



Will their arrangement ever be enough?

Relationships are not a priority for restaurateur Esteban Galiano, and when he sees Sonia Kennedy at a party, he plans to make her a conquest in a long line of many. But she rebuffs his advances and forces him to adjust—determined to meet the challenge and do whatever he must to make her his.

All her life, Sonia's beauty has caused unnecessary problems, and right now she needs a job, not a suitor. When Esteban makes an indecent proposal, her first instinct is to turn him down. But soon she's rethinking her response. Maybe it's time for her to use what she's got, to get what she wants.

Chapter One

Some men enter a room and transform it. That was exactly what happened when Esteban Galiano strolled into Arturo Salvador's retirement party at the Blue Top Hotel on South Beach.

Jackie rushed over and plopped down her silver beverage tray. "He's here!" she hissed.

Sonia Kennedy paused in the process of pouring light magenta wine into glasses lined up across the shiny surface of the bar.

A gentle hum of excited whispers permeated the attendees and guests approaching Esteban, seeking his attention and halting his progress into the room. The Argentinean restaurateur oozed confidence in a dark jacket and no tie, appearing relaxed for the evening celebration.

Sonia went back to draining the last of the wine into the final glass.

"He's even more gorgeous in person," Jackie murmured.

Jackie Wen was Sonia's best friend. Tall and model thin, she looked even taller and slenderer in a torso-hugging black T-shirt and equally tight black stretch pants, her raven hair secured atop her head in a vertical ponytail.

Sonia signaled for the male and female servers standing nearby. They walked over and lifted the glasses onto their trays and moved away to circulate among the guests.

"He is handsome," Sonia agreed, as she wiped down the counter, at the same time casting a surreptitious glance in the direction of the man who had the entire room buzzing.

Intensely private, Esteban Galiano was not often photographed, despite counting celebrities and other famous people among his friends and acquaintances.

Some estimates placed the self-made man's personal wealth right at a billion dollars, while conservative estimates suggested three-quarters of a billion. No one knew for sure, but no matter the amount, he'd amassed his fortune in the past ten years, starting at the age of twenty-one.

His investments included art, hotels, and other real estate, but what he was known for, and where his passion truly lay, was in the restaurant industry. As a successful restaurateur, he had a reputation for having the Midas touch. His restaurants received rave reviews and earned both him and investors an enviable return in an industry known for its volatility.

Resting a hand on her hip, Jackie tracked his progress in the room, while Sonia pretended not to notice and restocked the glasses.

"I would love to work for him," Jackie said.

"Why would you work for him? You have a job at Azul," Sonia pointed out.

They both worked at Azul Restaurant, Jackie as a part-time hostess currently “finding” herself. She didn’t need the job because her father, originally from China, was a wealthy hotelier with resorts around the world who supplemented her income from the UK. She had grown up socializing with the rich and famous and the not-so-famous. Living in Miami was a way for her to have a little fun before settling down into a life that included marrying an appropriately wealthy and well-bred man from her social circle and taking over her family’s hotel empire.

Unfortunately for Sonia, business at Azul had slowed considerably in the past few months. Sluggish sales meant they didn’t need two full-time sommeliers, so her hours had been cut to part-time for now.

Thankfully, one of Jackie’s friends had backed out of this weekend gig at the Blue Top Hotel, and she’d recommended Sonia for the position. Between the wages and the tips she and the other bartender would split at the end of the evening, she expected to have a very good night. One that she desperately needed to keep from borrowing any more money from Jackie.

Her friend leaned across the bar. “Aside from the fact that he’s probably the most important figure in the restaurant industry today, I heard he pays better than normal,” she said in her very proper British accent. “You should try to get a job at his South Beach restaurant, La Cocina Patagonia. It’s high-end, and I heard he wants to expand his wine collection.”

“How do you find out about this stuff?”

Jackie knew everything about everyone in Miami. Sonia learned more from talking to her than watching the news.

“People tell me things,” her friend said airily, waving a hand dismissively. “If he expands his wine collection, he might have to have to hire another sommelier. He has three full-time somms now.”

“One wine director and three somms,” Sonia said. She knew because she’d applied for a job at Galiano’s flagship restaurant, known locally as Patagonia, a few weeks ago. The restaurant took up most of the ground floor of the boutique hotel above it, also named Patagonia, which he owned. His two other Miami businesses included a bakery and an Italian restaurant named Nonna, currently closed for renovations but due to reopen soon.

“You know, I heard he broke up with that model...oh, what’s her name? The rather posh French one who goes by one name?” Jackie tapped her cheek.

“Noelle?”

“Yes, her. Rumor has it, he bought her a diamond necklace and had it delivered in a Rolls-Royce Phantom. Both were her breakup gifts.”

“Nice breakup gifts,” Sonia muttered. She didn’t even own a car and couldn’t imagine owning one that cost that much.

“I know. After my last breakup, all I got was a broken heart,” Jackie said glumly. She pouted, fiddling with the pendant on her gold necklace.

Sonia rubbed her friend’s arm.

Jackie was still recovering from a rather abrupt breakup with a boyfriend who’d accused her of being clingy. She then declared men were “heartless, soulless creatures who didn’t care whose feelings they trampled on.”

“I better get back out here and do the job I was hired to do.” Jackie tucked the round beverage tray under her arm and stepped into the crowd.

“I’m going outside for a quick smoke.” Davis, the other bartender, sidled past Sonia.

She busied herself filling orders while he was gone, chatted with guests, and poured more of the very popular wine from Arturo’s own inventory, imported from his winery in Argentina. When there was a break in her duties, she took that moment to seek out Esteban.

