



Dear Henry, Love Edith

Becca
Kinzer

"A rom-com treat
for readers
to devour."

BETHANY TURNER,
author of *Plot Twist*
and *The Do-Over*

Praise for Becca Kinzer

“With her debut romantic comedy, Becca Kinzer has established herself as a connoisseur of the genre—and an instant favorite of mine! Mistaken identities, love at first sight, friends to more, and even a delicious tease toward marriage of convenience come together to create a rom-com treat for readers to devour. Simultaneously a sweet romance with the perfect amount of heat and a laugh-out-loud comedy with a surprising dose of depth, *Dear Henry, Love Edith* is a witty and heartfelt gift from first word to last.”

BETHANY TURNER, author of *Plot Twist* and *The Do-Over*

“This delightful tale of mistaken identity is a must-read for romance lovers! Charming, witty, and with plenty of comedy, *Dear Henry, Love Edith* pairs well with tea, a cozy blanket, and a penchant for happily ever afters.”

BETSY ST. AMANT, author of *Tacos for Two* and *The Key to Love*

“What a quick, sweet, and charming romance to brighten your day! A lovely debut by Kinzer that had me cheering for the unlikely, and yet so perfect, pair, Edith and Henry.”

MELISSA FERGUSON, author of *Meet Me in the Margins* and *The Cul-de-Sac War*

“Rarely have I read a romance with such sparkling personality. Everything about Kinzer’s vibrant voice

and freshly told love story tugged at my heartstrings and widened my smile. Henry and Edith's quirky story as told with a dash of mistaken identity and peppered with epistolary flair is deepened by a cast of colorful supporting characters, zippy dialogue, and resonant themes of loss and hope. Fans of Katherine Reay and Pepper Basham will be enchanted."

RACHEL McMILLAN, author of *The Mozart Code*
and the Three Quarter Time series

"I couldn't put it down! Becca Kinzer's debut novel kept me turning pages well into the night. *Dear Henry, Love Edith* is a delightful story, with lovable characters in a town packed with quirks and charm that will have you laughing out loud. I can't wait for what this author puts out next!"

TARI FARIS, author of the Restoring Heritage series

"In *Dear Henry, Love Edith*, Becca Kinzer marvelously toys with favorite romance tropes such as mistaken identity, love at first sight, fake relationship, and May–December romance to create a fun romp full of heart and humor. With pop culture references and values from bygone eras, readers of all generations are sure to fall in love with Henry's charm and Edith's passion for helping those near and far."

JANINE ROSCHE, author of *Aspen Crossroads*
and the Madison River Romance series

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*For my husband. You told me to keep writing,
so I did. And I'll always be grateful.*



CHAPTER ONE

Henry grimaced, not sure which irritated him more—the persistent ache in his knee or the relentless voice in his ear.

“Please, Uncle Henry. She has nowhere else to stay.”

The voice. Definitely the voice. “Last time I checked, there were these things called hotels.” Henry adjusted the phone against his ear as he raised the dishwasher door with his cane and shoved it shut.

“Uh-huh,” Kat’s droll voice responded. “And when was the last time you checked? 1945?”

“If you’re referring to the fire that destroyed the Westshire Hotel, I think you mean 1937.” Henry punched the quick-wash button.

“*Ugh!*” His niece’s frustration competed in volume with the sound of spraying water. “I didn’t call for a history lesson.”

“Well, maybe next time you should. And maybe you should also read the newspaper every once in a while, because it mentioned the town fire in the ‘This Day in History’ section just yesterday.”

“And what a riveting read that was, I’m sure. Point is our town doesn’t have a hotel. Let the woman stay with you.”

Henry shifted his weight, the floorboards beneath him creaking as much as his joints. “Why can’t she commute?”

“From where?”

“I don’t know. Peoria.”

“She’s flying into Moline.”

“Okay then. Moline.” Henry grabbed the frying pan coated in egg residue and plopped it into the sink. He’d get to it later. Along with the pile of dirty casserole dishes he needed to return to his office manager, Peg. The scent of garlic marinara still lingered in the air from last night. Not Peg’s best dish, but Henry knew what they said about beggars and choosers.

Perhaps his niece needed the reminder. “Look, if this lady doesn’t want to commute, there’s always the bed-and-breakfast downtown. Built sometime *after* the fire. You ask me, she’s got plenty of places to stay.”

“Not for free.”

“What is she, a charity case?”

This time Kat growled loud enough to completely drown out the dishwasher. Loud enough to make Henry’s lips twitch as he hobbled into the living room, his cane thumping a slow beat across the wooden floor. With the way life had been going lately, he’d take whatever pleasure he could find. And pushing his niece’s buttons was one particular pleasure he never tired of.

“She’s doing volunteer work,” Kat said. “She’s donating her time to a good cause. She shouldn’t have to pay for shelter—not when I promised her a place to stay rent free.”

