

2 *in* 1
GREAT
VALUE

OH-SO-SENSIBLE
SECRETARY

JESSICA HART

HOUSEKEEPER'S
HAPPY-EVER-AFTER

FIONA HARPER

Cherish[™]

Jessica Hart

**Oh-So-Sensible Secretary /
Housekeeper's Happy-Ever-
After: Oh-So-Sensible Secretary**

«HarperCollins»

Hart J.

Oh-So-Sensible Secretary / Housekeeper's Happy-Ever-After: Oh-So-Sensible Secretary / J. Hart — «HarperCollins»,

OH-SO-SENSIBLE SECRETARY Jessica Hart Here – at last! – was my new boss, lounging in the doorway and smiling an irresistibly lop-sided smile. You know how it feels when a million butterflies are fluttering inside you? Well, that's what it felt like the first time I, Summer Curtis, laid eyes on Phin Gibson...
HOUSEKEEPER'S HAPPY-EVER-AFTER Fiona Harper Ellie Bond's heart has ached ever since she lost her beloved husband and little girl. Now her head is telling her it's time to get her life back on track. Her first small step: answering big-shot music executive Mark Wilder's Housekeeper Wanted advertisement!

© Hart J.

© HarperCollins

Содержание

OH-SO-Sensible Secretary	6
Jessica Hart	7
Fiona Harper	8
Table of Contents	9
OH-SO-Sensible Secretary	10
Chapter One	11
Chapter Two	19
Chapter Three	27
Chapter Four	35
Chapter Five	43
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	51

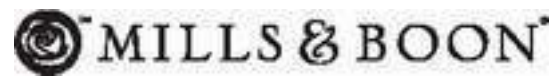
OH-SO-Sensible Secretary

By

Jessica Hart
Housekeeper's Happy-Ever-After

By

Fiona Harper



www.millsandboon.co.uk

Table of Contents

[Cover Page](#)
[Title Page](#)
[OH-SO-Sensible Secretary](#)
[About the Author](#)
[Dedication](#)
[Chapter One](#)
[Chapter Two](#)
[Chapter Three](#)
[Chapter Four](#)
[Chapter Five](#)
[Chapter Six](#)
[Chapter Seven](#)
[Chapter Eight](#)
[Chapter Nine](#)
[Chapter Ten](#)
[Housekeeper's Happy-Ever-After](#)
[About the Author](#)
[Dedication](#)
[Chapter One](#)
[Chapter Two](#)
[Chapter Three](#)
[Chapter Four](#)
[Chapter Five](#)
[Chapter Six](#)
[Chapter Seven](#)
[Chapter Eight](#)
[Chapter Nine](#)
[Chapter Ten](#)
[Chapter Eleven](#)
[Epilogue](#)
[Preview](#)
[Copyright](#)

OH-SO-Sensible Secretary

By

Jessica Hart

Jessica Hart was born in West Africa, and has suffered from itchy feet ever since, travelling and working around the world in a wide variety of interesting but very lowly jobs, all of which have provided inspiration on which to draw when it comes to the settings and plots of her stories. Now she lives a rather more settled existence in York, where she has been able to pursue her interest in history, although she still yearns sometimes for wider horizons. If you'd like to know more about Jessica, visit her website www.jessicahart.co.uk

For Nikki at 2DC, with many thanks for all her work on the website

Chapter One

EVERYTHING was in place. A sleek computer sat on my desk, humming gently. A notebook and freshly sharpened pencil were squared up to one side of a high-tech phone, but otherwise the desk was empty, the way I like it. I can't bear clutter.

There was only one thing missing.

My new boss.

Phin Gibson was late, and I was cross. I can't bear unpunctuality either.

I had been there since eight-thirty. Wanting to make a good impression, I'd dressed carefully in my best grey checked suit, and my make-up was as subtle and professional as ever. Rattling over the keyboard, my nails had a perfect French manicure. I was only twenty-six, but anyone looking at me would know that I was the ultimate executive PA, cool, calm and capable.

I might have *looked* cool, but by half past ten I certainly wasn't feeling it. I was irritated with Phin, and wishing I had bought myself a doughnut earlier.

Now, I know I don't look like the kind of girl with a doughnut fetish, but I can't get through the morning without a sugar fix. It's something to do with my metabolism (well, that's my story and I'm sticking to it), and if I don't have something sweet by eleven o'clock I get scratchy and irritable.

OK, even *more* irritable.

Chocolate or biscuits will do at a pinch, but doughnuts are my thing, and there's a coffee bar just round the corner from Gibson & Grieve's head office which sells the lightest, jammiest, sugariest ones I've ever tasted.

I'd fallen into the habit of buying one with a cappuccino on my way into work, and waiting for a quiet moment to get my blood sugar level up later in the morning, but today I'd decided not to. I wasn't sure what sort of boss Phin Gibson would prove to be, and I didn't want to be caught unawares with a sugar moustache or jammy fingers on our first day working together. This job was a big opportunity for me, and I wanted to impress him with my professionalism.

But how could I do that if he wasn't there?

Exasperated, I went back to my e-mail to Ellie, my friend in Customer and Marketing.

No problem, Ellie. To be honest, I was glad of something to do. There's a limit to what you can do as a PA without a boss—who STILL hasn't appeared, by the way. You'd think he could be bothered to turn up on time on his first day in a new job, but apparently not. Am already wishing I was back in the Chief Executive's office. I have a nasty feeling Phin and I aren't going to get on, and unless

——Original Message——

From: e.sanderson@gibsonandgrieve.co.uk

To: s.curtis@gibsonandgrieve.co.uk

Sent: Monday, January 18, 09:52

Subject: THANK YOU!

Summer, you are star! Thank you SO much for putting those figures together for me—and on a Friday afternoon, too! You saved my life (again!!!!).

Any sign of Phin Gibson yet??? Can't wait to hear if he's as gorgeous as he looks on telly!

Exx

'Well, well, well...Lex must know me better than I thought he did.'

The deep, amused voice broke across my exasperated typing and my head jerked up as I snatched my fingers back from the keyboard.

And there—at last!—was my new boss. Phinneas Gibson himself, lounging in the doorway and smiling the famously lop-sided smile that had millions of women, including my flatmate Anne, practically dribbling with lust.

I'd never dribbled myself. I'm not much of a dribbler at the best of times, and that oh-so-engaging smile smacked a little too much of I'm-incredibly-attractive-and-charming-and-don't-I-know-it for my taste.

My first reaction at the sight of Phin was one of surprise. No, thinking about it, surprise isn't quite the right word. I was *startled*.

I'd known what he looked like, of course. It would have been hard not to when Anne had insisted that I sit through endless repeats of *Into the Wild*. It's her flat, so she gets control of the remote.

If you're one of the two per cent of the population fortunate enough never to have seen it, Phin Gibson takes ill-assorted groups of people to the more inhospitable places on the planet, where they have to complete some sort of task in the most appalling conditions. On camera.

According to Anne, it makes for compulsive viewing, but personally I've never been able to see the point of making people uncomfortable just for sake of it. I mean, what's the point of hacking through a jungle when you can take a plane?

But don't get me started on reality TV. That's another thing I can't bear.

So I was braced against the extraordinary blue eyes, the shaggy dark blond hair and the smile, but I hadn't counted on how much bigger and more *immediate* Phin seemed in real life. Seeing him on the small screen gave no sense of the vivid impact of his presence.

I'm not sure I can explain it properly. You know that feeling when a gust of wind catches you unawares? When it swirls round you, sucking the air from your lungs and leaving you blinking and ruffled and invigorated? Well, that's what it felt like the first time I laid eyes on Phin Gibson.

There was a kind of lazy grace about him as he leant there, watching me with amusement. So it wasn't that he radiated energy. It was more that everything around him was energised by his presence. You could practically see the molecules buzzing in the air, and Phin himself seemed to be using up more than his fair share of oxygen in the room, which left me annoyingly short of breath.

Not that I was going to let Phin guess *that*.

'Good morning, Mr Gibson,' I said. Minimising the screen just in case, I took off the glasses I wear for working at the computer and offered a cool smile.

'Is it possible that *you're* my PA?' The blue eyes studied me with a mixture of surprise, amusement and appreciation as Phin levered himself away from the doorway and strolled into the room.

'I'm Summer Curtis, yes.'

A little miffed at his surprise, and ruffled by the amusement, I pushed back my chair so that I could rise and offer my hand across the desk. *Some* of us were professional.

Phin's fingers closed around mine and he held onto my hand as he looked at me. 'Summer? No.'

'I'm afraid so,' I said a little tightly. I can't tell you how many times I've wished I was called something sensible, like Sue or Sarah, but never more than at that moment, with those blue eyes looking down into mine, filled with laughter.

I tried to withdraw my hand, but Phin was keeping a tight hold on it, and I was uncomfortably aware of the firm warmth of skin pressed against mine.

'You are *so* not a Summer,' he said. 'I've never met anyone with a more inappropriate name. Although I did know a girl called Chastity once, now I come to think of it,' he added. 'Look at you. Cool and crisp. Conker-brown hair. Eyes like woodsmoke. What were your parents thinking when they called you Summer instead of Autumn?'

'Not about how embarrassing it would be for me to go through life named after a season, anyway,' I said, managing to tug my hand free at last. I sat down again and rested it on the desk, where it throbbed disconcertingly.

'I must thank Lex,' said Phin. To add to my discomfort, he perched on my desk and turned sideways to look at me. 'He told me he'd appointed a PA for me, but I was expecting a dragon.'

'I can be a dragon if required,' I said, although right then I felt very undragon-like. I was suffocatingly aware of Phin on the other side of the desk. He wasn't anywhere near me, but his presence was still overwhelming. 'I'm fully qualified,' I added stiffly.

'I feel sure Lex wouldn't have appointed you if you weren't,' Phin said.

He had picked up my pencil and was twirling it absently between his fingers. It's the kind of fiddling that drives me mad, and I longed to snatch it from him, but I wasn't that much of a dragon.

'What's your brief?' he added, still twirling.

'Brief?'

The look he shot me was unexpectedly acute. 'Don't tell me Lex hasn't put you in here to keep an eye on me.'

I shifted uncomfortably.

'You're the most sensible person around here,' had been Lex Gibson's exact words when he offered me the job. 'I need someone competent to stop that idiot boy doing anything stupid. God knows what he'd get up to on his own!'

Not that I could tell Phin that. I admired Lex, but I wondered now if he was quite right. Phin didn't seem like an idiot to me, and he certainly wasn't a boy. He wasn't that much older than me—in his early thirties, perhaps—but he was clearly all man.

'Your brother thought it would be helpful for you to have an assistant who was familiar with the way the company operates,' I said carefully instead.

'In other words,' said Phin, interpreting this without difficulty, 'my brother thinks I'm a liability and wants you to keep me in order.'

I'd leapt at the chance of a promotion, even if it did mean working for Lex Gibson's feckless younger brother. Perhaps I should just explain, for those of you who have just jetted in from Mars—well, OK, from outside the UK—Gibson & Grieve is a long-established chain of department stores with a reputation for quality and style that others can only envy. The original, very exclusive store was in London, but now you'll find us in all the major British cities—setting a gold standard in retail, as Lex likes to say.

The Grieves died out long ago, but the Gibsons still have a controlling share, and Lex Gibson now runs the company with an iron hand. As far as I knew, Phin had never shown the slightest interest in Gibson & Grieve until now, but, as heir to a substantial part of it, he was automatically a member of the board. He was coming in right at the top, and that meant that his PA—me—would be working at the most senior level.

I gathered the idea was for Phin to spend a year as the public face of Gibson & Grieve, so even though the job wasn't permanent it would look very good on my CV. And the extra money wouldn't hurt, either. If I was ever going to be able to buy my own place I needed to save as much as I could, and this promotion would make quite a difference to my salary. I'm someone who likes to have a plan, and this job was a major step on my way. I might not be thrilled at the thought of working for Phin Gibson, but it wasn't an opportunity I was prepared to lose.

I couldn't dream about a future with Jonathan now, I remembered sadly, and that left buying my own flat the only plan I had. I mustn't jeopardise it by getting on the wrong side of Phin, no matter how irritatingly he fiddled.

'I'm your personal assistant,' I assured him. 'It's my job to support you. I'm here to do whatever you want.'

'Really?'

'Of course,' I began with dignity, then saw that his eyes were alight with laughter. To my chagrin, I felt a blush steal up my cheeks. It was just a pity my plan involved working with someone who was clearly incapable of taking anything seriously. 'Within reason, of course.'

'Oh, of *course*,' Phin agreed, eyes still dancing.

Then, much to my relief, he dropped the pencil and got up from the desk. 'Well, if we're going to be working together we'd better get to know each other properly, don't you think? Let's have some coffee.'

'Certainly.' Making coffee for my boss. That I could do. Pleased to be back in proper PA mode, I swung my chair round and got to my feet. 'I'll make some right away.'

'I don't want you to make it,' said Phin. 'I want to go out.'

'But you've just arrived,' I objected.

'I know, and I'm feeling claustrophobic already.' He looked around the office without enthusiasm. 'It's all so...sterile. Doesn't it make you want to shout obscenities and throw rubbish everywhere?'

I actually winced at the thought.

'No,' I said. Gibson & Grieve had always been noted for its style and up-market image. The offices were all beautifully designed and gleamed with the latest technology. I loved the fact that this one was light and spacious, and free as yet of any of the clutter that inevitably accumulated in a working office. 'I like everything neat and tidy,' I told Phin.

'You know, I should have been able to guess that,' he said in a dry voice, and I suddenly saw myself through his eyes: crisp and restrained in my grey suit, my hair fastened neatly back from my face. In comparison, he looked faintly unkempt, in jeans, a black T-shirt and a battered old leather jacket. He might look appropriate for a media meeting, but it was hardly appropriate for an executive director of a company like Gibson & Grieve, I thought disapprovingly.

Still, I had no doubt he was even less impressed by me. I would have bet on the fact that he thought me smart, but dull.

But then maybe all men thought that when they looked at me. Jonathan had, too, in the end.

I pushed the thought of Jonathan aside. 'We can go out if you'd rather,' I said. 'But don't you at least want to check your messages first?'

Phin's brows rose. 'I have messages?'

'Of course. You're a director and a board member,' I pointed out. 'We set up a new e-mail address for you last week, and you've been getting messages ever since. I'm able to filter them for you, and you have another address which only you will be able to access.'

'Great,' said Phin. 'Filtering sounds good to me. Is there anything important?'

'It's all important when you're a director.' I couldn't help the reproving note in my voice, but Phin only rolled his eyes.

'OK, is there anything *urgent*?'

I was forced to admit that there wasn't. 'Not really.'

'There you go,' he said cheerfully. 'I didn't think I'd need a PA, but Lex was right—as always. You've saved me wading through all those e-mails already. You deserve a coffee for that,' he told me, and held open the door for me. 'Come on, let's go.'

It was all going to be very different now, I thought, stifling a sigh as we headed down the corridor to the lift. I was used to working for Lex Gibson, who barely stopped working to sip the coffee Monique, his PA, took in to him.

Lex would never dream of going out for coffee, or bothering to get to know his secretaries, come to that. I was fairly sure he knew nothing about my private life. As far as Lex was concerned you were there to work, not to make friends, and I was perfectly happy with that. I didn't want to get all chummy with Phin, but for better or worse he was my boss now, so I could hardly refuse.

'Where's the best place for coffee round here?' Phin asked when we pushed through the revolving doors and out into the raw January morning. At least it wasn't raining for once, but I shivered in my suit, wishing I'd bothered to throw on my coat after all.

'Otto's is very good,' I said, hugging my arms together. 'It's just round the corner.'

