



*Sex, Lies and Wedding Bells (Chapter One)*  
A Ravenous Romance™ Panamour™ Original Publication  
By EM Lynley

**Coffee Time Recommended Read & TwoLips Reviewer's Choice**

Kieran Quinn is a Texas native transplanted to Manhattan and working as a columnist for a national magazine. He's famous for his snarky, sardonic columns, but deep down he's more interested in what makes people tick than his editor would like. He keeps his desire to find his own Mr. Right hidden under a sexy, carefree persona that favors champagne and underwear models of the male variety.

When Kieran goes to Texas to cover the latest wedding of a real-life "runaway bride," he falls hard for the gorgeous—and straight—groom. Jaxon Lang is the handsome, confident high school principal in a tiny Texas town, where he relocated from Dallas to pursue his relationship with a woman he thinks he wants to settle down with, despite the fact she's left three men at the altar before him.

Kieran's charm and unique attitudes about sex and attraction soon challenge Jaxon's concept of what--and who--he wants. Will anything change when Kieran discovers the bride's been keeping a shocking secret?

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Sex, Lies and Wedding Bells

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## Chapter One

*Thursday*  
*New York City*

The first thing Kieran noticed when he woke up was something warm and wet on his cock. He let out a small moan, enjoying the sensations. He remembered leaving Brut—his favorite club, just a few blocks from his place—with a model. He couldn't quite remember which one, not that it mattered: Based on what the guy was doing to his cock, Kieran had made a good choice. He slowly opened his eyes and saw a pair of big blue eyes staring right back at him with a mischievous glint. *Ah, yes.* Now he remembered.

Kieran had no idea what the guy's name was, but his face was more than familiar. Just about everyone in the city had seen it, 10 times larger than life, looking down from a Times Square billboard and the sides of countless city buses. Now that same mouth with its full pink lips was wrapped around Kieran's cock. He couldn't think of anywhere he'd rather be at the moment. The guy—*Rod?*—swirled his tongue around the head of Kieran's cock and flicked across the sensitive bundle of nerves on the underside. He took most of Kieran into his mouth, the tip of his cock just brushing against the back of Rod's throat. He let out a groan that vibrated all the way down Kieran's cock. Warmth flooded across Kieran's belly, gradually becoming an ache in his balls. He sat up and tugged at Rod's flowing nearly-shoulder-length blonde hair. Rod looked up at him with his cornflower blue eyes again and Kieran pulled Rod onto his lap and kissed him deeply, his

cock sliding along the cleft of Rod's ass. Rod moaned into the kiss and let himself melt against Kieran's chest.

"No biting," Rod said, as Kieran scraped his teeth along one shoulder.

*Damn underwear models and their rules*, Kieran thought, and pulled his lips over his teeth. He knew Rod couldn't show up for a photo shoot with teeth marks on his perfect body. Memories flooded back to Kieran: Rod mentioned he was doing a new shoot in which he'd be completely nude, with just someone's leg thrown across his crotch area. A men's fragrance ad with the tagline "It's all I wear to bed," or something along those lines. *Can't wait to see the billboard for that one*, Kieran thought, looking at the real thing in his lap.

Kieran put his hands on Rod's hips and lifted him slightly, settling him onto his back, legs still wrapped around his waist, heels pressing into the small of his back. Rod let out a throaty sigh and relaxed back onto the lapis-colored, 800-threadcount sheets and spread his legs wide. Kieran admired the view of Rod's even tan on smooth, firm flesh and reached over to the bedside table to grab a condom. Rod pulled the packet slowly from Kieran's fingers and ripped it open using his teeth, never letting his eyes off Kieran's, conveying his own need and arousal as effectively as his erection did. He rolled the condom onto Kieran's hardness and gracefully hooked one knee over Kieran's shoulder while he waited for Kieran to apply extra lube to his cock.

Kieran tentatively pushed one slick finger into Rod and met no resistance. He added another. Rod was more than ready and Kieran wasted no time pressing the tip of his cock against Rod's slippery hole and plunging inside with one smooth move that overwhelmed his senses. Rod moaned as he took Kieran in, encouraging and increasing Kieran's own

pleasure at the tight, hot grip of Rod's ass around his cock. It felt just as good as it had the two previous times he'd fucked Rod, before they'd both fallen into a deep, sated sleep in the early hours of the morning.

