

# Love at First Fight

A Chick Flick Clique Christmas gift  
for my wonderful reader friends!

Heather Horrocks

**Dedicated to my readers—those amazing,  
wonderful, witty, scathingly brilliant people  
who love my books and characters and series.  
My writing dream could not have come true  
without you! Thank you!**

*When Lindsey Taylor and Ethan Peterson meet,  
sparks fly. Of course they do!  
This is where their love story begins.*

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# Love at First Fight

## Chapter One

Come on, Lindsey. You have to fall in love *sometime*.”

Carrying her lunch tray, Lindsey Taylor glanced over at her best friend, Kaitlin Hartley, who was walking beside her to their usual Aspen Grove High table along the east wall. “Just because you’re hoping Joshua Moore invites you to the Homecoming dance doesn’t mean we *all* have to fall in love. I don’t need a guy in my life. They’re just distractions.”

Kaitlin smiled. “One of these days you’re going to meet a guy who knocks your socks off.”

Two couples sat at the far end of their table. Lindsey nodded to them, set down her tray, and sat. “Yeah, yeah. And right after that, the apple tree in my back yard will start sprouting dollar bills.”

Kaitlin sat beside her and tossed her hair over a shoulder. “It could happen. I’ll buy a start off of it. I’d love a money tree of my own.”

“And *then* we’ll be struck by lightning.”

Kaitlin laughed. “You’re impossible.”

“No. Finding a guy who interests me is impossible.” Lindsey leaned in toward her friend. “And having them actually ask me out is even *more* impossible.”

“That’s because your big bad brother scares them off.”

“Jake does have an overprotective streak,” Lindsey admitted. Ever since their dad took off when

Lindsey was ten, her older brother had taken his faux-father duties very seriously. Lindsey appreciated that he cared about her—but he drove her crazy with all the questions and rules and insistence upon knowing what time she'd be home.

And she wouldn't get away from that until after she'd graduated. She knew because he'd informed her he wasn't moving from their mother's home until Lindsey was safely through high school. In his second year at Aspen Grove's Matthew Tuttle University—*Go, Purple!*—Jake was apparently a computer genius whose ten-year goals included opening a computer store on Main Street and going into politics. In addition to all his electronic smarts, her brother also wanted to change the world.

All that ambition and drive and talent—and all Lindsey was left with was cheerleading and hair. She loved fussing with people's hair. She seemed to have a knack for it and everyone asked her to help them. Which she didn't mind because she enjoyed it. Cheerleading was great, too. It could have been perfect—if not for Susie Quintana, the cheer squad leader. Lindsey's nemesis, as it were. A nemesis with a crush on Lindsey's brother. Ha. Suzie wasn't Jake's type plus she already had a date to the dance with one of the football players—thank goodness, because she never wanted to face the nightmare of having Suzie coming to family functions.

She planned to go to beauty college after graduation. Kaitlin wanted to get a degree in design. And her brother wanted to save the world.

Kaitlin lifted her slice of pizza, and took a bite. "Is it my imagination or does the school pizza get worse every year?"

"By the week." Lindsey fluttered her eyelashes at Kaitlin and lowered her voice to a sultry tone. "Oh, look. The most handsome guy alive just came into the cafeteria."

Kaitlin looked around, then picked up her napkin and wiped her mouth. Her cheeks went red when she spotted Joshua Moore.

Lindsey laughed. "You have it bad."

"Shut up!" Kaitlin hissed. "He'll hear you."

"He's looking over!"

"I hate you. Stop it!" Kaitlin ran a nervous hand through her hair. "I hope he asks me to the dance."

Lindsey saw when Joshua spotted Kaitlin. His gaze lingered on her until one of his buddies shoved him and he turned back with a laugh. Joshua was a nice enough guy, definitely not boring, and it was obvious he was interested. "If he doesn't ask you out, I'll be surprised. Hey, I know—I'll sic Jake on him!"

"Leave Jake out of my dating life."

"If only I could leave him out of mine."

Kaitlin tipped her head. "Hey, look at that guy. Have you seen him before?"

Lindsey looked back at the doors. An unfamiliar guy stood behind Jake's group, arms crossed. He was taller and more muscular than Joshua.

