

Evelyn



Evelyn

The Meadow Creek Series Short Story

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Chapter One

“Hello.” Evelyn answered the phone with one hand, while the other was holding a calico kitten.

“I sent a handsome older man to see you. He is on his way there now.” Mildred, who most referred to as Granny, spoke through the line.

Evelyn flinched and almost dropped the kitten in her arms.

“What do you mean you sent a man to my house?” Evelyn spoke in a skeptical tone. Granny had threatened to find a match for her at Isaac and Maggie’s wedding reception, but that had been some time ago. Evelyn wasn’t sure if Granny was making good on her threat. Which to Granny may seem like a promise, but to Evelyn— it wasn’t.

“Oh, just calm down. No reason to make your blood pressure spike. The man is wanting a dog, and I knew you had puppies you were trying to find a home for.”

Evelyn sighed and placed the kitten down on the living room floor.

Well, if that was all the man was coming for, then that was fine to her.

“Oh, good. I need to find four more homes, so thanks, Granny. I will be watching for him.” Evelyn responded.

She ended the call and tucked her phone in her back pocket. Then she walked outside to the pen the pups were in.

Evelyn had rescued a German Shepherd not long ago that was pregnant and ended up needing a c-section. She wasn’t sure what the mama dog was bred to, but the puppies all came out looking like German Shepherds.

The dog had eight puppies, and she was thankful she had already found homes for four of them. Hopefully, the man coming today would take one home with him. Or two!

While Evelyn waited for the man to show up, she went ahead and started on the routine she always carried out while doing her afternoon chores. She was right in the middle of feeding the horses hay when she spotted a white truck pull up in the driveway.

Quickly, she walked towards the stranger as he climbed out of the vehicle, her dogs

encircling him.

Evelyn waved her hand in the air.

“Don’t mind them. They aren’t aggressive, just curious creatures.”

The silver-headed man was bent over petting Tipper, a stray she had picked up from the side of the road that was injured and had nursed back to health. When he stood up and made eye contact, some sort of weird flutter took place inside of her. Evelyn laid her hand on her stomach. She hoped she wasn’t coming down with something.

The man approached Evelyn with a wide smile and his hand outstretched. His broad shoulders and lean trim caught her eye, but she pushed those silly thoughts to the side.

“Good Afternoon, I’m Ben Davenport. Granny sent me your way. She mentioned you had some large breed puppies you were looking to find homes for.”

Ben’s blue eyes sparkled, and Evelyn had to admit that he was one mighty fine gentleman. She couldn’t remember the last time a man had caught her fancy.

Evelyn shook his hand, then quickly pulled hers away.

“I’m Evelyn. Let me take you to them.”

Evelyn led him to the puppies and took them out one by one as he glanced them over.

As Ben stood holding the runt of the litter, Evelyn felt his gaze upon her. Her eyes found his.

“If you were choosing a pup to keep, which one would you pick?” He asked as the puppy licked the man’s cheek.

She nodded towards him.

“The one you are holding.”

Ben tilted his head sideways.

“How come?”

Evelyn half shrugged and looked past him.

“He gives the best kisses.” She mumbled, sure that her cheeks were bright red.

What was it about this man that set her on edge. This was silly.

“That seems to be true.” Ben replied, as Evelyn met his gaze once more. He winked, which set Evelyn’s cheeks even more on fire.

Was he flirting with her?

Surely not.

She was a widow and hadn’t even looked at another man since her husband had passed away over a decade ago. Evelyn had already decided that the single life was the only way to go. She didn’t think she could ever love anyone as much as she had Leroy. Besides, who would want an old woman who rescued every animal who needed a home?

“I think I will take this little guy.” He decided, a half smile playing on his lips.

“Great.” She replied as she closed the pen door and started walking to the man’s truck.

Evelyn couldn’t wait for the man to leave. She didn’t like the feelings he seemed to stir up inside of her. It made her feel like a teenage girl, and she was beyond that. The man was probably married with grandchildren.

