

A romantic couple is shown in silhouette, embracing and kissing on a beach at sunset. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light from the setting sun, which is visible in the background. The couple's figures are dark against the bright, hazy sky and the shimmering water of the ocean. The overall mood is intimate and tender.

SOPHIE LOVE

FOREVER,
PLUS
ONE

THE INN AT SUNSET HARBOR—BOOK 6

Sophie Love
Forever, Plus One
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Аннотация

35 year old Emily Mitchell is still reeling from the surprise news that she is pregnant. Just married, she and Danielle have no time to process the news as they are thrust into doctor appointments, preparing for the baby's arrival—and, in a surprise party, the revelation of their baby's gender.

Summer has finally returned to Sunset Harbor, and Emily and Daniel have their hands full with the overflowing inn, their gut renovation of Trevor's house, the building of a new spa, and Chantelle's reacting to the baby news. They barely have time to settle into life as newlyweds when Emily gets a call from her dad: he wants them all to visit him in England. Surprising herself, Emily agrees.

A life-changing trip to England culminates in shocking news, and Emily finds herself reeling. Daniel withdraws, and as summer comes to a close and her pregnancy develops, she wonders: will she ever be able to settle into this new life?

And will life with Daniel ever be the same again?

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Sophie Love

Forever, Plus One

Sophie Love

#1 bestselling author Sophie Love is author of the romantic comedy series THE INN AT SUNSET HARBOR, which includes seven books (and counting), and which begins with FOR NOW AND FOREVER (THE INN AT SUNSET HARBOR – BOOK 1).

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Sophie would love to hear from you, so please visit www.sophieloveauthor.com to email her, to join the mailing list, to receive free ebooks, to hear the latest news, and to stay in touch!

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BOOKS BY SOPHIE LOVE

THE INN AT SUNSET HARBOR

FOR NOW AND FOREVER (Book #1)

FOREVER AND FOR ALWAYS (Book #2)

FOREVER, WITH YOU (Book #3)

IF ONLY FOREVER (Book #4)

FOREVER AND A DAY (Book #5)

FOREVER, PLUS ONE (Book #6)

CHAPTER ONE

The noises of the bustling yacht club seemed to fade into silence as Emily heard her own voice repeating the words she'd just spoken.

“I'm pregnant.”

Opposite her, Daniel and Chantelle wore twin expressions of surprise. Neither uttered a word. Emily herself felt too stunned to say anything else. It had only been a minute or so since the pregnancy test she'd taken in the yacht club restroom had revealed her new reality. It hadn't properly sunk in yet.

It was Chantelle who finally broke the silence. Not with words, but with a squeal of delight. Her joyful exclamation seemed to shake Daniel from his trance. He reached across the table and grabbed Emily's hand tightly. Tears sparkled in his eyes.

“Really?”

Eyes locked on Daniel, Emily nodded. A wave of emotions rushed at her. It wasn't just shock now, but excitement, delight, joy. There was a baby growing inside of her! She was having her own child! She and Daniel had created a new life together. Their love and commitment had brought them this moment of blissful wonder.

Chantelle started bouncing up and down in her seat. “I'm going to be a big sister!” she cried.

Emily and Daniel's intense moment dissipated as they were

brought back to the here and now by Chantelle's exuberance. They both laughed and Emily nodded in affirmation of her statement.

"When will the baby be born?" Chantelle asked eagerly.

Emily shrugged, still struggling to accept her new reality. "I don't know yet."

She counted back in her head, trying to work out when she could have conceived. The baby, though wanted, was not planned. A happy accident had happened somewhere along the line.

Emily thought about the funny turns she'd been having recently, the ones she'd put down to stress, and the numerous moments of nausea that she'd assumed were anxiety. Could they have actually been the first signs of pregnancy? She'd been so rushed off her feet recently – what with the wedding, the adoption, her father, and Roman Westbrook – that she hadn't even realized her period was late. As she thought about it now she realized that she'd last had one the week before they married. Weeks ago. If she'd conceived on their honeymoon, she may already be halfway through her first trimester!

"We'll have to speak to the doctor," Emily explained to Chantelle. "They'll be able to work out how long I've been pregnant and tell me the due date."

"It will still be lots of months," Daniel added. "So you'll have to be patient."

Patient looked like the last thing Chantelle would be able to

be.

“Can we make a calendar?” she asked, her eyes wide and sparkling. “So we can count down the days?”

Emily beamed, touched by Chantelle’s enthusiasm. “That sounds lovely,” she said.

“Can we make it really big?” Chantelle continued. “As big as a whole wall?” She stretched her arms out as far as they could go.

Emily nodded. “Okay!”

“With rainbow colors?”

“If you want!”

“And glitter?”

Emily laughed. “That sounds wonderful.”

It was such a relief for her to know that Chantelle was happy for her. Sheila’s pregnancy had caused a whole host of emotions to erupt in Chantelle, compounded by the fact that her friend from school, Toby, was also soon to become a big brother. Emily had been slightly concerned that Chantelle may act out as a result of the news. But so far she seemed nothing but excited. Emily reminded herself to let her teacher, Miss Glass, and Gail, the school counselor, know about the situation in case Chantelle had a delayed negative reaction to the news.

Daniel’s expression turned serious for a moment. “Chantelle, will you be able not to tell anyone about this yet?” he asked.

She looked at him and frowned, visibly deflating like a popped balloon. “Why not?”

Emily knew why Daniel wanted to keep it hush for now.

She wasn't yet past the critical first trimester. This was her first pregnancy and she was an older mother. At thirty-six it fell into the horribly titled bracket of a "geriatric pregnancy." The chances of her miscarrying were higher than average. The thought caused a jolt of alarm to shock her.

"So we can keep it our special Morey family secret," Emily said, tapping her nose. "It will make it more fun."

Daniel looked up, his expression relaxing somewhat, presumably at the way Emily was handling the slightly delicate situation.

Chantelle's frown turned to suspicion. Then it disappeared as quickly as it had come.

"Okay!" she said, raising her eyebrows, suddenly on board. "But then, what about Papa Roy? He's family but he's a Mitchell, not a Morey."

Emily considered her question for a moment. What about her father? Should she tell him before the first trimester was over? Should she tell anyone? She'd need emotional support, that was for sure. She just didn't know who would be best placed to give it to her. Her father had only just come back into her life, after all. She didn't know how well he'd handle adjusting to being a father, father-in-law, and grandfather in one fell swoop!

"Maybe a bit later," she told Chantelle. "For now, let's just have it be between us three. Okay?"

Chantelle mimed zipping her lips. Everyone laughed.

Across the table, Daniel reached for Emily's hand again. He

squeezed it tight, his eyes gazing at her adoringly, and mouthed the words, “I love you.”

Emily smiled to herself and mouthed them back. This moment was so perfect, so beautiful. She felt blessed that her life had finally aligned so perfectly.

* * *

That night, Emily and Daniel lay together in bed.

“I can’t sleep,” Emily confessed, rolling onto her side to gaze at him.

Beneath the covers she felt Daniel’s hand move protectively over her stomach.

“I wonder why,” he said with a chuckle.

Emily rested her own hand on top of his. “I know, I can’t quite believe it’s real. Maybe once I’ve seen a doctor, had an ultrasound, I’ll believe it.”

“An ultrasound,” Daniel repeated with awe. “I never got a chance to do any of that stuff with Chantelle.”

Emily felt sorry for him. Daniel had missed out on so much of Chantelle’s early life, including her birth. Things were going to be so different this time around. He’d get to experience every moment of their baby’s life, all the firsts; first smile, first sneeze, first step. The thought warmed her.

“So when will we get to see our baby?” Daniel asked. “When’s the first ultrasound?”

“Twelve weeks, I think,” Emily said, realizing that she herself didn’t know a huge amount about what was going on. Her pregnancy was something they would have to learn about together. “I’ll know how far along I am once I see the doctor.”

“Do you think you conceived on our honeymoon?” Daniel asked.

“I hope so,” Emily replied with a grin, remembering their lovemaking in vivid detail, knowing that the time they’d spent together on their honeymoon would never be forgotten.

Daniel fell quiet then. “What shall we do about telling people? Friends. Staff.” Then more quietly, he added, “Moms.”

Emily sighed. She’d been ruminating on it also. Neither of their mothers were in their lives in any real capacity. Both were difficult personalities, both had failed their children in the past. They would likely fail at being grandmothers, too. If they couldn’t put their issues aside in order to witness their children’s marriage, what hope was there for them playing any kind of active role in their grandchildren’s lives?

“Let’s not think about them just yet,” Emily said. “I want to stay happy for at least a few weeks. Can we do that?”

Daniel nodded and turned his face toward the ceiling. Emily thought he seemed a little subdued, reserved. She hoped it was just over the mother issue and nothing more. But she couldn’t help worrying that there may be something else. Perhaps the news of the pregnancy wasn’t entirely welcome for Daniel. He’d wanted to plan their child together, after all. Maybe he was

disappointed that it had just been sprung on them?

Emily decided against prodding him for an explanation. Daniel, she hoped, would come to her in his own time to share whatever concerns he had. It wasn't like she herself wasn't filled with anxiety over her ability to parent, or over the child's health, the future, even the state of the world it was soon to be born into! There were a million things to worry about now. It would take some time for them both to process it.

