

A HEART IN CONFLICT EXCERPT:

“Well little lady, what do you think of this lot?” Steve’s accountant leant against the doorframe.

“Interesting,” she allowed, sipping her drink.

He grinned. He was attractive in a decadent sort of way. A lover of the good life, she mused. Fiftish, stocky and of medium height, crowned by a thatch of silvery hair.

“I hear you’ve recently been promoted.” He held out a hand and gripped hers warmly. “Let me congratulate you. I know what a hard taskmaster Steve is, so know the good wishes are deserved.”

“Thank you. That’s kind of you to say so. I don’t think I know your name.” Georgie tugged her hand free. “I’m Georgie.”

“I know. I’m David.” He wiggled eyebrows that matched his silver hair. “David Neil at your service.” He winked and Georgie laughed at his audacity. “What a smile! My God I’m in love.” He held a palm over his heart and sighed lavishly.

“Something tells me you’re a lady killer.” Georgie poked him on the arm.

“Go home to your wife,” her boss ordered from behind Georgie, and she turned to see him shaking his head.

“Okay, I’m on my way.” David didn’t look too happy with the prospect. Reaching for Georgie’s hand he planted a soft kiss on her knuckle, murmuring, “Until we meet again, sweet child.” After slapping Steve on the back, he strode out.

“He’s harmless,” Steve said. “And incorrigible.”

Georgie decided it was time to call a cab. She’d proved she could be as genial as the next person. Her head ached after all the polite chitchat. If she still worked at Sophinia’s next year she’d find an excuse to opt out of the Christmas do. The guy she recently started dating had invited her to a disco. She seldom went out, and it would have been fun to go dancing with Gary.

Georgie watched as Steve’s parents said goodbye. His mother grazed his cheek with her lips, and his father took his hand. Bemused, Georgie thought of the hugs and kisses she and her sister exchanged constantly. Their parents might have left them penniless but they’d left a legacy of love. Sofia treated her son like a distant acquaintance.

That was probably why her boss was so stiff and cool. He'd obviously never been hugged. Georgie stifled an overwhelming desire to go to him and throw her arms about his neck. She smiled to herself as she imagined his face freezing with disdain at such impetuosity.

"Can we give you a lift?" She jumped when Simon appeared at her side, his arm about Sharon, the woman who had joined him for a cigarette outside. He made a performance of hanging onto her. Did the creep think it would upset Georgie?

"No thanks, I'll get a cab."

"Suit yourself." He said goodnight to Steve and left.

The caterers were packing up with Grace Fisher overseeing them. She bustled back and forth to the kitchen. Georgie had found her boss's housekeeper friendly earlier when she'd been stiff with boredom. Grace coped splendidly with organizing everything.

"Would it be all right if I ring for a cab?" Georgie asked.

Steve, keys in hand, was telling Grace, "I won't be long."

Marika arched her immaculate eyebrows and asked sarcastically, "No car, Georgie?"

"No, I'm saving up for one," Georgie claimed. "I like to walk, but it's not wise after dark."

"Go ahead." Steve gestured to the phone on the hall table. Marika hooked an arm through his, blatantly asserting her claim on him. "If you're gone when I get back, have a happy Christmas, Georgie." He gave her a small smile, already turning away; a hand at Marika's back to guide her through the door.

Georgie made her New Year's resolution then and there. If it was the last thing she did she'd get him to smile properly at her.

"Thanks boss, you too." Turning her back on them she ground her teeth. It was enough to make her ill watching that snaky creature maul him. Why did he put up with it? What a stupid question. She was probably hot stuff in bed.