

A close-up, artistic photograph of a woman's eye, looking downwards. The eye is framed by long, dark eyelashes. The overall color palette is soft and warm, dominated by shades of pink, red, and light beige, creating a dreamy and intimate atmosphere. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the eye.

Rachel's Dilemma

Adeline Bolton

Rachel meets Al, the man of her dreams, at a play in the Abbey Theatre and, after a whirlwind romance, is whisked away from Dublin to a new and radically different life in Boston. Suddenly Rachel has everything she could ever want: a perfectly attentive and loving husband, a big, well-appointed house in the city, with a retinue of servants, a holiday home by the sea, the best of clothes and jewellery. The news of a baby on the way provides the icing on the cake.

But joy turns to heartbreak with the discovery of a condition that will severely afflict the child and Rachel is thrown into a sea of uncertainty. What should Rachel do? How will Al react to the terrible news? Where can she turn for support in this troubled time?

Difficult decisions and unexpected reactions cast Rachel on a journey of self-discovery that will test her emotions and resources to their very limit and illuminate the things in life that really matter.

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by Adeline Bolton

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In memory of my sister,
Rose

Books by Adeline Bolton

ROMANCE

Rachel's Dilemma

MURDER MYSTERY

A Killing Reprisal

A Deadly Greed

www.adelinebolton.com

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RACHEL'S DILEMMA

Chapter One

Rachel smoothed an imaginary crease from the ivory silk of 'The Dress'. It looked fabulous on.

"I can see myself walking down the aisle in this."

Irene looked at her. "It's great on, but you'd look great in a sack," she said, enviously.

Monica, the woman assigned to assist them in The Wedding Boutique, said, "She's right. Everything looks good on you; you've a great figure, but that one looks exceptional with your dark hair."

"For God's sake hurry up now and make up your mind."

"I have!"

"About time, too," grumbled Irene, good-naturedly.

"Wait until you're getting married, Irene Boyle. I'll remind you of this."

The Grecian style made her look tall and willowy and, she hoped, sexy. Although against Al's six foot four frame she'd probably still look petite. The soft ivory silk clung in all the right places; made her lightly tanned skin glow. The ivory brought out the golden highlights in her long chestnut-coloured hair. Rachel couldn't help preening a little as she looked in the mirror.

Fortunately, she'd made the appointment during the week for today, and was glad she did; it took much longer than she had anticipated to decide on a dress.

Irene snapped her fingers under Rachel's nose. "Stop day-dreaming. Decide."

"Sorry, I was thinking about Al."

"God! Rachel McDonald, falling in love has made you sappy."

Rachel sighed before pretending to faint. "I know I know! But Al's so fantastic I can't believe my luck."

Irene laughed.

Matronly Monica smiled at the girls' excitement. "Would you like to try on anything else?"

“No, thanks. I’ve decided on this one.” Rachel looked at her reflection in the full length mirror, turned sideways again to see the back view.

“Let’s see what your hair would look like piled on top, like this.” Irene took hair pins from her bag and gathered Rachel’s hair at the crown. The assistant picked up a spray of ivory silk roses and clipped them at the front before tugging the flowers down the left side of her head, nearly touching her ear. The hairstyle suited the dress. The flowers were identical to the roses that held the train to the dress at the waist.

“You look gorgeous, Rach. Cool and ethereal, if you know what I mean.”

“I hope I look sexy. Who cares about cool.” Rachel turned to Monica. “Have you any bridesmaid dresses?”

“We have two dresses that blend with this dress.” She took two in the palest shade of apple green from the rail and held one of them up to Irene. They were the same Grecian style as the wedding dress minus the train. “Are you one of the bridesmaids?” she asked, looking at Irene.

“Yes.”

“Try it, Irene. I bet it’ll look fab on,” Rachel urged.

The colour was wonderful with Irene’s blonde hair and fair skin and fitted perfectly.

Monica smiled. “You’d think the dresses were designed with you both in mind.”

“Yes, wouldn’t you,” agreed Rachel. Her eyes met Irene’s in the mirror. “Are you happy with the green or would you like to try something else?”

“No. This is terrific. But will Caroline be happy wearing green?”

“Well, you know Caroline; it won’t be right no matter what we buy.”

“I suppose.”

“Anyway, what can we do when she’s in Brussels? Caroline is slightly heavier than us, though. The dress might need letting out.” Rachel turned to the assistant. “Caroline, my sister, won’t be flying in until Sunday and the wedding is Wednesday, will that give you enough time for alterations?”

“Tell her to come in early Monday morning for a fitting and we’ll have it ready in the afternoon.”

“Can you believe, Rach, this time next week you’ll be Mrs Al Lynskey?”

“No. I keep pinching myself to make sure I’m not dreaming.” At Monica’s interested gaze, Rachel elaborated, “We met six months ago and I feel I’ve been on a roller-coaster ever since.” As an afterthought, she added, “He’s American. From Boston.”

Monica eyes rounded. “Are you going to live in Boston?”

“Oh, yes. I’m really looking forward to it. It’s a lovely city.”

Irene snorted. “The way you’ve been carrying on since you met him, anywhere would be lovely! You were only there for a week,” she reminded her.

Good old Irene. She always brought her back to earth. “Just wait until you fall in love, Irene. I mean really in L-O-V-E. I’m not just talking sex here.”

“For God’s sake, Rach, get a grip.”

Rachel smiled before asking, “By the way, how much are they?”

She gasped when told the price. But she reminded herself it was for three designer dresses, not just one. Her mother and father were paying for the wedding, clothes and all. They’d insisted, but they weren’t wealthy. Was she overspending? Suddenly a picture of Al’s mocking black eyes and handsome face flashed into her mind. She threw caution to the wind.

“Will you take a cheque?” Her father had given her a signed cheque. All she had to do was fill in the amount.

