

# SO NOT MEANT TO BE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MEGHAN  
QUINN



A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a bright blue button-down shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a plush red sofa. He is looking down and to his left. The background is a solid red wall. Scattered around the text are several white cupid figures holding bows and arrows, and several blue hearts, some of which are broken. The overall theme is Valentine's Day.

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## Prologue

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### KELSEY

“Kelsey, it’s a known fact men and women can’t have a working relationship and be friends at the same time.”

JP Cane leans against the edge of the conference room table, tattooed arms crossed at his annoyingly brawny chest, sleeves of his dress shirt folded up to his elbows, and sporting a smirk that is more infuriating than charming.

“What on earth are you talking about?” I ask as I sit hunched over a mountain of design papers.

Still leaning against the table, he lowers his hands casually and grips the edge as he says, “The other night, when we were having dinner with Huxley and Lottie, you said we could be friends.”

Lottie is my older sister—by twelve months—and my best friend. She’s engaged to the incomparable Huxley Cane, our boss and the brother of the bane of my existence standing before me.

How we all came to know each other is still an extremely fascinating story of luck. The quick and dirty explanation? Lottie was looking for a rich husband to save face with an archenemy, Huxley was looking for a fake fiancée in order to secure a business arrangement. They bumped into each other on the sidewalk. They formed a deal to help each other, signed a

contract, and she moved into his mansion. It's all *Pretty Woman*-esque, without the hooker aspect. Although . . . Lottie had a hard time staying away from Huxley's alpha advances.

But while she was playing the role of the dotting, madly-in-love fiancée, she was helping me with my business, Sustainably Organized. That's how we were hired by Cane Enterprises and how I found myself working closely with JP because he was the one assigned to my projects.

Like I said, a whirlwind. I still can't believe it happened this way.

"Do you have a rebuttal?" JP asks, pulling me from my thoughts.

Seeing that this meeting is going nowhere, I toss my pen to the table and stand tall. "First of all, we weren't having dinner *together* with Huxley and Lottie. It wasn't a double date—"

"Jesus, I know," he says, exasperated. "You made that very clear three and a half times." He uses his fingers to tick off the instances. "When we rang the doorbell, because we happened to arrive at the same time. When we were in the kitchen, both reaching for the same champagne. Outside by the pool when we happened to get left at the table alone. And in the living room, you were midway through telling me we weren't on a double date when Lottie interrupted you to show you a new 'toy' she got." He grins, flashing those annoyingly straight teeth of his. "Still waiting on the details of the new toy."

"And *secondly* . . ." I continue. No way am I telling him about that . . . device, Huxley got Lottie. Nope. I'm blushing just thinking about it. "Why on earth can't we be friends?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

I glance around the room, trying to see if I've missed any clues, but I spot absolutely nothing. I look back at him and say, "No. No, it's not obvious."

He shakes his head and moves around the conference table to sit on it, right next to me. "Because, Kelsey, there's a palpable attraction between us."

I snort so hard I spray snot on the design plans in front of me. Casually, I wipe away the droplets with my hand. An attraction?

I mean . . . sure, JP is a very handsome man. An obvious handsome, if you're into the steep cut of his jawline that's peppered by a thick, dark beard. His sexy, tousled hair curls ever so slightly on top but is faded short on the sides, and the hidden tattoos that only appear when he's comfortable



with his present company. Yes, he's handsome, sexy, I might have said a time or two.

But there's more to a human being than just finding them physically attractive, at least for me. For me to actually find someone attractive, they need to have a good heart, a desirable personality, and be able to make me laugh.

Not sure JP has a heart, and his personality reads like that of an attention-seeking middle child with an aptitude for not taking anything seriously. He might have a good one-liner here and there, but his overall ability to provoke, annoy, and irritate me wins out.

He must have one of the messiest offices I've ever seen, \*whispers\* which is a complete turn off for a detail-oriented person like I am. Who could look at someone sexually when his desk is stacked in papers and covered by coffee cups and pens with mismatched lids?

So, am I attracted to JP? That would be a definite no.

"You really think there's an attraction between us?" I ask.

"Babe, I can smell the sexual chemistry, and because it's so palpable, so thick, so . . . musky—"

"Eww, it's not musky."

What am I saying? It's not anything. There's no chemistry. Nothing is palpable, and there's absolutely no thickness . . . none.

Nor is anything musky. *Who even describes attraction as musky?*

But he ignores me and continues his far-fetched diatribe. "We can't possibly be work friends because the attraction between us will always and forever put the thought of sex on the table."

