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1. Joy's point of view.

I still have a crystal clear recollection of the first time my gaze met Richard's. I remember the brief flash of approval in his hazel eyes, quickly covered by a mask of indifference. It was at the Hospice House, where he'd driven an elderly friend to her first appointment. I recently learned, surprised, that part was true—a real coincidence and not a fabrication of the FBI like our other encounters after that.

It had been a long time since a man caught my eye—even if just as admiring an art masterpiece that you know you can't touch. I took notice of his stature, his wide shoulders, his attractive features, and those gorgeous laugh lines framing his eyes. He didn't have a movie star face, but there was something about him that set him apart. Maybe it was that air of self-confidence, almost arrogance.

Then later on, that good-looking man kept running into me in “coincidental encounters,” which eventually led to him shadowing me at work. He claimed he wanted to learn about mental health because he was considering a career change. For weeks after that, he became my companion during work hours; the person with whom I shared lunch and who traveled in my car between clinics and hospitals. It was unavoidable that conversations flowed and our relationship evolved into a friendship.

There couldn't exist two human beings more different than us. I was the upper-class girl from a small Florida beach town, raised in a bubble of protection, who'd always played by the rules and strove for her teachers' approval. He was the rebel kid from the Bronx, raised without

religion and with no supervision, who'd learned violence early in life in order to survive. Even far into his adult life, he resisted and resented rules.

Our contrasting view of life was precisely what fueled our intellectual attraction. Our first couple of arguments didn't go well; but after that, more friendly and enjoyable debating arose. It started out of boredom one day we were stuck in traffic while returning from the CeMeSH. Discussing a sad hospice case we'd seen earlier, we chatted about assisted suicide. He supported it, and considered it the ultimate right of a person to decide their end. I, on the other hand, argued that death was *as sacred as life* and considered it a sacrilege to interfere with it in any way but to stop fighting it.

We were never short of debate topics after that. He was pro-gun; I call myself "Pro-Peace." He was pro-death penalty; I'm a fierce defendant of life. He was a believer in the intrinsic evil in human beings that needs to be repressed constantly; I'm a believer in the intrinsic goodness in everybody that just needs to be fostered. The debates quickly evolved into brainstorming about the big questions of life. Conversing with him became a pleasure I looked forward to every morning.

Then we discovered unexpected likeness under our differences. We were both devoted parents, avid readers, and nature lovers, crazy about the ocean. Later on, he claimed all that was true and not part of the character he played—though I don't know what to believe.

Something else we had in common that I didn't know was that we'd both been Carl Andrews's students and were fascinated with his spiritual theories.

How did I not notice he was getting under my skin? Maybe I rested on a false sense of security. I had a force field around me, pushing men away, yet with Richard, I sensed I didn't have to worry; he was pushing me away even more than I pushed him. If one day we came one step closer, the next day he'd be more distant than ever, keeping me at arm's length, as if holding his own invisible shield between us. I never suspected that his shield was the *small detail* that he was there on an undercover mission, seeking evidence that I'd killed Michael.

Should I have guessed something? After all, this was a man who'd sit so still in my office that I wondered, sometimes, if he was breathing. Yet he could spring to my side in a flash to pull my arm before a car ran me over. He carried a constant air of indifference, as if he couldn't care less for me as a woman. Then he'd surprise me by remembering something I'd said weeks ago, showing he'd been paying me more attention than I'd thought. And for someone like me, who

spent her childhood feeling invisible and inaudible, that feeling of being so seen and heard felt wonderful.

He reportedly had a girlfriend at the time—I'm still not sure if that was true or part of his fabricated persona—so I never thought much of his unpredictable moments of attention. Some days he'd show up with coffee exactly when I was about to fall asleep, or a snack when my blood sugar threatened to crash. He seemed surprisingly in tune with my routines and needs, even guessing my favorite brand of ice cream. Only much later, I found out the reason was that he and his team had been spying on me for months.

His “girlfriend” was also why I didn't read much into the great time we had together at the Hospice House party. I admit it; I may've flirted a little that night. But I swear it was all innocent! I was just practicing social skills, encouraged by my sister. I thought I'd never see him again after that.

