



**MAD ABOUT MEG**

**MARI CARR**

## Chapter One

"What do you mean you don't have my rental car anymore? I called weeks ago to reserve it," Meg asked exasperatedly. Her flight to Eros Isle had taken three times longer than it was supposed to due to an oncoming storm and an unexpected layover in Houston because of some faulty gauge on her first connecting flight.

"Yes ma'am, I'm sure you did, but as I said before, when you didn't arrive by five o'clock we rented it to someone else. This policy was stated in the rental agreement you signed," the harried clerk answered.

The airport was packed even though it was midnight on Thursday. Every Valentine's Day weekend, the small tropical island hosted its own romance fest called Cupid's Carnival. Meg watched a program about it on the Travel Channel over Thanksgiving break. At the time, she thought the romantic escape was just the salve she and her fiancé needed to spice up their waning relationship. She immediately began saving her money and booked their nonrefundable escape to Eros Isle the second weekend in February as a surprise. The nonrefundable part didn't bother her until she caught her two-timing boyfriend unwrapping another woman under the tree on Christmas Eve. Unwilling to justify losing such a tremendous amount of money, she decided to forge ahead with her long, romantic weekend, sans the romantic part. If nothing else, the trip to the island was a welcome break from work and winter weather and she could use the long weekend to figure out where in the hell she had gone so wrong with her life.

Unfortunately, her real-life experience wasn't turning out to be the sun, fun and fiesta the program promised. She'd already missed her first whole day of vacation, spending it on overcrowded planes and waiting in interminable airport lines rather than lounging by the pool at her resort hotel drinking fruity drinks with umbrellas in them. Then to add insult to injury, she'd spent the last two hours waiting for her luggage which apparently was—at this very moment—on a slow boat to China. An extremely annoying airline agent was now in possession of her name and hotel information with plans to send her luggage on "just as soon as we find it." Yeah right. Chances were good she would be back in Virginia before it ever made an appearance.

"Do you have any cars left?" Meg asked disappointedly. She specifically rented a convertible sports car, looking forward to four days of cruising around the island with the top down.

"I have one vehicle left." The clerk was clearly relieved she wasn't going to kick up more of a fuss. Quite frankly, she was too tired to complain. "It's a very roomy mini-van."

"Terrific," Meg answered with a sarcastic smile. "Plenty of leg room for little old me and no luggage."

Signing all the appropriate forms, Meg waited inside the door of the airport while an employee of the rental agency fetched her mini-van. She killed the time trying to recall exactly what she'd put in her carry-on bag as she waited. No more clothes, she thought, glancing down at the comfortable

travel outfit she'd worn. Having spent the last twenty-two hours in it, she would have preferred to burn it rather than have to wear it again tomorrow. She had all her money – thank goodness, her camera, her passport and hotel information, aspirin – hallelujah and her now useless cell phone. She'd dropped and broken it while waiting for her connecting flight in Florida.

*Yep, I'm now officially in Hell.*

Finally, the employee pulled up with what the rental agent had referred to as 'a fine car.' Clearly, her definition of 'fine' varied somewhat from the agent's. If she had any strength left in her body, she would go back and beat the guy over the head with her busted cell phone. Looking down at the directions to her hotel, she silently said a prayer that the heap of junk in front of her would make it the ten miles she needed to drive.

"Here you go, miss." The young valet offered her a smile she felt the incredible urge to run her fist through. "Welcome to Eros Isle."

As if on cue, the sky opened up and rain began to come down in a deluge. Dripping wet and cold, she climbed into the monstrous van, prayed the windshield wipers worked and made her way out of the airport parking lot with her head pounding and her teeth chattering.

After thirty minutes of poor visibility and two missed turns, she finally found the right road. According to her directions, she was only a mile from her destination and a quick glance at the clock told her it was nearly 1 a.m. Thunder and lightning was now accompanying the pounding rain and the deafening sound of it was only adding to the pressure building behind her eyes. She should have taken a couple of those aspirin back at the airport.

Bright lights in her rear view mirror blinded her for a moment as a car came up behind her too quickly for her comfort. "You'll just have to hold your horses, hot shot," she murmured to the car now riding her rear bumper.

"Back off, asshole." The car continued to drive too close. She tapped on her brake lights twice hoping the driver would get the message, but the car continued to crowd her.

Apparently tired of tailgating, the car crossed the double yellow line and began to pass her. She was even more annoyed when she realized it was an enormous limousine.

"Oh perfect," she mumbled. "Rich boy too important to wait."

Suddenly a pair of headlights approached from the opposite lane and Meg's heart stopped in her chest as she watched the limo speed up to pass her before careening head-on with the other car. All she could see before slamming on the brakes was the limo's license plate – MAD 1 – taunting her. Meg swerved off the road and into a ditch as the limo began coming back into her lane before fully completing his pass. Her mini-van came to a relatively easy stop despite the fact Meg was screaming her head off and not really focusing on her driving. Looking up, she saw the limo continue down the road and the taillights of the other vehicle disappearing behind her.

"What kind of place is this?" If she ever got her hands on that limo driver, she'd kill him.

Taking a deep breath and trying to still her shaking hands, she hit the gas in an attempt to pull back out onto the road. Spinning tires greeted her and no amount of gear-switching would budge the car.

“Shit!” she screamed to the cavernous car. Grabbing her carry-on bag and throwing it over her shoulder, she climbed out of the car, kicking the tire as she passed to stalk down the road toward her hotel.

After ten minutes of trudging through the mud and the rain, the gods smiled on her as she saw the sign for her hotel. Picking up the pace, she sprinted across the dark parking lot. As she approached the front door of the hotel, she spotted MAD-1 sitting under the covered entry way. The stress of the day broke free as she watched the young chauffeur get out of the driver’s seat to open the back door. Meg saw red as she headed for the man who made her wreck her lousy rental car. Out of the corner of her eye she watched a man and woman emerge from the car, but her entire focus concentrated on the cocky blond driver. Walking up to him, she put a finger in his chest and let loose.

“You stupid, ignorant, son of a bitch,” she screamed at the startled man. “You could have killed me. You aren’t fit to drive a bicycle, let alone a limo. And as if that’s not bad enough, you leave me stuck in a damn ditch by the side of the road in a storm in the middle of the night. I should call the police and have you arrested for reckless driving. I should —”

“Excuse me, miss,” a calm voice said behind her. Turning, Meg looked up into the face of one of the most handsome men she’d ever seen in her life. Standing behind him with her mouth agape was his perfect female counterpart—an equally beautiful, actually stunning—brunette. Unfortunately, the man’s extraordinary good looks only deepened her fury as she took in his dry, immaculate, not-a-hair-out-of-place appearance.

“And you!” Meg could hear the hateful words spew from her mouth, yet she was unable to stop them. “You sit in that goddamned car like some kind of king and don’t even tell him to stop. Clearly you must have more money than brains considering you would hire him to drive your fancy car.”

“I’m afraid I’m not sure what you are talking about,” the man answered smoothly despite her insults.

Further angered by his calm demeanor, she continued berating him. “Sure you don’t. That man runs me off the road not ten minutes ago and you don’t have a clue what I’m talking about.”

The man glanced sharply at his driver. “George, is this true?”

Looking at his feet, the young chauffeur appeared chagrined by his actions. “I didn’t know she ran off the road.”

“You didn’t know? Did you pull over to check?”

“We were on a tight schedule,” George mumbled. “Already late.”

“Rob.” The attractive woman from the limousine was clearly uncomfortable with the coming confrontation. “I’m going to go in if you don’t need me anymore tonight.”

"Of course, Lana," Rob replied, "it's late. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night," Lana purred softly before making her elegant departure. Meg had to restrain herself from rolling her eyes at the woman's red carpet worthy performance and the two men gawking at her pert little behind as she strolled away.

"And the Oscar goes to..." she mumbled.

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Gorgeous asked.

"Christ," she muttered as all the fight left her. "Forget it. I'm wet, cold, hungry, tired and quite frankly, I don't give a shit about any of this anymore. Bye." Meg was well aware that her departure—unlike Lana's—was less than stellar with water streaming off her now see-through pink blouse, mud squishing between the toes of her sandals and her mass of curly blond hair hanging in her face.

"Miss," the elegant man named Rob called out to her, but Meg kept walking. The end of her hellish day was in sight and nothing was going to stop her from soaking in a nice hot bath, crawling between the soft cotton sheets of her king-sized bed and sleeping until noon.

The night clerk at the front desk seemed to take in her dirty, wet appearance with disdain. "May I help you, ma'am?"

"Yes." Meg rummaged through her damp bag for her hotel confirmation number. "I have a reservation. My name is Meg Williams. I have the confirmation number here somewhere. Oh yes, here it is." She pulled out the crumpled computer printout page with her reservation information.

Glancing at his computer, then at her paper and then back at the computer, the man's earlier haughtiness disappeared before he tugged at his collar and sighed heavily. Meg closed her eyes and waited for the words she'd heard so many times today.

"I'm very sorry, Ms. Williams. There seems to be a problem with your reservation."

"Of course there is," she answered woodenly. "Let me guess, my name isn't in your computer and you don't have any more rooms."

The man actually flushed. "Well, actually, yes, that's true. You have to understand Cupid's Carnival is our busiest weekend."

"Save it." Meg cut him off with her hand. "Are there any other hotels nearby?"

"There are," the man began, stumbling before adding, "however—"

"They're all booked too."

"There isn't a single vacancy on the island."

Looking around, Meg spotted the hotel bar.

"How late is the bar open?"

"Until three a.m." The clerk was clearly surprised by the fact she wasn't arguing more.

Numb and exhausted beyond belief, Meg merely nodded before walking away. All the fight had been beaten out of her. Eros Isle had officially kicked her ass. Dragging her shoulder bag on the ground behind her, she trudged toward the bar, unable to think beyond what drink she was going to order.

## Chapter Two

Rob watched the petite blonde who had attacked his driver so fiercely limp toward the hotel bar. After she'd left him in the parking lot, Rob questioned George about the incident, only to discover that his foolish chauffeur had indeed run the poor woman off the road. George—a last minute replacement for his regular chauffeur—had apparently thought to impress Rob by getting him to the hotel from the airport in record time. The only problem was Rob had been too tired to notice the man's reckless attempt. He hadn't wanted to confess to the angry woman he had actually been asleep during her terrible ordeal.

"Ah, Mr. Madison," Pierre greeted him from behind the desk with a genuine smile. "Welcome back."

"Thank you Pierre. It was quite a trip, I'm afraid. Everything okay here?" Rob couldn't help but look back toward the bar. The blonde had disappeared inside.

Noticing his glance, Pierre looked uneasy. "I'm afraid the infamous Timothy has struck again."

Rob had to fight to restrain a growl from emerging. Timothy had served as the reservation clerk for one month until it came to the attention of Pierre, the hotel manager that he was imputing all the information into the computer wrong. As a result, none of the reservations taken during the idiotic man's four weeks of employment were recorded.

"I thought we'd taken precautions against this?" Rob glanced back toward the bar where his hapless blonde had disappeared.

"Yes, sir. We hold back four rooms every night just in case. This weekend I kept eight rooms open, however with it being so busy —"

"You've already given away all of those rooms."

"And then some," Pierre confessed. "I just sent a couple to the Wakefield Resort. I've called all over the island and there truly isn't another room to be had. I was just thinking to myself that perhaps we were safe when she walked in."

"Terrific." Rob rubbed his hands over his travel weary face. He'd been in negotiations to purchase property in New York all week. Delay after delay had prevented him from leaving until finally this afternoon—with the ink still drying on the contract—he headed for his private jet, ready for some serious rest and relaxation. The last thirty-six months had been nonstop business meetings, conferences and charity events and he was taking some well-earned vacation time. Glancing at his watch he considered leaving the woman to her own devices for a split second before turning and making his way toward the hotel bar.

The bar was fairly quiet and Rob could only assume most folks were resting up for the festivities set to begin tomorrow. He found her in a quiet corner nursing a drink and shivering. Stopping by the bar, he asked Todd, the bartender for his usual.

"And another one of whatever that young lady is having."

Todd smiled at his request. "Yes sir. A martini and a Scarlett O'Hara."

Picking up the drinks, Rob studied her as he approached the table. Her face was truly lovely. She had a wholesome, girl-next-door look he found surprisingly appealing. Spending so much of his time with women who spent a small fortune on cosmetic surgery, personal trainers and makeup, he found her natural appearance refreshing. Her long blonde hair was still damp from her run in the rain, but as it dried, natural ringlets appeared and he imagined it was quite thick and soft. She had a healthy red glow on her cheeks, no doubt from the running or perhaps the cold. Rob felt an instant attraction to her, something he couldn't recall ever feeling before. She shivered again and Rob shook himself out of his reverie.

"Excuse me." He graced her with the most charming, least threatening smile he could muster. No doubt, he had some making up to do.

"Hello again." Her voice was soft, her tone distinctly friendlier than he expected.

"I was hoping I could join you for a few minutes." He gestured to the two drinks in his hands.

Nodding, she pointed to the seat across from her. "Sure."

"Peace offering." He placed the red drink he'd bought in front of hers, hoping his joke might work.

