



SAVED
by the
MATCHMAKER

A SHANAHAN MATCH
Book 2

Jody Hedlund

Books by Jody Hedlund

A SHANAHAN MATCH

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Saved by the Matchmaker

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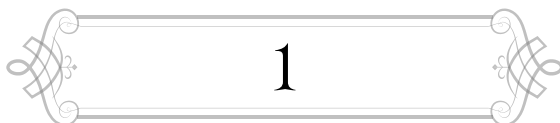
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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
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World's biggest fool.

The words felt engraved on Enya Shanahan's forehead. Not only did they feel engraved, but they were probably also blaring in bright colors that not even the darkness of the dreary Shrove Tuesday evening could hide.

No doubt her da and brother Kiernan, both sitting in the barouche on the seat across from her, could see the bold lettering as they spoke together, congratulating themselves on cleaning up the mess she'd made of her life.

She turned her face to the window, as if that could somehow transport her away from her shame and guilt—a shame and guilt that had been her constant companions in the two weeks since she'd returned home after her short-lived and failed marriage to Bryan Haynes.

Aye, she was the world's biggest fool, to be sure, for giving her heart and body to Bryan.

The knots in her chest yanked tighter. The lying scum.

The cowardly ratbag. The cheating hornswoggler. She hated him and hoped he'd drown in a river during his trek to the California goldfields. Well, maybe not drown. But at least that he wouldn't find a speck of gold, not even gold dust.

"I didn't doubt the archbishop would give us the annulment." Kiernan's voice held too much cockiness for his own good. He'd taken off his top hat, and his auburn hair was combed casually forward. It was much browner than Da's and hers, which happened to be a flaming red that rivaled a summer sunset. Kiernan also had blue eyes and not the green that Da and she also shared.

In his low-cut vest and tightly tailored frock coat, her older brother made a dashing picture as always. His high collar and cravat brushed against his smooth chin and cheeks, and his handsome features contained the distinct Shanahan heart-shaped face, wide cheekbones, and dimple in his chin.

Da was loosening his own cravat. "It was easy to prove the fellow never intended to have a permanent relationship with Enya." Her da's tone was gentler, but it held immeasurable relief.

Enya squeezed her eyes closed and fought back the hot tears that came all too easily over recent days.

He was relieved the marriage scandal was behind them, that he'd found a stipulation among those accepted by the Church that would allow for the annulment.

Little did he know the scandal had only just begun.

The carriage wheels hit a rut in the unpaved road and tossed Enya up and down several times. Her already queasy stomach lurched in protest, and she cupped her hand over her mouth to hold back the nausea.

She had to say something. But she also didn't want to ruin Da and Kiernan's good moods after so difficult a meeting with the archbishop and other church officiants. Da's wealth and prestige had likely moved the annulment proceedings along more swiftly and easily than usual. Even so, the process had been unnerving for all of them.

"I'd like to put the past behind us." Da leaned back against the leather seat as though trying to get comfortable, which was nearly impossible with all the jostling. The streets in St. Louis were notoriously bad, especially in February with the winter cold and snow.

Though the interior of the carriage was dark, the outside lantern attached to the front side of the conveyance illuminated enough to see Da smile warmly her way. "We'll leave the city tomorrow morn, so we will."

"Thank you, Da. That will be lovely." She couldn't muster a return smile, but she appreciated his efforts to soothe her nonetheless.

Kiernan's brow crinkled. "We discussed moving back home now that the spread of cholera is waning."

The dreaded and deadly cholera had arrived in St. Louis last month shortly after the new year started. Many families, including theirs, had panicked and left the city, expecting the illness to take a devastating toll the same way it had a decade earlier. But so far, it hadn't spread as the naysayers had predicted. Now many people were resuming life as normal.

"Aye," Da said. "It won't be hurting us to stay at Oakland a wee bit longer now, will it?"

Kiernan didn't respond, usually unable to oppose their da—unlike her. Of her brothers and sisters, she'd ended up

getting most of the spitfire. She had enough to spread out among all five Shanahan children, with leftovers to distribute to a dozen more people.

“If Kiernan wants to linger in the city, I don’t mind staying.” Enya clutched the edge of the seat as the barouche bounced again over the uneven street.

Kiernan shot her a grateful look.

Her brother clearly didn’t want to go back to their country home. Was he bored there? More likely he had a woman or two in the city he missed and wanted spend time with. And now that their oldest sister, Finola, was happily married, he was ready to enlist the services of the local matchmaker in forming his match.

Of course, with the start of Lent tomorrow, a wedding would have to wait for at least forty days since the Church frowned upon marriages during the holy weeks leading up to Easter.

“We’ll be going to the country home.” Da’s words held the finality of a judge’s gavel. “Mind you, it’ll be for the best. Until the wagging tongues have nothing else to say.”

Of course Da would be worried about what everyone was thinking. The Shanahan image was so gloriously important to him. More important than anything else. “Tongues will wag no matter what we do. So we may as well ignore them.”

“We can be doing our best not to fuel them.” This time her da’s voice contained an edge.

“Do you think I want to fuel them?” An edge crept into her tone too. This was the problem. No matter how much she and Da tried to be civil to each other, they ended up arguing.

Kiernan’s gaze bounced back and forth between Da and

her, and he opened his mouth as though he intended to jump into the conversation and intervene before full-scale fighting commenced.

But Da spoke again first. “Try, Enya.” Da was sitting up tall on his seat now, his backbone as rigid as a lamppost. “That’s all I expect.”

