



The Billionaire's Trophy: A Billionaire Romance (A Bride for a Billionaire Book 3)

By Lynne Graham

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On his arm... And in his bed?

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Emmie is outraged when Bastian, her uncompromising boss, confronts her. She had no idea her photo was online. But his check's been cashed and he's come to collect his prize... A weekend in Greece. With her. Alone. Their relationship might be fake, but Emmie's trepidation is all too real!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lynne Graham lives in Northern Ireland and has been a keen romance reader since her teens. Happily married, Lynne has five children. Her eldest is her only natural child. Her other children, who are every bit as dear to her heart, are adopted. The family has a variety of pets, and Lynne loves gardening, cooking, collecting allsorts and is crazy about every aspect of Christmas.

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Sebastiano Christou, known as Bastian to his many friends and acquaintances, studied the huge emerald ring in his hand with seething frustration blazing in his dark golden eyes, his lean darkly handsome features settling into forbidding lines of hauteur. He was holding the Christou betrothal ring, which had, until very recently, adorned the hand of his intended wife, Lilah Siannas.

Ironically, Lilah had not voiced a single word of reproach concerning the terms of the pre-nup agreement presented to her lawyer. Instead, while leaving the pre-nup unsigned, Lilah had become irritatingly unavailable and distant but her burning resentment had ultimately triumphed, culminating in her public statement that the engagement was over and the wedding cancelled. And ever since then Lilah had been noisily painting the town red in the company of a good-looking toyboy millionaire.

Bastian was well aware that Lilah was throwing down a gauntlet she expected him to pick up. He was supposed to be jealous: yet he was not. He was supposed to feel foolish: but he did not. He was supposed to want her so much that he would forget about the pre-nup: only he did not. No, Lilah was playing a losing game for Bastian would never marry a woman without first securing his wealth with a pre-nup agreement. That was a lesson learned well at his grandfather's knee.

His father had married four times and his three incredibly expensive divorces had decimated the Christou family fortune. Bastian's grandfather had taught his grandson that love was unnecessary in a successful marriage and that shared goals and principles were more important. Bastian had never been in love but he had often been in lust. Lilah, a tiny exquisite brunette, had excited his need to chase and possess but he had never kidded himself that he loved her. Indeed before he proposed, he had evaluated Lilah's worth much as though she were an investment. He had recognised the advantage of their similar backgrounds; he had admired her unemotional outlook, excellent education and her skills as a society hostess. But, as he now grimly reminded himself, he had seriously underestimated the strength and pulling power of his fiancée's avarice.

Bastian thrust the ring back in its case and put it in the safe, angry at the months he had wasted on Lilah, a woman demonstrably unfit to be his wife. He was thirty years old, more than ready to marry and have a family, bored with casual affairs. He had not realised that finding a wife would be such a challenge and he was already wondering how the hell he was supposed to avoid a scene at his sister, Nessa's wedding in two weeks' time because Lilah was one of Nessa's bridesmaids. Lilah would be outraged when Bastian didn't, at least, try to win her back. She would relish being the focus of all eyes at the wedding and would delight even more in a confrontation, but Bastian did not want his baby sister to be embarrassed or upset on her special day. The only way of avoiding that danger would be for him to arrive with another woman on his arm, for Lilah was too proud to overlook such a statement.

But at this late stage where on earth would he find another woman to act as his partner throughout a weekend of family festivities? A woman who wouldn't try to trap him into a relationship and who wouldn't read more than he meant into his invitation? A woman nonetheless capable of pretending to be intimately involved with him, for nothing less would keep Lilah at a distance. Did such a perfect woman exist?

'Bastian...?' He spun round as one of his directors strode in with a laptop beneath his arm. 'I've got something amusing to show you—are you in the mood?'

Bastian was not in the mood but Guy Babington was a good friend and he forced a smile to his hard mouth. 'Always,' he encouraged.

Guy opened the laptop on the desk and spun it round to display the screen to Bastian. 'There...recognise her?'