‘Better and better,’ said Phin. ‘Lead the way.’ He glanced down at me, shivering as we waited to cross the road. ‘You look cold. Would you like to borrow my jacket?’

The thought of his jacket, warm from his body, slung intimately around my shoulders, was strangely disturbing—quite apart from the fact that it would look very odd with my suit. ‘I’m fine, thank you,’ I said, clenching my teeth to stop them chattering.

‘Let’s step on it, then,’ he said briskly. ‘It’s freezing.’

The warmth and the mouth-watering smell of freshly baked pastries enveloped us as we pushed through the door into Otto’s. Inside it was dark and narrow, with four old-fashioned booths on one side and some stools at a bar in the window.

The coffee and sandwiches were so good that first thing in the morning and at lunchtime there was always a long queue out of the door, but it was relatively quiet now. We lined up behind three executives exuding testosterone as they compared bonuses, a German tourist, and a pair of middleaged women carrying on a conversation that veered bizarrely between some terrible crisis that a mutual friend was enduring and whether a Danish pastry was more or less fattening than a blueberry muffin.

Phin picked up a tray and hustled me along behind them. ‘What about something to eat?’ he said. ‘I’m going to have something. I’m starving.’

I eyed the doughnuts longingly, but there was no way I was going to eat one in front of him. ‘Just coffee, please.’

‘Sure?’ I could almost believe he had seen the yearning in my eyes, because he leant suggestively towards me. ‘You don’t want a piece of that chocolate cake?’ he said, rolling the words around his mouth suggestively. ‘A scone with cream? One of those pastries? Go on—you know you want to!’

I gritted my teeth. ‘No, thank you.’

‘Well, you’re a cheap date,’ he said. ‘I’m going to have one of those doughnuts.’

I had to press my lips firmly together to stop myself whimpering.

Ahead, Otto’s ferocious wife, Lucia, was making coffee, shouting orders back to Otto, and working the till with her customary disregard for the service ethic. Lucia was famous for her rudeness and the customers were all terrified of her. I’ve seen senior executives reduced to grovelling if they didn’t have the correct change. If the coffee and the cakes hadn’t been so good, or if Lucia hadn’t been so efficient, Otto’s would have closed long ago. As it was, she and the café had become something of a local institution.

‘Next!’ she snarled as we made it to the top of the queue, and then she caught sight of me and smiled—a sight so rare that the executives now helping themselves to sugar stared in disbelief.

‘Back again, *cara*?’ she called, banging out old coffee grounds from the espresso machine. ‘Your usual?’

‘Yes, thanks, Lucia.’ I smiled back at her, and then glanced at Phin, who was watching me with an oddly arrested expression. ‘And...?’ I prompted him.

‘Americano for me,’ he supplied quickly, before Lucia got impatient with him. ‘No milk.’

‘Why are you looking at me like that?’ I asked Phin as I slid onto a shiny plastic banquette. Otto’s wasn’t big on style.

‘I’m curious,’ he said, transferring the cups to the table and pushing the tray aside.

‘Curious?’

‘Perhaps intrigued is a better word,’ said Phin. ‘You know, I’ve dodged guerrillas in South America, I’ve been charged at by a rhino and dangled by a rope over a thousand-foot crevasse, but I found Lucia pretty scary. She had every single person in that queue intimidated, but you she calls *cara*. What’s that about?’

‘Oh, nothing,’ I said, making patterns in the cappuccino froth with my teaspoon. ‘I wrote her a note once, that was all.’

‘What sort of note?’

'I noticed that she wasn't here one day, mainly because the queue doesn't move nearly as fast when she's not around. I asked why not, and she told me she'd had to go back to Italy because her father had died. I wrote her a short note, just to say that I was sorry. It wasn't a big deal,' I muttered. I was rather embarrassed by the way Lucia had never forgotten it.

Phin looked at me thoughtfully. 'That was a kind thing to do.'

Feeling awkward, I sipped at my coffee. 'I didn't do much,' I said. 'Anyone can write a note.'

'But only you did.'

He picked up his doughnut and took a big bite while I watched enviously. My mouth was watering, and I was feeling quite light-headed with the lack of sugar.

'Want a bit?' he asked, offering the plate.

I flushed at the thought that he had noticed me staring. 'No...thank you,' I said primly.

'Sure? It's very good.'

I *knew* it was good. That was the trouble. 'I'm sure.'

'Suit yourself.' Phin shrugged, and finished the doughnut with unnecessary relish.

The more he enjoyed it, the crosser I got. What sort of boss was this, who dragged you out to coffee, tried to force-feed you doughnuts and then tortured you by eating them in front of you?

Scowling, I buried my face in my cappuccino.

'So, Summer Curtis,' he said, brushing sugar from his fingers at last. 'Tell me about yourself.'

It sounded like an interview question, so I sat up straighter and composed myself. 'Well, I've been working for Gibson & Grieve for five years now, the last three as assistant to the Chief Executive's PA—' I began, but Phin held up both hands.

'I don't need to know how many A levels you've got or where you've worked,' he said. 'I'm sure Lex wouldn't have appointed you if he didn't trust you absolutely. I'm more interested in finding out what makes you tick. If you're going to be my personal assistant I think we should get to know each other personally, and your work experience won't tell me anything I really need to know.'

'Like what?' I asked, disconcerted.

Phin sat back against the banquette and eyed me thoughtfully. 'Like your pet peeves, for instance. What really irritates you?'

'How long have you got?' I asked. 'Sniffing. Jiggling. Mess. Smiley faces made out of punctuation marks. Phrases like "Ah...bless..." or "I love her to bits, but..." Men who sit on the tube with their legs wide apart. Unpunctuality. Sloppy spelling and misuse of the apostrophe—that's a big one for me.' I paused, aware that I might have been getting a bit carried away. 'Do you want me to go on?'

'I think I might be getting the picture,' he said, his mouth twitching.

'I'm a bit of a perfectionist.'

'So I gathered.' I could tell he was trying not to laugh, and I was beginning to regret being so honest.

'You did ask,' I pointed out defensively.

'I did. Maybe I should have asked you what you *do* like.'

'I like my job.'

'Being a secretary?'

I nodded. 'Organisations like Gibson & Grieve don't work unless executives have proper administrative back-up. I like organising things, checking details, pulling everything together. I like making sure everything is in its right place. That's why I like filing. I find it satisfying.'

Phin didn't say anything. He just looked at me across the table.

'I'm sorry,' I said, putting up my chin. 'I do. Shoot me.'

He grinned at that. 'So...an unexpectedly kind, nitpicking perfectionist with an irrational prejudice against poor punctuation and a bizarre attachment to filing. I think we're getting somewhere. What else do I need to know about you?'

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing? There must be more than that.’

I drank my coffee, unaccountably flustered. I was more thrown than I wanted to admit by the blueness of his eyes, by that lazy smile and the sheer vitality of his presence. There was a whole table between us, but I was finding it hard to breathe.

‘I really don’t know what you want me to tell you,’ I said. ‘I’m twenty-six, I share a flat in south London with a friend, and my life is the exact opposite of yours.’

His eyes gleamed at that, and he leant forward. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Well, you come from a wealthy family whose stores are a household name,’ I pointed out. ‘You make television programmes doing the kind of things the rest of us would never dare to do, and when you’re not skiing down a glacier or hacking through a jungle you’re at all the A-list parties—usually with a beautiful girl on your arm. The closest I get to an A-list party is reading about one in *Glitz*, and I’d rather stick pins in my eyes than set foot in a rainforest. We don’t have a single thing in common.’

‘You can’t say that,’ Phin objected. ‘You don’t really know anything about me.’

‘I feel as if I do,’ I told him. ‘My flatmate, Anne, is your biggest fan, and after listening to her talk about you for the past two years I could take a quiz on you myself.’ I pushed my empty cup aside. ‘Go on—ask me. Anything,’ I offered largely, and even gave him an example. ‘What’s your latest girlfriend called?’

A smile was tugging at the corner of Phin’s mouth. ‘You tell me,’ he said.

‘Jewel,’ I said triumphantly. ‘Jewel Stevens. She’s an actress, and when you went to some awards ceremony last week she wore a red dress that had Anne weeping with envy.’

‘But not you?’

‘I think it would have looked classier in black,’ I said, and Phin laughed.

‘I’m impressed. Clearly I don’t need to tell you anything about myself, as you know it all already. Although I think I should point out that Jewel *isn’t*, in fact, my girlfriend. We’ve been out a couple of times, but that’s all. There’s no question of a real relationship, whatever the papers say.’

‘I’ll tell Anne. She’ll be delighted,’ I said. ‘She’s got a very active fantasy life in which you figure largely, in spite of the fact that she’s very happy with her fiancé, Mark.’

‘And what do you fantasise about, Summer?’ asked Phin, his eyes on my face.

Ah, my fantasies. They were always the same. Jonathan realising that he had made a terrible mistake. Jonathan telling me he loved me. Jonathan asking me to marry him. We’d buy a house together. London prices being what they were, we might have to go out to the suburbs, and even pooling our resources we’d be lucky to get a semi-detached house, but that would be fine by me. I didn’t need anywhere grand. I just wanted Jonathan, and somewhere I could stay.

I realise a suburban semi-detached isn’t the stuff of most wild fantasies, but it was a dream that had kept me going ever since Jonathan had told me before Christmas that he ‘needed some space’. He thought it was better that we didn’t see each other outside the office any more. He knew how sensible I was, and was sure I would understand.

I sighed. What could I do but agree that, yes, I understood? But I lived for the brief glimpses I had of him now, and the hope that he might change his mind.

Phin was watching me expectantly, his brows raised, and I had an uneasy sense that those blue eyes could see a lot more than they ought to be able to. He was still waiting for me to answer his question.

Jonathan had been insistent that we keep our relationship a secret at the office, so I hadn’t told anyone. I certainly wasn’t going to start with Phin Gibson.

‘I want a place of my own,’ I said. ‘It doesn’t have to be very big—in fact I’ll be lucky if I can afford a studio—but it has to be mine. It has to be somewhere I could live for ever.’ I glanced at him. ‘I suppose you think that’s very boring?’

‘It’s not what I was expecting, and it’s not a fantasy I understand, but it’s not *boring*,’ said Phin. ‘I don’t find much boring, to tell you the truth. People are endlessly interesting, don’t you think? Obviously not!’ he went straight on, seeing my sceptical expression. ‘Well, *I* find them interesting. Why is it so important for you to have a home of your own?’

‘Oh...I moved around a lot as a child. My mother has always been heavily into alternative lifestyles, and she’s prone to sudden intense enthusiasms. One year we’d be in a commune, the next we were living on a houseboat. When my father was alive we had a couple of freezing years in a tumbledown smallholding in Wales.’

It was odd to find myself telling Phin Gibson, of all people, about my childhood. I didn’t normally talk about it much—not that it had been particularly traumatic, but it was hard for most people I knew to understand what it was like growing up with a mother who was as charming and lovely and flaky as they come—and there was something about the way he was listening, his expression intent and his attention absolutely focused on me, that unlocked my usual reserve.

‘Wales was the closest we ever got to settling down,’ I told him. ‘The rest of the time we kept moving. Not because we had to, but because my mother was always looking for something more.’

‘Basically,’ I said, ‘she’s got the attention span of a gnat. I lost count of the schools I attended, of the weird and wonderful places we lived for a few months before moving on.’

I turned the cup and saucer between my fingers. ‘I suppose it’s inevitable I grew up craving security the way others crave excitement. My mother can’t understand it, though. She’s living in a tepee in Somerset at the moment, and for her the thought of buying a flat and settling down is incomprehensible. I’m a big disappointment to her,’ I finished wryly.

‘There you are—we’ve something in common after all,’ said Phin, sitting back with a smile and stretching his long legs out under the table. ‘I’m a big disappointment to my parents, too.’

Chapter Two

I LOOKED at him in surprise. ‘But you’re famous,’ I said. I’d known Lex wasn’t impressed by his younger brother, but had assumed that his parents at least would be pleased by his success. ‘You’ve had a successful television career.’

‘My parents aren’t impressed by television,’ Phin smiled wryly. ‘They think the media generally is shallow and frivolous—certainly compared to the serious business of running Gibson & Grieve. Lex and I were brought up to believe that the company was all that mattered, and that it was the only future we could ever have or ever want.’

‘When did you change your mind?’

‘When I realised that there wasn’t really a place for me here. Lex is older than me, and anyway he had Chief Executive written all over him even as a toddler. Gibson & Grieve was all he ever cared about.’

It was my turn to study Phin. He was looking quite relaxed, leaning back against the banquette, but I sensed that this wasn’t an easy topic of conversation for him.

‘Didn’t you ever want to be part of it, too?’

‘As a very small boy I used to love going into the office,’ he admitted. ‘But as I got bigger I didn’t fit. I was always being told to be quiet or sit still, and I didn’t like doing either of those things. I wanted to skid over the shiny floors, or play football, or fiddle with the new computers. After a while I stopped going.’

Phin’s smile was a little crooked. ‘Of course it’s easy now to see that I was just a spoilt brat looking for attention, but at the time it felt as if I were reacting against all their expectations. Lex was always there, doing what he should, and there never seemed any point in me doing the same. I got into as much trouble as I could instead,’ he said. ‘My parents were beside themselves. They didn’t know what to do with me, and I didn’t know what to do with myself. I don’t think they ever thought I would get a degree, and I took off as soon as I’d graduated. I suspect that they were glad to be rid of me! I mean, what would they have done with me at Gibson & Grieve? I didn’t fit with the image at all!’

No, he wouldn’t have done, I thought. In spite of its commitment to style, Gibson & Grieve was at heart a very solid, traditional company—it was one of the reasons I liked it—and Phin would have been too chaotic, too vibrant, too energetic to ever properly fit in.

‘So what did you do?’ I asked, wondering how he was going to fit in now that he was back.

‘I messed around for a few years,’ he said. ‘I worked my way around the world. I didn’t care what I did as long as I was somewhere I could keep my adrenalin pumping—skiing, sailing, whitewater rafting, climbing, sky-diving...I tried them all. I spent some time in the Amazon and learnt jungle survival skills, and then I got a job leading a charity expedition, and that led onto behind the scenes advice on a reality TV programme.’

He shrugged. ‘It seems I came across well on camera, and the next thing I knew they’d offered me my own programme, taking ill-assorted groups into challenging situations.’

And I knew what had happened after that. It had taken no time at all for Phin Gibson to become a celebrity, almost as famous as Gibson & Grieve itself.

‘And now you’ve joined the company,’ I said.

‘I have.’ Phin was silent for a moment, looking down at his hands, which lay lightly clasped on the table, and then he looked up at me and the blueness of his eyes was so intense that I actually drew a sharp breath.

‘Last year I took a group of young offenders on a gruelling trek through Peru,’ he said.

I remembered the programme. I had watched it with Anne, and even I had had to admit that the change in those boys by the end of the trek was extraordinary.

‘I recognised myself in them,’ Phin said. ‘It made me think about how difficult it must have been for my parents. I guess I’d grown up in spite of myself.’

His mouth quirked in a self-deprecating grin, then he sobered. ‘My father had a stroke last year as well. That put a new perspective on everything. It seemed to me that it was time to try and make some amends. My mother has got it into her mind that all Dad wants is for me to settle down and take up my inheritance at Gibson & Grieve.’

He sighed a little. ‘To be honest, it’s a little hard to know exactly what Dad wants now, but he did manage to squeeze my hand when my mother told him what she had in mind. Basically, a certain amount of emotional blackmail is being applied! In lots of ways it’s worse for Lex,’ Phin went on thoughtfully. ‘He stepped into my father’s shoes as Chief Executive, and he’s been doing a good job. Profits are up. Everyone’s happy. The last thing he wants is me muddying the waters. In the end he suggested that we capitalise on my “celebrity”, for want of better word, and make me the new face of Gibson & Grieve. You know we’ve just acquired Gregson’s?’