On top of Rod like this, Kieran couldn't really see as much of the man's gorgeous body as he would like; so he slowed his thrusts before either of them got too close to orgasm, wanting a better view. Kieran sat at the edge of the bed, facing the large mirror door of his closet and pulled Rod back into his lap, back-to-front, Rod's legs straddling Kieran's.

"I want to see how beautiful you are," Kieran mumbled huskily, "and watch you lose control." He helped Rod ease himself down onto Kieran's cock. With his hands on Rod's hips, Kieran easily moved him up and down as he watched in the mirror.

"God," Rod moaned, "yeah, just keep...fucking me...like...*that*."

Rod's head was thrown back against Kieran's shoulder, legs splayed wide so Kieran could stroke and play with his cock and fondle his balls as Rod fucked himself down on Kieran with an uneven rhythm. It didn't take long before Rod was so fucked out he could barely move on his own and Kieran had to do most of the work. That was fine with Kieran; he loved seeing a guy this far gone

Kieran had Rod coming with a few skillful strokes, shooting thick creamy jets up across his chest and shuddering around Kieran's cock as he grunted and sighed with his orgasm, whispering a few mouthfuls of delightfully filthy comments. Kieran came a moment later, still feeling Rod's aftershocks squeezing his cock, trying to keep his own eyes open so he could enjoy watching Rod as he pumped his own release inside him. The nearly dead weight of Rod's body in his lap intensified Kieran's own pleasure, as his

orgasm ripped through his body, pleasurable sensations ricocheting and reverberating along every inch of his skin and leaving him spent and exhausted and perfectly satisfied.

Kieran lay back, pulling Rod along with him. They lay quietly while their breathing returned to normal. Then Rod slipped out of bed and into the bathroom, and Kieran was surprised to hear the shower start. He disposed of the condom in a trash can next to the bed and waited, reliving the activities and enjoying his own afterglow. Rod took a surprisingly short shower and came back into the bedroom with just a few droplets of water on his beautiful nude body as he toweled his long, damp hair.

“Got any coffee?” he asked, bending bent down to collect his scattered clothes from the floor.

“Sorry, no. I usually go out for breakfast.” Kieran sat up in bed and watched Rod dress himself. “Want to come along?”

“I’m late as it is,” Rod said, not bothering to button his shirt. He slipped on his jeans, socks and shoes hurriedly before leaning down and brushing his lips against Kieran’s. Rod’s hand slid down Kieran’s chest gently stroked his cock one last time before Rod straightened up and left, waving a farewell.

“Bye, Rod,” Kieran said.

“*Todd*,” Todd-not-Rod corrected with an annoyed look, then turned on his heel and left. Only slightly embarrassed, Kieran listened as Todd let himself out the front door; and then with a heavy sigh padded into the bathroom to shower and get his own day started. He had to go into the magazine’s office, and by the time he had breakfast it would be close to noon. *No matter*, he decided as he shampooed his hair. He’d already

turned in his column the evening before by e-mail. All he needed was to get final approval from his editor.

Once Kieran washed and dressed, the only clue to his late-night and morning activities was the broad smile on his face as he walked out the front door of his building's lobby. He rounded the corner of his street and walked half a block to the tiny diner where he had most of his breakfasts. Inside he was greeted with warm smiles and cheerful waves by the two waitresses on duty, and seated himself in a booth near the window. Kieran liked watching people pass by on the street while he ate. He ordered a vegetable and cheese omelet, hash browns, and a fruit salad. His food arrived quickly and while he ate, his mind went over the night and morning he'd spent with Todd.

Physically, there was nothing to complain about. He'd been more than satisfied in that regard. But Kieran still felt that there had to be something more than what he and Todd had shared. Once again, here he was having breakfast—more like brunch, considering the hour—on his own, the way he did nearly every day. It was a seemingly endless parade of hot guys who had been to his place or with whom he'd gone home. Last night's guest was one of the few who spent the whole night; but Kieran would much rather have woken up in someone's arms than someone's mouth. He'd even asked Rod—*Todd*, he reminded himself—to have breakfast, and that was certainly a break from the usual routine.

