



*Sharon*  
**KENDRICK**

THE GREEK TYCOON'S  
BABY BARGAIN

Sharon Kendrick

**The Greek Tycoon's Baby Bargain**

«HarperCollins»

**Kendrick S.**

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## DEAR READER LETTER

By Sharon Kendrick

Dear Reader,

One hundred. Doesn't matter how many times I say it, I still can't believe that's how many books I've written. It's a fabulous feeling but more fabulous still is the news that Mills & Boon are issuing *every single one* of my backlist as digital titles. Wow. I can't wait to share all my stories with you - which are as vivid to me now as when I wrote them.

There's BOUGHT FOR HER HUSBAND, with its outrageously macho Greek hero and A SCANDAL, A SECRET AND A BABY featuring a *very* sexy Tuscan. THE SHEIKH'S HEIR proved so popular with readers that it spent two weeks on the *USA Today* charts and...well, I could go on, but I'll leave you to discover them for yourselves.

I remember the first line of my very first book: "So you've come to Australia looking for a husband?" Actually, the heroine had gone to Australia escape men, but guess what? She found a husband all the same! The man who inspired that book rang me up recently and when I told him I was beginning my 100<sup>th</sup> story and couldn't decide what to write, he said, "Why don't you go back to where it all started?"

So I did. And that's how A ROYAL VOW OF CONVENIENCE was born. It opens in beautiful Queensland and moves to England and New York. It's about a runaway princess and the enigmatic billionaire who is infuriated by her, yet who winds up rescuing her. But then, she goes and rescues him... Wouldn't you know it?

I'll end by saying how very grateful I am to have a career I love, and to thank each and every one of you who has supported me along the way. You really are very dear readers.

Love,

Sharon xxx

The Greek Tycoon's Baby Bargain

Sharon Kendrick



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**SHARON KENDRICK** once won a national writing competition, describing her ideal date: being flown to an exotic island by a gorgeous and powerful man. Little did she realise that she'd just wandered into her dream job! Today she writes for Mills & Boon, featuring her often stubborn but always to-die-for heroes and the women who bring them to their knees. She believes that the best books are those you never want to end. Just like life...

**Mills & Boon are proud to present a thrilling digital collection of all Sharon Kendrick's novels and novellas for us to celebrate the publication of her amazing and awesome 100th book! Sharon is known worldwide for her likeable, spirited heroines and her gorgeous, utterly masculine heroes.**

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## CHAPTER ONE

IT WASN'T the first time he had been late—but it was the first time he hadn't bothered to warn her.

Outside, the rain made the street look as glossy as an old black and white photo but Rebecca's eyes were fixed at the junction which would give her the first glimpse of his car.

The palms of her hands were cold and clammy and she bit her lip, her head spinning with thoughts she could no longer ignore. Because maybe this was how it all began—the end of a relationship. With the slow, slow drip of inconsideration—rather than the passion of the blazing row.

Her lips curved into a painful smile as she recognised that even calling it a relationship gave it more importance than it deserved. When two people lived on opposite continents and merely snatched at secret moments together—did that really count?

Perhaps *affair* would be more accurate. An affair which should never have started and which she'd tried her best to resist, but in the end she had been weak—of course she had. For wasn't that Xandros's special ability: to make women weak around him? It wasn't difficult to see why. Given the sheer charisma and powerful persuasion of the Greek billionaire, it was amazing that she had lasted out as long as she had.

Maybe this was what happened when you finally began to fall in love with a man like Alexandros Pavlidis—or Xandros to his friends and lovers. This terrible preoccupation which made all your thinking skewed. Even though you told yourself that you didn't want to be in love, that it couldn't possibly *be* love when all you'd known were some amazing dates and some even more amazing sex.

Yet you could tell yourself something again and again and sometimes almost believe it. And then he would call at the very last minute and she would hear that deep sexy voice, asking her if she'd like to have dinner, and her heart would flip—the world seeming suddenly to be lit by fairy lights. And even though she hated herself for being so available, she would be unable to say no.

The gleam of powerful headlights cut a bright channel through the night and Rebecca saw the shiny black nose of the limousine as it slowly eased its way into view. Hastily, she ducked out of sight as it stopped outside the apartment building. Not the most attractive sight in the world, was it? To be seen staring anxiously out of the window!

She checked the mirror. Her hair was clean and shining—worn loose, just the way Xandros liked it. She was wearing a dress in soft lilac and was slim enough and young enough to carry off the relatively inexpensive outfit and make the most of it. Xandros didn't like a lot of make-up and neither did she. A slick of lipstick and a curl of mascara—that was all.

But no amount of careful preparation could hide the faint shadows beneath her eyes, or the way that she seemed to have been constantly biting her lip lately, like an exam candidate who hadn't really understood the question.

The doorbell rang and she pinned a casual smile to her mouth, which died the instant she opened the door to see a tall man in uniform standing on the step, rain dripping from his peaked cap, and it took a moment or two to realise that she was looking at Xandros's chauffeur.

'Miss Gibbs?' he said politely, as if he'd never met her before. As if he hadn't witnessed Xandros kissing her so passionately on the back seat of the car. Or hadn't been forced to sit in a car outside her tiny house, waiting for his Greek boss to reappear over an hour later minus his tie, his hair dishevelled, his sensual mouth curved with pleasure.

Rebecca's cheeks burned with shame at the memory of that particular time. 'Where's Xandros?' she questioned, and then her eyes widened as a thousand horrible possibilities flooded into her mind. 'He's okay? I mean—nothing's happened to him?'

But the chauffeur's face might have been made of wood. Hard, disapproving wood—as if he was used to dealing with a hundred worried-looking women like Rebecca. 'Mr Alexandros Pavlidis

asked me to convey his apologies, but he is dealing with a conference call. He asked me to bring you to him instead.'

Rebecca swallowed. *Bring you to him.* Like a convenience, she thought. A package. Something handy, but ultimately disposable. Yes, that was her, all right.

There was a split second while she ran through her options. What was the normal response when your lover sent his chauffeur to collect you and you suspected that was because your novelty value was wearing off and he might be tiring of you? Did you smile gratefully and thank the chauffeur and settle back comfortably in the back of the luxury car, counting your blessings?

Or would you be more respected—and desired—if you politely told the driver that he could go back to his boss with the information that you had changed your mind about dinner, and were staying in? That if he was busy, then surely the best solution was to leave him in peace to get on with his work.

