Because I promise you-, there's nothing to hide", he paused for a moment and pulled her against him. "It all comes down to trust. Do you trust me?"

She nodded and whispered yes in a low voice.

"And I trust you", he whispered and nuzzled his face in her hair before they fell silent for a few minutes.

She swallowed and finally continued to speak. "I lost our first baby"

"What?", he murmured and opened his eyes again.

"I was pregnant. In 1997. I found out mid February when you-, when we-, ended it. And I miscarried just a few days later"

He removed his arms from her body to look at her, his expression confused. She could already see hurt in his eyes.

"I went to the hospital with my mother and had to have a dilation and curettage"

"You never told me", he said pointedly.
"No. I never told anybody beside my mother. After the procedure, I just wanted to forget about it. There was no room for grief, and certainly no room to grieve together"

"You should have told me!", he said, anger swinging in his voice. He remembered the time like it was yesterday. He'd ended their sexual relationship after he realised he was about to fall in love with her, madly so. It was a horrendous time for both of them. He'd met Téa shortly after and took shelter in a rushed marriage, while Gillian changed tremendously and burrowed her sorrow in alcohol and other men. It all made a lot more sense now.

"Why? You didn't want me. You told me you wanted to keep it casual and uncomplicated. You wanted to just stay co-workers. And then you met Téa"

He untangled himself from the sheets and got up, pacing the room in shock.

"It's a long time ago, David. It wasn't supposed to be"

"Yeah, but-. Do you remember what we went through back then? Do you remember how much you changed, how much everything changed between us all of a sudden? How hard it had been for us after this? We have talked about this a lot and you never told me until now, Gillian. I always thought you couldn't handle the rejection and my decision to end things before they would have gotten complicated. While you were going through a miscarriage on your own. We were nearly killing each other on some days and you just never said a word"

"What do you want to hear from me? I didn't want you to go through this, too. It was already over and you had moved on"

"I would've been there for you"

She nodded. "Yes, I know"

"You were drunk almost all the time when we weren't shooting and Piper wasn't around"

"Yes. I know. It wasn't a good time. But it was my decision not to tell you about it"

"I can't believe this" He moved his hand over his face and then through his hair.

"I'm sorry", she said in a sad tone.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, not facing her, but looking at the ceiling. "You got over it" He wasn't sure if it was a statement or a question.

"Yes. It took some time" She sighed. "A lot of time, actually. And it hurt when West was born, because it brought back so many memories and feelings. I miscarried three children, David. At some point you wonder why-, some things are supposed to be and others aren't"

He inhaled deeply and turned his head. "I think I need some time to-", he stuttered while he lifted his hand to make a uncertain gesture and then got up and walked out of the bedroom.

Two hours later, she found him curled up in a blanket on the sofa in the dark living room. Carefully, she sat down beside him and laid her hand on his upper arm. He stirred at her touch and sighed heavily.

"Hey", she whispered and gave him some time to regain consciousness.
"Hey", he replied and turned so that he lay on his back. She scooted back a little and put her hands in her lap.

"I'm sorry that I've never told you. You had the right to know"

"I can't believe you went through this alone, Gillian"

She nodded and looked down at her hands. "It was a mistake. I was so miserable back then, even though I knew you had made the right decision for us when you ended our... well, you know. There was no way we could've come out of this happy and healthy" She shrugged her shoulders and chuckled bitterly. "We'd been so careful, and you still got me pregnant somehow. Imagine what would've happened if I hadn't miscarried. As horrible as it sounds, a part of me was relieved when it happened. I was relieved that I wouldn't have to tell you, or Chris, or Fox. But I missed you, I missed us and I missed the-, the prospect of having a baby with you"

He put his hand on her upper thigh.

"I understand if you need time to deal with this alone, David"

He shook his head and moved his hand up to stroke her face gently. "I don't want to deal with it alone. It's ours. We shared this and I think that the best way to heal is to face this together. I hope that-, I want you to heal, too"

She raised her hand and rested it over his, smiling.
"I was surprised you called, Dave. I thought I wouldn't see you at all in the three weeks I'm in New York", Jason chuckled and sat down on the wooden bench beside David, who was bent over and nestled with his backpack to put away the boys snack bag and bottles.

David huffed and looked up. "It sounds like I don't have time for anything else when she's around"

"Aw man, you know what I mean"

He had called his good and old friend from school in Manhattan and co-star in Californication, Jason Beghe, this morning and talked him into a last minute hiking trip around the Cross River Reservoir with him and Gillian's sons to get out of the apartment and clear his mind.

"I don't blame you, you don't see each other very often. It's a shame you didn't bring her though, we could hunt for green, flesh eating parasites again. Like old times"

David sighed and nodded, zipped up his backpack and leaned back against the backrest.

"Thanks for seeing me on such a short notice, Jason. I know it's not ideal, but-", he said and gestured towards Oscar and Felix, who were inspecting the forest floor for bugs and worms just a few meters before them.

"No, it's fine. What are you even talking about, they're hilarious"

"They just needed to get out of town for some fresh air as much as I did"

"Trouble in paradise?", he winked and drank out of his water bottle.

"Not really. It's just-, it's like the past is lurking around in every corner and it's a lot of work to go through at the moment"

"Well, that's not really surprising, is it?"

"I guess not. Sometimes it's just like-, it's hard to leave it behind. You just never know what comes next"

"Well, a long conversation could fix a lot of things"

"Yeah. There's just so much we should talk about and until now, we're kind of avoiding it. With this little time, you just want to squeeze as much fun and happiness in a day as possible"

Jason cleared his throat. "How about the... future living arrangements?"

David turned his head and chuckled. "I have no fucking idea "
"And you're still married", Jason pointed out and David looked down at the tattoo on his finger, nodding. "I told you after we shot this weird episode back then, this woman is your match. And this might be the last chance you get with her. Even nature helped you out this time. Don't mess with it, Duchovny. Do it right, and do it now", Jason said and they turned their heads as they noticed that Felix was running straight towards them, smiling broadly.

"Look, I've found an Earthworm!"

"That's cool. What are you going to do with it now?", David asked curiously and looked at the wiggling worm in Felix' hands.

"I'm going to put him back so he can be with his family again. It would be mean to put him down somewhere else, wouldn't it?"

"You're right, buddy. That's very thoughtful of you", David replied, tousling the boys blonde hair affectionately, before Felix ran off back to his brother.

Jason and David smirked at one another. "They're not making it really hard for you, do they?"

David chuckled in response. "No, they're awesome"

They were quiet for a few minutes before Jason spoke up again. "Well, you'll have a baby pretty soon. That must be reason enough to sort things out"

David heaved a sigh. "Yeah, definitely", he said and paused for a moment. "A baby girl", he added and grinned at Jason, who chuckled, patting David's shoulder affectionately.

"Oh man, you gonna have your hands full!"

"Yeah, it's going to be crazy. It's already crazy. Watching her belly grow each day, feeling the baby's kicks. It's weird, I thought I would never get a chance to experience this again. And with her, it's so much different than with Téa. She is so intuitive and yet insecure and scared. And the odd thing is, it just recently started for me, too. Getting anxious from one second to another, and then I realized I'm about to have another kid I'm constantly worrying about"

Jason nodded. "Since you already have an idea of what you get and what's at stake, it makes everything even worse"

David grinned wide, as if suddenly something really nice came to his mind. "I can't wait to do this with her. She makes me unbelievably happy and I've fallen so hard for her. I just want her to be happy, too"

He had his problems raising his arm high enough to insert the key-card to open his apartment door, while carrying Oscar on one and Felix on his other arm.

It had gotten pretty late and it was way past bedtime for these two when he was finally able to open the door. It had been an adventurous and very fun day. After they'd hiked for a few hours, the boys were treated with french-fries, hamburgers and ice-cream before they headed home with David's car, where they immediately crashed on their backseats and went out like lights.

He carried them into the guest bedroom and laid them down on the queen-size bed gently.

He slipped off the shoes from their feet and pulled off their trekking trousers so they could be more
comfortable in their leggings. Lifting both of them carefully, he freed them from their zip hoodies and finally tucked them in under the sheets.

Felix stirred slightly and opened his eyes, murmuring unintelligible words and reached out for David.

"It's okay, buddy. You're in bed now"

"Are we going again tomorrow?", the little boy asked sleepily.

"We will do something else that's fun tomorrow, okay?", David replied in a soft voice and stroked the boys wild hair out of his face gently.

"Yay", he murmured and closed his eyes again. "I love you, David"

"I love you too, kiddo", David whispered and swallowed heavily at the child's confession.

"Yay", Felix murmured again and drifted off to sleep slowly.

David chuckled quietly and adjusted the sheets over them before he turned to leave the room. He was surprised to see Gillian standing in the doorway, smiling softly and gesturing for him to come towards her. He stepped out of the room and left the door open a tiny crack as he turned to look at her.

"Did you have a good day?", she asked and put her hands in the pockets of her robe.

"Yes, sorry for being late"

She shook her head slightly. "It's fine", she said warily and heaved a sigh.

He nodded and took her hand to pull her with him while he walked into the kitchen. He poured himself a glass of water, drank a few gulps before she took the glass from him to sip on it, too.

"How was your girls day in the city?", he asked and leaned against the counter.

"It was exhausting, but very nice. We had our nails done in the spa and then went shopping for a few new outfits and the first baby clothes. We had a lot of fun", she answered grinning.

He smiled and looked down on her. Wearing a white lace-trim babydoll and a rosé coloured satin robe, she looked as stunning as anyone could possibly look in the middle of the night after a few hours of sleep. Her face was scrubbed free from any make up and looked incredibly soft and rosy, and the blue in her eyes sparkled. He couldn't be more in love with her.

He stepped into her and grabbed her by the waist, taking his time to worship her beautiful, full and creamy cleavage. He licked his lips and smiled at her mischievously.

"I didn't know Victoria's Secret has maternity wear", he said pointedly and leaned down to nuzzle his head in her hair, breathing in the beautiful mix of scents from her shampoo, creams and herself.

"I don't think they do", she replied in a rasped voice. "It's not that fancy", she chuckled and put the glass down on the counter.

"It looks nice, though", he said and traced the swelling of her left breast with his thumb, just above the soft fabric of her babydoll. He raised his head slightly to look in her eyes again, his face now more serious but still gentle, his eyes dark with desire. "There are no words to tell you how much I love you. I need you. I need your warmth, your touch, your kisses, your laugh, your voice, your breath on my neck", he said softly and smiled at her. A warm, genuine smile that made her belly
tingle. "I need your humor and your kindness-, your care. I am so grateful to be a part of your life and your family, you have no idea" He wrapped his arms around her small frame and pulled her closely against him, stroking her back. "I don't want anything more than to make you happy"

"You're doing a very fine job making me happy", she whispered and held him tight. They stood like this for a few minutes, swaying in each other's arms, before she pulled back slightly. "I promise to never hide anything from you ever again. You're the one I'm relying on the most. You're my best friend"

He smiled at her and leaned down to press his lips against hers for a deep kiss. He was about to open his mouth for his tongue to slide over her lip when she suddenly started to laugh.

Confused, he leaned back and watched her hiding her face in her hands, laughing hardly.

"What is it?", he asked and started to chuckle.

"I would jump your bones if you wouldn't smell so bad"

"Hey", he called out, making a shocked face.

"This smell will never get out of the sheets of the bed the boys are lying in"

"It doesn't matter, they'll get their own new beds in a bigger house here very soon", he said and kissed her again.
Never set limits, go after your dreams, don't be afraid to push the boundaries. And laugh a lot - it's good for you! - Paula Radcliffe

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your sweet comments! They keep me going and motivate me so much :) This chapter is a little smutty again, I hope you enjoy it, because it's quite intimate. There's also a very little excerpt from David's book "Holy Cow" in this chapter. The search for a possible, fitting name is quite exhausting, though. I really hope I'm going to find one that feels right.

He let his Smartphone slide into the pocket of his mantle after he had replied to West's text message, raising his head just in time to see her walking towards him, smiling broadly again.

"Thanks for waiting. I really need this now!", she said and opened the brown paper bag in her hands to retrieve a chocolate covered donut. She smiled at it in anticipation, licked her lips and bit into it slowly while she closed her eyes in pleasure.

He grinned at her while she chewed on her donut. "Yeah, you really deserve it after this appointment", he said pointedly and made an annoyed face.

He put his arm around her shoulder and guided her towards the entrance of the park in front of them.

She nodded and swallowed. "You really need to watch your diet or otherwise you'll keep gaining weight in the same rapid speed you did so far", Gillian said in a deep voice, parroting the doctor they just had an appointment with. "She would take away all of my parental rights if she could see me now, eating this delicious donut after she told me I already gained 20 pounds and I should cut out the sugar"

He snorted and pointed at a near bench.

"I don't like this woman. I can't believe she called our daughter a slug", he complained. "She's just not dancing and kicking for everyone"

They sat down side by side on the bench and she continued eating while he laid his arm around her shoulder again.

"I didn't like her either", Gillian agreed and patted her belly. "You were so good in there, baby. You even moved so we could see your beautiful face, right?"

He watched her eating before he turned his head to stare at the little creek right in front of them for a few minutes.

"This was the third clinic we've visited. I really appreciate your intention to give birth here for me, but I don't see you getting comfortable with their policies and manners. I mean, of course I want what's best for the two of you, but not giving you the chance to have a natural birth doesn't seem... right. And I don't want you to sacrifice this experience because they do c-sections as if it's the most natural thing on this planet"
"I would probably go for it if I didn't trust Dr. Pisal as much as I do. I mean, logically, it sounds safer to go with the c-section, but the way they seem to approach this whole childbirth thing these days... makes me cringe", she said and raised her arm to hold the donut in front of his nose. "You want a bite? It's vegan!"

He chuckled and took a bite. "Hmm, it's delicious!", he replied swallowing and grinned at her. "So, you want the natural birth?"

"Yes. I want to try at least"

He nodded and squeezed her shoulder. "In this case, I think we should make an appointment with Dr. Pisal and ask her if she's going to deliver our little Slug", he said gently.

"In London?"

"Yeah. You're comfortable with her, you're comfortable in her hospital and they know you there. Everything else would be crazy"

She sighed, swallowed and looked at him. "Thank you", she whispered and tilted her head to kiss him softly.

"Hmm", he hummed into her mouth and poked her shoulder slightly.

Instead of letting go, she grabbed the back of his head and pulled him towards her, deepening the kiss. In response, he finally closed his eyes and gave in to the warm feeling in his gut that she was causing with her soft lips and tongue. When they parted, both of them breathed heavily, smiling at one another.

"Hmm, that was nice", she remarked, licked her lips and leaned back, her face flushed.

"Yeah", he cleared his throat and pointed at something to her left. "Paparazzi thought so, too"

She turned her head, her eyes following his finger, and she noticed a man standing beside a car with a camera in his hand.

"Oh, what a shame", she sighed. "We almost reached one whole year of making out in public places without anybody recognizing us"

She tried to focus on her edition of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams for over an hour now. She had made herself comfortable in her warm pyjamas, propping herself up on the cushions of David's bed, lying between fresh, scented sheets with a bowl full of gummibears. It would be perfect to go through this masterpiece for her upcoming play again, she thought, if he wouldn't lay beside her, writing on his own book. It wasn't the constant clicking of the laptops keys that kept her from making progress with her book. It was him, making her read every other paragraph or laughing at his own wit constantly.

She sighed when she noticed he was grinning at her again. "David-", she murmured and tried to prevent further requests.

"Just one last chapter, okay? Please?", he asked, making a cute, pleading face and pushed the laptop over to her side. "It's hysterical!"
"You said that before", she replied and pursed her lips, putting her book down and rolled to her side to look at the screen.

"You said the last chapter was delightful!", he said, pouting.

She ignored him and started to read, so he decided to turn to his side too to eye her 26 week baby bump. He reached out, lifting her pyjama shirt and began to prod her hard belly with the fingertip of his index finger softly. He had started this little game a few days ago. Prodding her belly and waiting for a response. He would then prod on another spot to see if she would kick right there, too. It worked sometimes, but he always rewarded her by resting his head on the warm skin of Gillian's belly to tell his daughter a fun story about her mother, while she continued to kick against his face. Sometimes he was able to trace the length of an arm or a leg with his fingers. Or she would stick out her bum and he would pat it slightly. He joked about her being horrified by this because she always moved away and it seemed like she was refusing to play with him for at least a couple of hours after that.

"Don't wake her, she's sleeping. I don't want to get up every hour to use the toilet the third night in a row because you wanted to play and she's not able to settle down for hours after that"

"Oh come on, don't be a party pooper, Mom", he said and prodded again.

She shot him a glance and he stopped abruptly before she would refuse to read the rest of his chapter. He waited impatiently, chewing on his bottom lip. After a while, he scooted closer and ran his hand over her thigh to occupy himself.

He caught her grinning and patted her upper thigh. "And, and?", he pushed.

"I'm not done yet!"

He murmured and grabbed a few gummibears, offering her some and fed her while she continued to read. At least she was smiling contently again.

Finally, she lifted her gaze to look at him and bit on her bottom lip.

"Yes?", he asked expectantly.

"Well-" She hit a key and closed the laptop, lifting it over herself to put it down on her nightstand, before she grabbed her book and placed it over the laptop. Rolling back, she raised her butt to pull her pyjama pants down her legs, then pushed at his right shoulder so he would lay flat on his back and finally crawled on top of him to sit in his lap. He knitted his eyebrows and grinned dumbly in response to her sudden actions. She leaned down, intending to bite his earlobe, but her belly was in the way. Instead, she raised herself a little and moved her hand down, reached into his shorts and adjusted his dick so that it pointed up to his belly. She sat down again and started a steady, deep grind against him and grinned.

He gasped and reached for her waist with both of his hands.

"Wow, this chapter must've been beguiling", he remarked and started to open the buttons of her pyjama robe.

"Hmm", she hummed and licked her lips. "I wanted to do this since you put on this snug, dark jeans of yours"

"You mean after I had to change after lunch, because you ripped the zipper of my favourite jeans apart while you were attacking me in the kitchen?", he asked and chuckled.
"God, I'm so horny-", she said panting. "And wet"

"I can feel it". He nodded enthusiastically. He felt himself grow harder with each of her strokes. Finally, he was able to free her from her top and threw it to the side. Her full breasts bobbed up and down with her movements. He was mesmerized and couldn't look away. He raised his arms automatically and grabbed her boobs with his hands, squeezing them together, brushing his thumbs over her erect nipples.

She moaned and reached down once again, pulling his hard member out of the boxer shorts and guided him to her entrance. He would tell her later how much he appreciated her for not wearing any underwear in bed, ever. She'd probably heard it from him a few times before, more like a hundred, but he would never stop telling her.

She sunk down on him slowly. Letting her set the pace, he enjoyed the feeling of her warm, snug walls around him and relaxed against the cushions. The sex between them had always been fantastic and mind blowing, but whatever it was, she was definitely enjoying it even more since she became pregnant.

"The phrase that it is not right to be reviled, nor is it right to be worshipped is actually pretty insightful, coming from you", she said and smiled.

He chuckled. "But isn't it true?"

"Hmm, I guess so. I don't know, I have to think about it for a while", she admitted. "I'm drawn to extremes"

He nodded. "But who's going to pay for it?!"

She sighed and tilted her head. "Oh no, have I just started another discussion about veganism?", she asked and grinned slightly.

"I'm not really capable to have a serious discussion right now, you know", he said and looked down to the place where they were joined. This was another thing he loved about being intimate with her. They could talk and laugh about almost everything while he was inside of her without getting limp at all. He had always been curious of how long they could stretch the time before he would actually slip out of her.

She snorted and rocked against him, flexing her inner walls to squeeze his hardness while he continued to caress her boobs.

"I like the book, it's like a modern-day dairy tale", she slurred and rocked faster against him.

He laughed out loud. "This would be the perfect subtitle!"

She smiled and closed her eyes. She panted softly with her lips slightly parted and was just about to drift off to her very own place of pleasure, when she heard a surprised Oh coming from his mouth and opened her eyes. His eyes were stuck on his hands, which were on her boobs. Looking down on herself, her eyes widened and she reached up involuntarily to try to hide her breasts.

"Oh my god", she called out and made an attempt to climb off him.

He stilled her sudden movements with his large hands on her waist and smiled softly.

"Hey, it's okay. Relax and stay where you are", he ordered in a gentle voice. "It's just breastmilk"
"Oh god, I'm so sorry. This has never happened before"

"Too much dairy talk?", he chuckled and took her hands off her breasts and squeezed them affectionately. She was still leaking little white drops and he watched one fall off her nipple in awe.

"This is embarrassing", she groaned.

"No it's not. Please don't be embarrassed. You're full of life", he said and smiled proudly.

She exhaled and relaxed a little, caressing his forearms with her fingertips.

"Can I taste it?", he asked seriously.

She made a disgusted face in response. "Ugh, David"

"Would it make you uncomfortable?"

"Um, I don't know", she sighed. "No, I guess not"

"Have you tried it before?"

"Um-, yeah", she admitted and tilted her head. "Okay, try it" It kind of horrified her that her heart was starting to pound really fast against her chest in anticipation.

Gladly, he didn't attempt to suckle on her nipple and instead caught a droplet with his fingertip and licked it off his finger.

"Hmm", he hummed.

She was feeling like she had just cooked dinner for him and waited to see if he liked it.

"It's sweet, but I hope she'll like it better than I do", he said dryly.

She chuckled and reached over to grab a tissue to wipe the remaining milk off her breasts.

"Do you think of me as a pervert now?", he asked and grabbed the tissue to wipe the last remains off her belly.

"Now?", she joked. "No, you're not a pervert, David"

He smiled relieved and thrust up slightly, making her squeal in surprise.

"Impressive... pretty amazing", she noticed and continued with her steady, deep rhythm.

"You do this to me. Just you, babe"

After she had cleaned herself up and used the toilet, she stepped beside the bed and put on her pyjama pants and robe again, closing the two top buttons over her breasts. He lay on his side with his eyes closed, breathing steadily and looking absolutely beautiful. She smiled as she sat down on the mattress and scooted closer to him before she lay down herself.

He inhaled deeply and opened his eyes to look at her.

"So Daddy, you woke your baby, play with her now!", she said and he grinned, turning over and rested his head right below her breasts and spread his hand over her belly to get a feeling for where
she was located at the moment.

"Hey little Slug, sorry for waking you... again. Mommy's just doing a lot of gymnastics lately", he said and heard Gillian snort with laugh above him. He went silent and waited patiently. A few moments later, a little bulge formed on Gillian's belly just above her navel. "Ah, there you are" He prodded on the same spot and she immediately kicked against his finger, making both of them chuckle.

"Mommy's a great gymnast, you knew that?", he asked towards her belly and Gillian started to laugh.

"You're impossible, David. Stop telling our daughter all that naughty stuff!"

"I'm just being honest", he said and pressed a kiss on her belly and sighed contently. "I'm getting tired, baby girl. Are you tired, too?", he asked.

"No, she's about to look my bladder again, her beloved trampoline"

He moved his hand to her upper belly and pressed gently. "Stay up here with me, Slug. Mommy deserves some rest, too"
The decisions you make are a choice of values that reflect your life in every way. - Alice Waters

Chapter Notes

This might be a slow and fluffy chapter, but I thought it was necessary to do some more groundwork before they're able to move on.

The Nest was one of her favourite bars in Downtown Los Angeles, which was why he found himself there on a buzzy Friday night in late January. He was early, lounging at the bar with a glass of scotch, hungry and therefore impatiently awaiting her arrival.

He put his glass down and looked around when a young brunette approached him, smiling the way he knew some women smiled when they wanted to get his full attention. "Hi", she slurred and slipped on the barstool next to him.

"Hey", he replied kindly.

"Remember me?"

He tilted his head and tried to find this particular face in his memory. It wasn't that rare that someone, mostly women, approached him and asked if he remembered them, but this one he actually did remember. It was a pretty pleasant memory actually. "Ah, I do, yeah. Caroline, right?", he guessed and she nodded, obviously happy that he indeed remembered her. "I haven't seen you in a while"

She chuckled and pointed for the waiter to bring her the same drink David had. "Well, I'm around quite often. Where have you been?"

"Oh, I spent some time in New York"

"Did you move there?"

"You could say that, yes. And um, you're still doing business here in LA?"

"I'm not trying to be an actress anymore, if that's what you're referring to", she replied a little sourly.

"Well, you tried your best back then", he smirked and raised his glass as the waiter put hers down in front of her. "Cheers"

"Cheers. Yeah, absolutely, but time has changed things. I studied digital innovation and business transformation and I'm working for the Fox Group now"

He raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Wow, so you're responsible for all the crazy stuff on Fox that's going to hit us in the future?"

"Hopefully not. I'm not into Programming and Production, I'm with the Human Resource department"

"Ah, you did good for yourself"
She smiled proudly and nipped at her drink. "Hmm. Hey, why don't we just-, you know, leave in order to have a more private conversation?", she asked, reached out for his left hand, which rested on his thigh, and drew small circles on it with her fingertip.

He grinned slightly and took her hand in his to lay both of their hands on the counter. "Time has indeed changed a lot of things", he said and she squinted her eyes. "I'm having these private conversations with just one particular lady these days"

Her eyes went wide and she groaned slightly, entangling their hands to run hers through her long hair. "Oh man, just when I was ready to take advantage of a man, this happens", she said and smirked.

"You already took advantage of me, if I remember it correctly", he teased jokingly and smiled at her.

"Hmm", she nodded and smirked.

"Please don't think I want to get rid of you, but I'm actually meeting someone here", he said as politely as possible and looked to Caroline's right as he saw her walking around the corner.

She turned her head and looked in the same direction as he did. "You're back with your wife?"

He chuckled. Her eyebrows knitted and he could see that she was trying to process what was going on. "Seems like you're not even reading the yellow press anymore, huh?"

"No, I'm afraid I'm not up to date", she sighed and got up, holding on to his shoulder for balance. "It was my pleasure, David. It was really nice to see you again"

"No, it was my pleasure, Caroline", he replied and shook the hand he was offered before she wandered off.

Téa had watched them while she had greeted an old friend who was sitting near the entrance and looked after the young woman, who was retreating to her previous seat while she strolled over to David.

"Some things never change, huh?", she joked and leaned forward to give him a quick peck on the cheek.

"One lady at a time", he said grinning and took her hand. "You look great!"

"Thanks. There's a free table by the window, come on!", she said and lead the way.

"God, I'm starving. I hope you don't mind that I already ordered Sushi?", she asked as they sat down face-to-face beside a huge window with an incredibly view over Downtown Los Angeles.

"No, sounds good"

"Who was that by the way?"

"Who?"

"The young woman you were talking to", she declared and ordered a bottle of white wine.

"Oh, that was Caroline, we met a few years ago. She wanted to be an actress and she talked me into giving her a little role in Californication back then"

"Uh huh, she talked you into it?", Téa asked, smirking.
He tilted his head and waved his hand in the air. "Yes, just talked. She's a smart girl, I wanted to give her a chance"

The waiter came back with the wine, filled their glasses before a waitress served two big plates full of Sushi.

"Thank you", Téa said to the waitress and raised her glass. "To us, and the future"

"To us", he replied and they clinked their glasses.

"And she just wanted to say hi?"

"She actually wanted to go somewhere private with me, but you know-", he shrugged and laughed. "You don't let your wife wait after you just sent her the divorce papers"

"Hmm-. Who knew it would be so hard after all?"

"I knew it would be hard, that's part of the reason why I had avoided it for so long", he said honestly and they started to eat silently.

"It's good we're doing this now. Although I was concerned it might send the wrong signal"

"What do you mean?"

She cleared her throat and swallowed her California Roll with a sip of wine. "I didn't want the kids to think we're doing this just because you're having another baby. I was scared that they would project their pain and anger onto the baby-, and Gillian. That, without them, there would still be hope for us to get back together as long as we stayed married"

"I have never thought about it that way", he replied quietly, a mixture of disbelief and regret washed over his face as he put down his chopsticks.

"I know, I haven't either", she admitted and smiled at him sympathetically.

"Are they okay?", he asked and sighed. "I mean, I feel like they are okay with it, but-"

She raised her right hand to stop him. "They're absolutely fine. I think it'll stay that way as long as we are open about everything and maintain a stable and respectful relationship between each other. And I don't intent to do anything else but that. I know it's going to be weird sometimes, but I really think we should all sit together some day and talk things through. I have the strong feeling that Gillian is feeling especially insecure and apprehensive about all of this. And there is no need to hide from me, like the two of you did around New Year's Eve"

He knew what she meant. How could he blame Gillian for not being especially eager to meet up with his wife, while she was pregnant with his child. It would be an awkward situation, but probably just as important.

He nodded. "I just don't know how to handle this, yet"

"Me neither. That's why we have to figure it out in peace", she said honestly and watched him eating for a few moments, before she continued. "I'm not hurt or angry, David, if that's what you two are afraid of. I can deal with her baby bump and I'm able to deal with your daughter. She will be treated like every other kid we know and love. There's no way we could possibly pretend that she is none of my business. She is their little sister-", she said and sipped at her wine. "And I really want to prove to you that it's actually you who passes on this very unique kind of stubbornness"
They chuckled, the mood finally getting lighter. He smiled at her shyly.

"What I mean is that I wouldn't mind seeing her. Please don't hide, it's not going to do any good. If there's some event, we'll all be there. Of course, that also includes Tim and his family"

"Of course", he agreed and raised his glass again.

Stumbling up the stairs in 4 inch high heels at almost 7 months pregnant was something she had done in all her pregnancies and had always regretted deeply after a long day on her feet. But there she was again, trying to climb the last steps without taking them off before she was able to fall onto the bed the second after. The house was quiet except for the muffled voices coming out of the master bedroom on the first floor.

She pushed the door open carefully and peeked inside. The only light came from the TV in the right corner and she had to squint her eyes to make him out on the bed. Stepping into the room just a little, she realized he lay on his side in the middle of the bed, still clad in his dressing shirt, facing the TV, with her pillow in his arms. She smiled and bent down to slip off her shoes to walk silently into the room without disturbing him. She looked to her right and saw a familiar face on the screen. It was herself. As Stella Gibson.

Shaking her head slightly, she walked up to the side of the bed and looked down at him. She asked herself if he could be any sweeter than this, laying there, obviously missing her enough to watch her show. She knew he was a little sad that she went to four events without him since they had arrived in Los Angeles a few days ago for the Golden Globes. But he hadn't mentioned it or asked to join her and she had actually enjoyed being out on her own in her old home, meeting up with old friends. He wasn't very interested in these events after all, but knowing he wanted to spend as much time with her as possible before she would leave again, she was aware that he would love if she asked him out.

And of course she loved the way he looked at her before she went out. The almost palpable hunger and longing in his eyes kept her on the edge for the whole evening. She also knew how much he liked it when she came back and slipped into the bed beside him after an eventful evening, waking him just enough so he would register her whispering she was home and she loved him, before he would rest his head on her chest, sighing contently.

She sat down beside him and reached out to caress his cheek gently. He sighed and grinned a little and she slightly rubbed her thumb over his eyebrow.

"Hmm, I love you too", he mumbled in his sleep before his face softened and his breathing evened again.

She smirked and reached over him to pull the sheets over his bare legs. She then got up and undressed herself silently before she walked into the bathroom to do her night time routine.

He was still sleeping in the same position when she walked into the bedroom again. She bent down beside him, pulled the sheets back and started to unbutton his dressing shirt. He stirred and inhaled deeply when his eyes fluttered open.

"Hey, you're home", he murmured and reached up to caress her arms.

"I'm home", she replied softly and smiled. "Let's get you out of your shirt, okay?"
He hummed his approval and shifted a little so she was able to pull the shirt from underneath him with great effort, while he just grinned to himself.

"Are you okay?", she asked and threw his shirt in the hamper by the bathroom door.

"I had a pretty bad headache earlier", he said and rubbed his right eye with the back of his hand. "Didn't want to take something and just went straight to bed." He pointed towards the TV. "Needed your voice to lull me into sleep. But I couldn't take my eyes off the damn screen because you looked too damn hot"

She laughed a giddy laugh and tousled his hair.

"C'mere, wanna hold you. My feet are cold", he slurred and lifted his right arm. She eased herself down beside him, a task that now occasionally caused a few waves of pain shooting through her back, and pressed her body against his. He pulled the sheets over them and embraced her with both of his arms. She kissed his chest and let her fingers play with the soft hair on it.

"Enjoying the nightlife as long as possible?", he teased, tilted his head down and kissed her cheek.

"Hmm. LA has it's peeks"

"Yeah", he whispered and continued to smother her face with soft kisses. "Missed you"

"How was your evening?", she asked and let her finger run through his hair.

"It was nice and pleasant. She wants me to tell you to stop hiding from her and meet her for she knows what I mean when you say it like that"

Gillian laughed and started to massage his scalp. "Okay"

"Okay?"

"Yeah, it's time"

"What does she mean you know what she means?"

"Oh, you know-", she whispered and nibbled on his neck. "It's something we used to do"

"You say it like the two of you used to see each other for... whatever"

"Occasionally"

"What?", he said in a high voice, making her giggle.

"We kind of shared a very intense man. We had to vent somewhere", she explained. They were silent for a few minutes to enjoy the soft caresses and kisses they gave each other.

"I'm getting divorced, Gillian"

She heaved a sigh and scooted up a little to be able to look into his eyes.

"It's okay, that's what I want. It's what we both think is right. And it's something we need to build our own future"

She nodded slowly, comprehending what he was saying and what it meant. She could empathize
with how this must be for him right now. And she was surprised that it actually meant so much to her either, more than she had expected it would.

"So, you want to spend a part of your future with a tired, leaking woman who's barely going to have time for a shower and a tiny, crying and farting little infant in England?", she joked and caressed his cheek.

"Only if they want an intense, annoying and hovering guy on their side who gives excellent backrubs in order to ease pain and release gas", he said and smiled.

"We're going to kill each other"

"Most likely", he nodded and kissed her softly on the lips.

"So", she said as they parted. "There's this last event tomorrow evening. I'd like it if my handsome guy would join me. What do you think?", she asked and felt him grin broadly against her cheek.
Chapter Notes

Thank you again for your nice words! I'm really busy with work right now until Christmas and I had some trouble with writing this chapter, because I didn't want their last big decision, at least for now, to be super awkward and ooc. Furthermore, after meeting Gillian at the Toulouse Game Show, I really needed some time to come off of this high :D I hope you enjoy it and you're looking forward to some long chapters over the holidays. Maybe we'll meet their little daughter soon :)

"Did you forget to tell me or did you not want to tell me that we have to go over the red carpet and do the press line?", he asked, pursing his lips and leaned forward to get a better look out of the window in the backseat, as they were driving by the Beverly Hilton Hotel and into it's parking garage.

She giggled and tugged at the sleeve of her gun metal grey Dolce & Gabbana dress. "Hey, as my date, you don't have to if you don't want to", she answered and wiggled her eyebrows.

He turned his head and grabbed her left hand. "If I'm able to conjure a real smile on your pretty face by being the perfect, handsome boyfriend, I'm more than happy to be your squire"

She chuckled and squeezed his hand. "You know you're as responsible for the kind of questions I get these days as I am, right?", she laughed.

He smiled and nodded. "Guilty as charged. Ah, I hate this stuff", he groaned, looking down on himself and sucked his stomach in.

She watched him tensing up noticeably beside her and was hit by a sudden déjà vu experience. Same day, similar situation, exactly 17 years ago. Not at the Producers Guild Awards, but the Golden Globes. They had arrived as each other's dates in the same car and stayed together for almost the entire evening. Although it turned out to be one of the most important evenings for their careers, both of them had been way out of their comfort zones, but at least comfortable with each other's company. It had probably been their last happy evening together, before her whole world had fallen apart.

She swallowed heavily and looked down at her belly. She had not known that she was pregnant back then, all these 17 years ago. She remembered the dull pain in her stomach from thinking too much and too hard about her separation and divorce from Clyde and all the possible effects it might have on her sweet little girl. And she remembered the thrill of anticipation, looking forward to a hot night full of sex with David in an expensive hotel room. But, in the end, all what was left was a divorce, a breakup and a lost little soul she was not meant to meet. Piper had shown her a clip on YouTube from that night just recently. She noticed bitterly how she hadn't even tried the champagne she was offered to celebrate their Awards and wondered yet again why things had to go so terribly wrong.

Sensing her sudden mood swing, he slightly poked her upper thigh with his index finger and grinned at her when she raised and turned her head to look at him. "Hey, Babe. You look beautiful", he stated and reached over to tuck her blonde, slightly curled hair behind her right ear. "You're going to be the Queen of the night!", he said, making her laugh out loudly.
He leaned back, taking a sip of his drink while drawing small circles on the warm skin of her neck with his finger and watched the tall, lean guy leaning over the table, his annoying face splitting into two pieces while he smiled at her widely. His words couldn't impress her, but the overly self-regarding man in front of them did not notice this fact and instead interpreted her fake laugh as an invitation to gabble away.

Not even the press line was as annoying as this guy, and he had been on the verge of flipping out when a young interviewer asked her if she only brought him because she felt the need to show him off so people would stop spreading rumors about a sudden breakup. She took it as lightly as possible and asked for more information about these rumors. Apparently, people could not deal with the fact that a woman, especially a pregnant woman, could go to different events a few days in a row on her own. She laughed it off, stating that she was happy to disprove the rumors so people could continue with their normal lives without having to worry their brains over hers. He chuckled at her statement, put his arm around her middle, high enough for his thumb to caress the underside of her breast, and gave her a lingering kiss on her temple.

He was deep in his thoughts when he noticed a quite familiar face approaching them. Gillian must have seen him before and raised her arms in delight.

"Ben!", she called out and braced herself on the table in order to stand up before she held out her arms again to embrace the even taller man in a friendly hug.

"Oh Gill, you didn't have to get up for me! It's so nice to see a friendly face", he said in a clear British accent and chuckled.

"Are you implying that I'm already too big to get up?", she asked jokingly.

"Compared to the last time I saw you?! No, you're just one very pregnant, very beautiful lady. I just wasn't expecting you to be this pregnant by now", he pointed out and stroked her upper arm while she looked down on herself, smiling.

"Yeah, she already comes after her Dad in her size", she replied, patting her belly and turned to David, who had gotten up himself. "I guess you two know each other? David, my very good friend Benedict. And Benedict, this is the one and only Spooky Mulder you wanted to meet so badly!" They laughed as both men shook hands, both of them obviously thrilled to meet one another. "My two most favourite Investigators together, a dream come true!"

"It's so nice to meet you! Oh god, I'm such a huge fan of The X-Files. Well, especially of her, but who can blame me?!"

"Likewise. And no, I certainly don't blame you. I'm her biggest fan myself!"

"Are you here with someone? Do you want to sit with us?", she asked and slightly leaned into David as he put his arm around her waist.

"If you don't mind. To be honest, I wasn't having the most pleasant conversations so far", he said and took the offered seat beside Gillian on the leather booth when the three of them sat down again, leaving her in the middle.

David looked up to find the annoying guy had disappeared without a trace, much to his delight.

"Yeah, we weren't either. Seems like you're only in good company when you're with Brits these days"
"That's a real compliment, coming from you" She grinned at David and leaned her back against his chest before she faced Benedict again. "How long are you staying here?"

"Just a couple of days. Will I be seeing you at the BAFTA Awards in February?"

"Oh yes, I'll be giving the Award away to the best animated film, which my boys are thrilled about"

"Oh god, another Award Show without me", David said and chuckled.

"You know, just a little over a week ago we were photographed by a Pap in a park in New York. In a-, let's say, in a rather cosy situation. So, in the last few days, I've been at some events on my own. And already rumors were spread that we broke up. Can you believe that?"

"It's awful. I'm always grateful when I'm sitting on the plane on my way back again. We're so spoiled that nobody gives a fuck about our private lifes there"

"We are", Gillian agreed and took a sip of her juice.

"Maybe we're better off spending the majority of time over there in the future, huh", David chuckled and squeezed her shoulders against him affectionately. She turned her head and raised her right eyebrow. "Just sayin'", he shrugged and smiled at her.

When Benedict left their table after a few minutes of comfortable chatting about their families, he leaned into her and kissed her ear before he closed his eyes and whispered, "I know you're thinking about it, and I want you to know that I meant what I said. I'm not teasing, okay?"

She nodded slightly and turned her head.

"Since you're flying back home tomorrow, I didn't want to miss the opportunity to talk to you about the decision I've made, because I don't want to tiptoe around it any longer. I know what I'm offering, but I don't want you to feel bad about it. And I don't want you to think that you have to make it up to me, which I know you will", he said and winked at her. After all, he did know her better than anyone else.

"David-

"I've been offered a role for a new Show John McNamara created. It sounds very interesting and I'd like to take it. Shooting would start in November in Los Angeles" She furrowed her eyebrows and tilted her head slightly. "I'm not asking for permission. I'm asking if you want us to be together as much as possible. I'm asking if you want me to live with you. I'm asking if I can come back home after working in another city for a few weeks"

"David", she whispered and put her hand on his cheek, smiling softly.

"It may not be a typical family life, but since we sucked at this before, multiple times, I just think we're entitled to try it the way we want to, right?", he asked.

"I guess that's a good plan", she replied and leaned her forehead against his. "You're making quite a lot of big decisions lately"

"I know. I'm doing it because we deserve it"
"Okay, this is the last one", Piper groaned heavily and put a big packing case down beside the other two she had already carried up from the basement, where they had been in storage for the last 4 years.

Gillian beamed and rubbed her palms together in excitement. "Oh, I can't wait to go through all of this. Thank you for carrying all of it upstairs, honey"

"You're welcome. Oh, I almost forgot something, wait a second!", she said and left the room to run down the stairs once again.

Gillian looked down at the three big boxes in front of her, each full of wonderful and sweet memories from the times her children were tiny newborns. She smiled to herself and rubbed her baby bump in big circles.

With only ten weeks left until her due date, she had just recently started to prepare herself and her home properly for the arrival of her daughter. She would have postponed it even further, if Piper hadn't insisted on painting the walls of the future baby room the way Gillian liked it before she wouldn't be able to do it herself. Piper knew that she would never forgive herself for letting someone else paint the room of her child after she had painted all of her babies rooms before. She had picked a warm, light grey for the walls and painted the ceiling in white, before she asked Piper to add some drawings. The end result was a warm, inviting room with a beautiful painted tree with white and turquoise leaves as well as pink and yellow butterflies and black birds. When she saw the room for the first time, she immediately started to cry, thankful to be the mother of such a caring and loving young woman. She had taken a picture of Piper's artwork and sent it to her father, who also couldn't be any prouder.

On this particular Friday evening, they wanted to go through the baby clothes that Gillian had stored away with the intention to give them to Piper as soon as she would become a mother. It was a mixture of well preserved clothing from all three of her children and she couldn't wait to see her little daughter in them, while remembering how cute Piper, Oscar and Felix looked in them.

She snapped out of her thoughts when Piper emerged in the door, carrying a large, heavy package into the bedroom.

"Oh my goodness, what's that?", Gillian asked and got up to help her put the package on the floor.

"The mailman delivered it today when you were at the doctor's with Oscar", Piper replied and sat down on the bed after they put the package down beside the other boxes. "Apparently, it's from David!" She wiggled her eyebrows and smiled at her mother, who bent over to read the consignor's name.

"This is huge, is he out of his mind?" She furrowed her eyebrows and grabbed the scissors she put on the drawer and cut into the cellotape. Once she cut through everything, she pulled the cardboard apart and looked into a fully stuffed package. "What is this?" She reached inside and retrieved a folded paper that laid on top of everything else, opening it and started to read out loud.

*Hey babe, I've got a funny story for ya: old guy walks into an organic and fair-trade baby clothing boutique, looking for a little something for his baby girl. Problem was that he just couldn't decide*
what to get and ended up doing an interview and buying a little more than he'd intended to buy in the first place.

So, before you freak out over the sheer amount of clothing I bought, notice that I will appear in a magazine for new parents next month. Furthermore, they'll donate three times the amount I spent to the Clothes Of Our Back Foundation. Another father-to-be, who happened to be in a similar, desperate situation, is going to donate the same amount as I will. Cool, huh? ;)

She put her hand over her mouth, tears welling up in her eyes.

"Aw, how sweet" Piper giggled at the sight of her mother getting emotional and got up to embrace Gillian in a gentle hug. "Oh Mom, you okay?", she asked and kissed Gillian's cheek.

She nodded and inhaled deeply. "Yeah. Sometimes I'm just overwhelmed with gratitude that we're at this exact point in our lives right now. That he was able to adopt and grow the side of him he rarely used to show, but has always been there. That he grew up to be this wonderful man and father"

"This sounds like he used to be a real pain in the ass"

"We both were", Gillian offered and nodded, stroking Piper's upper arm and chuckled. "This is really sweet"

"It is indeed. I want to see what's inside", she said and pulled the package towards the bed. Both of them then sat on the bed and started to unpack. "Looks like he has already sorted all of it by sizes, huh?", Piper asked and retrieved a stack which was tied together with a pink lace band. She opened the knot and put the band behind her on the bed. "That must be newborn size"

Gillian grabbed the first piece that laid on top of the pile and unfolded it. It was a very small eggplant colored jersey dress.

"Oh my god, look how small this is! Are they really that tiny?!"

"They are", Gillian answered and chuckled. "We just always forget because they grow so fast"

"Look at that!" Piper said and unfolded the next piece, a knitted playsuit with little stars and UFO's on it. "Oh, he just had to buy that, didn't he?"

Gillian snorted in laughter and continued to look through the first pile.

"We're really excited, Mom. I don't know if you know how much, but we can't wait to meet her. The boys are absolutely thrilled and love to brag with their baby in front of their friends. I heard them yesterday talking about diapers, and Oscar was like Yeah, what needs to be done, needs to be done. Of course I'm going to help my Mum with that"

She looked up and smiled at Piper broadly. "Thanks, honey. I really appreciate you telling me"

"Do you think differently now than you did when you got pregnant with Oscar?"

"What do you mean?"

Piper cleared her throat and crossed her legs on top of the bed. "You always asked me how I'm feeling about it and you told me to tell you if I feel like something's wrong. I got the impression that you were scared about all of this from early on, due to your own experiences with Aaron back then."
And I'm just wondering if you're feeling more confident about it now"

"Hmm", she hummed and turned to face Piper, bracing herself on her right arm. "A little, maybe. You were alone back then, and I think that makes a big difference. I'm not concerned about you anymore. I know you know how to make the best out of the situation and your positive attitude certainly helps with that. And I'm not as concerned about the boys as I was about you back then, mainly because they have each other to rely on. Even if they're going to be really confused and apprehensive at the beginning, I know they'll figure it out together, just like they seem to solve their problems together right now"

"Yeah, I think so, too"

Gillian reached out and tucked Piper's hair behind her ear and gently stroked her cheek. "I love you so much, Piper", she whispered and leaned in to kiss her forehead.

"I love you too, Mom"

They smiled at each other and continued to unfold the tiny little pieces, one cuter than the other, in a comfortable silence. Occasionally, they giggled in union or cringed their noses at a few very pink, very girly pieces. With all the hand-me-downs she still got, she probably wouldn't have to buy anything on top of that, she thought after going through the whole package. All in all, David had a really good taste and had chosen cute outfits for all occasions with a welcoming variety of colors and fabrics.

Piper had carried the piles into the baby's room before she collapsed on the couch in the living room next to her mother, groaning. "I'm done, Mom"

"Thank you. I'm exhausted ", Gillian sighed and closed her eyes.

"I bought flying saucers and jelly babies", Piper held out two plastic bags with colorful sweets in it and grinned mischievously.

"Oh Piper, don't offer me candy. I can't gain any more weight, I need to be slim for Blanche"

"Don't be so hard on yourself, you'll look fantastic"

"She's a not-eating-only-drinking alcoholic. How am I supposed to look like that 3 month after having a baby?", she asked and tilted her head before she exhaled with a soft groan. "That's not going to fill me. But bring it on anyway"

Giggling, Piper opened the bag with the candy and let her mother reach into it. "Hey, have you decided on a name yet?"

Gillian huffed and smirked at her daughter in response before answering, "Of course not"

"Why not?"

"Hm, it's not like we have different opinions or tastes. It's more like one of us comes up with a name, we both like it, but then we start to think and talk too much about it and-, one thing leads to the other, you know. And in the end, we agree that it's not a good name or it just doesn't suit or whatever"

"Trying too hard?"

"Yeah, maybe. You know, I know he likes unique names, but we both don't want it to be weird"
"Yeah, please don't pick something really crazy"

"Of course we're not. I had a pretty name in mind, but it sounds too much like something people don't genuinely like or would connect something negative with"

"Hmm, what's the weirdest name he suggested so far?"

Putting a flying saucer into her mouth, Gillian grinned. "Well, there weren't any particularly weird names yet. But I was pretty surprised that he seemed to like the name Maisie very much"

"Oh god, I can totally imagine your face after he told you that"

"Yeah. Bless him, he probably had this little Maisie in mind when he bought these adorable, pink dresses for her", she replied and they started to giggle in union.
Don't dwell on what went wrong. Instead, focus on what to do next. Spend your energies on moving forward toward finding the answer. - Denis Waitley

Chapter Notes

I hope you all had a wonderful christmas with your loved ones! This chapter is pure holiday induced fluff :)

He was expecting a lot of things when he opened the door to her house with his own key, unannounced and unexpected. But he didn't expect a rather unfamiliar voice coming out of the kitchen, asking slightly frightened who just let himself in. He paused and looked down at his shoes, unsure how to react.

"Um, it's David", he replied after a few seconds.

He heard shuffling and then footsteps. "David?", the voice asked just before a little woman emerged in the doorframe. "David!", she said and her face lit up.

He put his suitcase down and walked towards her, smiling. "Mrs. Anderson"

"Oh, honey. I wasn't expecting you! It's so good to see you" She reached up and put her arms around his neck, pulling him down against her. "And I'm surprised you got a key! I don't have one", she chuckled and patted his back gently.

"Well, I must have done something right", David said when she released him. "It's good to see you, too. I haven't seen you since-", he started before he realised when exactly he had seen her the last time.

"Since Aaron's funeral, yes", she added and nodded.

"Yes"

"It's about time, though. I was already wondering if I'm going to see you at all before my granddaughter is born"

"Since there are only 8 weeks left-", he smirked and began to pull off his coat.

"Exactly! Now come on in, you must be exhausted. Do you want something to drink or to eat?", she asked while taking his coat and ushering him into the kitchen.

He smiled to himself. Gillian's mother had always been a warm and friendly person he had always felt comfortable to be with. He remembered the times she had visited them on set very fondly. Especially her home cooked food and the good conversations they had shared.

"Just some water, please", he replied and sat on a stool behind the countertop, watching her getting a glass out of a cabinet. "Um, where-, where is she?"

Mrs. Anderson turned around. "Oh, I'm so sorry, David. I totally forgot. She is upstairs, taking a nap"
He nodded and attempted to get up.

"Oh-, um-", she hesitated, but reached out to put her hand on his forearm to stop him. "I know you had a long flight to see her, but let's just wait a little longer, okay?"

He knitted his eyebrows and sat down again. "Why? What's wrong?"

"It's okay, she's just exhausted. She had an appointment with her therapist early this morning and then we met her alternative practitioner for an acupuncture treatment for her back and some anxiety relief", she said and put a glass of water down in front of him.

"Oh"

"Don't worry, she's okay. She will tell you about it"

"Did something happen?"

She sighed and leaned on the countertop. "She had a panic attack yesterday when we were in the car while she was driving through London. We got it under control pretty quickly, but she was absolutely out of it for the rest of the day. She's just quite scared at the moment and needs to get some energy back"

"You two weren't thinking about calling me? I wasn't supposed to be here until next week"

"She's been wrestling with some demons lately. She wanted to call you today, she just didn't want you to worry too much and she needed to calm down before. She will be so happy to have you here", she said gently and put her hand on his. "It's okay, she's in good hands. She just needs rest and her loved ones around her"

She squeezed his hand and turned around to open the fridge. He sighed heavily and rested his head in his hands. He had hoped that she would not have to go through this again. He remembered the panic attacks she had while she was pregnant with Piper very vividly.

"I know you won't sit here any longer, so please bring her this sandwich", Mrs. Anderson said as she held out a plate for him, smiling.

He grinned at her and took the plate before hopping on his feet to jog upstairs. Approaching Gillian's bedroom, he slowed down and opened the door quietly before he stepped in. The curtains were half closed and the room was not completely dark, so he could make her out lying on the bed pretty easily. It was comfortably warm and the entire room smelled like fresh sheets. He walked towards the right side of the bed and put the plate down on the nightstand. Gently, he eased himself down on the mattress beside her. She was lying on her side, supporting the weight of her belly with the help of her new nursing pillow, which she had tucked under her right arm and between her legs. He smiled contently. She had gotten bigger in the last 3 weeks and he found himself staring at her soft, round cheeks and the tiny hint of a double chin.

"Honey", he whispered and leaned his head beside hers on the pillow. Reaching up, he started to gently stroke her hair out of her face and caressed her soft cheek with his finger. She stirred slightly, so he continued. "It's me, Gillian", he said, this time a little louder. He knew she probably wouldn't be startled by this and smiled happily when she slowly opened her eyes. "Hi", he whispered again while she blinked herself awake.

"What are you doin' here?", she mumbled and rubbed her eyes with her right hand.

He chuckled and put his arm over her, stroking her lower back. "Couldn't wait any longer, I missed
"you so much", he answered and kissed her forehead. "I just-", he started but stopped when he felt her tensing up in his arms. He was just about to pull back when she grabbed him by his shirt, pulled to fabric tightly against her face and started to sob bitterly.

"Oh, honey", he mumbled into her hair and held her tighter. "It's okay"

She shook her head. "No. I'm a total failure", she said under hiccups.

"You're absolutely not, Gillian. Please don't say that. This happening doesn't mean that you've failed"

"Then what does it mean?", she asked in a desperate, high pitched voice and pulled back to look at him.

He hadn't seen her looking this tired and drained in ages. His stomach clenched up in knots and he swallowed, trying to suppress his own tears while stroking her hair. "What do you think it means, other than that you've failed?", he asked carefully.

She wetted her lips with the tip of her tongue before looking down at her fingers on his chest, taking a moment to think about his question.

"I think it's the possibility of failure. It's my old pattern of thinking, I guess. I'm not enough, less than other women, other mothers. I'm 45, for fuck's sake. And I'm acting like I'm 25 all over again. Isn't that failure?"

"You're not acting like that at all. I'm scared and nervous myself, isn't it normal to some extent? You dealing with a panic and anxiety disorder has nothing to do with your age or your maturity" He paused for a moment, watching her expression soften. "Have you seen the article that got published last week... online?", he asked. If she had, he was certain she knew which one he meant.

Raising her eyes to meet his, she nodded slowly, tilting her head and stroking his cheek with her thumb.

"Just for one moment, I felt like I've failed. Myself, my children. My parents. You, I mean, what's it going to be like for our daughter if she ever reads something like that? They literally reduced her to be the result of my addiction. So, yes, I felt like I've failed her already. But I know it's not true. I know because you wouldn't let all of this happen if I was still that miserable and sick. We wouldn't be here if we hadn't been successful in getting better, in moving forward. And that's what we do. We're looking forward to be good parents, to give her what she needs to be a good, happy person who loves herself because she knows she's worth it"

"I'm so tired of worrying and thinking that it's not going to be enough while I do know what a good and fortunate life lies ahead of her, despite our history or our age. It worries and scares me how much energy I spend on this, knowing what good I could do with it instead. And it scares me what it does to her at this very moment, because I know she feels my distress and all this negative energy I produce while pondering over and over again how to change the past"

"What can I do to help you focus your energy again?", he asked tentatively and smiled at her.

"Hmm, staying for a while would be a good start, I think", she smirked and wiped the tears off her cheek.

"So you're not pissed when I say that I plan to stay for the next couple of months?", he winked and chortled.
"Usually, I would laugh at that, but you have no idea how desperate I am to spend time with you. A lot of time. All the time", she sighed and cuddled closer to him. "I love you for coming a week earlier. You know that, right?"

He closed his eyes and rested his head between her neck and shoulder. "I actually love myself for that brilliant idea, too", he whispered before slowly falling asleep peacefully with her in his arms.

It was still bright and sunny outside when they stepped out of the bedroom behind one another, now dressed in comfortable clothing. She looked quite relaxed again and she didn't feel as tense and depressed as in the last two days. Her spirits were rising every minute now and she smiled contently back at him while they were walking downstairs. Hearing some noises coming out from somewhere to her left, Gillian turned and walked through the living room towards the adjacent open kitchen.

Rosemary Anderson was staring into the oven, her hands on her hips and a pair of glasses on her nose. Gillian smirked at the sight of her mother standing in her kitchen, probably praying for an at least edible meal for the evening.

"Mom, you really didn't have to go through so much trouble", Gillian said while approaching her mother. "We could have ordered something"

She turned around and smiled at her daughter. "Don't be silly, honey. It's no trouble at all. What you need now is a nutritious, home-made meal from your mother. If it's edible, that is..." She shrugged and squeezed Gillian's shoulders.

"Thank you"

"Oh baby, you look so much better than this morning", Rosemary observed and smothered her with caresses, stroking her hair and face alternately. "I dare say this little nap did wonders, huh?", she asked and kissed her daughter's cheek.

"Yes, it was very much needed", Gillian said and pulled away from her mother to look into the oven. "What's that?"

"It's just a quick noodle-spinach-casserole. As I recall, you're a vegetarian, right?", Rosemary asked in David's direction.

"Um-" He stepped further into the kitchen. "Mostly, yes. It sounds very good"

"Is Dad still out with the boys?"

"He's here, too?", David asked surprised, his eyes widening.

"Well, yeah", Rosemary replied and shot a quick, questioning glance at Gillian, who had turned at David's reaction, smirking.

"What is it? You're getting nervous because my father's here?", she asked teasingly and walked towards him before she wrapped her arms around his waist, grinning up at him.

"N- No, no. I'm not nervous"

"Hmm, it's so sexy how you stutter in your high voice", she slurred and got on her tiptoes to nibble on his neck.

"Don't do that in front of him", he said in a serious, but gentle voice and shook his head, making her
snort with laughter against his skin. "I didn't have your lips on me for a couple of weeks, I really
don't want to embarrass myself in the presence of your parents", he whispered into her ear.

"Wouldn't be the first time after all", she whispered back and giggled.

Taking a deep breath of the fresh air, she closed her eyes in pleasure, holding tight onto his right
hand so she wouldn't step into the thicket of the forest to her right. Opening and adjusting her eyes to
the last rays of sunshine again, she noticed him watching her with a gentle smile on his face while
they kept walking on the trail.

She sighed contently and turned her head to look forward again. "Sometimes I forget how healing
the nature can be"

"How can you forget that? You have picked a house in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by a
nature reserve. A forest over there, fields on the other side. Streams, rivers, lakes, all different kind of
trails"

"Yeah, but it's just with you that I get to see all of that. You drag me out of here and I just love every
second of it", she grinned up at him, thinking about how much she did not want to go out after
dinner in the first place.

"What are you doing with them instead?", he asked and gestured towards Oscar and Felix running in
front of them. "Parks and playgrounds are for people who don't want to get dirty. That's utterly
boring"

She shrugged her shoulders. "They didn't complain yet"

"Oh, once they realize there's so much more interesting and fun wilderness than clean parks, they
will"

"Wonderful", she rolled her eyes and laughed.

"Well, you can even bring the baby to this nice forest and go for a run"

"Running, with a baby?"

"Haven't you ever had a jogging stroller?", he asked in disbelief.

"I don't jog"

"Ah, Gillian", he groaned.

She giggled and raised both of their arms playfully in the air. "Did you carry West and Miller?"

"You mean in a carrier?"

"Yes"

"Of course I did"

"Carrier or sling?"

"Both. The sling at the beginning and then later the carrier. We had a great one in which you could
carry the baby in four different positions", he said and stopped walking. "I mean, look at that", he
said and pointed at some hills to their left. "Hiking up there with the little one on your back, that's what I would call a damn good day"

She snorted. "Can't wait to see that", she teased and smiled.

"I can't wait to do it", he replied, smiling back and leaned down to kiss her. It was blissful moments like this that made all their current struggles small and worth digging through. Each day with her he felt like another little puzzle piece clicked into its designated place, completing the whole picture slowly, but steadily.

"Mom! David!", Oscar hollered and ran towards both of them. "Stop kissing and come look at this!", he demanded and grabbed both of their free hands and pulled on them.

David chuckled. "Stop kissing, Mom! Gross"

They let Oscar lead them along the trail and watched him pointing at a fence that was set up in the middle of a field.

"Horses, Mommy", Felix cheered and took Gillian's hand.

As they slowly walked towards the wooden fence, three brown horses watched them curiously, standing beside the fence.

"I think that's the farm where Tilda's horse lives. She wanted to invite me to ride one sometime", said Oscar and held out his hand for the horses to sniff at. He giggled when their warm and moist snouts touched his skin.

"I want to pet him, too", Felix whined and tried to reach up.

David looked down and asked, "Do you want me to lift you up?"

The little boy nodded and held out his arms for David to lift him up. He put him on his right hip and took a step forward so he could reach the horses.

"Who's Tilda?", David asked.

"A girl from my class", Oscar said plainly and walked a few steps away to see if the horses would follow him.

"Oh"

"Hmm, these girls", Gillian added and tied Felix' shoe while he was at a level in which she wouldn't have to get down to do so.

"Do we get a horse, too?"

"No, Felix. We don't have the time for a horse"

"But if you would work at the farm we could have a horse and you would have a real job", Felix remarked.

"What? Young man, I beg your pardon" Gillian raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth to suppress a laugh while David started to chuckle.

"Can we have a dog?"
"Let's see about that when we had our little girl, okay? One step at a time, kiddo"

"It's so cool here, can we come more often?", Oscar cut in.

She woke to the horrifying sounds of someone coughing and vomiting heavily coming out of the bathroom almost at the same time. She pushed the sheets off her body with her legs and sat up slowly, bracing herself on her arms. Stretching her sore back, she listened to another cough attack before she reached out to her left. His side of the bed was cold.

She sighed and rolled over to get on her feet and walked around the bed. Pushing the bathroom door open slowly, she saw him sitting on the floor in front of the toilet. His head rested in his hands and he obviously had problems to qualm his breathing.

"David, are you okay?", she asked, hurrying to his side and getting down on her knees beside him carefully.

He made a distressed sound and shook his head before he lifted his head to look at her. Tears were streaming down his face and he looked alarmingly pale.

"Ouch", he whimpered and pointed at his belly. "My stomach didn't feel so good"

She felt his forehead with the back of her hand briefly, ran her fingers over his chest and took hold of his hands.

"You're running a fever, honey. Your hands are ice cold. Are you finished? You need to get under a blanket", she ordered and helped him get up as best as she could.

"Yes, Ma'am", he said hoarsely and stumbled towards the sink to rinse his mouth before he followed her back to bed. "I had other plans for this night"

"Wait a second, let me put some towels on the bed first", she requested and nestled in her drawer.

"Do you mean plans other than falling asleep while I'm getting all pretty for you?", she teased and put two big towels on his side of the bed.

"Just because. That's how I do it at my house if someone's sick"

"So it's a ritual that's supposed to make you feel better?"

She huffed and patted the mattress. "Stop complaining and get in, you're shivering"

Smiling, he climbed into the bed and let her tuck him under the sheets. He would lie if he'd say that he didn't enjoy her pampering him. It was way better than being sick and alone.

"Do you want something warm to drink? Tea?"

"No, just come back to bed", he whispered and patted her thigh.

She walked around the bed and slowly sat down on the mattress before she turned and lifted her legs in what seemed like a huge effort. She was way too small to be that big in the middle.

She sensed that he was watching her and pursed her lips. "Stop looking at me like that. I know it looks awkward"
He shook his head and licked his lips. "Does it bother you a lot?"

"Uh-", she sighed and lay back on her pillow before turning to face him. "Not yet. Lying down is a struggle from early on, though. And I do feel my age. Things had been a lot easier five years ago. And less painful", she shrugged and scooted closer to him. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yeah. Mill had the stomach flu last week, I bet I caught it from him"

She cringed her nose and ran her hand over his face gently.

He reached up and took her hand in his, caressing it with his thumb. "8 weeks left", he said pointedly and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Can you believe it? I mean, considering that there's a good chance it's only 7 or 6 more weeks... it's hard to believe "

"How do you imagine her to be?", he asked gently and put his arm around her waist, pulling her closer so he could still watch her face.

She inhaled deeply and closed her eyes. "Hmm-. I always wondered what they think and see when they look at you with their deep eyes and a serious expression on their faces, but not able to say a single word yet. I think she will be able to look right through me, just like you. And, um-, I hope she sees something she might like and adopt for herself"

"Oh, she will see a lot of likable things", he nodded and smiled. "She'll be better in solving problems than I am, because she get's that from you"

"Well, she shouldn't come after either of us regarding that. That's not one of our qualities"

They laughed and she planted a quick peck on his slightly scratchy cheek.

He sighed contently before he continued, "I think I have found a fitting name for her, and I like it very much. But I'm reluctant to tell you right now, since we managed to tear apart every name we liked so far"

She snickered quietly into his chest.

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"No. It's fine. I think you have a point"

"Okay, so I just remember it until we see her, okay?", he said, grinning sweetly.

"Sounds perfect", she agreed and kissed him softly.
Appreciation is the highest form of prayer, for it acknowledges the presence of good wherever you shine the light of your thankful thoughts. - Alan Cohen

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all your kind words! They really keep me motivated! I wish you all a great New Year's Eve!

She noticed the young woman waving towards her the second she walked over the threshold into the café. She was a young woman with a kind smile on her face, nicely dressed in blue jeans and a grey sweater. She was late, and she hated being late, that's why she usually never was. Especially not for interviews. You never knew who you pissed off by letting them wait for you. Having met and talked to a lot of different interviewers over the years, working for different magazines and papers, she knew what could happen if the nice person in front of her was looking out to get some raw details or reactions out of her to use them to create a ridiculous, exaggerated story. Depending on what was currently going on in her own private life, those interviews were more or less enjoyable. And she wasn't really looking forward to do them these days.

Hurrying to approach the table, she let her car keys slip into the pockets of her coat and smiled apologetically.

"Hi, you're Fanny Tebould?", Gillian asked and held out her hand.

The young woman grabbed and shook it enthusiastically and pointed to the seat next to her with her left hand. "Yes, nice to meet you, Ms. Anderson. Thanks for agreeing to this interview"

"Nice to meet you, too. My pleasure", she replied and shook her coat off her shoulders before hanging it over the backrest of the chair. Turning to the waiter next to her, she ordered a cup of tea and two sweet scones and sat down when he walked away. "I'm sorry for letting you wait, traffic was heavy" It wasn't even a lie, even though the real reasons why she was late were currently lying on her couch, sick with the stomach bug and in need of a lot of pampering.

"That's fine. You look great, by the way! I'm a huge fan of yours!"

"Thank you", Gillian laughed.

"You agreed to half an hour, right?"

"Yes"

"Okay, then I would like to start right away"

"Sure, go ahead"

"Okay, I would like to start to talk about your upcoming play of A Streetcar Named Desire. Are you looking forward to it? What does it mean to you?"

"Well, I've been looking forward to do this play for a very long time and it never worked out until now. So, I'm very excited to play Blanche DuBois. It's a dream come true to pretty much the right
"And have you already prepared yourself for it? Are you going to watch other interpretations of Blanche, like Vivien Leigh's or Cate Blanchett's in Blue Jasmine?"

"No, I'm not going to watch it. I have never even seen the movie, actually. I want to come at this as fresh as possible. I've started to prepare myself, because there will be a time before the rehearsals in which I'll probably be very busy", she said and paused as the waiter came with the tea and the scones. "Thank you. That looks delicious, do you want one?", she offered and pointed at one of her scones.

"No, thank you very much. Um-" She fumbled with her papers and glanced at Gillian taking a bite, closing her eyes in pleasure in doing so. "Rehearsals will start in June?"

"Mid June, yeah"

"How will you manage that workload with a new baby?"

She grinned. That didn't take long. "I have a great supporting system. A wonderful family and good friends. I'm also very fortunate to have a great full-time nanny who helps me a lot with my kids. I couldn't do what I'm doing without her"

"You probably weren't expecting something like that at your age and to this time of your life. How do you think it will change your future and your work?"

"Well, when I learned something over the years it's that nothing ever plays out the way you planned or wanted it to be. I'm trying different things at the moment, writing a book is one of them. I try to explore more and see what I could do in the future. I'm not the person who waits what's happening next, so I don't think it matters too much what's actually happening in my life. It just has to fit in my life and I learned to make things fit over time. Maybe I won't get work as an actress anymore. But I won't sit around while there are so many other ways to make experiences and be of service to others"

"Do you think you focus too much on work and not enough on family?"

"Did you get the impression I do that?"

"Well, you're going to be on stage just a couple of months after giving birth. And you'll start rehearsals probably just a few weeks after. Considering you did something like that 20 years ago, when you had your first daughter, isn't it a scary thing for you?"

"Well, it's a whole different thing this time. I've got about 6 weeks before I go back to work, that's how a lot of women on this planet do it, or have to do. It's going to be physically challenging, but I like the challenge and I know my mind benefits from that. I mean, I'm in the fortunate position to fulfil my dream by doing it like that. I consider myself very lucky, because this is a very generous time of my life. I'm very grateful"

"But it all has to work out perfectly, doesn't it?"

"Yes, that's the risk you take. You can't see what lies ahead of you. Things can always go wrong"

"Are you worrying about that?"

"No. I'm not worrying about things I can't change as much as I worry about myself and my actions"

"Your publicist said beforehand that you don't want to talk about your relationship with David
Duchovny. But I'd like to ask how this new shift in your relationship affects the past you shared and how it might affect the future in terms of work. Do you think you could do it now?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you always said you were interested in doing another X-Files movie. But could the two of you do it not that you're having a child? And since people assume you're probably having a serious relationship."

She raised her eyebrows. *Probably? Even after their public statements? Are these people fucking serious?*, she asked herself and nipped at her cup. "Well, I haven't thought about that, to be honest. I guess we could. We're used to having a child on set, since my daughter Piper was on set with us all the time. Um-, we've matured over the years, and we had a lot of fun doing the last movie. So, I guess it would be great"

"Are there any concrete plans for another movie yet?"

"No, none that I know of"

"But you're still interested?"

"Of course"

"Just out of curiosity, it does not have to appear in my article, but how was the transition for your family, especially for your kids, from having you as a single mother to you having another baby with another man?"

"It doesn't have to make an appearance in your article?", Gillian asked, frowning. The way she had asked the question was weird, but she knew too well that you couldn't count on such a statement at all. You'd be pretty dumb if you did, actually.

The young woman chuckled shyly and looked at her hands. "I know you don't want these kind of questions, and by boss told me not to ask them, because you're known for not doing any interviews with magazines anymore when the interviewer asked the wrong things. That's not what we want, seriously. I'm just curious-"

Gillian sighed. "You know, it's not like we're the only ones going through this. Of course it's not always easy, but you could ask a thousand other families how they do it, and the answers will be the same and absolutely diverse at the same time. What can I tell you about it? I think my sons are very lucky to have two men in their lives who are great role models for them. We're all grateful to be able to share our lives with people we love. That's all that matters"

It took her a terribly long time driving back home and the only thing that kept her mood positive was listening to R. J. Palacio's beautiful book Wonder. Traffic might not have been very heavy while driving to the interview, but it certainly was on her way back.

She felt really bad for leaving them for such a long time, especially since Felix had come down with the stomach bug just this morning. With Mark out of town, her parents back at home and Erin on vacation, she had no other choice than leaving him with David or cancel the interview. It was already past dinnertime and she was very close to miss bedtime as well. To be stuck in a traffic jam was probably the worst way to spent the time while having a sick child at home, she thought and groaned. And no message from David most likely meant he had his hands full.
Half an hour later, when she finally arrived home and drove up the driveway, she found her house all dark and quiet. After searching for the three of them on the first floor unsuccessfully, she climbed the stairs and detected a soft light coming out of her bedroom as well as faint music. David really liked to turn her bedroom into his own comfortable zone. She opened the door quietly and discovered him standing by the window beside the bed, looking out at the dark forest in front of him. She saw two little arms tightly wrapped around his neck, two legs wrapped around his waist and a bunch of blonde hair on his right shoulder. He swayed gently to the music and she could hear him humming softly in tune. She smiled when she noticed that her bed was covered in blue towels and stuffed animals. Oscar was laying on her side on his stomach, tucked under the sheets.

Swaying a little more to the left side, he caught her standing in the doorframe and turned, smiling tiredly. Felix's eyes were closed and his head rested on the right side of David's chest, who rubbed the boys back soothingly with his right hand.

"Hey", she whispered and stepped towards them, mirroring David's tired smile. "I'm sorry it's gotten so late"

He nodded and leaned down to kiss her softly.

"Oh, must have been a pretty hard evening", she said and pointed at Felix, who was contently sucking on a pacifier.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I couldn't say no. He cried terribly because he was so exhausted, but he wasn't able to fall asleep. He drifted off just a few minutes ago", David whispered and continued rocking him.

"It's fine, I just had no idea that we still had one"

"I think he kept this one in his nightstand for emergencies", David whispered and chuckled slightly.

She stroked Felix's hair gently and felt his forehead. "Oh baby", she said, pouting her lips.

"Yeah, he has a slight fever. He couldn't keep his food down, but he had a lot of tea. Took it like a champ, but the fatigue has overpowered him eventually"

"As nice as it is to watch them growing up, I always loved to baby them when they're sick", she said and turned her head to look at the bed, grinning. "Thank you so much for looking after them"

"Anytime", he said and kissed her forehead. "You look pretty tired yourself. You want to take a bath?"

"Hmm, sounds wonderful. Do you think I have enough time before he wakes up again?"

"Yeah, just go ahead, I'll put him down and join you then"

She hadn't soaked in a nice bubble bath in a very long time and sighed when she eased her aching body down into the warm water. She'd even lit a bunch of candles to make it perfect this time. Leaning back against the tub, she closed her eyes and put her hand on top of her belly, hoping this whole thing would relax her restless daughter as well.

"You're already in?", he asked and left the door ajar while quietly walking towards the bathtub.

"Hmm", she hummed and smiled at him. "You're joining me?"
"Yep, they're sound asleep. I think it's safe", he replied and undressed himself quickly before getting into the tub behind her. "Oh, it's hot!"

She clicked her tongue, wiggled to find a comfortable position between his legs, leaned against his chest and grabbed his hand, putting it on her belly under hers. "It's perfect"

"Smells good, what is it?"

"The lemon ginger oil you got me for Christmas"

"Oh, thanks for sharing it with me. How was your interview?"

"It was alright. She wasn't experienced enough to annoy me too much. But you'll probably find your name in it"

"In what context?" He started to rub her belly with both of his hands, his fingers sprawled out over her smooth skin.

"I basically said we're lucky to have you in our lives"

"Sounds appropriate", he said dryly and she smacked his thigh playfully in response.

"I had two really delicious scones, I should have brought some-. What the heck are you doing down there?", she asked a little louder, frowning and lifted her head to look at their feet.

He shifted under her and groaned. "My legs are too long, they need to be in the middle"

"I don't wanna sit here like I'm about to give birth with my legs wide open, draped over yours"

"Why, don't you want to prepare yourself?", he chuckled and finally bent his knees beside her legs.

"I'm as prepared as anyone could be, believe me"

"Hmm", he murmured and rested his head on her shoulder, closing his eyes.

"So, our bed's occupied?", she asked after a while, stroking his thighs.

"Yeah. Also, weed's out of question"

"Uh. We could have ice-cream"

"Or we could be extremely bold and toast white bread and eat it with Nutella"

She raised her upper body abruptly, hitting his jaw with her shoulder in the process. "Ow!", he cried out.

"That's what I want!", she said and turned her head, looking at him with wide eyes before bursting into giggles and gave him a quick peck on his lips. "Sorry, baby"

"Oh man, that's what our naughty nights have become? You hurting me not because I drive you crazy and make you so horny you can't think straight anymore, but because I offer to make you white bread with sweetened hazelnut cocoa spread. Wow"

"Don't you like it?", she asked, sticking out her bottom lip.

"I love it. That's what scares me the most", he replied and was suddenly hit by a strange feeling of
nostalgia. He realized how different things were now compared to a time when they also shared a bathtub, but weren’t so sure and self-confident about everything, especially themselves. At a time in which she would jump through hoops just to satisfy his needs and wishes, only to prevent rejection. He never wanted to go back to that ever again.

As if she could read his mind, she smiled happily and leaned back against his chest again.

"I think I'm getting dizzy", said David and raised his arm to rub his temples.

"What? From that blow? Are you serious?" She shifted in his arms to be able to look into his eyes and put two fingers under his jaw to make him raise his head.

He grinned at her. "No, because I'm getting really hungry and it's still too hot in here. And I wanted you to shift so I could kiss you properly", he replied and captured her lips with his.

"Okay, make yourself comfortable, it's all set", he called out, rubbing his hands in anticipation.

Gillian lifted her legs onto the couch and stared at the table in front of her. Despite all good resolutions, she would absolutely not turn this midnight snack down, she thought and grinned up at him. She was used to be treated with fine wines, cheese and olives on such occasions, but white bread with Nutella and a glass of almond milk could probably count as the grown-up version. Or at least the version for pregnant women in their mid forties.

He sat down behind her, leaning his back against the armrest and helped her getting comfortable on his chest again while draping a blanket over her body. Reaching out, he handed her the plate and the glass of milk before using the remote control.

"You're comfortable?", he asked softly and looked over her shoulder. "Please be careful with your movements"

She giggled and took a slice of bread from the plate and held it out for him to bite off of it. "Very comfortable. My back is happy" He smiled at her, chewing his food. "What are we watching?"

"Hmm", he swallowed and pushed a few buttons on the remote. "Us"

She grinned. "Oh yeah, I'm in the right mood for this"

"Good, because we're watching fan-made videos of Mulder and Scully... doing stuff"
Every day we wake up, we have an opportunity to do some good, but there's so much bad that you have to navigate to get to the good. - Chesley Sullenberger

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year everyone! I hope all your dreams come true in 2016! And I really hope you keep enjoying this little fic. Be warned - the holidays really inspired me to write a lot of fluffy stuff :D

"I really can't believe you made me do this. These are absolutely not going to be pretty maternity pictures. These are pictures of a shapeless woman in a bikini looking like a beached whale", she grumbled, fiddling around with a vine embroidered beach kimono which she was wearing over a black bikini. "Why did you even insist on it? It seems so unlike you to suggest something like that"

He shrugged, crossed his arms and leaned back into the rattan chair he was sitting on. "One day I learned that sometimes, pictures can be very healing and comforting. Very important. As a reminder of how grateful you can be for everything you got in your life. I thought this happening to us was worth doing it"

She looked at him with a pouting, but apologetic expression and sighed.

"Hey, if you don't want to do it, it's absolutely fine. But you had fun until now, didn't you?"

"Yes", she admitted and looked at her toes. The photoshoot had been a lot of fun - making good, everlasting memories outside on a lovely trail and in a cornfield with the sun shining bright on them, on a king size bed with both of them in white clothing, and basically all around this beautiful house he had rented over the weekend - until she had to change into... barely anything. It wasn't like she still looked as toned as she did in the first season of The Fall, she thought and instantly felt a twinge of guilt flooding her body. Who was she to complain about carrying a healthy child at her age after all. He certainly hadn't arranged all of this so she would feel bad about her appearance. She even knew to what he was referring to. It must've been the worst days of his life when he learned the real value of a picture of his own child. "I'm sorry", she whispered and stroked her belly gently. The apology was directed towards both, her daughter and David. She walked towards him and sat down on his lap sideways. He also only wore black swim shorts and his chest was warm and soft against her skin. "I do have fun. And I love you for doing this for us. I just don't feel very presentable these days"

"But you sure look very presentable", he chuckled and patted her naked baby bump, watching it ripple with the baby's movements. "Have we ever been in a pool together?", he asked, puckering his lips.

"Of course we have"

"When? I only remember having fun with you in various oceans. Maybe one time in a hot tub?"

She raised her hands and narrowed her eyes. "Well, I don't know. Have we never been in a pool together?"
"Since you don't have one...", he teased.

"We don't need one"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The kids would certainly love to have one"

She looked up to the ceilings and around the whole luxurious, indoor pool area, lifting her eyebrow. "Well, looking at this I would love to have it myself, actually. We can't possibly tell them that we spent the long weekend in a house with a hot tub and a huge pool, having fun without them"

"Ah, now you're having fun?!", he said, making her giggle. "Maybe I'm buying this house to have a little getaway-place just for us. And when they're good, we'll bring them... sometimes" He wiggled his eyebrows at her and chuckled.

"This house is twice as big as mine, you can't be serious"

"Gillian, David? I'm ready for you", Anna called from her place where she was setting up her equipment for the underwater pictures.

"Let's get it on, honey"

She was used to photoshoots which lasted for hours and hours, but doing them while being 35 weeks pregnant was a whole different story, she noticed after the whole thing was over. Doing them with David had always been more fun than doing them alone, though. But never in her keenest dreams had she imagined to get maternity pictures done with him. It had been fun, and watching him looking at her with an expression full of love and admiration, touching her body gently but slightly possessive and trying to help her aching body out as best as he could, was worth all the effort. And she loved him for making her do this, as always. He had always pushed her to her limits - emotionally and psychically - in order for her to achieve everything, mostly things she didn't even think of wanting or needing to achieve. But while doing so, he had always looked out for her, all these 21 years.

Smiling, she stroked the surface of the warm water with her fingertips while floating on her back. Reaching her limits by doing a simple photoshoot was really a new record, she thought and giggled to herself.

"What's so funny in this pretty head of yours?", he asked, stepping out of the sauna naked with a towel draped over his right shoulder.

She turned her head in his direction, increasing the movements of her arms to keep afloat.

"I'm better not going to tell ya", she answered and watched him walking towards the open rainforest shower, admiring his long, muscular body that looked even more beautiful in the dimmed, golden lighting of the pool area. She really couldn't wait until she could jump his bones again and ride him like there'd be no tomorrow.

"You look like you're thinking about something naughty", he observed and rinsed his sweaty body.

"I am, but then I'm being pulled back into reality and perceive that I can't realize my fantasies right now because of this huge belly in front of me", she shrugged.

Grinning mischievously, his eyes wandered over her body. She was as perfect as she could possibly be at this gestational stage, or ever. Glowing skin, breathtaking cleavage, lush and fecund. Her huge
belly did not negate the fact that he was turned on since she had changed into her bikini and clung to him during the whole underwater photoshoot. He didn't worry about his persistent semi-erection that much. It survived nine years around her like that, why not a few more hours today.

He sputtered and turned the shower off. "There's nothing we can't do. Just name it and I'll make it true"

"Well then wait an hour for me to crawl out of this pool before you do me against this shower tile with my legs wrapped around your waist", she teased and let her feet sink to the bottom of the pool to get into an upright position.

"I'm up for the challenge", he said and walked towards the edge of the pool while smiling gently at her. Kneeling down, he hopped into the water and was by her side with two long strokes.

She grabbed a hold of his shoulders and pulled herself towards him in an attempt to loop her legs around him. When her belly bumped into his while she was hanging on to him with her calves around his waist, they cracked up with hoots of laughter.

"Anyways, thanks for not making me come out of the water", she said while trying to calm her breathing.

"You're welcome. Did you really have fun today?", he asked, bending his knees slightly and shifting her sideways so she could kind of sit on his thighs, supporting her by putting his left arm around her back and her legs by putting his right hand on her waist, while she wrapped her arms around his neck. She was still so tiny compared to his tall, muscular frame.

"Yes, I did. And thank you for doing this for us. It means more to me than it seemed... earlier, when I was a little cranky", she winked.

"Hmm", he hummed and rested his head on her shoulder, kissing her collarbone.

"But you've also had some fun, huh?", she grinned and started to caress his neck.

Chuckling, he worked his way up her throat, nibbled on the soft skin there before he began to suck on her jaw. "Being in a pool with you indeed is a lot of fun", he whispered. His hand roamed over her belly and moved higher to cup her left breast, squeezing the firm flesh gently. "God, I wish I could stop the time and stay here with you forever"

She snorted. "Like that?"

"You have no fucking idea how beautiful you are. What seeing you like this does to me, knowing you're carrying my child. I know it's sounds like I'm coming straight from stone-age, but I can't help but thinking this is mine, this is mine"

Giggling, she turned her head slightly to meet his lips, sucking his lower lip into her mouth before replying, "This still sounds pretty good, even if it's coming from stone-age. And it's true, you know-

"Is it?"

"It is"

"Fucking amazing", he said and kissed her again, their tongues colliding as he deepened the kiss. Slowly, he waddled towards the pool steps with her without breaking their kiss. When he reached the first step, he put his hand from her breast under her knees and held her tighter against him.
"You're not going to carry me outta here, are you?"

"I am", he said and took three more steps before stopping to adjust her weight in his arms.

"What, you're already regretting it?", she laughed and patted his shoulder playfully.

"No, just... a little surprised", he said and forced himself to smile, making her laugh even more.

"Oh come on, put me down. I don't want to be held responsible when these skinny legs break into a million pieces"

"Pah, these skinny legs could carry two of you. Haven't you noticed that I lift nowadays?"

"Oh god, I'm starting to get scared", she commented, holding onto his shoulder tightly.

"Why?"

"Because you're so tall and if you drop me..."

"I'm absolutely not going to drop you", he said in a soft voice and kissed her forehead before continuing to walk towards the shower before putting her down on her feet carefully.

"Be aware that at least 5 pounds belong to your daughter", she joked.

"We'll see next week. Turn around" He started to undo her bikini top by pulling at the straps and hung them over the towel hanger. Bending down, he helped her out of her panties, hanging them up with the top before grabbing the shower gel and squeezed a generous amount into her hand as well as in his.

"This is the biggest my belly has ever been ", she said and looked down at herself.

"Really? You were huge with Piper"

"Well, she was a very big baby", replied Gillian as they started to scrub one another down.

After they had rinsed their bodies from the bubbly soap, he carefully dried her off and wrapped her into a big towel before drying himself off.

"You want to get into these fluffy sheets upstairs to stay warm?", David asked, still standing in front of her naked and wiggled his eyebrows.

"Yeeees"

Taking her hand, he grinned at her. "Come on then, let me lead the way, my lady"

Reaching the bedroom, he grabbed her towel and tossed it on a chair beside the bed before laying her down on the fresh bedding. He climbed in beside her and wrapped both of them into the plush sheets.

"This is so nice", she whispered and closed her eyes.

"You finally look somewhat relaxed again", he observed and traced her hairline with his fingertips.

"Oh my god!", she cried out, wide eyed.

Startled, he blinked in surprise and grabbed her upper arm. "What is it?"
"My back doesn't hurt at the moment!"

"Jesus, Gillian", he sighed and let his head drop into the crook of her neck.

She laughed and pushed at his chest to look at him. "Do you want to try again?"

"Do you think that one failed attempt keeps me from trying altogether?", he grinned and started to caress the soft skin between her breasts. Not having had sex for almost two months, their last attempt to change that a few nights before had been everything but successful. While trying to adjust to her new girth, she had started to get extremely tense and insecure, even though he had been very careful and loving. She was close to tears when he literally put her out of her misery and wrapped her into his arms, showering her with sweet, innocent kisses before she fell asleep in exhaustion.

"But you don't have to do this just because I've been hard for you for almost the entire day", David said chuckling.

"I'm not", she whined. "I want to do it. I just don't want to have another one of these... unpleasant experiences"

"Hey, it wasn't all bad. We had a good time until you set your mind to something that just wasn't going to happen that way. We can try something different if you feel comfortable with it, or we can just make out a little more"

"But I want the whole thing"

"And I'm very happy to be of service", he grinned. "Okay, the way I see it... we're already naked and worked up, which means I don't have to fight with this belly band thing of yours again, which is... good. And there's no need for me to satisfy my oral fixation, even though I'd really like to, but know you don't want me to-. So, in my opinion, we're good to go"

"That sounds sad"

"Well, the last time I tried to do something fun I made you cry"

"That's because I feel like a fucking whale!", she shrieked and slapped his shoulder, making him raise his arms in defence.

"Okay, yes. Calm down, I get it. I'm sorry if I sound like I'm repeating myself, but making you uncomfortable is not what I want to do in order to get inside your panties", he said gently and kissed her lips.

"The sex was the one thing we were always good at, no matter how fucked up we were", she murmured.

"You say it like the last time destroyed our whole intimate relationship retroactively. I seem to remember a few more failed attempts under the influence of... you know, things. You're really not very kind to yourself saying things like that while your body works so hard for this. And I hate that it's just an excuse to cover your real fear. That I'm out of the door looking for something to fuck the minute you go to sleep. Am I right?"

"What the fuck, David?!", she hollered with an angry face.

"Yeah, what the fuck, Gillian? If I wouldn't give a shit about everything and wanted to fuck some random girl, I would be in Los Angeles right now. I know how to do this shit, I used to be that guy. But I'm not anymore, because I have everything that makes me happy on this very profound, intimate
level right beside me. So, for fuck's sake, stop telling yourself you're not good enough at the moment, because neither one of us believes that shit"

"No?"

"No"

She sighed and covered her face with her right palm. He was absolutely right, it was more than feeling not desirable enough. It wasn't like she didn't trust him, but she knew the way she had acted the last few days wasn't really charming either. And putting a strain on their relationship just because her head was constantly spinning around the what if's was worse than being honest and trying to make the best out of it by talking to him.

"Gillian, do you really think I would cheat on you?", he asked carefully.

"No, David. I don't think you would. It's just... my defences are up all the time at the moment-"

"Yeah, you're ready to pop, basically. That's fine, we're making it through this. And once the little Slug is clean and dry and has her routine down, we're catching up on all the time we lost arguing about nothing instead of making love"

Nodding, she looked at the ceiling above her. He had done everything to make her feel better over the last three weeks. This little vacation in a beautiful house that provided a breathtaking view over the Thames in a way she hadn't ever seen this river before was probably their last chance to have some time for themselves for a very long time.

"What are you thinking?"

"I think you're being very considerate and patient with me"

"I owe you that after 9 years of being a total pain in the arse"

"You weren't, at least not all the time", she whispered and smiled his most favourite smile, the one that revealed her pink gums.

He leaned in and started to kiss her again softly, without any pressure, just to be on the safe side this time. He seemed to have excelled himself in missing the perfect moment to approach something more than making out for the last several days. Maybe leaving it up to her altogether wasn't the worst idea for the next couple of weeks. So he indeed was pleasantly surprised when he felt her hand on his back, caressing it's way downwards until she stopped at his lower belly, stroking the sensitive skin there for a while before she put her hand around his almost fully erect penis.

He groaned louder than he had wanted to and pushed his pelvis against her hand, making her chuckle quietly while she started to stroke him and kissed him softly while he closed his eyes, concentrating on the pleasure she was giving him.

"I don't think I'm going to last long if you keep doing this like that", he whispered into her mouth and put his hand on her breast again, gently stroking her nipple with his thumb. She arched her back into his touch and a soft moan escaped her mouth. He took that as a sign to move on and tilted his head to kiss and lick the length of her throat. He knew it usually excited her a lot when he spent some time doing this before getting serious, especially since she wasn't really enjoying it when he tried to please her with his fingers or mouth between her legs lately, which was a whole new experience for both of them. He moved his hand from her breast a little lower and started to tickle her sides with his fingertips. She giggled in response and moved her hand from his dick to his ass, squeezing it until they both laughed in unison.
"I love that you can make me feel comfortable again so easily", she said and rubbed her nose against his affectionately.

"I love that, too", he nodded and stroked her slightly damp hair, laying with her like that for a few moments, just taking the moment in.

"Hmm", she sighed and reached down again and ran her thumb around the head of his shaft in little circles,. "I think it would be nice if you'd get behind me. I think this could work very well"

Nodding, he kissed her forehead and since she was already laying on her left side, he gallantly climbed over her without putting any of his weight on her and positioned himself behind her, reaching around her to palm her breast once again and started to nibble on her neck. She could feel his arousal against her back and pushed slightly into him, enjoying what she was able to do to him.

"God, you're so beautiful"

She chuckled and reached behind her to put her hand on his ass again, raising her right leg to give him access to enter her and draped it over his slightly bent leg behind hers. He moved closer and reached down to gently feel if she was ready for him, finding her center wet and swollen for him. He removed his hand to take a hold of his dick, stroking it a few times before bringing it to her entrance, rubbing gently along her labia from her entrance up to her clit.

"Oh god, that feels so good", she moaned and dug her nails into the soft flesh of his butt.

"Is this comfortable for you? Your leg okay there?", he asked softly.

"Yeah, everything's just fine"

Slowly, he pushed inside her, tilting his hips to get better access and for deeper penetration. She was almost overwhelmingly hot and tight like this.

"Jeez", he groaned into her hair and squeezed his eyes shut to keep himself in the game. He realized that he was squeezing her hip and digging into her butt when she started to caress his hand gently. He whimpered at her touch and released his firm hold on her a bit, bending his head down to gently suck on her shoulder.

She pushed back into him just a little and removed her leg from his, slowly bringing it down over her own again.

"Oh god, baby. What are you doing?"

She chuckled and turned her head to look at his face. He looked concentrated and sweaty. It suited him really well, she thought and kissed his lips.

"You okay?"

"I'm not if you're getting any tighter. Just wait a moment, okay?"

"Too much?"

"It's fine, you just surprised me by moving your leg" He swallowed and opened his eyes to look into her beautiful, sparkling blue ones. "I'm a sucker for your cute little ass. Having it against my pelvis is... really nice"

"Oh, David", she grinned and pressed her lips against his.
With their tongues caressing each other, he started to thrust into her in a slow pace, holding onto her hip to steady their movements. He pressed into her deeply and stopped there a few times, savouring the exquisite feeling of her snug walls around him, making her whimper.

"Can I touch you?", he asked, driving into her with more force.

"Yeah, please", she sighed, pressing her head into the pillow.

He snug his arm around her and under her firm belly, stroking her inner thighs before dipping two finger back into her wetness. She let out a muffled shriek and bucked into his hand.

"Is this good?", he asked out of breath, increasing his speed with every thrust and circling her clit steadily.

"Don't stop", she breathed and licked her lips before biting on her lower lip.

"Don't worry", he grinned, found a good place to suck on the smooth skin of her neck again and sped up once more, fucking her with devotion and consideration at the same time. After a few more thrusts, he felt her walls tighten around him and opened his eyes to see her hand clutching the covers just when she started to moan softly.

"I'm coming", Gillian whispered and turned her head again, searching for his lips. He loved when he could feel her breathing through her orgasm on his face and captured her mouth with his again, playing with her lips while she panted against him, her mouth open in a silent cry.

She whimpered in pleasure when he felt her contracting, removing his hand from her clit because he knew it would be too much if he continued, and was rewarded with a loud moan and even more intense contractions while pushing into her one last time, emptying himself inside of her, accompanied by a loud groan.

Coming down of their high's, they lay beside each other for a few moments in silence before she took his hand and squeezed it gently.

"I love you", she purred and slowly turned to lie on her back, watching his flushed face in awe.

He swallowed heavily and opened his sweaty eyes. "I love you"

He woke with her lips firmly pressed to his temple and her fingers stroking his chest gently.

"I'm back", she whispered and patted his left arm before stepping out of his sight when he started to regain consciousness.

"Hmm, where have you been?", he asked, squinting his eyes, and ran his right hand through his slightly shaggy hair.

"I've been on the hunt for some food, that's how modern women do it while they're pregnant", she teased jokingly and shed her jacket before hanging it over a coat hanger. "Come on, we're eating downstairs! The table's already set" With a coy smile on her face, she wiggled her brows and breezed out of the room before he could say anything in response.

"God, I love your get-it-done personality", he whispered to himself, chuckled and climbed out of the bed, putting on jeans and a black shirt before following her downstairs.
"Wow, what did you get?", he asked, walking behind her to wrap his arms around her waist, nuzzling her neck while she put an already opened bottle of wine on the dining table. "Oh, for me?"

"Hmm, I thought you deserved it after working so hard" She patted his hand on her stomach and started to pour the wine into their glasses. "Don't get too excited, you'll have to share it. It's non-alcoholic, I'm definitely having a glass. Oh, and you'll love this", she beamed and pointed at the different bowls and plates in front of them. "Moroccan Tagine, Hickory Barbeque Tempeh, Butternut Squash Gnocchi. All vegan"

"Oh, Babe. What's gotten into you?"

"I don't know, sounded tempting when I thought about what I should get for us. Oh, here's the most important part", she began and lifted a paper bag. "Lemon Cheesecake for dessert"

"Nice, thank you for hunting"

He patted her butt affectionately and she laughed up at him. "You're very welcome. Come on, let's sit down, I'm starving"

He nodded and helped her with her chair before taking the seat to her right at the head of the table.

When they had helped themselves with the wine and the food and started to eat, he put his left hand on her thigh. Not only did she look more relaxed, but she seemed to be more like her happy, giggly and bubbly self again. It felt like a huge weight had fallen off his shoulders because she was able to forget her worries and aches for a little while.

Looking at him, she knew exactly what was on his mind. This whole situation was probably the weirdest thing she had ever done in her life. But then again, their whole relationship was. With both of them changing so much over the years they'd known each other, it was like sitting beside a stranger she knew for almost half her life. She had missed a few of his hardest and challenging, yet most rewarding and life-altering years after all. Not that she had ever been in such a serious, long-term relationship with him before, but all of this took her more time to get used to than she originally thought it would. They wouldn't have gotten through all of this 17 years ago.
At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. - Albert Schweitzer

Chapter Notes

I love, love, love to read all your nice comments! Thank you so much!

"Please take a seat. Thank you for waiting. I'm very sorry for the delay, but I had to look after a patient who’s two weeks over her due date and very ready to give birth", Dr. Pisal explained while gesturing towards the two seats in front of her desk in her bright, inviting office.

“I know the joys of carrying postterm”, Gillian said, chuckling. "It’s no problem at all, we were in good hands with Dr. Abel", she added kindly and sat down beside David.

"That's great to hear. Good news is that all your results are already here, so we can go through them together. Tell me though, how are you?", the Doctor asked and opened a file to look through the results of Gillian's examination.

"Um-, okay I'd say. Not really comfortable anymore, and I've got a lot of pain in my back and feet. Sleeping is very difficult and the heartburn is almost killing me sometimes", she answered nervously, fidgeting with her fingers.

"Did you experience any contractions already?"

"Braxton Hicks, pretty frequently now, yes"

"Mhm, your CTG shows contractions every 12 minutes peaking up to 40. They are most likely Braxton Hicks, though. And, actually, you're already 60% effaced and 2 cm dilated"

"What?", David and Gillian cried out at the same time.

Dr. Pisal chuckled. "Relax, everything's fine. This is not uncommon and it's not a sign that you're actually about to go into active labor and deliver soon. Also, your blood pressure is excellent, baby's heartbeat is fantastic, placenta and umbilical cord work just fine and there are no indications that the baby might be in distress. I'll call you tomorrow with the results of your blood and urine tests, but you're doing wonderfully"

Inhaling deeply, Gillian turned her head to look at David, who looked at her with a boyish grin on his face. "Oh god, I wasn't expecting this at all"

"I told you, it's getting way too tight to be comfortable in there", David chuckled and patted her thigh.

"At this point, you have to prepare yourself for everything, it's pretty much unpredictable. Labor could start tomorrow, or in four weeks. I would like you to make it to 38 weeks, but she indeed is quite a big baby. Dr. Abel measured her a week ahead at around 6 pounds and 19 inches. I am very happy with her development considering the circumstances. Go home, stay active but take enough time to relax. I know it's not easy, but try to enjoy it as much as possible", she smiled at Gillian
empathetically. "You're still receiving acupuncture?"

"Yes, every other day now for water retention, heartburn and back pain. We had a few sessions a couple of weeks ago because of my… emotional state back then"

"Yes, I've got a report from your therapist that you had your first panic attack in this pregnancy"

"Yes. It was scary because I was sure once it would start, it would get worse progressively. Fortunately, it didn't. I guess I was lucky to have great people around me who prevented me to get overly anxious, or even depressed", Gillian said in a low voice and turned her head to look at David, smiling gently at him.

Reciprocating her smile, he took her hand and interlocked her fingers with his.

Dr. Pisal nodded. "I'm absolutely positive you're taking good care of yourself and are in control of the situation"

"Do you think it effects the birth itself? Should we reconsider everything and go with the C-Section just in case?"

"No, I didn't change my mind. As we spoke before, we're going to take it hour by hour. Are you still feeling positive about the natural birth?"

"Yes"

"Well then we go for it. You'll be closely monitored. And as I told you, you won't have to stress about me missing the signs that something's going wrong or that I would prolong things just because you said you preferred a natural birth. I hope you trust me enough to know that your and your child's wellbeing are in my best interest and I won't risk it just to avoid a C-Section. And until then, I would like for Helen to visit you twice a week to keep me updated"

"Your midwife?", David asked, narrowing his eyes.

"Yes", affirmed Gillian. "That's okay with me. And I do trust you, completely"

"Good, then it's settled"

"Are you okay? You've been awfully quiet since we got back", she said softly and looked over where he was lying beside her with a book on his chest. After her appointment, they went out for dinner with her good friend Simon and his wife Maureen and had a fun evening with lots of laughter and good conversations before they'd headed back home. It had been a cold day and she was glad when she finally got under her sheets with a good book and even better company. She loved going to bed with him every night. This new routine felt right. It felt safe and it was something she could picture herself doing for the rest of her life. Talking about whatever was going on in the world, challenging their statements and opinions and also having discussions about spirituality and literally everything else they wanted to talk about on a daily basis had a very healing and empowering effect on her. He was an incredibly intelligent man. She had never felt more alive in her daily life before. Even though there wasn't a lot of work outside her own walls to do for her at this time, which would usually result in depression and severe frustration, she didn't feel bored or restless with him at all. He kept challenging her, and it was the best thing she could've ever wished for.

Sighing, he ran a hand through his hair. "Well, I'm a little shocked and speechless, to be honest. It was like a wakeup call, reminding me that I don't have another lifetime to prepare myself to become
Scoffing, she leaned against his shoulder, peeking into his book. "You're a wonderful father. You don't need any preparation"

"It's easy to say when you're so connected with the kid"

"You're nervous?"

"Of course I'm nervous, do you think I'm a stone?", he replied with a hint of annoyance in his voice and sighed deeply before kissing the crown of her head. "I'm sorry. I'm scared, actually. I am one of those fathers who are a little jealous of the connection between a mother and her newborn. I always felt kind of left out, because you want to do everything and everything right, and you want to bond with your child from early on, but in the end you are just the third wheel trying to figure out how to fit in"

She nodded slowly, fully comprehending what he was saying. She knew that having a baby was a challenge for every relationship and some men had trouble finding their new place in the new constellation. And she could imagine what a touchy subject it must be in that case. She had no doubt that it had taken him a lot of courage to talk about those feelings openly, making himself vulnerable for everything that lay ahead of them in the future.

She was silent for a few moments, waiting if he wanted to add something, before she decided to reveal a fear of her own. "I'm wondering if I have enough love left for her in me. And what if I don't. I don't remember how I managed to adjust to Oscar while I was used to give Piper all the love and attention. What if I'm looking at her like she's an intruder? I was desperate to have Oscar, now I didn't expect to have another child, nor did I want another. It doesn't feel very good... I mean, not being sure I can love her as much, that is"

This time, he nodded slowly and put the book on his nightstand before he wrapped his arm around her shoulder, squeezing her arm gently. "And at the same time, you just know how hard you'll fall for her the second you see her face. Hear her cry and whimper for the first time. Feel her warm skin on yours. And you know exactly what to do to be the best parent your daughter could have", he stated and watched a warm smile form on Gillian's face.

"I would love to see her right now"

"Yeah, me too"

Giggling in union, they shifted into a more comfortable position in each other's arms.

"A lot of hair"

"Uh-uh, no hair", Gillian demanded. "Your babies are bald, that's a fact. I've seen all of them"

Laughing, his mind went back to when his children were born. Two soft, wiggling little humans. Strangers, basically. Amazing, yet frightening, how fast you couldn't live without them anymore.

"You look happy, David", she said matter-of-factly.

"I am happy", he replied in a gentle voice and kissed her forehead.

After a little while, she started to wiggle out of his arms, rolling her eyes. "Gotta pee"

He let her go and reached over to take his I-Pad from the nightstand, while she climbed out of the
bed and disappeared into the bathroom. He opened Twitter and was instantly overwhelmed by all the messages he had received. Or at least he thought they were meant for him. Somehow, he wasn't able to figure the Twitter out and still preferred Instagram over it, it was much more user-friendly for an old guy like himself without his skilled daughter around.

Scrolling through the messages, one weirder than the other, a tweet from what seemed like a very young woman got his attention. He read the caption and clicked on the attached link, which redirected him to the website of a British newspaper.

He skimmed the text quickly and chuckled before he called out, "Oh, baby. You're going to love this".

He heard the flush of the toilet and the water faucet being turned run. "Huh?", she replied as she stepped back into the bedroom, waddling towards the bed with her left hand pressed into her lower back. When she reached her side, he scooted into the middle and offered her his hand in order to support her while she attempted to sit down slowly. "I'm not loving getting into bed anymore", she grumbled and pulled the sheets over her body before leaning against his shoulder again.

"Look at that!", he said excited and put his tablet down between them. "Someone has sent me a link to the interview you did a few weeks ago. Have you seen it already?"

"No! Is it online?"

"Yes, it is"

"I should check my phone for messages from Ali more often", she said dryly. Lifting the tablet from the sheet, she squeezed her eyes. "My life is busy. And I'm very grateful for that. How Gillian Anderson manages her busy and successful working life as an actress, a writer, and an activist while enjoying her personal life as a mother, daughter, friend and partner to the fullest", she read and looked at him with a questionable expression on her face.

“Sounds good”, he smiled at her.

They continued to read the article in silence before her face split into a huge smile.

“As a woman who prefers to keep her personal life to herself, she grants me a little glimpse into what her fans were only able to speculate about – the nature of her relationship with David Duchovny. Yes, they are in a committed relationship and she describes herself and her children lucky to have him in their life. Because for her, in the end it’s all about sharing your life with people you love.

“Too much?”, she asked carefully, searching his face.

“No", he whispered and lifted his gaze to look into her eyes. “It’s nice” Nodding, he smiled gently and took her hand in his, squeezing it to reaffirm his statement.

She raised her head to kiss him softly before resting back against her pillow and his shoulder, closing her eyes.

“I’m snoozing a little, okay?”

He hummed his approval and shifted a little, letting her head fall into the crook of his arm while he operated the tablet with his left hand. Going through more tweets, he noticed his name on another article by one Rick Tomer with the caption Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny - Still in love - Can they beat the odds? He pursed his lips and turned his head slightly to check if she was silently
Anderson stated in her last interview how lucky she and her children are to be looked after by two fairly wealthy men who provide what it needs to extend a family at an advanced age.” Involuntarily opening his mouth wide in disbelief, he tried to suppress his consternation as good as possible. What a fucking asshole, he thought and scrolled down further. It wasn’t a big surprise to find some paparazzi pictures under the article of both of them strolling hand in hand through a farmers’ market on Sunday, even though they had tried and thought succeeded to remain a low profile there. Going back to Twitter, he decided to take care of this himself, even though he knew he was about to piss off his manager.

Opening her eyes to a dark room, she realized she must’ve been able to sleep a little, which wasn’t something she could take for granted these days. She remembered falling asleep in his arm, but now she was resting on her right side, slightly uncomfortable and stiff. Feeling a strong kick right into her back, she inhaled sharply and rolled onto her back while reaching over to grab her phone from her nightstand.

01:41 am. 3 hours of sleep. Not bad, she thought and unlocked her phone to open the notification she had gotten from Twitter. Even though she told everybody she wasn’t really into all of this social media hype, she enjoyed to secretly spy on media and fans, who were probably convinced by now that she wasn’t reading anything there after all.

Noticing that Twitter had opened a Tweet from David directed at her, she started to chew on her bottom lip in anticipation, waiting for the page to load fully before his message appeared on the screen.

@rickT Beating the odds since ’93 thanks to the most independent, devoted & loving woman, mother, friend & partner that @GillianA is

“Oh, David”, she whispered and turned her head. She could barely make him out lying beside her and scooted closer, putting the phone down beside her. “Honey”, she said quietly, not sure if she should wake him or not.

