The Mediterranean's Wife by Contract

Kathryn Ross

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Аннотация

The Greek tycoon's marriage demand! Two years ago Andreas Stillanos had an affair with innocent English rose Carrie Stevenson. But their relationship was never consummated and he's never got her out of his system. . . Now Carrie is unexpectedly brought back to Andreas's side as godmother to his orphaned baby niece.The chemistry between them is as potent as ever, and this time Andreas is determined there will be no running back to Britain. He's about to offer her a position she can't refuse ; as his convenient wife!

Содержание

THE 5
KATHRYN ROSS 6
CHAPTER ONE 7
CHAPTER TWO 19
CHAPTER THREE 36
CHAPTER FOUR 43
CHAPTER FIVE 57
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 61

‘I will do whatever it takes, Andreas! Anything to make Lilly’s life more secure.’

‘Anything…?’ He leaned back against the counter and surveyed her lazily. ‘Somehow I don’t think a nun’s habit would suit you, Carrie. Maybe you need to rethink that.’

‘Joke all you want.’ Carrie tipped her head up defiantly. ‘But I am prepared to put Lilly first. Whereas you—at the end of the day it’s still going to be your staff who tuck Lilly into bed, while you’re tied up with the business.’

Andreas held her gaze. ‘Not if I take a wife.’

Kathryn Ross was born in Zambia, where her parents happened to live at that time. Educated in Ireland and England, she now lives in a village near Blackpool, Lancashire. Kathryn is a professional beauty therapist, but writing is her first love. As a child she wrote adventure stories, and at thirteen was editor of her school magazine. Happily, ten writing years later, DESIGNED WITH LOVE was accepted by Mills & Boon®. A romantic Sagittarian, she loves travelling to exotic locations.

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BY

KATHRYN ROSS

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CHAPTER ONE

A BLIND date wasn't Carrie's idea of fun. But since day two of their holiday together when Jo had met Theo she had been determinedly insisting that Carrie just had to meet his handsome older brother.

'Honestly, the moment you see him you'll know what I mean,' Jo had told her seriously. 'If I wasn't head over heels about Theo I'd be interested in him myself. Andreas is absolutely gorgeous, and a really nice guy.'

'Jo, if you are doing this because you don't want me to be left alone then you really don't need to worry. After the last few months working for my degree I'm perfectly happy to be left to do some serious relaxing, soaking up the sun and—'

'Yes, I know, you said all that—but you really need to meet him, Carrie. He's a real Greek Adonis—honestly. Just humour me; meet Andreas once for a few hours one evening. We'll make it a foursome—how's that? We'll have pre-dinner drinks together at that lovely little taverna on the waterside. And if you are hitting it off you can stay and we'll have dinner together—if you're not, you can tell him you've already eaten and leave. But you will like him—honestly.'

On day four of the holiday in a moment of weakness Carrie had agreed. Now here she was sitting at a table by herself feeling more than a little apprehensive. Jo and her new boyfriend Theo

had been delayed. And heaven alone knew where Andreas was. Possibly dragging his heels if Theo had strong-armed him as heavily as Jo had her.

She should never have agreed to this, Carrie thought with embarrassment.

At least the waterside taverna was an idyllic place to wait.

The sun was setting in a glorious shade of crimson, turning the sea a flame red, and giving a spectacular end to another long hot day on the small Greek island of Pyrena.

Carrie breathed in the warm evening air, fragrant with jasmine and the salt of the sea, and relaxed. With a bit of luck Theo's brother wouldn't turn up and Carrie could make a hasty escape and leave Jo and Theo to enjoy a romantic evening together. They needed to make the most of their time, because in another ten days the holiday would be over and she and Jo would be heading back to London. Jo would be devastated to leave—Carrie had never seen her so captivated by a guy. It was completely out of character. And Theo seemed to feel exactly the same way. They had just clicked immediately and now, even though they'd only known each other a few days, it was as if they had always been together.

Was that true love? Carrie wondered.

Darkness was stealing over the landscape and a waiter was lighting some candles on the tables nearby ready for the evening ahead. As yet the place was quiet, just one other couple dining at a table tucked away in a far corner. She glanced at her watch. Jo

was now ten minutes late. Maybe if she wasn't here in another ten Carrie could sneak away—because the more she thought about it, the more she didn't want to be here. Jo and Theo needed to be alone, not wasting precious time needlessly matchmaking! Why couldn't they understand that she was happy on her own reading her book? She didn't want to meet anyone.

'Are you waiting for someone?'

The question made Carrie look up and shock sizzled its way through her entire body.

If this was Andreas, then Jo hadn't been exaggerating! He was absolutely gorgeous—in fact he was probably the most handsome man Carrie had ever set eyes on in her life.

He was tall yet powerfully built and he was wearing an expensive-looking dark suit with casual flare that only continental men seemed to achieve so effortlessly. A crisp blue shirt was open at the strong column of his neck. His thick dark hair was cut short accentuating chiselled features and a strong jaw. But it was his eyes that held her spellbound, they were the colour of dark molasses, intense, almost arrogant in their assessment of her.

Aware that he was waiting for a reply she tried to gather herself together with some difficulty. 'Yes…some friends—'

'You must be Carrie?'

She nodded. Was it her imagination, she wondered, or was the air electrically charged between them? Their eyes seemed to hold for a fraction too long before his gaze swept over her

in a bold unconcealed scrutiny of her appearance from her long blonde hair and sweetheart-shaped face, down over the curves of her figure in the bright blue summer dress.

And shockingly Carrie felt a thrust of sensual heat stir deep inside her at that slow, sexy deliberation.

'Andreas Stillanos.' He held out his hand and she took it, aware that as their skin touched she felt the zing of attraction deepen. She liked the strong firm touch of his skin against hers. She liked everything about him.

This was crazy, she thought with a mounting sense of panic. A man had never had this effect on her before; so, OK, he was good-looking—so what? She didn't know him—how could she feel so intensely…*turned on* just by the way he was looking at her?

But the simple truth was that she did—there was something almost raw and primitive about it. Carrie couldn't explain it; all she knew was that it was scaring her to death! She was a sensible person, grounded—realistic—this was a kind of madness that she didn't want.

She watched as Andreas pulled out the chair opposite her and sat down.

For a moment there was silence, filled only with the relentless sizzle of the tide as it brushed over the stony beach beside them, a sound that seemed to echo the sensations inside her body.

'Jo and Theo have been delayed,' she told him, trying hard to pull herself together.

‘Yes, so I gathered.’ His lips curved in an amused smile.

She supposed she had stated the obvious! Carrie tried to compose herself, tried to think of something else to say, but as their eyes held she found the task increasingly difficult.

A waiter appeared next to them and Andreas spoke to him in Greek. The sound was deep and sexy and Carrie was even further entranced.

‘Can I get you another drink, Carrie?’ He switched effortlessly to perfect English again and looked over at her.

‘No, I’m fine, thank you.’ Carrie indicated her glass of wine that was almost full.

They were left alone again.

‘I think the delay is something to do with Theo’s dive shop,’ Carrie continued, trying to stay focused on anything except the feelings he was generating inside her. ‘Apparently he stayed open later than usual to accommodate some customers who are going home to England tomorrow.’

Andreas regarded her sardonically. ‘Personally, I think the delay is more to do with throwing us together on our own for a while.’

That thought hadn’t occurred to her until he suggested it so bluntly and Carrie felt a surge of red-hot embarrassment. ‘I don’t think so!’ But even as she rejected the idea she wondered if it were true—were Jo and Theo deliberately late? Honestly, it was too mortifying!

‘Don’t you?’ He seemed to be watching her with very close

attention, and she knew that even though they were sitting in the semi-darkness of the star-lit evening he could see that she was blushing.

