

# WHENEVER YOU WANT



Nobody told her  
escorts snagged  
the best men!

STEPHANIE VAN ORMAN

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For my favorite beta reader, Kat Thornton.

# **Whenever You Want**

**Stephanie Van Orman**

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# Chapter One

## A Request for Tina

Christina Witten placed the final double red lines at the end of the last column on her accounting exam. She flipped her test booklet to the front to make sure her student information was correct and then she gathered her things together. She felt a certain relief as she saw she was not the first person to finish the test and not anywhere near the last. It was comfortable for her to finish sometime in the middle. All her numbers matched, so it had to be good enough. She turned in her exam, swung her bag over her shoulder and headed for the door.

It was a weight off her mind! The test had been an important one. The last one in April—end game. Once she got her (hopefully) good grades back, she'd have her diploma in office assistance and she could quit living her secret life. Not many girls lived a secret life, but if anyone back home heard she'd been working for an escort service, that would be the end of her freedom. She knew for certain her parents would pitch an epic fit and she'd be back in her home town pumping gas before she could say, "No tuition."

It hadn't been Christina's idea to work for an escort service. Well, it hadn't been her idea in the first place, but when her cousin Mindy showed her how much money could be made by being the shiny little woman on a boring man's arm for one evening... poor little Christina had to cave. Her pockets were worn thin. She needed money.

It was all because of her own stupidity that she had been short on cash. She was the one who told her parents she had enough money to leave her small town and move to faraway Edmonton. It didn't matter how far away she went, they didn't have any money to help her even if she lived next door, but she wasn't worried. She could take care of everything. She always planned to get a part-time job to help support herself while she went to school, but then she'd been late turning in a form to request a grant and even later with her application for a scholarship. In the end, it didn't seem to matter how many dishes she washed at the pub around the corner, there was barely enough money to pay the rent as well as her tuition. Feeding herself became a problem, too, and though Christina didn't like to say it—she'd already maxed out her credit card buying food and those expensive textbooks.

She often wondered if she should have told Mindy about her money problems before they got out of hand, but Mindy was very different from her and the only reason Christina's parents had allowed her move to Edmonton in the first place. She had to live with responsible Mindy who was making a killing at her job... which was? Christina was very suspicious. Mindy was hardly ever home in the evenings and wherever she went, she dolled up like a celebrity about to strut down the red carpet. What could she be doing? At first, Mindy blubbered something about networking. She didn't give any details about her career until Christina broke down and explained she was fifty dollars short on her half of the rent that month. She'd been killing herself at work for three months and she thought Mindy would understand if she was a little late.

Mindy looked at the money that wasn't quite enough and then at Christina before she said, "Your arms looked chapped. Do you want to make some money at something that doesn't involve elbow-deep boiling water?"

"But that's my job," Christina responded dully, almost on the point of tears.

"It doesn't have to be," Mindy said, dropping the bills Christina gave her on the table like they were nothing. She clicked over to the refrigerator in her high heels and took out a can of tonic water, which she opened noisily before leaning against the wall of their apartment like she was marketing the stuff. "I could take you to work with me, and you'd earn enough to pay your tuition for next semester in a couple weeks, especially since Christmas is coming up. You see, I'm actually—"

"A hooker?" Christina filled in for her.

"Escort!" Mindy emphasized. Then she shrugged her shoulders. "It's not even that bad."

"So, you don't sleep with them?"

"My clients? Ew! No," Mindy said, looking repulsed. "Not in a million years. But I do go on dates with guys who need a date for something and don't have the time or inclination to find a date for themselves. Sometimes, it's because they're shy. Sometimes, it's because they want to make a girl who's slighted them off burn with envy. Sometimes, it's because they're visiting the city and want someone to show them around with a little more intimacy than a touring bus. Stuff like that. Very often, they introduce me as their cousin." Mindy explained before she bluntly asked Christina, "Well, do you want to try it?"

"No sex?" Christina asked anxiously.

"Zero sex. I promise. I'll give you pepper spray and a pair of brass knuckles. Want to give it a try?"

"Aren't both of those illegal?"