As he was over six feet, she spotted him easily, in what looked like an intense conversation with another man. He nodded without saying a word, while the other man spoke animatedly with rapid movements of his hands.

Working for Galiano would be a great opportunity because of his restaurants’ reputations, and she was certain she could do an excellent job for him as a sommelier. Attending this event might turn out to be the perfect opportunity to make a connection and follow up on the application she’d filled out weeks ago. Maybe before the night was over, she’d get that chance.

Sonia watched as Galiano grasped the arm of the other man with his large hand, said a few words, nodded, and smoothly excused himself from the conversation.

He was sexy. Overtly so. Square-jawed and brunette, with dark, brooding eyes. He traversed the room with an elegant gait, striking up conversations with the other guests. But arrogance surrounded him in an invisible cloud, evident in the hard slope of his jaw, perfect posture, and the almost bored expression on his face as he surveyed the guests with whom he paused to say a word or two.

He may give extravagant gifts, but he didn’t wear his wealth in an ostentatious manner like the men and women in the room, with flashy gold rings and twenty-five-thousand-dollar purses. His

wealth was undeniable in the subtleties. Like the fit of his navy jacket, tailored to his physique. He was well groomed, clean-shaven, and with his hair cut very short and hinting at a wavy texture if allowed to grow much longer. The only jewelry he did wear was a platinum watch she caught peeking out below his sleeve. She couldn't see the timepiece clearly from here but suspected he wouldn't have chosen an obvious brand, such as Rolex.

“Excuse me, what was that wine you poured for me earlier?”

Sonia's eyes veered away from Esteban to the woman standing in front of her, holding up a glass with less than an ounce of white wine at the bottom.

“It's from Arturo's personal stock in Argentina.”

“White wine from Argentina?”

“Yes. You're probably more familiar with Malbec, but Argentina is becoming well known for their Torrontés. What you drank was Torrontés Riojano, which ranks second in wine exports from Argentina.”

“You don't say.”

Then Sonia got to do her favorite thing—share her knowledge and expertise about the wine she'd introduced to the guest. Hopefully, before the night was over, she'd have the opportunity to show off her knowledge to Esteban Galiano, too.

The first thing Esteban noticed about the bartender was her smile.

Which was interesting, since that usually wasn't the first thing he noticed about a woman. This woman had snagged his attention with the friendly smile she bestowed on every guest who approached the bar, male or female. Normally, his gaze encompassed a woman's breasts first, or her ass, or her hips, or the general shapeliness of her body—everything below her neck. Only then, after he was pleased by the visual, did he let his attention drift up to her face.

Lucky for him, this lovely creature was not only friendly, she was the type of shapely he liked. The black-on-black uniform did nothing to hide the lusciousness of her S-shaped curves. Full breasts sat atop her chest like monuments of perfection, straining against the black T-shirt. And when she temporarily moved from behind the bar, he glimpsed how the snug pants molded to her hips and thighs.

She had beautiful, golden skin and wore her hair in a short pixie—parted on one side and framing her round face. He'd already noted that she didn't wear a ring. And her lips...*maldito*. Full and painted a brilliant red that called to him. He had to speak to her before leaving tonight.

A heavy hand clapped his shoulder. “Esteban, glad you could make it! How was Buenos Aires?”

Dragging his eyes to his friend, Arturo, Esteban replied, “Excellent, as always.” He returned the enthusiastic greeting with a firm handshake. “So Maria finally convinced you to retire. What did she have to do, put a gun to your head?”

Arturo chuckled, and the wrinkles in his face contracted. Wavy hair as white as fresh snow touched the collar of his shirt. “Almost. She threatened to leave me if I didn’t stop working. Ever since I collapsed, she’s been after me to quit.”

Arturo and his wife had a strange relationship. In the thirty-plus years they’d been married, he’d never been faithful, and Maria turned a blind eye to his indiscretions. Two years ago, Arturo’s so-called assistant “found” him collapsed in the bathroom of a hotel, and Esteban thought for sure Maria would leave him then. Instead, it seemed to have brought them closer together.

“What will you do with yourself now?” Esteban asked.

“I suppose I could do what men my age are supposed to do, and play with the grandchildren.”

They both laughed, knowing Arturo was nothing like the typical grandfather. He liked to party, and see and be seen in the hotspots around the world. Basically, he was a twenty-five-year-old man living in a sixty-five-year-old’s body.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Arturo inclined his head toward the bar before lifting a glass of wine to his lips.

“Yes,” Esteban said evenly.

The pretty bartender stood out among the other women there, even dressed in the same black uniform as the other staff.

“I flirted a little bit with her, but there was no interest.”

Even with his wife in the room, that didn’t stop Arturo from making advances toward other women. At times Esteban wondered why his friend had gotten married. Why not live the unattached bachelor life, like Esteban? He never lacked companionship and didn’t have to worry about thorny issues like commitment and monogamy.

“I give you my blessing to pursue her,” Arturo said.

Esteban cast a sidelong glance at his friend. “I don’t need your blessing.”

“No, you don’t.” Arturo waved at a friend across the room. “I take it you’re not carrying a torch for Noelle?”

“You know better than that,” Esteban said dryly.

“Good. She was no good.”

“Is any woman good?” Esteban asked with a cynical twist of his lips.

“My Maria,” Arturo said definitively.

That was the closest Esteban had come to seeing how deeply his friend cared for his wife.

“Lucky you. You found the only woman worth marrying.”

“There are others, but until you find the right one, might as well have some fun.” Arturo cackled and patted Esteban’s shoulder. “I’ll see you later, friend.” He walked away, leaving Esteban behind.

Esteban shot a glance at the bar, a slow smile lifting one corner of his mouth.

If he played his cards right, he might have some fun tonight.

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