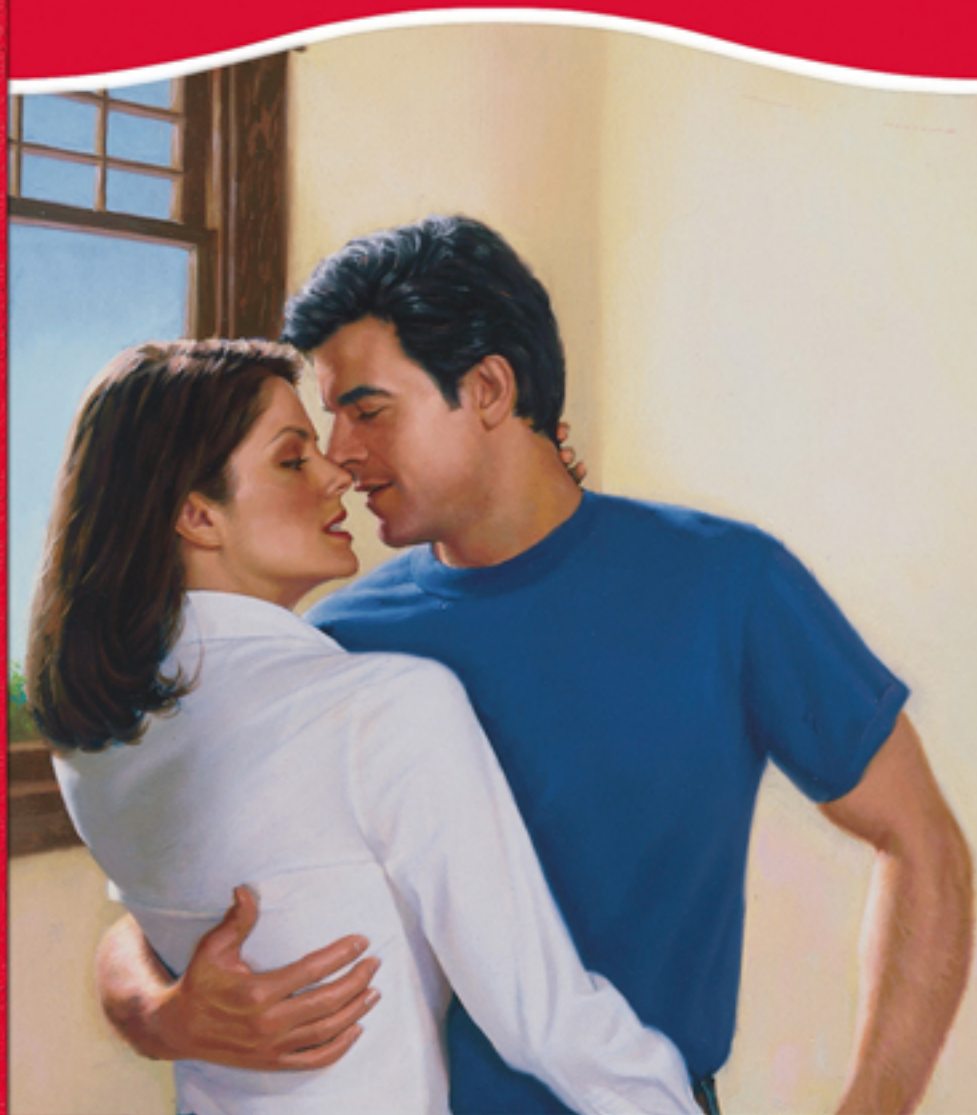


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Taming Tall, Dark Brandon

Joan Elliott Pickart



Vintage 90s

Joan Pickart

Taming Tall, Dark Brandon

«HarperCollins»

Pickart J. E.

Taming Tall, Dark Brandon / J. E. Pickart — «HarperCollins»,

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY... Marriage and babies weren't what Andrea Cunningham wanted - but Brandon Hamilton was. The gregarious hotel owner had a head for business, a body for loving... and a heart as warm and welcoming as his strong embrace. Like Andrea, he knew two weeks was too little time to understand what was happening between them. But unlike Andrea, he was starting to want all the things she resisted. Andrea had thought these stolen weeks with Brandon would make for beautiful memories. But somehow her heart and soul had been tamed by the tall, dark bachelor for whom memories were not enough... Best buddies find their bachelor days numbered in bestselling author Joan Elliot Pickart's engaging new series The Bachelor Bet

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Andrea Cunningham Was A Menace.

She did tricky little things to his mind and wreaked havoc with his body. The two weeks that she was scheduled to stay at the hotel couldn't pass quickly enough as far as he was concerned.

Two weeks. Then Andrea would repack her suitcase, settle her bill and leave. She'd be gone, never to be seen again.

Never? his mind echoed.

Well, sure. That was how it was with guests of the hotel. They came, they went, end of story. Unless Andrea decided to visit Prescott again at some point in the future and stayed at Hamilton House while doing so, in two weeks she'd be out of sight, out of mind forever.

Wrong, Brandon thought in the next instant. He had a sneaking suspicion that it would take a while to dismiss Andrea Cunningham from his mind... .

Dear Reader,

Why not sit back and relax this summer with Silhouette Desire? As always, our six June Desire books feature strong heroes and spirited heroines who come together in a highly passionate, emotionally powerful and provocative read.

Anne McAllister kicks off June with a wonderful new MAN OF THE MONTH title, The Stardust Cowboy. Strong, silent Riley Stratton brings hope and love into the life of a single mother.

The fabulous miniseries FORTUNE'S CHILDREN: THE BRIDES concludes with Undercover Groom by Merline Lovelace, in which a sexy secret agent rescues an amnesiac runaway bride. And Silhouette Books has more Fortunes to come, starting this August with a new twelve-book continuity series, THE FORTUNES OF TEXAS.

Meanwhile, Alexandra Sellers continues her exotic SONS OF THE DESERT series with Beloved Sheikh, in which a to-die-for sheikh rescues an American beauty-in-jeopardy. One Small Secret by Meagan McKinney is a reunion romance with a surprise for a former summer flame. Popular Joan Elliott Pickart begins her new miniseries, THE BACHELOR BET, with Taming Tall, Dark Brandon. And there's a pretend marriage between an Alpha male hero and blue-blooded heroine in Suzanne Simms's The Willful Wife.

So hit the beach this summer with any of these sensuous Silhouette Desire titles...or take all six along!

Enjoy!

Joan Marlow Golan

Senior Editor, Silhouette Desire

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Taming Tall, Dark Brandon

Joan Elliott Pickart



www.millsandboon.co.uk

With special thanks
to Tara Gavin,
Editor Extraordinaire!

JOAN ELLIOTT PICKART is the author of over seventy novels. When she isn't writing, she enjoys watching football, knitting, reading, gardening and attending craft shows on the town square. Joan has three all-grown-up daughters and a fantastic little grandson. In September of 1995, Joan traveled to China to adopt her fourth daughter, Autumn. Joan and Autumn have settled into their cozy cottage in a charming small town in the high pine country of Arizona.