The knowledge and the way he was watching her made her flush even more. 'Well, Jo rang me to apologise for their delay and she sounded genuinely agitated. She always likes to be on time.'

'So you haven't felt obligated to meet me, then?' he asked with a mocking lift of one eyebrow. 'Because to be honest Theo hasn't stopped going on about you for the last few days.'

'And you found yourself agreeing to this evening's arrangements just to get some peace?' Carrie wanted the ground to open up and swallow her. 'It's OK; I have to admit to a similar situation. Jo has been going on rather a lot about you too. I think she feels guilty about leaving me—but I keep telling her I'm perfectly happy.'

'They've fallen in love and now they think that the whole world needs to follow suit,' Andreas said wryly.

The waiter arrived with his drink and Carrie had never been so very glad of an interruption. It was obvious from his derisive words that Andreas had wanted this blind date even less than she had! And she noticed he'd ordered a Greek coffee—hardly a pre-dinner drink. He wasn't even pretending that he might stay.

As they were left alone again he glanced up and their eyes met. 'Unfortunately I have a business meeting back in Athens early tomorrow. So I can't stay long.'

‘Well—I can’t stay long either.’ Carrie rallied herself, her pride rising to her defence. ‘I was just thinking before you arrived that we should get this over with as quickly as possible. Jo and Theo should be making each moment count, having a nice romantic time on their own.’

‘Yes, I suppose they should.’ Andreas looked over at her with a teasing gleam in the darkness of his eyes. ‘But I wouldn’t worry too much. I’m sure their time has been put to some good use.’

Meaning what, Carrie wondered, as opposed to their time?

‘So how are you enjoying your holiday on Pyrena?’ he asked as he sat back into his chair.

Now he was trying to make polite conversation. This was excruciating.

For her friend’s sake she forced herself to smile and answer courteously. ‘I’m having a lovely time, thank you. It’s a beautiful island.’

‘Have you been out to see the coral reef yet?’

Carrie shook her head. ‘Theo and Jo invited me to go out there with them yesterday but I don’t dive.’

‘You could snorkel.’

‘I’m not a strong swimmer and I don’t like to be out of my depth.’

‘You just need someone experienced alongside. You should try it—it really is beautiful out there.’ His mobile rang and he reached to answer it immediately. ‘Excuse me Carrie,’ he said politely as he flicked it open.

She listened as he spoke in Greek, his voice crisp and businesslike, and his expression serious.

He was far too attractive, Carrie thought as she allowed her eyes to drift over him. Dangerously so.

She wondered what it would be like to feel those sensual lips exploring hers, those hands touching her skin.

He hung up and glanced over at her again. 'Sorry about that —business, I'm afraid.'

'That's OK.' Annoyed by her thoughts, she looked away from him and lifted her glass of wine. What on earth was the matter with her? Andreas couldn't have made it clearer that he was uncomfortable with this situation and wasn't interested in her and yet here she was daydreaming about kissing him! 'You know, if you need to go don't let me detain you. I'll pass on your apologies to Theo and Jo.'

'I don't think you'll need to. They're here.'

Carrie followed his glance out towards the road and saw Theo climbing out of his black sports car, closely followed by Jo. She noticed the way Theo waited for her by the pavement, reached out and took her hand.

There was something very touching about the moment, about the way Jo looked up at him.

'Somehow they seem right together, don't they?' Carrie didn't realize she had spoken aloud until Andreas answered her.

'Yes. I think this is serious.'

Carrie glanced over at him, his words resonating inside her.

He was right.

So what was going to happen at the end of the holiday when it was time for Jo to go home? Her friend deserved happiness so much, Carrie thought as she turned her attention back towards them. She'd been through so much in her life—Carrie knew exactly how tough she'd had it because they'd grown up together in the same foster home. She knew that Jo pretended to be tough but had a heart as kind and as soft as you could get.

As they approached Carrie thought her friend had never looked lovelier. She was wearing a black fitted dress that did great things for her slender figure, and her skin was glowing, her long blonde curls softly tousled around her face. 'I'm so sorry we're late,' she murmured, looking from one to the other of them searchingly.

'It was entirely my fault.' Theo cut in as he reached to kiss Carrie on both cheeks. 'Nice to see you again, Carrie, and I'm really sorry, time just ran away with us. But we knew you two would be hitting it off.'

Carrie wished she hadn't met Andreas's eyes across the table just at that moment.

He looked lazily amused, which irritated Carrie considerably.

'Don't worry about it,' he said nonchalantly as he got to his feet to greet them. 'Carrie and I have enjoyed meeting.'

'Oh, good!' Jo looked at Carrie with an 'I told you so' glint in her eyes and Carrie tried her utmost to look unfazed. Was Jo so blinded by love that she failed to notice Andreas's obvious

reluctance to be here?

'So, is everything OK?' Jo asked in an undertone as she took the seat beside her.

'Absolutely.' Carrie was distracted for a moment as she watched Andreas greet his younger brother. She noticed how alike they were, both tall and dark, but Theo's features were open, pleasant, less challenging than Andreas's, who had a powerful, hard intensity about his good looks.

It was immediately apparent that the men were not just brothers, but that they were also good friends. They talked together for a moment about Theo's business, Theo asking Andreas's opinion on some new equipment that he wanted.

'They would talk for ever about business.' Jo grinned at Carrie.

'Hey, I need all the advice I can get,' Theo cut in goodnaturedly. 'Especially from a brother who has a brilliant mind for business—I don't know what I'd do without him.'

'You'd do very well, Theo. Your business is flourishing,' Andreas told him staunchly.

'Not without your help.' Theo glanced around for the waiter. 'Shall we grab some menus? I don't know about everyone else but I am very hungry.'

'Unfortunately I'm not going to be able to stay.' Andreas glanced at his watch. 'I have to head off to Athens—I have a meeting early tomorrow.'

'Oh, no! But surely you can stay a little longer?' Jo couldn't contain her disappointment.

‘Afraid not.’ Andreas glanced over at Carrie. ‘But it has been really lovely meeting you, Carrie.’

The urbane civility of the words made Carrie cringe. ‘Yes—likewise.’ She smiled politely back at him.

Their eyes held for a moment.

Andreas noticed how she tilted her head up, an almost rebellious fiery light in her eyes. Obviously she’d been as uncomfortable with this situation as he had.

She was stunningly beautiful—Theo hadn’t been embellishing. But there was also an unusual fragility about her, and a reserve that fascinated him. Most young women flirted openly with him, but she hadn’t even tried to capture his interest, there had been no coy smiles, or false joviality. Just that proud tilt of her head as she looked across at him and when she smiled—really smiled, not in that polite way she was now—it blew him away.

But he didn’t have time for such things, he reminded himself firmly. He was in the midst of difficult business negotiations and now was not a good time for a dalliance. Besides, this situation could be a minefield. Theo was deeply involved with Carrie’s best friend and by contrast Andreas wasn’t looking for anything serious and never would be, so it was probably best to steer clear of muddying these waters.

‘I’ll leave you to enjoy your evening.’ He rose smoothly to his feet.

‘Damn!’ Jo muttered the word angrily under her breath as they

watched him walk away. ‘I’m so sorry, Carrie…I really thought you two would hit it off!’

‘We did. We enjoyed a very pleasant drink together,’ Carrie hastily reassured her friend. ‘Don’t waste your time worrying about it!’

‘Andreas really is in the middle of a most gruelling takeover deal,’ Theo inserted quickly. ‘He’s just sold his publishing house and now he’s buying out shares in a newspaper company—playing for very high stakes. If his meeting is early in the morning he will have to take the late ferry to Athens tonight and stay at his apartment there.’

