



**BECKY WADE**



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Becky Wade, *Meant to Be Mine*  
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*For Sarah Long*

*I can't thank you enough for the friendship, wisdom,  
and support you've shared with me. It's been a joy  
and an honor to work with you on my books.*

*A hundred times, thank you!*

*I don't think it was an accident that my manuscript landed  
in your inbox. You were Meant to Be My editor.*

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## Chapter One

### *Five and a Half Years Ago*

Will you marry me?” Celia glanced up at Ty and found him gazing down at her. His gorgeous blue eyes regarded her as if she were the most desirable woman on the planet.

“What did you just say to me?” She had to speak louder than usual to be heard above the happy din of the Las Vegas casino.

“Do you want to marry me?”

“Ty Porter, that’s not funny.”

“Who said I was kidding?”

“Me. I’m saying it.” Their romance had only begun four days ago. Granted, they’d been the four best days of Celia’s life. Because of him, she’d spent her daylight hours in a haze of bliss. She’d spent her nights thinking about him, staring up at her hotel room ceiling with eyes as round as Ping-Pong balls, too excited to sleep.

“Your turn, miss.” One of the dealers at the craps table pushed two dice toward Celia with his slim stick, bent at a ninety-degree angle at the end.

“Feeling lucky?” Ty asked.

“Yes.” Ty liked her—*her!*—which made her the luckiest girl in

Vegas. Their good fortune during the past two hours at the craps table hardly compared.

Celia picked up the dice and gave them a shake. The group of players gathered around the table focused their attention on her. Some called out encouragement.

“If you roll a seven,” Ty said, “I vote we get married.”

“You’re incorrigible.”

“If you roll a seven, sweet one, I’ll take it as a sign. We’ll get hitched tonight, and you’ll be stuck with me for life.” He placed all his chips on the pass line.

“Ty!”

“I’ve just proposed to this little lady here,” he announced to the table. “If she rolls a seven, we’re going to make it official.”

The players hooted and hollered.

“He’s just joking,” Celia informed them.

Their excitement drowned out her rationality. Several players raised glasses. Others added additional chips to their bets. All heartily approved of Ty’s plan. Apparently the decision to hang a lifetime commitment on the roll of two dice made perfect sense to sloshed tourists in Vegas.

Celia tossed the dice. They flew to the opposite end of the oblong table, bounced off the bumper, and skittered to a stop. A 3 and a 4. Seven.

The table broke into an uproar.

Celia stood amid the clamor. The sight of the dice, an unmistakable three and an unmistakable four, branded into her brain.

The dealers reached forward to dole out chips to all the players.

“You just doubled my money,” Ty drawled. “Thank you kindly, Mrs. Porter.”

“I’m not Mrs. Porter.” Teasing tinged her voice. She didn’t want to be too hard on him, not when the notion of his wanting to marry her was so outrageously flattering.

“Determined to wait until after the ceremony?” He tipped the dealer and requested a tray so he could pack up his chips. “You coming?”

“Definitely.” She didn’t want to tell him this, at the risk of seeming pathetic, but she’d follow him anywhere. They said their good-byes and headed toward the cashier.

“Looks like they’re eager to start in on the wedding night!” one of the players called after them.

A chorus of guffaws.

“Here’s to the honeymoon!”

“Congratulations on your marriage!”

“They actually think”—Celia turned and waved to their well-wishers—“we’re going to get married.”

“That’s ’cause we are.”

Once they’d cashed in their chips, they made their way to the taxi line outside the front entrance. Cool December air scented with car exhaust enveloped them. Ty held Celia’s jacket for her while she shrugged into it, then wrapped his arms around her for extra warmth. He stood behind her, his front to her back, as they shuffled forward in line.

Celia checked her watch. One thirty. Any other city would have been dark and shuttered at this hour. Here, lights blazed, slot machines jangled, and people clogged the sidewalks. An older couple in sweats and fanny packs stood in front of them. A group of twenty-year-olds dressed like Kardashians stood behind them.

Celia had never felt more distanced from her regular life. Nor a greater sense of surrealism. Nor happier, thanks to him.

Ty Porter, the high school crush she’d never outgrown.

During childhood and adolescence, her father’s job had relocated their family to a new city every few years. She could remember how furious she’d been at the age of fourteen when she’d been forced to move, yet again, the summer before her ninth-grade year. They’d settled in Plano, Texas. The address of their unimaginative house in their dull subdivision had dictated that she’d attend Plano East Senior High.

