



Falling
• FOR YOUR •
Madness

KATHARINE GRUBB

FALLING FOR YOUR MADNESS

a story of love, chivalry, and the power of words

By Katharine Grubb

For Corbin and Perrin

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FRIENDS

*Sunday, September 16, 2012
641 Trenton Street
East Boston, Massachusetts
4:46 p.m.*

Julie said that she was doing me a favor, but she was wrong. I was the one doing her a favor. I came to her baby's first birthday party under protest, and she knew it. We were close enough friends that she could handle the fact that I didn't think that a Sunday afternoon with her Mommy friends and her in-laws and her husband's colleagues was a good way to spend my time. Fortunately for her, the Patriots game was over. We had won.

"No, Laura. I'm doing you the favor. I'm sending David to get more ice. Go with him."

I had met David before—at least, I thought I had. I thought he was in her husband's department at Boston College. This David guy certainly looked like a professor. He had on wool trousers and a stereotypical tweed jacket and a tie. Yes! I did remember meeting him. At Julie's Memorial Day party; he was there, and we had even talked. I remembered thinking how odd it was that someone would dress in wool and tweed when the temperature was in the high 90s. I remembered thinking he was awfully tall, that he should do something about that curly black hair in his eyes, and that he was easy to talk to. I also remembered that I had wanted to get Trey's attention at that party. I had had Trey's attention all summer, kind of. Now summer was over.

"Hello, Laura. Do you remember me?"

"I do." He said my name, *Laura*, as if he were trying it on for size. It seemed to fit.

"We have been given a quest. We need to buy ice, and I'm hoping you'll go with me? I assure you that we'll be back in twenty minutes."

I did remember him! The English accent!

“I’m not that familiar with East Boston. I don’t know where to find ice.”

“Never fear. My driver, Merle, will take us where we need to go.” David offered me his arm.

No man had offered me an arm since high school prom, and even then I had to tell my date how to do it. Julie *has* done me a favor. For that minute, I forgot that I was sort of feeling sorry for myself that I couldn’t be in Chicago for my father’s show and that I was moping over Trey. I’d take the twenty minutes of tall, English-accented distraction.

“You have a driver?” We maneuvered around the party guests to get to the front door. It seemed like all of Julie’s and Brandon’s friends made way for this man. I assumed it was because of his height.

“He is actually a servant, mentor, and guide. He also does very bad card tricks, washes my socks, and makes excellent toast.”

He opened Julie’s front door for me, and his black Crown Victoria arrived at the curb. He opened the door for me too.

It was a perfect New England evening, the kind where the summer light is still clinging to the fading leaves. There was a hint of yellow here and orange there, even in a completely urban, concrete-and-aluminum neighborhood like Julie’s. I tried to stop, as my Dad had taught me, to savor little bits of life or light or magic or whatever it was that created inspiration. This was a good night for that. I wished I had brought my pencils with me. A drawing would have made a good distraction, too.

It was a warm night. This was the last weekend, I thought, that I could wear my favorite cotton dress, the one that I felt especially pretty in. I didn’t care that I was overdressed for a 1 year-old’s backyard barbecue birthday party. Everyone else was in shorts and graphic tees and flip-flops. Everyone except the man who sat next to me in the back seat of a black Crown Victoria.

“Julie said you came to the party alone. Is that true? It would be in very bad manners if I were encroaching on your sweetheart.”

I giggled and then felt silly for doing so. “No, my date was the stuffed bear that I left for baby Clive.”

“Oh, so you like your gentlemen with whiskers?” He smiled at me. He winked at me. He was *flirting* with me. “If you leave the bear for baby Clive, who will escort you home?” Had he flirted with me when I’d met him in May? Or was I so wrapped up in Trey, *Mr. Baseball*, that I didn’t notice?

“I was going to take the T in to Government Center, then switch to the Green Line to Coolidge Corner.”

“That cannot be borne, my dear lady. You would have to walk a half mile or more to the nearest

subway station. Then it would take you at least an hour. You should pick a more chivalrous bear next time. I have never known any stuffed animal to be particularly well-mannered. Make a note to tell little Clive to read the King Arthur book that I gave him to the bear when he's older. Perhaps that will teach him a bit about chivalry."

I had just gotten in the car with a nutcase. But he had a British accent, so I probably would have followed him anywhere.

"On Sundays, I prefer to be in my home by 8 p.m. I would like to suggest that at 6:30 tonight, Merle and I drive you home from the party. You will arrive in safety and dignity and end my week on a happy note."

