



The Ex Vows

"Jessica Joyce is a force
to be reckoned with."
—LANA FERGUSON,
author of *The Nanny*

JESSICA
JOYCE

USA Today BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *You, with a View*

PRAISE FOR

You, with a View

“Jessica Joyce has gifted all of us with an electrifying debut, and the perfect summer read! If you love your flirting paired with a healthy dose of roasting, rivals-turned-lovers, road trips that become journeys of self-discovery, hilarious but sexy banter, and steamy love stories, this is the beach read you want to pick up! A million out of five stars, Jessica Joyce is a new and forever fave!”

—Ali Hazelwood, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love, Theoretically*

“Sometimes all it takes to get back on track is a road trip with your oldest rival...Jessica Joyce’s debut, *You, with a View*, stole my heart and had me absolutely sweating at the chemistry between Theo and Noelle. I will never see a vintage red Bronco, a TikTok travel video, or a man’s thighs the same way again.”

—Alicia Thompson, national bestselling author of *Love in the Time of Serial Killers*

“Stunningly heartfelt and sexy beyond words. Jessica Joyce writes with a deeply empathetic pen, drawing each character with profound tenderness and crafting the perfect amount of rivals-to-reluctant-road-trip-companions-to-lovers tension—incidentally, my new favorite trope. I want to live inside this book.”

—Rachel Lynn Solomon, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Weather Girl*

“*You, with a View* is angsty, atmospheric perfection. While navigating grief’s pain as well as its transformative power, this road trip romance is an

unforgettable journey of tenderhearted healing, scorching chemistry, and divinely witty banter.”

—Chloe Liese, author of *Two Wrongs Make a Right*

“Jessica Joyce’s debut is a treasure! *You, with a View* is a romantic adventure that will make you want to pack your bags and take a chance on love. This heartwarming love story is a gift for romance readers who want to laugh, cry, and swoon.”

—Denise Williams, author of *Do You Take This Man*

“*You, with a View* is a sexy-as-hell romance that I couldn’t put down, a heartfelt tribute to the love of grandparents, and an achingly relatable exploration of the search for ‘success’ in your twenties. Noelle and Theo’s road trip is as epic as their emotional journey, leaving my heart a happy, mushy mess by the end. I love this book.”

—Anita Kelly, author of *Love & Other Disasters* and *Something Wild & Wonderful*

“Jessica Joyce wields razor-sharp prose with emotional poignancy and the perfect dose of unbelievable romantic tension with spice to create an instant classic in the romance genre. I’ll read anything she writes.”

—Mazey Eddings, author of *The Plus One*

“*You, with a View* is the total package: swoony, sexy, funny, and profoundly moving. Noelle and Theo’s irresistible chemistry had me tearing through the pages, and the depth and beauty of Jessica Joyce’s writing lingered with me long after I finished. This is a book that nestles deep into your heart and stays there.”

—Ava Wilder, author of *How to Fake It in Hollywood*

“Simultaneously escapist and deeply intimate, *You, with a View* is a love story about soulmates—both romantic and familial—and the importance of

seizing the present while honoring the past. Debut author Jessica Joyce's prose and voice shine on every page, threading her leads' simmering tension and tangible chemistry through a vividly drawn travel adventure. The result is a soul-satisfying romance about the genesis of beautiful things out of grief, and of two people discovering that what they truly seek has been there on the journey with them all along."

—Jen Devon, author of *Bend Toward the Sun*

"A stunningly emotional debut that wrapped itself around my heart from page one. Brimming with BIG GRANDPARENT ENERGY and crackling chemistry, this road trip romance is guaranteed to sweep you off your feet!"

—Amy Lea, author of *Set on You*

"If you're looking for excellent banter in your romances, look no further. This book balances big emotions with lots of tension and joy."

—*USA Today*

"Joyce's delightful debut skillfully blends love stories from two different times with a photo-ready travel tale."

—*Booklist*

"With crisp prose and twisty plotting, this romp should win Joyce many fans."

—*Publishers Weekly*

TITLES BY JESSICA JOYCE

You, with a View

The Ex Vows



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JESSICA JOYCE

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For past me,
who didn't give up,
and for future me,
who will look back on all of this and be so proud.

Prologue

I hate thinking about the way it ended, but sometimes I think about the way it began: with me walking through the door of someone else's house without knocking.

This has always been a typical move of mine, wandering latchkey kid that I was in my early years. But in every other way, the beginning was an atypical day.

When I let myself go there, I watch it in my head like a movie. I let it feel like it's happening now instead of thirteen years ago, where the real moment belongs, where fifteen-year-old me is turning the doorknob on a house I've burst into hundreds of times before. I find no resistance, because by my sophomore year of high school—when this memory takes place—my open invitation into the Cooper-Kims' home is implied.

My best friend, Adam Kim, is somewhere in here, probably still sweaty and gross from cross-country practice. At least I went home and showered.

I greet Adam's three rescue dogs, Gravy, Pop-Tart, and Dave, my ears perking at the dulcet tones of a video game played at full volume, two voices rumbling below it. The dogs trail me as I make my way to the den, the tags on their collars jingling. It's a sound as familiar as my own heartbeat.

