

A Card *for Valentine's*

## Books in this series:

1. Second Chance *at Christmas*
2. A Card *for Valentine's*
3. A Blooming *Spring* Love

A

Card

*for*

*Valentine's*

*Seasons* on the Island 2

Emily Engberts

© 2019 Emily Engberts

All rights reserved.

Cover and internal design by Easily Distracted  
Media

© 2021 Emily Engberts

© 5 Times Chaos / Easily Distracted Media

ISBN 9789493139282

NUR: 344

20210105

1



# *Kara*

“Be careful!” I watch as Sanne takes a big box full of things from the back of the small truck I’m renting for the weekend.

“I am.” She looks my way, her eyes shining, like she’s trying to hide a smile. “You’re just worrying too much.”

I sigh and grab another box from the stack. We have to move all my furniture and other things in one go, since I only have a parking permission for the island for two days. Schiermonnikoog is a car-free island, and while some residents have permission to have a car, very few people actually have one. This makes it a great island to stay at, but it does make things like moving a little more complicated.

Luckily, I was able to get a car permit to move my things, just as long as I didn't keep the van within the city limits too long. Today I'm just moving the boxes and big things and then Josie and Sanne will take the van back to the main land tomorrow, and anything I'll still need after that I can either take myself or it can just be sent here by mail, whatever works.

"Anything you want me to carry for you?" Josie, my best friend for years, is standing next to me, grinning, somehow she seems to find joy in my stress.

"Yeah, this one." I give her the box before grabbing a new one myself.

Just two weeks ago, I heard back from my job application to be a substitute teacher at the primary school on Schiermonnikoog until the summer, and now I'm moving into my own place on the island so that I can actually teach here. How time flies, I never imagined that it would all go so fast. Of course, when I applied I knew it would be very soon, but I never expected it to go this fast.

I follow Josie into the building and up the stairs. I'm in a small apartment over a shop. It's very clean and new and while not very big, it's definitely big enough for just me and Tys, my dog. I don't need much space to live. And if this thing turns into more, if they want to keep me after the summer, I can always look for a bigger place then.

I put my box in the kitchen area, before I go down the stairs again, getting the next box. We need to hurry up, the people here don't like having random cars in the street, and I kind of expect someone to show up at any moment to ask why the car is there. That, and the busses that bring people from the ferry to the town and the beach all need to pass here and they don't like the van in their way either. I kind of feel bad for leaving it out there, but there isn't another place where we can keep it while we're moving everything.

We've just got the dining room table and a few other big things left now, like a new couch and my bed, not many small items in boxes anymore.

As I reach the van, I catch Sanne frowning at one of the boxes in the van that's part of the couch.

"Too heavy?" I step next to her.

"Yep. But now that you're here, we can do this, I think?" She smiles my way. I've known Josie for years, but she only recently started dating Sanne, so I don't know her very well yet and we're still trying to get to know each other. But I get why Josie likes her, she's sweet, and she makes everyone feel like they've known her for years already somehow, she's always got a smile and a kind word ready for everyone.

"We can try." I pull myself up into the van and look over the box, it's really big and very clunky, which is

probably why it's so hard to carry. Then I push at the box and Sanne grabs the other end. "Is it too heavy?"

She shakes her head. "I'll be fine." I can see her brace herself as I push more of the box out of the van.

Then I quickly get out and we pull the box out the rest of the way so that we can carry it inside together. It really is heavy... I know that I put the box into the van yesterday, but I got help from Josie then, and after carrying all the other boxes for the last hour or two, I'm not as fresh anymore as I was when I put the box into the van in the first place. This is just the first of three boxes for the couch.

We carefully manage to get the big box up the stairs, put it down in the living area which looks out on the street below through some beautiful double doors, and I slump down next to the box after we've put it down.

Josie comes from the bathroom and grins as she watches us. "And then we've got to put everything together still."

I groan. Yeah, that's going to be fun, *not*. I'm not looking forward to that part of moving, but I'll have to do it since I can't do anything around the house until we've put everything together.

