

EVANGELINE KELLY

BLIND *Date*  
with the *Billionaire*  
BEST MAN  
BLIND DATE DISASTERS

# Blind Date with the Billionaire Best Man

EVANGELINE KELLY

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# Chapter One

Meadow

A warm, giddy sensation washed over me as I pulled my vehicle into a parking space in front of the restaurant and turned off the engine. Dense clouds covered the black sky, looking as if they might burst at any moment. The weather forecast had predicted rain, but not until later in the evening, so I wouldn't have to worry about walking in with my hair dripping wet.

Staring straight ahead, I gripped the steering wheel and offered up a quick prayer, asking God to calm my nerves.

Maybe this would be it—the day I met the man of my dreams. I usually tried not to get my hopes up before a blind date, and having gone on a few that didn't end so well, I'd learned to keep my expectations low. But this evening felt different for some reason. My best friend, Eliza, knew me better than anyone else, and she seemed convinced that Jaxon Griswold and I would hit it off immediately. He was her boyfriend's best friend, so she'd hung out with him many times and said she liked him a lot. I trusted her judgment, and if she thought we had a chance, I was willing to give it a try.

"He's exactly your type," she'd gushed. "His style is conservative, and I realize that's not your thing, but he's caring, confident, extremely handsome, and, of course, very well mannered. He's a solid Christian, the kind of man you admire from afar and wonder if you'll ever get a chance to meet. You know the sort I'm talking about, right?"

I had nodded uncertainly.

"He has this way with people. They're drawn to him, look up to him. It helps that he's a billionaire with a booming company. It's an on-demand grocery delivery service."

"That sounds impressive. What makes you think he'll like me?" I'd asked skeptically. She had previously mentioned that he was a billionaire, which in my mind meant he could choose almost anyone he wanted.

She had touched my arm and shared a secret smile. “Oh, he’ll love you, Meadow. Don’t you worry about that. I have a feeling about this. In fact, I was praying a few weeks ago, and I sensed the Lord urging me to introduce him to you. Mark my words, I guarantee the two of you will get into a relationship very soon.”

I had laughed, thinking she was crazy, but she’d seemed so sure that I found myself agreeing to her set-up, even though I had promised myself I would never go on another blind date again. Her description of this amazing guy intrigued me and made me want to see what all the fuss was about.

Blowing out a breath, I pried my fingers off the steering wheel, nervous butterflies twisting in my stomach. I slid out of my vehicle, smoothing out my blue and brown print bohemian style dress with its ruffle at the bottom. I loved this outfit because it reminded me of a patchwork quilt I once saw at a craft fair.

After running my hand through my long, wavy brown hair, I picked up my green velvet, wide-brimmed hat and stuck it firmly on my head before closing and locking the door. No one would ever accuse me of being your average cookie-cutter barbie doll, not that I cared to fit that image, anyway. I had my own style, and I wasn’t afraid to admit that I had a few quirks that rubbed some men the wrong way. But the right man would love me for who I was, and I refused to compromise. Even for some amazing guy who might be looking for a woman with a more classic look. If that was what Jaxon wanted, we would have to part ways.

I walked across the parking lot, my brown suede ankle boots with spiked heels click-clacking against the ground. I pushed against the glass double doors, a gust of warm air brushing against my face, and I quickly glanced around, looking for my date. Eliza had shown me a picture of him, so I wasn’t going into this completely blind.

I scanned the room until my gaze landed on a man sitting by a large window. He looked exactly like his photo, but he was ten times more handsome. He appeared as if he’d come straight from work in a black suit that hugged his broad shoulders, and he was peering down at his phone, lost in thought.

He wasn’t aware that I had arrived, so I took a few minutes to study him, taking in all the details: five o’clock shadow, firm jaw with a divot in his chin, brown hair parted and ridiculously voluminous on one side to the point that I was sure he’d put a good deal of effort into his image. An expensive

gold watch gripped his wrist, and his lips pressed together in annoyance. Confidence radiated from him. He had this vibe...like he believed he was the full package.

Maybe that was all in my imagination, but still, this was not the guy I'd pictured.

He resembled the man in the photograph, but in person, he made me uneasy. I preferred someone with a warm and personable personality, and I wasn't getting that from him.

I shook my head to clear away the negative thoughts buzzing around me like pestering flies. Eliza liked him, so he couldn't be all that bad. Everyone judged people on first impressions, even if they denied it. But that didn't mean I was correct in assuming he was arrogant just because he held himself in a manner that conveyed confidence. Or annoyance. Maybe he had a good reason to feel that way.

He could be the nicest guy in the world, for all I knew. And here I was, inwardly criticizing him because his hair made him seem like an over-styled playboy—as if he'd used tons of gel and looked into a mirror for hours, using a round brush and a hairdryer. I couldn't get excited about a man who spent that much time on his appearance.

*Okay, enough of that. Give the man a chance.*

I squared my shoulders and strode over to him, stopping at his table, my hands clasped in front of me. He was so engrossed in his phone that he didn't look up.

I cleared my throat.

He continued to stare at his device as if nothing in the world could tear his gaze away. Couldn't he sense someone standing in front of him?

After a few seconds passed, I cleared my throat again. "Hello, Jaxon."

Even after saying his name, it took a few seconds for him to pry his attention from what he was reading and glance up at me. Our gazes met, and a jolt of electricity shot through me. Dark-brown, soulful eyes stared back at me, and for one long moment, I lost my ability to speak. His gaze moved over me quickly, and to my dismay, I got the distinct impression he wasn't all that impressed on his end.

He pushed his cell phone to the side and stood to shake my hand. "Pleased to meet you, Meadow." His tone was flat, unenthusiastic, as if he'd used the same greeting for twenty other people today.

I gave him a tight smile and nodded. "Likewise."

“It’s Meadow Brooks, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

He gestured for me to sit across from him, and he slid back into his seat. “You look exactly like your picture, although that dress”—His gaze brushed over me, and his eyebrows flew up—“is quite...different from what I imagined you would wear. Very different, in fact.”

*Thank you. How nice of you to call me different, two separate times.* I pursed my lips and held in my aggravation so I didn’t start off on a bad note and say something I would regret. “You imagined what I would be wearing?”

He flushed slightly. “I just assumed you’d come from work dressed in business attire.”

“I don’t have business attire if you’re referring to black pencil skirts and white blouses.”

He cocked his head to the side, his eyebrows scrunching together. “Are you in between jobs?”

“No, not at all. In fact, I own a vitamin shop in Venice Beach, and I find that my customers prefer it if I dress casually.”

He frowned as he considered that. “Interesting. Eliza never mentioned your profession.”

“Is my career a problem for you?”

He took another moment to think that over and then shook his head. “No, it’s not something I would wholeheartedly get excited about, but if it’s not hurting anyone, then I guess it’s okay.”

Huh. Well, that wasn’t exactly a ringing endorsement, but at least he was honest. Uneasiness washed over me, and I didn’t know what to make of this situation. It certainly hadn’t started out the way I’d hoped, but maybe it would get better.

A waiter walked over and introduced himself, placing two menus on the table. He took our drink orders and then hurried away.

I leaned back and averted my eyes, finding it hard to look at Jaxon for more than a few seconds at a time. He was definitely handsome, to the point of distraction. Eliza hadn’t exaggerated about that part at all, even if her other descriptions didn’t seem to fit the man.

This situation irritated me to a certain degree because I wanted to feel like I was his equal. He was filthy rich, so I could never match him there, and he was beyond gorgeous. Instead of admiring what was in front of me, I felt...frustrated. I wanted a man who would see me as his dream girl, not someone



who didn't quite make the cut in his estimation. Sure, we were equals on a basic level, in the sense that all human beings had worth in God's eyes—I had to keep reminding myself of that fact—but I seriously doubted that this guy would ever get excited about me. And so far, I wasn't enthused about him either, though I wondered if a part of me was self-sabotaging because I was afraid of rejection.

And then there was his response to hearing what I did for a living. Most people perked up when I told them I owned a vitamin shop, but not this guy. Apparently, being a business owner didn't win me any points. He just stared at me with a cold expression, leaning back in his chair, his arms crossed over his chest. "You have a hippy vibe going on. What's that all about?"

"Bohemian," I said.

"What?"

"My style...it's called Bohemian, and it says a lot about my identity as a free, independent spirit. It's part of who I am."

"I see." He tightened his lips and glanced away, disapproval flickering in his eyes, then peered out the window, appearing as if he wanted to be anywhere other than here.

The waiter returned with our drinks: a glass of water for me and an iced tea for Jaxon. We both took a moment to study the menu and then ordered a few minutes later.

Several moments of silence passed, and I cleared my throat nervously, trying to think of conversation topics. "By the way, I have some expertise on health remedies, so if you have any ailments, I could recommend something."

He frowned and shifted slightly in his seat. "No, thanks. I don't believe in that stuff."

My eyes widened. "You don't believe in vitamins?"

He shrugged. "A multivitamin and a healthy diet are plenty, but a lot of products out there prey on people's desperation to feel better. It's all a hoax."

My mouth dropped open at his ignorance. "Sure, that's true for some things, but there are tons of useful supplements that will do a world of good if you take them. I have clients who return again and again because they say they're healthier when they add certain vitamins to their regimen."

"Haven't you ever heard of the placebo effect?"

"Of course, but that's not—"

"I understand from a business perspective why you might sell those things, but from a health perspective, it's a waste of time."

I gritted my teeth, anger washing through me at his blatant dismissal of my profession. “That’s rubbish. I can share tons of scientific studies that prove otherwise.”

His phone rang, and he seemed almost relieved as he picked it up and answered. “Hey.” He glanced at me and pointed at his cell. “Excuse me, I have to take this.” He stood and walked a few paces away, turning his back to me and speaking in a low tone.

For several seconds I stared at him in frustration, and then I sighed, wondering how long we had to put up this farce. Twenty minutes? Thirty? An hour? If Eliza hadn’t been the one to set us up, I would have made up some excuse to leave, but I felt obligated to give it longer. We just...didn’t fit. I could feel it. Sense it in my bones. This guy was not for me, and he obviously felt the same way.

While Jaxon was talking a few paces away, I pulled out my cell phone to check the time and gauge how much longer I had to stay.

A moment later, Jaxon sat down abruptly, placing his phone back on the table. “Sorry about that. I’m dealing with something at work, and it couldn’t wait.”

“Everything okay?”

He coughed into his fist and nodded slightly. “Yeah, it’s fine.”

I stared at his phone, trying not to be offended that he refused to put it away for even a moment. I was of the strong opinion that if you were on a date, you shouldn’t allow other distractions to take priority, but apparently, he didn’t feel the same way.

He clapped his hands together and smiled slightly. “So, where were we?”

“I’m not sure, but if you need to go so you can handle your work issue, I’ll completely understand.”

He shrugged indifferently. “No, it’s fine. I’m able to stay a little longer.” His eyes glazed over as if he were trying to push through the torture of sitting here with me, and I wanted to tell him not to do me any favors.

Eliza had said he was kind, well-mannered, and confident. She was correct about the last one, but I had yet to see evidence of the other two.

This just wasn’t working and forcing myself to go through the motions when I already knew how this would end seemed pointless. We would both smile politely and go our separate ways, never to speak to one another again. I let out a breath and did my best not to frown. “Can I be honest with you?”

“Of course.”

“I’m not getting the sense that we have much in common, and you don’t seem like you want to be here.”

He didn’t confirm or deny that statement, but there wasn’t a chance to reply because a woman with a high-pitched voice yelled his name from across the room. She ran over, her blonde hair flapping behind her. “I can’t believe you’re here!”

He grimaced and ducked his head for a moment, then seemed to realize there was no getting out of this. He gave her a tight smile and stood, the muscles in his arms rippling underneath his shirt. “Hi, Anabelle.”

He held out a hand, but she bypassed it and flung herself at him, hugging him tightly. “Where have you been?” she shrieked. “I’ve been trying to get in touch with you.”

“Oh, you know... Work keeps me busy.”

She stuck out her lower lip in a pout, almost as if it were a reflex. “I thought we hit it off so well the other day, but then I didn’t hear from you. What happened?”

He looked at her like a deer in headlights. “Oh...uh. I just didn’t think...” He coughed into his fist and glanced at me apologetically. “This isn’t the time or place to have that conversation.”

Maybe the awkwardness of the situation should have left me disgruntled, but it gave me the out I’d been looking for. “So, Jaxon took you out on a date?” I asked.

