

Boyfriend Day

Chapter One

Sunny stood in the entry with her arms crossed, her mouth turned down in a stubborn scowl and her foot poised ready to tap her annoyance to the world. The site of her cousin had soured her good mood.

"Sunny, open the door! You promised!"

"I only promised to get you off the phone. Go away! I'm not coming." She cursed the door man for letting Evan in. It was her own fault for telling him that her cousin was family and phone confirmation wasn't necessary in order to let him up.

"It doesn't matter, you still promised! Open the darn door, and let me in, Casey Ann Simpson!"

Sunny narrowed her brown eyes and tucked her perfect-from-a-bottle honey-blond hair behind her ear. She stared at her cousin through the peep hole, making sure he was alone.

"I'll open it, Evan, but I'm not going with you." She turned the lock with a click and stepped out of the way, quickly shoving her glasses up with a finger. She placed her arms back under her small breasts as soon as he shut the door.

"What in God's name are you wearing?" he asked incredulously, with his mouth curved in distaste. If it were anybody else, she might suspect they were talking about her 'natural' look, but Evan saw her without her extensions, blue contacts and extreme push-up bra regularly. What she called her 'public' look, he referred to as her 'Barbie bimbo' look. Most girls would be offended by the name, but she wasn't. After all, she worked very hard to keep up her Barbie look. She had enough teasing in high school to keep her motivated. Small girls with mousy brown hair, plain brown eyes and zero curves were too often targets for the cheerleader and jock types. She decided the summer before university to leave the geeky girl behind.

Sunny looked down at her apparel when Evan plucked at her shorts. He had no appreciation for her sentimentality. He was probably thinking she was being overly dramatic, like usual. She smoothed the red heart-patterned boxers she bought her last boyfriend for Valentine's Day and then wiggled her toes; the floppy, red woollen socks slouching around her ankles; they were from the boyfriend before him, and then she shimmied her shoulders in Kenny Jessup's high school rugby jersey, because he was the boyfriend she never had but always wanted. Stealing his Jersey wasn't one of her proudest moments, but as the biggest nerd in high school, it was the closest she could get to him. Funny how the fifteen-year-old guilt still nagged at her. She shook off thoughts of Kenny and his perfect square jaw.

"It's boyfriend day!" she declared, with the bright smile that earned her the nickname Sunny with her friends and family.

"What?" he choked on a snort of laughter. "Were you dropped on your head as a baby?"

She growled at him and walked into her galley-style kitchen. "I don't know, jerk! Ask my mother." The stove timer was beeping. Unfortunately, Evan followed.

"Oh," he said with an exaggerated round mouth and an elongated *O* sound. "That's right, once a month you dress up in all your exes' clothes, eat junk all night and watch chick movies." He looked her up and down again and shook his head. "It is the stupidest thing you've ever come

up with." He paused, giving her an expression that said she had come up with plenty of stupid things, too. "Especially, because every one of those exes was a complete *ass*, and a Saturday night should never be wasted on *asses*."

She grit her teeth and slammed her hand into the oven mitt so hard she thought she might rip through the end.

"No, I have brilliantly changed this otherwise useless Saturday into something constructive."

"How on earth could you describe paying homage to Jason Malcolm constructive?" He groaned slapping his forehead with his palm gently.

"Here, use this next time instead of your hand." She handed him a cast iron frying pan. He rolled his eyes and put it back on the stove. "He cheated on you."

"Yes, he did, but it was because I wasn't spending enough time with him. He was lonely." She inhaled the smell of sweet chocolate chip cookies deeply as she opened the oven. A blast of hot air hit her face. "I drove him to it, and I have learned from my mistake."

"Your fault?" Evan asked in disbelief. "*Jesus*, Sunny, you were working to pay the bills, so he could stay home and play video games!"

"He wasn't playing games. He was considering becoming a developer and needed to research what was popular." Sunny swallowed hard. Not even she could convince herself of that one. She pulled the cookie tray out of the oven and set it on top.

"And what about Johnny? He walked all over you."

"He did not!" she spit back, searching her mind for an excuse that would help her win this argument. God, she hated to lose an argument with him.

