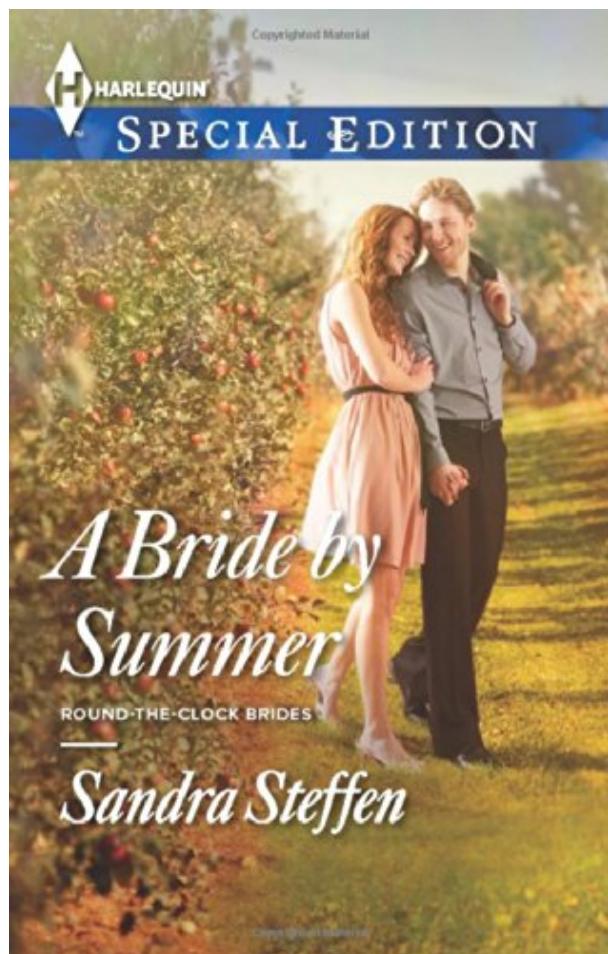
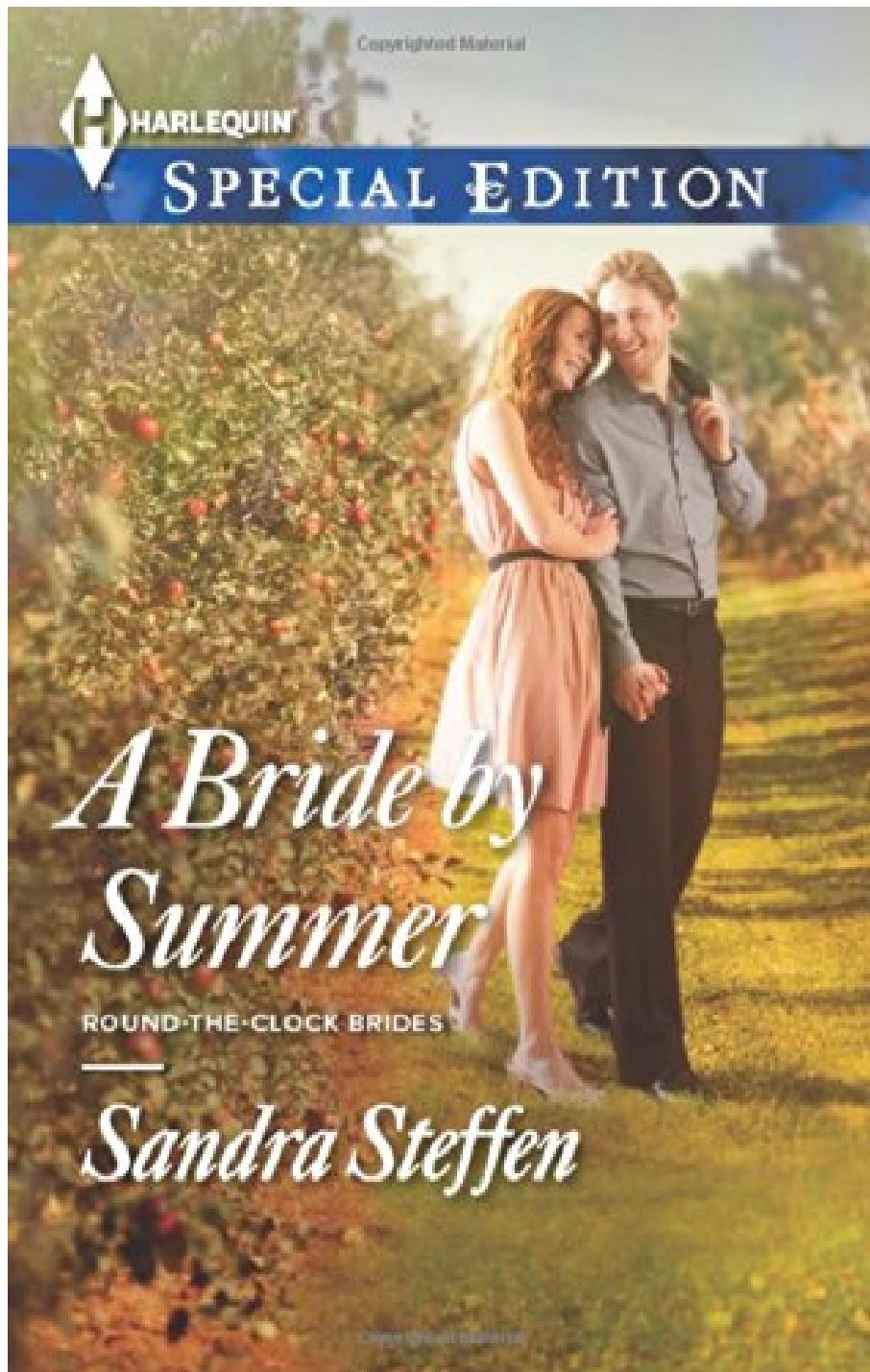


