



ANDREA
AND THE
5-DAY
CHALLENGE

A BIBLE STUDY CHALLENGE,
A PRAYER JOURNAL,
AND HOMECOMING.
THE COMBINATION JUST
MIGHT CHANGE HER LIFE.

CINDY K. GREEN

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Andrea and the 5-Day Challenge

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all my students over the years (Especially my LSA class 2012-13–A, A, E, M, K, K, A, J, R, C, R, A). You have been my inspiration in writing Andrea's story. And like Andrea, I pray you too will be inspired to seek the Lord and get into His Word where you'll see firsthand He has the power to change the unchangeable.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

~ Joshua 1:9

1

“Andrea! Are you up?” It was Mom attempting to break the sound barrier again.

“Yes, Mom,” I replied through my bedroom door before pushing my comforter back and wiping the sleep from my eyes. I’d had grand plans to start my day right and even get up early. (You know what they say about the best of intentions.) Guiltily, I glanced at my desk with my journal and Bible on top, which only seemed to taunt me further.

“Well, hurry up. Breakfast is almost ready. Dad wants you to get in some piano practice before school. Your recital is Saturday.”

How could I possibly forget?

They reminded me of that fact at least ten times a day. What was the big deal about this recital? Wasn’t it just like any other? (In my parents’ minds, this will be the one that will get me noticed, and they think offers will come from all the big schools, like Julliard.)

Honestly, I didn’t even know for sure if that was the life I wanted.

After plopping my size nine feet out of bed and onto the carpeted floor, I hurried over to my desk and

opened my Bible. I had a few extra minutes.

October 17

So here it is, Lord: Day 1 of the Bible Study Challenge. I, Andrea Jamison, am following through on Pastor Jace's one-week challenge to get into God's Word every morning and see what awesome things You do in my life—or through my life or something. (I'm not real clear on that part, yet.) I'm even utilizing the Proverbs prayer journal Mom gifted me two months ago, which has since just been collecting dust. I know she only gave it to me so that I might actually get up early every morning and do my quiet prayer and devotion time before heading to the big building where we do all the learning. So in a sense, I'm making everyone happy with me in one fell swoop.

With homecoming on the horizon at school, I have a sinking feeling I'm going to need all the help I can get. I know You can work miracles, and really I'm not asking for one, but please if I can spend one more day (or even a hundred) not making a complete fool of myself that would be great. Now I have to cut this short and get in some piano practice. Really, if I could ask for anything it would be the ability to freeze time, then I might actually get everything done.

Nugget of Truth from my reading this morning: Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

~*~

Later that morning, without incident, I made it to school. Homecoming banners twirled in the breeze. I met up with my friends and even attended a couple classes, but I should have known it was all just the

calm before the storm.

“Andrea, look, he’s right there. It’s the perfect time. No one else is around.”

I pressed my back into the lockers around the corner from the transfer student, Luke Ryan. My eyes fluttered closed as my heart raced. This was exactly what I feared. *Help me now, Lord!*

There must be something in the crisp, autumn air just as the pumpkins ripen and the days grow short which infects the hearts and minds of students everywhere. I thought my best friend, Amy Appleby, and I were immune, but obviously, I’d been mistaken as she attempted to contaminate me, too.

“Amy, please, stop.” I looked through Amy’s oval-shaped, frameless glasses and into her golden brown eyes. “I am not—I repeat—I am not now, or ever, going to ask Luke Ryan out and definitely not to homecoming. I’m not even going to the banquet. It’s lame.” Yes, a banquet, because at Aubrey Christian Academy we didn’t have dances.

“You only say that because you haven’t been asked.”

I replied with a scowling look. Of course, no one had asked me. *No shocker there.* And I wasn’t about to change that fact by asking Luke out on the spur of the moment in the middle of the north hallway. Frankly, I hadn’t any interest in going. At least, I didn’t think so.