But the lure of Xandros was strong, and so was her fear that a dramatic display of pique might bring about the end sooner than she had anticipated. Sooner than she could cope with.

'I'll get my coat,' she said.

The traffic was heavy and the weather bleak for a Thursday night in April. Rebecca's hair was whipped around her head by a biting wind as the hotel doorman opened the car door and she stepped out.

Had she been hoping that Xandros might have been standing in the foyer, waiting for her? That she wouldn't have to make the endless journey across the luxurious carpet on her own, imagining that eyes were on her, wondering who the woman in the cheap dress was? Wasn't there a part of her which was slightly terrified of being stopped by one of the hotel staff, demanding to know why she was taking the lift up to the penthouse?

But the journey passed without comment and in the mirror-lined lift she had the opportunity to drag a brush through her hair, to compose herself into the right kind of expression.

How did she look the first time he'd seen her—when he had hunted her down like a hungry predator? Surely she could recreate a similar kind of expression now. The kind of air which implied that she had a full and fulfilling life, and she wasn't particularly fussed about any man—not even if he *was* a world-famous Greek billionaire.

The trouble was that things changed. People changed, once a man like Xandros had possessed them. Did he have the power to turn women into his willing slaves—so that he could ultimately despise them for wanting him so badly?

Did he despise her? Had she no pride left where he was concerned?

The lift doors slid open noiselessly and she could hear the sound of his voice coming from the direction of the sitting room. A unique voice, in Rebecca's experience—low, soft, dangerous, sexy. He was speaking in Greek and then suddenly he switched to English as she began to walk towards its silken resonance, the heels of her boots quiet on the thick carpet.

He was sitting at the vast desk which overlooked London's Hyde Park, wearing a white silk shirt which contrasted against his deep olive skin. His ebony hair was ruffled and it sparkled with the light from drops of water—as if someone had scattered fine diamonds over his head, though he was clearly just out of the shower.

'Tell them no,' he was saying. 'Tell them ...' And then he must have become aware of her presence for his gaze flicked up from the document he was reading. He studied her for one long, unhurried moment and then the black eyes glittered, and he gave a slow smile, running the tip of his tongue over his lips—like someone starving who had just seen their meal arrive.

'Tell them that they will have to wait,' he said softly, and then put the phone down without any kind of conventional goodbye. 'Rebecca,' he murmured. 'Rebecca *mou*.'

Usually, that deep, sensuous endearment made her tremble, but not tonight. 'Hello, Xandros,' she said evenly.

His eyes narrowed. Leaning back in his chair, he continued to study her. 'Forgive me for not coming to collect you myself—but some business came in which I had to deal with.'

Rebecca eyed the dark arrow of hair revealed by the few shirt buttons which had been left open and she felt the habitual rush of desire which overrode everything else, even sanity. But if she ignored this lapse in plain courtesy, then wasn't she just giving him permission to treat her any way he saw fit? If it was any other man, would she have said something? Of course she would. *But with any other man you wouldn't care!*

'You could have phoned.'

There was a split second of a pause. 'I could indeed,' he agreed steadily and felt the flicker of a pulse at his temple. *Be careful*, agape mou, he thought. *Be very careful.*

'And you're still not ready.'

His eyes narrowed. Was that a *criticism?* Of *him?* Did she not realise that he would not tolerate being judged? That no woman ever had, and no woman ever would? And was she not aware that she was in danger of treading the path of the predictable—the path that so many women before her had taken—and that if she did there could be only one outcome?

Leaning back in his chair just a little, he crossed one long leg over the other, watching the way that her eyes followed the movement as she tried to disguise the hunger in her eyes. Should he take her now? he wondered idly. Could he really be bothered to endure a restaurant dinner of small talk when all he wanted was to lose himself in the sweetness of her body?

'Indeed I am not,' he agreed softly, following her gaze to his bare feet and remembering that amazing time when she had ... 'But that is easily remedied,' he said thickly. 'I shall go into the bedroom and finish getting dressed right now.'

'Okay,' she said uncertainly, something telling her that he was playing a game with her.

'Or ...' His mouth flickered in the mockery of a smile. 'Or you could always come over here and say hello to me properly.'

Was that a subtle dig that she hadn't already done so? Rebecca was aware of some unknown emotion hovering in the air about them—something unspoken and dangerous. Instinct told her that she was playing with fire if she continued to moan about his lateness. And an even stronger instinct made her badly want to kiss him.

Letting her handbag slide to the floor, she crossed the room and went over to him, bending her face to brush a light kiss against his lips. A kiss could wipe everything away, she thought longingly, her hands reaching up to his shoulders. *Oh, Xandros.*

'Nice,' he murmured. *Oreos.* Do it some more.'

She kissed him again. And then again—only deeper this time and more intently—until he groaned and reached for her so that she let him pull her down onto his lap. 'Xandros!' she gasped.

'Touch me,' he urged, his mouth against her ear, his nostrils inhaling her light, flowery scent and feeling the silken spill of her hair next to his skin.

'Wh-where?'

'Where ever you want, *agape mou.*'

Oh, the choice was dazzling. Where did she begin? With his face—and all its shadowy contours, its contrasting lines and curves? She let her fingers caress his cheeks, running them along the luminously gold skin as if she were measuring the high angles of his cheekbones until she encountered the rasp of the dark new growth around his jaw.

'You didn't shave today,' she whispered.

'Yes, I did.'

'Oh.'

'Don't you know what they say about men who need to shave a lot?'

'No. What do they say?'

‘What do you think they say?’ he taunted. ‘They say that he is a real man. Shall I prove it to you?’ Taking her hand, he guided it down to between his legs and Rebecca felt the rush of blood to her cheeks as she felt the unbelievable hardness of him stretching the fabric of his elegant trousers. ‘*Ne*,’ he groaned. ‘Touch me there. Right there.’

‘Like that?’ she whispered, cupping him in the palm of her hand.

‘*Ne*. More. Do that some more.’

She drifted her fingers teasingly over the rocky shaft of him, and his soft moan became an impatient imprecation. His ebony eyes were sparking pure passion and fire and his voice was unsteady as he stroked the silken skin above her breasts. ‘I haven’t seen this dress before.’

‘Do you like it?’

‘No. I want to tear it from your body.’