Anabelle nodded vigorously. “Yes, and we both enjoyed it, didn’t we?” She beamed for a few seconds until she suddenly realized what was going on. Her gaze landed on me, and a deep line formed on her forehead. “Are you guys...seeing each other?”

“Meadow and I are having dinner,” Jaxon said as if that part weren’t obvious.

Her eyes widened until I was sure they would pop out of her head. “Oh, I didn’t realize.” She gave me a pained look, the corners of her lips drooping down. “I would never have put the two of you together, but that’s neither here nor there.”

I bristled, despite agreeing with her assessment. “Well, we only just met, and we haven’t had a chance to get to know each other yet.” I cleared my throat. “But...I feel a headache coming on, so I think I’ll head home. That shouldn’t stop you from getting reacquainted, though. You should take my place.” I stood and gestured for her to sit in my chair.

Jaxon's gaze flew to me and there was an almost panicked look in his eyes. "You can't leave."

# Chapter Two

Jaxon

“Oh, but I feel I must,” Meadow said, backing away one step at a time, trying to escape discretely, but it wasn’t working. It was so obvious what she was doing. “You two...enjoy.” She smirked as if she knew leaving me with Anabelle would pose a mild inconvenience.

I wasn’t sure what to think of Meadow Brooks, but she was definitely... out there. She was attractive with long, wavy brown hair and expressive hazel eyes that were quite pretty, but everything about her screamed artsy, free-spirited, and lost in la-la land. Okay, the last description wasn’t entirely fair since she seemed intelligent, but I had no idea why my best friend and his girlfriend thought we would hit it off.

She started to turn in the direction of the exit, and I knew if I didn’t do something drastic, I would lose the opportunity and would end up stuck with Anabelle for the rest of the evening. That woman had flat-out told me she was looking for a sugar daddy, and I had no intention of falling into that role. I’d already shared that it wouldn’t work out between us, but she hadn’t given up.

I stepped forward and snaked my arm around Meadow’s waist, pulling her firmly to my side. She gasped and glanced up at me, her hazel eyes widening. For a moment, I almost lost myself in her eyes, but I quickly snapped out of it. “We would disappoint Asher and Eliza if we didn’t at least eat dinner. If you’re a vitamin chick, you must have a remedy for headaches.”

She tensed and stared up at the ceiling as if thinking. “Yes, I do, but not with me. It’s at home, so I—”

“Hold on. I bet Anabelle has something.”

As if on cue, Anabelle dug through her purse and pulled out a small bottle of Tylenol, shaking out two capsules into my palm. She pressed her lips together, one of those micro-expressions that conveyed frustration. “That

should do it.” Her voice wavered as if she were finally realizing there wasn’t much hope of us seeing more of each other this evening.

I picked up Meadow’s water and handed her the pills. Was I presumptuous in assuming she would stay? You bet. But I wasn’t taking any chances that she might head out the back door. “This should fix you up in no time.”

She placed the capsules in her mouth and gulped down the liquid. “Thanks.” Her shoulders drooped, and she looked anything but grateful.

“Well, I’d better go,” Anabelle said, sounding miffed. She advanced a few paces and then glanced over her shoulder, mouthing, *call me*.

That wasn’t happening.

She must have read that in my eyes because her expression hardened and she walked briskly toward the front of the restaurant.

Meadow sighed and lowered herself onto her chair, looking like a trapped animal stuck in its cage.

I sat across from her and loosened my tie, doing my best to relax the tension in my shoulders. “Where were we?”

She folded her hands on the table and got right to the point. “I’m not your type, am I?”

“What makes you think that?” I froze, not wanting to say more and offend her. I barely knew her, but I knew enough. Could I envision the two of us together? Not really. I wasn’t picky, but I preferred a woman with a conservative, classic style—similar to what I gravitated toward for myself—but Meadow was too far-gone into her Bohemian ways to suit my taste. That outfit was just...hideous, although I could probably get over it if she’d worn it on Halloween.

“I’m very intuitive, Jaxon, and I can tell by your body language that Asher forced you to come on this date. You took one look at my dress and decided I wasn’t right for you. I could see it in your eyes.”

She was correct on that assumption, but it was less about her specific dress and more about how the outfit symbolized our differences.

Reluctantly, my estimation of her rose slightly, only because I admired anyone who could read a situation so quickly. Granted...we hadn’t had much of a chance to get acquainted, and maybe my initial lack of enthusiasm hadn’t been entirely fair. Asher had said she was a sweet woman, and it was shallow to judge someone based on appearance.

She was attractive—that wasn’t the issue—but the Bohemian style wasn’t

working for me. It looked as if she'd taken an old blanket from a garage sale and made it into a dress. And believe me, I normally didn't critique women's clothing, but this was a special case. It was over the top.

"See, you're not denying it," she said, smirking. "It's okay to admit I'm right. You won't hurt my feelings."

I settled into my seat, leaning back, not ready to hand over the control of this conversation. "What about you? Do you think I'm your type?"

She bit down on her bottom lip as if considering. "As a matter of fact... no. I can't see us together, and I don't know what Eliza and Asher were thinking when they decided to set us up."

I laughed, feeling relieved we were on the same page. "Can't fault them for trying."

"No, I guess we can't."

Our eyes connected, and for a second it seemed like we were bonding over the fact that we both didn't want to be here.

The moment ended when our waiter brought out our meals, but I was glad for the distraction. He placed a plate of steak, broccoli, and mashed potatoes in front of me and gave Meadow a large green salad.

Once he left, I bowed my head and prayed out loud, asking the Lord to bless our food, and then I opened my eyes and cleared my throat. "Fine, I'll admit it. On the surface, we don't seem well-matched, but that doesn't mean we can't grow to like each other." I threw that statement out to smooth things over, not believing we would ever go beyond this one dinner, but I believed it in theory. Most people could find something they had in common if they tried really hard.

"I don't hate you," she said, stabbing her fork into her salad.

"Thanks a lot." My tone was sarcastic, but I winked to let her know she hadn't offended me. I cut my steak into pieces, then lifted a slice of meat to my mouth and chewed. "What about me turns you off? I'm not trying to seem conceited, but women generally like me."

"See, that right there. That's the attitude of a cocky man, and I don't care for it."

Tilting my head to the side, I considered her statement. "I was answering factually, as I don't typically receive a lot of critical feedback from women. That's all I was trying to say."

She didn't look as if she believed me. "If you say so." She sighed. "I prefer men with a warmer vibe, and you're a bit cold for my taste. But even if

you were the nicest, most genuine guy in the world, it wouldn't make up for the fact that you're a meat-eater, and I can't in good conscience approve of that kind of behavior." She looked pointedly at my meal as if I'd made the worst mistake of all by ordering steak. "I refuse to eat anything that bleeds."

I stared at her, stunned for a long moment. Never mind the comment about me being cold, which I had to admit bothered me a little, but I should have seen the comment about my food coming since I loved meat. Of course, we would have to be at odds about that as well. "Oh, so you're a vegetarian."

"No, actually I'm vegan. I won't eat dairy products derived from innocent animals."

Of course, it all fit. "You're one of those."

"One of those...what?"

"The sort that shows up on Christmas Day, demanding that everyone eat your Brussels sprouts and quinoa instead of turkey and ham."

She casually took a sip of water, appearing unhurried. "I'm impressed you know what quinoa is, but I've never demanded that anyone eat the way I do, though I prefer it because it's so much healthier."

"But you just told me you couldn't approve of my behavior."

"Well, when it comes to romantic relationships, I think it's easier if both people are on the same page, food-wise. Healthy eating is very important to me."

"Meat happens to be healthy in moderation. We all need protein."

"You can get that through a protein shake."

"No, thanks," I said a little roughly. "I'll stick to my steak, thank you very much."

"It was just a suggestion. You don't have to bite my head off."

"I suppose you think I'm some sort of butcher because I eat—"

"Animal flesh?"

I burst out laughing. "Is that what you call it?"

"Yes, because that's what it is."

I stabbed a large juicy piece of "animal flesh" and bit into it heartily. "If that was supposed to deter me, it didn't work."

She shrugged. "I'm not surprised."

"You're a little critical, aren't you?"

She pursed her lips. "No, it's a free country, and I'm one-hundred percent on board with people making their own choices, but you asked what I was thinking about you. Can't blame me for telling the truth."



I sighed. “Look, I think it’s safe to say we won’t be going on a second date. Am I correct?”

She nodded. “Yes, we’re both in agreement on that.”

“Then can we enjoy the rest of our meal, now that we’re off the hook? I don’t know about you, but I would hate to tell Asher and Eliza that our date was a complete disaster.”

“Um...too late. It already is.” But her grin stretched across her face until she could no longer contain herself. She belted out a laugh, throwing her head back, revealing a slender neck. She laughed long and hard, covering her mouth at one point.

The sound relaxed me, made me happy in a way I couldn’t explain. My chest filled with warmth, and it wasn’t until that moment that I realized how boring my life had been lately. How much I needed to enjoy myself more. Despite my reservations about this woman, she had a wonderful laugh, making her a little less unlikeable. Perhaps she was starting to grow on me the slightest bit, despite all the other issues.

“You’re looking at me funny,” she said, still chuckling.

“You’re quite pretty when you laugh.”

“Too late to change your mind. We’re both in the friend zone, remember?”

“I’m not changing my viewpoint, but I’m allowed to give you a compliment.”

She sat up straighter, placing her palms flat on the table. “Well, then, since you gave me one, I’ll give you one as well.”

My stomach jerked in anticipation, and it was strange how much I wanted to hear what she had to say. “Go on.”

“You’re overconfident, the expensive watch is too flashy, and your entire outfit is so stiff—”

“Isn’t there supposed to be a compliment in there somewhere?”

She grinned again, and my eyes dipped down, noticing her full, plump lips. Lips I hadn’t noticed until now. She cleared her throat impatiently. “I’m getting there.”

I gestured for her to continue, unable to take my gaze off her.

“You try a little too hard with your hair, and placing your phone on the table during our date is extremely rude. But all in all, you’re a very striking man. I can see why Anabelle was so taken with you.”

Huh. She found me striking. I tucked that away to ponder later on, but in

the meantime, I couldn't stop thinking about the "you-try-a-little-too-hard" comment since it didn't take a lot of effort to hire a stylist. I found myself attempting to think of something witty to say in return, but nothing came to mind. "Thank you." I cleared my throat. "And I apologize for having my phone out. You're correct; that was rude." I picked up my phone and slid it into my pocket.

She nodded in acknowledgment and then smiled pleasantly. "By the way, would you like to try my salad? It's delicious."

"I'll pass and take your word for it. Do you want some of my mashed potatoes?"

She shook her head. "They're most likely made with milk or cream."

"Oh...right."

Neither of us said anything more for a long time after that, but I found myself catching secret glimpses of her when she wasn't looking. She had a confidence that shined through, making her more beautiful than I had initially thought. I wouldn't admit this to anyone, but I was tired of kiss-ups, so discovering a woman who had her own likes, interests, and boundaries was quite a find. We were still too different to make a go of this, but I almost wished we could try.

Once we finished eating and I walked her to her car, I lingered for just a moment. "It was nice meeting you, Meadow, and I wish you the best of luck."

She smiled, jingling her keys. "It was nice meeting you as well. I'm sorry if I was too hard on you, and I hope I didn't say anything offensive."

"Nothing I couldn't handle. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings by calling your dress 'different.'"

She glanced down and snickered. "Hardly. It'll take the right man to appreciate this particular outfit."

For a split second, I wanted to be that man, but then I shook my head to clear it. We weren't compatible, so I had to shut down those thoughts and move on. "Have a good night."

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\* \* \*

The following evening, Asher stopped by on his way home from work to hang out. He'd texted yesterday to find out how the date had gone, but all I'd said was that she was nice. I had ordered pizza, and we were sitting on the couch eating when he finally broached the subject.

"So, what did you really think of her?"

I had just taken a large bite, so I had to finish chewing before delving into that particular discussion. I thought about what to say, knowing this was tricky considering he'd known her for a while, and she was his girlfriend's best friend. "I like her."

He gestured for me to continue.

"We had an interesting discussion."

"I figured you would. Are you going to ask her out again?"

I shook my head. "No, we decided we're incompatible."

He frowned, appearing slightly confused by my answer. "How so?"

"Well, for one, she doesn't eat meat or any animal products, and you know how I'm basically a carnivore." I pointed to the open box of pizza. "Case in point...I got the meat-eater's special, and there aren't any vegetables on this thing."

He shrugged. "That's something you two could work around. Couples do it all the time."

"Maybe, but we weren't a match. It wasn't just me. She felt the same way."

