

A photograph of a man with short brown hair kissing a woman with short blonde hair on the forehead. The woman is smiling and wearing a red dress with a white floral pattern. The man is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage.

THE NANNY WHO KISSED HER BOSS

BARBARA MCMAHON

Cherish

Barbara McMahon

The Nanny Who Kissed Her Boss

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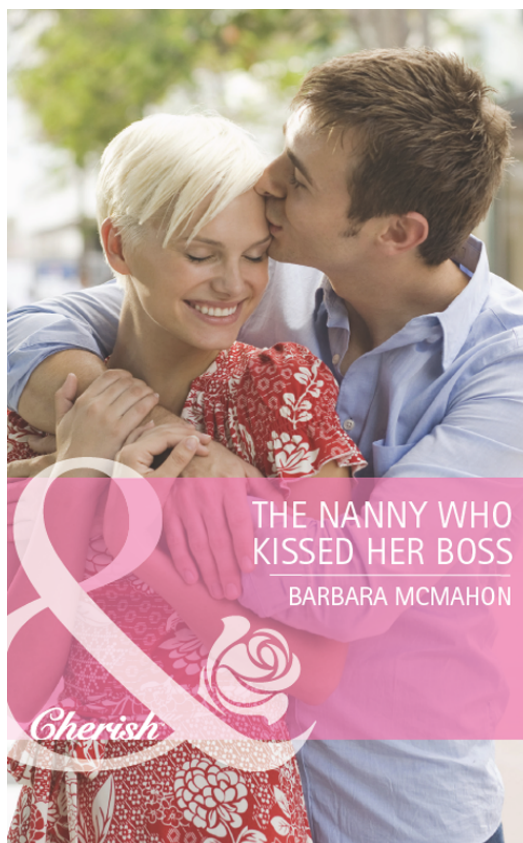
Dare to dream... these sparkling romances will make you laugh, cry and fall in love – again and again! Savannah loves being a nanny – but her assignment for single dad Declan is her most challenging yet. Declan's the ex she's spent seven years trying to forget. After Declan's ex-wife took him for a ride, he's maintained a suave, in-control persona. Yet seeing Savannah again makes Declan wonder if his real mistake was letting her go...

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Praise for Barbara McMahon

“Barbara McMahon takes a simple love story—employer falls for the employee—and turns it into a tale filled with romance, heartache and love. While the basis for this novel may be timeless, the issues both Caitlin and Zack face are enough to give this novel the feeling it has never been done before. These two characters rock!”

www.loveromancesandmore.webs.com on

Caitlin's Cowboy

“A great story, *The Tycoon Prince* is fit for any woman (and perhaps a few men) who wished they kissed a few less frogs and had more princes to sweep them off their feet!”

www.aromancereview.com

“A fresh spin on some tried-and-true plot elements makes this story work beautifully—and its outspoken, honest heroine is a delight.”

RT Book Reviews on The Daredevil Tycoon

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Muscular and fit, Declan didn't look a day older than when she'd last seen him. His hair was still dark, not a strand of grey she could find. His eyes were a rich chocolate brown, focused on her now. She could have stared back forever. For a moment she felt as tongue-tied as that college student who had been so in love. She nodded slightly, clinging to her composure with all she had. Wishing he'd aged, grown a pot belly and lost his hair.

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About the Author

BARBARA McMAHON was born and raised in the south USA, but settled in California after spending a year flying around the world for an international airline. After settling down to raise a family and work for a computer firm, she began writing when her children started school. Now, feeling fortunate in being able to realize a long-held dream of quitting her “day job” and writing full time, she and her husband have moved to the Sierra Nevada mountains of California, where she finds her desire to write is stronger than ever. With the beauty of the mountains visible from her windows, and the pace of life slower than the hectic San Francisco Bay Area where they previously resided, she finds more time than ever to think up stories and characters and share them with others through writing. Barbara loves to hear from readers. You can reach her at PO Box 977, Pioneer, CA 95666-0977, USA. Readers can also contact Barbara at her website: www.barbaramcmahon.com.

**The Nanny who
Kissed her Boss
Barbara McMahon**



www.millsandboon.co.uk

CHAPTER ONE

SAVANNAH Williams rolled over on her right side and pulled the covers over her head. It was morning, she could tell by the bright sunlight flooding her bedroom. But she was not ready to get up. She'd arrived home late last night after the airplane trip from hell. It had routed her all over the United States and got her to New York long after midnight when she'd been up before dawn on the west coast to make that first flight.

The apartment was quiet. Her sister was on assignment. She relaxed and tried to fall back asleep. Why hadn't she put a blackout shade on the window? She just wanted a few more hours of rest.

The ring of the phone jarred.

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" She threw back the sheet and stalked to the living room where the apartment phone was ringing. She'd turned off her cell, so naturally this phone had to ring.

"It better be good," she snapped into the receiver when she snatched it up.

"Good morning, Savannah. It's Stephanie. Did you have a good trip?" The cheerful voice was not what Savannah wanted to hear this early.

"The cruise was okay except it snowed two days. So much for lying on the deck while the children napped. And the two darling dears of Dr. and Mrs. Lightower were not the angels the parents purported them to be. I was never so thankful to end an assignment. Talk about spoiled brats! The flight home—or should I say the *flights* home—were horrible. I was routed from Alaska to LA to Dallas then Chicago, then I swear I thought I was going to be sent through Atlanta, but fortunately bad weather kept that airport off the schedule, so I got sent to Boston before ending up in New York at two o'clock in the morning!" She was practically yelling the last, but only heard Stephanie's giggles in the background. So much for sympathy.

"I was trying to sleep in," she grumbled.

"Oh, poor you. Go back to sleep in a minute. You have a new assignment and the client actually postponed his trip to make sure it coincided with your availability. This one's right up your alley—one child, a teenager. Parents are divorced, mother has custody. However, the teen is with her father now and will be for the summer apparently. Could be a bonding experience for them, I suppose."

"What could?" Savannah asked. She was growing wider awake the longer Stephanie kept her on the phone. For what? She was off the clock and wanted to catch up on sleep and fun before taking another assignment from Vacation Nannies.

"Backpacking in the High Sierras," Stephanie said.

Savannah stared out the window to the sliver of a view of the Hudson River she and her sister enjoyed from their apartment. Glass and concrete and that tiny sliver compared to endless vistas of mountain ranges? Clear blue sky instead of the heavy layer of smog over New York?

But backpacking?

"How come Stacey gets to lounge around at the beach on the Med and I'm stuck lugging a heavy backpack on a trail where there won't even be hot and cold running water?"

"Luck of the draw. Plus you're our resident expert on troublesome teens."

"Oh, joy, another challenge. When do we meet?" she asked. Rule number one of Vacation Nannies was that both parties had to agree to the assignment. Which usually worked to make sure the match between nanny and children was harmonious, but she had seriously been off with the Lightower children. Who expected them to behave so nicely at the initial meeting and then turn into terrors? Not that she hadn't been able to cope, but the carefree cruise she'd anticipated had not been the case.

"Friday. If everything goes okay, you'll depart next week and be gone three weeks."