‘Theo, you don’t need to explain.’ Carrie was discomfited by how upset they both were and also touched by their staunch regard of her feelings. ‘Andreas and I had a lovely time chatting as we waited for you. I thoroughly enjoyed his company. But we both agreed that you two need time on your own, and to be honest I’m really glad of the opportunity to go back to the apartment and have an early night.’

‘You are not going anywhere!’ Jo said with a raised eyebrow. ‘You are having dinner with us—we insist!’

‘But honestly, Jo—’

‘I wouldn’t argue if I were you,’ Theo told her with a grin. ‘Because you won’t win.’

CHAPTER TWO

CARRIE was sipping water as she lounged on the sunbed reading her book. This was quite blissful, she thought as she stretched lazily to put her glass down. But in a moment she was going to have to work up the energy to move into the shade.

London felt like another planet away. There were only a few people around the apartment-complex pool—and the tranquillity of the setting amidst green manicured gardens was very relaxing.

Jo had just left to go and have a coffee with Theo at the dive shop. She'd asked Carrie to accompany her but after the embarrassment of meeting Andreas last night she definitely preferred to be alone. That had to be the most uncomfortable half hour of her life.

However, he had been incredibly good-looking. For a second she remembered the dark, searing intensity of his eyes, remembered the craziness of her thoughts—the weird feelings of longing. She was twenty-two years of age and no man had ever stirred that kind of reaction in her before.

In fact, men had chased her, flirted with her, even kissed her and hadn't awoken that kind of response. She'd started to wonder if perhaps she didn't have it in her to feel passion, because she always thought things through—analysed relationships to the utmost degree.

Jo had told her she had a trust problem when it came to men,

and she knew deep down that her friend was probably right, that it was probably because her father had walked out on her when she'd been young. She'd even started to accept that about herself—accept the fact that maybe she would never allow herself to let go and just be swept away by emotions. And yet last night all Andreas had done was look at her and she had felt more alive—more turned on—than she ever had before!

Too much sun combined with holiday madness, she told herself swiftly as she switched her attention back to her book. Andreas wasn't even interested in her—and she wasn't interested in him!

Her phone rang and she quickly reached to answer it before it could disturb the peace and quiet of the afternoon. She couldn't see whose name was flashing on the dial but she guessed it would be Jo ringing to see if she would change her mind and join them.

'Hi, Jo—will you stop fussing? I'm by the pool doing nothing and loving every minute,' she told her breezily.

'Well, I'm glad to hear it.' The amused male voice sent so many disconcerting waves of shock rushing through her that she almost dropped the phone. She knew instantly who it was; there was no mistaking that deeply sensual almost lazy intonation. And it was so weird hearing his voice after she'd just been thinking about him. As if dark forces had conjured him up!

Trying desperately to dispel the ridiculous thoughts, she sat up on the sunbed, her book falling to the ground, and said the first thing that came into her head. 'Andreas, where on earth did you

get my phone number?'

'Well, now, you can have two guesses,' he replied teasingly, 'but if you'd like a hint, I've just seen Theo at the shop. He wanted some advice on this equipment he's buying—'

'And you allowed him to talk you into calling me! Andreas, I know you think a lot of your brother, but this goes beyond the line of duty—'

'Hey, can I just stop you right there?' he cut across her firmly. 'For once Theo didn't even mention you—I asked him for your number.'

There was a moment's silence and Carrie wondered if she had misheard him. 'Why did you do that?'

'Because I have some free time this afternoon, and I wondered if you'd like to go out to the coral reef with me.'

The invitation was deeply tempting but she forced herself to take a deep breath and think sensibly. 'Thank you, I appreciate the kind offer, but I'm busy—'

'I thought you just said you were doing nothing?' He sounded even more amused now.

'Yes, I'm busy doing nothing and loving it.'

'So come and be energetic with me and you'll love it even more.'

The teasing husky words made her adrenalin surge wildly.

'I'll pick you up in about ten minutes.'

'Ten minutes! I thought you were in Athens this morning!' Her voice rose slightly.

‘I was, for an early breakfast meeting. That finished early enough for me to catch the ferry over, so now I’m just down the road from your hotel—I told you, I’ve been out to see Theo.’

‘Andreas, I won’t be ready—’

‘Then I’ll wait—but not for long, so get a move on.’

The phone went dead and Carrie held it away from her ear and glared at it as if it were a living entity.

How dared he take her acceptance for granted? Did he think that just because her friend had been so keen to set her up with him that she was some kind of sad charity case? Well, she would soon put him right about that! She wasn’t going to go out with him! He would arrive and she would still be lying here reading her book.

Carrie picked it up and adjusted her floppy hat down over her eyes and tried to focus back on the page.

But all she could think about was Andreas. Why had he suddenly phoned her like this? She really had thought she would never hear from him again.

Should she swallow her pride and go out with him? She had to admit she was more than a little curious about the feelings he had stirred within her last night—had it just been some flight of fancy on her behalf?

She glared at the printed page, hating herself for weakening. Andreas had made it abundantly clear he wasn’t interested in her last night—so this was probably some kind of sop to his brother’s feelings, because Theo had been as upset as Jo when he’d walked

out.

She glanced up over the pages of her book as she heard a car pulling up outside. A few moments later she saw Andreas strolling in through the front gates of the property. He looked magnificent. There was no other word for it. His clothes were casual, a white linen shirt and sand-coloured trousers, yet he looked incredibly sophisticated and stylish—or was that simply the air of confidence that he wore like a well fitting cape?

Carrie immediately wished she'd rushed inside to get changed. Not that she had many stylish clothes with her. The dress she'd worn last night was it—everything else was shorts, tee shirts and jeans. But it was too late to even think about that now, she realized with a rapidly beating heart as he glanced over and caught her eye.

'Ah, there you are.' He cut away from the path and walked across the grass towards her and she noticed the interested glances he received from some attractive young women nearby.

She tried to pretend that she was engrossed in her book, only nonchalantly glancing up as he reached her side. She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of knowing that she too found it hard to take her eyes off him.

He seemed to tower over her, and that combined with the fact that she was only wearing a bikini made her feel suddenly extremely self-conscious.

She sat up a little straighter on the bed and then drew her knees up in an attempt to shield her body from his eyes. But she

realized that wasn't working as his gaze just moved over her long legs with swift male appraisal.

'I don't know what you are doing here, Andreas,' she murmured nervously.

'Don't you…?' His lips curved in a smile that made her heart rate start to increase. Then he took a chair from a nearby table and sat down beside her. 'I thought I told you when we spoke on the phone.'

'And I thought we'd dealt with this situation last night. Theo and Jo mean well,' she continued briskly, 'but we shouldn't feel obliged to spend time together just to please them.'

'Is that what you think this is?' One dark eyebrow lifted. 'I never do anything I don't want to do, Carrie…I can assure you of that.'

'Well, you turned up last night!' she reminded him swiftly.

'Yes, out of curiosity.' He smiled. 'You're right when you say that I think a lot of my brother—but dating to please him…?' He looked at her wryly and shook his head. 'That was never going to happen.'

'Yes, well, I feel exactly the same where Jo is concerned, so let's just leave it like that.' She flicked her chin up stubbornly.

'Good, I'm glad you feel the same—because it means we can just be friends, doesn't it?'

She liked the way he held her eyes as he said those words. Could a woman ever just be a friend with someone who looked like him? Carrie wondered.

‘I don’t do serious relationships anyway,’ he added gently. ‘I don’t want complications, nor have I got time for them, especially at the moment.’

‘Neither have I.’ She angled her chin up even further. ‘I’m on holiday to relax after working extremely hard for exams. And in nine days’ time I start a new job in the city.’

