



*The Dating List*

*Jean C. Joachim*

A New York Nights Novel

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**Mainstream Romance**

**Moonlight Books**

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**Dedication:**

**To Marilyn Reisse Lee**

**A woman who knows a lot about love as a loving wife, mother and my dearest friend for many years.**

**Acknowledgement: With many thanks to my supportive friends, especially Sandy Sullivan, Dawne Prochilo, and Lisa George, my family, Larry Joachim and Sally Joachim Gallagher, my editor, Kate Tate and most of all to my readers, who urged me to write this book.**

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### Author's Forward

*The Dating List* is the third book in The List series of New York Nights novels. In the first book, *The Marriage List*, the reader met Grey Andrews, a man who has worked hard, invested well and is now independently wealthy. He has achieved his financial goals so it's on to the next goal, finding a super-special woman to share his lifestyle with.

While drinking beer with his three closest friends from college, he discovers that they all lack one different but major factor in their married lives. This one factor missing in each man's wife is something Grey wants to avoid in his future mate. During dinner with his younger sister, the apple of his eye, he shares his worry he'll end up unhappily hitched to the wrong woman. His sister helps him compose a marriage "list" – comprised of the three qualities he refuses to compromise on in a future wife.

After three years of endless, fruitless searching, he stumbles upon Carrie, a beautiful woman, at a writer's conference. Although she starts off annoyed at him, he presses forward to explore her suitability as a wife. She fits his marriage list to a tee. The only problem, she has a life of her own and though he's a seductive suitor, she will have to make a choice — her career or Grey.

The second book in the series, *The Love List*, details Grey's love journey further. Having never had a serious relationship before, Grey is ignorant of the give-and-take involved when living with a woman. He doesn't know what he can expect from Carrie and what he should offer of himself in return. A huge blow-up alerts Carrie to Grey's inexperience as part of a couple. He needs instruction on how to be in love. Thus *she* creates a love list.

While Grey is learning how to love, he attempts the next step: bringing her into his family. Though his sisters married without any apparent difficulty, it seems acceptance of Grey's plans by his parents and siblings is not as quickly forthcoming.

To heal little brother, Colin's, feelings of neglect, Grey and Carrie invite him to stay with them for the second half of Christmas vacation. That is where our story begins.

Welcome to *The Dating List*, Colin's story and the next chapter in the love story of Carrie and Grey.

## Chapter One

*New York City, the last week of December*

Colin Andrews whipped open the front door of his brother's townhouse in Manhattan, revealing the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen on the other side.

"Do you always answer the door half naked in winter?" she asked.

Her beauty robbed him of words. All he could do was emit a low whistle. *Where did this angel come from?*

"I'd know those hazel eyes anywhere. You must be Grey's brother." She said, stepping closer.

His eyes widened as he stared. Clothed in a soft, rose-colored, quilted jacket the lovely, petite woman took his breath away. The white ermine trim on the hood emphasized the rich mahogany of her hair, framing her delicate oval face. Her eyes, the color of honey, glowed as they looked up at him. His lips parted but no sound came out.

Finally he squeaked out a response that he hoped sounded like *yes* while his gaze wandered over her face, settling on her luscious, kissable pink lips. Glowing skin with an attractive blush and the hint of tiny laugh lines topped off her perfection. She was, without a doubt, the most stunning woman ever to walk into his life.

"Name?" She asked. Merriment danced in eyes highlighted by artfully smudged black liner and fringed with black lashes.

"Colin," he breathed.

"It's cold out here, Colin. Do you think I could come in?" She raised her eyebrows as a small smile played with her lips.

Her words snapped him out of his reverie. He looked down to see a large red suitcase standing next to the diminutive woman. From male instinct, he picked up the suitcase, placed it inside next to the door and stepped back.

"Carrie's friend, Leah," she said, offering her small, white leather-gloved hand to him after she stepped across the threshold of the house, closing the door behind her.

