

*Runaway
Bridesmaid*

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Runaway Bridesmaid by Jane Colt (Revised edition)

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CHAPTER ONE

“How about this? You—naked under your graduation gown. You just better hope it’s not a windy day!”

“Come on, Em. You can do better than that.” Megan wagged her finger at her best friend courtesy of Skype. “I said *outrageous*, not *mildly naughty*.” She added a giggle. “Besides, a bunch of us already did that at the spring choral concert when we heard the auditorium’s AC had died.”

Emily frowned. “I’m tapped out, Meg. I’ve been guessing for 10 minutes trying to figure out your ‘big surprise’ and haven’t come close. I give up. Just tell me. You’re obviously dying to.”

“One last guess. If you still don’t get it, I will.”

She closed her eyes, thought for a moment and smirked. “OK. You want *outrageous*? You having sex with some amazingly hot stud in the Quad at high noon!”

Megan’s jaw dropped and she slapped her hands against her cheeks—so dramatically it was obvious she wasn’t serious. “Wow! Great idea! If we were having the wedding in town, we’d make it part of the honeymoon. But the ceremony will be too far away for that.” Putting on a ‘cat that ate the canary’ grin, she leaned back, crossed her arms and waited.

Emily furrowed her brow. “Wait. Did you just say? ... No. ... You couldn’t have. You and Darryl broke up.”

Megan flashed an engagement ring. Her smile was as radiant as the diamond.

Emily let out a shriek. “You’re serious? You’re getting married! Meg! That’s wonderful! How’d it happen? When? Where?”

“Just in the last few days. Darryl said he wanted to get together—but just as friends. I still hurt so much from the breakup that I really didn’t want to. But I was miserable without him. I at least wanted to give it a try. So I was stunned by what I found when I showed up at what used to be ‘our spot.’ He’d prepared a beautifully romantic picnic along the Charles River. Champagne. Flowers. He got down on one knee, held up this gorgeous ring and told me he couldn’t live without me. I was so thrilled I screamed ‘Yes!’ before he finished proposing. I’m afraid I scared a bunch of ducks in front of us. We both apologized for the stupid things we said when we broke up, then made out like crazy. The two of us

alternated between laughing and crying. We were so happy to be back together, we decided we didn't want to wait another minute. So we're getting married in a month in Las Vegas, and you're going to be my Maid of Honor."

Emily wiped away her tears. "I'm overjoyed for you, Sweetie, I really am. You and Darryl are made for each other. Of course, I'm thrilled to be Maid of Honor."

Then her face took on a frown. "I couldn't be happier for you, Meg. Really I am. But ... are you *sure* you want to tie the knot in a quickie ceremony in Sin City? Smoke filled casinos. Neon lights everywhere. Wedding chapels where you're married by an Elvis impersonator! And that slogan: 'Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.' Sure, it stays there—*except* for the pictures and video that end up on the internet!"

Megan smiled back warmly. "I love when you get all big-sisterly, Em. We aren't eloping. When we told my parents, they said that no matter what it would take, we were going to have a real wedding. Everything's going to be great. Trust me."

Emily conceded with a nod, smiling as she leaned in toward the screen. "The last thing I'm going to be is a wet blanket. I just want your wedding to be perfect—the way you've always dreamed. But you guys are crazy!" she laughed, "Planning a wedding in a month is impossible."

"It should be, but my Mom loves the idea. She and Dad got married at City Hall because they had so little money. This is like a second chance for her. We really lucked out finding a venue. Darryl's dad had a connection. The hotel is so romantic, you're going to die. And we're having the best time putting together a June wedding under the gun. Everything's happening at once. Graduation. Getting married. It's nuts! But I love it. I'm sure it'll turn out really special. And speaking of 'special,' I've got something else to show you."

Megan hopped off her bed and disappeared from the picture. The sound of someone rustling around in a shopping bag came up in the background. As Meg plopped back in front of her laptop, the screen rocked back and forth. Then it went all white with some blurry red lettering.

"Ta da! I just got these for my bridesmaids! I love 'em. Don't you?"

"Meg. Whatever it is, it's too close. I can't see a thing."

"Sorry. How about now?"

The image that snapped into focus was a pair of panties with red hand-stitching across the behind. '*Megan's SLUTS.*'

Emily smirked. This was classic Meg.

“The official bridesmaid panties!” Megan jumped up on the bed and twirled the customized lingerie above her head like she was a stripper. Then she shouted, “I’m getting married! I’m getting married!”

Emily couldn’t help but laugh as the picture bounced up and down in time to her friend’s little dance. When Meg sat back down, the pure joy and happiness in her face made Emily tear up again.

“And before you think I’m saying my posse is a bunch of tarts, the tiny embroidered fine print says, ‘Sexually Liberated Unbelievably Tasty Strumpets.’ It’s a compliment. Only the strong, confident women in my bridal party are permitted to wear these.”

Emily laughed again. “OK, I’m complimented. But *unbelievably tasty strumpets?*”

“Some guys need extra incentive to, you know ... I want my girls satisfied,” she added a naughty wink. Emily howled.

Meg flipped the panties around. “And here’s the front.” It was a silhouette of a couple having sex. “Just in case any of my girls hook up with guys who can’t read.”

The two friends burst out laughing.

“They’re silk and feel incredibly sexy! I’m already wearing mine. And Darryl’s the only person who will see what *they* say!” She gave a naughty wink as she looked back into the camera. “Everyone’s getting three pair. So you *will* wear them to every event. Let’s hope they warm up that coochie of yours enough to come out of retirement! There’ll be no shortage of hot guys—like Darryl’s bud Kirk. He’s great. More important, he’s *a stud*, Sweetie. If I weren’t absolutely head over heels for Darryl, I’d hit that myself. If nothing else, I’m counting on you to let him show you that not all guys are like that last jerk you dated. I mean, what a prick, blaming *you* for screwing his way through California.”

Emily’s face went dark and her body slumped as though she were punched in the stomach. “Meg. I’ve already told you I’m taking a break for a while. And you know I don’t do casual sex.”