He cocked an eyebrow at me and I nodded. The acquisition had made the headlines a few months ago when it happened.

‘Supermarkets are a change of direction for us,’ Phin went on. ‘Our brand has always been up-market, even exclusive, and we need more of a popular, family-friendly image now. Lex seems to think I can help with that, and I agreed to see how it went for a year initially, on condition that I could finish a couple of filming commitments.’

I smoothed my skirt over my knees. I was feeling a bit bad, if you want the truth. I’d dismissed Phin as a spoilt celebrity and assumed that he was choosing to dabble in the family business for a while. I hadn’t realised that he was under some pressure.

‘It makes sense for you to be Director of Media Relations,’ I offered.

‘I think we all know how little that means,’ said Phin, leaning across the table, and I found myself leaning back as if pushed there by the sheer force of his personality. ‘Lex’s idea is to shunt me off and just wheel me out to be photographed every now and then. As far as he’s concerned all the media relations will be done by his PR guy...what’s his name? John?’

‘Jonathan Pugh.’

Just saying his name was enough to bump my heart into my throat, and my tongue felt thick and unwieldy in my mouth. I wondered if Phin would notice how husky I sounded, but he didn’t seem to.

‘Yep, that’s him,’ was all he said, sitting back again. ‘A born suit.’

I bridled at the dismissive note in his voice. I’d been quite liking Phin until then, but I was very sensitive to any criticism of Jonathan. At least Jonathan dressed professionally, unlike *some* people I could mention, I thought, eyeing Phin’s T-shirt disapprovingly.

‘Jonathan’s very good at his job,’ I said stiffly.

‘Lex wouldn’t employ him unless he was,’ said Phin. ‘But if he’s that good there won’t be much left for me to do, will there? I’m not going to spend a year opening stores and saving Lex the trouble of turning up at charity bashes.’

‘Then why come back if you’re not going to do anything?’ I asked, still ruffled by his dismissal of Jonathan.

‘But I am going to do something,’ he said. ‘Lex just doesn’t know it yet. If I’m going to be part of Gibson & Grieve, I’m going to make a difference.’

Oh, dear. I had a nasty feeling this was the kind of thing Lex had meant when he had told me to stop Phin doing anything stupid.

‘How?’ I asked warily.

‘By increasing our range of fair trade products. Promoting links with communities here and overseas. Being more aware of environmental issues. Developing our staff and providing more training. Making *connections*,’ said Phin. ‘We’re all part of chain. It doesn’t matter if we’re picking tea in Sri Lanka, stacking it on the shelves in Sheffield or buying it in Swindon. We should be celebrating

the connections between people, not pretending that the only thing that matters is underlying operating profit or consensus forecasts.'

I was secretly impressed that Phin even knew about consensus forecasts, but I couldn't see any of this going down well with Lex.

I nibbled my thumb. It's a bad habit of mine when I'm unsure. 'And you haven't discussed any of this with your brother yet?'

'Not yet, no,' he said. 'I wanted to get to know you first.'

'Me?' I was taken aback. 'Why?'

'Because if I'm going to get anything done I need a team. I need to be sure that we can work together, and that we share the same goals.'

The blue, blue eyes fixed on me with that same unnerving intensity. 'You've been working for Lex, and I know his staff are all very loyal to him. I'm not trying to take over, but there's no use pretending he's going to share my ideas, and I don't want to put you in a difficult position. If you'd rather not work with me to change things, this is the time to say, Summer. I'm sure Lex would give you your old job back if you wanted it, and there'd be no hard feelings.'

I'll admit it. I hesitated. There was part of me that longed to go back to the Chief Executive's office—which buzzed with drive, where everyone was cool and efficient, and where there was no Phin Gibson with his unsettling presence and alarming ideas about change. I didn't like change. I'd had enough of change as a child. I wanted everything to stay the same.

But this was my big chance. When Anne got married I was going to have to move out of the flat. With my new salary I might be able to save enough to put down a deposit on a place of my own by then. It was only for a year, too, I reminded myself. When it was up, I'd be in a good position to get another job at the same level in spite of my age. It would be worth putting up with Phin until then.

So I met the blue eyes squarely. 'I don't want my old job back,' I said. 'I want to be part of your team.'

I was sorting through the post the next morning when Phin appeared. Late again. Hadn't he ever heard of a nine-to-five day at work?

He had spent no more than a couple of hours in the office after we had got back from Otto's, before disappearing to a meeting with his producer.

'But I've read all my e-mails, you'll be glad to hear,' he said as he left. 'I take back everything I said about never being bored. All that corporate jargon puts me to sleep faster than a cup of cocoa. I'm never going to make it through a meeting if these guys actually talk like that.'

It would be nice to think he would ever be there to go to a meeting, I thought crossly.

It was after ten, and I had been in a dilemma about when to have the doughnut I'd bought earlier at Otto's. Having forgone my treat the day before, I was determined not to miss out again, but I wanted a few minutes to myself, so that I could enjoy it properly. I needed Phin to be in his office, so that I knew where he was.

Not knowing when he might appear had been making me twitchy, so when Phin strolled in and wished me a cheerful good morning I glared at him over the top of my glasses.

'Where have you been?' I demanded.

'You know,' Phin confided, 'that librarian thing you've got going really works for me.'

'What librarian thing?' I asked, thrown.

'The fierce glasses on the chain, the scraped back hair, the neat suit...' He grinned at my expression, which must have been dumbfounded. That's certainly how I felt. 'Please say you're about to shake out your hair and tell me you're going to have to be very strict with me for being late!'

I'd never met anyone like Phin before, and I was completely flummoxed. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Never mind,' he said. 'I was just getting a bit carried away there. What was it you wanted to know again?'

‘I was wondering where you’d been,’ I said tightly. ‘It’s after ten. I was expecting you here an hour ago at least.’

‘I went into the Oxford Street store to see how things are going,’ said Phin casually, picking up the post from my desk and leafing idly through it. ‘I thought it would be an idea to meet the staff and hear what they think, and it was very useful.’ He looked up at me, his eyes disconcertingly blue and amused. ‘Why? Should I have asked permission?’

I pressed my lips together. ‘It’s not a question of permission,’ I said. ‘But there’s no point in having a PA unless you let me know where you are. I need to be able to make appointments for you, and I can’t do that if I’ve no idea when you’re going to turn up.’

‘Who wants an appointment?’

‘Well, no one, as it happens,’ I was forced to admit. ‘But they might have done. It’s a matter of principle.’

‘Principle? That sounds serious.’ Phin dropped the post back onto the desk and without thinking I squared up the pile, looking up when he sucked in his breath alarmingly.

‘What’s the matter?’ I asked, startled.

‘I don’t know...’ He was squinting at the pile I’d tidied. ‘I think those papers at the bottom might be half a millimetre out of alignment.’

‘Sarcasm—excellent,’ I said. Sarcastically. That was all I needed. ‘Thank you so much.’

He held up his hands. ‘It’s nothing, honestly. Just one more service we offer.’

My lips tightened. I tried to pick up the conversation. ‘Perhaps we should agree a system.’

‘A system,’ said Phin, testing the word as if he’d never heard it before. ‘Fine. What sort of system?’

‘If you let me have your mobile number, so that I can get hold of you if I need to, that would be a start. And then perhaps we could sit down and go through your diary.’

‘Absolutely. Let’s do it.’ He clenched his fist and punched it in the air, to demonstrate an enthusiasm I was perfectly aware he didn’t feel. ‘Let’s do it now, in fact.’

‘Fine.’

We exchanged mobile numbers, and then I carried the diary into his office. I would put all the details on the computer later, but it was easier at this stage to use an old-fashioned hard copy.

I sat down with the diary on my knee, while Phin fished out a personal organiser and leaned back in his chair so that he could prop his feet on the desk.

‘What do you want to know?’

‘I’d better have everything.’ I smoothed the page open, admiring in passing how nice my hands looked. I take care of my nails, and today they were painted a lovely pale pink called Dew at Dawn. ‘If you’re the face of Gibson & Grieve, you’ll be expected to appear at various functions and I’ll need to know when you’re available.’

‘Fair enough.’

He had an extraordinarily complicated social life, with two or three events an evening as far as I could make out. I couldn’t help comparing it with my own, which largely consisted of painting my nails in front of the television, watching Anne getting ready to go out with Mark and feeling miserable about Jonathan.

‘This is great,’ said Phin when we’d finished. ‘I never need to remember anything by myself ever again. Maybe I won’t mind being an executive after all. What else is there to do?’

‘There’s a meeting to discuss the new media strategy at half past ten,’ I said, handing him a folder. ‘Your brother suggested you went along if you were here on time. I’ve noted all the salient points, and included copies of recent minutes so you know the background.’

‘Salient points?’ he echoed, amazed. ‘I didn’t realise people still said things like that any more!’

I chose to ignore that, and looked pointedly at my watch instead. ‘You should get going. You’ve only got a couple of minutes and you don’t want to be late.’

‘You mean *you* don’t want me to be late,’ said Phin, but he swung his legs down from the desk.

I could hardly wait for him to go. I practically shoved him out of the door towards the lifts. Lex’s office was on the floor above, and as soon as I saw him step into the lift I scurried down the corridor to the kitchen to make myself some coffee.

My office, and Phin’s of course, was in a prime location on the corner of the building, with fabulous views of Trafalgar Square, but more importantly we were at the end of the corridor, which meant that nobody dropped in just because they were passing.

Even so, I closed the door as a precaution and prepared to enjoy my doughnut in private. I settled happily behind my desk with my coffee and cleared a space. Eating a doughnut could be a messy business. Perhaps that was why it always felt faintly naughty to me.

At last. I pulled out the doughnut and took a bite, mumbling with pleasure as my teeth sank into the sugary dough.

And then froze as the door opened and Phin came in. ‘I forgot that file—’ he began, and then it was his turn to stop as he took in the sight of me, sitting guiltily behind my desk, doughnut in hand and mouth full.

His eyes lit with amusement. ‘Aha! Caught red-handed, I see.’

Blushing furiously, I dropped the doughnut and brushed at the sugar moustache I could feel on my top lip. ‘I thought you’d gone,’ I blustered, mortified at having been caught in such an unprofessional pose.

‘Now I know why you were so keen to get rid of me,’ said Phin. ‘This is a new side to you. How very, very unlikely. Who would have thought that sensible Summer Curtis would have a doughnut addiction!’ He leant conspiratorially towards me. ‘Does anyone else know?’

‘It’s not an *addiction*,’ I said, trying for some dignity. ‘I just work better if I’ve had some sugar in the morning.’

‘Well, I’m delighted to find that you’ve got a weakness. I was finding all that perfection just a little intimidating.’ He grinned. ‘It’s good to know that when it comes down to it you can’t resist temptation either.’

Of course, then I had to prove him wrong.

The next day, when I called in to buy my usual cappuccino on my way into work, I refused the doughnut Lucia offered and felt virtuous. This would be the start of a new regime, I vowed. I didn’t need a sugar fix, anyway. That was just silly. I would stick to coffee—a much less embarrassing habit and one that was less likely to lead to humiliation.

And I made it all the way to the lifts before I started to regret my resolution. Why shouldn’t I have a mid-morning snack? It wasn’t as if eating a doughnut was immoral or illegal. I blamed Phin for making me feel guilty about it. It was more satisfying than blaming myself.

Already I could already feel the craving twitching away in the pit of my stomach, making me tense. It didn’t bode well for the rest of the day, and I hoped everyone would give me a wide berth. I wasn’t known for my easygoing attitude on the best of days, and I had a feeling this most definitely wasn’t going to be a good one.

At least Phin managed to turn up before ten o’clock, looking distinctly the worse for wear.

‘I hope I get a gold star for turning up early,’ he said.

I thinned my lips, still illogically determined to blame him for my doughnut-less day. ‘I’d hardly call ten *early*,’ I said repressively.

‘It is for me.’ Phin yawned. ‘I had a very late night.’

I wondered how much his lack of sleep was due to the beautiful Jewel Stevens. According to last night’s *Metro*, the two of them were ‘inseparable’. Not that I was scouring gossip columns for news of my new boss, you understand. In spite of taking a book to read on the tube every day, I somehow always ended up devouring the free paper on the way home. When it’s pressed into your hand, it seems rude not to.

Phin's name just happened to catch my eye—honest. There had even been a picture of him at some party, with Jewel entwined around his arm. I know I'm in no position to talk about stupid names, but really...Jewel? I'd put money on the fact that she was christened Julie. In the picture Phin had a faintly wary look, but that might have been the flash. He certainly didn't look as if he were pushing her away.

Why would he? She was dark and sultry, with legs up to her armpits, a beestung mouth and masses of rippling black hair. Every man's fantasy, in fact.

I felt vaguely depressed at the thought, and then worried by the fact that I was depressed—until I realised it must just be the lack of sugar getting to me.

'No, really, though. I'll be fine,' said Phin, when I failed to offer the expected sympathy. 'There's no need to make a fuss.'

I sighed and narrowed my eyes at him.

'I can tell that deep down you're really worried,' he said, and when I just looked back at him without expression he wisely took himself off into his office.

'I'll survive,' he promised, just before he shut the door. 'But if I don't, you're not to feel bad, OK?'

All was quiet for nearly an hour. I was betting that he had gone to catch up on his sleep on one of those sofas, but frankly I was glad to get rid of him for a while. I tried to soothe myself with a little filing, but a few days wasn't long enough to generate much of a backlog, and I couldn't stop thinking about how good a doughnut would taste with a cup of coffee.

Perhaps Phin was right. Perhaps I really was addicted, I fretted. I even considered sneaking out to Otto's, but couldn't take the chance of Phin waking up and finding me gone. I'd never hear the end of it.

The more I tried not to think about doughnuts, the more I wanted one, and it was almost a relief when Phin buzzed me. Yes, buzzed me—like a real executive! Maybe he would get the hang of corporate life after all.

'It's almost eleven,' came his voice through the intercom. 'Am I allowed to have coffee yet?'

'Of course,' I said, glad of the distraction from my doughnut craving, and relieved to be able to act as a normal PA for a change. 'I'll bring you some in.'

'Bring yourself some, too. We need to do some planning. You'll like that.'

Planning. That sounded more like it. I switched my phone through, wedged my notebook under my arm, and took in a pot of coffee and two cups on a tray.

I half expected to find Phin lying on one of the sofas, but he was sitting behind his desk, apparently immersed in something he was reading on the computer screen. He looked up when I pushed open the door with my elbow, though, and got to his feet.

'Let's make ourselves comfortable,' he said, guiding me over to the sofas and producing a familiar-looking paper bag from a drawer. 'I thought we'd have a little something with our coffee,' he said, waving it under my nose.

He'd brought two doughnuts.

It was all I could do not to drool. I've no idea what my expression was like, but judging by the laughter in the blue eyes it was a suitable picture.

'Now aren't you sorry you weren't more sympathetic?' he asked as he set the doughnuts out on a paper napkin each.

I eyed them longingly. 'I've just decided to give them up,' I said, but Phin only clicked his tongue.

'You can't do that just when I've found a weakness I can ruthlessly exploit,' he said. 'Besides, you told me yourself you needed a sugar fix in order to concentrate. You'll just get grumpy otherwise.'

Unfortunately that was all too true.

‘Take it as an order, if that helps,’ he said as I hesitated. ‘Keeping me company on the doughnut front is compulsory. If I’d been able to appoint my own PA I’d have put it in the job description.’

What could I do? ‘Well, if you insist...’ I said, giving in.

I sat on one sofa, Phin sat on the other, and we bit into our doughnuts at the same time.