Moving her empty glass out of the way, she smiled. "That wasn't necessary."

"I'm afraid it was," Rob answered. "My driver's actions were reprehensible."

She interrupted him. "No, please, you don't have to apologize. I'm terribly embarrassed by my behavior. I'm sure you won't believe this, but I'm typically not such a hateful bitch."

"I didn't think you were anything of the sort." Rob was surprised by her apology. If anyone was in the wrong, it was clearly him or at least George.

"Thank you for the drink." She grinned before picking it up, silently toasting him and sipping it.

"A Scarlett O'Hara?"

"It's my favorite. Cranberry juice and Southern Comfort. I was planning on drinking only fruity island concoctions, but after the day I've had, I needed a stiff drink."

"Ah, I see," Rob said. "If I'm not mistaken, I detect a bit of a southern accent?"

"Just a bit. I'm from Northern Virginia. Most folks there can't decide if they're northerners or southerners. I like to refer to myself as a middler. How about you? Where do you hang up your hat?"

"Everywhere," Rob answered honestly. "My work keeps me traveling pretty much non-stop."

"And during your childhood?"

"Army brat." He truly didn't have roots anywhere in the world. He owned homes on both coasts as well as in three different countries, but he never spent more than a month at a time in any of them. Watching her try to hide her shivering, he stood and took off his suit jacket.

"Here." He draped it around her shoulders. "You're about to shake yourself off that chair."

She started to protest, but he cut her off. "I insist."

"Thank you. So what's this business of yours that doesn't allow you to settle down?"

Rob was taken aback by the question. Surely she knew who he was. Looking closely at her, he determined she truly didn't know him. Used to being recognized instantly, Rob silently savored this anonymity.

"Uh," he stumbled, unwilling to give up this unique experience. "Just a businessman. Real estate and that kind of thing." He realized his answer was vague at best.

"You must do well, given your mode of transportation."

"Company car." He wasn't sure why he was intent on keeping up pretenses. For some strange reason, he liked the way this tired, petite woman looked at him. She was talking to him as an equal, almost treating him as she would a new friend. Her eyes weren't filled with dollar signs, trying to figure out how much he was really worth. Silently he laughed at himself. He'd spent nearly a decade amassing more wealth than he could ever spend, earning and demanding the respect of his peers, yet here he was down-playing his career successes so he could continue this simple, friendly conversation.

"How about you? What job keeps you tied to the middle of the country?"

"Oh, I have a terribly exciting job. I'm a special ed. teacher."

"It may not be what you consider exciting, but I can't imagine anything more worthwhile."

At his compliment, she gave him the most genuine smile he'd ever received. "I happen to agree with you. I love my kids and my job."

"Are you with a private facility?" He was shocked to find himself so interested in learning more about this fascinating young woman.

"Oh, heck no," she said with a grin. "Public education all the way. I teach at a high school."

"Ah," he teased, "I see now how you can afford such a fancy vacation. Making the big bucks as a public servant. Is Valentine's Day considered a national holiday for the school system?"

She giggled lightly before her smile turned to a grimace. "I saved up all my vacation days for this trip, and truth be told, I'll be paying this ill-fated adventure off my credit card for many years to come."

"Ill-fated?" He recalled that for all intents and purposes, she was homeless for the night.

"You couldn't believe my last twenty-four hours."

"Try me."

"Where to begin?" Her laugh was strained. "Due to mechanical problems, my first flight was re-routed to Houston and delayed long enough that I missed my original connecting flight in Florida. My scheduled seven hours of travel time turned into twenty-one."

"Ouch." He thought guiltily of the ease of his trip here on his private jet.

"I broke my cell phone, my luggage is somewhere in Timbuktu, the sporty little convertible I reserved weeks ago was downgraded to an ancient mini-van that your chauffeur left in a ditch a half a mile down the road. My sunny paradise has turned into hurricane hell and I have nowhere to stay tonight as this so-called luxury resort lost my reservation. Please bear in mind that is just today's run of bad luck and doesn't include the fact that I am alone in this damned lover's paradise because I caught my fiancé cheating on me on Christmas Eve and my plane fare was nonrefundable." She spoke with a lightheartedness he couldn't understand given her horrible experiences.

"Wow." He wasn't sure how to respond and was shocked further when she simply laughed at his reply.

"My sentiments exactly."

"So." He looked at her calmly sitting in the hotel bar and wondered at her poise. "What's your plan?"

She seemed to consider his question before replying. "That's actually what I was trying to work out when you came in. I thought I'd drink a little courage." She lifted her drink to her lips again.

"Courage?"

"Well, I figure the liquor will serve two purposes. One, it will warm me up on the inside before I have to run back out into the freezing cold rain again. And two, hopefully it will get me drunk enough that it won't bother me to sleep in my lousy rental car by the side of the road."

"That's your brilliant plan?"

"I don't remember calling it brilliant. Simply a plan." Her humor in the face of such a dreary and potentially dangerous night began grating on his nerves. "I only have to make it through the next few hours and then I'll call the car rental place about towing me out of the ditch and I'll catch the next flight out of here. Guess that will teach me for trying to live like the rich and famous for a few days."

Rob sat silently for several minutes brooding over the fact he was one of the rich and famous she was referring to and feeling incredibly guilty as he pictured in his mind the luxurious penthouse suite awaiting him. One of the perks of owning the hotel.

"You can't sleep in your car."

"I don't think that guy out there," she pointed toward Pierre at the front desk, "would like it if I sacked out on the couch in the foyer. This place doesn't exactly strike me as the type that would cater to vagrancy."

"You'll stay with me." The words came without thought, but Rob found himself immediately warming up to the idea of spending more time with her.

"Oh, now hang on a minute." She threw her hands up. "I appreciate the drink, but there's no way —"

He didn't let her finish her protests. "Hear me out," he said quickly. "My company owns the penthouse of this hotel. It's a two bedroom suite. You can have the other room for tonight. It even has its own bathroom. You can lock the door and pretend like it's your own hotel room. There is simply no way I'm going to let you sleep on the side of a busy road in the middle of a storm."

"There isn't much traffic out there now with all the rain."

"I'm serious. You've had a hell of a day and an unbelievably long string of bad luck. Why not give yourself a break?"

"Well, I have to admit with my luck such as it is," she added, "I'd probably get rear-ended by a tractor-trailer."

"Exactly," he answered. "My plan is better than yours and a hell of a lot safer."

"That remains to be seen." Rob considered the fact that she was seriously debating turning him down. He'd never had to beg a woman to share a room with him. Hell, most nights he was the one having hotel keys thrust at him. After all, he was Rob Madison, owner of this and a string of other luxury hotels all over the world. He had topped Fortune's list of most eligible billionaires the last three years running.

He watched as she chewed on her lower lip, clearly nervous about his proposition and offered her what he hoped looked like a friendly grin. "If it makes you feel any better, you can ask that man at the front desk to call every hour to check and make sure I haven't ravished you yet."

Rising slowly, she nodded her agreement. "Well, okay, but just for tonight."

Incredibly pleased with her response, he reached for her hand and she let him pull her forward a few feet before he suddenly stopping. "You know. I don't even know your name."

"Meg Williams"

"Short for Megan?"

She crinkled her nose. "No, actually it's short for Margaret, but don't you dare call me that."

"Family name, Margaret?"

"My mother's favorite book was *Gone with the Wind* and for some unknown reason she selected my name in honor of Margaret Mitchell, the author."

"And I'm assuming from your tone that wouldn't have been your choice?"

"For Pete's sake! Of all the names associated with that book, she lands on Margaret? What's wrong with Melanie or Katie Scarlett even?" Meg asked with a laugh. "Of course, it could have been worse, I suppose."

“How so?”

“If I’d been a boy, she was going to name me Mitchell.”

Laughing, Rob took her hand again leading her to the elevator before she pulled him up short.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Looking around, Rob shrugged, wondering what he could have forgotten.

“Your name?”

“Ah, Rob.” He paused for only a moment before adding a little white lie. “Mason. Rob Mason.”

From the corner of his eye, he caught Pierre’s startled glance, but he ignored him and the guilt associated with his look.

Meg offered her hand in introduction. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Rob Mason.”

## Chapter Three

Meg tried to persuade herself she wasn't making a huge mistake trusting this virtual stranger as they rode the elevator up to his penthouse suite. Fact was if she weren't so exhausted and completely out of options, nothing on earth would have convinced her to go to a hotel room with a strange man regardless of how nice he seemed.

She simply wasn't the type of woman to do something so rash and potentially dangerous. She was practical, never-take-a-risk Meg and her friends constantly referred to her as the 'reliable' one. Taking this vacation alone was the most daring thing she'd ever done in her life. She felt her cheeks flush as she realized Rob was still holding her hand and had been doing so since they left the bar. His palm was large and warm and surprisingly comforting to her. He was a stranger and yet she felt an immediate connection to him.

"Once you get into the room, you can take a nice hot shower and get out of those damp clothes."

Rather than comforting her, his words had the opposite effect and she felt a strange tingling sensation sweep through her body. Looking at Rob's handsome face, she considered what it would be like to let him peel the wet clothes off her and take a hot shower with him. His muscular body and god-like face were certainly awakening parts of her libido she didn't know she had and she certainly wouldn't mind letting him wash her back.

What the hell was she thinking? He was a complete stranger and she'd never had a one night stand in her life. She was practical, rational, level-headed.

*Fuck. I'm boring.*

As he unlocked the room, Meg recalled the goddess she saw emerging from the limo with Rob earlier. "What about Lana?"

"What about her?" Rob seemed perplexed by her question.

"Won't she mind me sleeping in the next room?"

"I don't really think it's any of her business one way or the other."

"Isn't she your girlfriend?" Meg silently berated herself for her too straight-forward nature.

Rob laughed at her question. "Good God, no. She's my secretary. She has a room down on the first floor."

Cursing herself for the sudden relief flooding her body, she followed him into the suite. Why it should please her that Lana wasn't anywhere in the vicinity, she didn't know. She wasn't about to try to seduce Rob Mason. Of course, the weekend was all about romance and it wasn't like she'd ever see him after they left here. Maybe she could break free from her own self-constraints a bit.

Live a little. Fact was she suspected Rob would be terrific in bed. Smiling to herself at the thought, she followed him into the hotel.

“Holy mother.” Rob watched as Meg’s eyes flew open upon entering the room.

“Pardon me?”

“This hotel suite is bigger than my whole townhouse.” She was obviously awed by the room. “This place is amazing. Beautiful. Is that a real Grand piano?”

Rob nodded as he glanced around, surprised by her comments. Silently, he wondered if he’d become immune to his lavish lifestyle. The hotel suite—by his standards—was quite simple. He wondered what Meg would think of his castle in England. Grinning at the thought of showing it to her, he shook his head. What was he thinking? He was helping out a young woman down on her luck for one night. Or perhaps more than one night. He felt comfortable in her presence and wondered what it would take to convince her to spend the entire weekend with him. He was enjoying his anonymity and her company very much. She was friendly and sincere, with a terrific sense of humor given the fact she could actually joke about her horrible day. In his cut-throat world those traits were uncommon and—given the reaction his body was having to her—apparently incredibly sexy.

“So the company you work for really owns this suite?” Her question jerked him from his thoughts.

“Yes, they do. Part of the benefits package is that we can take advantage of this place.” The continued lie was beginning to taste bad on his lips. Why he didn’t want to end the charade yet, he couldn’t explain. Somehow, for just tonight, he liked the idea of being plain old Rob Mason, hard-working businessman. It felt good to shed Rob Madison, billionaire bachelor for awhile. He liked the idea of befriending a woman with his personality rather than his checkbook. Unfortunately, his body was making a different sort of demand in regards to Meg Williams and he had to make a quick adjustment of his trousers.

“It must cost a fortune. I was going to offer to split the room fee for the night, but even half of this,” Meg gestured at the splendid room, “is way out of my price range.”

“You aren’t paying a cent. As I said earlier, the company pays, not me. Makes no difference who stays here. Your bedroom is right up there.” He pointed to a door four steps up on its own landing. “Mine is over there. Each room has a private bath. Please feel free to take advantage of the kitchen in the morning. I’ll call down and make sure room service stocks it with something nice for breakfast.”

“Oh no,” she said. “You don’t have to do that. I won’t imposition you for more than tonight, I promise. I’ll pick up breakfast on my way back to the airport.”

“I owe you at least a breakfast given the careless way my driver —”

“Rob,” she interjected. “The car accident didn’t change the fact that this stupid hotel overbooked.”

Rob winced at her words, swallowing down the insult to his property. Fact was his hotel had screwed up her vacation. Damn that idiot Timothy.

"Nonetheless, you need a place to stay and I'm able to offer it. That fact is going a long way toward soothing my guilty conscience over the car incident so let's leave it at that. Besides, look at what I've gained. The extra room would have been empty and I wouldn't have had such lovely company tonight."

Meg snorted at his compliment. "Oh yeah, I'm a raving beauty right now. Gotta thing for mud and frizzy hair, do you?" She ran her fingers through her tangled hair.

Rob grinned.

"I'm going to order room service. Have you eaten dinner?"

Meg looked longingly at her bedroom. "It will take awhile for them to prepare it. Why don't you take a hot shower and I'll knock when it arrives."

