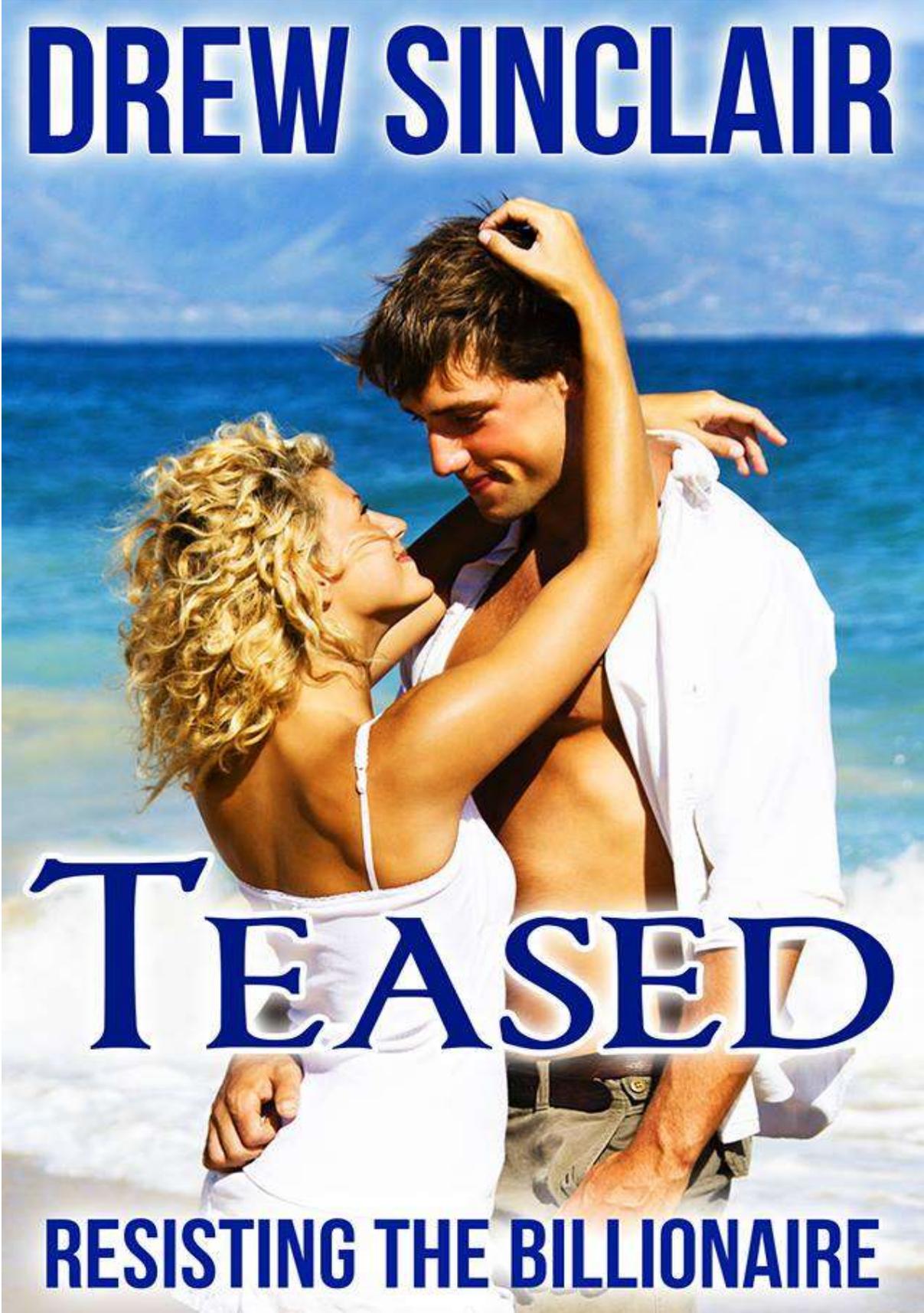


DREW SINCLAIR

A romantic couple is shown on a beach. The woman, with blonde curly hair, is wearing a white tank top and has her arms around the man's neck. The man is wearing a white shirt and is looking down at her. The background is a bright blue ocean under a clear sky.