I can’t tell you how good mine tasted. I laughed as I licked sugar from my fingers. ‘Mmm... yum-yum,’ I said, and then stopped as I saw Phin’s arrested expression. ‘What?’

‘Nothing. I was just realising I hadn’t heard you laugh yet,’ he said. ‘You should do it more often.’

My eyes slid away from his. ‘It’s easy to laugh when you’re being force-fed doughnuts,’ I said after a tiny pause. I was very aware of him watching me, and I licked sugar from my lips with the tip of my tongue, suddenly uncomfortable as the silence stretched.

I cleared my throat. ‘What exactly did you want to plan?’ I said.

‘Plan?’ echoed Phin, sounding oddly distracted.

‘You said we needed to do some planning,’ I reminded him.

‘Oh, yes...’ He seemed to recover himself. ‘Well, I had a chat about my role here with Lex last night, and we discussed things in a civilised manner.’

‘Really?’

‘No, not really. We had a knock-down-drag-out fight, and shouted at each other for a good hour. It didn’t quite come to fisticuffs, but it was touch and go at one point. Just like being boys again,’ he said reflectively.

I couldn’t imagine anyone daring to shout at Lex, but then Phin was a self-confessed adrenalin junkie and obviously thrived on danger.

‘What happened?’ I asked a little nervously. I hoped Phin hadn’t enraged his brother so much that we would be both be out of a job.

‘I’d like to claim utter victory, but I’d be lying,’ Phin admitted. ‘Lex wasn’t budging when it came to renegotiating our suppliers, but he did agree eventually that I could start to build up links with communities overseas. In return I had to promise to co-operate fully on the PR front. Apparently he’s lined up a feature in *Glitz* already.’

Phin shrugged as he finished his doughnut and brushed the sugar from his hands. ‘So, not everything I wanted, I’ll admit, but it’s a start.’

‘Well...good,’ I said, feeling a little uncertain. ‘What happens next?’

‘We’d better keep Lex quiet about the PR,’ he decided. ‘Make arrangements for that interview, and talk to Jonathan Pugh about what they want.’

Talk to Jonathan! *Talk to Jonathan.* My stomach clenched with excitement. I had a reason to go and talk to Jonathan! My handwriting was ridiculously shaky as I made a note, although there was no chance of me forgetting that particular task.

Phin was talking about a trip to Cameroon he was planning but I hardly listened. I was too busy imagining my meeting with Jonathan.

This would be my first chance to talk to him properly since that awful evening when he had told me it ‘wasn’t working’ for him. I had seen him around the office, of course, but never alone, and I was sure that he was avoiding me. I’d been holding onto the hope that if we could just spend some time together again he would change his mind.

I would play it cool, of course, I decided. Surely he knew that I was the last person to make a fuss? I would be calm and reasonable and undemanding. What more could he want? *I’ve missed you, Summer*, I imagined him saying as the scales dropped from his eyes and he realised that I was just what he needed after all. *You’ve no idea how much.*

But if he had missed me, why hadn’t he told me? I puzzled over that one. OK, maybe he had just been waiting for the right moment. Or he’d thought I was busy.

It even sounded lame in my fantasy, which wasn’t a good sign.

I suddenly realised that Phin had stopped talking and was looking at me enquiringly. 'So what do you think?' he asked.

'Um...sounds good to me,' I said hastily, without a clue as to what he'd been talking about. 'Great idea.'

His brows lifted in surprise. 'Well, that's good. To be honest, I didn't think you'd go for it.'

'Oh?' I regarded him warily. That sounded ominous. 'Er...what exactly didn't you think I'd like?'

'Staff development in Cameroon,' he prompted, but his eyes had started to dance.

'What?'

Phin tried to look severe, but a smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. 'Summer, is it possible you weren't listening to a word I was saying?'

I squirmed. 'I may have got distracted there for a moment or two,' I admitted feebly.

He tutted. 'That's not like you, Summer. After I gave you sugar, too! I've just explained about my plan to take a group from Head Office to Cameroon for a couple of weeks, to help build a medical centre in one of the villages I know there. It's a great way to start forging links between the company and a community, and everyone who goes will get so much out of it. But you don't need to worry about it yet. You'll have plenty of time to prepare.'

'Hold on,' I said, alarmed by the way this was going. 'Me? Prepare for what?'

'Of course you'll be coming, too,' said Phin, with what I was sure was malicious pleasure in my consternation. 'We're a team, remember? This is our scheme. It's important that you're really part of it. What better way than to go as part of the first group, to find out what it's like out there?'

Chapter Three

‘YOU’RE not serious?’

‘I’m always serious, Summer,’ said Phin. His face was perfectly straight, but I’ve never seen anything less serious than the expression in the blue eyes right then.

I stared at him, aghast. ‘No way am I going to Africa!’

‘Why on earth not?’

‘I don’t like bugs.’

‘There’s more to the rainforest than bugs, Summer.’

‘The rainforest?’ My eyes started from my head. How much had I missed here? ‘Oh, no. No, no, no. The jungle? No way. Absolutely not.’

‘You’d like it.’

‘I wouldn’t,’ I said, still shaking my head firmly from side to side. I’d seen him leading those poor people through enough rainforests on *Into the Wild* to know just what it would be like. They spent their whole time struggling through rampant vegetation, or slithering down muddy slopes in stifling humidity, so that their hair was plastered to their heads and their shirts wringing with sweat.

There was almost always a shot of Phin taking off his shirt and rinsing it in the water. Anne’s favourite bit, in fact. Whenever they reached a river she’d sit up straighter and call out, ‘Shirt alert!’ and sigh gustily at the glimpse of Phin’s lean, muscled body.

I didn’t sigh, of course, but I did look, and even I had to admit—although not to Anne, of course—that it was a body worth sighing over if you were into that kind of thing.

But I certainly wasn’t prepared to trek through the rainforest myself to see it at first hand.

‘It sounds awful,’ I told Phin. ‘Hot and sweaty and crawling with insects...ugh.’

He leant forward, fixing me with that unnerving blue gaze. ‘You say hot and sweaty, Summer,’ he said, rocking his hand in an either/or gesture. ‘I say heat and passion and excitement.’

Heat. Passion. Excitement. They were so not me. But something about the words in Phin’s mouth made me shift uneasily on the sofa. ‘And what on earth makes you think I would like that?’ I asked, with what I hoped was a quelling look.

‘Your mouth.’

It was a bit like missing a step. I had the same lurch of the heart, punching the air from my lungs, the same hollowness in the stomach. My eyes were riveted to Phin’s, and all at once their blueness was so intense that I felt quite dizzy with the effort of not tumbling into it.

‘It just doesn’t go with the rest of you,’ he went on conversationally, while I was still opening and closing the mouth in question. ‘You’re all cool and crisp and buttoned up in your suit. But that mouth...’ He put his head on one side and studied it. ‘It makes me think there’s more to you than that. It makes me think that you might have a secretly sensual side...Am I right?’

‘Certainly not,’ I blustered, unable to think of a suitably crushing reply. ‘I can assure you that there isn’t a single bit of me that wants to go to the rainforest.’

Phin clicked his tongue and shook his head sadly. ‘Summer, Summer...I never thought you’d be a coward. Isn’t it time you stepped out of your comfort zone and explored a different side of yourself?’

‘I’m not into exploration,’ I said coldly. ‘That’s the thing about comfort zones. They’re comfortable. I’ve got no intention of making myself *uncomfortable* if I don’t have to.’

‘But I’m afraid you *do* have to,’ said Phin. ‘You’re on my team, and my team is going to Cameroon, whether you want to or not. So you’d better get used to the idea.’

I looked mutinously back at him. He was smiling, but there was an inflexibility to his jaw, a certain flintiness at the back of the blue eyes, that gave me pause and, like the coward Phin called me, I opted out of an argument just then.

I was sent off to liaise with Human Resources and find candidates for the first staff development trip. Phin said that he would organise everything at the Cameroonian end, but it would be my job to sort out flights, insurance, and all the other practicalities involved in taking a group of people overseas.

I didn't mind doing that as long as I didn't have to go myself. Still, he could hardly force me onto the plane, could he? I would be able to get out of it somehow, I reassured myself, and in the meantime I was much more excited about organising the *Glitz* interview. This was the chance I had dreamed about. At last I had a real reason to be in touch with Jonathan again.

Putting Africa out of my mind, I sat down to compose an e-mail to him. My heart was beating wildly at the mere thought of seeing him again, and I didn't trust my voice on the phone.

All I had to do was suggest that we meet the next day to discuss the *Glitz* feature, but you wouldn't believe how long it took me to produce a couple of lines that struck just the right balance between friendliness and cool professionalism.

I knew Jonathan would want to get involved. *Glitz* was stacked at every supermarket checkout in the land, and a positive piece about Phin taking up a new role at Gibson & Grieve would be fantastic publicity for us. Jonathan wouldn't let a PR opportunity like this go past without making sure Phin's office—i.e. me—was onboard.

Sure enough, he came back straight away.

Good idea. 12.30 tomorrow my office? J

Not a long message, but I read it as carefully as the floweriest of love letters, desperate to decipher the subtext.

Good idea... That was encouraging, wasn't it? I mean, he could have just said *OK*, couldn't he? Or *fine*. So I chose to see some warmth there. Also, he'd signed it with an initial. That was an intimate kind of thing to do. Not as good as if he'd added a kiss, of course, but still better than a more formal *Jonathan*.

But the bit that really got my heart thumping with anticipation was the time. Twelve-thirty. Was it just the only time he could fit me in, or had he chosen it deliberately so that he could suggest lunch?

Naturally I spent the entire afternoon composing a suitable reply. The resulting masterpiece ran as follows: 12.30 tomorrow fine for me. See you then. S. And, yes, my finger did hover over the *x* key for a while before I decided on discretion. I didn't want to appear too pushy. Jonathan would hate that.

I discarded the idea of suggesting lunch myself for the same reason. But just in case Jonathan *was* thinking that we could discuss a PR strategy for Phin over an intimate lunch somewhere, I was determined to be prepared. Normally I'm very confident about putting outfits together, but I spent hours that night, dithering in front of my wardrobe, unable to decide what to wear the next day.

'What do you think?' I asked Anne.

I had dragged her away from yet another repeat of *Into the Wild*—wasn't there anything else on television?—so she wasn't best pleased. She sprawled grouchily on the bed.

'What I *think* is that you're wasting your time,' she said frankly. 'Face it, Summer, Jonathan's just not that into you. He's already made that crystal-clear.'

'He might change his mind,' I said, and even I could hear the edge of desperation in my voice.

'He won't,' said Anne, who had never liked Jonathan. 'Why can't you see it?' She sighed at my stubborn expression. 'For someone so clearthinking, you're incredibly obtuse when it comes to Jonathan,' she told me. 'It's not like he ever made any effort for you, even when you were seeing each other. Why was he so keen to keep your affair a secret? It wasn't like either of you were involved with anyone else.'

'Jonathan didn't think it was appropriate to have a relationship in the office,' I said primly.

'You weren't *having* a relationship,' said Anne, exasperated. 'That was the whole point. You weren't even having much of an affair. You were just sleeping together when it suited Jonathan. If he'd been really keen on you he wouldn't have cared who knew. If he'd loved you he would have wanted to show you off, not hide you away as if he was ashamed of you.'

‘Jonathan’s not the kind of person who shows off,’ I said, aware that I sounded defensive. ‘I like that about him. He’s sensible.’

‘I think you’re mad!’ she said, throwing up her hands. ‘I can’t believe you spend every day with a hot guy like Phin Gibson and you’re still obsessing about Jonathan Pugh!’

‘Phin’s not that hot,’ I said, dismissing Anne’s objections as I always did. ‘And anyway, he’s my boss. And we all know his idea of commitment is making it through to dessert without feeling trapped. I’m certainly not going to waste my time falling for him. That really would be mad! Now, concentrate, Anne. This is important. The twinset or the jacket?’

I held them on hangers in each hand. The cropped jacket was one of my favourites, a deep red with three-quarter-length sleeves, a shawl collar and a nipped-in waist. ‘Too smart?’ I asked dubiously. ‘I don’t want to look as if I’m trying too hard. But maybe the cardigan is a bit casual for the office?’

I’d bought the twinset with my Christmas bonus. A mixture of angora and cashmere, it was so beautifully soft I hadn’t been able to resist it. I liked to take it out and stroke it, as if it were a kitten. To be honest, I wasn’t sure that the colour—a dusty pink—was quite *me*, and I never felt entirely comfortable with the prettiness of it all, so I’d never worn it to the office. It was very different from my usual smartly tailored look, but perhaps different was what I needed.

Anne agreed. ‘The twinset,’ she said without hesitation. ‘It’s a much softer look for you, and if you leave your hair loose as well it’ll practically scream *touch me, touch me*. Even Jonathan won’t be able to miss the point.’

The hair was a step too far for me. If I turned up at work with my hair falling to my shoulders *everyone* would get the point. I might as well hang out a sign saying ‘On the Pull’. So I tied my hair back as usual, but made up with extra care and painted my nails a pretty pink: Bubblegum—much nicer than it sounds. I wore the twinset, with a short grey skirt and heels just a little higher than usual.

Phin whistled when he came in—late, as usual—and saw me. ‘You look very fetching, Summer,’ he said. ‘What’s the occasion?’

‘No occasion,’ I said. ‘I just felt like a change of image.’

‘It’s certainly that,’ he said. ‘You look very...touchable. How many people have stroked you to see if that cardigan is as soft as it looks?’

‘A lot,’ I said with a sigh. I’d lost count of the women who’d stroked my arm and ooh-ed and aah-ed over its softness. I couldn’t blame them, really. Wearing it was like being cuddled by a kitten. ‘It’s a bit disconcerting to have perfect strangers running their hands down your arm.’

‘But you can understand why they do,’ said Phin. ‘In fact, I’m sorry, but I’m just going to have to do it myself. I don’t count as a perfect stranger, do I?’ Without waiting for my reply, he smoothed his own hand down from my shoulder to my elbow, and I felt it through the fine wool like a brand. ‘Incredibly soft,’ he said, ‘and very unexpected.’

Funny—I’d never felt anyone else’s stroke quite like that. My skin was tingling where his fingers had touched me. I swallowed.

‘I think I’ll go back to a suit tomorrow.’

‘That would be a shame,’ said Phin. ‘I like this new look a lot.’

Now all I needed was for Jonathan to like it, too. If the cardigan had the same effect on him, it would be worth feeling self-conscious now.

For the first time I realised that Phin didn’t look quite his normal self either that morning. There was a distinctly frazzled air about him, and his shirt was even more crumpled than usual. Probably partying all night again with Jewel, I thought unsympathetically.

I was sure of it when he suggested having coffee immediately. ‘In keeping with today’s theme, I’ve bought Danish pastries for a change,’ he said. ‘I’m badly in need of some sugar!’

‘Hangover?’ I asked sweetly.

‘Just a very fraught morning,’ said Phin with a humorous look. ‘I never thought I’d be glad to say I had to go to the office!’

He didn't say any more, and I didn't ask. I was too busy checking the clock every couple of minutes and willing the hands to move faster.

I decided that if Jonathan didn't suggest lunch, I would. I would make it very casual. *Do you want to grab a sandwich while we're talking?* Something like that.

I mouthed the words as my fingers rattled over the keyboard. The trouble was that I didn't do casual very well. Look how astounded everyone was when I appeared in a cardigan.

I knew the words would come out sounding stiff and awkward if I didn't get it right, but how was I supposed to practise when Phin was in and out of my office every five minutes, asking how to send a fax from his computer, wanting to borrow my stapler, giving me the dates for the Cameroon trip—about which I was still trying to keep a *very* low profile.

'You know, you could just buzz me and I'd come in to you,' I said, exasperated, in the end.

