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Wife To A Stranger

DAPHNE CLAIR

Daphne Clair

Wife To A Stranger

«HarperCollins»

Clair D.

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Stranger in her bed Capri recognized the handsome man in front of her as her husband. She knew his name was Rolfe, but other than that he was a complete stranger to her. In fact, she could remember nothing at all about her life, prior to waking up in the hospital bed. Perhaps all she needed was to get home to New Zealand and her memory would return. It didn't, despite some shocking revelations about herself and her marriage.One thing she did know: whatever their marital problems might have been, the chemistry between them was as strong as ever. But how could she sleep with a man she barely knew - even if he was her husband?

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“You don’t want to take this further?”

She stared numbly at him, hectic color burning her cheeks. “N-not now,” she said.

“What are you afraid of? It’s not like you.”

Capri tried to smile, but her lips trembled. “Isn’t it? I wouldn’t know.”

“You don’t remember ever making love?”

“No,” she admitted. “I suppose that seems silly, when you…”

Her voice trailed off. He knew her intimately, had for more than two years.

“No…it’s not silly,” Rolfe said. “Kind of bizarre, but I find it rather intriguing.”

DAPHNE CLAIR lives in subtropical New Zealand, with her Dutch-born husband. They have five children. At eight years old she embarked on her first novel, about taming a tiger. This epic never reached a publisher, but metamorphosed male tigers still prowl the pages of her romances. She has won literary prizes for short stories and nonfiction, and has also published poetry. As Laurey Bright she writes for Silhouette. Daphne welcomes letters to Box 18240, Glen Innes, Auckland, Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

Wife To A Stranger
Daphne Clair

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CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS a small room. The man standing at the window with his back to her looked big by contrast. His broad shoulders hunched slightly under a crumpled white linen shirt, and his hands were thrust into the pockets of navy trousers, tautening the fabric over lean hips.

From the bed she could see only a washed-denim sky, the pale, peeling trunk of a gum tree, and a dusting of opaque clouds between the green cotton curtains. She wondered what he was looking at.

Pulling her gaze from him, she examined the room. There was a hard-looking tan leather chair, with a burgundy tie draped carelessly over its back as though the man had discarded it there some time ago. On the plain cream wall opposite the bed hung a cheap print of an English country cottage. A white-painted locker by her bed held a water jug and a glass.

It was a hospital room.

Perhaps she made some faint sound, or he heard a stirring of the bedclothes. The man turned, starkly silhouetted against the light from outside.

'Capri,' he said, his voice deep and unsurprised. 'So you decided to come back.'

'Back?'

Her voice sounded strange, scarcely more than an uncertain whisper in the quiet of the room.

Taking his hands from his pockets, the man crossed the narrow space to the bed. 'To the land of the living. You've been out for some time.'

'Out'

His quickly checked movement might have denoted impatience. 'Unconscious. Do you remember what happened to you?'

She started to shake her head, winced. 'No.'

He leaned forward a little—brown, enigmatic eyes raking her face, a strand of nearly-black hair falling onto his forehead. 'I'll call a nurse.'

He reached across her, finding the electric signal button with a decisive thumb. A whiff of his masculine scent entered her nostrils, a mixture of warmth, soap, sweat and shirting. She saw he hadn't shaved lately; his cheeks were fuzzed with shadowy growth.

One hand on the metal bed frame behind her, he paused, his face only inches from hers, his nostrils flaring as if he in turn had been caught by her scent. She looked into his eyes, dark and lustrous, with gold flecks about the irises. His mouth, firm and hard despite the generously chiselled curve of the lower lip, momentarily quirked at one corner, and then he withdrew, standing tall and aloof and thrusting his hands back into his pockets.

She took an unsteady breath, and her parched lips began to frame a question, but then a woman in a white uniform came hurrying on rubber soles, and made for the bedside. 'Well, well. So you've finally woken up!'

The nurse's fingers closed about her wrist, found the pulse. 'How are you feeling?'

'Not…so good.'

The man moved again, very slightly. The nurse studied her watch as she counted, then placed the hand she held back on the coverlet. 'You've been knocked about a bit. But we'll soon have you right as rain.'

'Knocked about—how?'

The woman studied her with a shrewd professional gaze. 'You don't remember?'

This time she was careful not to shake her head, but before she could get the words out the question was answered for her in a curt masculine voice. 'She doesn't. And I think she has a headache.'

The nurse's eyes lifted to him, then returned to her patient. 'You had a nasty whack on the head,' she explained cheerfully. 'Plus bruising and mild hypothermia. How bad is the headache?'

'It only hurts when I move.' She felt languid, every word an effort.

‘Can you tell me your name?’

‘My name?’ She blinked.

‘Her name’s Capri Helene Massey.’ He was definitely impatient this time. ‘If you people hadn’t known it, you wouldn’t have been able to get hold of me.’

The nurse glanced up. ‘It’s standard practice to check after a concussion, Mr Massey,’ she said calmly. ‘Just in case there’s been some damage.’

‘Sorry. I’m not familiar with medical procedure.’ After the curt apology he retreated again to the window.

‘When were you born?’ The nurse returned to her inquisition.

Automatically she recited her birth-date.

‘Good. And do you know what year this is?’

Again the answer was easy, requiring no thought.

‘Do you remember your present address?’

Panic gripped her, making her temples cold, her breathing irregular. ‘I…I’m not sure…’

The nurse looked across her, raising her brows at the silent man who now came back to the bed. He said, ‘She’s been moving about lately.’

The nurse patted her hand. ‘You might have a bit of a memory gap—it’s not unusual. Do you remember this gentleman here?’ Smiling up at him.

‘Well, Capri?’ he said when she didn’t answer immediately. His voice held irony. ‘Have you forgotten me?’

‘You’re Rolfe,’ she said clearly, positively. ‘Rolfe Massey.’

He nodded. ‘Your husband.’ He didn’t smile, although he was looking at her.

The nurse said encouragingly, ‘You recognise him. Well, that’s all right.’

He lifted his head. ‘Satisfied?’

The woman beamed at him. ‘You’ll be relieved. The doctor will check her over again, though, and tell you if we need to keep her for another day or two.’

‘Right. Thanks.’ He nodded dismissively, and after a moment’s hesitation the nurse left.

Rolfe seemed to be studying the pattern on the bedcover. When he raised his eyes again they appeared almost black. ‘I suppose it wasn’t for lack of trying,’ he said.

‘What?’ She stared at him. ‘I’m sorry?’

His gaze narrowed, and his head jerked sharply as if he’d sensed something unexpected in the air, but the movement was quickly checked. ‘It doesn’t matter,’ he said. ‘You’re not well enough for this discussion.’ There was a short pause, and then he said on an oddly intense note, ‘Shall I take you home, Capri? Is that what you’d like?’

Home. The word conjured up warmth, comfort—love. ‘Of course,’ she said, and saw a startling flare of some potent, primitive emotion in his eyes. ‘As soon as the doctor says it’s all right.’ She had the feeling that if she’d said, *Yes—now,* he’d have picked her up and bundled her off with him then and there.

