

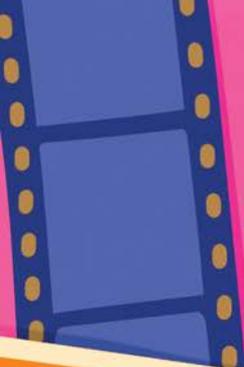


A NOVEL



# NOT WHAT WE PICTURED

BECCA KINZER



## PRAISE FOR BECCA KINZER

This book was so much fun! *Not What We Pictured* brings together a quirky cast of characters I couldn't help but love, a couple I wanted to root for every step of the way, and an ending that left me smiling long after I turned the last page. If you're looking for a love story that will make you laugh and fill you with hope, this is the book for you!

**RACHEL MAGEE**, author of *What Not to Do on Vacation*

An entertaining story full of heart and wit. I loved the Southern small-town setting, and the characters were the perfect balance of quirkiness and charm. *Not What We Pictured* is everything I picture for a darling rom-com.

**T. I. LOWE**, internationally bestselling author of *South of Somewhere*

*First Love, Second Draft* is a deliciously romantic story of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation that readers are sure to love!

**COURTNEY WALSH**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Everything's Coming Up Rosie*

This lighthearted and heartwarming Midwest romance is laugh-out-loud funny, especially during the text message exchanges, and the characters will feel like friends.

**LIBRARY JOURNAL** on *First Love, Second Draft*

Full of charm, snappy dialogue and characters you root for, Kinzer's latest rom-com is a perfect read for the beach. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

**RACHEL HAUCK**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Sands of Sea Blue Beach*, on *First Love, Second Draft*

This cute, quirky, and adorably sweet romance hit all the right notes of tender, funny, and downright charming. . . . [An] excellent story.

**PEPPER BASHAM**, author of *Sense and Suitability*, on *Love in Tandem*

A charming rom-com filled with unique twists and turns, *Love in Tandem* is sure to bring a smile to readers looking for a lighthearted romance. This is a sweet escape into an adventure in love, second chances, and holding on to what's most important in life.

**REBEKAH MILLET**, award-winning author of *Kate Landry Has a Plan*

*Love in Tandem* was everything I hoped for. Becca Kinzer knows how to deliver characters I immediately care about and put them in a situation I had to know more about. *Love in Tandem* is one for the Top Ten lists.

**TONI SHILOH**, award-winning author of *The Nature of Love*

What a quick, sweet, and charming romance to brighten your day! Kinzer . . . had me cheering for the unlikely, and yet so perfect, pair, Edith and Henry.

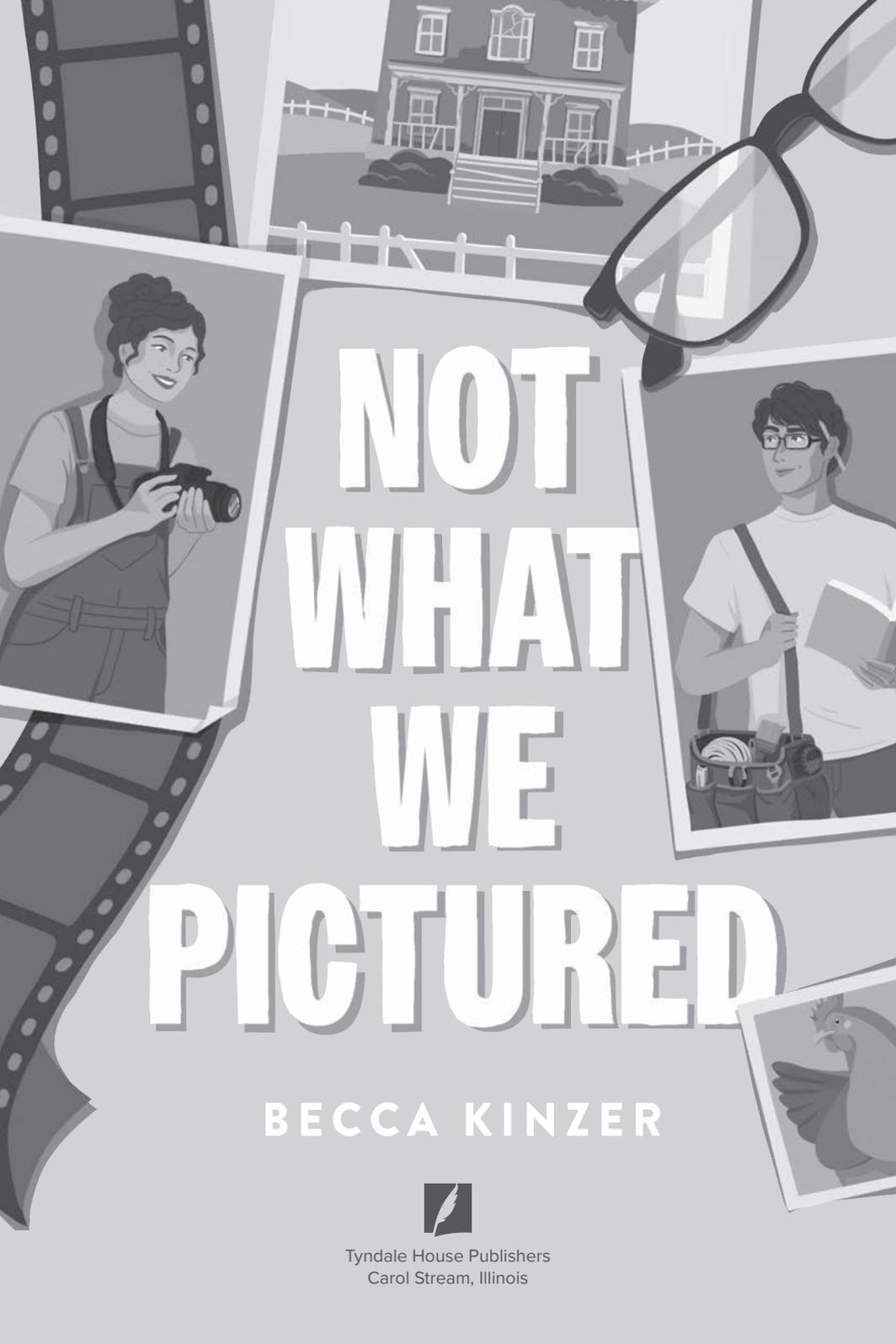
**MELISSA FERGUSON**, author of *The Perfect Rom-Com*, on *Dear Henry, Love Edith*