Not to be put off, Amy continued. “I’m just saying, you better hurry and make up your mind before someone else swoops in and beats you to it.”

I was ready to respond, but the warning bell rang before I could answer. The clamor around the hallway increased as locker doors slammed and my fellow students—the majority of whom had dressed

Caribbean style for Spirit Week—scurried to their third period classes.

And there I stood with my mouth still hanging open just as Luke walked by. With his backpack slung over his right shoulder, he glanced at me with a slight smile. OK, I couldn't deny he was kind of cute: tall, athletic, sun-lightened brown hair, and dark eyes. And a senior.

"You can close your mouth now, Andrea," spoke Amy with an annoying grin.

I plopped my mouth closed and shook my head "no" to her, knowing exactly what she was thinking. She knew better than anyone that I have incurable *Change-o-phobia*. Did she forget the freak-out in eighth grade when my mom surprised me by painting my entire room what was supposed to be a restful, sunset-like yellow? It turned out to be the color of macaroni and cheese. And then, there was that one particular *incident* last spring. I shuddered at the memory. Asking Luke to homecoming would be too big a change for my neurotic system.

The vice-principal, Mrs. Jenkins, with heels clipping along the vinyl floor of the hallway, approached. "Come on, girls. Don't you have classes waiting for you?"

Uuh! Who could think of classes at a moment like this? Ever since the *incident*, I'd steered clear of most school activities. Did I want to break my solemn vow and re-enter the world where people attended homecoming and other functions? What was I thinking?

It was Amy. She'd tainted my brain. She knew I wasn't interested in a date for homecoming and all that it required. It wasn't my style. It wasn't hers,

either...usually.

We didn't chase boys or go to date-required activities. We had more important things on our agenda. Things like signing up for transcript enhancing extra-curriculars, planning for the Christmas Break missions trip, and maybe even making it through the eleventh grade without another tardy to class. On top of all that, I had my recital to think about. The agenda did not include me stepping out of my comfort zone and asking a cute, popular guy to homecoming.

"Come on, Miss Indecisive." Amy broke into my contemplation.

"Miss what?"

She grabbed my arm and led me down the hall. "If we're late to Boeker's class again, we'll get detention, for sure."

My gaze took in another poster hanging in the hallway stating the theme for homecoming—*Written in the Stars*.

I'll tell you what's "written in the stars." I, Andrea Renee Jamison, would never find my name attached to Luke Ryan's.

~*~

That afternoon I sat at a table surrounded by my lunchtime crew—my friends since elementary school. Amy was next to me. Angie Horowitz, the artist who had sworn off men, sat in front of us, with Alisha Andrews beside her. Yes, we were the four As: Andrea, Amy, Angie, and Alisha. A-Company (yes, just like in the army) was what they called us in fourth grade. Of course, that had been because our previous military-trained teacher had placed us in the same reading

group, and we discovered how much we all loved to read.

When we were eleven, we even started a book club and called ourselves the A-Company Girls. Our reading choices at that time were totally dissimilar, with Angie devouring every Judy Blume book on the market, Amy quoting Louisa May Alcott, and Alisha sticking with teen romances. And I...I was transfixed with *Little House on the Prairie* and anything with a horse in it.

Now in the eleventh grade, we were still friends and occasionally met for book club meetings, even though we were no longer in the same social stratum. However, we'd made a pact back in ninth that no matter what, we'd spend lunch together. So, this table had been designated for A-Company—not that we called each other that at school or anything.

"Mike McCutcheon asked me to homecoming," Alisha announced just before taking a bite of her salad. She looked so cool and calm, with not one bead of sweat on her immaculate, smooth forehead

"I assume you said yes," Angie responded in her usual sarcastic manner as she flipped a strand of her long, blue-streaked auburn hair over her shoulder and rolled her hazel eyes.