As she walked side-by-side with Ben, Evelyn’s foot turned on a rock and she stumbled. She felt Ben’s hand grab ahold of her arm and was able to stable her before she fell down.

Evelyn’s gaze fell on his hand as tingles shot from his fingertips and right to her nerve endings. She lifted her eyes to his. Ben’s expression indicated he felt it as well.

“Thank you.” Evelyn whispered.

The corner of his lip rose.

“My pleasure.”

Evelyn broke away from his grip, trying to get a handle on the sensations that were streaming inside of her. Now she knew something was wrong with her. Maybe she was coming down with the flu. That was the only reasonable explanation for the way her heart was hammering inside her chest.

“How much do I owe you, Evelyn?” Ben asked when they reached his truck.

“No charge. I’m giving them away.” She responded.

Pulling out a wallet from the back of his pants, Ben placed the puppy on the truck seat, then retrieved a hundred-dollar bill.

“Nonsense. You have invested money to care for them.”

Ben handed her the money.

Evelyn didn’t want to take the man’s money. The mother was a stray and yes; she had spent quite a bit of money taking care of the puppies, but it was what she enjoyed doing. It was what kept her going in life. She had friends and family in Meadow Creek, but they had their own lives.

Investing her love in animals that were in desperate need of it, was living her passion and made her feel like she had a mission to accomplish. If she hadn’t had that to focus on when Leroy had passed away, she would have holed herself up inside her modest home and became a hermit.

“I’m not taking your money, Ben. I want to give these puppies away. I take pleasure in doing so.”

Evelyn hoped he understood, because she didn’t want to continue to stand there and argue with the man.

He stuffed the bill back inside his wallet.

“Okay, if you won’t take my money because you want to give the pup away as an act of kindness, then I would like to return the gesture back to you.”

Evelyn’s eyebrows furrowed as he climbed into his truck and closed the door. The window rolled down.

“There’s no need in doing that.” She replied.

Ben’s arm hung out the window as he leaned his head towards her.

“I insist. How about supper tonight? May I pick you up at 6:00?”

With a sharp intake of breath, Evelyn tossed her hand back and forth.

“No, no.”

What was this man thinking?

Evelyn studied him. His blue eyes were bright and clear. They crinkled at the sides. She wondered what kind of life he lived.

“Ma’am, I eat by myself every evening. I would be honored to take a lovely lady like you to the cafe in town to show my appreciation for my newfound friend. Would you please accept my invitation? If you do not enjoy yourself, I will never ask you again.”

Wait, again? She hadn’t even agreed to the first meal.

His eyes shimmered and Evelyn felt as if she could see straight into Ben’s soul, and what she saw made her heart warm.

What would it hurt just to have one meal with the guy? He seemed to be a gentleman, and she shared the same circumstances as he, which was being alone every evening.

“I accept your offer. Thank you for asking.” Evelyn replied cautiously. She wasn’t sure what she was getting into.

Placing his hand on his heart, Ben wore an enormous smile.

“You have made this old man’s day.” He stated with a wink.

Evelyn was flattered as she laughed nervously at his reply.

With a wave of his hand, Ben pulled out of the driveway.

Evelyn’s legs trembled as she completed the rest of her chores and headed back inside, wondering what in the world she was going to wear to supper?

Chapter Two

Evelyn sat on the couch, waiting for Ben to pick her up. She had showered and dressed in her nicest pair of jeans and plaid button-up top. She took the curling iron to her short silver hair and applied a small amount of blush and mascara.

Evelyn hadn't worn make-up for quite some time. She felt a bit uncomfortable dressing up for a man.

She wished she knew what exactly Ben's intentions were.

Was this a date or just a supper for companionship?

Companionship, she could handle.

The thought of going on a date made her nauseous.

Evelyn's eyes traveled to a framed picture sitting on top of a shelf. It was she and Leroy's last picture taken together. Tears pricked her eyes at the memories they shared.

