"It's a Heartwarmer." —Publishers Weekly on Julia Monroe Begins Again



Kate Landry Has a Plan





Rebekah Millet

BEIGNETS FOR TWO

KATE LANDRY HAS A PLAN

REBEKAH MILLET



a division of Baker Publishing Group
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JESUS, YOU WENT AND DID IT AGAIN.
THANK YOU FOR THIS STORY.
THANK YOU FOR NEVER GIVING UP ON ME.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR PEACE IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS.
AND THANK YOU FOR BEIGNETS.



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1

THE BRIDE'S BOUQUET ARCED THROUGH THE AIR, targeting me like a deployed missile. I stepped back at the last second, letting it smack the ground at my feet. Gasps echoed all around as if I'd committed the vilest of sins. One of the bridesmaids, drowning in peach chiffon, swooped up the floral arrangement, brandishing it high as though she'd won a coveted prize.

I wanted to tell the woman the bouquet meant nothing. That even if she got engaged and made it to a month before her wedding day, her happily ever after still wasn't guaranteed. Instead, I swallowed my sour grapes and continued to the edge of the courtyard that lay behind my café, Beignets & Books. Thanks to the bride delaying the start of the wedding by forty-five minutes to change the color of her toenail polish, I was late picking up my adopted niece, Hayley. I hated being late. To make matters worse, Hayley wasn't answering her phone.

A cool mid-February breeze traipsed through, rustling the leaves of the ancient live oak canopying the outdoor space. I cinched my coral cardigan, covering the matching sleeveless sweater beneath. A dark gray pencil skirt and black heels completed my professional appearance. I reached Penny, a college

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student who'd started as a hostess years ago, moved on to waitress, and now additionally acted as my right hand during special events like this one.

"I need to fetch Hayley from the library." I adjusted my hold on my purse. "Can you keep an eye on things until I return?"

Penny, with her thick brown hair pulled into a sleek ponytail, cast a wary glance at the temperamental bride. "Of course. All that's left is the second line?"

"Yes."

As if on cue, the trumpeter from the live band moved forward, playing a loud, high call to the guests. Everyone stopped in their tracks, responding with the customary shout of "Hey!" The rest of the jazz band joined in, continuing the festive melody of Joe Avery's "Second Line." The bride and groom were handed umbrellas decorated with tassels and sequins. They danced and walked, jutting the parasols above their heads. Guests grabbed napkins, waving them as they followed the couple in what I described to out-of-towners as an untamed version of a conga line.

"I've got it covered, Boss." Penny gave a mock salute.

"Thanks." I hurried through the side gate and into my bright blue Honda Civic (Consumer Reports top safety pick). At five in the evening, the sun barely clung to the sky. I pulled from the driveway and whispered a prayer for God to carry me through the rest of the day. A wedding was one thing. A bridezilla another. But a wedding with a bridezilla in the climax of Mardi Gras season?

Had this been any other time of year, I would arrive at the library within ten minutes. But St. Charles Avenue had already been barricaded for the parade due to start in half an hour, forcing me to the back streets. Back streets crammed with cars parked bumper-to-bumper against the curbs, rendering the narrow roads harder to maneuver.

Using the Bluetooth connection through my vehicle, I called

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the library, ending up in the librarian's voice mail. "Hi, Mrs. Gail. It's Kate. I'm running late, and I'm so sorry. This day has been a doozy on every level. A bridezilla, Mardi Gras . . . and all that brings."

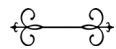
I came upon a group donning coordinated Mardi Gras shirts, their thick horizontal stripes of purple, green, and gold impossible to miss. They moseyed down the middle of the street unaware—or not caring—that they blocked traffic. I ground my teeth, two seconds from honking the horn. If only I knew how to safely rev my engine. Or could conjure Inspector Gadget. *Go, go gadget cattle prod.* "This world is full of *people*, Mrs. Gail, which you well know." Since we both worked with the public, we'd commiserated over the years. My uterus cramped, wanting to add its two cents. "Plus, it's the heaviest day of my period. I'm totally going to use the remedy you told me about."

