

Risky Restoration

E. F. Dodd

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Risky Restoration is a romance novel whose trio of girlfriends deal with relationship issues, pushing through their fears to get what they want.

In E. F. Dodd's romance novel *Risky Restoration*, a woman still reeling from an old break-up decides to reconcile herself to her past, only to find that her future may be much more satisfying.

Kez and Miller broke up years ago. Kez blocked his number and email, but that hasn't stopped her from occasionally doing some online investigating into her ex's new life. When she finds engagement photographs on his social media accounts, Kez talks her girlfriends, Rae and V, into a trip to Miller's high school reunion to put any lingering doubts about their relationship to rest.

But while looking for closure, Kez finds a new opening: a chance meeting with a sexy, charming, and confident man, Jackson. He sweeps her off of her feet. If she can let go of old hangups, her new start might finally put the past to rest.

Kez and her friends are bold, independent women who are successful and confident in every area of their lives—except for love. Each one is influenced by external expectations or past traumas; Kez holds on to the “what if” of her relationship, while V lets her parents' snobby beliefs control her. Rae is closed off and seemingly casual when it comes to men; her reasons for this approach are not revealed, but her cold attitude toward romance hints at hurt in her life. Accepting of each other's flaws, the women walk a delicate line between supportiveness and calling out problematic behavior. Their banter is quick-witted and emotionally honest. And in the course of the novel, each one meets a man who challenges them, with Kez and Jackson taking the lead.

Kez and Jackson's irresistible, steamy dynamic is built upon their mutual attraction. Delicious details come in; throughout, they remain just shy of explicit. Will-they-won't-they moments lead to tension: their physical encounters are frequently interrupted, building a sense of excitement. Kez has an endearing habit of referring to her libido as her “inner witch,” whose appearances represent her rising sex drive.

The fast-moving romance forces both Kez and Jackson to face their insecurities, manifesting in tender sentiments and moments of self-sabotage. Miller morphs into the villain of the tale; though there are both good and bad moments in his past with Kez, which are revealed in flashbacks and triggered memories, his behavior becomes erratic. Kez second-guesses herself as Miller admits to his own unresolved feelings.

With gal pal empowerment sessions and steamy seductions taking the lead, this character-focused story engages in some stereotypes with its ideas around femininity and masculinity. But it also addresses changing gender expectations in modern relationships. A well-maintained balance of informative, funny dialogue and engaging sensual scenes result in the perfect pace. Conflicts lead to uncertainty in vital moments, but the romantic resolution is satisfying, marked by humor and hope.

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to get what they want.

DELIA STANLEY (November 2, 2021)

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