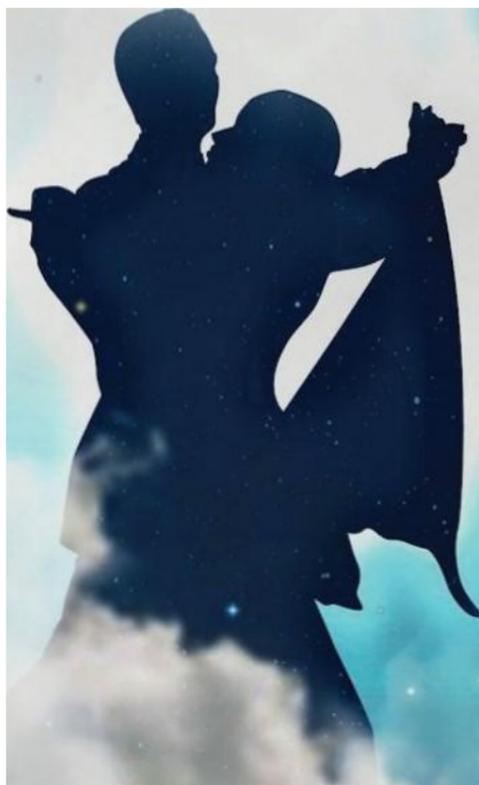


MATCHED IN HEAVEN

HEAVEN MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU IMAGINE



ANGELA PAGE

*Matched
In Heaven*

*By
Angela Page*

Eternal Press
A division of Damnation Books, LLC.
P.O. Box 3931
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-9998
www.eternalpress.biz

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Digital ISBN: 978-1-62929-328-8
Print ISBN: 978-1-62929-329-5

Cover art by: Dawné Dominique
Edited by: Kim Richards

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For K, J and M—RIP

Prologue

Bad Priest

When the young and handsome Jesuit priest, Padre Mateo, ascended to the spirit world, he heard the sound of “tsk-tsk.” As he passed through the white light, he continued hearing the sound of disapproval. Then it suddenly stopped and a voice announced, “Bad priest.”

Padre Mateo had sired several children with the parish maid in a Peruvian village. He fleeced the natives of their worldly goods for payment for services. At age thirty-five, he contracted deadly typhoid fever giving last rites to a dying Indian.

The now dead priest thought he escaped judgment until a voice remarked, “Dude, what were you thinking?” Then he knew he was screwed.

Padre Mateo was sent to a group of corrupt, perverted, and nasty clergymen and women for intense rehabilitation. It’s one thing to behave badly on Earth, but to do it while representing religion was another issue. The members of the Heavenly Council were especially angry about the bad PR. They were always doing damage control by sending kind and thoughtful clergy back to Earth to improve religion’s reputation. The last thing the council needed was everyone on Earth losing faith.

While in spiritual rehab, Father Mateo had an epiphany. He pitched the Heavenly Council the idea of a support group and matchmaking service for guilty priests who left behind young children and destitute women. Long before the Earth developed personal ads, Internet, and speed dating, Father Mateo set up a dedicated celestial matchmaking service. He convinced the council to give him the power to help clergymen match the partners they left behind on Earth and provide for their bastard children. The group was named Guilty Priests/Young Families, GPYF. He was so successful that the council eventually gave him non-clergy

departed souls to help. “Guilty priests” became “guilty partners” with Father Mateo—now rebranded Marcel—as the group leader.

Marcel resembled a middle-aged beatnik poet with a beret, a goatee, and a diamond earring in his left ear. He stood at five-nine, had close-cropped salt-and-pepper hair, and walked with a relaxed swagger in his usual jeans, loose silk monogrammed shirts, and cowboy boots. He recruited, facilitated, and coached guilty departed spouses. He was also in charge of earthly match-making. The spirit guides were pleased with Marcel’s progress and impressed by how many people he helped.\

As the dead spouses arrived, riddled with guilt, he guided them with his pastoral charms. He counseled them on how best to climb the spiritual ladder by taking care of unfinished business on Earth from Heaven. He was responsible for matching thousands of widows and widowers on Earth with new partners.