It wasn't as if they'd had anything to talk about; but Kieran had at least tried for more than a few pleasant hours in bed with the guy. *It might have gone better if I remembered his correct name*, Kieran thought, but reminded himself Todd had already turned down the breakfast invitation before Kieran's faux pas.

\* \* \* \*

Kieran finally rolled into the office of *Gloss* magazine—a *New Yorker*-style literary weekly aimed at a younger audience—well past noon, and got a mixed response of smiles and murderous glares from his coworkers. One person went so far as to mutter “*Prima fucking donna*” under her breath. Kieran was unfazed. He smiled his usual million-watt smile and greeted everyone cheerfully as he set his six-foot, four-inch frame at his desk in the center of an old-fashioned bullpen writers’ room. He was still in a fantastic mood after the night—and morning—he’d spent with Todd, a guy who undoubtedly everyone in this room would recognize.

He was quietly humming as he tugged at his half-tucked shirttail, fanning himself to help the cool air-conditioned breeze counteract Manhattan’s muggy, mid-May heat. *Might as well give them a show if they’re still staring*, Kieran thought as he treated half the room to a nice view of his chiseled abs and the thick white waistband of his Calvin Klein underwear as it slid low onto the deep groove of his hipbone. *Makes all those hours in the gym worth it*, he thought as he heard several people sigh. Smiling, Kieran settled into his chair and brushed damp strands of dark brown hair behind his ears.

“Kieran, nice to see you!” boomed a loud voice behind him, oozing sarcasm and irony.

“Jeff, hey!” Kieran replied cheerfully.

“Kieran, what does the sign on my door say?” Jeff asked, walking around to the back of Kieran’s desk and perching himself on its edge. In one hand he had a rolled-up sheaf of papers which he thwacked against the palm of his other hand menacingly.

“Morgan Jeffries, editor,” Kieran replied, wrinkling his brow. He hadn’t expected a pop quiz. Jeffries preferred to be called “Jeff” rather than any permutation of his first name; in fact he loathed his first name, so it was best never uttered.

“Okay, good,” Jeff replied sardonically, “you noticed that. And what does the sign on *your* office say?”

“I don’t have an office?” Kieran replied, knitting his brows and wondering if it was a trick question. The conversation had attracted the attention of his coworkers. Kieran could hear a few people still tap-tap-tapping at their keyboards, but no one spoke.

“Precisely,” Jeff said cryptically. The entire room was silent now, watching, waiting, probably *hoping* to see Kieran Quinn crash and burn.

“Are you telling me I’m getting a promotion?” Kieran asked eagerly, his grin widening, flashing his sure-fire dimples.

“Uh, I wonder what the Magic 8-Ball would say about that. All signs point to *fuck no*.” Jeff leaned down into Kieran’s face, breathing the tuna fish he had for lunch onto Kieran. Snickers and giggles echoed around the room.

“Okay, then what *are* you telling me?” Kieran didn’t consider himself a slow learner, but he still wasn’t sure where this was going. He was here and he’d turned in his column—by e-mail—well before the five p.m. deadline.

“Kieran, do you like your job?” Jeff asked, leaning back again. Someone in the far corner snorted and Kieran’s eyes darted in that direction without moving his head.

“Yeah.” Kieran didn’t like the way the conversation was going. He’d been thrown off because Jeff had called him “Kieran.” When Jeff was angry at someone he used his surname instead.

“Then what. The *fuck*. Is *this*?” Jeff demanded as he smacked the roll of papers onto Kieran’s desk, punctuating his remarks, The sheets fluttered to the floor. Kieran bent down awkwardly to retrieve the document, scanning to see what it was.

“Uh, my column about the crazy things people do to find love for Sunday’s issue.” Kieran wrinkled his nose as he looked at the manuscript, squinting slightly and ruffling through the pages. Jeff was old-school and had started at a newspaper, hence the bullpen-style office. *Waste of a goddamn tree*, Kieran thought. But it made for good drama in the office because Jeff threw papers at some poor schmuck at least once a week. “I guess you don’t like it,” Kieran said as meekly as he could manage. He didn’t want to antagonize his boss in front of the entire department.