"Well, that does sound good. I'm starving. Nothing to eat all day, but those damn little packages of peanuts they give you on the plane and I insist on picking up the tab for dinner since you won't let me pay for the room."

Rob shook his head at her stubbornness. "Meals are included with the use of the room. Company policy again."

Meg threw up her hands in defeat. "Fine! Order me whatever you're having. I'm clearly not winning any battles with you tonight. Maybe over dinner you can tell me how I can get a job with this unbelievably generous company you work for."

"Ah, surrender." Rob was pleased to see her starting to relax with him. "Finally. Go on and get that hot shower. There should be a bathrobe hanging on the door. I'll dig through my luggage and see if I can find something comfortable for you to sleep in since your clothes are still damp. I'm sure I have a pair of sweats and a t-shirt that would work nicely. Then, I'll order dinner."

"Are you sure the kitchen is still open? It's after two in the morning."

"It's open all night," Rob replied easily. At least it was for him, but she didn't need to know that.

"Alright then." She dragged her carry-on bag with her. "I won't be long."

"Take your time," Rob called out behind her, walking toward the phone to order dinner. He glanced at his own bedroom considering taking a shower himself. Only difference was his would definitely be cold.

## Chapter Four

As Meg entered the bedroom, she couldn't help but wonder what sort of company kept a penthouse like this available for their employees. Apparently she'd made a wrong turn in college choosing education over a business degree. She had no idea people lived like this. Studying the room, she felt overwhelmed once again by the decadence of it all. The room was elegance personified. The large king-sized bed was on a raised platform on one side of the room, complete with an honest-to-God canopy. She'd always wanted a canopy bed as a child, but there was never the money for such frivolous things.

While her small family hadn't lived in poverty, it may have been stretching things to say they were lower middle class. Her mother, Joanne, had gotten pregnant with her while still in high school. Needless to say, her father, a teenager himself, had refused to accept responsibility for her. Although Meg knew his name, she'd never made any attempt to contact him. He'd gone off to college, married, and now lived happily ever after with his legitimate family.

Meg's grandfather had died before she was born, so Meg grew up in a house full of women. Her Grandma Linda was the glue that kept their little family of three together. She had worked as a secretary in an accounting firm and when her mother had graduated from high school, she went to work for the same firm. Together, they had scrimped and saved every penny they made so that when Meg graduated she could attend college.

Meg silently wished they were here to see this room. Grandma would have laughed to see her living, even for just one night, like a princess in a palace and her mom would have been trying to guess what every piece of furniture cost. Cancer claimed them both and not a day went by when she didn't miss them dearly.

A soft knock on the door at her back jarred Meg from her recollections.

"Yes?"

"I found some clothes that may fit," Rob replied.

Taking a calming breath, Meg opened the door. The longer she spent in Rob's presence the more she wanted him. She'd never felt such an immediate or overwhelming attraction to a man.

He stood in the doorway with an easy-going, friendly grin. "You're still dressed."

Reaching for the clothing he offered, Meg silently cursed her trembling hand.

He'd obviously mistaken her distress for nerves instead of the pure hot streak of sexual energy that was pulsing through her body. "I know it doesn't help to simply hear the words, but you can trust me. I won't hurt you."

"Oh no, Rob." Meg stared at his totally kissable lips before catching herself. "I trust you. Really I do. I'm just tired. That's all."

God, what would he do if she leaned forward and kissed him? Shaking the thought from her head, she felt her sensible, boring side taking control again.

The slight grin on his face seemed to indicate he suddenly understood what her trembling was about.

"Meg." He leaned toward her.

She knew she should take a step back, but she felt as if her feet were sunk in concrete.

"Yes?"

"I'm going to kiss you." His mouth inches from hers. Meg could only assume he was giving her a chance to refuse him if she wanted.

"Thank God." She rose up the last two inches until her lips brushed his. She was stunned by the softness of his kiss. She'd anticipated a rushed, frantic maybe even awkward kiss, which certainly described how she felt, but Rob clearly had other plans. His lips studied hers as if they had the rest of their lives to figure out how to do it right.

"You know." His voice tickled her as he whispered against her cheek, placing soft kisses everywhere he touched. "Part of the festivities tomorrow include a kissing contest."

"No need to bother. You win."

Chuckling lightly, he tugged at her earlobe with his teeth. "Last year, the winning couple kissed for three and a half hours."

"Mmmm." Meg struggled to comprehend his comments.

"Perhaps we could try to beat that time." His lips followed the curve of her neck before placing soft kisses just under her chin. "Of course, it would require some practice."

"Practice." Meg was aware she must sound like a mindless droid, but she didn't care. She ran her hands through his soft brown hair, pulling his lips back to hers. He was talking far too much.

He kissed her again, much more deeply this time, his tongue enticing and teasing hers. His arms were holding her so closely she wasn't sure where she ended and he began. His hands drifted down her back, but the dampness of her clothing seemed to rouse him from their impetuous actions.

Pulling away, he looked down. "You are going to catch a cold if you don't get out of those wet clothes soon."

His words caused her face to flush with embarrassment. Despite her desires, she felt her 'good girl' upbringing bubbling back to the forefront. She reached up to hide her blushing cheeks. "Shit Rob. What you must think of me?"

"What?"

"I'm not easy." Her cursed honesty flew out of her mouth before she could hold it back. "I mean, I swear, I've never gone to a hotel room with a stranger and then started making out with him. Good lord, my mother would kill me."

For several seconds, he stared at her and she felt her blushes deepen. Finally, she watched his shoulders begin to shake as he attempted to restrain laughter. When his effort to control his humor failed, he gave into it and his laughs were long and loud.

Angry, she narrowed her eyes. "I don't see what's so funny. Your behavior wasn't much better. In fact, you were the one who initiated the kiss."

Rob, sensing he'd hurt her feelings, appeared contrite. "You're absolutely right, but Meg, there is no way on earth I'll apologize for kissing you. In fact, I have every intention of kissing you again, all night if you'll let me."

"But—" she started.

"Meg, I don't think badly of you at all. You'll simply have to trust me when I say in my line of work, I've met plenty so-called easy women and you could not be more different from them. I think that is one of the reasons why I'm attracted to you beyond all reason."

"You are? I mean I'm attracted to you too. Very much so."

"Stay with me this weekend."

"What?"

"It's a weekend for romance. I think we've established we both desire each other. Why not give ourselves the weekend off from our responsibilities and explore it a bit? Take a break from our real lives, our real personalities."

"Be who we want to be?" she asked. "Break out of our normal mold?"

"Exactly. Just be ourselves without worrying about the outside world or other people's expectations of us."

Rob's proposal appealed to her more than she cared to admit. She'd spent a lifetime caring for others, her mother and grandmother as they were consumed with cancer, the students in her classroom, even her needy ex-fiancé has seemed to only want her mothering, which made sense now that she realized some other woman was providing the sex. The idea of taking a weekend for herself, giving herself the chance to do anything she wanted without fear of recrimination was tempting.

"Rob, I really want to sleep with you."

"Thank God." He pulled her to him in a deep, passionate kiss.

## Chapter Five

"Rob." Her voice was a mere whisper and he could see her body trembling with need. "It's been too long. Please. I need you – now."

"Your wish is my command." He bent forward and picked her up easily.

Shock crossed her face and he was sure no one had ever whisked her off to the bedroom in such a fashion. He joined her as she laughed with delight.

"Now I really do feel like Scarlett O'Hara."

Rob put on his best Clark Gable impersonation. "Frankly, my dear, I'm about to have my wicked way with you!"

With that, he tossed her lightly into the middle of her bed before crawling up and over her on all fours, like a hungry lion stalking his prey.

He quickly reached down to unbutton her blouse, anxious to see her naked. His breath began coming faster as he saw her large, firm breasts displayed in all their glory in soft pink lace. Her laughter quickly turned to whimpers as he buried his face in the crook of her neck, kissing, licking and biting his way down to her breasts. He pushed the lacy material down, freeing her nipples, taking them into his mouth one at a time.

Straddling her hips, he bit back a groan as she pushed herself against the painful erection smothering in his trousers. Cool air on his chest alerted him to the fact his lovely southern belle had not been idle while he enjoyed her bountiful flesh. Her small hands slipped beneath his shirt as she pushed it off his shoulders. Her quick intake of breath and wide eyes proved she liked what she saw.

Pulling his shirt off, Rob help her wiggle out of her wrinkled linen pants. Once she was naked, Meg began to tackle the buttons of his pants.

"Hurry," she hissed and Rob fought hard not to laugh at her impatience. Never one to dawdle with the deed, he found himself purposely trying to prolong the act. He had every intention of making love to Meg all night and he was in no rush to see this end. His little teacher, however, had a different lesson plan.

He rose to shuck off his pants and started to return to the bed, but Meg stopped him with an outstretched hand.

"Wait." She sat up in order to see him better. Rob didn't have a modest bone in his body, but her close scrutiny left him flushing a bit himself.

"My God. You're incredible. I mean, holy mother. You're like Arnold Swartzenegger, Harrison Ford and that new James Bond guy all rolled into one."

“What, no Rhett Butler?” He was flattered beyond belief at her praise. Reaching over to her, he pulled her toward the end of the bed. He didn’t give her an opportunity to respond as he took her mouth again with a heated kiss. Gripping her knees lightly, he pulled them apart until he stood between her legs as she lay across the bed. The height of the mattress was nearly perfect for his intentions, her wet opening level with his hips. The scent of her body’s juices and her excited little whimpers nearly drove him out of his mind as he had to physically restrain himself for plunging into her hot depths. So much for taking it slow.

“Rob,” she whispered when he came up for much-needed air. “Condom?”

“Shit.” He was amazed he’d nearly forgotten. Reaching down, he grabbed his pants, retrieving the foil package.

“Wait,” she said when he started to put it on. “Let me.” She took the condom from his fingers. The first tentative touch of her fingers on his cock staggered him. His breath caught in his throat and he had to lean forward to hold himself upright with his hands.

“Christ,” he hissed, as he suspected she was teasing him with her firm, slow touches as she unrolled the condom. “Much more of that, Margaret and that lousy rubber will be useless before I even get inside you.”

Laughing lightly, she finished her task, running her hands appreciatively up his chest, stopping to toy with his own taut brown nipples. Rising up on her elbows, she teased each one with her tongue, planting soft kisses all over his chest.

“Rob. I need you.” Looking into her lovely eyes, he could see she spoke the truth.

“I wanted to go slow. Savor the moment.”

“We have all weekend to savor the moment. Right now, I need you. Hard and fast.”

Shocked by her tantalizing words, he moved to her hot core. All rational thought and years of practiced patience left him as he took her at her word. He entered her in one strong thrust, stopping for only a moment to enjoy how tightly she clutched his cock in her small body and how tightly her arms held his chest to her own.

“Holy mother,” she breathed into his ear as she came and he smiled at what was quickly becoming his favorite of her delightful expressions.

Unwilling and unable to hold back his own desires, he gave her exactly what she asked for as he moved in and out her body. Hard and fast. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he wondered if his movements weren’t almost brutal, but Meg’s cries of desire and her fingernails digging into his back urged him on. Never, never had he wanted a woman like he wanted this little teacher.

Rob had slept with movie stars, powerful business women, hell, even a princess. Yet somehow, this tiny woman stirred things inside him he’d never realized had lain dormant until she awoke them. On and on, he pounded inside her, vaguely registering as she climaxed twice more, her pussy muscles clenching him like a vise, her screams of ecstasy driving him on—he was the horse, her voice the whip. When he sensed she was approaching the cliff again, he prepared to jump with

her. As their combined orgasms swept through them, only one thought permeated Rob's mindless bliss. One weekend would never be enough.

It was several minutes later before Meg realized the knocking she heard wasn't that of her heart pounding in her chest, but the door to the suite.

"That'll be dinner," he said softly. "Why don't you grab a quick shower while I set it up?" He kissed her lightly on the cheek before attempting to move back down to her gorgeous breasts for another taste.

She laughed and pushed him away. "Food – now. I'm starving. I won't be a minute. Promise."

Twenty minutes later, Meg walked back out into the living room area of the suite feeling like a new woman. The clothing she'd borrowed from Rob hung loosely on her hourglass frame and she actually felt tiny for once in her life. Her grandma used to tell her she was a healthy girl with meat on her bones and she had long ago gotten used to the fact that she was never going to wear single-digit sized clothing.

"Well," Rob's pleasant voice said. "Don't you look cute."

"Ugh," she groaned. "Cute is for puppies and babies."

"Sorry, but fact is you look very cute right now." He laughed ruffling his hand through her freshly combed curls.

She smacked his hand away. "I just fixed that. The only time I can get a comb through these damn curls is when they're wet."

"I love your curls." Rob wrapped one around his finger as if to prove it. "Part of what makes you so cute."

"Oh, you're a regular comedian."

Grinning, Rob gestured toward the table by the big windows. Outside the rain was still falling, although it seemed to be weakening in intensity. Of course, that was probably just wishful thinking on her part.

"Still hungry?"

"Ravenous." She looked at the huge array of food. "My God, you've ordered enough for an army."

