# Chapter 1: A Budding Romance

Scene #1: Everything is on Track for Sarah

Life was good, Sarah thought, as she found solace in her academic haven, the undergrad library. Sipping her favorite cup of coffee, she immersed herself in a compelling audio seminar, reflecting on the flawless execution of her well-laid college plan. The serenity of the moment wrapped around her like a warm embrace, and she reveled in the sense of accomplishment. Little did she know that within minutes, a twist of fate was poised to enter her life, altering the course of her day, her semester, and quite possibly, her very destiny.

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Scene #2: Sarah is Late for Class

The Undergrad Library, with its unique underground design, had been a place of solace for many University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign students. The University had made a deliberate choice to construct the library below ground level, a testament to the respect they held for the adjacent historic Morrow Plots. The Undergrad Library’s subterranean architecture ensured that no shadow tainted the historic plots above.

Inside the library, the relentless fluorescent lighting illuminated Sarah Wilkins as she sat engrossed in her audio seminar. International business strategies... There’s so much potential here, she thought. The seminar’s captivating insights into the expansion of businesses on a global scale played through her earbuds, drowning out the muted hum of student conversations and the distant rustling of pages.

For Sarah, a teacher’s assistant in the throes of her academic journey, this library had been a regular haunt. Today, she had settled into one of the study tables, surrounded by her books and notes. As a dedicated TA, Sarah was responsible for guiding the first-year students through the fundamentals of Business-101.

Time seemed to slip away amidst the vast ocean of knowledge. It was only when she glanced at the time displayed on her phone that realization hit her. She was late! The class she taught would start in mere minutes. Panic surged through her veins.

She hastily packed her belongings, making sure not to pause the audio seminar. She wanted to catch every last word, even if it meant multitasking amidst the chaos. As she scooped up her books and notes, she opted to leave her earbuds in, the compelling voice in her ears serving as a comforting presence amidst her mounting anxiety.

She dashed towards the library’s staircase, hoping that if she hurried, she could make it to her class on time. The echoing steps of her shoes resonated with her heartbeat, amplifying the sense of urgency. As she ascended, the world outside remained a mystery to her. With her focus on the seminar and her impending class, the last thing on her mind was what lay beyond the library’s exit.

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Scene #3: Evan and Guido in the Quad

The Quad at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign sprawled like a lush green carpet under the sun. Majestic oaks and maples lined its periphery, their leaves rustling softly in the gentle breeze. Students lounged on the grass, engrossed in their books or chatting animatedly in groups, while others meandered along the pathways. The sky was a canvas of vivid blue, and the sun painted everything with a golden hue. It was the kind of morning that infused the soul with energy, and the Quad pulsated with the vibrancy of college life.

“Hey, Evan! Think fast!” Guido shouted, sending the Frisbee soaring toward Evan with a wicked curve.

Evan moved effortlessly, intercepting the disc with a graceful leap. “Man, you’re getting rusty!” he called out, his voice dripping with mock derision.

Guido laughed, adjusting his cap. “Maybe if you spent as much time on the field as you do in the library, you’d have a challenge here.”

Evan smirked, “Trying to get on Liz’s good side, you know. A promise is a promise.” He tossed the Frisbee back, his mind briefly flitting to his sister’s encouraging smile.

“Ah, the great Evan Vaughn, tamed by a promise to his sister,” Guido teased, catching the disc. “You know, most guys are trying to escape the library, not run toward it.”

Evan chuckled, picking up his backpack from the grass. “She believes in me, man. I don’t want to let her down. Besides,” he winked, “some of us need to hit the books to keep up. Not all of us have your natural... charm.”

Guido feigned a dramatic gasp. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

With a final laugh and wave, Evan began his departure from the Quad, energized by the day’s perfection and a commitment he intended to honor. The playful banter with Guido still echoing in his mind, the path ahead felt light and hopeful.

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Scene #4: Evan And Sarah Kiss

Sarah bolted from the library, earbuds blaring, eyes wide with the impending doom of lateness. The library steps loomed ahead, a sudden drop just waiting for the unwary, and she was just the kind of unwary the steps had in mind.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Evan. He was just another student, someone she hadn’t met before. But he had spotted her imminent tumble, her focus diverted to the chaotic thoughts swirling in her mind.

“Hey, lady in the skirt suit!” he shouted, loud enough to catch everyone’s attention except the lady in the skirt suit.

His legs propelled him forward, closing the gap between them with an urgency that matched her own. His arms enveloped her just as her foot missed the first step, the momentum of her hurried escape carrying them in a wild twirl. Her briefcase and purse took flight, flinging their contents everywhere. Her glasses escaped from her face, spiraling to the ground.

Her hair fell in a cascade of wavy blonde hair as the barrette that held it surrendered to the force of their twirl. As she leaned back into him, almost parallel to the ground, Evan could see that she was not a professor as he had initially thought, but a student like himself.

Their eyes locked, a silent conversation passing between them. “I feel like I should kiss you,” Evan said, his words floating in the space between them. Sarah’s eyes sparkled with a mix of amusement and surprise, and she responded, “I’m not going to stop you.”

Their lips met in a passionate kiss that seemed to suspend time, making the world outside their embrace fade away. After the kiss, Evan helped her to her feet, a newfound softness in his gaze.

Suddenly, reality came rushing back to her, and she remembered her lateness. She quickly gathered her scattered belongings with Evan’s help.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

Flustered, she replied, “I have to go. I’m late!”

