

In The Quiet After:

Isaiah

A Historical Romance

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Chapter One

June 8, 1854

A knock sounded on the door. Carolyn rested a hand on her stomach as Josiah walked their two toddlers over.

“Mama?” Isaiah looked up at her.

“What is it, my sweet boy?” She smiled down at him.

He held his arms up and she picked him up, holding him against her side.

“Carolyn.” Josiah tensed, glancing at her bump.

“It’s alright, honey.” She rubbed her stomach gently. “Baby’s alright.”

Isaiah looked down at her rounding belly as Josiah picked up Naomi. He placed a soft kiss on Carolyn’s lips before reaching for the door.

“You kids be welcoming to our guests.” He spoke firmly as he opened the door.

A man stood with a young couple just outside their house. A small girl clung to the woman’s leg, peeking at them around her skirt.

“Evening, Mr. and Mrs. Carter.” The man nodded. “This is Mr. Thomas Brown.” He motioned to the man. “His wife, Sarah.” His hand moved to the woman and he hesitated before he motioned to the trembling girl behind her. “And this is their daughter, Clara.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Carolyn nodded to them. “I’m Carolyn, and this is my husband, Josiah.”

Thomas and Sarah exchanged a glance before Thomas stepped forward to shake Josiah’s hand.

“And these are our kids, Isaiah and Naomi.” Carolyn rested her hand atop Naomi’s head. “You’re welcome to stay as long as you need.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Carter.” Sarah nodded.

“I’ll show you to your room. Carolyn warmed some water in case you wanted to wash off.” Josiah said as his arm was pulled by the toddler beside him.

He glanced to his daughter, who was scowling at him.

“Sorry, *we’ll* show you to your room.” He chuckled.

Naomi walked in front of Josiah with her head held high, his hand guiding her in the right direction. Carolyn returned to the kitchen, sitting Isaiah on a stool.

“I need to prepare dinner, honey.” She pressed her lips to his forehead. “Do you want to sit here or go find your pa?”

“Here.” He nodded.

“Alright then. Let’s make dinner.” She turned to place the pots on the heat. “I’m thinking cornbread?”

He nodded quickly, climbing to stand on the stool. Carolyn reached her hand out to steady him.

“Isaiah, that’s not safe, honey. You need to sit properly, or you’re going in the floor.” She raised an eyebrow at him. “You want in the floor?”

“No, mama.” He sat back down on the stool, swinging his legs.

“Good boy.” She brushed a kiss into his hair, turning back to the pot.

“Mama!” Naomi’s voice was loud. “Hungry.” She stomped into the kitchen, Josiah on her heels.

Carolyn chuckled softly as she turned to look at them.

“We did want a house that’s hardly ever quiet.” He murmured, picking Naomi up. “Just didn’t think we’d get a bossy one so soon.” He teased, adjusting her on his arm as he tickled her.

“Can you watch the children while I cook, dear?” Carolyn smiled at him.

“Of course.” He pressed his lips to hers. “I just came to fetch the water for our guests.”

“It’s right there.” Carolyn motioned to the bowl on the counter. “And, Naomi, don’t touch it, alright.”

“Yes, mama.” She nodded.

“Good girl.” Carolyn kissed Naomi’s forehead softly.

“Come on, son.” Josiah helped Isaiah down from the stool. “Let’s give your ma some peace.”

“Yes, Pa.” Isaiah marched out of the room.

Josiah grabbed the water from the counter, herding the toddlers.

Carolyn finished cooking dinner in peace.

June 20, 1854

“Is there anything I can do to be of use, Mrs. Carter?” Sarah stepped into the room with her head down and her hands in front of her.

Clara stood behind her legs, peeking out at Carolyn sitting on the bench by her kids.

“You don’t have to mind yourself so carefully.” Carolyn sat a hand on her stomach. “Just because I’m the missus of the house, doesn’t mean you’re beneath me.” She rose from the bench. “You are our guests, Mrs. Brown.”

Sarah blinked, raising her eyes to meet Carolyn’s gaze. “Afraid I ain’t used to this.”

