

ELLORA'S CAVE

*Blush*

GOODBYE BLUES,  
HELLO LOVE

*Christie Walker Bos*

SCINTILLATING  
SAMPLES

## Goodbye Blues, Hello Love

Christie Walker Bos

Blues guitar player Sean has little to sing about. While women love him when he's performing, once they discover his day job—garbage man—they dump him quicker than trash on collection day. Kaylee, meanwhile, has been proposed to more than most women. Too bad the men doing the asking are residents of the nursing home in which she works.

Enter Rose, Amelia and Gwendolin, Sean's new neighbors. The elderly busybodies have a knack for matchmaking and they've decided Sean and Kaylee are next—whether they like it or not!

*Note: Read about Rose, Amelia and Gwen's first foray into matchmaking in Getting Back to Delaney.*

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Goodbye Blues, Hello Love

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# *GOODBYE BLUES, HELLO LOVE*

Christie Walker Bos

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## Chapter One

From the safety of the hallway, Rose Ferguson paused to listen. Not hearing a thing, which at seventy-five didn't necessarily mean anything, she took a quick peek into the living room. Finding no one there, she walked with hurried steps to the overstuffed chair by the side window. She knelt on the soft seat cushion and rested her arms on the chair back.

She looked around one more time before carefully pulling back the white lace curtain. From her vantage point she had a clear view of the house next door and the moving van parked at the curb. A solitary young man was making a trip from the van, up the porch steps, across the patio deck and into the pistachio green house with the forest green trim. Rose watched for ten minutes as her new neighbor carried in one box after another.

*Boring*, she thought. You couldn't tell anything about a person from a bunch of boxes. "Where's the furniture?" she asked out loud. Maybe he was waiting for his friends to arrive before moving the larger items.

It was a typical June day in Venice Beach. Even though it was almost noon, the morning fog still lingered, making it cool and damp. But as Rose continued to watch, the sun began to win its battle against the clouds, opening up to patches of pale blue sky.

Her neighbor must have worked up a sweat because he pulled off his t-shirt and used it to wipe his face.

"Oh my," Rose stuttered, her cheeks flushing a pale red as she stared at the broad shoulders and the flat stomach of her young neighbor.

She looked around the living room once more, making sure no one had snuck up behind her before returning her attention to the sight of an exposed upper body of a thirty-something-year-old male.

*I may be old but I'm not dead*, she thought and let a giggle escape her lips.

The sun broke through the last of the fog as the young man stared up at the expanding opening appearing between the clouds. Rose watched as he walked to the cab of the truck, opened the door and leaned inside. The view of her neighbor's jean-covered backside caused Rose to giggle once more. When he emerged, he was wearing a pair of sunglasses and holding a beer. Rose watched as he ambled over to his porch steps on long legs, giving her plenty of time to check out the defined muscles of his back.

Rose sighed. The young man reminded her of another young man she'd fallen in love with over fifty years ago.

While he drank his beer, the man surveyed his surroundings, eventually spotting Rose's window and the pulled-back curtain. Rose let the curtain drop into place, spun around and flopped into the chair, adrenaline coursing through her veins.

After letting her racing pulse return to normal, she dared to look again only to find the young man gone. The front door was still wide open and Rose could see his beer sitting on the top of the fence post. Movement at the back of the truck caught her eye. Backing down the ramp, her neighbor had a green couch strapped to a moving dolly. He pulled the couch across the sidewalk then up the four steps, one at a time, making a clunking sound loud enough for Rose to hear.

"My, what a strong young man," Rose said to no one but herself.

Several minutes later he returned, stopping at the fence post for a swig of his beer before disappearing back into the truck. Moments later he emerged with a floor lamp in one hand and a large plant in a '70s macramé hanger in the other.

"Now it's getting interesting."

She watched several more trips—an old blue chair, a maple coffee table, an oak end table, several mismatched dining room chairs and a round pine kitchen table.

Nothing matched.

*This boy must shop at thrift stores*, she thought as she watched him carry in a burgundy easy chair.

The sound of the back door closing had Rose spinning around and dropping into the chair. She wished she had a magazine or book handy so she could pretend to be reading. Rose looked up expectantly at the hallway door and was relieved to find not her sister, Amelia, but the tall, slender figure of Gwen.

“Oh, it’s only you,” Rose sighed.

“Well, that’s a fine how-do-you-do,” Gwen snapped without anger in her voice, as she took in the scene—Rose sitting alone in the living room by the window. “What’s going on?” she asked in a conspiratorial whisper, her crystalline blue eyes twinkling with mischief.

“We have a new neighbor,” Rose said with the glee of a five-year-old who had just been given a puppy.

“I saw the moving van as I drove past. Anything interesting? Plants, perhaps?” Gwen asked.

“He carried in a large potted-something in an old macramé hanger,” Rose answered before resuming her kneeling position on the chair and pulling back the curtain.

“Did the ‘potted-something’ look healthy or will it be needing some of my grow juice?” Gwen moved in closer and looked out the window.

“It looked fine,” Rose said, slightly annoyed at Gwen’s preoccupation with plants. “Don’t you want to know about the boy?”

“The boy?”

“The owner of the potted-something. He’s really quite—”



Emerging from the back of the truck, the sandy-haired, shirtless “boy” was carrying a guitar case in each hand.

“Oh,” Gwen exclaimed as she watched him take the porch steps two at a time with ease. “I see what you mean. Much more interesting than plants.”

Absorbed in watching the neighbor carry in another guitar, a couple amplifiers and mike stands, Gwen and Rose didn’t hear the back door open. Amelia, Rose’s fraternal twin and older sister by ten minutes, stood silently in the hall doorway, watching her sister and best friend behaving like a couple of teenagers.

“What,” Amelia barked, causing Rose to spin and drop into the chair with a gasp, “are you two doing at that window?”

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph!” Rose shrieked. “Are you trying to give me a heart attack?” Rose held her hand to her chest, her round cheeks flushed with excitement.

Gwen, on the other hand, gave Amelia an annoyed look and turned back to the window, replying casually, “We have a new neighbor, a young man this time.”

