



*More Beginnings*

*Iris Blobel*

Beginnings – Book 2

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Other Books by this Author

About the Author

Acknowledgements

# MORE BEGINNINGS

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## BLURB

Zach Taylor, an escort in Sydney, living in Hobart, enlists the help of Natasha Peterson when his teenage friend, Mia, runs away. He soon finds out that the 'dragon' is really more of a kitten. And although Natasha, Mia's teacher, is attracted to him as well, she has her own problems to deal with, not to mention her initial reaction to Zach's occupation.

Will Zach's job keep him from a chance to be with Natasha?

Life is good for teenager Mia Levesque. But when Darren Schuster shows up in Hobart, she knows something is up once Sophie and Mark cut their weekend away short and rush home in the middle of the night. When Sophie won't answer Mia's questions, emotions run high, and Zach confirms Darren's identity to Mia. Disappointed, angry, and feeling alone, Mia runs away.

Will life settle back into a routine for Mia once she finds out about the stranger in her life?

New Beginnings have given the Levesque girls a new start in life, will More Beginnings be another chance for them?

## CHAPTER ONE



Zach Taylor's young neighbour, Mia, let out a long sigh as she joined him on his front porch and sat next to him on the swing. Enjoying a cool lemonade, he invited her to grab a soft drink from the fridge as well. It was a warm summer day, and the air showed no sign of cooling down. A lot of people in Hobart were weary of the unusual hot spell for the very southern Australian city.

With another hefty sigh, Mia raked through her long, blond hair and stared into the distance. "Honestly, Zach, she's a dragon. I'm sure she does it on purpose. She doesn't like me. She thinks I'm spoilt."

The dragon in question was Miss Peterson, Mia's high school English teacher. There was no doubt that Mia liked school, and she enjoyed her classes. And even though English wasn't her worst subject, it certainly was the toughest one, with Miss Peterson piling on homework one after the other.

Zach took a sip of his drink before he replied, "Hey, pumpkin, settle down. What's that supposed to mean you're 'spoilt'?"

She lifted her shoulder in a slight shrug. "You know!"

Raising his brows, he replied, "Actually I don't know! Isn't she Sophie's good friend?"

Another shrug. "Kind of, I suppose. They used to do the boxing stuff together, and since Soph's carrying a baby, they go and enjoy coffee and cake instead every once in a while."

Ignoring his chuckle, she went inside and helped herself to cold lemonade. She opened the can with a simple click as she returned outside and took a long sip. "Man, it's hot."

Zach pondered on that thought just like Mia, when she suddenly said, "You need to cut the grass, Zach."

He almost spilled the drink. "Good grief, thanks, honey."

There wasn't much yard in front of Zach's house. A flagstone path crossed the patch of lawn, and he'd kept the rest of the garden as low maintenance as possible. But he loved sitting on the front porch, watching the world go by.

He placed his arm around her and drew her in a bit closer. "Have you talked to Soph about your teacher?"

She nodded. "Yes. Her reply was that for most fourteen-year-old girls teachers seem like dragons. She still remembers her science teacher who gave her a hard time." She paused for a moment. "She blames it on my hormones because she thinks," Mia snorted and then continued with an exaggerated voice, "Miss Peterson is a really nice person."

He chuckled, which earned him a momentary glare from Mia.

With a shrug of his left shoulder, he commented, "I s'pose she has a point."

Rolling her eyes, she moved away from him again. "Too hot for sentiments like that."

A smile tugged at his lips. She had come a long way from when he had first met her. That'd been six years earlier, and she'd been only eight. Eight years old with already enough character for three teenagers combined. But he'd liked her from the moment he'd met her. He had been helping the girls find some stuff in their attic when he had mistaken her for Sophie's daughter. With hands on hips, she'd said to him, "Do I look like her daughter? I mean, seriously."

She had the genes to become a pretty girl and she was heading that way with big steps. The stylish haircut, a slight touch of make-up to emphasise her grey-green eyes, and always dressed in the latest fashion to compliment her slim figure. And she did have her heart in the right place.

"You'll meet her tomorrow when you drop me off at the school sports."

Eyes wide, he turned to look at her. "I will?"

“Oh man, didn’t Sophie tell you?”

“Apparently not. Or she might have.” He scratched the back of his head. “I guess she probably left a note on my calendar.”

“You’ll take me, won’t you?”

He gave a small nod. “Yup.”

Zach lived across the road from Sophie and Mia Levesque. The sisters had moved into Sixty-Four Chestnut Avenue six years earlier. He’d shared a hot kiss with Sophie in the early days, but in the end, it was Mark she’d fallen in love with.

“Will what’s-his-name be there?”

Mia did the eye-rolling thing again. “Josh. Yes he will. Remember, he’s in my class.”

Shaking his head with amusement, Zach replied, “Pumpkin, just because what’s-his-name is in your class ain’t meanin’ he’s participating in a sports day.”

“Doesn’t mean.”

“Beg yours?”

She took a deep breath. “It’s *doesn’t mean* and not *ain’t meaning*. You know it drives Soph mad when you use the American lingo.”

