



Something
Sweet

KATIE BALDWIN

Bethany watched Alice, the little girl's face scrunched up in concentration as she frosted a shamrock cookie. Her pink tongue stuck out as she focused on her craft. Except for green eyes, that were exactly like Aidan's, Alice looked like a mirror image of her namesake, Bethany's sister, when she was a toddler. Alice's hair was a halo of blond-red curls, her cherub face pink and bright with freckles. Sometimes, it startled Bethany how much her daughter reminded her of the sister she had lost so long ago.

"Look, Mommy!" The little girl waved her hard work around in the air, sending green sprinkles flying throughout the kitchen. Wonderful.

"Yes, baby, your cookies are gorgeous. Daddy would be so proud." Once again, she would have to mop the floor, but no matter, Alice was having the time of her life. She'd make sure the house was clean enough so they wouldn't get ants, even if it killed her lower back.

Aidan had been away for three months shooting a thriller on location in Vancouver. He was playing a sexy spy, opposite the sultry Cassie Stone. The woman had a reputation in the industry as a professional homewrecker. She had, thus far, destroyed three marriages and two serious relationships. While Bethany was confident in Aidan's love for her, the idea of that woman rubbing up against him made her skin crawl. Her years with Aidan had enabled her confidence to grow and take root. Not only because he made her feel beautiful, but she had grown up and understood her allure. It didn't hurt that she was a success in her own right.

Bethany was now a well-respected author of cozy mysteries and had devoted fans. They didn't scream and faint when she made a personal appearance, but that was a good thing to her mind. Typically, Bethany never worried or was even jealous when Aidan spent time in a movie

making love to some gorgeous actress. But this woman, a stunning brunette with almond eyes and full lips, was not quite right somehow. Bethany wondered if she might be mentally ill.

More often than not, their home in Kinsale, Ireland, was a paradise of peace and safety where she spent the day writing and playing with her child. However, this time when Aidan left for the film shoot, she felt isolated and alone. Deciding that being alone with a toddler was not good for her sanity, Bethany quickly packed some bags, and she and Alice headed to the States, to their home in Fredericksburg to be around friends. She especially missed her best friend and former colleague, Michelle when she was so far away in Ireland. Bethany smiled as she watched Michelle enter the bright kitchen and head toward Alice.

“Great God almighty! Why, these are the best cookies I have ever seen in my life. Who made them?” Michelle asked looking around the room dramatically.

“Me!” Alice hopped up and down, a huge grin and sprinkles covering her face.

“Well, I best break my diet right now and try one of these yummy things.” Michelle took a bite, rolled her eyes back in her head and moaned. “Amazing. You are a gifted chef, little Alice.”

Alice clapped her hands and grabbed a cookie as well. She rolled her eyes and moaned just like Michelle. “Good.”

“Yes, baby. Do you want to frost anymore?” Bethany asked, eyeing her counter with concealed horror. Frosting covered almost every available surface. No nap today, this kitchen counter was going to have to be bleached.

“Uh huh,” Alice said, as she proceeded to frost several more cookies while singing about a muffin man.

“She’s adorable,” Michelle said and gave Bethany a gentle squeeze. “How are you handling being a single mom while Aidan pretends to have s-e-x with that viper?”

“It’s hard. Aidan wanted me to hire a maid and an au pair, but I don’t know if I want a stranger privy to our daily lives, you know?”

“Your new bundle of joy will change your stubborn mind if nothing else will. You need help.”

“Not one bundle, Michelle. *Bundles*. *Twins*. My God, I’m having *twins*.” Saying those words out loud caused a strong need to sit down. She pulled a chair closed and pressed her girth into a seat.

Michelle placed her hands on Bethany’s belly. “No wonder you’re so... zaftig.”

“Thanks, you’re a peach,” Bethany said with a mock frown.

Michelle covered her mouth to hide a giggle but it escaped, and they both started to laugh uproariously.

“I’m as big as a house,” Bethany moaned.

Michelle examined Bethany so closely that she felt like she was on display in a department store. “You are heavy with child, but you look beautiful.”

Bethany’s eyes misted over. Another fun part of being pregnant—emotional crazy lady.

“I’m so happy you’re here, Michelle. I’ve been lonely.” They hugged despite the mound keeping them apart.

“Mommy, sad,” Alice said, her huge green eyes, so similar to her father’s, bright with tears. “She misses Daddy. And me too!”

“Oh baby,” Michelle said and scooped up the three-year-old and peppered her with kisses on her face until she squealed with laughter.

“Are there sad women in this house?” came a voice that even now made her pulse quicken and her breasts heavy and achy with need.

Aidan walked in and was greeted with loud enthusiasm by his daughter. “Daaddeeeeee!” He scooped her up and twirled her around, and she continued to squeal in delight.

“My God, that girl might be loud enough to break an eardrum,” Michelle said.

“Don’t I know it,” Bethany agreed.

