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## Desperate Measures By Scribblesinink

"Don't you dare send me another oaf, like you did last time, either. By God, my fish make for better conversation than that clod did."

"Of course, Miss Clarke." The voice in her ear strained to remain civil. "We won't, Miss Clarke."

Mimi blew out a frustrated breath. "And stop saying my name like that. It's annoying. I *know* you know my name; it's right there on the credit card info I gave you, isn't it?"

"Yes, Miss—." There was a brief pause as the person at the other end of the line reconsidered. "Yes, Ma'am."

*Hmph.*

Mimi huffed as she hung up. What was she letting herself in for *this* time? She gazed at the phone, her hand still resting on it. If she called them back right away, she could probably cancel the booking without paying the fee. But then what was she going to do?

Turning away from the desk and heading for the bathroom—a hot, soothing bath before she needed to get dressed would help calm her down—she gritted her teeth. It was all Derek's fault. If he hadn't bailed on her at the last minute, forcing her to face attending a formal dinner all on her own....

She considered her other options as she turned on the faucet and poured some oil in the bath. She could beg off, of course. Claim she wasn't feeling well; had a horrible migraine, or something. But the thing was, if she *ever* wanted to get out of that cubicle and not ruin her eyesight by deciphering badly written tax statements all day every day, she simply had to go to the dinner. Her boss had hinted he'd be willing to recommend her for a posting that would open up soon where she'd be handling field audits and able to get out of town occasionally, and this dinner was for one of his wife's charity projects.

She sank into the hot water, letting out a small sigh of pleasure as it engulfed her and started to draw some of the tension from her. In this town, she reflected bitterly, it wasn't what you did, it was who you knew, and who owed you a favor, that made or broke careers.

It was going to be a fancy black tie affair too, the kind of thing she normally enjoyed. But when Derek called her to say sorry, he'd gotten stuck closing a deal in Philadelphia and wouldn't be able to make it back in time, she'd heard the lie in his voice. Suddenly confronted with the thought of having to go alone, the empty chair beside hers shouting out the obvious, she'd done what she'd sworn she'd never do again: she'd called the escort service. Sure, the guy they'd sent the last (the only!) time she'd used them had been her type—big, broad-shouldered, all-American boy—and been dutiful enough in bed after they'd gotten back from the cocktail party. But the nonsense that came out every time he opened his mouth before that....

Despite the heat of the bath water, she shuddered at the memory. A jock like that was definitely not the sort of company she needed tonight. Tonight, she should be accompanied by someone... presentable was the correct term, she decided. Someone who wouldn't embarrass her, and who could at least pretend to have an interest in the world beyond the outcome of the latest Redskins game. Someone like Derek, who'd been a sort of friend-with-benefits, and her usual companion to social functions like tonight's—just as she'd been his, on more than one occasion.

She gritted her teeth again, feeling some of the tension flood back. Pulling the plug, she stepped out of the bath and grabbed a towel to dry off. She should've seen it coming: the benefits had stopped a while ago. And so, apparently, had the friendship. He could've picked a better time to tell her, though.

Glancing at the clock and realizing she'd spent more time in the bath than she'd intended, Mimi dressed quickly—donning her favorite lace bra and panties before slipping the black silk chiffon dress over her head—and carefully applied some makeup. She completed the outfit with new high-heeled pumps and the gold earrings she'd inherited from her grandmother, and eyed herself critically in the mirror. She smoothed the dress a little and gave herself a small smile and a nod of satisfaction. She looked good, even if she said so herself.

As if on cue, the doorbell rang, announcing that her escort was there. Mimi headed for the door, pausing with her hand on the knob and taking a deep breath. She sent up a silent prayer—*well, here goes nothing*—before she pulled the door open.

The man on her stoop was a couple inches taller than she was, even with the heels—*thank God*, she thought, as she realized she'd forgotten to mention it to the agency, and had a sudden horrible vision of arriving at the function with a guy half a head shorter on her arm. She looked him up and down. Dark-haired and clean-shaven, he wore his tuxedo well. Maybe he was a bit on the lanky side for her taste, but at least she could be certain he wasn't a former quarterback.

