

First Person, Past Tense

Elias's POV

"I know, I know, I know, I'm coming," I murmured, quickly turning all the eyes on the stove on low so the food wouldn't burn. I sped out of the kitchen afterward, already murmuring words of comfort that I knew Timothee couldn't yet hear as I made my way down the short hallway and into his room.

I grabbed the four-month-old out of the crib and placed him on my shoulder, rubbing his back as I tried to soothe him back to sleep. He'd already been fed, burped, and his diaper had been changed. He was just in a fussy mood today, plus, he usually gets like this late in the evening. I have a sneaking suspicion that it's because he starts to miss his mommy around this time. Can't say I blame him. I miss her too.

Alyssa and I both have busy schedules so it's a little hard for us to spend time together these days. When Alyssa first got pregnant, I knew that I wanted to be able to take care of her and my baby, so I started searching for a job as soon as I could, and I was willing to take whatever I could get.

I ended up dropping out of college in order to be able to provide for her and the baby and I've been working as a plumber for my father's company ever since. It's hard work but it pays well-enough, so I'm happy with it for the time being!

I leave the house at 6am and don't come home until 3pm. Alyssa watches the baby during that time, and then she goes to her GED class from 4pm to 8pm while I stay home and watch Timothee.

The past year hasn't been easy for us, and we've both been working hard to create a better life for our little family. When Alyssa first got pregnant, her father kicked her out of the house as soon as he found out about it. He wasn't happy that his seventeen-year-old daughter had gotten knocked up and he said that he didn't have the time to worry about her and her child when his own wife was pregnant and needed his attention too. So, Alyssa came to live with me and my parents, but that didn't work out too well either.

It was hell. It's not like my parents were exactly thrilled about having a nineteen-year-old son who was already a father-to-be, and they didn't want a newborn baby in the house either. The two of them made it clear that they wanted us out of the house before the baby arrived—not that they had to.

Alyssa and I had no intentions of staying there any longer than we had to anyway. They were against our relationship and they didn't even attempt to hide it. They wouldn't let us do anything that a normal couple would do, including sleeping together. They refused to let us sleep in the same room since we weren't married.

Which wasn't a problem for too long.

We ended up getting married just a few months later. Alyssa's father didn't have any problem signing the consent forms as long as it meant that we wouldn't be bothering him anymore, and my parents thought that us getting married was the right thing to do since we were bringing a baby into the world together anyway.

After that, Alyssa and I saved up as much money as we could and moved out the first chance we got. We were lucky enough to find an affordable little cottage with two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a nice kitchen. Things have still been a little tough on us, financially, but we're happy. We have our own space, our privacy, and the three of us get to live here as a family which is the most important thing. It may not be much, but we're proud of what we have, and everything that we've been able to accomplish so far.

Timothee is our biggest pride and joy, though. This baby is the reason we even bother to roll out of bed in the morning and work so hard during the day. Neither of us would be able to keep going if it weren't for him. He makes **everything** worth it!

I couldn't keep the smile off my face as I stared at him, even while he was still wailing loudly, and even as I felt tiredness seeping deep and heavy into my bones. None of the bad stuff mattered while looking at him; The child that I helped create.

It took a few minutes, but after some rocking and a little bit of quiet humming, he calmed down and fell asleep again. I let out a relieved sigh as I slowly put him back in his crib, careful not to wake him.

But right when I put him down, the doorbell rang loudly and I froze in my spot, watching carefully to see if he'd wake up. Thankfully, he didn't, but I could still feel annoyance creeping up on me as I realized without even having to answer the door exactly who it was.

I sighed, rolling my eyes as I crept out of Timothee's room and down to the hall to answer the door. I wished I could just ignore it, go back to the kitchen and check on the food while pretending that I didn't hear a thing, but I knew that wasn't an option.

The doorbell rang again two times in a row, and my brow twitched as I got ready to answer it. I knew she wouldn't go away until I answered the door and the last thing I needed was for her to wake Timothee up when I just got him down again.

I swung the door open, already glaring at the girl on the other side as she grinned at me and batted her eyelashes.

"Hey, Elias," she giggled, twirling her hair around her finger. "I was just passing through the neighborhood so I thought I'd stop by! How have things been? You doing alright?"

"I've repeatedly told you to stop showing up to my home unannounced and uninvited while my wife isn't around. I'm not interested in you anymore, and haven't been since we broke up, Jessica. It's been a few **years** now. Move on, and stop coming here," I rolled my eyes as I slammed the door shut in her face, not giving her any time to respond.