TEASED

RESISTING THE BILLIONAIRE

Teased

Resisting the Billionaire - Volume One

By Drew Sinclair

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First Printing, 2014

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Published in the United States of America.

Cover Art by Cali MacKay

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Acknowledgements

For the Joy of Romance and the Thrill of E-Publishing
But most of all for my beautiful little family!

Cover Art (and inspiration, guidance, encouragement) by the awesome Cali MacKay
Buy and read all her amazing books at:
www.CaliMackay.com

Prologue

Somewhere In The South Pacific

Blue skies, lapping waves. For what seemed like a long time, Melanie lay in the warm sand. She didn't want to think about where she was and she certainly didn't want to move. The heaviness across her waist made her look down. A tanned and muscular arm was draped across her, the strong fingers of a male hand resting lightly against her lower abdomen.

Was she on vacation? She had no earthly idea where she was or who she was with.

The arm didn't look like her boyfriend's -- no, wait -- her ex-boyfriend Mitch's arm. It was too strong, too tanned, too well defined.

She moved her head and it began to pound.

Panic set in.

She looked around her and all she could see was sandy beach, brilliant aquamarine sea, and azure blue skies.

"Oh my God... Where am I? What the hell have I done?" She whispered.

She turned her head to look at the rest of the man attached to the arm around her waist.

"Jesus Christ!" She had no recollection, no recognition of the beautiful stranger. He looked as exhausted as she felt. His clothes were ragged, and so were hers. She pulled his arm from her, scrambling to get up, but her head was too woozy and she landed back on her ass. She was wearing only her bra and her skirt was torn away, leaving most of her thighs exposed.

The ridiculously handsome stranger opened his eyes, looked at her intently for a moment, and then sprang to life.

"Melanie!", he shouted. His voice was full of concern.

"How do you know my name?" She said.

"What do you mean? We were on the flight together--"

"What flight? Who are you?"

"It's me, Alex your..." His voice trailed off.

"My what?" A feeling of dread came over her, that name... it meant something...

Chapter One

Three Days Earlier

"Do you have family values?" Alex Drummond said to the elegant woman seated before him in the private booth he had reserved for their meal. He was immaculately turned out, dressed in perfect smart casual, manicured and his dark hair just tousled enough to give the impression of not caring too much about his otherwise perfect appearance. Rugged but cultivated was the overall impression, like a movie star in an action role.

"Do you?" The woman said, staring intently into his eyes, searching for an indication of his feelings.

She had supermodel looks and a figure to match. Male eyes watched her surreptitiously from all directions in the Michelin star-rated restaurant of the Four Seasons hotel. She wore a gleaming white evening gown that perfectly complimented her flawless, golden brown skin.

"I asked you first." He said.

There was a silence. Alex studied the menu although he already knew most of it quite well. The award-winning exclusive spot was one he ate at often, even when he was alone.

"I don't know." The woman faltered. "It's an important question; one I would have to seriously consider."

"Oh, really?" He sounded bored. "To me it's totally unimportant--"

"Me too!" She said.

-- what other people think. Family values are core. Fundamental."

"That's exactly it. Fundamental. And core."

"If you are a complete idiot."

"A complete idiot."

"So which is it?" He pressed her.

"I'm sorry," she said, "... which is what? I'm confused."

Alex snapped the menu shut. "You know what, Vivian?"

"Valerie, it's Valerie."

"I've lost my appetite. You can stay if you like. In fact, please do. Tell Andre to put it on the Drummond account."

The woman stared at him. She was rake thin. Size zero. If she did decide to stay and eat, the bill would be negligible at best.

"Do you know I speak French?" She blurted desperately. Alex looked at her. "And Italian. My Mandarin Chinese is also good."

"I'm sure you would make a very beautiful interpreter." He said.

"Do you think I'm beautiful?"

"Vivian--"

"It's Valerie."

"Valerie. I really have to go."

"I have a Masters from the Harvard Business School."

Alex sighed.

"Valerie, you don't have to do this."

"I want to. I really want to. With you."