“Hmm?”, he murmured, bracing himself on his elbow. “Everything okay?”, he asked in a sleep drunken voice. Apparently, his daddy radar was already working pretty good.

“Yeah, I've read your tweet”

Sighing a laugh, he let himself fall into the pillow again. “This Rick is a fucking asshole”

“Who’s Rick?”, she asked, furrowing her brows.

“Well, the Rick who wrote this stupid article about you”

“I haven’t seen the article. I’ve just seen your sweet message”

“Okay, leave it that way, babe. Now go back to sleep”

“I can’t sleep”, she replied, snuggling closer to him and reached under the sheet to put her hand inside his boxers.

Startled, he jumped slightly and opened his eyes again. “Jeez, be careful! Your hand is cold”

Giggling, she reached down further and grabbed his ass, squeezing the warm, muscular flesh firmly.
“Sorry”

Moaning, he lay one arm around her, pulling her body closer to his and started to trace the line of her spine with his thumb. “Doesn’t feel like you’re sorry to me”

“Actually, I’m not”

“Mhhmmm”

Grabbing the waistband of his boxers, she awkwardly pulled the fabric down his butt with one hand, making a huge effort to reach behind him.

“What are you doing?”, he asked, raising his head to look at her questionably and his hip to help her out.

“You already know that”, she observed, moving her hand to his now free penis, which was much more alert than his owner. “You definitely do”, she deadpanned and traced his semi-erect dick with her fingers, feeling it twitch and grow harder.

She was about to wrap her hand around him when suddenly his phone started to ring, startling them both by disturbing the comfortable silence.

They groaned as he reached for it, squeezing his eyes as he tried to look at the bright screen.

"Must be Melanie who wants to kick my ass for that tweet", he chuckled and looked at the display. “Huh, it’s Tèa”, he said surprised, raising his eyebrows before accepting the call. “Hello?”, he asked and waited for a response.

She could hear her muffled voice through the speaker, but couldn’t understand what she was saying.

“What happened?”, he asked into the phone. After a few moments, he sat up and reached to his left to switch on the light on the nightstand. “How is she?”

Instantly alarmed by his concerned voice, she braced herself on her elbows and pushed herself up into a sitting position, too. Their eyes met and he quickly reached for her hand, causing a frown on her forehead.

“Yes, give me a few minutes to figure something out, okay? I’ll call you in a couple”, he said and ended the call, looking at his hands.

“What is it? What happened?”

“It’s my mother… she was admitted to a hospital in critical condition”
When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality. - Joe Paterno

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for reading my little fic and making so many sweet comments. I would love to see you all on tumblr, I'm Sembell there

Boarding the plane literally just a few minutes before it was scheduled to depart, she hurried to get to her seat while the stewardess already started to seal the doors behind her as soon as she had walked through them. Most of the business class seats on the 6am flight to New York were vacant, making it easy for her to make him out in the back, looking out of the window to his left, lost in his thoughts.

Just a few hours prior, he’d left the house in a hurry alone, leaving her behind after they’d argued if she should join him on the 7-hour flight, while he was still struggling to comprehend the unexpected news he’d just received.

“I’m absolutely not arguing with you about that”, he’d said, carrying a black suitcase out of her dressing room, put it down on the floor and opened the lid. “You’re not going”

“I think I am’, she'd insisted and stepped beside him with her hands on her hip. She should've started to pack her stuff instead of standing around, trying to make a point, she realized later when she broke a few speed limits to reach the airport in time.

He sighed and threw his toiletry bag into the suitcase before turning to face her, starting to get annoyed. “Gillian, no. Please don’t argue with me now, I promise you I’ll be back as soon as possible, just stay put, okay?”

He gave her a quick peck on the cheek before hopping into the waiting taxi and she decided she wouldn’t let him go alone, no matter how much she knew how stupid it would be to board a transatlantic flight after she’d just been told a few hours before that she could go into labor every minute now. She had considered calling Dr. Pisal for a moment, but decided against it, knowing she would talk her out of this craziness.

Reaching his row, she slowed down and looked down at him, clearing her throat to get his attention. He turned his head, his eyes widened when he realized who was standing in front of him and he groaned immediately, throwing his head back into his neck, rolling his eyes.

“Is this seat taken?”, she asked blithely with a slight smirk on her face and sat down beside him before he was able to answer. Letting her brown backpack slip onto the floor between her legs, she rubbed her belly with her right hand and faced him.

Shaking his head, he sighed heavily. “You can’t be fucking serious. How on earth did you manage to convince whoever you needed to convince to board a plane looking like you’re about to pop?”

“There was no need. I have a maternal logbook that says that my due date is not within the next 3 weeks, that’s all you need to get on a plane”, she stated, offering her left hand to him.

He glanced down, but didn’t take it. “Yeah, Gillian. That really helps after your doctor told you
you’re already dilated and effaced”

She pursed her lips and inhaled deeply, watching a stewardess pass by before replying. He was angrier than she thought he’d be. And he was right. “I would have gotten on a plane today anyway, so I thought it would be the best to go with you in case-“, she stopped. No, she probably shouldn’t go there right now.

“In case you start having contractions? In case the mother of three delivers a baby within 7 hours, which I happen to know is pretty likely? On a plane. Without medical attention. Right? Great, Gillian. Just great”, he murmured angrily.

“Hey, would you give me a break? I just wanted to be with you in case you needed me. I’m sorry if I’m reaching but I thought being with you could make this shitty situation a little bit easier for you. What did you expect me to do? Sit on my ass knowing you’re going through this alone and probably won’t be back within a few days or even in time to be there when your daughter is born?”

“And what now? Do you plan to fly back within the next two days?”

Chewing on the inside of her cheek, she lowered her head to look at her feet. They fell silent, listening to the engine being started just before the pilot welcomed them on the flight while the plane rolled towards the runway.

“Are there any news?”, she asked quietly while the stewardess demonstrated what to do and how you should behave in an emergency situation. She hoped she knew how to respond properly in case her very own emergency situation would occur.

“No”

She grabbed the two straps to her sides to fasten her seatbelt after a steward reminded her kindly to do so, hoping she wouldn’t need an extension. It fit right under her belly and she sighed in relief, closing her eyes, breathing deeply while caressing her belly with her left hand. She felt every step she had taken to get into this plane now.

Gillian opened her eyes again and noticed he was looking at her intently with a worried expression on his face. That was absolutely not what he needed in addition to his already worried and tense mind.

“It’s alright, David. Everything’s fine. I just had to hurry a bit to get to the gate and… jogged”, she explained and shrugged her shoulders. “But, I put on some compression stockings before I left the house…”

“Ready for take-off”, came over the speakers and he turned his head with a slight shake, looking out of the window again while her eyes were still fixed on his face.

Realizing he probably needed some time to himself, she leaned back and closed her eyes as they were pushed into their seats. She could do it, there were no indications she would actually go into labor in the next couple of hours. The baby hadn’t even dropped down into her pelvis yet, but then again she had heard that she shouldn’t expect this to happen in subsequent pregnancies weeks before labor actually starts.

She must’ve drifted off, because when she opened her eyes again, a blue blanket was draped over her body and she was lying in her seat comfortably. Inhaling deeply, she stretched her legs and rubbed her eyes before turning her head to find him smiling at her gently. Returning his smile, she
leaned in slowly and hoped he would do the same while closing her eyes again. He didn’t let her down this time. Feeling his soft, full lips on hers, her body tingled and her cheeks grew warm.

“You’re a good girl”, he said when he broke their kiss. “Only 4 more hours”

“What? I’ve slept 3 hours?”

Nodding, he pushed two buttons on her chair to get her into a upright sitting position again and kissed her forehead.

“Yep. I also got a text from Téa. Mom is stable, she’s in the OR now. They have to put in some stents”

“She had a heart attack?”

“Yes”

“So, it’s good we’re going”

“Well-“, he started but went silent again, then nodded. “Yes, it’s good. I’m glad you’re here with me. I was just scared for the two of you”, he admitted and rubbed her belly gently. “Do you want to eat something?”

“Yeah, but I have to use the restroom first”

“Go ahead, I’ll order something for you”, he said and removed the blanket from over her body and helped her out of the seat.

She slightly hopped up and down on the balls of her feet, getting a feeling if her body had changed over the last hours. Everything felt good, only her feet ached a little. Grinning at him, she made a step towards the restrooms before turning around again, looking at him with a serious expression on her face, raising her finger warningly.

“No oatmeal, no granola”

“Look who made it to the US in one piece”, he said softly, pointing towards the huge window to her left. She slowly turned her head, still slightly narcotized and weak from her surgery and the events beforehand, but in a good and stable condition.

Behind the mirror, she detected a very pregnant Gillian standing there with a huge smile on her face, waving furiously before she blew her a kiss while patting her stomach that held her second granddaughter.

Returning her smile, she whispered slowly, “Ah, David, why did you bring her? She looks more exhausted than I feel”

He chuckled and kissed her right hand. “I didn’t want to bring her, she was basically hiding in my suitcase”

“Can’t she come in?”

“No, just me at the moment, Mom”
She turned her head again and looked at her son under tired, fluttering eyes. “I would’ve been pretty pissed off if I had missed the arrival of your little girl, David”, she murmured emphatically.

He laughed. He hadn’t heard these kind of words coming out of her mouth very often in his entire life, but knew exactly how she felt. “Yes, Mom. Me too”

“What a scare. Funny what it takes to finally see you again”, Téa said and smirked before taking the seat next to Gillian, handing her a cup of steaming tea.

“Thank you”, Gillian whispered and took a sip. “Yeah, I’m sorry. I don’t know what to say except that it probably wasn’t very mature of me to avoid this for so long”

“I can’t believe you flew in like that”, Téa chuckled and looked down at Gillian’s bump. “You’ve always been strong-minded”

“It was a crazy idea. I’m just lucky as fuck it didn’t end in a disaster”

Looking at each other for a few moments, they smiled and drank out of their cups in unison.

“You know, I’m really happy for the two of you. There are no bad feelings at all, if that’s what you’re afraid about”, she offered with a kind smile.

“I didn’t really believe it until recently, actually”, Gillian began and looked at Téa, who tilted her head and squinted her eyes. “Mark asked his girlfriend if she would marry him, and she said yes. When he told me, I didn’t feel sour, and that actually surprised me. I wonder if it’s because I’m over him as a partner and he’s just a good friend and the father of my sons… or is it because I’m happy myself?”

“Hmm. Maybe both. Hopefully not only the latter. I think you should be happy for him no matter if you’re happy or not”

“Yes, that’s how I would like it to be, too”, Gillian nodded and smiled at Téa. “How are you? How’s work?”

“Oh, everything’s pretty good. Work’s challenging. And I really had a hard time getting into the groove again… you know, with the hours and all these lines”, she said and they both fell into laughter.

“Yeah, me and my bad memory know exactly what you mean. It’s awful”

“It really is. David said I’d get used to it, but… it takes more time than I had anticipated”

“I’ve seen about two episodes, you’re amazing, spot on… really!”

“Thank you”, Téa said and pointed her head towards the hallway.

“Hey”, Gillian said after she’d turned her head and spotted David walking towards them with a tired smile on his face. “How is she?”

He sighed and took the seat next to Gillian, an odor of sanitizer accompanying him.

“She’s sleeping now. The doctor says she’ll be pretty much out of it for the rest of the day and we should go home. She’s stable and they’ll call if somethings coming up, but everything looks okay so far”
“Thank god”

David nodded and rubbed his hand over his face, realizing how little the chances had been that Téa was there right when his mother collapsed. “Thank god you were there”

“Yes. You two look pretty beaten, let’s get out of here, huh?”, Téa suggested and gathered her purse and her jacket beside her.

“Do you guys want to grab something to eat?”, asked Gillian, pursing her lips. “Maybe with the kids?”

Chuckling, David rubbed her back and smiled at her. “You’re hungry again?”

“Well yeah, it’s been awhile-“

“I could have something, too. Let’s pick up the kids on our way to a good burger place”, Téa agreed and jingled her car keys.

“You starting to regret this whole thing?”, he asked and dragged their suitcases behind himself while walking into the elevator.

“What do you mean?”, she asked and followed him.

He held his key card against a monitor and the doors closed. “You won’t sleep in your own bed for quite some time”

Full and satisfied from a nice dinner with Téa and the kids, they’d finally reached David’s apartment just before midnight. The long and exhausting day had taken its toll on her, leaving her tired to the bones and ready to fall into any bed available. But she’d lie if she said she wasn’t wishing for her own. Wishing she wouldn’t be somewhere where nothing was ready for the baby she was about to give birth to very soon.

She shrugged and averted her gaze, staring at the mirrored ceiling as the elevator started to move. She couldn’t deny that she felt a little remorseful about all of this. Of course she would always go with him again and she was glad they went together. It was important and the right thing to do. Sighing heavily, she rubbed her temples tiredly and finally said, “I like your bed”

Huffing out a laugh, he stepped out after the doors opened again and walked towards his apartment door, realizing that she hadn’t followed him.

He turned his head. “What is it?”

“It’s the wrong floor”, she said and made a gesture for him to come back into the elevator.

“No, come on!” He stepped back again and grabbed her by her arm, pulling her towards him.

“David, it’s the wrong floor!”

“Babe, it’s the right floor” He leaned down and surprised her with a soft kiss. “Welcome home”, he said, smiling broadly and turned to insert the key card to unlock the door.

“What do you mean?”, she asked as he pushed the door handle down and opened the door.
“Lady’s first”, he grinned and held the door for her.

She shot him a cautious glance, questioning if he was messing with her or not, before slowly walking over the threshold into the gallery. She recognized his furniture immediately. The brown and red wooden bench with all the pillows she got him over the years on it. The green carpet underneath, of course. Everything seemed to be the same at first sight, but this whole area was much more spacious than the previous one, and had a lot more doors.

She turned to look up at him with wide eyes. “You moved?”

“I did”

“Why?”

Chuckling, he put his hands on each side of her belly and laid his forehead against hers. “Because my family is growing. Six kids and a beautiful woman. This was the best I could get without moving too far away. But it doesn’t mean I’m not open to move into a house one day. It’s just… for now”

“There’s room for all of us?”

“Of course there is”, he replied and took her hand. “Wanna see?”

Her face split into a huge grin and she squeezed his hand in anticipation.

“Let’s put you out of your misery first”, he said and wiggled his eyebrows, walking towards the second door on the right side with her. “I hope you like it. I really wanted to do this by myself, but I think it turned out pretty decent”

She arched her brow and watched his hand turning the doorknob and pushing the door open. Reaching into the room, he turned on the light on the ceiling before he put his hand on the small of her back to guide her in.

Her left hand went to her mouth when she realized where she was standing in. “Oh my god”, she sobbed, removing her hand from her mouth to grab him by his shirt. “Oh god"

He’d painted the walls in a warm, but light turquoise, which was a perfect match to the pale oak hardwood floor and the grey and white striped curtains on the two big windows. The white wooden furniture, including a cot bed, a changing table, a closet and two shelves as well as the white shag rug made the room even brighter and friendlier. She also spotted a beautiful yellow rocking chair in one corner beside a shelf full of colourful books, stuffed animals and a cinema light box that had welcome home baby written on. And he had picked some very sweet and funny paintings for the walls as well as a vintage style letter hook and paper cut lanterns hanging from the ceiling. It was absolutely beautiful and sweet.

“Did you really think I wouldn’t be prepared?”, he asked, pulling her out of her state of shock.

Shaking her head, she closed her mouth and swallowed. “I guessed you got a cradle or something”

Chuckling, he leaned down and whispered into her ear, “The cradle’s in the bedroom. Do you like it?”

“Yeah, I love it. It’s perfect. When did you do all of this?”, she asked, still looking around the room in amazement.

“After you went back to London. I bought the apartment last September when I heard it’s free and
has 5 bedrooms. They renovated it and then moved the stuff up as soon as we went off to LA in January”, he confessed and grinned. “Now she has two very beautiful rooms, huh?”

“She is one lucky little girl”, Gillian agreed and walked towards the crib. It looked so nice with the tusk bedding and the matching sleeping bag in it, waiting for her daughter. “I’m a lucky girl, too”

“You are?”

“Yes”, she nodded and turned to him, putting her hands on his chest. “You’re the love of my life”

A warm smile grew on his face as he stroked her upper arms. “And you’re mine”
We love life, not because we are used to living but because we are used to loving. - Friedrich Nietzsche

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your support! You have no idea how touched I am by your kind words here and on tumblr! Since some of you have asked if I would or could continue to write on this fic after the baby is born, I can tell you that I will, as long as somebody's out there who enjoys it (including myself ;) Feel free to send me prompts and I'd love to include them into the story if possible. This story lives because of you guys and I'm very happy, because I enjoy the image behind it just as much :)

Apart from a few low buzzing sounds you could hear in every hospital as well as their combined, steady respirations, the room was quiet and dimmed when he opened his eyes again, resting on his side, his arm protectively draped over the two warm, sleeping bodies beside him.

Almost two weeks after their arrival in New York, when his mother had already gone into rehabilitation and things seemed to settle down once again, everything had changed forever. It had taken her nearly two days of labor to bring this beautiful and precious new life full of possibilities and hopes into this world. A very loud little miracle, fierce like the sea and still a little bruised from the hard delivery she had just experienced. Her entry into this world was not as easy and smooth as he had hoped and wished for, leaving her mother battered, shaking heavily and uncontrollably for hours in shock and exhaustion, not even able to stand on her own feet anymore.

He had never been so scared in his entire life, and helpless. The moment she came out covered in blood, making no sounds and with a slightly blue skin, he was sure his brain had shut itself down and he hadn’t taken a breath himself for almost a minute until he heard her whimper for the first time and finally, a full blown manifest of her resentment.

And now, he was sure no moment had felt as pure and fulfilling as this in so many years. This was what Gillian meant when she talked about life coming full circle. Looking at their baby, he could see every year that was a part of her past right in front of his eyes. He knew it would never matter to her how difficult it had been to get to this point, to the point of her existence, and that was absolutely fine. But it mattered the world to him, and most likely to her mother, too.

He felt her stir under his arm and looked up to see that her tired eyes were focused on him. She still looked quite pale with dark circles under her eyes, which were puffy from all the tears she had cried in the last couple of hours. But her cheeks were warm and glowing and her eyes wetter and bluer than ever.

“Hey”, he whispered and raised his hand to brush a strand of wavy hair out of her face with his thumb before caressing her soft cheek. “How are you feeling?”

“Hmm, sore”, she groaned and tried to shift a little but stopped immediately when she felt her body aching all over. “Ouch”, she grimaced in discomfort and let her head fall back onto the pillow.

Nodding, he pursed his lips and looked down at the little bundle, resting in a little nest between them. “Well, that’s a big Duchovny head”
Yeah” She closed her eyes again and licked her dry lips.

Reaching behind him, he grabbed the large straw cup with water standing on his nightstand. “Here, drink something. The doctor said you’re a little dehydrated, you already had an IV”, he offered and she took it with a slight smile before she started to drink.

“Did she say anything about her head after I drifted off?”, she asked before closing the cup and putting it behind her on the mattress.

“Yes, everything’s fine. They did a sonogram of her head that showed no bleedings or anything like that. Just this little bruise here.”, he said and pointed at the slightly blueish swelling over the baby’s left eyebrow, apparently caused by an encounter with her mother’s pelvic bone. “You two just went through a lot”

He paused for a moment to pick up her hand and lace her fingers through his.

“I can’t believe all of this really happened”, David admitted and she raised her eyebrow at him. She wasn’t used to hear him like this, at a loss of words and full of awe. “No, really. Look at her” He removed his hand from her hip and put it on the baby’s belly, rubbing it gently. “She’s here, all warm and soft and healthy. She smells so sweet and it’s absolutely the best scent in the world. She looks like both of us, even though she’s as beautiful as her mother. She’s our biggest accomplishment, Gillian”

“You’re such a sweet new Daddy”, she grinned sweetly, resting her hand over his on her daughter. Nothing could have prepared her for this moment with him and the little person they’d made together. “So”, she slurried and started to stroke the baby’s tightly clenched hand with her index finger back and forth. “You were right about the hair–“

He nodded enthusiastically. “And the lips. I knew she’d have your beautiful, full and pouty lips…”

“And the lips”, she agreed, nodding with him. “But I was right about the nose. This little button nose is definitely Duchovny”

He snickered quietly, still looking down at his youngest daughter while he gently ran his fingers through the soft, light brown fuzz on her head and stroked Gillian’s hip with the thumb of his other hand in circles. “Yeah, I tend to pass this thing on” He grinned, realizing that she had the exact same nose West and Miller had when they were born. “Hey, when they did the sonogram, she opened her eyes and looked at me while I was talking to her. She has huge eyes, just like you. They’re like sapphire blue, but she has light green sparkles around her irises. Like yours, just darker, but just as beautiful”

“David?”, she whispered, closing her eyes tiredly.

“Hmm?”

“Tell me the meaning of her name again, please?”

Smiling, he scooted a little closer. “The first name means delight. It’s Hebrew and a name I knew my father liked in its alternative form of the original name, which I love very much myself. The second name means very holy and noble in terms of generosity. It’s more common, but beautiful nonetheless. And its similarity to the name Aaron is what drew me to it” He paused, watching her smiling with her eyes closed. “Do you really like it?”

“Yeah. I love it. It’s perfect” she slurried and opened her eyes. “I want to hold her, David. But I really need to go to the bathroom first”
“Okay, wait a second”, he said and rolled himself out of the bed carefully before walking over to her side. “Do you need the wheelchair?”, he asked, removing the blanket over her body.

“No!”, she said and pursed her lips before grinning. “I can do it” Slowly, she turned to lie on her back and grabbed his hands to pull herself up. Her sore stomach and pelvic muscles ached and she winced.

“I’ll lift you up slowly, okay? Just hold on”, he offered and put her arms on his shoulders.

“You’re an excellent nurse”, she observed and giggled while he got her into a standing position carefully.

“Well, thank you. How is it?”, he asked, easing his grip and looking down at her feet.

“Feels okay”

He turned to her side, wrapping his arm around her shoulder and pressed her body slightly into his side to support her while she took her first, tentative steps.

“Oh man, I’ve never felt that weak before. Not even after my C-Section”

“I feel tired and beaten myself, just by sitting beside you. I don’t know how you manage to walk at all. You’re a champ!”

“Hmm”, she hummed as he opened the door to the bathroom. “I kind of lost track of time. What day is it now?”

“It’s Monday, around 7pm. She picked a pretty cool birthdate, the 14th of April 2014”

He opened the lid of the toilet before turning towards her again, asking if he should help her with her pants by pointing his finger at it, and she nodded slowly. She grinned when he walked towards the door again to look into the other room.

“Never in a million years did I picture the two of us as new parents in a hospital bathroom with you undressing me so I can use the toilet”

He snickered, shrugging his shoulders. “The first thing I was able to do in order to help you out today”, he said with a hint of sarcasm.

“Nonsense. You were a great supporter”, she replied with a soft smile on her face.

“Are you feeling okay? Do you want me to order something to eat?”, he asked as they walked into the room again after he had helped her change her clothes and wash herself, still supporting her with his arm around her body on their way back.

“Yeah, I could eat something light. And I’d like to have some juice, please”

“Okay”, he replied kindly and helped her sit down on her side of the bed, lifting her feet before she rolled closer to the sleeping baby in the middle of the bed.

“Hey, baby”, she whispered and lowered her head to give her daughter a chaste kiss on her forehead. “Daddy’s right, you smell delicious”

Lifting his head as she called him Daddy so easily and naturally, he smiled at the sight in front of him.
“Would you like some rice with vegetables? And some apple juice?”

She nodded, fully focused on the baby. “Come here, honey”, Gillian said under a soft smile and gently slid her right palm underneath the baby’s head and her left underneath the bottom to pick her up carefully before shifting her into the cradle hold. “Oh, you’re so tiny”

Not long after Gillian had picked her up, the baby started to stretch her fingers and purse her lips while squeezing her eyes tightly shut.

Gillian raised her head and looked at David. “I think she’s waking up”

“Yeah?”, he asked and hung up the phone after ordering the dinner and sunk down beside her. “God, she’s beautiful”

“Yes, she really is”, agreed Gillian and shifted a little so he could sit beside her with his back on the headboard, before she leaned herself back against his chest, while he wrapped his arm around her.

A few minutes went by when she finally managed to open her eyes, making cute little noises while trying to adjust to the dimmed lighting.

“Hey, Eaden. Hi”, Gillian whispered and smiled, stroking the baby’s cheek with her index finger. “We did it, huh? You were such a good girl”

“You both did so good, I’m so proud of you”, David said. She could tell from his muffled voice that he tried to suppress a sob by talking into her hair.

She chuckled and turned her head to kiss his forehead before looking at him closely. She saw tears in his eyes and smiled affectionately.

He leaned in, closing his eyes as their lips met in a soft kiss. “Thank you. Thank you for giving me this precious gift”, he murmured as he gave her an affectionate kiss on her cheek before looking down at the baby again.

“We’ve both been gifted”, Gillian agreed. “Have you called my parents and the kids? And your family?”

“Yes, I have. They’ll be here at 10am sharp. You’ll probably have to spend two nights here”

She nodded, taking the baby’s hand and let her grab her finger. “Are you staying?”

“Of course I’m staying. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else right now”

He vaguely noticed some muffled whimpers first and woke up from his deep sleep, still not entirely conscious. It took him a few minutes to realize that the whimpers became more demanding and eventually turned into a loud wail before he was finally able to open his eyes, confused. At the same time, he felt Gillian stir beside him and heard her groan.

“Wha-“, she stuttered, obviously just as confused and disoriented as he was.

“That’s our baby, Gillian” He pushed the blankets aside and sat up. “We have a newborn. And she cries”, he added as he got up to walk towards the crib in front of the bed and bent down. “Hey little Slug, do you need maintenance?”, he asked and rubbed her belly gently before putting his thumbs under her arms, supporting her head with his fingers and turned her slightly to her side to pick her up.
He heard Gillian huff out a laugh while she sat up against the headboard and turned on her bedside lamp.

“She’s probably hungry”

“In this case, I’ll take you right to your personal milk bar”, he whispered while walking towards Gillian’s side of the bed, holding the baby close to his chest and rocking her while watching Gillian unbutton her nightgown with a sly grin on his face.

“Somehow I get the feeling you’re more looking forward to it than she is”, Gillian deadpanned, glancing up at him.

“Where’s your mind, woman?” he chuckled, shaking his head. “Ready?”

“Yeah”, she nodded and held out her arms to take her daughter from him. Leaning back, she didn’t notice him hurrying to her side and getting into bed beside her again, fully concentrating on the little bundle in her arms who eagerly rooted and sucked her tongue for food. After a good hour of calming down on top of her mother’s bare chest, it had taken her no time to latch on for the first time by her own just a few hours previously.

“Do you remember how this works, baby?”, she asked, bringing her to her breast and watching her open her mouth and eyes wide at the same time before tilting her head forward and latching on.

“Wow, she’s a Pro”

“Who would have guessed?”, Gillian teased jokingly, smiling down at David who had rested his head on her shoulder to get a better look.

“Didn’t you know that newborn babies look and behave more like the father in the first few weeks? Nature arranged this for the father to know that the baby is really his”, he explained.

She clicked her tongue in amusement. “No, that’s not true. Even though she indeed looks a lot like you. And behaves quite similar…”, she replied and they chuckled quietly, watching their daughter suck with gusto.

“I know it’s silly, but I’m proud that she’s born in New York, thinking about my grandfather who came here so many years ago for the very first time”, he said quietly, caressing Gillian’s hand gently. “What did he dream of when he first saw the city? What were his hopes and expectations? What did he expect of the future? I hope that-, I hope that this would make him proud. Make his journey worth the effort. That Eaden's existence would make him happy, because it’s definitely making me happy”
If time is not real, then the dividing line between this world and eternity, between suffering and bliss, between good and evil, is also an illusion. - Herman Hesse

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your wonderful comments on the last chapter! I'm so happy you liked it!

On day eleven, he finally started to feel his age for the very first time in his life. Coming home with a newborn baby and a still very exhausted and battered new mother to five very eager and very loving kids was a little too much for his 53-year-old self at this point, or at least he had thought so. In reality, he was tired and drained, but he also had the best time of his life.

Seeing the kids fighting over who got to hold and carry the baby around next and taking turns in bringing Gillian something to drink while she nursed filled his heart to the brim with pride and love. It was also very interesting to see how each of them dealt with this situation differently. The boys, much younger than the other three, wanted to either play with their baby sister or snuggle with Gillian, and sometimes with the baby as well. Whereas the older ones took a lot of responsibility without being asked to and mastered the techniques of burping the baby, changing her diapers and making snacks for everyone in no time in order to help wherever they could. He realized that to some degree, it made them feel more mature and in charge than ever before, and he liked how they thrived on being an indispensable part of the family. It was an unexpected challenge to raise teenagers and a cute little baby at the same time, especially in times like this. He understood their need and desire to post pictures on their social media accounts to share this experience with their friends, and basically the rest of the world. Nevertheless, he had instructed them to post pictures without showing the baby’s face. At the same time, he was astonished that they had a great understanding for his request and all three of them seemed to know pretty well how to protect their little sister from prying eyes.

Realizing once again what a devoted, intuitive and gentle mother Gillian was, which made his own transition into a father of a newborn much easier, also filled him with contentment and admiration. They adjusted and bonded well together, working as a team despite the short nights and bustling days with the kids as well as family and friends who wanted to pay a visit. With Gillian adjusting so well to her new role, the most he could do, other than go out and play with the kids and cuddle with his baby girl, was trying to take care of her. She was not exactly overjoyed or surprised when he started to make her deep green smoothies on a daily basis, but he knew she appreciated the gesture as much as his buckwheat pancakes and that he at least tried to get up with the baby every night to change her diaper before handing her over to Gillian for the feedings. However, he couldn’t change the fact that the boys needed to go back to school again and therefore had to fly back to London with Piper after almost 3 weeks in New York with them. He had driven West and Miller back to their mother’s apartment after taking the other kids to the airport, and his apartment was quiet for the first time in weeks.

Lying on the couch with the baby resting peacefully on his chest, he knew that the next two weeks would be hard for her before they would fly back to London. He had to admit that, even though he had enjoyed having all of them around for such a long period of time, he was really looking forward to spending some time with Gillian and Eaden alone. She probably needed the time to heal and relax before returning to her everyday life.
Coming out of the bathroom after a long shower, he watched her shuffling across the kitchen in her striped cotton pyjamas and a pair of black glasses on her nose. Her blonde hair looked full and wavy after a quick blow-dry. She shot him a quick glance, grinned tiredly before filling two cups with hot water from the stove, and walked towards the couch.

“Is she asleep?”

“No, she woke up a couple of minutes ago. Not really there yet, though” He smiled tenderly and rubbed the baby’s back in big circles. “Feeling better? Refreshed?”, he asked and pulled the blanket aside so he could put it over her as soon as she would lie down beside him.

She heaved a sigh, put the steaming cups down, and climbed over him carefully. He opened his arm and put his hand on her back to pull her close before draping the blanket over her tiny form.

“Not feeling better?”

“I do feel like a human again, that’s something”

“But?”

She shook her head. “I’m sad. Tired. Wired. Excited”, she murmured and leaned in to kiss the baby’s cheek.

“You need to explain that”, he replied softly.

She shook her head and pursed her lips. “I just need to focus on the bright side. We have two weeks for the three of us. That’s nice, right?”

“It is”, he agreed, but not as enthusiastically as he would if she weren’t so sad about the boys’ departure.

“Do you think we get some kind of a routine down before we fly back to England, Eaden?”, she asked, tilting her head to look into the baby’s eyes, who was intensely focussing her eyes on her mother’s face as if she saw it for the very first time.

Chuckling, he raised his head and kissed the baby’s head. “Poor baby, you’re not even two weeks old, huh? Mommy’s a little impatient!!”

“No!” Gillian called out, laughing. “Just setting some goals”

“A routine sounds like a big goal, what are you aiming for in particular?”

“I don’t know. Sleeping through the night?”, she joked, laughing quietly with him while the baby started to whimper. “What do you think about that, little dolphin? She looks at me like she is finally able to see me clearly”

Chuckling, he raised and tilted his head again, looking down. “’Bout time, heh? Mommy’s standards are high”, he teased as Gillian fell into quiet laughter and slapped his thigh playfully. “Do you agree with me that you have the most beautiful Mommy in the world, little Slug? Can you see her cute, tiny freckles? She likes to cover them with make-up, but they look so good on her. Your Mom is what people call a natural beauty”

“Oh god, David”, Gillian groaned and smiled broadly at him, shaking her head. “She’s starting to furrow her eyebrows. Either she doesn’t like what she sees or it’s time for dinner”
“Yep, okay. We don’t want to evoke the hungry monster - again - do we?”

“Definitely not”, Gillian agreed and sat up. With his large hand securely on the baby’s back, he scooted up himself and leaned his back against the cushions as she started to unbutton her top.

“Do you want me to get your nursing pillow?”

“Not if you let me lean back against you”, she winked, smiling sweetly.

“It’s my pleasure, milady”

He lifted the baby carefully as she climbed between his legs to get into a comfortable position. Nursing still took her nearly half an hour and she soon found out that her daughter, like her father, did not like to get distracted while eating. She had to get as comfortable as possible to sit like that until the little one was full and satisfied, because changing the position had always ended in at least an hour of angry and excessive crying. It worked best when he supported her by sitting behind her so she could lean against his chest and shoulder while he was able to support the baby’s weight with his arms around her as well.

“Do you think you’re up for this little trip tomorrow?”, he asked, whispering into her ear as he closed his eyes to the soothing, smacking sounds of his daughter’s content sucking.

“Yes. It’s going to be a good day. I can’t wait for your mother to meet her. Maybe we could squeeze in a little walk outside if the weather’s good?”, she asked and rested her head back into the crook of his neck, glancing up at him.

“M-hm”, David hummed and kissed her temple. “You smell good. Just wake me if I’m drifting off, okay?”

“You can’t drift off, I need you awake to swaddle her for the night”

“Oh, Mom. You need to learn how to swaddle your baby properly sooner or later”, he said under a chuckle.

“You’re the best baby-burrito maker, I don’t stand a chance. She’s just too small and wiggly”

“Yeah, that’s probably it”, he said and yawned. “God, I’m so tired”

“You sure we can do this another week?”

“Or even a month?”

“Not a month”, she slurred and giggled tiredly. “Neeeever in a million years”

“What do we do then?”

“I don’t know. For now, we have about 20 minutes to catch some Z’s while she’s nursing. What do you think?”

“You didn’t want me to fall asleep”

“Yes, but I want to sleep so badly”

“Then close your eyes, I’m staying awake”

“You sure?”
“Absolutely not”

“What a beautiful little person you are! And those bright eyes, hmm, little Eaden?”, Meg gushed with pride, holding the baby close to her chest while making eye contact with her youngest granddaughter for the first time.

After taking the almost two-week-old newborn on her first car ride to visit her grandma Meg at one of New York’s best cardiac rehabilitation centers, David and Gillian lounged on a couch beside his mother, watching the two of them happily. After everything that had happened in the last month, he couldn’t be more grateful to be able to witness this moment. Squeezing Gillian’s hand affectionately, she turned her head to smile at him. A tired, but content and happy smile that made his belly tingle.

“She’s so tiny. You always forget how tiny newborn babies are until you hold one again, right?”, Meg said and kissed the top of the baby’s head. “Also, this is the first Duchovny born with hair in… I don’t know, ever?”

Chuckling, David leaned forward to look at his daughter’s face. “She is kind of starting to look like Piper with those big blue eyes and the pouty lips. She doesn’t have as much hair, but she looks so much like Gill. Just like Piper did, and still does”

“Yeah, I remember your little mini-me very vividly, Gillian. How is she doing? And how are your boys?”

“They’re all fine. Piper graduated school last August and is currently taking a gap year. And the boys are going to a new school this summer. They’re both pretty active, very into computers and you know… they’re just little boys who want to explore the world”

“Yeah, they’re so much fun to be with. I love to go out with them on a hike or a bike ride”, David added, nodding proudly. He knew he was the one big figure in their life’s who encouraged them to do sports and go out and explore the nature, since their father was very good at teaching them how to use the computer and other multimedia devices.

“Do they like to be big brothers?”

“Well, they were quite excited while I was pregnant, but it took a week for them to warm up with her, to be honest. They are old enough to understand that you cannot play with a newborn baby on a physical level and that you have to be very careful if you want to hold and touch her. However, the last days were so sweet. They loved to cuddle with her and it was the sweetest thing ever, right?”

“It really was. They all transitioned pretty well into their new roles”, he said nodding and fumbled for his phone in the pocket of his jeans.

“I would be terrified to hold her as a kid. How much does she weight?”

“Well, she dropped under 7 pounds last week and just started to gain again”, Gillian explained, watching David tapping on his phone.

“Look at this pic, Mom”, he said and held his phone in front of his mother’s face to look at a picture with all six kids in his bed in their pyjamas, hovering over the baby.

“Oh god, how sweet is that? They all look so proud!”
Looking down at the squirming infant, Meg rocked her gently as she started to fuss against her chest, clenching her fists tightly and grimacing in discomfort. Gillian leaned forward and took the little hand in hers, rubbing it gently.

“I’m here, honey”, whispered Gillian.

“Is she hungry?”, Meg asked and raised her from her chest, looking at her face.

“No, it’s probably just a little tummy ache. Let me walk a little with her, she usually likes the movements”, David offered. Gillian nestled in her bag and retrieved another white burp cloth, before draping it over David’s left shoulder. Carefully, he took the baby from his mother and held her close to his body, positioning her high on his shoulder with her arms hanging down his back. “We’re just over there, okay?” He pointed towards a wall full of windows that provided a great view over the Hudson, patting the baby’s back firmly.

“Yeah” Gillian nodded and smiled gratefully as he walked away.

They fell silent for a few moments, watching the tall man slightly swaying towards the windows with the tiny baby against his shoulder until they couldn’t hear his soothing whispers anymore.

Sighing deeply, Gillian slumped back against the cushions and closed her eyes.

“You look so tired, sweetheart. How are you, Gillian?”, Meg asked and grabbed Gillian’s hand.

“Exhausted” She cleared her throat and opened her eyes. “It’s not-, it’s not easy at the moment”, Gillian admitted under a deep sigh, her lower lip trembled while she tried to hide her upwelling tears by rubbing her eyes with her left hand.

“Honey, what’s the matter?”

“It’s nothing in particular. I don’t know how to explain it”

“Overwhelmed?”, Meg offered with a polite smile on her face and scooted closer.

Gillian nodded slowly. “Yes. It’s a really good time, but it’s a lot to comprehend. I feel so much love and gratitude. I’m so in love with her. I didn’t think I could fall in love with her so easily. I love your son, but I noticed that I got a little carried away and am starting to feel like… needing him too much, which scares me to death. Everything’s just too much at the moment. Too many feelings. Good ones mostly, but overwhelming after all”

“And your probably very sleep deprived and your body is still recovering. It’s a taxing experience. I always had mild depressions after childbirth. You are vulnerable and dependent. Everybody seems to think you are constantly over the moon as a new Mom. Blissed out, so to say. But after all you have endured, how would that be possible for Christ's sake!”

Gillian huffed. “I don’t know. I know it’s normal to feel that way and I love that I have people around me who know that too. Who don’t expect me to be a perfect human being. I love being at home with them. We need this time”, she nodded, and Meg got the impression that she said it mostly to reassure herself.

“That’s right, Gillian. I know you’re a busy and very active young woman who struggles with letting go, taking a step back and slow down. Even now”, she observed and put her hand on Gillian’s thigh. “I remember you as a very young mother. Your little girl was still a baby and you were all over the place, trying to do everything at once. And to please everyone. From my perspective, it seemed so unnatural”
“Yeah, it was”, she agreed, raising her head to look at David standing by some big windows, swaying his baby gently from side to side. “A long time ago, when Piper was around two years old and still didn’t sleep through the whole night, somebody advised me to hire someone who’d get up with her at night, because I was constantly tired and not able to focus on work. I was reluctant first, but finally gave in because I really thought it was unfair to David and the rest of the crew to suffer because of me. So, I hired a nurse for the nights, and I was really looking forward to it. She had her own trailer with Piper and I remember going to bed early that first night, not thinking too much about anything but sleep. Somebody woke me early in the morning to get ready and told me I shouldn’t freak out, but the night had been terrible and the nurse was gone. They walked me to David’s trailer, telling me that they rescheduled the scenes for David to get some more sleep, because he had been up all night listening to Piper screaming and crying before he went over to the other trailer to look what was going on. Apparently, she was scared to death and so confused, nobody was able to calm her except of him. He took her into his trailer, made her a warm soup in the middle of the night before they both fell asleep exhausted. It was shocking to me what I did to us and where my priorities were. I know I don’t have this amount of pressure anymore, but I do feel some kind of pressure, even now”

Fidgeting with her hands, she huffed bitterly and rolled her watery eyes. “It’s probably my own fault. I would give everyone else permission to slow down but myself. Isn’t that hypocritical?”

“No. I personally think your life’s are so crazy, you somehow-, you know, you don’t live the life I lived when I had my children. I mean, I’m used to see all of you fly around the world, do all these big movies and series and go to all these parties and stuff. It’s kind of normal for me to watch you guys live like that, but I don’t really know how your life’s really are. And with children, you want to settle down and enjoy this precious time with them at home”

“Yeah”

“But David told me you have a pretty good plan set up for this year and you’ll be together most of the time”, Meg said enthusiastically, trying to lighten the moment and rubbed Gillian’s back gently.

Sniffling, she wiped the tears from her eyes and smiled at Meg. “Yes”

Meg stood up slowly and pulled at Gillian’s hand to bring her up with her. “Come on, dear. Let’s go over to these two, shall we?”

“Did you have a good day?”, he asked tenderly, pushing the stroller in front of him with one hand while holding Gillian’s with his other, playing with her fingers and smiling happily. To make good use of the warm, sunny weather, they had decided to stroll around the JKO-Reservoir after coming home from visiting his mother. It was their first coming out like that, both wearing baseball caps and sunglasses to avoid unwelcomed attention.

“Yes, it was a very nice day. It was nice to get out of the apartment”

“Hmm, yes. Would you like to start getting out more again?”

“Definitely”, she agreed, nodding at him with a bright smile on her face. She looked so much better and energized with the sun in her face and fresh oxygen running through her veins. “I’m sorry if you imagined all of this differently”
“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I guess I got a little lazy and too comfortable sitting around in there”

He laughed out loud and stopped walking, turning towards her. “Don’t even go there, Gillian. You don’t have to explain yourself. I know you need some downtime and I’m just happy to help you having a good time going out again. We’re old, and tired. We’re not rushing things”

She smiled shyly and looked down at her feet. “I don’t know why I’m so insecure right now. I hate it”

“There’s no need to hate it. You’ll get your confidence back as your strength comes back. But don’t be scared to be yourself in front of me, okay? We’re still in this together, aren’t we?”, he asked and squeezed her hand.

“We are”

“Do you know that I’m just as insecure as you are?”, he asked, making her look up again, furrowing her brows. “I guess every man is. You’re the one without the pain and without these huge hormonal changes and there are so many opportunities for you to screw up. You know me, I have a lot of wise things to say without having a fucking clue what I’m talking about, right?”, he said, grinning.

She laughed and let her head slump against his chest and felt her body tingle when he wrapped his arm around her waist.

“And I know I did it quite a few times in the last two weeks, right?”

“Maybe”, she murmured against his body and inhaled deeply.

“See, we’re in it together. Working together, knowing our weaknesses and helping each other out. It feels nice to know that I am safe being me with you”

“It is very nice” For her, it was actually something she still needed to get used to. Remembering that there was no need to suppress whatever she felt and thought, brought her a lightness she never knew before.

“Babe?”, he nudged her slightly for her to raise her head from his chest. “I love you. Very much. For being yourself”, he said quietly and smiled. “You’re a great Gillian. You’ve always been”

“That’s probably the nicest thing you have ever said to me”, she whispered as she felt fresh tears in her eyes while her belly filled with butterflies.

He leaned down, closing his eyes as he started to kiss her slowly, pressing her body firmly against his.

Breaking their kiss by nibbling on her lower lip, he gave her a quick peck on her left cheek before looking over her head. “Can I treat you to some ice-cream?”, he asked brightly and wiggled his eyebrows in anticipation.

She grinned and started to walk past him. Turning her head in his direction, she waved at him and replied, “I’ll need someone to warm me up after this, you know that, right?”
The world is so unpredictable. Things happen suddenly, unexpectedly. We want to feel we are in control of our own existence. In some ways we are, in some ways we're not. We are ruled by the forces of chance and coincidence. - Paul Auster

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all your comments again :-) I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Signing out of Skype and letting her phone fall into her lap after a long video chat with Piper, she sighed contently as she wiped the tears from her cheeks. It was such a strange, unsettling and yet very nice feeling to think about her not so little daughter, traveling around the world on her own, making new friends, experiences and memories. All on her own, without her mother by her side. It was a relief to be able to at least talk to her and see for herself that she was doing well, but, as her mother, she couldn’t stop worrying about that precious, innocent girl of hers, for whom she wanted just the best. She had cried several nights in a row before and after her departure to Asia, knowing that the eight weeks Piper would spend there would be like hell on earth. To distract herself besides spending time with her three younger children, she had started to prepare herself for her upcoming play by reading the scripts and setting her mind in the right place to start rehearsals soon.

The boys enjoyed the time with her tremendously, loving to have their mother around all the time. Although she was still tired during the days and needed time to relax while the baby slept, Gillian started to feel more and more like her old self as her body healed, allowing her to work out and be more active again. She also spent a good amount of time reclaiming her social life by visiting and inviting friends and a few other mothers from the boys’ school over to her house. As the baby slowly hit her groove, coming to life and growing into a routine, it was much easier to plan longer activities and even some time for herself, for work, and even her first night out in weeks. Meeting up with Ben and Vanessa for dinner while Erin watched the kids had been a welcoming change and distraction. Though they literally forced her to tell them everything about her new baby for almost the entire evening, the three of them had a great start of what would become one of the best summers of their lives. She had also started to prepare her temporary move to her apartment in Notting Hill for the weeks during her play to be able to spend more time at home with her kids before and after her performances instead of driving home for another hour.

Keeping herself busy was her way to keep herself from worrying too much, - about Piper, her role as Blanche DuBois -, and from missing David. The last eight weeks had been an emotional rollercoaster that finally seemed to slow down, allowing them to dismount and walk towards their new life as a family. Before the birth of their daughter, she had been afraid that she and David wouldn’t make it through these stressful first weeks and would end up estranged and fed up with each other. However, watching him approach their daily struggles with a lightness and a positive attitude made it easy for her to adjust to the new situation as well. When he’d left for Los Angeles to tie the knots for his new show, she realized how much closer they’d grown over the last months and how nice of a feeling it was that they had indeed accomplished a lot as new parents and as a couple. It was only a couple of days, but being away from him had never felt this unnatural and frustrating before. Especially since they were used to think they only worked well if they didn’t see each other all the time.
She enjoyed watching Oscar and Felix falling in love with their sister and getting used to this tiny little human around them all the time. The minute she was up, they just wanted to play with her and were constantly trying to get her to smile at them. She was grateful that she had been blessed with two young boys who adored their little sister and showered her with their love all the time, even though their conception of loving her mostly meant being loud around her and shoving cars in her face to look at. She didn’t seem to mind the turmoil around her though. In fact, the louder they were, the more she smiled at them.

Although it wasn’t easy to let all the kids participate in the same way with all these miles between them, she continued to try to let all of them feel like an essential part of the baby’s life. She frequently sent pictures and videos and let them talk to her on the phone or see her via Skype and FaceTime.

Sometimes, just like in this very moment, she managed to take a minute for herself, where she sat down and tried to wrap her head around all the things she was currently trying to handle in her life. A life she really wasn’t used to live yet. She wondered if she had ever gotten used to the different stages of her life. Leaning back against the pillows, she closed her eyes and tried to concentrate on the baby’s steady breathing beside her while slowly drifting off to sleep.

“Hey, you’re still up?”, he asked softly after opening the door as quietly as possible, sticking his head into her trailer with a sly grin on his face.

“Yeah”, she managed to press out and opened her eyes slightly to watch how he let himself in, closing the door behind him before he climbed onto her bed. With a low groan, he sank into the sheets beside her and ran a hand over his face.

“Did I invite you in?”, she asked and turned her head.

“No”

“Then what are you doing here?!”, she pushed, sounding more annoyed than she actually was. Even after a long, exhausting day and with him pushing her buttons almost the entire time, she was always waiting for him at night.

He chose to ignore her question and instead turned his head to look at her. “Where’s Clyde?”

She sighed. “Where would he be? At home”

“You want to take a shower?”

“So this is why you come these days?”

“Just want to be a good co-worker”, he replied dryly and rearranged the pillows against the wall before he pushed himself up into a semi sitting position and leaned back.

“Uh-huh” She nodded and pursed her lips into a tiny pout. She let a few minutes pass before she lifted Piper’s warm body carefully off her chest and handed her to David, who placed the sleeping baby on his own chest, gently stroking her head with his fingertips.

“Thank you”, she whispered and forced her tired body to roll over and get on her feet. She turned and looked down at them.

“Go ahead” He pointed his head towards the bathroom and draped a light blanket over the baby’s body before he closed his eyes. “My services ain’t cheap”, he slurred and she chuckled quietly on
her way into a much-needed shower.

When she emerged a good twenty minutes later, he smiled at her contently, still resting in the same position she had left him with the baby sound asleep.

“I can’t do this anymore”, she stated, sitting down beside him with her right leg folded underneath her and put her hand firmly on his upper thigh.

He shook his head. “Ah, let’s agree to disagree on that”

“I’ll never get used to this”

“This what?”

“Everything”

He sighed heavily. “Gill, we got this”

“We, David?”

“Yeah. What do you want to hear from me?”

She raised her eyebrow. “From you, as my co-worker?” He nodded. “I don’t know. What am I doing here, for example?”

“Living. What do you think you’re doing?”

“Well-“, she started and let her head fall back. “I’m a new mother. I’m working my fucking ass off while my husband’s not here to take care of our daughter. I’m too stupid for this fucking job and can’t decide if it wouldn’t be a relief to get fired after all. I have a co-worker who comes over at night to climb on my bed, not to sleep with me, but to hold my daughter as long as it takes me to wash myself”, she rambled, the words leaving her mouth way faster than her brain was able to work at this very moment.

“Hmm”, he murmured. “You rather want me to sleep with you again?”

“It wouldn’t be as confusing as this actually is right now”

“Sleeping with you wouldn’t be confusing?”

“No”

“Uh-huh”

“This is so fucked up”, she groaned.

Slightly turning his head, he looked her in the eyes and inhaled deeply before looking down at the baby again. “I can’t wait to have a daughter”, he suddenly admitted.

She tilted her head and sucked her bottom lip between her teeth, looking at his hand softly patting her baby’s back and nodded. “They’ll be so lucky to have you as their father”

“They?”, he grinned.

“I bet you’ll have two of them”
Waking up with a sudden jolt, she let out a short gasp as her eyes snapped open. Sensing the increasing movements beside her, she turned to her side and reached out into the co-sleeper just as she heard the baby whimper.

“It’s okay”, she whispered and took a little hand in hers. “Did I wake you? I’m sorry” She leaned in, placed a gentle kiss on the baby’s head and snickered against the soft skin. “Let’s go back to sleep, okay?” Putting her head beside the baby, she closed her eyes and breathed in deeply just as an uncertain and quiet voice broke the silence once again.

“Does this mean we don’t have to go to school today?”

“Huh?”, she responded automatically and lifted her head off the mattress. “What?”

“It’s 7:30, Mum. You want to stay in bed?”, Oscar asked and walked into the room.

“No!”, she called out and sat up, fumbling for her phone on the sheets. “Why the heck didn’t you wake me earlier?”

“Mum, you just swore”, he deadpanned and walked towards the co-sleeper.

“Oh Oscar”, Gillian groaned, swinging her legs out of the bed and got up, hurrying to gather some clothes and walked towards the bathroom. “You’re already dressed? Felix too?”

He nodded and reached for his sister, tickling her belly. “Yeah”

“So you just decided to wait to wake me up until it was too late?”

He looked up with a hint of panic in his face. “Um, no. I’m here, right? I woke you up” She smirked and turned again. His slightly stricken face betrayed him - they had indeed intended to make good use out of this situation. How could she blame them? At least they had decided to wake her after all.

“I’m sorry”, she whispered and pulled him into a bear hug. “I must’ve forgotten to set the alarm. It’s my fault”

“It’s okay. We wondered if we could get away with it”, he shrugged and let her kiss his cheek.

“I know, you would have gotten away with it. But you’re a good boy” She smiled and rustled his hair before she turned around and walked towards the other side of the room and started to undress. “I just need a few minutes, okay?”

He nodded. “Okay”

After a quick sponge bath, she walked back into the bedroom while applying some lotion onto her face.

“Do you want me to pick her up?”, he asked and waited until Gillian nodded before he crawled onto the bed. He reached for the baby and leaned down, supporting her head as he carefully pressed her against his chest and lifted her up with him. He scooted to the edge of the bed and stood up before putting her down again in front of him, his hand firmly on her belly.

“Be careful, I’ll get a fresh diaper and something to wear. Don’t leave her side, okay?”
“Of course not, Mum”, he sighed and shook his head. “As if, huh? I know you can always start to roll over, I won’t let you roll off this bed, Eaden”, he said brightly and leaned down to kiss her.

Gillian chuckled and put a diaper, wipes, a long-sleeve bodysuit and some pants beside the baby. “Do you want to undress her while I’m getting dressed?”

“Yup”, Oscar replied and started to open the snaps at the front and along the inseam of the baby’s onesie while Gillian put on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

“You’re a great helper. Is it okay if I change her this time? Did you have breakfast?”

“Yes”, he nodded and stepped away. “We had breakfast. We ate granola”

“Okay, so you two are good to go?”, she asked as she changed the baby’s diaper much faster than she usually did in the mornings.

“Yo. Felix is downstairs. I already helped him with his shoes”

“Wow, I’m impressed, Oscar”

“Yup, I’m Mr. Impressive”

When she had finally dropped them off at school and apologized for them being late, she decided to go to the farmers market in Bloomsbury to grab a quick treat before heading to her apartment in Notting Hill. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a bad idea. Talking to a woman who was selling homemade pralines, she noticed that the skin on her belly started to get damper and warmer with each movement. She slightly lifted the baby a bit and stuck her hand under the fabric of the sling.

“Oh shit”, she muttered and the old woman looked down at her, obviously confused.

“Are you okay, dear?”, another elderly woman asked as she stepped to Gillian’s side.

“Yeah, uh-, I think she peed on me”, she said under a slightly embarrassed chuckle.

“Oh well, that happened to all of us at some point”, the woman replied reassuringly and patted Gillian’s back.

After buying half a dozen dark chocolate pralines with chili, she hurried back to her car and put a changing mat on the driver’s seat before lifting her now fuzzing daughter out of the sling to put her down.

“Oh shit”, she muttered and the old woman looked down at her, obviously confused.

“Are you okay, dear?”, another elderly woman asked as she stepped to Gillian’s side.

“Yeah, uh-, I think she peed on me”, she said under a slightly embarrassed chuckle.

“Oh well, that happened to all of us at some point”, the woman replied reassuringly and patted Gillian’s back.

After buying half a dozen dark chocolate pralines with chili, she hurried back to her car and put a changing mat on the driver’s seat before lifting her now fuzzing daughter out of the sling to put her down.

“Oh shit”, she muttered and the old woman looked down at her, obviously confused.

“Are you okay, dear?”, another elderly woman asked as she stepped to Gillian’s side.

“Yeah, uh-, I think she peed on me”, she said under a slightly embarrassed chuckle.

“Oh well, that happened to all of us at some point”, the woman replied reassuringly and patted Gillian’s back.

After buying half a dozen dark chocolate pralines with chili, she hurried back to her car and put a changing mat on the driver’s seat before lifting her now fuzzing daughter out of the sling to put her down.

“Okay, honey. Seems like I didn’t fasten the tapes properly this morning, huh? What a day…”, she muttered and started to undress the baby. “At least it’s warm enough. We don’t want you to freeze your bum off, do we?”, Gillian cooed before kneeling down to grab a new diaper out of her bag. Just when she was about to get up again, she caught the reflection of a camera lens to her left and turned her head.

It took her a second to realize what was happening before she finally got up and planted herself in front of her daughter.

“What the fuck?”, she exclaimed towards the paparazzi and hastily draped a burp cloth over the baby’s lower body. “Are you fucking serious?”, she called out and threw another burp cloth into the car seat on the passenger side before putting Eaden into it carefully. She heard the guy yell
something in response, but couldn’t understand what he said.

“Are you fucking serious?”, she repeated angrily as she closed the door and stormed towards him, approaching the man in a few long strides.

With a bold grin on his face, he looked down at her and fell into laughter. It made her even more furious.

“Whatever you’ve got, you delete everything or you’ll regret it for the rest of your life!”

“Easy, Ms. Anderson. You’re threatening me”, he said under a chuckle, but took a step backward.

“You bet your fucking ass I am. I won’t say it again – delete the pictures, now!”, she yelled.

He laughed again and shook his head.

Stepping into him, she closed the distance between them and raised her chin. “I’ll destroy you if you publish any of these pictures-”, she started and turned her head to look at the car briefly before she went on, “You took pictures of my daughter without my consent in a vulnerable situation. That’s your last chance to delete everything before I call the police”, she blustered and was just about to slap the camera out of his hand when he sighed and raised his arms defensively.

“Calm down. Do you know how much these pics are worth?”, he asked and turned so she was able to look at the screen.

“I don’t give a fuck. You were about to harm my child!”

“Yeah, yeah”, he played it down. “All gone”, he added and showed her the last picture, taken a few hours ago.

“I hope I’ll never have to see your face ever again”, Gillian muttered under gritted teeth before she returned to the car. Her heart was racing furiously when she opened the door and got behind the steering wheel. The baby turned her head and looked at her with wide eyes, chewing on her fist vigorously.

“It’s okay, I’m here”, Gillian choked out and took a deep breath to calm herself down. “Everything’s fine”, she whispered, obviously more to reassure herself and started to wipe the baby clean while occasionally looking into the rear-view mirror. For the second time, the result of the diaper change was rather sloppy, but she didn’t care anymore. Strapping the baby into the car seat, she covered her with a blanket and started the engine with shaking hands.

Stepping out of the bathroom into her cozy bedroom, clad only in her bathrobe after a long and relaxing bath, she climbed onto her bed and gently put the baby down on her upper thighs.

“Did you like taking a bath with Mummy?”, Gillian asked and smiled softly as she reached for the cloth diaper and the baby oil she had laid out before. “I promise to do it right this time. I’m done for today, believe me”.

After applying the oil and putting her into the fresh diaper, Gillian lay back against the pillows and opened her bathrobe. Holding the baby close to her body, she started to stroke the baby’s mouth and cheek gently with her index finger to make her turn her head towards the breast and she immediately opened her mouth wide and turned her head to hunt for the nipple. Pulling the sheets over both of their naked bodies, Gillian closed her eyes and inhaled the baby’s sweet, freshly bathed scent.
She had tried to reach David over the entire day after the little incident on the farmers market, but hadn’t been successful. It certainly wasn’t the first time she had to handle such a delicate situation as a mother all on her own, but it really started to piss her off that she couldn’t even tell him right away. It had taken her hours and a long conversation with Alison to calm down. But all she really wanted was to share her fears with him.

Stroking the baby’s head while she sucked with gusto and watched her mother’s face intently, Gillian started to hum softly to her and smiled when the baby’s blue eyes grew wide in response. Gillian watched in awe as the little hand pushed into the soft skin of her breast, while milk was leaking out of the corner of her tiny mouth.

She giggled quietly and leaned down to kiss the baby’s head. “I love you, sweetie. Do you think he deserves another attempt to reach him? Should we call Daddy one more time?”, she whispered and grabbed her phone from the nightstand to call David once again. This time, her call was answered on the second ring.

“Hey Gillian, it’s Melanie”, David’s manager greeted her loudly. In the background, she could her loud music and a whole bunch of different voices talking and laughing.

“Um, hi Melanie. Is, uh-, is David around?”

“Yeah, just wait a second, okay? He’s talking to someone at the moment”

“Thanks”, she sighed in frustration. She was sure they both knew that she had tried to reach him at least four times today. As Melanie seemed to approach him, Gillian could hear his laugh getting louder, but he suddenly went silent and apparently excused himself. The line went quiet for a moment, probably because he was holding his hand over the phone, before she could hear him clearing his throat.

“Hey, is everything okay?”, he finally asked.

“I’ve tried to reach you”, she replied accusingly. She was angry, and he should know it.

“Yeah, I know. But you said on the voicemail that it’s not an emergency, so I thought it could wait until tonight”

“It is tonight”

“Um-“, he paused and it sounded like he closed a door behind him before he continued, “Yeah, right” He sighed. “I’m sorry. It’s been a busy day”, he apologized in a soothing voice, calming the storm that was brewing inside of her.

“I know, you’ve told me it would”, Gillian said softly. “It’s just-, it’s been a horrible day. I overslept, the boys were late for school, I didn’t make it to the appointment with the chiropractor and uh-”, she went on, telling him what happened on the farmer’s market after their daughter had peed on her. “I mean, I know it was my fault to expose her like that, but-”

“No, it’s not your fault”, he interrupted her. “It’s what happens when you have a baby. It’s normal and you shouldn’t have to fear that someone’s going to take a picture of you and the baby in a situation like that”

“I wanted to kill him”

He chuckled. “I bet, mama bear. Good thing he was dealing with you. He wouldn’t have been so lucky with me”
“Hmm”, she murmured and looked at the baby. “We miss you”

“I miss you too. What are you doing?”

“We took a bath before and now she’s having dinner. Where are you?”

“John McNamara’s house. He’s throwing a little party”

“So, I guess congratulations are in order, Mr. Duchovny, executive producer?”

He laughed. “Yep”

“I’m happy for you. Can’t wait for you to brighten up the TV landscape again”

“Yeah, well-“, he cleared his throat. “There’s something else I’d like to tell you”

“What do you want to tell me?”

“I met Chris today”
Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. - Seneca

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, I hope you enjoy a long chapter :) I have to be honest with you, I'm really looking forward to writing some smut again... stay tuned for it :P

As David walked across the parking lot towards the beach café, he immediately spotted Chris sitting at a table closest to the ocean under a sunshade, chatting with a young waitress.

He got the phone call a little past 8am, just as he was stepping out of the shower after working out for an hour at one of the gyms near his residence in Malibu. They hadn’t seen or talked to each other in months and they agreed to meet at a little café on the beach.

“Hey”, David exclaimed before putting his hand on Chris’ shoulder, who turned his head and smiled.

“David!”, he said, chuckled happily and squeezed David’s arm affectionately. “I’m glad you could make it!”

“I’m glad you’ve called!”, David replied and took a seat next to Chris, so both were facing the ocean.

“I just ordered those delicious golden fried jumbo shrimps and lemon juice. What can I get you? Have you ever been here?”

“Yeah, I’d like to have the guacamole with chips and a lemon juice as well”, David told the waitress, who thanked them for their order and walked away.

“I hadn’t had the chance to congratulate you on the birth of your daughter in person, so I thought it was about time”, Chris said under a broad smile and put out his arm to pat David’s back.

“Thank you”

“I’m still not really over it to be honest”

David chuckled and looked at his hands on the table. “Yeah, me neither. I’m still getting used to think of Gillian as a mother-, the mother of my daughter. It’s this weird, intense feeling… that’s just so new and unfamiliar, yet comforting and natural. Suddenly, there’s this new little person in your life and… sharing her with Gillian is really something special”

Nodding, Chris leaned back as a waiter put two glasses of fresh, sparkling lemon juice in front of them. “How is Gillian? How long has it been since the birth?”

“Almost eight weeks”, David replied, took a sip of his drink and put the glass back on the table. “She’s okay, as far as I can tell at this moment. Constantly tired and exhausted of course, but they’re both healthy and seem to have recovered from the birth pretty nicely”

“Where you there?”

“The whole time”, David said proudly and bit his bottom lip. “And what a ride it was”, he added and
Chris raised his eyebrows. “Yeah, Gillian was amazing, but it sure was hard work. She was in labor for like two days and she was absolutely beaten in the end. Both were. The baby had quite the bruise on her face and Gillian was shaking for hours. It was crazy”

“Hmm”

“But she was… simply stunning. I’ve never seen her this beautiful and perfect as in these two days and the days after”, David admitted and look at Chris. His big grin indicated that he must have sounded like some teenager who was head over heels for his first girlfriend. He snickered and shook his head. “I know, I’m rambling”

“No, it’s amazing, seriously. It’s great seeing you like that – happy and in love. It suits you well”, Chris said under a nod. Seven months ago, when he learned of Gillian’s fourth pregnancy and about the fact that David was the father, he spent days laughing quietly to himself on various occasions, not able to believe that this was actually really happening for the both of them. After all these years, after all he had been through with them, it was hard not to believe in fate anymore. After he had gotten the first picture of their daughter, he actually printed it out and got it framed. The picture was a great addition to the ones he had in his office of David, Gillian and his goddaughter Piper. What was meant to be a reminder of the work they did together and what they had achieved, had become something like a family wall.

“What about you? How is Dori? Are you working on any projects recently?”

“Dori’s very good. And no, still waiting if Amazon’s ordering more episodes of The After. But, that’s not really why I wanted to see you, to be honest”

David frowned. “Why did you want to see me?”

Clearing his throat, Chris leaned back and looked at the ocean. “I talked to Dana last week. Dana Walden”

It didn’t click with him right away, but when it did, David groaned with a laugh and let his head fall back. “Oh, I can see where this is going”

“Yeah, no, yeah. You know, it’s been six years”

“That’s right. Six years”

“They want us to come back”

“To come back? With a movie?”

As Chris was about to reply, their food was brought to their table and they thanked the waiter in unison.

“No, no more movies”, Chris declared and started to eat.

Dipping a chip into the guacamole, David shook his head and huffed. “No more movies? So, what do they have in mind?”

“She said they would like us to come back for a 10th Season”

“You Chris Carter”, he pointed out. “Yeah, he invited me for lunch. I didn’t even know he had my phone number. It was nice though. Catching up on each other’s lives, you know…”

She nodded slowly. “Hmm”

“Are you doing that lip thing right now?”, David asked.

“What lip thing?”

“Where you press your lips together and purse them a little. Most of the time you’re nodding while doing it, sometimes you’re even smiling. But you’re not right now. Right?”

“Do I usually do it when I get the feeling that someone’s about to tell me something I don’t really want to know, because I can already suspect what comes next? Or, like, I know that nothing good can come out of this situation and I fear the worst?”

“Um-” He cleared his throat. “Are you smiling?”

“No”

“Then maybe it’s one of them, yes”

“David”, she whined and shifted a little. With a loud smack, the baby lost her strong latch on Gillian’s nipple and coughed. “Oh honey”, Gillian whispered and manoeuvred the baby into a sitting position. Clamping the phone between her ear and her shoulder, she held the baby’s head up with one hand while using her bathrobe to wipe off the choked up milk with the other.

“You guys alright?”

“Yeah, just the same old story. Don’t move during feeding time, Mom”

David chuckled and waited a few moments before asking, “Can I call you back later?”

“Why? Do you need to get back to your pretty female co-stars?”, she teased jokingly while bringing the baby to her other breast.

He huffed out a laugh. “No, I need to get back to my pretty new partner Grey”

“Ohh”, Gillian exclaimed with excitement. “So he’s been cast?”

“Yep, hopefully I’ll solve more cases with him than I did with you”

“Woah, easy there, Mr. Duchovny!”

David chuckled and then sighed regretfully. “I have to go now, Gill”

“Hmm, okay. But please don’t call me later, I really need to sleep when I get the chance. She’s been up every other hour to nurse the last three nights”

“Ah, tell her not to grow too fast before I come back”

“I will. But, you know, you Duchovny’s are pretty stubborn when it comes to food”, she responded sweetly and giggled.
“More like when it comes to your bre-”, he stopped abruptly. “Never mind”, he added, but she had already started cracking up.

“Message received. Now go back to your party”

“Oh, um, do you have anything planned for Friday night?”

“Uh, why?”

“Well, because I’m coming back?”

“Yeah, I know. No, I haven’t planned anything in particular. I’m just… so tired these days. I’d like to go to bed early, so maybe we could spend some time outside on Saturday, what do you think?”

He went silent for a moment. In fact, he had planned and thought through a hundred different things for the upcoming weekend, most of them including her getting naked and him making her scream with pleasure. But apparently, it was still too early for that. He sighed and tried to play his disappointment down. “Sounds good. Are you still picking me up though?”

“Yep”

“I love you, babe”, he said and hung up without leaving her the opportunity to reply.

She chuckled quietly and put the phone back on top of her nightstand. Looking down, she found her little daughter snorting and grunting while she sucked eagerly and looked up at her with wide, curious eyes.

“Hey, you’re an observant little one, aren’t you?”, Gillian asked quietly and ran her fingers gently through the baby’s soft, light brown hair. “Just like Daddy”

***

When Friday finally came, she had arranged everything for the first night away from her baby. With enough breast milk in the freezer after pumping for three days straight and the pump in her luggage, she had thought that she was on the safe side leaving her with Erin. When Erin arrived after lunch, she had tried to feed the baby with the bottle to give Gillian some time to pack her things and get ready for the evening. Twenty minutes later, the baby hadn’t drunk anything from the bottle. Instead, she was screaming bloody murder. Gillian then tried it herself, but the baby’s cries made her boobs ache so badly and she was close to tears herself when she gave up and nursed her for only 5 minutes before exhaustion took over and the baby fell to sleep on her breast. There was no way she could or would leave her newborn alone like this.

She headed to the airport with mixed feelings, bashing herself for regretting how everything had turned out, because what kind of a mother would that make her? When she parked the car near the entrance, she looked into the rear mirror, watching her beautiful daughter through a little mirror over her car seat, sleeping peacefully. Gillian smiled, not noticing how David walked towards the car with a smirk on his face.

“Hey, young lady!”, he greeted loudly and tapped on the hood of her car with his index finger.

She jumped and immediately looked forward before a big smile formed on her lips. Gillian unbuckled herself and hopped out of the car while he walked over to the driver’s side and put his backpack down on the ground. She stepped into his open arms and pressed him against her body by
looping her arms around his waist.

“Hmm, I think I’ve found my ride home”, he said chuckling, stroking her back gently and rested his chin on top of her head. “You okay, honey?”, he finally asked after she didn’t reply and squeezed her gently.

She nodded slightly and stepped back a little to be able to look up at him. “Yeah, just very happy you have made it here safely”, she answered and rose to her tiptoes to reach and kiss him on the lips.

“Are you alone?”, he asked as their lips parted and gave her a quick peck on her cheek.

“No, she’s sleeping in the car. I um, I wanted to be alone with you tonight, and I know you wanted to-“

“No, Gillian. No, it’s not like that”, he said and stroked her hair gently as she tilted her head with a knowing grin on her lips.

“I know, David. I could hear the disappointment in your voice when I told you I’d rather like to go to bed early when we talked on the phone on Wednesday. You wanted more, and you have no idea how much I want it too” Gillian shrugged her shoulders when he laughed out loud and leaned down to kiss her forehead. “No, honestly. I’m craving you”, she added. “I have made big plans for tonight, and I have left the boys with Erin when they were Eaden’s age like at least once a week. But, she just didn’t want to drink out of the bottle”

“Oh"

“Yeah. I just had to bring her with me”

“That’s where she belongs right now”, David added reassuringly and smiled softly. “So, why don’t we just-, implement your plan for tonight with our daughter? I mean, I certainly don’t mind having her around”

Chucking against his chest, she raised her head and looked up at him. “Me neither. Come on, you need to see her round little cheeks. She gained a whole pound!”

***

Squeezing her firm little ass with both of his hands, he licked the hollow of her throat and groaned against the soft skin. She squirmed on top of him like a trapped cat, rubbing herself against his hard cock frantically and moaned when he lifted his hips and pressed himself against her hot center. He couldn’t believe they were finally able to do this again without her huge belly between them. Not that he didn’t like having sex while she had been pregnant, but there was nothing better than her turning into a feral sex goddess, taking things into her own hands, so to say.

He chuckled at his own thoughts and pulled on her panties, desperately trying to remove them. He would take things slow once she was naked, because in his mind, the first time after a delivery shouldn’t be a rushed fuck, but a gentle lovemaking. He instinctively knew that her cool and calm attitude would not last once things would get serious.

Her constant wiggling kept him from successfully removing her panties, so he lifted his hands and started to work on her shirt, trying to lift it up. She tensed a little and moved down, tracing the hem of his jeans with her fingers just as the baby started to gurgle in her crib on the other side of the room. For a moment, he didn’t make a single move and just listened, hoping that it was just a dream or
something like that. However, she gurgled once again and finally let out a high-pitched squeak, probably delighted by the sounds she could hear her mother making.

He cleared his throat and put his hand on Gillian’s shoulder. “Hey, fun fact about me”

She groaned while she fumbled with his fly. “Really, now?”

“Yeah”, he huffed out a tiny laugh. “It’s the perfect time to tell you that I’m not a good performer with a baby in the room, especially if it’s awake”

Stopping her administrations on his jeans, she looked up and shot him the brow. “Are you serious?”

David nodded, chewing on his inner cheek. “I’m afraid so”

“Oh, David”, she exclaimed with a whiny voice and slumped down on top of him.

“Sorry”, he apologized quietly.

“It’s okay. Uh, it just never plays out like I hoped it would”

“That sounds pretty sad. And concerning”

“Noooo-“, she called out and crawled further up his body to straddle him. “That came out all wrong!”

“All?” he teased and put his hands on her upper thighs, watching her face soften for a couple of moments. She just looked incredible smiling down at him with a sweet smile and her long blonde hair framing her beautiful face. “You’re amazing, you know that?”

She snorted and shook her head. He lifted his upper body into a sitting position and put his arms around her waist. He loved not only to watch and hear her breathing through her slightly open mouth, but also to feel every in- and exhale against his body. She was so warm and soft.

“It wasn’t amazing how I handled the situation with the pap”

He sighed and put the sheets over her bare thighs. “Why? He deleted all the pictures. You must’ve been pretty convincing”

“I threatened him”

“And? He fucking deserved it”

“Yeah, maybe”, she whispered and traced his eyebrows with her thumbs. “Maybe we have to give the media something. You know, just enough to keep them from starving”

“I don’t think this is gonna work that way”

“But it will decrease the value of the first photo of her and we won’t be such an attractive target anymore. Julie did some research yesterday. Do you know how much they would pay for a clear shot of her face? 100,000 Pounds! I mean, he was an idiot for giving in. Or, he had a child himself, that’s the only reason I can think of why he actually deleted the pictures“

He nodded and pursed his lips.

„We have to think of something, David. I don’t want this to happen again“
“I know”, he replied and turned his head as the baby squeaked again. “I’m really curious what’s so entertaining right now”, he said under a chuckle and helped Gillian off his lap to get up.

“She’s staring at these blue and yellow stripes on the nest thingy”, David stated and looked down at his baby.

“Yeah, she just started to fixate things with bright colours. She seems to like yellow, because she’s always fixating yellow things like a little lunatic”

“Hey”, David whispered and gently stroked the baby’s cheek to get her attention. Her eyes widened when she turned her head and saw him, a small smile formed on her face.

Imitating her smile, he leaned down and gently picked her up, holding her close to his face. “Wow, she’s really smiling at me!”

“M-hm, she loves faces, especially when they’re smiling at her”, she said and watched him walking back to bed and getting in beside her.

“Seems like you won’t be getting a little sibling soon, little Slug”

“I already told her that there is no little sibling in store for her, David. She’s already a sophisticated little girl”

“Hmm”, he grumbled and scooted closer to Gillian, who put her head against his upper arm.

“What happened to your arms?”, she asked after a while and raised her head to inspect them thoroughly.

“Huh?”

“Are you-, are you like… lifting weights or something?”

“You only just noticed?”, he asked, flabbergasted.

“Well, yeah. Sorry”

“I’ve been lifting for months now”

“Oh, for me or for your new co-stars?”

***

“Have you seen my blue shirt?”, David asked loudly and looked around the living room where he thought he had left it before he went to the gym. Holding the baby against his bare chest, he wasn’t really able to look under the table or the couch, but he was sure he had left it somewhere between those two.

“I don’t know where it is”, she replied from the kitchen. “Lois must have put it in the hamper”

“I don’t know where it is”, he imitated her, making his infamous goat sound that he used to make since high school. The baby startled in his arms, her whole body went rigid and she lifted her head off his shoulder, extending her arms and legs. He looked down and found her staring at him with wide eyes and a scared expression on her little face.
“Oops”, he exclaimed, grinning sheepishly at Gillian who raised her right eyebrow, shaking her head. He brought his hand up to the back of the baby’s head and caressed it gently while he felt her relax again. “I’m sorry. Don’t you like my goat sounds?”, he asked and bounced her up and down carefully while supporting her head.

“Nobody likes them”, she chirped as she walked by him, patting his butt playfully.

“Hmm”, he grumbled and grimaced, leaning down to plant a couple of smacking kisses on the baby’s cheek, trying to get his almost eight-week-old daughter to smile for him. “I think she should get used to it”

“Why, do you need to teach her your language so she can understand what you’re saying?”, she asked coolly.

He shrugged and stuck out his bottom lip. “She has to get used to your British accent, too”

She clicked her tongue. “Give me that baby and take your shower. I want to have some breakfast. And you smell like a Chewbacca”

Huffing, he handed her the baby and smelled his armpits. “What’s a Chewbacca?”

“Well, these big, hairy guys from Star Wars”, she explained, sitting down on the couch with her legs crossed and started to shower the baby with kisses.

“There is no such thing as a Chewbacca, Gill. Chewbacca is Chewbacca. It’s more like a name”

She shook her head. “No, it’s not. It’s a race”

“There’s only one of them”

“Nooo, there are a lot of them!”, she insisted and leaned back, putting the baby on her chest to encourage her to lift her head.

“Have you even seen one movie?”, he asked and pulled his black shorts down. Her wandering eyes and the little smirk that formed in the corner of her mouth didn’t go unnoticed. He let his hand travel over his belly and smiled as she licked her lips.

“Yeah, I saw something. Hey, don’t change the subject. I’m really hungry and I just need to make some coffee, the table’s already set outside”

“Okay, okay. Give me ten minutes”, he said seductively and leaned down to capture her lips for a quick, passionate kiss before walking towards the bathroom with a huge grin on his face.

Gillian loved that it was finally warm enough to sit outside to have copious meals again, read a good book or to watch the boys playing in the garden while she let the sun do its wonders on her pale skin. It was one of the biggest benefits of this house. The privacy it offered was invaluable.

A good ten minutes later, he walked onto the wooden deck and wrapped his arms around her waist from behind, resting his head on her right shoulder.

“Do I smell better?”, he asked and nuzzled the skin behind her ear with his nose.

“You do”

“Come on, let’s eat!” he said cheerfully and said down on the cushioned bench, pulling her onto his lap by her arm.
“Shh, come here”, he demanded and pulled her back against his chest before grabbing the fork.

“Have you thought about the media issue?”, she asked cautiously and opened her mouth when he offered her a slice of mango.

“Yeah. I don’t know what we should do. I mean, we can’t prevent that there will be a picture taken of her sooner or later. You did a good job with the boys, but I think it’s a whole different story with her. I think they will follow us no matter what, because people want to see how the child develops over time. They won’t be satisfied with a picture of a newborn who changes dramatically in the first year of it’s life. So no, I don’t want to release a picture now. It might seem stupid, given the fact that people post pictures of their children all the time. But we made this decision to keep our lives private a long time ago. I don’t want to change that”

“You’re right. I’m not ready to share my whole life and the kids with the world, especially not voluntarily”

Munching on some fruits, they sat in silence for a while before he said, “Hey, now that we have already agreed on something, which is a pretty good start to the day, I feel like I can tell you about another little something”

“’bout what?”, she asked and bit into the strawberry he held in front of her mouth.

“My lunch with Chris”

She turned her head abruptly and stared him in the eyes. “I knew it”

Chuckling, he patted her thigh and took a sip of water with his other hand. “You knew what exactly?”

“You two… you hatched a plot, right?”

“Hatched a plot? Who do you think we are?”

“I know the two of you! Now, spit it out!”

He sighed deeply. He should have known that this wasn’t going to be a pleasant conversation.

“Fox is interested in more”

“More X-Files?”

David nodded. “Yes”

“Okay. Let me ask you one question: are you sure it’s worth ruining this perfect morning and our first breakfast together in weeks?”, she asked and crossed her arms in front of her.

Laughing nervously, he wiped his mouth with a napkin and cleared his throat a second time. “Gillian-”, he started. This was going to be a tough sell.
The greatest gift that you can give to others is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance. - Brian Tracy

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much again for your great support! This is a very smutty chapter, and I hope you like it, because more smut is in the making ;)

"No, simply no", she stated dismissively and crossed her arms in front of her, still sitting on his lap. Everything he had told her in the last five minutes felt like a big joke. She had laughed it off first, be he seemed genuinely interested, even excited, and it scared the shit out of her. To make her stance crystal clear, she added, “No way in hell”, and raised her chin.

“You don’t have to decide anything right now-“

“There’s nothing to decide. I’m not getting on this ship again”

“Why not?”

“Why not?”, she huffed. “Why would I want to work on it again? I did it for 9 years! I want to do new things, and I’m doing enough TV as it is”

“Ah, now you sound like me!”

“David-“, she warned and looked at him with a serious expression.

He sucked his upper lip between his teeth and nodded slowly. “Okay”

She raised her head and tilted it to the right, squinting her eyes. “Okay?”

“Yes. I’m not pressuring you into it, especially not on this beautiful, sunny Saturday morning”, he offered and squeezed her lightly. Knowing Gillian for so long, he was fully aware that insisting and pushing too hard wasn’t the way to convince her, but would only lead into a fight. She had always been a stubborn person with an autonomous mind. It was a trait he loved about her, because it made her a very strong and interesting person. But it had surely taken him a very long time to deal with it properly.

She pursed her lips and nodded slowly. “Okay”

He chuckled quietly after detecting a brief flash of disappointment on her face for letting her off the hook so easily. Sometimes, it seemed like she was already up to the challenge to go into a fiery debate with him, and even quite excited about it.

“Oh man”, she huffed and dropped her head. “This is so weird”

“What is weird?”

“Us, being like this. We used to fight over every single stupid thing and neither of us wanted to give in. Do you remember how it used to ruin whole days?”
“I do remember that”, he answered. He even remembered that the first thing a crew member of their show asked when they were walking in, was whether David and Gillian were fighting for the last word once again. It had ruined the days for everyone on set.

“How did we do it, though? How was it possible to work like that?”

Sighing, he leaned in and put his forehead on her shoulder. “We have kids now. They rely on us, they’re looking forward to a fun day, and so am I. So, to answer your question – it’s not worth to ruin this day. Because I really want to go to the climbing center today and I want to get a nice kiss after I’ve reached the top”

“If you reach the top”, she corrected and smiled.

“Oh yeah, I’m getting a very nice kiss”

Oscar got the first kiss, even though he hadn’t been as keen as David to get one, after he’d reached the top in first place. At his age, he still expected hugs and kisses from his mother and was especially looking forward to them at bedtime, but public displays of motherly love was becoming increasingly embarrassing for him. He rolled his eyes when his little brother started to call for Mummy halfway to the top, clinging to the wall and close to tears. David would have won their little race, but he climbed back down and put his arm around Felix, holding him up while whispering reassuring words to him. When they reached the top together, Oscar was already climbing the next wall.

It was already past 9pm, and David sat on the edge of Oscar’s bed, reading to him out of David Almond’s book Skellig. Although it was way past his bedtime, David knew how eager Oscar was to continue with the book. They had started it when Oscar was in New York with them, and he had waited for David to finish it together.

“Dad shouted hello from somewhere upstairs. I went straight through into the backyard and squatted there and squeezed my eyes tight to try and stop the tears”, David read and closed the book carefully before putting it back on Oscar’s nightstand. “What do you think?”, he asked and watched the boy thinking hard about his question while biting on his upper lip.

“I like what he said about her... that she knows things about William Blake but not a thing about what ordinary people do. Don’t ordinary people know about William Blake? Because I don’t”, Oscar pointed out seriously. “But can’t someone actually know about William Blake and be an ordinary person? I really wonder what makes her so extraordinary then”

“What do you think makes her extraordinary?”, David asked.

“Hmm. Maybe she isn’t. Maybe she’s just special to him”

“Yeah, you might be right”, he agreed and nodded. 

Oscar turned his head and looked at his wall, full of pictures of his friends, dinosaurs and cars.

“Do you think we could go there more often? To the indoor climbing gym?”

David chuckled and patted the boys’ hands, resting on the sheets over his belly. “Of course we can. Did you like it?”

“Yeah. And I want to get better at it”
“Really?”

“Yeah”, he nodded and paused for a moment before continuing, “Aurelia, a girl from my class, is a very good climber. She’s unbelievably strong and she can climb anything!”

David laughed and nodded understandingly. “Ah, so you want to impress her!”

Oscar gave him a small smile and nodded.

The door was pushed open quietly by a few inches and David slightly turned his head. She grinned and winked at him as she peeked in from the door. Obviously a sign that she was done nursing and had successfully put the baby down to sleep. Directing his attention towards Oscar again, he cleared his throat. “You know, we have the whole summer to practice on our climbing skills while your mother is working on stage. If you want to, we could go there a few times a week”, David offered, embracing this great opportunity to bond with him a little more through sports. He had always loved bringing his kids to soccer fields, basketball courts or swimming pools. Encouraging and supporting them, seeing and sharing their excitement and learning from each other was his favorite thing about being a father. Needless to say, he was beyond happy to make these experiences with Gillian’s boys as well.

“That would be awesome! But, could we go there alone sometime? I mean-, without Felix? Just the two of us?”, Oscar asked and bit his lip.

“Yeah, we could do that”

“Cool!”, Oscar beamed.

“Now, let’s go to sleep, okay?”

Oscar nodded and yawned. “Yeah”

“Sleep tight, kiddo. See you tomorrow”

“G’night”, Oscar mumbled and turned to lie on his left side.

As he walked down the stairs, briefly looking at the pictures of Gillian’s children on the wall, he wondered when it had become so normal and natural for him to move around her house, almost like he belonged there. But it just felt natural. He loved every part of being here and being a part of this home - putting her sons down to sleep, walking downstairs to make her a cup of tea while she nursed the baby at night, pacing around the rooms as he tried to soothe his daughter. It had become his home, too.

He stopped and bent down to adjust his twisted sock. The house was quiet, and he hoped it would stay like that for the next three hours. He needed her, desperately. He was constantly thinking about making her come, about nudging her legs apart and pushing into her. If he wanted to get serious tonight, he had to make a move right now, before it was too-.

“David?”, asked a small voice behind him.

Too late.

He stopped in his tracks and turned slowly. With his teddy in his arms and his thumb in his mouth, Felix stood at the head of the stairs with a frightened expression on his face.

“Hey, buddy”, David said softly and walked up to kneel down in front of him. He raised his hand
and put it on his little arm, slightly pulling on it. “You’re sucking your thumb”, he reminded Felix gently and smiled softly.

“Oh”

“It’s okay. Did something scare you?”

Felix nodded and pressed his teddy closer to his body.

“What scared you?”

“It’s dark”

“Isn’t the light in your bathroom on?”

“It is on, but it’s still dark”

“I thought you liked sleeping in the dark without the nightlight? Do you want me to sit with you for two minutes?”, David asked softly and patted the brown teddy bear.

Felix shook his head. “I want to go downstairs”

“Felix, do you remember what Mom and Dad said about sleeping in your own bed and that you can’t stay up with the adults?”

“Daddy said I can come down if I’m scared”

“Yeah, you can if it’s an emergency. But are you sure you’re really scared or did you have trouble to fall asleep right away? Because I was under the impression that you really, really liked to sleep without the nightlight”

Felix looked at David with big eyes, unsure what to do next. His bottom lip slightly trembled and he started to whimper.

“Okay, I’ll walk you back to your room and you go back to bed”, David said in a firm, but gentle voice and took the little hand in his. Felix didn’t seem very happy, but he obeyed, followed David back into his room and got under the sheets without complaining.

“I love the cars on your bedding, and how soft your blanket is”, David whispered while he tucked Felix in.

“I like it too, especially the red cars”

“Yeah, your Mom loves red cars, too. Are you comfortable?”

“Yes”

“Good”, David smiled and sat down beside him. “Remember, it’s okay if you don’t fall asleep right away. It’s absolutely normal, because sometimes your head just wants to think about a few things before it goes to sleep. There’s no need to get scared or nervous because of that, okay?”, David asked and waited until Felix nodded. “I just want you to stay in your bed. I’ll check on you in 10 minutes, okay?”

“Yeah”

“Goodnight, Felix”, he said softly and stroked the boys’ hair.
“See you in ten minutes”, Felix replied coolly.

He was holding his breath on the whole way downstairs, listening for any noises coming from the kids, but the house remained silent. He sighed and looked at his watch. 9:42pm. If they were lucky, they had another hour before it would be time for the next feeding. Better than nothing, he thought as he crossed the corner into the living room, not expecting to find her sitting on the couch with the baby in her arms with an apologetic look on her face.

“What happened?”, he groaned, sounding slightly defeated, and raised his arms in disbelief.

“I put her down in the crib”, she said and pointed her head towards the little crib beside a bookshelf in the living room. “But she was already fussing and whimpering when I came back downstairs. I can’t just let her cry, not yet”

He sighed again and walked towards the couch, sitting down beside them. “Why didn’t you put her into her crib in the bedroom?”

“Because I thought we wanted the bedroom for ourselves”

He slumped back against the cushions and looked at the baby’s beautiful, but frowning face. “Yeah, we certainly don’t need it for ourselves anymore tonight”

“Maybe she’s going back to sleep in a few minutes” She didn’t sound convinced.

“Maybe. But there’s this other little guy waiting upstairs for me to come back to check on him in about-”, he looked at his watch again. “6 minutes”

“Felix?”

“Yeah, he wanted to come downstairs, but I put him back to bed, just like you wanted me to”

She shifted a little and turned her head to look at him over the baby’s fuzzy one. “Thank you”

Nodding, he shifted his gaze between her and the baby before suddenly grabbing the corner of the burp cloth on Gillian’s shoulder. “Milk’s coming up”, he stated and held the fabric in front of the baby’s mouth, who immediately spit up a huge amount onto her mother’s shoulder, followed by a frightened, high pitched cry.

“Oh no, honey, you’re okay. Everything’s okay”, Gillian said soothingly and rubbed the baby’s back firmly while David put another burp cloth on her wet shoulder.

“Hey, little Slug. Did you drink too much again?”, he joked when he saw the baby’s face relaxing again. She was obviously feeling a lot better now. “Don’t be so greedy, it’s all yours anyway. You don’t have to slug down everything at once”

“Why is she always spitting up so much milk?”, Gillian asked. She wouldn’t admit it, but it started to make her feel quite helpless and incapable.

“It’s okay, I think it’s still normal. She’s gaining weight, so I guess she’s just drinking too hastily, but gets enough”, he tried to reassure her and stroked the back of the baby’s head. “Don’t be so hard on yourself, Gillian. She’s fine, spitting up is normal. Don’t pressure yourself into letting her cry, she obviously needed you, and I’m really not a fan of letting babies cry” He shook his head and hissed. “I’m not even a fan of putting Felix back into his own bed like that, to be honest”
She raised her eyebrow at him. “Really?!”

David shrugged and pursed his lips. “We always brought West and Miller into our bed when they couldn’t sleep. It seemed like the right thing to do. They stopped coming over at some point…”

Gillian huffed and rolled her eyes. “Yeah, great”, she muttered and looked away, her lips pressed together into a thin line.

“I respect the way you two handle this topic with your sons, Gillian. I’m doing my best to play along”

“Thank you, how generous of you. And what about our child? Will she be sleeping in our bed until she’s 10 if that’s what she wants?” she hissed at him.

He waited a moment to reply, trying to stay calm. This conversation was certainly not heading into the right direction, and he would not let her get mad because of her frustration with how this whole evening had turned out. “I don’t know. Do we have to discuss this now, Gill? Let’s just try to put her to sleep, hmm?”

“She’s not going back to sleep, David! She just spit up all her milk and she probably wants to nurse again, because her tummy’s empty again”

“Okay, just figure something out and do what you need to do. I’ll check on Felix, just like the 10 minute check-in rule tells me to”, he fired back and got up.

He was a little surprised to find Felix sound asleep on his belly, softly snoring with his mouth open and the lights out. This weird sleeping program Mark had come up with was at least doing what it was supposed to do.

David seated himself in one of the children’s chairs belonging to Felix’ drawing table and put his face into his hands. He knew that all of this was just too normal to happen at this stage. An 8-week-old baby was a lot of hard work, and had always been. Adding two young boys to the mix wasn’t making it easier, but he wouldn’t change a single thing.

A few minutes later, he heard the soft tapping of feet walking down the hallway and into the master bedroom. He waited another couple of minutes before he stood up and quietly left the room.

The baby was sleeping in the co-sleeper, clad in fresh pyjamas, her little face as relaxed and content as possible. He smiled, admiring how she was becoming a more beautiful little person, inside and out, with each passing day.

David walked towards the bathroom and picked up the milk stained clothes she had carelessly thrown onto the floor before putting them into the hamper. After pulling his shirt over his head, he started to open the fly of his jeans and pulled them down along with his boxers and socks, then threw them into the hamper as well.

Hot steam had already filled the bathroom when he entered it, leaving the door ajar. She was standing in her spacious rainforest shower with her eyes closed and her mouth open, looking like the goddess of water and life. Her breasts looked full and heavy. Her nipples dark and erect. He couldn’t believe that it was actually the first time he got to see her completely naked since the birth - and she was perfect, even though their stubborn little daughter had left conspicuous marks on her body. Her belly was soft and still slightly rounded, but the skin looked tight and nothing seemed to be loose. Fascinating, he thought. Where had all the skin gone so fast? She had just recently informed him that
her uterus had returned into her pelvis and was back at its normal size. The little pouch that was left looked soft and feminine, he couldn’t wait to kiss it. He also noticed two long stretch marks between her hipbone and her belly button, the first she had ever had. They actually looked more like two pink tattoos than stretch marks.

She jumped and inhaled sharply when she opened her eyes and detected him standing in front of the open shower, staring at her body, naked and fully erect. “David!”, she cried out, spit out some water and turned away, spreading her hands over her breasts and her belly to hide them from his eyes.

He blinked, taken aback by her reaction and the way she shielded her body, and grimaced before stepping into the shower.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“Shh. It’s okay”, he whispered and stepped closer.

“Please-“, she whined, but didn’t attempt to move away from him.

“What do you need, baby?”, David asked gently and put his hands on her upper arms.

“I need you to leave the shower”, she said, but avoided eye-contact.

“Why?”

She shook her head and looked at her feet. Her bottom lip trembled and she inhaled deeply. Without her heels, she was so much smaller than him, he had to bend his knees to look at her face. Squinting his eyes, he just now noticed that she was crying. The sight of her looking so lost and vulnerable broke his heart.

“Hey”, he whispered and put his right hand on her neck, pulling her towards him. “C’mere, baby” Wrapping his left arm around her waist, she started to sob against his chest, her arms still in front of her like a barrier between them. He rocked her gently, the warm water relaxing his tense muscles and his bustling mind. Everything was okay, he said to himself.

“It’s okay. Everything’s fine. Everyone’s just fine”, he mumbled into her wet hair. “We can do this” She huffed out a tiny laugh and let her arms drop to her sides. Looking up at him, she searched his eyes for a few moments, not sure for what, but eventually raised her head to kiss him softly. “Touch me”, Gillian whispered demandingly in a low voice. She carefully bit into his lower lip, her tongue darting out between her teeth to lick over its soft, thick flesh.

He growled into her mouth. She opened her eyes when he dug his fingers into her hip and stepped back to his right. Fearing he would turn off the water, she moaned, but he held onto her and raised his right hand, sweeping the bottles of shampoos and lotions off of the stony shower rack. They clattered onto the wet stones and he pushed them away with his feet before grabbing her other hip and pushing her against his body.

“I’m gonna make you come so hard”, he whispered into her ear, and her whole body shuddered at his words. He kissed her hard - his mouth rough and demanding, his tongue fierce and bold.

Her clit started to throb and she crossed her legs and pressed them together to increase the sensation. Moaning into his mouth, she dug her nails into his neck and bucked her hips up into his. Their height difference made it impossible for her to rub herself against him for release, but she could feel his steel hard cock against her belly and reached between them. Pressing his length against her soft belly, she started to stroke the hot flesh up and down between her skin and her hand. He let out an extended
sigh and thrust up, the tip of his penis almost reaching up to her breasts.

He moved his hands up to her waist and broke the connection of their mouths. “You’re beautiful, you’re so fucking beautiful”, he said, panting and watching her face intently. She grinned slightly and squeezed his cock.

Gillian yelped when he suddenly lifted her up by the waist, high enough for her to wrap her legs around his waist while her arms clasped around his neck. She could feel his penis brushing her opening and wondered if he would just slip into her, getting it over with. But he didn’t. Instead, he whispered she should hold onto him and put his hands under her upper thighs, just above the pits of her knees, stepped forward so her back was against the wall, and lifted her onto the shower rack.

“Oh my god”, she cried out. Her ass barely fit on the narrow rack and she had to steady herself by pulling on his hair. He chuckled and put her legs over his shoulders, his head at the same height as her navel. “David-”, she whispered and looked down between her legs.

“M-hm?”, he hummed, but didn’t wait for her reply. He lowered his head and kissed her belly open mouthed, teasing the soft skin with his tongue and moving lower. She shivered and opened her legs for him, grabbing his right hand to bring it up to her left boob. Moaning his approval, he squeezed gently and nuzzled her bare mons with his nose. Slowly and gently, he started to kiss her swollen, glistening labia while his thumb circled around her soft nipple.

She squeaked, a noise he hadn’t heard her making very often, and bucked into him, so he stopped to look up. Her heart was racing in her chest and she was breathing fast, her lips open and her eyes closed. His goddess, he thought again and rested his right cheek against the inside of her upper thigh.

“You still taste sweet and delicious”, he pointed out and smiled.

“Please do that again”, she pleaded and stroked his head, finally smiling down at him.

Chuckling, he nibbled on her thigh, licked the crook between her thigh and her pussy before he moved back to her hot center. “Like that?”, he asked and licked her with the middle of his tongue where he had kissed her just moments before.

“Yeah”, she sighed and stroked his hair.

He sucked her lips into his mouth repeatedly, teasing her before licking all the way up past her clit. He did it slowly, taking his sweet time while she started to rotate her hips against his mouth, begging for more. He brought his left hand up and gently opened her folds. He dipped his index finger into her wetness and inserted the tip into her entrance, gathering her sweet juices before spreading them over her inner labia and stroking right up to her clit, avoiding direct contact with its tip. He parted her lips again and started to slowly tease his tongue around her opening. He gently rubbed his nose against the sides of her engorged clit and thrust his tongue into her, swirling it around her hot tunnel, stroking her inner walls. He brought his hand up again and put his index finger and his thumb on each side of her clit, pinching and rolling it gently between his fingers while he continued to lick the sensitive space between her clit and her opening.

“Oh god, David. This feels so good”, Gillian moaned with pleasure. She wasn’t sure if this had always felt that good.

“Hmm”, he purred against her. Gently removing his fingers from her clit, he entered her with two fingers and pressed down, massaging her inner muscles. He licked the sides of her clit with the flat of his tongue before putting his lips around it and sucking it into his mouth.
“Ahh”, she cried out and ground her pelvis against him while he continued to suck on her mercilessly. She was so close. Her left hand was shaking as she brought it up to her breast to carefully roll her nipple between her fingers. She let out one last cry before her body tensed up and she locked his head between her thighs, screaming as she exploded into a trembling orgasm against his face.

He stayed with her while she was coming down, gently nibbling on her tender skin while he felt her legs relaxing around him, releasing his head from their firm lock.

She was looking down with the sweetest and most loving expression on her face he had ever seen. He smiled in response and got on his tiptoes to softly kiss her swollen lips.

“Better than ever”, he said under a sly grin.

“You’re impossible”, she shook her head and chuckled, stroking his face. “And still hard”

“Yeah”, he nodded and lifted her off the rank to put her down on her feet.

“Do you want to—”, she started and made an uncertain gesture with her hands. Since when was it so hard to talk about sex with him?

“No”, David whispered and looked down between them. He gently took her hand in his and brought it to his cock. “But if you’d like to… continue doing what you did before?”, he asked and she smiled.

David was rubbing himself against her skin when he came on her belly, his face hidden in the crook of her neck, sucking on the soft skin, marking her as his.

She asked for something to eat when she stepped out of the shower to give him some space. When David walked out of the bathroom she lay on the bed on her side, facing away from him. The empty co-sleeper and the sounds of a baby’s soft sucking indicated that she was nursing again. He didn’t disturb them, but quietly put on some clothes and walked downstairs.

Knowing that she would like to have something she really loved, he went into the kitchen and prepared some sandwiches before setting the coffee table. He opened a bottle of beer for himself and turned on the TV, zapping through Netflix.

“What are we watching?”, she asked when she walked into the living room, rubbing her hands, her eyes fixated on the TV. She was wearing nothing but one of his shirts, hanging loosely on her slender frame, almost reaching to her knees.

“Um, Star Wars, maybe?”, he replied and cleared his throat.

“Yeah, okay”, Gillian said, sounding not very enthusiastic, and sat down beside him.

He picked up the remote control again, clicked his way through to Episode IV and started the movie.

They sat in an awkward silence for a while, neither of them really paying attention to what was happening on the screen. At some point, she reached for a sandwich and carefully ripped it into two pieces, offering him one of them. She didn’t share the second one.

He was starting to get bored out of his mind when he felt her moving closer. She wiggled a little beside him and accidentally nudged his arm with her elbow and apologized. He grinned. Since 1993,
this was a sure sign that she wanted to cuddle.

He played it cool though and leaned back. She nudged him again, apparently unsure if he had missed her first innuendo. He snickered quietly and finally lifted his right arm to welcome her into his embrace.

“You’re an amazing mother, Gillian. You’re a fascinating woman and a wonderful person. I love you for everything you are and I wouldn’t change a thing. And I know it will be interesting and challenging to embark on this journey with you. I mean, we will argue about setting boundaries for our daughter all the time. Of course we will, we love her. We want what’s best for her. And, you know, it doesn’t matter what I think about this specific program Mark wants us to follow to keep Felix in his own bed. I may not like it, but maybe it’s what he really needs”, David said and kissed Gillian’s temple.

“I’m sorry for snapping at you, David. It wasn’t fair”

“It’s okay. I wasn’t very patient either”, he said softly. “Is she okay?”

“Yeah, she listened to your advice and drank very slowly this time, and not too much. She burped and immediately fell asleep. Everything’s well in her little world”

“What a good girl we have”

“Yeah”, Gillian agreed sleepily and cuddled closer.

When the credits rolled, she shifted a little in his arms and looked up at him with expectant eyes. “Well, what do you think about this masterpiece?”, Gillian asked and grinned.

“Well-“ He cleared his throat. „I was right”
She frowned. “Huh? Right about what?”

“Chewbacca is a name, not a race”

“Did I say that it was a race?”

“Yeah, you did, you lost the bet”

“What bet?”

“The Star Wars bet”, he replied and shrugged.

“Okay, hold on. Maybe Chewbacca is his name, but I remember that you said that there was only one of him! And that’s wrong. He’s a wookie, and there are more of them”, she insisted.

“Oh, come on!”, he groaned. “I said there was only one Chewbacca, not only one wookie”, he clarified.

“You didn’t even know about the wookies!”, Gillian laughed and bumped her shoulder into him.

“This movie is too complicated for me”

“Nuh-uh. Don't give me that crap!”
“I didn’t like it”, he said, his lower lip protruded in a sulky pout.

“I won half the bet that has never really existed! And for my prize, I decide that you’re my very own Chewie from now on”

He bent his brow and tilted his head. “What does that mean?”

“It means I get to call you Chewbacca”

“That’s a weird prize”

“You don’t have to like it”, she pointed out and grinned.

“Okay, fine. But I won the other half of the bet!”

She nodded and bit on her lower lip. “You did. And you’ve been a very good Chewie this evening, especially in the shower”, she teased.

“Oh god, Gill”, he groaned before cracking up.

“Do you want to know what you’ve won?”

“What? I want to pick my own prize!”, he whined.

“Noooo, that’s not how things work in my house”, she said and moved into an upright position before climbing onto his lap. “I will think about it”

“Huh?”, he asked confused and put his hands on her waist.

“That’s your prize”

“I’m not sure I follow”

She licked her lips and let her eyes drift to his mouth before slowly leaning in. Just as she was about to kiss him, she smiled and whispered, “I will think about doing more X-Files”
Love is friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad times. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses. - Ann Landers

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy this long chapter. As I promised, you will find more smut in it :) Thank you for sticking with me!

Nearly seven hours had passed without a call or even a single message from him. This was good news, she tried to convince herself. It was her fourth day of rehearsals and his first day alone with Eaden, and she wasn’t sure which made her more nervous. When Friday came, he’d insisted on finally taking care for their daughter himself, telling her that she needed at least one day at work without the baby. And he was right. Even though Erin had managed to entertain Eaden for most of the day, Gillian still had to spend nearly two hours nursing her during costume fittings and readings.

It wasn’t the first time she was torn between her commitments as a mother and her work. She wanted this to be perfect. She needed this play, and first and foremost her own performance, to be perfect. It was a dream come true, she couldn’t and she wouldn’t have any regrets leaving her baby with her father. He was brilliant with her, and she was in very good hands, especially since he was the only one allowed to feed her from the bottle.

She knew he just wanted to let her do her job. But she was unbelievably worried and frightened. Or sad. She couldn’t decide which one it actually was. But she definitely missed them. She missed her daughter’s comforting weight in her arms. She missed those chubby little hands picking on her skin, her curious blue eyes looking up to her and this wonderful, toothless smile. God, she missed her smile. Her noises. Her smell. Her warmth…

“Gillian?”, asked Vanessa, who sat next to her, and put her hand on Gillian’s shoulder, tearing her out of her thoughts.

“Yes?”, she replied immediately, stopped gnawing at her thumb by putting her hand into her lap and looked up. Four pairs of worried eyes were directed at her, waiting for her response. “What?”, she added and let out a nervous laugh.

Vanessa smiled and squeezed her arm. “What do you think about the line we just talked about? Do you think you’re able to pull it off?”

“Um-“, Gillian cleared her throat and straightened in her chair. “I think… um-, I think I can do that, yeah”

“Okay, great”, Benedict exclaimed and clapped into his hands. “I think we could all use a little break. Let’s say ten minutes, yeah? And then we’ll go over the last two pages, which shouldn’t take longer than an hour”

As the others got up and engaged in some chatter, Ben leaned over her to get her attention. “Hey, are you alright?”, he asked kindly and smiled.
“Yeah, I’m sorry. I was… my mind’s already at home”

“Is everything alright?”

“Well, I don’t know, I guess so. I think I have to make a quick call”, she said and fished her phone out of the pocket of her jacket.

“Of course”

“Oh, my phone has no service”, Gillian noticed and her brow furrowed with concern. “I think I have to go outside for a minute”

As she opened the front door to step outside, she was frantically tapping on the screen as if it would bring her mobile service back any quicker. He would have called Julie if something had happened. And she would have called the theatre. Everything was okay, she tried to tell herself, but felt a low-sizzling panic arising within her. She closed her eyes and inhaled some fresh air to calm herself down.

Suddenly, her phone buzzed. Not once, not twice, but at least five times and her heart nearly stopped when she saw one message after another appear on the screen.

“Oh fuck”, she whispered and opened them.

But fortunately, it wasn’t what she had expected.

Hey, beautiful lady, how are you? As you can see, we just had our second breakfast and are now heading towards the mall and maybe even the farmer’s market… let’s see how much she likes to go out with Daddy :P Love you, everything is fine!

Underneath his message, he had sent a picture of Eaden lying in their bed, drinking from the bottle he held for her. Gillian smiled and started to read the next one.

Hi, Mommy. We just wanted to let you know that I love to sleep in the car, and Daddy put me into the sling without waking me! I snoozed a little while he went shopping – fortunately for me, I wasn't able to see if he actually bought what you wanted him to buy, but I guess he did – I mean, why wouldn’t he, right?! Okay, I think I need a fresh diaper now, but besides that, I’m a pretty happy little girl today :D Love you!