"That's too bad. Eliza and I thought she'd be perfect for you, considering your track record."

He wasn't incorrect about the last part. I'd dated plenty, but I wasn't a good "picker" when it came to choosing a partner. For some reason, I always ended up with shallow women who were only with me for my money. "I liked her, don't get me wrong, but I don't see it going anywhere."

"One date isn't enough to know something like that. Give her a second chance."

I smirked. "Pretty sure she doesn't want another date with me. In fact, if I called her up today, I'm almost certain she'd say no."

Asher shook his head. "What happened to the guy who used to be able to charm any woman in a two-mile radius? Have you lost your touch?"

My forehead wrinkled, and I tightened my lips. "Of course not. If I wanted to win her over, I could, but I don't—"

"You don't have it in you, do you?"

I jerked back, slightly offended. “What are you talking about? I can get anyone I want.” I snickered, letting him know I wasn’t serious. Honestly, I wasn’t that conceited, and I was fully aware that lots of women wouldn’t choose to be with me, given the choice.

Asher and I had gone to the same college, and we used to get competitive with each other when it came to the female gender. But then he found Eliza and realized she was the one for him, and he effectively took himself out of the competition.

“All right,” he said with a speculative expression, “then I dare you to win Meadow over and take her on one more date.”

I shoved a large bite of pizza in my mouth and spoke once I’d finished chewing. “Oh, no. I’m not accepting a dare. There’s nothing in it for me.”

“What if I were to sell you my 69 Camaro ZL1? The one you’ve been asking about for ages.”

My jaw dropped open because I hadn’t expected him to budge on that issue. There were only sixty-nine ZL1s made, so it wasn’t an easy car to get ahold of. I’d had my eye on his vehicle for a long time, but I had some difficulty believing he’d part with it. “That’s your baby.”

He chuckled. “Actually, I was already thinking of selling it so Eliza and I will have money for a house once we’re married.”

“Whatever you need, I’ll give it to you. You don’t have to make a bet to get some extra cash. All you have to do is ask.”

He smiled appreciatively. “I know, man, but I’ve got it covered. I’m not looking for a handout.”

“Then sell me the car. I’ll offer you a fair price for it.”

“Sure, if you get Meadow to go on another date.”

“And if I don’t?”

He smirked. “Then I’ll sell it to the highest bidder—someone other than you.”

“That’s cold, man.” I shook my head, laughing slightly. “You’d do that to me?”

He nodded. “Yeah, it’s for your own good. I’m trying to help you out here, but if you think you’ve lost your touch, then—”

“I haven’t lost my touch. I can win her over.”

He gave me a satisfied grin. “Great. You’ll have plenty of opportunities in the coming weeks. I asked Eliza to marry me this morning, and I’m hoping you’ll agree to be my best man.”

My mouth dropped open. “Congratulations! You should have mentioned that earlier.” I gave him a quick hug and slapped him on the back.

His eyes twinkled. “I was waiting for the right moment. So, will you be my best man?”

“Of course. I’d be honored.”

“Great, you’ll get a chance to talk to Meadow at the engagement party.”

“She’s going?”

“Yep. She’s the maid of honor.”

I gave him an incredulous look. “So, you plan to pair the two of us up at the wedding?”

He nodded. “Don’t screw this up and make it awkward.”

I shook my head and glanced away. “What have you gotten me into?”

# Chapter Three

Meadow

“I just arrived, and I’m on my way up,” I said, holding my phone to my ear, walking as quickly as I could to the hotel entrance. It was the evening of Eliza and Asher’s engagement party, and I’d promised to come on the early side.

“That’s a relief,” Eliza said. “I need someone to help calm my nerves. Asher’s family will be arriving soon, and I’m second-guessing my gown.”

“You have nothing to worry about. That dress is spectacular.” She’d purchased a lovely A-line blush evening gown with streaks of sparkling silver throughout and a silver belt at the upper waist. As it was a black-tie event, we’d gone shopping together ahead of time, so I’d seen the dress and knew she looked amazing in it.

“Thank you. Please hurry. I want you to give me your honest opinion about how I look.”

“Sure, I’ll be honest, but I already know you have nothing to worry about.”

“You’re the best, Meadow.”

“I’m in the hotel lobby now.”

“Great, we’re on the third floor, and the ballroom is toward the back.”

After I hung up, I clicked the up button on the elevator and waited for the doors to open. A moment later, I sensed someone behind me, but before I could turn around, he spoke.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t my Bohemian princess.”

The voice was deep and husky, sending goosebumps up my arms and neck. I knew right away who it was, and honestly, I couldn’t say I wasn’t pleased.

After my date with Jaxon, I’d thought about him a good deal, and I regretted not putting my best foot forward. Not that it would have mattered

because we clearly weren't meant for each other. But still...I sensed something between us toward the end. A small connection, or maybe it was all in my head. I faced him, and a jolt of electricity raced up my spine as his eyes swept over me appreciatively. "Jaxon."

"Ah...she remembers my name."

My face heated because...how could I forget? He wore a black tuxedo with a black tie and a crisp white shirt underneath. "You have an easy name to remember."

"Didn't someone tell you it's taboo to look better than the bride? That dress is..." He trailed off, his eyes glued to the teal ball gown that fit my personality perfectly.

It was a sleeveless V-neck with light pink applique flowers and silver stars two-thirds of the way down, covering the bottom of the gown. The same stars and flowers covered the shoulders as well, and it was truly a dream. I had fallen in love with it the second I'd seen it. To complete the look, I'd braided my hair on both sides of my head and pulled the rest into a messy bun.

"The bride picked it out for me, so she approves," I said.

He placed a hand over his heart and let out a mock sigh. "Well, that's a relief. I wouldn't want you getting kicked out of the party for looking so stunning."

My brows creased, and I leaned away from him. "You don't have to lay it on so thick. I know you're just trying to smooth things over after our failed date, but don't worry. There are no hard feelings on my end."

"I'm not doing that," he said, giving me a boyish grin. And then the grin slid off his face, and his expression grew serious. "I'm speaking the truth. Truly."

"Oh." I coughed awkwardly into my fist, not sure how to respond.

A ding noise echoed throughout the space, and the elevator doors opened. It was empty, so we both made our way inside, and I pushed the button for the third floor. The doors slid close and there was a huge jolt before the cabin slowly moved upward. There was a squeak and then a grinding sound, and I glanced at Jaxon with raised eyebrows. "That's concerning."

The elevator slowed and then stopped, but the doors didn't open. We both waited with bated breath, expecting it to happen any second now. The lights flickered and then...nothing. I frantically pushed the third-floor button over

and over as if that would make a difference, but it didn't matter. "This can't be happening. Tell me it isn't happening."

Jaxon leaned closer, and I caught a whiff of his subtle cologne. It smelled like sandalwood and pine—masculine and heady. "Hold on. Let me try something." He pushed the ground floor button, but we didn't budge an inch. "Well, it seems we are officially stuck."

"Noooo." I covered my face with my hands and let out a wail.

"At least we didn't drop. I get motion sickness and that wouldn't be good."

"An elevator dropping isn't good with or without motion sickness."

"You have a point there."

I shook my head, not understanding why I had to go through this today of all days. "This has never happened to me before, but of course, it would have to happen with you."

He chuckled as if he were enjoying the moment. "Hmm...maybe God's trying to tell us something."

I ignored that and pressed all the buttons again and again as if I were a child, hoping for a different result. "This isn't good."

He placed a warm hand on my shoulder and squeezed. "Take a deep breath. We'll be out of here in no time." He lifted the phone on the console and spoke to someone, letting them know what happened. Once he hung up, he gave me a grim look. "They said they'll come, but not for several more hours. We just have to wait."

"What?" I shrieked. "The party will be over by then."

His lips twitched and then slid up into a mischievous smile. "Relax, I'm kidding. They'll be here shortly."

So much relief flooded through me that I could have kissed him, but I refrained, not wanting to make a fool of myself. Instead, I grabbed hold of his arm and let out a breath. "Oh, thank goodness. I'm not generally claustrophobic, but being in this elevator for hours would elevate anyone's blood pressure."

"Well, you've already elevated mine." He stared at me for a long moment, his eyes twinkling, daring me to say something in return.

I stepped back, not sure how to take that. "Are you flirting with me?"

"Maybe."

"What happened to the stiff businessman who couldn't look away from his phone?"



He shrugged. "There are sides to me you don't know."

I reluctantly nodded, feeling slightly annoyed. He didn't want to go out with me again, so why flirt? Wasn't that leading a woman on? Although...I'd told him I wasn't interested as well, so he probably figured it was harmless fun. I glanced up to find him watching me intently, and I decided to have a little fun of my own. "Take a picture. It'll last longer."

He smirked. "That's an old line."

"And yet it's so effective."

He stepped closer, crowding my personal space, and he was probably five inches taller than me, so I had to tilt my head up to look at him. The air felt magnetic, electric even, and I was finding it hard to breathe. I couldn't say a word. Not one.

"If I ask nicely, would you allow me to take a picture of you?"

I refused to let him see that he was affecting me, so I kept my expression neutral. "No, you may not. We both know I was only saying that to make my point."

"Oh, come on."

"There would be no purpose."

"What if I want to print it out and frame it? Set it on my mantle at home."

I burst out laughing. "That's silly."

"You don't believe I'd do it."

"No."

"I might surprise you. In fact, why not come over some time so you can see if I'm serious or not?"

"There's no reason to visit you at your home."

"I'm sure we can find one." He wiggled his eyebrows playfully as if he were teasing me, trying to poke fun.

"Stop doing that." I moved away, purposefully turning my face so I wasn't looking at him, but I sensed his intense gaze and it was unnerving. I finally snuck a peek, and the moment our eyes connected, he started wiggling his eyebrows again like a lunatic. I couldn't hold it together any longer and burst into laughter. "You're crazy."

He began singing "Crazy," the song Willie Nelson wrote, performed by Patsy Cline, and that sent me into even more ripples of laughter. "You're a nutcase, you know that? If I had realized you had this side to you, I might have been willing to go on a second date." I covered my mouth, instantly regretting my words. They'd just slipped out as if they'd had a mind of their

own.

He wasn't interested. He was playing with me, and now I'd messed it up. Any minute, he would retreat and get serious again, and we would go back to pushing each other away. It wasn't that I wanted more with him, but I'd lost it momentarily, probably due to the confined space. My heart started beating quicker, and it felt like the oxygen was slowly being sucked out of the elevator.

"You...want a second date with me?" He smiled knowingly as if this wasn't news to him, and I bristled, not wanting to feed his ego.

"I was joking."

"Hmm." He swiped a hand over his jaw and cocked his head to the side as if considering. "Now, that's an idea. I'll take you out again if that's what you want. Where would you like to go?"

A bead of sweat gathered at the back of my neck, and I felt lightheaded and fuzzy. Not because Jaxon was getting to me, but because it was hot and stuffy, and I needed to see something beyond these four walls. Or maybe I was telling myself the lightheadedness was a product of claustrophobia rather than swooning over a handsome face.

The more I thought about it, the more I knew I couldn't go through with it. A second date was a terrible idea.

Or was it?

A few minutes went by, and at that point, we were both leaning our backs against the wall, trying to remain patient. Jaxon's playfulness mellowed out and he started asking questions in an attempt to make conversation. He didn't ask anything deep, just basic things such as where I'd gone to college (San Diego State University), and if I had any siblings, which I didn't. I asked him a few questions as well, and after a while, we settled into an easy camaraderie.

Before I knew it, we were sharing our Christian testimonies and talking about our churches. I told him that starting my own business had been a dream of mine since I was in high school. And he shared how he received a sizable inheritance when his parents passed away, and he used that money to start his grocery delivery service, which had expanded across the country.

Suddenly, the elevator doors opened, and a male technician stood there with an apologetic smile. "Sorry about that. I came as quickly as I could."

I stepped out, and the shift in temperature from the air conditioning slammed into me, and I sucked in a breath, trying to get my equilibrium.

“Thank you for coming.”

Jaxon walked up behind me and placed a hand on my shoulder as if we were together. As if we were a couple. “Appreciate you getting us out of there. You came faster than I thought.”

“No problem.” The man lingered, appearing as if he wanted to test out a few things. Once he turned his attention away from us, I let out the breath I’d been holding.

Jaxon’s proximity, his hand on my shoulder, was all too much, and I had to walk forward to break the contact and put some distance between us. “Well, that was interesting. It’s not every day you get stuck in an elevator. I’d better find Eliza. She’ll wonder what’s happened to me.” I took off without a backward glance, needing to get away from him.