They had promised each other if one passed away before the other that they wouldn't live out their days alone, that they would remarry. At the time, Evelyn had no idea what she was agreeing to. She just knew if she were to go first, she wanted a partner for Leroy.

She didn't realize it would be her that was left all alone. Some days were easier than others, but the desire to look for another man hadn't been there before.

So what was this?

Why did she agree to supper with Ben?

She knew why. Lately, she had found herself to be lonely. Her animal friends weren't filling the void like they once had.

Evelyn's hands trembled as realization hit her: she desired more than just companionship.

Her breath caught, and she felt like she couldn't get enough air.

She stood to her feet and paced the floor as she tried to talk herself down from the fear gripping her.

“This isn’t a big deal. There isn’t anything wrong with sharing a meal with a man. There isn’t anything wrong with wanting to be with someone again.”

Then why didn’t she believe that to be true? Why was guilt overtaking her? Why did she feel like going out with Ben was cheating on Leroy?

Tears streamed down her cheeks as she glanced at the clock. Ben would be here any moment, and she couldn’t do this.

Evelyn glanced around the room. If she stayed inside, she had to answer the door when he arrived.

Touching her throat, she knew she had to leave. She needed fresh air. She needed open spaces.

Evelyn changed into her cowboy boots and left her cell on the coffee table.

Quickly, she walked out of the door and hurried to the barn. Once inside, she opened the stall to her favorite mare, Ginger. She hooked the lead rope on her halter and led her out of the door.

Evelyn always preferred to ride bareback but as she got older she had a harder time mounting the horse without a saddle, so she had steps built that she kept in the barn. It was an easy way for her to climb onto Ginger. It also helped that she was a calm horse.

After going through the gate to the field, she rode to the other end of her property. The wind in her face and the scent of the horse soothed the aches deep inside.

Evelyn propped herself up against an oak tree and fought shame for standing up Ben. He seemed to be a kind man and didn’t deserve to be treated so ugly. She didn’t mean to cause him any harm. She was the one with issues.

After all these years of being a widow, she wasn’t sure she knew how to step out of that role and embrace doing something as simple as eating a meal with a man.

Evelyn leaned her head back and thought about what Leroy would say with the way she was acting.

A giggle worked its way out of her lips as she pictured him shaking his head, saying she had lost her mind. It was a free meal, after all.

Leroy was always so easygoing and found a way to laugh about anything and everything. Like the time they went away for the weekend and came home to find their front door wide open and their ten goats inside. It wasn't a scene you would wish on your worst enemy.

Anything that could have been chewed up— was. From the couch cushions to the house plants. They left the biggest mess of the century.

Evelyn laughed as she recalled the memory. She thought about how furious and upset she was to the point of wanting to sell them all. Yet Leroy held her hand and talked to her until she was calmed down. Then he made jokes, and they laughed about the situation.

He was a good man, and she missed him dearly.

What if Ben was a good man as well?

What if he could be a friend or more?

He would never take Leroy's place in her heart, but maybe she had enough room inside for another.

The thought of having someone to share life with was appealing. Evelyn pictured what it would have been like having supper with Ben, and she regretted the decision to run away.

If only it wasn't too late. If she had it to do over again, she would have gone out to eat with him.

Evelyn stood and grabbed the lead rope to Ginger, this time heading back to the barn. It was getting dark; the sun was setting, and she needed to figure out a way to make things right with Ben. If he gave her the chance to.



The next day, Evelyn visited Granny at the general store. Granny was the owner of the main store in the small town of Meadow Creek.

"Good morning. Want a cup of coffee?" Granny asked when she spotted Evelyn walking in the door.

Evelyn shook her head.

"I have already had three cups this morning, I'm at my limit."

Everyone knew to keep away from Granny's coffee. Evelyn wasn't sure what she did when she brewed it, but the last time she tried a cup, she couldn't stop coughing.

Granny frowned.

"Is there a limit when it comes to coffee?" She asked.