"He made you plan, pay for and drive on every date. I'm surprised he didn't make you bring him flowers." Evan crossed his arms, challenging her to come up with something to explain that. She so often regretted whining to him about her boyfriends. She really had to learn to stop doing that, since it always came back and bit her in the butt later. Johnny wouldn't even make someone a good house husband – he was basically useless at everything except bedroom hockey. Gosh, that man could body check a girl into oblivion, though. She licked her lips at the memory. She knew he was using her, but then she was using him too. He didn't care that she spent too much time with her head buried in reports and that her house was a mess. He only cared he had a place to hang out when his parents were home and a bed mate that was just as eager as he was. That was the problem with dating washed-up jocks – too many of them still lived with their parents.

"He was a huge supporter of the feminist movement," she garbled, knowing how pathetic the defence was. It was time to change tactics, she thought.

"Yeah, sorry that doesn't work. He bragged to me that his mother did his laundry and packed his lunch, and that's how it should be." Evan made a rude noise with his lips and rolled his eyes. "I almost clocked the guy when he suggested you take over." Sunny pressed her lips in determination.

"Really?" She took off the mitts and leaned against the counter. "You seriously think this inquisition is the best way to convince me to give up Boyfriend Day and go out on a double date with you, your horrid girlfriend, and her over-bearing, grouchy brother? Hmm, which one of us is crazy now, Cuz?"

"It's not boyfriend day! Man, you are such a friggin' drama queen, Sunny." He raked his hand through his thinning black hair and softened the posture of his wiry frame. He was as nerdy as she was; only he didn't try to hide it.

"You really think Chloe is that bad?" She hated his insecurity over her. So what if Sunny didn't like his girlfriend, he did, and that was all that mattered, wasn't it?

Sunny looked at him pointedly. Chloe watched her with the scrutiny of a scientist and asked millions of blunt questions, in the interest of figuring her out, making her feel like a lab rat. Once, after Sunny had been duped by a guy she had been dating—Bobby Renner, a former high school quarterback, but now jobless gym rat, had stolen her credit card statement from her apartment and went on an online shopping spree without her noticing until her card was maxed—Chloe had even come right out and said she wasn't all together sure how someone like Sunny survived on her own without a helmet, let alone become so successful in business. She had stopped talking to Evan for a month after he let that little dating fiasco spill to his girlfriend.

"I understand the little twits in the world; the ones whose biggest mental task for the day is trying to match their horoscope with the day's events, but you? You are this force in business; you're smart and shrewd and as efficient as a flawlessly executed computer program. Yet in your personal life, you make a fig look smart." Chloe's words burned in her head. "I thought the 'dumb blond' was an act," she had added, and it took every ounce of restraint not to step on Chloe's sensible shoes with her high heels, as she excused herself to use the restroom that night. But the woman was perfect for Evan. It was almost disgusting how much the two of them loved each other. She was happy for them, but she didn't need to hang out and witness it. And, *damn it*, if his happiness didn't turn him into a meddling cupid-type.

"She's a perfectionist – in all areas of her life." He paused to cock his head and give her a highbrow look when she opened her mouth. "And she doesn't understand how anyone can be so...er...carefree, like you." It wasn't his usual description of her – careless maybe, irresponsible, ditzy, flighty – those were all adjectives he'd used in the past. Carefree was his attempt at making nice. "And Sean isn't grouchy; he's straight forward. Um, blunt maybe."

"Uh huh, sounds like a super fun night. *Yee-haw!*" She plucked a cookie off the tray and gave him a dirty look as she took a bite. "How to Lose a Guy in 10 days is tonight's first feature, though, and Mr. Matthew is quite a treat in it so..." Sunny shoved the rest of the gooey cookie in her mouth and waved him away. At least, having a curve-less body meant she never had to worry about the carb overload she put herself in every time she celebrated Boyfriend Day.

He put his hands on his hips, and she grabbed the glass of wine she had poured for herself just before he'd rung her bell. "*Enjoyyernight*," she mumbled through the sweet confection. Damn, she could bake! It was the one domestic task she was good at.

"Put the wine down and go get ready." He looked at her in exasperation, pointing his thumb toward her room. He'd had enough. "Sean will be here in an hour to pick you up, and you'll need at least that long to get the smell of Kenny's cologne off of you." He scrunched his nose.

Sunny pulled the jersey to her and inhaled deeply.

"High school was a long time ago, the fact that you still have that makes me question your sanity."

"Mmm, isn't it wonderful?" She gave him a toothy chocolate-covered grin.

"Do you do that with Johnny's socks, too?"

She gave him the Elvis lip.

