

## ELEVEN

While Erik was in the office with Brent and the computer, Mary sat at the dining room table with her older sister, Angie, who was helping her twelve-year-old son, Paul, with his English homework.

Angie took a drink of her tea. "I can't believe he's going to be thirteen next month." She ruffled Paul's hair. "I'll have two teenagers in the house."

Paul ducked from under his mom's hand and slapped his book shut. "All done." He stood. "I'm going to see what Dad and Mr. Erik are up to."

Angie motioned for him to hand over his homework. She quickly checked it and sent him on his way. "So tell me all about Erik. Is he the one?"

"Oh, Angie. This is all a big mess. Erik's not really my boyfriend." It felt good to tell someone.

Angie smiled. "You could have fooled me. I see the way you two look at each other."

She widened her eyes. "We don't look at each other any way."

"You do too."

Angie obviously didn't understand and wasn't taking her seriously. "I was whining to my friend Phoebe about all of you giving me 'blind date' pictures and how I'd had enough already—and didn't know how I was going to make it through a whole year."

"We're just giving you a bad time. You know that. None of us really expected you to go out with all the guys we gave you pictures for. We are only doing this because we love you."

"I could use a little less love and a little more trust. I feel like I have to go out with every one of them to not hurt anyone's feelings. Two months ago when I brought Erik that first time to meet everyone, Dan gave me a picture. It's still on my refrigerator. Craig stares at me everyday wondering when we are going to go out."

"Oh, throw Craig away. You have Erik now. And we all couldn't be happier for you."

"Dan thinks I should go out with Craig instead of Erik."

"What does he know? He's still looking himself."

What did she know herself? Would she even know who was right for her? "Like I was saying, Phoebe, Erik's sister, decided that the best way to help me was to set up her brother as my pretend boyfriend so you all would back off. The day you all met him is the day I met him, too."

"So two months later, why is he still hanging around?"

Good question. Why was he? "He feels obligated to fix the computers for everyone in my family." At least that's what it seemed like.

"I think it's a little more than that."

"Honestly, it's not."

"Well, if you aren't falling for him and he's not falling for you, you both have me fooled. You look like you're falling in love with each other."

"We're not." Her head knew it was pretend, but her heart wasn't listening. "In fact, I'm going to break up with him on our way home. It's time to put a stop to this masquerade. How long do you think I'll have before the pictures start up again?"

Angie smiled. "I know this great new teacher at our school. Promise me you'll toss Craig and go out with Randy first."

“Angie!”  
Her sister shrugged and smiled wider.