



Inherited: Expectant Cinderella

By Myrna Mackenzie

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Daisy Lockett thinks the joke's on her—how dare this stranger, who obviously doesn't have a romantic bone in his (irritatingly sexy) body, threaten to close down her business? She can deal with morning sickness and swollen ankles—so she'll take this pain-in-the-backside billionaire in her stride!

Parker's encountered some tough cookies, but in this pregnant firecracker, he's met his match....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Myrna Mackenzie would have liked to be a princess but that job wasn't available. And since she loved stories and happy endings, becoming a romance writer was even better. An award-winning author, Myrna was born in Campbell, Missouri in the US, grew up outside Chicago and now divides her time between Chicago and Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. She adores the Internet, coffee, hiking, and "attempting" gardening. Readers can visit Myrna at her website: www.myrnamackenzie.com

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"This wasn't exactly what I was thinking of when I decided I needed some time away from Boston," Parker Sutcliffe muttered to himself as he climbed from his black Rolls Phantom. He had stopped in front of a large old white frame building in a low-rent part of Las Vegas where there were no casinos or tourist attractions. The words "Forever and a Day Wedding Chapel" marched across the building in lurid pink neon. The building next door lacked signage but was otherwise a twin and appeared to be connected. He noted that there was no number on the door.

No matter, he thought. *This is the place*. These structures had belonged to a relative he'd never even heard of, but he'd been given the keys and told that he could take possession of the two empty buildings. The whole situation had been a surprise, and he disliked surprises, but the timing was right. This past year, after all that had happened...

He shied away from the thought, concentrating only on Sutcliffe's. The business had been his lifeline for as long as he could remember. It was failing now, and he wasn't going to let it slip away. So maybe what he needed was this. Coming here to claim his inheritance gave him a chance to get away, think, work and come up with an idea that would save Sutcliffe's. Plus, it was an excuse to escape the incessant suggestions by his board that he should marry to create some badly needed positive buzz about the company and himself now that his father had passed on.

Their insinuations that he wasn't a dynamic substitute as the company representative, but that he could be its savior if he'd only listen, had been a source of tension. This trip offered a viable excuse for his absence while he grasped the opportunity to brainstorm away from the fray. He desperately needed some quiet alone time.

But when he turned the handle of the abandoned chapel, it wasn't locked. And when he entered, he discovered that the building wasn't abandoned, either. Or quiet.

Immediately, a wall of off-key sound hit him. He was standing at the back of the chapel, and a wedding was taking place. In the front, on a cramped raised stage, an Elvis impersonator who looked as if he'd been in the business a decade too long was belting out the ending to "It's Now or Never." A bride and groom, who clearly weren't hearing the music, were smiling.

For half a second, Parker wondered if he had walked into a reality show. Or maybe someone was playing a joke on him. But if his associates in Boston hoped to talk him into a wedding by throwing him into the midst of one, they had obviously chosen the wrong wedding.

That was all he had time to think. As the last of the lyrics died away, a blur of pink came rushing at him from the side aisle.

"I'm so sorry. You missed most of it." Parker looked down at a tiny woman with long copper curls and a hideous bright pink dress. She glanced at his dark suit. "You must be a friend or relative of the bride or groom, but don't worry. They're usually so excited that they won't notice a late guest. Unless you're family. Are you family?"

"Not at all. I—"

"That's okay, then. Here they come. Take this." She shoved something into his hand. "The reception is right down that hall and out the door."

Parker frowned. "Reception? You're mistaken. I'm not—"

"Quickly," she said. "They're coming, and with these smaller weddings, we need as much of a cheering section as we can get." Grabbing him by the hand, she tugged, trying to steer him toward the door.

He resisted. "Look, Ms.... I don't know who you are, but we need to talk."

"Mr.... I don't know who you are, either, but this is a wedding. They paid. This is the most important day of their lives, and talking can come later." She turned to go, then whirled back, a sudden look of fear in her big brown eyes. "You're not a bill collector, are you?"

Parker scowled. "No, but—"

"The police?"

"Do I really look like a police officer?"

She glanced at his suit. "Right. Not unless officers are wearing Armani these days. Okay, let's go, then. Talk later. Bring your bubbles."

"Bubbles?" he said half to himself, but the wedding party was closing in behind him, so he strode after the pretty, if bossy and insane, redhead.

They had barely arrived at what appeared to be a postage-stamp-sized courtyard of grass behind the twin white buildings when the bride and groom appeared.

