



Leave it to Sadie Matthews to get lost in her own hometown. In the three years she'd been away from here, houses had popped up everywhere like a spastic game of Monopoly. Now she found herself in a labyrinth of a subdivision, a latte growing cold in her cup holder, Michael Bublé crooning over her speakers, and the clock reading half-past seven.

Nothing like being late to her new boss's Christmas party.

A themed Christmas party no less. Her boss had texted super late last night, claiming she'd forgotten to invite several people due to a mistake with the guest list. Then promptly instructed Sadie to dress as a character from a popular Christmas movie. So at half past midnight, Sadie had rummaged her closet and found her vintage outfit. Tonight, she'd pose as Mary Bailey. Though her present distress had her feeling very Grinch-ish.

If only she could find the place.

She pulled over and checked her phone. Brow furrowed, she scrolled through numbers. She really needed to be

better about adding contacts instead of torturing herself trying to determine who'd messaged her. She located the correct text and copy and pasted the address into Google Maps again. Her phone's lagging internet had played the pivotal role in getting her lost, but now it refreshed quickly, indicating she was only four blocks from her destination.

Cars packed the driveway, so Sadie opted for a spot alongside the road. She'd make an appearance, browse the dessert table, chat with her boss, then invent a reason to leave. Her introverted-self had only been daring a handful of times in her adult life. One of which ended badly. Though not entirely her fault. How was she to know when she'd accepted a date with Landon Reeves—a man she'd fallen head over kitten heels with—she'd be stood up?

Always nice to remember those mortifying experiences when heading into a house full of strangers. She checked her makeup in the rearview mirror, then made her way to the front door.

A cute blonde sporting antlers appeared. "Hi there."

Sadie smoothed a hand over her hair. “Hi, is this Deidre’s party?”

Her cherry-red lipsticked nose wrinkled. “I don’t know a Deidre.” She gave a sympathetic smile. “I think you have the wrong address.”

“I’m so sorry. It’s been a day. Perhaps you know where this road is.” Sadie grabbed her phone, brought up the message, and angled the screen toward the woman. “Google keeps steering me wrong.”

“Oh.” Brown eyes widened. “Wait. That’s my number. That’s my text. But ... you’re not Gretchen.”

Sadie blinked. “Gretchen?”

Blonde Rudolph withdrew her cell from her brown suede pants. “I must’ve entered Gretchen’s number wrong in my phone. Wow, I’ve never had this happen before.”

“Me neither.” Yet now it all made sense. The uncharacteristic late message. The extreme usage of emojis. It hadn’t been her boss at

all. It’d been Blonde Rudolph. Awkward. “Well ... um ...” She stared at her shoes. “I apologize for crashing your—”

“Sadie?”

Her gaze snapped up at the familiar masculine voice.

“Landon?” It’d been over three years since he’d strolled into her parents’ diner, but those piercing blue eyes that could melt icicles with their warmth were unforgettable.

He stared at her as if she was some magical elf. “What are you doing here?”

Blonde Rudolph’s gaze toggled between Sadie and Landon. “You know her?”

Despite the December temps, fire pulsed through her. “It’s all a mistake. Sorry to bother you.” She spun on her heel and rushed off the porch, nearly toppling over a ‘Stop here Santa’ sign. This couldn’t be happening. If only she would’ve added her boss into her list of contacts, then Sadie would’ve recognized the error. That it’d been a wrong number from the get-go. Ugh, this could’ve all been avoided.

“Sadie.” Footsteps sounded behind her. “Sadie. Wait up.”

She stilled a hand on her car door, the metal cool to her sweaty palm. Her eyes slid shut for a few staccato heartbeats. What kind of freaky Hallmark movie had she’d just stepped into? After one last calming breath, she turned. Landon Reeves stood a yard away. Just as tall and just as swoony. “There was a mix-up. I was texted by mistake.”

“And I’m glad for it.”

Nope. Not again. She would not fall for his remarkable smile. Or the special way his gaze fused to hers. Instead she took in his ribbed gray sweater and black trousers. “Wait. I thought this was supposed to be a movie themed party?” Wouldn’t



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surprise her if she misread the text. Everything about this situation was a few branches shy of a Christmas tree.

His grin flashed. "I'm dressed as John McClane."

"Die Hard is not a Christmas movie."

"Yippee Ki Yay."

Her laugh spilled before she could swallow it back. This man did not deserve any more of her time. He'd led her to believe he was into her, then what had he done? Left her standing in Mistletoe Lane for two hours, while happy couples breezed past her, enjoying the lights and grandeur of the town's claim to fame Christmas exhibit. "I need to go."

All his amusement fled. "I'm sorry, Sadie."

She shrugged. "It was years ago. I'm over it." But was she? Landon had slowly inserted himself into her life. His regular visits to the diner during her shifts, and talking to her until after closing time, had been some of the most

memorable nights. But then, he'd stood her up and she hadn't heard or seen him since.

"I never got a chance to explain." A biting breeze whipped his collar against his neck.

"There's nothing to explain. Really. It's cold and you're missing your party."

"My parents got into a car accident that night." He blurted. "It was a bad wreck."

Sadie grew numb. "I'm sorry. I had no idea."

"Thank God they survived. But my dad had taken a hard lick. He was in and out of the hospital for months after that. I had to take over his business in managing his properties and rentals."

"You could've called. I would've understood."

"I wanted to. But I lost my phone somewhere at the hospital. I had no way of getting ahold of you." He raked a hand through his hair. "Then I was busy between taking care of my parents and the business. When I found time to visit your parents' diner, you were gone."

She'd left after the New Year, accepting an internship in Milwaukee. After those months, she'd decided to live there until this past fall when her firm had transferred her back home.

He held her gaze. "Can you forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive." She placed a hand on his arm. "I'm sorry for all you've been through. Wish I could've helped in some way."

His brows raised at her admission. "Maybe we could try again for that first date?"

She smiled. "I'd like that." A tragic misunderstanding had torn them apart but a bizarre mix-up had reunited them. Then again, perhaps this wasn't a mix-up after all, but a Christmas miracle.

Rachel Scott McDaniel is an award-winning Christian romance writer. Her stories inspire with faith and heart, yet intrigue with mystery and suspense. Her 2019 novel, [Above the Fold](#), was nominated for a Carol Award for best debut. Check out her critically-acclaimed new release, [The Red Canary](#), available now.



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