

'Bastone delivers on this truly heartwarming, funny, and real story'

ABBY JIMENEZ, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# Ready or Not



CARA BASTONE





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*Cara Bastone*





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## [About the Author](#)

**Cara Bastone** is a full-time writer who lives and writes in Brooklyn with her husband, son and an almost-golden doodle. Her goal with her work is to find the swoon in ordinary love stories. She's been a fan of the romance genre since she found a grocery bag filled with her grandmother's old Harlequin Romance books when she was in high school. She's a fangirl for pretzel sticks, long walks through Prospect Park, and love stories featuring men who aren't hobbled by their own masculinity.

To find out more, visit [carabastone.com](http://carabastone.com) or follow Cara on X and Instagram [@carabastone](#).

**By Cara Bastone**

Ready or Not

*Love Lines Series*

Call Me Maybe

Sweet Talk

Seatmate

## Praise for Cara Bastone

‘Bastone delivers on this truly heartwarming, funny, and real story. Come for the dog bar, stay for the special, slow-burn romcom’

Abby Jimenez, *New York Times* bestselling author

‘*Ready or Not* is the very definition of the perfect slow burn, friends-to-lovers romance. Cara Bastone’s voice is wholly unique and sparkles with effervescence and joy. I savored every page’

KJ Dell’Antonia, *New York Times* bestselling author

‘An absolute treasure of a book! Cara Bastone gives readers a gift, and pays humanity a compliment, with this warmly witty, profoundly tender story of a love that makes the world bigger and better. *Ready or Not* introduces indelible characters who navigate their entanglements with abundant, heart-bursting kindness. The result is one of the most emotionally satisfying romances I’ve read in years’

Joanna Lowell

‘A wholehearted meditation on all kinds of love, this novel is pure joy’

Annabel Monaghan

‘With loads of humor, lovable characters, and a first kiss that will leave you flushed and breathless, *Ready or Not* is a delightfully romantic story that celebrates modern love and the excitement of the unexpected. Readers will adore Cara Bastone’s joyful, swoony novel!’

Amy Poeppel

‘[A] truly heartwarming emotional journey . . . Bastone is wonderfully unflinching when considering the way pregnancy changes relationships . . . Funny and touching; Eve’s snappy voice and poignant vulnerability are a good match for the subject matter’

*Kirkus Reviews*

‘Cara Bastone is one of the most talented writers in the romance genre today. With her signature blend of heart, humor, and honesty, Cara’s books remind you that the best stories begin and end with hope’

Lyssa Kay Adams

‘The perfect late night read to sooth the soul . . . a cute romance with a touch of slow burn’

Harlequin Junkie

## About the Book

# Ready or Not

Eve Hatch has always been content to coast through her life, with a steady, if uninspiring, job and a cozy apartment in Brooklyn, close to her childhood best friend Willa and far from the midwestern, traditional family who never really understood her.

But when she finds herself pregnant after an uncharacteristic one-night stand, her comfy life is suddenly up in the air. Eve's loyal friendship with Willa is feeling tense, right when she needs her the most, and it's actually Willa's steadfast big brother, Shep, who steps up with the most support and he's . . . suddenly kinda hot?

As if she needs one more complication, there's also the baby's father, who is *technically* supportive, but *majorly* conflicted. But as Eve struggles to figure out the next step in her expanding reality, she begins to realize that family and love, in all forms, can sneak up on you when you least expect it.

*For Jordan and Lauren.*

*Pregnancy would have been a lot more confusing without you.*

# One

**I didn't start** this day thinking I'd be handing over a Dixie cup of my own urine to a woman in lavender scrubs.

"What's the verdict?" I ask about seven seconds after the nurse dips the stick into the cup on the other side of the exam room.

She is one of those ageless people whose fluffy gray-brown hair could have been that of an unfortunate thirty-five-year-old or a banging hot fifty-five-year-old. Her face gives away nothing as she looks up at me.

"The doctor will be in to discuss your results, Ms. Hatch."

*AKA, I'm not gonna be the one to tell you there's an egg in your biscuit.*

"Call me Eve and, look, you can just tell me. I'm sure you can read the stick as well as the doctor can. I know I'm pregnant anyways. I took three tests on my own. I did the research." (On the train on the way over here.) "I know that false positives really only happen for women who were just recently pregnant or taking certain fertility meds. There's no way I'm *not* pregnant."

I'm telling her. I'm telling myself. I'm telling the universe, because the facts are grounding me. I'm trying to be realistic here. I refuse to be secretly hoping for either outcome.

The nurse's face shows zero signs of life. Maybe that's the secret to her ageless success. If one never, ever moves one's face, one can look forty in one's seventies. I make a mental note to start having fewer emotions. Probably a super achievable goal right at the beginning of an unplanned pregnancy, right?



“The doctor will discuss it with you. Now, I just need some basic info from you.” She has me hop on a scale and then takes my blood pressure. I’m shocked when I don’t blow up the machine like a desktop plugged in during a lightning storm. She confirms my family history. And then the fun questions begin.

“Are you sexually active?” she asks the computer screen.

“You know, the term ‘sexually active’ has always been so weird to me. It doesn’t make sense. If I had gone on one run in the last three months and that was it, no one would classify me as being *physically* active.”

The nurse gives me that blank look as her hands twitch over the keyboard. Obviously, she is waiting for me to answer the damn question.

“But you schtup one bartender . . .” Apparently, I can’t resist.

Her blank look evolves into a slow blink.

“Anyways,” I continue through a small cough.

“Miss . . .” the nurse prompts.

“Right. Yes. I had sex about four weeks ago. If that answers your question.”