Evelyn chuckled.

"Not with you."

Evelyn needed to find out what Granny knew about Ben, but she didn't want her getting crazy ideas in her head about setting her up with him. Evelyn could do that on her own, if that was what she decided to do.

Right now, all she wanted was to find Ben and go out to eat with him like she should have last night.

If he didn't want to take her to supper after how terribly she treated him, she understood that. But she at least wanted the opportunity to apologize to him. Face to face.

Evelyn wasn't a person who went against what she said she would do. If only she hadn't allowed fear to drive her.

"The man that you spoke to yesterday about my puppies." Evelyn began.

This caught Granny's attention. She put down the magazines she was organizing and eyed Evelyn.

"Yes, did he take a puppy home with him?" She asked.

Evelyn nodded.

"He did. I meant to get his phone number so I could check on the puppy and I forgot to. Was he here when you visited with him?"

Evelyn tried to act casual and not give Granny any other ideas about why she wanted to talk with him.

It didn't work.

As soon as Evelyn noticed Granny's eyebrow raised, she knew she was on to her.

Evelyn looked at a display of gloves beside her.

"Yes, he did. I hadn't met him before. I gather he is new in town."

Evelyn waited on her to say something else, but she didn't.

She glanced her way and noticed Granny wore a slight smile.

"Okay, well, if you happen to run into him again, please ask how the pup is doing."

Evelyn didn't meet Granny's eye as she headed towards the door.

"I sure will." Granny replied.

There was no telling what Granny might tell Ben now.

Chapter Three

After some debate, Evelyn walked through the doors of the veterinarian's office and found Maggie sitting at the front desk.

A smile lit Evelyn's face when she noticed Maggie's hand caressing her round, pregnant belly. Maggie's eyes lifted and met Evelyn's.

"You are stunning, sweetheart. How is baby boy doing?" Evelyn asked, approaching the counter.

"He is quite an active little guy. I can already tell he will be adventurous like his daddy." Maggie responded.

Evelyn was thankful that Maggie and Issac had found each other. They were the cutest couple.

"How much longer do we have to wait to meet him?"

"Just a couple of weeks, and I am ready. I can no longer reach my feet to put my shoes on."

Evelyn giggled. She couldn't relate to what Maggie was going through. She wasn't ever able to have children. Which made losing Leroy even harder.

"What brings you in today, Evelyn?"

Evelyn laid her arms on the counter as she tried to explain.

"A man came to the house yesterday and took one of my puppies home with him."

"He won't be sorry. We love the one we got from you." Maggie interjected.

Evelyn smiled at her response.

"I'm so glad. Hopefully, that is the case with him as well. Anyhow, I meant to get his contact information to check in on the puppy. I was wondering if you could let me know if he brings him in?"

Evelyn wasn't lying about wanting to check on the puppy, but she didn't share the rest of the story about needing to apologize to Ben.

“No problem. Do you know the man’s name?” Maggie asked.

“Yes, it’s Ben.”

Maggie’s expression changed as she glanced over at a notebook sitting on her desk, then to the clock on the wall.

Evelyn wondered if she had forgotten she was supposed to do something when she noticed Maggie’s gaze slide past her to the door.

“You are in luck. A man named Ben called and made an appointment this morning for a puppy check up and it looks like he is here now.” Maggie stated as she pointed towards the door.

Evelyn didn’t move as her pulse rate picked up speed. She wasn’t prepared to run into Ben in person, even though she wanted to apologize to his face.

She waited to turn around until she heard the door open and close, and Maggie greeted him.

Slowly, she pivoted until she spotted him standing off to the corner, holding a leash to the puppy who was jumping around on the ground. Ben was looking directly at her. A guarded expression was on his features, and she didn’t blame him.

Offering a small wave, Evelyn stepped back from the counter to allow Ben to go in front of her. She wanted to pet the puppy, but she refrained for now.