**A BRIDE BY SUMMER (HARLEQUIN
SPECIAL EDITION\ROUND-THE-CLOC) BY
SANDRA STEFFEN**



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The woman had asked if his life had passed before his eyes as he'd spun out of control. He hadn't seen the images of either of his brothers or his sister, or of their parents, killed so tragically years ago, or the first girl he'd kissed, or even the most recent woman. He hadn't seen his oldest friend or his newest business associate.

The image in his mind as he'd spun to what might have been his death had been Joey's.

Sobered further by the realization, he pulled into his driveway and parked in his usual spot beside Marsh's SUV. He cut the engine then felt around on the floor until he located the test kit.

For a moment, he sat there looking at the sprawling white house where he'd grown up. Beyond the 120-year-old Victorian sat the original stone cider house his great-great-grandfather had built with his own hands. Ten years ago Reed and his brothers and younger sister had converted the sprawling old barn into a bakery, where they sold donuts and baked goods, and fresh apple cider by the cup or by the gallon. There was a gift shop, too, and sheds, where their signs and equipment were stored. Behind them was the meadow where thousands of customers parked each fall. From here Reed could see the edge of the orchards, the heart and soul of the entire operation.

He hadn't planned to move back to Orchard Hill after college, but life had a way of altering plans. Reed wasn't a man who wasted a lot of time or energy wondering what he'd missed. Bringing the family business into the current century was one of his proudest achievements. His brother Marsh knew every tree on the property, every graft and every branch that needed to be pruned. Reed knew all about business plans, spreadsheets, tax laws, health inspections and zoning. He'd been the one to have visions of expansion.

Already he could picture Joey following in his footsteps one day. What was shocking was that he wanted Joey to follow in his footsteps. Until they'd discovered that little kid on their doorstep ten days ago, Reed hadn't realized how much he wanted to pass on the legacy of Sullivans Orchard and his business acumen to another generation.

He would be proud if Joey was his son.

With that thought front and center in his mind, he went up the sidewalk and through the unlocked screen door.

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Baby, oh, baby!

