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GREAT
VALUE



Desire

BACHELOR'S
BOUGHT BRIDE

Jennifer Lewis

CEO'S EXPECTANT
SECRETARY

Leanne Banks

Jennifer Lewis

**Bachelor's Bought Bride /
CEO's Expectant Secretary:
Bachelor's Bought Bride /
CEO's Expectant Secretary**

«HarperCollins»

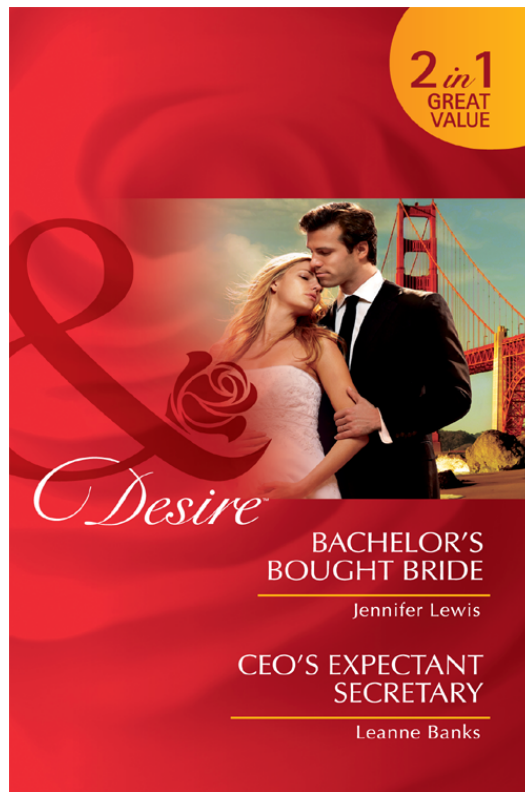
Lewis J.

Bachelor's Bought Bride / CEO's Expectant Secretary: Bachelor's
Bought Bride / CEO's Expectant Secretary / J. Lewis —
«HarperCollins»,

Bachelor's Bought Bride Attractive, sweet natured...and filthy rich, Bree Kincannon was just the bride ad exec Gavin Spencer had been looking for. And Bree's father had secretly offered him a cool million, too. It took the bachelor no time to turn the heiress into his loving wife. But when Bree discovered the reason behind Gavin's whirlwind courtship, the bedroom door was slammed in his face! CEO's Expectant Secretary CEO Brock Maddox had been betrayed by his lover. . . his own secretary. And when he finally confronted Elle Linton, he discovered she'd been keeping an even bigger secret. Elle was carrying his baby. Brock declared Elle would marry him. But he was determined that his head would make all his decisions from here on...KINGS OF THE BOARDROOM They need the right women to melt their steel-hard hearts!

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BACHELOR'S BOUGHT BRIDE

JENNIFER LEWIS

CEO'S EXPECTANT SECRETARY

LEANNE BANKS



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Advertising Media Volume 187

FEATURE SPOTLIGHT

This Week in Advertising...

The Adman: Gavin Spencer

Her New Campaign: People Treats. For husbands who need to learn to sit, stay and beg.

We've all heard the rumblings that Maddox Communications exec Gavin Spencer was itching to start his own agency. After all, he has been under the thumb of the Maddox family for far too long. And he is a genius. But we all wondered how he'd acquire the capital to get his business off the ground. Could he possibly have entered into a deal with the devil ... um, we mean his new father-in-law?

Yes, you read it correctly. Gavin Spencer has taken the marriage plunge—with heiress Bree Kincannon. There's no denying Miss Kincannon is somewhat attractive ... but she's been on the shelf for so long we almost forgot she existed. Could her rich daddy have offered Gavin some startup cash to take Bree off his hands? Oops—have we said too much? Sorry, Mrs Spencer! We're sure it's all pure conjecture on our part ... But may be you should speak to your husband just in case.

BACHELOR'S BOUGHT BRIDE

JENNIFER LEWIS

About the Author

JENNIFER LEWIS has been dreaming up stories for as long as she can remember and is thrilled to be able to share them with readers. She has lived on both sides of the Atlantic and worked in media and the arts before she grew bold enough to put pen to paper. Happily settled in England with her family, she would love to hear from readers at jen@jen-lewis.com. Visit her website at www.jenlewis.com.

Dear Reader,

The past year has been an exciting time for me. Last summer my family moved from our long-time home outside New York City to a pretty village near London. I grew up in London, but left when I was still a teenager, so there has been much to absorb and learn about living here as an adult. First I had to get used to driving on the other side of the road (I still keep trying to climb in the wrong side of the car!). Road lanes and especially parking spaces are tiny and I had my first-ever accidents, all involving stationary objects, happily. The twenty-four-hour clock is the norm here, and I still panic when I look for the time and discover that it's 15:34. Doesn't that sound way later than 3:34?

I've made some wonderful new friends and had many adventures, but it's also been a great pleasure to just slip into my fantasy world and write. I love the fact that the imagination travels with you, never gets lost in baggage claim and doesn't need an adaptor. My favorite characters live on both sides of the Atlantic—and anywhere else I might happen to be. Thank goodness for books!

I hope you enjoy escaping into Bree and Gavin's romantic journey as much as I did while I wrote the story.

Jen

For Julie, international woman of mystery and passionate San Franciscan, who's made living in England so much fun.

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to the kind people who read the book while I was writing it, including Anne, Anne-Marie, Carol, Cynthia, Jerri, Leanne, Marie and Paula, my agent Andrea and Senior Editor Krista Stroever.

One

Uh-oh. What now?

Bree Kincannon's father waved to her from across the ballroom. A self-conscious everyone-is-watching wave. She stiffened as he headed toward her, marching through the splendidly attired crowd. He'd left their table the moment dessert was done, heading out to see and be seen, as usual.

Bree, as usual, had settled into her chair to listen to the music and wait for the evening to end. She'd come only because the fundraiser was for one of her favorite charities.

Wary, she glanced up as her father approached, his silver hair gleaming in the ballroom lights. Then she noticed the tall man behind him.

Oh, no. Not another introduction. She thought he'd finally given up trying to introduce her to every eligible bachelor in San Francisco.

"Bree, dear, there's someone I'd like you to meet."

A familiar refrain. She'd heard it a lot in her twenty-nine years, and it rarely led beyond an awkward first date.

Still, she rose to her feet and planted a smile firmly on her lips.

"Gavin, this is my daughter, Bree. Bree, this is Gavin Spencer. He's an advertising executive with Maddox Communications."

Gavin Spencer thrust out his arm. She politely extended her hand to meet his. "Nice to ..."
Oh, goodness. She looked up and her heart almost stopped. Thick dark hair swept back from a high forehead. The slightest hint of five-o'clock shadow enhanced chiseled features, which framed a wide, sensual mouth.

He was gorgeous.

"Meet me?" A twinkle of humor lit warm gray eyes.

"Uh, yes. Really nice to meet you." She snatched her hand back. Her palm was practically sweating. Her father must be nuts thinking a man like this might be interested in her. "Maddox has done some really good campaigns lately. The print ads for Porto Shoes were really eye-catching."

And perhaps I could use the word really a few more times in quick succession. She felt her face heat.

"Thanks, I worked on that campaign." A smile revealed perfect white teeth. His chin had a slight cleft. "Your father tells me you're a photographer."

Bree's eyes darted to her father. He had? Shock and pride swept over her. He never bothered to say a word about her *hobby*, as he'd called it once. "Yes. I enjoy taking photos."

"She just won an award," her father chimed in, his face beaming with bonhomie. "The Black Hat or something."

"Black B-Book," she stammered. "It's a commercial photography competition."

"I know what the Black Book Awards are." Gavin tilted his head. "That's quite an accomplishment."

Bree's father waved to someone across the ballroom, nodded his apologies and strode off into the crowd.

Leaving her all alone with the most breathtakingly handsome man in the room.

She swallowed, smoothed the front of her crinkled taffeta dress and wished she'd worn something less ... hideous.

"What kind of photographs do you take?"

"Portraits, mostly." Her voice sounded reasonably steady, which was impressive under the circumstances. She was annoyed that this gorgeous man her father had forced on her was having such an effect on her. She always felt so out of place in these situations. "I try to capture people's personalities."

“That sounds like quite a challenge.”

“It’s mostly about timing. Picking the right moment.” She shrugged. She couldn’t explain it herself. “I think the technical term is that I have a knack for it.”

His finely cut mouth widened into a smile and those dreamy gray eyes twinkled. “A knack generally implies the kind of talent that makes you stand out from the crowd.”

“Well, I certainly don’t stand out from this crowd.” She swept her arm, indicating San Francisco’s most elegant and well-heeled partygoers—and instantly regretted her foolish words.

Of course she stood out. As the frumpiest and most unexciting person there.

“Everyone here is trying so hard to stand out.” Dimples appeared under his impressive cheekbones. “It’s the people who aren’t trying who are more interesting. Would you like to dance?”

“Dance?” Did he mean with him? No one ever asked her to dance at these things.

“Is there an echo in here?”

“No. I mean, yes. Yes, I’d like to dance.”

For a split second she wished the polished parquet would swallow her whole. Which would be quite a big gulp. Of course he didn’t want to dance with her. He was just being polite. No doubt he’d have appreciated it if she politely refused.

But he extended his arm, clad in a deep black suit—like every other man at the formal gala—and led her to the dance floor where a band, in white tie and tails, played the thirties classic “In the Mood.”

Gavin swept her out into the middle of the floor and slid his arm around her waist. Her whole body shivered with awareness, even through all the layers of crunchy taffeta. The steps to the dance were probably lodged somewhere in her subconscious. Lord knows she’d been dragged to enough dancing classes as a kid.

The room rushed past her as Gavin twirled her into a spin. He chased the music across the room, guiding them effortlessly through the other dancers. His enticing masculine scent wrapped around her, hypnotic and intoxicating. Her feet followed his almost as if they were attached, stepping in time. Her arm barely reached around his broad shoulders—which was quite something considering she was five feet nine inches—but she seemed to float along with him, gliding on the soaring trombones and quick-stepping with the punchy trumpets, until the music slid to a close.

Breathless and blinking, Bree extricated herself from Gavin’s strong arms. Was that really her whipping around the floor like that—with a man like him?

“You’re a wonderful dancer.” His breath felt hot on her ear.

“Me? It was all you. I just had to follow.”

“That’s an art in itself. I bet you half the women in this room would be fighting so hard to lead they’d trip me up.”

Bree laughed. “Probably true.”

“You have a beautiful smile.”

“Six years of orthodontics will do that for you.”

He laughed. “And a wicked sense of humor.” He led her off the dance floor, toward the bar. Eyes swiveled to him from all directions—both male and female eyes. Apparently no one could keep their gaze off the most impressive man in the room.

And he walked with his arm threaded firmly through hers.

Bree blinked under the unfamiliar glare of attention. They probably all wondered what on earth he was doing with her.

Heck, she wondered, too.

Being an heiress, and a plain one at that, made it easy to figure out what a man wanted. Begins with *m* and ends in *y*. But this guy could probably marry any heiress in the room—and there were plenty of them here tonight.

What was so special about her?

A voice in her head told her to stop worrying about it and just enjoy the attention that was making her heart beat faster than it had in quite some time.

“Would you like champagne?” He turned to offer her a glass.

“Thanks.” Why not? The dance alone was something to celebrate. She took a sip and let the bubbles tickle her tongue.

He leaned in until his sexy stubble almost brushed her cheek. “How come I’ve never met you before?”

“I don’t go out much. I adopted my two cats from the Oakland Animal Society, though, so I wanted to come to their fundraiser tonight. Do you have any pets?”

He shook his head. “Don’t have the time. I work long hours and travel a lot. I bet your cats were lucky to find you.”

“I like to think so. Especially since Ali needs insulin shots every day. Animals with health issues are hard to find homes for.”

“You’re a caring person.”

“Or a sucker.” She smiled. “But a happy one. They’re my babies.”

An odd expression flickered across Gavin’s face. Something in his eyes, really, since his chiseled features didn’t move.

Was he wondering why he was wasting time with a cat-owning spinster in a puffy dress, while stunning women cast suggestive glances over their drinks at him?

She’d rather be home with her cats anyway. Being around Gavin made her nervous, had her analyzing every move he made. She’d be a lot more comfortable with a camera lens between them. He was definitely too good-looking. It couldn’t be healthy for her insides to be fluttering like this.

“I’m here because a client bought a table for the agency. It’s obviously a good cause but I don’t like these dos much, either,” he murmured. “Too many people. Long speeches. Chewy beef.” His dimples appeared again.

A warm sensation filled her chest. “What do you like to do?”

He hesitated a moment. “Interesting question. I spend so much time working, sometimes I forget what else is out there.” He smiled, sheepish. “Lately though, I find myself wanting to slow down, enjoy the ride a bit more. Maybe even.” He paused and shoved a hand through his hair, as if embarrassed. “Settle down and start a family.” His mouth formed a wry grin. “I guess that sounds sappy.”