As it was, he took a breath that lifted the fabric of his shirt for seconds before he audibly released it. ‘Of course,’ he echoed her. ‘I meant…when they’ve cleared you.’

Her eyelids drooped, and he said, ‘You look tired… darling. Why don’t you go to sleep?’

She should be asking questions, like what had happened to her, and what her last address had been, and why…why…

Thinking was too difficult. She drifted, thought she felt her hand taken in a large, warm one, and another kind of warmth, bristly and underlaid with hard bone, briefly rubbed against the back of it. Then she slept.

When she woke Rolfe was gone. A different nurse took her pulse, read her blood pressure, poked a thermometer into her mouth, and later other people bustled about her with charts and

stethoscopes, asked how she felt, and gently prodded and kneaded her body, which was tender with bruises.

They told her that New South Wales had been lashed by spring storms, and a landslip caused by heavy rain had derailed a train, sending several carriages sliding into the Hunter River. She'd been lucky. Some of the other passengers were on the critical list in this hospital, the nearest to the crash site, while a few needing specialist care had been flown to Sydney. She'd had a brain X-ray on admission, and later a CT scan because she had been taking her time to come round, but they had shown no cause for concern.

'Anything worrying you?' someone asked at last.

She looked at him gratefully. 'The nurse said…I might have memory gaps.'

The doctor nodded. 'That's right. You don't remember the accident?'

'It's not only the accident I don't remember.'

'Oh?' He sounded almost casual. 'How much have you lost?'

It was a relief to confide in someone. 'I think…an awful lot.'

Another doctor came, shone lights in her eyes, and asked more questions, some of them general, others personal. At the end of it all he assured her again that there was no sign of physical damage, suggested she rest and try not to worry, and departed looking thoughtful.

She begged to be allowed to shower, and a nurse was detailed to monitor her.

'Not much of an end to your holiday,' the woman commented, 'getting involved in that crash.'

'No.' She took the soap the nurse handed her and stepped into the blessed warmth of the shower.

Afterwards, her wet hair wrapped in a towel, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the bathroom basin and was reassured at the familiarity of jade-green eyes fringed by thick, dark lashes, and a slightly long but straight nose in an oval face. Her skin was too pale and her lips bloodless and cracked, but apart from that she looked herself.

Shivering despite the steamy fug of the bathroom, she wished she felt it.

Just showering had exhausted her, and she was too listless to read the magazines a nurse found for her, instead staring out the window at a view of low tawny hills and, nearer, the gum tree with its narrow leaves twisting in the yellow sunlight.

Rolfe returned bearing roses and carnations in sparkling florist's wrap, and a parcel that he told her was toiletries he'd been advised by the nursing staff to buy for her. He had shaved and changed into jeans and a casual shirt.

The bouquet filled her arms, and perhaps that was why he didn't kiss her. His glance was sharply enquiring. 'How are you feeling?'

She inhaled the scent of the flowers. 'The headache's gone.'

'Good.' Walking round to take the tan chair between the bed and the window, he sat down and leaned forward, his clasped hands between spread knees, but then shifted back, coolly surveying her. 'You still look… fragile.'

She gave him a cautious smile. 'That's how I feel. What about you?'

He arched a black brow at her. 'Me?'

'You weren't with me in the train?'

'No.'

His face looked hollowed about the freshly shaved cheeks, his eyes tired, and he had a taut air of strain, as if he couldn't relax.

She said, 'I suppose I gave you a fright, getting hurt, and then…you've been waiting for me to wake up. Since yesterday, they said.'

He shrugged absently. 'I'm just glad you did wake. They told me you would, but…'

'So am I,' she said softly, 'glad.' She removed one hand from the flowers and stretched it towards him. 'Thank you for being with me.'

Rolfe hesitated before placing his fingers over hers, holding them. His gaze stayed on their linked hands. 'I couldn't not come,' he said.

'Of course. You're my husband.'

He looked up then, his eyes scanning her face. She moved to stretch her other hand to him, somehow needing that warm personal contact, and the flowers slipped, rolling down to the side of the bed.

Rolfe rescued them and stood up, releasing her. 'I'll see if I can rustle up a vase or something,' he promised, and left the room.

He returned with a big glass vase that he filled with water from the room basin, plunging the bouquet straight into it.

'They're lovely,' she said. 'Thank you.'

He looked down at her and his hand lifted almost as though he couldn't help it, his knuckles lightly brushing her cheek as he fingered her hair that had dried to a thick honey-brown bob with lighter streaks, the ends just level with her earlobes. 'Suits you,' he murmured.

She reached up to clasp his hand, but already he had withdrawn it.

'They said after you woke that if there are no obvious problems you may be discharged tomorrow,' he said. 'The accident has stretched the hospital's resources. Do you want me to book us into a hotel for a day or two, or shall we fly straight back to New Zealand?'

'New Zealand?'

'You did say you wanted to come home.' His voice had turned gravelly. 'Or have you changed your mind?'

'I haven't changed my mind.' The reply was automatic. Her heart thudded uncomfortably. She turned her head, staring out of the window, where darkness was creeping over the hills.

He said, 'You do know you're in Australia, don't you?'

'Of course I do.' She looked back at him.

'So where were you staying?'

She opened her mouth to reply, then paused. Finally she said, 'You must know that.'

He was gazing at her curiously. 'You don't remember.'

'No.'

'Do you remember anything that's happened to you in the past two months?'

'No…I don't.' She moistened her lips and said huskily, 'I seem to have forgotten…most of my life.'

Rolfe stared down at her, his eyes going nearly black. 'You knew me when you woke.'

Rolfe. She had known him, known his name. Just as she had known her birth-date without having to think. It had been reassuring, that familiarity. 'Yes, I recognised you.'

'How much do you remember about…us? About our life together?'

She looked away, running her tongue across her lips. 'I knew your face,' she confessed finally. 'Your name. That's all.'

'That's all?' Rolfe repeated.

She said helplessly, 'I know that must be a shock.'

He gazed down at her with frowning speculation. 'And now?' he enquired. 'Has anything more come to mind?'

'No.'

This time there was a lengthy silence, as if he had trouble taking that in. 'If you don't remember anything about me,' he said slowly at last, 'anything about our marriage, then for all intents and purposes I'm a stranger to you.'

'Yes,' she agreed, her hands twisting painfully together on the bedcover. 'Yes, you are. A total stranger.'

CHAPTER TWO

'WHAT exactly do you remember?' Rolfe demanded.

She swallowed. 'Not much. I remember things when I'm asked directly, or when something reminds me…'

His mouth compressed and his cheeks grew taut. 'Do the doctors know this?'

'They say it's probably temporary. And I feel fine, really…just a bit tired.'

Rolfe regarded her broodingly. 'I'll talk to them.'

