

CAN'T HARDLY WAIT

A NEVER A BRIDE SHORT STORY

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FROM THE DIARY OF NICOLE WINESAP, AGE 9

My birthday's in five days and I really really really want pierced ears. Mom says I can when I turn ten, but I've been trying to tell her that nine is almost as old as ten and every other girl in my class has pierced ears anyway, even though that's not exactly true but close enough. I worked on her all the way home from soccer today and she didn't say I could yet, but I'm not giving up.

She and Dad had another fight after dinner tonight. I guess Dad's been working so much and Mom says she never sees him, which is kind of weird because his office is like a mile away and a lot of my friends' dad's work all the way in L.A. and only come home on weekends. I think maybe Mom is just bored.

When I grow up, I'm never getting married. Married people fight and never get to do anything fun. I can't wait until college so I can get out of Santa Barbara and go somewhere different. Like New York! Oh my gosh, the sixth-grade class just got back from their

trip there and they said it was so amazing. They even got to see a Broadway show!

All I do is wait. Five days until my birthday. A whole year until I get my ears pierced, maybe. Two more years until my turn to take a class trip to New York. I can't wait until I'm grown up and I can do whatever I want whenever I want.

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NOTES PASSED BETWEEN RICKY KENDELL, AGE 9, AND HIS COUSIN JAMIE KENDELL, AGE 7

Girls are so gross! Lacey Torres gave me a big pink heart valentine at school and I tore it into a hundred pieces and put in the trash.

Yuck. Is she your girlfriend now?

I guess so.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 16

Well, it's done. After months of orchestrating our first date, I finally got Murphy to kiss me tonight.

It wasn't exactly how I'd pictured it. In the movies, the couple always seems to fit together like two puzzle pieces, but this was kind of awkward? He's like at least a foot taller than me, so I had to stand on my tip-toes and he had to kind of scrunch down, and his lips were like, really dry? Is that normal? And he tasted like burritos.

At least I can finally say I've had my first kiss. And Murphy is super sweet. Plus, he's going to NYU next year, so if I get in, too, I'd know someone there already. Not that I think we're going to stay together or anything. I wonder if college guys kiss better than high school boys????

Maybe sex is better than kissing?

Only one way to find out.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 18

College is the absolute best! I thought UCLA was going to be so annoying and just like high school (I still can't believe my parents refused to let me even apply to NYU—I may never forgive them for that) but it's actually been fantastic. There are tons of cute guys in all my classes, and I've already made two girlfriends. I thought the girls here would already be in cliques from high school, but pretty much everyone on my hall is really nice. Rosie's so shy I feel like the prom queen next to her, and Kate's tons of fun and already has the campus mapped out because she grew up near here, so I'm already feeling at home.

Rosie's pre-med, because she's a genius, but at least Kate and I have some classes together. We had Econ today, and it wasn't bad. The first few weeks are basically review, so that's easy enough.

That reminds me—there was a ~~cute~~ interesting guy in Econ. I saw him looking at me a couple of times. I suppose he could have been looking at Kate—it remains to be seen how smart it was to make friends with someone hotter than me—but I sort of felt like he was looking at me. He's not my type

at all—very straitlaced. Conservative, even. But there was something about the way he looked at me—shivers. And not in a creepy way, I swear. Anyway. I'll have to find out his name next week.

Gotta run to the art library, then there's an honest-to-god toga party off campus that Kate knows about. College rules!

* * *

TEXTS BETWEEN RICKY KENDELL, AGE 18, AND
JAMIE KENDELL, AGE 16

Ricky: College girls are a million times hotter than high school girls, Jamie. You have to come visit.

Jamie: What happens between senior year of high school and freshman year of college? Hot girl alchemy?

Ricky: Smartass. Just come down this weekend.

Jamie: I'll see if I can borrow Dad's car.

Jamie: You hooked up with any of them yet?

Ricky: I met the woman I'm going to

marry, that's all.

Jamie: What's her name?