'I'd rather come out,' said Phin, picking up a couple of spare ink cartridges from my desk and attempting to juggle them. 'I feel trapped if I have to sit down for too long.'

I detoured back from the photocopier to snatch the cartridges out of the air. I put them in a desk drawer and shut it firmly as I sat down.

'Why don't you go for a walk?' I suggested through clenched teeth.

'It's funny you should say that. My producer just e-mailed me to say that we're going back to finish filming in Peru next week, so I'll be doing the last part of the trek again. I'll be away about twelve days.' Now he had my stapler in his hand, and was holding it out to me like a microphone. 'Do you think you'll miss me?'

'Frankly, no,' I said, taking the stapler from him and setting it back on the desk with a click. I glanced at the clock. Just past midday! I didn't have long. 'Are you going out for lunch?' I asked hopefully.

'I haven't got any plans,' said Phin. 'I might just—'

That was when my mother rang. As if I didn't have enough to cope with that morning!

'I just *had* to tell you,' she said excitedly. 'A new galactic portal is opening today!'

I love my mother, but sometimes I do wonder how we can possibly be related. I'd suspect a mixup in the hospital if I hadn't been born into a commune, with who knows how many people dancing and chanting and shaking bells around my mother. It must have been the most godawful racket, and if had been me I would have told them all to go away and leave me to give birth in peace. But of course Mum—or Starlight, as she prefers to be called nowadays—was in her element. The wackier the situation, the more she loves it.

I pinched the bridge of my nose between thumb and forefinger. I knew better than to ask what a galactic portal was.

'That's great, Mum,' I said. 'Look, I can't really talk now—'

But she was already telling me about some ceremony she had taken part in the night before, that apparently involved much channelling of angels and merging of heart chakras.

'Such a beautiful spiritual experience!' she sighed. 'So empowering! The energy vibrations now are quite extraordinary. Can't you *feel* them?'

I resisted the urge to bang my head against my desk.

'Er, no—no, I can't just this moment,' I said, aware that Phin was eavesdropping. I couldn't imagine him caring about the fact that this was obviously a personal phone call, but I hoped he couldn't hear anyway. My mother was deadly serious but, let's face it, she could sound nuts.

'That's because you're not open to the energy, darling,' my mother told me reproachfully. 'Have you been entering the crystal the way I showed you? You must let the love flow through your chakras.'

'Yes, yes, I will,' I said, one eye on the clock. After dragging all morning, it was suddenly whizzing round. If I wasn't careful, I'd be late for Jonathan. 'The thing is, Mum, I'm actually quite busy right now. Can I call you later?'

I'd finally managed to give her a mobile phone, which I paid for by direct debit. I knew she would never keep it topped up herself. My mother preferred spiritual forms of communication to the humdrum practicalities of paying phone bills or keeping track of credit.

'That would be lovely, darling, but I'll be seeing you soon,' she said. 'I'm coming to London, so we can talk properly then.'

Another time I would have been alarmed at her casual mention of a London visit, but I was desperate to get her off the phone before my meeting with Jonathan.

'That's great,' I said instead. 'Bye, then, Mum.'

I caught Phin's eye as I put the phone down. 'That was my mother,' I said unnecessarily.

'Is everything OK?'

'Oh, yes, fine,' I said airily. 'A new galactic portal is opening. You know how it is.'

'Blimey.' Phin sounded impressed. 'Is that good or bad?'

'I've no idea. Whatever it is, it seems to be keeping my mother busy.' I glanced at the clock again. Twelve-fourteen. I should think about getting ready.

I gathered my papers into a file and stood up. Only sixteen minutes and I'd be alone with Jonathan for the first time in weeks. I couldn't wait.

Edging round the desk, I opened my mouth to tell Phin that I was going to a meeting, but before I could make my escape I saw consternation on his face as he looked over my shoulder. I turned to see Jewel Stevens framed in the doorway.

To say that she came in wouldn't do her justice. You could tell that she was an actress. I felt that there should have been a fanfare—or possibly the theme tune from *Jaws*—as she waited until all eyes were on her before making her entrance.

'Hi, baby,' she cooed, her sultry brown eyes on Phin. I was fairly sure that she hadn't registered my existence.

'Jewel!' The appalled expression I had glimpsed had vanished, and he was once more Mr Charm. 'What are you doing here?'

She pouted at him, sweeping a glance up from under impossibly long lashes. 'I just wanted to make sure you weren't too cross with me after this morning.'

'No, no,' said Phin easily. 'I never liked that dinner service anyway.'

Jewel laughed, delighted at her own power, and then her voice dropped seductively. 'I came to make it up to you. To see if you missed me after last night.'

You had to hand it to her. Completely ignoring my presence, she wound her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. And I don't mean a casual peck. I mean a full-on passionate kiss with tongues—well, I assume with tongues. It certainly looked that kind of kiss.

Anyway, by the time she had finished she was plastered all over him and twirling her tongue in his ear. Yuck. I can't bear anyone touching my ears—I'm funny like that—and it made me queasy just looking at her. Just as well I hadn't had my lunch yet.

I averted my gaze. No wonder Phin was looking tired this morning!

'What say we go back to my place?' Jewel was saying huskily. 'We can spend the afternoon together. Just wait until you see what I've got for you, tiger,' she whispered suggestively in his ear, and then—and I swear I'm not making this up—she growled.

Oh, please. I rolled my eyes mentally, only to catch Phin's gaze over her shoulder. He grimaced at me and mouthed an unmistakable *Help!*

I was half tempted to leave him to it, but there was such naked appeal in his eyes that I relented. 'You haven't forgotten your twelve-thirty meeting, have you?' I asked clearly.

'God, yes, I have!' Phin sent me a grateful look as he disentangled himself from her—which took some doing, I can tell you. Managing to free a hand, he slapped his head. 'I'm sorry, Jewel. I can't.'

Jewel's beautiful face darkened. 'Do you have to go? Meetings aren't important. What's it about?'

Another agonised look at me. 'You need to discuss PR strategy,' I supplied obediently.

'Yes, that's right. PR. So I'm afraid it *is* important.' Phin spread his hands disarmingly.

'Then I'll wait for you in your office.' She was twining herself around him again. Honestly, the woman was like an octopus. Phin would just manage to prise one of her hands away and the other would already be sliding round him.

'I think you'd get very bored, Jewel,' he said. 'It's likely to be a long meeting. We're going out to lunch. In fact, we'd better go—hadn't we, Summer?'

I looked at the clock. 'Definitely,' I said, picking up the file. I didn't care what he did with Jewel, but I was meeting Jonathan at twelve-thirty if it killed me.

Jewel's beautiful sullen mouth was turned down. 'When will you be finished?'

'I'm not entirely sure,' said Phin, steering her towards the door. 'I'll give you a ring, OK?'

Still pouting, Jewel insisted on another kiss before she would let him go. 'See you later then, tiger.' She smirked, and sashayed off towards the lifts.

There was silence in the office. I looked at Phin. 'Tiger?'

He had the grace to squirm. 'Believe me, Jewel's the tiger. I'm the baby antelope here.'

'I'm sure you fought madly.'

'If I'd known what I was getting into I would have done,' he said frankly. 'I mean, she's gorgeous, and I've got to admit I was flattered when she made a beeline for me, but she gives a whole new meaning to high-maintenance. Talk about a prima donna! I must have withdrawn my attention for about ten seconds this morning, while I made myself some toast, and my eardrums are still ringing! She was throwing plates at the walls—it was like Greek night down at the local kebab shop. I'm buying plastic ones next time. I never thought I'd say it, but it was a real relief to come into the office and find you as cool and calm as ever.'

I certainly hadn't been feeling cool and calm, I thought, but could only be glad my fluttery nerves hadn't shown.

'Anyway, I owe you one,' he said. 'If you hadn't rescued me I'd have been dragged back to her lair and spat out later, an empty husk of a man.'

'Call it quits for the doughnuts,' I said. I looked at my watch and my heart gave a lurch. Twelve twenty-five. 'I'd better go.'

Phin peered round the doorway to check if Jewel was still waiting for the lift. Apparently she was, because he withdrew his head hastily. 'I might as well come, too,' he said.

I looked at him in dismay. I didn't want him muscling in on my *tête-à-tête* with Jonathan! 'I don't think you'll find it very interesting,' I tried, but Phin was already hustling me down the corridor away from the lifts.

'We'll take the stairs,' he muttered. 'Isn't your meeting about PR, anyway?' he went on once safely out of Jewel's sight. 'I should know what's going on.'

'I'll fill you in on the details afterwards,' I tried.

'No, I'd better come. I wouldn't put it past Jewel to come back and surprise me,' said Phin, with an exaggerated grimace of fear. 'And where would I be without you to rescue me?'

If I resisted any more, Phin would start wondering why I was so keen to be on my own with Jonathan, and that was the last thing I wanted. I could hardly refuse to take my own boss to a meeting, after all, but I was rigid with disappointment as we made our way up to Jonathan's office on the floor above.

Not that Phin seemed to notice. He was in high good humour, having escaped Jewel's clutches, and he breezed into Jonathan's office and completely took over the meeting. I had no need to bring out my line about grabbing a sandwich.

‘Let’s talk over lunch,’ said Phin, and bore us off to a wine bar tucked away in a side street between Covent Garden and the Strand.

So much for my date with Jonathan. I walked glumly beside Phin, listening to him setting out to charm Jonathan, who was obviously delighted at Phin’s unexpected appearance. I was feeling pretty miserable, if you want the truth. I couldn’t fool myself that there had been even a flash of disappointment from Jonathan because he wouldn’t be meeting me alone.

Still, I found myself grabbing onto pathetic crumbs of comfort—like the way he arranged for me to sit next to him at the table. Later, of course, I realised it was so that he could sit face to face with Phin, on the other side, but at the time it was all I had to hang on to.

Not that it did me much good. I wanted to concentrate on Jonathan, but somehow I couldn’t with Phin sitting across the table exuding such vitality that even after what had obviously been a heavy night with Jewel everyone else seemed to fade in comparison to him. Whenever I tried to slide a glance at Jonathan my eyes would snag instead on Phin’s smile, or Phin’s solid forearms, or his hands that fiddled maddeningly with the cutlery as he talked and gesticulated.

The two men couldn’t have been more of a contrast. Jonathan was in a beautifully cut grey suit, which he wore with a blue shirt and dotted silk tie. Anne would have looked at him and said conventional and boring, but to me he was mature and professional. Unlike Phin, whose hair could have done with a cut and who was wearing a casual shirt and chinos in neutral colours and yet still managed to look six times as colourful as anyone else in the room.

‘*Glitz* are planning a major spread,’ Jonathan was explaining to Phin. ‘It’s a great opportunity for us to promote a more accessible image. Market research shows that Gibson & Grieve are still seen as elitist, so for the new stores we need to present ourselves as ordinary and family-friendly. Your image as a celebrity will be very valuable to us, but up to now you’ve been associated with the wild. What we want is to associate you with the home, and we’d like *Glitz* to interview you at your house, so that their readers get an idea of you in a domestic setting.’

Jonathan paused delicately. ‘If you have a girlfriend, it would be very good to get her involved as well—perhaps even give the impression that you’re thinking of settling down. I did hear that you’re going out with Jewel Stevens...?’ He trailed off, more than a touch of envy in his tone.

Phin’s eyes met mine. ‘I’m not involving Jewel,’ he said with a grin. ‘It might give her all the wrong ideas—and besides, I wouldn’t have any crockery left by the time *Glitz* turned up. I’m reduced to eating off paper plates as it is!’

‘She sounds very feisty,’ said Jonathan. I don’t know if he was aiming for a man-about-town air or humour, but either way it didn’t quite work.

I glanced at Phin and away again.

‘Feisty is one way of putting it,’ he said. ‘Sorry, Jonathan, but I’m going to have to do this as single guy.’

Jonathan looked disappointed. I got the feeling that he would have liked to have talked more about Jewel. ‘Well, perhaps you could give the impression that you’re thinking of settling down without mentioning any names,’ he suggested.

‘I’ll do my best.’

‘What about your house? Do we need to redecorate for you?’

‘Redecorate? I thought the article was supposed to be showing me as I am at home?’

‘No, it’s to show you at the kind of home we want readers to associate with Gibson & Grieve,’ Jonathan corrected him. He turned to me. ‘Summer, you’d better check it out. You’ll know what needs to be done.’

‘She’ll just tidy me up,’ Phin protested.

‘Summer’s very competent,’ said Jonathan.

Competent. You know, when you dream of what the man of your dreams will say about you, you think about words like *beautiful, amazing, sexy, passionate, incredible*. You never long for him to tell you're competent, do you?

'No redecorating,' said Phin firmly. 'If you make it all stylish it'll look and seem false, and that would do our image more harm than good. Summer can come and keep me on the straight and narrow in the interview, but I'm not changing the house. If you want readers to see what my home is like, we can show them. It's not as if I live in squalor.'

My only hope was that Phin might leave us after lunch, but, no, he insisted on walking back with us. So I never had one moment alone with Jonathan. I had to say goodbye to him in the lift as Phin and I got out on the floor below.

And that was my big date that I'd looked forward to so much. A complete waste of make-up. Jonathan hadn't even commented on my cardigan.

Phin looked nervously around the office when we got back. 'She's gone—phew!' He wiped his brow in mock relief. 'Thanks again for earlier, Summer. It's good to know you can lie when you need to! If Jewel comes in again, I'm not here, OK?'

I was too cross about Jonathan to be tactful. I was even beginning to feel some sympathy for Jewel. At least she had the gumption to go for what she wanted. Jonathan evidently found her feistiness appealing. Perhaps I should have tried smashing a few plates.

'If you don't want to see her again, you should tell her yourself...tiger,' I said sharply, and Phin winced.

'I'll try,' he said. 'But Jewel isn't someone who listens to what she doesn't want to hear. Still, I'm going away in a few days,' he remembered cheerfully. 'She'll soon lose interest if I'm not around.'

Chapter Four

HE LEFT for Peru a week later. 'How long will you be away?' I asked him.

'We should be able to wrap it up in twelve days.' Phin looked up from the computer screen with a grin. 'Why? Do you think you'll miss me after all?'

'No,' I said crushingly. 'I just need to know when to arrange a date with *Glitz*.'

But the funny thing was that I *did* miss him a bit. I realised I'd got used to him being in the office, managing to seem both lazy and energetic at the same time, and without him everything seemed strangely flat.

I told myself that I enjoyed the peace and quiet, and that it was a relief to be able to get on with some work without being teased or constantly interrupted by frivolous questions or made to stop and eat doughnuts—OK, I didn't mind that bit *so* much. I had a whole week without Phin juggling with my stapler and my sticky note dispenser, or messing around with the layout of my desk, which I know quite well he only did to annoy.

He was always picking things up and then putting them down in the wrong place, or at an odd angle, and he seemed to derive endless amusement from watching me straighten them. Sometimes I'd try and ignore it, but it was like trying to ignore an itch. After a while my hand would creep out to rearrange whatever it was he had dislodged, at which point Phin would shout, 'Aha! I knew you couldn't do it!'

I mean, what kind of boss carries on like that? It was deeply unprofessional, as I was always pointing out, but that only made Phin laugh harder.

So all in all I was looking forward to having the office to myself for a few days, but the moment he'd gone I didn't quite know what to do with myself.

That first morning on my own I went down to the kitchen to make myself some coffee. I'd got out of the habit of buying myself a doughnut, I realised. Phin always bought them now, and I'd forgotten that I wouldn't have anything to have with my coffee. It wouldn't kill me, but the lack of sugar just added to my grouchiness as I carried my mug back to my desk.

Khalid from the postroom was just on his way out of my office. 'I've left the mail on your desk,' he told me. 'You've got a Special Delivery, too.'

