



TICKLED

pink



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

HAVEN ROSE

TICKLED PINK

Sweetville, Season Two, Book Eleven

HAVEN ROSE



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DEDICATION

To Brynn Paulin and Pixie Chica, I'm so honored to be a part of Sweetville. I love the town we created and the people that reside in it...and those who will.

Travis Whitworth and Katia Duncan have been besties above the resties since she moved next door to him. In a tale as old as time, both treasured their friendship while aching to make it more.

Unfortunately, neither said anything and two years later, they've been zoned. Until the proverbial knock upside the head that Travis needs to get said body part out of his...hiney.

If she feels the same (she does), then they'll get everything they've ever wanted (each other). But not everyone is pleased with the change in their status and they're willing to bah humbug all over the new couple.

Disclaimer: No Grinches were harmed in the writing of this book. One was, however, an irritating nuisance that needed to be put in their place.

PROLOGUE

Katia

July 2021...

I still don't know what possessed me to choose Sweetville as my new home, but when I was scrolling through towns in the state, again randomly chosen, I came across it and it felt right.

It, as cheesy as it might sound, called to me.

As does the house that's now mine.

Focusing on all the good and not the bad, I begin unloading the truck.

The bad being that I packed up my life and had nobody to mourn that I was moving. Yes, I had a job, but the position was easily filled and my time there will be just as easily forgotten.

There's no family to give a forwarding address to.

No one to make the first step in this new adventure with me.

And I have to empty, and carry, everything on my own.

You decided not to focus on the bad, remember?

"My bad," I mumble, even though the reminder was a mental tap. Then giggle at the unintentional word play. Gotta find humor where you can.

On my third trip, the previous two consisting of boxes that weren't at all heavy, I turn and find a man standing there. I

should shriek, at the very least drop what I'm currently holding at the surprise appearance, but I do neither.

Instead, I watch him, my gaze on him no doubt equally as intent as his is on me.

“Need some help?” He offers, and while I contemplate it, seeking any hidden agenda, all I find is sincerity.

“Wouldn't turn it down.”

After we introduce ourselves, we have the space cleared and the stuff that was once in it sorted throughout my house. With no direction from me, he puts things where I want them based upon my labeling.

The least I can do is make the gesture to feed him as a thank you. Kinda hard to do when my kitchen hasn't been organized and the fridge hasn't been filled. Realizing that, I laugh and instead say it'll be my treat. “Any place close by you recommend? It'll give me a chance to get to know my new home, too.”

“Ella's Eats. The food is really good.”

It's actually better than that and the owner, Ella, is one of a kind. She must see something in me that she likes because before we leave, I have a job.

October...

“He was clearly out,” I tell my best friend, Travis, as we argue about the umpire's ruling on the field while watching the third game of the World Series. Since the day I moved in, we've been inseparable. If someone gave me a certain amount of money to spend on a dream guy, using it to purchase what characteristics I'd want, they would've all been ones Travis possesses.

“And you clearly need an eye exam,” he defends his stance, which happens to be the opposite of the umpires.

“Nah, twenty-twenty vision, baby.” I lean closer to him, then, as if to prove my point, add, “I can see perfectly that you're wrong.”

“Funny, I was just thinking the same thing.” Game faces on, we stare at each other, both determined not to be the first to break. Until the cheater sticks his tongue out at me. It doesn’t have the intended effect of making me laugh. Instead, my gaze locks on it and I imagine sucking on it...while it’s in my mouth.

I blink, not caring that he crows about his victory. I’m too flabbergasted. There have been instances here and there like this for months, and they’re happening more frequently.

As he’s given no indication of suffering the same infliction, and I don’t want to shake up the first real friendship I’ve ever had, I’ve been tamping them down.

But it’s getting harder.

He’ll be leaving soon on deployment for almost a year, and while the thought of not seeing him every day hurts, I can’t help but wonder if that old adage is true – Out of sight, out of mind...

It only takes a second to immediately refute the possibility.

It’ll just make me ache even more for what I can’t have.

Travis.

February 2022...

Her tears are killing me.

Katia has been trying to hide them from me, starting from shortly after I told her I was being sent out. Although, the closer my departure came, the harder it got for her to keep them from me.

Not that I want her to. We share just about everything, and that includes when one of us is hurting. I want to take her in my arms, let her know what she means to me, and promise to be back.

Unfortunately, I can only do one of those, which she’ll simply view as a hug from her best friend, given in comfort.

She doesn’t know that I’m battling my own tears.

Hating the idea of her not being the first person I see or speak to every morning.

Not being here in case she needs anything. Even if it's to get her a new car battery and install it when hers gives up the ghost.

What if something else happens and I'm not here?

That's why I haven't tipped my hand in regards to my feelings about her.

It'd be cruel to confess my undying love for her, then leave for months, or a year as I am now, at a time.

Then again, isn't it just as cruel to keep it to myself?

Before I can figure that out, the alarm I set on my cell to ensure I left with enough leeway, taking in account potential traffic issues, dings. Her face crumples at the sound, knowing it means our time is up.

I have to go.

"Come here, shortcake," I urge her, arms spread wide, my heart clenching as she complies without hesitation and snuggles against my chest. "Take care of yourself, okay?" When she nods, I gruffly demand, "Say it, Katia." If she says something, that's as good as a promise and she never breaks those.

"I promise, Travis." She sighs, her warm breath going through my shirt and hitting my bare skin. Damn, does that feel good. With that locked in my memory banks, fodder to get me through not having her close, I press a kiss to the top of her head.

"Thank you."

"Be careful," she pleads, hiccupping on the statement. However, I think it's more a sob that she attempted to disguise. She's trying to be so brave, not wanting to make this harder on me.

"Always. We'll talk soon. It'll be like I'm not even gone." She nods, though we each know it's nowhere near the same.

With one last squeeze, I step back, my whole being rebelling at the small distance between us, mourning that it's about to get a lot bigger, and get in my truck.

She's waving at me, cheeks streaked with her sadness, and I return it, not giving my own free rein until I know she can't see me.

Chapter One

TRAVIS

December 5th...

I may be, essentially, limping into town, but I'm still happier than I was when I left it. Then I was heading toward a yearlong deployment, leaving behind my best friend.

And the woman I love.

They are one and the same. She just doesn't know it.

Yet.

I've known what, who, she is to me the day she moved next door to me. I'd watched her, like a lurker, with good intentions.

Yeah, that sounds as if I'm prepping my defense for court. It's true, though. She was carrying numerous boxes by herself. Attempting to do the same with furniture. That's when I'd stepped in, purposefully drawing attention to my approach so as not to scare her, and offered to help.

A welcome to the neighborhood sort of thing.

She'd turned, giving me my first unfettered view of her face, and that was it.

I was hers even if she'd never be mine.

A bit dramatic and a lot Hallmark. Doesn't make it less true.