As much as I enjoyed his company, I was good enough at disconnecting myself from my own feelings that I brushed over the fact that I felt attracted to him.

Until that night when he kissed me for the first time, in the dark parking lot at the Hospice House.

I was completely taken aback. I couldn't handle it. My brain short-circuited; and for months, I tried to pretend nothing had happened. I felt terrible, but I couldn't help it. He seemed even more confused than me—getting closer to me one day, pushing me away the next one, and even disappearing from my life for weeks at a time.

And then I blinked, and I'm waking up next to him. We're a couple, together in bed.

How did that happen?

I still have to retrace the steps in my mind to figure it out. After all, I once swore I wanted nothing to do with men ever again. I'm still not sure how Richard was able to change that idea in my mind. But, boy, he succeeded!

I once truly believed I was *a soul which happened to have a body attached to it*, and that this body was nothing but a necessary evil in the path of spiritual growth. Richard made me reconsider that. He's taught me that the body can also be a gateway to the highest heaven.

2. The First Night Together (Continuation of Epilogue)

Reluctantly, I joined him under the covers.

Finding myself surrounded by his arms felt wonderful. The warmth of his chest was delicious against my skin, which was already turning cold from the glacial temperature he keeps his AC set at. My tension relaxed.

He groaned in delight. "I needed this so much. Your arms are so soothing. I could do this all night." He kissed the top of my head, making my body relax more. He then kissed my face again and again.

How many pairs of hands does this man have? It must've taken more than one pair to knead the sore muscles in my back and waist in the delightful way he was doing it. Yet another hand ran through my hair, caressing my scalp. His warm mouth left a trail of kisses on my neck, sending shivers all over my body. I closed my eyes, losing myself into the pleasure of his caresses.

Scared by my own desire, I tried to get out of the bed, then he groaned in pain.

"Are you okay?" I asked, worried.

Eyes tightly closed, he breathed deeply; waves of nausea and pain alternately crossed his face. I tried to sit up, but his arms held me firmly in place.

"Is there anything I can do?"

He shook his head. "The peak is passing."

I remained still, letting him hold me.

Abruptly, he let go of me and sat up in the bed, panting. "I feel I'm burning up." He unbuttoned his shirt.

My first thought was one of worry. A minute ago he'd been shivering and needed to get under the blankets. Now he complained of feeling hot. Did he have a fever? Had I missed an infection in his wound?

My hand reached out to feel the temperature of his skin; but at that moment, he shed his shirt on the floor. I stopped midair, gasping at the view of his muscular, shirtless torso.

My jaw dropped. I'd guessed about those muscles many times before, when he'd held me in his arms, but nothing had prepared me for what I was seeing.

Before I had a chance to react, he turned off the nightstand light, took me in his arms again and lay down.

In the darkness, I was suddenly deeply aware of the fact that he was wearing nothing but his briefs. Now his chaste kisses and caresses took a new level of meaning. His hard thighs pressed against mine, separated only by the thin fabric of my jersey dress, and they rubbed skin against skin in those areas where my skirt rode up. He kissed my neck, melting me. Then his mouth was on mine, gentle, non-demanding, nibbling on my lips.

A hunger for more rose inside me by the second, but then he stopped kissing me and turned me around, spooning me—my back against his chest. My brain was relieved, yet my body cried in protest.

A comfortable silence grew between us. For a while, the only sound was his deep breathing, either fighting the pain or fighting his desire.

“I want to apologize about Friday,” he said. “I was still under the high of the rescue operation. I was so relieved that we were alive—I wasn’t thinking. I know I was pressuring you; and I’m sorry.”

“Please don’t,” I said. “I’m the one who has to apologize. I’m always pulling the rug out from under your feet. And I’m sorry. I can’t help it.”

“*I know.*” His breath against my neck, his arms holding me tight as he spooned me, he whispered, “I know you’ve never been with another man but Michael.”

His words startled me.

How did he know? I didn’t want to ask. He and the FBI had bugged my house, spied on my telephone conversations, and even recorded video footage of my most private family moments. It was scary to wonder how much he knew about my deepest secrets, especially considering how little I knew about his real self.