Bastian studied the photo of a stunning blonde with bright blue eyes in a party dress. She was laughing into the camera. 'No...should I?'

'Take another look,' Guy urged. 'Believe it or not, she works for you.'

'No way... I would've noticed her,' Bastian instantly declared because she was such a beauty. 'What's her picture doing on the Internet? Are you on Facebook?'

Amused, Guy shook his head. 'I'm on a website advertising a business called Exclusive Companions. It's an escort agency for professionals, *very* exclusive,' he said, rolling his eyes suggestively.

Bastian frowned, his sensual mouth curling a little with distaste. 'Do you use escorts?'

'I wouldn't mind using this blonde,' Guy confided, ducking the question with a lascivious look.

Bastian elevated an ebony brow. 'You said she worked for me—'

'She does—as an intern on a three-month placement on this floor. Emmie...she does research for your PA.'

Astonishment gripped Bastian as he turned his attention back to the screen. 'That's Emmie?' he queried in disbelief, mentally flicking up an image of the young woman as she looked at work: hair tied back, specs anchored on her nose, dowdy clothes. Still frowning, Bastian zeroed his attention in on the dark mole on the centre of the blonde's cheek as he recalled that the intern had the same beauty mark in the identical place. 'Diavelos... that *is* her! She's actually moonlighting as an escort?'

'Evidently...but what I'd really like to know is why she dresses to look like the ugly duckling when she comes into work here,' Guy confided.

'Her name is Emerald according to the site.'

Sebastiano flipped open his own computer and hit several buttons to access the list of his staff. Yes, it wasn't Emmie short for Emily or Emma as most people would assume; her true name was indeed Emerald. So, weird and unbelievable as it seemed to him, it *was* the same woman.

'Doesn't she clean up amazingly well?' Guy chuckled lecherously.

Bastian would not have described the intern as an ugly duckling although he had to admit that on the few occasions she had been around him she had thoroughly irritated him.

'Sugar is bad for your teeth,' she had told him when she handed him his coffee, strong and sweet the way he liked it.

'Manners maketh man,' she had quipped when he strode through a door ahead of her and they almost collided in the doorway.

But he had noticed that, even clad in the ubiquitous black tights, she had incredibly long legs, the sort a man thought about wrapping round his waist. An escort, he ruminated thoughtfully, a woman whose company was available for hire. If she cleaned up as well as she did in that photo, she would make a very presentable piece of arm candy and, after all, it would be in her own best interests to meet his expectations. Possibly she wasn't fully aware of the terms of her temporary employment, one condition of which specified that she must do nothing to bring the company into disrepute. And working a lucrative sideline as an escort for rich men definitely didn't fit the bill of acceptability. He had never used an escort service before, nor would he have considered doing so in normal circumstances, but for this particular occasion he liked the idea of a woman he could *hire* to accompany him to his sister's wedding. He would not have to ask anyone for a favour, nor would he have to pretend an interest in a woman that he didn't feel anything for and there would be no room for misunderstandings in such an arrangement: he would pay Exclusive Companions and she would deliver the act he told her to deliver. In fact the more he thought about it, the more he liked that idea; she would be as much under his control as a robot.

Emmie swallowed back a yawn with difficulty while Bastian Christou's PA, Marie, gave her exhaustive details on the company she wanted her to research. Her hand unwittingly rubbed at her aching leg, which always bothered her when she was on her feet too much. Her right leg had been badly injured in a car crash when she was twelve and for years afterwards Emmie had been disabled, initially forced to use a wheelchair and only later recovering sufficiently to get around on crutches. Indeed, without experimental surgery she would never have walked unaided again and so grateful was she still for that surgery that she always shrugged off the occasional ache as unworthy of note or fuss.

Unfortunately, her tiredness made concentration a virtual impossibility and, not for the first time, Emmie marvelled that she had ever believed that an unpaid internship would be the perfect solution to her unemployment crisis. After months working a temporary deadend job in the local library, Emmie had been willing to try anything to get her career out of the doldrums. She had jumped, however, from the frying pan straight into the fire. Although she had several friends working for no money to gain some experience for their all-important CVs they were all, without exception, still in receipt of parental financial support.