A tingle swept through Lindsey.

Whoa. Looks like Joshua just lost the title—*this* was the most handsome guy alive! Light brown hair curling onto his collar—oh, man, she'd love a chance to trim his hair! Muscles visible under the T-shirt that had, appropriately, an older muscle car on it. Intelligent dark eyes she could see from here.

His gaze swept the cafeteria, passed over Lindsey—and then did one of those cartoon reverses. Locking. On. Lindsey.

The tingle exploded into goosebumps, and she couldn't seem to look away.

"Wow!" Kaitlin whispered. "He's looking at you. *Staring.*"

"Shut up!" Lindsey whispered back. "He'll hear you."

When a smile spread slowly across his features, she had trouble breathing. What was wrong with her?

“What if he comes over here?” Kaitlin said, an awed tone to her voice.

“He won’t.” She pulled her gaze away and forced herself to look at her food.

*Get a grip!*

\* \* \*

Ethan Peterson hadn’t wanted to move to this small town from Portland. He’d dragged his feet on packing, and moving, and signing up for school. He really, *really* wanted to stay with his friends, his football buddies, and his shop teacher who’d been mentoring him in restoring old cars.

But now things just made sense.

He ‘d had to come to this small town, to this school, to this cafeteria—for this very moment.

*He had just seen the girl he was going to marry!*

He hadn’t even spoken with her yet, and yet he knew.

When he smiled at her, her face flushed red, and she looked away from him, down at her tray.

He hadn’t moved around the country five times without learning how to shake off what people thought about him. So he wasn’t going to miss this opportunity. He wanted to claim this girl as his. The sooner the better. His coach in Portland always said, “Do what you have to.” He had to meet her.

He uncrossed his arms and strode across the cafeteria toward the beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed angel and her friend.

She glanced up at him, saw him drawing closer, and froze, like the proverbial deer in the headlights.

Reaching their table, he smiled again. “Mind if I join you?”

The angel didn't answer, but her friend motioned across from them, and said, "Sure."

He sat down across from them. "I'm Ethan Peterson and I'm new in town. Do you want to go to the Homecoming dance with me?"

Her pretty blue-gray eyes flashed on his. "You don't waste any time, do you?"

"Not when I see something I want. You know. Like a new car—you've just gotta look under the hood and see what makes her tick." He smiled again. "I'd sure like to know what makes *you* tick."

"I don't usually date guys I don't even know."

Her friend smiled back. "I'm Kaitlin Hartley, and you've just asked my friend Lindsey Taylor to the dance."

He reached out his hand. "Hi, Kaitlin Hartley. Glad to meet you." Next he reached his hand out toward Lindsey. "Glad to meet you, too, Lindsey Taylor."

She hesitated, and looked into his eyes, which shook him to the core. When she finally touched his hand with hers, heat spiraled up his arm, a jolt of awareness and attraction. Her eyes widened so maybe she'd felt it, too.

She jerked her hand back as though he were smoking hot. "You're moving a little too quickly for me, dark knight."

Huh? She flicked a glance at his black T-shirt and jeans. "So you want a knight in shining armor, Angel? I love saving damsels in distress."

"No distress here," she said, and pointed behind him. "Better luck over at that table. Loads of distressed damsels there."

He didn't turn to look. So she was going to play hard to get, was she? She didn't know what she was dealing with. Ethan always got what he wanted, on and off the football field. Like that wicked cool car he'd nearly finished restoring. "You'd look really

pretty in my '69 Chevelle SS. It's blue, so it would bring out the blue in your eyes."

"Are you for real?" she asked. But she didn't sound upset, just shaken up a bit.

Kaitlin touched her arm. "Don't be rude, Lindsey. He's new in town. New in school. We should be nice to him."

"Yeah," he agreed. "You should be nice to me. Accept my invitation to the dance."

She looked across the table at him. "I would have to know you for at least forty-eight hours before I go on a date with you."

"But the dance is tomorrow night."

"I know." She smiled, a wicked smile. A challenge.

She'd tossed down the gauntlet. He picked it up.

He stood and came around to her side of the table, leaned over so he could speak softly in her ear. "You're the prettiest girl I've ever met. I'll come by your house to pick you up for the dance at 6:00."