The driver stopped at one of those corner stores that are always in the rougher neighborhoods of Boston. He was a small old man with a white crew cut. He wore oversized black glasses and a yellow Nehru jacket. He had moved the driver seat up as far as it went, so that David could have plenty of leg room. They were quite a pair. He turned around to face us.

"David, you need to get the ice."

"Pardon me?"

"You need to get the ice. The lady can't get the ice. And I certainly can't get the ice. You have to get the ice."

"But I'm not ready to leave the side of this pretty lady."

"You told her twenty minutes. I saw this coming. You should have said thirty."

"Spoilsport. Excuse me, Laura. Merle is right. I must get the ice. I'll be back shortly."

*Sunday, September 16, 2012
241 Trenton Street
East Boston, Massachusetts
5:06 p.m.*

David and his driver brought me back to the party exactly twenty minutes after we had left. We came in as Clive was tearing into his gifts. The event had ceased to be a party and now was an explosion of tissue paper, cake crumbs, screaming infants, and far too many presents for a child. I don't know what Julie was thinking, but I thought that this party was a little too much for kids so young. I told David so as he stood next to me while I ate my cake.

"I think when I'm a mother, I'll save the bigger celebrations for when my kid can remember it." I was glad David had stayed by my side.

"Will you? Should I ever have a child of my own, I'll probably be so proud that I'll invite the queen of England. We never really know how vain we are. Especially once we have an heir. Now Laura, Brandon told me you are an illustrator; is that correct?"

"Yes, I freelance and do web design. I work from home."

"Ah. Then getting out was hard for you today. If you're not working, then you're not getting paid."

"You're right. But I have to make time to play, or I'd never see my friends."

"I agree. Every Sunday afternoon, I attend social-stroke-cultural events. And today's obviously was social, unless you think screaming toddlers and exhausted parents are cultural—but I'm guessing you don't, since you're an artist."

Brandon saw us. "Thank you for the ice, David. You saved the day."

"It was my pleasure."

I excused myself and followed Brandon into the kitchen. "Tell me more about David."

He nodded his head. "Julie's behind this, isn't she?"

"Maybe. There's no *this* yet. I'm just curious."

"What happened to Mr. Baseball?"

"An away series. At least that's the excuse I have this weekend. David wants to drive me home. Should I let him?"

"David is a great guy. Very professional. We share an office this semester, and I read his dissertation and man, he's a better writer and scholar than I am. He's really a complete package: great lecturer, great researcher, popular with students, he . . ."

“No, not the professional stuff. The personal. There’s not a hidden wife or kids anywhere, is there?”

“What? With David? No way.”

“Would you agree to let your sister go out with him?”

“My sister? My sister has three kids with three different fathers. I’d love it if she met a guy who was one-tenth the man David is. Let him take you home. You could do a lot, lot worse. You know, Laura, he only came today because I told him you were coming. He remembers you from Memorial Day. He’s always asking about you. He is really a great guy.”

So David is a *really great guy*. But I’d been told that before. Julie was the one who had set me up with Trey. Somehow the handsome princes who had stumbled into my life always, eventually had turned into frogs.

*Sunday, September 16, 2012
Right outside Sumner Tunnel
East Boston, Massachusetts
6:39 p.m.*

We had left exactly at 6:30, and I had to admit, I was ready to sit in the back of that Crown Victoria and see what this David guy was going to do and say.

“Do you mind very much if I ask you questions? We’ll have a long ride, and I’d like to make the most of it.”

“Sure.” Because we were on a toll road, traffic was backed up at the tunnel entrance. The car slowly edged forward in the traffic.

“What was the last book that you read?”

“David!” The driver turned around. “We’re entering the tunnel!”

“Of course we are, it’s a one-way street. There are no other options.”

“David! It’s a tunnel! Don’t you think you should consider the lady’s delicate boundaries?”

What were they talking about?

“Oh my good God, why didn’t you say something sooner? What should I do?”

“Tennyson!” The driver screamed.

Then David turned and looked at me. He was lit up as if he were on fire. “Tennyson! Laura, I do hope you like poetry. If you don’t, it’s too late to do anything about it.” Then David stuck his hands underneath him and closed his eyes as the car entered the tunnel. I didn’t know what was going on, and I was half-scared to death, but the whole scene was so comical.

Then he started shouting,

*“Half a league, half a league, half a league onward,
All in the Valley of Death rode the six hundred!”*

“I know this poem.”

He opened his eyes in wonder. “You do?”

“In high school, I had to memorize it. I didn’t like it at first, but then my father told me that it was good for me. It was good for inspiration.”