Alisha didn't have to answer. Her perfectly curled eyelashes twitched in such a way above her blue eyes that we all knew exactly what her answer had been. And why wouldn't Mike, an attractive football player, have asked her out? Alisha was beautiful and smart. I have seriously never even seen a zit on her face—*ever!* And that is perfectly all right. She's my friend.

I'm glad the endowment fairies were kind to her. Endowment Fairies, you know, those flitting creatures

who endow you with your inalienable rights to looks, smarts, and abilities. They'd been particularly absent in my case.

"Well, Andrea is going to ask Luke Ryan," said Amy, out of the blue.

My head snapped up from my cafeteria-provided lunch. "Whh..." was my pathetic attempt at speech.

Angie and Alisha's enthusiastic responses outplayed my wimpy reaction.

"Really?" said Alisha.

"Cool," Angie replied, far louder than I would have liked.

Finally, I found my voice. "Now wait a minute, Amy. I never said—"

"What do you all think?" Amy interrupted me.

All three of them turned to look at Luke, only two tables away.

It was like a slasher movie playing before my eyes, and I could do nothing to stop the horrendous events from unfolding.

They were smiling at him in unison just as he happened to look our way. Being the sweet guy that he is, Luke smiled back. He didn't seem embarrassed by the attention.

I, however, really wished an alien spaceship would beam me up. That seemed less noticeable and embarrassing than all my friends staring and smiling at this guy whom I was *never, ever, ever* going to ask out.

Luke Ryan hung out with the jocks at Aubrey Christian Academy since starting school two months ago. He and his mother had just moved to North Carolina from California after his parents' horrible split-up. Luke had gone statewide All-star in baseball at his last school. He had hair which naturally formed

in neat folds around his forehead. His complexion appeared clear, his eyes yummy, and his clothes expensive.

Therefore, no way on earth would he ever accept my invite to the homecoming banquet. To believe otherwise would be living in a fantasy world. Not with my fashion-challenged wardrobe, mossy green eyes, and this shoulder-length, impossible mousy-brown hair. There's nothing all that interesting about me. I can't dribble a ball or do a handstand. I'm not a fanged creature of the night, nor am I in love with one. I really had little to no reputation.

Aubrey Christian Academy had been around for at least fifty years and had over nine hundred students from Kindergarten to twelfth grade. I was just one of the many. To the cool kids, I was the equivalent of being invisible. I liked it that way. It was better than when a couple girls in my third grade class started calling me goody-goody just because I wouldn't steal candy from the student store.

"I think it's a great idea," said Alisha. "Mike's friends with Luke. He could ask Luke if he's interested."

Yikes! Heat flashed into my face as I returned to the conversation. She wouldn't actually do such a thing, would she?

"Uh, no thanks, Alisha. Amy is mistaken. I am not asking Luke Ryan to homecoming. I told her so this morning." I sipped soda through a straw, trying to look nonchalant.

"Oh, why not?" asked Angie. The man-hater rested her chin on her propped up hand. "He doesn't seem like the usual pinheads around here masquerading as teenagers of the male persuasion."

I was looking at him and there was still no reason to utterly humiliate myself.

Luke had resumed his conversation with his sports buddies. He swiped a hand through his bangs, brushing the hair back from his face.

Yeah, he was a hottie, and while I'd thought him cute before, I'd never considered him serious dating-material. *Ha! As if!* We were just friends. I'd even helped Luke out in Geometry. Yes, my worst subject, but he was even more lost and taking it for the second time in his high school career. I'd never been embarrassed around him before, but now the sight of him made my whole body tremble. What had my friends done to me?

Then I caught sight of something even more alarming.

Dion Washington, senior and football quarterback, smiled, and then winked one of his dark, dreamy eyes at...Amy.

My friend Amy—who is like, the most well-read girl in school, won the Bible verse plaque three times in a row, and will probably end up our valedictorian next year—had hardly spoken ten words to Dion, and he was flirting with her.

