

Chapter 1

Who knows why people do what they do, or how a split-second decision can change a life, or, in my case, several lives. No clue, hint, or sixth sense forewarned me of the impending events that day. Or, so I thought.

I woke up early Saturday morning, looking forward to a girls' day out with my best friend, Liz: a day planned to pamper ourselves with haircuts, manicures, pedicures, and massages and then finishing with dinner and hours of nonstop catching up and reminiscing.

The sky was dull and gloomy, typical for February in Ohio, with temperatures below freezing, and a thick blanket of heavy snow covering the ground. In spite of the cold and depressing weather, my spirits were still high.

My daughters were in the bathroom with me, where I was trying to finish my hair and make-up before dropping them off at my parents' house for the day. Jenna, who was ten, was helping get my almost three-year-old daughter, Mia, ready. I had just sprayed my hair one last time when Aaron, my husband of eleven years, walked in with the collar of his long sleeve white dress shirt straight up and a black and pink striped tie in his hand.

"Can you help me with this?" he asked, looking frustrated by his failed attempts.

"Sure," I said as I took the tie from his hand and wrapped it around his neck. Crossing one end over the other and then through the loop, I tightened the knot and then neatly laid his collar down. Looking up at him, I couldn't help but think how handsome he was. Standing at six feet tall, his cute baby face was framed with a head full of brown hair, deep blue eyes, and a beautiful smile. He was an attorney at Turner & Turner Law Firm in town, and I loved when he dressed in his black suit.

"Thank you so much," he said, putting on his suit jacket. "Do you want me to drop the girls off at your mom and dad's on my way to the office?"

"What time is your meeting?"

"In fifteen minutes."

"No, that's okay. Liz won't be here for another half hour, and I'm almost done getting ready."

"Okay. Do you have any idea what time you'll get back?"

"I'm guessing around eight o'clock."

"Sounds good. See you then," he said, giving me a quick kiss on the cheek. "You two have fun spending the night at Grandma and Grandpa's, and I'll see you first thing tomorrow morning."

"Bye, Daddy!"

Forty-five minutes later, I pulled back into my driveway after dropping the girls off at my parents to find Liz patiently waiting for me. I parked in the garage and then walked up to her car.

"Sorry," I said, sitting down in the passenger seat. "Will I ever be on time for anything?"

"Well, since you haven't been on time once during your thirty-four years of life, I highly doubt you are going to start now," she smiled.

"Good point. I even bought a book on how to never be late again, but I keep forgetting to read it."

The spa was in Dayton, a city that was an hour away, which gave us plenty of time to get caught up on the way. Liz and I had been best friends since we were in diapers. We are only fifteen days apart in age and are still as close now as we were in school. Her oldest daughter, Abbey, is the same age as Jenna, and then she has another daughter, Rachael, and twin sons, Jason and Jacob. She was filling me in on how everyone in her family was doing when she brought up Jenna.

“I can’t get over how tall she has gotten.”

“I know. She’s almost as tall as I am. I bet by the time she’s in junior high, I’ll be looking up to her.”

“Kate, you’re only five feet, two inches. You look up to everybody.”

“Actually, I’m five feet, two inches and A HALF, and on a good hair and shoe day, I’m five feet, four,” I laughed.

We talked a little more about the kids before the subject changed to work. We lived in Versailles, a small rural town, where we both grew up and graduated from high school together. Liz was a guidance counselor there, and she was talking about a new scheduling program they were trying to implement.

“Oh, and before I forget,” she said, her eyes lighting up, “Mrs. Lynn is retiring at the end of the school year. You should apply for her job.”

Mrs. Lynn was our art teacher when we were in high school. She was a fantastic teacher and was the one who inspired me to become an art teacher myself. I taught at Russia Schools, the same school I started at right after college, and it was only ten minutes from home.

“You know it would be nice to teach in Versailles, but I don’t think I could leave my students.”