“Oh David”, Gillian whispered to herself and her smile grew wider. Next came another picture of the baby, lying on David’s upper thighs with her head resting between his knees, apparently while he was sitting outside in the sun. She had a very excited expression on her face, probably because she was wearing David’s sunglasses on her tiny nose. She looked hilarious, and absolutely adorable. Just so you don’t forget how cute I am :) was written underneath it.

There was one last message from half an hour ago.

You’re working hard, huh? We miss you, babe, but we’re doing fine. I just told her that you’ll be home over the whole weekend. She truly smiled the sweetest smile ever! I love you! …and yes, I bought them :P

Gillian smiled and let her right hand drop to her side while raising her head to look up into the clear sky, suddenly knowing that all of this would work out just fine.
On her way home, she had picked up way too much Sushi from his favorite Japanese restaurant to surprise him. He really deserved a little treat after this day and she really wanted him to know how much she appreciated what he was doing in order for her to work on this play. Stacking everything into the fridge, she smiled as he was walking up to her. The baby was smiling widely as he got closer to Gillian and opened her tiny fists in anticipation. With his hand on her chest to hold her close against his own and his arm under her knees, she was looking forward and therefore had a clear view on where they were heading.

He smiled and leaned down to whisper to her, “Look Eaden, Mommy’s home, honey”

“Hi”, Gillian said softly and took a little hand in hers, stroking it gently. “Hello, baby. Are you happy to see me? Oh god, look at her, she’s beaming!”

“Hey, I’m beaming, too”, he said under a chuckle and leaned forward. She giggled, put her hands underneath the baby’s arms and gave David a soft kiss on his lips before taking Eaden out of his arms.

“Wow, that’s a very big smile for Mommy, huh? God, I’ve missed you so much” She planted soft kisses on the baby’s cheeks and tickled her neck playfully as she carefully put her against her shoulder. “You smell so good, baby girl”

“Say I’m freshly bathed, as is Daddy”, David pointed out and stepped beside Gillian, putting his hand on her hip and kissed her forehead. “Hi”, he smiled at her.

“Hey”, Gillian replied. “I missed you, too”

“Hmm, that’s nice, thank you”

“I loved the messages you guys sent me”

“Did you?”

“Yes”

His kisses were soft and undemanding first, gentle pecks on her lips that soon became more passionate as she opened her mouth, letting his tongue slide inside. The firm grasp on her hip and his hand on shoulder blade felt nice and comforting. Her body started to respond to the way he kissed and held her, and she was tingling all over. It had been a long day, and her family was happy that she was finally back home. Her family. How on earth did I get this lucky again, she wondered and raised her arm to put her hand on his cheek.

“Thank you for keeping me updated today. I didn’t realize that my phone was out of service for the entire time we were sitting downstairs, but I’ve got the Wi-Fi password now” She tilted her head apologetically and smiled.

“Ah, that’s why she wasn’t replying, baby. And there you thought she wasn’t interested in what you were doing”, he said under a chuckle and caressed the baby’s head.

“No”, Gillian whispered and squeezed her daughter a little closer to her chest.

“As much as I would love to see what you brought for dinner, I think she needs hers first, because besides that, she is ready for bed and I think pretty tired. I just squeezed the bath in because I thought there’s a chance you’d be back in time to nurse her and probably wanted to?”

“Yes, absolutely. Let me change my clothes quickly and I’ll be ready”
He settled himself down beside her on the couch and put his arm around her bare shoulder. She had changed into a pair of pyjama pants and a tank top, and the right strap was pulled down her arm to nurse the baby. He loved these moments in the evenings with them. With the house all quiet and dimmed, everyone was sleepy and content as they snuggled together. He knew it wouldn’t always be like this, and he wanted to make the most out of the little time they had as the little family they’d become.

“How was your day?”, Gillian broke the silence. “Please tell me every single thing about it”, she requested and leaned her head back onto his chest.

He sighed softly and cleared his throat. “Well, there are a few things that will brighten your evening, actually. Right after we came back from shopping, we spent nearly an hour at the changing table, because she… you know, it was a disaster”

“Oh god”, Gillian giggled and bowed her head to kiss the baby on top of hers.

“It wasn’t funny at all!”, he replied under laughter. “She got me crying, seriously! I don’t know what you’ve eaten in the last few days, but if you can think of anything unusual, please stop eating it!”

“Well, this delicious bean salad…”, Gillian stated and stroked the length of his upper thigh playfully.

Shaking his head in a teasing disapproval way, he clicked his tongue before his face split into a warm smile. “At least she had a very good time watching me gag, a really good time. And then I thought we could spend some time outside in the sun to get fresh air, but she didn’t really like it, because I think she was pretty tired after this nappy changing ordeal and it was too bright, so I got the idea with the sunglasses…”

“She loved them, huh?”

“Oh yeah, she really did”, he affirmed nodding and stroked the baby’s little fist on Gillian’s breast. “It kind of cheered her up for a while, so I sat her back on my lap and we continued to read your book”

“Oh wow, really?”

“Yeah, very interesting. You wrote the parts about Caitlin and Ben, right?”

“I did”

“M-hm. I mean, apparently, it’s a known fact that writers write about things they know or have endured, but you really took it to the next level there”, he remarked.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Her indignation was more feigned than real, and she laughed to make it clear.

“There’s no way one reads this book and isn’t going to see the similarities between them and us”

“Hmm. Is it that obvious?”

“Yes, it really is” He nodded and grinned.

“I just like how it turned out… is it a bad thing?”, she asked self-consciously.
“No! No, I don’t think it’s a bad thing”

“So I don’t have to ask for a last-minute modification?”

“Ah, Gill, no. It’s a great novel, seriously. A little too mystical for me, yes, but you already knew it would be” She nodded. “And for those two guys … I don’t give a fuck what people will say about that”

“Ahh pssst!”, she raised her finger and put it over his mouth, glancing down at the baby. They both snickered as they watched their unperturbed daughter fixating David’s finger on her own hand. It was only going to be a matter of time before she would spit out her very own first swear word.

“Sorry”

“So far, she only got the S-word from me. If she’s starting with the F-word, you’re the one to blame!”, Gillian said and grinned up at him.

“Wanna bet?” he teased and bowed his head to give her a quick kiss on the lips.

“Yeah sure, the last bet didn’t really work out in my favour! I’m not betting with you again”

“Mwahh”, he groaned. “Okay”

“Keep telling me about your day”, she pushed and turned her head to the right so her cheek was resting against his chest.

“I think I put her down for her nap after that and wrote on another song. This day kind of inspired me, you know?”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t know… it was a pretty simple, yet wonderful and rewarding day. I mean, she’s with you all the time, no matter what you want to do or where you want to go. You kind of do your thing, and she watches you, learns from you… And I think I haven’t appreciated that aspect enough before. While she depends on you to have a bottle prepared for her, or a diaper on hand, she’s also developing the whole time based on what you’re doing and saying. And it’s a very poetic and beautiful thing to have a baby, because there’s so much interpretation, and wonder on both sides. It’s amazing”, he confessed and made a low, humming noise as he nuzzled Gillian’s hair.

“You’re happy with it? With the way things are right now?”

“Yes, except for West and Miller, I have everything I need right here on this couch”, he whispered.

“I missed you so much”, Gillian said after a while and grabbed his hand.

He chuckled quietly and cooed, “Oh, it was only a couple of hours”

“No. I mean, I missed you, all these years, after we’d stopped shooting. It was so hard to work on something knowing you wouldn’t be there. Every day, the realization that I wouldn’t get to see or talk to you hit me so hard, it was like a stab right into my heart. I never dared to dream that-, that we would ever spend time together again. If I would ever be allowed to tell you again how much I love you, and if you would ever actually believe it”

“I always believed it”

“No, you didn’t. You always ran away when I said it. You always thought I didn’t mean it”
He inhaled deeply and looked up at the ceiling. He could remember every single time she’d said I love you to him before the series ended. He also remembered every single time he hadn’t said it back, although he really wanted to. It hurt to know that it wasn’t the lacking reply that hurt her the most, but thinking that he had never really perceived what she said exactly five times. Two times after he had left her, and after she had lost their child. Swallowing down the lump in his throat, he wrapped his arms around them tighter and pressed her body gently against his. He wouldn’t let her walk down this road again. He wanted her to enjoy what they had now, and he wanted her to feel secure and loved more than anything else.

“I always knew you meant it, but I was… I don’t know what I was thinking and why I didn’t do something. But to be honest, considering the way things had turned out, I don’t regret it. It’s wonderful the way it is now. I’m beyond grateful and happy”, he said with an honesty in his voice she hadn’t heard very often, not like this. “Let’s just… live in the here and now. Don’t worry about me, I have my girls right here, my books, my guitar and in a few weeks I have the rest of my offspring back. I just want you to rock this stage and have the time of your life, babe. I’m here to support you and I’ll always have your back. Live your dream. You deserve it and I can’t wait to see you up there, blowing everyone’s mind with your magnificent performance”

She snorted and clicked her tongue as a single tear rolled down her cheek before looking down at her baby, who had fallen asleep against her breast.

“But please don’t eat any bean salads again”

“Ohhh my goooood, I’m sooooo stuffed”, she groaned and slumped back onto the couch, holding her belly. Letting himself fall down right beside her between her and the backrest, he snickered happily and looked at her face. No make-up, rosy cheeks and a satisfied grin on her lips. Gillian after eating tons of carbs was a sight to love. He giggled some more and rolled on top of her. “What are you doing?”, she shrieked in response to his movements and fell into a fit of giggles before wiggling her hand out underneath him and patting his butt playfully.

“What’s the matter with you, woman? Are you drunk?”

“Noooohoooo, but I certainly feel like I am”

“These carbs, eh? Crazy stuff for little women, provides so much energy!”

“Don’t lay on my stomach, you crazy fool!”

“Hmm”, he leaned down and started to kiss the side of her mouth. “Thank you for bringing Sushi, that was really nice of you”

“You’re welcome”

“You’re so hot, baby”, he pointed out and pushed her legs apart with his knees and lay down between them. “Look at your face, it’s bright red!”

“I know!”, she moaned in frustration and put her hands on her face to hide herself from his prying eyes, but it was useless since he knew exactly what to do in a situation like that. She even knew what he would do before she felt his hand wander to her sides and towards her ribs, but it didn’t prevent her from laughing out loud when his fingers softly dug into her skin and started to tickle her. She was laughing and begging him to stop at the same time as she tried to squirm away from him before reaching down to get a hold of his busy hands on her ribs.
“Don’t hide your beautiful face from me”

“But I’m blushing”, she whined and stuck out her bottom lip while stroking the length of his arms.

“You’re the sweetest and sexiest when you’re blushing, you have no fucking idea how much I love it”, he admitted and started to place soft smacking kisses on her lips before she reached up to hold his face in place for a proper, passionate kiss.

“So, you’re providing the rubbers?”, she murmured into his mouth and pulled on his shirt.

“Hm, do we really need them already?”

“Yes, we really need them. It’s a myth that you can’t get pregnant before your first period. And we’ve made enough babies as it is”

“One is hardly enough”

“Believe me, this one’s enough”

“This one’s enough”, he repeated after her and sighed. “I want to cuddle for a bit, is that okay?”, he asked softly and hummed quietly as he nestled his head between her neck and her shoulder, shifting slightly sideways so he wouldn’t crush her underneath him. Wrapping his left arm over her body, he inhaled her sweet scent, closed his eyes and smiled contently. This was his favorite place in the whole world.

Gillian snickered quietly and ran her left hand through his soft hair, massaging his scalp and putting her right hand on his left forearm, she asked, “Are you tired?”

“Hmm, just a little sleepy” He closed his eyes briefly, enjoying the feeling of her fingers in his hair and her hand gently caressing his arm. When he opened them, he looked up and watched her silently. Her eyes were directed at the ceiling and moving from one spot to another. He knew exactly what was going on in her head and nudged her gently with his nose. “Hey, stay with me, hm?”

“I’m right here”

“No, you’re head’s still working. But you know what? It’s the weekend”, he said in an excited voice and smiled happily.

“I don’t know if I can do this, David”

“I know you can. But why do you think you can’t?”

“It’s just… overwhelming. So much to memorize, and-, and the fact alone that it’s so many nights, hence so many people who are going to see me doing this. Oh god, why am I doing this again?”

“Because you’ve proved many times that you’re able to do it and you’re able to enjoy doing it. You can trust yourself and the techniques you’ve developed over the years. And there are going to be a lot of people who love you, and you will feel their energy up there, and you will thrive on it, as always. That’s why you’re doing it”

Gillian smiled and put her chin against her chest to look at him. “Do you remember when you’ve first introduced me to your breathing techniques to decrease my anxiety and help me calm down?”

“Hmm, yeah. Wasn’t it when you had to give orders to a lot of people in one of the earlier episodes?”
“Yep, I think it was the third or the fourth. I haven’t practiced it for a very long time, though. But this week, I had to think about it quite often. And you know what? I can’t even remember how it worked. But I remember the evening you showed it to me, and how we sat on the carpet of your hotel room with all these candles around us—“

“And the wine”, he added, nodding.

“And the wine. When you put your hands on my chest and my stomach to feel if I was breathing right…”, she said, and both of them fell into quiet laughter.

“Yeah, that had nothing to do with you breathing right or wrong”

“I knew it!” Gillian grinned. “Thinking about the way you kissed me that night really helped me this week. I think it’s my new, favorite technique”, she stated proudly.

“Ohh, as nice as this sounds, that was one horrible kiss”

“Nooo, it was a great kiss! A great first kiss. We were a little clumsy, yes. But it was cute. And magical. And I felt very special”

“A cute first kiss from a 33-year old guy… sounds terrific. I hope the next time I’m kissing you while working on The X-Files is going to be much better than cute”

“Why are you so eager to do that, David? I thought you don’t want to not solve cases with me ever again!”

“Aaah, ever again? No, I wanna make out with Scully after all”

“You’re thinking about writing an episode yourself? Because that’s the only way you’ll ever get such a scene into an X-Files script”, she said confidently, nodded slowly and raised an eyebrow at him.

“So sure of yourself… I’ll prove you wrong!”

“I don’t think so”, she teased and cupped his face with her hands before brushing her lips against his. Her hands moved to the back of his head and she thread her fingers through his hair. He moaned and intertwined his lips with hers by lightly sucking on her bottom lip before releasing it to give the upper one the same attention. He could feel her tongue brushing gently against his lips while he did so and pulled her closer.

David broke away from their kiss, as it grew more demanding with every second, to look her in the eye with a sly smile on his face. She opened her eyes and was tilting her head slightly as she mimicked his smile and started to stroke his lower lip with her thumb.

“How do you feel?”, he asked and slowly pulled her tank top up to expose her belly button and the diamond tipped stud that pierced it. She winced slightly and furrowed her brow. He hadn’t expected that she would be this insecure and nervous when he touched her belly and wondered if there was something he could possibly say to make her feel more confident, because this was definitely something that was keeping them from being absolutely free and comfortable with being intimate. He noticed the way she searched his face. She knew exactly that he’d noticed her discomfort. He could only hope that she knew he was thinking that she was absolutely breathtaking and perfect.

“It’s amazing what women’s bodies can do, isn’t it?”, he suddenly asked with a soft voice and rubbed his nose against hers.
She raised her eyebrow and licked her lips, tempted to answer his question with sarcasm, but stopped herself just in time to give it a serious thought. Then she closed her eyes.

“I know what you’re trying to say, it’s just-“, she stammered and shook her head.

“What is it?”

Gillian sighed. “I don’t know, it’s pathetic…”

“No, it’s real, and probably very natural. I can imagine what’s going on in your mind, but I can only assure you that it’s not what’s happening in mine. I don’t think I can change how you feel about yourself, but maybe you could tell me what you like and what you don’t like me to do right now. Let’s see if this will make you feel better over time, hm?”

“I want this, we’ve already waited nine weeks”

“Yes, and as much as I’d love to do it, I want you to enjoy it, too. Just be honest, okay? I don’t want you to feel pressured into it when you’re not ready. I’ll rather wait another nine weeks”

“I am ready!”, she said louder than anticipated and nodded her head to emphasize her statement. Her eager response made him chuckle.

“Okay, do you want to go upstairs?”, he asked while stroking her back in circles.

Gillian nodded, suddenly feeling a nervous flutter in the pit of her stomach and blood rushing into her head, making her dizzy in anticipation. “Yes”

He held her hand on their way upstairs into the bedroom. It was an awkward, but given the circumstances pretty natural situation, and she loved how sweet and considerate he was dealing with it. He was very aware of how she was feeling and took her seriously. She squeezed his hand as he opened the door and he smiled down at her before letting her go. Putting the baby monitor on top of the dresser, he opened the upper drawer and retrieved a small plastic bag and a white bottle.

“I thought this would come in handy”, he said, shook the bottle and wiggled his eyebrows as she sat down and scooted in the middle of the bed.

God, what are we doing here, she asked herself and frowned as she watched him approaching the bed. Gathering all her courage, she got on her knees and moved to the end of the bed where he was standing. She sat up straight and took both items out of his hands, throwing them onto the sheets beside her before looking up again. His expression was gentle and full of affection. Slowly, she ran her hands under his shirt and caressed the warm, soft skin under his ribs with her fingertips. He was lean and fit, and she loved the way his hard muscles rippled underneath her touch. Lifting his shirt as high as possible in her current position, he reached down and pulled it over his head in one swift motion. Tilting her head just a little, she let her eyes wander over his beautiful body. She loved his frame. Broad, masculine shoulders, well-proportioned chest muscles were accompanied by a trained, rock hard midsection. It wasn’t the only part of him that was rock hard, though. She loved the way his cotton pyjama pants emphasized the firmness of his ass beautifully. Looking down further, she slightly bit into her bottom lip as she noticed his erection poking through his pants. He wasn’t wearing any underwear, so it was practically pointing at her and grew even bigger under her perusal.

His eyes still remained focused on her as she leaned in and puckered her lips, now looking up at him, and kissed the soft space underneath his left nipple while suggestively stroking his lower belly. She could feel his soft moan vibrating on her lips and smiled as she opened her mouth and teased his skin with soft strokes of her tongue. He stepped as close as possible and ran his fingers through her hair.
and down to her neck, watching her placing soft, arousing kisses and leaving a tiny wet trace on his skin. She eventually put her right hand inside the waistband of his pants and started to pull them down slowly. Gillian sat back and bent her head slightly to kiss the now exposed skin of his hip and she felt his fingers digging into her neck. She knew exactly what kissing him there did to him.

She took her time to kiss her way from the right side to the middle, kissing and teasing him with little bites into his skin before she raised her left hand. Very slowly, she pulled his pants over his hard cock, bending it slightly while doing so before it suddenly bobbed out, thereby brushing against her chest. Kissing his belly one last time, she put her fingers around his long shaft and started to stroke him slowly while massaging his frenulum with her thumb. He sighed deeply and craned his neck backwards. Her mouth was on him only a few seconds later, wetting the sensitive skin of his glans by slowly swirling her tongue around it. She then opened her mouth and put her lips around him, sucking gently while continuing to tease him with the tip of her tongue.

“Gillian-“, he moaned and swallowed hard. He was known for a great stamina and usually wasn’t one to get there close, but he hadn’t had her mouth on him in months, and he felt his climax approaching way too fast for his taste.

But of course, he didn’t have to say something for her to take notice. Gillian knew him too well, and it didn’t surprise him when she slowed her ministrations. He enjoyed the sensation of her gentle strokes and her light sucking and he felt himself calming down, even to the point where he was able to look down at her. She was watching him intently and winked at him before taking his length into her mouth almost entirely.

His breath hitched and he squeezed his eyes shut, because not only feeling, but seeing her doing this was quite overstimulating. He held his breath for a few seconds until she released him slowly, and he finally exhaled.

“Oh my god“, he whispered as he opened his eyes and saw her licking her full lips. “Come here“, David told her, leaned down and tugged on the hem of her tank top. She sat up straight again and he surprised her by cupping her butt cheeks and lifting her up in a swift move and captured her mouth with his. Kissing her passionately, he frantically tried to pull her top up with one hand while he carried her to the other side of the bed and sat down. She landed on his upper thighs and he pushed her back just a little to generate some space between them. He needed to see her.

Her hands were hanging loosely to her sides and she looked less confident than she did just a few moments ago when she was going down on him. That was Gillian as she lived and breathed. Loving to have control, needing to be the initiator, wanting to be the aggressor. But he knew the part of her that loved, wanted and needed to let go and hand the control over to someone she trusted.

He began to stroke her upper arms gently up to her shoulders, pushing the tiny strap away to gently kiss her along her collarbone. His other hand slid underneath her top again and moved up past her ribs to her breast, stroking the underside of it with his thumb before putting his fingers around its roundness. His thumb moved up to caress her nipple, knowing that he had to be very gentle for this to be pleasurable.

“Hmm, you taste so good“, he said quietly and his tongue darted out to lick over the soft flesh of her throat before gently sucking on her skin.

She giggled and put her hand in his hair. “Don’t leave a hickey, I have to go to work on Monday“, she warned playfully and searched his mouth for a kiss.

He teased her by opening his mouth against hers, denying her his lips until she groaned in frustration. Taking advantage of the little distraction, he reached down and pulled her top over her breasts, and
she immediately raised her arms for him to remove it.

He knew she wasn’t entirely comfortable with him looking at her like that, but he took his time to indulge in her beauty shamelessly and openly. There was no way she could miss the admiration displaying in his eyes, and he noticed that her breathing started to even out.

“You’re the most beautiful woman to me, Gilly”, he said, looking into her eyes. Calling her Gilly only emphasized his words as he only used it on rare occasions, and he knew she thought so, too.

He was bathing her in kisses when he had her on her back in the middle of the bed, absolutely naked and fully exposed. He asked her if she wanted to be on top while he was still sitting on the edge of the bed, but she had declined his offer and whispered that she needed to feel his weight on her. Even after all these years, she still kept him guessing.

David sat up between her legs and carefully ripped the foil apart before he unrolled the condom over the entire length of his erect penis and leaned over for a kiss. He scooted closer to her entrance and reached for the little bottle, looking at her as she nodded her approval before he opened it. He squeezed a generous amount of lube into his hand, rubbed it between his palms and gently spread it over her folds and around her entrance with his right hand while simultaneously spreading it over his dick with the other. She had already been ready and wet for him, but he wanted to be on the safe side and knew the condom wouldn’t help to make this easier and hopefully painless.

Leaning down again and putting his arms on each side of her head, he stroked her temples with his index fingers and smiled gently.

“Just tell me how it feels, okay?”, he requested and kissed her as she nodded slightly.

Removing his right hand from her face, he reached down to guide himself to her center. He gently rubbed his hard member through her folds, spreading the lubrication all over her and nudged her entrance with his tip a few times before he finally felt her relaxing underneath him. As he slowly started to push inside, his eyes never left her face. She was panting softly, and her own eyes were closed. She looked concentrated, but comfortable, so he continued to push further.

A tiny moan escaped her throat and she winced when he was halfway in, causing him to stop. She licked her lips and inhaled deeply before nodding, telling him silently to continue. He withdrew just a little bit before pushing in again, slowly and carefully until he was completely buried inside of her. She was unbelievably snug and tight, and he could feel his head nudging against her cervix, which was pretty unusual in this particular position.

But she didn’t seem to enjoy herself as much as he did. She was grimacing a little and her eyebrows were scrunched together.

“Honey”, he whispered and rubbed his forehead against hers.

She wiggled her hips underneath him and opened her eyes. “You’re big”, she said dryly and raised her arm to caress his back as he started to laugh nervously. “It doesn’t hurt, it’s just a little uncomfortable”

“Do you want to stop?”

“No, keep going” He raised his eyebrow at her. “It’s okay, David. I love to feel you so close and on top of me again. It’s very nice”, she assured him. And she meant it. Although she wasn’t sure she could enjoy it sexually or even come after a few gentle thrusts, she was getting more comfortable and felt herself adjusting to him.
He grunted quietly into her neck and held her close as he sped up. And to her surprise, she felt desire and arousal rise within her again. Gillian put her hand on his lower back and he raised his knees a little for her to reach his firm ass. She squeezed it and pressed him into her as he thrust inside. He moaned, pushed in deep, and stayed in this position for a few moments.

“This is nice”, Gillian whispered and flexed her inner muscles, making him moan loudly into her ear.

He silently thanked the condom for keeping him in the game. She felt too god to be real, but he was unsure if he should try his best, and probably too much, to make her come, or if he should just aim for his own release before pleasing her orally. He decided to go for it and continued with steady, deep thrusts.

“Yes”, she panted, wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer, and arched her lower back.

He kept sliding in and out of her while she worked her hips against his purposely. She was working towards her own climax, and he was just thinking how much he loved that she was able to take what she needed, when he felt her moving her hand between them and her fingers started to trace her moist, silky folds around his cock. David looked down and watched her busy fingers rubbing her clit.

“I’m going to come”, she gasped and pulled his head down for a passionate kiss. As their tongues slid against each other, she dug her nails into his neck and he drove into her harder and faster until her thighs clenched around him and her hips started to shake involuntarily before she pulled away from their kiss to cry out.

“I love you”, he growled, thrust into her one last time while her walls were still contracting around him, and came hard over and over again.

His entire body shook violently as he was gasping for air. His whole weight was pressing her into the mattress because he wasn’t able to hold himself up anymore. He closed his eyes and inhaled her scent. Her warm, soft hands started to caress his sweaty back and he could feel tender kisses on his cheek.

After a few moments, he rolled to the side and slid out of her. She gently removed the condom and handed him some tissues from the nightstand before heading over to the bathroom to clean herself up. Her whole body was pleasantly buzzing and she hadn’t felt this comfortable in it for a very long time.

They were both still naked when she climbed back into the bed and under the sheets beside him. He wrapped his arm around her and she snuggled up against his chest, putting her head over his heart and her hand on his stomach, smiling contently.

“I love you, too”, she whispered sleepily and closed her eyes.
Hey guys, I'm sorry for the delay! Work's a bi**** currently and I am planning my little trip to New York to see Streetcar in May, which takes a lot of time. This chapter is a little Streetcar related because I think we're all in the right mood for it. The next chapter will be much longer again, I promise :) Thank you for your nice comments! I don't want to beg for them, but they really motivate me very, very much! So please let me know what you think and what you'd like to read :)
over her busy mind. When her door was being opened, she sighed annoyingly and turned in her seat.

She wasn’t expecting David standing there, closing the door before walking towards her with a soft smile on his face, clad in dark jeans, a dark blue shirt and a black suit jacket.

“What are you doing? Is everything okay?”, she asked hastily and got out of her chair.

He raised his hand reassuringly. “Everything is fine, I just wanted to see if you’re okay”, he replied warmly and pulled her against him with one hand on her hip.

She shook her head and looked at his chest. “I’m so nervous”

“Hmm, I bet you are. There are a lot of people out there who are very excited to see you”

“Oh man”, she groaned and dropped her head.

“But they’re already over the moon about the fact that I’m here tonight. They were literally freaking out when they saw me. So, no matter what you do tonight, they’re happy”

She chuckled and pinched his side playfully. “Well, thank you. That’s really nice of you”

“And if you suck, and I know you won’t, we just make it up to them by kissing a little at the stage door, what do you say?”, he teased.

“You’re impossible. But it’s a good plan”, she agreed and lifted her head again to look at him. “It means so much to me that you’re here”

Nibbling on the inside of his cheek, his expression suddenly changed and became more serious. “How’s your stomach?”, he asked. The feeling in her stomach had always been a pretty precise indicator of how she was really doing. In the olden days, probably during Season 1, she had been constantly seen holding her belly before important scenes, looking like she was in horrible pain. And that was even before her morning sickness had started to torture her even more. As her pregnancy progressed, she’d also gotten issues with her breathing due to her worsening panic attacks.

Right now, she seemed fine, gently smiling up at him with rosy cheeks and steady respiration.

“Everything feels okay at the moment. Do you think I can do it without having an attack?”, she asked and furrowed her brows.

“Yes, I think you can. But if it’s still happening, it won’t be the end of the world. We’re with you, a lot of very nice people are out there and with you, and you have a wonderful team. And you can rely on your own skills”

"Hmm", she murmured. "Just going to think of all the soothing kisses you gave me over the years to bring me back to my feet"

David huffed and shook his head slowly. “I have a little surprise for you” He grinned mischievously and tilted his head to the side.

“Now?”

“It’s, it’s um-, nothing special, and it’s not that fancy, but it means a lot to me since I bought it a long time ago”, he murmured and started to fumble in the inside pocket of his suit jacket. “It was always meant to be yours, and I think it’s finally the right time to give it to you”

She raised her eyebrow and opened her mouth to say something, just as he retrieved a little, velvet
box. She stopped in her tracks and looked at his hands.

“David-“

“It’s everything you want it to be and there are no strings attached, so to say. Giving it to you means to me that you’re still my one person – the person I want to be with. You’re my warm, safe home. I hope you know that no matter what happens, I’m always with you”

He paused to look down before he slowly opened the box, showing a simple, but beautiful rose gold ring with round, brilliant diamonds cradled in a tapered band.

“It’s a promise, yes. And since I’m a newly divorced man, I can make these promises again”, he joked under a chuckle, watching her reaction intently. He could literally feel his heart leap in his chest when he noticed her small smile growing bigger. “I bought it for you 17 years ago, and I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with it and what I wanted it to mean back then. I hadn’t even intended to buy you a ring at that time, it just caught my eye and I immediately knew it was meant to be yours. So, now… here it is-, and here we are, 17 years later. You were always there for me, and I always want to be there when you need me”, David added, still smiling while he fumbled the ring out of the box to put it on her left ring finger under her observing eyes.

It fit perfectly, of course.

She swallowed, admiring his good taste and the sweetness of his gesture. This evening would certainly go down as one of the greatest and most memorable ones of her life.

“I um-, wow”, she exclaimed and looked up at him. “It’s the last thing I expected, even if it’s-, well-“, she winked shyly and grinned. “It’s a promise, yes” She nodded. “This is really nice, it makes me feel so loved”

He was nodding slowly as he gently stroked her cheek with his thumb. “You are”, David whispered and leaned down to kiss her softly.

When they parted again, he gently stroked a lock of blonde hair out of her face and grinned at her. “I’ve got another little something for you”, he pointed out and turned towards the door.

“David, this is wonderful, but-”, she started.

He put his index finger on his lips. “Shh. I promise it’s worth it. I’m not the only one who really wanted to be here”, he said, opened the door to let someone in. Gillian was momentarily caught off guard when she watched her smiling daughter walking into her dressing room with open arms.

“Oh my god!”, Gillian exclaimed and put her hand over her mouth as Piper literally stormed towards her and pulled her into a bear hug.

“Mom”, Piper said, sounding relieved. Her trip was the best decision she could have ever made, but she had missed her family terribly. Especially her very best friend – her mother.

“Baby, oh god I missed you so much”, Gillian rambled and put her hands on the sides of Piper’s face to look at her thoroughly. “Are you alright? You look so fantastic, and so grown up, oh my god”

Piper smiled when her mother kissed her forehead, then her cheeks and eventually the sides of her mouth, patiently giving her the time to indulge into her motherly adoration, since she hadn’t been able to for months.

“I’m great, Mom. I’m just happy to see you again”, she said and looked at David. “All of you”
“You weren’t supposed to be here for another two weeks!”

“I know, but I wanted to be here for opening night. Grandma, grandpa, Zoe and Elli are here too, so I just needed to come!”, she beamed.

“What, really, they’re here too?”, Gillian asked and looked at David, who was smiling proudly at both of them while nodding.

“Mom, it’ll be an awesome evening, I know you’ll rock this thing. I’m so proud of you for doing this right now, you have no idea”, Piper said softly and took Gillian’s hand to look at her ring. “I’m so happy to have all of you”

“Oh, baby. I’m glad you’re here tonight”

A soft tapping on the door interrupted them and Vanessa peeked in, smiling apologetically.

“I’m sorry for interrupting, but-“

“Oh, no-, no, come on in”, David said and walked towards her to open the door. “We don’t want to be in your way, we were about to go. Right, P?”

“Yeah, we’re already gone”, Piper responded and nodded eagerly before turning to Gillian, squeezing her reassuringly one last time. “I love you, see you later”

“I love you, too”, whispered Gillian, playing with the new ring on her finger.

As they were walking towards their seats in the front row where Gillian’s parents, her sister as well as her wife were already sitting and chatting, both David and Piper marveled over the stage right in the middle. It was perfect for this play, just as Gillian said it would be.

He sighed heavily and they stopped for a moment before sitting down. Looking up at him, Piper noticed the blank expression on his face and put her hand on his elbow.

“Are you okay?”, she asked worriedly and furrowed her brow.

Swallowing hard, he took her hand and squeezed it. “Yeah”, he nodded, his voice hoarse. “I guess I am more nervous than I thought I would be, especially for not getting engaged”, he admitted.

She smiled up at him, her expression revealing how full her heart was with adoration and affection for the man who loved and valued her mother so much, before she replied, “Well, that’s true love”

She was smiling that beautiful and playful, closed-lip, teary eye smile when she stepped out into the warm air of summer, still pumped from the incredible show and from meeting a lot of people at the stage door. She had changed into a comfortable, navy blue dress to meet the fans right after the show. Her face was scrubbed clean and her hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail. She looked tired, but also very proud and content as she walked towards her waiting family, and nothing remembered of Blanche anymore, who she just had so perfectly portrayed. Once again, she had not only been stronger than her fears, but had also survived the battle.

And the reward for her bravery was right in front of her. Her whole family made the long journey to see her doing this, and their support and love meant the world to her.

Some fans, standing on the other side of the street, applauded and screamed in their direction as
Gillian’s father called out, “Hey, there she is!”, smiled proudly and walked towards her before wrapping his eldest daughter into his arms. “God, this was an amazing performance!”

Rosemary, who had stepped closer to them, kissed Gillian’s temple and stroked her back affectionately before saying, “We’re so proud of you, Gillian”

“Thank you, thank you so much for coming. It means more than I can say”

“Mom!”, Piper called jumped excitedly. “It was so amazing!”

“It was awesome, sissy!”, Zoe said as she also joined them, grabbing Gillian by the shoulders and pulling her into a hug. “Aw, it was so good!”

Gillian averted her eyes towards the ground and smiled shyly. “Thank you very much”

“Hey, ladies, it’s my turn now!”, David opposed as he walked towards them and pursed his lips in a sly smile. He risked a quick glance down and was pleased to find his ring on her finger again.

Clicking her tongue, Zoe turned to look at him and pulled one of her famous, faux shocked faces. “Excuse me sir, you have her every day, it’s our turn now!”

“Indeed!”, Piper agreed and put her arms around both of them before they fell into a fit of laughter.

“Come on, guys, let’s take this car to get home and leave them a little space, what do you think?”, Rosemary suggested, already climbing into the backseat of the waiting limousine. “And we will be the first ones to see the baby again!”, she added before she disappeared as her husband got in beside her.

“Well that sounds good, we’ll see you at home then?”, Piper asked and let Gillian kiss her cheek goodbye as she nodded her approval.

“See you soon”, David said and closed the door behind Piper after they all got in before the car drove off, leaving the two of them behind.

He turned to Gillian again and just wanted to pull her against his body, when a loud “We love you guys” came from behind them and they turned their heads to the crowd still standing on the other side of the road, looking into their direction, some of them waving furiously.

Gillian laughed out loud and waved back. “We love you, too!”

“You’re so lucky, David!”, a tall guy screamed loudly, making most of the girls around him fall into laughter.

“Oh god”, David chuckled quietly and put his hand around Gillian’s waist.

“How’s the baby?”, a girl asked after a car drove by.

“Very good, thank you”, Gillian replied kindly before David pressed her against his body and dipped his head down and brushed his lips against her cheek.

“I didn’t even need to kiss you”, he murmured into her hair.

She pulled away slightly and raised a brow at him, looking confused. “Huh?”

David chuckled and leaned in before whispering into her ear, “At the stage door. You were brilliant, no need to make up for anything”
“Oh man”, she groaned and grinned shyly, looking into his eyes for a brief moment before she stepped on her toes to give him a quick kiss. “That doesn’t mean they weren’t hoping to see it”, she said under a grin, closed her eyes and captured his lips for another, more passionate kiss.

“Okay, let’s see if she’s still awake”, Gillian whispered as she quietly opened the door to her bedroom. “I think she is, she’s probably hungry by now”, she said, hopeful to satisfy her oldest daughter, her sister and her wife, who hadn’t seen the baby in weeks and were following her into the room on their tiptoes, fidgeting with excitement.

Walking to her side of the bed, she turned the soft light of the bedside lamp on and looked into the crib, where two wide blue eyes were staring up at her.

“Aww!”, Zoe cried out and put her hand over her mouth to muffle the sound.

“Look who’s awake”, Gillian cooed over the baby and lifted her out of the crib. “Hi baby, Mommy’s back”, she said and kissed her cheek. “Look who’s with me. Your sister came home, and your auntie is visiting us”

“Hey”, Piper whispered and took her sister’s little hand. “Do you remember me? Oh my god, she’s so beautiful”

“She looks so much like you did as a baby, Pip. Like a little porcelain doll ”, Zoe replied and took the baby’s other hand, caressing it gently with her thumb.

“Come here, sweetheart, come to me”, Piper grinned and carefully took the baby out of Gillian’s arms to hold her close to her face. Eaden was looking at Piper intently, as if she was studying her and trying to remember where and when she had seen this particular face before.

“She’s 14 weeks old now, right?”, Zoe asked and stroked the baby’s head.

“Yep”

Letting out a short squeak of excitement, the baby kicked her legs and reached out in a failed attempt to grasp a handful of Piper’s long, blonde hair, making the women around her giggle.

“She just started to reach for things and realized that she can actually hold onto them. Right, big baby girl? Look honey, she remembers you! She knows you’re her big sister” Gillian smiled proudly.

“Well, you heard me a few times over the phone, right? She’s still so tiny, though!”, Piper noticed and cradled her in her arms.

“She’s huge now, compared to how little she was when you left. She weighs 13 pounds right now and is 20 inches long. Growing way too fast for my liking”

“But what’s happening with that hair?”, Zoe observed and leaned in to take a closer look at the baby’s head. There was only a longer, dark patch of hair left right above her neck. The rest of her head was adorned by a soft, light fuzz that had just started to grow in.

“She lost pretty much all of the darker and longer hair, and that’s what is left”, Gillian shrugged, rubbing the baby’s neck as she pouted her lips.

“And that’s the new hair? Is it actually becoming red?”, Elli asked.
“It’s really a lot lighter now and it seems to have a red shade in it”, Piper agreed.

“Yeah”, Gillian pulled an awkward face and nodded. “It’s pretty obvious in daylight that it’s becoming at least copper blonde”

“Oh my god, a red-headed baby for the one who never wanted to be a redhead ever again!”, Zoe teased under laughter and grabbed Gillian’s shoulder, pulling her against herself.

“David loves it”

“I bet he does! You’ve got an original X-Files baby! For the second time!”
There will be days when you feel defeated, exhausted, and plain old beat-up by life's whiplash. People you love will disappoint you - and you will disappoint them. - Sheri L. Dew

Chapter Notes

Thank you for being so patient while I was away - I had a wonderful, unforgettable time in New York. I saw Gillian three times and had a blast in this wonderful, huge city! After that, I met David at one of his concerts, which was also unforgettable :) What a month... but they inspired me to continue with this little story, so here we go... I hope you enjoy this chapter, it's a little rough, but you know, so is life.

A very special thanks to justholdinghands, who volunteered to beta-read for me! I couldn't be happier, seriously. You will definitely notice :) Thank you so much for your time and all your wonderful comments!

To say that Gillian was tired by the beginning of September would've been the understatement of the year. Doing one, sometimes two shows on one day almost every single day since July had left her drained, on the edge of weighing less than ever and in need of a very long vacation. Her body was aching all over, her feet were swollen from all the standing, walking and running on the stage and she was completely covered in bruises, blisters and cuts. A nasty cut and her overwhelming fatigue had caused them to cancel a few shows a few weeks ago, which had been unfortunate, but necessary for her to carry on.

And now, it was the first night without having to go on stage in the next couple of hours, or even in the upcoming week, and while she was exhausted as hell, she couldn't believe it was already over and she most likely wouldn't get the opportunity to do this play ever again. It felt like a coat of sadness that was laying heavily on her shoulders.

After all, this was the part she was scared of the most. The silence. The standstill. Just herself and nothing she had to prepare herself for. She knew she needed her breaks after big projects, but she feared them more than anything, because of the restlessness they brought her, and the feeling of being unproductive and useless. Although she was looking forward to a nice vacation, all she wanted to do right now was planning the next big thing.

On times like this, she chastised herself for being so utterly selfish. Her family deserved to spend more time with her, and she needed them more than she needed the admiration of strangers, or the rush of adrenalin before every show. And she hated the feeling of being so torn between work and private life.

David was usually the one who was able to anchor her when her feelings and thoughts were all over the place. When she couldn’t make up her mind or wasn’t able to stop ruminating, he helped her sort everything out and set her priorities without pushing her.

It was weird to not have him around after spending almost four entire months together. It was only a week, but it just had to be the week of their last show when he needed to fly to Los Angeles. She had enjoyed the last show, the after party and their last little get-together for lunch the day after, but she wished he would’ve been there, sadly realizing that they would probably never spend every
important moment of each other’s lives together. She was wondering if this would be just as big of an issue if they never had a baby together. On the other hand, she didn’t want to think of not having this blessing in her life at all.

Turning off the engine of her car after she’d parked it in front of Erin’s house to pick up the baby, she smiled gently and took a deep, calming breath before she got out. It would be the last night in Notting Hill, and she had gotten so accustomed to living in central London again that she already missed it before they even went back to their more rural home in Wiltshire. In the last couple of weeks, she had often thought that maybe it was time to move back again. It would be more convenient for all of them and she definitely felt more home being in the middle of everything rather than living in the middle of nowhere. Now it was just a question of how she could successfully sell the idea of moving back into a town-house to her family.

Erin had the baby ready to go when she walked up the stairs to her house and the door was being opened, as if she was already awaiting her with Eaden on her right hip.

“Hey, look who’s coming to get you! Say hi Mommy!” Erin greeted and immediately handed the baby over to Gillian, who held her arms out to take her five month old daughter from her nanny.

“Hey, cheeky girl. How are you guys? Did you have a good day?” asked Gillian and kissed the baby’s cheek.

“Oh, we had a very nice day. She was such a good and happy girl today! How are you? How was your lunch with the crew?” Erin asked and bent down to pick up a little bag with all of Eaden’s favorite things in it and gave it to Gillian as well.

“It was nice, but I’m really looking forward to go home now, I’m exhausted”

“I bet you are. You’re sure I shouldn’t take her for the night?” Erin offered with a concerned expression on her face. Knowing Gillian for seven years now, she had never seen her this tired before.

“No, it’s okay. I need to cuddle with her tonight. Besides, my boobs are killing me from all the pumping I did in the last couple of days.” Gillian said and patted Erin’s upper arm. “Have a wonderful vacation, Erin. And don’t worry, we’ll miss you, but we’ll be fine”

Stepping forward to embrace Gillian in a friendly hug, Erin kissed the baby’s forehead before saying: “Thank you, you too! Enjoy the time with the kids and give them a kiss for me, okay?”

“I will!” Gillian smiled and turned to walk down the stairs. “Goodbye”

“Take care, bye!” Erin replied before closing the door.

“So, baby girl, what are we two going to do tonight, hmm?” Gillian asked playfully and smiled at Eaden, who looked at her with curious eyes. “Are you hungry? Mommy’s hungry for sure. What do you say about grabbing something to eat and heading home to eat on the couch, huh?” Gillian opened the back door and eased the baby into the car seat. “I think that’s a wonderful idea. Yeah, we’ll do that. You’re all set? Comfy, yeah?” she asked, mimicking her daughter’s smile before tickling her under her left arm. She could make that baby laugh that wonderful, full-hearty belly laugh literally all day long, she would never get sick of it.

After getting herself two burgers, french fries and a big salad, Gillian was just a few miles away from home when her phone rang and an American number popped up on the display of her on-board
“Hello?” she asked after tapping on the screen to accept the call.

“Gillian?” a female voice asked.

“Yes, who is this?”

“Thank god, it’s me, Téa.”

Raising her eyebrow, she slammed on the brakes as the bus in front of her came to a sudden stop and looked into her rear mirror, exhaling as she realized no one was behind her.

“Gillian?”

“Yes, I’m here, what—” Gillian started, but was cut off in the middle of the sentence.

“Where the heck is David? I can’t reach him and he promised to text me as soon as he was on his way to the airport,” Téa said, sounding worried and distressed.

“Um, I think he’s already on the plane, actually. Why did you want him to text you?”

“What do you mean he’s already on the plane? Where the fuck is he?”

“Uh,” Gillian murmured, confused. “He’s on his way back from L.A.”

“What? He was supposed to pick up West and Miller at the airport!” Téa replied, now even more frantically than before.

Gillian blinked, pretty sure she heard Tèa mutter oh my god and shook her head in confusion as she mouthed a silent what before asking, “Uh, airport? W-, which airport?”

“Heathrow of course! They’re on their way to London! Didn’t he tell you?”

“Yeah, he did. But he said they would arrive tomorrow evening.”

“No, it’s today! Oh my god, you can’t be serious, right? They’ll be there in less than an hour and he forgot them?” Téa was almost screaming by now.

“He probably just mixed up the dates,” Gillian said, realizing too late that she probably should’ve taken her more seriously since she was under the impression that her kids were all alone in a foreign country. She would be panicking as well.

“Jesus, Gillian… can you send someone to get them and-, I don’t know, put them in a good hotel?” Téa asked.

Gillian shook her head. “No, don’t worry, I’ll get them and of course they’re staying with me, just as they were supposed to.” she replied immediately, trying to sound soothing, knowing how worried Tèa must’ve been at this moment and added, “Don’t worry, Téa. I’m on my way, okay?”

“Are you sure? God, Gillian, I can’t thank you enough, you have no idea how worried I am right now. They don’t even have a credit card with them.”

“Yeah, of course, I know you are. I’ll text you when I’m there, alright?”
She knew she would most likely get recognized as she hastily and carelessly walked towards the arrival area after checking the live flight arrivals page on her phone back in the car. They’d already landed and she was in a hurry to get there in time before they would come out, realizing that not only their dad wasn’t waiting for them, but no one was. She just wished there had been some time to prepare them for this.

Sighing deeply as she realized they weren’t already waiting, she bounced up and down while holding the baby against her shoulder, humming softly to her as she rubbed her temples between the thumb and index finger of her left hand. She was getting really nervous, wondering how they would react seeing her waiting for them. She hadn’t seen them in four months, and she still wasn’t sure they were comfortable around her. They were always kind and friendly, but she could always feel their reservation and uncertainty, especially from West, when they were talking to one another.

The baby was starting to get fussy after her little nap during the ride, and Gillian knew she had to feed her soon. Cradling her into the crook of her arm, she offered Eaden her clean pinky finger to suck on, hoping it would soothe her as long as it would take to get back to her house, or at least to the car.

West was walking through the sliding doors first, pulling her luggage behind her as she scanned the area for her father’s familiar face. Right behind her walked Miller, clad in shorts and a short sleeve shirt while West was wearing a cozy hoodie and denim hotpants. They had spent some time in Italy with Téa’s family and probably just got from a nice, sunny beach straight to the plane. At least the weather was still pretty decent in London.

There weren’t a lot of other people waiting, so West recognized her almost immediately and squinted her eyes.

“Hey!” Gillian called out and waved, putting on the sweetest and calmest smile possible.

West turned her head to look back at her brother, who was already waving at Gillian, before looking forward again with a little smile on her face.

“Hi!” West said when they reached Gillian. “Um, we weren’t expecting you”

“Hey, you’re here to pick us up?” Miller asked and let Gillian hug him. Stepping forward, West also embraced Gillian briefly and looked down at the baby.

“Yes, I hope it’s not that big of a disappointment, but your Dad needed to stay in LA for another day.” Gillian said softly and tousled Miller’s hair. It wasn’t even a lie since he originally was supposed to be already back in London.

“No, not at all!” Miller said brightly and let the baby grab his index finger and wiggled his hand. “Hey, baby sis! I just washed my hands, can I hold her, please?” he asked and looked at Gillian expectantly.

“Of course you can!” she replied and transferred the baby into Millers arms, who held her against his chest so she was able to look over his shoulder. “You’ve got her?”

“Yeah, she’s so much bigger now!” he laughed and kissed her cheek. He looked so sweet with her.

“So, Dad’s not even in London?” West asked irritated and raised her eyebrow.

“Um-, no, no he’s not. But he’s on his way and you’ll see him in the morning”

“Does my Mom know about that?” she asked again, clearly not as happy as her brother to be picked
up by Dad’s girlfriend. Sometimes Gillian wondered how they were getting along with Téa’s new boyfriend and what she should do differently to win their trust and make them feel more comfortable around her. She was trying, but it was the first time she was in such a situation, and she didn’t want to try too desperately and blatantly.

Nodding in response to West’s question, Gillian raised her arm and put her hand between West’s shoulder blades. “Yes, your Mom knows. We can quickly give her a call in the car and you can talk to her longer as soon as we’re home, okay? Shouldn’t take more than an hour.”

“Okay,” West sighed, started chewing on the inside of her lip and let her shoulders slump down.

Rubbing her back affectionately, absolutely understanding the girl’s reaction, Gillian smiled gently and asked, “Are you guys hungry? I’ve got two burgers in the car and what do you think about getting more on our way back home? I’m starving!”

After a nice and comfortable evening with good food, a funny movie and lots of laughter, Gillian walked downstairs after tucking Miller in Oscar’s bunk bed to find West still sitting on the couch with the baby resting on her chest.

It had taken her a while and a phone call with her mother to get comfortable this evening, but the baby proved to be a good substitute for David and had distracted West from her disappointment. Her mood had increased rapidly as soon as Gillian put the baby in her arms after breastfeeding since she knew West wanted to, but needed a little encouragement.

“Everything’s alright?” Gillian asked with a soft smile on her face, and eased her aching bones down on the couch beside West. Eaden turned her head in the direction of Gillian’s voice, put her little fist into her mouth and grinned widely at her mother.

West smiled and stroked her sister's back. “Yes, everything’s alright.”

Nodding slowly, Gillian scooted closer to both of them and watched the baby turn her head again to look at West.

“Do you want to talk?” Gillian asked cautiously.

Pursing her lips into a tiny pout and briefly considering Gillian’s question, West replied coolly, “About what?”

“Well,” Gillian started, and cleared her throat. “About you, about us. About everything that’s bothering you and if I can help or do something, change something… to make you feel better?”

“Why do you think you can change something?” she sighed and rolled her eyes, apparently not eager to have this conversation with Gillian just now.

Gillian blinked and opened her mouth. “I-, I don't know. I just think it makes things easier when you talk about them openly. To understand better.”

“There’s nothing you need to understand better,” West said pointedly. She sounded a bit dismissive, but it was obvious that she just wasn’t really sure how to handle the situation. She certainly didn’t want to hurt Gillian, but seemed overwhelmed by her own emotions and the need to somehow let her know how she felt.

Gillian raised her eyebrows and asked softly, “Excuse me?”
Sighing deeply, West turned her head and looked at Gillian. “You already know it's not easy for us, but there's nothing you could possibly do about it, because you're already doing everything you can. You're a nice person and I like you a lot. It's just hard to adjust after such a long time and with the distance between us. It's hard… because she's our little sister and we're grateful and happy, but we hardly play a big role in her life, which is sad. I miss my Dad and I miss the life we used to live,” she confessed quietly and smiled gently when Gillian nodded understandingly. “We’d like to have more time with both Mom and Dad, but also with Dad, Eaden and you. I know we’re the older ones and therefore don’t need as much time with our parents anymore, but we’re kind of disconnected, you know?”

“Yes, I know what you mean. But you should also know that you’re entitled to have a lot of time with your parents no matter how old you are. I know it's difficult right now and we're struggling a little bit, but we're working on it and you are our top priority. Not only the little ones, all of you.” Gillian’s voice was calm, but her mind was racing. She had always been anxious about the possibility of them being unhappy with the situation, especially David's kids, who lived so far away. It was one of the first things that had been coming to her mind after she found out about her pregnancy, realizing that things wouldn’t continue to go as smoothly as before. They had never really talked about this possibility before. In fact, they had avoided it successfully so far. And now she realized that this was probably the worst thing they could have done to the kids. Shit, she thought, swallowed the lump in her throat and blinked the upcoming tears from her eyes.

West nodded and gently stroked the baby's back again as she rested her little head tiredly on her sister’s chest. “I know. I really do. I guess the distance is the biggest problem at the moment, because we truly love her and are very grateful to have a healthy little sister. You know, you cannot take this for granted.”

“No, you can’t,” Gillian agreed quietly and raised her arm to put it gently over West's shoulder.

They fell silent for a while and watched the baby watching them while chewing on her hand before West spoke again. “Did he forget us today?” she asked without really wanting to know the answer.

“Well, not exactly. He told me you would come and he looked forward to picking you up, he just got the dates confused,” Gillian replied honestly with an apologetic expression.

West pursed her lips briefly and smiled gently before nodding her head. “Okay, thanks for telling me. And thanks for picking us up.”

“There’s nothing to thank me for.”

Chuckling slightly, West offered the baby her index finger to grab and play with, before saying, “He owes you big time now.”

No, Gillian thought regretfully, we owe you big time.

When David opened the door of Gillian’s bedroom as quietly as possible, it was already way past midnight. He had landed an hour prior to his arrival at her house in Notting Hill, absolutely clueless of what had happened while he was above the clouds. The seven missed calls and fifteen text messages from Téa had scared the hell out of him when he switched his phone from flight mode to online. He nearly had a heart attack when he read her messages, realizing that he’d totally forgotten his children. With all the living in England now for most of the time and flying out to Los Angeles occasionally, he must’ve mixed up the dates Téa had sent him. Her messages ended with a last I’ll kill you out of three, sent six hours ago. She hadn’t left any voice messages, so he immediately called
her as soon as he was out of the plane only to hear that Gillian had literally saved his ass once again. His beautiful hero, who had cried the night before when they were talking on the phone out of sheer exhaustion after her last performance. He’d been really worried about her and now he felt really bad for letting her go through the trouble of taking care of his kids on her own, especially on her first day off.

The room was dark and cool despite the heat outside. He took a brief glance into the co-sleeper, which was still standing beside Gillian’s side of the bed, and smiled softly. The sight of his pretty little girl sleeping soundly, her mouth open just like her mother’s, hands clenched into tiny, moving fists, still made his heart swell with love and pride.

He looked up when the sheets started to rustle and a head full of blonde hair emerged from under the covers. “David?” she slurred tiredly and raised her arm awkwardly in the air.

Letting out a soft chuckle, he took her hand in his, kneeled down on the mattress and kissed her knuckles.

“Yeah, it’s me, beautiful.”

“Mhh,” she murmured and pulled on his hand. “Beautiful, huh? Feelin’ the need to make up for something?”

“I can’t tell you how sorry I am,” he whispered as he climbed in beside her before gathering her close to his chest. “I’m so unbelievably sorry, I don’t know how this could possibly happened.”

Raising her head to look at him, she stroked a few strands of wavy hair out of her face and squinted her eyes. “Hmm, it’s okay. Somehow, it worked out just fine.”

“Thank you so much, Gill. I think I really owe them an apology, hm?”

“Well, West was a little bit bummed and she asked me what happened. I just said you didn’t forget them, but you expected them tomorrow, not today. They’re not angry or something, we had a good time and a good and probably much needed conversation. I was barely able to keep my eyes open, but I really enjoyed having them for myself for once.”

“You’re just a cool Mom to be around.”

“Yeah, sure”, Gillian snickered into his warm chest. His scent had an incredibly soothing effect on her, but she didn’t want to get too carried away.

“You’re hard,” he remarked as he squeezed her against him and bent his head down to search for her lips.

Gillian huffed against his face as he sucked on her lower lip. “Isn’t that what I should say about you?” she chuckled.

“I mean, it’s good you’re done and I’m back to feed you properly again”

“Oh poor me, one week without you and I’m forgetting how to take care of myself,” she deadpanned and pulled a face.

“Come on, I’m just worried. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, David. I can take care of myself, you know.”
“I know you can-”

“Then stop it now, would you?” she spatted at him, sounding annoyed and scooted back before adjusting the pillow underneath her head, sighing deeply.

He scrunched his eyebrows together, obviously confused about the sudden change in her mood. Yesterday she was crying openly, telling him about her bruises, cuts and blisters and reciting the parts of her body that didn’t hurt, which had been a pretty short list. Now that he was there, she seemed distant and eager to avoid this topic. He knew her better than anyone, she was probably ashamed of her little breakdown, now.

“You should probably talk to West about some things. And for their sake, we should talk, too. This can’t go on like this anymore. No one is happy like that, and no one ever will be.” she said coldly and closed her eyes, realizing that this was not the way she had wanted to start this conversation.

David swallowed. This was going downhill faster than he was used to. “She’s not happy? And you aren’t either?” he asked softly and reached for her.

“I didn’t say that”

“Yes you did. You said no one is happy like that and no one will be. Wow, Gillian. Where is that coming from right now, all of a sudden?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered and put her hands over her face at the same time. “I don’t know,” Gillian repeated and started to sob.

He softly grabbed her wrists and pulled her hands from her face. “Gillian, what is this all about? Is this you being exhausted and overwhelmed with everything or is this really something you’re carrying around for some time now?”

“No!” she slightly shook her head, silently cursing herself for being unable to express what she really wanted to say. What she needed to say.

“No?” he asked gently. His expression was worried, and she couldn’t blame him for assuming the worst considering what she just said to him.

“I’m not-. It’s not what I meant, I’m sorry. My head is spinning, David.”

“I know it is, and it’s no wonder. But you wouldn’t say such things just because your head is spinning, would you?”

She shrugged her shoulders and a tear rolled down her left cheek. “I don’t know. The realization that we will never be together as a real family just hit me like a truck today. She is not happy, David. West is not happy at all. She feels disconnected from us. She misses you, she wants more time with you and her mother, which is understandable, right? And seeing them being so sweet with Eaden hurt so much, knowing that after this vacation, they won’t see her for weeks or months again. You know how long it took for West to warm up around us? It shouldn’t be like that, David!” she stated and looked at him, her eyes confirming how serious she was.

“Okay, yes. I agree it shouldn’t be like that, but we can talk about it and change a few things. You just did a time-consuming play and it’s over now, so things will be a lot quieter around here.” he nodded and tried to sound enthusiastic, but failed miserably with his attempt to reassure both of them.

“Ah yes, this family will be in three different cities by November. You in Los Angeles, West and Miller in New York and us here. Wow!” she stated and glared at him before freeing her hands from
his grip. “Let me go, you’re hurting me”

“What are you suggesting? We knew it would be like that, didn’t we?” he asked angrily and looked at her forearms, wondering how on earth he could’ve hurt her. He gasped as he saw them and his expression softened immediately. Her arms were covered in dark, blue bruises. “God, baby,” David whispered, softly stroking her skin with his fingertips. “Listen to me, Gill. We’re doing our best and we will talk to them, okay? We will find a way to make it work without anyone feeling left out. They’re old enough to express their wishes and we will talk to them first thing in the morning, alright? I agree it was a very long time that they haven’t been here, and it wasn’t ideal. I know. Just please stop questioning everything, would you?” he pleaded quietly, looking at her intensely and leaned forward to kiss her forehead. She slowly relaxed in his arms, nodding her agreement and wiped the remaining tears off her face.

She knew this side of herself. This overwhelmed, exhausted Gillian who suddenly thought she had lost control over everything in her life. She knew it, it always happened the same way and she always scared everyone to death with it. Not one of her former partners had been able to deal with her in that state, except David. He knew exactly what it was all about, and he was the only one able to forgive her the shit she said in her dazedness.

“I am happy, we just need to work on a few things for everyone to be as happy as I am. I don’t want to be happy until the kids are happy too. I don’t want to think of West and Miller missing their father because he is here with us and I’m not willing to go to New York.” Gillian finally said.

“You’re not unwilling, you’re bound here in London, and you’ve got commitments here. You love this city.”

“I don’t love this city as much as I love my family. Not as much as I love you, and not even as much as I love your children. If it weren’t for the boys, I would be outta here.” she interrupted him.

“Okay, we can work with that, don’t you think?”

“Yeah,” she agreed after a while and managed a gentle smile.

“Good.” David heaved a sigh. “Jesus, I think I just had my second heart attack today, Gillian.”

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I don’t know what’s gotten into me. And all of this just because I’m too proud to admit that I was indeed not eating as much as I should’ve considering the amount of calories I burn with breastfeeding and doing this play for weeks now. I didn’t think it would get to me like that, I didn’t think it would wear me out like it did. I’m glad you’re back again, because sometimes I really need my man to take care of me, no matter how independent I am... or want to be,” Gillian conceded and finally let him kiss her hello.
The more one does and sees and feels, the more one is able to do, and the more genuine may be one's appreciation of fundamental things like home, and love, and understanding companionship. - Amelia Earhart

Chapter Notes

Chapter 35 - can you believe it? Thank you for sticking around! I hope you enjoy this chapter :)

A very special thanks to justholdinghands, you're the best :)

It was a wonderful, sunny day and still warm enough to swim in the ocean when they arrived in Vancouver four days later, all ready for their two week vacation in Gillian’s house. They had spent hours thinking of the perfect place for a quiet and private last-minute vacation, a place without a lot of tourists and with enough space for the kids. In the end, she knew he loved his privacy more than anything, and while she would've gone to Hawaii or the Fiji’s, all she really wanted this time was a nice, familiar environment to relax and heal, where she wouldn’t have to see other people, besides a few friends maybe. Just herself and her little family. And hopefully, with a lot of time for herself and this tall, handsome, hot man of hers, who hadn’t been able to keep his hands to himself for almost the entire time since she put on that tight summer dress before their departure. Or stopped making suggestive comments for that matter.

As soon as all the bags were packed and it was clear that their flight would be on-time, all the tension that she had developed over the last few weeks had left her body, and apparently his as well. With the prospect of being together without having to be anywhere else, everything seemed so much easier again. She wondered if it really was just the enormous amount of work that had left her this uptight and anxious about everything. Without wanting to play their problems down now, she knew that having a fun time together was exactly what they needed as a family to move on, and look at things with a fresh perspective.

“Do you remember this place, Felix?” Gillian asked under a smile as she followed her youngest son through the open kitchen into the spacious living room.

“Yeah, I do,” he hollered and jumped up and down a few times, looking around curiously. “But the last time we were here, we didn’t have our baby, right?” he observed and ran towards a big window beside the white couch, pressing his face against it for the best possible look at the ocean in front of him.

“You’re right, kiddo,” David nodded and leaned down to whisper into Gillian’s ear, “But we were having a lot of fun making her here, huh?”

“David,” Gillian hissed under a sly chuckle and clicked her tongue.

He raised his chin briefly and grinned. “What, huh?” he murmured and put his arm around her waist, pulling her against him demandingly. Gillian crooked her head to the side and her smile grew into this beautiful, heartfelt smile he would probably kill for. But for now, he decided he’d rather needed to kiss her and leant in, opened his mouth and the last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was her smile fading and her lips puckering into this irresistible, open-mouthed pout before he could feel her
tongue sliding boldly into his mouth just as their lips met. He must’ve growled like a starving animal getting food for the first time in weeks because he could feel her suppressed chuckle before she raised on her toes, put both of her arms around his neck and pulled herself up. He helped her out by pressing her up against his body. The feeling of her little body against his made him nearly dizzy. She had been flirty since they left London, giggling away happily during the whole flight while he made sure to let her know how ridiculously beautiful she looked today, even more so than ever.

It had been a pleasant flight with sleeping children, who were in a good mood and well rested when they landed in Vancouver. A few people had taken pictures of them on both airports, and he was briefly concerned about Gillian’s reaction. He couldn’t fool himself, hiding was impossible like that, so why make a fuss? However, she’d remained calm, even took his hand and smiled at him.

“Oh, my God,” Gillian moaned softly and pulled away with a loud smack. “Do you think we can continue with that as soon as the kids are in bed?” she slurred and put her head in the crook of his neck, inhaling his scent.

Holding her close, he smiled gently, his lips still wet and swollen from their kiss. “If I can keep my hands off you until then, yeah. Or off myself…’ he pointed out and pressed his hips against her body, letting her feel just how much he wanted her.

Gillian snickered and patted his back affectionately. Poor guy couldn’t seem to catch a break today. However, it was too much fun teasing him, and she loved the way he was reacting to her.

“I need a minute, okay?” he requested quietly.

She nodded and gave him a quick peck on his cheek before letting him go, nudging him towards the guest bathroom.

As soon as he closed the door behind him, Oscar and Miller were breathlessly running into the room after they had already explored the upper floors, heading towards Felix who was still standing by the windows.

“Slow down, boys! Careful!” Gillian said and turned her head as Piper walked in with the baby in her arms.

“Mum! Can we go down to the beach? We already put our bags in our rooms!” Oscar asked and pushed his little brother to the left side to reach the door.

“Yes, but don’t go near the water, okay? Keep an eye on Felix!” she called after them, but the three bundles of energy were already out of the door as soon as they heard her say ‘Yes’. She was about to go after them when West jogged in with a baseball in her hands, throwing it in the air and catching it while she walked past them.

“I’m keeping an eye on them,” she said brightly and nodded her head towards the beach while looking at Piper, signaling to follow her.

“Okay, let me take her and go outside to have some fun!” Gillian said to Piper and took the baby from her, putting her against her chest.

“You’re coming, too?” Piper asked and bent down to undo her shoes.

“Yes, I just have to nurse her first. I’m also gonna make some snacks for us.”

“Alright,” Piper replied and followed West outside who was waiting for her to walk down the stairs to the beach.
Eaden turned her head to look after them, bracing herself on her little hands against Gillian’s chest to get a better look. As soon as she realized she was left behind and wouldn’t be able to participate in all the fun, her face literally fell apart. Eyebrows scrunched together in concern, she stuck out her full bottom lip and it took only one more second before she squeezed her eyes shut and cried heartbreakingly.

“Oh” Gillian chuckled and patted her back firmly. “Are they leaving you behind? Oh, you’re such a poor baby,” she said and leaned down to kiss her rosy little cheeks. “Hmm, sweet little girl, it’s alright. We’ll join them as soon as you had your lunch, okay?”

“Hey, cranky pants, what’s the matter?” David asked as he emerged beside them and laughed at the sight of his daughter’s angry face and the way she was pulling on her mother’s hair. She seemed to be a fast learner, so he wasn’t surprised that after she first realized she could actually get people’s full attention by pulling on their hair, she did it almost every time she felt she was being treated unfairly. She was developing such a feisty little personality, it was hilarious and scary at the same time.

“They went down to the beach without her,” Gillian said and tried to open the little hand that was grabbing at her hair, bending her head down to avoid losing more hair than she already did since her pregnancy.

He clicked his tongue and raised his hands to help her out. Eaden had a strong grip, especially when she was mad, and he wasn’t able to open her fist without hurting her, so he tickled the underside of her chin with his index finger to get her attention.

“No, we don’t pull on hair, Eaden! No, no, it’s owie!” he explained seriously and started to stroke her hand softly, but she didn’t let go and instead started to scream even louder, big tears rolling down her cheeks now. “Oh boy, the future looks bright with such a little hurricane,” David pointed out and raised his eyebrow at Gillian, who just sighed in defeat.

He reached into the right front pocket of his jeans and retrieved a pair of keys, held them up and jiggled them in front of Eaden’s face.

She opened her eyes, stopped screaming and hiccupped a few times, watching the keys for a while before slowly letting go of Gillian’s hair and reaching for David’s hand.

“Jesus,” David chuckled and shook his head in disbelief. “Did she just had her first temper tantrum?”

Gillian huffed and shook her head, flinging her hair behind her shoulders. “I wish it was her first! She did the exact same thing last week when she was lying on the floor beside the boys and they started to play with their Star Wars Lego-Set. I was scared she would put something in her mouth and choke on it, so I picked her up. She looked at me like ‘What the hell are you doing’ and instantly started to cry and pull on my hair. You know, I was so baffled for a minute I thought that I actually forgot our sweet little girl somewhere and accidentally took another baby with me!”

“No, that’s definitely your daughter. I’d recognize this angry face everywhere.” He laughed and stepped into Gillian, put his arm around her waist and nuzzled her hair with his nose. Eaden averted her eyes from the key and looked at him before she reached out and hit him in his face with her chubby little hand. “Ouch!” he cried out, making the baby fall into a fit of giggles.

“That’s not nice, Eaden!” Gillian scolded, but wasn’t able to suppress a smile.

“Now you’re also jealous? Look at this!” David said and started to kiss Gillian’s cheek, moving on to her mouth and was planting a few smacking kisses on her lips while they both watched the baby’s reaction. “Hmm, Daddy loves Mommy, too. You need to share her, she’s not only yours,” he
quipped playfully, happy to notice the little smile that was emerging on the baby’s pouty lips. “Ah, see? Sharing is not so hard. Look, Mommy’s sharing me, too,” he said and kissed the baby’s cheek, making her gurgle happily.

As probably every five-month-old baby, Eaden was happy and content again as soon as Gillian made herself comfortable on the couch and pulled the strap of her dress down her shoulder while David made himself busy in the kitchen, trying to make some snacks for lunch.

It was a nice thing to live in your own, familiar house on vacation, and she appreciated having a full fridge and clothes in the drawers when she arrived. It made things much easier, especially with six kids.

When the baby latched on, she leaned back, closed her eyes and listened to the loud shrieking and laughing coming from outside. Nothing in the world made her happier than knowing they were happy and having fun together, because nothing mattered more to her. The last few days had been rough, especially because of the way she had messed up the night he came home. She was still embarrassed about it and it hurt every time he leaned down to kiss her or show any kind of affection, remembering the look on his face when she said the things she had said so thoughtlessly right into his face. The conversation they had with West the other day, where they had talked about her wishes and expectations, had been a piece of cake compared to that.

She looked over her shoulder and watched him putting peanut butter and jelly on a sandwich. In the last one and a half years, he had given her more than she could have ever asked for. He was a devoted, honest and encouraging partner for her and became a caring and loving father to their daughter. He had said numerous times that she was the one he wanted to get old with, the only one he wanted to be with ever again. She wondered if she had ever really let him know that she felt the same for him. Maybe it was time to remind him of that.

Despite their best intentions to continue where they had stopped in the kitchen before lunch, the evening ended with both of them falling asleep on the couch while cuddling with the kids and watching Finding Nemo. After he’d fed and changed the baby, tucked everyone in their own beds and wished them a good night, he lifted her exhausted body from the sofa and carried her upstairs. Her bedroom was, as were all the bedrooms in every house or apartment she owned, cozy and inviting. He had always loved the way she decorated her houses, especially her private rooms. She stirred and hummed her approval when he eased her down onto the bed and pulled the covers up to her head, just how she liked it. He snuggled close to her after a quick shower without waking her, carefully and softly stroking her hair and face, taking his time to indulge in her beauty and grace before he also drifted off to sleep.

As expected, the baby’s sleep was restless this particular night. David got up with her four times, took care of her diapers and had to wake Gillian only once when it was time to feed her. At 9am in the morning, all three of them were still dozing in bed, Eaden resting on David’s chest, contently sucking on her pacifier while slowly waking up and watching her mother, who was comfortably lying in the crook of David’s arm, blowing her kisses and making faces.

The soft tapping of feet and some muffled mumbling behind their closed bedroom door indicated that it was finally time to start the day. Looking at David under a soft smile, she lifted herself just enough to give him a quick kiss on the lips before calling out, “You can come in!”

The door opened slowly and Gillian could hear Piper reminding her younger brothers to enter the
room quietly just before Oscar walked in, closely followed by Felix and Miller, who were each carrying a bottle of juice.

“Good morning.” Gillian smiled happily and scooted up.

“Morning, Mummy! Morning, David,” Felix whispered and walked to her side, put the bottle on the nightstand and climbed in beside her.

“Good morning, guys. Did you have a good night?” David asked as West and Piper entered the room with two breakfast trays. “Wow, look at that!”

“Eaden was loud tonight,” Oscar complained and climbed onto the bed after Miller, both of them crawling up to sit in the middle between David and Gillian.

“Oh, wow,” David chuckled and made room for them by scooting closer to the edge. “Good thing the bed’s big enough for everyone! What do you have there?” he asked, nodding towards the trays.

“We’ve made toast with soft boiled eggs and banana omelette. Thought you might like to stay in bed a little longer after this night. We’re all still pretty tired,” Piper replied and sat down beside her mother’s feet, putting the tray in the middle of the bed. West did the same and lay down beside David, who put his arm around her shoulder and kissed her forehead.

“Wow, thank you very much!” Gillian said when the kids started to help themselves with the food and beverages.

“David, do you know what tonight is?” Felix asked and giggled from his position on top of Gillian. Chuckling at Felix’ excited and teasing tone, David took a sip of his orange juice and asked cheerfully, “No, tell me!”

“Felix-,” Piper tried to interrupt him, but the boys started to giggle louder before Oscar exclaimed loudly, “It’s date night!”

“It was supposed to be a surprise! You are such a chatterbox!” West shook her head and lifted the baby on top of her.

“Mum wants to go on date night, David!” Oscar piped up.

“Oscar!” Gillian groaned and ruffled his head, shaking her head with a sly smile. She probably should have stuck with only telling the girls about her plan to take David out while she’d asked them if they would watch the boys and the baby. Next time she wanted to surprise him, she would definitely not inform these chatty little boys about her intentions.

“Really?” David asked surprised. “With whom?” he asked teasingly, pretending to be absolutely clueless.

“Oh, Dad,” Miller murmured.

“Huh? Oh, you mean like… with me?” he smirked and looked at Gillian, who hid her face in Felix’ hair, chuckling with embarrassment. “So date night it is,” he said softly and reached behind the boys to stroke Gillian’s cheek with his index finger.

***
Even though their table was located in a more private area of one of Vancouver’s best upscale restaurants, she still had to muffle her laughter after a few guests had already craned their necks, glaring at her angrily for having such a good time.

They usually preferred more casual places where they did not stand on ceremony that much, but the place had been recommended to her for its beef striploin and the seared yellowfin tuna. And she really wanted to treat him to a nice dinner, which she knew he would appreciate, and an entire evening just for themselves.

She was already digging into her dark chocolate cake with gusto after a wonderful dinner, satisfied and happy, her belly full with good food and tingling from all the laughing and bantering.

Shaking his head with a tiny pout on his lips, he took another sip of his white wine and leaned back. “I still don’t know if I want to hear it, actually.”

“Oh come on, you weren’t that jealous back then, were you?” she asked playfully and stretched her right leg, slowly running it up and down the length of his calve as she seductively bit into the right corner of her bottom lip.

David clicked his tongue and she could literally start to feel the heat that was building up in him. The muscles of his jaw worked hard and he averted his eyes, unsure if he should finally give in and let her tell the story he secretly wanted to hear for more than 15 years. On the other hand, he really didn’t want to know, actually already knew enough of that one night she knocked at his door, crying and laughing at the same time, high after smoking a few joints and, at that time, unable to tell him what had actually happened. Or unwilling. All he knew was that this had been the last night she was in a relationship with this 8-Pack guy, whom he’d despised immensely from the very beginning. Not because he was a bad person, not from what she’d told him, but just because Rodney had been with her, touching her, fucking her, loving her… and he hadn’t. At least not before he had made sure she was okay and unharmed on that particular evening. The way she had touched him that night and the way she’d let him touch her was enough for him to question the events prior to her visit. Until today, he hadn’t been able to get something out of her.

“I was exactly that jealous,” David admitted and watched her studying his eyes. “So, are you gonna tell me now or what?”

She looked down at her cake again, carefully considering his request with a slight smirk on her face. “You know,” she began and licked her lips. “Rodney’s a very passionate actor. And a very-, passionate lover”

David grimaced in disgust and shook his head. “Eww!”

Chuckling, Gillian put the last piece of cake in her mouth and closed her eyes sensually, savoring the delicious combination of dark chocolate and chili. “You’re already done listening?”

“No, no! Please, continue,” he nodded encouraging and took a big sip out of his glass, preparing himself to be able to handle whatever she would throw at him.

“So, um-,” she swallowed and took a moment before she continued. “He was really into roleplay,” she said and smirked in her unique, seductive way, looking from underneath her eyelashes, cheeks slightly flushing.

“Oh!” David raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“M-hm,” Gillian hummed her approval. “And he was pretty ambitious, and also kind of jealous.”
She looked at him briefly before putting knife and fork on her plate. He was looking at her with sincere interest. She noticed with satisfaction that curiosity had finally taken the upper hand of him and continued, “First, he wanted me to pretend I was Scully while he’d been Ed, and we would reconstruct the night they’d spent together. You know, it was fun at the beginning, but he wasn’t very interested in playing many other characters. Well, after some time, I noticed he really seemed to have a problem with Mulder, making snarky comments about him while he was pretending to be Ed, until he actually proposed to play Mulder. Well, we did that for a while, and he was so ambitious to be better than— well, you, I guess… I don’t know. Um, it was bizarre, because as Ed, he talked bad about Mulder, and as Mulder, all he wanted to do was kill Ed, after he had fucked me as Mulder.”

David snorted disapproving, shook his head and cringed as he envisioned the scene she had just described. Jesus, he had never thought about trying such a thing with her, and he felt arousal and jealousy rise within him.

“And, you know, looking back, I should’ve suspected what came next, but on this particular night and after a few joints, he wanted me to call him David,” Gillian said in a low voice and raised her eyebrows at David.

“Whaaat-,” he exclaimed and leaned forward.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. I guess so, at least. I was so high that night…”

David nodded. “Oh yes.”

“And I think at some point he realized that I had a little too much and wasn’t able to give him what he needed that night, so he called a friend, and before I knew it, two other people were with us in his apartment. A guy and another girl. I don’t remember the other guy very vividly, but he sat down with me on the couch while Rodney engaged with this girl. And I didn’t even realize he was making out with her on the floor in front of us until he actually moaned my name into her breasts, and she just answered, ‘How do you want to fuck me, David?’”

“Oh my god,” David breathed out and his jaw dropped, wrinkles of surprise formed on his forehead as he raised his eyebrows up high. “Are you fucking serious?” he asked, put his hand over his face and started to snicker quietly.

“Yes, I’m afraid so,” Gillian nodded and pressed her lips together into a tight line. “Needless to say, that’s when I walked out of there.”

“Good girl!” David laughed, still shaking his head in disbelief, but pleased as he reminded himself where she went after leaving Rodney’s house.

“The best thing is that this girl actually became his wife”

“No, you’re kidding!”

She smiled sweetly at him. “Nope, it’s true”

“God, I-, um, wow! I’m-, I’m actually hard now.”

She burst out into this wonderful, high-pitched laugh he loved so much and, once again, earned the disapproving looks of some other guests. She briefly looked down at her entwined hands before looking up at him from under her lashes, smiling shyly as he started to laugh wholeheartedly himself.

***
The night was her favourite time of the day to go out in public and do what every couple was supposed to do in private. Taking a nice stroll around a beautifully illuminated harbour, for example. She had briefly considered doing something fancy, splurge on a nice cruise on a yacht or something like that. But that wasn’t them, never had been, and she knew he was at his happiest when he could explore the world on his own, holding her hand while they watched other people walking by without giving a fuck who they were.

Therefore, instead of renting a yacht, she secretly packed a blanket, and, since she was still breastfeeding, sparkling cider as well as two plastic cups. On this warm and beautiful evening, she did not want to go on a walk with him, but wanted to do something they had never done before. On their way home, she parked their car at the small parking lot belonging to Panorama Park in Deep Cove, not far away from her house. She loved this park with its gorgeous view over the water, trees and mountains. She had visited a number of local festivals and concerts at his park to know it was a true hidden treasure. However, she had never been here when the sun was setting, but imagined the cove to be beautifully illuminated at that time.

He looked at her questioningly, but she only smiled at him before she got out and retrieved the blanket and a basket from the trunk, waiting for him to follow her.

“Wow, you’re really spoiling me with this romantic date tonight, aren’t you?” he asked under a grin after he hopped out of the car and took the basket from her hand.

She shrugged her shoulders and bummed into him as they started to walk towards the park side by side. “Oh, you know, I might.”

Inhaling the fresh, warm air, he smiled down at her and put his hand on the small of her back. “It’s beautiful here, are we going to have a picnic in the park?”

“No, we’re not having a picnic in the park,” she teased and grinned up at him, visibly proud of the little plan she had made in practically no time.

“There’s music,” he pointed his index finger to their left where he had detected people sitting in the grass, listening and swaying to what he recognized as Jazz music.

“Yep, don’t worry! We’ll hear it where I’ll take you.”

“Hmm”, he murmured excitedly and followed her along a trail towards the water. They walked past the park to the right side took some stairs to get even closer to the water. Although he was really starting to wonder where she was taking him, the little walk was comfortable and relaxing. Over the years, he’d adjusted his speed to hers after realizing she was always noticing so many little things around them just because she allowed herself to take the time. He wasn’t the rushed, restless guy that he used to be anymore, now able to actually enjoy her unhurried pace and the calmness it provided for both of them. Grinning to himself, he looked up and detected a long, wooden house by the beach. Except for an old man sitting in front of the house on a camp chair, the place was deserted.

As the man heard them coming closer, he turned his head to look in their direction, smiled and got up. “Good evening!” he greeted kindly and extended his hand towards Gillian. “You’re the lady who wanted to rent the boat and use the platform this evening?”

“Hi, and yes, that’s me,” Gillian replied and shook the man’s hand before he also greeted David.

“Great, I’m Seth, let me walk you to the shore, everything’s ready. No worries, the sea’s calm
tonight, you shouldn’t have any problems reaching the platform. You’ll recognize it by the blue light, can you see it?” he asked and pointed towards the sea. Gillian’s gaze followed his finger and she needed a moment to notice the bright blue light not far away to their left.

“Yes, I see it,” she nodded as they reached the wooden boat on the shore.

“Good. The blue light is located underneath the platform, but it will provide a subtle light on top of it, just enough to see what’s around you and where the edges are. You’ll also get a little table lantern, you know, for the romantic flair,” he winked and grinned mischievously. “Once you’re there, make sure to tie the boat up to the stake, okay? If something’s wrong, just use the flashlight inside the steel box on the platform, where you can also find the life-vests. I’m expecting you back at 11 pm. If you’re not back by then, don’t you worry, I’ll find you!” he said and laughed.

Nodding silently, Gillian turned her head and looked at David, who licked his lips before a sly smirk graced his glistening lips. He raised his eyebrows at her and gestured towards the boat.

“Well then, ladies first,” he said blithely and chuckled when she looked back at the boat, apparently not so sure anymore if this had been a good idea after all.

“Alright,” Gillian said bravely and climbed in, glad that she had decided to wear an elegant, yet comfortable dark blue summer dress for the evening.

Once David was sitting on the other seat across from her, Seth put an electric table lantern between the two before David grabbed both ends of the oars, waited until Seth had pushed them further into the water and wished them a fun evening before he started to row.

As soon as the boat started moving, she put her hand in front of her mouth, only able to suppress her laugh until Seth was out of sight before she burst out, leaned forward and patted his knee in apology.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, this is so creepy!” she laughed and looked around. It wasn’t pitch-dark yet, and the lights from the shore were illuminating the Cove beautifully, but she was slightly scared nonetheless. “This boat doesn’t seem very solid,” she observed and knocked on the wood.

He chuckled, shaking his head as he looked past her towards the platform. “I love it, this is hilarious!”

She groaned doubtfully and clutched the basked close to her chest.

“Come one, admit it! You just wanted to play Mulder and Scully again!” David teased jokingly and looked back at the shore. They were passing the park now and were able to hear the music again.

“David,” Gillian moaned, her expression a little frightened and uncertain. He winked at her reassuringly and she sighed deeply, courageously reaching down into the water, as if this little gesture would suddenly make her feel in control of things, and let it run through her fingers.

“Careful, Scully!” he warned. “This sea monster we’re trying to find here might want to take a bite of such a beautiful woman.” David laughed quietly and tilted his head. “You’re okay?”

“Hmm, yes. I think I’m getting there”

“Have I told you how incredibly beautiful you look tonight?” he asked and smiled, still able to see her blushing.

“Thank you,” she smiled broadly, aware that she was looking pretty nice tonight, thanks to West and Piper, who had applied the most subtle but efficient make-up on her.
“So, we’re like investigating undercover, right? Because Scully never looked that hot before!” David pointed out and navigated them more to the right.

She huffed and gently nudged his calve with the tip of her wedges.

“Jesus, Gill. That was one heck of a story. I can’t get over it”

“Really, David? I couldn’t tell”

“Oh, we’re reaching the platform, watch out!” David warned just moments before they bumped against the metallic border. He pulled them close to the platform before extending his left hand, offering her a little help to get out. She was giggling girlishly as she clumsily climbed on top of the platform before taking the rope to prevent the boat from floating away and started to tie it to the stake.

When she was finished, he handed her the blanket, lantern and the basket before climbing out and up the two steps of the latter himself. Standing up, he put his hands on his hips and looked back towards the shore.

“Wow,” David exhaled. The view was breathtakingly beautiful and absolutely worth the effort to get to this little platform in the middle of the cove. The park right in front of them was gorgeously illuminated by the last rays of the sun setting right behind it, lanterns and lights from the stage. He could barely make out some people sitting in the grass, listening to the music and enjoying the evening. One light after the other was turned on in the houses located on the shore to their right. Seth was right, the platform itself was softly lit by the blue light underneath and the little lantern he had given them.

She nodded in agreement. “Yeah, this is incredible.”

He turned his head and looked down at her. Over 20 years with her, and he could still answer the question if he loved her even more than the day before with a certain yes. Everyday. Always.

“Come here,” he whispered, put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her against his chest. As the scent of her favourite perfume filled his nose, he put his chin on top of her head and smiled contently.

“Mmh,” she purred dreamily against his chest.

“You always have the best ideas,” he conceded and kissed her forehead. “The music sounds great”

“M-hm, you want to sit down? I brought something to drink,” she grinned, patted his butt playfully and bent down to retrieve the things she’d packed from the little basket while he laid out the blanket. The lights from the shore were still bright enough out here for her to open the bottle of sparkling cider and pour it into their cups without spilling something on the blanket while David sat down behind her. She settled between his legs, welcoming the hand that encircled her waist and handed him his cup.

“Oh, classy,” David chuckled, looking at the white plastic cup in his hand. “Just like old times. Cheers!”

“Cheers,” she sighed comfortably, took a sip and crossed her legs.

“You cold?” he asked as he watched her smoothing the fabric of her dress, which barely reached to her knees, over her upper thigh.

She shook her head slightly and leaned herself back against his chest. “No, it’s lovely.”
They silently listened to the music for a while, gently swaying with the beat whenever one of them felt like it. He gently stroked little circles on her bare arm with his fingertips, sending tiny shivers through her entire body. He kissed her neck a couple of times and chuckled as goosebumps rose on the soft skin of her arms underneath his fingers.

After the seventh song, Gillian shifted in his arms again until she was able to look up at his face sideways. He tilted his head questioningly and narrowed his eyes before she spoke softly.

“A few weeks ago, you gave me this ring, telling me it means whatever I wanted it to mean.”

He searched her eyes and blinked a few times before nodding slowly.

“I um-, I was a little disappointed, to be honest. I wasn’t expecting you to propose to me right after your divorce… or at all. But I guess a part of me wanted to hear it nonetheless. I was disappointed until I realized that-, that you just wanted to let me know how you really felt without taking the control out of my hands. You know me so well to give me everything I want without taking anything I need,” she said, looking at him expectantly. He remained silent, watching her thoughtfully without breaking eye contact. “I mean, um-,” she laughed nervously, “Of course I could be wrong.”

“No,” he interrupted her. “No, you’re not wrong. It is exactly what I meant. To be completely honest, it’s not like marriage is essential to me at this point of my life. We’re already-, more than married. We’ve always been, at least in my mind. The piece of paper or the blessing of a priest are not going to bring me more love for you, more happiness and contentment or would fulfil me more in any possible way. You do it, every day. Our daughter does it. Knowing you’re happy does it too,” he said, his words genuine and weighing heavy. “If you ever want to do it though, I’m totally game,” he added and grinned mischievously.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” she smiled widely and stretched to kiss him. When her lips parted just a tiny bit, his hand came up to her neck, pulling her closer before he opened his mouth and let his tongue slide between her lips.

With the first contact of their tongues, she moaned into his mouth and raised her arm to the back of his head, searching for something to hold onto while he was kissing her breathlessly. His hair was soft under her fingers and she found a good place right behind his ear. In the meantime, she wiggled her left arm under his right, fumbled with the hem of his shirt and put her hand between the white fabric and the warm, soft skin of his back. She couldn’t describe the feeling that rose within her every time she touched the skin of this tall, muscular man. He felt strong and masculine under her hands, but also as soft and smooth as butter. He was her anchor in so many ways.

With a last gentle squeeze, his right hand travelled from her upper arm down towards her thigh, fingers demandingly pressing into her soft flesh and starting to bunch the fabric of her dress a little higher.

His lips had left her mouth and were now on her jawline, kissing their way down to her throat where he found a good spot, sucked once and softly bit into.

She hissed in surprise but immediately started to giggle into his neck as he did it again. With her cheeks resting against his soft, warm shoulder, she inhaled his musky scent and closed her eyes as she snuggled closer until she could hear his heart beating fast in his chest.

A soft breeze blew over her now fully exposed thighs and she felt his hand sneak under her dress, fingers tracing the lace of her panties before a bold one slipped in. Licking her lips in anticipation, she concentrated on the movements of his hand, feeling it dipping deeper into her panties until his fingers rested on top of her labia and started to stroke her. She opened her legs a little wider for him,
granting his hand more room to explore and started to push herself against it.

His other hand pushed the slim black strap of her dress off her shoulder and he dipped his head lower to kiss her collARBone first, and then even lower to push the fabric that was loosely covering her breast down with his nose. She leaned back and watched as his nose made contact with her erect nipple and his open mouth latched onto the underside of her tit, gently sucking on her flesh.

“Oh god,” she moaned as the hand that was fondling her neck cupped the breast and squeezed it demandingly under his hungry eyes. At the same time, one of his fingers inside her panties found its way between her folds and dipped into her moist and aroused center. She whimpered and dug her nails into his back as she could feel his finger curl and move up to her clit, gently spreading her own fluids around it before he started to draw small circles on it.

“You like that?” he whispered in a low voice, drunk with arousal and lust. He had never been shy when it came to his desire, but the way he was looking at her tonight, groping her body like he had to mark her as his was nearly torturous in a very pleasant way.

She nodded but gently removed his hand from under her panties, put her right arm around his neck and braced herself against him to get on her knees. He looked at her quizzically as she hopped onto her wedges and stood in front of him, lips swollen from his attack. The strap of her dress hang down her arm, exposing just a bit of the creamy white skin of her breast.

“I like it, but I want you. Now.” She grinned and looked into his eyes as she slightly bent over, and reached under her dress, pulling her black panties down her legs in one swift move.

David gulped visibly and blinked rapidly as she stepped out of them and quickly looked around. It was just them, the dark sea and soft music from the shore far away.

He must have zoned out for a moment, because when he looked up at her again, licking his lips, she looked at him expectantly, as if she was waiting for him to do something. He raised his eyebrow and she snorted with a soft smile on her lips, gesturing towards his legs.

Oh, of course.

“You’re the boss.” He chuckled nervously and closed his legs, earning a satisfied nod before she braced herself on his shoulder and sat down with her knees on the floor beside his thighs.

“You’re damn right,” she whispered seductively into his ear. Putting both of her arms around his neck with a sly grin on her face, pleased to see him at a loss for words, she tilted her head slightly and planted a lingering kiss on his mouth. It was gentle and slow, so much different from the previous one, but still so wonderful. He inhaled through his nose and wrapped his arms around her tiny body, pressing her against him.

As the kiss deepened, his hands began to roam over her body, stroking the exposed skin of her back and once again pushing the fabric of her dress up her thigh, trying to get a glimpse of what was hiding underneath.

He could smell her arousal now, and the scent made his nostrils flare in sensual pleasure.

His erection pressed painfully against the hard fabric of his dark blue jeans and felt immensely relieved when she snug her hand between them and started to unbutton his belt. However, she really took her sweet time with it, and he stopped kissing her to put her other hand down there, making her chuckle as he moved his hands up her thighs and over her hips, lifting the dress so he was finally able to get a glimpse of her sweet, glistening folds in the soft light of the lantern.
“Jesus,” David growled. His heart pounded rapidly against his chest and he licked his lips at the sight of his woman wanting him. He wanted to taste her so badly, but that had to wait until later.

He moaned when her fingers grazed over his erection as she quickly unzipped his fly, finally freeing him from the tightness inside his pants and pushed her hand through the opening of his boxers. He was rock hard by now, and she didn’t have to search for him too long before he felt her warm hand around his length, pulling him carefully out of his underwear and into the dark night.

He hid his face in the crook of her neck when she started to stroke him, occasionally circling the head of his penis with her thumb, spreading the little drops of precum over it and using it as lubrication.

She was usually one who loved to tease him, prolonging her sweet torture on him until he was about to give up. This time, she didn’t seem to be able to wait that long herself, fidgeting impatiently in his lap until she gave in and brought her hips towards his.

She was incredibly wet when she dragged his cock through her swollen folds, rubbing her clit against it a few times before she slid down on his erection with a soft moan.

He covered her exposed breasts with his large hands and squeezed until he was completely inside of her. Loving the way he filled her completely, she didn’t want to waste any time and immediately lifted herself up again until he was almost sliding out of her before she sat down again, repeating this motion a few times, very slowly, until she felt one of his hands on the small of her back, gently but firmly pressing her flush against him.

Gillian opened her mouth and moaned softly as his tongue found her throat again and licked her tingling skin. She increased her speed and changed her technique, now grinding her hips frantically against him, rubbing her clit on his pelvis with every stroke.

“Yeah,” he panted into her ear before kissing it softly.

With a tug on his neck, she got from her knees on her feet without breaking their connection, her body pressing even more into his than before. He groaned as she felt herself slide deeper into her and put his hands on her firm ass, guiding her up and down without setting the speed.

And suddenly, there it was. He could feel her inner walls clenching around him as she grabbed his neck, desperately clinging to him as if she was drowning.

“I can feel you,” he whispered. “God, you’re coming.”

“Yeah,” she whimpered breathlessly. Feeling the incredible need to take him with her, she clenched her inner muscles around him and panted against his neck. “Come with me,” she whispered, put her open mouth firmly on his throat and licked it with the tip of her tongue. She ground herself against him another four times before going rigid and arched her back. He was buried deep inside of her and held her tight against him as both of them cried out loudly before a familiar warmth filled her body.

She hummed after a while, her breathing had evened out again, her head was comfortably resting on his shoulder and his hands caressed her back gently. Their lovemaking had changed so much in the last year. With her pregnancy, the birth and all the changes her body, mind and soul had to go through, the emotional aspect of it had increased tremendously. She had always been able to feel a certain, unique connection between them, but now it was deeper and stronger than ever and anything she had ever experienced. She just knew he felt it, too.

“Yeah,” he murmured his approval. “You always have the best ideas.”
It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness. - Charles Spurgeon

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your lovely comments and all your support! Can't put into words how much that means to me!
And thank you, my dear justholdinghands, for your wonderful input <3

Erin had warned her insistently. Multiple times. One could think she’d be experienced enough after raising three children, but apparently, there were still things she needed to learn the hard way with her fourth child. Things to do with your baby and better not to do at a certain age. Flying with a teething six-month-old would fall into the last category. However, it wasn’t like she had that much of a choice in that matter.

While David started to shoot Aquarius in Los Angeles after their vacation, she’d kept herself occupied with doing interviews and photo shoots for various magazines like Vogue and Red Magazine. Having a whole month only for the kids had been necessary and wonderful, but it got increasingly difficult to spend time away from David, but also more exciting every time they’d see each other again.

With their busy schedules, it was getting hard to ensure enough time for him with his little daughter, and the idea of spending a whole summer together to shoot The X-Files started to sound pretty good to her. Maybe, just maybe, she should reconsider doing it, even though she swore she wouldn’t after her agent had told her she’d get half the amount of money David had been offered. Despite his disappointment, he understood her decision and encouraged her to stand up for herself by refusing to sign the contract for a new season. They’d been on her heels after her declination, now literally begging her to get on board, offering the same amount and some time off to fly back to London to see the boys.

She sighed heavily and looked down at her beautiful, horribly suffering little girl looking up at her under hiccups, holding her hand and clinging to Gillian’s turquoise t-shirt as if she feared her mother would leave her alone any minute. Soothingly stroking the soft fuzz of reddish, very light brown hair, which was becoming blonder by the day, she watched as the tears ran down the baby’s hot, red and puffy cheeks while humming softly to her.

Gillian had paced the floor of the plane from London to New York for nearly four hours with an apologetic expression on her face while she rocked her baby, who was screaming in pain and confusion, chewing on her fist and rubbing her own ear like a lunatic. She had earned a lot of understanding, empathetic smiles from other passengers, knowing too well that it was mostly because they’d recognized her. However, she had indeed noticed the relieved sighs when she went to her seat again, asked the flight attendant to chill Eaden’s bumpy teething ring and gave her some Tylenol.

Whimpering slightly, Eaden pulled on Gillian’s shirt and grimaced. “Shh, Mommy’s here, baby, it’s alright,” Gillian whispered and gently wiped some excess drool off her mouth before continuing to stroke her head.

A young flight attendant walked up to them and kneeled down beside Gillian. “Here’s the teething
“Thank you so much,” Gillian replied before giving Eaden the ring, watching as she inspected it and finally decided it was good enough to put into her mouth. “That’s better, hm?” Gillian whispered and chuckled quietly.

The flight attendant smiled warmly before saying, “What a sweet little girl. Please call me if you need something else.”

“Thank you,” Gillian nodded gratefully as the young woman walked away. “Does it feel nice, baby? I’m sorry it hurts so much. Teeth are so mean, huh? Do you think you can sleep a little before we see Daddy again? What do you think, sweetheart?” she spoke softly and smiled under the baby’s curious observation. Eaden yawned heartily and hold the ring up, offering it to Gillian, who started to chuckle. “Thank you!” Gillian said brightly and took the ring. “Oh, that’s slobbery, you should keep that young lady. It’ll make falling asleep so much easier. Here, see?” she said and let the baby grab the ring again to put it right back into her mouth. Smiling proudly, Gillian bowed her head and kissed her daughter’s forehead. “Good girl. Let’s have a little nap now, okay? We’re going to see Daddy soon, we don’t want to be cranky for him, right?” she whispered and started to caress her face again. Eaden seemed to love when Gillian gently ran her fingers over her forehead, stroking the soft hair aside while her eyes grew heavy and she was slowly drifting off to sleep. This time though, the only one she was lulling to sleep with her recurring motions was herself. Although the baby seemed to be more relaxed and not in that much pain anymore, sleep wasn’t in the realm of possibilities for the little one.

For the next two hours, she kept her mother awake and occupied by squirming restlessly on her lap, drooling all over the place and constantly wanting to nurse for comfort. She already was a determined and demanding little girl, knowing pretty well what she wanted and learning everyday how to get what she wanted. Gillian had started to recognize so many personality traits of both her and David combined in Eaden, making her a good-hearted, spunky, and also a very intelligent little girl, starting to strive for every bit of independence. She was by far the most challenging baby out of her four children, and Gillian could not just blame her advanced age for that fact.

On their way from JFK to David’s apartment, Gillian must’ve drifted off in the cab while leaning over Eaden’s car seat, her head resting in her palm when two little feet started to kick her. Her daughter, who had successfully fought napping, was brightly chewing on her right fist while reaching out for Gillian’s face. Lifting her head, Gillian looked out of the window next to the baby, noticing that they were already driving along Central Park. She felt refreshed when they arrived, quickly adjusted her unruly hair before getting out and letting the concierge carry the infant car seat into the spare room in the joint-basement of the apartment building.

While standing in line at Customs and Border Protection at JFK, she had suddenly felt awfully hungry and sent him a message, asking him to get everything for a cozy evening in front of the TV. Therefore, she wasn’t surprised to walk into an empty apartment. He usually never had unhealthy snacks for a proper TV-night around.

After putting her suitcase into the bedroom, she walked into the living room with the baby in her arms, smiling as she approached the windows with the beautiful view over Central Park. She loved this place. It was quiet and peaceful, providing enough privacy without being in the middle of nowhere. It had taken her a good deal of time to get accustomed to this city, but with every time she came back now, she fell more in love with it.

“Look,” Gillian whispered into Eaden’s ear, her face wet with the tears she cried since Gillian had lifted her out of her car seat. Pointing her index finger out of the window, she planted a few soft
kisses on her baby’s warm cheeks, before continuing, “That’s Central Park. Daddy’s surely going to take you out for a run while Mommy’s signing books. What do you think of that, hm? You love sitting in the stroller while someone’s pushing you really fast, don’t you? That’s going to be so much fun, baby. Hopefully you’ll feel better by then, huh?”

Eaden hiccupped and put her head tiredly on Gillian’s shoulder. Rubbing her little back up and down, Gillian sighed and headed towards the bathroom to freshen up and change their clothes into something more comfortable.

***

Gillian felt something tickle her cheek and stirred, unconsciously trying to hold on to sleep as it receded from her. She inhaled deeply and squinted her eyes. The smell of David’s freshly washed sheets and his wonderful, unique scent filled her nose and she smiled contently. Exhaling with a soft moan, she finally opened her eyes, finding David leaning over her with a warm smile on his face. He was tickling her with a curly streak of her own blonde hair that he held between his fingers. A sweet tingle filled her belly, reminding her once again that this was definitely the man she loved.

“Hey, babe,” he said quietly, let go of the streak and ran his fingers through the length of her hair, indulging in its softness.

“Hey,” Gillian replied hoarsely before clearing her throat. Looking around, she remembered lying down in his bed after she had washed her face and changed the baby’s diaper. Eaden was comfortably sleeping next to Gillian where David’s pillow would normally be, her soft snoring the only noise in David’s quiet bedroom. “Hmm, I must’ve fallen asleep.”

“Just a little nap, I guess. I haven’t been gone for long.”

Leaning down, he kissed the sides of her mouth softly before putting his lips on hers. He’d initiated a slow kiss, but as she opened her mouth and her lips closed around his, he could feel her tongue demandingly brushing over his lips.

“Oh, someone’s deprived of kissing,” he stated under a smirk, making her murmur into his mouth before he felt her arms around his neck, pulling him down closer to her as she deepened the kiss.

Carefully rolling her to the side without disturbing the baby, he snuck his arms under her back and broke their kiss to hold her firmly but gently against his body. She was warm, soft and smelled like the lotion she used to moisturize her face and a hint of baby powder. It was such a familiar, soothing scent, he almost started to sob remembering the nights he had wished to be able to smell her while he was lying alone in his bed in Los Angeles. He wasn’t used to the loneliness which had crept into his life in the last three weeks. Filming in Los Angeles had always been a welcoming time for himself. Being able to focus on a project while using his free time to sit in the sun to write or play the guitar had somehow lost its appeal knowing there would be no Gillian to come home to, to have fun with, or to make sweet love.

“It’s been three weeks,” she slurred into his neck and kissed the little spot right above his collar.

“I know. It was harder than I’d expected it to be.”

Nodding, she slowly let go of him and lay on her back again, looking at him for a moment before turning her head towards Eaden. David followed her gaze before reaching out and softly caressing his daughter’s cheek with his index finger.
“She looks beaten,” he pointed out, noticing the suspicious redness on her cheeks.

“Yes, it was one hell of a flight,” Gillian said quietly and rubbed her forehead.

“Has a tooth cut through yet?” David asked and carefully climbed over Gillian to hover over the baby’s body, bracing his elbows on each side of Eaden to keep from crushing her underneath him. Slowly, he started to insert his index fingers into the loose fists to the sides of her head, stroking the soft skin of her palm.

“No,” Gillian groaned. “If it doesn’t come soon, I’ll lose my sanity,” she said dryly and pursed her lips. “It’s a nightmare. She’s always uncomfortable, cranky, and since last week, unbelievably clingy. I’ve held her all day long for four days straight now. She’s not going to sleep unless she’s in my arms and she cries as soon as someone else wants to hold her or I have the decency to put her down while she’s awake. Except for the car seat, she still loves sitting in there, but only while driving,” she added, sighing.

“Uh,” David pulled a face. “Sounds fun.”

“Yeah,” Gillian nodded. “On top of that, she’s not able to sit on her own anymore. The doctor said she has strong muscles but she’s probably too lazy and too moody at the moment to do anything else besides teething. And since she always wants to be held, she can’t practice her robbing abilities anymore.”

David chuckled quietly, watching the baby contently sucking on her binky.

“But!” Gillian announced excitedly with a grin on her face, “We should start to introduce solid foods.”

“That’s cool. It’s about time, isn’t it?” he asked and furrowed his brows.

“Yeah, it is. I just loved nursing her exclusively for such a long time. But she’s ready, and I just need to accept that she’s growing up.”

“Oh, poor Mommy,” David said sympathetically, causing Gillian to nod in response.

“So, I guess it’s time for us to start making some decisions for her.”

“Such as?”

“What do we want her to eat, for example,” Gillian stated and scooted closer to both of them.

“Ah, I remember the story of poor Oscar waiting two years for his first piece of chocolate,” he winked and grinned widely at her. Oscar was a little over two years old when he got his first chocolate on Easter Sunday. And since David teased her since he’d learned she wouldn’t give the child any sweets until she really couldn’t keep him from it any longer, she wanted to make a point by letting him hear how her child behaved on a sugar-rush. He’d heard a lot of smashing over the phone, but that hadn’t stopped him from teasing her further. He still couldn’t understand why you wouldn’t give your child chocolate while you’re a chocolate-addict yourself.

Gillian clicked her tongue and slapped his back playfully. “He survived. But seriously, David. What do we want to feed her?”

Inhaling deeply, he briefly considered her question before answering, “I’m okay with everything, Gillian. You know I’m not a fan of meat and cow’s milk, and I would personally give her a lot of unprocessed, plant-based foods. Other than that, I think you’re absolutely capable deciding what’s
good and what isn’t.”

“I was thinking we could start with an avocado in the next couple of days, what do you think?”

“Sounds great. She’ll love it… hopefully.”

Gillian smiled. As bitter-sweet as it was to see her baby achieve one milestone after the other, she knew how much David was looking forward to be able to interact and bond more with her than he already had. Nursing her last baby for such a long time had been her way to savor every moment of her babyhood and having as much time with her alone as possible. Now, it was time for his turn, and she couldn’t wait to see them covered in cooked carrots and mashed potatoes.

“Speaking of food,” Gillian said after a while, gently stroking David’s back. “Any chance you brought something yummy for me?” she asked with a sly grin and a wink.

“Oh, there might be some things in the kitchen. You just have to look and see for yourself. I’m going to cuddle with my little girl for a while,” David answered softly and gave Gillian a chaste kiss on the lips.

“You can wake her if you want. I don’t want her up all night,” Gillian said and rolled out of the bed.

Turning his head to look at her, his face lit up like he was a little boy sitting in front of his favorite cake and tons of presents on his birthday. He was the most adorable man in this world, she thought, closed her eyes and shook her head under a warm smile.

She walked towards his dressing room and took her night gown off the hanger before sliding her arms through the sleeves, still watching David waking the baby very gently.

“You know,” he started. “I’m actually more concerned about her adopting your British accent than your weird eating habits,” he deadpanned and ducked his head down as a pillow flew in his direction.

***

Making her way through the waiting crowd of photographers, journalists and fans while holding her first book between her hands, Gillian felt confident in her form-fitting, dark blue dress and beige leather jacket, but also terrified. Writing parts of this book had been a wonderful experience. But now that other people besides Jeff, her team and David would read it, she was quite self-conscious of her work and her overall ability to write. So basically, she found herself way out of her comfort zone once again by putting herself out there. It was situations like this one that made her stronger, and a big part of her loved the challenge and the attention.

However, the other part of her just wanted to go home where she knew she was wanted and unconditionally loved. But she wasn’t 26 anymore, overly insecure and intimidated. She was a 46 year old mother of four with over 20 years of experience under her belt. And yet, sometimes it felt like nothing had changed in all these years.

