

## LOVE & DIAPERS

### BAILEY

“For the love of God! What *is* that?!” I pulled my t-shirt up to cover my nose as I began to approach the source of the dreadful odor. Then I chickened out and ran back to the kitchen to get Jake. It was only fair. I had carried the little mess-making machine around under my organs for the better part of a year. The least he could do was check out whatever was lurking in the kid’s diaper.

Okay, so maybe I’d used that excuse one too many times since Dani came along, but still. It was a valid point.

“Your daughter just shat herself and I think it’s time to call Guinness. Is there a category for worst smells ever?”

Jake looked up from his phone and took another sip of coffee while he considered me. Then he set the mug and phone down and folded his hands on the table. “Why is she only ‘my daughter’ when she does something nasty?”

I shrugged. “That’s just the way it works.” Duh, everybody knew that.

His lips twisted and he stood. “Fine. But you’re coming with me.” He pointed at me.

I crossed my arms. “Why in the world should we both suffer?”

Jake started to lower himself back into the chair.

“Wait! Okay, okay. Let’s go.” My shoulders slumped as I trudged down the hall to Dani’s nursery with Jake at my heels.

“Jesus!” Jake’s muffled voice sounded from behind me and I turned to see that he too had pulled his shirt up over his nose. We both stood in the doorway, our faces half covered as we peered into the room.

A grunt came from the crib.

I grabbed Jake’s arm. “I think she’s making more!”

“I’m thinking she has a future as a frat-house mascot. She’s already mastered the big five—drinking, belching, farting, pooping, and puking.”

I nodded. Truer words had never been spoken.

Jake inhaled deeply from under his shirt and squared his shoulders, as if preparing for battle. Then he stepped into the room. I followed reluctantly.

Our beautiful little girl lay in her crib, feet flailing and little fists to the side. Her eyes were bright as she tried to focus on Jake. He dropped his shirt—because it’s hard to do baby-talk with cotton shoved against your mouth.

“Hey, baby girl,” he cooed. It was all kinds of adorable when he talked to our daughter like that, and it made my stomach all melty. “Did you make a present for Mommy?”

I scowled at Jake, no longer finding him adorable. He chuckled and reached into the crib to get Dani. Only when he picked her up did we both realize she had pooped herself all the way up her back and onto the sheets of her mattress. There was shit everywhere. It was quite literally a shitshow.

Jake made a little gagging sound and it was hilarious watching him try to maintain his smile for Dani and not deposit his breakfast on the front of her little pink pajamas (courtesy of my mother, of course). I bit my lip under the cover of my shirt and tried not to laugh as Jake stood holding our daughter as far from his body as possible, smiling painfully and looking like he was handling a grenade.

“What do I do now? I can’t set her down!” His eyes were wild and I couldn’t help it. A laugh escaped, triggering Jake to step closer to me and nearly stick Dani’s shit-covered butt in my face. I scampered out of the way and quickly cleared off the changing table.

“Here! Set her down and we can clean it up later.”

He did just that, causing our daughter’s bottom lip jutted out in an expression I’d learned was generally followed by anguished sobbing. Despite carrying my genes, it seemed I’d birthed a drama queen. I dropped my shirt and smiled at her, trying not to breathe through my nose. “Hey, baby bird. Don’t cry. We’ll get you all cleaned up and ready for a cuddle.”

“I don’t know if I can do this, Irish.” Jake was beginning to look a bit green. “It’s never been this bad.”

I shook my head. “Laney warned me, but I didn’t really believe her.”

We’d started Dani on formula the previous day. The breastfeeding had not gone well and, according to her doctor, she wasn’t gaining enough weight. My boobs, on the other hand, were picking up her slack. They’d turned into these giant fun bags that ached like a bitch and were firmly on the Do Not Touch list for Jake. Despite our best efforts, our little bundle of stinky joy was not a boob girl. So we were weaning her—and apparently turning her into a weapon of mass destruction in the process. While breastmilk poop didn’t smell like daisies, it was nothing compared to this disaster.

I unzipped her pajamas and pulled her little feet out while Jake gathered three hundred wipes and held them at the ready. I shook my head at him again. “I really don’t understand you. You get downright filthy for a living, yet you tiptoe around a dirty diaper.”

“That’s different. Soil doesn’t come out of someone’s butt. Well, unless you count earthworms.”

I held a hand up, not in the mood for a lesson in agriculture. At this point, it was clear none of us were escaping without getting elbow deep in shit, so I swiped the PJs out from under my baby and shoved them toward Jake. He used the wipes to grab them and promptly dropped the outfit in the trash. I didn't protest since I was not a fan of all the pink.

Dani whimpered and squawked, and Jake did his best to soothe her by singing her song, which made me forgive him for any squeamishness. I opened up the diaper and marveled at my child's ability to shit half her body weight. Gold star for her. The next five minutes were spent wiping her up, watching her squirm in her own poop, re-wiping her, and finally getting to the point where we could give her a bath. She did not enjoy any of it, but then again, neither did we.

