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**THE NANNY'S  
SECRET**

*Grace Green*



Grace Green

**The Nanny's Secret**

«HarperCollins»

**Green G.**

The Nanny's Secret / G. Green — «HarperCollins»,

Living together by necessity...Jordan dotes on his little daughter and can't refuse her anything. When she begs for Felicity Fairfax as her live-in nanny, Jordan gives in—despite having a grudge against the Fairfax family!Loving each other in secret... Both are astonished when their enforced intimacy leads to a fiery attraction. How can they be falling for each other? And living under the same roof means nothing can be hidden—not their growing passion, nor a family secret that's about to turn everything upside down...

## Содержание

Books by Grace Green	6
CONTENTS	7
CHAPTER ONE	8
CHAPTER TWO	16
CHAPTER THREE	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

“I’m here about my daughter. I want to ask...” Jordan stopped midsentence and turned to leave.

Felicity stood still, her face very pale. “You owe me an explanation,” she said. “You can’t come here in the middle of the night and not tell me why.”

He shrugged. “It doesn’t matter.”

“What is it? What’s wrong? Is it little Mandy?”

Jordan almost wanted to plead, but his pride wouldn’t let him. “Mandy’s miserable, we need you—would you say yes if I offered you your old job back?”

Grace Green grew up in Scotland but later emigrated to Canada with her husband and children. They settled in “Beautiful Super Natural B.C.” and Grace now lives in a house just minutes from ocean, beaches, mountains and rain forest. She makes no secret of her favorite occupation—her bumper sticker reads: I’d Rather Be Writing Romance! Grace also enjoys walking the seawall, gardening, getting together with other authors...and watching her characters come to life, because she knows that once they do, they will take over and write her stories for her.

Grace Green loves to write deeply emotional stories with compelling characters. She’s also a great believer in creating happy-ever-after endings that are certain to bring a tear to your eye!

Jordan’s sister has her own story in

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## Books by Grace Green

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For John

## CONTENTS

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

## CHAPTER ONE

FELICITY FAIRFAX'S gray eyes pricked with tears as she gazed into the window of West Vancouver's Kiddi Togs store. "Wouldn't Mandy look adorable in that daffodil-yellow dress, Joanne? Oh, I'd love to buy it for her. If only—"

"If only Jordan Maxwell would let you anywhere near his daughter. But that," Joanne declared, "is never going to happen."

"How can he be so cruel?" Heart aching, Felicity turned to her friend, her heavy blond braid glinting in the early June sunshine as she flicked it back over her shoulder. "Yes, his wife and my brother Denny had an affair, but that had nothing whatsoever to do with me!"

"Of course it didn't. But you're a Fairfax and that's enough for Mr. High and Mighty Maxwell. As far as he's concerned you're persona non grata...and will be for ever." In an obvious effort to divert her, Joanne indicated a quilt displayed in the window. "Is that another of yours?"

"Mmm."

"I love the kitty motif. And I'm impressed. You've really upped your output lately!"

"I've had lots of time to sew now that I don't have Mandy to look after." Felicity clutched her friend's hand. "I miss her desperately, Jo. I've cared for her since she was a week old and I've always loved her as if she were my own. My life feels so empty, so pointless, now."

"I know, sweetie...but you must try not to dwell on it." Gently, Joanne eased her away from the window. "Let's go treat ourselves to a latte and a chocolate biscotti and talk about something else."

"I can't even think about anything else."

But Felicity allowed herself to be led along the sidewalk toward the Hill o' Beans café on the corner.

"Jo," she fretted, "I worry about her. I know her mother didn't pay her much attention, but even so, for Mandy to have lost both of us in one fell swoop...she must feel utterly abandoned and must be missing us terribly."

"Missing you, at any rate—you're the one she spent most of her days with for the past almost four years. Jordan Maxwell must be either incredibly stupid or incredibly stone-hearted to have cut you out of her life."

"I hear he's enrolled her at the Wedgwood Avenue Day Care."

"Really? It has a terrific reputation and wonderful staff. She'll be happy there."

They'd reached the Hill o' Beans, and as they entered the café with its tantalizing aroma of freshly ground coffee beans, Joanne added, a little anxiously, "Don't you think?"

"I hope so." With a deep and soul-felt sigh, Felicity followed Jo to the counter. "Oh, I certainly do hope so."

Jordan Maxwell swung open the door of the Morningstar Realty office building and strode into the umber-carpeted foyer.

"Good morning, Jordan." The middle-aged receptionist grimaced. "The meeting's already started."

He was late. Again. His boss was going to be hopping mad. If Phil Morningstar had one obsession, it was punctuality. The world of real estate waited for no one! And every morning this past week, since enrolling Mandy at the Wedgwood Avenue Day Care before returning to work after a prolonged absence, Jordan had been late for Phil's daily finger-on-the-pulse meetings.

"Thanks, Bette, I'll prepare myself for the usual flack attack. So...did you apply for that raise yet?"

"Not today I haven't. His ulcer's playing up."

"Oh, great, just what I want to hear!"

"Jordan, just a second, you've got a—"



“Later, Bette.” He loped past the reception desk.

“But—”

He shook his head, and rounding the corner to the corridor, headed toward the boardroom. As he went, he scraped an exploratory hand over his jaw...and muttered under his breath as he felt the unevenly bristled skin.

He should’ve taken the few extra minutes to shave at home. He’d never mastered the art of running an electric razor over his chin while driving—and trying to shave while dodging his way through rush-hour traffic and at the same time trying to pacify Mandy who was wailing her heart out in the passenger seat beside him was nerve-shattering at best.

The boardroom door was ajar, and he could hear Morningstar’s abrasive voice all the way along the corridor. But when he pushed the door open, a hush fell over the room.

Jordan felt a dozen pairs of eyes fixed on him, but his own came up against Phil Morningstar’s steely glare.

“Sorry, Phil. I got held up.” He slipped into his seat, the rustle of his suit jacket against the polished mahogany table the only sound in the room.

Then somebody chuckled.

Dumping his briefcase on the floor, Jordan glanced around the table, and saw his colleagues were smiling. Jack LaRoque, the office Lothario, grinned and, focusing his gaze on the breast pocket of Jordan’s jacket, tapped his own.

Jordan looked down and saw Mandy’s pink hairbrush sticking out of his pocket. He must have stuffed it there after tidying her mop of blond curls. His gaze shot back to his boss, whose lips were compressed to a pencil-thin line.

“Sorry,” Jordan muttered. But as he thrust the brush into his briefcase, his cell phone rang. Cursing silently, he checked the caller ID.

“I’ll have to take this.” He threw Phil an apologetic glance. “It’s my daughter’s day care.”

The caller was Greta Gladstone, the owner.

“You’ll have to come and pick Mandy up,” she said. “She’s been having hysterics ever since you dropped her off. This isn’t going to work out, Mr. Maxwell. You’ll have to come up with some other arrangement.”