"How old's the teen?" Savannah had specialized in adolescent behavior when getting her degree in education. She had a special bond for children who had reached the whacked-out stage of teenagedom, which included recalcitrant and defiant behavior.

“She’s fourteen. Lives here in New York.”

Savannah could hear papers being turned over, Stephanie was obviously referring to interview notes. She plopped down on the sofa, giving up any thought of going back to sleep until later. “Never mind giving me all the info. I’ll be by later to look at the file. Anything else I should know?”

“Do you have hiking boots?”

“Of course, remember my trip to the Adirondacks last fall? It was a glorious week tramping round the forest and enjoying at all the colorful foliage. The pair I got then are well worn in. How cold is it in the High Sierras in June?”

“Check the national weather outlook. I’ll confirm you’ll be there on Friday at eleven. Oh, and, Savannah ...” Stephanie sounded hesitant.

Savannah sat up at her tone.

“What?”

“The dad is Declan Murdock.”

Savannah frowned, almost hearing Stephanie holding her breath after delivering that bombshell.

“I’m not going,” she said. *Declan Murdock*. It had been seven years since she’d seen him. Seven lonely years of trying to forget the man she’d loved with all the fresh bright hope of first love—and who had dumped her so unceremoniously.

“He asked especially for you.”

“That’s hard to believe.” And was like a knife twisting in her. He’d left her because of Jacey. Now he wanted her to watch her while he was off doing what—oh yeah, backpacking. What had happened to Jacey’s mother? They were divorced—again?

“Why backpacking in the mountains? Why isn’t he just sticking around New York while he has Jacey? They could see shows, visit museums, go to the shore. Bond in New York.”

“I don’t inquire as to why our clients do things. Friday morning at his office. I think you know where.” Stephanie hung up before Savannah could utter another word.

She slammed down the phone. “For this I had to get up early?”

Declan Murdock. She hadn’t seen him in years, hadn’t thought about him in—well, at least maybe one year. She wished she could say she’d forgotten him as fast as he’d probably forgotten her. But she’d been incredibly hurt by their parting. She’d been dreaming of a wedding and he’d been lured back to his ex-wife because of a daughter he hadn’t known existed.

For the longest time she’d gone over everything, replaying in her mind every word he’d uttered at that final meeting, trying to see where things could have gone differently.

“Water long under the bridge,” she muttered, going to get coffee to jump-start her brain. Did Stephanie really think she’d take the job? Be alone with Declan and his daughter for three weeks?

“Why not ask me to plunge a knife into my heart to begin with. It would be just as painful,” she mumbled, watching the coffeemaker drizzle the brew into the carafe. Divorced, Stephanie had said. So when had that happened? What about Declan’s determination to make a go of his marriage for the sake of a daughter he’d just discovered?

No one would blame her for turning down a request for an assignment from the man who had broken her heart. The man against whom she had judged all other men ever since—and had usually found them lacking.

Maybe she should have asked the Lightowers to extend her services—even the horrible brats looked better than facing Declan again.

Taking her coffee, she went back to the sofa and gazed out the window. She wondered if he’d aged much. She’d learned how successful his sporting goods chain had become. Everything he touched seemed golden.

Divorced. Her curiosity got the better of her. Dare she risk her peace of mind by seeing him again? Any feelings she’d had for him seven years ago had evaporated. She’d become much more wary, much more cynical about men’s intentions.

And how could she watch his daughter—the reason he'd left her. She'd been so in love, and she'd thought he had, as well. How could he so easily have tossed that love aside to marry Margo—or rather to remarry her when she'd shown up years after their divorce saying Declan was a father. He'd had the paternity tests done and had then been convinced he needed to marry Jacey's mother again and build a strong family unit.

Forget about the college student who had adored him. Forget about the plans and dreams they'd had. Once he'd uttered the fateful words, Savannah had wished him well and left the coffee shop, tears not falling until she was home.

So what had happened to his precious plans that had brought him full circle back into her life?

Curiosity won. She'd go to the interview. It wouldn't go well, she already knew that. But the reputation of Vacation Nannies was on the line. She didn't want him bad-mouthing the company because of personal feelings. Feelings that should have died seven years ago.

"That *did* die seven years ago!" she repeated aloud. "I'm so over you, Declan Murdock."

Friday, Savannah dressed with care. She was no longer the college student dating an up-and-coming businessman. She went with the most trendy outfit she had, and spiked her short hair the way she liked it. Her outfit was the fourth she'd tried on this morning, wanting to get just the right look of successful businesswoman and capable nanny. The navy slacks, white blouse and sassy scarf declared her achievement.

He'd done well, she'd learned a couple of years ago. Well, so had she and her sister. Maybe not on the scale he'd reached, but wildly prosperous. She and Stacey had planned their business long before they were able to start it. The one course she especially wanted to take in her senior year in college was Start-ups on a Shoestring—taught by visiting guest lecturer Declan Murdock shortly after he began his sporting goods company. She'd hung on his every word. First for what she could learn about business, then for what she could learn about the man himself. When he'd asked her out, she'd gone. There were rules at the college against faculty dating students but as a guest lecturer, he wasn't really faculty.

Only a few years older than she, he'd captured her imagination and fired her enthusiasm about her business model for Vacation Nannies. Before long the business talk had turned personal and by Christmas that year she'd fallen in love. She remembered their talk about surfing together off the coast of Maine, the fun she'd had slugging a softball out of the park to his wild cheering, the thrill of rollerblading in Central Park together. Visiting museums and art galleries when the weather was bad, lost in a world of two despite the crowded places.

She shook off the memories. She was an accomplished businesswoman in her own right. She would see him, refuse the job and that would be that.

She gave the cabdriver the address. Savannah knew exactly where the company headquarters was for Murdock Sports. She'd met him there many evenings, to give them more time together. She didn't want to remember, but ever since Stephanie's call the memories had flooded in.

At least she had the teensy consolation that she wasn't still some lovestruck idiot pining for a man who'd married a woman he didn't love for the sake of a daughter who had been kept from him the first seven years of her life.

Maybe he'd say or do something so outlandish at the interview she could instantly say no. Highly unlikely, but she lived in hope. Truth was, she could turn down the assignment for no reason at all. She didn't answer to him.

But Vacation Nannies thrived on referrals. He probably moved in such rarified air these days he could give their company a big boost.

Three weeks was a mere twenty-one days. She could do anything for a short time.

The first thing Savannah noticed when she stepped into the building was the major renovations since she'd last been there. The reception area was larger and very upscale. Most suitable to the image of a very successful company. *Let the public believe you're highly successful, and you'll be*

highly successful, had been one of his axioms. So his business instincts had been right on. He was a huge success. Despite her heartbreak, she'd picked up some information over the years from the local business news. If nothing else, she'd learned solid business techniques and how to focus on the main goal from Declan's class.

Add the fact that the address of Vacation Nannies made a major impression on clients, also thanks to Declan. Granted she sometimes thought they paid way too much for the tiny offices they had, but the clientele they drew demanded the very best.

Savannah gave her name to the receptionist and was asked to wait. No hardship since she'd put off the interview entirely if she could. But there was no other nanny as suitable from their company so Stephanie had explained to her when she'd showed up at the office to read the file before the interview. The most important thing was to keep up the reputation of Vacation Nannies.

