

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

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**HOLLYWOOD
DREAMS**

MAE ARCHER

To my daughter who believes all of my fantastical stories and
can match them with her own.

Chapter 1

Even though Beau Tennant was on busy Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles he'd never felt so alone. As he waited for help, he watched the faces of people passing. They stared straight ahead, or craned their necks to the opposite side of the street to avert their eyes.

That's when he saw her, waist-length brown hair bouncing as she walked. She held a phone to her ear, a big handbag dragged on her wrist, and her other hand clutched a box. Her brown eyes caught his and when she didn't turn away he felt a thrill, as if he'd touched an electricity pole.

She stopped beside him. 'I have to go,' she said.

Beau looked up at her, but her eyes were on the box in her hand.

'I'll be there in twenty minutes!' She hung up and dropped the phone in her bag. 'You're stuck,' she said, looking at the wheelchair caught in a crack of concrete on the sidewalk.

'Yes, ma'am,' Beau drawled in his Southern accent.

'Here, hold this.' She placed the box onto his lap and squatted, somehow making the act look elegant in her silver platforms and black Capri pants. 'Mm,' she murmured. 'I need some grunt to get that wheel out.'

'Don't worry—' he started, but she'd walked off, leaving him with the box. What did she think he was, her shelf?

She stood in the path of the oncoming crowd. He saw her zero in on a young man in a tight, white T-shirt that displayed his bulging pecs. Beau knew the moment that White T-shirt caught her eye.

White T-shirt smiled flirtatiously, and slowed. 'Hey,' he said.

'Hey yourself.' She smiled back. 'So I need a hand with something. You got a few minutes?'

'Sure,' the young man replied.

She led him over to Beau. 'I need you to lift the wheel while I push,' she said firmly.

White T-shirt was taken aback, but her tone obviously brooked no argument.

'There's no need—' Beau tried to interject again, but she paid him no mind as she went to stand behind the chair.

'On my count,' she told the young man. 'One, two, three.' She pushed, while he lifted the wheel. 'Thanks. Appreciate you being a good Samaritan.' She patted White T-shirt on the shoulder and turned to Beau. 'Are you good?'

White T-shirt looked at her for a moment, but apparently realizing he was dismissed he merged back with the crowd, a confused look on his face.

'Yes, ma'am,' Beau said, feeling as confused as the young man who'd helped him. When the woman first stopped he'd pegged her for a Looky-Lou; one of those people who thought they could get his life story as part and parcel of small talk. Yet now that she'd gone and blown his first impression out of the water, he didn't quite know what to make of her.

'What happened here?' She looked at his hand with concern.

He'd cut it on the wheel spoke when he'd tried to wrench the wheelchair out of the crack. Before he could say anything, again, she had taken hold of his hand and was looking closely at the cut.

'It's fine.' He pulled his hand back, feeling self-conscious under the force of her attention.

'You can't turn the wheels with a cut in your hand. You'll get an infection.' She went behind the chair and before he knew what she was doing, she was pushing him toward Luna's Café.

That had been his destination—to meet his friend, Carter—but Beau didn't know whether to feel thankful or annoyed that she was hijacking him and his chair without asking.

She chose a table under a green shade umbrella. After she moved a metal chair out of the way and took the box off his lap, she pushed him in. As she sat across from him their knees almost touched under the small table. She placed the box under her chair, and took hold of his palm again.

'It just needs a good clean.' She rifled through her bag.

A waiter appeared. 'Chai latte with skim milk.' She rattled off her order without looking up.

'And you, sir?' The waiter looked at him.

'Black coffee, no sugar,' he said.

The woman pulled out an antiseptic tube and a box of bandages from her bag. As he watched the gentle way she tended to his wound he was puzzled. She was a stranger who'd jumped in to help him when everyone else acted like he was a leper.

He nodded at her supplies. 'You come prepared.'

'I'm a costume designer,' she said. 'In my line of work I find there's always some minor injury or another that needs to be tended to.'

He should have guessed. Prime Studio was only twenty minutes away and a lot of its employees frequented Luna's for breakfast meetings. It was also a café known for celebrity watching and was stalked by tabloid reporters, which is why Carter insisted they meet here.

'So you're in the business,' he said, stressing the word.

Los Angeles was the city of entertainment. Most people were employed in some way by the entertainment industry and if they weren't, then they were just angling for their 'break.'

'I see that we haven't made a good first impression?' she said. 'But I guess that's not much of a surprise. How long were you stuck there for?'

As she looked at him, Beau saw something he hadn't seen in anyone's eyes since he'd sat in the wheelchair. Understanding. 'Half an hour,' he said. 'Shit, I have to call someone.'

She placed a bandage on his hand, gently pressing down to make sure it stuck. He felt his skin tingle.

'Thanks.' He was feeling nonplussed at the sensations her touch evoked. He got out his cell phone. 'Hey, Carter, no need to come down,' he said quickly. 'I'm okay.' He cut off Carter's questions. 'I'll explain later,' and hung up.

