

Sutton had planned to do this, well, differently.

She'd *planned* share a wonderful dinner with Charlotte when she arrived home from a long day of work, before turning on the twinkling Christmas lights they'd hung throughout the apartment, and snuggle up to her wife in their glow, revelling in being close to her.

Which, in fairness, was actually a very common occurrence they had in the last several years. But, *then* –

She'd planned to take Charlotte into their bedroom and ask her to check over what Sutton had packed in her suitcase, for them to leave tomorrow and spend the holidays with Sutton's family. Charlotte had actually managed to snag her vacation time a full two weeks before Christmas and was going to join Sutton for the entire time at her parents' house, which was a first for them.

She always made it in time for Christmas, but even just last year that had meant she'd made it to Sutton's parents' house sometime on Christmas Eve. She *never* was able to work remotely for several weeks at a time, and definitely not in conjunction with actual vacation time after.

And in that suitcase, delicately placed on top, was a little onesie, decorated with a tasteful flower pattern that she knew Charlotte would love.

But like many of her plans, it didn't go entirely in accordance with what she'd pictured in her head.

Instead, Charlotte arrived home almost an hour early – a rare occurrence in the last couple of months, as she'd been busier than she typically was – just as Sutton had been putting the finishing touches on the suitcase.

She'd smoothed her hand over her own stomach as she'd closed it and stepped back, taking in a deep breath and already bursting with the sheer *joy* of – their baby was inside of her.

And then nearly jumped in shock as Charlotte's voice came from behind her. "Sutton, why is Dr. Laurier calling you?"

"You're home early!" Sutton's heart leapt in her chest in surprise, her mouth falling open though no words came out, because – she hadn't had a plan for this. "I... she did?"

Charlotte offered Sutton her phone. "You left this in the kitchen, her office just called a minute ago. And yes; I've missed you quite a bit in the last six weeks, darling," her voice dipped from the inquisitive I-want-an-answer tone, into the soft one she always reserved for Sutton.

Sutton darted her eyes down and did, indeed, see the missed call from her obstetrician, and – this was okay, she could work with this.

She stepped aside and gestured at the suitcase, "Why don't you take a look in the suitcase?"

Charlotte didn't budge, and – if anything – the look in her eyes only sharpened. "Sutton, why is Dr. Laurier calling?" Her gaze moved clinically over Sutton, that edge of worry that Sutton could so easily recognize making itself known. "I thought everything was fine?"

“It is!” She was quick to assure, because – well, everything was fine, now. “It’s—” *more than fine*, was cut off, as Charlotte moved even closer, shaking her head.

“I knew I shouldn’t have left,” she muttered, her voice taking on that angry edge, and Sutton knew it was at herself rather than at Sutton. “I shouldn’t have been away for so long! Not... so soon. Or, I should have insisted you come with me.” Big, brown eyes searched Sutton’s as she tapped at Sutton’s phone. “Call her back. Call her back, now. See if we can get you in, today. I’ll call Hamish,” she referenced her driver, already reaching toward her back pocket to take her phone out.

“Stop! I don’t need to see Dr. Laurier for anything urgent,” Sutton quickly reached out and took a hold of Charlotte’s upper-arms, stilling her movements.

She understood Charlotte’s worry – or, at least, she was unsurprised by it.

They’d decided last spring that it was time to seriously start trying to get pregnant. And after the first two attempts didn’t take, they’d waited for three months to try a third time. Sutton had coached herself to go into the appointment in September without expectations – as much as she could do that, anyway – because every time it didn’t work, she was so disappointed and so *heartbroken*.

Charlotte... well, Sutton knew she was disappointed, as well. But never quite heartbroken in the same way she was. Which, Sutton understood – that was who Charlotte was. There was no doubt about Charlotte’s investment in the entire process or in Sutton’s physical and emotional health, because she was there both every time Sutton asked and when she didn’t. And that was all she needed from Charlotte, during this process.

When they’d tried again two and a half months ago, they had then waited on baited breath – not rushing into taking any pregnancy tests that time – only to feel that same rush of disappointed sadness when Sutton had gotten her period mid-October.

Charlotte had then had an incredibly busy six weeks in terms of congressional hearings and meetings in D.C., followed up by a two week trip to the Middle East, from the end of October to only yesterday.

And it had been while she’d been away, working over ten hour days, that Sutton had come to learn that their latest attempt at IUI *had* worked. At her follow-up with Dr. Laurier just under three weeks ago, where she’d been expecting the same-old same-old, she’d been informed that she actually *was* pregnant.

That her bleeding had likely been hormonal, around the time she was due for her period.

