Sharon
KENDRICK
THE BOSS'S
BOUGHT MISTRESS

Шэрон Кендрик

The Boss's Bought Mistress

«HarperCollins»

Кендрик Ш.

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Giovanni Cerruti's wealthy family is always in the spotlight… So when his step-sister is headed for a rehabilitation clinic, he decides to work the paparazzi to keep her image from being splashed across the tabloids.With the help of his spin doctor, Giovanni devises a plan to keep the press occupied with another story – a fake engagement to his housekeeper, Misty Carmichael! But will Giovanni fall victim to his own plan?

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DEAR READER LETTER

By Sharon Kendrick

Dear Reader,

One hundred. Doesn't matter how many times I say it, I still can't believe that's how many books I've written. It's a fabulous feeling but more fabulous still is the news that Mills & Boon are issuing *every single one* of my backlist as digital titles. Wow. I can't wait to share all my stories with you - which are as vivid to me now as when I wrote them.

There's BOUGHT FOR HER HUSBAND, with its outrageously macho Greek hero and A SCANDAL, A SECRET AND A BABY featuring a very sexy Tuscan. THE SHEIKH'S HEIR proved so popular with readers that it spent two weeks on the *USA Today* charts and…well, I could go on, but I'll leave you to discover them for yourselves.

I remember the first line of my very first book: "So you've come to Australia looking for a husband?" Actually, the heroine had gone to Australia escape men, but guess what? She found a husband all the same! The man who inspired that book rang me up recently and when I told him I was beginning my 100th story and couldn't decide what to write, he said, "Why don't you go back to where it all started?"

So I did. And that's how A ROYAL VOW OF CONVENIENCE was born. It opens in beautiful Queensland and moves to England and New York. It's about a runaway princess and the enigmatic billionaire who is infuriated by her, yet who winds up rescuing her. But then, she goes and rescues him… Wouldn't you know it?

I'll end by saying how very grateful I am to have a career I love, and to thank each and every one of you who has supported me along the way. You really are very dear readers.

Love,

Sharon xxx

Mills & Boon are proud to present a thrilling digital collection of all Sharon Kendrick's novels and novellas for us to celebrate the publication of her amazing and awesome 100th book! Sharon is known worldwide for her likeable, spirited heroines and her gorgeous, utterly masculine heroes.

SHARON KENDRICK once won a national writing competition, describing her ideal date: being flown to an exotic island by a gorgeous and powerful man. Little did she realise that she'd just wandered into her dream job! Today she writes for Mills & Boon, featuring her often stubborn but always to-die-for heroes and the women who bring them to their knees. She believes that the best books are those you never want to end. Just like life…

The Boss’s Bought Mistress
Sharon Kendrick

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Chapter One

“Wrecked!” screamed the caption beneath the photo of a woman being bundled, glassy eyed into the back of a police car.

“Che cosa cha facenda?” His black eyes glittering, Giovanni threw down the newspaper and turned to his spin doctor. “Let’s hope this is the last of it.”

“You’ve spoken to the police?” asked Lucas.

“Si. The lawyers say charges will be dropped if she goes into rehab,” Giovanni said grimly. “She’s finally accepted that she has a problem. But Madre di Dio — it has taken long enough!”

After years of denial, his fragile step-sister had taken the first, tentative step on the road to recovery. But despite the sunshine that streamed through the windows of his beautiful London house, Giovanni couldn’t shake off his disquiet.

“But what the hell do I do now?” he questioned, his dark features hardening as he anticipated the troubles ahead. “How do I stop the snappers from camping outside the clinic and bribing patients to sell gossip? My sister needs protecting from the sharks who inhabit her world, and God knows there’s nobody else looking out for her.”

“We need to kill the story,” said Lucas, quietly.

“How?”

“We give the press an even bigger one. A diversionary tactic.”

Giovanni narrowed his eyes. “And what could be bigger than this?”

“You are.”

“Explain,” Giovanni said tersely.

“They want a story about your fabulously glamorous family.”

“And fabulously cursed,” echoed Giovanni sardonically. “Don’t forget that.”

Lucas shrugged. “Drugs are big, but you’re one of the world’s most eligible bachelors. Your engagement story would wipe everything else off the front page.”

“Engagement story?” Giovanni sat down and stretched out his long legs as he studied his spin doctor thoughtfully. “What black arts are you concocting now, Lucas?” he murmured.