Ricky: I don't know yet. She's in my Econ class.

Jamie: Mysterious. Just like the invisible hand.

Ricky. Shut up.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 18

So it turns out that guy from Econ's name is Ricky—what a dorky name, right? I think it's short for Richard. Why not Rich? Anyway, it turns out he's actually from Santa Barbara too, but even though I thought I'd met every rich, no pun intended, kid in the city, we never crossed paths because he went to Laguna Blanca, while I went to Cate, obviously. His dad has some investment fund thing, of course.

How did I find all this out, when in the six weeks we've had Econ together he's never once spoken to me? We got put together to work on a group project—him, me, and

some dance major who's clearly only taking this class to get a social science credit. I have a feeling Ricky and I are going to be doing most of the work on this one.

Anyway, we met up after class to talk about the project and before I knew it, we'd walked all the way to Dykstra, talking the whole way. He is about as conservative as I thought at first, with his polos and his Young Republican haircut, but he was really nice, and, I don't know... he's a freshman, too, so we're the same age, but he talked to me like we were both adults, not barely post-adolescent.

It was—I don't know.

I guess he wants to go into finance, gag me. At least it's not real estate like my dad. But he seems really into all the wonky theory stuff which is kind of cute. Not cute, cute. Whatever. We're meeting tomorrow after lunch to go over the project.

On a completely unrelated note, maybe I'll wear my new jeans.

* * *

TEXTS BETWEEN RICKY KENDELL, AGE 20, AND

JAMIE KENDELL, AGE 18

Jamie: You made a move on your future wife yet?

Ricky: Still biding my time.

Jamie: Aren't you worried someone else is going to scoop her up?

Ricky: Not really. She's too independent to be scooped.

Jamie: So what makes you different?

Ricky: When it comes to her, I'll wait forever.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 20

I'm floating on a cloud right now. It's ten at night and I'm practically shaking as I write this down. Two years of just being friends and dating other people and barely crossing paths some semesters and *Ricky Fucking Kendell* just kissed me.

I wasn't even planning to see him tonight. I went to the library to get a book for my Lit class and he was there, too. He asked me if I

was going to walk home alone and I said yes and he said no, he'd walk me, because that's what he does. He's a gentleman, as well I know, because he always looks me in the eye when we talk instead of staring at my breasts like half the straight guys on this campus. So I said okay and then we walked back and it reminded me of that first time we walked across campus together as freshman and I told him so and he stopped and looked at me kind of funny.

He said, "You remember that?"

Maybe I wasn't supposed to, but I said, "Of course I do."

And he didn't say anything for a while and then he asked me if I was still dating Travis and I said that was old news and I asked if he was still seeing that girl I saw him with at Homecoming and he said she was just a friend.

"You have a lot of friends who are girls?" I asked him.

"A few."

I think I was a little mad then because he's never made a move on me in two years and even though it was always kind of nice that I could count on him to be there without

hitting on me the fact that he never did always rubbed me the wrong way.

I said, "Is that your thing? Friends with benefits? Never actually dating anyone?" Not like I'm the poster child for monogamy, but right then it wasn't about me.

"Not exactly," he said. "There's no point in dating if you don't see a future with someone."

And I got it. He never hit on me because I wasn't the type of girl he could see a future with. I got really mad then. "So you just hook up with girls you wouldn't even bring home to your mother?" I didn't really mean it. And I know he's not really like that—I'd have heard about it if he was.

But he surprised me. He said, "I don't hook up at all."

That took a minute to process. "What, like—you're a—" I couldn't quite make myself say the word virgin, but it was implied.

"I know it's old-fashioned, but I've been waiting for the right woman."

I think I said something really dumb like, "That's so brave." Something idiotic. Because I've slept with... counting, give me a minute... *eleven* guys since Murphy and it never oc-

curred to me there were college juniors, especially junior boys, who still have their v-card.

"So, what, you're waiting for your soul-mate or something? Aren't you worried you won't find her?"