And her wife, at that moment, had been on a plane over the Atlantic, for literally world-changing, important business. Her wife, who had hardly stopped stressing about Sutton’s well-being for months, did *not* need to be worried about this from halfway across the world, where she could have very little control over anything.

Thus, this plan had been formed. The plan of wanting to see Charlotte face-to-face when she told her. The plan of knowing she was quite literally nearing the end of her first trimester and that they were officially at a less than 1% chance of miscarriage. The plan of telling Charlotte the day she was officially starting her vacation from work, where they could just – *revel* and enjoy and be *happy*.

And it had been so hard to hold it in – not that she and Charlotte had a *ton* of time to talk in the last few weeks, given their schedules and the time difference, but *still*.

Charlotte's eyes searched hers, still clearly dubious. "Sutton, what is going on?"

And the words bubbled up in her throat, unable to keep them down anymore. Because it had been *so difficult*, and, "I'm pregnant," she whispered.

She could see the way everything played out on Charlotte's face – the registering of her words, the shock, the excitement, and then the obvious confusion that came and settled. "But, *how*? When? I – you weren't when I left...?"

Her voice trailed off, sounding so odd compared to her typical self-assurance, as her gaze fell to Sutton's stomach, where she had yet to develop any sort of a bump, yet.

Soon, according to Laurier and every book she'd read in the last year. Soon enough.

She nodded, running her hands up and down the top of Charlotte's arms, loving her warmth, her closeness. "I was."

Charlotte's eyes whipped back to hers in question.

"I didn't know! I thought – we both thought I wasn't, but – I am."

She bit her lip, and even that wasn't enough to contain the gleeful smile that already started to slide over her features. She hadn't yet told her mom or her Regan, even though she had been dying to, because she'd been waiting for *this moment*.

"And I know it's not the way we thought we would have found out, but you've been so busy with work, and you weren't even in the country when I found out, and last time, when it didn't work, it was so *hard*. But this time—"

"Ten weeks?" Charlotte asked, her voice hushed, somehow both sounding amazed and matter-of-fact, at once.

"Yes," she confirmed, sliding her hands down to take Charlotte's, lacing their fingers together in that perfect fit they had.

And then, she waited. *She'd* had to take hours to process, so she could give her wife time. Especially after the fraught journey they'd had leading up to this.

Which, they'd discussed many times since then.

Charlotte's insecurities about being a mother as a whole, stemming from her own lack of warmly maternal figures while growing up.

Which, Sutton understood, but also... she experienced Charlotte's vulnerable side. Her openness and warmth, that maybe even her own wife didn't see in herself, but *she* did.

Charlotte's fears about being *present* – physically and mentally – because her work was still so important to her and how she was terrified she would be barely a parent, while leaving the heavy lifting to Sutton.

Which, Sutton appreciated. Because Charlotte was brilliant and observant and could see even her own potential flaws. But, also, Sutton didn't know how Charlotte didn't see how present and available she was for Sutton.

Charlotte's general, overall minute panics over *what to do* with a baby – when they get sick or cry or have anything go wrong in any way, due to her entire lack of interaction with any babies... ever.

Which Sutton absolutely could sympathize with... but, she also knew she was married to the most competent woman on the actual planet.

They'd talked through all of Charlotte's concerns, many times. And what Charlotte never seemed to entirely wrap her head around, was that Sutton shared none of the same concerns about Charlotte as a parent.

"*I know who you are,*" she'd say to Charlotte, and, well, she meant it. She *saw* all of the good in Charlotte, everything she was capable of, even when she couldn't see it herself. And she knew there was no one else on the entire earth that she'd want to go on this journey with. She knew there was no one else on the entire planet who would be better to go on this journey with.

The last year had been a focus on trying to get her wife – a Senator, who had a literal step-by-step book on managing world crises and plans to become the president – feeling confident in herself on this front, too.

Charlotte's big brown eyes stared into hers, the look in them wondrous and analytical at once, before they dipped down to her still flat stomach, then back to Sutton's eyes again. "You're pregnant," she repeated.

"Yes?" Sutton hedged out in confirmation, even though, it damnably *did* sound like a question.

But, she didn't expect Charlotte – who had an opinion on everything, and usually did not make a habit of hiding those opinions – to question this, several times. But, she'd reassure her as many times as she needed. She'd –

"Okay."

Sutton blinked, surprised confusion pushing through her. "Okay?" She echoed, staring at Charlotte, quizzically.