“Of course it’s good for you. All poetry is good for you, but Tennyson is like fresh vegetables.” He had been sitting on his hands since we entered the tunnel, and now he slipped one out and moved over a little closer to me.

The driver turned around and whacked him in the arm. “David! Stop it! The boundaries! Say your Tennyson!”

David looked panicked. “I’m so sorry, Laura.” He moved back over to his side of the car, stuck his hands under his thighs and looked at me. “I would do much better if you said it with me.”

“I would love to.” I sat on my hands too, clung to my side of the car, for some inexplicable reason, and said with David,

*“Forward the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismay’d?*

*Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
There's but to do and die,
Into the Valley of Death
Rode the six hundred."*

The message of the poem was not lost on me. I was in a Crown Victoria, under the Boston Harbor, driven by a short man in a yellow Nehru jacket, next to an Englishman who was sitting on his hands reciting Tennyson. Like the soldiers, I had no idea where I was going, nor did I know what the future held. This ride home was sheer madness.

I liked it.

*Sunday, September 16, 2012
332 Babcock Street
Brookline, Massachusetts
7:18 p.m.*

Apparently, one only recited Tennyson when one was underwater, because when the car came out of the tunnel and maneuvered into the Back Bay to get to Beacon Street into Brookline, David had opened his eyes and pulled his hands out from under his legs. He asked me questions all the way to my apartment building.

“You said your father told you that reciting poetry was good for you. Why would he say that?”

“He’s an artist. He’s always told me that if I want to be a great artist, I needed to fill up and look. By filling up he means doing a lot of reading, especially good books, not junk. Go to museums, listen to music. At some point you’ll be so filled up that you’ll overflow, and you will create great art. Or great web design and illustrations in my case.”

“That is extremely interesting. And what does he mean by *look*?”

“He means that great artists take the time to see what no one else can see. You have to practice it.”

“Your father sounds very wise.”

The car stopped in front of my building. David sighed. "It is unfortunate that we at our final destination. But, wait here." He opened his door, got out, walked around to my door, opened it, offered his hand, and helped me out of the car. "There was a tea room about three blocks away. We passed it on our way here. Are you familiar with it?"

"Yes, I walk by it on my way to the T."

"Would you meet me there tomorrow at 3:30? I would like to buy you a cup. And perhaps a scone too?"

"That sounds nice." Is he asking me out? "Yes."

"And Laura, would you bring your book? I would love to see your illustrations."

*Sunday, September 16, 2012
332 Babcock Street
Brookline, Massachusetts
9:40 p.m.*

"How was the party? Did you hear from Trey?"

My roommate, Ruby, and her boyfriend, Russ, had just come home from a movie. They had successfully weaseled out of Clive's birthday party.

Now I remembered. I was mad at Trey. "Didn't Trey stand right here and say, 'Laura-loo, I'm going to call you this weekend and we'll get together!' Didn't he say that? Or did I just make all that up?" I gathered my things out of the living room in case Ruby and Russ wanted some privacy. But if they were going to argue, I secretly hoped they'd take it into her room. I never knew what to expect with them.

Russ flopped on the couch. "Don't worry about it. Guys say stuff like that all the time."

Ruby half-slapped him on his head. "That doesn't make it right. So, you didn't hear from Trey, but you forgot all about him because you met your dream man at Julie's party."

"How'd you know?"

“What? Really? I was just kidding. You met somebody?”

“Well, I did. But he’s kind of strange. And I don’t know about the dream man part. He is tall and good-looking in an unusual way. And he has a driver. And I’m meeting him for tea tomorrow. His name’s David, and he works with Brandon at BC. Hey, have you ever heard of Professor Bowles in the English department?”

Ruby was getting a degree in counseling there. “No, but that doesn’t mean anything.”

“Look him up.” Russ flipped channels on the remote.

“Wait a minute, Laura. What about Trey?”

I sighed. “Trey. Oh yeah. I guess if I were important to Trey, he’d do a better job of acting like it. Besides, it’s just tea. It’s not like I’m marrying David or anything.”

“Oh yeah! Let’s look him up!” Ruby set her laptop on the kitchen table.

David Bowles, at least *this* David Bowles, wasn’t on Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter. His only Google hits were professional ones connected to Harvard, Yale, and BC, and one very obscure one about the Harvard fencing team from 2002. Then we went to *ratemyprofessor.com*.

