

PATRICIA
KAY

THE
ONE-WEEK
WIFE



Desire

Patricia Kay

The One-Week Wife

Аннотация

SEVEN DAYS A BRIDE Not so long ago, she'd been planning his wedding to another woman. Now Felicity Farnsworth was sharing his honeymoon suite. It had been a shock when dashing Reid Kelly, the former fiancé of one of her best friends, had invited her to join him in Cozumel for one week, no strings attached. Despite all the reasons she'd declined, two reasons made her board the flight: she'd secretly, desperately wanted this to happen — and so apparently had Reid. But Felicity had another secret she would never dare divulge to Reid. She wanted more than just one week.

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Coming Next Month

One

Felicity Farnsworth stopped her Toyota Highlander just outside the entrance to Rosedale Farms and took a deep breath to calm her jittery nerves. She dreaded her upcoming encounter with Reed Kelly. But she'd put the meeting off long enough. Now, even if she'd wanted to, she could no longer do so. Not since Madeline Newhouse had insisted her daughter Portia's wedding photos simply had to be taken at Rosedale.

Felicity was a wedding planner, the owner of Weddings By Felicity, the most successful event-planning business in Fairfield County, Connecticut. Her weddings were all spectacular, and the Newhouse wedding promised to be the most spectacular of all, for Portia was the adored only daughter of Alex Newhouse, the famous actor. And he had decreed that no expense should be spared when it came to his beautiful daughter's wedding.

So if Madeline wanted Portia's wedding photos taken at Rosedale, Felicity had to make that happen. Otherwise, she would be risking her hard-won success. And forfeiting the chance to be recommended by Madeline to her wide circle of free-spending friends.

Felicity took another deep, steadying breath, released the brake and drove slowly through the arched portal leading into Rosedale. Yet no matter how she cautioned herself to remain calm, her heartbeat picked up speed the closer she got to the main

building, which housed Reed's office.

Reed.

Felicity hadn't seen him since her best friend Emma Dearborn had broken her engagement to him, throwing him over for Garrett Keating. How was Reed taking the breakup? Was he devastated? Maybe he wouldn't want to see Felicity or anyone else associated with Emma. Maybe he hated all the Debs who were in Emma's close circle of friends. If he did, Felicity certainly wouldn't blame him.

Yet as uneasy as she was about seeing Reed, Felicity couldn't deny an underlying flicker of excitement. It was so ironic that the only man to interest her since her miserable ex of a husband had betrayed her and robbed her blind was Reed. That interest had sparked while Felicity was planning his wedding to Emma, and no matter how Felicity had fought it, telling herself Reed was off-limits, it had refused to go away.

But Reed was no longer her best friend's fiancé.

In fact, Reed was now available.

No, I'm not going there. Not, not, not...

After her divorce, Felicity had made a promise to herself. She'd vowed to spend her time and energy rebuilding her life and her fortune. Period. Because obviously she had rotten judgment when it came to men. What she'd thought was love on her ex's part had been opportunism, nothing more. He'd used her, and Felicity had no intention of ever being used again.

So no matter how attracted to him you are, put sexy, available

Reed Kelly out of your mind and stay focused on your goals—goals that do not include marriage or any other kind of permanent commitment to a man.

Arriving at the main building, Felicity pulled in and parked. Then she briskly climbed out of her truck, put on her game face and walked up the three shallow concrete steps into Reed's domain.

“Oh, hi, Ms. Farnsworth.”

Felicity smiled at the pretty young girl who sat working at a computer in Reed's office. She recognized her as one of his nieces, but wasn't sure which one she was. “Hi. Is Reed around?”

The girl—who looked to be about fifteen or sixteen—nodded. “He's out back in the stables. Want me to go get him?”

“No, that's okay. I'll walk back there.” Felicity preferred to see Reed alone. Especially if his reaction to her visit was anywhere close to what she feared.

Heading back to the stables, Felicity was grateful that the walkway was paved. The last thing she wanted was to ruin her Jimmy Choo mules, which had eaten up a big chunk of her disposable income last month. Shoes were Felicity's big weakness—some might even say her obsession. Currently she owned more than eighty pairs, and she still kept buying new ones.

Sometimes she felt guilty over the amount of money she spent on shoes, but she didn't allow those feelings to last long. After all, she worked hard. The cash she spent was hers, earned by that hard work. It wasn't as if she was spending some man's money.

No, it was the other way around. Sam spent all my money, she thought bitterly. She wondered how long it would take to get over the fact she'd been stupid enough to let her husband dip his hands into her inheritance from her parents.

“Felicity!”

Felicity blinked. She'd been so lost in her thoughts she hadn't even seen the approach of Max Weldon, Reed's trainer and assistant manager. A former jockey, Max topped out at five foot one and a hundred pounds, but his deep voice belied his size.

She smiled. “Hi, Max.” Max and her father had been very good friends, even though Max was closer to Felicity's age than to her father's.

Max's brown eyes gazed up at her with fondness. “Been a while since I've seen you. What're you doing out here? You in the market for a horse?”

Felicity shook her head. “I don't have the time to ride anymore. No, I've got to see Reed about a business proposition.” From the curious expression on Max's face, she knew he was dying to know what kind of business proposition she could possibly have that would interest Reed, but he was too polite to ask.

“Well, he's in the stables,” Max said.

“Thanks. Tell Paulette I said hi.” Paulette was Max's wife.

“Will do.”

They said goodbye, then headed in opposite directions.

Nearing the stables, Felicity heard a soft whinny, then the

unmistakable low voice of a man.

Reed.

