

Chapter 28

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I wore a cream-colored cocktail dress with heavy gold beading and a plunging neckline. I pulled my long blond hair into a high ponytail. I wore diamond earrings. I glowed.



The first thing you need to do to get a man to elope with you is to challenge him to go to Las Vegas.

You do this by being out at an L.A. club and having a few drinks together. You ignore the impulse to roll your eyes at how eager he is to have his picture taken with you. You recognize that everyone is playing everyone else. It's only fair that he's playing you at the same time as you're playing him. You reconcile these facts by realizing that what you both want from each other is complementary.

You want a scandal.

He wants the world to know he screwed you.

The two things are one and the same.

You consider laying it out for him, explaining what you want, explaining what you're willing to give him. But you've been famous long enough to know that you never tell anyone anything more than you have to.

So instead of saying I'd like us to make tomorrow's papers, you say, "Mick, have you ever been to Vegas?"

When he scoffs, as if he can't believe you're asking him if he's ever been to Vegas, you know this will be easier than you thought.

"Sometimes I just get in the mood to roll dice, you know?" you say. Sexual implications are better when they are gradual, when they snowball over time.

"You want to roll dice, baby?" he says, and you nod.

"But it's probably too late," you say. "And we're already here. And here's OK, I

suppose. I'm having a fine time."

"My guys can call a plane and have us there like that." He snaps his fingers.

"No," you say. "That's too much."

"Not for you," he says. "Nothing is too much for you."

You know what he really means is Nothing is too much for me.

"You could really do that?" you say.

An hour and a half later, you're on a plane.

You have a few drinks, you sit in his lap, you let his hand wander, and you slap it back.

He has to ache for you and believe there is only one way to have you. If he doesn't want you enough, if he believes he can get you another way, it's all over. You've lost.

When the plane lands and he asks if the two of you should book a room at the Sands, you must demur. You must be shocked. You must tell him, in a voice that makes it clear you assumed he already knew, that you don't have sex outside of marriage.

You must seem both steadfast and heartbroken about this. He must think, She wants me. And the only way we can make it happen is to get married.

For a moment, you consider the idea that what you're doing is unkind. But then you remember that this man is going to bed you and then divorce you once he's gotten what he wants. So no one is a saint here.

You're going to give him what he's asking for. So it's a fair trade.

You go to the craps table and play a couple of rounds. You keep losing at first, as does he, and you worry that this is sobering both of you. You know the key to impulsivity is believing you are invincible. No one goes around throwing caution to the wind unless the wind is blowing their way.

You drink champagne, because it makes everything seem celebratory. It makes tonight seem like an event.

When people recognize the two of you, you happily agree to get your picture taken with them. Every time it happens, you hang on to him. You are telling him, in no small way, This is what it could be like if I belonged to you.

You hit a winning streak at the roulette table. You cheer so ebulliently that you jump up and down. You do this because you know where his eyes are going to go. You let

him catch you catching him.

You let him put his hand on your ass as the wheel spins again.

This time, when you win, you push your ass against him.

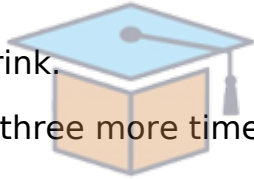
You let him lean into you and say, "Do you want to get out of here?"

You say, "I don't think it's a good idea. I don't trust myself with you."

You cannot bring up marriage first. You already said the word earlier. You have to wait for him to say it. He said it in the papers. He will say it again. But you have to wait. You cannot rush it.

He has one more drink.

The two of you win three more times.



Summaryer

You let his hand graze your upper thigh, and then you push it away.

It is two A.M., and you are tired. You miss the love of your life. You want to go home.

You would rather be with her, in bed, hearing the light buzz of her snoring, watching her sleep, than be here. There is nothing about here that you love.

Except what being here will afford you.

You imagine a world where the two of you can go out to dinner together on a Saturday night and no one thinks twice about it. It makes you want to cry, the simplicity of it, the smallness of it. You have worked so hard for a life so grand. And now all you want are the smallest freedoms. The daily peace of loving plainly.

Tonight feels like both a small and a high price to pay for that life.

"Baby, I can't take it," he says. "I have to be with you. I have to see you. I have to love you."

This is your chance. You have a fish on the line, and you have to gently reel him in.

"Oh, Mick," you say. "We can't. We can't."

"I think I love you, baby," he says. There are tears in his eyes, and you realize he's probably more complex than you have given him credit for.

You're more complex than he's given you credit for, too.

"Do you mean it?" you ask him, as if you desperately hope it's true.