Marcel reached an impasse with two long-standing members. Mimi and Jake needed his intervention. Both left behind partners and young sons, along with other complications. They only had one thing in common: guilt. Otherwise they hated each other.

As they passed from Earth to the spirit world, Mimi and Jake knew it was imperative they resolve their issues. This was critical or they would never progress in Heaven. The message was clear—get with the program or be banished into the oblivion of undeveloped souls. They saw many, who refused or were not ready to progress, roaming aimlessly. So Jake and Mimi knew they were obligated to match the spouses they left behind. They were told being assigned to Marcel’s support group was a privilege.

Before GPYF, they became support-group junkies since arriving in Heaven. Jake attended a gay support group and stopped when he was propositioned by a transsexual. Then he tried the disgraced bankers’ group; but, since he never committed fraud on Earth, he felt out of place. Mimi went to the eating disorders group that forced everyone to eat healthy snacks. Then she attended the sex addicts’ group—mainly to hear the graphic sex stories. Marcel found them both lurking around the GPYF support group gazebo and recruited them. They had no idea he was once a bad priest.

Jake wasn’t sure he should go to GPYF. Why did he feel so much guilt when he wasn’t Jewish? Then he did leave his wife, Samantha, in a very shitty situation.

Mimi was tired of the guilt and wearing the same black dress she died in. Matching her husband Syd on Earth was probably her only chance of getting into a new outfit. Neither Jake nor Mimi

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wanted to chance getting thrown into a valley of lost souls. At least they had that in common—besides being dead and hating each other.

Chapter One

GPYF

“When I lost control of all my bodily functions, Samantha was fabulous,” said Jake Becker.

“That’s just the sort of skill set my Sydney needs,” responded Mimi Weis with an air of authority. Jake frowned. They had this discussion many times.

Jake—a tall, lanky, balding man in his mid-thirties—wore a dress shirt, slacks, and wire-rimmed glasses. He retained the demeanor of the conservative banker he was on Earth but had more edge—a Midwesterner who was shaped by the big city. Mimi, a tall, plump woman in a shapeless black dress, looked older than her thirty-two years. She postured herself as she did in her younger, better-looking days on Earth and batted her eyes a lot. She spoke with the distinct New York Jewish accent of her era.

Jake and Mimi’s conversations of late took a nastier tone. Mimi had a bad habit of hanging onto Jake’s arm when talking.

“You have a poor track record for your old Syd,” said Jake, shaking Mimi’s arm off him.

“I take offense at that comment,” Mimi shot back.

“I was Syd’s soul mate. I can feel that Samantha is too.”

“Whoa,” Jake said, raising his palms. “Why would I want a repeat for my Samantha of being a caregiver with no benefits? Syd’s finances are a disaster.”

“Sydney’s having a temporary financial setback. He’ll turn it around, with Samantha’s help.”

“So Samantha is to be Syd’s financial rescuer *and* his nurse?” Jake flailed his arms. “Syd is twenty years older than Samantha and can provide no financial security for my family!”

“You were a fucking banker. So why did you leave them broke?” Mimi responded with her hands on her hips.

Jake turned red with anger as he looked out at the blue sky and rolling green hills through the large, open, star-shaped porticos.

The breeze was warm, fresh, and smelled of lavender. Then, with a loud sigh, he regained his composure.

“Mimi, you’ve hounded me ever since I arrived here. I’m done.” Jake turned his back and walked toward the archway of the gazebo, which housed a circular group meeting room. It was painted a meditative blue with soft green armchairs.

“Let Marcel decide,” Mimi yelled. “He’s the group leader.”

Jake turned around and yelled back, “Marcel promised Samantha would end up with the right soul mate and I’m holding him to it.”

“It’s not a given that our spouses are guaranteed a better life because we’re riddled with guilt,” Mimi responded.