I'd ordered a scanner the day before. The supplies department must have moved quickly for once, I thought, but as I set down my mug I saw a small confectionery box sitting in front of my keyboard. 'Summer Curtis, Monday' was scribbled on the top. Not a scanner, then.

Puzzled, I opened it up. Inside, sitting on a paper napkin, was a doughnut.

There was a business card, too. I pulled it out. It had Phin's name and contact details on one side. On the other he had scrawled, 'I didn't want to think of you without your sugar fix. P x'

My throat felt ridiculously tight. Nobody had ever done anything as thoughtful for me before.

Of course it didn't mean anything, I was quick to remind myself. It was just part of Phin's pathological need to make everyone like him. His charm was relentless.

But still I found myself—annoyingly—thinking about him, about where he was and what he was doing, and when I picked up the phone and heard his voice my heart gave the most ridiculous lurch.

'Just thought I'd check in,' said Phin. 'I hardly know what to do with myself. I'm so used to you telling me what to do and where to be all day. I've got used to being organised. Are you missing me yet?'

'No,' I lied, because I knew he'd be disappointed if I didn't. 'But thank you for the doughnut. How on earth did you organise it?'

'Oh, that was easy. I had a word with Lucia—who, by the way, smiled at me the other day, so you're not the only favourite now—and I asked her to send you a selection, so that you get something different every day I'm away. I think we're in a doughnut rut.'

‘I like my rut,’ I said, but I might as well have spared my breath. Phin was determined that I would try something different.

Sure enough, the next day an apricot Danish arrived at half past ten, and even though I was determined not to like it as much as a doughnut, I had to admit that it was delicious.

The next day brought an almond croissant, and the one after that an apple strudel, and then an éclair. Pastries I’d never seen before appeared on my desk, and I found myself starting to glance at the clock after ten and wondering what I’d have with my coffee that day. I’d try and guess what would be in the box—vanilla turnover? *Pain au chocolat*?—but I never got it right.

Inevitably word got round about my special deliveries. I wasn’t the only one who was guessing. I heard afterwards they were even taking bets on it in Finance.

‘I wish my boss would send me pastries,’ my friend Helen grumbled. ‘You’d think in Food Technology it would be a perk of the job. You are lucky. Phin’s so lovely, isn’t he?’

I heard that a lot, and although I always said that he was a nightmare to work for, the truth was that I was finding it hard to remember just how irritating he was. When he walked into the office the following Tuesday, my heart jumped into my throat and for one panicky moment I actually forgot how to breathe.

He strolled in, looking brown and fit, his eyes bluer than ever, and instantly the air was charged with a kind of electricity. Suddenly I was sharply aware of everything: of colour of my nails flickering over the keyboard—Cherry Ripe, if you’re interested—of the computer’s hum, of the feel of the glasses on my nose, the light outside the window. It was as if the whole office had snapped into high definition.

‘Good morning,’ I said, and Phin peered at me in surprise.

‘Good God, what was that?’

‘What was what?’ I asked, thrown.

‘No, no...it’s OK. For a moment there I thought I saw a smile.’

‘I’ve smiled before,’ I protested.

‘Not like that. It was worth coming home for!’ Phin came to sit on the edge of my desk and picked up the stapler. ‘I’m not going to ask if you missed me because you’ll just look at me over your glasses and say no.’

‘I would have said a bit—until you started fiddling,’ I said, removing the stapler from his grasp and setting it back into its place. ‘But now I’ve remembered how irritating you are.’

Deliberately, Phin reached out and pushed the stapler out of alignment with one finger. ‘Irritating? Me?’

‘Stop it,’ I said, slapping his hand away. I straightened the stapler once more. ‘Haven’t you got some other trip to go on? I’m sure they must need you in Ulan Bator or Timbuktu or somewhere.’

‘Nope. Next time you’re coming with me.’ He had started on the scissors now, snapping them at me as he talked. ‘So, what’s the news here?’

‘We’ve set up your *Glitz* interview for Thursday,’ I told him. ‘The interviewer is called Imelda Ross, and she’s bringing a photographer with her. They’ll be at your house at ten, so can you please make sure you’re ready for them?’

‘That’s an appointment, not news,’ he said. ‘What’s the gossip? Has Lex run off with a lap dancer? Has Kevin been caught siphoning funds to some offshore bank account?’ Kevin was our Chief Financial Officer and famously prudent.

‘Nothing so exciting, I’m afraid. Everyone’s been doing what they always do.’

Actually, that wasn’t *quite* true. Jonathan was looking much more relaxed these days. I had shared a lift with him a few days earlier, and instead of being stiff and awkward he had smiled and chatted about the spell of fine weather.

I’d replayed the conversation endlessly, of course, and was hugging the hope that he might be warming to me again. Between that and Phin’s pastries I’d been happier than I’d been for ages—

but I didn't think that would be of much interest to Phin, even if I had been prepared to confess it, which I wasn't.

'According to the gossip mags, Jewel Stevens has got a new man,' I offered instead.

'*Has* she? Excellent! I was hoping she'd lost interest.'

'She rang looking for you a couple of times, but I didn't think you'd want to speak to her in Peru, so I said you were out of contact.'

'Summer, you're a treasure,' he told me, putting down the scissors at last and digging around at his feet. 'So, even though you haven't missed me, you deserve a reward,' he said as he produced a paper bag. 'I've brought us something special to celebrate my return.'

The 'something special' turned out to be a cream doughnut each. 'I didn't feel we knew each other well enough to tackle one of these before,' he said as I eyed it dubiously, wondering how on earth I was going to eat it elegantly.

'I defy you to eat one of these without making a mess,' Phin added, reading my expression without any difficulty.

I couldn't, of course. I started off taking tiny nibbles, until he couldn't bear it any more.

'Get on with it, woman,' he ordered. 'Stop messing around at the edges. Take a good bite and enjoy it! That's not a bad recipe for life, now I come to think of it,' he said, watching as I sank my teeth obediently into the middle of the doughnut and cream spurted everywhere. 'The doughnut approach to living well. I might write a book about it.'

'Make sure you include a section on how to clean up all the mess,' I said, dabbing at my mouth with my fingers, torn between embarrassment and laughter. I spotted a blob of cream on my skirt. 'Ugh, I've got cream *everywhere*!'

'The best things in life are messy,' said Phin.

'Not as far as I'm concerned,' I said, as I carefully wiped the cream from my skirt. 'But maybe I'll make an exception for cream doughnuts. It was delicious!'

With a final lick of my fingers, I got to my feet. 'I'd better get back to work,' I said.

Phin got up, too. His smile had faded as he watched me eat the doughnut, and his expression was oddly unreadable for once. He was looking at me so intently that I hesitated.

'What?' I asked.

'You've missed a bit,' he said and, reaching out, he wiped a smear of cream from my cheek, just near my mouth. Then he offered me his finger to lick.

I stared at it, mesmerised by the vividness with which I could imagine my tongue against his finger. I could practically taste the sweetness of the cream, feel the contrast between its smoothness and the firmness of his skin, and a wave of heat pulsed up from my toes to my cheeks and simmered in my brain. For one awful moment I was afraid that the top of my head would actually blow off.

Horried by how intimate the mere idea seemed, and about Phin—my boss!—of all people, I found myself taking a step back and shaking my head at the temptation.

Phin's eyes never left my mouth as he licked the cream off himself.

'Yum, yum,' he said softly.

I know, it doesn't sound very erotic, but my heart was thudding so loudly I was sure he must hear it. My pulse roared in my ears and I had a terrible feeling that I might literally be steaming. I had to get out of the room before Phin noticed.

I cleared my throat with an effort. 'I...er...I should let you get on. Haven't you got a meeting now?'

'I have?'

'Yes, in HR. You wanted me to set it up for you, to talk to Jane about staff development and the Cameroon trip. It's in the diary.' I could feel myself babbling as I backed away towards the door. 'I'll forward the e-mail to you...'

Somehow I made it back to my desk, and had to spend a few minutes just breathing very carefully.

I felt very odd, almost shaken. I had never thought about Phin that way before. I had never thought about Jonathan like that either, to be honest. I loved Jonathan, but he was safe. This wild pounding of my blood felt dark and rude and dangerous, and I didn't like it.

I pulled myself together at last. A momentary aberration, I told myself. A huge fuss about nothing. I mean, we hadn't even touched. A flick of Phin's finger against my cheek. That was all that had happened. Nothing at all, in fact.

I was just...hot. Was this what a hot flush was like? I wondered wildly. If so, I wasn't looking forward to the menopause at all.

Jittery and unsettled, I took myself off to the Ladies' to run cold water over my wrists. Someone had once told me that was the best way to cool yourself down, and I had no intention of splashing cold water all over my make-up. I wasn't in *that* much of a state.

I met Lex's PA, Monique, on her way in at the same time. Typical, isn't it, that the moment you're desperate to be alone people you don't normally see for ages start popping out of the woodwork? This wasn't even Monique's floor.

I was afraid that she would comment on how hot and flustered I looked, but fortunately she didn't seem to notice anything amiss. Reassured, I stopped to chat.

See, I told myself, all I needed was a little normality. It was a relief to talk about ordinary stuff, and I began to feel myself again.

'So what's the gossip?' I asked Monique, remembering Phin's question earlier. Monique was famously discreet, but if she did have any news it would be good to be able to pass a titbit on to Phin. At least it would be something to say other than *Could we try that cream on the finger thing again?*

'Funny you should say that.' Monique glanced around and lowered her voice, even though there was no one else in there with us. 'Have you seen Jonathan recently?'

Phin and the cream were instantly forgotten. 'A couple of times,' I said, as casually as I could. My poor old heart was working overtime this morning. Now it was pattering away at the mention of Jonathan. 'Why?'

'He's a changed man, isn't he?'

I thought of how relaxed he had looked the last time I'd seen him. 'He seems to be in a good mood.'

'Yes, and we all know why now!'

'We do?' I asked cautiously.

Monique grinned. 'Our steady, sensible Jonathan is in love.'

Not content with pattering, my heart polevaulted into my throat, where it lodged, hammering wildly. 'In love?' I croaked.

She nodded. 'And with Lori, of all people! I wouldn't have thought she was his type at all, but they're all over each other and they're not even bothering to try and hide it. Oh, well, at least he's happy.' She looked at her watch. 'I'd better get on. Lex will be wondering what's happened to me.'

There was a rushing in my ears. I think I must have said something, but I've no idea what, and Monique waggled her fingers in farewell as she hurried off, oblivious to the fact that my world had come crashing down around me.

Shaking, feeling sick, I shut myself in a cubicle and put my head between my knees. *I mustn't cry, I mustn't cry, I mustn't cry*, I told myself savagely. I had the rest of the afternoon to get through, and if I cried my mascara would run and everyone would know my heart was broken.

I don't know how long I sat there, but it can't have been that long. I knew I had to get back. Lifting my head, I drew long, painful breaths to steady myself. I could do this.

Thank God for make-up. I reapplied lipstick very carefully and studied my expression. My eyes held a stark expression, but you'd have had to know me very well to spot that anything was

wrong. Inside I felt ragged and raw, and I walked stiffly, so as not to jar anything, but outwardly I was perfectly composed.

I made it back to my desk and sank down in my chair, staring blankly at the computer screen. I just had to sit there for another few hours and then I'd be able to go home. Phin had gone out to his lunch with Jane, the director of HR, so I was spared him at least. Those blue eyes might be full of laughter but they didn't miss much.

By the time he came back it was after four, and I had had plenty of time to compose myself. I ached all over with the effort of not falling apart, and my brain felt as if it had an elastic band snapped round it, but I was able to meet his gaze when he came in.

'How was your meeting?' I asked, knowing Phin would never guess what it cost me to sound normal.

'Very useful. Jane's great, isn't she? We talked about Cameroon and she's all for a trial visit to see—' He broke off and frowned. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing.' My throat was so tight I had to force the word out.

'Don't try and deny it,' said Phin. 'That stapler is a millimetre out of alignment. And...' he peered closer '...yes, I do believe that's a chip in your nail polish!' The laughter faded from his voice and from his face. 'Come on, I can see in your eyes that something's wrong. What is it?'

'It's...nothing.' I couldn't look at him. I stared fiercely away, pressing my lips together in one straight line.

'You're not the kind of person that gets upset about nothing,' he said gently. Going back to the door, he closed it. 'Tell me,' he said.

There was a great, tangled knot of hurt in my throat. I knew if I even tried to say Jonathan's name I would break down completely, and I wasn't sure I could bear the humiliation. 'I...can't.'

'OK,' he said. 'You don't need to say anything. But we're going out. Get your coat.'

I was too tired and miserable to object. He took me to a dimly lit bar, just beginning to fill with people leaving work early. Like us, I supposed. We found a table in a corner and Phin looked around for a waiter.

'What would you like?' he asked. 'A glass of wine?'

God, I was so predictable, I realised. No wonder Jonathan didn't want me. Even Phin could see that I was the kind of girl who sensibly just had a small glass of white wine before going home. I was boring.

'Actually, I'd like a cocktail,' I said with a shade of defiance.

'Sure,' said Phin. 'What kind?'

I picked up the menu on the table and scanned it. I would love to have been the kind of girl who could order Sex on a Beach or a Long Slow Screw Against a Wall without sounding stupid, but I wasn't. 'A pomegranate martini,' I decided, choosing one at random.

His mouth flickered, but he ordered it straightfaced from the waiter, along with a beer for himself.

When it came, it looked beautiful—a rosy pink colour with a long swirl of orange peel curling through it. I was beginning to regret my choice by then, but was relieved to take a sip and find it delicious. Just like fruit juice, really.

I was grateful to Phin for behaving quite normally. He chatted about his meeting with Jane, and I listened with half an ear as I sipped the martini which slipped down in no time. I even began to relax a bit.

'Another one?' Phin asked, beckoning the waiter over.

About to say that I shouldn't, I stopped myself. Sod it, I thought. I had nothing to go home for. 'Why not?' I said instead.

When the second martini arrived, I took another restorative pull through the straw and sat back. I was beginning to feel pleasantly fuzzy around the edges.

‘Thank you,’ I said on a long sigh. ‘This was just what I needed.’

‘Can you talk about it yet?’

Phin’s voice was warm with sympathy. The funny thing was that it didn’t feel at all awkward to be sitting there with him in the dim light. Maybe it was the martini, but all at once he felt like a friend, not my irritating boss. Only that morning the graze of his finger had reduced me to mush, but it was too bizarre to remember that now.

I sighed. ‘Oh, it’s just the usual thing.’

‘Boyfriend trouble?’

‘He’s not my boyfriend any more. The truth is, he was never really my boyfriend at all,’ I realised dully. ‘But I loved him. I still do.’

In spite of myself, my eyes started to fill with tears. ‘He told me before Christmas that he wanted out, that he didn’t think it was working,’ I went on, my voice beginning to wobble disastrously. ‘I’d been hoping and hoping that he’d change his mind, and I let myself believe that he was beginning to miss me, but I just found out today that he’s going out with Lori and he’s mad about her and I don’t think I can bear it.’

I couldn’t stop the tears then. It was awful. I hate crying, hate that feeling of losing control, but there was nothing I could do about it.

Phin saw me frantically searching for tissue, and silently handed me a paper napkin that had come with the bowl of nuts.

‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry,’ I wept into it.

‘Hey, don’t be sorry. It sucks. Who is this guy, anyway?’ he said. ‘Do you want me to go and kill him for you? Would that help?’

‘I don’t think Lex would be very pleased if you did.’ I sniffed into the napkin. ‘He’d have to find a new PR person.’

Phin’s brows crawled up to his hairline. ‘Are we talking about *Jonathan Pugh*?’