“Of course.”

They took the beautiful dresses off reluctantly and slipped their jeans and T-shirts back on.

Irene whispered while they were doing so, “You’ll bankrupt your parents.”

“I know. Daddy will have a heart attack.”

She watched as Monica put the wedding dress, which was on a silk padded hanger, into a white dress bag. Removing the floral spray from her hair, she handed it to Monica. “I’ll take this also.” She took out the pins and combed her hair.

“If you’d gone ahead and married in the registry office as originally planned, you could have got away with your new suit.”

“Yes, but I’m glad now we changed our minds.”

“But to wait until the last minute...”

“We’d have missed out on all this fun if we hadn’t.”

“You were lucky Father Brian was free,” Irene remarked, drily.

Monica asked, “Would you like us to deliver the dresses?”

“No, we’ll take them. The car is parked on Stephen’s Green. Thanks for all your help.”

“Congratulations again,” Monica said, smiling. “I hope you’ve a wonderful wedding day.”

“What time is it?” asked Irene as they walked into Grafton Street.

“Nearly five. Why?”

“Let’s go for a drink.”

“Oh, Irene, let’s look at shoes first, please, please?”

“The shops will be closing shortly, Rach. Can’t you come in on Monday with Caroline? We’ve been out all day looking at wedding dresses. I need a drink.”

“Just try one or two shops with me first. Tell you what,” she coaxed. “We’ll go to Fogarty’s in Duke Street afterwards. OK?”

Irene relented. “OK, but I’m definitely only going into one or two. When you start trying on shoes you forget everything else.”

“I won’t, promise.”

“Having the dresses with us is going to be awkward, Rach. Give me your car keys and I’ll put them in the boot. You go into the Shoe Store. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

They parted at the shop door. Rachel looked at the display. She knew exactly what she wanted, but she didn’t see anything even remotely like what she had in mind.

As the trendy assistant with the spikey hair finished with a customer, she nabbed him and asked, “Would you have anything suitable for a wedding in white or ivory.

“You’re the bride?”

“Yes.”

“Congratulations,” he said. His grin turned to a frown. “I must tell you most of our summer stock has already sold out. By August we’re selling autumn colours.”

“But I need white!”

“What size are you?”

“Five and a half.”

His frown cleared. “Hang on a second.”

“I’m in a hurry,” she called after his retreating back.

Rachel waited impatiently; time was running out. She didn’t want to delay if they hadn’t anything suitable, wanted to get to the next shop. The fact that white was a summer colour hadn’t occurred to her. What would she do if she couldn’t find suitable shoes? These were issues she hadn’t thought about when they’d decided to switch to a church wedding.

The trendy young guy came back a few minutes later with two boxes in his hands. He took out a white shoe. Rachel didn’t even bother trying it on. It definitely wasn’t what she wanted. He extracted a shoe from the second box before saying, “These are more evening shoes but you might get away with them.”

Rachel stared at them. A pale gold, open toed and heeled, with a narrow tee bar. She tried them on; walked around the shop in them. Gold wouldn’t have occurred to her, but now that she thought about it, white might not look good with the deep ivory of the dress. She was sorry now she hadn’t brought the dresses in with her.

“What do you think?” she asked when Irene entered the shop.

“They look classy.”

“But will they go with the dress?”

“Don’t know.”

“Would you mind bringing the dress back, Irene, please, please?”

“Okay, but that’s two drinks you owe me,” she said, winking at the assistant.

In the end, Rachel asked him to put the gold pair aside until Monday. There was a doubt in her mind as to whether they were quite the thing. She also remembered the gold shoes she’d bought earlier in the year to go with the black slinky dress she loved. Out in the street, she mentioned them to Irene.

“I’d forgotten you had them, Rach. If you’re going to wear gold, they’ll be perfect. They cost the earth, too,” she said as if that clinched the matter. “Come on, let’s go for that drink.”

They grabbed a small table in the corner of Fogarty’s, lucky to find one free.

Sipping a gin and tonic a few minutes later, Irene asked, “Is Seamus coming over for the wedding?”

“He has to. He promised Al he’d be groomsman.” She looked her friend in the eye. “You’re not still interested in my brother, are you?”

“Of course not! When is he arriving?”

“Not until Tuesday. But that’s not a problem. Daddy has already ordered their morning suits from the hire company.”

“So everything is more or less under control?”

“Except for shoes; I’ll have to check out the gold pair when we get home.”

“You’ll have tons of time on Monday if they’re not okay. I’ll shop for mine in my lunch hour. Pity I have to work next week. The old stick-in-the-mud thought bad enough giving me Wednesday off; he’d have a fit if I asked for the week.”

The bar was filling rapidly. Two stools they had shoved under the table were snapped up within minutes of their arrival.

“There’s an interesting crowd in this evening. Pity I promised Al I’d be home for his phone call.”

“You could ring your mother and ask her to take a message.”

Two attractive men came in just then. They stopped at the bar opposite their table and eyed them. A few minutes later, they walked over.

“May we join you?” one of them asked.

Rachel kicked Irene under the table to see if she was interested. Irene didn’t respond.

She smiled. “Sorry, but we’re going shortly.”

The taller of the two looked regretfully at his friend. “We’re out of luck, old chap,” he said, his accent unmistakably English.

Irene whispered when they were out of earshot. “Pity, we could’ve scored!” After a minute, she continued, “What time is he ringing?”

“Al? Eight.”

“Have you booked your facial?”

She nodded. “Anne is giving me the works Tuesday morning; eyebrow trim, leg wax, manicure, pedicure, a body massage.”

Irene whistled. “That’ll cost a bundle.”

“I know, I know! But I want to look perfect for my wedding day.”

“Ah well, it’s not every day you get married.”