His former students said: *“One of the hardest and most interesting classes I have taken. I didn’t think I would like poetry and I still don’t love it, but Dr. Bowles made me realize it was about the relationships men have with women. I’m looking at the world differently now. I would definitely take his class again. Dr. Bowles is tough, but he’s interesting, funny at times, and I could listen to his accent all day.”*

Another one said: *“While I disagreed with Professor Bowles about some of the conclusions he came to from the material, and there was a LOT of material to read, I thought that he graded fairly and communicated clearly his expectations for the class. But I think he’s crazy. ”*

This one intrigued me: *“Does the guy ever stop talking about chivalry? He is obsessed. But I guess you have to love your subject matter. I hated his class only because he made me feel guilty about what I did over the weekend. I take a class to get a credit, not to be told how to live my life.”*

“What does that mean, *made me feel guilty*?” Ruby looked at me as if I knew.

“I don’t have a clue.”

“You’re going to tea tomorrow. Look at this one.”

“*Why isn’t this guy married?*”

“Um, Laura, has Mr. Baseball ever had that question asked of him?”

Monday, September 17, 2012
The Boston Tea Party Tea Shop
1477 Beacon Street
Brookline, Massachusetts
3:35 p.m.

When we arrived at the table, David pulled my chair out for me and did not sit down until I did. He held a daisy.

“For you.”

“Thank you.”

“No. Thank you for coming. I would like to continue our conversation from yesterday. I found it so delightful.”

“I love that word.” It was. He was.

He laughed. “You brought your book. May I see it?”

This was that part that I couldn’t figure out. He was so gallant and formal, and I *did* get this vibe from him that he was attracted to me. I certainly was to him. But why would he want to see my book? That was something that potential clients or employers wanted. I am always looking for another job, and I was glad to bring it, but I was kind of hoping that David’s interest in me wasn’t commercial.

He took it from me and opened it across the table. He didn’t flip through it. He *studied* it. I was nervous and thrilled all at the same time. I kept looking for signs of approval or something. He didn’t say anything. He just smiled and sometimes touched the pages gently. “I really like this one.” He pointed to one of my favorites.

It was the piece I did for a book of fairy tales. It was fun and full of light, and while I didn't get paid nearly what it was worth, and I always regretted that particular professional connection, the drawing was one of my favorites.

"This is lovely. You are very sensitive."

"Thank you."

"And yet also whimsical." He turned the page and looked at the penguins. I had a series of penguins that I had put on an online site. They were very simple, yet their eyes were full of expression and mischief. "And I see your humor. How delightful. How lovely. How impressive. Why did you become an artist?"

"I wouldn't know how to do anything else. My father taught me a lot. He would hold up objects and say, 'Laura, what do you see? It's not an apple,' he would say, 'it is a specific shape. See the curves, they aren't perfect. See the lighting? See the lines on the skin and the little bruise here? To be an artist means you must take every last detail with your eyes so you can recreate it on the paper. There's kind of a magic to it.' This always inspired me."

David leaned in over the table. "Please tell me more."

I felt myself blush. "Sometimes he would be in his studio for days. 'That muse of mine is abusing me. She won't let me eat. She won't let me sleep. She just wants my full attention. It's a good thing your mother is so patient.' Whenever he said that, I always got a little jealous."

"You wanted more of his attention?"

"Not necessarily. I wanted to be a part of the magic. Does that make sense?"

He turned pale. Then he gulped down his tea. He didn't look well at all.

"Are you okay?"

"Never better." He closed my book and handed it back to me. "Laura, I think you are a perfect candidate for a project I'm working on. But I can't tell you about it today. I want you to be back at your desk working by five o'clock. There's a cafe down Beacon Street, across the street from the St. Paul T stop. Would you meet me there on Wednesday for lunch? From noon to two? Perhaps we can talk about it further?"

"Do you need an illustrator?" I hoped not. But then, I'd rarely had anyone so engrossed in my book before.

"Not in the least. What I need is someone who is expressive and tender. Someone who fully appreciates beauty. I saw that in you through your book. You'll forgive me if I am distracted." He was staring at me, in kind of a hopeful, innocent, admiring way. I liked it. "I could look at this lovely book

all day.”

Wednesday, September 19, 2012
The Rising Agent Bakery and Cafe
1111 Beacon Street
Brookline, Massachusetts
11:57 a.m.

On Wednesday, I walked from my apartment to the cafe to meet David. I kept telling myself, *this meeting is just for a job*. He was an eccentric who wanted me to illustrate his life story or something. He would ask for cash up front and then more when everything was completed. He struck me as the type of man who would micromanage every little bit of work, who may change his mind a million times on something crazy like that. If I felt weird, or felt like it was too intense, I could always say no.

