



“How much does this remind you of sleeping at Grandma’s house growing up?” Danielle and Adrian lay in the full-sized bed in Danielle’s old room late that night. The boys were tucked away in *Aunt Adie’s room* across the hall, and since Danny’s husband, Phil, was still in Little Rock, Adrian crawled in with her sister.

“I don’t know. It seems like there was more fighting over the covers when we were growing up and had to share a bed.”

“Want me to tug them all to my side?” Danielle gave a pull.

“You probably will before the night is over anyway.”

Danny’s pillow hit Adrian’s face with a *plop*.

Adrian threw it back at her. “Will you ever grow up?”

“You mean like you did?”

“What does that mean?” Adrian propped herself up on one elbow.

Danny rolled over onto her back and let out a sigh. “I don’t know, Adie. You know I love you, but I hate seeing how much Mom and Dad worry about you.”

“I don’t know why they worry so much. I’m doing fine. I have a great job that I love, a nice little apartment in St. Louis,

enough money to live on with a bit to put back for retirement. I get to see lots of new places.”

Granted, her apartment was more of a storage unit for her bed and dresser. She didn't have many pieces of furniture since she lived away most of the time. Why spend money on things that would just sit and collect dust while she was gone?

“And they're happy for you for all those things, but you know what they're really upset about.”

Adrian flopped back onto her pillow. “Why can't I have one visit without everyone harping on me?”

“No one is harping on you.”

“Mom feels the need to practically break down and cry just because I won't come to the singing on Friday.” Adrian ticked everyone off on her fingers. “Dad barely acknowledges my existence. You're the only one who treats me like a normal person, and even you're pushing it tonight.”

“Thanks a lot, kid.” Danny had always teased Adrian about being twenty minutes younger.

“You know what I mean.”

“Mom thinks if she doesn't say *something* when she talks with you, she hasn't at least tried to make things better. Dad hopes not talking about the issue will ease the tension and make things easier. Instead, it just makes it worse. They don't understand why you left the church.” Danny rolled over to face Adrian. “I'm not completely sure either.”

“I don't see the point in going to a worship service for a God who doesn't love me.”

“Adrian ...”

“Stop, Danny. What has God ever done for me?” Adrian held up a hand before her sister could answer. “No. I don't want to talk about it anymore.”

Danielle was silent for a moment. “I just have this feeling that if God wants you back, you won't have a choice. And there's a lot of people praying for that to happen.”

“What about free will? Didn’t Dad always preach about how we’re free to make our own decisions?”

“*That’s* what you remember about Dad’s sermons?” Danielle let out a half-hearted laugh. “Good grief. No wonder your faith is so messed up.”

Adrian sent her sister a dirty look even though the room was dark. Evidently, her silence clued Danny into the fact she truly didn’t want to talk about this anymore. They were quiet for a few moments, listening to the grandmother clock in the living room as it chimed out midnight, their dad snoring down the hall, a lone train whistle blowing a few blocks down the street.

“The boys had a good time with you tonight.” Danielle broke the silence.

Adrian grinned in the dark. “They’re the only ones in the family who just love me no matter what.”

“Kids are like that.”

“Mom really seems to love being a nana. You going to give her any more grandbabies, or are you done?”

Danielle shoved Adrian playfully. “I think it’s about time you joined in and gave her a grandbaby. Anyone looking good for husband material?”

“I don’t have time for a husband. I’m constantly traveling, living out of a suitcase, and at an office. When would I have time to meet a guy?” Adrian tried to squelch the image of Grayson Roberts that popped into her head.

“What was that look for?”

“We’re in the dark. You can’t see the look on my face.”

“The moon is shining right on your face, Adrian. I can see it just fine.” Danielle propped up on her elbow. “And that face said you were keeping something from me.”

“You’re crazy. It’s late. Go to sleep.”

“Ha!” Danielle half tackled her. “I’ve known you for almost twenty-six years. You’re keeping something from me, and I bet it’s about a guy. Spill it!”

Adrian pushed against her sister but couldn't get a good angle to move her much because of the soft mattress. "Get off!"

"Not until you spill."

"There's nothing to spill." Adrian huffed.

"I will get this out of you."

Adrian squirmed again. "There's nothing to get out. Get off of me!"

