



CALLING

on the

MATCHMAKER

A SHANAHAN MATCH

Book 1

Jody Hedlund

Books by Jody Hedlund

A SHANAHAN MATCH

Calling on the Matchmaker

COLORADO COWBOYS

A Cowboy for Keeps

The Heart of a Cowboy

To Tame a Cowboy

Falling for the Cowgirl

The Last Chance Cowboy

HEARTS OF FAITH

COLLECTION

The Preacher's Bride

The Doctor's Lady

Rebellious Heart

MICHIGAN BRIDES

COLLECTION

Unending Devotion

A Noble Groom

Captured by Love

BEACONS OF HOPE

*Out of the Storm: A BEACONS
OF HOPE Novella*

Love Unexpected

Hearts Made Whole

Undaunted Hope

ORPHAN TRAIN

*An Awakened Heart: An
ORPHAN TRAIN Novella*

With You Always

Together Forever

Searching for You

THE BRIDE SHIPS

A Reluctant Bride

The Runaway Bride

A Bride of Convenience

A SHANAHAN MATCH
Book 1

CALLING
on the
MATCHMAKER

Jody Hedlund



BETHANYHOUSE
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Calling on the Matchmaker • Jody Hedlund
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group © 2023 used by permission

© 2023 by Jody Hedlund

Published by Bethany House Publishers
Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hedlund, Jody, author.

Title: Calling on the matchmaker / Jody Hedlund.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, a division of
Baker Publishing Group, 2023. | Series: A Shanahan match

Identifiers: LCCN 2023026948 | ISBN 9780764241963 (paper) | ISBN 9780764242236
(casebound) | ISBN 9781493443758 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Christian fiction. | Romance fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3608.E333 C35 2023 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20230620

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023026948>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Author is represented by Natasha Kern Literary Agency

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



**ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
JANUARY 1849**

“Nip along with you now, Finola.” Madigan bounded onto Broadway, dodging an omnibus that was slogging through the thick mud. “The matchmaker is waiting.”

“Have patience.” Finola Shanahan followed her younger brother and tiptoed into the mire. She bunched up the black habit the Sisters of Charity had so graciously provided for her to wear whenever she accompanied them for charity work. “I’m going as fast as I can.”

“Mam and Da are done putting up with your impertinence.” Madigan shot her a warning look. The sixteen-year-old was already a handsome fellow with his big blue eyes and brown hair, turning the heads of the local lasses wherever he went.

Of the six Shanahan children, everyone claimed she and Madigan resembled each other the most. And aye, she had the same blue eyes and brown hair. But when God had been doling out the freckles, He’d forgotten to spread them out between her and Madigan. She’d ended up with them all.

The winter wind rustled against her hood and sent a chill down her back. “I’m a dutiful daughter.”

Madigan released a snort. “And I’m the pope.”

Guilt nudged at Finola. She *was* a dutiful daughter in almost every way except one. . . . She wasn’t cooperating with her parents’ efforts to find her a husband.

Madigan leapt over a half-frozen puddle. “They’re just trying to make a good impression on the matchmaker, dontcha know.”

“I’m well aware, to be sure.” They might want to impress Oscar McKenna, the local Irish matchmaker. But she wanted to frustrate Oscar enough that he’d refuse to help her parents. And being late for the meeting was a good start to that effort.

As she took another tentative step into the busy thoroughfare, the mud sucked at her lace-up ankle boots.

A faded yellow hackney rumbled down the street toward her. The coachman sat slouched, his head down, the brim of his top hat pulled low. He didn’t seem to be looking where he was going. Rather, he held the reins loosely, as if the team of horses knew the route well and didn’t need his directing.

Finola forced her feet to move more swiftly after Madigan. In the late afternoon of the dreary January day, the St. Louis traffic was heavy, especially on Washington at Broadway so close to the riverfront where factories, warehouses, and stores crowded the mostly unpaved streets. Apparently now that the gray skies had finished spitting a mixture of rain and sleet, everyone had come out to finish the day’s work.

As a beer delivery wagon filled with casks lumbered from the other direction, she paused. The driver wasn’t paying attention to her any more than the hackney. A dray from the levee followed, piled high with boxes of merchandise and hogsheads of tobacco.

Madigan was already on the opposite side, and as he spun to check on her progress, his eyes widened. “Holy thundering mother, Finola! Get out of the street before you get run over.”

He waved his arms, motioning her back, his gaze darting to the hackney coach that wasn't slowing—not even a fraction.

It was less than two dozen paces away from her, and the driver's head remained down, the reins still loose, the horses trotting forward with no intention of stopping for a lone woman standing in their path.

“Hurry, Finola!” Madigan's voice took on an urgency that prodded her pulse into a gallop. She tried to make her feet follow suit, but as she spun, one of her boots snagged in a rut. In the next instant, she felt herself going down.

She braced her fall with her hands and knees, the layer of mud cushioning the impact. But at the nearing rattle of harnesses and the creak of wheels, she scrambled to push herself up.

