

A pregnant woman with dark hair styled in a bun, wearing a black lace long-sleeved dress, is shown in profile from the waist up. She is looking down and to the right, with her hands resting on her belly. The background is a light blue and white watercolor wash.

**KACI
ROSE**

A Baby FOR
HER
BEST FRIEND
BE • MY • BABY

A Baby For Her Best Friend

Kaci Rose



Five Little Roses Publishing

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Contents

Blurb

Get Free Books!

1. Chapter 1

2. Chapter 2

3. Chapter 3

4. Chapter 4

5. Chapter 5

6. Chapter 6

7. Chapter 7

8. Chapter 8

9. Chapter 9

10. Chapter 10

11. Chapter 11

12. Chapter 12

13. Chapter 13

14. Chapter 14

15. Chapter 15

16. Chapter 16

17. Chapter 17

18. Chapter 18

19. Epilogue

20. Other Books by Kaci Rose

Connect with Kaci Rose

About Kaci Rose

Please Leave a Review!

Blurb

She's his best friend. He's her drunken one-night stand. Now there is no way to hide it...

Summer

Nick and I have been best friends since we were little kids.

We used to do everything together.

Still do a lot of the time.

Like going to a friend's wedding, turning it into a drinking game, having too much to drink, and accidentally sleeping together.

Since neither of us remembers it, so we can forget it.

Until over twenty pregnancy tests, all tell me I'm pregnant.

How do I tell him now that he's seeing someone?

Nick

I never expected to find out that I was going to be a father while at my parent's anniversary party.

Or the mother to my child wasn't the woman I was with,
much less that it was my best friend.

Now the life I want is just within reach.

My best friend as my wife, a family.

But that is the last thing Summer wants.

Especially when my now ex shows up with news of her
own...

A friends to lovers, one night stand, secret baby romance.
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Now on to the story!

Chapter 1

Summer

“Why are you looking at me like that?” I ask Nick.

We are running around in the field between his house and mine, but he stops and looks at me funny.

“I’m going to marry you,” he says.

“Why would you do that?” I ask, rolling my eyes.

I mean, we are only ten years old. Marriage is for old people. I have things to do with my life.

“Because you make my heart race, and my dad says Mom makes his heart race, and that’s love.” He has this determined look in his eyes.

“Your heart is racing because we were just running around. Now stop being a sap already.” I take off running again.

My phone starts ringing, breaking me from my daydream. Nick is my best friend. We grew up together, but lately, that

same memory keeps popping into my head the more distance there is between us.

Speaking of Nick, he's the one calling me.

"Hi," I answer.

"Hey, how's the weather up there?" He asks like he always does. It's like he needs a way to break the ice before we start talking.

I currently live in Memphis, Tennessee and he is in Jacksonville, Florida, so the weather can be nice, hot, and sunny there and cloudy and cold here.

"We have some sun today, actually it's been great for getting some writing done," I tell him. "I was thinking of walking downtown later and see what blues music I can find."

I'm writing for a woman's magazine and have the luxury of working from home so I can live anywhere. Which has been nice because I've moved around a lot since graduating college. No place has felt like home.

"Well, you are coming down for Tony's wedding, right?" He wants to know.

Ahhh yes. Our friend Tony from high school is getting married next week there in Jacksonville. Tony is a good guy. He was shy but seems to have grown out of it because he's finally getting married to an amazing girl.

They decided to have a Valentine's Day wedding and asked all the girls to wear shades of red and pink and all the guys to

wear black or white. It will be so cheesy but it's for Tony, so I'll go.

“Yeah, I'll be down. I need to book a room,” I say.

I know what's coming next. He will offer me his guest room, but his girlfriend Ashley isn't my biggest fan. To put it bluntly, she doesn't like me, and she isn't afraid to let me know it, even if she hides it from Nick, so I plan to steer clear of her at all costs.

“No, you can stay here,” he says.

“Nick, no. I...”

“No, listen, Ashley and I broke up and all her stuff is gone. It will be just you and me.”

I hesitate because as his friend I know I should say things like ‘oh no I'm so sorry’ and ‘what happened,’ but inside I'm just doing a jig that she is gone. He can do so much better than her.

Nick chuckles. “She broke up with me, but thanks for asking.”

I sigh, “I never liked her.” I say honestly.

“I know. So, this is settled, right? You're going to stay with me. We can catch up and go to the wedding together. Then we can watch everyone get drunk and make fools out of themselves. The food will be good and there will be cake. We can be each other's Valentine's, and do all the cheesy stuff together. Stay a few extra days and we can hit the beach, catch up. What do you say?”

A few days on the beach sounds amazing and I would like to catch up with him more than just the quick phone calls we have been having.

“Okay, I’ll be there,” I say.

We hang up and I stare at my half-finished article on the best makeup to prevent your skin from breaking out. The research I did for this piece on the ingredients in makeup makes me never want to use it again for the rest of my life.

I flip over my post on twenty gifts for your best friend. This one is pretty easy as I just have to sort through the folder with hundreds of gift ideas from our sponsors, come up with a list, and explain why they make good gifts. But even this simple article can’t hold my attention.

Nick may be my best friend, but I haven’t spent a night at his place since high school when my parents went on a twenty-year anniversary vacation and his parents let me stay with them. That was almost seven years ago.

I have to be overthinking this. So, I call my friend Maddie, who lives a few floors down, and she is up here in minutes. I relate the whole story to her as I pack.

“Okay, so you’re going to stay at a friend’s house and you get your best friend as your Valentine. What’s the big deal?”

I pull up Nick’s most recent social media picture and show her.

“Wow.” That is all she says as she drools over the photo.

Nick has always been handsome. It's why the girls wanted him in school and hated me just for being friends with him.

Now though, Nick has muscles that he isn't afraid to show off, and a nice tan from the Florida sun. His dark brown hair is long enough to run your fingers through, and he wears a beard that makes him sexy as hell.

"That is not my Nick," I tell her.

"When was the last time you saw him in person?"

"A little over two years ago, before he started dating Ashley."

"And nothing more friendly has happened between you guys?"

"Nope. The girls in school hated me for being his friend. Hell, his ex-hated me for being his friend, but we never exchanged more than a friendly hug."

"I don't know how you did it." She says, eyeing Nick up again.

"He didn't look like that back then."

"Well, just follow his lead. Remember, he is just a friend. He is the same guy, I assume, from the last time you saw him. I don't see the problem here," she says.

The problem is the massive crush I've had on this guy since high school and it doesn't help that just his voice turns me on.

Chapter 2

Nick

For the first time in a long time, I am excited to head home from work. It hasn't been fun coming home to an empty house. Even when I was dating Ashley, she was never there when I got home. So, I found myself working later and later hours until I'd come home, eat, and pass out, only to wake up and do it all over again.

Tonight is also the wedding rehearsal, and we were both asked to come to the dinner as it's kind of a friend reunion as well.

When I walk in the door of my apartment, it feels like there is life here. The music is going, and I can follow it to the master bedroom's bathroom where Summer is sitting on the counter doing her makeup. She doesn't see me right away, so I lean against the door frame and watch her.

She's in shorts and a spaghetti strap tank top. Her dirty blond hair has some light curls and falls just below her shoulders. She's always had the girl next door look to her, and she plays it up well with makeup.

When I opened the door last night and saw her on the other side, I just about swallowed my tongue. She was always really pretty, but in the last few years she's grown up, found herself and she's stunning.

Her eyes meet mine in the mirror, and the smile she gives me makes my heart skip a beat. The feelings I've been having for her from the moment she walked in that door have been anything but friendly.

This girl may be my best friend, but I definitely have been thinking of her in a way best friends shouldn't be thinking of each other.

She looks up and asks, "How was work?"

I'm taken aback. I can't remember the last time someone asked me how my day was at work.

"It was work," I shrug.

Walking into my closet, I close the door and change out of my jeans and shirt into dress pants and a dressier button-down shirt. I tell myself I didn't pick this shirt because I know it's her favorite color blue or because I know she has a thing for button-down shirts. I picked it because we are going to a nice place for dinner, and we should dress up. Thankfully, we don't have to dress in Valentine's Day colors tonight, too.

When I step out of the closet, she makes no effort to hide that she is checking me out in the mirror. When her eyes meet mine, there is heat in them, but then she blinks, and it's gone.

She gets down from the counter and disappears into the closet to change.

As I fix my hair in the mirror, I realize how easy this is. Glancing at the counter with her stuff on it mixed with mine, it looks like it was always supposed to be there. As if it's the most natural thing in the world.

I'm lost in thought and not prepared for her to step out of the closet in that yellow lace dress.

"Holy shit," I say without thinking.

A light blush courses her cheeks.

"Is it bad?"

"No, you look stunning. Like, wow," I say and let my eyes roam over her.

"We better get going. Tony made it very clear we aren't to be late," she says.

"Yes, I got several texts today. Apparently, his parents and her parents don't get along, so we're there to break the tension." I tell her as we head out to the waiting taxi.

"Oh, so this will be fun." She grins, entering the taxi.

On the way to the way to the restaurant, she doesn't miss a chance to tease me.

"So, I saw a certain lady's magazine on your coffee table. I thought maybe Ashley left it there, but the address label has your name on it."

“Yep, I’ve read every article you have written. Including how to pick out your best push-up bra,” I smile.

Her laughter fills the car. “You will never live that down.”

“Mom and Dad subscribe too, and I know my dad reads them because he makes comments every now and then. So, you have at least two male readers. I’m sure your dad reads it too, so maybe three.”

“My editor will be so proud,” she chuckles.

Once in the restaurant and seated at the table, it doesn’t take long for the families to start throwing veiled jabs at each other. Tony gives us puppy dog eyes, looking for help.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper in Summer’s ear.

“So have you heard Summer here writes for a magazine you ladies might have heard about,” I say, throwing my arm over the back of her chair.

Both moms ask about it and turns out they have both read some of the stuff she wrote, but that distraction only lasts about ten minutes before they are back at each other.

“So, every time Tony’s mom says ‘your daughter,’ we could take a drink,” Summer says.

I flag the waiter and have him bring us a few more drinks. I lost count on how many we have had, but thankfully we took a taxi here and we’ll take one home.

“Did you know Tony and Nick here used to be on the wrestling team? We’d hang out and they would just start

wrestling. Then, when Tony wasn't around, Nick would try to show me his moves." Summer says, rolling her eyes.

"I vividly remember you kneeing me in my junk several times," I tell her.

"And yet you never got the hint to not tackle me," she goes on.

"Maybe I had an ulterior motive for getting my hands on you," I say.

I see Tony smile and his bride-to-be Bella's eyes go big. Summer purses her lips.

"You always cause trouble." She says as the dessert comes. That seems to bring on more fighting, which brings on more drinking.

The last thing I remember was Tony's mom throwing her drink in Bella's mom's face.

Chapter 3

Summer

Ugh, why is the light so bright? Nick really should get blackout curtains. I try to open my eyes, but my head is pounding. How much did I have to drink last night?

I know Nick and I played a few drinking games, but it wasn't that much, was it? Though I don't remember coming home or getting in to bed. When I roll over, trying to get away from the light, I bump into a solid, warm body.

Nick.

My eyes pop open and that's when I realize I'm in Nick's bed. His eyes open about the moment I realize this, and he groans.

"Why are you in my bed?" he asks.

"I have no clue, I just woke up," I say, shifting to my side of the bed and it's then I felt the cool sheets against my skin.

Peeking under the blanket, I can verify that not only am I not wearing any clothes, but neither is Nick.

“We’re both naked,” I close my eyes, willing myself to remember anything from after we left the rehearsal dinner.

“Yep,” Nick says, staring at the ceiling.

“Do you remember anything from dessert on?” I ask him.

“No, I have no clue how we even got home. I’m assuming a taxi.” He pauses, “Did we...”

“I don’t know,” I say while stretching and trying to figure out how to get out of here with some dignity.

Damn. I’m deliciously sore between my legs, like only a good night of hot sex can make you. The only sucky part is I don’t remember the hot sex.

“I’m pretty sure we did,” I say.

“Why do you think that?”

I feel the heat creep up my neck.

“Well, it’s been a while since I’ve been with anyone and I’m sore down there,” I admit.

He nods but doesn’t say anything. I sit up, taking the sheet with me, but I don’t see any of my clothes in sight. Great.

“We should talk about this,” he says.