“Sounds like your problem, not mine.”

“Oh, for crying out loud, would you stop acting like a crotchety old miser? How was I to know my kitchen would flood as soon as I left for the summer?”

“You know why I don’t have to worry about stuff like that?”

“Because you never go away?”

“No.” Henry eased onto his worn brown leather sofa and propped his right leg on the coffee table, stifling a moan as he massaged his knee. “Because I have crotchety old miser insurance. Keeps me protected from kitchen floods and impromptu displays of hospitality.”

“If only it protected me from your mediocre displays of humor.”

Henry cracked a smile, scanning the couch for the TV remote. “How long would she need to stay here?”

“Not long. My landlord’s already on it. Edith can move into my house once it’s livable. I promise, you won’t even know she’s there. She’s the quietest, sweetest lady you’ll ever meet.”

“I thought you’d never met her.”

“I haven’t,” Kat said. “But that’s what Ruthie says.”

“Who’s Ruthie?” He aimed the remote at the TV.

“One of Sharon’s cousins who lives in Pittsburgh.”

“Who’s Sharon?”

“You know Sharon,” Kat scolded.

He smiled. He did know Sharon. In a town like Westshire,

Illinois, everybody knew everybody. Once he found the Cubs game on the flat-screen and noted the score, his smile turned into a groan.

“Oh, come on. It won’t be that bad.”

“Nothing could be that bad,” he muttered, punching off the game.

“What?”

“Nothing. What’s this lady’s name again?”

“*Edith*. She’s a nurse. Or used to be a nurse. I’m sure she’s retired by now. Sharon said she’s a widow. She probably spends all her time volunteering because it’s the only way she can cope with the loss of her one true love.” Kat sighed. “Isn’t that so romantic?”

Henry rolled his eyes. His thirty-year-old niece sounded worse than a lovestruck teenager. She would probably find the Three Stooges romantic if she ever watched them. “How soon until your kitchen’s fixed again?”

“Soon enough. But it’s not as if you can climb stairs yet anyway. Someone may as well put all that remodeling you did to good use. Besides, you can’t throw a little old widow out on the street. We both know Jesus frowns on that one. And really, between your morning therapy sessions and work hours, you probably won’t even see her. How’s your leg doing, by the way?”

Better than his pride. “It’s still attached.”

“When I think about how much worse it could have been—”

“Don’t.” *Please*. Last thing he needed was to rehash what a fool he made of himself the first week taking over his family’s painting and construction company. Yeah, the injury could

have happened to anybody. But he wasn't anybody. And as the man in charge now, he couldn't afford another misstep. Not in this town. Not after all the time it had taken to get back on his feet in the first place.

"Look, if this old lady needs a place to crash for a few nights, fine. Just so long as she stays upstairs and out of my way."

"Thank you!"

"But as soon as your house is ready—"

"She's gone. Promise."

Henry sighed into the phone. "After all this time, how do you still do it?"

"Do what?"

"Get me to cave to anything you ask."

Kat chuckled. "That's the power nieces have over their uncles—especially nieces who are only two years younger. Thanks again, *Uncle Henry*."

"Why am I already regretting this?"



Edith read the email again.

Hi Edith! Hope you landed safely. There's been a slight change of plans. One of my kitchen pipes decided to spring a leak on me. I know. Great, huh? So I'm afraid my house is more appropriate for FEMA than visitors. Don't worry though. My sweet uncle Henry lives close by and has graciously offered to host you for as long as needed. He hasn't been able to climb the stairs for some time now, so you'll have the entire second floor

to yourself. Make yourself at home. I'll let you know when my house is habitable again. Sorry for all the last-minute changes.

Kat

PS—My uncle really is a sweet man, but you know how bachelors get set in their ways. If he gives you any trouble, just tell him he'll have to answer to me. That ought to scare him! Ha!

Edith clicked her phone off and sank against the seat of her rental car. Why couldn't anything in her life ever go as planned?

She blew a layer of hair away from her eyes, wondering for the hundredth time if she'd made a mistake. Honey-colored strands fluttered back down, catching on her eyelashes. "I mean, really, Edith?" she muttered to herself. "*Bangs?*"

If she were going to go through a quarter-life crisis, couldn't she at least have been brave enough to get a tattoo?

Although planning to fly halfway around the world to a remote South African village by the end of summer surely accounted for something akin to bravery. Must be why the idea of sharing a house with a little old man didn't bother her. Because she was so darn courageous.

Starting her rental car, Edith flipped her visor down to block the late-afternoon fireball threatening to blind her. Then gasped. "What? Oh, you've gotta be kidding me."

