



SECRET WEDDING

Liz Fielding

& Cherish

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Аннотация

The husband she never forgot... Ordered to attend a romance writers' workshop in order to get in touch with his "feminine" side, the last thing bestselling thriller writer Tom Garrick expects is to meet the woman who lied to him and broke his heart... his wife! Mary Harrington was convinced she'd moved on from Tom, but one glimpse of her ex's gorgeous face and she knows she's been lying to herself! And, thanks to a hotel mix-up, she's now sharing a room with him! Sparks fly, but will this fling be for one night only, or can they find a way towards forever?

Содержание

Secret Wedding	6
Table of Contents	7
CHAPTER ONE	8
CHAPTER TWO	13
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	17



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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Excerpt](#)

[Title Page](#)

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAPTER EIGHT

[Copyright](#)

CHAPTER ONE

Begin your story at a moment of crisis, a point in time when your character's life is about to change for ever.

—Mollie Blake's Writing Workshop Notes

TOM GARRICK couldn't believe he was doing this. He wrote bestselling thrillers for men. His readers didn't want emotional guff polluting the action. Women were included for the sole purpose of providing sex and sympathy while they fixed up his hero's wounds. And to bump up the body count. He almost smiled. Almost.

"The books are still selling really well," his publisher had told him, "But you seem to have lost that wonderful humanity women readers loved. Get back in touch with your feminine side, Tom." The man hadn't been making a suggestion. He'd meant it. "Women buy a lot of books."

Tom didn't have a feminine side. Not any more. As for spending his weekend being lectured on how to raise the "sigh" factor in his books ... He said something rude, his mood deteriorating as he manoeuvred his sports car towards the gothic pile that was the venue for a weekend workshop with bestselling romance novelist Mollie Blake.

He repeated his curse, stocking up against his entry into a sugar-pink, expletive-free zone.

Mollie Blake was not happy as she shifted gears, grinding the

motor slightly. She didn't do signings, or talk shows, and she sure as heck didn't do workshops. But when your sweetheart of a publisher had promised a friend, had gone down on his knees, had been desperate enough to offer the loan of his precious car because it had a phone and she'd never be out of touch ...

Late, she put her foot down on the accelerator.

Tom cruised the packed car park. The venue, at least, was a bonus. The hotel had once been used as a set for low-budget horror movies, and the weekend might be considerably enlivened by devising grisly literary ends for other members of the workshop. He grinned. He'd think up something really special for Ms Mollie Blake.

Mollie's car phone rang and her heart gave a little lift as she pressed the hands-free button to answer it. "Hi, sweetheart ..."

Then, "Can you hold on a minute, darling? I need to park."

Spotting a space, Tom shifted into reverse. Maybe he could get a book out of this workshop. His grin deepened as he considered a title. *A Shroud in Pink Lace?*

"What the—?" He was jolted out of pleasurable thoughts of mayhem and murder by an ominous thunk and the sound of breaking glass. The positive thoughts evaporated; he'd got it right the first time. This was going to be the weekend from hell.

His old Aston Martin was built like a tank and had scarcely sustained a scratch. But he'd hit a hundred thousand pounds' worth of black Porsche and he let slip a phrase that he usually confined between the covers of his books.

“Ditto.” The woman who’d been at the wheel of the Porsche didn’t look up from her examination of the damage, but her voice gave him a moment of hope. Soft, slightly husky, the sound settled low in his vitals, stirring something that his mind reached for, but just slipped past the edge of memory ...

He shrugged, let it go. And fought to contain a smile. It wasn’t all bad news. Bent over the buckled rear of the car in a short, close-fitting skirt, the lady displayed a physical framework to match all that classy German engineering. Her face was hidden by a pale curtain of silver-blond hair that shimmered in the light spilling from the entrance to the hotel, but the rest of her was a feast to behold.

