

BIG WILD LOVE ADVENTURE

by Julianna Keyes

EXCERPT

Night fell while we were getting dressed, and the pool area has been decorated with flaming tiki torches and fairy lights, their glow reflecting on the surface of the water. It's still hot but there's a light breeze, and this far out in the jungle, the sky is pitch black and a million stars twinkle. Now that I have a second to breathe, the true enormity of my situation settles on me like a lead blanket. I'm here. I'm doing this.

The men are lined up opposite, dressed in shorts and linen trousers, tees and button-ups, smiling like they're excited for whatever's about to happen. It's cliché, but everyone appears to be here for the right reasons, and I'm not. I'm not looking for love; I'm not ready for it. My humiliating heartbreak was less than a year ago, but I haven't come close to dealing with it. All I want is to get my business back up and running, and if it means selling my soul for a few episodes of free advertising, then that's what I'm going to do. There'll be no "vibing" with anyone. And, to be honest, it's hard to believe any of those men would vibe with me when I'm standing next to seven women who appear to have come straight from the Victoria's Secret runway. I have wet hair and flip-flops and bug spray is leaking out of my pores.

All of a sudden, everyone starts to clap. I have no idea why, but I start clapping too, glancing around as I try to find the source of inspiration. Slowly, a grinning man in a bright white shirt and yellow shorts approaches from the field, making eye contact with every single one of us, which takes forever.

"Hello, adventurers!" He speaks with an Australian accent and never stops smiling. We keep clapping. "I'm your host, Kip Kendall. Welcome to the jungle."