His mouth kissed the back of my ear, sending goose bumps all over my body. His voice softened as he said, “I know that all this is new for you—dating, progressing physical contact, the idea of intimacy with someone who’s almost a stranger . . .” He left a path of kisses down my neck and shoulders, his left hand stroking my back. “And knowing what a bastard Michael was, how cruel he was to you over the years, it’s no wonder you’re scared to open up again. If he’s the only thing you ever knew as a man, I can understand your fear.”

Tears formed in my eyes.

“At an intellectual level, I know,” he said. “Forgive me if sometimes, in the peak of the passion, I forget. I just want you to know that I understand—and I’m willing to wait.”

His words brought me huge relief. Could this man really be this wonderful?

“I want you to know that I’m willing to wait for as long as you need,” he said. “I’ve been dreaming of the moment when you’re finally mine for months. More than that. I think I’ve been dreaming of you all my life. It’s no big deal if I have to wait a little longer.”

I felt so deeply thankful for his understanding that I turned around and kissed him. I let my lips communicate my love, my gratitude, and my debt. His body tensed, and he mirrored my passion with deeper and demanding kisses.

My hands took a life of their own and started tracing his hard body. Following my lead, the caresses of his hands on my body and his mouth on my neck turned more and more ardent. I didn’t fight it. I felt reassured by the fact that he made no attempt to remove my dress.

I thought my self-restraint was strong enough for the two of us. But I should’ve known better. I can’t even remember who moved first. Next thing I knew, my center was against his, and I could feel his growing arousal through the thin layers separating us.

And then my brain melted away. I’m still not sure exactly what happened after that. I have hazy memories of his hands and mouth all over me—and mine all over him. He was kissing me senseless, touching me and teasing me.

Then *I* was begging him to take me.

And he gladly obliged.

My mind evaporated in a cloud of light and pleasure, and it didn’t take long for him to follow after.

Later, still shaking in his arms, barely understanding what had just happened, I sent a prayer of thanks to The Universe. I’d feared that moment terribly—and now we were past it. I felt relieved, and also surprised, that it had been so enjoyable. I also felt one step closer to freeing myself completely from Michael’s ghost. I no longer belonged to him; I was Richard’s.

“I’m sorry,” I said. I was so used to being in trouble with Michael, apologizing was the only thing that came to my mind.

He held me tightly. “Sorry for what, angel?”

I didn’t even know. For making him wait so long? For the time we’d wasted? For having doubted him, not realizing he wasn’t Michael? For having enjoyed myself so much I forgot about his pleasure?

I heard my own voice saying, “I’m sorry if I wasn’t the best lover today. I promise I’ll get better.”

He went silent for a moment. “You’re talking nonsense. There’s no way in the world that could’ve been improved.” He kissed my head.

Bliss, peace, and gratitude filled me. I knew I was safe now. I knew I could trust him.

Could I?

Slowly, an idea crept into my mind and came into focus in the form of a question: *How come his leg was no longer hurting?*

I propped myself on an elbow to study his face. With his eyes closed, he still worked on catching his breath.

Holding his face, I whispered, “Did you . . . did you lie to me about being in pain?”

He gasped. “What? No!” Then he burst into laughter. “How can you think something like that? He rolled to his side to search my eyes. “Angel, do you have any idea how hard it was to get you to trust me, and how close I was to losing you? Do you think I could ever be so stupid to ruin it?” As he cupped my face with his hands, his eyes pierced my soul. “Baby, *you are my life*. I know I don’t deserve you. But the gift you gave me tonight—the gift of your trust—is something I’ll never risk losing by lying to you ever again.”

Brushing his lips on mine one more time, he made me lay my head on his chest, kissed my hair, and closed his eyes.

I gazed up to scrutinize his face.

Wait. Is that a repressed smile twisting his lips?

Is that facial expression bliss . . . or is it smugness?

The relaxed rhythm of his breathing soon announced that he’d fallen asleep. But I stayed awake in his arms for a long time, wondering.

Am I the luckiest woman in the world?

Or am I a fool?