“Honestly, I’d like to get out of here, take a shower and get ready for this wedding and maybe forget about this, if that’s okay with you,” I say.

My head is pounding, the bright Florida sun isn’t helping, and I finally give up and toss my pillow over his face.

“Don’t look.” I get up and take the blanket from the chair and wrap myself in it.

“Okay, I’ll take a shower and hydrate. Then I’ll make breakfast,” I say.

A hot shower doesn’t help. I have whisker burn on my breasts and between my thighs. I can’t remember that last time I looked this well loved the next day. But I feel like crying mostly because I can’t remember it and partly because it’s Nick.

My sexy as hell best friend. The one I know, without a shadow of a doubt, I would have still slept with stone cold sober because it had been a while for me, and he looks like a walking sex god.

I get ready for the wedding in the guest bathroom, keeping space between Nick and me so we can get our heads on straight. The wedding is this afternoon, and we need to start making our way there because our hangover induced sleep had us getting up late.

I step out into the living room, and Nick is drinking a glass of water. He sets it down on the counter and walks over to me slowly, making no effort to hide that he’s checking me out.

“You look beautiful,” he says.

“Thanks, you are looking pretty good yourself,” I say as I take in his black dress pants and black button-down dress shirt that he paired with a tie.

He follows me out and even opens my car door for me. On the outside, nothing has changed. But everything has changed. The way I feel around him has changed. I may not remember last night, but my body sure as hell does, and it's not afraid to tell me so. It's screaming for a repeat performance.

All he has to do is look at me and my panties are soaked, my clit throbs, and my nipples stiffen. I haven't allowed myself to look at his cock to see if I have the same effect or not.

Nick keeps looking over at me on the drive, but he doesn't break the silence until we pull into the parking lot.

He asks, "We are okay, right?"

I finally allow myself to really look at him, and his face is etched with worry.

"Yeah, we're okay. This will be weird for a little bit, but it will pass. Though I'd like to keep this to ourselves if we can. We already get enough heat for being friends for so long," I say.

"I can agree with that as long as you dance with me at the wedding."

"Deal," I agree.

We head inside and Nick goes to the groom's room since he's a groomsman and I enter and grab a seat. Taking a look at the guests, I realize I'm one of the few people in a dress.

I know the invitation said Florida casual, but I thought that meant a sun dress. Most people here are in shorts.

The wedding is very simple and nice, but I couldn't take my eyes off Nick and he had his eyes fixed on me the whole time as well. I remember thinking he was the best looking groomsman there.

Before I know it, the wedding is over, and Nick is pulling me with him to keep the girls at bay. He does this often to stop unwanted passes. It seems a wedding makes it even worse. The girls don't care that he's practically wrapped around me. They still flirt and try to get a dance from him.

"You know I can't be your fake girlfriend forever. One of those girls might even be nice. The redhead seems sweet and less ditzy than the rest," I joke.

"You know you think you're joking, but really, it's not helping." He says, dragging me on the dance floor.

The rest of the night flies by with some good food, catching up with friends, and lots of time dancing.

If I knew what was ahead, I would have said yes when Nick begged me for one more dance before we left.

Chapter 4

Nick

I think I have made a huge mistake.

I tried to forget my night with Summer like she asked, but I couldn't. I don't remember it, but my body does. Any mention of her, or even seeing a picture of her in my home, and bam, I'm hard.

I've never had this problem before. Sure, Summer is beautiful. No one would deny that, but I was never attracted to her like this.

So, when Ashley showed up and wanted to talk, I agreed. She missed me, she missed us, and wanted to work things out. Sure, why not? I figured it would be a good way to get over Summer.

But the harder I tried to get over Summer, the more I wanted her. Then everyone started hinting that since Ashley and I worked things out, we must be heading on the path to marriage, right?

Well before Ashley had broken up with me, I had bought an engagement ring. I actually forgot about it until the other day when I was home. I'd had a few drinks, and all of a sudden, Ashley squealed and comes running out with the ring in her hand.

Somehow she has found it and assumed I was going to propose. In my drunken stupidity, I went along with it, gave her some half-assed proposal, and now I'm engaged.

As I sit and watch Ashley take photos of the ring shining in the sunlight, I tell myself I'm never drinking again.

She insists on being here when I called my parents. They faked their enthusiasm very well, but it was false, I could tell. They aren't Ashley's biggest fans and made no point in hiding how relieved they were when we broke up.

I have one more person to call and I am dreading it down to my core.

"Hey, I have a work call to make, so I'm going to go sit in the car. I should only be a few minutes." I say to Ashley.

"Okay, babe. I'll start on dinner." She replies, not looking up.

She has been slowly moving some of her stuff into my place and I really hate it. The more her things show up, the less stuff is here that reminds me of Summer.

I head out to my car, get in, and start it up to get the A/C going. I make sure the doors are locked, and then I dial Summer's number.

“Hey,” she says, but sounds very guarded.

“Hi, how are you?”

I know I’m stalling. Even though I should dive right into it, I just can’t.

“I’m fine. Just started an article on the best dating apps. My editor made me sign up for them too. Talk about a shit show. Those things are horrible.” My stomach turns at the thought of Summer going on a date with anyone. It’s an emotion I have no right to feel, especially with what I have to tell her.

“Promise me you will be careful if you go on a date from one of those apps,” I say.

“Trust me, not a single guy on the apps got past four or five messages. It’s pretty horrible.” She says, her voice flat.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” I ask her.

“Yeah, just a hard day. What’s new with you?”

“Well, I’m calling to tell you... well, Ashley and I are engaged.”

The phone is so quiet I have to pull it away from my ear to make sure the call didn’t get disconnected. It didn’t.

“Did you hear me?”

“I heard you, but I just don’t know what to say. She treats me like shit, she treats your parents like shit, and now I’m supposed to jump for joy that *she* is the one who you want to spend the rest of your life with? I’m sorry, but that’s not the emotion I’m experiencing right now. I’m feeling like I’m

losing my best friend because I know she'll make you choose your wife over me," she snaps.

"I won't let that happen."

"Don't you see Nick? You shouldn't be with someone who you have to 'not let them pull you away from your friends.' You don't see a problem here?"

I can't even argue with her because she's right.

"It's the next step for us, Summer. I want a family and Ashley is so excited. We both have good jobs, and my friends here like her." All my excuses sound kind of thin.

"Not once did I hear you say you love her," she sighs. "Listen, I have to go. Congratulations, I guess. I hope you are happy, I really do. Though I won't be shocked when my invitation gets lost in the mail. Bye Nick." Then she hangs up.

I sit there staring at my phone, wondering what the hell just happened. Summer has been mad at me before. Like the time we were swimming at a friend's house when we were sixteen and I untied the top of her swimsuit.

Or the time I punched her prom date in the face for making out with another girl in the men's bathroom.

Though she was never like this, and we always talked it out. She couldn't get off the phone fast enough. But she's right though, Ashley won't stand for my friendship with Summer. She already made it clear she doesn't like Summer. She's packed up all the pictures of Summer and me from around the house.

Thank god she doesn't know about the ones on my desk at work. Especially since there isn't a single picture of Ashley on my desk, only of Summer and me.

I need to do some soul searching and see if my desire for a family outweighs everything else. I used to be happy with Ashley and I know I haven't given her a fair chance this time because I've been so wrapped up in Summer.

With a deep breath, I put this thing between Summer and me behind me once and for all. It's time to give Ashley a fair shot, so I know I'll have no regrets later.

Chapter 5

Summer

I hang up the phone with Nick, but my heart won't stop racing. I had been trying to figure out what to do, and it's like the universe said, here I'll make this choice for you.

Then I stare at the two pink lines again just to make sure they were still there. They are.

I'm pregnant.

I text Maddie because I need someone to talk this out with. She is at my door in a minute flat and knocks, but I can't bring myself to move. When I don't answer the door, she uses her key and comes in only to find me in the same spot, standing in the bathroom, still staring at the pregnancy test.

It takes her a moment to realize what's going on, but I know the moment she sees it.

"Oh, shit." She says, taking my hand, and leading me to the bed.

We sit down and I take a deep breath, trying to compose myself for the onslaught of questions I know are coming.

“It’s Nick’s,” I say, because I know that’s the first question she will ask. I had told her all about that drunken night Nick and I shared. Mostly because I needed to talk about it, and she isn’t in that crowd of people, so she won’t go talking about it to someone and have it get out.

She spent the night, and we decided I had made the right choice for the sake of my and Nick’s friendship. Though I’m willing to bet if we had known this, we’d have changed our answers.

“Are you sure?” she asks.

“Well, I hadn’t been with anyone for almost eight months before Nick, and there hasn’t been anyone since. So yep,” I say.

Then I go on to tell her about the phone call I just had regarding Nick and Ashley’s engagement. I don’t even hide how there’s no way I can be happy for him. But since I did manage to not yell ‘what were you thinking’ at him, so brownie points to me.

When I’m finished, her eyes are wide. What a time to not be able to have a damn drink.

“Are you going to tell him?”

I sigh, wishing I had an answer.

“Eventually yes, but I don’t think ‘oh hey congrats on your engagement. By the way, I’m pregnant with your baby’ was a good way to do it,” I say.

“But you need to tell him before he gets married. For one, what if the fiancé isn’t okay with it?”

“Oh, she will lose her shit. She hates me. Then I will be responsible for breaking them up and ruining his happiness. Some friend I am. What if she tries to take my baby from me and raise it as her own? Oh my god, she going to be my baby’s stepmother!” Tears fill my eyes. “Great, the emotions are already starting.” Then I full out cry.

“I don’t know what to do. No matter when I tell him I’m going to hurt him. I tell him now, he loses Ashley, and I hurt him. I wait and he finds out later, he’ll be hurt and angry that I didn’t tell him. He wants a family, but not like this. Not where I’m the other woman. It’s not supposed to be like this,” I sob.

Maddie holds me while I cry for the loss of my friendship with Nick, the fucked up situation my child will be born into, and for me.

“You know I’m here for you. Babysitting, maid service, laundry, grocery shopping. Whatever you need. I’d even be willing to move in and share this place to cut back on expenses. It’s a three bedroom. A room for you, one for baby, and one for me.” Maddie says and I cry all over again.

“You are the most amazing friend. I think I need to take a few days and let it sink in and then decide what to do. I just know I’m not telling him right now, which means I can’t even tell my parents because my parents are friends with his parents who will tell him. So, you are it,” I say.

Then my phone goes off.

Nick: Are you sure you're, Ok? I can tell something is wrong.

“That’s Nick, isn’t it?” Maddie wants to know.

“Yeah, but might as well start cutting the cord now. You know as well as I do that once he’s married, she won’t let him be friends with me anymore. I won’t even be invited to the wedding, not that I can go.” I point to my stomach.

Nick: Don’t ignore me, or I will be on the next flight there if I need to be.

Me: I’m fine. I swear I have a friend over, and we’re going to have a girl’s night and it will be fun.

Nick: OK. I miss you...

I don’t even know how to respond to that, so I don’t.

Just like I don’t respond to his texts the next day or the day after. Though I do answer a few, so he doesn’t worry. But he’s constantly asking what is wrong.

Thankfully, Maddie goes with me to my first doctor’s appointment. It’s then I almost break down and contact him. But as I am debating calling him, Ashley posts their engagement photos online, and it reminds me of what I’d be ruining, so I keep it to myself yet again.

“Yup, really need to tell him, Summer. You know this isn’t fair to him. He deserves to be part of this.” Maddie says as we leave the doctor’s office.

“Someday I’ll tell him. No matter when that is, I’ll lose him, not that I have him now. He chose Ashley. After everything, he chose her.”

“He didn’t know he had a choice. You wanted to forget it ever happened, and he has no idea about the baby, so how do you know he’d still choose her?”

Maddie’s right, I know she is, but I still can’t bring myself to do it, and she stops pushing me.

This is when the universe steps in again.

Chapter 6

Nick

My mom's calling and I know it's because their 30th anniversary is coming up. I'm sure she's calling to tell me about some fabulous trip they're going on like Summer's parents just left for. I almost don't pick it up, but since I'm getting ready to leave work, I'm looking for any reason to stall heading home.

"Hey, Mom," I say.

"Hey, Baby. You out of work?"

"Yep, just finished up."

Mom hates bugging me at work, so when she wants to talk, she times it to when I'm leaving. Many days we talk my entire ride home. Lately, I've been staying at work until we are done talking, then going home. My house is feeling a bit too small and not much like home since Ashley started moving her stuff in.

