



Halves *on a* Baby

— by ARIDAN —

CHAPTER ONE
TICK TOCK TICK TOCK

Chapter 1- Tick Tock Tick Tock

"Sometimes, the loudest sound in a room is the silence of time slipping away."

The doctor's mouth was still moving.
But Mac couldn't hear a word.

The room had gone silent, except for the thunder of her own pulse, each beat slamming against her chest like a battering ram.

Tick. Tock.
Tick. Tock.

It wasn't just a clock anymore.
It was a countdown.

The rhythm synced with something buried deep inside her, a cascade of panic.

Every second, a jab.
Every heartbeat, a blow she hadn't braced for.

In the ring, she could anticipate the hit.
But here?

No footwork.
No strategy.

Just impact.

And the hits kept coming.

The fluorescent lights buzzed like angry hornets overhead.

White walls closed in, sterile and bright, wrapping around her like a straitjacket.

The vinyl chair dug into her spine, cold and unforgiving, anchoring her when all she wanted was to move, to escape, to breathe.

Her throat clicked dry when she swallowed, like her own body was rejecting the truth outright. Even the button on her cuff felt tight, biting into her skin as if it, too, knew what was coming.

Across from her, Dr. Kasen's lips-shaped sentences.
Important ones.

She nodded, she thought she nodded, but her head felt disconnected from the rest of her.

The doctor's words blurred into nothing-
a flurry of sounds beneath the roar inside Mac's head.

It was like being underwater.

Distant.
Weightless.
Suffocating.

"...less than a year," the doctor said.
Her voice, flat, clinical, finally pierced the fog.
"After that, your chances drop to under five percent."

Mac blinked.
Once.
Twice.

The world tilted.

"What?"

The word ripped from her throat, raw and jagged, like broken glass.

Dr. Kasen's eyes softened in that practiced, pitying way, the way people looked at wounded animals.

As though Mac had already lost something vital.

"I know it's a lot to process," the doctor said, each word slow and careful, as if speaking to a child.

"But your hormone levels are low. Your ovarian reserve is significantly below average. And there are early signs of scarring on your uterus."

A pause.
A breath.

"If you want to conceive," she continued, voice steady, too gentle, "now is the time to act."

Now. Now. Now.

HALVES ON A BABY

It wasn't advice.
It was a verdict.

A gavel striking.
A countdown set in motion.

Now is the time to act.
Now is the time to decide.
Now is the time... before it's too late.

Her mouth stayed closed. Her spine remained straight.
On the outside, she was Marine-steel, silent, listening.
But inside, something was splintering. Cracking beneath
the weight of words she couldn't unhear.

Mac's hands clenched the armrests so hard the vinyl
squealed.

Her fingers went numb.

Her lungs forgot how to function.
The lights screamed above her. The walls didn't just
pulse, they closed in. Her throat cinched. Too much. Too
fast. Too late.

Less than a year.
Less than five percent.

Time had always been her ally.
Time was something she could measure, track,
command.

The time it took to run a mile.
The time it took to deliver a closing argument.
The time it took to pack a seabag with immediate orders.
The time it took to take down an opponent in the ring.
The time to walk away before anyone saw too much.

The same body that had earned expert marks in the
desert heat. The same body that could disarm a man
twice her size. That held the line in bootcamp and fought
for military justice in some of the most hostile courts.
That passed every readiness test. Now? It was turning
against her. Quietly. Treacherously. Her own organs,
once precise instruments of strength, now felt like brittle
gears, winding down.

Time was the enemy.
Slipping through her fingers.
Laughing in ticks as it spilled away.

And no amount of discipline or precision could stop it.

And then, unbidden, a memory surfaced, riding the breath she forgot to take.

Harm, leaning against her office door last week.

Arms crossed.

That half-smile he wore when he knew he was about to get under her skin.

“Your counteroffer on the Wright case was due at 1300. I’m not getting any younger, Mac- and neither are you.”

He’d tossed the folder onto her desk.

“Tick tock.”