Rachel held up her empty glass. “Do you want another?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll just have a tonic. I don’t want to be over the limit. I’m driving, don’t forget.” She caught the barman’s eye and ordered two tonics and one gin.

She stopped her Nissan outside the Templeville Road house, got out and patted it affectionately. She’d bought it in January after Bradley Assessors promoted her to senior administrator.

“What are you going to do with the car, Rach, after the wedding?”

“Daddy is going to sell it for me.”

She opened the boot and they took out the dresses.

“Is that you, Rachel?” a voice called from the sitting room when she entered the house.

“Yes, Mum.”

They went upstairs to her bedroom at the back of the house and hung the bags on the outside of the wardrobe.

Her mother walked in a few minutes later and eyed them. “You got a dress?”

“Dresses. Oh, Mum, wait until you see them! Go out and we’ll try them on for you.”

Her mother smiled at their excitement, but did what she was asked. Rachel eased the dress over her head, then took the gold shoes out of her wardrobe and slipped them on. Irene helped her fix the train before putting her own dress on.

“You can come in now, Mum.”

“Ah!” was all her mother could say for a moment. Tears sprang to her eyes. “Girls, you look beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. Aren’t you glad now you decided on a church wedding?”

Rachel nodded. "I'll go down and show Daddy. I hope he doesn't have a heart attack when he hears the price."

"Why? What did you spend?"

Rachel told her.

"What! The reception isn't costing that much."

"You don't mean that, Mum, do you?"

"I'm joking, darling," her mother said, quickly. "They're worth every penny." She turned to go. "Your dinner is in the oven, girls. Go down and eat it before it dries up."

"Thanks, Auntie Pam." Even though they weren't related, Irene had been calling Rachel's parents aunt and uncle since she was a toddler.

They had just finished eating when Al rang.

"Hold on, I'll take it upstairs." Rachel said, and fled to her bedroom.

"Missing me?" The husky question was like a caress over the line.

"Of course."

"Were you sad saying goodbye to your colleagues yesterday?"

"Yes and no, if you know what I mean."

"Explain."

"Sad because I'll miss the crowd. We had drinks in the office after work and they presented me with a Waterford Crystal bowl."

"Nice." Al paused before asking, "Where are you now?"

"In my bedroom."

"You're not in bed?"

"No. It's only eight-thirty."

"You never showed me your bedroom. Describe."

"The family jokingly call it the blue room because just about everything in it is blue. The bed has a blue satin throw, blue sheets and piles of blue, frilly, satin pillows. Even the walls are blue."

"Stop it! You're turning me on."

Rachel laughed. "You did ask."

"I wish I hadn't."

"Why?"

"I'd love to lie on your blue, frilly, satin pillows with you and make love all night."

"Mmm, sounds terrific!"

“Wait until I get my hands on you, Rachel McDonald,” he warned.

“I’m looking forward to it, Al Lynskey.”

“Did you buy a gown?”

That was one of the things she loved about Al. He was interested in everything she did. However, she refused to describe the dress. “You’ll have to wait patiently until our wedding day.”

“Is it sexy?”

“Demure,” she teased.

“Demure! What the hell is that? What happened to sexy?”

“Al Lynskey, you’ve only got one thing on your mind.”

He roared laughing. “Honey, there isn’t anything better, believe me.”

She asked him a question she had meant to ask him before, “Al, how did your first wife die? You’ve never talked about her.”

“In a car crash. Louisa and I sort of drifted into marriage. There was none of the ‘I want to be with you and only you’ about our relationship. She was pregnant with Charley when I noticed she was drinking heavily. One snowy December evening, when Charley was nearly one, Louisa was driving home alone and crashed the car. She was killed instantly. Afterwards, I learned she was drunk.”

They talked for nearly an hour.

When she hung up, Rachel opened the bedroom door and called, “Irene?” She ran down the stairs, found her in the kitchen helping her mother clear the table. “Do you want to go for a drink?”

“Yes, but can I borrow one of your tops? You know the cream and blue one?”

“Sure. Come up to my room and you can shower and change.”

“Save me going home.”

“I’ll leave the car, we can taxi it home.”

They were nearly ready to go out when there was a knock on the bedroom door. Her father had a tray with two gin and tonics on it.

“Thought you two girls might like a drink while you chatted.”

Her father looked cheerful. He mustn’t have minded the cost.

“Thanks, Uncle Derek.”

“We’re going out now, Rachel. Don’t forget to lock up and put the alarm on if you go out.”

Rachel grinned. He said the same thing every time he went out, even if it was only for an hour.

Most of the usual Saturday night crowd were already there when they got to Burke's. They started to hum the wedding march as the girls walked in.

"Stop it," hissed Rachel as she sat down between her old school friends, Breege and Rosaleen. Irene sat on the other side of Rosaleen.

"Well, did you get it?" asked Breege eagerly. "Come on, tell all. We're dying to hear."

"What are you having, girls? Gins?" interrupted Paul. He'd been talking to Clive and Mark when they entered.

"I only want a shandy," said Rachel. "I've already had two. I want to take it easy tonight." She turned to Breege when Paul went to the bar. "We found the most divine dresses, wait until you see them." She launched into a detailed description.

Paul returned and handed them their drinks before asking, "Tell me, Rachel, how did you manage to snare such a rich bloke?"

"Snare!" she cried, indignantly. "He moved on me. And money has nothing to do with it."

"Bull," Paul said, rudely. "I bet his money had plenty to do with it."

"We're not all money mad, Paul Allen."

"Hey, lighten up, Rachel, I was only joking."

My foot you were, she thought angrily. There was a cruel streak in Paul Allen which she found repulsive. She'd caught him pinching Breege once and knew he'd hurt her. Rachel shook with rage every time she thought about it. However, Breege liked him and he had to be tolerated. But there was an air of begrudgery about him which was awful.