"Sunny, I hate to pull this card, but if you don't get moving, I'm calling your mother to tell her exactly what you're doing tonight."

"You wouldn't dare!" Sunny screeched. Evan just nodded. "But she's sick, and you know when she worries about me her stomach acts up," she finished in a whiny tone.

"All is fair in love and war."

"Fine! Call Sean, and tell him I'll meet him at the restaurant. I don't want him knowing where I live." She narrowed her eyes in warning and when he pulled out his cell, she stomped out of the kitchen to get ready.

"You just don't want him to see this mess."

"Men don't care about this stuff." She looked around. She wasn't all that confident in the truth of her own words. She hated it. It always made her feel claustrophobic. Plus, could anything scream shopaholic more? "They only care how well you perform in the bedroom."

"That's only the case with the losers you date. Real men would be turned off by this. It's obvious you have a problem."

"Shut up! I'm in the process of organizing."

"Really? Organizing?" He picked up a stack of folded sweaters off the couch. Ninety percent of the surfaces of her apartment were covered in clothes, toiletries and shoes – most with the tags still on. The only thing that looked tidy was her desk. "Since when is your couch a dresser?"

"Until they come up with dressers you can see through, I am liking the couch closet very much, thank you!" She stuck her tongue out at him. "Saves time, okay? I might actually patent it," she added snottily.

"Admit it. It's here because all the bedroom closets and dressers are full."

"Hey, it's clean, what does it matter if it's disorganized?" She started rummaging through piles to find an outfit. She had the urge to run out and get something new, even though there was plenty of new already. It was insecurity, and she knew it, but could barely resist.

"I thought you said you were in the middle of organizing?" He leaned against the wall and watched her. She shrugged.

"It's a lifelong process." She grabbed a dress hanging on a dining room chair, ripped off the tag and went to the bedroom to change.

She grumbled the whole time she got ready, so he'd know she wasn't happy. She had been paired with Sean enough times to know she wasn't going to have a good time. She was going to spend the evening defending herself, followed by a night of self-loathing, because Sean was usually right when he called her on things.

Once she was dressed and finally in the bathroom installing her hair extensions, Evan popped his head around the door.

"You don't need fake hair, Sunny." He had never approved of her attempt at self-improvement. It was a regular argument between them, so she just lifted her brow, and he shut up.

"Can you at least be nice?" he said, changing the subject. "His fiancé left him at the altar, remember?"

"Oh, for goodness sakes, that was two years ago, and it was months before the wedding. *Pfft*, and you call *me* the drama queen." She dug through the drawer and pulled out her curling iron. "You guys need to get over it already. Quit making me the pity date to get him out of the house." She rolled a chunk around the hot cylinder and gave it a spritz of hair spray, not caring that her cousin and supposed best friend was in direct line with it. "Maybe you should tell *him* to be nice! The guy has a way of looking at me like I'm made of plastic wrap, and I've never met someone that can give a complete stranger an ass chewing over everything. He makes me feel like a five-year-old." He actually made her feel like maxing out another credit card to cover up all her flaws, but she kept that to herself.

"I'm glad someone can make you feel like that. You ignore the rest of us. And it was the second time he was left by his fiancé." He poked her, and she let head fall to the side.

"Doesn't that just say it all?" she grunted and rolled another chunk of hair.

"Not his fault," he added defensively. "When he was honest with them about what he wanted, they'd agreed and then backed out later, when they found out they *couldn't* handle it."

"Oh, and you think I can?" She scrunched her nose when he nodded confidently. She put the curler down and fluffed the fat rolls to hide the extension clips.

"Of course, you've got grit. You eat men like Sean for breakfast at work." He paused, eyeing her. "Why is that, Sunny? How is it you can take down CEO's like school boys and yet become a doormat for guys with fake charm and pretty boy looks?" He gave her a pointed look, crossing his arms. "Sometimes, it seems like you're two different people." He shook his head. "You run your personal life like a twelve-year-old girl."

His words made her heart heavy. She did cut through the bullshit of bigger men. Maybe because when she walked in the boardroom, everyone knew what she was capable of. She was confident; mergers and take-overs didn't scare her. She was like an angry badger there, in fact, that was what they called her behind her back. But the rest of her life was a mess. Personal relationships were too confusing and scary. No matter how much she'd changed, she still felt like the nerdy girl who was made fun of relentlessly in high school. The poor little smart girl, always alone, eating her lunch on the library steps and daydreaming about the star of the football team. She shoved the thoughts away and focused on her cousin. The truth was she was the disorganized, romantic, scatter-brained twelve-year-old. The Badger was the act – just as fake as her hair, blue eyes and size D boobs.

