



April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding)

By Holly Jacobs



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Even more aggravating, Lily seems to know everything about Sebastian, thanks to his grandfather. But Sebastian can't get her to open up about anything. Is she using all that merry sunshine to hide something deeper and darker? He's determined to find out, as long as their crazy attraction for each other doesn't get in the way....

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Editorial Review

Review

A VALLEY RIDGE WEDDING series:

1. You Are Invited
2. April Showers
3. A Walk Down the Aisle
4. A Valley Ridge Christmas

"Filled with interesting characters, this sweet enjoyable read is at its core a story of family and friendship."
RT Book Reviews, 4 1/2 Stars!

"Award winning author Holly Jacobs delights us with her witty and compassionate writing in APRIL SHOWERS. Readers are immediately invested in the hero and heroine as they spar with each other, trying to discover if their love has a chance to thrive despite their trust issues." ~CataRomance

About the Author

Holly Jacobs' books have made Walden's Bestseller List and won numerous awards such as the National Readers' Choice Award, the Holt Medallion Award and the Bookseller's Best. In 2004 Holly won Romantic Times's prestigious Career Achievement Award for Series Love and Laughter. Holly is currently writing for Harlequin Superromance. Find more info at www.HollyJacobs.com

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Sebastian Bennington was home.

He waited for a wave of nostalgic happiness to sweep over him as he turned off I-90 and headed toward his hometown—toward Valley Ridge, New York.

The wave never came.

No warm glow telling him that all was right in the world again because he was here. No feeling that he should never have left. No feeling that it was good that he was coming back.

No feeling at all. Nothing. Nada.

That pretty much summed up his emotions since he'd received his separation orders from the marines. Hearing that he was unfit for service hurt, but after that, it was as if everything froze and became a blank grayness.

He reached over and turned up the volume of the car's stereo, thinking maybe the music would inspire some feeling. "This is 93.9, The Wolf," a female DJ's voice announced. Sebastian flinched when his left hand tried to grip the wheel, as Lady Antebellum's plaintive song soon filled the car. Sebastian had always loved country music, and this song seemed nice enough, but it was new and evoked no particular emotion or memory.

Gray.

Sebastian had planned on driving immediately to his grandfather's diner once he arrived in town. He'd talked to Hank often on the phone, glossing over why he was delayed. He didn't share anything about the surgeries, or much at all about the injury. He'd simply said that he hurt his hand and was having trouble getting leave. He'd explain the discharge in person.

But instead of taking Park Street to the Valley Ridge Diner, where his grandfather would be this time of day, Sebastian went north toward the lake. Without thinking about it, he found himself standing at the edge of a rocky cliff, looking out over Lake Erie.

He breathed deeply and took comfort in the expanse of gray-blue water below.

When they were young, Sebastian and his best friends, Finn and Colton, came here often. There was a small path that led to the spit of rocky beach sandwiched between the lake and the cliff wall. His grandfather had hollered when he'd found out the boys had gone down there, but Sebastian only grinned as Hank lectured him about the dangers of that stretch of shore. Back then, he'd thought he was invincible. Back then, he'd thought that there was nothing he couldn't do if he tried. There was no cliff he couldn't scale, no situation he couldn't get out of.

Sebastian Bennington knew better than that now.

He knew that even if he wanted to climb down that cliff today, he probably couldn't.

He flexed his damned-near-useless left hand and winced at the sharp stab of pain. April in Western New York was still chilly, especially at the lakeshore. However, he wasn't wearing a jacket because he was particularly cold. He wore it because he was home and he'd be seeing his grandfather and friends soon. His jacket's pocket was a great place to disguise how damaged his hand was.

You should be thankful you're right-handed, a therapist had joked.

You should be thankful you're alive, his doctor had informed him.

Maybe he should be thankful to be alive, to be right-handed, to be back in Valley Ridge, New York.

But thankfulness was an emotion he couldn't manage.

Sebastian knew he should get back in his car and drive into town now. Instead, he continued to stand on the cliff's edge. He didn't ponder anything special. He didn't think any great thoughts. He just stared at the lake, his thoughts and emotions as flat and monotone as the water.

"Sebastian Bennington?" a woman asked, pulling him from his indistinct mental foray.

Sebastian turned and saw a dark-haired woman he couldn't place. He searched her features, waiting for the click of recognition, but still nothing. Valley Ridge was filled with friends and acquaintances. It was a small enough town that even if he didn't know someone, they at least looked familiar. But the woman didn't.

A stranger.

She had to be because she had the kind of look that a man would never forget. She had on some kind of flowy skirt, with a blousy top and big, chunky jewelry around her neck and wrists. And she had on dangling earrings that brushed her shoulders. But it was her hair that got him. Dark brown on the border of being black. It was long—way longer than most women wore their hair—and hanging down her back in soft waves that hinted at curls.

"Sebastian?" she repeated, staring at him with very blue eyes. Those eyes were even more memorable than her hair.

He realized he'd been staring and nodded. "Yes? Do we know each other?"

"No, not exactly, although I know you in a way I've known very few people."