Talk about being broadsided! When Reed Sullivan is almost run off the road by a reckless driver, it's town newcomer Ruby O'Toole to the rescue. But the last thing Reed needs is a sexy distraction like Ruby, especially with the paternity of the infant left on the Sullivan brothers' doorstep still a mystery. For now, all he can offer Ruby is friendship...and maybe a kiss here or there.

Quirky, independent Ruby is making a fresh start. Men are strictly off-limits—so maybe she and Reed should just be friends, despite their instant, combustible chemistry. But when a new wrinkle in the baby drama develops, will their "just friends" status stand? Or is happily-ever-after on the table?

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- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 224 pages

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For a moment, he sat there looking at the sprawling white house where he'd grown up. Beyond the 120-year-old Victorian sat the original stone cider house his great-great-grandfather had built with his own hands. Ten years ago Reed and his brothers and younger sister had converted the sprawling old barn into a bakery, where they sold donuts and baked goods, and fresh apple cider by the cup or by the gallon. There was a gift shop, too, and sheds, where their signs and equipment were stored. Behind them was the meadow where thousands of customers parked each fall. From here Reed could see the edge of the orchards, the heart and soul of the entire operation.

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He would be proud if Joey was his son.

With that thought front and center in his mind, he went up the sidewalk and through the unlocked screen door.

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

amusing contemporary

By Harriet Klausner

A Bride By Summer

Sandra Steffen

Harlequin Special Edition, Jun 17 2014, \$5.50

ISBN: 9780373658275

In Orchard Hill, Michigan someone abandoned Joey; leaving the baby with the Sullivan brothers; Reed,

Marsh and Noah (see *A Bride Before Dawn*). The three bachelors struggle with caring for the infant while they wonder who the mom is and which one of them she believes is the dad.

Reed and tavern owner Ruby O'Toole (see *The Wedding Gift*) meet when both were almost hurt by a maniac in a Corvette. They are attracted to each other, but he feels Joey and bodily excretions come before a firebrand female; and she recently vowed no more men even a nice keeper. As Reed and Ruby forge a friendship, platonic seems impossible.

The latest Round-the-Clock Brides (see *A Bride Until Midnight*) is an amusing contemporary as love proves bothersome when two people can't agree on what flavor ice cream to share. Readers will adore Ruby for her outlook (just ask Nanny McPhee), and appreciate Reed for his persistence with her but especially with his little pal Joey.

Harriet Klausner

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Engaging storyline, strong, complex hero, flirty romance

By Hope This Helps

Rating: 3.5 stars. PG Rated sexual content.

Stand alone read. 3rd in Round-the-Clock-Brides series.

GOOD READ! Well written, appealing storyline, well developed, complex characters, witty dialogue, great descriptive imagery, diverse supporting cast, heart-touching family dilemma, an entertaining romance, and the suspense about the baby's paternity leads to a satisfying ending. HOWEVER, the insta-attraction, clichéd beginning is somewhat annoying, and the heroine is often flighty, which seems unrealistic for such an adventurous spirit.

THIS STORY revolves around tavern owner and free spirit, Ruby O'Toole, family orchard manager, Reed Sullivan, and Joey, a three-month-old boy abandoned on the Sullivan brother's doorstep. Based on Joey's age, each of the three brothers can remember an affair during that time period and hire a PI to find and interview each of the three former lovers.

As the story unfolds, Reed and Ruby meet unexpectedly and are drawn to each other. But understanding Reed's desire to "do the right thing" if Joey is his son, they choose to ignore the sizzling attraction and opt for friendship instead. Because the uncertainty and their growing feelings for each other wear heavily on both of them, they struggle to deal with this difficult situation with strength and a restraint rarely found in this genre.

OVERALL, a engaging storyline featuring characters that focus on life choices, rather than on lust. A surprisingly enjoyable read (cvpl). ROUND-THE-CLOCK-BRIDES series includes *A Bride Until Midnight*, *A Bride Before Dawn*, and *A Bride by Summer*.

You may enjoy the complex characters and storytelling of N. Bruhns, A. Stuart, and E. Palfrey. For sweet, funny, heart touching romances with great descriptive imagery, try Susan Fox and Cara Colter.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Loved this book!

