

*Happily Ever After*

by E.A. West

Yet another wedding for yet another friend. Fate had spoken again, leaving Tammy to wonder if it was out to get her. She sighed as she watched Lisa and her new husband climb into the back of the limo, both of them wearing big smiles. Aside from seeing her friend so happy, the best part of the wedding had been a gorgeous groomsman. With her bad luck when it came to men, he was probably married and had six kids.

As the limo finally disappeared around the corner, Tammy sighed again and turned away from the crowd of well-wishers. How could she be happy when she was the last person in her group of friends to still be single? She didn't even have a glimmer of a possible relationship on the horizon. The last man she'd dated had dumped her in favor of a bleach blonde whose only real body part was her big toe.

"Hey, Tammy, come to the pub with us!"

She turned to see Missy, the first of their group to get married three years ago. "I suppose I could come for a little while."

"Of course you can come," Missy said, linking her arm through Tammy's. "Paul's already headed over there with a couple of other guys, and you're riding with us girls. Now, smile and at least pretend you're enjoying yourself."

Tammy flashed her a faux smile. "I just love watching all of my friends get married and live happily ever after while I haven't even had a date in three weeks!"

"Okay, cut the sarcasm," Missy said, rolling her eyes. "If you smile and act happy, maybe you'll meet someone at the pub and have your own happily ever after life."

"Yeah, sure, picking up guys after a wedding has worked out so well for me," Tammy replied dryly. "Remember Joe from your wedding?"

Missy laughed. "How was I supposed to know that he spends most of his time in the middle of the woods with only squirrels for company?"

"I think he was more squirrely than the rodents themselves." Tammy sighed. "And what about Travis from Arkansas?"

"Which one was he?"

"The one who ended every statement with 'know what I mean?'" Tammy said, doing an imitation of the man she'd met after another friend's wedding. "By the time I finally managed to rid myself of him, I was ready to go find Joe the squirrel man. At least he wasn't quite as obnoxious."

Missy laughed again and guided her to the parking lot. "So maybe meeting a nice guy isn't as easy as it used to be. But there's always the possibility you'll meet someone and in a few months we'll all be at your wedding."

“I’d just be happy with a date for Friday night with someone who has a decent job, doesn’t live with his mother, and is at least as sane as I am. A little quirkiness, I can handle. It’s the downright weird I have trouble with.”

Missy didn’t reply as they joined a couple of other women waiting beside a green Volvo. Tammy didn’t mind her friend’s silence; Missy knew her sad history of dating weirdos, and nothing she could say would make it disappear. Anything she said would be just another reminder of Tammy’s struggle to find someone normal in a world seemingly gone mad. Why was it that all the nice guys were taken?

When they arrived at the pub a few minutes later, Tammy was surprised to see the groomsman she’d had her eye on all through the wedding and reception. He was gorgeous with the body of an athlete, chiseled features, and the most stunning green eyes she’d ever seen. Out of habit, she checked the fourth finger of his left hand and smiled when she saw it was bare. Missy led her to a table in the back where the husbands of the women she was with waited. After ordering drinks and discussing the wedding, Tammy tuned out the conversation and let her gaze roam the interior of the pub. It was smoky, dimly lit, and had twangy country music playing on the jukebox. Not exactly the paragon of romance, but if the groomsman happened to see her flirtatious smile as she watched him and just happened to come say hi, who was she to complain about the atmosphere?

The song on the jukebox changed to a golden oldie, and Tammy looked away from the groomsman with a sigh. He wasn’t picking up on any of the signals she sent him, and she was tired of trying. He was probably some kind of nut who painted with his bare feet and ate only raw food. Tammy was trying to think of an excuse to go home when another country song started on the jukebox and someone came to a stop beside her. Looking up, she saw the groomsman standing next to her, smiling as he held out his hand.

“Care to dance?”

Tammy smiled and stood up, ignoring the grin Missy was giving her. “Sure, why not?”

He led her out to the dance floor and took her in his arms. Tammy could tell he was a much better dancer than she was, but he complimented her on her gracefulness. As they danced, she learned that Mr. Gorgeous was actually named Phil. She also learned that he taught English at the local college and his weirdest quirk was facilitating the college swing dance club. When the song ended, Tammy and Phil continued to talk, and she began to think he fit the list of qualifications she’d given Missy just a couple of hours before. By the time Phil left the pub to head home, he’d invited Tammy to join him for dinner the next evening. Of course, she accepted. She wasn’t crazy, though most of the men she’d dated had been.

She finally returned to the table where Missy still sat with their friends. As she sat down, Tammy realized Missy wasn’t the only one studying her with a speculating smile. After a moment, she couldn’t take the suspense any longer.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“That was Phil Trudeau,” Missy said. “He’s one of the most eligible bachelors in the state.”

Tammy stared at her for a moment, then a smile crept across her face. Finally, someone every woman wanted to date was interested in her. And he wasn't bizarre. This just might be the best wedding she'd ever attended.

Maybe fate wasn't out to get her after all.

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