She’d rolled her eyes.

Tossed the file back.

Fired off a comeback that made him laugh.

The memory should’ve been safe, anchored in banter and routine, in the strange intimacy they never named. But now, it flickered. Warped. His voice stretched into something low and cruel, like a record slowing down.

Tick... tock...

And then it disappeared altogether.

Mac could feel the diagnosis creeping over her, insidious and cold, burrowing beneath her skin like ice water.

A bead of sweat slid down her temple, catching on her jaw. Her stomach twisted, nausea coiling low and tight. The air thickened.

Her vision narrowed.

Tunneled.

The doctor was still talking.

But all Mac could hear was a chant. A countdown echoing inside her ears, louder than the doctor, louder than breath.

Now.

Now.

Now.

The ceiling spun into a white-hot blur.

The chair turned to stone.

The walls pressed closer.
The hum of time louder than breath.

And just like the ticking hands of a clock-

The room around her tilted.

The seconds didn't spill.

They crashed.

And with them, the version of her who thought she still had time.

Nightfall- Outside Harm's Loft

Mac didn't remember getting in the car.

She didn't remember green-lighting the route. Didn't remember the drive, only that the city bled past her windshield in a smear of brake lights and shadow, that somewhere between Georgetown and north of Union Station she'd lost the ability to breathe without it hurting.

Now she sat parked across from Harm's building, headlights dimmed, engine off, windshield streaked with soft misting rain.

Her hands clenched so tightly around the steering wheel her fingers ached.

With the news of the day, she could feel her body shifting into combat mode.

Except there was no plan. No mission brief. No covert extractions.

Just instinct, what kicked in after a bad op, when the dust hadn't settled and you needed something, or someone, before you unraveled.

Before joining the Marines, at one time that used to mean unraveling her troubles in her father's half-finished discarded bottles. And then her own.

Later, it was her throwing herself into ill-advised relationships, high-risk missions, high-profile court cases.

Now it was Harm.

Just Harm.

His name lived under her skin in moments like this. In moments when the sky cracked, and her armor didn't hold.

When she needed someone who would just be there.

Just know.

But now? She couldn't move. Couldn't make herself open the door, cross the street, walk into his life as if everything was still the same.

Because it wasn't.

And suddenly, the baby pact, what had once felt like a distant promise tucked safely into the maybe column of her life, now ignited like a flare she couldn't smother.

She and Harm had made that deal on a whim. Sort of.

Five years after little A.J.'s birthday.

If they were both still single.
If nothing else had worked out.

They'd go halves on a baby. Make it happen together.

AJ was a few weeks shy of turning four.

Mac sat still, swallowed by the hush of the car and the louder storm inside her.

The soft tick-tick of cooling metal under the hood kept time with her pulse. Rain tapped against the roof in steady percussion. Even the silence had a sound.

One year.

Five percent.

Scarring.

Below average.

Levels low.

Now.

HALVES ON A BABY

The words echoed like a post-op outbrief. She could practically see the debrief slide in some obscure military tent, clean font, mission centered, cryptic summary.

Estimated window of opportunity: 11–12 months.

Probability of natural conception after: statistically negligible.

Recommendation: Alpha. Charlie. Tango (ACT) November. Oscar. Whiskey (NOW).

Her body had thrown up the white flag, and no one had told her the war had even started. Mac leaned her head against the seat back and exhaled slowly through her nose.

The irony.

She'd spent years guarding her heart from him, after that night in Sydney Harbor, after his silence, after his inability to name what lived between them.

And now it wasn't her heart that betrayed her.

It was her body.

Wasn't that just the kicker?

The woman who could handle anything, blackmail, combat, politics, heartbreak, might lose to her own biology.

She turned her head toward his building. Warm yellow light glowed behind his window. Soft. Steady.

Like always.

Like him.

She remembered the way he looked at her sometimes—those quiet, unreadable seconds that made her feel seen in ways that had nothing to do with rank or the war they waged in court.

What would he say if she told him?