"Let's finish unpacking the van, and then have lunch before we put things together." I shrug. I'm already looking forward to relaxing at the end of the day, I'm so done with



moving. but at least I get to have my own stuff in this apartment. I don't have to move into someone else's stuff, I don't have to move into a house designed by someone else, like so many rental apartments these days or like a holiday house. I've got my own things and that's a definite bonus. The downside is having to actually move everything...

I push myself off the floor, standing up. "Okay, let's do this!"



Sanne drives the van to the ferry while Josie and I are walking the dogs and picking up some lunch. We didn't take anything with us to the island, we didn't want to pack even more, but there is a fresh bakery close to the supermarket and we bought some nice dark bread at the bakery and then we picked up some cheese and other things at the supermarket. The fridge is in place and currently cooling so it should be usable in the next few hours.

It's strange, moving to the island. Not just the moving into a new house or anything, I've done that often enough, but moving into basically a totally different culture. The stores here are closed earlier than in the city, you don't have as much choice in food and such at the supermarket and I still feel like I'm here on holiday, even though I'll be starting

classes in just a few days, on Monday morning. But having come here for holidays for years, it's strange to get into the 'this is my home now' mindset, to switch from being here on holiday to really realising that I'm now living here.

When we get back the apartment, and Tys and Bente have raced up the stairs, I look at them with a smile. I do have to admit that the idea of being able to just step out of the house and walking right into the fields or reach the beach in just a short time is an amazing feeling.

Sure, Josie lives on the edge of the city and she can step out into the fields at any time she likes, but she doesn't get the beautiful dunes or forests, or the sea that I can just walk to at any time that I want. She doesn't get any of that, and I think those are extra perks that make this a very special place.

Not just being able to walk out onto the fields, but to actually be able to go to the sea, or the mudflats, and spend hours there on my own, with Tys. Of course, I'll have to work and that will take a lot of time too, but all in all, it's an amazing prospect, I think. It's exactly what I've dreamed of for years, even if I never thought this was possible or if this is just temporarily, it's still amazing.

"You want fried eggs for lunch?" Josie is standing in the kitchen, hunting through boxes. "I see that you've got an induction unit here, so I don't know how well I'll do on the

eggs. I'm sorry in advance."

I laugh, walking over to her. "Yeah, I think a fried egg for lunch in this cold weather is great. The frying pan should be in one of these boxes, and I'll set the rest of the table for when Sanne gets back."

Josie checks her phone. "She should be here soon. She just messaged that she's on her way back."

"Okay." I nod, opening a box, hoping to find plates, but finding cups and mugs instead. Not the right box. I should have labelled the boxes... It takes me two more tries before I get to the plates, though, I've found a frying pan for Josie, so that was good too. I grab the plates and cutlery and set the table, carefully walking around Tys and Bente, who are somehow constantly running after each other. They're so excited about the new place that they're not able to sit still at all, even after just having been on a walk. They're silly like that, but it's also fun to watch them together. They're from the same litter and Josie and I have spent a lot of time raising them together. We've always been really close and this is the first time since university that we're not living twenty minutes away from each other, that's going to take some getting used to. I'm sure.

As I'm setting the last things on the table, Sanne is already back, grinning widely, her cheeks all red from cycling here, or just the cold, I don't know. Bente and Tys

greet her enthusiastically, jumping all around her, trying to get her to play with them.

Being here with Josie and Sanne makes it feel like this isn't real yet, that I'm just here on holiday or something, that this isn't the big change in life that it really is. It's strange how unreal this still feels, how strange. But I think I'll get used to it soon enough. I think...

I better, because it is real.



After lunch, we put together the couch and then all slump down onto it.

Josie keeps looking around. "You know what you're missing? You need something on the walls. It's too bare."

"What do I need to put on the walls?" I look at them, but they seem fine like this. A little empty and white, but that's okay, right? They don't need to be full of things.

"I think you need a map of Schier on them, get some colour in the room. And it's helpful too, makes it easier to decide where you're going to walk, you know?" She's grinning, like she's got some plan.