He quickly caught up to me and kept the same pace. “So, where do you want to go?”

We walked down a long hallway, the sound of voices echoing beyond us. “I’m heading to the ballroom.”

“That’s not what I mean. I’m speaking of our date.”

I glanced at him quickly to catch his expression, thinking he might be teasing, but he appeared serious, unreadable. I wasn’t sure if he was joking, so I threw out a ridiculous answer. “To Paris, or better yet, Italy, to the Leaning Tower of Pisa”

“I can arrange that.”

Oh, wait. The man was filthy rich and could afford to take me abroad. I laughed nervously, needing a way to cover up my mistake. “I’m teasing. Don’t pay me any mind.” We finally reached the ballroom where people were going in and out of the double doors, and I blew out a breath of relief.

Eliza stood in the doorway greeting guests, but once she caught a glimpse of me, she ran over, her heels scuffing against the carpet. “Meadow! Where have you been? You told me you were here twenty minutes ago. What happened?”

Seeing her friendly face released the tension in my shoulders, and I met her halfway, hugging her tightly, careful not to mess up our makeup. “We got stuck in an elevator. Can you believe that?”

She looked amazing in her pink and silver ball gown, her chestnut hair pulled back into a classy bun, her blue eyes widening. “Are you serious? That’s awful.”

“Not so bad,” the voice behind me bellowed. “We made the best of it.”

Her eyebrows flew up, and the corners of her mouth lifted in a smile. “Did you take good care of my girl, Jaxon?”

“Absolutely. We’re going on a second date.”

“Actually, I haven’t decided yet,” I said hurriedly.

“We’ll talk about it later.” Jaxon squeezed my shoulder and glanced at Eliza. “I’ve got to find Asher.”

“Go on inside. He’s talking to his parents on the other side of the room,” Eliza said.

He saluted us and then left. Once he was out of sight, I grimaced. “That was so intense. I’m a little shocked that he wants to go out again, considering he was so sure we were incompatible the last time I saw him.”

The smile on Eliza’s face slipped, and she glanced down as if not wanting to meet my gaze.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

Our eyes met and she winced. “I need to tell you something, but promise you won’t get mad.”

“What are you talking about? Why would I get mad?”

“Just promise me.”

“I’ll try to keep my emotions in check.”

“Fine, I suppose that’s good enough. Asher let it slip that he and Jaxon made a bet. If Jaxon goes on one more date with you, Asher will give Jaxon first dibs on his 69 Camaro ZL1. Apparently, Jaxon has wanted to buy it for some time, but Asher has always refused. I wasn’t going to tell you, but then I thought about it more, and it wouldn’t be right to keep you in the dark. If someone had done that to me—”

“Let me get this straight. Jaxon isn’t interested in me. He just wants to go out so he can purchase Asher’s car?”

Eliza’s lips pursed together with sympathy and perhaps a measure of pity. “I’m sure it’s not all about the bet. He wouldn’t go out with you if he didn’t like you at least a little.”

My heart dropped to my stomach, and disappointment tugged at my insides. It was all fake. Everything he’d said. “That jerk. All that flirting he did in the elevator was a massive scam, and I can’t believe I fell for it.”

Eliza’s forehead wrinkled, and her lips drooped down at the corners. “I’m so sorry. I gave Asher a really hard time about it. We argued for hours last night. He apologized profusely and said he’d tell Jaxon not to go through with it, but it looks as if it’s too late.”

“I should have realized. He was so different, and the change was too extreme. I feel like such an idiot.”

“You’re not an idiot.”

“You know what? I’m going to put it all behind me and pretend as if I had no idea. Once Asher speaks to him, he’ll probably drop it and that will be the end of it.”

“Are you okay?” Eliza’s eyes moistened, and I could tell she felt terrible about the situation.

“Relax, I’m fine. On our date, we both agreed we weren’t a match, so it’s no big deal. I’ve already adjusted my expectations when it comes to him.”

“But you were starting to fall for him when you guys were in the elevator. I can see it in your expression.”

I pressed my lips into a firm line, willing myself not to cry. “Maybe, but there’s no point in dwelling on it now. I refuse to let him upset me. Besides, surely there are a few eligible men you can introduce me to here at the party?”

Eliza perked up at the suggestion. “Yes, and I’m going to make sure you meet each and every one.” She linked her arm around mine and smiled. “Jaxon Griswold is not the only available bachelor at this shindig.”

# Chapter Four

Jaxon

Once I found Asher among a crowd of well-wishers, I was quick to pull him aside and tell him why I was so late. Needless to say, he thought the reason for the delay was quite entertaining.

He grinned happily. “I couldn’t have planned it better if I’d tried. Looks like the Lord wanted to throw you two together.”

“Yeah, I’m beginning to think the same thing.” I raked a hand through my hair and leaned in, not wanting anyone to hear what I was about to say. “That bet...it’s not sitting right with me. It feels...shady. Wrong. Not above board. And besides that, I’m starting to like Meadow, and I’d like to go out with her again, but I don’t want to start off on false pretenses. Know what I mean?”

Asher gave me a sheepish grimace, and he colored slightly. “I shouldn’t have suggested it. I was pushing you to give her another chance, but I didn’t think about the implications.”

“I get it, but let’s forget the bet. I don’t need the car that badly, and I’d rather have a clean conscience than a 69 Camaro ZL1 in my driveway.”

Asher straightened, and I could have sworn his eyes flickered with renewed respect. “I’m proud of you, man, and I’m sorry for interfering.”

“Just don’t mention the bet to Eliza. I wouldn’t want Meadow to hear about it and misunderstand my intentions.”

Asher tensed, then turned away, letting out a sigh. “Too late. I already told her, but I’ll make sure she doesn’t say anything.”

My eyes widened, and I scanned the room, looking for Eliza and Meadow. They were huddled in a corner talking to Eric Fleming, a guy I had briefly met through Asher. I watched as he clasped Meadow’s hand and held it longer than necessary, and a spark of jealousy washed through me so fast that I nearly lost my breath. Without thinking, I hurried over, not sure what I planned on doing. When I reached them, Meadow glanced at me, her lips

tightening. It happened so quickly that I almost missed it, but at that moment, I knew Eliza had told her. Either that, or she was sick of me after being stuck in the elevator for twenty minutes.

Eric slapped me on the back, smiling widely. “Hey, bro, what’s up? Good to see you.”

“I’m great,” I said, feeling anything but that. “Just thought I’d come over and say hello.” I nodded at Meadow and Eliza, acknowledging their presence.

“It was nice meeting you,” Meadow said, directing her attention at Eric, not sparing me another glance, “but we need to keep circulating.”

He nodded. “Sure, I understand. Maybe we’ll talk more later.”

Meadow smiled serenely as if she had fixed the expression on her face purposefully. “I would like that.”

Meadow and Eliza linked arms and started to leave, but I cleared my throat, not ready to give up. “Meadow, can I have a word with you for a minute?”

She looked at me, her brows furrowing, and she turned to Eliza as if needing guidance. “Now isn’t a good time.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Eliza said, glancing between the two of us. “I need to speak with Asher for a moment, anyway. I’ve kind of abandoned him, and I should—”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” Meadow said, appearing stricken. “Of course, you should be by his side. This is your engagement party, so I don’t know what I was thinking.” She swiped a hand over her face as if embarrassed. “I shouldn’t be monopolizing all your time.”

Eliza looked at her with concern, her forehead wrinkling. “You weren’t monopolizing. I needed to greet everyone, and you were helping me with that.” She lowered her voice to a whisper. “And it was my idea, so don’t feel bad. Are you sure you’re okay?”

Meadow nodded, appearing slightly uneasy. “I’m fine,” she whispered. “Please...go to Asher before he wonders who kidnapped his fiancée.”

I’d heard the conversation, even if they had intended to keep me out of it.

Eliza glanced at me with a look of judgment, then pursed her lips and turned back to Meadow. “Come find me in a few minutes so we can talk about that...thing.”

“Right...the thing.” Meadow nodded enthusiastically.

I didn’t know what they were referring to, but it didn’t take a rocket scientist to guess it probably had to do with me.

Eric was looking at everyone like he had no clue what they were talking about, but he must have figured it wasn't any of his business because he waved at all of us, appearing anxious to leave. "I see someone across the room that I haven't spoken to yet. Ladies...Jaxon...have a good evening."

Once Eric and Eliza had left, I stepped closer to Meadow, wanting to fix the bad opinion she had of me. "Hey, we need to talk."

"So you said." She glanced away, not meeting my eyes.

This was tricky since I wasn't sure how much Eliza had told her. "So... did you and Eliza discuss anything recently? You seem a little bothered by my presence."

She pressed her lips into a grim line and continued to avert her eyes. "Yes, we did actually, and she mentioned a certain bet made between you and Asher." She looked at me then, her eyes flaming with scorn. "How dare you? How dare you treat me with such disrespect? No wonder you were so flirtatious in the elevator. It wasn't because you liked me, but because you want Asher's Camaro."

My stomach clenched, and a spike of adrenaline shot through me. I needed to rectify the situation as soon as possible so she didn't hate me for good. "What we did was wrong. But before I joined you just now, I told him I wanted to forget the whole thing, and I said it's more important that you and I start off on the right foot. I don't need that car. I can live without it." Her eyes watered, and I felt terrible for what I'd done. "I'm so sorry, and I want you to know that I genuinely like you and want to see you again. I wasn't pretending in the elevator."

"I'm not sure I believe you," she said, her jaw tightening. "I mean...you do seem apologetic, and I appreciate that, but I don't want to accept a pity date. That's a waste of time for both of us, and—"

"Please don't think that. Pity is the last thing I'm feeling for you. Quite the opposite, actually. Give me a chance to prove myself."

She let out a sigh, and our gazes connected. "Honestly, I feel weird about all of this, so I'd rather not. I realize we're both in the wedding party so we'll have to interact more in the future, and that's fine. I'm perfectly able to remain civil, but I don't want there to be any drama between us while we're supporting our friends." She smoothed a hand down her dress and frowned. "I just allowed my best friend to introduce me to eligible men when she should have been enjoying the evening with her husband to be. Finding out about the bet disappointed me, but the focus should be on Eliza and Asher



and their lives together. So, let's forget about a second date or any other romantic entanglements so we can concentrate entirely on our friends."

Frustration flooded through me, as well as a sense that I might not be able to correct this. Actions had consequences, and I was seeing that play out in front of me. Still, I wasn't ready to give up quite yet. "That's very self-sacrificing of you, but I don't think Eliza or Asher would want us to put our lives on hold because they're getting married."

She shrugged. "Maybe not, but it's the right thing to do."

"Would you be willing to go on another date if I ask at a more convenient time?"

She bit down on her bottom lip as she appeared to consider the question. "No, we're too different, and I think we should stick to our initial gut feelings. However, I'm fine with being friendly and polite."

Friendly and polite. That was what she required from me. A friendly and polite conversation once in a while.

No one had ever turned me down, saying they wanted to be friends. She hadn't actually said that word, but she'd implied it. The few times that women had broken up with me, they'd either been heartbroken or angry. Not this. Not this indifference that stood between us. My chest tightened from the feeling of rejection, a feeling I wasn't used to.

Although...giving it more thought, I sensed she wasn't entirely indifferent to me. I had hurt her, and her response came from a place of no longer trusting me. I'd messed everything up and would have to accept that she didn't want to go out with me. It stung more than I would have anticipated, considering we had only gone out one time. "If that's how you feel, then I'll respectfully back off."

She lifted her chin slightly. "That is how I feel."

We parted after that, and I concluded that she was probably right. We weren't a match, and there was no need to get worked up over it. If Asher hadn't suggested the bet, I most likely wouldn't have given more thought to the situation. Or maybe that wasn't entirely true. I hadn't lied when I'd told her my interaction with her in the elevator wasn't fake. I had genuinely felt a connection and wanted to see more of her.

Whatever. It was too late to do anything about it now. I would have to chalk it up to a learning experience and move on.

But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't stop looking for her in the crowd, and every time she spoke with a new guy, I had that niggling

sensation that I had profoundly screwed up.

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A week later, I was eating Chinese food with Asher and Eliza at a local restaurant we'd been to before, and we were all discussing how I crashed and burned with Meadow.

"It's all my fault," Asher said, before taking a sip of water. "If I hadn't suggested that date, you guys might have worked it out on your own. I was trying to play matchmaker, and it backfired."

"You should know women better than that," Eliza said. "If we think a man is going out with us for a reason other than pure interest, it makes us feel used or unvalued."