“Sorry, Honey. I’m the bride. What I say goes. I know you were devastated, but it’s been a year. You need to get back out there, give yourself a break and let someone worship at the altar of that hot little body of yours. As much fun as your battery powered ‘friend’ is, a hot stud with a hard cock is so much better. Kirk’s a really good guy, and I want you to give him a chance. So here’s what I’ve done to make it interesting. I’ve told him only your first name and given him just a couple of details about you. All *you* get to know about *him* is he’s a jock, but a *smart* jock. Neither of you knows enough to Google each other ahead of time. So when you meet, you’ll have lots to talk about. Promise me you’ll give him a chance. ... If you don’t, I’ll cry.”

Meg’s pretend pout looked so pathetic, Emily couldn’t resist smirking.

“OK, Meg. Fine. I promise,” she said half-heartedly.

Her friend shot back a skeptical look. “I mean it, Em! You need to up your fun quotient. It’s time to put that loser ex behind you. No more, ‘It’s too soon,’ ‘I’m too shy’ or ‘Guys are jerks.’ Kirk’s nice. And you definitely need to get better in social situations if you want to end up as some big corporate muckety-muck. *Promise* me you’ll give Kirk a chance. None of this ‘Sorry, I’ve got Maid of Honor stuff to do.’ Promise you’ll spend some time with him.”

Emily took a deep breath and screwed up her courage. “There’s no way I’m going to disappoint my best friend at her wedding. OK. I’ll try. I promise. I mean it.”

Meg beamed. “That’s good enough for now. And I’m going to hold you to it. I *so* want you to have a wonderful time at my wedding, Em. And Kirk’s a terrific—and *sexy*—guy.”

Emily frowned. “Wait. The last time we Skyped, didn’t you say something about Darryl’s best friend heading for Oxford? That’s Kirk, right?”

“Do I sense backpedaling, young lady?” She shook her finger firmly. “Em, ‘Practical, Responsible Emily,’ future CEO, cannot come to the wedding. Stop thinking everything needs to be part of some life plan. I’m not saying you have to marry him. Just have a good time. Dance. Have too much to drink. Make out in some dark corner.” She leaned into the screen and dropped her voice. “Maybe even go to Hawaii,” she added a wicked wink.

Her Maid of Honor stared back blankly.

Megan scrunched up her face in disbelief. “You spend *way* too much time studying, Em. ‘Go to Hawaii?’ ‘Get *laid*?’... But I’ve got to run. Talk to you in a few days. You just start planning the bachelorette party! My Mom said spare no expense. Love you bunches.”

“Love you, too.”

Emily closed her laptop and stretched out on her bed. She was delighted Meg was so happy. And she admired Meg’s willingness to do something so wonderfully crazy as a last minute big wedding. She wished she had more of that sense of adventure and boldness.

She grimaced at the thought of spending time with a guy she knew nothing about. But she laughed that Megan called her out when she started being “Practical Responsible Emily.” *OK, maybe everything doesn’t have to be part of ‘the grand plan.’ And Meg did say Kirk’s a good guy. Besides, she’s right. A little fun wouldn’t hurt. And I’ve got to get over being so shy. But ‘wedding sex’ with a perfect stranger? That’s absolutely not going to happen! That’s so not me!*

* * * *

Kirk scrambled out of the taxi at Boston's Logan Airport, raced to the curbside check-in station and frantically handed over his ID and smart phone.

The friendly Red Cap scanned the boarding pass and called up Kirk's information on the screen. "You're lucky, young squire. You've got TSA PRE, and your flight's been delayed. If you run, you'll just make it. I'll make sure your bag gets on the plane."

He handed the man a generous tip, sprinted off and was the last person to step onto the jet. Exhausted, he let out a deep breath and sank into his seat. He checked his messages before turning off his phone.

He chuckled and shook his head. *Darryl, you're so predictable.*

Best friend or not, if you're late, I'll kill you. And don't forget the rings!

Worry wart. Plane about to take off. Will call when I reach hotel. And yes, I have the rings.

Kirk was asleep five minutes after the jet left the ground. Even an athlete of his caliber would be exhausted after cramming so much into the last few days. Graduation. The drive to Tennessee to leave his car (and a trunk full of books and dirty laundry) with his parents. The flight back to Boston. Shipping books and clothes to England. Packing for the wedding.

When he landed, it was another mad dash to baggage claim and then to the taxi stand so he'd get to the hotel on time. As soon as he stepped in line to register, he pulled out his phone and called the groom.

"I'm here, Dude. You can stop worrying... Yeah, in the lobby waiting to check in... You're right. It's is a great hotel. And I can't believe how many hot babes there are here." A gorgeous blonde in a very short white skirt and bright red halter top playfully squeezed his bicep and winked as she walked by. He flashed her a big smile and tipped his Stetson. "Bad for you, Mr. I'm Getting Married in the Morning. But great for me... Yeah, I know... Megan's friend... Yes, I *promise*... See you at dinner with your parents."

As he slid his phone into his back pocket, he thought he heard someone call his name. *When* he turned around, no one was there. Instead, a cute girl with big glasses and sparkling eyes on the far side of the lobby was looking at him.

Could that be her? Hmmm. Definitely 'plain' and 'prim.' I can picture her shushing people who talk in her library.

The young woman wore a navy blue sleeveless shell, a tan skirt with a plain leather belt, and sensible shoes. She wore no makeup, and her long, chestnut hair was pulled back in a ponytail.

She's really attractive. Beautiful face. Interesting eyes behind those big rims. Looks really fit. And she's different from all the other women around here in a good way. She doesn't notice all the guys scoping her out. She doesn't seem to know how pretty she is.

Kirk stroked his chin as he rocked back and forth.

Megan and her games. "All I'm telling you is her first name—'Emily.' Knowing anything else will ruin the mystery. I want you to spot her on your own. When you see her you'll think 'librarian.' She's quiet and shy. Even so, I think the two of you will really hit it off." OK, let's see if this is Emily.

He tipped his hat, gave his admirer a big smile, and winked. She responded by straightening her posture so that her breasts pushed out towards him. Taking off her glasses, she blew him a kiss and gave him a look that had ten times more heat than the blonde's flirtatious wink.

His pulse raced and his face got warm. His jeans suddenly felt *very* tight. He gulped at getting so turned on so quickly.

Whoa! Definitely not Emily! There's nothing quiet and shy about this Naughty Librarian. That's not just a come on. That's a challenge! I'll find Meg's friend later. I've got to meet this hottie right now!