“Yes, I gathered that,” Amelia said dryly, moving next to Gwen at the window.

Not fooled by Amelia’s act of indifference, Gwen pulled the curtain aside a little farther so Amelia could watch as the young man took another trip from the van to the house with a fourth guitar.

“Nice,” Amelia said, as his tanned back glistened in the now-bright sunlight.

Gwen squinted her eyes and cocked her head in a question to Amelia.

“It’s nice that he’s a *musician*,” she said, emphasizing the word and smiling innocently at Gwen.

“That *is* nice,” Rose agreed. “Another artist is moving in, although I do miss Delaney.” Rose shook her head, sending her curly gray hair bouncing.

“We all do, dear.” Amelia patted her sister on the shoulder. “But you can visit her at the gallery anytime.”

"Right, but it's not the same," Rose sighed, making it apparent that she missed the young woman who had been a part of their lives for over a year.

"Of course you're right," Amelia agreed. "But now we have a new neighbor to look after. Maybe he would like some of your homemade cookies."

"I don't know. He's drinking beer. Chocolate chip cookies and beer doesn't go together."

Gwen watched as the young man closed up the back of the moving van and climbed into the cab. "He's done," she announced before letting the curtain fall back into place.

Rose was sitting in the chair, her arms crossed under her pillowy breasts, a frown creasing her usually smiling face. Gwen took one look at her and knew she was trying to come up with something she could make for the new neighbor.

"Why don't you make him that tortilla casserole with corn, cheese and hamburger? I'm sure he'd appreciate a home-cooked meal and it would go wonderfully with beer," Gwen suggested.

Rose lit right up. "Why, that would be perfect. I have two ripe avocados, so I can make guacamole as well."

Rose sprang up from her seat and gave Gwen a hug. "It's perfect," Rose sang out before disappearing down the hallway to the kitchen.

Gwen turned to Amelia. "Now all is right in the world."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sean started the engine of the moving van but didn't pull away from the curb. He looked out the passenger window at his new home, a definite improvement over his apartment. Strange as it sounded, his apartment had been too close to the beach. He had picked it exactly for that reason, only to find out during his first summer that living a block from the beach in Venice meant you were inundated by millions of visitors each

year. Parking was a nightmare, the noise was constant and the trash... Don't get him started on the slovenly habits of the human race.

Looking at the cottage-style house with the forest green trim and bright red door made Sean smile. This felt like home. Still in Venice Beach but far enough away from the ocean to feel like a different city, the neighborhood was made up of homes within a triangle of land created by the intersections of Andalusia and Cabrillo avenues and Altair Place. Each was exactly the same size and shape, with different exterior paint and fire-engine red front doors.

While he would have preferred a white or pale yellow house like his neighbors', he considered himself lucky to get into the neighborhood at all. Once part of the "triangle community", people rarely moved.

He glanced at the yellow house next door where he'd seen a plump, round face framed with gray curly hair peering out the window. The curtain was back in place now and whoever had been watching him had moved away from the window.

*Looks like I have a nosy grandmother living next door,* he thought. Just once, he'd like to have a hot, young neighbor with deep blue eyes that sparkled and danced and a voice like the soft, low moan of a sax.

Sean put the van in gear. "And she'd think this blues-playin' garbage man was the sexiest guy on the planet," he said out loud, and then laughed. It even sounded ridiculous to him.

Pulling out onto the street, Sean used one hand to twist the radio knob until he came to KKJZ, L.A.'s jazz and blues station. The sultry voice of Ethel Waters singing *His Eye is on the Sparrow* filled the cab as Sean maneuvered the vehicle onto Venice Boulevard.

"Dear God," Sean whispered in awe. "If she had a voice like that, she could have any color eyes at all.

"Maybe I've been too picky," Sean said as he headed north to return the van. But he knew that wasn't it at all. There had been several women who had caught his eye.

When he was onstage with the band, playing lead guitar, women buzzed around him like moths to the flame. It was the aura of playing in a band, playing the guitar. Women couldn't get enough of it. He was convinced that if all he did was play in a blues band, he'd have no problem finding a woman. Unfortunately, he'd starve to death and be homeless if his band paychecks were his only income. The phrase "don't quit your day job" was custom-made for struggling musicians – and *his* day job was sanitary collection.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Jenkins took extra care dressing this morning, choosing a pale blue chambray shirt that would bring out the color of his eyes. He must have run the comb through his hair a dozen times trying to find just the right style – straight back, part on the left, part on the right – but nothing seemed to hide the fact that he had less hair than he used to. Sighing heavily, he gave up, but not before practicing a quick smile in the bathroom mirror.

He couldn't believe he was going to finally ask her. The small ring in his pocket felt like a millstone and he patted his pants until he could feel its shape through the fabric. He was ready. Now all he had to do was wait. He looked at the clock on his dresser – eight forty-five. Fifteen more minutes until the morning shift change. Mr. Jenkins' sigh rattled through his lungs as he lowered himself into the blue chair next to the window and prepared to wait. He hoped he didn't lose his nerve.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kaylee pulled her red 1965 Volkswagen Beetle into the parking lot and parked between her boss's Hummer and a large Suburban. When she stepped out of her car she felt like she had arrived in the land of giants, with her small vehicle dwarfed by the behemoths on either side. She couldn't suppress the smile that crept to her face at the knowledge that her Bug got thirty miles per gallon compared to the Hummer's eight or the Suburban's twelve.

"Size does matter," she said and then laughed at her own joke as she pushed down the manual door lock and closed the door. Kaylee crossed the small parking lot to the double glass front doors with a smile on her face. She waved to Carlos, who was already busy trimming the hedges with huge loppers.

"*Hola*, Miss Kaylee," Carlos called out without missing a chop.

"*Hola*," Kaylee replied before opening the door and stepping inside.

The reception desk was manned by Brenda, who gave her a barely there nod of recognition before returning her attention to the latest gossip rag and pushing a concealed button under her desk to allow Kaylee to enter the facility.

Once inside, it was like arriving at a family reunion. Greetings rang out from various staff members as she made her way to the employee lounge. The lounge was abuzz as the night shift prepared to leave and the morning shift started their day.

