

---

Let's Make Up for It Now

---

“Daddy’s home!” sang out a child’s voice from somewhere high in the leafy tree.

As if they’d been waiting for the signal, two boys aged seven and eight came running from around the side of the sprawling house and stopped near the driveway, watching a shiny black car slide to a stop. A tall, smiling man got out, and immediately the two boys moved to his side.

“Hi, Dad,” they said practically in chorus. “Do you want us to carry your bag?”

‘Dad’ was Gavin Kerr, CEO of Danvers Industries and married to Katie Danvers Kerr, great-granddaughter of the company’s founder. The two had been married ten years now and were the parents of three very active young children. They’d been blessed in life, and they both knew it.

Gavin gave the two boys a big hug and then popped the trunk and lifted his bag out, leaving them to argue over who got to roll it into the house. As the trio started for the side door, a desperate little high-pitched voice came from the tree, whose branches were now moving vigorously.

“Don’t forget me! I’m coming too!”

Gavin looked surprised and went over to the base of the tree.

“How in the world did you get up there?” he demanded, looking up as he watched his five-year-old daughter descending as fast as her small legs could manage.

“She stood on my shoulders,” answered Donovan, the older of the two boys.

“I’m not sure that was the best idea,” his father replied, wondering how long his daughter had been up in the tree.

“She insisted.”

Gavin chuckled. “That I can imagine.”

When the little girl reached the lowest branch, which was still above Gavin’s head, he held out his arms. “Jump, baby. I’ll catch you.”

Sarah Margaret, sometimes teasingly called ‘Sam’ by her brothers, peered down at her father dubiously. “What if you drop me?”

“Have I ever dropped you?”

“No, but you might start today.”

“Then I guess you’ll have to land on your own,” he answered, pretending to turn towards the house.

“No! Wait!”

Gavin turned back and raised his arms again. “Come on. I’ll catch you, don’t worry.”

Sarah sat down on the branch to get as close to the outstretched arms as possible and then gave herself a good push. Gavin deftly caught her and swung her around before planting a kiss on the top of her head and setting her on the ground.

“I’m not sure I want you climbing up in that tree when I’m not here,” he said as she joined the group moving towards the house.

“You could nail steps on it, and then it would be easier for me to get up,” she suggested. “I saw it on television.”

“We’ll talk about it later,” her father promised, not wanting to

get bogged down in one of his daughter's many projects before he'd even had a chance to greet their mother.

They entered the house through the door that led into a mudroom and then on to a large sunny kitchen where Bridget, the children's Scottish nanny, was puttering around. She sometimes cooked dinner for them, and it appeared that tonight would be one of those nights.

"You're home!" exclaimed the smiling woman who looked to be in her late forties.

"I am indeed. Is everything on the home front calm?"

She laughed, something that hadn't always come easily for her. "As much so as ever. I see you brought the troops in with you."

"Two were on the ground and one was up in the tree," Gavin informed her. "Did you know that Sarah was up there?"

Bridget rolled her eyes. "No, but I'm not surprised. If you don't want her up there, I'll try to keep an eye on the situation."

Gavin smiled wryly. "Try is the operative word there. I'd prefer she not climb that high, but you know Sarah. I'll talk with her, but she's got her own mind."

"Don't I know?"

"Did you bring us anything?" asked Sarah, impatient with the adult talk.

"Now why would I bring you something?" teased her father.

Before the conversation could continue, they heard the sounds of a suitcase being bumped up the stairs.

"Hey, let me carry that up," called Gavin as he hurried after the boys.

"What's going on?" called a woman's voice from upstairs.

"Dad's home," replied David, the younger boy, as he and Donovan gave a hard tug and bumped the suitcase up another step.

Their mother's head appeared over the railing of the top landing, a wide smile on her face. "Are you there?"

“I’m here,” came Gavin’s deep voice in response. By that time, he’d reached the two boys and taken the suitcase from them, so the whole troupe moved quickly up the stairs. Once Gavin reached the top, he put the suitcase down again so he could greet his wife.

“I missed you,” he murmured as he pulled her into his arms and gave her a kiss—more than a quick, chaste one but still family-rated. Nevertheless, it got a reaction.

“Ew-w!” exclaimed Donovan, making a face.

“Ick!” mimicked David, not to be left out.

Sarah got a dreamy look on her face as she watched her parents. She put her little hand on her heart and proclaimed, “I think it’s beautiful. It’s like a prince waking up his princess.”

Katie laughed. “But I wasn’t asleep.”

“It doesn’t matter,” maintained Sarah. “Daddy’s a good kisser, so it was still a movie kiss.”

“And you boys need to take note,” their father added, his eyes twinkling. “Someday you’ll be called on to do the same.”