‘Don’t do that, Xandros—it’s new.’

‘Then why don’t you take it off for me?’

Suddenly she felt shy, the doubts which had been assailing her all day coming back like spectres to haunt her. Was this an acceptable way to be treated by a man—to be made to feel insecure with him and then for him to ask you to perform a striptease, while he was still seated at his desk?

‘Shouldn’t we go into the bedroom?’

He gave a short laugh, but he was so hard and so hot for her that he doubted he would be able to make it to the door and this sensual power which she always seemed to exert over him made him want to wrest back control. ‘Isn’t it a little soon in our acquaintance for convention to rear its ugly head?’

Rebecca froze. *Acquaintance*. What kind of a word was *that*?

He saw her mouth tremble and he licked the tip of his tongue over it to cease its shiver, his hands slipping around her waist, fingers splaying over its slim indentation. ‘Take it off,’ he urged thickly.

She wanted to say *I can’t*, but then he might ask her why, and how could she possibly answer that? Telling him that she wanted him to respect her and not just treat her as a sex object might sound like emotional blackmail. Respect had to be earned, not demanded—and, besides, maybe this was the kind of high-octane way in which billionaires conducted their love affairs.

And wasn’t there a part of her which was revelling in her newly discovered ability to thrill him, to make his body rigid with tension, the black eyes opaque with a kind of helpless desire? Wasn’t this the only time she felt that she had any real say in the relationship—in that emotionally and physically fraught time just before a couple had sex?

She stood up and lifted her hands to her hair, scooping it up between her fingers, before letting the whole heavy mass fall around her shoulders, watching his black eyes following the movement almost hypnotically. She knew he loved her hair. He had told her that the first time she’d met him—he’d said it was the colour of the setting sun before the night sky swallowed it up, whole. And when he had said it, he had looked as if he would like to swallow *her* up whole.

Hadn’t it been his almost poetic way with words which had disarmed her just as much as the dark, good looks and the hard, lean body? The idea that a man could be the embodiment of all that was masculine and yet be unafraid to express himself in the way which would make a woman melt?

But hadn’t that just been part of his well-practised seduction technique? How long had it been since he’d told her that her eyes were like the violet-blue flowers which scrambled in among the arid rocks and bloomed during a Grecian spring? Or that her skin was pure cream, and that was why he liked to lick it?

She shivered. Pride told her she should not strip for him and yet she knew that the evening would start off badly if she started playing games by refusing.

Peeling off her dress with one slow, sweeping movement, she dropped it on the desk, right in the middle of all his papers, daring him to object—*wanting* him to object. To somehow make this powerful man feel as helpless as she did. ‘I do hope that won’t interfere with your work,’ she said, thinking no such thing at all.

'Rebecca,' he said unevenly.

'Yes, Xandros?'

'Turn around,' he said huskily. 'Turn around and let me feast my eyes on you.'

She made him wait. The only time she could—and then she began to walk to the other side of the desk.

'Rebecca?'

'Do you mean like this, Xandros? Do you want to see my bottom?' Slowly, she turned around and gave a flamboyant little wiggle and heard him laugh, but the laugh was tinged with a small groan as he saw the unbelievably alluring scarlet briefs and the matching bra over which her breasts spilled.

'Ne. Just like that.'

He loved her bottom, as well as her hair. He had told her that, too, insisting that the pert globes be covered in nothing but lace, wanting to buy her sets of lingerie from one of the most exclusive stores in London—but she had refused. She would not be bought, even though sometimes he made her feel like a possession—just like one of his sleek cars or the fancy apartments he owned.

She began to slide the panties off, but her hands were trembling as she hooked them off over each foot and as she turned around, she crumpled them angrily between her palm and threw them at him.

Catching them effortlessly, Xandros raised his dark brows, and then—very deliberately—he lifted them up to his face and closed his eyes as he breathed in their scent.

Rebecca felt faint. What did he *do* to her? What power could he wield that could make her feel so utterly abandoned and wanton when she was with him—and yet leave her feeling abandoned in quite a different sense when he wasn't there?

'Delicious,' he murmured. 'Now the bra. Take it off.'

'You take it off.'

'But I can't reach.'

'Then move.'

'Are you ordering me around, *agape mou*?'

'You bet I am.'

Laughing softly, he rose to his feet and walked towards her with the slow stealth of the certain predator. And then, without warning, he snaked his arms around her and crushed her into his arms into a kiss of such hard—almost brutal—passion that she lost her balance.

But Xandros had her held firmly in his arms and he continued to kiss her, luxuriating in the softness of her body, enjoying the little cries she was making. For a woman who had made him wait longer than any other—his victory was almost complete.

'Still want to go to the bedroom?' he taunted, dragging his mouth away from hers. 'Or did you have somewhere else in mind?'

She no longer cared, but she was damned if she was going to tell him that. Or to give into him yet again. He wanted her now and he wanted her here and he could damned well wait as he had made her wait for him to turn up tonight.

'B-bed,' she managed. Damn him, damn him, damn him! Everything with him was a battle—but this was one she was going to win. She didn't *care* if it was conventional to want to go to the bedroom—at least it wouldn't be insultingly convenient to have him take her there and then on the floor as he had done so many times before.

But he scooped her up in his arms as she had known he would—and all her angry thoughts melted because this bit was *her* fantasy come true. Her darkly virile lover taking his willing captive off to experience the perfect pleasures of his body. Wasn't that the stuff of every woman's secret dream—to be mastered and dominated by such a powerful man?

Rebecca kissed his neck as he carried her down the long corridor of the suite he rented whenever he was in London—which took over the entire top floor of the Park Lane hotel. She remembered the first time she had seen the bedroom—and had been rendered speechless.

Photo-spreads in glossy magazines could easily show luxury—but she'd been unaware that a single room could be so spacious. This one had a bed which was only slightly smaller than her entire bedroom back home—and everything else seemed to be controlled at the push of a button.

There was a giant TV screen and a small fridge, stocked with champagne and fancy chocolates as well as cut-glass bowls of flowers strategically placed to scent the room. There was even a bookcase and a rack which held all the international newspapers. But there was only one thing which she and Xandros did once they crossed the threshold of this room...

Xandros put her down on the bed and began to unbuckle his belt, watching her face as he did so, seeing her eyes darken in anticipation, as they always did. 'You want me to strip for you now?' he questioned softly.