This time I hold back my snort and let silence fill the air for a few breaths before I close the space between us until our faces are only a few inches apart. Despite him being almost a foot taller than I am, I can still look him in the eyes as I ask, "Are you feverish? Is that what's happening? You've come down with something and this is how you act?"

"I'm a specimen of health. You should know that. You check me out enough."

"I do not."

I don't.

Just need to make that clear. I really don't.

He guffaws, a sound so annoying that my molars grind together. "Why do you think my sleeves are rolled up right now?"

I glance down at his inked forearms—okay, sure, those are sexy, probably the best thing about the man. That’s it, though, the forearms. Can’t blame a girl for delighting in some arm porn, right, ladies?

He leans in close. “Because I know how much they turn you on.”

I press my hand against his face, stopping whatever he’s attempting to do. “Do you understand how massively inappropriate this is? I’m your employee.”

“Technically, you’re Huxley’s employee, I’m just the overseer of things.”

“Is that the professional term?”

He flashes that irritating grin of his. “It is.” He wets his lips but I keep my eyes trained on his eyes. There’s no way I’ll give him the satisfaction of glancing at his mouth. “Not sure why you’re getting all flustered and red in the face.”

“I’m not flustered.” I straighten my arms at my sides.

“I’m trying to be an honest do-gooder right now, attempting to educate you on why we can’t be friends. I should be praised, not disparaged with your sneer.” Before I can respond, he keeps moving forward with his so-called do-gooder’s education. “A man and a woman who find each other attractive and who work together will never be able to be friends. There will always be a giant elephant in the room, and that elephant’s name is Sex. It’s basic human math, Kelsey. We all need to climax, and when we find someone who’s attractive, we want that person to help us climax.”

Is anyone else hearing this?

God, he could not cheapen the act of making love any more. Is it an ego boost JP thinks I’m attractive? Yep. But where’s the romance these days?

Where’s the wooing?

Where’s the spontaneity?

Even Lottie and Huxley will admit there was nothing romantic about how their relationship started. It all seems so clinical these days.

As a true romantic who loves everything about love, I can’t help wondering if there’s a man out there who checks all the boxes of the perfect romcom hero.

Noooo, now we have to deal with catfishing, followed by an unsolicited dick pic, and then finalized by a solid ghosting.

I’m so sick of it.

Hands on my hips, I turn toward him and ask, “What the hell happened to make you like this? I asked you what you thought about bamboo filing cabinets and it turned into this argument about why we can’t be friends. I don’t see how this conversation is relevant to my question.”

“It’s relevant,” he says, sliding in closer, his shoe now pressing against my heel, “because when your hungry eyes are devouring me from across the conference table but your attitude is attempting to put me in the friend zone, I’m going to call you out on it. You said you want to be friends, but that’s not going to happen.”

A delusion, that’s what he’s experiencing. And someone needs to put him in his place.

I press my finger to his chest and say, “Trust me, JP, if I found you the least bit attractive, you’d know it. What you’re believing are hungry eyes for you, is a ravenous woman who had one waffle slathered in peanut butter at six this morning. Hunger hallucination has set in, and your meager body —”

“Meager? *Pfft.*”

“—has morphed into a giant meatball sub in my mind, nothing more. Convince yourself all you want about what you assume is my attraction toward you, but from my mouth to your headstrong ears, I couldn’t find you any more revolting.”

His brows shoot up in surprise. Honestly, I’m slightly surprised myself. Revolting isn’t the right word, but I’m on a roll.

“And if I had any romantic inkling toward you, I wouldn’t be wearing this simple, almost homely blouse that does nothing to show off my perfect, bouncy breasts.”

He wets his lips as he glances down briefly at my chest and then back up.

“And I wouldn’t be wearing underwear, either, on the off chance that you pulled me on top of this conference table and spread my legs for a small taste.”

His Adam’s apple bobs.

“And I sure as hell wouldn’t be mentally pleading for this conversation to end so I can pack up and retreat to my studio apartment to eat dinner peacefully alone without an imperious imbecile like yourself chirping in my ear about work relationships. Because, JP, if I wanted you, I would want to steal, consume, and savor every second I had with you.”

He reaches out to me just as I twist away to gather my papers. “But that’s not the case here.” I smile at him. “I can’t get away from you fast enough.” I am woman! Hear me roar!

His nostrils flare.

His jaw ticks.

And he stuffs his hands in his dress pant pockets where they belong.

“Now that we’ve cleared that up, I’ll leave since we’re getting nothing done here and a meatball sub is calling my name. I’m going to assume you approve of the bamboo filing cabinets.” I collect the papers together and then tap them on the table, evening them into one solid stack.