“Yuck!” With that response, Donovan grabbed the suitcase and started quickly towards his parents’ bedroom, with David in tow.

“Leave it just inside the door,” called Gavin. He’d tried to teach the children to respect the privacy of the master area he shared with Katie. When there were children, there were always emergencies, but he’d taught his own three that, barring a true emergency, they couldn’t just wander into the ‘big bedroom’ on a whim. It was their parents’ private space, like a clubhouse for adults, and Nanny Bridget was there to help enforce the traffic flow.

“Did you bring us anything?” asked Sarah again.

“Did you want something?”

“Yes.”

Gavin nodded seriously. “In that case, I’ll have to look and see what I can find.” He started searching through his pockets,

saying, "Hmm, not there," after each one. Sarah was standing on first one foot and then the other, trying to be patient, but she was losing the battle.

"Daddy!" she scolded him.

As the two boys joined them again, Gavin winked at his daughter and then opened his computer case and looked in. "Well, this is lucky," he announced. "I just happen to have three chocolate bars here. Is that something you'd like?"

All three answered in the affirmative, so he pulled out the very large bars and handed them out after first obtaining promises they'd be saved until after dinner.

"Bridget is going to love you for that," said Katie after the kids had run off. "The last chocolate bar you brought Sarah ended up staining one of her favorite dresses. Bridget had a terrible time getting the chocolate out without ruining the dress itself."

"I didn't know that. Maybe in the future we can convince Sarah that white chocolate is the best."

He looked around to double check that they were alone and then took Katie's hand and led her into their bedroom, closing the door tightly behind them. "Let's try that kiss again without an audience." This time he wrapped her tightly in his arms and delivered the kind of greeting that earns movies an R rating.

"It feels like you're happy to see me," remarked Katie with a joking smile as she put her hand on the bulge in his trousers.

"Not now," he said reluctantly. "I'm too hungry to miss dinner, but we'll definitely call it an early evening. I have three nights to make up for, and I intend to do it in one sitting."

Katie laughed. "Is that some kind of new position?"

"Smarty!"

She snuggled more deeply into his arms. "It's very lonesome when you go away. I was thinking about renting out your side of the bed."

Gavin gave her a playful swat on her backside. “Nice talk. *You* obviously don’t get a chocolate bar.”

“How about something else?”

Gavin just smiled as he lifted his bag onto the bed and started unpacking.

“I see it!” exclaimed Katie as she moved into place next to him.

“This?” Gavin watched Katie’s eyes sparkle as he held up a box of Godiva truffles tied with a gold bow. After a decade of marriage, he was well aware of his wife’s preferences, at least most of them, and Godiva truffles were definitely on the list. He handed her the box, which she immediately opened.

“Do we need to give you the same warning we gave the kids?” he asked, looking amused.

She ignored his question and instead held out the box. “Do you want one?”

“Later, thanks. Right now my hunger requires two things—real food and you—so chocolate will have to wait its turn.”

“That’s almost sacrilegious,” she replied as she read the guide to the contents and carefully selected something called Aztec Spice truffle. She sat down on a nearby chair to properly savor the chosen treat. “Mm-m,” she intoned blissfully as she nibbled.

Gavin smiled as he watched his wife enjoy the little confection. She’d never been shy about showing her appreciation for food, and he hoped that would never change. Women who fretted over each calorie were too serious about themselves for his liking. Katie was fun, natural and always full of enthusiasm for whatever they were doing, and he couldn’t imagine his life with anyone else but her.

“Bridget was going to make a pot of stew that would be ready whenever you got home,” Katie informed him. “Shall I tell her we’re ready to eat?”

“Absolutely. Just give me five minutes to wash up.”

"SO HOW WAS YOUR TRIP?" asked Katie.

The kids were in bed, and she and Gavin were relaxing in the sitting room that was part of the master area. Katie was sitting cross-legged on the end of the sofa, admiring her still-handsome husband.

"We talked every day," he reminded her, looking amused. "I have no great news I kept for a surprise."

"I know, but that was the big stuff. Now I want to know the filler."

Gavin had been gone only three days, visiting Tampa and then stopping over in Macon on his way back to Atlanta, the headquarters of Danvers Industries.

"You know, even though the Tampa facility is only seven years old, we're starting to outgrow it already," he said thoughtfully after a minute.

"They designed it for future expansion, didn't they?"

"Yes, thank God, and I think it's time to talk to an architect. Frank said they're running back-to-back shifts to meet production needs."

"Well, at least it means we're doing well."

"That we are." He smiled and put out his arm towards her. "You're too far away," he complained. "Come over here with me."

Katie scooted herself across the sofa cushion between them and then pulled Gavin's arm around herself. "Better?" she said, looking up into his face.

"Much."