"Good. I want to talk to you about our anniversary. We're having a party with friends and family, and I want you to be

here, and I expect you to get Summer to come too. She's been in a funk lately, and I think a weekend away will do her some good."

My stomach sinks. Summer is like a daughter to them. She calls them Mom and Dad, so I'm not surprised she expects Summer to be there. The problem is, I know Summer is trying to push me away. She texts me once a week maybe, and she hasn't taken any of my calls.

If Mom picked up on it, then something is up and I should have pushed harder. I should have gone up there and checked on her. Instead, I've been trying hard not to mention anything about Summer to Ashley, so I don't upset her. Then when I talk to Summer, I've been tiptoeing around anything about the engagement to Ashley.

"I'll try, Mom. But we haven't been talking much. She's been really hard to reach."

"I know and I don't care if you have to fly up there and bring her down yourself, I expect her here. Now, I'll text you the details. You and she will stay here. See you then." Then the line goes dead.

Summer and Ashley under the same roof for an entire weekend. What could go wrong?

I take a deep breath and call Summer. Of course, she doesn't pick up, so I fire off a text.

Me: Summer, I need to talk to you. It's about Mom and Dad.

Playing a little dirty, I hint that it's something bigger than it is. But I really want to talk to her, to just hear her voice.

I sit and wait and thankfully a few minutes later she calls me back.

“Hey,” I answer.

“Are they okay?”

Her voice is off, but I can't quite place it, so I decide to dive right in.

“Yes. I just got off the phone with Mom. Their 30th wedding anniversary is coming up and they're having a party. They expect us both to be there and stay with them for the weekend.”

“Nick, I can't,” she sighs.

“Well, Mom isn't taking no for an answer. While I know things are weird between us, this is for Mom and Dad. Since this is their day, we can put this all aside for them, right?” Because I'd give anything to see her again, I try to lay on a bit of guilt, or anything that will work. But I just know if I can get us in the same room, we can talk this out. I can fix us.

She blows out a breath. “Fine. For them.”

“Okay, Mom texted me the details, and I'll forward them to you. See you then. And Summer?”

“Yeah?”

“I really miss you,” I tell her, hoping for a sliver of hope.

“Good bye, Nick.” Her voice goes cold, and she hangs up.

I sit there staring at my phone for a minute.

Well, this is going to be fun.



Summer

Soon as I get off the phone with Nick, I text Maddie and she is at the door faster than I think is possible.

“Come in!” I yell.

She uses her key and joins me on the couch.

“Did you tell him?”

I expected this when the text message said ‘I talked to Nick, need to talk.’

“No, but he called. His parents are having a 30th anniversary party and want me there. So there really isn’t any more hiding it,” I say.

I rub my tummy that is just starting to show at eighteen weeks.

“If I wear baggy enough clothes, I can pass it off as gaining some weight, maybe. Then I’ll tell him right before I leave. I know it’s the coward’s way out, but this is his parents’ weekend, and I really, really, really don’t want to deal with Ashley and I’m sure she will be there.”

“Oh, if she knows you’ll be there, I’m sure of it,” Maddie says.

Then she gives me the look she has been giving me since we found out I was pregnant.

“I swear, I will tell him before I leave. Once I had the ultrasound and found out if it’s a girl or a boy, I was already thinking of telling him. This means I’ll have to tell my parents too because soon as he knows, his parents will, which means my parents will know as soon as they get back from their trip.”

“When was the last time your parents called?”

My parents are empty nesters and my dad just retired, so they are traveling around Europe for the next few months. They check in every few weeks.

“Three days ago, so that means I have maybe two more weeks before they call again,” I say.

“Or you can call them.”

“Nope, I’ll wait until they call me. If I know my mom, she will want to rush home to be here, and I don’t want to cut their trip any shorter than I have to.”

“Well, let’s get you packed up and make sure you have what you need. This is going to be a fun trip, so I expect you to keep me up to date.”

“If I go missing, start with Ashley,” I say, standing.

She giggles.

I just wish I was joking.

Chapter 7

Nick

I 'm settling into my old room at my parents' house with Ashley, and it feels wrong. My parents haven't hidden the fact that they aren't thrilled with my engagement to Ashley. In fact, I'm shocked they even wanted her to be here.

"Hey, I'm going to go talk to my mom while you finish unpacking," I say to Ashley, needing to get out of the cramped room.

I find my parents in the living room at the front of the house.

"Hey," I say as I walk in.

"Hey Baby, we just talked to Summer, and she'll be here in about an hour. She hit some traffic in Birmingham," Mom says.

My parents live just outside of Macon, Georgia so it's about a seven-hour drive for Summer, but it was only about four hours for Ashley and me.

Looking over my shoulder to make sure Ashley is still in the room, I turn back to my parents.

“I know you aren’t Ashley’s biggest fans, but can you try, please? For me?”

They look at each other, and then my mom sighs. “How about I take her out for breakfast tomorrow? Your father has breakfast with a few buddies in from out of town, so it will be me and her having some girl bonding.”

“Perfect. Thank you.” I say, helping my mom with dinner.

Summer gets in just in time to eat with us. Something is off with her, but I can’t place it. Her clothes are baggy, and she looks run down, though still as beautiful as ever. Yet something is off.

After dinner, she heads to the guest room and gets settled in. Ashley and I do the dishes while my parents go out to the porch with a glass of wine.

“I don’t understand why she has to stay here,” Ashley grumbles.

“My parents invited her.”

“But she isn’t family and she could have stayed in a hotel. It isn’t right,” she hisses.

“She grew up next door, and my parents consider her their daughter. While she isn’t family by blood, she’s family by choice, and saying anything about it won’t win you any points.” I scowl at her.

She glares at me like she is trying to figure out if she wants to fight me on this one, but I'm not backing down and she must pick up on that.

Sighing, she says, "I don't know why your parents don't like me."

"They just don't know you," I say like I do every time, but even I know that isn't the reason. "Anyway, my mom wants to take you to breakfast tomorrow, just her and you."

"Really?" She says with hope in her eyes.

"Yes. So maybe things are turning around."

"I hope so."

Deciding to keep the fact that my dad has plans for tomorrow morning, I keep to myself. No point right now in facing the argument that it will leave Summer and me alone together. Because I want to talk to Summer, and I didn't want all these ears around. This might be the only time I have to do it.



My mom and I are the first ones up in the morning and over coffee, I talk to her.

"Will you keep Ashley out for a while this morning? I want to talk to Summer and see what is going on with her."

"Only if you promise to tell me what you find out. I'm worried about her. Something is wrong. I know that even more so after seeing her last night," Mom says.

“I agree and yes, I’ll tell you. Also, please go before Dad does. I just want to avoid that fight.”

My mom gives me a stern look and, in that glance, I know she is saying why am I hiding that I want to talk to my best friend. And do I want to be with a girl that has a problem with my best friend? All things I’m not ready to talk about just yet.

“I know. I know. After this weekend, I’ll deal with it all,” I mumble.

Even though I haven’t voiced it out loud, I know I can’t marry Ashley. Looking at how happy Tony is and my other friends, they can’t wait to get home at night, while I dread it. She wants to keep me away from my best friend, she doesn’t get along with my parents, and that’s just the shortlist.

I don’t even know why I brought her with me this weekend other than she insisted, and I figured I could use this weekend to see how it goes and know if I was making the right choice. Especially after spending some time with Summer.

After my mom and Ashley leave, my dad isn’t far behind. Once it’s just Summer, I go in search of her and find her in the bathroom. The door is cracked open, so I knock on the door frame.

“Summer?”

“Go away, Nick.” She says, not sounding so well, but before I can ask if she’s okay, she starts throwing up.

Crap, no wonder she didn’t look so great last night. Pushing my way in, I gather up her hair as she’s throwing up into the

toilet. Then I lightly rub her back until she is finished and sits back against the tub.

“Go away, Nick, I’m fine.”

“Not a chance. Besides, who else is going to hold your hair?” I joke.

She gives me an irritated eye roll, reaches for her hair tie, and puts her hair up. While stretching her hands behind her head, her shirt rides up enough for me to see some of her stomach.

I have to do a double take because there is a small swell there, and it’s still there when I look again. Summer, realizing what I see, covers her stomach with her arms, but it’s too late.

“You’re pregnant?”

Before she gets a chance to answer me, she’s throwing up again. Even though her hair is out of her face, I stay and lightly rub her back as I process this. Why didn’t she tell me? I’d have been there in a heartbeat to help her out. Only she’s been pulling back the more I talked about the engagement. I thought it was because of Ashley.

Just another thing that has gotten so messed up with this engagement. I do a quick search on my phone for things that will help settle her stomach.

“Meet me in the kitchen. I’m going to get you some ginger ale and crackers,” I say.

Chapter 8

Summer

Well, this is not how I had planned for him to find out. My stupid morning sickness has been so unpredictable. I could go days without throwing up, and then I have a day like this where it takes me an hour to get out of the bathroom in the morning.

When my stomach settles, I stand up to brush my teeth and wash my face before going out to the kitchen. I find Nick leaning his back against the counter, watching me.

“How far along are you?”

“Far enough I should be over the morning sickness, but I’m not,” I say, trying to avoid the question. I want to do this my way, at the end of the trip, once my car was packed so I can leave.

“Omelet sound good for breakfast?” he asks.

“Just no bacon. The smell makes me sick.”

“You haven’t had a boyfriend in a year,” he states.

Oh boy, here we go. “Nope.”

He mixes up the eggs and starts on the omelets, and not another word is said as I drink the ginger ale and nibble on some crackers. When he plates the food, we sit down at the table and he looks at me.

“It’s mine, isn’t it?”

His eyes study my face and I can’t look at him. I look down at my food, pushing it around my plate.

“Yes,” I whisper and wonder if he heard me.

Of course he did.

With a hint of anger in his voice, he asks, “Is this why you have been ignoring me?”

“I found out the day you called to tell me you and Ashley were engaged. While we were on the phone, I was staring at the positive test. I want you to be happy. That’s all I ever wanted. We both know how this goes. Ashley hates me. She is going to be furious and make both our lives a living hell *if* she sticks around at all. How could I ruin what was supposed to be a happy time for you?” I say, but he doesn’t say a word.

When I finally look up at him, the anger I expected to see isn’t there, but a look of wonder is on his face.

“The baby is mine.” He repeats, but not as a question.

Nodding, I take a bite of the omelet. He stands and walks over to sit in the chair next to mine. With one hand, he pulls

my shirt up enough to see my belly. There is a visible swell, and he brings his other hand up and places it there.

The skin on skin with him alone is enough to turn me on. My body still remembers that night and despite the morning sickness a few minutes ago, it wants a repeat performance.

“Tell me everything I’ve missed.” He says without moving his hand.

“Well, you just got a front-row seat to the morning sickness. In all fairness, there was no traffic in Birmingham yesterday. I just made too many stops to pee along the way. My clothes don’t fit. I’m tired all the time, but the baby is healthy measuring on time, and I find out next week if it’s a boy or a girl.”

The last comment makes his eyes snap to mine.

“I want to be there. I’ve already missed so much.”

“I’m not going to stop you. You can be as much or as little involved as you want.”

“If you think I’m missing any of this, you’re crazy.” He shakes his head.

“Listen, today is about your parents. Can we shelf this until after their party? I promise we can talk, tell them, whatever you want, but can this stay between us until then?”

“Of course.”

I take another bite of my breakfast.

“For what it’s worth, I was going to tell you after the party, but before I left. I really wanted to do it in person, yet I wanted a quick getaway depending on how Ashley reacted.” Without meeting his eyes, I continue eating.

He just nods and watches.

“Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, now that I have some food in me, I’m starting to feel human again. I want to go get ready, but it takes me a bit longer now.”

“Okay, call if you need help or just need anything. I’m going to be in my room.”

As soon as I make it to the guest room, Maddie calls.

“How’s it going?” she asks.

“Well, Nick knows. He kind of got a front row show to my morning sickness.”

“How did he take it?”

“So far, so good. I think he’s more in shock right now than anything.”

“Can’t really blame the poor guy. How are you doing?”

“I’m okay. Now I just need to hold out. We agreed not to say anything until after the party. Then I get to deal with Ashley, which I don’t think will be much fun.”

“Ahhh well, I got some news. I’m on my way to Montana.”

“Wait, what?”

What the hell is in Montana? Mountains, sky, bears?