"Yep," Rob said. "I figured you'd need a little help keeping those sweatpants up. Tiny as you are."

"Ha ha. If I eat all this, I'll never fit into the new clothes in my suitcase I starved myself for months to buy. What is that?" She gestured to a small bowl on the table.

"Beluga caviar."

Meg wrinkled her nose. "Fish eggs?"

"Have you ever tried it?"

"No, they don't usually serve that in the school cafeteria."

"Well, you shouldn't knock it until you've tried it," he said. "It really is exquisite."

"I don't suppose you'd let me take your word for it?"

"Absolutely not." He picked up a cracker and placed a large dollop on top. "This is my favorite treat. Here."

He presented the cracker to her. She started to reach for it, but Rob shook his head, placing it at her lips, determined to feed it to her. "Open up."

She opened her mouth accepting the cracker. Chewing slowly, she decided the taste wasn't as bad as she might have expected.

"Well?"

"It's pretty good," she finally admitted, "although I don't think it's going to knock KC Masterpiece potato chips off the list as my favorite snack."

"At a hundred and fifty dollars an ounce, you are probably wise to stick with the chips."

"How much?"

Rob was obviously taken aback by her dismay. "A hundred and fifty dollars."

"How much did I just eat?" She felt sick to her stomach at the thought.

"An ounce?" he guessed.

Slapping a hand across her mouth, she shook her head.

"Are you okay?"

"I can't believe you let me eat that much caviar. You should have warned me," she chastised him. "I would have chewed longer. Hell, I wouldn't have eaten so much. My God! Do you know what you can do with a hundred and fifty dollars?"

Rob tried to stifle the humor her comments triggered, but the laughter won out. "Chewed longer?"

Meg rose from the table. "And you! You should be ashamed of yourself. Your company is nice enough to give you a free place to stay and to pay for all your meals and you take advantage of that. If I was your boss, I'd take that money out of your unappreciative hide."

Shaking his head at her impassioned words, he stopped laughing and considered her point of view. From her perspective, he certainly did look like a greedy employee. For a brief moment, he considered confessing his true identity, but he wondered if that would make any difference to her. For his entire life, he'd lived a lifestyle most people could only dream about. He was born to an affluent family and during his adulthood, he'd worked hard to increase his own personal wealth. He'd earned his first million by twenty-one and over the past decade, he'd continued to climb the ladder of success.

No doubt his upbringing and standard of living had blinded him to the travails of the middle class people who worked hard to chisel out an existence. He felt humbled by her words. For him, eating hundreds of dollars worth of caviar in a single sitting meant nothing, but to Meg, such extravagance seemed greedy and wasteful.

"I'm sorry to upset you. I thought you knew how expensive good Beluga caviar was. I should have warned you of the cost and let you make the decision." He was amazed to hear himself apologizing. Rob Madison was not a man to apologize for his actions and certainly not for something as innocuous as offering a woman caviar.

"Damn." Meg closed her eyes. "I must sound like the biggest prude on earth. Look at me, yelling at you for feeding me. I'm sorry. Just so you know, I'm this big a pain in the butt to all of my friends. I'm way too outspoken and opinionated."

Rob's heart skipped a beat as she referred to a friendship with him. For the first time in his entire life, he was making a friend based on his own personality and not by how much money he had in the bank. Meg treated him as she would any new acquaintance and he found that feeling unique. He was sick to death of having women throw themselves at him merely because they desired the power of his name and the bottom line on his paycheck.

"Don't worry about it, Meg. What do you say we dig in?" He gestured at the food desperate to get them back on solid ground. She kept him constantly on his toes.

Smiling, she agreed and they talked and ate until nearly dawn. Meg told him about her students and her family and he told her about some of his own traveling misadventures, making her laugh until tears streamed down her cheeks.

Rob rose to glance out at the rain. "I'm afraid this foul weather is going to upset some of the weekend festivities."

"Oh, that's right. There's supposed to be a parade of some sort, isn't there?"

"Yes," he answered. "There's a big parade down the center of Main Street, lots of bands and heart shaped floats. Bit ridiculous really. Venus and Cupid ride in on the last float and officially declare Lover's Lane open."

"Lover's Lane?"

"Actually, it's the marketplace in the city center. All the merchants hawk their romantic wares."

"Should I even ask what's considered romantic wares?"

"Oh, you know. Aphrodisiacs, lingerie, leather, sex toys. That kind of thing."

"You're kidding?"

"Nope. Don't worry though, Meg. As soon as the weather clears, I'll take you. I wouldn't let you miss it. I'm already thinking about all the things I want to buy you there."

"You are?"

Rob couldn't miss her quick intake of breath. Turning to her, he reached out and pulled her closer to him.

"Uh huh." He released the reins on his building need, taking her lips in a kiss utterly different from the ones that preceded it. He wanted Meg with a passion that bordered on painful and the thought of buying her sexy clothing, body lotions and toys sent his cock into full alert. Unwilling to wait another minute for her, he reached down and pulled his oversized t-shirt over her head, pleased to discover she hadn't put her bra back on after her shower. "You are so beautiful."

Matching his words with actions, he bent down and took one of her rose colored nipples in his mouth, relishing the sound of her delicious moan and the feeling of her hands tangling in his hair. She was so unlike the women he usually bedded. Women accustomed to power and money who cared only for their own pleasure. To be fair, he tended to treat sex the same way – merely a cold, emotionless merger, a way of having mutual needs met. Sex with Meg was different. He could feel it in the way her hands lovingly caressed his back as if she wanted his pleasure as much as she wanted her own.

Nipping at her delicious breast with his teeth, his free hand plucked at her other nipple, loving the sound of her rapid breathing and excited whimpers. Her hands tugging on his hair caused him to raise his head to look into her deep blue eyes, heavy-lidded with desire.

"Bedroom – now," she murmured against his lips.

Rob pulled away, smiling at her demand. "Thank God."

## Chapter Six

Meg awoke to the sound of light rain pattering on the window as two thoughts crossed her mind simultaneously. One—she had no idea where she was and two—she wasn't alone. Glancing to her side, she was greeted by the sight of an enormous muscular back and the sound of soft snoring. The image of light scratches on that gorgeous backside brought back everything—her hellish day of travel, the car accident, drinking at the bar, caviar and Rob as he came into her body ruining her for all other men for the rest of her life.

Squinting her eyes shut, she tried to feel remorse, regret, anything slightly resembling guilt, but nothing came. Nothing but the desire to poke the back next to her until the man rolled over and ruined her some more.

Apparently in tune to her thoughts, Rob turned toward her with a grin on his face. Smiling—with his hair tousled and his eyes still heavy from sleep—he looked years younger than the man she'd seen emerge from that limousine last night.

"Good morning, gorgeous." He rose up on one elbow and kissed her lightly.

"I was afraid it was all a dream."

He ran his fingers through her unruly curls. "You are so precious."

Meg narrowed her eyes. "You know, precious is worse than cute."

Rob laughed. "Still raining. I guess the parade will have to be postponed. What would you say to breakfast in bed?"

"I'd say you'd better make that a late lunch." Gesturing at the clock, she was amazed by the fact she'd actually slept in until three-thirty. At home, she was an early riser. "It seems like my days and nights got messed up somewhere."

"Well, that's probably my fault." He sat up. "Kept you up too late."

"Mmmm. You sure did."

"You keep looking at me like that and you won't ever get out of this bed."

"Well, it *is* still raining." She crooked her finger at him. "Not like we could go to the parade or swimming or anything."

"I would hate to waste a perfectly lovely day like this sightseeing and such." Leaning down, he took her lips with a kiss that betrayed the unquenchable desire they seemed to share. Coming over her, his mouth moved across her cheek to her ear. "I can't seem to get enough of you."

She was flooded with relief as his words confirmed he felt the same way she did. "There's still plenty of me here, but Rob—hurry."

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Several hours later, Meg stretched out on the comfy couch in the living room and looked at Rob on the other end. The day had been one of the most perfect of her life. After a long, hot, entirely satisfying bout of afternoon delight, they'd ordered an early dinner of thick, juicy steaks, baked potatoes and asparagus. For dessert, they'd polished off a bottle of champagne as Rob fed her strawberries while they'd soaked in the Jacuzzi in his bedroom. Then they'd spent the last two hours simply touching and talking.

He sat with her feet in his lap, lightly massaging them and she wiggled her toes marveling at the fact her feet seemed to be an erogenous zone. She'd never known that, but she certainly felt as if she could have an orgasm merely from the heavenly rubbing he was ministering. She smiled at the thought, wondering how Rob would react if she did.

"Well, that's a smile fit for the Cheshire Cat. What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking I could get used to this." She was too embarrassed to share her true thoughts.

"A foot massage?"

"Among other things."

"Ah." The look on his face said he was obviously aware of where her thoughts were lingering.

"Want to elaborate?"

"I've been pampered, petted, massaged, and fed. I feel a bit like a princess. Thank you, Rob. I can't begin to put into words how wonderful today was."

"We never even left the suite."

She laughed and stretched her arms above her head. "Umm, yes, well, I don't care if we ever leave."

Rob felt a slight rush of relief at her words. He had to agree that today had quite possibly been one of the best of his life and he considered the fact he could see himself doing this every night for the rest of his life. Meg was an easy companion—her sense of humor infectious, her views of life interesting, her attitude optimistic, despite the knowledge he knew she'd suffered quite a bit of loss in her life.

One of the things he enjoyed the most about her companionship was her openness as well as her unique perspective of life. They'd left no stone unturned, whether it be religion, politics, literature or even who was the most deserving American Idol winner. She went for David Cook while he remained loyal to Kelly Clarkson.

She'd admitted her family hadn't had 'two pennies to rub together' and yet that didn't seem to matter to her. He silently wished he could have met the two women who had raised such a happy, strong, self-assured young woman. For the first time in his life, he actually found himself feeling envious of someone else. If someone had asked him yesterday, he would have said he was the luckiest man on earth. Because yesterday all that mattered was the fact he'd amassed wealth beyond measure and lived a life others coveted. He was on top—sought out for his opinions and advice by politicians, business executives and powerful leaders.

Now, as he saw the world through her eyes, he wondered how much of his life he'd squandered in the quest for gold and power. Meg worked day after day with students who dealt with mental and physical handicaps—blindness, autism, mental retardation, deformities that left them in wheelchairs. Every day of their lives was a challenge and it was obvious Meg admired their efforts to succeed in a world where the odds were so clearly stacked against them. She made a pittance for her efforts, yet didn't complain. In her mind, the fact she'd been born healthy and raised in a loving home environment was so much more than others had and for that she was sincerely grateful. He tried to remember the last time he felt gratitude and he couldn't recall ever giving thanks.

Humbled, he looked down at Meg as she struggled to keep her eyes open. Jet-lagged, he smiled at his little trooper. She'd missed an entire night's sleep and yet she'd insisted on staying up with him. Overwhelmed with the desire to take care of her, he rose, bending over to pick her up.

"What are you doing?"

"Taking you to bed."

"Ooh, it's about time too."

He was amazed to see her come fully to life. "You must be exhausted. Why don't you call it a night?"

"Without you?" Her face was a mixture of disappointment and confusion.

"Aren't you tired, Meg?"

"I have the rest of my life to sleep if I want to, Rob. You and I only have two more days and I want to make them count."

His heart lurched with something like pain as she mentioned the end of their time together. Dismissing it, he grinned as she squirmed to be released. Lowering her, he savored the feeling of her body as it slid down his before jerking back at the realization she hadn't stopped sliding until she knelt before him.

"Meg." His hands reached beneath her shoulders to pull her back up.

Shaking him off, she reached for the button on his jeans.

He'd intended to tuck his little princess in bed for the night. Now she was turning the tables on him. Rob shuddered as she pulled his hard cock from the constricting denim.

"Meg," he said, "you don't have to—"

His words caught in his throat as her tongue darted out to tease the small opening of his penis.

"I want to." All thought of stopping fled his mind as she wrapped her lips and hand around his cock and gave him the blowjob of a lifetime.

Gripping him tightly in her fist, she tormented him with her lips, teeth and tongue. Each time he managed to settle his racing thoughts to her pattern, she changed the game. One minute she would simply run her tongue up and down as if he were a lollipop and she a small child. Next, she

would turn into a tiger, engulfing his length, nearly swallowing him whole as her teeth teased his sensitive flesh.

As she changed her motion, he found himself reeling in the wake of her devastating touches. His hands gripped her hair tightly and at her sudden hiss, he realized he was hurting her. He started to release her when she shook her head, his cock still buried in the wet cavern of her mouth. Reaching back down, he pulled again at her flaxen locks nearly bowled over by the realization that she enjoyed his rough play. The notion caused his cock to grow even harder, a fact that obviously wasn't lost on his little minx as she changed the rules of the game yet again. Using her free hand, she reached down to cup his balls lightly before exploring even farther. The feeling of her finger breeching the entrance to his anus nearly shoved him over the edge. Tugging her hair became an unconscious action as all his thoughts were centered on the extreme pleasure/pain her hands and mouth were evoking in his body.