He turned to look at her. “I honestly have no idea how I’ve survived the last few years with you girls across the road.”

Checking the time, she stood. “Thanks for the drink.” She leaned forward to place a kiss on his cheek. “Eight o’clock tomorrow morning?”

Zach nodded. “Does your dragon spit fire?”

With hands on hips, she retorted, “You’re not taking me seriously, are you?”

“I am!”

She tilted her head slightly. “Let me see,” she paused for effect. “With your green eyes, athletic body, husky voice, blond hair, which, by the way, is in serious need of a trim... hmm... she might like you. But then again, your job as an escort might disturb her.”

Shaking his head again, he stood and took her empty can of lemonade. "Instead of giving me a hard time with my lingo, Sophie should keep an eye on the books you read. All that romance stuff is making you silly in the head. *Husky voice.*"

He laughed and went into the house.

"At eight?" she screamed after him.

"Yeah, I'll be there."

\*\*\*\*

Mia Levesque walked across the street and entered the front yard of Number Forty-Six. Even though she had only been eight years old at the time, she still remembered the day they'd moved in. Number Forty-Six was an old brick-built, English cottage with a small path leading from the gate to two worn-out steps and up to the arched entrance. Although Sophie initially had loved the multi-pane windows with shutters, she had quickly found out how hard it'd been to clean them. Yet, she'd treasured and cared for the flower boxes in front.

Sophie, her older sister, had cried that day they'd seen the house for the first time, because it had been all too much.

Or had it been because she had been scared?

Mia didn't know, but she was grateful for every single moment since.

And for Mark and Zach.

Mark, who had moved in, and Zach, who lived across the road. There was a lot of love for both of them. As well as a lot of appreciation. She considered herself as very lucky to have both men in her life. And not only because it made her popular with the other girls in her class, but that was an advantage nonetheless.

"Hi, Mia," Mark greeted as she entered the house.

Looking up to him, she could see why her friends *ooh'd* about him. He wasn't a bad-looker with his blond hair that was a stark contrast to his suntanned face, his compelling icy blue eyes, which could actually be icy and make her clean up her room

to the last little bit of dust, a general inherent strength on his face which conveyed his self-confidence, and his long and sturdy legs. He was tall, all right. And he made sure he stayed fit. Well, Zach made sure of that, by dragging him to the gym at least once a week or taking him for a run along the beach. But there was also Jared, Mark's friend from way back, with whom he caught up during their weekly game of squash.

On the tips of her toes, she leaned forward and gave him a kiss on his cheek. "All set for the weekend?"

With a wink Mark replied, "I am. Not sure about your sister, though."

Mia snorted. "Why doesn't that surprise me?" She walked past him and into the kitchen. "What's for dinner?"

"Pizza."

"She burnt dinner again?" she asked as she turned to look at him.

"I heard that," came a voice from down the hall.

Mark and Mia shared a quick grin as they watched Sophie waddle down the hall. The pregnancy had been easy on her. At least as easy as it could be. Mia studied her as she came closer, and a thought popped into her mind. She quietly hoped for the baby to inherit some of her sister's blond hair and dark brown eyes. With all of Mark's pampering over the previous few years, her sister looked great in her late twenties.

"Baby's giving you problems again?" Mia asked with as much concern as she could come up with.

"I swear young lady, one day you'll have a tummy like this—" Sophie clutched her hands over her pregnant stomach. "—and I will make fun of you."

Mia stepped towards her sister and gave her a hug, though with great difficulty. The eight-month-pregnant tummy was very pronounced.

"You're late."

"For what?" Mia asked her sister with eyes wide.

Sophie managed to reply through stiff lips. "From school!"

Hands on hips, the young girl stood in front of her sister.

“You’re getting way too hormonal, Soph.” Letting out a long breath, she continued, “I went over to see Zach. I wasn’t sure whether you might have forgotten to tell him about sports day tomorrow.”

Mark laughed behind them, and they both turned to glare at him.

“What?” he asked with his arms up defensively.

“I swear—”

But Mark interrupted her. “You’re doing that a lot, sweetheart.” As he came closer he added, “I swear, I’ll be glad when this baby is born.”

A smile tugged at Mia’s lips as she patted him on his chest. “Olivia’s mum said tiredness can be worse than hormones.”

“And just for the record, yes, I did write it on his calendar,” Sophie added. “I even made the bed for you, left the hotel details in Launceston, and left a voucher for a DVD.”

Mark placed his arm around Sophie’s shoulder. “No wonder you’re exhausted. You better take a proper nap during the drive north, otherwise the anniversary weekend may end with one very grumpy husband.”

Rolling her eyes, not wanting to know any further details, Mia went back into the kitchen and retrieved plates from the cupboard before serving the pizza.

After sitting down and her first bite of the Italian meal, Mia wiped some chewy cheese from her lips. “By the way, Zach’s saying *Happy Anniversary* as well. He’s got a pressie, too, but you’ll have to wait until you return on Sunday night.”

“Another dinner for him and Sophie like *we* got last year for our third anniversary?” Mark grunted.