As I got to know her throughout the process of unloading her rental truck, I discovered she had no ties to Sweetville. To anywhere.

It's no way to live, and honestly, I'm not so sure she was. I watched the town embrace her as one of their own, giving her the home she'd been searching for. Even if she didn't know that's what she was doing. Her biggest supporter, aside from me, of course, is Ella Butler. Her boss.

Not only did Katia and I grow close, so did the two of them.

Ella has a tendency to know when people need her innate mothering and she gladly gives it. Katia soaked it up like a love sponge.

Seeing that bond forming between them almost from the get go, helped along by her hiring Katia on sight? It was a bittersweet wake up call.

Being in the military, I never know where I'm going nor how long I'll be there.

Or if I'm coming back.

It's a harsh reality.

So, I resigned myself to getting my Katia fix however I could. Then I got injured and, as they say, I saw the light. No, not that one. The other.

I realized I'm being idiot.

Whether we're a couple or not, it would still impact her. Just as her being hurt would me.

Then it happened. A bullet in the leg, resulting in said limp and a trip home after a quick layover at a military hospital. All things considered, I got lucky. The placement was in a spot that'll have no lasting effects, at least it shouldn't, and the difference in my gait is only temporary. I discovered something while the medic had been working on me.

Regret is a bitch.

All I could think about was the fact Katia didn't know how I feel about her.

That I'd wasted all this time loving her from afar instead of having the privilege of being able to kiss her, hold her.

Of course, this is all predicated on her being on the same page. While we've never discussed it, I have a feeling she is.

If the way I've seen her look at me is any indication, she's all in. She's merely waiting for me to make the first move.

Which is now.

I'm home, thanks to my wound, two months early.

And Ella has agreed to help me surprise Katia. Ella knows, without me even having said so, that Katia is mine.

When I called to ask for a favor, then laid out my plan, she'd said, and I quote, "There's hope for you yet." I'd laughed, but voiced my concerns that it was too late. Ella has this peace about her that just makes you confess things, admit to truths you may not even know yourself. Not that the latter applies to me. I know of my love for Katia.

We're doing one of those surprise visits from military personnel. Ella is recording it for prosperity. Not because of my return, but due to what it will symbolize. I'm making my intent with Katia known.

Perhaps sharing what I hope is the first of many kisses in public isn't a good idea – it could blow up in my face – but the staff that works there considers her family and her them. So, I thought it'd be fitting to have them be a part of this.

Or just witnesses to my epic fail if that bomb does go off.

Stop second guessing yourself, Whitworth. Katia is worth it.

I'd parked my truck down the block, then put boots on the ground to walk to Ella's Eats. I didn't want to risk Katia seeing my vehicle and ruining my entrance.

Then again, as long as I get her, nothing could. Not even her seeing me before I can proclaim my love and, hopefully, sweep her off her feet.

Rounding the corner, I peek in, my eyes unerringly finding her in the midst of customers. There's quite a few here, which isn't unusual as it's a popular hangout, but I'm thinking Ella might've spread the word about what's coming.

Not out of the realm of possibility considering the residents have observed us, no doubt making bets as to when, *if*, our status will change. If that's the case, which is highly likely, I'll place my own as to the culprit behind it.

Ella.

Wouldn't be the first she's started. Won't be the last.

My girl dyed her hair. Pink, this time. She must've done it after our last video call. It's her favorite color and therefore, mine when it's on her. Fitting as I'm currently wearing the Pink Panther tee she got me for my birthday earlier this year under my uniform. There was a lot of shit given when I pulled it from the care package, which I ignored because it didn't faze me. I knew full well they were messing with me, as we tend to do to negate what we're surrounded by day in day out. But nothing bothers me when my shortcake is involved.

An apt nickname I gave her long before the current choice of color. The woman loves strawberries and it's her preference for her body wash, lotion, and shampoo. Add in that she has the same traits attributed to the character Strawberry Shortcake and it was a no brainer.

She's sweet, kind, always willing to help others, and supportive of her friends.

Me, for instance. I know she's scared when I leave for deployment. As am I that it'll be the last time I see her. When I know it's coming, I make sure she's at my place while I pack, and I intentionally set the shirt I'd had on, and changed out of, after she'd arrived.

That item of clothing always disappears, returning to my house only when I do. She may not know my part in the little charade, but I know hers. The knowledge that she wants a piece of me, something I was wearing that smells like me, while I'm gone turns me the hell on.

The entire time away, I picture her in it, our scents mingling. And it never fails to be the perfect visual to use while showering to relieve the ache being away from her causes.

As quietly as possible, I open the door, thankful Ella remembered to remove the bell above it as promised, and move to stand behind Katia. People are watching her, waiting for her reaction, for mine.

I have this opportunity, so now what am I going to do with it?

Let her know she's mine and has been since the second I knew she existed.

****Katia****

There's always chatter in the diner, friends talking to one another, families sharing what's new in their lives, orders being placed, polite conversations being had. So when it stops, even the sound of silverware clinking disappearing, it's makes one curious.

When I notice numerous gazes on me, I glance down, sure I spilled something on me throughout the rush without realizing it. I find my clothes as clean as when I put them on, albeit more wrinkled, so it can't be that.

Eddie, the cook, gives a chin lift, indicating I should look behind me. Unsure what I'll find, but trusting Eddie that it won't be detrimental to my health, I pivot and drop the tray I was holding. Thankfully, the majority of items on it have already been delivered.

Ironically, now spilling a glass of iced tea on me, the only thing remaining. Normally I'd care. Right now, all that matters is that Travis is here.

My best friend.

The man I love.

He, though, only knows about the former.

Except the look in his eyes as he stares at me has me wondering if perhaps he knows after all.

"Shortcake," he says in that voice that stars in my dreams.

"Soldier man," I reply, loving when the sides of his mouth twitch.

“You gonna stand over there or come give me a proper hello?”

Then I run toward him, easily stepping over the small mess I’ve mad, and jump in his arms. Our position isn’t abnormal. The hands cupping my butt to hold me to him? That’s new. Usually, they’re around my waist. Always so careful about where he touches me.

Before I can truly process that, his mouth is on mine, his fingers squeezing my lower cheeks, and I sigh at the absolute rightness of this moment.

I don’t know what the heck is going on, but I’m more than happy to be a part of it.

When we reluctantly, at least it doesn’t feel as if either of us do so willingly, break contact, I see the grin I know so well gracing the lips I just kissed.

That just kissed me.

And look like they want to do it again.

Which I am fine with, yet I have some questions, the first being, “Travis? What’s happening here?”

“The inevitable, Katia. I’m done waiting. Done letting fear stop me from telling you how I feel.”

Trying to speak is hard, so it takes me a bit to finally get the words out. “Which is?”

“I love you.” Talking has never been an issue for me, but suddenly it’s a constant struggle? When it’s vital I say what’s been on my heart for so long? “Say something,” he urges.

My brain and voice get back in sync – hallelujah – and I declare, “I love you, too.”