A charming rom-com. . . . This lighthearted jaunt checks all the boxes readers will expect.

**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY** on *Dear Henry, Love Edith*

Mistaken identities, love at first sight, friends to more, and even a delicious tease towards marriage of convenience come together to create a rom-com treat for readers to devour. . . . *Dear Henry, Love Edith* is a witty and heartfelt gift from first word to last.

**BETHANY TURNER**, author of *Wes and Addie Had Their Chance*



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Tyndale House Publishers  
Carol Stream, Illinois

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Cover design by Sarah Susan Richardson

Interior design by Brandi Davis and Cathy Miller

Edited by Kathryn S. Olson

Published in association with the literary agency of Gardner Literary LLC.  
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For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-855-277-9400.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

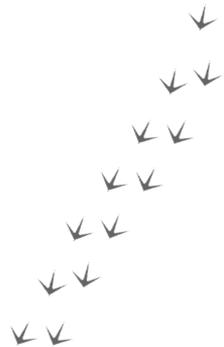
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

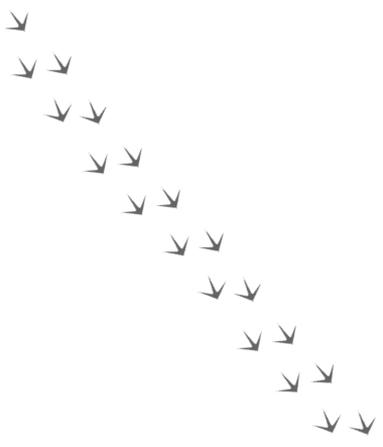
ISBN 978-1-4964-8909-8

Printed in the United States of America

32 31 30 29 28 27 26  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

**I dedicate this book to Maria and Charlie Kinzer because I love them with every beat of my heart (and also because they won't stop saying, "When are you going to dedicate a book to us? Huh, Mom? When are you going to dedicate a book to us?")  
Maria and Charlie—this one's for you.**







## **McKENNA**

“You want the facts? Okay, well first off, I didn’t kiss him. How’s that for a fact? I’m not the type of girl who runs around kissing strange men. And he was strange. I want to be clear on that from the start. If he’d been a normal guy with normal social etiquette, then everything would have gone as planned, and we wouldn’t be in this mess. But *nooooo*, he just had to be a bench-stealing, poet-pondering weirdo, didn’t he?”

“Are you writing any of this down? I don’t see you writing any of this down. This is my official statement. This needs to go on public record. I don’t know what Nate’s telling your little partner in the other room right now, but let it be known that I, McKenna Boston, did *not* kiss Nate Lambert the first time we met.”

## **NATE**

“The woman’s a nut job. First time we met, she couldn’t keep her lips off me. And that’s a fact.”



#### **FOUR DAYS EARLIER**

Was there anything that ruined a perfect marriage proposal more than a snoozing, potentially dead body on a bench?

