

Smell the Roses (KW Consulting Book 2)

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To my wonderful parents, Pete & Kim Larsen, for your love and support. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! Psalm 46:10 Table of Contents [Chapter One](#) [Chapter Two](#) [Chapter Three](#) [Chapter Four](#) [Chapter Five](#) [Chapter Six](#) [Chapter Seven](#) [Chapter Eight](#) [Chapter Nine](#) [Chapter Ten](#) [Chapter Eleven](#) [Chapter Twelve](#) [Chapter Thirteen](#) [Chapter Fourteen](#) [Chapter Fifteen](#) [Chapter Sixteen](#) [Chapter Seventeen](#) [Chapter Eighteen](#) [Chapter Nineteen](#) [Chapter Twenty](#) [Chapter Twenty One](#) [Chapter Twenty-Two](#) [Chapter Twenty-Three](#) [Chapter Twenty-Four](#) [Chapter Twenty-Five](#) [Chapter Twenty-Six](#) [Chapter Twenty-Seven](#) [Chapter Twenty-Eight](#) [Chapter Twenty-Nine](#) [Chapter Thirty](#) Chapter One Georgia Trent smiled as she congratulated her friend and admired her diamond solitaire. She hoped that her smile didn't look as forced as it felt. She was truly happy for Kate. After all that Kate and Jeff had gone through they deserved to finally be happy together. Kate Winslow and Jefferson Wescott had dated in high school. Kate had planned on staying near Jeff as they went through college, but Jeff had assumed that Kate wanted to settle down right after high school. He broke up with her and Kate went to college as far away from Jeff as she possibly could. After college, Kate opened KW Consulting, a wedding planning firm that quickly became the most sought-after firm in the city and Kate, the most sought after planner. She added three other planners to her staff. Brooke Bailey was a former fashion model who specialized in the trendiest weddings. Isabelle Leone was quirky, creative and specialized in themed weddings. Georgia Trent was bubbly and energetic. She specialized in outdoor as well as traditional weddings. But it was Kate who took all the high profile weddings and difficult weddings, which often ended up being one and the same. Kate thought that she had everything she wanted until Jeff walked through the door as the groom of a wedding she was to plan. Suddenly, everything she thought was over had come rushing back. As the months passed and tensions mounted, Kate had eventually been forced to give the wedding to another planner. A little while later, Jeff's fiancée, Lily, had realized that their problems were deeper than just having Kate as their wedding planner and she called off the wedding. Georgia had been thrilled when she heard that Kate and Jeff had finally been able to renew their relationship. Kate was a generous employer and a dear friend. As she stared at Kate's ring though, Georgia realized that she wanted what Kate had. She had planned so many other people's weddings. She was ready to plan her own. The problem was that she couldn't even remember the last time she went on a date. There was no "Mr. Right" anywhere in her immediate future. Suddenly, realizing that she was still standing there with an idiotic grin on her face, Georgia spoke up. "It's perfect," she said in her southern drawl, "but then everything the two of you do is perfect." Kate laughed. "Yeah, you all know better than that! You were there to witness the entire spectacle." The other planners laughed with her as they remembered the times they had despaired of Kate and Jeff ever realizing they were meant for each other. "Since you all had to suffer through all of that, I'd like for you all to be my bridesmaids." she said with a smile. All three of the other women smiled and enthusiastically agreed. As they hugged each other, they soon realized that there were more than a few tears on their cheeks and they parted with nervous laughter. Kate wiped her tears and said, "I'd also like for your help in planning my wedding." "Oh, so that's the catch!" Isabelle exclaimed.