THE BACHELORS:

Brandon Hamilton:

Age 35. Hotel owner. 6 ft., nicely built. Black hair, dark eyes. Principled, protective ... powerfully attractive.

TAMING TALL, DARK BRANDON,

June 1999, Silhouette Desire

Taylor Sinclair:

Age 36. Accountant. 6 ft., trim. Light brown hair, brown eyes. Self-confident, smart, stylish...sexy.

THE IRRESISTIBLE MR. SINCLAIR,

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Private, precise, proud...purely potent.

THE MOST ELIGIBLE M.D.,

August 1999, Silhouette Special Edition

These bachelor best friends have bet that marriage and family will never be part of their lives.

But they'll learn never to bet against love....



Meet Brandon, Taylor and Ben
in bestselling author Joan Elliott Pickart's
engaging new miniseries

One

The sleek, candy-apple-red sports car hugged the curving mountain road as the powerful engine beneath the shiny hood won the challenge of the steep climb with ease.

Andrea Cunningham drove the vehicle at the exact speed limit, nodding in approval at the performance of her new possession.

The car was an early Christmas present to herself, an indulgence that had surprised even her when she'd purchased it two weeks before.

She'd been researching automobiles for well over six months, reading consumer reports, price comparing at various dealerships, and going for test drives in sedate, compact cars.

The only color she'd even considered had been white, due to the extreme heat in Phoenix. She'd wanted the best gas mileage, a proven history of easy maintenance, and ease of maneuverability in the congested, big-city traffic.

But she'd been in a strange, out-of-character mood the day she'd walked onto the new car lot and seen the gleaming red sports car that seemed to be calling her name.

An hour later, she had driven away in the catch-me-if-you-can red car.

Andrea flicked on the blinker, pressed on the gas pedal and whizzed past an eighteen-wheeler that was struggling to ascend the mountain. Safely in front of the big truck, she eased back into the right lane, then reduced her speed again to the exact number posted on the signs along the highway.

What on earth was she doing with a vehicle like this one? she thought, with a mental shake of her head. Granted, it had given her a bit of a rush to zoom past that big truck, knowing that if she was still driving her little compact car she'd be chugging slowly behind the eighteen-wheeler.

But this new car had cost her far more than she'd budgeted for when she finally admitted that her ten-year-old vehicle had to be replaced.

She, Andrea Cunningham, vice president of the firm of Challenge Advertising, was actually behind the wheel of a roaring, red sports car? It was unbelievable, ridiculous, and borderline embarrassing.

This car was not who she was, it was as simple as that.

Andrea sighed, her shoulders sagging a bit as a wave of fatigue swept through her, accompanied by the beginning of a throbbing headache.

She was furious at herself, at her body that hadn't kept up with the pace she'd been keeping at work. The whole situation was so frustrating she could scream.

She'd been literally run out of town by her doctor, Andrea fumed. She'd finally gone in for a checkup, complaining of headaches, insomnia, lack of appetite, the inability to concentrate for great lengths of time and being so tired on occasion she'd been close to tears.

She was, the mighty medical man declared, suffering from complete physical exhaustion. He'd ordered her to take two full weeks off. No, she couldn't just cut back on her hours at the office, she was to get away, go somewhere peaceful and quiet, where her staff couldn't reach her. Only Jack, her boss, should be informed of her destination.

The doctor knew her personal history, was aware that she had no family to spend the holidays with. Her-parents had been killed in an automobile accident when Andrea was only four.

There had been no loving relatives waiting in the wings to make a home for the frightened little girl, who had had her serene world shattered by the death of her mother and father.

She'd been raised in foster homes before she'd struck out on her own when she was eighteen.

Now she was heading to the small town of Prescott, where she'd never been before, and where her two-week sentence would include the Christmas holiday.

Being away from home on Christmas didn't matter. She paid little attention to the festive event. She gave gifts to a few close friends, but politely refused all invitations to Christmas dinner. It was a day for families, and Andrea had no desire to be odd-woman-out at anyone's table.

But being in Prescott for Christmas wasn't what had her hopping mad. It was the emotion of inadequacy, of not being up for all she'd taken on and promised to do. Complete physical exhaustion. That was infuriating.

The pain in Andrea's head increased, but she now knew the frequent headaches were caused by fatigue. They even had the official medical diagnosis of fatigue headaches.

She was only twenty-seven years old, for heaven's sake, not one hundred and seven. She was five foot six, weighed one hundred and twenty-two pounds, and had thought she was in tip-top shape.

Ha! What a joke. She was falling apart. A total wreck. Talk about embarrassing. This whole situation was mortifying.

What was she supposed to do in dinky little Prescott for two weeks? Sit in a rocking chair with a blanket over her knees and knit? She didn't know how to knit, and she certainly didn't know how to spend lazy days doing absolutely nothing.

She hated this. She really, really hated this.

Andrea was pulled from her fuming thoughts by the sudden slowing of traffic and the realization that she was approaching Prescott.

Glancing quickly at the piece of paper she had taped to the center console, she shifted into the lefthand lane. She'd written precise instructions to herself after carefully studying a map she'd spread out on her kitchen table.

An image of her empty apartment flitted in her mental vision, but it evoked no nostalgia or homesickness.

It was a group of rooms where she ate, slept and spent very few leisurely hours, the majority of her life being centered on Challenge Advertising.

As her mind roamed from room to room in the high-rise apartment in Phoenix, she couldn't remember the last time she'd rearranged the furniture or purchased something new, pretty and personal for the place she'd called home for the past five years.

Why was she suddenly thinking about her dull apartment? she wondered. She'd do well to pay attention to her surroundings, or she'd probably drive right past Hamilton House, the hotel where she'd made reservations for the next two, long weeks.

"Oh, great," Andrea said aloud, frowning. "It's starting to snow. Isn't that just dandy?"

She hated cold weather. She hated snow. She hated Prescott, Arizona, and the reason that she was there.

Her doctor had suggested the small town, saying it was picture-perfect beautiful, with friendly people thrown in as an added bonus. Not having the time, nor the energy, to consider her options, she'd settled on Prescott without further thought.

"The crummy doctor might have mentioned that it snowed up here," Andrea said, stopping at a red light. "Oh-hh, I'm really hating this."

Brandon Hamilton stood behind the registration desk of Hamilton House, humming along with the carols that played softly in the large lobby of the hotel.

Excellent, he thought, looking down at a leatherbound registry. Once Ms. Andrea Cunningham arrived, Hamilton House would be booked solid through Christmas.

He couldn't ask for better than that, especially since this was the first Christmas that he'd had the hotel up and running after the extensive renovations he'd put the charming old building through.

Brandon swept his gaze over the lobby, unable to curb the smile that formed on his lips.