They sat there in silence for a minute, and then Katie spoke again.

"I should have gone to Tampa with you. If I couldn't live in Atlanta, Tampa would probably be my second choice."

"It's a nice place," agreed Gavin, nodding. "I must admit,

though, that it will forever be connected in my mind with Luke's shenanigans."

Katie made a face. "Shenanigans? I think it was a bit more than shenanigans! He could have really damaged our company."

"I know." He kissed her hair before continuing. "Do you remember our going to bodegas there looking for Danvers products? That was an interesting trip."

Katie gave a little laugh but then got serious. "Do you think some people are just born bad? After everything Grandfather did for Luke, he never got back a penny of the money he paid to save Luke's skin."

"How do you know?"

"Nana told me once. She said that Luke's not caring enough to keep his promise hurt Grandfather much more than the unpaid money itself."

Gavin nodded. Ever since he'd been in Atlanta with Danvers Industries, Luke Danvers had been a problem. He was the only other Danvers grandchild besides Katie and was the offspring of her grandparents' firstborn son, Douglas Danvers, Junior. The junior Douglas had been the heir apparent to the office of CEO until a skiing accident had cut his life short and left a gaping hole in the company's structure. Katie's own father, the only other child, had chosen not to enter the family business and had instead become an internationally acclaimed photographer.

Luke, who had been nineteen at the time of his father's death, had been in and out of trouble his entire life and had never been seen as a viable candidate for top management. As a result, Grandfather had served almost forty years as CEO until Katie got her own life in order and married Gavin. For a while she'd thought she would become the new CEO, but it wasn't really her first choice, so everything had worked out well in the end when Gavin had assumed the top spot and she'd continued as Senior Vice President of Product Development. She loved the

creativity of the laboratory and spent as much time there as possible.

Earlier, when Luke had married a woman from Tampa, Grandfather had made him IT Manager for the Tampa operation. Luke had continued to be resentful and entitled, the same way he'd always been, but his computer skills were unmatched. As Grandfather had once remarked, if he ever decided to hack the Pentagon, Luke would be whom he'd call.

Unfortunately, Luke had gotten himself into trouble with drugs and gambling and had ended up owing a Colombian gang there in Tampa huge sums of money. In an effort to repay the dangerous men, Luke had started stealing both inventory and money from Danvers, and his computer skills allowed him to cover it up for a long time. Only when Gavin and Grandfather decided to bring in a forensic expert did the situation come to light.

Grandfather had refused to send his only grandson to prison, but he had laid down a list of conditions, among them barring Luke from the company and expecting repayment of the money Grandfather put out to completely pay off the Colombian debt. His actions were heavily influenced by the fact that Luke's wife was pregnant with a little boy who would be the next generation of Danvers. Luke had never lived up to family expectations, but Grandfather hoped that the new baby could become part of the family circle and even have a future within the company.

Instead, Luke and his wife had left Tampa for Hawaii and then, not long after, divorced. In spite of notes and cards sent from Atlanta, Luke had cut himself off from the rest of the family, and finally the grandparents had to admit the truth to themselves: Luke was essentially lost to them, and with him, probably their great-grandson, Douglas Danvers, named after Luke's father.

It had been a bitter pill for the grandparents, but they filled the gap in their lives with the joy of Katie's family—her husband

Gavin, whom Grandfather called one of the best executives he'd ever known, and her three young children: Donovan Danvers Kerr, named for Gavin's father; David Gavin Kerr, named for Katie's father; and Sarah Margaret Kerr, named for her two grandmothers. Katie's lively and loving family was the joy of not only her grandparents but also of her parents, who had finally retired from their life abroad and now also lived in Atlanta.

"Maybe someday when Luke's son is older, he'll get in touch with us," suggested Gavin.

"By the time Doug's out on his own, Luke will have filled his head with all kinds of negatives," replied Katie. "It would be fun to meet him, though. He's not quite a year older than Donovan, so he should be about nine right now."

Gavin didn't answer but instead pulled her closely against him. "Enough family talk. I vote it's time for bed."

"So you can sit for your three-day catch-up?" asked Katie with a giggle.

"Keep up your smarty ways and you won't be sitting at all," he replied, but the smile on his face made it clear it wasn't a serious threat. "Come here, lass. Let me undress you."

She stood in front of him the way she had hundreds of times before while he lovingly removed each piece of her clothing. It had been only three days, but she'd really missed him. Grandfather had once called Gavin the ballast for her blithe ship, and that's exactly what he was. He balanced her life and made her feel more fulfilled and secure than she'd ever thought possible.

She moved forward into his arms and pressed herself against him.

"In a hurry?" he teased as he finished removing her clothes.

"I love you," she said. "I hate it when you're gone."

"So let's make up for it now."