



Forever (A Temptation Novel Book 3)

By Karen Ann Hopkins

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All I want is my happily-ever-after.

That's all I've wanted since meeting Noah Miller.

From the day we met, the world has tried to keep Noah and me from being together, but now that I'm carrying his child, no one will be able to tear us apart. Or so I hope. But Noah and I have made some mistakes along the way, and the consequences are impacting the people we love. Worse, there's a storm on the horizon, and it's sure to cause serious devastation.

If we can get through this, we'll finally be Rose and Noah—a family, forever.

But first we have to survive the road ahead. And happily-ever-after is a long way off.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

A master of lighthearted love stories, bestselling author Rachel Van Dyken has seen her books appear on national bestseller lists including the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and USA Today. A devoted lover of Starbucks, Swedish Fish, and The Bachelor, Rachel lives in Idaho with her husband, son, and two boxers.

No Bio

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Noah

It was dark except for the light slicing through the gaps in the barn boards. The silence made my skin crawl, and I shook the feeling away. I took a deep breath. Leaning back against the stall, I closed my eyes, and a picture of Rose immediately appeared.

She sat alone on her bed. Her head was bowed and her shoulders jerked with rocking movements. When she lifted her face, her cheeks were wet. The same moon that sprayed soft light into her bedroom was the one that lit the barnyard beyond the door. I wanted to go to her, gather her up in my arms and tell her that everything was all right. The pain of knowing that I couldn't hold her stabbed my chest.

Was it just my imagination that she was crying this night? I had no way of knowing; we were still being kept apart. Would it ever end? Was a time of peace and acceptance in our lives possible? Rose needed me. I could feel it in my bones, but I couldn't be with her—at least not yet.

Elijah Schwartz's voice hissed into the quiet air, snapping my eyes wide open.

"This is unacceptable, Amos. I only allowed my eldest daughter, Constance, to become betrothed to your son, because of your promise that his association with the English girl was over. Now, you're telling me that he wants to break off the engagement, only weeks before the joining? You can't be serious."

To Father's credit, his voice came out restrained and sure. As my head turned to him, he said, "Things have changed. I feel terrible that Constance will be hurt by the breakup, but the consequences if Noah went through with the wedding would be a greater travesty. He is in love with another girl."

The three long strides that Elijah took toward me brought me off the hay bale and into a standing position right quick. The older man looked at me with a tight frown.

His gray eyes glittered dangerously when he raised his finger to my face and said, "You are making a mistake, boy. Not only will your life with an outsider be filled with pain, lies and deceit, you have created a rift with me and my kin. Mark my words there will be no peace in your life with this decision."

Elijah stormed to the doorway. His eldest sons, Paul and Micah, were fast on his heels. Paul made a huffing noise and ignored me as he followed his father, but Micah took the time to meet my gaze. He frowned and shook his head sadly, and I quickly searched my memories for the reason for his distress.

I suddenly understood. The numerous times that I'd spotted Sarah lingering in the kitchen or barnyard while Micah was a few feet away finally made sense. But confusion peppered the realization. I thought Sarah had been moving in the direction of courting Edwin. It showed how out of the loop I'd become that I had no idea what was going on with my own sister.

As Elijah was pushing the door open, Bishop Abram caught his arm in a loose grip.

"Those are harsh words, Elijah. It's not with malicious intent that Noah has done this. Rose's family manipulated the younger boy to write a letter convincing the Millers that she was leaving on her own accord, but that wasn't the truth of it."

"Do you think that matters to me? My daughter will be humiliated. Our family will be made a laughingstock before the community." Elijah stood up straighter before passing his gaze between Bishop Abram and Father. "The acts of this boy—" he paused and pointed at me "-will not be ignored by our people."

When Elijah disappeared into the night with his sons in tow, the barn became quiet once again. With a groan, I dropped to the hay bale and rubbed my face vigorously.

"What a mess of things I've made," I mumbled into my hands.

