

A Perfect Gentleman

I'm really going to miss this guy. Sarah's body gave an involuntary jerk at the thought. She caught her breath sharply, quickly stifling her response.

She glanced over at Frank. Had he noticed her little startle movement? No, he was calm and focused as always. His hands rested on the steering wheel, his grip light but firm. Softly, he hummed along with the radio, a tiny smile gentling the weathered lines of his face. Sarah admired the way he drove just as she admired so many things about him. He projected an air of total confidence, as he navigated Cabrillo National Monument's winding road leading to the cliffs above the tide pools. Sarah knew that she could relax and leave the driving to him. Whether he was behind the wheel of a car or waltzing on a dance floor, Frank was always graceful and poised.

Sarah studied Frank's hands as he gently guided the steering wheel. His hands were unusually beautiful for a man. Thinking of those hands, strong yet so gentle, moving across her naked body made her tingle with remembered pleasure. He was the best lover she'd had so far, considerate, exciting, and always a delight. She would definitely miss that. What were these feelings about? None of the other guys triggered any regrets at all. When it was time for them to go--poof--they were gone. Only the money she skillfully moved from their bank accounts into her own remained.

But, Frank was different. He was such a nice guy. A perfect gentleman, really. His air of class, coupled with his gracious behavior had drawn her to him from the beginning. Oh, his looks were amazing, certainly. What a cliché to call him tall, dark and handsome, but that's exactly what he was. For a guy in his fifties, he kept himself trim and fit. And his looks were only part of the attraction. It was his courtly demeanor that really hooked her. Frank is the kind of man who opens doors, carries a woman's packages, and gently takes her arm when they cross the street. Sarah loved the feeling of being cherished and protected when she was with him. She had never experienced anything like it before. Would she ever find someone like him again?

Dating websites were tricky because you never could be sure of just what you were going to get. Whether you used one of the pricy sites or the sometimes cheesy, free meet-up sites, the problem was always the same. Guys would say anything to sound good, but the reality of meeting them was totally different. Sarah remembered one man

who told her he looked like George Clooney. What a let down that was. *If he looks like George Clooney, I'm Kate Middleton*, Sarah thought. The fact that he lied about looking like a movie star was annoying, but the worst thing was that it was clear that he had no money. What a colossal waste of time. He would have been laughable if he wasn't so pathetic. Sarah could write a book about false advertising and bad dates.

But Frank wouldn't even rate a foot-note in any book about bad dates. With him, even the usually awkward first meeting was special. Sarah smiled as she remembered that night. She knew right away that his guy was different. He was so well dressed that she immediately knew he had lots of money. That suit didn't come off the rack at The Men's Warehouse. No, custom tailored would be her guess. Were those Bruno Magli boots he was wearing? Those shoes start about two-hundred dollars but Sarah bet he wasn't wearing bottom of the line. This guy was well-heeled in more ways than one.

Frank could have bragged that *he* looked like George Clooney. He almost did resemble Clooney, with his hunky, dark good looks. But he would never call attention to himself that way. That was another thing that Sarah liked about him. He was soft-spoken and modest. He didn't put on any airs in spite of the fact that he was gorgeous and well-mannered.

Sarah always was a sucker for any man who treated her like a lady. Frank dipped his broad shoulders in a tiny bow as he reached to shake her hand but he didn't try to touch her after that. There was no under the table thigh-groping, no smarmy innuendos or suggestive smirks as they shared the requisite getting-acquainted small talk. He pulled out her chair in the restaurant and waited until she was seated before he took his place. He was completely poised and polished as he gave their order to the waiter. Sarah was totally impressed with Frank's table manners. Clearly, he came from a classy background. He knew what a napkin was for and had no problem figuring out the difference between a salad and dinner fork. Why, he even stood when she left the table to use the restroom and got to his feet again when she returned. Who wouldn't enjoy royal treatment like that? Sarah hadn't a clue about Frank's educational background, but if they gave out degrees in chivalry, she figured Frank had a Ph.D.

He was a bit embarrassed, he said, about falling for her so fast. Their whirlwind courtship was out of character for him but he was smitten, He simply could not imagine life without her.

That part was always so easy. Sarah never had any trouble getting men to fall for her. Growing up in foster homes was rough, until she learned the power she held with her budding sexuality. Once she saw how easily she could manipulate men, life got so much better.

And her looks didn't hurt either. Oh sure, Sarah kept her petite, five-foot four frame in great shape physically, watching her weight like her life depended on it. Which in a way, it did. If the scale showed even a one-pound gain, she was at the gym working out furiously. Or she'd be in the bathroom making sure that the high calorie dinners she consumed never remained in her system long enough to appear on her hips. Regular trips to the stylist kept her long blond locks shiny and alluring, and she learned to be a total whiz with the make-up brush. Her looks were her job security and she had no intention of letting herself go.

By now, Sarah had honed the ability to handle men to such a fine art that she quickly gained the upper hand in any relationship. She could figure out what men wanted before they knew it themselves. Did a man want a prim, proper, little lady? No problem, she could be that. Did he want a hot, sexy number? She could be that too, or anything in-between as well. Men were easy, really. And when they fell in love with her, she always claimed to be swept off her feet.