"Now I'm confused. What is it you want to do with me? We've only just met."

"I feel like I've known you my whole life."

"I'm going now."

The stunning blonde jumped to her feet and blocked his way.

"Don't!" She said desperately.

"Valerie, please get out of my way."

She stepped in closer and turned her eyes up to look at him seductively.

"I'll do anything you want." She whispered.

"Really?"

"Yes, anything." She put her hands to his belt.

"That's a relief, because I thought we were going to have to fight."

"I'll fight you if you want me to."

"No Valerie. Please just sit down. I have something I want to ask you."

"The answer is yes." She said. "Whatever it is."

"Great. Then sit down and close your eyes."

"Except for that. I don't want to close my eyes." She gripped his belt tightly again.

"Do it or I'll leave right now." He ordered.

Reluctantly she closed her eyes. He pulled her hands from his belt and then gently guided her back down into her chair.

"Begin counting backwards from 100." He said.

She opened her eyes again but he gently brushed them closed with his fingertips. "Shh. I've got something for you. I'll put it on the table right here. All you have to do is count all the way down to zero." She peeked through her fingers and saw Alex place a small dark box on the table. Then he wrote a note, folded it up, and placed that in the box as well. A thrill of excitement went through her. She had just met Alex Drummond, billionaire, that evening. He was a hard guy to be paired with through the dating website and it was rumored he was very picky.

But tonight was obviously her lucky night.

"Start counting and then keep going. If you stop or if you look then I'm taking it back."

"One hundred, ninety-nine..."

Alex stood up. "I'm going to stand behind you." He said. "Keep counting."

When she arrived at zero, Valerie peeked through her fingers. "Can I look now?" There was no answer. She looked around and Alex was gone, but his gift was still there. She grabbed the box and opened it frantically.

Inside was a single toothpick and a note.

Chapter Two

"God, I feel good today." Melanie Hutchinson said aloud as she smoothed her pristine flight attendant's uniform down over her hips.

"Well, that's nice to hear." Her friend Margaret said. "What has you feeling so good today?"

"I don't know. Can't quite put my finger on it. Maybe it's just that I'm still young, free, and single. I get paid to fly all over the world and visit exotic locations. To top it off, there's a plane full of hot, eligible, successful men out there just waiting to flirt with me. Maybe, just maybe, one of them could be Mr. Right. So you tell me, could this day get any better?"

Margaret sighed. "I remember when I was your age. The world at my feet. You enjoy it girl. This is the best time of your life. Grab it with both hands."

She smiled at her friend, picked up flight Captain Mitch McGovern's in-flight meal tray and turned to head into the cockpit.

"Whoa there!" She had nearly spilled the meal across him. The Captain had left the cockpit in the capable hands of his co-pilot while he stretched his legs in the galley. He was tall, muscular, tanned, with thick wavy dark hair and a square jawline.

Melanie blushed. The truth was that she had a crush on Mitch. Ever since the first flight she had shared with him six years ago on Drummond Airlines.

"I love it when you do that." He said, only making her blush even harder.

"It's kind of hot in here, don't you think?" Melanie said to Margaret.

"Too hot for me." Her friend grinned. "I better get out of here."

"No Margaret--" Melanie protested, but it was too late. Her friend was gone, leaving her alone with Mitch. In his smart Captain's uniform, he cut a strong figure.

"This is for you." She said. "Would you like it here or shall I bring it to the crew rest area?"

"Oh, I'll have it here." He said in his deep voice. He took the tray from her and placed it to one side. Melanie went to squeeze by him but he blocked her way. She felt her heart beat faster. It was happening. He had noticed her after all these years.

"Where are you going?" He said.

"I've got work to do Mitch. Let me out." She put her soft white hand to his strong forearm but he didn't budge.

"I'm the Captain. I need you here Melanie. I have something I want to discuss with you."

He was way too close and her skin tingled with excitement.

"What's it about Mitch? Can't it wait? I've got a whole planeload of people to look after."

"This is much more important than them." His lips came closer.

"Mitch--" He pressed his mouth to hers and she felt all her will power collapse, her fears vanished as his arms surrounded her, and their tongues explored deeply.

