

Chapter Two



“How did Sara Beth end up with a best friend like that?” Ty glanced over at Brian as they filled their plates at the monthly family Sunday lunch.

“Like what? Lennox?” Brian added a chicken wing, then another. “She’s okay. Nothing like Sara Beth. But she’s pretty cool.”

“Uptight seems more like it.” Ty added a spoonful of the next dish to his plate before he realized it was Jell-O salad. He wrinkled his nose but moved on rather than trying to find a discreet way to scrape it off.

“Really?” Brian grabbed several rolls. “What makes you say so?”

Ty flopped down on the brick hearth in Aunt Mary’s den. “Maybe because she practically had a conniption when I didn’t show up right at two the other day. Then she acted like I needed to keep her informed of when everything would be done. Doesn’t she know you and Sara Beth are in charge of the wedding? And she wouldn’t let me tell her the story of Brendan and Evangeline. Claims she’s not romantic.”

“Not everyone is like you. Some people actually believe in punctuality. Or don’t believe in the magic of getting married in

some old chapel.” Brian stuffed a bite of corn casserole in his mouth.

“But you *are* getting married in that old chapel.”

“That’s because I’m marrying someone who *is* romantic.” Brian wiped his mouth and took a swig of sweet tea. “Lennox and Sara Beth are polar opposites. But they’ve been friends forever. Like, since the first day of high school. Something about being forced to be partners in science class or something. I don’t know. I don’t have to understand. Lennox is part of the Sara Beth package, so I roll with it and go on.”

Ty sat silent for a moment, contemplating all Brian had said.

“She does lead a mean kickboxing class, though.” Brian playfully nudged Ty’s arm. “I’ll give her that.”

“Kickboxing?”

“She’s one of the owners of that little workout place on the square. Sara Beth likes to go take her barre classes.”

Ty spluttered the drink he was taking. “Bar?”

“Barre with an *E*. Like what ballerinas do.” Brian motioned with his hand to show where the barre would be hooked on the wall. “She also does PiYO and a couple of other things.”

“PiYO? What kind of language is this?” Ty pushed the Jell-O salad over to the side of his plate so its artificial cherry-ness wouldn’t ruin any of the good stuff.

“Workout language. I think PiYO is a combination of yoga and something else.” Brian snapped his fingers a few times as he thought. “Oh, yeah. Pilates. I don’t go for those classes. Just the kickboxing. Sara Beth said she loves the way I look. Gotta keep her happy. Besides, by taking these classes, we’re also supporting her friend.”

“Right. Rub it in some more, why don’t ya?” Ty set his mostly empty plate aside.

“What?” Brian flexed his arms. “That my body is better than yours?”

“No.” Ty scoffed. His lean frame might not look like much, but most of it was muscle he kept toned using his home gym

several times a week. “That the younger cousin is getting married before the older.”

Brian guffawed, causing several heads to turn toward them. He waited until the attention was gone before lowering his voice and replying. “So what? If you think about it, this is only the second generation where something like that could happen. Before our parents, there were no siblings.”

“Apparently, it makes me look like a slacker. Because I have no marriage prospects at the ripe old age of twenty-seven, I’m obviously hopeless.” Ty pursed his lips and scowled at his cousin, sending him into another round of laughter.

Brian shook his head. “Seriously, man. This is ridiculous. Are they really riffing you over my getting married first?”

“Today, I’ve already been asked four times if I’ll ever find a girl and settle down. Don’t I know I’ll be twenty-eight next year?”

“I can’t believe it. Who asked you such things?”

“Your mother, for one. And Aunt Tunene. And Uncle Ford.” Ty ticked each name off on his fingers. “And don’t forget my mother. Everyone’s asking if I’m going to be as late to marriage as I am to everything else in life.”

“Well, we obviously need to hook you up with Lennox so you can get married right away. Maybe even a double ceremony. Then, you can live up to the family’s unreasonable expectations.” Brian leaned over, his elbows on his knees. “Because obviously marrying someone just to make sure you’re not still single at twenty-eight is a completely sane and realistic reason to do something so permanent and life-changing.”

“Or not.” Ty mock-punched Brian’s shoulder. “Something tells me Lennox and I wouldn’t even get along long enough to make it all the way up the aisle.”

“Well, you better find a way. You have to walk that aisle together this fall.” Brian stood and motioned toward the kitchen. “Let’s go find some dessert.”

“Right. She’s the maid of honor. I guess that’s why she’s acting like a bridezilla?”

The edge of Brian's lip quirked up. "No. I think she's just more detail-oriented than Sara Beth. Lennox takes her responsibilities seriously. You know, in the olden days, people used bridesmaids sort of like decoys so the evil spirits couldn't tell which one was the bride and descend on her."

"What?" Ty almost dropped his spoonful of banana pudding—a near travesty.

"Yeah. One of those magazines the girls were poring over had an article about it. People believed all that stuff way back when, so to trick the spirits and keep the bride safe, all the girls wore similar dresses. Crazy, right? I don't think bridesmaids are supposed to do that much anymore, but the checklist for the maid of honor is never-ending."

"What's the list for best man look like?" Ty followed his cousin onto the back porch.

"I don't know." Brian shrugged. "I sort of tuned out after that. You need to make sure you get to your fitting on time for your tux. And plan the bachelor party. Hand me her ring during the ceremony. And ..."

"And?"