Two of the guys lagging at the rear of the oblivious bunch paused, lowering the large ice chest they carried. One of them opened the lid and snagged a beer. *Oh no you don't!* I honked, hating how polite my car sounded. The men didn't even notice. What I needed was a horn with different settings. A mild toot to scare squirrels and butterflies, a strong warning blast for emergencies, and a medium honk for situations like this. Or for when screen-addicted people hadn't perceived the red light they sat at had turned green.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the rearview mirror and the all-too-familiar worry line stretching vertically between my auburn brows. I pressed my index finger to what I'd dubbed the Crease, trying to smooth it away. Hayley wasn't supposed to leave the library alone, but at thirteen, she'd been steadily pushing her boundaries. What if she'd slipped out when Mrs. Gail had been in the bathroom or distracted? *Mrs. Gail!* I was still on the phone with her! "Sorry for rambling. I should be there in a few minutes. Please don't let Hayley leave. Thank you." I disconnected.

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Miracle of miracles, the group moved from the street and onto the sidewalk. I hooked a right at the corner and eventually came to the nonbarricaded section of St. Charles Avenue. Another minute and I'd be there.



I whipped into one of the handful of parking spots reserved for the library, elated the paradegoers had obeyed the library-only parking signs. In the 1940s, the historic estate and large plot of land it sat on had been willed to the public library system. It had also been Hayley's favorite place since I'd taken custody of her at the tender age of two.

Unlike other homes on the grand avenue, this mansion, with its Romanesque architecture, leaned toward a darker, imposing quality. Heavy rock-faced stone and round masonry arches dominated every aspect. Hayley had referred to it as a castle when we'd first started coming each week. She'd even gone through a phase of wearing princess costumes on our visits.

Major roof damage caused by a hurricane had led to the entire interior being gutted and remodeled for function with a cheery modern feel.

I opened the front door, gaze scanning for Hayley, and came to a screeching halt. Behind the library's reception desk sat Micah Guidry. Or at least, I was ninety-five percent sure it was him. The last time I'd clapped eyes on him had been our high school graduation, two decades ago. He'd always been striking with those deep green eyes.

A warm itch broke across my skin. The years had been good to him. I smoothed my skirt at my hip and pulled my shoulders back. Would he think the same of me?

His gaze met mine, his lips curving into a surprised smile. Lips that had knocked my Keds off in seventh grade. Lips that

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had tasted like pineapple Life Savers. "Kate Landry." His low voice held the slightest scrape.

The itch morphed into a tingle, and a faint quiver rolled through my stomach. "Micah Guidry."

He eased to a stand, his desk chair rolling backward. "How've you been?"

"Good. And you?"

"Good." He scratched behind his ear, the pencil in his hand barely brushing against his tidy, golden-brown hair.

"I'm picking up my niece."

"Redhead, yea high?" He lifted his other hand (no wedding ring) at chest level, drawing my attention to the firm planes beneath his hideous Hawaiian shirt. Yup. The years had been good to him. But not his style. What grown man walked around sporting palm trees and pink flamingos? At least the short sleeves accentuated his biceps.

I mentally pinched myself. *What's wrong with you?* "Yes. That fits her description."

"So she's . . . Claire's daughter? You adopted her?"

I nodded.

His features softened, and he set his pencil on the desk. "I'm sorry about your loss."

"Thank you." Despite the eleven years since Claire and her husband Adrian's death in a sailing accident, unexpected reminders of their passing in moments like this still stung. Though not as bad as they used to. I was just relieved Hayley wasn't nearby. Reminiscing about how great they both were was one thing. Discussing their actual deaths, another.

"I would have attended the funeral, but I was living in Colorado at the time." His earnest stare held on mine. That action alone was so different from most people, who looked away when Claire entered the conversation.

"You stayed there after finishing college in Boulder?"

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"I did." His brow tweaked. "I see you're still good at remembering facts."

And steamy first kisses. Stop that! Where was this coming from? It had to be the chaos of Mardi Gras wearing me thin. Had I run into Micah Guidry a month from now, my reaction would be that of the rational forty-year-old adult I normally was.

Micah's head tilted.

Oh. It was my turn to speak. But nothing came to mind. How was that possible? If there was one positive thing my upbringing had instilled in me, it was never being thrown for a loop. Or at least not showing it. Striving for indifference, I slipped on the Landry Mask. Some mothers passed down family recipes of filé gumbo or crawfish étouffée to their daughters. Mine had gifted me with lessons on emotional camouflage.

Movement sounded from above and to the rear. Hayley's black-and-white-checkered Vans came into sight, plodding down the stairs from the second floor. My tension lessened at laying eyes on her, even if was just her feet.