Asher winced and rubbed his fiancée's shoulder. "I'm sorry, honey. I promise that my intentions were good, but I can see now that I shouldn't have interfered."

"I know you meant well." Eliza turned to me and cocked her head to the side, giving me an appraising look. "Meadow appreciated the flowers and apology note you sent her, but she's a stubborn woman, and she hasn't changed her mind."

"Maybe she wasn't that into me to begin with."

Eliza shook her head. "That's not the feeling I'm getting. She's asked about you a few times since last week, so I know she cares. I think she's afraid that if she agrees to go out with you, it will end up being a pity date."

"I told her that's not the case."

She shrugged. "She doesn't believe you."

I tapped my hand on the table, a thought coming to me suddenly. "What if the four of us go on a group outing? It wouldn't be a date. Just...friends getting together."

"That's a great idea," Asher said, his eyes lighting up. "Give her more time to consider what she's missing out on."

Eliza chuckled and stabbed her fork into a piece of Mongolian beef. "I doubt she'd go for that. It will seem suspiciously close to a double date."

"Maybe there's a fifth person you can invite," I suggested. "Someone

who won't dominate the conversation or get between us. Do you know anyone like that?"

Eliza glanced up at the ceiling as if pondering the question. "Not really, but I'll think about it."

"That would be great. Perhaps if we hang out a little more, she'll see that I'm interested, and I'm not a bad guy."

"It might work," Asher said.

Eliza nodded slowly. "Give me some time to find a fifth person, and I'll get back to you."

# Chapter Five

Meadow

I had an anxious sensation in the pit of my stomach, my palms were clammy, and my heart raced every time I thought about talking to Jaxon. Two weeks had passed since the engagement party, and despite trying to put that man out of my head, he kept popping up in my thoughts at inconvenient moments. It had gotten so bad that I'd resorted to putting a rubber band on my wrist and snapping it whenever he came to mind. Even that wasn't working.

When Eliza suggested an outing to the Orange County Fair, I had immediately said yes until she inadvertently mentioned she planned on inviting Jaxon. "It's not a double date," she'd insisted. "It's a group of friends, and there'll be five of us, so no one will think it's a date."

I had reluctantly agreed, but mostly because I had to get used to being around Jaxon. He was the best man in my friend's wedding, and while it might be awkward to see him again, it was easier to rip the Band-Aid off now rather than later. I'd asked her who else was coming, but she'd said she wasn't sure yet. I had promptly told her this "fifth" person had better show up because if I found out it was only the four of us, I was bowing out.

As of today, I still didn't know who she'd invited, but Eliza had promised she would tell me if she couldn't find someone. The doorbell rang, and I grabbed my purse and headed out to answer it. Eliza stood there with a huge smile on her face and a knowing look in her eyes.

"What?" I asked. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

She laughed. "Because we're going to have fun!"

My gaze traveled behind her to a black SUV parked in front of my house, and because of the tinted windows, I couldn't tell who was sitting inside. No one I knew had a black SUV, so I could only surmise that it belonged to Jaxon or the mysterious fifth person.

"You look great," Eliza said enthusiastically. "I love the boots."

“Thanks. They’re pretty comfortable, and I love your outfit as well.” She was wearing white shorts and a cute red blouse with flutter sleeves.

I wore a white bohemian-style blouse with lace at the shoulders and bottom rim. The three-fourth sleeves flared out at the elbow, giving them a bell-shaped look. I’d paired the top with faded blue jeans and, of course, the knee-high brown boots. I walked out the door and locked up before turning back to Eliza. “So, who did you end up inviting?”

She leaned in and brought her lips to my ear. “Eric. Jaxon’s a little ticked off at me because he assumed I would ask one of my female friends. But most of them would hit on him, and I want us to have a relaxed day without any of that drama.” She bit down on her bottom lip as if trying not to smile. “Although, if you want to hit on him, go right ahead. I have no problem if you do it.”

I swatted her playfully and laughed. “I will not be hitting on any of the guys, so push that idea out of your head.” My smile waned as I pondered why Jaxon cared about who she’d invited. Did that mean he was hoping to go out with one of her other female friends? The thought hurt more than I wanted to admit.

We walked out to the SUV and Eliza motioned for me to take the passenger seat up front. “That one’s empty. I’ll sit in the back with Asher.”

Before she could get in, I frantically whispered, “Are you trying to push me and Jaxon together by making me sit with him?”

She frowned and shook her head as if I’d hurt her feelings by assuming the worst. “Of course not.” She spoke in a low voice, barely audible. “You should know me better than that. Eric is driving.”

“Oh.” For a second, I felt relief, but then disappointment washed through me at the thought of sitting next to him. Had I been secretly hoping to sit by Jaxon? I didn’t have a chance to analyze my feelings because I had to get into the car. I opened the door and slid inside, smiling at Eric, who sat across from me in the driver’s seat. “Hey, good to see you.”

“I’m glad we get to do this,” he said, returning my smile. “I’ve been wanting to go to the fair for a long time.”

I glanced behind me and waved at Asher, then allowed my gaze to land on Jaxon sitting in the last row. After two weeks, I hadn’t exactly forgotten how good-looking he was, but seeing him again caused butterflies to whip around in my stomach as if they had a mind of their own. “Hi, Jaxon.” I smiled and forced myself not to look away, needing him to see that I was no

shrinking violet.

He broke out into a wide grin that would make just about any woman swoon. “Hey, Meadow. I’m glad you decided to come.”

“Me too.” I unabashedly stared at him for a few seconds, taking in the way his blue t-shirt stretched across his broad shoulders and arms, revealing tanned biceps. His hair was less styled today, seeming more casual, but it looked healthy and wind-blown. I blinked, realizing that everyone was awkwardly waiting for me to turn around and buckle up so we could go. I quickly faced forward and placed my hands in my lap, needing a moment to breathe.

Eric tapped me on the knee. “Put your seatbelt on, please.”

I felt someone’s gaze and turned to find Jaxon scowling at Eric. Maybe he didn’t like that he’d touched my knee? And maybe...Jaxon wasn’t happy that Eliza invited a guy I’d talked to at the engagement party over one of her other female friends. Because...he was jealous? It was probably a huge jump to assume that, but it was possible.

Eric cleared his throat. “Meadow?”

“Sorry.” I hurriedly did as he asked and then let out a breath as he started the engine and pulled away from the curb. “So...what do you like best about the county fair?”

“The food. Most definitely the food.” He chuckled, and I found myself laughing with him.

“I’ll admit, you can’t go wrong with corn on the cob or one of those big apples.”

“If you haven’t tried the bacon-wrapped...” He trailed off and his brows scrunched together as he attempted to remember something. “Well, I can’t think what it was wrapped around, but everything tastes better with bacon.”

“I wouldn’t know since I’m vegan.”

He smiled a little. “That’s cool. You’re probably into lots of healthy stuff.”

“Pretty much. I own a vitamin store.”

“Wow, I’d love to hear more about that.”

We chatted the whole way over, at least an hour, and it didn’t take me long to figure out that while I liked Eric and thought he was a great guy, I wasn’t drawn to him in a romantic way. He was handsome, and I’d gotten the sense that he had a relationship with the Lord, but I just didn’t see him as a potential suitor.

After my first date with Jaxon, I didn't think we were a match either, but there had been no question as to my attraction to him. Jaxon irritated me, so I wasn't sure why I felt such a pull toward him. It didn't have anything to do with his wealth, as money had never been a big draw for me. I preferred a simple lifestyle, and as long as I had enough to meet all of my needs with a little extra for fun activities once in a while, I was perfectly content with that. I would rather be with a poor man I loved than unhappy with a rich guy.

Once we reached the fair, Eric found a parking spot, and we all got out of the vehicle and headed toward the entrance. Eric, Eliza, and Asher walked up ahead while Jaxon lingered behind with me.

"So, you and Eric seemed pretty chummy on the way here," he said, shoving his hands in his pockets.

He appeared interested in knowing what I thought about Eric, but I couldn't tell if he was jealous. I smiled politely, wanting to guard my heart. Jaxon made me nervous, and it was a little unnerving if I thought about it too much. "He's a nice guy."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Did you specifically ask Eliza to invite him?"

"No."

"But you and Eliza talked about him after the engagement party?"

I gave him a look. "Why are you asking?"

He shrugged. "I'm just trying to make conversation."

I laughed incredulously. "Surely there are far better topics we could discuss."

"Okay, name one."

My eyebrows flew up as I frantically searched for something to talk about that wouldn't start a disagreement. I said the first random thing that came to mind. "What's your favorite Bible verse?"

He was surprised by my question, but his expression softened, and he seemed pleased that I had asked. "Ephesians two, verses eight and nine. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

"That's a great one. Why is that your favorite?"

"Because it's a reminder that it's impossible to earn our way to heaven. Works won't make us acceptable in God's eyes. In other words, we can't take credit for our salvation. The Lord wants us to believe in Him, to follow Him, and to be thankful for what He has done in our lives."

I smiled at him shyly, glad I had asked the question. "Thank you for

sharing that.”

He nodded. “What’s your favorite?”

“John sixteen, verse thirty-three. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” I glanced at him and then looked straight ahead. “When I’m going through something difficult, I try to remember that. The Lord provides peace when we need it, and He’s in charge, so we don’t need to worry. It puts life into perspective, you know?”

“Yeah,” he said wide-eyed as if he were seeing me for the first time. “I’m truly sorry about what happened between us. You didn’t deserve to go through that, and I’m still beating myself up over it. I wish…”

A moment passed, and he still hadn’t completed that sentence. “What do you wish?” I asked.

The sadness flickering in his eyes tugged at my heart. “I wish we could start over.”

“I think we already have.”

The corners of his lips rose the slightest bit. “I mean on a second date.”

“Oh, no. Not that again.” I laughed, trying to make light of the conversation. “Are you one of those people who pushes until you get your way?”

He didn’t miss a beat. “Absolutely.”

“I guess that makes sense, considering how successful you are in business. You’d have to have a lot of determination.”

“That’s true, but for some reason, I can’t get my love life on track.”

“Why is that?”

As we neared the entrance to the fairgrounds, I realized we must have slowed down while the others sped up. They were watching us in the distance, beckoning us to hurry up. Jaxon didn’t seem to notice, and I ignored them since I wanted to hear his answer.

He shrugged. “It used to be because I was too busy for a relationship, but now that I’ve hired the right people to manage my team, I have more time on my hands. Guess I just haven’t convinced the right woman to give me a chance.”

“Well, I hope you find her one day.”

He continued at a lazy pace, looking sheepish all of a sudden. “Who’s to say I haven’t already met her?”

I didn’t have a response to that, so I motioned up ahead. “They’re



gesturing for us to hurry. We should probably walk faster.” I was about to increase my pace, but he placed a hand on my elbow, bringing me to a halt.

“This might be the only chance we get to talk alone, so I want to make sure I say what I’m feeling.”

“Okay.” We both just stood there, looking each other in the eye. My stomach dipped in anticipation of what he planned to tell me.

He raked his fingers through his hair and glanced away as if trying to choose his words carefully. “I brushed you off on our blind date. Didn’t give you much of a chance, but then I couldn’t stop thinking about you, and it drove me a little crazy. I just have this sense that we’re supposed to—”

“You guys,” Eric yelled, “get over here. We’re all waiting.”

I started to tremble, feeling overwhelmed by the situation. Maybe it was Jaxon’s serious expression or the way he kept staring at me as if he would bear his heart if he had more time. For some reason, it scared me because I was afraid to trust him again. What if we got closer and then he pulled away, saying it was all a joke and I’d been a fool to fall for him? I couldn’t risk that happening, so I cleared my throat. “We should go.” I took off, not waiting for him to answer.

By the time we reached the others, Eliza glanced at me with a questioning look in her eye, but I only shrugged. Asher, Jaxon, and Eric went ahead to purchase tickets while we hung back.

“What was that about?” she whispered, linking her arm through mine. “You guys got all serious. It looked like you were discussing something important. Did he ask you out again?”

“No, of course not. He just told me he was sorry and a bunch of other stuff.”

She smirked. “It’s the other stuff I want to hear about.”

“Come on, let’s get our tickets.” I tugged on her arm, not wanting to hang back and talk about it.

She nodded, appearing disappointed that I wasn’t opening up to her, but she didn’t press the issue. “Fine, but we’re going to revisit this conversation another time.”

I laughed. “Knowing you, I figured as much.”