As he turned to head her way, however, a beautiful hotel attendant walked up and offered him a glass of champagne. Pointing to the VIP tags on his luggage, she explained there was a special registration desk for the hotel's most important guests. She called a bellman over to pick up his bag and led him to a private area.

Kirk rushed through registration, hoping the Naughty Librarian would still be there when he was done. When he stepped back into the lobby, she was gone.

Damn! How do I find her?

* * * *

As soon as Emily walked into the hotel lobby, her breath caught at how stunning everything was—the sleek marble, textured wood, sparkling crystal, exotic flowers. She walked over to an arrangement full of brilliantly red blooms, and drank in the lush scent. The gentle tinkling of a marble fountain washed over her. Every detail sparked her romantic fantasies—especially the handsome men that seemed to be everywhere.

OMG! A tall, broad shouldered, sandy haired hunk in a cowboy hat and boots strode across the lobby, moving with the grace of a jungle cat. Her heart raced. *Wow! Is he ever good looking ... and hot!* After staring at him the whole time as he made his way towards the reception desk, she abruptly turned away before he noticed.

But even as she pretended to examine the flower arrangement, all she could think about was the cowboy. Desperate to take another look, her body buzzed—begging her to give in to the cowboy’s pull on her. Nervously warring with herself, she smoothed out imaginary wrinkles in her skirt and fussed with her ponytail. She finally stumbled onto a good excuse.

Wait a minute, coward! You promised Megan you’d have some fun. Here’s your chance. He doesn’t know you. This is Las Vegas. And you’re wearing your ‘strumpet’ panties.

A wave of uncharacteristic boldness swept over her. She struck as confident a pose as she could muster and checked the cowboy out. *Yum! Hottie at three o’clock. I love that jaw. Great smile. And those eyes! Crimson polo shirt. That’s a great color for him. And look at how it hugs his broad shoulders and muscular chest. Tight jeans—worn in just the right places. Boots. Sexy silver buckle. Is that a button fly? What a tease! That’s so much more trouble than a zipper to get at his you-know-what!*

He stood in one of the other check-in lines, talking on his cell phone. He was scanning the crowd like he was looking for someone. But he was also checking out the gorgeous women parading by who were flirting with him. The self-assured smile he shot back at them said he loved the attention.

Humph! No doubt about it. A player. I bet he’s here with his posse. They’ll have a ‘who can nail the most tail’ contest.

She shook her head in disapproval. But a definite tingling *elsewhere* said the rest of her thought differently.

When Mr. Button Fly saw her staring at him, he looked right back, tipped his hat and gave her a friendly smile.

The normally shy Emily was held spellbound by the lingering gaze from his hauntingly blue eyes. Without realizing it, she licked her lips sensually and let out a soft moan.

He winked in her direction.

She spun around to see who’d caught his eye, but no one was behind her. When she looked back at him, the corner of his mouth turned up.

He’s flirting with me? Me? Damn, he’s handsome. And sexy! Yum!

Her face got hot. Her sex moistened, and her breasts swelled, pleading to escape their satin prison. Her nipples stiffened, proudly announcing the intensity of her desire. Her legs buckled momentarily at the force of his gaze. She gulped. Her heart rate kicked up. *What’s happening? How’s he doing this?* A deep ache surged inside her. She had to respond to the cowboy’s interest in kind. She turned towards him, thrust out her breasts—now begging to be caressed. Removing her glasses, she blew him a kiss and gave him a look that said, ‘I would just love to have you for lunch . . . and dinner . . . and then breakfast. Are

you man enough for me?’ *Emily! What are you doing? This isn’t you. Stop inviting him into your pants!* Even then, she couldn’t make herself look away.

The way the cowboy stepped in her direction said he was about to come over. She froze as her heartrate doubled and she began to hyperventilate. *No! ... Yes! ... Really? ... Run! He’s so out of your league! ... No, stay! We promised Megan. ... And he is hot, hot, hot!*

As her head spun, she put her hand against the wall. She braced for the encounter, not knowing how she was going to respond. But she relaxed when one of the hotel staff approached the cowboy before he could head her way. The attractive woman led him to a private area. *I guess he’s some high rolling VIP. Right, definitely out of my league.*

But relief quickly turned to jealousy. *Champagne? Really? And that smile she’s giving him? Humph! She’s clearly smitten with him. “Welcome, sir. May I offer you a quickie while we finish preparing your room? Would you at least like to fluff my pillows? Wink. Wink.” What a tart! ... Stop it Emily! What’s gotten into you?*

Even after Mr. Button Fly was gone, her trembling body was still awash with desire. Her body trembled so much she leaned against the wall for support. She closed her eyes to center herself, but found herself transported to another world.

She noticed him as soon as he entered the lobby. A striking specimen of a species she would never experience—the so-handsome-as-to-be-lethal, drop-dead-gorgeous alpha male. Of course, every other woman within 50 yards of him sensed his presence, and the bolder ones advanced on him. He was polite in his refusals as they shamelessly (she thought) tried to slip their room keys into his pocket.

To her surprise, between trollops, he kept glancing in her direction. She turned around to see who fascinated him so much, but there was no one between her and the fountain. When she turned back, he was walking directly up to her. Taking her hand, he kissed it with his warm, full lips and looked directly into her eyes with an unsettling intimacy.

His self-assured bearing and musky scent were intoxicating. The openly sensual gaze of his electric blue eyes was hypnotic. Without her consent, her sex grew warm and wet. Her stomach knotted as every cell of her skin craved a lover’s touch and tingled with excitement.

His smoldering sexuality and obvious desire for her lit a fuse deep inside.

He was a complete stranger. Not a word had been spoken. She wondered if her wanton reaction meant he was the traveler her psychic had predicted. “He will lead you to an ecstasy few of us ever achieve,” the woman said with no small amount of envy.

There was nothing tentative in his actions. There was no “May I?” He simply said with the sexiest Southern accent, holding her hand the entire time, “Excuse me, Miss. I’m sure you saw me staring

at you. I apologize. But I haven't been able to take my eyes off you. You have a mysterious, electric quality that I have seen only once—and that was in a work of art."

After seeing how beautiful women flocked to him, it was hard to believe he was telling the truth. But his eyes said he was sincere.