If she walked through his door and said:

“Harm, I can't wait. I don't have time anymore. I don't know if I can even do this at all.”

Would he say yes out of duty?
Or worse- out of pity?

She didn't want it to be something he gave her out of
guilt. Or obligation.

She wanted him to want this. With her.

And a darker thought broke through, sharper, crueler.
Why hadn't he already said something?

She remembered the look in his eyes when she
mentioned shopping for AJ's birthday. It was not the
usual smirk or the quick-fire quip about "co-parenting
practice."

Just that wide-eyed, caught-off-guard flicker, like the
words had hit somewhere he wasn't ready to name.

Like maybe the clock was ticking in his head too.

He was supposed to see her.
Wasn't he?

She hated herself for thinking it.

It wasn't fair.

He couldn't have known.

Their deal still had a year left on it.

But part of her had hoped-

Just once-

That he'd look at her like the "maybe someday" had
become now.

Her phone buzzed on the console.
A name flashed.
HARM.

Mac stared at it.
Let it ring once.
Twice.

Then answered, voice steadier than she felt.

"Hey."

“You’re outside,” he said, tone soft but certain.
Of course he’d seen her. He always did.

She cleared her throat, “Yeah. I was, uh...I had a question. About the Barrow case.”

“Okay...”

He waited. Gave her room. Gave her space the way only he knew how.

“You coming up?”

Silence.

She glanced toward the glowing window, watching his shadow lean against the large bay windows.

“I can’t,” she said. “Something came up. I’ll follow up with you later.”

A pause. A breath she didn’t want to hear.
“You okay?”

Mac forced a smile he couldn’t see. “Yeah. Just a long day.”

“Alright,” he said finally.

But there was something in the way he said it. Like he didn’t believe her, but he wasn’t going to push.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she added, like punctuation.

The call ended.
The silence roared back.

Her hand hovered over her phone.
One word. One tap. That’s all it would take.
She whispered it into the hush of the car, voice barely audible-
“*Harm... I need you to help me do this. I can’t wait anymore.*”

But the silence that followed wasn’t comforting.

It was terrifying.
It made the truth real.

And she couldn’t bear that. Not tonight.

She opened the console and pulled out a folded sticky note, creased, worn, nearly rubbed blank at the corners.

Harm had written it years ago, in Bud's kitchen, a silent rebellion against her engagement to Mic, half a joke, half a dare, scribbled after too much whiskey (on his part) and too many memories:

“Rabb & Mackenzie – Future Co-Parents (God help the kid)”

She'd laughed it off at the time. Blushed when Bud found it stuck to the fridge the next morning. Pretended it didn't mean anything.

But now, in the hush of her car, it didn't feel like a joke. It didn't even feel like a pact.

It felt like a lifeline, one she couldn't bring herself to reach for.

Because grabbing it would mean facing the possibility that Harm didn't want it anymore.

Or worse... that he did, but not for the reasons she needed.

She folded it once. Then again.
And tucked it away.

She wasn't even sure what hurt more-
The fear she might never carry a child...
Or the fear that the only man she could imagine doing it with...
Might never know how close she came to asking.

She came so close to nearly letting it all tumble out.
But she didn't.

Because if this pact was going to mean anything-
It couldn't start from fear. Or pressure. Or panic.
It had to come from something real.

Their friendship.

Their history.

That unshakable, invisible tether that had always existed between them.

The quiet promise that someday... maybe...

She needed Harm to be vested for the right reasons.
She needed him to make a commitment he hadn't made to any other woman.

And like so many times before, Sydney Harbor, her engagement party, Harm adrift at sea, the Guadalcanal, the JAG-A-thon—they were ships that couldn't quite find the same tide.

And this?
She wasn't sure it would be any different.
She wasn't sure he was ready.

Right now, the only thing she could hold onto was this:
She wasn't ready to speak the truth.

She opened her mouth, then closed it. The words would come. But not tonight.

Instead, she sat up behind the wheel, turned on the headlights and windshield wipers before peeling out of the parking lot, eyes lifting once more to the window that framed the only man she'd ever trust with this kind of truth.