Ruby was completely dissatisfied with this conclusion. It was no secret that she didn't like Trey, and she believed she just wanted me to find someone else. Anyone else.

As for me, I didn't know what I wanted. I agreed Trey wasn't the greatest guy in the world, but I didn't know if David was any better. I couldn't figure David Bowles out. There was something between us, at least I thought there was. He *had* asked Brandon about me, and that had to count for something. But I had no more information about him than I did on Monday.

His car, the black Crown Victoria, was parked on the street between me and the restaurant. That funny little driver was in it. Maybe he could clear up who David was and what he wanted. I approached the car and tapped on the driver's side window.

Merle rolled down the window. “Hello, Miss Laura. May I be of some assistance?”

“Yes. What is David like?”

“He is a gentleman.”

“That's great. But as a boss, do you find him easy to work for?”

He laughed. I took that as a no. “David has his way of doing things.” Merle's glasses slid down his nose, and he peered at me over them. “He's a bit of an eccentric. He cannot bend the rules he has put on himself. If you can understand that, then you can understand him. It is not easy. Not at all. But he is kind and generous and honest.”

“Will I regret this relationship?”

“You will never be treated better. I can assure you.”

That was encouraging. I liked the gentlemen part especially. The world needed more of those.

David met me outside the cafe. He held out a Gerbera daisy. “Laura! I am so happy to see you. You look lovely. Your hair is different. It’s very elegant up like that.” Then he took my hand and kissed it and opened the door for me, and we went in.

Maybe this wasn’t a job interview after all.

He pulled the chair out for me. We ordered our lunch, and then he began to speak, or at least he tried to. He was fidgeting. He saw me watching him, and he was embarrassed. He didn’t seem like the type to get nervous. I really wanted to pat his hand and say, “Everything is going to be all right. You can do this.” But I didn’t know what he was doing, and we weren’t there yet. It wouldn’t be right.

He swallowed. “I spoke to you Monday about a project. I call it a project, but it is really more of a quest. I am in need of a bride.”

“What?”

“My quest is to someday attain a bride, and then, subsequently, heirs. Oh dear, you look startled. Let me slow down. This is always difficult to explain.” He took a sip of water. “You are not going to be that bride. Not until you say you are. I would like to propose that we become friends. That we meet regularly and develop our friendship over tea, lunch, and dinner. I fancy you. After our delightful conversation on Sunday, and then after seeing your book on Monday, I have many more questions to ask you, and I am hoping you’ll agree to answer them.”

“But you did say bride, or am I going crazy?”

He smiled. “You are not going crazy. I can’t have a bride until I have a fiancée. I can’t have a fiancée until I have a sweetheart. I can’t have a sweetheart until I have a friend. I am hoping you will be my friend.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. He was definitely eccentric. Probably crazy too.

He continued, “You are in complete control of this relationship. But I will have rules of how things will be between us. We will only meet three times a week. At tea on Monday, at lunch on Wednesday and at dinner on Friday. All expenses are my responsibility. I only ask of you that you entertain me with stories of your life. We meet at the same time, and we finish when I say we will. You know exactly what is going to happen at all points in our friendship. When we finish our meal, I will walk you to your building. I will never go in. I will only touch you to offer you my arm or to kiss your hand in greeting, if you allow me to. At any moment that you tire of this relationship, you must look me in

the eyes and say, 'This relationship is over. I release you'. At that point, we never meet again.”

I sat back in my chair. I had never heard anything like this before.

“There’s more.” He was uncomfortable. The cafe table was too small and his legs wouldn’t fit under it. He had to turn at an angle and cross them. “You’re enduring this very well, and I’m thrilled to see it. If you think that you would like to progress this friendship into a courtship, if you would like to be my sweetheart, you get to say so. I will never bring it up. I want you to understand that you are always in control. If you are my sweetheart, then we spend more time together on Saturdays and Sundays, and I will request the delight of kissing you on a very specific spot on the lower hemisphere of your lovely face.” He laughed.

I felt like I was about to scream. I didn’t know if it was in fear or in delight or what. But I was totally enchanted.

“Do you want to hear more? It gets better.” He smiled.

“I think so.”

“If you decide that you want to marry me, then you tell me. You will be in control. Always. I fancy you enough that I am willing to wait for you. I think you would make a remarkable friend, an enchanting sweetheart and a beautiful bride, but I’m not the one who makes the decision here. You are.”

“But there’s a catch.” This was it. I was almost ready to grab my bag and bolt out of there. Almost.

