

# from this day

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## CHAPTER ONE

I was both hot and sweaty. It was the first week of October in Chicago, and the city had been under a rare heat wave for the last several days. To make matters worse, I was running late. I had lost track of time serving lunch at the women's shelter where I was now the Director of Operations, and I had exactly fifteen minutes to make it to the Loop.

The brown line train arrived just as I reached the platform, and I jumped into the last car, relieved when a blast of air conditioning hit my face. I settled into an empty seat and pulled out my phone. The screen showed one missed call— Luke. I put the phone away without calling him.

Ten months had passed since I first spent an amazing evening with a handsome lawyer named Luke Donovan. In that time, we had hooked up, dated, broken up, made up, broken up again, re-made up and fallen in love. For a while, everything was perfect. I had quit my job at Luke's company, and the two of us had focused on developing our relationship. However, once I had gone back to work at the women's shelter, Luke had recommitted himself to his company, working sixteen-hour days and leaving town for entire weeks. I wasn't typically a complainer, but I missed my boyfriend. So, I was on my way downtown to surprise him at his office with lunch, and hopefully a little dessert.

Being the type-A personality that he was, Luke ate lunch at 1:00 every day, without fail. It was exactly 12:58 when I stepped through the front doors of Maverick. I waved at familiar faces and approached Luke's assistant, Annie, with a wry smile.

"Is he busy?" I asked, knowing very well that Luke was always busy when he was in the office.

Annie returned the smile. "He's in with Kent. They should be wrapping up soon."

"Thanks, Annie." I perched on the corner of Annie's desk and waited for Luke's office door to open. I didn't have to wait long.

Kent Reid stepped out of Luke's office looking dazed. His face lit up slightly when he saw me. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Kasey. Hopefully, you can do something to improve Donovan's mood."

"Is he grumpy today?" I teased, knowing very well how moody Luke could be.

Kent scoffed. "Grumpy, I can handle. Inexplicably hostile, that's another matter."

"I'll take care of it." I patted Kent on the arm as he passed me, head down and shoulders hunched.

Annie would have gladly announced my arrival to Luke, but I wanted to catch him by surprise. I stepped inside his office and shut the door behind me. Luke was seated behind his desk, hunched over his laptop. His blue dress shirt was slightly wrinkled, and he had rolled the sleeves up to his elbows. The disheveled look of his hair told me he had been running his hands through it. Even when Luke was in a state of disarray, he still looked perfect to me.

I cleared my throat loudly and said, "I hear you aren't playing nicely with others today."

Luke's head shot up, a smile flashing across his handsome face. His eyes were guarded and tired, but I could detect a spark of warmth in them. "Kasey," was all he said as he stood up, and it was all I needed to hear. Luke said my name in a way no one else ever had.

"Hey, you," I said softly, my playful mood slipping away. I held up the small picnic basket I had brought with me. "I brought you lunch."

"I'd rather have you," he replied.

"You already have me."

Luke's smile turned into a teasing smirk as he walked slowly around his desk. "Not in the way I'm thinking about right now."

I wagged a finger at him. "You're at work, Donovan."

"That's never stopped us before." Luke opened his arms as he approached me, and I happily stepped into them, letting the picnic basket fall to the floor.

It was hard not to get caught up in the moment. Luke was a fantastic kisser and his hands always managed to find just the right spot on my body. But I hadn't spontaneously stopped by the office for a booty call, no matter how good I knew it would be. We had important matters to discuss first.

"Nice try, bossman." With a great effort, I managed to pull away slightly. "You were almost able to make me forget that we're having dinner with your mother tonight."

Luke grimaced. "Well, that's one way to bring a man down—literally."

"Don't blame me. She's *your* mother." It was my turn to frown. "At least she likes you."

"Sometimes I wonder..." Luke shook his head to chase away a negative thought. "If you don't want to go tonight, I won't blame you."

"You won't, but she will." I sighed. "I'll just sit by your sister. She tends to absorb a lot of your mother's wrath."

Luke had already moved on, or rather back to where we were. His hand had slipped beneath my dress and was quickly traveling upward. I'd had a list of things to discuss with Luke but when his lips closed on mine, everything slipped away except for him and his touch. He had been out of town all week and it felt wonderful to be in his arms.

"I should let you get back to work. Maverick isn't going to run itself." I reluctantly pushed him away and smoothed down my dress.