Don’t miss the continuation of Joy and Richard’s love story. Read the next book:
[Beyond Light and Darkness: A Romantic Suspense with a Medical Twist.](#)

3- Never Released Deleted Scenes.

a- The psychiatrist's spell: Richard vents to Joy about Ray

After Joy finished dictating her last note, she set the Dictaphone on her desk and swiveled her chair to study Richard with attention. "Are you sure you're okay? You've been unusually quiet today."

Richard didn't think his dark mood was that obvious. He stretched in his office chair with a yawn. "I am okay. I just had a rough weekend."

"Is it something I can help you with?"

Richard dismissed the question with a wave and a headshake. He had no intention to start a conversation about his personal life.

"What happened?" Leaning on the desk, she kept piercing him with her dark eyes, as if hypnotizing him.

Something in her soothing voice encouraged him to answer. "It's my son. We're not getting along very well lately."

"Your thirteen-year-old?"

He nodded.

"Let me guess." Narrowing her eyes, she drummed her fingers on the desk. "He's all into his friends. He doesn't want to spend time with an old boring man like his dad. He keeps rolling his eyes at you as if he found you so annoying. And you know it is part of being that age, but it still hurts."

Richard couldn't help but laugh. It was like she could read the words in his mind. "Do you have a teenager, too?"

She shook her head. "No, but I know how it is." Not satisfied with having read his thoughts once, she added, "And you have no idea where time has gone, because it feels like yesterday when he was a newborn baby."

He gave a sour chuckle. "You're right in that, too. It was a blink ago when I had him in my arms out from the hospital nursery. He was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen." Against his will, he kept going as if talking to himself. "He was so little I was afraid of breaking him just by holding him. I spent hours watching him sleep, unable to believe this precious thing was mine. I remember thinking that his baby hair was the softest thing I'd touched in my life. And I loved his

smell so much! I loved putting him to sleep against my chest, so I could just smell him again and again.”

The expression on Joy’s face was a mirror of the sadness inside him. “And you think the fun is going to be over when they are not babies anymore, but it never stops,” she offered. “Then it’s so wonderful to see them grow up, learn something new every day, surprise us with outrageous comments...”

He chuckled. “That’s true. Some of the best memories of my life are of the time when Ray was four. He’d practically just learned to talk and I couldn’t believe how his little brain could come up with all these huge ideas. It was fascinating to hear him give me his view of the world.” His smile vanished. “And we used to have such a great time together: fishing, surfing, playing sports. I was his hero. Every day together was about something new he was learning from me.”

The long silence that followed made Richard think the conversation was over. Yet, Joy’s attentive gaze kept encouraging him to talk. “Go on,” she said, “he used to be the joy of your life; you used to be his hero...and now?”

“And now... We’re strangers.”

After a long pause, Joy asked, “How do you feel about that?”

He raised his hands in a powerless gesture. “It sucks. I wish I could turn back the clock and get my four-year-old back.”

“I know!” Joy bobbed her head effusively. “Sometimes I wish I could stop the clock too.”

Richard remained silent for a few moments and then said, “Joy, can I ask you a question, as a psychiatrist?”

“Sure, go ahead.”

He hesitated. “Sometimes I am afraid that I may’ve ruined things with Ray forever. I was the one who left his mother, and in his mind that means I left *him*. Ever since he was five he had to settle for seeing me only some weekends. Most days I haven’t been there for him at bedtime, to feed him breakfast, to pick him up from school.” He sighed in despair. “I failed to give him the time he deserved, and now he doesn’t want my time. Is it too late to fix things now?”

“Oh Richard, I so get it. Guilt is my daily life as a working mother.” Joy bit her lower lip. “But I doubt this is related to anything you’ve done or failed to do. Ray’s just growing up. He doesn’t push you away because he doesn’t love you anymore, he’s just trying to find his own identity.”

Richard didn't answer. A part of him knew that, but that didn't make it any less painful.

"But if you still want my advice, it would be very simple," Joy continued. "You guys need quality time together. We don't remember every single day we spend with our parents. It's the extraordinary events that make it into our conscious memories—the camping trip, the day at the zoo, the day making cookies together and eating the dough. Those are the memories we need to carve out for our kids. We can't be with them every moment of the day, but we can make our time together the most memorable moment of the week."

