

*Rosette*

*White Rose*

*Catching  
the  
Bouquet*

*Kara Lynn Russell*

# Catching the Bouquet

by

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Catching the Bouquet

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“You want to tell me what’s going on with you and my little sister?”

Jeff Bradley turned from the mirror where he was straightening his tie. “What do you mean?”

“Come on Jeff. She moved hundreds of miles just to be with you. I need to know what your intentions are.”

“Now?” asked Jeff. “Right now, a few minutes before you’re supposed to be at the front of the chapel waiting for Jasmine to walk down the aisle?”

Tony shrugged. “I want to get this out of the way before the wedding.”

“How can you even be thinking about this now?” Jeff reached over to straighten Tony’s tie, which was totally off kilter from his constant tugging at it. He swatted away Jeff’s hand.

“I’m the only family Angel’s got. I have to watch out for her.”

“Tony, we’ve been friends for years. You asked me to be your best man.”

“That doesn’t mean I trust you with my little sister.”

Jeff let his head roll back, and he closed his eyes. “I’m beginning to see Angel’s point about you being overprotective.”

“That’s easy for you to say. You don’t even have a sister.”

“Everything is going fine between Angel and

me. Don't worry Tony."

"Are you sure? Because she seemed a little strange at dinner last night."

Jeff shrugged. "She was probably tired from traveling. It's a long drive from Orchard Hill to Minneapolis. Plus, she's worrying about that dog, no doubt," he said, referring to Cherub, a stray that Angel had rescued.

"That had better be all it was, because if you break her heart, Jeff, I swear..."

"Hey, calm down, Tony. I'm not going to break her heart. In fact..."

"In fact, what?"

"I bought her a ring. I'm going to ask Angel to marry me."

Tony's mouth dropped open, and his face split into a huge grin. "That's great. We'll be brothers, Jeff."

"I hope so. I've been going crazy trying to find the right ring and figuring out how to ask her, when to ask her..."

"You're making too big a deal out of it. I didn't plan anything. I just asked Jasmine."

"I want to do it right. As you pointed out, she moved hundreds of miles to be with me. The proposal has to be special. She deserves it."

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Angel buttoned the last tiny button on the back of the wedding dress. "You look beautiful Jasmine." There was a chorus of agreement from the herd of cousins that had gathered to wish the bride well.

Her sister-in-law-to-be turned and gave Angel a radiant smile. "Thanks. I'd better. I spent a fortune on this dress. And my hair. And my nails..."

Angel gave a half-hearted laugh. "I get the idea."

Jasmine frowned. "Angel, are you all right? I know we haven't gotten to know each other that well

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yet, but you seem...not quite yourself.”

Drat. She thought she'd been covering her emotions pretty well. Ruining her brother's big day was the last thing she wanted to do. She had to try harder. Forcing a smile, Angel replied. "I'm fine. Weddings just make me teary-eyed."

"Speaking of weddings, will we be planning yours soon? You and Jeff seem pretty serious."

Appearances could be deceiving. Angel blinked back a fresh batch of tears. "Oh, I don't know. I suppose it's too soon to tell."

"You've been dating for months. You moved for this guy. You can't tell me you two aren't serious."

Angel had thought so too. But lately Jeff had been distant, distracted. Maybe he was getting bored with her.

Jasmine took her bouquet from Angel. "Well, I'll throw this towards you, all right? Maybe that will help."

There was a knock and answering the door saved Angel from having to answer Jasmine. It was the bride's father, ready to escort her down the aisle. The ceremony was about to start.

\*\*\*\*

It was over. Angel forced herself to admit it while she watched Jeff dancing with Jasmine's cousin. The woman looked like the very definition of high maintenance, and had a laugh that sounded like a whinny. But she was the country club type and that was the sort of woman she'd always thought would suit him. Not a starving artist from a blue collar family like herself.

Suddenly the reception was just too much. Too much noise and too many people. She had to get out. Angel slipped out of the hotel ballroom and made her way through to the lobby, and then outside, into the comparably cooler night air.

She was surprised when Jeff stepped out a few

minutes later. He slipped his arm around her and kissed the top of her head. A few weeks ago he would have aimed for her lips. "There you are. I knew you'd get tired of the crowd before long. Artists prefer solitude."

Angel pushed away from him. "Then you'd better go back and dance with Jasmine's cousin some more. You're intruding on my solitude."

"What? I just got away from that barracuda. I'd watch out for her when Jasmine throws the bouquet. She's going to trample anyone who gets between her and those flowers."

"So maybe I shouldn't even try for the bouquet. Is that what you're saying?"

"Angel is something wrong? You're acting strange."