The girls laughed. “I had a marvellous time,” Sophie admitted, ignoring Mark’s griping.

“I honestly still don’t understand why you have to push this anniversary trip before the baby is born.” Mia shrugged.

She didn't mind spending a weekend with Zach. Quite the opposite. She liked the stay-overs across the road. He let her stay up longer watching a movie, or he talked about Sydney. But this time she had something different in mind.

Sophie placed a piece of pizza on her plate. "Because the voucher is only valid for three more months. *And* I'll be fine. I was born late, you were born late, and I don't believe Zach would look after you *and* a baby."

Mark let out a laugh. "Would love to see that."

"So you'll be back Sunday night?" Mia asked, ignoring her brother-in-law's small remark.

"Yes," Mark replied. "I'll need to be back in the office on Monday morning."

Mia stood. "I'd better get my gear organised for tomorrow and pack for the weekend."

"Mia?" Sophie called after her.

"Yes?"

"How are you going with Miss Peterson?"

"Why?" she asked hesitantly. "Has she mentioned something?"

Sophie shook her head. "No! You know we don't talk about you as a student when we meet."

Yes, her sister had mentioned that a couple of times, but deep inside Mia sometimes wondered. Wouldn't it have been tempting for Sophie to get at least some information about her? With her shoulders sagging, she finally replied, "Yeah, she's all right."

No need to worry a pregnant sister who was about to go away for a weekend to celebrate an anniversary. And after all, she didn't know what to say anyway. She wasn't clear why Miss Peterson annoyed her, yet there was something that did. She simply didn't like her. Especially since the day she had asked Josh to sit next to Brad. What had that been about?

"All good now," she added, probably more to herself than to Sophie.

## CHAPTER TWO



A few minutes before eight o'clock the next day, Mia crossed the road and went to Zach's. There was a swing in her step as she walked over, a swing that could've told neighbours she was pleased about something if they had known her well. Sophie and Mark had liked their anniversary gift — two small custom comic figurines made from their wedding photo — and she was glad she had put so much effort into finding it.

"Zach?"

Silence.

"Zach?" she called out even louder.

Still nothing. Mia's frustration grew. Not that she wasn't able to rely on him, but she was eager to get going and not be late. So she tried again.

"Zach, I swear if you're still in bed —"

"Then what?" he asked, looking out of his bedroom.

She let out a long sigh. "I hope you're ready."

With quick long steps, he came towards her. "I'm a bit offended here, Missy. In all these years, I've never been late. Not ready, okay, but never late."

Sliding her hands into the pockets of her pants, she apologised.

"The good fairy's made your bed already. Throw your bag into your room, and then let's go."

She did exactly that. As she placed her bag into the spare room in the back of the house, she cursed her sister for putting on her old fairy bed sheets. All her intentions of asking Zach to have Josh around faded away instantly.

Fairy bed sheets? Good grief.

Sophie couldn't have been more inconsiderate.

"Pumpkin? You ready?" She heard Zach calling for her.

"Yes, I'm ready," she replied, disappointment dulling her voice. And as Mia caught up with Zach at the front door she asked, "Do you think we can..." She hesitated and exhaled. "Well, do you think we could get rid of the old bed sheets one day?"

He laughed. It was a hearty laugh, which made her smile as well. She loved it when he laughed. Not that he didn't do it often, but it was something about that laugh which was irresistible.

"The fairies, eh?"

Shoulders sagging slightly, she nodded.

"If you're still capable of walking this afternoon, I'm happy to go and get some new ones for you after your sporting efforts."

"Really?" she asked and even she noticed her voice high-pitched with excitement.

Ruffling her hair, he replied. "Yup, really. I want to see a few medals though today, and your help with dinner tonight."

Mia quickly finger-combed her hair while quietly cursing at him.

A few minutes later they were driving along the road when Zach asked, "So, refresh my memory."

Not looking at him, she asked, "About what?"

Even though she stared out of the window, watching the black clouds in the sky, she knew he looked at her. "Well, for one, about Josh. But—" He stopped to concentrate on the traffic as he changed lanes. "But also about Miss Dragon."

Tugging a strand of hair behind her ear, she turned to look at Zach. And as they drove through Hobart to the Sports Oval she told him about Josh.

"He's so cute. Honestly. I mean, like all the girls like him, but he asked me whether he could walk me home. That's so cool."

"Totally," she heard Zach saying quietly, which earned him a slap on the arm. "Ouch!"

"You're such a... never mind. It obviously shows how old you are." To emphasise the point, she raised her eyebrows and stared at him.

With a frown, he slowly rubbed his arm. "Let's just move on. I get the point. He's cool."

"No! The fact he—"

Holding his hand up to signal her to stop, he said, "Don't bother. Tell me about the dragon."

But she was sick of talking about her English teacher. And she had no idea why he was so interested in her. Best tactic was to ignore the question.

"Could he come over after school tomorrow?" she asked quietly.

"Who?"

"Josh."

Zach's head shot around. "What?"

Focussing on her hands in her lap, she added, "Please?"