Mitch reached behind him and yanked the curtains over while he lifted her up effortlessly to sit on the counter in front of him.

"Don't speak Melanie, not yet." He reached inside his jacket and took out a small box. Melanie's heart almost stopped.

"Mitch, no--"

He put his fingers to her lips. "Shh, Melanie. Let me do the talking for once." He went down onto one knee and opened the box carefully, the sparkle of diamonds glinted. Melanie began to choke up.

"Melanie Hutchinson, will you please do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

It was true. Only now did she realize how much she had longed for someone to ask her this question. But Mitch? He had hardly paid any attention to her in six years. It didn't make sense.

"Yes." She whispered. Why spoil the moment with rational thought?

"Give me your hand." He said and then carefully pushed the ring onto her finger. When she had admired it he stood up and gathered her into his arms, his warm breath on her neck excited her beyond belief. This gorgeous man was hers. In moments, they were naked and he was making passionate love to her on the galley floor. No -- it wasn't the floor, but a giant, soft bed with satin sheets -- but something was wrong. The whole plane surrounded them and people were staring at them, clapping, giving them a round of applause. Frantic to cover herself, she drew the sheets up to her chin.

"Mitch, what the hell is going on?"

"It's okay baby, these people are just happy for us. Come on, relax!"

"No, I can't! Are you crazy?"

She yanked the sheets up higher and then a thud brought her to herself.

Melanie looked around the room of Mitch's bachelor apartment.

"Oh my God." She moaned. "I'm still here. Twenty-eight years old and still waiting for this idiot to get serious." She looked at the good-looking man snoring next to her. Even with his hair all tousled and his mouth half-open, he was attractive. Still, nothing compared to the Mitch of her dreams. And he was no airline pilot, either. He was a ground staff supervisor. He had decent job a pay grade or two above her own but still at the lower end of the airline industry pile. He was such a sweet guy with a heart of gold, but would he ever move on from where he was? Would she, for that matter?

"I can't do it." She mumbled to herself. "I can't fly this stupid LA to Columbus route again." Melanie had been stuck on the same boring route for the last six months and it seemed like forever since she had been anywhere exotic or interesting. "No more fat, drunken, lecherous businessmen. Please." She wanted to curl up and stay under the covers all day but the alarm next the bed let her know it was 3:30 a.m. and time to go. The sound didn't wake the slumbering Mitch. He wouldn't be up for hours yet but she needed to start looking good for her long day as a Drummond Airlines flight attendant.

She swung her legs out of bed and began searching for her clothes. Now she regretted not going back to her own place last night. It was nice to hang out at Mitch's sometimes. The guy atmosphere meant that kicking back and drinking beers while watching a movie was relaxed. But then she only had her overnight bag to get ready for work.

Where had she left the damn thing last night?

It wasn't in plain view, so she began searching under the bed, quietly, so as not to disturb her boyfriend.

"There it is." She whispered. She slid her hand along the floor and felt something lacy, small, and feminine under her fingers.

"What the--?" She pulled her hand back and then went into the bathroom to take a look at what she had found. What Melanie saw made her blood boil.

She stormed back to the bedroom and turned all the lights on.

"Wake up, Mitch." She said tensely. He didn't move. She looked around the room again and then saw what she needed: Mitch's baseball bat. He liked to keep it in the bedroom for protection in case of intruders. She picked it up in her right hand and then walked to the bed. The lacy black underwear was in her other hand.

They weren't hers.

"Wake up, Mitch." She said louder now, but still he didn't move. She pulled the bedclothes off his body and watched him huddle up in the chilly nighttime air. He began to come to, slowly rubbing his eyes until he could see Melanie standing over him. She was still in her underwear.

"Hey, baby." He said with a smile. "What's up?"

She thrust the bundled panties into his face. "What are these?" She demanded. He stared at them bleary eyed, confused. Melanie shook them out and let them dangle in front of his eyes.

"Oh, those." He said. "Those are uh... a present. Yeah, a present for you."

She planted the baseball bat on the bed between his legs.

"A present for me?"

Melanie had never struck another human being as long as she lived.