“Not at all.” The way he looked at her with those soulful gray eyes made Bree feel woozy. Could this guy be more of a fantasy? “I think it’s perfectly natural. Everyone needs balance in their life.”

“Speaking of which, would you like to dance again? This song is one of my favorites.”

The band had struck up a sultry Latin tune. Adrenaline prickled through her at the prospect of moving in sync with this man again. Was he for real?

Gavin entwined his arms with Bree’s and led her back to the dance floor. He wished he wasn’t wearing the stiff suit so he could feel her soft skin against his. So far everything about Bree seemed soft—the big gray eyes half hidden behind her glasses, her pink-tinged cheeks, her pretty, kissable mouth. He suspected there was also a soft, lush body hidden somewhere under all that crispy gray taffeta.

Her father had implied that she was unattractive and undesirable, and that her continued spinsterhood was a social embarrassment to him. His own daughter, a burden he’d pay well to be rid of. Could Elliott Kincannon really feel that way about the sweet woman on his arm?

Pure pleasure rippled through him as he slid his arm around her waist. Yes, she definitely had the kind of body a man could lose himself in. Full breasts bumped gently against his chest as he pulled her close. Her brown hair was pulled back into a tight knot and he wondered what it would look like cascading over her shoulders.

He liked the way she moved, too. Soft—again—and yielding, allowing her body to flow with his. Light on her feet as he twirled her slowly to the gentle rhythms. As she spun around to meet him, her eyes sparkled and she flashed a sweet, shy smile.

He couldn't help but respond with a smile of his own.

If first impressions were correct, then Bree Kincannon could make a very nice Mrs. Gavin Spencer. She might not be the kind of girl men flocked around in a bar, but so what? He didn't need some nipped-and-tucked trophy wife to prove his manhood.

And Bree Kincannon came with some very real incentives. One million of them, in fact.

Their eyes met again and a needle of guilt pricked his heart.

Could he really marry a woman for money?

He'd busted his ass for ten long years trying to build a reputation as a top-flight account executive. Since his first day on the job he knew he wanted to open his own agency. Bring together top creative talent, innovative thinking and creative media buying that would take the advertising world by storm.

If you'd told him ten years ago that he'd still be working for someone else at age thirty, he'd have laughed in your face.

But life had done a little laughing of its own.

His dad's pension plan had gone bust and he'd bailed his parents out of a mortgage mess. In truth, though, he was glad he could help them. The biggest mistake of his life was being dumb enough to trust a renowned "investment advisor" with a large chunk of his precious nest egg—only to learn in the papers it had been squandered on racehorses and vintage violins.

Gavin tugged Bree closer, enjoying the soft swell of her chest against his. Her long eyelashes lifted to reveal shining eyes.

He liked those eyes and it wasn't hard work to imagine looking at them for the rest of his life. He had a good feeling in his gut about Bree Kincannon, and his gut rarely steered him wrong.

Finding a wife, or even a girlfriend, had never been a priority for him. Married to his job, that's what his friends joked. True, though. He really loved his work and was more than satisfied with the occasional fling. At least then, no one was disappointed.

If he went through with this crazy plan, he'd work hard not to disappoint Bree. He'd be a good husband to her.

He dipped her slightly, and she yielded to the motion, letting herself fall backward into his hand. Trusting. She had absolutely no idea what was going through his mind. If she knew, she'd be appalled beyond belief.

But she wouldn't know. Ever.

She giggled as he pulled her back up. A rare flash of excitement flared in his chest. She was enjoying this and dammit, so was he. He twirled her around, holding her close, hand pressed to the inviting curve of her hip.

He had a good feeling about this whole thing.

Bree stood in front of the mirror in the powder room on the pretext of rearranging her hair. Really she just wanted to see what exactly Gavin Spencer was looking at with that gleam of interest in his eyes.

People always told her she had pretty eyes. Rather an odd observation, since she wore glasses. She lowered the frames—the nice, low-profile ones she saved for special occasions—and peered into her own eyes. They didn't look all that special to her. Maybe that's what people said when they couldn't think of something else to compliment. She pushed the frames back up her nose where they settled comfortably into place. People said she should wear contacts but they were far too much hassle for her taste.

Her hair was a disaster, as usual. Unmanageable, frizzy and fighting her every step of the way. She never should have taken out the hairsticks she'd managed to jam in earlier. With a struggle, she poked them back in and secured a messy bun.

There wasn't a lick of makeup on her face, but then she never wore it. She wasn't skilled at applying lipstick, blush and eyeliner, so on the rare occasions she'd attempted to use them, she ended up looking like a clown.

And the dress was awful. Her Aunt Freda had assured her it "hid her figure flaws." It could also hide an international terrorist organization and several cases of contraband whiskey in its crispy folds. The boat neck turned her somewhat decent cleavage into an intimidating mountain range.

She didn't look any better than usual. If anything, she looked worse.

So why did Gavin seem so ... entranced by her? Like he couldn't take his eyes off her. He'd guided her around the room since the moment they were introduced. She kept expecting him to spot someone else and bid her adieu, but he didn't.

In fact, she half suspected he was standing right outside the ladies room waiting for her.

She blew out hard. Bright patches of color illuminated her cheeks in a way that wasn't entirely charming. Her eyes were certainly shining, though.

As well they might be. She'd never danced like that. Even in her imagination! How could she not feel like Cinderella at the ball?

Which was funny, really, considering she was one of the richest women in San Francisco. Of course she'd come by that money the old fashioned way—by inheriting it—so she wasn't proud of her wealth. Quite the opposite, in fact. She often imagined people clucking and muttering, "All that money, and look how little she's accomplished."

Her father certainly felt that way. Even said it once or twice.

She sucked in a long, deep breath and tucked a stray lock of wild hair behind her ear.

Bree Kincannon, you are a desirable and enticing woman.

Nope. Not convincing.

Bree Kincannon, you are a damned good photographer and a fantastic cat mom.

Better.

She half-smiled at her reflection, then wiped her smile away when she realized the sylph-like blonde beside her was staring. She quickly patted her hair and turned to the exit.

Outside there was no sign of Gavin. The little shock of disappointment surprised her. Then she chastised herself. Did she really expect a man like that to wait around for her like a faithful dog?

He was probably already dancing with someone else.

Surreptitiously she scanned the dance floor. Past midnight, so the crowd was thinning. All the men were dressed alike in black tie, but she knew she'd spot Gavin immediately. He had that kind of presence.

A tiny shimmer of relief trickled through her when she didn't see him.

But did that mean he'd left without saying goodbye? She'd probably never see him again. Why would he call her, of all people?

She lifted her chin and started to weave through the tables to where she'd sat with some of her father's duller business associates, which wasn't a very charitable way to think of them since they'd all been nice enough to pony up a thousand dollars per seat. She was relieved to see that they'd all left, and she lifted her beaded bag off the back of her chair and slung it over her taffeta-clad shoulder.

Another quick glance revealed no sign of Gavin. Cold settled in her stomach. So that was it. A lovely evening. A fantastic time.

Possibly the best night of her life.

She swallowed. No doubt everyone who'd stared at her on Gavin's arm was looking at her now, the same way they always did. Poor old Bree. Perennial wallflower.

She shuffled toward the exit. She usually got a cab home from these things as her father often stayed late to schmooze into the wee hours. Of course it was kind of pathetic that she still lived in the family mansion. But she loved Russian Hill, and the big attic studio she'd turned into her private apartment was filled with special memories of the happy years before her mom died. She used to paint there every afternoon, while Bree played on the floor near her easel.

Bree bit her lip. She was happy with her life. Really! She didn't need some tall, dark, handsome charmer to waltz in and stir up trouble.

She retrieved her coat from the cloakroom and slid it over her shoulders. She was just about to walk across the marble foyer toward the exit when her heart slammed to a halt.

Gavin. Tall and proud as a ship's mast, an earnest look on his chiseled features.

And he was talking to her father.

Bree frowned. How did they know each other so well? Her father usually bothered only with mega-wealthy entrepreneurs who could make him a fast and large buck. If Gavin was just an advertising executive—a challenging and interesting job, but still a job—why was her father leaning in to speak with him as if he was Bill Gates? she pulled her coat about herself and started slowly toward them. They both looked up fast when they noticed her, which made a weird knot of anxiety form in her belly.

“Bree, darling!” Her father extended an arm. “Gavin and I were just talking about what a wonderful evening this was. And I have you to thank for forcing me to buy a ticket.” He turned to Gavin. “Bree has a soft spot for animals.”

Bree managed a polite smile.

“It was a great pleasure to meet you, Bree.” Gavin's eyes met hers.

Instantly a flare of heat rushed to her face and her heart began to pound like a jackhammer. “Likewise,” she stammered.

“Are you free on Friday? The firm is having a cocktail party at the Rosa Lounge to celebrate a new campaign. I'd love you to come.”

Bree's mind spun. Friday night? That was a serious dating night. And he wanted her to meet all his business associates? Her mouth dried.

“Uh, sure. That would be nice.” She blinked rapidly.

“I'll pick you up at your house, if that's okay.”

“That would be great.” She smiled as calmly as she could. “I'll see you then.”

“See you later, darling.” Her father shot her a tight smile. “I have some friends to catch up with.”

“Sure, I'll get a cab.”

Gavin stepped toward her. “I'll drive you home. Then I'll know where to come find you on Friday.”

He summoned a porter to tell valet parking before Bree could protest.

She inhaled deeply, took his offered arm and walked outside. The light mist of rain that had followed her to the Four Seasons earlier had evaporated, leaving a clear moonlit night that illuminated the sturdy bank buildings across Market Street and gave them the grandeur of real Roman temples. Stars glimmered overhead as Gavin helped her into the passenger seat of his low-slung sports car.

They chatted about the new Louise Bourgeois exhibit at the Modern on the short drive home. Gavin admitted he went often to keep on top of emerging trends so he could impress clients. He was embarrassingly gorgeous *and* he knew about art?

She leaped out of the car in front of her house, heart pounding. Would he try to kiss her?

Impossible.

Or was it?

Terror streaked along her veins as he rounded the car toward her. He took her hand, which was sweating slightly. A shiver of heat shot right up her arm.

“Good night, Bree.” He clasped her hand in both of his, warm and firm. Their gazes held and her lips quivered with a mix of anticipation and apprehension.

Then he tilted his head. “I’ll pick you up at seven on Friday, if that’s okay.”

“Perfect. See you then.” She flashed a smile, then turned and scurried for the door.

Once inside she literally collapsed against it. And a big, wide, goofy smile spread across her face.

She had a Friday-night date with the most handsome man in San Francisco.

And if she weren’t so freaked out, she’d be pretty darn thrilled about it.

Two

“Gavin, sweetie, how are you?” Marissa Curtis assaulted him as he entered the Rosa Lounge with Bree on his arm. She wrapped her skinny arms around him and kissed him on both cheeks, overwhelming him with that eye-watering fragrance she always wore. “I’ve missed you this week. Were you in Cannes?”

“Yes. Had some meetings.” He’d had a really good time at the film festival, and it had given him a chance to plan his campaign to win Bree Kincannon, who stood rather patiently beside him.

“Marissa, this is Bree. Bree, Marissa.”

“Oh, lovely to meet you.” The blonde smiled, revealing frighteningly white teeth. “Are you Gavin’s sister?”

Gavin exploded into a laugh. “My sister? I don’t even have a sister.”

“Oh.” Marissa tipped her silly head to the side, so her silky hair cascaded artfully over her shoulder. “I just thought . . .” She looked mischievously at Bree.

“That Bree and I look so alike we must be twins?” Gavin wrapped his arm around Bree. She was stiff as a board.

Catty Marissa was no doubt trying to imply that Bree couldn’t possibly be his date. After all, she wasn’t built like a twig and dressed in Prada.

“Bree’s my date.”

“Oh.” Marissa’s grimace widened. “How charming.” She widened her eyes rudely. “Must dash. I see Jake. He said he’d bring me something nice back from Cannes.”

Gavin turned to Bree. “Don’t mind her. She’s just insane.”

Bree’s sweet smile reappeared, giving him a warm feeling in his chest. He liked her smile.

“And you know, we do kind of look alike.” He rubbed her shoulder. “We’ve both got dark hair and gray eyes. Or wait, are yours green?” On closer inspection, the irises hiding behind her metal-framed glasses looked like pale jade. “I couldn’t see you properly the other night. It was so dark at the gala.” They were close enough for him to enjoy her scent—subtle and fresh, like the rest of her.

“They’re probably more gray than green.” Bree shrugged. “Doesn’t make much difference to me. I just use them for looking out of.”

“And taking pictures. I looked up your Black Book photos. Those were some amazing portraits.”

“Interesting faces.” She smiled shyly, her lips rosy and inviting. “Made my job easy.”