After putting Alice down, Aidan dutifully tried one of her cookies and proclaimed them the best in the land.

Michelle kissed Aidan on the cheek. “Good to see you, hot stuff. I’m off to cook chicken and dumplings for my own hot stuff.”

“Tell Tom hello from us,” Aidan said as he waved goodbye.

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Aidan turned around and said in a dark voice, “I have you two all to myself!” Alice screamed as she ran to go hide. Aidan had created their little version of hide and seek so he could

spend a few precious moments kissing his wife, while his daughter impatiently waited to be found.

“Hello, Luv.” Aidan reached to hold his wife and his eyes widened. “The new ones are growing I see.” He kissed her with restrained passion, his tongue exploring the recesses of her mouth.

“I missed you so much,” she murmured when the kiss broke.

“Not as much as I missed you, Luv. I have so much to tell you. These months have been...unpleasant.”

Bethany reached up and kissed his chin. “I gathered from our phone calls where you were all moody. But for now, find your daughter before she explodes. She has the patience of a gnat.”

Aidan nodded but paused as he eyed his wife with concern. “You look tired.”

“I’m exhausted. My lower back is killing me, and Alice is going through a no nap stage.”

Aidan frowned, “we’re getting help for you. I don’t like coming home to see you this run down.”

Bethany held him close, “I’m worried we’ll hire someone who will sell the story of our day-to-day lives to the press.”

It was a valid concern. One of his best friends, Wisconsin Warriors quarterback David Johnston, was the focus of intense media attention after his former housekeeper detailed his sex life to one of the more popular rags.

“I spoke to our lawyer; he’ll draft a non-disclosure document. If they sell our story, we can sue them for everything they have.”

“I love you.”

Aidan grinned. “You see? I know how to satisfy my woman!”

Bethany barked a laugh. “Go. I have to clean up this mess so I can start dinner.”

“I’ll go pick up pizzas, don’t even think about cooking. Go take a bath.”

“My hero,” Bethany said as she beamed at him. As he left to find his daughter, he noticed she didn’t immediately go to take a bath but turned to clean up the cookie-making mess. Yeah, they needed a housekeeper.

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Later that night, he held his wife after a gentle bout of lovemaking. She was so tired she fell asleep the moment after she reached climax. There was nothing quite like holding this woman in his arms to feel content and at peace. And after everything he’d been through he deserved a little tranquility. A buzz from the table disturbed his afterglow and had him reaching for his phone.

Where are you?

Aidan cursed. Why had he thought just walking away would make this whole mess disappear?

Stop texting me, I mean it! I’m with my wife.

#

Bethany woke up early, which had become her habit since Alice’s birth. Five-thirty gave her at least forty-five minutes to have coffee and read yesterday’s pages from her new work in

progress, before her loving baby, who was a total morning monster, demanded food and orange juice.

Aidan's cell buzzed, and she reached for it without even thinking. He always said he had nothing to hide from her, but she still respected his privacy. But this time, she blamed her reaction on her pre-coffee blariness.

What she saw, made her old insecurities come flaring up, soaking her body with anger and humiliation. It was a photo of the actress, Cassie. The homewrecker. She was naked, her fake breasts perfect and full, with the caption, "I miss you." It was pornographic, and yet as Bethany looked at her own swollen stomach, she saw in the photo a beautiful woman who was confident and sexual. In her current state, feeling like a beached whale, she felt ugly and everything that wasn't sexy.

The coffee maker made its final sputters indicating it was ready for consumption. Bethany stood up and shook off her instant and violent reactions. She was hormonal, but she knew her husband. He wouldn't do this to her, would he? She poured her one cup of coffee and took a sip, hoping the dread would wash away with each sip of nectar. She padded over to her massage chair and allowed the chair to knead her pain away.

"Good morning," Aidan said from behind her, almost causing her to slosh precious drops of her coffee.

"Holy shit! You scared me."

Aidan chuckled. "Sorry. I opened my eyes and found that you weren't there, so I came to find you."

Bethany forced a smile. “Do you want me to make you some tea?”

Aidan leaned down and kissed the top of her head. “I’ve been making my tea since I was a child, I can handle it. You stay in your chair and keep moaning sexily.”

“I can do that,” she said and tried without much success to bring her feet up to the chair.

“Gah! I hate not being able to sit the way I want.”

She knew she should ask him about the picture, but her fears made speaking almost impossible.

“Someone else is a bit of a morning monster, I see,” Aidan said from the kitchen. She knew he was smiling that tender smile he reserved for her and Alice. Normally it made her heart melt, but now she worried that it might be the last time she heard that voice.

“I need to ask you a question,” she said, heart pounding.

“Of course, what do you need?” Aidan asked, sitting opposite her on the sofa. He looked so comfortably sexy in red tartan pajama bottoms and an old t-shirt, his legs crossed easily as he smiled sleepily.

“Where’s your tea?”

“Steeping in the kitchen,” he said and sighed deeply as nestled into the sofa.

