

## Chapter Three



Evangeline threw out her hands to keep her balance as Dot’s shoulder connected with hers. “What in the world is wrong with you?”

Dot rolled her eyes. “Don’t cast a kitten. If you hadn’t been lost in your own daydreams, that little nudge wouldn’t have bothered you. It’s definitely nothing to lose your temper over.” Dot motioned across the street with a tilt of her head. “Besides, that’s enough to set everything right again.”

Evangeline swallowed the urge to respond as she peered toward whatever had caught Dot’s attention. Though modestly sized, the rock exterior, stained-glass windows, and heavy wooden doors of the church made it seem immense compared to the one her family attended across town. But Dot wasn’t interested in sanctuary architecture. Movement at the doors explained her friend’s snared attention.

She sucked in a breath and glanced away from the two men exiting the building.

Dot turned to her with a mischievous grin. “What did I tell you? Those two will turn heads all over town. Maybe we should go introduce ourselves.”

Evangeline grabbed Dot’s arm to pull her along. “We will do

no such thing. I can't believe you'd even suggest it. That's brazen, even for you."

Dot laughed as she freed her arm. "Brazen? Evangeline Grace, I can't believe you'd say that to me. You're supposed to be my best friend. Is that what you think of me?"

Evangeline pursed her lips. She had no desire to hurt Dot, but lately, her friend's behavior had grown more rebellious and reckless than ever before. She sighed. "Maybe brazen isn't the right word. But you must admit, you've been giving your attention to young men more freely than you used to."

Dot laughed again. "You're a sheltered girl, Evangeline. You need to learn to leave your pious opinions in the pews on Sunday morning. They don't have a place in the day to day. Getting the attention of those young men is the reason God gave us certain assets in the first place. There's no harm in a little flirtation. It keeps life interesting."

Evangeline refrained from arguing. At one time, Dot was as dedicated to things of faith as Evangeline. Lately, she actively put as much distance as she could between herself and God. It amazed Evangeline that their childhood friendship had survived the changes. She had no doubt part of that was due to choosing her battles carefully and covering their friendship in prayer on a daily basis. Evangeline had learned a long time ago this was one of the battles she could never win. No need wasting her breath trying.

She opted for a truce of sorts. "To each their own, I guess. It doesn't matter right now, anyway. If we don't get going, we won't make it to the Orpheum before the show starts."

Dot shook her head as she looped her arm through Evangeline's and continued down the sidewalk away from the men. "We couldn't have that, now, could we? Fine. Onward to the Orpheum."

Brendan followed his brother's gaze to the pair across the street. It was Evangeline and her friend. He was as sure of their identity as he was that the women had spotted them as well. In fact, if he were a betting man, he'd be willing to place a wager that he and his brother were the topic of conversation. Quick glances from Evangeline and more forward, lingering ones from her friend all but proved him right.

James clapped a hand along his shoulder. His smile was too full of the devil to have just exited a church. "This town may not be as dull as I thought after all. What do you say we mosey across the street and introduce ourselves?"

Brendan suppressed a groan. "No."

While he was fairly certain James would have no interest in Miss Evangeline, he couldn't deny her friend's more flamboyant nature would be like honey to a fly. James's antics with the women in Chicago hadn't elicited their father's edict to get him out of town, but it hadn't helped his cause. The last thing they needed now that they'd relocated to Harrisburg was a replay of their Chicago troubles.

Relief swept through him as the girls, arm in arm, walked away. At least he wouldn't have to argue with James in the middle of the street. Whatever else they might be, the Dunne family was better than that. Their father would be horrified if they made a public spectacle of themselves.

James swore under his breath before he glared back at Brendan. "Looks like we missed our chance for now. It's your fault. Buy me a pack of smokes before the show, and I might be tempted to forget the whole thing."

Irritation crept through Brendan as James's brows lifted in challenge. He forced a good-natured smile. Contrary to the Irish blood flowing through his veins, fighting wasn't the answer, especially when it was over something as ridiculous as this. "Whatever you say, James. Let's go to Woolworths to get your cigarettes. But you're not making me late for the show. Understand?"