"Probably," Mindy said noncommittally. "I've never been attacked. I don't know what happens with other escort services, but my agency's really good. We're professionals and we say what we are willing to do very clearly in our ads. Gross stuff just doesn't happen."

"I'll think about it," Christina said.

"Do," Mindy said. "Do."

So, Christina thought about it. She didn't have much of a choice. She didn't have enough money to pay the tuition for the next semester and it would be due in mere weeks. If she could earn the money she needed, then she could quit being an escort and go back to washing dishes. If she refused the job, she'd probably have to drop out of her program and go back home. That would be too humiliating. On the other hand, could she really be an escort?

Christina thought honestly about Mindy and how she compared. Mindy was shorter than Christina unless she was wearing battle gear. When she was all dressed for work, Mindy wore ten-centimeter heels. She was tanned and pierced and tattooed in all the right places and Christina was simply nothing like her.

Christina didn't even have long, pretty hair. Her hair was that unfortunate color that was neither blonde or brown, and to top it off, it was cropped so short that it was almost boyish. She had no figure to speak of. She was pale and... ordinary. Couldn't a guy get a girl like her anywhere?

“Don’t you think I’m plain?” Christina asked when Mindy broached the subject a second time.

“Plain?” Mindy asked skeptically. “Plain? What do you mean? If you think you’re ugly, think again. It’s true, you need help, but your problems are nothing that can’t be solved with makeup and a little extra attention. Basically, if you give me permission to do whatever it takes to bring you up to snuff, you’ll look like a fox promptly.”

“Really?”

Mindy snuffed, “Everything is fake anyway.”

“No one is naturally beautiful?”

Mindy rolled her eyes and said caustically, “Even Cinderella needed a glass shoe.”

“Then I’ll do it,” Christina said. She was too desperate to pay her bills to think rationally.

“Okay then. You asked for it,” Mindy said, picking up her car keys and heading for the door.

Mindy took Christina to her agency where she introduced her to the boss and told her they could use her for the busy season. No one wanted to be alone around Christmas time, so there was always more than enough work. The woman in charge didn’t seem very interested in Christina, but assigned her the working name of ‘Tina’ and told her she’d work with Mindy the first few times just to make sure she was trained properly. Then Mindy took her to the back for her makeover.

The first thing Mindy did once they were alone was pierce Christina’s ears. She’d never had it done and it felt like her head was going to explode it hurt so much.

Mindy groaned when Christina whined. “Look, I’m not going to brand you. It’s a miracle you managed to make it to nineteen without having it done anyway. This isn’t a big deal.”

But, it didn’t matter what Mindy said, Christina still felt sore as Mindy busily gave her a facial, manicure, pedicure, plucked her eyebrows and did her makeup.

When Mindy finally left her alone, she felt sure she’d made the wrong choice. Beauty was too painful for her. She didn’t want to be beautiful when the price was getting your eyebrows plucked—hair by hair. She even considered bolting... but she did need the money. Ugh! She had to endure it.

Mindy brought her back a long honey colored wig and plopped it on her head happily.

“It’s great that your hair is so short. This way we can do whatever we want with you,” she said with a smile. “You’re going to be super hot.”

All in all, by the time Mindy was truly finished with Christina she was living a double life. By day, she was mild mannered college student Christina Witten and by evening she was Tina, an extremely beautiful and elusive escort who would never be seen past Christmas.

Or so she thought.

Mindy was right. Christmas was busy. Tina went to six office Christmas parties, three charity auctions, one ball, two shopping excursions, a dinner party, and a performance of *The Nutcracker*. By Boxing Day, her first day off, she looked at how much money she’d earned dating *interesting* men, and she was still four hundred dollars short on tuition, not to mention January’s rent, and additional expenses. She crunched the notice in her hand and knew exactly what it meant. She would have to work on New Year’s Eve. And who would be her partner that evening?