His day was going rapidly from bad to impossible.

“I’ll be there,” he said, “in five minutes.”

He surged to his feet. “Phil, I’m sorry, I have to—”

“You took three months off to be with your daughter after you lost your wife, Maxwell. Fine. Understandable. But enough is enough.” Morningstar pressed a hand to his chest and belched. “I’ll give you one more week. Get your personal problems sorted out before next Monday or—”

“Next Monday. Right. Thanks, Phil.” Jordan was already halfway out the door. “Thanks a bunch. I’ll have everything sorted out by then. I swear.”

Jordan called his sister the moment he got Mandy home.

“Lacey, thank the lord you’re there.” His daughter had fallen asleep in the car, and he held her limp figure in his arms as he spoke. “I need you to come up. Are you free?”

Lacey was twenty-five to his thirty-four and a world-famous model. She was forever flying off somewhere to a shoot; and she routinely smiled or pouted at him from the cover of top fashion magazines when he passed the local newsstands. With hair like sable, skin like cream, and legs that didn’t know when to stop, she was drop-dead gorgeous.

She was also super-smart, and he was hoping she would come up with some way out of his present dilemma.

She lived just a few minutes away, in a waterfront condo, and by the time he heard her car purr up his drive, he’d made a pot of coffee. As he was walking across the foyer to the sitting room with two steaming mugs, Lacey let herself in by the front door with her own set of keys.

“How come you’re at home?” she asked. Lending elegance to a simple white cotton T-shirt and blue jeans, she preceded him into the sitting room, walking with the trademark fluid glide that had graced hundreds of catwalks. “Shouldn’t you be out selling houses, now that Mandy’s at the Wedgwood Avenue Day Care?”

“Sit down, Lace.” He waited till she’d arranged her long willowy body in an armchair, before he handed her one of the mugs. Setting his own mug down on a side table, he paced the room. “Mandy’s not at day care. She’s upstairs, asleep.”

“Is she sick?”

He shook his head.

“Then wh—”

“She was expelled.” He scratched a despairing hand through his hair.

“Oh, honey.” Lacey rested her mug on her knee. “She wouldn’t stop crying?”

“Yeah, she’s been the same all week. When I made to drop her off today, she was sobbing and clinging to me like a terrified kitten. I felt like a monster, prying her little fingers free and then handing her over...as if I didn’t want her.” He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment, to try to blot out the ugly image. When he opened them again, he saw worry clouding his sister’s face.

“Oh, Jordan, I’m so sorry.”

“What the hell am I going to do?” he asked. “If this goes on, she’s not the only one who’s going to be thrown out. Morningstar’s had it up to here with me. I may be one of the top salesmen in the Lower Mainland but he’s given me till a week Monday to get my personal affairs in order and if I haven’t, it’s—” He slashed his throat with his index finger. “Game over.”

He slumped down in a chair and somber silence fell on the room as they drank their coffee.

When they’d finished, Lacey said in a tentative tone, “Honey, won’t you even consider Fel—”

“No!” He shot up from his chair and scowled down at her. “Don’t even say that name in here, I don’t want—”

“We’re not talking about what you want now.” Lacey stood and confronted him, her green eyes pleading. “Jordan, I understand how you feel—after what happened, I don’t blame you for hating Denny Fairfax—”

“Lacey, I’m warning you—”

“But his sister had no part in what he did, she didn’t even know until after the car accident that he and Marla had been involved in an affair for several months before it happened. And although you lost your wife—”

“In more ways than one!”

“—Felicity Fairfax didn’t come out of the whole mess unscathed. She lost her brother—or as good as lost him. According to all reports, he’s never going to come out of that coma. And, honey, Felicity and Mandy adored each other. I saw them together, it was beautiful. Won’t you at least consider rehiring her? You wouldn’t even have to see her—at least, not too much, only when you dropped Mandy off as Marla used to, and then pick her up again at night—”

A heart-rending wail coiled its way down the stairs and into the sitting room.

Jordan blew out a sigh. “She’s awake,” he said. “Let’s see what you make of her.”

They went upstairs and into her bedroom, which opened off the landing. The child was still crying.

Jordan felt a sense of panic as he and Lacey crossed to the crib. The situation was escalating out of his control. If this continued, he’d lose his job and then how would he support himself and his daughter? He’d made a helluva lot of money over the years but Marla had spent it as fast as he could earn it—sometimes even faster.

“Poor little mite.” Lacey bent over the crib rail, but Mandy wasn’t aware of her because her eyes were tightly shut. She was lying on her back, her cheeks wet and flushed scarlet as she wailed at the pitch of her voice.

Lacey waited till her niece stopped to catch her breath, and then she said, “Hi, sweetie, what’s the matter?”

Mandy froze, and then gulping back a choking sob, opened her eyes. When she saw Lacey, she started crying again, harder than ever, and rolling over she pressed her face to the pillow, so that her cries were muffled.

Jordan leaned over and lifted her up into his arms. Holding her close, he murmured soft words, and in a while, she stopped crying and just clung to him, shaking and giving an occasional gulping sob, her arms clamped around his neck.

Lacey ran a hand down her niece’s back, lightly. “Sweetie—”

Mandy jerked away from her caress. And tightening her grip around her father’s neck, started to sob again.

“I thought,” Lacey whispered to Jordan, “that you’d have managed to get her to sleep in her bed again by this time. She won’t give up the crib?”

He shook his head. “No way. It’s a lost cause. Look, you may as well go. I shouldn’t have had you come over, wasting your time. There’s nothing you can do, nothing anyone can do. This is one problem that doesn’t have a solution.”

Lacey opened her mouth to speak. But thought better of it when she saw the forbidding frown that warned her not to bring up Felicity Fairfax’s name again.

“Thanks for coming over,” he said. “I do appreciate it, Lace.”

“You’re welcome, big brother.”

She gave him a hug and walked over to the door. But when she reached it she paused. And just before she disappeared around the corner, she said, in a rush, over her shoulder, “There is a solution to your problem, Jordan, and you know very well what it is!”

Felicity wrapped her lavender and pink floral-patterned china teapot in bubble wrap and tucked it carefully into the packing box. Then straightening, she smiled when she noticed RJ batting a wad of tissue with his paw.

Some people said cats sensed when a move was afoot and became twitchy and unsettled. Not RJ. Felicity had been cleaning out her apartment and packing her belongings ever since she’d recently sold the street-level property and RJ was exactly as he always had been: playful and inquisitive and supreme monarch of all he surveyed.

Felicity moved over to the kitchen sink and washed her hands. “We’ll be leaving here for good, on Monday, RJ. What do you think of that?”

He ignored her.

“We’re going over to Vancouver Island, to stay with Mom until I find a place of my own. I might even be able to afford a little rancher, one with a tree in the garden because I know you love to climb!”