'Yes. I-I insist on it,' she said unsteadily, but for her it was less of an erotic turn-on than the fact that she wanted to see *him* vulnerable—or as vulnerable as he was capable of.

But there was nothing remotely vulnerable about watching Xandros take his clothes off. First, he loosened his shirt, button by button—an interminable amount of buttons, or so it seemed to her.

'Want me to go faster?' he mocked as he saw her tongue snake out to moisten her parched lips.

Rebecca shook her head as he slipped the garment from his broad, bare shoulders and let it flutter to the floor like the white flag of surrender—except she knew that he didn't have a surrendering bone in his body.

Rebecca saw him give a mocking wince as he slowly slid the zip of his trousers down and it said much for his self-possession and steely control that still he did not hurry it, despite the very obvious evidence of his arousal.

How could he possibly look both elegant and sexy as he removed his trousers and draped them over the back of a chair? His feet were bare, so all that remained were the silk boxer shorts which gave his body the look of a taut and supremely fit athlete. He kicked them off and for a moment just stood before her—completely naked and thrillingly aroused—his eyes glittering with an irresistible and arrogant challenge. And in that moment there was something so daunting—almost *forbiddingly* masculine—about him that Rebecca's heart thumped with something which felt more like fear than desire.

'Shall I come to you now, *agape mou*?' His voice was a caressing tease. 'Is that what you want?'

She wanted to tell him to promise not to break her heart, and she wanted him more than she could remember wanting anything in her life—more than breath itself. Was he aware of that? Or that sometimes he made her feel emotionally raw—as if he had seared away the top layer of her skin, leaving her cruelly exposed to his analytical eye? And what did that eye see? Someone who lived the way that plenty of other young women did—yet one who was dating a man way out of her league.

'If you want,' she answered, as if she couldn't care less.

He gave a low laugh of delight as he climbed onto the bed beside her. 'Come here.'

'No.'

'Ah, Rebecca. Rebecca *mou*.' Reaching out, he pulled her trembling body into the hard heat of his own, his thumb reflectively circling one puckered rose nipple so that it seemed to push insistently against him. 'You are still angry with me for being late?'

Tell him. *Tell* him! 'You could have let me know. I just don't want to be taken for granted, Xandros. I thought that you—'

His kiss silenced her, but then it was the most effective silencer in the world where women were concerned—and if all she was intending to do was to subject him to the age-old complaint about how a woman wanted to be treated, well ... He had heard that grievance more times than he cared to remember.

This was better. Just this. The feel of skin against skin, the growing warmth of their ardour making their bodies closer still—as if they were glued together. In his arms, she was everything he could want from a lover—a little inexperienced, it was true, but he liked that. He had no time for women with lots of different party tricks to try out—for they were little better than hookers. A sense of wonder was fine by him, and, for however long the affair lasted, he would enjoy teaching her everything he knew.

He enjoyed the mental battle he engaged in during sex. He liked to test himself—to bring the woman to the near-height of pleasure over and over again, while denying himself until he could deny it no longer.

‘Oh, Xandros,’ she pleaded, with a frantic little cry of pleasure.

‘Mmm?’

‘Please!’

‘Please, what, *agape mou*?’

‘Now!’

How eager she was! How quickly she reached her peak! He lifted his dark head from where he had been suckling at her breast and moved over her, his black eyes glittering, before thrusting into her long and hard and deep, with a little groan of pleasure.

Sometimes he liked to watch a woman bloom and flower, but Rebecca was reaching her hands up to his shoulders, pulling him down so that their mouths met, and she groaned with pleasure as she writhed beneath him.

Tangled and gasping, she wrapped her limbs around him like a soft, white octopus, moving her hips in abandon until he felt the control slipping away from him. His orgasm came with a strength and a power which surprised him, but it had been like that with her since the very first time, and he couldn’t quite work out why.

Because she had made him think the unthinkable—that he was actually going to fail to get her into his bed?

Her head lay against the stilling thunder of his heart and he stroked her hair, missing the absence of her warm breath as she turned her head away to stare at the wall, saying nothing.

Ironically, this was when he liked her best—when she was retreating from him, like the tide moving away from the ever-distant shore. Xandros only wanted something when it was beyond his reach. Because once he had possessed it he wanted to move on, as he had been moving on all his restless life.

‘Do you still want to go out for dinner?’ He stretched lazily, and yawned. ‘Or shall we stay here and order something in?’

For a moment, Rebecca didn’t answer. In a way, she was perfectly happy to stay there—for she was as warm and replete as a woman could be. He would order from room service and the food would be wheeled in on a grand linen-covered trolley, with big silver domes concealing the food. And a silent waiter would set their table for them, while they watched him, rather awkwardly.

There would be flowers and fine wines and morsels of food which they would pick at—and, soon enough, they would return to bed. Or make love on the sofa, while watching a film. And Xandros would probably take at least one business call.

The alternative was to get dressed and be whisked off to dinner—and every woman liked a little life outside the private world of the bedroom, no matter how wonderful the fantasy land within it. If theirs was a normal relationship she would have been thrilled to have been seen with him—but it wasn’t. They weren’t supposed to be dating and so they crept around, like thieves in the night. They visited discreet, out-of-the-way restaurants—or they stayed in his hotel room. Sometimes she wondered if anyone would actually believe her if she told them she was seeing the Greek billionaire.

But who could she tell? She had put her job on the line by agreeing to date him in the first place and none of her colleagues knew about it.

She turned her head to look at him, touching the strong curve of his jaw with the tip of her finger, and her heart turned over. Was she being selfish by wanting to go out? He looked so tired. Suddenly, her doubts and her fears melted away and she snuggled closer against his warm body, wrapping her arms around his broad shoulders and massaging the silken skin beneath. Was it inbuilt in a woman that she should want to nurture her man?

‘Which would *you* prefer?’ she questioned softly. ‘To stay here?’

Xandros bit back an instinctive click of impatience. He wanted to tell her not to keep accommodating *his* needs. But this was inevitably what happened. Women tried to please you and in so doing they submerged their own identity into yours. And then you lost sight of what had attracted you to them in the first place—for you could no longer see it.

‘What I would prefer is to stay right here,’ he said brutally. ‘But I am afraid that if I do that, then I’ll fall asleep and I’ve booked the Pentagon for nine—and you told me how much you’d always wanted to go there. So you had better make your mind up.’