“That’s why your beloved Sydney keeps ending up with losers, tramps, and gold diggers.”

“Time’s running out for Syd,” Mimi yelled. “Where are you going? It’s time for group!”

Marcel entered the gazebo and watched the heated interchange.

“Selfish bitch!” said Jake while walking away.

“Stubborn asshole!” Mimi screamed back.

“Can we be nice to each other? This is Heaven, after all,” Marcel said, raising his eyebrows.

Marcel worked with Mimi ever since she arrived in her shapeless housedress. Bewildered by her sudden departure from Earth, she was unsettled for a long time. Her attempts to console her earthly husband, Syd, and her little son, Damien, from the spirit world only caused them more grief. They were lost souls on Earth and she begged Marcel to help find Syd a new wife.

At first Mimi was picky and only wanted someone she knew or had an earthly connection to. “Why would I match my Syd up with a stranger?” Mimi would say. She was also adamant her son be raised by a Jewish woman. Mimi’s fear was that Syd would end up with a *shiksa* who would turn her son into a *goy*. Worse was the idea that Syd would be happy with a *shiksa*. So many misfires of matching him up with friends, neighbors of friends, cousins of friends, and a poor Russian immigrant. She finally conceded to the notion of opening her horizons and considering a non-Jewish woman for Syd.

Marcel pointed out that as Syd aged, he was attracted to *shik-sas*. He made her realize the failure to find Syd a peaceful life fueled her guilt and inability to move on in the spirit world.

“Do you realize why you are dressed as you were when you left Earth?” Marcel asked Mimi.

“I can’t move on until I find my boys peace,” Mimi cried. “It’s because of me they’ve been miserable.”

“They have their own free will on Earth. Syd had choices because you insisted I keep throwing women in front of him.”

“You could have said ‘no,’” Mimi said.

“So now blame me,” Marcel retorted.

Marcel took Mimi’s hands in his. “It’s time to let go. Syd’s up there in Earth years and you need to decide.”

“I know,” Mimi whimpered.

“As for Damien, you know where that’s leading and it’s out of your hands.”

“Stop! Stop!” Mimi jumped up and put her hands to her ears.

Marcel took her hand, led her back to the cushy sofa, and sat her down. He tugged at the hem of her garment.

“That dress won’t come off until you’re ready, hon.”

“Then can I wear anything I want?” she asked in a little voice.

“Of course, doll! You’ve seen the heavenly wardrobe department. It’s an array of clothing from all ages. You can dress ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Renaissance, or Civil War style; like a suffragette, a flapper, a bobby-soxer, or a Republican. Cross-dress if you want. No one will stop you.”

Mimi laughed.

Marcel continued, “There are non-earthly fashions from those planets which exploded and dumped their hand-me-downs into the atmosphere.” Marcel got serious. “You have to get your shit together. Find Syd a decent woman with a good heart who will love him until he dies.”

Mimi sat up and raised her hand. “Get Jake to agree to match Syd with his wife.”

Marcel looked puzzled. “Samantha’s not a Jew.”

“I don’t care. If you think she’s a good match for Syd, then I agree.”

“Let me talk to Jake first.” Marcel patted her thigh and left her alone. He wandered outside the gazebo, looking for Jake.

Marcel found him sitting in a lotus position on a lawn, meditating. Jake shifted around, unable to find a comfortable position.

“You’re restless,” noted Marcel in a soft voice.

“It’s that pain in the ass, Mimi, who gets to me every time.”

Marcel sat down next to Jake in a lotus position and said, “Let me help you release the guilt and the shame.”

Jake turned to Marcel, looking puzzled.

“Shame? Why do you say that?”

“Guilt for leaving your wife and child in those conditions?” Marcel asked with his eyes closed and his palms out. He added, “I think you want to do it all over again, but differently.”

“If I had the chance, I would tell Samantha how much I loved her. I would shower her and Bobby with my love right to the end, instead of ignoring them.”