Travis carries me outside, braces me against the wall, and presses our foreheads together. “You mean it?”

“I do.”

“You will soon.” That vow causes my heart rate to spike so high I debate whether it would register on a monitor.

“Promise?”

“I do,” he states with a wink, although his expression is the epitome of seriousness. “I’m sorry.”

“If you’re apologizing for that kiss, we’re going to have a problem.”

“Only for the fact I didn’t do it sooner.”

“Why didn’t you?”

Travis glances around, perhaps clueing in that we’re still in public and we’ve drawn a crowd. Again.

“Private moment here,” I mutter, to which Ella – of course she’s leading this – cackles.

“Doesn’t look like your house. Or his,” she tacks on, pointing at Travis. “I mean, I could be wrong. It has been known to happen.”

Leading someone else, I think it’s her daughter-in-law, Nora, her youngest son, Declan’s wife, to holler out. “No, it hasn’t.” That earns numerous agreements amongst the group.

“Click your heels three times and transport us away from here,” Travis urges, making me giggle.

“I don’t have any ruby slippers.”

“Whelp, ruined that escape plan.”

“We could just leave. I need my purse, though.”

He nods. “Let’s do that.”

“You have to put my down.”

“Suddenly not liking this idea.”

“We should talk about,” I point at him then myself, “whatever is going on.”

“I already told you.”

“The end result, yeah, and I approve. I need the details. Such as what changed?”

“My mindset,” he admits with not a little amount of regret tinged confession. As he’s saying this, he’s walking us

toward the diner, but doesn't need to go in as Ella thrusts my purse at me. Thankfully, with my cell already in my back pocket, it's all I need. My keys are inside it, but I hate the idea of separating from Travis long enough to get my car and drive home. Placing me in the passenger seat of his ride, he stands there, blocking any eyes on me. "You've built a life here, Katia."

"And you haven't?" It's a valid rebuttal and he knows it, so he doesn't respond. "Haven't you figured out yet that everything I've built here, as you put it, has you as it's foundation?" I can tell by the instant widening of his eyes, the gulp so hard it makes his Adam's apple bob, that he didn't. "What else?" He's lobbing these excuses at me and I'm knocking them out of the park. Travis chuckles, amused.

"Should've told you this before, let you get me out of my head back then."

"Not gonna argue there. I'm a problem solver."

"The else is, I think, what you already know." Him getting injured.

I sober at the thought. "And you already know where I stand on that."

"You'd be upset no matter what."

"Ding ding, ding dong."

"Name calling?"

"When earned."

"So noted." I wait for him to finish and when he doesn't, I raise an eyebrow. "You know I was hurt."

"Travis Aaron Whitworth." He cringes at the use of his full name. "If you downplayed the severity of it," I warn him, "our friend—," he corrects me and I amend the label with a questioning inflection, "—relationship," I change the word as he did, "will get a timeout."

"I didn't," he quickly assures me. "You know all of it." I better. "Except..." I growl at him, a man that can, and probably has, killed with his bare hands or any other number

of ways for the government and the safety of those at home. “Easy there, tiger. The only thing you don’t know is what I was thinking while they were patching me up.” I know we should actually transfer this discussion to a private place as we’d intended, but I don’t want to do anything to delay whatever he’s trying to tell me. “All that was going through my head was that I hated the thought of you not knowing that I love you as more than your bestie above the resties,” yeah, that’s what I call him and the fact he’s using it now helps ease the worry that had started gnawing at my gut. “I realized I could’ve died,” a possibility, even with him standing in front of me, that pulls a sob from me, “and I, *we*, would’ve missed out on so much because of my unilateral decision for us.” I know my mind needs to remain in the present instead of focusing on what could have been and how it felt to get that call from him, except it’s difficult. This is why that what if game should be avoided like the plague. “I swore that if I survived,” dang it, stop putting those kind of images in my head, “that I owed it to both of us to come clean. And I fervently prayed for that chance and, since I was at it, that you’d feel the same.”

When I let myself hope that we’d reach this stage, fearing it would never come and I was all alone in this, I imagined how it might transpire. Not once did anything resembling this scene take place.

I wouldn’t change the reality of it for the world.

Life hardly ever goes as you expect it. I’m living proof of that fact. Mom died in labor. Dad, a one-night stand, reluctantly took me in. By my fifth birthday – actually on it – he’d given up trying and handed me over to the state.

I will say, there seemed to be true regret in his eyes, when I look back on it as an adult, when he did it. Some would question a kid at that age having such a clear memory of that day, but how could I not? It had a huge impact on me. The trauma alone of being left behind...No, I mentally shake that away, not wanting to think about how it felt as if Travis was doing the same thing.

I know the circumstances were entirely different and he'd do everything in his power to return, but the feeling of inadequacy was still there. It's something I always fear. That my shortcomings, and surely I have them, will eventually cost me Travis, too.

Someone hollers at Travis. He shifts, sees the mayor and curses. Nothing against Jeff Bronson, I know, merely his timing. "Go on," I tell him. "He probably wants to give you a key to the town."

He still doesn't move. "Don't go anywhere," he orders me.

"Where would I go?" I blank my expression; fully aware he can see right through me if I don't.

"Nowhere that I won't find you, shortcake." Not sure if that's a threat or a vow, nor do I get to decipher it before he's giving me a hard kiss, with a nip to the bottom lip in warning, then he's walking away.

I debate for all of two seconds. "We'll see about that."

Of course, I ran. First, I'm not one for being told what to do, even when it's something I want. Second, I'm scared *because* of how badly I want this. Third, not only is the chase fun, being caught is more so.

Granted, he has to find me.

You'd think that'd be easy considering we know the same people here, it's a small town, and...we live next door to each other.

However, I had a trick hidden up my sleeve I wasn't aware of. Well, up the street.

See, Cydne is famous, perhaps infamous, around here for her game of hide and seek with her now husband's dog, Enzo. When she and Curtis Walker met, he was simply a nice man doing a good deed. Somehow, I'm saying fate, turned that into her absconding with Enzo, starting their own version of a scavenger hunt.

As if that wasn't funny enough, the residents decided to help...her.

So, who better to assist me than a woman with a history of this? She saw me sitting in the truck, somehow put the pieces together, and asks, "Need an accomplice?"

Now I ask you, who could turn down an offer like that? Not me, that's for sure. I jump from my seat, leaving the door open as I don't want to risk closing it and alerting him that I'm fleeing, and hurry to her as if I'm running for first base after bunting. Fitting as Travis and I love watching the season games together when he's home.

Enzo, like he knows exactly what's going on and can't wait to play, gives an excited bark. I swear he flipping smiles, too.

Within minutes, I'm in her house, and approximately forty-five after that, Curtis comes in the door, shaking his head as if he instinctively knows his wife is up to something when he sees me. She winks at him and I shift to pet Enzo, not wanting to intrude on their moment while reminding myself I could be having my own if I hadn't ran.