‘Then I guess we’d better go.’ Could his curt response be any better reminder that this particular man didn’t *need* any nurturing? She moved, her thigh brushing against his as she stretched—wondering if that would be enough to have him pull her back hungrily into his arms, but he didn’t. She gave him a quick smile, but it was one which was edged with nerves. ‘I’ll go and get dressed.’

He lay back against the pillows and watched her move across the room. She was both graceful and beautiful, he thought—but he recognised that something was changing between them. Something as inevitable as the sun rising in the sky each morning. The predictable had reared its ugly head. Xandros couched his words with velvet in an attempt to lessen their blow. ‘Because of course,’ he said softly, ‘this may well be the last chance we get to have dinner for some time.’

Her footsteps halted as Rebecca froze. Carefully composing herself, she slowly turned around, her heart beginning to beat hard beneath her breast as she considered the possible implication of his words—but she prayed that her face gave nothing away. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘Didn’t I tell you?’ he questioned carelessly. ‘I have to fly back to New York tomorrow.’

*Don’t react*, she told herself. *Stay calm*. ‘Oh? For very long?’

He could see her face working to conceal her disappointment and he gave a shrug, for his timetable was his own. He would not have disclosed it even if he’d known it, because freedom was as important to Xandros as breathing. ‘It is impossible to predict. A fortnight at least. Maybe longer—depending on the deal.’

‘How absolutely lovely,’ she said, with the bright enthusiasm of a travel agent. ‘I expect the city is beautiful at this time of year.’

‘Yes, it is,’ he agreed. Yet in a perverse kind of way, Xandros was disappointed that she was accepting it so easily. Hadn’t he been anticipating some kind of scene which might have heralded the end? If she had objected or sulked that would have been it. He would have finished it without a second thought, because no woman had the right to question his movements, no matter how much pleasure he brought them in bed or how much they had begun to paint rosy pictures of the possibility of a future together.

But she turned and began to walk out of the bedroom—presumably in search of the clothes she had so delectably removed—and he felt his body stir at the sight of the high, firm curve of her naked bottom. And suddenly Xandros knew that he still hadn’t got her out of his system. His tongue snaked out over bone-dry lips and his words caught her on the threshold of the room. ‘But I will see you when I return, *agape mou*.’

It was a statement, not a request. Rebecca felt like a mouse who had been played with by a large cat—and then had her fate spared at the very last moment. ‘You might. If you’re lucky,’ she said, in a light, who-cares voice which she thought sounded pretty convincing.

Thank heavens he couldn’t see her face—because surely he would have read her almost dizzy relief that he *was* coming back. And that he *was* planning to see her again. Or was he clever enough

to guess at her dreadful, aching realisation that one day soon it would all be over and it was going to feel a million times worse than this?

Her hands were trembling by the time she reached the sitting room and began to pick up her clothes, wondering how the hell she had let this happen—to have got herself into something she'd known was hopeless from the very start. And wishing that she could have sustained the strength of character which had attracted him to her in the beginning. In the days when it had been so easy to refuse him.

## CHAPTER TWO

THEIR paths should never have crossed, of course. Ordinary, suburban girls like Rebecca weren't supposed to rub shoulders with jet-setting billionaires like Alexandros Pavlidis.

But Rebecca worked as a flight attendant for a small and highly exclusive private airline which brought her into contact with the kind of people that most mere mortals only read about.

Evolo airline was based close to London and ferried its mega-rich customers around the world for astronomical fees. It paid Rebecca more than any of the bigger airlines would have done, but in return required her to be available at very little notice and, above all, to be discreet.

Rock stars, Hollywood actors, minor royals and just the plain rich frequented the champagne-fuelled flights which had been started by an ambitious blonde pilot named Vanessa Gilmour.

Each time she flew, Vanessa or her male deputy would brief Rebecca on the passenger list and one morning she had seen a name she didn't recognise. A rather beautiful name.

'Who's this?' she asked, tongue twisting over the words. 'Alexandros Pavlidis?'

Vanessa pulled a funny kind of face. 'Don't you ever read the newspapers?'

'Sometimes.' Rebecca pulled her uniform cap down over her smoothed-down hair and smiled. 'But I prefer books.'

'He's an architect,' explained Vanessa, an impatient wave of her hand dismissing the entire concept of books. 'Or *starchitect* as the press like to refer to him. A Greek based in New York—he's designing a new bank near London Bridge. I met him at a party and persuaded him that Evolo could accommodate his every need. It's the first time he's flown with us—and I don't want it to be the last. So be nice to him, Rebecca—just not *too* nice.'

Rebecca heard the warning in her employer's voice—although she didn't need one. She knew it was forbidden to date any of the customers. 'What's he like?' she checked politely, because as crew they were supposed to know about the passengers' likes and dislikes.

There was a pause. 'He's difficult,' admitted Vanessa softly. 'Very difficult.' And then her eyes sparkled in a way that Rebecca had never seen them do before as her voice dropped into a kind of ecstatic whisper. 'And absolutely bloody *gorgeous*.'

If difficult was an understatement, then so was gorgeous, Rebecca decided when she met him later that day. She found herself startled by the man's overwhelming charisma as well as his astonishing good looks.

If someone had said, 'Bring me the most delectable man in the world,' then Alexandros Pavlidis would have been the list-topper. If you wanted tall, dark, ruggedly handsome—with a coldly irresistible air about him—then Pavlidis ticked all the right boxes.

The Greek was terse to the point of rudeness, and he operated at the speed of light—the retinue who were following his tall, black-clad figure into the small departure lounge almost having to run to keep up with his long-legged stride.

And it didn't escape her notice that every woman who worked in the building found some kind of pretext to try to catch a glimpse of him.

But it wasn't her job to swoon over customers. Her manner had to remain benignly courteous and respectful. Whatever he asked for, she brought. She did not attempt to engage him in any kind of conversation and her entire dialogue with him was confined to politely answering his requests.

He began to use Evolo regularly for his European trips, since apparently he had sold his own private jet fleet for environmental reasons, and his work took him all over the globe. Rebecca tried not to be so heart-poundingly aware of him, but it wasn't easy. She couldn't quash the excitement she always experienced when she saw his name on the passenger list.

And even though she did her best to disguise it a kind of unspoken awareness began to sizzle between the two of them—because nothing could disguise chemistry, no matter how hard you tried.