He took her hand, squeezed it a touch too hard, causing her to wince, then let go. He watched her gaze move down from his dark brown hair to his hazel eyes, and lower until it rested on his bare chest. The deepening of the blush on her cheeks made him aware he had not finished dressing before answering the door. He crossed his arms over his chest.

"Excuse me," he mumbled as he made a hasty exit, taking the stairs two at a time to the second floor landing. The last sound to reach his

ears before he closed the door to his room was the tinkle of Leah's laugh.

A few minutes later, Colin left his room sporting a red plaid flannel shirt, jeans, Grey's piney aftershave and freshly combed hair. As he descended the last two steps, he saw Leah settled into a corner of the sofa; her slim legs encased in black suede boots were crossed. He stopped in the kitchen to grab a beer. After popping the top he plopped down on the sofa next to her. His older brother, Grey, dumped another log on the fire in the fireplace, sending sparks flying out to smash against the black mesh screen then disintegrate.

Carrie, Grey's slim fiancée, bounced into the room carrying a small pile of folded laundry.

"Housekeeper's day off?" Colin asked.

"You're looking at him," Grey said, closing the screen across the fireplace.

"You do the laundry?" Colin raised his eyebrows.

"Yep. Carrie cooks, our housekeeper cleans, so I have to do something besides shovel snow."

"Wait till I tell Jenna," Colin teased.

"I'll bust your head! I'll never hear the end of it. Our sister, Jenna, is the most awful tease and I'm her favorite victim," Grey said, turning toward Leah.

"Honus domesticus...Carrie you tamed the wild beast."

"Oh?" She tossed her streaked, shoulder-length blonde hair. "Was he a wild beast? Tell me all about it."

Colin blushed and shook his head.

"No way. I like living."

"Good answer, Punk," his older brother said.

Carrie put on a pot of coffee. Grey joined her in the kitchen, stopping to grab four mugs. Before long the sweet smell of brewing coffee filled the first floor of the elegant townhouse.

"Are you staying with us this visit Leah?"

"I'm bunking in at Nina and Clint's place again. They're upstate for the holiday."

"Coffee?"

"Thanks. It's cold out. By the way...I've got good news."

"Oh? Give," Carrie said as she put the top down on the coffeemaker and turned to face her friend.

Leah got up to retrieve a small portfolio from the outside pocket of her suitcase. Colin's gaze followed her, traveling up her leggings. When she bent slightly to unzip the pocket his eyes traced the outline of her behind, nicely rounded but not out of proportion to the rest of her slim

frame. His tongue felt thick, his fingers twitched slightly at the mental image of running them along the smooth skin of her bare bottom.

“Remember I told you I did some drawings of lingerie...” She flopped the portfolio on the kitchen island countertop. Colin left the sofa to join the others. He placed his empty beer bottle in the kitchen sink then wandered over to see what the women were fussing over.

“This is our cue to leave, Colin. Two women, the word *lingerie*...”

“Stayin’.”

“Your funeral. I’m going to see if there is a game on. Any game,” Grey said, disappearing through the den door that opened onto the kitchen.

Leah flashed Colin a warm smile before unzipping the small case. A small zing flew across his nerve endings.

“Hurry! I’m dying to see these,” Carrie said, shifting her weight from foot to foot.

Her friend took out three single sheets of drawing paper with sketches on them. “I made these from the historical romance I was reading. What do you think?”

Carrie picked up the first sheet and examined the first sheet but Colin kept his gaze on Leah, who stood, chewing her lip. He wanted to do a lot more to that lip. Colin moved back. Being six foot two made it easy to look over Carrie’s shoulder as she was only five foot six. He saw a stylized drawing of a woman with long legs, wearing a lacy number that looked like a corset.

“The material is soft...it just looks like a corset but it isn’t hard, no whalebone. Silk and lace and it hangs down a whisker below her...” Leah looked over at Colin, then back at Carrie.

“Low enough,” Carrie piped up.

Leah nodded, licking her lower lip, her eyebrows knitted.

“Do you like it?” She asked Carrie. “Do you think it’s sexy?” She glanced at Colin.