Not long following that, Curtis once again left. I assume he's giving the two of us privacy for whatever he thinks we're doing.

I'm wrong.

****Travis****

I may not have seen Katia leave, but I know she will. The mayor wanted to ask how I am, checking in on someone under his overall care due to his position. Plus, being former military himself, he's familiar with the toll it can take. I assure him I'm okay and promise to let him, or someone else, know if that changes. He takes me at my word, recognizing and believing the sincerity with which I say it.

On my way back to what I fully expect to be an empty truck, I start making plans.

Find Katia.

Make her understand that I regret the time we lost because of my skewed thinking and I don't want to waste a second more.

Then spend the rest of the night, and perhaps week, showing her that.

But first, I have to find her.

She's not in any of her, or our, usual haunts.

I already know she won't be at home either.

Strategic planning is my role within my team and while it's saved my life and that of my comrades a few times, I need it to save my heart and sanity now.

I systematically begin narrowing the possibilities, starting with the most likely first and working my way to the least.

Then I realize that's exactly the opposite of what I should be doing.

My girl is smart. Therefore, she'd know to do the unexpected. A fact confirmed about an hour in when Curtis Walker, a man I know of but don't know well, silently joins my search.

"Did I ever tell you how my wife and I met?" Umm, kind of a random question, but I don't interrupt aside from saying no. I can multitask, continue searching while listening. "She was a customer at Tap That." The bar owned by none other than Ella's youngest son where Curtis is a manager. "Cydne had come in with Nora," Dec's wife, "and stayed after Dec took Nora home." He smiles, no doubt because of the happy memories his story brings up. "We talked in between me tending to other customers and Cydne got a little tipsy. Long story short, I'd been a gentleman, taken her to my place, made sure she had everything she might need – along with a trash can, her cell, and a note informing her who I was."

"That was uh, sweet of you." It was, honestly, though I'm not getting why he's telling me this. I want to ask if we can be done with the sharing part, but something has me holding my tongue. He sought me out for a reason.

“She repaid that kindness by stealing, sorry, ‘borrowing,’ my dog.” I crack up, unable to keep it in as I picture his reaction.

“Clearly, you got him back and you and Cydne worked it out.”

“Yes and there was nothing to work out. Chasing her, chasing them, was the most fun I’d had in...well, ever. Somehow, this woman that had spent a minimal amount of time with me, knew it was exactly what I needed.”

It clicks. His point in telling me this. “I need to chase Katia. Do now what I should’ve done from the get-go.”

“A mulligan,” he confirms with a nod. “Good chat.” Then he starts to saunter off, calling out before he disappears, “You coming?” I stand there, lost as to why I would. “Katia is at my place.”

“Way to bury the lead, Walker.”

The whole trip I’m behind him, I’m formulating what to say to Katia, how to convince her to leave with me, to give us a chance to be more.

But when we enter his place, all I can do is stare at her. She and Cydne are laughing, the joy on Katia’s face is so obvious that all I want to do is keep it there.

“Kicks you in the gut sometimes, doesn’t it?” Curtis whispers, his gaze fixed just as raptly on his wife.

I don’t need to ask, yet I want to hear it all the same. “What?”

“Love.”

“It does. It really does.”

At my voice, Katia’s head pops up from where it had been close to Cydne’s as they’d been playing with Enzo and she grins. If I thought her beautiful before, seeing it all aimed at me, this time with no secrets between us? She steals my breath.

But when she comes to me, her arms going around my waist, I know I owe Curtis, exponentially, because he was right.

“You came for me.”

“I just wish I’d done it sooner, shortcake. Forgive me?”

“Nothing to forgive. You’re here now.”

And damned if I don’t tear up at that.

Chapter Two

TRAVIS

December 6th...

We do need to talk, there's no denying that. Yes, we've already said a lot. However, there's still so much more to discuss.

But the important things have been stated, that being the love we feel for each other. I know it's not the *only* important thing, only that the rest hinges on that basis.

So, we went home, both silently agreeing that would be mine, and I held her as we slept. The culmination of all my hopes and dreams for us were realized the moment her body snuggled against my own, her face pressed into my neck, as she fell asleep.

This wasn't the first time she and I had conked out together, having done so numerous times while watching movies, baseball games, what have you. It is the first we've done so with the knowledge of what it signifies.

This is a huge turning point in our relationship, a fork in our journey that could've ended with a road closed, being that I was alone in this, or a merging of two lanes, which would mean she feels the same.

Thank god it was the latter.

I will never again take for granted that there's time to do something because it can all so quickly be taken from you. "When do you have to go back?"

And here I thought she was sleeping.

“Not for a while,” I tell her, knowing it is and isn’t what she wants to hear. It’s not right away; I will at some point. “With my injury happening this close to the end of my deployment, and the recovery I still need, I was excused,” a silly word to describe it, like I’m getting a hall pass, “for the rest. I’m not sure when we might get called out again, but there will be some time in between, extenuating circumstances aside.” Meaning war being declared or a tragedy of an equal situation because it means lives are in danger.

“Okay.” She burrows deeper under the blankets covering us, her body heat warming me more than the cotton. “So, now what?”

“I take you on a date.”

“Going public, huh?” Katia teases.

“I think we did that enough yesterday,” I joke, making her cheeks pinken at the recollection of our reunion. “I don’t mind,” I reassure her. “Let’s everyone know you’re mine.”

“I guess that makes you mine.”

“Nothing new there, shortcake.”

****Katia****

“It’s a whole lotta new, soldier boy.”

“Are we going to hang out as we always have?”

“Yes.”

“Do you love me?”

“Yes.” I don’t get a chance to say it’s in a different way, which is fine because truthfully, it’s not. We may have been just friends, but I didn’t love him as such. I simply kept the depth of my feelings to myself.

“So, what’s new?”

“The sex,” I whisper, making him laugh. I glare at him in return.

“That is true,” he concedes. “How I introduce you to people will be different as well.”

“Oh my gosh,” I mutter, trying to hide the horror that realization spawns.

“What? That can’t possibly scare you. Instead of being my girl friend, you’ll be my girlfriend.”

“Potato, potato,” I hiss.

“Baby, people already thought we were dating as it is.” Okay, I’ll give him that.

“Your parents...”

“Care about you.” I wouldn’t go that far. I think they tolerate me. My tendency to dye my hair and my obvious tattoos – if only they knew how many I actually have – has gained me a few hoity-toity stares.

Not that they’re outright hostile or anything.

Or maybe I’m projecting.

That’s highly likely as I expect the worst. It’s a hard habit to break. The only exception being Travis. I’ve never had that worry where he’s concerned.

Even when I thought I’d been firmly friend-zoned, I didn’t hold it against him. You can’t force those kind of feelings, nor would I want to.

I want to be chosen.

It looks like I have been.

Like I had been long before now.

