

SO MUCH FOR TRUE LOVE

By Kimberly Gadette

CHAPTER ONE

NOTHING BUT THE BREAST

"Unbutton your blouse."

"Excuse me?"

"Ms. Copeland, I'm asking you to unbutton your blouse."

"Why?"

Dipping one manicured hand into a side drawer of her desk, Miss Olga produced a pair of thin white surgical gloves. Deftly snapping them on, she said, "I'll need to palpate your breasts...in order to determine their authenticity."

Right before New Year's, Georgie had confided to her cousin Teresa in one of their heart-to-heart phone chats, "Tee, I think I'm starting to worry. I'm turning thirty-five this year, and—"

"Yes, for the one hundred and thirty-fifth time, I know."

"And no more failure. This has got to be the year that I find my guy."

It wasn't that Georgie didn't date. On looks alone, she'd always had an easy time

attracting men.

Her deep blue eyes were flecked with tiny drops of gold, looking as if they continuously sparkled with great, good humor; her thirty-four-year old, physically fit, curvaceous body sported a healthy pair of breasts still victorious in their grapple with gravity; and although her lean legs were a little too long for her torso, she never heard any complaints.

But she'd never heard any marriage proposals, either.

And lately, a slightly desperate note had edged into her voice. God, she hated to hear unmarried women moaning about their advancing number of years versus the retreating number of men. *Worse than turning into my mother, do I have to turn into one of them?* Forcing a lighter tone, she continued, "So it seems to me, dear Tee, if I make an all-out effort to search every last fissure of this city, I can do it!"

"Fishers make lousy husbands. Their days are long, their clothing unattractive and can we talk about the smell?"

"You're impossible."

"What about the sex thing?"

"What about the sex thing?"

"Seriously, George, your overheated libido puts most rock stars and politicians to shame. You know you're going to have to hold back if you're looking for a husband."

"Why can't I have my beefcake and eat it, too?"

"Because you just can't. Even with all that female empowerment blather, it's still a

man's world. Ripping his clothes off before you know his name sends a wrong signal.

Trust me."

And so Georgie made a "How to Find True Love" list. She was always making lists. *Yeah, but a list for this? Pathetic.* For the umpteenth time, Georgie tried to puzzle it out. *What's wrong here? Perhaps I am too sexually assertive. Perhaps it's because the men have all been "too" something—too young, too old, too shallow, maybe too much in love with themselves. And maybe, just maybe, I've been a little too much in love with myself as well?* Annoyed, she started typing up a new plan of action—and caught herself banging on the keys. *And maybe I'm also just too damn aggressive.*

Teresa had a point. Georgie had probably scared a lot of men away without even knowing it. But that was about to change. She'd reign herself in, at least until they got to know her better. And she would cast a wide net. She'd try the personals, computer dating, upscale restaurant bars, concerts, clubs, and divorced-daddy baseball games. But at the top of the list: Miss Olga, matchmaker extraordinaire.

From what she'd read, she liked Miss Olga's business sense. Quality women would only have to be..."quality women," per Miss Olga's rigid parameters. The matchmaking fees would solely be paid for by the men.

By mailing in the excruciatingly-detailed, pre-screening questionnaire, she hoped to appeal to Miss Olga's expertise in matters of the heart. She'd been bombing out ever since her first movie date with a high school sophomore named Johnnie Fink, who didn't seem all that comfortable when Georgie took his hand and placed it on one of the two

pronounced bumps that were straining at the threads of her angora sweater. Maybe it was time to let Miss Olga make the choice for a change.

Georgie pulled up to the multi-storied, beige and boxy stucco house on a steep residential street north of the Sunset Strip. Rummaging through her purse, she pulled out the glossy ad that she'd clipped from one of the more uppity Los Angeles magazines for one last look. It read: "Miss Olga's Elite, Discreet Matchmaking for the Highly Discriminating." *I don't even see a name on the mailbox—this place is so discreet it's a secret from itself.*

Per the office's detailed instructions, she found the elevator located next to the carport. A spanking-new, gold BMW occupied one of the two spaces. An indication that business was good? That Miss Olga knew her stuff? She took the elevator up to the third floor, its older mechanism serenading her the entire way. *I don't often see an elevator in a private residence. Maybe Miss Olga is restricted to a wheelchair, poor dear.*

She pictured her potential benefactress—an excommunicated Russian aristocrat, torn from her homeland years ago, dripping in pre-Bolshevik jewels, now doing the only thing a woman of her means and class knew how to do.

Georgie realized she was projecting her own half-Russian, Jewish background onto a stranger, but without much family to call her own, she could hope for a kind of kinship, couldn't she?

The elevator doors opened to a waiting room of highly-polished, cherry colonial

furniture. How odd; not one samovar in sight.

"Georgie Copeland to see Miss Olga," she announced to an intercom built into the far wall.

After a moment, a woman's tinny voice replied, "Yes, Ms. Copeland, please have a seat. We'll be with you momentarily."

She sat on the least fragile of the Queen Anne chairs. Smoothing out her skirt to combat any wayward wrinkles, she heard her cousin's voice in her head. "I understand that the Whore-of-Babylon look is out this year," Teresa would hint, referring to Georgie's usually bright colors and high hemlines. *I think even Tee would be pleased with my wardrobe selection today.*

Wearing a sedate, navy wool skirt suit with an off-white silk blouse, Georgie hoped she'd achieved the picture of classy propriety. *But 'classy' doesn't entail breaking out in a sweat, does it?* She fidgeted in her seat. The high collar of the suit jacket scratched her neck. Her waistband dug into her flesh. In the warmth of the overheated anteroom, the weight of the wool suit against her chest suddenly seemed stifling. *If I don't peel off this jacket soon, I'm going to start smelling like a camel.*

"Miss Copeland? If you'll follow me?"

