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# HIS REASON TO STAY

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CATHRYN FOX





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## PROLOGUE

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Rachel Andrews glanced at the clock, then turned her attention back to the patient in her chair. Christmas music filtered in through the speakers above as she grabbed the dental floss, and coiled it around anxious fingers. In two short hours she'd be picking James up at the airport and she was excited to have him home for the holidays. Truthfully, she hadn't seen much of him since he went off to Harvard right after their high school graduation two years ago. They might have started dating prom night, but she'd spent far more time with his younger brother, Kyle—before he enlisted in the army.

She continued with her cleaning, and thought about the two brothers who meant everything to her. After Rachel's dad had died of a massive heart attack, she and her mom had moved to Austin during Rachel's sophomore year. A friend had introduced her to James and she met Kyle through him. The three had instantly hit it off. They were all tight through high school, and in all honesty she loved both brothers equally. By the time their senior year came around, James became a little more possessive around her, and the two

started dating before he went off to Harvard. A natural progression of their relationship, she supposed. While he was away, Rachel went to work at night to put herself through dental hygiene school, and Kyle, much to his parents' disappointment, joined the army the minute he was old enough. She wasn't sure why he wanted out of Austin so badly, only that he was eager to move away. God, she'd missed him so much, and when he upped and left after high school without so much as a goodbye, it nearly tore her apart.

Floss in hand, she swallowed down her emotions, finished the cleaning and straightened. "All set," she said. She removed the bib from around the woman's neck, and pressed a button to lift the chair. "Any plans for the rest of the day?" Rachel peeled off her gloves and tossed them onto the counter.

"Just finishing up some shopping."

Rachel groaned. She'd been so busy she hadn't even begun hers. Not that she had many people to buy for. Outside of her mother, the only family she had were James and Kyle. Not that the guys were related or anything. She and James had never even talked about a future. But they were both close to her heart and she'd be lost without them.

Her client stood, and Rachel walked her out to the front of the clinic. As she made her way to the counter to pay, Rachel hurried back to her station to clean it, ready to check out for the weekend. She said goodbye to the staff, grabbed her coat and rushed outside. She had just enough time to get home, shower, and change and make it to the airport on time.

The second she stepped outside and found Kyle leaning against his car waiting for her, her heart leapt. "Kyle," she squealed. She ran to him, and he picked her up, spinning her around as he hugged her tight. "What are you doing here?"

He grinned and set her back down, but kept his arms around her. "Oh, you know, just hanging out in front of the

dentist's office because a guy never knows when he's going to chip a tooth."

Laughing, she hugged him tight, the warmth of his body chasing away the chill in the air. "I didn't even know you were home."

"Got back early."

"Your mom and dad must be excited to have the extra time with you." She fought off a shiver at the mention of his mom. No matter how hard she tried, she could never do anything right in Irene's eyes. Neither could Kyle.

"Haven't seen them yet."

Her heart gave a little start to know he'd come to see her first. God, how she'd missed him. His gaze moved over her face, then his eyes met hers. They held for an extra moment, then he let go of her and opened his car door.

"Get in. It's freezing out. I'll drive you home."

"I only live two blocks away." She slid into the car anyway, and he crossed the front and hopped in to the driver's seat. He grabbed the stick shift and she closed her hand over his. "James is getting in tonight. Will you be able to go to the airport with me? He'll be happy to see you."

He scoffed. "He's been gone for four months. It's not me he's going to be happy to see."

"Don't be crazy. Besides, I want you to come."

"I don't know, Rach."

Honest to God, she didn't want him out of her sight, for fear that he'd up and take off again. "Pleeeeeease...."

He smiled and shook his head. "You know I can never say no to you."

"Good." She relaxed into her seat as he pulled in to traffic and drove the short distance to the apartment she shared with her friend Sara, to cut costs.

He parked and they both darted up the stairs. Inside her small apartment, Kyle plunked himself down on her sofa and

grabbed the remote. She glanced at him, noting how at home he seemed in her place. James hated her apartment. Said it was cramped and cluttered, but Kyle looked like he belonged.

“Give me a minue to shower and change.” She darted down the hall, peeling her clothes off as she went. Twenty minutes later she emerged from her bedroom, wearing jeans and a sweater with a hint of makeup. Kyle climbed to his feet when he saw her and his glance moved down her body, a slow inspection that rippled through her blood.

Blue eyes locked back on hers and a muscle along his jaw ticked. “You look beautiful, Rach.”

She laughed, but there was no humor in his eyes. “I bet you say that to all the girls.”

“No just to you.”