Luke tucked in his shirt and straightened his tie, and he was back to being Mr. Donovan again. "I need to run to a meeting, but I'll see you tonight?"

"Against my better judgment, yes."

Luke kissed me on the forehead. "Try not to look so glum. If it makes you feel any better, I've got a surprise in store for you tonight."

"A surprise?" I raised a skeptical eyebrow. "I'm not sure how I feel about that."

"It's a good surprise, I promise." Luke smiled sweetly. "Trust me, Kasey."

Trusting Luke was easy. Putting up with his crazy family was not. Fortunately, Luke felt exactly the same way about them, so as soon as dinner was over, he was the one to initiate the goodbyes.

"Whatever is the rush, Luke?" his mother demanded as we both hurried to our feet.

"I've got an early morning meeting," he said, not at all contrite about lying to his mother. "Just one of the joys of being the man in charge."

I wrestled back a smile as we walked away. We both knew that Luke loved being the man in charge— in the office and in the bedroom.

The valet delivered Luke's car and he drove us straight home. It wasn't until a few hours later when I was tucked warmly into bed that I remember Luke's promise of a mystery surprise. He hadn't come to bed with me, so I ventured out of our bedroom to find him.

When I finally tracked him down on the upstairs balcony of the giant house, I was definitely surprised.

"What did you do?" I gasped.

Somehow he had managed to cover nearly every inch of the balcony in candles and rose petals. The iron table held a bottle of champagne and two empty glasses. Romantic music played in the background, coming from an indeterminate source.

Luke's back had been turned and now he whirled around in dismay. "You're not supposed to be here! Go back inside!"

"What?" I laughed at the absurdity of his command. "It's a little late for that, don't you think?"

Luke's shoulders dropped and he looked adorably crestfallen. "This was supposed to be a surprise."

"Oh, don't worry, I'm more than surprised." I took a few slow steps forward, careful not to kick over any candles. "This is beautiful, Luke. What's the occasion?"

"You." Luke ducked his head, suddenly very shy.

I closed the rest of the distance between us and put my hands on his chest. Luke jumped at my touch and couldn't quite look me in the eye. "Hey," I said, "it's just me. Nothing to be anxious about."

He laughed nervously. "Easy for you to say."

"You're going to have to clue me in here, Donovan, because I have no idea what's going on." As far as romantic gestures went, this was one of Luke's more creative attempts. He had done flowers, diamonds, and exotic trips. But this was something else entirely.

"That's because I'm totally spazzing right now. I've never done this before, so you'll have to cut me some slack." Luke took both of my hands in his, which were shaking slightly.

"Done what?" I was still clueless.

Luke sighed a deep, suffering sigh, and said, "This." When he dropped to one knee, it suddenly made perfect sense to me. And that was when *my* hands started shaking.

I swallowed hard when Luke's eyes finally locked on mine. "I had a whole speech prepared," he started, chuckling nervously, "but for the life of me, I can't remember any of it."

"That's okay." My voice came out hoarse. "I don't need a speech."

"Maybe not, but you deserve one. I love you, Kasey." Luke's eyes glistened and though I didn't consider myself to be particularly girly, I could feel my eyes begin to water. "That first night we spent together was the best night of my life. I don't know how I got so lucky, but I'm not going to question it. I'm just going to do everything I can to keep you. So... will you marry me?"

The ring seemed to appear out of nowhere. Luke performed a magician's trick and was suddenly holding a super-sized diamond. I barely noticed, because I was still staring into his eyes.

"Nothing would make me happier. Yes." I dropped to my knees and threw my arms around him. I felt his breath on my neck as he laughed in relief.

"Thank god," he said, kissing me sweetly. He took my left hand and slid the ring into place, struggling just a little because I was still shaking.

"You know what? That first night," I said, flexing my finger under the foreign weight that now pressed on it, "was only my second best night."

Luke's face froze. "What was your best night?"

"Tonight." I reached for him again and told myself that I would never let go.

## CHAPTER TWO

I was riding high for weeks after that night. It was strange that I hadn't even suspected Luke was ready to commit in such a permanent way. We had only been together ten months, which most people would consider to be a pretty brief courtship. But it didn't feel rushed to me. It felt perfect. Nothing about our relationship had been "normal" or "traditional." But it worked for us, and that was all that mattered.