'They've already examined me thoroughly. I just need to be…home.' In familiar surroundings where she was safe and loved. Then surely this surreal feeling of existing in a vacuum would be dispelled. All she needed was the right trigger to fill the inexplicable void.

'Still…' Rolfe looked at a loss. That probably didn't happen to him often. He had the air of a man who knew his way around his world. 'I'll be back,' he said abruptly, swung round and left the room.

When he came back she'd been dozing. He leaned down to kiss her cheek, said he'd leave her to sleep and was gone.

Throughout the night she was dimly aware of being regularly checked on, and in the morning she was examined by a neurologist, then sent for another scan and more tests because Rolfe, she was told, had insisted.

Late in the day the neurologist told her, 'The good news is, all the tests have come up negative. A knock on the head can do strange things to people, but the amnesia is probably temporary. Your husband says you want to go home, back to New Zealand?'

'Um…yes…' Aware that she sounded less than positive, she said more firmly, 'Yes, I do.'

He smiled. 'Of course.'

She repeated her theory that familiar surroundings would surely solve the puzzling problem of her memory.

'You're probably right,' he agreed. 'Take it easy for a little while, and don't try to force anything. I'll give you a letter for your own doctor. If things don't start coming back to you spontaneously pretty soon, you'd better see someone.'

When she asked about her belongings, the nurse said, 'We gave your shoulder bag to your husband for safety. Your passport and money are there, but your makeup is in the locker. Things were a bit wet but there didn't seem to be much damage. The police sent along a box of passengers' effects soon after you came in, stuff that had been found in the wreckage, and we identified you from your passport photo.'

Next day Rolfe brought in a stack of wrapped parcels and shopping bags, put them on the bed and began opening them. 'They tell me if I look after you I can take you home. I bought three bras —I hope one of them fits.'

'I don't have any clothes?' she queried.

'The ones you were wearing were ruined. Even the undies were pretty bedraggled, and one bra strap was broken. You may have had a suitcase but it hasn't been found. And as you don't know where you were staying…'

'But don't *you*? Weren't we together?'

He gave her a quick look. 'No, we weren't.'

She'd assumed that they'd been holidaying together, that she'd only been on a short trip without him, perhaps shopping or visiting someone. 'Where were you?'

'In New Zealand. I came as soon as I could get a flight. Look…' he touched her arm '…why don't you get dressed and we can talk properly later?'

'All right.' She looked at the things scattered on the bed, some still in their wrappings.

'Do you want some help?' he asked her. He reached out to undo the tie on her hospital gown.

'No!' She shook her head. 'No, thanks.'

Still she hesitated, and after a moment he said, 'I'll…go and see if I can find the charge nurse.'

She picked up a bra—cream satin and lace. When she eased it on and did up the hooks it fitted quite well. She found matching panties, then shook out a jade-green cotton dress, low-necked with tiny front buttons and a gently flared skirt. She slipped the dress on and found it an easy fit.

A smart-looking boutique bag with handles and a zipper-type closure contained a primrose-yellow lined cotton jacket that she didn't think she'd need.

Rolfe had even bought dark green soft shoes with a medium wedge heel. And stockings and a suspender belt that she looked at with faint surprise. The sun was shining outside, giving no hint of the recent storms, and she decided to go bare-legged.

She unzipped the makeup bag that had been in her locker, applied sunscreening foundation, used soft olive shadow on her eyelids, touched a mascara wand to the tips of her lashes, and coloured her pale lips a warm coral.

Among the bags and wrappings she'd almost missed a small tissue-wrapped box, containing a phial of perfume. She was applying some to her inner wrist when Rolfe tapped on the door and then came in.

'Thank you.' She lifted her wrist to sniff at the slightly musky scent. 'You thought of everything.'

'Even your favourite perfume.'

'Really?' She dabbed the scent on her other wrist, then behind her ears, before she stoppered the bottle.

'You missed a spot.'

'What?'

Rolfe walked over to her and said, 'You usually put some here.' A lean finger touched the shallow little valley between her breasts, and his eyes darkened as her startled gaze flew to his face.

He quickly withdrew his hand. 'You look nice,' he said. 'The dress fits.'

'Yes.' She could still feel the intimate imprint of his finger on her skin.

She put away the bottle and moved to gather up the wrappings on the bed. 'I only tried one bra. Do you want to return the others to the shop?'

'No.' He slanted her a look of amused surprise. 'You may be able to wear them later. They're all the same size.' He stuffed the used wrappings into the rubbish bag near the basin while she folded the spare bras into the boutique bag along with the unused stockings and suspender belt.

She said, 'They told me you have my shoulder bag and passport.'

'In the hire car with my things. All your ID was in there, including a medical card listing me as your next of kin.'

After they entered the car he handed her the shoulder bag. The soft honey-coloured leather was stained with muddy water-marks.

'I'm afraid it's rather the worse for wear,' Rolfe commented. 'I've dried everything out, but some stuff was beyond saving. Fortunately your passport was zipped into the inner pocket and didn't come off too badly.'

As they left the car park she opened up the bag and went through the contents. The lining was still damp and smelled musty. Several credit cards were tucked into a card pocket, and she found a silver ballpoint pen, a Bank of New Zealand chequebook looking sadly crinkled, two keys on a ring, and a coin-purse containing Australian money, the notes crumpled but dry.

In the centre pocket of the bag she discovered a slim flower-patterned plastic folder designed for two photographs, and opened it to see her own face as a child looking back at her, formally posed and smiling in front of a man and a woman and beside a younger girl who must surely be her sister.

She stared at the photograph for a long time, and then like a faint echo a name came to mind. 'Venetia.'

As sisters they were only superficially alike. Both girls had long fair hair, but Venetia's eyes were blue, her face more square than Capri's.

Curious, she turned her attention to the adults in the picture, her eyes flicking from one to the other.

Divorced. The word entered her consciousness as she looked at the smiling couple behind the two children. They were divorced. It was like someone else saying the words inside her head, except that the voice was her own.

Opposite the family group was another photo—a classic head-and-shoulders wedding picture of herself and Rolfe. Her hair was long and piled into an elegant knot under a veil secured with a pearl coronet. Rolfe was gazing down at his bride, smiling, while Capri's eyes, her smile, were directed at the camera.

Rolfe glanced at the folder. 'Luckily that was in the zipped pocket with your passport. All I had to do was wipe a bit of water off the plastic.'

She closed it and put it back. 'Wasn't there anything else in the bag?'

'Some tissues that I threw away. A couple of sodden train and bus tickets. I couldn't find your address book, or any clue as to where you'd been staying recently. The bag was closed when I got it, but it could have fallen open at some stage. Do you know of anything that's missing?'

'No.' She had no idea what should have been in the bag, couldn't even remember owning it.

She half-dozed for much of the two-hour drive to the airport. Rolfe dropped off the hire car and hauled out an overnight bag from the back seat. Her only luggage was the plastic boutique bag.

He dug into a side pocket of his bag and produced two passports, stuffing them into the pocket of his light jacket. 'Okay,' he said, 'let's go.'