Pulse quickening, she left the brightly sunlit walkway and entered the shaded interior of the main stables. Assorted smells—molasses and oats, cured hay and wood shavings, and that particular scent of the saddle soap Reed and his workers used to wash the horses—assaulted Felicity's senses as she walked inside. Although she had once been an avid horsewoman, she hadn't ridden in many years. Her ex had considered riding and everything connected to the sport to be a waste of time and money, and for a long time, what Sam had wanted Sam had gotten. But today, once again among the familiar sounds and smells, she remembered with an ache of nostalgia all the reasons she'd loved horses and riding so much.

Reed stood a few dozen yards away, talking softly to a beautiful black gelding with a classically chiseled head. Felicity's breath caught at the picture. She wasn't sure which was more gorgeous...the horse...or Reed.

Feasting her eyes on Reed's six-foot-two frame, his thick brown hair and his tanned, muscled, athletic body clothed in a white knit shirt and coffee-colored riding breeches, she couldn't help thinking Emma was crazy. She'd told Felicity that once she'd seen Garrett again she'd finally realized she didn't love Reed the way she should. But how any woman could not love—or at least lust after—Reed Kelly was a mystery to Felicity.

In her opinion, Reed was the perfect man, if such a thing

actually existed. For not only was he gorgeous, he was sexy, lots of fun and nice. Warm, generous and kindhearted, he was the type of man both men and women liked. Added to all that, he loved horses.

If he'd been mine...

But he hadn't been hers. And he never would be. Because she was no longer in the market....

Felicity didn't finish the thought, because just then Reed turned. The stable was dim, and her eyes hadn't fully adjusted from the July sun outside, so Felicity couldn't quite make out his expression.

"Hello, Felicity," he said quietly.

He didn't sound mad. That was promising.

"H-hello, Reed." Damn. She hated that slight wobble in her voice. She prided herself on always being calm, cool and collected. Some people even called her the Ice Princess, a name she had actively cultivated, for it helped her when she was dealing with the megarich, as she often did. Never let 'em see you sweat. Always give the impression you're in perfect control. That had become her mantra.

"What brings you here? Did you come to gloat?"

Oops. Maybe he was mad.

"Gloat?" she said innocently. "About what?"

Instead of answering, he stroked the gelding one more time, then strode toward her.

Felicity had to force herself not to back up, even though that

nervousness she'd managed to quell earlier was back in spades.

"Is everyone talking about me? Feeling sorry for me?" he said sharply.

Now she could see his eyes. She had never known that blue eyes could actually blaze. Her heart beat faster. "No, of course not." But they were. After all, Emma and Reed's breakup was one of the juiciest pieces of gossip to hit Eastwick in months. And Eastwick thrived on gossip. Especially that witch Delia Forrester, who seemed to think she might become the new Bunny Talbot now that the "Eastwick Social Diary" gossip maven was dead.

Reed's jaw hardened. "Don't lie to me, Felicity. I know everybody in the entire damned county is gossiping about me. Hell, I can hear them now. There must be something wrong with Reed Kelly if Emma Dearborn has thrown him over."

"Oh, Reed." Felicity's heart melted at the realization that he wasn't mad. He was hurt. Unable to help herself, she reached over and laid her hand on his arm. He flinched, but he didn't pull away. Wanting to comfort him, she moved closer, sliding her arms around his waist and hugging him. "I'm so sorry," she said softly. "About everything that's happened."

For a moment he stood stiffly, and Felicity was afraid she'd crossed an uncrossable line. Then his arms encircled her, and he rested his chin on the top of her head. Felicity closed her eyes. Being held like this, even if it was only a hug between casual friends, felt so good. It had been a long time since she'd been embraced by a man she respected. Especially a man as attractive

as Reed.

She sighed and, drawing back slightly, looked up, wishing she knew what else she could say to make him feel better. “Reed...” she began.

He looked down.

When their gazes met, something electric and undeniable sizzled between them. And then, in an action Felicity knew she’d never forget, his head came down and his mouth captured hers.

Shock waves radiated through Felicity as his tongue delved. She moaned when his hands dropped lower to cup her bottom, pulling her even closer so that she could feel his arousal. Her insides had turned liquid, her entire body on fire with need.

Reed...Reed...

Her mind spun with the realization that one of her fantasies was actually taking place. For even during Emma’s engagement to Reed, there had been times Felicity couldn’t stop herself from wondering what it would be like to be Emma. To be kissed by Reed. To have him touch her. To make love with him...

Suddenly, penetrating the haze of desire consuming Felicity, she heard the sound of someone’s footsteps outside. Reed must have heard them, too, for he immediately released her, and she staggered backward.

For just a moment they stared at one another. Then Felicity, knowing her face was flaming, sputtered, “I—I have to go. Here. This is what I came to give you.” Reaching into her handbag, she grabbed the check she’d prepared earlier and thrust it at him. It

was a refund of the deposit he'd given her months ago when he and Emma had asked her to handle the arrangements for their wedding.

Too embarrassed to wait for his response, she spun about and, as fast as she could manage on her four-inch heels, she fled the stable.

Hell's bells!

What had he been thinking?

You weren't thinking. At least, not with your brain.

Huffing out a breath, Reed swore at himself. Jesus. That had to have been the stupidest thing he'd ever done. He'd practically attacked Felicity. Why? Was he that horny? Or was he somehow trying to get back at Emma for making him a laughingstock?

He gritted his teeth.

That's what galled him.

That's what really galled him.

On some level he'd always known that something was missing in his relationship with Emma. She was sweet and lovely and exactly the kind of woman any man would be proud to have as his wife. But if he'd been honest with himself, he'd have admitted that there were no sparks between them, which didn't bode well for their future.