“Go ahead. I was just visiting with Maggie.” Evelyn said, not really sure how to get a moment of his time without Maggie overhearing her.

Ben nodded and stepped in front of Evelyn, so she took a seat in a chair by the windows and waited.

Maggie handed Ben a clipboard with a pen, needing him to fill out paperwork. Ben spun around and took a seat a couple of chairs down from Evelyn. The puppy spotted her and came running towards her.

Evelyn bent down and petted the top of his head, her nerves calming a bit. She was going to miss this one. He was her favorite out of the litter.

She lifted her head and caught Ben’s gaze.

“Could I visit with you when you have a free moment?” Evelyn asked, as she saw Maggie walk down the hallway.

“Now is good.” Ben replied. His eyes held kindness, which surprised Evelyn after being so rude to him.

Eyes dropping to her hands that were clasped together in her lap, she couldn’t form her words. Finally, she just blurted them out.

“I’m sorry, Ben. What I did to you was wrong, and that isn’t who I am. I got scared, is all. I haven’t eaten a meal with a man since my husband passed away a long time ago.”

She couldn’t look up. A mixture of emotions swarmed her and caused her whole body to begin to sweat.

“Were you in the house when I came?” Ben asked.

Evelyn shook her head, not meeting his eyes.

“I took off through the pasture on my horse.”

Evelyn heard Ben chuckle and glanced his way.

He wore a smile on his lips, and his eyes twinkled as he observed her.

“All you had to do was tell me, Evelyn. I understand how you feel. If it makes you feel any better, I had second thoughts as well. But I am tired of being alone and haven’t met someone who is as beautiful as you are. I couldn’t resist asking you to join me for a meal.”

The corner of Evelyn’s lip lifted at the compliment. It had been so long since she had heard such endearing words it caused butterflies to dance in her stomach.

“Thanks, Ben. I was hoping, if you could forgive me, that we could try again?”

She held her breath, wondering what his response would be. To her delight, a wide smile covered Ben’s face, and he nodded.

“I would like that very much. How about this evening?” He asked.

Evelyn noticed Maggie return out of the corner of her eye and stood, heading to the door.

“Yes, I will see you later.”

She made eye contact for only a moment, which was long enough to catch the wink Ben directed towards her.

As she walked to her car, Evelyn held her hand on her cheek. The feelings Ben stirred up within her felt foreign. It had been so long since she had felt any of those types of emotions for a man. She warred with panic and excitement. She could only hope that excitement won out in the end.

Chapter Four

Evelyn repeated the same process later that evening as she had the night before. Once she was ready, she sat at the kitchen table and waited.

Trying to distract her mind from her sweaty palms, she thought about what she would order at the cafe. She hadn't been there in awhile; she had been sticking close to home because she had recently rescued a sick cat. She kept it in the barn to allow it a warm and safe place to rest away from her other cats and dogs.

She couldn't make up her mind if she wanted a chef salad or if she wanted soup. She wasn't a big eater in the evening. She preferred to eat something small before bedtime. Evelyn wondered what Ben would order. Was he the type of man who enjoyed a healthy portion of meat and potatoes like Leroy had been or maybe he was like her, and ate light meals at supper time.

Playing with the top button on her shirt, Evelyn felt like she couldn't get a deep breath again. The walls were constricting in on her. She tried to take a breath, but she felt like she was breathing in hot air which made her woozy.

Stepping onto the front porch, Evelyn tried to relax her shoulders and convince herself that she could breathe, that she only had a minor case of nerves.

Knowing Ben would arrive at any moment didn't help, in fact, it caused the symptoms to worsen.

She just couldn't do this.

Evelyn raced to the barn as fast as her feet could take her and found Ginger. She pulled on her halter and led her out of the stall.

She could hear Ben's truck in the distance and knew he would pull into the driveway shortly.

Evelyn directed Ginger to the steps and climbed onto her, sending her into a gallop immediately.