She snuggled down beneath the covers, her mind still running on overdrive, imagining what the future might hold. A son or daughter? Blond hair like Chantelle, or dark like her own? What would they call it? What room should they use as the nursery? There were so many things to think about.

She took a deep breath, trying to calm herself. Best to take things one step at a time. The first thing to do was get an appointment with the ob-gyn.

CHAPTER TWO

Emily felt as nervous as a child on her first day at school as she sat on the bed in the obstetrician's office, swinging her legs beneath her. Daniel looked just as much out of his depth as he sat in the hard plastic seat beside her. There were framed medical certificates on the mint green walls, colorful posters showing the different phases of pregnancy, and the unpleasant smell of antiseptic lingering in the air. Emily realized she was going to have to get used to this environment. Over the next few months, she'd be smelling a whole lot of antiseptic!

The door swung open and in walked the doctor, Rose Arkwright. On first impressions, Emily thought she was dressed very smartly, more like an attorney than a doctor. It was really only the comfortably flat shoes, the white doctor coat, and the stethoscope around her neck that gave her away.

She smiled at them both as she placed her clipboard down beside her computer and took a seat at the desk.

"Mr. and Mrs. Morey?" she asked, addressing them both. "Firstly, may I say congratulations."

She had a warm smile, Emily noted, and she shook each of their hands with a firm, confident grip. Emily got the distinct impression that Doctor Arkwright was an intelligent, no-nonsense kind of person. She felt like she was in very safe hands.

"Thank you," Daniel said, smiling shyly. "We're over the

moon.”

Emily was glad to hear him say as such. She wasn't entirely sure how he felt since he'd seemed a mixture of shocked and stressed yesterday.

“Shall we get right to it?” Doctor Arkwright said. She flipped over the first piece of paper and looked at Emily. “I'm afraid I'm going to have to take a lot of detailed notes to begin with. Forms, forms, and more forms.”

“No problem,” Emily said. “Fire away.”

“The first thing we need to determine of course is how far along you are. Are your periods usually regular?”

Emily nodded. “My last one was just before our wedding. So it's been about eight weeks.”

“So this might be a honeymoon baby?” Doctor Arkwright said with a smile. “How romantic.”

Emily blushed.

Doctor Arkwright continued. “The way we work out the due date is to initially take it to be thirty-eighty to forty-two weeks after the end of the last period. So currently we're looking at December eleventh.”

Emily and Daniel looked at each other, their eyes wide. So close to Christmas!

“Then when you have your first sonogram and the baby is measured that can be adjusted slightly,” the doctor added. “Can you tell me what symptoms of pregnancy you've been having and how long for?”

“She was feeling nauseous and faint,” Daniel explained. “From right after the wedding really, wasn’t it?” He looked over at Emily for confirmation.

“I thought it was stress,” she said. “There was a lot going on in our lives at that point of time.”

Doctor Arkwright nodded. “They’re the two most common symptoms to have early on. And often confused with stress. No fainting, though? Just feeling woozy?”

“Yes,” Emily said.

Doctor Arkwright took notes as she spoke. “Good. It’s not dangerous to the baby if you do faint because it’s too small at the moment and in a protective sac of fluid. But for you it can obviously be a bit distressing, particularly if you hit something on the way down. Keep an eye on that going forward. It’s likely to resolve over the next few weeks but for some women the symptoms do persist. If you’re naturally prone to low blood pressure it could continue into the second trimester. So make sure you take it easy. Stand up slowly. Eat regularly. Best to keep a banana in your purse. And a bag of nuts.”

“Sure thing,” Emily said, nodding, already starting to feel a little overwhelmed. She wished she was taking notes and hoped Daniel was committing to memory all the things she was too overwhelmed to absorb.

“Right, shall we take a look at you?” Doctor Arkwright said, standing.

Emily swung her legs round so she was lying flat on the bed.

Daniel stood and hovered beside her. Doctor Arkwright put on some latex gloves.

“I feel like I’ve been abducted by aliens,” Emily said, peering up at her audience.

Daniel laughed.

“Yes, you’ll be prodded and poked more in the next few months than ever before in your life,” Doctor Arkwright said. “By the end you’ll have no qualms about stripping off in front of people. Body hang-ups go completely out the window.”

“I look forward to that time,” Emily said, feeling her cheeks warming with a blush.

Doctor Arkwright checked Emily’s pelvis and abdomen, her hip rotations, and general joint flexibility. She moved her fingers deftly, checking almost every inch of Emily’s body. Emily felt she was a lump of dough being kneaded.

“I’ll order some blood tests,” the doctor explained as she worked. “So we know your type and Rh status. We’ll also check for anemia, certain antibodies, and make sure you’re immune to all the big viruses like chickenpox, rubella, hepatitis.”

Blood tests weren’t exactly Emily’s favorite things in the world. The thought of having so many tests made her feel increasingly anxious.

“This is your first pregnancy, isn’t it, Mrs. Morey?” the doctor asked as she placed a cold stethoscope against Emily’s chest.

Emily nodded. “Yes.”

“Any prior gynecological problems? Abnormal pap results?”

Sexually transmitted infections? Anything like that?"

Emily shook her head and wondered whether it would have been better for Daniel not to have come along to this particular appointment. She'd naively thought such delicate questions wouldn't be asked immediately. She was going to have to get used to revealing everything about her body now. Nothing would be off limits!

Doctor Arkwright removed her stethoscope and slung it back around her neck again.

"Now, because of your advanced maternal age," she explained, her attention drawn back to Emily's abdomen, "it's a little more important for you to take the right vitamins, sleep enough, reduce your stress levels to the absolute minimum. They're all things we would recommend to expectant mothers whatever their age, but for you it's that extra bit important."

"Should we be worried?" Daniel asked. "About Emily's age?"

Emily frowned up at him. With her stomach on display and the both of them looking down at her like a specimen it made her feel vulnerable and somewhat at their mercy. She could cope with the doctor referring to her age, but not Daniel!

Doctor Arkwright looked at Daniel briefly and shook her head. "It's far more common for women to leave starting a family until their late thirties these days and the medical world is catching up. It's not as much an issue as it used to be. Really the main hurdle is fertility, which clearly isn't a problem in this case. There is a marginally higher risk of gestational diabetes, blood

pressure problems, premature birth. But you're in safe hands."

Emily certainly felt like she was in safe hands. She just wished there wasn't so much testing to be done. It all felt a bit impersonal. Clinical. She didn't like just feeling like a baby-making vessel and would be very glad when this initial assessment was over and done with.

Doctor Arkwright peeled off her gloves. "All done. You're in good shape, so nothing of concern there. Please, take a seat and we'll have a quick look at your medical history."

Emily sat up and gave Daniel a weak smile, not quite ready to forgive him for his comments on her advanced age. She rearranged her clothes and slid her shoes back on, then took a seat. Doctor Arkwright washed her hands and then came and sat in her chair, spinning toward her computer. She took a moment to read the screen.

"You have a good clean bill of health," she said, looking through the data. "Scarlet fever in childhood with no lingering aftereffects. Non-smoker, which pleases me greatly. No particular health conditions. Nothing chronic. No ongoing medication use. A slightly higher alcohol rate than I'd like to see, but you'll be completely quitting that for the next few months anyhow." She spun back around and looked at Emily.

"We're both quitting," Emily said.

"I didn't think it would be fair otherwise," Daniel said. "Especially since we own a bar with a cocktail waiter who's second to none!"

Doctor Arkwright smiled. Then she laid her forearms against the table and looked across at Emily, her expression serious.

“Now, this might be a little bit of a delicate thing to discuss, but I couldn’t help noticing that on your registration forms you ticked the box of family history of mental health problems. If you’re comfortable to do so, I’d like you to tell me a little bit more about that history. It’s entirely for your benefit, no one’s judging here, it’s just to make sure we’re keeping an eye on the right sort of things while your hormones are changing throughout the pregnancy.”

Emily clasped her hands in her lap, feeling instantly uncomfortable. Talking about her chaotic upbringing was her least favorite thing to do, especially to a stranger, even if that stranger was a doctor who’d probably heard it all before and just wanted to help.

Daniel reached over and touched Emily’s hand for reassurance. Buoyed by his presence, Emily took a deep breath.

“My father went through a long, long period of depression,” Emily said finally, her voice sounding thin. “For dozens of years. It was following my sister’s death.”

Doctor Arkwright nodded and kept her face neutral as she wrote the information onto her form. “And your mother?”

“My mother?” Emily shook her head. “I don’t even know what’s wrong with her to be honest with you. It could be something psychiatric. But then again she might just be a difficult person.”

“She’s not been assessed or diagnosed with anything?”

Emily shook her head. She was feeling very uncomfortable now. Talking about this stuff always made her feel a bit panicky. But Doctor Arkwright added the information to her forms, acting in no way as if Emily’s admission was anything to worry about.

“And what about yourself?” she said, gently. “Did you ever experience any problems growing up?”

