

# *A Valentine's Proposal*

A Valentine's Day story by

Christine London

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*B*ryce ran the tip of his chopstick up and under the silken strings loosely binding one side of Kay's scarlet teddy to the other. Each filament untwined and fell across the rise of her breasts in a most tempting way. He had to force his eyes from the alluring swells, crescents now tantalizingly exposed.

"I've never been able to master these things." He twirled the thicker end of the wooden stick between thumb and forefinger, upturned eyes peering through lashes at her face. Cheeks stained with desire, Kay's mouth opened ever so slightly as though the air she took in was no longer enough, but came in ever increasing demand as he toyed with her.

"Your kitchen is the nearest thing to gourmet perfection this side of the Atlantic. I just wanted you to be able to experience Chinese food in an authentic manner," she responded coolly. He knew her smooth alto tone was a façade for the cauldron of luscious womanhood that lay beneath this thin veneer of control. Ten months since they'd reconnected at his best mate's cottage, he still couldn't get enough of the woman.

"I'll not have you for Valentine's Day alone." Bryce's voice sounded demanding even to him.

Kay grabbed the end of each string of her teddy, retying them in careless reply. Rising from her place at the table across from him, the flickering candlelight glowed satin on her skin. His gaze dropped to each long leg shaped by her morning runs and the hours she spent in Pilates at the gym on Sunninghill High Street.

"You'll not be fleeing the moment just because I'm a no hoper with the Chinese cutlery." He raised a brow in mock injury.

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The details of his flat were lost in the dim, receding into the background like the diminishing clarity of forest in the mist of early morn along the pebbled shoreline of Loch Lohmond. The memory of their time there at Culag House that first week after she'd said she loved him added the final straw to his attempt at controlling the lust, making him shift in his chair in discomfort. If he couldn't have the woman in the next five minutes he'd explode now for dead cert.

Tossing the chopstick to the plate of chicken and vegetables she'd so expertly prepared in his wok, he rose to his feet and extended a hand just in time to catch her wrist before she turned away. Skirting the edge of the dining table, he pulled her to him, raising her arm tightly against his shoulder. Hooking his other arm about her waist, the satin fabric of her short gown lifted even higher. He drew her closer, grinding the evidence of his arousal against her thigh. Not even the jeans he wore could disguise the hard on that now pressed into her leg.

"Bryyyyce," she whined in protest.

Mouth crashing down on hers, he claimed her in one of his 'unjust' kisses. Kay had so dubbed his ability to strip her of sanity with the mere swipe of his tongue past her open lips, beckoning her deeper into the witchcraft of his kiss.

He felt the starch in her posture soften as she surrendered to the insistence of his mouth.

A quick jerk of the strings she'd retied, he slid his hand across her collarbone dropping the silken strap from one shoulder to expose not only the soft slope leading to her arm, but the elegant curve of her neck. The warmth of her skin and the feral spice of her body lotion filled his head like a drug. How could any one woman smell, feel, and taste better than all the visceral delights he'd ever experienced?

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She pulled away from him, the gloss of her golden hair tumbling across the satin perfection of the neck he'd been ready to trail with hungry kisses.

"Three bites of chicken with the chopsticks and I let you eat the chocolate lava cake with a fork." Her voice taunted him, the quiver at the corner of her mouth betraying her duplicity. She was trying to retaliate for the many times he'd won the battle of seduction.

"I'd hate to ruin that perfect heart shape or the sheen of the chocolate glaze." The cake had been front and center on his kitchen table as he arrived home from work that evening, air filled with heavenly scent of oyster sauce, onions, and garlic. Kay, back to him, she pretended not to notice his entry into the granite countered gourmet kitchen of his Windsor flat. More a house actually, they'd spent every available weekend and holiday together. Still, the commute between Los Angeles and London was getting too much.

"Fair enough." He moved toward her, sweeping her into the expanse of his chest. Nibbling at the shell of her ear he whispered. "Move in with me."

Body stiffening, she pulled from his arms. Much to his surprise her usual expression of resolve was absent. She smiled. "Okay."