His black eyes would narrow thoughtfully when he saw her, and her heart would leap whenever he dealt her his rare, slow smile.

But she remembered Vanessa's words about discretion and boundaries and quickly turned away from it. Even if it wasn't forbidden to date the clients—was she really considering herself the kind of woman that someone like Xandros *would* date?

Yet her apparent lack of interest seemed to inflame him. He went out of his way to engage her in conversation and surely it would have been discourteous not to have joined in?

'What are you doing once we land?' he asked her one dark, starry night as the plane touched down in Madrid.

'I'm having an early night,' she answered.

'Ah!' His black eyes glittered with sudden understanding, for this would explain her inexplicable resolve not to flirt with him. He felt a slight pang of disappointment, but it was quickly followed by the inevitable rush of challenge—for there was no rival who could not be easily dispatched if Xandros wanted something. 'And who is the lucky man?'

Rebecca felt colour tinge her cheeks. 'Mr Pavlidis!'

*Ne, agape mou*, what is it?'

Why did he *call* her that? Didn't it mean 'darling', or something? 'Will that be all?'

'*Ochi*,' he said roughly, for he had seen her blush—something which was as rare as the rose-coloured Starlings which sometimes appeared on the Aegean islands. 'It will not be all. I want you to have dinner with me. In fact, I demand it.'

Maybe if she had agreed to his request then it would have all been over before it began, but Rebecca did something that few women ever did. She said no.

When a man had everything—he wanted what he couldn't have, and Xandros wanted Rebecca. He wanted her in a way he hadn't wanted a woman for years and he was forced to pursue her—something which was almost alien to him. Even when he'd first arrived in New York as an unsophisticated eighteen-year-old, women had fallen eagerly into his arms.

'What harm is there in dinner?' he mused, the next time they flew together. It was a late winter afternoon as the luxury jet began its descent towards Paris and the early-setting sun was lighting the sky with its fiery blaze. Coal-black eyes mocked her. 'Do not worry.' His voice was like silk, embroidered with sardonic thread. 'You have turned me down enough times to impress me, *agape mou*. And now that we have established your fine reputation, you can see there is no reason for us not to enjoy one another's company.'

It sounded unbearably tempting. Rebecca tugged unnecessarily at the neat jacket of her Evolo uniform. 'But I'm not supposed to mix with the customers, Mr Pavlidis,' she said.

'Says who?'

'Says my boss.'

'This would be Vanessa?' he queried, his eyes narrowing.

'That's right.'

He nodded, as if satisfying himself of something. Or someone. 'Vanessa has her own agenda,' he drawled softly. 'And I'm not proposing that we ride off into the sunset together,' he added sarcastically. 'I just think Paris is not a city to be alone in and that it would be agreeable to have a little company. Mmm? What could be wrong with that?'

His black eyes glittered with enticing question. In her heart, Rebecca knew that he wasn't being straightforward with her; she suspected he had an address book crammed with the numbers of beautiful and willing women no matter how many cities he visited. But she had held out for so long against her feelings for him and in that moment she felt defenceless against the full onslaught of his charm.

'Just dinner?' she verified breathlessly.

'If that is what you want,' Xandros returned, his smile careless.

It hadn't been 'just' dinner, of course. For how could you not let a man like Xandros kiss you at the end of it when you had been longing for him to kiss you since the first time you'd set eyes on him? And then? Her battle had been with herself rather than with him. Her sense of what was right and proper vying with her heart and her body's desires.

She had lost the battle. Of *course* she had ended up in bed with him. He was a powerful, virile man who would not be satisfied with a chaste kiss at the end of a first date—and for the first time in her life, neither was she.

Rebecca had never felt so physically vulnerable beneath a man's caresses as she was to Xandros. She hated herself for her easy capitulation that night and yet she couldn't stop herself. Her hungry body's need overrode everything else—ruthlessly quelling the voice in her head which demanded to know whether he would respect her after this.

And to Xandros, her only spoken objection was a practical one. 'No one from work must know,' she told him urgently as his hand began its inevitable and longed-for journey up her inner thigh.

'Why should they?' he breathed, peeling off her panties with a low moan of delight.

'Because ... *oh ... oh ... Xandros!* Because people ...' She closed her eyes, and swallowed. 'They talk,' she whispered eventually.

'Then we won't give them anything to talk about,' he assured her silkily, his fingers working ruthlessly against her hotly aroused flesh, feeling it yield to him. 'No one will know a thing. We will keep it secret, *ne?* Our little secret ...'

But weren't secrets wrong? Wasn't that making it sound as if he wanted to keep her hidden away—like something furtive, to be ashamed of? Rebecca tried to pull away, but the lure of his embrace was too strong to resist, the gentle caress of his fingertips too tremblingly intense. 'Xandros?' she tried, one last time.

'*Ochi,*' he negated fiercely. 'Say nothing! Do nothing but stay here in my arms when you know that this is what we both want!' And he kissed her into willing submission.

Yet even at the height of her very first orgasm, Rebecca was aware of a sharp twist of pain in her heart. That her surrender could be her emotional undoing, and that she risked losing everything—the most important thing being her heart. Her life and her future was one in which a man like Xandros would have no place—and yet, having tasted all the pleasures that he gave her, the thought of any future without him already seemed bleak and empty.

If she had known all that right from the beginning, then why hadn't she stopped? Why give into something which you knew instinctively was doomed on so many levels?

Because human nature wasn't like that. It made you reach out and grab at the unreachable.

The mists of memory cleared as Rebecca blinked around at her luxurious surroundings. She bent down to pick up one of the shoes she had discarded while she had been stripping off for her hard-bodied Greek lover and sighed. It was pointless going back over what had happened. She could do nothing to change the past—what she *could* work on was the present.

But the present brought her scant comfort.

She was here, in Xandros's penthouse suite—about to go out for a meal which she knew that neither of them really wanted. And after that he was off to New York, and she didn't know when she was going to see him again. So how was she going to play it? Did she have enough acting ability to convince him that she didn't really care, either way—or would he see right through her?

'Rebecca?'