“Yeah, so remember, Conner?”

Conner is her Nick. Like Nick and me, they grew up together. But unlike Nick and me, they tried the relationship thing, and then she ran and has been in Memphis ever since.

“Yeah,” I say.

“Well, I guess he had a one-night stand, and the girl decided she didn’t want to be a mother and dropped the baby off on his doorstep. He called me in a panic, so I packed up my car and I’m on my way home. I doubt I’ll be back.”

“Oh, girl, please stay in touch and let me know what happens. Though this sucks, I was hoping you’d be in the room when the baby is born.”

“We have time. I can still fly back once things are settled. Keep me updated and call when you get home, so I know you made it okay.”

Getting off the phone, I think of the crazy turn our lives have taken this weekend. Life sure likes to keep things interesting, huh?

Chapter 9

Nick

I 'm going to be a father. I can't believe it. And I'm going to be a father with Summer, of all people. If I created her myself, I couldn't have picked a better mother for my child.

Right now, I'm in awe and planning all the things I want to do. For sure, we have to do one of those adorably cute newborn photo shoots. Then, of course, I want to be there for all his or her first holidays. I can't wait to find out if it's a boy or girl. Though I can easily picture a little boy to take to sports games and a little girl that looks just like Summer.

When Ashley and Mom get back from their breakfast, a cold bucket of water gets thrown on me. I am still sitting at the dining room table, and haven't moved since Summer got up to get ready.

"Babe, are you okay?" Ashley asks, giving me a weird look.

When I look up at her, sadly, everything is so clear. I want to be this baby's father more than I want to be Ashley's husband. I don't even want to think about what Ashley will

say when she finds out and the thought of Ashley being any kind of step-mother to my child makes me sick.

I dread going home each night to Ashley, but when I was going home to Summer? I tried to get out of work early. It's a night and day difference. What an idiot I have been.

"Um, yeah, I was just lost in thought. Did you have a good time?"

"Yeah, it was great talking to your mom. We discussed wedding plans, and I helped her pick out her dress," Ashley says, and then bounces off to our room.

"Did you talk to Summer?" Mom whispers.

"Kind of. She's not feeling that great this morning, and promised to talk to me some more later. I promise everything is okay, though. When Ashley isn't around, I'll tell you more." Mom nods, understanding what I'm not saying.

When Summer steps out in leggings and this ruffled flowy dress, I know she's trying to hide her stomach. Though she looks just as beautiful as ever. It's then it hits me. My feelings for Summer are stronger than ever. Stronger than anything I've ever felt.

"Summer, will you help me with something in the garage, please?" I ask.

She gives me a look like she knows exactly why I want to talk to her, but she follows me anyway.

"We can't do this, Nick, not without drawing suspicions." She crosses her arms over her chest.

“I just want you to know I want to be this baby’s father more than I want my next breath, more than I want to be Ashley’s husband. Summer, my feelings for you have only grown stronger since that night, and I don’t want to deny them anymore.”

“Nick, please don’t, you are engaged to Ashley...”

“You think she’s going to stick around when she hears this? No way, nor do I want her to,” I say, cutting her off. “Things haven’t been right since I proposed. I’ve been fighting it, ignoring it, but it just isn’t and I’m not okay with how much she is trying to push you, my best friend, out of my life. After this weekend, I’m ending it with her.”

“Nick, please you haven’t thought this through,” she begs.

“I have thought this through. Things haven’t been right with Ashley and me. We barely kiss, and we haven’t slept together since we got back together. Before we broke up, I was going to propose. When she came back, I just thought it was the funk of everything that happened with you and me and I’d move on, but I didn’t. I have thought this out, I swear.”

“Nick, don’t, not now,” she pleads.

“Fine, but stay a few extra days, please? Let’s talk this out. Go get an ultrasound together and we’ll tell my parents. I’ll send Ashley home because she needs to move her stuff out and I don’t want to be there to deal with all of it.”

“Okay, I’ll stay. But please, let’s not do anything to tip anyone off. Today, it has to be about your parents. After the

party, we can have it out, but this is my one request.” She begs as her eyes start to water.

“Oh, Summer, you should know by now I’d give you anything you could ever want. Of course, no more until after the party. By the way, you look stunning.”

She gives me a wobbly smile. “Now, what’s our cover for coming out here?”

I head to the far wall and grab some soda cases.

“Can you carry one?” I ask.

“Yep.” She picks one up and I grab a few and we go in. When we enter, of course, Ashley has a sour look on her face seeing Summer and me together, but I really could care less now.

I won’t cause a scene before the party because I promised Summer, but tomorrow is fair game. Knowing my parents, this party will go late and I know pregnant women get tired easily. There is a girl I work with who is about seven months pregnant and is always so tired, so I don’t expect Summer to stay until everyone leaves.

“What can I do to help get set up, Mom?” I ask.

“Let’s get the back porch cleaned up and the extra folding chairs set up out there,” she says.

When I follow her outside, she points out what she wants to be done. To keep myself away from Ashley, I’ll do all the work I can and take the temptation away of wanting to talk to

Summer. Hopefully, I can get through nine more hours and keep my promise to Summer.

I just need to stay busy and try to keep my head off anything baby related, Ashley related, or anything about where my life is going in general.

Easy right?

Chapter 10

Summer

The party is in full swing and I've tried to stay out of the way, but Nick hasn't let me out of his sight. He might be on the other side of the room talking to someone with Ashley right at his side, but he is always watching me.

My feet start to hurt along with my lower back, so I sit down on a couch and almost cry in relief. I don't get a moment to myself before Nick's mom is sitting down next to me.

"Oh, Hun, you should have a cocktail. It always makes things like this so much easier," she says.

"Oh, I'm not drinking tonight," I say.

"Why not?" She looks at me, searching to see if something is wrong. Before I can come up with an answer, Nick is there.

"She started some new medicine for her migraines, and she can't have alcohol with them," he says to her.

"Oh, dear, are they acting up again? I thought you had them under control."

“I did, but...” I trail off and shrug. I don’t want to lie to her.

“Mrs. Hale, the food tonight is really good,” Ashley chimes in.

Nick’s mom looks almost annoyed for a brief second before she pastes on a fake smile. “Thank you, dear,” she says. “Excuse me. I need to make the rounds.”

“Here, let me fill that up for you.” Nick takes my almost empty cup of water and brings me a new one. “Drink up.”

“I’ve been drinking. Too much more and I’m going to float away,” I joke.

“You hungry?”

I know he is being attentive, but he’s missing the nasty looks Ashley is throwing out, so even though I am hungry, I don’t tell him.

“No, I’m good. I think you need to go rescue your dad from Robert. He’s starting to look bored.”

He looks over his shoulder and shakes his head. “Every time.” Sighing, he goes over and thankfully Ashley follows, but only after throwing me a dirty look over her shoulder. Only lasting a few more minutes before my hunger wins out, I go get a plate of food.

As soon as I have the plate in my hand, Ashley appears at my side. She is so close I can feel the heat of her skin against my arm, and it makes my skin crawl.

“I don’t know what game you’re playing at, but Nick is mine now. He put a ring on *my* finger, and I’ll be the *only* woman in his life. After tonight, you *will* leave him alone.” She whisper yells at me.

“If that’s what you think.” I say, being a little bitchy. With any luck, this weekend will be the last time I see her. If I’m being honest, I can’t wait until she finds out I’m pregnant with Nick’s baby and there is no getting rid of me.

I turn to fill up my plate, and Ashley grabs my arm and pulls me back to her.

“Ow,” I say, trying to pull my arm away.

“I said you will leave him alone. After this weekend, you will slink away and disappear from his life. Don’t make it any harder on him than it needs to be.” She lets go of my arm.

Needing to go sit back down and eat, I give her a friendly smile.

“As you wish.” I say sarcastically, but she doesn’t get a chance to reply because Nick shows up on my side.

“I knew you were hungry, and I should have just brought you a plate.” Nick chuckles, taking my plate from me.

Looking over at Ashley, I give her a smirk, knowing she won’t do anything in front of Nick. Then I turn to smile at Nick.

“Well, I wasn’t when you mentioned food and by the time you walked away, I was,” I say.

“Go sit down, and I’ll finish making you a plate.”

“I got it, really. Go mingle, I’m feeling fine.” I give him a pointed look.

“Okay, let me know if you need anything.” He moves away, wrapping his arm around Ashley and taking her with him.

“I could use another drink,” Ashley says as they walk off.

“You know where the bar is,” Nick tells her, and Ashley stops and stares at him while my mouth has to be on the floor.

Tonight isn’t going to end well. I can see it coming. Thankfully, I make my way back to the couch and my spot is still open. It is in a prime location. I’m right in the middle of the party. It’s a corner on a comfy couch, and there is an end table to put my drink and plate on, so I can still be sociable.

“Hey you’re Summer, right?” A guy says, sitting down on the coffee table in front of me. He looks like he might be a few years younger than me, but seems friendly.

“Yes?”

I can feel Nick’s gaze on me from across the room, so I don’t even have to look up.

“I’m Michael Bask. My parents are friends with the Hales. You used to babysit me.”

“Oh my god, your little Mikey! Not so little anymore. How have you been?”

“I’m good. I’ve been following your writing, and you actually inspired me to be a writer. Next year I graduate and

hope to be a sportswriter. I had an internship last year for a sports magazine out of New York and loved it. With all the writing you did and stories you made up when you used to watch me, you were my inspiration.”

I’m so touched tears actually come to my eyes. Stupid hormones. Of course, the tears are what trigger Nick to be back at my side.

“Summer, you okay?”

“This is little Mikey from down the street who I used to babysit. He was just telling me how I inspired him to get into writing, and he’s going to be a sportswriter,” I say proudly.

“Nick, can I talk to you a moment?” Ashley asks, her voice stone cold.

“Not right now, Ashley. Whatever it is can wait.” He doesn’t even look at her.

Mikey is smart enough to sense the tension and stands back up.

“Well, I’ll let you be. I just wanted to come over and say hi and thank you.” Michael nods and makes a quick getaway.

A look at the clock says it’s just after nine and I’m beat.

“Hey, I’m going to call it a night. I’m exhausted and I guess still not feeling one hundred percent. Will you cover for me with your parents?” I ask Nick.

“Of course, go to bed. Lock the door. We’ll talk in the morning.”

“Okay, thank you.”

I head in and get ready for bed. But of course, as soon as I lay down, I’m wide awake so I pull up a book on my phone to read. It’s not long before a text comes in.

Nick: Did you lock your door?

Me: Yes. Good night.

I go back to reading and it gets later than I thought because it sounds like everyone has left and Nick and Ashley are back in the room next to mine. Ashley is mad and doesn’t have to hide it anymore.

“You ignored me all night!”

“I did not. You’re exaggerating.”

I cringe because he was ignoring her.

“You paid more attention to Summer than you did to me. I’m your fiancé. You should have been getting *me* food and checking on *my* drink.”

“I’m sorry. I was worried about my friend who is sick,” he says.

Recognizing that tone, I know it included an eye roll.

Even though I’m feeling guilty eavesdropping like this, what choice do I have? I’m in my room minding my own business, and they’re the ones being loud.

“How did you even know about her migraines? Last I knew, you two weren’t talking,” Ashley says.

“She’s my best friend, always has been, always will be. We haven’t been talking like we used to, but we are still in touch. Not that you were very helpful. I heard you talking to her when she was getting food, and I saw you grab her.”

“Well, we can talk about that later.”

“There is no talking about it later. She is my best friend, and she isn’t going anywhere. Get on board with it or there’s the door.”

“You have to be fucking kidding me,” Ashley says, her voice rising.

“You know what? I’m going to sleep on the couch tonight. We can talk tomorrow when we have both cooled down.” Nick says, followed by a door closing.

I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but little one, if there was ever a time to get Mommy out of anything, this would be it.

Chapter 11

Nick

Talk about an uncomfortable breakfast. Ashley hasn't said a word to me all morning. I know Summer had to hear us fighting through the walls last night, and there is no way we didn't wake her up. At least she's trying to pretend like she doesn't know what's going on. My parents can tell we're fighting, so here we sit at the breakfast table in silence.

I can't take this anymore. Since I've made my decision on how I want to move forward, I don't want to pretend anymore. I want to be a dad and I want to see how things go with Summer, and I do *not* want to be with Ashley.

So, setting my fork down, I meet Summer's eyes across the table, and she seems to know what I'm going to do because she sets her fork down too.

