



JOSS WOOD
Too Much of a Good Thing?

MODERN
tempted™

Joss Wood

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«HarperCollins»

Wood J.

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It's time for Lu Sheppard to get back in the game – fact. After ten years of playing mom to her younger brothers the boys have left home and she's determined to make up for lost time! Item number one on her list? A man to have some fun with! Rugby coach Will Scott is just what Lu needs to ease herself back into the dating game. Only in town temporarily, king of the fling... he's perfect. But his kisses are so electric that remembering they have an expiry date is getting harder. Suddenly Lu starts wondering... maybe it is possible to have too much of a good thing!

‘I’m not looking for anything more than a couple of laughs, some fun.’

Lu continued, ‘I’m not a complete idiot. I know that you’re only going to be around for three months and that was just a little bit of getting carried away by the moment. And, frankly, I’ve just come out of a decade-long relationship with two boys and I gave them every last bit of energy I had. I just want to have some company. I thought maybe you could do with the same.’

Company? What was she offering? *Company* company or *sex* company? ‘Does the company involve getting naked?’ he asked in his most prosaic voice.

Judging by the shock that jumped into her eyes, she’d hadn’t reached the bedroom. But then her eyes smoked over and he knew that she wasn’t far behind him. Unfortunately along with seeing I-want-get-you-naked there was a healthy dose of I-don’t-know-what-I’m-doing as well.

And, anyway, what was *he* thinking? Hadn’t he just decided to try something different while he was here in Durban? Yet here he was, sliding right back into old patterns and habit reactions.

‘Ah ... um ... well ...’ Lu stuttered. *Good God.*

‘Actually, I had thought about it ...’

Dear Reader

I am so enjoying the Modern Tempted™ series, and I wait in eager anticipation (as I’m sure you do too) to download the new releases every month.

Rugby is a big deal in my part of the world, and we are passionate about our teams—from schoolboy rugby to our national team the Springboks. I was watching a post-match interview by one of the coaches and I thought, *Mmm-hmm ... he’s pretty cute.* I love being a romance novelist, so admiring handsome men can be classified as research! *What if he were super-hot and an ex-bad boy of rugby made good ...?* And the story started to take shape in my head.

Will comes to Durban on a three-month contract to be the caretaker coach of the city’s superstar Stingrays rugby team. Lu, with the twin brothers she raised now at university, is at a loss about what to do now. She wants to revive her flagging career, and by meeting Will manages to land a job as the Stingrays’ press photographer. Will, challenged by his best friend Kelby to do something other than bundle a woman into bed and then walk, thinks that Lu would be good fun to hang with, to help him pass the time in a foreign city. Lu, who has been dared by the twins to have some fun, thinks that Will would be the perfect companion to ease her into a new life without the daily responsibility and company of her brothers.

They both think that they can ignore the fact that their hair almost catches on fire from the sexual heat they generate ... ha-ha-ha!

As per usual, I had the best fun writing this book, and nothing makes me happier than to guide two sexy, headstrong people to their happy-ever-after. Enjoy!

With my very warmest wishes

Joss xxx

PS Come and say hi via Facebook: Joss Wood, Twitter: @josswoodbooks or at Josswoodbooks.wordpress.com

Too Much of a Good Thing?

Joss Wood



www.millsandboon.co.uk

JOSS WOOD wrote her first book at the age of eight and has never really stopped. Her passion for putting letters on a blank screen is matched only by her love of books and travelling—especially to the wild places of Southern Africa—and possibly by her hatred of ironing and making school lunches.

Fuelled by coffee, when she's not writing or being a hands-on mum, Joss, with her background in business and marketing, works for a non-profit organisation to promote the local economic development and collective business interests of the area where she resides. Happily and chaotically surrounded by books, family and friends, she lives in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, with her husband, children and their many pets.

Other Modern Tempted™ titles by Joss Wood:

IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT ...

This and other titles by Joss Wood are available in eBook format—check out www.millsandboon.co.uk

A little over a year ago, on the same day that I found out that my dream of becoming published was about to come true, my sister was involved in the most horrendous car accident.

Because she is the bravest, strongest, most incredible person I know, this book is dedicated to her.

Love you, Di.

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ONE

'Laptop and mobile chargers packed? Did you check the oil in the car?'

Lu Sheppard stood in the east coast early-morning sunshine and, because she knew that throwing her arms around the hairy knees closest to her and hanging on tightly wouldn't be appreciated, jammed her clenched fists into the pockets of her faded denim shorts. Turning her head away, she swallowed furiously before digging deep and yanking out her patented, much practised I'm-OK-you're-OK smile.

'Lu, you did,' answered Daniel, the younger of her twin brothers. 'Twice.'

That was right. She had. And she'd ticked it off on the list she'd made for them. Not that either of them had looked at it. Lord, how was she going to do this? These boys had been her life and her focus for the past decade. How was she supposed to just let them get into their car and drive across the country to university and, to all intents and purposes, out of her life? She'd yelled at them, cried with them and cried over them. She'd provided meals and lifts, helped with homework and bugged them to talk to her. She'd been father, mother, sister and friend.

She was twenty-nine years old and not only was she unable to stare empty nest syndrome in the eye, it was also kicking her non-sexy butt. But, like so many other emotions she'd experienced over the past ten years, the boys didn't have to know that...

Daniel leaned back against the door of his jointly owned car and cleared his throat. Lu saw the look he gave Nate and felt rather than saw the nod Nate gave in reply. Nate moved to stand next to his non-identical twin, equally tall, equally good-looking.

Daniel cleared his throat again. 'Lu, we are grateful that you stepped up to be our guardian when Mom and Dad died. If it wasn't for you we would've ended up with some crusty relative who probably would've shipped us off to boarding school and holiday camps.'

Since their parents had both been only children, Daniel's comment wasn't far off the truth. All their relatives were old, crusty, and generally waiting for the light in the tunnel.

'But it's time for a new start...for us and also for you.'

Huh? 'What do you mean?'

Daniel rubbed his jaw. 'We think it's time for you to do all the things you couldn't do because you were raising us.'

Lu frowned. 'Where is this coming from, guys? We talked about this—about you two leaving.'

'Sure—about what uni was like, how we felt about leaving, what we were getting into. But we never spoke about you.' Nate chipped in.

Lu's expression was pure confusion. 'Why did we need to? My life isn't changing.'

'It should,' Nate retorted.

'But why?'

'Because nothing about your life is normal for a single woman of your age! When did you last have a date?' Nate demanded.

Lu couldn't remember. It had been a while—six, eight months? She could barely remember the man, just that he hadn't been able to wait to get rid of her after she'd told him that her twin brothers lived with her and she was their guardian. She couldn't blame him; his had been the standard reaction from the very few men she'd dated over the years: shock followed by an immediate desire to find the closest exit.

Add a large house, two dogs, an enormous saltwater fish tank, three corn snakes—no, they'd been moved to a reptile centre when she'd refused to look after them after the boys left—and cats to the pile of her baggage, and it was no wonder her dates belted away.

'We need to talk to you about...you,' Nate said.

'Me?' Lu yelped as she pulled a band from her shorts and finger-combed her straight, mouse-brown hair into a stubby pony.

Uh, no. She looked after them—physically, mentally—they didn't look after her. That was the way their little family worked.

'Look, Lu, we're not only leaving, we're leaving you. You know our plans: degrees, then we want to travel. We have no idea where we'll end up but there's a good chance it won't be here,' Nate continued. 'That being said, it would be a lot easier for us if we knew that you were happy and busy and had a full life of your own. Take this house, for instance; we don't want you hanging on to this mansion in the hope that one of us will want it one day. And right now it's a huge house for you to live in by yourself.'