If that doesn’t just make everything better, I don’t know what could.

As Travis leans down and kisses me, I realize that can.

A thought I amend a few times as he begins placing them in other locations.

My last clear thought is, thank goodness Ella texted while I was at Curtis and Cydne’s, stating I was on vacation for a couple days.

Chapter Three

TRAVIS

December 20th...

“And they know I’m coming?” Katia asks, just as nervously as the first two times. Taking her hand, I press a kiss to it, driving not allowing me to do anything else. It seems to calm her down, but she quickly gets ramped up again. “Do I look okay?”

“No.” She gasps. “You look beautiful.”

“How did you tell them?”

I turn my head and grimace, realizing now I should’ve been more specific. However, in my defense, I wanted to surprise them, so I kept the details to a minimum. “I informed them I was bringing my girlfriend.”

She susses out what I didn’t say. “Travis.”

“I want to see their faces when they realize it’s you.”

“Can’t wait,” she mutters, making me frown. I glance at her real quick, wondering at that response. I didn’t think she had a problem with my parents nor vice versa, yet she seems reluctant to go. She’s been there numerous times and I don’t recall any outright nor subtle antagonism between them. But I’m also not always in the same room with them. At any given time, I’m either asked to meet, or reconnect, with friends of theirs if there’s a shindig going on or mom needs me to check on something.

Wanting to decipher her reluctance, I resolve to watch her interactions with my parents. I have my own issues with them,

namely dad insisting I join the military, following in his footsteps. He made a career of it, rising through the ranks and retiring a General.

He did everything he could to ensure his reputation, personal and professional, was above reproach. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but when you take it too far, that's when I have an issue.

My parents' marriage is by no means a love match. Hell, some days I'm not even sure it's a like one. They met through friends, discovered they had similar interests – that being prestige and so forth – and came to an agreement.

Now, this is nothing they've shared directly with me, but it wasn't hard to figure it out based on stuff I've heard amongst them and their peers. Mostly being mom stating such a union is always an option. "Look how nicely it turned out for myself."

By that she means the last name that came with it, memberships to clubs, and the bragging rights of being attached to a man of my dad's 'superior breeding.'

Awesome, right?

Surprised my maternal grandparents didn't include a dowry to solidify the deal.

Thankfully, they haven't tried to do the same with me.

That I know of.

Would they?

No, is my immediate thought, but I have to amend it almost as quickly and accept facts.

They just might.

****Katia****

I'm trying my own version of breathing exercises to calm my nerves, but I think I'm making myself lightheaded. I don't want Travis to worry, and I know he will if he realizes exactly how anxious I am about this.

Being their son's friend is one thing. It's a position, firmly set, that doesn't cause any concerns on their part.

But once they discover we've entered new territory, I fear that'll change.

My place in his life was already, in their eyes, I believe, tenuous. I feel as if they're humoring Travis, waiting for him to 'be done with me.' Although their tone is placating, as if I'm a charity case that makes him appear benevolent.

Like a king tending those lesser than him.

I have no clue how such a sweet man can come from two people who are so far from it.

Then again, I probably shouldn't say that regarding my own less than stellar background.

When we arrive, Travis hurries to my side, opening my door and assisting me out. I'm wearing a tasteful dress in keeping with the cooler weather and the upcoming holiday.

That's actually why we're here. Travis' family goes all out. Hiring a party planner, a decorator, and a catering company. Tonight is just the initial gathering, the others spanning the rest of the days leading up to, and including, Christmas. I attended last year with him, though not for the whole ordeal, err schedule.

Reaching the entrance, we're greeted formally. "Mr. Travis." A dip of the head in my direction. "Ms. Katia." It's so easy to forget what Travis comes from, then stuff reminds me it's from something while I'm from nothing.

Not enough.

You'll never be enough.

We greet the butler – see what I mean? – asking how he and his family are doing. Jarvis has been with Travis as long as he can remember, both his parents coming from old money, and is a sweetheart.

Honestly, I'd much rather we talk to him all night than go any further. Alas, I don't get my wish. "Travis, there you are." Left unsaid is the finally, as if we're late. "Please do leave the

man alone to do his job.” See? Things like that. Unnecessarily putting Jarvis where she deems he belongs. An underling. I know the second she notices me. “How delightful. Katia is here.” Her tone stating it’s anything but. Regardless how often we correct her, she insists upon pronouncing my name as Kate-yeah. It’s frustrating, to say the least. We’re shuffled inside, Mrs. Whitworth’s perusal of my attire making me want to hide behind Travis. So, instead, I proudly stand beside him, his hand grasping mine the most natural thing in the world to us. A move his mother does not miss. Her eyes narrow, her mouth purses as if she’s just sucked on a lemon. Which, I guess, is probably how she views me...sour. “I see.” And that’s all she says about the change in our status. Verbally, at least.

Her expression as she introduces me as Travis’ girlfriend is something altogether different.

The rest of the dinner is strained, though not between me and Travis. There’s a tension surrounding us that can’t be broken, despite the numerous attempts to do so.

Afterward, with the other guests gone, Mrs. Whitworth pulls me aside. Her offer is reminiscent of an olive branch, an attempt to get to know me, and I naively take it as such.

“I work the morning shift,” I respond in answer to her question about what I’m doing tomorrow. “I’ll be home by noon at the latest.”

“Splendid,” she declares. “Us ladies will go shopping.” I start to protest, knowing full well we have entirely different tastes and budgets, but she insists. Determined to try to have a civil whatever with my boyfriend’s mom, I relent. “I’ll retrieve you at twelve-fifteen on the dot.”

Great. That gives me all kinds of time to get presentable by her standards.

Chapter Four

TRAVIS

December 21st...

I still can't believe Katia and my mother are shopping. Together. Will wonders never cease? Assuming she'd need it, I purchased a bottle of wine for her and a six pack of beer for me. Both are currently chilling in her fridge, believing she'll come here first to stow any packages she purchased to place under the tree.

Which will be the one at my dad and mom's. They suggested we spend Christmas Eve there, that way we wouldn't have to travel on the actual day. A weird request considering they only live an hour from us, but I'd looked to Katia to see what she thought and waited until I received her nod.

Maybe they're trying to be actual parents for once. Perhaps attempting to build the crumbling bridge in preparation of grandchildren.

Regardless, I'm all for giving them the chance at either if Katia is.

While she was gone, I'd done my own buying. A sweater for her in her favorite color. A coupon for a tattoo date which is exactly what it sounds like. Nail polish, that I intend to put on her. A set of silver barrettes that'll bring out the flecks of it I swear her eyes contain.

And a ring.

Yeah, that kind.

Now that we've taken this step, I'm diving in head first. It's almost two years in the making, so it's not as if we're moving too fast.

If anything, we've gone at a snail's pace to get here.

I'd schedule the wedding for today if I could.

But I don't want to pressure her. I want her to make the choice on what happens next. For far too long, others have taken that from her, including myself by keeping my love a secret.