She'd taken Benadryl as soon as she bit into the salad with blue cheese, but obviously it hadn't helped. Angry welts rose

in ugly red blotches all over her neck, taunting her from the visor mirror. No wonder the man who'd signed out her rental car seemed afraid to touch the same paper she'd signed. Probably thought she had leprosy.

Well, that's what she got for not paying attention at the airport when she'd grabbed a quick bite to eat. Thankfully her allergy didn't amount to anything more than some annoying hives. But man, they usually weren't this bad. She scratched at a few, then forced her hands back on the steering wheel.

Edith met the gaze of the frowning reflection staring back at her from the visor mirror, the reflection that looked an awful lot like her mother when she went through her retro 1970s hairstyle phase. "Oh, what are you looking at?"

Edith flipped the visor back up, preferring to squint into the sun than be reminded of her mom. Thinking of her mom only led to thinking about her dad. Which led to thinking about regrets. And that sent her right back to thinking about her bangs.

Edith's stomach grumbled, taking her mind off everything but the fact she'd had only one bite of salad for lunch. She grabbed her phone. After typing the address Kat sent for her "sweet uncle Henry"—which Edith knew full well meant stubborn old mule—Edith breathed a sigh of relief. Less than an hour's drive. Good. Because a hamburger with all the trimmings was screaming her name. And according to the flight attendant, Westshire had one of the best mom-and-pop diners in all the Midwest.

If Edith was going to blow her diet, she might as well blow it big. Especially since she hadn't actually started her diet.

Before Edith made it out of the airport parking lot, her phone trilled a piano jingle. Her shoulders tensed. *No. Not already.* She didn't even have to look at the caller ID to know who was calling. *Just ignore it.* The piano continued its trill. *You don't owe him anything.* The phone finally stopped ringing.

Only to start up again a few seconds later.

That's it. She pulled to the side and threw the car into park. Better to get it over with now. She wasn't about to listen to that piano jingle the entire drive to Westshire.

"Hey, Steve," Edith said after a deep breath, relieved at the calm in her voice despite the trembling in her fingers.

A long stretch of silence followed. Then, "Are you insane?"

"No, I'm good. Thanks for asking. And you?"

"Knock it off, Edith. Why would you do this?"

"Do what?"

"Leave."

"I'm a grown woman, in case you've forgotten." She had the quarter-life crisis bangs to prove it.

Steve's deep breaths filled her ear. She could picture him as easily as if he were standing right in front of her. Jaw clenched, nostrils flaring, the Sherman scowl stamped on his face. It must be an inherited trait. She'd seen her husband wear the same look often enough.

"The least you could have done was tell me you were leaving."

She took a breath to respond, but he cut her off. "In person."

Edith scrunched her eyes shut. "I know. I'm sorry." So yeah. Maybe she'd taken the coward's way out by leaving him

a letter when she knew he was out of town. But the last thing she'd wanted was a face-off with her late husband's brother. Especially since things between them had gotten so weird.

"When are you coming back?"

Edith looked to the ceiling of her car, blinking her bangs from her eyes as she prayed for the right words. "No." Well, it was a word at least.

"No what? No, you're not coming back?"

"I need to move on."

"From me?"

"From . . . everything." If Edith had any lingering doubts about her sudden decision to fly to Illinois until her passport arrived, this phone call laid them to rest. No way would she have survived an entire summer in Pittsburgh with Steve's suffocating behavior.

Overhearing Ruthie mention her cousin's crisis nursery house this past Sunday at church had to have been divine intervention. Sharon, the director, was over the moon when Edith contacted her about volunteering. And Edith was over the moon to place five hundred miles between her and Steve for the next several weeks.

"Look, Steve, it's been a rough go. You know that. I just need a fresh start. On my own. I explained it all in the letter. You should have—"

"I got your letter. I know what it said. But you're making a big mistake. South Africa? No. That's crazy. Come home. Let's talk about this."

"But that's just it. Pittsburgh isn't home for me." Not since Brian died. Maybe not even before then.

"Where are you right now?"

Oh, she hated this. Edith tugged on her shirt collar. Why did confrontation always have to make her so sweaty? “I know Brian told you to look out for me after he was gone. And I appreciate all that you’ve done. I do. But you don’t need to take care of me. I’m good.”

Or at least she would be once her passport arrived. Who knew passports could take so long to process? Clearly not Edith. If she’d known that, she would have started the application process back in kindergarten. Then maybe she would be boarding a flight to the Eastern Cape of South Africa right now instead of sweating in a rental car in Illinois simply to avoid conversations like this.

So much for being courageous.

“What if I want to take care of you?”

Okay. This phone call was going from awkward to downright painful. She turned the air conditioner up higher. “It’s not what I want.” And now she was itching. Everywhere. At this rate, the hives wouldn’t disappear until mid-December. “Please, just let me go. It’s time for both of us to move on.” Before he could offer any further protest, Edith said, “Goodbye, Steve,” and ended the call.