Her legs alone were enough to give a man straight-to-hell ideas—if a man was in the market for that kind of thing. She was the kind of woman that any one of his heroes would be glad to have hanging off his left arm, and maybe, in the interests of research....

“Tell me,” she asked, pre-empting him without bothering to look up, “just what kind of idiot are you?” The softness had been illusory. Not that she had raised her voice. Simply endowed it with an edge of sarcasm that would have cut through steel. Well, in her place he guessed he’d be feeling a little touchy.

“I don’t know,” he said. “How many kinds are there?”

Mollie groaned inwardly. As if it wasn’t bad enough that he’d done untold damage to poor Jerry’s precious car, the man was a relic from some cliché-ridden romance. Ignoring the chat-up

line, she straightened, unimpressed with Mr Cute.

But she couldn't escape the clichés. Even in the darkness of the car park she could see that he was tall, with mile-wide shoulders. A car door opened nearby, and in the brief burst of light she saw that he was grinning, his mouth lifting at one corner in a way that left her momentarily floundering ...

“Didn't you see me?” she snapped irritably, and diverted her gaze to his car, pushing away disturbing memories. “Doesn't that heap of junk have a rearview mirror?”

“Heap of junk?” Now Tom was offended. “My car, madam, is a hand-built sixties classic. The finest—”

“Classic? That's another word for old, right?” Then she seemed to forget about insulting his pride and joy and reached into her car to pick up a squawking handset. “Harry, sweetheart, I'll call you in the morning. Miss you ...” *Kissy, kissy.*

The lady was spoken for, it seemed, and for once Tom found himself wishing it were otherwise. Which didn't improve his mood. “And what do you use your rearview mirror for, sweetheart?” he enquired softly as she switched off the phone and gave her attention to the more immediate problem of the car. “Fixing your hair—?”

“Oh, please!” Then, “But what can you expect from a man who drives an outdated car except old-fashioned, chauvinistic ideas to match?”

“Fixing your hair while you're on the phone chatting to your boyfriend?” he concluded. “You won't be his best girl when he

sees the damage to his car.”

She ignored the taunt. “Just give me your insurance details and shift that superannuated heap out of the way so that I can park,” she said. “I’m going to be late for my weekend workshop.”

“Workshop? You’re going to the Mollie Blake thing? Me too.”

“Really?”

She sounded sceptical. He didn’t blame her.

“Absolutely. Can’t wait,” he said, making a virtue out of a necessity. “So, why don’t we go inside and trade dents in comfort? I’m sure we can sort this out amicably over a drink.”

“Can’t wait,” she echoed faintly.

Tom parked, grabbed his bag from the boot. They reached the hotel doorway at the same time. As he pushed the door open and held it for her she turned automatically to thank him, and the light caught her face.

That was when he remembered where he’d heard the voice before. Younger ... Sweeter ... She’d changed, changed beyond recognition, but a man wasn’t likely to forget the voice of the woman he’d married. Even if the marriage had lasted barely long enough for the registrar’s signature to dry on the certificate.

CHAPTER TWO

Keep the conflict simple. Make sure the reader knows what's going on. Ask yourself ... Is this strong enough to sustain the length of the story?

—Mollie Blake's Writing Workshop Notes

“THANK YOU ...” Mollie Blake took the door and waited for him to follow her into the light of the foyer, waited for him to fill in the blank of his name. But he hadn't moved out of the shadows. Said nothing. “Are you all right?” The last thing she wanted was to get cosy with this man, but when he still didn't move she became concerned. “Did you get whiplash or something?”

“Yes—that is, no ...” Tom stopped, gathered himself. “I'm fine,” he said carefully. It was a lie.

He wouldn't have known her if they'd passed in the street. Hadn't quite remembered a voice not heard for more than five years. But the eyes ... He would never forget the pair of liquid grey eyes that had once bewitched him.

