

A collection of sweet romantic flash fiction stories

The background of the cover is a romantic scene of a man and a woman in silhouette, embracing on a beach. The sun is setting behind the ocean, creating a warm, golden glow that illuminates the sky and the water. The couple is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the woman's head tilted back and the man's head leaning towards hers. The overall mood is intimate and tender.

*Ever After
in an
Instant*

ABBIE DOWNEY

Happily Ever After in an Instant

By Abbey Downey

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This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

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A Furry Matchmaker

Screeching brakes and shouts from the park stopped Alice in her tracks. What kind of grown woman ran into the street without looking? Another of her typical public blunders. Staring at the van lurching to a stop mere inches from her legs, she almost forgot her goal. Just in time, she picked up the troublesome ball of fur before he scurried off again.

The driver's door opened and out came the man of her dreams. His wavy black hair framed familiar blue eyes and wide lips. Alice froze. Her former best friend, the secret crush from her school days. A ten-year-old memory threatened to surface, one she hated, from the night they argued about her feelings for him. There was no way she'd ever forget his face.

Even with that deep scowl.

Right. She'd almost caused an accident.

He flung open the van door, looking both ways before climbing out. "Did I hit you? Are you okay?"

"Hi, Malcolm. I'm fine, thanks. I didn't know you were back in town."

Recognition lit his face, and his frown slowly morphed into a wide grin. "Alice. I should have guessed—a woman running in front of a moving vehicle could only be you."

Stepping close, he wrapped his arms around her. Remembering the rogue hamster in her arms, Alice stiffly leaned into Malcolm's hug. Those muscles were a sure sign he'd started working out. What else had changed since they'd last seen each other?

"I'm so sorry. My niece and I brought her hamster into the yard, over on the other side of the park. We only lost track of him for a minute, but Piglet ran clear out here. I chased him without thinking."

Malcolm laughed, a deep, masculine rumble that resonated in her chest. "That sounds about right. Like the time in high school—"

Unwilling to relive the awkward school days that had revolved around her unrequited love for him, Alice blurted out the first thing that came to mind. "So

you're back for good? I heard you had a great job in the city."

Reaching out, Malcolm stroked Piglet's wiggling head. "Dad needs me. Since Mom died, his health isn't what it used to be. It seemed like a good opportunity to move closer to him and be my own boss for a change."

He waved at the van, and she took a closer look at the logo. "Oh, you're behind 'Catch-A-Cab'? I must've seen that commercial a dozen times."

There was the self-conscious smile she remembered, the one that appeared any time he received praise for one of his many accomplishments. "Yeah, that's me. It isn't glamorous, but it's better than the stress and long hours in the corporate world. Now I get to relax and spend time with Dad when I'm not picking up customers."

How sweet. He'd always been close to his dad, but changing his whole life took it a step further. "Your dad must be thrilled."

Something shifted in his eyes, growing deeper and intense. He moved closer. "He is. But to be honest, that's not the only reason I'm back."

Swallowing hard, she squeaked out a response. "Oh?"

He slid his hand around hers, twisted in Piglet's fur. "I missed a certain redhead. Couldn't stop thinking about her cute smile and kind heart. I wasn't ready for a relationship back then, but that's no excuse for the way I acted. I'm hoping to remedy that."

Warmed by his words, Alice hoped she hadn't misunderstood. She was the only redhead in town. Except... "I hate to disappoint you, but Mrs. Thompson started coloring her hair brown years ago."

His chuckle sent shivers through her. "Alice Wright, I'm trying to say I came back to apologize to the only woman crazy enough to run in front of a van to get my attention."

Alice joined his laughter, not bothering to correct him. He was right. Given the chance, she might have done it on purpose if it meant spending more time with Malcolm Donovan.