Micah cast a glance in Hayley's direction, then returned his attention to me. "I moved back a few weeks ago."

"And you're a librarian?"

"I am."

That made sense. Growing up he'd always had a book in his hand or could be found in the school library. "You're now working here? Has something happened to Mrs. Gail?"

"She's fine, but her brother in Arkansas had a bad fall. She's taking a leave of absence to care for him. I'm filling in until she returns. Or I find a permanent position."

I gnawed my lower lip. He'd be here for a while. Here, where Hayley visited several times a week and regularly volunteered, which meant I'd have to see him again. "I'm sorry I'm running late to pick up Hayley."

"You're not late."

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I glanced at the huge clock on the wall made up of books with numbers in their titles. Oversized hour, minute, and second hands accommodated them. The short hand pointed to a novel titled *Five Days in Skye*, the long hand to a children's board book called *Two by Two*. "You should've closed ten minutes ago."

One corner of his mouth hitched. "You're still a stickler for punctuality."

I slightly narrowed my gaze. "I'm going to take that as a compliment."

"As it was intended." His smile broadened, a gleam in his eyes emphasizing his amusement.

Hayley had stalled at the first landing, bringing her toothpick legs clad in jeans into view, as well as her drooping backpack. Her head bowed over her phone, her thumbs tapping at the screen.

"Would it make you feel better to flip the *Closed* sign?" He inclined his chin to the door behind me and the sign hanging on it, facing the wrong way.

Warmth invaded my cheeks. "I see you're still a stickler for . . ." *Where, oh, where had my brain slunk off to?* "Books." *So lame.*

"I'm going to take *that* as a compliment." He crossed his arms, causing one flamingo on his shirt to appear as if it sniffed the butt of another flamingo. "I'm guessing you're still anti-books?"

"No." Slight annoyance shadowed my tone. I wanted to reference the publications lining the walls of my café, but I didn't want to initiate Micah Guidry visiting my establishment and flustering me on my home turf. Though those books were all nonfiction, and Micah had always preferred made-up stories.

"You don't know what you're missing."

In a blink I was back in seventh grade, the pressure to experience a first kiss growing rampant among my friends. Like

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having to get a Swatch watch. And a Swatch guard. Talk about useless protection. "I seem to remember you using that line on me once before."

Micah's mouth pursed in a combination of shamelessness and delight. He rubbed his jaw, his fingers bristling against his five-o'clock shadow. "It wasn't a line then."

Heat swept up my neck.

He paused mid-brush. "You still blush."

I stiffened, cursing my tell and my pale skin that highlighted it. "And you're still brash." Though that wasn't exactly true. Micah had just always been forthright. Or maybe that was what we now called not having a filter. I eyed Hayley, silently imploring her to get off her phone and hurry.

"How about a truce?" Micah's goading expression had transformed to one of repentance. Sort of.

"I didn't realize we were at war."

His eyes crinkled at the edges. A blinking light on the desk phone caught his notice. He nodded at the front door. "I bet it's a madhouse out there with the parade coming." Holding the handset to his ear, he pressed a button on the phone's base.

Hayley slunk down the final steps. Her red flannel shirt looked like it'd been filched from Paul Bunyan's closet. And an oversized sweatshirt was tied loosely around her waist, as though it could slip off any moment, tangle her legs, and send her plunging to her death. Adding to the likeliness of that scenario, her focus lay on digging through her schoolbag.

I clenched my keys in my hand. She knew the dangers of not paying attention when going down stairs. I'd created a song that we sang together when at the age of four, she'd insisted on taking the stairway on her own from our second-floor residence above the café. *"Hold the railing, look with your eyes, then there won't be a tumbling surprise."*

"Looks like I missed your call," Micah said.

I blinked back to the present. "What?"

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His athletic body hunched over the phone, listening intently.

Oh no. The rambling voice mail I'd left for Mrs. Gail.

My stomach plummeted. I scowled at Hayley, who moved like an inmate walking to the electric chair. I headed for the front door and opened it, hoping to elicit a quicker stride from my niece. "See you around." I'd tossed the hasty farewell over my shoulder, one foot out the door.

"Kate," Micah called from behind.

I stilled. Hayley crossed the threshold, nearly dragging her book bag, the straps brushing over my feet, gathering a million germs.

He lowered the phone, mischief twinkling in his emerald eyes. "My sister swears by Advil and Pop-Tarts."