Dan jumped in. 'We're not asking you to sell the house, or anything like that... We just want you to know that we are cool with whatever you want to do with it: sell it, rent it out, start up a commune...'

Lu sat down on the steps leading to the front door and rested her forearms on her thighs. Nate sat down next to her and draped a muscular arm around her shoulder. 'Just please don't become a crazy lady who rattles around here talking to herself and rescuing cats. That was the first thing we wanted to mention...'

There was more? Really? Good grief!

Daniel dropped to his haunches in front of her and pinned her with a look that went far beyond his eighteen years. 'Lu, you are going to be on your own for the first time since you were roughly our age.'

Well, yeah. That was why empty nest syndrome was wiping the floor with her face.

‘We want you to have some fun—to live your life.’ Daniel raked an agitated hand through his hair, which desperately needed a cut. ‘You need to stop being so responsible, to take a breath. To do the things you should’ve been doing while you were raising us.’

Lu cocked her head. ‘Like...?’

‘Like clubbing and—’ Daniel looked at a point beyond her shoulder and blushed ‘—hooking up.’

Hooking up? Heavens, if she couldn’t remember when last she’d had a date, she’d had absolutely no idea when she last had sex. She suspected she might need a high-pressure cleaner to remove the cobwebs.

‘So, here’s your “to do” list. We want you to try new things like...skydiving or learning to surf. Pottery classes or dance lessons,’ Nate suggested.

Daniel, her brand and fashion-conscious brother, winced at her faded purple T-shirt and battered jeans. ‘Some decent clothes would also be a good idea.’

‘I have decent clothes!’ Lu objected.

‘Then wear them!’ Daniel shot back. ‘And your hair needs a cut and you could do with a facial. You need a lifestyle makeover.’

Since their words plucked a chord somewhere deep inside her, she suspected that they might be right. But she certainly didn’t have to like it.

Lu growled. ‘I hate you.’ She glared at Daniel. ‘And you.’

‘No, you don’t. You love us.’

Nate grinned and her heart flipped over. God, she did. So much. How was she supposed to let them go?

‘You should go clubbing. Somewhere hip and fun. You’ll have to dress up and make an effort.’ Nate said. ‘Makhosi will take you, Lu.’

Of course he would. Clubbing was her oldest and best friend’s favourite way to blow off steam.

‘But she has to have a makeover first. I wouldn’t be seen with her with that hair!’ Daniel added.

‘Hey!’ Lu protested.

‘Haircut, highlights and a makeover,’ Daniel stated, and Lu glared at him. ‘As Mak has said, more than once, that hair of yours is a disgrace: much better suited to a prissy librarian who doesn’t curse, drink wine and who has never had a Big O in her life.’

Well, that sounded like her. Not the wine and the cursing part, but the Big O was definitely true. Could she be so damn emotional because she was sexually frustrated? It would be easy to shift the blame, but the truth was that sex had been scarce—OK, practically non-existent—for most of this past decade, so she couldn’t blame her weeping on that.

Empty Nest Syndrome: two. Lu: nil.

And when had her brothers become old enough to mention her orgasms—or lack of them—anyway?

Nate leaned back and put his ankle on his knee. ‘But, Lu, more important than anything else...you should get a job.’

Dan shook his head. ‘Not that she uses any of it, but there is enough money coming in from the trust. She doesn’t have to work if she doesn’t want to.’

No, she didn’t... If she could bring herself to use the money for anything other than the essentials that kept body and soul together. She had never felt comfortable using her parents’ money for anything other than food, shelter and transport.

His brother sent him a you’re-a-moron look. ‘Not for the money, dude. Because it’s something to...to get her teeth into.’

‘Oh, right. Good point.’

Lu lifted her fingers and started to tick their demands off. ‘So, you two think that if I find a job, go clubbing, have a makeover, learn how to surf—’

‘And skydive,’ Nate interjected.

‘Dream on.’ Lu glared at him and continued. ‘Go to pottery and dance lessons then I won’t have time to mope?’

Two blond heads nodded to some internal twin beat.

Lu stared past their car down the driveway. The thing was they could be right. The distraction of getting out and about might keep her from going off her head worrying about them. It wasn’t a bad idea.

Lu nodded slowly. ‘I’ll think about it.’

‘Promise you’ll do it.’ Nate insisted.

‘I promise to think about it.’

‘If you do it, we promise to come home in three months’ time,’ Nate said slyly.

‘You’re blackmailing me with a promise to come home?’ Lu’s mouth dropped open. ‘You little snot!’

Nate just grinned and looked at his watch. ‘We need to get going, Lu.’

She couldn’t bear it. She really couldn’t. She struggled to find the words and when she did they were muffled with emotion. ‘Call me when you get there. Drive carefully.’

Nate pulled her up, cuddled her, and easily lifted her off her feet before placing a kiss on her cheek. ‘Love ya, sis.’

When Nate released her, Daniel held her close. ‘Take care of yourself. Have fun. Please, please have some fun,’ he told her. Daniel let her go and hopped into the passenger seat. ‘We’ll call you when we get there.’

Lu nodded, touched Daniel’s arm resting on the windowsill of the car and blew Nate a kiss.

Her boys...driving off to start their new life...

Lu watched their car turn into the road and sat down on the stairs, holding her face in her hands as she watched her two chicks fly from her very large and now very empty nest.

They would be fine, she assured herself. As for herself...she wasn’t quite sure.

* * *

Two weeks later, in the VIP area of Go! on a very busy Friday night, Will Scott placed his elbows on the railing and looked down at the gyrating masses below him. It was nearly midnight and he’d been thinking about leaving the club for the past half-hour. He could walk down the block to the boutique hotel he’d booked into two days ago and in fifteen minutes could be face-down on the monstrous double bed.

That sounded like heaven.

Will felt someone lean on the railing next to him and looked into the battered face of his best friend Kelby, CEO of the Stingrays rugby franchise, who was also his boss for the next three months. Panic swirled in his gut at the thought.

‘How is Carter?’ Will asked.

The iconic and surly head coach of the Rays had suffered a heart attack a month back, and as the rugby season was fast approaching the team had been left rudderless without a coach.

‘Still in hospital. Still doing tests. They’re talking about a bypass,’ Kelby replied. ‘He said to tell you not to mess it up.’

If it was anyone other than Kelby Will would never utter the words he was about to say.

‘The chances are good that I will.’ Will rubbed the back of his neck. ‘I really don’t know if I’m doing the right thing, Kels. This isn’t some little local team I’ll be caretaker coach of. It’s one of the top teams in the premier rugby playing world.’

‘It is,’ Kelby agreed easily. ‘So?’

‘So I’m thirty-four years old, not old enough to be a coach, and I have no experience at all! I only retired from international rugby last season and I don’t want to muck it up!’ Will retorted, shoving his hand into his dark brown hair.

Kelby placed his bottle of beer on a high table and sent him a penetrating look. 'It's strange to see you even marginally unhinged. You are probably the calmest, most confident person I know.'

'I don't feel too confident at the moment,' Will admitted.

'You've been unofficial coach of every team you've ever played for.' Kelby replied, his smile wide. 'I remember that first practice you attended as an eighteen-year-old. You were so full of Kiwi confidence that you told—who was it?—that he was breaking from the scrum too soon.'

Will dropped his head in embarrassment. He'd chirped the then Captain of the England squad and his big mouth had propelled him into a series of initiations by the older players that had quickly taught him to keep his head down and his mouth closed. But Kelby did have a point. Even early in his career he'd had an affinity for telling people what to do.

