

Sample Chapter of Her Man in Sorrento

Chapter 1

Sarah scooted over into the shade halfway up the steps of the cathedral. She pulled down her cobalt blue short sleeve tee and fanned herself with a small brochure. She paused and lifted her wispy red bangs to wipe her sweaty forehead. Bad luck to start the first full day of the dream vacation by missing the bus back to Sorrento. She opened the brochure, shaking her head and frowning at Amalfi's hotel prices. She studied the map section of the brochure and then searched below for a street sign. An organ pealed inside. A wedding going on? A black limousine pulled up below. Yes, a wedding complete with a limo, no less. She squinted to watch the driver checking his watch and adjusting his cap. He stepped outside the limo and stood, as if at attention, by the passenger door next to the steps. She scooted farther over on the steps and careened to look back at the big cathedral door. It opened and the organ music streamed out. She stood up.

A photographer appeared from nowhere below and raced halfway up the steps until he was parallel with Sarah. His shutter whirred as he slowly backed down the steps just in front of the smiling, laughing bride and groom. How did the photographer do that without falling? A woman dressed in pale blue from head to toe trailed behind the couple throwing rice. The maid of honor? The woman in blue called out, "Come on Nathan. Help me." A man in Navy dress whites emerged from the cathedral and took the steps two at a time, holding his cap in his left hand and throwing rice with his right hand.

When he was even with Sarah he glanced at her and said, "Good afternoon, Ma'am."

Surprised, Sarah was rooted to the spot and unsmiling. She watched the Navy officer continue down the steps, laughing and throwing rice. A few other guests followed suit.

When the bride and groom reached the limo, the officer clapped the groom on the back and kissed the bride on both cheeks, European style. The other guests stood on the bottom steps, waiving and calling out good wishes.

The limo driver collected his passengers and closed the door. He stepped smartly around the vehicle, adjusted his cap, got behind the wheel, and drove slowly away from the curb.

Sarah watched the woman in blue and the officer chatting with the other guests for a few minutes. As the guests dispersed one by one and in pairs, the officer took the maid of honor's arm and said something to her. She nodded yes, and he escorted her to a small bright green car parked a few yards down the street. He helped her into the driver's side and stood waving at her, as she slowly pulled from the curb onto the street lined on both sides with pedestrians.

Sarah sat down and watched the officer put on his cap and look back toward the cathedral steps. He waved in her direction. Is he waving at me? What the hell? She looked around to check the steps, but no one else was there. What is he up to? Should I ignore him and hurry and get lost in the crowd?

She watched him stride back to the bottom of the steps and start up. Smiling, he called out, "Ma'am, please wait."

Surely he doesn't mean any harm. A naval officer, but what the hell does he want?

When he reached her, he removed his cap and said, "Ma'am, I didn't mean to startle you, but I noticed how perturbed you looked when I was coming down the steps after the wedding. I'm guessing you are a tourist. Is everything all right? Do you need help?"

Waiting for her response, he smiled, but searched her eyes with the demeanor of a man used to reading people and finding out exactly what he wanted to know.

“Yes, yes. I am a tourist, and I’m OK. I just missed my bus back to Sorrento, and I have to spend the night in Amalfi. I was just resting on the steps and studying the brochure about hotels in Amalfi. I’m ticked off with myself for missing the bus and having to spend so much money to stay here for the night instead of the apartment I’m paying too much money for in Sorrento.”

He smiled. “I understand your frustration, and I can help. I’m going to Sorrento myself. I can drop you off.” He studied her face. “Forgive me. I should have introduced myself. I’m Nathan Ferrari.” He held out his hand.

Sarah studied his face a minute before taking his hand. “I’m Sarah Millerman. Ferrari, like the car?”

He laughed. “Yes, but unfortunately I’m not related to the car people.”

“I appreciate your offer, but I’ll just spend the night and go back to Sorrento tomorrow, Mr. Ferrari. In fact, I’ve got to get going to find a hotel.”

She started to get up and the officer held out his hand and helped her up.

“Thank you,” she said, arranging her deep tan handbag on her shoulder and wiping the sweat from her forehead.