So far, the guys she had dated hadn't seemed that bad. Most of them were in their twenties or thirties. They didn't have wives and weren't likely to. They had just gotten in the habit of phoning for a date when one of these once-a-year awkward occasions came up. Some were more embarrassed than others, but she worked hard to make them all feel like she saw them as real people instead of just a customer. One of them even phoned and requested her again. Mindy thought that was great and gave Christina smiles and cheek pinches to congratulate her on her first return client.

When the end of the night came with one of these men, they'd call a cab for her and put her in it without asking for so much as a hug. More than one of them had even told her that she was much too good a girl to be working as an escort and she'd be better off giving it up.

But by Boxing Day, she hadn't earned enough money and she'd have to work New Year's Eve—terrifying.

Mindy's words still haunted her. "New Year's Eve," she said with a wink. "Everybody's date gets a kiss on New Year's Eve. Don't even think of trying to skip out."

Christina gulped. If she worked that night, she'd definitely have to kiss her date!

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Christina popped her purple bubblegum and tried to work out some of the tension in her back. It was the dreaded night—New Year's Eve. Rats! She was dressed like two billion dollars. Her dress was deep red, the color of the season, and she was wearing a long black coat with fur trimming Mindy had loaned her for the occasion. All her clothes were borrowed from Mindy, except for the inserts in her bra (those were a gift). To complete her look, Christina wore long dangling earrings with rhinestones inset in them and a choker to match. The wrap she would wear once the coat was hung up was black with deep red blossoms scattered across it in a gorgeous array. Christina thought it was prettier than the dress. The wig she wore that night was sandy blonde with bangs that fell slightly into her eyes.

That night she was supposed to meet Mr. Mark Lewis in the lobby of the Grand Morton Hotel—downtown—uptown—a really good part of town. There was a party there in one of the ballrooms and she was his insurance that he wouldn't be going stag to the biggest party of the year.

She pushed through the revolving doors just before eight o'clock hoping she'd find him quickly. She was supposed to wait by the courtesy phone in the lobby. Phase one of the date wasn't a big deal. She'd been meeting men that way all along. Even though it had barely been a month, she felt like a seasoned professional. The reason sweat was forming in the space between her shoulder blades was that she couldn't stop thinking about the cold fact that she was going to have to kiss her date. Of course, Mindy was right. Having someone to kiss at the stroke of midnight was the whole purpose of hiring an escort on New Year's Eve. It was socially embarrassing to have no one to kiss. Christina just needed to pull herself together. She'd been kissed before. Lots of times... she thought.

She rolled her eyes and looked around for a place to spit her gum before her date got there. But she was so nervous she accidentally started to blow another bubble.

“Looking for something?” a deep male voice said coolly.

Christina’s gum bubble deflated as her eyes met those of one of the most handsome men she had ever seen. Christina didn’t even get a chance to examine him closely when she realized he was holding a silver dust bin in his hand, poised to catch her gum.

Christina reached into her pocket and quickly pulled out a tissue. There was no way that guy was her date, but her date was probably in the lobby (if he was on time) and she didn’t want him to see her spit a wad of purple bubble gum directly into a waste bin. She already felt like she’d tripped up by being majorly outclassed in the fancy hotel. She rolled her gum up in the Kleenex and dropped it into the bin.

“Thank you,” she said, trying to cool her cheeks and manage some sort of composure. Then she moved away and stood closer to the courtesy phone. She leaned against the pillar and tried to look for her date.

But the guy with the trash can wasn’t leaving. He set the bin down near a chair, came around, and leaned against the pillar beside her. “Was your gum grape or raisin flavored?”

“Those are the same,” Christina said, still scanning the room and not looking at the man next to her. “It just depends on whether or not the French side of the package is showing.”

He laughed. “Are you waiting for somebody?” he asked, flirting.

“I have a date.”

“Is he handsome?”

“Who?”

“Your date,” he answered, chuckling.

Christina looked around nervously. She had never seen the man. How was she supposed to answer? The stranger was clearly playing with her. If she said her date was gorgeous, she’d be in trouble when the short, bald guy rolled in. After scrambling for a moment, she answered, “I like the way he looks.”

“Hmm,” the brown-eyed stranger said, as he suddenly turned around the corner and put his arm by her shoulder, nearly pinning her against the pillar. “And you’re friendly with him no doubt?”

