

Five Years in the Future

I walked into the back door of Gran's house and collapsed on the couch. I'd been doing my yoga and art therapy summer camps for five years, and I couldn't remember ever being so tired. Sure, the kids always had a lot of energy—most of them had ADHD—but I'd never felt like taking a long nap at the end of the day.

The worst part was, the tired had started at the beginning of the day. I'd even snapped at one of the kids, which I'd never done before. I'd never had a kid try to paint one of the goats before either, but that was no excuse for raising my voice.

Just as my eyes began to close, Gran walked into the room.

"How did it go today?" She lowered herself into the easy chair next to the couch.

"Good." I sat up quickly in case she needed anything and stifled a yawn. "How are you feeling?"

"Slow and old." She leaned her head back and shut her eyes.

"Well, you look young and spry!" I jumped up and patted her knee. "Let me get you a sweet tea. That will pep you up."

Even I could hear the false excitement in my voice. Gran had slowed down in the past year, but I was the only one of us who didn't want to admit it.

"That's okay, sweetheart. Get one for yourself." She kept her eyes closed while she talked. "I just need a quick lie down before I go check on my garden."

"Let's both have a lie down, then I'll go out there with you before heading home." What I needed was a strong cup of coffee if I was even going to make it home, but I was too tired to walk to the kitchen.

I stretched out on the couch thinking about what I could do to improve my camp tomorrow and make sure I didn't lose my patience.

Over the past few years, my camps had grown so much that I'd had to hire assistants to help me, and Gran's barn was now my full-time studio. During the school year I taught art and yoga classes for adults and after-school I had kids' programs specially tailored to kids with ADHD.

During the summer, every afternoon for six weeks was devoted to my Art and Yogoat camps. Eleanor and Chidi had provided lots of baby goats for the kids to play and do yoga with.

The thing I was most proud of, however, was the comic book I'd written, illustrated, and self-published. My heroine's superpower? ADHD. I thought maybe I'd get a hundred or so readers, if I was lucky. Nope. It was a bestseller. Even better than that, though, were the notes of thanks I got from readers who saw themselves in my character.

I drifted off to sleep thinking about switching things up by reading my book and having the kids design their own superhero costumes.

An hour after I'd closed my eyes for a "quick" lie-down, Gran shook me awake.

"Are you teaching yoga tonight?" she asked as I blinked into awareness.

I sat up and immediately felt dizzy. "I can't remember," I mumbled and sank back onto the couch.

"Are you okay?" Gran pressed her hand to my forehead and frowned. "You don't feel warm, but you

look a little green around the gills.”

“Just a little tired.” I sat up again but didn’t feel any better.

Gran’s eyebrow went up. “Tired?”

I shook my head and pushed myself up. “It’s not what you’re thinking, Gran.” Jayden and I had stopped hoping for that, or even trying. The disappointment every month just got to be too much.

“Look at me,” she ordered, before gently turning my chin in her direction. Her soft skin smelled both rosy and powdery and her blue eyes bore into me.

After a thorough examination of something—my soul, maybe?—her mouth stretched into a smile. “You’re pregnant.”

A flurry of excitement attempted to flutter from my stomach to my heart, but at the last second, I stopped it in its tracks. “No, I’m not.” I lowered her hand from my face and squeezed it. “But it’s okay. I’m happy.”

“Hmm.” Her eyes twinkled. Literally. If there were an opening for a new Mrs. Claus, Gran would have been a shoo-in at that moment. “If I were a betting woman, I’d put money on the test you’re going to take being positive.”

A heaviness filled my chest. Just the thought of waiting the eternity between hope and fear before the test would read negative made me sick.

“And you’d lose every last cent.” I let go of her hand and grabbed my purse from where I’d tossed it on the couch. “Believe me, I know from experience. I’ve made the same bet too many times.”

“I know you have but give it another try. I don’t think you’ll be disappointed this time.” Gran shuffled close to me—her arthritis was acting up—and pointed to the floor. “Your keys.”

I bent down to retrieve the ring of keys I hadn’t even noticed had fallen from my purse.