Just inches away, she looked into his eyes. His breath caught, and hers seemed to, as well. Her response came out breathy. "You don't even know where I live."

"I have twenty-four hours to find out." He checked his phone. "Actually, twenty-four until the game—and I'm going to score my first touchdown just for you. Thirty hours until I pick you up."

She laughed at him. "Whatever."

And he turned and walked over to get his lunch.



## Chapter Two

Twenty-eight hours later, Lindsey and Kaitlin walked into Lindsey's house, glad for the warmth of the house, shedding their jackets. Outside, clouds and a breeze made the sixty-eight degrees feel ten degrees cooler.

They'd gone to the Homecoming game, where they'd cheered Aspen Grove on to victory—they'd won by twenty points. Apparently Ethan was a good player, because he had run the ball for two different touchdowns—the one he'd scored for her and one more. Impressive. When she heard other people admiring him, she wanted even more to go out with him. So she and Kaitlin had changed out of their cheerleading outfits and spent the last hour shopping.

Immediately, Jake called out from the dining room. "Is that you, Lindsey?"

"Yeah, bro."

She found Jake and their mother sitting at the table. Her mother said, "Want to join us for an early dinner, Kaitlin? I've got to leave in a few minutes to help with a book club tonight, but there's plenty here."

"Sure," Kaitlin said.

As they sat, Mom stood and grabbed her purse, asking Kaitlin, "Did Joshua Moore ask you to the dance?"

"Nope." Kaitlin shook her head and her grin was wicked. "I got tired of waiting, so I asked him."

"Way to go." Jake chuckled.

Kaitlin nudged Lindsey. "And the new guy asked Lindsey."

“New guy?” Jake’s eyes focused on Lindsey like a laser. “How do you know him?”

Mom waited to hear the answer.

“I don’t, really,” Lindsey said with a shrug, trying to act casual enough to get Jake to relax. “He just moved into town, and apparently he likes cars. At least a ’69 Chevelle SS, whatever that is.”

Jake whistled. “It’s a cool car, that’s what it is.” His eyes narrowed. “Tell him if he happens to *run out of gas* in it, I’ll pound him into the ground.”

“Oh, I’ll be sure to tell him that, thanks, Jake.” Lindsey rolled her eyes. “Is this violent dislike of cars cluttering the side of the road a new thing for you?”

Kaitlin laughed, then said, “She bought a new dress, just in case.”

Lindsey glared at her friend. “Can’t you keep anything quiet?”

“It’s your family.”

“Especially with my family! Sheesh!”

“And on that note, I’ll leave.” Mom pulled on a light jacket and waved. “See you girls later. Have fun at the dance.”

Kaitlin laughed and turned back to Jake. “She’ll go. This guy is amazing.”

Jake scowled. “Define amazing.”

Without missing a beat, Kaitlin said, “Good-looking, cool car, not afraid to ask out someone he just met.”

Lindsey wanted to change the subject. “Enough talk about Ethan Peterson. I want—”

“Ethan Peterson?” Jake’s gaze sharpened even more, if that were possible. “The football player from Portland? The guy who scored two touchdowns today? *That* Ethan Peterson?”

Lindsey tilted her head. “I don’t know where he’s from, but he did play in the Homecoming game.”

“I’ve been hearing talk about him moving here for weeks. He’s going to take Aspen Grove High to

State this year. He's really good." Jake narrowed his eyes at Lindsey. "How did you meet him so fast?"

"I just met him yesterday."

"He's a fast mover."

"You have no idea," Lindsey said, remembering how he's zeroed in on her. It made her blush to think of it now.

Jake thrust out his jaw in a way that made Lindsey grit her teeth. "I'd better talk with him when he comes to pick you up."

"Oh, that ought to go well," Lindsey said, throwing her hands in the air. "You scare all my dates away, most of them before they even dare ask me out."

Jake looked surprised, but then said, "I guess we'll know when a guy with some guts comes along, then, won't we?"

Lindsey glared at her brother. "Back off, Jake."

He glared right back. "Someone has to watch out for you."

Furious, Lindsey said, "You go ahead and talk with him all you want. I won't be here."

\* \* \*

Holding a corsage container, Ethan knocked on Lindsey's door promptly at 6:00.