"Damn," he hissed, when he felt her finger—one knuckle deep—begin to wiggle in the tight portal. "You are going to pay for this." His teeth were clenched and the glorious feeling of his orgasm pulsed from the root to the tip of his cock as he took control of her mouth. His hands gripped the sides of her face as he began fucking her mouth in earnest. His ejaculation was so overpowering, he fought to remain standing as his tormentor swallowed down every drop he fed her, licking him clean as she gradually released him.

"Holy mother," he murmured as he fell to his knees in front of her. Obviously pleased with his response, she wrapped her arms around his neck in an embrace that couldn't be called anything other than a hug. She'd tilted his world on its axis.

Pulling back, he looked into her bright eyes—her gaze full of something foreign to him. Happiness, contentment, maybe even a bit of love. Love. He knew she wouldn't say the words aloud. His Meg was too practical, too caring and she would think it was far too soon for saying such a thing. And yet, even though their acquaintance had been short, he wanted to hear those words from her. He'd suggested a weekend away from the pressures of the real world, a time out of time and she was giving it to him. Just as she had given him her trust, her body, her friendship.

And he had given her nothing but lies. The thought of him allowing this relationship to grow built upon such an innocent deception had seemed small enough at the beginning, but now it threatened to choke him. What would she say when she learned who he really was? Coward that he was, Rob pushed his confession away unwilling to take the risk of seeing that look in her eyes fade away.

## Chapter Seven

Midmorning Saturday was just as dreary as Friday and Meg cursed the weather.

"Damn." She was unaware of Rob's presence until she felt his arms embrace her from behind.

"Still no sunshine. Honestly, Teach, I've never known it rain like this here."

"Just my luck," she sighed. "I really wanted to go down to the ocean today."

"Well, unless you're made of sugar—which is a definite possibility given your sweetness—I figure we could go for a walk along the beach in the rain without melting."

Smiling, she turned in his arms, raising her hands to pull his face down to his. She kissed him softly. "I'd love to go for a walk. Are you sure you don't mind? We're bound to get soaked."

"We'd get soaked swimming in the ocean if it was sunny, so I don't really see much difference."

"I'll just go up and slip on my travel clothes." She glanced down at his oversized T-shirt. She'd worn it all day yesterday, which hadn't been a problem since they hadn't left the room. Her luggage still hadn't arrived. No big surprise there.

"I'll grab us both a couple of sweatshirts," he added. "It might be chilly."

Going their separate ways, they met up again in the living room after only a few minutes. Rob had put on a pair of khaki shorts and Meg took a second to admire his trim, tanned legs. Raising his eyebrows to let her know he was aware of her wayward glance, he handed her a big sweatshirt and a baseball cap before donning his own with a grin.

"This will keep the rain out of our eyes."

Walking down to the beach, Meg pulled off her sandals, delighted by the feeling of wet sand between her toes. Rob clasped her hand in his own tugging her forward and she was thrilled as she took in her first up-close look at the ocean.

"It's amazing," she said as the first wave crashed around her bare ankles. "I've never seen anything so beautiful."

"I can't believe you've never seen the ocean." Rob was stunned by her revelation late last night. "My family spent nearly every summer, vacationing at the beach."

"We didn't really have a lot of time or money for vacations," Meg explained, "although once, I went to Williamsburg on a school field trip and my mom came along as a chaperone. It was just a day trip, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. Such a wonderfully historic place. We spent the entire day pretending we were colonists living in the 1800's. It was fun, but *not* as fun as this." With her words, she bent down and scooped up a handful of ocean water to splash on Rob.

He acted offended before it apparently sunk in he was already soaked. "Uh-oh, now you've done it." Bending over, he returned the splash, his large hands able to throw twice the water, twice as far.

Squealing, she took off running and kicking up water as he gave chase. She felt his large hands reach out to pick her up in the midst of her retreat and she screamed with amusement as he proceeded to walk out into the water, threatening to throw her in.

"Don't you dare!"

"What will you give me if I don't?" He was teasing and Meg suspected he was angling for a kiss.

She pretended to think about his question. "I'll buy you an ice cream cone."

Rob laughed at her bribe before considering it seriously. "A chocolate one?"

"If that's what you want."

"Not vanilla." He clarified his demand. "I cannot abide vanilla."

"No vanilla then." She felt somewhat relieved when he pulled her closer to him and started to walk back out of the waves that were crashing around his strong thighs.

"Come on." He grabbed her hand again. "Let's get some lunch. I know a little place that makes corn dogs to die for."

"What? Corn dogs over caviar? Are you feeling well?"

"Very funny. And I'm not forgetting that you owe me an ice cream either."

The tiny diner was nearly empty when they arrived despite the fact it was the lunch hour. No doubt the weather had encouraged most folks to eat in the hotel restaurants rather than dash through the streets in such a downpour. Grabbing a booth near the back, they ordered a veritable feast of junk food, while Meg apologized profusely to the waitress for the puddles of water forming on the floor beneath them.

At the end of their meal, Meg ordered Rob a triple scoop ice cream cone—all chocolate—and helped him devour it.

When the waitress returned with the bill, Meg snatched it out of Rob's hands.

"Meg," Rob started, but Meg merely held up her hand.

"I don't break a promise," she said. "I owe you an ice cream."

"But not a whole lunch. Why don't we split the bill?"

"Nope, this one is on me. I'm not destitute, Rob. Besides, I feel bad taking advantage of your company's generosity. I'm used to paying my own way, so let me do it."

"Fine." Rob threw up his hands. "Have it your way. Thanks for lunch."

She smiled at his concession as the waitress returned to take her money.

"What's next?"

"Wanna go to the movies?" he asked. "There's a theater at the end of the block. It's probably just about time for the matinees to start showing."

"That sounds like fun. I wonder what's playing."

"Unfortunately this weekend, it's bound to be a romantic comedy." His answer was laced with obvious distaste.

"What's wrong with that?"

"I'm a horror man myself."

"Eww." She crinkled her nose. "All that blood and guts stuff gives me nightmares. Give me a good old fashioned love story any day."

"Well come on, Margaret, odds are good that the theater will be catering to your taste this weekend in honor of Valentine's Day."

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Three hours later, Rob and Meg returned to the hotel arguing about the plot of the movie.

"That kind of stuff never happens," Rob insisted.

"Bullshit. Of course it does."

"Meg," Rob continued, "There is no such thing as love at first sight."

"Well I believe there is."

"What you think is love is actually lust." He pulled her closer to him as he spoke.

"What?"

"Lust at first sight makes more sense. Two people see each other and feel a mutual attraction."

"Like us?" She nipped at his chin with a small love bite.

"Just like us."

"And the love part comes in where?"

"Later. Meg, to say you love someone based on merely their looks is shallow. For real love to happen, you need to talk to the person, get to know them."

"I see." She ran her hands under his shirt to tease his hard nipples. "Just for the record, I must be shallow as hell because I love how you look."

"Ah, something we have in common. What do you say we indulge in a little bit more of that lust at first sight?"

"Mmm, you feel so good." Her hands stroked around and over his shoulders, playing with the hair at the nape of his neck.

His hands gripped her buttocks to rub her against his lower body. Spending two hours in a darkened theater without touching her had been sheer torture. If the place hadn't been so crowded due to the lack of outdoor entertainment, he would have pulled her across his lap and had his way with her right there. Truth be told, he could barely recall any of the movie, his thoughts had been so centered on her sitting next to him.

Now he intended to make up for lost time.

"Meg," he whispered into her ear, teasing the delicate lobe with his tongue.

He rejoiced when she wrapped her arms around his waist, rasping his neck with her own soft tongue.

"Yes?"

Pushing her gently away from him, he took a step back eager to expand on their bedroom play.

"Take off your clothes for me." His voice was rough with the need to see all of her.

She blushed slightly, but complied with his request. Her hands slowly dragged her shirt over her head, leaving her clad in a lacy pink bra that showcased her very generous cleavage. Once she'd disposed of the shirt, she slowly unhooked her pants, pushing them off her hips with a sexy sway that had Rob's cock rising another two inches. By God, but she was gorgeous.

Clad only in her panties and bra, Rob struggled to calm his breathing, desperate to remain in control. He knew how he wanted this to play out and it would require patience on his part.

"Take off your panties," he said softly, "but leave on your bra."

She seemed startled by the fact he wasn't touching her, but again she obeyed his request. Kicking off her panties, she seemed uncertain what to do with her hands. Rob added, "Touch yourself" to his list of demands.

"What?"

"Go sit in that chair." He pointed to the comfortable armchair to his right. "And touch yourself. I want to watch you pleasure yourself."

"Rob—" She started to refuse, but Rob halted her words with a raised hand.

"Do it now, Meg," he said firmly.

Her eyes widened briefly at the command in her voice before glazing over with obvious desire. Slowly she walked to the chair and lowered herself onto it. Spreading her legs, she waited until he crossed the room to sit on the couch opposite her.

Without hesitation, her hands drifted down to her pussy and he was spellbound by the beauty of her actions. Rubbing her clit lightly with one hand, the other drifted down to her drenched opening. One of her tiny fingers, then two, disappeared in her soft, dark cavern. Rob heard her panting breaths and was aware how much his watching her actions was turning her on. Slowly, he stood, taking off his own bothersome shorts. Grasping his hard erection in his hand, he began to stroke himself, mimicking the rhythm of her fingers. He sensed when she was getting close to her

climax. Originally, he planned for them to watch each other to the end, but the idea of not feeling the glorious clenching of her inner muscles around his hard cock was too much for him to bear.

“Stop.” He crossed the room to her, grabbing her hands to halt her motions.

She cried out her frustration, fighting to reclaim her hands.

“Get down on the floor.” He pulled her up from the chair. “On your hands and knees.”

“Yes,” she hissed, obviously thrilled with the prospect of what he was offering her.

Turning, she presented him with a stellar view of her all-too-luscious bottom.

“That’s right.” He lowered himself to his knees behind her. Grabbing for the condom he’d thrown on the coffee table, he sheathed himself with one hand, his other on the top of her back, pushing softly.

“Lower your chest to the floor, but keep that gorgeous ass up.”

Once again, she heeded his request and the tether on his patience broke.

Moving to her entrance, he pushed into her one inch at a time, making sure she could accommodate him this way. She was so small, he sometimes wondered that she could take him into her body at all. His concerns were clearly unfounded when she began her lovely, demanding pleas.

“More.” She thrust back at him in an attempt to quicken his pace. Gripping her hips firmly, he held her in place, giving her no choice but to accept his will.

“Damn you,” she hissed. “Move. Faster. Harder.”

Still he held firm on his resolve until her last word.

“Please.”

Recalling her torments of the night before, Rob decided to exact his own sweet revenge on his little temptress. Pulling completely out of her—despite her angry cries—he replaced his cock with his hand, gathering up her copious juices before moving his soaked finger back to her anus. She stiffened at the first touch of his finger breeching the tight portal.

“Rob,” she replied breathlessly, “I’ve never —”

“Shh,” he hushed her. “I won’t hurt you. I want to play a little. I believe I promised retribution for last night, you little tease.” His words were light and he felt her relax, again amazed by her limitless trust in him.

Continuing to lubricate her, he slowly worked his finger in and out of her, rejoicing when he felt her begin to push back against it.

“Do you like that?”

“Yes,” she hissed. “God. I need you so badly.”

Once again, he lost the battle against her soft, willing body and lovely demands. Unable to resist, he thrust into her with all the power and strength left in his body and she countered each parry with her own movements. Her whimpers and moans of satisfaction were the impetus he needed. Leaving his finger in her anus, he buried his cock over and over in the wet warmth of her cunt, fucking her with both. He felt the moment her orgasm claimed her as her pussy clamped down hard on his throbbing cock and her ass clenched his finger so tightly he thought it would break. The power of her climax was all it took to drag him along, his seed shooting out like bullets from a gun.

Pulling out of her body, he dragged her limp form over to him, cuddling her in the crook of his arm.

"Wow," she whispered as he felt her drift into an instantaneous sleep.

A grin tugged at his lips at her words. "Wow."

## Chapter Eight

It was nearly two a.m. when Rob made his way to the hotel bar. Given the late hour, most of the hotel patrons had called it a night or were so far into their cups they didn't notice as he entered and planted himself at the darkest corner table. Meg was sleeping blissfully in his bed. After they roused on the floor, they ordered room service and then fed each other dinner in bed, taking turns using various body parts as utensils and plates. He was amazed that no matter how many times and how many ways he had her, he still came back begging for more. He also found himself jealous of her clear conscience as his own peaceful rest managed to elude him.

"Good evening sir," Rob heard. Glancing up, he was surprised to find Pierre, the hotel manager. Pierre had worked for him since Rob had graduated from Harvard Business School and over the years, their relationship had evolved from employer and employee to one almost resembling a friendship.

"Pierre." Rob gestured for the man should join him. "It's good to see you again."

Pierre had served as Rob's right hand man for nearly a decade, traveling all over the world with him. However when Pierre announced his desire to go into semi-retirement after a minor heart attack, Rob suggested he come manage this resort on Eros Isle. He knew of all the places they'd visited, this small island was Pierre's favorite stop. He also knew the resort practically ran itself and the job would not cause Pierre undue stress and, apart from the Timothy ordeal, he'd been correct.