“We still can’t be friends,” he says, his voice strangled.

God, is he still on that? Let’s add mental ability of a gnat to his list of incompatible qualities.

“Good. When I said that the other night, I was just attempting to be kind, you know, since your company hired mine, but now that our feelings are out in the open, we can live our lives without this fake, bullshit friendship.” I gently place my papers in my folder and then in my bag along with my pens, keeping them color-coded, of course. “Now, if you don’t mind, I have an appointment to stuff my mouth full of meat.”

I move past him, my shoulder bumping against his, but he places his hand on my hip, pausing my retreat. His touch is barely a blip on my bodice, but I shiver reluctantly. Our shoulders meet, side by side, and when I look forward, avoiding eye contact with him, he leans in and whispers into my ear, his lips inches away.

“The only bullshit thing between us is that spiel you just laid out. Deny it all you want, but I know you want me. The quicker you accept that, the better you will feel.”

Despite the heavy beat of my heart, I know it’s my time to turn my head, and when I do, our noses nearly touch. With all the bravado I can muster, I say, “The sooner you realize I’m out of your league . . . the better *you* will feel.”

It wasn’t always like this between us. When I first met him, all I could think about was how truly, stunningly handsome he was, with his mossy-green stare and a cocky air about him that demanded my attention. He was everything a girl fantasizes about. For the briefest of moments, I thought that maybe, just maybe, there could be something between us. That if he asked me out on a date, I would’ve said yes. But when my business was

toeing the line of becoming successful under his leadership, I knew I wouldn't mix business with pleasure, not when I worked so hard to get to where I was.

So I pushed my initial thoughts to the side and, sadly, I've come to see him differently now.

He regularly waltzes into meetings smelling like last night's perfume. He's often distracted by his phone, and when I've looked over, there's always been a different woman's name on the screen. He's flirty and clearly not someone interested in long-term anything. He teases about love, he jokes about forever, and he's never serious. And that's not what I want despite my initial attraction.

With my head held high, I move past him, out the door of the conference room, and to the elevators. I have no idea why JP is droning on about this *attraction* between us. It's not as though I've led him on. I'm a firm believer in love. Therefore, I'm looking for love. Not a fling, not a sexy one-night stand. I'm looking for my soulmate, just like the soulmates on my semi-popular podcast. *I want forever.*

JP Cane can believe what he wants, but if there's one thing I know for sure in this romance desert that is my life, he and I are so not meant to be.



JP

LET ME GUESS . . . Kelsey told you we're so not meant to be, right?

\*Rolls eyes\*

Of course she did. Not that I'm looking for forever, because I'm not. I'm just looking for a good time.

I've had too much loss in my life to commit to anyone. Yeah, I'm *that* guy. Psychoanalyze me all you want, but it's not going to change the fact that my fear of commitment is a real thing.

But I'll say this—if anyone was going to change my mind about that, it would be Kelsey.

She's . . . hell, she's all kinds of special.

From the first moment I saw her during her pitch meeting with us, I was wowed. But working closely together, I was enamored. Her smile, her

positive outlook on life, her fucking gorgeous eyes, she stole my breath, and it was the first time in my goddamn life that I actually thought to myself . . . *she could be my forever.*

Talk about scaring the shit out of myself. It was like a Nordic breeze shot right up my ass. Absolutely chilling.

I couldn't be thinking that way.

I couldn't be thinking about \*gulp\* forever.

So, being a mature adult, I've chosen to deflect. To annoy. To keep her as far away as possible. And boy was it working. I got under her skin. Whenever she looks at me, she wants to murder me. Whenever I look at her, I think . . . well, she's hot, but she wants to murder me, therefore, stay away.

And like I said, it worked. It worked so fucking well . . . until it didn't anymore.

You can ONLY imagine what happens next . . .