Oblivious to the prospect, RJ leaped up into the air before pouncing down on the scrap of paper as if it were a mouse.

“Moving to the island will be for the best.” Felicity tried to smile, but catching sight of her pale taut features in the chrome surface of the kettle she gave up the attempt. She really had nothing to smile about anyway. But surely, once she was back on the island with her family for support, she would eventually find joy in her life again?

But no matter how hard she tried to convince herself, she knew in her heart she would never get over losing Mandy.

RJ had grown bored with his paper, and scampering over to Felicity, wound his fluffy silver-white body sinuously around her right ankle.

She dipped down and picked him up. As he clutched her knit top, she stroked him, wondering if she’d ever felt quite so desolate. “It’s not as if I’m likely to ever have a baby of my own, RJ,” she murmured. “I’m twenty-seven, time’s running out, and still no sign of Mr. Right.”

If RJ could have spoken, she mused, he might have reminded her she'd had no fewer than three serious proposals of marriage over the years, but she'd turned them all down.

"Because I wasn't in love!" she protested. "I enjoyed their company, but not one of them made me feel the way I want to feel..."

RJ purred loudly, as if to ask, "And what way is that?"

"The way it is in romance novels." Felicity's voice was dreamy. "I want my heart to ache for him when we're apart, I want it to sing when we're together, I want to feel as if I'm on Cloud Nine when he takes me in his arms, I want to feel as if I'm drowning when he looks into my eyes. Wherever he is, that's where I want to be—"

The shrill ringing of the wall phone made her jump—and RJ leaped from her arms. Stepping around the packing boxes, she lifted the receiver. "Hello?"

She sensed someone at the other end of the line, but no one spoke.

"Hello?" she repeated. "Who is this?"

Still no reply.

"Who are you trying to—"

At the other end, the phone crashed down.

"Well!" She took the receiver from her ear and stared at it indignantly, "you might at least have said, 'Sorry, wrong number!'"

Jordan slumped back in his swivel chair and stared grimly at the phone on his desk. He'd been gearing up for days to make the call and when push came to shove, he couldn't go through with it. He could not, he would not, have anything to do with Denny Fairfax's sister—

"What happened? Did you make the call?"

He jerked up his head and saw his sister in the study doorway. "I thought you were upstairs with Mandy."

"She's asleep. Finally." Lacey came into the room. "So...did you make the call?"

"Yeah."

"You talked to Felicity?"

"No."

"Did you leave a message on her answering machine?"

"No."

"Why didn't you? Why didn't you just ask her to call you back when she gets home—"

"She's home."

"She's screening her calls? How can you know that?"

"No, she's not screening her calls. She picked up the phone."

"I don't underst—oh." Lacey slid her hip onto the edge of the desk, and sent him a disappointed reproachful look. "You didn't have the courage to—"

"It had nothing to do with courage, dammit." He pushed to his feet and planting his fists on his hips he glowered at his sister. "It had to do with—"

"Bitterness." Lacey gave a sympathetic nod. "Jordan, we've been over this ground before. OK, you feel bitter. But you're letting your emotions get in the way of what's best for your daughter. Mandy loved Felicity Fairfax, and it's my belief that she's missing her dreadfully and that's why she's so difficult to handle. She's letting you—and everybody else!—know that she hates the way things are now and she wants to get back to her old routine, where she felt safe, and loved, and happy. Jordan—"

Lacey's beeper went, and she exhaled a weary breath. "Honey, I have to go. I have a plane to catch tonight. Will you promise me you'll phone again...and talk to her this time? I do realize there's a possibility she may not even want to take on the job. She may blame Marla for what happened to her brother, and may feel as bitterly toward the Maxwell family as you do toward hers!"

"So what you're saying now is that I should call and plead with her to look after Mandy again and risk having her spit the suggestion back in my face?"

“That’s a chance you’ll have to take.”

He walked Lacey to the front door. The night was clear and bright, and from this location high on the slopes of West Vancouver, he could see the city lights spread out ahead like an endless field of stars...

Heaven upside down.

Lacey put her arms around him and gave him an encouraging hug. “Do it, Jordan. For Mandy’s sake.”

Felicity continued packing till well after midnight then decided to call a halt. After dragging the boxes she’d packed through to the utility room next to the kitchen, she let RJ outside for a quick prowl and then got ready for bed.

She’d just put on a T-shirt nightie, braided her hair, and slathered her face with white cleansing cream, when through the bathroom window she heard RJ yowling to get in.

She hurried to open the back door before he disturbed the neighbours.

“Come in, you handsome beast—” Her breath froze in her throat. RJ shot past her while she stood rooted to the spot and stared, startled out of her wits, at sight of a man standing on her doorstep. With the moon at his back, his face was in shadow, but his hair was dark and his eyes glittered as they fixed on her.

“If that’s the way,” he drawled, “that you welcome strangers in the night, I’ve come to the wrong place.”

What did he mean?

Uh-oh. Come in, you handsome beast.

Feeling like a fool, she nevertheless felt her fright dissipate. If he’d meant to harm her, surely he’d have grabbed her by now. Still, she stepped quickly back and pulled the door till it was almost closed, and peered at him through the narrow gap left.

“What can I do for you?” she asked. “Are you lost?”

His chuckle had a harsh quality. “No, I’m not lost,” he said. “At least, not in the way you mean.”

“What do you want then?”

“I want to talk to you.”

Felicity frowned. “Who are you?”

Impatiently, he looked around, and as he did, his profile was outlined against the bright backdrop of the moonlit sky. A sharply cut profile, with a swathe of dark hair falling over his brow, a strong nose, an uncompromising chin.

Fantastic bone structure. The kind that artists would adore. And women, too...

Felicity blinked the thought away.

“I’m going to close the door right now,” she said, “If you don’t tell me who you are and why you’re here.”

He turned and faced her. Just then, the people upstairs put on their bedroom light, and the yellow rays shone down on this stranger, illuminating him.

He was a handsome beast, Felicity thought. Handsome—and hostile. Oh, yes, no doubt about it...hostile.

“I’m Jordan Maxwell.” The words came out as jarringly as a jackhammer on granite. “And what I want to talk to you about is not something I wish to discuss out here.” He shoved his hands into his pockets and lanced her with his glittering gaze. “Aren’t you going to invite me in?”

He had expected someone who looked older. More solid. More mature.

Not this slip of a thing in an old T-shirt nightie, with her hair in a braid and her eyes filled with apprehension.

When she’d invited him in, it had been with an unsure gesture of her hand. The only words she’d spoken since had been to ask him if he wanted a drink.

He’d have liked a Scotch; she offered tea.

While the kettle was boiling, she'd left the room. When she came back, her face was scrubbed clean and she'd put on a gray cotton shortie robe and a pair of thongs.

So here they were, sitting at her kitchen table, drinking tea that tasted like cranberries.