The End

Hometown

Kayleigh blew a cooling breath through the lid of her foam coffee cup and glanced at Dustin. In his favorite ball cap, well-worn jeans, and scuffed work boots, he looked like a typical farmer. And it felt like a typical Sunday, as they leaned side-by-side against her dust-covered car. Every week since Dustin got his driver's license, they'd met for coffee before church.

But this Sunday was finally different.

Dustin sighed as he took a big swig from his cup. "Not much I love more than gas station coffee." He glanced at her, the look in his eyes more serious than his tone implied. "Maybe fishing. A perfect sunrise. Or that sundress you're wearing this morning. New?"

She nodded, wondering if she'd feel out of place wearing such a cheap dress once she reached her new life in Chicago. "Sure is. I'm glad you like it."

Silence fell over them again. They were rarely this quiet together and it didn't feel right. But then, nothing had since she'd applied for the job in the first place. Kayleigh's chest tightened in a way that was becoming too familiar. "What if I'm doing the wrong thing?"

Dustin leaned closer, drawn to her like she was to him whenever they were together. "No need to worry about that, Kay. If anyone's meant for city life, it's you. Besides, where else are you going to make a discovery that changes human history except at a world-class museum?"

His unshakable faith in her was great, but right now she'd rather have blunt honesty. "I'll miss it here."

"Of course, you will. It's the best place on earth." They locked eyes and grinned at the old inside joke. While all their classmates dreamed of making it big somewhere—anywhere—else, Dustin and Kayleigh always claimed they'd never leave Benton. And now here she was, car stuffed full, ready to abandon everything she'd ever known.

Including Dustin.

Setting her coffee on the roof of the car, Kayleigh gave in to the urge to lean against him, settling into that perfect spot under his arm. How could this be the right choice when it felt so wrong? "I wish you could come with me."

"I know. And you know I can't."

His voice broke with the words, and Kayleigh immediately regretted saying it. "I'm sorry, Dustin. I don't mean to keep bringing it up. You absolutely should be here, taking care of your mom. She needs you."

That terrible silence took over again. Kayleigh took a second to pray for Dustin's mom, who'd been as much a mother to her as her own. It wasn't only the cancer threatening his mom's life that kept Dustin here, though. Living in the city instead of being the fifth generation to work on his family's farm would break him. More than anyone she knew, Dustin belonged in Benton.

The question was, did she?

Dustin reached up to set his cup next to Kayleigh's, then wrapped both arms around her. "I know you're nervous, but you don't need to be. So what if the whole town's always had us pegged to settle down, to be together forever like a couple in those romances your mom reads?"

Kayleigh's heart ached. Wasn't that what she'd always dreamed of? When had the idea of leaving for something "better" taken root? Mom insisted Kayleigh would regret settling for life in Benton, teaching history at the high school and wasting time until the next wedding, baby, or county fair to break up the monotony. But was that true for Kayleigh, or just for her mom?

"Kay, you're going to do amazing things in the city. Turn that stuffy old museum upside down. You have a wandering side that I love. But I also don't get it. I'm meant to be here, where my roots are." Dustin chuckled, the sound vibrating through Kayleigh. "Fishing sure won't be the same, though. Might have to give that up if I don't have you there to bait the hooks for me."

For the first time all week, a laugh spilled out of Kayleigh. “I won’t miss touching those slimy, wiggly things and you know it.”

But she would.

The laughter died on her lips and Dustin turned solemn. “How about one last kiss?”

It was a bad idea. She should get in her car and drive out of town before church let out and everyone stopped her to say goodbye one last time. That was the whole point of skipping service this morning. It definitely wasn’t to spend every last second with Dustin.

Instead of making the wise choice, she tipped her face up and watched as he lowered his lips toward hers. Her eyes slid shut and she savored his touch, trying to imprint every sensation in her mind so she could remember later. Her stomach rolled and her head swam with that reality. One last kiss.

“No.”

She pushed away, needing to breathe without his scent filling her senses. Kayleigh met his startled gaze as the truth clicked into place in her mind. It didn’t have to be this way. “No, I can’t, Dustin.”