I held in a breath in timing with two beats from the wall clock. "Thank you." My tone relayed two different words: *shove it*. I flipped the sign on the door to *Closed* and left.

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2

I WOULD HAVE TO AVOID MICAH GUIDRY for the rest of my life. It was the only rational solution. Because there was no way I could face him after that humiliating voicemail. I sighed, rubbing the Crease. Hayley and I drove our way back through the chaos I'd just fought through.

She sulked, something she'd become proficient at. "I could've walked home."

"Not with all this Mardi Gras melee happening."

She tucked her long, pin-straight, light-auburn hair behind her ears, bringing her pale, delicate features out from hiding. The past year her choice of clothing had changed dramatically. Gone were soft feminine colors and frilly accessories. Little by little, she'd gravitated toward what could only be considered hobo apparel. "Even when it's not Mardi Gras, you won't let me walk back and forth. Or take the streetcar."

"Because there are serial killers and drug dealers and . . . teen-nappers out there."

"If you let me get a dog, I'd have protection."

Here we go again. Hayley had begun an aggressive campaign for a dog several months ago. I didn't have time for a dog, or even a fish. And as much as she'd said she'd take care of it, I—

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like all the parents that had gone before me—knew her promise would end up broken. "You can't bring a dog into the library."

Her slender fingers tapped across her phone screen at warp speed. Steel-gray polish coated her nails. *Sigh. No more pink sparkles.* I knew what was coming next as she'd become predictable in her quest for a dog. She was connecting via Bluetooth to my vehicle's speakers.

Within seconds, Sarah McLachlan's "Angel" filled the sedan. In researching pet adoption, Hayley had discovered the ads from the '90s, including the song from the old heart-wrenching ASPCA animal cruelty commercials.

When her desire for a pet had first surfaced, we'd had a detailed discussion of why we couldn't have one. And by discussion, I meant her staring daggers at the wall while I listed a multitude of reasons. As a result, she'd begun pulling away from me. Our conversations had dwindled to one- or two-word responses on her end and then her holing up in her room. At that time, she'd also initiated psychological warfare. Other than the "Angel" song, she'd leave the TV in the living room paused on commercials showcasing emaciated canines of every variety.

I'd read in a parenting book to ignore this type of behavior. And so that's what I'd done. Ignored the commercials and gritted my teeth through each beautiful note of Sarah McLachlan's now irritating voice.

I parked in my driveway, leaving a foot of space between my front bumper and the iron gate to the courtyard. Hayley bolted from the car before I'd killed the engine. I switched the music off and tipped my head back against the seat, a weary sigh escaping.

Hayley skirted the brick wall of the courtyard, avoiding the staff working to return the area to normal. Her slender shoulder brushed the year-round landscaping framing the perimeter. She made her way to the outdoor stairs leading to our residence, which occupied the second floor of the house that had been

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my grandma's Garden District mansion. The café occupied the bottom of the Greek Revival estate Mawmaw's family had bought in the 1920s.

Up Hayley trudged, except this time she held the railing. A small victory.

I exited my car and entered the courtyard, where blessedly, Penny directed the last of the lingering wedding guests to leave through the restaurant. The tablecloths had been removed, and the event tables were being deconstructed by the extra staff I'd scheduled to serve food and drinks. They'd stow them and the folding chairs in the storage shed.

I slowed as I passed Penny. "You're a godsend."

"I know." She flashed a smile and collected a pile of linens our supplier would pick up for laundering.

Taking the steps to the wraparound porch, I continued through the back doors of the café, depositing myself into a short hallway. The aromatic scents of freshly brewed coffee and fried dough greeted me. If I kept straight, I'd land in the main section of the restaurant, where I should go and check on things. There was always something to check on. The murmuring of customer voices intensified, along with dishes clattering.

I took an abrupt left, unlocked my office door, and closed it. A few minutes alone wouldn't hurt. I dropped my keys and purse on the desk, made a pit stop in my private half bath, and then collapsed in my cushioned leather chair and peeled my heels off. My toes exhaled in ecstasy.

My gaze drifted to a framed napkin on the wall. An eighteen-year-old napkin that had been pulled from a dispenser at Café Du Monde, where I had been waitressing at the time. It was actually my last day waiting tables, as I'd landed a job in the café's corporate office. Mawmaw's will had been read several days earlier, and my sister and I were in a state of shock. During one of my breaks, Claire and I had sat at a corner table.