Lookin' good, he thought. The huge, decorated Christmas tree in the front window was spectacular, and the gleaming, baby grand in front of it sat ready to be played.

Three separate groupings of high-backed, Victorian-era easy chairs surrounded low, round tables. The carpeting was authentic, cabbage roses on a black background, worn in spots but holding its own, considering that it had been on the floor since the turn of the century.

It was all paying off, he thought with a nod of satisfaction. The months of stress, of sleepless, worryfilled nights, of spending nearly every penny he had, plus the funds from a hefty loan from the bank, to restore Hamilton House to the majestic hotel it had been, had definitely been worth it.

Now all he needed was for Andrea Cunningham to show up and take possession of her room to give him that final emotional rush of knowing that the hotel was filled to the brim with happy guests.

Brandon glanced at his watch.

Two fifty-two, he thought. Check-in time was three o'clock. Where are you, Ms. Cunningham? He glanced at the front door, anticipating the sight of her smiling, ready-for-the-holidays face. Any moment now she would enter the hotel, filled with Christmas cheer.

Andrea got out of her car in the designated parking lot across from the hotel. She read the sign mounted on a post and frowned.

According to the instructions, she was to leave her luggage in her vehicle, if she chose to do so, and a member of the staff of Hamilton House would deliver it safely to her room.

Not a chance, she thought, glaring up at the large flakes of falling snow for a second. She was not about to announce, for all to hear, the description of her flashy car. She was having enough trouble adjusting to the fact that she actually owned the silly thing, without telegraphing the news to the world.

A few minutes later Andrea began her trek out of the parking lot, tilting slightly to one side due to the weight of her heavy suitcase.

The wet snow was sticking to the ground, causing her to slip and slide on her two-inch heels. The snow was also soaking the dark blue business suit that she wore with a pale blue silk blouse.

She didn't own a heavy coat, had no use for one in Phoenix. In her exhausted mental state, it just hadn't occurred to her to investigate the possible difference in weather between the valley and this mountain town.

Prescott was only a hundred miles away, for heaven's sake. That it was perched over five thousand feet up on a mountain was information she hadn't known until she had been well under way to arrive here.

It wasn't like her to be so disorganized, she thought, struggling to keep her footing as she crossed the street. But then, nothing about her life was in its proper order at the moment.

Andrea shuffled along the snowy sidewalk, shivering as she headed for the front door of the hotel, the suitcase feeling heavier with every treacherous step.

Her dark brown hair, which she kept in a blunt cut to just above her shoulders, was plastered to her head, creating icy-cold rivulets of water that dribbled inside her blouse collar and down her back.

She struggled with the stained-glass double doors to the hotel, pushed her slippery suitcase inside the building, then skidded in behind it, nearly toppling over the large piece of luggage.

She'd made it, she thought, and she could easily think of ten other places she'd rather be.

Brandon looked toward the front doors as the copper bell overhead tinkled that they had been opened. He did a double take as the incredible sight before him registered in his mind.

A woman, who was definitely teetering on her feet, was soaking wet and dotted with snowflakes. Her hair was streaming water, her suit appeared glued to her body, and she was not smiling with holiday cheer.

He had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach that this very wet and obviously freezing cold woman, who was becoming more furious with every passing second, was Ms. Andrea Cunningham.

"Oh, hell," Brandon muttered.

He rushed from behind the registration desk and across the lobby, then came to an abrupt halt in front of the woman, frantically searching his mind for something brilliant to say.

"Ms. Cunningham?" he said, beaming. "I'm Brandon Hamilton. Welcome to Hamilton House."

Before attempting to respond to the syrupy-sweet greeting, Andrea took a deep, much-needed breath, then another, then one more. As she exhaled for the third time, a strange buzzing noise hummed in her ears and black dots paraded in front of her eyes.

She looked up into the dark eyes of Brandon Hamilton, blinked, then without having managed to speak one word...she fainted.

"Oh, Lord," Brandon said, his eyes widening.

As the woman he assumed was Andrea Cunningham began to crumple forward, Brandon's arms shot out instinctively. He scooped her up before she reached the highly polished tile floor of the entryway.

Brandon stood perfectly still for a moment, staring at the soggy bundle now nestled in his arms.

If this really was Andrea Cunningham, he thought, she was lovely, absolutely beautiful, in a wholesome way. Her eyes, which were now closed, were big and dark, her features were delicate, and her lips were made for kissing.

She was as light as a feather, even with soakingwet clothes. She was fairly tall, maybe five-six, but she was exactly right for his six-foot frame.

How old was she? Maybe twenty-six or twenty-seven. The only thing that marred her pretty face were purple smudges of fatigue, or illness, beneath her eyes. She was—

“Cripe, Hamilton,” he said aloud, snapping back to attention. “Don’t just stand here. Do something.”

He turned and saw the dining room hostess crossing the lobby.

“Jennifer,” he called. “I need help.”

The attractive woman hurried to where Brandon stood.

“My gosh, Brandon,” she said. “What happened? Who is that? What’s wrong with her?”

“I think she’s our guest, Andrea Cunningham,” he said. “Please get on the phone and call Ben Rizzoli. Tell him we need a doctor over here...quick. Then have Mickey take that suitcase behind the counter, and find someone to cover the front desk.”

“Got it,” Jennifer said, then hurried away.

Andrea stirred in Brandon’s arms as he strode across the lobby and into his office. He kicked the door closed behind him and settled his precious cargo on a soft, beige leather sofa that was placed against one wall.

“Hello?” he said, hunkering next to the sofa. “Ms. Cunningham? Andrea?”

My, my, Andrea thought foggily, what a marvelously masculine voice that was calling her name. She was in the middle of the nicest dream, featuring one of the most ruggedly good-looking men she’d ever seen. He was “tall, dark and handsome” personified. The kind of man who appeared only in dreams or on the movie screen, but never walked around loose in real life.

He was holding her in strong arms against his rockhard chest. He had broad shoulders, thick dark hair, and eyes so dark they appeared obsidian.

The timbre of his voice was perfect; deep, rich and nimbly. He’d said his name. Oh, what was it? Brandon. Yes, that was it. It suited him.

“Andrea?” Brandon said. “Can you hear me? Open your eyes. Please?”

Her name had never sounded so lovely, so feminine, Andrea thought. Brandon’s voice floated over her, caressing her like plush velvet.

Oh, my, yes, this was a fantastic dream. But like all dreams, it had to end. She had to get up, go to work. She had so much that was waiting for her attention at the office.

Besides, she was terribly cold, chilled to the bone, in fact. The blankets on her bed felt clammy, as though she’d forgotten to put them in the dryer after removing them from the washing machine.

She wouldn’t have made up her bed with wet linens, would she? No, of course not. Handsome man named Brandon or not, she’d had enough of this.