"Yeah, baby." He glanced nervously at the bat. "Where did you find them?"

Melanie threw the panties at him. As Mitch reached up to catch them, she raised the baseball bat and took aim.

Chapter Three

"You're a very beautiful woman. But please eat. The toothpick look is unhealthy."

"You're kidding. That's what you wrote in the note you left her? Why the hell did you do that? She was hot, right?"

Alex sighed. Valerie had been hot -- scorching hot. But hot wasn't the issue anymore, if it ever had been.

"I don't know, little brother. I think I'm going to just forget about women and enter a monastery. Even this stupid dating website is just a waste of time. They are supposed to screen these women, for God's sake. All they send me are these spineless bimbos just wanting to jump into bed with you because they see green in the family name."

"Mm, spineless bimbos. Sounds perfect. Maybe I will sign up for that thing after all. Send me a link to the website. Anyway, what did you expect? It's a millionaire-dating website. By definition, any woman who signs up for it is a certified gold-digger."

"So what am I supposed to do? Go to clubs and strip joints like you? Look where that's gotten you."

"I'm not the one looking for true love. I get exactly what I need in clubs and strip joints. At least I'm looking for strippers there. You're looking for non-materialistic, spiritually pure women with family values on gold diggers dot com."

Alex sighed.

"You're right. I suppose I should go to church or something."

"To get laid? I don't think so."

"Don't you ever think about settling down?"

"Me? Never. I'm happy just the way I am. If I ever stay with one woman for more than two weeks, hit me over the head with something. I agree with the old man on this one: 'Never, ever, ever, ever let a female tie you down.'"

"Okay Sebastian, uh, my flight is being called. Good talk. I think. I'll catch up with you in a couple of days for the trip to Tahiti."

"Looking forward to it, bro. I can't get enough of those island beauties."

"Whatever. Catch you later."

He ended the call and looked at his itinerary. Los Angeles International Airport to Columbus Ohio. The Drummond Corporation had a small airline that ran the route. It was rare that he made use of Drummond Airlines but this was the perfect opportunity to check in with the little company that had started the Drummond family empire. He would travel incognito today, under his mother's maiden name. That way, he could get a sense of how the airline was run without any subterfuge or sugarcoating from the staff.

He got in line and began to take note of everything that was going on. Drummond Airlines was small; not exactly a budget airline, but not far off. Profits were razor thin and they were always looking for ways to cut costs. This particular route depended mainly on regular business

travelers like himself. Alex was as determined as his father, Alex Senior, to keep the company afloat, even if they could only break even.

"Can I have your boarding pass please, sir?"

Alex looked down at the pretty flight attendant. She gave him a sweet and professional smile, one that nearly floored him. The last thing he was on the lookout for here was dating prospects, but this woman had taken him completely by surprise.

"Sir?" She repeated. "May I have your boarding pass please?"

"Oh yes, of course, uh..." Alex read her name tag, "Melanie." He handed over his documents.

"Thank you Mr. Murray. Enjoy your flight." She smiled at him again and then looked to the next passenger as she handed his ticket stub back to him. He didn't move. Something was wrong. Melanie's mascara appeared slightly smudged at the corner of her eye.

"Come on buddy, keep it moving." The gruff business passenger behind him said.

"Yes, of course." He moved along but slowly, not in his usual Drummond Corporation hurry.

She's been crying. He thought. Now why would I even notice that?

It wasn't like him at all to notice or even less to care about other people's emotions. It was something he had even taken training in to meet his responsibilities as a CEO. Sensitivity had never been his strong point even if altruism was something ingrained in his nature. They didn't always go hand-in-hand.

When Alex reached his seat, he struggled to get in. He was a tall man with long legs and rarely flew economy. In fact, he rarely flew commercial at all, preferring the freedom of private jets. The Drummond family had a fleet of three in order to meet all of their conflicting needs. He was an accomplished pilot and often flew himself.

Thank God it's only a four-hour flight.

He looked up and saw Melanie board the plane. He checked his watch.

Okay, it's a three hour and forty-eight minute estimated flight time with a cruising time of approximately three hours. That's got to be enough time to find out why she was crying.