She nodded and said testily, “That’s why you shouldn’t be putting the moves on me.”

“Mark!” someone suddenly called from the other end of the lobby. It was a silver tinkling voice, exactly like the sound of Christmas ornaments jingling.

Christina turned her head to see who had called her date’s first name, when suddenly the stranger in front of her closed in and whispered, “Sorry for the late introduction. I’m Mark and I’m guessing you’re my date. Tina? Am I right?”

“Yeah,” Christina breathed, very much aware of his cologne. Breathing it in was a new sensation. What on earth was he wearing? But Christina still had the presence of mind to say, “But you’re not behaving very well. Do you have to stand that close to me?”

“I need you to help me with a little problem,” he said, taking her hand in his and leading her toward the woman who had called to him. He held onto her hand and introduced her to a ravishing blonde.

Her name was Laura. It was only necessary to take one look at her to learn that she was eating her heart out for Christina’s date.

“Don’t you ever go out with the same woman twice?” Laura asked poisonously when Mark slipped his arm around Christina’s waist.

Christina smiled and looked at him. Yeah, he definitely looked like the heart-breaker type. She was smiling though, because she was happy he had turned out to be her partner for the night. She couldn’t help it. So far, none of her dates had been with men that were above an average on an attractive-o-meter. Mark was undoubtedly a ten on any woman’s rating chart. At least she wouldn’t have to kiss someone at the end of the night she was not attracted to. So, she was smiling and enjoying the fun of being with a man who was obviously popular. Mindy had already prepared her for being a tool to make another woman jealous.

“Don’t scare Tina,” Mark said to Laura sternly.

“But I know how you like to give your flings the idea that it’s not just a fling,” she said, looking particularly wounded. “Someone needs to warn the poor girl.”

Christina smiled and answered before Mark had a chance to say anything. “Thanks for the warning, but I’m too young to settle down. You should just enjoy the moment. Don’t you think?” Even Christina thought her cheerful eyes and ringing voice were irritating as she said those words. Saying a line like that irked her conscience, even as she said it. She didn’t believe it at all. She wanted a steady boyfriend who wouldn’t just use her for a fling, but for a long life of deep, lasting love. However, Mark was paying her to be on his side, so she said what she had to without choking on her own tongue.

Christina knew she was successful when Laura gave her a disgusted look and then beckoned for someone across the room to join them. “He’ll make you sorry, even if you have that attitude,” she said crossly as she took the arm of a young man. He was tall and blond and Christina might have been mistaken, but she thought Laura’s date looked at her a trifle longer than was necessary.

Christina flashed a smile back at him. It was all part of leading her secret life. Smiling sweetly at strangers was all part of being Tina. Well, she wouldn’t have to do it for much longer. New Year’s was going to be the last night. Afterward, she’d have to make up the difference washing dishes in the back of the pub again. Maybe then she could relax because no one would ever find out what she’d been doing.

Mark led her over to the coat check and politely helped her remove her coat. “You really riled her up,” he said as he offered her an arm and led her down the stairs to the ballroom.

“Is she your ex-girlfriend?” Christina asked, trying to get a grasp of the situation. Maybe he would tell her.

“Not exactly. More like a hopeful girlfriend,” he explained.

Man alive! He had excellent posture. Christina pushed her shoulders back and tried to walk with half as much dignity as him. Having to match a guy like him was daunting, but she’d do her best. “And this is your way of letting her down easy?” Christina asked.

“Sort of,” Mark agreed, turning his dark eyes toward her.

“Did you have a fling with her?”

Mark looked annoyed, but it didn’t make him look like an ogre. With features like that, he couldn’t stop being gorgeous even with a scowl on his face. Even his arm was solid.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business,” he finally replied. “I said I need you to help me with something tonight and it wasn’t her. I assure you, I can take care of that

situation myself. There's something else. Last year, at the New Year's party, I had some... unpleasantness at midnight. You're going to keep me out of trouble. All right?" Christina smiled and promised she'd do a good job.