"Mom, I lied to you yesterday and I'm sorry, but I want to clear it up," I start.

"Oh, baby, what is it?" Her face softens, looking at me.

“Summer isn’t on any new medication like I told you. She’s pregnant.”

Waiting for everyone’s reactions, Summer looks terrified. Both my parents’ eyes shoot over to her and then smiles light up their faces.

Unfortunately, they don’t get a chance to say anything before Ashley ruins it.

“What a slut. You aren’t even dating anyone and haven’t been in a relationship, for what, a year?” Ashley snickers.

I lose it and instead of letting Ashley down easy like I planned, I snap.

“Well, I’m the father. It happened the weekend of Tony’s wedding when we had broken up.” I clench my fist, trying to get my anger in check.

Ashley looks stunned for a brief moment, then hauls off and slaps me across the face harder than I thought a small girl like her could. Damn, she has a good arm.

“I won’t be a bastard’s mother,” she squeals.

“Well, the child has a mother, me.” Summer joins the fray.

“Some mother you will be,” Ashley scoffs.

“Wow. Just wow. How did I ever think *you* would be a good mother? The wedding is off. I want to be a father and you have done everything to push Summer and me apart as it is. You won’t be getting in the way, because we are done. I’m staying here a few extra days, so have all your stuff out of my place by

Friday.” Thankfully, Ashley runs off to pack without another word.

Summer shakes her head, gets up and goes to the freezer, and comes back with an ice pack. She holds it to my face where Ashley slapped me.

“It’s fine, and I deserved it,” I tell her while she holds the ice to my face.

“Yeah, you did,” she chuckles.

Ashley packs her bag in record time. Walking out, she sees Summer holding the ice on my face and actually growls.

“Don’t come running back to me when you find out that baby isn’t yours and she proves to be the slut that she is.” Ashley yells and then walks out the door without a word.

I trust Summer with my life, and I have no doubt that the baby is mine. When the front door closes, the relief I feel is like the elephant that has been sitting on my chest is finally gone.

The moment the door slams shut, my parents both start talking at once.

“A Valentine’s Day baby!” Mom squeals.

“What did your parents say?” Dad wants to know.

Mom asks, “Why didn’t you say anything?”

“Whoa, guys, one at a time,” I say.

“I’m almost five months, and my parents left before I got pregnant, so I haven’t told them yet. I want my mom to enjoy

some part of a vacation.”

“And I didn’t say anything because I only found out yesterday,” I say.

My parents look at each other but are quiet.

“What?” I ask.

“Things really over with Ashley?” Mom asks, trying to keep the emotion out of her voice.

“Yeah, things just haven’t been right with us since we got back together. Marrying her represented everything I wanted. I just didn’t want it with her and didn’t realize that until I saw everything I wanted when Summer told me she was pregnant.”

Turning to face Summer, I take the ice off my face, and then take both her hands in mine.

“Move in with me. I want to be the baby’s father. I want to be there for every appointment, every craving, and every little thing. If you don’t want to move in with me, then I’m moving up to Memphis with you. Either way, we are going to do this together,” I tell her.

Her eyes study me, and she opens her mouth to speak.

But I stop her before she says a word. “Yes, I have thought it through. All last night after the fight with Ashley that you oh so nicely pretended you didn’t hear. I thought about nothing but this. We’re going to be a family, Summer. We always have been, but we’re going to be one even more so now. You can have your own room and we’ll still have a room for the baby.

We can set you up a writing corner and you can use the good bathroom any time you want.”

Tears spring up in her eyes, and she looks down at her lap. I gently cup her face and tilt it back to look at me.

“Okay, I’ll move in with you. Maddie left, so I won’t have any help in Memphis anyway, and I’m scared to do this on my own. I’ve been so frightened of telling you, of ruining things with you and Ashley, of having you in my life but not being able to have you.” She then bursts into tears.

When I take her in my arms, she wraps her arms around my neck and buries her head on my chest, crying.

“The hormones are going to get to her every time,” Mom says. “We’re going to take some coffee and sit on the back porch so you two can talk. Then later we can discuss this some more.”

“Your tears are breaking my heart,” I tell her.

“I’m sorry. I can’t seem to control it anymore.” She says, taking a few deep breaths.

“You mean it, you’ll move in?”

She nods as she wipes the tears from her eyes.

“You don’t have to do a thing, because I will handle it all. I don’t want this to stress you out. There is a girl at work, who is pregnant, and she really loves her doctor, and I can get the name for you or you can do your own research.”

“I have an appointment next week and was supposed to have an ultrasound to find out what we are having.”

“Aren’t there places we can go and have the ultrasound done here?”

“Yeah, if you want to. Your parents would even be able to come.”

“Let’s do it,” I say.

Chapter 12

Summer

While Nick takes a shower and gets ready for the day, I head out to the porch to talk to Nick's parents. I'm not sure how this will go, but I'm glad they know.

Mrs. Hale pats the seat next to her, and I sit down.

"You really haven't told your parents?"

I cringe, "I haven't told them because I knew they would call you and then you'd have called Nick, and I needed to be the one to tell him."

"Okay, well you tell them soon, as I'm sure they won't want to miss this."

I nod.

"We want to be a part of this baby's life," Mr. Hale says.

"We always thought you two would be together," Mrs. Hale says. "There is no pressure. If it doesn't work out, so be it. We still want to be part of the baby's life and you can always come

to us if you need anything, regardless of what happens with you and Nick.”

“I’m glad you told her that Mom, because I don’t think she’s believed it coming from me,” Nick says, sitting down on the other side of me and pulling me to him.

“I found an ultrasound place where they do those 3D and 4D ultrasounds. It’s here in town. We can all go. Is that something you are interested in?” he asks.

Even though he tries to play it calmly, he can’t hide the excitement in his voice, and it makes me tear up. Would he have been like this for each doctor’s appointment? Then I’m mad at myself for not telling him sooner, even though I know I made the best choice I could at the time.

“Let’s do it,” I say and they all cheer, causing me to laugh.

Nick calls the place, and they had a cancellation and can get us an appointment in just a few hours. We take it and I head in to get ready.

Mr. Hale drives us there. Nick and I are in the back seat and he is sitting in the middle with me pulled to his side with one hand resting on my tiny baby bump. Ever since we came out and told his parents, he hasn’t been able to keep his hands off it.

He’s going to be an amazing dad, and I hate that I ever doubted that this could work. Plus, I’m secretly glad that Ashley won’t be in this child’s life. I’d lie, cheat, and steal to

make sure that didn't happen. I know that now with one hundred percent certainty.

When we get to the ultrasound place, we are ushered right in. The walls are covered in photos of babies and ultrasound photos. There is what looks like an exam table for me to lie on next to the ultrasound equipment. But when I climb up, it's so much more comfortable than the ones in the doctor's office, I could sleep on it. All the walls of the room are lined with couches for the family. The room could seat almost twenty people.

"Ready to see your baby?" the tech asks. We all nod. "Now you want to find out the sex, right?" Again, we all nod.

She squirts some warm gel onto my belly before using the wand. Nick sits down beside me and takes my hand. I can tell he's nervous by the way his leg is bouncing and his constant movement.

A video pops up on a large screen on the far wall. It's not long before the black and white blobs take shape into the face of a little baby.

"There is your little one." The tech says and Nick squeezes my hand.

I breathe a sigh of relief knowing our baby is okay, and then turn to look at Nick, who is staring at the screen in wonder.

"We made that," he says, looking at me as tears fill his eyes.

"Yeah, we did," I whisper.

He gives me a watery smile and my eyes mist over. Then he leans down and kisses me. It's a sweet, soft kiss that is way too short. As he pulls back, he takes a deep, shaky breath and we both turn our eyes back to the screen and watch as the ultrasound tech does the measurements.

"Your little one is measuring right on track. Are you ready to find out what you're having?"

I turn back to Nick, "I'm ready, are you?"

"Yeah, I'm ready," he says, never taking his eyes off the screen.

"Okay, let's see if your little one is going to cooperate with us today," the ultrasound tech says as she moves the wand around on my belly.

"I don't think he or she wants to be found," I say, gripping Nick's hand tighter.

"Nope, your little one just flipped to get away from me." The tech says, and Nick's parents smile.

I love just watching our baby, but I start to think maybe we aren't going to be able to find out the sex.

"Ahhh, there we go. Congratulations guys, it's a girl."

The room erupts into cheers, but the look on Nick's face is what I know I will remember. It's that look of love every woman wants their guy to look at them with.

We spend more time getting some photos printed out before we head back to Nick's parents' house.

On the car ride, Nick has one arm around my shoulders and one over my belly, like he's protecting our little one from the world.

"I want to take you out on a date. Even though I know it's all backward, will you go to dinner with me tonight?" The car goes quiet. I know his parents are waiting for my answer.

Part of me wants to say we don't have to do this just for the baby, and we can still be two best friends raising a kid. Another part of me doesn't care if this is just for the baby. I want to see where it goes. I think I need to know.

"I'd like that," I say.

"Okay, next we're taking you clothes shopping. We already talked about it, so just agree." Nick says, smiling.

I think I'm in for one hell of a ride.

Chapter 13

Nick

Tonight, I have a date with my best friend, and the mother of my child. I feel like I'm living in one of those chick flick movies Summer is always watching. Since I don't really have date clothes, jeans and a button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up will have to do.

I'm in the living room waiting on Summer when my mom comes in.

"You need anything you let us know. The same goes for her. No matter how it works out with you two, that is my grandbaby, and I will always do whatever I can to help." Mom says before hugging me.

"Thanks, Mom," I tell her.

We don't get to say anything else because Summer walks out and I literally can't breathe. She is wearing one of the new dresses we picked up today, and it shows off her belly perfectly.

Even in the baggy clothes she was wearing earlier, she's always been beautiful. But in this, with her bump on display, she is sexy as can be. Knowing she is pregnant with my baby releases something primal inside of me.

“Wow, you look beautiful,” I say. Even though I know beautiful doesn't even begin to describe her.

“Thanks, you look good too.”

The moment she is next to me, my hands are on her belly. I know she is starting to feel our little girl move around and I'm desperate to feel her, too. Though everything I've read says it will still be a few more weeks before I might feel anything.

“You ready to go?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

Mom hugs her goodbye, and then I lead her out of the house and to my car. I open her door and make sure she is all set before going to my side and getting in.

I plan to show her just how well I know her tonight and that starts with dinner at her favorite BBQ joint in town, followed by some time down at the lake watching the stars. It's what she loved to do to relax growing up.

As we start driving, I reach over and take her hand. That small connection is soothing.

When I pull into the restaurant parking lot, Summer groans.

“What's wrong? Are you okay? It's the baby, okay?” I ask in a bit of a panic.

“How did you know I’ve been craving this BBQ?”

I relax and smile. “Well, it was a safe bet. You crave it when you aren’t pregnant. But from now on, when you are craving something, I want to know.”

“Why? Are you going to go get me orange juice at three a.m.?”

“Yes,” I say, dead serious. Her joking smile fades as she realizes how serious I am.

“Okay.”

“Stay there,” I tell her as I get out of the car and walk over to her side to open her door and help her out.

“Always the gentleman,” she sighs.

“You know my momma. She’d kill me if I wasn’t, especially with you.” I tuck her hand into the crook of my arm and lead her inside.

I have never been prouder than I am at this moment to have her on my arm.

We get seated toward the back of the restaurant, which is perfect because it gives us some privacy, but I know we’ll be seen by some of the locals. News of our date will spread fast because I’m not toning it down just in case someone might see. Let them see me with Summer and let them spread the word.

Summer opens the menu just as our waitress walks up, so I take the menu from her.

“We will each have a sweet tea. She’ll have the half and half platter with the BBQ meatloaf and BBQ pulled pork. I will also have the half and half platter with the ribs and BBQ chicken. Fries and coleslaw for both and extra cornbread.” I say, handing the waitress the menus.

“Okay, I’ll get this right out,” she says, walking away.

When I look back over at Summer, her mouth is hanging open.

“Did I get it wrong?”

“No, it’s perfect. I’ve never had anyone order for me before,” she says.

“Well, I know you better than you think, and plan to show you. That includes ordering for you, because I know you can never choose between the four entrees, so this way you can sample each.” I say as the waitress returns with our drinks and cornbread.