And still she hadn't said a word.

She looked down at the table as she sipped her tea, so he had an opportunity to scrutinize her further. She didn't resemble her brother. She was fair, he'd been dark. She was slim as a reed, he'd been ruggedly built...and had looked mature. But he'd been anything but. He'd been irresponsible and wild and spendthrift. Just like Marla.

They had been a pair.

He felt anger rise inside him as it did so readily these days. But he controlled it.

"I'm here about Mandy." He shoved aside his half-empty mug. "I want to ask—" He broke off as his glance moved beyond her to another room. A utility room. He could see packing boxes there, all neatly taped up. At the same time, he belatedly realized the kitchen had an echoing feel to it. And the walls were bare, many of the shelves empty.

"Are you moving?" He stared at her.

"Yes. I'm going home."

"Where's home?"

"The island."

It was the last thing he'd expected. Oh, he'd known she might turn down his proposal outright and that even if she'd accepted it, she might haggle about salary, hours, any number of other things. What he hadn't once anticipated was that she might be leaving the Lower Mainland and going to live on Vancouver Island. "You've made your plans?"

"Everything's settled. I'm going to stay with my mother till I find a place of my own." She finished her tea, put down her mug. "Now...it's very late...and you still haven't told me why you're here."

"It doesn't matter. Not now." He rose from the table, put his mug on the counter. "I'll be on my way."

He was at the door, opening it, before she said, "Wait."

He turned. She was standing still, her face very pale.

"You owe me an explanation," she said. "You can't come here in the middle of the night and not tell me why."

He shrugged. "You won't be here, so...what I wanted to ask you...doesn't matter."

"It was something about Mandy, wasn't it? If there's anything I can help with, please let me know. I realize it must be difficult for you to look after her—she has her own little ways, and if it'll make it any easier for you, I'd be happy to sit down and go over them with you. For example, her hair gets tangled after it's washed, and to keep her from fussing when you brush it, you have to..."

Her voice trailed away when she saw him drag a weary hand over his nape.

"What is it?" She took an urgent step toward him. "What's wrong? You must tell me!"

"Mandy's miserable. I've never seen a kid so unhappy." Jordan wanted to go down on his knees and plead with her to stay but his pride wouldn't let him. Instead, he gave another shrug—a deliberately careless shrug. "I just thought—at least, my sister Lacey suggested it, I was dead against the idea—Lacey suggested it might help if I were to offer you your old job back. For Mandy's sake."

Her lips parted in a round, soundless. "Oh."

"But since you're leaving, I'll have to find someone else. It's no big deal." He turned his back on her and opened the door. "I shouldn't have bothered you."

He went out into the night and as he walked in the moonlight to his car, he felt as if the world and all its worries were pressing down on him from every side.

What the hell was he going to do now! He'd told Ms. Fairfax he'd find someone else.

There was no one else.

He kicked at a stone, and hissed out a word that would have made Lacey's hair stand on end.

Wrenching open the car door, he was about to throw himself inside, when from behind him he heard someone call, "Mr. Maxwell! Wait!"

And when he turned around, Felicity Fairfax was running breathlessly toward him.

## CHAPTER TWO

FELICITY thought her heart was going to burst.

What Jordan had said had stunned her. And then joy had exploded inside her, lending wings to her feet as she raced out of the apartment.

Now, catching up to him, she gasped, “Do you really mean it? You want me to look after Mandy again?”

“I don’t recall using exactly those words...but yes, that’s what I came here to ask.”

“In the middle of the night?”

“I was hoping you could start tomorrow. I’d planned—if you were available—to bring Mandy over here on my way to the office. But since you’re moving out of the area—”

“But I don’t have to move—I don’t want to move! If you could only wait till I find another place, there’s nothing in the world that I’d like more than to look after Mandy again.”

A car stopped, farther along the street. Its headlights illuminated Jordan’s face, and there was no mistaking his expression of relief. Then the vehicle turned into a driveway and once again his face was shadowed.

“I can’t wait,” he said. “I need you to start tomorrow.”

“But I have the movers coming on Tuesday. And I’ll have to find another place to live—”

“You’ll stay at Deerhaven.”

“At your house?”

“Right.” Impatience snapped in his voice. “You’ll come home with me now, and tomorrow you can change all your moving arrangements.”

Felicity felt her initial exultation give way to indignation. If he thought he could ride roughshod over her, he had another think coming.

“I have not,” she snapped back, “even finished packing yet!”

“You can do that tomorrow night after I get home from work.” Restlessly, he shoved his hands in his pockets, to a jangling of keys or coins. “Now, if that’s all settled, I’ll give you a couple of minutes to pack a case with your immediate needs, and then we can—”

“I have a cat.”

“Ah, yes.” His tone was mocking. “The handsome beast. I’m not a cat lover myself. I don’t suppose you’d consider giving him up for adoption?”

“I most certainly would not!”

“Then he’ll be part of the package. Just keep him out of my way, or I won’t answer for the consequences.” He leaned back against the car. “Right, I’ll wait here.” He made a big play of looking at his watch. “I’ll give you twenty minutes to get ready.”

Felicity took thirty.

Oh, she was ready in twenty, but she sat in her darkened bedroom for an extra ten, letting her new employer cool his elegant heels outside.

Jordan was well aware that Felicity Fairfax had saved his job for him. And he knew he should be grateful to her. But as he drove his car up the narrow drive leading to his house, all he could feel was resentment—resentment that Fate had put him in the position of being beholden to her.

It made his blood boil.

Had Fate not dealt him a bad enough hand already, throwing his wife and Denny Fairfax together at that charity “do” last Christmas? His wife had always been an outrageous flirt, but at least she’d known which side her very expensive bread was buttered on and so she’d never become involved with anyone outside of their marriage...until she’d met Denny Fairfax—

“Who’s looking after Mandy just now?” Felicity asked.

He pulled to a halt in front of the house. “My sister. I believe you’ve met her.”



“Lacey. Yes, she came to pick up Mandy several times. Couldn’t she look after Mandy tomorrow?”

“No.” He could have told her Lacey was flying off to California in the morning; he chose not to. Felicity Fairfax was going to be his employee and he wanted to keep their relationship as impersonal as possible. “Now let’s get inside.”

He carried her case in from the car, she carried a hold-all in one hand and the cat in a wire cage in the other.

As he opened the front door, Lacey came across the hall from the sitting room. Before she realized he wasn’t alone, she said, eagerly, “How did it go?”

He stood aside to let Felicity step past him, and she walked into the hallway, swinging the cage in front of her.

“Oh, Felicity!” Lacey beamed at her. “I’m so pleased!”

“Hi, Lacey.” Felicity returned the friendly smile. “It’s lovely to see you again.”