"No. I better not tell you that one." Brian tapped the end of his spoon against his chin. "I don't think Sara Beth would like me to remind anyone of that particular tradition."

"Oh, come on, man. You can't leave me hanging."

"Decorations." Brian's dad, Uncle Matt walked up with a grin. "The best man is in charge of decorating the getaway car."

"Dad!" Brian's frown morphed into a grin.

"Just want to make sure you get the full experience, son." Uncle Matt chuckled, then turned serious as he faced Ty. "But more importantly, Ty, your duty as best man is getting that chapel ready. My future daughter-in-law has her heart set on that place. Are you up for it?"

"It's one of my greatest desires to see that place brought back to its former glory." Ty pressed his right palm to his heart. "I love

that chapel. I want to make sure it's repaired more for myself than for this guy over here."

"Well, thanks a lot," Brian scoffed. "Glad you're doing this for me. I figured you were doing it because you were tired of having an eyesore across the yard from your house."

"Eyesore? No way. Even a little rough around the edges, that chapel is gorgeous. It just needs a little TLC." Ty smirked. "Besides, some of those pews are probably in such rough shape because of our shenanigans growing up."

"Shenanigans!" Brian shook his head. "We were perfect angels."

Uncle Matt guffawed. "Not sure that's the term I'd use. Or have you forgotten that summer when Gran wanted you to come over and help with the dogs? Except you two took them for a walk by the creek. And ran into a skunk."

Ty chuckled. "I bet if the old cabin hadn't been torn down a few years ago, it would *still* stink. Seeing as we were told we had to sleep there until the stench wore off."

"Gran didn't mess around." Brian ran a hand through his hair. "But the trick was on her. Because we had more fun camping in that old cabin than we would have staying at the big house."

"Something tells me she knew." Ty sighed. "There's a lot of good memories on that piece of property."

"Agreed." Brian nodded. "Good thing Gran left the house to someone who cares enough to do something with the chapel."

"I'm doing it for all of us. It's been in the family since the 1920s, and we've neglected our duties. If I can't live up to one family expectation, maybe I can at least do this."

If only he could achieve both, but with no prospects in sight ... He would settle for salvaging a piece of their family heritage.

"Sounds good to me." Uncle Matt clapped him on the shoulder. "Did Brian tell you about our wedding invitation get-together?"

Ty raised an eyebrow at his cousin.

Brian shrugged. “Evidently, we’re not supposed to send invitations out until like two months before, but Sara Beth figures if we go ahead and address them, we’ll be ready when that time comes. She said we might as well address them at the same time we’re doing the *Save the Date* cards, whatever those are. She also wants to do a cake testing, so she figured it would be fun to turn it into sort of a party. Eat cake, address envelopes, and talk about tuxes, evidently.”

“Ooh, fun.” Ty’s voice dripped with sarcasm. “I’m sure it will give Lennox another opportunity to tell me to get a haircut.”

“Did she really?” Brian laughed.

“Your hair is a bit shaggy.” Uncle Matt tugged on a strand.

“You should have seen how pink her face got when she realized I heard her.” Ty grinned. If Lennox wasn’t so uptight, she’d be rather cute. He’d never paid attention to girls with super short hair before—hair shorter than his—but it flattered her round face and petite form. The color intrigued him as it changed shades of red under the light coming through the chapel’s stained-glass windows.

“Oh man, this is going to be so much fun.” Brian’s smile stretched from ear to ear. “I think you both may have met your match.”

“You forget. She’s not romantic. And thinks I’m unreliable. And, did I mention, my hair is too long?”

“We’ll see.” Brian pulled his phone out. “I’ll text you the information for the invitation thing so you’ll have it.”

“Great.” Ty opened the message and saved it to the calendar app on his phone. “Maybe I’ll show up early just to throw Lennox off.”

“There you are.” Ty’s mom walked up. “Discussing wedding plans?”

“Is there any other topic right now?” Uncle Matt squeezed his sister-in-law around the shoulders.

“Maybe Brian will rub off on Ty and remind him the clock is ticking, and the water is fine.” Mom emphasized the last three words with a jab to Ty’s chest.

Ty rubbed the sore spot. “Mom, that’s not the way things work, and you know it. Things are different now. People wait longer to marry. Just because you married young doesn’t mean it should happen forever.”

Brian rubbed the back of his neck and ducked his head. “Maybe Ty’s right. Maybe you guys are focusing too much on age. What if Sara Beth and I hadn’t found each other so early? Would you disown me or something?”

“We’re mostly teasing.” Uncle Matt patted his son’s shoulder. “You know we’ll love you both no matter what road your lives take.”

“I would like time to get to know my grandchildren, though.” Mom shot Ty a look that said she might not completely agree with Uncle Matt.

“Well, in the meantime, maybe I can at least get the chapel back to proper order.” Ty pushed away from the porch railing and held his phone up in the air. “I’ll see you later, Brian.”

Mom’s words and actions proved he was destined to be the black sheep in the family, and nothing he did would make that better. But he’d try anyway. He truly loved the chapel. He would start there. Then ...

Ty shook his head as if he could shake away the niggling thoughts Brian planted. Lennox couldn’t possibly be a girl for him. They were polar opposites, and despite the popular belief that opposites attract, he couldn’t imagine it working out between two people so completely different.

No. His focus would be the chapel. Tomorrow he’d locate workers for the repairs. Just a matter of eking out the time to make the calls. How hard could it be, with all Dad’s contacts?