

Finding Mr. Right
a short story sequel to *Hooking Mr. Right*

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ONE

January 2nd

“We’ll do a Valentine’s Day theme for the first two shows of the month.” Producer Becket Delaney handed the February program schedule to Dr. Trulee Lovejoy and Thea Chandler-Bennett, co-hosts of *Love Recipes*.

“No, we won’t.” Grace shoved the sheet of paper aside without looking at it. “I hate Valentine’s Day.”

“You’re Dr. Trulee Lovejoy,” said Beck, “bestselling author of all those how-to-catch-a-guy books. How can you possibly hate Valentine’s Day?”

Because she really wasn’t Dr. Trulee Lovejoy. She was Grace Wainwright, imposter. Then again, so was the real Dr. Trulee Lovejoy. Talk about a tangled web!

When Thea Chandler, writing under the pen name Dr. Trulee Lovejoy, had refused to promote her popular self-help books, Grace had no choice but to step into the limelight and take on the persona of the faux relationship expert. Her job was on the line. With two kids in college and a deadbeat ex, she couldn’t afford to lose her editorial position at Wordsmith Press.

The bean counters at the publishing house had made it clear that’s exactly what would happen to Grace if Dr. Trulee Lovejoy didn’t agree to a book tour and media blitz. But Thea had compelling reasons for keeping her identity secret and refused to take part in the publicity campaign.

So Grace became Trulee, embarking on the requisite interviews, book signings, and talk show appearances. In retrospect she’d do it all again. That one decision had taken her from within steps of the unemployment line to bestselling author and daytime television star. Thea, who first opposed the subterfuge, became Grace’s reluctant partner-in-crime, keeping Grace’s secret, just as Grace had kept hers for years.

Now Grace, with occasional input from Thea, wrote the Trulee Lovejoy books, and Thea, the former reluctant love expert, was free to pursue her true passion—cooking. Thea’s first cookbook, *Love Recipes: Secrets from Trulee’s Kitchen*, became an overnight success. A month after the book hit store shelves, Grace had negotiated a half-hour cooking show for them on PBS. *Love Recipes* now appeared on affiliate stations coast-to-coast.

Tangled web, indeed!

“I’m not all that fond of Valentine’s Day, either,” continued her producer, “but tradition dictates and our sponsors demand that cooking shows feature holiday recipes. Turkey and cranberry dishes for Thanksgiving. Cherry pies on Washington’s birthday. Ham at Easter. Romantic dinners and to-die-for chocolate desserts for Valentine’s Day.”

“He has a point,” said Thea.

“Screw tradition,” said Grace. Valentine’s Day brought back the most painful

memory of her life. For the past ten years she'd dealt with the day by calling in sick and throwing a pity party for two. Her only invited guest? Jack Daniels.

"We're doing a Valentine's Day show," said Beck, "whether you like it or not. End of discussion."

"If you insist." Grace scowled at Beck, then turned to Thea. "Got any recipes for heart-shaped arsenic cookies?"

"What's your problem with Valentine's Day?" asked Thea once she and Grace left Beck's midtown Manhattan office.

Grace sighed. "Long story."

"I have time."

"I'll need a drink to get me through it."

"One margarita coming up." Thea steered her toward an upscale pub on the corner of Ninth Avenue and 50th Street.

"This tale requires something stronger than a margarita," said Grace. "And definitely more than one drink."

"Lucky for you it's happy hour."

"Don't you have to get home to your hunky husband and that darling baby?"

"Luke is in Atlanta on business, and the nanny doesn't expect me for another couple of hours. So I'm all ears."

They found an unoccupied table in a back corner of the dimly lit bar. Grace waited to spill her guts until their drinks arrived—a double scotch on the rocks for her, a frozen raspberry margarita for Thea. "Brace yourself for another Dick-head story," she said, referring to her ex-husband.

"Now why am I not surprised this has something to do with him?"

Grace scowled into her glass, then took a long swig to work up some courage. "We had a tradition on Valentine's Day, dining at the restaurant where we spent our first date. Ten years ago, a week before Valentine's Day, I found a receipt from Tiffany's in his pants pocket."

Thea raised her eyebrows.

Grace held up her hands. "I wasn't snooping. Honest. I was taking clothes to the cleaner, and the jerk never remembered to empty his pockets before tossing clothes in the hamper."

Thea nodded. "Go on."

"Lucky me, I thought. But then late afternoon on the fourteenth Dick-head calls to say he's had a client emergency and has to work late. He cancelled our reservation."

"I can see where this is going," said Thea.

"I couldn't. Not at the time. I decided to place a take-out order. If he couldn't come to the restaurant, I'd bring the restaurant to him. After all, he had to eat, right? Imagine my surprise when I arrived to pick up the food and discovered him all up-close and extremely personal with some skank just shy of jailbait."

"Ouch."

"Oh, that's not the worst of it. While I'm staring across the room at him, not believing my eyes, he whips out a robin's egg blue box from his pocket and hands it to her."

"Double-ouch. Did he see you?"

"Not until I marched up to their table and dumped an order of steaming Shrimp

Bolognese on his lap. I stormed home, locked him out of the apartment, and filed for divorce the next morning.”

She drained her scotch, then slammed her empty glass on the table. “And now you know why I hate Valentine’s Day.”