"How'd it go last night?" Kaylee asked Carl, a tall black man with bodybuilder muscles and the smile of a child.

"It was pretty quiet," Carl replied in a silky, soft voice that was shocking only in its contrast to his body. "Mrs. Jaworski was doing a lot of coughing but settled down around two, so she'll probably be a bit grouchy today."

"And how would that be different from any other day." Kaylee winked at Carl.

Carl shrugged. "Mrs. Summerland was up to her usual tricks, buzzing me every half hour to tell me she was sure she was dying of some new ailment she'd found online." Carl pulled a black leather jacket over his enormous arms and grabbed a motorcycle helmet out of his locker. "One day, I swear I'm going to take her computer and toss it in the Dumpster."

"I thought it was a great idea when her grandson brought it in for her. It's making it easy for her to stay connected with her children and grandchildren. Most of our residents want nothing to do with computers, but Mrs. Summerland has taken to it like a fish to water," Kaylee said as she unzipped her gray sweatshirt and replaced it with a blue uniform shirt that hid her curves with its unflattering straight lines.

"I thought so too, until she discovered Google. Now she has unlimited access to the 'disease of the month' club. No matter the list of symptoms, she's convinced she's got it...everything from AIDS to zoonosis."

"Zoonosis. What's that?" Kaylee asked as she pulled her wavy honey brown hair into a high ponytail.

"You don't want to know," Carl said with a shudder, making Kaylee laugh. "Oh, before I forget," Carl continued. "You should check in on Mr. Jenkins first thing before you see anyone else."

Carl sounded serious.

"Is something wrong?" Kaylee asked, her voice going up an octave in concern.

"I think he's fine, but he was highly agitated all last night. Kept asking me to check the roster to make sure you were on today." Carl gave her a gentle nudge with his elbow and a wink.

Kaylee shook her head. "Not Mr. Jenkins too?"

"I'm afraid so." Carl closed his locker and started to leave, pausing at the door. "Seriously...you should go see him right now before the suspense kills him."

Kaylee made a shooing motion with her hand to Carl. "I will. I will."

"That's what you get for being so nice to them," Carl laughed.

Minutes later, Kaylee was walking down the hallway to room 57. She rapped on the door lightly with her knuckles and waited for Mr. Jenkins to open up. The Sunset Gables Assisted Living complex provided services somewhere between what you'd expect in a retirement community and a nursing home—balancing respect for the residents' privacy with their personal safety. While Kaylee had a master key to every room, she'd never think of using it unless it was an emergency and so she stood outside number 57 and waited. The sound of heavy footsteps on the other side let her know Mr. Jenkins had heard her knock and was coming...if somewhat slowly.

Patience was Kaylee's middle name—literally. She was named Kaylee Patience Abernathy. It was a good thing, too, since anyone who didn't possess a healthy dose of patience mixed with a generous sense of humor wouldn't last long at Sunset Gables.

Finally a voice asked from behind the door, "Who is it?"

Knowing Mr. Jenkins was a bit hard of hearing, Kaylee moved in close and said in a loud voice, "It's Kaylee."

The door opened immediately.

Mr. Jenkins held the door open. Pressing himself against the wall, he gestured with a sweeping motion of his arm for Kaylee to come in.

The rules required Kaylee to ask, "Would you like me to come in, Mr. Jenkins?" even though it was obvious he did.

"Yes, yes, by all means. Come in, Kaylee."

Kaylee walked past Mr. Jenkins but not without taking in his combed hair and blue shirt.

*Oh dear*, she thought. This was going to be a bad one.

"Would you like to take a seat? Can I make you some tea?" Mr. Jenkins asked.

"I'm sorry. I can't stay. I've just started my shift. Carl mentioned you wanted to see me so I came here first."

She wished she could make this easier on him but knew it was going to be painful for both of them regardless. She watched as Mr. Jenkins began to pace back and forth, if you could call it that, more of a shuffle to the left and a shuffle to the right, all the while lightly slapping his right pant pocket. Finally he stopped.

"Please, Kaylee. Could you sit down? It would make what I have to tell you so much easier."

"Okay, but I really need to start my rounds," she said as she took a seat in a blue chair.

Mr. Jenkins turned away for a moment and Kaylee watched as he pulled something out of his pocket.

*Oh no, not a ring, she thought.*

By the time Mr. Jenkins turned around, Kaylee made sure she had a pleasant, although neutral, look on her face. Then Mr. Jenkins did a most unexpected thing. Using the bed for balance, he lowered himself down on one knee before her. Considering Mr. Jenkins was seventy-seven and he'd had dual knee replacement surgery only six months ago, this was quite a feat.

Kaylee was more than a little concerned. "Mr. Jenkins. What are you doing?"

Instead of answering, he presented her with a solitaire diamond ring. "Would you do me the great honor of marrying me, Kaylee?" His bent knee was shaking with the effort of keeping him upright and his hand had a death grip on the bedspread.

"Oh Mr. Jenkins," Kaylee said gently, touched by his supreme effort.

"I know I'm a little older than you are..."

*Try forty-five years older, she thought.*

"But I'm still healthy and I have money...lots of money. You wouldn't have to work at this awful place anymore. I would buy you a house and we could —"

Kaylee lightly touched her finger to Mr. Jenkins' lips. He froze at the tender touch, his shaking coming to a halt as well.

"Mr. Jenkins, you are so sweet," she began.

"Call me Henry —"

"And it would be an honor and a privilege to marry such a wonderful man..."

She saw the flicker of hope burn brightly in his eyes. This was the part she hated the most, seeing the light disappear, knowing she was the one extinguishing the flame.

"But I can't marry you, Henry," she said, her voice deep and warm, hoping her tone would soften the blow.

"But why not? Is it because I'm too old?"



"You're not too old, Mr. Jenkins —"

"Henry, call me Henry."

"You're not too old, Henry."

"Then why, Kaylee? Why?"

"I'm in love with someone else," Kaylee said, dropping her eyes to the floor.

"What?" Mr. Jenkins's leg started shaking violently and Kaylee jumped up and grabbed hold of his arm before he tipped over.