In fact—and he couldn't have admitted this to anyone—they had never been intimate. Emma had been reluctant, wanting to wait until they were married, and Reed had respected her

feelings.

So when she'd broken their engagement because of another man, he'd been more embarrassed than hurt. But afterward he had wondered if her reluctance to engage in sex before their marriage had more to do with a lack of desire than it did with wanting to remain chaste, as he'd thought.

Now he questioned everything about their relationship, especially his own judgment. His ego was sorely bruised, and the fact that everyone in their circle knew exactly what had caused the breakup made the situation ten times worse.

Although Reed came from a big, gregarious family and really liked people, he was a very private person where his feelings were concerned. If he could have licked his wounds alone, he could have dealt with being jilted. As it was, he felt raw and exposed.

And stupid. Don't forget stupid.

"Hey, boss, everything okay in here?"

Reed tried for a normal smile. "Everything's fine, Max. Why?"

His assistant frowned. "I just saw Felicity rushing out of here. Thought maybe you'd had some kind of argument or something."

"No, uh, she had an appointment, I think."

Max nodded, but the speculative look remained in his eyes, and Reed wondered if he suspected what had really happened between them. "Which reminds me, there are some phone calls I need to make," Reed added.

Walking out of the stable, Reed put on his sunglasses and

headed for the office. In the distance he glimpsed the taillights of a silver SUV heading away from the farm. Felicity's vehicle, he realized ruefully. Getting away from him as fast as she could.

And yet...

She certainly hadn't shoved him away when he'd kissed her. In fact, he thought, she had responded rather enthusiastically. Just remembering that response and how good her slender curves and warm body had felt in his arms, he could feel himself growing hard again.

Maybe Felicity was just what he needed right now. If they were to get together, the gossips would have something new to talk about, and they'd stop feeling sorry for him. The idea was appealing, but after a moment or two he pushed it away. He couldn't do that to Felicity. It simply wouldn't be fair to use her that way. Especially when he knew, from comments Emma had made, that Felicity had been badly hurt by her former husband's betrayal.

Belatedly he looked at the check she had shoved into his hand. A twenty-thousand-dollar refund of the deposit he'd given her when he and Emma had first begun planning their wedding.

That was generous of her. As it was, he'd lost the thousands he'd paid for the honeymoon he wouldn't be taking. Not to mention the cost of the expensive diamond Emma had returned to him—a ring that he was sure the jeweler wouldn't take back, or if he did, would give Reed only a fraction of what he'd paid for it.

He hoped Felicity wasn't out any money because of the canceled wedding. Surely she would have deducted any expenses she'd incurred before making out the check. He made a mental note to ask her about that.

Reaching his office, he walked inside and smiled at his brother Daniel's daughter, Colleen, who promptly handed him three pink telephone slips.

"Julianne Foster, Dr. Finnerty and Gram called," Colleen said. "Gram just wanted to know if you're coming to dinner tonight."

"Thanks, honey." Reed looked at his watch. It was after one. "Shouldn't you be heading home by now?" Colleen was working half days for him this summer.

"I just wanted to finish up the newsletter," she said as Reed headed into his office. "Then I'll be off."

Reed sent a monthly newsletter to his clients, who numbered in the hundreds—some living as far away as Texas, for Reed's thoroughbred horses were renowned and commanded top prices. Rosedale Farms was a full-service facility providing the highest-quality care and environment for all boarding, foaling and bloodstock management needs. It sat on six hundred acres of rolling hills and pastures in a gorgeous setting that was the envy of many other horse breeders. Reed was justifiably proud of the farm named after his paternal grandmother, Rose Moran Kelly, who, along with her husband, Aloysius, had owned and run a successful horse-breeding farm in their native Ireland, and he hoped to pass it down to his children.

Children. At the rate he was going, he'd never have any. Too bad he couldn't just arrange a marriage the way they had in the old country. Make it a strictly business proposition and pick a wife who wanted children the way he did. Of course, he wouldn't want just anyone. She'd have to be smart, attractive and agreeable. Unwanted came the thought Someone like Felicity.

He grimaced. Oh, sure. As if Felicity would be interested. She'd made her feelings about marriage known to anyone who would listen. She'd been burned once and had no intention of being burned again. He and Emma had often talked about Felicity's attitude, because Emma really cared about her best friend and wanted her to be happy.

"She told me," Emma had said, "that from now on she's devoting herself to her career and only her career. When I tried to tell her she could have both a successful career and a successful marriage—all it would take is the right man—she said she was happy for me if I felt that way, but marriage was not for her."

Remembering that conversation, Reed told himself to put Felicity out of his mind. She was not a candidate to be Mrs. Reed Kelly.

Determinedly clearing his thoughts of everything but work, he sat down at his desk and picked up his phone to return the calls.

Felicity couldn't stop thinking about what had happened between her and Reed. Dear heaven, what had she been thinking? Why had she permitted that kiss? And permitting it,

why had she responded like a bitch in heat?

You know why. You've been lusting after Reed for a long time....

And now he knew it. Or if he didn't exactly know it, he sure as hell suspected it.

Damn.

Her face burned just thinking about her wanton, out-of-control behavior. She couldn't imagine what Reed was thinking. How could she ever face him again?

And Max. Why, she'd nearly run him down when she'd rushed out of the stables that way. She could just imagine what he'd been thinking. She'd muttered an apology and some nonsense about being late for an appointment and avoided his eyes. Oh, God...

She was still mentally berating herself when she got back to her office. Trying to regroup and forget what had happened out at Rosedale Farms—so Reed had kissed her, so what?—she entered her office.

Rita Dixon, her diminutive assistant, looked up from her desk. Her brown eyes sparkled with the boundless energy that made her such a valuable employee. "So how'd it go? Did he agree?"