“Who were they?” Her crisp black-and-white image of the older couple, standing outside on a city street, their bold, cheerful countenances sunlit and their happy union obvious, rather haunted him since he’d seen it. Something about the photo made it hard to forget.

“I don’t even know. Isn’t that embarrassing? I’ll be exposed as a fraud.” She bit her lip. “They were just standing there outside the library, waiting for someone, I think. I asked if I could take their picture.”

“I’d never guess you hadn’t known them for decades.”

“That’s what everyone says.” She shrugged. “It’s a little weird, I guess.”

“It’s art.” He grinned. She was starting to relax. Good. “Hey, Elle. Come meet Bree.” He beckoned to Brock Maddox’s assistant. The slim brunette pushed past two art directors to join them. “Bree’s a photographer.”

“Are you really?”

“Award winning,” pronounced Gavin. “Can I leave Bree in your capable hands for a moment, Elle? I need to chat with Brock.”

“Sure. First we’ll get her a drink. Follow me to the bar.” Elle led Bree off into the thickening crowd.

Gavin scanned the room for Brock. He'd had a great meeting in Cannes with a hot new Czech director who might be willing to shoot a campaign for the right price. Gavin wasn't sure Brock would go for Tomas Kozinski's "right price," but it was worth a try. He had a unique, hand-held style that made even the scenery come alive.

"Hey, Gavin, how's it going? Still getting cozy with the Rialto yacht people?" Logan Emerson materialized in front of him, wine glass raised.

Irritation prickled Gavin's neck. "Trying to."

"That account would be a really big score. I can already see those Rialtos sailing under the Golden Gate Bridge at halftime on Super Bowl night."

"That might be a tad predictable."

"I guess that's why I'm an account exec and not a copywriter." Logan chuckled and slapped him on the back.

Gavin inhaled. Something about this guy really bothered him, and it wasn't just his bad jokes. Logan Emerson had only been at the company a few weeks, but already he seemed to be underfoot all day long: in every meeting; loitering by the espresso machine; he even wandered into the damned men's room whenever Gavin entered. Sometimes, like now, he'd be all smiles and jollities, but most of the time he just stood there. Watching.

Maybe he was trying to soak up the Maddox *modus operandi* so he could beat the other account executives at their own game. Which wasn't such a bad thing. At least then Gavin wouldn't feel too bad about leaving Brock in the lurch when he quit to start his own company.

Hopefully soon.

He cast his eyes around the room and was relieved and pleased to see Bree, wine glass in hand, chatting with Elle.

So far, so good.

"Actually my undergrad major was English." Bree took a sip from her delicate glass. Elle had snagged some white wine, then ushered her into a relatively quiet corner of the sleek bar, where they could talk. Bree felt a bit intimidated by her at first. Elle was so polished and put together in a tailored suit that showed off her slim figure. Her brown hair was sleek as sable and her blue eyes shone with intelligence and good humor.

After a few minutes, though, she started to relax, answering questions that Elle seemed to have asked with genuine interest. "At the time I thought I might even pursue a PhD in English, but I took some time off to travel and changed my mind. Flaky, I guess."

Elle smiled. "Not flaky, thoughtful. A lot of people rush ahead with some big plan they've had in their mind for years, and end up painted into a corner doing something that isn't their passion. I have to admit, I've always been mad about photography. I took a lot of classes in high school and college, but I guess I've never been daring enough to try to publish or exhibit my pictures. What got you started in photography?"

"I'm embarrassed to admit this, but it was a total accident. My dad gave me a camera for my birthday four years ago. I actually think a client gave it to him as a gift, as he doesn't know anything about them, but it was a top of the line Nikon, with a set of extra lenses. The kind of thing even a professional photographer would salivate over. I started fooling around with it—taking pictures of old oak trees in the park, and interesting buildings around Russian Hill and the Marina District."

Elle nodded, her blue eyes alight with interest. Bree felt a warm connection to her, even though they'd just met.

"One day I was taking a picture of St. Francis of Assisi on Vallejo Street."

"Oh, yes. The one with all the doorways."

"You know how that woman in the blue coat is often there?"

"Feeding the pigeons. Yes, totally!" Elle smiled.

“Something about her intrigued me. She has such a sense of purpose. I have no idea why she’s there and I’d never ask. I’m far too shy.” She pushed a stray hair off her cheek. Somehow Elle had put her so at ease that she didn’t feel shy at all. “But I wanted to see if I could take a picture of that quiet dignity she exudes.”

“What did you say?”

“I just asked if I could take her picture.” Bree grinned. “I know now that I should have offered her two dollars and a model release form, but I was clueless at the time.”

“And she said yes.”

Bree nodded. “So I took the picture. Took only a few seconds—just her, standing there in front of the smallest door, her coat buttoned up to her neck like always, with that flock of pigeons at her feet. The shots came out pretty well, so I printed one and entered it in a small show at the local library. My image won, and people started making a fuss, so I figured I’d keep snapping away.”

“I’d love to see that picture.”

“You’re welcome to come up to my studio any time.”

“Really?” Elle’s eyes lit up. “I’d love to! I’ve never been in a real photographer’s studio.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t call it that.” Bree blushed. “But it does have a lovely view out over the rooftops. I’m around tomorrow, if you’d like to come by.”

“Can I? I don’t have to be anywhere until five. It would be so nice to see some photographs that aren’t glossy product shots for a change.” She winked conspiratorially.

“If I come in the morning, I could bring some pastries and coffee from Stella’s.”

“You’re on. I can never say no to their bear claws. The address is 200 Talbot Street. The limestone behemoth with the wrought-iron gates. If you come around the right-hand side there’s a separate entrance up to my studio.”

“Planning a secret tryst?” Gavin’s deep voice made her spin around. His gray eyes looked at her with amusement.

“Absolutely.” Elle grinned. “I want to see Bree’s work before she gets too famous to talk to me. Did you know she’s been asked to shoot a portrait for *San Francisco Magazine*?”

“Is that true?” Gavin tilted his head.

“It is.” Bree blushed again, wishing she were actually as cool as everyone seemed to think she was. “I’m shooting Robert Pattison. They had a tough time deciding between Annie Leibowitz and me. I suspect I was cheaper.” Gavin’s dimples appeared. “They just called me out of the blue. Saw my pictures in Black Book.”

“That’s awesome.” Gavin’s rich voice rang with admiration. “I’d like to see your photos, too.”

“Form a line, form a line,” joked Elle, raising her glass. “But seriously, Robert Pattison? I wish I was a jet-setting photographer and not a lowly administrative assistant.” She did a mock pout.

Bree very much doubted that Elle was just a “lowly administrative assistant.” She waved and chatted with everyone as if she was the owner of the company, not the owner’s right-hand woman.

“Hang tough, Cinderella. You’ll get to go to the ball one day. But in the meantime, you’d better find your boss. I haven’t seen him anywhere.”

“I’ll go track him down. Nice to meet you, Bree, and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Elle marched smartly off into the crowd.

“Brock has been a bit distracted lately.” Gavin leaned in until his delicious masculine scent stole over her. “A lot going on.”

The clang of a spoon hitting a glass snagged their attention.

Bree turned to see a gray-haired man in a conservative suit, wreathed in smiles. Amazingly, the entire room fell silent.

“It’s our oldest client,” murmured Gavin. “Walter Prentice. We’re here to celebrate the launch of a new campaign for his company planned by Celia, one of our account execs. It’s going really well.”

“It’s a great pleasure to spend an evening with the most impressive creative talent in the entire United States.” The older man’s voice carried through the crowded space. “In the years my company has worked with Maddox Communications, I’ve been pleased to get to know many of you as personal friends. I’ve just learned that Flynn Maddox and his lovely wife, Renee, are expecting their first baby. I’d like you to join with me in celebrating their new family with a champagne toast.”

Already waiters carried trays full of champagne glasses around the room.

“Flynn is Brock Maddox’s younger brother. He got back together with his wife recently after a long separation.” Gavin’s warm breath tickled her ear.

“How lovely.” Bree smiled and accepted a sparkling glass of bubbly. “And very sweet of your client to make a fuss.”

“He’s a nice guy. Very family oriented. Been married to his wife, Angela, for forty years.”

“Impressive. Nearly all my dad’s friends are divorced. Some of them several times.”

“That’s a shame.” Gavin sipped his champagne. “Marriage should be for life—otherwise what’s the point?”

His earnest gaze met hers—and made her gulp champagne too fast. “I’m sure you’re right. But I’ve never been married, so I have no idea what it’s really like.” Her words came out a bit rushed. It was downright freaky to be discussing marriage on a first date, let alone a first date with a man like Gavin Spencer.

“Me, either.” He grinned, boyish and charming. “But I hope that when I do tie the knot, it will be the kind of marriage I’ll toast with champagne forty years later.”

Bree tugged her eyes away. Okay, she must be dreaming. This couldn’t possibly be real. There was no such thing as a gorgeous, dashing and successful man who wanted to stay married to one woman for life.

Was there?

Walter Prentice raised his filled champagne glass. “A toast to the happy couple! May their family be blessed with many years of happiness, and not too many sleepless nights.” He grinned. “My own children have brought me so much joy. I know that Flynn and Renee will be fantastic parents.”

He looked down, then directly at a tall, black-haired man, who Bree guessed might be Flynn. “You know our company slogan—family is everything. Well, it’s not just a slogan, it’s a way of life.” He raised his glass.

The room buzzed with cheers. “Oh, my gosh, that really is their slogan, isn’t it?” Bree laughed. “I’ve seen their ads on TV.”

Gavin’s gray eyes twinkled. “I guess sometimes believing your own publicity isn’t such a bad thing. Hey, there’s Brock. Come meet the big boss.”

Bree’s eyes widened as he slid his fingers to the small of her back to guide her across the room, claiming her as his date in front of everyone—friends, coworkers, clients. Almost as if he was showing her off.

She fought the urge to pinch herself. Any minute now she’d wake up in her own bed, with Faith and Ali stretched, purring, on the duvet next to her. But until then she’d better keep a smile on her face.

Never a morning person, Bree had barely managed to drag herself out of bed by the time Elle showed up at her door. She and Gavin had stayed at the party until nearly 1 a.m. Once again, he’d dropped her home without dropping a hint about coming in.

And without trying to kiss her.

“Hey, Bree!” Elle kissed her on the cheek like they were old friends. “I brought your bear claw and some coffee. I bet you need it after last night. Gavin must have introduced you to everyone in the room.” She handed Bree a to-go cup full of steaming coffee.

“He may have even introduced me to some of them twice. It was all a blur after about ten o’clock. Come in.” She ushered Elle into the bright room. Ornate Victorian paned glass covered one wall and part of the sloped ceiling, creating the bright studio light that gave the space its name.

“Oh, my lord, look at the view.” Elle put the paper bakery bag on the small dining table and moved to the window. “I bet on a clear day you can see Japan from here.”

“Almost.” Bree grinned. “I do love watching boats in the bay.”

“I guess you’ll miss the view when you move in with Gavin.” Elle lifted a brow.

Bree froze. “What? There’s nothing going on between Gavin and me. I only just met him.”

“Really?” Elle’s eyes widened. “I got the definite impression that you two were a serious item.”

“He was being very . . . solicitous, but I only met him the night before.”

“You’re kidding me.” Elle’s eyes narrowed. “I know you and I only just met, so I shouldn’t even ask this, but you’ve kissed, right?”

“Not even a peck.” A prickle of embarrassment ran over her. If she were cute like Elle, he probably would have tried. “I think he’s just being friendly.”

“But he kept putting his arm around you.” Elle cocked her head. “That’s not the kind of thing you do with a friend. Nope. He’s definitely after you. Probably just taking it slow.”

Bree shrugged, hoping the heat in her face didn’t show. “Let me get some plates.”

They chatted about the house and the neighborhood while they ate their pastries and sipped the strong coffee. After they ate, Bree showed Elle some of her photos.

“You have an amazing eye. In each picture there’s something of the essence of the individual. I know how hard that is to capture. I can’t take a decent portrait to save my life. I’m lucky if their eyes are open.”

“I wish I could offer some tips, but I’m afraid I’m not sure how I do it.”

“Genius. Talent. All those things I don’t have as a photographer.” Elle smiled. “It’s not hard to see why Gavin’s crazy about you.”

“Oh, stop! First of all, he’s not crazy about me. Second of all, he hasn’t seen my photos.”

“Yes, he has. He was showing everyone the Black Book in the office on Friday.”

“Was he really?” Bree bit her lip.

“One word. Besotted.” Elle crossed her arms. “A man in love. Sometimes it happens that fast.”

“Oh, come on. What could Gavin possibly see in me? I’m definitely not the type men fall head over heels for.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, let’s see. My hair has a mind of its own, which changes with the barometric pressure. I need to lose weight. And the only famous person I bear a resemblance to is one Duncan Kincannon, Tenth Laird of Aislin. You can see him halfway down the stairs in the main hall, wrapped in a gilt frame.”