With a bit of effort, she helped him to his feet and sat him on the edge of the bed.

When he had caught his breath, he said, "I bet it's old man Schmidt down the hall in number 43. Don't think I haven't seen how he looks at you, the old coot. Why, he must be eighty-five years old!"

"It's not Mr. Schmidt, or anyone here, for that matter," she said, trying to calm him.

She glanced past him at his clock on the dresser. It was ten after nine. She needed to wrap this up and start her rounds.

"I'm extremely flattered that you would ask me to marry you and getting down on one knee was very impressive."

"I even had a ring, a real ring." Mr. Jenkins held it out to Kaylee, who took it and held it up to the light coming in through the window.

The facets of the diamond divided the light into the colors of the rainbow. How she longed for just such a ring. "It's a beautiful ring, Mr. Jenkins. Truly it is. Someday, you're going to make a special woman very happy."

"Someday? Ha. How many 'somedays' do you think I have left?" Mr. Jenkins plucked the ring back from Kaylee and stuffed it into his pocket. "How will I ever meet anyone when I'm stuck in this place?" he grumbled. "There are only old people here."

*I feel exactly the same way,* Kaylee thought, but said instead, "What about Mrs. Whitley in 37? I've noticed she likes to sit near you at bingo."

"That old biddy...she must be at least seventy." Mr. Jenkins crossed his arms tightly and his features hardened.

Kaylee knew that expression. She received the same stubborn look from him whenever she suggested he join one of the Gables' activity groups. Kaylee bent down and kissed Mr. Jenkins lightly on the top of his forehead.

"I really was flattered by your proposal," she whispered in his ear before straightening up. "I'll see you in the dining hall for breakfast?"

Mr. Jenkins shook his head no.

"All right. Maybe for lunch then," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder before turning for the door.

As she was turning the knob, Mr. Jenkins called her name. When she turned around, his arms were no longer crossed and his facial expression had relaxed.

"Yes, Mr. Jenkins?"

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone about..."

"Of course not. This will be our little secret." She gave him a reassuring smile before turning the handle and opening the door. Before closing it, she turned back and said, "You really should come down for breakfast. It's the —"

"Most important meal of the day. Yes, yes. I know."

"Okay then. I'll see you around, Mr. Jenkins," and she pulled the door shut behind her.

Kaylee took a minute to regroup. This was the third proposal of marriage this month. While she knew it was difficult for these men, it was no walk in the park for her either. Sometimes they surprised her with a sudden confession of love followed quickly by "Will you marry me?" Other times she was warned by a fellow staff member and was better prepared to let them down as gently as possible.

Today's proposal was especially difficult, what with Mr. Jenkins dropping to one knee and pulling out a ring. The very sight of that sparkling diamond stirred up

memories of a proposal from long ago. She'd been seventeen and the ring was made of plastic, but had meant more to her than gold and diamonds.

His name was Jeremy and they were going to run away together and get married in Vegas. Somewhere in the desert between Barstow and Baker, the car broke down. When the tow truck arrived, they had to make a choice...Barstow, which was back the way they'd come, or Baker, one step closer to Vegas. They chose Barstow since there were more options for auto repair and cheap hotels. Three days later, the car was fixed and they barely had enough money to limp back home. After that, the summer seemed to swallow them up and the next thing they knew it was September and school had started. The red-hot love of summer had cooled in the fall, and by Christmas break Jeremy and she were dating different people.

Out of the entire experience, what stuck with her even today was how she had felt when Jeremy had gotten down on one knee, pulled that silly ring out of his pocket and said the words, "Will you marry me?"

It was magical.

She hadn't been proposed to since, unless one counted the proposals from the residents of Sunset Gables – which of course she didn't.

The opening of a door across the hall brought Kaylee's thoughts back to the present. Mrs. Peterson was pushing her walker through the door, banging the door jam and cursing under her breath before finally making it through.

When she looked up and saw Kaylee, she said, "Don't get old, Kaylee. It sucks!" before turning and shuffling down the hall to the dining room.

*Being young is no picnic either,* she thought, before heading to the dining room herself.

## **Chapter Two**

Sitting on his front porch, eyes closed, feet resting on the steps, Sean was playing a rhythmic blues progression on his twelve-string guitar. His mind was conjuring up an image of a blue-eyed angel belting out a soulful melody when a soft voice floated out of nowhere, causing his eyes to fly open.

“That’s lovely.”

A short, soft woman with gray springy hair stood at the foot of his porch steps.

“Ah...thank you,” he managed, sounding a bit confused.

“I’m Rose, your neighbor.” She tilted her head to the left to indicate the house next door.

Sean remembered the round face he’d seen spying on him from the window earlier that day – the spying grandmother.

“I’m Sean.” He gave her a genuine smile. She reminded him of one of Sleeping Beauty’s fairy godmothers from the Disney movie. He would never admit it, but he loved that movie. Growing up, he’d watch the movie with his baby sister all the time.

“I made you a casserole and some guacamole for dinner tonight. Usually I welcome people to the neighborhood with cookies but we all thought a Mexican meal would go better with your beer.” She thrust a foil-covered pan at him, a cup of guacamole balanced on top.

Sean put his guitar aside, took the meal from Rose and set it on the porch. “So who is ‘we’?”

Her hands empty, Rose could now gesture freely and pointed at the house next door. “My twin sister Amelia and our best friend Gwen and myself. We’ve lived in this

neighborhood for over fifteen years. Did you know the woman who rented this place before you was an artist as well?"

Sean could only shake his head "no" because Rose hadn't paused long enough for him to answer.

"Her name was Delaney. I mean, of course her name is *still* Delaney, she didn't die or anything like that. She moved. She owns a gallery down on Abbot Kinney." Rose pointed down the street in the direction of Venice's art district. "She weaves the most amazing wall art you've ever seen. The colors and textures will take your breath away. We loved living next door to an artist and now we have a musician." She clasped her hands together and pressed them to her soft bosom. "I hope you don't mind if we keep our window open so we can hear you play?"

Sean barely got out the words, "Of course not," before she hurried on. He wondered when she would stop to catch her breath.

