

Hooking Mr. Right

by Emma Carlyle

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“The trouble lies in the Y chromosome.” Thea took a sip of her coffee and glared across the black Formica-topped desk at her editor, waiting to pounce on Grace if she challenged her statement.

“How so?” Grace leaned back in her chair and sipped her own coffee. Over the rim of the cup an amused expression played across her face.

“Simple genetics, really. Women have two X chromosomes. Men have an X and a Y. Do you know what the definition of Y is?”

Grace set her coffee cup on her desk and raised her eyebrows. “No, but I suppose you’re about to tell me.”

“Y is an X with a broken leg.”

Grace stared at her as if Thea had lost more than a suitcase in her recent, abrupt move from San Francisco to New York. “And your point?”

“Broken! Don’t you get it? Defective!” Thea slammed her hand onto a pile of unread manuscripts teetering on the corner of her editor’s desk, nearly toppling the unwieldy stack onto the floor.

Grace grabbed for her cup, barely averting a brown tidal wave.

“Ergo,” continued Thea, waving her hand in the air to punctuate her explanation, “there is no doubt that women are superior to men. No defective genes. Obviously, man was a rough prototype. God looked at Adam and said, ‘I can do better than that.’ Then he created Eve.” She placed her cup on the edge of the desk, leaned back in her chair, crossed her arms over her chest, and offered her editor a triumphant smile.

“So this explains why you cancelled your wedding and high-tailed it out of San Francisco? Defective male genes?” Grace shuddered. “Do me a favor, will you, Dr. Love? Keep these newly developed, radical theories to yourself. Unless, of course, you want to go from the *New York Times* Bestseller List back to an auditorium-size classroom packed with bored freshmen.”

Doctor Love. Thea winced at the nickname the press had dubbed her secret alter ego, Dr. Trulee Lovejoy. In truth, she did wish she could return to the classroom and the comforting monotony of teaching Sociology 101 to less-than-eager first year students. Not that she possessed an all-consuming passion for her chosen career in academia, but with everything she had lost over the past few years, at least she’d still have her integrity. However, she could no more turn back the clock and regain her compromised professional ethics than she could restore her family’s lost fortune. At least her popular how-to guides for finding the perfect mate had kept the collection agencies at bay.

“Some love expert! I couldn’t even keep my own fiancé from sleeping with my sister.” Thea raised her head and challenged Grace. “Now aren’t you glad I chose to publish under a pseudonym? Think of the public relations disaster I’ve averted. News flash: *Doctor Love Causes Coitus Interruptus after Catching Sister and Fiancé in Flagrante Delicto on Eve of Wedding. Update at eleven.*”

“Too erudite and wordy.” Grace brushed away the imaginary headline with a wave of her hand. “Who’d understand all that Latin?”

Thea grimaced. “I can think of at least two people.” Her brainy, Stanford-educated younger sister came to mind. As did her sister’s equally brainy, MIT-educated research partner who also happened to be Thea’s ex-fiancé. Too late Thea had discovered Steve and Madeline were engaged in far more than metaphysical debates while researching distant solar systems and spatial anomalies.

“Yes, well...” Grace fidgeted in her chair, her gaze dropping to her lap.

“It’s okay, Grace. I’m dealing with it. Putting three thousand miles between myself and them helps.”

“Out of sight, out of mind?” Grace raised her chin and met Thea’s eyes. “Come on, I know you better than that. You’re hurting.”

Thea exhaled a deep sigh and shrugged. “Guilty as charged.” She glanced over at the large scheduling calendar covering half of one wall in Grace’s office and laughed. The sound hung in the room, echoing with pain and resonating with irony.

“Just think, three weeks ago today my biggest concern was that the rehearsal dinner was getting cold because Steve was off in some corner deconstructing the theory of relativity. I used to dream we’d someday travel to Stockholm to pick up his Nobel Prize.” She leaned forward, propped her elbows on the desk and scowled at her nearly empty mug. “It just never occurred to me that the award would be for causing my world to stop spinning on its axis.”

Grace reached across her desk and patted Thea’s hand. “Trust me. You’re better off finding out the truth before the wedding rather than afterwards.”

“Speaking from experience?”

“More than I like to admit. Maybe I should take some of Trulee’s advice.”

“Get real! If you have any sense, Grace, you’ll let me out of my contract and forget about that third book. *Finding Mr. Right? Hooking Mr. Right?* I’m a fraud. I don’t know the first thing about how to get a man and keep him. I’m a thirty-two year old sociologist with a lousy track record when it comes to the male species. How can you trust me to write credible books on the subject when I can’t even trust my own judgment where men are concerned?”

Grace shrugged. “Maybe we both need to follow your advice. Others do and swear by your books. Besides, I’m not letting you out of your contract. Trulee Lovejoy is the best thing to happen to this company in years.”

“Trulee Lovejoy.” Thea shook her head. “What was I thinking? How did I ever let you talk me into that awful pseudonym?”

“If I remember correctly, I had a little help from a lady named Margarita. Several ladies named Margarita, actually. Besides, I’m hurt. You insisted on an alias, and I came up with the perfect *nom de plume* for you. After all, who would you believe when it came to matters of the heart, Dr. Trulee Lovejoy or Dr. Althea Chandler?”

Thea scowled. “Right now I’d suggest you might have better luck with Lassie.”