

What Readers Are Saying

“Rebecca Meek’s *Summer at Caroling Creek* completely enchanted me from the very first page. The charming lakeside community felt so real and welcoming that the characters quickly became like family, and I found myself reading far past my bedtime just to spend a little more time with them. Filled with heart, humor, summer romance, and the longing for a place to belong, this cozy story left me wishing for my own Adirondack chair by the lake. A delightful, soul-warming read!”

~Karen Barnett, award-winning author of *Through Water and Stone*.

“Charming and inspiring, author Rebecca Meek takes readers on a journey that is worth every single step.”

~Angela Ruth Strong, award-winning author of the High-Flying Romance Series.

A CAROLING CREEK NOVEL

SUMMER AT
Caroling Creek

REBECCA MEEK



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*For Ernie, Mel, and Carol, who first encouraged my storytelling.
And for the #mightymeeks. You will always be my why.*

Chapter One



Mylze

Under normal circumstances, turning down a blind date would have been a no-brainer. But standing up to the pressure of her older sister's misguided attempts to get her to settle down had never been a strong suit for Mylze Moore. At least this one was handsome. Still, as she sat across the table from Ethan, her mind drifted. Memories of Rome's pasta, Paris's cheese and fresh pastries, and Cancún's street tacos tugged her gently away from the restaurant. She wished she were miles away.

Miles away. She smirked to herself at the play on words. As a travel blogger, Mylze spent most of her time miles away from the small apartment she called home. Her blog, *mylzemooretogo*, had rocketed to the top of the travel blog popularity charts even before *Travel* magazine picked it up, and her childhood nickname became her personal brand. She still couldn't believe her luck.

"Is something funny?" Ethan gazed at her from across the table, his eyebrows pinched in confusion.

Great. Here she was, messing up yet another blind date. Rachel would never let her hear the end of it. But how could she focus on Ethan's brown eyes when the green and gold of the Irish countryside called her name? Or be dazzled by his bright smile when the white sands of Santorini beckoned?

Mylze shook her head. “Sorry, no. Thinking about work.” She offered an apologetic smile and leaned forward, clasping her hands under her chin. “What do you do?”

Ethan launched into a description of pharmaceuticals and number crunching. Mylze fought to keep herself from glazing over again.

“What about you? Your sister said you work for a travel magazine? It must be hard, traveling all the time.” A frown creased his eyebrows.

“Not at all. I love exploring new places. My aunt Carol likes to joke that she’s responsible for my blog because she’s the one who coined my nickname.”

Ethan’s brows lifted, his frown easing. “What do you mean? Mylze is pretty unique, I suppose.”

She stared at him. Did he really not get it? Or had Rachel given another date the bare minimum of information? “You know, my blog? Mylze Moore to go dot com?”

“That’s you? My ex used to read that blog.” His face darkened. “She broke up with me. Said I never took her anywhere.” He shrugged. “Traveling’s not really my thing.”

Mylze’s smile slipped, and she hitched it back into place. *Thanks a lot, Rachel.* Her sister seemed bound and determined to set her up—not only on blind dates, but for failure at the same time. Leave it to Rachel to pair a travel blogger with someone who didn’t like to travel.

“So, where are we off to after dinner? My sister mentioned you enjoy movies?”

The date went downhill from there. Awkward, stilted conversation plagued their meal at every turn. When her phone lit up halfway through the main course, she was almost relieved to excuse herself and take the call from her editor at *Travel* magazine. Almost.

“Mylze Moore speaking.”

“Mylze, it’s Tad. Sorry to bother you on a Friday night, but I just got out of a meeting with the big guys. I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news.”

Her stomach dropped. If Tad was calling after hours, it must be a big deal. “I’m listening.”

His sigh came through the line. “I’m afraid we’re going exclusively online. The print version isn’t selling enough to keep it going, so Jim and the other execs had to make the call.”

She released the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding, relief flooding her body. "That's not great, but I don't see—"

"It means we have to downsize everything, do a lot of reshuffling. I'm so sorry, Mylze."

Wait, what?

She leaned on the wall for support as the floor dropped out from under her. She shook her head, trying to understand.

"You'll keep the domain, as per your contract, and you are welcome to use me or Jim as a reference. You'll have to contact advertisers yourself if you want to retain any of them. This isn't a reflection on your work—"

"Wait." Mylze finally recovered her voice. "*Travel* is letting me go? But my blog isn't part of the print publication. I don't have anything to do with that. Why me?"

Tad sighed again, and she felt a hint of compassion for her boss. This couldn't be fun for him, either, having to make these calls on a Friday night.

"It's all about seniority, Mylze. I'm sorry. If it's worth anything at all, I told Jim the same thing. I told him it's a mistake to let you go, that your blog has been driving traffic to *Travel* since we took you on a year ago. But you know how it is ..."

She nodded, though Tad couldn't see her. She did know how it was. Breaking into the publishing world was harder than she'd expected, but she'd worked her tail off, freelancing and finding advertisers, working a second job to cover the rent, until finally being hired full-time with *Travel* just a year ago. Her mind raced as she swallowed against the lump in her throat. What was she going to do?