It still took both of us to bathe her since we were total newbies and were convinced our every misstep would result in irreparable harm to our little girl. Once she was cleaned up and her bedding had been changed, Jake made her a bottle and I settled in to feed her. It was hard to believe this placid little ball of cuteness was the same one who'd stunk up the whole house and screamed her little heart out in the process. I kissed the top of her head and leaned my own head back against the chair. I was exhausted and it was only eleven in the morning.

This baby stuff was no joke. Our kid woke up every two or three hours during the night and had absolutely no respect for our schedule. We were trying our best to limit her daytime naps so she'd learn to sleep through the night, but *you* try reasoning with a baby. Not only are they terrible listeners, but they are so easily distracted. Oh, and they think the world revolves around them. Which it does.

I sighed as Jake walked into the room carrying a giant coffee for me. I'd have to pump before I drank it, but I appreciated the gesture. I was looking forward to the point where my boobs

didn't threaten to explode anymore. "Did I tell you how much I love you?"

He pretended to think about it as he sat on the side of the bed. "Not today, I don't think."

"Well, I do." I kissed Dani's head again and ran my fingers over her soft dusting of dark hair. She'd gotten it from Jake and I couldn't be happier about it. She'd also gotten his mouth, but her nose was all me. We weren't sure what color her eyes would turn out to be, but I secretly hoped they were her daddy's hazel beauties.

Jake stood up again and set the coffee on the nightstand before gesturing for me to hand over the baby. We switched places and he put her over his shoulder to burp her. It nearly stopped my heart every time I watched him hold her like this, his large hand able to span almost her entire body as he gently patted her. I couldn't wait until I got the go-ahead from the doctor and could jump his bones to show him how hot my hormones and I found him to be. Who knew daddies were so irresistible?! It was possible I was developing a fetish of some kind.

I knew I should go pump, but I wanted to enjoy the view a bit longer. "What do you want to do today?" I asked. "Besides take a nap."

Jake looked at me and then back at Dani's little butt as he continued to pat her. "Why don't you call up one of the girls and take a break from baby duty? I'm sure they'd be up for grabbing a bite or something."

My brow furrowed. Could I do that? The thought hadn't even occurred to me. The only times I'd been out of the house in the past month were to take walks with Dani, visit my parents, and go to the doctor. I hadn't been away from my daughter in ... well, ever. How had I not realized that before now.

Noticing my struggle, Jake spoke up again. "You need to take some time for yourself or you're going to burn out. I promise

we'll be fine for a couple hours without you, isn't that right?" His voice changed tone to baby talk. Dani answered with a large belch, making us both laugh at our brilliantly witty child. Jake transferred his hold and gave her the bottle again and she happily sucked away.

I bit my lip and watched her.

"Go on. Text them and see."

I let out a breath and grabbed my phone from the nightstand.

*Me: Hey, anybody want to go grab lunch? I got a free pass and will be kid-free.*

*Laney: Oh! Me! Nate and Rocco are working on a "man project" and I'm bored.*

*Fiona: Me too! Mark has been at the gym forever and I'm getting hangry!*

*Me: Nazareth Bread Co. at 12:30?*

*Laney: See you there!*

*Fiona: Same!*

I looked up at Jake and smiled. "Looks like I'm going to lunch."

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"Hey, hot momma!" Laney sidled up next to me in the order line at Nazareth. "How is motherhood treating you?"

I raised a brow. "We had our first formula diaper this morning. Good God."

She laughed as we stepped forward in line. "I warned you."

"I officially apologize for not listening. I'm thinking gas masks might be a sound investment. Either that or an au pair. Do you think we can hire one just to do the dirty work?"

Laney shook her head. “I doubt it.” We both looked around, but Fiona was nowhere to be seen so we went ahead and placed our orders and took a seat in a booth while we waited.

Fiona strode in a few minutes later and came straight to our table. “Sorry I’m late. Mark came home from the gym and he needed my help showering.” She winked. Laney laughed. I scowled. “I’ll just run and order real quick. Be right back!” She headed for the counter in her high heels and dress.

“Does she own *any* casual clothes?” I took a sip of the water I’d grabbed.

Laney turned back to me. “I think those *are* her casual clothes.” We both looked down to our own jeans and t-shirts and shrugged at each other.

“Okay, what did I miss?” Fiona asked as she took a seat next to Laney.

“Bailey and Jake are considering hiring an au pair,” Laney shared, making me laugh.

“Oh no, don’t do that,” Fiona replied firmly. “They always end up sleeping with the baby-daddy. Haven’t you ever watched Lifetime?”

My brows drew together. “Hi, I’m Bailey. I don’t think we’ve met.”

Fiona pursed her lips at me. “Very funny. But I’m just saying.”