Elle giggled. “I bet Gavin loves your sense of humor.”

“That’s about all there is to love.”

“What nonsense! Though . . .” She tipped her head to one side and pressed a figure to her lips. “If you don’t mind my saying so . . . I can see a little room for improvement.”

Bree cringed inside her baggy college sweatshirt. “More than a little room, I’m afraid.”

“You’re lovely as you are, but you could be lovelier.

I spent a summer working at a froufrou spa in Santa Barbara. I learned all kinds of brilliant tricks there.”

“Like what?”

“Your hair. It’s curly, right?”

“I think frizzy is a better description.”

“No, seriously, will you take it down for a sec?”

Bree pulled the ponytail band from her hair with shaky fingers. The heavy mass fell—frizzily—over her shoulders.

“Oh, yes. You’ve got lovely ringlets in there. We just have to set them free.”

“How do you do that?”

Elle smiled mysteriously. “We need to gather a few tools.”

It was nearly four in the afternoon by the time Elle was satisfied with her work. They’d spent an hour in the sun while Elle filed and polished Bree’s nails, and they waited for artfully applied lemon juice to scorch highlights into Bree’s hair.

Next, Elle conditioned her hair. She’d rinsed, then applied yet more conditioner—gloppy handfuls of it—and made Bree swear she’d never let her hair dry without conditioner on it again.

While Bree dripped conditioner onto the wood floors, Elle rifled through her wardrobe, tut-tutting and holding items up to Bree’s complexion. In despair, she marched Bree—hair still damp—out the door and down to Union Street, where she encouraged her to try on, and ultimately buy, three very expensive new bras and several mix-and-match pieces from a trendy boutique. Elle made the whole thing so enjoyable, Bree felt as if they were BFFs out for an adventure rather than two women who’d only met the night before.

Once coordinating shoes were found, they hurried back to the apartment where Elle applied a loose powder all over her face, “to brighten you up a bit,” as she said. She brushed light blush over Bree’s cheekbones, and smudged gray-green shadow around her eyes. A touch of rose-pink lipstick gave a subtle punch to her color, without making her look like a clown.

“Your hair’s finally dry.” Elle arranged it about her shoulders. “Why don’t you look in the mirror?”

Half afraid of what she’d see, Bree made her way across the studio—no small feat in the heeled ankle boots Elle had talked her into.

A long mirror hung behind the bathroom door, and she inhaled as she pulled it open.

She squinted for a moment, looking the image up and down. Then she laughed aloud. “Who is that woman in my mirror?”

“It’s you, babe.”

“Not possible. This woman is trim and elegant, and has silky ringlets with blond highlights.”

“It’s all you. Standing up straight is a big part of it. Tall girls like you often stoop because you’re afraid to stand out. If you do those yoga poses I showed you just once a day, you’ll really see a difference in your posture.”

“It never would have occurred to me that clothes which fit could make me look thinner!”

“You have a gorgeous, curvy figure and you should show it off.”

“Who knew?” Bree grinned at her reflection. “And I swear on my life, I’ll never let my hair dry without conditioner again.”

“That’s my girl. So, when are you seeing Gavin next?”

Three

Gavin called on Sunday and invited Bree to a gallery opening on Tuesday night. A photography show. Said he wanted her opinion of the artist's work.

Naturally, she said yes.

For the opening she chose a wrap dress in a dark eggplant color that was subtle and dramatic at the same time. The cut flattered her hourglass figure—who knew she had one?—and made an asset of her height. For the first time in years, she wore heels, which probably made her about five foot eleven. She'd bravely "washed" her hair using only conditioner and it had come out shockingly well—a mass of shiny ringlets. As she sparingly applied some of the subtle makeup Elle had left for her, she wondered how Gavin would react.

At seven o'clock on the dot she heard a knock on the private door to her studio.

Heart pounding, she crossed the slippery wood floor as gracefully as possible in her heels and pulled it open.

"Hi, Br—" Gavin's mouth fell open.

"Hey, Gavin." She smiled. "How was work today?"

"Great. It was really good." He blinked, and peered at her curiously. "You look different."

"Just a little." She shrugged and turned into the loft. Part of her wanted to laugh out loud. "New dress."

"It looks stunning on you." His voice was deeper than usual. He looked devastating himself, in dark pants and a white shirt with a barely visible gray stripe.

"Thanks. Let me get my bag." She slung the small beaded vintage purse, which used to belong to her mom, over her shoulder. "I'm looking forward to the exhibit."

"Me, too." She turned to see him staring at her, a furrow between his brows.

"Something wrong?"

"Oh, no." He blinked. "No, nothing at all." He glanced lower, taking in the soft drape of her new dress over her hips. Her skin hummed under his hungry gaze.

He does find me attractive.

The feeling was utterly new, a strange and surprising thrill. She pulled her shoulders back, trying to maintain the posture Elle had showed her, and to hide the fact that her pulse was still pounding and her palms sweating, despite her composed appearance.

Gavin cleared his throat. "My car's downstairs."

They walked into the Razor gallery arm in arm. She was only a couple of inches shorter than him in her new heels. Eyes, once again, turned to stare. But this time they weren't glares of female indignation that she—lowly and insignificant plain Jane—was on Gavin's arm.

No, this time the men were looking, too.

Bree tossed her curls behind her shoulders as she accepted a glass of white wine. "Shall we look at the images?"

Even her voice sounded sultrier, as if overnight she'd morphed into a more sophisticated version of herself.

They looked closely at the photographs. Large digital prints of people, mostly at parties and nightclubs, the colors highly saturated and intoxicating. "I can almost hear the music," she said, looking at a couple entwined on a dance floor, perspiration gleaming on their barely clad bodies.

"That's why I like Doug's images. They invoke the other senses. I'm hoping he'll do a vodka campaign I have in mind. It's hard to make a flat piece of paper say 'drink me,' but I think this guy could pull it off." He pointed the artist out to Bree—a short, skinny guy with numerous piercings, a goatee and an air of manic enthusiasm.

“Now, he looks like an artist,” she whispered. “Maybe I need to pierce my nose. What do you think?” She tilted her head, fighting the urge to grin.

“Definitely not. Your nose is absolutely perfect already.” Gavin’s warm gray gaze rested on her face. Her skin sizzled slightly under the heat of his admiration. “Your eyes are green.”

“Yes.” She blushed. “I got contacts.” Elle had talked her into trying tinted ones.

“They’re cute. And I can see you better without glasses in the way.”

“Aren’t we here to look at art? I’m starting to feel self-conscious.”

Though she had to admit it was a good feeling to be admired. When Gavin went to get them fresh glasses of wine, a tall man with spiky blond hair approached her and made small talk about the images.

The look on Gavin’s face when he returned was priceless.

He had to get Bree out of here.

Gavin tried not to scowl at the punk who’d horned in on her while he turned his back for a moment. He recognized the guy, a Finnish video editor with a tinny laugh. They’d worked together on a storyboard. “Hey, Lars. How’s it going?”

“Good, Gavin. Good.” He turned his gel-crusted head back to Bree. “So you’re a photographer, too?”

“Yes.” Bree smiled sweetly. Gavin hadn’t noticed how full and lush her lips were before. Lust mingled with irritation in his veins. “Well, kind of. I haven’t actually done a professional shoot yet.”

“Bree and I were just heading out to dinner.” His statement was more of a growl than he’d intended.

Every man in the room was looking at her. And who could blame them? The richly colored dress draped her curves in a way that should be illegal. In her heels she was probably the tallest woman in the room, and with the regal tilt of her head and her cascade of shiny gold-tipped curls, she shone like a goddess.

“I’d love to take a quick peek at the images in the next room. Lars was just telling me about them. They’re portraits of the artist’s friends.”

Gavin decided he’d like to tell Lars a thing or two. But he resisted the primal urges surging in his blood. “Sure, let’s go look.”

He slid his arm through Bree’s, claiming her, and guided her across the floor. He couldn’t resist scowling at one dark-haired charmer who shot Bree a look so flirtatious it was downright tacky.

“Oh, look at this sweet couple,” she exclaimed. He peered into a small square-framed image. A pair of teenage lovers were wrapped in each other on a park bench.

Gavin could readily imagine being in such a clinch with Bree. Her lush curves called out to him, urging his palms to explore their hills and valleys.

Arousal surged through him, and he tugged his gaze from Bree’s breathtaking cleavage back to the artwork at hand. “Very nice,” he murmured.

She tossed her cascade of curls behind her shoulder. He could almost swear her hair looked totally different last time he’d seen her. It had been tied back—maybe that was it.

It wasn’t just the hair. Something was very different about Bree. She’d been pretty in a quiet and unassuming way when they’d met. Now she was undeniably a knockout. Even the way she carried herself seemed altered. Before, her shoulders were rounded, apologetic. Now she threw them back proudly.

Her stiff evening gown had concealed her body at the gala. This drapery number revealed it in tantalizing detail—her backside was a work of art all by itself. His fingers itched to pull at the bow tied her waist and unwrap the delicious present in front of him. “Are you hungry?”

Because I know I am. And not for food.

And her father was going to give him a million dollars to marry her? He’d approached the renowned venture capitalist to discuss an investment in his proposed business, and Kincannon had

shocked him with his own proposal: one million dollars and his still-unwed daughter. Gavin's first instinct had been to refuse, but he agreed to meet her. Now, his good fortune seemed almost unbelievable. And he certainly didn't want to blow it by letting some wiseass muscle in on his prize.

"Uh, sure. What did you have in mind?" She blinked, those rich green eyes shining in a way they hadn't behind her glasses. "There's a good Thai place about a block away."

"Perfect. Let's go." He wrapped his arm firmly around her waist as they moved back to the main gallery. No way would he let another guy get his hooks into Bree Kincannon.

He shot a warning stare around the room. Hands off. She's mine.

Her hips shifted from side to side under his arm, stirring heat in his groin. His pursuit of Bree was fast morphing from a business proposition into a personal quest. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been so aroused by a woman.

At the restaurant he requested a quiet table in the back room—a gold spangled festival of Thai kitsch—where they could talk undisturbed. He admired the rear view as he helped Bree into her chair.

She shook out her napkin. "The pad thai's really good."

"I'll get that then." He didn't feel like reading the menu. He was far more interested in looking at her. A tiny silver heart hung from a fine chain around her neck, dancing dangerously near the enticing cleft between her breasts.

Now all he had to do was convince Bree he should be her future husband.

He poured some San Pellegrino into her glass. "Have you always lived in San Francisco?"

"We used to spend summers in Napa Valley when I was little, before my mom died, but other than that, yes. I've lived in the same house in Russian Hill since I was a baby."

"That's a lovely neighborhood."

"I suspect that's what my ancestors said when they built the house a hundred years ago. It's lasted through several earthquakes and is big enough for me to share with my father without us driving each other nuts, so I'm very fond of it."

"Is it strange still living at home with your dad?"

"I'm used to it, so it's not at all strange to me. I'm sure some people think it's a bit pathetic and that I should strike out on my own." She sipped her water. "I suppose I will someday. When the moment is right."

Phew. Gavin didn't much fancy sharing a house with the old man. Especially since Elliott Kincannon was about to become his benefactor.

"Does your family live in San Francisco?" Her innocent question tugged him back to the present.

"San Diego, but I moved away from home when I was seventeen and never looked back. My dad wanted me to follow family tradition and join the military. He was furious when I applied to UCLA and got a full scholarship to study marketing. We had a big blowup and I left that night."

"How awful! Did you patch things up?"

"It took about four years for him to give up his dreams of seeing me in a dress uniform covered in medals, but he's happy that I'm successful doing something I like."

"That's all that matters, really, isn't it? My dad couldn't understand why I kept taking jobs at nonprofit organizations that paid me less than my age. I enjoyed the work and was glad to help. And since I already had a nice place to live, I didn't need to rake in big bucks."

"You're lucky. I had a tough time right out of school. I was ready to take on the world and become CEO of General Electric, and my boss kept wanting me to file his papers and answer his phone instead."

Bree laughed. "Trust me, it's not much different at a nonprofit. Though there are less people so you have to pitch in more. I think it's good to start at the bottom—then you get a chance to watch how other people do things."

"And learn from their mistakes."

“That, too.” Her bright smile flashed again, sending a charge of excitement through him. “Do you like working for Maddox Communications?”

“Sure. It’s one of the top agencies on the West Coast. We have some of the biggest clients in America.”

She cocked her head slightly. “Hmm, those are awfully generic reasons to like a place.”

“I like Brock and Flynn Maddox, too. They inherited the family business from their dad, but they’ve done a lot with it.”

Was it wise to tell her he wanted to strike out on his own? Probably not. Then she might start wondering if he was more interested in her funds than in her.

They gave their orders to the waiter, who quickly returned with their beers.

“I suspect my dad is disappointed that I don’t want to be a venture capitalist.” Bree raised her brows. “He can’t understand why anyone would do something unless there’s a profit involved.”