She was. She was purposely picking a fight, but Angel couldn't stand it any more. She knew Jeff was going to break up with her, and she wanted it over with. "So now I'm strange? You'd better go back and try your luck with one of Jasmine's other cousins. She has quite a collection."

"I'd rather dance with you."

Why did he have to be so nice? Here she was acting like a shrew. The least he could do was walk away in a huff. "No, you wouldn't. I have two left feet."

"I'm not worried. Those little bitty feet couldn't inflict much damage."

"You say that now. Wait until I stab your instep with these spike heels Jasmine picked out."

"I'll take my chances."

Angel gave up and allowed Jeff to lead her back to the reception and onto the dance floor. Maybe she'd been imagining the changes between them lately.

Or not. Jeff didn't speak a word to her during their dance. He didn't even hold her close. He



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seemed a million miles away. She should have known she didn't have what it took to keep his interest.

"Jeff, I know what you're thinking."

He started, and with a guilty look replied, "You do?"

"You're trying to think how to tell me that you don't want to see me anymore."

"No, that's not it at all."

"You probably wanted to wait until after my brother's wedding, but it's all right. I...I'm OK with it."

He looked stunned. "You want to break up with me?"

"It's obvious you're bored with me. You've hardly spoken to me for over a week."

"No, that's not it at all."

Frustration increased the pain she felt over this. She didn't want to let their love die a slow, painful death. Better to have a clean break. "Jeff, just admit it, you wish you hadn't asked me to move to Orchard Hill, and you've been trying to come up with a way to tell me."

"Angel, you couldn't be more wrong."

"Stop pretending! If you don't care about me anymore, just say it." She felt the tide of emotion welling up, threatening to overcome her. She needed to get away before she totally lost it. Without another word, she turned and walked away, leaving Jeff stranded on the dance floor.

Before she could leave the room, however, one of those many cousins grabbed her.

"Jasmine's going to throw the bouquet. Come on."

She was caught up in the tide of unmarried women as they surged towards the dais where the band was set up.

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Jeff watched as Angel was swept away from him. How could she so totally misread him?

Before he could decide on a course of action, Tony was at his side. "What's up with Angel? She looked upset."

"She thinks I want to break up with her."

"Do you?"

"Of course not! I told you I want to marry her."

"I think you'd better tell her that. Otherwise, you're going to break her heart, and if you do that..."

"I know, I know. You'll have to pound me."

"So stop worrying about how you're going to do it and just do it."

Jeff snorted. "Such wisdom from one so young. Maybe you should rent a mountain top or something."

As the men watched, Jasmine threw her bouquet. It soared over the heads of the women at the front of the pack. As Jeff had predicted, the cousin that he had been dancing with did her best to vault over the other women to catch it. But she was out of luck as the bouquet went straight to Angel, who was standing alone, behind the crowd, not even trying to catch it.

She did catch it though. And it was a good thing, because otherwise it would have hit her square in the face. Jasmine had some arm on her, thought Jeff.

Angel looked down at the flowers in her hands. From her expression you'd think she'd caught a bouquet of scorpions, rather than one of roses.

"Now's your chance," mumbled Tony as he gave Jeff a forceful shove.

Angel looked up at him as he stumbled in front of her. She looked like she'd bolt again, so he grabbed her wrists. "It looks like you're the next one to get married," he said.

She shook her head at him, the sadness in her

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eyes unbearable. It was now or never. He sank down on one knee in front of her. "I hope I'll be the one waiting for you at the front of the church. Angel will you marry me?"

She stared at him. "What...?"

"I'm sorry I don't have the ring with me. I...I didn't plan to do this now, but...it seemed like the right time."

She continued to stand as still as a statue, staring down at him.

Tony, still playing matchmaker, shouted "We need an answer, Angel."

"Yes. Yes, I'll marry you, Jeff," She said, and then immediately burst into tears and dropped Jasmine's bouquet.

Jeff was somewhat used to Angel's heights of emotion, so he stood and gathered her into his arms without alarm. "That's why I've been distracted lately," he told her. "I wanted the proposal to be special, and I just couldn't think how to do it. But then you thought I wanted to break up with you..."

"Any way you proposed would be special. It's not the delivery that matters as much as the person asking you."

"Am I the right person?"

She nodded and smiled at him through her tears. "Yes, Jeff. I love you."

Applause broke out from all over the room, led no doubt by Tony. Jeff leaned down and whispered "I love you, too Angel."



If you enjoyed Jeff's proposal to Angel, read their romance in *Entertaining Angel*, the second in the Orchard Hill Romance series available in our on-line bookstore at [www.thewildrosepress.com](http://www.thewildrosepress.com).

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