



Thirty Days to Win His Wife (Brides and Belles)

By Andrea Laurence



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Yet Amelia has always dreamed of a perfect marriage...and she doesn't think this self-made millionaire is lifetime material despite their friendship. She's given him just one month to prove her wrong...



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Andrea Laurence is an award winning contemporary author who has been a lover of books and writing stories since she learned to read. She always dreamed of seeing her work in print and is thrilled to be able to share her books with the world. A dedicated West Coast girl transplanted into the Deep South, she's working on her own "happily ever after" with her boyfriend and five fur-babies. You can contact Andrea at her website: <http://www.andrealaurence.com>.

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"Amelia," Gretchen pressed, "tell me you didn't elope in a Las Vegas wedding chapel."

Amelia took a deep breath and slowly nodded. Her stomach was turning somersaults, but she managed to get the words out anyway. "I did," she admitted. "The details are a little blurry, but I woke up married to my best friend."

"Wait." Bree held up her hands in disbelief. "Did you just say you're married? *Married?*"

Amelia looked at her two friends and coworkers, not entirely certain she could repeat the words. It had been hard enough to say them the first time. She actually hadn't admitted it aloud until that very moment. The past few weeks it had all seemed like a fuzzy dream, but with Gretchen and Bree staring at her as though she'd grown a second head, it was suddenly very, very real.

"My high school reunion didn't go the way I planned," she explained. "I thought going back to Las Vegas would be fun, but it wasn't. Everyone was passing around pictures of their wedding days and their kids..." Her voice trailed off.

The sad state of Amelia's love life had hit her hard that night. She'd been in the dating scene for ten years with nothing to show for it but a string of almost-but-not-quite relationships. It wasn't for lack of trying—she put herself out there time after time, but with no luck. She refused to settle for anything less than a timeless love, and it seemed just out of her reach.

Her hectic career hadn't helped matters. She'd spent the past few years since college focusing on building the business she and her partners had founded, From This Moment. Running a wedding facility was a stressful job, and her area of expertise—catering—was no small task. Between menu tastings, prep work and wedding cakes, the wedding day itself was the least of her troubles. She loved her job, but it left little time to seriously dedicate herself to finding the love and family she'd always fantasized about.

She was only twenty-eight. Hardly old-maid material. But then she'd gone to the reunion and found that her schoolmates had left her in their familial dust. Even dorky Dave Simmons had come with his wife, and she'd been certain he'd never find a woman. Not even having Tyler there—equally single—helped. He was single by choice, too happy to play the globe-trotting CEO to have the burden of a serious relationship.

"I was feeling sorry for myself. My best friend, Tyler, kept bringing me drinks, and eventually we decided to blow off the party and go down to the Strip."

"Skip to the part where you eloped," Gretchen pressed, with an odd mix of wonder and glee on her cherubic face. She enjoyed living vicariously through others.

Amelia shook her head. "It's kind of a blur, but Tyler reminded me about this stupid pact we made on graduation night. We swore that if we weren't married by our ten-year reunion, we would marry each other."

"You didn't!" Bree said, her large blue eyes growing wider by the minute.

"We did." She couldn't believe it either, but they'd gone through with it. When Amelia woke up the next morning, the giant diamond ring on her hand and the naked man beside her in bed had confirmed her worst fears. The night before had not been just a vivid dream. It had really happened. She was married to her best friend.

"We did it for a laugh, you know? In high school, the two of us were always coming up with crazy ideas. I think Tyler was trying to cheer me up, offering to marry me so I wouldn't feel like the single one at the reunion anymore. It seemed like a brilliant solution at the time."

"It always does," Gretchen noted, as though she'd had her share of impetuous experiences.

"What the hell kind of liquor were you drinking?" Bree asked at last, sliding away the bridal magazine she'd been reading to plan her own upcoming nuptials.

"Anyway," Amelia continued, pointedly ignoring Bree, "the plan was to annul it as soon as we can. He lives in New York. I live here. It's obviously not going to work long-term."

Work? What was she even talking about? Of course it wasn't going to work. She'd just married her best friend from high school! *Tyler*. She knew everything there was to know about him and she was certain Tyler was not husband material. He worked too much, he traveled constantly and he had a bad habit of falling off the face of the earth for weeks at a time. She loved him, but she couldn't count on him. And yet, here she was. Married to him.

"So far the annulment plan isn't panning out the way I'd like. Turns out you can't annul a marriage in Tennessee just because it was done on a whim. New York may have better laws, but if not, that means a full-on divorce. Either way, Tyler has been traveling too much to start the process. I've only gotten a few texts from him in between stops in Belgium, Los Angeles, India. I haven't even spoken to him on the phone since I left Las Vegas."