Stepping off the plane hours later at Auckland's international airport, she felt disoriented. The feeling remained as they crossed rain-wet tarseal to where Rolfe had parked his car when he'd left the country to race to her side. She was glad now of the jacket he'd bought her. Spring in New Zealand was decidedly nippy.

'Are you all right?' Rolfe asked after he'd paid the parking fee and joined the stream of traffic leaving the airport.

'Yes.' She felt as though she was in a strange land. 'How…how long have I been away?' He'd said they'd talk, but the airport bar in Sydney where they'd filled in half an hour before the flight had seemed too public, and on the plane Capri had fallen asleep again following the meal that had been served after take-off.

Rolfe braked for a traffic light. 'A couple of months,' he told her.

A long holiday. 'I can't have spent all the time on my own?' A twinge of anxiety hit her. 'Was there someone I knew on the train? Someone I was with?'

'Not that I know of,' Rolfe answered after a moment. 'There didn't seem to be anyone looking for you.'

'But…some people were killed.'

'Several, yes. I believe they were all…claimed.'

'My parents,' she said suddenly. 'Do they know—?'

'I phoned your mother in Los Angeles after the doctors told me they expected you to fully recover. She sends her love.'

'Thank you. Los Angeles? My mother's not American.'

Rolfe said carefully, 'No, she's Australian, as of course you are by birth, but she's lived in L.A. for years. So did you, for a while.'

'And Venetia?'

'Venetia too. Right now she's trying to break into films, with a bit of help from your stepfather.'

'My mother's remarried?'

'Her second husband is a photographer with contacts in the movie business.'

'What about my father? Did you contact him?'

He gave her a probing glance, then returned his attention to the road. 'I wouldn't know how to get hold of him, I'm afraid.'

Her father, then, hadn't kept in touch after the divorce. 'Why was I holidaying alone?' she asked. 'Were you too busy to come with me? You're in…' her mind fumbled for clues '…electronics or something?' Swiftly she added, 'I'm sorry. I should know, but—'

'It's okay. I own a manufacturing plant at Albany, just north of Auckland. We make laser equipment for medical and industrial use, selling to both local and international markets. It's highly specialised. I'm CEO of the firm, but the factory is run on a day-to-day basis by a very competent site manager and a team of engineers.'

'So you don't actually work there?'

'Usually I do. But I'm mainly concerned with design and development, and I have another office at home.'

'I'm…not sure where that is.'

'Atianui. A small coastal settlement an hour's drive from the factory, a bit more from Auckland.'

'Atianui.' She stumbled over the Maon syllables.

'Perhaps you'll remember it when we get there.'

She looked out of the window. Nothing out there had jelled in her memory. She blinked, lifting a hand to surreptitiously flick an unexpected tear from her cheek.

As she dropped her hand back into her lap, Rolfe's warm fingers covered hers. 'Don't worry, Capri. It will all sort itself out in the end.'

She gave a shaky sigh. His hand on hers was reassuring, strong. 'You didn't answer my question.'

'Which question was that?' Rolfe took away his hand and replaced it on the wheel. He wasn't looking at her.

'About…how I came to be holidaying in Australia on my own.'

He didn't answer immediately, speeding up to pass a couple of cars and change lanes as they approached more traffic lights. 'You decided on the spur of the moment to take this trip, and I wasn't able to get away. I can't just drop everything on a…on an impulse.'

A whim, he meant. 'But you came to the hospital.'

'Of course.'

'Have I disrupted your work?'

'Don't worry about it.'

She watched him covertly. The car moved smoothly under his guiding hands—houses, trees flashing by the windscreen. His profile was strong, like his hands, his expression remote as he concentrated on driving, only the curve of his mouth hinting at the possibility of gentleness tempering the strength and potent masculinity she'd sensed in him from the moment she'd opened her eyes and seen him standing with his» back to her at the window of her hospital room. Soon they were on the Harbour Bridge, riding up the steep curve over water that sparked and flashed in the afternoon sun. She remembered this, distantly. 'The Waitemata,' she murmured, relieved that she was able to name the harbour. 'Rolfe…?'

'Yes?'

'Did we quarrel?'

It was several seconds before he answered. 'Sometimes.'

'I mean…before I left. Didn't I want you to come with me? And if you…couldn't—'

'You mean wouldn't.' He seemed to think about it. 'Let's say,' he conceded finally, 'that things were a bit strained. Never mind about that now. I'm taking you home again, and I suggest we let the past go.'

'I don't have much choice,' Capri said wryly. 'Since I don't remember it anyway.'

It was scary how few details she could recall of a whole life. Twenty-three years of it.

‘You must be…’ Rolfe hesitated. ‘I can’t imagine how you must be feeling. Confused, disoriented… afraid?’ He accelerated and changed lanes smoothly to pass a lumbering truck.

‘All of the above.’ She tried to sound flippant, failing abysmally.

‘You’re taking it remarkably well.’

‘Am I? What did you expect—hysterics?’

‘It wouldn’t be surprising. I’m grateful you haven’t resorted to that.’

‘I’m not that sort of person—’ She paused there, frighteningly aware that she couldn’t tell what sort of person she was, and willed the wave of panic to subside. ‘Am I?’ she asked him.

He gave a short laugh. ‘None of us sees ourselves as others do,’ he said enigmatically. ‘And I probably know you a lot less well than I think. While you…’

‘I don’t know myself at all, any more,’ she said. ‘That sounds very self-pitying,’ she apologised, and gazed round them at the passing countryside. ‘I still don’t recognise any of this.’

‘At least I can help there.’ He described the various places they passed as if she were a tourist. When they reached the green fields and new buildings around the recently established university campus at Albany he nodded towards a side road. ‘My factory is down there.’

They passed the long sweeping foreshore at Orewa, almost hidden by housing, and later the little town of Warkworth that Rolfe told her lay along a riverbank, invisible from the highway. Soon after that they turned off to take a quieter road that eventually led them to a seaside settlement of mainly new houses.

‘Atianui.’ Rolfe glanced at her. ‘Recognise it?’

Capri shook her head. ‘No.’

He swung round a corner and into a driveway, pausing momentarily to touch a button on a small black box fixed to the dashboard. Wrought-iron gates swung open and he eased the car inside the high stuccoed walls. ‘It was only subdivided ten years ago—as a sort of combination dormitory town and retirement complex. We both liked the idea of living by the sea but not too far away from Auckland.’

The house was Spanish-influenced, long and low and white, with bougainvillaea, its thorny branches barely beginning to show colour, climbing the outer wall and framing an archway between the house and the two-car garage where Rolfe parked.

‘I know the house.’ Her relief was profound. ‘I know I’ve seen it before.’

‘Good. Of course you have.’ A garage door opened and Rolfe parked and pulled on the handbrake before turning to her. ‘It’s your home, Capri.’ He lifted a hand and gently turned her to face him, his fingers warm on her cheek. ‘Welcome back, darling.’