Felicity froze. Oh, my God. She had completely forgotten her main reason for going out to Rosedale. Sure, she'd intended to return Reed's deposit, but her most important goal was to get him to agree to allow Portia Newhouse's wedding photos to be taken there.

And she'd forgotten to ask him! Thinking fast, she said, "He's

going to get back to me.”

“Oh, fudge,” Rita said. “I was sure you could persuade him. Should I call Bo? He’ll be disappointed, but maybe he’ll have another idea that Madame Newhouse will go for.” Bo Harrison was the photographer Felicity always used unless her clients specified someone else.

“Don’t call him yet. I mean, Reed didn’t say no.”

Rita shrugged. “Okay. I guess if anyone can get a yes out of him, it’s you.”

Felicity told herself she hadn’t really lied to Rita in implying that Reed was thinking about allowing the use of Rosedale for the photos. Her mind whirled as she escaped into the relative privacy of the War Room—so named because it was used to plan the strategy for their large events.

Now what? she thought, trying not to panic.

But she knew the answer.

She would have to get over her embarrassment, pick up the phone and call Reed.

Now.

Two

Reed had the phone in his hand. He'd just finished talking with Jack Finnerty, who wanted to buy a broodmare, and was about to call his mother to say that, yes, he'd be there for dinner tonight, when the phone rang.

Glancing at the caller ID, he saw Weddings By Felicity. He hesitated only a moment before pressing the talk button.

"Reed Kelly."

"Reed? This is Felicity."

"Hey. I'm glad you called. Beat me to the punch. I'd planned to call you later to thank you for returning my deposit." Would she say anything about what had happened between them earlier?

"You're welcome."

"You gave me too much, though. You must have had some expenses connected with our canceled wedding."

"My expenses were negligible. You don't owe me anything. However, I do need a favor." Her voice was crisp and businesslike.

He finally realized she wasn't going to mention the episode in the stables. Good. That made things easier. They could both pretend it hadn't happened.

"What do you need?" he said, equally businesslike.

"I'm handling Portia Newhouse's wedding, and she and her mother have set their heart on having her photos taken at

Rosedale Farms. Would you consider that? They're willing to pay whatever you would want to charge."

Normally, Reed would have refused this kind of request. But he did owe Felicity, and there was something to be said for creating goodwill with the Newhouses.

"What are we talking about?" he asked. "I don't want tons of people tramping about, and absolutely no TV cameras or paparazzi."

"No, of course not. It would only be the wedding party, the parents and immediate family, my photographer and his assistant, and me and my assistant."

Reed thought for a minute, finally saying, "That sounds okay." He made a swift calculation. "The fee will be five thousand dollars. Will they go for that?"

"They'll be happy to pay it. Thank you, Reed. Portia will be thrilled."

"When's the wedding taking place?"

"In three weeks. Um, one more thing. Bo—that's my photographer—and I will need to stop by as soon as possible to scout out different locations. Is that okay?"

"Sure. You can come out tomorrow, if you like."

"Great. I'll call Bo to see what his schedule is like. Ten o'clock tomorrow morning would be best for me. Would that work?"

Reed looked at his calendar. Nothing urgent was penciled in for the morning. "That'll be fine. We can meet at my office."

Thanking him again, she hung up.

Reed didn't immediately call his mother. Instead, he sat there and thought about the conversation with Felicity. He knew creating goodwill with the Newhouses wasn't the only reason he'd agreed to Felicity's request.

The truth was, despite all the reasons he'd told himself she was not for him, he wanted to see Felicity again.

"Dinner was wonderful, Mom."

"Thank you, darlin'." Maeve Kelly beamed at Shannon, one of Reed's two older sisters. "There's nothing I enjoy more than feeding my family."

Wednesday-night dinner at his mother's was a weekly ritual in Reed's family. Not everyone could always attend. Shannon was a nurse anesthetist and her husband, John, was a lawyer with a busy practice. The same was true of Reed's other sister, Bridget, and her husband.

If everyone in the family, including brothers Daniel and Aidan, their spouses and children, came to dinner, the total count was twenty-three. Tonight only Reed, Shannon and her family, and Daniel and his family were there, making a total of eleven.

Normally, Reed enjoyed these gatherings. With everyone's busy schedules, he didn't get to see much of his siblings and their families, even though they all lived in Eastwick or its environs. So he made an effort to attend the Wednesday dinners. Today, however, he'd just as soon have skipped it, because everyone, but most especially Shannon, had been giving him furtive looks

filled with pity. He knew they all thought he was miserable over the breakup with Emma, but he also knew if he made a big deal of denying his misery, they'd think he was protesting too much.

Once again he realized the best thing he could do to stop all the gossip in Eastwick and the unwanted pity of his family would be to start seeing someone else...and fast.

Felicity.

Jeez! No matter how he tried, he couldn't get the sexy blonde out of his mind. Nor could he stop thinking about the way she'd looked earlier. He knew some people thought Felicity had ruined her hair when she'd chopped it all off after her divorce, but he liked the short, spiky style. In his opinion, she looked sexier than the other Debs, the tight-knit group of friends that she ran around with. They tended toward more conservative styles, whereas Felicity looked as if she could have been one of the trendy actresses on television.

Today she'd worn some kind of sparkly butterfly clip in her hair and one of her trademark short black dresses that showed off her rather remarkable legs.

He grinned, thinking of those legs and the completely inappropriate shoes she'd had on, all pointy toes and spike heels. She definitely hadn't looked as if she belonged in the stables, but she'd certainly gotten him thinking in terms of throwing her into the hayloft.

"Hey, Reed, you doing okay?"