However, she was here now, and after she had received a nice compliment from David and a sloppy kiss on the lips from her little one in the morning before she’d headed to New York Live, she knew that everything would be okay. They would be waiting for her no matter how this day would end, she told herself as she stepped beside Jeff for the first picture.

She was genuinely grateful for the people coming to show her their support for her projects. But to
interact with so many strangers, who saw her as their idol and seemed to have the time of their lives meeting her, was exhausting and sometimes even overwhelming.

After signing what had felt like a thousand books, a young woman was next and walked up to her table with a shy smile on her face. Behind her emerged a little girl who stepped next to her and put her chin on top of the table.

“Hi!” Gillian greeted kindly and took the book the woman held out for her. “How are you?”

“Hi, I-, I’m fine. How are you?” the woman replied nervously, looking down at the table while fiddling with her fingers.

“I’m wonderful, thank you. And how are you?” Gillian asked while standing up a little to get a better look at the little girl with cute little pigtails and a beautiful green dress.

“I see you a lot on TV!” the little girl said pointedly and smiled up towards her mother.

Gillian laughed at the girls’ sudden outburst while signing the book. “Do you?”

“How is your baby?” the little girl suddenly asked and braced herself on her elbows to look at Gillian. Her mother clicked her tongue and nervously ushered her away while saying her name in a warning tone before looking up with an apologetic expression.

Gillian snickered. “It’s alright,” she said reassuringly and smiled at the girl who was looking at her mother insecurely. “Thank you for asking. What’s your name?”

She stepped closer once again and answered proudly, “Kayla!”

“Hi Kayla. My baby is doing fine, but she’s about to get her first tooth, so she’s a little cranky.”

“Oh!” Kayla exclaimed and put her hand in front of her mouth. “That sucks!”

Laughing out loud, Gillian watched the mother’s face turn red as she started to shuffle with her feet.

“Yes!” Gillian nodded. “You could say that.”

“Why aren’t there any pictures of the baby? Don’t you have a picture?” Kayla asked and furrowed her brows.

“That’s enough, Kayla!” the mother interrupted and pushed the child against her body, ready to leave. “I’m sorry, thank you very much for signing this!”

“But Mom! I only asked-“

“No, no! It’s fine, don’t worry!” Gillian said calmly before giving the child her undivided attention. That little girl had an incredibly innocent and pure spark in her, she reminded Gillian so much of Piper when she was around that age. Somehow, she felt such a strong connection to this girl and her wonderful, childish curiosity, that she impulsively felt like doing something she’d never done before. “I don’t like to share pictures with strangers on the internet,” Gillian explained and smiled kindly. “But I do have a picture, do you want to see it?”

“Yes!” the girl called out, ran around the table and was by Gillian’s side before the mother could process what was happening.

Gillian unlocked her phone and briefly searched for a nice picture. She had never done such a thing before, but it felt good to be able to be open towards other people.
“I’m the first one who’s going to see a picture, Mommy!” Kayla said proudly as she excitedly hopped up and down. The speechless mother just nodded and swallowed heavily.

“Let’s see. Ah, that’s a nice picture, isn’t it?” Gillian asked and held her phone in front of the child’s face.

“Oh my god, she is so cute! She’s even cuter than my doll and she’s usually the cutest!” Kayla announced happily.

“Wow, that’s a nice compliment! She’s going to be so happy when I tell her that!”

“She looks just like you! Thank you for showing me!”

“You’re very welcome.”

After Kayla voluntarily promised Gillian not to tell anyone about what she’d just seen, and making her laugh once again, the duo wandered off, a very confused and dumbstruck mother following her happy daughter.

Later that evening, she’d received a picture from David with a selfie of both of them, pouting their bottom lips with a sad expression on their faces and the caption Missing her Mommy, missing his better half.

Knowing he hadn’t sent it to make her feel guilty or to command her back home, but because he was aware that she was missing them just as much and would rather be at home at this time after a long day. It was his way to tell her it was okay to come home and she could allow herself to leave.

***

When she arrived in David’s apartment with a paper bag containing three different cakes from a local bakery for her late night snack, Gillian was surprised by the lack of her baby’s cries.

“Of course you’re a good girl for your father,” Gillian muttered to herself, tired and aching all over from this long day of standing and sitting on hard, plastic chairs.

“I’m back,” she called while putting the cakes into the fridge. “Where are you guys?”

“We’re in the tub!” came out of the bathroom.

Slowly opening the bathroom door, she stuffed the last piece of the ciabatta she had found on her way out of the kitchen, literally waiting for her on the counter, into her mouth and closed her eyes in satisfaction.

“Hmm,” Gillian purred as she entered the room and grinned at him mischievously.

“Ah, look who’s found the bread!” he said under a laugh. “You really couldn’t stuff more into your mouth, could you?”

Gillian laughed and put her right hand in front of her mouth as she continued to chew.

Sitting in his big whirlpool bathtub, his knees where bent and the baby was resting comfortably in the water with her back against his upper thighs, her little feet kicking against his chest in excitement. She was smiling contently as her mother walked up to bathtub and kneeled down in front of them, still clad in her sleeveless dress. A bunch of brightly colored toys as well as a thermometer in form of
a yellow fish were floating around them.

Still chewing and not able to swallow yet, she put her right hand on David’s neck and gently stroked her thumb over his damp hair.

David raised his right hand in which he held a washing cloth, squeezed it between his fingers and continued to wash the baby’s neck with it.

“She was a little stinky, and I wanted to take a quick shower with her. But apparently, this little Miss has certain people for certain things nowadays. She wasn’t as calm and happy as she was when West was showering with her in that outdoor shower back in Vancouver. Good thing I’d already heated the room, because she wasn’t really patient while the tub filled with water,” he said, concentrating on washing her without her slipping too far under the water.

Huffing out a laugh, Gillian finally swallowed and leaned in to plant a smacking kiss on Eaden’s cheek and then turned her head to the right to give David a nice, long kiss.

“Hmm, Mommy smells good even after such a long day, Eaden,” David stated and grinned before kissing Gillian’s cheek.

“The two of you are so sweet in there. She looks so relaxed.”

“Yeah, finally,” David sighed and put the washcloth back into the water to rinse it out.

Raising her eyebrow, Gillian watched as he continued to wash the baby carefully. “Rough day?”

“It was slightly awful, to be honest. She’s-, uh, challenging,” he said flatly.

Gillian nodded and inhaled deeply.

“But she’s hilarious at the same time. We had one pretty decent and happy hour while we were heading Downtown to meet Colin for lunch. She loved riding the subway and had a blast watching all the people. She actually started to play hide and seek with some by laughing at them and then hiding her face in my chest. It was so adorable. But once we were sitting in front of our food she wouldn’t stop to fuss,” David said and started to gently wash the baby’s head. “West’s coming over tomorrow, I’m wondering how her mood’s going to be then.”

“I don’t have to be anywhere till 5pm, I can handle her while the two of you have some time together,” Gillian offered. She raised one of the baby’s little feet and gently rubbed the little spaces between her toes clean with her finger.

“I don’t think I’m the one she wants to see.”

“Well, she might change her mind once she hears that cranky little hurricane,” Gillian shrugged and took the other foot. “Have you eaten dinner yet? I brought dessert. I’m willing to share it,” she winked and grinned at him, still stroking his neck with her right hand.

****

“Ugh, she’s finally asleep,” David groaned tiredly as he walked into the bedroom where Gillian was already sprawled out on the bed. Despite her petite frame, she’d always had a tendency to take up most of the space. Not that he was complaining, he loved feeling her close.
A gentle smile spread over his face as he stumbled towards the bed, wearing only his favorite black boxer shorts. He climbed onto the bed between the sheets and switched off the ceiling lamp before turning to his left.

“You’re gorgeous,” he whispered, and watched how a tiny smile formed on her beautiful, full lips before she opened her eyes to look at him.

“Hold me for a while?” she asked softly and let him pull her close to his body until her head was firmly tucked under his chin. Deep in her thoughts, she began to trace little circles on his chest with her index finger while his hand roamed over her back.

“Are you making progress with the album?” she asked after a few minutes of comfortable silence. The weeks after he first told her about his plans to write his own music and sing his own songs, she had constantly teased him about it, mostly because she just couldn’t believe he was serious. When he told her that they were planning to perform on stage she had probably laughed at him for a couple of minutes before realizing he was indeed very serious. As much as she loved everything about him, his singing voice wasn’t one of the things she loved the most. At some point, he had started to sing to Eaden on a regular basis before nap- and bedtime, and the sight of the baby curiously watching her father was heartwarmingly beautiful. But that was their daughter. She wondered what people out there had to say about this whole thing.

“Oh, yes. It all starts to come together pretty nicely. I’ve finished writing twelve songs and we’re hoping to release it in May.”

“Oh wow. I-, wow. I’m excited for you,” she replied quietly.

“Hmm. I get the feeling you’re not exactly looking forward to that. You’re scared I’ll make a fool out of myself?”

“No!” Gillian called out insistently and raised her head from his chest. “I just don’t want-, I don’t know. If I think your feelings could get hurt does this mean I don’t believe in your music?” she asked hesitantly and looked at him with an uncertain expression.

“You’re scared that it will hurt me if people don’t like what I do? Well, I don’t want you to get hurt either, but I don’t think we should stop doing what we want to do just because of the possibility of failure. It’s alright for me if people don’t like it. I had fun writing all these songs, and if the album tanks, I still have Eaden as my biggest fan and loyal listener,” he quipped and smiled at her.

“And me,” Gillian added and kissed him softly on the lips. The truth was that she was unbelievably proud of him and admired his enthusiasm about this whole project. She had been so lucky to watch him learning to play the guitar over the last couple of years. On some nights during their vacation in Vancouver, they were sitting outside until midnight, enjoying the warm summer nights while he and West played for them. It was by far the best vacation she ever had.

“Did you meet anyone today who didn’t like the book?” David asked.

“No,” she shook her head. “But I think most of them haven’t read it yet.”

“Have you?” he asked in a serious voice and snickered as she slapped his arm.

Laughing quietly in unison, he slowly pushed her shirt up, exposing the skin of the small of her back. Before she could complain about getting cold, he put his large hand over it and gently kneaded her flesh.

“You’re so mean to me,” Gillian whined and snuggled closer into his warm chest. “And I was just
about to tell you some good news.”

“You’ve got good news for me?

She nodded her head yes slowly and pouted her lips. “M-hm. But I’m not gonna share them anymore.”

“Oh,” he replied sadly and moved his hand to her waist before he teased, “I think I know how to make you.”

Before she could reply anything, she felt his fingers brush over her skin and up to the most sensitive spot of her body just below her ribs, immediately starting to tickle her bare skin.

“No!” she called out and dug her nails into his biceps as she started to laugh and scream hysterically at the same time. She used to hate being tickled, it had irritated her more than anything and she always got incredibly uncomfortable by the loss of control. But not with David. His tickles had an uplifting effect on her, helped her to let go of some inner boundaries and getting in touch with ultimate pleasure and trust.

Both of them laughed lightheartedly as he stopped tickling and rolled on top of her, nudged her legs apart with his knee and settled between them.

“So,” he started, pinning her into the mattress with the weight of his body and hovering over her face. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes teary from all the hard laughing. He knew she could feel him through the thin material of his shorts swelling against her center.

She quietly groaned her approval and slowly rolled her hips forward, a tiny moan of pleasure escaping her lips as her clit made contact with his growing bulge.

“The good news?” David asked demandingly, bracing himself on his elbows beside her body while gently stroking her bare, upper arms.

Gillian stilled her movements and looked at him for a few moments until her breathing had evened out a bit before replying. “I think-, I’m going to do more X-Files with you,” she said and pressed her lips into a fine line.

“Are you serious?” he asked without hesitation, his mouth open in surprise. “What about the shit they did?”

“I know, it’s not very clever to give in after all. But it’s almost like when you’re looking forward to do something fun with the kids and they don’t behave themselves. You’re forced to discipline them and sometimes have to cancel the plans to go somewhere. And you’re so sad because you really wanted to go, do you know that feeling?”

“Oh yeah,” he nodded.

She sighed before moving on, “I really want to do it. It will be fun.”

“Yes,” David agreed and leaned in. “It will be a lot of fun,” he slurred before capturing her lips with his.

He kissed her passionately but slowly for some time before moving his lips away from her mouth to graze them over her jaw and down to her neck. She was relatively quiet underneath him, and he looked up to make sure she was even enjoying herself. Her eyes were closed, and if her fingers weren’t tracing the undersides of his ribs, he’d think she’d fallen asleep.
“Is everything okay?” he asked softly and nipped at her bottom lip.

“Yeah,” she slurred in response and her eyelids fluttered open. A shy smile formed on her lips as she looked into his expectant, hungry eyes. “Oh,” she breathed out and raised her right eyebrow before noting, “You want to have sex.”

“Well-,” he chuckled, amused by her observation, since he was hard as a rock between her legs.

“You’re not in the mood?”

“I um-, I’m in a strange mood. A little sleepy and a little tense. I don’t think I’m up to much,” she replied with an apologetic expression.

“Okay, that’s fine,” David said sympathetically and kissed her forehead before attempting to roll off of her.

Her fingers dug into his waist to hold him in place. “Could we just, um-, lie here and… do what I like to do sometimes?” she asked in an uncharacteristic, inhibited way and bit into one side of her bottom lip. “I mean, when I’m not in the mood to-”

His soft chuckle interrupted her and he nodded his head as he realized what she was trying to tell him. “I’d like that,” he whispered and leaned in for another slow kiss. This time, she was responding to him by letting her hands roam over his upper body and down to his butt.

David reached down to adjust himself in his shorts before finding the perfect spot between her legs and started to slowly grind his hips against her. The soft fabric of their underwear provided the perfect barrier and stimulant for this, and it felt so unbelievably good.

His movements became faster after a while, and her fingers where kneading his ass when her warm wetness started to soak through his underwear. He groaned at the sensation and increased his tempo while simultaneously pressing harder into her. She was rubbing herself against him now by moving her hips in tune with his movements.

Gillian was always the one to come up with this idea, but he loved this way of being intimate with her more than he was usually aware of. And it excited him how fast it brought her the release she worked so desperately for.

Needing just a little more simulation, he tugged at the strap of her nightgown and pulled it down to reveal the smooth skin of her beautiful, full breast. It bobbed slightly up and down and he raised his right hand to squeeze it before leaning down, putting his whole weight on his left arm and her body, and started to suck on her erect nipple.

She yelped in surprise as a jolt of pleasure ran through her body like an electric shock.

“Oh god,” Gillian moaned and felt her nipple pop out of his mouth as he remembered that he shouldn’t do that too often and too hard. He used to love sucking on her breast while swirling his tongue over her nipple and she knew he was suffering from not being able to do it as he wanted to. But he’d found other ways to satisfy his oral fixation by sucking on the underside of her breast and gently pinching her nipple between his thumb and index finger.

She was so close when his moans became more frequent and she murmured his name to make him look at her before pressing her open lips against his as they moved frantically against each other.

“I love you,” she panted and arched her back, her nails digging into his ass and neck as she cried out and came in the same moment as he pressed into her one last time and emptied himself into his shorts.
His hips spasmed between her thighs and a few minutes passed before he was able to raise his head and look at her.

“Wow,” he said in a low, trembling voice. His whole body was quivering and she softly stroked his neck with her fingertips. “God, how did I get this lucky?” he asked under a smile and kissed her gently.
The depth of the love of parents for their children cannot be measured. It is like no other relationship. It exceeds concern for life itself. The love of a parent for a child is continuous and transcends heartbreak and disappointment. - James E. Faust

You've had to wait for this chapter quite some time, so... thank you for your ungoing support! I love to read your opinions on this little story :) They're keeping me going! Love y'all!

“There you go, sweetie. You’re comfortable?” Gillian asked and sat down beside Felix on the edge of his bed, tucking the sheets snugly around his body. “Did you have a good birthday?”

He nodded slightly and looked at her under hooded eyes, tired from a long, exciting day in the company of friends and family. He was as happy as a little boy could be on his birthday – a belly full of cake, dozens of presents waiting for him to play with, and the pride that came with being a big boy at the age of six.

“Yeah,” he whispered and reached for her hand. “I love my new bike.”

She turned her head and briefly smiled up at Mark, who was standing beside the bed, smiling down at his son. “We’re very happy you like it. I can’t wait to see you riding it, honey.”

“Don’t let us forget to call David tomorrow to say thank you,” he slurred sleepily and closed his eyes.

“No, we won’t forget to call him. Don’t worry,” Gillian said calmly and stroked a few strands of hair out of the boys’ face. “Sleep well, my gorgeous little boy,” she said before giving him a soft kiss on his forehead.

Mark took her place on the bed after she got up and quietly walked out of the room. It had been such a wonderful day and she smiled contently on her way downstairs. The whole house was decorated nicely with balloons and paper lanterns and still smelled like the wonderful barbeque they had enjoyed for dinner. Mark’s father, Al, had once again proved to be the best pitmaster she had ever known and surprised her with the best ribs she’d ever had. Since it was a pretty warm and decent day for the middle of October, they were able to spend a good amount of time outside to eat and watch the kids play.

It was so wonderful watching Felix enjoy the company of his family and the lovely and thoughtful presents he had gotten from all of them. She was unbelievably happy that her separation from Mark hadn’t caused their families to break apart. They were still able to celebrate together and would do anything to make these wonderful boys happy.

She was putting the last plates into the dishwasher as Mark walked up behind her and poured himself a glass of wine before leaning his back against the fridge.

“He was out like a light,” he said and took a few sips out of his glass.
“I bet he was. It was an amazing day.” She started the dishwasher and took her glass of iced tea before nodding towards the couch. “You want to sit down for a moment before you go home?”

“Sure,” Mark nodded and followed her.

“So,” Gillian sat down and folded her legs underneath her before moving on, “Are you finally going to tell me why Ruby hasn’t showed up today?” she asked, more out of genuine concern than curiosity. She hadn’t seen Mark’s girlfriend around in more than two months, and he had gained a good amount of weight since then. She knew him well enough to know that he was an emotional eater, burying his feelings in huge amounts of food.

The boys had dropped little hints that they hadn’t been with her either, but weren’t able to tell Gillian what Ruby was up to these days. She was absolutely expecting to see her today and was looking forward to a nice chat with her, but was disappointed as Mark arrived alone.

He sighed and took another big gulp out of his glass. “She’s uh-, we’re not a couple anymore.”

Gillian raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth in disbelief. “What happened?” she asked softly and frowned. The possibility came to her mind before, but she had always come to the conclusion that he would’ve told the boys if they weren’t a couple anymore. Apparently, that hadn’t been the case.

Mark huffed and shook his head. “What happened? Yeah, that’s what I’m wondering after every break-up,” he replied, sounding slightly defeated and emptied his glass before putting it down on the table. She raised her eyebrow at him and tilted her head. “There’s another guy from her past she mentioned a few times. I guess I’ve got a thing for women who just need someone to kill some time with before they’re ready to go back to the love of their lives,” he added bitterly and clenched his jaw.

“Mark,” Gillian said softly and put her hand on his shoulder, squeezing empathetically.

“I don’t need your pity, Gill,” he said and shrugged her hand off. “It’s alright, I’ll get over it. I have my boys and my work and that has to be enough for the moment. I survived you leaving me and having another child with someone else. I will also survive this.”

Pursing her lips, she watched him getting up and pour himself another glass of wine. “I’m so sorry, Mark,” her words were soft and sincere. “Are you going to tell the boys?” she asked and looked at him expectantly as he leaned against the counter.

“Yeah,” he stated and stared at the glass in his hands.

When he stopped talking, she got up and took the bottle out of his hand to put it back into the fridge before he would empty the whole thing. The fridge was full with remnants of various salads and she had to shuffle a few things around to make space in the bottle rack. “And when?” she asked carefully but insistently, concentrating on her task.

She didn’t notice him putting down his glass and coming up behind her before he put one arm around her waist and, without warning, pressed her against his body. She froze for a second and just wanted to protest when she felt his lips on her bare shoulders.

“Mark,” she warned calmly and he immediately raised his head and let go of her.

“Sorry,” he mumbled and sighed as he put his forehead against the back of her head before she turned around and pulled him into an embrace.
“It’s alright,” she said softly and stroked his back as he cried in muffled sobs into the crook of her neck, his whole body shaking uncontrollably against hers while he continued to apologize. “I’m so sorry, Mark.”

“God, I love her so much, Gill. I can’t gather the courage to tell them they will never see her again while I can’t stand the thought of not seeing her again myself,” he whispered after a while and stepped out of her arms to rub his face with both of his hands.

She nodded and gently pushed him backwards against the counter to close the fridge behind her before handing him a tissue. Her heart broke for him and her boys, knowing how much they loved Ruby, too. They were already asking her constantly when they would get to see Ruby again. She had become one of their best friends and a wonderful stepmother.

“Do you want us to tell them together?” Gillian offered, poured him a glass of water, waiting until he wiped his face and blew his nose before handing it to him.

“I don’t know,” he sighed. “Thanks for the offer, though. Let me think about it.”

“Fair enough,” she nodded. “Why don’t you stay here for the night? I don’t want you to drive home by yourself after drinking.”

He huffed and threw the tissue into the trash can. “I’m fine.”

“You’re not driving,” she said firmly and added before he could reply, “The boys would love to have breakfast with you. Let me get you some fresh towels,” she said and was on her way downstairs to get everything he needed for the night as a high pitched cry came out of the baby phone standing on the kitchen counter. Gillian stopped in her tracks and sighed. She’d hoped for a peaceful night for the baby to rest as her teeth were still giving her a hard time and, since their return to London, recurrent episodes of fever. She hadn’t given it much thought and she wasn’t concerned, knowing that this was likely to happen when a child was teething. The day had been quite rough for her already. Eaden had a hard case of separation anxiety since she’d started teething, and meeting so many strangers had definitely overwhelmed her.

She just wanted to turn around to walk upstairs instead of downstairs when Mark waved his hand at her and nodded his head towards the stairs. “Let me see if I can calm her, okay?”

“Does this mean you’re staying?” Gillian asked and smiled softly.

“Yes, fine. You won,” he raised his hands in surrender and rolled his eyes, pretending to be annoyed before he winked at her under a sad smile.

As she entered her laundry room on the lower floor to get some fresh towels and something for him to wear for the night, she briefly looked at the clock on the wall before opening a cupboard next to the washing machine. It was already 10:30pm, and all she wanted to do was to fall into her bed. She was beyond tired after so many short nights with Eaden, and the jet-lag was still hitting her hard.

And after Felix’ birthday, Oscar’s wasn’t far away, which meant she already had to start to make preparations for his party to be just as cool and exciting as his little brother’s.

Gillian sighed deeply. Even if Mark was successful in calming Eaden and lull her back to sleep, she couldn’t just go to bed and leave him to himself after this shocking confession, could she? Maybe she could make him some coffee and sit with him for another hour before calling it a night without needing to have a guilty conscience.

Gathering her last energy, the towels and two shirts, she shuffled towards the door and turned off the
lights as she heard someone running down the stairs into the kitchen.

“Gillian!” Mark suddenly hollered, his voice sounding urgent. She scrunched her eyebrows together and shut the door behind her as he called for her again, this time even louder.

“I’m coming,” she replied and walked the five steps upstairs to find Mark bending over the sink with the baby resting motionless on the length of his forearm, facing the basin. His index finger was inside her mouth and he seemed to desperately try to get something out of her.

“What the fuck happened?” Gillian asked alarmed and hurried to him, placing the pile she was holding on the counter.

“She wasn’t breathing when I got to her, she’d already turned blue,” he said and continued to frantically make shovel-like motions in the inside of her mouth, retrieving remnants of the mashed carrots the baby had for dinner. “Shit, I think she threw up and choked on it,” he added, pulled his finger out and gave Eaden five firm blows on her back.

Gillian just stood beside him, watching Mark’s frantic motions without being able to do something herself out of shock. Her face had gone blank and her expression was stiff and frightened.

She couldn’t see the baby’s face. She couldn’t hear her making a single sound.

“She’s not breathing,” Gillian suddenly stammered. “I can’t hear her.”

“Shit,” he muttered in response and turned the baby around.

Gillian gasped at the sight of the baby’s limp body in Mark’s arms. The color of her skin had turned into a daunting shade of greyish blue. Her eyes were closed and her mouth open. But her chest wasn’t moving. She wasn’t taking a single breath of air.

“Oh god, Mark,” she panted and slowly reached out in an attempt to touch the baby’s arm, which was dangling lifelessly by her side.

“For fuck’s sake, Gillian!” he yelled and bumped his elbow into her to get her full attention. “Call an ambulance, now!”

***

The only thing they had told her in almost two hours was that Eaden was somewhat stable and they needed to do more tests. Those agonizing ten minutes when she had to watch the paramedics trying to get her baby to breathe again while helplessly sitting beside her in the ambulance would haunt her for the rest of her life. The look Eaden had given her when she finally opened her eyes again and started to take huge gulps for breath was present every time she closed her eyes for even the briefest moment. What the hell had happened to her healthy little baby? What the hell had she missed in the last couple of days? Why hadn’t she realized that her recurring fevers were indeed concerning? Had she given her too much food too soon? What would’ve happened if she hadn’t cried out and if they would’ve decided not to look after her, just as she did a lot of times when the baby just whimpered a bit before falling back to sleep on her own? What would have happened if Mark hadn’t been there?

Gillian took a deep, shuddering breath and rubbed her temples while leaning back into her seat. She was the only one sitting in the pediatric waiting area tonight and everything was just unbelievably and excruciatingly quiet and sterile around her. As if time had slowed down or stopped to prolong the torture of not knowing what they would do to her baby and if she would be okay.
The smell of antiseptics and illness had already manifested themselves in her nose and it felt like she’d spent years in this hospital, not just a little over an hour. With the adrenalin slowly leaving her body, she noticed her thoughts getting more confused by the minute and her eyes growing heavier. After a while, she closed them and sighed again, concentrating on not falling asleep, thinking back to the days she went into labor and gave birth to her beautiful little miracle. Thinking about all the hopes and dreams she had for her, and the fears that were haunting her from the very beginning.

They were strolling through Central Park the fourth day in a row, wearing baseball caps and sunglasses for privacy, but holding hands just like every other couple. Her body was heavy and he made an effort not to walk too fast. She knew the walking did her good, but she couldn’t not complain about him dragging her out there again every time they took the elevator downstairs. He was proving himself to be unbelievably patient with her mood and the thousand special requests she had in a single day, and she really wasn’t making a secret out of the fact that her heavily pregnant body was aching all over.

This time, they decided to take another route, and when they were walking past a basketball court, he recognized some guys he’d played with several times before. His puppy eyed look made her melt in seconds and she nodded towards the court before earning one of the sweetest smiles from him. Knowing she was a huge pain in the ass lately, he more than deserved a few minutes to shoot hoops with his guys while she waited for him.

“You’re the best. I won’t be long, okay?” he said, handed her his glasses and gave her a chaste kiss on the lips before jogging off.

Gillian smiled and watched them for a while, hands on her hips and constantly bending her aching back. And then, for the first time, she felt a real contraction, so very different from the Braxton Hicks she’d had for weeks now. She turned around and pressed her thumbs into her lower back. The beginning of labor had always come as a little shock to her, as if she wasn’t prepared for it to happen anytime soon.

Looking down at herself, her lips turned up in a gentle smile. The fear that something would go wrong was huge, but so was the anticipation to see the child she’d waited to have for such a long time. She just hoped they were ready for this adventure.

She was already out of breath and they hadn’t come very far as they were walking through the hospital’s park the next day. The baby surely took her sweet time and although the contractions were pretty painful, they were apparently not frequent and strong enough for them to think that she shouldn’t be up and outside anymore, like David had suggested... again. And of course, the doctor also thought it would be a good idea to get some fresh air, and maybe, the walking would speed up the labor process. So she’d given in, climbed out of her bed with a disapproving snort and reached for the hand of the man who was responsible for all of this. His face was priceless when she told him these exact words, and she immediately fell into a fit of giggles before she took his hand and let him lead her outside.

His pace was slow, but the volume of her lungs was next to zero these days, so she tucked at his hand and gestured for him to stop.

“Another one?” he asked under an empathetic smile and looked down at her.

Gillian shook her head and brought her hand to her chest before belching quietly. She rolled her eyes at his chuckle, but smiled gently as he carefully tucked a lock of hair behind her ears.
“I’ll miss that,” he said softly.

“Me constantly burping?” she asked in disbelief and made a disgusted face.

David shrugged his shoulders. “It’s adorable.”

Humming her disapproval, she leaned forward and put her head against his chest, sighing with relief as a protective arm came around her waist, gathering her closer.

“I’m so tired,” Gillian whined in exhaustion. “I’m done, I want to go home.”

“I know,” he nodded. “You’re doing so well, though. If anyone can do it at this point, it’s you.”

She huffed and raised her head. The last 24 hours had been long, almost sleepless, and painful. She wasn’t able to find a single comfortable position in her spacious and probably very comfortable bed, or anywhere else. The doctor had allowed her to take a bath a few hours before, which was nice, but slowed the contractions down, so she had to get out sooner than she wanted to.

“Aren’t you scared?” she whispered, her brows furrowed in concern and insecurity.

“Of course I’m scared”, he also whispered before he averted his eyes and looked past her, his expression suddenly blank. He opened his mouth to continue but gathered his thoughts for a moment before he finally spoke again. "My gut tells me everything's going to be fine. We will have our little, unexpected miracle because God knows we deserve it.”

She gave him a fugitive smile and nodded briefly.

“What scares you the most?” he asked after a few moments of silence and put his hand on her belly. Gillian inhaled deeply and put her hand over his. “That I wasn't grateful enough to get pregnant again and that fate wants to punish me for the thoughts I had in the first couple of weeks.”

“Gillian,” he sighed and pursed his lips.

“The thing is,” she continued slowly, “I already love her so much. I need her, and I want us to have her in order to love and raise her to be a wonderful human being. I already can't imagine my life without our baby, David.” He nodded and put his forehead against hers. “I can't wait to cuddle and kiss her.”

“I know. You will, babe. You will,” David said and kissed the soft space between her eyebrows. She started to groan with pain quietly and grabbed his shirt between her fingers, holding onto it as another contraction began to kick in. “We'll have a beautiful little girl lying between us very soon. I’m so proud of you,” he whispered and watched her concentrating on taking deep breaths.

“Miss Anderson?” someone suddenly asked, ripping Gillian out of her thoughts. She hadn’t noticed anyone walking into the waiting area and was surprised to find a middle-aged woman standing in front of her with a gentle smile on her face and her arm stretched out.

Gillian nodded, got up and shook the woman’s hand. “Yes. Hi,” Gillian choked out.

“Hi, my name is Dr. Lisa Gibb, I treated your daughter Eaden tonight. She’s in her room now and fell asleep right after we put her into the crib. She’s doing fine,” she said softly and watched Gillian sigh in relief. “Yeah, that must’ve been quite the scare for you!”

Her heart rate increased so fast she could barely hear the doctor’s words above the blood rushing in
her ears. “Yes, you could say that,” Gillian whispered under a nod and took a seat next to the doctor.

“We can go to see her right away, I just want to tell you what’s going on. Her airways were blocked with food residue and mucus. She has an acute respiratory infection as well as an infection in her right ear. We’re currently getting her bloodwork done and then we’ll see what we’re dealing with exactly. She needs to stay here for a couple of days until her fever breaks and her lungs are clear again. We just want to be on the safe side.”

Gillian nodded. “Yes, of course. So, she’s doing okay? She’s better?”

“Yes,” she smiled. “She’s out of immediate danger.”

“And she stopped breathing because she had to throw up and choked on it and not because of her lungs?”

“Exactly. The infection in her lungs has nothing to do with that, it just comes on top and she would’ve needed treatment for that anyway. I guess she’s having one or more viruses that also makes her nauseous.”

“Okay,” Gillian sighed relieved.

“Don’t be alarmed when we go in though, she’s hooked up on some monitors and receives a little oxygen through a nasal cannula,” she explained and put her hand on Gillian’s shoulder reassuringly. “Do we have to wait for someone or should we go in?”

“Um, no,” Gillian shook her head. “There’s no one-, um… her father’s not in town. I’m going to call him later. I just want to see her, please.”

The first glimpse she got of the baby lying in that sterile hospital crib, hundreds of wires coming out from under her blanket and the nasal cannula taped to her face by two heart-shaped sticking plasters was the worst. She gasped and tumbled backwards, the doctor’s hands holding her in place until she regained her posture and nodded before they walked towards the little bed together. A nurse was standing by Eaden’s bedside, checking her vitals and smiling gently at Gillian.

“Hi,” Gillian whispered towards the young woman.

“Hi. I’m Sahar, I’m Eaden’s nurse for tonight,” she replied kindly and adjusted a monitor hanging next to the crib.

“Oh baby,” Gillian sighed and looked down at her little girl lying in front of her, sleeping peacefully. She was alarmingly pale, the fine blue lines of her veins visible on her closed eyelids. She wanted to touch her so badly, but everything was so intimidating.

Sensing her reluctance, Sahar stepped closer to the other side of the crib and spoke directly to Gillian. “Don’t be scared of all these things here, you can touch her. It’s just a precaution,” she said softly. “She’ll love feeling her Mommy close.”

Gillian looked up and smiled thankfully before reaching out to stroke Eaden’s soft, warm cheek with the back of her fingers.

The doctor stepped beside her. “She’s under a mild sedation, she’ll sleep through the rest of the night to get some much needed rest.”

Gillian nodded absently as she continued to caress the baby’s face. “Honey, I’m here. Everything’s going to be fine” she swallowed heavily and tears started to form in her eyes which she tried to blink
away. “Mommy loves you. I love you so much.”

***

The two nights after he’d received the news of his daughter’s dramatic admittance to a Level 2 PICU had been the worst in his entire life. He knew the thrill, knew what all of that meant, and the shock that was still sitting in his bones from the time several years ago, when nearly the exact same thing had happened to West, was as present as it was back then. As if no time had passed.

She had told him not to come, told him that the doctors said the baby was doing okay. He knew she just wanted to protect him and keep him from worrying too much. But Piper’s updates of the baby’s constantly rising temperature and her lungs, which were not improving, made him nervous. He informed the crew about everything and they tried to reschedule things in order to shoot as many scenes with him as possible before he could fly to London. He’d worked his ass off to make it possible and the work provided a good distraction. But when he was trying to rest in his trailer at night, all the possibilities of what could happen were wheeling in his mind and would not allow him to get some sleep.

And he just couldn’t let her go through this alone.

So he flew out three days after the phone call, knowing that Eaden still needed support with her breathing and received tons of different medications for her lungs to heal.

Now, he was standing in front of a closed door leading into the second pediatric intensive care unit and waited for someone to let him in. It was nearly midnight and he was aware that visiting hours were long over, but he needed to see the baby right away before he could even think of sleep again. Gillian had not picked up her phone when he tried to call her minutes after his plane arrived in Heathrow, which was worrying him, although he hadn’t told her which flight he would take.

An elderly, very short woman came out of a room on the right side and walked down the dimmed corridor towards him with furrowed brows before opening the door and looking at him expectantly.

“Sir, it’s almost midnight!” she stated and pursed her lips. He suddenly wondered if they would actually let him in at this hour at all.

“Um, yeah, I know. I just need to see my daughter. I just flew in from the US and I really want to see her.”

“I’m sorry, but you have to come back tomorrow. Visiting hours are from 10am to 5pm,” she said quietly but firmly.

He shook his head. “No, I need to see her now. Please, can’t you make an exception this time?” he asked impatiently.

“Do you know how often I get asked for an exception?” she asked a little annoyed and tilted her head. “Now please, our patients need rest and we need time and space to care for them properly.”

“I know,” he said in a softer tone and stepped forward. “I know, and I respect that.” He sighed in defeat as she didn’t make an attempt to open the door further. “Okay um-, can you tell her mother that I was here and that I’ll be back tomorrow morning, please?” he asked pleadingly.

The nurse seemed to consider his request for a moment before sighing herself. “Who’s your daughter?” she finally asked.
“Her name is Eaden. Eaden Ariana Duchovny.”

“And you’re Mister Duchovny?” He nodded. “Do you have an ID with you?”

“Oh, yeah,” he said perplexed and reached into the pocket of his pants and retrieved his wallet to show her his driving license. His passport was in the backpack he’d left in his rental car.

She took the card out of his hand and inspected it for a moment before handing it back to him and finally opening the door under a heavy sigh.

“Oh, young man. This is the very last exception I’ll ever make. You need to wash and disinfect your hands here. You said you just flew in from the US? Then please pull one of these gowns over your clothes, okay?”

He nodded eagerly and followed her to a sink.

“Just one minute,” she said and walked away, disappearing into a room on the left side on the end of the corridor.

He washed his hands thoroughly and disinfected them before taking one of the gowns she had pointed to out of a shelf and put it on. When he was finished, he slowly walked towards the room the nurse had gone into and the closer he got, the more he could hear two voices whispering to each other. He stopped when the nurse emerged again and smiled shyly just before someone walked up behind her.

“Piper?” he asked surprised.

Gillian’s oldest daughter had a gentle smile on her face when she headed towards him, wearing black leggings and a blue top, hair in a high ponytail, looking as if someone had just woken her up.

“Hey,” she whispered as he pulled her into a gentle hug. “We didn’t expect you tonight!”

“I know, it was literally a last minute decision to take this flight. Where is she? Where is your Mom?” he asked and looked down at her.

“Mom went home and asked me to spend the night with Eaden. She wasn’t feeling well and she’s super exhausted. She just needs a break.” David nodded, thankful for Piper to be such a wonderful daughter and sister. “E aden’s doing okay, she’s sleeping.”

“Can I go see her?”

“Ten minutes, you guys,” the nurse pointed out and wandered off.

He had tried to prepare himself for the moment he would see the baby lying in the hospital bed, suspecting that it would bring back a lot of terrible memories from the past and would shock him once again. He was surprised to notice that he had not expected everything looking so different nowadays. The monitors beside her bed were small and modern, giving the illusion that everything was in order and under control, not like the big old machines he remembered from West’s stay in the hospital. Besides the nasal cannula and an IV, nothing seemed to be attached to the baby. She was even wearing her own pajamas.

The room itself was beautiful for a room in an intensive care unit as far as he could tell with the little light that was barely lightening it up. There were a lot of colors and a lot of beautiful drawings on the wall. The bed on the other side of the room for someone to spend the night looked inviting and cozy.
Despite the unfamiliar sight and the baby’s paleness, she still was and looked like his beautiful baby girl with the light, chopper blonde hair that had grown so much in the last couple of weeks. He just wished he could look into her deep blue eyes. Or feel her little fingers picking at his chin before trying to stick them into his mouth, giggling happily when he would lightly nip at them with his lips.

“It looks worse than it is,” Piper said quietly and followed him to stand beside Eaden’s crib. “They expect her to get better tomorrow since the symptoms of this nasty virus had peaked up in the last two days.”

He nodded slightly, watching the baby taking deep, steady breaths. She looked unbelievably tiny and fragile in that bed, yet he knew how strong and determined she was. He suddenly felt himself calm down and all the nervous energy that had stayed with him in the last couple of days left his body. He felt like as if he was finally able to take a deep breath again. It was okay. She was fine. Everything would be fine.

A soft hand on his arm made him realize that he must’ve really taken a deep breath. Turning his head, he smiled and pulled Piper against his body before giving her a kiss on the top of her head.

“She’s going to be fine, David. She’s gonna be her bubbly, happy self again before we know it.”

A good two hours later, he finally arrived at Gillian’s house. Despite the lack of sleep, he felt quite refreshed after the short visit and the knowledge that his baby was in good, capable hands. Now, he just wanted to see Gillian again and put his arms around her. He couldn’t imagine what she went through in the last couple of days, especially seeing her daughter on the brink of death for a couple of minutes. She’d tried to stay strong and cool over the phone, but he knew her too well to buy any of it.

This incident had scared her to death and she’d probably needed a good amount of time to get over it. He just hoped he could help her with that.

David expected her already asleep in her bed and was surprised to find the living room still illuminated. *Maybe she’d just forgotten to turn it off,* he thought as he walked through the hallway and into the living room before he heard a cough coming from the couch, then another, and then a heart-wrenching whimper. He hurried to the sofa and saw her lying on her side in a fetal position, one hand on her chest, the other covering her face while desperate sobs escaped her mouth.

“Gillian?” he asked and kneeled in front of her after two long strides.

She startled and put her hands defensively in front of herself before realizing who he was. The sight of her shocked him more than the sight of the baby. Her face was flushed and wet with tears and sweat. The usually bright white of her eyes had turned into deep red and dark circles had formed underneath them like shiners. Her clothes were clinging to her body and she was radiating so much heat he was afraid to touch her.

“Baby,” he whispered and brought his hand up to support her head. As expected, her hair was soaked with sweat and she was alarmingly hot.

She finally exhaled, but as she tried to take a deep breath, an alarmed look came over her face before she was hit by a massive coughing fit.

Standing up, he pulled her into an upright position and started to pat her back firmly as she dug her nails into his upper arms. Trying to get a look at her face, he tilted his head to the side, leaned forward and was just about to raise her chin when he felt her pushing him away and raising her hand
to cover her mouth, just a second too late to prevent herself from throwing up all over them.

Her hoarsely murmured apologies came just seconds after she blinked herself out of her brief state of shock of what just happened. Normally, her first instinct would be to hop to her feet and do something about the mess, but she was way too weak to do anything at all, and he seemed to be too perplexed either. His hand was still on the back of her head, stroking her hair gently as he examined his shirt. Relieved, she noticed that nothing but fluids had come out of her. Just the tea she’d had after she got home from the hospital. She’d never been a good eater in stressful situations.

He swallowed before meeting her eyes again and whispered “It’s okay,” in the gentlest voice she’d ever heard. His expression was nothing but worried and she felt like crying realizing just how much she’d missed his presence in the last couple of days. He was her rock. They’ve been through a lot together. And together, they would also navigate their way through this.
Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation. - Brian Tracy

Chapter Notes

You guys, you blew my mind with all your wonderful comments! Thank you very, very much! I love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tears were rolling down her face when he gently pushed her onto the mattress after guiding her out of the bathroom. It was the mere exhaustion finally taking over her whole body rather than the symptoms of whatever virus she may could’ve caught from Eaden.

Once she’d left the hospital and was on her way home, she started to feel sick to her stomach and her head was throbbing painfully. She was barely walking through the door and making her way into the bathroom before emptying her stomach for the first time. She hadn’t eaten a lot in the last three days, but the little she’d managed to eat for lunch was also gone now. Frustrated, she made herself some tea, feeling guilty for leaving Piper alone in the hospital with the baby. She was her mother, she should’ve stayed, she thought.

The more she bashed herself for her weakness and selfishness, the worse she started to feel. After drinking her tea, she sat down on the couch and wrapped herself in a soft blanket just minutes before her body began to shake uncontrollably, which didn’t help with her headache.

She wanted to sleep so badly, but she was unable to stop thinking about her decision to go home, which had replaced the dozens of scenarios running through her mind of what could’ve happened if Mark hadn’t been there. Would she have been able to save her own child?

She knew she couldn’t continue to think like that. Blaming herself for not recognizing the signs that the baby was sick long before, or for her slow reaction wouldn’t change a single thing. Neither would not spending the night in the hospital with her child made her a bad mother. She knew it. But her heart ached when she thought about everything that could have become her reality if she hadn’t been so lucky.

The tears came eventually, and she pulled her knees up to her chest, trying to rock herself to sleep. At some point she startled awake after a confusing dream and had to cough so hard it hurt her lungs because her whole throat was so painfully dry.

It was just right after she threw up on David’s shirt that she became somehow aware of her surroundings again. He carried her upstairs and into the bathroom before she could even protest. David mumbled something about her being feverish and dehydrated as he undressed her first, and then himself. She didn’t pay attention to his words though, and just felt his soft hands on her naked body as he pushed her into the shower. He washed them both pretty quickly and gently, thoughtful enough not to get her hair wet. That alone had made her cry in gratitude once again.

And now, she was sitting on the edge of her bed with her hands between her legs, sobbing quietly. She was cold, and she knew she was supposed to put on the shirt and leggings he’d laid out for her.
after he helped her into a fresh pair of panties and before he disappeared. Turning her head, she furrowed her brows and looked at the clothes to her left side.

She reached for the shirt and slowly put it over her head. She had to pull herself together before this whole situation would get more pathetic and embarrassing than it already was. She cringed at the thought of how he must’ve felt now. He was probably grossed out by her now. After all, it was the most distressing and awkward thing that had ever happened to her.

She got up onto unsteady legs and, as she leaned forward for the pants, decided that she didn’t need them if he would just come back and let her sleep with her legs between his. Keeping her warm and safe.

Gillian was still deep in thoughts when he walked back into the bedroom, carrying a large thermos bottle and a hot-water bag, only wearing black boxer shorts after their shower.

“Hey,” he whispered, looking pleased that she’d at least managed to put the top on. “Do you want me to help you with the pants?”

She shook her head and followed him to his side of the bed where he put the items on the nightstand before turning around. His expression displayed concern as he looked down and scanned her face.

She wondered what he was seeing in her right now. Weakness, of course. A weak, incompetent woman, not capable of caring for a baby, nor for herself. How couldn’t he see these things? She’d let him down. She’d disappointed him. She broke the unspoken promise to do whatever she could do to keep his daughter happy, healthy and safe. He’d trusted her with that. He trusted her with his child every time she or he left the country. And she trusted him with her, the difference was that something like that wouldn’t have happened under his watch.

His silence only confirmed to her that she was right. Gillian dropped her head, not wanting to look into his eyes anymore. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered.

“Ahh, it’s alright, it’s just… some fluids. I’ll survive. I don’t find you any less cute, so don’t you worry,” he said under a soft chuckle, his hands coming to a rest on her hips.

“No, it’s not just that,” she said in consternation and looked at him again. “David,” she sighed. “Our baby.”

He furrowed his brows and tilted his head, clearly not understanding what she was trying to say. “She’s okay, I’ve seen her before I came here. The nurse even removed all oxygen support to test if she still needed it for the rest of the night or if she was able to keep her levels up by herself. She was doing very good,” he said enthusiastically but squinted his eyes and tilted his head as he saw her unimpressed expression.

“Don’t you get it? We almost lost her, David. She was dying right in front of my eyes and there was-“

“Hey,” he interrupted her mid-sentence, his voice soft. He brought one hand up to the back of her neck, his thumb gently stroking over the fine, soft hairs there. “I know. I do get it, that’s why I’m here now. You don’t have to go through this alone.”

“I almost lost her,” she raised her voice in desperation and pointed at herself. “It’s my fault all of this happened. I didn’t take enough care of her to realize that she was sick. I just thought she was teething and-“

“Do you think I’m blaming you for what happened?” he cut in.
She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing would come out. Why wouldn’t he? He had every fucking right to blame her, she thought.

He shook his head slowly, as if he was reading her mind. “No, No, Gillian. I’m not blaming you at all. If anything, I’m blaming myself for not being here,” he said and gently pushed her back into a sitting position and kneeled down between her legs. Interlacing her fingers with his, he brought her hands up to his lips and kissed her knuckles one by one. “I know it must’ve been an unbearable and devastating thing to witness. And I should’ve been here. I know this is how our lives are, and we said we’re okay with it. But in a situation like this one, it’s so fucking hard to live like this. But I would never blame you for what happened. It could’ve happened to anyone, it’s what happens sometimes. You have so much responsibility, and I completely trust you.”

“Even now?” she asked quietly, watching him putting little pecks in the inside of her hand.

He nodded. “Always.”

She managed to mirror his soft smile and sighed in relief. God, she was so tired. So exhausted from everything. His reassuring, loving words had lifted a great weight off her heart. But still, it would take some time to come to terms with everything, to forgive herself and move on.

It was the first night both of them were able to have a good night of sleep, getting some much needed rest, lying there securely in each other’s arms. They’d woken up to Piper’s message a little after 8am, telling them that they should sleep in because everything was just fine.

They made love slowly and tenderly under the sheets, teasing each other with sweet words, gentle touches and soft kisses. It was wonderful and healing to feel his warm body moving over hers, pushing into her deeply before she finally reached her release.

The ride to the hospital a few hours later was quiet, but accompanied by a strange anticipation. They held hands while he drove, needing to feel the other as close as possible. Going together for the first time made the whole thing even more real than before, and it was scaring her to death, even after the good news they’d received in the morning.

He was greeted very friendly by two young nurses as he was scrubbing his hands while Gillian talked to another. Apparently, they’d already waited for him to finally make an appearance, and he felt much more welcome than he did the night before. He’d probably had to apologize again, realizing that this indeed was a unit with very ill children in need of a lot of care and attention. Eaden would be able to go home eventually, but he knew that for some other’s it was just one of many, very long stays. They really didn’t need parents knocking at their doors at midnight, demanding to see their children, while another capable adult was already staying with them.

As he dried his hands, suddenly, a familiar, very loud wail came out of one of the rooms, and by the way Gillian quickly turned her head towards the direction the sound came from, he knew he’d recognized it right.

“Oh,” the older nurse Gillian was talking to chuckled. “I was about to tell you. She’s finally found her voice again! That’s very significant progress!”

Entering Eaden’s room, they found Piper holding an almost naked baby who was pulling at her long, blonde hair, trying to stuff it into her mouth while Piper tried to pull it out of the baby’s grip, obviously making her angry with that.
Gillian put her hand over her mouth, and he got the impression that she hadn’t seen her baby that agile and active in a very long time. It must’ve been so hard to see her lethargic and nothing like the spunky little whirlwind she usually was.

Gillian smiled up at him before stepping further into the room.

“Hey,” Gillian greeted happily and walked towards Piper, who turned around and smiled desperately at Gillian.

“Mom! Help me, please,” she begged and pulled at her hair.

Gillian chuckled, but instead of trying to help Piper getting her hair out of Eaden’s firm grip, leaned down and started to kiss the baby’s head while murmuring words of affection to her.

“Mom,” Piper whined, making Gillian click her tongue before she finally opened the baby’s fingers while giving Piper kisses on her forehead and her cheek.

“Aw, girls. I’ve missed the two of you so much!” she said and took Eaden out of Piper’s arms as she started to show her resentment.

“I just put a fresh diaper on her and wanted to dress her nicely for you, but she’s really feisty this morning. With her quietly lying in that bed sleeping all the time I almost forgot what a little beast she can be,” Piper laughed and tickled the baby’s bare belly, making her giggle quietly before she hid her face in the crook of Gillian’s neck. “Oh now you’re pretending to be shy and innocent again, of course.”

“I can’t believe how healthy she looks again! Are you feeling better, baby girl?”

“Oh yes, she’s doing much better. She’s had two bottles after she woke up at around 9am, and it’s good you’re here because your milk’s out. Bloodwork hasn’t come back yet but her temperature is back to normal again. They say she probably needs a few days to recover fully, until then she’ll still be a little weak and tired.”

“Hey,” David walked up to them and smiled.

“Ah, the nightly intruder! Are you guys well rested?” Piper asked.

“Yeah, thank you so much for staying, honey. I was so exhausted,” Gillian replied while cuddling the baby close to her body. She barely smelled like herself anymore, having adopted so much of the hospital’s scent in no time it put Gillian’s stomach in knots. She couldn’t wait to bring her daughter back home where she belonged.

“You’re welcome.”

After giving the baby a kiss on her head, Gillian looked up and pointed at David. “Look who’s here, sweetie! Look! Who’s that, huh?” Gillian talked to Eaden while turning towards David.

Raising her head from Gillian’s shoulder, Eaden immediately recognized the tall man smiling down at her and reached for him by extending both of her arms and leaning forward in joyful anticipation.

“Yeah, it’s Daddy! Daddy’s here,” Gillian whispered and gently transferred her into David’s waiting arms.

“Hey, little slug, my favorite little hair-puller. You gave us quite the scare,” he said and kissed both of her cheeks while she held onto his neck firmly. “Oh, I’ve missed you so much.”
“Oh, she’s also got a little surprise for you!” Piper announced with a big smile on her face as she gently grabbed Eaden’s arm and turned her upper body to look at her. “Look at that!” she said and carefully pulled the baby’s bottom lip down, revealing a white, sharp little tooth in the center of her lower gums.

“Oh my god!” Gillian called out, slightly squealing in surprise.

“Look at that, your very first tooth! Finally!” David exclaimed and bounced her gently up and down.

Eaden smiled at the excitement around her and leaned her head back on David’s chest.

“Oh, sweet girl,” David whispered into her soft hair, cradling her head in his palm. “Everything’s going to be fine now.”

***

The following two days went by very slowly, but fortunately, the baby was starting to feel and look better by the hour. And that was the most important thing after all. David wanted to spend the remaining nights in the hospital by his daughter’s side, and kept them both occupied with long cuddle sessions, reading books and singing his new songs to her. After apologising for his rude demeanor, the older nurse from the first night even allowed him to take the baby into his spare bed for most of the night, which made them both more comfortable and gave them the opportunity to actually relax in this tiny, unfamiliar room.

When Eaden was finally back home again and recovering nicely, Mark had dropped Felix and Oscar off at Gillian’s house, because they couldn’t wait to see their little baby sister again. While Gillian was with them, David took the opportunity to talk to Mark, whose quick and skilled reaction had probably saved his daughter’s life, and to thank him. He knew that saying thank you would never do his actions any justice, yet it somewhat cleared the rivaling, heated atmosphere between them that had always been there. Fatherhood and the love for their kids was the one thing they had in common. They relied on each other to take good care of each other’s child.

After a little stroll through the park to let the boys run riot a little and for the baby to get some rays of sunshine, all three kids were lying in Gillian’s bed in the evening, freshly bathed and ready for bed.

The boys were lying next to Eaden, keeping her entertained by blowing soft kisses on her cheeks and into her neck while Gillian was resting behind Felix, inhaling the sweet scent of his hair, chuckling quietly at the boys’ lovely silliness.

“Aw, she missed your kisses and cuddles so much,” Gillian said as Eaden grabbed Oscar’s head and pulled him down to her.

“I think it was really boring in the hospital, Mummy,” Felix said and turned on his back to look at Gillian, who nodded in agreement and threaded her fingers through his blonde hair.

“Yeah, you might be right.”

“She missed me the most!” Oscar piped in with a sly grin on his face, ready to challenge his little brother.

“No!” Felix objected loudly. “She missed me more!”

“Boys, shh! It’s not a competition! She missed both of you equally!” Gillian cut in and gestured for
them to shush. “I think it’s time for the two of you to go to bed.”

“No, Mum!” the boys cried out in unison, startling the baby with their loud voices. Normally, she was used to them being loud all the time, whether they were just talking loudly, screaming at each other or playing vigorously—she usually liked a lot of action around her, even slept through it.

When she started to sob with her bottom lip stuck out and eyes firmly pressed together, Oscar looked at Gillian and bit into his upper lip. “I’m sorry! I didn’t want to make her cry, Mum!” Oscar apologized and placed a few gentle kisses on Eaden’s forehead to calm her.

“I know, she just really needs some more rest, boys. She’s not her old self yet, we should give her some time, okay? You guys are pretty tired yourself,” she stated and turned her head as David walked out of the bathroom.

“What happened here?” David asked and pointed his finger at the crying baby.

“Three tired kiddos are a little too many in this bed,” Gillian said brightly and gave Felix a kiss. “If David tucks you in, you’re going to bed without any protest?” she asked hopefully.

“Yeah,” the boys replied in unison and gave Gillian a hug and kiss goodnight before standing up, walking to the end of the bed to climb David’s body, one on each side.

“Ohh,” he groaned. “Do you guys want to kill me? Jesus, you’re heavy!” he laughed and threw the two giggling boys over his shoulders. “Say goodnight Mommy, and goodnight Eaden!” David said, hopped on his feet to make them cry out while he held them securely.

“I wasn’t done cuddling her,” Oscar complained playfully as David carried him piggyback into his room after tucking Felix in.

David chuckled and gently eased him down onto his bed before pulling the covers over his body. “You can barely keep your eyes open, buddy. You’ll see her tomorrow, okay?”

“How do you know I will? What if something’s gonna happen again?” he replied and looked at David with a mocking, challenging expression. “What if she has to go to the hospital again?”

David swallowed and slowly sat down beside him. Of course they hadn’t told the boys every little detail about what had happened, but instinctively, they knew it had been very serious. It was an emotional day for them. They were very worried and overprotective. Never had both of them left her side since Mark had brought them over earlier at once. Even in the park they’d taken turns in running away from David who was carrying her in the baby carrier, one of them always holding on to a little foot sticking out. They had always been gentle with her and seemed to care deeply. But the affection, love and gentleness they were showing towards her now literally took his breath away.

“You’re scared she has to go to the hospital again?” he asked softly and gently stroked a strand of hair out of his face.

Oscar nodded. “Yeah. I don’t want her to be sick. I want her here with us.”

“I know… I want that, too. The good news is, she isn’t sick anymore, just a little tired. We need to give her some time and let her sleep to get well and then we can play with her again. What do you think of that?”

“She’s one though little nut,” Oscar whispered. “She’s the toughest girl I know, besides Mum, and
Piper! She’s even tougher than I am!”

“Is that so?” David asked and raised his eyebrow. Such a comment from Oscar was rare, although he loved making nice and thoughtful compliments, he usually thought very highly of himself, and wasn’t shy letting people know about that. The little boy nodded slowly before David continued to talk. “You know, we’ll never know what’s going to happen tomorrow, or even tonight. We have to take things as they come and just… live our lives and cherish any minute of it.”

Letting a few moments pass to think about David’s words, Oscar finally replied quietly, “I think that sounds good. We should do that.”

“Yes, we should. And just so you know, one of the greatest challenges in life is to be able to cherish sleep,” David said suggestively and smiled as Oscar groaned knowingly. “Good night, kiddo. Sweet dreams.”

“Good night, David.”

When David returned to the bedroom, he found Eaden and Gillian still on the bed, lying closely side by side. The room was barely lit, but the lamp on Gillian’s nightstand provided enough light to see their faces. Gillian was watching her daughter nurse while holding one of her little hands in hers, gently stroking the baby’s tiny fingers, a gentle smile adorning her face. They were looking at each other intently, and he decided not to disturb them and to enjoy this beautiful sight for a few moments, just standing in the doorway. Eaden was drinking much louder than usually, apparently still struggling to breathe through her nose, and therefore losing her latch every now and then. Gillian gently guided her back to her breast, whispering reassuring words while staying absolutely calm.

He admired her so much. Her strength, her devotion, and her endless love for her children. He was the luckiest bastard in the world to be able to call two amazing women the mothers of his kids. How on earth did he deserve this?

Sensing his presence after a few minutes, she turned her head slightly in his direction and smiled tiredly at him.

Beautiful, he thought. She was also incredibly, painfully beautiful.

“Hey,” he whispered and walked towards the bed. “I didn’t want to disturb you guys.”

“We’re having some trouble getting back into our groove,” Gillian replied and looked back at the baby.

David slowly sat down on her side, leaning over to get a better look at his daughter’s pretty little face. “Is there something I can do to help?”

“Just… come to bed and… stay here with us, please?”

He slipped under the covers behind her, embracing her warm body by draping his right arm over her middle. She slightly leaned back against his chest, gently pulling Eaden’s body closer to her again before the baby latched on again and continued to drink peacefully.

“Hmm, you smell good,” he whispered into Gillian’s hair.

This moment was so pure, so wonderful, he felt blessed beyond words.
“Isn’t she just perfect?” he said after a while and reached down to touch one of Eaden’s feet, clad in soft, white socks, and started to rub her heel softly. “Look at this tiny little foot. You know that I always found their feet so fascinating? So little and fragile, yet capable of growing so much in such little time to let them stand and walk on them. Can you believe that she’ll be walking like… next year?”

Gillian snorted and shook her head. “No, I can’t. It’s such a bittersweet stage where you love to see them grow and develop, yet don’t want them to. Well, at least not too fast,” she winked at him before they watched the baby again. “She’ll always be our baby, though.”

“Yes, she will.” He nodded thoughtfully. “Gill, come with me. Come to LA. I want the two of you there with me.”

Gillian clicked her tongue and sighed. “Come on, David. You know I can’t.”

“Why?” he asked in a whiny voice, but she didn’t reply. Instead, she started to stroke the baby’s hair again, and watched how her eyes grew heavier and her mouth slacken.

“Gillian,” he pushed.

“David, this is our life. We knew it would be like that, even before we knew we’d have a child. Of course it would’ve been easier without her, but it’s still as it is. We’re working, and you know as much as I do that we can’t just stop doing that. We’re still the same people, we need the challenge and something else besides the kids. You can’t expect or want me to stop doing that.”

“I don’t do that at all,” he said calmly.

“I can’t go with you. I have work to do. Oscar’s birthday is coming up. I have to appear in a lot of shows in November and I’ll be in Italy through December.”

David snorted and rolled onto his back. She was right, of course. Before she got pregnant, they had talked a lot about what their relationship meant for their lives. And they agreed that what they didn’t want was everything to change. Who knew how everything would’ve turned out without the baby.

“That basically means I won’t see you till January…” he whispered after a few moments.

She inhaled deeply. “I know. It sounds pretty shitty.”

He raised his voice, “Yes, it does! Isn’t it possible for you to clear a single week? Just one fucking week?”

“David, come on. Don’t do that now,” Gillian said warningly, not wanting to argue with him.

“Sorry,” he groaned, his frustration almost palpable.

A few minutes passed in which both stayed quiet before he heard some rustling and Gillian giving Eaden a soft kiss. Then, she scooted up to sit against the headboard and lifted the baby up to rest on her chest before starting to pat her back firmly with her left hand. With her right, she reached down and ran her fingers through his freshly cut hair.

“I’ll make it possible,” she said quietly.

Little did she know then that she would not be able to keep her promise.
COMING SOON - Chapter 39 - Be prepared for the longest chapter in MF-history! It will be... intense :P
Erica was the kind of woman no man should meet when being desperate, lonely and drunk.

She was a stunning human being. Tall with a slim, athletic body and a glowing, tanned skin. She looked like she was spending a lot of time on Santa Monica’s beautiful beachfront – stepping on and off the little benches on the pier, working out on the rings, or just cycling on one of the numerous bike paths. Nice breasts anybody would’ve appreciated, and probably did. Her straight, brown hair reached all the way down to her butt. He always had a thing for long hair and strong bodies.

And he’d never been immune to physical beauty, nor to a charming, flirty woman who just wanted to have a good time. Uncomplicated and with no strings attached, basically.

Erica was exactly like that. And he’d met a lot of Erica’s in his life who’ve never given a shit about anything else but having a good time.

He’d met her in a bar way back in 2008. A good friend of his had told him that it was an exclusive establishment for celebrities, providing enough privacy and the luxury to make it an attractive location to visit and come back to.

He’d seen a lot of famous men in there, but also a lot of beautiful, not so famous young women. In 2008, no one cared who he slept with, at least no one who mattered to him. That wasn’t entirely true, but his reality was loneliness and trying to find his way back into a normal life. And it wasn’t until a year later that he succeeded in claiming his old, sane existence back.

And then, everything fell apart once again. 2011 marked the year of the big decisions, and even bigger realizations. Not long after their second separation, the same person who had also been there for him when he first separated from Téa walked back into his life. But at that time, everything was different. And at the same time, nothing was different at all.

The love was the same. The attraction. The closeness. Nothing had changed, not in over twenty years.

“You chopped off your hair,” he had stated dryly when he first saw her just minutes before the IBG-event. They hadn’t seen each other in months, but her appearance at his play had started to make him think about her again. More than he usually did. It had brought back feelings he thought had died long ago. However, he was surprised to notice that they were more alive than ever.

She’d hummed affirmatively and looked down at the floor, carefully considering her next words.
“You know the cliché,” she finally said without any other explanation.

He’d nodded, fully understanding what she was trying to tell him. Oh, and how he understood. A woman who changed her hair like that was most likely about to change a few other things in her life. It was a cliché, just like she said. But sometimes, you were able find some truth in them.

He’d invited her to the wrap party of Californication on the same evening, presuming that she would decline his offer since Mark and the boys were also in Los Angeles with her. But she surprised him by saying yes and actually showing up. However, it shouldn’t have been that much of a surprise after all.

He wanted her so badly that night. Wanted to touch her, kiss her, fuck her senselessly. But also make love to her. Finally, again. After all that time.

He knew she wasn’t the same person as she was three years ago, when she was hovering over him like a worried mother, desperately trying to keep him together while he was falling apart into a million little pieces. But in the end, she left again with her little boy and the man who’d gotten her pregnant for the second time.

In 2011, he felt that she had already detached herself from her relationship with Mark. She hadn’t been sure about her next steps back then, and she stopped him when he leaned in for a kiss, even though they were all alone and no one ever had to know. He knew she’d wanted him to kiss her, but couldn’t bring herself to allow it to happen. His heart broke for her that evening. And for himself, because he didn’t dare to dream that they would ever get a real chance again.

So the night after that wrap-party, Erica was the next best choice.

She was flirting shamelessly, and literally threw herself at him. Laughed with him and danced with him. Touched him and nibbled on his throat.

A lot of drinks. A lot of fun.

Until he saw her sitting at the bar, blantly watching them on the dancefloor.

It took him only seconds to excuse and entangle himself from Erica’s firm grip before approaching her.

“What are you doing here? Keeping an eye on me?” he snapped angrily and jumped on the barstool beside her before pointing his index finger at her drink to let the barkeeper know he wanted the same. It was a strange feeling to be annoyed by her and at the same time wanting nothing more than being close to her.

“Is it necessary to keep an eye on you?” she countered and raised her chin.

David shrugged. “I don’t know why it would be. I’m a single man, I can do whatever pleases me.”

She hadn’t expected his voice to be so cold and distant and it caught her off guard, but deep down she knew he was trying to fool her with this attitude. Trying to make her believe he had everything under control.

She inhaled deeply. “After last night, I thought—“

“Last night,” he cut in and raised his hand to silence her. “Forget about last night, will you?”

She shot him her right eyebrow. “Forget about it?”
“What do you want here, Gillian?” he asked pointedly and looked her right into the eyes.

His cold demeanor was almost unbearable. Even though she knew he was just trying to protect himself by keeping her at arms length, it hurt like hell.

She averted her eyes. “I just want to talk. And I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

He snorted and looked back at the dancefloor. Erica had already found another dance partner. A very good substitute for him, David observed – much wealthier and probably more willing to get things to the next level.

“So you’re keeping an eye on me,” he deadpanned and pursed his lips.

“Last night, you told me you wanted me. You said you wanted me to be yours,” she said quietly, her fingers absently tracing the ripples on the surface of her glass.

“I love you,” he said with a certainty that made her raise her head and look at him. It was the last thing she’d expected him to say in that moment, and he literally saw her walls crumbling down. “I’m nothing without you.”

Averting her eyes, she sighed and focused on something in the distance behind him.

“If you want me… if you really want me, this,” she gestured at the dancefloor, “this is not an option, David. You need to understand that I don’t leave Mark for you. If I leave him, I’ll do it for myself, for my own happiness. Regardless of anything you’re saying to me. But… let’s just say I feel the same for you, and would want to give it a try, I don’t want the same thing we had before. I can’t live with this again. I won’t. No matter how I might feel for you.”

“Something like this has never happened when we were together back then,” David pointed out and clenched his jaw. “What do you think of me? Just because I went to rehab I can’t be a decent man who’s happy with just one woman?”

“Do you actually think I’m that naive and think of you that way?”

“Then why are you here? Why did you feel the need to follow me into this bar? I told you everything I needed to tell you. You said you weren’t sure. You didn’t let me kiss you. So, what do you think I’m going to do? Sit at home and live in celibacy for the rest of my life?”

“This here, it’s not you. It’s not who David is.”

He chuckled bitterly and shook his head. “David is on his own now. He needs to look after himself and find a way to meet his needs.”

“But you don’t want to be on your own,” she said blankly.

“No, I want to be with you. I’ve always wanted you. Nothing has changed, despite everything. Despite all the shit that went down between us.”

His words stung her right into her heart and she took a big sip of her drink. It was non-alcoholic, but still had some kind of a calming effect she’d hoped for. The shit that’s went down. If he had the slightest idea, she thought.

He watched her for a while, sensing that he’d hurt her with his words. “Coming here wasn’t the best decision I’ve ever made, I give you that. I mean, you turned me down, and here I am. But no matter if you believe me or not, I wasn’t going to sleep with her, or any other girl for that matter. Probably
not forever, but definitely not tonight. Not after yesterday. I don’t care about these women. I care about you and if there’s no you in my life, there won’t be anything serious, anything that would matter. I would live, I would work, keep myself fit and do everything to be the best father I can possibly be. I would definitely sleep with some women, but I would never love someone as much as I love you.”

She hadn’t left Mark for almost another year, even though she visited him frequently during that time.

When Aaron died, they’d spent three consecutive days in a hotel room together. She came to him with a broken heart and left reinvigorated and with the knowledge that nobody knew her the way he did. All they did was lie in bed, mostly with his arms protectively wrapped around her shaking body, watch TV, sleep, cry and eat. She’d been able to tell him every detail of her brother’s last days, and how she felt watching him fade away right in front of her eyes. While Mark didn’t seem to be able to give her the time she needed to be really sad and depressed, David never made her feel like her feelings weren’t appropriate and valid. He never said ‘It’s going to be okay’, and when he watched her cry, he never had that pitiful look on his face. These couple of days had changed everything for her.

He on the other hand had almost given up on another chance when she showed up at his house the next summer. As a single woman. It was the first time they’d slept together in more than a decade, and it was just as magical as before, and a thousand times better. His hands still knew her body better than anyone, knew how she liked to be touched and what she didn’t like. Yet both took their time to embrace all the changes that had come with time and giving birth to two more children to get to know the people they’ve become. When the past met the present, it was an experience like she never had before.

They’d kept it casual for about 8 month, but casual wasn’t what he wanted with Gillian. He knew she was protecting herself from getting too involved and was testing the waters, see what she’d get by being with him. With the beginning of 2013, he decided it was time to take their relationship to the next level. It was time for commitment. He had proven himself. And she was finally ready. He never regretted this decision, although a baby wasn’t what he’d had in mind.

Now, Erica wasn’t particularly the woman he wanted to meet. Not in 2014. Especially not after two long months without seeing the love of his life. Two months without smelling her, feeling her warm body beside his and without a single touch from her.

She’d promised to come over while he was filming, but it never worked out. Her excuses made him angry to the point he’d hung up on her in late November before she could hear him breaking into tears in sheer desperation. He didn’t call back for three days straight. And when he did again, she only held the baby into the camera and let him talk to her, even though it was a pretty lopsided conversation. When he called her out on her behavior with the intention to make things better, everything pretty much escalated. He wasn’t proud of what he’d said on their last phone call, and he knew she said some things she wasn’t proud of as well. He remembered calling her selfish and unwilling to do everything what was best for their daughter. She’d called him a hypocrite. And she was right, though he hadn’t been able to admit that back then. Their fight had left him sick for days, and in some moments, when he was sitting in his trailer or standing on set waiting for the scene to be prepared, he felt terribly lost, and didn’t know what he could possibly do to make it all better again.

On the last day of filming before their hiatus, he’d finally received a text-message from her. The first
in five days. It was nothing more but a simple I’m sorry, but at that moment, it meant the world to him.

He not only missed her, but his daughter as well, who’d grown so much in such little time. He’d missed the first time she rolled from her belly onto her back, which had been caught on video, but still. He’d missed it. He’d also missed the opportunity to soothe her after her first big fall at the playground, where she was sitting in the grass and accidentally tumbled over the edge into the sandbox as she’d tried to reach for a little shovel. Nothing serious had happened, but she was covered in sand from head to toe and he would’ve loved to wipe the tears away and clean her dirty little face.

On some days, his job just didn’t seem to be worth the long time he was separated from them. On other days, he knew they were doing the right thing, and this was just a short period of time in their lives they just had to pull through. Yet he also knew he would never spend this much time away from them ever again.

It was December now, a week before Christmas, and he wouldn’t see her for another three weeks, if she was still planning on spending time with him while she was in Los Angeles in January. He would spend the holidays with the kids and then they’d head off to Turks and Caicos for the last big vacation with his and Téa’s family over New Year’s. Deep down, he knew why Gillian had refused to come with them, but he was still fuming over her decision and the missed opportunity.

He was lonely, bored and frustrated, craving her love and the bliss and happiness that was surrounding them when they were all together.

He’d contemplated long and hard if it was too dangerous for him to accept a friend’s invitation to meet up in this particular bar, especially considering the emotional state he was in. He craved for company and needed a few drinks, a good man-to-man-talk and maybe an innocent flirt to shut his mind off. But these things could lead to some stupid mistakes, as he knew all too well. A wasted David Duchovny sitting in a bar with a few good looking women around him wasn’t something he wanted to see on the internet.

He hadn’t noticed her in the bar that night before Jason excused himself to say Hi to another friend and she walked up to him, put her hand on his thigh and smiled one of those one-million-dollar-smiles he knew had driven him crazy back then.

He nodded at her approvingly and helped her onto the barstool next to him.

“David,” she said and licked her lips.

“Erica,” David replied simply and smiled gently.

She hadn’t lost any of her physical attraction in the last several years. The way she made eye-contact was still intense, and he found himself unable to break it once again. The olive-green dress she was wearing clung to her curves and he would lie if he said he hadn’t looked at her beautiful cleavage for more than a brief moment.

Somehow though, it seemed like she hadn’t changed at all. He wasn’t really sure if he found that appealing or not.

“I haven’t seen you here in a very long time, David,” she stated and stroked the length of his thigh down to his knee before squeezing it affectionately.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Can I get you a drink?” he asked and pointed towards the waiter.
She turned her head and nodded. “Cubra Libre, please,” she ordered and looked back at David. “You look great, David.”

“Ah,” he smiled shyly and shook his head before looking at her hand on his leg. “You look fantastic. You haven’t changed at all.”

“Guess I took good care of myself,” she whispered seductively.

Well, he thought, she’d never been a woman of many words. And she still didn’t seem interested in too much conversation.

“You want to dance?” she asked as to emphasize the impression she was trying to give.

“Um,” he murmured and felt her hand move up towards his inner thigh, not immediately realizing that her intention was to reach his crotch. When he felt her hand softly but demandingly pressing into his bulge, he jumped and grabbed her by her wrist to pull it away.

Apparently, his rejection came as a surprise to her, because she looked at him with big, daring eyes and her head slightly tilted to the side.

“Let’s dance,” he said and pulled her with him to join a few people already dancing in the middle of the bar.

She put her arms lazily around his neck when they found a spot just as Bad Day started to play, and she grabbed his neck with one hand to pull him down and chuckled into his ear.

“That’s the perfect song for us,” she slurred and looked down at his hands, which had found their way to her waist before he pulled her closer to his body. She could feel the heat radiating off of him, and she began to sway her hips and shoulders to the music. She could also tell he was aroused when she looked into his dark eyes again, and a shiver ran down her spine realizing that she still had that effect on this handsome, mysterious man.

“You’re having a bad day?” he asked quietly, his voice low and throaty.

Seductively biting on her lower lip, she tilted her head to expose the delicate skin of her bare neck to him. “Isn’t that why we’re all here?” she quipped and with every sway, pressed her hips more into his.

He opened his mouth slightly and blinked, and before he could reply, she rose to the balls of her feet, closed her eyes and leaned in. He was so close to give in and also close his eyes, but just before their lips met, he blinked again and suddenly, his heart started to race rapidly in his chest. Not with arousal or excitement, but with fear and the urge to get the fuck out of here.

“No,” he said firmly and took a step back without letting go of her.

“Oh,” she breathed, obviously not used to being rejected like that, but seemed to calm after looking into his eyes for a few moments. “Seems like some things have changed for you,” she pointed out and freed herself from his grip. “Not here for that kind of fun anymore?”

“No.” David shook his head firmly. “No,” he repeated.

He didn’t expect her to nod approvingly while she leaned into him once again, whispering into his ear, “Good for you. You’re a good man. She’s lucky,” before she walked away.
Climbing out of the cab after a long drive home to Malibu, David was tipsy, but not drunk, and probably for the first time ever felt like he finally made all the right decisions. He managed not to ruin a fun evening with a friend, let alone his entire life. That was a damn good thing, he thought, and it told him a lot about how happy, committed and in love he really was, even during this particular hard time.

However, he knew something was off when he entered the house and smelled the air. He had a great housekeeper, but he hadn’t left with the house smelling so good. This unique, wonderful scent hadn’t lingered there a few hours prior. The scent of Gillian with a hint of Jasmine Rouge combined with baby powder made his heart leap in anticipation.

It didn’t take him too long to find her in the living room, standing with her back to the windows, looking beautiful in her dark dress and her tiny frame illuminated by the lights of the pool outside.

Her expression was unreadable, and he fought the urge to hurry to her and scoop her up into his arms. He didn’t want to make her feel bad, but he needed her to know just how rejected he’d felt in the last couple of weeks. No, he wouldn’t give in. Not yet.

“What are you doing here?” he asked instead and rubbed his temples.

She raised one eyebrow and took a step forward. “What do you think I’m doing here?”

“I don’t know... I have no fucking clue. You didn’t seem very interested in talking to me anymore. You preferred to ignore my messages and my calls. So, why are you here? Didn’t want to break up with me over the phone?” he raised his eyebrow daringly. “Or could it be that maybe you’ve got your priorities straight... finally?” he said bitterly.

“I already said I was sorry. And now I’m coming directly from Florence, David. I was working,” she looked at her wristwatch, “until yesterday, just right before we flew out here. I was on my feet, walking through the city for days now or sitting on a bench freezing my ass off at a rail station. I’m exhausted, so don’t tell me anything about my priorities.”

“Ah, yes. I see. Your priorities were pretty telling lately. You had plenty of time for some stupid shows and events in the last couple of weeks... as far as I know. But none for me.”

“It’s the week before Christmas. Isn’t that telling enough?”

He snorted dismissively. “Christmas would be telling. New Year’s Eve would be telling. All of that is just... telling me I’m the side-kick who doesn’t need more than a short visit from time to time.”

His expression was angry now, and he was ready to fight her. To show her how hurt he was. Even if it meant he had to do it like a child. At the moment, he just wasn’t able to do it any other way. It was like his mind was blocked and only wanted her to say it was her fault. And that she was sorry.

“For fuck’s sake, Gillian. We haven’t talked in two weeks! Your stupid damn tweets were the only thing telling me you’re still alive!” he shouted.

“David,” Gillian sighed and her eyes scanned him from head to toe before whispering, “Where have you been tonight?”

“What does it matter?” he asked annoyed, and started to regret his tone, seeing the hurt expression on her face. His behavior was childish and immature. He behaved like an asshole for something that wasn’t her fault at all. He’d been working, too. Then why was he so angry? Was it easier to blame her for everything? Maybe it was, but it wasn’t right. And he knew it.
Suddenly, something changed in his head and the fear of taking it a step too far overtook his selfish need of some kind of justice. Hurting her wasn’t what he wanted after all.

He took a cautious step forward and bowed his head in embarrassment. “I was at a bar with Jason.”

She raised her right eyebrow and folded her arms in front of her.

“I had to vent a little. My emotions were… I just couldn’t handle them anymore. I needed someone to talk to and a few drinks to just… calm down. I was giving you a very hard time in the last few weeks, and it was unfair of me.”

“Yeah, it wasn’t fair,” she agreed under a nod. “I know you miss your daughter. I understand that.”

“I just had the feeling you didn’t care if you see me this month or next month or whenever again, Gillian,” he suddenly blurted out. “I was hurt and lonely.”

“You know it isn’t true. I tried so hard for a week in November. But you know about our commitments, and I want to do these things. I want to work for a good cause, even if it takes a lot of time. Even if it means we can’t be together for a few weeks.”

He nodded slowly.

“I understand how you feel, probably better than you think,” she said. “We’re emotional and angry because this matters so much to us. We matter, our baby matters. I’ve missed you like hell and there wasn’t a day I didn’t wish you’d be at home, waiting for me to have a nice dinner together. But this is our choice, it’s what we wanted.”

“I’ve missed you, too,” he replied, contritely.

She nodded and put on a soft, conciliatory smile and walked closer to him.

As he extended his arms for her, she took two final steps, jumped into his welcoming embrace and captured his lips with hers for a passionate kiss. He kissed her hungrily, desperately exploring her mouth with his tongue as if it was the first time.

“There wasn’t another woman, right?” she murmured into his mouth, barely audible. Gillian wasn’t the kind of person who asked these questions, but the last couple of weeks had apparently left her just as insecure as him, and she only had the courage to ask while she couldn’t be entirely sure that he’d heard her.

He briefly put his forehead against hers and nibbled on her lips as he slowly shook his head no before kissing her again.

She tasted so good, so unbelievably good. Minty, cool and just like her. She sighed into his mouth and pulled herself even closer. He stumbled backwards, his head dizzy with desire and the remnants of alcohol in his blood, causing her to yelp in surprise.

“’s okay, I’ve got you… I’ve got you,” he murmured and put an arm under her buttocks, holding her up against him while reaching behind him for the countertop.

“She’s here, right?” he asked and continued to take little steps backwards.

“‘Yes, she’s upstairs, in your bed,” Gillian replied and started to place sloppy kisses on his face while he licked his way down her throat. “You want to see her first?”"
“Yeah,” he answered and suddenly felt the cool and smooth surface of marble underneath his fingers, and his good intentions of seeing the baby first died in a second. Turning around, David put her on top of the counter before bunching her beautiful, dark blue dress up around her waist. With one hand, he pulled the zipper of the dress down to reveal her firm, round breasts while the other worked on the panties between her legs.

“God, whoever put this zipper there… is a genius,” he growled breathlessly into her ear and put his lips around her nipple, sucking it into his mouth.

“Oh god,” she groaned and arched her back into him. “Careful,” she whispered, though barely audible. The last thing she wanted him to be was careful, but she saw it as good manners to at least remind him that she was still breastfeeding, even though he’d never seemed to care.

Pulling her panties down her thighs, he bent his knees to pull them entirely off while she fumbled with his shirt. He looked up at her questioningly and she realized he wouldn’t be able to free her from her panties if she continued to pull at his shirt. Chuckling, she let go and watched his head disappear underneath the fabric of her dress.

“Oh god, I love you. I love you,” he muttered and started to gently nibble on her inner thighs, slowly heading towards her warm, inviting center. Her smell made him dizzy, especially after such a long time. Sweet, musky and clean. “Hmm, you drive me crazy,” he added hoarsely and licked the smooth skin of her outer lips up to her mons, his nose buried deep into her soft flesh.

“Hush now,” she ordered playfully, her whole body trembling in anticipation, and pressed his head against her crotch.

His brief chuckle died as he continued to tease her with his tongue, avoiding any contact with her already engorged clit. She was so wet, and tasted even better than she smelled.

It was getting warm and hard to breathe under the dress, so he raised his right arm to pull the fabric over his head. She groaned at the sudden distraction, but helped him out and removed the whole dress, now sitting completely naked on the cool marble, having the best sight on him pleasing her. His look made her shiver. She saw raw lust in his eyes, and his mouth glistened with her arousal. He slowly licked his lips while looking straight into her eyes, tasting her, savoring her.

Her hips rotated in front of his face and he dipped his head down again, gently kissing her outer lips before slipping his tongue between her folds. He raised her legs and put them over his shoulders before diving in, licking and sucking on her sweetness, enjoying her taste and the way she was moaning above him. He loved knowing that she watched him, comfortably reclined, bracing herself with both of her arms.

She was panting constantly now, and he alternated between sucking on her clit and drawing little circles on it with his tongue, exactly how she liked it the most.

“Feels so good,” she whispered and licked her lips audibly.

“Yeah,” he encouraged her before putting his right index finger into his mouth, wetting it with his saliva. Then, he brought his finger to her opening and slowly pushed inside. She was hot, wet and unbelievably snug, her inner walls pulsating around his finger. “You like that, don’t you?”

She mewled her approval and relaxed, making it possible for him to add another finger, and push deeper.

“Yeah baby, just like that. God, this is so beautiful,” he said before his mouth attacked her clit once
again and his hand started a steady pump in and out of her.

She cried out as he sucked her little bundle of nerves inside his hot, soft mouth and played it with his tongue.

Her thighs started to shake around his head and she moaned his name until the first gentle spasm rippled through her body.

He curled his fingers inside of her and pushed them against her most sensitive spot before rubbing it gently without stopping to lick on her clit.

“Oh!” she shrieked unbridled and arched into him before reaching forward, gripping his hair between her fingers and pulling on it while he rode her through her climax.

He kissed the insides of her thighs softly until she calmed down and her breath evened out, gently stroking her trembling knees to make her feel comfortable.

When she finally opened her eyes again, he smiled at her and placed one last kiss on her pubic mound, his eyes never leaving hers.

With her pouty lips open like that and her face fully flushed, she looked like a dangerous mixture of innocence and sensuousness. She was so perfect in every imaginable way.

“Hmm, I must be good at that,” he stated dryly, his eyes soft and full of affection.

She pushed her tongue into her cheek, then licked her lips and smirked. God. This man. She was head over heels with him.

“Fuck me,” Gillian panted. “Please, fuck me… now.”

“Jesus, yeah,” he breathed out, stood up straight, pulled his shirt over his head and started to unbuckle his belt. “Condom?” he asked and unzipped his fly. Normally, she would tell him when it was that specific time in her cycle and they needed one. But he still asked, just in case she’d ever forget about it in her post-climax-daze.

She shook her head no and he sighed in relief. He just wanted to feel her, all of her. Just pure Gillian and nothing else.

She was caressing his hard, muscular abdomen with her fingertips, causing goosebumps arising on his arms as he stepped out of his jeans and boxer shorts, then kicked them to the side.

“You’re so beautiful,” she whispered, her eyes focused on his hard member before adding, “I appreciate your efforts at the gym.”

David chuckled and palmed the outer sides of her breasts, just below her armpits, and squeezed them together.

“Hmm, that’s good to hear,” he murmured in response and bowed his head to hide his face between her tits.

“David,” Gillian laughed out loud. “What are you doing?”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. “My favorite place,” David murmured, kissed each breast and then looked up again. “I thought about doing that for weeks now.”

“Ah,” she nodded and pulled his head towards her. “I couldn’t stop thinking about how your dick
feels inside of me,” she whispered seductively and pressed her lips against his.

His deep growl only encouraged her to slip her tongue inside his mouth, searching for his to start their wonderful game. She tasted herself on him and it turned her on even more, if that was even possible.

He surprised her by lifting her from the counter by her hips, pressing her firmly to his body and carrying her aimlessly into the living room.

“David,” she whined, desperately holding onto his neck, her legs firmly wrapped around his hips. “What-“

“Bed?” he stammered and turned towards the stairs. “No, no. Baby’s in bed,” he remembered. “Uh, couch?”

“Oh my god, David,” she was starting to get noticeably impatient. The fact that his penis was nudging at her folds with every step he took wasn’t making it any easier. If he would’ve held her a little lower, it’d be so easy for him to just slip inside. “Go wherever you think, but hurry the fuck up!”

He chuckled sheepishly before he seemed to regain his focus, and suddenly eyed the pool outside.

Oh yes, he thought, grinned mischievously and made his way towards the french windows. It was still quite warm outside, especially for December, and he hoped that 77 °F would be enough to convince her to jump into the water with him.

“Outside?” she asked suspiciously and furrowed her eyebrows.

“Yeah, yeah!” he replied insistently, finally sounding confident of what he had in mind.

“Yeah,” she agreed as he reached the door and opened it. “Leave the door open, the babyphone…” she whispered and started to nibble on his left earlobe. “God, you’re so hard. I want to have you inside of me so badly.”

“Shit, I can’t…” he murmured, adjusted her weight so he was holding her with one arm around her hips and reached down with the other to guide himself to her entrance. There was no way he could wait until they were in the water. Not with her talking like that.

Carefully letting her body sink a little lower, he slowly entered her, enjoying every inch he slid deeper into her hot, snug tunnel.

The last time he fucked her like that was decades ago. He was much younger back then, and his knees much stronger, yet it had never felt that good before.

She dug her nails into his neck until he was completely buried inside of her, and then raised her head. “Jesus, David,” she panted under a laugh and kissed him fiercely.

He parted his lips, happily granting her entrance. She was wild and demanding tonight, and he moaned into her mouth when her tongue found his. He bucked his hips into hers and she broke the kiss to cry out.

“Sorry,” he mumbled and put his left hand on her bare back to steady her.

“God, no. So good, more;” Gillian slurried. “You need to… your arms under my knees,” she said and
tightened her grip on his neck. Like that, she was able to hold herself up while he removed his arm from her hip, bent his back and snuck his arms underneath her knees, raised her legs a little higher before placing his hands on each of her butt cheeks.

She was unbelievably tight in that position, and he felt the blood pulsating around him.

Gillian rolled her hips forward and they both groaned when his shaft pressed against her cervix.

Not able to withhold himself any longer, he thrust his hips into her, starting a steady, deep pump.

She extended her arms and reclined back, still gripping at his neck, but now looking down at them, watching her breasts bob up and down with his frantic movement, occasionally getting glimpses of his slick dick sliding in and out of her. It was an animalistic, primal and frenzied lovemaking, and the thought of how they must looked, standing there completely naked, fucking in the middle of the pool-area, was making her dizzy with arousal.

Her eyes rolled back and she opened her mouth, her breath coming in short gasps as he sped up a little more. He was already soaked with sweat and everything started to get dangerously slippery. Her hold on his neck loosened and she could feel him desperately holding onto her ass.

“Babe,” he suddenly whispered breathlessly.

Thank god, he’d recognized it too, she thought and nodded. “Yeah, I’m slipping off, let me down.”

“Hold on,” he said instead of setting her back onto her feet and turned his head to look back, trying to find the next best chair. “There,” he nodded his head towards a deckchair standing beside the pool and started to walk backwards.

He managed to reach the chair with her still in his arms, giggling into his neck as he awkwardly sat down and scooted back, finally having the opportunity to catch his breath.

She was sitting on his hips now, her upper body leaning over him so her face was just a few inches away from his. He’d slipped out of her on his way into the chair, but his erection was resting securely between her legs.

She smiled softly, scanning his face from his forehead to his chin before gently stroking over his damp hair.

“David, the things I said to you…I can’t take them back, but…I didn’t mean them the way they came out. We have some issues we need to figure out, but there’s nothing we can’t handle.”

He nodded. “I guess we learned the hard way how we shouldn’t do it, how it just doesn’t work. We were both pretty much on the edge, and I’m sorry, too. The words didn’t hurt me as much as the silence that came after them.”

“Yeah, that was stupid of me,” she admitted regretfully.

“Hey,” he raised her chin. “I love you.”

“I love you too, David,” she whispered and leaned down for a slow, passionate kiss.

His right hand slipped down and found his favorite place where her thigh met her butt while he put his other one around her neck, gently stroking her ear with his thumb.

Their kissing quickly got more demanding and heated again, and she rubbed herself against his hard
She sat back on her knees and reached between them, wrapping her hand around his erection and started to stroke him. He closed his eyes with pleasure, softly panting through open lips and slightly raising his hips to increase the friction. Her thumb gently circled the tip of his cock, watching little transparent drops of precum coming out before she spread them all over his head and continued to move her hand up and down, steadily going faster.

He moaned quietly and licked his lips. Her little hand felt so good around him, and she knew exactly what to do and how to touch him.

She was smiling at him when he opened his eyes again, straightened up and guided him to her opening before slowly sinking down on him.

“God, Gillian. You feel so good,” he growled and grabbed her by the hips, digging his fingers into her soft flesh while she rode him purposely. She looked like a goddess, her hips moving rhythmically back and forth, tits bobbing up and down, her bottom lip stuck between her teeth. He could not live knowing he would never see her like this ever again.

“Yeeees,” she slurred, bracing one hand against his lower abdomen.

Slightly bending his knees, he started to thrust up into her while she leaned forward and pressed her upper body against his.

She was moaning constantly now and alternating between nibbling on his lips and just panting into his ear. He enjoyed both and pressed her hips down with each of his thrusts upwards.

“David,” she whispered. “I want you on top of me.”

Chuckling quietly, he nodded his approval, put his hands on her back and turned her onto her back in one swift motion.

Her face was glowing underneath him, the little grin on her face so unbelievably adorable. He settled back between her legs and slipped into her while kissing her softly.

“You’re so beautiful, so fucking beautiful,” David whispered against her skin and began to thrust into her deeply. “You’re everything.”

She smiled, enjoying the feeling of his lips lightly sucking on her throat and gently stroked his toned, muscular back. “Yours,” she replied softly. “I’m yours, and you’re mine.”

Sneaking a hand between their bodies, she put two of her fingers around her opening, feeling his length pounding into her relentlessly before starting to draw little circles on her clit.

One of his hands found her left breast and he gently pinched her nipple between his fingers.

She moaned out loud and long, arching her back into him. He was so close now, pumping into her faster and deeper to take her with him. Her inner walls were becoming even tighter around him and she scraped her nails along his back down to his butt before squeezing his left cheek.

“Harder. Please, harder. I’m sooo close,” she pleaded and her hand fluttered faster between her legs.

“Shit, yeah,” he moaned and drove into her with short, hard thrusts.
David was already coming, releasing his seeds into her warmth when she cried out while he was moaning into her neck. The feeling of her coming so hard around him prolonged his own orgasm. It felt like it was never ending, and he started to feel dizzy before slumping onto her, spent and satisfied.

They lay like that for a couple of moments to catch their breaths, gently caressing the other with soft touches and kisses. He moved a little to the side to take his whole weight off of her and cradled her to him when he came to a rest beside her.

“Our sex is always good, but our make-up sex has always been… I don’t even know how to label it,” she said under a girlish giggle and put both of her hands over her face before adding, “God that was good.”

“That was the best make-up sex I’ve ever had, that’s for sure,” he mused and chuckled with her.

“Although this thing is very uncomfortable to fuck on.”

Gillian chuckled slightly at that, but then suddenly pouted. “We didn’t even make it into the pool.”

David shrugged his shoulders. “Tomorrow’s going to be another hot day,” he winked. “I mean, assuming you’re planning on spending tomorrow here with me?!”

Gillian grinned widely and nodded her head. “Yes. The whole week is ours.”

“Don’t laugh at me, but I’m so nervous right now,” he chuckled as he stood in front of his bedroom, one hand on the doorknob, looking down at Gillian with an expression full of anticipation.

When they’d heard the baby babbling to herself through the babyphone, he was up on his feet in seconds, washed his face and hands before putting on his clothes and jogging upstairs. She followed him closely, also clothed and washed, highly amused by his boyish anticipation.

“I can see that,” she laughed and patted his arm empathetically.

“It sounds like she’s having a very interesting conversation with herself,” he grinned.

“Yeah, she does that for a couple of days now. But only when she thinks she’s alone.”

“Ahh,” he nodded. “Just like Momma,” he pointed out and fell into laughter as she slapped him playfully.

He opened the door quietly and stepped into the room. Gillian had left the light on his nightstand on low intensity, so he immediately spotted the baby lying in the middle of the bed between their cushions, which she’d put to the baby’s sides.

They walked towards the bed, and the baby stopped chattering as soon as she noticed that someone was coming in. Her chubby little hand was wrapped around her left foot, and she was happily sucking on her pink sock, looking like she was trying to bite into her big toe, while she curiously watched David coming closer.

“Hey!” he whispered excitedly and sat down on the bed, scooting to the middle. “Hi sweetheart.”

She watched him silently for a few moments before finally letting go of her foot, kicking both of her legs and squeaking in happiness.
“I know! I’m just as happy to see you pretty little girl,” he said with a big smile on his face and leaned down to kiss her, laughing when she grabbed his head in an attempt to give him some sloppy kisses all over his face.

Gillian laughed at the sight of father and daughter, who’d apparently missed each other a lot, as she lay down on the other side of the bed. Eaden wasn’t a people person these days, shyly hiding herself in her mother’s neck whenever anyone but her two brothers or Piper talked to her. But she knew who her Daddy was, and it made Gillian’s heart full with love.

“Look at you, how big you are! God, Daddy missed you terribly. I can’t believe you’re so blonde now. There’s barely any red left in it,” he observed and looked at Gillian, stroking over the baby’s soft hair.

“Yeah, it’s fading out. I love how golden it looks at the moment though.”

“It’s amazing, she’s starting to look so much like West when she was little. But with Piper’s big, sparkling blue eyes and your lips.”

“Mh-m. She’s gorgeous.” Gillian nodded and traced the baby’s double chin with her index finger, tickling her slightly. “David, we have something to confess.”

“What’s that?” he asked softly.

“I haven’t put her into her own bed for over 7 weeks. She slept beside me every night since you left.”

“Oh!” he said, raised his eyebrows in surprise and grinned mischievously. “Is that so? Did you sleep with Mommy for the whole time?”

“Yeah,” Gillian nodded shyly and pressed her lips into a thin line. “I know, totally against my own rules. But she’s still so little and so precious, and I was so lonely without you. So she usually falls asleep in my arms or on my chest and then I can watch her for hours. It’s so nice.”

“Yes, I bet it is,” he said with a hint of wistfulness in his voice.

“I’m sorry you’re missing so much,” Gillian said quietly and genuinely.

“I know you are, but you’re here now. I’m so happy she has such a wonderful, loving Mommy. She needs you so much, and it means the world to me knowing that she’s your number one priority. That you take her with you wherever you go as long as she’s still so dependable on you. It makes everything a lot easier for me, seriously.”

“Dada!” Eaden suddenly exclaimed loudly, eyes fixated on David and wide with wonder of what had just come out of her mouth.

“Eaden!” Gillian cried out in surprise. “Did you just say Dada? Oh my god, David!”

“That’s my girl, Gill,” he snickered and softly kissed the baby’s nose. “You’re Daddy’s baby girl.”

***

“You’re ready for the day, little Slugger?” David asked brightly and lifted his daughter, who had a very doubtful expression on her face, out of the car seat. “Hey, smile! We’re at the beach! Why else
would you wear this cute little sundress and the matching beach hat, hm?” he teased her and pulled the little white hat over her face. But instead of getting a smile out of her, which had been his intention, she started to wail angrily, so he pulled it back up and pressed her gently against his chest. “Oh, come on. It’s alright, shh,” he cooed and kissed her head.

“You’re a grumpy little girl this morning,” Gillian stated as she walked around the car, wearing a light yellow summer dress.

“Maybe she’s still traumatized from her last encounter with sand,” he joked.

Gillian clicked her tongue and let David hand her the baby. “You’re getting over it today, little lady. Daddy loves the beach, you should get used to it sooner rather than later.”

“You want to look for a nice spot while I get the bag and the sunshade out of the trunk?” David asked and leaned down to give Gillian a quick peck on the lips.

“Yep, thank you,” Gillian nodded approvingly and started to walk towards the beach, stopping here and there to enjoy the view from the parking lot and pointing towards the sea.

The area around Point Dume was one of David’s favorite places to hang out and go for a swim. The Malibu beach was usually not as crowded as the Santa Monica Beach and therefore provided a little more privacy. However, luck didn’t seem on their side this day, and as soon as she left the parking lot and stepped onto a wooden trail towards the beach, she spotted a man with a camera, waving and screaming at another, who was apparently taking shots of someone else, before he turned at started to run down the cliff and towards Gillian.

She groaned in frustration and put her hand over the baby’s face to shield her as the man came closer. With that camera, he was probably able to take pictures from a long distance, but that didn’t seem what he had in mind. With only a few feet left between them, he started to walk backwards in front of her and began to take pictures.

“Hi Gillian, how are you?” he asked in a put on, southern accent, hopping from one side to the other to get the best shot possible.

“That’s really creepy,” she replied instead and bashed herself for not putting on her sunglasses and some kind of hat that would’ve made her unrecognizable. “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Having a nice day at the beach? How’s the baby?” he asked and at the same moment, Eaden tried to pull Gillian’s hand from her face and cried out when she wasn’t successful. “Is David here, too?”

“If I wouldn’t need to cover her face, she’d be better,” Gillian replied angrily and pulled the burping cloth from her shoulder and draped it over Eaden.

“Show us the baby!” the other man suddenly hollered from her left side as he jogged towards them.

“Would you get out of my way and leave us alone? I’m not gonna say it again,” she snarled and stopped walking as she realized they would follow her all the way down to the beach. It wasn’t like she was in an airport and would soon reach a secluded business lounge or hop into her car. This was what she hated the most. That they could ruin a normal trip every family deserved.

“Woah, don’t get mad. We just want one pic!”

“Fuck off!” She was getting really pissed off now and she knew she was starting to scare the baby with her sharp, angry tone. Stay calm, she said to herself. Keep in control.
“You’re on video, Ms. Anderson,” the guy who’d been with her first laughed.

“So you can show anyone what a creep you are for following me to try to get a picture of a little baby? It’s upsetting! And sick!”

“Hey!” David suddenly hollered from behind her. Gillian turned around and watched him walking towards them. He wasn’t particularly jogging, but was by her side in no time while carrying all their stuff. When he reached her, he put everything in front of Gillian and walked towards the man standing just a few feet in front of her. “You guys are way too close! Stop that shit and get away from here!”

“Hey, leave me alone, dude!” the pap backed up as David put his hand in front of his lens. David was a lot taller than the guy and it was apparent that the man knew he was in a disadvantage as he turned his head to seek help from his companion. Even Gillian could feel the anger and frustration radiating from David.

“Dude, you leave my family alone! Have some self-respect and stop harassing people with their kids!” David replied angrily and stepped into the guy, making him back up even more.

“Just doin’ my job, dude. Just one pic, what do you say?”

“It’s enough! Get the fuck out of here!” he yelled and smacked his hand into the camera and the man leaped to the side.

“Yo man, calm down! Josh, come on, we’re out of here!” he ordered and gathered his stuff in his arms before running off towards the parking lot.

The other guy took a few more pictures from Gillian and the baby before he turned and followed the one David had talked to.

“What an asshole,” David muttered and picked up the bag from the ground. “You guys okay?” he asked and nodded at the whimpering, covered baby in Gillian’s arms.

“Yeah,” she grinned and walked towards him before raising to her toes. “That was impressive. What a hero,” she slurred and kissed him on the lips.

“Nah, that’s my duty as the man of this family,” he replied proudly and patted his chest, making her laugh with this primal gesture. At least their mood hadn’t been spoiled by that little incident.

“Hmm, some day we won’t be able to hide her anymore,” Gillian said and pursed her lips before turning her head to look back.

“Yeah, I don’t really care. I just don’t want them to get so close to you, or her. That scares the fuck out of me. I don’t want her to have their cameras right in front of her face.”

“Well,” Gillian shrugged her shoulders. “Maybe we really should rethink this whole damn thing and release an official picture after all. That might keep them on arm’s length,” she said hesitantly. “I mean, this isn’t as easy as keeping the boys out of the spotlight.”

“Yeah,” David sighed and took her hand. “We’ll talk about it.”

When she nodded slowly, he leaned down and gave her a chaste, lingering kiss and picked up the sunshade before they continued to walk towards the cliffs to find a nice, secluded spot to settle down. While Gillian calmed the baby, he put their blankets onto the sand and opened the sunshade before throwing a little shovel and a bucket into the sand for Eaden to play with.
“This is nice,” Gillian smiled and sat down with her legs underneath her, putting the baby down in front of her. The sea was calm today, shimmering in a beautiful green-blue shade. Every time she came here she was remembered of why he loved this place so much, despite of all the Pap’s and the chance of a fan-encounter.

“Are they gone?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he looked up and squinted his eyes against the sun. “They seem to be.” David turned his head and looked down at Gillian. A soft smile grew on his face before he said, “You look very pretty.”

“Hmm,” she hummed under a shy grin and put a strand of hair behind her ear that had fallen out of her ponytail. “Thank you.”

She watched him pulling his shirt over his head and sitting down beside her, only wearing his swimming shorts. He must’ve spent a lot of time in the sun lately, because he was nicely tanned and looked absolutely fantastic.

Noticing how her eyes wandered over his body and finally focused on his taut, muscular stomach, he leaned back on his elbows and put one hand on his belly, stroking over his abs. “You like what you see?” he asked under a sly grin.

“You know I do,” she chuckled and leaned over for another kiss just as Eaden squeezed herself between them and started to pull herself up to climb on David’s chest.

“Hey, you, excuse me! What do you think you’re doing? Your toys are over there, young lady,” Gillian said in feigned indignation and leaned her head on David’s chest to look at her daughter’s face. She was smiling widely at Gillian, proudly showing off her two bottom teeth, amused by her mother’s familiar tone. Gillian had noticed weeks ago that the baby already knew what a particular tone or the word No meant. And she’d learned very fast that smiling her prettiest smile could be the key to change her mother’s mind. Or anyone else’s, for that matter.

“Are you laughing at me? You’re such a sly little rascal, I can’t believe it,” Gillian snickered and kissed the baby’s head. “Are you allowed to interrupt Mom and Dad while they’re kissing, huh?”

David put his hand on his daughter’s back to keep her steady while she was unsuccessfully trying to stand up, giggling as Gillian distracted her by tickling her armpit. He laughed softly and leaned his head against Gillian’s as he contently watched their cute little banter.

These two, they meant the world to him.
Be of service. Whether you make yourself available to a friend or co-worker, or you make time every month to do volunteer work, there is nothing that harvests more of a feeling of empowerment than being of service to someone in need. - Gillian Anderson

Chapter Summary

It's the beginning of 2015, a very important and exciting year for Gillian and David as individuals, but especially as a couple.

Chapter Notes

I was so happy you guys liked the last chapter so much! Thank you so much for all your comments! Are you as excited as me to see what 2015 has in store for this little family? :-)

If there was something in her life Gillian would never forget, it was the times she’d left her kids for the very first time for a trip overseas. Horrible memory aside, these situations had always marked her deeply as a person and as a mother. She’d been very lucky in that respect, because despite her anxiety and the guilt she felt for leaving them, everything had always turned out great. Yes, her kids were used to have a mother who was travelling frequently from early on. With the exception of Eaden. At almost nine month old, Gillian had never left her for more than a night, and that particular situation wasn’t a memory she cherished at all.

Up to this day, she’d insisted to bring the baby everywhere she went. On set, she had someone to look after Eaden, but most of the time, she ended up with a crew member, because they were all crazy about Gillian's mini-me with the sparkling blue eyes and the wonderful, contagious smile. Bryan loved to carry her around, showing her the set and teaching her how to direct a series. And she was fascinated by Mads, who played with her when the cameras weren’t rolling. Gillian just always shook her head at the sight of her beautiful baby girl hanging around on set like a pro, having all these professional, grown-up men wrapped around her little finger. It reminded her so much of the time Piper was little, and Gillian was absolutely convinced that it was for Eaden’s best to be so close to her. Also, she had never been able to breastfeed any of the three older ones that long, and that was one hell of an accomplishment for her she was very proud of.

Until an incident right after Christmas, where she’d attended a business party and overheard a conversation between two women who slandered her for the way David and her were raising their daughter. Poor little baby, one of them said sadly and shook her head, suffering because her parents are constantly working on different continents and when they get together, they would drag the baby from Great Britain to the United States multiple times a year.

Now, she wasn’t one to give two fucks about other people’s opinions. Not anymore. But that comment hit a nerve and she found herself almost unable to hold a serious, meaningful conversation for the rest of the evening. She just couldn’t stop pondering over it. The worst thing was the
realization that they were, to some extent, actually right. Of course they’d had this conversation before, especially after her last bronchiolitis just a few weeks prior and the doctor telling them that her respiratory system wasn’t the strongest yet. So they debated whether it was okay to expose the baby so often to such a stressful situation as flying was with the jet-lag, all the germs and radioactivity in order to be with both of her parents. In the end, they agreed that Eaden was getting old enough to stay with Erin and without Gillian for a few days, and that it was more responsible for him to be the one to come to London when he wanted to be with her rather than Gillian bringing the baby to him all the time.

It was a complicated situation, and it was constantly giving her headaches. And yet she wondered if she was just stressing too much about it. The kids were doing fine, and Eaden was a happy, normally developing baby. After all, they were very privileged to live a life like that.

But guilt wasn’t the only feeling she felt when she left the kids, especially for the first time in their lives. Strangely, it was accompanied by a huge amount of relief and freedom. For Gillian, it marked a very significant point in their mother-child relationship that was so important for everything that would come in the future. And she liked the feeling of only being a person for a few days, and not mainly a mother.

So when she left the house after smothering the baby with kisses and hugs to head to the airport, Gillian felt surprisingly good and confident. Five days weren’t an eternity, and Eaden was in the best hands possible. And boy she couldn’t wait to just do whatever she pleased - to stay awake till 3am or drink two bottles of coke in one hour. There would be no baby suffering from the caffeine or waking up at 6am, making her regret not going to bed earlier.