By Amazon Customer

Reed and Ruby were overflowing with zing from the moment they met. Wonderful characters and a great plot made it difficult to put this book down. I loved the way the relationship grew without hopping into bed the second they met. The language was clean, and the love scene was not graphic. I'm looking for more

books to read by this author. I'm getting so tired of books that are 95% graphic sex and pay far too little attention to the development of their characters or an intriguing plot.

[See all 5 customer reviews...](#)

A BRIDE BY SUMMER (HARLEQUIN SPECIAL EDITION\ROUND-THE-CLOC) BY SANDRA STEFFEN PDF

Curious? Of course, this is why, we mean you to click the web link web page to go to, and afterwards you can take pleasure in guide A Bride By Summer (Harlequin Special Edition\Round-the-Cloc) By Sandra Steffen downloaded up until finished. You can conserve the soft documents of this **A Bride By Summer (Harlequin Special Edition\Round-the-Cloc) By Sandra Steffen** in your device. Obviously, you will bring the gadget everywhere, will not you? This is why, each time you have extra time, whenever you could delight in reading by soft duplicate book A Bride By Summer (Harlequin Special Edition\Round-the-Cloc) By Sandra Steffen

About the Author

SANDRA STEFFEN is an award-winning, bestselling author of more than thirty-seven novels. Honored to have won THE RITA AWARD, THE NATIONAL READERS CHOICE AWARD and The Wish Award, her most cherished regards come from readers around the world. She married her high-school sweetheart and raised four sons while simultaneously pursuing her dream of publication. She loves to laugh, read, take long walks and have long talks with friends, and write, write, write.

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Reed Sullivan wasn't an easy man to read.

Not that the two women waiting in line behind him at the drugstore in Orchard Hill weren't trying. In the security camera on the wall he saw one nudge the other before motioning to the small carton he'd pushed across the counter. The pharmacy tech held any outward display of curiosity to a discreet lift of her eyebrows as she dropped his purchase into a white paper bag.

Apparently men didn't buy paternity test kits here every day.

He didn't begrudge any of them their curiosity. Most of the time he appreciated that particular trait inherent in most women almost as much as he enjoyed the way they could change the atmosphere in a room just by entering it. He had a deep respect for women, enjoyed spending time with them, was intrigued by them and appreciated them on so many levels. He did not leave birth control to chance. And yet here he was, making a purchase he'd never imagined he would need to make.

He paid with cash, pocketed his change and left the store, by all outward appearances as cool, calm and confident as he'd been when he'd entered. Out in the parking lot, a bead of sweat trickled down his neck and under the collar of his shirt.

Reed understood profit margins and the challenges of zoning issues. Those things always made sense in the end. This was different. Nothing about this situation made sense. Gnawing worry had jolted him awake at 4:00 a.m. It didn't require great insight to understand the cause. It all centered around the innocent baby he and his brothers had discovered on their doorstep ten days ago.

The very idea that someone would abandon a baby in such a way in this day and age was ludicrous. And yet there the baby had been, unbelievably tiny and undeniably alone. Reed, Marsh and Noah were all confirmed

bachelors and hadn't known the first thing about caring for a baby, but they'd picked the crying infant up and discovered a note.

Our precious son, Joseph Daniel Sullivan. I call him Joey. He's my life. I beg you take good care of him until I can return for him.

Our precious son? Whose precious son? The handwritten note hadn't been addressed. Or signed.

Reed wasn't prone to self-doubt, but now he wondered if they should have performed a paternity test immediately. He should have insisted. What had he been thinking?

He hadn't been thinking. None of them had.

They'd spent the first week fumbling with formula and feedings, diaper changes and sleep deprivation while doing everything in their power to determine what the infant in their charge needed and wanted.

Joey had a lusty cry he wasn't afraid to use, and yet before his first night with them was over, he'd looked with burgeoning trust at the three men suddenly thrust into this new and foreign role. He didn't seem to mind their ineptitude.