He turned to Shannon, who had scooted over next to him now

that her two teenage girls, along with Daniel's kids, had begun clearing the table.

"I'm fine. Why?"

Shannon, who had the Kelly blue eyes and dark hair, shrugged. "You know..." She lowered her voice, although no one else at the table was paying any attention to them.

Reed stifled a sigh. "Trust me. I'm fine."

She looked as if she wanted to say something else, but instead bit her lip. Her eyes held concern.

Reed reached over and squeezed her hand. "Thanks for worrying about me, Shannon, but I'm really okay. In fact, I'm relieved."

"Well, I think the whole thing stinks. What's wrong with that woman, anyway?"

"There's nothing wrong with Emma. She was just more honest than I was. Our breakup is for the best."

"You're not just saying that? You've been awfully distracted today."

He shook his head. "No, I'm not just saying that." Shrugging, he added, "There was always something missing between us. I felt it, but I didn't want to face it. I'm glad Emma did."

Now Shannon gave him a real smile. "You know, I never thought she was right for you, either."

He couldn't help grinning. Her loyalty warmed him. He could always count on his family.

"What's going on over there?" Daniel said.

“Who wants to know?” Shannon said cheekily, winking at Reed.

After a few more lighthearted remarks, Daniel’s wife, Anna Lisa, turned to Shannon and said, “Hey, guess who I saw coming out of Goldman’s Deli this afternoon.”

“Have no idea,” Shannon said.

“Alex Newhouse.”

“Really?”

Alex Newhouse sightings were rare in Eastwick, for even when he was home and between films, he usually stuck close to his gated estate, especially during the height of tourist season.

“Yes. You should have seen the tourists gawking at him.” Anna Lisa giggled. “Of course, I wasn’t much better. God, the man’s gorgeous! Those eyes...” She sighed. “Did you know Felicity Farnsworth is doing his daughter’s wedding?”

Shannon nodded. “I’d heard.”

“Wouldn’t you kill for an invitation?”

“I know I would,” Reed’s mother said. “I’ve loved Alex Newhouse from the moment I first saw him in a movie.”

“He is magnetic,” Shannon agreed.

Reed wondered if he should mention the fact that the Newhouse wedding pictures were going to be taken at Rosedale. And that Alex would be in them. Best not to, he decided. The Newhouse family wouldn’t want an audience, especially at a photo shoot that was costing them five grand.

“Felicity’s done quite well for herself, hasn’t she?” Anna Lisa

said.

“Surprisingly so,” Shannon said.

Daniel stifled a yawn, clearly bored with this talk of weddings.

“Reed, want to go catch the rest of the ball game?”

What Reed really wanted to do was stay and hear what the women had to say about Felicity, but he couldn't think of any way to do that, so he reluctantly pushed his chair back.

“Why do you say surprisingly so?” Anna Lisa asked.

Yeah, Reed thought, stalling by pretending something was in his shoe. Why do you?

“Oh, you know,” Shannon said. “She was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. I just didn't think she'd have that kind of drive.”

“She strikes me as a woman who, once she sets her sights on something, will work like crazy to accomplish it,” Anna Lisa said. “I give her credit for picking herself up after that horrible divorce of hers and making something of her life.”

“It's too bad she doesn't have better taste in friends,” Reed's mother said, shooting him a dark look.

Reed knew an exit line when he heard one.

But even after he and Daniel were settled in the family room in front of the big-screen TV their father had bought less than four months before his fatal heart attack, Reed's mind was only marginally on the Red Sox game. Most of it remained centered on Felicity, his ex-fiancée's best friend. And the more he thought about her, the more he wanted to pursue what they'd started

earlier today.

Damn!

Why couldn't he get the woman out of his mind?

Maybe his subconscious was trying to tell him something. Maybe, instead of trying to forget about Felicity, he should be figuring out how to get her into his bed. Because, obviously, he wasn't going to be able to move on with his life until he did.

When Felicity arrived at her office Thursday morning, she wasn't surprised to see Bo Harrison already there, ready and waiting. Bo, with his dyed platinum hair, diamond earrings and all-black "uniform," looked like the creative artist he was. His photographs were works of art, and he was in high demand despite his outrageous prices.

"Good morning," he said, smiling.

"Good morning, Bo."

"Ready to roll?"

"As soon as I get my coffee I will be." She'd barely uttered the words before Rita emerged from their little kitchen and handed Felicity an insulated cup. Felicity grinned. "You're an angel, Rita."

Today her assistant wore a bright yellow dress and matching yellow heels with peekaboo toes. She, too, was a shoe junkie, although unlike Felicity, Rita bought her shoes on sale at discount stores instead of designer shops.

"You look nice today," Felicity said.

“So do you,” Rita countered, eyeing Felicity’s frothy multicolored sundress, a far cry from her normal work attire of either black or taupe—colors that would never take attention away from her brides or their attendants.

“Thanks,” Felicity said. “I have a Debs Club luncheon later.”

“I saw it on your calendar,” Rita said. “What time will you be back here?”

“Probably not until three. Why? Is there something urgent that I’ve forgotten?”

“No.” Rita smiled. “I just like to keep track.”

“If anything changes, I’ll call you. Or if something does come up, you call me on my cell.”

“Okay. Have fun today, you two.”

Five minutes later, Bo and Felicity were on their way. Felicity had declined Bo’s offer of a ride, since she would go straight to the club from Rosedale.

As they neared the entrance to the horse farm, her heart beat a little faster. Even though she’d spoken to Reed on the phone after that kiss—and both had pretended it hadn’t happened—it would be different seeing him in person. Meeting his gaze, remembering how his body had responded to hers, and hers to his. But no matter how awkward the situation, Felicity was determined to be her normal cool, efficient self today.