# Chapter Six

Jaxon

After we entered the fairgrounds, we all decided to get something to eat since it was lunchtime and a few of us hadn't had breakfast. Looking around, there were a lot of booths with different things to choose from, including nachos, Philly cheesesteak sandwiches, Hawaiian chicken bowls, giant turkey legs, and more I hadn't seen at first glance. We couldn't seem to agree on what to get, so we ended up splitting up with the intention of meeting back at the seating area once we'd chosen our meals.

I ended up purchasing a personal pizza and a large lemonade then found a table big enough for the five of us. As the others were still ordering, I took a moment to pray, asking God to show me how to handle the situation with Meadow. I felt a longing to go out with her again and wasn't ready to give up yet. I had to be careful because I wanted to respect her feelings, but I needed her to understand that I truly was interested in her. She was having a hard time trusting that—through no fault of her own—so I wanted to do something to prove I was trustworthy. I just wasn't sure what that was.

A few minutes later, the four of them walked over to the seating area, and I waved overhead so they would see me. They joined me at the table, and we all talked about what we wanted to do today.

"I want to check out the animals," Asher said, opening up his map.

"Me too," Eliza said, perking up. "Baby animals are so cute, and I heard there is an area where you can walk around and pet them."

Eric bit into his hotdog and spoke with a full mouth. "I want to go to the butterfly exhibit."

Meadow's jaw dropped open, and she gasped. "There's a butterfly exhibit? No way. That's so cool."

He nodded and showed her where it was on the map. "I went a long time ago, and it was eye-opening."

“That sounds amazing,” she said. “Let’s go there first.”

Asher and Eliza informed everyone that they wanted to see the animals first since they were closer to our location, and they suggested we could view the exhibit after that.

That made sense to me, but then Eric cleared his throat. “Actually, guys, I’m going to have to skip seeing the animals. I’m pretty allergic to anything with fur, so I might just head out to the butterfly exhibit on my own.”

“You can’t go by yourself,” Eliza said. “Not that you’re not capable, but you’d probably prefer some company. One of us should accompany you.” She nudged Meadow with her elbow. “What about you?”

Meadow glanced up and smiled. “Sure, why not?”

Eric sat up straighter, appearing pleased with that solution. “That would be great. You’ll love it, Meadow. They’re so beautiful, and it’s a neat bonding experience for friends. The last time I went was in high school, and I saw it with this girl. We ended up dating after that.” He laughed as if just realizing what he’d said. “Not that I’m putting any pressure on you.” He wiggled his eyebrows playfully.

She chuckled. “No worries. I know you were only kidding.”

But I didn’t know if he was kidding, so I wasn’t willing to risk it. “You know what? I think I’ll tag along with you guys. It’ll give these two a chance to have some alone time.” I glanced at Asher and Eliza, and they smiled happily, Asher, in particular, giving me an appreciative look.

“That would be great,” Eliza said.

After we finished eating, we split up, agreeing to meet up in an hour. It was slightly awkward as Eric, Meadow, and I veered through the crowd toward the butterfly exhibit. I could tell Eric was annoyed about something, but I didn’t want to assume it was because I had joined them, although it seemed that way to me.

He kept sneaking glances at Meadow when she wasn’t looking, and at one point, he placed his hand on her lower back, guiding her around a group of people. It took everything in me not to crowd him out and take his place, but I knew the Lord didn’t want me to behave in that manner. She wasn’t my girlfriend, and acting as if she was would cause unnecessary tension.

When we finally arrived at the exhibit, I had to admit that it was amazing. We entered a glass dome-shaped structure and butterflies of all shapes and colors flew around, some landing on our shoulders and heads, others passing by, unhurried.

“Wow,” Meadow said, her eyes widening. “This is spectacular.”

I laughed, feeling like a child on Christmas morning. “They’re everywhere.” A large yellow butterfly landed on my finger, and I held it up. “Look at this one, Meadow.”

She smiled and leaned in, getting a better view. “It’s beautiful. Its wings are so delicate, and they’re moving back and forth like they’re fanning us.”

“Check this out over here.” Eric grabbed her hand and pulled her to the other side of the room, and I was pretty sure he didn’t want her attention on me one second longer. He pointed to an informational plaque, still holding her hand, and my stomach twisted. It would stink to come out here only to watch them fall for each other, but I didn’t have control over that. I couldn’t explain why I cared so much, but it was this strange gut feeling that she was special, and I was missing out if I didn’t convince her to go on another date. Seeing her with Eric created an extra sense of urgency.

Because I was tied up in knots over the issue, I decided I needed to back off and let them do their thing. If we were meant to be, it would happen, but forcing my way in between them would only make it worse, as I didn’t want to come off as a jealous lunatic or do something I would regret. I stayed put while they laughed and talked on the other side of the room, and it took everything in me to keep my distance.

*Lord, I don’t know what you’re doing here, but help me to trust you.*

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\* \* \*

Forty-five minutes later, the three of us headed to the eating area where we had agreed to meet Asher and Eliza. Eric and Meadow were especially quiet, and I wasn’t sure why that was.

Eric walked with slumped shoulders, his lips drooping down at the corners, and Meadow’s expression was blank as if she were trying to hold back her true feelings.

I had meandered around the exhibit on my own, doing my best to calm the anxiety in my chest, but I was certain I had done the right thing by keeping my distance. Now and then, I had scanned the room, looking for them, and they’d seemed perfectly happy up until five minutes ago when

Meadow marched over and told me we should go if we didn't want to be late. She had seemed a little uncomfortable, or maybe I was reading into things.

When we finally reached the seating area where we'd had lunch, Asher and Eliza were already there, sharing a funnel cake. Eric jogged up ahead to talk to them, and I glanced over at Meadow. "Is everything okay?"

She appeared surprised by my question. "Yeah, why do you ask?"

"You and Eric seemed quiet."

She bit down on her bottom lip and clasped her hands behind her back. "Well, we were getting along great, but then things got a little awkward at the end."

"How so?"

"He asked if I'd like to go out with him next week, and I told him I'd prefer to stay friends."

"Oh." I couldn't wipe away the grin that spread across my face.

She saw it and pushed playfully against my shoulder. "It's ridiculous that you're so obviously happy about that."

"I am. I won't pretend I wasn't feeling jealous back there."

"You were?" Her hazel eyes widened, looking especially beautiful in the light. "You seemed content to be on your own. I thought you wanted to be alone or something. Why didn't you join us?"

"Because I was starting to get worked up about you and Eric, and I didn't want to come across like I was desperate to get your attention."

She laughed outright as if she found that explanation ludicrous. "I have a hard time picturing you as desperate. You're so confident, so calm..."

"Well, I didn't feel especially calm when Eric held your hand. I wanted to tell him to let go, but I refrained because I figured you didn't need me pushing my way in."

"I wouldn't have minded if you'd pushed your way in." She blushed, and it gave me the slightest bit of hope that I had a chance with her. She glanced at me suspiciously, one eyebrow lifting higher than the other. "How do I know you're not bluffing to see if you can get a reaction out of me?"

I slammed my hand across my chest dramatically. "I would never do that to you." And then I remembered that she felt deceived because of that stupid bet, and I wanted to groan, to kick myself for acting so stupidly. "I am interested, Meadow. I hope you believe that one day."

We had reached the others at that point, so she didn't have a chance to respond, which was fine. I wanted her to think about it more than I needed an

answer right then.

Asher wiped some powder sugar off his mouth with a napkin. “How was the exhibit?”

“Great,” Meadow said. “The butterflies were beautiful.”

I nodded. “They were awesome.”

We all looked at Eric for his response, and he shrugged. “They were okay.”

I felt a little sorry for him at that moment, despite my earlier annoyance. His bonding experience hadn’t gone the way he’d hoped, and I understood his disappointment.

Eliza perked up, her eyes lighting with excitement. “Asher and I were thinking we could hit the rides next. We could always double back and see the animals again if you—”

“Jaxon gets motion sickness,” Meadow interjected, and I was surprised she remembered that.

I shrugged. “That’s okay. I don’t want to hold you guys back. I’m fine with watching.”

Asher rose and threw away their empty plate and napkins in a nearby trashcan. “You sure, bud? We can do something else if you don’t want to stand around.”

“No...please. If you guys want to go on a few rides, by all means, you should do it.”

Eric stood taller and crossed his arms as if my statement had emboldened him. “I, for one, would like to get on the Ferris Wheel. I just need a willing partner to sit next to me.” He glanced at Meadow, but she averted her eyes, looking down at her toes and then off to the side at a couple putting their baby in a stroller.

Eliza stood and brushed her hands together, wiping off the crumbs. “Well, let’s get out of here. This should be fun.”

# Chapter Seven

Meadow

“How did you do it?” Eliza whispered. “How did you manage to get two guys wrapped around your finger? Every time I glance up, they’re both looking at you.”

I smiled sheepishly. “It’s weird, isn’t it? I’m not sure why that is, but—”

“Oh, come on,” Eliza said. “You’re beautiful and smart and sweet, and they’d be missing out if they didn’t notice.”

I placed my arm around her and squeezed her shoulder affectionately. “You’re a good friend.”

The others were a few steps ahead, involved in conversation, but she lowered her voice, anyway. “So, if you had to choose...”

“Jaxon.”

Her eyebrows flew up. “Really? I’m surprised and not surprised at the same time.”

“Why?”

“Because you were so upset about that bet. I didn’t think you would let it go.”

“Well, I haven’t...yet. But he told me he doesn’t want the car now, and he keeps emphasizing that he’s interested. Maybe I should reconsider.”

“Jaxon and Asher made mistakes, no doubt about it. But I wouldn’t have set you up with Jaxon if he wasn’t a good guy.”

“I know.”

She sucked in her lips and slowed her pace a little. “I sense an attraction between you two, a connection of some kind.”

“Do you think I should go for it?”

“You’d better go for it!” She said it so loudly that she slapped a hand over her mouth to smother her laughter, and the guys all turned around and glanced at us.

“What are you ladies talking about?” Asher asked with a smirk on his face.

Eliza shook her head, still laughing. “Just girl talk. Nothing you’d be interested in.”

We finally made it to the rides, and since Jaxon didn’t want to participate, the four of us got on the bumper cars first, starting with something easy. It felt incredible to slam into other cars on purpose, and Eliza and I went after each other, laughing hysterically when we collided. After that, we hit a few roller coasters and switched up partners each time. We decided to go on one more ride before heading back to the stadium, where they were holding pig races. Eric wanted to go on the Ferris wheel before we left the area, so the five of us strode in that direction.

Jaxon walked next to me, glancing at me with an intense expression. “Want to partner up?”

I frowned, momentarily confused by his question. “For what?”

“The Ferris wheel.”

“I thought the rides made you sick.”

“They do, but I think one won’t kill me, and if it means I get to sit with you, it’ll be worth it.”

“That’s...awfully sweet of you.” I must have sounded suspicious because he chuckled.

“I’m not doing it to be sweet. I’m doing it because I want to spend time with you. And in case you’re not tired of hearing it, I really like you.”

I glanced at him sheepishly. “Maybe a small part of me is starting to believe you.”

“Seriously?” He seemed entirely too happy with my answer, but his happiness was part of the charm—pulling me closer and closer to him.

“If you’re willing to face nausea just so you can sit beside me on a ride you wouldn’t normally go on, I figure you must either be insane, or you truly like me.”

He nodded. “Yep, that about sums it up, and I’m not insane.”

When we all got in line, it surprised the others to see Jaxon with us, but no one said anything. Eric looked slightly aggravated and moved ahead, turning his back to us. I felt bad for him, but there was no way I could make this easier. I wasn’t going to change my mind and go out with him when I was starting to have feelings for Jaxon. It wouldn’t be fair to any of us.

Asher and Eliza kept exchanging knowing looks as if they knew



something was up, but they kept their comments to themselves, and I was grateful for that.

When it was our turn to get into one of the cars, a bar folded up to keep us snugly inside, and the wheel turned, lifting up slightly as Eliza and Asher got into the car below. We continued that way until all the guests had filled up the seats. The ride began moving faster, bringing us around and around while the light breeze brushed against our faces, and we saw views of the fairgrounds we hadn't seen before.

"How are you doing?" I asked, glancing over at Jaxon.

He looked slightly pale, but he smiled bravely. "Hanging in there."

"Are you sorry you did this?"

He shook his head. "Not at all. I'm going to remember this moment for a long time."

I sensed that he meant it in a good way, and it made my stomach flutter with the realization that something could happen between us if I let it. "Me too."

After the ride continued for what felt like several minutes, I glanced over at him again, and he looked a little green around the gills. "I think it's almost over. Would it help to hold my hand?"