"When I was in Rome years ago, I viewed a sculpture of the Greek goddess Artemis. Even though she was marble, her beauty, strength and sensuality overwhelmed me. I have prayed ever since that I would meet a real woman with the same qualities. I had almost given up hope. But here you are." He kissed her hand. "We are meant to be together. I know you feel it too."

She couldn't deny it.

The spark moved farther along the fuse.

"Fate has finally led me to you, so I cannot let you walk away. I know I'm being forward, but you must be my guest at a reception tonight. One of the hospitals I give millions of dollars to is thanking me for a new wing I've donated. It's in Rio de Janeiro, so we'd have to fly there in my private jet. It's a formal affair, so you'll have to allow me to buy you a designer gown, shoes, jewelry and anything else you'll need. And we'd have to leave right now."

He stroked her cheek in just the way she loved and as though it was the most natural thing to do. Her heart took off in a gallop. A luscious warmth flowed through her body, and she melted into a moment that felt like a magical eternity. As she returned his passionate gaze, she knew she was meeting her soulmate.

"May I take your silence as consent?"

On the surface, everything he had said was above board. But the fire in his eyes revealed a hunger that was anything but proper. And the strain in his face disclosed the depth of his struggle to keep it under control.

The spark reached the powder keg.

A primal longing exploded deep inside her and tore through her burning flesh. The ache was so urgent, she leaned against him, nipped his earlobe and replied with her most sensual voice, "You may take my silence any way you want. You may take me any way you want."

Her words so enflamed him that even though the couple was in plain view in the middle of the lobby, he ran his thumb back and forth over her sensitive, swollen lips. He cradled the back of her head and kissed her hard. As she opened her mouth so that their tongues could mate, he let out an animalistic rumble. She groaned deeply in reply.

As they tasted each other, he put his hand on her behind and pushed their bodies together. His hard shaft pressed against her. She ground her sex against him to feel as much of his stiffness as possible. She moaned at what she discovered. Her entire body trembled. She'd never experienced such longing for a man.

They kissed as though they were lovers who had been separated for years. They clasped each other so tightly, they could hardly breathe. They needed to be closer still, with nothing separating them.

He took her hand and led her to a remote, dark corner of the lobby. She could sense deep inside that he was about to take her body to heights she'd only been able to imagine.

"You are beautiful and bewitching. You are everything I could ever want in a woman. I must have you—now."

She had met him only minutes ago, yet she was already the prisoner of his desire. She would die if he didn't take her right now! She gasped a desperate "Yes."

His mouth covered hers as he pushed her against the wall. Ripping open the front of her dress, he squeezed her breast with one hand while the other dove beneath the damp satin kissing her drenched sex. Two large fingers slid between her lips and were coated by her slick juices. They explored her pussy while his thumb worked her clit. He found her g-spot as though they had done this forever. Stunned at the intensity of the pleasure he was giving her, she immediately rocketed towards ecstasy. As her body exploded and joy flooded every cell, she was shocked at how forcefully her sex clenched his fingers. She bit his shoulder so that only a muffled version of her passionate release might be heard.

As the pleasure ebbed, she tried to catch her breath, but he crushed her against the cool stone wall. Shredding her panties with one sharp yank, he lifted her leg so that she was open to him. Freeing his large cock, he entered her forcefully. Welcoming the warm, hard shaft, she luxuriated in the sensation of being taken so commandingly. She melted into his rock-solid body. Each powerful thrust felt like a battering ram commanding her to yield. Each time he drove into her, she willingly surrendered another piece of herself. The sensation of being possessed and filled by this man was overwhelming. Tears filled her eyes.

"You are mine—now and forever," he said breathlessly.

"More," she begged. "Fuck me."

He plunged into her mercilessly, both of them grunting each time he pounded into her and their bodies slapped together. The air filled with the scent of their primitive joining.

Hurling towards another orgasm, she squeezed his wide, stiff cock as hard as she could. She felt it grow and throb.

“Come with me!” he commanded.

“Yes! Oh yes!”

“Come with me.”

“Yes!”

“Please, come with me!”

“Excuse me, ma’m. If you’ll *please come with me*, we’ll get you registered.” The voice was loud and a shade annoyed.

Her eyes snapped open. A male attendant was holding her bag and was prepared to lead her to the registration desk. He’d been trying to get her attention for more than a few seconds.

Flustered, all she could do was cough and utter a meek, “Sorry.”

Being so bold and graphic—even in a fantasy—startled her. She hoped no one around her noticed that her face was flushed with lust and embarrassment, or how heavily she was breathing. *Oh my God! Where did that come from? What is it with that cowboy? Or do they just pump aphrodisiacs in the air? Sin City. No kidding!*

As Emily handed the receptionist her credit card, I.D. and reservation information, she was happy to scurry back to being Practical, Responsible Emily.

CHAPTER TWO

The romance of Emily's room was overwhelming—the dark rich wood in the furniture, exotic fresh flowers, a gleaming marble bathroom with a huge whirlpool tub, plush towels, and the view of the fountains dancing in front of the hotel. It was the most luxurious hotel room she'd ever been in.

Once she unpacked, she pulled out her checklist for the bachelorette party. After being blindsided by lust in the lobby, she needed to focus on tasks. She called the concierge. Emily was nothing if not organized. Everything was ready. Limo. *Check!* Drinks and dinner at the hottest restaurant. *Check!* Admission to great clubs. *Check!* The 'extras' designed to surprise Megan. *She did say she wanted 'over the top.'* *Check!* Brunch the following day, complete with Bloody Marys. *Check!* Massages, waxing, facials, mani-pedis at the spa in the afternoon. *Check!*

With everything set, she stepped on to the balcony and watched people walking along The Strip. A man in a cowboy hat moved through the crowd, getting admiring looks from all the women around him. She felt a jolt of excitement. *Wait! Is that?* She laughed at herself. *Dial it back, girl. It's probably not him. This is the West. Everybody wears cowboy hats. Besides, we've probably got lust goggles permanently attached. It's been a year since we made that promise to ourselves.*

Surveying the crowd, she spotted a young man down on one knee in front of his girlfriend, singing a love song that ended as a proposal. Everyone around them cheered, her heart melted and she teared up at the loving scene. But then she squirmed with desire as the couple proceeded to make out passionately for the next few minutes. She sighed deeply and clenched her jaw. *But just because that pledge made sense doesn't mean we're any less horny.*

She checked in with the bride, updated her on *almost* everything planned for the upcoming evening and offered to help with any loose ends.