I could see him trying to picture Jonathan’s appeal. I know Jonathan isn’t the sexiest looking guy in the world, but it was about more than looks.

‘Jonathan’s everything I ever wanted,’ I told him tearfully. ‘He’s a bit older than me, I know, but he’s so steady, so reliable. He seems reserved, but I always had the feeling that he’d be different in private, and he is. I never thought I’d have a chance with him, but then there was the summer party...’

I’ll never forget my starry-eyed amazement when Jonathan came over to talk to me, and suggested going for a quiet drink away from all the noise. I’d been bedazzled by all my dreams coming true at once.

‘I was so happy just to be with him,’ I told Phin. Now I’d started talking, it was as if I couldn’t stop. I had to blurt it all out. I gulped at my martini. ‘I’d never been in love before, not like that, and when I was with him it felt like I had everything I’d ever wanted. I didn’t mind that he wanted to keep our relationship a secret—to me that was just him being sensible, and I loved him for that, too. But he’s not being sensible with Lori,’ I said bitterly. ‘He’s not keeping *her* a secret. He doesn’t care who knows how he feels about her.’

My mouth began to tremble wildly again. ‘It wasn’t that he didn’t want to have a proper relationship. He just didn’t want *me*. He wanted someone like Lori, who’s pretty and feminine.’

‘I bet she isn’t prettier than you,’ said Phin.

‘She is. If you saw her, you’d know.’

I’d never liked Lori. She’s the kind of woman who gives the impression of being frail and shy and helpless, but who always manages to get her own way. Men hang around, asking her if she’s all right the whole time. As far as I knew Lori had no female friends—always a bad sign, in my opinion—but even I had to admit she was very pretty. She was tiny, with a tumble of blonde curls, huge blue eyes and a soft, breathy little voice.

Phin wouldn’t be able to resist her any more than Jonathan had.

‘OK, maybe she’s pretty,’ Phin allowed, ‘but you’re *beautiful*, Summer.’

‘I’m not.’ I blew my nose on the napkin. ‘I’m ordinary. I know that.’

He laughed at that. ‘You are so not ordinary, Summer! You’ve got fantastic bones and beautiful skin and your eyes are incredible. And don’t get me started on your mouth... Your trouble is that you don’t make the most of yourself.’

‘I do,’ I protested, still tearfully. ‘Look at me.’ I gestured down at my suit. Even in the depths of my misery I knew it was better not to draw attention to my face right then. I’m not a pretty crier. Maybe the likes of Lori can cry without their skin going blotchy and their eyes puffy and their nose running, but I couldn’t. ‘I always take trouble over my clothes,’ I pointed out. ‘I never go out without make-up. What more can I do?’

‘You could let your hair down sometimes,’ said Phin, lifting a hand as if to touch it, but changing his mind at the last minute. ‘It looks as if it would be beautiful, thick and silky. It would make you look more...’ he searched for the right word ‘...accessible,’ he decided in the end, and I remembered what Anne had said about changing my image by letting my hair hang loose.

But what difference would it have made? ‘What’s the point in looking accessible when I’m boring?’ I asked despairingly. ‘Jonathan still wouldn’t want me.’

‘He must have wanted you at some point or he wouldn’t have got involved with you in first place.’

‘No, he didn’t.’ I was just starting to accept the truth. ‘I flung myself at him, and I must have been convenient, but he never meant it to be more than that. He didn’t want *me*. And why should he? I’m boring and sensible and practical,’ I raged miserably, remembering now—too late—some of the things Jonathan had said. In hindsight, it was all so obvious. Only I hadn’t wanted to see the truth before.

‘Jonathan doesn’t want someone as competent as he is. He doesn’t want someone who can look after herself. He wants someone needy and feminine—like Lori. Someone he can look after. But I can’t do needy. I’m too used to dealing with everything, ever since I was child. I can’t help it, but Jonathan thinks it makes me bossy. He used to make comments about it. I thought he was being affectionate, but now I wonder if it really bothered him. Funny how a man is never bossy, isn’t it?’ I added in a bitter aside. ‘A man is always assertive or controlling, but never, ever bossy.’

‘I don’t think you’re bossy,’ said Phin. ‘You’re practical, which is a very different thing.’

‘Jonathan thinks I am. He just got bored with me. All that time I was telling myself how much I loved him, he was losing interest. I should have realised that he hadn’t invested anything in the relationship. He didn’t even leave a toothbrush at my flat. When he ended it, there was nothing to discuss.’

Oh, dear, here came the tears again. I groped around for the wet napkin until Phin found me another, and I scrubbed furiously at my cheeks before drawing a shuddering breath.

‘When Monique told me about Lori today, it just made me realise what a fool I’ve been about everything,’ I said. ‘I’d had this dream in my head for so long, and it was all wrapped up with being with Jonathan and feeling safe, but I should have known it was too good to be true,’ I said wretchedly. ‘He’d never want someone like me.’

‘But you still want him?’

I nodded. ‘I love him,’ I said, my voice catching.

‘Then I think you should go out and get him back,’ said Phin. ‘I didn’t have you down as someone who would give up as easily as that. What have you been doing since you split up?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Precisely, and look where it’s got you. You’re miserable, and Jonathan’s dating a woman named after a truck. Lori? I mean, how serious can he be?’

I looked at him. ‘That’s a pathetic joke,’ I said, but I managed a watery smile even so.

‘I’m just saying you shouldn’t give up,’ Phin said. ‘Your trouble is that you’re too subtle. I had lunch with you both the other day, and I didn’t have a clue that there had been anything at all between

you. I wouldn't be surprised if Jonathan thinks you don't care one way or the other. I suggest we have another drink,' he went on, gesturing for the waitress to bring another round, 'and plan your strategy.'

I considered that, my brow creased with the effort of thinking after two martinis. 'You think I should tell Jonathan how I feel?'

'Absolutely not!' Phin tutted. 'Really, Summer, you haven't got a clue, have you? If you get heavy on him he'll panic and think you're about to drag him off to the suburbs via the nearest registry office—which is what you want, of course, but this is not the time to tell him that. You've got to reel him in first.'

'Well, what do you suggest, if you're such an expert?' I asked, wiping mascara away with the napkin. What was the point of waterproof mascara if you couldn't cry? I would have to write and complain. 'If I tell him how I feel, I'm too intense. If I don't, he won't notice because I'm so boring and predictable.' I lapsed back into gloom once more.

Another beer and a fresh martini were placed on the table. Phin pushed my glass towards me. 'For a start, you've got to get this idea that you're boring out of your head,' he told me sternly. 'You're smart, you're funny—not always deliberately, I'll grant you—and you're sexy as hell.'

Chapter Five

I STARED at him. *Sexy?* I was sensible, practical, reliable. Not sexy.

Jewel was sexy, pressing herself against him and sticking her tongue in his ear. Not me, with my glasses on a chain and my neat suits. Phin was either being kind or making fun of me.

For a fleeting moment I remembered the way I had felt as he'd wiped that blob of cream from my cheek, but then I pushed the memory aside. It was too incongruous.

'All you've got to do is make Jonathan appreciate what an incredible woman you are,' said Phin.

Yeah, right. 'How?' I asked, with a trace of sullenness. 'He never appreciated how "incredible" I was before.'

'Make him jealous,' said Phin promptly. 'I know guys like Jonathan. Hell, I *am* a guy like Jonathan, and if I saw you with another man I'd be intrigued at the very least. I guarantee Jonathan would start to remember what he saw in you if there's another guy sniffing around and making it obvious that he thinks you're incredible.'

'Well, yes, brilliant idea,' I said, picking up my glass. The third martini was definitely kicking in now. 'There's just one problem. I don't have another guy.'

'Start dating again,' said Phin, as if it was obvious.

'Oh, sure,' I said sarcastically. The martinis had made me bolshy, but it was better than snivelling. 'That's easy. I'll just snap my fingers and produce a man.' I patted my pockets. 'I'm sure I left one or two lying around somewhere...'

Phin looked at me appreciatively. 'I see you're feeling better,' he said. 'Look, it can't be that hard for a girl who looks like you to find a guy. Go and stand at the bar and smile, and I bet they'll be falling over themselves. Better still, eat a cream doughnut.'

There was a tiny silence. I flickered a glance at Phin. He was smiling, but the blue eyes held that odd expression again—the one that made me feel as if the world was tilting out of kilter.

'You have no idea, do you?' he said.

I swallowed. I didn't want to remember that disconcerting wave of heat. I didn't want to think about what it meant.

'I don't think it would be that easy,' I told him, my eyes sliding away from his. 'And even if I *did* find a boyfriend who wouldn't mind the fact that I don't actually want to be with him, when would Jonathan ever find out?'

'I see what you mean. Someone at work would be better.'

'Except if it was someone at work Jonathan would just feel sorry for him.' My confidence was crumbling again. Quick, it was time for another gulp of pomegranate martini.

'Not if it was obvious he was mad about you.'

'Oh, so now I have to find a boyfriend who can act, too? I'd have to hire him, and where do you suggest I look?'

'What about right here?'

I looked around the bar. 'How do I know if any of these guys can act? Well, the barmen are probably resting actors, but I'd never dare talk to them—they're far too cool.'

'No, *here*,' said Phin, tapping his chest.

My jaw dropped. 'You?'

'There's no need to look like that! I'm perfect.'

'I know you think so,' said the third martini, and Phin grinned.

'I do think so, and so will you if you think about it,' he said. 'Jonathan can hardly not notice if you're with me, and I think you'll find I'm not a bad actor. They still talk about my Ugly Sister in the school pantomime and, according to my mother, I stole the show in the nativity play as the sheep that fell over when it tried to kneel in front of the manger.'

‘I don’t know why you’re not in line for an Oscar,’ I said, ‘but why would you want to squander your great talent on me?’

‘I like you,’ said Phin simply, ‘even if you are a bit sharp with me sometimes. If I can help you, I will. Besides, it might work out quite well for me from a PR point of view.’

I frowned. ‘How do you work that out?’

‘Think about it. Jonathan was very keen to push my family credentials in the *Glitz* interview. How better to do that than pretend I’m about to settle down with you? You can hang around and look good for the article, which means that even if Jonathan hasn’t got the idea before, he definitely will then. A double whammy.’

He sat back smugly while I sipped my martini and considered what he had said. Surely it couldn’t be as easy as Phin seemed to believe?

‘What about Jewel?’ I prevaricated.

‘What about her? You said yourself that she’s been going out with someone else, poor guy. I’m well out of that one!’ said Phin. ‘I wouldn’t have had a plate left in the house. But now I come to think of it,’ he went on, ‘it might not be a bad idea to let her see I’m unavailable now. Just in case she’s thinking she might pick up where we left off before I went to Peru.’

‘I can’t believe you’d have much trouble finding someone else to make sure she gets the point,’ I demurred. ‘There must be much more likely types who would give the impression that you’re ready to settle down.’

‘I wouldn’t want to give anyone the wrong idea,’ said Phin, not bothering to deny it. It would have been annoying if he had, but I was annoyed anyway. ‘I’m not the settling down kind,’ he said. ‘At least with you we’d both know it was just a pretence.’

I blame it on the pomegranate martinis, but it was starting to make a weird kind of sense.

‘No one would believe that I was really your girlfriend,’ I said. ‘You’re used to going out with actresses and models.’

‘Which is why they’ll think I’m serious if they see me with you.’

My, this was doing wonders for my ego.

‘It would only be for a few weeks,’ Phin was saying. ‘You wouldn’t have to do much. Just be seen out at a few parties with me and hang around looking like a girlfriend for the interview. Then we can seem to break it off later, so I can carry on avoiding commitment while you walk off into the sunset with Jonathan.’

‘Do you really think it would make a difference with Jonathan?’ I asked wistfully.

‘Listen, do you really want him back or not?’

‘I really do.’

‘Even though he’s made you feel boring and unlovable?’

‘I love him,’ I said, dangerously close to getting weepy again.

‘OK,’ said Phin, ‘if Jonathan is what you really want, then I think you deserve what you want. The first thing is to make him realise that you’re not boring at all, that you’re quite capable of being spontaneous when you’ve got the right incentive. Make him think that it’s *his* fault you never had much fun with him—which it probably is, by the way. We’re going to convince him that we’re having a raging affair, and he’s sure to sit up and take notice.’

‘How do we go about having an affair?’ I said doubtfully. I couldn’t see myself being convincing as someone in the throes of a raging affair somehow. It wasn’t the kind of thing I would do. It wasn’t the kind of thing I liked, to be honest. It smacked too much of losing control and abandoning yourself. I liked things calm and steady and *safe*.

‘Well, let’s see,’ said Phin with a grin. ‘I could take you back to my place. We’ll say it’s just for a drink, but we won’t be able to keep our hands off each other. The moment we’re through the front door I’ll start kissing you, and you’ll kiss me back. You’ll fall back against the door and pull me with you—’

‘I don’t mean really have an affair,’ I interrupted, scarlet. I was horrified at how vividly I could imagine it, and there was a strange thumping deep inside me. Jonathan had never lost control like that. I was beginning to feel very odd, but I hoped very much that was down to the martinis. ‘I meant... how would we make everyone believe it? We can hardly send round an e-mail announcement that we’re sleeping together.’

Phin didn’t seem to think that would be a problem. ‘We’ll go to a couple of parties, maybe leave work together—or even better arrive together—and word will get round in no time. If you can contrive to blush whenever my name is mentioned in the Ladies’, or wherever you girls all congregate, so much the better. And remember how besotted I’m going to be with you,’ he went on. ‘I won’t be able to keep my hands off you—especially when Jonathan is around. I don’t think it will take long before he gets the point.’

I buried my nose in my martini, trying not to wonder what it would be like to have Phin putting his arm around me, sliding his hand down my back. Would he twine his fingers around mine? Would he stroke my hair?

Would he *kiss* me?

The breath rushed out of my lungs at the thought. *Would* he? And if he did what would it be like?

My heart was thudding painfully—*ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom*—and I had to moisten my lips before I could speak. This was about Jonathan, remember?

‘But if Jonathan thinks I’m with you, he’ll assume I’m not interested in him any more,’ I objected.

‘Once he starts paying attention—and he will—you’ll have to let him know that you just might be tempted away from me. If you can do it without seeming too keen. You might have to spend some time alone together...’ Phin snapped his fingers. ‘Of course! Jonathan can come to Cameroon. If you can’t seduce him back on a steamy tropical night, Summer, I wash my hands of you!’

I thought about it as I sucked on the long curl of orange peel which was all that was left at the bottom of my glass. Apart from the reminder of Cameroon, which I’d been rather hoping he’d forgotten about, I was struggling to think of a good argument as to why Phin’s idea wouldn’t work.

The third martini wasn’t helping. I was feeling distinctly fuzzy by now, and finding it hard to concentrate.

Phin followed my gaze to the empty glass. ‘Had enough?’ he asked, and I bridled at the humorous understanding in his voice.

A sensible girl would say yes at this point, but being sensible hadn’t got me anywhere, had it?

‘No,’ I said clearly. Well, it was *meant* to sound clear. Whether it did is doubtful. ‘I’d love another one.’

One of Phin’s brows lifted. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Absho—absolutely sure.’

‘It’s your hangover,’ he said, the corner of his mouth quirking in that lop-sided smile of his. He beckoned the waitress over. ‘Another pomegranate martini for my little lush here, and I’ll have another half.’

I waited until she had set the glasses on the table. Part of me knew quite well that Phin’s plan was madness, but I hadn’t been able to come up with a single argument to convince him how ridiculous the idea was.

‘Do you really think it would work?’ I asked, almost shyly.

‘What’s the worst that could happen if it doesn’t?’ Phin countered. ‘You’d be in the same situation you are now, but at least you’ll know you did everything you could to make your dream come true. That has to be better than just sitting and watching it disappear, doesn’t it? And, if nothing else, we’ll have promoted the family image of Gibson & Grieve with this interview. As a good company girl, I know you’ll be glad to have done your bit!’