Until that night, Reed and his brothers hadn't considered the possibility that one of them might have become a father without their knowledge. To make matters worse, they had no way of knowing which of the women from their respective pasts might have been desperate enough to leave Joey in such a manner. The million-dollar question remained.

Which of them was Joey's father?

Reed placed the small paper bag containing the paternity test kit on the passenger seat and started his car. As he pulled out of his parking space, the impulse to squeal his tires was strong. He quelled it because he was the middle brother, the one who thought before he reacted, who kept his wits about him and his head out of the clouds, the one with nerves of steel and the willpower to match.

Minutes later he was on Old Orchard Highway, a few miles from home. The sunroof was open, the morning breeze already fragrant and warm. The radio was off, the hum of his car's engine little balm for the uncertainties plaguing him today.

That first night, he, Marsh and Noah had put their heads together and had come up with a schedule for Joey's care, as well as a plan to try to locate his mother. It hadn't taken Noah long to find the woman from his past. A daredevil test pilot, he'd realized soon after coming face-to-face with Lacey Bell again that covert moves weren't her style. Joey wasn't Lacey's baby, and therefore Noah had been certain he wasn't his, either. That hadn't kept him from pulling out all the stops to rekindle the love affair of his life. Noah and Lacey had eloped two nights ago.

Paternity came down to Marsh or Reed.

They'd hired a private investigator to follow clues and leads regarding the whereabouts of the women who seemed to have disappeared into thin air. Under ordinary circumstances, he and Marsh didn't talk about their sex lives. If not for Joey's arrival, Reed wouldn't have known that Marsh had spent an idyllic week with a woman named Julia Monroe while on vacation last year or that she'd seemed to disappear into thin air as

soon as the week was over.

Like his brothers, Reed liked to keep his private life private. There was only one woman, and one night, he couldn't account for. She was a waitress he'd met on a layover in Dallas during a business trip last year. She'd told him her name was Cookie—now he wished he'd asked a few questions. Could she have left Joey on his doorstep a year later?

He and Marsh had hired a P.I. with an impressive success rate. But so far every lead Sam Lafferty had followed had turned into a dead end. At least, once Reed and Marsh determined which of them was the baby's father, Sam could focus on finding one woman instead of two.

The test kit slid to the edge of the seat as Reed approached a banked curve in the highway. Behind him a red car that had been a speck in his rearview mirror a few seconds ago was closing in on him fast. The sports car came so close to his bumper he braced for a rearend collision. All at once, the car swerved across the double yellow line and began to pass.

Up ahead an eighteen-wheeler was barreling around a curve straight toward them. An air horn blasted and tires screeched. The driver of the Corvette cranked the wheel to the right, thrusting his car back into Reed's lane. With no other place to go, Reed took the shoulder of the highway. He braked, but it was too late. His tires broke loose. And he started to spin.

Around and around he went, on the highway and off, from one shoulder to the other. Gravel churned and dust rose. He somehow missed an oncoming vehicle but clipped a highway sign with one of his mirrors. When he finally came to a complete stop, his engine was racing and so was his heart rate. He gripped the steering wheel, his foot pressed hard on the brake.

The dust was settling when he noticed that another car had stopped a short distance ahead of him on the opposite side of the road. The door opened. The next thing he knew, a slender, sandalensconced foot touched the ground.

Ruby O'Toole hit the pavement running.

She raced across the highway toward a silver Mustang sitting at an odd angle along the side of the road. The driver was looking at her through the windshield, his eyes narrowed and his jaw set. She stood back as he got out, and watched as he opened his fists and unclenched his fingers, straightened his arms and rotated his broad shoulders, as if checking to see if everything was still operational.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

He didn't answer, making her wonder if he was in shock.

"I'm calling 911. I've seen a lot of accidents and you could have whiplash."

"I don't need an ambulance." His voice was steady and deep, but the way he put a hand on the back of his neck made her wonder if he was more shaken than he was admitting.

"It's best to err on the side of caution," she insisted. "Adrenaline and shock can mask an injury like whiplash or a spinal column misalignment."