The silken, accented Greek voice filtered through the air. By concentrating on finishing fastening her shoes, Rebecca was able to compose herself before straightening up to look at him. His black eyes were set like dark jewels in the backdrop of his gleaming olive skin and her heart turned over with love and longing. If only he didn't look so heartbreakingly gorgeous. Reaching into her handbag, she took out a hairbrush and began to make great sweeping strokes through hair all tousled from love-making. 'Yes, Xandros?' she questioned calmly.

He liked to watch her brush her hair. The first time she had loosened it for him he had told her that it was the colour of Greek honey—which was darker and richer than any honey in the world. ‘The car is waiting downstairs, *agape mou*.’ His eyes narrowed at her in question. ‘You still want to go and eat?’

What would he say if she told him the truth—that what she really wanted was to know how he felt about her? Whether he *was* tiring of her—or whether it was a figment of her over-active imagination. But some bone-deep instinct told her that a man like Xandros would ultimately despise a woman who wanted that kind of reassurance. To an independent man that might smack of neediness—and everyone knew how unattractive *that* was.

‘Eat? I thought you’d never ask,’ she said lightly, turning her head so that her newly brushed hair swung in a scented curtain around her still-flushed cheeks. She even managed to give him a faintly mocking look in return. ‘Somehow I’ve worked up quite an appetite—though can’t for the life of me work out why!’

Xandros gave a barely perceptible nod as he picked up her coat and held it open for her, watching the naturally sinuous movement of her body as she wriggled into it. Her response had held just the right amount of cool distance and yet her apparent composure was strong enough to fan the flames of his desire once more. He found himself wanting to pull her back into his arms again and a nerve flickered at his temple.

This was going to be harder to finish than he had anticipated.

## CHAPTER THREE

NEXT morning Rebecca awoke to the sound of a shower splashing nearby and Xandros singing something rather tunelessly in Greek. He sounded happy, she thought wistfully—and why wouldn't he be? She opened her eyes and stared at the chandelier which glittered above the vast bed like a canopy of diamonds.

Over dinner last night, he had described the elegant new apartment block he was building, which incorporated a 'sky-garden' at its summit which would bring lush grasses and fragrant shrubs to the defiantly urban part of the city in which it was set. He wanted it to be the first of many—to bring greenery to grey places. He wanted a world which did not push nature out. His deep voice had been passionate and dreamy and Rebecca had found herself swept up by it—torn between admiration and envy. It had been as if he was describing a paradise she would never be part of.

She heard the gushing of the water stop and after a few minutes he walked into the bedroom—completely naked—towelling at his ebony hair with a small towel.

His hard body glowed, the broad shoulders tapering down into narrow hips and then long, hair-roughened legs. He was a man utterly at ease with his nudity—but then who wouldn't be with a physique like that? He swam every day, no matter where he was in the world. He had told her that it was one thing he had brought with him from his native Greece—the desire to feel the water on his skin and the delicious freedom which came with it.

He looked at her lying amidst the rumpled sheets and his mouth softened briefly into a smile. 'Kherete,' he said softly.

'Hello,' she murmured back, astonished at how she could still feel almost shy when he looked at her like that—despite the fact that he knew her body more thoroughly than any other man had ever done. 'I feel so lazy I can't move.'

'Seeing you lying there like that makes me want to stay.'

Easy to say. 'But you can't.'

'No.' He slid on a pair of dark boxers which felt silky next to his skin. 'Unfortunately I can't. As soon as I get off the plane, stateside, I have a long list of meetings to attend.' He looked up and shrugged but his black eyes gleamed with anticipation. 'There is a big deal nearing completion, new plans to draw up.'

'And no doubt a stack of invitations to glittering parties from just about every New York society hostess worth her salt.' She hadn't meant to say it, but somehow the words seemed to tumble out of their own accord.

There was the fraction of a pause, the faintest elevation of jet-dark brows. 'That, too,' he agreed.

Rebecca knew that she was stepping into unfamiliar territory. That Xandros, more than most men, compartmentalised his life—and she was firmly fixed in the English section. But surely showing interest wouldn't necessarily be interpreted as possessive jealousy? Didn't dating him give her the rights to know *something* about his life? 'And do you go to them?'

'To parties?' He shrugged as he reached into the closet for a pure silk shirt in a buttery ivory colour and, slipping it on over his broad shoulders, began to button it. 'Sometimes—like most people—when I'm not too busy. Why wouldn't I?' He pulled on a pair of dark trousers. 'And what about you, Rebecca—what do you do when your Greek lover is not in town?'

Was it significant that he was asking her this now—when he had never really been interested before? Or was he simply being dutiful and turning the question back on her? Pride made her want to embellish a life which would surely sound very ordinary when judged by his standards. Imagine how he would react if she told him that she spent a lot of her free time thinking about him! Even the supermarket was an unsafe zone, for she often found herself scouring the shelves for the brand of olive oil she knew that his family firm produced back in Greece. Up until now, she'd never found it.

'Oh, this and that.' She pushed a stray lock of hair out of her eyes. 'I go out to the cinema—sometimes the theatre—'

'With your girlfriends, of course?' he cut in, his fingers pausing in the act of zipping up his trousers.

Something in his dismissive tone offended her. Who did he think he was? He offered her nothing, nor promised her anything—did he think she just crawled into a dark box and stayed there when he was out of the country, like some caged animal eagerly panting for his return?

'Not always. Obviously, I have friends of both sexes.'

Brilliant black eyes were fixed on her and he shot the word out as if it were a bullet. 'Men?'

There was a pause. Did he imagine these were the Dark Ages? 'Of course.'

'Men that you go out with?'

Rebecca sat up in bed, her hair now tumbling down all over her bare breasts. 'Not *go out* with!' she protested. She wanted to say, Not like I go out with you—but that would have sounded false. They didn't exactly *go out*, did they? They just got together for some very agreeable sex whenever he happened to be in town. That he bought her dinner or occasionally took her to a show was neither here nor there. 'Just men whose company I occasionally enjoy. You know.'

His eyes narrowed, fiercely intelligent, hard and, in that one moment, displaying a flash of something which looked almost like cruelty.

'No, I don't know. You are not making any sense to me, *agape mou*. In my experience men and women who go out together have only one real item on their agenda. For that is how nature intended it.'

His silky voice sounded almost ... *threatening*. And *primitive*. Rebecca frowned, taken aback by the hot storm of accusation which blazed from his eyes. 'What are you suggesting, Xandros?' she queried unsteadily. 'That I have sex with other men while you aren't here?'