It hadn't been hard to find out where the prettiest girl in Aspen Grove High lived. Though some of the guys had warned him off, telling him she was unattainable.

"She'll shut you down," the quarterback had said. "And if *she* doesn't, her big brother will."

But Ethan couldn't stay away. Even if she shut him down. He wasn't sure what had happened in that moment he'd first seen her, but it had rocked his world.

The door opened—but it wasn't the prettiest girl standing there. Instead, a big guy glowered at him.

Ethan was guessing this must be the big brother. And his tone wasn't overly welcoming when he said, "Yes?"

"I'm here to pick up Lindsey. I'm taking her to the Homecoming dance."

The brother crossed his arms. "Lindsey isn't here."

"Oh." Ethan tipped his head. That made things more awkward. But if he had to meet the brother anyway, it might as well be now. "That's okay. I can wait."

"You don't get it. She's not going to the dance with you." He glanced at the curb. "Too bad, because that's one sweet ride."

"But she said—"

"She changed her mind."

Ethan frowned and looked at the guy, not saying anything. What was there to say?

After a long moment, the guy shook his head. "Come in and I'll explain a few things about my little sister." He stuck out his hand. "I'm Jake Taylor, by the way."

"Ethan Peterson."

"I caught the game earlier. Good work."

"Thanks."

Disappointed, Ethan followed the big guy into the house, down the hall, and into a large kitchen.

Jake pointed to a stool. "Have a seat, Ethan."

Ethan did. He set the corsage box on the counter and sighed.

Jake set chips and salsa on the counter, and pulled out the stool next to Ethan. "I love my sister, but she's got a few quirks."

"Okay," Ethan said, not sure where Jake was going with this talk.

Jake dipped a chip into the salsa and chomped it into submission. "First, Lindsey doesn't like that I interview all of her dates. She didn't like the idea I'd

be talking to you.” He grinned at Ethan. “But I talk to all of her dates.”

Ethan tried to act like he wasn’t intimidated. “You’re taking care of her. That’s good.”

Jake scowled. “You know, I could squish you like a bug and bury you in the back yard right now and no one would be the wiser.”

Ethan wasn’t going to be run off this easily. He played football. He had muscles—more muscles than Jake did. He could hold his own. “You could try.”

Jake scowled a moment longer, then he laughed. “You’ve got some guts, I’ll say that.”

He punched Ethan’s arm, hard enough to sting. Ethan forced himself to not react, except with a responding grin. “That’s what my coaches say.”

“You’re a good player, I’ll give you that.” Jake nodded. “But don’t think that’s going to get you a date with my sister.”

“What will?”

Jake studied him. “You know I will hurt any man who hurts my little sister, right?”

“That would worry me *if* I planned on hurting her.”

“What are your plans?”

“I plan to take your sister to the dance, and ask her for another date.”

Jake sat back and frowned. “Honorable intentions?”

“The best.”

“Do not make me regret this.” The *or else* was silent as Jake shook his head. “I will help you on one condition.”

Ethan nodded.

Jake went on. “You take care of her as though you know I will kill you if you don’t.”

“Yes, sir.”

“All right then.” Jake paused, as if still deciding. Finally, he shook his head. “Lindsey is at Candy’s Café on Main with a girlfriend.”

“Oh, great, thanks.” Ethan reached for the corsage.

Jake put a hand on his arm. “Not so fast. There’s more you need to know. You go in the café flashing that corsage and she’ll turn you down because she tends to not look up to guys who chase her too much. What you need to do is make my sister *jealous*.”

“Jealous?”

“Oh, yeah.” Jake grinned. “If she thinks you’re the one doing the rejecting, she’ll get downright angry.”

“I don’t really want to get her *angry*—”

“If you want to date her, you do. Besides, it’s too late. I already ticked her off.”

Ethan narrowed his eyes. “Are you sure you’re helping me? Or helping me never get a date with your sister again?”

“Hey, whatever. Try it your way and see what happens.”

Ethan studied Jake’s face. The guy seemed on the level. He might as well hear him out. “Okay. What do you suggest?”

“Glad you asked.” Jake grinned. “I suggest you take another girl to the dance. And you leave with Lindsey.” He glared at Ethan. “And you bring her straight home, of course, or I pound you into the ground.”

