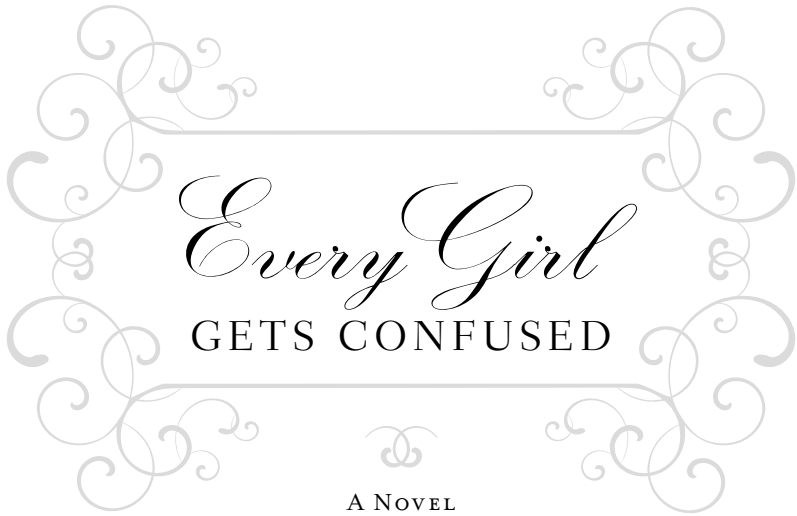


BRIDES *with* STYLE • 2



JANICE  
THOMPSON

  
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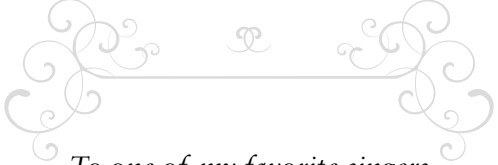
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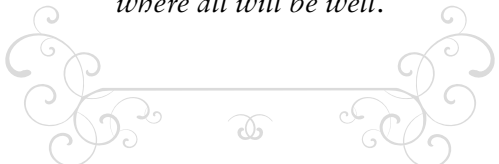
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*To one of my favorite singers  
of all time, past, present, or future: the  
incomparable Doris Day. What joy to base  
this book on someone I've admired since  
childhood, and how fun to use her songs  
and movies as my chapter titles.*

*In loving memory of our precious Evie Joy.  
You were not long for this earth, little one,  
but remain forever in our hearts.  
Can't wait to see you in heaven,  
where all will be well.*



# 1



## *Hoop-Dee-Do*

I always feel a rise in my scalp or in the backs of my wrists when something is special, whether it be a song or a man.

Doris Day

If anyone had told this small-town, freckle-faced girl that she'd end up gracing the cover of a big-city bridal magazine wearing the world's most beautiful wedding gown, she would've said they were crazy. But that was just what happened.

Through a series of unfortunate—er, fortunate—events, I found myself plucked up from my predictable life in Fairfield, Texas, a quaint little town where Pop ran the local hardware

store and Mama led the choir at the Baptist church. In less time than it took to say, “Hey, let’s all go to Dairy Queen for a Blizzard,” I was transported to a whole new world in the Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex, that of Cosmopolitan Bridal.

From there, I somehow landed on the cover of *Texas Bride* magazine wearing an exquisite gown that had been specifically designed for me by none other than Nadia James, Texas’s most renowned dress designer. All of this because of a contest for brides-to-be, a contest I had no right entering in the first place since I wasn’t exactly engaged. Oh, I’d come close to having a ring on my finger, but my now ex-boyfriend, Casey Lawson, had left me high and dry in the eleventh hour. My ringless finger still ached, and I shuddered whenever I thought about the pain and embarrassment our very public breakup had caused back in Fairfield.

Not that anyone at Cosmopolitan Bridal seemed to care about my lack of a groom. They were far too busy celebrating the upswing in sales after the October issue of *Texas Bride* hit the stands. I was now firmly planted in the happiest place on earth. Or at least the happiest place in the state of Texas. Groom or no groom, I was destined to be surrounded by gowns, veils, and bridesmaid dresses every day. Goodbye, Dairy Queen. Hello, big-city life.

Settling into my new job turned out to be easier than I’d imagined once Brady James, the shop’s interim manager, welcomed me with open arms. After a brief getting-to-know-you season, he also welcomed me with a few sweet kisses. But my budding relationship with the pro basketball player turned bridal shop manager didn’t necessarily mean I’d be wearing that gorgeous wedding gown for real, at least not anytime soon. Still, a girl could daydream, right?

That was exactly what I found myself doing near the close

of the day on the first Monday in November. A firm voice brought me back to reality.

“Katie, did you place that ad in the *Tribune*?”

I startled to attention as our head salesclerk’s voice sounded from outside my office door. Before I could respond, Madge entered the room, her arms loaded with bolts of fabric—tulle, lace, and the prettiest eggshell-hued satin I’d ever laid eyes on. The bolt on top started to slide, and I bounded from my seat to grab the slippery satin before the whole pile went tumbling to the ground. I caught it just in time and secured its spot atop the others.

“Thanks.” Madge shifted her position, nearly losing her grip on the bolts once more. “So, did you place the ad or not?”

“I did.” I gave her a confident smile. No one could accuse Katie Fisher of falling down on the job. No sir. I aimed to please.

