



Taming the French Tycoon (Harlequin Romance (Larger Print))

By Rebecca Winters

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Luc doesn't trust easily, but Jasmine needs his help, and something in her beautiful blue eyes tempts him to offer his support. When Luc realises how much he cares for her, he'll risk everything to keep the woman who stole his heart by his side...

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Rebecca Winters lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. With canyons and high alpine meadows full of wildflowers, she never runs out of places to explore. They, plus her favourite vacation spots in Europe, often end up as backgrounds for her romance novels because writing is her passion, along with her family and church. Rebecca loves to hear from readers. If you wish to e-mail her, please visit her website at: www.cleanromances.com

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May

With his banking business done in Cyprus, Luc had taken a rare morning off to visit Yeronisos before flying back to France. He'd always had an interest in archaeology and the tiny island off the coast was thought to be the site of the temple of Apollo. They'd dug up foundations, walls, coins, amulets, wine jugs, and much more. So far the items had been traced to Alexandria, three hundred miles away.

Evidently Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, had possessed the resources to build here on the top of these seventy-foot cliffs that kept visitors away. Yeronisos was so inaccessible they called it a virgin island because it had remained much as it had been when man had first come there over ten thousand years ago.

Luc had walked around the excavations for an hour and found it a totally fascinating place where he could indulge his passion, but then a boatload of male teenagers had arrived in a dinghy to disturb its tranquility. Instead of studying antiquities, they'd come to cliff dive, a foolhardy pursuit with the waters churning at the base because of a swift current. There was a sign that forbade it, but this group paid no heed.

Deciding it was time to go, he descended the steep steps. The warm May sun forced him to put on his sunglasses to cut the glint reflecting off the deep blue water. When he looked out, another dinghy was approaching. He returned to the speedboat he'd rented and started untying the ropes at the dock.

While he was doing so, the boat pulled in behind him and more young divers jumped out. He recognized their eagerness as they scrambled up the side of the island to get to the top and challenge the elements.

Stepping into his boat, he happened to glance at the last guy to leave the dinghy. But it turned out to be a young woman wearing a backpack. She had a pair of the most fabulous long legs he'd ever seen. A T-shirt over her bikini couldn't hide the voluptuous mold of her body. A dark braid circled her well-shaped head.

As she passed him, he found himself staring into an incredibly lovely face. Classic, with high cheekbones and a provocative mouth. She reminded him a little of Sabine, the girl he'd loved and lost in a plane crash years ago, but sunglasses covered this woman's eyes so he couldn't see their color. With her attention focused on the top of the cliff, he doubted she'd noticed him. She'd come here with all those hormone-filled idiots?

In the background came the excited shouts from the divers already launching themselves into the dangerous, swirling waters. One by one, they jumped into the huge swells and then had to swim for their lives to reach the rocky walls of the cliff. When he heard several bloodcurdling screams among the shouts, his emotions suddenly morphed into gut-wrenching pain as he was transported back to his last year in high school.

During those years he and his friends had felt immortal. In their crazy exuberance, they'd decided to go skydiving. But it had ended in horror when their plane crashed against a hillside. Out of the six, four of them survived. The other two had perished, one of them being Sabine.

His fear for the divers' safety intensified, causing his body to tense. Any one of them could be killed doing something so reckless. Luc knew all about it. He broke out in a cold sweat watching the attractive female make her way to the bottom of the steps that would take her to the top of the cliff. He thought of Sabine and couldn't bear to see this woman hurt or possibly killed doing something so reckless.

She was young like they'd once been, eager for adventure and heedless of the danger. Didn't she know her body could be tossed against the rocks and knocked unconscious or worse? Fearful for the welfare of this beautiful woman, he climbed out onto the dock again and called to her.

She stopped and turned around. "Yes?" she answered in French. "Were you speaking to me?"

The sight of her made his heart beat faster, a reaction he hadn't felt for a woman in years. "Haven't you read the sign? No cliff jumping! You heard those screams. Don't you realize that what your group is doing could end in fatalities?"

Her arched brows frowned. "If it's your job to enforce the rule, you should have stopped the group in the first dinghy."