The concept—provide short-term, temporary nannies to watch children while the family was on vacation—had proven surprisingly popular. Savannah and Stacey had begun the business because of their own desire to travel and see the world. With the little money they had that would be unlikely. So they'd found a way to travel on someone else's dime.

After a degree in education, plus some business courses at NYU, Savannah had been instrumental in getting the business going. Soon there were more requests than she and Stacey could handle, so Stephanie had been hired to handle the scheduling aspect. Other nannies, trained at the prestigious Miss Pritchard's School for Nannies, were carefully vetted and hired. Now they had a dozen others on the payroll, and during the summer months everyone was fully booked.

To ensure the nannies weren't stuck for weeks with horrendous children or parents, the interview aspect went both ways. Either the prospective client could decline after meeting the nanny or the nanny could refuse to take the assignment.

So far there had only been a handful of refusals. She winced, thinking she'd make this another one.

She grew more nervous the longer she waited. What was she doing coming here? She didn't want to spend three weeks with Declan. Or with his daughter.

"Mr. Murdock can see you now," the receptionist said, rising and heading for the hall on the left. Her sleek toned looks gave mute testimony to the healthy lifestyle a sports aficionado could expect—especially if they used Murdock equipment.

Savannah wished she could have checked her makeup and hair one more time. It would never do not to be immaculately turned out and polished-looking. She hoped Declan didn't remember the casual clothes she'd worn in college. Money had always been tight in her family. After the first six months with their new venture, however, that had changed. Now she and her sister enjoyed high-end fashionable clothing, makeup and a professional hair stylist. No more letting her hair grow long like Stacey. Savannah liked it short and spiky. And the kids usually liked it, too. It was easy to care for. And if she were in the sun for long, the blond bleached out to almost white. Which was always a startling contrast to her tanned skin.

The receptionist handed her off to a personal assistant who took her to Declan's office—still located in the back corner of the warehouse-converted-to-offices. But the extremely modern look of chrome, leather and fine woods was a huge step up from when she'd visited before. His business model had obviously propelled his own firm into the stratosphere.

"Savannah," he said when the PA opened the door to usher her in. He stood behind the desk, studying her as she stepped into the office.

Savannah felt a catch in her breath. He looked the same. She'd forgotten how tall he was. While she was only five foot four when she stretched, Declan had to be close to six feet. Muscular and fit, he didn't look a day older than when she'd last seen him. His hair was still dark, not a strand of gray could she find. His eyes were a rich chocolate-brown, focused on her now. She could have stared back forever. For a moment she felt as tongue-tied as that college student who had been so in love.

She nodded slightly, clinging to her composure with all she had. Wishing he'd aged, grown a pot belly and lost his hair.

"Hello, Declan." Yippee, her voice hadn't cracked. She hadn't stuttered or slapped his face. She also hadn't expected the jolt of awareness that spiked through her. Taking a slow breath she tried to relax, to treat him like any other prospective client. She wished she could forget the past that seemed to spring to the forefront. Why did long-dormant emotions have to blossom now?

"Connie, coffee for us both." He said to his PA, then looked at Savannah with an eyebrow raised in silent question.

"Thank you, that would be nice." They both had shared a love of strong coffee. Their final meeting had been at a coffee shop. She'd often wondered if he'd done that deliberately to make sure she didn't cause a scene in public.

"Thanks for coming. This is a bit awkward."

"You need a professional nanny for a trip you're taking. That's what our company specializes in. The past is dead, Declan."

He sat after she did and glanced away. Was he remembering their time together, their last meeting? She hoped he found this meeting *extremely* awkward. She would do nothing to ease the situation. After a long moment, she broke the silence.

"Do you still guest-lecture?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No time now. The business grew faster than I expected. The spring class that year was the last one I did. We've expanded to major markets around the country—which is the reason for the trip. I'm exploring the possibility of opening boutique stores in some resorts. So I'm combining business with pleasure. I want to spend a day or two at the San Francisco facility. It's fairly new. Then on to the mountains to test some new equipment. Then to one of the resorts in California that wants to discuss opening a boutique outlet there, offering only the sporting goods suitable for their resort."

She listened, but kept her expression impassive. So he was doing well, good for him. She was here merely to talk about the proposed trip.

He waited a moment and then cleared his throat. Was he as nervous as she felt? She hoped so. And hoped he rued the day he'd dumped her for Margo—daughter or not.

"I hear your company's doing well."

She nodded.

"I don't think I'd have pegged a firm like yours as a contender for growth, which shows how wrong I'd have been. I have friends who had one of your nannies for their trip to South America last year, the Spencers?"

"I think Stacey had that assignment. They visited Machu Picchu," Savannah said.

"Right. They highly recommend the agency to anyone who listens. And as many of us who socialize together have children, we all listened."

Connie brought in a tray with a carafe of coffee, sugar and cream and two mugs.

"Thanks," Declan said. She nodded, smiled at Savannah and left, closing the door behind her.

Once they both had their coffee, Declan leaned back and studied her for a moment. "So tell me how this works."

"Stephanie didn't explain?" Savannah asked. Usually the prospective client got the complete rundown. Fees, limitations, expectations—the works.

"Mainly what I took away from meeting her was we both have to suit each other. I know you'd suit, what do you want to know about Jacey?"

"I need to meet your daughter," Savannah said. He'd been divorced when she'd known him before. Now according to the interview at the office, he was divorced again. What had happened to that second go-round of marriage? Had he ended up dumping Margo as he had her?

“So your office manager said. Jacey will be with me all summer. So if you come by the apartment tomorrow you can meet her. I want to fly to San Francisco on Monday. If you two don’t suit, I haven’t a clue what I’ll do. I heard you specialize in teenagers.”

“I do. Is she a problem?”

“I rarely see her. Now I have her for the summer and am not sure what to do with her.”

Savannah’s attention was caught by his comment. Why didn’t he see his daughter? He’d said he wanted to make a good family life with her. What had happened?

“What time?” she asked. Maybe she’d learn a bit more once she met Jacey.

“Say tenish?” His home address was on the questionnaire he’d filled out at the office. She knew the general area—affluent, but not outrageously so. Close to work and other amenities of downtown Manhattan. Was she seriously considering taking the assignment?

She hesitated a moment, still unable to make up her mind. She hadn’t expected to be so drawn to him. They’d been lovers, always touching, kissing, delighting in just being with each other. Now it was awkward, as he’d said, to sit opposite him and pretend he was merely a client. To ignore the past, the heartache that threatened again. To refrain from demanding he tell her he’d been wrong to lose the best thing that ever happened to him.

She blinked. She was over this man!

“Tell me about the trip,” she said, stalling before making up her mind. One part wanted to learn more about what he was like now. Another wanted to run as fast as she could.

“A couple of days in San Francisco, then we’ll head for the Sierra Nevada mountains in California. We’ll hike part of the Pacific Crest Trail for a few days to test a new tent and camping gear. Also I want to get Jacey away from New York. Her mother’s made other plans this summer and she’s sulking about it. The sweet little girl I knew is long gone. Now it’s a phone glued to her ear, clothing that’s totally inappropriate for her age and makeup that could clog a sewer pipe. All part of growing up, so Margo says, but I don’t like it.”