“Sounds great, Em. Mom and I are set for now and have everything under control. I'll see you and the other bridesmaids in my room at 8.”

Emily took her dress for the bachelorette party out of the closet again and hung it on the door. She shook her head. But she had no choice. During a Skype chat, Megan asked her what she planned to wear. Em showed her the conservative navy-blue cocktail dress she'd bought.

“Emily! You are *not* wearing that to a night of partying in Las Vegas! You'll look like our maiden aunt chaperone! Return it and get your money back. I know your size. I'm sending you something that

will show off your assets. And you *will* wear it! Gotta go. Kisses!”

Two days later, a shimmering, bright red, strapless little number arrived. It was, by Practical Responsible Emily’s standards, *sinfully, scarily, short, short, short!* and *tarty, terrifyingly, tight, tight, tight!* Megan included a pair of bright red stilettos.

Emily frowned as she studied herself in the mirror. “Show off my assets, indeed. If I reach up, *these* assets will pop right out.” She turned to check out the rear view. “And *these* assets are barely covered.” Stepping back to view herself from head to toe, she almost lost her balance. “And I’ll be lucky if I don’t fall off these stilts and twist an ankle.” All the exposed skin made her feel self-conscious.

When Emily arrived at the bride’s room, her friend glowered at the pashmina wrapped around her shoulders, and then confiscated it. She nodded approvingly at the way the dress hugged Emily’s body and showed so much skin. “Just a few details left to fix because pale pink lipstick and barely noticeable blush do not count as makeup in Las Vegas.” She pointed to a chair. “Sit!” Then she turned to one of the other bridesmaids. “Carole, you know how to do this better than anyone I know. Get out the war paint. Let’s sex Emily up.”

When the girls finished, Emily barely recognized herself. Staring back from the mirror was a sexy woman with bright red lips, high cheekbones, devastatingly smoky eyes and long black lashes. “I always said you’d be a knockout if you wore the right makeup, Em. And you *will* let Carole do you the entire weekend!”

That evening, the girls danced, drank, partied. Emily was taken aback at all the attention she got from guys who were drawn to her new, dramatic look. She wasn’t used to getting ogled by hot guys or having drinks sent her way. Part of her felt like a phony because she knew this wasn’t who she really was. But as the vodka martinis kicked in, it seemed like fun—like a game of pretending to be someone else.

When the group’s third stop turned out to be a male strip club, Meg was surprised. But she was *shocked* when Emily appeared on stage, called ‘Bride-to-be Megan’ up and handcuffed her to a chair. Then a handsome ‘fireman’ gave her a lap dance in front of everyone.

When Megan returned to the table, she really was a *blushing* bride. “Emily! You minx you! And you just stood there taking pictures! I need those before Darryl sees them!”

Her friend gave her a delightfully naughty smile. “Come on, Meg. I know you. You loved it. And as for the pictures, your Groom didn’t complain. I sent him a few while you were on stage.”

Megan’s mouth fell open. “This is so *not* you, Em. Why you little—”

“BFF, Maid of Honor, all around fantastic person,” Emily interrupted. “I know. But you asked for ‘over the top.’ So the word of the day is ‘outrageous.’ Just get your ass into the limo so we can get to the next club.”

The Bride-to-be complied with a drunken giggle. “I’m impressed, Em. I didn’t know you had it in you.” Then she gave her friend a warning poke in the arm. “Just you wait. The weekend’s not over. I’ll get even.”

The next stop started out harmless enough. It was a club that featured a psychic, and Emily had made appointments for everyone. In the first part of the reading, the strikingly beautiful woman with iridescent green eyes and a thick Greek accent astonished the girls with what she told them about their past relationships. Not surprisingly, since they were in Las Vegas and were obviously a bachelorette party, the rest of the reading focused on sex. In fact, when the girls emerged from Mistress Aphrodite’s candle-filled chamber and compared notes about what she revealed, they discovered that the psychic had told each of them a variation of the same ‘vision.’

“Just holding your hand, I can tell you are a deeply spiritual person with an ancient and advanced soul. You have a remarkably strong love line. And these unusual lines show you to be a *very* passionate woman.”

Then, pointing to a particular spot on the girl’s hand, Mistress Aphrodite appeared worried.

“Hmmm. In such a powerful soul, I am concerned about the intersection of these two lines. Venus and the Moon align in a rare way this week. And Las Vegas rests atop a magical epicenter which amplifies certain energies. Please sit quietly while I ask The Goddess for help.”

She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. After a few seconds, she cocked her head as though she was listening to someone. Then she nodded a few times.

“Yes, M’lady.”

More nodding.

“I understand, M’lady. *Very* serious. Yes, M’lady. You have our thanks.”

When she opened her eyes, she looked pleadingly into the girl’s face. “My sister. The Goddess tells me that you *must* make passionate love at some point over the next two days. Only this will safely release the energies that are building and swirling around inside you. You must *promise* me you will do as The Goddess says. In fact, she now says she will show me the ideal man for this encounter.” At this point, Mistress Aphrodite would appear to go into a trance. Then, she would describe one of the groomsmen in uncanny detail.

The girls didn’t know that ahead of time Emily had given the psychic enough details about Darryl’s friends to make the pairings plausible. And when she lied so convincingly that her only contact with the woman was setting up the session via email, they all giggled naughtily.

“I simply heard she was the best psychic in Las Vegas. And I wasn’t going to settle for anything

less for my best friend. If that's what The Goddess wants, I'd pay attention to it."

For Megan, Emily came up with something special. She had the psychic say, "And since you are the bride, you must make love in your wedding gown."

Her bridesmaids giggled.

"Come on, you guys. We already plan to have hot sex once we get to the hotel in San Francisco. I'm sure The Goddess will be OK with my not doing it in my gown."

Melissa took the lead in objecting.

"Meg, you've *got* to!" she pleaded. "The 'naughty bride' is the ultimate fantasy. You'll regret it if you don't." Then she mimicked Mistress Aphrodite's serious tone. "It's bad luck to disobey The Goddess."