“The catch is on me, because you do the breaking up. I will not do it. Ever. I promise. And I always keep my promises. If you release me, you must speak to me in person about it. No phone calls or emails or ghastly text messages. Once it is over, it is over. No changing your mind or saying you didn’t mean it. Because I will have no more contact with you. None whatsoever.”

“That’s intense.” This should have been scary, but it wasn’t. This man had been hurt. Perhaps he’s devising this crazy system out of protection. I didn’t know what I was going to do with him at all, but the idea of control certainly appealed to me.

“I’m afraid it has to be intense. Am I frightening you?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“Do you have any questions? I want you to have complete understanding on all points of the rules.”

“What if I say yes, let’s be—what did you call it, sweethearts?” I had to laugh at this. “And I decide I’d rather be friends again.”

“Excellent question. You always tell a lot about someone by their questions. Our relationship’s

progress is a one-way street. We cannot go back to friends; that option only works in pop songs. Your only option, if you are unhappy, is your final release of me. But once you shut that door, you cannot open it again. It would be humiliating and unfair for me to see you and have you say something like, 'Oh David! I've missed you!' He batted his eyes. 'Oh David, can't we meet for tea just once for old times' sake?' or 'Oh David, I need a plus one for my friend's wedding.' No! Absolutely not. There will be no toying with me. I will not be humiliated."

I believed it. He meant business.

"My purpose is marriage. It is serious and final. While we are friends, you may have your beaux, but insist you don't tell me about it, nor do I want you to string us both along for your amusement. You don't strike me as the type of girl to do that."

"No." I had had my fill of that in junior high school. I had stopped when I realized how much it hurt people.

"I can tell you are a lady. I only associate with ladies."

A lady!

"I want to remind you that I will do everything that I say I am going to do. I also promise you to not touch you, except in greeting. Never to put physical demands on you. Never try to get you drunk so I can have my way with you. Never presume upon you. There will never be, while you are with me, making out, shacking up, or calls late at night asking you if you want a visitor. You will be absolutely safe in my presence at all times."

"Wow."

"But, there is this. I cannot be alone with you. Never. Not in a car. Not in your apartment. Not in any circumstances. We meet in public, and I walk you home. And once we are engaged, well, I'll grow fangs and ask if I can suck your blood."

"What?" Was he completely mad?

"I'm joking about that part. You were looking a bit pale. I wanted to lighten the mood. I did a bad job of it. Please forgive me."

I laughed. "I do."

He leaned back. "I realize that I come across as being intense. Let's take a moment."

Our food came. I let it sit there. "Why are you doing it this way?"

"As I said before, this is how it must be done. I am a peculiar, eccentric man. You and I will argue over my rules more than once, I am sure, but they cannot be bent. I will exasperate you, baffle you,

and perhaps drive you batty, but this how I want it done.”

“Who are you? I know you’re David, but who *are you?*” I don’t know why I was so bold. Perhaps it was because of his audacious plan. Perhaps it was because I saw something in him, something beyond eccentric. I needed to see more.

He was happy with my question, I could tell. “I am Professor David Julius Arthur Bowles, employed by Boston College in the department of English, where I teach English literature. I was born March 1 1982, precisely at noon. I grew up on the North Shore with my father, aunt, and sister. I have an undergraduate degree from Harvard, a graduate degree from Yale, and last year, I was awarded my doctorate from B.C. Go Eagles!”

I laughed.

“I am 30 years old and live in one of those romantic old brownstones on Commonwealth Avenue with Merle. When we are sweethearts, you may know my precise address. I am six feet three and three quarter inches tall. I weigh one hundred and ninety-eight pounds. I have all my teeth. I am in excellent health. I have no need for corrective lenses, although I am reading constantly. I credit this to either impeccable genes or magic. I have an excellent credit rating. I have been neither arrested nor married. The only phone I have is in Merle’s keeping, and it is for professional purposes only. Did I mention that you can never call me? All of my day time is committed either to teaching class, grading, reading or research. All of my evening time is committed to taking classes in Bartitsu or fencing, which I have done since I was fifteen years old. And in the summer, I ride. Oh, and I am left handed.”

“You’re from the North Shore, so you’re not British?”

He smiled a wide smile. “By bloodline I am. By citizenship I am not. All of my favorite things are British.”

He was absolutely insane, but I couldn’t help listening to him. “So the accent is fake?”

“Hah! My father, who is crazier than I am, if you can believe that, insisted that though I was schooled in the States, I speak the Queen’s English, complete with the accent. It’s a sloppy, Americanized one but it’s an accent nonetheless. He always said that if I did, I would undoubtedly be a hit with the ladies.”