'I guess I should introduce myself.' She offered her hand. 'I'm Maree Reynard.'

'Beau Tennant.' As they shook, her hand was enveloped by his much larger one and he realized how small she was. Her presence and manner made her seem much taller. If they'd met while he was standing up she'd only reach his shoulder.

'Lieutenant? Corporal?' she asked.

He was surprised. He was in civilian duds, wearing jeans and a blue short-sleeved shirt. 'Lieutenant. How did you know?'

She reached across the table and lifted his dog tags. He smelled the sweet scent of her hand cream. As she brushed her thumb across the metal he felt a stirring as if she was brushing his skin.

He'd debated about wearing them this morning. A civilian had no reason to wear dog tags, but Beau felt naked without them.

'New to this?' She nodded at the wheelchair as she released the tags, her fingers like the whisper of a butterfly's wings.

'A week stateside.' Beau had joined up with six of his friends after September 11 and had been in the army ever since.

The waiter returned and placed their coffee orders on the table.

'You're the first person I've met, outside of the hospital, who is nonplussed by my wheelchair.' He took a sip of coffee.

'A friend in high school.' Maree lifted the sugar dispenser and poured in two teaspoons. 'She had a car accident after a party. The first six months she got stuck a few times. It's amazing

how many people don't know what to do. The whole wheelchair thing spooks them.'

'But not you?'

'Not much spooks me.'

There was a glimmer of flirtatiousness as Maree looked at him. For a moment he forgot himself and responded as the old him, his lips quirking into a smile, his shoulders straightening as he got ready to launch into his move. Then he saw his reflection in the window behind her. His blond hair hung to his shoulders, a beard covered most of his face, and even his eyes were unrecognizable with their brown tint. He looked down at the table as he took a sip of his coffee. He was imagining it. Why would a woman like her be interested in someone like him?

'What are you doing in town?' she asked.

He rubbed his hand across the back of his neck. He'd practiced his story a thousand times, yet now that it was show time, he felt ill at ease. 'I'm meeting with some people. They might be making a movie about me.'

'Oh,' she said.

He cleared his throat. 'Yeah.'

'Did you write the screenplay?' she asked.

'No, a friend of mine wrote it.' He took a sip of his coffee.

'You're a braver person than I am.'

'Why?' he asked.

'Are you sure you know what you're getting yourself in for? After all Hollywood is not known for its accurate storytelling.'

Beau was surprised by her serious face. Usually women were impressed by his movie credentials, but Maree seemed to be concerned that he was naive in getting involved in the business.

'Well, it's based on me, but they're not using my name,' Beau covered himself, not wanting her to think he was a fame chaser, but a regular Joe Blow who just happened to find himself in extraordinary circumstances.

'That won't make much difference,' she said wryly. 'Once that movie comes out you can kiss a regular life goodbye.'

'You seem to know a lot about the negative effects of fame?' he asked.

'My father is an actor.' She said the word like it was a curse.

'You don't sound like you like actors?' Beau asked, guessing from her formal use of father instead of dad that her relationship was strained.

'Maybe I don't.' Maree laughed wryly. 'I've seen too well what fame can do to people. They become arrogant, self-centered, and lose all touch with reality.'

She was looking down at the table, her eyelashes shading her eyes, but her pain was obvious from the sad slant of her lips.

'Not all actors are like that,' Beau said. 'I've met some and they seem perfectly nice.' Even though he'd been thinking cynically about the movie business, now he was feeling strangely defensive.

'Some.' Maree didn't sound convinced.

'Your twenty minutes are almost up,' he said abruptly. She gave him a blank look. 'You told whoever you were speaking to on the phone that you'd be there in twenty minutes,' he explained.

'Yes.' She looked at her watch. 'You're right. I should get going.'

'I've got it,' he said, as she reached for her purse. 'No, really.' He held her hand down when he saw that she was about to argue.

'Okay,' she agreed, a small smile on her face.

He took out his wallet and placed a note on the table.

'It was nice meeting you, Beau.' Maree stood.

He looked up, noticing the way she said his name with an inflection. 'Nice to meet you too, Maree.'

He hesitated. Normally at this point he'd ask for her number, an act that used to be as natural as breathing, but in this new role it didn't seem right. She lingered, and he saw in her eyes that she was waiting, giving him the chance to ask.

'Would you maybe—' he started, his mouth forming the words of their own volition, but he couldn't finish the sentence. 'Never

mind. Thanks for everything.' He wrenched his wheels in the opposite direction.

'Yes,' she said.

He stopped and turned his head.

'Call me.' She handed him a card and leaned down, giving him a soft kiss on his cheekbone above the beard.

After she had been swallowed up by the crowd Beau looked down at the business card she'd passed to him. It was plain white and listed her title as Costume Designer for *The Time of Our Lives*, a popular soap opera that had been on television for thirty odd years and whose speciality was love triangles between various family members and their lovers. Beau didn't know if he would call. Pursuing someone who was so close to the business and who could easily break his cover wasn't prudent, but he was intrigued.