After the first few honeymoon weeks, I began to feel less enthused as it sunk in that I would now have to plan a wedding. I lay awake at night worrying over where to have the wedding, who to invite, who not to invite, what kind of cake to have, and on and on. It was no wonder that I spent my days feeling nauseated and tense.

Luke was much more relaxed once I said "yes." He didn't care when or how we got married, just as long as it happened. He even offered to go to a justice of the peace on a random Tuesday. It was a little too spontaneous for me, but I appreciated the offer.

About a month after the proposal, I had a much more intense panic attack while babysitting Luke's niece and nephew. I volunteered for the job when Luke mentioned that his brother was getting overwhelmed caring for the kids nonstop since his wife had left the family. Maddy and Max were cute kids, and I was glad to have the time with them while Luke and Andrew headed out to play golf.

I made the kids eggs for breakfast and let them watch some morning cartoons while doing a couple of loads of laundry. Luke had paid for a nanny and housekeeper while Andrew got settled into his role as Mr. Mom but after a few weeks, Andrew had sent them away. He wanted to do it himself and for the most part he had things under control. But it was obvious that he was struggling to keep up. I wanted to help out if I could.

Halfway through mopping the kitchen floor, I felt my stomach turn and clench. I made it to the bathroom just in time to stick my head in the toilet. When I opened my eyes after retching, my hurried breakfast with the kids stared back at me. I flushed it down, then shut the lid and took a seat with my head in my hands. It was the third day in a row I hadn't been able to keep my breakfast down and to a woman of a certain age, that typically meant one thing.

I did the math quickly and the timing was certainly possible. Luke and I were normally very responsible with protection, but as any pregnant teen could tell you, it only took one lapse in judgment to get knocked up. Dred began to settle into my now empty stomach.

"Kasey!" Little Maddy pounded on the bedroom door. "Max is being mean to me."

"Just a minute, Cal." I hurried to the sink and rinsed out my mouth. As much as I didn't want to have my fears confirmed, I wouldn't be able to think of anything else until then, so I made a decision. "Get your brother and put on your coats. We're running an errand."

One of the great things about living in the city was that you could find a drugstore on just about every corner. Getting the kids out the door, down the street, in and out of the drugstore after a quick purchase, and back in the house again took less than thirty minutes.

The kids were happy to return to the television while I took my secret purchase into the bathroom. I tried not to think at all as I unwrapped the little stick and set about peeing on it. Thinking would lead to panicking, and I couldn't do that right now.

While I waited to see whether my whole life was about to change, I heard the front door open and Luke and Andrew greeted the kids in loud voices. I didn't want to get caught with my pants down, so to speak, so I buried the test in my purse without seeing the result.

"You alright?" Luke asked when I joined them in the family room. My face must've betrayed how distraught I felt.

"Yeah. Breakfast didn't sit well." I forced a smile. "How was golf?"

"It was fine, except for the part where Luke was on his phone the whole time," Andrew said.

I frowned. Luke was usually pretty good about compartmentalizing work, but the last week or so he had been glued to his phone. "Something going on at Maverick?"

“Nothing we need to talk about right now,” he said with a poor attempt at a reassuring smile. I could tell from his eyes that something was bothering him though.

The five of us had lunch together before we took off, and Luke kept checking his phone. By the time we left, he was a bundle of nerves. We had tentative plans to check out a new museum exhibit, but it wouldn't be much fun for either of us if he was going to be distracted the whole time. The slightly good news was that Luke's mood swing was distracting me from my own potentially earth-shattering news.

“You need to tell me what's wrong,” I said when I finally got sick of seeing him staring at his phone. We were halfway down Lake Shore Drive and he hadn't spoken a word.

“I don't want to get into it right now,” he said, eyes focused on the road.

Very rarely did I lose my cool with Luke, but now was one of those times. “I don't care. You either tell me what's going on or take me home right now.”

A quick glance in my direction told him just how serious I was, and he sighed and pulled the car onto an exit ramp that led to the park.

“Fine. We'll talk. Just let me park the car.” He found a spot and turned off the engine. “Let's walk down to the lake.”

It was a chilly day, but not terribly cold. The crisp air felt good against my skin as we settled on some concrete stairs at the lake's edge. The water was an icy blue, the same shade it always was before it began to freeze. The color almost perfectly matched Luke's eyes when he looked at me.