I was giggling. “Are you?”

“It would be ungentlemanly to say so.” He winked at me, which convinced me that he was! There was a twinkle in his eye. It looked otherworldly. Not in a scary way. More like he was beckoning me to an adventure. Then it was gone. Maybe I was just seeing things.

“Now Laura Adamsky. I know a little from Julie and Brandon, but I want to know, who are you? Who *are you?*”

He made me feel confident. I wanted to say my answer exactly the way he said his. I had never been with a man who made me step up my game, like I was meant to follow him.

“I am Laura Elizabeth Victoria Adamsky, I . . .”

He held up his hand. “Excuse the interruption. But, Elizabeth Victoria? Did you know you share your name with two very important Queens of England?”

“I did.” And then I realized, “David Julius Arthur? You don’t do too badly in the name game either.”

He looked surprised. He laughed and looked little flustered, as if I had caught him off guard. It was obvious to me that I had said the right thing. I didn’t know why it was right, but he was glad I had said it. I was too. “Good observation.” David leaned in closer to me. “Please continue.”

“I was born April 14, 1987, to Paul and Kathleen Adamsky of Libertyville, Illinois. You already know that I am self employed. I am five feet six inches tall, but I will not reveal to you how much I weigh.

“A lady need never divulge that information except to her physician.”

“Exactly.” I couldn’t help but laugh while I was talking to him. “I have a degree from Mass College of Art, and I’ve lived in Boston since coming here to attend school. I have two sisters, one younger and one older. I do not have all my teeth because I had my wisdom teeth pulled when I was sixteen. I wear contact lenses and ...”

“Not tinted ones.”

“No. I’d rather keep my natural blue.”

“And a beautiful blue it is. Please continue.”

I blushed. “I also have never been arrested or married. My credit rating is ...”

“None of my business. What else? Oh dear, I’ve been interrupting you quite a bit, but you are so fascinating. I’m afraid I’ve lost my good manners. Please, I will hold my hand over my mouth until you’re done.”

I laughed at him. I liked this David Julius Arthur Bowles, Ph.D. “That’s really all there is. I work a lot. I don’t have much free time, but when I do, I watch movies with my friends or read or go to museums to *fill up*, as my father says. And I never miss a Patriots game. Oh, and I’m also left handed.”

“Excellent. Bravo. Well done.” He applauded me. I felt myself blush again.

“I think our soup is cold.”

“That’s a very good sign.”

We ate, and I caught myself looking at him and trying to stifle my giggles.

“Laura, could I ask a small favor of you?”

“Maybe.”

“Does your phone have a camera?”

“Yes.”

“Merle claims that you are not as pretty as I say you are. I want to take photo of us together, email it to him, and prove to the little munchkin that he is wrong, as always.”

“That sounds like a line, Professor.”

He bit his lip. “It is. It’s a terrible one. Will you do it anyway?”

“Yes.” He stood and brought his chair next to mine. He leaned in closer to me. He put his arm along the back of my chair, but he did not touch me, just like he said he wouldn’t. He smelled decidedly masculine. Was that *lavender*? I didn’t know what it was. He held out the phone in front of us. I held my Gerbera daisy. I smiled, and he took the photo, emailed Merle, and gave me my phone and moved back across the table.

“The restaurant I want to take you to on Friday is right off Beacon Street on Harvard. Bombay’s Fine Indian restaurant. Are you familiar with it?”

“I love that place! They have a great vegetarian curry.”

He looked at me like he’d lost his balance. “I will be there Friday evening at 7:00.” He swallowed. “Will you?”

“I will.”

He looked happy. “When we are finished, I will walk you to the doorstep of your building by 10:00 p.m., and if you allow me, kiss your hand. Just to remind you, this is not a date. We are friends. The progress of this relationship from being friends to sweethearts is up to you. It can take six dates, six months, or six years. I am unbelievably patient. Now, though, I am going to excuse myself. It isn’t very chivalrous to leave a lady alone, but I’ve found that young women often need time to think. Be assured, Laura, my time with you today was absolutely delightful.”

He picked up my hand and held it to his lips. Then Dr. David Julius Arthur Bowles walked out of the cafe, hailed his driver, entered his car, and drove away.

Wednesday, September 19, 2012
332 Babcock Street
Brookline, Massachusetts
6:15 p.m.

“Wait, a minute. He said you were in complete control?” Ruby was beside herself.