"You just want to go shopping in those small stores..." I glance at her. It's not a bad idea. Putting a map on the walls will probably make this room a little homier, even just so I can look at it and remind myself that this is really

happening. “Okay. Fine.” I sigh. “Let’s go.” I stand up and the dogs are around my feet immediately, excited to get moving again. “Yeah, yeah. We’re going outside, I promise.”

“Yes!” Josie grins as she also gets up. “You know, it’s different if you live here and aren’t just here on holiday. Those small shops are now your local stores.”

I raise my eyebrow as I look at her. “I live here. Not you. I’m not sure how much *you* going to those stores means that they’re ‘local’ to me.”

“Same difference. They’re still cute.” She shrugs, pulling Sanne along with her. Josie can be a little bit odd sometimes, but whatever. That’s usually half the fun of being around her.

“I’ve not seen them much yet, at least not in the last couple of years.” Sanne looks like she’s trying to look innocent, but I can still see her grin. Yeah, no help there. None at all.

“Fine. Like I said, we’re going.” I put my shoes on and then wrap up warm. It may not be snowing anymore, like we had at the start of the year, but it’s still really cold, being the end of January and all. Maybe not the best time of the year to move here, as the island is much more beautiful in spring or summer. But any time of the year is a good time to move to your dream island.

I put the leash on Tys and he immediately starts walking circles around me. “Just wait a little longer, impatient boy.” I grin as I grab my bag.

When everyone is ready, we go down the stairs, to the street below and then take a left onto the main street. It’s not very busy, but that’s what I like, like this, you can really see how beautiful the island really is.

And isn’t that why I wanted to come here anyway?

# 2



## *Lin*

I don't know if I feel lucky that I've almost survived the first week at the store, or unlucky that I still need to work tomorrow too, but at least it's nearing the end now.

I'm looking after my mum's store, Maaiké's Books, while she's taking care of her sister on the other end of the world. Closing the store just didn't seem like the best idea, so I'm taking care of it instead. The store sells books and crafting supplies, and, of course, souvenirs of all sorts of types. This is the only bookstore on the island and also where newspapers outside the main three Dutch newspapers are sold. So we get a lot of locals but also a lot of visitors in the store, Dutch and German alike. Sadly

enough, my German is really rusty and I've had to stumble my way through more than a handful of conversations this week already. I've not had to speak this much German since the first summer Mum opened the store and I helped her out for a few weeks.

“Schönen Tag noch.” I smile as a customer leaves the store, letting in a really cold breeze and I rub my hands together. It's pretty quiet right now, which is normal when there aren't many visitors because there aren't any holidays and such. When it's mostly just the locals who drop by, the store can be really quiet. I can go hours between customers. Not that it matters much, it lets me read books during the off-time, allowing me to catch up on my to-read list.

I lean on the stool behind the counter, reading one of the books we got in yesterday with the stock of new and popular books. I'd seen it on the bestseller list before, but I hadn't bought it yet, and now I can read it while I'm also 'working' at the same time. Pretty cool, if you ask me.

Just as I'm halfway down the page, the door opens again and I stand up, smiling at the three women who step inside. They're excitedly chatting to each other and immediately go over to the shelves of souvenirs.

“This is what I meant.” One of them, a woman with chestnut coloured hair and a warm smile on her lips, picks up a map of the island. “You need this for your wall.”



The second woman shakes her head as she grins, her eyes crinkling a little. “I don’t know if that one’s big enough.”

“That’s what she said.” The third woman snickers before glancing my way. “Is there a bigger size of that map? We’re looking for something more wall poster size, not an actual usable map.”

The second woman also looks at me, her bright blue eyes so captivating it takes me a moment before I can answer.

“No.” The word rushes out, way too clipped in my surprise. I try again. “No, that’s the only size map we’ve got on sale. We’ve got smaller, not bigger. Most people just need a map, not a poster.”

“I guess that makes sense.” The third woman shrugs, already distracted, and then pulls the first woman along to the back. “Come on, we should go look for a housewarming gift.”

“Seriously?” The second woman looks after them and then sighs deep. “You don’t have to. You know that.”