Rosaleen asked, "What did the staff give you, Rachel?"

"A Waterford Crystal bowl. They're sending it on to Boston."

"Oh, gorgeous, I love Waterford crystal."

"Are the presents piling in?" asked Breege.

Rachel laughed. "They are and a lot of cash as well."

Breege looked at Paul. "Wouldn't mind getting married myself."

Paul ignored her. "Who's for Harcourt Street?"

Rachel's Dilemma

Chapter Two

It was after midnight. This was her wedding day. Her wedding day!

The windows were wide open and she could see the night sky with its full moon and stars. She imagined Al lying beside her, his clean masculine scent drifting to her nostrils. Was he worth the sacrifice of family and home? His black eyes floated before her and she smiled. Yes, he was. And no matter who she married, it would be a wrench leaving home anyway. It was inevitable. She should have gone into an apartment like Irene and sampled living on her own for a while, but she'd been too lazy and besides, she loved her parents and enjoyed home life.

Rachel slipped off the bed and went to the window. Nothing stirred, no sound, not even a cat's meow. The walled-in garden below was bathed in moonlight. The yellow and crimson roses made her think of her mother, who loved gardening. Half of the right side of the garden was paved with terracotta slabs and was cordoned off by a green trellis covered in creeping vines and her mother's roses. The green patio furniture was now neatly stacked. They'd had dinner there earlier with Caroline, who had arrived on Sunday. She had entertained them with the Brussels' gossip and juicy bits about the crowd she went around with. Caroline had a sharp humour, which could be downright nasty at times. She could still see the appalled expression on Caroline's face when she saw the green bridesmaid dress.

But, to be fair, all she said was, "God!"

Rachel had hidden a smile, pretending not to notice. She wasn't giving Caroline an inch. If she did, they'd be racing around looking for something else, and if she knew her sister, something totally unsuitable. Caroline could wear the most garish clothes at times.

She left the window and went back to bed; lay down with her hands under her head. Her heartbeat quickened as she thought about Al, and their first meeting at the Abbey Theatre six months ago.



Irene hadn't wanted to go to the theatre that night, but Rachel had persuaded her. When they got up to go to the bar during the interval, Rachel's eyes met the admiring stare of an extremely good-looking man. She hurried after Irene. While they were waiting for their drinks, Rachel was about to tell Irene about the stranger when a voice asked, "What would you like to drink?"

He was American.

"We've already ordered," Rachel said.

He flashed a smile. "Why don't you both join me?"

Irene heard the exchange as she picked up the drinks and handed one to Rachel. Her eyes darted from one to the other. "Rach, you haven't introduced me," she said, miffed at being overlooked.

"I can't because I don't know his name."

His right hand shot out and gripped Rachel's before she finished speaking. "It's Al Lynskey. And yours is?"

"Rachel McDonald, my friend, Irene Boyle." She had to pull her hand free.

"How did you do that?"

"What?" asked Irene, smiling. She could feel the air crackle between them, she told Rachel the next day.

"Get your drinks so quickly." His black eyes danced, the dark hair shone, his beautiful teeth gleamed whitely.

He shepherded them into a corner once he had his glass of beer. "You like the theatre?" Again the question was directed at Rachel.

Her eyes lit up with enthusiasm. "Oh yes. I've always loved it; and this is my favourite play."

"Mine, too."

Rachel was astonished. "I wouldn't have thought this particular O'Casey play would have appealed to an American?"

"I've a friend who's a playwright and he talks about O'Casey a lot. I'll tell Jack I visited the Abbey when I get home." Just then the bell went and they drained their glasses. "See you later."

When he was out of earshot, Irene exclaimed, "What a hunk!"

Rachel whispered back, "Isn't he!"

"I'm sure we'll see him again."

The curtain went up. They stopped talking, but Rachel found it hard to concentrate. All she could see was a pair of laughing black eyes. She couldn't stop herself searching the auditorium for him. Once she'd located him, three rows from the front, found her eyes drawn to him again and again. She could just make out the back of his head in the darkness. Once, he turned and seemed to look directly at her.

They left their seats as soon as the play was over, and merged with the crowd in the aisle. An arm was thrust through Rachel's.

With a grin, Al Lynskey said, "Come along, I insist on buying you supper. Let me tell you now, I'm not taking no for an answer."

His good humour was infectious and Rachel laughed. They took a taxi to the Fitzsimons Hotel on Stephen's Green. While they waited for a table to be free, Al insisted they have a drink at the bar.

"What part of America are you from?" asked Irene.

"Boston. Have you been there?" His bold eyes held Rachel's.

"No," answered Irene.

"You should visit, Irene, it's a great place."

The waiter stopped by the bar and told them their table was ready.

The food and wine were superb, their companion very entertaining. By the time they finished eating, Rachel felt as if she'd known Al Lynskey all her life. It was nearly 3 am when they finally left the hotel. Al hailed a taxi and insisted on seeing them home. Rachel, a little drunk, protested, but he insisted, even though he was a little inebriated himself. They dropped Irene off first. Outside Rachel's home, he asked the driver to wait and walked with her to the front door.

"How about having breakfast with me?"

She looked up at him in the dim light from the street lamp and giggled. "It's nearly breakfast time already."

His arms circled her body and pulled her close. She felt as if a huge, friendly bear was holding her. "Then come back with me to the Fitzsimons Hotel and we'll start breakfast now."

"Al Lynskey, I've to be in work at nine o'clock."

He made a mock, sorrowful sound. “You’re a hard woman to convince, Rachel. Couldn’t you take pity on a lonely guest in your country and have breakfast with me?”

She looked into coal black eyes. “No. And stop trying to tempt me.”