Rugby was as natural to him as breathing...but coaching? He was a player, not a technician. Kelby kept telling him that he had the assistant coaches for that side of things—a support team who were employed to deal with the technical aspects. His job was to train, to motivate, to strategise, to inspire and to lead. To get results and to win.

But, hey, no pressure.

It was a new ballgame, Will told himself. Something new to conquer. Another challenge to meet. A temporary stop-gap while he decided what he wanted to do for the rest of his life.

Kelby looked contemplative. 'You know, when I offered you this job it was more with hope than expectation. I know you've had other job offers, like commentating, and I also know that your business interests in New Zealand are extensive enough to keep you busy. So why did you accept this job halfway across the world, Will?'

Will shrugged and looked down into the mass of people below. There she was again, her long, lean body dressed in tight jeans and a sparkly emerald-green top. Her elfin face was topped by an ultra-short cap of sun-streaked light brown hair and he wished he could see what colour those light eyes actually were. Blue? Grey? She was talking to the guy she'd spent most of the evening dancing with and he couldn't quite work out the relationship between them. There was a lot of touching, but no kissing, and he frequently left her to dance with different women.

Even at a distance he could see that the guy had charm and he used it...and the woman didn't seem to mind. She just perched on her barstool, politely dismissed the guys trying to pick her up and watched the crowd.

'Will?'

Kelby was still expecting an answer so Will jammed his hands into the pockets of his jeans and thought about how to answer his question. 'I just wanted to get out of New Zealand for a while...get away from the constant speculation and conversation about why I retired at the peak of my career. About what I'm going to do, whether I'm ever going to settle down.'

'Why did you retire at the peak of your career?'

'Exactly that—because it was the peak. Hopefully when people remember my contribution to New Zealand rugby they'll remember the last seven years—not the years I spent before that, trying to flush my career and my life down a toilet.'

'Did you take this job because you felt you owed me?' Kelby demanded. 'Because if you did I'll kick your ass.'

Of course he had. If it hadn't been for Kelby he wouldn't have had a rugby career—wouldn't have captained the team for the past five years, wouldn't be known as one of the best fullbacks in the sport. Three months of his life spent coaching the Rays wouldn't even come close to paying his debt.

'I do owe you.'

Kelby shook his head. 'You just had your head too far up your own backside and I yanked it out.'

Will shook his head. Only Kelby could describe his self-destructive behaviour so lightly.

‘You repaid your debt to me by straightening out your life. But, like with everything else, you, being you, have to take everything to the nth degree,’ Kelby added, resting his elbows on the railing that overlooked the heaving club below.

Will’s grin faded at Kelby’s serious face. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘Both you and Jo became too successful, too young...and it went to your heads. Jo was the bad girl of professional sports, and because you wanted to get into and stay in her pants she pulled you into her crazy lifestyle.’

‘Sex, drugs and rock and roll,’ Will said bitterly. ‘Then I married her.’

‘And, because you’re a competitive SOB you thought that whatever she could do you could do better. God, the press loved you two.’

Thanks to their exploits, they’d sold so many newspapers that the holding companies should have offered them shares, Will thought sourly. They’d fallen into bed within an hour of meeting each other, been married within a month. Theirs had been an instant sexual connection, an adrenaline-filled lust that had been as compelling as it was dangerous.

‘Jo did walk on the wild side and I loved it. The clubbing, the drinking, dallying with recreational drugs.’

Then had come the hell of trying to juggle their schedules to be together, the massive fights when they did meet up, and his slowly dawning realisation that they didn’t have anything keeping them together other than a waning sexual chemistry.

‘But what’s that got to do with being competitive?’

‘After the divorce you wanted to show Jo that you didn’t need her to have a good time. The parties got bigger, there were different girls every night, and you were still making the papers for all the wrong reasons.’

‘Nearly losing my career by pitching up at practice either drunk or constantly hungover. Yes, I remember! You covered for me that entire season. When the management team threatened to fire me you promised them that you could straighten me out, why?’

‘You were too talented to be allowed to mess up your life,’ Kelby stated.

Will shuddered. If Kelby hadn’t stepped up and fought for him to stay employed by the rugby franchise there would’ve been no captaincy, no career.

Damn straight he owed him.

‘But I didn’t think I’d create a Frankenstein! When you finally heard my come-to-the-light talk you went from Mr Wild to Mr Disciplined Control. You hardly drink, you’re rabidly anti-drugs, and you never allow yourself to have a relationship that lasts longer than a night. Maybe two.’

‘The spark usually only lasts that long,’ Will muttered. Bitter experience and a couple of brief affairs had taught him that the hotter the sexual flare of attraction, the quicker the flame died.

‘Fires need to be fed, Will. Your problem is that you think sex fuels a relationship. It doesn’t. Not long-term anyway. Love fuels sex. Maybe if you tried getting to know a woman first before taking her to bed you would actually learn this.’ Kelby sent him a knowing look. ‘Or maybe you do know this and that’s why you limit yourself to one-or-two-night stands. You don’t allow yourself to get to know anyone because you don’t want to risk falling in love.’

Why would he want to fall in love? Love was the pits! A rollercoaster ride of hot sex, huge fights and total loss of control. Control...he never lost it. Not any more. Not on the field, not in relationships, never in the bedroom. It reminded him of who he’d been and he didn’t like it. Didn’t want to be reminded of it.

‘Have you been taking some of Angie’s girl pills?’ Will demanded. ‘Geez, you sound like one of my sisters!’

Yet Kelby wouldn’t shut up. ‘Here’s an idea...why don’t you try being friends with a woman instead?’

‘That’s not the way it works.’

‘On planet Normal it does,’ Kelby retorted.

Will couldn’t find a clever retort so he fell back on an old, trusted response. ‘Shuddup.’

Kelby just snorted into his beer.

Will looked over the railing to see some of his team in the heaving mass of dancers below, surrounded by a lot of nubile, barely dressed female flesh. They were so young and so obvious. He looked right, to the woman at the bar who was the complete opposite of them. Older, but inadvertently sexy, he mused, fascinated by her. Understated, yet compelling, with her minimal make-up and short, no-fuss hair.

Kelby banged his empty bottle down on the table. ‘Let’s get out of here.’

Will nodded and drained his beer. His eyes swept over the crowd below and he saw that she was still there, standing by the bar, a long glass of what looked like mineral water in her hand. Unlike the rest of the clubbers she looked completely sober, and when she lifted her arm, and swung her watch-bracelet around her arm, he saw that she was checking the time. Her body language screamed that she wanted to leave and he was momentarily disappointed not to have met her.

You’re here for three months only. Sex was important to him, although he was still weary of casual hook-ups. But as the thought of a permanent relationship gave him hives it didn’t leave him with a lot of options. What could be worse than being trapped in a relationship with someone after familiarity and boredom had snuffed out all sexual attraction? It had happened with Jo, consistently rated as one of the world’s sexiest sportswomen, so it was bound to happen with anyone else.

If he got bored, fell out of lust and couldn’t maintain a relationship with someone as hot as her, he held out little—actually, no hope that he could do it with someone more...normal. He was, he admitted, a dysfunctional ass when it came to women.

As Will and Kelby walked down the steps from the VIP area he debated which exit to use. If he turned right it would take him past the bar and he might see the woman again.

Not that he’d do anything about it when he saw her; he just wanted to satisfy his curiosity about the colour of her eyes.

He traded high-fives with the more sober clubbers and rugby fans who recognised him, and Kelby willingly allowed himself to be pulled into a conversation with a couple of devoted fans. Rugby talk and free beer. Will grinned. Kelby couldn’t resist either.