Because the last thing she wanted was for Reed to think that kiss had been important to her or that she attached any significance to it. Better for him to think her behavior yesterday

had been a temporary aberration, a momentary lapse of good judgment.

Reed stood outside the office building as Felicity and Bo drove in. They both parked, then walked over to greet him.

“Good morning,” Felicity said crisply.

“Good morning,” he answered.

Damn, he looked good. Once again he wore close-fitting breeches, but today they were topped with an open-necked blue shirt the same vibrant shade as his eyes.

Felicity’s heart clutched when those eyes met hers. It took every ounce of her willpower and self-control not to look away. Instead, she said in a voice admirably even, “Reed, this is my photographer, Bo Harrison. Bo, Reed Kelly, the owner of Rosedale.”

“Bo,” Reed said, extending his right hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“Thank you, Mr. Kelly. I appreciate the opportunity to work here.”

Reed smiled. “Where did you want to start?”

“Maybe you could just give us a tour of the place,” Felicity suggested. “Give Bo an idea of what’s here?”

Reed gave her a dubious look. “Are you planning to walk around in those shoes?”

“And risk my Blahniks? Are you crazy?” Felicity grinned. She’d shopped far and wide for the perfect complement to her shimmery sundress in shades of turquoise, violet and gold. “I brought some others.”

She reached into her tote and extracted a pair of New Balance cross trainers, exchanging them for her strappy gold sandals.

Soon they were off, Reed leading the way and explaining what each area's function was. Felicity was glad they'd decided on a morning tour, for already the sun was getting uncomfortably warm. As they walked, she couldn't help being impressed with the scope of Rosedale. It was truly beautiful, and far more comprehensive than Felicity had imagined from Emma's sketchy description the one time they'd discussed what Reed did for a living.

Come to think of it, Emma hadn't talked about Reed much at all during their engagement, other than to say they'd been there or done that. The omission should have been Felicity's first clue that all was not well between them.

Had Reed sensed Emma's misgivings? Because surely she'd had them for a while, even if she hadn't been able to articulate them or share them with Felicity. Wondering how long it would take him to get over Emma, Felicity shot Reed a furtive look.

And caught him looking at her with the oddest expression on his face.

Startled when their eyes met, she could feel her face coloring and quickly looked away, pretending to be interested in the quarantine and layup facility he had just pointed out.

What had he been thinking just now?

She swallowed. Damn, she wished she had been capable of restraining her baser instincts yesterday.

For the remainder of their tour she studiously avoided looking at Reed. He unnerved her, and she didn't like the feeling, even as she liked him far more than was good for her.

Telling herself any future interaction with Reed that didn't involve business would complicate her life in ways she absolutely did not need, Felicity thanked him when the tour was over, said goodbye to both him and Bo, and drove away from Rosedale without looking back.

Reed stood outside and watched the departure of Bo and Felicity. An idea had struck him this morning, one that, on the surface, seemed outrageous.

And yet...was it that outrageous?

He didn't have to be a rocket scientist to see that Felicity was as attracted to him as he was to her. Just the way her gaze darted away every time it met his—well, maybe not every time—would have told him she felt the same things he did.

So what if she had no interest in marriage and he did? All he wanted right now was something new. A brief liaison, one that would satisfy both of them and be a hell of a lot of fun in the process.

Sex with no strings.

He grinned.

Sex with no strings. They'd both get something they wanted and wouldn't have to worry about any messy entanglements or hurt feelings afterward.

And if he presented his proposition to her on that basis, she might just say yes.

Three

Felicity headed straight for the powder room when she reached the club. She felt overheated by her excursion to Rosedale. Or maybe the heat had been caused by her impossible-to-deny attraction to Reed.

God, he was sexy.

Just looking at him made her feel weak in the knees.

Well, no matter what had caused this unwelcome heat, she needed to put herself together again before facing the Debs, some of whom were way too perceptive. Of course, no one had to know where she'd been earlier today. In fact, she absolutely did not want them to know, because the last subject she wanted to discuss, in front of Emma or anyone else, was Reed.

After repairing her makeup and repositioning her violet rhinestone butterfly hair clip, Felicity felt ready to make her appearance.

Walking past the Emerald Room's malachite bar, she waved to Harry, the bartender, who waved back, and headed straight for the table where she and the other Debs always sat.

Sure enough, two of them were already there—Emma, wearing a powder-blue dress that set off her silky black hair and violet eyes, and Lily Miller Cartwright, who was now seven months pregnant and radiant in a yellow maternity dress that hugged her rounded belly.

Felicity used the few moments before her friends noticed her approach to study them. She couldn't help feeling a twinge of envy at the happiness evident on both faces. A happiness caused by being deeply in love and knowing they were loved back.

But I don't want to be married. I don't even want a long-term commitment. So why am I envious because they've both found their soul mates?

Just then, Lily turned and saw her. "Felicity!" she exclaimed, giving her a beaming smile.

"Hi, Fee," said a quieter Emma.

As Felicity leaned down to kiss first Lily, then Emma, she wondered at Emma's more restrained greeting. Was it possible she suspected something about Felicity's whereabouts today? Her inappropriate feelings for Reed? Was she even now wondering if Felicity had harbored those feelings all along, even when Emma and Reed had been engaged?

Oh, don't be ridiculous! How could she possibly suspect anything? That's just your guilty conscience bothering you.

Besides, Felicity thought, even if Emma did suspect something, why would she care now? She hadn't wanted Reed. She'd wanted Garrett. And Felicity had absolutely no interest in Garrett Keating. But even after telling herself this, she still felt uncomfortable. After the debacle with Sam, she hated deception of any kind, even when it was rooted in an omission rather than an outright lie.