Andrea’s lashes fluttered, then she opened her eyes slowly, taking a steadying breath in the process. In the next instant she gasped as she found herself staring at obsidian-eyed Brandon, the man from her dream.

“What are you doing here?” she said, attempting to sit up. “Don’t you know the rules about dreams? I’m awake now, so get out of my bedroom.”

“Easy; easy,” Brandon said, pressing gently on her shoulders to keep her prone. “Are you Ms. Andrea Cunningham?”

“Yes, I am, but—”

“I’m Brandon Hamilton. Do you know where you are?” he said. Was she beautiful, but nuttier than a fruitcake? Rules about dreams? She thought she was in her own bedroom? “Just think for a second.”

“You’re Brandon?” Andrea said, frowning. “This doesn’t make sense. The man in my dream said his name was—” Her eyes widened in horror. “Oh, my gracious, it wasn’t a dream. I’m in Prescott. This is Hamilton House, and—”

“And you fainted right after you arrived,” Brandon finished for her.

Cancel nuts, he thought. Andrea was hitting on all cylinders and was none too pleased with her reality. He had to keep her calm before she became hysterical or did something else that would disturb the tranquility of the hotel.

“There’s a doctor on the way to see you,” he said. “Everything is under control, Ms. Cunningham. Andrea. May I call you Andrea? We’re not exactly strangers, you know. You fainted right into my arms, just like in the movies.”

“I don’t believe this,” Andrea said, pressing one hand to her forehead. “I’ve never fainted in my life. I’m mortified, absolutely mortified. I’m going home.”

“No, no,” Brandon said quickly. “There’s no need to be embarrassed.” He produced his best hundredwatt smile. “You can’t leave. You’re my lucky charm—the guest who filled Hamilton House to capacity for the holidays. Lucky charms have responsibilities, you know.”

“That,” Andrea said, glaring at him, “is some of the corniest bunch of malarkey I’ve ever heard.”

Brandon’s smile slid off his chin. “Oh.” He paused. “I have to admit, you scared the socks off me by fainting the way you did. I’ve never had that experience before here at Hamilton House.”

Andrea closed her eyes for a moment, then looked at Brandon again.

“It’s a first for me, too,” she said.

A woman could drown in the depths of those fathomless dark eyes, she thought. A strange heat, which was far greater than the cold consuming her, was beginning to pulse low in her body. There was a blatant, masculine sexuality emanating from Brandon that was nearly overwhelming in its intensity.

“No one faints without a reason,” Brandon said, pulling Andrea from her sensuous thoughts. “Maybe I should take you to the hospital if you’re...well, if you’re pregnant and something is definitely not as it should be.”

“No,” Andrea said, then sighed. “I’m not pregnant. I have no dread disease, nor mysterious ailment. I’m just tired.”

“Very tired, then,” Brandon said. “Let me guess. Your doctor has ordered you to rest, so you came up to Prescott from Phoenix.”

“How did you know I’m from—oh, my registration information. I gave you my address.”

Brandon nodded. “Where’s your coat?”

“I don’t own a heavy winter coat. I didn’t investigate the weather up here. My doctor suggested Prescott and I came. This trip was not a good idea.”

“Sure it was,” Brandon said, smiling. “Prescott is a great place to get away from the rat race in Phoenix. What do you do for a living down in the valley?”

“I’m the vice president of Challenge Advertising.” And she was also a beautiful woman, Brandon thought. Was there a special man in Phoenix, who would be extremely distressed to learn that his lady had fainted into the arms of a complete stranger?

Well, if there was a guy, where was he when Andrea needed him, the louse? Forget the jerk. He, Brandon Hamilton, had been right on the spot to scoop Andrea into his arms. And, oh, man, how fantastic she’d felt nestled against him.

“Advertising.” Brandon cleared his throat as a bolt of heat rocketed through his body at the remembrance of holding Andrea in his arms. “That’s heavy stuff. Competitive. Pretty stressful, I imagine.”

Andrea lifted her chin. “I enjoy my work and I’m very good at what I do.”

"I don't doubt that for a minute, but you've apparently enjoyed your occupation right into total exhaustion. That, combined with suddenly being at a much higher altitude than you're accustomed to, is probably what caused you to faint.

"Your body is talking to you, Andrea, sending signals loud and clear. I've been down that road, and I suggest you listen to the message you're getting from yourself."

"Mmm," she said, frowning.

"You're registered to stay at Hamilton House for two weeks, so sit back and enjoy them."

"Right," she said, rolling her eyes heavenward. "I won't have to worry about being exhausted. I will die of boredom."

Brandon chuckled. "No, you won't. Prescott has a lot to offer. I'm a single man and I find plenty to do, and the people are warm and friendly."

"Who are you?" she said. "A representative for the chamber of commerce?"

Brandon shrugged. "Just stating the facts, ma'am." He paused. "I'm glad there's nothing seriously wrong with you, Andrea," he went on, looking directly into her eyes.

"Thank you," she said softly.

The seconds ticked by and neither moved nor hardly breathed as they continued to gaze into each other's eyes. A swirling heat seemed to weave around and through them, pulling them closer together, closer and closer....

A brisk knock sounded at the door, causing both Andrea and Brandon to jerk in surprise at the sudden noise. A man entered the room in the next instant.

"Rizzoli to the rescue," he said cheerfully, crossing the room to stand by the sofa.

My stars, Andrea thought. Prescott, Arizona, had cornered the market on handsome men. This one was obviously Italian, indicated by his name and olivetoned skin. He, too, was tall, dark and handsome, his rough-hewed features boasting a nose that had obviously been broken at some point in his apparent thirty-odd years.

There was a subtle difference between the men, though. Brandon Hamilton was wearing what was obviously a custom-tailored suit. He had an aura of class and money, and his features were a tad more refined, smooth.

She would consider Mr. Rizzoli a diamond in the rough, in his faded jeans, plaid flannel shirt and fleece-lined, tan bomber jacket. His dark hair was also badly in need of a trim.

But they were a dynamic duo. Talk about mortifying. She now had two handsome men gawking at her. She wanted to crawl into a very deep hole and never come out.

"I'm definitely going home," she said, starting to sit up again.

"Whoa," Ben Rizzoli said, raising one hand. "I haven't done my rescue bit yet. I'm Dr. Benjamin Rizzoli, at your service. Call me Ben. Doctors have a terrible need to be needed, so you have to allow me to check you over or I'll pout. And you are?"

"Leaving," Andrea said again.

"She's Ms. Andrea Cunningham," Brandon told Ben. "She walked in the front door and fainted. There's nothing wrong with her that a good rest won't cure. A rest she will definitely get by staying two weeks here at Hamilton House."

Ben nodded. "Well, Andrea—I'll call you Andrea and you call me Ben. We're very laid-back, friendly folks here in Prescott. I already know a great deal about you."

"Do tell," Andrea said dryly.