Emily shrugged. “I don’t think so. I mean, I was devastated after Charlotte died. And after my dad...” She stopped speaking to collect her thoughts. After a breath, she started again. “There have been some really trying times in my life. I don’t know how well I dealt with them at the time. It took me years to even deal with it all. Then when I started, it came back to me in sort of scary flashbacks.”

Daniel’s thumb stroked the top of her hand where it was resting. “She would zone out occasionally,” he added. “Sort of space out. But it happens a lot less now.”

Doctor Arkwright remained very professional as they spoke, absorbing Emily’s admissions with nothing more than a sympathetic nod of the head. “It sounds like you may have been experiencing some mild PTSD symptoms,” she said.

Emily felt alarmed. It sounded so dramatic. For her, it had just been something she’d gone through, some kind of natural outcome to touching on the memories she’d closed off for so many years.

“Please, don’t worry,” the doctor reassured her. “It’s far more

common than people believe, particularly when trauma happens in childhood. When we don't have the language to express our emotions or even label them properly, repression becomes a natural defense mechanism. The important thing to note now is that you may be at a slightly higher risk of pre- or postnatal depression or psychosis. Again, it sounds dramatic but it's very well treated these days, through counseling and medication if necessary. As long as we keep an eye on your symptoms there's absolutely nothing to worry about."

Emily nodded and let out her breath. Doctor Arkwright was very reassuring, but at the same time she felt a sense of unpleasant anticipation for what might be in store for her. These things were never talked of. Not amongst her friends, nor her mother's generation. She couldn't help but feel worried about having a higher chance of experiencing something that was so poorly understood.

Doctor Arkwright smiled and handed a glossy folded slip of paper to Emily. "Here's a pamphlet that details nutrition, vitamins, exercise, travel do's and don'ts, et cetera. Take some time to read it and let me know if you have any questions when we next meet. I'll also give you a prescription for prenatal vitamins, which are very important. We'll book a sonogram for four weeks' time, so you can see your baby."

She turned to the computer and logged in an appointment for a scan. Then she turned back. "That's it for now. I promise the follow-ups won't take quite so long."

She stood and offered her hand to Emily to shake. Emily stood and shook the doctor's hand, and Daniel did the same. It felt like the appointment had gone so quickly and was over in a blur, though they'd been there for such a long time. Emily had no idea how much of what she'd just heard she'd managed to absorb. It felt like basically nothing.

They left the doctor's office and walked together out into the bright day.

"Did you take any of that in?" Emily asked Daniel as they strolled to where the car was parked.

"Not really," he confessed. "There was just so much information."

As they walked, Emily studied his face. He looked stressed and she wondered which bit of the appointment specifically had worried him the most. Her age-related health concerns? Her possibly elevated risk of postnatal depression? Or just the fact that he hadn't committed every single one of the doctor's words to memory?

"It's all in the pamphlet," she reassured him. "We can read it over and over again. Every night before bed, if you want."

She laughed, trying to lighten the mood. Though Daniel nodded, he still looked tense, his gaze somewhat far away. Emily wanted to ask him what was going through his mind, to find out what the issue was for certain, but he seemed to have shut down.

She felt her own excitement begin to fade away as a result. Daniel's attitude seemed to be becoming more at odds with her

own. She couldn't see even the smallest flicker of excitement in his eyes. It was just concern, worry, and stress that she saw in his expression.

They got into the truck and drove home in silence.

CHAPTER THREE

Doctor Arkwright's advice for Emily to stay off her feet and reduce her stress levels to the bare minimum went immediately out the window, because Memorial Day weekend arrived all too soon and the inn was packed to the rafters.

Emily hurried down the stairs into the foyer, where guests were milling about in groups. The inn was looking beautiful thanks to Chantelle's decorations. She'd filled the place with flags. Posters for the town parade adorned every wall. It looked set to be the best event yet. Mayor Hansen had really gone above and beyond this year, with an antique fire truck procession, the marching band from the high school, and a twenty-one-gun salute at the end. Emily was glad he'd organized such a great commemoration for the men and women who'd given their lives for the country's freedom.

Lois and Marnie were on the front desk, both looking rushed off their feet as they took calls and answered guest queries. Ever since Bryony's redesign of the website had led to the inn being booked for the entire summer, Emily had had to shuffle things around. Serena wanted less work so she could focus more on her degree, so Emily had promoted Marnie from maid to front of house. Then she'd hired the Magic Elves cleaning company that Amy had sourced for the wedding to fill the void left by Marnie, and had gone on to employ an extra pair of hands in the form

of a porter, a young man named Trent, whose role was to carry bags upstairs for the guests on check in. Despite the hecticness, it looked like the new system was working well. For now, at least.

Emily caught up with Bryony in the guest lounge. Her laptop was resting on her knees, a pile of half drunk cups of coffee stacked on the coffee table before her. Usually there were only ever one or two people in the guest lounge, but today every single table and couch was occupied with people drinking coffee and juice, reading papers, studying maps, and planning their days out.

“I know I say this every time I see you,” Emily said to Bryony as she sat beside her, “but seriously, thank you so much for everything you’ve done for the inn. I’ve never seen it like this.”

Bryony smiled. “No problem. I just can’t wait until you get all the renovation work done for the expansion. It’ll give me a whole load of new coding to do. New forms. New pages.” Her eyes glittered with excitement.

“You really love this stuff, don’t you?” Emily said, feeling baffled herself. She’d worked in marketing for years back in New York City and hated it now with every fiber of her being.

Bryony wiggled her eyebrows. “I *love* it. Plus, I get to see all the mysterious guests who book in. Look at this one.” She swiveled her laptop around to show Emily the accommodation spreadsheet which was automatically populated by website bookings through the magic wizardry of computer code. “The carriage house has been booked out by Mr. X. I’m hoping he’s another Roman Westbrook.”

Emily raised her eyebrows, excited also. “Or a James Bond villain.”

Just then, a group of three men walked into the inn. They were all wearing beige slacks and polo shirts, and had varying shades of gray hair. Emily noticed then that each had a large roll of paper under their arms and realized that they weren’t some kind of traveling barbershop quartet but the architects from Erik & Sons, with their initial sketches for renovating Trevor’s house.

She and Daniel had approached a local family firm, hoping they’d have a more sympathetic approach. As she leaped up now and walked toward them, she realized by their eerily similar appearances that they were the “& Sons” contingent. She shook each of their hands, blinking, feeling like she was looking at the same person three times over.

“We’re triplets,” the man with the lightest gray hair explained. “I’m Wayne. This is Cain. And that’s Shane, the youngest by five minutes.”

“My chances of remembering whose name belongs to who are more or less zero,” Emily confessed.

“We don’t mind,” Wayne Erik continued. “We’ve had fifty-five years of being confused with each other. If we had a problem with it, we probably wouldn’t dress the same.”

He grinned, indicating their matching *Erik & Sons* navy blue polo shirts.

“Please,” Emily said, “let us go and find somewhere quiet where we can spread these out. I know we’re meeting for a tour

of the house later today, but I'm so happy to take a look at these now."

She led them from the bustling foyer and into the empty dining room, whereby the Erik triplets unrolled their sketches onto the large walnut table.

Emily peered down at the designs, one scroll per floor of the house. The plans looked phenomenal, grand and rather exciting. But seeing Trevor's house pared down to lines and measurements on pieces of paper felt so odd to her, so unpleasant and final. She felt herself getting choked up.

"I'm sorry," she stammered, as tears suddenly sprung into her eyes. "The house belonged to my late friend. I still haven't gotten my head around the fact he's gone."

"It was Trevor Mann's house, wasn't it?" Wayne asked, softly.

"Yes," Emily said, dabbing her tears with her shirt sleeve. "Did you know him?"

"Of course," Cain confirmed. "Mr. Mann was on the zoning board so we had a lot of contact with him. He was quite a guy."

Emily could tell from the way he said it that he was being polite about the fact that Trevor was a difficult person to get along with.

"He was a curmudgeonly old so-and-so, I know," Emily said with a wistful smile. "He hated me at first. But we were great friends by the end."

The Erik brothers look at her kindly.

"We'll leave the plans with you," Wayne explained. "Then

we'll talk more when we go through the house later.”

“Thank you,” Emily said, glad that she and Daniel had chosen to go with this firm. That they were local and knew Trevor Mann was immensely reassuring. But something about Wayne Erik's kindness made her tears come more readily. She flushed with embarrassment as she found herself suddenly unable to stop them streaming down her cheeks.

“I'm also pregnant,” she confessed with a shy giggle. “The hormones are making me crazy.”

The Erik triplets reassured her that she had nothing to apologize for. They left the plans with her so she and Daniel could look over them at a less hormonal moment and Emily told them she'd see them later that day.

Just then Chantelle ran into the room. Yvonne must have just dropped her home following her sleep-over with Bailey.

“Mommy!” she cried, running toward Emily and throwing her arms around her neck. She bestowed kisses onto her cheeks. “Wait, why are you crying?” she asked, moving away.

Emily wiped the tears away. “Pregnancy hormones,” she said in a hushed voice. Then she put a finger to her lips.

“Our secret,” Chantelle said with a nod. She jumped up off Emily's lap. “When does the Memorial Day Parade start?”