Mary Harrington had been soft, sweet, an absurdly young twenty-year-old, with mousy hair, lingering baby fat, and shoulders rounded from her attempts to disguise her height. Over-protected by dominating parents, she'd been dangerously naïve.

Not his type of girl. No way.

Shy, and sweetly innocent, and never-been-kissed—at least

not the way he'd kissed her. Maybe that had been part of the attraction for a girl kept on too short a leash. The danger.

And his excuse? That he'd been captivated by something fresh, untouched, that had shone from her? No one had believed that. Not for a minute.

"Mary." He said her name. That was all.

Mollie caught her breath as every cell in her body went on red alert, responding with a familiar rush of adrenaline to the softness of her name on this man's lips. Her real name. Mary. No one had called her that in so long. Only ... She gave a choked cry as he stepped inside, let the door swing shut behind him.

"Tom?" She said his name hesitantly, half lifted her hand to his face, as if to touch it, reassure herself that he was real and not some figment of her imagination. Then, as the light fell full onto his face, the blood drained from hers and reality kicked in. The last time she'd seen him he'd been shouting to be heard over angry voices, her tears, as she'd been surrounded by her family and hustled away from the registry office they'd chosen for their secret runaway wedding. Swearing that he'd be back, that nothing, no one, could keep him away.

Five years ago.

But he was still a liar.

"It's been a long time," he said.

She choked back the words gathering in her throat. The *Where were you? I waited but you didn't come* words.

"Not long enough," she replied, and he flinched as if she'd hit

him—and how many times over the years had she dreamed of doing just that? There was no pleasure in it, she discovered as she turned and walked away, dropping her bag beside the hotel desk. Just an overwhelming sadness.

“Not one more tear,” she whispered shakily as she gripped the pen, filled in the form. “Not one.”

“I’m sorry, madam?”

“Nothing.” *Nothing*. What a joke! Everything, more like it. The weekend was a mess. Jerry’s car was mess. That was Tom Garrick for you. He could make a mess just crooking one of those expressive eyebrows. But she’d get the car fixed, just as she’d fixed her battered heart. It would look okay. Work efficiently. Only she would know the difference, that it would never be quite the same again, never be quite perfect.

“Mary—”

She swung round to face him.

“I’m busy, Mr Garrick.” She picked up her bag, but he beat her to her key and he clearly wasn’t going to surrender it until he’d got whatever it was he wanted. “Please, Tom! What do you want? What are you doing here?”

Tom heard the desperation in her voice. The unspoken plea for him to leave her alone. Well, he would. But not until he’d got some answers. He was entitled to answers.

“My publisher thinks I need to woo my women readers,” he said, relieving her of her bag and heading for the stairs. “He’s hoping that the brilliant Mollie Blake will pass on a few of her

secrets.”

“Don’t count on it.”

He glanced back. “You think I’m wasting my time?”

“No, you’re wasting mine. Please give me my key.” He handed it over without a word. “And my bag.”

She stopped. “This is my room.” Pointedly, she did not unlock the door.

He wasn’t ready to move on yet. “Why didn’t you ever bother with a divorce?” he asked. “I was sure *Daddy* would insist.”

If he was hoping to provoke a reaction, crack the cool façade, he failed miserably. She slid the key in the lock, opened the door and, picking up her bag in the same smooth movement, shut it in his face. Despite everything, he knew that given the choice he’d still have rather been on the other side of it.

Mollie leaned back against the door, fighting the weakness, the temptation to fling it open and race after him, demand to know if it had been worth it. She shut her eyes, as if to shut him out of her mind, her heart. She wasn’t that gullible girl he’d married. No way.

According to the programme left in Tom’s room, there was to be a reception to meet the famous Mollie Blake before dinner. The noise of the crowd rose to meet him as he went downstairs, but that wasn’t why he paused. Mary was ahead of him, stunning in a long sea-green silk tunic worn over a pair of chiffon trousers that billowed transparently around her legs. And heels as high as the Andes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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