In reality, she was the one doing the sweeping, but they never caught on to that. Men always fell right into idea of sharing their financial information with her. Frank was the only one who hesitated. Sarah knew how to be very persuasive and eventually, she wore him down. Then, Frank said that he wanted to take good care of her, so he suggested that she give him the PIN for her accounts. "I'll probably never use it," he said. "But just in case something happens to you and I need quick access to funds for your medical care, I'm prepared." And he suggested that they both take out insurance policies to protect each other in the unlikely event of an accident. None of the other men had thought of that.

None of the others had lasted this long. She knew she was delaying the inevitable just because she adored being treated like a fragile piece of fine china. Frank

was everything a woman could dream of in a man. In addition to being handsome and refined, he was such a sweet, caring guy. No, she would never find anyone like him again.

But, her bank balance was getting low and her charge cards were maxed out. She didn't have the energy to keep up the charade much longer. San Diego was getting to be a drag anyway. The humidity really messed with her hair.

Yesterday, when they took a sunset drive through Cabrillo National Monument, Sarah had found her inspiration. Their stay was limited because the park was ready to close, but she'd seen enough to recognize the opportunity to be found in those craggy, rock strewn cliffs and the signs cautioning visitors about their instability. How easy it would be, she thought, to get Frank to retrieve a carelessly dropped item. Why, he was such a gentleman, he'd automatically leap to pick up something for her. And, if she could get to the park early and remove the danger sign, he wouldn't realize how unstable the cliffs were until it was too late.

So, the next morning, Sarah took advantage of Frank's coffee and newspaper routine and suited up in her exercise clothes.

"My weight is creeping up," she said. "I guess I'm paying a price for those gourmet dinners you've been fixing. Time to ramp up my exercise routine. I'm off to the gym. You finish that pot of coffee and I'll be back before you get the dishwasher loaded."

Sarah planted a quick kiss on his cheek, grabbed her car keys and headed out. When she got home, breathless from her activity, she proposed that they pack a lunch for an excursion to the park. They could follow the trail from the cliffs down to the Cabrillo tide pools. It would be great fun to see what excitement the pools held on a cool, cloudy day like today.

Frank agreed that would be lovely. While Sarah showered and changed her clothes, he volunteered to run down to the French bakery for some croissants. Then he'd hit the deli for some of that gourmet cheese they loved, and stop at the farmers market for fresh fruit. Croissants. Fresh fruit. Cheese. How thoughtful. What a nice guy!

The day was overcast, and a storm was predicted for later that afternoon. But there should be enough time for a walk and a nice lunch before bad weather rolled in. The couple had no trouble finding a parking spot in the nearly empty lot at the head of the

trail. Frank pointed out how nice it was that the park was almost deserted and they had it all to themselves. Romantic, he called it.

Sarah eyed Frank's broad shouldered, blue-jean clad figure as he lead the way from the parking lot to the trail entry. *Nice butt*, she thought. *Yes, I'm certainly going to miss this guy. Too bad, but it has to be done.*

"Come on, slow poke," Frank teased, looking back at her. "We've got a hot lunch date with some tide pools and we don't want to be late."

Sarah noticed that he was wearing his hiking boots. Darn. She wished she'd had the presence of mind to wear studier footwear. Her soft soled shoes were slippery on the path. *Oh well, I'll just have to be extra careful. This shouldn't take very long*, she thought.

They saw no one on the trail as they walked. A sharp wind blowing off the ocean brought tears to Sarah's eyes as they followed the path. *Damn, its cold*, she thought. Then she remembered that this weather was probably keeping other visitors away, so that was a good thing.

It was much colder now than it had been earlier this morning when she'd come here to hide that sign. She blinked her watery eyes, trying to see the path. They were almost at the spot where she planned to pretend to slip a bit and drop the picnic bag. The cliffs were just a couple of yards away. She could even give him a push if she needed to help things along.

But something looked different, and she was disoriented. Where was the spot she had selected? Here? Or was it up ahead? She couldn't tell.

Sarah was trying to puzzle out where she was when Frank reached out to take her in his arms. He pulled her toward him, buried his face in her hair and sighed.

"Of all of them you've been my favorite," he said. "I wish it could be different."

What? She was still trying to understand when he spun her around and gave her a powerful shove. She lost her balance and landed with a bone-jarring thud on her backside. The picnic bag she was carrying flew down the slope and disappeared over the edge of the cliff. Frank's foot grazed her shoulder and she felt him give her a powerful shove. She began slipping down the sandy, rock-strewn slope. There were shrubs lining the path but her hands were numb from the cold and she couldn't get a purchase. Then,

the loose rocks on the cliff began to move as she slid helplessly toward the edge. The whole side of the cliff was giving way, taking her with it.

One of the last things she saw as she slid over the edge was the warning sign tucked into a crevice behind a scraggly bush.

The last thing she saw was Frank's courtly little bow as he mouthed: "Terribly sorry, my dear."