As soon as they reached cruising altitude, Alex left his seat and headed towards the galley. There was a single male flight attendant on duty but no sign of Melanie anywhere.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"No. It's okay. Just looking for the restrooms."

"They're right over there."

"Actually, maybe you can help me. Who's head of the cabin crew today?"

"That would be me, sir. My name is Richard. Is there something I can help you with?"

"Yes Richard, is Melanie working economy or business class today?"

"Uh, I'm not sure I need to give you that information sir."

Alex took out his wallet and produced a 100-dollar bill.

"I'm sure the attendant you have on duty in economy will be just fine, sir."

Alex took out another one, two, three, and then a fourth note.

"She's in business class, sir." He went to snap the money from Alex's hand but Alex didn't let go.

"I'll need an upgrade." He said.

"That's gonna cost you. I could get in serious trouble over that."

"Get me a seat right in front of her and I'll make it worth your while. Double or quits."

"Go back to your seat. Leave it to me. I'll see what I can do."

Ten minutes later, the man was back.

"I think I have just the seat for you sir. Please follow me."

One thousand dollars for a seat in front of a flight attendant who works on the family airline. I must be crazy.

Alex took his seat and waited. For ten minutes there was still no sign of Melanie anywhere. Then the seatbelt sign went on and the captain's voice came over the PA system:

"We're about to experience a little turbulence ladies and gentlemen. Nothing to be alarmed about, but please do pay attention to the seatbelt signs and remain in your seats until the seatbelt sign is turned off. Flight crew, please take your seats as well."

The turbulence hit as soon as the captain had signed off.

Alex was cursing the head of the cabin crew when Melanie appeared in front of him and strapped herself in directly opposite of his seat. She was surprised to see it occupied. She didn't look happy but then she gave him that sweet smile again.

"Upgrade?" She inquired.

"Something like that."

Her eyes were red and her makeup looked like it had been hastily redone.

"Is everything okay?" He asked.

"Nothing to worry about sir." She replied. "Just a little turbulence, nothing out of the ordinary."

He smiled. "I'm not worried about the turbulence, Melanie."

"I don't understand."

"Forgive me for being forward but you look like you've been crying."

"No I haven't. I'm just tired from an overnight flight. My eyes are a little sore."

He continued looking at her and didn't buy her story for a minute. Alex Drummond may not have been the most sensitive man in the world but he had plenty of experience with women.

"It's okay." He said softly. "I'm sorry for intruding. It's just that you seem like a nice person and you looked like you were in pain, but it's my mistake. Please forgive me."

The plane began to shudder from the turbulence and they were forced to silence. Melanie couldn't help but look back at the handsome stranger who was taking such an interest in her. She hadn't noticed him until he suddenly appeared in the spot directly opposite her own. He was still looking at her and she knew he didn't believe her. It was as if she couldn't lie to him.

She felt tears coming to her eyes and fought to hold them back. Alex nodded his head.

"Bad day?" He ventured. The plane banked sharply and both of them let out a gasp of surprise. The aircraft steadied again and they exchanged another smile.

"Something like that." She said. Alex drew a brilliant white handkerchief out of his pocket and offered it to her. She laughed again.

"You're kidding me, right?"

"Well, at least it put a smile on your face, right?"

"What are you, the last living gentleman in the United States of America?"

"Maybe. I hope not. Look, seriously, if you need it, take it. I always carry a spare and its brand new."

Melanie looked incredulous. The florid initials AD were in the corner. She smiled again and took it from him, then dabbed her eyes, and handed it back.

"Don't be silly." He said. "I can't possibly take it back; just use it until you need it."

"You really are a smooth one." She said. He smiled and held her gaze until she smiled again. Melanie didn't know what the gallant stranger was doing to her, but she liked it.

"So come on Melanie, tell me: What's wrong with you today? You never know, maybe I can help?"

"Do you always offer help to complete strangers?"

"Never." He said firmly. "But I've never met a complete stranger like you before."

He watched a slight blush come to her pretty face.

"You stop it now." She said. "Before I get the wrong idea."

"How do you know it would be the wrong idea?"