The first woman looks back, raising an eyebrow like she’s not making any sense. “Of course we have to. That’s what friends are for.” Then the two women walk to the back of the store, quietly talking together.

“Housewarming gift?” I look at the beautiful woman in

front of me.

“Yeah.” She shrugs. “I just moved here.”

“To the island?” I blink, you don’t hear that often, at least not from someone who is so young. Most people who buy places here are old and just use it as a status thing or to show off how much money they have. The island has a lot of millionaires, even if they’re never actually here. Which is why so many of the houses, especially the big ones, are empty most of the year. It’s a shame, really, as it’s an amazing island.

“Yeah.” She smiles more, her bright eyes shimmering. “I’m the new part-time teacher at the primary school, at least until the summer.” She looks so proud and it gives me butterflies in my stomach.

“That’s really cool. Congratulations!” I look at her a little closer, at how she holds herself so comfortably. “We’ll be running into each other more often then. Since, you know, I work here and all. And the island is pretty small.” Because I start babbling when I get nervous... Trying to fill the silence.

The woman holds out her hand, she’s wearing really pretty fingerless gloves in a blue just a little darker than her eyes, and I shake it. “I’m Kara.” There is a bright spark in her voice.

“Lin.” I can’t help smiling. “I’m taking care of this store

for my mother for a while.”

“Oh, that’s pretty cool.” Kara nods. “Must be nice, meeting all sorts of different people and all.”

“It is. Though, my languages aren’t that good, makes it a little complicated sometimes.” Babbling, again...

Kara lets out a deep laugh, making my stomach do a flip. “I can imagine. I’ve been on the island a good couple of times and you do really need to be fluent in German to survive as a store. Right?” She looks at me like what I say actually matters.

“Yeah.” I nod, my cheeks colouring. “Not my greatest skill.”

“Mine neither.” She grins. Then the other two women come back over, carrying all sorts of crafting things and a few books, and Kara raises her eyebrows at the other women. “I don’t need all of that, you know. Really.”

The first woman grins. “We know, but we thought it would brighten up the apartment. We can maybe make something nice with them.” Then she looks at me, holding out her hand. “I think it would be rude not to introduce myself now, seeing as you’ve already exchanged names. I’m Josie.”

I take her hand. “Lin.”

The final woman raises a hand awkwardly, trying to hold onto a whole stack of paper and I think I can see some

pencils and paints in the pile. “Sanne.”

“Nice to meet you.” I step to the side so that she can put the items on the counter. “Would that be all? I think you’ve grabbed about half the store.”

“We’ll probably buy more tomorrow.” The woman who introduced herself as Josie grins. “Can’t leave Kara without a whole stack of things to do and craft with the kids.”

“Hey. I need to actually teach them things, I can’t just do crafts with them, you know?” Kara glares her way, but it’s nothing angry or mean, she’s still laughing and Josie laughs too.

“I know. But these are great tools to teach with, right?” Josie grins as she looks at me, somehow getting me into their conversation too.

I start scanning the items as Sanne starts putting them away into a bag. “I think so. Crafts can be a really good way to teach.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kara rolls her eyes. “I’ll become their favourite teacher who doesn’t teach them anything at all, you know... How am I supposed to keep them all focused on their work when everyone sees me as the ‘fun teacher’ and not as a real teacher?”

I shrug, not really sure why that would be a problem. I always liked the ‘fun teachers’ best anyway. “Well, you know

that if you need anything else, you can just drop by here, right?”

Kara’s eyes go up to mine, a small but warm smile on her lips. “Yes, I know. Thanks.”

My cheeks heat up a little again, they’d just stopped burning, and I’m captivated by her eyes again. I don’t know what it is, but, somehow, I just can’t help but watch her. “Do you need anything else? Or will this be all?”

Apparently that was all as Kara pays and then leaves the store with her friends.