“That would be hard but think of how much fun it would be if we worked together.”

“I know, but I’d be afraid we would get into trouble like we did when we were in school.”

“So true! Well, give it some thought. They just accepted her resignation, and I don’t think they have started interviewing yet.”

“Okay,” I said, leaning back onto the head rest. Looking over, I checked out Liz’s shoulder-length hair, which she would either wear straight or curly, depending on her mood that day. At one time, she had colored it dark brown, which made her blues eyes really stand out, but she has been blondish-brown for a while now. My hair style, on the other hand, had been the same forever - shoulder-length blonde bob.

“This cold weather has really put me in a blah mood lately,” I sighed. “I’m almost tempted to color my hair dark brown to spice things up a bit.”

She crinkled her nose up at me, obviously not liking my new hairdo idea.

“This winter has been a depressing one, but don’t you think coloring your hair dark, when you have been a blonde your whole life, is a little drastic?”

“You’re probably right. I guess I was thinking about it because both Kellie and Kristie colored their hair dark brown, and they look great.”

Kellie was my older sister and Kristie was my younger one, and all three of us were blondes, just like our mom.

“I saw Kristie’s hair, and I really like that color on her. I didn’t realize Kellie colored hers too.”

“Yeah, they both dyed their hair around the same time. It was funny because right after that, Dad made a comment about how he USED to have three blonde daughters. Then he looked at me like ‘now don’t you go doing the same thing.’”

Knowing my dad, Liz started to laugh. “I can so hear your dad saying that. Well, if you want my personal opinion, I love you as a blonde, and that messy flip thing you do makes you look so young and chic,” she kidded, emphasizing the last word and fluttering her eyelashes.

Our laughter was interrupted by her cell phone.

“Hi, Dan! He did what? Is he okay? I’ll be home as soon as I can.”

“What’s going on?” I asked the second she hung up.

“That was Dan, and he thinks Jacob might have broken his arm. He’s on his way to the emergency room right now.”

“Oh no! How did he do that?”

“He was trying to climb to the top of Jason’s bunk bed and fell.”

“That’s awful.”

“I know. I could hear him in the background crying ‘I want Mommy,’” she sadly sighed. “Dan said he has everything under control and that we should still do our girls’ day, but I don’t think I can. Do you mind if we reschedule?”

“No, not at all.”

Her tense shoulders relaxed and her blue eyes softened with relief. “Thank you so much.”

A few minutes later, she had her car turned around and we were heading back home to Versailles.

Chapter 2

It was a little before noon when we pulled back into my driveway. I thought about calling Aaron to tell him I was home, but decided to wait until later. The meeting with the partners at his law firm was supposed to be most of the day, and I didn't want to bother him.

Digging my house key out of my purse, I let myself in our front door and glanced through the mail first before heading upstairs to change into some comfortable clothes. When I got to the top of the stairs, I heard Aaron's voice.

He must have gotten home early from his meeting, I thought as I walked toward our bedroom.

The door was slightly open, and I could see him standing by our bedroom window. He had his back to me and was talking on his cell phone.

"Of course, I want to see you too, but I don't think now is the time." He paused before going on. "Please don't say that. You know I care for you, but I love Kate, and I can't keep doing this to her."

My heart stopped, and everything seemed to be in slow motion as I tried to register what I had just heard. It felt like my feet were being pulled out from underneath me as I fell against the wall. Aaron turned around and as soon as he saw me, his face went pale. My insides were shaking uncontrollably, and I felt like I was going to throw up. I don't know why, but for some reason I turned and ran down the stairs. Before I got to the kitchen, he was behind me and had my arm.

"Please, Kate, let me explain," he pleaded.

"Let go of me!" I yelled, yanking my arm away from him.

Running into the garage, I got into my car and with trembling hands locked the doors. Aaron was yelling my name and trying to open the driver's door as I squealed my tires backing out. The last thing I saw, before racing down our street, was Aaron standing in the middle of our driveway watching me drive away.