His face fell. “Yeah, of course. There’s no reason to make this any harder. You better get going if you’re going to make it before dark. Let me know when you get there safe.”

Sliding her arms around him again, she let the joyful realization fill her heart. “I mean, I can’t leave. I don’t want to leave. I’m staying.”

He searched her face for a long moment, then he broke out in the huge grin that had captured her heart as a pre-teen. “You’re sure? Don’t stay just for me and then regret it down the road. I want you to be happy.”

“That can only happen here in my hometown with you.” Kayleigh laughed as she rose on her tiptoes to meet his lips again. One last kiss was never going to be part of their story.

The End

Second First Date

“Wait. Your first date was where?”

Evelyn Barnes cringed at her roommate’s incredulous tone and repeated the story. “Olive Garden. Before his senior prom.”

Brianne shoved a bite of bagel in her mouth and chewed a few times before speaking around it. “Which was in the 4-H building at the county fairgrounds.”

“And he drove us in his dad’s pickup truck. Yes. All of that.”

Checking the skirt of her floral wrap dress in the mirror, Evelyn tilted her head. Was the outfit nice enough without looking like she was trying too hard? Brianne appeared behind her in the mirror, resting a hand on Evelyn’s shoulder. “So why did you agree to another date with this guy? That sounds like...a country song nightmare.”

There was no quick answer to the question, which had been plaguing Evelyn for the last few days, too. “I’m thirty years old, Brianne. I haven’t had a boyfriend in three years. I spend all my time at work or here with you. And Jack, when he comes over.”

Brianne’s lips turned down into a pout and Evelyn laughed while strapping on a pair of heeled sandals. “That’s not bad, obviously. But I want the kind of love you two have. No matter how it sounds, it wasn’t a terrible date. Plus, it’s been twelve years. We’ve both changed. You’re the one who snooped on Facebook and found out Ryker runs a very successful business. Why not give him a second chance?”

Swallowing her last bite of bagel, Brianne shrugged. “If you say so. But don’t you wonder why he texted you suddenly after all these years? It’s a red flag if I ever saw one.”

Evelyn couldn’t argue with that. She’d been mentally analyzing their one-date past since she got his text last week. She’d gone to Ryker Duncan’s senior prom as a favor to their mutual friend, Alex, but she hadn’t lied to Brianne. The date had been fun, if simple. Ryker was kind and made her laugh. He’d held doors for her and stayed by her side the entire night in the room full of students

from the next town over that she didn't know. She'd nursed a crush on him for a few months afterward until it became clear he wasn't going to contact her again.

Brianne started for their apartment kitchen with her plate. "Just remember our signal. Text me a puking face and Jack and I will rescue you."

Finally alone, Evelyn stared at herself in the mirror. What was she doing? The man had ghosted her. But she'd really liked him back then. And the profile pictures Brianne had dug up showed he'd definitely improved with age.

Was it so bad that she wanted one romantic evening with a hot guy who might not be a jerk?

A knock on the apartment door rattled Evelyn out of her thoughts. She grabbed a denim jacket and went to answer it, revealing a man who was taller than she remembered. And broader. And dressed so much better. That expensive-looking suit confirmed Brianne's conclusion about the level of success his electrical engineering company had achieved. He leaned against the doorframe in a pose that made Evelyn's stomach melt into a pile of flutters. "Hi, Ryker. It's good to see you again."

Ryker backed up to let her step out of the apartment, flashing a wide smile. Now that she remembered. She'd been so taken with that grin as a teenager. "I'm glad you agreed to have dinner with me, Evelyn." His deep voice settled into her soul and his eyes...oh, they could burn up what was left of her, they were so intense as he perused her carefully chosen outfit. "I admit, I thought you would say no if you responded at all."

Evelyn craned her neck to look up at him. "Why would you think that?"