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All in all, the evening was oceans more fun than she expected. She danced with Mark most of the time, and when he was called away by someone else, she danced with one of his friends. He had nice friends. They were good looking, young, successful, and didn't have wandering hands when they danced with her. The food was excellent and Mark was a good date. He was clearly popular both in his profession and with his friends, because he introduced her to at least fifty people, if not more. He had a good sense of fun and knew how to dance. He told her about his interests in a way that none of her other dates had bothered to. It was almost like he wasn't sure how to date an escort and so he was dating her in the same way he would date her if he was really interested in her. By the end of the night, she thought more than once that it was a pity her date with Mark was just for her job; otherwise, she would have loved to find herself in a more long-term relationship with him.

At around eleven-thirty, he gave up leaving her even for a moment. He took hold of her hand tightly while they danced and turned people down if they tried to take her from him by cutting in.

"What happened last year that makes you so nervous about midnight?" she asked while pressed close to him in a dance.

He rolled his eyes. "I'd rather not talk about it. It was... unpleasant."

"You keep using that word!"

"Yeah, well, it was. Fine, I'll tell you. I ended up getting passed down a long line of women and it was... unpleasant," he said, looking like he still needed to wash his mouth out.

"I thought most guys would like that." She laughed.

"Are you kidding? It was so fast I didn't even get a chance to recognize all of them. No, it wasn't fun."

"Yeah, I know it was... unpleasant. And this year, I'm supposed to protect you from it?"

"Well, don't tell me you don't think I look great in my dinner jacket, so..." he paused. Then he leaned in, put his forehead against Christina's, and looked into her eyes. "Please take care of me."

Christina wasn't sure, but she thought knowing she was going to get to kiss him at midnight was making it even more exciting. She looked at the giant clock at the end of the hall. Sometimes it seemed to be moving faster and sometimes it seemed to be moving slower. In a minute the countdown would start.

"Ten!"

"Nine!"

"Eight!"

"Seven!"

Mark turned Christina toward him and put his arms around her waist. She was looking into his eyes. She couldn't even hear the noise of the crowd filling the ballroom. There was just her and him.

And then their kiss.

The room was stifling, and so his lips were hot as he pressed them down on hers. Christina had told herself over and over again she had been kissed plenty of times, and so it wasn't a big deal, but kissing Mark was different. She had never felt her blood like it was scorching through her veins. It was like she was being kissed by someone who knew how to kiss, by someone who really meant business, and by someone who was not going to let up. It wasn't the kiss of a passing stranger who just wanted to avoid being passed around. Instead, it seemed like the kiss of someone who wanted something badly but was not allowed to have it. Christina broke away and took a quick breath. He pulled her back roughly. Her brain was shutting down, but she had one more thought before she completely shut down. She thought that to him, she must seem like the type of woman who wasn't attainable. Since kissing her was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, he wouldn't stop.

And she didn't really want him to.

At some point, Christina somehow became aware the singing had stopped and the band had stopped playing. Christina put her hand to Mark's face and pulled off. Then she looked into his eyes and smiled like their kiss had been part of the act. "Did I do a good job guarding your honor?" she asked with a wicked smile.

His expression went blank like he just realized what was going on. Maybe, his expression was of disappointment, because he just remembered she really wasn't attainable.

"Of course," he said. "You did a great job. Do you want something to drink?"

She nodded and he strode toward the bar.

Christina went back to their table and sat down. Why did she have to ruin everything by reminding him she was only an escort? They could have enjoyed the fantasy for another couple of hours, couldn't they?

Mark returned and gave her a glass of soda water—the only thing she had been drinking all night. He sat down next to her, his expression black when suddenly he was grabbed from behind and given a kiss on the mouth by a woman. It wasn't Laura, but someone else. Christina put a hand to her forehead and wanted to groan. There was no way she could have stopped someone that fast.

Afterward, the woman winked at Christina and said, "It's just not New Year's without kissing Mark!"

Mark didn't smile, and Christina was worried he might be mad at her. Instead, he ran a hand through his hair and leaned forward to ask pleasantly, "Could I please have a piece of your grape bubblegum?"

Christina smiled. "Sorry, I only have raisin."