I stare after her for a while, only shaking my head and pulling myself back to the present when another customer comes into the store. I know that the island doesn’t have that many people on it and I know that I’m not supposed to do anything odd, I’m supposed to keep a low profile. And I definitely know that not everyone would appreciate me catching the eyes of a woman like her, or any woman at all. But the way she smiled, the way she interacted with her friends, it gave me a warm fuzzy feeling inside.

A warm fuzzy feeling that I haven’t felt in a long time. I didn’t just come here to take care of my mum’s store, I came here to hide away, to run away from my life.

And now I’m not so sure if that was a good idea...



I unpack one of my boxes full of books. I know that my mum sells books, but these are my favourites, I don't go anywhere, I don't live anywhere, without these. The genres are all over the place, from fantasy to high literature to my favourite romance books. Sure, I mostly read on an ereader these days, but that doesn't mean that I don't still buy my favourite books in print. And I don't think that will change any time soon.

My mum has always had an extra room in the house, the place where me or my siblings would sleep if we visited her. But for the next weeks it will be my room, it will be where I'll be sleeping. Because I'm not sleeping in Mum's room. That's just weird.

My mum's apartment is over the store. It's got two floors, the first one is a living room and kitchen and above that are two bedrooms and a bathroom. It's not big, but for someone living on her own, like my mum does, it's by far big enough.

At the back of the house are two small studio apartments that are rented out around the year. It gives some extra income, although, it also gives some more work. Luckily, my mum hires someone to clean the studios and put on fresh sheets and all sorts of stuff like that. We don't really have to do much, apart from checking that everything is clean and in the right place when a new guest arrives and

to give them the key and things like that.

To be honest, if you don't like strangers and don't like always having different people around, you probably shouldn't be living on the island anyway. There are always changes in who are around, there are always different people, and new people everywhere. It's never the same. Even if you keep visiting, year after year, it's never the same. No two weeks are the same, no two holidays are the same. I can see the attraction in that for some people. My mum has always been very open, has always been very welcoming to people, always loving to talking to everyone. But I'm not really like that. I'm not a private person, necessarily, I'm just... I'm just not that good with people.

I don't know why, it's always been like that. From the time I was very young, I've never able to really understand people. Someone would joke and I would just not get it. And going out in public, into groups of people that I didn't know? I really did not understand that. When it was with people I knew, I would be fine. It wouldn't matter. I'm not even sure why. I would just, *know* how to do things, I would understand it. But if they were people I didn't know, I would get confused.

Part of me is scared of working at Mum's store. Scared of talking to all those random people. Scared of having to talk to them. But at the same time, I understand this. I

understand what has to happen when someone walks into the store. I understand having to explain things to people. I understand having to sell them things, to ask if they need something. It has a pattern to it. Things like that have a pattern. Customers come in, I greet them, they look around, maybe pick up a few things, and, if they look lost, I go up to them to ask them if they need something, and then they will buy something, they will pay, and then they'll leave. That's pretty easy to understand. It keeps things simple.

I guess that's why I'm okay with doing this, just standing at the counter, and just being the place where people go to ask things and where they pay. Because it's them talking to me, it's not me having to go up to someone to sell them something. It's so different from my mum, or from some of my siblings. They're all so open so open and... friendly. People tend to think I'm sweet and kind. But they don't tend to find me friendly, and I'm okay with that. I'm not up for big parties and hanging out all the time, too many variables, so I don't mind the more quiet life like this. Most of the time anyway. But it also makes for very lonely times sometimes, it can also be very lonely.

I sigh, sitting down on the bed for a moment. It means that sometimes life can be very lonely. I look around the room, at the few shelves I'm going to fill with my own things, at the closet almost filled with my clothes now. At



how I'm going to make this place mine, even for just a couple of weeks.

Yeah, sometimes the best way to feel less lonely, to feel less like I'm always alone when people around me aren't, is to actually go away go to a place where nothing is ever the same.

At least, that's what I was hoping for. That's all I ever wanted.

I don't feel at home in many places, always feeling a little like an outsider, but in a place where everyone is an outsider, at least, I don't feel like I'm the only one.

At least I don't feel like I'm the only one alone.

Hopefully.

That was the plan, anyway.