“Ms. Millerman, Would you like to cool off with a soft drink at the café down the street before you strike out in this heat?”

“You’re not going to talk me into driving back to Sorrento with you. We don’t know each other. I’m not naïve enough to get into a car with you, even if you are wearing a Navy uniform.”

“Well, let’s go into the café and cool off with a soft drink and get acquainted. Then you can decide if you want to ride to Sorrento with me. OK?”

Sarah searched his face. “It would be good to cool off before I start looking for a hotel room.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

He put his cap back on, took her arm, and steered her gently down the steps onto the street and into the café.

Inside, he removed his cap, and they stood at the front for a moment, letting their eyes adjust from the glare of the hot afternoon sun.

In a heavy Italian accent, a waitress said, “Good afternoon, Commander Ferrari. What may I get for you? The usual Coke or perhaps something else today?” The attractive young woman ignored Sarah and smiled into the commander’s eyes.

He turned to Sarah, “What would you like?”

“A diet Coke, please,” Sarah said, eyeing the waitress.

“Take any table you want. Up front, at the back, anywhere. Two Cokes, it is,” the waitress said. She smiled at the commander again, and walked toward the back of the café.

They took a table halfway back, and he pulled out the wooden chair for Sarah.

“Thank you.”

He sat down in the chair opposite her and smiled.

Sarah said, “So, Commander, are you deployed on the base in Naples?”

“Please call me Nathan. That’s a logical assumption, but that’s not my base. I’m deployed in San Diego. I was deployed at Naples years ago, and I have many friends at the Naples base. In fact, my friends who just got married are civilian contractors there. I was lucky to be here for their wedding while I’m on leave. I’m staying at my aunt’s beach house in Sorrento. I come to Sorrento for my annual leave as often as I can.”

“So, you’re not related to the Ferrari car people, but you have an aunt with a beach house here. Does she live somewhere in Italy?”

“Yes, Aunt Alessa. I grew up in Brooklyn, but I’ve spent a lot of time with my aunt in Italy. When my mother died, she came to live with us for six months.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. How old were you when your mother died?”

“I was 12.”

“That’s awful. My dad died just before I started college. That was bad enough.”

“Yes, it was awful. I loved my mamma. I didn’t understand why she died. I was scared. I don’t know how I would have gotten through it without Aunt Alessa. She is a wise and generous person. ‘Alessa’ means ‘defender of mankind.’ She lives up to her name. When I was 13, I spent the summer with her and my uncle and their two sons in Tuscany. They taught me a lot about growing grapes that summer and several other summers when I visited them.”

“Is it a big vineyard?”

“Yes, they grow extraordinary grapes for Chianti Classico wine. Only certain grapes qualify for the Black Rooster Chianti Classico seal. My aunt’s two sons and their families live on the family compound which has expanded over the years. They tend the grapes, year after year. I’d like to have a vineyard somewhere in the United States when I retire from the Navy.”

“Are you thinking of retiring early?”

He laughed. “It won’t be early. I’m coming up on 18 years in the Navy.”

“You don’t look old enough for that. I mean, of course, it’s none of my business.”

“I was in Naval ROTC in college, then active duty, and the years have whizzed by. I’d like to go for 25 years, and maybe Reserves after that. Not sure.”

“I see. Well, about the vineyards, I know there are some vineyards in Texas. Maybe you could have a vineyard there when you retire.”

“Are you from Texas?”

“No, a tiny town near Oklahoma City, but I know quite a bit about Texas.”

The pretty waitress returned with their Cokes. Sarah noticed her white peasant blouse was pulled farther off her shoulders than it was when she left to get the drinks.

They sipped their drinks in silence for a few minutes.

“So you’re here on vacation. Do you still live in Oklahoma?”

“My mother still lives there. I haven’t lived there since I left for college. I’m an engineer in Denver. After the vacation, I’m moving to San Diego to get a master’s degree in Cybersecurity Engineering.”

“Outstanding. You’ll be able to get great jobs with that degree.”

“So I’ve heard.”

“When I get back to San Diego, I could look you up. Maybe we could see each other.”

“I’m going to be really busy with the degree and working part time.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if you worked on the degree full time?”