But Charlotte's typically intensely focused gaze wasn't there. Not on Sutton, anyway. There were those wheels turning in her mind, the gears shifting, and Sutton, at this point in being together, could usually tell the direction her wife's thoughts were in, if not the entirety of said thoughts.

At this moment, though, she was lost.

Especially as Charlotte nodded to herself. Once, then twice. Before turning on her heel and walking out of their bedroom.

Sutton stood there, hands hanging at her sides, as she stared blankly at the spot Charlotte had been in seconds before. The picture she had in her mind, of Charlotte and her revelling in the news, disappeared before her very eyes.

“I...” She had to shake herself out of it, “Charlotte?” She called out, starting to follow, only to head the resounding sound of the door to their apartment shutting.

That made her hustle, jogging down the hall, because – there was no way Charlotte had just *left*, right? There was no way she’d told her wife, her lovely, attentive, capable, brilliant wife, that she was pregnant, only for her to turn on her heel and walk right out of their apartment.

Right?

Wrong.

That was *exactly* what had happened.

She’d ran to look in every room, first, believing that her mind had played tricks on her.

But, no. It hadn’t.

Charlotte really wasn’t there.

And when Sutton called, Charlotte had answered, in the tone that told Sutton she’d been on the line with someone else, but had picked up for Sutton – and Sutton, only – to check in.

“Where–” had been all she’d been able to get out, before Charlotte had cut her off.

“Are you healthy?” Charlotte asked, her tone that strangely alluring coaxing demand. “Are you and the baby healthy? Have you seen Dr. Laurier?”

“I – of *course*. And yes, we are,” she answered, pressing her hand over her lower stomach, that warm glow floating through her whenever she registered that *she was pregnant*.

“Charlotte–”

“Good,” Charlotte’s reply was swift, and she moved the phone away from her mouth as she directed who Sutton could only assume was Hamish, her driver, to turn. “I’ll see you soon.”

“Where–”

And then it was over.

She *did* answer the text Sutton had immediately followed up with –

Sutton – 4:43PM

???????

Charlotte – 4:44PM

Soon.

Charlotte – 4:45PM

Do not go anywhere.

Charlotte – 4:45PM

Don't even move.

Charlotte – 4:46PM

Sit on the couch, with the blankets, with all of the Christmas lights

Sutton did so, but mostly only because she was trying desperately to ward off her insecurities.

It wasn't working very well, if she was being honest. Sutton knew she was an emotional person, by nature, and pregnancy hormones were certainly already adding to it. And, if she was honest, the biggest fear she'd had going into this was that Charlotte would realize she didn't want it, even if she'd been the one to initially push for them to start trying.

She rubbed her hand over her eyes, trying to scrub away the tears that were already forming, as she called Regan.

"Have you seen Charlotte?" She pulled her knees up, tugging the blanket around herself.

"Um... no?" Regan replied. "Isn't that your job? And didn't she just get back from a long-ass trip? And you two are going to Jack and Katherine's for the holidays? Shouldn't she be disgustingly all over you?"

Normally, she was. She'd come home early – a rare occurrence – for that purpose.

The idea only made the grip tightening around her heart even tighter.

"I – yeah. We just..." She trailed off, biting at her inner-cheek, and it... god, this was *so* not how she'd expected anything to go and...

"Oh my *GOD*, did you tell her you were pregnant?!" Regan's scream made Sutton grimace, pulling the phone away from her ear.

Before she whipped it back to her ear. "How did – I didn't tell *you* I was pregnant!"

"I've known for weeks, babe! I've been waiting for you to tell me."

"Weeks?!" Sutton had barely known for two weeks.

"Do you know how much self-restraint I've had? Does this mean we can bring over the stuff I got for you?"

Sutton was still reeling, though. "*How* have you known for weeks?"

"Emma's been making me wait for you to say something, but it's been *tough*," Regan said, instead of answering.

Sutton brought her hand up to massage her temples. "I – listen, I can't—"

Regan's voice gentled, "I'm *so* happy for you. You deserve this, my giant ray of ginger sunshine. Little Regan Junior is going to be the most loved baby there is, even if Charlotte

went AWOL right now. She'll be back soon... and if she isn't, I will personally hunt her down like a shark and murder her."

The lowkey serious threat in Regan's voice, even with her light tone, made Sutton laugh, in spite of the facts. That she was pregnant, and she'd told her wife, who had then about-faced and walked out of their home.

She stayed on the line with Regan for a little while longer, long enough to get a soft congrats from Emma too, before they hung up. And then, she just... sat.

