

true calling series ~ book three

LOVE'S TRUE *Measure*

LORI DEJONG



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

www.ScriveningsPress.com

Copyright © 2025 by Lori DeJong

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC

15 Lucky Lane

Morrilton, Arkansas 72110

<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, or recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-474-1

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-475-8

Editors: Amy R. Anguish and K. Banks

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to “train” generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

*For my grandmother, Nadine Taylor, whose legacy of faith lives on in
her family and those she poured herself into.*

CHAPTER ONE



Oh, the joys of standing all of five feet, two inches tall. And that only if her ponytail was high enough.

Regretting her choice to grab the last two boxes instead of leaving one for a return trip, Shannon wished the carton on top was as transparent as the glassware inside. Unless she craned her neck to peer around it one way, then the other, the view directly in front of her consisted of the logo on the side of the box.

"Why didn't you have your friends move these with everything else over the weekend, Shan? Then we could be at brunch right now."

Shannon rolled her eyes at her little sister's whining. Okay, so not really *little*, as Delaney had passed Shannon by five inches years ago. At least Delaney could see over her box. "They weren't packed yet. And there aren't that many, Dee. Man up."

"I'm all girl, and you know it."

"Okay. Girl up, then. If you break a nail, I'll pay for your next manicure."

"Don't think I won't take you up on that."

Nearing the front entrance, Shannon smiled at the now-

familiar gurgling of the fountain outside the historical building renovated into high-end condos. Such a nice greeting to come home to, even if she had almost passed on the top-floor unit with a loft. A decision she'd come to reluctantly, knowing it made the most sense, even if it meant sacrificing some hard-won self-reliance.

But with everything else on her plate, it would've been unwise, and prideful, not to accept the offer of a free condo for as long as she needed it. Once she earned her master's degree, a full-time position as an adolescent psychologist awaited her. Then she could reclaim her independence.

"Shan, watch out!"

Her sister's warning came a nano-second before the man's voice. "On my way n—*oomph*."

A jolt knocked her back a step as her load teetered in her arms. A small splash and Delaney's gasp preceded the top box crashing to the ground with the gut-wrenching sound of glass shattering into a million shards.

Still holding the other box packed with plasticware, the epiphany that she should've stacked *that* one on top came a minute too late.

She turned to see a man staring down into the fountain's base, a leather briefcase held in one hand and the other against his forehead. A nicely dressed man, obviously on his way to work. Probably in one of the downtown Fort Worth high-rises only walking distance away.

"You didn't see me coming?"

His arm lowered as he turned a thunderous scowl to her. "See *you* coming? Who carries a box they can't even see over?"

Ignoring his question—because standing at least six foot, he could never understand the struggles of the vertically challenged—she peered into the fountain and sucked in a breath. "Uh-oh. Is that your phone?"

"Yes. With my boss on the other end."

He pulled a wireless earbud from his ear, which explained

how the phone ended up flying into the fountain. *His* epiphany, should he have one, would no doubt be he should've kept it in his pocket instead of his hand.

Except he probably hadn't anticipated being broadsided by a moving carton.

"I am so sorry."

"He probably thinks I got hit by a bus, and this meeting is wrecked." He raked long fingers through thick, wavy brown hair as he stared into the water.

She chewed her bottom lip. She had less than an hour to get to work, a part-time position at the counseling practice where she'd interned last year. Where she'd work full-time once she finished up her grad program.

"If I can't get back to him, this meeting *will* be wrecked, and I'll wish I *had* been hit by a bus." He turned his steely blue-gray eyes to her. "I'll even allow you the honor of pushing me in front of one. You know, to finish the job."

"Yeah, that's not overly dramatic." She set the box on the ground and pulled her phone from her back pocket. "Here. Use mine."

"Thanks." With no hesitation, he took the phone and punched in a number.

"But I need to be at—"

"Hey, Jules, I was on the phone with Alden when I ran into a ... a ..."