“The program is set up for people to work and go to school. Anyway, I’m used to it. I worked my way through college.”

“After your dad died?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll give you time to get settled before I look you up.”

He smiled at her with a twinkle in his eyes.

“I’m not starting the degree program until January, but I’ll be really busy with work and figuring out how to get around in San Diego.”

“I can definitely help with that.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“I hope you have decided you’ll ride with me to Sorrento. Let’s finish up, so we can get back to Sorrento before sunset. OK?”

Sarah searched his smiling face. “You’re a very persistent person. What the hell. Let’s go.”

He put money on the table and called out to the waitress, “Arrivederci.”

“Grazie,” she replied.

Sarah said, “I think she has a crush on you.”

“She’s a sweet young lady. I’ve known her for a long time. She was just a little girl helping her mother fold napkins when I was deployed in Naples. She’ll find a young man soon and settle down, most likely right here in Amalfi. She’ll probably be running this café pretty soon.”

Nathan opened the door, and they stepped out into the late afternoon sunshine.

They crossed the street to a black convertible. He unlocked it and helped her into the passenger seat.

They buckled up. “I’m not much into cars, but I’m guessing this is a vintage muscle car.”

He looked at her and smiled. “For a woman who isn’t into cars, you’re pretty astute. It’s a Ford Mustang. Most of the time, it’s been parked in Aunt Alessa’s beach house garage, but it’s always fun to come home to.” He pulled out onto the side street and maneuvered back to the winding road that would take them to Sorrento.

Sarah said, “On the way to Amalfi on the bus this morning, I was sitting next to the window on the coast side. More than once I looked down and couldn’t even see the roadside, just straight down to the beach and water so far below. The driver took the curves way too fast. I think he was nuts.”

Nathan laughed. “That’s a pretty common feeling among tourists. I promise you won’t feel that way about my driving. I’ve driven this road a lot, though I will admit that I don’t relish driving it at night. I drove it at night when I was younger during my deployment in Naples. I even loved doing it on my motorcycle, but I don’t ride the bike on this road anymore. Too much bus traffic. Maybe I’m getting wiser as I’m getting older.”

He looked over at Sarah and smiled. “I hope there’s something good about getting older,” he said. “I keep looking for it.”

“I do, too, but none of my older friends have convinced me yet,” Sarah replied.

“How long will you be in Sorrento?”

“Too long for my budget. I saved for this trip for years. I got here yesterday, and I’m staying two weeks.”

“Good. That’s long enough for us to do some things together. If I pass your safe driver scrutiny on this trip, maybe you’d trust me to drive you to some other places around here.”

“Like where?”

“Naples, Rome, Aunt Alessa’s vineyard in Tuscany. She has a birthday coming up, and I’ve already promised I’ll be there to help her celebrate.”

“That’s crazy. We don’t even know each other. Don’t you have something better to do on your leave?”

“I’m planning to go to those places anyway. You’re an American on vacation. I’m an American on vacation. It makes sense for us to have some fun together.”

Sarah said, “You’re serious about this.”

“Of course, I am. I’ve been told that I am a good tour guide. Italy is like a second home to me.”

Sarah laughed. “You’re as crazy as that bus driver, but not because of your driving.”

Nathan laughed, as he carefully cornered a steep curve. “I’ll take that as a maybe Miss Millerman of Oklahoma.”

Nathan pointed to the right. “In just a minute you’ll be able to see Postiano sprawling up the hillside. It’s beautiful. We really ought to go there, too.”

He smiled at her and turned his eyes back to the road.

Sarah studied his profile: clean-shaven strong jaw, roman nose, wavy black hair. Almost too long for a Navy man?

She shook her head and looked out the window, smiling to herself. This guy is something else. Charming, thoughtful, absurdly handsome. Why not have a little fun with him? Maybe a date or two. Maybe even one day trip. Like he says just two Americans on vacation having a little fun together.

+++++

Nathan pulled away from Sarah's Sorrento apartment. A brainy sexy self-confident redhead. Smiling, he fingered the scrap of paper with her cell number and stowed it in his shirt pocket.