Emily checked the time. “Not long now. Once Daddy's back from the store we can all go together.”

Chantelle clapped her hands. She loved a parade, and anything where she got to spend time with her friends.

Emily, too, was excited. Not just because she loved the memorial parade, but because Amy was in Sunset Harbor at the moment visiting her new boyfriend, Harry, the younger brother of Daniel's friend George. So far, Amy had kept him completely to herself. Emily was growing increasingly curious about meeting him. In fact, she'd only seen him once, before Amy had revealed they were dating, and just fleetingly. She couldn't even remember what he looked like, other than boyish. Amy was clearly in the beginning throes of lust because she'd been keeping her relationship very private, just as she had done with Fraser. Amy had a habit of not wanting any external sources to influence her relationship decisions. It had taken ages for Emily to get Amy to relent to introducing Harry, reminding Amy that she hadn't let her vet Fraser and that had ended disastrously. Amy had finally agreed that the parade was a suitable place for them to have an actual conversation, and now the time had finally arrived for Emily to meet the man who had managed to change Amy's mind about her little old town so thoroughly. She couldn't wait!

Maybe Harry was Amy's The One?

* * *

As expected, the town was packed with all the locals and many tourists out in force to show their respect to the troops of yore. In fact, Emily was certain she'd never seen Sunset Harbor this busy. It felt as if the place had changed quite a bit in the time

she'd lived here. It wasn't as sleepy anymore.

"Is it me, or are there more people here than usual?" Daniel asked her, as they strolled along together hand in hand.

"I was just thinking the same thing," Emily said, looking about her to see if she could spot Amy and Harry anywhere in the crowd.

Just then, they saw Karen from the convenience store up ahead. They walked toward her and she turned as they drew up to her side. She hugged them all, thrilled to see them as always.

"It's so busy, isn't it?" she exclaimed, echoing their sentiments.

"More so than usual," Emily agreed.

"It's because of Roman Westbrook," Karen said, and she pointed to the other side of the road where the famous singer was waiting to watch the parade. Her eyes sparkled with excitement at the presence of the pop star on their humble streets.

Roman was standing with an entourage, something that he hadn't needed before. Emily realized that someone must have blabbed to the papers about him moving here, and she couldn't help but feel disappointed to know that word had gotten to the press so quickly. He'd been trying to keep his move here a secret to keep his privacy for as long as possible.

Emily, Chantelle, and Daniel all waved at him warmly when he looked over and saw them. Karen's eyes widened.

"You're friends?" she asked.

Emily nodded. "Even famous people chat with their neighbors, you know." Then she added, "I do hope these people

aren't just here to catch a glimpse of Roman. It feels a bit... I don't know... disrespectful... to come to a memorial parade just to catch a glimpse of your favorite singer."

"It's nothing to do with Roman," Cynthia said, turning around from where she stood in front of them. Somehow, despite her neon orange hair, Emily had failed to notice her standing there with her son, Jeremy.

"What's it to do with then?" Emily asked.

"The inn!" Cynthia exclaimed. "Obviously."

Emily shook her head. "I don't think so."

But Cynthia was hearing none of it. "Believe me. After Colin Magnus wrote his article on the inn people have been buzzing about it on all the travel forums. Someone suggested Memorial weekend was a good time to visit because the parade is always so amazing. And, ba-da-boom, this is what you get."

Emily frowned, still unsure that the increase in patrons could be because of her humble inn. It was true that she'd had more bookings thanks to Colin's article. Coupled with Bryony, the marketer extraordinaire, perhaps it *was* conceivable that her inn could make this kind of impact on the town.

Emily let the news sink in and found herself grinning. She was shocked that her little inn could be helping to put Sunset Harbor on the map, but it was a good feeling. She felt proud of her achievements.

Just then, Emily noticed a familiar face in the crowd. It was Amy, looking suave in a casual black ensemble. She was holding

hands with the boyishly good-looking Harry. From a distance they looked like a bit of an odd pair. Amy looked like she'd been lifted straight off the pages of *Vogue* magazine, whereas Harry was dressed more modestly. But he had a film star look about him and Emily could imagine the two of them looking very handsome together in formal attire. Emily was in no doubt that Amy would manage to change his whole sense of fashion within a matter of weeks.

"It's them," she said to Daniel, tugging on his sleeve with excitement.

She felt her stomach flip with anticipation. She wasn't entirely sure why but something felt different this time; the ease with which Amy stood beside him, the display of affection from their simple handholding which was something Amy usually resisted. There was a happiness exuding from Amy that Emily had not noticed ever before. Her excitement at getting to know Harry grew even more.

Just then, Chantelle noticed who Emily had pointed out.

"Amy!" she cried.

Ever since the bachelorette party, Chantelle had decided she liked Amy, and had gotten over their initial rocky introduction when she'd thought Amy and Jayne were New York snobs.

As Chantelle careened toward Amy, Amy turned and bent down just in time to catch Chantelle in her arms. Looking a little surprised, she straightened up and twirled the little girl in a circle, somehow managing to keep her balance in her chic black heels.

Daniel and Emily wended their way through the crowds as Amy popped Chantelle back down on her feet. They stopped beside her and Amy became instantly red.

Emily hugged her friend tightly. Then, as she released her from the embrace, she caught her eye and wiggled her eyebrows.

Amy's blush deepened. "Em, Daniel, this is Harry. Harry, my best friend Emily and her husband, Daniel."

Daniel shook Harry's hand. "We've met before," he explained. "I'm an old friend of George's."

"Of course!" Harry said, his eyes widening with surprise. "But it was a long time ago now."

Daniel nodded. "I spent some years in Tennessee."

Chantelle looked up at Harry and beamed then. "That's where I get my accent from," she said.

Harry smiled at her, seemingly taken by her spirit. Emily noticed his fingers re-entwining with Amy's. She felt a smile tugging at the corner of her lips.

Behind them, the flag parade streamed past. Then the thirty-strong marching band started, blaring out "Hail to the Spirit of Liberty" in trumpets, French horns, and woodwinds. The crowd surged toward the road to get a better look.

"Do you come to the parade often?" Emily asked Harry as people filtered past her. She was eager to know more about him.

"Of course, every year," Harry explained. "We come from military ancestry. Both on our mom's side and on our dad's side. So it means a lot to both George and I."

Emily wanted to speak to him further but the band was fast approaching and the noise was too great. She fell silent and watched them, thinking, as she was here to do, of all the fallen men and women.

At last the band passed, but the noise didn't lessen because hot on their heels came the antique fire truck procession, their bells clanging. It was a long stream of them, not just fire trucks but old military tanks, too, clanking and rattling along the road on caterpillar treads. It was quite a sight to behold. And with the heaving crowds, it felt very loud and chaotic. Emily wondered if her overwhelmed feeling was partly from the pregnancy hormones heightening her senses.

"We have to follow them to the park now," Chantelle said, grabbing Emily's hand. "That's where they're doing the gun salute. Quick! I don't want to miss it!"

She tugged, and Emily followed her. The huge crowd of people who'd been watching streamed into the park. Emily felt like she was in a river of people flowing along the streets, caught in a current. It was a somewhat claustrophobic feeling. The only thing grounding her was Chantelle's hand squeezing hers tightly.

She looked around, searching for Daniel, Amy, and Harry. She caught sight of them being herded along with the flow of people. Harry was looking adoringly at Amy, a protective arm around her shoulders. Her expression was serene, as though she were completely lost in her happiness. Emily smiled again, realizing that Amy was completely smitten. She couldn't wait to

learn more about Harry once the noise and furor had died down.

As the crowds reached the park and dispersed, the others caught up with them. They huddled around the group of military personnel in uniforms, who had their guns pointed to the sky. Emily felt a sudden sense of anxiety at the thought of the loud noise. Though she knew it was perfectly safe she couldn't help but worry now, knowing that it was more than her own safety that mattered. The power of her maternal instinct to protect her unborn child almost took her by surprise.

"Let's stand a little way back," she said aloud, hovering a foot or so behind the crowds, trying to take a step backward.

"But I can't see," Chantelle complained. She bobbed up and down on her tiptoes, frowning, eager to get nearer to the action.

"Daniel, can you take her closer?" Emily asked, finally staggering back enough to be beside the benches. She gripped the back of one to steady herself as a panicky sensation swept through her.

"But I want us to go to the front together," Chantelle said, her voice verging on whining.

Daniel knelt down and looked Chantelle in the eye. Emily overheard him say in a hushed voice, "Remember our secret? Emily needs to be here, at the back. So either you come to the front with just me, or we all stay together. You can climb on the bench or get on my shoulders if you want a better view."

Chantelle wasn't to be convinced. She folded her arms petulantly and pouted.

“I didn’t know the baby meant we wouldn’t be able to have fun anymore,” she grumbled.

Emily tensed. Not because she was worried about Harry and Amy overhearing – she was certain with the volume of chatter they wouldn’t be able to pick Chantelle’s voice out of the crowd – but because she felt bad to have dampened Chantelle’s spirits. She didn’t want there to be any competition or animosity between Chantelle and the new baby. It mattered to her greatly that they had a harmonious family life. She hoped this was just a moment of teething problems, something that wouldn’t grow.