“Friends first, then sweethearts if I want to be.” I had tried to explain to her, as best I could, all the rules that David had suggested. I couldn’t remember them all. I should have taken notes or asked for handout. Every time I told her something that I remembered, she reeled a little more.

“We’re calling Jessie.” She waved her hands in the air.

“And did I tell you about the no phone calls?”

“What? How could there possibly be more rules than what you already told me? We’re calling Julie too, if Brandon can watch the baby. We need all the girls over here. They have got to hear this.”

“You’re going to get everybody over here now?”

“I don’t know if this is the creepiest thing I’ve ever heard or if you just met a knight in shining armor. Are you going Friday?”

“I don’t know. I think so. What do you think?”

“I think we get the girls over here and decide. I’ll call them. You get the ice cream.”

Within an hour, we had eight of my closest friends sitting in my living room. These were not just girls, they were a part of the fabric of my Boston life. Erin and Julie and I were inseparable at Mass College of Art. Ariel and Miranda lived across the hall from us when we lived on Huntington Avenue. Ruby and Jessie had known those two from their undergrad days. I met Emily when I went out with her brother. Katie lived with Emily and easily fit into the circle. We had been through so much together—broken hearts, engagements, new romances, homesickness, deadlines, bad grades, good

parties, and countless conversations about men. This group was the reason I had wanted to stay here and not go back to Chicago after graduation. They were a second family. They were going to love this story.

I stood in front of all of them. “All right, ladies, what would you say if a tall, handsome-ish college professor, who you just met, suggested to you that he wanted you to be his bride?”

“How handsome?”

“Handsome enough. Well-defined face. Curly black hair in his eyes. Boyish at times.”

“Is he rich?”

“He’s a college professor. Probably not. Listen, we’re getting distracted. I had the most unusual conversation I have ever had with this David guy—no, I mean, man—no, I mean, gentleman, and I need you guys to tell me what I should do.”

I explained each one of the rules. I had made a list while waiting for them to come over. “We start out as friends, and we meet three times a week. Tea on Monday, lunch on Wednesday, and dinner on Friday. He never touches me. He pays for everything. Then he walks me home and kisses my hand. He never comes in. He won’t call. If I want to be more than friends, I decide. All I have to do is say the word, and then we’re sweethearts.”

All the girls started laughing.

“No, really. That’s what he calls it. Now, I’m thinking about meeting him Friday for our first dinner, as friends. What do you think? Should I go or not?”

“Wait a minute,” Jessie put her hand up. “Did I miss something? What happened to Trey?”

“Well, Trey and I are ... ”

Ruby stood up and waved her spoon at all of us. “Listen. Trey is old news. Buh-bye.”

I tried to stop her. “No, wait, there is not an official ruling on Trey. That’s part of the problem. Trey was really busy all summer and now that ...”

“Are you blind?” Ruby got up in my face. “Let me tell you what your summer was like. It was, *‘Oh Trey! You’re so handsome! You make so much money! It’s so cool that you work for the Red Sox and ooh! This is such an expensive restaurant and tee-hee, you’re so sweet, no I don’t mind waiting by the phone for three solid weeks while you travel all over the country pretending you’re important. I don’t mind shutting down my summer completely waiting on you to grace me with your presence! I don’t mind moping and feeling sorry for myself and making my roommate miserable!’*”

“So, Ruby,” I was a little upset by this. “Tell us how you really feel.”

~~“I’ll tell you. You go to dinner with David. And if you don’t, I will.”~~

All the girls cheered.

“Okay, well then. We’ve heard from the anti-Trey delegation. Anyone for the anti-David side?”

“He knows Brandon and Julie, right?”

“Right. This is a friend-of-a-friend situation. Brandon had nothing but nice things to say about him. But Brandon is not a girl, so, you know, he hasn’t paid attention to the important stuff.”

“And he says you won’t be alone with him, right?”

“Yeah. He really made it clear. That’s it, really. I don’t see a problem here, unless he really is crazy or something. But I can get out. That’s another rule; once I break up, it’s permanently over.”

Jessie raised her hand. “I say we take a vote. Raise your hand if you think Laura should meet David on Friday?”

I couldn’t believe all the hands that went up. “Wait a minute. This isn’t up for a vote. I have the final say here. I just want opinions. Opinions that are not Ruby’s.”

Emily raised her hand. “Is there any hope for you getting back together with my brother?”

“Em, I hate to disappoint you, but you know what he did to me.”

Ruby was still hot. “What did he do?” She looked like she was out for blood.

I shook my head. “He committed the unforgivable. He became a Jets fan.”

Friday, September 21, 2012

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