Will dismissed the raucous comments flung his way and flatly ignored the offers from women—and one camp man—to buy him a drink. It took him about fifteen minutes to get to where he’d last seen her and he looked around. She’d disappeared.

Gone.

Later, he couldn’t have said why he looked in that direction, what made him glance over his shoulder. But there she was again. Except this time she was swaying on her feet. A large man, one whom he hadn’t seen before, had put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her into his side. She wasn’t resisting. She just looked past him with glassy eyes and her head bobbed on her neck.

She was high as a friggin’ satellite.

Will frowned. Fifteen minutes ago she’d been dead sober and wanting to go home—now she was spaced.

He knew drugs—could spot the signs—but he was convinced she’d been telling her friend that she wanted to go home. Why take a hit if she wanted to leave? And whatever she’d taken had propelled her into la-la land very, very quickly.

Will looked at her and his gut instinct screamed that something was wrong. He really didn’t like the look of the broad, hairy hand that was cupping her ribcage, one grubby-looking thumb resting just under the curve of her breast. She’d refused the advances of far better-looking and better-dressed men than him the whole evening. There was no way that she’d hook up with that jackass now.

Date-rape drug. The thought slammed into his head with the force of a rugby scrum.

And where the hell was her friend...boyfriend...date—whatever he was? Will gnawed his bottom lip and swore, considering what to do. He was ninety-nine percent sure that her drink had been spiked, and if it had been, he couldn't just leave her. Who knew what would happen to her?

But...what if he was wrong? This could all be consensual and he could be grabbing the wrong end of a very sharp stick. But it would be far, far worse for her if he was right and he left her on her own.

Oh, well, here goes nothing, he thought as he approached them, pulling a name out of the air. 'Flora? Hey—hi! I never expected to bump into you here!'

TWO

Disconnected memories and snippets of conversation jumped in and out of her brain as Lu struggled to open her eyes. Eventually she just kept them closed and let herself drift. She remembered a friendly argument with Mak about her new, super-short hair. She didn't think it suited her, and she thought her newly plucked eyebrows were shaped in too thin a line. Mak had snorted that she had the fashion sense of a goat and that she looked fabulous. Rolling backwards in her memories, she saw Mak arriving at her house with skinny jeans, too expensive shoes and a sparkly top, because the boys had been gone two weeks already and he was tired of her moping so he was taking her clubbing.

When was that...? Today? Yesterday?

No, last night she'd been at that club, watching Mak's broad back slink off to the dance floor for one more dance while she waited for him at the bar.

Then...nothing.

Lu forced her eyes open, blinked and rubbed her eyes. When she opened them again they focused on a handsome face lying on the pillow next to her. Her eyes drifted over his long frame, over his muscled arm down to the tanned, broad hand that rested lightly on the top of her much whiter thigh. A masculine hand with a light touch... It felt so right, she thought as her eyelids drooped closed again.

OK, this dream was too awesome to lose by waking up.

Lu had no idea how much time passed before she woke again, but in contrast to the last time this time she didn't feel as if she had cotton candy clouds stuffed in her head. There wouldn't be a man lying next to her.

Lu opened one eye and—holy mackerel!—there still was a man. In bed.

With her?

And not just any man. A tall, dark and sexy one, who ticked all her make-me-hum boxes. Broad shoulders—tick. Muscular arms and chest—tick, tick. Long, powerful legs and slim hips. A face that was utterly masculine, a strong jaw and a battered nose that kept him from being over-the-top gorgeous.

Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick...

When he opened his eyes would they be an intense blue or green? They were neither. Just amber...the rich, deep hue of expensive sherry...edged with stubby dark lashes. They blinked once, twice, and then he yawned and she could see excellent teeth and...tonsils.

Tonsils? Seriously?

'Oh, crap!' he said as he rolled off the bed to his feet. He held out his hands as Lu scooted up the bed and wrapped her arms around her knees. 'Don't freak!'

Strangely, she wasn't close to panicking, but he looked as if he was about to.

'How do you feel?' he demanded. 'Are you OK?'

Was she? Lu considered his question. She was in a strange, albeit expensive hotel room, with a man who dinged her personal hotness bell, and she had no idea who he was or how she'd got there.

There was only one logical explanation for waking up in a strange man's bed. What was it that she'd tossed down her throat—and how much?—that she couldn't remember having sex with such

an attractive man? It had to be the equivalent of an alcoholic bravery pill, because she never did casual hook-ups.

Lord, she prayed that he used a condom.

Right—there was only one way to get through this, she thought. Keep calm. Play it cool. Act your socks off. After raising two boys she was a master at putting on a ‘happy face’ to get through any awkward or emotional situation.

She put on a fake smile and met his brilliant eyes. ‘So, that was fun. Thanks. I’ll just get dressed and get out of your hair.’

Lu forced the words out and held her breath when he placed his hands on hips covered in black low-slung boxers. He topped six feet by a couple of inches and, because the navy T-shirt and boxers left little to the imagination, he radiated physical power. Why did he seem so familiar?

Heavy brows lifted before dropping into a frown. ‘Fun?’

Oh, good Lord! Hadn’t he enjoyed it? Was she that out of practice? Lu felt heat creep up her neck and into her cheeks. ‘I’m sorry, I’m not very experienced at...’ she waved her hand at the crumpled sheets ‘...this. Look, let me just get out of here and we can both pretend it didn’t happen.’

Laughter flashed in his eyes and the corners of his mouth twitched. Lu felt the heat on her cheeks intensify. ‘What do you think happened last night?’

Lu stared at her bare knees. ‘I’m presuming that we had bad sex.’

‘You don’t remember?’

‘Hence the word presuming,’ Lu snapped. ‘Did we sleep together?’

‘Uh, not in the biblical sense.’ He crossed his arms across his chest and those spectacular biceps bulged. His mouth flirted with a smile. ‘And, for the record, men don’t ever have bad sex. There’s OK sex, blow-your-head-off hot sex and everything in between. But bad sex? Not so much.’

‘Thanks for the update,’ Lu muttered. ‘So, nothing happened?’

‘No, nothing happened...sex-wise.’

Damn, was that disappointment she felt? OK, even if she couldn’t remember it, re-losing her virginity—and after so long she was pretty sure that she could be reclassified—to such a wonderful-looking man could only have been a fabulous thing.

A headache she hadn’t been aware of started pulsing behind her eyes as confusion swirled around her head. ‘So, if I didn’t sleep with you then why am I half undressed and in your bed? Bra less? Did I say I would and then pass out? Should I start feeling scared?’ But she didn’t. Not yet. Weird, yes. Confused, definitely. Scared? Not so much.

‘I promise that you are safe.’ He must have sensed her confusion.

Lu looked into his sincere eyes and nodded. She wasn’t sure why but her gut was saying that she could trust him—that despite his size he wouldn’t lay a finger on her.

He sat down in the chair to one side of the bed and rested his forearms on his knees. After a short silence he spoke again. ‘I’m Will Scott, by the way.’

Will Scott! She’d thought he looked familiar. What on earth was she doing in the hotel room of the new—crackling hot—coach of Durban’s super-starry rugby team?

‘Ah...’

‘Do you want coffee? I need coffee. Actually, I need a drink. But coffee will have to do.’ Will stood up and walked over to the phone next to the bed, placed the order with Room Service.

Lu pulled up the neck of the T-shirt that had fallen halfway down her shoulder. His shirt, obviously. Which meant...what? Had he undressed her? And if they hadn’t slept together why was she out of her clothes?

‘Where are my clothes?’ she asked, unable to forget that she wasn’t wearing a bra.

‘Bathroom. Disgusting,’ Will replied. ‘You vomited all over yourself.’