"We get to be your bridesmaids, but you're going to work us like dogs first." "I've done enough weddings that I know how these things work." joked Kate. "Brooke, I'd like you to help me with the wedding clothes. Georgia, I'd like your help with the flowers, and Isabelle, I'd like your help with the reception." All three women readily agreed knowing that she had chosen each of them for their strengths and was using those strengths for her own wedding. "I've got a meeting in five minutes," Isabelle said, looking at the clock, "I should pack up and head back to my office." Isabelle put her left over food back in her Care Bears lunch box. Kate again marveled that Isabelle could pull off the vintage lunch box that she brought every day, but somehow it just seemed to fit with Isabelle's quirky personality; her chunky jewelry and bold color schemes. The bright yellow baggy shirt and black leggings she wore today were subtle for Isabelle whose spiky hair was now colored a bright orange. Her artistic flair and creativity had helped her in some difficult wedding situations and Kate was thankful every day that she had found Isabelle. Brooke stood up too and she and Isabelle left the lunch room together. As Georgia started to leave, Kate grabbed her hand. She stopped in surprise and looked at Kate. "Georgia, I'd like for you to be my maid of honor. You were so helpful and sweet when it seemed like Jeff and I could never get it together. It just seems right to have you by my side when we get married." Georgia was surprised and touched. She hadn't felt like she had done much for Kate but apparently the little she had done had been appreciated. "Of course I will." Georgia said. Kate smiled and let Georgia leave. As Georgia headed back to her office, she tried to remember how many times she had been a bridesmaid. She soon decided that it was just too depressing to think about it and hoped that the old adage of being a bridesmaid and never a bride wasn't true. Georgia entered her office and again felt thankful for her job. Knowing how much time each planner spent in their office, Kate had given each of the girls a generous budget to spend on decorating their own office. She wanted it to be their space. Georgia had her walls painted a slate blue with the trim in white. All of the furniture in her office was white, including her desk, and the couch and arm chair in the corner. The oak floor warmed up the room. She had a few watercolor paintings hung around the office. On her desk there was a crystal vase that she always had filled with fresh flowers. Today, they were pale pink tulips. No sooner had Georgia sat down than Jennifer, her secretary tapped lightly on the door and then let herself in. Kate had also let each planner hire their own secretary since they would be working with them so closely. Georgia and Jennifer had worked well together for a few years now. Jennifer was an expert at keeping Georgia's busy schedule straight and she had never double-booked her for appointments. As Jennifer crossed the room and slowly lowered herself into the chair across from Georgia, Georgia realized that time had gotten away from her. Jennifer had to be at least seven -- maybe even eight months pregnant and Georgia hadn't even started looking for a temporary replacement for her. "What do I have going on this afternoon?" Georgia asked as she pulled up her schedule on her phone to verify that they both had the same appointments scheduled at the same time. "First you have a meeting at The Greene Thumb for the Madison wedding at 1:30. At 3:00 you have a dress fitting for the Wilson wedding." Jennifer went on outlining the rest of Georgia's day as Georgia made notes or changes on her phone's planner. "And of course, you remember that tonight is your night to eat dinner at your parent's home," Jennifer finished. Georgia tried to mask her groan. She had forgotten that she had planned to have dinner with her parents that night. While she loved her parents, dinner wasn't always the most peaceful affair. Jennifer pushed herself out of the chair and then hesitated. "Miss Trent," she started hesitantly, "I only have two weeks left until my maternity leave begins. Have you even started looking for a replacement for me?" Georgia looked down at her desk and wondered if she should lie and tell her that she had been looking or own up to the truth. Finally deciding that Jennifer would see right through her lie she opted to tell the truth. "I haven't got around to it yet," she said softly. Jennifer sighed softly. "I would like to have some time to train the person who takes my place and I'm sure you would like that too. Would you like me to make some calls or put an advertisement out or something?" Georgia thought for a moment. "Let me think about it. I'll let you know this evening before I leave what I want to do and you can get started on it in the morning." Jennifer smiled. "Thank you." She let herself out of the office hoping that Georgia could find a suitable replacement within a week so she would have a week to train them. Georgia sighed

and put her hand on her head. How had she forgotten that she would need a replacement for her secretary? She decided that she had been in denial. She had been thinking that if she ignored the situation it would just go away, but of course, it didn't work like that. She remembered the search to find her secretary when she was first hired on, and how long it took to find the perfect fit. How was she ever going to find a replacement in time to train her before Jennifer went on leave?