“Crazy.” Gavin managed to keep a straight face.

“I swear, I think the reason he never married again is that he couldn’t find anyone richer than himself to marry!”

Bree laughed, and Gavin forced himself to join in. He had to make sure she *never* found out about her dad’s proposition. “What do you think is a good reason to get married?” He poured some beer into her glass.

Bree looked up, as if studying the patterned ceiling for an answer. “Love, I suppose. What other reason could there be?”

His stomach clenched slightly. “Have you ever been in love?”

“Not since third grade. Randy Plimpton broke my heart so badly when he sat with Jessica Slade at the end-of-year picnic that I never recovered.” A mischievous sparkle lit her eyes.

“That sounds devastating. I can see how you’d never trust your heart to a man again.”

“That’s how I felt. I guess that must explain why I’ve never even had a real boyfriend.” Her cheeks colored slightly.

“That Randy has a lot to answer for. On the other hand, if you’d had a serious boyfriend you might have married him. Then you wouldn’t be sitting here sipping Thai beer with me.” He raised his glass.

“I guess there’s a good side to everything.” Bree clinked her glass against his and took a sip. Her adorable nose wrinkled. “I don’t drink much, either. I’ve led a very dull life, really.”

“Perhaps that’s all about to change.”

Bree’s eyes widened. “Do you think?”

“I do. I have a funny feeling about it.” He cocked his head and let his gaze drift over her face. Her lips parted slightly, moist, as if they’d like to be kissed.

Which hopefully they would be in the very near future.

Bree took a tentative sip of the golden liquid, then blinked as she swallowed it down. “You know what? I’m ready for change. I’m tired of sitting on the sidelines of life. I’m ready to get out and enjoy it more.”

Their pad thai arrived, steaming and fragrant with basil. They ate in silence for a few moments. Then Gavin decided to head deeper into dangerous territory.

“I’ve had girlfriends before, but never one that I thought was ‘the one.’”

“I wonder how it’s different. If you just *know* a person is the one you’ll spend the rest of your life with.” Her smooth brow wrinkled slightly. “That must be an amazing feeling.”

“I hear it happens fast.”

Her brows rose. “Love at first sight?”

“Something like that. The person just clicks with you.”

Bree inhaled deeply, which drew his gaze to her bosom. Gavin’s arousal thickened at the sight of her full breasts under the clingy dress.

She looked up at him, eyes soft. “I hope I’ll find that one day. You know, someone I can feel totally comfortable with.”

Maybe you already have.

Gavin tilted his head. “It could be the kind of thing that sneaks up on you as you get to know the person.”

“You mean like one minute they’re a friend and the next ... you can’t keep your hands off them?” She giggled.

“I’m sure that happens to people all the time.” Her laugh tickled something deep inside him. “Probably just when they least expect it.”

Gavin dropped Bree home and said goodbye with a restrained peck on the cheek. She didn’t invite him in, though she looked as if she wanted to. He wanted to keep things slow and steady, rather than rush in too hot and heavy and possibly scare her off.

For their next date, he invited her to a jazz concert at the Palace of Fine Arts. For dinner he brought a carefully packed picnic from the gourmet store near his apartment, and a bottle of champagne. Bree, resplendent in a midnight blue dress and sparkly silver earrings, blushed with delight as he spread a blanket under a huge shade tree on the grounds and unpacked the food. The weather was warm and calm.

“I’ve always wanted to come for a picnic here,” she exclaimed. “It’s got to be one of the most romantic spots in the city.”

He looked up from the feast he was unpacking. “Tonight seemed like the perfect opportunity.”

“Look at the way the sunset lights up the lagoon.” The expanse of water shimmered like liquid gold. Around them other couples and groups laughed and dined and took in the beauty of the spring evening. “The city has so many interesting places. You could live here for decades and never visit them all.

“And what a shame that would be.” Bree unwrapped a lacquer box filled with stuffed grape leaves. “Ooh, one of my favorites. I swear the Kincannons must have Greek ancestry somewhere. We’re all crazy about Greek food.”

“You fit right in with the architecture then. Or is this Roman?” He glanced up at the heavily ornamented Corinthian style columns that adorned the massive buildings nestled around the lake.

Bree laughed. “They were built in 1915 for the World’s Fair here in San Francisco. I’d call them World’s Fair Classical. I love how ‘over the top’ they are. The original buildings were made of paper, and only meant to last a year. They proved pretty sturdy and by the time they started to fall down decades later, everyone was so attached to the place that they decided to rebuild it permanently.”

The fading sun gleamed in her curls, lighting up the gold highlights. Her skin shone, cheeks still pink with excitement. He wanted to kiss her right now....

But he resisted. “How do you know so much about everything?”

“Just curious, I guess. And I have lived here my whole life.”

“Do you plan to spend the rest of your life here?” He wasn’t entirely sure why he asked. Did he want to find out if she had a life plan already mapped out, and if so, if she’d be happy to reconfigure it for him?

She frowned slightly, then smiled. “I don’t know. I guess it all depends on where life takes me.”

“As a photographer you can work anywhere.”

She laughed. “I still don’t think of myself as a photographer. I’ve only been offered one professional assignment so far. I haven’t even done it yet. What if it’s a disaster?”

“It will be fantastic. Is this the one for *San Francisco Magazine*?”

“Yes. It’s next week. Robert Pattinson, for crying out loud! I’m paralyzed with nerves.”

“You move very well for someone with paralysis.” He offered her a dish of stuffed olives, and she smiled and took one. “Do you have to fly to New York for the shoot?”

“No, he’s coming here for a movie premiere. At least if everything goes as planned. Maybe he’ll cancel at the last minute.” She tucked a curl nervously behind her ear and bit her lip.

“He won’t cancel. He’s a professional. And you’ll do an amazing job. Just think, soon your picture will be pirated all over the internet.”

“Oh, stop! I just hope I don’t annoy him, or drop my camera or something. It’s got to be film, not digital. I think that’s one of the reasons they asked me.”

“They asked you because you’re amazingly talented and they know everyone will be talking about the pictures. Just relax and try to enjoy it.” He stroked her arm. Her dress was silky soft jersey material that draped lusciously over her curves. Heat flared in his groin and he had to resist the urge to let his hand trail over more of her delicious body.

All in good time, he promised himself. He needed at least a few dates with her under his belt before he made any kind of . . . move. Though the temptation to make one right now was killing him.

Especially when she shifted, and the fabric of her dress pulled tight for a moment over her tantalizing breasts.

Ouch. His pants suddenly felt tight.

Her eyes sparkled as she sipped her champagne. “I’m excited about the concert. I’ve been going to jazz concerts regularly over the past year. I’m really starting to get the music.”

He smiled. “Then you can teach me. All I do is enjoy it.”

“That works, too. It’s so nice to meet someone who likes doing so many of the things I enjoy.”

“I love walking around with you. You know so much of the city.”

Her eyes brightened. “I’d be happy to roam around more of it with you.”

He offered her some marinated chicken in a pita and she put it on her plate. “Where do you recommend?”

“How about the Marina? Or the Painted Ladies—the Victorian houses, of course, not the hookers—near the park? Alcatraz is pretty wild. Have you ever been there?”

“No, and now I can’t wait to go to each and every one of them.”

Why hadn’t he kissed her yet? Bree examined her carefully made up face in the mirror. Gavin was due any minute—again. They’d seen each other every other day for the past two weeks, walked nearly a hundred miles around the city, eaten countless meals and even—gasp!—held hands.

But not a single kiss on the lips. He brushed her cheek lightly with his lips when they said goodbye, but that was it.

Maybe he wasn’t attracted to her, after all?

She should be exhilarated after her shoot. Despite a late start, everything had gone smoothly and the proofs were to die for. The star was every bit as charming and polite as she’d imagined, and she’d managed not to blush and stammer like a teenager in his presence. She even showed him her portfolio so he’d have some idea of who the heck was taking his picture, and he’d asked all kinds of questions and seemed genuinely enthusiastic about her work.

She should be over the moon. Her first professional assignment was safely under her belt and she had another date with the most gorgeous man in San Francisco.

So why did she feel so . . . uneasy?

Gavin *seemed* to be interested. Something twinkled in his eyes when he looked at her, and she’d caught him sneaking glances at her cleavage, which had been on display more over the last couple of weeks than ever in her life.

He laughed at her jokes and appeared intrigued by all the odd anecdotes she’d picked up over the years. At one point, in the quiet gloom of an abandoned Alcatraz cell, she could almost swear he was going to step forward and kiss her. Tension hummed in the air like whispered voices of the people who’d been captive there. Her skin tingled at his nearness and she hoped with bated breath that he’d reach out to her.

But he didn't. And once again, after the ferry ride back, he said goodbye by pressing his lips gently to her cheek.

Good old Bree. Not really the kissable type. Perhaps he saw her more as a friend. Or a sister, even, as that catty woman at his office party had suggested.

A sharp knock on the door tugged her back to the present. Her heart pounded under her latest clothing purchase, a stylish blouse with fine green and gray stripes. She added an extra hint of gloss to her lips for luck. Maybe he'd notice them and want to put his own lips on them tonight. If not, she might have to take matters into her own hands.

As if she had the nerve for that.

She pulled open the door and, as usual, her lungs squeezed with excitement and a big goofy grin pulled at her lips. "Hi, Gavin."

"Hi, Bree." The chaste cheek kiss he gave her still made her knees weak. How could a man smell so good after a long day at the office? Like wind and sea air and adventure. He'd changed into a pale blue shirt and faded jeans that hugged his thighs like a lover. "How do you feel about a walk to the Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill?"

"Great." Yeah, just great. The most popular proposal spot in the city and she was going to go there and maybe hold hands if she got lucky.

Unless ...

She swallowed hard. No. Gavin Spencer was not going to propose to her tonight. This was the twenty-first century, not the eighteenth. A man did not ask a woman to marry him after accompanying her on a few bracing walks.

"There's a neat little Italian restaurant nearby, too, so we could grab some dinner."

"Sounds lovely." Her reply came out sounding a bit forced.

Gavin cocked his head. "Are you sure? Because we don't have to go if you don't want to."

"No, really, I'd love to." She reached down to grab her bag.

"And I was thinking that afterward, if you'd like, you could come back to my place for a nightcap."

"Oh. Sure, that would be great." Suddenly she was all breathless excitement. Her cheeks heated. He surely wouldn't ask her back to his place unless he intended to ...

Butterflies unfurled in her stomach. What exactly did he have in mind? Possibly quite a bit more than a kiss.

"Let's go." He held out his hand and she took it. The door slammed behind her with a resounding thud.

They walked briskly through the streets to Telegraph Hill, where the pale spire of the tower rose above the surrounding houses. The climb up the hill toward the tower left Bree panting. "I can't believe you haven't even broken a sweat."

"I work out regularly." Gavin squeezed her hand. "I enjoy a good climb. Want me to carry you?" He raised a dark brow.

"The situation isn't that desperate yet. But there are steps inside the tower, too. I may take you up on it then." At the top of the hill, they admired the view of the Bay Bridge and Gavin suggested that maybe they'd climbed far enough.

"No way. You think I can't hack it, don't you?" She flexed her muscles under her new striped shirt. "I'd be a lousy date if we didn't even make it in to see all the murals. Did you hear the rumor that the tower was designed to look like a giant fire hose nozzle? Supposedly the lady who donated the land and the money to build the tower was a big fan of the local firehouse."

Gavin chuckled. "I can see a resemblance. I'm sure Sigmund Freud would have some other suggestions for things it looks like."

"You're not the first person to have made that observation, either. A giant phallic symbol rising over San Francisco. On that note, shall we go in?" She grinned and Gavin chuckled.

Inside the rotunda of the tower, he slid his arm around her waist as they looked at the murals painted during the depression: rural scenes of people picking crops, a San Francisco street scene complete with a pickpocket and a nasty car accident, a poor family panning for gold while a rich family looks on. “These were all painted during the depression, to provide work for artists, under the Works Progress Administration.”

She enjoyed the warm sensation of his big arm around her, heating her skin through her thin blouse. “I know. Aren’t they’re stunning? I guess something good comes out of even the worst disasters.”

“That’s a very positive perspective. I fully approve.” He squeezed her slightly as he turned to answer. Their faces hovered close for a second. Bree held her breath, sure he was going to lean in and kiss her.

But he peeled his arm gently from around her waist and moved away to peer at a detail in one of the paintings.

She rocked back on her boot heels and sucked in air. If he didn’t make a move soon, she was going to go out of her mind.

After they had a delicious dinner and walked the short distance back to Russian Hill, Bree eased herself into the passenger seat of Gavin’s sports car with a growing sense of anticipation and terror.

What if he *didn’t* try anything? She might just die.

Gavin’s gray gaze drifted from her hot cheeks to her rather dramatic cleavage and back again, with enjoyment that made excitement sizzle in her belly.