“Yeah, and the rest of the women you have falling at your feet.” She wagged a finger at him. “I see how women look at you.” He opened his mouth, like he wanted to say something, then shut it again. “Kyle?” she asked.

“We better get moving.” He checked his watch. “Traffic is heavy.”

She nodded, slipped on her boots and coat, and locked the door behind them. Kyle put his arm around her and offered his warmth when they stepped into the wind. Inside the car, she blasted the music and sang along to the Christmas carols. Kyle kept casting glances her way, grinning as she sang off tune. But she didn’t care. She was happy. Her two favorite men were home, and that was the best Christmas present ever.

At the airport, Kyle parked and they dashed through the parking garage. She checked the board inside and clapped when she saw James’s plane had arrived.

“Come on.” She grabbed Kyle’s hand. His big palm practically swallowed hers whole as she tugged him, maneuvering through the crowd until they reached the escalator. They



stood at the bottom, and ten minutes later, she spotted James. His glance met hers and her heart beat faster when he gave her a big smile. That smile however, faltered a bit when he noticed his brother.

James reached them and she let go of Kyle's hand to give him a hug. He picked her up and spun her, in much the same manner as Kyle had earlier. His lips landed firmly on hers, kissing her possessively.

After a very public display of affection that made Rachel slightly uncomfortable, James put his hand on Kyle's shoulder. "Hey, little brother, good to see you."

"You too." Kyle threw his arms around James and gave him a hug. A noise sounded at the luggage carousel and Kyle inched back. "I'll grab your bag for you and give you two a minute." Rachel smiled. That was just like Kyle. Always watching out for his older brother and conscious of his needs. There wasn't anything Kyle wouldn't do for him.

As James pulled her in close, she cast a glance at Kyle, who suddenly couldn't seem to meet her eyes.

James shifted his backpack. "No need. I packed light. Let's get out of here." They started toward the car, Kyle walking a few feet ahead of them to give her and James a bit of privacy, she assumed. James leaned in to her. "I made reservations for us at Lucien's."

She blinked, surprised. Lucien's was a very expensive restaurant, and she was far from dressed properly. Not to mention a meal there probably cost more than she made in a day. "You did?"

"I wanted to go straight there."

Her brow furrowed. "You don't want to go home first?"

"No."

Rachel looked him over. He seemed anxious about something. "Is everything okay?"

“Yeah, I just didn’t expect to see you with Kyle, and the reservation is for two.”

“I asked him to come. Do you think we can change it to three?” She didn’t want to leave Kyle out.

“Hey,” Kyle said, slowing to let them catch up. “You two go ahead to dinner. I have things to do anyway.”

She put her hand on his arm. “But I want you to come.”

“Yeah, me too,” James said. The brothers exchanged a look Rachel didn’t understand.

“You sure?” Kyle asked.

“Yeah, I think you should come. You should be there.”

Rachel wasn’t sure what James meant by that, but she was happy that they were all going to be together. James pulled his phone from his pocket and called the restaurant as they made their way to the car.

The brothers sat in the front, catching up with one another, and Rachel claimed the back seat. She sat there grinning, her heart so full she was unable to wipe the smile from her face.

Thirty minutes later, they were led to a quiet table in the back of the restaurant, and James ordered a bottle of wine. As they sipped, his hand closed over hers, and across from her Kyle shifted in the seat.

“It’s good to be home.” James leaned in to press his lips to hers. This time she was the one shifting. Sure they were dating, but it felt oddly wrong kissing James in front of Kyle, and James seemed to be showing more affection in front of his brother than usual. His lips lingered and he coiled his fingers in her hair. “I missed you so much.” Before she could answer, James pushed his chair back, and then he went down on one knee.

Rachel gasped and her gaze instantly shot to Kyle. He sat ramrod straight in his chair, his eyes locked on hers, his mouth set in a grim line.

“Rachel,” James said, a note of irritation in his voice. “Look at me.”

She turned her attention to James, her heart pounding so hard in her ears, she could barely hear anything.

He pulled a box from his pocket and tears pricked her eyes. Was this really happening? Here, in front of Kyle? Is this what he wanted his brother to see?

“Will you marry me?” he asked.

“Oh, my God,” she said under her breath. Once again her gaze crept to Kyle’s. The muscles along his jaw ticked, and his Adam’s apple bobbed as he swallowed hard. Her throat tightened, her vision going a little fuzzy around the edges.

She blinked, and something in Kyle’s face softened. There was a slight nod of his head as he pushed back in his seat. As he distanced himself both physically and emotionally, she turned back to James and knew she had her answer.