



## WHEN DREAMS CROSS

By Terri Blackstock

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### Chapter One

The past was a funny thing. It had a way of catching up with you no matter how fast you ran. Andi Sherman realized now that it was gaining on her.

There was no way around it. The Khaki Kangaroo cartoon was the only one that had the kind of characters she had wanted for her amusement park. But she had resisted choosing it, because she wasn't sure she was up to dealing with the baggage that came with it.

But letting personal feelings influence her business decisions would have disappointed her father, who had trusted her to take over his dream when others saw her as not much more than a kid. She had something to prove now. Even if it meant working with Justin Pierce.

Andi sighed. "It's perfect, Wes. That cartoon is the only one that strikes the right chord."

The builder nodded. "You chose it, Andi. You knew those characters were perfect for Promised Land the first time you saw them. I did, too."

Andi turned around in her leather swivel chair and stared down at some papers on her desk. Of course she had known it was perfect. But that was before she had learned that Justin Pierce was its animator.

Justin Pierce. She had counted on spending the rest of her life without seeing him again.

She raised her eyes to Wes, her old friend and the builder who would incorporate these characters into the rides. As she watched, he rolled a purple Tootsie Pop around in his mouth, one that he'd probably bought for his daughter, Amy. "It doesn't matter, though," she said. "Justin probably won't come anyway. He's already an hour and a half late."

Wes took the sucker from his mouth and surveyed the uncharacteristic tension on Andi's face. "Justin's not stupid. If he has any business sense at all, he'll come."

"If it were just business," Andi said in a hollow voice, "it wouldn't be that hard."

Standing up, she went to the window, hands jammed in the pockets of her slacks. The cool pink blouse she wore provided a soft contrast to the tan on Andi's arms. Absently, her hand went up to tuck a stray strand of hair into the French braid at the nape of her neck. If only she could put this off until another day, she thought.

"Andi," Wes said, his gentle voice cutting into her thoughts to remind her he was still there. "Eight years is a long time, and you were both practically kids. Don't you think he's put all that behind him by now?"

Andi breathed a silent laugh. She had never been able to completely put it behind her. But she had lost more when the relationship ended than he had. She turned back to Wes, who'd been friends with them both when they were all involved in a Christian discipling group in college. "Of course he has. I'm just worried about those resentments he had toward me the last time I saw him. They might get in the way of my offer."

Wes stood up and stuck the Tootsie Pop back in his mouth. "Those resentments were unfounded. And your father was wrong. Everything that happened was wrong." His words were slurred around the candy, making what he said seem less important, but Andi knew better. "Surely the past won't cloud a business deal like this."

Surely, Andi thought with a sarcastic lift of her brows. But unless Justin Pierce had changed, she knew there would be trouble.

The secretary's warning buzz and the knock on the heavy oak door paralyzed Andi. She glanced at the closed circuit television screen behind her desk the one that monitored the goings and comings outside her office and saw the man she'd been waiting for. She looked at Wes, trying not to look as fragile as she felt.

He seemed torn between compassion and amusement as he sat on the edge of her desk. "It's him," he said.

"I can't believe he came."

Wes started to the door. "I'll let him in, then leave you two alone."

"No, stay," she said quickly. "We'll talk about old times."

He turned back to her. "Andi, Justin and I have kept in touch. He was in my wedding last year, for heaven's sake. If you still want to talk about old times after you've had this meeting, we'll all have dinner tonight. But don't sweat it. It's just Justin."

Just Justin.

The words didn't go together. It was like saying, "Just napalm." Justin Pierce had never been anything that could be preceded by the word just.

She went back to her desk but remained standing. Lifting her chin and hardening her green eyes, she told Wes, "Let him in."

Wes opened the door, and Justin stood there, looking as apprehensive, as defensive as she. Surprised to see his old college roommate, Justin let a slow, reluctant grin break across his face.

"Hey, buddy," Wes said, taking his hand in a friendly shake. "How's it going?"

Justin laughed. "Man, I didn't expect to see you here."

"We haven't talked in a few months. This is one of the reasons I've been so busy. Andi hired me to head up the building going on here," he said.

At the mention of her name, Justin's smile faded, and he faced the woman behind the desk. Her smile was tentative, almost awkward. "Thank you for coming, Justin," she said.

For a moment he just stared at her, his cool scrutiny making her wish she had never swallowed her pride and called him. He had not changed. His black hair, tousled by the April breeze, fell over his forehead and ears, ruffling across the collar of his shirt, but he made no attempt to sweep it back into place. One hand rested in the pocket of worn jeans, and his tweed blazer was caught behind his wrist.

Wes was still grinning. "I gotta go, buddy, but we'll get together later, okay?"

"Sure," Justin said.

Wes glanced back at Andi. "You know where I'll be."

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