“Of course, but I couldn’t do that. It wouldn’t be fair to either Lindsey or the other girl. Besides, who can I ask at this late date?”

“I know a girl who would be willing to help out—and who would be fine with making my sister jealous.”

Ethan paused, a little confused.

“You do like my sister, right?”

Ethan looked at the angel's scary big brother. "Uh... she's... um... awesome."

Jake chuckled as he punched Ethan in the shoulder again. "Well, maybe she is and maybe she isn't, but what she is is skittish. And stubborn. And has a temper."

"Who is the other girl?"

"Susie Quintana. She's a cheerleader, too, one who drives Lindsey nuts. And Susie wants to date me, of all people."

"Go figure," Ethan narrowed his eyes. "But why does a pretty cheerleader need a date for tonight's dance?"

"She found me after the game and told me her date had to go out of town because his grandmother died." Jake returned the smile. "So I'm pretty sure she'd help you. Just say the word and I'll call her."

Ethan tapped the corsage container. "So who wears this?"

"Susie." Jake grinned. "Susie gets the flowers and a date with me later. You get Lindsey for the evening and just maybe for another date." He frowned. "If you get her in tonight before curfew."

Ethan hoped he was making the right decision, and that Jake was actually trying to help him. Otherwise, he might not ever get another date with Lindsey. Finally, he said, "Okay. I'm in."

Jake punched his shoulder, in a spot that was rapidly becoming sore. "I'll call Susie."

\* \* \*

"Time to go," Kaitlin said. "Joshua's pulling up out front."

"You know what? I think I'll just go home." Lindsey really didn't feel like going to a dance without a date, especially an event as big as the Homecoming dance. She was feeling bad because she could have

gone with the most attractive guy in Aspen Grove. But she'd let Jake infuriate her. *Again*.

She watched Joshua walk past the windows of Candy's Café. He was wearing a denim jacket in the sixty-five degree fall weather. "Why did you have him pick you up here?"

"Because we left your house so *your* date couldn't find you, remember?"

Lindsey sighed. "Yeah. It probably wasn't the best idea I've had. I actually wanted to go out with Ethan."

"He is so good-looking!"

Joshua walked in and spotted them, heading toward them.

"Almost as good-looking as Joshua!" Kaitlin giggled. "I just want to run my fingers through that dark hair."

Why had Lindsey let Jake make her mad? Why did she care if he did his usual *faux* "pa" grilling of her dates? It's not like he could actually scare them away. And now he didn't even have to, because she had stood Ethan up. He'd probably never forgive her. She'd blown it, big time. Wasn't the first time. Probably wouldn't be the last. Stupid impulse control malfunction.

Regret filled her. She had really liked Ethan. Now he would never ask her out again. Lindsey was feeling more and more down.

Joshua pinned a corsage onto Kaitlin's wrist, and then took her hand. "Ready, ladies?"

Lindsey shook her head. "You guys go without me."

"Oh, no, you don't." Joshua frowned. "Your brother called me and told me I'd better make sure you get to the dance. And I always listen when your brother talks."

Lindsey rolled her eyes.



“I’m serious, Lindsey. I can’t take Kaitlin to the dance unless you come with us.”

“My brother needs to butt out of my life.” But she climbed out of the booth. “Fine. I’ll go. But not because my brother said to.”

Was it because she was hoping Ethan might be there, and she could apologize for not being home, and they could still have a fun time?

Surely not.

*Maybe.*

\* \* \*

Susie Quintana flicked a piece of lint off Ethan’s jacket. “Relax,” she whispered. “She’ll be here soon.”

Ethan scanned the dance floor again, nerves eating at him. The high school auditorium had been decorated in the Aspen Grove High colors, blue and white. Tables lined the walls, with a large space in the center. A DJ was sending music into the room. So far he’d alternated between fast and slow songs, current music and some ballroom dance music Ethan remembered from a class he’d taken last year.

He turned back to Susie. “What if she doesn’t come?”

“She’ll come. Jake said he’d make sure of that.” Susie reached for Ethan’s hand and batted her eyelashes at him. “And when she does, we want to be looking like we’re having a really good time together. Remember?”

