

Chapter 2

//Flashback//

Three Years After the Twins Were Born

Harper

WAKING UP TO tiny hands slapping my face, I thought to myself, who needs an alarm when you have a mini human? Opening my eyes, I quickly grabbed Hanzel's hand and playfully put it in my mouth. "I'm going to eat you!" I teased. He giggled, squirming around as I tried to get a hold of him.

"I got you, little monster!" I said, tickling him.

"No, Mommy! No!" he squealed, kicking his little legs, and giggling uncontrollably. I stopped to make sure he could catch his breath.

Once he recovered, I asked, "Where's Daddy and Hazel?"

"Down!" he pointed toward the door, which meant they were downstairs.

Stretching, I helped him get down from our Texas King bed and made my way to the en-suite bathroom, with Hanzel following closely. “Mommy needs to use the bathroom, can she? He shook his head, still trailing behind me. After handling my morning routine and washing up, we brushed our teeth together before heading downstairs, moving slowly to avoid any falls.

When we found out we were having twins after getting married, Miles immediately asked Tessa to send us listings of mansions—no joke. He told her, “Money’s not an issue.” We ended up doing virtual tours of about twenty homes, narrowing it down to seven that I was interested in visiting. We eventually fell in love with our current home in West Palm

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Beach, in the Hypoluxo Island neighborhood. The views, the layout, need I say more? It was perfect, especially the kitchen. And as someone who loves cooking and hosting family gatherings the house was a dream come true: 7 bedrooms, 9 baths, a gym, a library, and a grand staircase that led to the second floor. The interiors were bright and sunny, with soaring ceilings and a mix of marble and hardwood finishes. The living room opened to a beautifully landscaped backyard complete with a lap pool and spa. The kitchen, my favorite part, connected to the family room, and the open terrace was perfect for entertaining. The primary suite had dual baths, oversized closets, and a sense of serenity. It even had an attached in-law suite and was a block away from the beach. The only downside? The price tag—a whopping \$32 million.

As much as I loved the house, I could not wrap my head around that price. But of course, Miles put in an offer that same day. Without my knowledge, so I was a bit bummed out when Tessa called to say the house was already under contract, but I figured it was not meant for us.

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So, imagine my surprise when, a few weeks later, we went for the final walk-through before signing the papers. It was ours.

Years later, I still love our home, though the grand staircase, while stunning is a bit slippery, so we always make sure an adult accompanies the kids whenever they go up or down.

“Good morning,” I said as I walked into the dining room. Hazel was sitting in her highchair, with Miles next to her, gently feeding her. She had him wrapped around her little finger, and it was clear she knew it.

“Morning beautiful,” he responded looking up at me.

I walked over to Miles, leaning in for a good morning kiss. But before he could even kiss me, Hazel placed her tiny hand on his face and said, “No, my daddy.”

Hanzel, not wanting to be left out, wrapped his arms around my legs and declared, “My mommy!”

He may be your daddy, but he is, my husband. I could not help but laugh. I have no idea where they got this from, but for the past month, they have been doing this little routine. I gave Miles a quick peck, kissed Hazel on the forehead, then lifted Hanzel and placed him in his highchair.

“Good morning, Harper,” Mrs. Ellis said as she placed a plate of waffles, eggs, cheese, and turkey sausage on the table for Hanzel and me. She also set down a cup of tea for me.

“Have you eaten yet?” I asked her.

“No, not yet,” she replied.

“Have a seat and let’s eat together,” I insisted, and she smiled as she took a seat.

Mrs. Ellis is family to us. When we used to live in the condominium, she came once a week to clean. After we moved here, she started coming two to three times a week. When we found out she had lost her husband to cancer, we offered her a full-time position, including medical benefits and her room since her daughter lives out of state. She accepted, and she has been an incredible help ever since. Now, with the twins and the house being much larger than the condo, we have hired a few more staff, but Mrs. Ellis remains an essential part of our lives.

“What do you guys want to do today?” I asked, looking at Hazel and Hanzel. “Do you want to go to the zoo to see animals, or to the museum to look at exhibits and play?”

“Manimls!” Hazel shouted.

“Musum!” Hanzel replied.

I glanced over at Miles, hoping for backup before this turned into a full-blown crying battle. Understanding the situation perfectly, he chimed in, “How about we do both? We can go to the zoo and the museum, and afterward, we can get ice cream. How does that sound?”