‘So a bit of light-hearted fun is in order all round.’ She wanted to ask him what kind of fun he was talking about, but she didn’t dare voice that question because it seemed far too dangerous.

‘So, the bottom line is that you’re at a loose end this afternoon?’ she said instead.

He laughed at that. ‘Maybe it is.’

‘Well, I’ll have to check my appointments diary.’ She nodded. ‘Because I’m *really* busy…’

He liked the playful gleam in her blue eyes.

‘Yes, I can see that.’ His glance moved towards the book that she was still holding in her hands and he reached out and took it from her. At first she thought he was taking it away, but he simply turned it around and handed it back and she realized she’d been holding it upside down!

She flushed with embarrassment. ‘I dropped it a few moments ago.’

He nodded. ‘It’s obviously riveting.’

‘It is…but I suppose I could tear myself away from it for a few hours. I’m not so sure about snorkelling at the reef, though…as I told you last night I am not a strong swimmer.’

‘Well…we’ll sail out there, assess your skills and take it from there. How’s that?’

‘Sounds OK.’

He nodded. ‘And if you don’t want to swim or snorkel you can watch the boat whilst I dive. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.’

‘Oh, right, so I’m just the lookout for sharks now, am I?’

‘No, I’ll promote you. You can be the bar manager,’ he amended.

‘Gee, thanks.’ She laughed. ‘Just give me a minute to go inside and change.’

‘You’re fine the way you are.’ She was wearing a very sexy red bikini that showed off her incredible figure to perfection: high pert breasts, a narrow waist, and slender hips. ‘Just throw on your shorts and T-shirt.’ He picked them up from the bottom of her sunbed and tossed them up at her.

She caught them instinctively. ‘But my money is in the apartment safe so I need to go back inside anyway.’

‘You don’t need money.’ He watched as she took off her sunhat and her hair tumbled around her shoulders and down to her waist in a golden silky wave.

She was so beautiful that he found it difficult to look away. He noticed how her ribs protruded as she stretched upwards to put her T-shirt on and how flat her stomach was and he longed suddenly to reach out and touch her, slide his hands over the satin perfection of her skin. As she stood up from the bed and pulled

her shorts on she flicked a glance over at him.

It was a look that was both vulnerable yet filled with an answering fire. The same look she had thrown him last night. It intrigued him…

Not many women had that effect on him, and there had been no shortage of beautiful women in his life over the years. Mostly he hadn't had to pursue any with too much rigour; they'd fallen into his bed with the greatest of ease—and he'd enjoyed them, whilst being as honest as he could about the fact that he had no intention of committing to a real relationship. The strange thing was that the more elusive he was, the more interested they became. But it wasn't a game with him—he really didn't want to get himself entwined in a serious relationship. He'd been there and wouldn't return.

Presently there were no women in his life—he'd cleared the decks because he needed all his time and concentration for the intricate negotiations of the takeover deal. Ditching his social life for these last few weeks hadn't cost him a second thought. He was completely focused on the deal.

Or rather he had been until this morning when during a meeting of the board he had suddenly been distracted by thoughts of Carrie.

He hadn't been able to get her out of his head all night either. That almost defiant way she'd looked at him with clear sky-blue eyes. The way her skin flushed so easily, and vulnerability slipped in. She was a bewitching mix of innocence laced with provoking

passion and despite telling himself to stay away he just couldn't.

Right now he should have been in a meeting with his accountants, not here with her. But, he reasoned, he deserved an afternoon off anyway. They would keep things light and tomorrow he would regain his complete focus on business.

Andreas had recommended that she kept her shirt on to protect her delicate fair skin from burning whilst snorkelling, but all he wore were his trunks. She watched from the back of the boat as he dived cleanly into the calm turquoise water. He looked like an Olympic athlete, she thought admiringly; his body was perfectly honed, his skin gleaming a rich honey gold. He disappeared for a moment beneath the satin surface of the sea and then resurfaced. 'Right, your turn.'

'Very funny. I can't dive like that!'

He grinned. 'Go down onto the platform and slide in. Don't worry—I'll catch you if you have any difficulty.'

Carrie didn't know which made her heart race faster: the thought of him putting his arms around her or the vast depths of the ocean.

'Come on, it's lovely once you're in,' he coaxed.

Taking a deep breath, she went down the ladder onto the back platform and then allowed herself to slide in. The water felt surprisingly icy and she gasped.

'Gosh! It's cold.'

He laughed and swam over so that he was next to her. 'It's not cold, you're just hot.' He added teasingly, 'In more ways than

one.'

It was amazing—even in the cool water she could feel the heat of his gaze licking through her. He was so very close; she could see the gold flecks in the darkness of his eyes, noticed how thick and dark his eyelashes were, how sensual and inviting the arrogant curve of his lips.

She wanted to reach out and touch him. Instead she forced herself to swim away. 'So where is the reef?'

'A little further out.' He picked up the masks he'd left on the platform and headed after her.

Carrie didn't think she would ever forget being alone with Andreas that afternoon, surrounded by nothing but the vastness of the sea. The water was so tranquil and clear, and, when her skin became accustomed to it, quite warm. Andreas showed her how to use the snorkelling equipment and stayed close until she was feeling more confident. And by then she was enraptured by the secret world beneath them.

The reef was spectacular, a giant living city of swaying tentacles and flower shapes that moved with a swirl of its colourful fish inhabitants.

She loved every minute of it and was disappointed when Andreas told her it was time to head back to the boat.

'That was fabulous.' She smiled happily up at him as he climbed on the platform and reached to help her out of the water.

'You're glad you did it, then?'

'Really glad. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.'

‘You certainly looked at home. In fact, you looked like a mermaid with your hair streaming behind you as you swam.’

She laughed. ‘Well, unless this T-shirt dries out quickly I’m going to look like a bedraggled fish out of water on the way home.’

‘You can borrow a shirt of mine to put on.’ He led the way up onto the deck. ‘Although I have to say that the bedraggled look also suits you.’

Distracted by his gentle flirting, she lost her footing as she stepped down onto the polished floor.

Immediately he caught her and for the briefest moment she was held close against the powerful lines of his wet body.

Then he released her.

‘Sorry about that. I just slipped.’ She tried to sound nonchalant, and smile at him, but the contact had knocked all the breath from her body, and the curl of dangerous excitement deep inside her was still there.

Disconcerted, she looked away. ‘I suppose we should head back to the island now.’

‘Yes, I guess so. I have work to get back to.’ His glance moved over her, he hadn’t been lying when he’d told her that she looked good. Her wet hair was slicked back from her face revealing her perfect skin, her high cheekbones.

His gaze moved lower, noticing how the wet shirt was moulded to the shapely curves of her body and how taut and firm her body was.

He wanted to peel the shirt off her and unfasten the bikini, let his mouth and his tongue explore her warm, wet curves.

His eyes moved upwards and connected with hers and suddenly naked hunger burned like a blue flame between them. Carrie felt a thrill of need kick inside and take over, her desire so intense it made her feel powerless.

How was this happening to her? she wondered in panic.

How could he make her want him so desperately with just the slightest touch, and one look?

She made to turn away but he caught hold of her hand and pulled her back.

The next moment she was in his arms and his mouth was on hers, possessing her with an almost ruthless intent.

No one had ever kissed her with such total demanding control and she hesitated for a moment as shock pounded through her, and then pleasure detonated inside her. It felt so good, as if he were reaching inside her, drawing out the secrets of her soul…

She kissed him back, her arms sliding up and around his neck, aware that at the same time his hands were moving beneath her wet shirt, stroking up over her.

