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*Becca by the Book*

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I have lifted my plane from the Nairobi airport for perhaps a thousand flights and I have never felt her wheels glide from the earth into the air without knowing the uncertainty and the exhilaration of first-born adventure.

*West with the Night*

Oh. My. God. What a rush.

I couldn't believe I was skydiving. At last. This totally rocked! As the wind whipped my face and I plummeted toward the ground, Lynrd Skynrd's *Freebird* filled my head.

Me, Becca Daniels, sharing airspace with eagles. How cool is that?

Cool. And cold. My skin tingled and my cheeks flattened into my skull from the force of the wind and the tight goofy glasses they made me wear. But who cares? I was free-falling.

I could stay up here forever. Away from dreary, mundane earthly pursuits like going to work, paying bills, and schlepping to the Laundromat. How boring is that? Talk about tedious. At

least I don't have a happy hubster, 2.5 kids, and a house in the suburbs.

Thank God for that.

I've never understood the appeal of that particular American dream. Being tied down to one guy, a mortgage, and a couple of rug rats?

Not for this chick. I've got better things to do.

Like traveling.

Exploring.

And skydiving.

It doesn't get much better than this.

I felt a tap on my shoulder and Zach, my instructor who was strapped against my back for our tandem jump, let me know it was time to pull my chute. I reached down by my hip and pulled the cord. The harness jerked my body and we came to an abrupt halt.

Only it wasn't really a halt. Just an immediate slowing down—a huge change from when we were hurtling toward the ground mere seconds ago. Now instead of speeding downward, we were gently floating. Zach gave me the handles which controlled our descent, and I led us into a spin. And then another.

Rock my world. Definitely the best adventure ever.

“So what'd you think?” Zach asked after we landed and he unbuckled the harness that strapped us together.

“Loved it! Can we do it again?”

“A woman after my own heart.” He favored me with a sexy, gap-toothed smile.

I never did like guys who were too perfect. The slight space—the width of a thin stick of gum—between his front teeth just made him all the more appealing.

“Another hundred and fifty bucks and we're back up there,” Zach said.

That wasn't as appealing. I'd hoped he might offer to take me up again. For free.

In my dreams.

I heard a squeal behind me. As I turned, the squeal turned into a roar as Jenna, my adventure buddy in crime, rushed toward me. With a giant bear hug, she tackled me, knocking me to the ground.

Jenna's usually a high-five girl, but your basic high five was totally inadequate for the moment. "So, was that sweet or what?" she asked.

"Oh, wow." I untangled my arms and legs, the adrenaline still pumping. "It rocked! I want to go again."

My roommate Kailyn joined us from the safety of the sidelines, shaking her head. "I can't believe you really did it."

"And I can't believe you didn't," I said. "Oh wait, yes I can. You wouldn't want to break a nail."

Kailyn, with her flawless blonde hair, killer body, and designer flip-flops, is the girliest girl roomie I've ever had. Ever. And I've had plenty of roomies over the years. Of them all though, Chloe was the best.

Even though she was a church chick.

Too bad she had to dump me to go find herself in Paris. Not that I blamed her. I'd dump my grandmother for the chance to live in Paris for three months. Or Rome. Peru. Beijing ... anywhere overseas. The more exotic, the better.

Kailyn, my roommate of financial necessity, thinks I'm crazy for wanting to live in China. Or anywhere exotic, for that matter. "Don't they eat cats and dogs in those places?"

She's another church chick. One of those perky ones.

Do Christian girls take lessons in perkiness or what? Maybe it's one of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt always be perky.

Whatever.

Sometimes, though, it's like fingers on chalkboard. Especially in the morning. Kailyn's one of those disgusting morning people. She bounds out of bed at seven a.m., all bright-eyed and squirrel-tailed, humming and dancing around like some Disney princess with a halo of happy bluebirds twittering around her head.

Good thing I'm a pacifist. Otherwise, I'd blast those stinkin' bluebirds to kingdom come.

Our first Sunday under the same roof, she sang in the shower while she shampooed her perky blonde hair, rummaged through her closet for her perkier outfit to wear to church, nuked two perky cinnamon rolls, and then rapped on my door, singing out in her perky blonde voice, "Rise and shine, sleepy-head, breakfast is ready. Want to go to church with me?"

I lifted my Seven Dwarves Grumpy head from beneath my pillow and yelled something I know she's never heard in Sunday school.

But we're good now.

Kailyn knows not to wake me before nine on the weekends, that I'm more a fruit and granola girl, and not to even attempt to make conversation before I've had coffee.

She also knows better than to ask me to go to church. Not my thing. Too many rules and regs. And glitz. Some of those churches, especially those big ones, really creep me out. Too much Splenda razzle-dazzle.

Like Mister Rogers on crack.

Dancing girls, bright, shiny choirs, and men with Italian leather on their feet and more product in their hair than I've used my entire life. And don't even get me started on the Stepford women in their ice-cream-colored suits, plastic smiles, and matching pumps.

My ratty Birkenstocks would definitely be out of place.

And what's up with all the committees, meetings, and

campaigns? Is it a church or a corporation? Then there are all those holier-than-thou types putting on a show on Sunday like they're all that, and then turning around on Monday and snorting coke or hitting on the hot barista at the coffeehouse when their wives aren't around.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have anything against Jesus. Jesus was cool.

He took care of the poor, hung out with the lepers, and treated women well—unlike most of the men of his time. Really, if you think about it, Jesus was a feminist. But to some people, that f-word is a dirty word. And applying it to Jesus? Heresy.

Another reason I'm not into church. Everyone gets so uptight if you take Jesus out of their churchy box.

And that whole women and submission thing? Not in this universe. I so can't believe women buy into that in this day and age. Hello. Is this the fifties or the new millennium?

Seriously.

As Kailyn drove back to our duplex, chattering all the way about some *amazing* close-out sale at her favorite shoe store, I tuned out and relived every high-flying second of my morning skydive.

While we were watching the informational video at the parachute center that said they weren't legally responsible if you died on your jump, one guy in the group turned white and booked it.

Wuss.

Hey, if it's your time, it's your time. Why not go out with a major rush?

Once home, I log onto my laptop to scope out my Visa statement. Last I checked, I was close to maxing out my card. It didn't help that my last job turned out to be a bust. Marketing, my foot. I didn't get a degree in English to be a sign waver.

Like Teddy Roosevelt said, “A man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad.”

I didn’t want the whole railroad, but I did want a job with a little more meaning.

My friends told me I should never have left Dunkeld’s Bookstore, but I’d been there over three years—a record for me—and gotten bored of the same-old, same-old. Yeah, it was great to be surrounded by books all day long, but at the end of the day, it was still retail.

Unfortunately, in the two months since I’d quit, all I’d been able to find was a telemarketing job—where I got tired of people yelling and hanging up on me—a part-time barista job where I spent most of my paycheck on lattes, and this last marketing job where I spent an entire day waving a *30% OFF ALL FURNITURE!* sign on a street corner.

Really meaningful, that.

I needed something exciting to get me out of my unemployed funk. And as I checked my credit card statement, I found it.

The next day, I was up in the air again with Zach. Free-falling in that wild blue yonder on a clear, crisp April morning. And it was just as cool as the first time.

Until the landing.