She dared the tires of her Corvette to outrace the speedway of thoughts behind her eyes, leaving any resolution in the dust.

JAG HEADQUARTERS BULLPEN

Sleep hadn't visited, only grazed her shoulder, fleeting, restless, gone before it could settle. Morning didn't ease in gently; it stormed the perimeter like a drill sergeant barking orders at sunrise.

Mac stepped through the bullpen doors, briefcase in one hand, jacket and cover draped neatly over the other. Her posture was straight, steps deliberate, gaze sharp, as composed and battle-ready as any Marine reporting for duty.

But before she could reach her office, her stride faltered.

The air shifted.

Not in temperature, not in scent, but in weight. It was as if the world had taken a breath and forgotten to exhale.

Something imperceptible thickened around her, tightening the atmosphere until every sound felt magnified.

Her heels on the tile no longer echoed with crisp authority, they absorbed sound, muffled beneath the mounting pressure of seconds. Seconds she could feel, collecting around her ankles, dragging at her like undertow.

She was being watched.

Not by people.

By time.

The wall clock loomed, brass-framed, aged, and dutiful, a relic from another era. Mounted high like a vigilant guard above the bullpen. Its thick black numerals stared down, a quiet authority that had blended into the background of a thousand ordinary days.

Its second hand moved with mechanical smugness, each tick a sharp echo slicing through Mac's consciousness. It didn't just mark time, it fractured it.

Tick.
Tock.
Tick.
Tock.

She had passed that clock countless times without a thought, a fixture as familiar as protocol. But now, it wasn't just ticking.

It was waving.

And not a wave of greeting at the early morning hour.

It was a warning.

A summons.

She was no longer in control of the clock.

Now, time had declared jurisdiction over her.

She took a breath, measured and slow. It didn't settle her. It was just one more thing she was suddenly aware of, how breath filled time. How time emptied breath.

Then she stepped forward again, into her office.

Each step deliberate.
Each one echoing, not with sound, but with loss.

0700 HOURS BREAKROOM

The coffee maker whined like a stubborn engine, each slow drip another reminder of how long everything took when you couldn't afford to waste time. Mac stood motionless, her hand resting lightly on the counter, eyes fixed on the pool of dark liquid collecting in the bottom of her mug.

Drop by drop. Like minutes bleeding out.

She wasn't thinking about coffee.

Her thoughts were elsewhere.

She was thinking about numbers.

Twelve months.
Less than five percent.
No margin for error.

A future she could measure but not guarantee.

Her gaze drifted to the JAG calendar taped to the refrigerator, a hodgepodge of inked commitments, deadlines, training blocks. It reminded her of the one in her own kitchen, so clean, so deliberate, every day accounted for in sharp, black ink... except for yesterday.

That date was circled in red. Noted. Marked.

A deadline.

And not the kind the court granted continuances for. There were no extensions. No appeals.

BACK IN MAC'S OFFICE

She opened her phone calendar and created a new event, an innocuous label, just the word: *Window*.

Slotted it out for the next twelve months.

Maybe if she could give the decision structure, put it on the books, it wouldn't feel like it was already slipping away.

But as she stared at the blinking cursor, her fingers stilled.

What was the window for, exactly?

Natural conception? IVF? Surrogacy? Egg freezing?

The titles from the pamphlets her doctor had handed her swarmed in her head, clinical, bold, blinking.

The questions came too fast. Too loud.

Her breath caught somewhere between logic and panic.
She closed the calendar.
The clock on the wall didn't care.

0800 HOURS

**STAFF CALL – ADMIRAL'S CONFERENCE
ROOM**

“Time is of the essence, people.”

The Admiral's voice rang out like a bell across the mahogany table. Mac flinched, just slightly. Her pen stilled mid-stroke, frozen above the ruled yellow pad. She hadn't noticed she'd been pressing it so hard, the ink had blotted, a small, dark bruise of hesitation on the page.