"Okay, I will," he said, grinning. "You're very organized and efficient. I mean, hey, you might have fainted before you came into the hotel and clunked your head on the snowy sidewalk. The fact that you waited to blink out after you entered this fine establishment proves my point. As for the rest of the diagnosis, it sounds as though Brandon has been doing my job for me. You're majorly tuckered out."

"There you go," Brandon said, smiling.

“Do you two practice this routine?” Andrea said, glowering at the pair. “This is ridiculous. I’m going home.”

“Let’s get serious here,” Ben said, his expression now matching his statement. “As a doctor, I have a few more questions for you, Andrea. Brandon, hit the road. I want to talk to Andrea alone.”

Brandon planted his hands on his thighs and pushed himself up to stand eye-to-eye with Ben.

“I’ll be right outside the door,” Brandon said.

“Holler if you need me.”

“Yep,” Ben said. “Go away.”

Brandon hesitated, looking at Andrea for a long moment, then left the room. He closed the door behind him and immediately began to pace back and forth in front of it.

What other questions did Ben want to ask Andrea? he thought. Did Ben suspect there was something seriously wrong with her? No. No way. That was not acceptable.

Andrea. Pretty name. Pretty lady.

She had felt just so... so right in his arms, as though she belonged there, close to him, protected and cared for by him.

“Hell, Hamilton,” he muttered. “Where is your mind going? You’re sounding like the fruitcake you thought Andrea was.”

But there was no denying the feelings of protectiveness and possessiveness he’d registered as he scooped Andrea into his arms and carried her into his office. She was so delicate, had become so pale, which had only accentuated the dark smudges beneath her eyes.

Brandon halted his trek and stared at the door.

Come on, Rizzoli, he mentally ordered. What in the hell was going on in there? He didn’t want a major problem to have caused Andrea to faint.

No, she was fine, just fine. She had to be.

Brandon frowned and dragged one hand through his hair.

He was overreacting. Big-time. He didn’t even know Andrea Cunningham. The cold fist of fear in his gut that she might be seriously ill didn’t make one bit of sense, nor did the desire for her that had exploded throughout him.

Well, yes, maybe it did. He was a decent man, a nice human being. It wasn’t Andrea, the woman, he was tied up in knots over, it was simply one person hoping that another person was all right. And it was simply a normal, healthy man’s libido reacting to an attractive woman.

Anyone would feel as he did.

Wouldn’t they?

Two

Before Brandon could give further thought to the troubling, confusion-induced question in his mind, the door to the office opened and Andrea appeared, with Ben right behind her.

“Are you all right?” Brandon said, staring at Andrea intently. He switched his scrutiny to Ben. “Is she all right? You both look so serious. What’s wrong? Why aren’t you talking to me?”

Ben laughed. “You’re using up all the air space, Hamilton. I’ve never seen you so rattled, which is very interesting, but how are we supposed to get a word in edgewise here?”

“Oh,” Brandon said. “Sorry.” He paused. “So? Say something, Rizzoli.”

“I can’t. There’s such a thing as doctor-patient confidentiality, you know. If Andrea wishes to inform you that she is suffering only from complete exhaustion, combined with a dose of Prescott’s altitude, that’s up to her. My lips are sealed.”

“Oh, good grief,” Andrea said, laughing. “You two are trouble, you really are.”

“That’s the first time you’ve smiled,” Brandon said quietly, his gaze riveted on Andrea’s face. “Your laughter reminds me of the sound of wind chimes.”

“Well, I... Well...” Andrea started then stopped speaking as she looked directly into the depths of Brandon’s dark eyes.

Those eyes again, she thought. They were pinning her in place. She couldn't move, or think, could hardly breathe. Brandon Hamilton had the most compelling, mesmerizing eyes she'd ever seen.

She wasn't freezing cold anymore. No, she was suffused with warmth, with steadily increasing heat that was thrumming low in her body and spreading rapidly throughout her.

Dear heaven, what was this man doing to her?

Ben cleared his throat.

"I hate to interrupt," he said, merriment dancing in his eyes. "But Andrea needs to get into some dry clothes and to eat something. My prescription is that you, Brandon, as the owner of Hamilton House, extend some extra tender loving care toward this weary guest. I definitely have the feeling that you can handle that."

"What?" Brandon said. "Oh, right. Sure thing. Yes. You bet."

"You're so articulate," Ben said, chuckling. "Well, I've got to get back to my office. I have patients waiting to—hey now, here are my favorite girlfriends."

Andrea's eyes widened as she saw two women, who appeared to be in their seventies, bustling toward them.

The women were identical in size and features—mirror images of each other. But there the similarity stopped.

One was wearing a sedate gray, long-sleeved dress with a high, old-fashioned collar. The other was adorned in a flashy red satin number that reminded Andrea of pictures she'd seen of turn-of-the-century saloon girls.

The women smiled as they arrived where Andrea, Brandon and Ben were standing.

"Andrea," Brandon said, "may I present my great-aunts Prudence—" he swept one hand toward the woman in gray—"and Charity. The Hamilton twins."

"Hello," Andrea said, smiling.

"Good day, dear," Prudence said. "We heard you had the vapors, and thought perhaps we might be of assistance."

"Why would she want our help, Pru," Charity said, "when she has two hunks of stuff like Brandon and Ben fussing over her? All that's missing here is Taylor, our other handsome bachelor-on-the-loose."

"To know 'em is to love 'em, Andrea," Ben said. He kissed each of the elderly ladies on the cheek. "I'm gone. I'll check in with you later, Brandon."

"Goodbye, Benjamin," Prudence said.

"See ya, hotshot," Charity said.

Ben laughed as he strode away.

"Andrea needs to get settled into her room," Brandon said.

"It was a pleasure to meet you both," Andrea said to the women.

"Oh, you'll be seeing us again," Prudence said. "We live here in Hamilton House. How long will you be with us, dear?"

"Two weeks," Brandon said. "Come on, Andrea. We're not following Ben's orders by standing here. You need dry clothes and some food."

"Two weeks?" Charity said. "Don't you have a family that will miss you over the holidays?"

"Charity," Prudence said, "that is none of our business. You're being terribly nosy."

"Well, how am I supposed to find out what I want to know if I don't ask?" Charity said. "Andrea?"

"No," she said quietly. "I don't have any family, Miss Hamilton."

"Well, you do while you're here," Prudence said. "You call me Aunt Pru, dear, and Charity will be your Aunt Charity, and Brandon will be... well, just Brandon."

"He'll see to it that he's more than just Brandon if he has half the sense he claims to have," Charity said.

“Charity, hush,” Pru said. “Mind your manners. You’re being naughty.”

Brandon gripped one of Andrea’s arms and propelled her forward at a rapid pace.

“Bye,” she said over her shoulder to the aunts.

“Ta-ta, dear,” Aunt Pru said.

“Put some makeup on,” Aunt Charity said. “You’re as pale as the ghosts who live in this place.”

“Ghosts?” Andrea said.