“Right,” Bethany said and rubbed her stomach absently. “Sorry, I forget how serious you are about your tea.” For the first time, Bethany noticed the strain on Aidan’s face. The dark circles under his eyes, the tight mouth, the slow movements as if he were sleepwalking. She was so focused on her discomfort, on her insecurities she hadn’t noticed his unhappiness.

“What’s the matter, honey?” Bethany asked, as she carefully extracted herself from her massage chair to sit next to her husband.

“You first, Luv. What’s your question?”

Bethany stopped the chair in mid-massage and looked over at her handsome husband. “Your phone buzzed this morning.”

“Right.” Aidan stood up and grabbed the phone. “It was buzzing last night, and I left it out here so it wouldn’t bother us.”

“Aidan, there was a photo that popped up, with a text. I grabbed it without thinking. I wasn’t snooping.”

Aidan’s eyes widened, then he looked down at his phone and sighed so deeply that she felt the stress that came out as if it were energy circling her furiously.

“I don’t hide things from you, Beth. I don’t care if you looked at my phone.”

“It wasn’t something I wanted to see, you know? She was naked.”

Aidan groaned, “Yeah, Cassie’s not shy.”

“I guess not.” *Please, she prayed, please tell me that you didn’t have sex with her. I need to hear it.*

“The shoot was tough, baby.”

“Yeah, you said that a lot.” The tension in the room was so thick, Bethany was getting heartburn.

“Cassie was…”

“She tried to seduce you, right?” Bethany asked, hoped, and prayed that she only tried, but was not successful.

Aidan turned, his eyes filled with such sadness that Bethany allowed for a brief moment the fear that he had cheated on her with this woman.

“Before I met you, I slept around.”

“I know.” Bethany sat back onto her massage chair and curled up as much as her body allowed. “ You told me. But also, the press followed you around like crazy back then. So I knew you were a Casanova before we even met.”

Aidan smiled, but his eyes were still bleak. “I’m reformed, and I need you to believe me.”

“I do.”

Aidan muttered a curse and took out his phone, and began to look for something. The whole time, the babies in her belly were quiet – no movement at all, as if they knew something was wrong.

“Look at this photo, ” he said as he stood up to hand her his phone.

With great trepidation Bethany looked at the image on his phone. It was Aidan, naked, legs splayed with his erection in full view. His eyes were bright green and had that lazy look he had after he spent a good time in bed with whoever had taken the photo.

“This was taken almost six years ago, and I didn’t even know she had taken the damn thing.”

“Then why am I looking at this?”

“Because Cassie has been hounding me, saying I am her great love. She’s threatened to break up our marriage by selling this photo to the press. She’ll tell people the photo was taken during this movie.”

“But...”

“She kept threatening. I came home early so we could talk. I can’t lose you.” Aidan began to pace. “I need you to know that this is my past. You are my present.”

Bethany stood up and grabbed him by his shoulders, finally able to relax. He was hers, and she was his, just like always.

“I know you’re mine. I’m going to be honest, do I wish this photo had never happened? Oh my God, yes. But you are mine.” She kissed him lightly on his mouth. “Are you doubting us?”

Aidan held her tightly. “When I’m away from you, I see what the rest of the world is like, and I hate it. There is so much deception, manipulation, and avarice. I guess I started to believe you would fall for her tricks. Not believe me when I said I was faithful to you.”

Bethany kissed him again, because she cherished this man more than he could comprehend. He was her family, her home, her everything. “Please, I’m married to the hottest man in Hollywood. My skin is much thicker than that. Plus, the world isn’t like that, honey. Maybe parts of your world, but not all. Maeve and her brand new husband are happily in Scotland on their honeymoon, the director from your last picture, Richard? He and Scott are mad for each other. And Sergio finally found a man who can keep up with him.”

“That’s true.” A small hopeful smile appeared on his face.

Bethany eyed the photo and then started to giggle.

“What?” Aidan asked and grabbed the phone.

“Your scar.”

“What scar?”

“Exactly. When you were in *Lies My Lover Told Me* with Maeve, you fell during the sex scene and cut your inner thigh badly, remember? Maeve called me right away in hysterics saying she had fucked you to death. I never laughed so hard in my life.”

Aidan’s eyes grew huge. “I have a scar on my thigh.”

“But you didn’t then, see?” Bethany pointed to his inner thigh where a perfectly non-scared thigh was on display.

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Aidan was able to breathe again. After three months of stress, he was free of the clingy Cassie. She could call, threaten or do whatever she wanted, now that he was positive his wife believed him. He turned and gave his wife a tender kiss. “My hero,” he whispered.

“You’re damn right.”

“Shall we have a bit of breakfast before...”

They both turned simultaneously when they heard a scream of irritation from their daughter’s bedroom.

“I want awn duice!”

Aidan stood up, kissed his wife and bellowed, “Daddy’s coming with your orange juice.”

End.