“And is that your case? You’re going to stay here? Oh, I guess so,” she chuckled, looking at the cat. “You’ve moved your family with you.” She crouched down and said, “Psst! RJ!” The cat pulled back, pushing its rear end against the cage. Lacey laughed, and straightened. “It’s so good of you to come, Felicity.”

Jordan cleared his throat. “Is Mandy still asleep?”

“Yes. She’s been a bit unsettled but she hasn’t wakened since you left.” Lacey gave Felicity another friendly smile. “I’m leaving now—I have an early start tomorrow, I’m off to California on a shoot.” She swept up her scarlet linen jacket from the deacon’s bench at the door, and swung it over her shoulders. “I’ll be able to leave with an easy mind, knowing Mandy’s in your hands.”

“Thank you, Lacey.”

“Bye, Jordan.” Lacey gave him her usual hug. “I’ll be in touch when I get back. Probably Friday.”

As the front door clicked shut behind her, Jordan said, “I’ll put you in the room next to Mandy’s so you’ll be able to hear her at night.”

They walked up the stairs and as they did, he saw her looking around.

“I can’t think why,” she said, slowly, “But I feel as if I’ve been here before. It all looks so familiar to me—those Mandori oil paintings, the cream marble floor in the hall, this lapis-blue carpet on the stairs and...this.” She ran a hand lightly over the Benducci grandfather clock in the curve of the stairwell. “Where have I seen this before? I know it’s one of a kind, made for some Italian count...”

“Do you read architectural magazines?”

“My friend Joanne sometimes passes her copy on to me.”

He ushered her on, up to the landing. “Then that is where you may have seen the interior of Deerhaven. There was a spread in—”

He paused as they reached the door to Mandy’s room. They’d spoken quietly, but they must have disturbed her because she’d started to fret. She sounded as if she might be waking up, though her mumbles and whimpers were drowsy.

Felicity had paused beside him. He heard her breathing quicken. “May I see her?” she asked.

“Best not go in. She’ll drop off again.”

But she wasn’t about to drop off again. He heard the creak of her mattress, and pictured her scrambling to her feet. He almost groaned aloud. Another sleepless night lay ahead, not that there was much of the night left.

Now she was crying, the cries becoming louder, more demanding, by the moment. This time, he did groan aloud. He loved his daughter more than anything on this earth, but so help him, if she didn’t let him get some sleep, he was liable to go take a very long walk off a very short pier—

Felicity touched his forearm lightly. “Why don’t you show me where I’m to sleep, and then get yourself off to bed. I’ll take care of Mandy.”

“No, I’ll need to show you the lie of the land. Downstairs, too, because I’ll be out of here before you’re up in the morning. I need to give you a tour—”

“I’ll find my own way around.” She swung the cat cage forward. “Is my room along this way?” She was bossing him. Taking charge.

Well, okay, but just for tonight. And just because he was bushed. Tomorrow, he’d show her who was head honcho around here.

Fighting a huge yawn, he opened the door next to Mandy’s.

“There you are,” he said. “It’s all yours. En suite included.” Mandy’s crying had taken on a shrill singsong note, which he knew from experience she could keep up for hours.

“Good night, Jordan.” Felicity walked past him and set down the cat’s cage.

He knew he should say ‘Thanks’ but the word stuck in his throat. He turned to go...and then turned back.

“What about the cat?” he asked curtly.

“RJ? Oh, he’ll be fine now till morning. Then I’ll take him for a walk outside—on a leash—to get him acclimatized to his new surroundings.” She dropped her holdall on the carpet. “In a few days, once I’m sure he’s not going to run away, I’ll give him free rein.”

Even as she was speaking, she’d tossed her shoulderbag on a chair and thrown her anorak onto the bed.

Flicking back her braid, she looked at him with a challenging sparkle in her eyes. “I’m ready,” she said. “You can hit the hay now, and I’ll see you...” She gave a light shrug, her gaze amused. “Whenever.”

She walked past him again and headed for Mandy’s room. After a brief hesitation, he turned on his heel and proceeded along the corridor in the other direction, to his own room, which was on the far side of hers.

Halfway there, he turned to glance back...

She had already disappeared from view.

Felicity tiptoed into the child’s bedroom.

Rose-pink light glowed from a night-bulb plugged into an outlet by the curtained window. In its gentle gleam she could see a single bed to her right. It was neatly made but unoccupied.

She flicked her glance around and was taken aback to see Mandy in her crib—the large white-painted designer crib Marla Maxwell had delivered to Felicity’s apartment when Mandy was six months old. It had remained at Felicity’s apartment until Jordan Maxwell had sent a van for it the day after his lawyer had notified Felicity her services would no longer be required. That was three months ago, right after the car accident that had changed all their lives.

Felicity had known that although Mandy had loved napping in her crib when she was at the apartment, she had long since graduated to sleeping in a bed when she was at home. So why on earth was the three-year-old not in that bed now? Certainly the crib was big enough for her because she was dainty as an elf, but surely using it was a backward step? She’d have to ask Jordan about it tomorrow.

Tonight, her aim was to comfort his daughter.

Mandy was standing up, hanging on to the crib rail, her head thrown back, tears spilling from her eyes. She was crying in a keening way that tore at Felicity’s heart.

Tears pricking her own eyes, she whispered, “Oh, my poor darling!” as she hurried across the carpeted floor.

She ached to scoop Mandy up in her arms, but she didn’t want to frighten her. Instead, she gently set her own hands atop the child’s small-boned fingers, which were wrapped tightly around the top rail, and in a soft and soothing voice, she started singing Mandy’s favorite lullaby.

The crying stopped.

Mandy froze. And for a long moment, the only sound was a sudden loud hiccup that echoed around the room.

Then slowly, very slowly, she lifted her head up from its lolled-back position, and stared, wary-eyed and open-mouthed, at Felicity.

Felicity smiled. And blinked back a tear.

"Hi, sweetheart," she whispered. "It's me."

Another hiccup. Then a shaky, teary voice that was filled with wonderment and disbelief. "Fizzy?"

Felicity's smile was watery. "Oh, yes, my darling, darling child. It's Fizzy. Come to look after you."

Now she leaned in and tenderly lifted the three-year-old in her arms, and cuddled her against her bosom. Mandy seemed lighter, even more fragile than she'd been last time she'd held her. Poor baby, she'd been through so much.

Feeling a surge of joy as the child's slender arms wound their way around her neck, Felicity sought the nearest chair—a comfortable armchair by the hearth—and sank down.

"Fizzy?"

"Yes, sweetheart." Felicity smoothed a hand over the tear-damp hair, and kissed the tear-damp forehead. "What is it, my little love?"

"I missed you." Mandy started to weep again, but this time in low-strained sobs even more heartbreaking than her loudest most desperate wails had been. "I missed you every day."

"And I missed you, too, precious. You'll never know just how much. But we'll always be together, from this moment on. You can count on it."

She felt the grip around her neck tighten as the child gulped out an anguished "Promise, Fizzy?"