"Please," he persisted. "I gotta get that taste out of my mouth, and I already used your token kiss for the evening. Please?"

She clicked open her purse and pulled out a piece of gum. After unwrapping it for him, she popped it into his mouth.

"It's too bad this is just for tonight," she said, "because if it was just you and me with no strings attached... I know I'd fall for you." She reflected later she never could have

said those words if she didn't have the cover of her identity as Tina. Because she was playing Tina, she was able to say something that daring. Christina never played coy.

"I'll bet you say that to everyone," he said, before biting down hard on the gum.

She smiled. "Didn't you enjoy hearing it?"

Then he pulled her to her feet and made her dance with him.

# Chapter Two

## Two Requests?

After New Year's Eve, Christina went back to washing dishes in the back of her pub for the month of January and tried not to think about what she could be missing working as an escort. After all, not every date had been like the last one with Mark Lewis. Yup! She didn't think about what Mark's kiss had been like or how he held her while they danced. She didn't think about his eyes or the way his hair fell into them. Nope! Not one bit!

Best of all, she didn't think about the money she was missing out on while she worked her *honest* minimum wage job. At least, not until her January paycheck came in. When she saw the numbers and did the accounting in her head, she computed just one fact—she was in trouble.

Mindy was reading a magazine in her recliner when Christina limped into the apartment after getting her pay stub. Mindy instantly flipped the glossy cover shut and took her headphones out of her ears to ask Christina, "So, how was work? Did you get paid?"

"I got paid," Christina sulked.

"Not enough?" Mindy inquired as she put her arms behind her head and stretched her body out. "You already owe me six hundred and twenty bucks and that's on top of February's rent. Do you think you're going to be able to make good? I'd hate to have to call Auntie and ask her to make up the difference for you. I can't pay for this place by myself."

"Yes, you can!" Christina countered noisily. Mindy made tons of money. She was just trying to bully Christina into going back to the escort service. "You could easily pay for this place by yourself."

"Ah," Mindy said. She sounded bored. "I suppose that's true, but I can't think of a good reason why I *should* have to pay for your housing when I have such good plans for my hard-earned money."

"I could pay you back!" Christina claimed.

"When?"

"After graduation—"

"Whatever," Mindy interrupted. "I'm not telling you what to do. You can get the money to pay me however you want and I guess whenever you want. I'm not heartless enough to call your parents and insist that they pay me. I just wanted to tell you that Valentine's Day is coming up and there has been a request for you through the agency."

"Really?"

"Yeah. A request for Tina! Do you feel like doing it?"

"What's the hourly rate for the job?" Christina asked. Not all jobs paid the same. She had made thirty dollars an hour during the Christmas holidays, except for New Year's and Christmas Eve. On those nights she had made fifty dollars an hour. "Valentine's is worth how much?"

“Fifty,” Mindy said. “Except that there has been a miraculous turn of events in your favor. There wasn’t just one request, but two.”

“Two?” Christina asked, stunned. “What happens when there are two?”

“Well, you can either go out with the highest bidder, or you can go out with the one you like, or you can go with the one who made their appointment first, or whatever. You can flip a coin if you want. Feel like working?”

Christina crossed her fingers and said, “If either of those guys is Mark Lewis, I’ll go on the date.”

Mindy’s eyes lit up. “That’s a charming development! We’re not supposed to have favorite clients, but it’s inevitable. I have some I like better, but I’m probably more mercenary than you are. I like the ones that pay more.”

“Was Mark one of them?” Christina asked impatiently.

“Yes, he was.”

“YES!” Christina cheered with her arms in the air. “I’ll go! Yay!”

“Wait, Darling,” Mindy continued. “Get off the ceiling and listen to the rest. Hey!” she yelled, to get Christina’s attention. “Sit down!”

Christina forced herself to sit cross-legged on the floor, but her cheeks were burning. She was so excited she was practically bouncing. Another date with Mark! Hooray!

“Calm yourself. Mark has only offered to pay the standard fee because he was the one to make the appointment before the other guy called and you got double booked. The other guy said he wanted you, too. So, we asked him if he was willing to outbid your first request for that night.”