Telling herself to chill, Felicity sat next to Emma and when

their waiter approached, ordered a glass of her favorite German Riesling, then joined in the conversation, which centered around an upcoming baby shower for Lily.

“It’s being hosted by Jack’s cousin Jennifer,” Lily said happily. She absently pushed an errant strand of curly auburn hair under her yellow headband. With her blue eyes and bright coloring, she could have been the model for a Botticelli painting.

“I hope we’re all going to be invited,” Felicity said brightly.

Lily gave her a look of incredulity. “Of course you are! How could you even think I wouldn’t want all the Debs Club there?”

Just then, Vanessa Thorpe and Abby Talbot, the last two members of their group who were joining today’s lunch, arrived together. Both young women were immaculately turned out—Vanessa in the same shade of green as her eyes and Abby in white, which set off her beautiful tan and long blond hair. Felicity hadn’t seen much of Abby since her mother’s funeral earlier in the summer, and she wondered how Abby was doing.

Kisses, hugs and compliments flew while the newcomers settled themselves and ordered glasses of wine. Once they’d had a chance to briefly study the menu—they met here for lunch so often they’d practically memorized it—the five women ordered. Mostly they stuck to salads, fish, or chicken, although Lily—laughing—said she didn’t care, she was going to have pasta today. “After the baby comes, I’ll have to say goodbye to carbs. Might as well enjoy myself while I can.”

“Knowing you, you’ll be back into a size four before that kid’s

a month old,” Vanessa said.

“I’ve never worn a size four in my life,” Lily said.

“Well, six, then.”

“Eight’s more like it.”

“Listen to her,” Vanessa said.

“Oh, she’s just trying to make the rest of us feel better,” Abby quipped.

“Like you’re fat or something,” Vanessa shot back.

Felicity sat back and enjoyed the banter. She loved these get-togethers with the Debs. They were all terrific women and had become loyal friends who had supported and encouraged her through her problems with Sam.

Even Abby had been loyal, although that mother of hers had had a field day writing about Sam’s desertion and the loss of Felicity’s inheritance. Felicity had long wondered how a mother and daughter could be so different, for Abby rarely gossiped. Maybe she’d had enough of it growing up with Bunny.

After their orders had been placed, the conversation turned to Emma’s relationship with Garrett, or more accurately, the breakup with Reed.

“How’s Reed taking the news?” Vanessa asked.

Emma shrugged. “I haven’t seen him or spoken to him since I broke the engagement,” she confessed.

Vanessa grimaced. “Poor Reed. He’s probably brokenhearted.”

“I hope not,” Emma said. She bit her lip.

Emma was tenderhearted, and Felicity knew she'd truly cared for Reed and wouldn't have wanted him to suffer.

"Have any of you seen him?" Emma asked, looking around the table.

The question unsettled Felicity. She didn't want to reveal that she'd seen him, because she was afraid that in talking about their meetings she might give away her feelings, yet she hated deceiving Emma. So she pushed back from the table. "Sorry, I've got to visit the ladies'. Now, don't talk about me when I'm not here to defend myself."

They all laughed.

She would stay away just long enough to let the conversation move to another subject. Unfortunately, when she entered the ladies' room, Felicity almost turned around and walked right out, because standing in front of the large mirror in the outer lounge area was Delia Forrester, one of Felicity's least favorite people.

"Felicity! Darling, it's been too long," Delia exclaimed. For some unknown reason, the woman had taken a shine to Felicity, almost as if she thought they were two of a kind.

Felicity forced herself to smile and say pleasantly, "Hello, Delia." Although she detested the woman, she saw no point in openly antagonizing her. "How are you?"

"I'm absolutely wonderful." Delia patted her dyed platinum pageboy, which was always perfectly coiffed.

Why was it people seemed to love platinum-blond so much? Didn't they realize the dyed version looked completely fake?

Felicity looked in the mirror at her own natural platinum hair color with satisfaction.

“And what about you, dear? I know you must be run ragged these days, what with the Townsend wedding and the Newhouse wedding and the Dearborn-Kelly cancellation, not to mention all that committee work.”

This last was said disparagingly, because Delia was not a part of any of the charities or club committees that the Debs were involved in. Felicity nastily wondered if that was because she knew the other women would not let her run roughshod over them as she was wont to do.

“I’m managing just fine,” Felicity said. Her tone didn’t invite further comment. Taking lip gloss out of her handbag, she applied a fresh coat.

Delia, however, was too obtuse to take the hint. “I’m just shocked that your supposed friend Emma would do that to you.”

Felicity frowned. “I’m not sure I know what you mean.” She closed the tube of lip gloss and dropped it back into her handbag.

“Oh, come on, Felicity. Why, she just canceled her wedding out of the blue, now, didn’t she? That tells me she doesn’t care who she hurts. Frankly, I think it’s horrible that she would let you lose money like that. But that’s typical of your friends, isn’t it? They’re all independently wealthy, so they can’t understand what it’s like for someone like you.”

“Delia, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” Felicity snapped, suddenly not caring if she antagonized this stupid

woman or not. “Emma would never purposely hurt anyone, least of all me. Breaking her engagement to Reed Kelly had nothing to do with me, and even if it had, I would not have wanted her to marry him if she didn’t love him. And as far as my friends being independently wealthy, Lily’s had nothing given to her. She’s worked hard all her life. And Abby’s an executive—she works like a dog. In fact, they all work. Emma has an art gallery and Vanessa...” Her voice trailed off. Why was she even talking to this despicable woman? “Never mind. I’m wasting my breath talking to you.”