Ethan drew in a deep breath. “Yeah. Sorry.”

“No problem.”

He studied her. She was slender and pretty, dressed in a form-fitting red dress, and if he hadn’t been so smitten by Lindsey, he might have looked twice at her. “So remind me why you’re willing to help me win a girl you don’t like?”

“Let’s consider ourselves a mutual aid society. I help you get a date with Lindsey, and I get a date with Jake. Win-win, you see.”

“Win-win. Gotcha.” But what if Lindsey didn’t come? Then what? He shook it off. “We both get what we want.”

“And I’ve been practicing. Watch this.” Susie put her hand up to her trembling mouth. She looked as though she were trying not to cry.

“Wow.”

Susie dropped her hand and grinned. “Yeah. That ought to convince her you’ve broken my heart.”

“You’re good at that. You should be an actress.”

“A-plus in theater class.”

The song changed to a waltz.

“While we’re waiting for her, we might as well have some fun.” She smiled at him. “Let’s dance.”

“Okay.”

She led him between couples on the crowded dance floor, turned, and slipped into his arms in the ballroom dance position.

He placed a careful hand on her waist and took her upraised hand. Then he grinned at her. “You are about to be the recipient of an A-minus in Ms. Barrett’s ballroom dance class.”

“A in Ms. Florence’s.” She grinned back at him. “Show me what you’ve got, Portland.”

So he started to twirl her.

## Chapter Three

So why exactly am I here?” Lindsey teased, smiling up at her girlfriend and her date. “Because I love being a third wheel?”

“Nope.” Joshua answered. “It’s because I have always wanted to date two girls at once, and this is the first time I’ve gotten two girls to agree. This evening is like a dream come true for me.”

Kaitlin smiled past Joshua at Lindsey. “Wow. Glad we could help you out with your bucket list.”

Lindsey laughed. “Yeah, whatever. Kaitlin only agreed to let me tag along so she’d have someone to dance with if you turned out to be a dud on the dance floor.”

He grinned at his date. “Okay, ladies, calm down and let me rephrase. Lindsey is with us because I’m a nice guy who’s willing to bring your best friend along on our date.”

Kaitlin nodded. “Keep this up and you might just get another date. Plus a chance to prove you’re not a dud on the dance floor.”

Joshua put his hand on his muscular chest. “Be still, my beating heart.”

“You’re a dork,” Lindsey teased.

“But a likeable dork,” he retorted.

“Yeah, okay, whatever.” Lindsey nodded. “Let’s get in there. The quicker we go in, the quicker we can start having some fun with you and your stupid date.” She smiled sweetly at Joshua.

“Correction.” Joshua lifted an eyebrow. “3.98 average. *Smart* date, not stupid.”

“I know.” Lindsey patted his arm and laughed as Kaitlin swayed to the music. “Let’s find a table so you can start dancing for real and I can look over the guys without dates.” Like Ethan, for instance. “I’ll behave.”

“That’s a first,” Kaitlin said with a laugh.

Joshua led the way to a table near the dance floor. He pulled out first Kaitlin’s chair, and then Lindsey’s.

Lindsey looked at him with genuine gratitude. “Thanks, Joshua.”

“I am honored,” he said formally and without jest. Then he grinned. “What would you *two* lovely ladies like to drink? That is my favorite number tonight, for some reason.”

Lindsey rolled her eyes.

“The *non*-spiked punch, please,” Kaitlin said.

As Joshua walked away, Kaitlin smiled dreamily. “I am such a lucky girl.”

“You have mush for brains when you’re around him.”

“I know. Isn’t it great?”

“If you happen to like mush for brains, it is.”

Kaitlin’s eyes widened.

“What?” Lindsey said, turning her head.

Kaitlin grabbed her face with both hands. “Lindsey, I need you to listen to me.”

“What is it? Let me see.”

“No!” Kaitlin held her fast. “You are my best friend and you do not want to see anything. In fact, Joshua and I should take you home now.”

Lindsey scowled at her friend. “First, let me go.”

“No, first, is you promise to listen to me before you look.”

Resisting the urge to turn her head, Lindsey said, “You’ve got thirty seconds.”

Kaitlin lowered her hands and sighed deeply.