The sensation of pleasure was so exquisitely irresistible that she ached for more, ached to be rid of all the clothes and have no barrier between them. All she could think about was how much she wanted him—and how she could intensify the enjoyment—how she never wanted him to let her go.

'I wanted to do this from the moment I saw you again this

afternoon.' He murmured the words against her ear as his hand slid down to stroke over her bikini-clad bottom, pulling her in against the hard arousal of his body.

'And I thought you just wanted to be friends.'

'Well, I want that too…I want everything…' he murmured, stroking his hand along the smooth curves of her hips. 'Everything you want to give…' His fingers teased across over her thighs and then swept higher to the soft core of her through the material of her costume. 'I'm greedy like that.'

Carrie found herself gasping with pleasure as his lips took control of hers again. She felt greedy too…and impatient, and where lovemaking was concerned these were emotions she'd never had to deal with before.

She tried to tell herself she didn't know this man, that she should be cautious because this was nothing more than a holiday fling. Did she really want her first time to be just a casual encounter? But her body was fighting the thoughts, pushing them away with almost mocking disregard so that her reasoning was lost like a whisper in a hurricane.

'Maybe we should go inside, make ourselves more comfortable,' he suggested as his fingers stroked ever more tantalizingly over her.

She couldn't answer him, couldn't formulate any words. His lips moved down over the column of her neck with butterfly kisses and she held him closer. He pressed against her, parting her legs, and suddenly she realized he was responding to her

urgency and if she didn't say anything he would just take her right here, right now…

Momentary panic zinged through her as she felt how powerful his body was against hers and she froze. Immediately he pulled back.

'What is it?' His voice was distracted as he traced his hands up over her narrow waist and ribcage. Then he looked into her eyes…And for just a fleeting second he saw her vulnerability.

'You have done this before…haven't you?'

It was almost a throwaway question, but when she didn't answer shocked realization flooded through him closely followed by the knowledge that maybe he'd suspected her innocence all along…Yes…when he thought about the delightful way she blushed so easily, her way of avoiding his gaze sometimes, and of course the vulnerable gleam in those beautiful eyes. Even the hesitant way she'd first met the demands of his kiss.

Deep down he'd known…

'You're a virgin.' It was more statement than question. Then he said something in Greek softly under his breath as he pulled her shirt down to cover her body again.

'Andreas?' She looked up at him questioningly, and as she saw him moving back from her it was as if icy cold water were suddenly flooding through her veins.

'Carrie…this…changes things.' He said the words slowly as he tried to get his brain to operate without the almost violent intervention of the desire he still felt for her.

She frowned. She didn't want this conversation; all she wanted was for him to take her back into his arms. 'Does it?'

'Of course it does!' He raked a hand through the darkness of his hair. 'You're young and beautiful, and obviously a virgin by choice.'

'Well…yes…' She frowned, not understanding where he was going with the conversation.

'Which means you don't do casual relationships—and that's all I have to offer.'

He watched how her skin coloured. 'Carrie, I don't want to hurt you,' he added gently.

'No, of course not…and you're right, this would be a bad mistake!' Her voice came out in a rush as reality swooped in. She couldn't believe what she had so nearly done! Obviously this would be nothing more than casual sex. Something she had always avoided.

Hell—from as far back as she could remember she'd always promised herself that she would be in control of relationships. She'd witnessed at first hand the devastating consequences of loving the wrong person.

She swallowed hard as she looked over at him, her pride stinging. 'But I'd no intention of going further—I was just enjoying a bit of light-hearted fooling around.'

'Were you now?' His voice held amusement and she felt her skin scorch with sudden wild heat as she remembered how eagerly she had returned his advances.

‘I don’t know what I was thinking,’ she admitted.

‘Well…I know what I was thinking.’ His voice was husky, his eyes on her lips. He reached out and stroked a stray strand of her hair back from her face.

‘Don’t, Andreas.’ She flinched away from him. ‘Let’s just put this down to a little bit of madness, and forget it, OK.’

Andreas frowned. He didn’t want to forget it—but nor could he proceed…not now…not with any conscience.

‘Anyway, we said we’d head back to land now, didn’t we?’ she said quickly.

‘Yes, dry land and sanity.’ He turned away from her and headed up to the bridge. She was off limits, he told himself firmly. And that was the end of it.

Carrie picked up one of the towels that Andreas had left out for her earlier and wrapped it around her slender figure. She was trembling with cold—yet the sun was blazing down on her. It was the strangest feeling.

CHAPTER THREE

CARRIE was sure there would be a strained silence between them in the car on the way home, except that as soon as Andreas switched on his phone and put it into hands-free mode it kept ringing. He took one call after another as he drove slowly back along the coast road.

Carrie couldn't understand a word he was saying, but it was obviously all to do with business because he dealt with each call in the same serious, crisply concise voice.

'My apologies, Carrie. I employ a team of accountants and yet they still need me to hold their hands,' he muttered in annoyance as he started to say something to her and the phone rang again.

'That's OK.' She shrugged and looked away from him. In truth she was glad. She couldn't wait to get away from him, pretend that this afternoon hadn't happened.

He finished his call just as the gates to her apartment complex loomed and as soon as he pulled up outside she reached quickly for the door handle.

'Well, I hope your takeover deal goes well for you.' She smiled at him. 'And I'll see you around some time.' She'd been practising the goodbye line for the last few miles and she was pleased that it sounded casual enough.

She hadn't intended waiting for his reply, but his voice held her back as she turned away.

‘Haven’t you forgotten something?’

‘Have I?’ She looked back at him with a frown.

‘An invitation for coffee would be good.’

Her heart rate increased. She didn’t really know how to handle this situation. Part of her was desperately pleased he wanted to come in with her and the other side of her was telling her fiercely to walk away now and not prolong the agony of wanting him…

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea.’ She lifted her chin a little.

‘I think it’s a very civilized idea.’ He smiled. ‘Let’s not be awkward around each other, Carrie. I’m thirty-four and a man of the world. You’re twenty-two and a virgin and I respect you for that.’

Her face flamed with colour.

‘Besides, I’d like my shirt back.’ His eyes flicked with wry amusement to the garment he’d given her to wear. It drowned her slender frame, yet she still managed to look sexy in it…How was that?

‘I’ll wash it and give it to Theo for you.’ She tipped her chin up a little higher.

‘No need, just give it back to me now.’ Why did he love teasing her so much? he wondered as he watched the consternation and the fire in her beautiful eyes.

She turned away and got out of the car. ‘I suppose you’d better come in, then.’

The grudging invitation made him smile and he reached for his phone and followed her.

The inside of the apartment was basic but pleasantly decorated. From his seat at the breakfast bar Andreas could see into a bedroom that contained two single beds.

He switched his attention back to Carrie as she flicked the kettle on. Her hair had dried in long flowing curls; she looked like a girl from a Pre-Raphaelite painting, young and yet somehow incredibly fragile as she looked over at him.

'I'll just change out of this shirt.'

He nodded and watched as she disappeared into the bedroom and closed the door. He would leave as soon as he'd had a coffee and she'd returned the shirt, he vowed. He had no business pursuing a virgin. Happily ever after wasn't for him, never would be. And something told him that innocent Carrie wouldn't really want to settle for less.

A few minutes later she reappeared wearing a blue fitted T-shirt over jeans and put his shirt down on the table beside him. 'Thank you.' Her voice was stiffly polite.

'My pleasure,' he replied and smiled to himself as she turned hurriedly to make the coffee.

She looked great in the jeans, they curved over her bottom, emphasizing how pert and toned she was.

He still wanted her. What the hell was the matter with him? he wondered angrily. He knew a million women with great figures —so what was he doing here? He should be heading back to his office. There was a mountain of paperwork waiting for his attention.

