

A DREAM FOR LANI EXCERPT:

“So, Miss Moore?” Ryan noted her slender fingers were bare of rings. Was she living with a man? Somehow that idea made him feel annoyed. Why, he didn’t want to question. “Getting married? Needing a new home? Or just fed up with your present living arrangements?”

Ryan straightened the papers on his desk as he let her name roll around in his head. She was as unusual as her name. Her gorgeous hair shone. Not what you would call a beauty in the classical terms, and the air of melancholy about her intrigued him. Her clothes were nothing out of the ordinary.

Obviously expensive but not striking. Her defiant little chin jutted warningly; here was a woman who didn’t suffer fools. But contrarily she seemed uneasy and self-conscious with him. Glancing about nervously she allowed him to study her profile; her perfect nose and that dainty chin.

“I’m looking for a farm, or a small property. I want to buy not rent.”

Ryan mulled that over. She hadn’t said whether she was married or not. Perhaps she had a partner. “How small? How many children do you have that need all this space?” Ryan felt stupid. Why was he so keen to learn her marital state? What did he care if she had a dozen kids?

“Children? Why, none.” She gave him an old-fashioned look. Had she guessed he was fishing? “I have a horse.”

Ryan’s insides lurched, and he stifled a groan. A bloody horse!

“I need somewhere where there’s plenty of room for her. I’ve just moved to Victoria. At present I’m living with a friend and my mare is stabled some distance away. It’s not a satisfactory arrangement.”

Suddenly unsure of herself, Lani wondered what she’d said to annoy him. His friendly demeanour had disappeared and she couldn’t think why. He now seemed disinterested, which caused her to think she’d been using her imagination before and manufactured the interest she was sure he’d shown her. What nonsense. What would a man like him see in a mousy creature such as her?

How Lani wished she was worldlier. Had she mistaken the look in his eyes? He’d seemed to be studying her with interest. But perhaps he treated all his female clients with the same amount of attention. Not for the first time she wished she could carry on a casual flirtation. What fun it must be to indulge in carefree banter with a man like this.

The look he gave her as he said, “Ah, a horse,” was purely disdainful. The curt sentence was as effective as having a bucket of cold water thrown over her. What a fool? Of course he hadn’t been vaguely interested in her as a woman—merely as a prospective client. And he now thought her odd.

Her back straightened, and her chin jutted. “Yes, a horse. What’s so strange about that?” His ready smile had been replaced by a frown. Now it was her turn to think him strange. “Do you have any local properties on your list? I live alone so don’t need a large house, and I have a shop here in the complex.” With a small jerk of the head she indicated the mall outside his office. “I’m after something within easy driving distance. I haven’t the time or inclination to drive for hours each day.”

The small nod of his head didn’t reveal much as he said, “I’m sure I can find something to suit.”

Was that hostility in his eyes now? Lani resolved to ignore his strange mood swing. Perhaps he was taciturn like this all the time and the grin only kept for greeting when you entered his office. But that was extremely odd. Surely an estate agent should be friendlier towards a potential buyer. But when had she ever been a good reader of character? “Give me a day or two. Your needs should be easy to fulfil.”

“That’ll be fine. I’m in a hurry, but not so that I want to take anything just for the sake of it.” Disappointment made her sound curt.

“Right.” He nodded and picked up a pen. “If you’ll give me a rough idea of the price range you have in mind, I’ll get working on it. Which shop is yours? As soon as I find a property that looks as if it might suit I’ll let you know.”

He took her details, looking slightly taken aback when she mentioned the figure she was prepared to go to. Lani stood and extended her hand. This time his handshake was brief. “Thanks, Mr Bachus.”

“My pleasure.”

That was a matter for dispute. He’d seemed pleased at first, but that had soon fizzled out. Which filled her with a sharp sense of something akin to loss. Wasn’t that just too ridiculous? But he’d bolstered her frail confidence with his blatant look of admiration only to dash it. If only she had the front to come right out and ask him why he’d suddenly changed.

“I’ll be in touch,” he said, walking with her to the outer office. He held the main door open and his warm breath fanned her cheek as he waited for her to pass him. With a small frown she walked away. When would she understand people—men especially? Now that was a loaded question. What woman understood the men in their lives entirely?