Rachel caught the flash of white teeth. “If you must be so hard-hearted,” he said, “how about lunch?” At her hesitation his arms tightened. “I’m not letting you go until you promise, even if I have to stay here all night.”

The taxi’s engine was ticking over. If her father came out to see what was going on, she’d be *so* embarrassed. “All right. I’ll meet you for lunch at one,” she said, quickly.

He kissed her cheek and gave an elaborate bow, a wicked gleam in the dark eyes. “I can’t wait!”

Rachel grinned. “You’ll have to.”

He walked down the driveway. Instead of opening the gate, he vaulted it smoothly. Rachel realised she was quite drunk as she let herself into the house and made her way upstairs.

She woke with a headache. But the excitement of meeting Al - one of the most fabulous men she’d ever met – made it bearable. There was nothing flashy or tiresome about him. He was cultured and classy. Rachel wondered if it had been the amount of wine she’d consumed that had made him appear so attractive. He couldn’t be as handsome as she remembered; no man was that good-looking.

Irene rang halfway through the morning, agog with curiosity.

“I’m having lunch with him.”

“Oh ho. He’s a fast merchant! Ring me as soon as you get back to the office, don’t forget!”

“Won’t, promise.”

Her heart skipped a beat when she approached the hotel. He was standing outside the main entrance with a bunch of red roses in his hand. He was so good-looking, more than one passer-by glanced at him. His eyes danced when he caught sight of her. He handed her the flowers.

“Roses for a beautiful Irish rose,” he murmured as he took her hand.

She noticed the head waiter called him by name as he escorted them to a table in the dining room.

“A glass of wine?”

Rachel grimaced. “No. My head’s still aching from last night, but thanks anyway.”

He dismissed the wine waiter. The head waiter asked Rachel if she wanted to leave the flowers with the cloakroom attendant.

She grinned mischievously. “No. I’ll leave them on the table.” The blood red of the roses was startling against the snowy white tablecloth.

Afterwards, she couldn’t remember what she had for lunch. All she remembered was that the hour flashed past. Looking at her watch, she was horrified to see the time.

“Oh my God, Al, I’m late!”

“Do you really have to go back? Couldn’t you stay? Call in and ask for the afternoon off.”

Rachel was tempted. There would be precious little work done anyway, the mood she was in. Realising she was weakening, Al persisted. Finally succumbing, she took out her company mobile phone and handed her bag to Al. The phone was large and cumbersome but terrific at a time like this. When her boss came on the line, she asked for the afternoon off. Fortunately they weren’t too busy and he agreed.

In the months that followed, Al travelled from Boston to Dublin every other weekend. He was a real romantic, a woman’s dream. He wined and dined her, sent masses of red roses and small gifts of jewellery to her home and office. She fell madly in love, astonished at the strength of the passion which swept over her whenever she was with him.



Now, Rachel turned over on her right side and drifted off to sleep, the open window doing little to cool the room. Two hours later she woke sweating, her heart hammering. She got out of bed and went to the landing. Thank God! The house wasn’t on fire. The dream had been so vivid it took her a few minutes to realise she was still at home and not in a strange house with flames licking the top of the stairs. She returned to her room, tried to sleep, but the dream had been so vivid, she tossed and turned for an age before drifting into a troubled sleep.

Adeline Bolton

Chapter Three

It was nine before Rachel surfaced. The sun was shining. She'd hoped the good weather of the past few weeks would hold, and it had. It didn't feel as sticky as yesterday, either. She went into the bathroom, turned on the taps and threw in her favourite oil. She loved the fresh herby smell. When the bath was full, she sat in the warm water and relaxed. Everybody else seemed to be in the kitchen, judging from the noise downstairs.

"Rachel, are you up yet?" her mother called.

"I'm in the bath, Mum."

"Hurry, Rachel. Your breakfast is ready and the hairdresser has arrived."

"Okay," she shouted.

With her right index finger she scooped up suds and blew them away like a child. This is very pleasant, she thought. It was usually a mad dash in the mornings with time for only a quick shower. She wondered what Al would say if he could see her now. Probably get in beside me, she thought, smiling. Though it wouldn't be the first time he'd seen her naked. The weekends he was in Dublin, he reserved a suite in the Fitzsimons Hotel. They'd spent most of the weekends there. The week she and her parents had spent in Boston, though, they'd been more circumspect. Al had booked a suite in the 5 star Briony Hotel facing the Boston Common for them, but they were out and about most of the time sightseeing with Charley. Al had wanted Charley to get to know Rachel before the wedding. In fact, eight-year-old Charley had been just as keen as his father to show them around.

Her mother's voice floated up the stairs again, "Rachel, get a move on. It's half nine."

She stepped out of the bath, dried herself and then rubbed body lotion into her damp skin.

“About time, too,” her mother said when Rachel entered the overflowing kitchen.

Her brother Seamus, sister Caroline, parents, Irene, and Madge, the hairdresser, were sitting around the circular pine table which had been in the kitchen for as long as Rachel could remember. Her mother was standing at the stove cooking a fresh batch of bacon and sausages.

“Do you want some, Rachel?”

“Please, Mum.”

The toaster was working overtime. Every time it popped, a hand went out to take a slice of bread. The next time it popped, Rachel took two slices and buttered them.

“Will you be ready to have your hair done when you’ve finished eating?” asked Madge.

She nodded, unable to speak with her mouth full of toast.

“Rach, you’d better hurry. We’ve only two hours to get ready.” Irene was as anxious as her mother to get her moving.

Seamus added, grinning, “You don’t want to keep the poor fool waiting.”

“I’ve plenty of time,” Rachel replied, calmly. Even surprising herself at how laid back she was.

“No you haven’t, Rachel,” her mother said, swiftly. “Take your second cup of tea upstairs with you. You can drink it while Madge does your hair.”

