

## Greta Comes of Age

Greta plunged the tip of a knife into a large fillet steak, wishing it was the man sitting across the table. She'd promised her father, Michael Marsh, world-famous actor and singer, she'd let him okay her boyfriends before she went on a date, and he did. He employed Wilf Payne, detective, to investigate them, and the few he approved were so boring dinner with Mr Payne himself would be preferable; he must have dozens of stories to tell.

This approved date finally stopped eating and drinking for a minute and remembered she was with him. 'How long have you been playing the second lead in *ForNever Lovers*, Greta?'

If the wretched creature had the slightest interest in her, other than she was the daughter of a very wealthy man, he'd know, or was he angling for a free ticket to see the musical? Rich people sometimes got that way by being incredibly mean.

'I extended my contract from six months to a year, and it's darn hard work doing eight performances a week and attending drama school.' And that was a marvellous excuse to escape his company. She placed her knife and fork together, pushed her chair back and stood. 'Sorry, I'm too tired to eat, but you carry on. I'll catch a taxi.'

'But...'

He was supposed to see her home, or at least to the end of The Mews behind Mere House where Bob, or one of the other bodyguards, would meet her. The half-hearted *but* meant he'd rather eat his huge steak and finish the bottles of wine he'd ordered. She marched out of the restaurant, and the hotel concierge called a taxi.

'Where to, Miss Marsh?'

Oh heck. No wonder Michael worried about her being out alone; she was a prime kidnap target, as she'd found out three times before, and too easily recognised. 'Err... could you drive around a bit, please?'

The driver pulled into the traffic. What she should have done was call Bob, but she had freedom so rarely and it was a marvellous chance to go out with Jed. Mr Payne hadn't investigated him yet, and she had a nasty feeling when he did he'd cross him off the list. Jed worked when he felt like it; he was something in the city and too wealthy to be a likely kidnap threat, but Mr Payne was sure to find out he frequented Soho pubs. She'd got into trouble in Soho before... the sleazy bit. Tourist Soho was okay. She called Jed on his mobile.

'Greta, it's been ages since I've seen you anywhere but drama school. Don't tell me you're actually free for a date this evening?'

She saw him at drama school because he sometimes gave boring financial lectures. If he'd been on the permanent staff he'd know she was only sixteen, and she didn't intend to tell him. The last boy she'd told her age when he'd been seconds from having sex with her had backed off. 'I am at a loose end actually. The latest guy was a bore, so I grabbed a taxi.'

Jed chuckled. 'I'm at home, Greta, but I promise not to be a bore. Have you eaten?'

Melon balls in kirsch didn't count. 'No.'

'Give the driver your phone a minute. I'll tell him where to come and then start cooking.'

Talking on a mobile whilst driving was illegal, but the driver didn't seem worried. He handed it back. 'It'll take about an hour from here, Miss Marsh.'

An hour she could spend putting up her long curls; it made her look older, which was why her step-mother had warned her not to wear it like that on dates. Evie was a fuss-pot... Evie was lovely, and she made Michael happy, but she'd been a detective too before they were married and saw the worst in everybody.

Soho wasn't her destination. Jed lived in a beautiful secluded house about an hour from London's West End. She could see herself here, married to Jed. It would be an excuse to leave drama school so she could stop slogging for A-levels, and not too far to travel to the theatre. Greta Marsh, second lead, intended to be Greta Marsh, superstar... and it was time to pay.

Jed opened the front door, towering at least a head over her and she was tall. His brown hair was tied back in a ponytail, and he had a smile in his brown eyes. At a guess, he was only about ten years older than her, and Michael couldn't object to that; he was over thirty years older than Evie.

'I love the dress, Greta, and your hair styled like that.' Jed grinned. 'Only you could get away with wearing red with red hair. Come through to the dining room. Dinner's almost ready, and do you like rosé wine? It's my favourite, but I chilled white just in case.'

'Rosé will be lovely.' She knew very little about wine. Michael and Evie liked red and she didn't, so she usually stuck to water. Tonight's official date had ordered sparkling white without asking, and the bubbles had made her sneeze.

Dinner was delicious and so was the wine. It was lucky he'd chilled two bottles. She refused cheese and biscuits, full after a second helping of a butterscotch desert. 'Jed, did you really cook all this marvellous food, or have you told the cook to hide in the kitchen?'

Jed laughed. 'I have a cleaner who comes in daily, and she's used to clearing up my mess. There's nobody here but us right now.'

She opened her mouth and closed it on her favourite but childish *wow*. 'What are we going to do... I mean are we going out?'

'In a taxi or with a drunk driver? We're both over the limit.'

He did think she was older than sixteen. 'Perhaps we'd better stay put.'

'Come through to the lounge. The fire only needs a match and a few minutes to get going.'

Jed led the way, lit the pile of kindling laid ready in the grate and pushed the sofa closer.

She sat where he obviously intended and kicked off her shoes. How Evie walked so easily in high heels was beyond her. Forget Evie. This was *her* night with a man she liked very much, and Michael trusted the drama school staff so she wasn't really breaking her promise only to go out with men Mr Payne had approved.

Jed produced a decanter. 'Brandy, Greta?'

