

A  
Sweet   
DREAM COME TRUE

SARAH ANNE CROUCH



*For Elizabeth, Lily, and Peter with all my love. Thanks for  
always sharing your ice cream.*



# Acknowledgments

If you are ever in Middle Tennessee, go get some ice cream at Janarty's. You won't regret it.

Thank you, Janelle and Marty, for all of your insight and delicious ice cream.

Thank you to Amy, Heather, and Regina. I'm honored to be included with you talented ladies.

Michael, thank you for your love and support.

Thank you to Linda, Shannon, Susan, and everyone at Scrivenings Press for all the work you do.

To you, dear reader, thank you for taking this journey with us. I pray you will be blessed by our stories.

And to the God who created all things, may my work always honor You.



# Chapter One



Isaac Campbell was exhausted, and he'd never felt better. He stretched his arms and cracked his knuckles. A grin spread over his face as he surveyed the customers around him.

Three teenage girls huddled over their bowls, leaning in toward one another and chatting with animated expressions. A set of parents juggled cones and twin toddlers covered in a sticky mess. An older couple stood at the counter tasting samples.

Isaac inhaled a deep breath laced in sugar and cream and vanilla. *Oh, man.* His lifelong dream really was the best job in the world—getting to serve delicious ice cream and make people happy every day.

The door swung open to allow his best friend, Zeke Harvey, entrance. Isaac couldn't help smiling at Zeke's exaggerated wave as he stepped into line.

"Hey there, Zeke."

The Mr. Dream Ice Cream shop stayed busy most weekends through the spring and summer, but today was extra

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special. Last night had kicked off Bestwood, Tennessee's annual fall festival, Best Fest. Visitors came in from all over Middle Tennessee and even farther to admire the giant pumpkins, take a train ride, eat pulled pork barbecue, and listen to excellent country music.

Isaac turned his attention back to the register where Josh was backed up filling orders again. His smile fell a fraction of an inch, but he pushed a grin back in place when Josh handed the older couple their two cones and sent them down his way.

"Two double scoop waffle cones?"

"Yessir." The gentleman reached in his wallet and pulled out a credit card and a store loyalty punch card. "And I think this makes our tenth ice cream."

As he whipped out the hole punch, Isaac racked his brain. He'd seen this couple in the shop several times now and he should know their names. Sparks? Smart? No, Sharp.

"Wonderful, Mr. and Mrs. Sharp. That means your second cone is free." He reached for another loyalty card from the plastic container on the counter. "Here's a fresh card for the next time you come in. And be sure to leave a comment in the suggestion box."

Mrs. Sharp leaned over her husband's shoulder as he took back his credit card and signed his name on the tablet. "We love your ice cream, Isaac. We can't get enough of it."

"Well, I can't get enough of you, either."

The couple chuckled together before waving goodbye.

Two more double cones and a fudge sundae before Zeke made it to the counter. "This place is hopping!" He handed over his credit card.

With practiced automaticity, Isaac slid it through the reader and flipped the tablet over for Zeke to sign. "Not as busy as I'd like though. I took all of your suggestions to heart. We pushed hard on marketing leading up to this weekend.



And we gave out door prizes last night to open up the festival.”

Zeke licked a stray drip of mint chip off his cone and gave a low groan. “Man, your ice cream is good.”

Isaac’s lips pulled into a satisfied grin. “Thanks.”

“Well, it looks like you’re going to have a great end to the season.”

The downside of owning an ice cream business was the winter and early spring. Few wanted to buy a frozen dessert when temperatures dropped. Isaac knew, even before Zeke and the rest of the Chamber of Commerce told him, he needed to go out with a bang at the end of the season if he wanted to make it through his first year. Sales had been good, but Isaac worried it wouldn’t be enough.

As Zeke left to find a seat at the bar against the back wall, Isaac mentally assessed all the customers in the small restaurant. Everyone looked satisfied. A few people had chosen to eat at the two tables on the patio, the Sharps and a mom with her kid. He spotted a mess that needed to be cleaned up. Maybe that would be a good job for Josh.

“Hey, Josh. How about you wipe down that middle table and clean up a little?” He turned to the young woman making waffle cones behind him. “Abby, could you take over scooping?”