“I think it’s amazing...so original, Leah. It’s beautiful. I’ve never seen anything like it. But as for sexy, let’s get a man’s opinion.” Carrie turned to face Colin then raised her eyebrows.

Heat pooled in his chest as the two women trained their eyes on him. Suddenly his throat went dry. His gaze dropped down to the picture. The model had hair the color of Leah’s. In the drawing, the soft garment in pink and cream, draped gently around the model’s curves. Colin narrowed his eyes to picture it on Leah. He stole a glance at her hips and legs, outlined perfectly by her leggings. He could visualize the edge of the lace on the garment Leah designed barely covering her luscious rear end. Her long-sleeved aqua tunic was cut low enough to reveal a nice helping of

inviting cleavage, especially when she leaned slightly in his direction folding her arms under her breasts. For the neckline of the garment, again he stole a peek, figuring, with quick male calculation, Leah's breasts would fill his hands as well as the bustier. Mentally, he made the switch from the tunic to the bustier top. His breathing snagged for a moment.

The heat of the mental image of Leah in the skimpy garment brought warmth to his cheeks and between his legs. He shifted his weight, trying to readjust his jeans which had suddenly become tight. Not only could he picture her in the garment but he'd have given his right arm to see her in it at that very moment.

"So... what's the verdict? Sexy?" Leah asked, biting a fingernail.

"That's an understatement." Colin said when he managed to control his breath.

Leah clapped her hands together, jumping up and down like an eight-year-old who was told she was going to Disney World. Grey appeared in the den doorway.

"Did I hear someone say 'sexy'?"

"Mister One-Track-Mind has returned!" Carrie teased.

Grey moved over to the counter, resting one hand on Carrie's shoulder.

"So what's sexy, besides my fiancée?"

Carrie handed the sketch to Grey.

"Whoa! What's this?" Grey stared at the paper.

"It's one of Leah's lingerie designs," Carrie explained.

"Can I buy this for Carrie?"

"It's only a drawing now but..." Her eyes glistened as she paused.

"Give!" Carrie demanded.

"Lady Jeanne wants it. She wants to buy the design and three more of my Wild West lingerie designs. You should see my saloon gal one...it's...well..."

"Hot, I'll bet," Carrie finished. "You're selling these to Lady Jeanne?"

"Better than that. She's invited me to come to Paris for six months and design for her."

"Ohmigod! Leah! You're going to Paris?" Carrie clapped her hands together.

Leah hopped on tiptoe and grinned, nodding her head vigorously.

"Wow...you're going to be a Paris designer? That's the woman who designed the...uh... special Christmas present I bought for Carrie," Grey said.

"A Paris designer..." muttered Colin, staring at Leah, "I've never

met a Paris designer before.”

“You have now,” she said with a giggle.

“This calls for a celebration! Dinner out,” Grey announced.

“Someplace French?” Carrie suggested, brushing Grey’s sandy-colored hair off his forehead.

“Madame et Monsieur?” Grey asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“That’s so fancy...” Leah protested.

“So what? It’s a celebration.” Grey raised his fist in the air. “Can you ladies be ready in half an hour?”

“That’s enough time.”

Leah wheeled her suitcase into the den. Carrie joined her, closing the door to the men.

Colin put his hand on his brother’s shoulder. “I don’t have any fancy clothes, Grey.”

“You didn’t bring a sport jacket and some nice slacks? This is Manhattan, Punk.”

“I figured we’d hang out and drink beer.”

“Some of us aren’t twenty-nine anymore...” Grey ruffled his brother’s hair.

Colin looked at the floor as he felt heat seep into his face. “I don’t own a decent sport jacket, let alone a suit. Don’t need ‘em teaching Phys. Ed. in Pine Grove.”

“Leah can fix this.”

“Leah?”

“Hold on,” Grey knocked on the den door. “Leah! Can you come out?”

She stuck her head out.

“One minute.”

