

UNFROZEN FOUR  
BOOK 1

A  
BIRTHDAY  
SURPRISE!

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*A Birthday Surprise!*

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## A Birthday Surprise! Colin Carter

“What do you mean you didn’t know?” Aaron asks as he unties his skates. “Lily’s been talking about your birthday party *non-stop*. How didn’t you know?”

I blink at my best friend, frozen in place. Even after all these years, he’s still as immature as ever. Okay, he’s grown up, has two kids now, and although I used to think he’s super smart, Aaron sometimes lacks common sense.

“Maybe because it was supposed to be a *surprise* for me?” If Lily finds out that her brother just spoiled my surprise party for me, she’s going to rip his head right off his neck.

Fine, it’s not *that* much of a surprise. Lily’s been throwing me a party every single year, not telling me the theme. She always comes up with strange themes where everyone dresses up as something. I never have a say in my outfit because my wife picks it for me.

Last year, Lily made the theme Pirates. Everyone looked like a freaking pirate, including the kids.

The year before, she made us dress up as fairies because that year was the ten-year anniversary of our first kiss and I wore a fairy costume. I don’t know who celebrates such a thing, but it was adorable.

So, yes, I knew Lily would throw another party, but I didn’t know the theme. Up until now.

“Dude, she’s going to *kill* me!” Aaron covers his face with both of his hands, mumbling his goodbyes. “Dead. Vanish from the planet.”

“What’s up with him?” Grey asks as soon as he comes back from the shower room with no care in the world.

Most of the team already skedaddled off to get home, but as usual, the three of us are the last ones to make our way out. We live close by anyway, so no need to rush. Unless Miles already cooked and the food’s ready, then we should’ve been home ten minutes ago. That guy will eat us alive if we’re late for *any* meal he cooks.

“He told me the theme for my party,” I say, now closing my locker.

We won again, but it was to be expected as we barely lost a single game since Grey’s our captain. Somehow, we only fuck up when Grey’s off the ice. To be fair, he’d also send us straight to hell if he was on the ice while we fuck up.

Grey nods slowly, sighs, and then walks over to his locker to get dressed. “It was nice knowing you, Marsh.”

“My sister is going to *kill* me!” Aaron groans, still hiding his face. “K-I-L-L M-E.”

“We know how to spell,” I say. I grab my phone from the bench, checking my messages.

**Dwarf:** Mom and Dad are here!

**Dwarf:** You didn’t tell me they’d come.

**Dwarf:** Why didn’t you tell me?! I would’ve cleaned up my room. Now Dad is lecturing me on respecting your space!

I snort as I read the last message from my brother. Reece and cleaning up his room is about as likely as penguins learning how to fly.

In all two years, I have never seen his bedroom floor unless Lily or I tidied up. I don’t know how he isn’t embarrassed to let Brooke in there.

**Colin:** In case you forgot, they’re my parents too. Of course, they’d come for my birthday, enano.

**Dwarf:** They barely made it to Kayden’s this year, how was I supposed to know they’d make it to yours?

**Colin:** Doesn't matter anymore. You already got the lecture

"You ready to go?" Grey slapped his hand to the back of my neck. "Or do you plan on staying in the arena all night long?"

"Honestly, it sounds better than—"

"Hey, your wife put a lot of effort into today's theme, okay? You will *not* skip it."

"But... Grey, it's literally—"

Grey covers my mouth with his hand, shutting me up. "You'll love it."

←♡→

I am not loving it.

While we never invite anyone to our birthdays, it's still a huge party if you think about it. We're not just nine people anymore—including Brooke here. Every single one of us—minus Brooke—is married and has more than one kid.

I love how big our friend group is, our family, and how every birthday turns into something unique and fun... but if you imagine an apartment filled with about twenty people staring at you because your wife decided it'd be a great idea to make the theme of your birthday party *Princess And The Frog*, and *everyone* is dressed up as someone royal while your wife made you—who would've guessed it—the goddamn frog... it's not so fun anymore.

At least my boys are dressed up as frogs as well. Granted, Kayden probably didn't have a choice since he's only three years old, and Kieran still refuses to dress himself even at six years old, so again, Lily's decision.

Though I hate frogs because they creep me the fuck out, I couldn't imagine my life without my wife and her strange obsession with them.

Besides, this theme was a long way coming anyway.

Usually, I'm the life of the party at events like birthdays, but today, I don't feel like throwing

myself into the crowd and having conversations with the same people I see every single day. It's not because I'm upset or anything. For some reason, I find it much better to just stand a bit away from everyone, watching my first-born son play.

I can't believe he's already six years old. It took Lily forever to make up her mind about whether she wanted kids or not, and while our friends believe Kieran was planned, he really wasn't.

