



Excerpt: Always the Baker, Never the Bride ©2010 Abingdon Press

The door to the consultation room was cracked slightly, and a beam of light streamed out from inside. Jackson reached it first, but the moment he pulled the door open and peered inside, he closed it again and turned toward Emma. The look on his face was one of amused alarm, mixed with ...

The taste of a bad lemon, Emma decided.

“Is it Aunt Sophie?”

“No.” He stated it with a firm resolution that further piqued Emma’s interest.

“What is it, Jackson?”

He reached for her, but missed when she sidestepped him and pushed open the door.

It was the oddest sensation that came next as time sort of stood frozen and a shower of prickly needles poked at her. Without further thought, Emma opened her mouth and allowed the scream that rose up from the very pit of her stomach to catapult over her throat and straight out

her mouth. In the very next instant, Jackson stood behind her, bracing her against him, and he covered her mouth with his large hand.

He hadn't silenced her fast enough, however, and her parents reacted to her squeal, fumbling out of the embrace in which she'd caught them, sputtering a forced end to their very passionate kiss.

"What are you DOING?!" she bellowed into the palm of Jackson's hand. "Are you out of your MINDS?"

Avery swiftly pulled the handkerchief from Gavin's pocket and shoved it toward him, nodding at the smear of lipstick around his mouth.

Dabbing at it while he spoke, Gavin stammered, "Th-there you are, P-Princess. We ... your mother and I, that is ... we were wondering where you'd gotten off to."

Jackson slowly eased his hand away, bracing Emma's shoulder with a firm grip.

"Try counting to ten," he whispered, his breath tickling her ear.

Emma's eyes were so wide and round that they stung. "There isn't a number in the world big enough for me to count down. What are you two *doing*?"

"Well," her father said on a chuckle. "We're smooching, Emmy."

"Gavin!" Avery gasped, smacking his arm with the back of her hand.

Emma turned around, her parents behind her. Swallowing hard and wondering if she was about to lose her dinner, she muttered, "Aunt Sophie is missing. We need to find her."

As she walked away from them, she heard her mother and Jackson whispering.

Good, Mother. Involve my boss in your breakdown.

She shook her head as she ambled back toward the ballroom, and Meredith stepped into stride beside her.

“Did you find her?”

“No.”

“Are you all right?”

“No.”

“Em, really. I am so, so sorry.”

Emma stopped in her tracks, and Meredith nearly ran right into her.

“If you had seen what I’ve just seen ...”

“What?” Meredith cried. “What did you see?”

“I mean, my eyes!” she exclaimed. “They may be scarred for life, Mer.”

“You’re freaking me out.”

“You don’t know what it IS to be freaked out. Not until you’ve seen your divorced parents, feeling each other up and sucking face in a closet.”

Meredith’s entire face scrunched up into a balled fist. “Ew.”

Emma nodded knowingly, and then shook her head again. “It was tragic.”

“Are they ...” She leaned in toward Emma and whispered, “... getting back together?”

Emma considered the thought and then shuddered.

“Watch your language, Bianchi. Even in a whisper, that comes off obscene.”