A rail-thin, tall, blonde woman, who also looked to be in her mid-thirties, ushered her into a spacious inner office, which contained more of the same colonial furniture. She wore a conservative, black wool dress and a single-strand pearl necklace. Her hair was straight and short, her eyes humorless, her nose almost perfect except for a little

indentation on the tip.

The bones of her face were so sharp, they looked like they hurt.

Georgie assumed she was an assistant, until the woman circled around the large cherrywood desk and sat, gracefully dipping down into the high-backed, executive chair, as if she were balancing a basket of eggs on her head.

"Please," she said, indicating with a rolling gesture of her hand that Georgie should do the same.

Where was Miss Olga?

The pale blonde glanced down at a file, then looked up to stare at, or rather through, Georgie.

As if I'm day-old produce.

"It says here that you have dark hair."

"Yes, it's chestnut. But I recently touched it up with a few blond streaks. You know, the New Year and all?"

From the sour look on her face, Georgie realized that no, she didn't know.

"I'll need to see your driver's license to ascertain your age."

"I believe you have a photocopy in front of you," said Georgie, aware of her own icy tone. Who is this officious twit?

"Ah yes, I see it here..."

"...and may I ask your name?"

The woman looked surprised. "I'm Miss Olga."

The onion domes of Russia's orthodox churches suddenly came crashing down.

What, no toasts to the Motherland with the purest Russian vodka? No late night strumming on the balalaika of lighthearted tunes from the Ukraine? No inside scoops on Anastasia? And even worse...no adoptive matriarch to press me to her breast?

But hell, since she was here already, maybe it would be okay.

And that's when the surgical gloves came out.

Involuntarily clutching her blouse, Georgie sprang to her feet. "What kind of business is this?"

Miss Olga looked appalled at her outburst. "Only the best of its kind in all of Los Angeles. We ensure that our women meet the highest standards of class, intelligence and beauty. Our male clientele knows that when they order an escort for the evening, she will—"

"Did you just say 'escort'?"

Miss Olga nodded. "Ms. Copeland, what did you think?"

Georgie grabbed the folded ad out of her purse and tossed it down on the desk in front of her interrogator. "It says 'matchmaking'...as in long-term relationships? Husbands?"

For the first time since the start of the interview, Miss Olga's porcelain skin seemed to move with some animation and with an amused look in her eye, the tip of her nose wrinkled. Georgie assumed that what she might be witnessing could be considered

laughter.

"We're an escort service, Ms. Copeland. Given your college education, as well as the 20/20 vision that you claim you possess on your questionnaire, one would think you might have been able to read between the lines."

I'm an idiot. And this Olga creature is right. If I weren't so desperate to believe that I had found some magic answer to my loneliness, of course I would have figured it out.

Embarrassed, Georgie struck back. "So this is nothing but an upscale whorehouse?"

Miss Olga graciously rose, seemingly unfazed, the basket of eggs still intact. Removing her gloves, she said, "I believe our interview is over."

Georgie put her hands on the desk and leaned toward her. "Come on, just between you and me, haven't you ever turned a trick or two yourself? I'm sure it could happen, what with too many girls suddenly out sick, or an unexpected Christmas rush ... or is that rash?"

Miss Olga pivoted on her classic Prada heel, then marched to the waiting room.

Following her out, Georgie called up a mental picture of her "How to Find True Love" list. *What's the next item on the list? Divorced-daddy baseball games? Whatever. After all, it's only January...I've got the whole damn year ahead of me.*

They approached the elevator.

Looking straight ahead, as if Georgie were not worthy of her gaze, Miss Olga

spoke. "Think before you judge, Ms. Copeland. When a man pays for your dinner and your entertainment, and brings you lavish gifts, which I assume you readily accept, you're doing the same thing we do, minus the middle man." Pushing the "down" button, her manicured finger did a little flourish in triumph.

In the glare of the fluorescent light directly overhead, Miss Olga's porcelain face looked like a mask. Plastic. Phony. As perfectly polished as the furniture. And perfectly suited to the business of selling false affection.

Raising her voice to be heard over the approaching elevator creaking up from a lower level, Georgie said, "Just so I'm clear, what you're stating is that the concept of unselfish love is bogus, that it's all just a matter of trade?"

"Exactly."

"Quid pro quo? Tit for tat?"

The car had come. Miss Olga looked relieved once Georgie stepped inside. "Yes, Ms. Copeland."

Waiting for the elevator doors to close, Georgie shot back, "Then call me foolish, but when I find love, there will be plenty of tit. No strings, no silicone, no charge. And with absolutely no demand for tat!"

She threw off her wool suit jacket and plopped down on the driver's seat, no longer concerned about any wrinkles in her skirt. She tore away from the curb, and sped down the hillside, forcing herself to slow down after she almost ran a stop sign. *You're making too much of this. Come on, it's a great story.*

Anticipating the fun she'd have relating it all to Tee, she grinned. Out loud she said, "On second thought, I probably was a tad abrupt. By the way the tip of her nose wrinkled, I think Miss Olga may have liked me. Shame, I just wasted a perfectly good opportunity to meet not one, but many men of my dreams. I'm sure there's worse ways to sell my soul for love. Aren't there?"