Savannah said nothing, but to her Jacey sounded like a normal teenager, maybe carrying things a bit to the extreme, but that was teenagers. And ones with divorced parents often went to the edge for attention, reassurance, love.

“Then we’ll spend a few days at a resort in the mountains. It’s an exclusive destination resort with hiking trails, some white-water rafting nearby and all the amenities you’d expect to find at a five-star resort.” He shrugged. “I think the trip will be good for Jacey.”

“Sounds like you would be with her most of the time. Why a nanny?”

“There will be times when I won’t be with her. She’s too young to leave on her own in San Francisco or the resort. While we’re on the trail, it’ll be just the three of us.”

She slammed the door shut on the image that immediately sprang to mind—starlit nights, quiet conversation, kisses in the dark.

“San Francisco’s a favorite city of mine,” she murmured. She loved the crisp breeze from the Pacific, the dazzling white buildings against the deep blue sky. The excitement unlike New York’s but special in its own way. “Has Jacey been before?”

“No. And I’m not getting an enthusiastic response when I bring it up. I’m hoping she’ll come around.”

He hesitated a moment, then said slowly, “There’s one small thing, though.” He narrowed his eyes slightly as he watched her.

Savannah’s instincts clamored for caution. Something about his change in tone suggested this could be a deal breaker. Was his daughter more of a problem than a typical teenager?

“I, ah, need you to keep the past in the past. She need not know we once—” He floundered for the word, his expression one of regret.

Savannah stared at him. That was the absolutely last thing she expected. And the last thing she’d ever do—tell anyone how he’d chosen someone else over her.

"I assure you, I keep my private life my own with all my clients. I would never tell your daughter—" Never tell her of her heartbreak. Never tell her how she had so loved her father and been devastated when he'd chosen Jacey and Margo over her.

The feelings of the past threatened to swamp her. She drew a deep breath. Things changed in seven years. She was a bit disconcerted to discover she was still very aware of him as a man. But she had a life she loved, friends and a work ethic she'd spent years developing. And a definite hands-off attitude for any of her employers. She would never risk her heart a second time with a man who threw her love back in her face.

"Say something," he urged softly. "Will you take this job?"

"Why me? Surely there are others in the field you could find to accompany you two." There were other nannies in her own firm who could have gone.

"Stephanie said you had the most experience with teenagers. That you have a way with them. I need someone who will help Jacey. I think she's long overdue for some good moral values and—"

"I still have to meet her before making a decision," Savannah said. Sure, she was good enough to hire to watch his daughter for three weeks, but not good enough to marry and present as a stepmother back in the day?

"Give her a fair shot, Savannah. It wasn't her fault what happened."

She looked up and was met with steady brown eyes. What if she fell for him again?

Never! The trust they'd shared had been shattered. She would not make that mistake a second time.

For three weeks she'd have to be around Declan—some of that time 24/7. She'd have to keep all thoughts of the past from mingling with the present. And she'd have to look after his daughter by another woman. She didn't know if she wanted that. It was like lemon juice hitting a cut. Sharp and painful.

Carefully putting down her cup, she prepared to leave. "I have your address from the application. We'll meet at your flat tomorrow at ten." She had to think this through. Maybe talk to Stacey or Stephanie to get an impartial view. Maybe have her head examined that she was even considering it.

"You'd need to understand about Margo, as well."

"What about her?" Savannah didn't want to even think about his wife. Ex-wife.

"We divorced before I started Murdock Sports. She left New York, but when she came back, she had Jacey. I really wanted to do the right thing by my daughter. It was a mistake from the beginning—except for Jacey. She's been the light of my world for years. However, ever since the second divorce, this company's really grown. Margo's been haranguing me for more money. She wants a share. That's the last thing I'll agree to." The hard edge of his tone reminded Savannah that as fascinating as she'd found him, he was still a hard-driven businessman.

"And she's using your daughter as a weapon," Savannah guessed. She'd dealt with other divorced parents in her job. Some could be so thoughtless around their children.

"Exactly. At least I have her for three months this summer. My hope is that we build some kind of relationship like we had a few years ago. That's the reason I wanted to start with a couple of weeks in the wilderness. Cut off from outside influences, just focusing on rebuilding our relationship, maybe she'll realize what's important in life."

There was definitely the chance to build something when it was only Jacey and her father, away from her mother, friends and cell phones.

Declan continued, "She used to love going on hikes, camping. We did a lot of it when she was younger. I'm hoping that enjoyment will surge forth again. The Sierras are the prettiest mountains in the west, I think. Clean, fresh air, beautiful country, wildlife. Perfection."

If Savannah had a lick of sense, as her grandmother used to say, she'd turn down the job so fast it'd make Declan's head swim. But she liked the outdoors. She liked to hike and camp and see nature's beauty. And she'd never seen the Pacific Crest Trail.

She was intrigued and tempted.

Yet could she set aside her resentment of his daughter? Despite his cutting her out of his life when Margo had returned, he'd helped both her and her sister and the others who now worked for Vacation Nannies by fine-tuning her business plan with her. No one else might think so, but she owed him. She had a dream job, plenty of money for her chosen lifestyle, went on assignments to some of the world's most beautiful and sought-after locations—all because Declan Murdock had taken time to teach a class.

She could handle anything for three weeks. As long as she remembered every day it was only temporary! She would be the most professional nanny in the world. And at the end of three weeks, she'd walk away without a backward look.

CHAPTER TWO

DECLAN stared at the doorway after Savannah left. He was surprised she'd agreed to proceed. He wouldn't have blamed her if she'd refused outright.

Rubbing his hand on the back of his neck, he looked at the stack of reports in front of him. Not that he saw them. Instead, images of Savannah danced in front of his eyes. Her laughter that time they'd taken the paddle boat around the lake at St. Anne's. The way her eyes grew a deeper blue when he kissed her. The evenings they'd made dinner together, stopping between tasks to kiss, touch, promise silently that even more would come later.

The worst mistake of his life had been turning his back on Savannah, thinking he and Margo could make a marriage just for Jacey's sake.

He wasn't sure what he'd expected when he saw Savannah again, but it hadn't been that mature sophisticated businesswoman instead of the fun-loving student on the brink of life.

It looked as if she'd succeeded. He'd learned a lot about her business, but nothing about the woman. What had she been doing these past seven years beyond Vacation Nannies?

Did she have a boyfriend?

The thought twisted his gut.

He had no rights. Any he'd had years ago he'd forfeited when he'd told her goodbye.

"You need to do what you need to do and have no regrets," she'd said at that coffee shop when he'd told her he was breaking it off with her to remarry Margo.

He wished he could have lived with no regrets.

The past was past. Now he needed her in a different way—to help with his daughter.

He remembered Vacation Nannies' office manager telling him the nanny had to approve the children or they would not take the job.

He hoped Jacey would behave. He needed someone to be there for his daughter when he had to work. He'd know by tomorrow shortly after ten.