“I'm selling Maverick,” he said, no hesitation and fluff.

“What?” I could've guessed a thousand things that might be plaguing Luke, but I never would've guessed that he was thinking of selling his company. “When did you decide this?”

Luke shrugged. “I've been thinking about it for a while, but more seriously in the last six months.”

“Why? You love that company?” He had built the company from nothing. It was his pride and joy.

“No, Kasey. I don't love it. I love you. The company was just a hobby that turned into a career.”

“A very successful career,” I clarified. “How have you been thinking about this for six months? You've never hinted about this to me. Isn't this something we should've talked about together?”

“You would've tried to talk me out of it.” Luke shook his head in frustration. “I don't want to be talked out of this, Kasey.”

“I'm sorry, I just don't understand where this is coming from. Why do you want to sell Maverick?” My head felt like it was spinning.

“I'm ready for the next chapter of my life.”

“Doing what?”

“Whatever I want. That's kind of the whole point.” Luke's tone was borderline hostile. “I shouldn't have to justify this to you.”

“It's not about justification, Luke. I'm just trying to understand where your head is at right now. This is coming out of the blue for me since you never once bothered to mention your plans to me before today.”

Luke's face was stony and unreadable. “I didn't say anything because it was just something I was idly thinking about. It wasn't really a plan until recently.”

“What changed?”

“I found a buyer.” He leaned away from me reflexively. “A company that handles global accounts, but is based in the United Kingdom. They made a solid offer and I'm planning to accept.”

I was even more dumbfounded. “So you're ready to sign on the dotted line? Just like that?”

“We're in the middle of negotiations, but yeah, I'm hoping to close this deal.”

“What's the biggest sticking point?” As annoyed as I was that Luke hadn't discussed any of this with me, being angry at him wasn't going to help the situation. Now that he was opening up, I wanted to keep him talking until I had all the details.

“You’re not going to like it,” he said. I glared at him until he continued. “They want me to move to London for the first year of the acquisition as part of the deal. They will need help transitioning accounts and closing some cases.”

“Are you telling me that you are moving to London for a year?” I felt queasy again and hoped I wouldn’t have to throw up in the lake.

Luke shifted uncomfortably. “Yeah, I guess that’s what I’m telling you. But it doesn’t have to be just me. You can come with me. Or we can take turns visiting each other. A year really isn’t a long time.”

“I can’t just ‘come with you’ and you know it. I have a life here, a job that I love.” I felt very much like crying and I wondered if it was possible that pregnancy hormones were kicking in. That made me think of the unread plastic stick in my purse and the potential fetus growing inside me and tears pooled in my eyes. “Do you have any idea how much can change in a year?”

Luke’s tough façade faded away. “Don’t cry, Kasey. You know that kills me.”

“I can’t exactly help it.” I angrily wiped away a tear. “Only a few weeks have passed since you asked me to marry you, and now you’re choosing to leave for a year?”

“Hey, we are still getting married. I still want to be with you more than anything. Selling the company is what will best for us as a couple.” Luke reached over and wiped away a second tear. “This job is requiring more and more of my time. I need to put in some time now to make it a smooth handoff, and then when that is done we can start talking about having a family.”

“Some time? That sounds longer than a year, Luke.”

“A year in London is required but I may need to stay on at the company a little longer. There’s no way to know for certain right now.”

The stress of the day had taken its toll on me. I was exhausted. “I want to go home.”

“Kase-”

“Take me home, Luke,” I said firmly, tears replaced by anger.

Even after we were home, I couldn’t bring myself to look at the test results. Luke had directly admitted that he wasn’t thinking about having a family for at least a year, possibly longer. If I really was pregnant, I was carrying an unwanted child and that was too depressing to acknowledge.

I wanted to block that thought from my head, so I turned on a mindless movie and made myself busy ignoring everything else, including Luke.

“You have to talk to me eventually,” he said when the movie ended. He was sitting next to me on the couch, arm thrown over the back, twirling my hair absently in his fingers. It was a calming gesture for him, something he did when he was nervous or I was upset. In this case, it killed two birds with one twirl.

“I’m not *not* talking to you. I just don’t have anything to say right now.”

Luke sighed. “Fine. I’m getting a beer. Do you want one?”