“Second, what is going on?”

“Remember that you stood him up. That’s all. He did not stand you up. You stood him up. Important distinction.”

“*Ethan...?*” Lindsey turned her head, slowly, and searched the dance floor.

It took only seconds to see that it was, indeed, Ethan.

Dancing!

“Who is he dancing with?” Lindsey’s voice rose. “They’re dancing way too close together!”

Kaitlin shook her head. “No, no, no. Don’t do anything you’ll regret.”

“He’s with *Susie Freaking Quintana?!?*”

“You stood him up.”

“She’s wearing a corsage. He invited *me* to this dance! How many other girls did he invite?”

“With his heart broken, he turned for comfort to Susie. There’s no other explanation.”

“I’ll break his cheating heart. Watch my purse.” Lindsey stood. “That will keep me from smacking him upside the head with it.”

Lindsey strode purposely toward Ethan and Susie, her hurt and anger growing with each step.

*He asked me out! What is he doing here with Susie Quintana?*

She saw the moment Susie spotted her, because her eyes widened, much like Kaitlin’s had.

*Yeah, you’d better be afraid!*

As Ethan twirled Susie and caught sight of Lindsey, he stumbled, just a little, before going back to that smooth flowing dance step. Well, that dance step was about to stop.

Catching up to them, Lindsey tapped Susie on the shoulder. “May I cut in?”

Susie and Ethan stopped. Susie looked deep into Ethan’s eyes. “I don’t know. This is kind of a special dance for us.”

*Aaarrrrggghhhh!* Lindsey wanted to hit something—or someone! Instead, she forced herself to be civil, to act casual—kind of. “Let me rephrase that. May I cut in . . . or would you like to take this out in the parking lot?”

“You’ve always been violent, Lindsey Taylor. I’ve always thought so. It’s what makes you an inferior cheerleader.”

Susie put her hand up to her mouth, as though fighting off tears. Lindsey tried to feel sorry for her but—*nope*—it didn’t work. She shouldn’t be poaching other girl’s dates.

Ethan protested, “Now wait a minute—”

But Susie was already walking away.

Ethan took a step after her, but Lindsey grabbed his hand and pulled him around to face her.

A shock zapped through her as he caught her gaze. And his hand, touching hers, sent shivers skittering down her spine. And he was looking at her as though she were a princess. He took her hand, and placed another on her back, ready to dance. Was he kidding? But, hey, she’d show him she could hold her own on a dance floor, better than Susie.

He led and she followed into a waltz step, as he twirled her around a couple who nearly ran into them.

It was really hard to gather her anger around her, but she did it. “This is *my* dance, Ethan Peterson. You invited *me*. I said yes.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“But you showed up, so you thought I did.”

“And then you weren’t at your house when I went over there to get you. Six o’clock *sharp*.” His gaze narrowed. “I don’t like being stood up.”

“I wasn’t standing you up. Not really.”

“What do *you* call it when you aren’t there when a guy shows up? And has to talk with your brother?”

“Jake grilled you?”

“We had quite the conversation.”

“I *knew* it. That’s why I left. I’m so tired of him scaring away my dates.”

“He didn’t scare me away.”

She looked up at him, hope growing in her heart. “He didn’t?”

“No. *You* did. Are you really the kind of girl who gives her word and then breaks it?”

He dipped her and his face was within inches of her. As she hung there, supported by his very muscular arms, her insides fluttering, she managed to say, “I didn’t say yes.”

He pulled her up and closer, his voice a growl. “I need to know now, Lindsey, before I ask you for even one more date.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“I know that you’re beautiful, stubborn, and feisty. It’s a start.”

“Well, you are bossy, tricky, and not nearly as charming as you think.”

“So I’m growing on you?” He began dancing again, and she followed.

“And you are a cheater.”

“Can I be a cheater if we’ve never had a date? Anyway, who did you come with?”

“Kaitlin and Josh.”

“Whoa. So you’re into kink? I don’t think I’m quite ready for that. Call me vanilla, but I guess I’m a little bit more traditional than you.”

She gasped. “And you have a dirty mind!”

