

WARNING: FUN SPOILER ALERTS AHEAD

The Decorator

Brian eased the spare bedroom door closed. He'd been up since the ass-crack of dawn assembling Riley's wedding present, but it was finally done. And it turned out perfectly if he did say so himself. Shooting a quick glance up the hall to his sleeping wife, he tiptoed toward the kitchen. *Wife*—damn that had a great ring to it.

It wouldn't be just the two of them for long though. His sugar-and-spice future had his gut in knots. They were having a girl. In five months he was going to be some little baby's daddy. That realization terrified and excited him in turns.

He opened the refrigerator, palming a carton of eggs then searched the cabinets until he found a frying pan. His nervous energy settled as he worked the plan-of-the-day: breakfast in bed for his Riley, the big reveal, and then making love. What better way to spend his first leave since taking the job that sent him to South America?

Brian was working his way through the carton when Riley wrapped her arms around his back. Her baby bump pressed against the small of his back. "Is the honeymoon already over after one day of marriage?" she asked with a teasing lilt to her voice. They'd gone to the Dawson County Courthouse yesterday, saying their vows in front of his family and a few of their friends.

Brian turned, brushing aside her long hair to kiss the sweet spot behind her ear. "Not a chance, sunshine. Just had a few chores I wanted to get done while I was home."

He'd been away a month—four effing weeks of missing her. And of her worrying about his safety in the field. He already dreaded having to leave her again in the morning.

"I thought nesting was a mother-to-be thing," she said chuckling.

He couldn't get enough of the spark in her violet-colored eyes. Or watching her grow ripe with his child. His hand went to her belly. "Gotta take care of my girls."

“I’ve missed you,” she said, tugging on the hem of his T-shirt. “Let me take care of you for a little while.”

He especially loved how insatiable she’d become. “Pregnancy becomes you, Mrs. Stone,” he said, leaning in for a quick kiss. He melded their bodies together, loving the warmth of her skin. Perhaps they’d reverse the order on his to-do list.

“Thanks.” A small smile teased her lips. She bit her lip. “So are you going to tell me what had you up so early when I had you up so late?”

He wagged his eyebrows. “But I like being up late.”

“Come on,” Riley said, tugging his hand. “Curiosity is killing me. I tried the door but you’d locked it.”

After weeks of scouring the Internet, purchasing just the right things and having them shipped to his best friend Grant’s house, he now began second guessing his surprise. What if she hated it? His pulse kicked up a notch. “If you don’t like it, I’ll send it all back.”

“I’m sure I’ll love it,” she said smiling sweetly. “Now open the damn door.”

Brian couldn’t resist swooping in for a kiss as he fell in love with her all over again. Who’d have thought Riley would take the risk of loving him after all the loss she’d already suffered. “Not yet,” he said, pulling a sleep mask out of his back pocket. “I want you to wear this first.”

“Kinky.” She giggled, her cheeks turning a lovely shade of warm pink. “What are you up to?”

“Trust me?”

She tilted up her face, her arms dropping to her side. “With my life.”

Didn't that just humble him all to hell in back? His hands trembled as he slipped the mask over her eyes. Then he opened the door and guided Riley inside. Then he turned her to face the focal point of the room. "Remember, I can change anything you don't like." With that he tugged off the mask. He breathed through the panic as she looked wide-eyed around the room. Her silence had every muscle in his body tense.

Were those tears in her eyes? *Crap*. What did he know about picking out wedding presents? "I can have it boxed up and out of here in a couple hours," he said, quickly back pedaling.

"Never," Riley said, stopping him when he moved toward the piece of furniture she'd spent an hour putting together. "It's beautiful." She stepped to the mahogany crib and ran her hand over the lacy canopy. "But it's too much. I'd planned on buying what we needed at a consignment shop."

"No." Material things had never mattered to her. It was one of the things he admired about her. But taking care of his family was Job One for him. "No more hand-me-downs for you. Or for Gloria."

Riley twined her arms around him, nestling her cheek against his chest. "I love you, Brian. All I need is you back in one piece. Everything else is frosting on the cake."

"I love you too, Mrs. Stone," he said through a throat tight with emotion. He scooped her into his arms, headed toward their bedroom. They could admire the baby furniture later. "You're everything I didn't know I needed."