“Chantelle,” Daniel warned, clearly not impressed with her attitude.

Suddenly, the guns started firing. The noise was immense. Emily covered her ears with her hands, alarmed and exhilarated by the sheer volume. The crowd was stunned into silence as the explosive sound cracked through the sky. It felt as if everyone was gasping collectively.

Then the firing stopped and everyone began to clap and cheer.

Amy turned to face them, her eyes bright with exhilaration. “Wow, that was awesome,” she beamed.

Emily nodded, glad to see Amy had enjoyed her small-town parade experience. But she still hadn’t had a chance to speak to Harry and she was desperate to know more about him.

“We should all go and get lunch,” Emily suggested.

Even though Emily was feeling a little nauseous and the idea of lunch made her stomach turn, she didn’t want Amy to hurry

off with Harry and deny her the chance to speak to him properly.

Chantelle cheered up instantly at the suggestion. Everyone agreed it was a good idea.

As they left the crowds behind and ambled slowly along the roads, Emily wondered how well she'd be able to refrain from blurting out the news of her pregnancy to her closest friend. But then she realized that Amy would likely guess all on her own. Not just because she was intuitive but because all it would probably take was for Emily to turn down a glass of wine for her to guess. She felt a sudden sense of excitement as she realized that very soon someone she dearly loved would be party to her news.

She couldn't wait to see Amy's reaction.

CHAPTER FOUR

As part of the Memorial parade, an outside barbecue had been set up, with picnic benches to eat at. Emily thought it a rather fitting test for Amy, who was so used to dining in swanky New York City establishments. But Harry was a local, like Daniel, like she and Chantelle had now become, and he was enthusiastic about the prospect of eating outside. Emily noted the way Amy looked visibly distressed as it dawned on her that she was the odd one out and wouldn't be able to persuade anyone to eat elsewhere.

They took one of the benches at the end of the row, furthest from the busy streets, the music, and celebrations, where it was quieter. Daniel and Harry went off to order them all hot dogs and soda, leaving Chantelle, Amy, and Emily to catch up.

"It's so nice to see you," Emily said to Amy. "And to see you so happy," she added, knowingly.

Amy blushed and replied rather stiltedly, "Yes. Well."

"You fit in with the Sunset Harbor crowd now," Chantelle said with a grin.

Emily smirked. "I agree wholeheartedly. You're right at home here."

Amy's blush deepened. She was clearly very uncomfortable with the whole situation.

Soon, Daniel and Harry returned with the food, both chatting happily like they were old friends. They sat down and handed

everyone a paper plate with a hot dog.

“So Harry,” Emily began, excited to finally be able to query him and get to know him. “What job do you do? Are you in glass restoration like George?”

Out the corner of her eye she noticed Amy’s expression turn to horror. Emily smirked to herself. It was exactly the sort of question Amy had fired at all of her past boyfriends so it seemed only fair that Emily gave her a taste of her own medicine. And anyway, she was genuinely curious. Amy had pretty high standards when it came to the earning potential of her partners. If Harry bucked the trend of being a high-flier, as Emily suspected, it would be even more evidence that Amy was finally properly in love rather than treating her relationships like a business partnership.

“Construction, actually,” Harry explained. “My firm specializes in sprucing up properties. We mainly modernize old houses before selling them.”

“I could’ve done with knowing you a couple years back,” Emily joked, remembering the hard work of getting the inn into shape. “Do you enjoy the work?” she added, although really she wanted to be nosy and find out how much he earned.

“I do, but I’ve been doing it for a while now and I’m getting itchy feet,” Harry said. “I’m hoping to change jobs. I want to be my own employer, open a business.”

Emily was impressed with his ambition. She couldn’t imagine Amy being happy with a construction worker, but she could

certainly see her settling down with an entrepreneur.

“What kind of business?” Daniel asked, curious.

“Well, the dream is to open a restaurant,” Harry said. “I’ve been waiting for the right moment, though. In a place like Sunset Harbor a lot of the business can be seasonal. But things are just starting to change. There are more tourists, and I think we could handle another one.”

Emily’s eyes glittered as she glanced over at Daniel. “Competition,” she joked.

Harry was midway through a mouthful of hot dog. His eyebrows rose as he chewed more hurriedly. He swallowed. “You’re opening a restaurant, too?” he asked, surprised.

Emily dipped the end of her hot dog in a mound of ketchup. “We already serve food at the inn for guests, and the speakeasy is open to the public. But we’re planning to further expand over the summer and have a larger restaurant that serves high-end evening meals, open to the public rather than just guests. Our friends the Bradshaws own the fish restaurant in town so they’re going to give us some advice. I could put you in touch with them if you’d like.”

Harry looked thrilled. “That would be amazing. Thanks.” Then he looked over at Amy. “I didn’t realize your friends would be my business rivals.”

Emily laughed. “Nonsense. I was only joking. We all help each other out here! And now is definitely a good time to open more eateries.”

“You think the town can handle more?” Harry asked, looking genuinely interested in Emily’s take on the subject.

She felt proud to be in a position to be offering advice to others now, when not that long ago she’d been the one needing expertise. “I do,” she said. “And we don’t have to compete. We could work together to make the good folk of Sunset Harbor want to eat out more than once a month! The people around here can be quite humble and dining out a lot seems flashy to them. Together we could turn that around.”

Harry looked more and more interested. Emily felt herself warming to him. He seemed to have real spirit, a sparkle in his eye, a hunger to experience more and reach for the stars. She could see what Amy saw in him – other than his film star good looks and the builder’s physique she presumed he had hidden beneath his shirt. Amy was beaming with pride next to him.

“Here’s an idea,” Daniel said, suddenly alight with enthusiasm. “Maybe you could run our restaurant instead of us employing a manager. Get some experience under your belt for when you decide to go it alone.”

“Daniel,” Emily hissed out the corner of her mouth. “That’s a bit forward.”

But Harry looked delighted. “That would be amazing,” he said. “I’ve been stuck in construction for ages not knowing how to break out, or when to time it, or how to even approach it. If there’s a job for me to move into it wouldn’t be so terrifying!”

“Let’s definitely keep that option open then,” Emily agreed.

She didn't want to rush into anything. They had only just met, after all. And though she felt an immediate friendly connection with Harry she had to keep it at the back of her mind that things might not remain all sunshine and roses between him and Amy forever. What if they had a messy breakup? It would be awful for Amy every time she visited knowing her ex was onsite. Best not to rush into anything, though Emily had a strange feeling in her bones that told her it was a great idea, that Harry had landed in their life at this exact moment for this exact reason.

“Are you looking for investors for your expansion?” Amy asked. “I'm looking to broaden my portfolio and you guys seem like a great bet.”

Emily was shocked by the offer. Though Amy was always offering positions at her business to her friends, she was cautious when it came to mixing friendship and money. She'd been burned in the past when lending to friends and didn't do it often anymore.

Suddenly, Chantelle let out a frustrated groan. “This is *boring!*” she wailed. “Can we please stop talking about business?”

Everyone laughed. Emily nodded to Amy. “Let's discuss it another time.”

Amy smiled. “Sure.”

Emily looked again at Harry. “So did you go to college here in Maine?”

“No, actually I went abroad instead,” Harry said. “I was supposed to spend a month building homes in Ghana but I ended up staying for eight months.”

Emily's eyes widened with surprise. "How fascinating!"

Harry smiled. "It was great. I loved the hands-on work. It was hard going, digging trenches, laying foundations, building tanks for water, but it was so satisfying. And I met so many great people. My parents thought it was a bit of a strange thing to do voluntarily, though. I think they would have preferred that if I wasn't going to college I at least earned some money."

"Do you get on well with your parents? With George?"

Harry nodded. "Oh yeah, we're very close. They can just be a bit traditional sometimes. They wanted us both to go to college, get sensible jobs, marry, have kids. So far neither of us have followed the path they were intending."

Chantelle piped up then. "Well, when you marry Amy they'll get their wish."

Emily laughed loudly. Amy's eyes darted to the table. But Harry took Chantelle's comment in good spirits. Emily found herself liking him more and more. She had no time for men who acted terrified by the very thought of commitment. Harry had definitely passed that initial test with flying colors.

Amy turned to Chantelle, clearly wanting to steer the course of the conversation away from her budding relationship. "Right, it's your turn. What's happening in the world of Chantelle? Any exciting news? Any secrets?"

Chantelle's eyes widened at the mention of the word "secret" and Emily could tell her mind had instantly gone to the pregnancy, which they taken great pains to explain to her was a

secret.

Feeling jovial from the meal, Emily decided that telling Amy wouldn't be such a bad idea. She wiggled her eyebrows at Chantelle.

"I think you can let Amy know about your secret," she said, grinning.

Daniel touched Emily's hand over the table. "You sure?" he queried.

Emily nodded. Amy looked from one to the other, her eyes squinting suspiciously.

"Tell me right now," she demanded. "The anticipation is killing me!"

Chantelle looked like a balloon about to pop with excitement. She gave Daniel and Emily each one last glance for confirmation that she was really allowed to spill the news. When they both nodded, she looked back at Amy, bounced up and down in her seat and squeezed her hands together.

