

REX WOLFE

Looking up at the cheery, red brick house, Zoe grinned, hardly able to contain her excitement.

"I can't believe we're actually here!" She squealed, hugging Josh. "I really can't believe it!"

"Believe it, honey," he laughed, spinning her around in the air. "I promised you that we would do it, and we did." Wiping tears of joy from the corners of her eyes, she rubbed small circles on her belly.

It was the first morning in a while that she didn't wake up nauseous, and she saw it as an auspicious sign that her morning sickness had dissipated on the very day that they moved to Hollis Gardens.

" all right, all right, this is all very well and good, but let's get you guys moved in, huh?" Zoe's brother Greg came up behind them, draping one arm over her, and the other over Josh.

" what, do you and Todd have something better to do today?" She joked, punching her brother lightly on the arm.

"yes, big sister, we actually do, believe it or not," Todd interrupted. "well, I don't know about Greg, but I have things to do and people to see, and I still don't understand how you have a whole truck and a half full of things. Not to mention your minivan."

"that's what we have you boys here for," Zoe pinched her brother's cheek lovingly. "speaking of brothers, babe, where's yours?"

" you mean Isaac? They stopped for a bite... I told them that it was cool if they caught up with us in a little bit."

"Um, okay," she replied, a little disconcerted. " I guess we'll start without them."

Moving was long and tedious work, not to mention the fact that it attracts the notice of the people in the immediate area. It was a small and relatively new subdivision, and newcomers always were a cause for conversation.

"mom, look!" A young girl, who looked to be about six or seven years old stop and pointed as Josh, along with Zoe's brothers, walked back and forth from the house to the street.

"Jenny!" the mother reprimanded her child. " you know better than to stare, now keep walking." little girl rolled her eyes, but heeded her mother's words.

" nice neighbors you've got there," Todd chuckled. " and something for you guys to look forward to, huh?"

"cute, Very cute," Josh snapped as his in-laws laughed raucously.

" do you guys know what you're going to have yet?"

" Not yet. The doctors said that it's too soon to tell. Oh, hey... Here comes Isaac and the rest of them."

Waving to his childhood best friends, he watched as they turned into their driveway. Isaac, his fiancee Melanie, and the twins Dylan and Connor.

"It only took you guys about five years," he jeered as they all shared hugs.

"you'll be all right," Dylan waved a dismissive hand at his friend. "so, what are we looking at here?" Josh chortled to himself, opening the front door to let everybody else in.

" see for yourselves," he bit back a smile.

" well..." Isaac tried to crack a joke, but he came up empty handed. " shit..."

" babe! It's not like Zoe can do much... how far along is she?" Melanie asked Josh.

"Uh, almost four months now. Yeah, this couldn't have come at a better time, actually.

Believe it or not, we'd been looking around this area for about *six* months. Everything was either too expensive, or too small, or it just wasn't a good fit. Then we found out about this place... and you guys know the rest," he laughed.

" anyway, get inside. We've made a little progress already, so don't think that we're leaving all the work to you guys."

She slowed her car down to a crawl, staring openly as she passed by the newly occupied house. *New neighbors*, she thought to herself, giving Josh and the others a quick but thorough once over. *That one's kind of cute*. Smiling wickedly, she stepped on the gas and drove home, just two streets over. Checking the messages on her landline, as she always did, she rolled her eyes good naturedly at the sound of her mother's voice.

"Kimmy, honey, it's Mom. Just checking in on you; I know you're busy. Call me when you get a minute. We love you!" Making a mental note to call home before the end of the week, she had other plans. Pulling her cell phone out of her purse, she scrolled through the speed dial until she found her best friend Cassie's number. Before she could hit 'dial,' another call came through. Daniel. Good old Danny Boy.

Kimberly smirked, debating whether or not she should even answer the call. She had her sights set on somebody else, and Daniel was well on his way to becoming yesterday's news.

- "Hello?" she sighed in a bored voice.
- "hello yourself," he answered in a low, breathy tone. "what are you up to today?"
- " Just getting in after a super long day. Those kids wear me out." Quickly growing bored of this conversation, she cut to the chase. " did you need something?"
- "Why so hasty?" Daniel replied, sounding hurt. "as it so happens, I've set aside a little time... For me and you. So, what do you say?" Laughing in earnest now, Kimberly wiped a tear of mirth out of the corner of her eye.
- "You're hilarious, do you know that? Just for that, you're worth keeping around... maybe some other time. For now, I'm going to get out of my work clothes and soak in a nice

hot bath. I suggest you take the time to spend with your wife. Ciao!"

Hanging up on him, she unbuttoned her pink and white stripes blouse, untucking it from her skirt. It wasn't a complete lie when she said that the kids that she works with had worn her out; being a kindergarten teacher was not the easiest job. Kimberly had struggled through undergrad and graduate school, finally landing a coveted position at Hollis Gardens Early Childhood Center a little over nine years ago. While it wasn't exactly a high paid job, it made her happy, and that's what counted. That, and the letter of recommendation that she was given by the Early Childhood Center that helped her get approved for her modest three bedroom house. At only thirty three years old, life was certainly good.

Still in her heels, she clicked her way into her kitchen, pouring herself a glass of wine. Just one. It was then that she remembered that she was supposed to call Cassie; hastily dialing the number, she took a long swig.

" well, well!" Cassie greeted her pleasantly. " look who it is. How was it today? I know it's the first week back with the little snots."

"nothing out of the ordinary: the same criers, a fight or two... but no accidents! So that's always a good thing." they shared a laugh and Kimberly sat down at the table, wishing that she hadn't forgotten to get another carton of cigarettes, though she was making a halfhearted attempt to quit. "So what's up?"

"The same crap as usual. You know how glamorous the world of retail is." as a manager of rather large clothing boutique, Cassie dealt with a lot more stress than Kimberly ever did. The grass was definitely not greener on that side.

" sorry," Kimberly pulled a face, even though her friend couldn't see her over the phone. " how about some drinks? I promise it'll make you feel better."

" since you offered, give me an hour and I'll be right over."

After checking her resources, it dawned on her that she was running dangerously low. Looks like I have an excuse to go for the cigarettes after all, she mused. Changing into a more comfortable t-shirt and jeans, she took her hair down from the ponytail and fluffed it. Driving down the main road, she saw him again. This time, he was checking something in his car, looking frustrated. Rolling down her power window, she waved to get his attention.

- " are you okay?" She asked in a saccharine sweet voice.
- " yeah... no. This damn thing overheated earlier, and I think the radiator's busted. We're new here, but I don't really know where anything is," Josh explained.
- " well, I don't know too much about cars, but I do know where the auto parts shop is. If you like, I can give you a ride? I'm just going down to the corner store."
- " no, no, it's fine. I don't want to inconvenience you, Miss...?"
  - " Bryson. Kimberly Bryson. And you are...?"

"Josh Hatfield."

He turned around at the sound of the front door opening, and Kimberly immediately stiffened at the sight of the wide smile that spread across his face. " and this is my wife, Zoe."

- " hey, how are you?" She asked amicably. Kimberly hesitated before responding,
  - " just fine. Did you guys just move here?"
- "yeah, we did," Zoe answered. "Today is actually our first day here." Okay, but nobody was speaking to you, bitch, Kimberly thought in annoyance. Hiding her true feelings behind a Colgate smile, she let her gaze fall once more on Josh.
- " nice. Welcome to the neighborhood, you two. I'm sure you'll love it here." glancing in the rearview mirror, she saw an oncoming vehicle. " well, let me get going, then." looking back at Josh, her smile widened. " if you need anything, I'm two streets over. Good luck with your car!"