

# THE RULES OF BLIND DATES

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LAUREN BLAKELY

LAUREN BLAKELY BOOKS

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## ABOUT

I have my doubts about matchmaking friends. But I agree to a blind date with a romance novelist anyway. What's the worst that can happen? She entertains me with steamy stories of happily ever afters? Looks like I'm about to find out...



## THE RULES OF BLIND DATES

By Lauren Blakely

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## MATTHEW'S STORY...

### *Matthew*

All couples seem to like to play the same game. The let's-set-up-our-single-friend one.

Nadia's been champing at the bit to play it ever since Phoebe and I split up. Tonight, I suspect she's going for the kill at the Spotted Zebra in a one-two punch.

One being her, two being her beau.

"So, Crosby and I have this idea," she begins, setting down her drink.

"Sweetheart, it's pretty much *your* idea," Crosby puts in.

"That's not true. It's definitely *our* idea," she says, chiding him.

"Nope. It's yours. I'm just going along with it," he says, stretching out on the striped couch, flashing a you-go-first grin at his woman.

I make a rolling gesture with my hand. "Serve it, Nadia. Clearly it's your idea and I've got a feeling I know what it is."

"You do?"

"I do," I say, smiling and waiting.

She rolls her eyes, then huffs out a "fine." She leans closer. "Crosby and I think you should go out with his cousin."

Crosby leans and kisses her cheek. "You do. You think he should."

"Are you saying you disagree?"

He shakes his head adamantly. "Nope. Not one bit. You're always right."

She kisses him back. "See?"

"I see he's been well-trained," I remark with a laugh.

Crosby lifts his glass. "Only way to be, man," he adds.

"In any case, I want to set you up with Rachel," she says, then tells me more about Crosby's cousin, and when Nadia's done, I have the perfect idea where to take her out on a date.

\* \* \*

I'll admit it. I've developed quite an affinity for wine and painting. It's not simply because the classes are a great way to meet women.

I don't go there to meet women.

I go to Wine and Sip in the heart of Hayes Valley for two reasons.

One, dealmaking all day long requires some serious unwinding afterward, and any man who fails to recognize the need to say *fuck it all* to work for an hour or two will burn out.

I love my job, so I don't want to burn out. Ergo, wine and painting is necessary.

Two . . . hedgehogs.

I grew up with hedgehogs as pets.

They're literally adorable.



And all I wanted as a kid was to draw Daisy and Oliver, the hedgehogs.

Small goal, but it was mine. Unfortunately, I was total shit at drawing.

Like, literally my entire life. So I decided, why not actually try to engage the right side of my brain? All day I'm completely taxing the left side, analyzing, strategizing, inking contracts.

But once a week, the right side gets the attention.

Tonight, though, I'm not going to wine and painting alone, with my paintbrush and my deliberate but still pathetic attempts to craft a hedgehog, or an otter, or a penguin onto a canvas.

I'm going on a blind date.

It's been ages.

As I get ready, I know one thing for sure—it's time to ditch the three-piece suit.

I pull on a long-sleeve shirt and a pair of jeans, run my hand through my hair, and peruse my reflection.

Since I don't look the part of a sports executive, maybe she won't worry about the way my job can take up a ton of my life.

Maybe she won't even think about it.

"Right. Trick her. Good plan," I say to my reflection, shaking my head, trying to shake off Phoebe and the past. "Or maybe, just be yourself. Put yourself out there."

I repeat Nadia's words of advice. Reminding myself that Phoebe isn't every woman.

Phoebe was Phoebe, and Rachel is Rachel.

A writer.

A romance novelist at that. Apparently, that's why she was so fixated on setting up Crosby's cousin.

Well, let's see how this blind date goes with the romance novelist.

I leave my apartment, walk the ten minutes to Wine and Sip, and then wait outside.

I'm here early. I check my watch, then scan the street for her, though I don't entirely know who I'm looking for. All I know is she wears glasses.

I half expect her to show up all frazzled, like the stereotypical heroine in a chick flick. Wearing bright patterns or paisley and a knit cap, carrying a ton of bags, dropping papers on the pavement, her eyeglasses sliding off too.

She'll be late, and she'll apologize profusely while flashing a winning smile, and I'll pick up the papers and say it's not a big deal . . .

And holy fuck.

Is that her?

If so, she's nine minutes early, and she's . . . gorgeous.

With the fog rolling behind her, a brunette wearing electric-blue glasses click-clacks down the street in black boots, jeans, and a—who the hell knows—some kind of top.

I'm pretty sure my jaw comes unhinged.

I wasn't expecting her to be beautiful.

I didn't even ask to see her photo.

All I wanted to know was if she had a big heart and liked to talk.

Nadia said yes to both. So I said yes to the blind date.

Now here is the woman with blue glasses who is dressed simply, smiling, unfrazzled, early, and utterly lovely.

"You must be Matthew," she says when she reaches me.

"And you must be Rachel," I say, trying not to grin wildly. But failing completely.

"Last time I checked," she says. "But I could be pretending to be her. How would we know? We didn't even exchange photos. Was that a terrible idea?" she asks, all playful and endearing already.

"I guess we're just going to have to take a crazy chance that we're each other's blind dates. Though I did hear you paint a fantastic giraffe, so that'll be the proof, I suppose."