“I have tried.”

“If we live rightly, then we don’t have to be worrying about the gossipmongers, now do we?” His voice rose a notch.

Hers did likewise. “I did live rightly. I wasn’t living in sin.”

“You ran off with a dirty, damp dog!”

“At least I got married!”

“You married the dog without my permission!”

“I don’t need your permission for everything I do.” Her declaration rang hollow. The one time she’d broken free of her parents’ strict control—to choose her own marriage partner—the situation had ended in disaster.

“You’re my daughter, and as long as you’re living under my roof, you’ll do as I say, that you will.” Da’s words now boomed in the small confines of the carriage. Even in the dim lighting, it was easy to see that his face had reddened, and his thick brows furrowed together above flashing eyes.

All the angst inside her swirled into an eddy that was quickly sucking her down. “Maybe I’ll find another place to live.” She tossed out the threat, even though she wouldn’t be able to follow through on it, would never be able to live where she wanted, and wouldn’t be able to support herself. Not as a single young woman.

“You’ll live at Oakland until summer, so you will.” Da sat back and dropped his voice a decibel. “Now, say no more about it.”

She hated that her da could cut her off with such callousness, giving no merit to her opinions and ideas. But that's the way it had always been, not only with where to live and who to marry but how to spend her time, including the dreams she'd once had about composing music and becoming a concert pianist.

The heat of anger and helplessness roiling inside swelled, like a boiler about to explode.

"I'm pregnant." The words bubbled up and spilled over before she could stop them. The only person she'd told about her pregnancy was Finola. But now, ready or not, the news was out.

Her da's eyes rounded, shifted to her stomach, then returned to her face.

She jutted her chin and met his gaze, letting him see the truth. Because it was the truth. She'd known the day after she'd missed her courses last month. And now that she'd skipped a second month, there was no denying it.

He held himself rigidly only a moment longer before his shoulders slumped and the hard lines of his face melded into haggardness.

Of course. She'd disappointed him again. As usual.

"Sweet blessed mother, Enya," he whispered. "What am I to be doing with you now?"

"Nothing." She shot the word past the ache that pushed into her throat. "I'll take care of myself and my baby—"

"She'll get married, that's what." Kiernan knocked against the front of the carriage to get the attention of the coachman.

"I don't want to get married." At least not so soon after the disaster of a marriage with Bryan.

But Kiernan was already calling out instructions to the coachman and taking charge of the situation, which was something he was good at, a quality he'd inherited from their da.

Aye, she knew her da had worked hard over the years to build up the Shanahan name and reputation and that Kiernan was trying to build a name for himself too. But why couldn't he stop for a moment and acknowledge that she had a baby growing inside her and show some support instead of rushing to fix her again?

Kiernan twisted back around on his seat. "We'll try to find someone for Enya to marry."

Her da shook his head. "We're out of time. The wedding will have to wait until after Lent, and by then, it will be too late to attribute the child to the new husband."

Kiernan's jaw was set with determination, and he glanced at Enya's abdomen. "How far along are you?"

She settled a hand on her stomach. It was still flat. But her da was right. After Easter, she'd be almost four months pregnant. "If you hope to make some poor fellow believe my child is his, you're out of luck."

"Ach, no," her da said.

Kiernan recoiled. "Holy thundering mother, Enya. No. Of course not. We're not aiming to trick anyone."

"Then why does everyone need to believe the baby belongs to a new husband?" She already knew the answer, but she wanted to make her point—that they cared more about appearances than about her.

"Now that we have the annulment," Kieran said, his voice filled with sincerity, "we want to put your past behind you and give you a fresh start."

A fresh start, someplace away from her da's disappointment? Aye, she'd take it. And keeping her distance from Mam? Aye, she'd take that, too, because once Mam learned of the pregnancy, Da's disappointment would look like sheer joy in comparison. Maybe not quite. But Mam's judgment would be worse. Much worse.

Enya buried her face in her hands. She couldn't bear to face Mam. Not tomorrow. Not the next day. Not anytime soon.

If only there was a way to magically sail away someplace where no one knew about her or her family. . . .

"We'll find a nice Irish fellow and a good Catholic who will make a fine husband for you." Kiernan spoke smoothly and softly. He'd obviously learned well over the years that such a method worked better with her than Da's more direct approach.

Her da released an exasperated breath. "We don't have time, Kiernan."

"We didn't use up all the favors owed to us." The arrogance returned to Kiernan's tone. "I'm sure if we went to the archbishop next week or even the week after and asked him to make an exception for Enya, he probably would allow for a wedding."

Da shook his head. "Requesting a hasty annulment is one thing. But I can't push for more."

"You don't have to. I will."

The barouche rolled to a stop, but not in front of their home. Instead, they were still in the business district.

A group of strawboys singing boisterously swaggered past the carriage. They were wearing tall, conical-shaped hats made from straw that rested on their shoulders, conceal-

ing their identities. A few even had straw stuck into their clothes.

Ancient lore predicted that a newly married couple would be very lucky if strawboys showed up at their celebration, beating their great sticks against the door, hammering the floor, and joining in the festivities.

Enya scowled. Such joviality shouldn't be allowed. Not tonight. Not now. Not in front of her.

As the fellows passed, the sign on the nearby establishment was all too easy to read. The bright green calligraphy contrasted the white background. Oscar's Pub.

She didn't need anyone to tell her what they were doing here. She already knew. They were visiting the matchmaker.