She could hardly believe how intimate and easy their conversation had become over the last few dates. Weren’t men supposed to be difficult and mysterious and hard to understand? Gavin was easier to talk to than her girlfriends.

His apartment was in a tall white building on Stockton Street, and they parked in the lot underneath.

“This is very convenient.” Bree pressed the elevator button that Gavin said would take them from the garage up to his apartment. “I hardly feel like we’re in San Francisco. Shouldn’t you have to throw on the parking brake and hike up a hill to get home?”

Gavin grinned ruefully. “Until I met you, I’d been missing out on a lot of the city’s charm. I moved in here so I’d be close to work. I’ve been in this apartment since I first came from L.A. five years ago.”

Gavin stepped into the small elevator after her, his nearness intimate in the cramped space. He’d rolled up his sleeves to reveal muscled forearms. His skin was tanned, dusted with dark hair. She wondered what those arms would feel like wrapped tight around her waist—right now.

Heat unfurled in her belly at the thought.

She glanced shyly at him as the door opened.

“We’re here. It’s the third door on the right. Not nearly as stylish as your studio, I’m afraid.”

Bree walked down a hallway lined with identical blue doors. She watched Gavin’s strong fingers turn the key in the lock, and a shimmer of exhilaration slid through her as he opened the door into his apartment.

Gavin held the door for Bree to walk in ahead of him and she could swear she felt his eyes on her backside as she stepped over the threshold. His interest in her put a swing in her hips that she’d never felt before.

The front door led into a living room dominated by a black leather sofa. A glass coffee table held three neat advertising magazines and a TV remote.

“Would you like a drink?” Gavin headed for the small kitchen. “I have white wine, vodka and rum.”

“I think I’d better go for wine. I’m not used to the hard stuff.” Just being around Gavin made her lightheaded. She followed him into a neat galley kitchen with gleaming appliances. “Your apartment is very tidy.”

“We can thank the maid for that. I’m not home all that much. I’ve been working flat out on the Prentice account lately. They’re running a new campaign starting next month.”

“I can’t imagine working such long hours. You must be exhausted.”

Gavin poured wine into two glasses and handed her one. “Not really. You get used to it. I enjoy the work—it’s energizing for me.”

She took the glass and smiled. “You’re lucky to have found work you like so much.”

“Trust me, I know it. We’re both lucky that way. Here’s to your promising career as one of the West Coast’s hottest young photographers.” He raised his glass and Bree clinked hers against it.

“I’m not sure I’m really young enough for that title.”

“Of course you are. Don’t be ridiculous.” Then a mock frown darkened his brow. “Unless you’re seventy and have a really good plastic surgeon.”

Bree laughed. “This is California. You should probably check my driver’s license.”

“Nah. I’ll take my chances and drink to California’s most beautiful photographer instead.” He sipped his wine and peered at her with those seductive gray eyes.

“Now you’re just exaggerating.”

“Not at all.” His eyes swept over her, scorching her skin all the way from her exposed neck to where her new expensive jeans encased her thighs. “You’re certainly the most gorgeous woman in San Francisco, and I can say that with some authority since I meet a lot of models in my line of work. They’d all fade into the background with you around.”

Bree bit her lip. What a flatterer. He did working in advertising—and she’d better not forget it. Still, he was very convincing.

She sipped her wine. The tart, cool liquid zinged over her tongue. Maybe he really did think she was pretty. She pushed her shoulders back the way Elle had shown her and tossed her curls behind her shoulders.

“Come sit on the sofa.”

Gavin led her back into the living room. His blue striped shirt revealed his broad shoulders and, tucked into his faded jeans, emphasized his trim waist and a very cute butt. Desire sizzled in her belly as she imagined what he looked like underneath. All their hiking around the city had revealed him to be extremely fit.

She tore her gaze from his physique as he turned around and gestured for her to sit. She lowered herself carefully onto the leather couch and crossed her legs. Once again she felt Gavin’s eyes on her cleavage. Heat swelled in her breasts and thickened her nipples, making them hum with sensation.

Usually she hated her large breasts. They were always in the way, making her feel large and ungainly. But in her new, perfectly fitting bra, they were transformed into a pleasant and desirable part of a body she was forming a new relationship with.

Since she’d met Gavin, she felt comfortable—sexy—in her own skin. For the first time in her life.

He put his glass down on the table. Feeling a sense of impending ... something, Bree set hers next to it.

Her skin prickled as he drew closer. His scent, masculine and seductive, crept over her. She could see the shadow of stubble on his skin—he’d definitely have to shave twice a day to lose it. A tiny smile lifted the corners of his wide, sensual mouth.

Oh, boy.

Bree sucked in a breath as lips moved closer. *He’s going to kiss me.*

Her heart beat hard against her ribs.

For an agonizing instant, their faces hovered so close she could feel the heat from his skin against her cheek. Panic rushed through her, laced with longing so deep it ached in her bones. Then his mouth brushed softly against hers.

Four

Bree shuddered as sensation crashed through her. Gavin's big, strong hands pulled her close as he deepened the kiss. His fingers pressed into her back, revealing the urgency of his own need.

Their tongues met in a jolt of electricity and she enjoyed the rough rasp of his chin against hers. She writhed on the smooth leather, desire filling her body like a bottle that might overflow.

Her hands found their way to Gavin's shirt front, where she ran her fingertips over the cotton, feeling the muscle beneath.

A moan issued from his mouth and echoed through her. His thickly muscled arms pulled her close until her nipples brushed against his chest. Arousal thrummed low in her belly, pounding in a way she'd never felt before. Her hands were now on his back, roaming and testing the hard muscle, grasping at his shirt while he kissed her—hard and fast.

When they finally came up for air, Bree found herself blinking and breathless.

“Wow.” The single, low syllable fell from Gavin's moistened lips.

Bree exhaled hard. “Wow is right.” Her whole body stung and tingled with stray sensations all the way down to her toes.

She'd kissed men before, but it had never felt anything like this. Usually there was some groping and fumbling, and she'd even had rather disappointing sex on two occasions, but she'd never known anything like this crazy jumble of emotions and feelings that swept through her like madness.

She reached for her wine and took a bracing gulp. Anticipation glowed between them in the quiet apartment. It wasn't total silence, though—the rapid beating of her heart warred with the ticking of a nearby clock.

Bree blew a lock of hair out of her face. “I guess that's what they call chemistry.”

Gavin's mouth quirked into a smile. “No question. And I suspect if harnessed correctly it could solve all the world's energy problems.”

“Less dangerous than nuclear fission, too.”

“Or so we think.” His storm-gray eyes swept over her. Her skin tingled as atoms snapped in half under his gaze. “Further experimentation is required.”

Bree inhaled slowly, her breasts rising inside the caress of her bra. “If it's for the cause of science, we can hardly refuse.” Her lips hummed with the desire to meet his again.

Gavin leaned in, his soft breath warming her skin for a second before his mouth slid over hers. Their tongues tangled and their hands grew bolder. Bree's fingertips slid beneath the waist of his pants and pulled at his shirt. She gasped when he brushed her nipple, and he cupped her breast, testing its weight in his palm.

Bree pulled his soft shirt loose in the back and reached under it, touching his skin. It was hotter than she expected, and the muscles of his back flexed under her fingertips.

His thumb slipped inside her blouse and strummed her nipple through her bra. She arched and moaned through their kiss in response.

Leaning into him, she let her fingernails rake over the hard muscle on either side of his spine. She'd never felt such a powerful male body. Heat simmered in her core as she felt the sheer strength of him, so different from the skinny boys she'd known in the past.

With a deft hand, he unbuttoned her blouse and pushed it aside until her breast was bared—or at least her bra. Her lips reluctantly gave up his mouth as Gavin pulled back.

Bree's eyes opened to see his gaze resting on her cleavage. The fine lace of the pretty bra gave the vista an erotic flavor. Thank goodness she wasn't wearing one of her old, white “over-the-shoulder-boulder-holders.” She owed Elle big time for her fashion and beauty tips.

Gavin's chest rose as he inhaled and sighed. “This is the best view I've seen in a long time.”

“And I bet you can see pretty far from this high floor.”

“Rooftops and seagulls have nothing on the hills and valleys I see right now.” His gaze scorched her skin.

Then his fingers tugged at her blouse and pulled it off completely. Bree wriggled out of the sleeves, until she was naked from the waist up.

Well, a bra counted as naked, didn't it?

She certainly felt naked under his hungry gaze.

Gavin lowered his mouth to her breast and licked her nipple through the satiny fabric. Bree's belly quivered at the sensation. His hand roamed over her back, sliding under the bra strap, then releasing the clasp with practiced ease.

She sucked in a breath as he pulled the black satin and lace from her, leaving her totally exposed.

“You are unbelievably hot.” His eyes rested on her chest as he said it, which made her laugh. Her breasts weren't used to such frank and enthusiastic worship, and she couldn't help enjoying it.

“I don't think it's fair that only one of us gets to enjoy the view.” She reached for his shirt buttons and pushed the shirt back to reveal ripped, tanned muscle. “Ah, much better.”

A fine line of silky dark hair ran between his thick pecs, heading down below his leather belt. Bree's breath caught in her throat as she saw the thick bulge beneath the buckle.

On instinct, her hand slid down to touch him through the denim of his jeans. Hard and powerful, his raw arousal made her blink.

“I think we'd be more comfortable in the bedroom.” Gavin's low voice sent a shiver of awareness through her.

“Okay.” Her voice may have quavered a bit but he didn't seem to notice.

After a smoky head-to-toe glance that threatened to light her skin on fire, he took her hand and led her into his bedroom.

He switched on a soft light, which threw out just enough illumination to reveal dark blue sheets on a wide wooden bed with sleek modern lines. Blinds covered the floor-to-ceiling windows. Gavin shrugged off his shirt—which was barely on to begin with—and held out his hands. Bree walked into his inviting embrace.

Her skin hummed under his exploring fingers. Breathless and a little nervous, she reached for his belt buckle. She wasn't experienced but she knew she shouldn't sit back and wait for him to do everything. He was probably used to temptresses like that woman at the party, who could drive a man to heights of distraction with one flick of a manicured fingernail.

She was surprised when the thick leather belt came easily through the thin buckle. Her knuckles grazed his thick erection, which throbbed under her touch.

He really wants me. She still could hardly believe it. How could everything have turned around so quickly?

One minute she was plain old Bree Kincannon, going about her usual dull but pleasant existence. Now she was standing in a strange man's apartment in her underwear, apparently on the brink of making love.

Love?

No. No one had said anything about love. Still, she couldn't deny that she felt a special connection with Gavin. And he obviously felt it, too. Isn't this what falling in love must be like?

“Oh!” She let out a little exclamation of surprise as he unzipped her jeans. He slid them down her thighs, caressing her skin with his mouth as he went, leaving her in only her lace-edged panties.

“You're breathtaking,” he murmured.

Bree tried to hold up her end by undoing his jeans. Her eager fingers fumbled with the button and Gavin helped her slide them over his tight backside and down his thick, powerful thighs.

Oh, my. She'd never seen thighs like that. At least not outside an underwear commercial. Heart in her throat, she tugged at his dark gray boxers and couldn't help gasping as his arousal sprang free.

Gavin guided her gently onto the cool sheets and tugged her panties down over her thighs.

Now she really was naked. Excitement and fear prickled in her veins.

He climbed over her, his big muscled body making hers seem almost insubstantial, and lowered himself carefully onto the bed beside her.

A gentle kiss on the lips soothed her rattled nerves. Gavin's broad fingers roamed over her belly, leaving tingles of sensation in their wake. She tensed up slightly as he strayed between her thighs, but she parted her legs and let them in.

His fingertip probed into her warmth and she sucked in a breath as it found a sensitive spot. Her hips twitched slightly as he moved his fingers, stimulating secret places no one else had cared to explore.

Eyes closed, an expression of pleasure lighting his chiseled features, Gavin looked more heartbreakingly handsome than ever. Bree's heart squeezed. Could he be the one?

She'd more or less given up hoping that Prince Charming would come sweep her off her feet. Every little girl has that dream, but a grown woman of twenty-nine has learned that most frogs don't improve all that much upon kissing.

Ooh. She wriggled as Gavin's fingers sent a shockwave zinging through her. A tiny moan escaped her lips. Gavin's eyes opened a crack, and a wicked smile played at the edges of his sensual mouth.

Hot and slick under his touch, she felt more aroused than ever in her life. Gavin eased closer, until their bodies pressed together all the way from his broad shoulders to his sturdy thighs. Then he raised himself up onto a powerful arm, rolled on a condom with expert ease, and climbed over her.

She couldn't help an involuntary shudder as he entered her. All her nerve endings were alive and buzzing. Eyes closed, she gave herself over to the sensation. Her fingers dug into the hard muscle of his back as he slid inside her, slow and gentle, opening her like a secret chamber left unexplored for far too long.