Emmie was rather less fortunate in that field. Although she had an excellent business degree the economic downturn meant there were few graduate jobs and the few that there were went to applicants with the skills and practical know-how that were only attainable from actual employment. After countless unsuccessful applications, Emmie had known that she needed work experience to improve her chances and she had initially been ecstatic when she got through a tough assessment centre and first won the internship at Christou Holdings, one of the most aggressive and successful software companies in London.

Never having lived in the city as an independent adult, she had not initially appreciated what a challenge it would be simply to make ends meet. And then, her estranged mother, Odette, had got in touch out of the blue and had offered Emmie her spare room and Emmie had snatched gratefully at the opportunity for cheap lodgings without which she could not have hoped to accept the job. It had not once occurred to her that

Odette might have an ulterior motive in inviting her to stay. Naively, Emmie had simply been eager for the opportunity to get to know the mother she had last seen when she was twelve years old. From that age Emmie and her two siblings had been raised by her eldest sister, Kat, in the Lake District and, although she had recognised Kat's dismay when she learned of the London scheme and Emmie's plan to live with their mother, Kat had not interfered and had merely warned her sibling that Odette could be 'difficult'. Well, the word *difficult* didn't begin to cover the problems she was having, Emmie reflected heavily, hoping that she wasn't in for yet another long-running row when she got home later.

Her first unsettling discovery after moving in with Odette had been the disturbing revelation that her mother made her very comfortable living through an Internet-based escort agency. The even bigger shock that followed had been Odette's firm conviction that Emmie should join her list of escorts and earn her keep that way. When Emmie had refused and had instead taken on waitressing work five nights a week, Odette had been furious and, even though Emmie was handing over every penny of her meagre earnings to her mother, Odette was still angry and dissatisfied with her daughter.

Perhaps the most upsetting experience of all for Emmie had been the dawning awareness that her mother didn't love her, cherished no fond wish to get to know her better and certainly didn't regret having left her to her sister's care at twelve years old. That learning curve had been steep and painful and had made Emmie appreciate that she had gone to live with her mother in the hope of reviving a relationship that had only ever existed in her own imagination. Sadly, Odette was not the maternal type. Her children were simply the by-products of relationships that had gone wrong and it honestly seemed as though Odette had never managed to form an attachment to any of her daughters.

'Ah, Marie...' a familiar dark accented drawl pronounced from the doorway. 'The meeting is about to start. Emmie can take the minutes for us.'

Emmie spun round, faint colour blooming in her cheeks as she focused on Bastian Christou's tall powerful frame. The Greek entrepreneur was a popular choice for profiles in leading business publications and she had read all about him long before she came to work for him. He took a brilliant photograph but was even more eye-catching in the flesh, where his height and breadth and the gleaming luxuriance of the ruthlessly cropped black hair that framed his lean, darkly handsome features were disturbingly noticeable even in a crowd. Of course he was taller than most men, something Emmie tended to notice because she was five feet nine inches tall but he topped her by a comfortable six inches. In truth he had the charisma and looks that no woman could ignore, added to a sun-kissed complexion the shade of dulled gold and the perfectly formed features of a fallen angel. His mother, she had read, had been a famous Italian film star and he looked exactly like her, right down to the burnished dark eyes that were currently engaged in roaming over her as though she were edible and he were starving. Startled by that analogy and the intensity of his continuing appraisal, Emmie tensed and jerked her chin up while throwing him a look of frowning enquiry, for he had never looked at her in that way before. Perhaps his reaction was an illustration of the strange mood that Marie had warned her that her boss was in, doubtless fallout from the broken engagement that nobody had yet dared to mention in his presence, she reasoned uncertainly.

'Of course,' Marie responded equably. A slender, efficient brunette in her early forties, she rose from her seat to follow her boss back out of the office.

Users Review

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