"We love music, especially live music. And the blues..." Rose waved a hand in the air. "That's Amelia's favorite. Do you know Amelia has every Big Jack Johnson record ever made? Oh, of course you don't. You haven't met her yet," Rose laughed.

Sean saw movement over Rose's shoulder and looked up to find another woman coming through his gate. She was petite, with straight salt-and-pepper hair that stopped abruptly at her shoulders and bangs that made a line across the top of her eyebrows. While she looked different from Rose, there were enough similarities for him to guess this was Rose's twin sister, Amelia.

"Rose," she blurted out with an authoritative voice.

Rose jumped. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph," she shrieked.

"I thought you were going to drop off the casserole and come right home. I'm sure our neighbor doesn't want to be bothered. He needs time to settle in."

Sean saw the color rising up Rose's neck and came to her rescue. "Rose wasn't bothering me. We were having a conversation about the blues. She tells me you're a Big Jack Johnson fan."

Calling it a conversation was a bit of a stretch but the smile of relief on Rose's face told him he'd said exactly the right thing.

"I've collected all his albums for as long as I can remember —"

"Which could be last week," Rose whispered to Sean.

If Amelia heard, she didn't let on. "If you ask me, he's a musical genius."

"Vinyl." Sean whistled. "Now that's impressive."

"Yes, and two of them are autographed," Rose added.

"Real collector's items, I imagine. Probably worth a pretty penny," Sean nodded.

"But I'd never sell them."

"Of course not," Sean agreed.

"We'd better let you go," Rose interjected. "Wouldn't want to keep you from dinner. I'm sure you're starving after moving. If you put the casserole in the oven at three hundred fifty degrees for thirty minutes, it should be perfect."

"Okay, thanks, Rose." Sean stood up. "Nice meeting you two. Maybe you'd like to come hear our band sometime, since you like live music. We can't hold a candle to Johnson but we give it our best."

Sean picked up the casserole in one hand, his guitar in the other.

"That would be delightful," Amelia gushed like a regular groupie.

Rose shook her head in disgust and pulled Amelia by the sleeve. "Come on."

Sean could hear Rose chastising her sister as they walked down the garden path to the gate that separated his yard from the sidewalk.

"I don't know why you had to come over and butt in. I was doing fine before you showed up."

"Really?" Amelia snapped back. "From what I heard, you were doing all the talking and that poor boy couldn't get a word in if he'd had a crowbar."

"Oh, so you were spying on me, were you?" Rose's voice went up an octave.

"Not spying. I happened to be on our front porch."

"Happened? Ha!" Rose spit out.

"Besides, you were supposed to find out if he's married or has a girlfriend," Sean heard Amelia say as they opened their garden gate and headed up the path to their porch stairs.

Sean couldn't help himself. "Not married. No girlfriend," he called out, which made the sisters' heads spin around in astonishment.

"But if you know someone with blue eyes and a voice like Billie Holiday's, please send her right over."

The two women looked at each other in surprise before rushing up their porch steps and disappearing into the house, leaving Sean with a smile on his face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Parking the car in the garage, Gwen entered the house through the back door and was immediately aware of raised voices coming from the living room. She set her purse on the kitchen table and walked down the hall and into the middle of a heated argument.

"Tell me one thing you found out about him. One," Amelia was demanding.

"He's not married and doesn't have a girlfriend," Rose said, crossing her arms and nodding as if to say, "so there".

"Oh no. You didn't find that out. He told us that later." Amelia crossed her arms and nodded *her* head, as if to prove *her* point.

"That's enough." Gwen stepped in between them. "Who are you two fighting over? Did you meet some hot old seventy-year-old or something?"

The sisters stopped glaring at each other and turned on Gwen in unison. "Of course not," they both said at the same time. "It's Sean."

Gwen looked perplexed.

"Sean," Rose repeated, thrusting her thumb in the direction of the new neighbor's house.

"Our new blues-playing neighbor," Amelia added.

"The blues...that's your favorite music." Gwen made it sound as if it meant something more.

"And what if it is?" Amelia tilted her nose in the air. "It doesn't mean anything."

Gwen had heard enough.

"Okay girls. You're acting like ten-year-olds. The important thing here is that somehow, in the midst of all this nonsense, you managed to find out a few important things, like he's single. Right?"

"Right," Amelia agreed.

"And he asked us to find him a girl with blue eyes who sings like Holiday," Rose added.

"Is that so?"

Both women nodded with enthusiasm.

"That's very interesting." Gwen's brow furrowed in thought as she tapped a finger to her lips.

Rose and Amelia mirrored her movement.

"What's interesting?" Rose wanted to know.

Instead of answering her, Gwen said, "Guess where I was this afternoon?"



## Chapter Three

Kaylee pulled her Beetle into a parking spot reserved for compact cars and shut off the engine. She didn't open the door but sat in the dark trying to figure out how Gwen had talked her into coming. As if it weren't bad enough that she spent Monday through Friday hanging out with the geriatric crowd, now she was going to voluntarily spend her Saturday night with Rose, Amelia and Gwen at a local coffee shop.

*I have no life.*

She had fallen for the classic trap. Gwen had been coming into Sunset Gables once a week to visit Sylvia, an eighty-seven-year-old fireball who'd recently lost her last living relative. Apparently Sylvia and Gwen had met back when Gwen owned a health food store. Sylvia blamed Gwen's herbs and vitamins for her longevity and regularly let everyone know about it loud and clear right before swallowing a rainbow of supplements.

Gwen had shown up for her Sunday visit as usual. She should have known something was up by the way she'd approached her and started a casual conversation about her job, which led to a question about whether or not her *boyfriend* minded her working so much.

When she'd told Gwen she didn't have a boyfriend, a smile brightened Gwen's face and all she said was, "Oh, that's too bad," before spinning around and heading for Sylvia's room, her long gray braid swinging back and forth across her back.

Two hours later, she'd forgotten all about it. So she wasn't on guard when Gwen reappeared and asked her what she was doing the following Saturday night.

Without thinking she'd said, "Nothing." And that's how she found herself sitting outside Blake's Beanery on a Saturday night, preparing to spend the evening with three women in their seventies.