"I knew you would visit when you had the time," Pierre said, his eyebrows raised.

Rob refused to rise to the man's bait. No doubt he was overwhelmed with curiosity over Rob's unexpected roommate. "That reminds me. Has Meg's luggage arrived yet?" He knew she was worried sick about losing all her pretty new things, despite his assurances he would buy her a whole new wardrobe if her clothing didn't arrive.

"Not yet, sir," Pierre answered. "I did call the airport as you requested. Once I mentioned your concern over the matter, the head concierge was consulted and I was assured it would be located. I would be surprised if it didn't arrive first thing in the morning."

"Very good," Rob said. "And her rental car?"

"Has been towed back to the airport." Pierre was clearly used to taking care of many onerous tasks for him, as his days were filled with numerous meetings and events.

"Good," Rob replied. "Thank you."

"The weather is already clearing and the forecast is calling for the return of sunshine. Might you actually partake of some of this weekend's events?"

Rob smiled at the old man's wily ways. He was like a dog with a bone when he wanted to know what he was up to. However, being a diligent employee and steadfast gentleman, he refused to ask bluntly who the hell the woman was in his room and what in the hell was he doing with her.

Usually, Rob took great pleasure in leaving him dangling, but tonight he simply didn't have the energy.

"I promised to take her to Lover's Lane. Did you know she'd never seen the ocean before today?"

"Really?" Pierre's face showed his surprise that he was being so forthright.

"She's a special education teacher from Virginia." Rob wasn't sure why he was sharing anything at all about Meg.

"Quite an admirable profession."

"She still doesn't know who I am." Rob was surprised by his confession, despite the fact he knew Pierre had overheard his false introduction.

"I see." Pierre's voice was tinged with a bit of disgust.

"At the time, it seemed like a harmless enough lie," Rob replied. "But now —"

"I see." Although Pierre repeated the words softly, Rob could see that Pierre truly did understand.

"The first night we met, we talked. It was nice, normal, friendly. When I realized she didn't know who I was, I found myself leery to give up the —"

"Nice, normal, friendly part. You know, Rob," Pierre's voice was gentle, "no good comes from a lie."

"You think I'm a fool."

"Not at all. However—given the fact you seem to be quite taken with this special education teacher who has never seen the ocean—perhaps it would behoove you to tell her your true identity now."

"I think it may already be a little too late."

"Why?" Pierre asked.

"Because I think she's fallen in love with me and I know I've fallen in love with her."

## Chapter Nine

Meg was amazed by the sight of the sun rising over the ocean on Sunday morning. She'd seen the ocean all weekend, but the dark clouds and misting rain had obscured her viewing the true breathtaking beauty of it. Today, the bright blue sky seemed dim and dull in contrast to the crystal clear azure water. Valentine's Day, she thought with a grin and she ran back to the bed and jumped on top of her new lover.

"Hey." Rob protested grumpily when she pulled the covers off his delectably naked body. Drooling at the sight, she tried to calm her heated thoughts by picking up a pillow and pummeling him awake.

"The sun is out. No more rain. Let's go swim in the ocean."

Joining in her obvious delight, he grabbed up his own pillow holding it in front of him like a shield.

"The ocean is overrated. Let's stay in bed." With that, he pulled her beneath him, straddling her thighs with his own.

"Rob," she whined as he lowered his lips to hers. He kissed her until she forgot all about the ocean and the sunshine. Hell, she was struggling to recall her own name.

"Now that is a much better way to wake up."

"With all our practice, I bet we'd be shoo-ins at the kissing contest." She struggled to gather her wits about her. His kiss should be registered a lethal weapon.

"Mmm," he murmured, "but I find that only a few minutes with your lips and I'm powerless to stop myself from stripping all the clothing from your body. How do you feel about public nudity?"

She shook her head and swatted at his shoulder. "I suppose we'll have to limit our kisses to private places."

"That's my girl," he answered with a charming grin. "I'm incredibly jealous, you know. I want your scrumptious curves all to myself."

"Scrumptious, huh?" she asked with a laugh. "Well I must say I prefer your description, Mr. Mason. My grandma liked to call me pleasantly plump."

She watched a strange look she couldn't quite understand cross his face at her words.

"Well." He surprised her by pulling away and rising from the bed. "I believe I promised my girl a swim in the ocean. Why don't you put on your swimsuit and we'll head out?"

Slapping her head, she swallowed back a curse. "My swimsuit is in my luggage, which I don't have. Damn it!"

“Actually, my love, your luggage arrived very early this morning. It’s in your bedroom.”

His use of the words ‘my love’ caused her heart to turn over in her chest before his other comments sunk in. She squealed with delight at the prospect of having her own clothing. She dashed across the living room toward her room. “Woo Hoo! I won’t be a minute, I promise.”

Rob smiled at her enthusiasm realizing it was no doubt the truth. He was pleased by how quickly Meg could get ready for her day. Used to women who took hours to shower, dress, primp, and do God only knew what else, he found her ability to prepare herself in under fifteen minutes amazing.

Pulling on his swim trunks and a T-shirt, he reviewed his plan for the day. He’d arranged to have his yacht docked nearby, where he and Meg would have a romantic breakfast. He planned to take her on a cruise around the island, stopping for a swim in the ocean—maybe even some waterskiing—and hopefully, sometime during the day, he would manage to confess the truth about his true identity. He knew he was being a coward, but by confining her on a boat, she wouldn’t be able to escape until he’d had a chance to try to win back her favor. Especially if she became as angry at his deception as he expected her to. Not one of his more brilliant plans, but for now, it was all he had. Time was running out.

## Chapter Ten

Giggling, Meg nearly tripped getting off the elevator and Rob quickly wrapped a steadying arm around her waist.

“Careful, Teach,” he murmured in her ear.

As they reached the door to the penthouse, Rob surprised her by turning her and leaning down to kiss her. She could taste the wine they’d shared on the boat on his tongue as it swept into her mouth, enticing her to play. She raised her arms to his shoulders, her fingers running through his dark hair. His hands traveled around her waist, rubbing lightly, seductively over her back.

Only with Rob had she ever felt so carefree and happy, without a worry in the world. She’d spent her entire life working. In high school she’d held down a part-time job to help with the bills while studying non-stop to earn good enough grades to get a scholarship. Unable to afford the cost of living on campus, she’d spent her college years driving the forty-five minutes home every night to care for her dying grandmother and then her ailing mother. So much of her life spent working and worrying and caring for others.

This time with Rob in a tropical paradise was healing parts of her she didn’t know were injured. She laughed and joked with ease. The practical, no-nonsense Meg she was at home would never have consented to spend a weekend with a virtual stranger. She felt as though she’d lived a lifetime in this single weekend and it saddened her to think about her return to the real world.

Rob noticed her quiet, pensiveness. “Hey, why the long face?”

“I was just thinking about leaving tomorrow. Rob—if I don’t remember to say it—the past three days have been the best days of my life and I will never forget everything you’ve done to make them so special.”

“We still have tonight and tomorrow morning, Meg. Let’s not waste that time worrying about the end.” Her heart stopped at the word ‘end.’ How would she ever be able to walk away from Rob without a backward glance? No doubt, he was used to short-term relationships, but her heart was bleeding at the thought of never seeing him again. Shaking off her unwanted concerns, she beat down the practical Meg and brought back the new version of herself, the one who lived for the moment.

Rob unlocked the door to the suite and she started to walk in, but he stopped her, tugging at her elbow. “Before we go in, I should warn you that I fully intend to ravish you.”

She laughed, despite the effect his words were having on her body. Every moment in his presence only strengthened her desire for him. Every time he left her body she literally had to stop herself from begging him to come back in. Never had she been so wholly consumed by a man’s touch.

Reaching up, she placed her palm on his cheek, his five o’clock shadow tickling her fingers. “Thank God.” She stood on tip-toe to place her own devastating kiss on his lips.

The two continued kissing even as they stepped into the room. Turning, he shut the door before shoving her against it, lifting her legs.

“Wrap your legs around my waist.” His voice took on its commanding tone and her passion mounted even higher. Heady with the feelings he was evoking in her body, Meg pulled him closer, her fingernails digging into his bare shoulders. She shuddered as his lips left hers burning a path across her face, nipping lightly at her ear, before drifting down her neck. His teeth, tongue and lips devoured everything they touched. She loved the moment—right before he took her—when she sensed he wanted her every bit as much as she wanted him.

“Meg.” He gathered her hands in his one of his own, pulling them above her head, holding her still for his amorous assault. It was clear he meant to direct their passion again. With his free hand, he pulled her bathing suit to one side and she sensed he would rip it off of her if he could. His fingers plunged roughly into her wet pussy and she reveled in his lack of finesse. He always seemed so in control and she discovered she much preferred this wild man before her to the suave Rob she’d grown accustomed to. He was as frantic to be inside her as she was to welcome him in.

She heard her pleas fall from her lips before she could think better. “Please,” she whimpered as his fingers tormented her quivering flesh. Two fingers became three and she couldn’t stop the climax that was attacking her with devastating speed.

“Oh God.” She cried out as the orgasm ripped through her body. Her cries seemed to break what little control he had over his own body and she gasped as she felt him push into her. Over and over, he came into her—hard and fast. The banging of her back on the door only vaguely made its way to her ears as she was overwhelmed by the incredible feelings he was producing in her body.

“More.” Her voice was now the demanding one and his cock took on a life of its own, pounding inside her as she clenched her inner muscles around him, demanding he fill her, stay with her, never leave her. The strength of her next orgasm shocked her considering she’d thought the first had been powerful. He joined her in her climax, both of them shouting their pleasure and pain together.

She was so fulfilled and happy she couldn’t conceive that he wouldn’t feel the same, which is why his first word left her so perplexed.

“Fuck.” His tone was much less than pleased.

Opening her eyes, she saw him looking at her, not angry, but chagrined.

“Rob?”

“Are you on the pill?”

At his question, she realized why he was so upset. In their frantic rush to devour each other, they’d forgotten the condom. Her stomach dropped to her feet and she felt all the blood leave her face.

“I’ll take that as a no,” he said.

“They make me nauseous,” she added pitifully. “Oh Rob, I’m so sorry.”

"You're sorry?" His tone one she couldn't quite understand.

"I'm sure it will be okay." Despite her calm words she knew it wouldn't be. After all, she'd been conceived during her mother's one night of youthful indiscretion.

"I'm glad you're so sure."

Pulling away, she felt as though she'd been sunk into quicksand up to her neck. Her body was going into a full scale panic attack—her arms and legs refusing to move. This was why practical Meg existed, she thought. Reliable, boring Meg would never have made such a mammoth mistake.

"I have to get out of here." She willed her paralyzed body to move, but before she could take a step, he picked her up and carried her to the couch, settling her securely on his lap.

"I'm the one who is sorry, Meg." He tucked her head in the crook of his neck, resting his cheek on the top of her head. She felt her body give way to the fear permeating it as she began to shake.

"Oh no, sweetheart, please. Please don't worry. You aren't alone and you never will be. I would never leave you to deal with this by yourself."

"My father—"

"Was a bastard," he finished for her. "And he clearly doesn't know what he missed. Who in their right mind wouldn't want you? You're perfect."

His kind words went a long way to soothing her, yet she couldn't help but ask the question pounding inside her brain. "If I'm pregnant?"

"If you are, we'll deal with it. Together. I meant what I said. You aren't alone, Meg. I promise." Bending down, he sealed his vow with a gentle kiss that was nearly her undoing.

As he kissed her, Rob foolishly prayed his sperm would succeed. He'd started several times today to tell her the truth about his identity, but she had taken such delight in the day, he couldn't bring himself to ruin it for her. Her enthusiasm when she'd realized they were going out on the water had been priceless. She'd never been in a boat. So many things to show her, to share with her. He found himself wishing he could give her the world on a silver platter.

So, his plan to come clean hadn't been successful and now he'd failed her again by forgetting to use protection. And, as if that wasn't bad enough, here he was silently hoping she was carrying his baby because for the first time in his life, Rob Madison was faced with the very real possibility that he might not get something he wanted. And as selfish as it sounded, he was willing to do anything to keep her. He wanted her—not just for this weekend—but forever. However money wouldn't buy Meg Williams. He suspected his wealth may actually be a liability and as the days passed, he found himself running out of options.

He had to tell her the truth. As he felt her small hands in his hair, he suddenly realized he couldn't make any more excuses. She deserved the truth from him. Shaking himself for his uncharacteristic cowardice, he took a steadying breath. He was Rob Madison, for God's sake. He never shirked from a challenge and he certainly never backed down from something that he wanted.

"Meg." His next words were interrupted by a knock on the door and he cursed the timing of the person on the other side. "I suppose I should answer that."

"I suppose you should." Her voice was still a bit shaky and he longed to continue holding her. "While you do, I'll slip up and take a shower. I must look a wreck." She ran her hand through her tangled curls.

"You look gorgeous. Meg." He lifted her face up to his. "I meant what I said. Everything will be fine."

The grateful smile she graced him with had him kicking himself again. She didn't deserve his continued deception. Rob was determined to get rid of their unwanted company and show her how much she'd come to mean to him. "Put on something pretty and I'll take you out for a nice dinner. Maybe we can stroll Lover's Lane afterwards."

