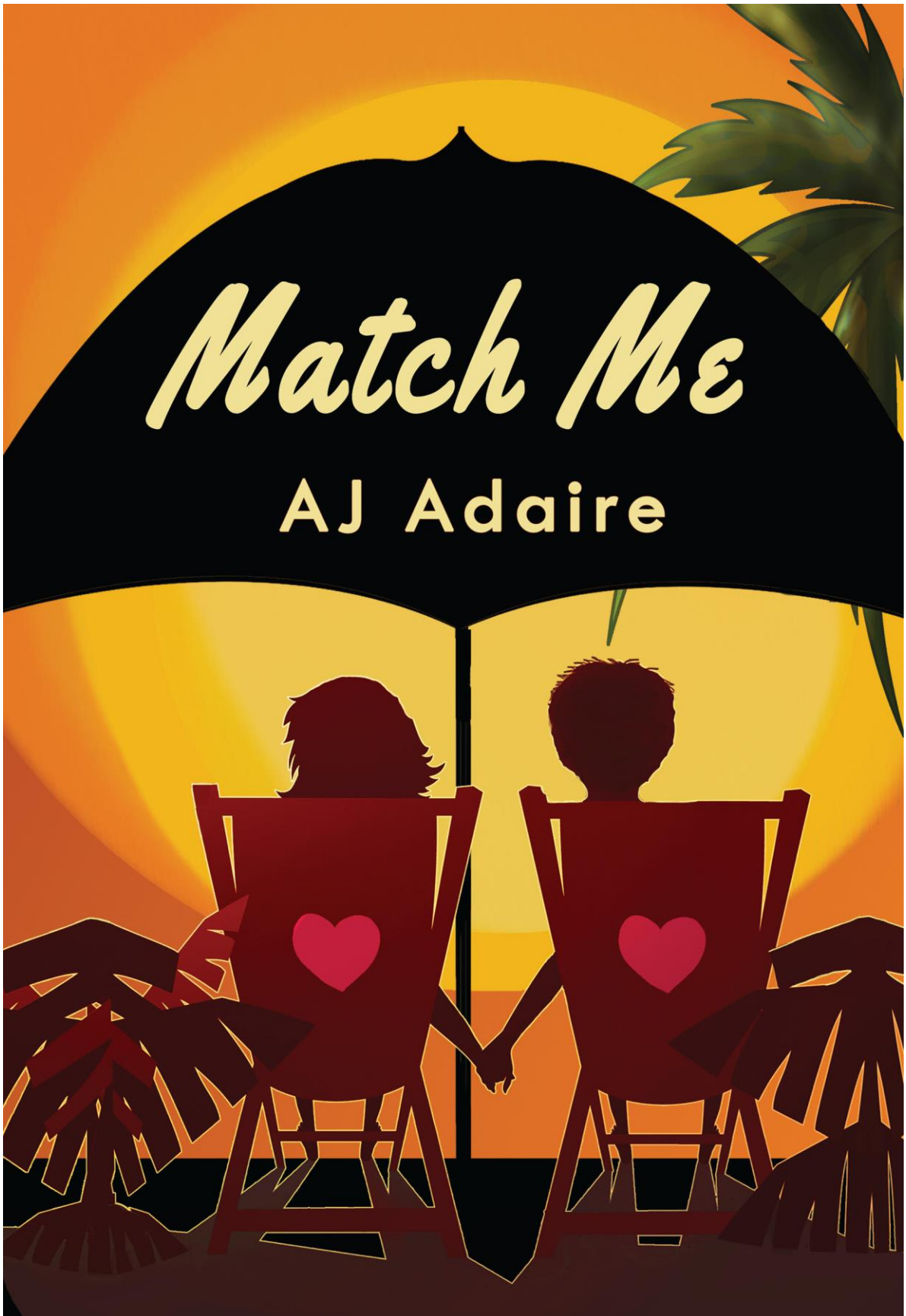


# *Match Me*

AJ Adaire



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AJ Adaire

  
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By AJ Adaire

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1961 Main Street, Suite 220  
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Editor: [CK King](#)

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## **Blurb**

What do Casey Harrison and Mica Baxter have in common? Apparently pretty much everything. Having known each other since high school, the two peas in a pod, long-time friends and business partners, are a couple in every way but one. That line hasn't been crossed, due to Casey's industrial strength walls and set in stone conviction against becoming romantically involved with a friend.

Hilarity ensues as Mica convinces Casey to enter a contest run by a new start up lesbian dating service called Match Me. The prize at stake is a romantic vacation for two on an isolated island near Key West, and Mica wants to win it big time. Casey, feet dragging all the way, finally succumbs to Mica's pleading and agrees to participate.