“So, I’m going to hire a moving company to come and pack all your stuff, and they’ll be there next week. I don’t want you lifting anything. I will fly up so I can drive back with you and I’ll take care of breaking your lease.”

“Wow, that’s fast.”

“I don’t want to miss anything else. It just happened the company I called has the room next week because of a cancellation, so I took it. It’s a long drive and I don’t want you to drive it alone. Plus, if I drive, you can rest. I don’t want this move to be stressful on you.”

“I don’t think you will let it be stressful.” She says with a hint of a smile.

“Stay the week here. I took extra time off so Ashley can have everything out before I go back, and I have a friend watching the place. If you stay, we can date and have some fun,” I urge her.

“I have an article I need to finish, but after that I’m free. So, I can stay.” The rest of the night we talk about both her work and mine and catch up on everything we missed over the last few months when the walls were up between us.

Once we get back to my parents’ place, I get ready for bed and then go to Summer’s room.

“Everything okay?” she asks.

“Yeah, I read online that the baby is starting to hear right about now,” I say, not quite sure how to ask for what I want.

“Yes, I saw that too. I’ve been reading her a book each night. Would you like to read one tonight?”

It’s like she’s reading my mind, but then this is the way it’s always been with us.

She pulls a book up on her phone and hands it to me. Then I sit down on the edge of the bed, and she lies down beside me getting comfortable. I push her shirt up and rest my hand on her belly. When I place my hand on her skin, the electricity that surges from the connection takes my breath away. This moment is bigger than just reading to our baby. It’s pivotal and we both feel it.

As I read aloud to her and our baby, I rub her belly with my other hand the entire time.

“Your voice is very soothing.” Summer says when I finish. She looks ready to crash.

Leaning down, I kiss her belly.

“Hey, there little one. I’m your daddy. Go easy on mommy, yeah? She needs some sleep. I can’t wait to meet you.” Then I kiss her belly again.

This quickly becomes my favorite nighttime routine.

Chapter 14

Summer

I've always hated moving day, which is funny because I have moved around quite a bit since I graduated college. No place has held my interest long enough to stay for more than a year or two. I've always loved Jacksonville and was going to move there once, but Nick had just started dating Ashley and she wasn't too fond of me, so I stayed away.

So as much as I hate moving day, I am excited to finally make my way to Jacksonville. I'm thrilled to be closer to Nick and if I'm honest, I'm elated to have some help and also a midnight craving runner.

Nick has been amazing in all this. He flew up to Memphis a few days ago and was there to direct all the movers and got us a hotel room for the night after they packed everything up. He even dealt with breaking my lease.

Then he drove the entire way and insisted we break it up into two days, so I wasn't crammed in the car. He's been amazing. Every night has ended the same with him reading to the baby, talking to her, and rubbing my belly.

He is going to be a kick-ass dad. If I had any doubt about that, they were blown away when we got to his place last night. He knew I hadn't bought any of the big stuff for the baby, so when I walked in to find the third bedroom set up like a nursery with everything we would need, I cried. There was a crib, a dresser, a rocking chair, a baby swing, a car seat, and a stroller all for the baby.

“Summer, love, sit down, please. You can direct where everything goes from the couch.” Nick says, leading me away from the baby's room that I haven't been able to stop staring at.

Nick has been handling the movers directing them as they move everything in. He insisted on bringing all my furniture, which is pretty much a duplicate of everything he already has. He said we can figure out which one I like better and sell the second set or put it in storage. I think it was a waste of money, but he insisted and that wasn't a hill I was ready to die on.

Right now, he's having them set up my room, which I love because I'll have my own space. Even though he isn't pushing for more, I can tell he wants more.

Every so often, Nick takes a minute to look over at me and smile. Moving isn't fun, I know it isn't, but he still smiles like there is no place else he'd rather be.

“You're hungry, love?” he asks.

I nod and go to stand up.

“No, no, I'll get your food. Sit down.”

I just laugh. “Nick, it’s okay, I have to pee then I can help with lunch. Not only do I feel fine, but a little walking around will be good for the baby,” I say, hitting him right in the soft spot.

When I get to the kitchen, I notice he has stocked up on all my favorites. Doritos and the trail mix I like. Best of all, he even got my favorite coffee.

“Thank you for not making me get rid of my morning coffee,” I say to him.

“Well, you stopped drinking soda and anything but water all day, so I figure a cup of coffee in the morning can’t hurt. Also, I bought that loaded baked potato soup you like. Do you want that with some French bread?”

“Nick, you don’t have to cater to me. I’m perfectly capable of eating whatever you have.”

“I know, but I want you and our little jellybean to be happy here,” he says.

“We have you, so I promise we are happy.”

The next morning, as soon as I open my eyes, morning sickness hits me. I run to the bathroom and start heaving up a whole lot of nothing in my stomach. A moment later, Nick is there rubbing my back and holding my hair out of the way.

It passes after a minute, so I sit back against the wall and Nick hands me a cool wet washcloth I use to wipe my face.

“How did you hear me from across the house?”

“I slept on the couch because I wanted to be close in case you needed me.”

Wow. He gave up a comfortable bed because I wanted my own space. All because he wanted to be close to me. I don't know why it surprises me. Nick has always been like this with me.

“Nick, I'm sure you have to be getting ready for work. I'm okay.”

“I'm right where I need to be,” he says.

We stare at each other for a minute before the trance is broken.

“If you don't feel up to going out at any point today, just let me know, okay?”

After some discussion, we decided to date and at least try for the baby. We owe her that. That includes going out to dinner and letting him wine and dine me, his words.

“I promise, but this normally passes and by lunch, I feel fine.”

“Even so,” he says.

As he gets ready for work, I make us some omelets because that's what sounds good to me. He steps out of his room and stops.

“You don't need to be cooking for me, Love. It's my job to take care of you.”

“But it’s also our job to take care of you. Besides, omelets sounded good and I wanted to eat with you before you left.” Just like that, another new routine is set and it’s another one I love.



I’ve been living with Nick for a month, and he has been so considerate. Morning sickness seems to have left me alone for good, but even so, Nick is still sleeping on the couch and as much as I feel bad about it, I still love that he wants to be close.

He’s been to every doctor appointment and not just meeting me there, he comes to the house and picks me up and brings me to them.

We are still dating, and he takes me out to dinner, the movies, some festivals, and events in town at least twice a week. Then every night ends with a kiss, just like tonight. We just got home, and he looks over at me and smiles.

“I had a really good time tonight,” he says.

“Me too. We’ve always had fun together, sometimes too much fun.” I smile and so does he.

He takes one of my hands in his and pulls it up to rest on his chest, just over his heart.

“It’s different now.” He says with a smile.

“Yeah, it is.” I’m barely whispering.

Keeping his hand over mine that is on his chest, he wraps his other hand behind my head and pulls me in for a kiss. One thing I've learned about Nick, which I never knew, is he's an amazing kisser.

When he kisses me, my knees go weak, and I have trouble standing by the end. He claims my mouth, leaving me breathless when he finally pulls away. Then he looks into my eyes as if to make sure it was okay, that it wasn't too much. I offer up a smile and we head our separate ways to bed.

"Oh, don't forget we have dinner with a few friends tomorrow," he says.

"I will be ready when you get home," I say with a forced smile.

His friends haven't really accepted me, and I have a feeling Ashley has something to do with that based on the comments a few of them have made. Though I won't bring it up to Nick, as he has enough to worry about. I'll go to dinner and smile. Nick doesn't need to know.

No, Ashley is my battle.

Chapter 15

Nick

I really love our date nights. Things have always been comfortable between Summer and me, but I had no idea dating her would be this easy. We haven't moved past kissing, but god I have wanted to.

I want her to be sure of us because not remembering our first time together is one thing, but to take that step and actually remember it this time will change everything. I have to be sure she's ready for sex. Though, I know I am. For me, there is no going back. Summer is everything I've been looking for and so much more.

Once I'm ready for bed, I go to Summer's room. It's our nighttime routine. I'll read to the baby and if I'm lucky, she will play a little with me by kicking my hand. After the story time, Summer and I talk about anything and everything.

It's my favorite part of the day. I know Summer wants her space, but I wish I could convince her to sleep in my bed. I'd love to wake up with her too. But I won't push her.

I knock on the door that is partially open.

“Come in,” she says.

Summer is sitting up in bed and smiles when I walk into the room. Her room is decorated in teals and pinks, and she still had the patchwork quilt in the same colors her grandma made her on the bed.

Since she gets really hot at night, she’s in cotton shorts and a maternity tank top she swears is the most comfortable thing to sleep in. All I know is it makes her breasts look tempting and I’ve been dying to get my hands on them.

I read the baby a story, and then sit on the edge of the bed with my hand rubbing Summer’s belly as we talk.

“Tell me about the last guy you dated.”

“Ahhh, it’s been what a year ago now. He cheated on me with my next-door neighbor. He’d leave my apartment and sneak into hers. They forgot her bedroom butted up to my bedroom so when they got a little too loud one night there was no hiding it,” she shrugs.

“When Ashley and I got back together after the wedding, I proposed because everyone said it was the next step. I thought we’d work through everything, but to me, it just didn’t feel right. I wanted a family so bad I was in love with the idea more than I loved Ashley. We barely kissed, and we didn’t sleep together. I need you to know that there hasn’t been anyone since you.”

She smiles, “There hasn’t been anyone since you for me either.”

“Good. And to be clear, we are in a relationship, a committed one.” Laughing, she says, “Yes, because guys are lining up to date the pregnant chick.”

“Well, I think your pregnant belly is extremely sexy,” I say.

“That’s because it’s your baby in there.”

Then our little girl kicks my hand.

“You feel that?”

“Yeah,” I say, amazed.

Pushing her shirt up to expose her skin, I place my hand on it, and the baby kicks again.

“Hey there princess,” I rub the spot she’s just kicked. I place my other hand on the other side of Summer’s belly.

The baby kicks again.

“We really need to come up with a name for her,” Summer giggles.

“Yeah, how about we both make a list of names we like, and then this weekend we can sit down and talk about them,” I say.

“Perfect.” She says while I continue to play with our little girl.

Then it hits me. All the skin on skin contact makes my cock twitch while at the same time, I see her rub her thighs together.

“You, okay?” I ask her.

“It’s nothing,” she says.

“I still want to know,” I say.

A beautiful flush covers her cheeks.

“It’s just... that pregnancy has made me... horny. You rubbing all over me like this isn’t helping matters much.” She whispers, but I hear her loud as day.

My heart races, and my cock hardens.

“I can take care of that,” I say.

Her breathing quickens and her nipples turn to stiff peaks under her tank top. Then she nods.

I trail a hand down her belly to the top of her shorts. Running my finger along the hem, I watch for any hesitation or sign that she’s changed her mind. When all I see is desire, I slide my finger over her shorts and stroke her pussy a few times before pulling the shorts aside. Then I continue stroking her over her black silk panties.

When she moans, I move the panties to the side and get the first look at her. She’s wet and waiting for me. I run my finger through her juices and then over her clit. She throws her head back and moans again. With every little move I make, she’s so responsive.

My hand glides over her clit, her hands tangle in the sheets, and her hips buck. I slide my fingers lower and thrust into her. She gasps and her pussy clamps down on me. Then I slowly move them in and out of her, adding a third finger.

“Nick, Nick, Nick,” she chants my name.

I rub my finger over her G-spot and a few strokes later, she’s screaming my name and a gush of cream coats my fingers. But I keep thrusting, prolonging her orgasm until she opens her eyes to look at me.

Pulling my fingers out, I lick them, getting the first taste of her, and I’m instantly addicted. She may not realize it, but she just sealed her fate because there is no way I can let her go now, knowing how amazing she is when she cums.

Then I lean up and kiss her. “Good night, my love.”

“Nick...” She reaches for me.

“No, I will always take care of you, but it’s not a tit for tat, okay?”

She nods and I can see she is fighting sleep.

“Get some rest. I’m here if you need anything.”

Taking my spot on the couch, I can’t stop the smile that spreads across my face.

Yes, I think I’m going to like our new routine.

Chapter 16

Summer

It's been a week since the first time Nick fingered me before bed. He's done it every night since, and I've been looking forward to it.

Something shifted that night with us. It's like Nick had been holding back because he was not sure how I felt. Now he's much more affectionate and constantly has his hands on me, not just my belly. Especially when we are out. It's as if he wants no doubt in everyone's minds that I'm his.