“Ice cream!” they both shouted excitedly.

“And later, you’ll get to see, your grandpas and grandmas at dinner,” Miles added.

“Grandma!” “Grandpa!” they each echoed, smiling with excitement.

Crisis avoided. I looked over at Miles, and he gave me a wink. Teamwork at its finest.

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It is Sunday, and Mrs. Ellis has the day off. Some days she offers to come with us, while on others, she prefers to stay home and rest. Today is one of those well-deserved rest days for her.

Miles and I do our best to ensure the kids have as normal a life as possible, despite our busy schedules. We prioritize being there for them, planning our business trips carefully so that at least one of us is always with them. And when we cannot be, our parents, along with their aunts and uncles, are more than willing to help—which we're incredibly grateful for.

As we strolled through the Palm Beach Zoo, we marveled at yellow tigers, bears, an albino alligator, birds, turtles, and many more. The twins were having the time of their lives. "Look, wada, Mommy!" Hanzel called out, pointing excitedly toward something. Following his gaze, I saw a splash pad where kids were playing in the water.

Since we had brought a change of clothes, we let them join in. Miles and I sat on a nearby bench, watching them play and laughing as they splashed around. The joy of seeing them so happy, knowing we brought these two beautiful souls into the world, feels amazing.

Squeezing my hand, Miles whispered, "I love you, beautiful."

"I love you too," I replied, smiling brightly at him — before laying my head on his shoulder.

After letting the kids play for a while, it was time to go. "Did you two have fun?" Miles asked as we gathered them.

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

they both answered.

"Good," he said, smiling. "Now, let's get you changed so we can grab that ice cream."

Miles pulled up to Sloan's Ice Cream and parked. He unbuckled Hanzel from his seat while I did the same for Hazel. Holding their hands, we walked into the shop, hand in hand. As soon as we stepped inside and they saw the bright, colorful interior, they wanted to break free from our grip and run around.

Where they get all this energy is beyond me.

"No running inside, remember?" I reminded. Hazel nodded obediently.

"You too," I said, looking over at Hanzel, the main troublemaker. He shook his head, pretending to be innocent.

Thankfully, the line was short, so we did not have to wait long. When it was our turn, Hazel ordered a scoop of strawberry while Hanzel, ever the adventurous one, asked for birthday cake flavor with gummies on top. I went with Nutty Pistachio, and Miles opted for dark chocolate. Mine was delicious, but of course, I had to sample his too.

We sat down, enjoying our ice cream before heading over to Miles' parents' house for the rest of the afternoon. Deciding to save the museum for another day.

Looking in the back seat, I noticed both Hazel and Hanzel were knocked out, exhausted from all the running around and fun they had. By the time we arrived at Miles' parents' house, they woke up on their own, so we did not have to carry them. I spotted Dad's car, which meant Mom and Dad were already here.

As soon as Hazel and Hanzel realized where we were, they went running toward the house. "Don't run! You will fall and hurt yourselves," I called out behind them.

Shaking his head with a smile, Miles said, "Just let them be. They will be fine," he assured me.

Walking in, we found the twins with their grandparents, enthusiastically telling them all about their day. We greeted Miles' parents, Eliza, and Arthur, along with my mom and dad.

"How's everything?" Mom asked.

"We're doing well," I replied, with Miles nodding in agreement.

"These two keep us on our toes," Miles added, making everyone laugh.

Nick soon entered with Renee, who was wobbling beside him, heavily pregnant with their second child. When Austin spotted his cousins, he ran over, hugging them tightly. As the oldest, it is so sweet how much he cares for them, always playing with them and sharing his toys.

Renee sat next to me, and we started chatting. She informed me that she is scheduled to be induced next week, and I could not help but empathize, knowing exactly how she feels.

Once everyone had arrived, the helpers brought out the food, and dinner was served. Dad and Arthur got back to their discussion about politics, while the rest of us ate and chimed in from time to time. I glanced over at Hazel and Hanzel—they looked completely worn out. They were full, tired, and ready for bed.

After dinner, I took the twins to the powder room so they could use the potty before we hit the road. Meanwhile, Miles gathered up all their things. We said our goodbyes, thanking everyone, and then dispersed to our own homes. It was a lovely day, but now it was time to get the little ones bathed and into bed.