"I think I do, baby. I do. I love everything about you. We only just met, but I feel like I can't live without you." What he means is that he thinks he can't live without screwing

you. And that, you believe.

“Oh, Mick,” you say, and then you say nothing more. Silence is your best friend.

He nuzzles your neck. It’s sloppy, and it feels akin to meeting a Newfoundland. But you pretend you love it. You two are in the bright lights of a Vegas casino. People can see you. You have to pretend that you do not notice them. That way, tomorrow, when they talk to the papers, they will say that the two of you were carrying on like a couple of teenagers.

You hope that Celia doesn’t pick up a single rag with your face on it. You think she’s smart enough not to. You think she knows how to protect herself. But you can’t be sure. The first thing you’re going to do when you get home, when this is all over, is to make sure she knows how important she is, how beautiful she is, how much you feel your life would be over if she were not in it.

“Let’s get married, baby,” he says into your ear.

There it is.

For you to grab.

But you can’t look too eager.

“Mick, are you crazy?”

“You make me this crazy.”

“We can’t get married!” you say, and when he doesn’t say anything back for a second, you worry that you’ve pushed slightly too far. “Or can we?” you ask. “I mean, I suppose we could!”

“Of course we can,” he says. “We’re on top of the world. We can do anything we want.”

You throw your arms around him, and you press against him, to let him know how excited—how surprised—you are by this idea and to remind him what he’s doing it for. You know your value to him. It would be silly to waste an opportunity to remind him. He picks you up and sweeps you away. You whoop and holler so everyone looks. Tomorrow they will tell the papers he carried you off. It’s memorable. They will remember it.

Forty minutes later, the two of you are drunk and standing in front of each other at an

altar.

He promises to love you forever.

You promise to obey.

He carries you over the threshold of the nicest room at the Tropicana. You giggle with fake surprise when he throws you onto the bed.

And now here comes the second-most-important part.

You cannot be a good lay. You must disappoint.

If he likes it, he'll want to do it again. And you can't do that. You can't do this more than once. It will break your heart.

When he tries to rip your dress off, you have to say, "Stop, Mick, Christ. Get a hold of yourself."

After you take the dress off slowly, you have to let him look at your breasts for as long as he wants to. He has to see every inch of them. He's been waiting for so long to finally see the ending of that shot in *Boute-en-Train*.

You have to remove all mystery, all intrigue.

You make him play with your breasts so long he gets bored.

And then you open your legs.

You lie there, stiff as a board underneath him.

And here is the one part of this you can't quite come to terms with but you can't quite avoid, either. He won't use a condom. And even though women you know have gotten hold of birth control pills, you don't have them, because you had no need for them until a few days ago when you hatched this plan.

You cross your fingers behind your back.

You close your eyes.

You feel his heavy body fall on top of you, and you know that he is done.

You want to cry, because you remember what sex used to mean to you, before. Before you realized how good it could feel, before you discovered what you liked. But you push it out of your mind. You push it all out of your mind.

Mick doesn't say anything afterward.

And you don't, either.

You fall asleep, having put on his undershirt in the dark because you didn't want to sleep naked.

In the morning, when the sun shines through the windows and burns your eyes, you put your arm over your face.

Your head is pounding. Your heart is hurting.

But you're almost at the finish line.

You catch his eye. He smiles. He grabs you.

You push him off and say, "I don't like to have sex in the morning."

"What does that mean?" he says.

You shrug. "I'm sorry."

He says, "C'mon, baby," and lies on top of you. You're not sure he'd listen if you said no one more time. And you're not sure you want to find out the answer. You're not sure you could bear it.

"OK, fine, if you have to," you say. And when he lifts himself off you and looks you in the eye, you realize it has accomplished what you had hoped. You have taken all the fun out of it for him.

He shakes his head. He gets out of bed. He says, "You know, you're nothing like I imagined."

It doesn't matter how gorgeous a woman is, to a man like Mick Riva, she's always less attractive after he's had sex with her. You know this. You allow it to happen. You do not fix your hair. You pick at the mascara flakes on your face.

You watch Mick step into the bathroom. You hear him turn on the shower.

When he comes out, he sits down next to you on the bed.

He is clean. You have not bathed.

He smells like soap. You smell like booze.

He is sitting up. You are lying down.

This, too, is a calculation.

He has to feel like the power is all his.

"Honey, I had a great time," he says.

You nod.



Summaryer

“But we were so drunk.” He speaks as if he’s talking to a child.

“Both of us. We had no idea what we were doing.”

“I know,” you say. “It was a crazy thing to do.”