Adam's house is warm and sun-filled, often noisy, with a lingering, faint citrus scent. The first time I walked in, something unraveled in my chest; it felt like *home*, not a place where two people lived with sometimes intertwining lives. My house is quiet and often empty, just as it was all the years between when my mom left when I was three years old and now.

The times my dad and I do sync up are great; he asks tons of questions and tells me what a great kid I am, how easy I've been, how proud he is of my grades and the extracurriculars that keep me busy. He listens to every story I can get out of my mouth, his phone facedown on the dining room table while

it buzzes and buzzes and buzzes. Eventually the phone wins, and I'm left craving more time.

It's why I've made a habit of making other people's houses my home, and why I love the Cooper-Kims' house best.

In this memory, I'm nearly to the den, wondering who Adam has over. I sincerely hope it isn't Jared; I keep telling Adam what a dick he is.

With the power of hindsight, I know what's going to happen seconds before it does, so I always hold my breath here—

Right when I turn the corner and run face-first into a broad chest. It has so little padding it makes my teeth rattle.

“Whoa,” a voice breathes above me, stirring the hairs at my temple. Warm, strong hands grip my arms to keep me upright.

I look up...and up, into a face fifteen-year-old me has never seen before.

Whoever this is, he's beautiful. He's tall (obviously) and broad-shouldered, with limbs he hasn't grown into. In this moment, I don't know that he'll fill out in a painfully attractive way—his chest will broaden to become the perfect pillow for my head. His thighs will grow just shy of thick, mouth-wateringly curved with muscle, the perfect perch for me when I sit in his lap.

But the eyes I'm looking into won't change. They'll stay that hypnotic mix of caramel and gold, rimmed in deep coffee brown and framed by sooty lashes and inky eyebrows that match the hair on his head. They'll continue to catch mine the way they are in this movie moment—like a latch hooking me, then locking us into place.

“Oh. Hello,” I say brilliantly.

His mouth pulls up, which is wide and meant for the toothy smiles I'll discover he doesn't give away easily. He's prone to quiet ones, or shy, curling ones, like he's giving me now. “Hey.”

I step back, my heart flipping from our crash and the warmth his hands have left behind on my skin. “Sorry, I didn't know Adam had someone over.”

“Never stopped you before, Woodward,” Adam calls distractedly, his eyes glued to the TV screen.

I roll mine, turning back to this stranger. “I’m that doofus’s best friend, Georgia.”

“Like the peach,” he says, his voice lifting at the end. It’s not a question, but a tentative tease. In my life, I’ve heard that joke a million times and hate it, but here, I like the way he says it, as if he knows how ridiculous it is and is in on the joke.

I grin. When I’m watching this, I think about how open my expression is, how hopeful and full of sunshine. “Good one. No one’s ever said that to me before.”

His eyes narrow, like he’s trying to figure me out. I make note of how quickly he does, a tendril of belonging curling around me when he laughs. “You’re joking.”

“Yes,” I laugh back.

He pretends to look disappointed. “So I’m *not* the first?”

“More like lucky number ninety-nine,” I shoot back, and he grins. A toothy one. “Should I call you by the number or do you have a name, too?”

“That’s Eli—*motherfucker*,” Adam shouts.

My gaze slips from the stranger—Eli Joseph Mora, I’ll find out—to Adam, whose tongue is sticking out while he furiously pounds on a game controller. A second one lies next to him, a decimated bag of Doritos next to that.

When I direct my attention back to Eli, our eyes click. I hear it in my head, feel it in my chest, both in the memory and for real. Whenever I let myself think about the beginning, I want to get out of this moment as much as I want to wallow in it.

Fifteen-year-old me smiles up at fifteen-year-old him. “Hey, Eli. I hope *you’re* not the motherfucker.”

“Not that I’m aware of,” he says. His eyes spark with amusement and other things, and the spark transfers to me, burrowing somewhere deep. It’ll wait there for years while we go from strangers to friends to best friends. It won’t catch fire until our junior year of college, when he joins me at Cal Poly after two years at community college.

“Who are you, then? Other than a stranger until”—I look down at my watch, a Fossil one I bought with the Christmas cash my dad gave me because he didn’t want to get the wrong one—“three minutes ago.”

“The new guy, I guess?” I notice his nose is sunburned along the bridge when he scrunches it. “I just moved from Denver, started at Glenlake two days ago.”

He doesn’t tell me now, but later he’ll divulge that his parents moved him and his two younger sisters to Glenlake, a city in Marin County just north of San Francisco, to live with his aunt. His dad lost his job as a mortgage broker when the economy crashed, starting a relentless financial slide until they lost their house. At fifteen, Eli’s sleeping on a pull-out in his aunt’s rec room; later, when we buy our first bed together, I talk him into splurging for a king.

I always notice the way his shoulders pull up toward his ears, maybe wondering if I’m going to ask questions. He doesn’t trust me with his heavy stuff yet, but eventually he’ll trust me with a lot of it, before we both start hiding ourselves away.