He nodded, and I clasped his hand, squeezing it for good measure. "You're a trooper."

He smiled slightly but didn't say anything, and I had the feeling he was concentrating all his efforts on not throwing up. I felt guilty, knowing he was putting himself through this just so he could sit with me.

If he'd wanted to make a point, he'd certainly made it.

Any man willing to sacrifice his own comfort to be with someone he cared about was okay in my book. As my anger and frustration over the bet subsided, I started to forget why I was resisting him in the first place. The bet was wrong, but he'd apologized and was trying to make amends. Was I so unforgiving that I couldn't bend?

"I know we got off to a rough start," he said after another moment, "but I hope you see that I'm serious."

"I do."

He squeezed my hand and then cleared his throat nervously. "Does this mean you'll consider going out with me again?" He sucked in a breath as the breeze tousled his hair, giving him a boyish appearance. "I don't want to harass you about it, so this will be the last time I bring it up—"

“Yes.”

His gaze shot over to me, and he seemed almost incredulous—as if he hadn’t expected me to answer that way. “Really?”

I nodded, allowing my smile to spread across my face. “Really.”

“Then it was all worth it, getting on this ride with you.”

I laughed. “And if I’d said no, would it have still been worth it?”

“Of course. It would have been our last hurrah.”

We both burst into laughter, and he clutched his stomach as if laughing had made his queasiness worse. Relief washed through me when the ride came to a stop because poor Jaxon looked like he was going to be sick, but he managed to hold himself together until we got off. Once we were on solid ground again, he informed me that he would return in a few minutes, and then he took off running in the direction of the restrooms. The others joined me a moment later, and I explained that he wasn’t feeling well.

“To tell you the truth, I thought he’d gone crazy when he got in line,” Asher said. “I was with him the last time he went on a ride, and let’s just say he lost his cookies afterward.”

Erick snickered. “Looks like it’s probably happening again.”

About ten minutes later, Jaxon walked toward us with a swagger, looking much better with a confident smile on his face. He shot his fists in the air. “Woo-hoo! Let’s go again.”

“Really?” Eliza asked, her voice hopeful and excited.

He shook his head. “Not really.”

We all laughed, and Asher slapped him on the back when he reached us. “Did you hold everything down?”

Jaxon glanced at me and Eliza sheepishly, then turned to Asher. “Let’s have this discussion another time. I’m sure the ladies don’t want the gory details.”

Eliza dramatically cleared her throat and then clapped her hands together. “No, we do not, and thank you for keeping it to yourself.”

“I will say this,” Jaxon said. “I was able to brush my teeth. Brought a toothbrush just in case.” Jaxon glanced at me sheepishly.

Why was he looking at me like that? Did he plan on kissing me? The thought made my face heat.

We all strolled in the direction of the stadium where the pig races were taking place, and Jaxon and I walked slower than the others. He held my hand, and I didn’t pull away, not even when Eliza and Asher glanced behind

to see where we were. They both grinned, and Asher looked smug.

“What’s the expression on his face about?” I asked.

“He was insistent that we would make a good couple before everything fell apart. Let him have his moment.”

“What about us? Do we get to have our moment too?”

Jaxon stopped walking, and I did as well. He wrapped his arm around my waist and tugged me closer. “I don’t know. Do we?” He leaned in closer but not all the way, and he seemed to be waiting for my approval.

I nodded, my stomach doing flips of anticipation. “Yes.”

For a few seconds, the two of us just stared at each other while the tension grew. Finally, he closed the remaining distance between us and tentatively brushed his lips over mine, a magnetic force drawing us even closer. He increased the pressure, and I matched his energy and enthusiasm until my legs felt like jelly. When we pulled apart, we froze, unable to look away.

My mouth dropped open as I tried to process what just happened. “That was... That was amazing.”

“Yes, it was.” He cleared his throat and tilted his head toward a spot behind me. “Looks as if we have an audience.”

I had been oblivious to everything around us, but his words woke me up like a splash of cold water on my face, and I glanced around to find a crowd of people watching us. As soon as they realized we noticed them, they started clapping slowly until everyone joined in, and then it was as if we’d put on quite a performance, and the clapping got louder and faster until it reached a crescendo. My face heated, and I couldn’t pretend their actions didn’t embarrass me, but it was the good kind of embarrassment. The kind you looked back on with a chuckle and told your friends about. One day I would tell anyone who would listen about the time a man kissed me in front of a crowd of people.

Jaxon grabbed my hand and squeezed it, then leaned in. “Look, Asher and Eliza are a part of this. They must have started the clapping.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me.”

He took out his phone and held it up, taking a picture of us, then slid it back in his pocket. “What do you think? Should we get out of here?”

I nodded. “You’ll get no argument from me.”

Before I knew what was happening, he swooped me up into his arms, carrying me like it was the easiest thing in the world, and he jogged through

the crowd until we were a distance away. He put me down, only slightly out of breath, and he leaned over, resting his hands on his thighs until his breathing slowed. “So, when are we going on our second date?”

“Tell me when and where, and I’ll be ready.”

“All right,” he said with a grin. “I’ll pick you up tomorrow.”

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\* \* \*

The following evening, Jaxon and I decided to have a low-key date—my suggestion—so we could concentrate on getting to know each other better. We clearly had chemistry and a few things in common, such as our faith in God and our good taste in friends. But we also had a few differences, and we wanted to see how we did without our friend group close by. I was looking forward to seeing where he lived and learning more about him.

I’d told him I was perfectly capable of meeting him at his place, but he insisted on picking me up himself, even though he could have easily sent a car for me. When we arrived at his home in Malibu, my eyes nearly bulged at the massive structure. We walked inside, and I took in the open spaces that flowed from room to room and the high-quality beige furniture and wood floors. He took me to a fireplace, and there resting on the mantle was the picture he’d taken of us at the fair.

I picked it up to get a better look. “You followed through with putting it on your mantle, just like you said you would when we were stuck in the elevator.”

“Of course. I told you I wasn’t playing with you.”

I gave him a bright smile, kissing him on the cheek, and then he took me to the living room with panoramic views of the ocean, seen through floor to ceiling windows, leaving me breathless. “This is outstanding.”

“The scenery is definitely one of the perks of living here.”

Jaxon pushed a button and automatic sliding Fleetwood doors opened, giving us a taste of an outdoor-indoor environment. The cool, moist sea air greeted us, and I breathed it in, feeling refreshed. “I can’t believe this is your home. It’s so...amazing.”

He smiled, seeming pleased with my response. “I love it here. It’s a

retreat away from the craziness of life. Would you like to sit on the patio for a while and talk?”

“Sure.”

He led the way, and we walked past the pool to an elevated patio with a table and chairs set up. We chatted about the previous day at the fair and some of the funnier moments, including the instance where Jaxon had to run to the restroom after getting off the Ferris wheel.

“I’m glad you bounced back after that,” I said. “I felt so bad for you.”

He laughed. “I had been praying for a way to get through to you, and then God brought to mind that I should sacrifice some of my comfort to be next to you.”

“Well, it won me over. I’m sorry I gave you such a hard time.”

“No, don’t apologize. I deserved it, and I should have realized that agreeing to a bet like that was a terrible idea.”

We continued to talk for a good thirty minutes, and then we headed inside to get dinner started. Jaxon told me he was making me an eggplant parmesan dish with an egg-free breadcrumb crust, homemade cashew ricotta, fresh basil, and spaghetti squash noodles. The perfect vegan meal.

We walked into the kitchen, and he pulled the ingredients out of the refrigerator.

“Thank you for taking my dietary needs into consideration,” I said. “I really appreciate it.”

“It’s not a problem. I’m looking forward to trying this recipe.” He gestured for me to sit on one of the barstools while he sliced the eggplant into half-inch rounds, and then he glanced up and smiled. “This is a hypothetical question, so try not to freak out or think I’m moving too fast.”

“Okay...”

“If we were to become an item, would you have a problem with me eating meat around you?”

“No, of course not. I know on our first date I told you I only wanted to go out with a vegan, but I know that’s too restrictive, and to be honest, I said it to get a rise out of you.”

“Okay, that’s a relief.”

“I understand that other people have their own tastes and preferences, and I would never impose my food choices on anyone else. If you noticed, yesterday I didn’t have a problem with all of you eating meat when we were at the fair.”

“That’s true.”

“So, it’s not an issue for me.” I sat up a little straighter. “Would you consider trying out more vegan dishes if we ended up...together?”

“Sure. When I was looking for recipes online, I saw a bunch of things I’d like to sample. We could make that part work if we put a little effort into it.”

“What about my profession? You inferred that you don’t believe in vitamins, and—”

“I was an idiot. While it’s true I only take a multi-vitamin, I was being stubborn because I didn’t believe we were a match. Basically, I was being a jerk.”

I laughed. “Looks like we both said things we didn’t mean.”

“To be honest, I think it’s great that you took the initiative to become a business owner, and you’ll get nothing but support from me.” He started mixing milk, flour, and apple cider vinegar to create a batter.

“Thank you. Do you want any help there, by the way?”

He shook his head. “Nope. I’ve got it all under control.”

He dipped the eggplant slices into the batter, then coated each side with the breadcrumbs. Once he did that, he fried the eggplant nuggets until they were golden brown and then placed them to the side while he stir-fried the spaghetti squash. He put some crusty rolls on a cookie sheet and put them in the oven to heat up after setting an alarm.

“You seem very comfortable in the kitchen. Do you cook often?”

He nodded. “When I can. It’s one of those stress-relieving activities I enjoy, though I use a meal service for a lot of my meals.”

Once the spaghetti squash noodles had finished, he scooped them onto plates and served the eggplant nuggets on top. He pulled a chickpea and cucumber salad from the refrigerator that he’d made earlier, and I helped him bring everything to a nearby table. The alarm went off, so he took out the bread and placed each roll into a basket lined with a towel to keep them warm. He poured us ice tea and then we said grace before digging in.

The food was amazing. In fact, for the first minute or two, neither of us said a word because we were too busy eating. “This is delicious. You did a wonderful job.”

“Thank you.” He grinned and passed me the basket of bread.

I took a roll and set it on my plate, and then we talked about anything and everything under the sun. We probably sat there for an hour, throwing out one question after the next, finding out where we each stood on different

issues.

Eventually, I helped him clear the table and do the dishes. Even then, we kept talking, and it felt like we were making up for lost time. Once we finished, we returned to the couch and talked some more. I was having so much fun that the hours sped by quickly. Too quickly, in fact. We ended the evening the way we'd started...on the patio. We watched the sunset, held hands, and allowed the moment to resonate. I couldn't have asked for a better date.

"I enjoyed this," I said, "and I would love to do it again. Maybe on our next date, I'll cook for you."

He took my hand and held it firmly, looking out at the ocean. "I'd love that."

I chuckled to myself, remembering our first date and all the ways it had gone wrong.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"I was just thinking about how we met and your reaction to my crazy quilt dress. I don't think I won any points with that outfit."

He laughed. "Maybe not initially, but I'm glad you wore it. You weren't ashamed to be yourself, and I like that about you. You don't apologize for being you, and you shouldn't have to because you're a pretty cool chick."

"Thanks. You're pretty cool yourself."

He smirked. "You sure about that? I distinctly remember you commenting about my hair being too much and you said something about my stiff outfit."

My eyes widened at the recollection. "You also shouldn't have to apologize for being you. I was a little harsh, and I wish I could take back my words. I like you just the way you are."

"Good to know."

"I think we'll make a great team. And now that we've broken the ice and get along, we'll be able to support our friends in their wedding, you as the best man and me as the maid of honor. No matter what happens between us, or where this relationship goes, I'm just thankful God brought you into my life."

"I couldn't have said it better myself." He leaned forward and kissed me, and suddenly the future looked a lot brighter.

# Epilogue

1 year later...

Meadow

The scent of fresh bouquets of roses, calla lilies, and Queen Anne's lace was fastened to the end of each pew, filling the church with a pleasant smell. The late evening sun poured through the top windows, illuminating the space below, while at least two hundred guests looked on. The wedding party stood at the front, all of us with anticipatory expressions as Eliza and Asher exchanged their vows.

Eliza looked so beautiful in the simple tulle wedding gown her mother had worn when she'd gotten married. The classic style was sleeveless with a V-neck and applique encircling the waist. Asher stood next to her in a black suit, appearing more handsome than I'd ever seen him before.

