

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT GLITTER AND THE GROUCH

Whew! what a ride!

I've enjoyed all of the books in this series and this one was no different. You're quickly pulled in to not only see if they finish this crazy race, but also to see how they're going to overcome what put them at odds in the first place. A bit more suspense woven through from a crazy ex, and you've got a great story you won't want to put down.

I'm so excited about the next story in this series too. Valiant, Texas, is a place you'll want to visit again and again.

AMY ANGUISH

I read this book through Kindle Unlimited and I love it. It's written in perfect deep Point of view so that I could picture everything happening. The characters are well-rounded and bicker while secretly infatuated with each other as they attempt to win a Texas canoe race to save their jobs. And it's filled with plenty of tension that kept me turning pages as the two characters fall in love. A wonderful romance read.

DEBRA ALLARD

This novella entertained from page one! A prank gone awry hilariously lands the two main characters in a grueling canoe race down an unpredictable river. Their opposite personalities in close proximity create humorous situations that are relatable and entertaining. I loved how the author masterfully developed and matured the two opposing characters thru a difficult 4 day race. The bulk of the novella centers around the Texas Water Safari, an annual race occurring on the Guadalupe River, where people across the nation compete. I would very much recommend this adventurous, sweetly romantic book!

NANCY ROBISON

What a treat to read this book! I really enjoyed the dynamic between the two main characters, Nat and Sy, as they figured out how to survive the Texas Water Safari. They don't call it the world's toughest canoe race for nothing! Mary Pat Johns brings the events of the race to life - sometimes humorous, sometimes hair-raising - so that you feel you're right there alongside Nat and Sy as they fight both the river trying to beat them and the love blooming between them. It kept me turning the pages because I wanted to know what would happen next!

C. L. KESS

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*For Nancy and Phillip. Do you remember the year I gave each of you
a T-shirt with the phrase, "Mom's Favorite"? It's still true.
You've grown into such lovely adults, I'm doubly blessed to be the
one you call Mama.*

ROMANCE IN VALIANT BOOK FOUR

WAITIN' ON PAIGE

MARY PAT JOHNS



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“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” Job 19: 25-27

CHAPTER ONE

“Jesse won’t miss his wedding day, Brenna.” Of all the things that concerned Paige Munoz about this wedding, a no-show groom wasn’t one of them. At least until a few minutes ago, but she dared not let it show. Her job was to convince the bride her wedding would be perfect.

Standing behind the bride, Paige gazed into the mirror and addressed the panic in Brenna’s eyes. “Jesse’s crazy about you. He wanted to get married six months ago.”

The renovated space they were in served as the prep room for the bridal wedding party. It adjoined the barn, and despite the copious amounts of flowers everywhere, Paige still detected a faint horse smell. She stifled a grimace. This was Texas. Rural odors abounded.

She spared a critical look at her dress, adjusting the tiny spaghetti straps on each shoulder.

“Does the dress fit?” Brenna stopped dabbing at her face to cast Paige another anxious look. “Are those spaghetti straps comfortable? They make me feel like I’m wearing a

nightgown.” She fanned her cheeks with the program. “Are you sure the AC is working? It’s hot in here.” She swiveled around on the bench, green eyes darting to the vent.

“I checked. The AC is going full-blast. Nice and cool in the main area. As far as my dress goes, you were smart to let the bridesmaids choose their design—I adore mine. The aquamarine color is stunning. Perfect for all the bridesmaids.” She leaned down with her face next to Brenna’s. “But you, my dear, are exquisite.” Paige meant every word. Her friend was beautiful on any given day, but today, she was radiant.

A tiny moan emitted from Brenna’s throat. She hugged Paige tightly. “Thank you. Guess I’ve got a case of pre-wedding jitters.”

Careful not to crinkle Brenna’s wedding gown, Paige untangled from the hug, keeping a hand on her friend’s shoulder. “I’ve got this. We’ve done our due diligence with every aspect of your wedding. Your job is to enjoy it.”

“Yep. You need to chill, baby girl. It’s your day. Cain’t shine like the sun if you’re upset.”

Spiky heels stabbed the floor as a mountain of aquamarine blue ventured into the room. Paige thought Dicey, the other bridesmaid besides Vi, was intent on making herself a spectacle. She’d chosen the most voluminous dress, swishing her skirts around like a dark, fluffy bird. Already tall, she’d insisted on a beehive updo. Brenna and Paige exchanged a knowing look as Dicey joined Brenna on the bench.

Dicey looked dubiously at the neat row of makeup lined across the small table. Organization was part of Brenna’s DNA. “Ain’t none of that gonna work for me.”

“Well, not the foundation, silly. Here, try some eye shadow.” Brenna handed her a peacock blue shade, absorbed in the moment.

A relieved sigh gently swooshed out of Paige’s lips as she

watched the two women. How they had forged a solid friendship with such drastically different personalities remained an ongoing miracle.

Vi entered the room. Her normally vibrant coloring had a greenish cast. She tilted her head toward the door as her eyes bored into Paige. Without a word, Paige followed her out.

In the hall, Vi faced her. “Update on the groomsmen. Nothing to be concerned about, I’m sure. Except we’ve momentarily lost track of Jesse.”

“How?” The word squeaked past Paige’s fast-closing throat.

“He didn’t show up when he was supposed to, and he’s not answering his phone. Rory’s gone to find him.”

The breath Paige swallowed hurt going down. “Don’t tell Brenna—her chief worry today is he will freak out at the last minute and not want to marry her.”

Vi snorted indelicately. “As if. She’s been the one with cold feet—not him.”