“Adam’s already got you in his clutches?” I raise my voice. “You work fast, Kim.”

Adam grins, but doesn’t spare us a glance.

Eli looks over his shoulder at his new friend, then back at me, rubbing the back of his neck. “Yeah, I think he kind of adopted me.”

“He does that,” I say, remembering that fateful day in sixth grade when Adam and I met, a month after my best friends of three years, Heather Russo and Mya Brogan, unceremoniously dropped me. Halfway into our inaugural year of middle school, the friends I thought were forever suddenly decided I was too needy, that my desire to hang out at their houses all the time was burdensome, and my occasional emotional moments were supremely irritating.

In the end, Adam saved me from my loneliness. It makes sense that he’d save Eli, too, though I don’t know yet that he’s also lonely, or that Adam’s house will become his home as much as it is mine.

“All right, Eli,” I say, looking him up and down. He’s wearing scuffed Nikes, gym shorts, and a T-shirt with a tear near the neck. I can see a sliver of collarbone pressing sharply against his golden skin, the glint of a fragile gold chain. “I guess I’m kind of adopting you, too.”

His eyes move over my face. “Probably a good idea, since I’ve already got a nickname picked out for you and everything.”

“Does Adam have one?”

“Slim Kim,” Eli says automatically, and I laugh as Adam scoffs. He’s all elbows and knees at fifteen. “Still workshopping it, though.”

It’ll morph over the years—Slim Kimmy, SK, Kiz, or Kizzy. I’ll watch him test versions of nicknames with other friends, but mine will only ever be Peach. When I eventually ask him why, he’ll tell me it’s because he knew exactly who I was to him from the start.

I glance at Adam. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I think I won the nickname portion of this adoption process.”

My chest warms at the way Eli’s grin widens. It’s an addicting feeling, knowing I’m in the middle of meeting a person I’ll get to hang on to.

Adam looks at me over Eli’s shoulder, his mouth pulling up, and I know he feels it, too: the three of us are going to be friends. Something special.

Years later Eli will tell me that he fell in love with me right then, and in this movie-like memory I always see it—how we can’t quite break eye contact, the flush along the shell of his ear when I sit next to him on the couch minutes later, the way his eyes linger on me when Adam and I bicker over control of the TV, the steady bounce of his knee. The beautiful, shy smile he gives me over the pizza we have for dinner later.

He’ll hold on to it for years, but eventually that spark will become a wildfire.

And then we’ll burn it all down.

Chapter One

Thirteen years later

This wedding is cursed

“Not again,” I mutter.

To the untrained eye, this text probably looks like a joke, or the beginning of one of those chain emails our elders get duped into forwarding to twenty of their nearest and dearest, lest they inherit multigenerational bad luck.

In actuality, it’s been Adam’s mantra for the past eight months.

Adam is the brother I never had and I’m truly honored to be along for the ride on his wedding journey. But had sixth-grade Georgia anticipated I’d be fielding forty-seven daily texts from my more-unhinged-by-the-minute best friend, I would’ve thought twice about complimenting his Hannah Montana shirt the day we met.

My Spidey senses tingle with this text, though. It hasn’t been delivered in aggressive caps lock, nor is it accompanied by a chaotic menagerie of GIFs (my kingdom for a Michael Scott alternative). Whatever has happened now might actually be an emergency.

Then again, the wedding is ten days away. At this point, anything that isn’t objectively awesome is a disaster.

I pluck my phone off my desk, typing, What’s the damage?

A bubble immediately pops up, disappears, reappears, then stops again.

“Great sign.”

It’s nearly four p.m. on Wednesday, the day before my week-long PTO for the wedding starts, and I still have half a page of unchecked boxes on my to-do list, plus a detailed While I’m Away email to draft for my boss. I can’t leave Adam hanging in his moment of need, though. What kind of best woman would I be?

No better than the largely absent best man? comes the uncharitable punchline. I slam the door on that thought. It's not like I've minded executing most of the best-people activities; it's been a godsend for multiple reasons. It's just so typical of him to—

I catch my own eye in the computer's reflection, delivering a silent message with the downward slash of my dark eyebrows: *Shut. Up.* I'd rather think about curses than anything tangentially related to the subject of Eli Mora.

Not that I believe in curses at all.

Except...deep down, I do worry that Adam's been hounded by bad vibes since he proposed to his fiancée, Grace Song, on New Year's Eve. Their plans have involved a comedy of errors that have escalated from *bummer* to *oh shit*: the wrong wedding dress ordered by the bridal salon, names misspelled on their printed wedding invitations twice, and—the one that nearly got me to believe—their wedding planner quit three months ago because his Bernedoodle had amassed such a following on social media that he was making triple his salary as her manager.

For Adam, whose natural temperament hovers somewhere near live wire, it's been a constant test of his sanity. Even Grace, who's brutally chill, the perfect emotional foil for Adam, has been fraying.

But then, she would've been fine eloping. Every new disaster probably only further solidifies the urge to book it to Vegas.

Adam's texts tumble over one another:

Georgia

Our fucking DJ

BROKE THEIR HIP

LINE DANCING AT A BACHELORETTE PARTY