Richard gave a sad, crooked smile. "That's what I used to do when Ray was smaller. But now he doesn't even allow me close enough to build new memories."

"There must be something you guys can still enjoy together." Holding her chin, Joy squinted, as if pondering. "Something too good for a teenager to resist."

Richard glanced at the wall clock and was startled. "Joy, look at the time! You missed your chance to go and get lunch. I'm sorry for keeping you!"

"It's okay." She shrugged with a dismissive wave. Then, she held his hand on the desk. "I just wish I could've helped you."

His fingers automatically closed around hers. Her soft, cold hand felt incredibly good in his. "You already helped me. Thank you."

Richard left his hand on hers for a few moments, taking in her smile. He wasn't sure why he'd opened up to her in that way. He probably should feel self-conscious, but he didn't. He felt incredibly uplifted and in peace.

So that's what her patients experienced when they were on the receiving end of her energy infusion. It felt amazingly uplifting. It was like standing under a shower—or waterfall—of prime-quality, soothing, nurturing, cell-regenerating *love* energy. No wonder her patients were all addicted to her.

When he realized, shocked, what he was doing, a blast of adrenaline ran through his blood, quickly undoing the hypnotic trance she'd brought him into.

Shit. She was dangerous.

He had to wrap things up and get away from there as soon as possible.

c- The Day the Spiderman got lost (Richard faces Arthur's tantrum, unabridged version)

Richard made it to the school in good time. When he arrived at the parking lot, he immediately spotted the lonely van and recognized the Nanny, whom he'd seen many times through the monitor cameras.

He parked next to the van and lowered the window. "Hi, Donna, having a tough day, eh?"

The woman studied him with a blank expression. Sitting in their car seats inside the van, the twin toddlers scrutinized him with mistrust. Only then he remembered that for them he was a stranger— even though he felt as if he knew them, after having surveyed them for weeks.

He exited the car and approached the Nanny, extending his hand. "I'm Richard Fields, Joy's friend. She sent me out to pick you up."

"Oh! Sorry, Mr. Fields." Donna relaxed and accepted his handshake. "I was expecting someone older. Joy doesn't have many young friends, especially not *male* friends."

"Hi kids!" He reached his head in the van and waved. The twins started crying immediately.

In the third row he noticed another child he didn't know. "And you are...?"

"Diego," the little boy replied. "I'm carpooling with them today."

Next to Diego, Richard recognized the chubby brown-haired as the oldest of Joy's three sons. "And you must be Arthur, how are you?" He unhooked the seatbelts securing the twins' car seats.

"Who are you?" Arthur's abrupt question hinted his caution.

"I'm a friend of your mom's."

Richard carried the first twin along with the car seat from the van into his SUV's third row of seats. The toddlers stopped crying, curious about what was going on. While picking up the second twin, Richard addressed Arthur and his friend. "Okay, kids, your turn. Get in my car."

"I'm not going with a stranger," Arthur blurted. "How do I know you're not going to kidnap me?"

Richard smiled. At least the kid was more careful and practical than his mom. He must've got that from his father. After setting the car seat in his SUV, he reached into his pocket for fake Police ID and showed it to Arthur. "I am a *policeman*, see? You can trust me."

Arthur's eyes beamed and he immediately jumped out of the van, followed by his friend.

"If you are a policeman how come your car doesn't have the red and white lights?" Diego asked.

“That’s because I am a *secret policeman*.” At least that part was kind of true.

“WOW! Do you have a gun?” asked Arthur.

Richard worked on securing the twins’ car seats on the third row. “Yes, I do.”

“Can I see it?”

“Uh, I am not sure that your mom would like that... actually, I left it at home,” he lied.

Done with the twins, he lifted Arthur and then Diego to help them climb into the high SUV.

They kept watching him like a hero.

“So how big is your gun?” Arthur asked as Richard tied Diego’s seatbelt.

“It’s just a regular one.”

“Will you show it to me some day?”

“Maybe, if your mom says it is okay.”

“Oh, man! Do we really have to tell her? She doesn’t let me play with anything that has violence in it.”

“I can imagine that. I don’t know, Arthur, I’d have to ask for her permission.”

He was done with Diego’s seatbelt, but Arthur’s was stuck.