"Yes, my darling." Felicity injected all the assurance she could into her words. "I promise."

If there was one thing he hated, it was the smell of burned toast.

It hailed Jordan as he strolled along the corridor to the kitchen next morning, and set his teeth on edge.

She wasn't to have known, of course, that toast always stuck in that old toaster; a person had to stand beside it and pop the toast up when it looked ready. Still, she shouldn't even have been downstairs, far less making toast! She should have had the savvy to stay upstairs till after he'd gone. She must know how he felt about her; and the last thing he'd want was to have to make conversation with Denny Fairfax's sister at the best of times...and first thing in the morning, before he'd even had his first mug of coffee, was certainly not that.

Surly, and prepared to be curt, though not to the point of rudeness, because dammit, he needed her—at least for the time being!—he shoved the kitchen door open.

And found the room empty.

Oh, she'd been down all right, and not too long ago. The smell of burned toast was even more cloying in here. The sweetish aroma of strawberry tea fought a losing battle for survival under it.

A black-and-red tea caddy, with a pattern of dragons, sat on the counter.

A note on the table read "Your Toaster's Broken."

And over by the back door, on the gleaming white-tiled floor, her cat was throwing up.

"Good morning, Jordan!" Bette welcomed him with a cheery smile. "Glad to see you back... and you're the first one in!" She ran an approving glance over him. "Looking like your old self, too. Nice shave, hair immaculate, no pink hairbrushes peeking out of your pocket! So I gather you've solved your problems with Mandy? You've found someone reliable? You're—"

"Yes, yes...and yes, to whatever your third question was going to be." Jordan ran frustrated fingers through his hair, making a mockery of Bette's "immaculate" comment. "Java, Bette. Please tell me you've made the coffee?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Yes, I have. But you don't usually have any here till midmorning. You always have coffee at home first thing in the morning to set you up—"

“Not this morning, I didn’t!” He was already halfway to the staff room. Over his shoulder, he threw back, “Not with that darned cat throwing up all over the place.”

The coffeepot was full. He took his mug from the cupboard—the one he’d got last Christmas from Mandy with her picture on it. According to the child, “Fizzy” had had it done at a photo shop, ‘specially for him.

He’d never met “Fizzy,” his daughter’s baby-sitter, but he’d appreciated the thought that had gone into the gift. He’d always meant to let her know, but time had slipped away from him...and then...it was too late. The very name “Fairfax” had become anathema to him, and “Fizzy” Fairfax was the last person in the world with whom he’d wanted to become involved in any way, shape or form—

“Cat?” Bette materialized at his side. “You can’t stand cats! What was a cat doing in your kitchen?”

Jordan filled his mug with coffee. “You don’t want to know.”

“But I do.”

Bette Winslow had been married four times, and had, she often said, “Seen it all.” In her early fifties, she had the kind of personality that invited confidences—and all the agents knew that Bette in Reception was closer than a clam.

Jordan was a private person and normally he didn’t talk to outsiders about his personal problems. Today, however, frustration had him wanting to tell someone about his impossible situation. And if anyone would listen and show him sympathy, it would surely be Bette.

He added milk to his coffee, and drank half of the teeming mug in one long swallow.

Only then did he set the mug on the table, fold his arms over his chest, and say, “It’s Felicity Fairfax’s cat.”

Like everyone else in the office, Bette had learned that his wife and Denny Fairfax had been having an ongoing affair during the several months before Denny had smashed up his sports car, killing Marla in the process and sending himself into a coma. And she must know how he would feel about any of the Fairfaxes.

“So,” she said, “you’ve rehired Felicity Fairfax to baby-sit Mandy, and she’s going to live in.”

Bette, he mused, never needed to have things spelled out. “Right,” he said.

“A wise decision.”

“I had no other choice. My hours are erratic, you know I work late more often than not, and I couldn’t go leaving Mandy with her while I’m closing some late-night sale or—”

“I meant it was a wise decision to rehire Felicity Fairfax. I don’t know her, but my cousin Joanne does, and she has only the nicest things to say about her.”

“You missed my point, Bette. It wasn’t a so-called ‘wise decision’ to rehire the woman. A Fairfax is the last person I’d have hired, if I’d had a choice. I hadn’t.”

“You’re not telling me, Jordan Maxwell, that you’re tarring the sister with the same brush you were quite justified in tarring her brother with!” Censure tinged Bette’s voice. “For heaven’s sake, Jordan, the girl—”

“She’s not a girl!” He felt like a schoolboy put out after being reprimanded by a favorite teacher. “She’s a woman, and one I don’t want to be around.” He sounded, now, like a sulky schoolboy, and that irritated him.

“You have to put Mandy first. She’s the one who’s important here...not you. The poor child lost not only her mother but the baby-sitter she loved. I know she adores you but she needs a mother—or at least, a female to mother her. I don’t think you’d have had quite so serious a problem with her if she’d lost just one care-giver—in that case, she’d have been able to turn to the other for comfort.”

“I know that,” he growled. “You don’t have to...” His voice trailed away as a thought occurred to him.

“Then what are you going to do, Jordan? I don’t see a way out. You’re determined to do what’s best for Mandy, but you’re just as determined to dislike this woman. Children sense conflict. It’s the last thing Mandy needs.”

“Don’t worry.” Jordan put his hand in the small of Bette’s back and ushered her toward the door. “What you said just now...you’ve given me an idea.” Smiling, he escorted her through to the reception area. “Thanks to you, I believe I see a way out of my dilemma.”

Felicity looked down at her sleeping charge and wondered if she’d ever felt happier. She’d told Joanne the truth when she’d said she couldn’t have loved Mandy more if she were her own child. Being here, caring for her again, was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her.

Her heart went all mushy now as she gazed upon the little girl, who looked adorable in sleep. Her bubbly blond curls were tousled, her cheeks were flushed to the same pink as her nightie, and her rosebud mouth pouted, as if she were blowing bubbles in her dreams.

She looked like a fairy...but at the thought, Felicity frowned, wondering again why Jordan still put her to bed in her crib. She reminded herself to ask him about it.

In the meantime, she was looking forward to spending the day with Mandy and wished she would wake up!

As if the child had read her mind, she opened her eyes and when she saw Felicity, her face split in a smile.

She scrambled to her feet. “Fizzy! You’re still here!”

“Of course I’m here, darling. Didn’t I tell you I always would be?”

“Let me out! Out, out, out!”

Laughing, Felicity unhooked the side of the crib and slid it down. Then taking both Mandy’s hands, she encouraged the child to jump, and swung her down, her narrow feet landing with a light thump on the carpet.

“I’ve been waiting for you to waken,” Felicity said, “so we can start our first day here together.”

Ten minutes later, they were on their way downstairs, with Mandy wearing the yellow T-shirt and shorts she’d chosen from her wardrobe, with a pair of yellow sandals.