'Yes, please.' If she admitted she'd never had any he might get suspicious, and she knew what to do; she'd watched Michael warm it, the glass cradled in his hands, and sometimes he drank it and sometimes he didn't.

'Sensible, it'll warm you. I'm surprised you weren't wearing a coat. It smelled chilly out when I opened the door.'

'Oh, I don't feel the cold. Redheads don't.' True or not, she was grateful for the heat of the flames that grabbed greedily at the logs Jed added to the blaze.

'I want you to be comfortable naked, Greta, and firelight is so much nicer than just turning up the central heating thermostat.'

She gulped a mouthful of brandy and choked into a tissue. She'd spent years wanting somebody to love her, and make love to her, but not... where were the compliments? The promises of eternal love? She'd expected to be married, and she could be at sixteen with Michael's permission. Jed almost certainly thought she was eighteen and he didn't need to ask, so where was his proposal? *Jed* was the sort of man Evie had warned her about, and she wasn't about to ignore her step-mother who was her best friend too. Ditching the glass and the remains of the brandy she took out her mobile and hit the key for Bob.

'Hello, Greta. Are you at the end of The Mews?'

'No, I'm...'

Jed snatched the phone and tossed into the fire. 'You don't want to talk to anybody, Greta. Get undressed, now.'

Suddenly, Jed looked taller and the muscles in his arms rippled. He pulled his shirt over his head and unbuckled his jeans. He was wearing nothing under them and an impressive erection emerged when he unzipped. It's what she'd longed for two years ago with Zack, but he'd pulled

back when she told him she was only fourteen. Would Jed? Did she want him to stop? Evie's voice echoing in her head was muzzy. She couldn't see properly...

She could feel, and Jed's penis hit the back of her throat. She gagged and wriggled, and he wound his fingers in her hair, holding her head where he wanted it.

'Use your tongue, and squeeze my balls.'

Closing her eyes, she bit him.

He pulled out and howled, but he didn't let go of her hair. 'You'll pay for that, Greta. I'm going to fuck you silly.'

'You are not!'

'Who's going to stop me? A drunken little cow who can't see straight?'

'My father...'

He dragged her down on the carpet and trapped her under his body. 'Your father isn't here, and neither should you be. You'll keep quiet about anything I do.'

She screamed, and kept on screaming.

He poked one finger inside her and laughed. 'Damn it if I haven't got myself a virgin.' Grasping her flailing hands, he pinned her wrists above her head and forced her legs open with his knee. One agonising thrust and he was in. The world whirled, a circle of agony, and went dark.

Her toes burning woke her, and she snatched her foot from the brass around the fire. Jed was snoring on the rug beside her. She sat up and looked in horror at blood on her inner thighs. Evie had warned her it might happen her first time, but she'd said a bit not *litres*. She scrambled to her feet, careful not to disturb Jed, and found her underwear and the red dress. Greta Marsh was out of here, and there must be a phone somewhere.

If there was a landline she couldn't find it, but Jed was sure to have a mobile. She crept towards where he'd dropped his clothes and stretched her hand towards the oblong bulge in the

pocket of his jeans. Jed groaned and rolled onto his stomach. Much longer and he'd wake; he'd drunk quite a lot, but he'd be used to it. She grabbed the brandy decanter and broke it over his head.

His mobile in her hand, she shook too much to press the keys. Was he dead? He deserved to be, but it made her a murderess. *Think*. Evie rarely got breathless now, but there'd been a time when even the effort of walking a few yards had caused her to collapse. What had Michael said? *Deep breaths... one... two... three...*

It worked, but she couldn't walk away from what might not be a corpse. Dial 999? Ask Michael first. She keyed in his number.

'Hi, Greta. Bob's waiting for a call to meet you at the end of The Mews. Are you likely to be late, sweetheart?'

Michael sounded so calm, so normal... he yelled when he was worried, and what she had to say... Jed was bleeding. Did corpses bleed? Sure to, with shards of glass sticking out. '*Michael, I've killed him.*'

*'Who? For God's sake, Greta, what's happened?'*

She rubbed her ear. If Jed was alive that yell would have woken him, so he didn't need an ambulance. 'Jed. He's a drama school lecturer.'

'Greta, you were out with the latest approved...'

'He was a bore, so I... err... I thought Mr Payne might approve Jed... or maybe not. Anyway, Jed raped me so I hit him over the head with a brandy decanter.' Michael liked brandy. 'It was almost empty.'

Michael drew in a huge breath. 'Where are you?'

'I don't know. A house somewhere.'

'The drama school will have his address. Wait.'

The mobile went dead. *Wait* with a corpse who probably was but might not be? She was out of here, for definite this time. She dressed and left, taking his mobile with her.

In a taxi, heading home, the truth hit her. Murderess or not, she might be pregnant; Jed hadn't used a condom. It wasn't the child's fault its father had raped her. If she wanted to keep a baby she could. The Marsh family were experts at hiding children born of affairs... incest... Evie could pretend it was hers and defeat The Spy, the journalist who'd let on she couldn't have children. She slid a protective hand over her stomach. *Greta Marsh* had a bone of her own to pick with The Spy, making her go out in public to prove to the world that Michael Marsh, The Diamond Superstar, hadn't punched her black and blue and broken her rib.

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