

Bless Your Heart*Linda Copeland*

Ow.

'No.'

Ow. Wake up.

'No. This is an abuse of power. You are abusing your power right now.'

You can turn over. Ow. You can open your eyes.

Ow. Ow. Ow.

'Or I could just lay here.'

YOU HAVE TO TURN OVER AND OPEN YOUR EYES! OW!

I try to shake out the grog of getting up way before I'm ready to. My brain feels like the bottom of the deepest bayou that was ever formed in the pits of Louisiana and I'm swimming around for details that are hiding in the depths. I know it's Saturday, didn't even need my brain to tell me that, and I know that last night's adventures involved more alcohol than my little southern self could take.

I pry my eyes open with sheer will. My brain, may that dictator burn in hell, cheers on my eyelids as they unstick from the goop of night old mascara. My eye crusts shift and rub together as my vision tries to focus. I can see small shafts of light filtering through my blinds. That could mean anything. I turn over to click my phone. It's 6:30 in the morning.

'I hate you.'

A snore erupts from the other side of my dorm room. For a moment my mind shifts to the possibility that there's some kind of supernatural being in my room, but my brain knocks that hazy idea almost immediately and shoots me straight to the point. That snore should not be happening. It would've been fine if that snore had happened last semester when my ex-roommate was here and not considering dropping out of school. But it's not last semester and she's not here. Another snore erupts. It's loud enough for me to finally look across my room at what should have been my ex-roommate's empty bed to see a guy curled up in my Avengers blanket.

My brain isn't acting like its usual self. Maybe it's the over sized Swedish klog stomper rhythmically stomping away up there, but my brain isn't going into full blown panic mode. This thing, that keeps me up to at least three in the morning every freaking night with anxieties on the future and the past, on things that I could have said or done differently is chill. This dictator like mechanism that sends panic through the rest of me when I say something that can be interpreted as even slightly stupid is doing nothing of the kind right when I need the panic the most. What a jerk.

It was a date.

'What?'

You were on a date.

'WHAT?!'

Date is new. Date is odd. Date is surprising and very unbelievable because date doesn't happen. Ever.

You went on a date with Henry.

'Henry. Perfect Henry.'

Yes, Perfect Henry.

'I went on a date with Perfect Henry.'

Lord help you child, yes. You went on a date with Perfect Henry.

'How?!'

That last hit was not in my head. My throat feels like the state when it's under a burn ban causing me to sound like a woodland witch ready to eat up some kids or curse royal babies. Whatever it sounds like, my witch voice causes Perfect Henry to jerk awake.

"What?"

"Ssh!"

"What?"

"Shut up!"

Perfect Henry nods and curls up even more.

"Sorry." He whispers.

"That's okay. Just try not to talk so loud."

My head feels like I'm about to give birth to a Grecian goddess of wisdom. I need an Hephaestus.

"Good morning." Perfect Henry whispers. He's got a big, fat, stupid grin on his face. I suppose it makes me feel a little better about the ridiculous situation that we're in, but not much.

I slowly get out of bed a hobble to my desk where a half empty bottle of ibuprofen and an almost full bottle of aspirin sit. I pop two coral pills into my mouth and dry swallow because I guess I'm tough or something. I try to think of a way to get Perfect Henry out of here. There aren't any games today, or at least not any important ones, and the only people out at this time on a Saturday are those fitness whackadoos. Last night there was a secret Tau Iota party, so that counts out at least 76% of said whackadoos. I still have my pants on and my keys are still in my pants pockets (thank you God, thank you Jesus, thank you Holy Spirit). If I'm going to get Perfect Henry out of the dorm without getting caught, it's now.

"We gotta go." I whisper. Perfect Henry nods, sighs, and slide off my ex-roommate's bed with ease. He's fully clothed too (thank you, thank you Jesus), much to my relief. We exit my dorm room and sneak down the unlit hall to the emergency exit. The three flights of stairs that lead to the parking lot are going to be the pique of my lulled anxiety. Everything is up to chance. I take every step with caution and prayer.

The sound of one of the doors that leads to the stairs opens with a pop. We both freeze and I motion for Perfect Henry to become as much of the wall as he can. I look over the bars to see it was a fitness whackadoo on the second floor going out for her morning jog.

"Thank you. Thank you so much. I will never do anything like this again."

Praise God later. Get the boy outta here.

The rest of the stairs is a breeze and soon we're headed for my car.

"This is real nice of you." Perfect Henry says as I unlock my door.

"Don't mention it."

"No. Any other person would have left me to find my own way out," He pauses. "I haven't done this before. Just to clarify."

"Never took you for that kind of guy."

I drive him to his apartment, silent. I just want to get him out of my car and go to sleep. Not that the date wasn't fun or anything. It's just this outcome was not really what I wanted.

"Oh hey, let me get you gas money."

"That's not really-"

"Come on, you drove clean across town. Least I could do, really. Come on in."

Don't you do it. Don't you even think of it.

'He doesn't seem like-'

You have seen way too many horror movies and have read way too many stories. I swear to the Lord Jesus that if you go in there-

"Okay."

I'm going to kill you.

I wait on Perfect Henry's as he goes to his room to get the money he feels like he owes. The living room is nice. It's spacey and the couch is really comfortable. Really comfortable.

"This is really nice."

Don't go to-

I wake up with a blanket over me that smells like apples. Perfect Henry is walking in from his kitchen when I realize where I am. My brain, nice to see it back, kicks into all panic mode. And all panic mode is equivalent to crazy aggressive. I jump off the couch.

"Hey. You kind of fell asleep-"

"Where are my keys?!"

Perfect Henry looks shocked by the sudden anger that's spewing from me. He shouldn't be though. Idiot.

"On the coffee table. That's where you put them."

He's talking slowly and as calm as he can. He even points to the small lump of metal sitting on his coffee table.

"Good," I snatch them up. "I'm leaving."

"Hey, let me-"

"You think I'm some kind of idiot?"

"What?"

"Don't play games with me. 1 in 4 women are sexually assaulted in college."

"Woah. I did not-"

"Back off, you English turd blossom!"

Perfect Henry looks as if someone just purposefully ran over his dog right in front of him.

"I'm not....I'm not English."

Something catches to corner of my eye. I look at the wall that the couch is against. Over it is the Irish flag.

"Oh."

Crap.

'We screwed up.'

"Sorry."

"It's okay. You've had a pretty rough morning. Bless your heart."

Bless your heart. That's what he says. Maybe where he's from it means something else, a sign of true pity perhaps. But here down in the South it's used at the end of an insult to make the shade that you're throwing a little less dark.

I sigh.

'I have had a rough morning.'

Amen, amen.

"I should go. Sorry, again, for blowing up at you and mistaking you for an Englishman."

"It's fine, happens more than I want. Oh, here."

He hands me a twenty. Gas money.

"Thanks."

"Yeah. See you round."

"Yeah."

I walk back to my car and turn it on. For a moment, I let my head fall on my steering wheel. My first ever date and I ruined every single part of it.

Bless your heart.