

**ALL OF OUR
DREAMS
JAMES ANDREW
WILSON**



To Clarissa, my dream come true.

1

“That’s not right.” I turned from my reflection in the water and yanked the knot loose. “Don’t any of you know how to tie a tie?”

My fellow groomsmen shrugged. Jacob, my best friend since our sophomore year in high school, cinched up the knot at his neck. “We just left them in overnight. My dad tied ours yesterday at the rehearsal.”

I draped the tie around my neck, trying to remember if the thick side went on the right or the left.

“I think it goes the other way,” Robert said. Robert’s dad was rich, and Robert was the self-appointed expert on everything—especially women, though I couldn’t remember the last time he’d actually had a real date. “No, the other way.”

I put one end over the other, pushed it around, through, over, under. Pulled it tight. “There. Did I get it?”

Jacob tilted his head. “Looks a little off.”

I turned back to the fountain. Even through the rippled and

swaying mirror, it was clear that the knot around my neck was *not* the knot it ought to be.

“This is just fantastic,” I said, once again prying the knot loose. “The ceremony is supposed to start any minute. I’m gonna look like a dork up there without a tie.”

“I don’t think a tie is going to change that, man.”

“Shut up, Robert.” I gave the tie another hasty attempt.

“Are you boys ready?”

I turned at the sound of the familiar voice. A quartet of ladies in emerald-green dresses stood with bouquets in their gloved hands. The tallest, and the one whose voice I had recognized, was the groom’s sister Jewel—though between her and her brother, Mike, I’d have to say that she got all the good looks.

“We’re supposed to be lining up to march down the aisle,” Jewel said. “They’re ready to start.”

Robert stepped forward and offered his arm. “Then let us be off, my dear maiden of the pale moon.”

Jewel pushed him aside. “I’m not walking with you, idiot. You’re with Brittany.”

Robert frowned and stood beside Brittany, plunging his hands into his pockets. Brittany—she was one of those girls with a good personality, you know—pried her fingers under his arm and said, “It’s no picnic for me either, darlin’.”

Jacob cleared his throat and offered his arm to Jewel, all casual and calm, like he’d done this sort of thing a hundred times before.

Jewel smiled. “Thank you, sir.”

“My pleasure,” Jacob said, then winked at me.

Our fourth groomsman was one of the bride’s brothers. I couldn’t remember his name. He was walking with Mike’s other sister, Elizabeth.

Which left me and the remaining bridesmaid. Since I wasn’t able to make it to the rehearsal the night before, this was my first time meeting her.

In the movies, this moment is accompanied by a moving orchestral score and lit with a dazzling glow from a myriad of carefully placed lights, and the film is slowed down to enhance the mood, to let you linger in that place of awe. That is how I remember it.

She was a porcelain doll with rosy-red cheeks and dark curls of chestnut hair. I noticed her eyes because her emerald dress made them shine. Her skin was fair, like morning, like pale sunlight. Whereas Jewel stood tall and proud, a classic American beauty queen, my partner for the journey down the aisle was small and petite. She was like one of the flowers in the bouquet she was hiding behind—her delicate grace was not evident from afar; you had to stop and notice, and then you were entranced.

I did not possess the debonair charm Robert flaunted, otherwise I might have offered her my arm and called her a goddess of the sky. Neither was I as smooth as Jacob, able to drop girls to the ground in a fainting spell simply by saying hello.

“Hello,” I said.

“Hello.”

“I guess we’re walking together.”

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Beautiful.” I shook my head. “Luke. My name is—you look beautiful.”

She smiled. Then, in a shockingly adept Yoda impersonation, she said, “Arianna, my name is.” And then in her normal, sweet voice: “You look handsome.”

The music started. That was our cue.

We were supposed to be marching down the aisle right now—the aisle that was on the other side of the courtyard.

“Uh-oh,” I said.

“Your tie,” she said.

“We better run.”

“Your tie,” she said again.

“There isn’t enough time.”

“It’s a little—”

I grabbed her hand and started toward the rows of chairs on the lawn. “It’s all wrong, I know. It will have to do. We’re out of time.”

“Stop.” She pulled me back.

How could I have realized the significance of that moment? Not only was it the first stroke of our love, but it proved a foreshadowing of that final, elusive, most important stroke.

In the end, we didn’t have enough time.

“They’re waiting for us,” I said. “It’s good enough.”

“Hold this.” She thrust the flowers into my hands. Then she reached up to my neck. “Good enough isn’t good enough. It has to be just right.” Her fingers danced around my collar. I could smell her perfume. She tugged the knot tight and stepped back. “Now you’re ready.”

I’ve come to learn something: love is not an accident, a bolt of lightning that strikes you and renders you helpless under its power. Love is a choice, sometimes the hardest of all.

But I didn’t know that then. I was struck with the awareness that this young woman who stood before me was the most fascinating creature I had ever seen. She was perfect. A flawless cloud; graceful, heavenly. Nobody could have predicted the storm.

“May I have my flowers back?”