He moved closer to her. "It's anyone's job to stop a bunch of headstrong young people from bringing harm to themselves." Without thinking he said, "I'd hate to see a lovely woman like you lose your life for a thrill. Have you no concern for your family or loved ones who would be devastated if anything happened to you?" Luc would never forget the pain.

She stared at him for a full minute. One corner of her mouth lifted in a mocking curve. "*Félicitations, monsieur*. That's the most original pick-up line any Frenchman has ever thrown at me and believe me, I've heard the best of them."

Frenchman? That was an odd thing for her to say since *she* was French. Her response stunned him in more ways than one. "You think that's what I'm doing?"

"It looks that way to me. I'm wondering how often you loiter at the dock, lying in wait for an unsuspecting, accessible female to detain."

"*What?*" he almost hissed the word.

"If I'm wrong...*je regrette*!" She shrugged her shoulders. "Is it possible you never did anything so daring as cliff jump when you were young? Might I point out that you took your life in your hands just coming out here in your speedboat rental?"

Luc had to tamp down his temper, caught between his concern for her welfare and her provocative insinuations about him. "In what way?" his voice grated.

"Surely you know the Mediterranean has its share of great white sharks. What are you? Approaching forty? I hope you're still a good swimmer in case you should meet with an accident at sea. A rental boat isn't always reliable, but try to enjoy your sedentary day anyway instead of attempting to ruin it for everyone else. *Ciao*."

In the next breath, she started up the steps with surprising speed to reach her destination.

Between the disturbing flashback and their shocking conversation, Luc had been thrown into a particularly foul mood. He got in the boat without looking back. Once he'd started the engine and edged away from the dock, he headed for the mainland.

When he thought about it, he could imagine that many a man had lain in wait for her, thus her ready defense, which was damn off-putting. The female who'd clashed with him was probably twenty, maybe twenty-one, but he'd found out she could take care of herself without effort. Before the plane crash he might have done exactly what she'd accused him of doing in order to get to know her.

To his chagrin, the vision of the captivating young woman stayed with him long after his flight home, as he picked up his car at the airport and drove to his villa in Cagnes-sur-Mer outside Nice. In that moment when he could imagine their outing ending in tragedy, the memory of the plane crash had swept over him. He'd wanted to spare her from plunging to her death. Instead she'd managed to get under his skin.

Though born with an adventurous spirit, he was no longer willing to take risks when life was so precious. Over the last fifteen years he'd grown particularly cautious when it came to making landmark business decisions that could affect not only his professional life, but his family's welfare and reputation.

The plane crash had changed him into a different person. He'd learned the meaning of mortality. That caution had also kept him out of involved personal relationships that could put his emotions in jeopardy. It was the reason he hadn't cut the motor and reached for his binoculars to watch her defy danger because she thought she was immortal. He needed to put her and the incident out of his mind.

Jasmine reached the top of the island with only a little time to spare. The dinghy full of guys eager to cliff dive had been rented for two hours. Since this group of teens had room in the boat for her, she'd ridden to the island with them, glad she didn't have to drive a boat herself.

While they jumped, this would be her one and only chance to take pictures of the excavations before she couriered the negatives to the publisher. With this last task done, the book could be printed by the end of the month and ready for the distribution date. She was no photographer, but it didn't matter as long as they turned out.

To her chagrin, the encounter with the man at the dock had shaken her. He wasn't anything like André, the French guy with the seductive way of talking. She'd dated him a little at university before dropping him because he'd turned out to be way too controlling. But just now, when the stranger in sunglasses had come at her about the dangers of cliff jumping, she had been reminded of André, and her adrenaline had taken over in a negative way.

With hindsight, Jasmine realized she'd been ruder to this man than any male she'd ever met. The trouble was, with his unruly black hair and strong masculine features, he was *all* male and breathtaking in those white shorts that hung low on his hips.

Her instant attraction to him had come as a tremendous surprise. That was why his erroneous conclusion about her reason for being there had caused her temper to flare. She wasn't some foolish teenager, yet he'd put her in that category. Little did he know, she thought the cliff jumpers were crazy too, but she'd grown up with older brothers and knew you couldn't stop them if they saw a challenge.