However, she hadn’t expected that watching a cute little family going through security right before her would suddenly make her feel so lonely. All of a sudden, she missed Eaden’s weight in her arms and her little fingers poking into her eyes or pulling at her shirt. She missed Felix’ clinging arms around her thighs and Oscar’s witty remarks about planes and what they talked to one another when they were standing beside each other. And she missed David being with them, having fun with the boys, or holding her hand on the walk to their gate while she carried the baby, or giving her gentle kisses while they waited to board their flight.

It’s normal, she tried to convince herself. It was a natural emotional reaction, but if she was honest with herself, she hadn’t expected it to be like this. Not with her fourth child. Wasn’t it supposed to be easier the fourth time, she wondered.

Life was a weird and always changing adventure she’d probably never get used to. But who did, she thought and inhaled deeply as to reassure herself when she took her seat by the window in business class. Alone, for the first time in more than a year.

***

She spent the first day in Los Angeles recording the Nerdist Podcast, which turned out to be hilarious, and wonderfully distracting. She had a blast with these guys, especially because she teased them so much regarding an tenth season of The X-Files, which she knew would be announced very soon since she’d signed the contract a few weeks prior. She still couldn’t believe that they would actually shoot another season. The whole thing was just so surreal to fully comprehend at this point. But it was nice seeing and hearing people’s excitement and anticipation, especially after all these years and that second, horrible movie.

The same day, she attended the Netflix TCA Press Tour Event for The Fall with Jamie and Allan
before they shared a quiet dinner in a French restaurant together, talking about what Allan had in store for a possible third season all of them wanted to do.

She loved Januarys in Los Angeles, especially because of all the crazy parties, with the highlight being the Golden Globe Party, and meeting people she rarely saw during the rest of the year. As every year, she attended all of them on her own, and she knew people were still talking behind her back why she never went with David, especially when he was in the same building most of the time. She secretly enjoyed letting people guess, hoping that someday they would realize that a woman didn’t need to bring a man everywhere she went. Neither did a man bring his woman to everything. It was not at all like she was pretending that they weren’t a couple and not in a serious and happy relationship. However, they just weren’t the kind of couple which stuck to each other like glue. Both enjoyed some time for themselves, especially with the knowledge that the other wasn’t that far away. Besides, the anticipation that came with the chance of a fleeting meeting at some point during these evenings, like when he snug out of his party under false excuses only to surprise her by pressing her against his body and nuzzle her neck, was making the whole thing even better. And no one had to know about the exciting moments they’d excuse themselves to make out in a dark corner before going their separate ways again, knowing that once the party was over, they would always go back to the same house together.

On their last evening in Los Angeles before she had to fly back to London, David invited her to meet Harry, an old friend of his, who threw some nice dinner parties every once in awhile at his beautiful house in Monte Nido, about twenty miles away from Malibu.

With every day that had passed, Gillian had gotten increasingly restless and worried, even if she talked to Erin multiple times a day. Five days away from her baby was the maximum she was able to handle, and it was almost unbearable. So after their meeting with Melanie for lunch, he thought the best thing he could do was distracting her. The other alternative was her pacing the house while constantly looking at her phone to check the time, or if Erin had sent a message. It would’ve driven him nuts, so the garden party was the best solution. He just hoped she’d enjoy it at least a bit.

The property was nestled in the foothills of Malibu Canyon on three acres of fruit trees, oak, pine and extensive lawns. The house itself was built in the Spanish Colonial style with tall windows, white stucco walls and a red tile roof, and therefore fit perfectly into it’s natural surroundings.

Looking out of the passenger window with one hand on David’s upper thigh, Gillian enjoyed the breathtaking view under a soft smile as David came to a stop in the driveway. She could absolutely imagine living in a place like this, or at least spending an entire summer here, sitting by the pool in the middle of mother nature, preferably in the shadow of a big tree, watching the kids enjoying their vacation.

“That’s it,” he announced and waggled his eyebrows when she turned her head to look at him.

“Wow. It’s in the middle of nowhere, but it’s really beautiful and seems so serene,” she said in astonishment and unbuckled herself.

“Yes, it’s an amazingly beautiful piece of land. Harry got very lucky when he purchased it a few years ago.”

“Where did you meet him?” Gillian asked as they got out of the car. “Harry?”

“Oh, I think at one of his parties, actually. And if I remember correctly, Evan invited me, back then. Harry usually invites like five to eight people he knows to these parties and asks some of them to
bring someone he doesn’t know yet.”

“Hmm,” Gillian hummed in approval. “That sounds fun. When you like these people, chances are
high they bring someone equally as cool, huh?”

“Yeah. And it seems to work, right?” He grinned. “I’m bringing the coolest chick on Earth.”

“Aww!” Gillian smiled widely. “Jesus David, that was nice,” she said and got on her toes to give
him a kiss on the lips.

David shrugged. “It’s true. Don’t worry though, his parties are very casual. Nothing too upscale and
boring. They’re pretty much very normal people.”

“Good,” she nodded and took his hand to walk towards the front door.

It turned out that this particular night, Harry’s party wasn’t that successful. Someone David also knew
from previous nights had brought a nice friend of his, a new mother of an eight-week old baby, who
she brought with her. So far so good, if there hadn’t also been her husband and the father of the
baby, Roger, who nobody really knew and whose first remark towards Gillian, when he approached
her as David was talking to Harry, was ‘I think I’ve seen some of your earlier work, but lately there
hasn’t been anything that would be slightly interesting to me.’

She tried to have a conversation with this man, mostly because she didn’t want to be rude and make
a scene while everyone else seemed to have a good time. He kept making snarky remarks in a very
subtle way, one that made it hard to call him out for his behavior, but which was still insulting and
therefore not pleasant at all. At some point, she even considered excusing herself and walking over to
David, who was having a much better time talking to Harry. This guy made her feel so
uncomfortable and shoddy, he even managed to degrade her into an insecure teenager again – one
who needed someone to put his arm around her and make her feel valuable again. But she knew that
men like him wanted to see exactly that. A woman who wasn’t able to stand up for herself and
needed reassurance by a man. She knew that needing David didn’t make her a weaker woman in any
way, and vice versa. But she didn’t want to give this horrible man the satisfaction of being right and
seeing her like that. Instead, she kept talking to him, disarming him with her politeness, and
eventually, he lost interest in mocking her.

Harry, his wife and the rest of their guests were nice people though, some with very interesting
professions as Gillian learned over the evening. She had a long conversation with a young woman
who was working on various projects in Canada with romani refugees from Europe.

Dinner took place in the garden, where they all sat around a huge, handcrafted table of different
stones, designed by an English company Gillian had never heard of, and enjoyed grilled lemon-
salmon with different salads and a glass of wine. For dessert, Harry and his wife served a dark
chocolate tarte Gillian could’ve died for.

When she put her fork into her second piece, Roger, who was sitting opposite from her, looked up
and shook his head before saying, “Having a baby is always a great excuse to have more than one
dessert, right? Even when the child’s 20 you’re just going to say it’s the baby weight.” He chuckled
and looked at various people sitting around the table for validation, but wasn’t able to find it. Kerry,
his wife, was the only one pulling an empathetic smile.

David, who was still unaware of their previous unpleasant encounter, was totally caught off guard
for a second, and he was just staring at the guy, chewing his food. Gillian on the other hand stared at
him with a condescending smile on her lips before she replied in a quiet voice that she felt sorry for
him if he thought she actually gave a single fuck about his opinion. That wiped that stupid, smug
grin off of his face for awhile.

His wife Kerry wasn’t even able to finish her main course when their baby suddenly started to scream bloody murder. Gillian knew that sound all too well. When Oscar was that age, he also suffered from colic, and it had been a nightmare. No wonder Kerry looked so exhausted, Gillian thought while watching Roger, who had already finished his dessert, slugging his beer, absolutely unfazed by his crying son.

After unsuccessfully trying to calm the baby, Kerry eventually turned to Roger to tell him something. He made an annoyed face before he got up and headed inside.

“I’m sorry, I hoped for a quiet evening without him having these horrible tummy aches. I just needed to get out of the house for a while,” Kerry apologized and put the baby back into the car seat.

“There’s no reason to apologize, Kerry. And I can absolutely relate to that,” Gillian nodded empathetically and got up to stand beside her. “My oldest son was suffering from them, too. Does he have them all the time?”

“Pretty much, yes. It’s only for two or three hours a day that he’s doing fine. The night’s usually the worst for him, so I think we’re heading off.”

“Yeah, that’s understandable. He’s a beautiful boy. How old is he again?”

“He’s almost nine weeks old,” Kerry smiled proudly and put a pacifier into the baby’s mouth, which seemed to calm him a little.

“Wow, he’s huge! He might be as big as my daughter who’s almost nine months old!” Gillian chuckled.

“Oh yeah, he was already eleven pounds when he was born!”

“Seriously? Wow, you’re a champ! I’m so glad you decided to come here anyway. It was very nice to meet you!” Gillian said softly and stroked Kerry’s back affectionately while looking down at the screaming infant.

Kerry smiled at Gillian, clearly touched by her unexpected, kind words. When she’d gathered her things together, she said good bye and wished them a wonderful remaining evening before she picked up the baby’s car seat and walked towards the porch.

When Gillian sat down again, she made a hissing sound as she inhaled convulsively and David turned his head to look at her.

“What’s wrong?” he asked with a concerned expression and put his hand on her thigh.

“I’m so sorry to say that, but right now, I don’t feel sorry they’re leaving at all,” she whispered and rolled her eyes.

“Why?” he asked in confusion. Just a minute ago she seemed to be very considerate about the baby screaming his lungs out. It wasn’t like their kid was any different and she didn’t know how it was.

“My breasts hurt because of him crying like that,” Gillian replied before she raised her right hand and cupped her left breast as to exemplify her statement.

David tilted his head and looked at her in disbelief. “Are you serious?” There was a slight smirk on his face as he watched her lifting her own breast a little, probably to feel how heavy it had already
“Yes,” she said sadly and stuck out her bottom lip. “It’s just my body thinking it’s time to nurse. Also, her husband’s a fucking asshole.”

“Oh.” He raised his eyebrows. “Um, what do you need? You want us to go home, too?”


“If you need a hand you know where to find me,” he deadpanned before they burst into a fit of giggles.

“Oh, aren’t we such parents?”

“Yep, we are indeed.” He took her left hand into his as they watched Harry disappear into the house to say goodbye to his other guests.

Gillian snorted scornfully. “Baby weight, that guy has nerves,” she whispered while shaking her head.

“Yeah,” David chuckled. “How can anyone even think about that? And besides, I know it’s not the point, but she doesn’t even look like she has any left at all, and I know for a fact that you weigh even less than before the pregnancy. It’s probably us guys, and especially him, who still carry some extra baby-pounds,” he stated and watched her as she turned her head and grinned widely at him.

“You gained weight during my pregnancy?” Gillian asked and tilted her head empathetically.

“Well, of course. With all the temptations in your fridge and all the stuff I had to buy before you came over…, and besides, I mean, it was an emotional time.”

Gillian laughed and patted his thigh. “How much did you gain? And you still didn’t lose it?”

“Oh, around twenty pounds,” he answered and when she shot him a disbelieving look, raised his arms in defense. “Hey, while you were doing Streetcar and burning all those calories, I was sitting at home with a warm newborn on my chest, reading books or writing songs. That didn’t burn any calories at all. And in addition to the weight I gained during the pregnancy, I also gained some in the time shortly after. At some point, I started to feel like a new mother who had to eat regularly and enough to stay fit for the every-day challenges with the baby. Like I had to nurse her or something. It was so weird.”

Gillian nodded her head and bit her lower lip. “Yeah, you had a lot of energy as far as I recall.”

“See, I snacked very well during these days. Every fucking day!”

Snickering quietly, she leaned her head against his arm and closed her eyes. It was a long time ago that a man like Roger was able to ruin her mood for an entire evening. And she realized that she finally was at a point in her life where she was confident, comfortable and happy being and standing up for herself. But sometimes, she liked when someone else, especially David, who knew her so well, stood up for her.

“Does it make me a horrible person if I say I enjoy this evening with you so much, and a big part of it is because there’ll be no kids in the morning to look after?” Gillian asked and David chuckled. “Even though I miss her terribly?”
“Do you really think it does make you a bad person?”

Gillian puckered her lips. “No, I guess not. I probably just want to hear it from you…”

“Why? I certainly enjoy spending time with you…, alone. There haven’t been a lot of opportunities since…, I can’t even remember…, the little slug’s birth? There has been a lot of baby stuff in the last year, that’s for sure.”

“Yeah,” she nodded. “A lot. So this is a real treat, and I’m glad you dragged me out of here to distract me.”

“It is. I think we need to start to plan things ahead and make some plans for us as a couple. As you said, it’s nice, and I could think of a lot of things I really want to do with you sometime.”

“Really?” her head snapped up and a big smile grew on her lips. “Like what? Tell me!”

David snickered and placed a soft kiss on her forehead. “Ah you know, I’m having this dream of going on vacation with you for a very long time now. Places people wouldn’t normally travel to, places without a lot of tourists, just to explore and find the coolest things there with you.”

“Hmm,” Gillian sighed contently, just seconds before both of their eyes grew wide and they opened their mouths in disbelief, watching as the father of the baby walked back into the garden with two bottles of beer in his hands. “What the fuck,” Gillian exhaled and sat up straight.

“He’s staying and leaving her alone with that poor little guy?” David asked in astonishment. “Wow. That’s… wow.”

She squeezed his hand and leaned her shoulder against his to get a better look at the man who was now handing another bottle of beer to a very young, very good looking woman before patting her arm.

“Well, seems like she couldn’t have left soon enough,” David observed and turned his head to look at Gillian’s face. He knew her. He knew how situations like that set her on fire in less than a second. And he knew that face. With her lips slightly parted and her eyes wide open, she couldn’t hide her aversion for this guy, no matter of how good of an actress she was. First and foremost, she was this wonderful person, a woman who had a great sense for what was right and what wasn’t. And she had zero tolerance for things like that.

She swallowed and looked at David. “I would love to say something to this asshole, just to let him know he is an actual asshole and to make him feel bad, but I shouldn’t, right? Seriously, David, it’s alright to tell me to shut up.”

“You haven’t even started yet,” he chuckled, but as soon as she shot him her right eyebrow, he stopped and licked his lips. “I don’t know, if you have something to say, I would love to hear it,” he replied. In fact, he enjoyed when she’d roasted that son of a bitch during dinner. What kind of guy would make such a comment about the mother of his child and a complete stranger’s body?

It wasn’t exactly what she wanted to hear from him at this moment. She would never let someone tell her what to say or even when to say anything at all. But she knew she had a tendency to cross the line, and stick her nose in things that weren’t her business. And David was probably the only human being on this planet she trusted enough to help her make the right decision in such a matter. If he’d advise her to leave something alone, he always had a point and it was never to shut her up, but only to protect her from herself. In the past, he only did it when she was fighting with Clyde and was in danger of losing her mind over it.
Right now, all she wanted for them was to enjoy this evening without caring about one asshole between so many nice and interesting people, no matter how much it bothered her that this man thought he was the cool, irresistible macho who could get away with anything.

“That’s not okay,” she said quietly and shook her head, sadly watching the man engaging in what seemed to be a very exciting conversation.

“No,” David agreed and nuzzled her hair with his nose before placing a lingering kiss on her temple. “I love you,” he whispered into her ear and put his arm around her shoulders to pull her closer.

She smiled to herself. Despite everything, this man had never pretended to be something he wasn’t, and he would never treat another person like that. He wasn’t perfect, just as anyone else, but he was a good man who was honest and sincere. He’d worked hard on himself in the last decade, but especially in the last three years, and it showed. She’d never thought he’d be genuinely happy with her on his side. But he was, and sometimes, it still startled her when he did something so considerate and sweet to let her know how happy he was. They’d had a lot of arguments and fights over the last 22 years, but he’d never belittled her or made her feel worthless for being who she was. Even during their worst times, when they would barely talk to each other, they both tried to encourage and lift the other up whenever it was needed.

Gillian was unusually quiet and seemed a bit melancholic when they got back home. She immediately went to the bathroom for her nighttime routine before snuggling into bed with the new book he’d gotten her for Christmas. Watching her sulking because of whatever was bothering her while changing into pajamas, David decided to try to cheer her up, shuffled to the kitchen without saying a word and cooked her a pot of hot, dark chocolate just the way she liked it.

Her head was almost entirely under the sheets when he returned to the bedroom. He chuckled quietly at how awkwardly she was holding the book in front of her face. He loved when the little drama queen in her came out every once in awhile.

Quietly making his way towards the bed, he heard some rustling and got a glimpse of her eyes peeking from under the sheets.

“Okay babe, I don’t know what’s bothering you so much, but I’ve made you a comforting beverage,” he whispered and slowly sat down beside her.

She slightly lifted her head and sniffed the air before pulling the sheets entirely away, her eyes suddenly wide with surprise and delight.

“You made me hot chocolate?” she asked sweetly and he smiled at her, happy that his attempt to brighten her up seemed to be successful.

“Yes, I did,” he nodded as she sat up and took the mug from him. “What’s bugging you?” he asked and watched her taking a cautious sip before closing her eyes with pleasure.

“Hmm,” she murmured. “That’s very good, thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now, what’s up? Missing the little Slug that much?”

“Yeah,” Gillian whispered into her mug. “But I’m also wondering… you know… Kerry, who’s such a lovely woman, she doesn’t deserve to be treated like that. I didn’t deserve to be treated the way this asshole treated me tonight. Things like that always make me so scared. And I don’t want to be scared, fearing this might also happen to our daughters someday. Or any other girl and woman out
there. I want to do something against it, stand up for women, and for men who know how to treat women like actual human beings, rather than just… objects,” she stated and nibbled on her bottom lip. “You know, as a feminist, and in my position, I think I could do a lot more for women in general.”

David nodded slowly. This driven, passionate woman was amazing him every day anew. Always alert, observing and analyzing and immediately coming up with an idea or a plan to make a change. Not only for herself, but for everyone. He often wondered what a world ruled by her would look like.

“I mean, am I right?” she asked demandingly, pulling him out of his thoughts. “I could reach so many people, so many young women.”

“You’re right,” David nodded and took a deep breath before he climbed over her legs and lay back with his head in her lap, looking up at her face. “Except for the fact that you’re already reaching a lot of people with your messages. I mean, I don’t know another person who uses celebrity as good and clever as you do to raise awareness and money for so many important causes.”

She snorted with laughter, put the mug on the nightstand and started to run her fingers through his soft hair.

“I think the only thing you need to know from me regarding all of this is that I’m with you and that I’ll support you on every step you take. You’re just… amazing, Gillian. I’m proud and happy and so in love with my badass woman,” he said under a grin and in such a sleepy voice full of adoration. Her cheeks reddened and her heart felt like it melted hearing him say these words.

“Thank you,” Gillian whispered and took his hand to put both hers and his on his chest while continuing to stroke his hair. “Do you think I could really do this? Encourage others?”

“I know you can. You do it all day long every day,” he said quietly and licked his lips before adding, “You have strong opinions. People love you, they listen to your words. You’re a good person and what you want is legitimate and right and important. I mean, just thinking about our little girl and how I want the world to be she’s growing up in. I want her to be strong, outspoken, and safe in whatever she wants to do and I also want her to be treated as an equal part of this society, no matter where she is and who she’s with. And I want the same thing for West and Piper. I know everyone can make a change, but you have an extraordinary talent and a wonderful way to talk to people.”

“Jesus,” Gillian laughed. “What’s up with all the compliments tonight? Is there something specific you want from me?” she asked suggestively and tilted her head to the side.

“Nah, I’ve got everything I need. And I’m just honest. And maybe a little… I don’t know…, I just want to let you know how loved and cherished you are after all the stuff you had to see and hear from a man tonight. It made me feel kinda bad being one.”

Gillian clicked her tongue and shook her head. “No. You have nothing in common with men like him,” she said in a low, sultry voice with a wicked grin on her face and leaned down, her long, blonde hair framing his head as she started to kiss him slowly and sensually.

Putting his hand into her hair and pulling her even closer, he moaned as her tongue slipped inside his mouth and teased his. She tasted warm, rich and chocolaty in a very pleasurable way. He had to remind himself to make her another hot chocolate when he was in London in February, so there would actually be something nice about the cold, wet weather they had over there.

As the kiss intensified, he snug his hand under her shirt and ran it over the soft skin of her belly up to
the underside of her breast. She was so warm and inviting.

She huffed a laugh and broke their kiss, gently nibbling on his upper lip.

“Hmm, you taste delicious,” David stated, pulled his hand out of her shirt and lifted it over his head.

Gillian chuckled and sat straight up as he placed an open mouthed kiss over the silver ring on her belly button before he licked his way upwards to her sternum.

She giggled and put her hand over his head, which was stretching her shirt.

“Ugh,” he grumbled, realizing that the shirt was too tight for him to reach her breasts, and pulled his head out again.

“What are you doing?” she shook her head, grinning. “I thought you didn’t want anything from me?”

David shrugged and lifted the hem of her shirt. “Changed my mind. This has to come off.”

“Really?” she raised an eyebrow, but he already pulled the shirt over her head and she raised her arms to help him pull it off.

“Much better,” David said with a satisfied grin on his lips, pulled himself on his knees and climbed under the sheets beside her.

Gillian smiled, put her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. Their lips met for a hungry kiss as his hands skimmed her upper thighs up to the waistband of her hotpants.

“Let’s take these off too,” he said and she raised her hips dutifully. When he had the soft clothing pulled down to her calves, she kicked them off and further down the bed.

She shivered and goosebumps rose on her skin, her body tingling in anticipation as his arms came around her body.

“Mmh,” he murmured and pressed her against his warm body. “You’re freezing,” he said and grinned, his erection prodding her belly demandingly. He wasn’t in a hurry though. Not at all.

Gillian shrugged. “I’m just always cold so I have an excuse to have you close,” she said, and the allusion to Rogers statement earlier that night did not escape him.

He chuckled and started to caress the length of her spine with the tips of his fingers. “No more excuses. Let’s live,” he said throatily and captured her lips again.

Gillian moaned into his mouth, deepening the kiss as he rolled on top of her, cradling her head between his hands, his fingers curling into her soft hair.

She loved these intimate, unhurried moments, and they were what she missed the most when he wasn’t around. For her, they represented the ultimate form of love, because they weren’t overly exciting, but they were reassuring and warm and made her feel safe. She was convinced that every couple needed them like air to breathe, and knew the pain when they didn’t feel that way anymore, or when you realized you had neglected them until it was too late.

She let her hands travel over his muscular back down to his toned ass, not breaking their kiss as her fingers slipped into his boxershorts. His skin was warm and soft, and she wanted to feel more of it.

He chuckled at her unsuccessful attempts to free him from the last piece of clothing he was wearing.
Oh how much he loved their height-difference, especially in bed where she wasn’t able to do anything about it.

She groaned impatiently at his unwillingness to help her out and raised her hips, grinding them teasingly against his erection. He moaned at that, placed another kiss onto her lips and sat back up on his knees with a sly grin on his face.

His erection sprang free when she slowly pulled his shorts down his slim waist, pointing directly at her, literally pleading for attention.

She wrapped her hand around his length and gently started to stroke him. Her movements were slow and savoring. His eyes were not entirely closed, and she knew he watched her intently as she licked her lips at the sight of his still growing dick in her small hand.

Now it was his turn to shiver and he grabbed the sheers to his sides and pulled them up and over his back as he lay back down between her open legs. She embraced him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him, slightly tilting her head for a lip lock, but teasing him by occasionally withdrawing, causing him to moan in desperation to feel her close.

She giggled quietly, but then his tongue slipped out and caressed her lower lip, and she was a goner.

They kissed for minutes with occasional breaks to catch their breaths and to look at each other, smiling at what they saw in the eyes of the other.

With one hand firmly on her back, he slightly turned them to the side and raised her leg over his upper thigh.

“I want you so badly,” he murmured and pressed his face into the hollow of her neck and sucked on the soft skin there. She would definitely find some hickeys there tomorrow, but she didn’t care. It would remind her of this sweet night for a few days.

Reaching between them, she gently guided him to her entrance, dragging the head of his penis through her wet slit before allowing him to slide inside.

They moaned in unison as he stretched her walls and completely disappeared into her snug warmth. She held him close against her as he began to move, threatening her fingers through his hair and massaging his scalp.

The position didn’t allow fast movements, but he pulled almost completely out before retreating and pushed deeply into her.

His hand found her right breast and squeezed it as he thrust into her as hard as possible. She moaned in pleasure, starting to crave faster and harder penetration. Trying to roll herself back onto her back, he stopped her with his hand on her shoulder and whispered ‘No’ into her ear before he raised his head and looked at her.

“From behind?” he asked almost sheepishly, and so unlike the David who just used to grab her hips and turn her around. She found both highly endearing.

She smiled and nodded, gave him a chaste kiss on the lips and pulled away, letting him slip out of her slowly.

He chuckled as she wiggled her butt playfully against his pelvis after she’d turned around and gently bit into her shoulder. She giggled, reached behind herself and her hand rose to slap his left butt cheek.
“Hey!” David yelped, his surprised tone causing her to giggle in satisfaction.

“That,” she murmured innocently and glanced back at him with a mischievous, challenging grin on her face. She looked so unbelievably sexy, it drove him almost crazy.

This time, he didn’t ask, and instead grabbed her waist and turned her around onto her stomach.

“Oh,” she exclaimed and hummed approvingly, bracing herself on her elbows, hips arching upwards as he positioned himself behind her.

“God,” he growled and entered her slowly, fingers dug into the soft flesh of her hips.

“Goddess,” she corrected and held onto her pillow as he began to thrust into her with force. “Jesus,” she moaned and bit into her bottom lip.

“What a match,” he panted, closing his eyes at the sensation of his hard cock deep inside of her.

Everything about her was perfect. Her firm little ass that he squeezed as he looked down at himself, watching as he slid in and out of her with purpose. Her beautiful back and how wonderful it tasted when he leaned down and licked her sweaty shoulder blade up to her neck. How her breast felt in his palm as he removed one hand from her waist, and the way she moaned when he pinched her nipple between his thumb and index finger.

Lost in his arousal, he grunted against her skin, thrusting into her relentlessly. When her moans grew louder, she let her upper body sink into the mattress and panted into the pillow. He moved his hand from her breast downwards towards his goal between her legs.

She grunted in anticipation as she realized what would come next. Him fucking her from behind felt like heaven itself, but when he brought his skilled fingers into the game, she knew she was completely lost.

It felt like hours before he finally reached her pussy, and she cried out at the first touch of his finger on her clit and bucked back into him, clenching her internal muscles involuntarily.

He hissed and removed his hand instantly, grabbed her waist again, which made her groan in frustration, until he started pounding into her so hard and fast, unable to hold back anymore.

She cried out and bit into her fist. It hurt a bit, but the pain felt wonderful. He knew exactly what to do to provide the highest amount of pleasure. His movements were ferocious, and she wouldn’t allow anyone to do this to her but him.

It was the other piece of ultimate love and trust, and realizing again that she could only have that with him, she felt her climax approach fast, and knew she would come hard even without his fingers.

“Yes,” David growled, feeling that she was close and bent over to put his lips on the back of her neck, pressing her entire body deep into the mattress. “Yes, baby. You’re going to come so fucking hard.”

Suddenly, his fingers were back between her legs. He slightly changed the angle of penetration and continued to fuck her, his dick now hitting the sweet spot inside of her that made her legs quiver and her fingers curl into the sheets until her knuckles went white.

“Oh, fuck,” she sighed, and with a few more swipes of his thumb over her pulsating clit, her whole body jerked back into him before it went rigid, and a low cry escaped her throat as she came so hard around him, milking him that his own orgasm came literally out of nowhere, taking him so much by
surprise that he squeezed his eyes shut and moaned loudly into her back as the jolts of pleasure took over his entire body.

When she whispered his name, he inhaled deeply and blinked himself out of his unconsciousness that must’ve lasted at least a few moments, since his breathing had evened out again. He murmured a barely audible ‘yeah’ and kissed the back of her neck before rolling off of her, coming to a rest beside her, spent and happy. She smiled warmly, her face flushed and so fucking radiant. Slowly, she turned to her side and scooted closer towards him.

“That was nice,” Gillian said, grinning.

“Nice?” David scoffed, but chuckled as she furrowed her eyebrows. “You’re feeling better?” he asked softly and moved his hand to her back, gently stroking her soft, warm skin in small circles.

“M-hm, much better.”

“Well, I just had to give my best to make it last for the next three weeks,” he said and winked at her. Her laugh was heartily, and she rubbed her nose against his. “At least you get to see the little Slugger soon,” David added and pouted his lips.

“Yeah,” she whispered empathetically, only able to imagine how hard it must be for him to be away from his daughter for such a long time.

“Just give her lots of kisses and cuddles from me, okay?”

She nodded. “I definitely will. And I’ll tell her that we’re going to have a wonderful, fun time in February when you’re done filming,” Gillian replied softly and gently traced his soft eyebrow with her thumb, hoping that February would come fast.
A girl’s first true love is her father. - Marisol Santiago

Chapter Notes

One of my dearest readers just reminded me that I'm writing this story for over a year now - wow! Can you believe it? It's been a crazy ride, and I'm so happy you all still enjoy it and want more! I'm still in love with this story and the idea behind it myself, so, even though it sometimes takes me longer to post another chapter, I still love to write it! And talk about it, and think about it... all day long if I could :P Love you guys! Thank you so much! And a special thanks to my dear justholdinghands, who's just the best <3

The last three weeks of filming Aquarius went by much smoother and with less drama than the first. What a difference a serious talk about feelings and expectations could make, he often marveled in a quiet minute, even though the situation had remained pretty much the same - he was in Los Angeles while she was in London with the kids. The difference was that now, there weren’t any hurt feelings anymore. No more hanging up on each other, no unspoken accusations and no more silence. Now, there was a deep and genuine understanding for the other, and a whole new level of empathy. And despite the distance, they made sure they were as close as possible.

When he dropped Gillian off at the Airport in January, giving her a kiss that was worth a whole month of kisses, he decided that he would not spent three weeks sulking and pondering how crappy the whole situation was. No. He would enjoy filming the first season of this new, exciting series before going back to New York for a couple of days to see West and Miller, and for a few business meetings. It was hard, but first and foremost about the right mindset, and once he’d realized that, it all started to work out and the weeks went by flying.

His bags were already packed and checked in by his assistance when he left the studio after being on Live! with Kelly and Michael to promote Holy Cow. He felt excited when he hopped into the waiting limousine on Columbus Avenue, because not only had the show been pretty good, but he was finally taking the first step on his way to England. In 10 hours from now, he would quietly sneak into Gillian’s new house in a beautiful neighborhood in Central London with a bag of fresh bagels, muffins and hot coffee under his arm, before he would find her in bed, cuddling with the boys and the baby, all soft and warm and cozy. He would probably just slip under the sheets to join them and let the coffee cool down. Who the hell cared for coffee, anyway? He just wanted to be with them again.

One can imagine his expression when the young lady at the counter of British Airways told him that there was a problem with the plane, and therefore, the flight was already four hours delayed. He groaned in frustration, which made the woman, who seemed to have her first day on the business class counter, even more nervous. It was pointless to get upset, and he didn’t want to take it out on her, so he grabbed his backpack and his papers and was about to walk away, when she stopped him and asked if it was alright to book him on another flight, which was also delayed, but would take off in an hour. It would cost him twice the amount he’d originally paid for his ticket, because the only seat available was in first class. He didn’t care anymore. His butt would be very well seated and, most importantly, an hour earlier in London than expected.
It was still very early in the morning when he arrived at Gillian's house with fresh Bagels and Muffins for breakfast. The sun hadn't even risen when he walked into the townhouse and quietly closed the door behind him.

Dirty shoes were piling up in the landing area, and anyone could tell by the smell alone that some young, active boys were living in this home. And for the first time, he also spotted a pair of tiny, milkshake pink winter boots neatly put down beside a pair of Piper’s turquoise sneakers. He smiled as he felt the anticipation rise within him again. This was his family, and he couldn’t wait to be with them again. To rinse the dirt off the boys shoes after a soccer game. Or to lift Eaden onto his lap to gently insert her little feet into her shoes, knowing that she would pull them off in a matter of minutes, and lose them in the street if he wouldn’t pay enough attention.

He’d visited this house once before and therefore knew his way around, but it still felt a little strange. It was much smaller than the previous one, but it was absolutely beautiful with its spectacular reception rooms, the original walls and the sash windows of the rear elevation. It was also much cozier and, just as he had expected, already very homely.

The move into the city was a decision mostly made because of logistics. It was closer to the airport, and Gillian wouldn’t have to drive an hour in and out of the city for work. Piper’s university could be easily reached by bus and the boys’ new school seemed to be awesome. Also, they were closer to their father.

He hadn’t been that much involved in the house-hunting process, which was fine - it was her house after all. And Gillian was Gillian. She had always preferred to make certain decisions by herself. Secretly, he was happy enough to just leave the old house behind. No matter how often he told himself that Mark wasn’t a part of this household anymore, he was never entirely able to shed the feeling that it was another man’s home. The whole thought process was weird, especially for being a part of such a big patchwork-family. He knew that. Actually, it surprised him that deep down, he had these territorial feelings at all. However, he couldn’t help admit that it felt good knowing that this new house was Gillian’s, and hers alone.

He gave up on the coffee, because he didn’t want to waste it, knowing that there was no way she would get up this early, especially since the boys were off of school this week, and the fact that an exciting evening was lying ahead of her.

Leaving his luggage on the ground floor, David headed straight to the master bedroom. The soft light in the hallway, which was on in case the boys needed to use the stairs during the night, illuminated her bedroom just enough to make out her small frame on the bed as he pushed the door open and quietly stepped inside.

He smiled as he remembered about a dozen conversations he had with Gillian about letting the kids sleep in her bed and how much she used to stress over it. And yet there he was, standing in her bedroom while shedding his clothes, once again looking at the mother of his child sleeping contently on her side while the baby was lying next to her on her back, one little hand gripping on her mother’s shirt.

She’d told him weeks ago that she liked having the baby in bed with her when he wasn’t around, even though chances were high nowadays that she would wake up to a painful punch into her jaw by a little foot or a finger poking into her nose. He just hoped Eaden wasn’t like her brother Miller and would find joy in farting right into one of her parents’ faces. That could end this cozy little arrangement sooner rather than later, he thought and chuckled to himself as he climbed into bed behind Gillian.

When she started to keep the baby in bed with her, she also got rid of the dozen blankets she usually
needed to stay warm and instead began to heat the room even during the night. It seemed comfortable for the two of them, but he needed to shed as much clothes as possible to avoid sweating like a pig during the nights. Sharing a bedroom with an always freezing, tiny woman wasn’t that easy for a tall, muscular guy like him.

Sliding under the sheets and scooting closer to her, he gently put his hand on her right arm, which was resting on top of her rib cage above the sheets, and whispered, “Good morning, sleeping beauty. It’s me,” into her ear.

She groaned in her sleep and stirred before eventually leaning back against his chest and this time, sighing contently.

“Yes, I’m home,” David added, gently stroking her bare arm, the skin cold from not being under the covers.

Slowly regaining consciousness, she mumbled something unintelligible and slightly turned onto her back. Just as she was about to turn to him completely, she realized that something was holding her back from turning around, and the baby started to whimper in protest, about to lose her grip on Gillian’s top.

“What’s wrong baby?” Gillian slurred in concern and opened her eyes to look down at the fuzzy, blonde head beside her.

“It’s alright, she’s fine. She’s just holding onto your shirt,” he reassured her softly and kissed the back of her head, inhaling the scent of her freshly washed hair.

Eaden began to stir and grimaced, apparently not amused to be disturbed like that. As her whimpers became more demanding and he expected her to start to cry out any second now, Gillian ran her hand through the baby’s soft hair, loosened her strong grip on her nightshirt, pulled it up and brought her to her breast.

The soft, content sucking that filled the room just moments later caused her to exhale heavily, and she finally turned her head, looking at him under hooded eyes.

“Hey,” she whispered warmly, the tiniest grin gracing her lips. “What time is it?”

“Hey, it’s a little after 6:30am. My plane was delayed and they booked me on another flight, which was also delayed, but landed an hour earlier than the other one would’ve originally. Isn’t that cool?”

“Awesome,” Gillian nodded slowly, her eyes so heavy she wasn’t even able to keep them open. She would probably ask him again later why he’d arrived so early.

As the baby fell back to sleep immediately at her mother’s warm skin, her mouth slackened against her breast and she opened it with a loud smack. Like on autopilot, Gillian inserted her index finger into the corner of the baby’s mouth and gently pulled her nipple fully out of it before rolling Eaden back onto her back, stroking her pretty little cheeks with the back of her fingers.

This was their routine. This was how they spent the nights when he wasn’t around. They were an established team, but he still hoped he made a difference by being there.

“We missed you,” Gillian said, as if she was able to hear his thoughts. “So glad you’re finally home,’ she added quietly and scooted backwards into his warm chest.

Smiling in contentment, he put his arm around her waist and closed his eyes. “I missed you, too.”
“Glad you actually found your way back home after getting cozy with so many beautiful women,” she teased. He’d sent her a lot of pictures from the Aquarius set and told her a lot about the plot during their phone calls. Therefore, she knew that his character was a popular guy among women, and based of what she knew about his female co-stars, she figured out early that he also had a thing for pretty women. Not that she was jealous or something. Not really. But when you miss someone, you want to be the one lying in their arms for hours, you don’t want someone else there instead.

David chuckled brightly in response. “Yeah, but it wasn’t easy to peel them off my clothes before I got on the plane.”

She reached out and pinched his arm, giggling quietly as he whined ‘oww’. “Your loss. Who knows how much fun we could have had…”

“What?” his voice cracked, and she had trouble not to burst out into laughter. “You’re a tease,” he growled, and they both settled down, quietly snickering, and looked at their peaceful sleeping daughter.

Even in the dark he noticed how much bigger she had gotten. The tiny little thing she was only a few months ago was not so tiny anymore. She was still a little baby for her age, as far as he could tell anyway, but it was obvious that she would indeed become a toddler in the next few months.

And she was absolutely, stunningly beautiful. Almost a spitting image of her mother with the pouty lips and big, blue eyes, which were just slightly hooded and almond-shaped like his own. But apart from that and the stubby little nose that she’d definitely inherited from him, she looked just like a baby-version of Gillian. Like a perfect little porcelain doll. He couldn’t wait to see what else she would adopt from them over time.

Gillian seemed to sense that he was marvelling over their little girl, and gently stroked the golden blonde hair, slightly curled from sleep, out of Eaden’s face. He guessed that they could be called bangs pretty soon, knowing that Piper would be pretty happy when she could finally make cute little hairstyles out of her sister's hair.

“She’s incredible, David,” Gillian whispered sleepily and closed her eyes.

“Yeah,” David nodded, gently tracing the length of Gillian’s arm with his thumb.”Go back to sleep, babe. I’m here,” he said softly before drifting off into a peaceful slumber.

***

“Are you really sure you don’t want me to call Erin to take the boys tonight?” Gillian asked frowning, and leaned down to pull the black shoe over her heel before standing up straight and taking a few cautious steps into Eaden’s nursery, adjusting to her new height.

Sighing, he turned his head and smiled warmly at her, preparing himself to patiently explain another time that he was perfectly capable of caring for three children on his own, no matter of their current mood or that two of them were constantly fighting each other at the moment. He could absolutely do it, and one evening wouldn’t kill him, he thought and nodded.

“Yes?” she asked again and ran her hand through her slightly wavy hair.

She looked stunning in her black dress, wearing a subtle, natural makeup and this beautiful hairstyle that let her hair fall softly over her shoulders, and he didn’t realize she was waiting for an answer as his eyes slowly travelled from her head, over the soft curves of her slim waist, to her feet and the
killer heels she was wearing. He could spend hours staring at these beautiful ankles of hers. He had a thing for them since the day they met. And for her feet too. They were so perfect, feminine and strong.

“David!” she prompted impatiently and stared at him with expectant eyes and her hands on her hips.

“Um,” he cleared his throat and unfolded a fresh diaper that he had pulled out of the drawer with one hand while holding the baby still with his other hand firmly resting on her belly. Before he moved on, he looked back at Eaden lying on the changing table, who was starting to whimper impatiently, and trying to roll to the side. Grabbing her little feet with his left hand and raising her lower body to put the diaper underneath her, he nodded again, hoping to please both at the same time while trying to concentrate, when Piper stumbled into the room behind her mother and groaned in frustration.

“Mom, I can’t find any matching earrings. Can I borrow some from you?” she asked and nervously tucked a strand of her light brown hair behind her ear.

David grinned and fixated the straps of the diaper over the baby’s belly before putting his index finger underneath the hem to check if it wasn’t too tight. The prospect of meeting the Prince of Wales, Prince Charles, at the Prince’s Trust gala dinner at the Savoy Hotel was clearly starting to get to her nerves, and it was quite amusing seeing this usually laid-back young women like this. Like her mother, she was also wearing a black dress, and looked absolutely beautiful.

“Yes, they’re all still in my green jewelry box in my dressing room. Just go and see if you can find something you like, honey,” Gillian replied and watched her oldest daughter run away with an empathetic smile on her face before walking towards the changing table.

David had managed to put the baby into some black and white striped leggings and a long-sleeved, dark blue denim dress in the meantime, and pulled a pair of white socks over her wiggling little feet.

“We’ll be fine, don’t worry,” David said. “I’m going to order pizza and we’ll watch a nice movie. I think I can handle that.”

“Hmm,” Gillian pursed her lips and rested her head against his upper arm. “I know you can, it’s just that these three can be quite challenging at the moment.”

“That’s fine, I’m up to it. You just concentrate on having a nice evening. And besides, I think the real question is, are you ready to handle this little bundle of nerves by yourself?” he chuckled and nodded his head towards her bedroom.

“Oh boy, we’ll see,” Gillian shrugged with a grin and waggled her eyebrows once.

David raised the baby from the table and held her against his chest, slightly leaning to the side for Gillian to kiss her goodbye. Eaden had just learned to give kisses, and fell into a fit of giggles when their lips parted with a loud smack, making her parents laugh too.

“God, you’re so cute, little one. But Mummy has to go look after your Sissy now, it’s not cool to let a Prince wait, you know?”

“Nah, that’s a no no,” David agreed, leaned down and puckered his lips expectantly.

Gillian smiled and gave him a lingering kiss. She was about to pull away, but he leaned in further, not wanting to break the kiss, but to feel her soft lips just a moment longer on his.

“David,” she whined, also struggling to step away. “I really have to go.”
“Mom!” came out of Gillian’s room, Piper’s voice sounding urgent and desperate.

They parted immediately and with a sigh and a last squeeze of his arm, she started to walk backwards and waved goodbye.

Taking Eadens arm, he waved back and said quietly into her ear, “Say bye bye, Mommy. See you later!”

“Bye bye, baby. Be good for Daddy!”

Almost six hours later, David sighed as he stumbled over another of the boys’ toy cars that had been scattered all over the living room floor and the adjoined, small kitchen.

Gillian wasn’t exaggerating when she told him the boys were a handful these days, bustling with energy and barely able to sit still for a few minutes, not even for dinner. The plan to sit down and watch a movie with them was quickly dismissed as they started to play with their cars until eventually, the whole living room floor had become one big city with a hundreds of roads build out of everything they were able to find. David was blown away by their great and endless imagination and they had a lot of fun, until Oscar and Felix started to fight over who got to play with the red Ferrari. Felix was on the verge of tears and attacking his big brother when David cut in and suggested a little walk through a nearby park before bedtime, hoping that it would wear them out.

Now, after an hour long walk during which they got so dirty he had to put them in the bathtub, they were finally lying in their beds and were actually sleeping. He had never thought that one evening with the three of them would exhaust him that much, but he was absolutely beaten.

Picking up what felt like the hundredth car, he looked into the playpen and into the face of his grinning, still wide awake daughter, chewing on Sophie, the rubber giraffe she got from Piper when she had started teething.

“Still not tired, Slugger?” David asked and threw the car into a box beside the coffee table before bending over the railing and lifting her out of the playpen.

He’d missed caring for her, and the smile she gave him when she looked at him warmed his heart immensely. From what he’d learned of her over the day, she was definitely not just an innocent little baby anymore. No, this little girl had developed quite the character over the last few months. She was stubborn and strong minded, even more than before. New to him was that she was also curious as hell, and wasn’t happy when she couldn’t be in the middle of something. Not able to walk or even crawl yet, she had found another way of moving around. It was a mixture of pulling herself forward, robbing and rolling, and it looked absolutely hilarious. Her brothers’ toys weren’t safe from her anymore, and therefore they all had to make sure that she wouldn’t find something small enough to choke on. The boys were wonderful with her, though. They were patient when she robbed over their legos and duplos or chewed on their toys. But no matter how gentle they were with her, sometimes she just got between their rambunctious play and was accidentally hit by a toy or thrown to the ground when they ran her over while she tried to pull herself up on something. It was the fate of being the baby sister of two older brothers, David always joked.

“Mwah mwah mwah,” Eaden babbled, pulling him out of his thoughts and smacked the sides of his face between her hands, leaning in for a slobbery kiss.

“Mwah?” David grinned, giving her the requested kiss. “Does mwah stand for kisses?” he asked and kissed her cheek, making her giggle. “Yes?”
This time, she smacked her lips in response and shook her head, which she often did nowadays when somebody said the word yes. It seemed like she just wanted to have the last word, regardless whether she understood what was meant. She wasn’t able to say No yet, but she knew what it stood for and that a shake of the head basically meant the same thing.

He chuckled and patted her back. “Hungry, maybe? Do you want Daddy to make you your bottle now?”

“Mwah Dada,” she nodded firmly, her expression suddenly serious, as if she indeed understood what he’d asked, which he knew she wasn’t able to.

“Well that’s a statement! Let’s see,” David played along and walked towards the fridge, moving Eaden to his right hip before opening it. “Look at that, honey. Mama has left you a bottle for tonight. Isn’t she wonderful?” he said quietly, retrieved the bottle full of milk and gave the baby a quick peck on her temple.

Her beautiful blue eyes stared up at him, looking straight into his own as she lied comfortably in his arms. David had dimmed the lights before sitting down on the new, spacious couch and offering Eaden the bottle she was now contently sucking on.

He loved these intimate and quiet moments, feeling such a strong connection to his child as he provided what she needed the most. Food, warmth and unconditional love.

It was amazing. Before having children, he’d never thought he was able to love to such an extend. Gillian had often expressed that she felt the same. That the love for her children was beyond everything she’d ever felt. And he would never forget the look on Téa’s face when she had laid eyes on their daughter for the very first time. It was such a major change, he often wondered if she’d become a whole new person the minute West was born. In retrospect, he was pretty sure he had.

He loved all of them equally, yet naturally, very differently. Before having Miller, he used to ask his mother and other parents with more than one child how you’re supposed to love two or even more of them so much, or even the same. He had horrible thoughts before Miller was born. What if he didn’t like him? What if he wouldn’t turn out as wonderful as West? With Eaden, his biggest concerns were how his teenagers would react to a new sibling, and how much it would mess with their lives. Was it fair to do this to them? Should he feel guilty for being selfish and actually wanting to have a child with Gillian?

At some point in his life, he realized that there would never be an answer to all of these questions. Life happened. There were good days, and there were bad days.

What he did realize along the way was that most of these doubts were unfounded. Each child turned out to be wonderful in it’s own, unique way. And love apparently had the ability to grow to be sufficient for all of them. The only hard thing about having more children was the simple fact that your heart split into yet another piece you weren’t able to keep around and with you all the time.

Eaden was the sweetest surprise he’d ever gotten. Having her was a gift and nothing short of a miracle after all they’d been through. He was excited to watch her growing up, especially now that he had an idea of what was lying ahead of them, and looked forward to go through all the great, crazy and sometimes even frustrating times and stages with her.

When she had swallowed the last ounces of milk, he slowly pulled the sucker out of her mouth and put the bottle back on the table.
“All done? Was it good?” David whispered and moved into the corner of the couch, resting his back against the backrest and stretched out his legs. The baby turned in his arms and grabbed his shirt to pull herself onto her knees on his lap, trying to put her head on his shoulder.

With a soft chuckle, he lifted her slightly and gathered her close to his chest, both of her arms and her head now resting comfortably on his shoulders. She seemed to really like this position, especially when he was walking around. She could rest and still have a great view on everything from high above. It was also a great position to put one's feet into other people’s faces when they were standing beside David.

They sat like that for a couple of minutes with David quietly humming his song *Passenger* to Eaden - which apparently was her favorite song from his album - until the baby’s soft, regular breathing and the warmth they were creating with their combined body heat lulled him to sleep.

He woke to the slight shift of the cushion underneath him as someone quietly sat down beside them. Two soft fingertips gently brushed a strand of hair from his forehead, followed by a pair of soft, plump lips being pressed between his eyebrows.

Inhaling deeply, he recognized her sweet scent immediately and let the air out with a soft sigh as he blinked himself awake.

“Hey,” she whispered and smiled at him with her lips closed, one hand caressing the baby’s back softly up and down. “How are you guys? Is everything alright?”

David nodded and put his left hand on Gillian’s knee, gently stroking the exposed skin right underneath the hem of her dress. “Ah, yeah…, so far so good. Boys are in their beds, baby’s fed, and have I already told you that you look incredibly beautiful tonight?”

Grinning, she bowed her head, looking at her hands in her lap, and blushed. “Thank you.”

“How was your evening? How’s P?”

“It was awesome! Food was good and everyone was so delighted to meet Piper. It was so nice, and I’m so proud of her, David. My little girl is all grown up.”

“Was she nervous?”

“Oh yeah, she definitely was,” Gillian grinned. “But so was I. It’s a little intimidating after all, meeting a Prince. But it was fine, we were very well behaved,” she said and nodded her head proudly.

“Yip, we definitely were!” Piper added, breezing into the room with her usual lightness and a smile on her face. “I rocked that thing.”

“Well we all know who’s the one who knows how to behave herself, so I wasn’t worried about you, Piper,” David joked, chuckling as he looked at Gillian challenging.

“Hey!” Gillian exclaimed and pressed her lips together as the baby slightly startled on his chest. She slapped his thigh with the back of her hand and pouted. “You’re mean.”

“Nah, just kidding,” he winked and turned his head to look at Piper, who was pouring herself a glass of water in the kitchen. Biting his bottom lip thoughtfully, he looked back at Gillian and gently poked her upper arm to get her attention. “Hey, do you want to tuck her in, get comfortable and
come back downstairs for a cup of tea?”

Gillian nodded. “Hmm, alright,” she said, got up from the sofa with a heavy sigh and bent over to lift the baby carefully from David’s chest. “C’mere, honey. Let’s get you into bed.”

As soon as Gillian walked into the hallway and was out of sight, David jumped up from the couch and jogged towards Piper on the balls of his feet.

“And?” he asked excitedly, leaning over the counter as Piper turned around to look at him. “Does she suspect something?”

“Not a thing,” Piper shook her head and grinned widely. “She’s absolutely clueless. Oh my god, I can’t believe we’re really doing this.”

“No, me neither. I’m getting really nervous, especially that we have to keep it a secret for such a long time. And cover up our traces,” David sighed.

Piper smiled softly and reached forward, putting her hand over his. “You know what? When I saw the pic you sent me of the documents the other day, I was sitting with my friends, and I wasn’t able to talk for like five minutes and just sat there and stared at the photo and thought fuck, my Mom is loved so much.”

Snickering shyly, he looked at their hands and nodded his head. When her words were already touching him so much, how would it be when Gillian heard of his little surprise for her. Would she like it as much as her daughter? Would she appreciate the gesture or was it too much? Was he crossing a line? He knew doing this would mean the world to her, but would she accept it when he was the one initiating everything and finally making it happen? She had never liked when someone took control over her, and it had always been an act of balance between doing something nice for Gillian, or upsetting her to the point where she just felt the need to free herself and flee. While it fascinated him, there also weren’t a lot of other things that scared him more. And he was scared shitless right now.

“Hey,” Piper prompted, sensing that he was starting to have second thoughts. “She’s never been better, David. She’s happy and content. And she’s allowing herself to let you love her, and to love you back. It’s sweet, thoughtful and…, altruistic. No one has ever done anything like that for her to show her how much she’s loved…, and how much they cherish the past, present and future with her in their lives.”
I can control my destiny, but not my fate. Destiny means there are opportunities to turn right or left, but fate is a one-way street. I believe we all have the choice as to whether we fulfill our destiny, but our fate is sealed. - Paulo Coelho

Chapter Notes

And I also can't say enough how much I love you guys for your wonderful feedback! I work hard on this to remain enjoyable and I'm happy to say that I have another wonderful beta-reader now with mulderscullyinthetardis, beside my beloved justholdinghands, and I can't thank them enough for their time and wonderful input! I hope you enjoy this chapter, and that I managed to surprise you as much as David surprised Gillian :D <3

The weeks up to Eaden’s first birthday were filled with a lot of wonderful and pretty normal days. Compared to their usually busy lives, some would say that the days were almost boring. As boring as it could get with two young boys, who enjoyed every minute of the beginning of spring outside, and an adventurous baby who was out of sight in a matter of seconds if nobody was paying attention, even though she still hadn’t figured out how to crawl properly, like a normal baby. But what was normal, anyway? In fact, for this crazy little family and with these parents, David supposed that Eaden was actually pretty average and fit in quite nicely. Like the one puzzle piece that was missing for some years and finally filled the gap, making them whole. And besides, if you lost sight of her, chances were high she was just hiding underneath the closest table, bed or in her brothers toy boxes. Pretty average. But boring was the last thing their life was.

Beside a few interviews and photoshoots here and there, and a week in New York for some early rehearsals for David’s first concert, they were basically enjoying their time as a family in London. Waking the kids before sunrise on a school day, preparing their breakfast before driving them to school, patiently listening to them complaining and whining why school had to start so early. The boys were annoyed with David telling them that he’d already been out for a swim way before he woke them. He had to admit that it wasn’t the norm anymore, but sometimes he was able to peel himself out of the comfortable warmth of their bed whilst this beautiful little woman of his just sighed sweetly and turned to the other side, catching up on as much sleep as possible.

After all, their nights were still very short. Gillian had never been someone who went to bed early, and besides, their evenings were too much fun to go to bed early, even for him. Sometimes, they went out for dinner or drinks when the kids were asleep, leaving them with Erin who had her own little apartment in the lower floor when she was spending the night. Most of the evenings though, they stayed at home - playing board games, sitting on the floor building big cities out of legos, duplos and plastic or wooden roads, reading with the kids, sitting on the couch cuddling with them and watching a movie on their home cinema. Or sometimes cooking dinner together, which mostly ended in a huge mess.

On weekends, they occasionally took both boys to the movies, or just one of them. Giving one their undivided attention had turned out to be a good way to avoid them getting too riled up on such a night, which could get very exhausting. After all, they weren’t the youngest parents anymore. If someone would have asked him twenty or even ten years ago what he imagined his life to be at the
age of 54, he sure as hell wouldn’t have thought about raising three young children, one of them not even able to sleep through the night. Being woken by the baby two to three times a night wasn’t something they were able to take in their stride anymore.

On the other hand, he couldn’t think of a better way of having a nasty case of flu than staying in bed with all three of them on or squeezed between Gillian and him. With the baby resting on his chest, his shirt wet with her snot while she snored, snorted and wheezed away, smelling of dried spit and sweat while Felix’s little hand was tightly wrapped around David’s thumb as the little boy slept close beside him. David felt truly blessed beyond words.

On April 13th, the day after the Olivier Awards and one day before her birthday, Eaden was scheduled for her twelve month check-up at the doctor’s office.

With all the issues she’d already had with her lungs and bronchial tubes, and therefore very frequent doctor's appointments, Gillian was glad to have found such a caring and understanding pediatrician in Dr. Khan, who was able to make every visit bearable for Eaden. No matter how unpleasant and painful the examination and treatment was, the baby had never been scared of him.

Under Gillian’s and David’s watchful eyes, the doctor weighed and measured her and did a complete physical examination before joyfully telling them that their daughter was completely healthy, and had finally reached the average height and weight for an one-year-old, just as he’d predicted she would when Gillian had expressed her worries about the baby’s weight in the past. Whilst not being able to walk yet, he also reassured them that the weird way she was crawling wasn’t an indication that something was wrong, but more like a unique, personal trait. She had a lot of character, he said beneath a grin as he watched Eaden examine his stethoscope.

Both men had a good laugh as Dr. Khan gave Eaden a toy to see if the baby understood she should give it to her mother, and if she would say Mama specifically directed towards Gillian. With pursed lips, Gillian explained that she had never once heard her saying the word Mama at all, let alone directed at her. When he told her that it would be fine if she just showed him that she at least knew who her Mama was, Eaden turned in his arms and without even looking at Gillian, extended her arm towards David and loudly exclaimed the word Dada.

“Aw, poor Mommy!” David said empathetically towards Gillian, who made a pouting face, and bowed her head. “Look at Mommy! Is Mommy sad?” he then asked Eaden.

She turned her head and looked at him with a puzzled expression.

“Would you give Mommy your toy?” Dr. Khan asked.

With a grin, she once again held the toy out for David to take.

Laughing, David tickled Eaden’s belly. “I’m not Mommy, silly. Where’s Mommy, huh?”

“Mommy’s not present anymore, she’s like… invisible for Miss Eaden,” Gillian said, feigning sadness as she crossed her arms in front of herself.

“Mommy’s still a little sensitive and sad that she didn’t win the Award yesterday,” David snickered and took Eaden from Dr. Khan, who chuckled quietly and went back to his desk to put on some gloves.

“No, I’m not!” Gillian replied in a huffy tone, but couldn’t keep her lips from turning upwards into a tiny grin.

Closing the distance between them, David kissed Eaden's cheek before whispering into her ear,
“Give Mommy some love, will ya, Slugger? Give her a nice kiss, okay?”

“Nice try,” Gillian rolled her eyes as her daughter turned her head to look back at the doctor, totally ignoring David’s request. “I told you she’s still angry I wasn’t at home last night.”

“Oh, a resentful little one?” Dr. Khan cut in as he prepared the shots for the baby.

“Totally.”

David nodded in agreement, but then looked at Eaden seriously. “Uh-oh, baby girl, I think it’s time for your shots now.”

“Alright, I think it’ll work best if you just sit down with her on your lap for a second so I can give her the shots in her legs, making it as quick and painless as possible,” the doctor suggested as he approached them with a little tray in his hand.

Sitting down on one of the chairs beside the examination table, David put his arms securely around his daughter’s middle to hold her still whilst whispering sweet nothings into her ear to distract her as the doctor disinfected her upper thighs. Even after four kids, Gillian was still not able to watch this whole procedure. Although there wasn’t much blood involved, the needle itself was a huge trigger for her stomach to clench itself together into one giant knot. Not to mention how much her heart hurt watching and hearing her kids afraid and suffering. With her bottom lip tucked between her teeth and her eyebrows furrowed, she turned around, and just listened to David cheering the baby up and the sounds of the doctor preparing the shots and giving David the final instructions.

A few moments and a well-meant “good girl!” coming from Dr. Khan later, Eaden suddenly burst out crying loudly and heartbreakingly. Hearing her baby like this felt like someone had just stabbed a huge knife into the middle of Gillian’s heart and twisted it slowly and cruelly. Slowly turning around to look into the red and wet face of her screaming daughter, holding her arms out in her direction, literally begging Gillian to pick her up, she didn’t hesitate a second and immediately started walking towards them as the doctor quickly put two colourful band-aids on Eaden’s chubby little legs.

“There’s Mommy. Yeah, you go to Mommy,” David whispered and lifted Eaden off his lap, handing her to Gillian.

Two little hands were desperately grabbing at Gillian’s shirt as Eaden pressed her face into the crook of her mother’s neck, continuing to cry while Gillian held her baby close to her chest and stroked her warm, bare back gently.

“It’s alright, honey. I know, that wasn’t fun at all, huh?” Gillian said softly, rocking Eaden gently from side to side. “Shh, it’s okay. Mommy’s here.”

Standing up from the chair, David picked up the diaper bag from the floor and walked towards them with a warm smile on his face before coming to a stop right in front of Gillian.

“Yes,” he said softly and put his hand on Eaden’s arm reassuringly, “When it comes down to it, there’s no substitute for you.”

Eaden clung to Gillian for the next couple of hours, refusing to sit in the stroller so Gillian had to carry her in the Tula Baby Carrier as they strolled through Camden Market and along Regent’s Canal, enjoying this beautiful spring day, sharing green smoothies and some delicious treats.

By the time they drove out to Heathrow to pick up West and Miller, Eaden’s mood had eventually
brightened a little, and her face lit up like fireworks when she spotted her siblings walking out of the baggage claim area straight towards them. Apparently forgetting why she was clinging to Gillian, she finally let go of her and literally threw herself into her big sister’s arms, with whom she shared such a very sweet bond, before Miller took over, cuddling and tickling her on their way back until tears of joy ran down her little face.

They met up with Piper and the boys to have a nice and quiet dinner with burgers and fries in a cozy little place in Central London, far away from any touristy places. It was a rare occurrence that all eight of them got to share a meal together. They were lucky, though. Lucky that the kids got along so nicely. That they always had a great and an especially fun time together with lots of laughter, jokes and pranks and the wonderful feeling of being one family, regardless of the distance and the time that had passed between their meet-ups. And while Eaden slept through the majority of the evening before her first birthday, mostly snuggled up against Gillian, all of her siblings took a lot of wonderful pictures for her to look at some day. One year ago, they were only able to dream that someday, it would be like this.

He had never been more tired in his entire life - not in all those 53 years. Not after filming for 72 hours straight without a single break besides some ten-minute naps here and there. Not even after marrying Téa right after such a shift, only to go back to set the day after they’d exchanged their vows.

And the baby wasn’t even born yet.

Maybe it was because he was much older now, he thought as he closed the door to Gillian’s hospital room behind him and sat down on one of the cushioned chairs on the other side of the hallway, facing the door and running a hand through his already rumpled hair. Or maybe it was because he knew what was at stake here. That a million things could go wrong and change their lives forever. Not only Gillian’s and his own, but also the lives of their children, who were expecting a little sister sooner rather than later. A sister that surely took her time and all of her mother’s strength to come into their lives. And right now, things were not heading in the right direction at all.

With a heavy and shaky sigh, he rubbed his eyes before pulling his phone out of the pocket of his jeans and unlocking it. Hours had passed since his last message to Gillian’s Mom, Piper and Téa, informing them that things were progressing slowly, and now he had three missed calls on his display and had received 44 messages.

Things were not only progressing very slowly anymore, it seemed like they weren’t progressing at all. He’d left the room with a crying Gillian in it, who was a thousand times more exhausted than him. And in pain. And scared as hell. Not only for her own life, but for the life of their little daughter as well. She was undergoing a full examination before the medical team and whoever the hell else was in that room might make a final decision and tell them that it was time to set an end to the whole labor process and get the baby out of there as quickly as possible. It was terrifying. Excruciatingly so.

Holding his phone to his ear with a shaking hand, it only rang two times before someone picked up.

“And?” Tèa asked excitedly. “Is she here?”

He shook his head and closed his eyes to force the tears away that had instantly welled up hearing her anticipation. He tried to will himself to calm down and cleared his throat before replying, “Um, no. No. She’s not.”
“Wait a minute,” she whispered, but he wasn’t sure if it was directed at him or not. Then he could hear her starting to walk before a door clicked shut. “Is something wrong?” she finally asked, worry penetrating her voice now.

A few moments of silence must’ve passed before he was able to find the right words to reply, but by then she had already called his name urgently.

“We’re kind of at a standstill at the moment. They think she might be stuck and… and they’re worried that she… that she’s not getting enough oxygen and that her umbilical cord may be wrapped around her neck or that she’s swallowing too much fluids and all that stuff - I don’t know,” he sighed defeated.

“Are her vitals okay?”

“They’re checking that as we speak and will make a decision then.”

“Okay,” Téa replied quietly, and it sounded so wonderfully reassuring, like she was affirming for him that this was a good thing after all. “How is Gillian?”

“Not good. She’s crying and shaking uncontrollably for over an hour now. Her blood pressure is very low and she’s just…” he exhaled deeply, “I think she’s reached a point where she just doesn’t want this anymore. She’s exhausted and it’s hard to motivate and calm her. I don’t know what to do anymore.”

“You just stay with her, be there for her. The doctors will make the important decisions, if you don’t know what to say to her it’s okay, really. Just hold her hand and caress her if she likes to be touched and do whatever she asks you to do, okay?” she said softly but firmly. She had gone through two births with him, and while she’d always told him that there had been moments she wanted to throw him against the nearest wall, she also said that she wouldn’t have wanted to do it without him. That he’d been a great source of strength. So very loving, caring and patient.

“Yeah,” he replied, almost not audible, before he sighed and continued, “It’s just so different. You were so vocal, and she’s so quiet. She doesn’t say what she needs, and it’s so unlike her it’s downright confusing.”

“She’s probably just overwhelmed right now. It’s been over 30 hours already. Try to stay calm for her, okay? Don’t lose your nerve.”

“It’s just that I’m - um… I’m scared, Téa,” David whispered, his voice small and desperate. Turning to her with his fears wasn’t something he did every day anymore. Or at all. Especially not about things that concerned Gillian or their baby. At least not before this exceptional situation in which he found himself quite overwhelmed. And he trusted her. He knew she still cared enough to be there for him in such a situation.

She had to admit that hearing him like that made her quite nervous too, no matter how natural and normal his reaction might’ve been. Trying to hide her irritation, she hummed affirmatively and said, “I know you are, Dave. It’s okay, I’m sure everything’s going to be okay. Don’t let the fear overpower you, do you hear me?”

“Yes…”

“Alright. Now go back to her. Keep us updated if you can. Tim’s picking up Piper at the moment. She doesn’t feel like staying with her friend anymore and will spend the night here with us.”

“Thank you. Thank you so much for everything.”
“You're very welcome. We can’t wait to meet the new member of the family!”

Closing the door to Piper’s room behind him with a smirk on his lips, David shook his head slightly as he crossed the hall and walked towards the bedroom. To his surprise, the boys were already asleep just half an hour after he’d sent them into Oscar’s room, where they would spend the night on a few mattresses spread all over the floor. The girls on the other hand were hanging out on Piper’s bed, snickering over their smart phones and giving him death glares when he opened the door and amusingly asked what in the world could possibly be so funny on the internet at this late hour.

The short-spoken explanation was a mumbled, “Instagram, Dad,” coming from West, before Piper, sounding just as bored with his question as West, added, “Snapchat.”

Choosing not to embarrass himself by claiming to know what Snapchat was, he curtailed himself from advising them to go to sleep soon and just wished them good night, surprised by the smiles and thanks he received from them.

“Jeez, we’ve got us some very nocturnal girls here,” David quipped as he walked back into the bedroom and shut off the light before heading towards the bed.

Gillian was lying on her back, eyes closed and arms spread wide. Eaden was kneeling in between Gillian’s left arm and torso, bracing herself on her mother’s chest while continuously leaning down to kiss her.

By the tiny grin on Gillian’s lips David could tell that she was suppressing a fit of giggles as the baby put one sloppy kiss after the other onto her face. David chuckled as he climbed on the bed to lie beside Gillian and opposite from Eaden.

Inhaling dramatically to get Eaden’s attention, he made an excited face as she turned her head to look at him. “What are you doing, huh?” he asked brightly and tickled the baby’s armpit, making her giggle sheepishly.

“Are you trying to wake Mommy? Is she asleep? Or is she just pretending?”

Eaden made a humming noise in response and grinned before she suddenly started to smack Gillian’s chest with her left hand a few times and then climbed up and covered Gillian's face with her whole upper body. Not able to hold back anymore, Gillian’s whole body started to shake with laughter, which was muffled by her daughter lying on top of her.

David chuckled and tapped the baby’s back with his index finger. “Hey, why are you crushing your Mom now? Poor Mommy! I bet she’d like to see you turning one year old instead of suffocating underneath you!” he laughed and picked Eaden up, rolled onto his back and maneuvered her into the air in one swift motion, holding her securely above his head with her body resting against his large hand.

She squealed delightfully as he rotated her slowly from one side to the other.

On times like this, they always joked that they probably were the worst parents ever. It was close to midnight, and the baby should be fast asleep by now, or at least undergoing a quiet, soothing bedtime routine. Instead, he did everything to rile her up even more, and they loved every second of hearing their daughter laugh and seeing the happiness in her eyes.

Also chuckling heartily, Gillian scooted closer to David and let him wrap his arm around her shoulder and gather her close to him so both of them were lying underneath a hovering Eaden before
he gently eased her down onto his chest. She continued to giggle quietly into his shirt, but otherwise remained quite motionless and content.

“Gill?” David whispered and put his hand on the baby’s back.

“Hmm?”

“Do you also think that... from now on, time will just fly? That she’ll be achieving so many milestones in the next couple of months, and the next thing we’ll know is her blowing out the candles on the cake for her second birthday,” he said and turned his head to look at Gillian. “I’ve really enjoyed her just being a baby, and I’ll miss it.”

“Yeah,” Gillian nodded slowly. “Me too.”

“It’s hard to believe that it’s been a whole year, right?”

“Oh yes,” she grinned. “One year ago right now I was about to kill you for doing this to me. And I was completely serious about that... at least until I saw her and fell head over heels in love with her,” she shrugged, grinning mischievously.

With a soft sigh, Eaden turned her head on David’s chest towards Gillian and put her thumb into her mouth before closing her eyes. She looked so content and comfortable resting on her father. It was the most adorable sight in the world, and it always had the power to fill her body with so many warm feelings. And so much love.

He nodded and raised his hand and put it protectively around the baby’s head, his thumb gently stroking over her soft hair. “We did a very good job with this little girl.”

“So that’s basically good news, right? That we don’t need a c-section yet?” he asked the doctor again, who’d just explained the results of their examination and what would be the next steps to them.

“No,” Gillian murmured from her position on the bed before the doctor could reply, even though they were standing a few feet away by the door and she was lying on her side facing the window.

“Yes, it’s good news,” the doctor nodded. “We know she’s tired, but the baby is doing fine. And she said she still wants to try and deliver naturally.”

“She should try to get some sleep now,” the midwife added with a soft smile. “And we’re monitoring her around the clock. If you want to help, make sure she drinks enough and eats some snacks every now and then, okay?”

When the concourse of doctors, nurses and midwives finally left and the room went quiet again, he took a moment to set his mind before he would face her again. He didn’t want her to see the fear in his eyes, or his own exhaustion. He wanted to be her pillar of strength. He wanted to provide nothing but support and love.

“David?” she pleaded desperately, and he sighed deeply before walking towards the bed.

“Hey grumpy girl,” he said brightly but warmly and carefully climbed onto the bed beside her. “I’m right here.”

When they had arrived at the hospital the previous afternoon and moved into one of their private
rooms, they were positively surprised by how spacious and beautifully decorated it was. And especially that it had a huge bed with enough space for both of them if they wanted to be close to each other. One of the nurses had called it a family bed, but at the same time offered him a separate one to sleep in. Apparently, there were enough men who weren’t particularly happy with the thought of having to share a bed with a woman in labor. He had declined her offer politely, more than happy about the possibility of being close to Gillian during the night, also knowing that at the moment, she wouldn’t want to have it any other way.

“Hmm,” she hummed wearily and opened her eyes to his smiling face resting right beside hers, on a pillow.

She didn’t look any happier than before he’d left the room, but a little refreshed after washing her face and combing her hair. And she wasn’t shivering anymore. He guessed that was a good sign.

David took her hand and entwined his fingers with hers. “What are you thinking?” he asked softly.

She swallowed and quietly cleared her throat. “That I don’t want to have sex with you ever again,” she deadpanned, her face so serious he wasn’t sure whether she was joking or if it was appropriate to laugh or not. Sensing his uncertainty, her lips raised into a tiny, wicked smile before she added, “And that I’m glad you’re paying for all of this. Your daughter’s stubbornness isn’t cheap.”

This time, he chuckled with her and nodded, relieved that she was at least feeling up to joke with him again. “And first you didn’t want me to.”

She shrugged her shoulders and averted her eyes briefly. “I took the epidural,” she then admitted almost bashfully, as if it was the worst thing she could’ve done at this point.

She’d fought hard and insistently against it for over 30 hours now. And he was almost glad that she finally reached a point where there was no other option left for her than to take it.

He smiled and nodded. “That’s good. Why didn’t you call me in? I would’ve held your hand.”

“I wanted to give you some space. You’re tired and you’ve been trapped in this room for more than a day now. And for who knows how much longer.”

He pursed his lips and shook his head, fighting the urge to roll his eyes at her. “Jesus, Gill. I’m pretty positive I’ve got the easier job here. Don’t worry about me, okay?” he whispered and gently stroked some loose strands of hair out of her face and behind her ear. “You’re comfortable?”

“Mmm-hmm. At least more than before.”

“Then you’ve made the right decision. Let’s get some rest, okay?” he snuggled his head into his pillow. “Because we may not have the bed to ourselves anymore for a very long time.”

Eaden’s tiny eyebrows were scrunched together as she looked around the brightly decorated room and at the ten people standing around her, singing happy birthday to you whilst her sister Piper held a beautiful pink and white birthday cake with a single candle on top of it in front of her. She had the exact same expression on her face as her mother when she was confused and scared - eyes and mouth wide open, and looking at people like they’d gone completely nuts. The reassuring kiss Gillian placed on her cheek only had the effect that she turned in Gillian’s arms and buried her face into the crook of her mother’s neck.

With such a big family, it had been hard to keep the party small and somewhat simple. Even the
grandparents had to wait another week for their turn with their now one year old granddaughter. However, having five siblings, who’d all insisted on celebrating with their baby sister, it was inevitable that the party would be bigger than Gillian had anticipated. She also couldn’t do it without Erin’s help. The only guests Gillian had actually invited were her friends Grace and her husband Greg with their son Xander, who were some of her best friends. Xander was Eaden’s age and her very first buddy. Despite knowing all these people around her, Eaden was obviously overwhelmed with all the attention directed her way and did what had always worked best for her in a situation like that: hiding her face in Mommy’s soft hair.

When it came to actually eat the cake, curiosity finally won out over fear and the birthday girl bravely took a spoonful of her sister’s delicious creation from David, chewing her very first sweet treat slowly and thoughtfully before she grinned and opened her mouth for more as all the adults around her chuckled in amusement.

After the second spoonful, David had the decency to turn away from her and she turned her head, looking at Gillian questioningly before suddenly blurting out, “Moa!”

Her demand didn’t go unnoticed and David turned towards them again, his expression as baffled as Gillian’s.

“Well,” David finally stated, gently patting Gillian’s arm before leaning in for a chaste kiss. “See it this way, babe - at least it’s not far from More to Mama anymore.”

The nurse lifted the tiny pink bundle gently off of Gillian’s bare chest, who reluctantly, but tiredly, let go of her newborn daughter. David’s eyes followed the woman carrying the baby to the little bassinet on the other side of the room, and quietly watched as she carefully put Eaden under the radiant heater and pulled the soft blankets aside.

Another nurse stepped up to Gillian’s bed, pulled the covers over her upper body and leaned down to talk directly to the shivering and shaking mother of his child.

Gillian. His Gillian. The mother of his child.

Tears were still running down her face, even though her eyes were closed, and her bottom lip was quivering so hard he was sure he was able to hear her teeth chattering together.

Infusion. Medication for her low blood pressure. Waiting for the placenta to be delivered. Probably needs stitches. Rest. The nurse’s words didn’t really reach him, and especially not Gillian either. When he eventually realized that the nurse waited for some kind of reaction from him, he’d already turned around with what he figured was an understanding smile and had started to work on the tubes and wires coming out from under Gillian’s blanket.

Whispering one more “I love you,” into her ear and placing a soft kiss on her damp forehead, not getting more out of her than a soft nod, he promised he would be right back and walked towards the nurse hovering over his quiet daughter.

The hour on her mother’s chest had calmed her to the point that she was also almost asleep. The rough delivery had obviously taken a toll on both of them. Therefore he couldn’t be more grateful for her rosy pink cheeks, the regular lifting of her chest as she breathed, and the tiny little rolls of baby fat bunched up on her arms and legs.

“You can come closer,” the nurse encouraged him, waving him towards them.
He smiled softly and stepped closer, getting his first proper look at his little girl as the nurse quickly shortened the rest of her umbilical cord, that he’d originally cut through just half an hour ago, and clamped it just above her belly.

Her limbs were sticking out in the weirdest angles. One knee was bent and raised almost to her belly while the other leg was extended. Her fists were tightly clenched, which he’d always found fascinating, especially when those little hands were strongly grasping his finger.

“7 pounds 4 ounces and 20 inches long,” the nurse declared and he looked up at her. “That’s absolutely perfect.”

And she was, he thought. She was absolutely perfect.

Whilst they washed Gillian, gave her something for her low blood pressure and tucked her in to stop shaking and shivering, he’d followed the baby up to the pediatric intensive care unit, where they wanted to perform an ultrasound on her head, on which she was sporting quite the bruise right on top of her forehead, as if she’d already ran straight into a fridge. David held her tiny little hand with her perfectly formed little fingernails during the procedure, and held his breath as the baby started to open her eyes, blinking herself awake and slightly turning her head in the direction of his voice.

“She recognizes your voice,” the young doctor who performed the ultrasound smiled at him before looking back at the screen. “I can’t see any bleeding in her brain. Everything looks perfectly fine. It’s just a simple bruise. It will heal in about two or three days. Birth is hard, it happens sometimes,” she said reassuringly.

Relieved, David exhaled heavily and nodded. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome,” the doctor replied, gently wiping off the ultrasound gel from the baby’s forehead. “Do you want to hold her while I write my report so that you can go straight back downstairs?”

He grinned broadly.

The first time he held his youngest daughter in his arms was nothing but overwhelming. She was so, so tiny. And so breathtakingly serene and beautiful.

“Hey baby,” was all he was able to whisper before placing a soft kiss against her hairline. She mewed softly, almost contentedly in response, her lips puckered into a cute little pout that reminded him so much of her mother’s. She was blinking constantly now, trying hard to open her big, dark blue eyes for him, her efforts filling his heart to the brim with pride and happiness.

It was the moment he knew he was in love with his child for the rest of his life.

Gillian couldn’t help the warm smile which spread across her face as she watched David standing in front of the crib, holding the baby close to his chest and giving her a chaste kiss on her forehead. He was so gentle and careful with her, whispering sweet words of affection as he slowly eased her into her bed, pulled a light blanket over her body and put her favorite stuffed bunny beside her.

The last year had gone by so very fast. She knew the importance of cherishing each of these precious moments, but it seemed like there never were enough of them. Or there didn’t seem to be enough time to stop and take them in completely. Savor them. To not take them for granted in daily life.

Birthdays had always been a gentle reminder for her to slow down and to take time and enjoy these
moments again before the routine of daily life would catch up again. But never before had the first birthday of one of her children awoken so many different feelings in her. She’d gone through so many emotions during the day - one second she’d felt like crying because her baby was growing up so fast, the next she was happy and grateful for her little whirlwind growing up healthily at all, and becoming this wonderful, extraordinary person.

She liked to think she had done a good job indulging a lot of sweet little moments with Eaden. For both of them. But still, the first year was over, and with it so many moments, missed or not, they would never get back again.

She made David aware of her presence by pulling her hair out of her leather coat until it cascaded over her shoulders and she quietly cleared her throat.

He turned his head and grinned. “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” she nodded.

He’d told her only half an hour ago about his plans to take her out for a casual stroll and some drinks. She hesitated for a moment, arguing that it was mean to leave the baby with the nanny on her birthday, but he had insisted that it was very important to celebrate the mother of the child as well, so of course she had to give in.

“Do I need anything? My purse?” she asked when they walked downstairs and reached the front door where she waited for him to put on his jacket.

He grinned. “Nope, just yourself,” he replied casually before peeking into the living room, where the kids were watching a movie with Erin. “We’re heading off. You know where to reach me?”

“Yes, have fun you two!” Gillian heard Erin say, and the girls immediately started to giggle in unison.

It was a pleasant evening to walk outside a good hour before sunset. The air felt comfortably warm after the first proper taste of spring in the city, and the wind had died down. After a pretty wet winter, there was finally no rain forecast for the next few days.

They slowly walked hand in hand with their fingers entwined through the bustling streets of London. It took her some time to realize that he wasn’t just strolling around, but obviously leading them somewhere in particular. He hadn’t said a word since they’d left the house, and the only way he communicated with her was through occasional glances and by the squeezing of her hand.

When they reached Regent’s Park after a good thirty minutes of walking, she decided to put an end to the silence. “So,” she prompted. “Where are we going?”

“Nowhere specific, why?” he asked.

She huffed out a small laugh. “Because you clearly have a specific destination in mind.”

“Clearly, huh?”

She nodded and puckered her lips smugly, which made him laugh. “And the girls were giggling suspiciously... so I have to wonder why.”

“Curious, aren’t we?” he teased and bumped shoulder playfully into hers before putting his arm around her waist and pulling her against him.
“Oh, you damn well know I am!”

“Trust me, there’s nothing to be curious about. No surprises. Just us walking down the street to relax and end a wonderful day. And if we’re feeling particularly bold, we might go into a bar and have some drinks to toast on the achievement of surviving the first year with this rascal of ours. That’s about as exciting as it can get with an old man slash young father like me these days.”

Gillian giggled giddily and rested her head against his side. “We’ve already walked past a lot of good pubs.”

“Have we now? I’m a complete stranger in this city!” he said in feigned indignation, smiling as her right eyebrow shot up, and she shook her head incredulously.

And then, unexpectedly, she told him, “I love you, you know.”

Kissing the top of her head, he squeezed her tightly and whispered, “I’m pretty fond of you, too.”

Instead of following the main street, much to her surprise he took the pathway directly into Regent’s Park. She had assumed by now that he probably had reservations in some fancy restaurant for desserts and wine, but that didn’t seem to be the case as he purposely headed straight towards the gardens, passing Queen Mary’s Rose Gardens and walking towards the Japanese Garden Island.

“Wow,” Gillian exclaimed approvingly as they stepped onto a bow bridge leading over a tiny lake onto the island. “It’s beautiful here.”

“It is. Look at these wisterias!” he pointed at the rails of the bridge. “Did you know that in Japan, wisteria viewing in early May is almost as popular as cherry blossom viewing in Europe?” he asked, and Gillian shook her head no.

They continued to walk along a series of winding paths which lead them past a stone lantern and over gurgling streams, interspersed with a variety of bushes and beautiful, flowering plants.

Letting go of her waist, he took her hand again and nodded his head towards a small stony path, leading them to the top of the mound from which the waterfall descended. Arriving at the top, a breathtaking view over the whole island opened up in front of them, and they took a few moments to take it all in. Squeezing her hand, he pointed at a few rocks just a few feet before them by the waterfall.

“Let’s sit here,” he suggested and held her hand as they slowly sat down, their feet dangling off the rock, hers swinging gently back and forth, as he turned his upper body slightly towards her.

“David,” she hummed and smiled affectionately. “And there you say you’re a stranger to the city. I didn’t even know this place!”

“So you like it?” he asked hopefully.

“Yeah, I do like it a lot. When did you discover it?”

“Oh a few years ago, actually. Just remembered it recently and thought that would be the perfect place.”

She turned her head and raised her eyebrows, eyes wide in expectation. “The perfect place? For what exactly?”

He grinned sheepishly and bowed his head. “Well, there might be a little surprise after all. And I
wanted there to be kind of a romantic surrounding.”

A slight smirk formed on her lips and her tongue darted out to wet them. She silently watched him turn to her, tucking his right leg underneath the left so he was able to scoot closer to her.

“This is a very special day to me, Gillian. For so many reasons I can’t even begin to explain,” he said, his voice suddenly so low and soft it sent shivers down her spine. “But it all comes down to you, and to what we are together. You and I. What we’ve become.”

He swallowed and sighed heavily, trying to find the courage to continue. It started to make her nervous to the point that her whole body was tingling in anticipation, and she found herself almost unable to wait for him to speak again, which he eventually did.

“When we met for the very first time, and we stood in that tiny room together, facing each other, with you rattling off all those weird lines, it was so hard for me to concentrate and stay in the scene. Because I remember that my mind would only repeat one sentence: Me and those lips, just once,” he whispered, smiling gently at her. “And you know what happened when I kissed you for the first time just hours after I thought that for the very first time? Of course you do. I wasn’t able to stop anymore. I never wanted to stop. And then came a long period of time I just had to. It wasn’t easy, but I don’t claim that it… that it wasn’t necessary. Or that I regret those years. Because there were some good times. We’ve got some wonderful kids, and I know they are the most important thing for both of us. But… we ended up here. Together. Strong, and more mature. Still loving each other to the moon and back. Having a baby together. I’m pretty sure that makes me the luckiest guy on earth, and you can bet I’m so grateful for every single day I have with you. You guys make my life so full and seriously, nothing’s lacking anymore. And one year ago, you gave me the most precious gift. She completed my life, made me whole. Made our family whole.”

Taking her hands, he pulled them onto his upper thigh and turned them, gently stroking her open palms with his thumbs. There were tears in her eyes, and she tried to smile, but failed miserably as she took a deep, cleansing breath.

“I wish that I could find the right words to express the love I have for you. But you can’t put love into words, no matter how hard you try. The soul doesn’t want to reveal all its mysteries, maybe because we’re only supposed to feel them. Because every word would belittle the true feeling of loving someone more than you love yourself. I’d like to think that my actions speak for themselves sometimes, and I hope that this little surprise I have for you shows you…” he swallowed and looked shyly at their entwined hands between them, “That your happiness means the world to me. And to a lot of other people as well.”

She looked at him with wide eyes now, and he thought he could also see a hint of concern in them.

“I know that face,” he snickered to lighten the mood and raised both of her hands to his lips, kissing each softly before putting them down onto his thighs again. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to ask you that question. But I’m asking you,” David reached into his jacket, retrieving a little package, wrapped in a beautiful rose gold paper, and held it towards her, “to accept this.”

Slowly and hesitantly, she took the present from him, and looked at him quizzically before she started to open it, “What is it?”

“It’s, um-” he stopped, waiting for her to start unwrapping. “It’s kind of… uh, I took some liberties with your schedule. And it’s something you might cherish.”

Gillian cocked an eyebrow at him before looking down again, gently pulling the wrapping paper aside. She revealed a golden journal, tied with an olive suede band, with a Bodhi Leaf of
Enlightenment and the 'Om' symbol painted on top. As she was trying to process what she was holding, she barely heard him saying something else.

All of a sudden, she understood exactly what it was.

It was one of Aaron’s notebooks. One he’d never really shown to anyone. A few months before he died, he had read one of his poems from it. She remembered it so clearly as if it had been yesterday. It was about freedom and the acceptance of your own, destined path. It was breathtakingly, heartbreakingly beautiful.

For years she thought that the little book had been lost. Not able to find it anywhere, her family had started to wonder if he hadn’t wanted them to find it. Or that he had thrown it away before he died.

It had disappeared, just like his body. But just like his beautiful soul and spirit, it had never left Gillian's heart, had never truly disappeared.

“I know how much you want to do this, how important it is to you. And I also know how much it bugged you that you weren’t able to go last year because of the pregnancy,”

“What? David,” Gillian cut in, raising her head, her expression unreadable. She did not understand what he was referring to.

She just stared at him for a few moments, looking somewhat shocked, but not necessary in a bad way. He wasn’t really sure. His heart was beating so fast in his chest he could literally hear the blood rushing through his head. Then she licked her lips and looked back down at the journal.

“Where did you find this?” she asked him, her voice barely audible.

He looked at her, puzzled. “Uh, he… he gave it to me. Have you seen it before?”

“Yeah,” she whispered and wiped away the tears that were beginning to roll down her face. “Yes. He once read a poem out of it to me. When did he give it to you? I looked for it for such a long time!”

“I didn’t know that. He gave it to me a few months before he died. He’d asked me if I’d be in Chicago sometime… and said that he would like to see me before -,” David swallowed. “So I went to Chicago, pretending to have some things to do there… but I just went to see him. It was only half-written when he gave it to me. He said he wanted me to finish it. And that he felt like there would be a time… the right time, to give it back to you, because it's where both of our hearts belong. With you.”

She chuckled at that. As sappy as it sounded, it sounded absolutely like something her brother would actually say. He'd always known how to get through to her. There had always been some wit in everything he did. That was one of the things she’d loved about him the most.

“He also said that there would be something in our future to complete us if we tried hard enough to deserve it. That it wouldn’t come easily, or just like that. And that we needed to find our way back to each other in order to earn it and be gifted with it.”

“Oh god,” Gillian gasped softly.

“Yeah. He knew, Gillian. I’m not joking or exaggerating. He felt it somehow. And he felt the need to tell me to… maybe help me make the right choices.’

“He liked you very much,” Gillian nodded. When Aaron and David first met, he’d been a teenager.
A curious, funny but also serious and sensible young boy who’d immediately connected with David, sensing from the very first minute that they had a lot in common. “He thought very highly of you.”

“I liked him, too. And that he shared this with me, and wanted me to complete it, really meant… means a lot to me. And that’s one of the reasons why I… organized this trip to Nepal for you. That you finally get to scatter his ashes where he wanted them to be. We owe it to him.”

“Does this mean you…” she swallowed, “That we’re really going to Nepal? This year?”

“Yes,” David nodded. “It’s all ready and set… the flights and your hotel are booked, there are guides to lead you safely to the top of the mountain and… uhm, all the paperwork is done. You’re allowed to… to import his ashes and scatter them. It’s only four days, yeah… but these days belong to you, Piper and Zoe.”

“When did you plan all of this? How did you find the time for this in my schedule this year?” she asked in disbelief.

“Well,” he chuckled quietly and raised his right hand, gently stroking her tear stained cheek with his thumb. “Let’s say we had to cut down some time on some less important, non-personal things.”

Inhaling deeply, she absently untied the suede band and opened the first page of the book, looking at Aaron’s neat handwriting that said ‘Gillian.’ and nothing else.

“Wow,” she cleared her throat and leaned her cheek against David’s soft palm.

“You like it?” he asked softly, and there was still a hint of uncertainty in his voice. “What do you think?”

Raising her head, she looked straight into his beautiful green eyes, and the second the words formed, her heart began to race rapidly in her chest. She had never believed that thinking about it would ever feel like that again. That it would ever feel special and intimate and exciting rather than scary and threatening. But it suddenly did. And there was absolutely no way to hold the words back anymore, so she put her fingers over his wrist and whispered, “I think I want to marry you.”
To say that one waits a lifetime for his soulmate to come around is a paradox. People eventually get sick of waiting, take a chance on someone, and by the art of commitment become soulmates, which takes a lifetime to perfect. - Criss Jami

Chapter Notes

I won't lie, these damn rumors at the beginning of the month really got to me more than I thought they would, and more than they should have. I struggled writing this chapter, I seriously did. But there it is, and I hope the wait was worth it! Thank you for everything, you guys are the best! The support you're giving me means everything! Also, as always, a huuuuuge thanks to justholdinghands and.mulderscullyinthe tardis, who both put so much time into editing this fic! They're amazing friends!

The way he was grinning reminded her so much of the boyish, playful David of their early days. And his sparkling green eyes still looked at her with so much adoration and love.

Whether or not he still wanted to marry her really wasn't much of a question, but he sure seemed to enjoy keeping her in suspense as he did not reply immediately, just kept smiling at her warmly while stroking her hand.

Knowing him, his ego was probably boosted to the brim right now. He obviously hadn’t expected this at all. To be honest, she hadn’t thought this could be a possibility either until a few months ago, when she realized, to her great surprise, that the concept of marriage itself didn’t sound as unappealing and oppressive as in the last eight years. She had given it a lot of thought during the last few weeks, and the more time they got to spend together, the more they grew as a family, Gillian had become so sure that David was the one she wanted to do this with again. He was the man she wanted to spend the rest of her life with. A man who saw her as an equal, who genuinely loved her and had grown into a self-respecting, independent human being, interested and invested in the world around him and not just focused on himself.

He respected that she hadn’t been ready to marry him before and had never pressured her. In fact, she was sure he’d pretty much given up on the hope that she would eventually say yes. He probably had never dared to dream that she would be the one asking him again.

But he deserved it, all of it. So she inhaled deeply, gathering all her courage and asked, "David, do you want to marry me?"

“Yes,” he replied without hesitation, his eyes crinkling as his smile grew even bigger. And then, without warning, he pulled her into a bear hug, chuckling happily into her ear before he whispered, “Yes, I so want to marry you.”

They giggled their way back into the house like two drunk teenagers madly in love, earning questioning glances from a group of young people walking by as Gillian put her key into the keyhole of the green door whilst David pressed himself into her from behind, his lips gently nibbling against her throat.
“David,” she whined and gasped when he started to suck on her soft skin. “I can’t get the… thing... into... the… fucking hole!”

He huffed out a laugh and reached over her shoulder to grab her hand, guiding it slowly to the keyhole. “That’s a problem I’ve never had with you,” he slurred into her ear and inserted the key before turning it around. “Ever,” he added, grinding his erection against her one last time before pushing the door open.

Desire started to pool between her legs and heat rose on her cheeks as a response to feeling how much he wanted her.

“Yeah, your service has always been excellent, sir. You’ve never disappointed me.”

“Always there to please you, ma’am,” he whispered into her ear and gently ushered her inside with a hand on the small of her back.

As they stumbled into the hallway, the walls of her quiet house were filled with the sound of her giggles before he kicked the door shut with his foot and spun her around to capture her lips in a fierce kiss.

Gillian moaned into his mouth and raised to her tiptoes before crossing her arms around his neck and pressing herself against his strong frame. While his left arm encircled her waist, his right hand snuck between them and started to open the buttons of her black blouse, almost ripping it apart frantically while she raised one of her legs and put it around his waist, grinding her hips into his purposely.

David reached down, squeezing her firm little ass. Not too hard, but hard enough to make her moan appreciatively.

When her blouse finally fell open, he lifted her up in one swift motion so her cleavage was at the same level as his face. She yelped in surprise, but immediately started to giggle as he buried his face between her breasts. Her fingers went straight in his hair, and her blonde, already messy hair fell into her face as she looked down to watch him lick the sensitive skin that wasn’t covered by her black silk bra.

She was panting with desire and her heart was pounding rapidly in her chest. There was no way he wouldn’t be able to feel it on his lips, and it excited her even more.

He was about to free one of her breasts by pulling on her bra with his teeth when they were suddenly interrupted by a sharp inhale coming from someone who’d just walked out of the living room area, and he immediately set Gillian back down on the ground and pressed her against him.

“Oh god, I’m sorry,” Erin said, her tone a mixture of panic and embarrassment. “I thought Piper and West forgot something!”

“S’okay,” Gillian chuckled shyly, licking her swollen lips, trying to wipe the smeared lipstick from the corners of her mouth. David shook his head at her frantic actions and grinned, not even bothering to remove the sweet remnants of their kisses from his face. As if her nanny hadn’t already seen them making out shamelessly in the middle of the house. But still, Gillian was furiously blushing as they staggered out of Erin’s way, and it was the most adorable thing he’d ever seen.

“Don’t mind me, I’m not even here anymore… um, West and Piper just went to the movies and the boys are all in bed. I’ll take the baby monitor down with me,” Erin jabbered as she walked past them, desperately trying to avoid eye-contact, and especially trying to ignore the fact that Gillian stood in front of David like a shield, trying to hide the huge bulge he was sporting in his jeans.
The awkwardness of the whole situation made David chuckle in amusement. Even more when Gillian’s blouse suddenly fell off her left shoulder as Erin accidentally brushed her on the way down the stairs to her apartment on the lower floor.

“Oh sorry!” she apologized and intuitively raised her arm to grab Gillian’s shirt. She had it almost up to Gillian’s shoulder again when she suddenly realized how utterly awkward her actions were and quickly pulled her hand away. Biting on her lower lip, Erin nervously raised her hands in defence and turned around, her face now as red as Gillian’s. “Okay, I’m out of your hair, sorry, don’t mind me!”

“It’s okay, Erin,” David chuckled as Gillian pulled the blouse up herself and put her forehead against his chest. “We’ll turn our baby monitor on by midnight, alright? Enjoy the rest of the night!”

“You too!” Erin responded immediately before suddenly stopping in her tracks, cringing in embarrassment. “Uh, yeah… you too.”

When the door to her apartment finally shut behind her, Gillian let out the breath she had been holding for nearly a minute now.

“Oh god,” she groaned. Although she had expected something like this to happen at some point, she still wished they could’ve avoided it as long as they were living under the same roof, which had been the case for more than eight years.

As if he was able to read her mind, David leaned down and whispered, “It’s nothing short of a miracle that this has never happened before,” and lifted her up once again, losing no time in carrying her up to the bedroom before anyone else could come between him and his plans to make sweet love to his beautiful woman.

She flopped back onto the bed and pulled him down on top of her before their lips met again for a soft, languished kiss. As he braced himself on his elbows and cradled her face between his palms, gently caressing her burning cheeks with his thumbs, Gillian couldn’t suppress the smile forming against his soft lips.

The quiet chuckles rippling through his body in response and the sweet whispers of affection filled the room only for a few moments before they were replaced by the sounds of feverish kissing and clothes being shed, carelessly thrown onto the floor.

When she lay underneath him clad in only tiny black panties and a matching bra, chest rising and falling slowly, David was so mesmerized by her beauty to the point that he couldn’t stop staring at her, and she patiently and happily let him.

Mesmerized David was one of the sweetest, she found, because in these moments, all his natural barriers were down and through his eyes, you could see straight into his soul. In these moments, she enjoyed him just as much as he enjoyed her lying in front of him, willing to let him see her with all the flaws time had left on her body, despite her insecurities. His gaze made her nothing but feel good.

The one thing she could rely on though was the fact that once he was finished staring, he would come back even more aroused and hungry for her. Every single time. The only thing that was constantly changing was the part of her body he would delve in first.

This time, he started by opening the front clasps of her bra before burying his face between her full breasts and pushing the lacy fabric to the side with his fingertips. He could feel her heart beating
under his lips, and her skin was warm and so, so soft.

She moaned as he slowly explored her body with his mouth and hands, alternating between gently caressing and kissing her most sensitive spots and teasing and nibbling to make her writhing in pleasure and almost begging him for her release.

When she started to whisper his name and reached down to gently push his head between her legs, he growled appreciatively and of course, gladly obeyed.

The scent of her arousal was divine, and as soon as his tongue dove into her folds for a first, tentative lick to taste her sweetness, David found himself in a state where he could die a happy, fully satisfied man. Even though she would probably find a way to kill him if he died in this exact moment. She was pretty single-minded in her quest, especially once she had his head locked between her thighs. The woman knew exactly what she wanted, and had definitely learned how to get it.

When her legs started to quiver around his head, he gently sucked on her clit one last time before letting it slip out of his mouth. A low groan followed and he chuckled lightly at her being so impatient. All things in good time, he thought and licked and kissed his way up her body, breathing her in and tasting her, feeling the little goose bumps rising on her skin beneath his lips.

When his eyes were at the same level as hers again and he lay comfortably between her legs, their gazes met and held until she broke into a soft smile.

“You’re so gorgeous,” David whispered, and kissed her deeply.

Her eyes fluttered closed, almost involuntarily, at the sensation. His kisses just weren’t from this planet, and together, they probably made the sexiest, hottest kissers in the entire universe.

“Hmm,” she growled and broke their kiss with a loud smack. “And you’re mean for leaving me hanging like this.”

“Leaving you hanging?” he asked appalled and without warning, slipped inside her. She inhaled deeply and dug her nails into his shoulders while he caressed her flushed face with the back of his fingers before murmuring, “I don’t have the slightest idea what you’re talking about.”

They moved slowly together, rocking gently back and forth and holding each other close, kissing between muffled moans and whispers of affection. She tenderly caressed his back as he sped up for a while and hid his face in the crook of her neck, thrusting into her relentlessly before going more slowly again, taking his time to indulge in her soft, pure womanliness.

She reached her climax quietly and, if he didn’t know her so well, it might have almost gone unnoticed. Sometimes, she was far less vocal than other times, which he’d once found difficult to deal with. That was until he found out that these orgasms were her favourite, because they only happened rarely and when her state of mind was in a certain, peaceful place, as she’d explained. Now, he even felt something akin to pride when she did get her release that way, because then he knew he hadn’t just given her body the love it deserved, but also her mind, and hopefully her heart.

The other thing he’d learned over time was that when she came way before him, he had to be careful not to end up over stimulating her. So he did what he’d never really been afraid to do. Ask her what she wanted and needed.

“Just keep going like this,” she murmured in response, pecking at his plump bottom lip and tracing the line of his spine with her nails. “It feels so nice.”

“Yeah,” he nodded and sank deeply into her, holding that position for a few seconds before lifting
his hips off her again. “I can’t hold back any longer.”

“It’s alright,” she whispered softly and put her arms around his neck, pulling him flush against her as his thrusts sped up a little. “I love you so much.”

And with that, he tumbled over the edge, slammed his eyes shut and let the feeling of his seed filling her take over his entire body before he slumped down on top of her tiny body underneath him, spent and satisfied.

After what could’ve been seconds, minutes or even hours, he wasn’t sure at all since his mind seemed to be completely in a daze, she gently pushed at his shoulders. With a groan, David slowly rolled to the side and out of her warmth. Not exactly his most favourite thing about sex.

Gillian chuckled as he pouted his bottom lip and leaned in to place a soft kiss on his cheek, lingering there for a few moments before placing another one onto his eyebrow and whispered, “I’ll get us some water from the fridge, okay?”

Chugging down half of the bottle she’d just retrieved from the fridge way too fast, Gillian wiped away the stain of water running down her chin with the back of her hand and closed her eyes. Her body was buzzing pleasantly, and she felt warm all over.

Walking towards the kitchen island, Gillian noticed a yellow note on the wooden counter and put the water bottle down before pulling the note off the surface and started to read whilst slowly slipping onto one of the purple bar stools.

‘The boys and Eaden were absolutely beaten and are sound asleep. West and Piper were bored and went out to the movies. You can expect them back by midnight. Downstairs if you need me - enjoy your evening!’

Closing her eyes with a long exhale, Gillian shook her head in amusement before putting the note back. The entire household had probably known about David’s sweet surprise and had apparently tried to give them some privacy. Much needed privacy, Gillian thought, especially after weeks of having at least one child in bed with them every fucking night.

David, always the practical one with the great imagination, had occasionally found some other opportunities for them during the day. Like one evening when he simply pushed a bar stool to the side before scooping her onto the counter and having, what Gillian called, one of the hottest ten minutes of her life. But with a baby who was getting more independent by the day, two very noisy young boys and an adult daughter who still lived under the same roof as them, those occasions were pretty rare nowadays.

Remembering that David had given her Aaron’s notebook earlier that evening, a gentle smile spread across her face while at the same time, tears started to prickle in her eyes. She would read it in private sometime soon, when she had a few hours to herself to indulge, to laugh and to cry over it. Part of her was still astonished that out of all people, Aaron had given it to David. At the same time, it didn’t surprise her as much as it probably should. Not when she was remembering all those long conversations she’d had with her brother in the weeks before he passed.

On one of his good days, when the pain was bearable and the laughs came easily, he even used to tease her that it was unfortunate that he wouldn’t be able to attend her wedding, watch her marry David. Since he’d said it completely out of the blue the first time, she’d put it aside as some sort of confusion, a few words said in a delusional state. But he’d continued to say it until she demanded
some explanation how on earth he could possibly think that this would ever happen. He’d said he
could see it right in front of his eyes. And that there would be so much more she didn’t even dare to
dream of. Only now, after what David had told her, she finally knew that he meant their little girl
Eaden. And it was breaking her heart that Aaron had never got to meet his youngest niece.

She heard David walking down the stairs and shuffling into the living room to join her and inhaled
deeply, pressing the tips of her thumb and index finger into the corners of her eyes to stop the tears
from falling. To no avail. He was by her side and put his hands on her shoulders before she was able
to regain some control over herself.

A shaky sob escaped her throat and she sat up straight before removing her hand from her face.
When she looked into his warm eyes full of sympathy and appreciation, her eyes watered despite all
of her best efforts to hold her emotions back, to not crumble into a thousand little pieces.

But as he pulled her against his warm, broad chest, she was once again reminded that it didn’t matter
with him. She had never felt this safe when falling apart right in front of another person. There was
no need to hide, or to suppress her emotions at all. The only important thing was, as she’d learned the
hard way over the years, to let go. When you were lucky enough to have found the one person, your
person, then you should never deny yourself the support and love they would willingly give.

She was crying quietly, her nails digging into the flesh of his upper arms as his hand drew gentle
circles on her back, the other tangled in her hair.

Aaron had meant the world to Gillian, and his death had been one of the most traumatic events in her
life. David had known that the notebook wouldn’t just be a joyful surprise. It would also bring back
parts of the sorrow and the pain that came with his passing.

So he didn’t say a word. There was no need to do anything but hold her, caress and comfort her.
And as she slowly calmed, he started to place gentle kisses on top of her head and against her
hairline.

“What hurts the most is the fact that he knew he would never get to see her,” Gillian whispered after
the sobs had slowly subsided. “And that he’d never see us getting to this point.”

“But he knew we would,” David insisted gently. “Aaron had a lot of faith in us,” he added and
huffed out a laugh remembering the two nights they hadn’t slept in a row, sitting over beer and
greasy pizza while talking from the bottoms of their hearts. David had never met a stronger and more
positive human being than Aaron. The situation he had found himself in hadn’t changed anything
about that.

Pulling away, she ran her hand over her face and sighed deeply. “Sorry,” she said under a sniffle.
David shook his head and put his hands on her shoulders. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. I just
hope Aaron’s notebook brings you more joy than sorrow…”

“It will,” Gillian nodded firmly and put on a reassuring, yet sad smile.

“Yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Okay,” David smiled warmly and leaned in to place a kiss on Gillian’s forehead. “If you want to,
there’s a nice bubble-bath waiting for you upstairs to relax in.”
Easing her body into the warm water and slowly sitting down between his legs, Gillian sighed in contentment as she leaned back against his chest and closed her eyes.

Wrapping his arms around her middle, David put his head on her shoulder and started to gently kiss the sensitive skin of her throat while watching her intently.

She hadn’t expected and was completely surprised to find her bathroom romantically lit by dozens of candles, beautifully decorated with petals of red and white roses and the claw-foot bathtub filled with steaming, bubbly water when he’d guided her in. Another one of these little, thoughtful things he’d done for her to show her how much she was cherished. David was the master of sweet little gestures of affection that made a woman feel unbelievably loved. She didn’t know anybody who wouldn’t appreciate these sentiments every now and then, and she had surely grown very fond of them. Especially when they came absolutely out of the blue, just like tonight. You never knew what he would come up with next. Once in a while it was a thoughtful, but very expensive gift. Most of the time though, he surprised her with little gestures that put a smile on her face, made her belly flip in anticipation and her heart swell to the brim with love and gratitude.

No wonder her emotions were all over the place right now, Gillian thought and smiled to herself.

“You okay?” David whispered and nuzzled the tiny space behind her ear with his nose.

“Yes. You know me… the state between happiness and sadness is not the best place for me to be in. It confuses me so much.”

“I’m a little confused myself,” he admitted, stroking her wrists with his thumbs. “I wasn’t expecting all these feelings to be honest. I wasn’t expecting this to make me so happy.”

Gillian nodded. “I know. We’re officially the biggest fools around.”

David chuckled. “Nah, we’re just very slow.”

“Then let’s not wait too long, okay?” she shifted in his arms to look back at him. He was staring at her sweetly, his left cheek resting along the length of her shoulder. She licked her lips. “I mean, it would be nice if we could do it… this year… maybe?”

David’s smile grew wider. Her reluctance and shyness was beyond adorable. “Oh, we can’t wait to become Mrs. Duchovny, can we?” he quipped, closed his eyes and puckered his lips. When the kiss he was expecting didn’t come, he opened his eyes after a few moments again and was greeted by an eyebrow arched higher than he’d ever seen it. Pushing his tongue into his cheek, he grinned mischievously, knowing exactly that she was expecting him to dismiss his statement as a joke.

But he decided that wasn’t going to happen today. Instead, he shifted his head and gently nibbled on her shoulder before his tongue darted out and teased her skin.

“There’s no way you can pretend that you can’t wait to be called that,” he murmured quietly.