“Thanks, Gran.” I kissed her cheek, then walked out the front door to my car.

A hundred yards away, my niece, Annie, pushed her brother, Carter, on the porch swing. He saw me and waved his chubby three-year-old arm. “Hi Aunt-y Z!”

I waved back but resisted the urge to go join them in their fun. Now that Ian and Brooke were living back in Creekville right next door to Gran, I popped in often to see the kids. And my brother and sister-in-law, but mostly the kids. If the closest I was going to be to a mother was an aunt, I was going to be the best one around.

But today, Aunt-y Z needed a break. Not just because I was tired, but also because Gran’s words were swirling in my head, tempting me to get my hopes up and believe her.

By the time I got home, Jayden was already there. He greeted me at the door with a kiss that still made my skin warm faster than stepping on to hot sand in the middle of summer.

“How about we skip dinner?” he asked in his husky bedroom voice before slipping his hand into mine and leading me in that direction.

“Actually,” I put my other hand around both of ours and stopped. “I’m really hungry.”

I’d never chosen to eat over ... doing other *things* with Jayden, but I was suddenly ravenously hungry. Like, all I wanted to do was stuff food in my mouth. All the food. Especially of the french fry variety.

Jayden stopped, looking as surprised as I felt by what I'd said, but only for a second. He quickly broke into a grin. "Okay. Eat first. How about I order something from Roundy's?"

The thought of the meatloaf I knew he'd order made me do something else I'd never done before when thinking about meatloaf (the food, not the late singer). Gag.

I swallowed hard to keep Jayden from seeing the nausea washing over me. "How about something else? I don't care what, as long as there are fries involved. I just need to lie down for a minute."

Without waiting for his answer, I sank onto our sofa.

"Rough day today?" he asked while scrolling through his phone to find somewhere to order from.

"A little bit."

Gran's words niggled in my brain, but I didn't want to tell Jayden anything about what she'd said. There was no reason for us both to be disappointed when the test came out negative. Because, yes, she was right about one thing. I was going to take a test.

The next morning, when Jayden went for a run, I dug through the clutter under our bathroom sink until I found what I was looking for: one last pregnancy test.

After checking to make sure it wasn't expired, I went through all the steps on the directions. Then I pretended I didn't care what the answer was while telling myself over and over it was definitely going to be negative.

Except...

It wasn't.

My first impulse was to take another test to prove the first one had been a fluke, but I didn't have any left. So, I did the next best thing, and called Dr. Payne—which is, quite possibly, the worst name ever for an OBGYN.

Not only had Jayden known Dr. Payne in high school, but the three of us had also been through a lot together over the last few years of expensive fertility treatments and disappointing pregnancy tests. Which is why I have his personal phone number on my speed dial.

He picked up on the second ring even though it was only seven AM.

"I'm pregnant," I blurted out as soon as he'd said hello.

"What? How do you know?" The uncertain excitement in his voice only increased my own feeling of being stuck in a surreal dream.

"I took a test. It's positive." I sat on the edge of the closed toilet lid and stared at the test. The result still didn't seem real.

Dr. Payne took a deep breath. "Okay. Come in and let's do some bloodwork."

"I don't want to tell Jayden yet." The thought had just occurred to me. Not only because I didn't want him to be disappointed, but also because our anniversary was in a few days. If, by some miracle, the test wasn't lying to me, what better gift could I give him to celebrate five years of being married than to tell him we were finally having a baby?

"Got it," he replied without asking why. "Meet me there in an hour. I won't say a word to him."

Within the hour, I'd showered and thought of some excuse to give Jayden about where I was disappearing to on a Saturday morning. Luckily, he had soccer he wanted to watch and didn't question me too much. But it took every ounce of my willpower not to tell him about the test.

After getting the bloodwork and talking to Dr. Payne, keeping my secret to myself for the rest of the weekend was an even bigger challenge. If Brynn and Landon hadn't been living in Bali, I could have at least told her, but she'd abandoned me for my brother—not that I was bitter or anything). The test results wouldn't be back until Monday, so I had to keep my rising excitement to myself for at least two more days. Longer, if I wanted to wait until our anniversary on Wednesday.