CHAPTER THREE

HIS lips touched hers, sure and firm but not demanding, lingering only moments before he moved away. 'Come on,' he said. 'Let's get you inside.'

A smart little hatchback runabout occupied the other space in the garage. Rolfe said. 'That's yours. You probably shouldn't drive for a few days, though.' He took both bags from the car and put a hand on her waist to lead her to the house. Inside, she stood in a wide, terracotta-tiled hallway and looked about. 'How long have we lived here?'

'Two years,' Rolfe said matter-of-factly. 'Since we were married.'

She swallowed a dismaying desire to turn and flee. She'd been married to this man for two years, yet she knew nothing about him. Except that he was doing his best to cope with a situation that must be as difficult for him as it was for her. 'I…' She gazed around again, helplessly. 'It's not… familiar.' The disappointment was sickening. She'd been sure that once she was home everything would fall into place. But this didn't feel like home.

Rolfe touched her arm. 'I'll show you…the bedroom. Maybe you'd like to rest for a while.'

'I am tired,' she admitted. 'Although I seem to have slept a lot today.' Her skin felt stretched, her eyes heavy.

He ushered her into a spacious room overlooking the sea. The carpet was deep turquoise, the furniture white with touches of gold, the sumptuous cover on the double bed patterned in several shades of blue and green.

Most of the wall facing the ocean was tinted glass. Sliding doors opened onto a broad tiled terrace under the roof of the house, and a huge sloping archway outside the room framed the sea.

'It's a glorious view,' she said.

'Yes.' He had put down the plastic bag that she thought of as holding all her worldly possessions. 'Can I get you a drink or something? Make you a coffee?'

'No, thanks. I think I'll lie down for a while.'

'Sure.' He paused. Evidently sensing her nervous tension, he touched her cheek with his hand, the thumb rubbing gently over her skin, waking a tiny tremor of sensuous response deep within her. 'It'll be all right, Capri,' he said. 'There's nothing here to frighten you.' He dropped his hand. 'Have a good rest. I'll be around if you need anything. Just yell.'

'Thank you.' She watched him leave, still carrying his bag. He closed the door and she stood feeling lost. Hesitantly she approached the long dressing-table against one wall, touched a rather ornate gold-decorated hand-mirror lying on the white surface, and lifted a cutglass perfume bottle, removing the stopper to sniff it. It was the same scent as the one Rolfe had bought her before they left Australia. Spicy, faintly earthy—a very sexy perfume. 'Your favourite,' he'd said.

Turning, she opened a door and found a walk-in wardrobe filled with clothes. She touched some of the garments, moved them along on their hangers. They were all her size, colours that suited her. Most of them looked expensive. Easily thirty pairs of shoes sat neatly in pairs along the floor. It seemed an awful lot.

Fingering a peacock-blue silk dress, she frowned. Rolfe was presumably quite well-off. He had a thriving business, and this house in its exclusive coastal enclave was certainly not cheap real estate.

Perhaps she had come from more modest circumstances? Where had they met? She must ask him later.

Nothing here had triggered her elusive memory, and her shoulders drooped as she left the wardrobe and opened another door into a white and turquoise bathroom.

Here too the floor was carpeted. There was a roomy glass-fronted shower, a marble bathtub almost big enough for two, and all the taps were large and goldplated.

Seeing another door on the opposite side of the bathroom, she tapped on the panels and opened it on a bedroom identical to the one she'd come from, right down to the bedspread, on which Rolfe's overnight bag sat.

She closed the door quickly, her emotions a mixture of shame and relief. Was he going to sleep there?

Rolfe was her husband and she'd been away for two months. Instinctively she knew that he was a man who appreciated sex—his virility was so much a part of his personality she couldn't be unaware of it The way he looked at her and touched her made her conscious of her femininity, and even that brief welcome-home kiss in the garage had held a hint of sexuality, of passion.

But although she'd reacted blindly to his masculine attraction since she'd woken to see him waiting for her return to consciousness, what she had told him in the hospital was the truth. So far as she was concerned he might have been a total stranger. And she wasn't a woman who would—or could—make love with a man she scarcely knew.

How could she *know* that with such certainty? she wondered, stripping the cover from the bed in the room that was evidently to be hers.

Moving slowly, she removed her shoes and lay down, glad to have her head rest on cool, clean linen. She supposed that although her mind for some reason refused to remember events, places or people, deep down she was still the same Capri she'd always been. Personality remained, even when memory was absent. Her essential self hadn't altered. It was a comforting thought.

She woke to gathering darkness, the room dimmed and the sea outside grey and sleek with gold highlights.

Momentarily disoriented, she sat up and pushed back her hair. The room, the view were alien to her. Remnants of a dream clung. Familiar voices, a house with tall pale trees around it…

Then she remembered the hospital, Rolfe, the journey home, and the wardrobe full of expensive clothing.

She swung her feet to the thick carpeting and crossed to the dressing-table.

There were three drawers along the top, all holding a variety of makeup and grooming products—bottles, jars, mascara wands. She found a comb and closed the drawer, deciding she needed a shower.

In the bathroom a brass shelf held a stack of thick, clean towels above a heated rail. She hung her clothes from a brass hook and stepped into the shower.

Recessed shelves held scented soap and bottles of shampoo and matching conditioners. The water was hot and forceful. She let it run over her for several minutes, shampooed her hair, and closed her eyes to allow the spray to rinse out the foam.

A sound made her turn her head, and through the steam she saw Rolfe standing in the doorway from her bedroom.

Her immediate reaction was to raise one hand across her breasts and lower the other in the Venus pose.

'Are you all right?' Rolfe demanded.

'Yes. Thank you.'

He nodded and withdrew, closing the door.

Stupid, stupid, she chided herself, turning off the water. She grabbed a towel and rubbed at her hair, then quickly took another, dried her body and wrapped the towel about it, tucking the ends firmly under her arms.

When she entered the bedroom Rolfe was standing at the window, reminding her of the first time she had seen him.

No, not the first time, she corrected herself. The first time she *remembered* seeing him…

He glanced over his shoulder at her, and then reached to draw the curtains across the window. 'People walk along the beach.' He turned to face her. 'Now and then one of them will climb the bank.

You don't want to entertain peeping Toms.' The room seemed smaller now, more intimate. 'I'm sorry if I embarrassed you.' His slight smile was crooked. 'I'm afraid I didn't think…and I was a bit worried. You're only just out of hospital—'

'It's all right,' she said. 'It was…silly of me to be so—'

'Shy?' he suggested as she groped for the right word. 'It certainly didn't seem like you, Capri.' His gaze slid over her, making her conscious of her nakedness under the towel.

She felt her body flush. 'I…suppose I'd got over any shyness with you, after being married for two years.'

'Oh, I think quite a while before that.'

'Does that mean we…?' She paused. 'I mean, were we…lovers for a long time before we got married?'

'Several months.' His eyes glittered and narrowed, as if her thoughtless query had evoked some erotic memory. 'You'd better get dressed. You'll be cold.'