"I need a cup of coffee." And as he directed his attention back to the traffic, he stressed "As in *now*."

"Is that a yes?"

"That's an *I need a coffee* and then we'll talk about it. Does Soph know about this?"

Mia shook her head.

"For Pete's sake, Mi. Soph's gonna kill me."

"Please?"

"Coffee first!"

Knowing better than to push it any further, Mia turned back to the window and watched the world go by. *Coffee* didn't mean *No* she tried to convince herself. There was still a chance.

They drove the rest of the trip in silence, Mia deep in thought about the many things that occupied her mind nowadays: life with a baby in the house, Miss Peterson, and Josh.

She closed her eyes for a moment thinking of how far she'd come over the last few years and knew that whatever happened, she'd be able to deal with it.

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Zach was still annoyed about the whole Josh-coming-over request, but even the cheap coffee from the sportsground canteen did its best to awaken his sleepy brain cells.

He knew he'd be in trouble with Soph, if he said yes. He cursed, threw the disposable cup into the trash bin, and pulled out the information sheet about the day's events. With long steps, he strode towards the oval and tried to find Mia amongst the hundreds of students. He shook his head. How was he supposed to find her when she wore the same outfit as everyone else? He glanced around and found a non-uniformed, good-looking woman. A smile tugged at his lips.

"Excuse me," he said as he came closer. "Year eight girls' shot-put. Any idea where that could be?"

"Who're you after?" she asked, and for a moment all he did was stare.

At her.

Close up, she looked even better. Nicer. Sexier.

Medium height. Her black hair cut short, and those eyes! The dark blue colour mesmerised him. And her graceful and warm smile made him like her instantly.

She studied him considerately, obviously expecting some sort of response.

"Right." He scratched the back of his head. "Mia. Mia Levesque."

Zach drew in his lips as he watched her studying him. And she did. Carefully, from top to as low as she could without being obvious. Bad attempt though, and he looked down to disguise his smile.

Then he saw her hand appear in front of him. "Hi, I'm Natasha Peterson. Mia's English teacher."

Well, if that didn't make his eyebrow twitch in surprise.

“You don’t look like a dragon at all.”

She laughed. “I hope not.”

Shaking her hand he said, “Zach Taylor, Mia’s babysitter.”

With a clear frown and her chin tilted slightly higher, she studied him again. But then her gaze moved into the distance before turning back to him. “Babysitter, eh?” She shook her head. “I’d better not ask for any more details.” She pointed towards the north side of the oval. “Sophie’s told me about Mia spending the weekend with her *babysitter*, but honestly I had no idea—” She paused and looked towards the other side of the sports ground. “Anyway, I’m about to head over to shot-put.”

He quickly followed step. “As in you had no idea a babysitter could be a man?”

She smiled. Fair dinkum, and he liked her smile.

But halfway to shot-put she was stopped by a student and apologised as she directed him to a group of young girls.

He waved his hands in a gesture of thanks.

As he strolled over to the group, his mouth curled into a grin. Shot-put wasn’t what he’d call one of Mia’s best events. She did well, but it was obvious she enjoyed the company of her friends and the constant chatter a lot more. Zach couldn’t help but let his eyes wander around the big sports oval to spot the *dragon*, or better known to him now as the beautiful Natasha. But no such luck. It seemed as if she’d disappeared, and disappointment settled over him.

Quickly brought back from his thoughts of Natasha, he turned to see Mia and her friends staring at him. He shrugged as if to say *what*, but Mia sported a big smile. If she’d only put that much effort into her shot-put, she’d probably get it shot putted to the other side of town.

Shaking his head, he walked off. “I’ll be over near the seats getting some lunch,” he yelled over his shoulder, not waiting for Mia’s answer.

It was only a short while later that she joined him.

“All the girls wanna come over this afternoon.”

“Why’s that?” Zach asked without actually looking at her, but at a group of teachers walking across towards the carpark.

“Lost something?”

He turned towards her not sure what she was talking about. “Huh?”

Mia took a bite of her hot dog and followed his stare.

“Looking for something?”

“Your dragon.”

“Excuse me?”

Zach chuckled and turned to look at her. “Your English teacher. What’s her name again? Natasha—”

“Miss Peterson?” she asked hesitantly.

“That’s her.” He grinned. “She comes across more like a cute little kitten.”

Mia almost choked on her hot dog. Coughing, she grabbed her drink and took a sip. After she’d recovered from her surprise, she turned to look at him with a big frown.

“Kitten? Seriously?”

A big grin spread over his face, but before they were able to say anything else, Mia’s friends had joined them at the table, giggling, and chatting about boys and movies. Instantly, Zach knew he was out of place now and left. Sometimes enough was too much.

He went back to the canteen for another cup of coffee and as much as he tried, he wasn’t able to find Natasha in the crowd.

Surprised at his own curiosity about her, he wondered what had attracted him to her. Had it been her looks? It’d definitely been her smile. And her eyes.

He shook the thought of her out of his mind and casually strolled back to Mia, trying his best to focus on her efforts today.

But Natasha’s image kept coming back to his mind.

## CHAPTER THREE



“Hi, Mia.”