The next morning Declan was up early and back at work to finish up loose ends before the trip. His housekeeper was with Jacey. She herself would be taking a vacation while he was gone. Had she been a younger woman, he would have prevailed on her to go with them to California. But, in her late fifties, she was not interested in backpacking in the mountains.

His vice president would be in charge of the business for the next few weeks. Declan knew he'd do a good job. It was hard to leave with so many different irons in the fire, but he was determined that while Jacey was with him, he'd do what he could to get his daughter comfortable around him. He wanted his sweet little girl back.

The trip was not all about bonding with Jacey. He was interested in adding an entirely new direction to the company. The fact he was combining business with their time away was prudent. He'd show his daughter some of what he did for a living, thus correlating work with earning money. Her mother was filling her head with an entitlement attitude that drove him crazy. Nothing in life came free.

Some things came with a steep price. He thought about Savannah and couldn't help but feel a stirring of anticipation. He'd see her soon. He had told Jacey about hiring a nanny and hoped she'd behave.

He'd forgotten over the past seven years how pretty Savannah was. Or had he deliberately suppressed the memory? He'd genuinely tried to make the marriage work. It took two, however, and Margo's agenda had been different from his.

Marrying Margo a second time had been a huge mistake almost from the beginning. Granted, she was stunning. Long dark hair, mysterious eyes, a sly, catlike smile. He'd been captivated the first time around. If she'd told him she was pregnant before they'd divorced, he might have stayed in the

marriage. She was high maintenance from the get-go, always wanting to party, to be seen in all the trendy places, to acquire clothes and jewelry and anything else that could be construed as a status symbol. Nothing had changed the second time they married. She'd hired a housekeeper and fobbed Jacey's care off on her.

But she hadn't told him. They'd divorced and he'd met Savannah.

She'd been a small-town girl, new to New York and focused on the business idea she and her sister had of nannies for vacations only. He'd never felt so young and carefree as he had in the months they were together. That time still remained a special memory.

She'd been the first person he'd thought about when he decided to take Jacey backpacking in the wilderness. Savannah was no longer a shy country mouse. From her hair to her attire to her attitude, she was just what he wanted Jacey to be like when she grew up. Trendy without being over the top. Confident, assured, pleasant.

And she probably hated his guts.

He stared at the numbers in the reports he was skimming. None of them made any sense. All he could see was the cool manner in which Savannah had deliberated before giving him an answer. Her final agreement was predicated on her meeting with Jacey going well.

He checked his watch. Time to head for home. What wasn't done wouldn't get done. The world wouldn't end.

Jacey was watching television when he entered his flat a short time later. Mrs. Harris, his housekeeper, was sitting with his daughter, crocheting. Jacey looked up and then deliberately looked back at the television without any greeting.

He had to admit the all-black attire, the dark circles around her eyes and the straight, flat black hair had taken him aback when Margo had brought her by unexpectedly a week ago. Where was the sunny smile Jacey had had when she was younger? The enthusiasm she'd evidenced when she saw him? She used to run to hug him.

"Hi, Jacey," he greeted her, going across the room to give her a kiss on her cheek.

She pulled back and glared at him. "When's the babysitter coming? I called Mom. She'll want to know you plan to pawn me off on some stranger."

"Since your mother didn't consult me at all about this summer, I suspect she'll be happy enough to go along with what I have planned. I thought she was in the Hamptons."

Mrs. Harris, his housekeeper, rose and smiled at her employer. "I'll just finish up in the kitchen," she said and took off without even a glance at Jacey. She did not like confrontations and there'd already been a couple of major storms since the evening Margo had arrived unexpectedly with Jacey, announcing she had plans for the summer and Declan could take a turn with his daughter.

Declan rarely saw Jacey. While he had visitation rights, Margo had demanded full custody. And many of the times he'd planned to see his daughter, Margo had had other plans and couldn't have Jacey spend time with him.

"She has a life, too, you know," Jacey said. "She has a hard time making ends meet. She's going to petition for more child support. And I think you could help out your only child. It's tough living in New York on a small salary."

He looked at her, hearing Margo's voice in his child's words.

"I send more than adequate child support. If she wishes to challenge it in court, maybe we should consider you coming to live with me. That way all her money could go straight to her own needs."

"I don't want to live with you. I'm stuck here this summer when I could be going to the Hamptons with Mom's friends."

He smiled without humor. "Yet your mother brought you here."

Jacey frowned. The fact was she was as angry with her mother as much as with Declan. He was angry with Margo for putting such ideas in his daughter's head. If he could audit his ex-wife's finances, he knew he'd find more of the support money was spent on Margo than on his daughter.

He knew how much he sent each month. He doubted Jacey saw much of it, however. Margo had always been high maintenance.

Jacey pouted and looked away, studying the toes of her black shoes. "I wish I was at home."

"What do you normally do at home?" he asked easily.

"Hang out with my friends, for one thing."

"Maybe when we get back from California we can see about having some come over here. Or you can visit."

"It's not like I can walk there."

"I'll provide transportation."

"Whatever."

"Until then you have San Francisco, then backpacking in the High Sierras to look forward to. Remember how we used to go camping?"

"Oh, pul-ease, not camping. I was a kid then. What did I know? When I hear California I think beaches in LA, maybe go to Hollywood, see something worth seeing."

"I understand the views from the Pacific Crest Trail in Yosemite are amazing."

The doorbell sounded. Declan took a breath. Make-or-break time.

Jacey looked at the door but didn't move.

He rose and went to open it. Savannah stood there. Today she wore a light blue silk blouse that made her eyes shimmer. Her slim white pants showed her shapely figure. He wished she'd at least smile at him instead of looking like someone going to a funeral.

Jacey came to Declan's side and looked at Savannah.

"Are you the babysitter?" she asked rudely.

"I'm a certified nanny, but you can call me a babysitter if you think that fits better," Savannah said calmly.

Jacey looked at Savannah and then at her dad. "Did you hire her for me or you?" she asked.

"That's enough," Declan snapped out. "Come in, please, Savannah. As you probably guessed, this is my daughter, Jacey." He turned to Jacey and introduced Savannah.

"If she's going, I'm not. I'm calling Mom." Jacey turned and went back to the sofa, pulling her cell phone from her pocket. She glowered at both her father and Savannah.

Savannah sighed softly. She really didn't need another assignment that didn't go well. Her last one had been enough to drive a saint crazy. And she wasn't anywhere near being a saint. While her gaze was focused on Jacey, she was very aware of the girl's father standing near enough that she caught a whiff of his aftershave, which spiraled her right back to when she'd been close enough to nuzzle his neck and be flooded with sensations of scent and touch.

Still, having come this far she felt obligated at least to give this interview a fair shake. Trying to ignore Declan, she put herself in Jacey's shoes. She found a bit of empathy. Teen years were hard. Being shunted back and forth between parents was hard. And if Jacey's mother was allowing her to dress like this, she wasn't getting a lot of parental guidance at home.

She sat on one of the chairs, looking at Jacey as the girl stared back at her.

Declan stood nearby. "Does anyone want something to drink?"

"Like what?" Jacey asked.

"Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, a soft drink?"

"I'll have coffee," Savannah said.

"I don't want anything," Jacey growled.