“I know, right? Now she’s here and ...” She couldn’t bring herself to finish the thought. “He’s just running late”—Jesse never ran late—“or something has happened ...” Not a good thought either.

“I’m sure Rory will find him. Or he’ll turn up all apologetic, sidetracked by some minor detail.” The reassuring words didn’t match Vi’s drawn expression.

“Okay. They’re doing makeup now. We’ll just wait in here until Jesse and Rory arrive. It’s just them, right? The others are here?”

“Yes.” Vi’s terse answer left plenty unsaid.

Jesse, where are you?

Twenty-eight endless minutes later, they sat in the makeshift dressing room with no update. Paige was doing her best to appear calm, as if a wedding on hold was a normal

occurrence. Dicey had given Paige a scathing look when she came back into the room. As if it were her fault Jesse was running late. Bless her big heart, though, Dicey had speedily changed gears and wheedled Brenna into helping her apply a pair of audacious fake eyelashes. The woman deserved a trophy for the longest-running eyelash application. Brenna's hands and mind had stayed busy the entire time. Still, the pressure in the room persisted. Alive. Breathing. Rising to combustion.

A flurry of knocking sounded at the door. A small man wearing a royal blue hoodie and jeans burst in. Not exactly wedding attire, but the hoodie looked new. Paige gaped as he brushed aside her objection, then loped over to where Brenna and Dicey sat.

"What are you doing here, Emilio?" Brenna's question could have chipped glass.

Emilio panted, hands on his knees, then looked up. "I'm sure Jesse's on his way. Boss wouldn't miss this for nothin', you know ... everybody's cool with it."

Brenna's face blanched. She dropped the tiny tube of eyelash glue she'd been holding and shot a look of betrayal at Paige. "He's not here? What time is it?" She reached for her phone, but Dicey snatched it away.

Paige fumed over Emilio's unwelcome news, then interjected in what she hoped was a calm voice. "There's plenty of time."

Brenna saw through her indirect answer. Fists clenched, she turned away from Paige and snapped, "What time is it, *Dice*?"

Dicey was wagging a finger at Emilio, who managed to appear angelically sorry. "Get out of here, fool."

Emilio did a double take, then backed away with caution, not taking his eyes off Dicey's bristling form.

When the door shut behind him, Paige watched helplessly as two huge tears rolled down Brenna's cheeks. "Why isn't Jesse here?" The hurt unfurling across her face was too much to bear.

Paige's eyes filled. She opened her mouth, then closed it again. Her normal self-possession had deserted her. She had no clue how to address this catastrophe. Through the roar in her ears, she heard or felt her phone ring. She turned away from Brenna to fish it out of her pocket. Rory's name flashed across the screen.

Thick-fingered with fear, she clicked it on. "Give me good news, boss."

"It's Jesse. We're on our way. Let me talk to Brenna."

She felt faint, but motioned to Brenna and mouthed *Jesse*.

Brenna took the phone. "Jesse?" The hesitancy in her voice had Paige sniffing back more tears. *God, get them through this.*

She couldn't hear Jesse's end of the conversation, but Brenna's body language morphed from stiff to relaxed as she listened to what had to be the mother of all apologies. She even giggled at one point. Paige wanted to cry with relief.

The conversation wasn't long, but Brenna gave Paige a trembly thumbs up when she clicked off. "They'll be here in ten minutes."

Vi had slipped back into the room, looking paler than ever. Her eyes brimmed with the question they all wanted to ask. Why was Jesse late for his wedding?

Lips sealed tight, Brenna swung around to the mirror, frowned at her face, and declared to Dicey. "I'm getting married today. Help me repair this teary mess."

Elation filled Paige where fear and sadness had reigned only moments before. Now that the groom was on his way, it would be smooth sailing.

“AND NOW, you may kiss the bride,” Pastor Mike announced, his eyes gentle, a smile tugging his lips sideways. Jesse leaned toward Brenna, anticipation lighting his eyes.

Tavo Morales was happy for them, especially now that the inauspicious start to the wedding seemed smoothed over. However, a deep disquiet had lodged in his heart, and he couldn't seem to jar it loose. His close-up view as a groomsman wasn't helping. Once upon a time, he thought marriage would be his ticket, too. But that was back in high school, for pity's sake. Before the only girl he'd ever loved up and left him.

The expected kiss was over, but Jess leaned in for another one. *Oh, here we go.* Tavo's stomach clenched. He wasn't sure how much more he could take. When Brenna shifted closer to Jesse, the space she'd vacated filled with Paige. The tiny crease between her brows assured Tavo she was as jangled as him, though she'd never admit it. She gazed at him for a moment before looking elsewhere.

Tavo, Rory, and Jesse had remained close since high school, and the girls were best friends as well. He didn't know the other bridesmaid, a tall dark woman, but Rafe, the third groomsman, was Jesse's cousin. They weren't a couple outside of the wedding, so he didn't feel like the odd man out. Until he remembered Rory and Vi had tied the knot a few months ago. Today, Jesse and Brenna were following the same path. Happily ever after. Tavo's jaw ached from grinding his molars.

After living in San Antonio, then Frisco, he'd moved back to take care of unfinished business, the first being his relationship with Paige. But it had been twelve years. Since he'd returned, he'd not made one stitch of progress. It had stayed the old proverbial one step forward dance. Only for every tiny step forward, there had been multiple steps back. Tavo couldn't

crack the just-friends veneer Paige wore twenty-four/seven, but there had to be a way. Even though he hadn't maintained a close relationship with God, he knew—he just knew—this was the right step. Somehow, he would reclaim her love. *Please, Lord. Let it be sooner rather than later.*