Mia turned only to stare right into Josh’s eyes. “Hey there,” she said, doing her best not to get flustered. Of course, all her friends went quiet, and she noticed how they suddenly all focussed on her.

“We’re still on for this afternoon?” he asked.

Damn it. Zach hadn’t actually given her an answer. “Yeah. Of course,” she lied, too afraid to hesitate or even tell him the truth.

With thumbs-up, he walked off and followed his friends. No more words. No nothing.

Mia stared after him, deep in thought. He was lean and somewhat taller than her. His sandy brown hair was cut according to the latest trend like the singer from the English boy band sensation. And he had the eyes to be in a boy band as well — really dark, chocolate brown eyes. Kind of hypnotising brown eyes. None of the other boys looked as neat in the school uniform as Josh. Nearly perfect.

Well, boy band perfect, Mia thought, and she noticed a little tingle inside at the idea that he would be coming over that afternoon.

“Crap!” She suddenly remembered one crucial fact.

“What?” chorused her friends.

Turning her head around to find Zach, she absent-mindedly said, “Not sure whether Zach was okay with it or not. I think we kind of got side-tracked with the bed sheets.”

“With the bed sheets?” Olivia piped in an octave too high.

Mia shot her a glare.

The two girls had been best friends from the very first day Mia had started school in Hobart. Although they had almost the same colour hair, Olivia's was curly and unruly. She was barely able to contain it. Her eyes were blue, and her mouth was always in a smile; unfortunately, her skin was fighting a recent hormonal change. Being roughly the same height and weight, the girls often swapped their latest fashion for a day or two, quite to Sophie's dismay, as she was often confused what and what not was actually her sister's. But Mia's friend was also the reserved one in their friendship, always thinking twice before making a decision and envying Mia for her babysitter.

They more or less did everything together. Their tastes were very much alike — music, movies, *the best-looking pop star*, clothes, and even food. Except seafood. Mia couldn't understand how someone could enjoy eating rubbery little creatures.

"Soph put the old fairy bed sheets on. I simply asked Zach whether we could get new ones. Somehow I forgot to go back to my initial question of having Josh around."

"Now what?" asked Alice.

Shrugging, Mia replied, "No idea." She sighed. "Wonder whether I can simply pretend to have forgotten to tell Josh to not come around."

Olivia laughed softly. "That might work with Mark's parents, but not Zach. Remember, he's the worldly one in your whole chaos of a family."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Well, for one, whose babysitter looks like a movie star?" Alice added to the conversation.

"Living with your sister and her husband and probably having to share your room with your niece." Flo joined in.

"Not to mention the in-laws' mother, who makes the best cakes in town."

Mia looked around. She had no idea who had just said that, but whoever it was had been right. Mark's mum Bev did make the best cakes. "You're all just jealous," she said as she stood. "It'll turn out right. Zach won't say no, once Josh stands in front of his door."

Looking around the group, she asked, "What's up next? I'm still pooped from the eight hundred metre run."

The girls laughed as everyone agreed, but deep inside Mia didn't feel like laughing at all. She really needed to talk to Zach. He had to say yes! This was important to her, and once he figured out how much, he'd have to agree.

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Zach sipped on his coffee and watched Mia and her friends laughing. Sometimes he wondered how this little girl had crawled into his life and heart. It was obvious, though, he hadn't been the only casualty to her charm. Her friends thought a lot of her, which meant Sophie had done well in raising her. He relished seeing her soaking up life and all it had to offer.

Times had turned bad for Sophie and Mia after their mother had broken her ankle in a bad fall. The healing process had chewed up more than her sick leave entitlement and she ultimately lost her job with a small company. Only shortly afterwards, she'd found out about her pregnancy. Unemployable, with two young children and no support, she'd fallen into a depression. And Sophie had taken over caring for her younger sister, Mia. When their mother had died a few years later, Sophie had just turned eighteen. A blessing in disguise as she'd been allowed to keep and look after her little sister. Though the two sisters didn't share the same father, they were remarkably close and always had been.

"She's come a long way."

Brought back from his thoughts he turned to find his cute little dragon was standing right next to him.

"Mrs. Peterson."

"Miss," she corrected him, which made him smile.

"Miss," he repeated slowly and saw a little flush on her cheeks, which made him want to smile even more.

She blew out a ragged breath. "Anyway, Mia did confirm that you're her *babysitter*."

He said nothing but did raise a brow at her.

"Well, you have to admit that it does ... you know—"

"Nope."

"Good grief. It's very rare to have a man your age being a babysitter for a teenage girl."

Zach laughed. Even more so when she blushed.

"I should be offended," he told her. "A man *my age*?"

She flustered. "That's ... that's not what I meant. You know, I meant as in—"

To hold back another burst of laughter, he wiped his thumb across his lips. "I think I get what you mean. You owe me, though."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You offended me."

Hands on hips, she replied, "I did no such thing."

He narrowed his eyes.

"How did this conversation go so out of control?" she asked.

She turned and looked around, but he wasn't quite sure why. Following her gaze, he spotted Mia on the sports oval, reminding him to catch up with her.