"Miss Clarke?" He held out his hand. "Jake. The, um, agency sent me."

"Mimi, please." Only as she took the offered hand did Mimi realize he'd been checking her out with just as much curiosity as she had him. Much to her chagrin, she felt herself blush a little. In an attempt to hide it, she bit her lip and nodded curtly. "You'll do."

That caused the right side of his mouth to quirk up in a wry half-smile. "Thank you." He didn't say anything else, but the way his gaze had traveled up and down her body, taking in the silk gown, had already said enough. And although she wasn't a stranger to admiring looks, the memory of the way he'd looked at her only served to deepen her blush, and made something flutter in her stomach.

*Don't be an idiot*, she told herself as she snatched her shawl, purse and house keys from where she'd left them ready on the hall table, and pulled the door shut behind her. *You're paying the guy, remember?* So of course he was going to try and make her feel attractive. And it probably didn't hurt that she looked nothing like the middle-aged matrons she suspected were his usual clients.

His hand rested light and warm on her back as he escorted her to the cab he'd kept waiting, and his grip was firm on her elbow as he helped her climb in. She probably should've been affronted by the bold familiarity of the gesture but, strangely, she wasn't.

They didn't speak much during the ride to the hotel hosting the function, renewing Mimi's fear that the agency had sent her another wordless nitwit, good looking though he might be. But, as the evening progressed, it turned out that, while obviously not a man of many words and rather private about himself, Jake was quite capable of holding his own in the polite conversation flowing around their table.

Gradually, Mimi let down her guard, only to suffer a moment of panic when the wife of her boss's boss leaned over to ask where she'd found "such a charming young man", and she realized she didn't have a cover story ready. But even as she raked her suddenly blank mind for a decent explanation, Jake came to her rescue, telling the woman they'd sort of bumped into one another in the park, jogging.

"Oh, how quaint!" the woman tittered, before turning away to flirt with the gentleman on her other side. Mimi shifted toward Jake, gazing up with gratitude—clearly he was capable of quick thinking as well as light conversation—and he gave her that same lopsided half-grin in reply, along with a little shrug. Dipping his head, he kept his voice low as he whispered, "Was that alright? You look like a runner."

She nodded back wordlessly, her anxiety slowly subsiding, and attacked her food with

more vigor than was strictly warranted.

And thus midnight saw them back outside her apartment again. Mimi waited while Jake paid the cabby—well, paid him with *her* money, she reminded herself sternly. It might appear chivalrous enough, but she knew she was going to find the expense charged to her credit card the next morning.

Jake turned back to her as the taxi drove off, putting his hands in the pockets of his pants, and examining his feet.

Mimi clutched her shawl more tightly around her. The early November air held a bite of winter already. "Thank you."

Jake hunched his shoulders a little. "You're welcome. I hope things went well for you this evening?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good." He accompanied the word with a quick dip of his head.

Mimi hesitated. Jake was attractive enough, and it had been a long time since she'd been with anyone, but calling the service had been an emergency, and she'd made a promise to herself...

"So...." He cleared his throat. "Is there... um, anything else I can do for you?" He tilted forward on the balls of his feet, for the first time meeting her eyes, if only briefly. Mimi blinked, a bit startled at his sudden reticence. She'd expected a little more... well, boldness.

"Did you....Um.... Did you want to come up for a bit? For a night cap? Or I could make coffee?" Even as the words left her lips, Mimi wanted to smack herself. God, she'd made it sound like he was a regular date.

Again there was that rueful little grin, as Jake nodded. "Sure."

Once inside, where it was pleasantly warm after the cool night air outside, Mimi dropped her shawl over the back of the sofa and kicked off her high-heeled shoes with a sigh of relief. Jake shucked his dinner jacket, draping it over a dining chair, and loosened his tie. He wandered around the living room, studying the prints on the wall and leaning down to peer into the fish bowl, while Mimi poured them drinks—a scotch for him, and a glass of red wine for herself. After handing him his glass, she settled herself on the sofa, curling her legs under her. Jake sat down beside her, the sofa dipping beneath his weight, and

sipped from his scotch, watching her over the rim of the glass.

She shifted uncomfortably beneath his intense gaze. "What?"