I'd thought waiting for home pregnancy test results had been excruciating but waiting for Dr. Payne to call was the equivalent of being waterboarded. Or at least as bad as the time my brothers made me drink an entire liter of Coke then locked me out of all the bathrooms.

Finally, at five minutes before five o'clock on Monday as I drove home and just when I'd given up hope of hearing from him that day, Dr. Payne called.

"Congratulations," he said as soon as I answered.

All the excitement I'd been trying to hold back exploded like the finale of a fireworks show on the Fourth of July.

"Really?" Tears formed in the corner of my eyes. "Are you sure?"

"Positive. No pun intended." He laughed at his own joke while I pulled over to the side of the road.

My hands were shaking. "And everything looks okay?" My voice trembled as badly as my hands.

"Well," he paused. "There were some anomalies with your bloodwork, so I'd like to do an ultrasound. Can you come in tomorrow morning?"

"What does that mean? Anomalies?"

His words snuffed out my fireworks faster than a sudden rainstorm.

"Your HCG levels are higher than I expected for how far along we're guesstimating you are," he answered without the concern I'd expected. "It's not a bad thing, but an ultrasound will give us a better idea of your due date and clear up some of my other questions."

Questions weren't necessarily concerns. That's what I told myself over and over for the rest of the night and the next morning. Jayden asked me more than once what I was smiling about, but I dodged his question by answering, "Just thinking how great the last five years with you have been."

The next morning, the ultrasound tech pressed the wand to my belly, and the swishing sound it made almost drowned out the pounding in my chest. When she printed out the pictures, I asked for extras. Fifteen minutes later, Dr. Payne told me that the ultrasound had confirmed his suspicions, and I was thrilled to have double the amount of pictures to show Jayden.

I knew just where I'd hang them when I broke the news to him.

But Gran was the first person I told about the pregnancy. Her response?

No words, just her *I told you so* smile. Which was fine, because she hadn't guessed everything right. Jayden would be the first person I told about what *exactly* to expect now that I was expecting.

On Wednesday, I texted Jayden to meet me at sunset under Gran's linden tree. Then I strung lights throughout it—I was practically an expert now—and hung the ultrasound pictures from the lowest branches.

I spread a blanket over the ground, and I had a basket of fried chicken strips and fries for us to eat. Because that's what sounded good to me. Meatloaf still made me want to gag.

Also, a bottle of sparkling cider to celebrate.

At sunset, Gran flipped the switch to the lights as Jayden walked under the leafy branches to reach our spot.

"I feel like I've been here before," he said as he wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Are you tired of it?" I slid my hands up his bare his arms until my hands met behind his neck, right where the collar of his polo hit.

"Never." He kissed my neck right where I liked it best. "It's my favorite place to be with you." His kisses moved closer to my ear. "Or, at least second favorite."

"Except that time a few months ago? Was it your favorite then?" I turned my head so he could nibble on my ear.

He moaned. "That was nice."

Suddenly, Jayden let go of my ear with his teeth, and his breath stopped. "What are these pictures?"

He let go of me and walked to the one hanging closest to him. Holding it gingerly between his fingers, he looked over his shoulder. "Is that what I think it is?"

I nodded. A lump formed in my throat at the look of anticipation on his face.

"Really?" Jayden's voice caught, and he turned back to the pictures looking at each one carefully. "Why are there two circles in some of them? What does A and B mean?"

I stepped closer and slipped my hand into his. "There are two."

Seconds passed while Jayden blinked and stared at the pictures. As the news finally sunk in, his face lit up brighter than the lights surrounding us. He turned to me with a smile that can only be described as wonder, shock, and overwhelm all wrapped up in the best burrito ever.

"Twins?"

"Twins."

And they lived crazy busy, but happily ever after...

Loved this bonus epilogue? I've got more FREE stuff for you!

Follow this link for my free novella, *Picture Perfect*

<https://BookHip.com/PRADRJR>