Chapter Two Mark Greene was in the storage room of his parent's florist shop. Holding a mirror, he checked his appearance. Mark was average height and he considered himself average in looks. He had short brown hair and green eyes. His skin was tanned from working at his family's nursery and he had a muscular build, but he never felt like there was anything extraordinary about his appearance. As he once again came to this conclusion, his little sister walked into the storage room and looked over at him. He hastily tried to put down the mirror but it was too late. Tracey laughed and said, "So today must be a wedding planner day." Tracey was ten years younger than her older brother. Their parents had thought that they would never have another child after Mark and considered Tracey a blessing, but right now Mark thought she was more of a pest. "I don't know what you're talking about." Mark grumbled. "Really?" asked Tracey, "So a Miss Georgia Trent from KW Consulting doesn't have an appointment with a certain florist today?" Mark glared at his younger sister. "Oh just shut up." he grumbled much to Tracey's delight. He marched back into the main floor of the florist shop and pretended to be busy. The Greene family actually owned two businesses. The Greene Thumb Nursery was started before Mark was born and had become a thriving business. Later, Mark's mom studied floral arranging and fell in love with it. The Greene's then opened The Greene Thumb Florist Shop. Through high school and college Mark had worked at both locations. He had studied botany to try to help with his family's nursery, preferring to work outdoors than to be in the florist shop. One day, while working on his masters, his mom had been sick on a day when she'd had an important meeting with a wedding planner from KW Consulting. Knowing that the firm was highly sought after and if the planner liked their work she would use them again, she was upset to have to cancel. Mark decided that he could step in for one meeting. When the planner arrived, he had been knocked off his feet. Georgia Trent was a petite blond with short curly hair and baby blue eyes. She had a bubbly personality and sweet southern accent and Mark had been drawn to her immediately. Making up one excuse after another, Mark decided to remain in charge of that particular account. Several months later when Mark's mom happened to be there as Georgia arrived, she finally understood why her son really wanted to help with the wedding. Now a few years later, Mark was the principle contact for Georgia and the rest of the KW Consulting team. The bell over the door chimed and Mark glanced up to see Georgia come in. She was wearing a pale pink blouse and white Capri pants with white high heeled sandals. He never knew how she could stand wearing those things, but she always seemed to have heels on. She immediately headed over to the corner where a table and chairs were set up for meetings and pulled out her client's folder. Mark looked at her more closely and realized that something was bothering her. Normally she would greet him with a smile before sitting down, but this time she didn't even look his way. Mark walked over and sat down next to her, hoping that he would have a chance to talk to her before her clients showed up. They exchanged greetings, and then Georgia seemed to withdraw. "You look like you have something on your mind," Mark stated simply. Georgia looked up at him in surprise and then smiled. "I guess I should focus on what's at hand or my clients are gonna wonder what's going on with me," she said. "Anything I can help with?" Mark asked. Georgia looked at him as if she was debating something. Finally she said, "Not unless you can come up with a secretary for me. Mine is going on maternity leave soon and I have to find a replacement soon so she can train her." "Have you advertised for the position yet?" "No. I don't know why, but I haven't done anything yet. I guess I've been in denial. It was so difficult to find Jennifer that I really don't want to go through the process again." Georgia leaned her head back against the seat and closed her eyes. "It's only a temporary position, but if I don't get someone who is capable of keeping all of my schedules straight and making my appointments for me I could end up in a difficult situation." Again the bell above the door rang and a couple walked in. Georgia immediately stood up with a large grin on her face and gestured for the couple to join them. Mark hoped that Georgia would have some time at the end to talk about it some more, but oftentimes

she had to dash off quickly afterwards for another appointment. The meeting went well and Mark was sure they could provide what the couple was looking for. The couple left looking happy and holding hands and Mark couldn't help but glance at Georgia and wish he could reach over and take her hand, especially since the worried look was back on her face. Mark decided to take a risk. He gently laid his hand on top of hers. She looked at him with surprise but didn't pull away. He smiled softly and said, "I know you're worried about your secretary problem, but remember that God already knows what's going to happen. I'm going to be praying that God will bring someone along that will fit all your needs." Mark had learned early on that Georgia shared his faith in God and that knowledge had just increased his attraction for her. Georgia smiled. "All my needs? That's a pretty tall order." "Hey! With God, anything is possible. Besides, that's what He promised and He never breaks a promise." Mark smiled back at her. For a moment, there seemed to be a connection and Mark began to hope that maybe she felt something for him as well. Then she glanced at their hands and self-consciously pulled her hand out from under his. She gathered her things and stood up. "I believe I have another appointment with you later this week. Is that right?" she said, back to business. "Yeah," he said taking his cue from her, "I think we meet again on Friday." "Great! I'll see you then," she said as she headed toward the door. When she reached the door, she turned back. "Thanks, Mark! I appreciate your prayers." With that she headed on to her next appointment, but Mark sat for a while staring at the door. He started praying for her right away.