Everyone laughed and agreed. So Emily ordered another bottle of champagne, and the group debated how the bride should 'do it' in her wedding dress.

Julianne pressed her finger against her cheek as she thought. "For openers, you can't wear panties. That gives you more options."

"Right," Louise chimed in. "There are all sorts of places you can have a quickie during the reception."

"I say even sooner than that," Carole interjected. "Right after the ceremony, but before the reception. We'll stand guard outside a coat closet."

"I am *not* going to tell all of you when Darryl and I want to have sex!" Meg protested with a laugh.

Carole crossed her arms and tried to look offended. "Suit yourself. But your dress has so much 'poof,' you're going to need a few minutes of privacy to get unfastened. You don't want someone interrupting you."

"Carole's right, Meg," Maria added. "In fact, you have so much 'poof,' you may need someone to help you. I'll even volunteer."

She gave Megan a naughty wink. "I like to watch." The group howled.

Emily decided to join the fun and stir things up. "Better yet. You could join in. I bet Darryl would love that. A threesome! What a great wedding present."

"Em, what's gotten into you? First the lap dance. Now this. I guess Vegas turns you into a little tramp! I'll tell you what. I'll 'do Darryl in the dress' if you promise to 'do Kirk '! I bet that's what

Mistress Aphrodite said, right?”

Being in a dark limo was the only thing that kept the other girls from seeing the red in Emily’s makeup get even brighter. “Nope,” she lied. “She said I was to be the virginal Maid of Honor whose job it was to make sure you don’t run off with that male stripper and break Darryl’s heart. She said she had a vision of you being a little too taken with his *firehose*, if you know what I mean.”

Megan adopted as serious a demeanor after a night of partying would allow. “I’m hurt and insulted, Em. I’m going to med school. It was just professional curiosity.”

“Or is someone having ‘buyer’s regret?’” shouted Carole. “That fireman was packing some pretty powerful peckage. Is there something you’re not telling us about Darryl? Any *short-comings*?”

The girls howled and teased Megan to come clean. But she simply looked back at them smugly. When she held up her hands about nine inches apart, the group squealed.

“You lucky bitch,” exclaimed Carole. “I am *so* jealous.” Then she pointed a finger at Megan. “Wait! Real friends share, right?”

The rest of the girls screamed “Yes!” and chanted “Friends share! Friends share! Friends share! Friends share!”

Holding up her hand to quiet them, Megan nodded her head, “You’re right. *Friends* do share. That’s why it’s too bad I’m not friends with any of you bitches anymore!”

The girls howled and peppered Megan with questions about what sex was like with such a well-hung guy until the limo arrived at the next club. Megan never went back to asking Emily what the psychic said. Em felt she’d dodged a bullet.

The bride and bridesmaids got back to the hotel just as dawn was breaking. They were so exhausted they were giddy. Megan gave her BFF a big hug and the pair almost tumbled over. “It was pef ... [yawn] ... perfect, Em.”

Understandably, at brunch everyone was hung-over and super sensitive to light, noise, even the sound of their own heartbeats. But the spa treatments worked their magic. By the time the girls had to leave for the rehearsal, everyone was back on their feet and raring to go.

* * * *

When Megan and Carole finished getting her ready for the rehearsal dinner, Emily was again a traffic stopper. Bold make up, styled hair, a rich green *tight* one-shoulder dress (another ‘Meg special’) and matching stilettos.

As soon as the girls walked into dinner, Meg grabbed her friend by the hand and led her to where Darryl and his groomsmen were talking. “Em, let me introduce you to Kirk.” The tone of her voice and the mischievous look told her this was ‘payback’ for the lap dance. Emily hung back, but Meg tugged her hand hard.

Megan walked up behind the tall, sandy haired hunk chatting with her fiancé and tapped him on the shoulder. As the stranger turned, Emily gasped audibly and put her hand over her mouth. It was Mr. Button Fly.

Deep inside her a flame ignited. Her body got warm. She was in turmoil. She had competing impulses to run away *and* to kiss him. *Breathe. It’s OK. He doesn’t know that when you ‘napped’ yesterday afternoon, all you did was picture the two of you naked, ravaging each other—in the lobby, on the plane to Rio, at the reception, all night on silk sheets at the hotel, back on the plane, . . .*

Kirk’s face lit up as though he was meeting an old friend. “Wow! It’s you!”

It was such an odd way for two strangers to meet each other that Megan and Darryl exchanged puzzled glances.

Kirk took Emily’s hand in both of his. “I’m sorry. I mean, I’m Kirk. And you’re Meg’s friend Emily. I’m delighted to meet you. But we’ve already met—sort of. I mean we *almost* did. I noticed you in the lobby and was heading over to say hello. But then I got called to check in. When I turned around you were gone. I was afraid I’d never see you again, so it’s great to meet you. You look beautiful. And you have wonderful eyes. You shouldn’t hide them behind your librarian glasses. They sparkle. And the color of your dress brings out their green flecks. I’m sorry I’m rambling. It’s wonderful to meet you, Emily.”

Just as Megan knew would happen when Emily was face to face with such a handsome guy, she blushed deep red at the compliments and froze. The combination was too much for her.

“It’s nice to meet you, Kirk. I’m . . . I’m . . .”

He was so sexy—penetrating eyes, cute dimple, gorgeous hair, deep voice—her mind literally went blank. The hypnotic effect of his gaze made her forget her own name. Her heart pounded so hard she was sure everyone could hear it. She couldn’t stop picturing him—naked—in her ‘fly to Rio with me’ fantasy. The way her hand fit so well in his made her think about *other* ways their bodies probably fit—and she couldn’t let go of his hand. Which, of course, only made it more obvious to everyone (including Kirk) just how attractive she found him.

Megan was ready with a quip. “Sorry, Kirk, you’ll have to forgive Emily. She’s been in convent school all her life and has never been this close to a ‘drop dead gorgeous’ guy before. But you be careful. You know what they say about girls who are quiet and shy on the outside. They’re tigers between the sheets.”

As Emily blushed even more, her brain finally started working. “I’m ... *Emily*. It’s nice to meet you, Kirk. I remember seeing you in the lobby as well,” she stammered and finally let go of his hand.

Kirk was about to say something, but Darryl grabbed him for some ‘Best Man business.’