“It’ll take some time.” Carolyn offered her a smile. “Catch my husband doin’ it from time to time.”

Sarah nodded, returning her smile. “Still like to make myself useful, if I can.”

“Of course.” Carolyn turned back to the pile of laundry in the basket by the bench. “You can help me fold the linens, if you’d like.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Sarah moved to sit with her.

The pair sat down, folding the laundry carefully. Isaiah and Naomi sat in the floor nearby, playing with toys their father had carved for them from wood.

“You needn’t call me ma’am either.” She didn’t look up from the pile in front of them. “Carolyn will do...or Mrs. Carter, if you prefer.”

“Understood, Mrs. Carter.” Sarah nudged Clara with her hand gently. “Go play, baby.”

Clara looked at the pair laying in the floor before shaking her head, hugging her mother’s leg.

“Afraid she ain’t used to other kids.” Sarah mumbled.

“Clara?” Carolyn leaned forward.

Clara turned, her wide eyes meeting Carolyn’s.

“Would you like me to introduce you again?” Carolyn reached her hand out to the child. “I promise they won’t harm you.” She glanced to her children. “Right?”

“Right, mama.” Isaiah smiled at her.

Naomi nodded, not looking up. Clara moved slowly, reaching out to take Carolyn's hand. She led Clara to where Isaiah and Naomi were playing.

"Isaiah, Naomi, you remember Clara?" Carolyn spoke softly, earning nods from her children. "Clara, this is Isaiah and Naomi."

Clara looked them over slowly, moving closer to Carolyn.

"Isaiah, can you give Clara a toy to play with?" She looked to her son expectantly.

He hesitated, looking over the toys. "Yes, mama." He whispered, grabbing a wooden horse. He stood up, holding the toy out towards Clara.

She smiled at Isaiah, taking the horse before staring down at it.

"What do you say, baby?" Sarah called out.

"Thank you, Isaiah." The words came out breathy as Clara nodded to him.

"You're welcome." Isaiah plopped back onto the floor, grabbing the nearest toy.

"Sit down and play." Carolyn whispered.

Clara nodded, sitting down in the floor with the horse. Carolyn returned to her seat on the bench, holding her stomach to steady herself.

"Be good for her." Sarah nodded.

"And them." Carolyn agreed.

July 16, 1854

“Mrs. Carter, please.” Sarah blocked the entrance to the kitchen. “You’re in no condition to be doing so much.”

“It’s fine, Mrs. Brown.” Carolyn had one hand on her stomach, the other on her back. “I’ve done housework with child before now and I’ll do it again.”

Sarah’s mouth fell open momentarily. “I’m afraid I must insist.”

Josiah and Thomas stopped at the entrance to the kitchen.

“What’s wrong?” Josiah wrapped his arm around Carolyn, his hand resting on her stomach.

“Mrs. Carter is refusing to rest.” Sarah insisted.

“Honey.” Josiah looked down at her.

“I can handle chores, dear.” She rolled her eyes, smiling at him.

“You have to admit; this is different than the last time.” He rubbed her stomach. “Might be a good idea to rest more.”

“Not you too.” Carolyn groaned. Even she had to admit she was carrying unusually large.

“Honey.” Josiah laid his head against hers. “Go sit with the children or do some mending.”

She raised an eyebrow at him.

“Please?” He added, kissing her cheek softly. “I’ll feel better knowing you’re resting.”

Carolyn sighed in defeat. “Fine.” She turned to leave the entrance to the kitchen. “But I’m not pleased.”

Josiah chuckled softly. “Now, we have work to attend to.” He patted Thomas’ shoulder.

Carolyn sat on the bench as the men left. Clara lay in the floor with Isaiah and Naomi. She had been watching the entire interaction, her brow furrowed in concentration.

“You three having fun?” Carolyn smiled at them.

“Yes, mama.” Isaiah kicked his feet.

“Yes.” Naomi nodded at her, grinning.

Clara nodded once, lips tight.

They continued playing as Carolyn picked up a shirt from a pile, mending it carefully.