"Mommy's pregnant!" she cried.

Then she instantly clapped her hands over her mouth and looked around to make sure no one else had overheard her exclamation.

Amy's face transformed into an expression of euphoria. "You are? Oh my God! Em!" Then she burst out crying.

Emily was surprised. Amy wasn't one to cry readily. The sight of her so emotional like that made Emily well up as well.

"Don't! You're setting off my hormones again," she

exclaimed.

Amy leapt up from her seat and ran around to Emily, grabbing her in an embrace.

“I’m so happy for you!” she cried.

The two friends hugged tightly. In her peripheral vision, Emily noticed Harry congratulating Daniel with a handshake.

Amy let go and finally composed herself, wiping her tears away. Then she hugged Daniel too.

“Congratulations,” she said. Finally, she sat back down and squeezed Chantelle around the shoulders. “You’re going to be a big sister, huh?”

Chantelle nodded vigorously. “Not until December though, which is forever to wait.”

Amy quickly counted back on her fingers. “December? When did you conceive?”

Emily flushed red. “Not a topic for the dinner table, Ames,” she said.

Amy’s eyes widened and she mouthed, “Honeymoon?”

Emily nodded and turned her gaze down.

“What are you saying?” Chantelle asked, looking between the two women. She looked at Daniel. “Daddy, what are they whispering about?”

Daniel laughed. “Nothing, sweetie. We’ll tell you another time. When you’re a little older.”

Chantelle folded her arms and pouted. Everyone laughed.

“Oh, Em,” Amy gushed. “My cheeks hurt from smiling so

much. Will you let me take you shopping to get a gift for the baby?”

“Now?” Emily asked.

“Yes!” Amy exclaimed. “I’m too excited to wait. I’ll drive us up to Bangor. There is a gorgeous bespoke baby store there. What do you say?”

Emily looked at Daniel and Chantelle. “Do you guys mind?”

“Not at all,” Daniel said. “I’ll take Chantelle home for singing practice.”

He stood then and everyone followed suit.

“Harry, it was great to meet you,” Daniel said, shaking Harry’s hand again. “Let’s stay in touch about the restaurant stuff, okay? Maybe hang out with George sometime. I’ve sworn off alcohol for the duration of Emily’s pregnancy but we could do something else. Do you fish?”

“I love to fish,” Harry said, grinning.

“Great, we’ll go out on my boat sometime,” Daniel told him.

They exchanged numbers, and Emily felt like the two of them in particular had hit it off. It made her so happy to see. Fraser and Daniel were never going to be friends, they were from such different worlds. But with Harry she could easily see the four of them hanging out on the porch, drinking together, enjoying local events with each other. She could suddenly picture the future, with Harry and Amy married, settled in the neighborhood, their kids at the same school as Emily and Daniel’s. It was an awesome thought!

Emily said farewell to Harry and Chantelle, then Amy looped her arm around Emily's and dragged her off to the car, bouncing with every step, exclaiming in every way possible just how happy she was for her friend.

"Can I be godmother?" she asked.

"Maybe, but that wouldn't be fair to Jayne."

"Jayne wouldn't want to be a godmother."

"No, but she'd still kick up a fuss and you know it."

"Fine. In which case, if it's a girl can it be named Amy?"

Emily laughed and shrugged. "We haven't discussed names yet. You do know Daniel gets an equal say. And, *again*, I must stress that Jayne would be livid if I called the baby Amy!"

Amy moved on quickly to her next excited exclamation. "When he or she grows up they can come and intern with me! I'll be cool Aunt Amy with the apartment in New York."

Emily just nodded along to all of her exclamations, overjoyed that Amy was so openly happy for her. They had come so far since that time when Amy had been furious with her for running away from New York City. Now it felt like they were closer than ever, like their bond was unbreakable. Emily just hoped that things went so well with Harry that Amy moved closer. Then, everything truly would be perfect.

CHAPTER FIVE

Typically of Amy, Emily found herself being dragged into the most high-end, luxurious children's store imaginable. It was all beech wood shelving and pastel-colored walls, hundred-dollar quilts and thousand-dollar christening gifts. It stocked everything from clothes and gadgets to baby furniture and ornaments.

"Amy, you can't get me a gift from here," Emily protested, glancing about her at all the beautiful items.

"Why not?" Amy retorted. "My best friend is having a baby. I can spoil you as much as I want. Now do you want something practical like a stroller or something lavish like this organic eco-friendly pacifier? Ooh look!" Amy cried, becoming instantly distracted and hurrying over to another shelf. "Biodegradable diapers." She grabbed a packet and began reading off the back. "Hypo-allergenic materials. Rainforest alliance certified. Low toxins. No dyes."

Emily felt a little overwhelmed by the choices available to her. She hadn't even begun to think about toxins or allergens. She'd hardly even thought about diapers and pacifiers! She'd only just begun to wrap her head around the fact a baby the size of a raspberry was currently growing inside of her.

"How much stuff is this baby going to need?" Emily said, suddenly feeling anxious.

Amy looked at her friend, concerned. "Don't start freaking

out.”

“But I haven’t even begun to work it all out,” Emily replied, hearing her own voice rising with panic.

Amy sprung into action. She scooped an arm around Emily’s shoulder and led her to a plush Scandinavian-style nursing armchair – that cost \$1,400 dollars, Emily read on the sign – and sat her down.

“Let’s make a list,” Amy said. She perched on the matching charcoal footstool opposite Emily and looked up. “There’s nothing like a list for clearing the mind.”

Emily shook her head. “I don’t need a list,” she said with a resigned giggle. “I’m just having a moment. It’s all so new and strange and... unexpected.”

“It wasn’t planned then?” Amy asked, curiously. “The baby, I mean?”

“Nope,” Emily confessed. “But if I *did* conceive on our honeymoon like we all seem to think, then it must have been the night before Daniel told me he wanted to start trying for a baby.” She chewed her lip, remembering how Daniel had booked the entire lighthouse restaurant in order to broach the subject in a beautiful and romantic way, and how terribly that moment had ended for them when she suddenly got cold feet. “Right before I told him I wasn’t ready.”

“Oh...” Amy said, wrinkling her nose. Her voice softened. “You didn’t want this to happen?”

“I did,” Emily said. “I changed my mind a couple of weeks

later. I just needed some time to let it sink in. But I must have already been pregnant by then so I wonder if it was just the hormones changing my mind subliminally. And I think the damage was done by that point, for Daniel, I mean. He seemed glad when I told him I'd changed my mind again but I wonder whether he kept hold of a bit of resentment.”

“The pregnancy isn't quite as happy a surprise for him as it is for you?” Amy asked.

Emily shrugged. She became aware of all the fears she'd been bottling up. “I was the more reticent but now that it's here it feels so perfect and right. But Daniel just seems stressed. Like there's something he's not telling me. I was wondering if it was something to do with how much he missed out on Chantelle's start in life. But he's being typical Daniel about it. Not saying a word. Leaving me to speculate.”

Amy patted Emily's hand. “I'm sorry, Em. That sounds hard. And you could do without that kind of stress right now.”

Emily smiled at her friend. “I actually feel a ton better now I've talked to you about it. It's so nice having you here.” She wiggled her eyebrows. “So, Harry. Do you think this is the real deal?”

Amy blushed as the conversation turned, once again, toward her blossoming romance with Harry.

“It's going really well,” she confessed. “We're so different yet somehow so completely compatible.”

Emily grinned. “I always had a feeling you needed a younger man.”

“Oh, don’t remind me,” Amy said, rolling her eyes. “He’s only five years younger than me but it feels like a whole generation. I’ll mention some pop song that I liked in high school and he’ll tell me he remembers it from when he was ten! I mean he’s still closer to his twenties than his forties.”

“I don’t think thirty-six should be counted as being close to your forties,” Emily said, remembering her own classification as an older mother and the slight risk it posed her. She always felt a little sensitive when people brought up aging, even if accidentally.

“Fine,” Amy said. “But thirty-one sounds like a baby to me! I don’t like to think about it. Me hitting the big four-oh so much sooner than him.”

“You’re thinking that far ahead?” Emily asked, raising her eyebrows.

Amy shrugged. “I guess I am. I can’t help it. We just click. It’s like everything is easy, you know. Even the arguments don’t feel that bad because I just have this sense that we’ll work it out.”

“That’s amazing,” Emily said, smiling to herself. Amy’s description sounded just like her own relationship with Daniel. It wasn’t easy, there were still challenges, but there was a pervading sense that they would make it work no matter what. “But what do you argue about?”

“Time,” Amy said. “Distance. Obviously.”

“Yeah, what’s going to happen with that?” Emily asked. “Do you think you’ll move here? Or Harry to New York City?”

“I don’t know. I’m here for the summer now so I’m just going to think about that. I needed to get out of the city for a bit anyway. I guess I’ll see how I feel about it after having spent a couple of months here. The back and forth wasn’t fun but I wonder if once the initial passion stage dies down a bit the long distance might not be so much of an issue anymore.”

Emily laughed. “It’s so funny hearing you speak like this. There was a point when a weekend was too long for you here.”

Amy looked embarrassed. “Well, it was,” she said defensively. “Back then. Things are different now.”