The bridesmaids and I wore floor-length royal blue A-line dresses, featuring sweetheart necklines and lace cap sleeves. Everything had gone perfectly so far, which was a relief as no one had tripped, fainted, or fallen ill, thank goodness.

I stared at the audience with a serene smile, sensing someone's gaze on me from the other side of the stage. Discretely, I glanced over to find Jaxon staring at me, his eyes twinkling and the corners of his lips edging up in the smallest of smiles. He winked at me, and I grinned, warmth spreading over my skin. I couldn't wait to celebrate with him at the reception, to have him at my side.

We had dated for a full year—a year of happiness and bliss—completely opposite from the disappointment we'd felt on our blind date, where both of us had walked away, saying we weren't a match. It was amazing how fumbling beginnings could turn into something solid and real. Jaxon was my best friend, and I was his, despite our differences. In fact, we'd grown to



appreciate the way we contrasted because having everything in common would have been boring, to say the least.

“You may now kiss the bride,” the pastor said, pulling me out of my thoughts.

Asher leaned over and kissed Eliza, slowly and tenderly, and when he drew back, everyone clapped and cheered. The two of them swept down the aisle and out of the church to “Ode to Joy” by Ludwig van Beethoven, and the rest of the wedding party followed.

The reception was lively and fun, and we danced the night away. During a slow dance, our movements synchronized, and Jaxon pulled me closer into his arms as we swayed as one.

He placed a tender kiss on my jaw and smiled warmly. “Did you ever think we would make it this far?”

“Not initially, but after our second date, I thought there was hope. What about you?”

He pressed his lips together, a smile tugging at the corners. “When we were at the fair and you agreed to give me a second chance, I knew it would be okay. From then on, I swore to myself that I wouldn’t mess it up.”

“And you didn’t, but we’re past the point of having to prove ourselves.”

“Oh, way past. Now we can just...be.”

“Exactly.” I sighed and rested my head against his shoulder, feeling as if everything was right in the world. “What’s next?” I asked boldly, not expecting a straight answer. I thought he might say something like, “Dinner out tomorrow,” or “Let’s take a day at the beach.”

“Marriage, kids...a golden anniversary.”

“Whoa...a golden anniversary. You’re thinking that far ahead?”

“Uh-huh.” His nose swept across my cheek, and he brushed his lips against my skin. “I want it all. With you.”

It wasn’t as if we hadn’t discussed getting married before, but he seemed so sure about it, so settled on the idea that my heart skipped a beat. “I want that too.”

The song came to an end, and we didn’t get a chance to discuss it more because the MC made an announcement, asking all the guests except for the single ladies to clear the dance floor so the bride could throw her bouquet. Jaxon released me and stepped back, grinning from ear to ear. “Think you’ll catch it?”

“I don’t know.”

“You should try.”

“I should?”

He nodded. “Yep. I believe that bouquet belongs to you.”

A giddy sensation emanated from my stomach, and I was suddenly alert, a goal taking shape in my thoughts. “I’ll do my best.”

Everyone moved to the periphery except approximately thirty eager women, ready to compete for the prize. Before the wedding, Eliza and I had discussed that she shouldn’t attempt to throw the bouquet to me, as showing favoritism would annoy all her cousins. I had no illusions that this would be easy, but that was okay.

“All right ladies,” she said, a huge smile spreading over her features, “May the best woman win.” She turned around and counted to three, and on the last number, she heaved the bouquet over her head and threw it.

I saw it flying through the air toward me, and I lifted my hands to catch it, thinking this was it, when someone from behind jumped up and grabbed it. I glanced over to find Nicole, one of the bridesmaids, holding it in her hands.

“Yes, it’s mine!” She held it up, laughing with sheer delight, showing it to anyone who would take notice.

Disappointment washed through me, but I was happy for her, especially seeing how thrilled it had made her. “Great job,” I said, giving her arm a gentle squeeze. “You deserve it.”

When I returned to Jaxon, I held my palms up in the air. “Oh, well. It wasn’t meant to be.”

He pulled me into a hug, chuckling softly as he gave me a secretive smile. “Maybe not now, but at some point.”

Later that evening, after the bride and groom had left and most of the guests had gone home, we walked hand-in-hand to his 69 Camaro ZL1 in the parking lot. Asher had eventually sold the vehicle to him, and from what I’d heard from Eliza, Jaxon had paid Asher more than it was worth because he wanted to help them out.

“It’s been an amazing day,” I said, already feeling nostalgic about the memories we’d made.

Always the gentleman, he unlocked and opened my door for me and waited until I got inside. He jogged around the front and slid into his seat after I unlocked it from the inside. He started the engine and then turned to me. “Yes, it’s been amazing, but it’s not over yet. There’s still more to come.”

“You’ve sparked my curiosity.”

“Good.” He flashed another secretive smile, and my heart kicked up a notch.

“Why do I feel like you’ve been planning something?”

“Maybe because you know how to read me,” he said.

“Are we going to a restaurant?”

“No.”

“The movies? If so, I should probably change out of this dress. It’s way too formal for—”

“A theater is not in the plans.”

“Okay... Are you taking me to your house?” When he shook his head, I bounced to the next idea. “Someone else’s home?”

“Nope.”

“Oh, I know. We’ll drive to the ocean to sit and observe the beauty of God’s creation, or you could be taking me for ice cream. No, wait...we’re going to one of those coffee houses that have musicians who play late into the night.”

“No, no, and no, although those are all great ideas.”

“I can’t imagine what we’re doing then.”

“Good. I don’t think you’ll figure it out, so just sit back and enjoy the experience.”

I rubbed my chin with my forefinger and thumb. “An experience... That’s a different way of putting it.”

He refused to give me any hints, even though I asked a million questions. We drove for about an hour and a half until we came to Ventura County, where there were fields with crops on both sides of the highway. Jaxon turned down a dirt road, and we continued on it for the longest time until we could no longer see the main street behind us. Up ahead, there were bright lights, like something you’d expect from a film crew.

I glanced at Jaxon in wonderment. “What in the world?”

He grinned but refused to say anything further, not giving me even the slightest of hints. As we got closer, I took in a group of people, bustling around as if they all had a job to do. They’d set up a small table with a red tablecloth littered with white rose petals and several candles. My eyes wandered to the left and bulged at the large structure, sitting in the dark. Someone must have hit a button as we approached because carnival music began to play and colorful lights lit up an enormous Ferris wheel. It all made

sense now...this experience he'd been talking about.

I gasped. "This is amazing! How did you know about this Ferris wheel? Has it always been here?"

He shook his head. "I had everything brought in for our special evening together." He stopped and parked the car, and we both slid out, closing our doors behind us.

I gaped at the enormous ride, shocked that he had done this for me. "I can't believe it."

He took me by the hand and led me over to the Ferris wheel where an attendant waited. "Would you like to get on?"

I glanced at him, concerned that he might get sick. "Are you sure about this? I know you get motion sickness."

"I'm sure, and we'll just go around a couple of times. How about that?"

"All right, if you think you can handle it..."

We sat down in the wagon closest to the ground, and then the attendant folded a bar over our legs. "Hold your hand up when you'd like to stop. Enjoy."

The wheel began moving until we were way up in the sky, overlooking some of the most beautiful agricultural land in Ventura County. The breeze flicked through my hair, messing it up a little, but I didn't care. I stared at him, stunned that he'd put this all together for me.

He took my hand and held it firmly in his own as if he never planned on letting go. "Do you remember the last time we went on this ride?"

"Yes, how could I forget? We were at the fair, and you asked me to go on a second date with you."

"That's right, and I distinctly recall saying I would remember that moment for a long time. Well...now we have a new memory to add to our collection."

My eyes misted from his thoughtfulness, and I leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "You're truly a romantic. I'm still in shock that you planned all of this without me having any idea what you were up to."

"I didn't tell any of our friends, so no one would slip up and share the news. I love you, Meadow. I love you so much..." He got a little choked up, and then he cleared his throat. "Would you do me the honor of being my wife?"

My eyes widened because I wasn't expecting a proposal so soon. We'd been dating for a year, but I had assumed that he'd want to wait longer before

we got engaged. “This is so unexpected,” I said, sounding breathless, but I was happy.

“If you need to think about it—”

“No!” I laughed at how quickly I’d shut down that line of thinking. “I don’t need time. The answer is yes. Absolutely yes. I love you too, Jaxon, and there’s nothing I want more than to be your wife.”

He pulled a gorgeous diamond ring out of his pocket and slid it onto my finger. I held up my hand and stared at it in amazement. “It’s beautiful, and it fits my personality so well. You truly know what I like.”

“I had a designer create this especially for you.”

Half circles and squares, filled with tiny diamonds, surrounded a larger diamond in the center. It had an artsy, art deco style that was perfect for my taste. “I love it. You couldn’t have done any better than this.”

He kissed me long and hard, and after we’d circled a third time, he lifted a hand to alert our attendant to stop the ride. When we got off, he looked a little pale, but the color returned to his cheeks once we sat down at the table. A waiter served us sparkling apple cider and vegan cheesecake topped with a red raspberry sauce. Jaxon waited until he felt better before trying his dessert, but the light in his eyes showed how much he was enjoying himself.

When we finished eating, one of the workers brought out a gorgeous arrangement of white and pink roses, along with grevillea, eucalyptus, and Queen Anne’s lace. Jaxon took it from the woman and gave it to me, smiling warmly. “I didn’t initially plan this, but when you didn’t catch the bouquet at the wedding, I figured I’d call ahead and make sure someone picked this up for you.”

My lips curled up in a smile, and my eyes misted with tears. “It’s so beautiful. You thought of everything.”

After that, we slow danced to old classics by Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman, and Duke Ellington. It must have been three in the morning by the time he brought me home, and it had been a full day. I was exhausted and running on adrenaline, but I wouldn’t have had it any other way.

He walked me to the door and brushed his lips over mine with a kiss that curled my toes. “We make a good team, Meadow.”

I grinned from ear to ear, remembering I’d said the same thing a year ago. “I feel the same way. And I have to say, not only were you the best man in Asher and Eliza’s wedding, but you are the best man for me.”

And even though it was late, and we were tired and a little worn out from all the activities, we weren't ready to let go of each other, so we sat on my porch swing and thought about our life together. A life that had all started from one blind date.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read, *Blind Date with the Billionaire Best Man*. Evangeline appreciates your support more than you know. If you enjoyed this book, she would like to ask you a favor. Would you be kind enough to leave a review? It would be greatly appreciated! Feel free to get in touch if you have questions or comments at [Evangelineromancebooks@gmail.com](mailto:Evangelineromancebooks@gmail.com)

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Description of Blind Date with a Blue-Collar Billionaire

**Can her blue-collar man prove he's different from all the rest?**

Lindsey Clarke was doomed. Every serious boyfriend she had fell for her more beautiful cousin, Destiny. When it happened yet again on the eve of her thirtieth birthday, she was devastated and wondered if she would always be relegated to second best.

A friend suggested a blind date, and Lindsey went along with it in order to get her mind off her wounded heart. Once she met Grayson Hall, she was star struck. Not only was he good-looking, but he was kind and sweet as well.

Grayson Hall owned the largest general construction company in Los Angeles. He had everything he could possibly want except love from a good

woman. After being burned by a girlfriend who was only with him because of his money, he was determined to keep his financial status a secret from Lindsey. Following a disastrous first date, Grayson determined to make it up to Lindsey. Soon, he was falling hard and could easily see a future with her.

But when a terrible lie threatened their relationship, Grayson had to prove he was the kind of man she could count on. And Lindsey had to make a decision. Was Grayson the man he said he was? Or was he no different than the men who dumped her for her cousin?

This is an inspirational Christian romance about the power of forgiveness and how one woman learns to trust God during difficult times.

[Check out Blind Date with a Blue-Collar Billionaire!](#)

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## **Blind Date Disasters Series**

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[Blind Date with a Billionaire Professor](#)

[Blind Date with a Billionaire Biker](#)

[Blind Date with a Billionaire Single Dad](#)

[Blind Date with my Billionaire Boss](#)

[Blind Date with a Billionaire Reality Star](#)

[Blind Date with my Billionaire Protector](#)

## **California Elite Series**

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# About the Author

Evangeline Kelly writes clean and Christian romance with characters that grow and change through the difficulties of life. As a child, she enjoyed writing stories for her grandma but didn't pursue that passion until much later in life. She worked for twenty years as a social worker with foster children and tries to incorporate what she learned about human behavior into her books. Evangeline lives north of Los Angeles and loves spending time with her husband and family. Evangeline desires to take her readers through a spiritual journey and hopes her writing will bring glory and honor to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.