I was so shaken up that I could hardly drive. As soon as I got out of town, I pulled into a driveway of an abandoned farm house and got out of my car. The cold air filled my lungs as I tried to catch my breath. All of these crazy thoughts kept running through my head. *Who was he talking to? Is he having an affair? No, there's no way he would ever do that to me. But why would he say he needed to quit lying to me? Oh my gosh, he had to be talking to another woman!* I dropped to my knees in the wet slushy snow and began to cry.

I drove around aimlessly for the next two hours before mustering enough courage to go home and confront him. The house was dark and it looked like he wasn't there.

Are you kidding me?! These last two hours have been nothing but pure hell and he's not even home?! I angrily thought.

As I sat on the living room couch waiting for him, my anger got the best of me. There were so many looming questions, and I needed answers now. I paced the floors to calm myself down, but that didn't work. I literally felt like I was losing my mind. One minute, I wanted to hit something, and then the next minute I wanted to cry. I couldn't take it anymore. On impulse, I ran into our

bedroom and began going through his drawers, searching for anything that would help unlock the mystery of what was going on.

I was not a jealous or angry person and rarely lost my temper. Tonight was a different story. I threw all of his clothes from the drawers onto the floor and then ripped his shirts and pants off the hangers from the closet, going through each and every pocket, but finding nothing. I hunted through the vanity in our bathroom, but there wasn't a trace of anything in there either.

Running back downstairs to his office, I frantically searched through the files. Nothing stood out to me until I came across our cell phone bill from last month. My eyes raced over the numbers to see if there were any that showed up more than the others. The number 584-1212 was on there almost daily in January.

Maybe it's a client?!

Nervously, I went back to the file for December's bill. Scanning over it, 584-1212 was nowhere to be found. A small amount of relief came over me, but I still wasn't satisfied. Pulling out October and November's bill, I examined them for that number again, which to my dismay, I found.

My hands shook as I wrote down every date, time, and length of the calls. Then there, in front of my own two eyes, was the proof that since October, minus the month of December, Aaron and whoever this number belonged to talked at least three to four times weekly and for long periods of time. I felt as if I could get sick when I discovered this. Not wanting to, but knowing I had to, I picked up my home phone, hit *67 so my name and number wouldn't show up, and called the number. There were a couple of rings before a woman answered.

"Hello," she said in a cheerful voice.

"Is...is Julie there?" I asked, trying to sound as casual as possible.

"I'm sorry. You must have the wrong number."

"But isn't this 584-1212?"

"Yes, it is, but there is no Julie at this number."

"I work for the utility company, and I was given this name and number for a service call. May I ask what your name is?"

"My name is Angie Sims, and there is nothing wrong with our utilities, so I am sure you were given the wrong number."

"I...I apologize for calling you. Thank you for your time," I choked out, ending the call.

This can't be really happening. He's been talking to Angie? Her name replayed over and over again in my mind to the point where my breaths started to come quick and fast, and I felt like I was hyperventilating. I sunk to the ground and started to cry. There was now no doubt in my mind that he was having an affair and of all people, it was with his old high school girlfriend, Angie.

"Kate! Kate!" I heard from the living room. It was Aaron and it sounded as if he was running from room to room looking for me.

"Thank God you're okay," he said when he found me. When he noticed the cell phone bill gripped tightly in my hand, all of the color from his face vanished.

"How could you do this to me?" I sobbed, hurt and angry.

"I'm so sorry. I swear I never meant to hurt you," he cried as he knelt down and touched my arm. I jerked it away from him, and he backed away with a scared look on his face.

"How can you say that? Of course, I would get hurt by you sleeping with Angie!"

"I didn't sleep with her. I stopped before it got that far," he blurted out.

The second the words left his mouth, he stuttered around trying to recover from what he had just confessed.

His words pained me beyond belief. "Get out!"