Kaylee looked in her rearview mirror. She was about to put on a fresh layer of lip gloss but shook her head.

*Why bother?*

"I should be on a hot date," she said to her reflection and then she laughed.

*Who am I kidding? I haven't been on a hot date since...who can say?*

She opened the car door and climbed out. The air smelled like salt with a splash of seaweed and she inhaled deeply.

"Hopefully the music will be decent," she sighed before locking the door and walking across the parking lot.

Blake's was packed. It was much more than a coffee house. It was a social magnet for the performance arts, with live music, poetry readings and even the occasional one-act play. She stood inside the front door, off to the side, waiting for her eyes to adjust as she took in the scene. Mismatched sofas and an assortment of chairs were arranged in small groups, all facing a wooden stage with a drum set and a few amplifiers and mikes. Behind the stage, hanging off a brass curtain rod, was a burgundy velvet drape that created a backdrop for the stage. The rest of the walls in the coffee shop were covered with framed, signed photographs of various musical groups and acts, some famous, most yet to be discovered.

The coffee bar was off to the right with the majority of the light coming from the four lamps that hung over the counter. Rusty, red wall sconces cast pools of warm light around the perimeter and a single spotlight shone down on a wooden stool, highlighting a brown felt fedora as if it were a piece of art.

The place was filled with a wide age range of people—from teenagers pretending they were at a hip bar, to baby boomers enjoying a cup of coffee and intense conversation. The oldest people in the room were Rose and Amelia, who were standing and waving wildly at her.

*Great.*

Locking her smile in place, Kaylee made her way around a group of people her own age to the sofa sitting directly in front of the stage.

Amelia and Rose each gave her an all-embracing hug before motioning her to sit between them on the couch.

"Where's Gwen?" Kaylee wondered out loud.

"She's in line buying coffee. She's getting you one too," Rose told her. "I hope that's all right?"

"Yes, that's fine. Thanks."

Kaylee took her seat in the middle of the couch with Rose and Amelia dropping down on either side. Gwen showed up seconds later with four mugs of coffee on a tray. She placed the tray on the coffee table in front of them.

"Hi Kaylee. Glad you could make it."

"Hi Gwen." Kaylee smiled, wondering what the older woman was up to. She'd never invited her to anything before. She barely even knew her. Something was definitely up. Kaylee watched as Gwen passed out the coffee, the picture of innocence.

Speaking in an extra-cheerful voice, Gwen announced each cup of coffee. "Black for you, Amelia. Cream and two sugars for you, Rose." Turning to Kaylee she said, "I made yours black since I didn't know, but brought the cream and sugar just in case." Gwen smiled, full of sweetness and light.

Kaylee forced herself to match Gwen's smile with one of her own.

*I'll play along for now, she thought as she reached for her coffee, sneaking a peek at her watch. You've got an hour and then I'm out of here.*

As she lifted the mug to her lips, she saw Amelia reach into an oversized handbag on the floor between them and pull out a silver flask.

Amelia looked up and caught Kaylee staring at her in amazement. She leaned forward to look past Kaylee at Rose. Kaylee turned to look at Rose, who was watching

the crowd. When Kaylee turned back, Amelia was pouring what looked like cream into her coffee. Then she leaned into Kaylee and whispered, "Baileys. Want some?"

"Really?" Kaylee couldn't believe this sweet-looking grandmother had smuggled alcohol into the coffee shop.

Amelia nodded and winked.

Kaylee placed her mug next to Amelia's. Taking a quick look around to make sure no one was watching, Amelia poured a healthy shot of Baileys into Kaylee's mug before capping the flask and slipping it back into her bag.

Picking up her mug, Amelia said, "Cheers."

Kaylee joined her in the toast. The evening had taken a small turn for the better.

Hearing the toast and not wanting to be left out, Rose lifted her coffee mug as well. "To a wonderful evening of music," Rose added.

"I hope you like the blues," Gwen said before taking her seat in a chair next to the couch.

*Maybe you should have asked me that before you tricked me into coming,* Kaylee thought without anger as the creamy coffee slid down her throat and began to warm her tummy.

Movement on stage turned Kaylee's attention to a waif-thin girl with long brown hair who had walked up to the mike.

"Welcome to Blake's Beanery. Tonight you're in for a real treat." Her deep, rich voice didn't match her barely there body. "I call them a three-piece wonder but you can call them Midnight Blues."

The crowd gave up a courtesy applause, reserving judgment until after the first set. The first to take the stage was a forty-ish looking man, gray at the temples, who took his seat behind the drums and immediately began tapping out a rhythm. Next up was a tall, lanky black man who looked to be in his fifties. He pulled a standup bass out of the shadows and began plunking away at the strings.

*Great*, Kaylee thought. *It's a senior band*. She turned to look first at Rose and then at Amelia. They were both riveted – Rose on the drummer and Amelia on the bass player.

*Well good for them*.

Kaylee looked over at Gwen. She wasn't looking at the stage but directly at Kaylee. Expectation was written all over her face, from a mischievous twinkle in her eyes to the twitching smile lines around her mouth.

Kaylee gave her a polite nod before turning her attention back to the stage just in time to watch the guitar player settle himself on the stool directly under the spotlight.

"Good evening," he said in a richly textured voice that sent shivers through Kaylee's entire body, making her toes curl. "Sit back and relax," he continued, though Kaylee felt anything but relaxed.

Her body had jumped to full alert. She watched as the guitar player raked both sets of fingers through his sandy brown hair before placing the brown fedora on his head.

"We're going to take you on a musical trip down to the Mississippi Delta, to the birthplace of the blues." He tugged down on the brim of his hat to shade his eyes from the spotlight before turning his attention to his guitar.

Feeling eyes on her, Kaylee turned to find Gwen smiling at her. Gwen tilted her head ever so slightly toward the stage and nodded.

*Why, that sneaky old broad. She's trying to play matchmaker*.

Kaylee turned away, undecided how to feel about being set up. Was it so obvious even to Gwen, a once-a-week visitor, that she needed help finding men? She looked at Gwen again, whose attention had turned to the stage.