Bishop Abram sighed and sat down beside me in a smoother movement than my own. He placed his hand on my knee and said, "Yes, a storm is brewing on the horizon. Elijah won't let the matter rest. He is a prideful and stubborn man. Any difficulties we've had dealing with Mervin Weaver will be mild in comparison to what the Schwartzes will bring down upon us."

"Yet he's only lived within our community for a few months. Perhaps you're overestimating his influence," Father suggested, rubbing his beard thoughtfully.

Bishop Abram shook his head before raising his gaze. "Don't take that man lightly, Amos. He's already been talking with the other men in the church with the desire to take a place as their minister. He may be new to us, but he's strong-willed and intelligent. I have no doubt the matter will go before the church, regardless of my wishes."

A chill passed over me at his words.

Rose's reputation would forever be clouded within the community if she was with child. Elijah would use it against us...and my entire family. If Rose and I could hold on for a while longer, she'd be old enough to marry me without her father's approval. Then we could begin our lives unsullied.

With a sudden change of heart, darkness settled over my spirit. I said a silent prayer that Rose wasn't pregnant.

Role

I was glad they couldn't see the fresh tears on my cheeks. They'd been so good putting up with me the past

few days- I didn't want them to think I was turning into a sputtering fool again. I had to be strong.

"What are you thinking, Rose?" Summer's voice was soft and muffled. She must be leaning against Sam's chest, but the way I was resting on the bed in Aunt Debbie's guest room, I couldn't see them on the floor, and I didn't even have the energy to turn my head to look their way.

"Everything...and nothing at all." I sighed and dropped my head on the pillow.

"God, please tell me you've changed your mind," Sam said.

His rough words made me shiver. He was becoming irritated again. Things were always so cut-and-dry with him. Couldn't he understand where I was coming from?

"No, Sam, I've made up my mind."

"You just keep making dumb decisions-why won't you ever listen to the voice of reason and good sense?" Sam's voice rose with each word.

"Shhh, your aunt will hear, and that's the last thing we need right now," Summer chastised. She pulled away from Sam and climbed on the bed beside me. "We've gone over it a million times. This is the best plan for now."

Even in the semidarkness I could see Sam's head jerking back and forth. "I don't agree. As much as I hate the guy, he should know what he did to Rose. She shouldn't have to deal with it by herself."

"I'm not alone. I have you guys," I piped up.

"And, Sam, it's only for a few weeks. Really, you're making more drama than necessary." Summer said it quietly and slowly enough that I was betting Sam wouldn't argue.

But I was wrong.

"Dad should at least know. This is serious business-" his hand waved into the air at me "-she needs to see a doctor."

"Women have been having babies forever, a few weeks won't make a difference," Summer said with a shrug.

"We aren't even certain she's pregnant, though."

"Don't be dumb. She took five prego tests. She is, and that's the end of it."

Sam muttered under his breath, "Damn, females are diabolical."

I heard him loud and clear, though...and I was suddenly afraid.

Sarah

Glancing sideways, I quickly looked back into the laundry basket and blushed. Micah had been watching me. Oh, goodness, what should I do?

Trying to ignore what my eyes had just told me, I reached into the basket and pulled out a pair of pants still heavy with dampness. Snapping them on to the line, I nearly jumped out of my skin when Micah spoke close behind me.

"Would you like some help with that?"

His words were fuzzy in my mind, and his face blurred for a second. Did the brown-haired boy with the prettiest green eyes I'd ever seen just ask me if I needed help hanging the laundry? Surely, I must be dreaming.

Coming to my senses as quickly as I could, I looked around for anyone watching before facing Micah.

"Uh, no...but it sure is nice of you to offer-none of my brothers ever have," I said, turning back to the work.

As much as I wanted his company, I wished he'd leave. If Father or Mother caught him talking to me, I'd be in trouble for sure. Especially with everything so mixed up with our families and all. Oh, if only Noah had never gotten involved with Constance. He hadn't taken my advice, and now we all were paying the price--especially me.

Micah chuckled softly and said, "My mother and sisters trained me well." He paused and took a wet work shirt from the pile and began hanging it. "Actually, I don't mind helping you at all."