"I'll be right back," Declan said and disappeared into the kitchen area. Suddenly she felt sorry for Declan. He appeared to be trying so hard. Faced with the rebellious teen before her, Savannah knew he'd be in for a bumpy road.

"I don't need a babysitter," Jacey said defiantly.

Savannah took the time to study the girl while she tried to come up with an answer. Jacey could be really pretty if she'd wash her face and wash out whatever dye she'd used on her hair. And put on a colorful shirt. Black leached the color from her skin.

"I'm sure your father knows best," she ended up saying.

"I'm not going."

"Oh? Have the plans changed?"

Jacey frowned. "I don't think my mom's going to let me go to California."

Declan returned, carrying a tray with two mugs of coffee. He glanced between the two and then placed the tray on a table. "You like it black," he said to Savannah, handing her the cup.

Jacey looked at her father with suspicion.

"Jacey says she isn't going on the trip," Savannah said, taking the cup and meeting Jacey's gaze over the rim.

"Well, Jacey's wrong. She's not only going, she's going to have a great time," he said, sitting on another chair facing the sofa.

"When Mom calls back and I tell her what you want to do, she'll come get me."

Savannah watched as she sipped her coffee. Here was a very frustrated, unhappy young person anxious to make things go her way, and they weren't going to. What could she do to distract her? Get her off that line of thinking and on to exploring the possibilities the summer offered?

Jacey faced her father defiantly. "She'll be calling soon."

"Honey, your mother said when she brought you here that she wants you to spend the summer with me. I want you to have a good time. But if you decide to make it painful, so be it. We're still going to California, all three of us."

"Did you tell her we'll be shopping in San Francisco?" Savannah asked. She looked at Jacey. "I've been to the City by the Bay before. It's a fabulous place. They have the crookedest street in the world there. Yummy seafood at the wharf. And the stores are to die for."

"Manhattan has the coolest stores," Jacey said, not at all interested.

"Other places can be cool, too, if you give them a chance," Declan said.

"I hate you!" Jacey jumped up. "Mom said you were always difficult. She was right!"

She ran from the room. A moment later a door slammed.

Savannah looked at Declan. "That went well," she said. "Not. Is she always like that?"

"Before Margo brought her over the other day, I hadn't seen her since April. The hair and makeup is new since then. I think today was a new high in rudeness. Or maybe I mean a new low. With that attitude, we're all going to be miserable."

He looked at her. "You're still going, right? I know you have the right to refuse, but see her for what she could be, not how she's acting today."

Savannah hesitated. She was a professional and knew she was good at her job. But this assignment would be more difficult than any other she'd had. Not only was the child rebellious and going through a definite Goth stage, Savannah was having trouble not focusing on the man sitting across from her.

"I could try it. If nothing else, I'll stick through the San Francisco portion. If it is untenable you'll be on your own for the hiking part. But you'd be with her there and really not need a nanny."

He nodded. "I can handle that. It's not what I want, but if it's the best you'll offer, I'll take it. And hope you change your mind by the time we leave San Francisco."

"We don't always get what we want," Savannah said, rising. "I'll meet you at the airport on Monday. What airline and flight? I imagine the next few days will prove challenging." In more ways than dealing with his daughter.

"I think getting her away from her mother will be the best thing for her. I haven't told her yet there's no cell service in the mountains," Declan said, his expression one of bewilderment and frustration.

“Won’t that be fun when she finds out,” Savannah said. She studied Declan, seeing his frustration beneath everything. It would prove interesting to see how he handled his daughter.

Savannah hadn’t known her own father; he’d died when she was very little. But she’d have loved to have had a father like Declan, good-looking, successful and obviously concerned about his daughter.

Suddenly she hoped the trip would go as planned for his sake.

She walked to the door as he rose and followed her. She could almost feel the vibrations between them. Time and distance—that’s what she needed.

He looked at her and caught her gaze, lifting an eyebrow in silent question.

She looked away, too many memories.

“We leave from JFK at ten, arrive in San Francisco shortly after noon.” He gave her the airline and said he could have a car pick her up.

“Not necessary, I’ll be there.”

She reached the door and ventured one more look at him. “Strictly business, right, Declan?”

“Absolutely. Do you want to go over the itinerary before you go?” he asked.

Savannah hesitated again, then shrugged. “I guess.” Every instinct clamored for her to leave, but curiosity got the better of her.

“I have brochures and maps on the dining-room table,” he said. “Jacey, come in here, please. I want to show you something.”

Jacey came out of her room by the time Savannah was seated. A couple of maps were spread out on the table, a scattering of brochures nearby. Jacey sat opposite Savannah while Declan took the head seat.

“We’ll fly to San Francisco Monday. We’re staying right in the heart of the city. I’ll take you both with me to check in with the store and get our hiking gear. Want to do anything special after that?” he asked Jacey.

When she merely shrugged, he turned to Savannah.

“There’s so much to San Francisco. I think Jacey would enjoy the wharf, especially Pier 39. Then there’s the crookedest street in the world, everyone should see that. We can walk down or drive, it’s like a corkscrew. Chinatown’s fun. And we have to ride the cable cars.”

She tried to put as much enthusiasm into the suggestions as she could. She watched Jacey as she spoke, wondering if anything would spark her interest.

“There’s also some fabulous shopping around Union Square,” she added.

“New York has fabulous shopping,” Jacey spoke up.

Savannah nodded. “If you know where to shop.”

“You don’t like my clothes?” Jacey immediately took up the challenge.

“Not at all,” Savannah said.

Declan frowned at her.

“What? I’m supposed to pretend I do when I don’t? One thing I insist upon is absolute honesty with children,” Savannah said. Time this teen learned not everyone would kowtow to her behavior.

“If you’re so honest why not say you’re interested in my dad and that’s why you’re going?”

Savannah burst out laughing. “Oh, no, you have that wrong. I’m the reluctant one on this trip”

Jacey looked at Declan, her expression puzzled. “Why?”

“Various reasons. Anyway, I’ll be glad to show you some of the attractions in San Francisco while your father’s working. You can pick or I will,” Savannah said.

“Whatever,” Jacey mumbled, staring at the map.

“So we buy lots of stuff at your San Francisco store,” Savannah said, changing the subject and looking at Declan. “I have my own boots. I don’t need new ones. But a few new tops and cargo pants wouldn’t hurt.”

“I don’t have anything like that. I don’t want to go hiking,” Jacey said.

“We’ll have a couple of days in San Francisco, and we’re ending the trip at a resort in the mountains. You’ll need clothes for that, too,” Declan said.

Jacey looked bored, her gaze on the map in front of her.

Savannah nodded at the maps. “Show us where we’ll be hiking.”

Declan rose and leaned over the map of California, showing where San Francisco was and Yosemite National Park. He drew a marker along the Pacific Crest Trail showing where it became the John Muir Trail in Yosemite.

“It’s a high elevation,” Savannah murmured, following as he pointed it out.

“Some of it’s above ten thousand feet. And we’ll have higher peaks surrounding us.”

“Where are we staying?” Jacey asked, leaning forward to look.

“Camping out on the trail. We’ll backpack our stuff—clothes, tent, sleeping bags, food, everything. This is true wilderness. But the resort is here,” Declan said, pointing to a spot on the map not too far from Yosemite National Park.