“After breakfast,” Felicity said, “We’ll go out for a walk. But before we go out, would you like to show me over the whole house? It’s lovely, but so big. I’m sure to get lost if you don’t show me where everything is.”

“And I’ll show you outside, too.” Mandy skipped along happily. “There’s a garden, and a greenhouse, and a hot tub. Daddy sometimes uses the hot tub, but only in the winter. He says it’s for grown-ups, to relax after a hard day. Do you have hard days, Fizzy?”

She’d had some very hard days over the last three months, but now, thanks to whichever angel was sitting on her shoulder, life was going to be wonderful.

“From today on,” she said, “for me...and for you, Mandy dear...the hard days are over.”

Jordan didn’t get home till after seven.

Silence met him as he walked into the foyer. He stood and listened. Not a sound...except for the steady tick-tock of the grandfather clock in the stairwell—a clock he personally thought looked hideous. The price had also been hideous, but Marla had wanted it so Marla had bought it.

He pushed the memory away.

With his linen jacket slung over his arm, he tugged the knot of his tie loose and made for the stairs. Ascending with barely a sound, he reflected that it was a very long time since he’d sensed peace in the place.

And it was peace he needed.

First day back on the job, he’d scrambled to catch up—contacting clients, checking new listings, dealing with an irate couple whose newly purchased condo had sprung a leak just days after they took possession...

He would shower, go down to the kitchen and rustle up a sandwich. And he'd take it—along with a beer—to the lounge, where he'd put up his feet and read the newspaper. Thank the Lord the Fairfax woman was keeping out of his way. He saw, when he reached the landing, that her bedroom door was closed. With a bit of luck, he mused, she was in there and would stay there.

The cat, he hoped, was in there, too.

Mandy's door was half open, the heavy curtains closed, the night-light on.

He moved the door gently in, and tiptoed to the crib.

She was sound asleep; he could hear her soft breathing.

He leaned over and with a tender hand, touched her fine curly hair.

"Good night, princess," he whispered. "Daddy loves you, and things are going to be much better from now on. Just don't go getting too attached to your precious Fizzy again, because I'm going to ease her out of here as soon as I can find someone else to look after you. But don't worry, honey, I'll do it in such a way you'll never even notice she's gone."

He stood there a while longer, thinking, listening to her breathe, mulling over his plan.

And then, after blowing her one last little kiss, he turned on his heel and walked out of the room.

"What an absolute snake!"

Shooting up to a sitting position in Mandy's single bed, Felicity hissed out the words as she stared, outraged, at his back and the closing door.

Because Mandy hadn't wanted her to leave after she'd been put down in her crib for the night, Felicity had offered to stay with her till she slept, and had lain on the bed.

But she had fallen asleep herself.

She'd wakened when she'd sensed someone in the room. She'd been drowsy at first, but had come fully awake when she'd heard Jordan Maxwell warn his sleeping daughter not to get too attached to her "precious Fizzy again"—because he was planning to get rid of her.

Well, she wasn't about to be got rid of.

And forewarned was forearmed.

But what could he have in store for her?

What was his devious plan?

Whatever it was, she'd better get out of Mandy's room right now in case he came back.

She snuck across the room, peeked out to ensure the coast was clear, and then dashed to her own room.

Once she closed the door, she could hear the sound of water running nearby. His bedroom must be next to hers. Had he just come home? If so, he was probably taking a shower before going down for his evening meal.

She waited, with her ears pricked, and a short while later she heard his bedroom door open. Taking in a deep breath, she opened her own door and casually stepped out.

She almost bumped into him.

"Oh!" She gave him a fake-surprised smile. "You're home! Your dinner's in the oven, Jordan. Shepherd's pie, I hope you like it. I'll come down with you, and tell you all about the lovely day Mandy and I have had."

## CHAPTER THREE

FELICITY FAIRFAX was the last person he wanted to chat to...if he happened to be in a chatty mood, which he most definitely was not!

But of course he did want to know how Mandy had been.

"Fine." His tone was gruff, his manner abrupt as he took off across the landing...with her at his heels. "You can talk while I make myself a snack."

"I said I'd made shepherd's—"

"I don't want you cooking for me." He bounded down the stairs...but she stuck to him like a shadow. "I'm used to looking after myself."

"Mandy says you fired your housekeeper after your—"

"I've never liked strangers around the place." There, that should knock some of the pep out of her. "When I come home from the office, the last thing I want is to have to make small talk with—"

"That's you. But what about Mandy? Who's been making her meals for the past three months?"

"I have." He leaped down the last few steps in one bound.

She scuttled down after him. "You can cook?"

His heels clicked on the marble foyer as he crossed to the kitchen corridor. The lighter, dainty click of her sandals irritated him. "Sufficiently well to keep us from starving."

He slid the kitchen door open and stood back to let her enter first. As he followed, he was so taken up with the delicious savoury aroma in the air, he almost tripped over the cat which suddenly scooted out from under the table.

"Sorry," she said. And obviously sensing his displeasure, added, "I'll pop him down to the laundry room."

"Can't you just put the beast outside?"

"He needs a few days to get his bearings, take over his new territory, before I can give him that freedom. He'd probably rocket away and then not be able to find his way back...and it would break my heart to lose him."

Break her heart to lose a cat? What kind of a heart did the woman have, that it could be broken so easily!

She went out into the corridor with the mewling animal. He heard her open the door to the basement, then heard her clattering down the basement's wooden stairs.

He turned to the fridge.

The mouth-watering aroma drifting from the oven seemed to intensify by the moment. Trying to ignore it, he poked about in the fridge and took out a head of lettuce, a large tomato, a wedge of cheddar cheese, and a jar of mayonnaise, and set them on the counter along with a bottle of beer.

Then he reached into the bread bin for the loaf he'd bought at the deli two days ago...and came up with nothing.

What the—

"Are you looking for bread?" The tinkling voice came from behind him. "Mandy loves bread pudding so I—"

He turned to face her. "So you...?"

"I made some. And I'm afraid I used up the last of your loaf. I'd noticed the freezer in the basement, and I just assumed you'd have more loaves down there, but..." She spread out her hands in a "How was I to know?" gesture. "I can pick up some bread and rolls when I go out tonight."

"You're going out?"

"I have to finish my packing," she reminded him. "The movers will be coming in tomorrow."

"How are you going to get over there? I can't drive you, can't leave Mandy—"

"A friend's coming to pick me up, after I call."

“Why don’t you phone her now?”

“It’s a him, not a her. OK, I’ll do that. He lives in the area so he’ll be here in a few minutes, I’ll just have time to fill you in on Mandy’s day.” She whirled around, made for the wall phone and picked up the handset.

She made the arrangements, and finished by saying, “Come to the back door, Hugh. I’ll be in the kitchen.”