Caroline also got to her feet. “I’ve to get into that green thing!” she complained to no one in particular and left the room.

Rachel had to bite her lip to stop herself from laughing. Back in her room, she sat down in front of the dressing table mirror and waited while Madge took out brushes and dryer from her large holdall.

Madge did a more sophisticated version of the style Irene had concocted in The Wedding Boutique and fixed the flowers in place. Without a veil, her hair had to look really good, she thought as Madge secured it with pins. Somehow Madge always made her hair look shinier, the golden streaks more pronounced. Why, Rachel could never understand. It wasn’t as if she used less or more shampoo. Did she rinse it better? Maybe that was the secret.

“Are you happy with that?” asked Madge, holding a hand mirror up so Rachel could see the back and sides. She had arranged the roses just as Monica had done on Saturday.

“Madge, it looks great,” she said, truthfully.

“Whose hair will I do next?”

“Caroline’s or Irene’s. Ask Mum if she needs your help as well, please, Madge.”

Rachel started to make up her face. She used a light foundation. Navy kohl emphasised her blue eyes, but she was careful to smudge it to soften the outline, and a touch of berry-pink lipstick to her lips. That finished, she got up from the dressing table and opened her under-wear drawer and took out the new bra and knickers she’d bought for this special day. The bra was only a tiny bit of lace but cleverly shaped and pushed her breasts a little higher than usual. When she’d the matching knickers on, she stood back and looked in the full length mirror. Al told her on more than one occasion she had a beautiful body and, even if she was being immodest, she had to agree with him!

She slipped her narrow feet into the gold sandals. They made her legs look longer and slim, she thought.

“Rachel?” Her mother called in a panicky voice. “Are you ready yet? It’s a quarter to twelve.” She knocked before opening the door.

“For God’s sake, Rachel, the car will be here shortly.”

“Mum, I’ve only to slip my dress on. Stop panicking.”

Her mother’s cream and chocolate coloured suit was lovely and made her look slimmer than the size fourteen she was. Rachel told her so. She’d also had her hair lightened to a paler blonde and it really suited her.

“Hurry, darling, you really haven’t time to dawdle.”

Rachel took the dress from the silk hanger. “Is Irene ready?”

“Everyone is ready except you. Here, let me help you. You don’t want to smear it with makeup.”

Her mother slipped it over Rachel’s head carefully, and eased it down over her bust and hips. Rachel fixed the bodice while her mother settled the train.

“You can’t wear it that low!”

“It’s fashionable, Mum. Anyway, I like it that way.”

Her mother rolled her eyes upwards. “Fashionable my foot! However, it’s your wedding. If that’s the way you want to go to church, I’m not going to argue with you.”

The front slit was nearly thigh high and showed plenty of leg when she moved. She didn’t highlight this aspect of the dress because her mother wouldn’t approve.

Caroline barged in. “How do you expect me to wear this?” She grabbed a bit of silk and looked at it in disbelief. “It’s so... conventional.”

“It looks beautiful on you,” her mother said, firmly. When Irene appeared in the doorway, she continued, “And yours does, too, Irene. Anyway, it’s just for one day, Caroline. Why do you have to make a song-and-dance about everything?”

“Oh, Mum, you always take Rachel’s part. If Rachel said black was white, you’d agree with her.” Caroline flounced out of the room in disgust.

“You look terrific, Rach,” Irene said.

Rachel beamed, totally unmoved by Caroline’s outburst. “Thanks.”

“Can I do anything for you?”

“No thanks, Irene. I’m ready.”

“See you in church,” Irene said cheerfully as she left the room.

“Don’t forget your flowers,” Rachel called. Irene’s and Caroline’s were a combination of cream roses and lots of green foliage. Her own bouquet had a mixture of lilies and cream roses. “Are you sure everybody is ready, Mum?”

“Positive. Seamus and your father are dressed and in the sitting room. Madge left twenty minutes ago. Your father paid her.” They heard the sound of a car stopping outside the house. Tears came to her mother’s eyes as she looked at Rachel again. “You look lovely, darling.” She blew her nose, then said, “I’m going with Seamus now. You don’t need me for anything else, do you?”

“No. Tell Daddy I’ll be down shortly.”

“See you later,” Caroline called as she rushed past the open bedroom door.

Within minutes, the house emptied. Only Rachel and her father were left.

He called up the stairs, “Are you ready, Rachel?”

“Coming.”

As she appeared at the top of the stairs, her father looked up.

“Ah, you look like a princess.”

As she got closer to him, Rachel realised he had tears in his eyes and hugged him. “I’ll miss you!” she cried.

“Now, now, you’re not going to a funeral, you know,” he joked. “The car’s back. We’d better go.”

He straightened and proudly extended his arm. They walked to the white Mercedes.

As she walked down the familiar aisle of St Jude the Apostle Church in Templeogue, Rachel felt good. Al, dark and dashing, with Jack, his best man, and her brother, Seamus, was standing in front of the altar. Her father squeezed her fingers before releasing them, then retreated to her mother’s side. Rachel looked up at Al and smiled.

The ceremony went by in such a haze, Rachel felt she was watching someone else getting married. She must have spoken at the right places because nobody looked at her peculiarly. All through the photo sessions in the churchyard and later, in Stephen’s Green, the unreal feeling persisted. Rachel asked Al, when they were alone for a few minutes while the photographer was setting up some equipment, if he missed having his father at the wedding.

Al smiled. “Yes. But it was better for Dad to stay with Charley when he was sick.”

Rachel knew Charley had developed a severe case of tonsillitis on Monday.

Al whispered in her ear. “Did I tell you how beautiful you look?”

Rachel cracked a smile. “No.”

“I’ll tell you in more detail later.”

She blushed at the look in his eyes.

“Haven’t you finished?” Al asked the photographer as he settled Rachel’s train for the hundredth time.