"No, I found her already. I'm just waiting for her to be ready for me."

And there was something in his voice. I swear I was blushing like a fire engine. Because when he said that, I felt, I knew, what he meant. He meant—

And then he touched my chin and tilted it up—he's a couple of inches taller than me—and he was so sweet and so serious and it was the most mortifying but also the most romantic thing that's ever happened to me. "Let me know when you're ready, Nicole," he said. Like a line from a movie or something.

And then he kissed me. No tongue or anything, just really soft, and I—I was basically melting and would have gone home with him immediately if not before but obviously that's not what he wanted. So he just dropped me here, and I said something—again—totally dumb, like thanks or see you or something. *Ugh.*

I've gone home with a lot of guys. But I've never had one wait for me to choose him. And all this time it irritated me that he didn't seem to want me, when it turns out he wants me, but only if it's for real.

How did he know? How did he know I wasn't ready for that before but maybe... maybe I'm ready now? Maybe I do want that. With him.

But fuck, it's a lot of pressure. He's a virgin FFS.

A virgin.

Why is that so hot?

* * *

RICKY KENDELL TO-DO LIST FOR FIRST DATE
WITH NICOLE WINESAP

make reservation at Spago
buy new tie
haircut
corsage? tennis bracelet?
special order a bushel of Winesap
apples
condoms

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 20

I've never had sex with a virgin before. I don't know if I can do this. But we've been dating for months, and every time he kisses me I practically drench my... you know what I mean, and I know he wants me. He's just waited so long, and what if I'm not what he expected? What if I can't make it good enough for him? What if he's disappointed? He can't get a do-over.

My first time wasn't anything to write home about, but I was sixteen. Sex isn't supposed to be good when you're sixteen. Ricky's twenty. And he's adorable.

Okay, I like a challenge. I'll just make it really romantic. Maybe we should go to a hotel. But that might be too much. He has a bunch of roommates, so his place is iffy. I guess I could ask Rosie if she can stay with Kate for a night?

I've never wanted someone like I want Ricky Kendell. I refuse to screw this up.

We're having sex, dammit. And it's going to be the best first time in history.

* * *

RICKY KENDELL, AGE 20, UNSENT TEXT TO
JAMIE KENDELL, AGE 18, WRITTEN, THEN
DELETED IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Ricky: Sex is awesome, dude. Really lives up to the hype. Ten out of ten. Do recommend. And Nicole is... my everything.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 20

Okay, Ricky Kendell is a fast study. I didn't even think he'd be anywhere close to the best I'd ever had. It was his first time! Come on. But at the moment, I'm so blissed out I can't even remember the name of the guy who was formerly my best.

My man brought it.

I don't think I did too badly, myself.

* * *

RICKY KENDELL'S LIST OF PROS AND CONS OF
MOVING TO NEW YORK IF NICOLE DOESN'T
COME WITH ME

Pros

get experience in related field
live cheaply/save money
make East Coast connections
free for networking events

Cons

no Nicole

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 22

Ricky wants us to move to New York. *New York City*. He wants us to leave everything we know and everyone we love behind and move three thousand miles away. And that's not all. He wants me to apply to Parsons, for their industrial design master's program.

What the fuck am I supposed to do?

I love him, but this is a big step. We talked about moving in together after graduation, but I thought we'd get an apartment in Santa Monica or something. This is major. This is like... our future.

I don't think we'll make it if he goes and I stay. And I know he's going to go.

And yeah, I've always wanted to go to New York, to do the *Sex and the City* thing. But if I go with Ricky, I won't be a single gal on the town. We'll be figuring things out together.

Together. I knew Ricky was in this for the long haul, but I guess I didn't fully know what that meant.

I'm not sure about this. But I am sure that I don't want to break up.

I guess we're moving to New York.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 24

Super tired. My manufacturing class is kicking my ass, but it's amazing. Ricky got an awesome end-of-year bonus, so he's treating

me to a spa day this weekend. We're not going home for Christmas and my parents are pretty pissed, but I can't face flying at the holidays this year.