"So do you think he's really busy, or is he avoiding you?" Gretchen asked. "I would think that might be an awkward situation to deal with. I can't even imagine sleeping with one of my guy friends from high school. If the sex was bad it would be hard to face him later. If the sex was good...that might be even worse."

"The sex was amazing," Amelia confessed, quickly clamping a hand over her mouth. Had she really said that out loud? She shook her head. The words had spilled out because they were true. Tyler had been the most talented and attentive lover she'd ever had. Their wedding night had easily left her top five encounters in its dust. She wasn't entirely sure what to think about that.

"Well, then," Bree noted with a smile twisting her lips. "Do tell."

"Oh, no," she said. "I've already said too much."

"Maybe he's dragging his feet in the hopes of getting some more of that sugar," Gretchen suggested.

"There's no more sugar to be had. That was a one-night thing and we both know it," Amelia argued, even as she felt the untruth of her words. She wanted more, she just knew she shouldn't. "He's just busy. He's always busy."

Tyler obviously wasn't that concerned with fixing this.

In the few texts she'd received, he'd told her to relax. If annulment was off the table, there was no rush, so unless she was madly in love and needed to marry someone else right that minute, it wasn't a big deal. He, of all people, knew about her relationship struggles and knew that the odds of that were extremely low.

But it was a big deal to her. Especially considering the extenuating circumstances. She couldn't even wrap her brain around that, so she continued to ignore it. It wasn't a pressing issue...yet.

"So you're really just going to walk away from the man that gave you the greatest orgasms of your life?" Gretchen frowned. "I don't think I could do that, even if I couldn't stand the guy. You and Tyler love each other, though. It's not much of a hop from friends to lovers, is it?"

"It is a huge hop over a massive chasm, I assure you." Amelia knew for certain they shouldn't go there again. Tyler had been her best friend since ninth grade, but she had never really allowed herself to consider anything between the two of them. For one thing, there was no way she wanted to risk their friendship in an attempt to take it to the next level. If it failed—and the odds were that it would—she'd lose the most important person in her life.

For another reason, there was a big difference between being friends and being lovers. Being friends was easy. She tolerated Tyler's jet-setting, bossiness and extended radio silences just the same as he tolerated her romantic drama and pickiness. It wasn't a big deal because as friends, it didn't impact them directly. Dating someone magnified those personality quirks, and suddenly they were deal breakers.

Her raw emotional state at the reunion had apparently forced all those concerns out of her mind. The next thing she knew, she was on the verge of consummating her marriage. In that moment, nothing mattered more than peeling away Tyler's clothes and getting a taste of the forbidden. His hard body and sure touch had been an unexpected surprise, and she hadn't been able to get enough of him. Even now, the mere thought of touching him again sent a thrill through her body, awakening parts of her that should never, ever throb with need where Tyler was concerned.

Since she'd gotten home from the reunion, their night together had haunted her. The marriage could be undone. But the memories... Those couldn't be erased. The way he'd touched her. The way he'd coaxed pleasure from her body as though he'd studied his whole life for that moment... She could never go back to the blissful ignorance they'd once had. They had eaten the forbidden fruit.

A chime like a kitchen timer went off on her phone, rousing her from the mental spiral she'd just dived into. It was a new text. She frowned down at her phone when she saw the name. Speak of the devil, she had finally gotten another text from Tyler. Unfortunately, it didn't address her million questions or make up for the weeks of waiting he'd put her through since they'd married. All it said was, Are you at work?

He must be ready to talk about all this at last. Perhaps his jet-setting had abated for a few days and he was finally able to move forward.

Yes, she replied to his text. She would be able to call him back after the staff meeting was over. At that point, she could go into her office, shut the door and have the much-needed discussion to put this behind them. Natalie, the wedding planner and office manager, would arrive any moment with coffee, as she did every Monday morning. Not even Amelia's latest life catastrophe would throw off Nat's schedule.

On cue, Natalie pushed open the door of the conference room and stopped in the doorway. She had the cup holder clutched in her hands, four paper cups held tightly in place, as usual. But there was a strange look on her face. Her normally calm expression was pinched, her mouth tight. Something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Natalie?" Bree asked.

Natalie turned from Bree to look at Amelia, her long dark ponytail sweeping over one shoulder. "There's an incredibly hot guy here to see you, Amelia. He says that he's your, *uh...husband*"

Someone gasped. Amelia wasn't sure which of them it was. Probably her. She launched up out of her chair, her expression no doubt panic-stricken. He couldn't possibly be here. He'd just texted her and hadn't made any mention of being in Nashville. Natalie was surely mistaken.