Then it got worse when she smiled back.

The world had turned topsy-turvy (a term my grandmother commonly uses to describe the trend of current events). I needed to get away from it all. "You know what? I forgot. I have something I have to do before next period." I stood rather rigidly and grabbed my tray filled with my uneaten lunch. "I'll see y'all later."

Angie and Alisha said goodbye and began studying their notes for the test on *The Scarlet Letter*.

My entire private life appeared to be on public display. At least, they were no longer focused on me and my social life—or lack thereof.

I stepped away from the bench and Amy joined me on my trek over to the trashcan. She walked in step, staying very close. “Why? Just tell me why?” She lowered her voice as she spoke, with her sincere gaze pointed right at me.

“Why, what?” I whispered. Of course, the loud reverberating sounds of the cafeteria made my words almost inaudible.

“You know what. Why won’t you ask Luke to homecoming?”

“For one thing, I have a piano recital on Saturday. I don’t even have time to go.”

“Your recital is in the morning, long before the football game. That gives you plenty of time to get yourself ready for the banquet and maybe even attend the game and ceremony.”

“My parents will probably take me out to dinner later. I told you, I just don’t have the time.”

“Your parents will gladly forgo a meal for a school activity, and you know it.”

“Have you met my parents? They’ll freak if they think my time will be taken up with a boy instead of piano practice. Besides, you know they frown on the whole idea of my dating.”

“So don’t focus on the date. Explain to them that homecoming is a...a necessary juncture in the furtherance of your high school experience which will deepen your appreciation of the community at large.” Amy had a habit of flinging out some such diatribe at me like it should all make sense.

I clapped my mouth closed. Really, how do you

respond to something like that? "They wouldn't buy it. Besides, I have a big Geometry test next week. I have to study."

"Now you're just making up completely irrelevant excuses." She was right.

I'd spouted off my last and final argument. Well, the best defense is a good offense. "Tell me why you want me to ask him out so much? You're beginning to make me wonder if you have an ulterior motive or something." I dumped my lunch in the trash, and then folded my arms while trying to look my most cross.

Her expression turned incredulous. "Me?" She pressed the fingers of her left hand into her chest. "What motive could I have except hoping my best friend would have a fun time?"

"Call me old-fashioned, but why should I pull a Sadie Hawkins on him, and why Luke, of all people?"

"He's new, and he might not be sure about asking anyone out. So, it's only kind and charitable for you to ask him." Hmm, she'd obviously given this a lot of thought.

Which had me worried. "It's my duty. Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Exactly." Her fair head nodded, but there was something unusual in her expression, which made me wonder. What was going on in that genius brain? She eyed me.

For a split second I actually considered her demented idea. The insanity didn't last long. "Amy, how can you even suggest...I mean, after..." I glanced around the cafeteria to double-check that there were no eavesdroppers. "After the...*incident*," I whispered.

"Andi, that was like, a lifetime ago." She rolled her head in a dismissive gesture as if it hadn't only been

five miserable months before. "It's time to let it go."

"Let it go? You do remember..."

"Remember how Jeff Sandburg used you just to get his girlfriend back and when he did, he dropped you and took Kasey Tucker to the Junior/Senior Prom? Uh, yeah. I think I'd remember your worst freak-out ever."

"Exactly my point." Finally, she began to make sense.

"But Luke's different. You know him. You like him."

"Not like that."

She ignored me and kept going. "It's time to get over the *incident*," she emphasized the last word with air quotes, "and move on. Are you planning to remain cloistered at home with your piano until you graduate or something?" She had a point. *Darn her*.

Jeff may have humiliated me, but thank goodness, he'd transferred to the science magnet school this year. Never trust a scientist.

"So, you think Luke might actually go with me to homecoming?" What was I saying? This was crazy talk. Amy had me back to actually considering her lunacy.