# Chapter One

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KELSEY

*Meant to Be Podcast*

*Alec and Luna*

**Kelsey:** *Welcome, listener, to the Meant to Be Podcast, where we talk to madly-in-love couples about the way they met. Alec and Luna, thank you so much for joining me today.*

**Alec:** *Our pleasure. Luna could not stop raving about you.*

**Luna:** *Guilty. I'm obsessed with this podcast.*

**Kelsey:** *Thank you so much. So then, you must know how we run things over here. The intro is you two giving us a quick rundown on your meet-cute. Think you can do it?*

**Luna:** *We can.*

**Alec:** *She made me practice.*

**Kelsey:** *Ha-ha. Well then, take it away. How did you two become meant to be?*

**Luna:** *My brother got engaged to his boyfriend and they couldn't afford a big, fancy wedding, so I signed him up for a DIY wedding show called The Wedding Game.*

**Alec:** *My brother, Thad, was a groomzilla and wanted to win the grand prize at the end of the show, an apartment overlooking Central Park, and*



*laid a guilt trip to force me to help.*

**Luna:** *First day of shooting, Alec assumed I was a PA and demanded I get him coffee.*

**Alec:** *Asked, not demanded. Let's keep things straight, but, yes, I did. And you can imagine how the little spitfire next to me reacted.*

**Luna:** *I had it out for him. He was the competition and he was going down.*

**Alec:** *I didn't care about the competition at all and was counting down the days until it was done. Then I realized what a bad brother I was being and how sad Thad was, so . . . I put in the effort.*

**Luna:** *Effort meant following me around a baking store so he could learn how to bake a cake.*

**Alec:** *I knocked over some nuts, and she helped me pick them up and found me out. She took pity on me and showed me how to bake a cake to help Thad.*

**Luna:** *That day in my apartment changed everything. I didn't see him as competition. I saw him as a brother trying to make a difference.*

**Alec:** *She's a sucker for family, and so shortly after that, I asked her out.*

**Luna:** *We got married last spring.*



“CAN you two stop making out? Honestly, I came here to have dinner with you, not see you lick each other's faces.”

Lottie pauses and looks over her shoulder. “But he smells so good. Have you smelled him?”

“I haven't, because he's not my boyfriend.”

Huxley twists Lottie off him onto the outdoor couch they're sharing and lifts her chin to his lips. “I'm going to go check on the pizza.” He presses the lightest of kisses to her lips and then stands. “Kelse, can I get you a refill on your drink?”

I hold up my wineglass to him and say, “Please, thank you.”

Huxley has the best wines. He doesn't drink much of it, so I always make a point to put a dent in his labels when I'm over for dinner, which is at least once a week. And eating outside is always my choice. Huxley and Lottie have a gorgeous, coastal-style house with white walls and black

accents just outside Beverly Hills in The Flats. The backyard has a breathtaking infinity pool that stretches the length of the property and expensive yet massively comfortable patio furniture. Tall palm trees add privacy. Their backyard is my favorite place.

When he disappears into the house, Lottie leans toward me and asks, “Kelsey, you know that vibrator I showed you the other night?”

“Yes?”

She looks over her shoulder, checking on Huxley, and then says, “I blacked out. He legit had to shake me back to consciousness. He won’t use it on me anymore even though I’m begging desperately for it.”

Keeping my expression neutral, I say, “Isn’t that lovely. Congratulations on the intense orgasm.”

Lottie’s brows tilt down. “Hey, am I sensing some sarcasm?”

“What clued you in?” I cross one leg over the other, wishing I didn’t ask for a refill on wine.

“Uh, the attitude. What the hell is going on?”

Sighing, I look my sister in the eye and say, “I’m very happy for you and Huxley and your love, but I’m the perpetually single one, and it’s hard to watch.”

“Are you jealous?” she asks.

“Yes,” I answer, not even trying to avoid the truth. Lottie is my best friend and I tell her everything, even if it makes me look bad. “I’m very jealous that you have this consuming relationship with a man who worships you, and I don’t even have one prospect.”

“That’s not true,” Lottie says as Huxley rejoins us, handing us both glasses of wine. “What about JP?”

“Oh, please,” I groan and then send my apologies to Huxley. “No offense to you since he’s your brother, but JP is a moron.”

“No offense taken. I agree with you,” Huxley says as he drapes his arm behind Lottie and pulls her against his side while bringing his beer bottle to his lips.

“How is he a moron?” Lottie asks.

“Where to start?” Huxley asks, looking so composed and regal. If Huxley, JP, and Breaker—their other brother—didn’t all look so much alike, I would question their relationship to each other.

I’ve always liked Huxley, even when Lottie hated him. It was easy to get along with him because he’s very business-minded, smart, and can

remain impartial. He's savvy with work decisions, enjoys helping, and loves deeply. He's the total package. I'm very grateful Lottie found him, but God, if only JP had an ounce of Huxley in him, it would make being around him bearable.

"JP is fun, the kind of fun you need," Lottie says. "I love you, Kelse, but you're a bit uptight."

"I am *not* uptight," I defend. "I just know what I like and what I don't like, and trust me when I say I don't like JP. He's annoying and thinks too highly of himself and, frankly, he's far too messy for me."