“You assume I would take your name, of course?” she asked sternly, but the way she was melting into his body told him that she knew he was just teasing, and she played along. He couldn’t care less about the damn name.

“You wouldn’t?” he moved his mouth to her neck and sucked and kissed his way slowly up to her jawline. He also removed his right hand from her wrist and let his fingers trail up her firm belly towards her left breast before gently stroking its underside with his fingertips.

She arched her back and moaned as his thumb suddenly brushed over her erect nipple and began to
draw little circles around and over it repeatedly.

“I, uh,” Gillian stuttered, the touch of his other hand, which was traveling down her body and the anticipation of what was coming with it made it hard for her to form a coherent sentence. She swallowed as he briefly stopped at her bellybutton and circled her piercing with his fingertips.

“You?” he pushed, his fingers almost gruesomely slow getting where she wanted them to be the most.

Opening her legs for him just a little bit, Gillian closed her eyes and sucked her bottom lip between her teeth as his hand reached down. To her great dismay though, he didn’t go any further and instead moved his hand to the side, fingers tracing the two tiny, silver lines, the only remnants her last pregnancy had left on her beautiful body, on the right side of her stomach up to its middle again. And while his gentle, teasing touch sent shivers down her spine, she groaned in frustration and pressed her legs together to create a little bit of friction for her throbbing clit.

“Something wrong, Miss Anderson?” he chuckled lightly.

“Stop teasing me!” she whined in response.

“Hey, who’s teasing who, huh?”

“Oh come on, you know about my tiny old fashioned, traditional streak. And knowing yours I bet you’d like it if I decide to be Mrs. Duchovny in our private life,” she said and turned her head with a sweet smile on her face before she leaned in and brushed her lips across his. “How does that sound, hmm?” she asked teasing.

“In our private lives, like… in bed?” he asked, skimming his hand down between the valley of her breasts towards her tattoo.

Snorting, Gillian pursed her lips and shook her head. Sometimes, even this brilliant man’s imagination had a tendency to be suddenly very limited. “In bed? Seriously, David? I meant in front of friends and family,” Gillian declared and leaned her head back against his shoulder.

“Oh. Ah,” he nodded slowly and his hands stilled. This was indeed a surprise for him.

“Mm-mh,” Gillian grinned and looked into his dazed face. It suddenly dawned on her that his mind was starting to drift off rapidly, which had absolutely not been her intention.

Don’t distract David Duchovny while he’s focussed on your body and giving you pleasure if you definitely want him to do exactly that, she scolded herself as he wasn’t making any efforts to continue.

Therefore, she decided to do what would be best in a situation like this, which was to surprise him with boldness and hopefully stimulate his very active imagination enough to bring his thoughts back where she wanted them to be.

It was the soft, long-drawn moan that escaped her lips that made him very aware of her naked body sitting between his legs again, and that he’d obviously missed how and when her left hand had gotten so busy between her thighs.

Clearing his throat and wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue, he looked down on her for a few moments, watching her hand slowly moving up and down while her hips gently rotated in tune to her movements. He wished he could say that this was the sexiest, most arousing thing he’d seen tonight. And on a normal night, it would be. With the demands of both family life and their careers, they
didn't usually have the luxury of spending a whole night - or day - together alone, free to pleasure each other multiple times. They hadn't even married each other yet, but it seemed they were already starting on the honeymoon. There was no way life could get any better than this. He was definitely in heaven by now.

“You don’t seem to be that confused about what you want anymore,” he finally observed with a sly smirk on his lips,

“No,” Gillian slurred. “Are you?”

“Hmm,” David murmured and nibbled on her neck. “What confuses me is the fact that it’s your fingers rubbing your clit, not mine. And we’re not on the phone, not continents apart, and I’m still missing out on all the fun,” he said, pouting.

Gillian moaned out loud as a jolt of pleasure went through her body and she arched her back into him before closing her eyes and starting to pant through her open lips.

“Jesus, babe,” David hissed into her ear, feeling himself getting stone hard in record time and began to rub himself against her while her constantly moving hips also provided some sweet, maddening friction between them.

“Yeah, keep going. Does it feel good? Do you like touching yourself while I’m watching you?”

“Yes, me too. Just listening to you doing it over the phone turns me on, but watching you drives me crazy,” David whispered while licking and kissing her neck reverently.

Realizing that she seemed happy enough with her own little hand between her legs and not wanting to disturb her rhythm, David started to busy his unoccupied ones by continuing to caress her upper body.

Tracing the edges of her slightly prominent ribs downwards to her waist and then up again by her highly sensitive sides, her moans got increasingly more frequent and louder and her head slumped comfortably back into the crook of his neck.

“So beautiful,” David whispered into her ear and gently sucked her earlobe between his lips.

Gillian licked her lips and set her feet flat on the floor of the bathtub, bending her knees closer to her body and opening her legs a little more. Very slowly, almost teasingly, her middle finger slipped into her entrance and pressed her palm against her clit, starting to fuck herself while her hips slightly rose into her hand every time she pushed her finger inside.

Seeing her like this was almost too much for him without being able to really touch himself. He was now purposely grinding his hips into her lower back and let out a low moan as she scooted up a bit and reached behind her, grabbing his dick firmly with her little hand and stroking him in sync to the motions of her left hand. It was an awkward position, but damn it felt so fucking good.

“Ahh,” David groaned and palmed her breasts, immediately starting to pinch her nipples between his thumb and index finger.

“Feels so good. You’re so fucking hard,” Gillian gasped, pulling her fingers out of herself and continuing to rub her clit in small circles.

“Just for you, baby. God, you’re gonna come for me?”
“Mhh-yeeah. Y-you too?”

“You want to come?” she asked seductively and squeezed his cock to underline her question, making him moan. “You wanna come inside of me?”

“Je-sus, Gill. Yeah, yeah, please.” He wasn’t embarrassed to notice that he was whimpering by now. Again. She always did that to him.

Not wasting any time to lift herself up and kneel between his thighs, she pulled the plug to drain some water until his erection was bobbing in the air. He reached for her slim waist to guide her little ass in position so she was kneeling right over his cock while she leaned forward to brace her hands on his knees.

“Oh shit,” David exclaimed as she slowly sat down and took him all in. He put his large hand flat on her back, slightly pushing her upper body forward to be able to see where they were joined. Watching him slipping out of her while her body rose and fell was a sight for the gods. He couldn’t keep his hands from her anymore and started to kneel the soft flesh of her ass with one while the other gripped the tiny little love handles by her waist and held on for dear life as she rode him into oblivion.

And oblivion was coming faster than he had expected and he suddenly started to feel his balls tightening dangerously as her walls literally milked him, pulsating so wonderfully around his penis he knew he’d lose it any second now.

She was frantically rolling her hips back and forth now, her breathing laboured and riddled with tiny moans. He knew she was just as close as him to reaching her release.

Putting both of his hands on her hips to hold her still, David sat up straight behind her, pressed his chest against her back and snuck his arm around her waist and down between her legs. As soon as his fingers found the hard little bundle of nerves hidden in her soft folds, she arched her butt into his pelvis and moaned out loud, fingers desperately holding onto the slippery edge of the tub as he thrust up into her once, twice, three times and suddenly, she came so unbelievably hard that she opened her mouth for a silent scream, barely noticing him filling her with his warmth before he gathered her close to his body. Both of their bodies were shaking rapidly as he leaned back against the tub with her in his arms and sighed contently into her neck.

Next morning, David awoke to a few rustling sounds beside him, followed by a big, hearty yawn and then complete silence again. Somewhere in the back of his mind he concluded that Gillian must’ve got up and brought the baby into the bed, but he was still too tired to open his eyes and just buried his face deeper into the warm pillow, hoping that it wasn’t already time to get up.

He groaned as the silence of the bedroom was once again disturbed by someone’s babbling after he’d been able to fall back into a light slumber so easily.

It was definitely Eaden who was already awake, and he knew that as soon as she got aware that he was just pretending to sleep and in fact also pretty much awake, there would be no chance for him to catch a few more minutes of sleep anymore. So he kept laying still, listening to her smacking her lips together and quietly mumbling a dozens of “Raaa’s” and “Nnngg’s” to herself. As long as she seemed occupied and happy, David didn’t see a reason to do anything but letting her lull him back into a sweet slumber.
Until suddenly, his eyes flew open and he held his breath, listening intently into the once again silent bedroom. Had he really heard what he thought he had? Or was it just a dream?

When nothing followed, he turned his head and was surprised that Gillian was still fast asleep beside him, apparently still as naked as she was when they had stumbled back into the bedroom after their bath last night, her body only covered by some creamy white sheets.

However though, there was no sign of the baby in their bed.

He must’ve heard her through the baby monitor, David reckoned and sighed, realizing that in less than ten minutes, he would have to get up before their little whirlwind would become frustrated by the lack of attention from her parents.

“Just five more minutes,” David whispered to himself and was about to close his eyes when he heard it again, this time a little more clearly.

Yes, it was definitely what he thought it was.

“Gill,” he threw his arm out to the side and hit her waist clumsily, causing her to startle out of her sleep. “Gill!”

“What’s this?” Gillian moaned. “Lemme sleep!”

“No,” David said and turned around, grabbing her shoulder, starting to shake her gently but firmly. “Listen! Babe?”

“What?”

“Listen!” he whispered and watched her struggling to blink her eyes open while resting his head on hers.

And then there it was once again. Loud, clear and of course, a complete surprise. His heart nearly jumped out of his chest in anticipation as her eyes grew wide and she looked back at him in disbelief. She’d patiently waited for it for such a long time. And now, he couldn’t possibly be happier for her.

The light of the baby monitor flickered on again and after a few moments during which you could only hear her sheets rustling, Eaden’s sweet little voice came through the speakers, whispering “Mama? Maa-mma, maa-mma?”
Gillian’s throat started to feel suspiciously sore right after she came home from an extended breakfast with two of her friends in Notting Hill. It was subtle at the beginning, and first she blamed it on the excessive talking during their breakfast, but it became progressively worse as she was trying to busy herself with writing on the second book of The Earthen Saga.

By the time she left the house to pick up the boys from school, she was beyond frustrated that she hadn’t managed to write a single page and that a painful, dull throbbing headache had manifested itself right behind her left eye, already driving her insane. It didn’t really help that both boys had apparently had a very exciting day at school and therefore felt the great need to tell her every single detail about it loudly and exuberantly for the whole thirty minutes they spent in the car on their way home.

When she shuffled back inside the house, struggling with a writhing and sobbing Eaden in her arms, Oscar and Felix blustered right past them, dropping their backpacks carelessly onto the floor so that she almost stumbled. Gillian sighed in defeat and let her chin drop to her chest, trying to suppress the nausea that was settling in the pit of her stomach by concentrating on taking slow, deep breaths. It seemed to work until the baby started to scream directly in her ear and pulled her hair, demanding attention.

This day was absolutely not turning out the way she had hoped.

She could’ve sworn that she’d literally just closed her eyes when she heard the front door being unlocked and someone entering the house.

Knowing she should get up again, unsure which of her friends Piper had possibly brought home this time and who she did not want to see her like that, Gillian turned to lie on her back instead and pulled the soft blanket covering her shivering body up to her chin while keeping her eyes closed, wincing in pain that was now radiating through her entire body. And before she knew it, sleep had caught up with her again, and pulled her back into its sweet, warm world.

David found her on the couch, sleeping so deeply that the little kisses he placed on her damp forehead failed to wake her.

When he left a few hours ago for a tennis match with an old friend in Regent’s park, everything seemed just fine. Now, she was laying there, exhausted as if she hadn’t slept in weeks.

He stared at her for a few moments, making sure she was breathing regularly, and eventually noticed
that the house was very quiet. Maybe a little too quiet for his taste, and David wondered how long she’d already been lying there.

He decided that he should definitely look after the kids first.

Climbing the stairs up to the boys’ rooms, David got increasingly more suspicious. He couldn’t think of many scenarios that would cause these kids to be so freaking quiet. The most likely one being that they actually weren’t there anymore at all. Hopefully because Piper had taken them outside and not because they’d decided to go to the nearby park on their own.

But when he finally reached Oscar’s room, he could hear the boys talking to each other quietly and let out the breath he was holding with a long exhale.

He slowly opened the door and immediately spotted all three of them, Oscar, Felix and Eaden, lounging on two huge, colorful beanbags beside each other. Oscar was reading out of what appeared to be a comic book, while Felix seemed to be listening intently, his nose deeply buried in his baby sister’s messy blonde hair, who was lying on top of him, also listening to Oscar's voice and chewing on the ear of her stuffed bunny.

David’s jaw dropped at this blissful, almost too good to be real sight in front of him and briefly wanted to pinch himself in order to wake up from this precious dream.

He knew they loved Eaden to pieces, but they were young boys bustling with energy, so usually they just didn’t have the time for more than a quick kiss for the baby unless she was hurt. In that case, they always made sure to cuddle and kiss her owies better as long as she needed them to. But he’d rarely seen them like this. Not fighting or wrestling until one was crying, but sitting peacefully together and enjoying each other’s company. Yes, he was exaggerating a little. They did also know how to play nicely together, and they proved it almost every day. However, they weren’t that much into sitting still and reading on their own at this point, so it was a pretty rare sight after all.

And David suddenly felt unbelievably grateful to be part of their lives, and proud that they were making such good decisions when they realized that they were more or less on their own.

“Hey you guys,” he announced himself by gently tapping on the door and stepping in. “Is everything alright?”

An apparent lack of enthusiasm was displayed on all three small faces, unamused that David had disturbed them in the middle of their story.

“Yeah, but Mummy’s not feeling well, David,” Felix replied concerned as Eaden rested her head back on his chest.

“She said she wanted to take a nap with Eaden and we should go play quietly. That was two hours ago at least! And then Eaden woke up and got hungry-”

“And she had a very full nappy!” Felix chirped in and wrinkled his nose.

“Yeah,” Oscar nodded, grimacing in disgust, before adding dryly, “She really needed to be changed.”

Unable to bite back a chuckle, David sat down on the edge of Oscar’s bed and ruffled the boy’s hair.

“But we got her all clean! And we made us some toast. Eaden had a lot of it. And we gave her some juice to drink. But no sweets for her, promise!”
“Wow, boys! She’s a lucky girl for having such great big brothers!” David said proudly. It wasn’t surprising to hear that poor Eaden didn’t get any sweets from them. If David could rely on something, then it was definitely Oscar’s and Felix’s responsible idea of what their little sister could eat. And sweets, especially theirs, wasn’t one of these things. “Thank you for helping out! Mom’s going to be so grateful!” he praised with a smile.

“That’s okay, I just wanted Mum to get some rest.”

“Me too!” Felix exclaimed.

“I’m very proud of you, boys! But you do remember that you can always call me if you need me, right? No matter what, okay?”

Both of them nodded in unison.

“Alright, I know I can trust you guys to keep everything under control here, so I’m going to check on your Mom, see if she needs anything,” David said, and braced himself on his knees to stand up.

Gillian was in exactly the same position he had left her, her head still slumped to the side and her mouth hanging open slightly. If he woke her now, he could finally prove to her that she was indeed a drooler.

David sat down beside her quietly and tucked the blanket under her arms and hips. She didn’t even stir.

“Hey sleepy head, wakey wakey,” David said softly, but furrowed his brows in concern. Her cheeks were flushed and her nose bright red but the rest of her skin was pale and cold. She was definitely running a fever, and she seemed to be dehydrated.

“Gillian?” He gently shook her shoulders and finally, her eyes fluttered open, slowly and weakly.

“Ugh,” Gillian coaxed and swallowed thickly, raising her hand to her chest.

“Let me get you some water, you’re burning up.”

Her hands were shaking when she tried to bring the glass of water he’d brought her to her lips, and some of the fluid spilled onto her shirt.

“Jesus Gill, what happened? You were fine when I left, right?” he asked and put his hand over hers, steadied her grip and helped her taking a few sips.

She nodded after a few moments and let him take the glass from her.

“Shit,” Gillian moaned and pressed her palm against her forehead. “My head hurts.”

“Just your head? You look horrible.”

Gillian cringed and leaned back against the cushions. “Thank you. My throat is sore… and my joints hurt all over.”

“Hmm. Seems like you’ve caught the flu… again,” he smiled tentatively and stroked her cheek with his thumb.

“What time is it?”

“It’s a little after five. Why didn’t you call me? I would’ve come back earlier.”
“I didn’t want to make you come home early for nothing…” she started, but then suddenly, her eyes flew open. “A little after five? Shit, where are the kids? Where’s Eaden?”

“Relax, they’re upstairs.” David chuckled and patted her left shoulder. “The boys took care of the baby while Mommy needed to take a little two-hour-long nap. They even changed a diaper!”

“Jesus. I must look horrible if they’d decided that changing her themselves would be a better option than waking me,” Gillian replied dryly.

David shrugged. “Maybe, but you’re still cute,” he said and they both started to chuckle before she was suddenly hit by a coughing fit sounding so awful that he actually got a little scared she’d pass out any minute. He pulled her into a sitting position and patted her back firmly. “Breathe, honey.”

“Oh fuck,” Gillian groaned and put her fingers over her lips.

“Are you going to be sick?” he asked, and cautiously scooted back a bit. His daughter and her mother had a thing for getting sick all over him, and it had taken him a lot of time to learn to read the signs. And a lot of shirts.

But she shook her head no. “I don’t think so. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” He offered her the glass again and watched her drink before he asked, “Do you need me to get you something from the drugstore?”

“Mhm, no. I have some ibuprofen somewhere around here and some cold remedy. But Mark’s coming over in half an hour to pick up the boys, and I thought we would head out for dinner tonight, but-”

“Yeah, I’m going to head over to Waitrose when they’re gone, okay? How does a vegetable soup for dinner sound?”

Gillian wrinkled her nose. “Are you going to make it?”

David scoffed and leaned down to kiss her forehead. “No. Fuck, I’m not trying to kill you. They have those really good organic soups, I’d just have to put one in a bowl and heat it. But most ready made things there probably still taste better than anything I could make you.”

“Hmm,” she hummed and closed her eyes. “Sounds good to me.”

After Mark had left with the boys for the weekend, David put Eaden into the baby carrier and strapped her up in front of him.

Waitrose wasn’t barely even five minutes away, and although the sun had already set and it had become a little cooler again, it was a very nice evening and there was still a pleasant scent of spring in the air.

The baby looked up at him with her beautiful, big blue eyes, sucking fiercely on her pacifier and holding onto his shirt. He smiled softly at her as he started to walk away from the house where he’d left Gillian sleeping peacefully on the couch.

He gently stroked the baby’s soft blonde bangs from her forehead to the side. She’d inherited that tiny, prominent freckle right underneath her hairline from her mother, and he bowed his head to place a soft kiss on it before he looked back up and crossed the street when the lights turned green.
“Okay cutie pie, is there something specific you’d like to have for dinner?” he asked after entering the store, heading straight towards the fruit and vegetable aisle.

“What about these avocados? They look pretty good, but it’s very important to feel them before you buy them,” he explained to Eaden and picked up one avocado to show her. “If you want to eat it soon, it should be a little squishy, but not too much. This one feels fine for tonight.” She reached for the fruit and he gave it to her, smiling proudly. “Do you want to hold it for Daddy? There you go. Good girl! Let’s see if we find some crackers to go with it. Or would you prefer some bread? I know Mommy would like some bread with her soup.”

He rubbed Eaden's back and slowly walked down the other aisles, stopping when he spotted one of his favourite brands of dried fruits. The package was stored pretty high in the shelf, and despite being 6 feet tall, he had to stretch himself to reach it. As he did, Eaden let go of the avocado, and it dropped to the floor before rolling right in front of a pair of shoes.

“Oh oh,” Eaden said with wide eyes and tried to grasp her lost item by bending to the side and reaching down.

“Oh oh, have you lost your dinner?” David chuckled and turned around towards a young woman with long black hair, who was bending down to pick up Eaden’s avocado. He walked towards her and she raised her head to look up while she reached for the avocado, and suddenly froze in her tracks.

He knew the look on people’s faces and the sudden shock in their eyes when they recognized him, so it wasn’t hard to guess what was happening right now.

He smiled politely and extended his hand to her. “Hey, sorry. She isn’t usually so generous in sharing her food,” he quipped and helped the young woman back into a standing position before she handed him the avocado and started to chuckle shyly.

“Um, it’s okay.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she swallowed and looked down at her feet before huffing out a laugh. “Oh god, I’ve never thought I’d be starstruck and this is beyond awkward, sorry,” she said and looked up with knitted eyebrows and an apologetic smile.

“It’s alright, don’t worry about it.”

“Could we, uh-, could we take a picture together? My Mum would never believe this happened for real! She’s been a fan for more than twenty years!”

“Yeah, sure,” he nodded and waited for her to retrieve her phone from the pocket of her jeans. “Do you want to hold your avocado again while I’m taking a picture with this nice young lady, hm? But don’t lose it again, okay?” he said softly to Eaden, who stared at the stranger in front of them, totally ignoring her father.

David made sure that Eaden was not looking into the camera as he bent down to be at the same level as the young lady, who was even a little shorter than Gillian, and put his arm around her shoulder so she could take a selfie with him.

“Did you get it? Is it good?” he asked and looked at her screen.

“It’s great! Thank you so much!”
You’re welcome. It was nice to meet you and please say hi to your Mom from me!

She laughed. “I will, thank you! We are so looking forward to the new episodes!” Her eyes went to Eaden, who was now holding the avocado in one and her pacifier in the other hand, still curiously looking at the woman with her eyes wide open. “Your baby is very, very cute by the way.”

David chuckled and patted the baby’s diapered little butt and with that, his youngest daughter finally turned her head and smiled up at him again. “Yeah, she is, thank you.”

David and Eaden continued their shopping after saying goodbye, getting some dried apples and cranberries and choosing a big loaf of whole-wheat bread.

He stood pondering in front of the soups for a very long time, unable to decide which ones he should get. There was a comforting chicken soup and a chunky vegetable soup and probably a dozen others. They looked okay, but then again, he didn’t really want them to be just okay for her.

No, David thought, pursed his lips and turned around to walk back to the fresh vegetables. Gillian deserved better. He would make an effort and cook her his very first, freshly homemade soup. He could do it, despite his earlier lack of conviction, he was sure of it. And it would probably still taste better than any ready-made soup he could possibly buy.

Eaden fell asleep against his chest during their five minute walk home, and he gently removed the avocado from her hand so they wouldn’t lose it again.

David could walk with her for hours through the night. She kept him warm and was great company. The sweetest company actually, no matter how much she drooled on his shirt. She usually slept so peacefully when he was carrying her. The father in him just couldn’t resist the feeling that came with the realization that his little daughter loved his presence as much as he loved hers. For him, it was the best feeling in the world.

He re-entered the house to soft, cheerful chatter coming out of the living room, immediately putting a smile on his face. Thank God, Piper was home.

She was sitting on the sofa beside her mother, who was smiling widely at her daughter before spotting him standing in the threshold.

“Hey, you’re back!” Gillian said hoarsely and tiredly waved her hand at him.

“Hi, David,” Piper grinned.

“Hey you two. It took a little longer than expected. We met a fan and I had to take a picture with her. And then I couldn’t decide which soup I should get,” he explained and put the bags on the kitchen counter under Gillian’s and Piper’s watchful eyes. “And then I suddenly had the magnificent idea that I should make you guys some real soup, from scratch, but I’m not so sure anymore that it was such a good idea,” he said sheepishly, and mother and daughter grinned at him in unison.

“You’re so sweet, honey.” Gillian said softly. She wasn’t sure if it was the sickness or rather the medication that made her so mushy right now. Probably the combination of both. But who really cared?

“You guys are really something,” Piper sighed, got up from the couch and walked over to the kitchen, glancing at David. “A simple soup? Really?”
“I have never made soup in my entire life,” David shrugged. "But I’ve just managed to download a recipe! What does it mean, 'make a basic vegetable stock'? What witchcraft does that even involve?"

“Jesus,” Piper rolled her eyes and started to unpack the bags. “I'll help you this time. And next time,” she pointed her index finger at him, “promise me you won’t even consider buying soup from a supermarket, alright?”

The final result turned out absolutely delicious. David was amazed at how easy it was to make fresh soup by himself. Chop the vegetables, put vegetables into a pot full with water, boil everything slowly and patiently. Refine with herbs and spices, add a little salt and pepper. The only important thing to consider was not to cook it for too long and on too much heat, because you wanted to preserve as many vitamins as possible.

It was so easy he could definitely do this on his own. But then again, Piper was probably the best cook he knew, so he doubted it would turn out like that when he was on his own. But damn, he had to admit that cooking could be a lot of fun. At least in such good company.

It hadn’t escaped him that Gillian had watched them from her position on the couch while dozing on and off. Her happy, content expression flooded his stomach with butterflies, and he winked at her when he noticed that she was quietly snickering because of his clumsiness.

Even Eaden, who woke up at some point and was watching them from her highchair, was very interested in the whole process, but wasn’t very happy that she was not allowed to hold the knife.

Truth be told, he was getting so used to this sweet domesticity. There never was a single, dull moment when all of them were together. Not even while cooking soup.

Who would’ve thought six years ago, when he was at the lowest point of his entire life, that this would be in the realm of possibilities for him? No one? Certainly not him.

But there he was. Standing in the kitchen loading the dishwasher after dinner as Piper decanted the remaining soup into Tupperware-containers to freeze it, constantly laughing at his jokes while his one-year-old sat on the counter, chewing a carrot between her gums and the four front teeth she was sporting.

And damn, he was happy.

It was a little past ten o’clock when David came back from the bathroom and laid back on the long half of the couch.

After he’d tucked both Eaden and Gillian into their beds right after dinner, Piper suggested they could continue to watch a few episodes of The Walking Dead since she didn’t have any plans to go out tonight.

Of course it was Piper who’d chosen the show in the beginning, but he was actually getting addicted to it. And quite fond of the popcorn, the potato chips and the soda Piper insisted were compulsory for such a proper binge-watching night.

Sometimes they just sat in a comfortable silence and watched, other times they talked for basically the whole time. With Piper, a light, witty conversation was always just as possible as a very deep and meaningful one. It was mostly something between the two of them since Gillian was not particularly interested in any show whatsoever. Especially not in the ones Piper preferred to watch.
So he was more than surprised when he heard her shuffling through the hallway and into the barely lit living room. She usually avoided coming down when they were watching something, knowing that whatever it was, it would definitely be too creepy for her.

She was smiling tiredly now as she crossed the room and raised her hand to wave at them, her hair ruffled from sleep.

“Hey, do you guys mind if I join?” she asked quietly and walked towards the couch where David and Piper were sprawled out.

She was wearing a thick, cotton robe over her long-sleeved, creamy pyjamas, looking like she was living in a little cottage in the middle of the forest during winter without heat. And her arms were still tightly wrapped around her petite frame.

“Hey,” David smiled happily at her and held out his arms. “Of course not! How are you feeling? Did you get some sleep?”

“Mhm yeah,” Gillian nodded and took his hands, letting him pull her down to lie close beside him. She smiled and sighed contentedly as she rested her head right over his heart, sniffling her nose as he draped the soft cotton blanket over her before hugging her tightly against his warm body. She should’ve come down way earlier to let him wrap her into his warmth instead of staying in bed and literally freezing her ass off. “But it was cold in bed. What are you guys watching?” she asked, her voice sounding completely nasal now.


“Oh! Hey, did I ever show you the picture of me and part of the cast? I think it was Norman, Chandler, Lew-”

“Yes, Mom,” Piper sighed in annoyance and rolled her eyes. “You’ve shown us multiple times. Stop bragging about it. It’s a little annoying that you pretend to be such a fan when you haven’t seen a single episode.”

“Well, that’s about to change,” Gillian twisted her lips into a satisfied smile. “I bet I’ll like it.”

“Yeah,” David snorted with laughter, “you’ll love it,” he placed a soft kiss on Gillian’s forehead before grinning at Piper.

They weren’t even ten minutes into the episode and Gillian was already glancing between her daughter and the TV suspiciously with knitted eyebrows. She knew that the show was supposed to be horribly brutal and disgusting, but it was actually a lot worse than she had expected. And Piper wasn’t even wincing when the pretty girl with the samurai-sword decapitated a guy who, unlike these walkers, still seemed to be pretty much alive. That was before his head rolled away of course.

She had to close her eyes during a few scenes when it got too nasty, and tried her best to inhale David’s freshly showered scent through her clogged nose. It was a good thing that she was still so unbelievably tired that her eyes were so heavy they were constantly closing on their own.

Gillian woke again when he wiggled himself out from underneath her and it suddenly got so uncomfortably cold. Lately, she often wondered when she’d become so dependent on his body heat and how she was supposed to sleep without his wonderful, familiar scent again. She used to always like to have space. A lot of it, actually. And that included liking to sleep on her own side of the bed without being touched all the time. David had always been the only man respecting what she wanted and needed at any given time. But she was sure that this major change in her basic needs hadn’t gone
completely unnoticed, or unwelcomed.

She was just about to deliberately whine in protest when she felt his hands sliding between her back, knees and the couch and before she knew what was happening, he’d already lifted her up. And instead of whining, she let out a satisfied hum.

“Wha’time issit?” she murmured when she realized he was already climbing the stairs and struggled to open her eyes.

“Time for bed, babe. A little after midnight.”

“Mh, I can walk,” she said, but put her arm around his shoulder, snuggling closer into his warmth.

“I know.” He grinned, amused. “Too late though,” David said and gently eased her down on the bed, the sheets still rumpled from earlier.

“I didn’t know that you were into horror shows,” Gillian said and lifted her legs off the mattress so he could tuck the sheets underneath them.

He smiled at her. “Not particularly. Though it’s not as stupid as I thought it was.”

“It isn’t?”

David shook his head and pulled his shirt off before tossing it over a turquoise armchair beside the bed. “Nope. But that’s not why I’m watching it.”

“And why are you watching it?”

“Because,” he climbed into the bed beside her, “It’s nice to sit and spend some time with your daughter. It’s very comfortable and relaxing.”

Gillian turned her head and raised an eyebrow at him. “Well, you guys should consider watching a show that’s a little less disturbing if you want to sit in peace with each other.”

David shrugged and scooted closer to her, smiling as she raised her arm for him to cuddle up close.

“Piper likes it.”

Gillian sighed weakly. “David, that show is horrible. I hate that she watches things like that, and that it doesn’t seem to bother her. I wish she would watch things like… I don’t know, Gilmore Girls, instead?”

“Oh boy, that sounds even more disturbing, and do you even know what Gilmore Girls is? I thought you didn’t watch TV!” he teased, reaching over her to turn off the bedside lamp before draping an arm over her waist. “Don’t worry, Mom. Piper's clever and wonderful. She has a good head on her shoulders. And she’s the girl who grew up on a set full of fake monsters and aliens, she knows what’s real and what isn’t. She just likes the thrill,” he said reassuringly. “And besides, there’s a baby that’s worth fighting for,” he stated and she burst into a fit of giggles, holding her head and chest.

“Oh my god, Dave. Admit it! You’re the fanboy here!”

“Maybe,” he chuckled and craned his head to kiss her cheek. She wasn’t feeling quite as warm as earlier, but he figured it was just the ibuprofen doing its magic.

“Even the soundtrack is nerve wracking! I’ll be having nightmares tonight.”
“I’m here, baby. I won’t let anyone take a bite out of you, I promise.”

Gillian smiled and buried her fingers into his soft hair, gently massaging his scalp. “Thank you. Also for the soup, it was delicious. And I appreciate that you actually cooked it yourself.”

“You’re very welcome. You know I’d do anything for you,” he whispered in a soft voice and closed his eyes.

David soon found out that she’d been damn right when she had predicted that she would have nightmares. Of course he’d noticed that she had closed her eyes and buried her face into his shirt during certain scenes. He knew she was squeamish, but he was actually genuinely surprised when she started to whimper and toss her head from one side to the other beside him.

“Hey,” he whispered, still mostly asleep, and turned around to face her.

He reached out and got a hold of one of her arms. Her pyjamas were drenched in sweat and she was alarmingly hot.

“Damn,” David muttered and turned on the light on her nightstand. “It’s just a bad dream, honey. Wake up,” he said softly and stroked her face until she slowly opened her eyes. “You’re okay. It’s just a dream.”

“They were scratching at the door,” she gasped after a few moments and pointed her head towards their closed bedroom door.

David furrowed his eyebrows. “Who?”

“The zombies.”

“Jesus, Gill,” David sighed and rolled out of bed to walk over to her side.

“I told you these things scare me,” Gillian sobbed and pressed her fingers into her eyes to relieve the pain pounding through her head.

“Don’t,” he said and pulled her hand to the side, checking her temperature by touching her forehead. “And I think it's time for your next dose of medication. Next time, you’re not allowed to join our binge-watching sessions unless it’s really something like Gilmore Girls, babe,” he quipped, even though he didn’t feel like making jokes at all. He was actually starting to get worried. But then she smirked, and he couldn’t help himself but smile back at her before adding, “Which will, for your information, never happen.”

Another thing he’d never expected to get this good at was giving sponge baths. Gillian on the other hand was still not very good at receiving help. She was pouting after he came back from the bathroom holding painkillers and a wash cloth, handing her the pills and a glass of water, making sure she took her medicine and undressing her almost simultaneously. He quickly and efficiently washed down her face, chest and limbs so her nearly naked body wasn’t exposed to the relatively cold bedroom air for too long.

“I’m so hot,” she whispered after a while.

“Yeah, but unfortunately not the good kind of hot. At least not yet.” He threw the wash cloth into the bathroom basin and retrieved a fresh long-sleeved-shirt and some white cotton pants from a drawer before beginning to dress her again. “But it’s a good sign. It means the sponge-bath is helping and your temperature is coming down.”
In response, she mumbled something unintelligible and then closed her eyes and kept quiet for the time he dressed her. The nausea was coming back full force, and she tried to keep it in control by inhaling through her nose and exhaling through her lips, which failed because of her completely blocked nose.

“You okay?” David asked tenderly and pulled the pants up her hips and then the covers over her body before he dimmed the light of her nightstand. She nodded at his question and he gave her a doubtful look. He sighed as she remained silent. “Is the light alright or does it bother you?”

“It’s okay, thank you,” she whispered in response and extended her arm to the left, patting the empty spot beside her. “It might help to keep the zombies away,” Gillian quipped tiredly as he crossed the room to get back into bed.

“That’s the idea.”

“You know, maybe it isn’t as stupid as you think,” Gillian said quietly, watching him as he climbed in beside her.

“What do you mean?”

“Gilmore Girls. At least, I don't think it would give me nightmares.”

He sighed, shaking his head slightly. “Go to sleep,” he advised softly and nestled his head back into his now cold pillow.

“The baby got to me the most,” she broke the silence after a while and reached for his hand.

“Gill -” he said firmly, but entwined their fingers and brought both of their hands up to his chest. “You really should get some sleep now. Stop thinking about TV-shows!”

“I can’t. That’s what watching TV does to me. It’s why I rarely do it.” He sighed again. “Do you want to know why?”

“Because it’s blonde and it’s cute and it looks like Eaden and every time you see her, you imagine your baby having to live in a world like that,” he stated matter-of-factly, hoping to end this conversation as soon as possible. The combination of a Gillian who’d just watched a show she wasn’t able to comprehend, once because she had never seen an episode before and secondly because of it’s cruelty, as well as one who was running a high fever, was getting slightly annoying. If he didn't put an end to it, she would ramble on until the night was over. And she really needed the rest. Come to think of it, so did he.

She sniffed her nose. “Am I that transparent?” Gillian asked sadly.

“You’re a Mom of four kids and, no offense, you’re horrible at not letting these things get to you,” David replied and squeezed her hand. “Let’s go back to sleep. That dose of medication will kick in soon.”

“Hmm,” she hummed wearily and then whispered, “Would you hold me, please?”

He smiled and gently pulled on her hand. “C’mere, my little virus-disseminator.”

“Mhh, I’m sorry if I’m being needy,” she apologized halfheartedly and scooted closer, letting him wrap his arms around her gingerly. There weren’t many things on this planet that had the power to make her feel better in a matter of seconds. Yet, his embraces had always been one of them.
“Babe,” David muttered into her hair before kissing her forehead. “You don’t ever have to apologize for that. I like to cuddle with you. And besides, you know me when I’m sick. You’re low in maintenance compared to that!”

Gillian chuckled quietly and buried her face into his chest. “Hmm, I have to say this is the best medicine.”

“That’s nice to hear,” he smiled and wiggled his warm hand underneath her shirt to rub her cold back. “I don’t think you can fly like this, though. Not the day after tomorrow.”

“But I really wanted to go to West's birthday party!” Gillian whined.

“Your nose is completely clogged, do you know how much it would hurt to fly like that? Your eardrum could rupture. Do you want to end up deaf?”

“No,” she coaxed out, and cleared her throat. "But she was so looking forward to us celebrating with her and that her best friends finally get to meet the baby.”

David shrugged. “I’ll take Eaden with me and they can gush over her as much as they want.”

“What?” Gillian raised her head abruptly from his chest, causing her to wince in pain. “David, I don’t… I mean, no.”

“No?” he looked at her, perplexed. “You don’t want me to take the baby with me?”

She bit into her lower lip and slowly shook her head no.

“Why not? You’re sick, it will definitely get worse before it gets better and Erin is on vacation. You have a book to write and a deadline to meet.” He paused to lick his lips. “Wouldn't it be much easier if the baby was out of your hair for a few days? And besides, you just had her while I was in L.A two weeks ago. Now let me take care of her so you can focus on yourself and your career.”

“I” she started, but the words caught in her throat. There really was no good reason to turn down his offer, but the thought of being separated from Eaden still made her stomach clench. Only his soft expression and the empathy in his eyes helped calm her sudden sense of anxiety.

Gillian sighed. “Don’t get me wrong here, I mean I know you'd take good care of her, but she's still only one year old - traveling overseas and caring for a baby at the same time isn’t a piece of cake. And you’re on your own. And also, you have rehearsals. Where’s she going to be during those times?”

“My Mom’s home, and she wanted to spend some time with her granddaughter anyway. West and Miller will be there too, and you know how much they love being with their little sister. She can come to meet the band, they’d be absolutely thrilled when she finally gets to use those tiny pink earmuffs they got for her in the hope that she would join us someday. We’re prepared for her, Gill. I’m prepared to care for our child on my own,” he said softly, his tone gentle, but quietly determined, lacking anything that would make her think that he was trying to force something upon her.

She knew that he was very aware of what was going on. And she was glad that he wasn’t acting like she was trying to hurt him intentionally, to reduce him to a father who was only there for fun and unable to take any real responsibility.

When it came to her intuition about anything related to the kids, he rarely argued with her. Mostly because she didn’t give him a reason. They had similar doubts, fears, expectations and values. But he had a great understanding for her role as the mother and respected her feelings unconditionally,
without taking them personally.

So she wasn’t surprised that the next thing he wanted to know was how she felt about this instead of challenging her and asking the question she wasn’t sure she could answer.

Was she ready to let them go without her?
The best thing to hold onto in life is each other. - Audrey Hepburn

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year, everyone! I hope 2017 is going to be a wonderful year for all of you! It means the world to me that you're still letting me know what you think of this little fic, and that it brings some joy :) To my friends justholdinghands and mulderscullyinthetardis, who put a lot of time into the beta - thank you so, so much! I love you!

Now, before you start, I suggest you look at this precious picture of David and a cute little one from this weekend to get into the right mood for this chapter :D http://sembell.tumblr.com/post/155587124995/justholdinghandsok-bye-x

David had absolutely no idea what lay ahead of him when he boarded the plane from London to New York two days after he’d offered to take Eaden with him on his own.

Gillian had told him dozens of different horror stories about flying with a one-year-old. Specifically, with their one-year-old slash unpredictable-ball-of-energy daughter Eaden. On top of that, he now knew every do and every don’t Gillian could’ve possibly thought of. At some point he suspected that she was simply trying to scare him so much he would finally backtrack from his offer to take the baby on his own.

And he would have, just because he saw how much Gillian was struggling with the prospect of her baby flying out of the country without her. But in the end, it didn’t make any sense. She was way too sick to take care of herself and their daughter.

The day before their departure had been an exceptionally hard one. Besides coughing, sleeping and waiting to take the next dose of pain-killers, Gillian had cried multiple times, once even yelled at him before she broke down in his embrace and let him hold her until she fell asleep. It was rough to see her like that. Struggling so hard to stay in control while all her emotions and instincts were taking over, pushing common sense very far away. David knew where the fears originated from. She was traumatized from the events several months ago, and had lost a fundamental confidence in the world when Eaden had stopped breathing.

Before they left this morning though, Gillian had finally resolved herself to the fact that David taking Eaden to New York was the best solution after all. And she’d hugged them both close, successfully holding back the tears at least until they got into the cab.

But, truth be told, whether it had been her intention or not, she’d succeeded in making David a little nervous by the time they arrived at the airport.

Nervous to a degree that he went into every single restroom on their way to their gate to check if she was still dry so that he wouldn’t have to worry that she’d get grumpy while boarding the flight and waiting for take-off because of a wet diaper. Which, as he was very aware of, bordered on ridicule considering that he wasn’t at all a new father with little to zero experience under his belt.

Eaden on the other hand was her usual, cheeky self, taking in her surroundings with interest and curiosity just as she always did, especially when she was safely strapped in front of his chest up until
they boarded the plane and took their seats in business class.

Although his daughter could be called a frequent flyer by now, her last flight had been more than four months ago, and everything seemed very new to her. She was usually more of a noisy and adventurous kind of baby, not really the scared type, but the sounds that came from the engines on the runway definitely seemed to worry her.

The attempt to distract her with one of the little children books he’d brought failed miserably as she became increasingly restless in his lap until he put everything aside, turned her around so she was facing him and was able to snuggle up against his chest while he held her in a close embrace. Together, they looked out of the window as David quietly explained to Eaden what they were able to see. Her head rested comfortably against his shoulder, her little fingers gently scraping the skin of his throat as she listened attentively to Daddy telling her about the clouds passing by.

It was how they spent the first two hours- watching the Earth getting smaller and smaller beneath them and dozing through some light turbulence, and the first round of snacks.

Eaden was in good spirits after her nap and a quick run to the restroom for a diaper-change. He ordered lunch for them and fed her the warmed-up bottle of pumped breast milk Gillian had insisted he took with him. With the two bottles for the journey had also come a sheet of paper with instructions of how often he was supposed to feed her the milk that was still frozen in his refrigerator. He’d made a pretty stupid joke about accidentally forgetting and ending up weaning her, which Gillian hadn’t found funny at all, of course.

After that, he had learned the milk-schedule by heart, because if Gillian arrived in New York and the baby refused her milk after her mother had pumped for days, she would be devastated and heartbroken. And he would most likely be dead. An unhappy and pissed off Gillian was an intensely scary Gillian, one he would rather not provoke, if possible.

When their lunch arrived, he sat Eaden on her own seat beside him and let her munch on a stalk of steamed broccoli and a cracker while he was able to eat his vegetable lasagna in peace.

As he watched Eaden engrossed in her food beside him, David started to feel a little sorry for Gillian. And guilty that he’d put mother and baby through flying back and forth whilst she was so little. It must’ve been so hard, and probably a nightmare during the times she was teething. He was getting away with it way too easily, but he hoped that he was at least making it up to her a little now by giving her the time and space to get better again and focus completely on herself. Even though she still saw the whole thing more as torture than a relief.

Eaden did eventually get a little grumpy when they were about five hours into the flight. Knowing his often restless daughter well, it would have taken him by surprise if she hadn't protested about the lack of crawling space at some point.

In order to release some of the increasing tension and dispel boredom, they walked up and down the narrow aisles a few times, with David holding onto both of Eaden's little hands as she clumsily planted one foot in front of the other. She was concentrating a lot more on the nice people to her right and left, who were smiling widely at her, than on walking, which caused her to trip over her own feet multiple times. But David held on, preventing her from landing on her diapered little butt, and the way she was hanging from his hands sometimes made her giggle even more. By the time he carried her back to their seats, she was much calmer and fell asleep in his arms the minute he sat back down.

The landing, which Gillian had resolutely described as the worst part, went so smoothly and uneventfully it was almost boring. David woke his daughter gently when the pilot started the descent
and offered her a bottle of water to help her ears pop. And that was it. Piece of cake, basically. He'd have to tell her mother about that trick.

And he was pretty sure that especially the female flight attendants smiled and nodded exceptionally acknowledging when he left the plane with his cute, well-behaved ray of sunshine. He couldn’t help it, but he was so fucking proud of himself for keeping his little girl happy and safe, even though she had just travelled a thousand miles away from the most important person in her life. He couldn’t replace her mother. But he was her father and with that, doing his best to do the right and responsible thing. Not only for her, but also for her mother.

Despite the relatively relaxed flight and a quiet ride into Manhattan, both David and Eaden were pretty beaten when they arrived at his Upper West Side apartment at around 4pm. After a quick dinner consisting of sandwiches, a change of clothing and another bottle of milk, they crashed on the couch in their all-time favorite way - with an old black-and-white movie quietly playing on his TV, and Eaden resting in the crook of David’s arm, safely tucked in between the backrest and his chest under a soft, wool blanket. She was out like a light in a matter of minutes, her little fingers constantly twitching whilst they grasped his shirt as her mind was running on overdrive, trying to process all the exciting adventures of their very successful day.

How did you know if your one-year-old was missing her mother who was currently on another continent? Would she cry and scream the whole time? Or would it be worse just before bedtime, when it was exceptionally hard to be away from someone you loved? Would she be grumpy and sleep-deprived because Mommy wasn’t there to nurse her to sleep and put her to bed like usual? Or clingy and restless, refusing to eat, not in the mood to play?

Well, Eaden was none of those things, and it proved difficult to answer Gillian's questions, when she called him first thing in the morning and again in the evening. Having to explain to a mother that her baby had an overall great time without her didn’t feel very nice. Gillian made it easy for him though, laughing and chuckling through his narrations of how enchanted the Mañana club was by their little girl and how much everyone adored her. And that Eaden must’ve inherited his great musical talent based on how well she played the drums sitting on Colin’s lap as her father tried to sing along.

Gillian enjoyed hearing about their adventures visiting his favorite sights and places in Manhattan together and how much Eaden still loved riding the subway. But it wasn’t until their conversations were almost at an end that it became clear just how acutely their daughter felt her mother's absence. Eaden, who seemed mostly unfazed by their calls in general, and lay motionless on David’s chest, suddenly reached up to Daddy’s ear where the sound of her mother’s voice had been coming from for over ten minutes and called for Mama with a big grin on her little face. And then she and Gillian spent another ten minutes talking, giggling and playing peek-a-boo over facetime. David couldn't help but find it utterly adorable, and just a little heart-wrenching.

She might’ve been good at hiding it and was still having a good time with him, but his little one-year-old was definitely missing her mother.

The next day, they woke up early when the birds began to sing across the street in Central Park. The first rays of sunshine were sliding their way through the curtains and into his bedroom, as the sheets started to rustle beside him and a little someone clumsily climbed onto David’s torso. He blinked himself awake to see a still sleep-drunken Eaden, who’d of course spent the night in his bed again.
Her blonde hair was sticking out in all directions as she buried her face into his neck and spread her arms wide over his chest for her morning cuddles.

“Morning, sunshine,” David slurred tenderly, and Eaden let out a contented sigh as he started to rub her back in slow circles. She was still so warm and soft from sleep, and smelled intoxicatingly like baby powder and her very own, sweet baby scent he would never get enough of.

It was the perfect way to start a special day in his favorite city with that precious, soft little human in his arms. The weather forecast was promising and he was absolutely looking forward to grabbing some breakfast and spending the day outside again before it was time to prepare for a very exciting evening.

Sixteen years ago today, his life had changed for the better, and he became a better man. Yes, the best part of his life began when his oldest child came into this world, and it was bittersweet and somewhat unbelievable that he could call his oldest daughter a young woman now, whilst being fortunate enough to also hold her little sister in his arms. Sometimes, life could really surprise you, with its unexpected twists and turns.

“It’s your sister’s sixteenth birthday, Eaden,” David whispered and placed a soft kiss on her hair. “Let’s give her a call, okay? Are you going to say Hi to West?” he asked, and reached for his phone on the nightstand before dialing his daughter’s number.

“Hey Dad,” West answered after only two rings. He smiled as the picture of an excited West popped up in his mind, probably sitting in the car, ready for school, and already replying to birthday messages. Like probably every teenager, she had longed for this day to finally arrive.

“Hi, baby,” he replied warmly. “Happy birthday, my sweet, lovely young lady.”

She chuckled softly. “Thanks, Daddy,” she said so sweetly that she almost sounded like a little four-year-old again. It was so hard to comprehend that somehow that was twelve years ago.

And yet, she was still the same girl who knew exactly which buttons to press to get everything from her father, who was just madly in love with her. It wasn’t that much of a surprise that Eaden had somehow inherited the exact same ability. All of his kids pretty much had David wrapped around their fingers, and everyone knew it.

“How does it feel being sixteen years old?”

“Hm, I’m feelin’ old,” she said with a chuckle. “Could be due to the little party we had last night, but who knows?”

“I missed a party?”

“Nah, nothing special. Just burgers with a few friends. And besides, weren’t you busy trying out life as a single Dad? How’s that turning out?”

David scoffed softly and looked down at Eaden, whose eyes were already closed again. “Oh, you know me, your old man is a pro. My daughters are usually good to me as long as I do what they want.” West giggled at that. “How come you already know about that anyway?”

“I was told by someone who sounds like her vocal cords have been rubbed down with sandpaper. Could’ve been Gillian, but she sounded so bad I’m still not entirely convinced it was the real her.”

“Sounds exactly like Gill right now, afraid to say. I’m sorry baby, she did want to be here for your birthday, but she’s just too sick. She’s really bummed she couldn’t make it,” David replied.
“Yeah,” she replied, in a matter-of-fact tone, and somehow he’d expected a stronger reaction to Gillian not being able to attend her birthday party. After all, West was the one who’d expressed the desire that Tim and Gillian should be there when the family was celebrating her birthday. “But you’ll bring Eaden, right?” she asked, this time sounding hopeful.

“Yes, of course.”

“Great! Dad, I gotta go now, I have to get to class. Thanks for your call and I’ll see you later, ‘k?”

“You can count on it, kiddo. Have a good day!”

The place West had chosen for her birthday-dinner was a cozy Italian restaurant in the West Village that held so many wonderful and special memories for their family. As a family of four, David, Téa and the kids had celebrated a lot of birthdays here over the years. Up until the past two years, when West and Miller had blossomed into teenagers and everyone’s lives had started to change immensely; not least because David had become a father once again. Not in his wildest dreams had he thought they might become one big patchwork-family. And a strangely constructed, yet successful family, at that.

On his way to the restaurant, David thought about how lucky they were that all of their children had emerged out of their parents’ separations and divorces as well-functioning, whole individuals. Frankly, the ones still struggling the most with the craziness of all of this were actually them, the adults. No matter how much they were able to laugh it off, it still felt awkward to bring the baby he had with Gillian to a party with his ex-wife and her new partner while his mother would be sitting at the same table. In spite of everything, it was pointless and a waste of time to agonize about these things. It was only important that all the kids were as comfortable as possible with their parents’ chosen partners.

He spotted Téa standing at the bar and talking to a waiter when he entered the restaurant, and he waved as she turned her head and looked into his direction. With her glasses on and her hair slightly curled, she looked more like the secretary of state she was portraying on TV than the actual Téa for a second, before her lips formed a very Téa-like ’O’ and her eyes went wide in genuine amazement when she realised that David had brought his baby along on his own.

“Wow!” she exclaimed exuberantly, and with one last nod towards the barkeeper, walked towards David and Eaden, whilst he hoisted the diaper bag off his shoulder, grappled with the baby carrier before pulling the straps down his arms and handed everything to the guy at the coat check.

As usual, the restaurant was crowded, which wasn’t surprising considering the popularity of the place, and great food and atmosphere on offer.

“Wow, look at you guys!” Tèa said, reaching them just as David unzipped the baby’s jacket.

“Hey you,” he smiled happily and leaned down to give his ex-wife a quick peck on the cheek.

“Hey yourself! You’re cold, did you walk all the way or what?” Téa asked teasingly and put her flat hand gently on the baby’s back, smiling widely at Eaden, who was looking at her curiously, and repeatedly mouthed the word hi.

“Nah, just a few blocks.”

“Come on, let me take her so you can shed your coat and leave it here. You’ll need your hands free to hug the birthday girl and some of her guests.”
“Mom’s already here?” David asked, and carefully passed her over to Téa. He had a sudden flashback from 15 years previously, when Téa was a new Mom, and West was Eaden's age. He immediately shrugged it off, realising that no matter how much he loved all his kids, the parallels were too strange even for his tastes.

“M-hmm.” Fortunately, Téa was completely oblivious to his thoughts, and besotted by Eaden, as was usually the way with his cute and extremely charming young daughter. The baby was studying Téa’s smiles intently, with her mouth hanging wide open and brows furrowed.

“Hey beautiful, how are you doing?” Téa took the baby’s little hand and shook it playfully, cooing over her. “Look at you, you're so big! I can’t believe how big you’ve gotten! You're barely even a baby anymore! Where did the time go, hmm?”

David pursed his lips and thanked the young man who took their coats from him before tugging up his jeans and shrugged. “Yeah, the time's just flown. Just don’t tell Gillian that she looks more like a toddler than a baby already.”

“Yeah, who would want to hear that!? Just take a look at our baby, David - sixteen now!” Téa replied with a chuckle. “You ready? Let’s join the others.”

The private booth was their favorite, tucked away at the back of the restaurant so they could celebrate without being disturbed by people staring or taking pictures of them, which was one of the reasons the Duchovny family had always liked this place so much.

West was the first to hop onto her feet when they came into their sight. Miller, Tim and David’s mother Meg were already seated at the table, sipping drinks, chatting and reading their menus.

“Dad!” West exclaimed and fell into his arms, burying her head into his chest.

Smiling, David put his arms around his daughter. “Happy birthday, baby,” he said and kissed the top of her head, snickering to himself as he could smell the expensive perfume Gillian had gifted her with for Christmas last year.

“Thank you.”

“Your gift is waiting for you at home. It’s too big to bring to a restaurant,” David whispered and she raised her head abruptly, grinning broadly. No matter how old they got or how cool they thought they were, even teenagers turned into shiny-eyed little kids when it came to presents. And in her eyes, he could definitely see the brand new guitar she'd fallen in love with a couple of weeks ago. The equipment he'd also bought was just to spoil her a little.

After shaking hands with Tim, high-fiving his son and embracing his mother with a huge hug, David took a seat beside her, opposite from Miller, Téa and Tim. Grandma Meg immediately claimed Eaden for herself, sitting the little one on her lap. The baby captured a napkin, appearing fascinated with the colorful restaurant logo, looking deceptively demure in her gorgeous navy striped dress which Gillian had chosen for their daughter. So far, Eaden was behaving impeccably. As though butter-wouldn't-melt, David thought. He smirked to himself inwardly.

As Meg started to smother her youngest granddaughter with kisses, Miller reached across the table several times to get his little sister's attention, who started to giggle heartily at their actions.

“She’s been looking forward to seeing grandma again, isn’t that right?” Meg said warmly and ran her fingers through Eaden’s hair.

David smiled. He had always loved to watch his mother with his children. As a grandmother, she
was just as loving, caring and gentle as she’d been as a mother. The kids loved to go to her, surprisingly even more so as they got older. That was probably because she was a wonderful listener and gave great advice to people all ages. David was beyond grateful that Eaden could grow up knowing her, too.

“Can we order now? I’m starving!” Miller whined.

“Just a moment, hon. Give everybody a chance to look at the menu, please,” Téa replied calmly.

“What are you doing?” David asked as he noticed West still standing beside him, looking into the dining room. “Sit down and look at the menu, we’re hungry and would like to order.”

“Yeah just a sec, Dad. Besides, I’m sitting there,” she said, pointing at the chair at the head of the table.

“Why wouldn’t you want to sit beside me? Come here,” he said and tugged gently at her arm.

“No,” she wiggled her arm free. “I’m the birthday girl, I’m sitting at the head of the table. The seat next to you’s already taken.”

“Oh man,” David groaned and let his head slump back against the backrest. No matter how much he liked the young man, the prospect of having a love-drunk 17-year-old-boy beside him for the whole evening wasn’t one he was particularly fond of. West’s boyfriend was everything he’d always expected a boyfriend of his daughter’s to be. Kind, respectful and humble with a great sense of humor. Yet, he always seemed to be around nowadays. And whilst David knew that it was just normal for them to want to spend as much time together as possible, West was still his little girl. Who he didn’t get to see nearly as much of as he would like, these days. He hadn’t been prepared or ready for that at all.

Looking up again, he noticed that Téa was biting back a smile as she looked at him and then at West, and then couldn’t stop herself from grinning as someone apparently walked up to their daughter. David pursed his lips and shook his head. This guy had managed not only to wrap his daughter around his finger, but her mother as well. It was unbelievable.

“Hey, is this seat taken?” suddenly came from beside him, the voice sounding slightly raspy, but gentle.

Turning his head, David startled at the sight of the person standing in front of him and blinked a few times. She was grinning at him with her bottom lip tucked between her teeth as if he was wearing the dumbest expression on his face. He supposed he probably was.

“What?” he stuttered, not entirely trusting his own eyes, and looked back at Téa, who started to chuckle in amusement.

“We thought we’d surprise you too, Dad,” West said brightly.

“That’s one hell of a surprise!” David said and finally got up from the booth, smiling widely at Gillian as he slid his hands around her waist to greet her, pleased to notice that she looked a lot better than a few days ago.

“What a relief - I’m glad you’re not disappointed!” Gillian quipped, her voice still sounding slightly hoarse, and, despite wearing heels, had to get on her tiptoes to place a chaste kiss on David’s cheek. “Hi.”

Not really satisfied with that, he pulled her closer and leaned down for a quick kiss on the lips. When
they parted, his grin was a mischievous, lopsided one that made her belly tingle. Seeing the joy in his
face and knowing that she was so welcome here was a fantastic feeling. She wouldn’t have wanted
 to miss it for the world.

“Are you better? Did you talk to the doctor before you flew out? Are you sure it was OK for you to
fly? And did you guys know about this?” he fussed, questioning both Gillian and West
simultaneously.

“Honey, let Gillian give Eaden a cuddle first, will you, David?” Meg interrupted and patted the seat
beside her, indicating for Gillian to take a seat.

"Yes, thank you, where's my baby!" Gillian clearly couldn't wait to greet their sweet little daughter,
her face bathed in relief as she claimed the baby back from her grandmother,

She held Eaden up in the air to get a proper look at her, her eyes glistening with unshed tears of
satisfaction. Then she pressed her baby close to her body and showered the pretty little face of their
daughter with kisses, making Eaden squeal in delight. David watched their reunion quietly, his heart
pounding so hard it felt like it had relocated itself in his throat, and there was little else he was able to
hear besides the sound of blood rushing through his ears. They had barely spent four days apart, but
his body was reacting to her sudden appearance as if he hadn’t laid eyes on Gillian in months.

The little daughter they shared simply completed the picture, and watching the pure joy mother and
child obviously took from the simple presence of each other also brought him a kind of peace and
contentment he hadn't thought possible to experience at this point in his life. Of course he was able to
be without Gillian and if he said he hadn't also enjoyed some time on his own, it would be a lie. But
knowing that he would see Gillian at least at the end of every day, being able to lie in bed together,
experience events together, and share things as a family was… better. Much better.

She would go home with them tonight, he realised, and smiled dreamily. She would sleep in his arms
and they would wake up with his head resting between her breasts. Or, if she was still having trouble
breathing because of her cold, they could spoon up together, his face buried in her soft hair. And she
would be there when a horde of teenage girls would raid his apartment tomorrow night for a
“slumber-party”. Well, something like that at least. The fact that he wasn’t allowed to call it a
'slumber party' anymore spoke for itself, and scared him more than he wanted to admit. Especially
with the prospect of handling things on his own.

Now, Gillian would keep everything under control, but the girls would still have fun. As a parent of
a grown up daughter, she would know exactly what to do. She would rock that evening. David
would most likely end up in the bedroom, looking after the baby (one year olds were, in many ways,
so much easier to please) and reading a good book in peace while the girls had the time of their lives
with someone as fun and lovely as Gillian. He was sure West's friends would find her a lot less
embarrassing, a lot more forthcoming and way cooler than he was.

As the waitress arrived and the group started to place their orders, David scooted a little closer to
Gillian so that their thighs touched and took her left hand in his, gazing at her adoringly, gently
tracing the circle tattooed on her wrist with his thumb. There were a lot of things he wanted to say
(and do) - none of which were really appropriate given their surroundings.

When their eyes met, and she giggled as the baby reached up to grab a fistful of Daddy's shirt
possessively, Gillian whispered "Me too," and winked at him. David knew there was no need to say
how happy he was that despite her illness, and the opportunity to concentrate on herself again, for
once, she had still chosen to make the trip to be there for him, and the kids. Somehow, she had
known he needed her, and they were going to go through this weirdness together.
She already knew how he felt. And most importantly, she was happy to be there, too.

It was at this very moment that he, for the first time, thought about letting the world know just how much he loved her. And suddenly, David had a pretty good idea of where he could do that.
“Jesus,” David’s voice trembled against her bare shoulder, feeling the damp patch that his breath had left on his lips as he brushed them over her soft skin.

This was getting out of control way too quickly, and he had trouble processing all at once. His senses were heightened almost painfully, and his whole body was buzzing all over. As if someone was relentlessly picking at the ends of his nerves. And someone else working just as hard to keep the adrenaline rushing through his veins rather than giving him a minute to calm down.

And that someone was Gillian at the moment, who apparently had no interest in helping his heart rate to slow down, even though he was sure she could feel it wildly hammering against her own chest.

No, she was making it very clear that she didn’t intend to help him calm in the slightest, not with her hands all over him - roaming, pulling and squeezing everywhere. Or the way her eager, plump lips nipped at the lobe of his ear and, oh god… her wet little tongue darting out occasionally, teasing the sensitive skin right behind his ear.

She was in full force while he was obviously having a hard time comprehending anything at this point.

Speaking of hard times... the only part of his body which was actually fully focussed was his cock underneath her hand, which was already half erect when David started to realize that this was a very, very bad idea.

What the hell was she thinking?

Smelling devine like dusky clary sage and looking absolutely stunning in that simple black dress and with that messy hair-do didn’t make it any easier for him.

Like the rockstars bride. Absolutely and indisputably irresistible.

And one that obviously had no chill. Which was so, so bad.

“Babe,” David croaked as he felt her teeth gently biting into the flesh of his neck, knowing all too well what that did to him, that little tease.
He needed her to stop. He should make her stop. But his head was completely spinning.

He was sweaty, sticky and slightly drunk, and there was no way she wasn’t able to smell and feel that he’d just spent two hours on the stage singing his heart out. Not that something mundane like that had ever kept her from going rogue. Who was he trying to kid? His masculine smell was exactly what turned her on in moments like that, that he’d learned a very long time ago.

“Fuck,” David groaned as all his good intentions resolved into a pitiful pile of nothing, bent down a bit and, in one swift motion, hoisted her up against his body.

And then, just as his head disappeared into her cleavage and she purred a seductive “mmh”, the familiar sound of their opening theme, which was meant to be his cue to come back on stage, played on a guitar rang out and was followed by excited cheering.

And as fast as she’d attacked him in the first place, she was gone, had wiggled herself out of his embrace and was pushing him back with one hand flat on his chest, the tip of her tongue poking out between her teeth and a mischievous smile.

“Just one kiss,” David pleaded, puckered his lips and craned his neck forward while at the same time, adjusted his dick in his pants to at least try to hide what had happened in a matter of two minutes.

“Uh-uh,” she shook her head, her eyebrows raised daringly high.

“That’s David’s entrance music. I don’t know where he is…” came from Colin and with a last push at his chest, he stumbled backwards through a black curtain, turned around and tumbled back on stage with wavering arms.

This was going to be one heck of a night.

***

Four days before David’s first concert in one of New York’s most exciting nightclubs, the chaos, as Gillian referred to it, had started to unfold.

David had two weeks of daily rehearsals behind him. Long hours consisting of standing, dancing, singing, playing the guitar and trying to get everything perfect for the day he was so looking forward to. From the very beginning, she’d been able to tell that he was putting his whole soul into this project and that he wanted it to become special. But everything had its price, and he was starting to pay with utter exhaustion. And maybe even more than that.

David had been very weary and drowsy on the phone the night before her flight. It was so much different from the previous nights, in which he would barely even stop talking to take a breath, that’s how excited he was starting to get.

She was desperately trying to cheer him up somehow, but this awkward and fairly lopsided phone call ended after five minutes when she started to hear him snoring on the other side. It was only a little after 5pm in New York, and he was already down for the night.

Gillian arrived at the Upper West Side at noon a day later, not entirely surprised to find David completely zonked out on the couch underneath a heap of blankets. Considering the state he was in the night before, it had almost been foreseeable that he would eventually come down with something. And there he was, feverish and sweaty, mumbling incoherently at her attempts to gently
wake him up.

What was a surprise though was the state of his apartment. The place was a complete mess, and she had never seen his home like that before. Notes were scattered all around the floor, empty cups with dried green juice or red smoothie standing on almost every surface between the kitchen and the living room. And the smell... It was like coming into a prehistoric cave, but here you not only got the scent of an unwashed, sick man, but also the weird combination of burnt eggs and red peppers still waiting in a pan to get thrown away and the odor of vanilla, probably from the air freshener she discovered in the sink.

It took Gillian nearly two hours to get the apartment back into a decent state while he snored along. She searched everywhere for something she could give him for his cold, but of course, the typical David had nothing of that sort at home, and relied completely on his juices and smoothies, even when he was sick. And sick he really was. Terribly so. The fever was high and the pain written all over his face when he finally woke up to her gently stroking his scratchy cheek. She hadn’t that much experience with a sick David under her belt, but she remembered the few times he’d been in the past, and he had never fulfilled the stereotypical cliche of a sick, male individual. He wasn’t one to complain, whine or pretend to be worse off than he actually was. No, David was a brave guy.

She on the other hand was the one being all over him.

The doctor she’d called while he took a much needed shower diagnosed him with strep throat, and, much to David’s dismay, prescribed him antibiotics and, knowing his stubborn patient for many years, suggested to actually take in light of all these huge events that were lying ahead of David.

Gillian had changed the sheets of their bed before she tugged him in for the night and running herself and Eaden a quick bubble bath.

He seemed to be asleep when she came back into the warm bedroom with the baby in her arms, both already wearing their pyjamas, but the baby’s impatient whimpers for her nighttime snack made him stir underneath the sheets.

She slowly sat down and settled back against the cushions into a semi-sitting position before she turned on the soft light on the nightstand, cradled the baby into the crook of her arm, and pulled her already unbuttoned nightshirt to the side.

The room went almost completely quiet after a last contented sigh from Eaden before she latched on and only her soft, muffled breathings against Gillian’s breast could be heard.

“He gave me the good stuff,” David slurred under a wide, dreamy grin and extended his arm to the side, poking her upper thigh with his index finger repeatedly. He blinked as if in slow motion, and he looked like he could be everything between drunk and stoned, and not just heavily medicated with cold remedies and painkillers. It was adorable beyond words and she snickered softly.

“Is the pain gone or why do you suddenly think it’s the good stuff?” she raised her eyebrow at him, thinking about his previous refusal to take the medication at all.

“Pain’s gone and I’m having an epiphany right now,” he replied and she squinted her eyes questioningly before he huffed out a laugh and scooted closer to her. “Have I ever told you what watching you nurse her does to me?”

“David,” Gillian closed her eyes and shook her head slowly without losing her smile. “You have, multiple times. A thousand times, actually.”
“It’s the purest thing. You look so radiant. So beautiful and soft. Just breathtaking,” he said languishly and slowly rolled from his right side over his left and onto his back and lay his head onto her upper thigh. “I won’t get to see it that much longer, so let me indulge, woman.”

She smiled softly in response and started to trace the lines of his face with the back of her fingers. He looked absolutely wasted with his glassy eyes, and she couldn’t stop herself from biting her lip and snickering quietly.

“How’s it goin’? She suggested, wiggling her eyebrows at her.

“What’s that?” she asked tenderly and ran her thumb over his eyebrow.

“You’re having a rockstar in your family now,” he said in all seriousness and nodded his head, watching as she let her chin drop to her chest, heaved a sigh and rolled her eyes. “What?” David laughed out loud and turned to his side to have a better look at her face.

“You’re some rockstar. All high from a few mild painkillers and getting sappy at me because I’m breastfeeding a baby,” she replied teasingly and looked down at Eaden, whose eyes were closed and little fingers had started to twitch against her breast. A sure sign that she was on her way to dreamland.

David pouted his lips. “And that’s not hot enough for you? Sexy or wild?”

Gillian looked up at him again and tilted her head to the side. “Oh, I didn’t say that.”

“Yeah well, how could you? It’s my baby you’re breastfeeding, that makes me a pretty wild man… rockman… rockstarman.”

“Ah,” she bit into her bottom lip and shrugged her shoulders. “If you say so.”

“It doesn’t make me any less of a rockstar.”

Gillian smirked inwardly. “No, I guess it doesn’t.”

“And I want to make love to you.”

“Oh god,” she groaned and closed her eyes, but unable to stifle a quiet chuckle.

She was just about to say something in response, but he beat her for a second and prompted, “Make more babies with you.”

She snorted and shook her head, carefully separating the sleeping baby from her boob and closing her shirt. “You are so out of it, mister,” Gillian chuckled and patted his chest playfully with the flat of her palm. “Let me put her to bed and we’ll see how we can please you tonight, alright?”

“How’s it goin’? She suggested, wiggling her eyebrows at her.

“Hmm,” he hummed approvingly and rolled back onto his pillow to let her get up. “That sounds promising.”

David’s elation barely lasted longer than ten seconds once she’d walked out of the door and was immediately replaced by another wave of exhaustion and apprehension. Two feelings he’d constantly carried with him for the last two weeks and which he just wasn’t used to to that extent. He’d noticed that the whole thing was starting to get to his head by the time they reached the two-week-mark before the concert. Literally since the moment he woke up on this day, David had started to feel very insecure and doubtful. There were moments last week in which he would’ve moved heaven and hell to go back in time and beat that crappy idea out of himself.
What had he been thinking? It was no wonder he’d gotten sick with all the physical and emotional stress. It wasn’t like he had a lot of expectations rather than having some fun, and hoping that his music would bring people some joy. But there were always doubts, and many fears.

He felt her slip back into bed the moment sleep had started to pull him into its abyss, and he struggled to open his eyes again.

Her smile was soft and tender when she lay back down beside him. She had so many different faces, each one telling its own little story. He loved them all, but this particular sweet, almost angelic expression she was wearing when she came to bed was his undoing. The wavy hair. The naturally pale, but glowing skin with its adorable freckles. All her little wrinkles, the beautiful evidence of a life well lived. The pouty lips, always glistening and ready to be kissed. And those baby blue eyes. In the evening, when her face was scrubbed clean, they had a tendency to shine especially bright and warm. God, he had no idea how many times he’d lost himself in them.

“You’re back,” he whispered and took her extended arm as an invitation to snuggle close while she pulled the sheets up over both of them.

“Yeah. Why wouldn’t I, hm?” she asked and put her arms around him. He was so much bigger than her, yet every time they lay like this, him half on top of her and his head resting on her chest, he somehow managed to make himself so small. Or gave her the feeling that she was the tall and big one for once. Sometimes, she really enjoyed that.

He nuzzled his cheek into her warmth and sighed. “Because I’m a pretentious asshole.”

“Mhh. At least you’re my very own pretentious asshole. And you’re sick, so you’re excused.”

“Am I?”

“Yeah,” Gillian nodded and tangled her fingers into his soft hair before lifting her head and placing a kiss on his head. “But you’re neither right now and weren’t ten minutes ago, so what’s wrong?”

Nothing and everything, he thought and closed his eyes, inhaling the sweet scent of her soap and moisturizer. “Anxious,” David whispered after a few moments and buried his face into her neck.

Her tender “It’s a lot at the moment, hm?” as a response was, once again, exactly what he needed at this moment. Gillian had always had a very wonderful, unique way of not talking down one's feelings with phrases like “everything is going to be fine”, or “there is no reason to, you’ve got this”. And while he knew they were mostly well-meant and everybody used them, he couldn’t stop thinking of how much different it made people feel when she said something that was actually acknowledging their feelings. He knew that she, a person who was very sensitive and often struggled with intense and overwhelming feelings, had experienced time and time again what it was like when everyone around you was not taking you seriously.

And no matter how minor this sickness was, combined with everything else that was currently going on in their lives, it was starting to become too much. In fact, it currently felt like a blanket that was killing the fire underneath it. In this case, his entire strength. At least she was here now to keep his enthusiasm and motivation alive.

“Yeah. I guess I’m just trying to compensate with bad jokes.”

“That’s the best way to compensate sometimes,” she nodded in agreement. “Although,” Gillian raised her finger, “making a comment about wanting more babies two weeks before your vasectomy is kind of… concerning.”
With a snort, David grazed her jaw with his nose. “Just concerned for my manhood.”

“Hmm, you sure? I don’t want any complaints once it’s done.”

“Oh, you will definitely get some complaints if this shit hurts. Which it will... like hell, so don’t you worry.”

“But on the bright side... no more condoms,” she tilted her head downwards and waggled her eyebrows.

“That’s the good part,” David agreed quietly. Now that the brief high from the medication was really subsiding, he was starting to feel extremely drowsy again, and her warmth and the gentle stroking of his back were slowly lulling him back to sleep.

“Promise you will still love me once the snip’s been done?” he asked quietly.

“Of course.”

“And will you still love me in the likely case that I make a fool out of myself at that concert?” he mumbled after a while when she pulled the sheets higher over both of them as his eyes dropped shut.

“Yeah,” she whispered and placed a soft kiss on his forehead. And then, from very far away, he could hear her saying, “I will always love this hot, wonderful rockstar of mine.”

Two days later, Gillian was, despite the early hour, stepping out of the shower with a wide grin on her flushed face. A sick man and a 12-month-old, one that was running her parents ragged these days, was enough to make her look forward to getting up at 7am and start a day that would include a lot of press and stupid questions. In the end of the day, she knew she would be happy to come back to her sniffling and coughing man and that cranky, teething daughter of theirs.

There were times Gillian was minimally excited about hitting a red carpet, and while she didn’t hate it as much as in the 90’s, it was still mostly not her favorite thing. But right now, all Gillian wanted, and needed, was to mingle with people who were actually able to speak in whole sentences and weren’t falling asleep during a conversation.

She had her whole day meticulously planned through with a shoot for Fox’ “One Nation One Team” - campaign for the Fifa women’s world cup and a couple of interviews while David would be at the NBC’s Upfronts and walking the red carpet there for Aquarius. And that was before they would meet up again to join Chris on stage to talk about the new season of The X-Files they were starting to shoot in June. It was a good thing that they’d never planned to attend the Entertainment Weekly and People Magazine Party in the evening together. He would need every hour of rest he could get before the craziness that was waiting for him on the next day.

But with the antibiotics doing their magic and her excellent care over the last days, he was doing much, much better. And there was literally no reason not to be excited for the next two days anymore. Gillian was really, really happy and relaxed when she wrapped a soft white towel around herself and walked back into the bedroom, looking forward to wearing a beautiful summer dress on this warm day in New York City and get her hair and makeup done after days of shuffling around in her pyjamas.

And then she saw him sitting on the edge of the bed, and noticed that troublesome expression he was wearing while worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.
Oh god, Gillian thought immediately and her shoulders slumped down. And as if David was able to read her mind, he just started to nod.

“Oh no. Please, whatever it is, make it fast and painless,” she pleaded and stepped between his legs and let him wrap his arms around her waist.

“Lois has burnt her arm with boiling hot water and is sitting in the emergency room,” he said flat out, not even trying to sugarcoat what could not be sugarcoated. That, in fact an hour before she had to leave the house, the babysitter would be out of action. In fact, the only babysitter available that Eaden at least met twice and therefore wasn’t a complete stranger to her. The only one she’d accepted besides Erin.

And therefore, her face was a perfect portrayal for the whole mess that was spreading out right in front of their feet. It was a good mixture of disbelief, panic and the way she always looked when she was racking her brain for a quick solution. Which he already had for the last five minutes before realizing that there wouldn’t be a quick solution. Simply because there wasn’t a solution at all.

She blinked a few times before tilting her head and narrowing her eyes. “You’re kidding me, right?” Gillian asked, and he couldn’t stop himself from chuckling at that desperate little attempt to get her world straight again. Which was unfortunately what made her eyes sparkle up with a hint of hope that he’d actually just been joking.

He started to shake his head slowly. “No, not this time.”

“David,” she cried out and stepped out of his embrace, throwing her hands up in despair and clasped them over her head. “No no no no no.”

“I know,” he sighed heavily.

“Shit, David. How could she do that?” Gillian asked as if her babysitter had deliberately put herself in that situation, and she immediately regretted her sudden, unfair outburst. “Fuuuuck,” she cursed pointedly and threw her towel into his direction and with a last muttered “Shit”, disappeared into the dressing room.

“It’s going to be okay, Gill,” he called after her and continued to button up his dress shirt. David had no clue how that could even be, but he’d felt he should say at least something.

“Really? How’s that? I have to leave in half an hour and you have to leave in two. And where exactly do you think we should drop Eaden off on our ways?”

“I don’t know, I’ll figure something out, okay?”

“David,” Gillian whined and emerged back into the bedroom, now wearing a black bra and matching panties.

“I will, trust me.”

She couldn’t say that he hadn’t figured out anything at all, David thought and smiled warily as Gillian noticed them standing by the beverage-table and started to walk in their direction. David was just offering Eaden a sippy-cup of water when he’d saw her emerging from the red carpet area into the lounge. She was looking absolutely beautiful and cute in that black summer dress, greeting and smiling at people who walked past her until she spotted them and it hit her that he had actually brought the baby with him.
Despite his best efforts, he of course hadn’t managed to pull another babysitter out of his sleeve in the last-minute. With his mother being out of town for a visit at his brother’s and West in school for pretty much the whole day, he couldn’t just leave Eaden with a stranger, no matter how good her records might’ve been and how warmly friends had recommended that person. So there basically wasn’t any other option left than to simply bring the little one. And up to this point, everything had worked out just fine. With Eaden away from the spotlight and in good hands with Melanie, his manager, he walked the red carpet.

Yes, the whole thing was far from ideal, and he doubted she’d be very amused by it. The last couple of days had been as hard for her as for him. Gillian was a huge brooder, and well-known for striving for staying in control. Always had been. She wasn’t good at enduring a situation she couldn’t change, and never willing to stop looking for a way nevertheless. And while it was admiring, it was also exhausting. The loss of control had a frighteningly deep impact on her, and often enough had he seen her spiralling down because of it, regardless if it was just concerning herself or the people close to her.

So it was surprising that, after the initial shock had disappeared off her face, David thought he could actually make out a smile on her face as she was making her way through the crowd and towards them.

He’d thought about a lot of different ways to explain why he hadn’t come up with a better plan, but a rueful “I couldn’t figure something out,” wasn’t one of those. And yet, these exact words were leaving his mouth as if on their own the second she was coming to a stand in front of him.

“Oh well,” she raised her hand and stroked the baby’s unruly, blonde bangs from her forehead to the side before getting onto the balls of her feet to give both, Eaden and David, a kiss. “Everything seems just fine to me.”

He smiled, not believing how relaxed she was. “Well, I told her that the lazy life has come to an end and it’s time to do some business. But I didn’t expect that she’s so serious about getting the job done. She had everyone wrapped around her finger at NBC’s,” David chuckled and pulled Gillian close to them.

“Yeah, I bet. But don’t expect to be as welcomed over here, Eadie. They have never liked us Anderson girls over here,” Gillian whispered and grinned up at David.

“They were actually really forthcoming. A lot of people have already offered to take her while we’ll be on stage. But you know how it works… when a man brings his child, it’s sweet and honorable and everyone’s on their feet to help. It’s a lot different when a woman does,” David said and placed a lingering kiss on her head.

“Oh, the hypocrisy…”

“Yeah. How are you? How was the photoshoot?” he asked, but didn’t give her the chance to answer before he added, “You look very lovely, by the way.”

“Thank you,” she said and grinned up at him bashfully, feeling heat creeping up her cheeks. “It was pretty good. I’ve got a very neat shirt I will show you later. How are you holding up?” she asked and stroked the length of his upper arm up and down.

“Ugh, very tired already. Can’t wait to get back to bed.” He bowed his head, put his lips against her ear and whispered, “But not so much to get in there alone.”

Gillian snickered and was about to respond when a “Hey you two!” was coming cheerfully from
behind them, and they both turned around to a smiling Melanie. “Hi, Gillian!”

“Hey Melanie, how are you doing?” Gillian greeted back and embraced David’s manager in a friendly hug.

“Great! How couldn’t I? I’ve been carrying this little munchkin around for half the day,” Melanie replied, took Eaden’s little foot between two fingers and wiggled it playfully.

“I’m sorry you’re the one stuck with her now.”

“Nah, don’t be silly, it’s absolutely fine. When do I get to spend that much time with her anyway?”

“That’s true,” Gillian chuckled. “Oh, could you do me another favor and take a picture of us that I can tweet for the action of the doodles for NF?”

“Absolutely, yes! They’re desperate for a new picture of the two of you.”

“Oh god, really? Do they still think we’re not together anymore?” Gillian asked and waited for David to hand over the baby before giving Melanie her phone.

“I don’t think so. But who knows? I can’t keep up with how fast they change their opinion. Alright, you’re ready?”

“Yep!” Gillian leaned into his side.

“David, there’s this strand of hair poking out,” Melanie pointed at his right ear. “Right there.”

“Where?” he asked and patted the top of his head.

“Here,” Gillian said warmly and reached up to comb her fingers through his hair. “It’s getting a little bit out of control.”

“I thought you liked it a bit longer,” he said in mocking indignation.

“Yeah, it’s very rockstar-like.”

David clicked his tongue and sighed heavily. “Oh boy, you will never stop bringing that up, will you?”

“Nope,” Gillian shook her head and turned around, “definitely not,” she added smugly and grinned into the camera.

***

Over a hundred eyes were staring up at the stage as Gillian Anderson suddenly emerged out of nowhere, tripped over a bunch of cables on her way to the next microphone and then told everyone that she definitely wanted to hear that shit.

David was absolutely taken aback by his audience’s reaction, and watched them completely losing it with surprise and amusement. He had seen a lot of things in over twenty years, and heard many girls screaming their lungs out, but this room had literally caught fire when she came up on stage, and exploded the moment she walked over to him, mouthed an inaudible “hi”, as if they hadn’t just made out a few moments ago, and then kissed him right on the lips, taking him completely by surprise. And probably everyone else too.
By the time the stupid grin on his face had slightly subsided and the crowd had somewhat calmed down again, he introduced her, quite clumsily, as Gillian Anderson, and insisted that she’d get to decide what song she wanted them to play.

As soon as the band played the first beats of Neil Young’s Helpless, it felt like the energy in the room shifted once again, this time into a buzzing calmness he’d never experienced before. It was like they all melted together just by being there together. By creating this wonderful, unique moment as a large group of very diverse people who were going to share this experience for the rest of their lives. It wasn’t just about him, and it also wasn’t just about her. It was all of them.

Watching Gillian standing right beside him, singing along - hesitantly and bashfully at first, but soon becoming more confident - swaying her hips languidly and smiling at him like he’d just brought the world infinite peace by staying there in all his sweaty glory, brought him a whole new understanding of what it meant to be in love with her.

She was his everything. The brightest light in his life that hadn’t lost its spark in over twenty years. On the contrary - she was shining with an intensity never seen before, captivating everyone and everything around her.

That night, he really wanted to show everybody just how much he loved Gillian. How grateful he was for her. So that everyone, even the last skeptic, would know it and believe it. At least for a couple of weeks.

Their second kiss was a more fleeting one than he’d anticipated, mostly because of her telling him that she loved him and him not able to hear her. But he made sure that his lips grazed her neck more than just briefly as he insisted that she’d come back out for the second encore, because he needed her on there with him, making her blush on her way out.

And oh god, how glorious did she look with that tambourine and all those delicious, delirious dance moves? He wasn’t that much in a daze that he could’ve possibly missed that. Her letting loose rose pretty much on top of his list of what turned him on the most about her. She was simply stunning. And again, David was sure he wasn’t the only one thinking that way.

The elevator ride up to his apartment had never been that long before, David was sure, and bounced his right leg impatiently as he watched the numbers slowly changing on the display over the door.

“Please don’t be asleep, please don’t be asleep”, he muttered to himself and gnawed his bottom lip.

Almost one hour after she’d went home and left him to sign his CD’s and meet his groupies, as she’d said teasingly, and also after giving him another, lingering and quite promising kiss, she now was the only person on this planet he wanted to see. And feel. Boy, did his exhausted, tired body ache for her soft skin and gentle touch right now.

Just don’t be asleep.

The ring of the bell indicating that he’d reached his level startled David out of his thoughts. He took one last, deep breath and stepped out of the elevator as the doors opened right in front of him.

And there she was. Leaning against the doorframe, waiting for him.

What a lucky guy he was indeed.

The smirk that was grazing her lips was the wonderful one that David liked to call the shy bold
smirk. It was sweet, but it was also mischievous. Only Gillian was able to pull off something like that.

Her eyes though had this dangerous, playfully challenging spark in them that he had never been able to resist since the moment he had seen her for the very first time, sitting on some stairs, making an impression on him like no one had before. That day, he’d been sure he could never forget her, no matter what would happen and where they would end up. He wouldn’t be able to. This tiny little person, kind, fierce and compassionate as she could possibly be, had burned herself right into his soul. Her voice, her smell, her breathing and her heartbeat had become an inseparable part of his own being.

“Hi,” she said softly, holding her hand out to him.

“You’re still awake,” David sighed in relief, took her hand, pulled her against his body and encircled her waist with both of his arms. For a moment, they just looked into each other’s eyes without saying a word before he leaned down and pressed his lips to hers.

She hadn’t showered yet, and was still wearing that cute little black dress. She smelled like this wonderful mixture of getting ready for a big night and having the time of your life. It was the divine smell of her shampoo, her perfume and the richness of her own, unique smell after partying hard.

Yeah, partying hard, he thought and chuckled into their kiss.

“Hmm?” Gillian drew her head back to look at him.

“Nothing,” he shook his head briefly. “How are things on the babysitting front?” David asked and let his fingers trace the side of her throat.

“The last thing I heard from Téa was that she’s down for the night and that they’re heading to bed too. That was a little over two hours ago.”

“Mhh, great,” he whispered and leaned in, putting his lips on the soft skin his finger had just caressed. “Still feeling bad about it? For leaving her with them?” he asked, his voice muffled against her neck.

The discussion about whether it was a good idea to accept West’s offer to babysit Eaden, and therefore ask Téa if it was alright to bring the baby to her apartment had been a long, exhausting one the night before. Her points against that had been absolutely understandable. But he so badly wanted her to be able to come to his concert, and, what he didn’t say out loud, wanted her for himself tonight. It was hard to find some time just for themselves after all. Six kids were a huge responsibility and it was a logistical nightmare to meet all their needs and expectations equally. And while they were happy to always put them first, neither of them wanted their relationship to fall on the wayside just because of that.

Gillian snorted in response and raised her head in the search for his lips before capturing them for an unhurried, but intense kiss as her hands started to travel over his upper body.

Only reluctantly did he pull back for air after a while, his heart beating rapidly in his chest, and rested his forehead against hers.

She grinned at him wickedly. “How could I? It was an awesome night. Wouldn’t have missed it for the world.” She reached up and tangled her fingers in his hair. “Let’s go and take a shower, yeah?”
The very second the warm spray of water hit his shoulders, David felt the tension of the last couple of days leaving his body in one big whoosh. His eyes were closed the entire time she gently scrubbed his body with a sponge that was soaked with his soap.

“Bent down a bit,” she whispered after a while, and slid her hands into his hair as he did as she had told him.

Soft, pleasured sighs were coming out of his throat as she started to massage his scalp, her delicate fingers applying just the right amount of pressure. He indulged into this wonderful, relaxing sensation for a while before his hands came up to her hips and he drew her closer.

Their kisses were hot and passionate, tongues eagerly darting out in search for a mate as his hands were busy roaming her body while hers were desperately holding onto his shoulders.

Leaving her lips with a loud smack, he pressed her flush against him and buried his face into the crook of her neck, thrusting his hips up against her flat belly. Her body jolted as one of his hands came up and cupped her breast, squeezing it demandingly as his cock, trapped between their bodies, grew with each grind.

“God, you feel so good,” David growled and after one last thrust, took a step back and, very slowly, was kneeling down in front of her, licking and kissing the valley between her breasts and her firm stomach on his way downwards. He wetted his lips before he lowered his face to her mons with a low hum, gently pushed her legs farther apart with the back of his hand.

Gillian let out a soft moan as he started to nibble at her outer lips a couple of times and then teased her with the tip of his tongue, tracing her slit back and forth before finally, diving in deeper and coming in contact with her throbbing clit. She bucked against his face and hissed in pleasure. Her fingers, once again, slid into his hair, carefully pulling and pushing at his head in tune with the motions of his tongue, taking what she wanted and needed.

“Oh god,” Gillian panted and lifted her right leg over his shoulder.

He took his mouth away from her and grinned up, reached around her upper thigh and took the hand that was resting there in his, and squeezed it gently to make her look down at him.

Her eyes were glazed and cheeks were flushed beautifully with arousal.

He slowly tipped his head forwards and continued to nip at her, holding their gaze. Her eyelids were fluttering as his lips teased her clit, and he could see that she was fighting the urge to let her eyes roll back into her head, desperate to keep this intense eye-contact with him.

David eventually brought his right hand into the game, first stroked over the sensitive skin right below her clit before inserting two of his fingers into her warmth. She gasped at the sudden, unexpected sensation and clutched his hand hard. He could taste the fresh wave of moisture that was pouring out of her center, and he couldn’t stop himself from running his tongue through her folds, lapping her up.

“Oh fuck!” she cried out loud, followed by a weak whimper as her inner walls clenched around his fingers.

He chuckled against her clit and sucked it into his mouth, his fingers now thrusting into her relentlessly.

And just as he had her so close to her release, he pulled his head away and let his fingers slowly glide out of her.
“Wha-?” her shocked expression could’ve been almost heart-wrenching if it wasn’t that funny. At least for him. “David, what the fuck!” she almost yelled.

“Shh, hush,” he said and stood up. His voice was commanding, but warm. And it made her knees buckle. His hands landed on her hips and he turned her around, pressing himself into her from behind. One of his arms snuck around her and found its way back between her legs while his other one cupped her breast, and tipped his head down. “Mine,” he panted into her ear, reached forward and opened the frameless sliding door of his shower by pushing it to the side. As much as he liked sex in the shower, it just wasn’t a possibility for them right here without risking to break their necks. He couldn’t hold her up on that slippery surface, and there was nothing for her to step onto to increase her height so he could fuck her from behind. And usually, she wasn’t wearing her heels in the shower as well, regardless of how much she loved them.

What did work very well for them though was when he lifted her up to sit on his marbled sink, and as soon as she realized that this was his plan, Gillian hummed in approval and dug her nails into his sides, pulling him between her legs. David groaned as her lips recaptured his into a fierce, open-mouthed kiss and her arms came up around his neck.

David could stay like this for the rest of his life, wrapped in her embrace, her mouth devouring his and his dick securely nestled between her soft folds. It was a heavenly place.

But she had other things in mind. Not that he was complaining. Not at all. If someone knew how to upgrade an already heavenly place, it was Gillian.

She broke their kiss as her small hand wrapped itself around his throbbing erection, stroking it a few times before she guided him to her entrance, looking straight into his eyes as she dragged his engorged head up and down her slit, coating it with her wetness.

“My,” she slurred lowly, and, without giving it another thought, brought him into position at her entrance and wrapped her legs around his slim waist to welcome him in, consuming him wholly.

“Fuck me,” she said pointedly and clenched her inner walls around him.

The look in his eyes went feral at her words and the feeling of her warm, wet tightness around him, so he grabbed the backs of her upper thighs and drove into her hard and deep.

Gillian yelped in surprise and dug her nails into his neck and shoulder, encouraging him with a loud moan, and he picked up his pace and started pounding into her.

The sounds of their bodies slapping together came in sync with their shallow whimpers and deep kisses.

“Oh fuck I love you,” David breathed and pressed her body close to him, one hand firmly between her shoulder blades and the other on her ass.

“God, yes,” she mewled repeatedly, holding onto him tightly. He was rapidly jamming his cock into her, and she was getting so fucking close.

“Ahh, Gillian. Fuck...” he moaned and closed his eyes as he felt his balls tighten dangerously. He wouldn’t tumble over the edge without her, so he started to grind his pelvis against her clit with each thrust, and it didn’t take long for her walls to contract around him as she reached her climax, her mouth wide open against his in a silent cry. And with that, he allowed himself to let go and pushed into her deeply one last time, crying out as he filled her with his hot release.

He swallowed heavily after a while and tipped his head back to look at her. “God, babe,” his voice
trembled, and she finally opened her eyes to meet his gaze. Those deep blue eyes, staring up at him with so much love and trust that it almost took his breath away. A warm smile spread across his face and he leaned in to gently rub his nose against hers and softly whispered, “This is the best night of my life.”
Almost four hours had passed since Gillian and Eaden had landed in Vancouver, and rather than having some time to relax from the long flight that was lying behind them, Gillian had already spent two hours in hair and makeup. The hands of three strangers were all over her face and hair, trying to fit an even stranger wig on her head while they were all somehow trying to entertain a increasingly restless baby.

And yet, the first thing David was able to hear when he walked along a fifteen feet long hallway, on which end she’d messaged him he could find her, were her hysterical laughters.

He couldn’t help the excited grin that was forming on his lips when he came closer and turned the corner to look into the bright, bustling room.

Ever since the day she agreed to these six episodes, he’d been excited for her transformation back into the character that had made her famous. Just to see if it still felt right. To see if Scully was still in her somewhere, because he knew the second Gillian would look like her again, Mulder would come back to life as well.

The wig had been in discussion for almost two weeks now. The first time he heard about it was on the phone when he was lying on his couch, pressing a plastic bag with crushed ice against his crotch after the rather unpleasant procedure that the vasectomy had turned out to be. And he’d had a lot of other things on his mind to worry about than her hair. The pain, for example, which occasionally shot through his blue and swollen balls like a lightning, leaving him on the verge of tears. Or the itching. But not necessarily Gillian’s weak, damaged hair or the thought that a wig would be that much of a problem. Or weird in any way.

But then he got the first glimpse of that furry thing, barely redder than Eaden’s golden hair, dangling over one of the stylist’s fingers, and suddenly and completely unexpectedly, it hit him that it wouldn’t be the same as it was before.

Not just because of the hair, of course. But because of so many things he really hadn’t taken under much consideration before, as odd as it was for him to have to admit that.

They weren’t the same people anymore. They were living absolutely different lives now.

And the world wasn’t what it used to be 20, 15 or even 7 years ago when they shot the second movie. And while he was confident that the show itself was timeless and would fit into this world no matter what time and state it was in, David suddenly wasn’t so sure anymore if they were this flexible too.

David also realized that Gillian had, of course, thought these things through a very long time ago.
Her overall reluctance and fairly uncharacteristic reservation to sign on for this wasn’t just due to the way Fox had treated her during the negotiations. She must’ve been very aware that coming back wouldn’t be a piece of cake and would most likely feel odd, at least in the beginning, while he’d, up to this day, expected it to be just as it had always been, no matter how much they had changed over the years.

But now, seeing her sitting there with her blonde hair kempt back into a tight ponytail, her eyes closed while someone was literally pulling Scully over her head and their one-year-old daughter being handed over to him was the weirdest situation David had found himself in in a very long time. Considering that he’d given his first concert barely a month ago and just sat in a doctor’s office with his legs spread wide apart, it really had to mean something.

Funny enough, Eaden seemed to be just as confused as him. Her concerned expression and the trembling bottom lip when she saw her mother with the new hair for the first time earned her some empathetic “ohh’s” from the people standing around them. And a lot of laughters when she loudly refused to let Gillian give her a kiss. No, the baby definitely didn’t fall in love with Dana Scully at first sight.

Vancouver on the other hand suited the little one’s conception of having a fun time a lot more. To prevent more confusion in his child’s little mind, David took her out for a nice long stroll through the city and along the beach while her mother was spending this beautiful, sunny day in hair and makeup. Spending some time alone with his littlest adventurer was always wonderful, and they seemed to share a great love for the outdoors. And for getting dirty.

Since Eaden was getting a lot more mobile - crawling everywhere in a very fast pace, climbing on everything, and being just days away from (finally) taking her first steps - it was a huge joy to watch her explore the world around her curiously and courageously.

Eaden would never have such a childhood, on that they’d agreed on from the very beginning. Not that it had prevented Piper from becoming a wonderful young woman, or that Gillian still had that same, crazy workload. No, he just wanted some kind of normalness for her. The same that Gillian had managed to give her two young boys despite all the privileges most kids their age just hadn’t. And even if it meant that she would spend most of her time in London, make friends, go to nursery and school and attend all her sport classes there, and therefore he wouldn’t get to see her as much as he wanted, it was still worth it.

And yet, he was really looking forward to these three months they had in Vancouver together. Wig or not, they would find their way back into their old groove and have a fun time. There was a lot of work lying ahead of them, but the prospect of doing it together and being able to enjoy each other this time around was very exciting.

Piper would be with them the entire time, and West and Miller would spend half of their summer in Vancouver as well. He just hoped that at some point, Oscar and Felix would be able to join them, too. Being away from them for such a long time would be so hard for Gillian, and he would do everything to make it as easy and enjoyable for her as possible.

And because he wanted them to have an awesome start to a successful summer, he prepared everything for a romantic, delicious first night in her beach house with two bottles of red wine and her favorite pasta and garlic bread from the little Italian restaurant a few miles down the road. They would finally have some time to watch a few old episodes to prepare themselves, which they’d
wanted to do for weeks now.

It was already dark outside and the baby was fast asleep in her bed when he heard a car coming to a stop right in front of the house. The table was already set, candles lit and some Blues was playing in the background as he watched her getting out of the black limousine before it drove away, leaving her standing on the driveway, looking a bit lost as she seemed to contemplate the plastic bag in one of her hands. David was able to see whether she was exhausted from miles away. After such a long day and with jet lag still haunting her since they’d just flown in today, he was positive that she was probably in need of some pampering tonight.

When she started to shuffle towards the front door, he also made his way back into the kitchen, where he would greet her with that wine and an antipasto platter.

But once she entered the kitchen with her eyebrows raised up high and puffed out cheeks from sighing heavily, the evening started much different from what he’d anticipated.

His warm greeting was acknowledged with a low, dismissive grunt and the plastic bag being thrown onto the kitchen counter beside him. Whatever happened from the time he’d left the studios to now, it didn’t seem like fun.

“You okay?” David asked carefully and gave her a concerned look.

Her hands landed on each side of her waist and she licked her lips before meeting his gaze. “We’ve got a problem,” she said, her voice quite calm and lacking anything that would indicate that it was an emergency, which caused him to relax a bit immediately.

“Nah,” David chuckled and waved his hand towards the food. “We’ve got Italian food and red wine. That’s as far away from having problems as we could be tonight,” he smiled, filled her glass and held it out to her. “So sit down, have some antipasto and enjoy this wonderful wine with me and tell me about your day. You’re in for a treat. There might even be a bubble bath in store for you tonight. And a back rub,” he waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

She gave the plate with all its deliciousness a brief glare, set her jaw and inhaled deeply before looking up at him again. And then, with the slowest and matter-of-fact voice she could have possibly used, she said, “I can’t have this fucking wine. I’m pregnant.”

David blinked two, three or four times and swallowed heavily. What did she just say? The bottle and glass in his hands were suddenly very, very heavy, and he slightly turned to the side to put them on the counter without breaking their eye-contact.

Fuck, he thought. She didn’t look like she was joking at all. But then again, where did this come from all of a sudden? She had to be joking. And didn’t she just talk to her sister today? Zoe definitely had the kind of cruel humor and the ability to convince her big sister that this would be a fun way to prank the guy who’d just gone through the vasectomy to prevent something like this to happen again. Yes, that had to be it.

With a snort, he nodded his head and grinned at her knowingly. “Yeah, sure. How on earth could you be pregnant now?” he asked dismissively and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

And while she was an awesome actress, he hadn’t expected to see so much genuine disbelief flashing over her face while she was processing his question. His pretty dumb question, as he figured now, in case she actually wasn’t joking after all. Shit. She wasn’t starting to laugh. Fuck. She wasn’t joking.
“What the fuck, Gillian!” he cried out in desperation and she raised her hands into the air, as if she was at a loss of an explanation herself.

“Yeah, what the fuck, David? Where was that condom four weeks ago? I mean, I know where it wasn’t, but why didn’t we think of it? And why haven’t we realized that we haven’t used one the morning after?”

“You- you mean after the concert?” he stuttered and furrowed his eyebrows.

“Yes, after the concert, on your sink.”

“I’ve used a condom.”

“No, you haven’t.”

He really hadn’t. Shit. “Gillian, it was just one time!”

She gave him a stern look. “Are you saying that there’s no way a woman could get pregnant from having unprotected sex, even if it was just one fucking time?”

“No!” David said, almost indignant, as if that wasn’t exactly what he’d just said. “Yes! No,” he sighed and gathered his thoughts for a moment before continuing. “But- at our age? At your age? What are the odds?”

“I don’t know,” she shrugged. “I don’t care. All I know is that I’m late and that my breasts hurt like hell and that you didn’t wear that condom be both said we wouldn’t forget!”

“I’m sure I pulled out before I-”

“No, you didn’t do that either.”

“Gillian,” David whined and braced his arms on the counter behind him. He was getting very dizzy all of a sudden, and not from the wine he’d hoped would be in his stomach by now. Fuck.

Gillian sighed heavily and ran one hand over her face.

“Do you- do you already know for sure?” he asked softly, his eyes squinted in concern.

“No,” she shook her head, stepped up beside him and reached for the plastic bag. “But I bought a couple of home tests. We might as well get it over with now.”

Four sticks were already doing their magic on yet another marbled bathroom sink as David walked up to it with the fifth one in his hand.

The irony of all this, he thought and he carefully put the last one beside the others, creating an accurate, straight line of pregnancy tests, all different in shapes, colors and handling.

He heard the flush of the toilet and sat down on the edge of the bathtub, right across from those five little guys basically holding the power over their future.

Gillian emerged from the little room with the toilet, only separated from the main bathroom by a partition wall, and trotted to the sink to wash her hands. She didn’t dare to take a curious glance at the armada of sticks right beside her.
“Why five?” David asked as she sat down beside him, bent over and put her head in her hands. “I needed three with Felix to get a positive result. I just want to be on the safe side.”

“So, wouldn’t it have been better to take them on different days then instead of taking them all at the same time?” He thought that this was a legitimate question, but she sighed in annoyance regardless. “No. We will find out tonight, that’s for sure.”

“Well then… okay.” He didn’t really get that logic, but she probably knew better anyway, so he dropped it.

However, the silence that followed was almost unbearable. At some point, he realized that none of them had watched the time to know when they could risk a first look. This was so ridiculous. What was wrong with them? They were way too old for this shit. They should worry about becoming grandparents instead of parents at this stage of their lives. And yet, they seemed to have learned nothing from the past.

Well, that wasn’t entirely true. He was shooting blanks nowadays after all.

Another couple of moments, which felt like hours, in excruciating silence passed, and he started to fidget beside her. She on the other hand was sitting beside him like a rock. Not moving, barely even breathing. It wasn’t just almost unbearable. It was intolerable.

David cleared his throat and started to speak quietly. “I’m sorry I couldn’t keep my promise. I should’ve thought of using a condom.”

“It’s okay,” Gillian whispered after a while and looked down as he slowly reached over and entwined his fingers with hers before squeezing her hand affectionately. “I didn’t think of it either. We just forgot in… the heat of the moment, I guess.”

“Yeah,” he agreed. It had been the craziest night of his life, and after the concert, there wasn’t that much left on his mind besides getting inside of her and kissing her senselessly. At least he’d succeeded in that.

“Yeah,” she repeated and fell silent again.

“I know we haven’t talked about this very much before,” he turned his head to look at her. “Not that I was trying to avoid it or don’t feel comfortable to talk about it, but-.. Um, haven’t there been months before in which you… missed a period?” he asked tentatively.

The soft chuckle that followed was like music to his ears. “You’re a good observer,” she finally acknowledged and met his gaze.

David shrugged. “Just trying to pay attention. So, am I right?”

“Yeah. I missed one or two since it came back after Eaden.” He nodded thoughtfully. “But before you ask - no, I wasn’t worried back then.”

“Well, there wasn’t a need to be worried. We were always very careful.”

“Yes, up to the night we’ve had sex for the very last time before your vasectomy. How us is that?”

“Very, I’m afraid.”

“Yep. It’s so typical for us to sit here like that, a day before we start shooting this damn series again.
What the hell were we thinking?"

“Do you mean what were we thinking when we fell in love? Or all the times we had sex? Or when we signed up for this season?”

“At least two of these three were worth it, and pretty enjoyable” she stated dryly, but couldn’t suppress a sly smirk. “This wig will give me hundreds of pounding headaches. If I’ll end up being pregnant as well, I’d better kill myself now.”

“No,” he bumped his shoulder into hers. “I’m not going to do this without you. And don’t underestimate the healing powers of my massage.”

Gillian chuckled and leaned in for a soft kiss. Since they didn’t get a chance earlier today with all the people in the room with them, it was the first proper one in 16 days. Not that she had counted. But god, did it feel good to have him that close again. She would never not miss this.

“You know you’re my best friend, right?” she whispered against his lips, and before he could reply, her tongue eagerly sought out for his.

The loud rumbling in her belly interrupted them just as he was about to pull her onto his lap, which was probably for the best anyway, but still caused both of them to groan out at the same time.

“Someone’s hungry.”

“Yeah,” she said bashfully and licked over her red, properly kissed lips. He couldn’t decide what he found more endearing - her bright pink cheeks or that cute little smile. “I haven’t had anything to eat yet.”

“Okay, so… there’s lots of foods downstairs to indulge in. And maybe we’ll find some time to watch at least one episode after dinner… although,” he tilted his head to the side and started to gently nibble on the soft flesh of her neck. “I think I have a better idea for our nighttime program.”

“Do you, hm?” she murmured and closed her eyes in pleasure. “Well, maybe Mulder and Scully will get some action this year. So we better practice some more, right?”

“I like the way you’re thinking,” David smirked and his tongue darted out to, teasing her soft flesh before he suddenly and without warning, sucked her skin into his mouth

Before she realized what he was actually doing, the damage was already done, and as she moved away from him, his lips released her with a loud smack.

“What are you doing?” she cried out and rubbed the already reddened spot with her hand.

“Leaving a subtle lovemark,” he replied innocently and with one last kiss against her forehead, he pulled back and looked into her eyes.

“Don’t you think you’ve marked me enough as it is? I mean, in case these are positive?”

David snorted. “I’m a caveman when it comes to you, what do you expect?” he asked, and they both burst into quiet chuckles before he rubbed her back and asked tenderly, “You ready?”

“No,” Gillian laughed out loud and furrowed her eyebrows in concern. As if you’d ever be ready for these kind of news. “I’m anxious as fuck.”

“Yeah, me too. Come on,” he nodded towards the sink and together, they stood up and held each
other’s hand as they closed walked up to the five little sticks patiently waiting to be looked at for the last ten minutes.

Gillian knew that, no matter what, she would have this wonderful man by her side she could always rely on. And David knew that he could always rely on her and her will to fight and master any hurdle lying in front of them.

They wouldn’t let each other down ever again. Not after everything they’ve been through. Not after coming so far. Being here together in the year of 2015 was their greatest accomplishment.

Pregnant or not, they were the loves of each other’s lives. They were best friends and crazy about each other. In all those years, it had never been different, and it would never be, no matter what the future might hold for them.

They both held their breaths as the results came in sight, and it took them a few seconds to look at each one of them intently and then again for a second and a third time, just to be sure.

Suddenly, she squeezed his hand very, very hard, and he looked down to find her grinning up at him. “I’m ready for that dinner now,” Gillian said and tugged at his hand before she turned around to walk out of the room.

He quickly glanced down one last time and let the air out with a big sigh before following her. That girl would be responsible for his first heart attack someday, that he was sure of.