“We clear this docket before the end of the quarter,” the Admiral said, flipping to the next page in his briefing binder without missing a beat. “Eyes on anything aging more than thirty days. I don't want any delays. No excuses. We handle time, before time handles us.”

The words didn't just land.

They struck.

Mac blinked. Her throat tightened. A silence bloomed inside her, terrible and loud.

Handle time before time handles us.

A mantra. A prophecy.

Her eyes flitted to the Admiral's watch, a gift from a fellow Navy Seal, heavy, burnished, ticking steadily through the morning's assignments. Mac used to admire that kind of precision. She had lived by it. Trusted it to keep pace with her own internal clock.

But now?
They felt like shackles.

The second hand didn't care about ovulation charts or AMH levels or hormone reserves. It didn't care that the doctor's voice still echoed in her mind. It didn't care that every beat of it brought her closer to a decision she feared she would have to make alone.

It kept moving.

Oblivious.

Steady.

Indifferent.

She kept her face composed. She always did. But inside, a pressure was building. Not panic, no. Panic was loud. This was worse. This was quiet. Sinking.

She wasn't just losing time.

She was being prosecuted by it.

And in this courtroom?

There was no recess.

There was no defense.

She just watched the second hand keep ticking. A quiet, mechanical laugh.

0930 HOURS ELEVATOR TO BULLPEN

The elevator panel blinked:

4... 3... 2...

Each descending number lit up like a sonar flare. Each one a descending heartbeat, closer to the ground, closer to the inescapable.

She had no control over the descent.

Not here. Not anymore.

The doors opened with a sterile chime; the kind designed to be comforting.

It wasn't.

Mac stepped into the familiar hum of the bullpen, where over-brewed coffee hung faintly in the air, fluorescents buzzed like gnats in the background, and the clatter of keyboards blended with the soft shuffle of paper, courtroom rhythm disguised as routine.

A heartbeat later, she saw Harriet by the copier.

Her hand curved protectively over the gentle roundness of her belly. In the other, an ultrasound printout, fresh from the appointment. New life in gray smudges.

“Four more months,” Harriet beamed, eyes soft and full of future. “AJ talks to her every night like she’s already here.”

Bud grinned beside her. “He says he wants to teach her how to salute.”

Mac's steps faltered.

Then recovered.

Too quickly.

The suddenness made her heels slap the tile like gavel strikes, harsh and sharp, as if volume could defend her from emotion.

She didn't look at the ultrasound. She didn't let herself.

She focused on her rhythm. The sound of walking. The sound of *not falling apart*.

Four months.

The words circled her like sharks.

Four months to grow a life.

Four months to prepare a future.

Four months, she narrowly had on her timeline.

Her fingers curled into fists. Half-moons dug into her palms. Pain was welcome. Pain meant control.

She had always prided herself on discipline. On not reacting. On holding it together.

But time wasn't just approaching today.

It was infiltrating.

It was everywhere.

It was Harriet's smile. Bud's quiet awe. The clock on the wall.

It was in the beat of her own heart, a pulse she no longer trusted.

Time wasn't whispering anymore. It was screaming from inside her.

And Mac?

Mac had no strategy for silencing it.

MAC'S OFFICE

1300 HOURS

One Week Closer

The stack of case files on her desk loomed like unopened verdicts, concrete, damning, weighted with decisions she hadn't yet made.

At the top sat the prosecution of Lt. Jeremy Duncan, charged with the theft of classified Psycoustics technology. A career-shattering betrayal. The kind of case she normally devoured.

But today, the words swam on the page. Blurred. Disjointed. Unreadable.

Her eyes drifted to the clock.

The second hand ticked with the same mechanical indifference that had pulled time forward every day for the last week.

A soft knock interrupted the silence.

She didn't flinch.

"Come in," she called.

Harm stepped into the doorway, shadow stretching long across her office floor. Steady. Familiar. Too observant for comfort.

He always carried calm with him like a scent, anchoring and infuriating. And today, it pulled something taut inside her.