The thing was, while Charlotte had told Sutton about her insecurities, Sutton had been so *sure* of Charlotte. She'd never had any reason to falter with Charlotte, not since before they'd truly gotten together. After Charlotte had come to her and said that having a baby was something she'd wanted, Sutton was *sure*. She was sure even when Charlotte wasn't, about how wonderful Charlotte would be with this. Because she just *was*, with everything.

They'd talked through Charlotte's worries – that she would prioritize work, that she wouldn't be present, that she would check-out... that she'd be more like her parents than she would ever hope – so much, before last spring, and Sutton had at turns, soothed these worries and logically worked through them.

And she'd left the ball in Charlotte's court, last spring – right after Sutton's birthday – as she'd brushed those soft dark waves behind her ears after one of their Big Conversations, and looked into her eyes, as she'd said softly, "I know *you*, as much as I know *me*, that you would be an amazing mother. Someone who loves differently than I do, but is no less loving. And I want to have babies with you, Charlotte Thompson. But if that's not what you want, if any part of you isn't sure, then that's okay."

And she'd pressed her forehead against Charlotte's, as she'd felt her wife's hands come up and tangle into the ends of her hair as she'd stroked Sutton's back, and... it had been a moment of utter clarity and honesty.

It had then been Charlotte who had come home a couple weeks later with research done by her assistant about all of the best places in the city to conceive and, because she was Charlotte Thompson, consult appointments set up at the top five.

She'd been there at every step, every appointment, every high and low, holding Sutton's hand, asking every question to Dr. Laurier, holding Sutton herself whenever the tests were negative.

She'd had no doubt. None.

But right at this moment...

She jerked her head up as the door opened, her heart hammering. "Charlotte?"

"Just place it there, thank you," most definitely Charlotte's voice directed, and heavier footsteps fell, until the doorman came into Sutton's view, his arms laden with bags.

He gave her a smile and a nod. "Mrs. Thompson."

"Blake," she tentatively smiled back, wiping at her face, as her hands sat listlessly in her lap, before her gaze fell to the, frankly, overwhelming amount of bags he'd brought in.

“Senator,” he said as he turned to Charlotte, who also had now made her way into the apartment, and was also laden down by shopping bags.

Which Sutton stared at, nearly uncomprehensive.

Charlotte had left... to shop?

“Thank you, Blake,” Charlotte murmured, discreetly slipping him cash as he walked by. “I appreciate it.”

“Of course,” he accepted the tip and turned back to Sutton, who slowly pushed herself up to stand. “And, if I may say so, congratulations.”

“Thank you,” she smiled back at him, still feeling like her head was spinning.

She watched as he waved, and went back down the hall, before she faced Charlotte again. Still hurt and indignant and utterly baffled.

“I have it all,” Charlotte nodded, her hands falling to her hips, as she surveilled the room.

Sutton only stared. “What?”

“Everything, I have it,” Charlotte answered, gesturing at all of the items.

She looked at it all, slowly guessing, “Baby stuff?”

Charlotte finally turned to look at her, incredulous. “Darling, we are months away from that. Though,” she admitted with a self-deprecating smile, “There are a few things that I’ve accumulated. Blankets and clothes and – just some little odds and ends.”

“Accumulated?” She couldn’t help but ask, once again looking at everything now amassed in their living room. And, yeah, Charlotte *had* only been gone for an hour, which certainly wasn’t long enough to get *all of this*.

“Most of it is for you,” Charlotte said, in that tone of *obviously*.

“Me?” Sutton dimly echoed.

“Well, of course,” Charlotte started sifting through the items. “In there,” she pointed to a box that Blake had essentially nudged in with his feet while his arms had been full. “Is a pregnancy pillow that is supposed to be the best on the market.” She tugged out several items, “And this, is a back support, and a yoga ball – I know you love yoga, but you’ll need supports, we can take any risks.”

Sutton’s head started spinning as she could only watch Charlotte methodically start moving through her purchases.

“There are ginger drops – just in case you start experiencing any nausea, Heather – my assistant’s wife? She swore by them. And those are oils and lotions and bath bombs and aromatherapies, all very baby safe, for me to pamper you with, whenever you like. Some speciality teas – yes, those are right here. And, this heating pad was very highly recommended, and so were these slippers. See? Comfortable and soft, but orthopedic. Oh, and those joggers were rated as the top comfort clothing item for pregnant women for the last four years in a row.”

Charlotte stood up straight, blowing her hair out of her face as she looked around at everything, her eyebrows drawing together.

“I thought about getting some more maternity clothes, just to make it easier for you, but then I thought – you’d like to do that, right? I’d like to come with you, too.”

“That’s where you went? To... go and get all of this?” She gestured at all of the items, disbelief coursing through her.