"How long do I have?"

A pause came through the line, and her stomach dropped again. "It's effective immediately. If you have anything here at the office, you can come in and pick up your belongings on Monday morning. Again, Mylze, I'm so sorry. Please, if there's anything I can do for you—"

Tad was still speaking as she quietly disconnected the call.

She peeked through the dining room to where her date was fiddling with his silverware. Shaking her head, she couldn't help but feel sorry for herself. Not only had she lost her job, but her dating prospects were growing slimmer by the minute. Could this night get any worse? Tears

beginning to well, she ducked across the lobby into the ladies' room. A quick glance in the mirror told her what she already suspected—her face was red and blotchy from holding back the tears. Still, she had a date to get through.

"Pull yourself together, Mylze. You can cry about this later." She glared at her reflection. After splashing some water on her face, she fluffed her hair and steeled herself for the rest of the evening.

She made her way to the table where Ethan was waiting. Only he wasn't alone. Their waitress—what was her name? Sunny? Something easily pronounceable, she was certain—leaned over to pour Ethan a fresh drink. The server's flirtatious giggles hit her long before Mylze reached their table.

He raised his eyebrows at her when she slid into her chair across from him. "Everything all right?"

Swallowing over the lump in her throat, she shrugged. "Actually, no. I just lost my job."

Ethan shifted in his seat, clearly unsure what she expected of him or if he should comfort her. "Oh, no. I'm so sorry. Are you all right? If you'd rather take a rain check ..."

Taking the hint, she pulled her wrap from the back of her chair. "Yeah, if you don't mind. I don't think I'd be much fun tonight."

He brightened the slightest bit and shot a quick glance to where Sunny was delivering food to another table. "We could do this again. Maybe after things settle down for you?"

Doubtful. She smiled sadly at the suggestion. "Yeah, maybe."

Escaping the restaurant into a downpour of rain, Mylze wasn't at all surprised that Ethan didn't offer his jacket. When he dropped her at the curb in front of her building, she was almost shocked his tires didn't squeal as he pulled away. Definitely not second date material.

Mylze stepped into the lobby, grateful for the warmth of the building. Her blonde curls were already frizzing as she shook the rain from her hair. She slipped her heels from her feet, sighing in relief. Whether the relief was that her feet were free or that the painful date was over, she wasn't sure, but she made a mental note to mention shoes in her next blog post.

Walk This Way: Top 5 Recommendations for Travel Footwear

Ugh. What blog? Sure, she retained her domain and could count

on some of her readers staying with her, but she was starting over again. Back to freelancing, chasing down advertisers, everything that kept her from what she really wanted to do—travel.

She padded barefoot through the lobby, then rested her head against the cool metal wall as the elevator made the short trip to her floor.

Why had she agreed to the date anyway? She knew the answer. Rachel had asked her. Strike that—Rachel had bullied her into a date Mylze hadn't even wanted.

The elevator dinged and opened to her floor.

She dropped her shoes, purse, and wrap in a pile by the door and strode to her bedroom. After tossing her little black dress in the laundry pile in the corner, she pulled on a pair of sweatpants and an old sweatshirt. Tossing her curls into a messy bun, she studied her face in the bedroom mirror. So far, no signs of the stress she was under, thank goodness. Even the blotchiness had faded, though it would return once she had a good cry. Her high cheekbones and green eyes were the same as ever, though she felt older than her twenty-eight years.

The image in the mirror eyed her with criticism. Once again, she'd failed. Once again, she'd have to report to Rachel. And that was just for the date, never mind losing her job. Mylze shook her head. Why did she care? Rachel, married with two kids and a literal homestead in her backyard, seemed to think happiness could only be found one way—her way.

There were other paths to happiness, but Mylze's eyes, reflected in the mirror, filled with dread as she imagined the coming phone call.

Not tonight. It could wait until morning.

Morning. When she'd have to face not only her sister, but her job situation as well. *Ugh.*

She turned from the mirror and pushed away the thoughts, padding to the kitchen in her sock feet, to pour herself a glass of sparkling water. She folded herself into her secondhand couch and pulled out her phone to text Lina, her best friend.

That was a disaster.

The reply came quickly.

Oh, no. You're home already?

Her heart sank as her thumbs flew over the keyboard. Typing it out made it more real. *What is wrong with me?*

Oh, hon. I'm so sorry. What are you going to do?

I have no idea. At least I keep my domain name.

Do you need me to come over? I have ice cream.

No, but thanks. I'll call you tomorrow.

Okay. I'm here if you change your mind. Have a good cry, but if anyone can pull off a career comeback, it's you! And don't worry about the date. If a guy doesn't love you at first sight, he's not worth it. Love you, girl!

Mylze smiled weakly and sent off a smiley face and heart emoji. She was happy living the single life and spending time with her girlfriends. At least, she had been until she lost her job. Lina was right. She'd built her blog and worked her way into her dream job before. She could do it again. Once Mylze got her stride back, she'd be too busy traveling for a relationship, anyway.

She downed the rest of her drink in one gulp. Lina's words had cheered her a little. But if she was right, why did Mylze feel so alone?