

A Time For Love  
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Annie Morgan stepped back to get the full effect and caught her breath at the vision before her. "Oh, Dante, you're beyond beautiful," she said to her best friend, who would be getting married in a few minutes. "Avery is going to be speechless."

"Really?" Dante whispered as she looked at herself in the mirror. "Is that really me? Is this really happening?"

Annie stepped beside her, and the two friends were framed in the mirror as if time had saved a photograph of the moment. Blonde, blue-eyed Dante Harrington was a vision in traditional white, a tiara and veil crowning her upswept hair. Annie's bridesmaid dress was a shade of blue meant to show off her stunning red hair and turquoise eyes. Best friends since childhood and roommates for the last four years, they both knew this was the end of an era.

"It's happening, Dante. Avery is a wonderful guy."

A soft smile lifted Dante's lips. "Yeah, he is. I am so lucky."

They could hear the organ beginning to play and knew they'd have to join the others in a minute. "One more thing." Annie said as she picked up a small box from the table and took out a heart-shaped charm that read "Best Friends Forever." Picking up one of the ribbons on Dante's bouquet, she tied the charm firmly in place. "Just to remind you that I'll always be here for you," she said as she kissed Dante on the cheek. "Don't you dare cry! You'll mess up your makeup!"

Just then, Dante's mother came in, closely followed by Avery's mother. The bridesmaids, Erin Scott and Olivia Maxwell, were behind them.

"It's time, darling," Dante's mother said as she gave the veil an imperceptible adjustment. "You are so beautiful."

There was a flurry of activity as bouquets were picked up and last-minute adjustments made to hair and dresses. Then the mothers were gone, and the wedding planner stood ready to start the procession as soon as the mothers had been seated.

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Christopher "Kit" Maxwell sat beside his parents in the second row as they waited for the wedding to start. He usually didn't "do" weddings, but Dante was his favorite cousin and his sister, Olivia, was one of the bridesmaids. His mother had made it pretty clear that his attendance was mandatory. His body was present, but his mind was on his meeting with his graduate advisor yesterday morning.

*"Mr. Maxwell, may I see you for a moment?"*

*Class had just finished, and Kit was stuffing papers into his backpack.*

*"Sure, Dr. Nesbitt."*

*"I was reading your assignment last night. It's really not up to your normal excellent standards. I found several misspellings, but, more troublesome, there were instances where you used the wrong word, and places where it seemed whole paragraphs were missing. Is there something interfering with your writing?"*

*“Three somethings, sir. I live in a house with three other guys, and they’re the partying type. It’s noisy, and I’m always being interrupted. When I was working on that piece, one of the jerks set the kitchen on fire. It was distracting to say the least.”*

*“Can you move somewhere else?”*

*“I wish I could, but my jobs don’t pay enough for a good place. With what I can afford, I’d be stuck with the same kind of situation. I figure it’s better to stick with the evil I know.”*

*“It’s affecting your writing, Kit. You have a real talent. It deserves your full attention.” He handed Kit the assignment he’d been talking about and said, “Take this home and do it again, then I’ll grade it. And keep in mind, you won’t get a second chance when you present your novel.”*

Not that he needed reminding. He *knew* he needed to move. His internship at *The Times* was unpaid. His graduate teaching assistant position and a part-time job in the library barely stretched to cover his living expenses. Right now, splitting the rent was all he could afford and writing late at night was the only time he had. He’d tried working in coffee shops but the constant traffic was almost as bad as being in the apartment. At least when he worked at home he could write as late as he wanted and then collapse into bed for a few hours sleep.

His thoughts were interrupted by a murmur in the church as the ushers seated Avery’s mother, then Dante’s mother, his Aunt Mary. The music rose as Avery and his groomsmen took their places, watching as the bridesmaids came up the aisle to join them. His little sister Olivia was first down the aisle. She was absolutely beautiful, he thought with surprise. When did she get to be such a lovely young woman? Erin Scott, Olivia’s best friend since kindergarten, was next. He realized that, seemingly overnight, she’d grown up as well, a beauty in her own right. Little Annie Morgan, not so little now and a well-respected presence on Broadway if Olivia was to be believed, followed Erin. When the string quartet began to play the traditional wedding march, everyone turned as Dante, looking like a young Grace Kelly, floated down the aisle on her father’s arm.

He had a perfect view of Erin Scott’s profile during the ceremony, and he was struck again by the change in the leggy girl who had been ever-present in their home. Dante and Annie had joined the group in high school, when all four of them joined the same dance class. From his lofty three-year superiority, he’d just considered all of them annoying friends of Olivia’s, filling the house with girl stuff and giggles. Now he was forced to acknowledge that they’d grown up while he wasn’t looking.

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Taylor and Laura Morgan smiled as Annie walked down the aisle. Tall like her father, with her mother’s red hair, she was a striking young woman. She’d been on her own for five years now, steadily carving out her own niche in the New York theater world under the stage name of Morgan Collins. Her first starring role as the ingénue in *Sundown* had been the year she’d graduated from high school. They’d made the difficult decision to allow her to pursue her dream while they returned to Laura’s childhood home in Albuquerque to begin new careers.

They’d known Dante for years, since she had roomed with Annie while she’d pursued her own dancing ambitions on Broadway. Dante had lived on another floor in their building, and the two girls had bonded the first day they met. Most weekends the girls had slept over at one or the

other of their homes. After Erin and Olivia joined their circle, the sleepovers expanded so that each family had all four girls one Saturday night a month.

Laura smiled with pride at the poised young women they had become, while Taylor struggled with the same questions going through Kit Maxwell's mind. *Where had the time gone?*