“No, I ‘don’t like it,’” Jeff replied, mimicking Kieran’s voice. “It’s too fucking nice, for fuck’s sake! Fuck, Kieran!” Jeff liked to say “fuck,” and averaged about one use per sentence. He was clearly making up for lost “fucks” so far in this conversation.

“Nice?”

“Too. Fucking. Nice,” Jeff repeated. “We don’t pay you to write nice interesting little columns with heart and hope and happy endings. We pay you to be bitchy and snarky and enter-fucking-taining, for fuck’s sake. This is bo-ring! I wouldn’t use it wrap dogshit in! Come on! You talked to matchmakers and psychics and speed-fucking-daters and more crazy-ass lovelorn sons of bitches, and there was a fucking *fuckload* of potential for snark here, and you end up writing some fucking sympathetic piece about how hard it is to find ‘love in the big city.’” Jeff mocked. “Fix it the fuck up or pack your fucking desk and get a job at *Redbook* or *Ladies’ Home Fucking Journal*. Got it?”

“Fuck yes?” Kieran ventured with a grin, but clearly Jeff wasn’t in a mood to joke around and didn’t return the smile. He *had* managed to say “fuck” fourteen times so far, which might be a personal best for one conversation, Kieran thought. When he’d first started working here, he’d found himself counting rather than paying attention to what Jeff was actually saying. But now, after three years of practice, Kieran could listen and count “fucks” at the same time.

“Deadline is five pm, which gives you four hours to get me a new draft. Or to pack. Your choice, Quinn,” Jeff said and stormed back to his office. Heads turned, following Jeff’s progress until he slammed the door behind him. Then everyone stared at Kieran.

“Thanks, all y’all, for your concern about my well-being,” Kieran said in his sweetest, most drawling native Texas accent—so sugary it practically hurt his teeth just to use it. “Now mind your own fucking business!” he added in his normal, only barely-a-trace-of-an-accent-voice, and smiled a huge, pleasant and clearly facetious smile, showing most of his large and very pearly whites. He was a diligent flosser.

*Fuck! Fuckity fucking fuck!* he thought. Great, now Jeff was rubbing off on him. Ugh, *that* was a mental image he tried desperately to wipe from his mind as he booted up his computer and opened the file to edit his column. Slowly, the room returned to its normal level of noise and activity as people resumed whatever they had been doing when Jeff had made his appearance at Kieran’s desk.

They were all used to Jeff’s weekly tirades, but Kieran hadn’t been the object of Jeff’s disaffection for quite a while. A lot of the other staffers thought he deserved it, the way he swanned in—never swished despite what some people might say—at all hours of the day and consistently turned things in at the last minute. But no one disputed he was

one of the most talented and most popular writers—at least with the readers—at *Gloss*. His columns invariably generated hundreds of letters and emails, a mixture of plaudits and complaints, but the magazine didn't care, as long as people were buying and reading it. The circulation department discovered a good number of people bought the thing just for Kieran's column. They purposely didn't post his column on *Gloss's* website in order to force people to buy the magazine, and apparently it worked. Circulation was at an all-time high, which was quite a feat given the Internet had caused most magazines and newspapers to lose huge portions of their print readership.

Three and a half hours later Kieran had been to the coffee cart in the lobby three times and was so hopped up on sugar and caffeine he couldn't sit still. He furiously tapped away at his keyboard, banging one knee rhythmically against his desk, and occasionally muttering to himself. Several co-workers stared at him and probably wished he hadn't shown up in the office after all. The feature writers had the option of working at home a couple of days a week, if their job allowed—the newswriters clearly couldn't—but everyone was expected to be in the office on deadline day. Preferably arriving *before* noon. But now the room was nearly empty, as the writers who had already turned in their stories went home or off to live their lives.

“So, Kieran, how's the rewrite going?” Chad Raines asked from a few desks away. He was probably Kieran's closest friend at *Gloss*, and possibly in real life—or whatever you called life outside of work. He wrote for the Entertainment section, reviewing films. Kieran liked to think Chad's job consisted of sitting around in the dark watching movies all day then coming in on deadline day to turn in his columns. *How hard could that be?* But then again, Chad probably only got half the salary Kieran did, which was only fair, in

Kieran's opinion. Chad looked and sounded like a California surfer: light brown hair streaked with golden highlights, which was quite a feat considering he'd come from Vermont. Maybe he'd watched too many films and was just playing the part.