Celia had decided to hate it. She’d managed to stay that course until the moment when Ty Porter had taken the seat next to her in Introduction to Ceramics.

She could recall exactly how he'd looked that day: a tall, well-built sophomore with golden-brown hair and dancing blue eyes. His appearance had been good enough. But then he'd gazed at her as if he really *saw* her. He'd cracked jokes under his breath. He'd asked her advice on his coil pot.

Within two weeks, every hope and dream she'd ever had about the opposite sex had coalesced into a devoted and long-lasting infatuation with him.

"You cold?" He tightened his arms around her.

"Not a bit."

He rested his chin on the top of her head. They inched forward.

Ty'd been incredibly sweet to her during their high school years. He'd always gone out of his way to flirt with her and to make an unpretty teenager feel very pretty indeed. Despite her prayers, though, their friendship had never led to anything more serious than *Mrs. Celia Porter* doodled through her spiral-bound notebooks. Oh, he'd dated plenty. But he'd always chosen beautiful, outgoing girls his age or older. Girls Celia had envied with every drop of teenaged emotion she'd possessed.

After his graduation, Ty had enlisted in the Marines and moved away. Celia had slunk around in a cloud of despair over him that whole summer.

A year later she herself had graduated and moved to Oregon for college. Two and a half years ago she'd completed her degree and taken a job as a restaurant sous chef.

All told, she hadn't seen Ty for seven and a half years. But when her high school friend Lacey had called and informed her that Ty would be competing in bull riding in the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, his name had hit her like a lightning bolt. The passage of time and distance had not squelched her affection for Ty Porter.

Celia had convinced Lacey to meet her in Vegas for a girls' weekend and bought tickets for them both to the rodeo.

She and Ty reached the front of the line. A taxi pulled up and a casino employee held open its door as they climbed into the backseat.

Ty leaned toward the driver. "We're going to get married—"

“No!” Celia burst out laughing. “We are *not* getting married.”

“We want the corniest wedding chapel around. Nothing classy, you understand? Just pure Vegas—like the kind you see in movies. Do you know a place like that?”

Their driver nodded, and the cab slid into traffic.

Looking pleased with himself, Ty leaned back and extended his arm across the top of the seat.

Celia turned her upper body to face him. “You’re crazy.”

“Yeah,” he admitted, grinning unrepentantly.

“You’re joking about this wedding.”

“Try me.”

This kind of thing—taking a bet to the limit, following through on a dare—was not out of character for the Ty she’d known in high school. “You really want to drive to a Las Vegas wedding chapel?”

“I really do.” He pushed her jacket sleeve up and trailed tiny kisses along her forearm. “You rolled a seven. Your fate is sealed.”

Celia smiled, drunk on pleasurable sensation, drunk on the joy of looking at him. It was possible that Ty, however, was just plain drunk. How many drinks had he had? Hard to recall. She’d been too wrapped up in mooning over him to pay attention. Except for this wedding nonsense, he didn’t *seem* drunk.

“You’re adorable,” he murmured into her arm, then reclined against the seat.

They stared deeply at each other.

Dark and light from the passing hotels of the strip played over his face. He had a smile that flat-out demanded a girl smile back. Eyes a shade of blue so light and bright that it stole your breath. Sandy brown hair, always a little mussed, cut by someone who knew exactly what kind of damage they were wrecking on the hearts of females everywhere.

Tonight he wore a white T-shirt under a rugged brown blazer-style jacket. He’d stuffed the front of his T-shirt into his jeans above a leather belt that didn’t showcase any of the many rodeo buckles she knew he’d won.

“I can’t get enough of you,” he said.

In response, she tried to look sassy and chiding instead of just lovelorn.

“I can’t,” he insisted.

Celia had enjoyed a few pleasing dating relationships in her time. But she’d never had anyone she liked half this much say these kinds of things to her.

“You’ve gotten under my skin, Celia. I don’t see how I’m going to go on without you.” His brows lowered. “How come you’re smiling? Don’t you have any pity?”

“Yes, Ty. I have plenty of pity. I’m just not convinced that you deserve any.”

He closed the distance between them and kissed her. “You have this way,” he whispered, “of hitting me right in the heart.”

Her fluttering breaths mixed with his. “I feel the same way about you.”

His smell, like the Piney Woods of Texas, wrapped around her and further fogged her brain. During her years there, she hadn’t really liked the state of Texas all that much. Yet—irrationally—she adored Ty, whose accent oozed Texas, who smelled like Texas, and who wore square-toed alligator cowboy boots.