He didn't budge.

"Get out!" I screamed this time.

We had never raised our voices to each other, and my angry tone scared him. Finally, after a moment of hesitation, he left. When the front door closed, I lost control of my emotions. I cried until I couldn't cry anymore. I wanted so badly to call Liz or one of my sisters, but I couldn't. My head and heart were in too much shock to do anything at the moment.

The house was completely dark. Feeling frail and weak, I made my way to the living room and sunk onto the couch. For the next couple of hours, I did nothing but stare at the ceiling trying to figure out where I went wrong in my marriage to make my husband want to be with another woman. He and I had been together since I was fifteen years old and never would I have imagined that Aaron, of all people, would ever do something like this.

Chapter 3 - Summer of 1988

“Hey there!” I heard from behind me as someone tapped me on my shoulder.

It was the summer before my sophomore year of high school, and I was at an open-air dance with my girlfriends. The dance, which was basically a concert in the park, was filled with many kids from our town and surrounding towns. A local band was on stage singing, and we girls were off to the side of the crowd listening to them. They were almost done playing for the night, and we were savoring every last second of their awesome show.

I turned around to see who had tapped me. Standing there with a smile on his face was Aaron Turner, a guy in my older sister Kellie’s grade. Trying not to be too obvious, I looked behind me to make sure it was me he was actually talking to.

“Hi,” I replied, still convinced he must have mistaken me for someone else.

“Are you having fun tonight?” he asked.

“Ah, yes. How about you?” I was still puzzled as to why he was striking up a conversation with me, of all people.

“Yes, I am.” He paused. “You’re Kellie’s younger sister, Kate, right?”

“Ah, yes,” I repeated, sounding like a foolish little girl.

“I’m Aaron Turner, a classmate of Kellie’s.”

I couldn’t believe he was actually introducing himself as if I didn’t know who he was. He was only one of the most popular and hottest guys in our school, and every girl in a five grade radius wanted to date him. Unfortunately, though, he had a girlfriend.

“Didn’t you play on the varsity softball team this year?”

“Yes, I did.”

“I watched a couple of your games and thought you did a great job at short stop. Aren’t you only going to be a sophomore?”

Oh my gosh! He knows my name AND what grade I’m in. Wow! This is so cool!

“Yes, I am. You played varsity baseball, right?” The instant those words left my mouth, I felt like an idiot.

Duh, you big dummy. Of course, he’s on the varsity team. He’s one of the best baseball players in our school’s history AND he’s going to be a senior.

By this point, I was ready to just walk away from him before I made a bigger idiot of myself, but he continued to talk to me like he hadn’t noticed my blubbing.

“I hope I’m not being too forward, but I was wondering if you would like to go out on a date with me tomorrow night.”

My jaw dropped to the ground, and I stared at him in disbelief. “You what?”

A smile came to his face. “I know we don’t know each other, but I’d really like to take you out on a date and get to know you.”

“But aren’t you dating Angie Sims?”

This time he was the one caught off guard. “Actually, we broke up.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know that.”

“No need to apologize. It wasn’t a messy break-up or anything, and we’re still friends. We decided we wanted to enjoy our senior year of high school and not let each other influence what we wanted to do after graduation. But anyway,” he continued, obviously not wanting to talk about his ex-girlfriend, “Would you be interested in going out with me tomorrow night?”

“Yes, I would like that very much,” I answered as casually as I could.

“Awesome. How does seven o’clock sound?”

“That works for me.”

“You live on Center Street, right?”

“Yes, the fourth house from the post office.”

“I’ll see you then.” Leaning over, he gave me a hug. “It was nice talking to you tonight.”

“You too,” I said as the butterflies in my stomach went crazy.

After walking away from him, I met up with my friends, who had all scattered like mice the second he and I began talking.

“Aaron Turner just asked me out on a date!” I squealed.

“Oh my gosh!” Liz shrieked.