Admitting that was a hard pill to swallow because it got stuck in my throat.

Hearing a car door outside, I peek out and see my parents' driver, Roger. I leave my own version of a peephole and head to the kitchen where I proceed to get the glasses for our drinks.

Katia comes in and locks up behind her. She whirls at the noise I make, my hands setting down the fragile cups a bit harder than I should. But I can't help it.

My woman is beautiful no matter what, yet I can't process what I'm seeing.

That lovely pink hair that she adored is gone as is the length that went to the middle of her back. I freaking loved gripping it when I took her and it floated around her like a set of wings when she turned fast.

She's currently sporting chestnut brown strands that end at her shoulders.

Katia is still breathtaking, yet she doesn't seem the least bit happy at her transformation. Trying to take it all in, while keeping my reaction from showing, it's a solid five minutes before I realize what else has been changed.

She'd chosen a quarter-length sleeve sweater this morning when she got dressed after our shower, knowing how hot crowded stores can get. It displayed the talented creativity imprinted on her arms over the years.

Slowly stepping forward, not wanting to spook her as she seems close to breaking, I relieved when I don't see any

bandages or marks indicating laser removal. A stretch with the length of time they were together, but I never thought any of this would occur, so I'm not ruling a thing out.

What I do find upsets me just as much.

Concealer is covering them.

Hiding who she is.

It, with the new hairstyle, tells me all I need to know.

Katia would not have done this on her own.

She is too confident in herself to change for anyone.

What she would do, however, is change in an area where she isn't.

And it hurts my heart at the realization that's me.

Us.

****Katia****

Travis hates it.

So do I.

His mom, though, loved it. She said that I need to be presentable for a man of Travis' standing. That I would want him to be proud of me when he introduces me to those he serves with. That, when I was merely a friend, my appearance was one thing, but now that we're dating, she wouldn't stand for it. As if I was besmirching his character by being myself.

When you're trying to create a bond with the woman who might very well, hopefully, become your mother-in-law, you're willing to make concessions. Even when they make you miserable.

But I have to give it a chance.

Right?

"Honey, I'm home," I say unnecessarily, trying to dodge the inevitable questions.

"Hey, shortcake." No more words are exchanged as I close the distance between us and let him embrace me. I'm not sure

which of us needs it more.

Pressing a kiss to the top of my head – I love when he does that – he asks how my day went. I chuff, a sound that in no way would be confused as a laugh, and say, “It was nice.”

When he makes the same noise, I realize how appropriate and disconcerting it can be on the receiving end of it. “Katia.” With a gentle hold on my hair as my face is pressed to his chest, his heartbeat reassuring me that he’s with me because he wants to be, he urges me to look at him. “What happened?” I start to answer, or rather *think* of an answer I can give that won’t incriminate his mom, but he stops me. “It was rhetorical, baby. I already know. Valerie Whitworth. All I want to know is if you’re happy with her treatment?”

“Do you like it?” Avoidance, thy name is Katia Duncan.

“We’re not doing this. Yes or no.”

“No. It’s not me.” I expel a ragged breath. “But that’s the point, isn’t it? She doesn’t want it to be.”

Taking my hand, he leads me to the couch, plops on a cushion, then pulls me to his lap. “What’d she say? Or allude to?” So, I tell him. While I talk, he withdraws a pack of wet wipes I keep in the kitchen drawer, the fact I didn’t even see him grab them a testament to how shook I am by today’s events. Wiping the concealer from my arms, he traces each design as it’s revealed. When all the artwork that had previously been covered is once again proudly displayed, I whisper his name, a tear falling when he says, just as quietly, “These are a part of you. These are what make up the woman I love. You, not the version she believes I want.”

“I don’t want to embarrass you. I don’t want to be found inadequate again.”

****Travis****

There it is. The crux of the problem. It never had to do with me. The past is rearing its ugly head, making her question any kind of happiness.

And I furthered that by waiting so long to tell her she’s mine.

I really am an idiot.

Yep.

But, as she burrows into me, like I'm the shield that can protect her from everything determined to hurt her, I realize she doesn't see it that way.

Not because she's biased where I'm concerned, though there is that. It's that she has merely been taught by everyone that should've loved her that it doesn't last. The manner in which they leave doesn't matter, it's simply that they leave.

Telling her I won't be just another that disappears from her life is a way to convince her, and while I'll certainly do that, I need to show her.

Praying I'm not making a mistake, hating the idea of it looking like I'm disregarding her concerns, I carefully inquire, "Will you do me favor?"

"Anything," she immediately agrees.

"On our wedding day, I want to see this," I finger her hair, "back to pink as you walk toward me in the gorgeous gown *you* will choose."

She's speechless. Oh my gosh. Alert the press. The impossible *is* possible. "Our," she croaks, "wedding day?"

"Well, yeah. We also need to discuss what date, do we want a short or long engagement, small or large ceremony, who do we invite, what flavor cake. No, scratch that. Shortcake for dessert. No, scratch *that*. Only *I* get to eat shortcake."

Katia laughs. Thank God. Although, I am deadly serious about the last item. "The fumes from the dye must've erased my memory of you proposing."

Shifting her to the side, loathing the weight of her not being on me, I crouch in front of her, then drop to my knee. "That's because I'm doing it now."

My heart stops when she jumps to her feet, races to a bag and takes something from it. "Close your eyes until I say otherwise." I hear rustling, followed by the feel of her once

more sitting on the sofa. When I get permission, they pop open and I can't help the smile the sight in front of me brings. Katia shrugs. "I wasn't comfortable the other way."

"Because that's not you."

It's not the same shade of pink she was sporting when she left my bed this morning, but the wig is close enough for now. "I saw it and excused myself from your mom, claiming I needed to get a present that she wasn't allowed to see." Implying it was for her. If Katia had stated she needed to use the restroom, that could've easily resulted in my mom offering to join her. "And I got this." Happy to see the time with my mom didn't completely kill her uniqueness, I give her a kiss. "Now, ask me again."

"You are the very heart of me, Katia. My shortcake. My woman. The love of my life. I know you're mine and I am yours, but I want everyone to know it, too. This ring," it's a pink diamond, of course, "will allow me to do that. So will giving you my name. And when, or if, you're ready, the babies we make will be a third. With everyone who knows us watching, I want to make you my wife."

"How could a woman say no to that?"

EPILOGUE ONE

Travis

Christmas Eve...

Instead of spending the Christmas weekend with my parents as expected, we'd politely declined, with a few choice words courtesy of me to my mother, opting to celebrate in a different way.

The venue? A wedding.

Katia, gorgeous in her light pink wedding dress and darker pink hair, had come toward me with purpose. That being to make me the happiest man in the world. A task she accomplishes just by existing.

Many of the male residents, and a few females – including Ella, had offered to 'give her away,' but she'd said no, thank you.