“An engagement of convenience,” replied the other man smoothly.

In spite of everything, Giovanni gave a short laugh. “Aren’t you forgetting something? There’s no one who fits the bill. In fact, there’s no particular woman in my life.” Relationships bored him — and scared the life out of him. He’d spent his early years avoiding the fallout of partnerships, which always seemed flawed and ultimately doomed….

“Which is what would make it such a good story,” persisted Lucas. “It would be so out of character.”

“I may want to protect my step-sister,” said Giovanni grimly, “but there’s a limit to what I’m prepared to do.”

“No one’s asking you to go through with it,” placated Lucas. “Just join in with the game, that’s all. Buy the ring. Play cat and mouse with the cameras. The press will go wild and by the time they’ve finished chasing you, Miranda will be clean and sober. We can get her discharged somewhere quiet and you can call the whole thing off.”

Giovanni gave a stare that would have intimidated most men. “And who’s going to agree to be my wife?” he questioned sarcastically. “Any bright ideas?”

Lucas smiled. “Oh, come on, Giovanni — you practically have to fight them off!”

Giovanni shrugged. It was true. He could have his pick of any woman he wanted — whenever, wherever and however he wanted. If word went out that he was looking for a bride, then they would be lining up around the block. Women flocked to him like ants to jam — attracted to his good looks and legendary sex-appeal, as well as his massive bank account and starry address-book.

And therein lay the problem.

He flicked Lucas a questioning look. “And when it’s all over? What woman is going to take kindly to being dumped?”

“Not a one…unless you tell her the truth first. Number-one rule of spin — don’t tell lies; just be sparing with the facts.”

“But that would mean trusting them.”

“And there isn’t anyone…?”

Giovanni gave a brittle smile. A woman he could trust? Were there pots of gold at the ends of rainbows? His teenage years had been spent watching avaricious women bleed his father’s fortune dry. And when Giovanni was just sixteen, one of the women had even come to his room late at night — astonished when the rugged youth had turned down her offer of sex.

“No,” he answered shortly. “There isn’t.”

The silence that followed was splintered by a smart, seasoned rap on the door.

Giovanni stretched and yawned. “Yes, come in,” he said, without bothering to turn round.

The woman who pushed the tea trolley into the elegant drawing room was just short of her thirtieth birthday and didn’t really have a job description.

In the days when even the aristocracy had the bare minimum of people working for them, Misty Carmichael had a number of skills at her disposal. She was able to cook, clean and serve food and sometimes she was called on to do all three in rapid succession.

She looked across at her not-quite-Lord, but certainly her master — the arrogant but drop-dead-gorgeous Giovanni Cerruti. In four years of working for him, she had tried not to love him, or to react to him as a woman. It hadn’t been easy and it still wasn’t, but Giovanni had helped by managing to make her feel as if she was invisible.

“Coffee?” she asked.

“Please,” said Giovanni absently. “Well, I’ll give your idea some thought,

Lucas.”

But Lucas did not reply. He was watching the woman as she poured coffee — the steam making her pale cheeks grow pink.

Misty offered a plate of tiny macaroons, thinking how strained Giovanni looked. “Would you like a biscuit?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” said Giovanni impatiently. “You know I never eat between meals.”

Irritated, he glanced over at Lucas. Why the hell was he staring at Misty like that? He followed the direction of his spin-doctor’s eyes and for the first time noticed that Misty’s checked working dress was pulling very tightly across her bottom. Two tight globes thrusting against the man-made fiber. It was as though he was seeing her for the very first time and inexplicably, a nerve began to work in his cheek.

Misty glared at them both. What were they staring at? Had her hair suddenly turned green? “Will that be all?”

“Er, yes. Thank you.”

Lucas turned to Giovanni, who was still staring at Misty’s retreating bottom.

“Why not her?” he questioned simply once she had gone.

“Her?” Giovanni flared his haughty nostrils, and laughed. “Are you honestly suggesting I get engaged to one of the staff?”

Chapter Two

"What's wrong with getting engaged to a member of your staff?"

Giovanni's jet black eyes narrowed as he stared at his spin doctor. "Madre di Dio! You are proposing that I ask Misty Carmichael? Are you crazy, Lucas? She serves the meals!"

"That could be useful," said Lucas.