And with that, Felicity spun on her heel and walked out. She told herself to calm down, but she was still gritting her teeth and muttering under her breath when she got back to the table.

“What’s wrong?” asked Emma.

Felicity rolled her eyes. “Delia Forrester. Need I say more?”

Everyone immediately groaned and agreed.

“You know,” Abby said, “I sure would like to know what that woman did before she married Frank. My mother tried to find out, but as far as I know, she wasn’t successful.”

“Oh, I know what she did,” Felicity said.

“You do?” This came from Lily.

“Yes.” Felicity grinned. “She stirred her cauldron and concocted her brews.”

For a moment there was silence. Then Vanessa snorted, and they all burst out laughing.

“Oh, you’re bad,” Emma said, but she was laughing, too.

“Well, she is a witch,” Felicity pointed out.

“More like a bitch,” Vanessa corrected.

“That, too,” Felicity said.

The conversation stopped as their waiter approached with their food, and after that, the subject of Delia was dropped. For the next hour they talked about the blackmail letters that Lily’s husband and Garrett’s sister Caroline had received. Abby was convinced that the extortion attempts and the theft of her mother’s journals were connected, and Felicity couldn’t help thinking she was right, even though that might mean Abby’s other theory—that her mother had been murdered—might also be right. Felicity shivered at the thought. Murder seemed so horrible, but Bunny had certainly inspired animosity among those people whose lives and secrets she’d written about.

When they’d exhausted that topic, the conversation turned to Vanessa’s ongoing battle with her deceased husband’s family over his will.

Emma, much more openly kindhearted than Felicity would ever be, reached over and clasped Vanessa’s hand. “I’m sorry you’re having to go through this, Van.”

At times like this, Felicity couldn’t help remembering how Sam’s family—whom she had adored—had turned against her after the divorce. She, too, reached for Vanessa’s hand. “Just remember. This will pass.”

Her reward was a smile. “Thanks,” Vanessa said softly. “To all of you.” Raising her water glass, she said, “Here’s to friendship.”

After they toasted one another, the talk finally veered to lighter subjects, and before Felicity knew it, it was time to go.

Emma walked out with Felicity, and as they stood in the parking lot, she asked, “Is everything all right? You left the table so abruptly before.” Her eyes were troubled. “Are you angry with me for some reason?”

“Why would you say that?” Felicity wished she could confide in Emma, but how could she? “Of course I’m not angry with you.”

“I know you’ve always liked Reed. You probably think I treated him badly.”

Felicity sighed. “Emma, you did the right thing. Actually, I admire you for having the guts to tell him the truth.” She smiled. “I’m glad for you and Garrett.”

“You’re not just saying that?”

“No,” Felicity said softly. “I’m not just saying that.”

Emma sighed in relief. “I’m so glad. I—I would’ve hated if this had impacted our friendship.” She hesitated, then added, “Your friendship is very important to me—you know that, don’t you?”

“Of course I do. Because I feel the same way.”

Smiling at one another, they hugged, then said goodbye, promising to talk soon.

Driving home, Felicity vowed that in the future she would not do anything that would cause her to keep secrets from Emma again. Her friendship with Emma was too important to jeopardize, and even though Emma had broken up with Reed,

she might still feel a sense of betrayal if Felicity were to start seeing him. She might even think Felicity had just been waiting for an opportunity to pounce. I can't have that happen. I can't gamble with my friendship with Emma.

So even though she felt regret, Felicity knew she had to put Reed Kelly out of her mind once and for all.

“Hey, Reed! Wait up.”

Reed, who had been about to walk into the Eastwick hardware store, turned to see his lawyer and old friend, Jack Cartwright, approaching. “Hey, Jack. How're you doing?”

Jack grinned. “Great. How about you?”

“Great.”

“No, I mean, how're you doing, really?”

Dammit. There was that look of pity Reed had come to despise. “Hell, Jack,” he said irritably. “I'm fine. I wish everyone would quit asking.”

Because Jack really was a good friend, he didn't take offense at Reed's testy answer. Instead, he reached over and grasped Reed's arm, saying, “Sorry, man. I just...you know.”

Reed sighed. “Yeah, I know.” Determined to change the subject, he added, “How's Lily? Isn't she about due?”

Jack's expression softened. “She's got a couple of months yet.”

Reed couldn't help feeling a pang of envy. Not only was Jack married to a beautiful woman he was crazy about, she was carrying his child.

They talked a while longer, then Jack said he had a three-o'clock appointment and had better hurry if he was going to make it. They promised to get together soon, and Reed went inside the store. He found the things he needed, then walked to the front of the store to pay for them. Mae Burrows, the wife of the owner, was working the counter. She rang up his purchases, told him what he owed, then said, "Reed, I just wanted to tell you how sorry I was to hear about you and Emma Dearborn splitting up."

Trying to keep his voice from showing his frustration, he said, "Thanks, Mae, but it was for the best."

"Well, that may be," she said, "but it still must hurt."

"Oh, no worse than having my nails pulled out one by one." At her expression, he chuckled. "Only kidding, Mae." Reaching over, he squeezed her hand. "Seriously, I appreciate your concern, but our breakup really is best for both of us." Taking his package, he waved goodbye and walked out before she could say anything else.

But her remarks, combined with Jack's sympathetic comments, only reinforced the idea that had been brewing now for more than twenty-four hours.

"People in this town need something new to talk about," he muttered. "And I know just what that something is."

So instead of heading straight back to the farm, he walked down the block to Georgia Lang's travel agency. He was in luck. Georgia was in, and she didn't have a customer. Peering at him over the glasses perched on her nose, she said with a slight frown,

“Hello, Reed.”

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