Katia said she wanted to ensure that I knew she was giving herself to me.

Any wonder I love her with all that I am? All that I can be?

The logistics of where we would live were pretty easy to figure out, as was moving the other's belongings to it.

I'd offered to sell mine and keep hers, knowing how monumental it had been for her to live in a home she'd chosen. To which Katia had said, "Now I choose yours."

That resulted in a vigorous lovemaking session that might've loosened the foundation said house stood on. Though it's held for every single one since without incident, so I'd say it's on steady ground.

A theory we'll continue to test for many years to come.
For research.

As for her place, we're keeping it as additional financial input by using it as a rental property. A win-win as it'll give her the leeway she needs to cut back on her hours at Ella's and enroll in online schooling.

She wants to work in social services, helping kids who grew up like she did. Katia isn't sure in what capacity that'll be yet, but she's gotten the ball rolling and that's a great start.

Plus, it'll help keep her mind occupied when I'm deployed again. Not an impending occurrence but it will happen, sooner than either of us are wanting it to.

Such is the life I signed up for. One Katia agreed to when she became my wife. Before the ceremony, when we'd nailed down the date, her and I had a heartfelt conversation about my future in the service.

If she wanted me to, I would've ended my current contract as soon as possible but she'd begged me not to. Claimed that just as the hair and tattoos were a part of her, the military was a part of me. With her blessing, I'd promised not to put in my papers as long as she did the same to come to me if she ever changed her mind.

Now we're surrounded by our friends, those we consider our true family, and I am dancing with my whole world in my arms.

And Katia is staring at me as if she can't believe this is real.

The feeling is mutual, shortcake.

EPILOGUE TWO

Katia

Eleven and a half years after meeting...

Forget not being enough. My life the last decade has been more than I could've ever hoped for.

A husband that adores me. Precious kids.

Family that loves me for me.

Heck, we even had a hair coloring party. Instigated by Ella. She provided the food, I gave the house, and we each brought the dye we wanted to use.

Time with Travis and our children excluded, it was the best day ever.

And let me tell you, Ella rocks lavender hair like nobody's business.

By silent mutual agreement, it became a regular thing, the location switching and the number of ladies in attendance growing.

We call our gatherings To Dye For Night.

Sydney, our six-year-old daughter, has already declared that she wants to be a part of it as soon as she's old enough. I have no doubt she'll eventually start a second generation club that'll have the parents of all the girls involved smiling with pride.

Our oldest, Walker, is eight. Yeah, we seem to have a theme with their names. Curtis and Cydne have become our best friends and the four of us, along with their children,

Olivia and Parker, get together quite frequently. Olivia, their oldest, was born a year prior to my son and their youngest, Parker, is smack dab in the middle of Walker and Sydney.

Enzo goes crazy about all the attention he gets when we hang out, pretending he doesn't get any at home. Each of us knows that's not true, but we fawn over him regardless.

Travis is still serving our country, and though I long accepted that this is who he is, watching him go doesn't get any easier.

I went into counseling, focusing on children, specifically those in the system, though I don't turn any away. I also, as needed, advocate for them where I can without overstepping any boundaries.

Warren and Ella act as honorary grandparents for Walker and Sydney, a role they all cherish. And that's the only adults who fulfill that need.

The Whitworths took our absence at Christmas, and their own at our wedding, as a sign. A line drawn in the sand, so to speak, in regards to what we will and will not tolerate. For Travis, that's their lack of respect for me.

Sad to say, he's been happier since removing them from his life. If they change their ways, they're more than welcome to come back, yet we both doubt that'll happen.

Their loss.

As for me, I'm tickled pink with my numerous blessings.

And sometimes purple. Others blue. Even a green once. Might do silver next.

Be sure to look for Ridge and Cassidy's book, *Stiff Competition*, releasing 02/20/23.

If you liked Travis and Katia's story, please take a moment to leave a review. Not only are authors happy to know they've brought enjoyment to someone's life by providing an escape from reality, even if only for a short time, but they are a way for others to decide if they'd also be interested. The greatest way to share your love for their work is by word of mouth, whether it's literally, or through your own written word in a review.

STAY CONNECTED

You can email the author, if you'd like, at havenroseauthor@gmail.com. Haven has created a Facebook page for those interested in connecting with her or for updates on current works in progress and future books – facebook.com/authorhavenrose/. You can also follow her author page or on BookBub (bookbub.com/authors/haven-rose). Her website is havenrosebooks.com, and she has created a closed reader group on Facebook. If you're interested in becoming a member, please visit The Rose Garden at facebook.com/groups/227103614772999/.

Thank you for taking the time to meet this couple, and those near and dear to them, as well as characters you may see in future books.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Haven Rose spends her days high atop the world in a tower overlooking a beautiful meadow, waiting for her prince to find her. No? That's a different story? Okay. In real life, the author, who prefers to remain a mystery, met her true love at a very young age and the two have been enjoying their lives together ever since. Has it had its ups and downs? Yes, but their love for one another has endured it all and only grown stronger. He is the foundation upon which her Heroes are created. She knows things can never be perfect in a relationship, at least not outside of books, which is why the pen name of Haven Rose was created, allowing readers, such as herself, to escape into a world where problems are easily solved, love is instant and true, and the story is always safe.



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(series page - amzn.to/3rYG1pI)

Under His Skin by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetUnderHisSkin)

Season Two

Pipe Dreams (releasing 03/15/23)

Season Three

Crowning Glory (Crime Pays Series #2 - releasing 03/14/24)

Heart of a Wounded Hero Series

(series page - amzn.to/38rPGhu)

Tapped Out by Haven Rose (Family by Choice #3 –
mybook.to/GetTappedOut)

Home Cooked Holidays Series

(series pages - tinyurl.com/4j7j3pbf)

Blending with Boone (mybook.to/GetBlendingwithBoone)

Love at First Bark Series

(series page - amzn.to/3wU7HNQ)

Doggone Cute (mybook.to/GetDoggoneCute)

Love's Valley Duet (with May Gordon)

Spark of Love and Lesson in Love
(mybook.to/LovesValleyDuet)

Magical March Series

Spelling Bea (Mates & Mischief #2) by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetBiteMe)

Monster Bait by Brynn Paulin (amzn.to/3tjI8nv)

Short Kings Series (multi-author)

King of His Domain (mybook.to/GetKingofHisDomain)

Signed, Sealed, Yours Series

(series page - amzn.to/3h3oeH7)

Desperate Measures by Annelise Reynolds

His Forever Bride by M.K. Moore

Wild, Wanton, & Wed by Barbra Campbell ([amzn.to/2SqzVPU](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B082S9ZVPU))

Class Act by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetClassAct)

Farmer Takes a Wife by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3w5NQsF](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083W5NQSF))

Sizzle Beach Summer Series

Dirty, Flirty Dancing by West Greene ([amzn.to/3bTLfxd](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083BTLFXD))