I quickly grabbed the garment from his hands and tugged. "You mustn't do that. Someone might see, and then questions will be raised."

Micah was strong, and he wouldn't let go. He pulled the shirt back and argued, "There is nothing wrong with me assisting you. I hardly see why anyone would complain."

Nearly frantic, I glanced around and yanked hard. The rip was loud, and I didn't need to see the shirt to know a seam had split. The material came loose from his hands, and I stepped back.

My cheeks felt warm when I said, "Now look what you've gone and done. You're supposed to be building a fence with Peter. And with all the trouble brewing, you should be happy that Father invited you to do so."

Micah must have lost his mind, I thought, when he came forward and whispered close to my face, "If you hadn't refused my help, that wouldn't have happened. Besides, the only reason my father allowed me to come over here at all was to spy."

I felt light-headed and ignored the possibility of others watching us.

"What are you talking about?"

Micah did a quick scan of the area and said, "I shouldn't have said anything, but I don't guess you'll tell anyone. You used to talk to me and smile sometimes, and now you won't even glance my way. Is it because of your brother and my sister?"

Sighing, I said, "Of course, silly. I'm not sure why we became friends, but the things that your father has said about Noah and my family have made it impossible for our friendship to continue. It wasn't proper, anyway. I'm going to begin courting Edwin."

His hand shot out and grabbed my arm. The heavy feel of it made the blood drain from my face. "What...?"

"Are you crazy, Sarah? You don't even like him."

"Course I do. And who are you to say so?"

Micah leaned in and said with a sureness that made me believe him, "'Cause you like me, that's why. Things will settle down soon between our families. Don't do something that we'll both regret."

He left me and went back to the fence across the yard. A part of me wanted him to come back, but the other wanted him to stay far away. He was dead wrong about our families. When the bishop announced Noah and Constance's separation on Sunday, it would get worse.

Wiping the wetness from my eyes quickly, I went back to work. I had to get Micah Schwartz out of my mind.

He was nothing but trouble.

* * *

Sam

Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I stared at the ceiling. Why the hell did I have to get dragged into my family's shenanigans? How did Summer manage to get me to do whatever fool thing she wanted? It was beyond me, but I was looking forward to the day when the honeymoon phase ended, and I could think straight again.

"Come on, Sam, Dad's downstairs and about to pop a blood vessel. He wants to get moving," Justin said, peeking in the doorway. He was too smart to come all the way in and risk my early morning wrath.

"If he only knew, he wouldn't be in such a damn hurry," I mumbled into the pillow.

Justin risked a step in but kept his hand on the door. "What did you say?"

I opened my eyes and stared at my little brother. He'd grown a couple of inches over the summer and was nearing my height now. At some point, my intimidation tactics might not work on him.

"Are you so tied up in your fantasy military world that you don't notice anything going on in the here and now?"

Justin thought for a second, before saying, "I know everything going on. You're the naive one, thinking I'm clueless. That's what makes me smarter than any of you."

The smug expression on his face made me sit up straighter and narrow my eyes at him. Could he possibly know about Rose? I was suddenly suspicious that he might.

With a speed that surprised even me, I was out of the bed and through the doorway. I tackled Justin to the floor in front of Rose's room. The kid might be sneaky, smart and growing, but I still held the superior strength. Thank God.

Near his ear I whispered, "You better tell me exactly what you know, or I'm going to sprain your hand and you won't be able to hold your controller for weeks."

"You wouldn't. Dad's in the kitchen," Justin whined quietly.

"I don't care where he is. I'll do it and then I'll lie to him about what really happened...you know I will."

The extra pressure on his wrist did the trick. Justin puffed out, "All right, ease up." He lowered his voice and said, "Rose is pregnant."

The volume wasn't low enough, though. Rose was standing in the doorway. I caught only a glimpse of her pale, shocked face before she stepped back into her room and slammed the door.

Rolling off of Justin, I sighed loudly, "Now you've gone and done it, you idiot."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Douglas Wyss:

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