Yet still he sat on. *Because he was more intrigued by Carrie than ever*.

She put the coffee down in front of him just as his phone rang and he answered it impatiently.

'Now you know why I suggested going out to sea today,' he told her with a smile as he ended the call a few moments later.

'Theo told me that you never stopped thinking about business,' she said as she took the seat opposite him. 'I take it you enjoy it.'

He shrugged. 'It's become a way of life, I suppose. We grew up in Athens in complete poverty and I vowed back then that I wouldn't rest until I'd got us out of it.'

Carrie met his gaze. 'And obviously you did that.'

The simplicity of the statement made him laugh. 'Yes. But the thing is, the deeper you get involved with business, the more the responsibilities spiral.' He didn't tell her that he employed a lot of people, that he was backing Theo with an expansion plan for his diving business or that he'd just bought his father a house back on the island of Mykonos.

'It's addictive, you mean.'

'I don't think I'd go as far as to say that, but I like the challenge.'

She nodded. 'And I suppose being single and without children it's easier to immerse yourself in it, take bigger risks along the way.'

'I suppose it is…' He fell silent, her insightful remark taking him aback.

'My father was a wheeler-dealer in his day. But never gave

a thought to his responsibility for others.' She frowned as she thought about her childhood. 'He was always looking for the next big deal.'

'And was he successful?'

'At first—but unfortunately he didn't know where to stop. Contentment wasn't a word he understood and risk-taking became a way of life.'

'He went bankrupt?'

She nodded. 'Yes. Took one risk too far and lost everything.'

For a moment she fell silent. The personal cost had been even higher than the financial one. Her mother's health had crumbled and so had their marriage. Carrie had only been ten but she remembered the trauma and the feelings of helplessness as sharply as if it had been yesterday.

She pushed the silky weight of her long hair back from her face, trying to dismiss the memory. 'However, he was forever the optimist. He's probably out there somewhere right now looking for the next big deal.'

Andreas frowned. 'I assumed that your parents were both dead. Jo told me that you grew up together in a foster home.'

'We did. But my circumstances were different to Jo's. I wasn't orphaned. My mother died, but my father decided to go off looking for his fortune elsewhere and having a ten-year-old along with him was a bit of a handicap. So he left me to social services.'

She saw the look of shock on Andreas's face and shrugged. 'Some people aren't cut out to be parents, are they? And in the

long run he probably did me a favour.'

Behind the brave words he heard the edge of sadness in her tone. 'Do you know where he is now?' he asked gently.

'I think he's in the States. I tried to trace him a few years ago and found out he was in Chicago and that he'd remarried. I left my contact details for him, but he never got in touch.'

'Some men don't deserve families,' Andreas muttered.

'Well, it worked out OK,' Carrie continued swiftly, 'because I met Jo and we are like family. She's the sister I never had, if you know what I mean.'

'Yes, I know what you mean.' He smiled.

His phone rang again and impatiently Andreas flicked it open and answered it.

Carrie finished her coffee and tried not to allow her eyes to linger on him. She couldn't believe that she had just opened up and told him all about her family! It was crazy. One moment he infuriated her…the next she felt as if she could melt in the warmth of his gaze…

He hung up and glanced across at her. 'Unfortunately I'm going to have to go.'

'Yes, of course.' She tried desperately to mask her disappointment. It was for the best—she didn't want to be a notch on anyone's bedpost, even someone as good-looking and enthralling as him. And at least by having this coffee together they'd broken the awkwardness between them, so that if they had to meet again due to Theo and Jo it would be tolerable. Maybe

that was why he'd wanted to come in.

She stood up and walked with him towards the door. 'Thanks for an…interesting afternoon.' She'd been going to say enjoyable afternoon and thought better of it.

'Maybe we can do it again some time.'

'Who knows?' She tried to match his flippant tone. 'Maybe if you are passing and I'm in, we could fit another coffee between phone calls.'

'Perhaps, then, I should just say goodbye for now, Carrie. But I'm sure I'll be seeing you again soon.'

And then he was gone, striding away from her without a backward glance. So damn arrogant, she thought angrily, yet somehow utterly irresistible.

CHAPTER FOUR

CARRIE OPENED THE BLUE shutters and bright sunshine flooded into the cool interior of her apartment.

It was Sunday morning, the last day of her holiday and time to go home. Somewhere a church bell was tolling, the sound echoing down the narrow cobbled streets of the village. Carrie leaned against the window sill and allowed the heat and the tranquillity of the morning to wash over her.

She'd thought Andreas would have come to her last night, that he would have wanted to make the very most of their last evening together—but he hadn't. Of course he'd happily seen her over the past few days, on his terms! She hadn't been able to say no when he'd invited her out to dinner a couple of days after their trip to the reef. Nor had she had the strength to refuse his subsequent invitations. The truth was, she was wildly attracted to him, and she'd naively jumped at every chance to spend time getting to know him.

And now he'd seemingly tired of her. She didn't know whether to feel sad or just plain angry. He could at least have had the decency to phone her and tell her he wouldn't see her before she left.

But what did she expect, she asked herself furiously, when it was just a holiday fling and Andreas was a busy man?

Carrie raked a hand through the long length of her blonde hair

as she thought back over the holiday. So much had happened—including the momentous news of Jo and Theo's engagement. And Jo had taken the decision to remain in Greece.

The four of them had enjoyed a celebratory dinner two nights ago. It had been a very joyful occasion. Carrie was going to miss her friend, but she was so happy for her.

But she hadn't seen Andreas since.

After the dinner he'd told her he was too involved with work to make a definite next date, and that he'd ring her.

That was the last she'd heard from him.

She wished now that she had never got involved with him—had never allowed herself to start believing that he might actually care about her. Especially when he'd made it quite clear up front that he wasn't looking for a serious relationship.

At least she hadn't been stupid enough to sleep with him.

But how much of that decision had been down to her good sense and how much had been down to his restraint, a traitorous little voice asked her mockingly. Because she did want him, in fact so much so that she ached for him. *And he knew that*. There had been a few times when he had kissed her at the end of an evening and she had been a whisper close to just begging him to sate her.

She turned away from the view of red-tiled rooftops and shimmering blue sea. It was just as well he hadn't come to her last night—because she might have done something she would have regretted.

She'd had a narrow escape, she told herself angrily as she glanced at her watch. Obviously the man couldn't really care less about her! If he did he would at least have phoned her last night to say goodbye.

It was time to start packing. Jo would be here to give her a lift down to the ferry terminal in an hour.

Carrie could hardly believe that Jo wasn't going to come back to London with her. It was going to be so strange not having her around any more, but she had no doubt that her friend was doing the right thing; Theo was such a nice, steady and reliable kind of guy.

The same could never be said of Andreas, she thought disparagingly. He spoke about commitment and love as if they were things to be avoided at all costs. And he'd obviously broken hearts by the truckload.

Yet he had been genuinely pleased for his brother and Jo.

She couldn't quite work him out.

Not that she wanted to work him out, she told herself firmly.

Their relationship was never going to be anything as serious as Theo and Jo's. Neither of them were ready for settling down, it was the wrong time, the wrong place. Andreas was totally consumed with his business deal and she was too wary to commit herself to just a holiday romance—she had a good job to go back to.

So why did she feel like this? she wondered angrily as she got her suitcase out and started to pack. Why had she waited and

waited last night for her mobile to ring?

Somehow over the last week reality had been swept away on a tide of emotion that she had never experienced before. Maybe it was something to do with the beauty of the surroundings and the way Andreas had wined and dined her; perhaps she had even been caught up with the mood of romance that surrounded Jo and Theo she thought rationally as she folded T-shirts and shorts.