“I want to catch the wedding party walking across to the Fitzsimons Hotel on video. All right?”

“OK. But hurry.”

She sensed his impatience. Anyway, it was time to go. Most of the guests would be in the hotel by now.

“Yes, Rachel,” said Caroline. “Tell him to hurry. He’s taken enough photos to fill a suitcase.”

“And I’m dying for a jar,” Seamus added.

Trust Seamus to be thinking of Guinness at a time like this.

Rachel would never forget the traffic coming to a halt as they walked across the road and into the hotel. Some of the drivers honked their horns as they crossed, and the photographer, like an agile monkey, hopped in front, side and back of them as they walked, catching their every move on video for posterity. He then ran ahead to record them entering the room reserved for the wedding party. As they entered, a waiter handed them brimming glasses of vintage Champagne Salon, a gift from Al’s father, Charles.

The meal was served shortly afterwards. Even though she couldn’t eat a thing with the excitement, Rachel knew the menu off by heart and mentally ticked each course off as it was served. The third glass of champagne made her tiddly. She really was seeing everything through rose tinted glasses, she thought, then giggled. The speeches were clever and witty.

Afterwards, a musical trio got going and Al and Rachel danced together for the first dance before the rest of the party joined in. It seemed no time at all before Rachel had to throw her bouquet, which Caroline nearly knocked poor Breege down to catch. Nobody, except her parents, knew she and Al were spending the night in the hotel.

“Alone at last, Mrs Lynskey,” said a smiling Al as he shut the door of the suite behind them. He took Rachel into his arms and kissed her passionately, parting her lips as he did so. His hands slid the dress off her shoulders and cupped her breasts. They didn’t speak. Their physical need was greater than words as they stripped each other urgently. Al picked Rachel up and carried her to the bed. The long night was spent touching, stroking, feeling. In between, they sipped champagne. It was a wedding night to remember, thought Rachel as she curled her body into Al’s and drifted off to sleep.

The ringing of the telephone woke them.

Rachel heard Al say, "OK. We'll take off at ten."

"Who was that?" asked Rachel as she snuggled into Al's naked back and stroked his thigh.

"Stop that! We have to go. That was Pete, my pilot. He's at the airport."

"Aren't we going by regular airline?"

"No. We're using the Gulfstream."

Rachel stroked his side and stomach.

Al groaned and caught her hand. "We haven't time. It's eight and take-off is ten."

"Oh, Al, I don't ever want to leave here."

"If we want to get home, Rachel, you'll have to. Race you to the bathroom."

"No. You go ahead. I'm going to order breakfast. I feel too lazy to move yet."

With a glint in his eyes, he got up and whipped the sheet off the bed, leaving Rachel naked. He stared for a moment, groaned and slid back down beside her.

Al came out of the shower. "We'd better hurry or we'll miss take-off." He rang Jack's room to make sure he was ready. They were all travelling on the same flight.

"Aren't you going to have breakfast?"

"We'll have something on the plane."

As they waited for Jack outside the hotel, Rachel stood and stared at the Green. "Oh, Al," she exclaimed.

He took her hand in his, sensing her panic. "You're not going forever. You can come back anytime you want."

Jack joined them as the porter helped the taxi driver with their luggage. Jack put a hand to his head and groaned. Rachel grinned. He had had way too much champagne, they all had. They got into the taxi when their luggage was stowed and the driver pulled away from the kerb.

Her parents were already at the airport when they arrived. Jack went off to find some coffee to alleviate his hangover.

“Mum, will you pick up my wedding dress from the hotel and take it home? I didn’t have the dress bag to pack it.”

“Of course, darling. We took the rest of the wedding cake home last night. If you want me to send the dress or the cake on, ring me.” Tears came to her mother’s eyes. “Bye, darlings.” She kissed them both. “Be happy.”

Her father gave Rachel a hug but said nothing. He didn’t need to. He communicated his love without words.

“There’s Pete. Buddy must be on board. We’d better go.”

Rachel waved until her parents were out of sight.

Al introduced Pete as the Gulfstream IV pilot and Buddy as the co-pilot.

“Buddy takes over if Pete’s sick.” Both men looked to be in their late twenties or early thirties. “Have we clearance, Pete?”

“Yes, Al, everything’s OK.”

They left the airport building. Rachel walked between Al and Pete. Jack followed behind with Buddy.

“Al, do you want to take her up?”

“No, Pete.”

Rachel looked from one to the other, but before she could utter a word, they stopped beside a small, white aircraft with only six windows on either side.

In an astonished voice, she asked, “We’re not crossing the Atlantic in that?”

“Sure we are,” said Al.

“But, Al, I’ve only flown in jets.”

“This is a jet, Rachel.”

“I mean a big jet. When I travelled to Greece, Spain or Italy, the planes were huge. I’ve never been in a small plane before.”

Jack mounted the steps followed by Pete and Buddy.

Al smiled. “Rachel, this is the same. There’s no difference. You’ll enjoy the experience,” he promised.

“Pete, Buddy and I have thousands of flying hours behind us. We’re good pilots. There’s nothing to fear.”

“You mean you can fly this thing, too?”

“Sure. This ‘thing’ happens to be a very sophisticated flying machine. It can practically fly itself.”

“Why didn’t you book us on a regular flight?”

“Because I use the Gulfstream.”

“You used it to fly over at the weekends! That’s why you hadn’t any problems flying to and from America.”

“Right in one.”

“But isn’t it more costly to hire this thing?”

“It belongs to the corporation.”

“What corporation?”

“Lynskey.”

“Oh.” Rachel went up the steps and into the aircraft. “Wow!”

He smiled at the expression on her face as she absorbed the luxurious interior.

“Al, it’s fabulous.”