'Do you?'

First she felt faint, then hurt—and then angry. But it was difficult to maintain your dignity while you were completely naked and Rebecca yanked the sheet from the bed and wrapped it around herself. As she got out of bed she realised that her hands were shaking and she turned on him.

'I can't believe you would even *ask* a question like that! Implying I'm some kind of ... some kind of ... *tramp*!' Her breath was coming hot and rapid and he regarded her with a narrow-eyed scrutiny before crossing the room, but she waved him away. 'Just what kind of woman do you normally associate with to make you think something like that?' she demanded.

None that had as much fire in their eyes as she did at that precise moment, he thought with a mixture of sexual hunger and something much darker which had not reared its ugly head for a long time. With an effort he forced himself back from its brink. For a man who rarely considered himself to be in the wrong, apology did not come easy. 'It was a clumsy question—I should never have asked it.'

'No, you shouldn't.'

He reached out for her and he could see the struggle taking place within her, telling herself not to forgive him too quickly. Until, with a reluctant sigh, she let him lift her hand to his lips and he managed to coax a reluctant softening of her mouth as he kissed each fingertip in turn.

'Forgive me,' he murmured, against skin which still carried his scent from their long night of sex. 'Forgive me, *agape mou*.'

She wanted to—and yet she wanted to tell him to go to hell. Wavering between desire and despair, Rebecca closed her eyes, wishing she were strong enough to walk away from this sweet torture he inflicted on her. And when she opened them again it was to find his gaze upon her—dark and unremitting and gleaming with erotic promise. When he looked at her that way, she was utterly lost—so did that make her weak, or him strong? Or both? *Oh, Xandros*.

'Do you?' he prompted her.

With an effort, she shrugged, thankful he didn't have the power to read her thoughts. She might not want to let him go, but she was damned if she was going to lie down on the ground and let him trample all over her. 'I'll think about it.' Her eyes grew serious. 'But please don't ever accuse me of something like that again. It's unjustified and it's archaic'

Was it? 'But I am Greek,' he returned softly. 'And we Greeks understand that human nature never really changes. I believe that it is impossible for a man and a woman to have real friendship—for how can they, when the hungry presence of sex is for ever in the background? Particularly when the woman happens to look like you, Rebecca.' His mouth twisted into an odd kind of smile as he forced himself to voice the inevitable climb-down. 'But I accept that you have no intention of bedding another man.' And why would she, when Xandros Pavlidis was the finest lover a woman could ever desire in a hundred lifetimes?

He could see her looking as if she wanted something more—and this wearied him because he did not provide emotional security. Ever. Xandros used exactly the same coolly analytical attitude towards relationships as he did towards his work. Affairs ran their course—in the same way as a fever did—and by now he had gone through most of the stages with Rebecca.

He had chased her and seduced her. Revelled in making love to her—over and over and over again. But much more and the relationship would slip into a boring and predictable pattern—and Xandros would not tolerate either. Much better for it to finish on a high. To leave him with exquisite memories, rather than the slow deterioration into apathy.

Yet even though he sensed that his time with her was coming to an end, something inside him relented. A little longer, that was all he wanted. Because somehow—unusually—he had not quite got her out of his system and he needed more time to rid his mind and his body of her sweet temptations. He felt the sweet, hard jerk of desire.

'I should be back on the tenth,' he murmured. 'So why don't you plan something around that? Something you'd really like—a place you've always wanted to visit. Bill it to me.'

Rebecca flinched as one of his phones began to ring, but he didn't even appear to notice the wounding nature of his words—dropping a brief kiss on the tip of her nose, his mind already occupied with the day ahead.

'I'll call you,' he promised as he clicked one of the buttons to answer it. *Soon*, he mouthed, beginning to speak rapidly in Greek as she headed for one of the bathrooms.

Rebecca felt distracted all the way home. And hurt—the kind of simmering low-grade hurt which wouldn't go away. Usually, when Xandros flew out she treated herself to chocolates or bubble bath, or a new book—silly little inexpensive treats which helped lessen the impact of his departure. But today she didn't feel like buying any. Nor did she feel like an early night, which was the sensible solution after so little sleep—with a flight the next day leaving soon after dawn.

*Plan something*, he had said.

*Bill it to me*, he had said. Was he aware of how dismissive those words had been—as if everything in life came with a price-tag? She supposed that maybe for Xandros it did. Did he think that she couldn't manage to provide an enjoyable time on her rather limited income? It was true that her salary as a stewardess was a mere drop in the ocean compared to his vast wealth—but she knew how to live. You didn't need vintage wines and costly foods to satisfy your appetite.

Rebecca shut the front door behind her and looked around. Yet she hadn't exactly welcomed him into *her* home, had she? Why, Xandros had barely been here apart from a few bouts of snatched passion *en route* to somewhere else. He had certainly never eaten a meal here or spent the night with her in her—admittedly—rather small bed. But it *wasn't* small—it was a normal, double bed. It was just that anything was going to seem minute when compared with what he was used to.

Putting the kettle on to make a cup of coffee, she stared out of the window where the first hint of green buds were softening the sharp edges of the branches. Springtime often brought with it clarity—shining a light after the long darkness of winter—and maybe it was time for her to face facts.

She was falling ever deeper for Xandros, but currently their relationship was all on his terms. She was worried about it ending and yet how could anything so one-sided possibly be sustained?

Surely Xandros got fed-up with everyone always acceding to *his* whims. An appetite would inevitably become jaded if it was always indulged. Didn't you need a proper contrast in life to enjoy it to the max?

*Plan something*, he had said.

Rebecca's mouth curved into a sudden, spontaneous smile. She most certainly would! Only she wouldn't dream of billing it to him. He would get a taster of life, Rebecca-style! A little home-cooking and a flavour of the ordinary.

She decided to make him a home-made chicken pie—a favourite choice from her childhood and something he'd be unlikely ever to get in one of the fancy restaurants he frequented. Going down the road to her local wine merchant, she bought a mid-price bottle of red which the wine-merchant said was a real find. Next, she set to giving her apartment the kind of spring-cleaning which it hadn't seen in longer than she cared to remember.

How satisfying it was to drag out pieces of furniture and to polish and wipe and shine in all the dusty corners. It was liberating—and Rebecca felt as if she were cleaning out all the dark corners of her own mind as she scrubbed and polished.

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