Natasha's sudden words startled him. "Hey there. I'm *Miss Peterson*. Nice meeting you. You must be Sophie's neighbour, who's looking after Mia this weekend."

He could've kissed her then and there. There was no doubt about it. Eyeing her hand that she held towards him, he finally took it.

"Nice meeting you, too, *Miss Peterson*."

"My apologies, but I think I'm needed over at the... well, somewhere."

Without any more words, she left him standing there, alone with his thoughts.

One kiss. One small kiss to taste those lips. That was all he could think of. He watched the teacher walk away across the oval until she was approached by a group of

students. In the middle of their conversation, she tilted her head slightly and looked at him, and he was sure he saw a small smile on her lips. He returned her and kept watching her until he remembered why he was here in the first place.

*One small kiss.*

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## OTHER BOOKS BY THIS AUTHOR

### NEW BEGINNINGS

The chance to start life all over with the help of a stranger.

Twenty-two-year-old Sophie Levesque has been guardian to her eight-year-old sister Mia since their mother's death a few years ago, and it hasn't been easy. Luck comes their way when they inherit a small house in Hobart. Problem is, though, they don't know and have never heard of Clara Bellinger, the testator. Settling into their new life, Sophie is still afraid it's all a mistake.

Mark O'Connor, attorney in Hobart and the bearer of the good news for Sophie and Mia, curses himself for the lack of information about the testator. However, researching the questions gives him an opportunity to see Sophie again, and the more time he spends with the two, the more he realises that his life is missing something. And it's not his casual lover Linda.

But then there's Zach, Sophie's sexy neighbour from across the road... and a very good friend of Clara's.

Will unravelling the mystery unravel Sophie and Mark's promise of a future?

### **Chapter One**

Sophie Levesque stared at the attorney in front of her, waiting for some answers. She and her little sister, Mia, had been quietly sitting in Mr. O'Connor's office for more than half an hour, learning about the details of their inheritance.

Once he was finished, silence hung in the air before she asked with raised eyebrows. "Who?"

"Clara Catherine Bellinger."

Mia leaned closer to her elder sister and gave a soft tug on Sophie's shirt. "Who is she?"

Sophie shrugged. "I wouldn't have a clue." Then turned her attention back on Mr. O'Connor and asked the same thing. "Who is she?"

The handsome attorney on the other side of the massive desk leaned forward and rested his elbows on it before he started to repeat his earlier speech. Although hearing his words, Sophie still found it all very hard to comprehend. Here she was in this old office, furnished with heavy antique oak furniture, the curtains in a pretty shade of aubergine, and the carpet beneath her shoes thick and warm in a matching shade, hearing about an inheritance from someone she'd never even heard of.

Startled by the subtle sound of the clock chiming across the road, Sophie's gaze turned to the window, where she saw the post office building across the road. It looked impressive and old. It'd been only a few hours since they'd arrived in Hobart, the most southern capital in Australia, but she already liked it. A lot more than Sydney, the place she'd lived all her life.

Hauled back from her thoughts, she heard Mr. O'Connor say, "I believe she was a distant relative of yours. I'm afraid I don't have any further details."

Sophie arched an eyebrow in disbelief, doubting the accuracy of it all. Not only did she try not to question his competence as a lawyer, but she also hoped it wasn't a dreadful misunderstanding.

With a slight shrug of her shoulder, she asked, "Why not?"

He met her gaze steadily. "Pardon me?"

Sitting up straight, she repeated, "Why not? Why aren't there any further details?"

He rubbed his chin with his fingers, his unease now obvious, and although she almost felt sorry for him, she tried not to care. She needed to know more. And not just the what, but why and who as well.

Only a week earlier, Sophie had received the call from Mr. O'Connor telling her about an inheritance. Initially, she'd thought it had been a horrible joke when he'd given her details on where to pick up airplane tickets to Hobart. It was important for her to come, he'd explained. Some legality she hadn't understood. Something about her having to sign documents for the transfer of ownership of some assets. It'd sounded too farfetched at the start, but after some research on the firm with the help of a friend, it sounded valid, and she'd hoped her life was finally turning around for the better.

Mr. O'Connor let out a long sigh. "Ms. Bellinger was one of the partner's clients. I was only given the details shortly after the client's death."

Sophie drew in her lips, as her gaze drifted past him to the window. She took a few deep breaths, inwardly calming herself. Nothing had ever been easy in her life.

"Why isn't the partner here?"

"Retired."

As she pondered on his reply for a moment, she began to imagine what life could be like with this inheritance.

*Different. And better.*

Another sigh escaped as she returned her gaze to the man behind the desk. "You can't leave your assets to just anybody, can you?"

"Miss Lever—"

"Levesque," she helped him.

Their eyes met.

"Are you refusing the bequest?" he asked hesitantly, and she clearly noticed how one of his eyebrows arched upward.

Staring blankly with her mouth open, panic rushed through her veins with every thump of her erratic heartbeat. An uncomfortable silence fell over them before she spoke with a rushed voice, "No. No, of course not. We're accepting."