Emily thanked every major and minor deity she could think of for the opportunity to regroup. *Groan. I flashed ‘the girls’ at him and blew him a kiss right after the blonde came on to him. Oh no! And that look I gave him! Does he think I’m on the prowl? Does he think Meg was cluing him in to ‘DTF Emily’ with that ‘tigers between the sheets’ comment?*

Giggling, Megan came over and gave her a big hug. “OK, we’re even.” Then she whispered into Emily’s ear. “Didn’t I tell you he’s *hot*? He’s got you forgetting your own name already. And I think he really likes you. Remember what your panties say! You go for it, girl!” Emily turned red yet again. Her head said, *Snap out of it! Get a grip!* Another voice deep inside had a different idea. *Yeah! What a hottie! Sex! Sex! Sex! Sex!*

As Maid of Honor and Best Man, Emily and Kirk were seated beside each other at dinner. Since she was experiencing a unique combination of panic, self-consciousness and being too-horny-to-think-clearly, the fact that he took the lead in conversation let her relax. She was surprised that he seemed genuinely interested in knowing more about her.

The couple started by swapping stories about how they met the bride and groom. Then somehow they got into a ‘worst dates’ contest. She was amazed that someone as handsome as Kirk could have had bad experiences with girls. But he swore the stories were true. The longer they talked, the more she thought she’d misjudged him in the lobby. The more she felt his pull on her, the more confused she got.

OK, maybe he isn’t a player. He’s just a Southern gentleman who makes any woman weak in the knees... and warm and tingly everywhere else. He did say he was coming over to meet me in the lobby. Maybe he honestly wondered if it was me and was being friendly. Meg did say he’s a really good guy ... But wait. What if he wanted to meet me was because the way I looked at him made him think I wanted to hook up? So he’s looking for the ‘lobby ho,’ not me. ... But [sigh] he’s hot, hot, hot! ... He said something really nice about my eyes. He noticed them? That was sweet. It feels like he likes me. This is crazy, but I feel a real connection with him. ... OK, it is crazy. I’ve just met him. It’s just my imagination—fueled by wedding fantasies and celibacy. Be careful, girl! That’s a bad combination.

As soon as the rehearsal was over, the guys headed off for the groom’s night on the town. Kirk made a point of saying goodbye to Emily.

“Meg tells me you all are going to a show. Have a great time.” Taking a strand of hair that had fallen in front of her face, he tucked it behind her ear. When his fingers brushed her sensitive skin, her breath caught. Warmth and a deep ache swept over her. She sighed. *Yummmmm. It’s been so long since a guy touched me like that, I’d forgotten how good it felt.* When he gently stoked her bare shoulder and said,

“Sweet dreams,” the ache intensified, and her nipples hardened. *Quick! Hunch over so he can't tell. No! Let him see! He'll love it. Don't go! Have sweet dreams with me! At least read my panties! ... Emily! Stop it! This isn't you!*

As he walked away, he called to Megan. “We'll try to stay one step ahead of the Federales, Meg. But I'm not promising anything. Have a lawyer on speed dial.”

Emily closed her eyes and put her head in her hands. She clamped her legs tightly together and took a deep breath. *This guy is dangerous.*

* * * *

“So, Kirk. Emily? What do you think? I've gotten five texts from Megan already. You gotta give me something, Dude. Or she'll hound me all night.”

“Five since we left? What is it with you guys?”

He grabbed Kirk's phone and handed him a beer in exchange. He texted back.

Meg. I've confiscated D's phone. You're right. My first thought seeing Emily—librarian. But tonight—hot librarian. Now leave us alone! Kirk

The guys were at a strip club, admiring the ‘athleticism’ of the pole dancers. But despite all the naked flesh crying for his attention, Kirk's mind kept drifting back to Emily.

He was startled—and excited—as soon as the sexy woman in the tight dress walked in with Megan to the rehearsal dinner. Not wanting to be obvious, he played it cool and waited for Meg to do the introductions. But electricity surged through his body at the prospect of meeting her. He was stunned when it turned out to be Megan's BFF. *That's Emily? What a surprise. Prim, proper? Not in that dress! Very sexy. And that look she gave me? Talk about an invitation!*

His mind kept turning over the same question. ‘*Librarian*’ or ‘*naughty librarian*’? *The girl at dinner was sweet and a little shy. In the lobby, she showed real fire. Which is the real Emily? There's something special about her. I haven't been able to stop thinking about her since I first saw her. And I was so nervous when I met her I must have sounded like a babbling idiot. It just feels so good to be with her. She's smart, interesting, easy to talk to—and apparently has a hidden sexy side as well! We barely know each other, but I really like her. I've never felt so much for a girl so fast. Am I being crazy? I can't wait to spend more time with her.*

* * * *

The next morning, all groomsmen were present and accounted for—although a couple looked like

they'd been pushed to their limits.

The wedding was perfect. Flowers everywhere. A harpist. Megan looked stunning, and deeply, blissfully in love. Darryl clearly adored her. They were the perfect couple. All the unattached women in the chapel (plus a few of the married ones) were green with envy.

Just as the couple began saying their vows, Emily caught Kirk casting a glance her way that she wasn't supposed to see. *Did he just blush? A sexy guy blushing because I caught him looking at me? I'm in love.*

Emily struggled to keep her eyes dry through the rest of the ceremony. It was only when she heard the majestic strains of the Wedding March rise from the organ and she paused before walking back down the aisle that she began to cry.

As she tried to keep her tears from being too obvious, she was surprised to feel something being pressed into my hand. It was a handkerchief. Kirk smiled and put his arm around her. "My Mama taught me always to carry a clean spare—especially at weddings." Her face lit up, and she cried some more.

At the reception, it seemed like there was one Maid of Honor duty after another. The most important one was keeping Megan's mother in the dark when the happy couple disappeared for about 10 minutes. "I'm sure this was your idea, Em. So *you* make sure we don't get caught!"

Except for chatting during dinner and a perfunctory Best Man/Maid of Honor dance, the couple didn't spend any time together. As Emily attended to her Maid of Honor duties, she forced herself not to let Kirk's magnetic pull on her be a distraction—made even worse by how striking he looked in a tuxedo and what a good dancer he was. But whenever she had a chance, she'd look for him.