Boy did I. But it seemed like a very irresponsible choice, so I shook my head no. Luke dropped a kiss on the top of my head, either out of habit or as an attempt to ease my annoyance with him. I would never have admitted it to him, but it worked. I was still mad that Luke had kept all of those secrets from me, but it didn’t change the fact that I was crazy about him.

“I’ll get it for you,” I said, jumping to my feet. I poured myself a glass of water and drank it slowly in the kitchen while I tried to convince myself to look at the test. I was unsuccessful, so I returned with Luke’s beer and sat next to him, closer than before. “I still love you,” I said, kissing his cheek. “Just thought you should know.”

Luke smiled for the first time all day. “I’m not sure I deserve it, but thank you.”

We stayed that way for a while, snuggled together without talking. Somehow those were always my favorite moments– the small, ordinary moments of love. It had to end eventually, as it always did, but I still wasn’t ready when Luke excused himself to do some work. I couldn’t begin to imagine losing him for an entire year.



Aside from Luke, one of the other things that had a great calming effect on me when I was stressed was a long, hot shower. Once my head was under the scalding water, I could feel the tension in my shoulders start to ease. After a little time to reflect on the day, I knew it was time to discover my fate. I needed to know if the answer was yes or no before I could figure out how to handle Luke's news.

Unfortunately, that plan was quickly railroaded in another direction when I stepped into the bedroom. Luke was waiting for me, and I could tell from the smile on his face that he had other plans for me. He hooked a finger at me, a gesture to come forward. For a long while, we lay on the bed making out like teenagers. We kissed long and slow and explored each other's bodies.

"You know, you're not going to be able to do this from London," I said during one of our breaks for air. We lay on our sides, facing each other.

"Not this way. But we'll have other ways to achieve results." Luke's hand rested on my hip, skimming slowly over my skin.

I was busy drawing circles on his chest with the tips of my fingers, trying not to worry about our uncertain future.

"Luke, do you want to have kids?" I wasn't sure why, but we had never really talked about starting a family. It hadn't seemed that important just a couple of days ago.

Luke's hand stopped moving and he didn't answer right away. When he did answer, his tone was very serious. "Yes. I'm not sure I always wanted to have kids, but now I want them, with you. Someday."

Those were the words I needed to hear. Now I could check the results and either way, I knew we would be okay. "I'll be right back," I said, bolting upright.

"What's wrong?" Luke was thrown by my sudden movement. He wrapped an arm around me. "Don't leave me."

"Nothing's wrong." I smiled, my newfound relief needing an outlet. "Don't worry, I'm coming back to you. I'll always come back to you."

Luke smiled uncertainly, but he let me go. His phone rang and he reluctantly got out of bed, reaching for his discarded pants and digging into the back pocket. "Oh goodie. It's my mother."

"Tell her I send my love," I joked, grabbing his wrinkled shirt from the floor and pulling it on. The house was a little too chilly to be running around in it naked. My purse was still on the entry table by the front door and I grabbed it, fumbling around for the stick.

"Kase."

I froze. Luke was standing at the end of the hall, cellphone still in hand. His face was a haunted combination of confusion and worry.

"Luke, what's wrong?" I dropped my purse and hurried to his side.

"My step-father had a heart attack. He's in the hospital."

My mouth dropped open. "Oh, god. Is he going to be okay?"

"No one seems to know. He's in cardiac intensive care." Luke's eyes were foggy, like he wasn't seeing anything around him.

I threw my arms around his neck. "We'll go to the hospital and see for ourselves." I wanted to tell him that it was going to be okay, but I didn't know if that was true.

"Yeah." Luke was holding on to me with no intention of letting go. I could feel his heart pounding in his chest. "Just give me a minute, okay?"

"Take whatever time you need."

I had never seen Luke cry. Rarely had I seen him upset. He was good at guarding his emotions and he was especially skilled at guarding any feelings he might have for, or about, his family. The Donovan family was completely dysfunctional, but it had been proven to me on more than one occasion that underneath all of the layers of chaos, bickering, and unpleasantness, there was a solid foundation of love.

I had to keep this in mind when we met up with his family at the hospital. They were scattered around the cardiac waiting room, up to their usual antics. Mother Virginia was complaining to a member of the hospital staff about the temperature of the room. Andrew was trying to catch the news on the television mounted on the wall, but his kids were busy climbing all over him. Little sister, Alexis, was furiously typing on her phone, headphones in place. The only member of the family missing was Luke's older sister, Lola. Lo was my second favorite Donovan, after Luke.