He must have looked puzzled because she laughed. The expression seemed at home on her face, as if that upturned curve of her lips and the crinkling of her eyes were their default positions.

"Sorry, how do you know me?"

She struck a pose similar to that statue his grandfather liked, *The Thinker*. Her hand was under her chin and she was serious for a split second, then smiled again, as if whatever thought she'd had was a pleasant one. "Well, I know that your grandfather served you brussels sprouts when you were young and you dropped them on the floor in hopes your dog would eat them for you. Problem was, Chance didn't like brussels sprouts, either. Of course, I've had Hank's brussels sprouts and there's really nothing to recommend the vegetable the way he prepares them. I mean, he's a good cook, but he's never really had to perfect vegetables at the diner, has he?" She punctuated each item with more laughter and he was sure he was right—this was a woman who laughed a lot.

"Who are you?" Sebastian asked.

This didn't invoke any laughter, but her smile lingered. The crinkling around her very blue eyes wasn't quite as pronounced, though it was still there. Laugh lines. He'd never understood why they were called that until this minute. They weren't a sign of aging, as he'd always imagined, at least, not on this woman. On her, they were a sign of a happy disposition.

He wished he could work his way up to feeling happy...to feeling something.

On the back of that thought came the awareness that if he mentioned those laugh lines, the woman wouldn't thank him for it. Not that he would mention it. He might not know a lot about the female gender, but he was pretty sure most women didn't want to hear they had lines of any type.

The woman extended her hand. There was a zing of awareness as they touched, and he realized it had been a long time since he'd been this attracted to a woman. And that little zing sent a ripple through the blandness he'd been living with for a long time.

"Sorry," she said as she shook his hand. "I'm Lily. Lily Paul. Hank's tenant and—"

He pulled his hand away, disregarding any attraction that he imagined he'd felt. He knew who this was, and he was absolutely not attracted to her. As a matter of fact, he felt an immediate surge of another emotion. Annoyance. Not that he'd thank her for that, either.

"You're her," he said.

"I am." She didn't seem to notice that he was less than thrilled to be meeting her, just as she didn't seem to notice he wouldn't appreciate a stranger calling him and reading him the riot act on how he treated his grandfather. Telling him he needed to get home. Telling him that Hank needed him.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked.

He knew he'd meet this Lily eventually, but he wouldn't have guessed that she'd be the first person he'd see upon his return to Valley Ridge.

"We're having Sophie's shower at the Nieses' cottage. I spotted you and figured I should come over and introduce myself."

"How?" he asked.

She looked confused now, although not unhappy. "*How* what?"

"How did you know some stranger on the cliffs was me—Hank's grandson?"

"Oh, that *how*. That's easy. Hank has a wall of your photos. I've seen you almost every day since I moved here. I'm especially fond of the one of you in your dress blues. Sophie says you're going to wear them for the wedding. I can't wait to see you in them in person."

He flinched as she mentioned the uniform he'd given up. He didn't want to wear it to the wedding, but he wasn't sure how to tell Colton that, so he was probably stuck, even though he'd feel like a fraud putting it on. She couldn't have known that she'd induced yet another feeling. Sebastian found himself wishing for the grayness that had been his norm.

The woman continued, "But I think I'd have recognized you even if I hadn't seen the pictures. Hank loves you and has missed you, so he's talked—"

The woman—Lily—was making Sebastian feel uncomfortable. He didn't like the thought of Hank sharing stories about him with a stranger. He didn't like that this woman was looking at him as if she could see to his very core.

All that time he'd been in the hospital, he'd dealt with a shrink regularly. He hadn't liked the man analyzing him. And he'd only shared the things he wanted to share. He had control over what information was disseminated. He wasn't convinced that it had helped any, but he had the situation in hand. With this woman, however, he didn't have control at all over what she knew about him or what things Hank had revealed.

"Speaking of Hank, I'm on my way to see him. I only stopped here—" Wait. He didn't owe this woman an explanation for being here.

When he abruptly became silent, she continued, "I'm so glad you're home. I need your help with Hank. He had a doctor's appointment scheduled the other day, but he skipped it. He claimed he forgot, but this time there was none of the confusion I mentioned over the phone. He doesn't want to hear a doctor's official diagnosis. I've rescheduled the appointment, but unfortunately, it's not for another three weeks and—"

"No." Sebastian didn't have to know this woman to know what she was talking about. She'd talked to him already. And she was wrong.

Hank had always been scatterbrained, but that didn't mean he had Alzheimer's or dementia like this woman claimed he did. Forgetting a few things only meant Hank was who Hank had always been, multiplied by a few more years. And right now, Sebastian found the thought of that comforting.

"If my grandfather, who is in his eighties, by the way, doesn't want to go to the doctor's, if he doesn't think he needs one, then that's that. You weren't asked to schedule appointments for him or make a diagnosis." He realized he was talking with his hands in motion, an old habit he was trying to break, and until lately, his left hand had been in so much pain he hadn't slipped. But maybe it was a sign he was getting better, or it was a sign this woman was annoying him more than anything, because he caught himself using his left hand.