“I’m crazy about you,” he said.

“I’m crazy about you, too.”

He gently nipped her bottom lip, then bent his head and went to work kissing her knuckles.

She’d arrived at the Vegas airport on Thursday. She and Lacey had gone to watch Ty compete in bull riding on Friday. As soon as his event had concluded, Lacey had dragged Celia, mortified and protesting, to the arena’s back exit. They’d waited there until Ty had emerged. When Lacey had pulled Celia into his path, Ty had shocked her by remembering her immediately.

She’d been too overwhelmed to say much to him during that first conversation. For one thing, she’d just come off the staggering sight of him riding bulls in cowboy garb that included chaps and a hat. For another, her old crush had looked even better at the age of twenty-five than he had at eighteen.

She and Lacey had gone out to dinner that night with him and a buddy. To her astonishment, Ty had taken a swift romantic interest in her.

They'd been inseparable every waking hour since.

Lacey, like a sane person, had returned to her regular life on Sunday night as scheduled. Celia, like a crazy person, had let Ty sweet-talk her into staying in Vegas for a few extra days. She'd charged additional room nights on her credit card, let her flight home depart without her, and called her boss at the restaurant to beg for more vacation days. Her boss had given her three. Which meant she had to arrive back at work on Thursday or lose her job.

It was already late on Tuesday—nope, early on Wednesday. Her time with Ty had slipped away much too quickly.

The taxi pulled to a stop, and Ty reached for his wallet. Celia let herself onto the sidewalk. A white picket fence surrounded a complex that included a pink A-frame building in the center, a gazebo, and a rusting fairy-tale carriage harnessed to a horse statue. Sprays of plastic white roses tied with royal blue ribbon had been wired to the chapel's front door, around the horse's neck, and at the gazebo's entrance. A billboard flooded with light read *Luv Shack. Everyone's favorite 24 hour wedding chapel!*

Ty took her hand and drew her onto the Astroturf yard. A dimple dug into his cheek as he surveyed their surroundings. "Our driver knew his stuff. This is corny."

"Extremely."

"And perfect."

"You could say that."

"You're perfect. Can I say that?"

She flushed and nodded.

A bell over the front door jingled as they entered the A-frame. More pink paint, more fake roses. Deep within the building the bridal march played.

A woman of approximately one hundred and fifteen years sat behind the counter. She looked up from an issue of *Cosmopolitan* and said in a flat voice without inflection, "Welcome to the Luv

Shack, home of the ninety-nine-dollar vow renewal, where all your romantic dreams come true.”

“That sounds promising,” Ty said.

“I’m Doris, your love event coordinator and fairy godmother. I’ll be making sure that—”

“All our romantic dreams come true?” Ty smiled.

Celia bit her lip to keep from giggling. Coming here had been a fun idea after all.

“So,” Doris said, gesturing to the sign behind her like a *Price Is Right* model, “which of these enticing wishes can I grant for you tonight?”

Ty seemed to be taking it all in stride. “What do you have to offer in the way of weddings?”

Doris nodded toward the middle section of the sign. “The Luv Shack Special, the Elvis, the Country and Western, and the Deluxe.”

“What’s the Country and Western involve?”

“A candle-lit ceremony in our ‘Don’t Mess With Texas’ chapel—”

“Now you’re speaking my language.”

“—a bouquet of five yellow roses for the bride, a yellow rose boutonniere for the groom, the minister’s fee, two country songs of your choice, a keepsake frame, and a CD containing eight photographs. All for just \$149.99.”

“You read my mind, Doris. How’d you know that’s just what I wanted?”

Doris looked back at him, deadpan. Celia knew Doris wouldn’t be able to remain immune to Ty for long, and sure enough, after a few seconds her eyes crinkled and she released a dry laugh. “You’re a handsome devil. I’ll give you that.”

“Thank you. You’re easy on the eyes yourself.” Ty set two hundred-dollar bills on the counter. “One Country and Western, please.”

Celia recovered from her shock in time to swipe the cash off the counter before Doris could get her antique arm moving. “Excuse us for a moment?” she asked the older woman.

Doris nodded, and Celia pulled Ty to the room’s corner. “Okay,

Mr. Country and Western. The visit here has been entertaining. Goodness knows, I can tell you're enjoying yourself. But we've gone far enough. I don't want you to waste any money."