She ground her teeth at what she saw. *Hmmf! Always a different, sexy woman. Now it's a blonde hanging over him. What happened to the redhead whose chest was falling out of her dress? I can just imagine what she said. 'Oh, Kirk. My boobies can't seem to stay in. I guess it's because the satin is so slippery. Tee hee. Will you help me put them back in?'*

He was catnip to all the women. They were so obvious about how attractive they found him, there was no question what they had in mind. And the big smile on his face said he loved it. Emily let out a deep, disappointed sigh.

Damn. He really is just a player. His compliments from last night were just a line. He was being nice to me because that's what Megan asked him to do. My feeling that we had some sort of connection was stupid, stupid, stupid. He's gathering room keys left and right. Nice guy, my ass! He doesn't even back off when the women coming on to him are married. I bet he's packing a pocket full of Viagra given the number of tarts he's lining up.

As soon as the bride and groom climbed into the limousine to head for the airport to fly to San

Francisco for their honeymoon, Emily decided to relax and have a good time. Grumbling when she saw Kirk with yet another beauty, she decided to ignore his catting around.

Thirty minutes later, however, the powerful buzz produced by too many glasses of champagne made her feel far more confident than usual. Just for fun, she decided to mess with him just to throw him off his game.

She walked over, took his hand and yanked him away from the gorgeous brunette in the seductively low-cut red cocktail dress who was whispering in his ear.

“I’m sorry, Miss. But Davey Crockett here is the Best Man, and he has some official wedding business to attend to.”

When the couple stepped onto the empty patio, she was sure Kirk would realize there was no “official wedding business” and that she had deliberately interrupted his attempt to line up another conquest. He’d be annoyed. But she was prepared to give him a lecture about taking advantage of the romantic fantasies single women get at weddings.

His look of relief surprised her. “I can’t thank you enough, Emily. Before I left Tennessee, my Mama told me, ‘Kirk, you’re the Best Man. That means you dance with any single woman who needs a partner or just wants to chat. It’s no fun for those girls to go to a wedding alone. So you be a gentleman and make those women feel appreciated.’ Every time I went to look for you, another girl asked me to dance. And while I think innocent flirting’s fun, when that brunette just told me, ‘I’ve got 6 piercings. Let’s go to my room so I can show you,’ that was more than I was ready for. Besides, except for last night, you and I have barely said two words to each other. I had a great time talking to you at dinner, and I really want to get to know you better. Let’s go somewhere quiet and talk.”

His smile was so warm and genuine, her heart—against her head’s better judgment—did a little flip and softened towards him. It didn’t hurt that simply being so close to such a handsome stud made her breathing deepen.

Without waiting for an answer, he took her hand and led her through the festive reception toward the lobby. Pausing at the bar, he slipped the bartender a few bills and received three bottles of champagne in exchange.

She raised an eyebrow. *Where are we going that we need three bottles of champagne?*

They walked across the lobby toward the elevators. “Come on, you know the rules. The bride and groom aren’t officially married until the two of us drink a toast in their honor. This is a *great* champagne. I don’t think they have it in England, so I’m taking some with me. You’ll love it. It’ll be the perfect send-off for Megan and Darryl. Let’s go to my room. It’s got a great view of the fountains.”

One part of her hesitated. She still thought he might be a player. And it wasn’t like her to go to the

hotel room of a man she barely knew. But the liquid courage marinating her brain made it hard to resist the powerful pull she felt. She was melting inside just from being beside him as they stood in front of the elevator. *Maybe he's just trying to soften me up. But it's fun to get so much attention from such a hot guy. Besides, if I say no, Megan will be mad. OK, there's no harm in one drink.* "Sure. You're right. And we did both promise Megan we'd spend some time together."

Kirk gave her a sexy smile, slid his gold key card into the "VIP" slot and pressed the top "PH" button.

Emily shot him a worried look. "Wait a minute. How did you rate a room on the Penthouse floor? What are you, a high-stakes gambler as well as a skirt chaser?"

Kirk replied with a conspiratorial grin and lowered his voice. "I majored in computer science, so I'm a pretty good hacker. Before I got here, I cracked the hotel's system and upgraded myself. I even managed to counterfeit their VIP luggage tags so that I didn't have to stand in line to register. But you can't tell anyone. Hopefully, I'll be in England before anyone figures it out."

He gave the explanation with an absolutely straight face. *Wait. Is Kirk a real 'bad boy' who's conned both Darryl and Megan into thinking he's a nice guy?*

Then he laughed at his own tall tale. "Don't I wish! Megan's father is friends with the CEO of the company that owns the hotel. That's why the wedding's here. He gave the family a great deal. The newlyweds, in fact, are spending the night in the specular honeymoon suite of one of the company's properties in San Francisco. Because Darryl and I have been roommates and best friends since freshman year, he insisted on giving me a room on the top floor with a great view. No one else in the bridal party is supposed to know."

As the glass walled elevator rose, the couple turned to admire the sparkling scene below. All the colored lights reminded Emily of Christmas, which was the most romantic time of the year for her. The intoxicating scent of Kirk's cologne, his sexy pull on her and the effect of too much champagne took their toll. She turned to Kirk and casually remarked, "You know, in convent school, the nuns told us the bride and groom had to 'do it like rabbits' for a marriage to be official. But if you say it's that we have to toast them with champagne, I can go with that."

She punctuated her saucy comment with a naughty wink.

He did a double-take. Then the corner of his mouth turned up. "Just 'do it'? I don't think so. According to a class I just finished at *Haaavahd*"—Emily burst out laughing at his fake Boston accent—"the latest research says the couple must screw themselves silly." He added such a sexy look, she literally went weak in the knees for an instant.

But she wasn't going to let him win this round. Pretending to be a real 'dirty girl' was too

tempting. “Tsk. Tsk.” She shook her head, stared straight ahead and commented nonchalantly, “It’s sad to hear *Haaavahd* is so far behind the times. Because I just learned at *Berkeley* that a couple isn’t truly married until they fuck their brains out.”

The way Kirk choked told her he hadn’t expected such an explicit comeback.

Mission accomplished, she smiled to herself. *Hmmm. Being a strumpet’s kind of fun.*

But his sexy laugh that followed said he was pleased.

At that instant, the elevator opened right into the suite. Her eyes opened wide and her jaw dropped. “Oh my God! Is this friggin’ for real?”