



## Love By Chance

Kacy Cross

AS SHE CROSSED HER CONDO to fetch her bag, the answering machine clicked on. The machine was old-fashioned, but it still worked, so she hadn't seen a reason to get rid of it. A disembodied male voice floated from it.

"Hi, Claire. You don't know me, but your mother suggested I give you a call."

"Seriously?" she said to the machine and made a face at it.

Claire didn't bother to pick up the phone. Any guy who'd take her mother up on her matchmaking schemes did not deserve a second of Claire's attention.

The disembodied voice continued. "Maybe we could grab dinner tomorrow night? My name is Peter Bloom. Call me back, let me know."

"No." Not just no. *Never.*

"My number is 256—"

Claire grabbed her jacket and slammed the door of her condo for good measure, right as the answering machine clicked off.

When she got to the bakery, she buzzed straight past all of Marco's stellar decorations and cornered her mother in the kitchen.

"Who is Peter Bloom?"

At least Helen had the grace to look slightly chagrined, but definitely not chagrined enough for the crime in question, at least not as far as Claire was concerned.

"Peter, yes." Her mother smoothed her hair self-consciously. "He came to an open house of mine. He didn't end up buying. But a single man shopping for a four-bedroom? I guess he wants to start a family."

Claire rolled her eyes, because really? Maybe he wanted to start a hotel for dogs. Unless he'd expressly told her mother that he was looking for a wife to go along with his house, Helen needed to butt out.

"Mom, you have to stop setting me up."

*Especially* with men Claire had never met. Or men she had met. Men she'd dated a few times and had lost interest in. All of them were off limits.

Claire wheeled toward the sink to dump the plate she'd snagged as her excuse for being in the kitchen, instead of out front ensuring everything was running smoothly. Which was where she should be instead of back here telling her mom yet again to lay off.

Helen followed her to the sink, still making excuses for her overbearing behavior. Still fussing over Claire with maternal concern practically dripping

from her expression. Her mom reached out to adjust the neckline of Claire's dress.

"Oh, Claire, pretty soon your dad and I are going be off traveling the globe, and if he has his way, we are not going to be home much. I hate the idea of you being alone."

"I'm not alone! I am here, at the bakery, twenty-four/seven, which is exactly where I want to be. There's plenty of time for me to find someone and fall in love."

It wasn't that Claire hated the idea of meeting someone. It was just... Well, she wanted to meet someone. Like, literally *meet* them, in a special, fate-filled way that would clue her in instantly that she'd met The One.