"Great, Chad. It's the best fucking thing I've written," Kieran replied with mock-enthusiasm, not looking up from his monitor.

"Really?" Chad asked. Irony was usually lost on him, Kieran knew from experience.

"No, Chad, it's going to end up like Franken-fucking-stein when I'm done. A little of this and a little of that, all sewn up with some bitchy snarkiness, and then some snarky bitchiness with a dollop of irony and sarcasm on top for good measure." Kieran's tone was bitter.

"So what's got your thong in a twist, dude?"

"I don't know, Chad." Kieran sighed deeply and sprawled back in his chair. He pushed off from his desk and let his office chair roll backwards into the desk directly behind his. Alexa Harrington, another of his good friends sat there. She grabbed a handful of Kieran's hair until he yelped.

"For fuck's sake, Lex, that fucking hurt!" Kieran shouted, rubbing his head, but his smile said he wasn't really angry.

"Hmm, sounds like Mr. Grumpy Pants is trying for Jeff's job or something," Alexa said with a laugh. She spent most of her time in New York, but every other week she spent a few days in another city to try new restaurants, interview celebrity chefs, and follow up on food and taste trends around the country. Kieran was sure she had the best job at the magazine; and Alexa was sure he had only befriended her so he could eat fantastic food for free, and she constantly teased him and gave him grief for his famous

appetite. She usually ordered five appetizers and five entrees at each restaurant, plus a few desserts; *someone* had to eat all that extra food, Kieran reasoned to her. Slim, petite, elegant Alexa could actually pack away a lot more than anyone might expect, but not *that* much. All the food seemed to have gone to her boobs, Kieran speculated, noticing she was wearing another daringly low-cut blouse today. He might be gay, but he could certainly appreciate Alexa's allure.

"I just don't feel right making fun of some of the people I interviewed for this piece," Kieran admitted. "This matchmaker, for example. She was the sweetest little grandmotherly thing. She actually did remind me of my grandmother. I can't bring myself to mock her."

"So, just mock the people who *go* to her," Chad suggested. "Or maybe you should have interviewed a few different matchmakers so you would have one you didn't like that you could really rip to shreds."

"I'm surprised people even *agree* to let you interview them," Alexa said. "You're known for making people the butt of jokes or embarrassing them. How do you manage to convince anyone to talk to you?"

"It's his country boy charm and good looks," Chad answered, "and the killer smile. I'm still in awe of the way you can get nearly anyone to not only want to get in your pants, but to think they actually have a chance: male, female, any age or sexual orientation. What's your secret?"

Kieran didn't bother to protest. He *did* abuse that ability, thanks to his mixture of good looks, hours spent in the gym, and a genuinely engaging personality. But he was the first to admit he'd been pretty lazy on this piece. He definitely should have interviewed

more people, but was taken with the matchmaker and spent too much time chatting with her. She was quite successful at pairing up couples, many of whom had stayed together for years. Kieran had half-considered asking her to help *him*, since he had no luck finding love in the big city. The night before aside. Then again that wasn't love, that was *fucking*, he reminded himself, and he knew the difference.

The whole theme of the column had hit a bit too close to home for him, and he'd gone into it with entirely too much empathy for the people Jeff called the "lovelorn sons of bitches." Kieran thought he could use some help in that department himself. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life picking up hot guys from bars. He really did want to find someone special and settle down, but he seemed to be much more successful with the underwear models than with anyone who could actually be his soulmate.

He'd had a lot of fun interviewing the psychic, too. She did readings out of her tiny apartment in Brooklyn and he'd gone over there twice after the initial visit, rather than just calling her. Of course he didn't really believe in any of that paranormal stuff, and he knew she used attention to detail to "read" his personality and what his problems might be, but she had said something that had gotten his attention. He was going to meet his soul mate sometime soon, she predicted, and it would be a complete surprise to both of them. The person would be seeking Kieran's help for a serious problem, she continued, adding something cryptic about a "baby who wasn't there," whatever *that* meant.

"Earth to Quinn," Chad startled Kieran out of his thoughts. "You've got less than half an hour to finish that column and get your next column outlined. Are you going to manage it?" *Gloss* had writers plan out their work two issues in advance so they could manage space and advertising requirements.