But not today. Today, he was relieved that their lives wouldn’t get much crazier than they already were.
Transformation is a process, and as life happens there are tons of ups and downs. It's a journey of discovery - there are moments on mountaintops and moments in deep valleys of despair. - Rick Warren

If David had only remembered just how loud and obnoxious a French Bulldog as the one currently sitting in his carrier beside him, safely buckled up on the passenger seat, could be, he would have given the whole thing a lot more thought.

For the last couple of months, it had been one of Gillian’s top priorities to find a dog that would fit into their crazy schedules and, most importantly, into their big family. After years of denying the boys one of their greatest wishes, and after a lot of convincing from him and Piper, she’d finally given in and agreed on finding a little dog low in maintenance and patient with the kids. Gillian’s attempts to find one on her own had been rather disappointing and unsuccessful though, with one visit ending in a fiasco as the supposedly tiny dog, which had had a remarkable growth spurt in just a couple of days, bit into Piper’s bottom lip as she was kneeling down to greet him. That incident had put her off her agenda for quite some time, and with all their commitments in between, there just hadn’t been the opportunity to start a new search for the perfect dog for their family in over six months.

David was pretty sure that, by now, the boys had completely given up on the hope of eventually getting that little companion to play with and care for. They’d begged, they’d cried and had thrown countless tantrums over the topic. They longed for that dog, and whenever he listened to them telling him how great having a dog would be, he did too. They knew they were hitting his soft spot with this. They knew that he loved animals and he’d told them thousand of stories about his dogs, and they hoped that he would be able to talk to their mother and bring her to actually look for one again. But with Gillian being Gillian, it wasn’t as easy as that. There had always been particular matters she simply didn’t appreciate another person's involvement in. Not even his. And the dog thing happened to be one of them.

So it was no wonder that every time he’d tried to bring it up, her characteristic stubbornness kicked in and had let him know that she was perfectly capable of finding the perfect dog on her own, but all in good time. After that, he didn’t even dare to start a discussion why on earth she felt the need to get one from a breeder and not from a shelter and why she assumed that every dog from a shelter would be a threat to her baby’s safety. Especially after what had happened to Piper.

And even though time just passed and the boys kept begging, David swore he wouldn’t get involved unless she wanted him to and asked.

That was up until three weeks ago, when a very excited old friend called him from Los Angeles in the middle of the night while he was lying in bed in New York, telling him that she had just found the sweetest, most adorable little French Bulldog all alone in the streets of Brentwood. And since she knew that Gillian was looking for one, she didn’t bring him to a shelter, but took him home, thinking that this little guy could be the perfect fit for them.

Andrew, another good friend of theirs and his family had looked after him for the last two weeks and had brought him to Vancouver. Between filming all day long and spending the rest of their time with Eaden, there hadn’t been an opportunity to bring him home until this beautiful Friday afternoon, when he’d been able to sneak away from the set at 2pm to head out and finally bring the little guy home.
He was so excited to finally reveal the little secret he’d kept for such a long time and couldn’t wait to see their faces and to find out how the dog reacted to Eaden, and how she would react to him.

So far, David wasn’t having any doubts that this could be a successful and enjoyable encounter for both sides.

But the constant snoring and grunting was really something David needed to get used to. Very soon, if Gillian would allow him to sleep in the bedroom. He was very curious what kind of a dog-mommy she would be.

With a brief glance to the side, David pursed his lips and eyed the brown furred little guy with his white chest suspiciously. He seemed like a calm and friendly dog who appeared in desperate need of a loving, caring hand and some good, appropriate dog-food to get rid of all the hairless spots all over his back. Nothing that Piper and Gillian couldn’t handle.

Yes, David thought and smiled, he was sure that they had made a pretty good catch with this dog.

The sun was still high in the sky when he arrived back at Gillian’s waterfront house and parked the car in front of the garage.

Once again, it was a very warm and sunny day in Vancouver, and he’d been right to expect them to sit on the beach behind the house in and let the afternoon-sun shine onto their faces.

This beautiful, secluded property at the beach with all those big, heavy trees around it and the breathtaking view all around the cove was their very own little paradise. It was a place to relax, to leave one’s cares behind and to simply be. It was quiet, and it was peaceful.

They’d used it only for family vacations in the last couple of years, mostly for a few weeks around their birthdays or when they needed a quick escape from everyday life and hide in a familiar surrounding where no one cared for them. Which wasn’t exactly the case in Los Angeles, where there were not just paparazzi lurking behind every other bush, but there was also always the possibility of a drone flying over your house while you were sitting outside in the hot tub.

That they could now spend almost three months here at this place while filming these six new episodes was a real blessing.

The first week had been extremely tough. He was more used to the long hours on set than she was nowadays, but even he was absolutely spent at the end of each day. And these last couple of days had always started around 9am and ended somewhere in between 8pm and 1am.

Needless to say, but Gillian was absolutely exhausted by now, but tried her hardest not to show it. Her days were even longer than his due to the time she spent in hair and makeup at the beginning of each day and before she could finally go home to talk to the boys back in London before she went to bed. Each night after work, she spent another hour awake nursing the baby while wishing Oscar and Felix a wonderful day and telling them that she loved and missed them terribly. And each morning, she got up half an hour early to call them again to hear how their day went and what they would have for dinner or what movie they’d picked up to watch with Daddy. On some days, they asked what her day had been like and what exactly they were doing in Vancouver that required them to stay away for such a long time. And he knew that every time they asked if she had to do that and if she really couldn’t come home, her heart broke little bit more, and the guilt became almost unbearable.
If that hadn’t been enough already, there was also a very demanding one-year-old with two chubby little arms literally glued to her mother’s neck these days. One that, after two months in which nothing had happened, started to teeth literally the second the director yelled “action” on an X-Files set for the first time in over seven years.

Upper front teeth were apparently the biggest assholes ever.

There was a lot of pain, a lot of screeching and screaming, drool everywhere and on everyone, and an almost endless stream of tears running down a pair of puffy, burning red cheeks. Day and night. Especially at night.

It probably wasn’t the best time to bring a dog into their lives and therefore make things even more complicated than they already were.

But now, as he was carrying the grunting, wide eyed little guy down the wooden stairs towards the beach, looking at Piper and Gillian lying on a blanket side by side, braced back on their elbows to watch the calm sea in front of them while the baby was shoveling sand over Gillian’s bare feet, David was confident that everything would turn out just fine. They’d always managed to make things work one way or another.

When he was close enough to hear their cheerful giggles, David gave the pup a reassuring squeeze and carefully sat him down on the sand while holding onto his leash.

"Here we go, buddy. Are you ready? Ready to meet these girls over there?” David asked brightly and scratched the soft space behind the dog’s ear. “Let’s go, you’ll love them, I promise,” he added and gently ushered the dog in Piper’s and Gillian’s direction right in front of them.

Reluctant at first, the dog took his sweet time inspecting his new, unfamiliar surroundings and stopped and sniffed at every little piece that the ocean had flushed onto the beach, especially taking a liking in all the seaweed lying around on their way until he finally caught more interest in the people sitting in the sand and suddenly couldn’t get there fast enough.

Neither Gillian nor Piper had noticed them coming up behind them as the dog’s wet little nose came in contact with Gillian’s bare upper arm, making her jump and cry out in surprise.

Her face was the most hilarious thing he’d seen in a very long time, and went from absolutely terrified to embarrassed and then delighted in a matter of mere seconds.

“Oh my god!” Gillian giggled bashfully and her hand came up to her chest as she realized who was the person holding the other end of the leash. “You scared me!”

“Whoa, hey!” Piper said brightly and took off her pair of sunglasses and immediately started to pat the dog.

“Ladies,” David said with a smile, got down on his knees between Gillian and Piper, and held the dog in place right in front of him as he leaned forward to give Gillian a kiss on the side of her mouth. “Meet… the French Bulldog that has no name yet. And French Bulldog, meet my ladies. Well, a couple of them.”

“What is this about?” Piper asked as the dog’s focus shifted to the baby, who came crawling towards him.

“Oh, Eaden, no-” Gillian grabbed the baby by her arms and pulled her into her lap to prevent her from touching the dog, who was now curiously padding after Eaden.
“It’s okay, he’s friendly,” David insisted as the baby, obviously not amused to be restricted by her mother, started to protest with a loud wail and an attempt to wiggle out of Gillian’s tight grip by bending her back from one side to the other. “Let her get to him.”

“David-, where is this dog coming from?” Gillian asked, hesitating to let Eaden off her lap, even though the little dog didn’t seemed disturbed or angered by her screaming at all.

“Oh, he’s coming from the US,” David replied and patted the dog’s head. “A real American, so don’t hold it against him if he doesn’t understand your British accent immediately and needs some time to get used to it. But if you like him, he’s yours.”

“What? Really?” Piper beamed, but Gillian just furrowed her brows in confusion.

“What do you mean, yours?” she asked and at the same time, let Eaden slide from her lap onto the blanket for the first, timid approaches between her and the dog.

“He’s looking for a nice family and you’re still looking for the right dog. I mean, what’s not to love? He’s a boy, yeah. So I don’t know about naming him Stella, but look at him,” David pointed at a giggling Eaden, who was absolutely fascinated by that dog. “He’s a charmer.”

“He is so darn cute, David! I’m sure we can come up with another name. Right, Mom,” Piper said pointedly, and it sounded more like a statement than a question.

With a heavy sigh, Gillian watched her oldest daughter getting onto her knees and grabbing the end of the leash as the dog was about to wander off towards the shore. “Watch out for Eaden, Piper. She’s following you,” she called out.

“And you might not want to let go of the leash, I’m not sure he’ll come back,” David added with an amused chuckle.

She tensed beside him, cautiously watching the dog running towards Eaden, who was now sitting in the sand and reaching out for him. Although Piper was kneeling right beside her little sister, Gillian couldn’t help the sudden nervousness rising within her as the dog’s snout came in contact with her baby’s little hand and then, he started to lick it, making the baby squeal in delight.

“Relax babe,” David’s hand came up and stroked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear, his knuckles brushing over her cheek as she took a deep breath to temper down the fear. “He’s awesome. He’s the perfect dog.”

“You do realize that this is crazy, right?” she turned her head to look at him. “That it would’ve been easier to look for a dog in the UK?”

“Sure, but you haven’t found one yet and this was… fate,” David said with a shrug and smiled at her. “Mel literally ran into him on the streets and she immediately thought of you guys. You’re lucky she let him go, because she absolutely fell in love with him.”

“And he really doesn’t belong to anyone?”

“No,” David shook his head. “He can be yours. And besides the malnutrition, he is healthy, has already gotten the first round of shots and you really don’t need to worry about anything else. I will take care of it. All you have to do is take him home in a couple of weeks.”

She eyed him suspiciously for a few moments before closing her eyes and eventually starting to shake her head. Sometimes, it was hard to believe that there had ever been a time she wasn’t able to see this beautiful, sweet and generous soul of his through all the anger and resentment she’d felt
towards him.

“Oh god, David,” Gillian said with her lips pursed into one of these cute little smiles of hers, and added, “Why are you like this?”

“Like what?” he asked softly and tilted his head questioningly, the smile on his lips growing into a lopsided grin.

But instead of replying, her azure blue eyes, sparkling beautifully in the sun, slowly traveled over his face, indulging into every little line and wrinkle she loved so much, before meeting his gaze again. And then, ever so slowly, she leaned in and watched him close his eyes just before their lips met for a soft, languished kiss. One that spoke louder than any words she could’ve used to say just how much all of this meant to her.

Barely a week later, Gillian was sitting on a toilet lit, clasping some crumpled sheets of toilet paper between her hands while tears were streaming down her face, her mascara smeared across her eyes and running down her cheeks in pained trails.

She hadn’t expected this to happen, but in that very moment, in which she felt like she experienced some kind of a Déjà-vu, Gillian eventually remembered where all those hard times they endured during the original run of the series had originated from. That all the stress, a couple of misunderstandings and their combined stubbornness had often left them at this awful place where bitterness, resentment and anger were overshadowing such a big part of the affection and love they felt for each other.

What she had never really, genuinely considered though, was her own part in this. Suddenly, there were so many flashbacks coming to her mind from previous fights and disagreements, and if she was honest, she had to admit that they hadn’t been much different from what just happened. And what just happened was him being his rational, forthcoming self, and her reacting absolutely unreasonably. Driven by her own, irrational fear that she was losing control in conjunction with a very rational, legitimate fear, in this case for her children, she was prone to throw a couple of accusations at him and then flee out of the situation before he would see how insecure and desperate she was. That had always been her way to deal with difficult situations when a decision had to be made while she was overwhelmed and he was simply trying to be helpful.

Two days ago, the new week seemed to start out just fine.

Nelson, named after the great Nelson Mandela, had gotten somewhat used to his new name by the time Monday came around, and he got to come to set with Gillian for the very first time.

During dinner on Friday night, there had been a heated discussion between Piper and Gillian over the name of their new family member. David’s objection that the boys might want to have a say in this too had been dismissed with two equally disapproving glances, apparently the only thing they were able to agree on right away, before their discourse continued until late at night, when David was already dozing with his head resting in Gillian’s lap while they were sitting outside on the terrace. How and when they finally agreed on Nelson he couldn't recall, just that she’d cried his name out sometime in the middle of the night when the dog suddenly hopped onto their bed. Eaden, who’d slept between them again, wasn’t able to fall back to sleep for the next three hours.

Needless to say, it was a delightful first night. And an equally delightful second one, before on the third, he finally seemed to understand that he had to sleep in his basket. Not that it had made much of a difference anyway. As much as he needed to get used to his name, they needed to get used to his
snoring.

Monday had turned out to be a slow day on set, and Gillian was already finished with her scenes at around 3pm, which left her enough time to drive home and get ready for a nights out in downtown Vancouver with some old friends.

By the time she arrived back at home, pleasantly repleted and warm from the glass of wine she’d enjoyed, she was in a very good mood and ready to slip into her bed and spoon up behind her man.

So it came as a surprise that the house was still lit and David did not seem to be in bed. At 11pm, more than two hours after his usual bedtime, she really hadn’t expected him to be still awake.

When she stepped into the living room and approached him while he was already getting up from the couch, Gillian almost instantly noticed that something was off. The way he searched her face and the weird, cautious expression on his own immediately set off alarm bells in her head.

He asked if she had seen the missed calls by now, which she hadn’t, and as she reached for her purse to grab her phone, he stopped her by taking her hands in his and pulling her towards him.

“Don’t freak out now,” he’d said and entwined his fingers with hers. “Mark tried to reach you and eventually called me. Oscar is in the hospital.”

The next thing Gillian was able to remember was sitting on the couch probably a couple of minutes after that, when her heart rate had started to slow down again and her ears stopped ringing.

Her son had collapsed in school and had been unconscious for about ten minutes. A febrile seizure was what the doctors were suspecting so far, but they would need to do a series of tests to be completely sure and to find out if there was a more serious issue behind it or not. It could be everything between a simple virus infection, the first stages of epilepsy and a meningitis.

And while he was stable and in good hands, Mark said that they were having a lot of trouble calming him. That he was scared, and the person he needed and wanted the most was thousands of miles away from him. His mother.

The next day was a complete blur for Gillian, and she barely remembered working at all, but negotiating with Chris that she could head home earlier than originally planned, arguing with Mark and trying to soothe a distressed Oscar over the phone, who was literally begging her to come home.

She also remembered talking to Sheila, who was, as everyone on set, trying to do her best to reassure her that everything would be fine, but, as a mother herself, completely understood what she was going through.

And David, who was not leaving her side and looking after her by reminding her to eat and drink. Things she usually neglected in situations like this.

It was a blessing that she had to spent so much time in his arms that day as Scully was mourning the loss of her mother. Being wrapped in his arms and able to bury her nose in his chest, inhaling his soothing scent, was so, so comforting and helped loosening the tight knot in her stomach.

This particular day had been almost unbearable and ended late at night with them still not knowing when she would be able to fly home. She was aware that there still were a couple of scenes she needed to shoot for this episode, but not exactly how many and how long it would take to get them. What Gillian knew though was that she needed to go home as soon as possible. And not knowing if her son would have to wait another day, or two, or even three for her to be with him kept her awake for almost the entire night.
Wednesday started a little better. Despite the tiredness, the experience of having a camera strapped in front of her was a new and exciting one for Gillian. Everyone was trying to cheer her up, and there was definitely more than just one moment she wanted to kiss David for being so sweet and funny. And once or twice, she actually did.

But then something happened that changed her mood completely in mere seconds, and she wasn’t really able to put a finger on what exactly had triggered her to suddenly feel like she was having a panic attack.

They were sitting on their chairs and watched the crew set up the next scene while having fresh coffee and sandwiches Gillian had gotten them from Starbucks during her short break. The mood was lighthearted, and they giggled when Dean stumbled over a couple of cables and almost knocked one of the cameras down.

“I think there’s a good chance that you can take a flight out tomorrow. Just one scene left, we’ve got this,” David said cheerfully and bumped his shoulder playfully into hers.

“Yeah. I hope Chris makes up his mind soon, I’m so done with this waiting game. And I just want to pack Eaden’s bag and tell Alison to book us those tickets.”

“Pack Eaden’s bag?” David asked, confusion written all over his face, and then added, “I thought you would want to go alone.”

“Why would you think that?”

“Well,” he took another sip from his coffee, “to have more time for Oscar, and Felix? I’m sure they would love your undivided attention.”

“David, I’ll be gone for over a week.”

“And? It’s not like you haven’t done it before. She’ll be alright.”

“She was with Erin back then. I can’t just leave her with her new sitter for such a long time,” she said, not realizing what effect her words might have on him.

David swallowed and it was obvious that he was trying to temper down his feelings. Her words stung, but he didn’t want to make her feel any worse.

“She’d stay with me, of course,” he said softly, “and I’ll take her to Los Angeles with me. It’ll be just fine and you wouldn’t need to worry about anything else but the boys and yourself.”

She looked at him sternly and let her hands, which were holding her sandwich, drop into her lap. “Are you saying that I can’t take care of all three of them and myself at the same time? That it would be too much for me to handle?”

“I- no. I don’t know how you think that’s what I was saying. It’s just logical to split some of the responsibility, isn’t it?”

“You don’t get what you’re implying here, right?” she asked, and he furrowed his brows in concern.

“What? Gillian-” he sighed, absolutely not getting what he was allegedly implying. “I’m just saying that I can take care of our daughter while you’re in London being there for the boys.”

“Yeah, right,” she snorted scornfully. "That’s just wonderful. You two enjoy playing these responsible, devoted, always available uber-fathers, right? You guys enjoy to watch me struggle so
you can step up, oh so selflessly, and make it look like you saved the day for everyone, right?"

“No, I—” David stuttered, but couldn't finish his sentence as she suddenly hopped off her chair and threw the paperbag with the rest of her sandwich onto it before looking straight at him.

“Why are you doing this to me? Why do you have to do that, knowing how fucking bad I already feel?” she pounced furiously, her eyes narrowed accusingly and with that, Gillian turned around and staggered away, one hand covering her face as the tears began to flow.
Maturity is achieved when a person accepts life as full of tension. - Joshua L. Liebman

Chapter Summary

Happy Easter guys! I hope you all had wonderful, relaxing holidays, whether you celebrate Easter or not!

I am SOO excited about the huge surprise I have for you! @allyinthekeyofx has made something we all needed in our lives and let me tell you, I'm just over the moon!

Thanks to my dear @justholdinghandsok for the beta again, what would I do without you? <3

So, without further ado, I hope you guys enjoy this Chapter :-)

As a highly independent person who liked to stay in control, and one who was prone to be stubborn, it was the worst thing that, once your emotions had gotten the best of you and you basically overreacted to the point of crying, there was nothing more needed than someone else coming over and putting you out of your misery.

How pathetic, Gillian thought. And so hard to accept that sometimes, when emotions and hormones were running high, you needed another person to provide some of the confidence and stability you weren’t able to muster yourself.

While this feeling was so familiar to her, had accompanied her for the major part of her life, Gillian despised it, and would probably never make peace with it. The loss of control, no matter how small and insignificant it might’ve seemed to others, was unbearable and, for her, almost entirely intolerable.

It almost felt like falling into a million little pieces, losing one by one on her way through life. The thought that other people could somehow see all those lost pieces and judge her for the sheer amount was terrifying, even though Gillian knew that this was one of the most ridiculous illusions she had. Yet it was one that stuck in her mind for decades now. One she wasn’t able to get rid of.

No one had come after her when the sobs slowly started to subside. Sitting on that hard, closed toilet lit, her butt was beginning to hurt, and she needed to check if there was anything she could do about that smudged mascara or if her makeup was completely ruined by now. Which would mean she had to let her stylist re-do everything. How fucking embarrassing.

With a deep, hitched inhale, she reached out and ripped off another couple of sheets of toilet paper and blew her nose.

She needed to go back. They were probably ready to shoot the next scene. She just had to pull herself together one last time and get it over with for the sake of her son, who was needing her by his side. Nothing else mattered in this moment.

Getting up, she opened the lit and flushed the crumpled tissues down the toilet before turning around to unlock the door and stepped out.
And then she saw him, leaning against one of the sinks with his arms crossed in front of his chest and gaze fixated on his shoes. His expression was thoughtful and serious, his teeth were gritted tight enough that his jaw muscles flexed rhythmically.

He must’ve sneaked in at some point, and had waited patiently for her to regain some control on her own without ever leaving her completely alone.

He was always there in case she fell apart, but giving her the privacy and time she needed. There was no smothering and no pressure. David was like a silent rock. Always there, but never imposing. She could always rely on David, even when she’d been a total bitch to him.

But as much as she wanted to go to him, and as desperately as she was yearning for his arms around her, she just couldn’t move. She was frozen in place and unable to say a word. It felt like she’d suddenly lost the ability to speak. Neither her brain nor her mouth seemed to know what to do.

She should apologize. She should explain herself. Do something to let him know she didn’t mean what she had said. But she couldn’t. She just couldn’t do it.

In her mind, she was desperately begging him to be the first to break the silence. To be the stronger one and tell her he forgave her, and that everything would be okay. She hoped he knew how grateful she was that he was there, and that he understood why she couldn’t say it.

Time was standing still as they stood there facing each other, and waiting for the other to make the first move. To say something, anything at all. Even the slightest attempt to move towards one another or a glance would be enough to break the spell, to bring her some relief.

But it didn’t happen.

Instead, his shoes made a loud, squeaky noise on the tiled floor as he turned around and, before she realized what was happening, pushed the door open and walked out of the restroom. Leaving her alone.

Once Chris and Glen had gotten wind of the ‘little incident’ with Gillian, as it was making its round, it seemed like that, all of a sudden, they had everything they needed from her for the second episode and they could give her the green light to go home to London.

David didn’t see her around for quite some time, but now spotted her, almost two hours later, taking a picture of Piper, who was quite bashfully holding a tray in front of her, apparently showing her proud mother some of the props she had made for the episode.

Gillian wasn’t wearing her wig anymore, but was now clad in a blue summer dress and her face was already scrubbed free from the heavy makeup she had to wear for the part. She looked like she was ready to leave any minute now.

He just wondered if they’d get a chance to talk before she left for over a week.

When he’d left her in that restroom, it hadn’t been because he’d intended to hurt or punish her. He was hurt, yes. And also sad. But he wasn’t particularly angry. It wasn’t that hard for him to understand what she was going through. She was a mother, and, unlike other men he knew, David was convinced that, even if there was an active, devoted father around, she was the most important person in most kids lives. And if a kid was sick, there was nothing that he needed more than his mother. And a mother didn’t want anything more than be by her child’s side to love and care for him.
That it had to be hard to leave another one in order to be with the sick child was also very understandable. Mother’s guilt was a huge topic in Gillian’s life ever since Piper had been born. Finding a balance between work and motherhood had always been a struggle for her. And with the increasing number of children and them becoming somewhat of a patchwork family, it hadn’t gotten any easier over the years. It was okay when everything was working out according to plan. But the reality was that it rarely did. And he bowed his head to everyone who was able to deal with these things in an organised, mature way. Because they surely hadn’t figured out how to do that by now.

And yet… he had enough of hearing the same things from her over and over again. He thought of himself as a supportive, patient partner. But his patience wasn’t endless, and Gillian knew her ways to reach his limits.

He would do everything for her. Absolutely everything. The problem was that she had always been too proud and at the same time too insecure to accept his help. Or anyone’s, for that matter.

Instead, she tended to use it against people. Accused them of having ulterior motives, wanting to threaten her and to make her look weak and incompetent.

And that wasn’t something he would ever accept, especially not from her.

He was her partner. Her confidant. They were family.

And the one thing he really wished her to be was accepting of his support and unconditional love and to allow herself to rely on him.

He would do anything in his power to stop all those self-doubts and the insane pressure she put on her own shoulders from ruling their lives and their relationship. And the only way he knew how to make her understand that was by giving her the opportunity to find out herself.

Which was exactly why he’d walked out of this restroom earlier.

He’d desperately wanted to hug her. Wanted to tell her that everything would be alright. That of course she could take Eaden with her, if that was what she wanted.

But he didn’t do any of those things. Despite the way she’d been looking at him, with all the confusion, desperation and sadness in her watery blue eyes, he’d made a decision he wasn’t entirely sure had been the right one.

“David!” someone suddenly called him, pulling him out of his reverie. His gaze fixated back on Piper and Gillian, and he noticed that her oldest was looking at him expectantly, neck craned and eyebrows raised high. She definitely wanted him to come over.

Gillian on the other hand seemed to avoid looking at him while he approached them, busying herself with straightening Eaden’s dress and unruly hair.

“What’s up?” he asked as blithely as possible and put his hand demonstratively on the small of Gillian’s back.

“You’re going to pull these off your shoes later, don’t they look super gross?” Piper chuckled, proudly looking down at the armada of gooey band-aids neatly lined up on a cardboard. They were in fact very, very gross.

David pulled a disgusted face. “Yeah… they’re… pretty realistic. Ugh.”

“You think you can handle it?” Piper asked, making her mother snort in amusement.
And then, to his great surprise, Gillian leaned herself against his side, and he slung his arm completely around her waist to pull her a little closer. He could literally feel the tension leaving her body.

“I don’t know, what do you think?” he prompted Gillian, grinning down at her as she lifted her gaze to meet his eyes.

“I think you can handle it just fine,” Gillian said with a nod, and he thought he could detect a tiny, sly smirk on her lips. Yeah, it was definitely there. His belly tingled in relief and anticipation. And before he could think about it twice, he leaned down and kissed her softly.

***

“Alright slugger, do you promise me not to make a mess while I’m in the shower? Can you do that for Daddy, hm?” David kneeled down in front of his little daughter, who was sitting on the warm bathroom floor, tiny toothbrush in hand and a mischievous spark in her eyes that usually meant nothing else but trouble.

“Five minutes, okay?” he added and tickled her sides with his index finger, making her squeal in delight.

Eaden, the master in making messes in the shortest amounts of time, was also widely known to always find something somewhere to destroy or hurt herself with, even when the door was closed and the lower cupboards baby-proofed as it was the case right now.

“Otey.” Eaden replied with a big grin, sounding almost like she’d understood his request and was actually taking it seriously, but David was sure that his sweet, innocent looking girl had already made up a plan on how to spend the next five minutes differently from what he’d asked her to.

“I don’t believe a word that’s coming out of your mouth, young lady. Which is concerning since you only know eight of them yet.”

“Mwah Dada, nononono,” she babbled and shook her head almost frantically.

“Yeah, exactly, no messes, alright? Daddy’s right back! Daddy hears and sees everything!” David said pointedly and patted his daughter’s head before he got up and walked over to the shower and started to run the water.

“Are you going to tell Daddy a story while he’s in the shower, baby?” he asked while shedding his boxers, and with one last glance down on the floor, where Eaden was occupied with her toothbrush and completely ignoring him, stepped under the refreshing spray of water.

The day Gillian left for London wasn’t completely forgotten. After their chaste kiss, they had a brief, not particularly uncomfortable but awkward conversation in her trailer in which she told him that she had purchased a ticket for the last flight out to London this evening and that Eaden would stay with him just like he’d wanted her to. He had to swallow a harsh comment on that reproachful undertone that she used to make clear that she wasn’t happy with that at all. He so badly wanted to tell her to just take the baby with her and look how she got along if she really needed to have it her way to feel better. Of course he hadn’t.

There were no further exchanges of affection between them, only Eaden got showered in kisses and
hugs before Gillian placed her little daughter in David’s arms, gave his arm a squeeze while saying goodbye and that she would text him before she hopped into the cab to the airport.

The next day, he heard from Piper that Gillian had called to tell her that Oscar was out of the hospital and that she’d been able to take him home. David got a text message later that day, and another one each day, but nothing more. Which wasn’t really that surprising, yet disappointing that she was still falling back into these old musters of hers. He’d thought that they were over that by now. Apparently, that wasn’t the case.

On Friday evening, he flew back to Los Angeles, but not alone as he’d originally planned, but with Eaden. David was very aware of how lucky they were to have such a resilient, overall content and happy baby. If she wouldn’t be able to cope with the fairly regular separation from one of her parents or the traveling as well as she did, they would’ve been in some serious trouble given the circumstances.

Their Saturday was lazy and relaxed. After running some errands and getting fresh green smoothies and food for the weekend, David laid out some blankets and pillows in the garden, creating a comfortable little space for them in the shadow of a tree by the poolside. They enjoyed sandwiches and avocados for lunch, cuddled while listening to the birds and eventually fell asleep with Eaden sprawled out on David’s chest. In that respect, father and daughter were very much alike. Both were able to enjoy the simplest little things for hours without needing more than each other. Gillian was usually a little more restless in that respect, struggled with enjoying the moment and just let things be. It would’ve been so easy for him to wallow in his hurt and sulk in self-pity and loneliness only caused by the way they’d parted. He could be angry about how unnecessary this stupid fight was, just like almost every other they ever had. Instead, David did his best to enjoy what he had - a lot of free time with his youngest daughter - and to trust Gillian to come back to him whenever she felt ready.

When he opened the glass door and stepped out of the shower a couple of minutes later, his first glance went down to the floor where Eaden sat earlier, but wasn’t anymore.

With a shake of his head and a grin, David grabbed a towel off the rack, quickly dried himself and slung it around his waist.

“Eaden?” he asked in feigned concern and started to wander around, pretending not to know where she was hiding. “Where is Eaden? Where is my little girl?” He looked around the corner of one of the counters. “Oh no! She’s gone! What am I going to do without her?” he whined, and heard a soft giggle and suddenly, she appeared within the bathtub, grinning widely at him.

“Oh! Hi!” she squealed delightfully, jumping up and down with excitement while holding tightly onto the tub.

“Oh, hi! There you are, thank god! Come here, sweetie,” he said affectionately and scooped her up, kissing her little cheeks before she put her head on his shoulder and let him rub her back. “You’re funny, you know that?” And so much like your mother, he didn’t say, sure that she would only get upset remembering that her favorite person wasn’t around at the moment and wouldn’t spend the day with them.

Burying his face into her soft, blonde hair and inhaling her sweet scent, he instead whispered, “I love you, slugger. Let’s get ready for the day, okay?”
For this beautiful, sunny Sunday in Los Angeles, David had dressed Eaden in a black little onesie that said “peace, love and naps”, and which was, in his opinion, just as perfect as his orange “pumpkin” shirt. But unlike Eaden’s, David’s outfit didn’t get a lot of compliments from West and her friends. For no apparent reason, they seemed to be quite amused by it instead.

Their stroll through the farmer’s market with eight teenagers and their parents, all old friends from the time they lived here as a family, was a comfortable one. When the kids were younger, and him and Téa still together, they used to do these meet-ups with other families quite often. But since they separated and had moved to New York, there weren’t a lot of opportunities to catch up anymore, but it was important to both David and Téa to keep these friendships alive, not only for the sake of the kids.

By the time they arrived back in Malibu, bellies full with burgers, fries and ice-cream, the sun had already Set, West and her boyfriend had left to spend the night at a friends house and the two remaining kids, Eaden and Miller, were fast asleep on the backseat of David’s car.

Together, they managed to wake their exhausted teenager - a task almost impossibly hard these days - and even got him brush his teeth before he went to bed. Bringing the baby to bed was easy compared to that. While Téa was with their son, David changed Eaden for the night and tucked her into his bed with her favorite stuffed animal, where she continued her peaceful slumber.

“Is she still sleeping?” Téa asked when he closed the bedroom door behind himself and walked into the kitchen while she poured herself a glass of red wine. Noticing his confused expression, she shrugged her shoulders and filled a second glass. “Sorry,” she nodded her head towards the bottle, “but I felt like we could both take one.”

“Or two,” David said with a sigh and took the glass from her. “Thanks. To our kids?”

“Yeah,” Téa nodded and clinked her glass with his. “To our wild, independent daughter and our sleepy son. And no, before you start again, he’s fine. The doctor checked his blood and told me that we should start to accept that our sweet son will do exactly three things in the next two to three years - sleep, eat and complain.”

“That sounds just wonderful,” David stated wryly.

“Yeah that’s exactly what I told him, too!” She took a big sip out of her glass before grabbing the bottle. “Come on, it’s so nice outside, let’s not waste this beautiful evening by staying in here!” she waggled her eyebrows and led the way out of the living room and through the back door.

It was indeed a wonderful night to sit outside, listen to the soft waves of the ocean near by and enjoy the pleasantly warm air.

If only he could really enjoy it. If only he wouldn’t miss her so much.

“So,” Téa prompted once they were seated on one of the loveseats on the patio. She was looking at him expectantly, and he knew exactly what it was she was dying to know.

“So?” David asked cautiously and nipped at his wine.

“Is everything alright? How’s Gillian? And how’s filming?”

“Ohhh,” David groaned and closed his eyes while letting his head fall back on the backrest of the couch. “It’s stressful. Can’t we keep talking about our sleepy, grumpy son?”

She gave him a perplexed look, but chuckled to keep the mood light. “Three weeks and you’re
already stressed?”

“You know how it is! You just forget how exhausting it is and how insane the hours are… Seriously though, it’s hard, especially with a baby and all that kind of… stuff.”

Téa nodded understandingly. “I bet it is, being away from home must be especially hard for Gillian. How’s she taking it?”

David took a deep breath, closed his eyes and went quiet for a few moments.

Given everything that had happened between them in the last eighteen years, he thought they both couldn’t be more grateful for what they had right now. They genuinely loved and deeply cared for each other, yet the reason why they weren’t a couple anymore was more apparent than ever. They were both the happiest with somebody else. And loneliest without them.

However, the friendly relationship he now had with Téa was based on trust and mutual respect. They knew each other for such a long time, he couldn’t fool her into believing that everything was alright. And there was a time when it had been easy for him to go to both women and tell them about the problems he had with the other. And it was one of the most selfish things he’d ever done. Extremely unfair and disrespectful to both Téa and Gillian.

And he wouldn’t do the same mistake ever again.

“It’s harder than expected,” he nodded thoughtfully and looked at Téa before adding, “but we’re doing our best to make it work.”

David climbed into his bed little after midnight. They had emptied the first bottle of wine while he told Téa what he had planned for West and Miller during their stay in Vancouver and the second bottle while they discussed when they would start looking at colleges for West.

That was the nicest part about their relationship - being able to be the parents of two kids who were aware of their joint responsibility for them. And who liked to raise them together despite everything.

Eaden’s still sleeping soundly beside him on Gillian’s spot, her little lips making sucking-like motions as if she was dreaming of milk and, which was an ongoing joke between them, Mommy’s boobies. Although for entirely different reasons, he certainly couldn’t blame her for that.

With a soft chuckle, he pulled the light blanket over her little feet and ran his thumb down her soft cheek before rolling onto his back and turning his head towards the nightstand to his right, where his phone was blinking repeatedly.

He wanted to take a look, but he also wanted to prevent himself from yet another disappointment.

He took a deep breath and eventually reached over, grabbed his phone and squinted his eyes to the bright light as he pressed the home button.

His heart skipped a beat when he saw her name appearing on the screen. She had finally called, and even left him a four-minute-long voicemail.

His fingers were literally trembling when he started to play her message.

“Hi, um… it’s me,” there was a slight pause, and he couldn’t suppress a relieved chuckle. It felt so good to hear her voice again. “I know you have someone over and I don’t even know why I’m
calling now,” she paused again, and by the way her voice was trembling he figured that she’d been crying. “Well I know why… it’s because I’m too much of a coward to talk to you and I was thinking that while you had guests over, I could finally give you a call without actually having to talk to you, which is…” she sighed, “… which is stupid because I really want to talk to you. Um, god, why is this so fucking hard?” she asked and then blew her nose. “Sorry,” a soft, bashful chuckle followed. “I um, I’m meeting a friend today, because I feel like this is growing over my head and while it’s you I need to talk to and tell what’s going on, I understand if you don’t feel like that at the moment. Yeah, um… I’m seeing Jennifer today so… god, I’m sorry, I’m rambling.”

“I don’t care,” David said to himself and closed his eyes. She could read the phonebook to him and he would still enjoy listening to her.

A familiar wave of warmth and love flooded his body, replacing the pent-up anger he’d felt in the last couple of days.

“I just wanted to tell you that I wish I could go back to that kiss and just… do everything differently from that point on. I mean, obviously I can’t, but… I would do everything for that kiss right now. Or a hug…” her voice broke, and it was so hard to listen to this without being there. Without being able to reassure her that he felt the same way.

“I love you, David,” she said in a whisper, but her words were loud with longing. “And I miss you very much.”
The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance. - Nathaniel Branden

Chapter Notes

This isn't an easy time for Gillian and David, and I hope you guys like to see how they're trying to navigate through their problems ;)

David had always been looking forward to become a father.

Since he could think, there was nothing he wanted more than to get the chance to be what his own father had been to him and his siblings - a devoted, gentle and understanding father. One who loved his children unconditionally, who was a guide and provided loving praise, support and a nurturing, safe environment in which a tiny human being could grow into a confident, open-minded and independent adult.

Based on how he had experienced his own father, David always thought that fatherhood would come naturally to him. That the adjustment would be easy, and that he wouldn’t have any trouble finding his role. When West was born though, the love he suddenly felt for this tiny person was almost overwhelming, and the new responsibilities and the pressure he put on himself to be everything his own Dad was and wasn’t to him paralyzed him at times. Especially in the beginning. It took him months to find his place in his daughter’s life, to connect and bond with her. And years to learn and accept that fatherhood was a constant learning curve, a delicate act that could not be applied to every man and every child the exact same way.

When Eaden came around, he had 15 years of experience under his belt, with the hardest being the first one and the last two after his and Téa’s separation. And a few months of experience in being some sort of a father figure to two young boys and a young woman that weren’t his own.

To say that this journey had been an easy one would be an understatement. But now, as he was sitting in the dirt beside his children after three hours of hiking up to the Escondido Falls, David once again realized how worth it has been. Every single second of it. All of those doubts and fears and every tear that had been shed.

Because this, this was everything. Their bantering, the witty jokes they pulled out of their sleeves, their laughter, the way they helped their little sister drink out of a big bottle of water or feed her spoonfuls of avocado.

It all made his heart grow twice its size with pride and love. It brought him a sense of joy he didn’t believe he had in him all those sixteen years ago.

A lot of things had changed over time. Some had remained difficult. But the beauty of the simple things, and the love, had remained the same.

***

“I love you, David,” she whispered, but her words were loud with longing, “and I miss you very
The silence that followed was excruciatingly painful. She hadn’t hung up yet, and he could literally picture her holding the phone, eyes squeezed shut, lips pressed together and hands balled into fists to keep herself from falling apart.

David knew that it wasn’t just their disagreement putting such a strain on her, but the fact that she had once again been too stubborn to let him help her without putting up a fight was nagging at her immensely. Especially now that she was realizing how much easier it would be if she hadn’t ignored him for the last couple of days.

He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes, letting the hand that was holding the phone sink onto his chest.

He would never make her feel guilty for her actions by blaming her, but he also couldn’t just take away her bad conscience by acting as if nothing had happened. As if she hadn’t hurt him.

A choked sob was the last thing he heard before the line went dead without another word from her, and David groaned into the silence of his bedroom. It was ridiculous, and so typical for them.

He could call her back now, and was actually really considering it. She was definitely awake by now, but probably on her way to school to drop Felix off. Or at home, busy caring for Oscar. And most likely not ready to talk yet. Or maybe she was, and he would miss the opportunity to clear the air for good now. But if he was honest to himself, he wasn’t ready either.

With a heavy sigh, David picked up the phone from his chest and pressed the home button. The picture on his lock screen had been taken a couple of months ago in Los Angeles. It had been a windy and gloomy Sunday back in December. One you would rather spent at home on the couch, comfortably tucked under a duvet. But they had decided to go to the beach after lunch nevertheless. Just to get some fresh air and let the kids burn some energy. They walked and sat on a completely deserted beach for nearly two hours while the boys were flying their kites. At some point, Gillian had gotten up from the blanket and joined the kids, and out came a wonderful picture of a beautifully giddy Gillian, hair messed up by the wind, holding onto the rope while Miller was standing behind her to assist and both Oscar and Felix cheering exuberantly into the sky.

With a warm smile gracing his lips, he unlocked his phone and decided to at least write her a text message. He was too tired for this conversation tonight. If he would have her on the phone now and hear her voice, he knew he would definitely give in, accept her apology and tell her to forget about it. He wanted to put her out of her misery. Especially since she was dealing with so many other things at the moment that required her full attention and most of her energy. Compared to the health of her child, the overall well-being of both boys and the problems she had with Mark, their own struggles seemed almost trivial at the moment. And yet, here they were.

By avoiding the topic, they would never reach the core of the problem, and it would surely only get worse. What David really needed was a serious conversation with her. In person, and not over the phone with thousand of kilometers between them. They needed to sit down and talk this through, no matter how long it would take or how hard and painful it would be.

Barely two minutes after he’d hit the send button, put the phone back on the nightstand and closed his eyes in hope for at least five hours of sleep, it buzzed beside him.

For a few seconds, he contemplated whether he should just ignore it. He’d chosen his words wisely in an attempt to sound neutral, but not cold. Another five seconds later, he gave up and took his phone from the nightstand, clicking his tongue in annoyance. Not with her as much as with the
situation itself.

He had to scroll over his own message to get to the new one, and quickly reread it before he got to her reply.

_Hey. Good to hear that Oscar is doing alright! Please give the trooper a big hug from us! It's late and we’re going on a long hike tomorrow, so I need to go to sleep now (the slugger is already snoring beside me). I know you want to talk, but to be honest, I need more time and I really can’t talk about this over the phone. I’ll catch you sometime later, okay? Have a nice day!_

It still sounded alright to him, yet somehow, he wasn’t at all surprised by her answer.

_You’re scaring me…_

David sighed. Of course he was scaring her now. She was already doubting herself and he wasn’t giving in. And Gillian wasn’t used to this.

As he typed, _You don’t need to be scared, but we can’t solve this now_, he was thinking about what he wanted her to understand. That she had not only hurt him, but also herself. That they could be dealing with this together, as a union, if she would’ve allowed it. If she would’ve let him be there for her.

Confident that he was doing the right thing, David send the message and turned the vibrating alert of his phone off before putting it away, finally ready to go to sleep.

***

After seven hours on the go with two teenagers and a one-year-old, hiking through the woods and climbing some rocky cliffs to one of Malibu’s most beautiful places and beyond, David was the only one of them not lying flat on his back on the couch after a quick cooling down in the pool. It had been a hot day, and it was an adventure of almost epic proportions they hadn’t had in a very long time. He was starting to feel the additional twenty pounds he had carried on his back, but other than that, David felt energetic and… light.

The fun day had definitely helped clearing his head, he noted in satisfaction as he squeezed the juice of a freshly cut lemon into a carafe with cold water, just like the kids had asked for.

An exhausted groan from Miller came from the couch, and David shook his head in amusement. It wasn’t even 7pm yet and the kids seemed ready for bed.

“Jesus, you guys. Your old man has lived longer than the three of you together, and look who’s serving who!” David said with a chuckle as he set the tray with the carafe and four glasses onto the coffee table and took a seat beside West, who was sprawled out on the long side of the sofa with the baby lying bonelessly on top of her.

“That’s because you’re the best Dad,” West slurred tiredly and put her hand on Eaden’s back to sit up, holding her sister close against her chest.

“Ohh, thank you! I’ll take that,” David smirked and started to pour water into their glasses.

Miller began to stir on the other end of the couch, apparently rising from the dead by the prospect of a fresh, sparkling beverage, and asked “Dad?”
“Yes, kid?”

“Didn’t we want to give Oscar a call and see how he’s doin’?”

“Um,” he stalled, his mind calculating the time difference and thinking about a way to avoid this at the same time. “Let’s do that tomorrow, alright?” he finally continued, spilling some of the water on the coffee table. “Shiii- oops.”

West took the nearest napkin and patted the table dry with her free hand, eying her father suspiciously. “Why? Wouldn’t it be nice for him to know we think about him?”

“Yes, but guys, it’s too early in London. They’re still sleeping.”

West groaned. The baby was getting restless on her lap, obviously ready for her bedtime bottle, and she started to bounce her legs rhythmically. “Okay, but what about a video?” West suggested,

“Yeah, let’s make a video!” Miller exclaimed in excitement and sat up straight. “They’ll see it when they wake up!”

David cocked his head curiously. “A video?”

“Alright, I’ll start and you guys can just chime in, alright? Ready?”

“Bring it on!” Miller said and clapped his hands.

David grinned. These two, he thought and looked at the screen. With West squeezed between them and Eaden sitting on his lap, slumped against back his chest and sucking on her thumb, David had to admit that they made a cute bunch of crazies. A lovable one as well.

West pressed the recording button on his phone.

“Hey Oscar, it’s us, as you can see!” They all chuckled. “We’re so, so happy you got to go home and that you’re doing better, and we’re making this little video to tell you that we love you, and that we miss you all terribly!”

“And that I can’t wait for you to come to Vancouver and we can go out fishing!” Miller added.

West nodded. “Yep. And you too, Felix! We’re going to have a lot of fun this summer!” she said brightly and looked to her right at Eaden, taking her little hand in his and waved it. “Eaden misses you guys too, by the way! Look!” she raised her index finger before leaning down to get on the baby’s eye-level. “Eaden, can you say hi to Oscar and Felix! Say hi!”

“Caaar?” Eaden asked, thumb still in mouth, her expression a mixture of concern and anticipation, and all three of them aww’ed over her utter sweetness.

“Caaar?!” Eaden asked, thumb still in mouth, her expression a mixture of concern and anticipation, and all three of them aww’ed over her utter sweetness.

“Yeah! Oscar! And can you say Felix?”

“Feef!” she said proudly, now grinning from one ear to the other. “Caaar! Feef!”

“Good job!” West praised and gave her sister a smooch on her cheek while David patted her belly. As West continued, David leaned down and whispered something into Eadens ear before he felt West’s hand on his arm. “Dad, you want to say something?”

“Yeah!” He raised his head, looked into the camera and smiled. “Hey, buddy! We love you, both of
you, very much, and there are so many cool and fun activities waiting for you this summer! So Oscar, you get your rest and listen to your Mom so you can come over in August, okay?” he winked. “We’re about to head to bed now, and we hope you have a good day - lots of rest - and please say Hi to your Mom from us, okay?”

David smiled and then leaned down again to talk to Eaden, who immediately started to wave her little arm in excitement and bursted into a loud babble, “Mammamaa! Eye-eye Mama!”

And with all of them waving goodbye, West ended the video.

“Fantastic!” his daughter nodded in satisfaction.

“That was very nice of you, guys!” David stated proudly, leaning over to reach behind West to tousle Miller’s hair while giving West a kiss against her temple.

“You think he’ll like it?” Miller asked under a laugh, ducking away from David’s hand.

“He will definitely like it! He’s probably bored to death by now, so a little peek into what he can expect from this summer can’t hurt.” David turned Eaden around, who was yawning heartedly and immediately buried her head into his neck, and stood up.

“Can I send it right away?” West asked, looking at David expectantly.

“Sure,” he said and was about to turn around and walk away as it hit him. “No! Wait!” David suddenly called out and with a big step backwards, grabbed his phone out of West’s hand. Eaden startled in his arms and began to fuss.

“What’s wrong?” she asked perplexed, her eyebrows furrowed in confusion, and exchanged a questioning look with her brother, who was shrugging his shoulders. Then it finally dawned on her, and she started laughing. “You’ve got some nudes on there or what?”

“What? No!”

“Ewww, that’s disgusting!” Miller cringed and got up from the couch. “I’m outta here.”

West let out an annoyed groan and rolled her eyes at her brother. “Grow up, Mill! Gillian’s beautiful. You act like you’d never look at a beautiful woman!”

“Da-ad!” Miller whined.

David grinned inwardly. Although he counted Téa and him to the more fortunate parents since their children’s teasing and fighting never led to physical violence or too hurtful digs, sometimes, their bickering was driving him nuts nonetheless. But this was just cute.

“Guys,” he finally said and snickered, rubbing Eaden’s back soothingly to try to calm her again. She was crying now, completely exhausted and in desperate need of a nappy change. He needed to take care of that and tuck her in first before sending the video. “I think it’s time for all of us to go to bed now.”

Sometime in the near future, this very bad habit would need to come to an end, David thought as he carefully laid his daughter onto his bed, handed the sleepy child her binky and pulled a light sheet over her body. He watched her eyelids flutter, stroked her head and hummed softly to her until her eyes were closed and she was finally asleep.
She was starting to look so much like her mother, and reminded him of Piper when she was this age. So delicate and beautiful on the outside, yet fierce and witty on the inside.

David smiled and took his phone from the nightstand and searched for the video they’d just filmed and, once he found it, selected it and stared at the screen. This was for Oscar, he thought, and not for her.

Gillian still hadn’t replied to his message from last night, which he thought could be both a good and a bad sign. Maybe it had reassured her somehow, and she was okay with waiting to talk this out once they were together again. But he knew that it might as well just had angered her.

Either way, she would have had to deal with this video now, one way or another.

***

It was a quiet evening, for once, and Gillian revelled in the warmth and comfort of lying on the couch under the duvet, her sons snuggled up close against her, both of them completely absorbed in the animated film they had chosen to watch this evening.

After last night’s fiasco, she’d been quick in telling them that it was either a cartoon or no movie at all tonight. Although it had been entirely her own stupidity to show them an episode of The X-Files - Bad Blood, her all-time-favorite no less - Gillian really didn’t want to provoke another night full of nightmares.

Now, they were watching a horribly silly movie rated G and her mind was, of course, somewhere entirely else. She constantly caught herself looking over at the coffee table, where her phone was patiently blinking away. The message she’d gotten early in the morning, and all the ones that had followed over the day, were still unread.

Why did it have to be so fucking difficult? Why, for once, couldn’t life be easy and manageable? Why did she have to be such a self-sabotaging fuck-up?

She’d never been in such a stable relationship in which the man wasn’t feeling threatened with her being the boss. David was a self-confident man, and his admiration and love for headstrong women was a big part of why their relationship was working so well. That was, however, if she didn’t take it too far, and let her stubbornness and resistance take over common sense, which ultimately lead to resistance on his part; and rightly so.

It was the running theme in her life - finding a balance between being weak and being strong, and learning that with a partner she trusted, she could be the weakest and the strongest, but first and foremost, she had to accept whatever it was in any given moment.

Oscar started to stir beside her and tucked at her shirt. “Mum?”

“Hmm, yes honey? You’re alright?” she asked, and her hand automatically reached up and felt his forehead, still afraid that he’d spike a fever again. The flu that had caused the febrile seizure in the first place wasn’t completely gone yet, and therefore also not the possibility of it happening again. But other than the nights before, he felt normal to her now. “The movie’s over,” he stated, and Felix grumbled on the other side.

“Hmm,” Gillian smirked. “So, is it time for bed now or do you guys have a better idea?”

“You could look at your phone now,” Oscar suggested and nodded his head towards the coffee
Oops, Gillian thought and opened her mouth, trying to come up with something, anything to talk herself out of this - but she was busted. She sighed and let her head drop back against the cushions.

The minute they’d seen her again, both boys had sensed that something was wrong. Especially Felix, her little boy with his wonderful ability to know whenever people were upset, had picked up on her bad mood and emotional edginess. But it had been Oscar who mentioned David first, which had brought her in a position she’d never found herself in before - talking to her boys about her partner. Which was, as she now knew, a whole different thing from talking to them about their Dad and, in a child-appropriate way, about the struggles they sometimes had with each other.

But kids were curious creatures and Gillian was a firm believer that it was important to tell them what was going on so they could comprehend what was happening around them. Otherwise, they were just confused, and she was afraid that the only thing they’d learn was to keep quiet about their emotions, and that they needed to hide their problems even from their loved ones.

It was the first time the boys had showed any interest in her past with David, even though he’d become such a big part of their lives in the last couple of years. So she told them a little bit about their story; just the basics really, because everything else would’ve been too much and probably highly inappropriate anyway. They heard just enough to get an idea of what it was they were currently doing in Vancouver, and that they were not only in a relationship, but had been working together for a very long time. She also told them that she’d made a mistake, which was the reason they were both hurt at the moment. And that she needed to apologize to David in person to make it better again.

She felt Oscar’s little hand on hers and looked down, straight into his concerned eyes.

“Mum! What if it’s from David? Maybe Eaden’s sick?”

“He would’ve called if something was wrong, honey.” She ran her fingers through his light brown hair and brought his hand up to her lips, kissing his palm. “Do we want to watch another movie? And make some popcorn?”

“Mum,” Oscar insisted tentatively and tucked at her hand again. She could see that he was getting impatient with her. “Can’t you just look?”

Gillian inhaled deeply and closed her eyes. She knew better than to argue with a child about things like that. Unable to endure the uncertainty and the tension that came with disagreements of all sorts, kids expected adults to fix things immediately. And neither was it appropriate to tell them the whole story nor were they actually interested, which she learned from the one time she’d actually tried to give Piper an explanation.

No, they wanted adults to behave like they thought adults should behave. And they wanted the people closest to them to be… simply happy and alright. She guessed that she could be grateful that Oscar, and also Felix, liked David so much.

“Mummy, maybe he’s waiting for an answer,” Felix chimed in, feeling like his brother could use some support in this.

Gillian sighed in defeat. “Alright,” she finally said, and his entire face lit up as she reached for her phone. “Let’s see who sent me a message.”

Since there was no sense to hide it from them anyway, Oscar noticed David’s name on the display the second she hit the home button and balled his hands into triumphant fists.
“See! I told you it’s from David! He thinks of you!”

“It’s a video, Mum!” Felix called out and swiped his finger over the screen before typing in her pin.

Gillian raised her eyebrow and shot him a glance. “So much for privacy, huh?” she nudged him playfully, and his lips curled into a bashful smile. She really needed to remember to change her password later.

“Load it, load it, load it!” This time, Oscar tapped his finger on her screen.

It took only a couple of seconds to finish, and before she knew it, one of them had already pressed play, and the video started.

The second Gillian saw all four of them - Miller, West and David - sitting close side by side, Eaden on David’s lap, her heart began to beat rapidly in her chest. God, she was missing them terribly.

“Hey Oscar, it’s us, as you can see!” West said brightly, and both David and Miller started to chuckle at her stating the obvious. She just clicked her tongue and gave her brother a job with her elbow before continuing.

“We’re so, so happy you got to go home and that you’re doing better, and we’re making this little video to tell you that we love you, and that we miss you all terribly!”

We miss you too, Gillian thought and sniffled before burying her nose into Felix’s hair.

“Vancouver is going to be superb!” Oscar exclaimed exuberantly.

Then their attention shifted on the little blonde girl sitting comfortably in David’s lap. Was it just her imagination or did her baby look so much different than five days ago, Gillian wondered, also noticing Eaden’s slightly tanned skin. They must’ve spent a lot of time outside and on the beach, and now she looked like a typical Californian baby.

“Caaar? Feef? Car! Feef,” Eaden said proudly into the camera and smiled sweetly, showing off all of her four front teeth.

“Oh my god!” Felix screeched in excitement.

“She said our names, Mum!” Oscar added, beaming. “Have you heard that?”

“Yeah,” Gillian nodded and swallowed heavily, not entirely surprised to feel the tears springing into her eyes. “Yeah, I’ve heard it.”

Now David started to speak, and the boys went quiet again, listening attentively to what he was saying. His voice was so warm and full of love while he was talking to the boys.

“Aww, Mum!” Felix put his arm around her neck and craned his neck to kiss her cheek right after David had asked them to say Hi to her. Barely a second later, she felt a kiss from Oscar on her other cheek, and the first tears escaping her eyes.

She was so unbelievably blessed with all of them. This man, these kids…

To fuck this up without an effort would be the greatest of sins. To not give her best to make it work for the rest of her life would ultimately lead to lifelong unhappiness and despair, that she was sure of.

David was whispering something into their daughter's ear now, and Gillian was once again taken aback by his gentleness with that little girl. Not that it had ever been any different with any of the children, but seeing him like that with their child, one hand protectively wrapped around her middle,
the other holding the baby’s tiny one, made her feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

He was the best father Gillian could imagine for Eaden. Whenever he entered a room and she saw him, she would smile. Every time she was afraid, she’s searching for his face, his warm eyes, for reassurance. He’s the first one she called when she’s hurt. Some days, he was the only one able to calm her at bedtime. And he definitely was the only person she let clip her fingernails.

They had such a remarkable bond. And Gillian was grateful for it every day.

With her lower lip tucked between her teeth, Eaden started to wave with her free hand, making all of them laugh immediately. What she’d tried to suppress in the last couple of days, the incredibly strong longing for her baby girl, was hitting Gillian extremely hard right now.

And she wasn’t prepared in the slightest to suddenly hear her say her name. “Mammmaaal!” Eaden called, and Gillian squeezed her eyes shut instinctively as a overwhelming surge of feelings went through her body. She thought she heard the baby say “Eye-eye Mama!”, but definitely needed to rewatch it later to be sure, and then everything went quiet around her.

Felix was the first one to break the silence after a few moments. “Mummy, are you okay?” he asked softly.

“Yes, sweetie,” she wiped the tears away with the back of her hand before looking down into his concerned eyes. “That was just very, very nice, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. And Eaden is so cute! I miss her a lot a lot a lot!”

“But can we call them?” Oscar asked eagerly and sat straight up, looking at his mother expectantly. “To say thank you?”

“Um,” Gillian quickly glanced at her watch. “Yeah, sure,” she agreed, and before she knew it, Oscar had claimed her phone.

He was so quick in finding the number, it was obvious that he’d done that a million times before.

She suddenly felt extremely nervous.

“Oh, let me just grab something to drink,” Gillian said and wriggled herself out of the duvet. She had to climb over Oscar to get off the couch, and he was staring at her incredulously as she walked over to the kitchen, literally fleeing from the situation.

With a disapproving shake of his head, Oscar pressed the speakerphone function. After the third ring, David finally answered his phone.

“Hello?”

“Hi David, it’s Oscar and Felix!” Oscar chirped brightly. She couldn’t believe it. Was this the boy who was too shy to call anyone but her and his father?

“Oh, hey!” David cleared his throat. His voice was sounding thick and husky, and genuinely surprised. Maybe they’d woken him from a nap. “Hey guys, how are you two doing?”

“Good!” they said in unison, and then Oscar added, “We just saw your video!”

“You did?”

“Yes, thank you! We can’t wait to come to Vancouver!”
“Eaden says our names now!” Felix interrupted out of the blue.

“Yes!” David chuckled, amused by the sudden change in subject. “She’s getting very good at it! She also learned the word *dog*!”

Gillian smirked inwardly and took a sip out of the glass bottle. Nelson had really made an impression on their little girl. It had been love at first sight between these two. She couldn’t wait for the boys to meet the little guy too.

“Although it still sounds more like *dod,*” David continued and the boys started to giggle.

“Is she walking already?” Felix asked curiously, looking over at Gillian. This child could read her like a book.

“Nope! I bet she’s waiting to take her first steps once you guys will be with us. She’s very close, though.”

“I miss her!”

“Me too,” Oscar nodded thoughtfully, looking over at Gillian, before suddenly blurting out, “Mum wants to talk to you, David!”

Her head shot up, and she watched her son sliding from the couch in utter horror.

“Oh,” there was a brief pause. “Really?” Did his voice just became a pitch higher?

“She misses you!” Felix said pointedly, following his brother towards the kitchen. They were by her side in an instant, and she rubbed her hands on her upper thighs.

“Oh?”

Oh.

“Yeah, I’m handing you over now. Bye David!” Oscar said before he extended his arm and held out the phone for her to take. There was a challenging expression on his face she’d never seen before.

Gillian slowly reached for it, her eyes never leaving the hazel ones of her son. His gaze, direct and unblinking, continued to bore into her eyes. He wouldn’t let her get away without having talked to David.

She took her phone from him and he immediately pulled his hand away, turned around and pushed at Felix’s back, ushering him out of the room as quickly as possible.

And now there she was, standing in her kitchen all by herself, heart pounding rapidly in her chest, cheeks warm and flushed.

_It’s okay_, she whispered to herself, trying to find a calm, centered place in her mind. _It’s David. Your David._

Looking down at the screen, she deactivated the speakerphone and with one last, deep inhale, brought the phone up to her ear.

“Hello, David,” she finally said and closed her eyes, apprehensively, but also impatiently awaiting his answer.
The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions. - Nhat Hanh

Hey you guys, it’s been a loooong time, I know, but MF is finally back! I missed writing terribly, and you guys were the best motivation to continue despite everything! I hope you find your way right back in and that it continues to bring you joy! Love you all, and especially @justholdinghandsok for forever being my wonderful beta no matter what (;P)!

Gillian took her phone from Oscar, who immediately pulled his hand away, turned around and ushered his little brother out of the room, leaving her behind.

And now there she was, standing in her kitchen all by herself, heart pounding rapidly in her chest, cheeks warm and flushed.

It's okay, she whispered to herself, trying to find a calm, centered place in her mind. It's David. You're fine.

Looking down at the screen, she deactivated the speakerphone and with one last deep inhale, brought the phone up to her ear.

“Hello, David,” she finally said and closed her eyes; apprehensively, but also impatiently awaiting his answer.

“Hey, Gilly,” was his quiet reply, his voice so soft and affectionate, and Gillian instantly felt relieved.

She wasn’t sure what exactly she’d been expecting, but his gentleness took her completely by surprise. He often used her nickname, “Gilly”, when she was feeling uncomfortable or when she was irritated by someone or something, and he’d lean down and whisper it softly into her ear. It was meant to be reassuring, and it never failed to be just that. Not even now.

Heat rose to her cheeks once again and her stomach fluttered furiously. A bashful laugh escaped her lips, and it didn’t take a couple of seconds before he started to chuckle as well. He was just as nervous as she was.

“I’m glad these two are so damn clever,” he conceded after a few moments, and she could hear the rustling of sheets in the background.

“And that they’re always able to read my mind,” she nodded absently, half her mouth crooked into a lopsided grin.

“They know you, hm,” David said, and it was more like a statement than a question.

“Yeah.”

“Hmm. I guess we’re either horrible actors or we have incredibly smart and sensitive kids.”

“Both, probably.”
David chuckled approvingly. “Probably, yeah.”

The seconds went by, and both of them stayed silent. It felt like she was finally able to breathe freely again, just because of the few words they’d exchanged. And she felt the built up stress and pressure from the entire last week slowly leaving her body.

“I miss you,” Gillian suddenly blurted out, soft and desperate, and immediately closed her eyes at her own stupidity. Damn, she thought. Why did she have to make herself even more vulnerable? And why was she so scared that he would reject her? Hurt her?

He chuckled softly. “I was just… thinking the same about you,” he stated tenderly, and then went quiet for a moment before continuing. “This bed feels… weird without you.”

A small smile formed on Gillian’s lips and she relaxed a bit. “Does it?” she asked and walked back towards the couch, sitting down on her previous spot.

“Yeah… there are… uh, crumbs in it. Eww.” She could hear him run his hand over the bed sheet. “We might’ve had oatmeal cookies this morning.”

Gillian snorted amusedly and leaned back. “So it feels weird because I’m not there to play the no-food-in-bed-police?” she asked in feigned indignation.

“No, because it’s oatmeal cookie crumbs and not dark-chocolate-chip. And there’s also no good coffee to wake up to,” he pouted, and they both fell into soft laughter.

“I see. I must be greatly missed.”

Truth was, he would probably make a fool out of himself if he’d start to declare just how much she was missed. Especially at night.

More used to have her there than to have to sleep alone these days, he was waking up in the middle of the night because his hand was constantly, subconsciously searching for her warm, soft, feminine body. Most of the time, he’d end up spooning her; arm around her slim waist, hand under her shirt, fingers spread wide over her stomach. Chest flush against her back and face deeply buried into the soft silk of her hair - that was how he slept the best. But when she wasn’t there, his hand would reach into the void and then fall down onto the cold sheets beside him, and he’d wake up in confusion before remembering that they were an ocean apart again. It was his least favorite way to wake up.

He hummed affirmatively and looked at the empty spot beside him. “I miss you a lot.”

There was silence again. Oh how much he wished she was here, so he could wrap her in his arms. Wished there were no issues, no problems to figure out and talk through. No awkwardness.

“Um-” she started, pulling him out of his reverie. “About me flying back to Vancouver... am I right in assuming that you want to talk before we go back to work?”

“Oh,” David cleared his throat, taken aback by the abrupt change of subject. Couldn’t they talk about missing each other a little more? “If it’s possible, yeah.”

“Oh,” she stated in a flat tone, all the excitement and warmth from moments before suddenly gone from her voice.

*Back to business*, he thought. The sudden shift stung in his chest, but he was aware that she was just trying to protect herself from getting carried away. From letting emotions getting the better of her.
This was Gillian after all.

“I’ll take the plane on Saturday then. Is that alright?”

“Sounds good, yeah.” He tried to keep his voice cool. “You want me to pick you up?”

“No need. I’ll just... meet you at the house.”

“Alright,” David sighed. He couldn’t believe that the sheer prospect of having a serious talk could still bring so much awkwardness to them. Especially after all the hurdles they’d encountered and overcome in all those years.

“Good. So, is there something I need to know? Everything okay?”

“Um, you mean with Eaden?”

“For example, yeah,” she said almost incredulously. Not that he left her completely in the unknown whenever she was away from the little one, and she didn’t expect hourly updates, but not being able to just check on her and see her whenever she felt like it was still so incredibly hard.

“No worries, everything is fine,” he said warmly.

“Okay. Then why are you still in bed?”

“Uh yeah well,” he stalled and cleared his throat. “I didn’t sleep well last night, so I’m just catching up on some while Eaden is out with West and some of her friends for a couple of hours,” David answered, deliberately not getting into detail on why he was still so tired.

The baby had been fussy all night; whimpering, crying and asking for Mama in her sleep. Based on that and her fire red cheeks, David was betting on a new set of teeth coming through. But since Eaden had woken up fairly happy and rested, as if nothing had happened, there was no need to alarm the mother who was thousand of miles away from her baby.

“Eaden is out with West and a couple of her friends? That sounds like she’s… twelve or something,” Gillian said, amusement swinging in her voice. He couldn’t see it, but he bet she had the cutest smirk on her lips right now.

“Yeah,” David agreed with a chuckle. “She’s being introduced to the lifestyle of today's sixteen years olds. They went to Point Dume’s beach and I already got a video of like... six teens dancing to some music and our little girl sitting in the middle of everything… under an umbrella, sunscreen painted on her face indian style, sippy cup in one and a pirates flag in the other hand. So I’m apologizing in advance for any damage done on our child’s innocent little mind.”

Gillian laughed out loud, a full belly laugh he hadn’t heard in way too many days, and it sounded like music to his ears.

“I have no doubt that she is having the time of her life right now. She’s becoming a little Californian Girl, huh? She looked quite tanned in the video you sent us.”

“Yeah, she got a little sun-kissed in the last three days. West says her hair is starting to look like she’d gotten it done by a professional with all the highlights in it.”

Gillian sighed. “I miss her so much, David. Just… give her a big kiss from me once she’s back home, will you?”
“Certainly. She’ll be excited to hear you’ll be back in a couple of days.”

Gillian smiled. “I can’t wait either.”

Three days later, Gillian was sitting on the plane back to Vancouver, having said her goodbyes to Oscar and Felix hours ago as she’d dropped them off at their father’s house. The colorful sheet of paper they’d crafted for her the night before was neatly sitting on top of her clothes in her carry-on bag. 32 days were to cross out until she’d see her boys again.

Gillian felt an almost childish frustration that she couldn’t have it all. Her kids, her partner and her work, all at the same place and at the same time. Just this once.

At the beginning, the prospect of filming this new season had been overwhelmingly exciting. The fact that it would be work, hard work, had somehow made it so far into the back of her mind that the intensity of the first days had taken her completely by surprise. As did the problems that had kept piling up faster than she thought was even possible.

Despite the careful and thoughtful preparation beforehand, their lives were way too complicated for everything to go smoothly.

To say that it was all becoming too much - juggling a life in Europe and another one in the US - and actually declaring defeat, was very tempting at the moment.

She already couldn’t even remember what the first episode was all about, and still hadn’t read past page two of the new script. Yet she owed it to Chris and the loyal fanbase to focus on this, and not much else, knowing how much people were looking forward to these six new episodes. And contradictory of what some people were thinking, it was important to her too.

Almost eleven hours after she boarded the completely packed British Airways flight to Vancouver, Gillian finally walked through the sliding doors after spending an hour getting through security, including an unnecessary argument with one very annoyed border officer about the lack of empty pages in her passport.

She was tired, but the better part of the exhaustion she felt was coming from what she knew was lying ahead of her.

A long, lonely way home and an uncomfortable talk which would stir up one heck of a lot of suppressed emotions and fears. Nothing she was really looking forward to. Never had.

Even from far away she was able to spot the long line of people queuing for a vacant cab, and she let her chin fall onto her chest with a heavy sigh on her way towards the end of the line. It would take her at least another fifteen minutes to even get into a car.

A family of six was waiting right before her. The youngest child, a boy she estimated to be around three years old, was pushing his stroller around, and Gillian gave him twenty seconds to ram that thing into her shins if his parents wouldn’t stop pestering their teenage daughter, who was typing on her phone, almost completely ignoring their pleas to take one of her younger siblings by the hand, who the mother held by his wrist, and who were desperately trying to escape. It was a mess Gillian was all too familiar with, and she chuckled inwardly at the beauty of it.

And then, as if someone had counted down the seconds, she felt a tire rolling over her right foot and the right edge of the stroller hit her knee. Hard.
The boy was pulled away from the handles by in an instant with a warning “Braydon!” by the father, and the teenager dutifully grabbed the little ones’ hands while the mother rolled the stroller back hastily, muttered her apologies and looked at Gillian in a mixture of embarrassment, annoyance and expectation. Expecting the single woman with the little carry-on bag to make some kind of a snarky remark, or at least roll her eyes at them, and Gillian could see the surprise on the woman’s face when she was given a soft smile.

“It’s alright, don’t worry,” she appeased with a shake of her head. The father was looking at her with a doubtful expression, but the mother was smiling that same relieved and thankful tired smile she was wearing herself when they were out in the wild as a family, and no one was behaving themselves.

There was that fleeting moment of sadness again, and the feeling that half her life was indeed missing made her throat tighten for a second before suddenly, she felt a hand coming to its rest on the small of her back, making her startle.

She turned abruptly, and looked into the familiar faces of her own little family smiling down at her.

“You said you didn’t want me to pick you up, but I wasn’t expecting you to completely ignore us,” David quipped with a sly grin on his lips, his hand not leaving her back even as Eaden plunged forward into her arms.

“Wha-, hey!” Gillian let out in surprise and caught the baby halfway before bringing her close to her chest. “Hey, honey. Wow, hi.”

“Hihi Mama,” Eaden babbled and squealed as Gillian peppered her little face in sweet kisses.

“Hi, baby! That is… one heck of a surprise! Wha-, where are you coming from?” she asked and looked around.

“Oh, we were standing right over there,” he extended his arm to his left and pointed at a column.

“Oh.” She must’ve walked right past them. “I guess I was too distracted by that horrendously long line here,” Gillian chuckled bashfully, and let her eyes wander over him while pressing little kisses on Eaden’s temple. He wore a decent 7-day scruff, and was dressed as if he was coming straight from a photoshoot; blue linen shirt, skinny jeans and a pair of dark brown shoes Gillian was sure she hadn’t seen before.

She was completely taken aback by his whole appearance, by how shockingly hot he looked, and was just staring at him dumbstruck for a couple of moments, as if she hadn’t seen him in weeks.

“Yeah well,” David nodded and with a quick glance to both sides, gently lead her out of line by her elbow. “If you want, there’s a car with your name on waiting outside to bring you home.”

He was grinning now, that soft boyish grin that made her knees buckle every single time she saw it on his lips, knowing that this particular smile was only reserved for her.

“Uh yeah, I’d really like that,” she stuttered and swallowed, adjusting Eaden’s weight to one side of her hip before running a hand through her own, unruly hair. Could she smell herself or was she just imagining it? She couldn’t believe that she was feeling so self-conscious all of a sudden.

Sensing her discomfort, he leaned down and placed a soft kiss on the shell of her ear, briefly stroking his daughter's head, whose face was now buried into Gillian’s neck.

Gillian’s cheeks flushed in an instant, and she noticed the other mother smiling at her from the corner of her eye.
“You look gorgeous. Come on, let’s go home,” David said and took her hand on their way to the parking garage.

Their way home was mostly silent. When they’d reached the car, Eadens little hand had already found its way into Gillian’s blouse and had started to tuck at her bra impatiently. While there had been the small hope that one week would be enough at her age to wean herself for good, Gillian felt nothing but relieved that she’d pumped at home when Eaden looked up at her with these big, trusting blue eyes and played with the loose strands of her hair while nursing in the backseat of the car. She was still a little baby needing her mother.

When they were finished, Gillian took a seat beside Eaden, gently caressing her daughter’s little face while the baby fought hard to stay awake, not yet ready to take her eyes off her mother.

The prospect of having to have that talk was hanging over them like a dark cloud, making it hard to concentrate even on the small talk they were trying to hold up.

How’s Oscar doing? Did Eaden eat well? Did she say a new word? When will West and Miller come to Vancouver? Have you read the new script yet? It’s supposed to be funny...

By the time they reached the house, Eaden was asleep, and the sun was starting to set.

Gillian took her time to tuck the baby into the crib - changed and put a fresh pair of pyjamas on her, rocked her, indulging her child’s weight in her arms and the sweet baby scent, and humming a couple of lullabies before finally laying her down.

Vancouver was different from what she was used from it. No rain in weeks, hot days and mild nights. She wasn’t surprised to find David outside by the illuminated pool, clad in black boxer shorts and the shirt he was wearing earlier, feet dangling in the water. His back was to her, but as Gillian came closer, she could see the smoke of a cigarette rising above him. A bottle of beer was standing beside him at the poolside. It was silent except for the waves of the ocean crashing softly against the shore nearby.

“Need something to loosen up a little?” he asked and held out the cigarette, not looking at her as she put the baby monitor on the ground and pulled her dark blue skirt a little higher before sitting down beside him. He turned his head when she didn’t reach for the smoke.

She was staring at him with an unreadable expression.

“Why would I need something to loosen up?”

“Aren’t you as… tense as I am?”

“Why are you tense?”

He scoffed incredulously and took a last drag before stubbing it out behind him. A sweet scent immediately filled her nose, and she closed her eyes and inhaled deeply as she let her feet slip into the water. It was cool and felt incredible on her swollen feet.

“What did you mean by ‘you’re scaring me, David’? What exactly does that mean?” he asked, referring to a text message she’d sent him a couple of days ago, and took a swig out of his beer bottle. She shook her head when he offered it to her, but immediately regretted it. The small talk had come to an end faster than she’d expected.
Gillian shrugged her shoulders and stared down at her feet, absently playing with the thin strap of her white tank-top. “I don’t know.”

“Of course you do.”

“Why are you pretending that you don’t know exactly what it means?”

“I don’t. I just want to know… what did I do to make you question my feelings for you?”

“You didn’t do anything to make me doubt your feelings. If there’s one thing you’ve always made sure of, it’s that I know you love me.”

“Then what is it? The logistics? Bad sex?”

She rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue. “Don’t be crude.”

“We don’t have bad sex?”

She shot him a glance and pursed her lips. “Maybe I just wondered if you still want this relationship. If it’s still something that makes you happy.”

“Jesus,” David huffed and brought the bottle back to his lips. “Seriously, Gillian. Sometimes I have trouble figuring out if this is just you being overly dramatic or insecure. I mean, it doesn’t matter in the end, but damn… something has to change. You can’t keep running away from me when things get complicated.”

“I know.”

“Do you? I’m not so sure about that, to be honest.”

“It’s not as easy as you think, you know,” she raised her voice in defense, eyebrows now furrowed tightly.

“I know it isn’t. But Gillian, correct me if I’m wrong, but I think I gave you a lot of opportunities to calm down and talk to me even after you accused me of wanting to make you feel even worse than you already did. And sometime between that and the point you left for London and wouldn’t call for days, I expected you to… I can’t say it any differently, I’m sorry… but I expected you to get back to your senses, to be honest. Because that was one fucked up stunt you pulled there.”

“Yeah, I realize that,” she said remorsefully. “And I’m so scared to fuck this up and lose you,” she said quietly, her voice a mixture of desperation and resignation. “Again.”

He licked over his lips and swallowed before looking at her leg and putting his hand on her knee. He gave it an affectionate squeeze. “Gill-”

“This is what happens all the time, right? Me fucking things up. It’s that… damned self-destructiveness of mine. Making everyone’s lives more complicated and putting a strain on my relationships because… yeah, why? I don’t even know myself! Because of my ego? My anxiety? Because of not having enough faith in things?”

David shook his head slowly and raised his left leg out of the water to put it behind her. He was facing her now, and she also shifted so they could look at one another. His hand came to a rest on her upper thigh. “I can’t tell you what it is, Gillian. But you need to figure it out, or find someone to help you figure it out. Of course I’m hurt and confused. But it’s-” he took a deep breath, “It’s hard to see that the person you love tends to fight alone.”
“I know,” she murmured. Tears were beginning to form in her eyes and she let out a shaky breath.

“And it’s you who suffers the most in the end.”

Gillian nodded thoughtfully, averting her gaze, and he watched her silently for a moment before he spoke again. “I learned that I don’t need a lot to be happy, but you-” he reached up and caressed her cheek with the back of his hand, never breaking eye-contact, literally forcing her to keep her eyes on him. “You are the most essential part to my happiness. I don’t want to imagine my world without the kids, but you are my foundation; my base. You’ve been for over twenty years. I know it’s hard; but we knew it would be that way when you got pregnant. And we agreed to be there for each other. That’s what we wanted. And I am here.”

“Yes, you’re here,” she leaned into his touch, and a single tear escaped her eye. He was the sweetest man, the most reliable partner, and it angered her that she was this emotional, unstable mess. She had no reason to cry but out of gratitude, yet she cried out of fear. Fear that she wouldn’t be able to be the woman she needed to be to make this relationship work. To make a marriage work.

As if he was able to read her thoughts, he took her hands in his and brought them to his lips, peppering them with soft kisses before saying, “Separation hasn’t even crossed my mind, okay?”

“Okay,” she whispered, sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and smiled.

“We will figure it out together, but you need to let people help you, babe.” His arms came around her shoulder and waist, pulling her into a tight hug. Burying her nose into his soft shirt, she inhaled the masculine, rich scent of his as if it had been years she’d smelled it last.

“We’ve got this,” he kissed the top of her head and inhaled deeply. “Even with the bad sex and all,” he joked, and her whole body was shaking as she let out a muffled laugh against his shirt.

Her fingers found their way under his shirt, and ever so lightly, she started to run her fingers over the smooth skin of his back. He jolted under her touch, and she giggled quietly at his ticklishness while moving her flat hands up higher, pressing him closer against her. He was warm and soft, and she had craved touching him so badly in the last couple of days when she was laying in bed, alone.

His hands moved from her back to her arms and up to her face, cradling her cheek in his palms and gently lifting her head from his chest. He was wearing that soft, dreamy smile of his - the one that was capable of melting thousands of hearts.

It faded only for the briefest of seconds before he was there, kissing her, slowly and tentatively.

Her belly tingled fiercely, and she let out a soft whimper when she felt his tongue boldly seeking entrance and grazing over hers. His fingertips started to do these wonderful things on the sensitive skin of her throat and down to her neck - circling and tugging, again and again as their kiss intensified rapidly. Hungry lips clinging to one another, only letting go to change the angle, to explore again what had been explored so many times before, but would never get old.

It had always been a thin line between fighting, reconciliation and sex for them. They were good in fighting fiercely, and even better at sex. The part in between had always been a small one, but they’d become better at it over time while the fighting had gotten more civilised, and the sex mind blowing. It had taken Gillian a long time to understand this logic and that it was a part of growing up and finally being in a healthy relationship rather than a toxic one.

His hands had travelled down to her hips and under her top when she realized that her own were busy unbuttoning his shirt, as if they had a mind of their own. It fell from his shoulders just seconds
later, and her lips were drawn to the sun-kissed skin of his chest like magnet to metal. He tasted rich and salty, and she could feel goosebumps rising underneath her mouth as she kissed and nipped her way up to his neck. The vibration of his low growl tickled her lips, and she smiled against his skin as he bunched up the hem of her top underneath her arms, gently urging her to raise them over her head.

Her hips jerked forward when his lips closed around her engorged nipple. Jolts of pleasure were running straight from her tit down to her already throbbing clit. How on earth his kisses alone were capable of doing that to her, she still didn’t know.

He held firmly onto her waist, keeping her still while she was starting to squirm under his touch. All her senses were on high alert, and the sounds his mouth made as he sucked, licked and nibbled on her were so unbelievably arousing, she wanted nothing more than for him to move down, where she was waiting for him, all slick and swollen.

He suddenly hummed, as if she’d said something, and pulled her over and onto his lap in one swift motion. Her skirt wasn’t tight or uncomfortable for either of them, but he seemed to want to get rid of it nonetheless, and helped her into a standing position.

As she stood up, he put his arms around her legs, stroking up and down their length while smiling up at her. His eyes were dark with lust, lips moist and pink and expression smug as fuck. She couldn’t possibly love him more.

She shimmied out of her airy skirt and kicked it aside, leaving on a tiny black string that caught his attention immediately.

He licked his lips and swallowed. Oh this woman with her milky white, velvet thighs. He could live the rest of his life with his head in between their softness while gently, or not so gently, squeezing their outer sides with his hands. His hands always needed to be occupied.

As did hers, apparently.

She ran her fingers slowly between the valley of her firm tits down to her navel, circling it languidly before wandering down further, tracing the hem of her panties with her fingertips, knowing exactly what touching herself did to him.

He clenched his jaw when her hand disappeared beneath the soft fabric and his breath quickened, nostrils flaring as he inhaled the scent of her need. He was fully concentrated on her, and the thin material didn’t leave much to the imagination so that he could see exactly what she was doing with her tiny hand on her perfect little pussy.

She gasped as her fingers came in contact with her clit, and the other hand shot out to steady herself on his shoulder. He grinned and turned his head to the side to kiss her wrist, eyes never leaving her flushed face. He couldn’t begin to explain how gorgeous she looked with her lips slightly apart, chest rising and falling rapidly as she increased the speed of her hand, knees starting to wobble.

“Oh god,” she gasped, digging her nails into his flesh. “I can’t-”

“Yeah,” he said, knowing that she wasn’t able to stand up much longer, and leaned forward, pressing a kiss onto her navel while she slowly removed her hand from between her legs.

“You smell delicious,” he whispered and took her hand by the wrist, looking up at her as he slowly closed his lips around two slick fingers. “Hmm,” he hummed and released them with a loud plop.

“You taste like heaven. So sweet.”
“Sweet?”

“Yeah,” he murmured, hooking his index fingers under the thin straps of her panties, slowly pulling them down.

Her hand reached back down right away, tentatively at first, but then one finger disappeared wholly inside, and she started to buck into her own hand.

“Jesus, babe. You’re so fucking hot.” His own hand slid into his shorts, finding his dick thick and ready, pulsating and waiting desperately for attention. He started with slow, languid strokes, barely any pressure, just a little something to take off the edge. He reached up and palmed her right breast, squeezing it firmly before starting to roll her nipple between his thumb and index finger.

Her eyes caught sight of his busy hand and she whimpered before it grew into a proper moan as her clit hit this wonderful spot on her palm that almost made her tumble over the edge for a second. She slumped forward against his body, his face now against her belly, surprising her by biting and licking at her soft flesh hungrily. She let him for a bit, ran her fingers through his hair, watching him leaving wet spots and red marks on her stomach.

Suddenly, she pulled him away from her. Her patience was gone. No matter how good it felt, she needed him now, and let him know by pushing at his chest so that he landed back on his elbows. He chuckled in delight and raised his hips as her fingers tucked at his shorts, not wasting any time anymore, finally freeing him.

The twitch of his cock as Gillian’s eyes fell on it didn’t go unnoticed, and she tucked her bottom lip between her teeth and smiled one of the slyest smiles he’d ever seen. It made him harden even a little more.

He welcomed her in his lap by putting his arms around her slim waist and pulling her close, kissing her.

This felt so, so right. All of it - her warm body flush against his, his pulsating dick nestled in her hot slit, tongues playing their exciting game. This woman was his undoing in the best ways possible.

David yelped in surprise as he suddenly found himself in her hand. Her grip was much firmer than his own, of course. She knew him better than he knew himself after all. She stroked him with purpose, slowing only to circle the tip of his penis with her thumb before squeezing it in her palm and starting to rub only the shaft, and his efforts to stay still died with an involuntary buck into her hand.

When the head of his cock dipped into her wetness, both of them gasped and quickly looked at one another before falling into soft laughter.

“I love the fuck out of you, you have no idea,” he said genuinely as she sank down onto him; soft, tight walls suddenly surrounding him wholly.

“Hmm,” Gillian raised her right eyebrow, smiling smugly at him. “I fucking love your cock,” she said, starting to rotate her hips.

“You fucking love my cock or you love fucking my cock?”

“Where’s the difference? I miss it when it’s not in me,” she slurred and closed her eyes, concentrating on the sensation of her slow movements.

David grinned and squeezed her thighs. “I can assure you that it misses you too.”
“Ohhh,” she moaned and squeezed her muscles around him.

“Yeah…” he breathed, holding onto her hips as her arms came around his neck and breasts were shoved into his face.

Her movements were becoming frantic as the hot puffs of air coming out of her mouth were wettening his forehead. She was completely uninhibited now, grinding her clit against his pelvis, moaning and whimpering loudly as her release came closer and closer.

“Do you ever miss my pussy?” she shifted in his lap and looked at him. Her movements had come to a stop, only her inner muscles were working, milking him with every squeeze.

“Hell yeah,” David rasped and his balls tightened dangerously. “Every day, every hour, every minute-” he groaned as she dropped her head into the crease of his neck and bit his throat, “Every second… I cannot kiss it, lick it, fuck it... I miss it.”

“Then fuck it now,” she said and lifted her head off his shoulder. “Fuck me, David.”

“Jesus Christ,” he growled and wrapped his arm around her waist.

She’d expected him to turn them both around and settle back in between her legs, but instead, he lifted her to the side so that she ended up sitting on her knees beside him. He came up behind her and pushed her forward so he wouldn’t fall into the pool before bending over her and licking along the line of her spine.

Her body shivered under him. Every nerve ending from her toes up to her head felt like it was on fire, and everything was tingling.

She almost screamed out loud when he entered her from behind, slamming his hips against her ass while at the same time, biting into the side of her neck.

Her arms were suddenly so weak that she had to brace herself on her elbows, and he placed a last couple of kisses on her shoulder blade before thrusting into her hard and fast.

His fingers were almost painfully digging into her sides, and somewhere in the back of her mind Gillian realized that she would be a sore, walking bruise tomorrow. They both would.

His arm snuck around her middle and suddenly, his fingers were on her swollen clit, pressing, rubbing and pinching and fuck, it felt so good. So unbelievably good.

“Fuck you’re so tight. Feels so good,” he whispered into her neck.

He was everywhere, his large body surrounding hers completely. Even after all these years she couldn’t believe that they were such a good match, with him being so big and her being so tiny. But nothing had ever been more perfect than this.

“David,” she whimpered as his fingers became quicker and her walls began to flutter around him. It was only a matter of seconds before, before… she moaned, and her legs started to shake violently, almost giving up on her if his grip hadn’t been so strong.

“You’re coming, babe,” he grunted, giving her a few quick, hard thrusts and removing his fingers from her clit to press them into her lower belly right above her mons.

“Fu-huck!” she cried out loud as her orgasm hit her forcefully, and the last thing she remembered was the feeling of his hot semen spilling into her before everything went black.
His face was right above hers when she came back to herself. Her heart was still beating rapidly in her chest, but she was laying on her back now.

“Did I just faint during orgasm?” she asked confused, but relaxed immediately when he grinned at her.

“No, not really. You kept talking to me, even if it was just “O’s” and “I’s”. But your muscles gave out,” he said and lay down beside her, cradling her close against his chest.

“What did you do with your hand?”

He grinned. “You liked it?”

“It almost killed me!”

“Nah, I doubt that,” he whispered and nuzzled his nose against hers. “Glad to see it works for you, though.”

“Fuck, David. My legs are still shaking.”

“Yep, they are. Are you okay?” he asked softly, his genuine concern making her smile.

Gillian nodded and closed her eyes, enjoying the feeling of his warm hands slowly roaming over her back. “Yes. But I have to tell you” she murmured and met his gaze again. She cupped his chin between her fingers and drew him closer to her face before whispering, “If we ever get a divorce, it’s definitely because of the bad sex.”

Both of them were chuckling quietly as she captured his lips for a soft, passionate kiss.
A lie can run around the world before the truth has got its boots on. - Terry Pratchett

Gillian jolted awake as she heard a high-pitched cry coming from the other room, and immediately hissed at the sharp pain shooting through her neck, caused by her sudden movement.

“Oww, fuck,” she cursed and reached for the bedside lamp while shielding her eyes against the brightness. A quick look at the alarm clock told her that it was just a few minutes past midnight, and the spot beside her was still empty.

With an exaggerated sigh, Gillian slowly rolled out of the bed and stretched her stiff neck before shuffling out of the bedroom and towards the nursery.

The repercussions of their little accident a couple of days ago, when she reversed Scully’s Ford Explorer right into a pole she had totally forgotten was even there, were still palpable. Very much so. While the dizziness had gone away completely, the pain in her neck and head was still there, and the Tylenol she’d taken before bed was already wearing off, leaving her with an unpleasant, throbbing pain right between her eyes.

David, who had been with her in the car when it happened, and who deserved an award for being the prankster of the year for scaring her to death with that neck brace, was completely fine on the other hand, and already back at his nightly dance lessons for the 5th episode, which they were about to start shooting.

For the last few of days, he’d gone to the gym right after work, or, on days he got home before her, after tucking Eaden into bed, leaving Gillian for a couple of exhausting and very loud evenings alone with her two sons, who’d arrived a week ago.

David was completely immersed in his training, and extremely determined to master every single move for this dance sequence. He was a fit man with a great stamina, but she could tell that this was a challenge even for him. However, David had never been one to turn down a challenge; no, he thrived on them, especially the physical ones. It most certainly didn’t hurt his enthusiasm and motivation that he had a young, equally fit and very beautiful young woman as his personal coach.

She was happy that he was having fun, but she missed him in the evenings, especially after those long, tiring days on set, when she just needed a shoulder to lean her head on while snuggling up on the sofa, or someone to share a hot bubble bath with.

Things had just gotten a little bit better between them; the tension had slowly dissipated over the last couple of weeks, and working together had turned out to be very easy and extremely pleasant. But what they still needed the most, time for each other, was very limited these days. Even though they were living under the same roof, they rarely managed to sit together in the evenings, share a meal and just talk. Instead, all their meals over the course of one day were usually rushed, and if they happened to end up in a lunchroom at the same time, there were at least four other people sitting with them. And their attempts to sneak out and have lunch somewhere else had always been cut short by a set-call. In the evenings, the kids and the dog had to be entertained and cared for after a long day at childcare, or with the Nanny.

The fact that he got to spend more time alone with his dancing teacher than with her didn’t really help either. Not that she was jealous, by any means, nor was she a 15-year-old teenager unable to spend a day without her boyfriend. But still… it was more than a week now that they had been able to spend a couple of hours together, in private, just the two of them. She was missing her man. And
she envied the one who currently had him all to herself.

Gillian quickly made her way towards the nursery just across the hallway, hearing Eaden soft sobs even before she’d pushed the door completely open. A night light in the form of a half-moon was softly illuminating Eaden’s bedroom in a gentle glow, just enough for Gillian to see Eaden standing in her crib on wobbly legs, holding onto the white railing with one hand and rubbing her eye with the other, desperately whimpering for her Mommy.

“Hey, what’s the matter, sweetheart?” Gillian cooed and reached forward to lift her daughter out of the bed, but stopped in her tracks when she felt that Eaden’s pajamas were completely soaked.

With a quick look down into the crib, Gillian detected a yellow sippy cup on Eaden’s mattress and let out a groan.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, David,” she muttered almost inaudibly and lifted the baby up, carrying her over to the changing table while she gently stroked her warm head. “It’s alright, honey. I’m here. It’s just water.”

She had lost count of the number of times she’d told David not to put a cup of water into Eaden’s bed. While being leak-proof was really the definition of a sippy cup, theirs never were for some reason, and Eaden always managed to spill everything all over herself.

The baby let out a couple of whimpers as Gillian lay her down. The angry red circles around her bright blue eyes were an ugly contrast to her fair baby skin, and Gillian quickly wiped the tears off her face before she continued to rub her eyes with her tiny fists.

“It’s alright. Mommy has you nice and dry again in no time, honey,” Gillian whispered and began to unbutton the front of her blue polka dot pajamas. She couldn’t really blame him, though. As of late, Eaden refused to go to sleep without her cup, and if they’d take it away once she was asleep, she’d wake up barely an hour later in search for her drink, and would bluster into one gigantic crying fit that could last a couple of hours. No matter what they did, their daughter just wasn’t able - or ready, as David liked to say - to sleep through the night just yet. There was always something not quite perfect. Like a leaking sippy-cup.

At 15 months old, Eaden wasn’t able to do a lot of things Piper, Oscar and Felix had already done when they were much, much younger than their sister. Sleeping through the night was just one of them. Being able to walk without help was the other that was causing some concerns.

Gillian did her best not to compare her baby with her older siblings, or other toddlers, knowing that David was right when he said that every child develops at its own pace. Yet, as her mother, Gillian often couldn’t help but be concerned, and wondering when Eaden would finally hit certain milestones, or if she needed professional help to catch up.

Gillian was aware that she was most likely driving herself crazy over nothing, and that she had a tendency to forget about the things Eaden outclassed other kids her age by far. Talking was her greatest strength, for example. Gillian knew no other 1,5-year old who was able to speak and understand so many words as Eaden. And her attention span was incredibly long. She would sit still, and listen to a story or look at a child’s book until they’d reached its end.

Deep inside, Gillian knew that everything would be just fine, and that David’s confidence in their daughter was exactly what she needed to grow into a happy, healthy person who was brave enough to try something new over and over again, even if she was scared, or had failed before.

She would walk eventually, Gillian knew, and until then, she had to cherish the time her first class
crawler was speeding through the house on her knees, because it would never come back again.

“Dood, Mommy?” Eaden suddenly asked, much calmer now, and looking down at herself, curiously inspecting the fresh, navy striped pajamas Gillian had just finished buttoning up.

“All good, baby girl,” Gillian replied and sat her up, gently stroking some unruly strands of hair out of her daughter’s little face. “All good to go back to bed,” she added with a soft smile.

Her little daughter looked so, so sweet with that bedhead of hers and her bottom lip pulled between her teeth, staring up at Gillian with tired, but attentive eyes. It was getting hard to tell who she resembled more. For a very long time, she looked like the spitting image of Piper. But now, with the longer hair and the more distinct features, Gillian could see more and more of West in her. Except for the eyes - those were still all Piper’s. Very big and very blue.

Some days, Gillian still couldn’t believe that she was allowed to have something so perfect so late in life.

“Mommy Daddy bed?” Eaden prompted, her voice sweet and innocent, knowing exactly how to get what she wanted.

Gillian chuckled softly, lifted her off the changing table and placed her on her left hip. Lowering her head, she nuzzled her nose against the soft spot right behind Eaden’s little ear, where she smelled so unbelievably warm and sweet, and hummed before lifting her head again. “Hey,” Gillian playfully tapped her fingers against Eaden’s belly. “Do you know how much I love you?” she asked, and with a big grin reaching from one ear to the other, Eaden shook her head in excited anticipation of what she knew would be coming next.

“I love you,” Gillian started, every word was drawn out, signing the word ‘love’ by making a fist and crossing her arm over her chest between pointing at herself and then at Eaden before starting to tickle her under the arm while at the same time saying, “sooo much!”, and making the baby squeal and giggle in delight. A warm, soft smile played on Gillian’s lips. “Mommy loves you so much, Eaden. So, so, so, so much!”

“Ov u Mommy,” the little one replied sweetly, also signing the words, but just with one hand, and let her body slump against Gillian’s.

“Good job, sweetie! Come on, let’s go cuddle a bit in Mommy’s and Daddy’s bed, alright? Mommy is in serious need of some cuddles.”

During nights like this, when Eaden was awkwardly sprawled out on top of her, tiny fingers opening and closing against her skin as the baby held her boob in place so she could nurse in this new, very weird favorite position of hers to eat in, while her 6-year-old was shuffling across the room towards the bed, Gillian definitely felt like a part of some alternate universe in which she just happened to end up as the luckiest woman on this whole planet. How the hell she had ended up like this, with a life filled with so much love and joy, she would never know. But often asked herself which road it was that had ultimately lead her here, under which circumstances and premises she’d chosen it, or how much this life had changed her as a person.

The rebellious, extremely troubled teenager was still in her, although most of the time peacefully living side by side with the outspoken woman and her wide range of interests, the ambitious award-winning actress in her forties, and the devoted, loving mother of four.
Gillian’s life was full of everything one could ever wish for. But her family, the kids, and David, were making it whole and truly meaningful.

Extending her arm to grab her son’s hand, Gillian asked, “Are you alright? Did Eaden wake you?” and pulled to help him climb onto the bed.

“Mm-yeah,” he lamented, earning a pitiful smile from his mother.

“Oh, I’m sorry. C’mere, baby.” She put her arm around his shoulder and pulled him close against her side before tucking the sheets around him and pressing a firm kiss on his forehead. Once upon a time, she hadn’t been a big fan of letting the kids sleep in their bed on a regular basis for many reasons. But with two very affectionate and cuddly sons, a newborn baby and a partner who never had a problem with it, more like encouraged her to enjoy the time they still wanted to come to seek physical comfort, it had gotten really hard to hold onto all these reasons. So unless the door was closed, they were welcome, and now, Gillian really enjoyed when they were coming over every now and then.

“Hi,” Felix rested his head on Gillian’s shoulder and smiled at Eaden, who was curiously watching him from her position on top of Gillian, still nursing. Her lips grew into a grin and she reached out and smacked her brother’s face with her chubby little hand, making him giggle. To his sister’s delight, he pretended to snap her fingers and bite into them a couple of times, making her completely lose interest in her midnight snack so that Gillian was able to pull her shirt down and shift the baby into a more comfortable position on her belly.

“Where is David, Mum?” he then asked, taking Eaden’s hand and placing a kiss on her fingers.

“He’s still working.”

He looked up at her with furrowed eyebrows. “Oh, it’s so late! Isn’t he tired?”

“Hmm, yeah. I bet he is,” she smiled and ran her fingers through Felix’ thick blonde hair. His consideration and empathy for other people truly never failed to warm her heart. He was such a sweet and gentle little guy. “He still needs to practice his dance moves though. He wants to be very good at it.”

“Oh, okay,” he nodded slowly. “It will be on TV, right? So he has to be good, because people will see it.”

“Yes, that’s right. But it’s not like what you know from gymnastics where you have to get it perfect at the first try when you’re at a competition. You have a few tries and they film all your tries, and then the director and his team pick the best one out of them.”

“Really?”

“Yes. That makes it a little easier, doesn’t it?”

He nodded thoughtfully. “I guess so, yeah. But he still has to know his choreography.”

“Yes, he still has to practice it very hard,” Gillian agreed, watching Eaden reach for her brother's head, grabbing his hair. “Please be gentle, Eaden,” she said, but her daughter started to pull on his hair regardless, and Gillian sighed.

Both boys had a very high tolerance when it came to Eaden. Would one of them do something like that to the other, there would be one hell of a lot of screaming. Their patience and love for their little sister were basically endless. Never had she been able to evoke an even remotely mean reaction from
her brothers, no matter how many and what kind of toys she’d destroyed or stolen, how annoying or loud she’d been. They were the best brothers Gillian could imagine. But the downside was that Eaden enjoyed a freedom that often went beyond what Gillian and David found acceptable. And pulling hair or hitting was definitely not acceptable in their book.

“Honey, if you want her to stop you can tell her, okay?” she reminded him probably for the hundredth time, but Felix just pulled his head back, which of course hurt him even more, so she opened the baby’s fingers around a strand of blonde hair and started caressing Felix’ cheek with Eaden’s little hand in hers.

“Look, I think Felix would like it much better if you were gentle with him, Eaden. We don’t pull on hair, okay? We’re very gentle with each other.” Her voice was soft, but firm, and Eaden was studying her face intently before continuing to run her hand over her brothers face on her own, slowly and gently.

“Thank you, Eaden,” Felix smiled and closed his eyes, obviously enjoying the nice treatment.

“Feef!” Eaden screeched loudly, lifting herself off her mother’s chest and plunged forward, head-on colliding with her brother, who erupted in a fit of laughter.

“Hey!” Gillian called out and caught one of Eaden’s feet just before it would kick her in the face.

“Shh, guys! It’s the middle of the night!” she whispered. “We’re not starting to wrestle now!”

“She really doesn’t seem sleepy anymore, Mum,” Felix chuckled and pulled Eaden’s upper body on top of his own and in the same moment, Gillian’s phone lit up on the nightstand and started to vibrate, announcing an incoming call. Momentarily distracted, Gillian glanced over Felix’ head in an attempt to see who it was, not noticing the knee that was aiming directly at her jaw, and suddenly hitting her with full force.

***

The half-hour drive through the middle of the night didn’t do anything to help loosen up the knot of nerves that had manifested itself in the pit of David’s stomach. On the contrary. The closer he got to home, the worse he was feeling.

This evening had not exactly turned out how he’d anticipated it. Not in the slightest.

What was supposed to be his last dancing lesson had turned into a long debate with Melanie and him having had to ask Daniela to delete her post on Instagram, which had been a little bit too… suggestive. Too late however, the drama had already started in their again very active fandom, with the crazy ones amongst it completely freaking out on all social media platforms, calling poor Daniela all kinds of disgusting names, and accusing him of cheating - with a woman in her twenties who apparently was, according to some of his fans, ‘exactly the type of woman he would fall for without giving it another thought’. Thank God they weren’t the only fans he’d managed to make in the last twenty-five years.

From experience, very painful experience, he knew that Melanie was right, and that something needed to be done so it wouldn’t get worse, possibly end up in the yellow press, or even become the leading topic in every interview they’d give in the next couple of months. During the promotion of their show, no less. It didn’t take a genius to realize that this could turn into a complete disaster. Unfortunately, there weren’t many options left without making the mess bigger than it already was but deleting the post, and that would ultimately lead to a new uproar and more questions. No matter
what you did, whatever you’d say, people would always take it the wrong way.

The fandom drama was one thing they’d learned to deal with over the years. And by that, he simply meant ignore it. But times had changed. Pretty much all of the older kids were able to google now. Both Piper and West were openly active on instagram, facebook, and wherever else, therefore easy targets for everyone who wanted to blow off some steam and drag their parents through the mire. Some people knew no boundaries whatsoever. And protecting those kids from these freaks was getting harder and harder. Especially if he couldn’t even protect himself, or Gillian.

One post could change everything nowadays. A few single words, chosen without due consideration, could cause extreme havoc. Could ruin established, successful careers just as fast as a whole family. And he hated that he had to bring this back into his home, and to his family.

Gripping the steering wheel just a little harder, David inhaled deeply and turned the car to the right and into the illuminated driveway of their house before slowly bringing it to a halt.

It was quiet out here, peaceful. It always was.

He just hoped that it would stay this way, and that Gillian would believe him that he really hadn’t taken one of those ‘opportunities’ Daniela had talked about in her text, in which she’d tagged him, and posted with a very nice, very revealing picture of herself.
We live in a changing world, but we need to be reminded that the important things have not changed, and the important things will not change if we keep our priorities in proper order. - S. Truett Cathy

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas to all of you! I love you guys, thanks for everything! I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

The coffee was hot and surprisingly good, even though it had come without the shot of rum she would have loved, and really needed on this particular Wednesday morning.

The entire lot of the North Shore Studios in Vancouver was exceptionally bustling this morning, and maybe she wasn’t used to it anymore or she really was that stressed out, but she was glad to sit in this quiet trailer on this comfortable couch, far, far away from any trouble. Or so it seemed.

David stepped into his trailer in full Mulder gear. She knew that they had spent the entire previous day in Mulder’s office and would be there until noon today. He’d told her that they’d move to a country club in Pitt Meadows to shoot the dancing sequence this afternoon. And with wrapping the fifth episode, Melanie hoped that the rumors and accusations, which were currently making their rounds on social media, would also come to an end. It had only been a day, but she already had enough of it for a very long time.

Especially since David still appeared to be absolutely relaxed when he closed the door of his trailer behind him and stepped up to the couch where she’d been waiting for him for at least twenty minutes now.

“Good morning!” he said cheerfully and flashed her one of those annoyingly disarming smiles of his before he gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and flopped down next to her. He immediately started to loosen up his tie.

“Morning,” Melanie grumbled into her coffee and rolled her eyes. She was still fuming, and he still seemed absolutely oblivious.

When he left their little meeting last night, she’d secretly hoped that the rumors of him having an affair with his very young dancing instructor would evoke the same reaction in Gillian as it had in her, especially after learning that a stupid post on Instagram by said dancing instructor was the root of the problem.

Now, Melanie had to shake her head over her own naivety. As if Gillian, the queen of bad, insinuating social media posts, would’ve been bothered by such a thing.

Apparently, she was the only one of them realizing that David’s name attached to a slinky picture of a half-naked young woman and a suggestive offer wasn’t making that much of a good impression out there.

“And, how are things this morning?” David asked and folded his hands behind his head, looking at her with what she’d call an almost challenging expression.
Greetings from Gillian, Melanie thought and pursed her lips. It wasn’t like she wasn’t up for the challenge, but she’d rather just have a conversation with a fairly level-headed David. “Oh you know, it takes a while before such news make it around the globe, so—”

“So, everything’s fine.”

She shot him a warning look. “You know damn well how fast these things can get out of hand, so don’t you come to me with some bullshit like ‘see, Mel, everything you made me do last night wasn’t necessary’.”

He raised his hands defensively. “Wouldn’t even cross my mind. Look, I’m grateful for everything you do for me. But…” David shrugged his shoulders, “it wasn’t Dani’s intention to cause trouble. And it’s not like I have something to hide, or anything to be ashamed of.”

“I know that, David. But it’s my job to protect you from those who don’t care about you and your family. No matter if it’s a random fan who likes to accuse people of all kinds of things, someone you work with, or-” she suddenly stopped, pressing her lips together in a thin line.

“Or?” he leaned forward, searching her face.

She shook her head. “Nothing.”

“Or my girlfriend, is that what you wanted to say?”

“I didn’t say she doesn’t care. I’m just saying that… she’s not making the best choices when it comes to her or your public image.”

David sighed and clenched his jaw, leaning back against the cushions. “I think she just doesn’t take it that seriously. As in, it doesn’t bother her what people are saying online.”

“Well, that’s nice to hear. But frankly, I don’t really care if Gillian minds or not. When I say I’m trying to protect her, I basically mean trying to protect her from herself. Because we have a plan here, David, and that goes beyond what she finds acceptable or not. My concern is how things will affect you, your public image, and your children. If Gillian doesn’t care that a young woman lets everyone know that she wants - an affair, or whatever - with you, or if Gillian herself just loves to rile people up on social media with all those innuendos—”

“Mel-” David tried to cut in.

“You know what I think about that, David. It will backfire eventually. You talk to me in a couple of years.”