"What does he look like?"

Natalie's brow shot up. "Five minutes ago, I didn't think you had *a* husband, period, much less so many that you wouldn't know who he was immediately when I mentioned him."

"Tall, dark blond hair, bushy eyebrows, icy blue eyes?"

Natalie nodded slowly. "That would be him. He's waiting in the lobby with a shiny wedding ring on his hand. Have I missed something?"

"Oh, yeah." Gretchen snorted.

Moving into the room, Natalie set the drinks on the table and then crossed her arms over her chest. "You're married? To the guy in the lobby?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Amelia—the one who's had her wedding planned since she was five? Amelia—the one who just a few weeks ago was complaining that there was no one special in her life? I mean, you *are* the same person, right? You're not a pod person that just looks like Amelia?"

She wished she could blame her rash behavior on alien influences, but it was all her doing. Natalie was right to be surprised. Amelia quite literally had had a wedding planned for twenty-three years. Her files of cartoon drawings and magazine cutout collages had evolved into Pinter-est boards and spreadsheets, but the content was basically the same. And considering she had never been engaged, it was an excessive level of detail. She occasionally updated the color palette, but the rest was the same. She'd always fantasized about a big wedding with hundreds of guests, tons of good food, dancing and all the elegant touches she adored. All she needed was the love of her life to slip into that Armani tuxedo and make her dreams a reality.

To throw all that away so she could get walked down the aisle by Elvis and marry her best friend was...unthinkable. But Vegas seemed to have that power over people. "It's a long story. They can fill you

in." Amelia started toward the door.

"Do you at least want your coffee?" Natalie asked, holding up the paper cup with her white chocolate-caramel macchiato.

Amelia started to reach for it, and then she caught a whiff of the strong aroma. Her stomach immediately started to turn, making her wince and step back. "Ugh—no, thanks. Maybe later. I just can't face it right now."

Turning quickly, she disappeared down the hallway. Natalie's voice easily carried the distance. "Will someone *please* tell me what the hell is going on?"

Tyler Dixon waited longer in the lobby than he expected to. When the dark-haired woman disappeared down the hallway to deliver his message, he was certain Amelia would come rushing out to him immediately. She would run and jump into his arms, greeting him with a big hug and a kiss on the cheek the way she always did.

Glancing down at his Rolex, he started to wonder if he'd miscalculated. He'd known she was here, even before she'd texted him back—he'd recognized her car in the parking lot. That meant she was either angry and making him wait for ignoring her, or she was avoiding him because she was embarrassed by the whole sex thing.

He didn't know what she had to be embarrassed about. With a body like hers, walking around naked could be considered a public service. Sure, they'd crossed a line, but they could work through that. They'd weathered rough patches in their friendship before.

It probably had more to do with him not calling her back. His schedule had been pretty hectic since the reunion, but it had to be. He'd bought some raw diamonds and taken them to India to be cut. He'd hit an auction in Belgium and picked up an antique sapphire brooch formerly owned by French royalty before the revolution. He'd closed a huge deal with a Beverly Hills jewelry designer to provide diamonds for their pieces. Whenever he'd thought to call her, the time zones were off. She wouldn't have appreciated getting those calls at 2:00 a.m.

This was why he didn't get in serious relationships anymore. He'd gotten burned with Christine and learned his lesson. He knew that most women didn't appreciate his schedule, even if they appreciated the money that resulted from it. At first, his diamond airline status and exotic travels seemed exciting, but it didn't take most women long to realize that meant he was always on the go. No, he wouldn't be able to go to that work thing with you. No, he couldn't talk about your crappy day when he was ten time zones behind and busy working.

Amelia had never minded his schedule before. Had that changed along with their marital status?

What was the rush anyway? She hadn't found Prince Charming in the ten years leading up to now. Certainly she hadn't found him in the past month while he'd been gone. He loved Amelia, but she wasn't known for her successful relationships. He'd only met one woman in his whole life who was as high maintenance as she was, and that was his ex. He'd known that about Amelia going into this, but she was his best friend and he would do anything to make her happy. Apparently.

They'd take care of the divorce. That was why he was here at his first opportunity. Despite what Amelia might think, Tyler wasn't deliberately dragging his feet. Although, if he was honest with himself, there was a

part of him that was sad that he'd never get to touch those soft curves again. He'd always been happy to be Amelia's friend, but he wouldn't mind spending a little more time exploring her body before they went back to being just friends. He'd only had one brief taste, and that wasn't nearly enough for a woman like her.

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