New York is so pretty right now. Yeah, it's cold, but the lights are so cheerful. All the store windows are decorated like crazy, and I'm so excited about my Christmas present for Ricky. I love him so much. And he was right about New York. We're building something here we couldn't have back in California. I know we'll go back someday, but for now, it's just the two of us against the world and I'm loving every second.

* * *

TEXTS BETWEEN RICKY KENDELL, AGE 26, AND
BEN SMITH, AGE 26

Ricky: Congrats to you and Kate, man! Nicole told me you got engaged.

Ben: Thanks! I'm pretty lucky, right?

Ricky: The luckiest.

Ben: You and Nicole ready for that step?

Ricky: Ha. Well, we're working on it. There's no rush.

Ben: You sure about that? Nicole's not the most patient person in the world.

Ricky: I've known she's the woman I wanted to marry since freshman year. But she has to be sure.

Ben: Good luck with that.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 27

It's time to go home.

Our lease is up and Kate and Ben are getting married in a few months. Ricky's itching to start his own venture capital firm. I've been thinking about what I want to do. I've learned a ton working for other people, but I'm getting sick of having defer to their visions. I haven't touched my trust fund—Mom and Dad probably never thought I could actually support myself by working. Surprise! The money should be enough to

set up my own shop. I just need a bit of space, some materials. Contacts I have in spades. Might be good to find someone to handle the business side of things, so I can concentrate on the creative stuff. A partnership?

I hope Santa Barbara is ready for the return of Nicole Winesap and all the fabulousness that comes with me!

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 27

Horrible, horrible news. Ben's dead. A traffic accident. We're flying to L.A. tonight to be with Kate. My heart is breaking for her. She's so strong, but I can't imagine what she's going through. She's terrible about asking for help, so I'm just going to stay with her until she's back on her feet.

My darling Kate.

Ricky's really shaken up. He and Ben were closer than I realized, always debating sustainability and ethical business practices and all that.

How can someone be here one day and then suddenly not?

What if I got that call one day? Ricky could get hit by a car, or shoved onto the subway tracks. Well, probably not, he never takes the subway, but something terrible could happen and what would I do then? He brings out the best in me. I wouldn't even know who I am without him. God, I'm freaking myself out. I wonder... maybe it's time that we stop playing house and actually go all the way.

We've talked about marriage, sort of hypothetically. I haven't been sitting around hoping he'll pop the question or anything, but things like this make you wonder what we're waiting for.

* * *

TEXTS BETWEEN RICKY KENDELL, AGE 28, AND
JAMIE KENDELL, AGE 26

Ricky: You're coming for Thanksgiving, right?

Jamie: Wouldn't miss it, cuz.

Ricky: You'll finally get to meet Ophelia.

Jamie: Nicole's cousin, right? The young one?

Ricky: She's 23. She's like Nicole's sister.

Jamie: Strange we haven't met yet.

Ricky: Well, you will on Thursday.

Jamie: You're being weird about Thanksgiving. You're not going to propose over turkey and stuffing, are you?

Ricky: What makes you say that?

Jamie: I figured it would happen any day now. You guys are setting up here in Santa Barbara for good. You just bought a house together, for fuck's sake.

Ricky: I'm not proposing at Thanksgiving at my parent's house, and I would appreciate it if you didn't talk about this subject with Nicole.

Jamie: OK, OK. Touchy.

Jamie: Everything okay with you two?

Ricky: Of course. We're just not there yet.

Jamie: Well, don't make her wait too

long. She's not exactly patience personified.

Ricky: I know what I'm doing.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 28

Ricky and I had an amazing time in Napa for our anniversary. It was so romantic, and we needed the break from work. Lani and I have been pulling 12-hour days on Winesap Design and he's been down to L.A. and back a bunch of times for meetings, so we really needed to get away.

A part of me thought maybe he'd use the perfect setting and the freaking million-course dinner at The French Laundry as the opportunity to, well, propose.