Lily was so scared our kids would inherit her depression, and I know that she still worries about it. She worries that they might suffer as much as she did, and still does at times. It was the only reason why she didn't want kids.

Then Kieran just happened. I could never forget the fear on her face when she told me, but the happiness too. She really wanted Kieran, and not a single day has passed that she ever regretted having him, but she still worries.

I can't even blame her for once.

While Kayden hasn't shown a single sign since he was born, Kieran showed multiple. He lacks energy at times when his cousins run off to play. He doesn't get excited a lot; keeps to himself. He only ever really plays with Jamie and not as much as a six-year-old should. Kieran's really self-critical... when he drops something, he'll get really frustrated with himself.

Seeing him play with Jamie, smiling, laughing, it's surprisingly rare.

"He helped bake the cake." Lily smiles up at me before she wraps her arms around my body. I pull her in, enclose her in my arms without a single plan to let her go for the rest of the night.

"He did?" I press my lips to the top of my wife's head just to hear that little giggle that always leaves her. "That's why it looks like... well, that."

My eyes move over to the food table, looking at the mostly demolished cake. Lily isn't the greatest cake baker either, but she can make them look good. Today's cake looks a lot like a kid decorated it.

“Yup. He said he wanted to surprise you,” she tells me. “Kieran accidentally made the whole cake collapse though, so I had to use *a lot* of butter creme to glue it back together.” Lily sighs, looking back up at me. “I think he cried for an entire hour after that.”

I hold my wife a little tighter, knowing she needs that hug now more than ever.

“It looked like he really enjoyed decorating the cake until it fell...” Her head presses deeper into my chest. “What if it gets worse when he grows up?”

“It won’t,” I say with conviction.

“What if he ends up like me, Colin? Kieran doesn’t deserve that.”

“He won’t.” I push Lily off me, just enough to bring a bit of space between us so I can lift her face and make her look at me. “He’s loved, and he knows that.”

“Love isn’t always enough, you should know that.” Tears swell in her eyes, burning in my heart.

I nod, about to speak when all of a sudden, someone tugs on my pants.

I look down, finding my son grinning up at me. He’s hiding both of his arms behind his back, his eyes gleaming.

“I got a surprise,” Kieran says, giggling.

“For me?”

He nods as Lily steps back, but he turns around to see where his mother’s going only to realize she just wanted to make some space for him.

He’s always watching Lily and me, making sure he knows exactly where we are. I don’t know if that’s normal or if we should be concerned about that.

I kneel down to my son, pull him into my embrace; hearing him laugh when I plant kisses all over his little face.

Lily insists Kieran looks just like me, but I think he has more resemblance to Reece when he was younger than he does to me. To be fair, Reece also looks a lot like me, even more so

now that he's getting older.

Once I let go of my son, Kieran holds out his hands to give me my present. "Do you like it?"

I take the little box from him, inspecting it. It's just a plain white, rectangular box with small holes. One side feels heavier than the other, but somehow, that heavy side switches the second I go to open the box.

"Please tell me there isn't a frog inside of this box," I beg. We've had *one* before years ago, but that one got out and jumped off the balcony.

"There is no frog inside the box, Daddy." Kieran giggles, covering his mouth with his hands. I've never seen him more excited than today, so I don't care if there is one frog inside or a million, as long as my son's happy and smiling, I'll take it.

He definitely got that frog thing from his mother.

As I open the box, my eyes immediately fall on a mini frog. Seriously, that thing is most definitely still a baby. I'm not even sure if that thing is as big as my index *finger*. Okay, it's a bit bigger, but it might as well be smaller.

Kieran gasps, getting up on his tiptoes to look inside the box with me. "Look, Daddy! Do you like it?"

I know I should be looking at the miniature frog, but I much prefer to watch my son and the way his eyes shine so bright when tries to reach a hand into the box.

"I love it," I say, definitely not talking about the frog.

"Can I name him?" Kieran asks, taking the box from me again. "Can I have him, Daddy? Please?"

I chuckle. "I thought he was my present?"

"Yes, but Daddy, please?" He pouts at me. "You don't even like frogs, but I do, Daddy."

"So you just wanted the frog for yourself, huh?"



“Yes, but Mommy says you can’t say no when it’s your pet.” Kieran closes the box. “Come, Daddy, I show you his home, okay?” He holds out one hand, waiting for me to take it.

I stand, then immediately take my son’s hand. As we pass Lily, I grab her hand in my free one and pull her after us.

A couple of years ago, the only reason why I’d ever disappear from my own birthday party—or any party—would be because I wanted to fuck Lily. Now I’m sneaking off to let my son show me the terrarium for our new pet frog.

Funny how life works sometimes.

←♡→

I wrap my arms around my wife’s shoulders from behind, meeting her eyes through her mirror.