And he saw that Lily had noticed it. She took a step backward. He didn't blame her. The hand was a mass of angry scars. The doctor said they'd fade in time and no one would pay attention to them, but that time hadn't come yet.

"But he does need to see a doctor," she insisted quietly. "When you're with him—"

"Ma'am, I want to be clear. I know that you're my grandfather's tenant, and I know he seems to like you." That was an understatement. When he talked to Hank, he was all Lily-this and Lily-that. "But Hank's a grown man. I won't *make* him do anything."

Hell, he'd spent the past few months feeling boxed in, forced into places and situations he didn't want to be in. Forced into surgeries. Forced into talking with shrinks and working with physical therapists. Now he'd been forced to separate from the marines. He'd been forced to leave the job he'd worked for, the career he loved. He'd been forced to watch his unit leave for battle without him.

No, he would never subject anyone else to that kind of treatment, especially not Hank.

He would never make Hank feel as frustrated as he'd felt.

Suddenly, it occurred to him that maybe he needed his homecoming to be without too much emotion or drama. Feeling numb was preferable to feeling as frustrated as he'd felt in the hospital.

And it was damned better than the frustration this wrinkly-eyed woman was making him feel now.

Yeah, Miss Laugh Lines here didn't seem to understand the term *even keel*. She'd gone from laughing and smiling to hair-pulling aggravation in the blink of an eye.

"But he needs—" she started again.

Sebastian interrupted her. "My grandfather is an adult. I'm sure he knows what he needs better than some nosy, pushy stranger who rents a room from him." That was all this Lily Paul was—a tenant. She hadn't even lived in Valley Ridge for a full year. She didn't know what she was talking about.

"It's more than that," she said softly. "Hank and I are business partners."

That stopped him. "Business partners?"

"I bought a share in the diner. The accounts were a mess, and that's part of the reason I suspect—"

Sebastian felt something else now, but this went beyond aggravation. "So you've not only moved into my grandfather's house, but now you're buying his diner. You're pushing your way into his business and messing with his books?"

"I didn't push anything. I bought a share. A small share. Hank was behind in paying suppliers and I offered him a loan, but he wouldn't borrow money from me. He couldn't pay the bills himself. I don't think you understand the situation." She stopped, met his stare with her blue eyes unblinking and crossed her arms over her chest, setting her baubles to clinking. "Don't look at me like that. This was his idea. So I—"

Sebastian shook his head. "You can be sure I'll be looking into that. I've heard about people who prey on the elderly."

"You were telling me that Hank's an adult and doesn't need looking out for. Now you're accusing me of taking advantage of his mental infirmity. You can't have it both ways, Seb."

Sebastian bristled at the childhood nickname. This woman didn't have any right to use it. "It's Sebastian. And Hank is an adult. I'll thank you to remember that. But I'm not some grasping person out to... Well, I have no clue what you're out to do. But I'm his grandson and I love him."

"Yeah? You couldn't prove it by me. He's been saying you were on your way home for weeks, and rather than go see him at the diner, you're here? Hank needs you."

Sebastian clenched his fist in his pocket. Truth was, his hand barely made a fist, and what little there was of it sent spasms shuddering down his lower arm that served as a reminder of so many things he didn't want to deal with. This woman was one of them.

Well, he couldn't escape his injury, but there was nothing to say he had to stand here and allow himself to be browbeaten by an utter stranger.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go find my grandfather." He stalked away from this woman who looked like a gypsy, all wild and free, but sounded like a house-bound shrew.

He'd been waiting to feel some sense of homecoming—to feel any emotion—about coming back to Valley Ridge. And now he did. Annoyance and suspicion about this woman who'd wormed her way into his grandfather's home and business.

Well, he was here now, and he'd take care of things.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carlos White:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book could be option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday.

The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the guide untitled April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) can be good book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Aurelio Ashley:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because if you are reading a book particularly book entitled April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging every single word written in a e-book then become one contact form conclusion and explanation which maybe you never get just before. The April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) giving you another experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful details for your better life with this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Carla Arbogast:

Do you have something that that suits you such as book? The book lovers usually prefer to choose book like comic, small story and the biggest an example may be novel. Now, why not striving April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) that give your pleasure preference will be satisfied by reading this book. Reading routine all over the world can be said as the way for people to know world much better then how they react when it comes to the world. It can't be mentioned constantly that reading routine only for the geeky man but for all of you who wants to end up being success person. So , for all you who want to start reading through as your good habit, it is possible to pick April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) become your current starter.

Melissa Fernandez:

As a university student exactly feel bored to be able to reading. If their teacher questioned them to go to the library as well as to make summary for some guide, they are complained. Just small students that has reading's soul or real their pastime. They just do what the educator want, like asked to go to the library. They go to right now there but nothing reading seriously. Any students feel that reading is not important, boring and also can't see colorful pictures on there. Yeah, it is to be complicated. Book is very important for yourself. As we know that on this period of time, many ways to get whatever we wish. Likewise word says, ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore this April Showers (A Valley Ridge Wedding) can make you truly feel more interested to read.

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