"Oh, Luke. Thank goodness you're here." Virginia marched across the room and dramatically threw her arms around her son. Her eyes darted in my direction. "Kasey."

As was always the case with Virginia, I was completely uncomfortable and had no idea what to say, so I just nodded.

"How is he?" Luke asked.

Virginia sighed painfully and pulled away from him. "It doesn't look good from what I can surmise. But I can't get a straight answer from anyone."

"Kasey!" Maddy looked up from torturing her father and squealed in delight. It helped to know that at least one member of the family wasn't repulsed by my presence.

I left Luke with his mother and went over to relieve Andrew from his assault. The kids were full of pent-up energy with no way to let it out. A stack of coloring books was buried under the magazines and after a brief hunt, I managed to find a carton of crayons. The three of us sat at the kiddie table and colored while Luke tracked down anyone that might have information about his step-father.

When he returned, the news was not good. Simon had suffered a heart attack and one of his arteries was 99% blocked. They tried to open the artery but had trouble, so now the best option was a more invasive surgery. Unfortunately, they were having trouble stabilizing him to the point where he would be able to undergo open-heart surgery.

"So what does that mean?" Andrew asked.

"We wait."

Luke took a seat on one of the cheap vinyl chairs and put his elbows on his knees, head in hands. As someone that usually kept a good poker face, I could only assume that he was keeping further bad news away from his family.

"Keep coloring," I told the kids.

Luke sat up when I took a seat next to him. His eyes were weary.

"You okay?" It wasn't a very good question given the circumstance, but I was worried about him.

I wasn't exactly surprised when he didn't answer me, but he did put an arm around my shoulders and pulled me close. I nestled my head into the crook of his neck and let him hold me. When my own parents had died, I remember feeling so alone. I had wished for someone in my life that I could lean on. I wanted to be that person for Luke.

"The doctor isn't sure he'll make it through the night," Luke finally said, softly enough that no one else could overhear. "Mother won't be able to handle losing him."

While I agreed that Virginia would be devastated over the loss of her husband, I thought that Luke was discounting how tough she could be. If anyone could be the rock for this family, it was Virginia.

"Let's not worry about that yet. Everything might end up okay." I reached up and stroked his cheek, looking deep into his eyes.

His face softened slightly at my touch and he kissed my forehead. "Thanks for being here."

I didn't have a chance to respond because Lola had finally arrived. "What the hell, people?" she demanded as she stormed into the room.

"Lola!" Virginia barked at her daughter. "Language."

"Hi, Mother." Lo smirked in her direction. "Good to see you are focusing on the important things right now."

Virginia glowered at her. "Did you even look in the mirror before you left home?"

Lola was known for her crazy hair and wild outfits, and this hospital trip was no exception. Her hair was bleached so intensely it was nearly white and it had streaks of purple throughout. Her black dress wasn't terribly offensive, but the low cut in front bordered on inappropriate. I loved all of it.

We exchanged hugs and then she took a seat on the other side of Luke and he filled her in on their step-father's situation. She was playing it cool, pretending not to be worried, but she couldn't stop gnawing on a fingernail.

"Congrats, by the way." She pointed to my adorned ring finger. "Have you set a date?"

I didn't think it would be wise to say that the thought of setting a date made me want to vomit. "Not yet," I said instead.

"You should elope," she advised and I returned her smile.

"It's under serious consideration," I said. Luke's cellphone vibrated for the tenth time since arriving at the hospital, but as with all previous times, he ignored it.

With no windows in the room, it was easy to lose track of time as we waited. When the doctor came in to give an update, Maddy and Max were curled up on their seats, dozing peacefully. I was nursing at least my third cup of coffee.

The Donovans had a decision to make. Simon's condition wasn't improving and without surgery, he wouldn't last another 24 hours. They had to choose whether to give it more time and hope his vitals improved, or to move ahead with the operation and hope he would survive. The doctor left to let everyone discuss the options which turned into a typical Donovan screaming match. The yelling woke up the kids, adding two more disgruntled Donovans to the mix.

"Kasey! I'm hungry." Maddy yanked hard on my arm.

Distracted by the activity around me, I sent her off to find my purse which I was pretty sure held a banana. It wasn't much, but hopefully it would do for now.