Lu winced. OK, gross. Gross to the factor of four hundred. This story just kept getting better...not!

‘Why did I vomit? I never drink enough to vomit. I don’t understand.’

Lu dropped her legs and swung them off the side of the bed. For a moment she thought she saw Will’s eyes on them, but when she looked at him again he was staring at the beige carpet beneath his bare feet.

‘What happened to me?’ Lu questioned as she stood up and his shirt fell to just above her knees. Of course it still revealed most of her shoulder, but better than her naked breasts...though she suspected he’d already seen those since he’d undressed her.

‘I saw you in the club and you looked sober. The next time I saw you—Lu—you looked spaced...high. You were also in the arms of a man I hadn’t seen you with and he agreed that your name was Flora.’

‘Flora? Who is Flora?’ Lu demanded. ‘And if we’ve never met before how do you know my name?’

‘Oh, you have some business cards in your wallet. After I got you settled I went through it to try and find someone I could contact for you.’

That made sense. She did have business cards in her wallet that she occasionally handed out to promote her photography.

‘So, you saw me with this guy...?’ Lu prompted.

‘I pulled the name Flora out of the air and he went along with it. That was a pretty big clue that something wasn’t right. So I grabbed hold of you and tried to figure out a way to attract a bouncer’s attention. Then you puked all over him. And yourself. And my shoes,’ Will added ruefully.

Lu closed her eyes. ‘Oh...hell. Seriously?’

Will nodded. ‘Thank God you did. Puking probably saved your life. You got all the rest of that undigested date-rape drug out of your system.’

Lu blinked and held up her hand. ‘Whoa! Date-rape drug? What date rape drug? What?’

‘It’s the only reason why a stone-cold sober person would be reduced to a high, spaced-out, unresponsive robot in fifteen minutes,’ Will explained.

Lu felt the pounding in her head increase, followed by an unpleasant whirling sensation. Date-rape drug? Lu staggered to the edge of the bed, dropped down and felt nausea building in her throat. She could have been held hostage, raped repeatedly, subjected to indescribably disgusting acts...

In her head she was screaming, panic was bubbling, and she bit down hard on her bottom lip to keep from whimpering. She would not cry. She would not lose control, she thought as stark images conjured up by her imagination—hard and cruel—slapped her again and again.

She couldn’t get any air...she needed air.

Will crouched in front of her, his arm resting on his knee. ‘That’s quite an impressive show of control. Most girls would be hysterical by now. Right—now, breathe. The important point is to remember that nothing happened. I took you away after you threw up. So just breathe, slow and deep.’ It was the voice from her dreams, calm, steady. In control. The images disappeared.

‘But...’

‘Nothing happened, Lu.’

Will hooked her chin and made her look into his calm face. She could see hot rage bubbling in his eyes...for her? She grabbed his wrist and held onto to him, needing his steadiness, needing the contact, needing to lean, just for a minute, on his strength.

She sucked in more air. ‘OK, nothing happened. You’re sure?’

‘Very sure. A thousand percent sure. You were in my sight the entire time, apart from the fifteen minutes just after your drink was spiked. You’ve only been alone with me the entire time. Believe me?’

She did.

‘Your mobile is dead, so I couldn’t contact anyone, but I took you to the closest hospital, they pumped your stomach and you stayed there the night.’

‘What? I stayed the night in hospital?’

Will nodded, his face grim.

‘So today isn’t today, it’s tomorrow?’ Lu cried. ‘I lost an entire day?’

Will grimaced. ‘Yeah. You came round for a while this afternoon and the doctors thought that you were well enough to be discharged, provided someone kept an eye on you.’

‘I don’t remember anything!’

‘Apparently that’s normal.’

‘That’s your opinion. Nothing is vaguely normal about this. So you brought me back here?’ Lu looked around. ‘Where is here?’

‘The Bay—penthouse suite. My temporary quarters until I find a flat to rent. Well, I didn’t know who to contact, and I couldn’t leave you alone, so I changed you into one of my T-shirts and let you sleep it off.’

Lu looked at the bed they’d shared. ‘You slept with me?’

‘Just to keep an eye on you,’ Will reassured her. ‘You were having some nasty dreams. Judging by your quick downhill slide, the hospital doctors think it was GHB, which is very easy to overdose on. You were very lucky. Because you weigh next to nothing, the doctors were worried. An overdose can lead to a coma or death.’

‘I never leave my drink unattended,’ Lu protested.

‘You did. You put it on the bar when your friend came back from the dance floor. You checked the time...’ Will cursed.

Lu raised her eyebrows. He’d been watching her? How? From where? And yet she still didn’t feel creeped out. Just protected...and safe. As if she had a burly guardian angel looking after her.

Will closed his eyes for a millisecond. ‘You were directly below me. I was watching the action from the VIP area above.’

‘Now I sound like a stalker.’ He raked his hand through his short hair and grimaced. ‘I’m not, I promise. I saw you. You looked sober. The next time I saw you, you looked high, with someone I hadn’t seen you even speak to. Something just didn’t seem right.’

Lu believed him. Maybe she was being naïve or dumb, but she knew, to the bottom of her toes, that Will had saved her. Besides, seriously, why would anyone who looked like him need a date-rape drug to get a girl into bed? He was probably beating them off with clubs as it was.

She wasn’t a celeb-watcher but his profile was high enough that it was hard not to read about him. He was the ex-bad-boy of international rugby who dated supermodels and superstars. His ex-wife was the Golden Princess of women’s professional tennis, with a face and body that could launch intergalactic starships. And he was an international rugby god—one of New Zealand’s national treasures, Lu thought as she remembered the twins’ many conversations about him. He was a multi-capped player and had been instrumental in leading his team to victory in the last World Cup. He’d just retired from international rugby and was in Durban for a few months.

Lu was snapped back to the present by a sharp rap on the suite door. Will smiled and her stomach rolled. Hoo-boy! Mega-attractive man.

‘Coffee. It’s about time.’ Will moved to the door and looked at her over his shoulder. ‘My mobile is next to the bed, or use the hotel phone to contact anyone you need to.’

‘Thank you. I will...after I use the bathroom. And Will?’

Lu swallowed and lifted her hands when he turned and looked at her.

‘Thank you. It sounds inadequate, but I am so, so grateful. For everything. I am forever in your debt.’

* * *

Lu washed up and held each side of the free-standing basin, staring down into the expanse of white porcelain. Why did she feel nineteen again? Defenceless, vulnerable, scared... It had to be because, like before, she’d been dumped into this horrible situation without any warning, any time to prepare.

It was a situation she couldn't control and she was propelled back to that black time when she'd felt sick with grief, crippled by the responsibility of her new role as guardian to her brothers, feeling so helpless.

Every insecurity she'd ever had came rushing back—every sadness, every fear. Oh, she knew intellectually that this wasn't her fault, but knowing was different from feeling, and being at the mercy of whoever it was who'd spiked her drink scared her down to her toes. Added to that was the realisation that she'd been in Will's hands, his care...under his power.

She wanted to curl up in a corner and suck her thumb. GHB? Spiked drinks? A high-profile celebrity rescuing her from what might have been a very nasty situation? Incidents like this didn't happen to ordinary girls like her. If she thought about what could have happened...

Lu bumped her hand against her forehead in an effort to clear the cobwebs and realised that her stomach was rebelling again.

Don't think about it. Don't think about it...

Will's face popped into her head and she focused on that as a distraction. He was so much better-looking in real life than in the newspapers and on TV. They didn't capture the intelligence in those topaz-coloured eyes, the flicker of movement in that mobile mouth, the very, very small dimple-type dent that appeared in his cheek when he smiled.