The walk to Liz’s mom’s car consisted of six fifteen-year-old high school girls giggling and talking nonstop about how “Kate Stewart is the luckiest girl in the world!”

“He’s going to be here in three hours, and I’m so nervous I could puke,” I told my thirteen-year-old sister, Kristie. We were in our bedroom, and she was lying on her bed reading a book while I was rummaging through our closet for something to wear.

“You’ll be fine,” she said matter-of-factly.

“What if he thought I was somebody else and asked me out on accident?”

Looking up from her book, she rolled her eyes at me and then went back to reading again.

What does she know? She’s just a kid. I thought to myself as I pulled a couple of shirts off of the hangers to try on.

“How’s it going, hot stuff?” I heard from behind me.

Kellie, my older sister, came strutting into our bedroom as if she owned it. Plopping down on my bed, she began sorting through the outfits I had chosen so far.

“Is this what you’re wearing?” The right side of her lip was turned up in disgust.

“Yes. Why? Do you think I’ll look stupid?”

“No, but it looks more like something you’d wear to a softball game. Hang on a minute,” she said, leaving the room.

A couple of minutes later, she returned with a tan skirt, black satin tank top, and a pair of cute black flip flops.

“Here. Try these on.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

Kellie was crazy protective over her clothes, and even though she and I were about the same size, she was stingy about sharing anything with me.

“You have a date with Aaron Turner, and I have a reputation to uphold here. I can’t have my younger sister looking like a slob.”

“Thanks!” I excitedly said as I tried on the outfit.

Three hours and a gallon of Aqua Net hairspray later, I nervously awaited for Aaron’s arrival. Kellie was out with her boyfriend, Kristie was in our room reading again, and Mom and Dad were

in the living room watching television, while I stared nonstop at myself in the mirror above the couch.

My shoulder-length blonde curly hair and big bangs were puffed out as big as I could get them, and my blue eyes looked nice with the touch of pink eye shadow and black mascara. I opened my mouth to make sure I didn't have any of the light pink lipstick on my newly "braces free" smile.

"How do I look?"

"You look beautiful," Mom reassured me.

Just then a car pulled into our driveway.

"Oh my gosh! He's here!" The nervousness I had been feeling all day doubled.

A second later, the doorbell rang. Dad got up from his chair to let him in.

I had been on a couple "friend" dates with guys in my grade, but we always went out with a group of friends. This was the first time I would be on a date by myself and this realization made me even more nervous.

"Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Stewart. I'm Aaron Turner." He reached his hand out to Mom and Dad.

"It's so nice to meet you," Mom said with an approving smile.

"Hi, Kate," he said shyly to me.

"Hi," I said, taking in how handsome he was. He had on khaki shorts and a white short-sleeve collared shirt, and his brown hair was combed neatly off to the side.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I thought we would go out to eat first and then see Dirty Dancing at the movie theater, if that's okay with you."

"Yes, that would be fun."

"It was great meeting you two," he said to Mom and Dad.

"You too. Have fun and make sure you're home by midnight."

"Okay, we will." I waved goodbye to them and then followed Aaron out the front door.

"It sure is a gorgeous night," he said as we walked towards his white Ford Taurus.

"Yes, it is," I responded, privately wondering how many times I had already said the word "yes" to him.

"Your chariot awaits," he said in a charming voice as he opened the passenger door for me.

"Why thank you!"

"Are you nervous?" he asked once he got in the driver's seat.

"A little."

"Me too."

"I have to admit that when you first started talking to me last night, I thought you had mistaken me for someone else."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because you are the hottest and most popular senior guy in our school, and I'm only going to be a sophomore."

He busted out laughing, and I was instantly embarrassed by my blunt and stupid comment.

"Sorry for what I just said."

"Don't be. I like the idea that you think I am "hot", and if it matters, I think you're one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen."

I blushed at his compliment.

We arrived at the restaurant, and our nonstop conversation continued throughout the meal.