And then she remembered the way Andreas could kiss her and her hands stilled. Deep down she knew her feelings weren't anything to do with their surroundings, Andreas's attentive generosity or even Theo and Jo's wonderful love for each other. It was the way Andreas made her feel. The way he'd been able to send shivers of pleasurable anticipation through her with just a look. The way he could kiss her and set her totally on fire.

No one had ever done that to her before.

But she wasn't stupid; she'd tasted the danger in his kisses, knew that beneath the charming urbane exterior there was the steely heart of the predatory male.

He was the type of man who would normally have made her run for the hills, yet something strange had happened when he'd touched her; he terrified her, yet he'd captivated her.

And because he had treated her with restraint and respect she'd even started to imagine that she meant something to him… Stupid, she told herself as she started to fling clothes into her suitcase now without bothering to fold them. The sooner she got away from here and back to reality, the better.

There was a knock on the door and Carrie glanced at her watch. Jo was early! The realization that it was almost time to say goodbye to her best friend struck through her like ice.

'I wasn't expecting you for another hour…' Her voice drifted off as she swung the door open and found that it wasn't Jo, it was Andreas outside. Surprise and pleasure flooded through her. 'Oh…it's you!'

Hastily she tried to pull herself together. Every time she saw him she couldn't believe how gorgeous he was. But didn't he just know it, she reminded herself quickly as his dark intense eyes seem to sear into her and he smiled that confident smile of his.

He was wearing a suit and a blue shirt that was open at the neck, and he looked as if he'd come straight from a business meeting. It made Carrie feel very self-conscious about her own dishevelled appearance.

'I wasn't expecting you!' She tightened the belt of her blue silk robe. 'I thought it was Jo.'

'Are you disappointed?' he asked teasingly.

She didn't respond to the warmth of the enquiry. He was so damn sure of himself, she thought with a dart of anger. 'I'm just surprised,' she answered instead as she stepped back to allow him in. 'When I didn't hear from you yesterday I thought you'd probably forgotten that I leave today.'

'No, I didn't forget. I just got tied up with business in Athens.'

She noticed he didn't bother to try and apologise—didn't try to explain why he hadn't phoned her when he had said that he

would.

As he moved further into the room his glance moved to the open door and the suitcase on the bed.

'You're lucky to have caught me,' she said lightly. 'I leave in an hour.'

He turned to face her and as their eyes connected she could feel the chemistry swirling between them like a living entity… entwining around her heart, enticing her with invisible strings to step closer into his arms.

It took all of her self-control to stay where she was.

She had her pride, and he was probably only here to say goodbye. 'So how is business going?' she asked lightly. She wasn't really interested; it was just something to say—something to cover the overwhelming feelings of need and confusion swirling inside her.

'Hard to tell. It's early days.'

She nodded. 'Theo told me last night that you were at a delicate stage of negotiation.'

'Did he?' Andreas shrugged nonchalantly.

His laid-back attitude stung. She'd suspected last night that Theo was making excuses for his brother's absence—but at least he had been trying to spare her feelings! 'I hope the deal works out for you,' she murmured, 'but you know what I think about high-risk ventures.'

He looked amused. 'Well, luckily I haven't come to discuss my business strategies with you, Carrie.'

‘Haven’t you?’ She glared at him and raised her chin defiantly. ‘So what are you here for?’ she asked angrily.

To her surprise he reached out and took hold of her arm… pulling her closer. ‘I’ve come for this…’

Before she could move away, his head was lowering, his lips capturing hers in a fiercely possessive kiss. She tried not to respond—she was upset at his high-handed manner…still reeling inside from the way he had just ignored her for the last two days.

But, hell, he could kiss and she wanted him so badly, and before she realized what she was doing she was kissing him back hungrily.

Slowly she started to wind her arms up and around his neck.

‘That’s better.’ He murmured the words with satisfaction as his hand stroked under the silk of her gown, finding the curve of her breast. ‘This is *our* unfinished business…everything else doesn’t matter.’

Her eyes closed on a wave of ecstasy as his fingers stroked provocatively over her. But even as she started to give herself up to the pleasure of his caress her mind was still whirring. Everything else did matter. As much as she wanted this, she couldn’t shut out reality—he had ignored her for two days with not even the courtesy of a phone call, and her air ticket for home was sitting on the bedside table.

The reminder enabled her to pull away from him and draw the silk of her gown closer around her naked body. ‘Andreas, I leave in less than an hour.’

‘Yes—I realize that. But as I was saying, we’ve got unfinished business.’ He looked at her with dark brooding eyes. These last couple of days he had purposefully distanced himself from her—told himself that it was for her sake as well as his own. She was so young, her whole life stretching ahead of her, and if she stayed and they got deeply involved, pretty soon she’d want a level of commitment from him that he was unwilling—unable—to give.

He was at a crossroads—a place he didn’t want to be. He’d been heavily involved in a relationship once before and it had been a big—no, *huge*—mistake. He wasn’t going down that route again.

‘Andreas, I don’t think you heard me. I leave for England in an hour.’ She repeated her words fiercely, her eyes wide blue pools of shimmering emotion.

And suddenly he knew that, however selfish it was, he couldn’t let her go. ‘So why don’t you tear up that air ticket and stay?’

Carrie stared at him. The quiet words made her heart pitch with so much emotion that for a few seconds she couldn’t think straight, and deep down she realized she’d wanted him to say those words to her…wanted it so desperately and so unrealistically that she hadn’t even dared to voice the thought to herself.

But close on the heels of happiness there was wariness.

She remembered how he’d told her he could only offer her a casual affair—remembered how she’d waited over these last couple of days just for the telephone to ring.

If she said yes to Andreas would she be placing herself in a relationship where she came second to business? It certainly seemed so.

She tried to dismiss the fear, but the sensible side of her wouldn't let her.

OK, he'd asked her to stay, but she was all too aware of the things that had been left unsaid. What had changed between telling her that he didn't want a serious relationship and now?

'Why?' She raised clear unwavering eyes to his and he looked at her as if he couldn't believe the question. 'What are you thinking?' she continued quickly. 'In what capacity do you want me to stay?'

'I would have thought it was obvious. I want *you*…Carrie…'

The words were said almost coolly…dispassionately. But there was nothing cool about the way his eyes raked over her. 'I want you in my bed. I want to teach you all there is about making love…morning, noon and night. Is that specific enough?'

The way he had just looked at her had fired her blood…*She wanted him too*. But his words weren't enough to banish the doubt churning inside her. And she realized suddenly that she had wanted him to tell her he had feelings for her and that he had started to fall in love with her. How naïve was that? she mocked herself fiercely. She really had lost all sense of reality!

Her eyes held with the darkness of his. He'd laugh if he knew what was going through her mind. She'd laugh herself only she was too deeply shocked by her own stupidity—and yet even now

she felt a connection to him that was so deep that she couldn't quite unhook herself from it.

He didn't have time for deep emotion, she reminded herself firmly. He was too busy putting all his energies into business… playing for much higher stakes than love.

Could she really give up the good job that was waiting for her in London for this kind of uncertainty?

She took a deep breath, suddenly scared. 'I'm sorry, Andreas…but maybe on balance it would be best if I went back to London.' The words sounded stiff and staccato on her tongue. They weren't the words she wanted to say…but they were the ones she *had* to say. She couldn't give everything up for a man who put her second, a man moreover who liked to live dangerously where business deals were concerned—the lessons of growing up with someone like that were too deeply ingrained to ignore.

For a moment she saw surprise in his eyes. He'd expected her to just accept his terms, without any promises or even soft words. His arrogance was rather galling.