"He needs the surgery. If we don't proceed, he'll die." Luke was the only one speaking in a normal tone.

Andrew disagreed emphatically. "He's not strong enough. The surgery will kill him."

"We don't know that," Lola argued.

Virginia was protesting the loudest of all. "We need to say a prayer. The Lord will protect him."

Watching them all was a bit like observing a tennis match, back and forth, back and forth.

"Kasey!" Maddy had returned, standing in the middle of the group, holding my purse in one hand. The item in her other hand was more concerning. "Can I use this pen?"

"Shit." I snatched for it, but not before the rest of the family saw what she was holding. My hand closed around it, but the damage was done. "It's not a pen, Maddy."

The room fell silent, so quickly it was almost like going deaf. Everyone was looking at me. My eyes flitted from face to face, skipping over only Luke. Virginia looked horrified, Andrew looked confused, Alexis remained disinterested and Lola was on the verge of laughter.

"Surprise," I said with no emotion. "I'm just gonna step away for a minute."

Rather than "stepping away," I fled the room.

### CHAPTER THREE

I didn't stop in the hall, but rounded the corner and kept going. I was not sure where I was headed, but I was desperate to get away. Somehow I ended up on the baby floor, an unfortunate result. I finally stopped in front of a collage of baby pictures, all successful deliveries in the hospital. The pregnancy test was still clutched in my fist and my hand was shaking.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Luke had managed to track me down. It's possible he had been following me the entire time and I had just failed to notice.

"I don't know." I kept staring at the pudgy baby faces, unable to look at him.

Luke was undeterred and he moved closer. "Yes, you know why you didn't tell me. You had a reason."

"That's not what I meant. I meant that I don't know if I'm pregnant or not. I haven't looked at the results." I faced Luke. "I wasn't going to say anything until I knew for sure."

"You still could've said something. This is a big deal, Kasey."

"I wanted to tell you. But then you dropped the news about moving to London and I wasn't sure what that meant for us. Life got a little crazy." It was hard to believe how much had changed in the last day or two.

Luke frowned. "You still should have told me."

"We both kept secrets from each other," I reminded him.

"We're done with that. No more secrets, no more lies." Luke held out his hand. "We'll face this together."

Somehow, it was easier with Luke by my side. All of the worries I had been carrying felt a little lighter. I handed him the test.

"What are we looking for?" he asked, keeping the results portion covered with this thumb.

"A line means negative and a plus sign means baby."

"Okay." Luke put an arm around me. "Deep breath."

His thumb moved a fraction of an inch and in that subtle movement, the world around us stopped moving.

"Huh," I said. Luke hadn't made any noise at all.

I glanced up at him, expecting to see shock or some other paralyzing emotion, but Luke was grinning, a big, spontaneous expression.

"We're having a baby."

I couldn't take my eyes away from him, but he was still staring at the plus sign, awed.

"Yeah. You're going to be a father," I said, and somehow those words made everything okay. Thinking about becoming a mother was terrifying, but knowing that Luke was going to be the father of our baby made all the panic fade away.

Luke finally turned to me, his smile contagious. His arms went around me in a tight embrace. "We're going to be a family, Kasey."

I hadn't been part of a real family in so long, hadn't felt this loved since losing my parents. Suddenly, I wanted this baby more than I had ever wanted anything in my life and I knew that Luke felt exactly the same way.

His family was less enthused when we officially told them the news. Virginia glared at me and said nothing. Andrew tried to congratulate us, but was probably being more honest when he wished us luck, surveying his own children that were now coloring on the waiting room walls. Alexis, as always, said nothing. Lola at least seemed happy for us, though that happiness stemmed more from how screwed she thought we were.

"You two have no idea what you've just signed up for," she said, laughing. "This is going to be great."

It didn't matter what the Donovan family thought about the situation. I had made up my mind that this baby was a blessing, and nothing was going to change that.

The family managed to agree that Simon should have the surgery which meant we had even more waiting to do. Luke split his time looking worried, then happy. I could tell from a glance at his face which thought was running through his mind. A smile meant he was thinking about the baby, a clenched jaw said his step-father was his primary thought.

Occasionally, I would feel Luke staring at me and those moments were harder to comprehend. He didn't smile, but he also didn't seem bothered. He was just studying me thoughtfully.

"What?" I finally asked after the fifth time catching him.

He smiled bashfully. "Nothing."