Horse hooves pounded closer.

She clawed at the mud, slipping and sliding and attempting to find footing.

Several shouts—including Madigan's—advised her with increasing fervor. But her heart was suddenly beating too hard to hear anything clearly . . . except the toll of the death bell.

She was going to die. And there was nothing she could do to stop it.

“Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.” The words clogged in her throat, the rest of the plea for mercy drowned in a frustrated cry as she tried to wrench herself free.

But with each move she made, the mud coated her more, seeming to lock her in place.

“Lie flat!” A deep voice penetrated her panic.

Even as she began to brace herself for the impact of the horses and carriage, a man slammed into her and rolled her to her back, throwing himself over her and covering her body with his just as the horses passed by her on either side. Their hooves slapped so close, she held herself stiffly.

The man shielding her also held himself rigidly, clearly intending to take the brunt of the harm from the horses. He

ducked his head next to hers, near enough that his cheek bumped against her bonnet and his heavy breathing echoed in her ear.

She cringed, waiting for a hoof to hit him, but only mud splattered against them.

A moment later the horses were gone, and the green hackney wheels were rolling past. The low underbelly of the vehicle box slipped over them, brushing close to her rescuer's back so that he flattened himself against her even further.

Thankfully she had a slender frame and was on the smaller size of the average woman. Even so, she did her part to mold against the street, attempting to keep the man from getting hurt.

As the shadows of the hackney gave way to the cloudy day above them, the man lifted his head and scanned the street as though gauging whether he needed to protect her from any other oncoming traffic.

Apparently seeing no immediate threat, his body relaxed against hers, and he returned his attention to her. "How do you fare?"

Finola found herself peering up into blue eyes so dark they were almost black. Deep set, they crinkled at the corners with concern, and his fair brows bunched together above a fine, narrow nose. His hat had been knocked off, and his toasted blond hair fell across his forehead in disarray.

His gaze held hers intently, as though he wouldn't be satisfied until she reassured him she was fine. She did a quick mental assessment of her limbs, wiggling her fingers and toes simultaneously. Nothing seemed to be missing or broken. "I think I'm alright."

He glanced again over his shoulder and then down the street in the opposite direction. The wagons all around them had come to a standstill.

Too little, too late.

As if thinking the same, her rescuer homed in on the hack-

ney, the only vehicle still in motion, slogging away at the same careless pace, as if it made an everyday occurrence of running over pedestrians.

He frowned, his square jaw hardening. The angular edges were covered in a light brown layer of stubble. Though his expression was serious, she was suddenly aware of just how handsome he was.

“Saint Riley to the rescue again!” someone shouted.

Saint Riley? Riley Rafferty hailed as Saint Riley of the Kerry Patch?

She’d never personally met him. But the Irish community in St. Louis had always been small enough—at least until recent years—that she knew of almost everyone, saw almost everyone at one point or another at a parade or mass or a wedding or a funeral. So of course she’d seen Riley Rafferty from time to time over her twenty-three years.

But he was several years older and wasn’t in any of her family’s social groups. She’d never given him a second thought until last autumn when she’d witnessed him dive into the Mississippi and rescue a drowning steamboat deckhand.

Over the past four months since that rescue, she’d observed him on occasion from a distance and had marveled like everyone else over his daring deeds.

And now, here he was.

Her breath snagged in her chest, this time not out of fear of being crushed by an oncoming conveyance. No, this time, she was breathless because the heroic Riley Rafferty had saved her life.

Her body awoke to the realization that his full length was covering her—a broad chest, muscular torso, thick arms, and long legs. She knew from watching his dripping-wet body emerge from the river that he was a strong man with muscles in every conceivable place. He had the kind of body that could make a nun blush.

Even so, his presence wasn't heavy or suffocating. Instead, she felt safe, as though the world had stopped and nothing or no one could hurt her, not as long as Riley was with her. The feeling of security was odd, one she hadn't felt in many years.

"Finola Shanahan!" The next shout was Madigan's from above her. "What am I going to do with you?"

At the mention of her name, Riley's brows arched, and his eyes lightened a wee bit to a midnight blue. Did he recognize her?

More likely he recognized her family's name. Her da was one of the most prominent men of St. Louis. And one of the wealthiest.

Riley seemed to study her more carefully, his gaze slowing as he passed over the freckles on her nose and cheeks.

Of course, there were other Irish Shanahans in St. Louis, and he might not realize she was the oldest daughter of the iron magnate James Shanahan, sole owner of Shanahan Iron Works.

"You're sure you're not hurt, Sister?" Riley's eyes, full of questions, met hers.

Sister? Did he think she was a nun? She supposed the confusion was only natural since she was clothed in the habit. Should she correct him?

"Come on with you now, Finola." Madigan thrust a hand toward her.

A part of her wanted to clear up Riley's mistake in thinking she was a nun. But what was the point in doing so? She had every intention of joining the Sisters of Charity . . . just as soon as she could convince her parents to allow it.

