

# DAY ONE

## *Sabrina*

Sometimes I wonder why I get up so early. My bed is warm and comfy, and outside is cold and piled with snow. Snow makes me grumble. It's nice to look at, don't get me wrong, but driving in the confounded stuff makes me want to move to Bermuda. Then again, I'm not a huge fan of sand either.

Hmm, a jungle then, perhaps? Nope, too many bugs.

I get myself ready for the day and head out, bundled and booted to battle Silverton's pre-winter chill. It's not even the middle of November yet. Maybe the weather will calm down and give us another few days of autumn. One can only hope.

The silence that greets me when I unlock the door of my bakery and wander to the kitchen in the back, flipping on lights and inhaling the lingering scent of deliciousness, is something I cherish. Not sure why. Perhaps it's just the knowledge that this place is *mine* and has been for the past two and a half years. I could do my morning routine with my eyes closed, which sometimes happens when I'm extra sleepy, and by the time the ovens are preheating and I've got dough and batter in my industrial mixers, I know exactly why I do this five times a week.

I simply love baking.

It started in middle school. One of my friends was planning her thirteenth birthday party, and I volunteered to make her cake. As a child, I watched Grandma Nadine create magic in her kitchen, as well as helped my mom bake stuff plenty of times for the B&B, so I figured it would be a cake walk. I roll my eyes at myself. I dislike puns almost as much as I dislike snow.

Anyway, the cake was a huge hit, and I was soon baking sweet treats for people all over town for all sorts of occasions. By the time I graduated high

school, I'd saved enough money to rent some equipment and lease a small space downtown. The Sweet Treats Bakery was born and has since grown into what it is today. A flourishing business with catering options. Like for a certain wedding taking place in less than two weeks.

Tuesday is sourdough day—at least the baking part, since I get things ready the night before. In a couple of hours, I'll have sandwich loaves, breadsticks, bread bowls, and dinner rolls. While the fermented dough rests one last time and I wait for my two assistants to show up, I peruse my stack of recipe cards. I'll be providing the wedding cake and a dessert of my choosing for my brother, Gavin, and his fiancée, Noelle—who asked me to be her maid of honor. I'm excited for all of it. I could do the tried and true brownie or chocolate chip cookie, but I'm itching to do something extra special. Something unexpected.

I set aside a few potential winners. My hands pause as one particular card from the stack makes an appearance. I'm not sure why I still have it since I vowed to never make it again. My eyes drift to the trash can a few steps away. I hesitate. It's my grandma's recipe, so I have strong sentimental ties to it, but...

It's also *his* favorite.

At least it was five years ago.

*Grandma Nadine's Extra Fluffy Cinnamon Rolls.*

When he broke my heart, I vowed to never touch the recipe again, and I haven't until right now.

I stare at the list of ingredients and instructions. I know them all by heart, even after all these years. How many times did I make them, just so I could watch him devour two or three in one sitting? And then hear him tell me they were the best he'd ever had. He made that declaration every time, as if each new batch was better than the previous, even though they were exactly the same.

But then he left and never responded to my letter.

Now *that's* something I'm definitely not going to think about.

As much as I want to crumple the card and toss it away, I can't.

Grandma's recipe deserves more respect than that. So, I settle for hiding it at the bottom of the pile and continue my search for the perfect dessert for Gavin and Noelle's perfect wedding. Just like that, I put cinnamon rolls and my brother's best friend—the man who demolished my poor teenage heart—out of my mind.

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## *Conrad*

The drive from the airport to my parents' house was a nightmare. I forgot how much I hate driving in snow. And Silverton must have ticked off Old Man Winter, because he paid them a visit in the worst way.

And it's not even officially winter yet.

Nostalgia hits me hard as I pull into the driveway. I'm home, at least until I find a place of my own. I don't have a garage door remote—Mom promised to have one waiting for me on the kitchen counter—so I have to get out and punch in the code like a loser. Grumbling at the frigid temperature, I dash back to my SUV and drive forward.