He was watching my face.

‘It’s a risk,’ he said in a different voice, ‘but you don’t get what you really want without taking chances.’

I looked back at him, biting my lip.

‘So,’ he said, lifting his glass, ‘do we have a deal?’

And I, God help me, chinked my glass against his. ‘Deal,’ I said.

‘Good morning, Summer!’ Phin’s cheery greeting scraped across my thumping head.

‘Not so loud,’ I whispered, without even lifting my head from the desk, where I’d been resting it ever since I’d staggered into work twenty minutes earlier. Late, for the first time in my life. I would have been mortified if I had had any feelings to spare. As it was, I had to save my energy for basic survival. Breathing was about all I could manage right then, and even that hurt.

‘Oh, dear, dear, dear.’ I could picture him standing over me, blue eyes alight with laughter, lips pursed in mock reproach. ‘Is it possible you’re regretting that last martini?’

I groaned. ‘Go away and leave me to die in peace!’

‘Aren’t you feeling well?’ Phin enquired solicitously.

‘How could you possibly have guessed that?’ I mumbled, still afraid to move my head in case it fell off.

‘I’m famed for my powers of deduction. The FBI are always calling me up and asking me to help them out.’

I didn’t even have the energy to roll my eyes. ‘How many martinis did you make me drink last night?’

‘Me? It wasn’t me that insisted on another round, or the next, or the next...I asked you if you were sure, and you said that you were. Absolutely sure, you said,’ he reminded me virtuously, and I hated the laughter in his voice.

I only had the vaguest memory of getting home the night before. Phin. A taxi. Anne’s astonished face as I reeled in the door.

‘Oh, God...I’m going to be a statistic,’ I moaned into the desk. ‘I’ll be one of those moody binge drinkers we’re always hearing about who throw away their entire careers.’

‘You don’t think you might be exaggerating just a teeny bit?’ said Phin. ‘Letting your hair down once in a while isn’t the end of the world.’

It certainly felt like the end of the world to me. I’d never been closer to pulling a sickie. I couldn’t even *imagine* a time when I would feel better. My forehead stayed where it was, pressing into the desk. ‘If you knew how awful I felt, you wouldn’t say that.’

‘You were great fun,’ he offered, but that was no consolation to me then. ‘You were the life and soul of the bar by the time I managed to bundle you into a taxi. It’s one of the best nights I’ve had in a long time. I think I’m going to enjoy going out with you.’

‘I’m not going out ever again,’ I vowed.

‘You’ll have to. How else will everyone know how in love we are?’

Very cautiously, I turned my head on the desk and squinted up at him. ‘Please tell me last night was all a bad dream.’

‘Certainly not!’ said Phin briskly. ‘We had a deal. You drank to it—several times, if I recall. Besides, we’re committed. I met Lex on my way in and asked if I could take you to some drinks party he’s having on Friday.’

‘What?’ Horrified, I straightened too suddenly, and yelped as my head jarred.

‘Our cunning plan is never going to work if you hide away,’ Phin pointed out, sitting on the edge of my desk and deliberately pushing a pile of squarecut folders aside. I was in such a bad state that I didn’t even straighten them, and he looked at me in concern.

‘Jonathan will be there,’ he added, to tempt me, but I was beyond comfort by then.

‘Oh, God.’ I collapsed back onto the desk. ‘What did Lex say? He must have been horrified.’

‘Not at all. He was surprised, sure, but he said falling for you could be the most sensible thing I’d ever done.’

‘I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,’ I moaned.

‘Now, come along—you’ll feel better when you’ve had some sugar,’ said Phin, jumping off the desk. ‘I’ll go and make some coffee, and you can have your doughnut early.’

Oddly enough, I *did* feel a bit better after something to eat. My head was still thumping, but at least it didn’t feel as if it was about to fall off my neck any more.

Gingerly, I settled down at my computer and managed a few e-mails, although the clatter of the keyboard made me wince and I had to type very, very slowly, while Phin drip-fed me coffee and tried to rouse me by pretending to put files away in the wrong drawer.

‘Don’t torture me,’ I grumbled. ‘I thought you were supposed to be in love with me?’

‘That’s true. I should think of a truly romantic gesture to show what you mean to me. I could start putting my books in alphabetical order, or using a square rule to tidy my desk.’

‘Why don’t you try leaving *my* desk alone, for a start?’ I said, swatting his hand aside as he made to pick up my calculator.

‘Aha, I see you’re feeling better!’

‘I’m not. I’m a sick woman. I can’t take any more.’

The words were barely out of my mouth before ‘more’ arrived—much more—in the shape of my mother.

She wafted in the door, beaming. ‘Summer, darling, *there* you are!’

‘Mum!’

It was Phin’s turn to gape. ‘*Mum?*’

I couldn’t blame him for looking staggered. No one ever believes she’s my mother. You’d never think she was in her forties. She’s got long red hair, shining eyes and a clear happy face. There’s something fey, almost childlike, about her. I’ve never seen her in a scrap of make-up, she wears sandals and flowing ethnic skirts, and she always looks wonderful.

And, while she may be deeply into all things spiritual, she’s not immune to flattery either. The smile she gave Phin was positively flirtatious. ‘I hope I’m not interrupting?’

‘Of course not,’ said Phin, leaping forward to shake her hand. ‘I’m Phin Gibson.’

‘And I’m Starlight,’ she told him.

They beamed at each other. I judged it was time to put a stop to their mutual love-in.

‘I wasn’t expecting you,’ I said.

‘I did tell you I was coming to London,’ she reminded me.

She *had* said something, I remembered too late. ‘I didn’t realise it would be so soon.’

‘It was an impulse.’

When had it ever *not* been an impulse? I thought wearily.

‘We were gathered the other evening, channelling, when we were all seized by the same idea. It was the most extraordinary coincidence, so we knew that it had to be meant! Each of us felt our guardian angels were telling us to follow the ley lines into London...and now here we are!’

‘What about the shop?’ I asked, my heart sinking. A couple of years ago she had decided that she would open a New Age shop in Taunton. I’d been all for the idea of her settling to a job, so I’d helped with the practicalities of arranging the lease and sorting out a set-up loan. Mum had been full of enthusiasm for a while, but I hadn’t heard much about it recently. Obviously she was into something else now.

Sure enough, she waved all talk of the shop aside. ‘This is more important, Summer. We’ve been walking between the worlds at the powersites along the ley line. The earth needs it desperately at the moment. Only by channelling the energy and letting the Divine Will flow through us can we help to heal it.’

'Someone told me there's a ley line running right along the Mall to Buckingham Palace,' said Phin, sounding interested. 'Is that right?'

'It is.' She beamed approvingly at him. 'And this building sits on the very same line! I'm getting good vibes here.'

I dropped my head into my hands. My hangover had come back with a vengeance. I wasn't up to dealing with my mother today. I wished Phin would stop encouraging her.

Meanwhile my mother had turned her attention back to me. 'Your aura is looking very murky, Summer. Haven't you been using the crystals I sent you? If only I had some jade with me. That's very calming for irritability.'

'I'm not irritable, Mum,' I said—irritably. 'I've just got a bit of headache.'

'I sense your energy is all out of balance.' She tutted. 'You need to realign your chakras.'

'Right, I'll do that. Look, Mum, it's lovely to see you, but I have to get on. Where are you staying? We could meet up this evening.'

Her face fell. 'Jemima is going to regress tonight. Her spiritual journeys are always *so* interesting,' she told Phin. 'Last time she was reborn as one of Cleopatra's maids. It was quite an eye-opener.'

'I can imagine,' he said. 'You wouldn't want to miss that, so why don't I take you both out to lunch?'

'Oh, but—' I began in dismay, but neither Phin nor my mother were listening.

'I know a vegan restaurant just round the corner,' he was telling her, having accurately guessed her tastes. 'They do a great line in nut cutlets.'

How Phin came to know a vegan restaurant I'll never know, as I'd had him down squarely as a steak and chips man, but sure enough, tucked away a block or two from the office, there was a little café. Before I knew it, we were tucking into grilled tofu, bean ragout and steamed brown rice, and my mother, blossoming under Phin's attention, was well into her stride with stories about my childhood. I gazed glumly into my carrot juice and wished for the oblivion of another martini.

'She was such a funny little thing,' Mum told Phin. 'Always worrying! Ken and I used to joke that her first words were "Have you paid the electricity bill?"' She laughed merrily.

'Ken was my father,' I explained to Phin. 'He died when I was nine.'

'Such a spiritual man!' My mother sighed. 'I know I should be glad he's moved on to a higher astral plane, but I still miss him sometimes. We were totally in harmony, physically and spiritually.'

'You're lucky to have had that,' said Phin gently. 'It's quite rare, I think.'

'I know, and I'm so glad dear Summer is going to have the same feeling with you.'

I looked up from the alfalfa sprouts I was pushing around my plate, startled. 'Er, Mum, I think you've got wrong end of the stick. Phin's my boss.'

I might as well have spared my breath. 'His colours are very strong,' she said, and turned to him. 'I'm getting a lot of yellow from you.'

'Is that good?' asked Phin, as if he was really interested.

'In positive aspects, absolutely. Yellow is a warm colour. It relates to the personality, the ego.'

'No wonder you've got so much of it,' I said snippily, but Phin held up a hand.

'Hold on, I get the feeling your mother really understands me.'

'Yellow is how we feel about ourselves and about others.' Did I tell you Mum is a colour therapist? 'It tells me that you're confident and wise and positive about life.'

'And you thought I was just like everyone else,' Phin said to me. 'What about Summer? Is she as wise as me?'

'Summer has a cool aura,' said Mum, well away now. 'She's got a lot of indigo and blue. That means she's fearless and dutiful and self-sacrificing, but she's also kind and practical.'

Phin nudged me. 'Bet you wish you were wise, like me!'

'You're a very good match,' Mum said, and I scowled.

‘How do you work that out? Yellow and blue are quite different.’

‘But when you put them together they make green,’ said my mother. ‘That’s the colour of balance and harmony.’ She smiled at us both. ‘Green relates to the heart chakra, too. When it comes to giving and receiving love, it’s the perfect combination.’

‘Thank you for not laughing at her,’ I said to Phin when my mother had drifted off to prepare for the evening’s regression. I fingered the clear crystal pendulum (“Very good for energy tuning”) that she had pressed on me before she left. ‘I know she’s a bit wacky, but...’

‘But she’s so shinningly sincere you can’t help but like her,’ said Phin. ‘What’s not to like about someone who loves life as much as she does?’

As we walked back to the office I tried to imagine Jonathan sitting down to grilled tofu with my mother. I’d never really talked to him about my childhood. I’d had the feeling he’d be appalled by her flaky ideas, and I was absurdly grateful to Phin for seeing her good side.

‘It must have been hard for you, losing your father when you were so young.’ Phin broke into my thoughts. ‘Did you miss him?’

‘Not that much,’ I said honestly. ‘We were living in a commune then, and there were lots of other people around. Besides, we weren’t allowed to be sad. We had to rejoice that he had ascended to a higher plane.’

I shook my head, remembering. ‘I think it must have been much harder for my mother. They do seem to have really loved each other, and I suspect she threw herself into the spiritual side of things as a way of coping. She’s got a very flimsy grasp on reality, and sometimes she drives me mad, but at least she’s happy.’ I sighed. ‘And who am I to say what she should or shouldn’t believe?’

‘I can’t see you in a commune,’ Phin commented.

‘I hated it, but, looking back, it was the best place for Mum,’ I said reflectively. ‘I wish she’d join another. At least then someone else would worry about the day-to-day things.’

‘Like paying the electricity bill?’

‘Exactly. They were both hopeless with money, and just couldn’t be bothered with things like bills, so the electricity was always getting cut off. They thought it was funny that I used to fret, but if I didn’t sort out the practicalities no one else would.’

‘Sounds like they were the opposite of my parents,’ said Phin, as we waited to cross the road at the lights. ‘They were both obsessed with financial security. They thought that as long as they could pay for us to go to “good” schools and we had everything we wanted they would have done their duty as parents.’

He grinned at me suddenly. ‘We’re an ungrateful generation, aren’t we? My parents did their best, just like yours did. It’s not their fault that we want different things from them. Mine drive me mad, just like your mother does you, but that doesn’t mean I don’t love them. The truth is that there’s part of me that still craves their approval. Why else would I be at Gibson & Grieve, getting in Lex’s way?’

‘At least you’re trying,’ I said. ‘My mother would be delighted if I gave up my job to channel angels or dowsed for fairy paths. I don’t think she even knows what “career” means.’

We were passing a burger bar just then, and as the smell of barbecued meat wafted out Phin stopped and sniffed appreciatively. ‘Mmm, junk food...!’ His eyes glinted as he looked down at me. ‘Are you still hungry?’

‘What? After all those delicious alfalfa sprouts? How can you even ask?’

We took our burgers away and sat on the steps in front of the National Gallery, looking down over Trafalgar Square. It was a bright February day, and an unseasonal warmth in the air taunted us with the promise of spring.

I was certainly feeling a lot better than I had earlier that morning. I was still a bit fuzzy round the edges but my headache had almost gone. Perhaps my mother’s crystal was working after all.

‘What are you doing?’ Phin demanded as I unwrapped my burger and separated the bun carefully.

‘I don’t like the pickle,’ I said, picking it out with a grimace and looking around for somewhere to dispose of it.

‘Here, give it to me,’ he said with a roll of his eyes, and when I passed it over he shoved it into his own burger and took a huge bite.

‘See—we’re like a real couple already,’ he said through a mouthful.

I wished he hadn’t reminded me of the crazy pretence we’d embarked upon the night before. I couldn’t believe I’d actually agreed to it. I kept waiting for Phin to tell me that it was all a big joke, that he’d just been having me on.

‘Did you really tell Lex that we were going out?’

‘Uh-huh.’ He glanced down at me. ‘I told him that we were madly in love.’

I wanted to look away, but my eyes snagged on his and it was as if all the air had been suddenly sucked out of my lungs. Held by the blueness and the glinting laughter, I could only sit there and stare back at him, feeling giddy and yet centred at the same time.

It was a very strange sensation. I was acutely aware of the coldness of the stone steps, of the breeze in my face and the smell of the burger in my hands.

I did eventually manage to wrench my gaze away, but it was an effort, and I had to concentrate on my breathing as I watched the tourists milling around the square. They held their digital cameras at arm’s length, posing by the great stone lions or squinting up at Nelson on his column. A squabble erupted amongst the pigeons below us, and my eyes followed the red buses heading down Whitehall, but no matter where I looked all I saw was Phin’s image, as if imprinted behind my eyelids: the mobile mouth with its lazy lop-sided smile, the line of his cheek, the angle of his jaw.

When had he become so familiar? When had I learnt exactly how his hair grew? When had I counted the creases at the edges of his eyes?

There was a yawning feeling in the pit of my stomach. Desperately I tried to conjure up Jonathan’s image instead, but it was hopeless.

‘What did Lex say?’ I asked, struggling to sound normal. ‘Did he believe you?’

‘Of course he did. Why wouldn’t he?’

‘You’ve got to admit that we make an unlikely couple.’

‘Your mother doesn’t think so,’ Phin reminded me.

‘My mother believes that fairies dance around the flowers at dawn,’ I pointed out. ‘The word “unlikely” doesn’t occur in her vocabulary.’

‘Well, Lex didn’t seem at all surprised—except maybe that you would fall in love with me.’ Phin crumpled the empty paper in his hand. ‘He seemed to think that you were too sensible to do anything like that. He’s obviously never seen you drinking pomegranate martinis!’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.