And she wasn't even going to think about his body...fit, hard, utterly—shockingly!—masculine. Lu rubbed her thighs together. Strangely, she suddenly felt a pounding pulse in a place where she'd never pulsed before.

Lu raised her head to look at herself in the mirror above the sink and yelped at her reflection. Her brand-new, streaky gold hair that had looked so fabulously chic last night now stood up in tufts on the right side of her head and lay dead flat on the other side. She was sheet-white, her freckles the only bit of colour in her face, and someone had painted the bags under her eyes a bright purple.

No wonder Will Scott had belted out of bed as if the hounds of hell were snapping at his heels. Admittedly her eyes were an unusual colour—sometimes green, sometimes blue—but the spray of freckles across her nose and cheeks were the bane of her life. She was more 'girl next door' than 'I am woman, hear me roar'.

This morning she barely reached 'I am human, hear me whimper'.

So any ideas that he'd been looking at her legs or mouth or any quick flashes of interest she'd thought she'd caught in his eyes was just a very optimistic dose of wishful thinking. Stupid girl. Lu pulled a tongue at her reflection, opened the tap and splashed warm water on her face. Stealing a bit of Will's toothpaste, she brushed her teeth with her finger and helped herself to a healthy swig of his mouthwash.

She wet her hands and ran them through her hair in an attempt to look less like a neurotic bantam chicken. She wished she could pull on her clothes, but when she reached for the packet containing them one whiff of the contents had her changing her mind. Will's T-shirt, which barely hit her knees would have to do for now.

Right—she felt marginally human and slightly better able to deal with Will, his smack-you-in-the-face sex appeal and this very weird situation. Lu straightened her spine and opened the bathroom door just as Will walked across from the closet, now dressed in hip hugging faded Levi's, a fire-engine-red T-shirt clutched loosely in his hand.

His chest was lightly covered in dark hair and he had a six-pack that would make a male model jealous. It made her mouth water.

I am woman, see me drool.

* * *

'Lu! Lu, where the hell are you?'

Forty-five minutes later a pounding on the suite door and an upset male voice caused Lu to jump in her chair. Will lifted his eyebrows as Lu went to answer the door and the handsome guy from the club pulled her into his arms and whirled her around.

'Bloody hell, Lu. I take you clubbing one frickin' time and you disappear on me! And what the hell were you saying about your drink being spiked? And keep your damned mobile charged, woman!' he bellowed.

Not allowing her to reply, he segued into a barrage of Zulu. While Will didn't understand one individual word, he got the gist. It was the universal tone of you-scared-the-crap-out-of-me.

Lu interrupted him by placing her hand over his mouth. 'Mak Sibaya—Will Scott.'

Mak pushed her hand away, lifted his own hand in a half-greeting and carried on ranting. 'I left you for one dance...I came back and you were gone! I thought you'd done your normal I'm-sick-of-waiting trick and left on your own. When I couldn't get hold of you by yesterday afternoon I went around to the house. When I saw your car was there but you weren't I started to freak. I'm still freaking! And what were you saying about a date-rape drug? What the—'

'She's fine,' Will stated, shoving a cup of coffee into Mak's hand and cutting off another barrage of colourful swear words. 'Did you bring clothes?'

Mak sat down and looked around, eventually pointing to the plastic bag he'd dropped by the door. Will stood up and went to retrieve it, understanding that Mak needed a minute to compose himself—that he'd been seriously worried and expressed it by acting like a jerk. He couldn't blame the guy. It was what guys did when they were unhappy. Any man would be jumping the walls if his woman vanished on him and he couldn't get hold of her.

There was another reason not to have a partner or a girlfriend...you couldn't get agitated and upset if there was no one to get agitated and upset about. And he still wasn't impressed that Mak hadn't taken better care of her at the club—kept his eye on Lu instead of leaving her alone at the bar.

Will sat in the chair opposite Mak and poured himself a cup of coffee. They waited in an uneasy silence as Lu dressed in the next room.

Mak lifted his head and his dark eyes looked miserable when they connected with Will's. 'Thanks, by the way. If anything had happened to her...'

Uncomfortable with the level of emotion he heard in the other man's voice, Will shifted in his seat. 'Sure...I'm glad I was there.'

'Me too.' Mak scrubbed his face with his hands. 'Lu is...she's—'

His words were cut off by Lu's return. Will's T-shirt had been replaced by a snug, cropped T-shirt of pale pink, revealing an inch of her belly above the band of low-cut white shorts. Long legs ended in a pair of battered flip-flops. She crossed them as she sat down on the couch next to him.

Will handed her a cup of coffee. 'Black. Add what you want to it.' He gestured to the milk and sugar on the tray. Lu, he noticed, took hers black and sweet.

'I hope we're not keeping you from anything?' Lu said after sipping and sighing.

'I have some press interviews scheduled for later, but I'm not in any rush.' Will placed his cup on the tray and leaned forward. 'What do you want to do about the other night? Do you want to press charges?' He watched Lu think.

'I don't know. I feel fine now. A bit of a headache, but that's it.' She dropped her elbows to her knees and rested her face in her hands. 'I'd go to the police but I don't remember a damn thing.'

Will's voice hardened. 'I do. I can give the police an idea of who we're looking for.'

'Except that we can't prove the man you saw me with spiked my drink. He could say that he was helping me,' Lu pointed out.

Will felt his back teeth grind together as the truth of her words registered. 'True, but I still think you should report it.'

Lu placed her thumbnail between her front teeth. 'You're right. It's irresponsible not to.'

'I'll take you, Lu,' said Mak as he placed his empty cup on the coffee table.

He looked calmer, Will thought, less wild-eyed.

Lu angled her head so that she could look at the face of Mak's watch. 'Today is Monday, right?'

Mak nodded.

'You can't take me anywhere. You have thirty minutes to get to that preliminary interview at the school. That's all the way across town.'

It took a moment for her words to register, but when they did Mak shot out of his chair and looked panicked. 'I don't want Deon going to that school.'

'It's a back-up plan, Makhosi. We discussed this. It's just in case he doesn't get into St Clare's.'

'You're right—I know you are right. But I don't have time to take you home, get him, and get across town in time for the interview. Is there any chance you can hang on here until I can get back?' Mak asked.

'Lu and I will go to the police and then I can run her home,' Will suggested.

Mak threw him a relieved smile. 'Thanks, Will. I appreciate it.'

Will stood up to shake Mak's hand. He clenched his jaw as he watched Mak and Lu exchange another tender embrace and then Mak was flying out of the door.

Lu shut the door behind him and shook her head. 'Mak only operates at warp speed.' She flicked her thumbnail against her teeth as she walked back towards him. 'You've already done so much. I couldn't impose on you any more. I'll be fine on my own. I'll go to the police and then I'll find my way home.'

Will resisted the impulse to grab her hand and to tell her to relax, to calm down. 'We'll go together,' he insisted and saw her shoulders drop from around her ears. She'd be fine on her own, his ass. But why did he care?

The girl had had her drink spiked, he reminded himself. If he hadn't interfered she could've been raped, subjected to abuse... Will ground his teeth as his blood pressure spiked. Damn straight he'd go to the police with her.

'Maybe I should just write it off as a bad experience and avoid clubs—no matter what my brothers want me to do,' Lu said, picking up her cup again.

'What do your brothers have to do with you clubbing?' Will asked, intrigued.

'Ah...they think I need to get out more,' Lu explained.

He felt disappointed when she waved her words away.

'It's a long story which you'd probably find boring.'

Strangely, he thought he wouldn't. Sure, she wasn't glamorous or glossy, like the women he normally came into contact with, but he had a feeling that Lu was far more interesting than most of the women he met. There was something settled about her...calm, down to earth...wise.