Marcel shifted, opened his eyes, turned to Jake, and asked, “What if I told you it was possible?”

“To go back down and relive my life?”

“Not exactly,” Marcel responded. “You can find another man for Samantha and speak all your love and devotion through him. That’s all I can offer.”

Jake nodded. “Sold. Better than nothing.”

Marcel rose, took Jake by the hand, and led him back to the meeting room. Mimi was still sitting on the sofa. Marcel motioned to them to reconcile. They reluctantly shook hands and took their seats. A clock chimed and Marcel signaled it was time for group.

The support group members filed into the room, including Carmella Santini. She appeared as if a gust of wind propelled her from behind. Carmella, a stocky, petite, fiery, and feisty platinum blonde with a heavy New Jersey accent, was known on Earth as “The Seaside Psychic.” She wore a flowered pant suit, wedged heels, and smelled of cheap perfume.

Carmella departed Earth after a bout with breast cancer, leaving behind a truck mechanic husband, Frank, and a young, spoiled daughter, Annabelle.

Marcel acknowledged a new recruit in the group, a young man in fatigues. He asked everyone to make introductions and motioned for Jake to begin.

“I’m Jake, and I left Samantha and little Bobby in 1994.”

Marcel then nodded towards Mimi.

“Mimi. 1974. Left behind Sydney and five-year-old Damien.”

Carmella piped up. “Details! What’s wrong with youse guys? Let me start out by telling you about my boobies.”

Jake rolled his eyes. The young man in fatigues chuckled.

Carmella used hand gestures as she spoke and held her breasts.

“They were gorgeous—not too small, not too big, and nipples to die for.”

“Are we going to hear the story again about the famous plastic surgeon who felt you up?” Mimi asked.

Carmella ignored Mimi’s comment and continued, “My Frank won a trifecta at the track and said, ‘Take this dough and buy new tits.’ I was fucking floored.”

Carmella adjusted herself in her chair and crossed her legs.

“For fifteen years, he never complained about my boobs.” She uncrossed her legs and crossed them again.

Jake looked bored and offered the young man in fatigues a stick of gum.

Chewing loudly, the new recruit said in a heavy Southern accent, “I think ah’m in the wrong group, y’all.” He sat up and continued speaking in his thick drawl, “I caught my wife fucking my buddy when I was home on leave, so I fucked her sister.”

Carmella piped up, “The cheating spouses’ group meets on Thursdays, three floors below here. I heard that room is hot as hell.” She threw her head back in a belly laugh.

Jake asked Marcel casually, “What if you cheat, die, and leave the spouse with small children? Which group are you in?”

Marcel turned to the new member and said, “Your wife was pregnant.”

“What the fuck?” the young man responded.

Mimi piped up, “That’s a double whammy.”

The new recruit shot up out of his chair.

“I don’t fucking believe you, dude. It probably ain’t mine. She was a whore.”

Marcel extended his palms out to the new guy and, in a calming voice, said, “Share your story, soldier.”

Jake interjected, “Start with your name and when you died.”

The soldier circled the group like an animal and tried to light a cigarette.

Mimi cleared her throat and reminded him, “You can’t smoke up here.”

“What are they gonna do? Throw me out?” Then he laughed at his own joke and threw the cigarette out of the portico.

“*Oy vey*, isn’t there a fine, like spiritual demerits, for throwing a lit cigarette?” Mimi asked.

“My name is Bishop...Bishop Leatherberry. I died on December 13, 2003, during Operation Red Dawn and been wanderin’ round here ever since.”

Jake perked up and asked, “The capture of Saddam Hussein?”

Carmella looked impressed.

“I like to keep up with events down there,” Jake proudly said.

“Yes, sirree. They reported no lives lost, but that’s bullshit. I was killed by a sniper in a nearby village.” Bishop took a deep breath. “They wanted a clean operation; looks better on the evening news.”

Mimi asked Bishop, “Who did you leave behind?”