She rode her to the same spot she had gone last night, then slowly slid off of her. She was thankful for as old as she was; she was physically fit and could do most anything she wanted to. She had decided at a young age to work hard to stay active, and she was grateful the decision had paid off.

Evelyn sat down under the oak tree, feeling defeated. She dropped her face in her hands and allowed a couple of tears to slip out. She felt like a failure for allowing fear to take control and causing her to bolt.

She couldn't figure out where the panic was coming from. She normally was a person who was in control of her emotions.

She continued to allow the tears to fall. How would Ben ever want to be around her again after standing him up not just once but twice?

Evelyn jolted when she heard someone clear their throat. She jerked her head up and looked in the direction of the noise.

Standing ten feet away from her was Ben, with both hands in his pants pockets.

"I didn't mean to scare you. Can I come closer?"

Evelyn's tense emotions relaxed just a bit by his politeness.

"Yes."

He approached closer, and Evelyn opened her mouth to explain, but Ben held his hand up.

"Evelyn, no explanation is needed. I can tell by the look on your pretty face you are having a hard time."

Surprised by how intuitive he was, she held her tongue.

Ben crouched down beside her and reached for her hand. Evelyn hesitated, but went ahead and slipped her hand in his, noticing the tingles the small action produced.

Even though guilt was having a heyday inside of Evelyn, Ben's gaze captured hers.

"Do you mind me sitting here with you?" Ben asked with a soothing tone.

"No, not at all." She admitted. And she didn't. She enjoyed being around the man, so why did she keep running away from him?

They sat in silence for a few minutes. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence; it felt cozy and Evelyn could sense all the fear she had been wrapped up in had left. She could breathe and wasn't queasy like she had been.

They sat hand in hand, which created a small smile to work its way onto Evelyn's lips. She felt like now was the time she could share her feelings.

"I'm sorry I did it again. Fear got the best of me, and I panicked. Thank you for coming out here, Ben. You are quite the guy."

They turned to where they were face to face. Ben reached up and gently touched her cheek, then dropped his hand.

The longing Evelyn experienced for more of his touch took her off guard.

"I don't know you very well, but as soon as I met you, I knew you were a special lady. When I showed up tonight at your house and you weren't there, and after you telling me about coming out here, I knew I couldn't just walk away from the potential relationship we could have. I am a very patient man and am willing to take things as slow as you want to as long as you will allow me into your life. Will you, Evelyn? We never have to eat at the cafe. We can meet here instead if this is where you are comfortable."

Evelyn's heart melted at his kindness and consideration of her feelings.

Surprising herself, Evelyn leaned her head onto his shoulder and Ben wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close to him. Evelyn breathed in the scent of his spicy aftershave. She had forgotten how good it felt to be held in a man's arms, and it almost caused her to weep. She attempted to relax and enjoy the moment.

"I would like for you to be in my life. Thank you for being so understanding, it really means a lot to me."

Staying in the same position until the sun went down, Evelyn felt her heart had opened up, and that she was capable of loving someone again. It didn't mean she would ever love Leroy less, but there was enough room inside her heart to care about another man.

She already knew the type of man Ben was by how gently he treated her. He cared about her feelings and that spoke wonders of his character.

Evelyn shifted and sat up while Ben turned towards her. His eyes dipped to her lips and back up, holding a questioning look.

With no words being said, they both leaned in, their lips barely touching. Evelyn relished in the feeling of his warm moist lips on hers. He pulled back, his eyes searching hers.

She knew he was making sure she was okay. She was shocked by the fact she was. Evelyn leaned into him and deepened the kiss, wrapping her arms around his neck while Ben wrapped his arms around her.

A pleasurable noise was heard, and Evelyn wasn't sure if it had escaped from her lips or Ben's. A few minutes later, they released each other.

Ben stood and offered his hand to Evelyn, who accepted it. He pulled her to her feet and grabbed the horse.

"How about some supper?" Evelyn asked with a grin as they walked back to the house—

Hand in hand.

I hope you enjoyed Evelyn's short love story.