Grasping the crest of each shoulder, he stared into the glittering sincerity of her blue eyes. "They've moved?"

"They have."

He pulled her in for a quick hug, pressing her away as swiftly. "Will you be able to do all your promotions and editing and—"

"Yes. The agency is now officially international and my publisher has agreed to handle all my work electronically with the odd trip to New York to smooth any rough edges."

Bryce lifted her from her feet and twirled her about. Her giggles resounded like the tinkling of bells and he

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lowered her back to the wood of his kitchen floor eyes brimming with tears.

"God I thought I'd never have you all to myself."

"You know I've seen no one else since—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted. "Still hasn't made this long distance affair much easier."

Kay reached behind her to the counter, small red box in hand as she turned to face him. He looked into the lapis blue of her eyes, then down to the gift she held.

"What is it?" His heart rose to his throat and he swallowed hard to keep the emotion from escaping.

"Open it, silly."

"Just a minute." Bryce turned. Extricating the bottle of champagne from the bucket of ice in which it was chilling, he rocked the stopper free, captured air whispering past the cork with a sigh. A quick splash of golden liquid in both glasses, he pressed the one closest to him into her hand. "First, a toast."

Raising his glass, he directed her to do the same with a lift of his chin, eyes beckoning. "To the love of my life." He touched the crystal rim of his flute to hers.

She smiled, her gaze shifting to the chain of bubbles rising in elegant dance from the base of her glass. Round as oranges, her eyes grew in circumference as she focused on the golden circle at the bottom.

"What? It's...it's...just like what I got...what we—"

Bryce pinched the chopstick from next to his plate, poking it into her glass and through the ring. Sliding the golden loop out of the champagne, he held it in front of her for her inspection.

"Best use of chopsticks on the planet." He nodded toward the ring. She slid it off the wooden stick.

"It's beautiful." The pear shaped diamond caught the glimmer of candlelight like fire and ice as she held it between thumb and forefinger.

She laughed, a mixture of sobs punctuating her delight. "I guess great minds really do think alike."

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Extending her hand to him, he took the red box from her.

Inside was a perfect band of brushed gold. He choked back the lump that threatened to suffocate him. "Best save this one for the ceremony." Bryce touched the band with his fingertip as though it weren't real. Lifting his eye to the woman he loved, he set the box on the table and took the ring from her pinch. Looking into her eyes, he slid it on her finger.

"It's official then?"

"It is," she replied.

He lifted her into his arms and carried her down the hall to his bedroom...their bedroom. He liked the sound of that. *Theirs. Them.*

Lowering her to tiptoes, he stared into her eyes. "Mrs. McKendrick."

She hooked the spaghetti strap slipping it from her other shoulder. The swatch of red silk dropped to the floor. His eyes drank in every inch of her as he lowered his gaze from her face to her toes and back again.

By the time he reengaged her eyes they were filled with invitation. Nimble fingers at the fastening of his jeans, shrug from fabric of shirt, the shake of a foot freeing him of the final constraint of fabric. They stood naked before each other. Fluid tumble to cool sheets, warm dance of candlelight across planes of torrid flesh, sensitive fingertips, heightened senses, rush of blood through veins thrumming in ears, ancient ballet of skin against skin, heart to heart, breath mingling, time lost in lover's embrace. The world sighed, paused in deference to the moment. Two as one, the earth stood still and the moon rose silver over the English countryside blanketed in February snow. Sunninghill Snow.

## *About the Author*

Christine London was born in Chicago, Illinois, but left the long winters of the Midwest as a child to find her roots in the sun and charm of California, both North and South. Her adopted home became Great Britain when she spent a year of college in the east end of London with three male flat mates; one from each country on the main island. Her fascination and love affair with all things British has grown over the years, facilitated by summers spent trading houses.

Graduating from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, Chris continued with family, teaching, singing in a jazz sextet & running foot races (and winning) before discovering her true passion....the romance and adventure of writing.

It took one Scot to awaken her poetic appreciation of Scotland's natural beauty, and another Scot to ignite her passion for writing. Thank you, gentlemen.