“So where do you want to go to college?” I asked as I nibbled on my onion ring.

“Ohio Northern to be a lawyer, and after I graduate, I want to work for my dad and grandpa’s law firm here in town. How about you?”

“I really want to be an interior decorator or an art teacher.”

“I’ve noticed your artwork in the display cases at school. You’re very talented.”

“You’re not a creeper, are you?”

He laughed. “It kind of looks that way, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, but that’s okay, I like it,” I grinned.

“I know I mentioned us watching a movie, but would you be up for going to my grandparents’ house instead? They have this little gazebo in their backyard, and ever since I was little I have loved to lie on the ground next to it and stare up at the stars. Tonight the sky is full of them.”

Feeling like I could trust being alone with him, I agreed to go.

His grandparents lived in a nice section of town, and when we pulled into their driveway I was in awe of how beautiful their home was. It was a large two-story brick colonial house with a two-car attached garage. Aaron took my hand as we made our way in the dark to the back of the house.

“Shouldn’t you let them know we are here?” I asked.

“Nah, they’re probably in bed sleeping by now.”

We rounded the side of the house, and when we reached the back, my breath was taken away. Gorgeous mounds of flowers decorated the yard and there was a stone sidewalk leading to a pretty gazebo. Aaron grabbed a blanket that was lying on a bench and unfolded it on the ground. Taking my hand, he pulled me down beside him. I was a little nervous wondering if he wanted to do more than just talk, but that feeling quickly faded as he started pointing to the millions of stars up above.

“I like to see how many different crazy things I can come up with for the stars. Like over there, doesn’t it look like an ice cream cone?”

Staring in the direction his finger was pointing, I tried to envision an ice cream cone. To my surprise, I could see it.

“Yeah, I see it. That’s so cool. You know, me and my sisters do this, but with clouds.”

“You have another sister?”

“Yep, Kristie. She’s two years younger than me. How about you? Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

“I have a sister, Carey, who’s two years older than me. She’s going to Ohio State to become an engineer.”

“Are you two close?”

“Very. She has been home for the summer and it’s been great. I love Mom and Dad, but it’s not the same when she’s gone.”

“What are your parents like?” I then asked.

“Dad is laid back and doesn’t get excited about anything whereas Mom is bold and very to the point. How about your parents?”

“Both of my parents are laid back. I think Dad was a bit of a hellion in his day, but then he had three daughters so that mellowed him out, and my mom is just plain wonderful. Now is this your mom’s parents’ house or your dad’s?”

“My dad’s. Their names are Gene and Dorothy and they’re so cool. There was this one time when Grandpa Gene took me fishing…” he reminisced.

For the next couple of hours, we held hands and told each other everything we thought there was to know about us. Finally, looking down at his watch, he sat up.

“Oh, wow, it’s almost midnight. I need to get you home.”

My spirits were crushed. I was having so much fun being with him, and I didn’t want the night to end.

“I had a great time tonight,” he said after he helped me up from the ground.

“Me too.”

“Would you want to go out again?”

“Definitely.”

We stood there inches apart from each other, both feeling the anticipation of what was to come.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked.

Out of nowhere, my palms were sweaty and these weird thoughts popped into my head. Does my breath smell like onion rings? Is he going to French kiss or just regular kiss me? Are we going to make out?

“Yes,” I answered instead.

He leaned over and touched my lips with his. His gentle and sweet kiss made sparks fly throughout my entire body.

Wow! He is a good kisser, I thought to myself.

We kissed for what felt like forever, which was only minutes, before he pulled away.

“I should get you home.”

“Okay,” I answered, feeling very disappointed.

Taking my hand, we made our way back to his car. “Every Sunday we come here for brunch. Would you like to come with me tomorrow?”

“You want to introduce me to your family already?”