Jacey pulled out her cell phone to check it. “Mom should be calling me,” she said.

“Maybe your mother has already started her summer,” Declan said.

“What does that mean?” she asked suspiciously.

“She obviously had plans this summer that didn’t include you. Why else would you be here for three months?”

“She likes to have me there.”

“I know she does. But she’s an adult and would like some time to herself,” Declan said.

“She can’t do much. She has to work all the time. We don’t have money for extras,” Jacey said.

“I have to work,” he said easily.

“Most people on the planet have to work,” Savannah added. Wow, Margo had done a number on this child. Money wasn’t that important in the greater scheme of things. Family, friends, experiences, all went together to make a rich, fulfilling life. Money helped, but there was more to life than money.

“You’re rich, you could do more for us,” Jacey said to her father, ignoring Savannah.

“What more do you want, Jacey?” he asked, looking directly at her.

“We’re always pinching pennies,” she grumbled.

“I send your mother a lot of money each month. It’s supposed to all go for you. What’re you lacking that my generous child support doesn’t provide?” he asked.

“I didn’t go skiing with my friends in February. Mom said we didn’t have enough money and you wouldn’t give her any more.”

“You’re old enough to understand a few things,” Declan said. “First we’ll discuss the money I send.” He told her how much money he sent each month. Judging from the way Jacey’s eyes widened, she’d had no idea. “Granted, some of it goes to supplement the rent and food and basic expenses like that. But if your mother managed the money well, there’d be plenty for extras like a ski trip in February. And, by the way, this is the first time I’ve heard about that.”

“It’s expensive to live in New York,” Jacey said.

“Your mother’s not managing the money I’m sending. Next time something like that comes up, call me directly. I’ll consider paying for the trip.”

“Mom needs money this summer,” she said.

“Now isn’t that interesting? I continue to pay the same amount every month, no reduction for the time you stay with me.”

Declan glanced at Savannah who was watching the interchange closely. He disliked airing dirty laundry in front of strangers, not that she was a stranger precisely, but he didn’t know her now. She’d changed over the years. He hadn’t a clue what she was thinking. Probably that all his problems served him right. He’d made a major mistake and could never forget that.

“So we leave in two days,” she said, trying to change the subject.

He nodded, suddenly wondering if his idea had been such a good one after all. Jacey was behaving worse than he'd expected. He hoped their time together would prove beneficial.

What really startled him was the anticipation he felt at the thought of spending the next three weeks with Savannah Williams. She'd done nothing even to hint she wanted to resume a friendship, much less anything more. And he couldn't blame her. Looking back, he'd shattered something precious.

No one could go back to the past. Knowing what he now knew, he'd have held on to Savannah for all he was worth.

What would it be like to take this trip with her? What if they could have taken it alone? Spend days hiking spectacular country and then nights with nothing but the starry sky overhead and endless miles of empty land surrounding them? He knew the reality of their trip would be different, but, for a moment, he almost pretended.

CHAPTER THREE

TIME flew by and before she knew it Savannah was boarding a plane for the flight to San Francisco Monday morning. All weekend she'd dithered, talking things through with Stephanie because she couldn't reach her sister. In the end, she decided to go. It might be a mistake, but she'd made plenty of those in her life. What was one more?

Declan had booked three seats in first class, a luxury she'd grown used to in her line of work. Most of the families who could afford Vacation Nannies had plenty of money and wanted their children to enjoy first-class travel as much as they did—as long as the nanny was there to watch them.

Sitting by the window, Savannah settled in with pleasure. Her lifestyle was so different today from what she'd experienced growing up in that small house on the outskirts of Palmerville, West Virginia.

"Want to sit by the window?" Declan asked Jacey when they boarded the plane.

"Whatever," she said, going in first. Their two seats were together. Savannah's was across the aisle.

Settling in, they watched as the rest of the passengers for the flight boarded. Once they were airborne, Declan got out of his seat and leaned over to talk to Savannah.

"There was a mix-up in the room reservation at the hotel in San Francisco. We have a suite, but only two bedrooms. Would you find it horrible to share with Jacey? I was confirmed for a larger suite, but found out this morning we got bumped to the smaller one. Some special envoy or something."

She looked into his dark eyes. He looked tired. How stressful was it having his teenage daughter fighting him at every step? Jacey stared out the window, looking mad and unhappy.

"That's what you've hired me for, to be with Jacey. It'll be fine."

"Thanks. If she says anything—I mean, I expect she'll be a bit of a brat."

"Remember you asked for a teen expert. I've handled recalcitrant teenagers before. Relax, Declan. She's being a teenager. They really do better with boundaries and adults running the show. Start as you mean to go on."

He nodded and sat back in his seat.

Savannah smiled at her seat companion and turned to gaze out the window. She had her own problems. Like not getting to sleep last night for thinking about the trip with Declan Murdock. She'd been so in love with him years ago. She thought she'd put all romantic notions behind her when he left. But he was even more interesting now that she'd seen more of the world, spent time among dynamic men who moved in the highest circles. He had a special appeal, and it wasn't all based on the past.

Declan could hire a raft of people to watch his daughter. But he'd chosen her. Not for old times' sake, but because she'd come so highly recommended. And he did need help with his daughter if he so rarely saw her. Savannah was here to do a job, not to dream about her temporary employer.

Savannah brought out a novel she'd picked up in Boston, not having had a moment to read it after she'd landed in New York—was it only a couple of days earlier? Reading would while away the flight.

As they prepared to land several hours later, Savannah looked over to see Jacey peering out the window as the plane banked over San Francisco. The city gleamed in the sunshine. The buildings of downtown were predominantly white. The water of the San Francisco Bay were deep blue. It was a gorgeous day. Savannah hoped that the teenager would let herself experience some emotion at visiting one of the world's most exciting and beautiful cities.

When they reached the hotel near Union Square, Savannah was pleased with the ease at which Jacey accepted the room assignments. They went into the room they'd share. Two double beds left plenty of room for a dresser and television. The sitting room of the suite also had a large-screen television and two sofas, several easy chairs and a wet bar.

They had a small view of Union Square and when they opened the old-fashioned window, they could hear the famous cable cars clanging as they reached the turntable near Market Street.

Jacey plopped on her bed and leaned back, staring at the ceiling.

"It's only midafternoon. Want to go out?" Savannah asked. The advantage of traveling west was arriving in time to do things.

"Is Dad going?"

"He said he wants to go to the store right away. We could go with him. Or wait until tomorrow to go shopping for our hiking stuff. I know a couple of places where we could find some trendy clothes. Maiden Lane has some fabulous shops."

Jacey sat up. "Whatever."

Savannah resisted rolling her eyes. She wished that word had never been invented. However, she was sure Jacey and teens everywhere would find another equally annoying if that were the case.

Shopping proved more fun than Savannah had expected. In the first shop, Savannah pulled out a lollipop-pink sundress. "My sister's favorite color is pink," Savannah said. "I wouldn't be caught dead in this."

"If you were dead, you wouldn't know what you were wearing," Jacey said.