"Oh, you are good. Really good. Too good. Way too smooth for me."

"Look, why don't you just try me? It never hurts to share a burden."

"Okay." She sighed. "Have you got a million dollars?"

"Well, not on me." He laughed.

"I didn't think so."

"What do you need a million dollars for?"

"It's my mother. She's in a nursing home in Florida. But it turns out her care and medical bills have been unpaid for the last year and the debt has been mounting up and now we owe them nearly a million in total and on my salary as a flight attendant, that might as well be a billion dollars. If she can't pay \$10,000 by the end of the month, they're going to evict her." Melanie began to tear up again.

"God, Melanie. I'm sorry to hear that. Isn't there anywhere your mother could stay?"

"She could stay with me, but she needs round-the-clock supervision and I'm hardly on the ground half the week with my schedule." She stopped abruptly. The seat belt sign had gone off. She released her buckle and stood up.

"Sir, I'm very sorry. I shouldn't have talked about my personal life like this. It's very unprofessional, and I should know better. I'd be grateful if you didn't mention this to anyone."

"Don't worry; I won't mention it to a soul. It'll be our secret."

"Thank you. I appreciate that." She turned from him to go towards the galley.

"On one condition." He said. Melanie froze. Drummond Airlines were strict on crew etiquette and the cabin crew manager on duty was the Nazi version of a flight attendant. She turned back to the man whose name she still didn't even know.

"What is it?" She asked nervously. He looked at her and smiled.

Chapter Four

"Little bro, I'm telling you I think I may have found the one."

"Sure. You mean the next one."

"No way. I mean The One."

"So what's different about this girl?"

"You know I flew to Columbus on Drummond Airlines yesterday, right?"

"Yeah. Why, I can't imagine, not when we have three luxury private jets at our disposal. I call that masochism at best, stupidity at worst."

"It's a good airline, Sebastian. You should step outside your comfort zone sometime and try it."

"There's stepping outside your comfort zone and then there's stepping into pure hell."

"Well, if that was hell then, why did I meet an angel there?"

His brother guffawed on other end of the line.

"What are you doing? Trying to get into bed with me? Even if I was one of your girlfriends, do you think I'd fall for a corny line like that?"

"I'm serious Sebastian, you and I have been looking in all the wrong places. These socialites and debutantes are all just about appearances, money, what you have, and what your family does. I don't know why I didn't think of it before. There's a whole world out there of normal, ordinary people who don't live life from one gala dinner to the next."

"Okay, so go on then, tell me. You met some cute girl at the Burger King in the airport and she was so down to earth, you took her home with you?"

"It was a flight attendant."

"Okay, I'll admit I've done my fair share of those."

"With Drummond Airlines."

There was a silence on the other end of the line.

"Please tell me you're not serious big bro. Please, because you know if you did anything with her and it gets back to the old man, then you are in big trouble."

"I'm serious."

"Oh Jesus Christ, Alex. Come on. You're a big boy. What the hell are you doing? The world is full of gorgeous women and you have to pick the one, single class of female that is forbidden to you by our extremely wealthy, extremely powerful, and extremely irrational father?"

"That last one is the key: irrational."

"No way. It's the first two that count and if he finds out you did anything, I mean if you even thought about it in your dreams, then you can kiss your share of \$35 billion goodbye."

Alex took a deep breath.

"I know the risks. You don't have to tell me."

"I'm not so sure. It seems like that's exactly what you need for me to do, because it looks like you just don't get it."

"I get it, I get it. Now stop lecturing me."

"Weird, huh? Normally I'm the one doing the crazy stuff and you're the one lecturing. How does it feel?"

"If you could feel what I'm feeling now, you'd be the happiest guy on Earth."

"Did you fu--"

"Don't say it. And no, I didn't. Nothing happened."

"Thank God for that. You aren't a complete fool. Now just consider yourself lucky and never take that route again for any reason. Go hang out at one of the airport hotels and have some fun with the crew of Swedish National Airlines--"

"I asked her out on a date."

"Oh, Jesus Christ."

"But she point-blank refused."