He admired her coolness under pressure. Her assumption that they'd slept together had been funny because she'd had a good excuse to lose it earlier. Instead she'd reined in her emotions and thought the situation through, keeping calm and in control, her emotions in check. He'd been dreading having to deal with a weepy, scared creature and her undramatic reaction had been a very welcome relief.

Impressive. He valued keeping his control and he admired her ability to do the same.

And those eyes, God...a mermaid's eyes, reflecting the greens and blues and aquas of a tropical sea.

Will rested his head against the back of the wingback chair and thought that his brief visit to Durban had started off on a very interesting note.

THREE

Will turned into the driveway Lu indicated and parked in front of the huge iron gate as she scabbled in her bag for her keys. He looked through the bars of the gate to the huge, sprawling house with its deep, wraparound veranda and nodded his approval. With a haphazard garden and pitched roof, it looked as a house should—homely and lived in. Big.

Will looked through the gap between the house and the garage and caught a glimpse of the sea. 'This is home?'

'Yep,' Lu said. 'Thanks for the lift and for coming to the police station with me. You were a lot calmer than Mak would've been.'

'He probably would've shouted at you the whole time,' Will stated calmly.

'He did go a bit berserk, didn't he? Sorry about that.'

Will's fingers tightened around the steering wheel. 'He's crazy about you. How long have you been together?'

Lu sent him a puzzled look. 'We're not. Why would you think that?'

Oh, maybe the fact that he kissed you on your mouth, whirled you around and wouldn't stop touching you! Freaking big clues!

'My mistake,' Will said aloud, but he wasn't convinced. And that wasn't jealousy he felt. It couldn't be. He didn't know what it was, but it wasn't jealousy.

'He used to live next door to us and we remained friends when he moved. Mak is just...intense. Protective of me. He adores me, but we're only friends,' Lu explained as the gate slid open.

Yeah, and rugby isn't a contact sport, Will thought as he drove up the circular driveway to her front door. She might think they were only friends, but he was a man and he knew how men acted and thought. How could Mak not want to sleep with her? She was gorgeous! A natural beauty with those incredible eyes...

'I saw the look on your face...you think that Mak was irresponsible because he lost track of me.' He couldn't deny it.

Lu sighed. 'He isn't—not really. He just has a lot on his plate, and when he gets time to step away, to socialise, he goes at it full tilt. And I'm not the type of girl that needs to be looked after...Mak knew that I wanted to go home and I knew that he wanted to stay. I've left him behind at many functions, so he wouldn't have thought it unusual. I have taxi companies on speed dial.'

Will just lifted his eyebrows and looked unconvinced.

His mobile rang. He pressed a button on the steering wheel to activate the hands free and greeted his caller. Lu felt that she should give him some privacy to take his call and tried to get out of the car, but his hand on her arm kept her firmly in place.

Through the car speakers somebody whose name she didn't catch was talking about that afternoon's press conference and Lu listened as Will was briefed on the questions he could expect.

'And obviously there will be the usual questions about your ex-wife.'

'Yeah, OK, I'm so happy to answer those!' Will barked, obviously frustrated.

She didn't need a degree in sarcasm to realise that he really didn't want to answer any questions on his old life, ex-wife and their marriage.

'Jo's blonde, gorgeous and successful. You're handsome, talented and successful. She's still single. So are you. You were once married and everyone still wants to know what happened to your marriage,' the voice replied calmly. 'The press know there's a story there and they want it.'

'They can all get...' Will shot Lu a look and swallowed the word he wanted to use. 'Stuffed. As per normal, Jo and anything to do with her is off the table, not open for discussion. It was all so long ago you'd think they'd get over it.'

With Will's hand still holding her arm, Lu stayed where she was and thought that they couldn't be more different if they tried. Like Mak, like her parents, even her brothers, Will was a breed apart. One of those successful, innately confident, very-sure-of-their-niche-in-the-world people.

She wanted to be like that.

She didn't have a niche. Her place—her space—had been ripped away when her parents died, and two weeks ago when her brothers had left it had shifted again.

After a decade of the twins being the centre of her world she was alone, and she had to live in this empty house without the daily responsibility of being their guardian. No more suppers to cook,

errands to run, parties to keep an eye on. For the first time in her life she wasn't defined by her relationship to her popular parents and her orphaned twin brothers.

Isolation and loneliness kept creeping closer, and she frequently felt ill-equipped to cope with a life that didn't have the twins in it. If she wasn't careful she could slide over the edge into self-pity, and from there it was a slippery slope to depression. She couldn't—refused—to let that happen.

She had to do something about her life, and quickly. After everything that life had thrown at her so far she refused to buckle under because she was alone and feeling at sea. That was why she'd agreed to go clubbing with Mak. She'd realised that she had to get out of the house, out of her own head. The boys were right. She had to start living her life.

Of course getting her drink spiked was an embarrassing start.

It had been a tough decade, she admitted as Will lifted his hand from her arm and carried on with his conversation. She had just started exploring her options for a career when she'd been catapulted without warning into caring for the twins. With the inheritance covering her basic costs she'd run around her brothers, caught up in making their world as secure as she possibly could, determined that they wouldn't feel as lost, as alone and as scared as she did. She'd kept herself and them active and busy in order to keep the grief at bay, and while she'd tried to keep up with her photography she hadn't been able to give it the dedication it required for her to succeed. Somewhere along the way she'd stopped thinking about herself, her place in the world and what excited her.

Who was she? Lu was terrified to realise that she hadn't the slightest clue. It was OK, she told herself. She had time to figure it all out. She just needed a plan.

'Sorry about that.' Will's voice pulled her back to the present. 'Lu? Are you OK?'

Lu blinked and focused on his face. Will, so very up close and personal, was even more mouth-wateringly, panty-crumpling, breath-hitchingly gorgeous than any photo anywhere. He wasn't perfect—that would be far too intimidating—and she liked his flaws as much as she liked the rest of the package. Creases at the corner of those warm eyes, and his deep brown hair was, sadly, six inches too short. He had stubby eyelashes and untamed brows and a slash of a nose.

'Do you want me to come in with you? Are you going to be OK?' Will asked.

'I've taken far too much of your time already,' Lu replied, glad to hear that her voice was reasonably steady. 'Thank you for all your help. As I said, I am in your debt.'

Will's eyes tracked over her face. 'If you start remembering anything and you have questions you're welcome to give me a call at the rugby union. They'll make sure that I get the message and I'll get back to you.'

It was a nice offer, Lu thought, noticing that he didn't give her his mobile number. She wasn't that out of practice that she didn't recognise the gentle brush-off. He wouldn't call again and she could live with that.

After all, she had her own life to get back on track. She didn't need the distraction of a super-sexy rugby player.

But, damn, how she wished they had had sex. Just one little time and preferably of the blow-your-head-off variety. Just to...you know...clean those cobwebs out...

* * *

Two days later Lu sat on the floor between her leather couch and her coffee table, her laptop in front of her. She was updating her website in an effort to attract more photography work and thought she'd made pretty good progress. The site was hipper and brighter than before, and she liked the photos she'd put on the front page. There was the Johnsons' newborn baby, stark naked with a bright blue bow tied around his tummy and a tag that read 'Special Delivery'. Below that was her favourite photograph of a bridal couple, caught in a loving look so profound it made her throat catch every time she looked at it.