“That’s a strange name,” he joked, but the humor was lost on her. She was too caught up in her rush, her mind a whirlwind of confusion.

She dashed away, unknowingly leaving her broken glasses behind. Evan picked them up and called after her, but she was already disappearing into the distance. Evan was left standing there, a lighthearted grin on his face and her glasses in his hand, looking forward to the future encounter that their unexpected meeting promised.

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Scene #5: Sarah is Frazzled

The classroom was a microcosm of order and structure, juxtaposed with the youthful energy of the students filling it. As the wall clock ticked, the students’ faces mirrored their confusion, their eyes flicking to the vacant podium, to the ticking clock, then back to the podium. Where was their punctual teacher’s assistant, Sarah Wilkins?

Then, the door swung open, and there she was, Sarah. Except she was different. Her usually neat hair was let down, her eyes were bare without the usual frame of glasses, and there was a flush to her cheeks that was never there before.

With a silent apology mirrored in her expression, she straightened her outfit, straightened herself, and stepped towards the podium. “I apologize for being late. It will not happen again. Today we will review topics we’ve covered for next week’s exam,” she declared. Her voice, though steady, had an unfamiliar softness to it.

While Sarah wrote on the board, a student raised his hand. “Ms. Wilkins, we have never discussed that material,” he pointed out.

Sarah’s eyes widened a tad, realization slowly dawning on her. There was a beat of silence before she let out a soft laugh, clearing her throat. “Did you ever have one of those days where something happens that you didn’t expect, and it throws you off your game?” she asked, leaning against her desk in a relaxed pose, the air around her lightening.

Nods and smiles of understanding echoed around the room. It was a rare glimpse of Sarah, the person, not just Sarah, their teacher’s assistant.

“Today is one of those days for me,” she admitted, a touch of color staining her cheeks. “Let me tell you a secret about exams. 80% of the questions simply test your memorization. The other 20% are laced with trick questions to gauge how thoroughly you understand the material. Let’s focus on the trick questions instead of wasting time on simple memorization. I think this will give everybody a better chance to ace this exam. Is everyone agreeable to that?”

The room erupted in unanimous approval. For once, excitement echoed through the room, as opposed to the usual resignation. The rest of the class flowed easily, a stark difference from their usual sessions.

As the class emptied, one student, Katie Andrews, approached Sarah. “Ms. Wilkins, I wanted to say how much I enjoyed our class today. Whatever happened, I hope will happen again next week!”

The corner of Sarah’s lips twitched upwards, her heart swelling in her chest. With a nod and a warm smile, she looked at Katie, her thoughts echoing Katie’s sentiments. Me too.

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Scene #6: Evan Hopes for Sarah's Return

Evan stood just outside the entrance of the undergrad library, his heart still pounding from the kiss. He glanced down at the spectacles in his hand, a silent testament to the whirlwind event that had occurred just minutes prior. All thoughts of studying had fled; Sarah was the only subject matter on his mind now.

His feet began to trace the pathway to the Morrow Plots, almost on autopilot, as his mind played out the scenarios of Sarah returning. He visualized her surprise upon seeing him there, remembering their passionate kiss. The fantasy was tantalizing. He did not stray too far, lingering near the sight of their fateful encounter.

Evan paced, his eyes scanning the area for a hint of Sarah. One hour passed, then another. She did not return. Disappointment crept in, but with it came a renewed determination. He would mend her glasses, return to the same spot tomorrow. He hoped fate or Sarah's schedule would be consistent.

With his newfound resolution, Evan sought out his friend Guido, his steps carrying him toward The Quad. As expected, Guido was in the midst of his own adventure, attempting to charm two sophomore coeds.

Yanking Guido away from his endeavor, Evan said, "I gotta tell you something!" His voice echoed his excitement.

"Why'd you do that?" Guido protested, his bravado still on display. "I had those two in the palm of my hand."

Ignoring Guido's typical exaggeration, Evan blurted out, "I just kissed the most beautiful, amazing, wonderful woman in the world!"

Guido responded with skepticism, a hint of sarcasm edging his words. "Sure you did."

Undeterred, Evan pressed on, relaying the entirety of his story, brandishing Sarah's glasses like a prized trophy. Guido laughed, his surprise echoing through The Quad. Seeing Sarah's glasses were broken, Guido said, "That must've been one hell of a kiss!"

"It was!" Evan's voice was soft, reverent. "I think I will call her Cinderella. Instead of leaving a glass slipper, she left eyeglasses."

Guido raised an eyebrow, visibly taken aback. "You kissed a girl Before even getting her name? That's not like you, bro."

Evan shrugged, his face lighting up with the memory of the encounter. "The Universe dropped her on my lap, and I had to go for it."

"And now?" Guido asked, ever the pragmatic.

"I’m going to fix her glasses and try to find her tomorrow. Do you have an eyeglass repair kit?"

Guido's gaze fell on Evan like he'd lost his mind. "Sure, I got one in my back pocket," he quipped.

"I should be able to find one at the mall. You want to come with?" Evan asked.

"Nah," Guido glanced across The Quad at a student reading on a blanket in the grass, "I see a lonely lady over there that looks like she needs a visit from 'The Guido.’"

And with that, they parted ways, Evan headed towards his car with a newfound mission and a heart brimming with anticipation. Despite the uncertainty of whether he would find Sarah the next day, he felt an unusual sense of excitement, like he was on the brink of something truly wonderful.