"And she is a single mother!" Giovanni exclaimed.

"So?"

"So I have my reputation to think about!"

Lucas shook his head. "But this is a bogus engagement, remember? Designed to take the heat off your sister's spell in rehab. The more unsuitable the candidate, the more press coverage it will get. Think about it, Giovanni."

Giovanni did, his arrogant lips curving with distaste. "She is plain…" he added disparagingly.

From the other side of the door, Misty froze. She had just crept back to hear the tail end of Giovanni's conversation.

Plain?

She bit her lip and blinked rapidly. Plain?

So it was true what they said — that eavesdroppers never hear anything good about themselves. And how! Listening in to her employer's conversation wasn't her usual pastime, but who could blame her on this occasion?

The peculiar way that Giovanni and his new spin doctor had been staring at her had been enough to make her feel concerned, and with good cause, she now recognized.

"So ring and ask her," came Lucas's voice from the other side of the door.

Ask her what, she wondered?

Hurriedly, Misty pushed the tea trolley back into the kitchen. There was only a second to check her appearance in the mirror before the bell began to summon her back again.

Frizzy hair, flushed cheeks and PMS making her tummy look fat. She winced. Plain indeed. Why feel insulted by Giovanni's description of her when it was nothing but the truth?

She rapped on the door and walked into the spotlight of Giovanni's blazing ebony stare which, unusually, was fixed unwaveringly on her.

"I want you to do me a favor, Misty," he said, his velvety voice tinged with his faint Italian accent.

Perplexed by his tone, Misty clasped her hands together at her waist. "M-more cake?" she asked stupidly.

Giovanni gave an impatient click of tongue. On many levels, he and his housekeeper understood each other perfectly. She knew his likes and dislikes. When to keep quiet and when to speak. Unusually, he felt he could be himself around Misty, but her question about cake drove home the great gulf between them.

How the hell did he go about asking her something like this? Especially with his enigmatic spin doctor looking on…

"You can leave us now, Lucas," he ordered.

"Sure."

Misty allowed herself a smug moment as Lucas left the room — he wasn't so high-and-mighty now, was he? Dismissed like a servant himself!

"Sit down," said Giovanni.

Misty was tempted, but she resisted. Something told her she needed all her wits about her, and flopping down onto one of those priceless brocade chairs in her working uniform would surely unsettle her even more.

Especially with Giovanni's long body dominating her line of vision with those strong, muscular legs and the powerful jut of his pelvis. She felt an unwanted prickle of excitement in her breasts, and hastily crossed her arms. "I'm fine as I am."

Giovanni's eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he watched her. The unconscious way she had covered her breasts with her arms told him everything. So she wasn't immune to him — but there again, what woman was? Funny he'd never noticed it before.

And when he stopped to think about it, mightn't her inferior status actually work to his advantage? Because if the woman he involved in his scheme was beautiful and his equal, he might be lured into making love to her — complicating matters more than they needed to be. Whereas there would be zero temptation from this pleasant but very ordinary looking woman….

Then he remembered her pert bottom thrusting against the check material of her uniform and once again, he felt the heat to his groin. Damn Lucas for drawing his attention to it!

"I want you to pretend to be my fiancée," he said huskily.

There was a momentary, pin-drop silence.

"Is this some kind of joke?" she demanded.

"No, Misty…" It occurred to him how rarely he had ever used her name before.

And what a strange name it was. "No. I am being deadly serious."

"Why?" she shot out.

Giovanni expelled an impatient sigh. "I know it must sound bizarre — and it is bizarre. But I need to take the attention off my sister. You know she's been admitted to a clinic?"

"Yes."

"It's just to give the press something bigger to get their teeth into. You know how dangerous they can be. They are sharks," he finished.

But he had no qualms in throwing her to them! Hiding her hurt, Misty stared at him. "What would I have to do?"

Giovanni relaxed. Perhaps this was going to be easier than he had imagined! "Very little," he murmured. "You would wear my ring, of course. Appear by my side in public." His mouth curved into a half smile. "And perhaps you could be persuaded to hold my hand and gaze up at me with suitable adoration from time to time?"

Oh, but he must think she was born yesterday! That mocking tone didn't fool her — not for a moment. He was used to adoration by the bucket-load, and no doubt expected plain Misty Carmichael to shovel on a whole heap more.

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