Grey went to the coffeemaker to refill his and his brother’s mugs. Colin rooted around in the refrigerator for milk.

When the women opened the door, Leah entered the kitchen wearing a low-cut, silver beaded dress and black patent leather pumps. Colin choked on his coffee when she appeared. Carrie attended to him while Grey took Leah by the elbow.

“This guy has no dress clothes. I can lend him something for tonight, but we have theater tickets, there’s the New Year’s party, we’ll go out to dinner again...he needs the proper clothes. Would you mind taking him shopping? I’ll give you my charges at Paul Stewart, Brooks and Lord & Taylor. You’re better at this than I am.”

“It would be my pleasure, we can go tomorrow morning,” she said before turning to face Colin. “Okay, country boy. I’ll get you fixed up

fine.” She motioned for him to turn around in a circle, casting her most discerning gaze up and down his fine form. “We have a lot to work with here.”

“Now I know how those prize pigs auctioned off at the state fair feel.”

“Sweetheart, I’m not buying...but I might borrow...” she wrapped her fingers around his bicep. “hmmm...larger suit size. Forty-two regular?”

“Don’t know. Haven’t bought a suit in a while.”

“Don’t worry, Sweetie, I’ll take good care of you. Need to buy everything in time to have it tailored and ready before the party. And you *will* need some tailoring...shoulders a mile wide.”

“Tailoring?”

“With your body? No off-the-rack suit is going to be wide enough for your shoulders and narrow enough for your waist.” She placed her hands lightly on his waist, sending a little shock up his spine.

“That’s good?”

Now it was Leah’s turn to blush. “I’d say so.”

“Come on, Punk, let’s find something of mine that fits you.”

The men walked up the stairs together, followed by Carrie, leaving Leah alone, staring into her cup of coffee. At the top of the stairs, Colin turned to glance down just as Leah looked up, their eyes met. His gaze held hers for a few seconds before she looked away. He smiled then followed his brother into the bedroom.

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The next morning, Colin and Grey went out to shovel snow that had fallen during the night. When they were ready for a break, Carrie delivered hazelnut hot chocolate to warm their bones. The men lingered out in the fresh air.

“You think there’ll be any hot chicks at the party?” Colin asked his brother.

Grey and Colin sat on the stoop they’d just cleared of snow.

“Hot girls at Leah’s New Year’s party? Undoubtedly.” A smirk curled Grey’s lips into a knowing half-smile.

“Not girls, women.”

“Oh? And you know the difference?” Grey raised his eyebrows.

Colin nodded as he blew his breath on the steaming liquid.

“Do tell, little brother.” Grey wrapped both hands around the warm mug.

"I'm almost thirty, Grey."

"So tell me, I'd like to know."

"Forget it." Colin looked away in disgust.

"No, seriously." Grey rested his palm on Colin's shoulder.

"Girls are well...not as serious as women. They're still talkin' an' worryin' about their weight, their makeup or stupid stuff like movie stars...shopping..."

"And women?" Grey interrupted, raising his eyebrows.

"Women know what they want. They're focused...confident. They talk about something real, like politics, their jobs...they're better in bed, too."

Grey hid a smile behind his hand. "And how many "women" have you slept with?"

"Enough." Colin dropped his gaze to his shoes.

Grey laughed. "Name one."

"What? No."

"Can't eh? Don't remember their names or *her* name?" Grey continued to laugh.

"Okay, okay, yeah, only one. That time in St. Thomas. I was drunk. I don't remember her name but it was the greatest..."

"Best sex ever, huh? And you were drunk?" Grey cocked an eyebrow at his brother.

Grey laughed so hard he spilled some of the cocoa, which immediately froze on the stoop.

"Thanks for your understanding," Colin said with more ice in his tone than was on the sidewalk. He stood up.

Grey placed his hand on his brother's arm. "Sit down, sit down. Don't get all bent out of shape."

"You ought to know what I'm talking about. You were there." Colin stood looking down at Grey.

"I was?"

"Yeah, you screwed the redhead...left me with her older sister."