Once inside her, Gavin released a throaty moan—a sound of relief mingled with pleasure. He started to move, and Bree's hips automatically joined in the dance, just as her body had flowed with his so readily on the dance floor at the charity gala. Maybe they were meant to be together...

She let the delicious thought flow through her as she followed him into a new realm of pleasure. Gavin's hands roamed over her body, squeezing and enjoying every inch of her, as they moved together. She explored the muscled ridges of his back and the firm curve of his backside.

Desire fluttered in her chest—and in all kinds of places she didn't know existed—as Gavin deftly shifted them into different positions. Heat pulsed through her and her thoughts jumbled and scattered as primal sensation shoved thought aside. Her body cleaved to his, writhing and twisting, steamy and slick.

She arched under him, taking him deeper, her breath coming in unsteady gasps, until suddenly everything exploded.

Or imploded.

Her body convulsed and twitched as tidal waves of wringing pleasure crashed through her bloodstream.

Then a low groan filled the air and she felt Gavin's arms wrapped around her like a vice. He throbbed inside her, sending further sparks of nuclear fission to her fingers and toes.

"Wow." His voice, thick and rough, echoed her exclamation after their kiss.

"Uh-huh," she murmured back, half amazed that she could still use language. Her brain seemed to have switched off for a few moments there. She opened her eyelids a tiny bit and her gaze locked onto Gavin's. His gray eyes dark with passion, he gazed at her, wrapped up in her completely.

Bree's chest tightened, filled with too much emotion. Gavin Spencer was too much for her. Way too much. Sweet, kind, caring, thoughtful—and ridiculously handsome. Things like this didn't happen to her. She was boring old Bree, the one you could always count on in a pinch because you knew she'd be free.

Or was she?

Maybe, after Elle's clever alterations, and with the help of Gavin's experienced touch, she'd truly morphed and changed into someone new. Someone exciting and desirable, whose life would now unfurl and brighten like a flower after the rain.

"I've never met anyone quite like you, Bree." Gavin rested his head on the pillow, peering at her through sleepy, half-closed eyes.

"Me? There's nothing special about me." She kicked herself for giving in to the familiar urge to run herself down.

A frown furrowed Gavin's brow. "Everything about you is special." He stroked her chin with his thumb. "You're warm and kind and caring. You're clever and creative and artistic."

Bree swallowed. She'd heard those before. They were the kind of compliments her starchy aunts offered, usually after critiquing her posture and lamenting her lack of marital prospects.

"And you're the best looking woman in San Francisco."

"Only in San Francisco?" She couldn't help teasing. His smoky gaze roamed over her naked body making her feel like the most beautiful woman on earth.

"Definitely in the whole Bay area. And the State of California. And the entire West Coast."

Bree mock pouted. "And there I was hoping for the Midwest, as well."

"I haven't spent much time there so I'm not an authority." His narrowed gaze twinkled with mischief.

"Never mind then." She tossed her curls. Gavin took one in his fingers and tried it on like a ring. "That's rather suggestive," she murmured.

"Perhaps that's my intention." He cocked his head slightly.

She bit her lip to stop a naughty smile sneaking across her mouth. "Shouldn't we get some sleep? Tomorrow's a workday."

"Actually, I'm on vacation. Had to use it or lose it."

"Lucky you."

"But if you have a busy day, I quite understand." He twirled her curl softly around his finger.

"Actually, I don't." She didn't have any plans at all, in fact.

"Then I have an idea." His brow furrowed again. "A big idea. A crazy, mad, wonderful idea." Curiosity prickled through Bree. "What?"

He shifted until he was sitting up. "I'll be right back."

With a navy towel around his waist, Gavin strode to the study.

Crazy.

Definitely crazy, but the idea had seized him. Maybe because everything about Bree felt so right. Their lovemaking was sensational. Bree was every bit as passionate and erotic as he'd imagined, and that unbelievable body of hers.... He frowned at the erection already getting started again.

Mad.

No question he was mad. Everyone would tell him that. Heck, Bree would probably tell him that. They'd only known each other for two and a half weeks. But sometimes the universe was on your side and everything came together, like the time he won the big Stayco account.

No. This was nothing like the time he won the Stayco account. That was a business relationship. This would be a lifetime commitment.

His chest tightened. A lifetime with Bree. Right now that seemed very appealing.

In the study, the display on the digital clock gave off just enough illumination for him to see the drawer handles.

Yes, the one million dollars offered by her father was an enticement. But it wasn't the only one, not by any means. It was more like a pearl necklace around the neck of a beautiful woman: it enhanced her appeal, rather than overshadowed it.

Wonderful.

That's how things could be if everything went according to plan. He and Bree could buy a nice house somewhere—maybe even Russian Hill, he'd always liked that area.

He could finally start his own company and settle into an exciting yet comfortable existence as a man in charge of his own destiny.

Excitement swelled inside him. He pulled open the top drawer and reached into its dark interior. Past the paper clips and stapler, his fingertips settled on a smooth leather box. He picked it up. The gold embossed around the edges glowed in the green light from the clock. He'd had no idea what to do with this ring when he was given it, but suddenly it seemed like just another perfectly fitting piece in the puzzle of his life.

He flipped open the lid to reveal a lovely Art Deco ring, three flawless diamonds—a large one flanked by two smaller ones—in a pretty setting. Most people probably would have sold it, but he couldn't do that. It had belonged to his grandmother, one of the most amazing people he'd ever met. She'd encouraged his creative ambitions, taking him to drama class and music lessons, paying for summer arts camp when his parents had disapproved.

She'd left him the ring in her will. At the time he'd wondered why, but now he knew. She wanted him to give it to the woman he loved.

Gavin drew in a ragged breath and plucked the ring from its satin bed. Would Bree be offended by the offer of a used ring? She was an heiress, after all, able to buy whatever she wanted without a thought.

The ring glittered as he examined it. Bree wasn't flashy or pretentious, he thought. Deep down, he suspected the sentimental value of a ring might be more important than its market price.

He had no idea if it would fit, but that would be easy enough to fix. He left the box on the desk and tucked the ring into his palm.

Bree lay on the bed, curls sprawled on the pillow, the sheet draped over her delicious body. She smiled as he stood in the doorway. Adrenaline surged through Gavin's body—how would she react? Might she reject him out of hand? Then his plans would lie in ruins and he'd have to tell her father he'd failed to hold up his part of the bargain.

Her dark lashes flickered as she looked at him, expectant, probably wondering why he stood over her, hesitating, one hand behind his back. The ring prickled against his skin, hard facets of diamond goading him to ask her his burning question.

He walked to the bed and sat down on the covers next to her. The heat from her skin warmed him and eased the tension in his limbs. "Bree, I know we haven't known each other long." His voice sounded oddly gruff. Her eyes widened. "But sometimes life offers you a rare opportunity, something you weren't expecting and couldn't even have hoped for." He swallowed. "Bree, will you marry me?"

Five

Bree blinked. Obviously she was asleep and dreaming.

But it felt so real.

Gavin sat next to her on the bed, muscles honed by the soft lamplight, a towel wrapped around his waist like a toga. In his fingers, something sparkled. A ring. Just like in fairy tales when the handsome prince gets down on one knee and . . .

"I know it's sudden." His voice interrupted her thoughts. "I'm sure you're surprised. I am, too. I had no idea I could develop such strong feelings for a woman so quickly."

Chest tightening, Bree pushed herself up onto one elbow. "I'm not dreaming, am I?"

Gavin's handsome features creased into a smile. "No, you're not. I'm as real as you are." He caressed her thigh through the sheet. Her skin hummed under his touch.

"And I'd like you to be my wife."

She swallowed. Gavin Spencer wanted to marry her? This couldn't be real. For a start, they'd known each other less than three weeks. Plus, he was gorgeous, a drop-dead knockout who must have women trailing after him wherever he went. Why would he want to be stuck with one woman for the rest of his life—least of all her?

"It's too sudden, isn't it?" He tilted his head.

"No. I mean, I don't know." She had no idea how to respond. Did she want to marry him? All the nerves and muscles in her body—especially those newly awakened by the evening's activities—sang *yes!* in a harmonized chorus.

But the old Bree muttered something quite different. Beware. Something's off here. It's too soon. He's too good to be true.

Bree drew in a long breath, which didn't help steady her racing nerves. "I don't know what to say." Her voice came out high and squeaky.

"Yes' would work." Gavin's gray eyes sparkled, much like the glittering ring in his palm. Odd that it lay flat in his hand. Didn't men in the movies usually hold it between their fingers?

But this wasn't a movie. It was her life. Which had suddenly taken such a strange turn that she hardly knew who she was anymore, let alone how she should react.

"But we only just met. You don't know me." What if he married her, then realized she was just boring old Bree, not the fantasy woman he'd built up in his mind? "You probably think I'm a lot more exciting and interesting than I really am."

Gavin cocked his head. "You should have more faith in yourself." He eased closer on the bed and rested his free hand at her waist. "We've spent hours talking and you're undoubtedly the most thoughtful, intelligent and interesting person I've ever met."

"Am I really?" The question flew out before she could stop it. How embarrassing to go fishing for a compliment like that.

"No question about it. And that's not all. I'm entranced by your beauty, too."

"Oh, come on." She blushed. "I'm hardly a head turner."

"That's where you are so wrong. Heads turn wherever you go."

Bree bit her lip. Elle's makeover had apparently had its intended effect. She'd never attracted so much attention in her life as she had in the past couple of weeks. Even the time she'd accidentally worn two unmatched shoes to school on Awards Day.

"I'd be a good husband."

"I'm sure you would."

But doubts still niggled. Why was he trying so hard to sell himself? Couldn't they date for a while and test each other out more?

“I’d cherish and honor and ravish you.” A mischievous gleam lit his eyes. A flash of desire echoed in Bree’s belly. “Why don’t you just try it on?” He shrugged, as if it was something casual. Try on an engagement ring and see how the whole engagement experience feels.

Bree shrugged, trying to conceal the odd mass of feelings roiling in her stomach.

“Why not?” Her squeaky voice betrayed her apprehension.

Gavin held the ring for her. She raised her hand. She rarely wore jewelry at all, and never on that finger. Everyone knew it was bad luck to put anything but an engagement ring on it. She’d never really expected to put a ring on that finger, resigned as she was to her quiet life with her cats.

Now a new realm of possibilities glittered, facets shimmering in the dim light. She poked out her naked finger, clutching the sheets about her with her other hand. A shiver of fear and excitement slashed through her as the cool metal touched her skin. Would it be too small? She wasn’t a petite little thing, though her hands were probably the most delicate part of her. Would it stick firm over a knuckle and refuse to budge?

That would be a sign.

But it slid on, smoothly, all the way to the right spot.

“A perfect fit.” Gavin’s triumphant gaze fixed on hers.

“It is. How did you manage that?”

“Pure luck. And I think it’s a message from the universe that it fits so well.” He stroked her hand where the ring glittered on her finger. “I don’t know how you’ll feel about this, but it’s a special ring. It belonged to my grandmother, who was married to the love of her life for fifty-seven years.”

The three stones sat in a pretty setting. Looking at it now, she could see it was probably designed in the twenties. “It’s lovely.”

The ring buzzed a little against her skin. She wasn’t sure how she felt about wearing someone else’s wedding ring. It seemed to underscore the sensation that she’d accidentally stepped into someone else’s life.

“My grandmother was very special to me. She gave me the ring in her will so I could give it to my wife one day. I can’t believe how well it fits you. Like it was made for you.”

Bree gulped. Now that the ring was on her finger, did that mean she’d said yes? “It’s beautiful. Are you sure you want to part with it?”

Gavin held her hand. “I don’t want to part with it. I want it on the finger of the woman I love.”

Bree’s stomach clenched. The word *love* hung in the air like a flash of smoke from a magic trick.

That’s what had been missing, why the whole proposal had felt rather odd, forced—because he hadn’t told her he loved her.

Until now.

“I love you, Bree.” He caressed her hand with his thumb. “It’s a new love, untried and untested, I’ll admit. But I’ve never felt like this about anyone before. Something in my gut, in my heart, tells me that you’re the woman for me.”

The conviction in his voice wrapped around her like a cloak. Did she love him? She had no idea what love was even supposed to feel like. Arousal and desire sizzled through her like steam, no denying that. And Gavin was sweet and charming and intelligent and fun. And completely hot.

All the things she would have looked for in her dream husband. If she was looking for a husband. Which she certainly should be, according to pretty much everyone she knew. She was just so used to being suspicious, to doubting the motives of any man who came near her because he might be more interested in the Kincannon coffers than in her.

“There’s something special between us, isn’t there?” His voice interrupted her thoughts.

“Yes, there is.” Bree frowned. The connection between them crackled right now, as she sat on the bed, her hands in his. She’d never felt so comfortable with a man, so safe. She’d certainly never felt so desirable and intriguing. “I do feel it.”

She looked down at the three diamonds twinkling on her finger.