She narrows her chocolate-brown eyes. "Who's spilling all my secrets?"

"Can you believe it? But maybe you want to show me this terrific giraffe."

She mimes waggling a paintbrush. "I've got a paintbrush, and I'm not afraid to use it."

\* \* \*

Thirty minutes later, we've finished our first glass of wine, and I'm admiring the neck on her animal, and she's admiring the spines on mine.

But not completely.

Actually, that's not admiration at all.

She's studying my painting like it doesn't add up. Pointing, she asks, "Do you think maybe your hedgehog looks more like a puddle?"

I pretend to be offended. "Are you kidding? That is a gorgeous hedgehog."

She sets a hand on my arm and laughs. "*Matthew.*"

My gaze drifts down to her arm, then lingers there as she leaves her hand on me, like she's imprinting warmth through my shirt onto my skin.

I'd like her to leave her hands on me.

I'd like to get my hands on her too.

I'm equal opportunity handsy.

I point to her painting. "Well, I think your giraffe neck is more like a . . ." I trail off, still distracted by her hand on me.

"Like a what? Say it. You can't hurt me. I'm like a hedgehog with spikes that protect me."

I laugh, and this might be the most I've laughed on a date. Ever. "Fine. It really looks a lot like . . . well, a sausage."

Her lips part in an O. "You're the worst for not complimenting my talent." Then she smiles at me and shrugs. "We're terrible at painting."

"That seems to be the case."

She lifts her glass. "But very good at wine?"

"I'm excellent at wine," I say, all confidence and deliberately sexy bravado.

"Well then. Want to go to a wine bar and just talk some more?"

I beam at her. "Let's ditch the giraffes and hedgehogs."

"It's so sexy when you talk about oddly shaped animals."

I lower my voice to a dirty rumble, playing up the phone sex voice. "*Penguins. Foxes. Squirrels.*"

"Ooh, yes, tell me more, tell me more. It's all sexy in your accent."

\* \* \*

Three hours later, we're still talking at the wine bar.

We talk about work, and the city, and music and family. "I'm glad you love your job," she says.

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"I love mine. I'd only want to be with someone who also loved his job. I think it's a great thing."

"I can't tell you how fantastic it is to hear that," I say, relieved, delighted, even.

"How fantastic?" she asks, all playful and flirty.

"Utterly, completely, thoroughly fantastic."

She smiles, sets her hand on my arm again, and says, "Good. Because it's all true."

And this might be one of those dates that's too good to be true.

At least I think it might be. I haven't had any dates like that.

Since we're getting on so well, I decide to go for it. To ask the important question. "Rachel, level with me. Is this date too good to be true?"

She narrows her brows. "Well, if I were writing a romance novel about this date, it would end with us discovering you're my boss, or I'm your boss, or you're secretly buying my business, or I'm secretly buying yours. Or maybe my brother doesn't want me to date you because you're a player, or perhaps I have amnesia and can't remember you tomorrow. Or the other option is I also own a tattoo shop and you just opened the competing one next door, and now we're mortal enemy rival ink shop owners."

I blink. Amazed. A little turned on, too, by how fast her brain works.

I'm more amazed at how quickly this connection between us is crackling with electricity.

With spark.

With desire.

I clear my throat. Adopt a serious expression. "Well, I suppose now is the time to tell you about my secret life as a tattoo shop owner. And my nefarious plans to buy your business. Thus, we clearly can't date."

She frowns. "I'm sad. First time I don't want my life to be like one of my novels."

My heart thumps harder. "So if this were your book, what would happen next?"

She leans in closer, the jasmine scent of her hair lingering near my nose. "We'd kiss."

Oh, do I ever like her creative mind. So I pick up the thread.

"But then I discover you're my long-lost . . . ah, fuck it."

I lift a hand to her face, cup her cheek, and lean in.

I pause when I'm inches away from her gorgeous pink lips, and continue the story in the only direction I want the night to go. "And the kiss wouldn't be too good to be true. It would just be so damn good."

I lock eyes with her, savoring the flickers of desire in her brown irises, enjoying the flush of her skin.

Her breath hitches. "It absolutely would."

I brush my lips to hers, gentle at first, a tease of a kiss.

She gasps, a sexy murmur that sends sparks racing across my skin and makes me wrap a hand more tightly in her hair, hauling her closer, kissing her a little harder, a little greedier.

I taste her lips and get to know the flavor of her kiss.

A little like wine and lip gloss, fantastic first dates and the possibility of even better second ones.

When I break the kiss, I make sure of the latter.

"Would you like to go out with me this weekend?"

"I would love to."

"But would that ruin the plot of your next novel?"

She shakes her head, grinning like she's as giddy as I am about seeing each other again. "In this case, I don't want life to imitate art. I just want to see you again, Matthew."

That's what we do that weekend, and a few days later, and the next one, and the next.

Because I'm learning that putting yourself out there again is worth it.

Some first dates aren't too good to be true.

They're true and real, and they become everything I could ever want.

Many months later, we go to Crosby and Nadia's wedding together, and as we dance, I have a feeling that we're going to be dancing together for a long time.

Maybe soon just like they are.

Just good and true.

THE END

Want more sexy, swoony romances? Check out all the other titles in the Rules of Love series!





## CONTACT

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