“Huh? The outline is due *today*?” Chad had Kieran’s full attention. “I thought that wasn’t due until tomorrow?” An extra 24 hours could do wonders in Kieran’s experience. Hell, he’d written entire columns in less time. Often, in fact.

“Oh, right, you weren’t here the other afternoon when Jeff announced the new schedule,” Alexa said. “Now we have to turn in the new outline along with the story for the current issue. I guess bankers’—make that underwear models’—hours can be a bitch, huh?” she teased. She knew him all too well, Kieran decided.

“Figures.” Kieran frowned. “He probably said that just because I wasn’t here, right?”

“Well, there was an email, too,” Chad added in a tone that made Kieran want to smack him again.

“I never read emails from Jeff,” Kieran said, a touch of concern creeping into his voice. A lot of Jeff’s emails ended up in the spam folder, filtered out for having the word “fuck” in there. Kieran hoped he hadn’t deleted everything in the trash folder in his email program. He wondered what else he might have missed. Why did his job have to be so much *work*? He loved research and interviewing people, and of course the writing, but he *hated* the planning and outlining Jeff was so keen on. “I don’t have a clue what I’m doing two weeks from now.”

“Well, do you at least have this week’s column finished?” Alexa asked. “Or are you gonna pack your fucking desk?” She tried for Jeff’s voice and intonation, but couldn’t manage it.

“Yeah, just about done,” Kieran said, wheeling himself back to his desk and taking one more look at what he hoped was the finished column. Just then a trim, good-looking

guy with sleek dark, shoulder-length hair approached Kieran's desk, delivering mail from a pushcart.

“Hi, Kieran,” Chris-the-mailroom-guy said cheerfully. That was how most people referred to him. “I can't wait to read your next column; I hear it's about finding love.” He was obviously flirting. Kieran tried not to glare at him, and flashed a toned-down version of his normal smile. He didn't want Chris getting the wrong idea—although it was probably far too late to avoid that.

“Yeah, Chris, something like that, if I can get it done in the next ten minutes.” Kieran hoped his tone let Chris know the conversation was over without directly snubbing him. Chris didn't seem to notice the undertone and headed to the next desk, swaying his hips. Kieran rolled his eyes and turned back to the monitor, ignoring the huge pile of mail Chris had dropped on his desk.

“Looks like love might have found you, Kieran,” Chad said with a smirk once Chris was out of earshot.

“No, Chad,” Alexa said, laughing. “That wasn't love, that was fucking.” She mimicked Kieran's voice almost perfectly as she uttered one of his key phrases.

“Hey, do we have to have this conversation here, *now*?” Kieran asked, exasperated his personal life was common knowledge around the room. He looked around and realized the three of them were the only ones still left, except for the book reviewer—the short, balding Eric Johnson or Thomson or something equally as generic and forgettable—whose desk was over in the corner. Eric was a short, balding guy with eyes that rotated independently like some kind of lizard, as Alexa had once described him. He also had a crush on Alexa and often stayed until she left. He'd hardly ever even spoken to

her, and Kieran always dared her to ask him out or unbutton her top in front of his desk. Alexa didn't go much for dares, but every now and then she'd glance over at Eric and he'd scurry around his desk looking for something, or hide his head in his book.

"I still think it's so fucking hilarious you went home with Chris-the-mailroom-guy from a bar, and *then* found out he worked here!" Chad cried with a laugh. "And he's got the biggest crush on you. I'll bet a week's salary he followed you to that bar in the first place, hoping you'd pick him up." Chad nearly choked with mirth at Kieran's obvious discomfort.

To Kieran, the whole point of one-night stands was simply that: it was only supposed to be one night. You were supposed to fuck him and forget him. They weren't supposed to show up at your desk everyday making puppy-dog eyes hoping you'd ask them out again. It was no wonder Kieran preferred to work from home as often as possible. If he'd had found any sort of deeper connection with Chris, it wouldn't have ended up as a one-night stand in the first place.

"You two are so *adorable* together," Alexa added in a saccharine tone, but Kieran ignored both of them, instead focusing on finishing his column by the deadline.

"Okay, this is done!" Kieran announced ten minutes later and hit the enter key with a flourish as he emailed the final draft of his column to Jeff. Chad and Alexa applauded loudly.