I paused, holding my breath as I waited to see whether Timothee would wake up again or not, but thankfully, he didn't. I shook my head as I headed to the kitchen to check on the food again.

I don't know why Jessica was so hell-bent on bothering me. She was always popping up on random days, always during the evening time when she knew Alyssa wouldn't be home because she was attending her classes, and she always refused to leave unless I at least opened the door and tell her to. The two of us broke up a couple of years ago now and I've clearly moved on from the relationship, but I guess she hadn't.

That's too bad for her, but she needed to find a way to get over it soon. I was in love with Alyssa and **only** Alyssa, and I wasn't going to do anything to mess up our relationship when we'd already come so far and been through so much together.

It was annoying to have my ex popping up constantly, but I guess it could've been worse. Alyssa **could** know about it, but thank God, she didn't. At least Jessica had enough sense not to come around when she was here.

I hadn't told Alyssa about Jessica's frequent visits and I didn't plan to. I didn't want her to worry about it while she already had enough on her plate as it was.

I tried not to think anymore about it as I turned the stove back up and checked on the food in the oven.

A little over a half hour passed and the food had just been set out, hot and fresh on the table when I heard the front door open and Alyssa's voice calling out a quiet 'hello!'

When she walked into the kitchen, I couldn't help but smile as soon as I saw her. She swayed on her feet, looking tired from a long day, but even with bags under her eyes and a sleepy look on her face, she looked like the most beautiful woman in the world to me with her soft black hair, brown glowing skin, and big brown eyes gleaming even in the bad kitchen lighting.

"Hey," I greeted as I went over to pull her in for a hug. She let out a deep sigh as she squeezed me tightly, burying her face into my shirt. "How was class?"

"Hard," she groaned. "I think they might have gotten mixed up and put me into Harvard law school level classes instead."

I snorted, shaking my head at her. "You'd still find a way to pass even if they did."

She sent me a look and I didn't give her any time to respond before pulling her in for a long, deep kiss. This just might be my favorite part of the day. Getting to kiss her, usually for the first time of the day, before sitting down to have dinner with her. I loved hearing about her day and listening to her playfully critiquing my cooking with a horrible British accent as she pretended to be Gordon Ramsay despite the fact that she couldn't cook anything aside from ramen and scrambled eggs.

"It all smells delicious and looks even better," she grinned after we finally broke our kiss. "I have a big enough appetite to eat enough food to fill a small grocery store, so you better grab some scraps for yourself before I get back."

"I already ate my portion before you came," I joked. "I had exactly one bite's worth of food."

She laughed as she stood up on her tippy toes to give me another quick kiss. "Wait for me!" she said before turning to head down the hallway, on her way to check in on Timothee as she always did.

"I will," I smiled before starting to fix our plates.

It was silent for a minute as I continued plating our food, which I thought was a little odd since Alyssa always talks to Timothee when she comes in, but I thought maybe she didn't want to disturb him while he was sleeping.

A little more time passed, though, and I heard her footsteps and what must have been the door to our bedroom opening.

"Elias? Did you put Timothee on our bed or—" her words were cut off and I heard her footsteps thudding against the floor before hearing our bed squeak. I decided to see what was going on, so I walked down the hall and peered into our bedroom where she was kneeling on the bed, fumbling with the opened window. I guess maybe she opened it for some reason, but I couldn't see why.

"What are you—"

"Where's Timothee?!" she asked quickly. "I went into his room and looked inside his crib but he wasn't there! So I thought that he'd be in our room but he isn't here either! Where is he?"

"I—He was just in his crib!" I could feel my heart starting to race as I rushed into his room to check again, and sure enough, his crib was empty, but how could that be possible? I put him in there and it's not like he could have just gotten up and walked off himself!

"Elias, is this a joke?" Alyssa called. "This better not be one of your practical jokes! It's not funny!"

“I’m not joking! I don’t know where he is—he’s supposed to be in his crib! He was right here in his crib just a few minutes ago. Shit!”

The two of us froze for a few moments as we met face-to-face in the hall, both wide-eyed and breathing heavily as the gravity of the situation started to set in. Then, the two of us jumped into action again at the same time. I ran to grab my cell phone from where I’d set it down in the kitchen and Alyssa began searching the rooms frantically.