'Unlike you I'm not a person who likes to take risks,' she continued swiftly. 'I've been offered an extremely good job in London—one that I've worked hard to get. Even if I just stay there for a short time I need to take it.' She pulled the silk of her robe even closer around her slender body in an almost instinctively protective gesture as his eyes seemed to darken to deepest midnight. 'And maybe we need some space to think

about things.' She added the words huskily, unable to bear the thought of completely closing the door on them. 'You're consumed with this business deal—who knows how we will feel about each other in another, say…six months' time?'

'You are quite a tease, aren't you, Carrie?' he cut across her suddenly, his eyes narrowing as rage started to simmer inside him. 'What you're really saying is that you want to keep your options open.'

'That's not what I'm saying at all!' Her skin flared with colour. 'Come on, Andreas. You are in no position to throw that kind of accusation at me! You are totally focused on this deal of yours. You said yourself you don't want a relationship; you just want to take me to bed because…' Her voice trailed away in sudden embarrassment.

'Because you are a virgin.' He finished the sentence for her and watched as her skin caught fire. 'And you're right, I do prize the fact that you are a virgin.' He put a hand under her chin, tilting it so that he could look at her. 'And I've respected you for it.'

Their eyes held and silence seemed to simmer between them.

'But then you know that, don't you, Carrie? And you've used it to your advantage.'

'I don't know what you mean!'

'Well, let me spell it out. If you are waiting for me to propose marriage, it's not going to happen. I can't offer you that kind of commitment—it's not who I am.'

The cold, arrogant comment made her eyes widen with fury

and gave her the strength to pull away from him. 'Well, it's a good job, because it's not who I am either. I'd have turned you down flat.' She gave a shaky incredulous laugh. 'I don't want a marriage proposal from you! I'm an intelligent woman, not a naïve fool. And we hardly know each other, for heaven's sake.'

'Good, we are both of the same mind, then. And I know very well that you are an intelligent woman, Carrie.' His voice was quiet, his gaze flicking over her, noting the rise and fall of her chest, the way she moistened her lips as his eyes touched them.

'I also know that you want me…'

The husky, confident words made her senses swirl. He was right she did.

There was still a part of her that wanted to say, Yes, OK, let's give this a whirl, *but for what*? She certainly didn't want a marriage proposal from him, but she did need more from him emotionally than he seemed prepared to give.

She hated his cold arrogance—hated the way he could look at her like that, tell her he just wanted her for his bed, and still turn her on.

If she stayed, she could end up as a kept woman totally dependent on his every whim! She wouldn't even be able to get a decent job because she didn't speak Greek.

And then he could simply discard her for his next conquest when he got bored and she would be left without any fallback position.

She took a deep breath.

'The timing isn't right for us, Andreas, and we both know it.'

The fact that she could look at him with such emotion in her eyes, such warm need, and yet still turn him down enraged him; it also reminded him forcibly of things he didn't want to remember. Such as how he had no right asking her to fulfil his needs when he could never meet hers.

He'd made a mistake coming here. Asking her to stay had been crazy and he'd known that all along. Even if he just made her his mistress he would be in too deep—before he knew it they would be back at this crossroads and the relationship would have to end. Better that it was done now. He should have done it days ago, he told himself angrily, for her sake as well as his. He needed to burn all bridges and forget her.

'And when would you deem the time to be right, Carrie? When my business deal has paid off? Are you planning to save your virginity for the highest bidder?'

'I can't believe you've just said that!'

He was unrepentant as he watched the furious fires of anger and hurt burn in her beautiful eyes. *He needed to do this.*

'Don't worry about it, Carrie—we've had a bit of fun. And you were right, your innocence did intrigue me—I admit I wanted you and I know that, despite what you might say, you wanted me too.'

Carrie felt as if he had just struck her. 'Yes, well, hell would have to freeze over before I'd stay here and be stupid enough to give myself to someone like you!' she retaliated furiously.

He smiled. ‘Actually, that’s not true. I know I could have had you any time.’

With that he turned for the door, leaving her speechless with rage.

CHAPTER FIVE

Two years later

CARRIE stood out on deck as the high-speed ferry skipped across the glittering blue of the sea. In the distance she could see the small island of Pyrena drawing closer, shimmering in the hazy heat of the Greek sunshine, and memories tumbled painfully through her mind.

It was two years since she had first come here on holiday with Jo. And she could still recall every detail of that summer so vividly it was as if it were just yesterday.

Now it was hard to believe that Jo wasn't going to be waiting for her on that quay.

Even though they'd been mainly apart for the last couple of years the strong and enduring bond of friendship between them had never been broken. Jo had always been there in the background with emails and phone calls…

And Carrie had been back to visit her on the island three times and on each occasion Jo had been waiting eagerly for her.

And now she was dead…and Carrie could hardly bear it.

The island was clearer now; Carrie could see the familiar purple mountains, the secluded golden bays, the stunning scenery inevitably reminding her of Andreas, and the time they'd spent together.

Hastily Carrie turned her mind away from that. She didn't

like to think too deeply about Andreas. Even under happier circumstances the recollections of him made her emotions twist—which was crazy considering it had meant nothing, whereas Jo and Theo's relationship had been the real thing.

The last time Carrie had visited the island had been just after Jo had given birth to her daughter six months ago. The couple had been ecstatic and more in love with each other than ever.

Lilly's christening had been only three weeks ago, a time of celebration and happiness.

Carrie hadn't been able to make the christening. She'd been dealing with a vitally important contract at work and her boss had refused to give her the time off, had needed her to go to Hong Kong to sort things out for him.

But Jo had still wanted her to be Lilly's godmother, and had arranged it in her absence.

'I can't think of anyone I'd rather have to watch over my precious little girl,' she'd told Carrie in their last conversation. 'We may not be blood relatives but you are a part of my family and this is very important to me.'

It had been important to Carrie too—she'd taken the honour very seriously.

And now the words kept playing over and over in her mind. Because by the time she'd got back from Hong Kong to London there had been a letter waiting for her telling her that Jo and Theo had been involved in a car crash and that they'd both died instantly. The letter had been dated just four days after the

christening.

The view of Pyrena blurred under the weight of Carrie's tears. Firmly she brushed them away. Since receiving the news from Jo's solicitor she had done nothing but cry and it wasn't helping. She had to be practical now, for Lilly's sake.

Jo and Theo had no family except for Andreas. Lilly was with him at the moment. But Carrie was worried about the situation, because, as she well knew, Andreas wasn't a family man; a six-month-old baby wouldn't fit into his bachelor life! And, besides, by the sounds of things he was still as deeply involved with business as ever. Certainly every time she had visited the island he'd been away overseeing some important deal or other.

So what would become of Lilly, orphaned and alone?

The question had kept Carrie awake at night. And it haunted her days now. In desperation she'd even got Andreas's number from the solicitor and rung to see if he could shed any more light on the matter.

It had been her first contact with him in over two years. And the conversation had been very strained. Just thinking about it now made her temperature rise. He'd been very offhand with her.

For a few moments they had talked about Lilly and about Theo and Jo. And when Andreas had mentioned his brother's name there had been a raw note in his voice that had made tears immediately spring into her eyes. But he had cut short her whispered words of sympathy. And then he'd swept on and told her with brutal disregard for her feelings that there was no point

in her coming back to Pyrena and that Lilly was none of her business!

The ferry slowed as it approached the harbour, and as the sea breeze died the heat of the day throbbed with an incredible force that almost matched the heat Andreas had stirred up inside her.

He always had been able to rouse extreme reactions within her. When they'd first met, those reactions had been purely passionate—an instinctive response to an extremely attractive man.

But back then she had been young and foolish. She'd learnt her lesson.

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