



The Millionaire's Inexperienced Love-Slave (Ruthless Book 17)

By *Miranda Lee*

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But Sharni was not a one-night-stand kind of girl. Adrian was prepared to do anything to have her—but there was one problem: he was the spitting image of Sharni's late husband....

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Editorial Review

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Sharni was about to have lunch in a very trendy Sydney café when her dead husband walked in!

Her hands shook as they gripped the menu, her heart racing as she stared at Ray with shocked eyes.

Common sense finally kicked in, steadyng her thudding heartbeat and whirling head.

Of course it wasn't Ray. Just some man who looked like him.

No, that was an understatement. A huge one. This man didn't just *look* like Ray, he was the spitting image of him. If she hadn't personally identified her husband's lifeless body five years ago, Sharni might have imagined he'd somehow not been on that horrible train that fateful day.

My God, he even walked like Ray!

Sharni's stunned gaze slavishly followed the man as he was shown to a table by the window, not all that far from her own. She kept trying to find something different, something out of sync with her mental memory of the husband she'd loved, and lost.

There was nothing.

Maybe this man was a little taller. And dressed a little better. That rusty brown suede jacket he was wearing looked very expensive. So did his cream silk shirt and smart fawn trousers.

Other than that, everything was the same. The same body shape. The same face. The same hair, both in colour and style.

Ray had had the loveliest hair: thick and wavy, a rich brown with a hint of red. He'd worn it longish, well down onto his shirt collar. She'd loved running her hands through his hair. He'd loved it, too.

Ray's double had exactly the same hair.

Sharni's mouth dried as she waited for him to sit down, waited to see if he would scoop his hair back from his forehead the way Ray had done every time he sat down.

When he did, Sharni only just stopped herself from crying out.

What cruel trick of fate was this?

She'd been doing so well lately, finally feeling capable of moving on with her life. She was working again. Okay, only part-time, but it was better than sitting at home all day.

This trip to Sydney had been another huge step for her. When her sister had given her a weekend package holiday in Sydney for her thirtieth birthday a couple of months ago, Sharni had initially shrunk from the idea.

'I can't leave Mozart for a whole weekend, Janice,' she'd said straight away, even though she knew this was

just an excuse.

Admittedly, Mozart was not the easiest of dogs to mind. He still pined for Ray and could become snappy with other people. John, however—a local vet and Sharni's employer—had a way with the sad little terrier, and would happily mind him for Sharni.

Janice had seen through her excuse and worked on her quite relentlessly. So had Sharni's psychologist, a very kind lady who'd been treating her since she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress a year ago.

Finally, Sharni agreed to go.

Getting on that damned train yesterday had been difficult, but she'd managed, though she'd grabbed for her mobile the moment the train had moved away from the station, fearing a panic attack coming on. Janice had calmed her down with some sympathetic but sensible talking, and by the time the train had arrived in Sydney Sharni had felt a little like her old confident self. Confident enough, anyway, to have her hair done first thing this morning in the hotel beauty salon before hitting the shops to buy some new clothes. Just casual ones, but more expensive than what she usually bought.

Money wasn't a problem, Sharni hardly having touched the three-million-dollar compensation payment she'd received eighteen months ago.

When she'd walked into this café shortly after one, dressed in one of her new outfits, her spirit had been much more optimistic, and her stomach free from anxiety.

Now, suddenly, her whole world had tipped out of kilter again.

She couldn't stop staring at the handsome stranger with his heartbreakingly familiar features.

Sharni had read somewhere that everyone had a double in this world, but this was way beyond being a double. If she hadn't known better, she would have said this man was Ray's twin brother.

Her mouth fell open at this last thought. Maybe he *was!* Ray, after all, had been adopted, and had never found out the circumstances behind his birth, saying he didn't want to know.

It wasn't unheard of for twins to be separated at birth and adopted out to different families. Could that be the solution to the startling evidence before her eyes?

She had to find out.

Had to.

Adrian had spotted the attractive brunette through the glass front of the café before coming inside. Despite his having a penchant for attractive brunettes, her presence had nothing to do with his entering. Since moving into his luxury apartment in Bortelli Tower a month ago, Adrian had become a regular at the ground-floor café, partly because of its convenience but mostly because the food was great.

The brunette had looked up when he'd walked in. Looked up and looked right at him. Hard.

At another time, Adrian might have encouraged her by returning solid eye contact, instead of averting his own gaze and pretending he hadn't noticed her interest.