“Did you book me not knowing whether or not I’d be able to come in?” Christina questioned, feeling like she knew the answer before Mindy told her.

Her cousin winked. “Naturally. I didn’t take you off the books. You still owe me money.”

Christina groaned and Mindy went on.

“Anyway, he offered one hundred dollars an hour—into your pocket.”

“A hundred dollars... an hour! You must be joking. A guy does not pay that much without expecting sex!” Christina exclaimed.

“This guy does. When he offered that much, the rules were firmly explained to him and he said he wanted you for a date and nothing more.”

“Have I met this guy before? Did I go on a date with him?”

“I don’t think so. He said he saw you at the New Year’s Eve party. I guess your date was with Mark that night? Anyway, he thought you were interesting and he wants to take you out. His name is Dominic Figura. So, which will it be?”

Christina shrugged. “I’d rather date Mark, but that’s a lot of money. Does he only want me for an hour then? Could I go to both?”

Mindy shook her head. “If memory serves—both of them wanted from seven to midnight. So, pulling a doubleheader is out of the question, but I’m proud of you for asking. You’ve got a dirty mind after all, don’t you, Tina?”

“Shut up! I’m trying to make money here!”

“Then date Dominic. You’ll make twice as much and cover five hundred dollars of your debt to me in one night. Even making a hundred dollars an hour, that won’t even cover half of what you’ll owe me by then. I’ll tell you what I’d do. I’d date Dominic, stop being little miss goody-two-shoes, and work for the agency until you get a real job.



That way you'll be out of debt when you graduate and you can move forward in your life with pride."

"You just want me to swallow my pride for now?" Christina asked, feeling heavy.

"Everyone should do it a time or two," she said before she claimed she needed a shower and left the room.

Christina sat alone in the living room. She felt flat. She really wanted to go on a date with Mark on Valentine's Day, but crappity-crap-crap-crap, she'd have to bail. She needed the money too much to take an opportunity like a hundred dollars an hour for granted. But, if she turned him down, would he ever call and request her again? She doubted it.

Yep! She was right the first time. She was in trouble.

\*\*\*

Valentine's Day.

Even before the date, Christina felt sure she was already dead and roasting for her sins in hell, but how could she have known that Dominic would take her to the same restaurant as Mark that night? Bah!

Christina hadn't been the one to call Mark to tell him he had been outbid. Christina fed herself all kinds of good reasons why she had turned him down. She was doing it for the money, so why not do it for the money? If that was her philosophy, then it didn't matter who asked her. The sooner she could pay off Mindy and her credit card, the better. It wasn't like she wanted luxurious living. Mostly what she wanted was a reasonable meal. Eating cheap Asian noodles two meals a day was hardly nourishing, but she didn't have money for anything better.

She also told herself maybe it was better if it didn't go any further with Mark. It wasn't like he was going to fall head-over-heels for an escort, and the last thing she wanted was to fall in love with a guy who only thought of her as a purchased woman. It wasn't like she blamed him. When she was Tina, she was only a shade better than a prostitute. It was her job to make him comfortable and treat him like she liked him. It was all a game, so she couldn't blame him if he liked to play it, or stop playing when it suited him.

When she met Dominic in the lounge of the restaurant, she thought she had seen him before. New Year's Eve? That was when Mindy said they had met, but she couldn't place him. Dominic was blond and thin with a curious smile. He had a gleam in his eyes that couldn't be mistaken for anything except mischievousness. It must really be a game for him. Something about the arrangement must be extensively amusing. He was young and Christina wondered why he wasn't able to get a date on his own. He was handsome enough for it, but it didn't take her long to figure out why he had called and offered so much for her to accompany him that night—he was the Devil.

"I thought we'd have dinner with my sister and her boyfriend," he said, his eyes virtually on fire. "Afterward, we're going to see a movie."

That surprised Christina. A hundred dollars an hour to go watch a movie? Who paid for that? However, she took his arm and went with him into the dining room. His smile was as broad as a Cheshire cat. He was having *way* too much fun.

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