"What about you guys? Almost done?" Kieran asked.

"Yeah, Jeff approved my final draft hours ago," Chad answered.

"Me, too," Alexa chimed in. "We're just here offering you moral support."

“And mocking my unfortunate sexual encounters,” Kieran added wryly, but he smiled, happy his friends had thought to stick around with him until he got his own piece done, even if they distracted him more than they helped him.

“We’ll stay till Jeff signs off on the piece, and then we’ll let you take us out for drinks to show your gratitude,” Chad said generously.

“I see money does buy companionship, at least, if not respect,” Kieran replied ironically.

While waiting for Jeff’s final approval on his column, Kieran needed to find something to write about for the future issue. He glanced at the pile of letters on his desk. An idea formed in his head. *How about writing about the people who write me letters?* He could pick a few choice ones, call the people up, and speak with them. He would need to figure out what the angle of the piece would be, but figured something would come to him after chatting with a few of them. Kieran grabbed the pile of letters and flipped through them, looking for interesting return addresses or uncommon names that would make good fodder for ridicule.

One envelope caught his attention. It was made of beautiful thick pearly beige paper that sort of glowed under the fluorescent light, and had a return address of Buckwheat Springs, Texas. Kieran had never heard of it, so it must be one of the tiny towns in the middle of nowhere with a population of five people, 500 cows, and 20 pickup trucks that dotted Texas. It looked like a wedding invitation, but he didn’t know anyone who would be getting married in Buckwheat Springs, Texas.

“Hey, I got invited to a wedding, I think, by one of my readers,” Kieran said excitedly. He tore the envelope open and read out loud:

“Mr. and Mrs. Robert Harris request the pleasure of your company at the marriage of their daughter Danetta and Jaxon’—with a fucking X!—‘Lang.’ Hell, I don’t know these people. There isn’t even a letter in here explaining who they are or why *I’m* invited.”

“Hang on,” Alexa said. “Did you say Danetta Harris?”

“Yeah,” Kieran said. “Why? What the fuck kind of name is Danetta anyway? Of course she’d have to marry someone with an ‘X’ in his name.”

“I went to college with her,” Alexa replied.

Kieran took a good look at the envelope and saw it was addressed to Alexa, not him. *Chris obviously isn’t as good at sorting mail as he is at sucking cock*, Kieran thought with a laugh. *Poor guy is going to have to sleep his way to a better job.*

“Sorry, I didn’t realize it’s actually for you. It was in my pile of letters.” Kieran handed over the invitation.

“Well, how interesting,” Alexa said, reading it over. “The wedding is next weekend, and I’m just getting an invitation *now*? I guess I was on the second string.”

“Are you going to go?” Chad asked, coming over and perching on the edge of Alexa’s desk.

“No, for several reasons,” she said. “Firstly, I have to be in Napa that weekend for a winemaker’s event.”

“Oh, poor thing,” Chad moaned. “The agony!”

Alexa ignored him. “Second, I’m annoyed to be invited so late. And third, get this. This is the *fourth* wedding invitation I’ve gotten from Danetta over the past five or six years. And she’s *still* not married yet.”

“Fourth? What d’you mean?” Kieran asked.

“Well, I missed the first wedding. It was before we were really friends, but I went to the next two. And at all of them she decided—at the *altar*—she didn’t want to get married after all!” Alexa shrieked with laughter.

“You’re saying she dumped the guy in the middle of the wedding?” Kieran was dumbfounded, but intrigued.

“Yeah. *Twice*.” Alexa couldn’t say more because she was laughing so hard. “Well, twice I saw, and then one more time when I wasn’t there, but it was while she was still in college.”

“Oh, that’s hilarious,” Chad said. “Well, maybe not for the guy, but to plan a whole wedding and then just wait till the last minute to cut and run?”

“Well, it’s too bad if it happens once, but she’s done it three times so far. But I haven’t gotten an invitation for a couple of years. Maybe she’s serious this time.”

“Hang on a minute,” Kieran interrupted. “I saw this in a movie!” He wondered why Chad hadn’t recognized the storyline by now. *Just shows he must be faking it*, Kieran decided. “Does this chick think she’s Julia Roberts or something? I mean come on, no one does something like that for real.” Kieran was incredulous.