Her fingers type-type-type away, sealing my fate into the computer. I am now, officially, an irresponsible sex-haver. Add it to my permanent record.

My eyebrows rise as the nurse continues typing. Thirty seconds pass. Another fifteen. I don’t think *had sex once four weeks ago* should possibly take that long to input. What is she, writing a novel over there? A diary entry? Updating her blog?

Finally, she looks up. “Date of last period?”

“I don’t know. I’m really irregular and I don’t keep much track. Maybe September?”

More novel writing. This woman is obsessed with typing. Her grandfather invented the typewriter. In her family, it’s a rite of passage to learn how to type six thousand words a minute.

She looks up from the computer. I brace for more questions that all seem like they *could* contain the word *vagina* but for some reason never do.

“Honey,” the nurse says. “Are you all right?”

I blink at her. That was not the type of question that I expected her to ask me. I hate it significantly more than all the others.

“I’m on my lunch break,” I say to her, as if that explains absolutely anything about my well-being. *Stay in your lane, blank-faced nurse. Let’s get this over with.*

Apparently, though, it answers her question. She nods briskly and turns back to the computer screen. “I need to ask a few more questions before the doctor comes in.”

“Okay.”

“Are you in a monogamous relationship?”

“Can’t we just talk about my feelings again?”

She slants me a look.

I clear my throat. “No. I’m not. It was a random encounter.”

“Do you have sex with men?”

“I have had sex with men. I’m not currently sleeping with anyone.”

She types, clicks, scrolls, and types and clicks again. Apparently, I answered two questions in one.

“Do you have sex with women?”

“Nope.”

“Do you have vaginal sex?”

“Yes.”

“Oral sex?”

“Yes and yes.” I answer that way because that question can be construed in two ways. I promptly realize I’ve revealed too much when the corner of her mouth lifts for a brief second before she clicks, types, and scrolls.

“Anal sex?”

“Haven’t had the honor.”

More clicking. More scrolling. She turns to me. Her hands are folded. I don’t take it as a good sign.

“We recommend a full panel of STI testing for our patients who are not in monogamous relationships.”

“Okay.” Because what else can I really say? “But I really need to be back at work soon. Can I make a second appointment for that?”

“Yes,” the nurse answers briskly. “They’ll schedule you in for later this week, as it’s important to get it done as soon as possible.”

“Great.”

What a silly word *great* is. I only said it so she’d know I’m not trying to avoid my STI testing. I should have just said *fine* and moved on with my life.

She asks about fifteen more invasive questions and then stands up to go get the doctor. I watch the clock tick-tock. I made a New Year’s resolution this year that I won’t aimlessly scroll on my phone when I’m waiting for something. I’ve never wanted to break my rule more than I do right now, but it’s already October and even though I’d love to drown in a round of Technicolor point-and-shoot I’m only a month and a half away from being the only person on the face of the earth who has ever held to their New Year’s resolution for an entire year. This little speed bump shall not be my undoing. Because that’s all an unplanned pregnancy really is, right? A speed bump? A tiny little momentary blip that barely affects your regularly scheduled programming? Someone please confirm that for me.

My parents dealt with an unplanned pregnancy at the whopping age of fifty-two.

The results? Moi.

I spent my childhood having other kids ask me why my mom had gray hair and watching my parents’ necks get red in church while people whispered over raised eyebrows about the fact that after three *appropriately* spaced older brothers, I, two decades later, must have been an accident.

Maybe accidents are genetic? I got my mom’s pointy nose, my dad’s bony feet, and both of their proclivity towards apparently irresponsible sex. How embarrassing.

They passed away when I was in college, but even if they were still around, this isn’t exactly the kind of thing I’d ask them for advice about.

My thumbs twitch, begging me to open my phone and let me match dancing fruit to other dancing fruit. But nay! A massively unexpected life

change will not break me.

The uneaten peanut butter sandwich in my bag just might, though. The seconds of my lunch break are splintering away as I wait for my doctor. At this rate, I will definitely not have time to eat lunch before I get back to work. And it's not like I can eat at my desk, or even right before I head back into the building. Micah, the junior accountant at Wildlife Fund of America, where I work, sits kitty-corner from me and is deathly allergic to peanuts. I stow a toothbrush in my bag to keep the peanut-related homicide to a minimum. But I won't have time for that at this point. My sandwich could kill him with one puff of my breath and it would be all this tardy gyno's fault.

There's a brisk knock, not enough time for me to answer, and the OB-GYN strides into the office. My former doctor apparently moved practices since the last time I was here, so this is a meet-and-greet as well as the moment I find out I'm officially pregnant.

You know, just to make things easier.

The doctor is a statuesque bottle blonde who looks like a female version of a Ken doll. No, I don't mean Barbie. This woman is ripped.

Nurse Blank follows in after her. The welcome brigade. Exactly the two people I would have chosen to tell me that my life will never be the same.

The doctor says what I was expecting to hear, but the words wobble upon entry to the atmosphere. I respond somehow. I'm lying on my back with no pants on and the OB-GYN, who I've decided must be named Bridget, rolls a condom onto an enormous wand, slathers it up with frankly an absurd amount of lube, and my eyes squeeze tight while she does her internal exam.

There's a picture on a screen that looks like nothing to me. The doctor pulls the wand away from me, and the only noise in the room is the snap of her gloves as she tosses them in the trash.

"Nurse," the doctor says. "Where's the testing tray?"

"She's coming back in later in the week for her testing."

The doctor lowers her voice and says something I can't hear. My feet are still on the stirrups and the nurse leans around me and taps my big toe with