She turned to look at her younger sister. "We're actually looking forward to seeing it, aren't we?"

He stood with one swift movement and went to a little cupboard near the window to retrieve a bunch of keys. "Would you like me to take you there?"

Still feeling a rush of excitement as well as caution within her, Sophie took Mia's hand and inclined her head when she asked, "Is it far?"

Her voice sounded tired even to her. It had been a long day already. She stood and placed her arm around Mia assuming that, considering how tired she was, her little sister was most likely exhausted.

"No, not at all. Five to ten minute drive, I'd say," the attorney replied.

"I still don't understand. Why us?" Sophie asked quietly, meeting his gaze and, for the first time, actually taking in his icy blue eyes. He was very attractive, with a face tanned by wind and sun, and there always seemed to be a hint of a smile on his lips.

Her gaze fixed back on his mouth. Blushing, she quickly looked away.

He turned to them, raking a hand through his short, curling blond hair. "Ma'am, what I know is that both of you are in the will. What I know is that I was supposed to fly you down here to officially read you the will. What I know is that I'm supposed to hand over the keys to you, and to let you know that your expenses are covered for the next twenty-four months. I did not know Ms. Bellinger, as one of the retired partners wrote up the will. I do not know who she was or in what way she was connected to you. I assumed she was a distant relative of yours."

Sophie took her sister's hand as she thought about his last comment. She wasn't aware of any distant relatives. Dead or alive. Her mother would have at least mentioned her once. Letting out a soft sigh, she made a mental note to table the question for a later moment with the resolve to find out the answers. And soon.

"Okay, let's go then."

He pinched his nose with his thumb and index finger and took a deep breath. "Look, Miss Lever—"

"Levesque," Sophie helped him again, this time somewhat more firmly.

Running his thumb over his eyebrow, he stepped closer, but not so close as to be intimidating. "I'm sorry. It's been one extraordinary week," he said with his voice just above a whisper. "Once I get back I'll check with the partners here to see whether anybody knows more about it."

Did he say he'd had one extraordinary week? Annoyance crept in. His remark irked her to the very core. Holding Mia even closer to her side, she lifted her finger and pointed at him. "No offence, Mr. O'Connor, but it has been quite a week for us as well, and I was prepared to answer all *your* questions. I have one simple question, and you don't know the answer. Wouldn't there be *something* in the file?"

Sophie considered herself a kind person. Kindness could've been her middle name, but she met his surprised frown dead-on.

He seemed taken aback by her words. "No offence taken." And then he let out a deep breath. "You're right. I apologise. As I said, I'll find out details and let you know."

"Thank you, Mr. O'Connor," she replied and then blew out a breath.

Tugging on Sophie's shirt, Mia asked, "What about our stuff?"

Sophie shifted and looked down at her sister, but before she had a chance to say anything, Mr. O'Connor beat her to it.

"What stuff?" he asked as he opened the door.

"Considering what we inherited here, we brought all our things," Sophie explained without looking at him.

Mr. O'Connor stopped in his tracks. "All, as in all your clothes?"

The underlying opinion in his words didn't go past her. They were actually hurtful. Yet, it'd been like it most of her life. People judged her on what they saw. In Sophie's case, it was a little girl about fifteen years her junior by her side. They were dressed well, but nearly everything was second hand. Sometimes people's preconception hurt, but often she was able to take it in her stride.

Today, she wasn't sure. There was something about Mr. O'Connor that she was drawn to.

Sophie's eyes met his, and she squared her jaw as she tried to keep her composure and stood straight as she corrected him. "All, as in all our belongings."

He simply nodded. They made their way to the front door and stepped outside the building, following Mr. O'Connor with their suitcases. Two teenage boys walked past them, eager to capture the interest of some girls across the road. Aware of the attention, the girls covered their mouths with their hands and broke into giggles.

Sophie's stomach churned. So many things she had missed out on in life. The little things most took for granted. But it was going to be better from now on, she reminded herself. Better for both of them. She didn't want Mia to miss out on so many things like she had, and the thought gave her some joy

## FRESH BEGINNINGS

(coming soon)

Jared Fraser, a landscape business owner in Hobart, Australia, sets out for a holiday to the USA to travel along the Route 66 in a motorhome. Looking forward to his first holiday overseas, he's excited as he prepares himself for the journey. But little could've prepared him when he crosses paths with a beautiful hitchhiker. Furthermore, the arrival of family friend Mia Levesque and her boyfriend, Josh, turns Jared's holidays upside-down when he's forced to play arbitrator between the two teenagers.

Will he be able to put his past aside and grab onto happiness?

Ivy Bennett thought leaving her boyfriend would be the hard part. It doesn't take long to figure out how wrong she was. As she struggles with making a new start in her life, the last person she expects to lead her to happiness is a laid-back Australian on holiday.

But she will have to say goodbye again. And not only to Jared.

## LITTLE BEGINNINGS

A blind date that doesn't happen might lead to love.