Beachside With You by T.O. Smith ([amzn.to/3yFSP7M](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083YFSP7M))

50 Shades of Sun by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3P4CC1d](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083P4CC1D))

Things We Did Last Summer by Pixie Chica
([amzn.to/3SujWcQ](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083SujWcQ))

Heartbreak Beach House by Layne Daniels ([amzn.to/3Ijo77r](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083Ijo77r))

Girl on a Beach Blanket by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3RbfDU4](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083RbfDU4))

Crazy Rich Lifeguard by Rachelle Stevensen
([amzn.to/3r9MywI](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083r9MywI))

Hot For Lifeguard by May Gordon ([amzn.to/3fmcHp4](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083fmcHp4))

Rebel without Sunscreen by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/RebelwithoutSunscreen)

Guy with a Starfish Tattoo by Brynn Paulin
([amzn.to/3P4DbrR](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083P4DbrR))

Steamy in Sweetville Series

August 2020

Measured Love by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetMeasuredLove)

Put a Ring on It by Pixie Chica ([amzn.to/3SvIRwQ](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083SvIRwQ))

Postcards in the Sand by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3xToSjN](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083xToSjN))

Christmas 2020

Count on Me (mybook.to/GetCountonMe)

Cuddle Up Buttercup by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3j7OEHE](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B083j7OEHE))

Stranded Christmas by Pixie Chica ([amzn.to/30c07yk](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

February 2021

All Fired Up (mybook.to/GetAllFiredUp)

Pants on Fire by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3nXHQxZ](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

Ring of Fire by Pixie Chica ([amzn.to/39KDntb](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

April 2021

Cross my Heart (mybook.to/GetCrossmyHeart)

No More Running by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/2PTmIhj](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

September 2021

In my Rearview (mybook.to/InmyRearview)

In Plain Sight by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3g90GSn](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

January 2022 (last of original series)

His Sugarplum Kisses by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3gCHJrz](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

Sweetville Season Two

January 2022

Between the Lines (mybook.to/GetBetweentheLines)

March 2022

Smokescreen (mybook.to/GetSmokescreen)

Paws for Love by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/34KgpDK](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

Good Cop Bad Girl by Pixie Chica ([amzn.to/35TdkT3](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

June 2022

Suited for You by Haven Rose (mybook.to/SuitedforYou)

Amaze Me by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/34JEDOQ](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

Happenstance by Pixie Chica ([amzn.to/3P4LtQt](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

October 2022

Booked Solid by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetBookedSolid)

Something So Sweet by Brynn Paulin ([amzn.to/3JgYLac](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YK7YK7K))

Falling for the Enemy by Pixie Chica

December 2022

Tickled Pink by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetTickledPink)

Mistlefoes by Brynn Paulin (amzn.to/3a35JCS)

Homeward Bound by Pixie Chica

Sweet Obsession Anthology (NO LONGER AVAILABLE)

Individual listing - Set in Stone (The Stone Siblings, Book One) by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetSetinStone)

Tarpley VFD (a part of Susan Stoker's World)

Series page - amzn.to/3uJgBfg

Fighting for Elena by Silver James (amzn.to/38lGeGL)

Fighting for Carly by Deandra Hall (amzn.to/375rH1I)

Fighting for Calliope by Haven Rose (amzn.to/2TpvL8p)

Fighting for Jemma by MJ Nightingale (amzn.to/2TEQdTn)

Fighting for Brittney by TL Reeve (amzn.to/2R7iOPI)

Fighting for Nadia by Nicole Flockton (amzn.to/2NGOZmK)

Series page - amzn.to/3uBmo6x

Fighting for Amanda by TL Reeve (amzn.to/3b0wTZ1)

Fighting for Marcy by MJ Nightingale (amzn.to/3bIO7tc)

Fighting for Bree by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetFightingforBree)

Fighting for Lorna by Deandra Hall (amzn.to/3uI8LSQ)

Fighting for Justice by Silver James (amzn.to/3kBbBEz)

The Law Trilogy

Multi-author series featuring myself, Sylvia Kane, Brynn Paulin, Barbra Campbell, May Gordon, and MK Moore)

Collateral Damage, Beyond the Law, Book One by Haven Rose (mybook.to/GetCollateralDamage)

In His Sights, Breaking the Law, Book One by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetInHisSights)

Settle the Score, Book One by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetSettletheScore)

Valentine's Sucks Series

Bite Me (Mates & Mischief #1) by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetBiteMe)

Vampire Bait by Brynn Paulin ([My Book](#))

My Vampire Mate by Pixie Chica (amzn.to/327lphd)

XOXO Series

(Christmas 2019).

Ex Scrooge Me by Brynn Paulin (amzn.to/37RukoB)

Mistletoe Magic by Haven Rose (Meant to Be #1)
(mybook.to/MistletoeMagicBook)

Candy Covered Kisses by Loni Ree (amzn.to/2OYFqQ6)

His Christmas Delivery by Pixie Chica (amzn.to/2LjfEm)

(Valentine 2020).

Sweet Surprise (Meant to Be #2) (mybook.to/SweetSurprise)

(Spring Love 2020).

Billionaire Bunny by Brynn Paulin (amzn.to/2yA51dP)

A New Start by Haven Rose (Meant to Be #3)
(mybook.to/ANewStart)

Mr. Boss Man by Loni Ree (amzn.to/2UHcyQg)

A Royal Payne by Pixie Chica (mybook.to/ARoyalPayne)

Yours Everlasting Series (YES!)

Brynn Paulin, Dakota Rebel, Haven Rose,

May Gordon, Pixie Chica, and Rachelle Stevensen

Learning Curve by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetLearningCurve)

A Place for Daniel by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetAPlaceforDaniel)

Something Borrowed by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetSomethingBorrowed)

Step Above the Rest by Haven Rose
(mybook.to/GetStepAbovetheRest)

Season Two

May 2022

Count the Ways (Just Beachy Series, Book One -
mybook.to/GetCounttheWays)

Upcoming Standalones

Final Countdown (TBD)

Pardon Me (TBD)

Future Series (with more planned):

Aftereffects Series

Deadly Acts (TBD)

Deadly Intentions (TBD)

Deadly Hope (TBD)

City of Angelis Trilogy (subject to change)

Titles to be Decided

Coming Home Series

Titles to be Decided

Danger Duet

Cuts Like a Knife (TBD)

The Key to His Heart (TBD)

Perilous Love Series (subject to change)

Running from Peril (TBD)

Hidden Peril (TBD)

Triple Peril (TBD)

Reluctantly Royal

Reign Interrupted (TBD)

Other Titles to be Decided

Saints & Sinners MC Series

Dangerous Curves (TBD)

Other Titles to be Decided

Shadow Men Series

Titles to be Decided

The Four Seasons Series

Titles to be Decided

Weathering the Storm Series

My Sunshine (TBD)

A Touch of Frost (TBD)

Other Titles to be Decided