“Have you shot anybody lately?” The chubby boy continued.

Richard was getting uncomfortable. “Uh, not recently.”

“Have you ever killed anybody?”

Would he get in trouble with Joy for answering the truth? “Uh...Maybe once or twice, but only bad guys.”

“My mom says that there are no bad guys.” Arthur shook his head. “Only good guys making bad choices.”

Richard held a chuckle. “That definitely sounds like something your mom would say.”

A half an hour went by and there were still no signs of the tow truck. At least the twins were distracted by a kid’s music CD Donna had transferred to the SUV. Arthur and his friend’s unending questions made it impossible for Richard to start a conversation with Donna. Hoping they’d run out of steam eventually, he focused on keeping them entertained to earn Donna’s goodwill.

The tow truck finally showed up. “I have to go fill out some paperwork,” Donna said. “Can you handle the kids for a minute on your own, Richard?”

“Of course I can.”

“Thank you.”

As Donna talked to the tow truck driver, Richard continued with his role of entertainer. He felt proud of his own performance. It had been a long time since he had to deal with small kids.

“Do you have kids?” Arthur asked. The little boy talked so much he’d barely left his friend edge a word.

“I have one son,” Richard replied.

“How old is he?”

“He’s a big boy. He is almost fourteen.”

Arthur beamed. “A teenager!”

Richard smiled. “Do you like teenagers?”

“Do I like them? They’re the coolest people on earth. But you have to be very careful how you talk to them, you know.”

“Really? What do you mean?”

“You need to talk *cool* to them. You have to say things like: *Hey, Dude, whassup?* and all that.”

“Oh, interesting, I’ll keep it in mind.”

The twins had started to fuss and Richard was getting anxious, too. Arthur’s unending questions were cute at first, but were turning annoying.

He was relieved when Donna returned to the SUV. “Okay, Richard, thank you so much for your patience. We can go now.”

He gladly jumped into the driver seat. “Where are we going?”

“First we have to drop Diego at his grandma’s house in Palm Tree Cape, and then please drop us at Joy’s home.”

Richard made a quick calculation: Palm Tree Cape was twenty minutes south and Joy’s house was twenty minutes north of where they were. The total trip would take one hour.

Perfect. He’d squeeze in enough casual questions to Donna without she realizing he was interrogating her. Afterwards he’d still have time to join Joy for the last couple of hours of her day. In addition to serving his purpose, he felt good to be doing her a favor. The role of knight in shining armor rescuing the lady in distress had always been his favorite.

“So, Donna, how long have you worked for Joy?”

“Almost six years, ever since Arthur was a newborn baby.”

“That’s great.”

Richard had barely merged into US-1 highway when a deafening shriek reached him from the back of the car. It was Arthur, screaming.

“My Spiderman! I left my Spiderman in the van!”

The boy burst into tears, and wailed so loudly Richard almost lost control of the car.

“What? What happened?” he asked, confused.

“Oh, no! Not the Spiderman!” Donna pressed a hand to her chest. “Arthur doesn’t go anywhere without that toy! Whenever he loses it he goes crazy.”

“My Spiderman, my Spiderman! Waaaaaaa!” Arthur kicked and screamed while flailing his arms.

“What should we do?” Richard asked Donna.

“His mom has a replacement at home for situations like this. We can either go back and see if the tow truck is still there, or we can just do what his mom does—ignore him until we get home and give him the spare one.”

Another shriek pierced Richard’s ears. “Ignore *that* for an hour? No way!” He took the next street he found and turned around.

3. The night babysitting Joy’s kids (deleted scenes).

Richard knelt down to examine the broken safety gate, trying to remember how to put it back together. It’d been a while since he’d last set one.

He glimpsed at his reflection in a nearby mirror. He almost didn’t recognize the exhausted face that gazed back. There was macaroni and cheese woven into his hair, and marinara-sauce handprints stamped on his shirt. That was the replacement shirt he’d brought, since the one he’d worn when he arrived was now in the dryer after getting soaked when giving the twins a bath.