Chapter Three Georgia pulled up into her parents' driveway and turned off her car. By the end of the day, she had decided that all she could do about the secretary position was to advertise and pray that she would quickly find a replacement. She had told Jennifer to put ads in the papers as well as on a few job search web sites. Since her schedule was already filled with appointments with her clients, she and Jennifer had agreed to do interviews during lunch as well as before or after work. Georgia wanted Jennifer in on the interviewing process since she knew the job forwards and backwards. She would best be able to answer any specific questions the applicant might have. Georgia realized that she'd been sitting out in the car for a few minutes and she needed to get inside to her family. She grabbed the store bought strawberry cheesecake and her purse from the passenger seat and headed to the front door. Letting herself in, she called out to her mom, who hollered back that she was in the kitchen, and Georgia headed back to join her family. "Hi, Mom," Georgia greeted as she went over to give her a kiss on the cheek. "Hi, Sweetheart," her mom responded and took the cheesecake from Georgia's hands. Laura Trent had the same blond curls and blue eyes as her daughter, although her hair color was done by her beautician now. Mother and daughter looked so much alike that often they were asked if they were sisters, much to the delight of Laura. "Your father is outside grilling the hamburgers." Georgia made a small noise that passed for acknowledging her mom's information. "Is there anything I can help with?" she asked. "You could set the table and get all the condiments out." her mom replied. "Is Caroline coming this evening?" Georgia asked, speaking of her older sister, as she started gathering the dishes for the table. "Yes, but she'll have to come right after her shift. She should get here right as we sit down to eat." Georgia collected all the plates and silverware for the four of them and began to set the table. As she was finishing up, her dad walked through the sliding glass door with a plate full of hamburgers. Georgia's mouth started to water at the tempting smell of the freshly grilled meat. George Trent looked at his youngest daughter and jerked his head to acknowledge her presence. Georgia sighed and tried not to roll her eyes. She may look like her mother, but her personality was her father's and there had been friction between them for about as long as Georgia could remember. Her dad had a tall military bearing with short cropped grey hair. He set the plate down on the kitchen counter. "Georgia brought a cheesecake." Laura told him and pointed to the dessert in its plastic packaging. "Store bought." George said gruffly. "I just got off work, Dad. Give me a break." Georgia responded. "You're a wedding planner. You can't find time between weddings to actually make food? No wonder you're still single." "George!" Laura protested. "No, I'm serious." George responded. "The old saying is true. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Your mom got my attention when she made me the most delicious batch of peanut butter cookies I had ever eaten. After that I knew that I wanted this woman for my wife." He affectionately put his arm around his wife and Laura smile awkwardly

at him. She loved her husband and her daughter, and hated it that they could never seem to be in the same room without fireworks going off. There was a sound at the front door and George beamed. "There's Caroline now," he said proudly. He moved to go greet his older daughter and Georgia moved closer to her mom. She didn't say a word, but her eyes spoke volumes to Laura. "I know," Laura replied as if Georgia had spoken, "I know it's not fair, but I don't know what to do about it. Can you try to get along with your father tonight even when he's difficult? From something Caroline said, I think she has some news to share. I think her promotion finally came through." Georgia groaned. "Great! Now he's going to be going on and on about the wonder that is Caroline and how much of a failure I am in comparison." Laura didn't bother to deny it. She just reached over and squeezed her daughter's hand. "I know it's hard, but I also know that you love your sister. Could you try to ignore your father and be happy for her?" "I'll do my best, Mom." Georgia promised, but she knew it was going to be a long evening for her. Caroline and George came back into the kitchen. Caroline was still wearing her police officer's uniform since she had come straight from work. She was average height with straight brown hair that she wore in a French braid while she was on duty. Her blue eyes were the one common trait she and her sister shared. She looked embarrassed and almost anxious. Georgia felt like she was about ready to burst with her news. She wondered how long she'd be able to contain it, but knowing her sister, Caroline would hold it in until the perfect time. She seemed to have a knack for doing everything with perfection. At least George seemed to think that was true. The family sat down to eat and after a brief prayer for the food, they began to pass the food around and started to eat. George asked Caroline all about her day and Caroline shyly answered her father. Caroline hated to be the center of attention, but somehow always seemed to end up there. To make up for George's lack of attention, Laura asked Georgia about her work. Nothing seemed to penetrate her father's