The house is quiet when I slip inside to the mudroom, dragging two suitcases and a duffle bag with me. They hold pretty much my entire life from the past five years, during which I served in the Army. And now I'm back, with little time to pause and take a breath. I glance at the clock hanging on the wall. Eight o'clock. I've got one hour until I need to show up at the Silverton police station.

Getting my new job took some finagling, and not just to ensure it was ready for my arrival. There was tons of red tape to cut through. I didn't attend the police academy in the civilian world, but my service in the Army's

Military Police was enough for Captain Gusson to not only hire me but bump me up to detective without batting an eye. And my injury wasn't a dealbreaker for him, even if it was for the Corps. An honorable discharge after only five years was not how I planned to make my exit from service. It was supposed to be my career for at least a decade. Maybe longer.

Despite that disappointment, I'm not unhappy to be back in Silverton. I love this town and plenty of the people here. My parents, for one, even if they're not here to greet me. They're currently on a cruise in Mexico. They wanted to cancel so they could be here for my return, but I insisted they go ahead with their plans. I have plenty of friends I'm eager to see. One in particular.

Is it too early to call him?

I shrug, snatching my phone from my pocket and punching his reserved speed-dial button, labeled as G-Money. Yeah, I chose it when I was a teen and have no intention of changing it.

The phone rings a few times.

"Hey, Con, did you make it home?" Gavin asks.

"Just got here," I say, smiling. It's good to hear his voice. We've mostly communicated by email or text during my time away. "How's the B&B?"

"Everything's great," he says. "The past couple months have been booked solid, and the rest of the year looks just as good. I'm a natural at this owner thing."

I laugh. "Are you sure it's not your fiancée who deserves the credit? I can't wait to meet her."

"She *is* pretty incredible. I'm stoked you'll be here for the wedding. Having my best friend be my best man makes everything perfect. When do you start work?"

"In less than an hour, but I'll leave soon so I have plenty of time to deal with this crappy weather." I glance out the window and scowl. Another

round of snowflakes is just starting to fall, as if purposely mocking me. “Once I know my schedule, I’ll stop by to see you and meet Noelle.”

“Sounds good.” He pauses. “I know it’s not how you wanted things to happen, Conrad, but I’m glad you’re home. I’ve missed my best bud.”

A lump nearly clogs my throat, though I’m not sure if it’s because of my unplanned circumstances or his sincerity. Either way, I put my emotions aside. “Thanks, man. See you soon.”

I don’t have time to unpack, so I just carry my stuff up to my room and hop in the shower. Ten minutes later, I’m dried and dressed in slacks, a dress shirt, and a solid blue tie. My badge and department-issued firearm will be waiting for me at the station. I have two guns of my own; each is in a separate locked container in my closet. I’ll put one in my vehicle at some point. Gathering everything else I need, I leave the house, psyching myself up for an unpleasant drive to downtown.

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I know it’s common, and even expected, for “the new guy” to get razzed, but I’d rather get tased than go back on the road so soon. The snowfall is getting heavier, and my mood sinks with it. But the guys demanded their morning sugar rush, so here I am pulling into the parking lot of a bakery. One that wasn’t here when I left home.

The Sweet Treat Bakery.

Catchy name.

A bell jingles above me as I hustle inside. I pause to shake snow from my coat, trying not to make too many puddles as I wipe my feet on the entryway rug. My attention is quickly seized by the amazing smell. I have no idea what’s causing it—other than usual bakery items—but I want to bottle it and wear it like cologne.

The next thing I notice is the undeniable fact that I'm going to be waiting a while. The place is packed. Two people—a lanky man and an older lady with bright pink hair—are behind the counter's long display case, taking orders and payments. I recognize the lady and almost laugh. Mrs Stella Crandle. She used to babysit me. I watch the two of them move about, impressed by their quickness, while still giving each customer their attention. I can already see why this place is popular.

The line in front of me steadily shrinks, making the wait time fly by. My turn comes, and the lanky man greets me with a smile.

“Welcome to The Sweet Treat Bakery, detective,” he says, his gaze dipping to the badge hanging from my neck. “You here for the usual?”

I wasn't told to order anything specific, so I say, “Yes, please.”