“Oh, please,” Laney cut in. “Jake can’t take his damn eyes off her. No way would he even give an au pair the time of day.”

I shook my head. “It’s not me. It’s my boobs.” I straightened my shoulders, causing the fabric of my t-shirt to tighten across my chest. Their jaws dropped.

“Wow. You’re not kidding,” Laney said.

Fiona nodded. “Nice rack, Bailey.”

“Ugh. I can’t wait for them to go away.” Our eyes were all focused on my boobs, so the server had to clear his throat to get our attention as he stood by the table with three heaping plates of food. I could feel my face heat, but the two bitches across the table just laughed. The poor server’s face was as red as mine and he couldn’t get away from our table fast enough.

“Can I have them?” Fiona asked, gesturing again to my chest. “It would keep Mark occupied for hours.” She giggled and took a bite of rice.

“I’ll see what I can do. Anyway, the au pair thing is a moot point. No way could we afford one, even if I wanted one—which I don’t. It was hard enough leaving Dani just to come to lunch.” I took a bite of my chicken and almost moaned.

Laney sighed. “Oh, I remember that. I thought Rocco would disappear if he wasn’t within arm’s reach those first few weeks. It will get better.”

I shrugged. “That’s what Jake said. I swear, I never saw myself as such a clinger. If Dani were older, I’m sure I’d be ostracized by her clique.”

“No way. You’re as cool as they come.” Laney looked offended on my behalf.

“Ha! Right.”

Laney’s phone chimed, and she checked it before turning the screen to us. “Uh oh. It’s Jake. He said we’re not allowed to talk about babies.”

“He’s not the boss of us.” Fiona harrumphed. “And besides, we were talking about boobs.”

“Eh, he’s probably right. I need to re-enter the world of adults or my vocabulary will be reduced to random grunts and made-up baby words.”

Laney smiled and Fiona leaned in closer. “Okay, so how about this? I think there’s something going on with Ollie.”

Laney’s eyes widened. “Oooh. Spill it.”

We stayed at Nazareth for another hour and I listened to their theories of what might be up with Ollie. Part of me wanted to tell them to just ask him outright, but they were having too much fun. I took one last bite of pita and pushed my plate away, propping my chin on my hand. I’d forgotten how nice it was to hang out with adults—even ones who were currently gossiping like teenagers. I resolved to schedule some regular outings so I wouldn’t go batty before my maternity leave was up. Not that I wanted to even think about that yet.

When I walked in the door to our condo a bit later, everything was quiet. I hoped Jake hadn’t let Dani sleep the whole time I’d been gone or we’d be in for another grueling night. I set my stuff down and walked down the hall, peeking first into the nursery, but finding no one there. Then I walked into our bedroom. Dani was on a playmat, her little fists flying as she stared at a dangling sunflower with a mirror on it. Her body wiggled when she saw me.

But my eyes transferred from my daughter to my husband. Jake lay fast asleep on the floor next to her, his face resting on his bare arm and his breathing slow and even. I itched to run my fingers over the dark scruff on his face, but I didn’t want to wake him. Instead, I leaned down and picked up my baby girl. “Let’s let Daddy sleep,” I whispered in her ear as I nuzzled her soft head.

We talked about my lunch with Laney and Fiona, and she was truly riveted. At least, I assumed she was, based on her level of eye contact and the waving of her arms in response to each detail. I also told her all about the new Thor movie Jake and I had watched the night before, and we lay on the couch having Mommy-daughter time.

I wasn't aware of Jake's presence until I heard him speak. "Oh, man. Sorry about that. I didn't mean to fall asleep."

I smiled. "It's okay. We needed to catch up anyway, didn't we?" I made a face at my kid.

"How was your lunch?" Jake lifted my legs and sat down on the couch before draping them over his thighs.

"It was fun. Laney and Fiona were nuts, as usual—and I should probably call Ollie to warn him about a few things—but it was nice to catch up. Talking to other adults was a bonus." I grinned and Jake rubbed my legs.

"We'll have to make sure you do it more often, yeah?" He gave me a soft look and my belly did that thing again.

"Yeah," I agreed quietly.

Dani let out a squeal, interrupting the moment. I laughed and turned her in my hands so she could see both Jake and me.

"Look, it's Daddy."

She pumped her legs and then her little lips turned up and her mouth parted in a real, honest-to-goodness smile.

"Oh my God!" My smile matched Dani's. "She's smiling!" It was so adorable.

"Look at you smiling!" Jake beamed and put a finger to her belly. Our wonderful, perfect baby was smiling for the first time. It was a huge milestone, a precious moment we'd never forget.

My nose stung as tears of joy threatened to gather in my eyes. And then my nose stung for another reason entirely as a very familiar scent hit me and I came crashing back down to earth.

Jake burst out laughing as soon as he realized what our kid had done. I couldn't help but join in. So our baby hadn't figured out the smiling thing yet. She'd get there eventually, and Jake and I would be right there when she did.

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