“Ah. I see.” Madge’s nose wrinkled. “Nadia wants to talk to you about that. She’s on the phone.”

“O-oh?” I still flinched whenever my boss’s name was spoken. Working for one of the country’s top designers still made me a tad nervous. Okay, a *lot* nervous. “It’s almost midnight in Paris. Why is she calling so late?”

“It’s important.”

I gave Madge a nod and reached for the phone. Seconds later, I was engaged in a lively conversation with Nadia. I assured her that the ad had been placed in the *Tribune*, as per her earlier instructions.

Instead of celebrating that fact, she groaned. “Oh no. I was hoping you hadn’t placed it yet.”

“Why?”

“Because we’re backlogged. Madge says we’ve taken over sixty orders for the Loretta Lynn gown just since I left the

Dallas area. They've come in like a flood and I'm not there to build a dam."

"I see." Although her dam analogy left images of beavers running through my mind.

"I didn't think about what this would do to our business, to be honest." Nadia's voice was laced with anxiety. Weird. She rarely let her worries shine through. "I mean, I expected sales, of course, but we'll have to mass-produce to keep up with the demand. We've been busy in the past, but never like this."

"What can I do, Nadia?" I reached for my pen and paper.

She hesitated and then released a little sigh. "That's the problem. I don't know."

My pen hovered above the paper, awaiting its cue.

"I've talked to Dahlia. Even with the extra seamstresses she's hired, she just can't keep up." The exhaustion in Nadia's voice rang through. "It's a happy problem, I guess. Growing pains. But I truly don't know what I'm going to do. There's no way we can continue taking orders for dresses if we can't fill those orders."

I set my pen down, ready to offer all the assurance I could. "Don't worry, Nadia. We'll figure it out, I promise. I'm sure Brady has a plan in mind."

"I hope so. That boy of mine is a whiz—on and off the court."

"Yes, he is." Only, he wouldn't be on the court anytime soon. With his knee injury requiring a second surgery, Brady had already missed out on most of the season. Heartbreaking.

"When you see him, please give him my love." Nadia released a yawn. "I'd better hit the hay. Long day tomorrow."

"Of course."

I'd just started to say goodbye when she jumped back in. "And Katie, in case I haven't said it often enough, we're tickled

to have you on board at Cosmopolitan Bridal. I credit our recent successes to you.”

“To me?” I was just the one who’d pretended to be engaged so I could enter a contest.

“Yes. I truly believe God brought you to us. And you’re doing a fantastic job with the marketing end of things.”

“Maybe a little *too* good?” I countered.

She chuckled. “Never thought I’d say so, but yes. Do you think you can pull the ad from the *Tribune* before it goes live?”

I glanced at the clock. Five minutes till five. I’d have to get right on it. “I’ll give it my best shot, Nadia. I’ll shoot you an email after I find out.”

“Thanks, hon. Talk to you later.”

“Bye.”

I put in a call to the advertising rep at the paper and asked him to pull the ad. No telling what he would put in its place, but that wasn’t my concern. I needed to keep my focus where it belonged—on the shop.

*And* on the handsome fella now standing in the door of my office. I felt the edges of my lips turn up when I saw Brady standing there. Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome took a couple of steps in my direction and I rose to meet him. He extended his arms as if to offer me an embrace, but I shook my head and whispered, “We’re on the clock.”

“It’s six minutes after five.” He gave me a knowing look and then pulled me into a warm hug. “And you . . .” He kissed me on the cheek. “Need . . .” He gave me two more kisses on the other cheek. “A break.” These words were followed by the sweetest kiss on the lips and I was transported to a happy place.

Until Madge cleared her throat from out in the hall.

Brady brushed the tip of his finger across my cheek and



then took a step back just as she entered the room, clucking her tongue in motherly fashion.

“Are you two at it again?” Madge rolled her eyes. “I thought we agreed to no PDA.”

“PDA?” Crinkles formed between Brady’s dark brows.

“Public displays of affection,” Madge and I said in unison.

“Makes the customers nervous,” she added.

Brady crossed his arms. “Let me understand this. You’re telling me that the sight of a man kissing a woman makes happy-go-lucky brides-to-be nervous?”

“Well, in the workplace, I mean.” Madge shook her head. “Anyway, I suppose it’s really none of my business.”

“Yep.” Brady pulled me back into his arms. “And we’re off the clock. So you just tell any nervous bride to worry about her own love life, not mine.”

*Love life?*

Did he really just say *love life*?

I gazed up, up, up into Brady’s gorgeous blue eyes, my heart soaring to the skies above—okay, the ceiling above—as he gave me a kiss that erased any doubts.

Madge left the room, muttering all the way. I couldn’t seem to rid myself of the giddy sensation that threatened to weaken my knees. Just about the time I’d leveraged the distance between heaven and earth, my cell phone rang. I hated to interrupt such a tender moment, but it might be Nadia calling again.

Strange, though, that she would call me on my cell and not the office phone.

Brady stopped kissing me and gave me a little shrug as I reached for my purse. Seconds later, as the phone rang for the third time, I finally held it in my grip. When I read the name *Casey Lawson* on the screen, it took everything inside of me

not to toss the foul thing into the trash can on the far side of the room—a perfect three-point shot.

Instead, with my heart in my throat, I pushed the button on the phone and tried to offer the most normal-sounding hello that a once-jilted girlfriend who'd just been caught kissing a new fella could give.