"Guess I took the wrong one, 'cause I don't remember."

Colin laughed, shook his head before returning to the stoop. "Now who was drunk?"

"Was I?" Grey rubbed his face, lost in thought, trying to remember the woman.

"I didn't think so at the time...but you get it...the woman versus girl thing, right?"

"I do. I do." Grey nodded as he took another sip.

"Carrie's a woman, not a girl." Colin stared at Grey, resting his

mug on the step.

“Absolutely...all woman.” A small smile played at Grey’s lips.

“And?” Colin raised his eyebrows at his brother.

“Don’t go there. Don’t even think about it. Stuff about Carrie is private.”

“I can ask, can’t I?” Colin broke into a teasing smile.

“Ask all you want, Punk. Ain’t happening. Where does Angela fall? Girl or woman?”

“Girl. Definitely girl.”

“Sex no good?”

Grey brought the mug up to his lips for a longer drink now that the chocolate had cooled some, waiting for a reply from Colin.

“Hey! You’re not talking, so I’m not talking.”

“Have it your way. Thought maybe she left you horny and broken-hearted.”

Colin laughed a hearty belly laugh. “Horny, always. Broken-hearted? No way.”

“Good,” Grey said, clapping his brother on the shoulder.

“I’m still looking for that one woman.”

“The one with your name tattooed on her ass?”

“And other places.” He said, snickering.

“Let’s finish this, get back inside. It’s damn cold out here,” Grey said, pushing to his feet, draining his mug before placing it on the top step.

“Got a hot date with Carrie? Gonna do her in the kitchen?” Colin grinned at his brother as he set his mug down.

“What did you say?” Grey asked, picking up a handful of snow from the hedges lining the front of his brick townhouse then hiding it behind his back.

“You heard me,” Colin said, turning to face his brother.

Grey whipped his snow-laden fist around and wiped Colin’s face with the snow. Colin sputtered, the icy water went flying. He wiped his face with his hands. Anger lit up his eyes while Grey’s glowed with glee.

“Told you not to go there,” Grey said, backing away.

Colin grabbed a handful of snow. Soon a snowball fight was in full swing on the front sidewalk. The area they had painstakingly cleaned of snow became dusted again as the men fired snowballs at each other, laughing with glee when they made a direct hit. Carrie came to the front door. She picked up the mugs.

“Hey, you’re getting snow all over where you already shoveled!”

Grey stopped at the sound of her voice. Colin rifled one more snowball at Grey’s back before he, too, halted. Both men looked at the

ground.

“Shit,” Grey muttered, picking up a shovel.

Colin followed suit. Within fifteen minutes the extra snow was cleared off and the two men, soaked to the skin, shivered, retreating to the warmth of the house.

“Oh, no, stay there!” Carrie commanded holding her hand up.

The men stopped inside the front door.

“Take everything off here. Don’t want that dirty wet snow tracked all over the house. And you’re both soaked...” She picked up Grey’s muffler to slip her hand underneath. “...to the skin. Jackets off. All off right here. Wait, I’ll get a bag.”

While Carrie scooted back to the kitchen. The men toed off their boots and began to peel off layer upon layer of wet clothing. When Carrie returned with a large plastic bag, they stuffed their jackets, flannel shirts, socks and t-shirts in it. With nothing but wet jeans on both men padded into the kitchen. Grey took off his jeans, went into the bathroom to hang them over the shower curtain bar, then trudged upstairs.

Colin looked around for a moment before doing the same. The kitchen was beautiful with gleaming white appliances against a bright coral wall, off-white cabinets, an Italian ceramic tile floor in earth tones and a gorgeous granite countertop with lines of black and brown running through the natural stone. A generous, rectangular island covered in the same granite divided it from the living room, leaving the room airy and open. Carrie didn’t like feeling trapped or stuck away in the kitchen when she cooked. The kitchen she had renovated was elegant and practical at the same time.

“Maybe we need a fire,” Grey said approaching the fireplace in the living room.

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