"Nothing." Jake took another sip and swallowed. "Just wondering."

Mimi stiffened, pressing her lips into a hard line. *Hell no*; she wasn't about to have that conversation again. Certainly not with this virtual stranger who was being paid to be here. She cleared her throat. "Maybe you—."

Apparently misreading her discomfort, Jake put his glass down on the nearby coffee table, and slid over. He took the glass of wine from her hand, making the rest of what she was about to tell him die on her lips, and set the wine next to his scotch, his gaze never leaving hers. Mimi swallowed, her heart thudding in her chest. He leaned in, effectively trapping her between his body and the corner of the sofa, cupping her cheek with one hand, his thumb stroking her jaw.

She thought he was about to kiss her, and her breath stuck in her throat, but he held off at the very last instant. Mimi used the opportunity to slip out of his embrace and off the sofa. A couple feet away, she stopped and turned, breathing hard.

"I'm sorry." Jake sounded contrite as he glanced up at her. He gestured helplessly. "I.... I thought you wanted...."

Wondering what had come over her, Mimi found herself reaching for his hand. "I do." Her voice was hoarse as she urged him to his feet. "I just...." She shrugged, unsure what it was she wanted to say. Instead, she turned and, pulling Jake along after her, headed toward the bedroom. Once there, she shut the door behind them and stepped close to Jake, wrapping her arms around his neck. He responded by putting his hands on her hips, his palms warm through the thin material of her dress.

"Should I... kiss you?" He peered down at her uncertainly.

Mimi hiccuped a laugh. "You're asking me? Have you even done this before?"

He shrugged, a little defensive, and she supposed it wasn't a totally unreasonable question after her reaction on the sofa. "Not everyone likes—."

"Yes," she interrupted before he could finish, raising herself on tiptoe and dragging his head down so she could find his mouth with hers.

After another second's hesitation, he kissed her back, gliding one hand up to tangle in her

hair and guiding her with the other toward the bed.

By the time he pulled her down on to the bed on top of him, Mimi had stopped caring that she was paying him to do this. He was a good kisser, gentle yet demanding, and it had been so damned long.... Heck, she'd happily max out her credit card if he just kept kissing her like this, she decided dizzily.

Once they finally broke apart to get some air, Mimi sat back up, straddling him. She started in on undoing the buttons of his shirt, popping them quickly. She found smooth, warm skin, and firm muscle. Her hands brushed over his ribs as he sat up to allow her to push the shirt off his shoulders, and he gave a shiver.

She giggled. "Are you ticklish?"

"A little," he admitted.

She trailed a hand from his collarbone down across his the planes of his chest, before putting her palm flat against him to push him backward on the bed. He went down obediently enough, and Mimi couldn't help herself: she leaned in to taste some of that soft, tanned skin, laying down a trail of light kisses. Jake shivered again; half lying on top of him, she felt him grow hard against her leg.

Suddenly, she could no longer wait. Her hands fumbled with his belt and the button and zipper of his pants, eager to free him. Jake lifted his hips off the bed and she backed off a little to allow him to wriggle out of his pants and shorts. He wasn't fully ready yet, she noticed, but she knew she could get him there quickly enough. Hiking up her skirt, she gasped, "Condom?"

Jake's gaze flicked toward the bedstand, where she saw he'd left a packet within easy grasp at some point, but he didn't reach for it, despite her plea. "Not so fast," he murmured, taking her by the elbows, stilling her movements.

"What? Why not?" She frowned down at him, wondering if he was concerned whether or not she was gonna pay him for this.

She was about to tell him the agency would charge it to her card, when he shrugged, a little bashful again. "I just thought.... I thought you might enjoy it more if we went slower."

"Oh...." Mimi quirked an eyebrow, gaining a new appreciation for him. He'd been a constant curiosity all evening, such a far cry from the previous guy the agency had sent her that she'd been half-wondering if maybe someone was pulling a fast one on her.

"Okay...."