Probably.

But right now, McKenna Boston couldn't think of what that might be.

She lowered her Nikon camera to her chest and stared at the distant figure sprawled across the wooden park bench like an uninvited, inebriated wedding guest. Or at least what she imagined an uninvited, inebriated wedding guest might look like.

Ever since her boss declared weddings too nerve-wracking for their little photography business to take on more than a decade ago, McKenna had trouble recalling what an invited sober guest looked like anymore.

But considering nobody in their right mind would choose a wedding venue along this lonely stretch of river outside her tiny Nebraska town, in addition to the fact she didn't spy any empty bottles, she was sticking to the napping or death theory. Mostly because she didn't

have time for any other theories. Not when she needed her sister engaged by the end of the night.

“Sir,” she called out, startling several birds in the surrounding pine trees into flight. “Sorry,” she apologized to the birds before screaming even louder, “Sir,” as she hurried forward, trying not to lose her brown Birkenstock sandals in the process.

*Side note—don’t wear sandals when you’re trying to hurry, because you will lose them in the process. Several times.*

*Side note to the side note—don’t have size twelve feet. Cute options for summer footwear may be limited to fifteen-year-old pairs of Birkenstock sandals.*

McKenna patted her outer thigh, more concerned right now with the valuable ring in her pocket than the style of her shoes. Her fingers dug into the fabric of her dress until they gripped the round metal shape buried within the pocket.

Still there. Good.

Not having a box to secure the ring made her twitchy, which is why she’d made sure to wear her cream-colored dress with the pale teal stripes. Not only did the dress make her look cute and girly—a direct opposition to the towering Amazon vibes she usually exuded as a six-foot-one woman—this dress had the deepest pockets.

She gave her outer thigh one more reassuring pat, then flicked her wrist to glance at her watch. Six thirty. Good. Everything was good. Her smartwatch buzzed with a call. Everything but this.

“Mr. Sullivan?” she whispered, holding her wrist close to her lips. What could her boss possibly need on a Friday evening?

“McKenna?” His shaky voice whispered back. “Are you okay?”

“I think so. Are you okay?”

“Why are you whispering?”

“Because you’re whispering.”

“Because *you’re* whispering. Are you in danger?”

“No,” she whispered. “I mean, no,” she said louder. “I’m just getting things ready for the proposal.”

“What proposal?” She didn’t have to see her boss to know he was rushing into the kitchenette area of their photography studio to look at the wall next to their coffee station where the Cat-Astrophe calendar she’d given him last Christmas hung. “I don’t see anything about a proposal.”

“It’s a surprise, remember? For my sister?”

“I hate surprises.”

Right now, so did she. “Was there something you needed?”

“No, no. Not really. My son just called and asked me to come out for a visit again.”

“Okay?” And this had necessitated a call to her because . . . “You should go.” Maybe he needed a little reassurance.

“No, no. We’re much too busy. That’s what I told him. We’ve got too many jobs lined up. I’m looking at the calendar now and no. I can’t leave. Nobody can leave. We have the Fultons’ anniversary shoot next week.”

“I know.” They’d discussed it at length less than two hours ago back at the studio. Mostly because they had little else to discuss. McKenna had never understood her boss’s idea of *busy*. Averaging one photo session a week certainly wasn’t hers. “Remember, we have Kristi now. If you—or me—ever wanted to get away—”

“No, no. Maybe when things settle down in a few years. Right now we’re much too busy. Well, I’ll leave you to the proposal. I hope it goes well.”

“Thank you,” she said right before he ended the call. She hoped so too.

So far everything was going according to plan.

Well, everything other than random worried calls from her boss and the snoozing, potentially dead body on the bench—oh, and the little fact that she wanted to quit her job and move thousands of miles away from Nebraska as soon as possible.

But that was a conversation for later, with both her sister and her boss.

Right now she'd focus on the conversation needing to be had with the snoozing, potentially dead body on the bench.

"Sir?" McKenna stopped to adjust her left sandal. "Are you okay?"

Not a single twitch from the man on the bench. What was his problem?

McKenna pulled out the bottle of Windex she'd packed earlier in her shoulder bag. Under normal circumstances she'd proceed with a little more caution—at least with something more along the lines of pepper spray instead of Windex—when approaching a stranger in a secluded area a dozen miles outside of town.

But this wasn't normal circumstances.

Her sister's boyfriend was about to propose. Again.

And unlike the previous times Oliver *about proposed*, McKenna was going to make sure this time it happened, slumbering dead body or not.

No messed-up orders like at the first fancy restaurant. No lost reservation like at the second fancy restaurant. No undercooked meat like at the questionable restaurant when the fancy restaurants in Omaha weren't panning out.