“You’re in love,” Emily pointed out. “Now you know why I had to stay here.”

Amy nodded reluctantly. She hated being wrong.

Just then, the store woman came over. “I’m sorry, ladies,” she said, “but we’re closing now. Did you want to purchase anything before I shut down the till?”

“No thanks,” Emily said at exactly the same time as Amy said, “Yes.”

Emily looked at her friend, frowning with confusion.

“We’ll have this nursing seat,” Amy said.

“Ames, no way!” Emily cried. “It’s so expensive!”

Amy shook her head. “It’s fine. You deserve it. And it already has significance to us. We had a good heart-to-heart on this very chair. We can’t not take it now that it has such sentimental value.”

Emily held her hands up, relenting. There was no point arguing with Amy over this. Best to just let her friend go all out. Treating

her friends was one of her great pleasures in life after all.

They paid for the chair and loaded it into the back of Amy's car. Emily noticed as she got in the passenger's seat that she had a missed call from the inn. She checked her voicemail. It was Lois.

"Sorry to disturb you, Emily, but the Erik & Sons men are here. They said they had a meeting booked with you. A tour of Trevor's house. Daniel says you have the keys so he can't let them in."

"Oh no!" Emily cried. "Amy, floor it. I'm late for a meeting!"

CHAPTER SIX

The echo inside Trevor's house made Emily shudder. It felt so empty and un-lived in. So devoid of humanness.

Wayne Erik drew up to Emily's side. "It's a beautiful place," he said. "Trevor kept it in great condition."

"It was his summer home for many years before he moved in full time," Emily explained. "That might account for the lack of wear and tear."

That and the fact that Trevor hadn't really had anyone in his life; no family or friends to visit him. He'd rattled around in that big house alone for years. Emily wondered whether her father lived a similar type of existence. Elderly and alone. Maybe he had neighbors who thought he'd been abandoned by his family, who worried about him getting lonely. The thought made her ache inside.

Daniel came up next to her and touched her elbow lightly. "Are you okay?" he asked softly.

Emily nodded. "I just get so sad when I come here," she explained.

Daniel scooped his arm around her shoulder. "I know. It's a good thing that we're transforming it. Although I know it doesn't always feel like we're doing the right thing by stripping Trevor from this place. But you did it with the inn, remember, and that was ultimately the best decision."

“You’re right,” Emily agreed.

They held hands as they walked through the house together with the architects, stopping periodically to study their plans and compare them with the real thing. The Erik brothers had drawn up several options for how to convert the house, depending on how many rooms Emily and Daniel decided on as guest bedrooms, how big they wanted the restaurant and open-plan kitchen area to be, and how much they were willing to spend. The cheapest option involved doing the least amount of work, keeping as many of the original internal walls in place as possible, but Emily was certain she wanted the entirety of the lower floor to be completely open plan, which was only a feature on the most expensive option. From a business plan point of view, they also had to factor in the increase of income from having more rooms to rent out, but Emily didn’t want to just cram in as many as possible. The third floor of the inn already had dozens of smaller, cheaper rooms. Emily wanted this part of the inn to be luxurious, high end, something that would really dazzle visitors.

They stopped in the kitchen and looked over the three plans.

“I want this to be the lower floor,” Emily explained, pointing at Wayne’s creation for the kitchen and restaurant. “But this for the rooms.” She pointed at Cain’s third-floor plan with just three apartment-style rooms that could accommodate families with space for a living room and separate bathroom in each apartment. “I like how you’ve laid them out so that each one has an ocean view.”

Daniel seemed to agree, though Emily noticed his focus was much more on the cost of things. It hadn't escaped his notice that she'd chosen the most expensive downstairs option and the least lucrative upstairs option.

"And what about the second floor?" Wayne Erik asked.

"I can't decide," Emily explained. More bedrooms as per Shane's design? Or more restaurant space as per Wayne's? "What if we were to replicate the third floor on the second?" she said. "A carbon copy?"

Daniel frowned. "But then there would only be six apartments in the whole house," he interjected.

"I know," Emily explained. "But think of it in terms of the revenue from the higher price of the apartments. Right now there's only one place for families to stay, which is the carriage house. But Bryony said there was so much demand coming in from families who want to spend the summer in Sunset Harbor. If we convert this into the family-friendly part of the inn it would be a great selling point. Plus, if we do it this way then every room can be advertised as having an ocean view! That would be an amazing selling point too."

"I can see what you're saying," Daniel said, not sounding even the slightest bit convinced. "But I can't help feeling like that's not the best use of the space."

"We'd only need to have six families each summer to get fully booked," Emily contested.

"We don't want to get fully booked from six families," Daniel

countered. "If there's so much demand, why not double the amount of apartments? Income from twelve families is going to be better than just from six!"

Emily rubbed her forehead. She didn't just want to pack the inn to the brim. And more people traipsing in and out would mean hiring more staff to care for them. They would cause more damage and wear and tear that she'd need to account for. The costs would be eradicated through the amount of cleaning, reupholstering and towel washing alone!

"We can always go back to the drawing board," Wayne said. "Find a compromise that's somewhere between your two ideas."

"Like what?" Emily asked, not sure that there could be a compromise to satisfy both her desire to keep the inn feeling personal while making it as luxurious as possible with Daniel's wish for a more stable income.

"We could make six smaller apartments on the second floor," he said. "Then you can get a range of prices as well."

"But what about the ocean views?" Emily asked. She desperately wanted every room to look out over the gorgeous sea.

"We could try to design them so that as many as possible had a view. But it would be impossible for all of them to. Probably three. Four at the most."

Emily knew that it would make things a little more complicated when it came to the booking forms on the website, but Bryony would probably relish the challenge so that shouldn't be too much of an issue.

Wayne spoke again. "Why don't we create the new designs over the next few days and you can see what you think?"

Emily looked at Daniel for an opinion. He just gave a little shrug. She turned back to Wayne.

"We may as well try some new designs," she said.

"Sure," Wayne replied. "The rest of the work we can get started on right away, though."

"When do you think we'll be able to get all the work done by?" Daniel asked.

Wayne Erik looked down at the plans spread on the table and pondered. "Considering we're going to redraw this floor," he said, pointing at the second floor, "we're probably looking at Labor Day for the whole thing to be complete."

"That soon?" Emily asked, surprised. She'd been expecting years of work.

"Yes, for this place," Wayne explained. "For the spa over at the inn it may take a little longer as you'll need different constructors in there. Pool specialists and the like."

Emily had quite forgotten about Chantelle's spa plan to transform the empty old swimming pool. She realized then that they hadn't yet looked at the brothers' options for converting that place

"Can we look over those designs now?" Emily asked.

"Of course," Wayne said.

"We should fetch Chantelle," Emily said to Daniel. "It was her idea, she should be involved."

They left Trevor's house and collected Chantelle from the inn. Then they all went into the dark, unused outhouse that stood on the inn's grounds. It was cold inside, despite the warm weather, dark and filled with shadows. Emily was glad for the sensation of Chantelle's warm hand in hers, and drew comfort from it.

The brothers produced their plans for Emily, Chantelle, and Daniel to consider. The most impressive (and, once again, the most expensive) was to convert the space into a part indoor and part outdoor spa, overlooking the ocean. The barn area in that specific design would have two floors, a spiral staircase connecting the two, and the top floor containing an infinity pool with views of the oceans.

"I can't resist the staircase," Emily said. She'd wanted one ever since she'd set eyes on the yacht club's.

Daniel grew animated then. "We could design it. The team at Jack Cooper's, I mean. We've done spiral staircases before and it would help keep costs down. In fact"—he looked again at the plans and Wayne's lightly scribbled notes—"we could do this paneling work here as well. The changing area doors. The reception desk."

He looked excited by the prospect and Emily was glad to see that glint in his eye once more. He'd seemed so stressed recently it was good to just see him enthusiastic again.

"And if we hire Jack Cooper's for the woodwork then I'll be onsite, closer to home," he added. "I can project manage the whole thing."

“I like the sound of that,” Emily said, thinking of the baby and how much more relaxed she felt knowing Daniel was close by as opposed to the other side of town. Not that she was anticipating going into labor anytime soon!

Chantelle nodded her agreement. “It would make it even more special to know you’d made some of it yourself,” she said.

With the decision made, they bade farewell to the architects from Erik & Sons and went back to the inn. As they crossed the lawn, Emily was happy listening to Chantelle and Daniel’s merry chatter and all their grand ideas. But as they went, Emily couldn’t help notice the disparity between how excited Daniel seemed about the renovation work in comparison to how stressed and muted he seemed about the baby.

When they reached the inn, Emily was so wrapped up in her thoughts she’d become completely distracted. Her main focus in life at the moment was the baby; it was the main source of her excitement, the thing that she thought of last thing at night and first thing in the morning. But she felt like that wasn’t the case for Daniel. He seemed more enthusiastic about making a wooden spiral staircase!

“I think I’m going to head upstairs for a rest,” Emily said, wanting to excuse herself and take some time to sit with her thoughts alone.