It was like a sitting room; couches, armchairs, and tables between the armchairs. They walked to the rear.

“Oh my God, Al, it’s a complete kitchen!” Rachel couldn’t believe the compactness of it all. There was an oven, microwave, and fridge. A glass cabinet with stacks of gleaming glasses and china and equipment to cook a meal from scratch if one wanted to. The sink was covered and set into the wooden counter top.

“I can’t believe this. Even huge jets aren’t this luxurious.”

He was enjoying her reaction. “Look at this.” He pointed to a CD and video.

“Where’s the screen?”

Al turned around and pointed to a screen built into the wall in the cabin. “The monitor gives flight information; speed, temperature, destination, etc. It’s also a video screen if you want to look at a movie.” He pointed beyond the kitchen. “That’s where our luggage is stored. If you want anything during the flight you can come back here and get it. It’s not like a commercial plane where the luggage is inaccessible.”

Rachel loved the colour scheme: seats and walls cream, carpet peacock blue with touches of red and gold. A sound made Rachel look up front. The main door was closing.

Al answered her unspoken question. “The door is worked hydraulically; opens and closes at the touch of a button.”

Jack lowered the table between two armchairs and turned it into a bed. “If it’s OK with you two, I’m for some shuteye. I’ve a busy evening ahead in New York.”

He lay down, closed his eyes and promptly fell asleep.

Rachel turned to Al. “New York?”

“We’re dropping Jack off first. He has rehearsals.”

“Are you sure this plane will fly all the way to New York?”

“Sure I’m sure. You don’t think I’d risk my own neck or your beautiful one?”

Rachel sat down on the couch and thought, what the hell, you can only die once. Al fastened her seat belt and allowed his hands to roam a little before kissing her.

“You OK?”

“Why? Are you going somewhere?”

“Just to the flight deck. Do you want to see it?”

“Not yet.” Rachel thought she’d absorbed enough for the moment.

“Al, can you come to the flight deck?” Pete asked over the PA system. “I’m waiting for clearance from the control tower.”

Al kissed her lips and whispered, “I won’t be long.”

Soon after, Rachel could hear the engines running; about fifteen minutes later they took off. After the initial feeling of leaving your stomach on the apron, it wasn’t too bad. Half an hour later, Al returned to the cabin. He asked Rachel again would she like to see the flight deck.

“Is Pete flying it or Buddy?”

“Pete, but right this minute it’s on autopilot. As I said, it practically flies itself. We’ll stay on autopilot until we’re near Kennedy.”

“Kennedy?”

“New York airport.”

Rachel opened her safety belt and got to her feet. She couldn’t have Al thinking she was a coward.

Fair-haired Buddy got out of the co-pilot’s seat and invited Rachel to take his place. Al sat on the jump seat just behind them. Rachel looked nervously around her. Pete and Al were grinning. How anyone made head or tail of it all, she couldn’t imagine. She tentatively touched the

control column, then looked at the numerous clocks and dials overhead, in front and on the side panels. It was an electronic masterpiece.

Pete asked, "Would you like to handle it?"

"No! No," Rachel said hastily when she realised Pete was serious. Despite herself she was fascinated. "What are the two small television screens for?" They were in front of each control column.

"Electronic Flight Instrumentation system; they show speed, altitude and compass information." Pete pointed to the right of the control column. "Radio display, weather, etc. That's the Flight Management System."

Rachel decided not to ask any more questions, smiled at Pete and thanked him. She wouldn't understand anyway, she thought as Al helped her out of the seat. Flying in a small aircraft, though, was interesting.

A few hours later, Al went aft and returned with trays of cold salads and cups of coffee and gave one to Rachel.

"When we've eaten, I'll relieve Pete, then Buddy, so they can eat. Jack is still asleep."

Rachel had been much too excited to sleep. She thought about Charley, and wondered if he was better. Would she get along with him? Would she get along with her father-in-law? Anyway, it didn't really matter. She married Al, not his family. She was starting a new life; had a new husband; new home; new country. What more could a girl ask for, she thought as she looked into Al's eyes.

"When you look at me like that," he gave an exaggerated sigh, "I wish we were alone."

"Al!" She thought it prudent to change the subject. "Once you get used to the idea of flying in a small plane, it's great."

"Not if you hit bad weather, but that's not going to happen today. The weather is good all the way."

Al took the trays to the kitchen when they finished eating and Buddy came back first, then Pete. Rachel picked up one of the magazines Al had bought for her at the airport shop and started to read.

She must have slept, because the next thing she knew she could hear Al waking Jack.

"We're about to land at Kennedy, Jack, do you want coffee?"

"No."

The plane landed. They got off with Jack and entered the airport building.

“See you soon, Jack.” Al shook his hand. “Thanks again.”

“Think nothing of it. Be happy you two.” Jack waved and was swiftly lost in the crowd.

“Why did we have to get off?” asked Rachel, interested in everything that was happening.

“For an aircraft check. It won’t take long. Pete will see to it.”

“How long will it take to fly on to Boston?”

“Forty-five to sixty minutes, depending on air traffic.”

“Will we have to wait here long?”

“No. Let’s take a walk.”

“Good idea.”

She wanted to see Kennedy Airport having heard so much about it. It was extremely busy, people coming and going in all directions.

Rachel meets Al, the man of her dreams, at a play in the Abbey Theatre and, after a whirlwind romance, is whisked away from Dublin to a new and radically different life in Boston. Suddenly Rachel has everything she could ever want: a perfectly attentive and loving husband, a big, well-appointed house in the city, with a retinue of servants, a holiday home by the sea, the best of clothes and jewellery. The news of a baby on the way provides the icing on the cake.

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Difficult decisions and unexpected reactions cast Rachel on a journey of self-discovery that will test her emotions and resources to their very limit and illuminate the things in life that really matter.

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