After her divorce, Jeri Belmont moved to Hobart and now runs a successful art gallery. When her niece sets her up with a neighbour, Jeri expects a blind date like all the others. But she never expected her date wouldn't even show up because of her age. Despite feeling unjustly judged, when she unexpectedly runs into him again, she finds it hard to ignore Ely's charm.

Ely Lennox knows he shouldn't have skipped the blind date because of the lady's age. After all, it had only been a date, not a lifetime commitment. When his carpentry business takes him right to the woman he bailed out on, his guilt turns into regret when he finds out she's everything a man could hope for. How can he convince Jeri he made a big mistake?

Will she forgive him? Or is she hiding behind something else?

## JOURNEY TO HER DREAMS

Would you travel around the world to uncover the reason for your dreams?

Hollie Anderson, a young woman from Tasmania, lives on a farm outside Launceston, Australia. She has good looks, likes her job, and loves to hang out with her friends. But it's a recurrent dream that throws her daily life into chaos and takes her on a journey to Ireland.

Sam Shaughnessy enjoys the success as Head of Advertising for a popular magazine in the Irish capital Dublin. Married to Padraic, she thinks she loves her husband, but when she meets Hollie under unusual circumstances, she needs to face the truth, and not just about her marriage.

When both women, so different in many ways, find out they have one thing in common, it changes their lives forever.

## INNOCENT TEARS

Becoming a parent can be daunting at the best of times, but for Flynn, a business lawyer in Melbourne, it almost pulls the feet from right underneath him. He's become a father to six-year-old Nadine literally overnight! He had no idea about her existence, and the news throws him into chaos, even more so when he is asked to take over custody.

With the help of Emma, an employee at the hotel where Nadine and her grandparents are staying, and his parents, Flynn tries to do the right thing. Yet, the right thing in his eyes differs from his parents', and Emma is voicing her opinion as well. And right in the middle is little Nadine, still grieving the loss of her mother and finding a wonderful friend in Emma. There's no doubt she's afraid where and with whom she will settle.

But in the end, it's a letter Flynn receives that helps him figuring out what to do.

## LOVE WILL FIND YOU

*Can their new love survive the scrutiny of the public eye?*

After his father's heart attack, Australian Football League player Tyson Gaspaldi takes his parents on holiday to a small place at the New South Wales coast.

One morning, following a surfing session, he comes across a crying woman on the beach. Everything about her intrigues him, and he can't walk away. She's not only sexy and humble, but, as he soon finds out, vulnerable as well.

It's only been a few months since Katie Cassidy lost her sister in a car accident.

Still overwhelmed by the loss, a chance encounter on the beach with an attractive stranger awakens unexpected emotions inside her. She's instantly drawn to his caring nature, but also his looks.

However, Tyson's past quickly catches up with them, causing Katie's childhood demons to return, and the road to romance becomes anything but smooth



## LET ME LOVE YOU

Oliver Dempsey, pitcher for a Melbourne baseball club, loves the women, and they love him...

But he keeps them at an arm's length, and when he meets Tamara, he's unprepared for the attraction he feels for her. Told by his coach that she's off limits, only draws him in more.

Tamara Amis moved to Melbourne to find some distance between her past and herself...

With the help of her uncle, the coach of a Melbourne baseball club, she quickly finds a job, and a place to live. Yet, one meeting with the handsome pitcher stirs unexpected emotions that threaten to overwhelm her.

It's Oliver's injury that brings them together, but as they find out about each other's pasts, how can they be ready to share a future?

## I THINK I LOVE YOU

Markus DeLeon and Sarah Winter's lives couldn't be more different...

After three years away as the goalkeeper for an English soccer club, Markus has been happy to be back in Australia. He'd missed his family and friends, including Sarah. He's known her since childhood, and often protected her from the teasing of other children and the troubling consequences of a broken home.

When they attend their friends' wedding, a new light is cast on their friendship...

Sarah is fresh out of a bad relationship, and Markus has always been the one she can confide in. Maybe it's the magic of the wedding—or how stunning he looks in a tux—but the attraction between them intensifies in ways they'd never imagined.

But sometimes when risking what you have, you might lose everything...

Following a passionate encounter, Markus isn't sure how to handle this new aspect of his relationship with Sarah, and literally flees the scene for the coast. Sarah is unsure how to react to his sudden departure, but is soon knocked off course by misunderstandings and a frightening family emergency.

Markus realises his mistake and wants to make things right, but he also faces obstacles. He's been offered an exciting new job, and an attractive newcomer to the neighbourhood is eager to claim his attention, though the last thing Markus needs is another confusing relationship.

Can Sarah and Markus face the fear and doubt—and the potential loss of their lifelong friendship—to give their love a chance?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Iris Blobel** was born and raised in Germany and immigrated to Australia in the late 1990s. Having had the travel bug most of her life, Iris spent quite some time living in Scotland and London, as well as Canada, where she met her husband.

Her love for putting her stories onto paper emerged only recently, but now her laptop is a constant companion.

Iris resides west of Melbourne with her husband and her beautiful two daughters as well as her dog. Next to her job at a private school, she also presents a German Program at the local Community Radio.

**Questions or comments?** Find Iris on the following social networks:

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