It is said that getting there is half the fun. That adage is certainly true about Casey and Mica's journey to their paradise island. Will the two self-described 'unluckiest people in the world', be able to overcome all the obstacles, real and perceived, that stand in the way of their happy ever after? Join Mica and Casey in this romantic comedy, as they struggle with unexpected complications standing in the way of their happiness.

## **Acknowledgement:**

This book has passed through many hands on its way to you, the reader. I'd like to thank the following people: Irene, who allows me the time I need to write; my beta readers who've combed through and commented to make this story the best it can be; C.K. King, my editor, who polishes and reorganizes my words until they shine their best; and finally, my publisher, Lee, who pulls it all together and gets it to you, the reader. Lastly, thank you to all my readers, for supporting my work over these past years.

## **Dedication:**

To my mother, a very funny woman, who was the inspiration for Grams and her friend, Millie. Although my mother didn't always approve, I know she loved me unconditionally. Thanks, Mom.

## CHAPTER ONE

"CAN I STAY WITH you?" Mica Baxter sat on the bed, phone to her ear, and leaned against the last of the suitcases she'd packed that morning.

"Hang on a minute." Casey Harrison glanced over at Haley, her current girlfriend, and moved into the kitchen, hopefully out of earshot. "What's up?"

"I've had it. I can't do this anymore. I can't take the moods, the jealousy, the accusations."

"Is she there with you now?"

"No, thank God." Mica played with the toggle on the bag zipper. "I told her I was leaving, and she stormed out. I'll rent an apartment as soon as possible, so I can get out from under your feet."

"Sure, Mica. The spare room is all yours for as long as you need it." She leaned over and checked on Haley's location. Casey lowered her voice. "I'd welcome having someone here who likes the same things I do. You bringing your stuff over now?"

Mica glanced around at the stacked bags. "Within the hour. I still need to lug everything to the car. I can't believe I'm homeless, again."

"You're not homeless. You always have a place with me."

Haley came around the corner just as Casey ended the call with her friend. "Who has a place with you?"

"Uh...Mica." Casey prepared for the tirade.

Haley rolled her eyes. "A place. You mean here with us?"

"It won't be for long." Casey chose to ignore the 'with us' comment since, technically, Haley didn't live with her full time. She only stayed with Casey Friday through Sunday. Because she worked in the city and hated the commute, Haley kept a room at a friend's house for the weekdays.

"Five minutes with her is too long. You two gang up against me all the time. You and Mica like the same music, the same TV shows, and have the same sarcastic sense of humor. It feels like you two are the couple and I'm an outsider."

"Don't be ridiculous. We've been friends for like...well forever." Casey stuck her phone back into her pocket. "I've told you a million times, you've no reason to be jealous of her."

"I think thou dost protest too much." Haley's fingers drummed against her thigh.

"Oh, for God's sake! I'm not protesting. I'm denying. If we were ever going to have been a couple, don't you think it would have happened by now?"

Haley's nostrils flared. "If she's coming now, I'm going home. I really want to see that movie we planned to watch." Haley put her hand on her hip and stuck out her bottom lip. "It's my weekend to choose. Even if I'm not overruled, the two of you will ruin it for me by making fun of everything."

"I'm sorry, I don't understand how anyone can watch monster movies and not see the humor in them. Seriously, how can you not laugh at a giant lizard terrorizing a city?"

"They're not comedies. They're meant to frighten you. All you do is make fun and laugh."

In her heart, Casey knew Haley had a valid point. At the outset of her relationship with Haley, at the point when the sex was hot, and the differences mattered less, they'd both been more tolerant of their diverse likes and dislikes. Lately, they'd been arguing about things as minute as the toilet paper over/under debate, and whether the knives should face left or right in the silverware tray. Even meals were a challenge. Casey was a devoted carnivore, and Haley an avowed vegan who hated the smell of meat.

Back in the living room, the two women retreated to separate ends of the sofa. Haley narrowed her eyes and glared in Casey's direction. "Do I not have any say in her staying here?"

Noting the arch in Haley's eyebrow, Casey was wary of where this discussion was headed. She bit back her immediate no response in favor of a more reasonable approach. "Look, what would you have



me say to her? She's my oldest friend, my business partner, and..." She almost said, 'I love her.' Although the last statement was true, Casey knew it would elicit a tirade she really didn't want to deal with today. They were treading on rocky ground already, so she simply said, "my best friend."

"Yes. I've heard all those things before." Haley walked to the closet and took out her coat.

Casey's eyebrows lowered creating a frown line between them. "What are you doing?"