She went up to her room and sat on her vanity stool, staring at her reflection in the mirror. Why was Daniel behaving this way? Amy had acted a hundred times more enthusiastic when

she'd told her. Amy had wanted to instantly run out and buy things for the nursery, but Daniel hadn't even mentioned all the things they would need for the baby. Even if he went into his practical, logical, sensible mode and started researching strollers and car seats that would be better than the overwhelmed and slightly stressed state he seemed to be in.

As she mulled on her thoughts, Emily realized then that the only people other than immediate family who even knew about the baby were Amy and Harry. She'd told a friend but hadn't yet told the person she wanted to the most, the person whose reaction would be the best of all: her dad.

She rummaged in her drawer for some paper and pen. Knowing full well that her father had next to no connection to the internet, and only a pay phone in the village which would be difficult to coordinate, she knew that writing to him would be the quickest way to get him the news. Plus, there was something extra special about writing an old-school letter. He could keep it and cherish it for years to come. Holding onto scraps of paper was one of her father's great pleasures, after all.

She began to write.

Dear Dad,

I miss you so much! The house just isn't the same without you. Coming home after the honeymoon was bittersweet because I knew that you wouldn't be here. I hope we can fly out to England to see you this summer as you suggested. I know Chantelle would love

that. She's pining for her Papa Roy!

My reason for writing to you is actually two-fold. I'm not just writing to tell you how much I miss having you around, but because I also have some exciting news. Daniel and I have recently discovered that I'm pregnant! Can you believe it? You're going to be a granddad! The due date has been set for early December.

Of course I would prefer to have been able to tell you my news in person but I thought this would be the best way to get the news to you. Plus you can frame this letter or add it to your hoards of paper, which I know you're fond of doing!

I look forward to getting your return letter. Or, even better, you could invest in a cell phone and then we could FaceTime! Video calls, Dad, can you believe it? It's like we're living in the future!

All my love, always, forever,

Emily Jane xx

She read the letter again, hoping Roy would appreciate her slightly cheeky tone and not be offended by it, then folded it up and put it in an envelope.

Just then, Emily heard a knock on the door. She turned to see Chantelle poking her head around.

“What’s wrong, Mommy?” she asked. “You’ve been up here for ages.”

Emily gestured for her to enter and the little girl walked inside, padding across the rug with soft footsteps. When she reached Emily she folded into her open arms.

“Nothing’s wrong,” Emily told the little girl. “I just wanted to write a letter to Papa Roy to tell him about the baby.” She held up the now sealed envelope. “Would you like to come and mail this with me?”

Chantelle nodded her agreement. Emily handed her the envelope, which she clutched in her hand, then they left Emily’s room together. They went downstairs and out the front door, then headed along the lane slowly toward the mailbox, hand in hand. Emily noticed that Chantelle was awfully quiet as they went. Usually the child never stopped talking, but she hadn’t uttered a word since they’d left the B&B.

“Are you okay, love?” Emily asked, giving her hand a little squeeze.

Chantelle looked up at her sadly, her other hand tightly clutching the envelope. “I miss Papa Roy,” she said.

“I do too,” Emily replied wistfully.

“Doesn’t Papa Roy have a phone we can call him on?” Chantelle asked. “We could do a FaceTime call?”

Emily laughed and tapped the envelope. “I asked him the very same thing in that letter,” she said. But despite her attempt to lighten the mood, she couldn’t help but share in Chantelle’s disappointment. Getting a cell phone was the last thing she could imagine her father doing.

“He did say he might get a phone,” Chantelle said. “Remember?”

Emily did. Just before they’d left for Martha’s Vineyard. She’d

been wishing him goodbye, something she hadn't had the chance to do since the age of fifteen, and he'd joked that he might get a phone to keep in better contact. At the time she'd felt filled with hope. Not that he'd get a phone but that he would remain in regular contact. Sadly, it didn't seem to be panning out that way. If he couldn't stay in letter touch, what chance was there of him breaking with the habit of a lifetime and getting a phone!

"I'm going to pray that he does get one," Chantelle said affirmatively. "And that we get to FaceTime each other."

Emily nodded, hiding the grief that was creeping up inside of her. "I think that's a very good idea," she told the child.

Chantelle closed her eyes and Emily watched, her heart swelling, as the girl's lips moved in silent prayer. Then she opened her eyes and grinned. "Amen."

They reached the mailbox and Emily helped Chantelle put the letter inside. As they headed back to the house, Emily heard an incoming text message on her cell. She instantly thought of her father. Perhaps Chantelle's prayer had been answered already!

But when she pulled her phone out of her pocket she was surprised to see that the name on the screen was Roman Westbrook.

Emily felt a jolt of shock. She didn't want to act star-struck around Roman at all. He'd made it very clear how important his privacy was, how much he appreciated being respected in Sunset Harbor. It was among his reasons for wanting to stay in contact with Emily and the rest of the family after checking out. But

she also couldn't quite get her head around the fact that *Roman Westbrook*, famous singer, mega superstar, was a contact in her phone!

She opened the message and read it in her head, then exclaimed aloud.

"What is it?" Chantelle asked quizzically.

"Roman's bought his house," Emily said to Chantelle. "The one in Sunset Harbor."

"Cool," Chantelle said. "Does that mean we can do a welcome party? Take him a gift basket?"

Chantelle loved making up packages for the neighbors. She'd created several care packages for Trevor when he'd still been alive.

"He wants us to come over for a dinner party," Emily told the child.

Chantelle looked excited and clapped her hands. "When? When?"

"Today!" Emily exclaimed. "Quick, go and put on a nice dress and wash your face. I'll get Daddy!"

They hurried back to the inn, both as excited as each other that they would be spending the evening with none other than Roman Westbrook.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Of course Roman's house was in the nicest part of Sunset Harbor. Emily felt a little embarrassed as they pulled onto the curved driveway in Daniel's beat-up, rattling pickup truck.

"We really need a new car," she said, looking out the passenger's side window and up at the huge, vast mansion.

Chantelle whistled. "This place is awesome," she said.

There were pots containing styled topiary, creeping ivy and roses up the walls, a *fountain*, and Roman's cream-colored Rolls Royce parked to one side.

The family got out of the pickup truck and went to the large, carved front door. Chantelle rang the bell and a few seconds later it was opened by a humongous security man wearing a dark suit and a very stern expression.

"I'm Emily Morey," Emily explained. "This is my husband, Daniel, and our daughter, Chantelle."

The man didn't say a word but he nodded as though he'd been briefed on their arrival and stepped aside. They went through the door and into the foyer, which had vast ceilings and pristine tiled floors. The decor inside was far more modern than the outside would have suggested.

They were greeted next by a maid, a young East Asian woman dressed casually in a summer dress. She took their coats and slung them over her arm.

“Can I show you through to the drawing room? Mr. Westbrook won’t be a moment.”

They followed her into a large room with wooden floors, a bright red leather couch, a large patterned rug, a glass coffee table and matching glass liquor cabinet, and a very large abstract painting taking up one wall. Emily caught Daniel’s eye and they exchanged a glance.

“Chantelle, don’t touch anything,” Emily said.

Chantelle sat on the couch, her feet not reaching the floor, hands clasped in her lap, looking very intimidated by the surrounding room.

“This is insane,” Emily whispered to Daniel.

They sat also, the brand new couch squeaky under their weight.

“It looked like an old money mansion from the outside,” Daniel said, looking around. “But he must have had the place gutted and completely redone on the inside.”

Just then, they saw Roman descending the staircase, wearing his trademark fedora.

“You made it!” he grinned, bouncing exuberantly into the room.

They stood and he skidded to a halt, arms wide for hugs. Emily felt stilted embracing Roman Westbrook. She still didn’t know him very well, even though he’d gone all out by pulling some strings so they could have the fanciest hotel room on the whole of Martha’s Vineyard.

“How was the honeymoon?” he asked Emily as he let her go.

“It was wonderful,” Emily said.

Roman shook Daniel’s hand. “And your jazz band?” he asked.

“They’re still doing the wedding circuit?”

“They play at the inn once a week now,” Daniel confirmed.

Emily was surprised that Roman could remember so much about them. She was rather touched.

“Chantelle,” Roman said, turning to the little girl. “How’s my little star in the making?”

Chantelle blushed and replied shyly, “Good, thanks.”

“Want to see the recording studio before dinner?” he asked.

Wide-eyed, Chantelle looked at Daniel and Emily for confirmation. They nodded.

“Okay,” Chantelle said in a timid voice. It wasn’t often that she was bashful these days.

Roman led his guests out of the room and into the foyer, then to a large door. He opened it to reveal a staircase heading downstairs.

“It’s in the basement, of course,” he said.

They all went down. It was very dark and because of the sound-canceling walls their footsteps were almost completely muffled. It was quite a strange experience, Emily thought. Like walking into the vacuum of deep space.

The recording studio was brand new, state of the art. The walls were dark and a large glass partition separated the recording area from the mixing area. There was an old-school 1940s

microphone inside the recording room, a grand piano, a large double bass and a concert-sized harp. On the producer's side of the glass was the soundboard containing a million knobs and buttons and screens that indicated noise levels. Chantelle's mouth dropped open in awe.

“I'm going to speak to your school about having a choir on the background of my charity Christmas single,” Roman said. “What do you think about that?”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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