attention until she mentioned needing a new secretary. "Why haven't you been looking for one before now?" he asked abruptly. "I don't know, Dad. I guess I forgot," she responded looking down at her plate and trying to hold her temper in check. "How could you forget? The woman is pregnant! Surely you noticed her expanding waistline month after month. That should have been a reminder to you." Georgia gritted her teeth. "I don't know, Dad." "I do. You have no organizational abilities. Caroline would have been searching months ago." "Dad," Caroline quietly protested. She hated when her dad compared her to Georgia. She felt Georgia glance at her, but didn't look up at her. Georgia felt bad for her sister, knowing she'd rather not be dragged into situations between her dad and her sister. She glanced at her mom who was giving her a slight shake of her head and she took a deep breath. Thinking about her calendar and her closely scheduled day, she decided that her dad might be surprised if he knew what her organizational abilities were really like. Instead of making a smart aleck remark, she just quietly said, "You're right, Dad." George looked at his daughter in surprise and searched her face for any sign of sarcasm. Satisfied with her passive expression, he went back to his dinner and to his conversation with Caroline, the memory of Georgia's humble answer, however, stuck with him. Maybe his younger daughter was finally becoming the quiet, submissive woman he wanted her to be. When dinner was over, Caroline and Georgia helped Laura clear the table. Then the girls brought back dessert plates with slices of the strawberry cheesecake that Georgia had brought. Georgia snuck a glance at her dad and was relieved that he just quietly picked up his fork and started eating without making any references to the dessert being store bought. It didn't escape Georgia's notice that Caroline hadn't brought anything for the meal, but her dad hadn't found fault with her. Of course, Caroline had a "real" job and therefore didn't have time for such things as cooking whereas Georgia didn't really work, so she had all the time in the world. Georgia grimaced and then took a bite of her cheesecake hoping the sweetness of the cake would drive away the bitterness in her heart. Laura cleared her throat. "Caroline, Sweetie, was there something you wanted to talk to us about?" she asked. Caroline glanced down in embarrassment. She had hinted to her mom that she had something to announce at dinner, but now that the time had come, she didn't know what to say. Looking straight into Georgia's eyes, she smiled softly and said, "I'm getting married." "What?" George cried as he dropped his fork onto the table with a clatter. "Why are you getting married? Who is marrying you? When did this happen?" Caroline looked down for a moment and

then started softly, "His name is Jake Thompson. He proposed a week ago. As for why I'm getting married, it's because I love him. Isn't that the normal reason to get married?" Laura spoke up. "Well, dear, you have to admit that we were a bit taken by surprise. After all, none of us even knew you were seeing anyone, let alone thinking about marriage. Are we going to be able to meet Jake anytime soon?" "Actually," Caroline said, sheepishly, "he's coming over tonight. He should be here any minute now." She stole a glance at her sister who was continuing to stare at her with a bite of cheesecake still on her fork. "Can you tell us a little bit about Jake before he gets here? Maybe let us know a little bit about your relationship?" Laura asked. George seemed struck dumb after his first outburst. "Of course. Jake and I met at work," she began. "So he's a police officer, too?" Laura questioned. Caroline nodded. "We've been seeing each other for six months. His proposal was unexpected, but I just knew it was right." "What's wrong with him?" George finally asked. "Excuse me?" Caroline asked with astonishment. "Why hasn't he had the decency to come meet us? He could have at least asked my permission before he proposed. What kind of man doesn't have the common courtesy to talk to the parents before he proposes?" he said gruffly. "It's my fault he hasn't been by before." Caroline admitted. "I didn't want to bring him over until I knew it was serious, and then I just kept putting it off. I never expected to be engaged at this point, but I'm glad I am," she finished with a sweet smile. Once again she looked over at Georgia. She had set the fork down, but was uncharacteristically quiet. "Georgia? Aren't you happy for me?" she asked wistfully. Georgia blinked and then forced a smile. For the second time that day she had to be happy for someone else's engagement and forced to acknowledge her own pitiful relationship history. "Of course I'm happy for you! It was just a surprise. I had no idea," she stopped and swallowed. "Well, let me see the ring!" she exclaimed as she reached her hand across the table for her sister's. The ring was a small solitaire, not as spectacular as Kate's, but on a police officer's salary it wasn't likely he could afford one the size of Kate's. Yet it seemed to fit her sister very well. Georgia thought that Kate's ring would have seemed out of place on Caroline's finger. The dainty, classic ring was just the right fit for her soft spoken sister. "It's perfect." Georgia finally said and was rewarded with a huge smile as Caroline squeezed her hand tightly. "I'm so glad you're happy for me! I want you to be my maid of honor, of