Haley picked up the bag she carried back and forth every weekend and set it next to the door. She always packed on Sunday morning and put her things into the closet, to be ready for her trip back to the city on Sunday evening. "I'm going home. One day this week, when you're not here, I'll come for the rest of my things. You'll find my key on the table then." Haley's lips were set firmly together. "I think whatever this was has run its course. Don't you?"

"Are you really leaving because Mica is coming to stay here? I told you it'll only be for a short time." Casey approached her angry girlfriend.

Raising a hand indicating stop, Haley shook her head and stalled Casey's forward progress. "That's only part of it, and you know it. We've been in a relationship for months. I don't feel like I know any more about who you are than I did at the end of our first two weeks of dating. I feel like I'm always less—less important than work, less important than your grandmother, less important than your friends. You're a closed person, Casey. You keep people at a distance. Somehow, Mica got in."

"Come on, Haley. Mica's been a friend..."

"I know...forever. I've heard that before. Think about it. You're an attractive woman with a great personality and good sense of humor. You never have trouble getting a lover. You don't manage to hang onto them though. You've had a series of relationships that all ended the same way. You don't commit to your lover half as deeply as you do to your friends, especially to Mica."

"Haley..."

"I suspect you'll probably attribute the end of our relationship to me being jealous. It's not that. By nature, I'm not a jealous or unkind person. Maybe it's as simple as we're not the right people for each other." She shrugged. "One thing I am sure about, is that I need more from my lover than you're willing to give. I need someone able to be open enough to risk their heart." Haley picked up her bag and turned to kiss Casey on the cheek. "I'm sorry Casey. This isn't working for me. I hope you'll find what you need someday."

Casey stood staring at the door. Her mind raced as she tried to figure out what had just happened. Haley was right about one thing. Casey was a failure at long-term relationships. Her romantic track record was dismal and discouraging. Although not all of them ended up being sexual, she'd had more short-term relationships than a bank teller at a drive through. Of all the breakups over the years, ever since Jennifer, this one with Haley had been the most civilized. Casey sighed and returned to the living room, where she poured herself a sherry and carried it to the sofa.

The sound of the doorbell caused Casey to jump. For a second, she thought that maybe, Haley had returned. Instead, Mica opened the door and stood there surrounded by three suitcases. "I have more in the car. Want to help me carry them up?"

## CHAPTER TWO

CASEY HURRIED TO HER car. She was on her way to meet Mica, who had moved into her own apartment on a cold, rainy Saturday about six weeks after she'd shown up with her pile of suitcases. That was about eight months ago. Mica having her own apartment made as much sense as a stripper having an extensive wardrobe. Except for Mica going home to sleep, it seemed that the two friends were always together.

Mica was already inside when Casey pulled into the diner's parking lot. She hurried up the steps and spied Mica in a booth against the wall. Casey gave Mica's shoulder a quick squeeze and slid into the vinyl seat opposite her.

"Hey, look at this, Casey." Mica slid the newspaper across the slightly sticky table in their favorite breakfast joint and tapped her finger on the quarter-page advertisement. "We could use a vacation, don't ya think?"

Casey squinted as she read aloud. "Win a romantic adventure for two on a private island. Gorgeous views, isolated living, plus four days in Key West in luxurious accommodations. What's that about?"

"Forget the romantic part. Think sand, sea, and cool breezes. Wouldn't it be neat to be on a private island for a week with your best friend? Plus, there's a few days at a resort before and after. Please, please, please? If you do this for me, I'll owe you big time. You get to name the price."

"Did you read the description of the island? It's described as rustic. That can't be good, although it does say all expenses paid." A long sigh escaped Casey's lips. "What hoops do you have to jump through to win?"

"Hmm...looks like it's a new lesbian dating service named Match Me opening up. They are trying to recruit folks, so they're offering one free membership and a fifty percent discount if you join with a friend. The rules say that you're each required to accept a minimum of one date from the list they send you to be eligible for the vacation drawing. All the details of the date are arranged by them. They send you the person's name, a meeting location, and the time. Doesn't that sound like fun?"

"I'd suspect my last root canal might have been more fun than either of us will have on a computer-matched date. What could a computer know about my taste in female companionship?"

"You'll never know until you try. Come on, Casey, how many dates have you had in the last six months using your real-world charm and assets?" Mica's eyes took in the visible length of her friend.

"I don't need dates. I have you." Casey's fingers slid through her hair, as she rolled her eyes. "Why? Why do I let you talk me into these things? Last time it was that Dumb Mudder thing. We damned near drowned in the electrified mud pit. I think my back still carries the mark where the electric wire stung me."

"That's not what it's called, and you know it. Besides, I told you not to crawl on your hands and knees. You have to slither like a rattler."

"Slither like a rattler. Yeah, right. It was embarrassing. Admit it, Mica. You and I were the oldest people there. We took a lot of ribbing from all those young kids."