"All facts," Huxley says. "Kelsey deserves better."

"That's your brother," Lottie says.

"I'm aware, babe. But I agree with Kelsey. They aren't a good match."

"Thank you." I sip my wine. "And since we're on the topic, I'll let you know I'm thinking about joining that local dating app. You know, the one with the blind date restaurant?"

"Wait, the one that Noely Clark from *Good Morning, Malibu* has boasted about? The one where she found love? What's it called?"

"Going in Blind," I say.

"Yes." She snaps her finger at me. "Oh my God, didn't you interview her and Jack on your podcast?"

I nod. "Yes, that's where I got the idea. She was telling me all about it while we weren't recording, and it seems really interesting. Like, maybe I could actually find someone like-minded."

"How does it work?" Huxley asks.

"It's all anonymous through an app, but everyone is put through a background check and screened to make sure there's no catfishing. Then, the app matches you with people. You don't know who the person is by name or what they look like, and you meet up at the restaurant, Going in Blind, where you share a meal together and see if you're a match. Like a blind date."

"That's pretty neat," Huxley says.

"I love it," Lottie adds. "God, I should've thought of that when I was trolling for a rich husband."

Huxley's arm tightens around Lottie as he says, "I think you did pretty good for yourself."

Lottie cups his cheek and pulls him in for a kiss. "I did decent, though you can be quite grumpy."

I watch Huxley's hand curl around my sister possessively as he whispers something into her ear. Ugh, great, you're in love. WE ALL CAN SEE THAT!

I lean back in my chair and drain my wineglass, while they do some sort of secret whispering thing to each other which, frankly, I have no desire to be a part of. Not that they want me to be a part of it either.

What I would like is to be a part of a relationship like theirs where you're so infatuated with each other that you completely forget the world around you and get lost in each other's eyes.

I want to be worshipped.

I want to be important in someone's life.

I want to be the person someone calls when they need advice or have big news . . . or just want to hear my voice.

I want to be surprised with flowers at my apartment door. Whisked away to somewhere I've never been. Thought of nearly every second of every day because I consume someone's thoughts.

I want the real.

The ugly.

The pettiness that comes with relationships.

The teasing.

The arguments.

The laughs.

The love.

The romance.

I want it all. And sitting here, watching my sister experience exactly that, yes, it makes me jealous, but it also makes me realize that if I want all those things, I'm going to have to make them happen myself. I can't sit back and wait.

If I want love, I need to go find it.



"OH GOD, I feel like throwing up," I say as I shake my hands at my side. "Why did I think this was a good idea?"

"Because you want to be in a relationship," Lottie says calmly from where she sits cross-legged on my bed.

“I do.” I nod as I stare at myself in my full-length mirror, examining the purple, strapless dress I chose for my date tonight. “I really want to be in a relationship.”

“And you yourself said this guy sounds nice. Likes dogs, has his own business—something you have in common—and has a secret desire to be in a boy band, which is charming.”

“It is.” I nod again, still staring at myself. “The boy band thing really got me.”

“And what was his favorite quote again?”

“‘Buzz, your girlfriend! Woof!’” I say, chuckling as I turn to the side, checking out my back.

Lottie chuckles too. “See, he seems like a good time as well.”

Now I turn toward Lottie and ask, “What if he’s the one?”

“Okay, you can’t go into this thinking like that. You need to be calm, composed, and just have fun. You can’t go all crazy romantic on him and ask him to have your babies fifteen minutes into the date.”

I give her a glaring look. “I would never do that.”

“Just checking, because earlier you asked me if purple accented your elbow pit veins too much. Who asks that?”

I flash my arms at Lottie and say, “Mom gave me these veins, and they are far too prominent. I don’t need the purple of this dress making them even more prominent.”

“With the way that dress makes your boobs look, I’m pretty sure the last thing he’s going to be looking at is your inner elbow veins.”

I clutch my chest. “Oh my God, do I look like I’m trying too hard?”

“Noooo,” Lottie moans. “You look perfect. Now, if you don’t leave soon, you’re going to be late and I know what you hate most in life is being late.”

“That’s true. Being late just means you’re either a ‘time bender’—that’s a real thing—or you don’t care about other people’s time. And time is the one thing in life you can’t get back.”

“Yes, I know.” Lottie stands from the bed and ushers me toward the door, but before she can push me out, I turn toward her and grip her arms.

“What if this is it, if he’s the one? I’m going to start sweating when I see him. I won’t be able to act cool. What if this is my one and only chance at love?”