Today, however, he was not in the mood for female company. He was still smarting over what Felicity had

said to him last night.

'You should never have a real girlfriend,' she'd thrown at him after he'd been appallingly late for a dinner date. 'What you need is a mistress! Someone on tap who's just there for the sex. Someone you don't have to seriously care about, or consider. What *I* need is a man to love me with his whole heart and soul. The only thing you love, Adrian Palmer, is yourself, and your bloody buildings. I'm sick to death of waiting for you to ring me, or to show up. A good friend warned me about your reputation as a womanising workaholic, but I stupidly thought I could change you. I see now that I can't. So I'm out of here. Maybe one day you'll meet some girl who'll break *your* heart. I sure hope so.'

Being told he had a reputation as a womanising workaholic had shocked Adrian. So had the realisation that he'd hurt Felicity, whom he'd always thought was as career-orientated as he was. Obviously, she'd been more emotionally involved with him than he'd ever been with her.

He should have noticed, he supposed. But he hadn't.

He'd spent a sobering few hours last night, vowing to change his self-centred ways. Which was why he continued to ignore the brunette, despite his male ego being seriously stroked by the way her eyes followed him all the way across the room.

But when he sat down and scooped his hair back out of his own eyes, he caught a glimpse of her reflection in the window.

Wow, she wasn't just attractive. She was *very* attractive, with long glossy black hair framing a pretty face and big brown eyes, which remained flatteringly glued to him.

When he picked up the menu, Adrian couldn't help slanting a quick glance her way. Her eyes immediately dropped away, but not before he saw embarrassment in them.

Thank goodness she wasn't the bold type, he thought, otherwise he might be tempted to go over to her table and ask her to join him for lunch. Which didn't say much for his resolve to mend his womanising ways.

The brunette's action of getting up from her table and approaching his totally surprised Adrian.

'Um...excuse me,' she said, rather hesitantly.

He glanced up from where he'd been pretending to read the menu.

She was even prettier up close, with a heart-shaped face, clear skin, a sweet little turned-up nose and a very kissable mouth. Her figure wasn't half bad, either, shown to advantage in superbly tailored black trousers and a fitted pink jumper, which emphasised her full breasts and tiny waist.

'I'm sorry,' she went on, 'but I have a question which I simply must ask you. You'll probably think it very rude of me, but I...I need to know.'

'Know what?'

'Are you adopted, by any chance?'

Adrian blinked up at her. As a pick-up line, this was a highly original one and very effective. Far better than the old 'Have we met somewhere before?'

Maybe he'd misread her earlier. Maybe she *was* bold. But with enough womanly wiles to be subtle in pursuit of what she wanted.

That was one of the reasons he was drawn to brunettes. He'd always found them interesting. And more of a challenge.

Adrian was a man who liked a challenge.

'No, I'm definitely not,' he replied, and wondered what she'd do now.

She frowned, her expression bewildered.

'Are you absolutely sure? I mean... I don't want to cause trouble, but some parents don't tell their children they're adopted. Is there any chance at all that you could be?'

Adrian finally appreciated that she wasn't trying to pick him up. Her question was genuine, evidenced by the distress in her quite lovely brown eyes.

'I assure you that I am my parents' biological child, and I have photos to prove it. Besides,' he added, 'my father would never have kept something as important as that from me. He was a real stickler for honesty.'

'That's incredible, then,' she said. 'Truly incredible.'

'What is?' he asked, curious now.

She shook her head. 'No matter,' she muttered rather dispiritedly. 'I'm sorry for bothering you.'

'No, don't go,' he said when she began to turn away. There was a mystery here to solve.

Adrian loved mysteries almost as much as challenges.

'You can't leave me up in the air like this. I need to know why you thought I was adopted. Sit down and tell me.'

She glanced worriedly back at her table where she'd left her handbag, along with several shopping bags.

'Why don't you get your things and join me for lunch?' he suggested.

She stared back at him for a long moment. 'I'm sorry. I... I don't think I can do that.'

'Why not?'

Her eyes grew agitated, as did her hands, their wringing action bringing his attention to her wedding and engagement rings.

The realisation that she was married disappointed Adrian more than anything had in a long time.

'Because your husband wouldn't like it?' he said, nodding towards her left hand.

Mentioning her husband seemed to agitate her more.

'I... I don't have a husband any more,' she blurted out. 'I'm a widow.'

Adrian found it h...

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