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She was twenty-one, I was twenty-two, and the reading of the will had sealed our future.

It had also shoved a bigger wedge between us and our parents. Mawmaw had bequeathed everything, including her home and hefty bank account, to us. We'd decided that day to open our own restaurant and documented it on the napkin. A café honoring Mawmaw and the things she loved: her beignet recipes and books. We'd signed the napkin as though it were a solemn oath.

I swiveled my seat, the overhead lights reflecting off another frame. This one protected a piece of paper with several goals Claire and I had crafted—after the napkin contract—and again signed for added emphasis.

The first goal, opening the eatery, we'd accomplished together five years later. Having completed culinary school, and with an intense passion for food, Claire had become the chef, managing the back of the house. My business degree and experience from working my way up through Café Du Monde positioned me as general manager, running the front of the house.

But then Claire and Adrian had died two years later. And everything, *everything*, had changed. A small ache throbbed in my throat. *Chin up. Chin up*. I stood and approached the enclosed timeline, focusing on Claire's looping signature and our game plan, which had been a saving grace. It gave me purpose. Something tangible to complete when the world felt out of control.

Outside my office window, I spied the bride-and-groom second-line umbrellas propped against the base of the two-tiered fountain. I tried for a deep, cleansing breath . . . and failed. Turning away, I slid my fingers across my desk and nudged the mouse. My computer awoke from its slumber, the monitor revealing the desktop wallpaper of the Grand Canyon. The machine automatically loaded a different picture of vacation

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destinations every few days. Of places I longed to visit. Places out of reach. For now, anyway.

I reclaimed my chair and logged on to Facebook through the café's business account. In the search box, I typed in three words, *Ryan Comeaux Georgia*. Bracing myself, I clicked the search icon.

Checking my ex-fiancé's personal page was a guilty pleasure I only indulged in annually, which happened to fall during Mardi Gras season, which encompassed the anniversary of our breakup.

Was this tradition unhealthy? Absolutely. But finding his single relationship status unchanged over the years had been a small consolation prize. Several Ryan Comeaux's loaded, and I perused the profile pictures for the handsome, irksome face of my ex. My gaze halted on the screen. *Bingo*. There was Ryan, another year older, and his smile just as full. I hovered the cursor over his grin and clicked hard, as though I could somehow knock his front teeth out. He'd always had his personal page set to public viewing, but I never looked beyond the only thing I wanted to know. And there it was again. The *S*-word holding strong.

Vindication hummed through my veins.

Considering my own single status, it was an ironic victory. But remaining unattached was a choice for me, hewed from harsh reality. Ryan had been a colossal mistake. One I'd never make again. I logged off and rolled my neck, working out the tension trying to seep in. My heart nudged me to slip into the cool evening air and pray. I didn't always find answers in praying, or instant peace, but I knew God heard me. And there was something about verbally talking to Him, getting my thoughts off my chest, that helped lighten the load.

Beyond my window, a breeze stirred the leaves of the oak tree, beckoning. I always felt closer to God when speaking to Him outside. I stifled a snort. As if He didn't have X-ray vision and couldn't see me just fine where I sat now.

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Hayley ghosted past on the porch. No doubt the parade had drawn her outdoors.

I slipped my heels back on and exited my office. Instead of walking through the café, I eased out the back door, taking the porch around to the front, the route Hayley preferred.

The setting sun had made way for darker evening skies, the streetlamps following suit and flickering on. A trace of BBQ smoke hovered from one of my neighbors. Soft white light from the side windows of the restaurant poured out, and a melody of drums and horns saturated the air, becoming louder with my advance.

Sure enough, a high school marching band strutted down St. Charles Avenue. A thick crowd lined the street, swaying and clapping to the up-tempo music. A woman on the sidewalk danced, pulling a purple, green, and yellow feather boa from her neck, waving it above her head.

Mardi Gras was a blessing and a curse. Great for extra business with the influx of tourists, but the chaos and additional details involved with running the café during parades was a hassle. Thankfully, with the three-foot iron fence bordering my corner lot, I had a bit of control over the revelry and people trampling my property. Normally, the gate was open, welcoming customers to walk right in and take the path to the front entrance. Not so during parades.

Jonathan, another college student who worked as a waiter the rest of the year, now manned the gate in his seasonal role as the beignet bouncer. I'd learned long ago that with the café smack-dab on the parade route, most people viewed my establishment as nothing more than a public restroom.