With a grimace, he said, "My back is fine. And I don't have whiplash." In his early thirties, he had short, sandy-blond hair and wore a gray dress shirt, the sleeves rolled partway up his forearms.

"You just never know," she argued. "The stiffness wouldn't necessarily set in until later."

He circled his car, his face impassive as he ran his hand over the Mustang's hood.

"Trust me. I'm fine."

"If you say so, but if I were you, I'd be stomping my feet and shaking my fist and swearing at that jerk who ran you off the road. You could have been killed! The creep had no right to drive like some bat out of hell. Jerks like him think they own the road and everything in their path." Catching him looking at her, she said,

"Some women cry at emergencies. I get mad. I have a temper. And don't tell me it goes with my hair."

"I won't."

She thought he might smile. When he didn't, she heard herself say, "It's what my boyfriend used to say. My ex-boyfriend. Peter. Cheater Peter." She had to clamp her mouth shut to keep from continuing. What was wrong with her?

"That explains the ex," he said in a deep, smooth voice that gave little away. As he examined his loosened mirror, he asked, "Are you an EMT?"

She'd been in the process of smoothing her hands down her shorts and straightening her tank top, and had to stop for a moment to wonder at his question. "Oh," she said. "You mean because I said I've seen a lot of accidents. No, my most recent career jag was driving a tow truck for my dad's wrecker service near Traverse City."

She didn't bother telling him that prior to working for her dad she'd spent three years with a trendsetting marketing firm in L.A. This stranger didn't need to hear how much trouble she'd had deciding what she wanted to do with her life. Reverting to small talk, she asked, "Do you live in Orchard Hill?"

"A mile from here." The breeze ruffled his blond hair and toyed with the collar of his shirt.

"I just moved here two days ago," she said. "In all likelihood, my mother is rearranging the furniture in my new apartment as I speak, while my father adds to his ever-growing list of all the reasons buying a tavern in this college town is a mistake. So, did your life pass before your eyes?"

* * *

Reed did a double take and looked at the talkative woman who'd stopped to make certain he wasn't hurt. She wore shorts that fit her to perfection and a white tank top that made her arms and shoulders appear golden. A silver charm shaped like a feather hung from a delicate chain around her neck. Her hair, long and red and curly, fluttered freely in the wind. When he found himself looking into her green eyes, he wished he'd have started there.

His gaze locked with hers, and the air went oddly still. In the ensuing silence, he wondered where the birds and the summer breeze and the traffic had gone.

Her throat convulsed slightly, as if she was having trouble breathing, too. "You're not much of a talker, are you?" she finally asked.

"Normally," he said, "I'm the one asking the questions."

She took a backward step and said, "Are you a lawyer?"

"Why, do I look like a lawyer?" She shrugged one shoulder. "It's just that lawyers tend to ask a lot of questions."

"I'm not a lawyer."

"A journalist, then?"

"No."

"A Virgo?" she asked with a small smile.

He had to think about that one because astrology was hardly something he put stock in. "My birthday's November sixth."

"Ah, a Scorpio. You water signs are deep. And moody. Obviously." She shook herself slightly and said, "If you're sure you aren't hurt, I'll be going."

The smile she gave him went straight to places that made a man stop thinking and start imagining. It was intimate and dangerous, not to mention off-limits, given his present situation.

She glanced back at him as she opened her car door, and said, "Two-X-Z-zero-three."

"Pardon me?"

"The Corvette's license plate number." She started her car, and through the open window said, "It's two-X-Z-zero-three. I happened to notice it when the jerk flew by me at the city limit sign."

"You happened to notice it."

"I have a photographic memory for those kinds of details." With that, she drove away.

Reed got back behind the wheel of his car, too. When the coast was clear, he made a U-turn and continued toward home. He drove more slowly than usual, the entire episode replaying in his mind, from the uncanny near miss, to the chance encounter with the modern-day Florence Nightingale along the side of the highway. He wondered if he'd ever met anyone with a photographic memory.

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Sobered further by the realization, he pulled into his driveway and parked in his usual spot beside Marsh's

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