It wasn't in the least cold—the house was surprisingly warm—but she turned to the wardrobe she'd discovered earlier, then hesitated. 'What should I wear? Are we…do you have any plans for this evening?'

'Don't tempt me.' Again that disconcerting flare of sexual awareness lit Rolfe's eyes, and she put a hand on the edge of the towel that covered her breasts, nervously checking it was secure.

His voice changed and became crisp. 'Wear whatever you're comfortable in. I assumed you wouldn't feel like eating out tonight, so I got a few supplies in while you were asleep.'

If he knew she'd slept, then he'd looked in on her before. How long had he watched her while she was oblivious?

Mentally she shook herself. He'd been concerned. 'Do you want me to cook?' she asked him.

'Good lord, no! I can rustle up some kind of meal.'

She couldn't stand around wearing nothing but a towel. Turning to the walk-in wardrobe again, she murmured, 'Excuse me,' went in and half shut the door.

When she had dressed and come out again Rolfe had gone. About to close the door of the wardrobe, she paused, surveying herself in the mirror on the back of it. The loose cream silk shirt and dark green trousers suited her colouring and they fitted perfectly. Yet she felt as though she was wearing someone else's clothes.

Her hair was still damp. She went into the bathroom and hunted in the drawers under the vanity unit, coming up with, as she'd half expected, a hand-dryer. There was a safety plug near the basin, and in ten minutes her hair was dry—silky soft and bouncy with the underlying wave that had always created problems.

Always? For a moment memory seemed almost within her grasp. And then there was nothing.

She brushed the style into shape, then padded back to the wardrobe and, after a brief indecision, slipped her feet into bronze pumps, one of the few pairs of shoes that didn't have high heels. Then she opened the door and ventured into the turquoise-carpeted passageway.

The aroma of frying meat led her to the kitchen, a spacious room that gleamed with stainless steel and whiteware. Rolfe turned from the stove top set into one of the wide counters. He smiled, his eyes studying her thoroughly and making her skin prickle, not unpleasantly.

'Can I do anything?' she asked.

'Finish off the salad if you like.' He indicated a glass bowl half filled with lettuce leaves. 'You'll find tomatoes and cucumber in the fridge.' Turning back to the stove top, he took a pair of stainless-steel tongs from a wall rack to flip the chops over.

Looking about, she found the refrigerator, first opening the door of the matching freezer by mistake.

She placed the vegetables on the bench and rummaged in a drawer for a few seconds before Rolfe looked around and asked, 'What do you want?'

‘A knife?’

He directed her to the wooden block by the refrigerator where she found several knives of different sizes. By the time she’d finished the salad, Rolfe was turning down the heat under the chops. A beeping noise made her look at the microwave oven at one end of the workbench.

‘Can you turn those spuds?’ Rolfe asked her.

She opened the door and dealt with the two potatoes in their jackets, then restarted the machine.

When she turned away again Rolfe was watching her with a curious stare.

‘What is it?’ she said.

‘You seem to be familiar with the microwave.’

She hadn’t thought about it. ‘Yes,’ she agreed, momentarily pleased. Perhaps if she just let things happen without thinking too much, skills and memories would return to her. ‘I must have used it before.’

‘Frequently.’ He gave her a slightly taut grin. ‘As soon as the potatoes are done we can eat.’

Rolfe carried their plates to an adjoining dining room while she brought along the cutlery they needed. He’d already flung a cloth over the small table that fitted into a half-circle of windows. A longer table flanked by highbacked chairs occupied most of the remaining floor space.

The curtains were open, and moths and insects flung themselves against the dark glass. A particularly loud thump made Capri glance up from cutting into her baked potato, and she gasped at the huge brown winged beetle, long feelers waving madly, trying to gain access through the window.

‘It’s only a huhu.’ Rolfe got up to jerk the curtains closed over the window, then sat down again.

The beetle hurled itself twice more at the window, and then apparently gave up and flew away. Relieved, she said, ‘The insects here are pretty rampant.’

‘Only at night. How’s your chop?’

‘Fine. You’re a good cook.’

‘I have a few basic skills.’

‘I’ll do the cooking tomorrow.’

He looked up, a fork poised in his hand, then nodded. ‘If you feel up to it.’

She helped him clear the table, and watched as he placed the dishes in a machine. ‘It hardly seems worth it,’ she commented, ‘for just a few dishes.’

He straightened, closing the lid, and his brows lifted slightly. ‘You’ve always had a firm belief that laboursaving devices are there to be used.’

‘Well…I suppose…’ She shrugged. There was some sense in that.

For a moment she had a weird sensation of being lost in a dark, unknown place, blindly groping for something to cling to.

‘Capri?’ Rolfe’s hand was on her shoulder, his eyes probing hers. ‘What is it?’

‘I just…I don’t know. For a minute I…didn’t know where I was.’

He grasped both her shoulders, but not hard. ‘You’re home, Capri,’ he said. ‘It’s all right.’

Something snapped. ‘It’s not all right!’ she retorted sharply. ‘I feel like an intruder in my own bedroom, my own wardrobe, I don’t know my way around, and I can’t even remember where the damned knives are kept!’

He gave a small, not unsympathetic laugh, but in her oversensitive state even that stung.

Her voice notched a note higher. ‘It’s not a joke! And how do I know you’re really my husband? I’ve no recollection of being married to you!’

And that, she realised, remembering the wedding photograph in her bag, was a pretty stupid thing to say.

The smile had disappeared from Rolfe’s mouth. ‘Believe me, I don’t think it’s at all funny, Capri. But I am your husband, and you’re my wife!’

The air had thickened between them, and everything seemed to go still. She was overwhelmingly conscious of his strength, his nearness, his masculinity, and her breath caught in her throat, a tiny pulse hammering at its base.

He drew in a breath too, and she remembered that moment in the hospital when he'd seemed to be affected by the scent of her, and she'd seen his nostrils dilate and his eyes darken as they did now.

His hands slipped from her shoulders to the bare skin of her arms. His expression went taut and purposeful. 'Maybe this will help,' he said, and pulled her closer, his arms sliding about her as her head involuntarily tipped back, and then he caught her mouth under the warm impact of his.

The kiss was intimate and insistent, the warmth and hardness of his body pressing against hers, unfamiliar and a little frightening, even though her blood sang and her lips involuntarily parted under his persuasion. His hold was firm but deliberately gentle, as if he had remembered that her bruises were still tender.

Now her head was cradled against his arm, and his mouth demanded a response that she gave at first tentatively and then with increasing passion, until he shifted their positions and manoeuvred her up against the workbench, and with his strong hands under her arms lifted her and sat her on the counter, his mouth freeing hers and his hands going to the buttons of her blouse.

But the mindless spell had broken. 'No!' Her fingers closed frantically over his, stopping him.

'No?' His voice was hoarse, and he spread his hands under the feeble constraint of hers, big palms cupping her breasts through the flimsy fabric. Then his expression tightened. 'Did I hurt you?'