She was good at it, she mused. Capable of capturing the essence of the moment. And now that she had the time to devote to it she realised how much she missed being behind a camera. She'd tried

to establish herself as a photographer a couple of times over the past decade, but every opportunity had fizzled out. She'd been offered an apprenticeship under one of the better photographers in the city about a year after her parents had died, but when she'd realised that after-hours work and out-of-town shoots were a standard condition of her employment she'd resigned because she had to be at home for the twins.

She'd done small weddings, worked part-time in a photographic studio before it had closed down six months ago, and done some freelance graphic work, but she hadn't, because of her family situation, been able to land her big break. Her fellow students from photography school were flying and she was ten years behind.

It wouldn't take much to kick-start her business. She had a studio already outfitted in the cottage next to the main house: lights, props and backgrounds. She just needed the clients to get back on track; she had to make up for all this lost time.

Her mobile buzzed on the floor next to her and she frowned at the unfamiliar number. Debating whether to answer it, she took a sip of wine and wondered whether she felt like speaking to anyone. You're becoming a hermit, she chided herself as she pushed the green button. Six steps away from becoming that self-conversing, crazy cat lady the twins mentioned.

'Lu? It's Will Scott.'

Lu's eyebrows shot up as her mouth dried up. Of all the people she'd expected to be on the other end of the call Will was last on her list.

'Um...hi...'

'I called to see how you were doing? Whether you had any lasting effects from the drug?'

'No, I'm fine.'

'Nightmares?' Will demanded.

'One or two,' Lu admitted. 'Normally when I let myself think about what could've happened. Uh...how did you get my number?'

Lu swore that she heard his lips pull up into that super-sexy grin. 'I swiped one of your business cards from your wallet. I see that you freelance...how's the photography business?'

'Slow, actually. I was just updating my site and racking my brain about how to get more clients. How's the rugby coaching business?'

Will's sigh was a combination of frustration and weariness. 'Honestly? Right now it's a pain in my ass. I have some squad members who have the maturity of a two-year-old.'

Lu leaned back against the couch and took a sip from her glass of wine, happy to hear his voice sliding over her. Her mouth curved. 'They'll get used to you.'

'They don't have a choice,' Will stated, his tone resolute. 'It's either my way or the highway.'

'So you're a dictator?' Lu teased, and then bit her lip. Lord, what was she saying? She didn't know him nearly well enough to tease him!

'Only in my job. I know what I want and exactly how I intend to get it.'

So sure, so confident. She wished she could rub herself against him and have some of that innate self-assuredness rub off on her. Oh, hell, forget anything else, she just wanted to rub up against him, full-stop. He set her nerve-endings on fire... This is why you shouldn't go so long between dates, Sheppard! When your hormones are invited to a party they head straight for the tequilas and start doing the Macarena.

'Well, I'll be rooting for you,' Lu said, after a longer than normal silence.

'Thanks,' Will replied. 'It's nearly seven. I've been here since six this morning. Any ideas for where I can eat? I can't face Room Service or takeout.'

'Are you going to live in that hotel for three months?' Lu asked.

'Hell, no. I need to find a flat I can rent, but I haven't had any time. I'm planning to look around on the weekend.'

'So...restaurants. What do you feel like eating?'

‘Mac and cheese,’ Will responded promptly.

‘Mac and cheese, huh?’ Lu looked towards the kitchen that sat at the other end of her open-plan lounge. Did she dare? What if he said no? She was mad. Of course he’d say no. But there was a chance—a numpty billion-to-one chance—that he might say yes.

And, because her mother had raised her right, she should do something to say thank you. Yeah, keep telling yourself that’s the reason you are about to invite him over. You might convince yourself in a millennia...or two.

Pull on your brave girl panties, Sheppard.

‘If you’re interested, I can do one better than mac and cheese. I have a lasagne that I made and froze. I can whip up a salad to go with it if you...well, don’t feel obligated...but I feel like dinner is the least I can do for you since you... Um...you’d probably prefer to eat out,’ Lu stammered.

‘Lu?’

‘Mmm? Yes?’ He was going to blow her off. She just knew it.

‘Homemade lasagne sounds really great.’

‘Ah...OK. Good.’ Lu closed her eyes. Eek! Now she would actually have to defrost the lasagne and make a salad. And have a shower and do something with her hair...

‘I could be there in half an hour? That work for you?’

‘Sure.’ She’d prefer an hour to primp, but that wasn’t going to happen. Well, as per usual, make-up would be sacrificed.

‘Do you remember how to get here?’ she asked, almost reluctant to let him disconnect even though she’d see him soon.

‘I have a pretty good sense of direction, but keep your phone close in case I go off course,’ Will told her. ‘What is Lu short for, by the way?’

‘Um...don’t laugh.’ Lu blushed. ‘Tallulah.’

‘Tallulah?’

His tongue caressed her name and Lu shivered.

‘Lu suits you better. See you soon.’

* * *

As Will pushed the button on the intercom outside Lu’s closed gate he thought that the heat and humidity of Durban were obviously frying his brain. What did he think he was going to achieve from this visit apart from, obviously, some homemade pasta? Lu had crossed his mind more than once over the last few days but he’d be lying if he said it was only because he was worried about her, worried that the date-rape drug might have had a side effect that neither of them, nor the hospital doctors, knew about. He’d been thinking about her and, unusually, not just as someone he wanted to get into bed.

‘Why don’t you try being friends with a woman instead?’

Kelby’s words from last week kept popping in and out of his head, quickly followed by a flash of Lu’s freckled face, her sea-coloured eyes. For the first time in for ever he could see himself being friends with a woman—being friends with Lu. Sure, he was attracted to her. But from the little he’d seen of her he really liked her as well. She seemed unconcerned about who he was and what he did.

She was, he decided, refreshing.

He was in a new country, trying out a new type of job. Maybe he should try something different when it came to the opposite sex too.

Will felt himself relaxing as her gate rolled open and he steered the SUV up the long driveway. A change is as good as a holiday, he thought, pulling to a stop.

Then why did his heart thump when he saw her standing by the open front door, dressed in a similar outfit to the one she’d changed into in his hotel room—a pair of white cotton shorts and a teal tank top with thin straps that showed off an inch of her flat belly? He lifted his hand as he left the car and patted two dogs of indeterminate breed, sliding a hot glance at those long, tanned legs and bare feet tipped with fire red toenails.

Friends. New approach. Don't let your libido distract you. It had, as he well remembered, led him into far too much trouble before.

'Hi.' Lu lifted her glass. 'I started without you. Want one?'

'Hi, back.' Will waved the bottle he held in his hand as he walked up the two stone steps to the door. He brushed past a pot plant and his nose was filled with the scent of sweet lemons. The bigger of the dogs nudged his hand and Lu grinned. 'Harry, stop it!'

'Harry?'

'Potter's behind you. The cat's are Dumbel and Dore.'

Nice place, Will thought as he stepped into a huge hall and Lu closed the door behind him. She took the bottle he held out. He searched her face, happy to see some colour in her cheeks, less blue under her eyes. Lu dropped her eyes from his and Will looked around. A coat rack stood next to the door and a large antique credenza squatted next to the wall, photographs in silver frames crowding its surface. A massive vase of haphazard flowers stood on a narrow high table, and the wall in front of him was dominated by two oversized canvas photographs of two young boys, their faces a chocolate smear.

'My brothers,' Lu explained as he stepped up to look at the photographs. 'Come through this way. I thought we'd eat on the veranda.'

Will followed Lu through a huge kitchen and his mouth started to water at the smell of garlicky, herby, meaty pasta. The kitchen flowed into a large, messy lounge with battered leather couches, a laptop on a big coffee table and a large screen television. Oversized glass and wooden doors led onto a wraparound veranda, which had its own set of couches, a casual dining table and an incredible view over the city to the Indian Ocean.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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