“Ignore that,” Brandon said.

At the registration desk, he released Andrea’s arm and moved behind the counter.

“I’m sorry about my aunts,” he said. “They can be a bit much at times.”

“They’re darling,” she said, smiling. “For being twins, they certainly have different personalities.”

“No joke. Forget what Aunt Charity said about ghosts. She just likes to keep things stirred up. Both Aunt Pru and Aunt Charity have hearts of gold, though.”

“And you love them.”

“Well, I... Yes. Yes, I love them very much.”

Their eyes met across the gleaming counter that separated them.

Oh, Lord, Brandon thought, there it was again...the heat, that coiling heat, tight and low in his body. Andrea’s great big dark eyes did unnerving things to his mind and, heaven help him, his libido.

“Sign this,” he said, tearing his gaze from Andrea’s. He shoved a card toward her. “I’ll have Mickey show you to your room, and carry your suitcase for you. Would you like some hot soup and a sandwich sent up?”

“Yes, thank you, that would be lovely.” Andrea paused. “Brandon, I apologize for all the trouble I’ve caused since I arrived.”

“Don’t give it another thought. You haven’t been one bit of trouble.”

No, the trouble stemmed from the strange and unsettling impact that Ms. Cunningham had on him. All she had to do was gaze at him with those big, expressive dark eyes of hers and he was consumed by a flash of heated desire.

Emotions he was very unaccustomed to were not doing anything for his peace of mind, either. That protectiveness and possessiveness he’d felt toward Andrea had come out of left field.

Oh, Andrea Cunningham was trouble, all right. He was going to have to keep his distance from the enchanting Andrea during her stay at Hamilton. House.

He had an etched-in-stone rule about never becoming involved with a guest in the hotel. Not only was it tacky from a business angle, it was also potential heartache. Patrons checked in, then checked out. Poof. They were gone.

Jennifer came rushing to where Brandon stood behind the registration counter.

“I’m sorry, Brandon,” she said breathlessly. “I was covering the desk, but got called to the dining room to solve a seating problem.”

“Where’s Teddy?” Brandon said.

“He went home with the flu. He was fine one minute, a sick puppy the next.” Jennifer looked at Andrea and smiled. “I hope you’re feeling better, Ms. Cunningham.”

“It’s Andrea, and I’m fine. Thank you.”

“Wonderful,” Jennifer said. “That means you’ll be able to enjoy your stay at the hotel and take part in all the Christmas activities in Prescott. You picked the perfect place to be for the holidays. Oh, I’m Jennifer Mackane, the dining room hostess.”

“She’s more than that,” Brandon said, smiling warmly at Jennifer. “She keeps that dining room running like a well-oiled machine. I’d be lost without her.”

“How... admirable,” Andrea said, smiling politely.

Jennifer Mackane was also beautiful, she thought, with a tumble of wavy, strawberry-blond hair that fell in fetching disarray to just above her shoulders, and pretty, sparkling green eyes.

She was tall, with a Barbie doll perfect figure, accentuated by a green wool holiday dress that had a stylish drape to it.

Brandon would be lost without her? Did he mean that literally? Was this the woman of importance in Brandon Hamilton's life?

Oh, for Pete's sake, Andrea, she admonished herself. What difference does it make? Who Brandon might, or might not, be romantically involved with was none of her business, nor did she care one iota.

She was simply having a typical feminine reaction to Jennifer Mackane. The hostess was stunning, while there she stood looking like a drowned mouse who had staggered in from the snow.

Enough of this nonsense.

"I really would like to go to my room and get settled in," Andrea said.

"Oh, yes, of course," Brandon said. "I'll page Mickey right now. He's our teenage jack-of-all-trades, Andrea."

"Mickey is across the street in the parking lot changing a tire for one of the guests," Jennifer said. "I'll cover the desk, Brandon. You can take Andrea upstairs."

Damn it, Brandon thought. He didn't want to. He'd just vowed to keep his distance from the woman. Seeing her to her room certainly wasn't following his own rule. Well, there was nothing he could do about it.

He retrieved the key packet from a drawer, picked up Andrea's suitcase and rounded the registration desk.

"Shall we go?" he said, looking anywhere but at Andrea.

"Gladly," Andrea said. "I'm already envisioning a hot shower, shampooing my hair, and putting on lusciously dry clothes."

Don't think about Andrea standing naked in the shower, Hamilton, he told himself, stifling a groan. The warm water would cascade over her delicate body, then she'd raise her arms in an oh-so-feminine gesture to shampoo her hair.

She might close her eyes in ecstasy at becoming warmed through after being so cold. She'd sigh, a womanly sigh of pleasure and—

"Come on," he said gruffly, starting across the large lobby.

"Gracious," Andrea said, hurrying to keep up with him.

Jennifer propped her elbow on the counter, cupped her chin in her hand and watched the pair heading for the elevator.

"Interesting," she said, smiling. "Very, very interesting."

Hamilton House was five stories high, and part of Brandon's restoration plan had been to create Victorian-era rooms, each with a slightly different decor. It had taken a seemingly endless number of hours conferring with a decorator to accomplish the feat, but Brandon was immensely pleased with the results.

Brandon's suite of rooms were on the fifth floor, as were the ones where Aunt Pru and Aunt Charity resided. Walls had been knocked down to create the two apartments, leaving only two rooms for guests. Andrea had been booked into one of those rooms.

After a silent ride in the elevator, Andrea smiled in delight when she finally entered her room. She swept her gaze over the charming area.

There was a dark wood, queen-size sleigh bed, a matching desk and dresser, a small round table with a chair, and an overstuffed easy chair. The walls were decorated in pale green and vanilla-striped wallpaper, with the bedspread a shade darker green. The plush carpeting was a lovely salmon color.

"Oh, this is beautiful," she said, turning to face Brandon where he stood just inside the closed door.

"I'm glad you like it." He placed her suitcase on a wooden luggage rack by the door, then put the key packet on top. "I'll have your food sent up in about an hour. Will that give you enough time to take your shower and... to do all that you are going to do?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Fine. Just call down to the desk if there's anything you need, want, whatever. Goodbye. Oh, welcome to Hamilton House. Forget that. I think I've said it to you about fifteen times already."

"Brandon?" Andrea said, frowning slightly. "Is something wrong? You seem to be...I don't know... angry all of a sudden."

Brandon took a deep breath, then exhaled slowly, puffing out his cheeks in the process.

"No, I'm not angry, Andrea," he said quietly. "I realize that I'm not behaving properly in my role as owner of Hamilton House. I'm sorry."

"It must be difficult," she said thoughtfully, "to have to always be on."

"I've been doing it for six months, ever since the renovations were completed and we had the grand opening. This is the first time I've let my professionalism slip."

Brandon shook his head.

"You have a strange effect on me, Ms. Cunningham. You're a spell-weaver. I look at you and I... You've felt it, too, haven't you? The pull?"