course, and I'll need your help with planning the wedding. You are the expert after all, and I haven't even a clue of where to begin." "Of course! Just let me know when you want to get started." "We'd like to get married in six months. We don't want anything fancy, just a simple, traditional ceremony." Georgia thought quickly. "I think the first thing we need to do is make a decision about the location. Some places will fill up more than a year in advance so we should get something reserved as quickly as possible." She pulled out her phone and started pulling up her calendar when she felt her sister's hand on hers. She looked up in surprise. "Not tonight," her sister said firmly. "Tonight I just want to let you guys get to know Jake and celebrate our engagement. We'll have plenty of time." Georgia again forced a smile and laid her phone down on the table. Planning a wedding was comfortable for her. She knew what to do and when to do it. She had tons of contacts for every element of the wedding. Acting like she was thrilled that her sister was marrying a guy she didn't even know was not comfortable. As she glanced around the table, she realized that she wasn't the only one who was uncomfortable. Her mother sat with a frozen smile in place while her dad glowered at the table as if everything that had just taken place was somehow the table's fault. Caroline seemed to be oblivious to the tension. Now that she had told them her news, she was no longer worried. She knew they'd love Jake as soon as they met him. She finished off her cheesecake, unaware that she was the only one still eating. Hearing a car in the driveway, Caroline jumped up from the table. "It's Jake!" she shouted as she darted for the front door. Georgia and Laura exchanged glances. Quietly, they picked up the dessert plates and headed for the kitchen. George remained seated at the table. "Do you think Dad's going to be okay?" Georgia asked when they were in the kitchen. "It's been a shock for him." Laura replied, "It was shock for all of us. None of us saw this coming. I have no idea why Caroline kept this from us. Do you think she's ashamed of Jake?" "I have no idea. Maybe she's ashamed of us." Georgia replied. Laura shook her head. "I hope that's not the case." "She might have been afraid that Dad and I would start fighting and scare him off." "I would hope that you and your Dad could behave civilly for one night for Caroline's sake." "Maybe she's afraid Dad won't

approve." Laura looked up at her. "That is definitely a possibility. I think you hit on something there." "Mom? Dad? Georgia?" Caroline hollered from the living room. "Come meet Jake!" "Well," Laura said, wiping her hands on a towel, "I guess it's time to meet Jake." Chapter Four Laura and Georgia walked into the living room and found George already in a stand-off with Jake. George was standing with his arms folded across his chest and staring Jake down. Jake looked vastly uncomfortable, but was not backing down. Laura sighed and went over to Jake with a friendly smile and held out her hand to give him a hand shake. "Hi, I'm Laura. I'm Caroline's mother," she said and Jake offered her a relieved smile and gratefully took her hand. She liked Jake immediately. He had short brown hair and dark brown eyes. He was wearing jeans and green button up shirt. His smile was endearing and she was not surprised that her daughter had been attracted to this man. Georgia came over next. "I'm Georgia," she said and she surprised Jake by giving him a hug instead of offering her hand. "We're going to be family. All this stiff formality is just ridiculous," she explained with a smile. Laura and Georgia sat down on the love seat while Caroline took a seat on the couch. Jake began to sit next to Caroline and then realized that George was not going to sit down. He stood back up and looked around uncomfortably. He had been afraid that this meeting was not going to go well, but he hadn't expected it to be quite so awkward. George continued to stare Jake down, but hadn't said a word yet. Jake looked around at the women and was encouraged by their calm and smiling faces. Caroline reached up and squeezed his hand. He took a deep breath and decided to plunge right in. Jake held his hand out to George. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir. Caroline has told me so much about you." George kept his arms folded. "That's funny. She hasn't mentioned you to any of us. Why do you suppose that is?" Jake swallowed and put his hand down at his side. "I'm not sure, sir. I suppose that she would have to answer that question." He glanced back quickly at Caroline. George caught the glance. "What are you looking at her for? I want to know why she would be too embarrassed of you to even mention you to her family let alone introduce you to us. So what is it? Are you a criminal? Are you married?" "What?" Jake cried, "No!" "Dad," Caroline protested, "Stop it!" Georgia looked at her sister in surprise. She had never seen her sister stand up to her dad about anything. She looked back at Jake with respect. Anyone who could create that strong of emotion in her placid sister was deserving of her. "I didn't bring him over because I really liked him and I was afraid that you would do exactly what you're doing right now. Stop giving Jake the third degree and talk to him like he's a human being. He's going to be your son-in-law whether you like it or not, so why don't you at least try to get along." George blinked in surprise at his daughter. He