“Sure thing, boss.” Abby grabbed an aluminum scoop from the canister and stepped up with a smile. “What can I get for you today?”

As the man behind the plexiglass ordered his ice cream, Josh stood looking left and right.

“Here, buddy.” Isaac stepped back to pick up a clean rag from the shelves. He handed Josh a spray bottle of cleaner.

Josh nodded and ambled away, walking right past the messy table.

“Over at the middle table, Josh.”

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Isaac shook his head. He'd trained the kid over two months ago. Why couldn't he get the hang of things? Josh came highly recommended by a friend and had wowed Isaac with his stellar interview. He'd told Isaac he was studying business at Middle Tennessee State and hoped to become an entrepreneur.

But that was the last time Josh had impressed Isaac. Since then, he'd needed constant hand-holding and assistance. Isaac knew he should have a heart-to-heart with his employee. He just hadn't worked up the nerve to do it yet.

The next customer he rang up ordered a triple. Lemon blueberry crunch, peanut butter cup, and mint chip. Not a combination he would've chosen, but such was the beauty of an ice cream shop. The customers got to pick whatever flavors thrilled their hearts. And they always left happy.

Isaac sighed and rolled his shoulders. He checked to see that Josh had finished wiping tables and noticed the mom and boy still sitting outside. He frowned. Had either of them ordered ice cream earlier?

The mom drank a swig of water from a plastic bottle then handed it to her son. She smiled at the boy and pointed to something across the street.

"Abby, did you see those two come in earlier? The lady and the kid outside? Did they buy something?"

"No, but maybe I missed them."

"Cover the register for me. I'll be right back."

Isaac patted Josh on the shoulder as he walked toward the middle of the shop. "Go help Abby, would you?" He smiled at the customers he passed. "How's everything tasting?"

Murmurs of delight answered his question.

Isaac's skin itched. He was embarrassed he even had to approach the woman sitting outside. And he was irritated with himself that he was acting like such a coward. But deeper than that was a fear his business would fail. Isaac needed this

weekend to go well. He couldn't have people taking seats from his patrons.

"Excuse me, ma'am. I need these seats for my customers."

The woman looked up at him sharply. She had the most arresting blue eyes, and they practically sizzled with anger. He had to remind himself to breathe.

"It's ninety degrees outside. We can't sit for a few minutes in the shade?" She pointed to her son. "I have a small child here. He'll get overheated."

The boy squirmed.

"You're welcome to come inside and order a sundae for him." Isaac's heart raced. He never spoke to people this way. But his discomfort was worth it for the sake of the store.

"No, thanks." She grabbed her purse and her son's hand, then marched off in a huff, dragging the boy behind her.

Isaac covered his face with his hands and blew out a breath. That exchange had been excruciating, but it was over now. He smiled and waved at a family passing by before walking back in the store. Zeke was turned around in his seat at the bar, watching him with an amused smirk on his face.

"Remember that lady I was talking to you about? The single mom from my church who makes chocolate and candy?"

"Yeah." A sinking feeling grew in the pit of his stomach.

"That was her. Melanie Wilson."

"Of course it was."

Zeke hooted with laughter. "She can be a little fiery, huh?"

"That's putting it lightly." He'd gotten third degree burns from her glare. Isaac groaned as a realization dawned on him. "I've got to go talk to her now, don't I?"

Zeke shrugged. "Eventually, you probably should. You've gotta taste her chocolates. She could help you bring in serious traffic this winter."

*Doesn't that just figure?* The one time Isaac mustered up

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enough courage to stick up for himself and make someone unhappy, it backfired on an epic scale. He should've known better. Confrontation went against his very nature and made him uncomfortable in his own skin.

Quitting his accounting job in Nashville and starting a business had been a big risk, but the smiles he saw every day and the peace he felt in his own heart made everything worth it. Isaac had stepped out in faith to trust in God and follow his dreams, and he'd been blessed more than he'd ever thought possible. But if he wanted his ice cream shop to last beyond the first year, Isaac needed to pull out all the stops. And it couldn't hurt to make nice with the chocolatier.

He shot a glance to the counter. Josh and Abby seemed to be handling things fine. Surely he could step out for a minute without the whole store blowing up.

He pulled a coupon from his pocket. Time to see if Melanie Wilson could be won over with a little free ice cream.