*Apparently so*, Kaylee thought, wondering if she should even care. After all, she actually *did* need help meeting men her own age and by the looks of him, the guitar player seemed to be in his early thirties.

*I wonder how these women know him*.

As if she could read her thoughts, Rose leaned into Kaylee and whispered, "Isn't he wonderful? He's our neighbor."

Kaylee nodded in agreement even before the music had registered in her brain. Focusing her attention for the first time on the music, Kaylee's breathing took on the slow, rhythmic beat of the bass guitar as she sank deeper into the sofa.

She watched Rose's neighbor make love to his guitar, lovingly sliding long fingers up and down the neck as his right hand stroked and plucked the strings.

The bass player started singing a melody in a deep, raspy voice, but Kaylee was captivated by the guitar player. He was wearing a dark green t-shirt and black leather vest that showed off strong, well-defined arms. Unlike rock-and-roll musicians, whose onstage antics can make them seem part-dancer, part-acrobatic, the guitar player barely moved except for his left foot, which was keeping time with the beat.

If you had asked Kaylee yesterday if she liked the blues, she'd have shrugged her shoulders and said, "I don't know." But when the song ended, Kaylee was the first to start clapping.

*If this is the blues, she thought, then I guess I'm a fan.*

The guitar player dipped his head, tugged on the brim of his hat and said, "Thank you," into the mike in a barely there whisper. His soft voice had Kaylee imagining him whispering into her ear. The thought turned to liquid and flowed through her veins, making her squeeze her crossed legs together tighter. She shot a quick look at Rose to make sure the woman wasn't reading her mind again, but Rose was completely engaged in clapping and then waving with an open hand, like a two-year-old, at her neighbor.

The guitar player acknowledged her with a subtle return wave before introducing the next song.

"This song goes out to my new neighbors, especially Amelia, a Big Jack Johnson fan from way back."

Kaylee heard a giggle escape from Amelia. As if Kaylee didn't know, Rose leaned in and said with glee, "He's talking about us."

For the next thirty minutes, Kaylee sat spellbound. Between watching his hands move with such grace and listening to his voice sing of hard times for the people of the bayou, Kaylee felt she had become part of an old Neil Diamond song, becoming the moon to his sun.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the end of the first set, Kaylee wasn't the only one mesmerized. The clapping wasn't tentative anymore but a heartfelt thank you from the audience.

"We'll be back in ten," the drummer announced before standing up.

The guitar player stood and leaned his guitar against the stool before stepping off the stage. He was immediately surrounded by three beautiful women, all preening in front of him. One was holding up a CD for him to sign.

*Groupies*, Kaylee thought, for some reason annoyed.

Surprised at her own reaction, she decided she needed to clear her head but as she began to stand up, Amelia reached out and touched her.

"Where are you going, dear? Don't you want to meet Sean?"

She looked over at Sean, who seemed to be enjoying the attention of the women. "I need some fresh air," she explained to a clearly disappointed Amelia.

The crowd behind them had grown and Kaylee had to weave her way through a forest of bodies to the front door. Once outside, the cool night air was a soothing balm to her raw nerves. It had been a long time since someone had such an effect on her.

*It's probably the music*, she rationalized before the cigarette smoke from the three smokers who'd joined her had her moving back inside.

She approached her seat in time to see the backside of the guitar player walking away. When she sat down again, the last thing she expected was to be slapped lightly on her thigh by Amelia.

"You just missed him. He came over and practically spent his entire break talking with us. He's such a nice boy," Amelia said, as if describing her grandson.

*That*, Kaylee thought as she watched his jean-covered bottom, *is no boy*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two sets later, the evening was over. Expecting to leave after the clapping died down, Kaylee stood up, only to be pulled back down by a surprisingly strong Amelia.

"Oh no you don't," Amelia said. "We promised Sean an introduction."

"But I—"

"No buts. It's only ten. If we can stay up past our bedtime, so can you," Amelia said with a finality that left no room for argument.

Looking at the stage, Kaylee found it empty and scanned the crowd. Walking directly toward her, nodding and saying "thanks" but not stopping as people gave him compliments, was Sean—guitar-playing neighbor of Rose, Amelia and Gwen and, based on her racing pulse, keeper of the keys to her heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tonight's gig wasn't supposed to be anything special...just another chance to play. But then he'd seen *her* and the evening transformed, inspiring him to play as if he were auditioning for something more than a new gig. He'd known his three neighbors were going to be there. Rose had mentioned it one way or another every day for a week.

"Can't wait to hear you play."

"Looking forward to Saturday."

"We'll be sitting front-row center."

Sean thought Rose's enthusiasm was sweet, but it was Gwen's comment he remembered the most.

"We're bringing you a surprise. So make sure you come visit us between sets."



*What kind of surprise?* Sean had wondered. Cookies, brownies, a recording agent? He hadn't imagined they'd bring him a woman. His first reaction to seeing the brunette sitting between Rose and Amelia was one of dread.

*Oh god. They're trying to fix me up with one of their granddaughters.*

But when he came to their table after the first set, he'd learned she wasn't related to them at all. He'd missed her after the first set—she'd gone outside. He'd missed her after the second set—he'd gotten caught up selling CDs. So after the third and final set, he was determined to meet this woman who had sat through three sets, never watching anyone in the band except him.

This wasn't the first time he'd had this happen. As a matter of fact, it happened quite often, so much so that he'd gotten into the habit of scanning the crowd between songs to see if he'd captured anyone's interest.

Unfortunately the interest always seemed to disappear faster than the crowd after last call as soon as they found out he was a garbage man. Well, he wasn't going to postpone the disappointment tonight. He'd tell her his occupation right away. She'd react like every woman before her with a polite, "Oh," and then he'd watch as the twinkling light of interest faded from her eyes.

*Of course, if she happens to have blue eyes and the voice of an angel, I could wait a bit before revealing my true profession.*

But the sick feeling of a dozen rejections overpowered him.

*No, not this time. Not even if she has eyes the color of the sky.*

He was determined to get this over with.