He twirled her toward the side of the room, and led her off the dance floor and through the tables and out the door. They found themselves in the common area of the high school. Two other couples sat at tables set up out here. The music sounded from the speakers overhead.

Lindsey’s heart pounded as Ethan led her around the corner, to a semi-darkened hallway. He brought her hand up to his lips and kissed her wrist. “I bought

the prettiest corsage I could find, for the prettiest girl.”

“So you think Susie is the prettiest girl?”

“I bought it for *you*. I planned to wrap it around your wrist when I picked you up. Which, as we know, didn’t go as planned.”

She shook her head. “But why did you give it to Susie? And how on earth did you get her to agree to go out with you? She’s like the snootiest girl in school. And she’s already dating someone.”

He grinned. “It’s my natural charm.”

“She’ll make your life miserable for this.”

He leaned in close to her. “It will be worth it. For this.”

Her breath caught in her throat. “For what?”

And then his lips were on hers, gently. When he pulled back, she wanted to grab his shirt and tug him closer again. She wanted a second kiss.

He drew in a ragged breath. “You feel it, too? Between us?”

She nodded her head and whispered, “Yes.”

Maintaining eye contact, he leaned forward gently until his forehead rested upon hers. “You are mine. I knew it the first moment I laid eyes on you in the cafeteria.”

“And you are mine,” she whispered back. “No more Susies.”

“No more ditching me.” He pulled her close. “Will you be my girlfriend, Lindsey Taylor?”

“Yes.” Oh, yes, yes, yes!

“So we won’t ever have any misunderstandings or jealousy again, right?”

“Right.” She squeezed his hand and happiness filled her heart.

\* \* \*



Lindsey's date might have started out rough, but it ended up being the best ever.

Ethan stayed by her side, and they danced with each other, then traded partners with Kaitlin and Joshua—but just for one dance, and she was already missing Ethan. She'd never been so acutely aware of a guy before. Like she'd just been waiting for him to come along. Like she hadn't even known what she was missing until he showed up. Like she was maybe falling in love at first sight.

He held her hand as they walked back to their table. He pulled out her chair, and Joshua pulled out Kaitlin's. Ethan looked down at her with that special light in his eyes again, the one that melted her. He squeezed her shoulder gently. "Would you like anything from the food tables?"

"A donut from the Holier Than Thou box I saw when I came in."

He leaned down. "*As you wish.*"

"You're quoting *Princess Bride* to me?"

He smiled. "I'll quote movies all day long if you like."

"I need to introduce you to Candy. She loves movies."

"I thought you said no other girls."

"She's older and owns Candy's Café. I think she can resist your charms."

"Ah-hah." He stood up. "One donut, coming right up."

"Make that two, please," Kaitlin said.

Joshua jumped back up. "I'll get yours."

As they watched the two most handsome guys alive work their way toward the buffet table, Kaitlin raised an eyebrow. "Wow. It was like love at first sight for you guys."

Lindsey nodded. "I feel like I just met the love of my life. It will be smooth sailing now, right?"

“Right.” Kaitlin nodded and looked serious. “So can I borrow some money from your apple tree?”

“Smart aleck.”

“Does this means you no longer have a no-romance policy...?”

Lindsey shook her head. “As a wise woman once told me, you have to fall in love *sometime*.”

~ *Just The Beginning* ~

# Thank You!

Watch for **Lindsey and Ethan's story** to (*finally!*) play out in *While You Were Stranded*, coming in 2015. **Joshua and Kaitlin's romance** is shared in *A Hound Dog Named Elvis*, in the RONE-Award winning anthology, *A Timeless Romance: Autumn Collection*.

I'll also be gifting this story to everyone who signs up to receive my email notifications, so **if you want to share it with your friends, please refer them to my website, [BooksByHeatherHorrocks.com](http://BooksByHeatherHorrocks.com)**.

If you're interested in helping to spread the word about my books, join the awesome readers on **my Facebook Street Team at [Heather's Scathingly Brilliant Readers](#)**. You can be **officially** scathingly brilliant! (And kudos if you remember which movie the line "scathingly brilliant" comes from!)

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(*While You Were Stranded* and *Davidson and Goliath* have 2015 release dates.)

**Thank you again for being one of my awesome, witty readers!**

***Merry Christmas, Heather Horrocks***