'You didn't hurt me, but—don't, Rolfe! I'm not ready for this.'

'Damn it, Capri—'

She gripped his wrists, her cheeks hot and her body trembling. 'Please—'

His hands moved to her face, his eyes subjecting her to a hard, furious inspection. 'Are you saying you don't want me?'

'I'm saying I don't want…this.' She still held his wrists. 'I know you have every right, but—'

'Right?' He dropped his hands then and stepped back. 'The time is long past when a man could claim his *right* to his wife's body, Capri. Do you think I'd force my way into your bed?'

'No! No, I don't think that.' Her hands clenched on the counter on either side of her. 'But… please try to understand. I'm not…comfortable about going to bed with someone I…feel I hardly know.'

Rolfe gave a short, disbelieving laugh. 'Really?' It was obvious she'd thrown him off balance, his rigid control cracking. His eyes were hard and brilliant as onyx. 'It didn't stop you before!'

CHAPTER FOUR

'WHAT?' She felt her eyes dilate painfully, her throat lock.

A spasm seemed to cross Rolfe's face. He lifted a hand and thrust back a stubborn strand of dark hair that had strayed to his forehead. 'Never mind.'

'I do mind! What did you mean?'

'Just that you were in my bed within hours of our first meeting. So excuse me if I find it a bit ironic that you're being so coy about making love to me now.'

She stared at him in disbelief. *'Hours?'* She couldn't comprehend this. It sounded so…wrong.

'Lust at first sight.' He grinned narrowly. Then he must have noticed her instinctive recoil. 'I'm sorry if the word offends you, but one could hardly call it love…'

'What happened?' They'd taken one look at each other and fallen into bed? He was a very attractive, sexy man and she could well believe she'd have been tempted, but it seemed so out of character…

Again her lack of real knowledge taunted her. What did she know about her own character, how she might have reacted, what sort of lifestyle she'd led before marrying Rolfe?

'What happened?' Rolfe repeated. 'We met at a party in L.A. You were with someone, I was alone. You were…' his eyes glazed slightly as though he was looking at a distant memory '…stunning.'

Her lips parted, her heart thudding disconcertingly. In some level of her subconscious she was aware this wasn't the first time she'd been complimented on her looks. Only surely never with the intensity that she heard now m Rolfe's voice.

His eyes refocused, studying her, and the intensity changed to self-mockery. 'It was like all the romantic movies you've ever seen. We looked at each other across a crowded room and from that moment there was no one else there for either of us. You smiled, I walked over and introduced myself. I tried to be civilised, talk to the man you were with, other people. I have no idea what I said to them. We danced. Your date…' He paused, a faintly regretful expression darkening his eyes. 'Your date got drunk and aggressive, and I offered you a lift home. In the car I asked if you'd like to come to my hotel for a nightcap, and you looked straight into my eyes and said yes, that would be nice.' Again he paused. 'We hadn't even kissed. But when we got to the hotel I gave you the choice of having a drink in the public bar or raiding the minibar in my suite. You chose the suite.' He smiled crookedly, reminiscently, his eyes gleaming under hooded lids as he looked at her. 'We never did have that nightcap.'

She was staring at him. He shoved his hands into his pockets. 'You don't remember any of this?'

Silently she shook her head. He might have been describing some other woman entirely. A woman who was sexually confident to the point of recklessness, willing to take incredible chances with an exciting stranger. 'Had I been drinking?'

His brows rose. 'It was a party. But you weren't drunk. I wouldn't take advantage of a tipsy woman, Capri.'

But maybe she'd had enough alcohol to affect her judgement, to topple her inhibitions and send her into a stranger's arms. A stranger who had attracted her so strongly that she'd boldly beckoned him with a smile, had neglected the man who'd accompanied her to the party, and gone home with the interloper. Not only gone home with him, but slept with him that same night. She had no reason to doubt Rolfe's account of their meeting, and she could believe that she'd been fascinated by his striking looks, his confident sexuality, and his overt interest, but at the same time she was convinced that the behaviour he described wasn't normal for her.

Rolfe moved towards her, his hands going to her waist. He studied her face, his eyes very dark and enigmatic. Then he tightened his grip and lifted her down, and she felt his lips brush her forehead

before he let her go. 'Maybe we were in too much of a hurry back then. This could give us another chance.'

'Another chance?'

'To get to know each other again,' he suggested. 'It'll be…different this time.'

'I want to get to know you,' she told him, still feeling breathless. 'Thank you for being so understanding.'

His continued scrutiny of her turned curious, even puzzled. He nodded. 'It could be…my pleasure,' he said rather obscurely.

She looked away from the disturbing light in his eyes. 'Do you mind if I wander around—familiarise myself with the house?'

'It's your home, Capri. Would you like me to come with you?'

'In case I get lost?' She gave him a pale smile. It was a big house, but hardly a castle.

'In case you want to ask questions.' His eyes cooling, he asked abruptly, 'You're not faking this, are you?'

She blinked. *'Faking?'*

Impatiently, Rolfe shook his head. 'No, of course not,' he answered himself. 'There's no reason—'

'Well, you'd know better than me about that!' she said with a spurt of indignation. 'Why would *anyone* want to fake amnesia? It's no picnic!'

'It was just a thought.'

'You have very strange thoughts!'

'You don't know the half of them.' His eyes held hers, sending hot shivers down her spine. He moved away from her. 'Go and take your tour of the house,' he said. 'I'll be in the lounge if you want me. You do know where that is?'

'Yes, we passed it on the way in.'

She left it until last, after she had seen the several bedrooms and another bathroom, the utility room, and one that must be Rolfe's office, with bookshelves, filing cabinets and a desktop computer. And a room that held a sewing machine, a work-table strewn with paper templates, and shelves filled with pattern books, fashion magazines, and piles of fabric, a sumptuous collection of colour and texture. A dressmaker's adjustable form stood in one corner, and here too there was a computer, with a box of disks beside it.

She retraced her steps to the wide lobby-cumpassageway and the double doors leading to the lounge. Like the rest of the house, the large room was furnished with taste and discernment—she could almost picture the words in some glossy magazine.

Rolfe was sprawled on a long off-white sofa, reading a newspaper and listening to something she vaguely thought was Mozart. She said, 'I found the sewing room.'

'Yes?' He swung his feet onto the carpet and picked up a remote control, muting the music to a low background sound.

'Am I a dressmaker?'

Rolfe smiled with a hint of incredulity. 'A dressmaker? You'd hate to be called that. Come over here.' He indicated the space on the sofa beside him and folded the paper, putting it aside on an elegant glass table.

Tensely she walked over and sat down, leaving two feet of space between them. 'It doesn't look like a home sewing room,' she said. 'It's a workroom. What did I do?'

'You do some fashion design,' he said patiently. 'You're quite talented. Although…'

'Although what?'

He shrugged 'You've come close to winning awards a couple of times, but…your temperament isn't suited to steady work. You have flashes of inspiration, work on them like mad for a few weeks,

and need as many weeks to recover—and, I suppose, to allow the creative juices to flow again. It isn't a style that adjusts well to the business world.'