Andrea wrapped her hands around her elbows. "Yes," she whispered.

"We have to ignore it, to pretend it isn't there. You realize that, don't you?"

"Of course I do," she said angrily. "You're speaking to me as though I'm an adolescent with uncontrollable hormones. I'm not a child, Brandon Hamilton. I'm a woman."

"Believe me," he said, a weary quality to his voice, "I'm very aware of that."

"This... this whatever it is that has taken place between us is very understandable."

"It is?" he said, crossing his arms over his chest. "This ought to be good. Why don't you explain it to me, since you have it all figured out."

"Certainly," she said, lifting her chin. "In my case, my overreaction reaction—"

"Overreaction reaction?" Brandon interrupted with a burst of laughter.

"Do you mind?" she said with an indignant little sniff. "I have the floor."

"I humbly apologize," he said, curbing his smile. "You were saying?"

"Yes. Well, my ridiculous reaction to your... masculinity is due to the fact that I am in a state of total exhaustion. I'm a tad vulnerable, not conducting myself as I normally would."

"I see," Brandon said, stroking his chin. "That makes sense, I guess."

"Indeed it does. Granted, you're a very attractive man, but I deal with good-looking men every day in my profession. They don't cause me to be unable to think, make it impossible for me to move, or breathe, when they look at me."

"But I do?" he said, grinning again.

"Would you stop it?" she said, planting her hands on her hips.

Brandon cleared his throat. "Sorry."

"Once I've rested," Andrea continued, "I'll be fine. No problem. You'll just be another handsome man in a long line of same who cross my path and whom I ignore."

Brandon narrowed his eyes. "Is that a fact?"

"It is," she said with a decisive nod.

"And my overreaction reaction to you? Would you care to explain that, as well?"

"It's very simple, Brandon. Fainting in your arms brought out the Tarzan-Jane, knight-in-shining-armor instinct in you. It's nothing to get all in a dither about."

"Let me be certain I have this straight," Brandon said. "I'm suffering from a massive machismo rush because you fainted?"

"Yes."

“And you’ll view me as just another man in the multitude of men out there once you’ve overcome your state of exhaustion?” Brandon started toward her slowly. “Have I got that right?”

“Well, I guess... Well, yes, that about sums it up,” Andrea said, taking a step backward as Brandon continued to advance.

A shiver coursed through Andrea. Was this fear? she thought frantically. Brandon seemed suddenly like a sleek panther stalking his prey—her. Was she frightened? No, it was a strange, sensual excitement that was consuming her, causing that thrumming heat to pulse low in her body once again.

This was insane! She should stand her ground, demand that Brandon Hamilton leave her room immediately. Yes, that was exactly what she should do.

But she wasn’t going to.

Because a part of her that she hadn’t even realized existed wanted to know, had to find out, just exactly what Brandon intended to do when he finally closed the distance between them.

Brandon stopped in front of Andrea and cradled her face in his large hands. He looked directly into her dark eyes, and his voice was deep and rumbley, and very, very male when he spoke.

“Your grand theories may be on the mark for all I know,” he said. “I really don’t have a clue. What I do know is that I resent being heaped with every other guy in a pair of pants. That’s totally unacceptable.”

“I certainly didn’t intend to insult you,” Andrea said, her voice trembling slightly. “I was just explaining my theory about what’s happening between us.”

“Mmm. Well. put this in your data bank, Ms. Cunningham, and see if you don’t come up with a rather different conclusion.”

Oh, my gosh, Andrea thought, he’s going to kiss me. No!

Brandon lowered his head and captured Andrea’s mouth in a searing kiss, parting her lips, delving his tongue inside the sweet darkness to seek and find her tongue.

Yes! Andrea thought, her lashes drifting down.

Their bodies were inches apart, not touching, yet the heat of rising passion wove around and through them, as though they were one entity.

The kiss went on and on, and desires soared.

What in the hell are you doing? a voice thundered in Brandon’s head.

He was allowing his damnable male ego to run roughshod over common sense and decorum.

For Pete’s sake, man, get a grip.

Brandon broke the kiss, took a ragged breath, and dropped his hands from Andrea’s face. Without speaking, he turned and strode from the room, closing the door behind him with more force than was necessary.

Andrea blinked, placed one hand on her racing heart, then rested the fingertips of her other hand on her tingling lips.

Never in her entire life had she experienced a kiss like the one she’d just shared with Brandon.

That kiss had stolen the very breath from her depleted body.

That kiss had created vivid images in her mind of clothes being torn away so that there was no barrier between her and Brandon.

That kiss had been the prelude to slow, exquisite lovemaking with Brandon that would have been ecstasy in its purest form.

That kiss never should have taken place.

“The nerve of that arrogant man,” she said, narrowing her gaze. “How dare he just march across the room and kiss me senseless? Just who in the blue blazes does he think he is?”

In the next instant she sighed, her shoulders slumping as fatigue swept over her.

She could rant and rave from here to Sunday, she thought dismally, but it wouldn’t erase the fact that she had been a very willing partner in that kiss. She’d savored every sensuous, heart-stopping second of it, and had not wanted it to end.

She had never behaved so recklessly, so... so wantonly.

"I'm not myself," she said, pressing one hand to her forehead.

She didn't care how angry her theories had made Brandon. They were sound and true. Her state of exhaustion was causing her to act and react out of character.

She would dismiss from her mind what had taken place in that room with Brandon. When she saw him again in the hotel, she'd be pleasant but cool, nod a greeting, and keep moving. She would not engage in further conversation with Mr. Hamilton, and she certainly would never be alone with him again.

The rest she desperately needed would restore her to normal, she told herself. The two-week sentence she was facing in this freezing cold little town would pass quickly, then she'd get into her ridiculous red sports car and whiz back down the mountain to Phoenix, where she belonged.

With a decisive nod, Andrea retrieved her suitcase, opened it and removed dry clothing. When she entered the bathroom, she gasped as she saw her reflection in the mirror above the sink.

"Oh, good night," she said with a burst of laughter.

She looked like a drenched kitten. Her hair was sticking up in places and was plastered to her head in others. The circles beneath her eyes were darker than ever, making her appear ghostly. Her suit and blouse were wrinkled and soggy.

"Why on earth," she said, leaning closer to the mirror, "would a man like Brandon Hamilton want to kiss you?"

Andrea straightened and then frowned, aware of a funny chill tiptoeing around her heart.

Brandon hadn't wanted to kiss her, she thought. He would have kissed anyone who had insulted his masculine ego the way she had. The kiss had been a product of his anger, not his desire for her.

That made sense.

Then why, if that was so all-fired reasonable, was she registering feelings of disappointment and rejection ?

"Oh, I don't know," she said, unbuttoning her suit jacket. "And I don't care. Just forget it."

Please, Andrea, she thought, dropping the sodden jacket to the floor, just forget it. For your own good.