"Why wouldn't he?" Amy shrugged. "You guys are friends. Most of our friends are just going together as a big group, anyway. What have you got to lose?"

My dignity, self-worth, etcetera. Even if I got permission to go, I could never ask Luke. How embarrassing would it be, especially if he said no?

"Why don't you ask him if you're so concerned?"

"Because, my dear friend, Andrea, needs to have some fun. Besides, someone already asked me." She smiled with a proud glint in her amber-hued eyes, her

shoulders rising in tandem with her grin.

“Somebody...what?” I couldn’t believe it. Why hadn’t she told me? “Who?”

Before she had a chance to answer, I heard my name called out. I pivoted, but I was totally unprepared to see Luke coming right up beside me. My face grew warm again. Oh, please, if only my skin wouldn’t turn all blotchy like it usually did when I blushed.

“Uh, hi Luke.” I couldn’t say any more. If I opened my mouth, it would come out in gibberish, I was sure. *Lord God in Heaven, if You’re listening, and I know You always are, please, please, don’t let him have overheard what we were talking about.* When was that spaceship getting here, anyway? I’d settle for an invisibility cloak, too, just as long as I could disappear.

“Hi.” Luke smiled.

Why *now* did his smile make my heart do cartwheels? I’d seen him smile dozens of times, maybe even a hundred, and my heart had never done that before. OK, that’s not completely true. There had been a couple occasions when my pulse tripped upwards, but I just needed some more vitamins or something.

“I was wondering if we could go over that new proof from yesterday. I’m not sure I have it yet.”

Geometry? He wanted to talk about Geometry.

My heart fell. I don’t know why I thought it would be anything else. I mentally slapped myself in the head. *Of course.* The Geometry quiz today.

“Well, I gotta go,” announced Amy with a conspiratorial smile as she adjusted her glasses and walked off.

I turned to Luke. “You know, Geometry isn’t my strong subject.”

"I know." He knew? His answer surprised me.

I stood staring at him for a second. His brown eyes looked a little sparkly as he grinned at me. I must have been seeing things. Yeah, I definitely needed some extra vitamin A.

"If I had to guess, I'd say history is your best subject." Luke still smiled, in fact, I think it grew.

How did he know my favorite subject? "Uh, yeah, it is. How..."

He raised his expansive shoulders slightly. "I can tell by the way you speak up in class."

Class. Oh, yes, because we also had U. S. History together. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't. I wasn't that much of a coward. I could stand here and look into his eyes...no, I couldn't. They were somehow more fascinating than ever. I lifted my view to the doorway. "You know, I need to get to my locker and pick up my books for next period."

"OK, me, too."

So, I'm walking with Luke Ryan. He is suddenly very interesting to me and seems to know more about me than I do about him. Something is definitely wrong with this picture. Had I somehow walked through Alice's looking glass without noticing, because this was unquestionably a wonderland.

2

I definitely hadn't intended to start afternoon classes this way. My hand shook as I lifted it to draw a long line down the center of a piece of notebook paper. How ridiculous am I that I can't even draw a straight line with Luke sitting across from me. The knowledge that at this very minute his chocolate brown eyes were fixed solely on me completely unnerved me. I could kill Amy right now. She'd infected my brain with convoluted thoughts about Luke Ryan. About homecoming.

Focus. Right. The proof. I drew a horizontal line through the vertical one.

Luke and I were in our Geometry classroom with only ten minutes left before the bell rang to end lunch. Mr. Carter sat at his desk busily recording grades into the computer.

I set up the proof from a homework problem. Step one. What went under step one again? Oh, yeah, that's right. "Well, let's fill in the givens." I glanced up at Luke.

The sunlight from the immense window behind him framed his face. He had long dark eyelashes which made his eyes look sort of golden in the rays of the sun.

Unconsciously, I held my breath and forgot what I was going to say next.

Luke pointed at the triangle. "Segments AB and CB are congruent." He lifted his gaze. "Right?"