"Huh? I mean, thank God for that, but also, huh? Did she even know who you are?"

"No. No one did."

"It was Drummond Airlines, right?"

"Sure, but I bought the ticket with my British passport under Mom's maiden name, so no one knew I was a Drummond. I was doing field work, you know; checking out the quality of service undercover."

"Undercover field work. So that's what you call it these days?"

"Trust me, all I wanted to do was check out the customer service but when I saw Melanie--"

Sebastian snorted a guffaw into the phone. "Awesome name. Now I get the down to earth bit. Was she chewing tobacco as well?"

"What the hell is wrong with the name Melanie?"

"Can't you see it? Jesus, you really are love struck."

"Melanie Hutchinson."

"It only gets better. Melanie Hutchinson. Just rolls off the tongue -- like a fur-ball."

"Shut up, you dick. This girl could be your sister-in-law one day."

"You shut up. Stop right there. That will not happen. Ever. But tell me anyway, why did Melanie Hutchinson turn LA's second most eligible bachelor down?"

"Well, it may have been my fault."

"Impossible." Sebastian said ironically.

"We got into a conversation and she told me some things about herself that I kind of tried to use to make her go on a date with me. I thought it would be just fun."

"Amateur. Even after all these years. One day you will follow the master, Sebastian Drummond, and learn the true art of seduction."

"She told me some of her personal problems and then she felt embarrassed, as though she had acted unprofessionally."

"Which she clearly did."

"Don't be so officious Sebastian; it was just two people sharing. So what if I own the company she works for?"

"HR doesn't see it that way. The labor courts probably wouldn't see it that way, and sure as hell the old man won't see it that way."

"She asked me to keep it between me and her, and I said I would, but only on the condition that she has dinner with me back in LA."

"When will you ever learn?"

"She said she didn't want to make things worse. She was sorry she had been so unprofessional and that she had to decline."

"Great. End of a sad and clumsy story."

"So I upped the ante."

"Oh crap. What did you do? Tell Sebastian."

"I offered to pay for her mother's medical bills if she would have dinner with me."

"Whoa, didn't see that one coming. Was it a wild guess on your part? A stab in the dark kind of thing?"

"That was some of the personal stuff she told me. Her mother is being evicted from a nursing home and she needs \$10,000 by the end of the month. On Drummond Airlines flight attendant salary, she'd need ten years to put that much together."

"There are other jobs out there if you're qualified."

"So I offered to pay it."

"And did she make you a member of the Melanie Hutchinson Mile High Club?"

"Are you kidding me? I thought she was going to throw me out of the plane. I'm lucky she didn't set the Air Marshal on me."

"I'm not surprised. What a sap. I keep telling you that you don't need to ask, you need to take. Why can't you get it into your head that people like us don't have to play by the rules that other people do?"

"I know you don't believe that Sebastian, so come on. Stop pretending to be the arrogant rich kid and give me some advice here. There's no one I trust in the whole world more than you."

Sebastian sighed.

"It's true, Big Brother. That's one thing that'll never change. Now you have to trust me on this one. Just let this Mildred--"

"Melanie."

"Melanie Huddersfield."

"Melanie Hutchinson."

"Yeah, on LA to Cincinnati--"

"Columbus. What the hell is wrong with you today?"

"With me? It's you who's about to throw away \$10 billion on a fling with a flight attendant. Take my advice and forget about it."

Alex gave a long, resigned sigh.

"Okay, little bro. I guess you're right. I'll see you tomorrow in the executive lounge. Maybe Tahiti will help get this off my mind."

"You betcha. Those island beauties will cure anything that ails you."

"Why don't you swing by later and stay over at my place? We can have a few beers and get into vacation mode."

"Sounds good, little bro. I'll see you about 8:00 or so."

"It's a date." He laughed.

Alex put his phone down and opened the folder on his lap. The file inside was marked with the Drummond Corporation logo, Human Resources Department. He opened the file and looked at the digital picture of Melanie Hutchinson printed on the upper-left corner of the resume.

"No one says no to me, Melanie Hutchinson." He mumbled and then took in a deep breath. "That's not how things work in Alex Drummond's world."

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