He looked at her. "Neighbor. I think. Anyway, my phone is currently under water, so if you could have it replaced today, I'd appreciate it. Can you transfer me to Alden, please? Thanks."

He walked a few yards away from the gurgling fountain and traffic passing by on the other side. Shaking her head, Shannon pulled off her tennis shoes and socks.

Delaney set her box on the side of the fountain and took a seat next to it. "What are you doing?"

"Getting Mr. Big Shot's phone. Doubt he's going to roll up the legs of that thousand-dollar suit to go get it." Remorse

replaced her indignation. "Sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I knocked it in, I should get it out."

Delaney leaned in, her gaze fastened on Shannon's new neighbor. "Mr. Big Shot is hot," she said in a stage whisper. "And a good dresser." Both very important things on Delaney's list. "If he lives here, I may be coming to see you more often."

"Whatever it takes."

Anything to have more time with her sister. Shannon worried about Dee's college party-girl ways and continued to hope she would accept her weekly invitation to come with her to church one of these days.

She stepped into the fountain and gasped as cold water darkened her jeans up to her knees. She retrieved the phone, shook it out, and stepped back onto the stone pavers.

The man nodded at something *his boss* said but didn't look her way. With nothing to do but wait to exchange phones, she set it next to the fountain and walked over to the battered box on the ground.

The tape had split open on one side, and several newspaper-wrapped bundles lay next to it. When she picked one up, the drinking glass inside collapsed in her hand. The others followed suit, as it appeared none had survived the fall.

She righted the carton and said a silent prayer of gratitude none of the shards had escaped the paper. It was bad enough she'd have to replace all her glassware.

And her neighbor's cell phone. She should at least offer, right? Regardless of his snarly tone?

An unpleasant detour on this late September Tuesday that had started out with such promise. The blue sky dotted with powdery white clouds she'd watched from her new balcony during her quiet time had buoyed her to move the final pieces from her last apartment. Missing her roommates and not in love with the idea of living alone—an extrovert's worst nightmare—she'd sought solace and strength from the one place she always knew she could find it. Hopefully, she could

reclaim some of the peace from those early morning moments.

Still holding the phone to his ear, the man glanced up but made no move their direction. She checked her watch. Forty-five minutes to change into something more office-appropriate than wet jeans and a Texas Rangers T-shirt, put on some make-up, and do something with her hair. Not to mention the twenty-minute drive to the office in Arlington.

"I bet he's really smart," Delaney said. "Good-looking, intelligent, designer suit. I wonder if he's married."

"He's too old for you."

"What do you think he does?"

"Probably something corporate. Has the same attitude as Dad and Cam when they're in business mode." Which was pretty much whenever they were awake.

After finishing his call, his brisk stride brought him back over to them. He would be more handsome if he smiled. A smile always improved a countenance, not to mention mood. And his disposition definitely needed improvement.

"Thanks." As he returned her phone, and took his drenched one, he regarded the crumpled box with a grimace. "Sorry about your ... stuff. Sounded ominous."

"Not as big a deal as your phone. When you get a new one, give the concierge the invoice, and I'll reimburse you. I'll let him know to send it up to me. I truly am sorry."

He gave the phone a few good shakes, and water droplets spotted the ground. "Don't worry about it. It's insured, and my admin will have a new one for me by end of business today." He glanced at her broken box again. "I'd offer to help, but this meeting—"

"It's okay. We've got it. I hope your day gets better."

"Can only go up from here."

He turned and walked away, his gait easy and shoulders back. Confidence was not this guy's shortcoming. Chivalry? She'd reserve judgment on that. Chances were slim she'd run

into him much, anyway, even if they did live in the same building.

Delaney stood and picked up her box. "Totally hot neighbor."

And totally not Shannon's type. She made a habit of steering clear of corporate hotshots, like her father and brother. If Delaney wanted him, she could have him.