"Complain all you like. At least you finished."

"I was last."

"You were only one step behind me. I was proud of us. Come on. Wouldn't you like to meet someone and settle down?"

"I guess. What would I do with you?" Casey winked at Mica. "We've been friends since right after high school. We went to the same college, and now we own a business together. For the ten months we've both been single, we work together all day and spend every night with each other. I don't think either of us has been actively looking for a date. Hell, if we do meet someone who shows a scintilla of

interest in one of us, we ask them to bring a friend and we double date. We're like forty-two-year-old teenagers."

"That's even more reason to give this a chance. Who knows, maybe we'll meet the woman of our dreams and have a wonderful vacation." As Casey attempted to interrupt, Mica raised a finger. "I know, I know, you think it's a dumb idea with absolutely zero chance of success. Assume you're right...that the computer can't offer up a perfect woman for either of us. If one of us wins the trip, we can go together and have a free, all-expense-paid trip. Come on, be a sport." Mica kicked Casey's leg under the table. "Please? And none of those long, tortured sighs. Just nod."

Casey sobered for a second, as the thought raced through her head. *Suppose there is a perfect woman for one of us. What then?* Near capitulation, Casey again rolled her eyes and shook her head left to right.

"Your grandmother would say, 'If you keep rolling those eyes like that, they'll get stuck that way forever.' Anyway, you're shaking your head in the wrong direction...it should go up and down, like this." Mica demonstrated with an exaggerated nod.

Casey took another deep breath and exhaled it audibly.

"That's about the fifth big sigh. If you keep heaving out those huge gulps of air, I'm going to have to get you a paper bag to breathe into."

"I'm not hyperventilating." Casey shook her head. "You're impossible."

"Come on, Case, be a sport."

Contrary to Mica's admonishment, a long and breathy sigh escaped through Casey's pursed lips one more time. "Okay, I'll do it, but you're paying for the membership."

Mica gave a fist pump. "Yay! What's the worst thing that could happen?"

"Worse thing to happen is that I have one bad date. We'll never win the vacation. We are the two unluckiest people I've ever known."

"Come on. Let's go back to your house and get on the computer. We can sign on to the website and get the application we need to complete.

Two hours later, they were on the tenth and final page of the application and questionnaire.

"What color would you say my hair is?" Mica tipped her head forward trying to see her bangs. "And don't say mixed grey. I can always pull out the grey ones."

"In that case I'd have to answer bald."

"Very funny."

"I guess I'd say honey blonde." Casey's brown eyes met Mica's green ones. "If you had to describe me in three words, what would they be?"

"Wait, what number are you on?"

Casey leaned forward and squinted at the laptop screen. "I think it says thirty-eight." She turned the screen around and pointed to the question.

"Thirty-six. You need your computer glasses."

"They're on the table over there. These are fine."

Mica leaned over, got the glasses, and handed them to her friend. "Here. You know you'll have a headache if you keep going with your regular readers."

"Thanks. I need your three words."

"Well, lazy comes to mind first. No, maybe stubborn. Or..."

"I'm going to kill you, Mica." Casey did her best to hide her smile. "Because you're making me do this, the least you can do is help me."

"I did help you, I gave you your glasses. How many times do I have to hear that complaint?"

"You'll be hearing it until one of us wins that vacation. Come on. I don't know what to answer."

Mica buried her toes under Casey's thigh. "My feet are cold. Don't you have any heat in this place?"

Ignoring Mica's distraction, Casey asked again. "Three words...specifically, 'If your best friend were to describe your personality, what three words would she use?' Since the objective is to get someone to choose me as a date, please try to make them positive words."

"Okay." Mica tipped her head to the side and rested her cheek on her palm. "I guess I'd say loving, loyal, and genuine."

"Really?"

"Yeah. What words would you pick for me?"

Casey thoughtfully tapped her chin with her index finger. "Loyal, loving, and sexy."

Mica's head snapped up. "Sexy? Really? *You think I'm sexy?*"

"Of course I do. You turn heads wherever you go. Probably your most endearing quality is that you're totally oblivious to the looks you get."

"How come I didn't know that?" Mica's eyebrows knit together, arching upward to nearly touch in the middle of her forehead.

"I would guess it's because you've never made me complete a questionnaire that required a million responses before. You especially have sexy eyebrows." Casey put on her glasses and began typing.

Mica shrugged. "Humph. Sexy. Who knew?"

Finally finished, they each printed out a copy of their questionnaire and compared their answers. Casey laughed and pointed to the top of the form. "With few exceptions, we could have filled in one form and just changed the names and addresses at the top. God, we're like two peas in a pod."

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