It sounds kind of dumb written down like that.

It's not like I don't think we're going to be together forever. I just thought we'd reached a point in our lives when the inevitability meant we might as well take that last step.

Guess I was wrong.

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 29

My twenty-ninth birthday. Ricky went all out—we took a limo to the Bowl, saw Little Dragon, had a catered dinner from my new favorite place. Really excellent birthday.

And, oh yeah, he gave me a watch.

It's a really nice watch.

But where is my freaking ring???

* * *

RICKY KENDELL PROPOSAL PREP TO DO

ask Nicole's parents for their blessing

make sure ring is the right size

get the champagne Nicole likes

flowers

L.A. Times announcement?

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 30

If I'm ever going to get married, I think I'm going to have to take matters into my own hands.

* * *

NICOLE WINESAP PROPOSAL TO DO LIST

design Ricky's ring. size?
ask his parents for their blessing?
They love me already, but maybe?
get that whiskey he likes
flowers
new lingerie? (why not)

* * *

RICKY KENDELL PROPOSAL SPEECH, DRAFT 16

Nicole, I've been sure about you from the start. I've never not known that you were the perfect person for me. And I wanted to be sure of you being sure about me right back.

I waited for you until I knew when I kissed you for the first time I'd be the last person you ever kissed.

When you chose to go to New York with

me, we started to build the foundations of our future together. But we were still just kids playing around. Not with each other's hearts—no, you've never been cavalier with mine. Even so, it wasn't until we came home, bought our house, started building our businesses, that I knew we were working toward the same thing. Still, I waited.

I wanted you to be as sure about me as I've been since the moment I first laid eyes on you.

I love you with everything I am. You've made me a man rich beyond anything I could have ever dreamed of, not because of what abundance we have, but because with you by my side, I don't need anything else. You're enough. And I'm the luckiest man in the world to have the most gorgeous, most creative, most brilliant, most loving woman I've ever met be the person I get to spend my life with.

Will you spend your life with me?

Will you marry me?

* * *

FROM THE JOURNAL OF NICOLE WINESAP,
AGE 30

I can't believe that just happened. What even did just happen?

I had it all planned out. I had a ring made. I had a speech prepared. I was going to make steaks and baked potatoes and I bought a chocolate cheesecake. The bubbly was cold, and the whiskey was standing by. I was going to damn well take matters into my own hands and ask Ricky to marry me.

And I did.

I fumbled through the speech, but it amounted to the fact that I love him more than I thought I could love anyone, that I need him, that we're better together and I want to be together for the rest of our lives. Okay, that was better than what I actually said. Maybe I should have practiced a little more.

I pulled out the ring, and Ricky started laughing. Laughing! And then he left—he went to our bedroom, and I was about to hyperventilate but he came back before I could have a full-blown panic attack and he went down on one knee and showed me the ring

he had made for me and he told me he wanted to wait until he was sure I was ready. He was, well, he was much more eloquent than me.

We put the rings on each other's fingers. It almost feels like we're already married.

Then we had sex on the floor of the living room and the baked potatoes burned to a crisp.

Anyway, I'm finally engaged!

I wonder how long I have to wait before I start planning the wedding?

* * *

Thank you so much for reading *Can't Hardly Wait!* Now that Nicole and Ricky are engaged, the wedding planning starts with the selection of Nicole's bridesmaids. Read about Rosie in *Can't Help Falling in Love*, Ophelia in *Can't Make You Love Me*, Kate in *Can't Fight This Feeling*, and Lani in *Can't Hurry Love*.

Welcome to the world of the Never a Brides!

xoxo, Libby

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Libby Waterford writes steamy contemporary romances where lust always leads to happily ever after. She has participated in National Novel Writing Month every year since 2008 and is a five-time “winner.” Libby lives with her family in Fairfield County, Connecticut, and is a member of Romance Writers of America. Email her at libby@libbywaterford.com.



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