The man, whose name tag reads *Rick*, grabs a box and starts loading it with the most delectable-looking pastries and baked goods I've ever seen. I want to eat one of each, even if the gorgefest will send me into a sugar coma. I scan the trays, a frown gradually appearing on my face. “Do you have cinnamon rolls?”

Rick looks up from his task. “No, sorry.”

Seriously? What kind of bakery doesn't have cinnamon rolls? I mean, everything else looks fantastic, but I thought cinnamon rolls were the reason bakeries existed. My shoulders sag in disappointment. Rick finishes up, taking the well-laden box to one of the cash registers.

“Hey, Rick,” calls out a voice from somewhere unseen—probably the kitchen in the back. “Are we low on anything?”

“Eclairs and sourdough rolls,” he replies as he enters my order and then looks up. “That will be thirty-nine fifty-five.”

I hand over my credit card just as a door to my right swings open and a young woman walks through, carrying two trays. I stare at her, forcing my mouth to not drop open like a trapdoor.

She's petite with short brown hair, creamy skin, and sky-blue eyes. But a different word describes her even better. Gorgeous. My hands feel numb, and I think something is wrong with my pulse. It's much too fast. She sets the trays on a ledge behind the glass case and shifts her attention to me. Her eyes widen. We stare at each other, the room becoming electrified. Is she having the same reaction I am? Does she feel the same intensity? Who is she? Something about her is familiar, but, having been away for five years, my memory comes up with nothing. And unlike Rick, she isn't wearing a name tag.

I clear my throat. "Hey, good morning." My voice comes out a bit strangled, and I cringe. Could I sound any more lame? I steady my breath and offer a winning smile. "I'm Detective Conrad Goodwin, the newest addition to the Silverton PD."

Her expression suddenly becomes stony, rivaling the frostiness of the weather. The change doesn't make her any less beautiful, but I'm taken aback. Does she not like policemen?

Breaking her gaze from mine, she turns to Rick. "Did you include an apple fritter for Captain Gusson?"

"Of course," he says, handing my card back to me. I take it, my eyes still on the mystery woman, who seems to dislike me a great deal. I don't enjoy being disliked, especially when I don't know *why*. And even more so when the one doing the disliking is a living representation of my dream girl.

Her eyes dart to me again before she busies herself refilling the eclairs and rolls, effectively dismissing me.

I want to ask questions—too many to count—but the customer behind me steps up, and I have no choice but to move out of the way. I'll have to come back. I *will* come back. I head for the door, glancing over my shoulder, finding her watching me. She quickly turns her head, but I notice a pink tint infusing her cheeks.

Interesting.

Maybe she doesn't dislike me after all.

Back at the station, the box of treats is well received and emptied in seconds, leaving me with nothing but a lingering image of the woman's beautiful face. I have to find out who she is. Taking a seat at my desk, I turn to my neighbor, a middle-aged guy named Bruce Waters, who may or may not have caught Gavin and me toilet-papering the high school the day after graduation. I wonder if he remembers. "Hey, Bruce, do you know everyone who works at the bakery?"

He glances at me, chewing the last bite of his poppyseed muffin. "Probably."

A man of many words. I temper my impatience. "I met Rick," I say. "Nice guy. Mrs Crandle was there too. And there was another woman, with short brown hair."

Bruce's forehead creases. "You mean the owner?"

She's the owner? Wow, good for her. I automatically nod.

He brushes crumbs off his shirt. "Who also happens to be the sister of your fellow vandalizer from high school."

I flinch. I guess he does remember. Wait, did he say sister? I lean back in my chair. Sabrina? No way. Heat crawls up my neck, making my tie feel much too tight. How in the world did I not realize it was her? Well, because the last time I saw her, she was sixteen and still mostly a child. She's definitely not a child anymore. I almost curse. This isn't good. I *cannot* be attracted to my best friend's sister. Gavin is the nicest guy I know, but

He.

Will.

Kill.

Me.

Despite my inner turmoil, I think I know why she seemed so upset with me. Who could blame her? I'd feel bad if someone I knew all through childhood didn't recognize me either.



I have to see her again. To apologize. That's my reason to go back now.  
A sourness settles in my gut. That can be the *only* reason.