No restaurants at all this time.

Especially after the one proposal fiasco involving a flaming desert and a very aggressive sprinkler system that led Oliver to making the terrifying statement that maybe these were all signs he and Bobbi shouldn't be getting engaged.

They should. They should definitely be getting engaged.

Not only would her sheltered, nerdy, microbiology-loving sister never find another man more perfectly suited for her than Oliver—his ability to drone on about how his new software development positively impacted the acidity level of soil in both arid and dry climates earned him all sorts of Bobbi heart-eyes alone.

But the fact he droned on with a British accent? Well, even the microbiology-averse McKenna found that endearing. What Jane Austen-loving girl wouldn't?

Though to be honest, McKenna thought he sounded more like a 1990s bumbling Hugh Grant than a brooding Mr. Darcy when he carried on any type of conversation unrelated to his software development.

But hey, let Oliver drone and bumble all he wanted, so long as he proposed to Bobbi with the heirloom ring McKenna had promised her dying mother to keep safe until Bobbi was ready to wear it.

*Side note—never promise dying people anything. Just keep telling them you'll think about it. Otherwise you may find yourself stuck for years in a place like Nebraska. No offense, Nebraska. Nothing personal, but sometimes a girl just aches to move on.*

Even this second McKenna's fingers itched to respond to the email she'd received yesterday from Briella, an old high school friend. An email McKenna had already memorized by heart.

Hey Girly,

Long time no talk! I know this is out of the blue, but I met a woman at church whose sister runs a wedding photography business in LA. She said her sister especially loves doing photo shoots of the bride and groom with their pets. The pictures are adorable! Check out her website! Anyway, the reason I thought of you is because this woman mentioned how her sister's business is exploding and she's wanting to hire another photographer or two to help keep up. When I mentioned you, she immediately reached out to her sister. And her sister says you sound like the perfect fit for what she's looking for. She wants to look at your portfolio!

LA? Weddings? A chance to put her photography skills to use?

Yes. Yes. Yes. Talk about the perfect dream-job scenario.

All McKenna needed was for Bobbi to get engaged first. Which meant all McKenna needed was for Oliver to propose—and Bobbi to say yes, of course. But right now Oliver just making it through the proposal would be a major victory. Progress at least.

More progress than McKenna was currently making down this steep, tree-rooted trail toward the man on the bench.

She removed one of her Birkenstocks to brush away a stabbing piece of mulch as she offered up a prayer that everything worked out this time. *Dear Lord, please don't let this be like the ice cream shop incident.*

Oliver had been so close that night. If only the elderly gentleman at the table next to them hadn't started having a heart attack. And if only Bobbi handled emergency situations better. The man having the heart attack probably recovered long before Bobbi did.

She'd been so hysterical, Oliver told McKenna afterward there was no way he could pop the question for at least another month. *You know how important this proposal is to your sister. She wants it to be a complete surprise. And since I only plan on doing this once, I want everything to be as perfect as she does. Can you blame me?*

No. McKenna couldn't blame him. Wasn't her job in photography all about helping her boss stage and capture perfect smiles? Well, as perfect as anyone could get snapping gap-toothed grins and brace-laden smirks since the majority of their workload centered around taking all of the local districts' school-year photos.

But that wasn't the point. The point was she understood where Oliver was coming from. Most of the time. If he was excited and yelling at the television over a soccer match, she didn't understand him at all. But again, not the point.

The point, the real point, was that Bobbi was special. McKenna had known that since before her little sister was even born. So if McKenna had to take matters into her own hands to ensure Bobbi got the perfect proposal her baby sister deserved, that's what McKenna would do whether Oliver wanted her to or not.

And based on their conversation yesterday, he did not.

*No offense, McKenna, but I think you've perhaps turned into a jinx. Every time you've been there, the proposal has gone up in flames—quite literally the last time. I know you want to capture the big moment on*

NOT WHAT WE PICTURED

*film, but perhaps it's best that you don't. I was nervous enough that she'd see you at one of the restaurants. If she spots you next to the river, she'll definitely know something's up, which will blow the whole element of surprise and we'll be back at square one again.*

*She's not going to see me. I promise.*

*Should you even be out and about so soon after surgery?*

*I had a mole removed, not a kidney. Now will you please just trust me? I can hide the ring for you on the bench, so there's no chance of her finding it beforehand.*

*Fine. But then you disappear. No meddling.*

*Disappear. No meddling. Scout's honor.*

In her defense, they never really did nail down what constituted the definition of *meddling*. Making sure a bench was vacant and clean before she planted the engagement ring, then snuck behind a tree to secretly take pictures surely fell under the umbrella of *not meddling*.