If only the man had just stopped there, but he hadn't. It was the mention of family that had hit a nerve where her guilt lurked. Where did he get off implying that Jasmine didn't care about them? The intensity of his attack had caught her on the raw, creating a negative reaction in her that went volatile.

In retaliation, she'd hurtled little insults back at him like darts thrown at balloons, hoping to damage his ego, but she doubted he'd felt them. He was most likely in his early thirties. Being rock-hard lean and fit, she imagined he could outswim a shark. Deep down, she knew he was the kind of man who could have any woman he wanted and didn't need to hang around some lonely outpost waiting for an opportunity.

For the next hour, she concentrated on her task, trying to shake off the encounter. Once finished, she went back down to the dock and ate her lunch while she waited in the dinghy for the others. The speedboat had long since gone. She wondered what the man had been doing there in the first place, but why she cared was quite beyond her when she was still smarting from their confrontation.

Pretty soon, the first dinghy filled up and took off. A few minutes later, the others divers came running. She learned that one of the guys had cut his lower leg open. Someone had wrapped it in a towel, but he needed medical help. They left for the mainland, where she'd parked her rental car at the boating concession.

Jasmine looked around, but didn't see the man with whom she'd traded insults. She was relieved he hadn't been there to watch them come ashore with the injured teen. She could just imagine his "I told you so" smirk as the guy was lifted into the ambulance.

There was something wrong for her still to be thinking about him. Determined to put the incident behind her, she got in her car and drove the short distance to Nicosia. From the airport there she would catch her afternoon flight back to France.

Later in the day, when the plane began its descent to the Nice airport, it dawned her that the stranger had spoken with a distinct, cultured Niçois accent. A small shiver raced through her body to think he might actually live here, but the chances of bumping into him again were astronomical. How absurd to imagine such a thing happening.

For the second time today, she had to ask herself why it mattered when she had earth-shaking events on her mind and little time to accomplish all that had to be done by midsummer.

July

When the phone rang at six-thirty a.m. Friday morning, Jasmine was awake, but she hadn't gotten out of bed yet. To her shock, she'd been dreaming about the stranger on Yeronisos again. Visions of him had been filtering through her mind for the last two months and she was sick of it. Her fantasy of seeing him again was absolutely crazy!

Thank heaven today was her twenty-sixth birthday, the day she and her papa had planned out in detail before his death. She could put aside the memory of this man who'd been haunting her dreams and deal with real problems. Jasmine glanced at the caller ID. Sure enough it was Robert Lambert, her grandfather's attorney, calling right on cue.

Jasmine clicked on. "*Bonjour*, Robert."

"*Bon anniversaire* to you, Jasmine. I know it's early, but we don't have a lot of time before the staff meeting

at ten in the conference room."

"I'll be ready." She'd been getting ready for this day for a long, long time.

"Excellent. Per your grandfather's wishes, you will be interviewed in his laboratory for tonight's six o'clock news. The arrangements have already been made. He wanted it announced over the air before the day was out to quiet anyone who wasn't on board."

"I'm all prepared for it."

Not only had her grandfather hated publicity, he'd never let outsiders step foot inside his laboratory. For him to sanction a television interview in the place where he'd worked all his life indicated an intimacy between him and Jasmine the viewers couldn't possibly misinterpret.

"Meet me at nine-thirty to discuss one more matter with you before everyone else arrives at ten. Do you have any questions?"

"No. At this point I want to thank you for all you've done and are doing to help me. I couldn't do this without you. Papa knew that."

"We both miss your papa. Knowing where he is now, I'm sure he's happy this day has come for many reasons."

"I agree. See you soon."

They both clicked off.

It was really happening.

The second she hung up, her phone rang again. She glanced at the caller ID. This time it was her parents. Recurring guilt stabbed at her because she was spending yet another birthday away from home. Thankfully it would be for the last time.

After picking up, she cried, "Mom? Dad?"

"It's your dad, my darlin' birthday girl. We miss you so much, we gathered the whole family together and decided to fly over to celebrate this weekend with you." A soft gasp escaped. "You mean you're *here*?"

Users Review

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