He lightly pressed his palm against her back, steering her toward the parking lot. "I know I left you hanging after prom. When Alex mentioned he ran into you a few months ago, I hoped maybe you'd had enough time to forgive me. Because not pursuing you back then was definitely a mistake."

A warm shiver worked down her spine, as much to do with his words as his soft touch. "There's nothing to forgive. It's not like you promised to call me afterward. But why didn't you get in touch if you were interested in me?"

Ryker opened the passenger door of an impeccably restored vintage pickup truck that made her smile. The way he held her elbow to help her climb up took her right back to that night in the floor-length silver gown she'd loved so much.

Once he'd settled into the driver's seat, Ryker turned to face her. "I didn't call right away because I didn't want to look desperate. Then Alex told me you were dating a guy from your school. I thought I'd missed my chance."

Staring into those warm, hazel-flecked eyes, Evelyn almost forgot she should answer. “He must have meant Liam. We were on-again, off-again all through school, but I thought Alex knew it never stuck. We were completely over by the time I went out with you.”

Ryker held her gaze while his fingers slid across her cheek. “Well, I’m happy to finally get a chance with the girl I never stopped thinking about. So, should we try again? I hear the Olive Garden here is better than the one I took you to before.”

Evelyn tried to mask the way her heart sank until he reached down to twine his fingers with hers, that glorious grin reappearing. “Just teasing. I think our second first date deserves that little Mexican place Alex said everyone loves. What do you think?”

Examining the man who made her youthful daydreams look like a joke, Evelyn scooted a little closer to Ryker on the bench seat. “I think that’s a date I can’t refuse.”

The End

Diner Uprising

Gulping down a swig of cold sweet tea, Rowan leaned back in his usual booth to watch the few patrons populating the truck stop diner. Dwarves claimed several tables and three gnomes had filled a back-corner booth. Rowan was tempted to join a cyclops in worn denim overalls sitting alone at the long counter. His single eye brimmed with the same loneliness Rowan felt after days on the road.

This diner—run by magical beings and often deserted, unlike the busy human-run place across the street—had matched his forlorn mood for the last three years.

Glancing at a newspaper the dwarf waitress, Daisy, had left on the end of his table, Rowan decided he wasn't in the mood for more reports about the bravery of his brother, heir to the throne of Baerwen. While Rowan had been driving a semi overnight to deliver necessary goods to a remote dwarf village near the northern border, Ryker would have continued his violent quest to eliminate the magical races he'd declared dangerous. His smug face would be splashed across the front page of every newspaper in the kingdom.

The bell over the door jingled. Rowan watched a delicate, lovely woman walk in and pause, glancing around the restaurant. With long hair draped over her tell-tale ears, she would have passed for human if not for the slight ethereal glow emanating from her pale skin. He didn't encounter many elves this far north of the capital and the sight of her froze him solid.

Daisy stopped and elbowed his side with a knowing grin. "She's a lovely one, eh? You should offer to share your table."

He was distracted by pain thundering in his ears. "Not that one."

"You know her?"

That was an incredible understatement. Seeing Finley again—and in such a remote, unexpected location—was a cruel twist of fate. Pushing up from the table, he knew it was better to face her head-on rather than wait for her to find him. Finding people was her specialty, after all.

Finley turned, and her breathtaking teal eyes met his. She came to a stop a foot away from his table. “Finally. You’re a hard man to track, Rowan.”

His fingers itched to reach out for her hand. The last time they’d spoken... had been more kissing than talking. But then Ryker declared Rowan must either give up his love for the elf or his position in the royal family. The choice to leave his childhood home had been easy. The unintended consequence that losing his royal position left Finley unprotected had been harder to handle.

But here she was, in front of him. And he wanted nothing more than to reach out and pick up where they left off, with their lips melded together.

Finley plopped down on the bench seat across from him. “You might as well eat while we chat.”