Ray and he had been trying to put the twins to bed for an hour. They’d just found out that Edward had learned how to get out of his crib and break his baby gate. In the five seconds that it took Richard to go check what the noise had been, Edward had run out of the room and they needed to search the whole house looking for him. They’d found him in the master bathroom, with his hands in the toilet.

Now, as Richard tried to put the gate back together, he could hear Ray yelling for help.

“Dad! Edward is drinking the hand sanitizer!”

“Don’t let him! Take him to Arthur’s room and distract him with some toys.”

Richard secretly hoped that Edward had inherited his mother’s poor tolerance for alcohol. Maybe the hand sanitizer snack would finally make him go to sleep.

He struggled to make the gate pieces snap into place. How on earth could that two-year-old be strong enough to cause so much destruction?

“Daaaaad!” Ray yelled again. “Edward’s jumping on the bed really high! His head’s about to bump the ceiling!”

“Good! Maybe that will make him tired. Just keep the ceiling fan off and make sure he doesn’t land on his crown when he falls.”

Richard finally finished securing the gate when he heard someone crying.

“Dad! Edward’s hitting Arthur! Now he’s hitting me!”

“Hang in there, Ray, I’m coming.”

On his way to help Ray, Richard heard Alex playing quietly in his room. He felt sorry for the boy that, as the docile one, usually got less attention than his twin. He peeked inside the room to check on him and the disgusting smell of a dirty diaper hit him in the face like a slap.

The toddler sat naked in the crib. His clothes lay all over the room’s floor and a dirty diaper rested on the crib mattress. He seemed to be trying to clean himself up using his own hands and the crib sheets.

Richard couldn’t help growling.

The boy batted his eyelashes and pointed at his dirty diaper. “Poop.”

Richard laughed. “I know what it’s called, Alex. What have you done? Now I have to give you another bath and clean up all this mess! Aren’t you supposed to be the easy one?”

The boy answered with a charming smile.

“Wait there!” Richard disposed of the diaper, washed his hands and started filling the bathtub, then went to Arthur’s room.

Ray was managing better than he expected. While Arthur played a video game, Ray had sat Edward in his high chair in front of the TV and given him an extra game controller. The excited toddler pushed the buttons, pretending to play.

“Great job! Now I have another challenge for you.”

“What now?” Ray groaned.

Richard led the way to Alex's bedroom. Even after getting rid of the dirty diaper, the stench in the room made Ray dry heave.

"This place stinks, Dad...what happened?"

"A dirty baby happened, and we need to clean him up. You'll watch him in the bathtub while I clean this mess."

A few minute later, Alex splashed in the tub, lathered up with soap under Ray's vigilance while Richard replaced the crib sheets. The landline rang.

"Ray, would you answer the phone please?" Richard called from Alex's room.

Ray answered the phone extension in the bathroom on speakerphone. "Hello. Joy's house here."

"Ray? It's me, Joy."

Having heard Joy on the phone, Richard headed for the bathroom.

"Are you guys doing okay?" Joy asked.

"Kind of. Your babies are on strike, and refuse to go to sleep." Ray replied.

"I'm so sorry, Ray; this is going to take me longer than I thought. Can I speak to your father?"

"He can't come to the phone right now, he's buried in sh..."

Richard snatched the phone out of Ray's hands before he completed the sentence. "Hello, Joy, how's the meeting going?" Richard held the phone to his ear with his shoulder to free his hands to wrap Alex in a towel and carry him out of the tub to the changing table.

"Hello, Richard, I'm so sorry. It looks that I may not be back until 9:30 or 10:00."

Putting a diaper on a baby must be like riding a bike. Richard was quickly done and getting Alex in his pajamas. "Don't worry. Take all the time you need. Everything's under control—"

A loud scream coming from Arthur's room startled Richard. Fortunately, Joy did not seem to hear it. "Uh... Joy, I have to go check something. See you soon." Richard disconnected the call, picked up half naked Alex and ran to Arthur's room.

This is the end of the bonus and deleted scenes. For more Richard, Joy, their naughty and adorable children and the LOTU investigation, pick up the next story: [*Beyond Light and Darkness: A Romantic Suspense with a Medical Twist*](#). Or move on to the following standalone. [*Just for Joy: Beyond Achievement*](#).