Therefore, in the midst of parades we switched to a reservation-only policy and marked those patrons with plastic wristbands. No reservation, no wristband, no admittance. Customers also didn't mind paying a convenience fee for enjoying the festivities from our restaurant, and the use of its bathroom.

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The floodlights from the house revealed Hayley on the front lawn, within the enclosure, snapping pictures with her phone. Only one other couple remained inside the fence. No doubt most of the patrons preferred to be closer to the street, where all the action was. Hayley had removed the sweatshirt from her waist, her flannel shirt hanging on her slim frame like a deflated parachute. I'd gone through the same phase when I was her age. Despising my skinniness and how other girls were developing while I remained as flat as a sheet of plywood.

I hadn't had the option of trying different clothes to experiment with, or to hide under. No, my mother would have sooner died than allow her daughters a say in anything, even in clothing. Thank goodness for Mawmaw. She'd secretly taken us shopping and let us keep those purchases at her home and wear them when we stayed over. It wasn't that I'd aspired to don something scandalous like a tube top and Daisy Dukes. I'd just wanted a choice.

I stopped next to Jonathan. "How's it going?"

"Good." He wore the laxer of the uniform shirts employees had a choice of, pairing the white logo T-shirt with jeans. "Everyone with a reservation checked in, and most of them are out in the crowd." He inclined his chin toward the throng.

"Perfect. If you need a break, let me know."

"I will." He lowered his voice. "And don't worry about Hayley. I'm keeping an eye out." Fortunately, Jonathan was a vigilant brother to three younger sisters and understood my protective streak with Hayley.

"Thanks."

The roar of a tractor's motor increased, towing a float decorated as a Viking ship. Shouts of "Hey!" and "Throw me somethin', mister!" erupted from the crowd. The masked riders aboard the faux ship threw beads, trinkets, and plastic cups. Several small frisbees sailed from the float to paradegoers.

Hayley neared the fence, waving her hands, her attempt at

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catching anything unsuccessful. The float rolled on, and her attention shifted to the sidewalk. A man perched a few rungs up on a wooden parade ladder. A child's seat—similar in design to one on a shopping cart—was attached to the top, where a toddler sat above the throng. The father pointed to the float making its way to them.

I stepped off the concrete walkway, my heels sinking into the sod, and stood next to Hayley. "You used to love sitting in a parade ladder."

"I did?"

I nodded. "Your mom, dad, and I would take turns manning it."

Her brows knit together. "I don't remember that. But I do remember the year we dressed up as dalmatians on Mardi Gras Day, and I kept stepping on your tail."

Ah. That had been two years after Claire and Adrian's passing, when she'd been in prekindergarten.

"Wouldn't it be fun if we had a real dalmatian and dressed up like that again?"

I snorted. "Nice try."

Another float rode by, this one bedecked as a dragon, the scales lined with thousands of lights. Hayley's gaze remained on the father and daughter. The toddler was gently tossed a small stuffed animal, to her great delight. A bittersweet smile curved Hayley's lips.

Invisible fingers pinched my heart. "I can dig up the pictures and videos from those parades with your parents. If you want to see them."

Her gaze slid to her phone. "That's okay." She opened her texting app and scrolled through it.

The advice of the childhood therapist I'd sought after the accident came to mind. *"Offer the past, but don't push."* Pulling in a low breath, I redirected my attention to Jonathan. He shook his head, talking to a man on the other side of the gate

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who faced away from me. A broad-shouldered man donning a flamingo-themed Hawaiian shirt.

No. How was this possible? I'd gone two decades sans Micah Guidry, and now I'd seen him twice in the span of thirty minutes? I quickly calculated my evasion possibilities, then eyed Hayley. Despite my petite stature, she was still too small to hide behind. Dashing to the front entrance of the café was a no-go. Especially with my hair like Rudolph's nose. It'd give me away in a blaze of copper. *Darn you, floodlights!*

I eased around Hayley, using her as a barrier, and crouched, pretending to fiddle with my heel. Maybe her oversized hobo shirt would shield me. After a moment, I leaned, peering past Hayley's legs, and found Jonathan alone. I exhaled, my muscles relaxing. *Thank You, God*.

"Lose something?"

The question had not come from Hayley. My molars ground together as I faced forward.

Micah squatted on the other side of the fence, a playful, knowing glint in his dark green eyes.

Sarah McLachlan.

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