At her blush, he knew she recalled all the things he'd promised they would buy at the marketplace. The very thought of it had him going hard as he considered all the ways he wanted to make love to her. He watched as she walked to her room, shutting the door softly behind her.

Yet another knock, louder than the last came and Rob called out impatiently, "I'm coming."

"Finally," a shrill, familiar voice chided as he opened the door and he barely had time to step aside before being run over by Shelly Thompson-Rhodes, her beleaguered husband, Seth, and her sister Tara.

"Shelly," he said in surprise, "What are you doing here?"

"What kind of greeting is that for your dearest friend in the world?"

Rob attempted — yet suspected he failed — to paste on a pleased smile. Truth be told, Shelly was his oldest friend, although old is not a term that would ever cross her lips. Shelly's parents and his own had been fast friends forever and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, their hopes were dashed when Shelly chose to marry Seth Rhodes, an eminently prominent neuro-surgeon, rather than him. Despite Shelly's numerous faults, she knew as well as he did a marriage between them would be nothing short of a disaster. Unfortunately, she didn't feel the same would be true for him and Tara. She took every opportunity available to her to push the two of them together and much to his chagrin, Tara seemed to feel she owned some sort of territorial rights to him, regardless of the fact, he'd never expressed any interest in the shallow girl.

"I beg your forgiveness. Of course, I'm delighted to see you. Simply surprised."

"Well," Shelly answered, "that's better. We were cruising the islands on our yacht when we heard you were here. We simply had to dock and see you. It's been far too long since you've come to stay on Martha's Vineyard with us. Tara's beginning to feel neglected."

"I can't imagine why." Rob was unwilling to deal with Shelly's matchmaking schemes when he was having the time of his life with Meg. Meg had changed him in some inexplicable way that left him with little patience for behavior he used to tolerate with nary a second thought.

Shelly, however, was exceedingly astute. "Are you feeling well, Robert? We've been here several minutes and you've yet to notice my new hairdo or remark on Tara's lovely dress. We did go to special pains for you, darling."

Ah, of course, he groaned. He'd committed a major faux pas, failing to follow the social niceties expected by the Thompson-Rhodes of the world. Without a thought, he slipped into the familiar character he'd played his entire life, noticing for the first time, how much it chafed.

"Forgive me, Shelly. It's simply that you've caught me unaware and then appearing here looking so lovely, well, I've been left doubly speechless."

Obviously appeased, Shelly and Tara teetered at his insincere praise.

"Seth, how are you?" Rob turned his attention to Shelly's husband, anxious for an escape from the two women.

"Quite well," Seth replied, "quite well. Managed to schedule a couple months of R and R from the practice. The girls were chomping at the bit to get out and about."

Rob swallowed his sarcastic reply, well aware that Seth—since landing the very wealthy Shelly Thompson—was little more than a token figurehead at his successful practice leaving the real work to his partners. Shelly kept him on a tight leash and would not accept more than his total attention and devotion. It was the main reason she and Rob would never have been a compatible match. He was far too independent for Shelly's tastes. However, as far as he could tell, Tara would be perfectly content to share his name, homes and money while making few demands on his time. He'd successfully evaded her maneuverings for the last two years. Meg's appearance in his life had only managed to solidify his conviction that Tara was the last person on earth he wanted to marry.

"Well, you've always been a good man, keeping your girls happy." Rob swallowed heavily, the words he uttered leaving a bad taste in his mouth.

"Robert Madison, I swear I don't know where your manners are. We've been here ten full minutes and you've yet to offer us a drink." Shelly crossed to the bar and looked ready to settle in for the long haul.

"And I apologize for that." He was suddenly extremely anxious to get rid of his unexpected guests before Meg reappeared from her room. This heartless trio would blow his cover in a matter of seconds and he wasn't willing to have his real identity revealed in such a fashion. "However, I'm afraid you've caught me at a bad time. I was about to shower and head out to an important meeting."

"A meeting? At this time?" Shelly's tone revealed her suspicions about his awkward lie. "Robert, it's nearly five o'clock. Surely you haven't planned a meeting in the midst of your vacation."

"Actually, an unexpected opportunity has fallen into my lap. You know me, Shelly, never one to look a gift horse in the mouth."

"What type of opportunity?"

"Ah well, Shelly," he hedged, "I find as I get older, I don't like to talk about business ventures until the deal is done. Getting a bit superstitious."

"You, superstitious? Ha! Ridiculous. What are you up to, Robert? I find it very hard to believe you have anything so pressing that you would miss the opportunity to spend Valentine's Day with Tara. Especially after all the fuss she's gone to for you."

Glancing behind Shelly, he watched Tara throw him a come-hither look as she thrust out what appeared to be a new pair of breasts. Dear God, these women were relentless and he felt a trickle of sweat bead at the back of his neck as he counted the minutes remaining before Meg returned. Suddenly, her habit of showering and dressing quickly seemed less endearing. He needed more time.

The sound of a door opening behind him, as well as the shocked faces on the three people in front of him convinced him that time was up. Turning slowly, he felt his heart skip—despite his panic—at her lovely appearance. She'd donned a simple sundress, the same color as her cornflower blue eyes. Her hair was still damp, but she'd left her long, blonde curls loose the way he liked them best. Her face was more made-up than he was used to as she'd added light blue eye shadow to her usual lipstick and mascara combination. He recognized the special pains she'd taken and he'd never seen her look more beautiful.

Her friendly smile kick-started his uneasiness as he could practically hear the women behind him sharpening their claws.

"Meg." He walked quickly to meet her as she approached. "You look beautiful," he murmured in her ear as she graced him with a delighted grin. "Come and meet some of my friends."

Placing a protective arm around her waist, he turned to face the firing squad, praying silently for a reprieve.

"This is Seth Rhodes and his lovely wife, Shelly."

"Pleasure to meet you." Meg shook their hands in her ever-friendly, open way and he watched the subtle rising of Shelly's eyebrows as she took in every aspect of Meg's appearance.

"Of course it is." Shelly's words were chillingly cold and Meg looked inquisitively at him.

Ignoring Shelly's rudeness, he gestured to Tara. "And this is Shelly's younger sister, Tara." He smiled inwardly as Shelly hissed at his mention of her elder status. Shelly was extremely sensitive to any mention of age and Rob was pleased to manage his own revenge through the introduction.

"Nice to meet you." Meg repeated the words warily, obviously wondering what response she would receive from this sister.

"Yes." Tara looked down her nose at Meg. "Indeed." Moving closer, Tara managed to insinuate herself between them with an ease that caught him unaware.

"What a surprise to meet one of Rob's little—" she paused for effect, before rudely adding the word, "friends." She placed a proprietary arm on his and he started to look at Tara with new eyes. In one sentence, she'd made it perfectly clear she considered Meg to be nothing more than a whore, insinuating she wasn't the first and—most likely—wouldn't be the last. In the past, he'd

felt Tara was as much a pawn of Shelly's machinations as he was, but now he wondered who was truly pulling the strings.

Managing to shake off Tara's possessive hand, he moved back toward Meg, anxious to shield her from the wolves he'd unleashed on her. He was shocked when she took the initiative to grasp his hand in her own. She glanced into his eyes with an enigmatic look he couldn't even begin to interpret.

"Shame on you, Rob. You should have told me we were expecting company. I would have dressed up."

Rob nearly burst into laughter at her imitation of Shelly and Tara's snotty imperiousness. Winking at her sheer nerve, he replied with as much remorse as he could muster. "I'm sorry, my dear, but their visit is a complete surprise to me."

"Yes." Shelly—obviously miffed at being excluded from their banter—attempted to enter their conversation. "We knew Robert would be pleased by our unexpected arrival. You see, he is so terribly fond of Tara. We grew up together and Robert is forever inviting her to visit."

Rob had to physically stop himself from growling at Shelly's bold faced lie, but Meg beat him to the punch. "Oh, I'm not surprised. Of course Robert would have a soft spot for a young woman he must think of as a sister." Her southern accent drawled his name in pure country club style and shocked him to his core.

Studying her face, he suspected he was seeing a truly angry Meg for the first time since her run in with George the night of the storm. Her face was flushed and her eyes were shooting sparks all over the room.

Determined to bring this painful interlude to an end, he turned to face his unwanted guests. "I do hate to cut this reunion short, but as I said earlier —."

"Oh yes," Shelly interrupted, "your business meeting. You know, Seth, I've just had a thought. It would be terribly impolite of us to leave this lovely young woman alone." She gestured to Meg and Rob felt his stomach drop to the floor. "Especially not while Robert's out amassing another fortune. Meg, darling, you simply must join us for dinner tonight."

Rob stepped forward rapidly. "Actually, Meg and I have dinner plans after my meeting."

"Then for drinks." Shelly was as undaunted as ever. "I insist, Robert. You know I consider you a brother as well and I'm very interested in getting to know your new—" Shelly also added the insulting pause before calling Meg his "friend."

"I would love to join you for drinks." Meg answered before he could offer a suitable excuse.

"Meg." He was desperate to stop the disaster unraveling before his eyes.

"Rob," she said softly. "They're your friends. And apparently, you have a fortune to make?"

Hearing the confused question, he cursed. "Meg." He pulled her aside, despite the rudeness of the gesture. "We need to talk. Please don't go out with them." He could feel the walls of his lies closing in on him.

"Robert," Shelly spoke loudly, no longer masking her anger. "I thought you were in a hurry. You must know we'll take very good care of your friend."

"I'm a big girl, Rob, and it's just a drink. I didn't realize you had a meeting."

"I—" don't, he started to say, but the word caught in his throat. "I wish you would stay here."

"Rob, are you embarrassed by me?" As soon as she whispered the question, he understood how much Shelly and Tara's insults had hurt her.

"Don't be silly."

Tara's voice came from across the room and stopped him from adding any other assurances.

"Honestly, Rob. You would think we were a school of piranhas circling around your little goldfish. It's just a drink. We won't even leave the hotel. We'll go to the bar downstairs. Come on Meg." Tara added a twinge of a dare to her words. "We're all friends here, aren't we?"

Meg pasted on a fake smile and stiffened her spine. "Of course, we are."

## Chapter Eleven

Rob watched as Meg followed his oldest friends out of the hotel. The sound of the door closing behind them sounded ominously like the last nail being driven into his coffin. He'd been a fool to let her meet Shelly's entourage, let alone leave with them. Sinking onto the couch, his mind raced as he considered what he could have done or said differently. Meg thought he was ashamed of her. How the hell could she think that? She was a wonderful woman.

A wonderful woman he'd been lying to since the beginning and now all his lies were unraveling. Shaking his head, he realized she was never going to dismiss his lie as anything less than what it was—an outright deception. Now that she'd met his friends he deceit seemed even worse. No doubt, Meg would believe he'd been toying with her, making fun of her. Tara and Shelly weren't going to ruin the best thing that ever happened to him. Rising, he raced to the door, startled to find Pierre, poised to knock.

"Pierre," he began, "as you can see I'm on my way out."

"Yes sir." Pierre continued to block the doorway. "I beg just a moment of your time."

"Pierre, this really isn't a good time."

"I understand. I saw Ms. Williams in the company of Ms. Thompson-Rhodes and her sister. No doubt you intend to join them."

"Yes." He was relieved not to have to explain his haste.

"Dressed as such?" Pierre gestured at his clothing.

Grimacing, he realized he was still dressed in his swimming trunks and the tattered T-shirt he'd pulled on just before opening the door to Shelly and the disaster she represented. No wonder Tara and Shelly had looked so shocked when he'd first opened the door. He never dressed in anything less than height of fashion. However, he'd toned down his appearance over the past couple of days so Meg would feel more at ease. It occurred to him now, however, that he was the one who'd been more at ease in the comfortable clothing.

"Damn." He turned and tromped back to his bedroom. The sound to the door closing alerted him that Pierre had followed. Reaching into his closet, Rob pulled out his Etro Cargo pants and black silk shirt. Buttoning the shirt, he turned to find Pierre standing in the doorway. "Go ahead. Tell me what an ass I've been. I should have told her the truth. Say I told you so because, by God, you did."

"I don't think you were wrong."

On a roll, Rob continued to rant. "I've been lucky to get away with such an idiotic lie this long. Hell, everybody on this fucking island knows me. I don't know what possessed me to think I could—what did you say?"

"I don't think you were wrong to lie to Ms. Williams."

"But you said no good ever came from a lie." Rob recalled the long conversation they'd had at the bar last night and he was astounded by Pierre's admission, especially in light of the fact it was all about to blow up in his face.

"I think you've never known a true friend or even a true love. Someone who saw you as you truly were, not merely as an image displayed for public consumption. Very few people have ever seen through the mask you don to hide the true person inside. But Ms. Williams, she has seen inside you, yes?"

Rob nodded. "Yes."

"And I assume she liked what she saw?"

"Amazingly, yes."

"Then you weren't wrong to lie to her," Pierre stated. "However, you would be sincerely remiss in letting someone else—perhaps someone less careful—reveal your true identity."

"I would, but Pierre, I've waited too long. How could I ever ask her to trust me when the whole basis of our relationship—short as it's been—has been built on a lie?"