Blake's had turned the lights up, the universal sign for closing time, and so when Sean was within six feet of the woman he could already tell she didn't have blue eyes.

*Good. That will make this easier.*

He widened his smile and prepared to drop his little bomb. He stepped in front of the woman and she instantly stood up and extended her hand.

"I'm Kaylee," she said with the voice of a mere mortal. "I really enjoyed your music."

Sean reached out and shook her hand, quickly blurting out, "I'm a garbage man."

The shocked look on Kaylee's face was exactly what he'd come to expect. What he hadn't counted on was her next reaction—laughter. Her golden brown eyes sparkled with delight and her whole body quivered with the force of her laughter, causing her hair to dance around her shoulders.

"That's great," she managed to say, before putting her hand to her mouth.

Sean had never had a woman come right out and laugh at him before. He crossed his arms and said under his breath, "It pays the bills."

She touched his bare forearm lightly. She might as well have zapped him with a stun gun—his legs almost fell out from under him.

"My grandfather is a garbage man too. Or I should say *was*. He retired ten years ago," she explained, a smile on her face. "He used to let me ride with him in the garbage truck and sometimes he brought home cool old stuff that other people threw away. One of my favorite toys was a rocking horse he'd rescued and fixed up for me."

She wasn't laughing at him at all, he realized. In that instant, Kaylee was transformed. Suddenly her fawn brown eyes, alive with amusement and pleasure—yes, definitely pleasure—were the most beautiful eyes he'd ever seen. He uncrossed his arms and extended his hand again.

"Let's try this again..." he began. "I'm Sean. Thanks for coming tonight."

When he took her hand it felt soft and warm, and fit perfectly in his. She didn't seem to mind that his hands were hard and a bit on the rough side. She held on longer than was necessary and seemed to be as reluctant to let go as he was.

"I'm Kaylee," she said again. "I'm a nurse practitioner. I work at the Sunset Gables Assisted Living complex. It's like a retirement home."

Sean wondered why she was telling him her occupation until he remembered he'd blurted out his. He must have looked confused because she said, "I thought we were declaring our occupations."

This time it was Sean who started laughing. "Oh yes, my wants-everyone-to-know-I'm-a-garbage-man comment. I wanted to make sure you didn't think this was my only job."

"I figured that out. Most musicians I've known have several jobs."

They stood staring at each other, both with big goofy smiles on their faces. The next six words that came out of Sean's mouth were as much a surprise to Sean as they were to Kaylee.

"Would you like to go out?"

"Right this second?" Kaylee laughed nervously at the suddenness of the question.

"Ahhh..." Sean stalled. He usually was more poised than this. This woman had gotten under his skin. "Ah...no. It's already pretty late. How about tomorrow?"

"Sure," she said easily. "What did you have in mind?"

In mind? He didn't have a single thing in mind except being with this woman. He was winging it big time. Standing before him was a beautiful woman who'd been mesmerized by his music, but more importantly, hadn't run screaming from the room the moment he'd told her he was a garbage man. This was a bird of a different feather and he didn't want to wait a whole day to find out more about her.

"Are you a breakfast person?" he finally managed.

"Absolutely. As long as it's after nine. I like to sleep in a bit on my days off."

"Let's meet here tomorrow morning at nine-thirty. It's pretty crowded but I can have the manager hold us a table. They make a mean Southwestern omelet. Afterward I'll take you on a ride in the garbage truck if you want."

"Really?"

*Oh no. I might have pushed my luck with the garbage truck.* “Sure, unless you think it’s too weird.”

“I think it would be wonderful. I’ll see you tomorrow then,” she said before turning to Rose and Amelia, who had been sitting still as statues taking in the entire exchange. “Thanks for inviting me,” she said to the sisters and then turned to Gwen, who’d also heard the entire conversation. “Thank you, Gwen.”

Gwen responded with a very self-congratulatory smile and a wink.

Sean had to take two steps back to allow Kaylee to get by. As she passed he caught a whiff of lavender that made him think of spring. He was still following her with his eyes when Amelia and Rose stood up and high-fived each other like kids on a basketball court.

“We’ve done it again,” Rose exclaimed.

“Yes we have,” Amelia agreed. “That makes two. Maybe we should start a little business or something...Amelia and Rose’s Matchmaking Services.”

Gwen joined the two sisters. “Funny how you two are taking all the credit. I’m the one who found Kaylee.”

“Yes, but it was Amelia’s idea to invite her to Sean’s gib.”

“You mean gig, dear,” Amelia corrected.

Rose shrugged her shoulders. “Gib, gig...what’s the difference?”

“Well, for one thing, gig is the correct word and gib isn’t...” Amelia began before Rose dismissed her with a swish of her hand.

“Now, now, you two,” Gwen scolded. “It doesn’t matter. What matters is that Kaylee and Sean have found each other. Soon they’ll be a happy couple just like Delaney and Tyler. Next thing you know they’ll be moving in together.”

“Oh dear,” said Rose, sounding worried. “I hope she’s okay with moving in with Sean. I’d hate to lose Sean as our neighbor like we did Delaney.”

“Ahhh, hello. I’m standing right here,” Sean interjected. “Nobody’s moving in with anyone,” he said in what he hoped was an authoritative tone.

The three women smiled and shook their heads knowingly. “We’ll just have to see about that, now won’t we,” said Amelia, a knowing twinkle in her eyes.

## About the Author

When looking for her soul mate, Christie Walker Bos made a “man list” with 65 items, created a “magical” ceremony and buried the list in the mountains. Two months later, her “magical man” appeared with 63 of the 65 required traits, so she had no choice but to marry the guy. Now she lives with her soul mate Robbie in a mountaintop community in California surrounded by pine trees, crazed squirrels and an orchestra of birds.

The author of three romantic comedies from Ellora’s Cave Publishing, Ms. Walker Bos is also a photographer, multi-published non-fiction author, editor for the optical industry, professional jewelry maker, environmentalist and feminist. Ms. Walker Bos has embraced her love of romantic comedy, with plans for dozens of new books in the years to come.

“What is life and love without a liberal dash of humor? I want to laugh, cry and fall in love with the characters in every novel I read and write.”

Christie welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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