"So what is it that makes these other girls run?" She had wondered that question for a long time. For the right girl, Sean was a catch; she could at least admit that much. He was attractive, financially secure and well mannered, so what if he was blunt. Some women liked honesty. Evan shrugged.

"Whatever it is, you can handle it." He looked at his watch.

"Spill, Ev." She gave him her best CEO stare down, and he swallowed hard.

"I have no idea."

"Come on, Evan, if you know something, tell me!"

"Honest, Sunny, I don't know." He held up his hands. "But I think the two of you could be great together."

"The last date we went on, he gave me grief for ordering salad, after I told him I had a late lunch and wasn't really hungry. He looked at me like I was a big fat liar! If I wanted a steak I'd have had one, but I didn't. *Jeez!* Why the hell should he care what I eat?" She paused and then smirked. "I told him what I ate was my business, and he should mind his own." She cocked her head to the side. "I really don't know why he would want to go out with me again. I'm not my usual sweet self with him. Oh, I always start that way, but damn, if he doesn't get me all twisted."

"Were you lying?" She lost her smile and ground her jaw at his question. Figures, Evan would ask something like that. She could never lie when asked directly about something, at least, not away from work and never to her cousin. At work, there were plenty of grey areas and lots of game playing strategy that she understood. Dating was a game as well, but one that she didn't know the rules to. Did a guy want a girl who ate like a bird and twittered at everything he said or did he want a girl that actually ate and had opinions? Did he want a girl that watched sports and drank beer? Or a refined girl that enjoyed wine and girl-time when he watched his sports? The whole dating thing was like an instruction manual written in a foreign language.

"That is beside the point, Evan and you know it!" She pushed passed him and went back to her room for shoes. Evan followed and almost tripped over a pile of shoeboxes on the floor. She would've enjoyed seeing him flat on his nose just as she was sure he'd love to comment on her disorganised mess of a room, but neither of them made comment. He had commented before about how no one would ever believe *the little blond badger* had an apartment like this.

"No, Sunny, that is exactly the point. Honest people expect the same."

"He has no sympathy points left with me is all I'm saying." She raised her hand above her head. "I don't care how successful or good looking he is, this is the last time I'm going out with him!"

"He's lucky I have such an amazing and beautiful cousin then." He kissed her cheek and gave her blond tendril a tug. It came out in his hands and he handed it back to her with a 'sorry' expression. "Even if she doesn't realize her natural beauty is way better than the Barbie hair and boobs."

"Uh, huh." She slipped on a pair of stilettos. She'd long since grown used to them, but oh, how she longed to slip on a pair of comfy flats for once. *Mmm, eat a burger, have a beer and watch a game.*

"I'll see you there." He gave her another quick peck on the cheek. "I have to pick up flowers for Chloe." He started to walk away and then paused. "You know, in case you're curious, he doesn't seem to need any convincing when we ask him about going out with you."

"He's desperate; it doesn't surprise me."

"You think Sean is desperate?" Evan laughed, tipping his head back, giving her the fleeting thought about closing her hands around his scrawny neck. "A guy that looks like that, has his own business and all his hair has no problem getting dates, Sunny, he just isn't interested. That's why we always ask you. You're the only one he says yes to."

Sunny let her jaw hang for a minute, watching her cousin leave. Was that the truth? She listened to the door close and gave herself a final look in the full-length mirror on the back of her door. Why on earth would he keep going out with her? And why did her stomach tickle in excitement at the knowledge? They were opposites – but not in the complimentary way. His quiet serious yet relaxed nature irritated her. He was too confident and comfortable in his own skin for her liking, too. She'd like to say he was arrogant, but she knew that wasn't true. She twitched her nose at the dress she had finally settled on. Evan was just trying to get under her skin. She turned to look at her profile. Was the dress too long? Too short? She didn't want to invite the idea she was interested, and with him either could be taken that way. She wasn't kidding, it didn't matter that he was good-looking and established. The fact that he was actually someone that was willing to commit to a long term relationship and that he was already loved by her family were all moot. She wasn't interested in dating someone that made her feel guilty for her very personality.