"Actually," Pierre replied, "I would say—for the first time in your life—this is the *only* relationship not based on a lie."

Considering Pierre's words, Rob had to agree. Meg knew the true Rob Madison, the man underneath the money and power. She knew the man who liked corn dogs and horror movies, the man who hated vanilla and who read mystery novels voraciously. She knew his secret fondness for reality shows and folk music. She knew all of this because she'd listened to him, taken the time to get to know him and ask him about himself. She'd cared enough to get to know him—as a person of worth, not net worth.

"I have to go." He was suddenly desperate to declare his love and his lie, desperate to stake the one claim in his life that meant a damned thing to him. He was a man known for never losing, never giving up. He would be that man now because if it took him until the day he died, he would marry Meg Williams. He wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of his life, spoiling her rotten and introducing her to everything she'd missed—snow skiing, Italy, art museums and rock concerts. He'd give her the entire world.

"Good luck to you sir," Pierre said as Rob rushed toward the hallway.

"So you're a teacher?" Shelly asked for the third time. Meg suspected she was merely repeating the fact until she was able to believe it. "Special education?"

"Yes." Meg glanced toward the door for the hundredth time, wishing Rob would save her from the interminable company of these intolerable people. How on earth could he actually be friends with such a lazy, snooty, viperous lot?

"Retards, you mean?" Tara joined the conversation for the first time.

"No." The hair on Meg's arms stood straight up at the woman's heartless words. "I do not teach retards. I teach children who are mentally handicapped."

"Same difference." Tara stifled a yawn as if to express her boredom with the current conversation.

"Not the same difference," she added hotly. "Although I would say to someone with your limited education and level of compassion, it might seem so."

"Excuse me?" Tara leaned forward, her face filled with malice. "I will have you know I attended one of the finest finishing schools in the country. No doubt you're a product of public education."

"And proud of it."

Tara smirked at her response as Shelly shot Meg an appraising glance. Apparently, the older sister felt a threat the younger sibling didn't. Meg decided Shelly was clearly the one of Rob's friends she should be most wary of. Tara didn't have two brain cells in her entire head, too wrapped up in her own self-importance to notice anyone around her. Seth was clearly an alcoholic, as she watched him polish off his fourth martini in ten minutes without batting an eye. He covertly caught the eye of the waiter who immediately brought him his fifth.

"I think teaching is an admirable profession." Shelly shocked her with the seeming sincerity of her words. "I must confess, however, I'm curious as to how a teacher from Virginia managed to end up sharing a suite on a resort island with one of the most eligible billionaires in the world."

At her words, Meg felt the breath leave her body. Billionaire? Of all the things, Shelly could say to blindsides her, she had to admit the nasty woman had scored a direct hit. Aware the others were waiting for her response, Meg struggled to clear the lump that had formed in her throat.

"Ah, there you are," a familiar, deep voice said behind her. Turning, she saw Rob, her lovable, dear new friend. Yet this time, she felt as if she was seeing him with different eyes. His clothing was casual enough, yet she suspected it cost top dollar. Judging from the distraught look in his eyes, she knew he'd heard Shelly's last comment. However, she couldn't help wondering if he was distressed by the comment or that she'd discovered his secret.

Tara bounced out of her seat at Rob's appearance, clearly feeling victorious since the discovery that Meg was merely a teacher and no serious threat to her claim. "Rob Madison," she purred. "You naughty boy, how could you leave me alone for so long?"

Rob Madison. The name bounced around in her brain until she thought it would explode. Madison hotels. Good God, she'd been shacking up with the owner of the stupid hotel that had screwed up her vacation plans. How could she have been so blind? The penthouse, the caviar, room service at two in the morning. Damn, even the limo proclaimed the truth—MAD 1. Of course, he was the owner. And what a laugh he must have been having at her expense. No doubt the poor little rich boy had decided to do a little slumming. And she had slept with him. Given him her trust and her body. God help her, she could be carrying his child.

She didn't remember leaving the bar or walking toward the front door of the hotel. She didn't remember walking out to the parking lot. She didn't remember anything until she felt Rob's hand on her arm, yelling her name.

"Meg," he shouted. "Dammit, Meg, you have to let me explain."

"Explain," she whispered, shock setting in. "Nothing to explain. I have to leave."

"No," he said, quieter now that she stopped walking away. "You aren't going anywhere. Not like this."

"Robert," Tara's voice sounded from behind her. "Let her go. I'm here now."

"Tara." Rob's voice was filled with more menace than Meg had ever heard. "Get the fuck out of here right now before I have you escorted off my property by security."

Meg heard Tara's gasp and through the fog clouding her mind, she wondered if anyone had ever spoken to the rich bitch in such a manner.

"Come on Tara," Shelly's voice said. "I think it's time we took our leave. I'm sorry, Robert." Meg could hear the truth behind her words. What a waste, she thought with a humorless laugh. He was the one playing the game. He was the liar who had gotten exactly what he wanted from the dumb little hick from the sticks.

She felt the laugh continue, bubbling out of her in great, gasping hiccups. She laughed until she felt tears streaming down her face.

"Christ, Meg," Rob exclaimed. "You're killing me, sweetheart. Please don't cry. I can't take your tears. They tear me up inside."

"Let me go," she whispered, anguish rife in her voice.

"Never." Rob lifted her into his arms, turning back toward the hotel.

Jerking herself from her self-pity, she struggled to get away. Flailing and kicking, she felt Rob fight to keep a firm grasp on her. In the midst of her thrashing, he shifted her, tossing her over his shoulder. She gasped when she felt his hand land hard upon her rear-end.

"Damn you!" She was aware of the scene they were making in the lobby, but she didn't care. The ding of the elevator caused her to renew the fight, knowing her chances of escape would be severely limited if he got her back to the penthouse. Again, she felt his hand come down on her buttocks.

"Ouch!" she squealed. "That hurts."

"Then stop fighting me. I'm going to talk to you and I don't give a damn if I have to tie you to a chair and gag you to make you listen."

"Oh no, Rob Madison." Her voice was mocking as she said his true name. "You listen to me. I'm leaving. Put me down this second!"

He ignored her request as they entered the elevator and she continued to struggle, feeling more and more trapped as the elevator rose. Too soon, it arrived at the top floor and Rob carried her down the hall to his penthouse. His penthouse – not the company he worked for – the company he owned. Her anger returned full-force.

As soon as he shut the door behind them, he set her on her feet, bracing himself for her attack. If she hadn't been so furious, she would have laughed at the sight of a man the size and stature of Rob Madison preparing himself for the blows of a woman who barely came up to his shoulder.

"How dare you!" She raised her fist and pummeled his chest. "Who the hell do you think you are to manhandle me like that? You lying, conniving bastard!"

He winced at her words and blows and she felt a sense of déjà vu as she lost control of her temper and her tongue, much like she did her first night on the island.

"You're right," he admitted softly. "I am a liar. I lied to you."

"You're damn right you did and right from the beginning." She felt a bit stupid pointing out the obvious and backed away from him, desperate to get some distance between them. She was finding it hard to catch her breath around the lump that had lodged in her throat. Rob had lied to her. She'd trusted him and he had lied. Finally, her voice broke around the question she had to have answered. "Why? Why would you do that?"

"You didn't recognize me."

"So?" She was perplexed at his answer and her anger returned full-force. "What, did that piss you off? Are you so used to everyone knowing your face that you wanted to punish me for not worshipping at your billion dollar feet?"

"Good God, no. I liked that you didn't know me."

Confused, she just continued to stare, waiting for him to explain.

"For the first time in my life, I was able to get to know someone and let them get to know me without my name and fortune influencing things."

"That makes no sense."

"Maybe not to you. No doubt the friendships you've formed were made based upon mutual interests and compatible personalities and those relationships were built on trust. I constantly question the motives of the people who call themselves my friends because most people of my acquaintance don't give a shit about me, only what I can give them. You met Shelly and Tara—they are prime examples of the type of women who travel in my circles. Shallow, self-centered, spoiled to excess."

"But you aren't like that," she said, her temper beginning to calm.

His powerful words were chiseling through her wall of anger. His pain was palpable and she found herself wanting to reach out to him despite the fact he'd lied to her, hurt her.

"Ah, but there is the rub, my sweet Meg. Until I met you, I fear I was exactly like that."

"I don't believe that." She turned away. She was livid with this man and yet here she stood, defending him, reassuring him.

Was she a glutton for punishment or what? If she had a brain in her head, she would get the hell out of here and leave the poor little rich boy to his own devices. But then a memory formed. The

image of Rob following her into the bar Thursday night, offering her a drink and a place to stay. Offering to help her, despite the fact she'd looked like a drowned rat, despite the fact she'd attacked his driver and then him. No, she thought, he wasn't like Shelly and her family. No matter what he might say, there was a lot of good in him. For all her faults, she considered herself to be a very good judge of character and despite his lie, she thought Rob was one of the kindest, most genuine men she had ever met.

Turning around, she watched him standing silently by the door, no doubt thinking he could bar her escape. His head was bowed and she saw how much her anger was costing him. Maybe there wasn't such a thing as love at first sight. She didn't deny their original attraction could be called anything other than lust. But somehow, somewhere, in the midst of all that lust, love had come. It was just as he had said. By getting to know him, by learning his personality and figuring out what made him tick, the love had grown. His compassion and generosity spoke to her. His sweet words and compliments warmed her lonely heart. He said she saw the true man behind the name, but he also saw the true Meg, the one she'd kept buried deep beneath the boring, sensible parts. The one who longed to live, to see the world, to love him.

Love him.

Taking a small step forward, she swallowed her wounded pride and approached him with her heart in her hands.

"I love you," she whispered, silently wondering if anyone had ever sincerely offered him those words before.

Staggering back against the door, Rob's head jerked up. His mind was sure his ears had deceived him. For a second, he thought—no he'd dreamed—that Meg told him she loved him. Looking up, he saw the same look in her eyes he'd come to covet as the weekend passed. The look he considered more valuable than all his property, all his possessions, all his money. Love. She loved him. Her lower lip trembled slightly and he realized how much courage it must have taken for her to confess her feelings to him. Once again, he'd done nothing to deserve the trust she constantly bestowed upon him.

Falling to his knees before her, he grasped her small hands in his own. "I love you, Meg and I'm so sorry. Sorry for everything. I promise if you'll give me a second chance, there will never be anything, but total honesty between us."

Her light, tinkling laugh shone over him like a glorious rainbow and he watched as she kneeled down to join him on the floor.

"Rob, I understand why you lied and there is nothing to forgive. You gave me a wonderful gift this weekend. You gave me yourself, the true you. Your name doesn't matter."

"What about the money?"

"That doesn't matter, either," she replied seriously. "It's just paper, honey. And that's not what makes me love you. It's you, the real you, that owns my heart."

Laughing lightly at her casual dismissal of his billions, he leaned toward her. "I'd give it all away to charity if it was the only way I could convince you to marry me."

"M-marry you?" Her voice stumbled over the words.

"Meg." His grip on her hands tightened. "I don't want just a weekend with you. I want a lifetime. I want you to be my wife and I want you to have my babies. I want to put down roots and have a real home with you. Will you marry me?"

Tears formed on her long lovely lashes and she merely nodded, speech obviously failing her.

"Is that a yes, Margaret?" He returned to his familiar teasing and she choked out a tearful laugh.

"Yes," she whispered, before repeating the word louder. "Yes."

Reaching out, he pulled her close to him, embracing her and his future with a heart that felt years younger and lighter than air.

"Thank God," he whispered into her ear.

## Epilogue

Rob looked at his wife in the center of the circle of dancers. Loosening the bowtie of his tuxedo, he grinned to see her having so much fun and wondered what his business associates would say if they could see him now. He was attending his very first high school prom as Meg had insisted he help her chaperone. She and her students had talked of nothing but attending the school dance since the beginning of spring and finally, the big night had arrived.

Meg had gotten special permission to pick the kids up at their homes since transportation was a problem for some. He and his lovely teacher had spent two hours traveling from door to door, picking up each student in her class and posing for innumerable photos. When they at last arrived at the dance with their students, all dressed to the nines, it was not in a limo, but aboard a handicapped bus. He marveled at her boundless energy and enthusiasm. It was clear her students adored her and he knew for a fact, the feeling was mutual.

As the song ended, Meg made her way through the throng of teenagers smiling as she walked toward him. She was only beginning to show and he looked forward to the arrival of their first child—a little girl according to the sonogram—shortly before Thanksgiving.

This year, he truly had much to be thankful for. Meg had given him a place to call home. Her circle of friends had welcomed him with open arms and everyday was filled with the wonder of being a part of her world. While he had introduced her to waterskiing, she'd fed him Kraft Macaroni and Cheese. He'd taken her to her first movie premiere in New York and she'd taken him to his first prom.

"Rob, you are such a trooper."

"Oh, how so?"

"I don't know many billionaires who would humor their wives by going to the prom."

"Meg," he answered. "Haven't you figured out I would go anywhere in the world, so long as I could be with you? I'm mad about you, Meg."

"Oh," she laughed. "You are getting so lucky tonight!"

"Thank God." And there in front of the principal, her students and the entire school, he kissed her.

The End