I love every minute of it. He's erased any doubt I might have had that my body was not a turn on to him. And the way he looks at me? It's the way every girl dreams a guy will look at her, with desire and anticipation, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say love.

I'm getting ready for bed and trying to think of a way to bring up the topic of sex. Last night, his fingers just weren't enough. I need more, but I don't know how he'll feel about moving forward with sex, to a full relationship like that.

A soft knock on the door lets me know Nick is here.

“Hey,” I smile and turn to get into bed.

He catches my hand and pulls me to him. Then he cups my face, running his thumb over my cheekbone saying, “Come stay in my room tonight. I just want to hold you.”

Looking into his eyes, I can see he appears tired. I know he’s been crashing on the couch, and I feel bad because it doesn’t look like he’s been sleeping. An added benefit would be that if we were in his bed, it might be easier to convince him to take things further. If nothing else, I’ll have time to drive him crazy.

“Okay.” I nod and grab my phone and charger, following him to his room.

We lie down both of us facing each other. Then he scoots as close to me as he can get with my belly in the way. He tucks some hair behind my ear and trails a hand down my neck to my breast.

He runs his thumb over my nipple, and I bite my lip to stop the moan that tries to escape. My breasts have been extra sensitive and the feeling of his touching them is delicious torture.

“May I see them?” he asks eagerly.

I nod, and he pulls my tank top down, exposing both breasts.

“God, you have amazing tits.”

“Nick, I want more,” I say, trying to get across my thoughts from earlier.

He leans down, taking one nipple into his mouth and sucking on it hard, causing me to cry out.

“Nick.”

“Yes, my love.”

“I want all of you,” I say.

A visible shutter racks his body as he leans in to kiss me.

“We don’t have to do this. I’m perfectly happy taking care of you.” He kisses down my neck, making my skin tingle.

“Nick, please. I’m already pregnant, so what’s the worst that can happen? You wouldn’t even have to use a condom.”

“Fuck.” He whispers as he rests his forehead against mine.

I can feel his hard length against my belly. I know he wants this.

“This changes everything,” he says.

“That’s not a bad thing. Things have been so good with us. I want to take this next step. Don’t you?”

“More than anything. I just need a promise from you.”

“Anything.”

“Promise me if this doesn’t work out between us that we will stay friends. It will be awkward at first, but we will push past that,” he says.

Nodding, I say, “Of course. We have our little girl to keep us together.”

A smile graces his lips, and he removes my tank top and his shirt, so we are skin to skin from the waist up.

“Will you start sleeping naked with me?” he asks, smirking.

“If you crank the air conditioner down, I will. It’s so hot already and a Florida summer is only going to get hotter, especially if you are curled around me,” I say.

Nick laughs. “Deal.”

He takes off my shorts and his, then he settles himself between my thighs and pushes my legs wide.

“Hold them just like that, my love.” His tongue flicked over my clit. Teasing. Torturing. My pussy clenches and I cry out.

“Have I told you I love how sensitive you are?”

“It’s the pregnancy,” I gasp as he thrust a finger into me.

“Hmm,” he hums against my clit as he adds a second finger and I grip his hair to hold him in place. Tension coils in my belly and I know if he were to stop, I’d die. Thankfully, he doesn’t stop, and the harder I pull on his hair, the harder he sucks on my clit until the orgasm crashes into me. He keeps lapping at my clit, extending my orgasm until my bones are jello and I can’t move an inch.

“Orgasms are definitely better when pregnant. Or maybe it’s just you,” I say.

“I can’t wait to find out. But be warned if it’s the pregnancy? I plan to keep you pregnant.”

That shouldn’t make my pussy clench, but it does.

“Why is that so hot?” I moan.

“Maybe because you know it’s me claiming you. It’s telling the world you’re mine and my cock has been inside you. My seed is growing in your belly and you let it happen.” He says as he looks me over.

“I don’t want to hurt you, and I want you to be comfortable, but I looked up a few positions, and it’s your choice. On your side, on your hands and knees, or you can ride me.” He says the last one on a groan.

“Sounds like the last one is a winner.” I sit up and roll to him at the same time.

Wrapping my hand around his cock, I like the control I have like this. He hisses and his hips buck. When I look up at him, his eyes are filled with so much heat I might spontaneously combust.

“Don’t play long. I’m not going to last,” he grits out.

A few more strokes and a drop of precum slips from his slit. Without warning, I lean down and lick it up.

“Summer!” He shouts as he jerks up.

I smile, then swing a leg over his waist and I can feel his cock against my pussy lips.

“Fuck. I’m not even inside you and you feel too good,” he moans.

“Is there really a thing as feeling too good?” I sass.

“Yes, it’s called cumming before you’re even in your girl.” He says, gripping my hips. “Please don’t tease.”

I decide to show him mercy and move up as he guides his cock to my entrance. Our eyes lock and neither of us blinks as I slide down and take all of him.

“I can feel every inch of you,” I gasp.

“You can’t say stuff like that, Love, I’m barely holding it together.”

“You don’t like my dirty talk?” Pouting, I slowly start sliding up and down on him.

“Fuck, I love your dirty talk.” He says as he throws his head back and the muscles in his neck and forehead bulge in the strain of him holding back his orgasm.

His hand snakes across my hip and finds my clit and as he strokes it, my orgasm picks up speed.

“No, I can’t cum again,” I say, falling forward.

“Yet your pussy says otherwise,” he smirks.

“I’ve never cum more than once. I didn’t think I was able to.”

Like he has to prove me wrong, he presses harder on my clit and starts thrusting his hips up to meet mine.

“I can’t wait to feel your pussy squeeze me when you orgasm. It’s already fluttering around me.” He grits out and adds pressure to my clit.

That’s all I need to be pushed over the edge and I start cumming. I lock my elbows so I don’t fall on my belly, but that’s as far as my brain goes as I scream his name.

As I’m relaxing, his orgasm hits and feeling his hot cum spurt inside me sets off another smaller orgasm.

As we lay side by side, I try to catch my breath. “Holy shit,” is all I can say.

“That about sums it up,” he pants.

Lying together cuddled up, he runs a hand up and down my arm.

“I think I always knew we’d end up here,” he says.

“Yeah?”

“Yep, in the back of my head I knew we had something special, but the last few weeks confirm it. I’m crazy in love with you. Maybe I always have been and just didn’t want to admit it and risk losing the friendship.”

“Nick, I know exactly how you feel. I love you too.” I say, putting words to the feeling that has been floating inside of me since he found out about this baby.

“I want this family of ours so much. More than can be put into words.”

“Me too,” I whisper.

I'm starting to drift off when my phone rings.

"It's my parents," I say.

"Well, it's time to tell them. They're the last to know."

He runs his hand over my belly as I answer the phone.

"Hello, Mom," I say.

"Hey, Baby. We're calling from Greece. It's just like *Mama Mia*. You would love it here," she says.

"I'm sure I would."

"I got your last few emails. What is this? You moved in with Nick?"

"Yeah, well, I didn't want to tell you in an email, heck I'd rather tell you in person, but is Dad there? Can you put him on speakerphone," I say, only wanting to do this once.

"Hey there pumpkin pie!" Dad's voice comes over the line.

"Okay, so yes, I moved in with Nick," I say and pause for their reaction.

They're quiet.

"As friends?" Mom asks hesitantly.

"Not really. Remember Tony's wedding on Valentine's Day? I stayed with him then, and things kind of happened. And I. Um. Well. I'm pregnant."

It's so quiet on the other end, so I pull the phone away to check to make sure we're still connected.

"Mom, Dad?"

“With Nick’s baby?” Moms wants to know.

“Yes. And we’re dating.”

“And living together,” Dad says.

“Yes, we want to give this a real chance for the baby and Nick doesn’t want to miss anything.”

“Well, we always knew you two would end up together, though we thought you’d get married first then have babies,” Dad says.

I look over at Nick, who has a big smile on his face.

“How far along are you?” Mom asks.

“About six months.”

There are some hushed muffles then Mom comes back to the line.

“Do you know what you are having yet?”

“A girl, but we don’t have a name,” I say.

“Okay, well, Dad and I are going to rearrange our schedule and be home in a few weeks. No way would I miss our first grandbaby being born!”

We chat a little longer about where they have been since we talked last, and get off the phone with the promise of seeing them soon.

Everything seems to be falling into place. But I should know better that it never lasts long.

Chapter 17

Nick

Things are going great with Summer and me. She's about seven months along or thirty weeks, as she calls it. We have about ten more weeks to go.

She's moved into my room and made it our room. I love waking up with her beside me and going to bed with her wrapped in my arms. If I'm being honest, I just like being back in a bed, but to go to sleep and wake up next to her, I'd sleep on a cement floor.

While we still haven't decided on a name for the baby, we do have her room all set up and decorated. I took a weekend and painted it, then put all the rest of the furniture together. It's all white wood that Summer insisted on. We painted the walls with the paint she picked out called light rose. We even went a little crazy and painted one of the walls with glitter.

The whole time I just kept thinking, I hope whoever buys this house when we sell it has girls because I really don't want to repaint over all this. But it made Summer happy, so it was

worth it. It does look like something from the cover of one of those home magazines.

Summer's parents moved back and bought a condo down in St. Augustine. They said they wanted to be close, but not too close. They were worried about us just dropping by, but it's been them dropping by. Can't say I mind, they always have food with them, and Summer's mom is a fantastic cook. All Summer has to say is she is craving something, and her mom will whip it up and bring it over.

Right now, Summer is out to breakfast with her mom and I promised I'd call her on my lunch break. So I keep staring at the clock, willing the next twenty minutes to go by faster than they appear to be. While I want her to enjoy her time with her mom, I can't wait to talk to her either.

The knock on my door pulls me from staring at the clock. I'm grateful for the distraction until I see who it is.

Ashley.

She hasn't changed a bit. Still, railroad thin and bleached blond hair pulled back in some fancy hairstyle. Her clothes are well put together, but I can't stand how artificial she is. I love Summer's more relaxed feel and at that thought, I miss Summer even more.

"What are you doing here?" I grit out.

"Is that any way to greet me?" She asks, plopping down in the chair in front of my desk.

"I will not ask you again," I say.

I just want her to spit out what she has to say and leave. The smell of her perfume is making me sick to my stomach.

“Well, I just came to tell you I’m pregnant.”

“Great, who’s the father so I can send the unlucky bastard a condolence card?”

“You’re the father, silly.”

What. The. Fuck? Does she think I’m that stupid? She must, but I don’t know what she is playing at.

Of course, that’s the moment Summer walks in. Pure rage crosses her face as she stares Ashley down.

“No, you aren’t, because if you were, you’d be as big as me, if not bigger. So, if you are, it certainly isn’t his,” she snorts.

That’s my girl, always a fighter.

Ashley laughs, “We slept together at his parents’ house, silly. I’m just starting to show, but thank god for tummy trainers.”

I’m so shocked by her blatant lie that I can’t form the words needed to deny it. What the hell is a tummy trainer? My mind is racing a million miles a minute.

Taking one look at me with tears in her eyes, Summer runs out of my office.

“I swear Summer that’s not true,” I yell as I run to my door, but she’s already in the elevator.

Rage taking over, I turn on Ashley.

“What the fuck is your problem? You. Lying. Bitch.”

My mom raised me never to cuss at a woman, but I'm sure she will forgive me this time.

"I can't believe you thought it would actually work out with that small-town girl. She knows nothing about the way the world works." Ashley waves her hand.

"She grew up right next door to me. We went to the same school, had the same teachers, have the same friends, so what does that say about me?" I snarl.

When she opens her mouth to speak, I find I don't want to hear whatever is about to come out of it.

"I know you cheated on me and then turned all my friends against Summer, but she's too sweet to say anything. Stay out of my life or I'll expose you for the lying, cheating slut you are." Not waiting for her response, I just turn and run after Summer.

Then I send my boss a text. He knows about Summer and is excited for the baby, so I just tell him there is an emergency with Summer, and I need to take the rest of the day off. I've never done this, so I know he won't mind. He asks if everything is okay and what he can do to help. Telling him I'll let him know, but I make a mental note to bring him one of Summer's chocolate cakes. He has quite the sweet tooth.

Getting in my car, I head home, thinking that is where she would be, but the house is empty.

Then I call her mom and say we had a fight and ask if she knows where Summer is. She doesn't, and I hit the steering

wheel. Dammit, where is she?

I try to call Summer, but the second time it just starts going right to voice mail.