"Congratulations!" the pretty woman in pink called, opening her little white container of bubbles and blowing, her lips pursed in a way that some men might have called sexy. Parker wasn't calling it anything. This woman was messing up his carefully planned day and his escape from all things wedding-related.

She gave Parker a stern look, which only made him more aware of how amazingly expressive her eyes were. Immediately, he squelched that thought. He wasn't in the market for a woman, especially not a petite pirate who had boarded and was taking over his...

Wedding chapel, he thought, then quickly changed it to *building*. Damn it, given the situation with his business and the board, the very last thing he needed was a functioning wedding chapel or distractions from the very real problems he needed to solve. He certainly didn't want to have to deal with pretty trespassers with full berry lips. And bubbles.

Parker frowned, eager for this fiasco of a wedding to end so that he could find out what was going on. As he watched, the Elvis impersonator, the man who had officiated at the wedding and the woman who had played the piano made their way outside, the pink beauty gave them their containers and wands, and the bride and

groom were treated to a rainbow of bubbles floating down on them and popping sloppily as they kissed.

The pink lady, aided by an elderly woman with a cane, turned on some soft music and uncovered a small wedding cake. Then the pretty redhead shifted gears, grabbed a camera and began shooting pictures as the bride and groom fed each other cake and shared a dance. Somewhere along the way, the papers were signed, the bride and groom left, and Parker found himself standing next to the pink princess.

"So..." she said, gazing up at him and finally losing the smile she had maintained for the past thirty minutes. Her brown eyes looked worried. "If you don't know anyone from that wedding party and you're not a bill collector or a police officer, who are you?" Then her eyes suddenly brightened and the smile reappeared. "I know. You must be a prospective groom. You want us to conduct *your* wedding. Forgive me for not thinking of that sooner. It was just...your suit. I'm not quite used to seeing that kind of quality, but don't worry. We know how to step things up a notch when we need to. I guarantee you won't regret coming to the Forever and a Day chapel."

"Too late," he said, frowning down at her. "I already regret it." He looked down to where some bubble solution had landed on his cuff.

"Oops, I'm so very sorry," she said, reaching out to rub it off. Her slender fingers brushed the back of his hand. As she moved closer, trying to undo the damage, he breathed in the faint scent of lavender, of...woman, and his entire body tightened. Ridiculous. She was a total stranger, and even if she weren't, he'd made too many mistakes with women. Serious, life-changing mistakes that had left him reeling and had nearly caught others in the crossfire. So...no. Definitely no.

The beauty must have felt the same way, because she quickly jerked her hand away. A pink smudge of cake frosting remained on the sleeve of his suit where her fingertips had slid against him, and he almost felt the small gasp whoosh out of her.

"I'm ninety-nine-percent positive that will come out," she promised with a blush. "You could give it to me. I could fix it."

Parker felt an unfamiliar urge to smile, but he restrained himself. There appeared to have been a lot of "fixing" going on, given the fact that the building was supposed to be unoccupied.

But the outcome of this wasn't going to be fun or funny. He lost the urge to smile. "I think not. We're done here," he said.

Those pretty brown eyes blinked. "Excuse me? Does that mean you won't be having your wedding here?"

"If I were ever going to have a wedding in this lifetime—and I don't plan to—then no, it wouldn't be here."

"Because we're not up to your style?"

"Because I'll be selling the building and I doubt that the next owner will leave it intact."

Parker would have sworn that those big brown eyes couldn't have opened any wider or looked more distressed, but he would have been wrong.

"Sell the building?" Her words came out on a whisper. "But this is Tillie's building."

He thinned his lips. "I assume you're referring to my aunt Mathilda and she's."

"She passed away," the woman said quietly. "You're her *heir*? She had *an heir*? A real live heir?"

The woman was clearly distressed to learn of his existence...and possibly the fact that he was still among the living. "I'm Parker Sutcliffe," he said, "and I never met my aunt. And you are.?"

"I'm...well, I'm..." She had a look in her eyes that Parker recognized from experience. She was searching for a good story to tell him, so he gave her his best don't-even-bother-trying-to-lie icy aristocratic stare, the one he'd learned to use on the servants before he could even talk.

She blew out a breath that lifted those pretty copper bangs, took a deep breath and stood tall, or at least as tall as someone whose head barely reached his shoulder could. "I'm Daisy Lockett. I live here." She pu...

Users Review

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