Charlotte nodded, before pursing her lips. “Oh, and I called Paula. I’ve told her we need to be her first priority come the new year.”

“Paula,” Sutton repeated. “The realtor.”

“I know we *were* looking last year, but nothing seemed perfect, and we didn’t think it was necessary to move, then. But now, with our baby – this apartment is just too small, I think. I want her to have the space to run and play and... if we’re being honest, I’d like to think very seriously about a townhouse.”

Sutton stared at Charlotte, from where she stood across the living room from her, everything inside of her that had panicked and hurt, turning into this warm pile of *mush*, just like that. And Charlotte was still speaking, pushing her hair back from her face as she gestured at the items and down at her phone to what Sutton believed was her planner, and...

She hopped easily over the items sprawled over the floor and pulled Charlotte against her, effectively cutting her off.

She tunnelled her fingers into the mass of dark hair, breathing easily out, before inhaling Charlotte’s scent. “You had this all ready? All of it?”

“I’ve been buying since we started trying,” Charlotte whispered, her hands coming to clutch at Sutton. “I want to make sure you have everything, darling. I never wanted to bring it back and make it harder, when it wasn’t working. I just... I wanted it all to be perfect for you and for her...” she trailed off, nuzzling into Sutton’s neck.

Before she jerked back, only inches, but enough that Sutton could see how wide her eyes were. Wide and wondrous as she pressed her hand between them, against Sutton’s stomach. “You’re *pregnant*,” she whispered, and that wondrous look was reflected in her voice.

Her beautiful, capable hand, with their wedding band on it, slid over Sutton’s stomach, both soft and firm, and they both stared down at her.

“I’m pregnant,” she confirmed, placing her hand over Charlotte’s. Before she ducked her head to make eye contact with Charlotte, “And don’t you *ever* turn around and walk away like that, after I tell you news.”

Her hurt feelings had faded by now, because... this was what she’d wanted, honestly. This was all she’d wanted. Charlotte’s investment and softness and love, and Sutton could see *now*, that it was Charlotte’s intensity and focus that had completely taken her over.

Charlotte nodded, looking contrite as she stared back up at Sutton, “I – I didn’t even think. I just, I heard that you were pregnant, and that it was *real*, and finally here. And I’ve been... I’d tried to hide every time it didn’t work, how hurt I was, because I wanted to be strong for

you. But every time we tried, I would go out and buy more pregnancy items for you, and keep them in storage and just, *hope*. And, I needed you to have it all. I needed—” she jerked her head back again, staring up at Sutton. “You shouldn’t be on your feet. You should be relaxing. We need to call your mother. Maybe she can come here for the holidays? Maybe—”

Sutton couldn’t help but smile, then laugh, as the joy pushed through her.

This was exactly what she’d expected. This was the Charlotte she’d known would appear.

She reached up and cupped her hand around the side of Charlotte’s neck. “Love, I’m allowed to stand. And be active. And mobile. In fact, it’s healthy. Okay?”

Charlotte’s eyebrows furrowed, clearly in conflict. “All right.” She pursed her lips. “Though, I’d like to make another meeting with Dr. Laurier, so I can ask some questions.”

Sutton laughed, not expecting the tears that slid over her cheeks, but also not surprised by them. “All right.”

Charlotte reached up and cupped Sutton’s jaw, using her thumbs to gently stroke away Sutton’s tears, and the look on her face was so absolutely tender, it might make Sutton cry even more.

Even before it turned scolding. “How could you not tell me, darling? You knew when I was away?”

“You were going to the Middle East, you weren’t here, and I know everything you’ve been working on is *so* important—”

The look in Charlotte’s eyes went utterly hard. Not *at* Sutton, but firm? Serious and somber, like she needed Sutton to *hear* her. “I would have turned that plane around. Do you understand? In words I never thought I’d ever say before you, Sutton – I don’t give a flying fuck about *anything* else. Not in congress, not in the Middle East, not even about Caleb or *anything*. You come first.” A breath shuddered out of her, as she slid her eyes back down to Sutton’s stomach. “You both do, now.”

Yeah, the five inches between them was far, far too much distance.

She pulled Charlotte back against her, instinctively knowing that Charlotte’s face would be tipped up to hers. She felt Charlotte’s lips, soft and full, on hers and breathed out a sigh into them.

She supposed if Charlotte didn’t have a storage locker full of every single item Sutton and their baby would need, months before she got pregnant, mixed in with single-minded focus and communication that Sutton had to coax out of her, she wouldn’t be Charlotte Thompson.

And Sutton... only wanted this life with Charlotte Thompson.