After putting the phone down, she took the shepherd’s pie from the oven, and set the steaming dish on the island. Next she brought out a smaller casserole. Removing its lid, she revealed piping-hot, chunky-cut carrots and green peas.

Before he could say, “Thanks, but I’ll just make myself a salad,” she spoke first.

“Mandy is so sweet!” She scooped a generous helping of shepherd’s pie onto a plate. “She gave me a tour of the house and grounds.” Adding vegetables to the plate, she prattled on about how much they’d both enjoyed their day, as she set the plate in front of him. “Now what else do you need? Oh, salt and pepper—”

“Miss Fairfax, you and I have to talk. I—”

“Call me Felicity.” She gestured toward the table. “Don’t stand there, sit down and eat your dinner. Here,” she commandeered his bottle of beer, “let me.”

Before he could stop her, she’d taken an opener from the cutlery drawer and levered off the cap. Then she set the bottle and a dimpled glass beer mug on the table.

“There,” she said. “I think that’s everything. Sorry there aren’t any buns or bread. As I said, I’ll get some when I’m out.”

Jordan felt as if he were being rolled over by a runaway train—and he snatched at something to stop it in its tracks. “You were holding that cat—” he looked at her accusingly “—just before you dished up my food!”

“I washed my hands in the laundry room. For heaven’s sake, Jordan, sit down and try not to be so difficult. Since I’m going to be head cook and bottle washer from now on, you’d better get used to—”

“I didn’t hire you as a cook!” He scowled at her. “You’re here to look after Mandy. Period. Don’t include me in your plans to play house!”

“I’m not here to play house.” Exasperation threaded her voice. “This is for real, Jordan. I want to make Mandy happy, and for that, the child needs a warm, secure and loving home. I need to be the next best thing to a mommy to her. And that means doing ‘mommy’ things, like cooking and cleaning and—”

“I don’t need a cook/housekeeper! I can cook for myself, and I hire an excellent cleaning company to—”

“But I don’t want to be your—quote—cook/housekeeper. I know I can never be Mandy’s mother, but I don’t want her to think of me as a servant, either. I want her to experience the things mothers and daughters do together—like dusting, and tidying cupboards, and making cookies, and arranging flowers, and—”

“Point taken.” His own voice sounded dour, churlish. “So,” he said grudgingly after a few moments, “am I to understand you want me to cancel the cleaning company? You’ll do everything yourself?”

“Yes.” She sighed. “Look, I know you don’t like me—and to be truthful, I don’t know yet how I feel about you. So far,” her tone was dry, “I have to admit I’m not favorably impressed. But for Mandy’s sake, we must agree to live amicably. She’s had enough stress in her young life without having to experience conflict between the two people who mean most to her—”

She paused as someone knocked on the outside door.

“Excuse me,” she said. “That’ll be Hugh.” Crossing the kitchen, she unlocked the door and opened it.



On the stoop stood a very tall young man wearing a baseball cap, a striped sports shirt, and peacock blue Bermuda shorts. His grin was as wide as his shoulders.

"Hey, Fliss," he said. "You ready?"

"Come in," she said. "Meet my employer. I just have to pop upstairs and get my bag." She turned to Jordan. "This is Hugh Andrews, Jordan, an old friend. Hugh, this is Jordan Maxwell. I'll be right back..."

Jordan nodded curtly.

"Don't let me interrupt you," Hugh said, waving a hand towards the shepherd's pie. "Don't let your dinner get cold. Sit down, man."

"It'll wait." Jordan shoved his hands into his pockets. "So..." he searched for something to say "...you've known Ms. Fairfax for some years?"

"I knew her brother first, actually. He was the one who introduced us."

"Denny." The name grated on Jordan's ears. It seemed as if he was fated to meet people connected to—

"No, not Denny. He was older. It was the other brother, the younger one. Felicity's twin."

"She has a twin?" Good Lord, another Fairfax.

"Had." Hugh's face sobered. "Todd. He was a fisherman—died two years ago when his boat capsized in a storm."

As Jordan took this in, he heard steps approaching.

"Don't say anything about it," Hugh murmured quickly. "It devastated Fliss. She never talks about it."

When Felicity came into the kitchen, Jordan found himself looking at her in a new light. Looking at her properly, for the first time.

"I don't know when I'll be back," she said. "Could you give me a house key?"

All he'd seen previously, because he'd never wanted to let his eyes linger on her longer than absolutely necessary, was that she had a long blond braid, a generous mouth and wide-set gray eyes. Now, as he met those rather lovely gray eyes, he saw a hint of sadness there, which was in direct contradiction to her pleasant, questioning smile.

"Jordan?" She waved a hand before him. "Do you have a spare key?"

"Sure." He crossed to the desk under the wall phone and opening a drawer, fumbled around till he found the key he was looking for. He walked over to her. "There you are."

She held out a hand, and he saw a fretwork of faint lines on the palm. He also saw delicate blue veins at her wrist. How fragile she was. That surprised him, because although she was slim and slightly built, he had not thought of her as "fragile." She gave off such an aura of determination and self-confidence and energy.

He dropped the key onto her palm and she closed slender fingers around it. Her nails were neatly manicured, and buffed to a shine. Pretty hands. Feminine.

She smelled of wildflowers and citrus, romantic and energetic, a tantalizing and intriguing blend.

"When you've finished your shepherd's pie," she said, "you'll find some bread pudding in the oven."

With that, she followed Hugh outside, leaving him feeling confused and off balance, and unable to pin down the unsettling new emotions she'd stirred up inside him.

Felicity didn't get back to Deerhaven till almost two in the morning, but though sleepy and bone-tired, when Hugh dropped her off she had that satisfied feeling of a job well done.

"Thanks, Hugh, I owe you," she told him through his open window of his van. "I do appreciate all your help!"

"No problem." He looked up at the house. "Lights are all out."

Felicity yawned. "I'll have to be quiet."

“Have you got the bread and buns?”

“Right here.”

“Don’t forget to set your alarm!”

“It’s going to be a short night!”

She watched him leave, and then went around to the back door.

Once inside, she put on the kitchen light, and after putting the bakeries away, noticed a note on the island. Expecting that Jordan might have written a few words to thank her for making dinner, she flicked it up and with a feeling of anticipation, she read what he’d written:

Don’t forget to let that \*&%\$\* cat out. He’s been yowling like a banshee all night.

Ungrateful wretch! she muttered.

And screwing the paper into a hard little ball, she flung it, in a fit of pique, across the room.

Jordan cautiously opened the kitchen door just before seven next morning, half expecting to see the cat throwing up again. But there was no sign of him.

The only thing on the kitchen floor was a wad of paper.

He picked it up, unrolled it.

And saw the note he’d written the night before.

Remorse stabbed him. She must have been exhausted when she got back—he’d heard the car arrive, around two o’clock. She’d have come into the kitchen, feet dragging, glad to be home...only to be greeted by his bad-tempered complaint.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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