wasn't sure he liked this change in her, but looking around at the others in the room he decided that maybe he was overreacting. His wife's eyes especially seemed to tell him to behave. He relaxed his stance and sat down in his favorite armchair. Jake nearly dropped into the couch in his relief. Caroline gripped his hand and gave him a smile. He smiled back and turned his attention back to his future father-in-law. "Sir, maybe I should have pushed Caroline harder about introducing me to you all, but I figured she knew you guys better than I did. I'm sorry that I didn't try harder, especially once I knew that I would be proposing." George grunted. Jake wasn't sure how to interpret that. He glanced at Caroline and saw her roll her eyes. He looked around the living room again. Laura gave him an encouraging smile, and Georgia looked amused at the whole situation. Caroline had told him a little about the relationship between George and Georgia and figured she was enjoying seeing his ire focused on someone else for a change. "In my day, a man asked the girl's father for permission to propose," George said gruffly. "Yes, sir, I know. I had thought about that, too. I guess when I make up my mind to do something; I have a tendency to just go after it. You'll have to agree that Caroline is a treasure worth going after," he added with an affectionate smile at Caroline. Caroline blushed and put her head on Jake's shoulder. He gently kissed her on top of her head. Georgia blinked her eyes rapidly at the tender display of affection and looked out the window. She noticed the truck parked in front of the house and smiled. Her father put a lot of stock in the type of vehicle their boyfriends drove. If they drove a sports car, they were dangerous. If they drove a motorcycle, they were rebellious. If they drove a sedan, they were boring. The only boyfriend she had ever had that her father approved of had driven a truck. A truck was masculine and dependable. "You have a nice truck out there, Jake," she said, drawing

the attention away from the situation. George glanced out the window and Georgia was amused to see him look at Jake as if he was reevaluating his opinion based on this new information. "Yeah, she's a good truck," Jake said with pride, "I got her used when I graduated from high school and she's lasted all these years." George sat back in his chair with satisfaction. "Well, if you treat them right, a good truck will get you through a lot of years." "That's what I've always thought as well," Jake said. "It drives me crazy when a guy goes out and buys a new truck every couple of years at the first sign of wear and tear. All they need is a little love and elbow grease and they'll be good for years to come." "Exactly," George exclaimed. "No one knows how to work on their own cars anymore. They take it to the mechanic and he's just out to cheat you." "My dad made sure I took auto shop in school so I'd know how to do at least the basic auto maintenance on my car." Jake said. "He's a wise man," George said, nodding. Jake nodded as well and silence fell on the group. "Jake, could you tell us a little more about yourself?" Laura questioned. "We'd really like to know you better." She gave him a friendly smile. "Oh, yeah!" Jake said, "I suppose that would be nice to know. I'm one of five children. I'm the youngest and I have an older brother and three older sisters. My parents didn't really have much interest in spiritual things, but my grandma, my mom's mom, was a devout lady and she would often take us to church. Through her teaching, I came to know Christ when I was in my early teens. Soon after that, we had a career day at school and I heard a police officer talk. I decided that was what I wanted to do with my life and really felt that was where God wanted me as well. As soon as I was able I went to the police academy and began my career." Laura glanced over at George and could tell he was pleased. George had spent many years of his life working in law enforcement. A few years ago, a large budget cut had forced the city to lay off several police and George had been one of those who had lost their jobs. Knowing he'd hate being indoors all day, he had found a job with a landscaping company and had quickly learned new skills to make him a valuable employee. "Did you and Caroline meet on the job?" Georgia asked. They glanced at each other. "We were sort of set up." Jake said. "A friend of mine and a friend of hers decided we would be perfect for each other." "And they were right," Caroline said, with a smile. "How did you propose?" Georgia asked next. "My grandmother, the one who led me to Christ, passed away a few months ago. Before she died she gave me her wedding set and told me that she knew that Caroline was the right one for me and that she wanted me to give the set to her when I knew it, too. I've been carrying the set around in my pocket ever since thinking that I'd be ready when that time came. Last week we were sitting at dinner and I looked at Caroline and realized that I wanted to have dinner with her every night for the rest of my life." He looked at George for a second. "I told you that I tend to plunge in when I decide I want something. I decided not to let the opportunity pass me by. I immediately slipped out of my chair and knelt beside her. I reached into my pocket and pulled out my grandmother's ring and asked her to marry me." Caroline looked over at her mother and sister and saw the tears of joy in their eyes. She