The kids are fast asleep, and I believe Reece is staying over at Miles’s because of Brooke, so after everyone left, I finally have some time with just Lily. I’ve had an early game, so I could barely even eat breakfast with her this morning.

I need my daily Lily time, otherwise, I will go nuts. Just her and me.

Her usual scent fills my chest with warmth, so sweet and comforting.

Before her, I never knew I could ever love anyone as much as I love Lily. Every time we’re apart due to our jobs, I feel like life ripped my heart right out of my chest because, clearly, my heart would rather stay with her.

Understandably so.

There hasn’t been a single day in all those years that I wished for some space from her. Not even on days when we can’t seem to exchange a single word without fighting.

I know fights happen, and they have to happen because, without them, it’s like living with someone you don’t even care about. I know we bounce back every time, and that it’s never her against me, but us against the problem. So, even on those days, I never want space from her.

“You totally hated this year’s party, didn’t you?” Lily leans her head back against my body, sighing heavily. “I’m sorry.”

“It was perfect, *mi sol*.” I kiss the top of her head. “As long as you’re present, every birthday will be perfect.”

She blushes and smiles softly. “You’re just saying that to make me feel better.”

“No, I’m saying that because it’s true.” In seconds, I turn Lily around in my arms, then pick her up and sit her down on the dresser behind her. “Every single birthday with you by my side is the perfect birthday. In fact, every day with you in my life makes that day perfect.”

I stand between her thighs, holding her hands in mine. Her green eyes shimmer with happiness, and I still have a hard time believing I’m part of the reason for it.

“You know...” Lily brings a hand to my torso, sliding her fingers over the ripples of my body. “The boys are asleep.”

A smirk pulls on my lips. “Are they now?”

My Lilybug hums as she nods. “And it’s still your birthday...”

“For another hour.”

Lily smiles and takes my hands, laying them down on her waist. Her legs close around me, pulling me even closer. “I might have one more surprise for you.”

I lean down, trail kisses down the bridge of her nose. “Do you?”

“I might.”

My hands sneak to her back, finding the zipper of her dress. Slowly, I pull on it. The fabric in the front loosens, sliding down but not quite enough to bare her to me.

Her hands reach underneath my shirt. Her cold fingertips press against my skin, draw lines.

“What’s the surprise?” I ask with my lips brushing hers, but before she can reply, I kiss her.

I kiss her deeply; like I fear I’d never get to kiss her again. I will, I know that, but that doesn’t stop me.

Her hands pull away from my body at the same time as she denies me more kisses. Carefully, Lily slides off the dresser and then runs off into our en-suite bathroom. She doesn't even fully close the bathroom door.

"Don't come in!" she snaps when she must've heard me take a step. "Sit down on the bed and close your eyes."

Sighing, I do. Who am I to disobey my wife? Honestly, I don't have the balls to disobey her. She cut them off the last time I tried.

I'm kidding, obviously. But I was in deep shit the last time I didn't take out the trash when she very obviously told me to do it. So... yeah, I'm never *not* listening to what she tells me ever again.

I've learned my lesson.

"Eyes closed?" Lily asks after a while.

"Yes, *mi sol*."

"Are you sitting on the bed?"

I chuckle. "Yes, Lilybug."

"Okay, I'm coming out now! Don't open your eyes."

"Don't tell me *not* to open my eyes if you don't want me to open my eyes."

I keep my eyes closed as I hear Lily step back into the room, even when I feel her getting closer to me.

I even manage to keep my eyes closed when Lily sits down on my lap. She's still wearing her dress, at least as far as I can tell.

Lily leans closer to me, then whispers, "I lied. I don't have another surprise, I just wanted to brush my teeth so you can kiss me all night long without tasting pizza."

Laughing, I open my eyes. "You're something else, Lilybug."

Lily shrugs. "Yet you love me."

Standing up, I force Lily to stand on her feet. As I stare into her green eyes, I reach for the straps of her dress and push them down her shoulders; watching as the dress falls to her feet and leaves her almost naked before me.

God, she still blows me away every single time I get to see her naked. I know every inch of her body like the back of my hand, and yet I know every time, I look at her like it's the first time I see her.

"More than anything," I say just before I pick her up, kiss her once, and then throw her right on our bed.

As I crawl up her body, leave kisses every other inch of her, Lily says, "And to think that I was going to stop talking to you after nine days."

I chuckle. "Well, you got twelve years with more to come, two kids, and a marriage certificate instead. All because I'm awesome. You're welcome."

Lily laughs, and god, her laughter is the sweetest melody anyone's ever heard. It's one of my favorite sounds in the entire world.

She cups my face with her hands and pulls me up until our eyes are at the same level. "I wouldn't say *awesome*."

I gasp offensively. "What else am I if not awesome?"

"Just someone who lied to me about nine stupid days."

"And I'd lie about them again."