

There was something about an airport. People were coming and going. Some were heading out for adventure and some were heading home—just like Tyler Benson.

Nashville would always be home. He'd taken nearly three years to see the world and think his life through. He wasn't sure he had a better grasp on it yet, but he knew one thing—he missed his family.

Why had he let his mother's choices affect him so much? Things must have been pretty bad for her if she gave up a child and never spoke of it again.

The man in him understood. She was protecting him and his brother from what had happened to her when she'd fallen in love with an abusive man who tried to kill her. But the boy in him was still hurt.

Heading back wouldn't fix everything. He assumed there'd be a lot of late night talks over the kitchen table as there had been when he was a teenager. His father already had offered him a good job in the construction firm which had been in the family for generations. And—he needed to finally get to really know his sister.

Darcy had been as shocked as Tyler when she'd learned who her mother was. After all, she'd fallen in love with Tyler's cousin—that had to have been a little odd. But the Keller family was eclectic. It was made up of lots of adopted children, but they were still one big family.

His cousin Ed and his sister Darcy had been married over a year now. Their wedding had been the only time Tyler had been home in three years. Now it was time to face his parents and ask for some forgiveness, though he was sure they'd give it to him. Everyone understood his need to find himself.

They called his flight from New York to Nashville. It was time to board the plane. He stood and moved toward the line as a woman ran right into him.

"I'm so sorry," she said quickly.

"It's no problem." He looked down and noticed she'd dropped her scarf. "You dropped this." He bent down to pick it up and hand it to her.

The woman only held out her hand, but didn't reach for it. Tyler placed it in her open hand.

"Oh, thank you. I lose more things." She gave a casual laugh and continued on. It was then he noticed the cane in her other hand.

"Do you need an arm to get on the plane?"

She smiled at him, though her eyes were shielded behind big sunglasses. "Are you a nice man or do you feel sorry for me?"

That was quite a question, he thought. "Well, I'd like to think it was because I was raised right."

"You're from the South." She thought a moment. "Tennessee?"

"Yes. Born and raised in Nashville."

She leaned in closer to him. "I guessed from your accent and since we're getting on a flight bound that way."

He couldn't help but chuckle. "Offer still holds."

"What's your name?"

"I'm Tyler. Tyler Benson."

"Courtney Fields and, Mr. Benson, I'd love to have you guide me if you don't mind."

"It would be my pleasure."

He let her take his arm, though she didn't interlock elbows, instead she held the back of his arm just above his elbow.

When they approached the door, Courtney held out her ticket and the woman scanned it and placed the stub back in her hand. She then did the same for Tyler.

Once checked in, they walked down the jet bridge.

“Do you travel a lot, Mr. Benson?”

“It’s Tyler, and I’ve been doing my fair share the past few years. How about you?”

“I’ve been seeing the world, though not intentionally. So yes. I travel quite a bit. But this is a special trip back home.”

He desperately wanted to ask her why she said she’d been seeing the world. Could she see? Was it just a figure of speech?

“Hello, Ms. Fields.” The stewardess greeted her as they walked on board.

“Celia.” Courtney smiled, having obviously recognized the woman’s voice. “I didn’t expect you on this flight.”

“I’m state side now.” Celia took Courtney’s hand which still held her cane and patted it. “I’ve heard we have your brother on board,” she said softly.

Courtney nodded. “Finally.”

“Your family has been in my thoughts for a long time.”

“Thank you,” Courtney said. “Oh, Celia, this is Tyler. My arm candy for the walk down the jet way.”

Celia looked at Tyler and then back at Courtney. “I thought you had an escort.”

“It’s always good to make a new friend. How’s he look?”

Celia scanned another look over him. “You did good.”

Tyler forced a smile. “Thank you?”

Celia laughed. “Courtney, can I help you find your seat?”

“If you don’t mind, I’ll use my arm candy.”

Tyler looked at her ticket. “You’re in 3A.”

“Yep, that sounds right. Where are you?”

“I’m in 4F.”

“You like the window too?”

“Luck of the draw really.”

Courtney stopped and turned back to Celia. “Can you see if you can arrange my escort to trade to 4F?”

The smile on Celia’s face and the look she casually gave to Tyler made him a little nervous. His good deed had warranted him a seat change?

“Do you mind sitting by me on the flight? I could use some good company,” Courtney asked.

Tyler thought about the past three years and wondered if he could be good company. But, like he’d told her before, he’d been raised right. And if the woman wanted to sit by him who was he to turn her down?

“If the other passenger doesn’t mind changing I’d be happy to switch.”

“I still like the window. I hope that’s okay,” she said as she walked toward her seat.

Once they were seated, Courtney turned to him. “Thank you for picking up my scarf.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Thanks for keeping me company. This trip home is a hard one and it’ll be nice to have a handsome man to talk to.”

He wondered what made her trip so hard, besides the obvious hindrance of not being able to see the world around her.

“How do you know I’m so handsome? Celia might have been lying to you.”

*Excerpt from THE ACCEPTANCE, book eight in the Keller Family Series by Bernadette Marie.*

She smiled. "Oh, I can tell you're handsome. And you're not married. I would guess you're in your mid to late twenties. You were well educated. You're about six-two. And you have blue eyes."

He knew that staring at her with his eyes wide open wasn't going to make her aware of how stunned he was, but for some reason he was sure she knew.

"How do you know all that?"

The smile on her mouth turned into a playful pucker forcing her cheeks to dimple on both sides. "You handed me my scarf with your left hand. You don't have a ring."

"You felt for a ring?"

"I dropped the scarf on purpose. You smelled good."

That made him laugh aloud. "Okay, keep going."

"I've held the arms of many people. I'm five-five, so I know my heights from there."

"I'm six-three."

"I was close."

"My education?"

"You have an accent, but your words have a refined quality to them. I'd guess you can speak more than one language."

"My father speaks French, and so does my aunt. I've always known both."

She nodded slowly as though she were collecting her reward for knowing so much.

"Okay, those are all logical. How do you know I have blue eyes?"

"That one was a guess, but I was right. You just told me."

"You have quite a talent."

Courtney turned her head toward the window. "You also seemed lost."

"I beg your pardon. How would you know that?"

"I could feel it. It felt as though you could use some company and I sure know I could."

He wasn't sure how this woman could tell so much about him, but she had a keen sense of the world around her.

The last passenger to board the plane was a soldier in uniform. As he passed by their row he looked down at Courtney as if he knew she'd be there and then he continued to his seat which Tyler noted was the seat he was to have occupied.

As the doors were secured the pilot came over the speaker.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we will be starting our flight shortly. I wanted to inform you that we have the honor of flying a vet home to his final resting place today."

The air in the plane grew thick and Tyler could hear the many gasps and even sobs which had come from that announcement. He turned toward Courtney who had gripped her hands in front of her and pressed her forehead to her white knuckles.

"Are you okay?"

She lifted her head and he could see the tears streak down her cheek from under her sunglasses. Hesitantly she nodded.

"I'm finally getting to make the journey to take my brother home."

Tyler let out a long breath and watched as this woman he'd just met turned her face toward the warmth of the sun coming in through the small window.

He'd gained a sister and felt like his world had ended.

Courtney had lost a brother and yet was thankful to be with him on his final ride home.

Tyler rested his head against the back of his seat. His life didn't make any more sense than it had three years ago when he'd left Nashville. But at least when he got there his brother, sister, and his parents would be there.

What was there for Courtney?