wondered now why she had kept Jake a secret from them. Her dad might have embarrassed her like he did tonight, but her mom and sister would have been supportive. She thought of everything she had missed by not sharing her relationship with Laura and Georgia. She decided that both of them would be very involved with the wedding planning to make up for it. Jake looked back at George. "So you see, sir, it wasn't a conscious decision to not ask you before I asked her. I just knew I needed to have her in my life forever and couldn't see any reason to delay that." Caroline smiled at Jake. "We would have eloped that night if he'd had his way." "I didn't see any reason to wait any longer than necessary." Jake replied with a smile. George grunted again. As much as he didn't want to like this man, he had to admit that Jake was hard not to like. If he took care of his truck for so many years, he would be loyal to Caroline and care for her for life. He had a noble and steady job. Even his impulsiveness showed a man who knew his own mind. Just then, Georgia yawned loudly, drawing attention to her. "I'm so sorry," she said, embarrassed at the attention. Caroline looked at her watch and exclaimed. "I didn't realize how late it was. I'm sorry I kept you guys up so late." They all stood and Laura and George walked their girls and Jake to the door. They all said good-bye and no one watching would know that the evening had started out so painfully awkward. Laura grabbed a dish cloth and headed for the dining room. She hadn't been able to wipe the table off after dinner because of Jake's arrival. When she walked into the room,

she paused. Sitting on the table was Georgia's phone. Laura knew it was Georgia's lifeline. She went over and picked it up knowing she would have to go drop it off at Georgia's house tonight. Her daughter would never be able to function without it. As she held it in her hand, her mind went back to the earlier conversations at dinner before Caroline had made her big announcement. She remembered George's comment about Georgia's lack of organization and turned on the phone. She entered the password which she knew Georgia used for everything and found Georgia's calendar. As she suspected, each date was filled with appointments and activities and each one was color coded. Her days were filled from practically the moment she got up until the time she went to bed. Laura smiled sadly. How did George not know his own daughter? She had no idea what it was that made him so antagonistic toward her, but she realized that she had done little to help the situation. She had encouraged Georgia to remain quiet when perhaps she should have stuck up for herself. She had told Georgia not to make waves when she knew good and well that Georgia rarely started their confrontations. It was easier to correct her daughter than her husband. George certainly didn't take criticism from anyone well and definitely not his wife. Maybe it was time for Laura to gently show her husband who their daughter really was. Maybe if he got passed his preconceived notions he would ease up on Georgia. George walked into the dining room at that moment. "Can you believe what Caroline did?" he asked without prelude. He stopped and noticed the phone in Laura's hand. "What's that? It's not yours." Laura looked down at the phone. Georgia's phone case was a bright turquoise blue with glitter in it. Laura smiled. It was certainly not her phone. Her tastes were much more subdued. "It's Georgia's phone. She must have forgotten she laid it down on the table." "Of course she did." George said gruffly. "That's not fair, George." Laura said softly. George looked at her in surprise. "Has Georgia ever left her phone here before?" George was quiet for a moment, but refused to admit he was wrong. "We were all shook up after Caroline broke her news. It wouldn't be completely out of character for Georgia to forget her phone in such a moment." George grunted, but again said nothing. Laura sighed. "George, there's something I want you to see." She again got into Georgia's phone and opened up her calendar. She held it out to George and he took it from her. "What is this?" he asked staring at the information on the screen. "That is Georgia's calendar." Laura replied. "So? What do I care when Georgia schedules her manicures or spa days?" Laura closed her eyes and wondered if she had waited too long to step in. "I wanted you to see the calendar for two reasons. First, you accused our daughter of being unorganized. I wanted you to see how tightly planned out each day is for her. She hardly has any space from one appointment to the next. Secondly, I want you to see that Georgia doesn't sit around all day watching soap operas. She works and she works hard." George started to interrupt, but Laura held up her hand. "I know that her job doesn't seem important or worthwhile to you, but she is very good at what she does and she helps a lot of women."

Georgia Trent is one of the prestigious bridal consultants from KW Consulting. While her life is extremely busy, she has always managed to get by. Now she's faced with planning two weddings outside of work, in addition to her regular work load, and to make matters worse, she is losing her priceless secretary. Surprisingly, help arrives in the form of Mark Greene, who quickly realizes that Georgia desperately needs to slow down. Can he convince her to stop and smell the roses before Georgia breaks down?

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