When had his food arrived? Rowan sank back into his seat, unable to wrap his mind around being with Finley again. She’d changed in the three years since he left her. Perfectly fitting jeans and a tied-up t-shirt were typical to her style. But her hair was cut shorter and there was a hard strength in her eyes that he didn’t recognize.

He tried taking a few bites of fried chicken and cornbread, but it stuck in his throat. Could he manage to avoid the question he’d been dreading for three years?

She denied him the chance to find out and got right to the point. “Why did you leave, Rowan? I know you love me. You never once gave me a reason to doubt it.”

Dropping his fork, he tossed aside any pretense of eating. “You weren’t safe. Ryker was coming for you simply because I didn’t let him get his way.”

She leaned across the table and grabbed a piece of his cornbread. “I can defend myself. I had to on many occasions while living in human cities.”

He squeezed his eyes shut, the brutal threats against her in his brother’s last note burned into his brain. With familiar grace, she slid onto the seat next to him, her closeness both exhilarating and excruciating. He willed her to understand why being here was so dangerous. “He has the entire kingdom behind him, Finley. You couldn’t defend yourself against his army and every citizen that supports him. He wanted revenge on me through you and he wouldn’t stop until he got it.”

“So you just left? If you’d talked to me about it, I would have reminded you of the truth: together, we can beat him.”

She rested her hand on his bare forearm and the breath withered in Rowan's lungs. He let his fingers graze her soft cheek, then glide around to cup the back of her neck. Without hesitation, she leaned into him and pressed her lips to his.

This was the only true home he'd ever known. The fruity scent of her shampoo surrounded Rowan as he deepened the kiss, driven on by the way her breath quickened against his chest. He was lost in her.

But he couldn't be.

Dragging himself reluctantly away from his favorite place, he prepared to leave her again. To protect her.

But then he noticed the silence in the diner. Behind him, Daisy stood with Harold, the kobold cook. Every customer and employee stood at attention. "What's this?"

Finley smiled. "You didn't think I just now found where you'd been hiding, did you? I've followed you for weeks, explaining the situation to all the magical people you help."

Daisy touched his shoulder. "We're all ready to stand with you against Ryker. You've touched so many lives on your delivery routes. Once Finley revealed who you are, word spread that it's time to take our land back."

Entwining her fingers with his, Finley lit up his world with her smile, awakening hope in him for the first time in years. "Prince Rowan, let's go save your kingdom."

The End

A Pirate's Promise

Tortuga, 1645

Cataline Morely pressed her back against the carved wooden door inside the captain's quarters, waiting with bated breath for the shouts of guards to announce her presence to the other pirates. Thankfully, not even the sound of waves hitting the dock outside breached the stillness on the ship. It seemed everyone on board was heavily asleep.

Wiping damp palms down her embroidered bodice, Cataline fought back an unwanted memory—the glimpse of beloved green eyes her mind tricked her into seeing while these pirates overturned everything in her family's home, hunting for valuables. It couldn't have been Taryan Bristol, son of the best weaver on Tortuga. Not only was he assumed dead after five years with no word, but he would never stand by and watch pirates hurt her family.

At least, the Taryan she'd known all her life wouldn't.

Cataline released a slow breath. It was time to finish the quest that sent her sneaking into the darkness so far from the perpetual glow of Fort de Rocher's lanterns. The best loot would be found in this cramped chamber, where the captain kept it close to avoid his men trying to steal it.

And Mother's diamond necklace would certainly be part of the best loot.

A sliver of moonlight illuminated one corner of the room, glinting off the sharp spindle of a spinning wheel that was oddly out of place. Most of the chamber was taken up by a large bed with a human-shaped lump under the blanket. Against the wall next to the bed was a stack of crates—her destination.

Cataline crept forward. If caught, she would never leave the ship alive. So she fixed her attention on figuring out how to dig through the crates without waking the man sleeping only two feet away. Before beginning her search, she risked a glance to her right to see if the pirate was still sleeping.