“I know it’s probably too soon, but I really like you, and I had a great time tonight. I told you things I’ve never told anybody before. You’re so easy to talk to, and I would love to take you out on a million more dates, so I can get to know you even more.”

“Then in that case, I would love to go with you tomorrow.”

“Great. I’ll pick you up after church.”

There were no lights on inside my house when we got there, so I assumed Mom and Dad were in bed. Standing on the front porch, I nervously began wondering again what he wanted to do next.

“This was by far the best date I’ve ever been on.”

“Me too,” I said shyly.

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you then.”

Seconds of an awkward silence passed before he leaned over and gently kissed me on the cheek. My heart did a flip-flop.

“Thanks for a great night,” he said and then walked back to his car.

“No, thank you for the greatest night of my life,” I said as I watched him drive away.

The next day Aaron introduced me to his family, and they were absolutely fantastic. I clicked with all of them. Even though he said he wanted to be single so he could enjoy his senior year, he and I began dating each other seriously after that. Let’s just say that my sophomore year of high school was the best year of my life and consisted of nothing but Aaron. We were inseparable and did absolutely everything together. Life was wonderful, but as the school year ended and summer turned to fall, it was time for him to leave for college.

"I know Ohio Northern is only two hours away, but it's not going to be the same when you're gone," I cried one night as he and I were lying on the blanket by the gazebo.

"It's going to be hard, but we'll get through this. I will come home as often as I can, and on the weekends I can't, you can drive up to see me."

"I'm going to miss you so much," I said as the tears came harder.

"Hey, come here," he said, pulling me to him. "I love you, and we're going to be with each other for the rest of our lives. Before you know it, I'll be an attorney, and you'll be an art teacher, and we're going to have six, seven, ten kids and live happily ever after."

His words still didn't make me feel better.

"Kate, please don't cry. You're going to make me cry," he said, bringing me even closer to him.

Being that near to him and dreading him leaving, I began kissing him as passionately as a sixteen-year old could kiss. His kisses got more intense too, and before I knew it, we were undressing each other. I had to have him, and I had to have him now!

"Aaron, I want to be with you. I need you!"

His kisses abruptly stopped.

"Kate, no, we can't do this."

Devastated by his words, I sat straight up. "Why? Don't you love me? Don't you want to be with me anymore?"

"No, it's not that. I love you so much, but you're only sixteen years old, and when we do make love for the first time, I want it to be when we are both ready."

I looked the other way. *I'm not too young!* I thought to myself.

"Kate, please don't be mad at me," he said, but I still wouldn't look at him.

"I'm not mad at you. It's just that I love you so much, and I don't want to you to leave."

"I don't want to leave either," he said, bringing me back down to him on the blanket.

I nestled closer to him and squeezed my eyes shut, tears streaming out of them one by one. Eventually, I stopped pouting, even though I was still upset. So, our last night together was spent in a tight embrace under the dark starry night filled with the pain of him leaving, the dread of not seeing him every day, and the bleeding of my broken heart.

The first week after he had left for college was absolutely awful, to say the least. I didn't know it was possible to cry so many tears, but it was, and I did.

"Kate, I know your heart is broken, but he's just two hours away at college, and you'll see him in a couple of days," Dad said to me.

Aaron left on Sunday and it was only the Wednesday after when my dad finally sat me down to have a good talking with.

"You don't understand!" Burying my face into my hands, I began to cry again.

"Kathleen Marie!"

Uh oh!

When Dad used my full first name AND middle name that meant I crossed the line.

Looking up, I knew by the irritated look in his eyes that he had it with my over-dramatization, so I wiped my eyes and decided to quit my sniffling around like a baby.

"Why don't you go wash your face, and I'll take the whole family out to eat."

"Okay," I said, getting up from the kitchen table.

As I was walking out of the kitchen, I overheard Dad tell Mom, "I'll never understand girls. Kellie has been at college for two weeks now, and she hasn't said one word about missing her."

Mom's laughter ran throughout the entire house.