Three

When Brandon left Andrea's room, he glanced longingly at his apartment door at the end of the hallway, then shook his head and went to the elevator. He hesitated, his finger poised at the button.

He'd walk down the five flights of stairs, he decided, in lieu of taking some much-needed private time in his apartment. It wouldn't be fair to Jennifer to leave her stranded at the front desk when she had things to tend to in the dining room.

Brandon started down the wide, carpeted stairway, each step thudding in an angry cadence directed at himself.

He should be shot at dawn, he mentally fumed. Strung up by the thumbs. Tarred and feathered. Run out of town on a rail.

Where was his brain? His sense of right and wrong? He was the proprietor of a hotel, who had blatantly kissed one of the guests without her permission. Cripe, he was probably staring at a lawsuit that would wipe him out financially. One kiss and he would now be rendered a moneyless derelict, living on the streets of Prescott.

Brandon stopped on the landing of the third floor and dragged both hands down his face.

Andrea Cunningham had pushed his macho buttons, and he'd behaved like a Neanderthal. For reasons he couldn't fathom, her dismissal of the fiery attraction between them had ignited his fury. He'd become blindly determined to prove her ridiculous theory wrong.

So, he'd kissed her.

With a shake of his head, Brandon resumed his plodding trek down the stairs.

That kiss, he mused, had been sensational. Desire, hot and heavy and coiling, had exploded within him like a rocket. He'd been consumed by it, and had come very close to losing total control.

Brandon narrowed his eyes.

That reaction, by damn, had been mutual. Andrea had returned the kiss in heated abandon.

What did that mean? Why hadn't she shoved him away, smacked him right across the face, then hollered the roof down?

Hell, he didn't know what had gone on in Andrea's mind when he'd kissed her, nor what she might be thinking now that she was alone. Women were so complicated, he wouldn't live long enough to understand any of them.

The question at hand was... now what?

What should he do, say, how should he act, the next time he saw Andrea?

Maybe he should just wait and see, take his cue from her. That seemed like a very good idea, since he was messing up royally when left to his own devices.

"You're such an idiot, Hamilton," he muttered as he reached the lobby.

Jennifer smiled at Brandon when he returned to the registration desk.

"Did you get Andrea all taken care of?" she said.

"In a manner of speaking," he said gruffly.

Jennifer frowned. "What does that mean?"

"Nothing. Would you have some soup and a sandwich sent up to Andrea in about an hour?"

"Yes, but—" Jennifer glanced at her watch "—it's getting late. Don't you think Andrea will be ready for a full dinner?"

"Good thought."

"Why don't you call her and ask if she'd like dinner sent up, or if she plans to come down to the dining room? For all we know, she might wish to leave the hotel for her meal. Yes, you'd best phone her, Brandon."

"No," he said quickly.

"Why not?"

"Because...because that's not efficient time management, Jennifer. I'd have to track you down if Andrea told me she'd like to eat in her room. Therefore, you call her."

"Well, all right." Jennifer paused. "Andrea's quite pretty, don't you think? Even not being at her best, she's attractive. She has lovely eyes."

"Mmm," he said, straightening some brochures that didn't need straightening.

"I hope she doesn't get lonely spending the holidays in a hotel. No family. No friends here. That sounds like a rather bleak Christmas."

"It's none of our business, Jennifer. Don't you have something to do in the dining room?"

"Maybe we should invite Andrea to the staff Christmas party." Jennifer went on as though Brandon hadn't spoken. "That might brighten things up a bit for her."

"Don't be silly. We can't start doing something like that. What if other guests hear that Andrea was included in the staff party? No, absolutely not. Staff is staff. Guests are guests."

Except that he'd kissed the socks off the guest under discussion, Brandon thought. Hell.

"All right, Mr. Scrooge," Jennifer said. "Maybe the aunties will take Andrea under their wing so she won't be quite so lonely."

"I'm sure they will. They're aware of the fact that Andrea doesn't have any family."

"No family at all? No one?"

Brandon shrugged. "Apparently not."

"That's sad, it really is. I wonder why an attractive woman like Andrea isn't married?"

"I'd say she's married to her work, because Ben said she was suffering from exhaustion."

"Oh, I see," Jennifer said, nodding. "She needs to learn how to stop and smell the flowers."

“Jennifer, do you realize you have me standing here gossiping about one of our guests? I don’t do things like this. Go away.”

Jennifer laughed. “Yes, boss. Whatever you say, boss. Your wish is my command.”

“I should hope so.”

“You never did say if you agree with me that Andrea is pretty.”

“Goodbye, Ms. Mackane,” Brandon said, frowning at her. “Go earn your keep.”

“Bye,” she said, wiggling the fingers of one hand at him.

“Women,” Brandon mumbled as Jennifer disappeared from view.

The next two hours flew by as Brandon was approached time and again by guests with questions needing to be answered.

He supplied brochures listing the holiday activities taking place in Prescott, arranged for the mailing of Christmas gifts that had been purchased in town, helped several couples decipher maps for destinations of outings planned for the next day, and answered the telephone, telling three frantic, local hostesses that Hamilton House had no vacancies.

No vacancies, Brandon mentally repeated as he replaced the telephone receiver. That was due to the arrival of the woman who had taken occupancy of the last available room in the hotel.

Andrea.

Jennifer had appeared briefly an hour before to announce that Andrea had requested that a salad, small steak and a pot of tea be delivered to her room. Jennifer had looked at him intently, as though expecting a major reaction regarding Andrea’s choices for dinner. He’d simply shrugged, causing Jennifer to glare at him and stomp away.

What had Jennifer wanted him to say about Andrea’s meal, for Pete’s sake? Food was food.

Now that he really thought about it, however, Andrea hadn’t ordered very much to eat, which was probably the point Jennifer had been attempting to make. Andrea should have added a potato, vegetables and dessert to her dinner. She was physically exhausted, and should be consuming more food to bolster her energy.

When he’d held Andrea in his arms after she fainted, he’d been aware, very aware, of how delicate she was, how fragile. She needed someone to look after her, to take care of her.

Brandon shook his head and frowned.

Yeah, right, he thought dryly. Andrea was a big-city executive, who was dedicated to her career to the exclusion of everything else, including her own health and welfare.

She didn’t want, nor seemed to need, anyone intruding on her focused life.

He’d lived that type of existence for more years than he cared to admit. When he’d suddenly suffered from chest pains, his doctor had told him that he was a lucky man. His body had warned him of a potential heart attack waiting in the wings even though he was only thirty-five years old. Brandon decided then to make some adjustments in his life-style.

So, he’d walked away from the world of highpressure, corporate law in New York City, taken courses in hotel management, and returned to Prescott, to his roots, to take possession of Hamilton House and begin the restorations that were needed so badly.

The charming old building had been in the Hamilton family since the day it was built at the turn of the century. When his great-grandfather had died, the series of leases had begun, the hotel falling into good hands at times and into inefficient care at others.

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