This close, the curve of his jaw was so like Taryan's that Cataline found herself leaning closer to examine his features. It was silly. There was no reason her dearest childhood friend, her first love—the man who promised to return for

her before leaving Tortuga to discover the truth about his parents—would be occupying the captain’s quarters of a pirate ship.

Her brain demanded she find the necklace and run. Instead, Cataline stretched precariously over the bed, desperate to see if she’d conjured Taryan’s image or if there was something more going on.

But then a heavy wave hit the ship, causing the vessel to shudder and rock. Losing her balance, Cataline tumbled straight onto the sleeping pirate—and her lips landed squarely on his.

In her shock, Cataline reacted too slowly. The pirate’s strong arm wrapped around her back, pressing her closer to his shockingly bare chest. Calloused fingers buried in her hair, holding her head so she couldn’t remove her lips from his. His eyes opened.

Eyes the color of sea glass shimmering in the sunlight, a pale green she’d never seen on anyone else. She hadn’t imagined seeing him.

Angry tears burned. Had Taryan changed enough that stealing something so precious to her family meant nothing to him? She pushed hard against his chest, jerking her head to the side at the same time, breaking his hold on her.

Cataline scurried away until her back pressed against the opposite wall, attempting not to stare at Taryan’s unclothed torso while he sat up. “I won’t complain about being woken with a kiss, but Cataline, what are doing here? This isn’t safe.”

Bitter heat built in her chest and Cataline’s fingers clenched into fists, as if she might hit him given the chance. “You’re one to talk of safety, after bringing pirates into my family’s home. And I might ask you the same question. If I cared enough to wonder what became of you.”

She attempted to put on a haughty expression so he wouldn’t see how much his betrayal hurt. But Taryan stood and crossed the cabin in three long strides, stopping so close she could smell soap on his warm skin. He must bathe more often than most pirates. “Your family was never in danger. You have to know I would never hurt them...or you. I needed to see for myself before announcing my return. To learn if...you waited for me.”

With fingers aching and those dratted tears still threatening to fall, Cataline fought to comprehend what he was saying. “You raided our home because you thought I might have given up on you?”

He nodded, the sheepish way he pressed his lips together softening her anger. But there was still enough of it. Cataline once again shoved his substantial

chest with her palms, wishing she was strong enough to send him sprawling on the floor. “Why did you take Mother’s necklace, then?”

Unaffected by her push, he ran a hand through his mussed hair, the size of his flexed bicep capturing Cataline’s attention so thoroughly that she almost missed his explanation. “I didn’t want the men to know I had romantic intentions. They’d never respect me as their captain again if they knew the truth. I was going to return it when I got the courage to see you without the disguise.”

Taryan reached into a pocket in his trousers and pulled out a fabric bundle. He unwrapped it to reveal her family’s treasure, perfect gemstones catching the moonlight while nestled in his palm.

Cataline stepped forward to take it, but as her fingers closed around the metal, Taryan captured her in his arms. “Can you forgive me, darling Cataline? For the raid, for my cowardice, and for being gone so long without sending word? I have so much to tell you about what I discovered.”

His seafoam eyes softened as he lowered his head, lips hovering just above hers until she nodded. The kiss was a promise, one that, like the last, she fully believed he would keep.

The End



Abbey Downey started writing inspirational romance stories during naptime when her kids were babies and found she couldn't stop. She is the author of the Adventurous Hearts series from Wild Heart Books, with the new Headliners and Heartstrings series releasing soon. Abbey also works with Spark Flash Fiction producing a quarterly digital publication that contains love stories under 1000 words.

A life-long Midwestern girl, Abbey lives in central Indiana with her husband and two kids. She loves watching her kids in their activities and fixing up a 125-year-old farmhouse with her husband. Want to read more by Abbey? Find all her books and writing at <https://abbeydowney.com>.