Pulling over on the side of the road, I take a deep breath. If she wanted to get away and think, where would she go? I rack my brain of all the times she has been here to visit me. Then it hits me.

Turning the car around, I pray she's there.

Chapter 18

Summer

I didn't want them to see me fall apart. Stupid hormones. I cry over just about anything. A spider could lose its leg, and I'd cry and let me tell you, I hate spiders.

I don't even know where I'm going. Yet by the time I decide that I need to figure it out, I realize I'm at the beach, the one with the fishing pier that has the little tucked away spot where you can watch the whole beach. Unless they're looking for you, they won't see you. You can watch the world go by here, it's so peaceful. Just what I need.

I'm about to get out of the car when my phone goes off. Of course, it's Nick but I can't talk to him right now. So, I shut it off but take it with me just in case.

The wind whips my hair around as I step on to the beach and the salt air fills my lungs and I'm instantly at peace. Taking my shoes off, I make my way to my spot, enjoying the warm sand between my toes.

I sit down and stretch my legs out. It's hot being Florida but there is cloud cover today, so the chances I'll burn are slim. Though maybe I should start keeping some sunscreen in my car.

Even though I try to focus on small things like sunscreen and my to-do list, it doesn't work. Before long the image of Ashley in Nick's office fills my head again.

Nick has told me nothing happened with her since we slept together the night of the wedding. Do I believe him?

His room shared a wall with mine at his parents' house, and all I heard was them fighting. He even slept on the couch. His parents' anniversary was how long ago? She'd have to be about fourteen weeks, be showing a little, especially in the outfit she wore, and she was still thin as a board.

So, do I believe Nick?

Yes. He's never had a reason to lie to me, and has always told me the truth, even when it would upset me.

If I believe Nick, then there is no way Ashley was pregnant, at least not with Nick's baby. So, what's she playing at?

Trying to get child support? Maybe. Nick does have a good job, but not enough that child support would be enough for her to live on. Hell, here in Florida it wouldn't even pay rent.

Would she do all this to try to break us up? I wouldn't put it past her. She has put so much energy into making sure Nick's friends have turned against me. Not only that, but she left some negative comments online about a few of my articles and

was stupid enough to use her real name. Pretty quickly and without any hesitation, my boss got her banned from commenting.

Though I simply don't understand why she hates me so much. I tried to be her friend and from day one, she shut me out. A while ago, I gave up trying to understand her, but that doesn't mean she wouldn't go through all this trouble.

Is this just revenge on Nick? Trying to ruin his life and I happen to be one of the casualties? That's a possibility too.

No matter what the reason, I need to get myself together and go talk to Nick. He doesn't deserve to think I'm mad at him when I know this is all Ashley, but I needed time to think. A few more minutes at the beach with the sound of the waves crashing into the sand will have me right as rain and I can go home and talk to Nick.

I close my eyes and enjoy the warmth from the sun that has peeked through the clouds.

"There you are," Nick says, causing me to gasp.

The sound of the waves covered his footsteps.

"How did you find me?"

"I know you, Summer." He says with a sigh as he sits down next to me.

I shouldn't be shocked he found me here. He knows me better than I know myself most days.

We both stare out at the beach in silence for a few minutes before he speaks.

“I didn’t sleep with her, I swear it.”

When I place a hand on his arm, he visibly relaxes.

“I know you didn’t. After I thought about it, I realized she was lying, but I just don’t know why.”

“Recently, I found out she was cheating on me. If the timing would put her getting pregnant when we were together, it would blow up in her face and everyone would know. So, if she tries to claim the baby is mine, it saves face. Only it would be impossible to be mine.”

“A simple DNA test would prove that, and they can do that before the baby is even born,” I say.

“She probably hasn’t thought that far ahead. Besides, she could just refuse until the baby is born.”

“If she has nothing to hide, why refuse? If you asked for a DNA test, I’d give it to you.”

His eyes soften as he looks at me.

“I know you would, and I don’t need one. This baby girl is mine and, more importantly, I trust you without a shadow of a doubt.”

Another moment of silence passes and he reaches over and takes my hand in his.

“Why didn’t you tell me how much she has turned my friends against you?”

Shrugging, I say, “I don’t know if it was just me being overly emotional or if they were really her friends and truly mad at me, or if she was spreading lies. I didn’t see the point in causing more drama. We are already quite the juicy gossip.”

“From now on, I want to know everything, even if you think you’re overreacting. If you’re feeling it, I want to know it. I love you and my joy is taking care of you. To be able to do that, I need to know everything,” he says.

My eyes water with happy tears this time.

He moves to his knees in front of me.

“Growing up, I always had this vision of you and me doing everything together. I wanted us to be my parents. While I didn’t understand it all then, but I do now. I was seeing my future with you. Fate had to step in to make it happen and show me what an idiot I was, but we are here, and I want to lay it all on the line. I want to marry you, be a family, and live my life with my best friend. Will you marry me?”

Sitting there in shock, I open my mouth to say something, anything, but nothing comes out. So, I just nod my head.

“Yes?” He says almost in disbelief.

“Yes,” I say.

He slips the most beautiful oval cut diamond ring on my finger before pulling me into his arms. Then he kisses me and when he comes up for air, I get a good look at the ring. It’s even more beautiful than the one Ashley had, and it looks familiar.

“Wait, is this your grandma’s ring?”

“Yes, it’s a family heirloom for the girl who is already family. I got it from my mom when we were there for my parents’ anniversary. I knew even then we’d end up here. Nothing has ever felt so right.”

I agree with that statement. Nothing has ever felt so right.

Epilogue

Nick

“**A**re you sure this is okay? We can wait until after the baby is born.” I say for the fourth or fifth time today.

“Nick, I swear a courthouse wedding is perfect. I want to be married before the baby is born. We can do the big wedding at our one year wedding anniversary.” Summer tells as we head out to the courthouse.

My parents and her parents are meeting us there. It may be a quick courthouse wedding, but Summer is dressed to kill in a white summer beach dress and her hair is done up. She insisted I wear dress pants and a sports coat for pictures.

Both sets of parents meet us on the courthouse steps.

“Oh, you look so beautiful,” my mom says.

Her mom exclaims, “You look ready to pop!”

“Any day now,” Summer says. “The doctor said I would probably go late, but I’m thirty-eight weeks and I’m ready to be done being pregnant!”

The Florida heat and being pregnant don't mix. We have been spending a lot of time in the pool at her parents' condo complex or at the beach when it's not too crowded.

We make our way inside the courthouse. We were here a few days ago, filling out all the paperwork and getting our license. Now that everyone is here, it's time to get married.

Saying those vows to Summer is one of the most emotional things I've ever done, next to seeing my baby on the screen at the ultrasound for the first time.

I slide the ring on her hand and something in my heart clicks into place. She's mine, and this ring is a sign of her being mine. Now I'm really happy I insisted on a nice ring for us both.

Her smile is blinding as she slips the ring on my finger. When the justice of the peace says you may kiss your bride, I barely hear the cheers from our parents. I simply pull Summer in and kiss my wife for the first time.

It's too short of a kiss because we have an audience, but it's still perfect. Our parents take us out to a steak place for our reception. As we eat, our parents share stories of us growing up and we are all laughing so hard.

"Now I firmly believe all couples should have a honeymoon. I know traveling isn't an option right now, but we wanted to make sure you had something." My dad says and hands me an envelope.

“This is from all four of us.” My mom adds while hugging Dad’s arm.

Summer leans over my shoulder as I open it to find a receipt to a resort and spa right on the beach here in Jacksonville.

“It’s all taken care of. You have an ocean view suite, spa reservations, and they have pregnancy massages, the meals are paid for, along with access to the pool, and the beach,” Summer’s mom says.

“While you are there, ask to see the ballrooms. We think this place would be perfect for your big wedding next year,” my mom adds.

Summer bursts into tears and I’ve had to learn what are happy tears and what are sad or mad tears, and they are defiantly happy tears. Before long, both our moms are crying too.

“Now you’ve done it.” I smile at my dad and father-in-law.

An hour later we are walking into the hotel room because Summer refused to let me carry her over the threshold, but promised when we get home from having the baby I can.

“Wow, this room is amazing.” Summer says as we take in the two-room suite that is done up in beach white, blue, and tans. From our balcony, the ocean view is breathtaking.

Summer checks out the bathroom while I continue to enjoy the view. I can’t pull my eyes away from the water until I hear Summer squeal and I run to the other room.

There I find her in the bathroom looking at the large clawfoot tub that overlooks the ocean.

“We are going to have sex in there at least once.” She says, making my cock harden at the thought alone.

“Speaking of sex, Mrs. Hale. Have you seen the bed? I think it’s a great place for me to make love to my wife for the first time.” Then I take her hands, leading her back to the bedroom.

“It is perfect.” She smiles then turns her back to me and pulls her hair over her shoulder, exposing the zipper of her dress.

Ever so slowly, I pull the zipper down and kiss the skin that’s exposed. When the zipper reaches the bottom, her dress pools around her feet, leaving her in a sexy lace bra and pantie set.

I kiss my way back up her spine and unhook her bra, letting it join the dress on the floor. Turning her to face me, I kiss her chest, paying special attention to her sensitive breasts, and then pull her panties down. When I look back up at her watching me, I never break eye contact as I stand back up.

“Go sit on the edge of the bed and spread your legs,” I say, stripping out of my clothes.

When I’m naked, I tell her, “Lean back on your arms.” Then I kneel down between her legs.

“You okay like that?” She nods and I don’t waste any time getting the first lick of my wife’s pussy.

“Somehow, marriage makes you taste even better,” I growl before taking another lick.

Knowing my wife is on a hair trigger being so sensitive and pregnant, I don't waste my time. I thrust two fingers into her and suck hard on her clit. That's all it takes for her to fall back on the bed, screaming my name as she gushes all over my fingers.

I lick up every drop before I kiss her beautiful, round stomach and then her perfect lips.

“I love you, my wife,” I say and then spend all evening making love to her.



After three amazing relaxing days at the resort, we are on our way home. We had a couple's massage, which turned Summer on so much we barely made it into our suite before she had me inside her. We made love in the bathtub overlooking the ocean twice and even got a little daring at three a.m. and had sex on our balcony outside. Of course, I made sure no one got to see my wife, but the thrill of it was enough for Summer.

She hasn't stopped smiling at me since we got in the car. I swear if this were a cartoon, she'd have hearts for eyes.

“Um, Nick, I think we need to make a pit stop,” she says.

“Of course, where?”

“The hospital. My water just broke.” She says very calmly.

I take a deep breath and redirect the car.

“Thank god for leather seats.” I try to joke, which earns me a glare. “Call our moms and let them know.”

She does and the moment we hit the hospital, a flurry of excitement surrounds us. Nine hours later, I am holding our little girl.

When our parents walk into the room, I smile. “I’d like you to meet Valentina Madison Hale,” I say and hand her off to my mom, who reaches me first.

“Oh, I love the name, Sweetheart!” Summers’s mom gushes as she sits on the side of Summer’s bed.

“What’s the meaning behind it?” My mom asks.

“It’s the female version of Valentine, and this all started on Valentine’s Day,” I say.

“Oh, she’s going to hate you for that. I can see it now. The teacher goes around the room asking why everyone’s parents selected their name and she is the one that says it’s the night my parents got so drunk they had sex and made me.” At my mom’s words, everyone in the room laughs.

“Madison is one of my best friends and actually my biggest supporter in the months before Nick found out. She was there for everything and it only seemed fitting,” Summer says.

Right here, right now, everything is perfect. My little family is growing, and everyone is safe and healthy.

I should have known fate would give me this life in the last way I thought possible.



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About Kaci Rose



Kaci Rose writes steamy contemporary romance mostly set in small towns. She grew up in Florida but longs for the mountains over the beach.

She is a mom to 5 kids and a dog who is scared of his own shadow.

She also writes steamy cowboy romance as Kaci M. Rose.

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Table of Contents

Blurb

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1. Chapter 1

2. Chapter 2

3. Chapter 3

4. Chapter 4

5. Chapter 5

6. Chapter 6

7. Chapter 7

8. Chapter 8

9. Chapter 9

10. Chapter 10

11. Chapter 11

12. Chapter 12

13. Chapter 13

14. Chapter 14

15. Chapter 15

16. Chapter 16

17. Chapter 17

18. Chapter 18

19. Epilogue

20. Other Books by Kaci Rose

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