He was still thinking about her when he entered his apartment. He'd never met a woman like Maree. It was refreshing to spend time with someone so warm and natural, without an iota of artifice. He got out of the wheelchair, leaving it by the front door, as he walked into the bedroom. He looked into the vanity mirror as he took off the wig and hung it up on the Styrofoam dummy-head sitting on the table. He carefully poked his eye with his index finger and removed the disposable brown tinted contact lenses and put them in the trash.

When he looked back in the mirror, it was now the face of Tom Calvert staring at him. Tom, with his short, slicked brown hair, the blue eyes that a reporter had once described as icy, and the fine features that had helped him launch a career as a fashion model until he became a 'model slash actor', and then finally an actor only.

Sometimes he looked in the mirror and cursed himself. While his good looks had opened up doors, they'd also closed as many, guaranteeing that he would always be seen as a soap actor first and a serious actor second.

He jumped in the shower, momentarily startled as he started to soap himself and saw the black tattoo snaking across his

arms and chest. It was in semi-permanent ink, and proclaimed in cursive script 'For those I love I will sacrifice.'

As Tom stepped out of the shower his phone rang.

'So how did you go?' demanded the voice of his agent, Carter.

'Really well,' Tom said. 'Just have to learn to avoid sketchy sidewalks in the future.'

'Ha ha,' Carter said.

Tom heard the sound of rustling paper and knew that Carter was doing his usual and multitasking as he spoke to him.

'We've got a date for the Marco shoot in a couple of weeks.' Carter reminded him of the sportswear line he'd agree to endorse.

'Great.' Tom faked enthusiasm.

He hadn't wanted to do it. He knew that an endorsement was just another cross against him being taken seriously, but it was the only way to scratch the right back in order to get an audition. The *Heroes of Tennessee* director was married to the CEO of Marco and Carter had negotiated the deal. Thankfully it had worked, and Tom had blown the director away and scored his dream part.

'Only a month until shooting starts. Do you think you'll be ready?' Carter asked.

'Shouldn't be a problem,' Tom said. The movie was about six friends from a small town in Tennessee who signed up to the army on the same day, and Beau's character was based on the only soldier who'd survived. Tom had been in character for a week. He'd spent hours every day as Beau, practicing maneuvering his wheelchair in and out of buildings, onto buses, and out on the street, seeing how people related to him. With each day that passed he'd felt Beau settling onto him like an old coat.

'Good,' Carter said. 'Because you know what's at stake.'

'I know.' This part was going to make his career. He would finally be the serious actor that he'd always wanted to be.

After he hung up he caught sight of Maree's business card and smiled. Here was his chance to really put himself to the test as Beau.

About Author



Mae Archer knew she wanted to be a writer since she was a child. She loved listening to her grandmother's war stories about English maidens falling in love with handsome Yankees while England burnt under the Luftwaffe's blitz.

When she discovered romance novels as a teenager she soon realised that her dream job was to be a romance writer. After many career twists and turns she's making her dreams come true.

Mae's real life is like one of her grandmother's stories. She met a foreigner who travelled through Australia and it was love at first sight. She married him six months after they met and every day since has been an adventure. She lives in Australia with her husband and daughter.

Mae has been an avid reader of romance novels since she was a teenager and her own novels combine some of her favourite romance tropes including time travel, second chances and star-crossed lovers.

Mae Archer is the pen name for author Amra Pajalic. Amra writes young adult contemporary fiction under her own name and dark fiction as A.P. Pajalic.


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Dreams of Destiny

Dreams of Destiny series are suspense novels featuring lovers who are each searching for a dream, when love finds them at the most inconvenient time. They feature secret identities, hidden agendas and thwarted ambition.

You've already met Tom and Maree in the first book of the series. Book 2 features Maree's best friend, Allegra, and book 3 is about Gerald 'Mack' Mackevoy as we discover what he's doing impersonating a homeless person.

Hollywood Dreams

She's fallen for his greatest role. But can she fall for him?

Vintage Dreams

She had to nearly die before she could live again. Can she build a new life on the embers of her old one?

Vengeful Dreams

She's dreamt of vengeance since she was a young girl. Can she find redemption in love?

Vintage Dreams



She had to nearly die before she could live again. Can she build a new life on the embers of her old one?

After being diagnosed with breast cancer Allegra Kenton finds new direction using her passion for vintage items by renovating a dilapidated mansion she inherited into a dance studio. When she meets Emmett Dennison and begins falling in love it seems that her new life is on track, until a mistake from her past puts everything in jeopardy. Can she hold onto her dreams and Emmett?

Emmett Dennison had a plan: the right type of fiancé, the right time to get married, the right career rung, but his plan

took a detour when he became a guardian to his autistic brother and his fiancé broke off their engagement. Now his life is all about the day to day, until he meets Allegra. She inspires him to dream again, but his fiancé's betrayal makes it hard for him to trust. Will Allegra make him believe in happy endings?



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