"Liar."

"I just can't wrap my mind around the fact that our baby is growing inside you right now." His head shook in disbelief. "It's truly a miracle."

"You really are the chick in this relationship."

The surgery was nowhere close to finishing anytime soon and the kids were going crazy being cooped up for so long. I offered to take them home. A real meal and some solid sleep in their own beds was the only cure for their bad moods. Andrew was grateful for the offer, and though I didn't want to leave Luke, it was probably wise to give the adult Donovans some time alone.

After filling their bellies, overseeing bath time, and reading bedtime stories, I found myself collapsing onto Andrew's couch, utterly exhausted. I kept my phone next to my head in case I fell asleep, but Luke didn't call.

Instead, I felt someone softly shaking me awake after I dozed off.

"Kase, wake up."

I bolted upright. "Luke! Why didn't you call?"

Luke sank onto the couch next to me. "I was hoping you were catching up on some sleep. I didn't want to wake you."

"How's Simon?"

"He's out of surgery and in stable condition." Luke leaned back and closed his eyes. "He's not in the clear yet, but he has a good chance of recovering."

"That's great news, Luke."

"I have a lot to be thankful for today." He sat up, suddenly wide awake. "Let's go home, Kasey."

"Home," I agreed.

I assumed Luke would be completely spent by the time we walked through the front door, ready for a hot shower and a long nap. But he went to his computer instead, firing off emails. It was only then that I remembered he was still in the middle of negotiations, and that he might be leaving for London soon. It wasn't something to discuss with him right then though, with all the other things he was juggling. I planned to give it a few days before I approached him about his decision.

But Luke had other plans. His step-father pulled a miraculous recovery after a couple of days and Luke was able to concentrate on other matters. He came home from work three days after the baby news with a determined look on his face.

"I'm not selling the company," he announced defiantly.

"No? But what about all those things you told me?" This was a complete reversal for Luke and I was lost.

"It was clear that this wasn't a good move— for me and for Maverick. So I came up with another plan." Luke smiled proudly. "I'm keeping the company, but I'm stepping out of my role as CEO. I've found someone to handle the day-to-day responsibilities. Kent."

"Kent is a wonderful choice." I was impressed by Luke's decision. It would allow him to spend less time running the company, and by appointing Kent to be in charge, Maverick would still be in good hands. "Good work, Donovan."

"I'm not done yet," he said. "We're going on a trip."

"We are?" It seemed like odd timing for a surprise trip.

Luke handed me a ticket. "I'm going to make an honest woman of you, Kasey Maxwell."

It took a minute, but I realized what Luke had planned. It was perfect.

A week later, we were on the beach in Florida. It was sunset and I was wearing a long, white dress. Luke had on a blue dress shirt and we were both barefoot, holding hands and facing each other. We had found a minister to marry us, and two members of hotel staff to act as witnesses. The date was exactly one year after the night that Luke and I had met, that one night that was never supposed to last.

Now we were saying “I do” and promising to love each other forever. It was the moment I had always hoped to experience one day, but had begun to believe was never going to happen. Until I met Luke. He changed everything.

Later that night, Luke and I lay in bed and his head was on my chest as he stroked my stomach, speaking softly to our unborn child. He was telling him or her the story about how we met, skipping over the more scandalous details.

“Your mother was breathtaking that night,” he said, his breath warm on my skin. “I had never seen a woman that beautiful, and for some crazy reason, she agreed to go on an adventure with me. It was the best night of my life.”

“Do you remember what I said to you on the roof when you proposed to me?” I asked.

“Of course.” Luke looked up at me.

“I’ve changed my mind about my best night. You were right.”

Luke smiled. “I was?”

“That first night was definitely our best night.”

“Why?” he asked, bringing his head level with mine.

“Because it was the night that we found each other.” I stroked Luke’s cheek, falling even more in love with him.

Luke kissed me and said, “And it was the night that led to all of our other nights, and all the ones yet to come.”

“Do you think we’ll ever be able to top that night?”

Luke’s hand was still on my stomach and I felt it press down, warm and firm. “I don’t know, but from this day forward I won’t stop trying.”

## About the Author

Hunter J. Keane lives in Chicago where she surrounds herself with good food, great books, and fantastic friends. She is the author numerous contemporary novels. When she isn't busy writing, Hunter is fighting crime and solving world peace.

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