“Aaron!” I excitedly squealed.

Wednesday turned into Thursday, and Thursday FINALLY turned into Friday. I had been sitting on our front porch ever since I had gotten home from school waiting on my *Knight in Shining Armor* to come and rescue me. When I noticed the white Ford Taurus driving down our street, I jumped up from the front porch and began running towards it. Aaron barely had the car parked, and I already had his door opened. He seemed more excited than I was to finally be together again.

“I missed you so much!” he said as he tightened his embrace around me and whirled me around in a circle.

“I missed you too!” I said.

“I love you so much!” he said in between the nonstop kisses.

“I love you so much too!”

Our weekend together was wonderful, and when he left on Sunday to go back to college, it wasn't as painful as the weekend before because I knew I would see him soon. Since I was only a junior in high school, Mom and Dad wouldn't let me spend the weekend at Ohio Northern by myself. The weekends Aaron didn't come home, Kellie would take me up there to see him. She and I stayed with one of her high school friends, who also went to school there. We would hang out with Aaron and his friends the entire weekend, which was wonderful!

While most kids our age were having sex, Aaron and I were still not. Other than the one night when I almost caved into the desperation of him leaving for college, we decided to wait for when we were both completely ready to give ourselves to each other. We kissed a lot, and many times that got pretty heated, but he would always stop before we went too far. Most of my girlfriends were surprised we hadn't had sex yet, but I didn't care or let it influence our decision to wait. We knew we would marry one day and be with each other for the rest of our lives, so we felt there was no need to rush into anything.

Soon, before we knew it, the weeks turned into months and the months turned into years, and I graduated from high school and was ready to embark on my own college adventure.

It was June 1st and my eighteenth birthday. The weekend was busy with all of my friends' graduation parties, and Aaron and I had just left Liz's house.

“I have a surprise for you,” he said with a grin when we were in his car on our way home.

“What is it?” I asked intrigued.

“You'll see.”

A few minutes later, we were pulling onto his grandparents' street. My curiosity was getting the best of me as we parked the car and tiptoed to the backyard. We rounded the corner and in front of me was our blanket laid out neatly on the grass with a dozen candles circling it.

“When? How?” I asked, wondering when he would have found the time to come do this considering we were with each other the entire evening.

“I left Liz's party about ten minutes before I knew we were going to leave to come and set this up.”

“What about Grandma and Grandpa?”

“They take their hearing aids out when they go to bed. They'll never know we were even here,” he kidded.

Standing in front of me, he brought me to him for a kiss. “Happy birthday.”

“Thank you,” I said, pulling him even closer inhaling the heavenly scent of his cologne.

Our kiss went on forever, and I cherished every second of it. I loved him so much and it was wonderful being with him. I slowly slid my hands down to his pants and started to unzip them.

He stopped me. "Are you sure you are ready for this?"

I nodded my head "yes."

Taking my hand, we made our way to the blanket where he gently laid me on my back and began kissing my lips first, then my eyes, cheeks, ears, and neck.

"I love you so much," he whispered softly before unbuttoning my shirt. I pulled his shirt up over his head and within seconds our naked bodies were one. He held my hand the entire time and showered me with gentle kisses and many "I love you's", and when we were done, we laid wrapped in each other's arms savoring our first time of becoming one. It was the sweetest, most touching moment of my life.

But now, all of these years later, as I lie here, I wonder how something so sweet and sacred could be the exact thing that he almost did with another woman. Again, tears burned my eyes over the thought of him kissing Angie. Just thinking about it made me feel very disgusted with myself. I couldn't get into the shower quick enough. Turning the water on as hot as it would get, I scrubbed my entire body as if it had been invaded.

With my hair soaking wet and the towel wrapped around me, I went to the medicine cabinet to take some sleeping pills. For just a split second, I had an urge to take the entire bottle, but I quickly snapped myself out of it and forgot about such an absurd idea.