First, she had to thwart their newest plan to use the matchmaker to arrange her marriage. Once she foiled their efforts, they'd surely agree that after so many failed matches, the only bride she was suited to become was a bride of Christ.

At the sight of Madigan's outstretched hand, Riley started to push away. She had the urge to grab him and prevent him

from leaving her. The need was completely irrational. This man was a stranger. And she couldn't remain in the middle of busy Broadway any longer than she already had.

As Riley gingerly crawled off her and stood, the watching crowd cheered and clapped.

Madigan bent down and began to help her to her feet. All the while, she couldn't tear her sights from Riley.

A young lad hustled toward Riley and reverently handed him his hat. Riley squeezed the boy's shoulder in thanks before he situated the work-worn felt hat on his head. He waved and grinned at the onlookers as if he'd just finished putting on a theater production he'd been rehearsing for weeks.

Although Riley's breeches and woolen stockings were heavily splattered with mud, his coat and the linen shirt underneath were fairly mud free. Unlike her clothing . . .

She didn't need to glance down to know she resembled a sow who'd just had a grand time flopping around in a pigsty. Not only was her front caked in mud, but her backside was too. She could even feel splotches on her cheeks and forehead.

No doubt, Riley thought she looked a fright.

As if hearing her silent assessment, he swung his attention back to her. The seriousness was gone from his expression. Instead, mirth added faint stars to his eyes, and his lips quirked at the corners, as if they weren't comfortable anyplace other than in a smile.

Was he finding humor in how she looked?

She started to swipe at one of the splotches on her cheek but then stopped herself. It didn't matter what Riley Rafferty thought about her. It didn't matter what any man thought about her. Not now. Not any time.

She pulled herself up to all of her five-feet-three inches. "Thank you for saving my life, young lad."

Riley's brows rose. "My pleasure."

Absolutely no one in her right mind could mistake Riley as

being anything other than a full-grown man. But treating her suitors as though she were sixty years older than they always seemed to douse any growing sparks. Not that Riley was a suitor. And not that he had any growing sparks. But it was best if he knew she harbored no attraction toward him. None.

“You’re quite the boy.” She reached up and pinched one of his cheeks just like a grandmother would do. “Keep up the good work.”

With that, she slipped her arm into Madigan’s and tried to nudge him on his way.

When Madigan didn’t budge and continued to stare at Riley with wide-eyed admiration, she jabbed her elbow into his ribs harder.

He released a low *oof* before stumbling forward and leading her the rest of the way across the street. Fortunately he’d been the one carrying her bag with her change of clothing and shoes, and it had survived the escapade intact.

As they made their way down Broadway, he didn’t release his grasp of her arm, retelling every detail of the rescue from his perspective, as if the brush with death wasn’t already clear enough in her mind.

On the next block, she dragged Madigan past a printing shop until she reached the alley behind it.

Her brother didn’t resist but followed along warily, likely having had enough drama for one afternoon. “What are you doing now, Finola?”

She nodded to the back of the livery stable on the opposite side of the alley. “I’m needing to change before I go home.”

Madigan’s lips curled up into one of his irresistible grins. “I’ll not be arguing with you there.”

“Good.” She crossed to the livery door and peeked inside to find it was as deserted as always at the late-afternoon hour. She’d have no trouble finding an empty horse stall and putting back on her garments like she had on previous occasions.

She always changed out of the robe lest she cast suspicion upon herself. Yes, her parents knew she was heavily involved in charity work with the Sisters of Charity. But they believed she'd given up her aspirations for becoming a nun, as they'd suggested, and didn't know she still held the desire very dear to her heart.

They also didn't know that she'd purposefully driven away all her previous suitors so she could enter into service. Of course, after she'd recently sent her last suitor running into the arms of another woman, she'd hoped her parents would finally resign themselves to her being single and might even suggest that she become a nun. She hadn't guessed they'd be desperate enough to enlist the help of the matchmaker.

"Get along with you now, Madigan." She shooed him away.

"I can't show up without you—"

"You know as well as I do, we'll both fare better if you nip ahead and let everyone know I'll be there in a wee minute." Maybe in addition to her tardiness, she could earn another demerit if she arrived looking like a swamp monster. Doing so would certainly give Oscar McKenna pause and make him think twice about arranging a marriage for her. More likely that strategy would backfire, and Oscar would decide she needed to marry a man who also looked like a swamp monster.

Whatever the case, she didn't want to mortify her mam and da. She might be full of shenanigans, but she wouldn't intentionally hurt or embarrass her parents.

Finola shook the habit but couldn't dislodge the mud.

Seeing her futile efforts, Madigan heaved a sigh and handed over her bag. "Fine. But mind you, no more dawdling, or you'll get me in trouble for sure."

"I'll hurry, so I will." She was already ducking inside the livery's back entrance and heading for the closest stall. Low voices wafted from the front of the establishment, but from what she could tell, the rest of the building was deserted. Only the scent of damp hay and horseflesh greeted her.