He waved his hand dismissively. “It’s just for fun…”

“Until it isn’t just fun anymore. We have next to no control over social media. I can’t stop people from talking or spreading crazy rumors, and literally everything could get viral these days, no matter if it’s true or not.”

“And what am I supposed to do? We all know what she does keeps people interested in us and the brand. They want to know and see what we’re up to, especially while we’re here in Vancouver. People want the banter. And of course,” he raised his hands and gave a half shrug, “they want to know how the baby's doing.”

“She uses your relationship and plays with your privacy, and I will never be a supporter of that. We’ve been through this time and time again. How come she just doesn’t want to learn anything
“Hey, please give her a break. She just enjoys sharing tiny bits of our lives, and she likes to tease. That’s just how she is. I might not participate all the time, but I definitely won’t take that away from her. It doesn’t harm anyone.”

Melanie sighed and shook her head. It was useless. She’d left meetings with him and Gillian feeling like life had been sucked right out of her - not just once, but multiple times over the last fifteen years. While he usually wasn’t that much of a tough case, Gillian had the ability to talk you into the ground, and everything that was left of you, in the end, could be compared to a kitten who’d just gotten run over by a bulldozer.

It had gotten worse in the last two years, and Melanie knew that this was mostly due to her own doing. While she had no idea how on earth Gillian had found out or who’d told her, she knew that ever since Gillian learned that Melanie had advised David to stay quiet about his involvement in Gillian’s pregnancy, she’d lost her.

It had been a mistake, one that had hurt Gillian very bad, and one Melanie was trying to make up for it ever since, and if it was just for Eaden - that wonderful little girl that was the best thing that could’ve happened to David and Gillian. She would do everything in her power to keep her out of the spotlight and make sure she could live a normal, happy life. Because ultimately, that’s what David and Gillian both wanted for their daughter.

Melanie just didn’t understand why Gillian was acting so carelessly these days. She clearly had fun and was receiving the attention she was looking out for. But after so many years, she had to be aware that everything came with a price - right?!

“Okay, what do you need me to do?” David offered, taking her hand.

She huffed out a laugh and shook her head.

A knock on the door made them both jump, and without waiting for an invitation, the door was being pulled open and a tall man with long brown hair stepped into the trailer. Set life had always been more convenient than polite, Melanie remembered.

“Dave?” the guy asked, and his eyes grew wide when he spotted Melanie. “Oh, sorry! I don’t wanna disturb, but we need you on set.”

David looked up and furrowed his brow. They’d been told it would take another half an hour to finish setting up Mulder’s office for the next scene. “What, why?”

The man shrugged his shoulders, but his one corner of his mouth tilted up in a lopsided grin. “Hurry up, they’re waiting!”

David groaned. “I’ll be out in a minute, Fred,” he finally replied and waited until the man had disappeared before turning back to Melanie, looking at her with an apologetic smile. “Sorry. You want to come?”

With a light chuckle, she patted his hand, inhaled deeply and shook her head. “Thanks for the offer, but no,” she stood up and grabbed her coat. “But don’t you worry… you did what you could do. Everything else’s my job,” Melanie winked and turned for the door.

Just when she was about to open it, he stopped her with his hand on her shoulder and smiled as he took her coat and held it up so she could slip in.
“You keep me updated?” he asked and opened the door for her.

Melanie looked up at him and managed a weak smile. The whole situation had put much more stress on him than he was willing to admit. She knew him, very well actually. His first concern was always his family, and how his actions would affect every single member of it. And while it wasn’t his doing what had happened in the last twenty-four hours, Melanie was sure that if Gillian had reacted differently, she’d have much more work to do now. In that respect, he was just a normal man deeply in love with his woman.

Mulder’s office hadn’t been used for over 13 years, and that’s exactly what it looked like in 2015. That was the weirdest part about coming back; that nothing was looking the way David was used to. It was stupid, really. The show had ended a lifetime ago, and everything had changed since then. But this modern, half furnished, too tidy and too spacious office didn’t resonate well with him, and he couldn’t really pinpoint why.

Another thing David didn’t understand right away was how his baby daughter and Piper had ended up in the middle of all of this, and it took him a few moments to take the whole scene in.

Eaden was standing by the desk, still clad in her bright pink pajamas, bedhead at its finest, holding onto one of the blue chairs for dear life. Chris was standing a few feet behind her with a full-blown grin on his face while Piper was kneeling at the other end of the table in front of Eaden, waving her little sister nearer. And Dean, their camera first assistant, was filming everything with their documentary camcorder.

“This is our little girl Eaden, who’s so close to taking her very first steps,” Dean announced proudly and panned the camera away from Eaden to Piper, who gave him the thumbs up, “and that’s her big sister Piper, who took her first steps on this very same lot twenty years ago. Isn’t that cool y’all?"

“Although I was much younger than this lazy little cub,” Piper added with a laugh and extended her arms towards Eaden. The little one was just standing there with her feet wide apart, chewing on her fingers and looking cautiously up at the tall man with the unruly gray curls. “Come on, baby! Come to me!” Piper cheered exuberantly, trying to get Eaden’s attention.

David spotted Gillian to his right standing by the room divider, all dressed up as Scully and taking pictures of her daughters with her phone, her expression a mixture of sheer pride and childish excitement. He couldn’t help but grin at that sight. She was so darn precious.

Coming up behind her, David put his hand on Gillian’s waist and leaned down to whisper in her ear. “Hey, what’s happening here? Is she about to walk or are they just taking over our show?”

With a big smile sneaking up on her face, Gillian leaned back against him and shrugged her left shoulder. “Maybe both, I’m not so sure of the walking yet, though. She just woke up and Tina brought her in for her good morning kiss, but she wanted down and crawled around and all of a sudden, she pulled herself up and attempted to take her first step. She just put her foot forward, looked at it for a few seconds, and then pulled it back. She’s making it super thrilling here.”

“Hmm,” he hummed amusedly and pressed a chaste kiss to her cheek. “I wonder who she got that from; that streak for the dramatic.”

“Hey!” she lightly stabbed her elbow into his side, and after he winced almost dramatically, they fell into soft laughter and he pulled her closer to his chest.
“Come here, honey. You can do it! Just one step, sweetie!” Piper continued to encourage her little sister, who was now concentrating on Chris coming closer to her.

“She’s not gonna do it,” Gillian sighed, watching Chris squatting down beside Eaden and starting to rub her back.

“Nah, have some faith, Mom. She will, she will... although, can you see how she’s looking at Chris?” he nodded his head towards them, and they started to chuckle at the same time.

Eaden’s little face, the big, doubtful eyes and scrunched eyebrows were just too much. Chris and kids, that combination had always provided the best material for some good laughter. He was so, so nice and gentle with them, but unbelievably awkward at the same time. Piper had always loved him to pieces, but Eaden still wasn’t entirely convinced.

“There’s a fifty-fifty chance that in the next ten seconds, she’ll either start to cry or run away from him. My bet is on the crying, though.”

Gillian chuffed a laugh through her nose and nodded.

He crouched down a bit and rested his head against hers, his gaze shifting between her phone and her face. She was concentrating hard, tilting the device from one side to the other, then tapping on the screen repeatedly to try to get her daughters, and Chris, in focus.

It was moments like this that made him the happiest, simply because she was happy.

For a long time, David had wished he could bottle those moments and feelings up and pull them out whenever needed - whenever she was unhappy, or whenever he’d made her sad again. But over the years, he’d learned to concentrate more on the present, on what he was doing and what was happening now instead of holding too tightly onto the past. Cherishing each moment, each memory, whether they were good or bad, but trying his best to make good decisions for everybody’s happiness and joy, that’s what he was concentrating on nowadays.

“Oh!” Gillian’s eyes widened, and David looked up to watch Eaden putting her right foot forward while Chris slowly let go of her. “David!” she breathed almost inaudibly, too scared that she would break some kind of spell if she spoke any louder. He gave her an affectionate squeeze, letting her know that he was just as excited as she was.

When Eaden’s little foot hit the ground, they both gasped and held their breaths. She was standing up all by herself now without any support, and the whole room had gone completely quiet with everyone’s eyes glued to Eaden, who was cautiously putting more weight on her right leg.

And then everything happened so unbelievably fast, almost too fast for a 15-month-long wait.

She lifted the other leg, and all of a sudden, she was standing a whole step away from Chris, arms outstretched to her sides to help maintain her balance, mouth and eyes wide open in both awe and shock at what just happened.

“There you go, girl!” Piper laughed and clapped her hands.

Realizing that Gillian was just staring at the girls by now and had completely forgotten about her phone, David reached over her shoulder and took a couple of pictures for her.

She just nodded her thank you, too awestruck to say anything in that moment, and sniffled. He was sure that she was already crying, and that someone would need to redo her makeup before they could start to shoot the last scene in here. Not that it mattered; not in the slightest.
The only thing that mattered was their little girl with that huge smile taking another wobbly step and then a third, getting more and more confident with herself, and determined to reach her sister’s waiting arms. He couldn’t be any prouder.

“We have a toddler, babe,” David whispered, and Gillian took a deep, shaky breath, before answering, “We sure do.”

And what a toddler they had all of a sudden.

By the time Gillian was done for the day, Eaden was able to walk along the whole length of her mother’s trailer and was immovable of her decision to do it over and over again, much to the dismay of her nanny Tina.

The rest of the day was, to put it mildly, exhausting beyond words.

From the point Gillian had strapped her daughter into her car seat and headed off for lunch with an old friend, the little girl wouldn’t stop screaming until Gillian sat her down and let her run loose. Which had made having a decent conversation or time to eat in peace almost entirely impossible.

With her mother hot on her heels, Eaden walked to everything and everyone she found even remotely interesting, and even though she wasn’t very fast yet, she was tripping over her own feet very, very often, which lead to quite a few tears over the course of the day.

After settling the boys for the night, both tired to their bones due to an adventurous day at a children’s camp out in the forest, Gillian contemplated whether she should run herself a bubble bath or simply crash on the couch to watch whatever bad soap opera she happened to come across first.

But she was restless, agitated even despite the long, draining day and the short night prior to it.

Shortly after Eaden and Felix had finally fallen asleep in her bed last night, Gillian went downstairs to give her assistant Alison a call, who’d unsuccessfully tried to reach her while she almost got knocked out by one of Eaden’s knees.

From what Alison had told her alone she wouldn’t have been able to fall back to sleep right away, but then David came home, joined her on the couch, buried his head into her lap and started to talk for the next hour.

Now that the house was quiet and she had nothing to do, Gillian was slowly starting to process everything that had happened in the last 24 hours. And all she wanted to do now was burying her own head into the warmth of his lap and let it all go.

She was sitting at the kitchen counter, chewing on the straw she’d put in her can of Red Bull when she heard someone coming in the front door at around 8 pm.

Piper was mustering her mother and that faraway look of hers suspiciously when she entered the kitchen and let her heavy backpack slide to the floor.

“Hey, baby. How are you?” Gillian asked and ran her hand over her face in an effort to pull herself out of her reverie.

“Hey, I’m good, but busted. Is everything alright?” Piper retorted and headed for the fridge. Her entire shirt was covered with splashes of red paint.
Must’ve been a busy day for her as well, Gillian determined as she watched her daughter retrieving a bottle of coke, and began to nod slowly. “Yeah, I’m just… I can’t sleep.”

“Still too excited?” Piper grinned and took a swig, but Gillian gave her a questioning look. “Because Eaden’s walking now?”

“Oh that, yes… yeah,” Gillian chuckled. “But, um…” she licked her lips. “Would you mind terribly looking after Eaden and the boys for a couple of hours? They’re already in bed.”

“Umm, no. No, I wouldn’t mind. I just wanted to watch some TV before going to bed anyway. Why? You wanna go out?”

Gillian nodded with a smirk. “I think I’d like to surprise someone.”

The parking lot of the Rooster’s Country Cabaret was filled with trucks and trailers, so Gillian parked at the nearest McDonalds, bought herself and Rob, the elder security guard standing in front at the parking lot, a coffee and walked over.

The air had cooled considerably in the last couple of hours, and Gillian was glad she’d put on her black leather jacket over her sleeveless dress and had chosen the knee boots over the heels. With this outfit, she might’ve been able to convince Chris to let Scully do a lap-dance after all, she thought and snickered to herself. Not that she was intending to go anywhere near him again tonight, or anyone on set for that matter. Except for one.

Rob had no problem to let her sneak into David’s trailer, happy with his warm beverage and the quick hug he’d been given.

They were still laughing hard when they stepped out of the stuffy, hot club and into the cool summer night, having had one of the best and most memorial shooting nights thanks to Mitch, Tom, Dean and Bruce. And, of course, the mushroom stamp.

Honky-Tonk Mulder with his eagle shirt, the cowboy hat and the girls dancing around him really was the weirdest thing David had done in a very long time. And that was pretty telling.

“Hey, some people and I will have a drink Downtown, just to unwind a bit. You wanna come?” she offered, and he stared at her for a couple of moments before he found his voice again.

“Um,” David chuckled nervously and averted his eyes to the ground. At this point in his life and at his age, he found himself actually blushing at such an offer. He cleared his throat. “Uh, thank you, Dani. Sounds fun, but I have to pass. I just want to go home to my-, to Gillian and Eaden.”

“Oh, okay. I hope I… didn’t cause you too much trouble and that’s why you can’t come? Because Gillian thinks we-”

“Oh no,” he was quick to reply. “No. Don’t worry, she had a good laugh over it,” he nodded reassuringly, knowing she was genuinely worried. “But I’m old, and I can't wait for to hit the pillow. And if I’m lucky, there might even be a massage in store for me,” he winked.

“Oh, you wouldn’t want to miss that!”

They laughed and stopped, both turning to face each other.

David shook his head. “No, I really don’t.”
“So… I guess I see you tomorrow?”

“You will. I will not disappoint you, I promise!” he grinned, referring to the dance sequence they would shoot tomorrow.

“I’m sure you won’t. Good night, David.”

“Night, Daniela,” he raised his hand to wave at her and turned, heading to his trailer on the other end of the parking lot.

A change of clothing and a quick beer and he would be out of here, David thought, walking up the stairs to his trailer and opening the door while pulling his phone out of his back pocket.

He didn’t look up when he closed the door and started to text his driver when suddenly, two arms came up around his waist and pulled him backward.

David jolted and gasped, almost dropping his cell, his heart beating fast in his chest until he looked down at himself and found two small, familiar hands making their way up his torso. That’s when he finally took a deep breath, and her wonderful scent filled his nose.

“Jesus!” he exhaled, reaching up to interlace their fingers right over his heart. She gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

“Hmm?” she hummed against his back.

“You scared me.”

“A little girl like me can scare a big guy like you?”

He didn’t answer, but brought her hand up to his lips before turning around to look at her.

“Hey,” he said, the surprise evident in his face. Now that he could see her, and her radiant appearance, it was a rather good surprise. Her outfit was a dark, dangerous contrast to the blond hair spilling over her shoulders in soft waves. She wasn’t wearing any makeup except for dark mascara.

“Wow, you look-” he let his eyes fell over her perfect collarbones to the soft swell of her breasts and licked his lips. “Wow.”

She pressed herself against him, her nose brushing along his neck up to his ear followed by her hot, moist breath causing goosebumps to erupt everywhere.

“I thought you had your heart set on a quiet night at home.”

“Yeah,” she murmured, starting to nibble at his earlobe. “We can do that later.”

He closed his eyes at the sensation of her wet little tongue teasing the sensitive patch of skin behind his ear, and his groin tightened.

She was on fire tonight, and he was the last one to ask more questions than necessary at this point. She was here, hands tucking impatiently at his fly and a pair of soft, full lips had just landed on his mouth. What else did he need to know?

“You’re hard,” she said matter-of-factly, but needed to squeeze him through his jeans to get his attention.

“Huh?” David stammered, fidgeting with her dress, trying to pull it over her thighs. Why was this thing so fucking long?
“You are hard, Mr. Duchovny. Are you hard for another woman?”

“What?” he cried out, his eyes big and dark. “No!”

“Hmm,” she gave him another squeeze, and he buried his head into her neck, almost as if to hide. “Are you sure that all these hot young girls dancing around you didn’t cause this? Were they touching you? I bet they were.” With his fly now open, she reached inside, finding him hot and pulsating beneath his trunks.

“Did they turn you on?” she asked, her voice incredibly sultry. When he didn’t react again, she grabbed him by the balls. “I know they’d turn me on.”

He growled into her neck, his knees weakening by the second. God, what was she doing? Trying to kill him?

“It did turn me on,” he whispered when he finally found a way inside her dress. Having her soft skin underneath his fingers made him feel much more confident to play along.

“Hmm, naughty. So, so naughty.” He felt like crying when she pulled her hand out of his pants, and he squeezed the flesh of her hips to keep her close. She peered up at him; accusingly, defiantly, playfully - he couldn’t really decide, but it made his cock surge with desire.

A goofy smile began to spread across her face. Uh-oh, David’s eyes widened.

Slowly, oh so slowly, she squatted down in front of him, taking his pants with her and letting them fall to his feet.

“I think,” she tucked her fingers into the elastic waistband of his boxers, “I need to remind you,” she pulled, and his erection sprang free, “of a thing… or two.”

David swallowed, feeling excitement ripple through him. “What do I need to be reminded of?”

She puckered her lips, tilted her head to the side and ran her fingertips over the exposed skin of her neck.

“Fuck,” he growled beyond himself. Gillian’s idea of punishment was a wicked one, but it was always working.

One of her hands landed on his upper thigh, bracing herself on it while she wrapped the other around his thick shaft, her thumb swiping over his sensitive glans. She tuck at him once, twice, and then let go, raising her hand and sticking her digit into her mouth.

And then she hummed. She hummed in pleasure and closed her eyes.

Jesus.

Yes, he remembered. He remembered very well how much she liked his taste.

“Yeah,” she nodded as if she was able to read his mind.

She released her thumb with a plop, sucked her cheeks in and ejected a gush of saliva onto her fingers before putting them back around his penis.

“Oh,” he reached behind himself for something to hold onto, anything to steady himself with. He didn’t find anything, so he tangled his fingers into her hair.
She raised her eyebrow at him. “Mr. Duchovny, are you swaying? Not because of me, right?” she asked innocently.

“Hunn,” he grunted, wondering when exactly her mouth had come so close to his erection. Did he pull her towards it? No, he didn’t, right?

Oh well, she was grinning now. He actually did pull her closer to his cock.

“Good boy,” she praised and slid her lips over the head of his penis, feeling him tighten his grip on her hair. She looked up expectantly, but he didn’t make a move, even started to tremble from the effort of holding still.

She let her tongue swirl around the underside of his head a couple of times, lubricating it before taking him in deeper and pressing him up against the roof of her mouth.

“Fuck, Gillian,” David finally found his voice again. He gently rocked his hips against her, knowing that she had everything under control thanks to that brilliant little tongue of hers. God, how lucky was he that the woman he loved enjoyed this so much?

She cupped the hand with which she’d steadied herself around the base and squeezed lightly, creating pressure to direct more blood flow to the head.

The sensation increased immediately, and he moaned out loud.

“Fuck, Gillian.” Didn’t he just say that a couple of moments ago? “Babe,” he tried again, cradling her cheek with his other hand. “I wanna…”

“Hmm?” she hummed before slowly releasing him. “You want what?”

“Touch you. I want to touch you.”

“Is that so?” she teased, licking her way along his erection and down to his balls and without warning, sucked one of them into her mouth.

“Fuuhuuuck, babe, come here. Please, come here,” he begged and pulled at her jacket, needing to kiss her so, so badly.

After giving his glans a last, lingering kiss, she slowly stood up and smiled at him. God, she was beautiful.

“Oh, so compliant all of a sudden,” he said and pulled her against him with one arm around her waist while the other pushed her jacket off her shoulders. “Is this dress new?”

She shrugged her shoulders, and her jacket fell to the floor. “Maybe.”

He pushed her back and let his eyes wander over her. It was a really, really tight dress, reminding him of one she’d worn for a photoshoot a couple of years ago. Yeah, he was good at remembering these things.

She suddenly grabbed his wrist and pulled him down, capturing his lips with hers. She tasted of coffee and of himself. So incredibly good.

She clutched for his ass; flesh hard, skin soft. She’d never met a man with such soft skin in her entire life. How was this even possible, she wondered.

He groaned into her mouth and reached around her, finding a zipper in the middle of her back.
It would’ve required just a minimum of common sense to not be surprised that she wasn’t wearing any underwear underneath this tight little thing, but apparently, he just didn’t have it. Not at this point anyway.

“Oh fuck,” David uttered, not able to stop saying it over and over again. “You’re breathtaking, you know that, right?”

Truth was, she didn’t feel all that breathtaking the majority of the time. She knew that she was good-looking, but she’d always wondered what it was about her that was driving this man completely crazy. She could act as cool as she wanted, but the fact that he wanted her, and just her, would always bring her down to earth, and flood her with so much gratitude and joy she was barely able to breathe.

He had her in his arms before she knew it, carrying her over to the couch they’d slept countless of times on in the last couple of weeks.

And suddenly, she was lying underneath him. His head had disappeared between her legs, and she was only able to feel – his breath on her inner thighs, his mouth placing gentle kisses on her outer lips, and then, finally, his tongue diving into her slit.

“David,” she sighed, bucking her hips into his face.

She couldn’t think clearly anymore by the time one of his fingers entered her, the sensation too good, too overwhelming. This was not what she had planned, but much, much better. Sometimes, it was good to lose control and to trust someone else to take the lead.

He was moving his face from side to side, up and down. His fingers were kneading the curves of her ass, his tongue tracing her outer lips and his lips sucking on her clit.

Her legs started to quiver around his head and she was whimpering for her release. He slowly made his way up, kissing her stomach and gently biting her nipples, just how he knew she liked it, before lifting her legs onto the mattress.

He climbed over her and smiled when he came to a rest between her legs.

Her cheeks were flushed, mouth slightly open. “So beautiful,” he whispered, and this really was his most favorite sight.

“Oh god,” she mumbled as he pushed into her, sinking deep into her warmth.

David held her close for a couple of moments, enjoying to be surrounded by her tight walls before starting to rock against her.

Gillian was incredibly relaxed now, responding to every thrust he gave her with a soft moan. She wrapped her legs around his waist, dug her nails into his back and started to kiss him again.

Nothing about this was rushed anymore. It was two people savoring the sensation of being connected, making love in every conceivable way.

They came quietly with their fingers tightly interlaced beside her head, and she was still shaking even after he’d slid out of her and gathered her close to his chest.

She was still exhausted, but her body was finally calming down.

“I’m so deep into loving you as anyone could be,” he whispered, and she raised her head slightly off
his shoulder, eyes sparkling with amusement. He chuckled and squeezed her affectionately. “I remember reading that in a poem when I was fourteen, thinking that if I’d ever find a girl so special, then…” he went silent, biting his lower lip.

“Then?” she prompted, her eyebrow raised high.

He shook his head. “I-, I never got that far. I guess my final conclusion was that I would either never find someone like that or never know if I actually did. Or that it was just a phrase every other overly romantic fourteen-year-old boy would dig. Nothing with actual substance.”

“Hmm,” she nodded thoughtfully. “What do you think now?”

“I think that I have never said it to anyone else. And it feels very, very good right now.”

“I love you,” she said and rested her head back on his shoulder. “And I want to tell you something, too.”

“Hmm?”

“We just got the green light for Streetcar in New York next year,” Gillian whispered, and now it was his turn to raise his head, watching her hand tracing tiny circles on his chest. She licked her lips before she continued to speak. “And, after that,” she inhaled deeply, “I really want to move in with you.”
September, and with it the end of filming, came around much faster than expected.

Parting ways had always been difficult, but incredibly hard after spending three and a half months together - as a family.

A few days after wrapping, David and Gillian found themselves, once again, on completely different continents, thousands of miles apart from each other. When he’d started to film the second season of Aquarius in Los Angeles, Gillian had flown out to Nepal with Piper and her sister to shed Aaron’s ashes. Right after their short and highly emotional trip, she traveled to India to shoot her new movie Viceroy’s House.

The weeks went by excruciatingly slow, even though their days were always busy and packed with an enormous workload.

By the middle of October, she was still shooting the movie in Jodhpur while David found himself at the New York Comic Con with Mitch and Chris, starting the promotion of their six-episode-event-series.

Although she couldn’t be with them, she had sent a video of her sitting by the pool, sounding somewhat like Lady Mountbatten and making a teasing comment about one of the pool boys. David grinned to himself as the audience cheered, remembering all those hours they’d watched documentaries and recorded her voice during breaks, and how much they’d laughed over her weird accent.

They’d started the panel with screening the first episode, and the rest of it went smooth and enjoyable, mostly due to Kumail, whose love and excitement for the show was basically endless.

At some point, right in the middle of an audience’s question, David’s phone buzzed on his upper thigh. With a quick glance down, he saw that Gillian had tweeted something.

*Lying in bed in Jodhpur watching live NYCC panel. Miss you guys. Especially one of you.*

He pursed his lips and read it again.

*Especially one of you.*

And then again.

Suddenly, Chris had started to talk again, and David raised his head abruptly, his eyes wandering over the audience. He had no idea what the question was, but it was answered quickly, and Mitch
was talking again. And that was basically the rest of the panel for David. He just wasn’t able to concentrate anymore, especially since his phone kept on buzzing with new messages coming from his little tease over in India.

“She just texted me about my flow,” David said bashfully as he followed Mitch off the stage. The panel had just ended, and they were already on their way back to the media area where they were supposed to give a couple of interviews.

Mitch chuckled, turned around and gave David a pat on the back. “Did she watch us live?”

“Yeah, she did.”

“What does she think about your flow?”

“She says it’s flowing just fine, she’s still turned on by the way I handle my chunky monologues,” David answered, and they both fell into hearty laughter.

There was another message that he’d received during the panel, which he didn’t show Mitch, that said:

> Is that handsome dude on my screen really my boyfriend? I miss him terribly <

She knew exactly how to sweeten him up.

> I thought he’s right there with you, providing cold drinks and fresh fruit? <

A couple of seconds later, she started to type, and it didn’t take long for another text to pop up:

> :P - I wish! Y’all looked fantastic though. I’m so sad I couldn’t be there and watch the episode! Is it any good? <

> It’s good, the audience liked it. <, he replied and began to chew on the inside of his cheek as a new wave of longing came over him.

Right then, he couldn’t have cared less about the episode. All he could think of was kissing her in that pool by her hotel, running his nose over her cute little freckles and smelling her delicious, sunkissed skin.

Yes, he was desperate. And who could really blame him after all those weeks without her? Though admittedly, it had started to become fun to play with all the possibilities they had nowadays to stay in contact and feel somewhat close. David especially had become a big fan of those little sexting games she would constantly come up with. He certainly couldn’t imagine his life without being able to play “Queen of the day” with her anymore.

Unfortunately, nothing was even remotely close to what it felt like to have her in his arms, kiss her beautiful lips and tell her he loved her while looking into her deep blue eyes.

A couple of weeks later, David landed at London Heathrow Airport on a gloomy Friday afternoon, tired to the bones and aching from a long week on set.

He had been looking forward to their first weekend together in what felt like forever, at least up until last Tuesday, when he received a call from a very angry, but also abashed Gillian, telling him that the convention she would attend this weekend wasn’t actually taking place in Paris, as she assumed it
would, but in a little French town called Toulouse, which was basically in the middle of nowhere.

All their plans for a nice, long weekend together with the kids, visiting the Eiffel Tower, climbing the stairs of the Basilica du Sacre-Coeur de Montmartre up to the top, or eating years worth of crêpes and baguettes had died in a matter of seconds.

Instead, David decided to spend the weekend at home with the kids, not really keen to drag them out to a cold, snowy Toulouse, no matter how nice and interesting it might’ve been. With so many geeks in one small city, chances were they wouldn’t be able to have a very good time after all.

It was already dark when he arrived at Gillian’s house, and Erin, the kids’ nanny, was all set to leave for a romantic weekend with her boyfriend in a nice little cabin somewhere on the coast. David couldn’t possibly envy her more, even though he was starting to look forward to having some fun with the kids alone.

Over the last couple of months, it had become somewhat of a tradition that whenever he had Gillian’s kids for himself, he’d take them to places that served American food. The good, greasy and overly sweet stuff that the boys didn’t get too often, but of course loved tremendously. He’d lie if he said that he didn’t enjoy spoiling them - they were awesome boys, and they had a good relationship even without buffalo wings, chicken with waffles or s’mores, but he loved having a good time with them and seeing them happy and relaxed around him. And whenever he’d been away for a longer period of time, it was an easy way to skip the awkward first couple of hours to warm up to each other again.

They took the tube to a nice little place near St. Paul’s Cathedral and had a wonderful dinner before driving back home and taking Nelson for a long walk around the neighborhood.

The dog had become everything David had hoped he would when he gave him to Gillian - a wonderful, beloved buddy for her active young boys. Both Oscar and Felix were very dedicated to Nelson, and it was a delight to watch how much fun they were having together, but also seeing how much responsibility the boys had taken for the little guy.

When David had settled Eaden for the night, the boys showed him their new sports game on the Nintendo Wii, and they ended up playing tennis and golf way past midnight, having so much fun that David even forgot to call Gillian before she fell asleep in her hotel in Toulouse.

On Saturday, the four of them went to an indoor playground right after breakfast, and David spent the better part of his day counting heads, carrying Eaden back to the toddler area, which she was constantly sneaking away from to jump around with the big kids, and handing out snacks and drinks.

Around midday, he started to receive some hilarious text messages from an incredulous Gillian, asking him how anyone in their right mind could possibly confuse Toulouse with Paris and complain that she was freezing her ass off in the hall she was sitting in before she eventually sent him a picture of a squat toilet, labeling it “Welcome in Europe 2015”.

While David had a good laugh over it, he also felt for her. She deserved a weekend to relax, yet she was out there making other people’s dreams come true. He couldn’t admire her more right now.

Gillian was back at her signing table after the first round of photo op’s around 2 pm, frozen to the bone and overwhelmed by the number of people still waiting in line to see her.
It was fun though, really. She’d grown to like these conventions despite her fear of crowds and her aversion to public speaking.

Her fans were crazy, but most of them were very nice, lovely people, and knowing she could make them very happy by just being there and taking a moment to talk to them was bringing her an immense amount of joy as well.

Her phone buzzed beside her, and she only meant to take a quick glance at it, but the first three words immediately caught her full attention and set her on alert. It was a message from David, one that didn’t start very good.

“Oh shit,” Gillian exclaimed, taking her phone and looking at the young woman standing in front of her. “Just a second, sorry!” Gillian said with an apologetic smile and unlocked the screen before reading the entire text:

> Rufus is missing. I can’t find him anywhere. Erin said Eadie didn’t have him for her nap either. Do you remember seeing him around somewhere? <

And that was when the nightmare started.

Gillian hopped into the waiting limousine to leave the convention center by 7:30 pm, much later than she’d anticipated since she spent another hour at her table, meeting even the last person who hadn’t gotten the chance to see her earlier today.

The rest of the day had been so busy that she didn’t get the chance to write David anymore, and his messages had piled up by now.

His immediate reply to her suggestions where the bunny might’ve been was:

> No, he’s not in the car and not under our bed, or any bed for that matter. Please come up with something a little bit more helpful. I’m running out of options here.<

There were four more rather desperate ones before she reached the last one:

> I can’t find it. I looked absolutely EVERYWHERE! <

Gillian inhaled sharply and turned her head to look out of the window as they were passing the crowds on their way home, or to the next bar.

It was raining again, or snowing, she couldn’t really tell. The cold and cloudy weather in the past couple of weeks was starting to get to her mood and overall well-being. As if only the sun could recharge her batteries. Maybe a nice long bubble bath back at the hotel and a decent sized burger with fries and a milkshake on the side would do the trick, too, Gillian thought, smiling to herself. Boy, she really wasn’t looking forward to making a call home and face the reality that her one-year-old’s heart was probably broken into a million pieces.

With an exasperated sigh, Gillian dialed David’s number and raised her phone to her ear. Better get it over with right away, she thought.

He picked up on the fourth ring.

“Hey, stranger. You’re done with your day?”
Gillian smiled. “Hello, yourself. Yep, I'm completely done. Done, done, done in every possible way. My brain is just… mush.”

“I bet it is,” David said with a chuckle. “Lots of people, huh?”

“You have no idea. But now tell me what’s going on! How is she?”

“A-s-l-e-e-p,” he spelled, especially emphasizing the ‘p’ at the end, sounding both relieved and tired.

“Oh, wow,” Gillian said in surprise. “I wasn’t expecting that.”

“Yeah, me neither. But she basically cried herself to sleep on the couch while I was trying to make dinner. I guess it was an exhausting day for all of us, and now she’s lying half on top of Nelson - who’s also on the couch, I’m very sorry - clutching one of your hoodies to her face.”

“Oh no, poor girl,” Gillian said ruefully. The bunny had been on top of her mind since David’s first message, and she couldn’t really remember when she’d seen him the last time. On Friday morning when she’d gotten the baby ready for the day? Did Eaden have him in the car during their school run? Or… did they bring him to get a couple of groceries and actually lost him while strolling through Brick Lane Market? Which was, undoubtedly, the worst case scenario.

“Yeah, it’s sad,” David said, pulling her out of her thoughts. “She just doesn’t understand it.”

“Fuck, David. I feel so guilty. It’s all my fault.”

“No, Gillian. Things like that just happen.”

“Have you ever lost the favorite stuffed animal?”

“Well, no. But we’ve lost a bunch over the years…”

“Yeah, the ones that are forgotten the next day. But you usually don’t lose the favorite one because you never bring it with you when you leave the house. That’s the number one rule every parent knows… and usually follows.”

“Maybe we’ll find him again. I will keep looking, okay? Don’t lose any sleep over it, babe.”

“Maybe I should go out for a drink with David and Nicholas after all,” Gillian mused, referring to the American actors that had also attended the convention with her.

“Yeah, at least one of us should have fun,” he said with a light chuckle.

“I’m so sorry, David. I know this wasn’t what you were expecting from this weekend. Are the boys good for you at least?”

“They’re awesome. One of them was always with Eaden or looking for the bunny. They took off to play upstairs an hour ago when the crying got really bad, which I can’t blame them for, to be honest. I think they’re hungry and waiting for dinner now, so…”

“Oh, okay. What are you making?”

“Baked mashed potatoes.”

“Um, okay. Sounds… interesting.”

“Easy and… basically ready to serve. I gotta go, babe. I love you, you know?”
Gillian smiled as heat rose to her cheeks. “I love you, too. Very much.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Finally.”

“Yes, finally. Good night, Gillian.’

“Good night, David. Please give the kids a kiss from me, okay?”

Rufus hadn’t miraculously resurfaced by the next day, which pretty much sealed the deal for David that Eaden’s favorite stuffed bunny had in fact gotten lost in the streets.

After lunch, which the baby had refused to eat even though it had been pizza, David found her in the library rummaging through one of the bookshelves.

She didn’t even look up when he kneeled down beside her. “What are you doing, slugger? Are you redecorating Mommy’s books?” he asked, running his hand over her back.

It was only when she turned her head that he saw the tears running down her cheeks again.

“Ufus!” Eaden sobbed, her bottom lip stuck out so far that a bird could have perched on it.

“Oh honey,” David sighed. How often could his heart actually break for this little girl? She was looking at him as though he was the only one who’d be able to make everything okay again. There were so much hope and expectation in those piercing blue eyes. How he wished he could take away her pain. Or at least be able to explain what was going on.

Thankfully, she fell asleep in his arms after he’d picked her up and laid down on the couch with her.

But it was barely an hour later that Eaden couldn’t be soothed anymore.

David was leaning against the kitchen island with a screaming, wiggling Eaden in his arms when he heard the front door being closed and someone in heels walking through the hallway.

He had a tight hold on Eaden’s little feet as Oscar was standing right in front of him, looking up at his sister with worried eyes while he was gently stroking her arm.

Felix was sitting on the couch, holding his ears while staring at David’s iPad.

Oh boy, Gillian thought as she caught the first sight of them. It was worse than she’d expected.

Putting her bags down, she gave David a weary look as she approached them, but could see a hint of relief crossing his own features.

“Hey, you guys. What’s the matter here?”

“Mum!” Oscar exclaimed and ran into her arms, embracing her waist. “We weren’t able to find the bunny.”

“Mummy, she won’t stop screaming and we looked everywhere!” Felix complained from his position on the couch, not even attempting to get up and give her a hug.
“Yeah, we did! We thought Nelson might have taken it, but it’s nowhere in the house! She must’ve lost it somewhere outside.”

“Oh dear,” Gillian sighed and ran her fingers through Oscars hair before leaning over to give him a kiss. “That doesn’t sound good.”

“Nope,” Felix stated, cringing as Eaden let out another loud wail and plugging his fingers back into his ears.

“Hey, baby girl,” Gillian cooed and walked towards David and Eaden with Oscar following her closely. With four fingers of her right hand stuck in her mouth, she was clutching David’s neck with the other, and her head was resting against his shoulder as though she’d literally no energy left in her to hold it up herself.

“Look! Mommy’s home, baby. Everything’s alright now,” David whispered, gently bouncing her up and down.

Gillian snorted and started to rub Eaden’s back to get her attention. She seemed to be completely out of things, and her whole body heaved with convulsive sobs, each one wracking her harder than the last. It sounded pretty much like she was choking.

Her normally bright, sparkling blue eyes looked glassy, and the white in them had turned into a bright pink. Only her cheeks were redder than her eyes.

Gillian felt her daughter’s forehead with the back of her hand, eyebrows furrowed in concern.

“She’s hot.”

“Yeah, she’s been crying and screaming on and off for hours now. She didn’t eat anything at all and only managed to take a couple of sips of tea here and there,” David said, worry and remorse evident in his voice.

“M-hm, it’s hard to make her drink anything when she’s so upset,” Gillian squeezed his arm reassuringly.

He managed a weak smile before asking, “You want to hold her for a bit?”

“Yes. Just let me change into something clean and comfy, okay?”

“Yeah,” he nodded and put his hand on her upper arm as she was attempting to walk away, pulling gently. “Hey,” he whispered, his smile soft but tired.

She raised her arm and stroked his stubbled cheek before putting her fingers around his neck and pulling him down for a chaste kiss. “Hey,” she whispered as she pulled back. She’d pictured their first kiss after weeks a little bit differently. “Hang in there, I’ll be right back.”

The crying got worse again once she’d left the room to head upstairs, and it resonated even up to her bedroom. Gillian could count on ten fingers the times she’d heard one of her kids crying like this, and it had mostly been Eaden with her newborn colics. The memories of spending hours walking around and bouncing her to ease the physical pain were still very vivid. But how on earth was she supposed to help her one-year-old with her emotional struggles?

Gillian sighed as she quickly undressed and walked into the bathroom to wash her face. No matter
how many kids one had, parenthood would always be a challenge, and it would never be simple.

She came back to David pouring what she guessed was fennel tea, Eaden’s favorite, into a sippy cup while their daughter was now sobbing directly into his shoulder. They always made a whole can in the mornings and let it cool down. Gillian hated it, couldn’t even stand the smell anymore, but Eaden was chugging it down like crazy. On a normal day, at least. She really hoped Eaden would take it.

She went over to Felix first, who had been joined on the couch by Oscar, to make a point and give him a kiss hello. He smiled at her bashfully when she ruffled his hair before finally pulling her down for a bear hug. No matter if she was gone for a weekend or a couple of weeks, they always seemed happy and grateful when they had her back, and in need of a lot of cuddles. She hoped she’d get the chance to spend some quality time with both of them before she had to fly out to Belfast on Tuesday.

“Hey sweetheart, look what Daddy made you! Your favorite tea!” Gillian tried to sound as excited as possible when she stepped beside David, who let out a frustrated sigh while trying to screw the lid with one hand.

She gently put her hand over his, gave it a reassuring squeeze and took the cup to close it.

“Eaden, Mommy is here now. Have you seen her?” David murmured, gently trying to loosen her tight grip on him so she would at least take a look. He still couldn’t believe how hard it actually was to peel a tiny, clinging toddler off of you. “Eaden, please,” he begged, and Gillian could tell that he was giving everything not to sound annoyed or harsh. It must’ve been a horrible weekend for him, especially after not seeing them for such a long time.

“Okay,” Gillian nodded, put the cup on the counter and started to take the baby away from him.

She was holding on for dear life, pulling at his shirt and stretching it as far as possible before he finally got to open her fingers around the fabric, and she let go.

Gillian had just turned her around and settled her on her hip to take a look at her when Eaden broke into full-blown bawl, arched her back and suddenly threw herself backward so forcefully that if David hadn’t been there to catch her, Gillian would’ve dropped her.

“Jesus Christ,” Gillian breathed in utter shock, her heart now beating rapidly in her chest. Eaden’s cries once again intensifying.

David nodded, running his large hand over Eaden’s small back while Gillian was holding her tightly, even though she was squirming in her mother’s arms.

“It’s alright baby,” Gillian tearfully choked out. She felt horrible. Eaden had never resented her like that before, and it stung.

If she only had been there for her over the last two days.

She looked up to meet David’s eyes. “Do you think it might help if I retreat into the library and lay down with her?” Gillian asked, cradling her daughter’s head in her palm and bouncing her gently.

“Yeah, you do that,” David said softly and leaned forward to kiss her forehead before handing her the sippy cup. “I’ll be out here if you need me, okay?”

“Yeah. Thank you,” she whispered, hoping he knew how grateful she was for everything he was doing for her. Flying over for the weekend to watch her two boys, their daughter and the dog all by himself was more than she was expecting from him, especially since she didn’t even have to ask.
He found them peacefully lying in the raffia glider a while later. The library was one of his favorite rooms in her house. It was peaceful and comfortable, and he loved to come in here, browse her bookshelves and lay down with a book that caught his interest. David even had a shelf for his own books in here, and sometimes, he’d find a book in it that she’d bought him, one she thought he would like, or one she just really wanted him to read.

Eaden was slumped against Gillian with her head resting on her mother’s chest, her little body still shaking with an occasional sob. With one hand, she was fingering a few tendrils of her mother’s hair that had escaped out of her ponytail. The other one was holding onto Gillian’s shirt.

“Hey, it’s so quiet in here,” he said with a soft smile and let himself slump down onto the blue sofa beside them.

“Yeah, finally,” Gillian said, her voice just above a whisper, and looked at her little girl.

Eaden had stopped drinking, but Gillian was pleased that she’d managed to drink at least half of the cup. Her eyes were still open, but she was staring at nothing in particular, her little fingers absently playing with the collar of her black shirt before disappearing underneath it again.

Gillian sighed. It was so tempting to give in, to go 10 steps back, ruin everything they’d worked for over the last eight weeks and just let her nurse, even if it was just for comfort’s sake.

“Babe, don’t,” David said quietly as if he’d read her mind, his eyes warm and full of affection. “I know what you’re thinking, but it won’t help her, or you, in any way.”

Gillian nodded and buried her nose in her daughter’s soft blonde hair. He was right, of course; the whole process was a nightmare she didn’t want to start over again. She couldn’t do that to Eaden, or to herself.

For Gillian, it was an emotional rollercoaster of unknown dimensions. Some days, she thought she was experiencing something similar to postpartum depression. She had to excuse herself from meetings or during filming to cry in private multiple times in the last couple of weeks. Had found herself on the verge of a panic attack every Monday morning when she was about to leave for Belfast, or felt completely unable to get up in the mornings and go to set.

On other days, she was incredibly relieved that she didn’t have to offer her body to a little person every waking hour of the day, or night, anymore. While she loved being close to the kids and loved providing the physical comfort each child needed, there was definitely a certain point when she started to feel very anxious, claustrophobic and protective of her own body.

One night back in the beginning of September, she’d broken down into tears after another day of tugging, fumbling, holding, carrying and rocking a cranky toddler, just to be used as a human pacifier at bedtime, and hours beyond.

Just the thought of having to hug or kiss David, or give herself out to anyone else on top of that made her heart race and her stomach clench. She was feeling incredibly overwhelmed and irritable pretty much all the time. Touched out, as some were calling it. And she found that this description was pretty fitting to what she had been feeling over weeks.

When Gillian had finally come to the conclusion that she couldn’t carry on like this, David met her with an immense amount of sympathy and appreciation. He’d been the one encouraging her to make whatever changes she had to in order for her to be able to take and do whatever she needed to remain
happy and healthy. In the end, Gillian was quite surprised to find out just how invaluable her 
imintacy with David and the sheer feeling of being a desirable human being was to her sanity after 
all. And that by regaining some of her emotional and personal space, she quickly became much more 
relaxed and approachable again.

For Eaden, it seemed to have similar effects. She appeared to be much more independent and mature 
all of a sudden, boldly exploring her surroundings without looking back in search for Gillian quite 
that often anymore. But she was struggling to accept all the other ways to be close to her mother as 
the new and sole sources for comfort and security, and that nursing wasn’t one of them anymore.

She simply didn’t understand what was going on, and her coping strategies varied from crying for 
Gillian at night, throwing tantrums and downright begging to very creative attempts to change her 
mother’s mind, like pulling coy and funny faces, or even offering Rufus Gillian’s ‘na-na’s’. “Omise 
na-na Ufus, Mommy,” she would say, probably thinking that her mother was too polite to say no to 
Rufus when he’d already been promised something.

The look of rejection on her child’s face was unbearable though, as was having to say “No” over and 
over again, no matter how sweetly Eaden was looking at her. Or how heartbroken she was over the 
loss of her favorite stuffed animal.

“She probably thinks we keep punishing her, David. And of course, she has no idea why we’d do 
that.”

Even if he wanted to, he couldn’t argue with that. It did indeed feel like they were pulling the safe 
ground they’d tried to build over the last two years right from underneath their child’s’ little feet.

Nothing had ever been really easy with Eaden. Maybe it was because of their own, rather advanced 
age for being the parents of a baby, or the fact that she was definitely their last child, but both him 
and Gillian were incredibly attached to this kid.

David only knew that guilt was playing a big part for himself. Not only that they weren’t living 
together and working all over the world, therefore dragging the little one from one place to another, 
but because their daughter had two parents who would probably not be able to be by her side for the 
bigger part of her life. He could be extremely grateful if he’d make it to her thirties. And that… didn’t 
feel really good.

Being aware of that, they were working hard on providing her with a secure, nurturing environment 
and making sure she always felt safe and loved.

Right now though, it seemed like they were failing miserably. Or maybe, he thought as he was 
looking at them, it was just him who was failing his daughter, and Gillian, by constantly being away 
from them.

“You’re a terrific mother, Gillian. I know I don’t say it enough, but I’m constantly amazed how you 
handle all of this; four kids with completely different needs and expectations. Mostly by yourself.”

Gillian gave him a warm, lopsided smile and shook her head slowly. “I’m not by myself.”

“I-, I know you don’t see it that way… with Erin being around and the boys spending half the time 
with Mark. But when it comes down to it, it’s your opinion and your decision that counts. You are 
the mother and you know all of them better than anyone else.”

“David,” she said and held out her hand. He reached up immediately and took it in his. “I couldn’t be 
the mother I am, or trying to be, without you. I’m thankful every day that the three of you are the best
father’s I could’ve possibly chosen. But this,” she made a circle like motion with her head, “is only possible because of you and me together. We haven’t seen each other in what, six weeks? And you come here, all the way from LA, knowing I won’t be here most of the time, just to watch the kids. Not just our kid, but mine as well.”

“That’s the least I could do after you’ve watched them for six weeks,” he stated.

“It’s only about being able to rely on each other. I have your back and you have mine, right?” Right, he thought. Just sometimes, he felt like it wasn’t enough.

Eaden let out a soft whimper and turned her head, searching for David. “Daddy,” she murmured, extending her left arm towards him.

“Yeah, baby,” he said and let her wrap her tiny hand around his thumb before he closed his fingers completely around it. “Daddy’s here.”

The tiniest hint of a smile played on her lips as she borrowed her face deep between Gillian’s breasts and let out a content sigh.

“Come here,” David said softly, holding Gillian’s hand while she was climbing into the tub to join him, hissing when her heel met the water. “Careful.”

“It’s hot,” she said, squeezing his hand tighter.

He raised his right eyebrow and gave her an amused smile. “Hot? I’m sitting in here, it can’t be that hot for you.”

“I told you, I’m frozen to the bones. It probably feels hotter than it actually is.”

“Alright, take your time,” David nodded, putting his hands on her hips as she slowly climbed in.

When she was finally standing between his legs, he let his hands fall down to her upper thighs and leaned forward, placing soft a kiss against the mole on her right butt cheek before gently biting into her flesh, just where her ass met her thigh.

Gillian giggled and braced her arms on the edges of the tub to ease her body into the warm water. Once the bubbles had covered her breasts and his arms had come around her middle, she let out a satisfied moan and leaned back against his chest.

It was almost 8 pm now and all three kids were asleep. After getting Eaden to eat a couple of bites of the leftover mashed potatoes for dinner, Gillian gave her daughter a quick bath and rocked her to sleep before tucking her into her crib, not leaving until she was sure the little one wouldn’t wake the second she left the room.

The boys had been patiently waiting for her on Oscar’s bunk bed to tell her everything about their weekend with David. There was a brand new Star Wars Lego-set they’d started to build in the middle of the room, and they proudly showed her the letters they’d received from their teachers to inform their parents about their impeccable behavior in class in the last couple of weeks. The Lego-set, so they explained, was David’s reward for them. Gillian could barely contain the amused grin the entire time they were talking. David really was… something else. The relationship he had built with Oscar and Felix was a fascinating one. There was a great deal of respect, curiosity, friendship and lately, probably since Vancouver, she really thought she could see love between them, too.
Something very similar to the love between a parent and a child, still developing its roots, but very beautiful to witness. Something Gillian had never dared to hope for it to happen.

She lay with the boys for a while, listening and cuddling before giving them both kisses and hugs good night, turning off the lights and leaving their room to search for David.

She found him in the master bathroom, already sitting in a bubble bath between a sea of lit candles. She felt like crying of gratitude for this sweet man.

“Feels good?” David asked softly.

“Hmm, feels like heaven. I’m so glad you’re here.”

“Yes, me too.”

“By the way, I stumbled upon that… huuuge Lego walker-thingy in the boys’ room.”

“Oh?” David chuckled almost nervously. “Am I in trouble?”

Gillian laughed. “No, of course not. It looks extremely expensive, though.”

David shrugged, cupped a handful of water in his palm and let it run down her upper arm. She smiled and leaned further back, resting her head beside his.

“Boy, I need a vacation. A very long one.”

“Hmm,” he nuzzled her cheek with his nose. “What are you thinking of?”

“I think of multiple things.”

“Of course you do,” David chuckled and brought his index finger up to her nose, placing a tiny bubble of soap on its tip.

“Hey!” she giggled girlishly and wiped her nose before giving him a chaste kiss.

“What are you thinking of?” he eventually asked again, absently caressing her forearms with his thumbs.

“Hmm, a private rooftop or balcony pool from where you can see a beautiful, white beach.”

“Oh,” he nodded approvingly. “That sounds promising indeed.”

“A big bed.”

“One with enough space for all our children?”

“No!” she nudged him playfully in the side. “No kids.”

“No kids?”

“No. At least not the entire time. The big bed would be ours alone. Enough space to eat a big breakfast and read the papers in the mornings. Or for all the food I’d order from room service in the middle of the night while we’re all sprawled out, watching Trash TV. Or—”

“Or?”

“I don’t know… what else can you do in such a big bed with no kids around?”
David shrugged his shoulders. “I have no idea. It’s not like I’m used to having a big bed just for the two of us anymore.” God, he wasn’t even used to the way she felt in his arms anymore. Had she ever been this tiny?

“Yeah, true. Hmm, maybe we’ll think of something once we’re there.”

“So this is the beach vacation somewhere nice and warm?”

“It is, yes.”

“Maldives, maybe? One week with the kids and then another… for us? Just you and me, a private little house on the ocean with a balcony pool. You completely naked the majority of the time…” he said dreamily, and she started to giggle.

“Sounds so heavenly, can’t we go now?”

“That would be something, wouldn’t it?” he nodded.

“Seriously, David,” Gillian said and turned her head so that she could look into his eyes. “I can’t go that long without seeing you anymore. It’s… getting harder and harder every time. And it’s just that… sometimes, I feel like…” she paused, pondering her next words while stroking his forearm with her thumb absently, “…not that we’re neglecting our relationship per se, but that it… gets lost in the shuffle, sometimes. Often. You know, with work, and the kids, which is completely normal, but… I wish we’d have more time for ourselves. To do adult things…”

“Oh,” he said appreciatively and waggled his eyebrows, making her snort before she went serious again.

“Yes, those things, and just… explore places without pushing a stroller or without having to stop at every other ice cream stand. Go to museums, meditate together, spend a night in town, just,” she sighed, “we don’t necessarily have to do all those things, but it would be nice to at least have the time that we could if we wanted.”

“I know what you mean,” he nodded.

“But it’s mostly just the… mundane things that I miss the most. Like sharing a meal in the evenings, or going to bed together. Not having to sleep alone…”

“Yeah. I miss that, too,” he said with a sigh and rested his chin on her shoulder.

At least they were happy, that was what he was thinking when he was lying in bed alone on one of those many lonely nights these days. He felt whole knowing he was hers, and she was his, no matter where they were.

“So,” David said, “about the vacation…”

“Mh-hm,” Gillian hummed.

“Is it a good thing that I… booked us a weekend in Budapest in March? Just for the two of us?”

Gillian opened her eyes and blinked before looking back at him, surprise written all over her face. “What? Are you serious?”

David chuckled. “I am, yes. Being the only one who has full access to your schedule certainly has its perks when it comes to making a surprise perfect.”
“Oh my god, I love Budapest! I will show you all the beautiful sights! And I will give my friend Zoltan a call, who has a nice little restaurant there, and ask him if he cooks us the best Hungarian food you’ll find on this planet before we’ll head to the coolest bars you’ve ever been to! And because we also need some time to relax, we will go to one of their famous baths!”

“I love when you’re so excited. It’s adorable.”

“That’s really nice of you, David. I always wanted to do a city trip with you. And I would love to go on a nice shopping tour again. Budapest is great for shopping,” she nodded with enthusiasm, but then seemed to reconsider. "Although I can’t do that with you.”

“Why not? Didn’t you say that I’m a very patient shopping companion the last time we went together?”

“I did. But I can’t blink twice and the cashier already has your credit card in their hand,” she smirked at him.

“And? Correct me if I’m wrong, but you would’ve made it clear if you didn’t like a little bit of spoiling every now and then,” David winked and leaned in for a kiss.

“Hmm,” Gillian hummed approvingly.

“Am I right?” he prompted, his breath brushing against her neck.

“Mhh, yeah, you are. The apples don’t fall far from the tree, you know?” Gillian tilted her head to the side to give him better access to her skin.

“So I’ve heard,” he murmured, teasing her with delicate kisses so faint she didn’t dare to breathe, too afraid to miss a single one of them. His hands had started to roam over the flatness of her belly, fingertips tickling the sensitive skin between her breasts up her neck, and eventually drawing little circles right under her ear.

The simplest touches of his hands had the power to make her squirm like a cat in heat, unable to ignore her bodies basic needs. To be touched. To be loved.

They were lying there silently beside the occasional giggles while washing each other until the water started to turn too cold for her liking.

David knew that she could lie there for hours, refilling the tub with hot water every now and then, but he had something different in mind. It didn’t take a lot of convincing to make her get up and let him rinse both of them off before wrapping her in a big, fluffy towel.

He’d barely gotten a chance to dry himself off and she was impatiently pulling him back into the bedroom by his hand, her own towel left behind on the bathroom floor.

She fell back onto the mattress and pulled him on top of her, both giggling like two young people who’d just fallen in love with each other. Yet they were doing this for almost 25 years.

Languid kisses quickly turned into something more serious. Hands were roaming and hips grinding against each other for a little bit of relief. Their bodies were still warm and soft from their bath, and the sensation of skin to skin was unbelievably arousing.

Their breaths were coming in shorts pants when David broke away from Gillian and gently moved her into the middle of the bed, making sure that her head was comfortably propped up on a bunch of pillows before kissing his way down, caressing very scar and stretch mark on her perfect little body.
There really wasn’t anything not beautiful about her.

He had just placed a couple of kisses on her pubis and outer lips when Gillian moaned out loud, and he quickly looked up from between her legs, surprised by her strong reaction. He hadn’t even come close her clit yet her back was arched and he already needed to shush her.

“Shh, not so loud,” he whispered, caressing her tummy with his flat palm, his smile giddy and reaching up to his eyes.

“David,” she said in a half warning, half desperate voice, glaring down at him. “It’s been six weeks with only my own fingers down there. I will scream this place down if you don’t continue, and nobody wants that to happen, right?”

“What about screaming it down because I’m continuing?” he teased, but earned nothing but a blank stare, telling him that she wasn’t in the mood for his jokes anymore.

He continued easy on her, his thumbs caressing her inner thighs, nuzzling her slit with his nose while kissing and licking the soft space between her pussy and her ass. She was dripping wet already, her hips softly rotating.

Her face was still relaxed, though. Eyes closed, cheeks flushed, bottom lip lightly tucked between her teeth. It was rare that she was so content and comfortable, only concentrating on the sensation of his touch, and he loved seeing her like that.

When she put her left foot flat on the mattress beside his shoulder, basically opening up for him, he knew the teasing was over, and she needed more.

The second loud moan didn’t come as unexpected as the first, but David had to retain himself from looking back and check if she’d closed the door earlier. She probably had. At least he hoped so.

As if she could read his mind, or maybe it was his slackened tongue that had given him away, she reached down and tangled her fingers in his hair.

“Relax. The door is locked,” she murmured, licking her lips in anticipation of what was coming next.

David rested his cheek against her inner thigh and glanced at her beautiful, open pussy right before him. It was sensory overload - the pink, glistening flesh with the perfect little nub poking out of the middle and that divine, feminine smell of hers.

She had never been shy about this particular part of her body, while there were others, much less private ones, that she didn’t feel entirely comfortable with, and wouldn’t let him look at for too long. It was a miracle that she’d let him get away with kissing her ass.

Her hand suddenly came in his vision, the index finger stroking his cheek a few times before she ran it through her folds.

“Whenever I did this, when I touched myself, and made myself come, I was thinking about you, and those long, skilled fingers of yours,” Gillian said, her voice low and sultry.

David swallowed, pressing his hips into the mattress. His cock was hard as a rock. Almost painfully so.

“How?” David coaxed out, watching two of her fingers disappearing into her wetness. “How did I
fuck you?"

“Hard. You fucked me hard, David. Like you did in that tent on the last day of shooting. You remember that, right?” she asked, pressing herself against her palm.

How could he possibly forget that? It had been a tent with no solid walls in the middle of the set. Everyone could’ve walked in at any given time.

“I remember,” David nodded thoughtfully. What a great memory it was. “You weren’t able to keep your voice down back then either.”

“Hmm. What can I say,” Gillian said, pulling her fingers out and resting them on his bottom lip. With a growl, he opened his mouth and welcomed them in. “You do this to me.”

“Hmm,” he hummed around her fingers, swirling his tongue around them.

“Were you planning on fucking me tonight?”

David huffed, pushed her hand aside and leaned down and sucked her clit between his lips.

“You bet I was,” he murmured against her hot flesh. “Fuck babe, when I’m done with you, you won’t be able to walk for the rest of the week,” David added and dove in for good, sucking as much of her tender flesh into his mouth as possible, rubbing her clit with the flat of his tongue.

She’d braced herself on her elbows, watching him with a smug expression on her flushed face, and it was the hottest thing on earth. She was a demanding lover with very high expectations; a woman who knew exactly what she needed, and how to get it. When you got her looking at you like that…

“Oh fuu-huck,” Gillian moaned and threw her head back, nails digging into the mattress, bunching the sheet between her fingers.

… or moaning for you like that, you could consider yourself the luckiest guy on earth. Because this was… mind altering. Unbelievably fucking sexy.

His erection felt hot and gigantic between his pelvis and the mattress, pulsating with each heartbeat. He couldn’t help himself but grind it against the soft sheet, again and again, probably leaving one hell of a wet spot there.

Her hips bucked up against him, and he felt a new rush of her hot wetness on his lips that he greedily lapped up.

“Hmm,” David hummed, watching her in wonder.

A single strand of hair was now sticking on one side of her face, and he could see a soft layer of sweat glistening on her forehead. She was licking her lips, biting them, pouting, opening her mouth only to press her lips together a couple of seconds later, then opening it again for a low moan. There was so much happening on her face at once, he just couldn’t look away. With every lick and every suck, her expression changed.

Eventually, she opened her eyes again and met his gaze.

“So close,” he whispered. It wasn’t a question. “So beautiful.”

At the same time as she reached down, David reached up and took her hand in his, giving it a light squeeze and put both of their hands down beside her hip.
His other hand snuck under her thigh and lifted her leg over his shoulder and onto his back, surrounding himself with her almost completely before putting his mouth back on her pussy, gently nibbling and licking, building the tension once again.

Her chest heaved as she struggled to control her breathing. She squeezed her thighs around his head and lifted her hips, hoping he would get the cue.

He didn’t disappoint. Of course not.

His free hand snuck between her legs, and she could feel his thumb entering her as the rest of his hand came to a rest between her butt cheeks.

“Oh god,” Gillian whimpered as he started to draw his middle finger around her anus with gentle pressure, spreading her wetness all over it. “David… fuck.”

“Yeah, you like that, huh?” he said softly, his eyes not leaving her face anymore. This was going to be so, so good.

“Ye-hes,” she whimpered and bucked into his face, inner muscles clenching around his digit.

His tongue sliced back and forth, up and down and in circles over her pulsing clit, lips sucking rough and relentless.

“Ahh,” Gillian cried out, and he knew her release was lingering so, so close now.

He pressed his finger a little firmly against her anus, and suddenly, she was grabbing a handful of his hair, twisting it between her fingers while she squeezed his other hand, her whole body jerking.

“Oh fuck, oh fuck, Dave- fuuuck,” she screamed, and he couldn’t do anything about it but enjoy and watch in awe as she came... so fucking hard.

It lasted longer than ever before, and when she finally slumped back onto the mattress with an exhausted groan, he slowly removed his hand and kissed her inner thighs, staying with her while she was calming down.

“Oh my god, oh god,” she breathed after a while and put both of her hands over her face, letting her leg slide off his shoulder.

Gillian completely zoned out for a couple of moments, and when she finally opened her eyes again, he was lying beside her again, a lopsided grin on his beautiful, slick lips.

“David,” Gillian whispered and turned towards him. His arm came around her waist and pulled her close to his chest.

“That was incredible,” he said and stroked the small of her back, feeling goosebumps rising underneath his fingertips. She was still incredibly warm, and so soft.

“That was loud,” she corrected and looked at him sheepishly, her forehead bumping against his'.

“Yeah,” he nodded, gently thrusting his erection against the soft skin of her belly. “We better save that for our vacation, huh?” David whispered and captured her lips in a passionate kiss.
The apartment was stuffy and still smelled of last night’s Indian take-out and stale cigarette smoke when she slammed the door shut behind her and let the bags fall to the floor.

It’s been a tedious day filled with college classes and another 6 hours of serving greasy food in a creepy diner to even creepier people.

A quick shower and maybe, maybe a bite of those soggy chili cheese fries she brought with her, that’s all she wanted to do before falling into bed for the next twenty hours. Or at least until her boyfriend would call.

Instead of showering and eating, she ended up on the couch in front of the flickering TV, listening to the news. Two people had been killed in the Chicago area in the last twelve hours, that’s the last thing she remembered before falling asleep and snapping awake a couple of hours later.

The apartment was dark and quiet, but she felt like she wasn’t alone anymore. There was something...

“Mommy?” a tiny voice suddenly asked, and she sat up in confusion, searching her living room.

Police sirens could be heard from outside, and the wind was blowing against the shutters, slamming them against the brick wall over and over again.

“Hello?” she asked, as if expecting an answer, and waited patiently.

There was none. Of course not.

With a heavy sigh, she pushed the scratchy blanket off her body and trotted over to her kitchenette to pour herself a glass of water, annoyed with herself for not going to bed immediately. Falling asleep with strange voices in the background never did her any good.

“I’m so tired,” she mumbled to herself any ran her fingers through her brown, wavy hair.

Would there ever be a time in her life when she wouldn’t be on the verge of complete exhaustion?

At 20 years old, she sure felt like she’d already lived a lifetime. If only she would be able to...

“Mommy?” there it was again, coming from the other end of the room. This time though, it was a different voice. One of an older child. “Can you see me?”

She held her breath, eyes wide and pupils dilated. She couldn’t see a damn thing. Who the hell had turned off the TV anyway?
The floor creaked exactly where the voices had come from and she gasped.

“Who is this?” she asked and took a few steps forward. She could see with her own eyes that there was definitely no one there, yet she felt like someone was with her. Someone she knew very well, but couldn’t know at the same time.

She stood there for some time, waiting and listening until she realized that she wasn’t making any sense. Someone she knew but couldn’t know? she thought. And why didn’t it feel weird to be called Mommy in the middle of the night after all?

Before she could think about it any further, her perspective suddenly changed and she was now looking at herself from behind, standing in the middle of the room.

A baby started to cry not that far away, and the familiar sound alerted her immediately. Trying to make a step forward, she realized that her feet didn’t move, as if glued to the floor.

“David?” she asked, turning her head from side to side, searching. She felt completely helpless, paralyzed even. “David, I need you!” she said again, louder this time.

“Why aren’t you helping me, Mom?” a child called out desperately, a different one once again. A girl. Jesus, what was happening?

She began to scream, for help and for David, and as if on cue, the perspective changed again. This time, she was watching from the other side, looking straight into her own, stricken face. Only she wasn’t twenty years old anymore. She was looking at herself screaming in her old, shabby Downtown-Chicago-apartment as an almost fifty-year-old woman.

The buzzing of her phone on the nightstand jolted her awake with her heart beating rapidly in her chest, and gulping for air. It took her a couple of seconds to calm herself down, realize where she was, and what had happened.

A nightmare. Nothing but a nightmare. She was safely tucked in the sheets of her warm, comfortable bed in London, nose deeply buried into David’s pillow. Everything was okay.

With a groan, she dragged herself across the bed and reached for the phone.

“Mhh-yeah, hello?” Gillian slurred, licking her dry lips before swallowing.

“Hey, Gillian, it’s me, Téa. Sorry for bothering you at this hour, you must’ve been asleep.”

“Téa?” Gillian sat up and took a glance at the clock. 2:34 am. Her heart started to race once again. Why would she call in the middle of the night? “No, it’s alright. What’s the matter?”

“Gillian, look, I know you’re busy, but I think you should get over here as soon as you can.”

“What? Why?”

“Well, David,” she let out a heavy sigh, “he’s”

“Uh, w-what happened, Téa? Is he-” she started, panic rising within her.

“Relax,” Téa was quick to reply. “He’s safe, at least for now. But I’ve got to head back to New York tomorrow, and I don’t have a good feeling about leaving him all by himself right now, so…”
"Wait, I- I don’t get it, what’s the matter? You’re with him? Why can’t he be alone?" she asked, and there were a couple of moments of silence before Téa spoke again. She forced herself to relax, but to no avail. Was she really awake or still in the middle of the nightmare?

"Um, you… you don’t-, you don’t know?" Téa asked cautiously, and Gillian furrowed her brows in confusion. "He hasn’t told you?"

"Told me what? Téa, what the hell are you talking about!" Gillian stressed impatiently.

"Jesus Christ, David," Téa whispered and sighed deeply. "Garry, it’s Garry, Gillian. He’s… passed away yesterday."

"What?"

"Yeah, I thought you already knew. I’m so sorry you have to hear it like that."

"Oh god, Téa. Where did this happen? And why?"

"At his house, here in LA. It looks like he had a heart attack, but they’re doing an autopsy, of course, and the results won’t be back for a couple of days, maybe even weeks. He’s just… gone… all of a sudden."

"Oh my god."

"Yeah, I know. It’s… unfathomable. But listen, David’s… he’s really not doing good, as you can imagine. And he needs you. This stupid dickhead told me you can’t come, but I was thinking, I mean…"

"No, yeah, yeah, yes. Jesus," she pressed her thumb and index finger into her eyes, feeling her pulse hammering. "I don’t even know how to think right now. Is he around? Can I talk to him?"

"He’s actually sleeping right now. I’d rather not wake him up, if you don’t mind. Just an hour ago he was completely delirious and on his way out. I was lucky that I got him to sit on the couch, where he eventually passed out."

"Oh, okay," Gillian nodded to herself. Téa was right, they should let him rest while he still was. "So uh, you have to leave tomorrow, did I get that right?"

"Exactly, yes. You know him, he’s already counting the seconds until he’s finally alone. I just wouldn’t want him to…" she hesitated, then drew in a long breath and let it out with the words, “do something stupid.”

"Yeah," Gillian sighed. They both had enough experience with a lost, troubled David doing something stupid.

But Garry had been his best friend, and the only even remotely similar situation that came to her mind was the time when West was sick, and they weren’t sure if she would make it through the night. He’d fled from the hospital back then, first to a tattoo parlor and then to her home, stumbling over her driveway with a bottle of whiskey in one and a cigarette in the other hand before hammering at her door like a lunatic.

Gillian had barely gotten him off of her and was left with a couple of angry bite marks and hickeys on her neck.

She’d driven him back to the hospital that night, and she knew that Téa was forever thankful for that.
No matter how weird and painful the situation, they had always tried to look out for one another.

“Um, I need to find someone for Eaden first thing in the morning. The boys are with their father, but my nanny Erin has some days off since we planned to spend a few days out of town without Eaden.”

“Yeah, Budapest. He told me the other day,” Téa said, gently. “I’m sorry about that.”

Gillian shrugged, noncommittally, swallowing both her disappointment and the shame she felt for being disappointed. She’d been so looking forward to this rare little get-away alone with David. To have some time for themselves before her play and his tour started. And now, his best friend was dead. Gone, forever.

She just couldn’t imagine a David without his Garry. It sounded impossible to her, unnatural. Wrong.

Gillian sighed once again. “There will be another time. I will text you as soon as I know more, is that okay?”

“Of course! I’m taking the latest flight out tomorrow evening. Don’t worry too much, it will be alright. Try to get a little more sleep and I’ll hear from you later.”

“Yeah, and Téa? Thank you so much, for everything.”

23 hours later, Gillian’s plane arrived at LAX. The driver she’d requested earlier was already waiting to bring her straight to Malibu.

Without Piper, who’d immediately stepped up and offered to look after Eaden until Erin came back, she would’ve never made it here so quickly.

Not that she felt like her presence was actually wanted, or needed - David still hadn’t called or texted, let alone answered her calls. Gillian could only imagine that Téa had told him she would come.

During the entire flight, she hadn’t been able to stop thinking about this weird dream she’d had just before Téa called. And why David was ignoring her.

She’d lie if she said it didn’t sting that he was shutting her out, but right now, her concern for him outweigh any resentment or disappointment. It wasn’t like him to leave her in the dark, and she couldn’t understand why he had chosen this particular time to act like she usually would.

No, she wasn’t angry. She just wanted to be with him.

The warm, humid air instantly made her feel even more uncomfortable than she’d already been when she got out of the car and swung her backpack over her shoulder. It had been cold back in London, which she didn’t like either, but the feeling of walking against a muggy wall was the absolute worst.

The driver gave her a suspicious look when she failed to enter the correct pin number to open the gate for the third time, but didn’t say anything.

Standing there in the middle of the night, knowing that no one was really waiting for her, made her feel more like an intruder than someone who actually belonged here.

What really didn’t belong here was the red BMW parked beside David’s car. She took a curious
glance through the windows, found nothing that would indicate to whom the car belonged to, then headed for the door.

Gillian didn’t want to be anxious about what was waiting for her inside. Deep down, she knew she had nothing to worry about, nothing to be afraid of. They’d been through anything, gone through hell and even survived the long way back. Even if…

No. She would not consider if. She refused to give it any life just by thinking about it.

The smell that welcomed her inside was distinct and familiar. Weed. Great, she thought, and let her backpack fall to the floor.

Brick, the little dog David had taken in a couple of months ago, came running towards her with his tail wagging with joy. But aside from the scratching noises his paws made on the wooden floor as he jumped up and down in front of her, the house was quiet. No music, no talking. Nothing.

“Hey buddy,” Gillian said and kneeled down to scratch him behind the ears. “How are you doing? Where’s your Daddy, hm? Should we go find him?”

She got up again, took one last deep breath and headed for the living room, where the lights were still on.

When she came around the corner and looked around, she noticed that someone was sprawled out on the couch behind the fireplace, which was located in the middle of the room. Another two steps and she could tell that it was two someone’s who were sitting there with their backs to her, both neither moving nor talking.

She walked further into the room, quietly passing the kitchen island and the fireplace before coming to a stop right beside the coffee table.

Gillian exhaled the breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding.

They were sprawled out on the couch, sitting side by side with her head comfortably reclined against David’s shoulder. His long legs were resting on the coffee table whilst she had hers tucked underneath her. Their eyes were closed, even though he was holding a joint between his fingers, and both looked completely busted and disheveled. The two large bottles of Whiskey standing on the table only completed the picture.

Pamela, David’s co-star from Californication, noticed her first, and her entire face lit up as if it were Christmas morning.

“Oh look, the Brit’s here!” she cheered in her distinctive husky voice and patted David’s chest with the back of her hand, startling him out of his semi-consciousness before waving her hand at Gillian, who reluctantly stepped closer to the couch. “And there we thought the party was coming to an end!”

“Hey, blondie Brit!” David exclaimed and raised his glass to her before setting it down on his upper thigh again.

“You’re la-ate!” Pam slurred, and both her and David fell into a fit of giggles.

“More like early,” Gillian stated, quickly looking at her wristwatch before raising her head again, giving them a concerned look.

“C’mere and drink with us, Gill. We’ve just opened the second bottle of that fine Whiskey and lit this
beauty of a joint to call it a day. Or a night.”

“Where’s my daughter?” he interrupted and turned his head to Pamela, pouting. “I really wanna… I wanna kiss and hug my sweet lil’ girl.”

“Yeah, I know! Where’s that freaking cute munchkin?” asked Pamela and held her hand out to Gillian.

She didn’t make an attempt to come closer and take it. Instead, she put her hands on her hips and said, “At home, in London. Didn’t seem like a good idea to bring her given the… circumstances.”

“At home, in London,” David repeated in a remorseful tone.

“Well, I think that it was a very wise, very good decision!” Pam nodded and raised her glass. “Cheers!”

“Yeah,” David pursed his lips before huffing out a bitter laugh and raising his glass as well. “Wise decision.”

“Yeah,” Gillian fixated him. His eyes were heavy-lidded, watching her with cautious expectation.

She gave them a quick nod before she let her gaze wander over the complete mess of a room. Pictures, notes, newspapers, silverware, glasses and empty take-out-boxes were scattered all over the floor.

“What happened here?”

“Oh, jus’ us, celebrating... you know, Garry's life,” Pam replied.

“I see.” She threw her coat on the next armchair. “I need a drink, and something to eat,” she said, and with that, walked over to the kitchen.

They were quiet for a couple of moments. While Pam seemed to watch Gillian, he kept his eyes on the black TV in front of him.

“Tell me again,” Pam suddenly broke the silence, “why is she so... so irri-ri-tatingly beautiful?!?” she asked, making a puzzled face, and David scoffed. “Wha’ issit? She- she’s like the Sasha, just the tiny version.”

“What the heck are you talking ‘bout?” David chuckled, taking a drag from their joint.

“Natascha! Our Natascha! Gill’s just the same level of a goddess... just without the leggy part”

Instead of giving her an answer, David simply smirked and shook his head. He took another sip of his drink before looking over to the kitchen where Gillian was starting to get busy.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about her being here now. Not calling her had been a conscious decision. Well, more or less. He’d wanted to wait for another stage of grief or two, sober up and take a shower before allowing himself to let her catch him. And he wasn’t ready by any means.

But since he was still deeply stuck in denial, he might as well have her here to take care of him. Anger, bargaining, and depression weren’t things he really wanted to go through alone. Not without her. It was Garry, for fuck’s sake. *Fuck, Garry.*

“What the hell is she doin’ over there?” Pam suddenly asked, pulling him out of his thoughts, leaning over him to get a better look.
“Um,” David finally swallowed his drink, and with it, a big lump in his throat. Gillian was now rummaging through the fridge, and he didn’t need to see what she was retrieving to know what she was doing. “S’wiches,” he answered, and leaned his head back, snickering. “She’s makin’ san’wiches.”

“Oh man,” Pamela tousled his hair. “I love that woman of yours. So thoughtful.”

“Oh, she doesn’t make them for us. She eats to cope with my drunk ass.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. So if you want one, you need to get your own drunk ass over there and say,” he raised his finger and closed his eyes, concentrating on his next words. “Hey pretty lady, may I have one of those deee-heee-lish-ous san’wiches you’ve got there? I- uh, I always give her butt a little squeeze at that point, but… you really don’t have to. I… just don’t know if the words are enough…”

“I’ll take my chances, big boy,” she slurred and got up awkwardly, wavering a bit before she regained her balance and raised her index finger. “And don’t you think I wouldn’t tap that pretty little ass of hers... just because it’s yours.”

“Hmm,” he hummed, “Don’t hold back on my account,” he said as she walked away, taking the last sip out of his glass before refilling it, occasionally glancing over to Gillian and Pamela, who hugged, long and fiercely, before Pamela took Gillian’s face in her hands and kissed both her cheeks.

Watching them, he felt a strong sense of gratitude while at the same time, feeling like the biggest fool on the planet. He hadn’t thought much about it when Pam arrived the second after Téa got picked up, bringing food, drinks, smokes, and records to keep him happy and occupied for the night.

It was pathetic - really, really pathetic. They had his best interest in mind, he knew that much. He really did. Nonetheless, he was perceived as the kind of man that couldn’t be left alone without fucking up his entire life. Would be for the rest of his life.

And it sucked. Big time.

But it was his fault after all. Decades of one stupid, fucked up decision after the other had gotten him right here. Three wonderful women he loved, one of them being the love of his life, all by his side.

David let out a bitter chuckle, ran his hand over his face and took another sip. Oh, the irony of life. He really didn’t deserve any of them.

He’d known that Téa wouldn’t buy that Gillian was too busy to fly over and be with him. However, he hadn’t expected that she’d actually call her.

Pam came back, sandwich in one hand, and leaned down to talk to him.

“I’m crashing in your guest-room, if you don’t mind,” she said and gave him a quick peck on the lips before glaring at him intently,

“What? No! Why? I mean-, s’the party over?”

She shook her head and reached forward to squeeze his cheek between her fingers.

“Ouch!” he whined. “What’s that for?”

“You lucky dickhead, you! Get your fucking ass over there!” she said and patted his cheek with the
flat of her palm. “You’ve gotten yourself one heck of a wonderful woman! Let her be there for you!”

David blinked a couple of times, then nodded at her. With a satisfied smile, she walked back to the kitchen, gave Gillian one last hug, then disappeared upstairs.

“Great,” he muttered to himself and stomped out his joint. His knees cracked when he stood up, making him wince. He was getting too old for this shit.

Slowly, he shuffled over to where Gillian was still busying herself, holding his glass with both of his hands.

He was trying to come up with a witty remark, something that would make her laugh and set a light mood. He really wasn’t feeling like heavy talk right now.

“So, the occasional Hollywood midnight, huh?” he slurred, referring to a decade old inside joke between the two of them, and wavered from the kitchen island to where she was standing at the sink, colliding with a couple of bar stools and spilling half his drink. “Oops,” he chuckled bashfully.

She wasn’t even looking at him. “It might help if you’d put your drink down for a moment.”

Alright, David thought, no more wittiness then.

“Yeah, that might help,” he agreed and set his glass on the counter.

She was obviously pissed, and he completely understood why. He would be furious if she’d shut him out like that. He had been, many times, because Gillian was the master in shutting people out to suffer alone.

Or maybe, she was pissed that Pam was here. He probably needed to explain that it hadn’t been him who’d called her. And that it hadn’t been his intention to invite another woman rather than her. Any woman, for that matter.

He came up from behind, pressing himself into her, hands wandering to his favorite spot on her tiny waist. Her body tensed, but then she relaxed and leaned back.

“I’ve been a good boy,” he whispered, nuzzling his nose into her hair.

“You’ve been surrounded by good girls,” was her immediate reply, and David winced at her unconcealed bluntness.

“Touché,” he said and rested his forehead against the back of her head, taking a deep breath and reveling in her scent.

For the first time in days, he felt like he could finally, finally let go. With the pain so fresh and raw, his mind and body not used to it yet, he’d barely been able to breathe, let alone eat something.

Now, the painful feeling residing in his chest, the one that had robbed him of his breath ever since he received the shocking news was slowly dissipating. She was home, and he was safe.

He shut his eyes for a moment, then squeezed her hips and kissed her behind the ear.

“I don’t wanna fight,” he whispered against her skin.

Gillian sighed, dried her hands and turned around. His hands landed on her waist again, but his eyes were cast down. She put her fingers under his chin to make him look at her.
“I’m not here to fight,” she said, her voice quiet and gentle, her expression serious.

David nodded slowly and tightened his grip on her, needing to feel that she was really there. And make sure that she wouldn’t slip away.

Her gaze was so full of concern and affection he could barely stand it. His eyes fluttered closed and he swallowed heavily, his body gently swaying back and forth.

He was so tired. So unbelievably tired.

Gentle fingers found their way into his hair, smoothed it down at the back of his head and came to a rest around his neck.

He knew she was watching him, but he couldn’t bring himself to open his eyes and look at her again. Tears were starting to well up, and for whatever reason, he just didn’t want them to fall. He couldn’t bear the thought of letting the pain take over.

“I know it hurts,” she said, as if she was able to read his mind. “I know how much it’ll hurt to accept the pain, but you only have to do it one time. Just once, David. And I’m here.”

“I can’t,” he choked. He had no idea what it was he was feeling, only that it was all consuming, and not ready to come to the surface yet.

Why did it take so fucking long, and how much longer would he have to wait, he wondered.

“Talk to me,” she whispered, gently massaging his tense neck with the tips of her fingers. “Why haven’t you called me?”

He shook his head. “I couldn’t. I didn’t want you-, I just-,” he stammered, and slowly leaned forward to put his forehead against hers. “I couldn’t speak the words. I couldn’t say that Garry’s-. I can’t say it.”

Despite his best efforts, the tears began to flow and gentle sobs started to shake him. He let her pull him into her embrace, and he immediately clutched her body tighter.

“Shh, it’s okay. I’m here,” Gillian whispered, running her hand up and down his back. “I’m here.”

It was the smell of freshly brewed coffee that finally pulled her out of her lazy slumber. She stretched and mewed, feeling surprisingly good considering the stressful couple of days that lay behind her. Not having to sleep alone really did wonders.

Last night had ended with them lying on the couch for hours, her holding him tightly until he finally drifted off. It hadn’t been until the sun started to rise that they went to bed together. She remembered the feeling of his warm hand on her breast and the sweet, languid kisses they’d exchanged before they must have fallen asleep.

She didn’t notice his presence until the mattress dipped beside her, and the delicious smell increased. The anticipation of what was about to come brought a soft smile to her lips.

“Good morning, sleeping beauty,” David whispered.

“Mhh,” she slowly opened her eyes, squinting in the bright light and yawned. “Mornin’.”

He smiled warmly and reached forward, combing his fingers through the wavy hair that had fallen
into her face before tucking it behind her ear.

“Did you sleep well?”

“Very,” Gillian nodded and cleared her throat. She watched him for a couple of moments before her eyes landed on the steaming mug he was holding, and she raised her eyebrows curiously. “Is that coffee?”

David snickered. “It is.” He waited for her to sit up before handing her the mug. He’d always loved watching her enjoy her first cup of coffee in the morning. She made it look like it was the best thing one could possibly taste.

“Hmm,” she hummed as she took her first sip. “It’s perfect, thank you. What time is it?”

“A little past 11. Pam would’ve liked to stay a bit longer, but she had to leave early. She told me to give you a kiss from her.”

“Why didn’t you wake me?”

He shrugged and draped his arm around her waist. “You didn’t even stir when I got up to take Brick for a walk. I figured you’d be exhausted, so I let you be,” he said softly and leaned forward to kiss her on the lips.

She nodded when he pulled back and licked her lips. He tasted salty, as if he’d just came back from a long walk at the beach.

“How are you feeling?”

“Yes, I’m feeling a lot better. Having had the first little breakdown had left me exhausted, but I was feeling lighter. For the first time in days, he felt like he could eat something again. All thanks to her, of course.

“I took Brick down to the beach,” he continued. “Got papped though, so if you’ve planned to head to the ocean today, I’d suggest a different location.”

“Hmm. I didn’t plan anything yet.” She took another sip. “I wasn’t sure what you’d be up to, or if you wanted to leave the house at all.”

“I can’t stay in here all day long, I need to go out.”

“Okay,” Gillian nodded and squeezed his arm. “Maybe we could escape the hustle and bustle by going on a hike.”

“You hate hiking.”

“I don’t hate it. I’m just… too lazy for it.”

David chuckled before he grew serious again, biting his lower lip. “You know, I still want to go to Budapest as planned.”

She pursed lips, gaze shifting between his eyes and his mouth, contemplating his statement before
asking, “Are you sure this is a good idea?”

“Hell, yeah. I uh, I need… a change of scenery to get out of my own head. And-,” he took her hand, brought it to his mouth and kissed her knuckles. “And I need you.”
Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness. - Marianne Williamson

Chapter Notes

Surprise, surprise! Unbelievable, right?
I can’t believe it took me over a year to finish this. It's been... hard.
But I like this little story a bit too much to abandon it, so here it is, the new chapter!
I hope you enjoy it! (no beta, and still not a native English speaker... sorry!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

David looked up from his magazine, searching for her familiar small frame among other travelers standing in line to get a fresh cup of coffee in the airline’s lounge.

Gillian hadn’t been gone long, maybe a couple of minutes tops, but her absence was already unsettling.

He hated airports - hated sitting around and wait, the immense crowds and most of all, David hated when people were staring at him. And while no one seemed to stare at him at this very moment, he didn’t feel good without her in his immediate proximity, which seemed to be the case all the time since he received the horrible news of Garry’s passing.

How he’d survived the first few days without her, he didn’t know. He also had no idea what he was thinking when he decided to deal with his grief alone. The only two things he was certain of was that he was an idiot and that the answer to the latter question was nothing. Obviously.

When he finally spotted her, she was standing a couple of feet from where he’d last seen her, engaged in a conversation with a lanky guy with short hair, who looked around his age. Based on their easy banter and David’s observation that both of them were holding some kind of beverage, David figured that they knew each other and had just met waiting in line.

He watched them for a couple of moments, then drew his attention back to the sports magazine he’d been looking at, reading the same paragraph about a retired baseball player probably for the tenth time.

His brain felt like mush, and his eyes were burning. With a heavy sigh, he stuffed the magazine into the side pocket of his backpack and closed his eyes.

While they still had a long flight ahead of them, he couldn’t wait to arrive in Budapest, have Gillian all for himself, and just be. Just the two of them. For four entire days. What a wonderful thing to look forward to.

“Alright,” she announced and he opened his eyes to her standing in front of him with a soft smile on her lips, holding out his travel mug. “They were out of the one you wanted, but I thought you’d also like the citrus mint tea.”
“Yeah, that’s perfect. Thank you,” he said and took the mug, closing his widespread legs to make a bit more room for her.

Not interested in having too much space between them, she sat down close beside him - arm to arm and thigh to thigh - before opening the lid of her bottle of coke and immediately taking a swig under his watchful eyes. The way her entire face would relax the second the coke hit her taste buds would never cease to amaze him.

“Who’s the guy you’ve been talking to over there?” he asked after taking a sip of his hot tea, putting his hand on her jeans-clad thigh.

“Oh, a screenwriter I’ve worked with a couple of years ago. He’s on his way back to London after a rather unpleasant business meeting,” she replied with a smirk and pushed a strand of hair behind her ear.

He couldn’t help but notice the sudden, although subtle change in her accent. She also appeared slightly… flustered. Interesting, David thought. So she likes the guy. Hmm.

“What?” Gillian prompted, and he just now realized that he was absently nodding his head.

“Nothing,” he squeezed the inside of her thigh. “Weren’t you hungry?”

“Oh, damn! I completely forgot about the snacks.”

“Got distracted, huh?”

“Ha-ha,” she playfully nudged her shoulder against his upper arm. “Do you want me to get some chips? Or anything else to eat?”

“No, I’m good,” he said, and just as she was about reply, her phone started to ring.

She closed the lid of her bottle and pulled the phone out of the pocket of her black coat, looking at the screen.

“Oh, it’s Piper,” Gillian said, lifting the phone to her ear. “Hey, hon. How are you doing? Is everything alright?”

He took another sip and put his arm over the back of Gillian’s seat, listening quietly.

"Oh no! I’m so sorry about that! Did she at least take a long nap?” Gillian grimaced, took another sip of her coke, then nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, that’s fine. Just remember that the boys need to pack their gym bags for parkour tomorrow, and Oscar needs his cleats for his game on Sunday. They need to pack that stuff tonight, otherwise, they’re not allowed to watch TV, alright? And please make sure they don’t eat their body weight in pizza,” she insisted.

With Erin, their nanny, sick with the flu, the situation at home was a mess, and it would be much easier for everyone if they just flew to London, wouldn’t get on their connecting flight to Budapest, and head home to take care of their kids. Instead, Piper had volunteered to look after her siblings until Mark picked up his boys the next day, so she’d only have to care for Eaden for a couple of hours after nursery school, which aligned perfectly with her current presence time at university.

Neither of them liked putting Piper in the position of the babysitter. While she was fantastic with her
little siblings, she had better things to do with her life than doing their job. But she always assured them that she didn’t mind watching the kids from time to time. David also knew that her mother always came up with a more than genuine reimbursement to show her daughter how grateful she was for her help, and he wasn’t exactly stingy with them either.

Though in this case, David knew that Piper wasn’t out for anything. She was doing it just for him.

“Hi baby, how are you doin’?” Gillian’s voice was suddenly a pitch higher, and he turned his head and grinned as he realized that she was talking to their daughter now.

“Are you going to have pizza tonight?”

Her question was followed by a long pause, in which Gillian waited patiently for an answer. It just didn’t seem to be the one she was expecting.

“Oh, you want to talk to Daddy?” Gillian glanced at David. “Yeah, Daddy is here. Don’t hang up, sweetie! I love you,” she said and handed him her phone. “Our daughter wants to speak to you,” she said, feigning a look of indignation under an amused smirk.

He stuck out his tongue and smiled, bringing the phone to his ear. “Hey, Eaden, it’s me, Daddy,” he said and waited for a response. There was a bit of rustling and in the background, and he could hear Piper instruct her baby sister to talk into the phone.

“Daddy!” she suddenly called out, so loud that even Gillian startled beside him. They shared a bemused look.

“Hello there, little slugger. How are you?”

A bit more rustling, then a sound as if someone had just knocked over a Duplo-tower.

“Oh-oh,” he could hear Eaden say in her sweet little voice. Someone else, probably one of the boys, was groaning loudly.

“God, I miss this crazy little girl so much,” David whispered to Gillian and wrapped his arm around her shoulder.

She was smiling her most endearing smile at him, and he couldn’t stop himself from leaning in and placing a couple of short pecks on her lips before resting his head against hers.

They started to chuckle in unison as Eaden let out a loud wail on the other end.

It was always a ride to talk to an almost 2-year-old on the phone, and they preferred to facetime so Eaden could comprehend the situation a bit better. But he’d learned to just go with the flow whenever a simple call had to be enough.

“Keep talking, babe,” he could hear Piper say. “Keep talking to Daddy, he is right here on the phone. Sit down and talk to him, we can play later.”

“Mmm, Daddy! Pway!”

“Yeah, hi baby! I can hear you play. Are you playing with Duplo?”
“Ossa pway.”

“Oscar is playing with you? That sounds nice! Are you being a good sport or are you just destroying everything?”

“Daddy!”

“Yes, honey?”

“Pway, Daddy!”

“Yeah, we will play again soon, I promise. Mommy and I will be back in a couple of days. You need to be good for your sister, okay?”


“Yes, I’ve heard that you’re going to have pizza tonight. Try and eat a big slice for me, will you? No fussing over your food, okay? Can you do that for me? Hello?” he squinted in confusion and looked at the screen.

The line was dead. His youngest daughter had hung up on him.

“Well,” he said, pouting. “That’s a first.”

Gillian chuckled. “Did she push that tempting red button again?”

“Did she do it before?”

“Yeah, it seems to be her new thing. She found it a couple of days ago while talking to my mother. She loved to make Mom call us back over and over again, and of course, Mom completely played into her game.”

“O-kay,” David made a face and handed her the phone. “I like to make her happy, but I’m not exactly in the mood for this right now.”

Gillian nodded in agreement. “And I’m not keen to make a habit out of it. I’ll just text Piper that we’ll call tomorrow night.”

"Is everything alright at home?"

"Eaden woke up at 4 am this morning. Bright-eyed and ready to play."

"Oh shit."

"And she only had a ten-minute nap this afternoon."

"Ouch. Poor Piper."

"Yeah, I feel so bad for her. At least Eaden's still in a good mood. It'll be fine," she assured.

David nodded. “Hey, did you know that none of my kids have deliberately hung up on me yet?”
“Really?” Gillian lifted her head to look at him curiously. “I’m having a hard time believing that.”

“It’s true. I hung up on West once, and she called me out on being super immature, though I’d been so close to burst that I thought it was for the best before I said something I’d regret later.”

She smiled and put her hand on his thigh, knowing all too well what he was talking about.

"Has Piper ever hung up on you?"

Gillian nodded. “Many times.”

“What have you done to deserve such treatment?” he asked, keeping his tone light.

“Haven’t kept my promises,” she answered with a sigh. “We’ve had a hot phase of hanging up on each other right before she moved to London. I never want to go through something like this again. It was horrible.”

David nodded his head. He was very aware of how difficult Gillian’s and Piper’s relationship had been at certain times. For many years, he’d tried his best to keep his nose out of Gillian’s businesses, especially when it came to the upbringing of her daughter. He’d felt like it wasn’t his place to have an opinion, let alone judge her for the choices she was making.

To this day, he couldn’t imagine what it must’ve been like for her, or Piper. All these crazy working hours; the days, later weeks, apart from each other. But he wished he’d provided more support along the way. Anything to make Gillian feel better. To lift some of the weight off her shoulders.

They were silent for a while, both of them watching a young father chase his toddler through the lounge with an older kid hot in his heels. All three of them were laughing from the tops of their lungs, making both David and Gillian smile.

“Hey,” she nuzzled her nose against his ear. “What are you thinking?”

David rested his head on top of hers and sighed. “Just that I’m really glad we’re going.”

"Mmm-hmm," Gillian hummed in approval. "We're gonna eat all the food, stroll through all those splendid streets, make the most out of those fantastic beds they have in that hotel..."

David chuckled softly, then tilted his head to kiss her temple. "That's exactly what I need right now."

***

The Four Seasons was a masterpiece of a hotel right on the Danube. Gillian knew the house, a lovely restored palace from the early nineteen-hundreds, but it was the first time for David, and she could see that he was just captivated by its beauty as she was.

The suite he’d chosen offered breathtaking views over the Buda Hills, the Royal Castle and the Chain Bridge spanning the Danube between Buda and Pest. It was spacious and elegant with a big, inviting bed and a jacuzzi-bathtub that would see a lot of her in the next couple of days.

They didn’t talk much shortly after arriving, tired after their long flight with the short layover in
London, unpacking their belongings in a comfortable silence and taking in their beautiful home for the next couple of days.

She was standing by the door to the balcony, sipping a cup of tea when he came out of the shower, wearing nothing but a towel, and wrapped his arms around her from behind. Without saying a word, they stood there for a couple of minutes, enjoying the silence, watching people stroll over the bridge and boats sail past. When she finished her tea, it was her turn to freshen up for the night ahead.

It didn’t take her too long to remove her makeup and shower, but when she came out of the bathroom, gently applying moisturizer to her face, he was lying in the middle of the bed with only a pair of boxer shorts on, sound asleep.

He hadn’t been able to sleep very well in the last couple of days, so it was no surprise that he would be out like a light as soon as he got even remotely comfortable.

Relieved that he was finally able to get some rest, she put one of the sheets over his lean body, closed the curtains and went into the living room to get some fresh air on the balcony.

It had been raining for weeks just until a couple of days ago, and now the sun was bathing the city in a soft glow and pleasant warmth. Everything was blooming, and winter all but forgotten.

Gillian loved spring, and she was looking forward to the temperature to rise into its 70s in the next couple of days. It would make exploring much more enjoyable for her sun-loving man. And she wanted him to see a lot of this pretty city to take his mind away from death and loss. At least for a couple of hours.

She went back into the living room and poured herself a glass of coke out of the minibar, contemplating what to do while he was getting the rest he needed, and her first impulse was to grab her laptop and continue to work on the next chapter of her new book.

But the thought made her stomach clench.

Ever since she read the publisher’s email that they wanted more personal insights and asked for more details about their struggles to help people identify with the book and underline the meaning behind each principle, she hadn’t been able to write a single word. Putting any kind of personal details into a book, even this kind of book, scared the hell out of her.

Where would she ultimately draw the line, she wondered. Did she even know what she was comfortable sharing and what would simply be too personal? Who would take her insecurities and struggles and turn them against her? Or, even worse, use them to harm her family? She needed to talk to David about this, but right now was not the time nor the place for that particular conversation.

With a sigh and a last glance towards her laptop, she decided that she wouldn’t spend another minute of this short vacation thinking about work, emptied her glass, put it on the couch table and sneaked back into the bedroom.

Now there she was, a content smile on her face as she eased herself down onto the bedside right beside his sleeping form, conscious not to disturb and wake him just yet, hoping for a few more moments to watch him and indulge in the beauty of his messy bedhead and five-day-scruff.

From the very beginning, Gillian was the kind of woman who had rarely taken the opportunity to nap every time the baby was sleeping, and not only because there hadn’t ever been much time for
napping. Gillian would much rather watch her child sleep, touch it and marvel at its miraculous perfection.

For her, there was something about the simplicity of the moment, the calm sensation of stillness that touched her deeply when she was able to watch a person she loved sleep. Better than any yoga class and even more powerful than meditation, and she was trying to hold the feeling for as long as she could to be able to summon it whenever life got stressful.

And the last couple of days had been incredibly stressful.

Gillian wasn’t entirely sure that they’d made the right decision by coming to Budapest after everything that had happened in the last couple of days, no matter how much she’d been looking forward to this trip. She’d openly voiced her concerns, afraid that it would be too much too soon. It would be a much-needed change in scenery, he’d said. And, most importantly, a distraction from all the depressing thoughts and feelings. He was scared to feel trapped, and Malibu had started to feel like a fishbowl to him. So they'd re-booked their flights and left his house with nothing more than two carry-on bags.

There’s no closure with death. When someone who’s a part of you dies, you carry it with you for the rest of your life. The loss can’t be fixed, repaired or resolved, or the pain be made better.

Whilst all his friends were sacred to David, Garry had been special. A once-in-a-lifetime person for someone whose trust didn’t come easily. Two difficult, highly sensitive men, both blessed with a brilliant sense of humor that had ultimately brought them together.

They loved and complimented each other so well that you almost always felt like the third wheel in their presence. Even her. Or, in this particular case, especially her.

It wasn't exactly a secret that she and Garry had never warmed up to each other, and she was certain that he didn't find her worthy of his best friends' devotion and love.

“You’re a hurricane, Gillian,” he'd once said to her. “You think you’re unstoppable in destroying everything that’s on your path. But you’re wrong. I will prove you wrong. Because I won’t let you destroy him, or the family he is trying to build. Not now, not ever.”

His words had marked her deeply, even though she’d laughed at him for sounding so cliché. What did he know about them after all? She had refused to let this man write their story.

But in the end, it was Garry who had provided her with the necessary willpower to stay away, and somehow, she was thankful for that.

She’d watched David become a father and fall in love with his family from a distance; always around, but never too close to distract him from what she knew had become the most important thing to him; his daughter.

Pulled out of her thoughts by his sudden, sharp intake of air, Gillian smiled and put her hand flat on his chest, patting lightly.

“Hey you,” she whispered, smiling as he blinked his eyes open to look at her. “How are you feeling?”

“Hmm, good. Better,” he murmured, stretched his arms over his head and yawned heartily. “Sorry, I
fell asleep on you. Have I been out for long?"

"No, maybe half an hour. You needed a bit of rest, though. I tried to be productive, but ended up sitting here and watching you."

"And what now," David mumbled and turned over, putting his arm over her waist to pull her closer. "More sleep?"

"Nope," Gillian shook his head and leaned down to kiss his cheek. "No more sleep till tonight. We have to stay awake for a couple of hours."

He grumbled his disapproval and nuzzled his nose against her upper thigh, slipping one hand underneath her shirt to caress her back. "But the bed is warm, and you smell so nice. You must be exhausted, Gillian."

"I'm fine."

"Don't lie. You've been to New York the day before Garry passed, and gave a speech in front of the United Nations. You then flew back to London, only to fly to Los Angeles two days later. Now you're back in Europe. In which time zone are you even right now?"

"I don't know."

"Yeah, I think so, too," David whispered. "Come to bed, babe."

"I am a bit tired," Gillian admitted and ran her fingers through his soft hair, gently massaging his warm scalp. "But we need some food and the weather is good. Do you think we could go out for a little while?"

He sighed and closed his eyes. "I guess we could."

"Aren't you hungry at all? I'm actually kinda starving."

"I could eat something, yeah," he murmured and rubbed his eye with the back of his hand.

"Well then. Get up, Mister Duchovny!" Gillian said and patted his arm. "I can't wait to show you this beautiful city!"

***

David had no idea what time it was, but it felt like he'd been studying the swirling patterns inside his eyelids for hours now. Sleep just didn't want to come.

The room was quiet, the bed warm and soft and the sheets smelled like heaven.

Or maybe it was the beautiful woman lying next to him with her head resting on his chest, who always smelled divine, and who was never not soft and warm in his arms.

Nothing was wrong, and he was tired to the bones after their long flight, two hours of sightseeing, a delicious, heavy Hungarian dinner, and two glasses of red wine.
He really should be sleeping the sleep of the just. But he wasn't.

Instead, his mind was on overdrive. Memories of Garry mixed with thoughts about Téa and his children, his late father, his mother, sickness, age, death and why, why, why?

Wasn’t it just a couple of weeks ago that they'd celebrated the premiere of the new season and, a couple of days after that, his star on the Walk of Fame, and everything seemed to be just fine? Hell, everything was fine last week, when they’d met for lunch in Malibu, only two days before…

"What's wrong?" Gillian’s soft voice suddenly broke the silence. It wasn’t the first time that she seemed to be able to sense his inner restlessness.

"I can't sleep."

"Do you want to talk?"

David shrugged his shoulders and exhaled through his nose. She slipped her hand inside of his and squeezed.

"Was he sick? Garry?"

"No," he replied after a couple of moments, then added, “I mean, not to my knowledge.”

“Okay,” she said, quietly.

“He would’ve told me, Gill,” David said, nodding to himself. "He would've told me if something were wrong."

“I'm sure, yeah."

"He was in good health. He didn't drink much alcohol, he ate well. He was… he was a great boxer. Hell, we went boxing every chance we got," he rambled. "Maybe-, maybe not in the last couple of weeks, because he was still recovering from this dental surgery, but… he was fit. I mean… I don't understand. I just don't get it."

"Honey," Gillian whispered and lifted her head to look at him.

"I don't get it," he kept mumbling, shaking his head with his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

Gillian reached to turn on the bedside lamp, dimming the light to a gentle glow before putting her hand back on his chest.

He looked down at her, his expression mirroring the multitude of questions and worries running through his head. She could count the times she'd seen him this tired and emotionally drained on one hand, mostly because he usually managed to hide it so well.

While the day had provided enough distractions and he enjoyed strolling through Budapest's splendid streets and eating all the foods they could find, the night wasn't as gentle and kind with its quiet darkness, and it showed.

David swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing in his throat. She felt him tighten his grip on her hip
while his free hand came up to tuck a strand of hair behind her ear.

"He wasn't always nice to you, was he?"

Gillian raised her eyebrows. She hadn't expected a question like that, and this particular one made her uncomfortable. It was hard to suppress the urge to squirm out of his arms and turn around so he couldn't see her face anymore.

He held her gaze as she willed herself to relax.

"He was nice to me. Most of the time," she finally said, quietly.

David groaned. "Most of the time," he echoed, wryly. "Did you know that he always came up with some stupid reason not to come to my house when he knew you were there?"

"It's not like I put a lot of effort into our relationship either. I feel like we had this… mutual agreement that we didn't get along. So we avoided each other."

"Come on, we both know that this isn't true," David said, and she narrowed her eyes questioningly. "The truth is that he could be an asshole when it came to you."

Gillian opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

She wasn't sure what he was getting at, or why he was mentioning it now, after never mentioning it before. Was he feeling ashamed for the way his best friend had treated her in the past, or guilty that he hadn't done enough about it?

The last thing Gillian wanted was to make him feel bad about something Garry had done, or the way he'd behaved in the past.

But it wasn't about that, she realized.

She cleared her throat and licked her lips before she spoke again. "He was just worried for you, David. And for your family. He loved you, and we weren't always… good for each other. Who wouldn't have wanted to protect their friend in a similar situation?"

"I would've at least considered the possibility that my friend could have found his person, you know?"

"He probably thought this person was Téa."

"Oh, come on."

"Is this about you being angry that now that Garry is dead, he and I will never become friends?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I know how much you wanted us to like each other. To have the same thing he and Téa had, so we could be this fun party of three you have been."

"That's not true."
"Isn't it?"

"I just didn't want you to feel… hurt, sad, or less than just because my best friend didn't like you, but loved my ex-wife."

"David."

"I was scared that you could take it as a sign that… we weren't meant for each other, or something."

She raised her eyebrow, incredulously.

"You know you can be receptive to these kinds of things," he justified. "I just didn't want you to worry about it."

Gillian remained silent. It was so hard to find the right words, and it felt weird to talk about someone she never felt close to but played such a huge role in her partner's life.

"Hey," he said when she started to gnaw on her bottom lip. The expression on his face was thoughtful, almost serious. "Are we... still not good for each other?" he asked.

"David," Gillian sighed and rolled onto her back. She raised her hand to pinch the bridge of her nose between her thumb and index finger.

"I'm just-, I don't know."

"You say you didn't want me to worry, but why did you let yourself worry about it? About us?"

"I was never worried about us. I was just… he made me feel insecure, and as if I had to prove something to him. I didn't like that."

"Did you ever tell him that you were feeling this way?"

"No. I think he didn't want to hurt me, but he just couldn't bring himself to-"

"Accept me," she finished his sentence.

"Yeah."

"Mmm."

"So?" he prompted and turned to his side to look at her. He didn't need to say more for her to know what he was trying to get at.

"I think that… we were having a very nice, very casual thing going on and a lot of fun when I got pregnant. Nine months wasn't a long time to merge two families with five children and to figure out… if, and how we wanted to do this together, as a couple. And then she was there, so perfect and beautiful, and… the first year with her was… so fucking hard. The second one isn't much better, so thank god it's over in two weeks."

David let out a quiet exhalation of amusement. Not that the year of the terrible twos promised to become anything but hard, but a parent could hope, right?
"We weren't planning to have a child together, and we didn't have a rock-solid relationship at that point. And to be honest, I didn't think it would work out when I held that positive pregnancy test in my hand. Any of it. So I can't blame anyone in our lives who might've thought the same. But… here we are."

"Yeah, here we are."

"I really like what we have."

"Me, too. I think we did very well with all the merging, decision making, committing..."

Gillian nodded in agreement. "We did. And you know, with Garry, it was enough for me to know that he loved Eaden. And she adored him. And remember when you took the boys to his gym last year? They're still talking about what a fun day they had. He was so good to them."

"Yeah," he whispered, and she could hear that he was starting to choke up. "I love him, Gillian. I love him so much, despite everything."

"I know you do," she reached up to cup his cheek, feeling the dampness of his tears underneath her thumb. "And it's alright, David. It's alright to love him, to miss him, cry over him, and also to be angry with him," she said and smoothed his tears away. "Whatever it is, I'm here."

He pulled her closer and nestled his face into the crook of her neck, her sweet scent and her warmth calming him instantly. "I'm so glad to have you with me."

Gillian smiled and wrapped her hand around his neck as she buried her nose into his hair. "I wouldn't want to be anywhere else."

Chapter End Notes

This won't be posted anywhere else.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!