Jake sat back up, balancing her on his knees, and slowly stroked his hands up her thighs, his calloused fingertips catching lightly on her stockings before he reached the patch of bare skin between the top of her stockings and her panties. A shiver ran along her spine as he made contact, and her skin rose in goosebumps. Pausing only briefly, he continued to slide his hands up under her dress, his palms barely touching her as they moved over the garter belt and up along her flanks, until he reached the lace edging at the bottom of her bra. His hands stopped, resting on her ribcage, fingers spread, while he peered up at her. "Is this alright with you?"

"Yes..." Mimi nodded and swallowed. *No!* she wanted to cry out. Because it wasn't nearly enough. She wanted—.

As if he could read her mind, Jake let his thumbs slip under the edge of the bra to stroke the soft underside of her breasts for a few moments, before he collected the folds of her dress in his fists and lifted it so he could pull it over her head. His gaze lingered on her cleavage, making butterflies dance in her stomach. Then, almost reverently, he unhooked her bra.

Mimi felt a moment of triumph that she'd decided to wear the one with the front clasp: she'd never felt more feminine or more desired than when Jake pushed the cups aside and held her breasts in his palms. She pulled in a sharp breath as he dipped his head towards them, and threw her own head back, whimpering in anticipation, only to look back down when she felt Jake pull back. He was glanced up at her, seeking her approval once again.

"Go on." Her voice was scratchy, and she could barely get the words out. Even as she spoke, she squeezed one hand between their bodies, finding him hard and throbbing. But he hissed as her fingers wrapped around him, and gently but firmly disengaged her grip.

Was it her imagination, or did he blush a little when she gave him a questioning look? She couldn't be certain in the dim light of the bedroom.

"You don't have to... you know?" He shrugged slightly.

She cocked her head, smirking. "What if I want to?"

He seemed to consider that for a moment, before he nodded. "Okay."

Once again, she got the impression that maybe he wasn't as experienced at this as he was pretending to be, and it made her smile a little inwardly. She reached down between them again, aiming take him in hand once more, but before she could do so, Jake had

lifted her up and off his lap. Mimi squeaked in protest, but didn't have time to demand to know what he was doing before he'd twisted her around and settled her back down, her back flush against his chest. He kept one arm around her waist, holding her tight, his hand covering a breast again.

"Oh...." Her breathless cry of surprise stuck in her throat as Jake slipped his other hand beneath the top of her panties. She gave an involuntary start as his fingers brushed through her curls, and he stilled again. But she was beginning to be able to read him now, and guessed he wasn't sure if he had her permission to go on. Impatiently, she grabbed his wrist to push his hand deeper inside her panties, and he took the hint without complaint; an instant later, his long fingers were stroking her folds. Mimi let out another moan, letting her head fall back against Jake's shoulder, all thought of taking the hardness now pressing against her buttocks in hand fleeing from her mind. Tension was building up inside her, heat pooling in her lower belly, and she knew she wouldn't hold out much longer.

"Jake...." She drew in a shuddering breath. "Want you. Inside me." The words came in staccato bursts, half swallowed in gasps. "Now."

"Okay." Jake was panting hard as well; she could feel his chest rising and falling against her back, and his breath was hot in her neck. "Just...."

With dismay, Mimi realized there were still a few practicalities standing in their way. Growling in frustration, she tore at the fastenings holding up her stockings. *Should've put the stockings on first*, she berated herself, once she could finally wriggle out of her panties. Then again, she'd counted on hiring a dinner date, not... *this*.

Jake had used the time to grab the condom from the nightstand and roll it on. As Mimi kicked away her panties, he wrapped an arm around her waist again, pulling her back into his lap while he lay back on the pillows. Supporting herself on her knees on either side of his hips, Mimi lifted herself up a little and reached down so she could guide him in. Sinking back down, she let out a contented sigh as he filled her.

oOo

Afterward, before she showed Jake out the door, Mimi rummaged in her purse so she could push a few extra bills into his hand. She wasn't sure what fee the agency paid him, but she'd decided he deserved every cent, and more. He accepted the money, but something in his features had changed, closed up, almost as if she'd offended him.

And when she called the service again, about a month later, and asked for Jake, she was told, "We're sorry, but the gentleman is no longer employed with our agency."

It wasn't until almost three years later, in a small town in Kansas, that Mimi laid eyes on Jake again. By then, of course, *everything* had changed.

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