Bishop stood up and cleared his throat. “Mah darlin’ wife. Velma was humping my buddy, Willy ‘Fathead’ Fitzsimmons. Jesus Christ Almighty, you go off to war and tell a buddy to take care of your wife and he does it with his dick.”

He then remarked, “Where is that dude at? Jesus, I mean. I thought he’d be one of the good ole boys, talking up a storm.”

Mimi piped up, “He’s got a new look—cut his hair and shaved his beard. I reminded him that he was a Jew before he turned into a *goy*.”

Carmella was appalled. “Jesus? I love that guy. He was a Jew?”

Jake laughed. “Mimi’s right. Jesus was born a Jew and killed by them too. I heard he changed his name to Bob. Too much baggage being called Jesus.”

“Not only is he a Jew, but he’s a little darker than you think.” Mimi said.

Jake asked, grinning, “Is his skin darker than a paper bag?”

Carmella made an angry face and uttered, “Holy Christ! I mean, Holy Bob!”

Bishop piped up, “I don’t give a rat’s ass if Jesus looks like a sand nigger. Can I get answers please about my whore wife?”

Carmella whispered to Jake, “What’s a sand nigger?”

Jake whispered back, “A Muslim, I think.”

“I get it. Dark people in the desert, right?” Carmella smiled, proud that she figured it out.

Marcel raised his hand and said to Bishop, “We’ll see in the viewing room if Velma had your kid or Fathead Fitzsimmons.”

Bishop took out a cigarette from his shirt pocket and stuck it in his mouth without lighting it.

“Jesus is really a darky, huh? This is one fucked-up place. Every time I try to find out about Velma, all I hear is, ‘Ya not ready, Bishop, more spiritual growth, Bishop.’ Might as well send me back to Earth as an itty-bitty slug—lowest animal on the food chain.”

Carmella crossed and uncrossed her legs. “I just want to get back down there and finish business.”

Mimi asked, “Why are people so anxious to get back down there? It is delightful here. Equality, no unemployment, no wars, crises, or famines.”

Jake added, “No fucked-up kids to make you miserable.”

Mimi smirked at Jake.

Carmella got feisty. “Nuthin’ happens up here. You can’t shop, eat, or fuck.”

“Well said,” noted Jake.

“I’ve been wanting to get my nails and my roots done since I died,” Carmella said as she held out her hands and then pointed to her hair.

Marcel stood and walked over to Bishop, who looked troubled. He laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Son, I know Heaven isn’t what you thought it would be,” said Marcel.

Jake looked towards Bishop and weighed in. “Confused, unhappy, and angry people in transition.”

Marcel chimed in, “You must have made progress, soldier. You’re here.” He pointed to the group. “We’re getting off track; follow me to the viewing room. We have work to do.”

Mimi motioned for Jake to speak to Marcel.

“You promised next time we were in the viewing room, you would attend to our spouses,” Jake said firmly to Marcel.

“You both have been the biggest pains in the ass,” Marcel said, directing his words to Jake and Mimi. “You’ve been around for ages, your spouses are in a mess, and I’m tired of your bickering.”

“Mimi’s the goddamn problem,” said Jake loudly. “She wants to hook my Samantha up with an old man.”

Mimi stood up with her hands on her hips. “*No one* is good enough for Samantha. What is she? Fucking royalty?”

“Simmer down. I’ve had enough,” Marcel said. “Age? Money? Irrelevant. It’s their soul path and the compatibility meter that matter. We’ll settle whether Syd and Samantha should be matched in Heaven.”

Jake and Mimi were about to go at it again, but Marcel raised his hand to stop them. He almost suggested that their earthly spouses might not find their soul mates in their present lifetimes. They might be forced to cope with their guilt. Marcel bit his tongue, took a deep breath, and thought, *Patience*. He needed an easy match and low-hanging fruit, so he decided to fix Bishop’s spouse first and hoped Jake and Mimi wouldn’t kill each other in the meantime.

Then Marcel chuckled to himself, “They’re already dead.”