Digesting that, she glanced around the room. The long sofas arranged in a U-shape with glass end tables, and the group of chairs around another, larger glass table looked comfortable enough. The pictures on the walls were originals and she recognised the signatures on a couple of them.

The drapes that Rolfe had drawn against the night were textured faille silk, well chosen to complement the turquoise carpet used throughout the house, and in the daytime to frame the view of the sea and echo its colours.

Everything was beautifully co-ordinated and money had not been stinted. But she felt like a visitor here. 'Who decorated the rooms?' she asked. 'And who designed the house?'

'One of Auckland's top architects did the house. And we hired an interior designer. You wanted perfection and insisted on expert advice. What's the matter?'

She had shifted restlessly, oddly dissatisfied. 'Nothing. It's a lovely room.'

It *was* a lovely room, only it seemed to lack warmth. She supposed that in summer the cool effect might be an asset.

The music had stopped. 'Was that Mozart?' she asked.

'Yes—I know you'd prefer something a bit livelier. The tapes and discs are over there under the player. Why don't you choose one?'

Hesitantly she got up and went over to the built-in unit holding the music centre, knelt and opened the top drawer.

Rolfe said, 'Most of yours are in the second drawer down.'

She opened the next drawer. The first few labels meant little, but then she found a CD that she lifted out with delight—an album by a New Zealand group that had made the pop charts both in their home country and overseas. 'This is one of my favourites!'

'Yes.' Rolfe had approached silently across the carpet and was standing just behind her, looking over her shoulder. 'You used to play it a lot.'

And her subconscious had remembered. 'Can we play it now?' She twisted to look up at him.

'Feel free.'

She turned back to the music centre, inspecting the rows of buttons and dials. It took her a minute to locate the CD component. 'Here?' she asked, checking.

'Right.'

She slid out the disc that was already there and replaced it with the new one. Nothing happened, and Rolfe said, 'You need to press the "play" button.'

Her fingers hovered as she read the labels on the various buttons, then touched one. 'This?'

'Yes.'

The music began, barely audible, and she asked, 'Where's the volume control?'

'Here.' His lean fingers turned the knob. A hand briefly lighted on her shoulder, then he offered it to help her up.

Taking it, she rose to her feet. 'Thank you. Don't you like pop music?'

'Some.' He let go her hand. 'These guys are musicians. They know what they're doing.'

'So we have tastes in common.'

He regarded her strangely. 'I guess we do.'

Her lips parted, her tongue caught for a moment between her teeth. 'Of course we do, or we'd never have married.'

His laugh was brief. 'That's a remarkably naive view of marriage, for you.'

'For me?'

'For anyone,' he amended swiftly. 'Don't they say opposites attract?'

'Do they? I mean, yes, I know people say that but…I'm not sure it's a good basis for marriage. *Are* we opposites?'

‘Some people might have thought so,’ he allowed. ‘But we were both willing to take a gamble on our relationship. Perhaps for different reasons.’

‘Different reasons? What were they?’

He was silent, staring down at her. ‘I can’t speak for you,’ he said. ‘It wouldn’t be fair. And as for myself…’ Shrugging, he turned away to go back to the sofa. ‘I suppose I was in love.’

‘You suppose?’ Following him, she stopped short as he sat down, facing her.

When he looked up his eyes had a strange, glazed glitter in them. His smile twisted. ‘All right,’ he said, and reached forward, his hand closing about her wrist to tug her down beside him.

He retained his hold, looking at the hand he held, his thumb stroking over the back of it. ‘I don’t know what else to call it.’ His voice was low and strained.

He’d called it lust earlier, she remembered. Lust at first sight, he’d said, describing their meeting.

‘It’s not my habit,’ he told her, ‘to take a woman I’ve just met to bed—no matter how willing she is. For months I could hardly see straight for wanting you. You were…an obsession.’

‘And you resented it.’ She stated the fact baldly.

He seemed startled, his eyes meeting hers, searching her face. ‘Maybe I did in a way. I wasn’t used to that level of…distraction.’

‘Distraction?’

‘I have a demanding, complex business to run. Ever since I left university I’ve been building it, expanding it. There wasn’t time for much else in my life. Or energy. And then suddenly there was you. For a time I felt as if I’d lost control.’

‘You’d hate that.’ She knew as surely as if he’d spelled it out for her that Rolfe liked being in control of himself, of his life.

And of his wife? The wayward thought made her shiver inside. Just how *had* he felt, how had he reacted, when she’d insisted on visiting Australia without him? She’d sensed anger in him several times since she’d woken in that hospital room—anger controlled and usually well concealed, but simmering beneath the surface.

Rolfe released her hand and sighed, settling into the corner of the sofa, one arm laid along the back. ‘Hate it?’ he repeated. ‘The most exciting sex I’d had in my entire life?’

‘Sex?’ Capri clamped her hands together. ‘You just said you fell in love.’

‘Sometimes it’s hard to separate the two. Harder, they say, for men than women. Perhaps that’s true.’

‘Perhaps,’ she agreed tentatively. ‘I don’t think I would have found it so difficult.’

‘Don’t you?’ He regarded her pensively.

Her gaze slid aside. Maybe she was wrong. At this moment she was fighting a strong urge to close the small space between them and rest her head against his chest, feel his arms about her. Could that be love? Perhaps her body, her heart, remembered what her mind refused to give up to consciousness.

‘Listen.’ He tipped his head back, angling it to concentrate on the music from the hidden speakers. Two voices blended against a subtle, haunting melody.

Burning like a rocket
exploding into stars
most splendid in its dying
is this love of ours

The song was called ‘Fire in the Sky’. She loved the tune, but the words saddened her, telling of a love that had flared briefly, incandescently.

too bright to last the distance
a fire in the sky.

‘He knows,’ Rolfe murmured.

‘He?’

‘The guy who wrote the song.’ He turned his head, his eyes half closed and gleaming, his mouth cynical. ‘Doesn’t he?’

‘It isn’t like that with me!’

Rolfe’s attitude was relaxed but very still. Something stirred in those almost-hidden dark eyes. ‘How would you know?’ he enquired softly.

‘I know if I really loved someone it would be for ever. Not some flash in the pan, like in the song.’

‘You sound as though you mean it.’

‘I just *know* that’s how it is, for me.’

‘Really.’ Although he still hadn’t shifted his position, his hand was tightly gripping the back of the sofa. ‘And yet you left me.’

‘Left you?’ She stared at him.

Rolfe stirred then, sitting up but not meeting her eyes. ‘To go off to Australia without me.’

‘But that was a holiday…wasn’t it?’ Doubt sneaked in and a hollow feeling opened in her stomach. ‘Do you mean I didn’t intend to come back? But…if we were separated, I’m here under false pretences—’ The thought was frightening. If their marriage had ended, if he didn’t really want her here, she had no right to be with him, and where could she go? A sliver of fear chilled her.

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