“You got a minute?” he asked.

“Sure.” She smiled, calm, composed, unreadable. A mask, sewn tight in Marine green. She didn’t trust her voice not to crack if she let him see what was behind it.

He closed the door with quiet deliberation, then moved toward her desk. His gaze swept across her face with the kind of precision that always made her feel seen, too seen.

He didn’t speak at first, just gestured toward the shelf behind her.

The gift.

He hadn’t planned to bring it up.

But the moment he saw it, tucked against a row of military law journals on her shelf, something shifted.

It didn’t belong.
Not since she’d misnamed it.

He needed to know.
“Last week you said that was for AJ’s fifth birthday,” he said softly, nodding toward it.

She blinked. “I did?” A frown flickered across her face, though her mind was already rewinding, fast.

Had she said that?

Had she wanted him to hear it?
Damn.

“He’s not turning five,” Harm said, voice gentle but unwavering. “He’s turning four.”

She folded her arms, chin lifting. “Well, I stand corrected. The gift is for AJ’s fourth birthday.”

Harm just gazed at her with an intensity that only grew as questions formed behind his eyes.

“That’s what’s bothering you? The gift? Or... our deal to have a baby together after five years?”

Harm shrugged. “Wouldn’t say it was bothering me, exactly...”

She arched a brow.

“Mmm. But something is. Like that comment you made two days ago about the clock ticking. That was supposed to be my biological clock, right?”

She didn’t wait for a response, just let it hang, sharp as a cross-examination.

“And now that I think about it, you’ve been slipping those in a lot lately. What was the last one?”

Her eyes narrowed, voice dry.

“Mac, I’m not getting any younger—and neither are you. Tick tock.”

A beat.

“Was that before or after you accused me of submitting a late counteroffer?”

His expression froze- mid-deflection.

“I didn’t mean it like—”

“Harm.” Her voice was light, edged in amusement that didn’t reach her eyes. “You should’ve just said what you were thinking.”

“You looked like you had enough on your mind already,” he offered gently.

Because I do. And you have no idea.

She smirked, shifting into familiar terrain. Banter was safer. “Or maybe you were just afraid to ask.”

His jaw flexed, barely. But she caught it. She always did.

“Why would I be afraid?” he asked, steady but searching.

She reached for her pen, realized she was already holding it in a white-knuckle grip.

Loosen. Breathe. Control the witness. Control yourself.

“Do you?” she asked.

“Do I what?”

“Want to go back on your promise.”

“No.” Immediate. Firm. No hesitation. Conviction in a single syllable.

Of course not. Harm always kept his promises. He just hadn’t realized yet how close they were to that finish line.

She nodded slowly. “Then why the sudden concern? It’s over a year away.”

At that point, it might already be too late.

He hesitated. “I don’t know... Singer got pregnant. Then Harriet... And I guess I just—”

“—assumed I’d want to join the club?” she finished, tone cool, but not biting.

He opened his mouth, then closed it. There was no defense to mount.

She did want a baby.

She just hadn’t planned on the timeline no longer being hers to command.

She leaned back in her chair, letting a slow smile form.

“You’re funny.”

He didn’t laugh. Not really.

“You know, if something is going on, you can tell me.”

Mac’s smile didn’t flicker. But her heartbeat did.
“Of course I can.”

And then she looked away.

Their eyes locked again, longer than casual, heavier than friendly.

His presence steadied her, even as it exposed her.

There were things she couldn't let him see, not yet.
Not until she'd built the case she hadn't meant to start preparing.

The clock on her shelf ticked once.
Just once.
But she heard it louder than anything he'd said.

For one suspended beat, neither moved.
And they both smiled.

But inside?
Mac's smile was a smokescreen.
Her mind was already spiraling, charts, test results, odds
she could now recite backward.
She wanted to believe what she'd said.
That it had just been a slip. That nothing had changed.

But it had.
Everything had.
She still wasn't ready to say it out loud.
Not yet.