Savannah laughed. So maybe the kid could be fun to be around. "Good point. What's your favorite color—and don't say black."

"What if that's my favorite color?"

"It's no one's favorite color. Lots of people wear it, but not because it's a favorite color. Purple's my favorite, but I don't wear a lot of it."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to look like a plum?" Savannah suggested.

Jacey actually giggled. "I'd like to see you in purple."

"Okay, find something. I'm not buying, but I'll try it on."

Jacey searched through dresses, finally finding a deep purple one.

"Okay, wait here." Hoping she could trust the teen not to dart away as soon as her back was turned, Savannah went to the changing room. Stepping out a couple of minutes later she was relieved to see Jacey still looking at dresses.

Turning to see Savannah, Jacey began to laugh. "You do look like a tall, thin plum."

"You try it on and see what you look like, Miss Smarty-Pants. You'd look like a plum, too," Savannah retorted, delighted to finally hear a laugh from the girl.

"Purple's not my favorite color."

"What is, then?"

"Blue."

"Powder, navy, aqua?"

"Powder."

Savannah pulled out a light blue dress. "So try it on. Maybe you'll look like a robin's egg."

Jacey rolled her eyes but followed Savannah back to the dressing rooms. While Savannah changed back into the outfit she'd worn on the plane she could hear clothing shuffle in the changing stall next to hers. She was surprised to see how pretty Jacey looked when she stepped out in the blue dress. The makeup was still garish, the hair too dark, but she looked more like a pretty young girl.

"Nice," Savannah said casually. "Want to try on another dress? We don't have to buy anything. It's fun to play dress-up. You should've seen me and my sister when we first moved to New York. We'd spend all Saturday afternoon shopping at high-end stores, just trying on clothes."

They'd done it to find out what looked good and what didn't, making notes on what styles best suited each of them. It made a big difference in the way two country girls were able finally to fit in.

Over the next hour Jacey tried on several different outfits, but she never returned the blue one to the rack.

As it grew closer to the time to meet Declan for dinner, Savannah wondered if she dare buy the blue dress for Jacey.

“Ready to go?” she asked.

“I guess. This has been fun. I think I could be a model.”

“Sure, once you learn the tricks of the trade.”

“Like?”

“How to walk, pivot, fix your hair and makeup.” She was taking a chance very early in their tenuous relationship, but Savannah only had three weeks with Jacey, if that. Anything she could do for Declan would be worth the risk. “Maybe we could get a makeover at one of the department stores on Union Square. I bet their makeup selection is huge.”

“Ummm.” Jacey didn’t exactly jump at the chance, but Savannah was relieved not to have her turn it down completely.

“I like the blue dress,” Jacey said casually.

“I do, too. Shall we buy it?” She held her breath.

“Whatever.”

Savannah laughed. “Deal.”

They reached their hotel room before Declan returned.

“Time for a shower and shampoo before dinner,” Savannah said when Jacey dropped the bag from the store on her bed. “Want to go first?”

“I guess. You could use Dad’s bathroom since he isn’t here,” she suggested. “Then I can take as long a shower as I want.”

She was once again trying to reach her mother by phone. Savannah didn’t know if Margo had ever called her daughter over the weekend. If not, Jacey must be getting annoyed at being ignored.

“Okay, that’ll work,” she said. Judging how much longer until the dinner time Declan had suggested, she figured she’d have time to be in and out before he returned.

Savannah walked through Declan’s bedroom to his bath a few moments later. She kept her gaze averted from the bed, ignoring the few things of his on the dresser. But stepping into the bathroom brought back even more memories. His scent permeated the air. She saw his razor on the bath counter, his aftershave in a bottle beside it. For a moment she was immobile, remembering.

Shaking off the past, she stepped into the shower and soon felt the soothing beat of the hot water. *Focus on your job*, she admonished herself. Jacey had been cordial most of the afternoon—actually, almost friendly toward the end. Trying on clothes was fun no matter what kind of attitude she was trying to maintain.

Still, it felt good to have a few moments to herself. She wondered what Declan had been doing while they shopped. Not that she cared. Maybe she should suggest he take Jacey to dinner and let her stay behind to order room service. It would give the two of them time alone. And she would be spared dining with him again.

Not him precisely. Nothing like before. Despite all the pep talks she’d given herself, it was hard not to feel something around him. An innate curiosity, a feeling of déjà vu, an attraction that sprang forth as strong as ever before. And a memory of his hard words, the end of her love.

After drying off a few moments later, Savannah slipped on one of the thick terry robes the hotel provided. She towel-dried her hair, needing to get the mousse on it. Now it was flat and boring. She didn’t know how her sister stood having such long hair. Short hair was so easy to care for. And she liked the sassy look it gave her.

Opening the door she stopped suddenly when she saw Declan lying on the bed. His legs were crossed at the ankles, one arm under his head, as he stared at her coming from his bathroom. Heat flooded, her heart raced. So he’d looked many times before when they’d spent a weekend somewhere. Swallowing hard, she tried to breathe.

“Oh.”

“Oh, indeed,” he said, rising. He crossed slowly over to her as his gaze traveled down the length of the terry robe. Her heart flipped over, pounded harder than ever.

“Jacey and I wanted showers before dinner. You weren’t here. I hope I didn’t hold you up,” she said. She also hoped he wasn’t getting any ideas about her appropriating his bathroom. Obviously she’d misjudged how long he’d be at the store.

He stopped inches away. She wore only the robe, closed with a sash that with one flick of a wrist could be undone. Trying not to think of how little she had on beneath the robe—like, nothing but bare skin—she edged sideways toward the door. He stepped closer and for a split second she thought he was going to reach for her. The surge of longing to feel his arms around her one more time caught her by surprise. Her gaze flicked to his mouth, her own almost tingling in yearning to feel those lips against her again, drawing a response from her that she’d once so freely given.

Then the echo of the words he’d said that had ended everything sounded in her mind.

She was fantasizing about him ripping off the robe and taking her into his arms, kissing her for real, a full-blown lip lock that would blow her mind, when he’d so cavalierly thrown her over for Margo. Now Margo was gone. Did he think he could step back in where they’d left off?

She took another step, watching him warily. What could she say to make sure he knew she was so over him it wasn’t funny? That she’d taken this job only for Jacey’s sake.

Declan stepped closer. She could feel the warmth from his body. Her eyes locked with his as her imagination ran wild.

“Declan,” she started, but that husky voice didn’t sound like the crisp professional tone she was striving for. She cleared her throat, took two more steps to the door and opened it.

“How did it go with Jacey today?” he asked.

She turned and looked at him over her shoulder.

“Actually, better than I expected. She actually thawed a bit by the time we reached the second store. I had her trying on any dress she wanted as long as it wasn’t black. She even let me buy her a blue one. If she wears it tonight, be complimentary, but don’t make a big deal over it.”

“Any luck with the makeup?”

“Young girls need to experiment. I’d say you have a typical teen. Once in the wilderness, no makeup for a few days and a compliment or two thrown her way, and I bet she doesn’t go back to it. I suggested we could go to one of the major department stores and have a makeover. But her response was tepid at best. Maybe when she gets back to New York you can take her to one of the stores there.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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