“Will you marry me?” Gavin’s simple question, asked with hope in his wide gray gaze, blew away any last traces of resistance.

“Yes. I will.” Exhilaration—and terror—flashed through her as she said the words. But she also felt a fierce conviction that this was right. Strange—and sudden—as it was, their pairing was meant to be.

Gavin wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. The warmth from his body mingled with hers and possibly for the first time in her life—at least since her mother died—she felt totally protected and cared for.

And loved.

As they pulled onto the Golden Gate Bridge in Gavin’s car, Bree snuck a glance backward at the city. When she returned, she’d be a married woman. Mrs. Gavin Spencer. They were getting married right over the bridge in Sausalito.

Gavin had wanted to get married as soon as possible. No guests, just the two of them—and Bree’s cats. Gavin had sweetly insisted that they come, too, since they were members of the family. One of his former clients owned a boutique hotel with a terrace overlooking the city that hosted small weddings quite often. He’d promised to provide the wedding officiant, a photographer and two witnesses.

The whole thing had been arranged so fast. The only holdup was the prenup—Gavin had insisted on one, maybe to prove that he wasn’t a gold digger. She found the whole thing embarrassing. Didn’t it imply that they might one day get divorced? She didn’t want to think about that. Still, he’d managed to get one drawn up and signed in less than a day, and now here they were, barely forty-eight hours after his proposal.

Gavin turned to look at her. “Nervous?”

“A little.” It was all happening so quickly. And a wedding without any friends and family seemed odd.

Still, despite some reservations, Bree had to admit it made sense. She didn’t want the kind of big society wedding her father would have insisted on, which would take a full year to plan and involve more fuss than a royal inauguration. Better to do it this way, quickly and privately. Oddly, her father hadn’t protested their impromptu plans the way she’d expected. He’d seemed quite unsurprised by her news and happy for both of them. Which wasn’t so odd, really, since he’d undoubtedly introduced her to Gavin in the hope that she’d finally find a mate. Finally she’d managed to accomplish something her father approved of! Or at least she would have soon.

Very soon.

“Sausalito’s a fun place to escape to. Even though it’s just across the bridge, you feel like you’re a million miles away.” His warm grin tickled something inside her. Gavin looked even more breathtaking than usual today. A casual black shirt rolled up over his powerful forearms, faded jeans, his thick, dark hair slightly tousled. She could hardly believe she was sitting next to him, let alone driving to Sausalito to marry him.

The diamond ring still glittered on her finger. She hadn’t taken it off since he’d put it on to test the size.

“We can live in my condo until we find a place. But I think we should get a house, so there will be plenty of room for you to have a big studio. What do you think?”

“I don’t know what to think.” She smiled. “I’ve never lived anywhere but the house I’m in now. I’m open to anything. I can always rent a separate studio for my business.”

“No way. We’ll find a house with a great studio for you. And a view of the bay is a must, since you’re used to enjoying one.”

How rich was he? He talked as if he had all the funds in the world at his disposal. Or did he expect her to pay for their new house? Odd how they were about to walk down the aisle but they hadn’t discussed even the most basic practical matters.

Except the prenup. And those often weren't worth the paper they were written on anyway. If he hadn't insisted, she wouldn't even have thought of it. If she couldn't trust her husband, who could she trust? She wouldn't let money rule her life.

They drove through the low hills of the Gateway National Recreation area, then climbed up into the steep and picturesque streets of Sausalito. He pulled up in the circular driveway of a small Mediterranean style building with blooms bursting from pots and beds in every direction.

"The wedding's booked for six o'clock tonight, so we'll have plenty of time to get ready."

"Tonight?" Panic flashed over Bree. For some reason she assumed they'd have at least a day to ... to what? If they were getting married, might as well get on with it.

Still, she'd barely had a chance to get used to having a "fiancé" yet, and they were going to run down the aisle *tonight*. Kind of funny how he'd just gone ahead and made all the plans—and she'd let him.

Gavin climbed out of the car, then came around to open her door. She stepped out onto the gravel on shaky legs. He slid a palm across the base of her spine, which sent waves of heat—as well as anxiety—shivering through her. "Tonight will be our wedding night." His smoky gray gaze smoldered with possibilities.

Bree blinked and blew out a shaky breath. "So it will."

He squeezed her hand. "I can't wait to be your husband, Bree."

"I can't wait to be your wife." She squeezed back, and happiness swelled in her chest, pushing away the anxiety. He was so open and affectionate, on top of all the other things she adored about him. Did anyone have a right to be this lucky?

Then she froze. "But what am I going to wear?"

"Anything you like. We have all afternoon to shop."

Though Bree was nervous about her ability to pick a flattering dress without Elle, she found one quite easily at a stylish shop down near the docks. The silvery-white, tea-length gown in shimmering satin draped elegantly over her curves. Sky-blue heels proved an oddly perfect match. At a local jeweler, they chose engraved wedding bands for the ceremony. Back at the hotel, she was visited by a bubbly hairdresser who piled her curls into a chignon fastened with pearl-tipped pins. Bree put on the sparkly pearl and diamond earrings they'd picked together. Gavin insisted on paying for everything, and her transformation into a blushing bride gave him obvious delight.

"You're breathtaking." He came up behind her as she put the finishing touches on her lipstick. His face appearing next to hers in the mirror made her smile.

"You're pretty smashing yourself." She glanced at his crisp, black satin bowtie. The elegant tuxedo only enhanced his matinee-idol good looks.

"We do make a nice looking couple." He slid his arms around her satin clad waist.

"And we do fit well together." She didn't look at all big or ungainly next to him—at over six feet, he made her feel perfectly proportioned. She wriggled under his tempting, warm touch. "In fact, I rather wish we didn't have to leave the room."

"It'll be worth it." He pressed a soft kiss to her cheek. Her skin, already hot and made up with blush, flushed deeper under his lips. "And we'll have all night to celebrate." Gavin's throaty whisper echoed through her, a promise of sensations she was quickly becoming addicted to. "Are you ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

Panic and excitement tingled to Bree's toes and fingers as they stepped out onto the hotel's terrace. Glorious sunshine lit up the simple gazebo where the officiant waited for them. Gavin tightened his reassuring grip on her hand, and shot her an encouraging glance. Petunias spilled from carved pots and planters, and ribbons festooned the table holding the official paperwork.

The hotel's manager walked up to them, followed by a pretty blonde holding a boutonniere for Gavin. "Welcome, and congratulations on your special day." The speech sounded a little canned,

Bree thought, then cursed herself for the petty thought. They were just being polite, and trying to make them feel at home.

She glanced out at the impressive view over the bay, where sailboats scudded over the dark water. It was a lovely spot to get married. Perfect, even. Besides, the whole point was to join herself to this wonderful man and begin an exciting new chapter in her life.

Still, her breathing came a little shallow as they walked toward the gazebo where the officiant stood waiting.

Could something that came together this quickly and easily really be permanent? Despite Gavin's strong and soothing hand in hers, Bree found herself pestered by doubts.

Maybe Gavin thought he was marrying the ringleted temptress Elle had turned her into, rather than the real her. What would happen when he discovered he'd married a dull mouse rather than the exciting woman of his dreams?

"I love you, Bree." His whispered words banished her worries like a strong breeze.

"I love you, too, Gavin." She rasped the words back with conviction. How had he known to turn and reassure her at just the right moment?

Because he was perfect—for her.

A few pleasantries were exchanged, and before she had a chance to gather her wits, the ceremony was underway.

"Do you, Bree Kincannon, take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, to cherish and love, as long as you both shall live?"

"I do." She spoke the words clear and loud, determined not to let any lingering doubts become evident to the witnesses, even if they were strangers. Gavin said his vows with a reassuring, deep voice and an expression of honest enthusiasm that almost made her laugh aloud.

"You may now kiss the bride."

In front of the assembled strangers, Gavin eased his arms around her waist, pulled her close, and kissed her—gentle, yet firm. Heat shimmered through her from head to toe.

"We're married," he whispered. "I've never felt so excited and happy in my whole life."

"Me, either." Bree spoke the truth. A whirlwind wedding to the most gorgeous man she'd ever met was unquestionably the high point of her quiet life so far. "It's all happened so quickly, I can't quite believe it."

"When something's right, it's like all the forces in the universe converge to make everything come together. That force has been in motion since the moment I met you."

"Even though I was wearing that horrid gray dress?"

Gavin laughed. "An ordinary dress can't hide the light that shines from inside you, Bree. I could tell right away that you were special. And then when we danced." He let out a low whistle that tickled a laugh from down deep in her belly. "We're definitely going out dancing later." Then he hesitated. "Or maybe tomorrow. It's our wedding night and I have some very detailed plans for it." A slightly raised brow made desire quiver in Bree. The promise of sensual pleasure thickened her nipples under her silky dress.

She almost slid her hand inside his jacket to enjoy the hot hard muscle she knew lay under his elegant tux.

Then she remembered they still stood in the middle of the hotel terrace, under the professional gaze of the "witnesses."

She glanced around and took a step back. "Perhaps we should go somewhere more private?"

Back in their comfortable suite, which also featured breathtaking views of the bay, Gavin had the whole evening arranged down to the finest detail. Even the cats were settled near the sofa with gourmet meals and plush cushions. A knock on the door confirmed that everything was happening according to plan.

“That must be dinner.” He kissed Bree’s sweet lips one more time before heading for the door to their suite. He’d secretly placed an order for the hotel’s finest meal, for them to enjoy in the privacy of their suite.

Only the best for Bree. Not because she was an heiress and accustomed to it anyway, but because he truly did want to cherish her, and to see that pretty face light with its familiar glowing smile.

“I’d just assumed we’d go out.” Bree glanced at the door.

“On our wedding night? I prefer privacy.” He shot her a teasing glance.

The waiter wheeled in a cart laden with pretty Mediterranean pottery, then congratulated them and left. Bree lifted the lid of the first dish to reveal a rush of steam and the tempting scent of delicate hors d’oeuvres, two of each, an array of tiny pastries and bite-sized morsels.

He fed them to Bree, and she returned the favor, both of them laughing. When had he ever done anything this simple—this silly—with a woman, and had such a great time?

Never. That’s when.

Bree’s easy, drama-free approach to life was so refreshing. Even if one million big ones weren’t currently winging their way into his bank account, he’d be very pleased with his choice of a life partner.

The soup was creamy vichyssoise sprinkled with fresh chives. Tender steak tips, baby vegetables and new potatoes in a rich gravy made a satisfying main course, and he was sure he couldn’t eat another thing until they uncovered the desserts—tiny éclairs and profiteroles, delicate tarts and hand-decorated cakes. He licked cream off Bree’s lips and toasted their marriage with a glass of Moet.

“I think we should retire to the bedroom.” He picked up the champagne and their two glasses. “We’ll be more comfortable there.”

He waited while she stood, looking radiant, glowing like a movie star in her wedding finery. So different from the quiet, almost apologetic woman he’d met that first night at the gala. She’d blossomed magnificently since he met her. Eyes darted toward her wherever they went, taking in her statuesque beauty, and she looked quite comfortable and assured under the gaze of all those envious males.

The bed was turned down, fresh white sheets gleaming in the soft light. Bree settled herself gingerly on the edge and accepted the offered glass of champagne.

Gavin sat down next to her and pulled a pearl-tipped pin from her chignon. “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.”

She giggled. “Wouldn’t it be a shame to undo all the hairdresser’s hard work?”

“But I can’t run my hands through your tresses when they’re all piled up on your head.” He pulled out another pin, this one with a spray of baby pearls around a tiny diamond. A single coiled ringlet tumbled free.

Bree tugged gently at one end of his bow tie. It slid apart and she pulled the black silk loose from his collar. “Two can play at that game.” Her green eyes glittered, pupils wide and dark.

The flame of desire burning deep inside Gavin all day roared through his muscles. But he kept his cool and slowly pulled another pin from Bree’s shiny updo. A thick lock of luscious dark hair fell to her shoulder.

Bree reached for the button on his collar and pulled it loose. She undid the next one and ran a cool finger along his chest between his pecs.

Arousal snapped inside him. He lifted the fallen lock of hair and found the delicate shoulder strap of her dress. Pushing it aside, he kissed her shoulder and neck, inhaling the rich scent of her and burying his face in her hair. “Bree, you drive me crazy.”

“Crazy enough to make you marry me, apparently.”

“I’m the luckiest man alive.” He found the zipper on the side of her dress and tugged it down gently. “To have the woman of my dreams right here in my arms.”

Or in his hands. He let them roam, shameless and hungry for the touch of her after a day of restraint. His palms cupped her full, heavy breasts, sending desire pounding through him like a drumbeat. He slid his hands to her hips, to enjoy the lush curves draped in seductive satin. Breathing ragged, he pressed a hot kiss to her mouth.

Bree pushed herself against him, breasts crushing against his chest, her hands tangling under his jacket. “Your clothes are in the way,” she gasped, when they broke for air.

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