"Waste money? A wedding only costs \$149.99, sweet one. Didn't you hear the lady? That includes a keepsake frame."

He was more than a head taller, so Celia had to reach up to place her palms on his cheeks. "Can you be serious for one second? You don't actually want to marry me here at the Luv Shack tonight."

"Yes I do."

"No you don't!"

"Yes." He took her hands in his and cradled them against his chest. His gaze, serious now, searched down to the deepest depths of her hopes. "I do. I want to marry you, Celia. Right now. Here at the Luv Shack. No joke."

All the air sailed from her lungs with a soft *oof*.

"Do you want to marry me?"

"Oh my goodness," she breathed.

"Do you?"

Yes. He was offering her a chance to make him hers forever. It was too heady to bear. Too sweet to turn down. And yet she knew she *should* turn him down for the sake of sanity and prudence. They'd been dating four days. . . .

Her thoughts lost themselves in the blue of his eyes.

Time pulled.

"C'mon," he coaxed. "Let's do it. Let's do something crazy for love."

She knew for certain that she would love him forever, that she could never love anyone else the way that she loved him.

"Will you marry me, Celia?"

"Well . . ." she said, her voice tremulous. "I did, after all, roll a seven."

He laughed. "Is that a yes?"

"I . . ." She swallowed.

"Is it?"

"Yes."

He whooped, then crushed her to him in a hug.

For the next twenty minutes, Ty handled paper work and made the necessary selections. Celia stood next to him with her hand wrapped around his elbow, smiling like a jack-o'-lantern.

Right before the ceremony, Celia stepped into the restroom and confronted her reflection. Her curly hair was typically a problem for her. The dry desert air had become her ally, however, and her hair looked better than expected. She finger-combed the big brown curls that fell to her collarbones in layers only someone with a PhD in hairstyling could manage. Leaning in, she applied peach lip gloss.

*I'm getting married*, she thought. The excitable and daring woman in the mirror looked nothing like her. *Right now. I'm marrying Ty Porter tonight.*

She arranged the folds of the silvery dress she'd charged to her credit card that afternoon. A cross between a toga and a scarf, it tied behind her neck and draped over her body down to her shiny T-strap sandals. Like the extra hotel nights, the dress was something she couldn't technically afford.

Minutes later, she found herself walking toward Ty down the aisle of the "Don't Mess With Texas" chapel. Light from two standing candelabras at the front lit the space dimly, perhaps a blessing. Stereotypical cowboy junk hung on the walls next to decades-old portraits of country singers. Celia recognized June and Johnny Cash and Dolly Parton, but none of the others. A twangy song flowed from the speakers. The edges of her yellow roses were browning.

Celia could not believe this was happening.

If she'd had days or weeks to prepare for this wedding, she'd have changed a lot of things. But as her gaze locked on Ty, she knew wholeheartedly that she wouldn't have changed a single thing about her groom.

When she reached him, he winked at her and took hold of her hands. Tears pooled in her eyes. She loved him with every ounce of the passion she'd harbored for him at fourteen and then some.

The officiate had donned a sheriff's badge and a ten-gallon hat

for the occasion. It took him no time at all to lead them through their vows.

One they'd spoken them, Celia's heart began to pound with expectation.

"I now pronounce you little lady and young buck—or, as the city slickers like to say, husband and wife."

*That was it? They were married?*

Ty kissed her thoroughly.

The fake sheriff picked up a camera and led them through a series of poses, each cheesier than the last. Ty down on his knee pretending a marriage proposal. Ty in the background with his chin on his fist, staring wistfully at Celia in the foreground. Ty lassoing Celia around the waist.

At some point Celia burst into hysterical laughter and couldn't locate her composure for the rest of the session. Suddenly, she could see the whole situation as Ty did. It was brash and ridiculous, their surroundings kitschy, and all of that only made it sweeter. They were doing something wildly spontaneous. On their fiftieth wedding anniversary, they'd be able to tell their grandkids one heck of a wedding story.

The fake sheriff steered them to the gazebo outside and took some photos of Ty removing Celia's garter—challenging, since she wasn't wearing one. Then a few shots in the fairy-tale carriage, where they were encouraged to wave like royals.

When it was over, Doris presented them with their keepsake frame, a bronze plastic number with a cartoon cowboy and cowgirl smooching in one corner.

That officially concluded their nuptials.

Ty took her to his hotel and asked for an upgrade to something bridal. Then he carried her over the threshold of their room and kicked the door closed behind them.