He hesitated again, like he wanted to say more.
She did too.
But the silence was easier than what either of them
might confess.

MAC'S OFFICE – MOMENTS AFTER HARM LEAVES

The door clicked softly shut.

The smile drained from her face.

Silence dropped, heavy as a ruling.

Tick.
Tock.
Tick.
Tock.

She turned toward the brass clock on the wall. Its face
was unflinching. Its hands in motion. Something stirred
in her.

She stared until the edges of the room reassembled,
until the pressure in her chest loosened just enough to
breathe again.

Time wasn't in the background anymore.

It had stepped into the forefront like lead counsel with a case to win.

Demanding answers.
Requesting action.

If she wanted a future, not just motherhood, but one shaped by choice, not regret, it wasn't enough to feel the urgency.

She needed a strategy.

Build the argument.
Support it with evidence.
Control the narrative.
Deliver it to the only person whose vote mattered.

She'd treated time like it was on her side. It wasn't.
The hourglass had been turned.
She could feel it, the sands shifting.

It was sitting across from her now, arms folded, unimpressed. A relentless prosecutor, cross-examining her choices. Every delay. Every deflection.
Every time she let fear hold the gavel.

This was it, the moment gathering weight like a verdict about to fall.

She had never lost a case she'd thrown her full self into.
And this time, the case was her life.

And Harm?

He was the one she wanted to make the closing argument to.

More than a name on the file-
He was the one she trusted to carry the verdict forward with her.

The only man who knew how to hold her steady without trying to fix her.

The only man she could imagine beside her-
Not only just in a delivery room or courtroom...
But when things unraveled, too.
When the stakes got real.

The window was narrowing.
And she wouldn't wait to be handed a ruling.

She'd never asked for permission to fight a battle worth winning.

She wasn't about to start now.

She would persuade him. Not with panic.

With precision.

With certainty.

With purpose.

With resolve.

Because the jury was still out.

And Sarah Mackenzie didn't leave her future to chance.

She always argued best when the stakes were highest.

The brass clock ticked above her like a judge's gavel.

This wasn't just a deadline.

It was the start of opening arguments.

And Mac?

She'd always known how to build a case.

Now she had to win the one that mattered most-

The case for her future.

For going halves on a baby with Harm.

Before time ruled against her.

She turned toward her monitor, fingers steady now, the fog lifting with every keystroke.

She pulled up the shared calendar.

Harm had a gap at 1500 tomorrow, no hearings, no briefs, no interviews.

For her, that meant no excuses.

She made a mental note.

That's when she'd do it.

Because she wasn't leaving this to fate.

Not when there was still a case to be made.

She reached for her pen, the same one she used for opening and closing arguments-

And clicked it once. She was deliberate and certain.

If she had to pull an all-nighter, so be it.

She'd build the case from the ground up. Thought by thought. Truth by truth. Word by word.

HALVES ON A BABY

Too much at stake to be anything less than prepared.

Because if he said no-
If he didn't want this with her-
There'd be no cross-examination strong enough to undo
that silence.

And she wasn't sure how she'd live with that.

Somewhere in the bullpen, footsteps passed.

It wasn't his.
But her spine straightened anyway.

Soon, she thought. Soon.
And tomorrow at 1500?
She'd take the floor-

And deliver the most personal argument of her life.

THE SOUND OF CHAPTER ONE



Click Here to Play the Story Music Playlist:



Or Scan to Listen:



Hourglass — Iniko

Time becomes valuable when there is suddenly not enough of it. For Mac, the diagnosis turns years she assumed she had into a loud countdown.

The Prophecy — Taylor Swift

Mac has built the career she fought for, but the future she wants most cannot be earned through discipline or rank. Now she is asking whether fate can still be rewritten.

Rain Drops Dancing on Car Windshield

The background sounds of Mac alone in her car outside Harm's loft, listening to the rain while deciding what comes after the words you may not have much time to have the future you want most.



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RETURN TO CHAPTERS

HALVES ON A BABY

CREATOR NOTES AND DISCLOSURES

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