Across the hall, one of the boys cried out in his sleep. Danielle sat up a bit, and Adrian took advantage of the moment to get out from under her sister. When they didn't hear anything else, Danielle laid back down.

"But things are good?"

"I told you they were. I loved my stint in Chicago. I think if I weren't working out of St. Louis, I'd probably want to live there. The buildings are gorgeous, the lake is amazing—you can't even begin to see the other side of it, so it feels like an ocean—and I'm not sure I'll ever like thin-crust pizza again."

"I still think you're hiding something from me."

Adrian rolled over with her back to her sister. "That's your prerogative. Get some sleep. Those boys get up way too early."

"I'm hoping maybe Mom will keep them occupied until we get up."

"That's a sweet dream." Adrian listened as her sister's breathing evened out and got a slight whiffle, though not even a shadow of the grizzly-sized snores coming from their father down the hall. Even though she hadn't wanted to come, she was glad she had if for no other reason than the time with her sister. If only things weren't so awkward with her parents.

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ADRIAN'S PHONE rang at breakfast the next morning. "Hey Brad, what's going on?"

"Sorry to bug you during your vacation, but we may have a problem."

She stepped out into the carport, where her conversation wouldn't interrupt anyone's waffle eating. "Oh?"

"Healthcare for All may need you sooner than the end of next week. Gray's boss is thinking we haven't allotted enough time to get everyone trained correctly. I don't want you to have to cut your vacation short—"

"Don't worry about me. Do they want me this week?"

"The end of the week is what he said. That way, you and Gray can get a few things hammered out and then start training next week."

Adrian glanced up to see her mom at the window. She grinned at her even as she knew she was about to break her heart a little more. "I'll head home today to grab my things and can be in Memphis late Thursday."

"Friday is fine. Don't push yourself too hard. And we'll make sure you get the rest of your vacation once you're finished with this training."

"Sure. That's not a problem. I'll swing by the office either this afternoon or tomorrow." Adrian looked out on her mother's perfect yard. Adrian hadn't inherited her mother's green thumb—partly because she never stayed in one place long enough to give the plants the care they needed. Too hard to water plants from three hundred miles away.

It was peaceful out here, and she lingered a few minutes to breathe in the honeysuckle growing on the fence. Straightening her shoulders, she turned to go back in. She'd finish her waffle, say goodbye to everyone, and head back north. At least now she had a better reason to give her mom for not going to the singing on Friday.

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"GRAY!" Riley called from her office as Gray walked down the hallway.

He spun on his heel and raised an eyebrow. "Yes?"

“You’re ready for the LogMeIn girl, right? Because she’ll be here tomorrow.”

“You got it moved up?” Gray leaned against the doorframe.

“I did.”

“Great. We should be ready, but I’ll double-check things when I get back downstairs. Where were you thinking her workspace would be?”

“Since she’s only temporary and basically working with you the whole time, I figured that extra table in your office would be best for her landing spot. I mean, most of her time at first will be in the conference room doing training, right?” Riley barely glanced up from some notes she was sorting through.

Gray rubbed the back of his neck. “Right.”

“Uh, oh.” Riley glanced his way. “How deep is the pile this time?”

“I’ll make sure it’s useable.” He drummed his fingers on the wall. “Anything else?”

“No. That’s it for now. Let me know if you need anything else before she gets here.”

“Will do.”

His office. The tiny little corner of the basement he called his own was barely big enough to turn around in. And they would have to share it. Considering his warning to himself about maintaining his distance from Adrian Stewart until he determined her stance on God, this could get interesting.

The sight of his piles of paperwork and paraphernalia stopped him as he entered his domain. Mama would kill him if she knew he let it get this bad. When had it happened?

He scooped up the top layer and shuffled through a few things, filing some in the trash and moving a few more to the top of the filing cabinet for later. His phone pulled him away from the task. Two help tickets later, it was almost the end of the day, and most of the mess remained. He let out a sigh. He’d have to tackle it first thing in the morning. It definitely wasn’t happening now.

One more walkthrough of the conference room and he had everything else as ready as he could. Now to prepare the wall around his heart and make sure those hazel eyes didn't penetrate it until he was ready. Shouldn't be too hard. Especially knowing she wasn't supposed to be here that long.