“Danetta has,” Alexa replied. “Yeah, it does sound like that movie, doesn’t it? Stupid film; I hated it.”

“Lex, you should go, just in case,” Chad suggested. “Richard Gere might be there!” So he had at least heard of the film.

“Shut up, Chad!” Alexa said dismissively.

“What kind of shit-for-brains guy would even date her, much less propose to her with that track record?” Kieran mused, shaking his head in disbelief. “Guys, I’m getting an idea here,” he added excitedly. “I can do a column on the wedding! What d’you think?”

“What’s the angle?” Chad asked.

“Well, I could focus on Danetta,” he said the name with scorn “and how she’s such a flake—she is a flake, right, Lex?”

“First class.”

“That could work, but it doesn’t quite do it for me,” Chad said. “Real-life *Runaway Bride*, that’s not exactly original now, is it? You need some other spin to make it fly.”

“Okay…” Wheels turned in Kieran's head as he sought a more original slant that would be snarky enough to a travel budget approved. “Okay, okay, how’s this? I focus on the guy. *Guys*, I guess. I can interview the first three: try and find out what her secret is for getting all these proposals, and then focus on the current one… what’s his name?”

“Jaxon.” Alexa glanced at the invitation again, obviously holding back a giggle.

“Danetta. Jaxon. How on earth do people come up with these names for their kids in that town? I never heard of either of those names. But anyway, so I hang out with Jaxon a couple of days before the wedding, see how he’s dealing with the uncertainty of whether she will or won’t actually marry him.”

“Yeah, that’s good,” Chad said encouragingly. “What about something on how to avoid this happening to you?”

“Good, good.” Kieran was on a roll now with their brainstorming. “And of course it will be easy to make him look like a fool for even asking her to marry him, considering her past behavior. And if she bails again, I can really go to town on him.”

“Kieran, I think you’ve done it,” Alexa said. “Now hurry up! Write up the proposal, send it off to Jeff, and let’s get to the bar.”

“She’s having Cosmo withdrawal symptoms, I can tell,” Chad said.

“I am so over Cosmos, Chad,” she chided him. “It’s pomegranate martinis now.”

They leaned over Kieran’s shoulders as he outlined his idea, correcting his punctuation and mocking his overuse of adverbs while he tried to type. He did his best to ignore them, and when he was fairly satisfied with the proposal he emailed it Jeff.

“So, Kieran, tomorrow let me call Danetta and tell her you’ll be going to the wedding in my place,” Alexa offered.

“That’d be great, thanks, Lex,” Kieran replied. “I’m going to have to spin it differently with her if I want to get a chance to interview her and Jordan before the wedding.”

“Jaxon,” Chad and Alexa corrected.

“Jordan was actually the name of groom number two,” Alexa said.

“Whatever. So, how about if you tell her I’m there to do a column about how this time she’s so sure, and how in love they are and…” Kieran stopped talking, eyes on the ceiling. “Hey, could she be pregnant? ‘Cause if she is, she might be more likely to go through with it this time. That would fuck everything up for the story.”

“Well, I’ll see if I can find out when I talk to her,” Alexa said.

“Anyway, we’ll make her think my angle is how *this* time it’s right, and how special and different things are this time with Justin. He’s *totally* Mr. Perfect,” Kieran mocked in a campy tone.

“Jaxon,” Chad and Alexa said again.

“*Jaxon*,” Chad and Alexa said again.

“Yeah, I know. How could I possibly forget a name like that?”

They all turned around when they heard Jeff’s door bang open.

“Quinn, in my office, *now!*” Jeff roared out of the open door.

“How about we just meet you at the bar?” Chad suggested. “Boulud okay?”

“Wow, I’m generous tonight, huh?” Kieran asked. He walked toward Jeff’s office as his friends gathered their things to go. “How about Brut instead?” Kieran shouted over his shoulder. He’d rather they went to the small champagne bar close to his SoHo apartment rather than the most expensive restaurant in town. There was someone he was hoping to run into there.

“Quinn!” Jeff poked his head out of his door to find himself face-to-chest with Kieran.

“I’m here, Jeff,” Kieran said as he looked down at his boss, who was actually more than six feet tall himself.

“Get your ass in here.”

\* \* \* \*

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