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Editorial Review

About the Author

Nicola Marsh has always had a passion for reading and writing. As a youngster, she devoured books when she should've been sleeping, and relished keeping a not-so-secret daily diary. These days, when she's not enjoying life with her husband and sons in her fabulous home city of Melbourne, she's busily creating the romances she loves in her dream job. Readers can visit Nicola at her website: www.nicolamarsh.com

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Stranded Survival Tip #1

Your past is only a line call away.

Kristi Wilde picked up the single blush-pink rose, twirled it under her nose, closed her eyes and inhaled the subtle fragrance.

She should call Lars and thank him but... Her eyes snapped open, landed on the trite card he'd probably sent to countless other women, and she promptly tossed the store-bought, cellophane-wrapped rose in the bin.

The only reason she'd agreed to a date with Sydney's top male model was to gain a firsthand look at a rival promotions company's much touted coup in landing the Annabel Modelling Agency as a client.

The fact Lars was six four, ripped, tanned and gorgeous had merely been added incentive.

Walking into Guillaume hand in hand with a guy like Lars had been an ego trip. But that was about as exciting as things got for the night.

Lars had the looks but his personality could put a bunch of hyperactive kids to sleep. While she'd scoped out the opposition, feasted on fabulous French food and swilled pricey champagne, Lars had droned on about himself... and on... and on.

She'd faked interest, been the epitome of a dewy-eyed, suitably impressed bimbo hanging on his every word. She'd do anything for a promotion these days. Excluding the horizontal catwalk, which was exactly what Lars had had in mind the moment they'd stepped into the elevator at the end of the night.

The rose might be an apology. Then again, considering his smug assuredness she'd succumb to his charms next time, he was probably hedging his bets.

Wrinkling her nose, she nudged the bin away with her Christian Louboutin fuchsia patent peep-toes and darted a glance at her online calendar.

Great, just enough time to grab a soy chai latte before heading to the Sydney Cricket Ground for a football promotion.

She grabbed her bag, opened the door, in time for her boss to sweep into the room on four-inch Choos, a swathe of crushed ebony velvet bellowing around her like a witch's cloak, a cloud of Chanel No 5 in her wake.

'Hey, Ros, I was just on my way out—'

'You're not going anywhere.'

Rosanna waved a wad of paper under her nose and pointed at her desk.

'Sit. Listen.'

Kristi rolled her eyes. 'The bossy routine doesn't impress me so much any more after watching you dance the tango with that half-naked waiter at the Christmas party last year. And after that romp through the chocolate fountain at the PR awards night. And that incident with the stripper at Shay's hen night—'

'Zip it.'

Despite her being a driven professional businesswoman, Rosanna's pride in her wild side endeared her to co-workers. Kristi couldn't imagine speaking to any other boss the way she did to Ros.

'Take a look at this.'

Rosanna's kohled eyes sparkled with mischief as she handed her the sheaf of documents, clapping her hands once she'd delivered her bundle.

Kristi hadn't seen her boss this excited since Endorse This had snatched a huge client out from under a competitor's nose.

'You're going to thank me.'

Rosanna started pacing, shaking her hands out, muttering under her breath in the exact way she did while brainstorm-ing with her PR team.

Curious as to what had her boss this hyped, Kristi scanned the top document, her confusion increasing rather than diminishing.

'What's this reality show documentary about?'

It sounded interesting, if you were crazy enough to want to be stranded on an island with a stranger for a week. 'We doing the PR for it?'

Rosanna shook her head, magenta-streaked corkscrew curls flying.

'No. One better.'

Flipping pages, Kristi spied an entry form.

'You thinking of entering?'

Rosanna grinned, the evil grin of a lioness about to pounce on a defenceless gazelle.

'Not me.'

'Then what...?'

Realisation dawned as Rosanna's grin widened.

'Oh, no, you haven't?'

Rosanna perched on the edge of her desk, studying her mulberry manicured talons at length.

'I entered your details for the female applicant.' She gestured to the flyer, pointed at the fine print. 'You've been chosen. Just you and some hot stud on a deserted island for seven days and seven long, hot, glorious nights. Cool, huh?'

There were plenty of words to describe what her boss had done.

Cool wasn't one of them.

Kristi dropped the entry form as if it were radioactive waste, tentatively poked it with her toe, before inhaling deep, calming breaths. Rosanna might be tolerant but there was no point getting wound up to the point she could happily strangle her boss.

'I want you to turn Survivor for a week.'

This had to be a joke, one of Rosanna's bizarre tests she spontaneously sprang on employees at random to test their company loyalty.

Clenching her fist so hard the documents crinkled, she placed them on the desk, desperately trying to subdue the buzzing in her head to form a coherent argument to convince her boss there wasn't a chance she'd do this.

Only one way Rosanna would listen to reason: appeal to her business side.

'Sound's interesting, but I'm snowed under with jobs at the moment. I can't just up and leave for a week.'

Rosanna sprang off her desk as if she hadn't spoken, snapped her fingers.

'You know Elliott J. Barnaby, the hottest producer in town?'

Kristi nodded warily as Rosanna picked up a flyer, waved it under her nose. 'He's making a documentary, based on the reality-show phenomenon sweeping the world. Two people, placed on an island, with limited resources, for a week.'

'Sounds like a blast.'

Rosanna ignored her sarcasm. 'Prize money is a hundred grand.'

'What?'

Kristi tried to read over Rosanna's shoulder. 'You never told me that part.'

'Didn't I? Perhaps I didn't get around to mentioning it, what with your overwhelming excitement and all.'

Kristi stuck out her tongue as she speed-read the prize details.

A hundred big ones. A heck of a lot of money. And if she was crazy enough to go along with her boss's ludicrous scheme, she knew exactly what she'd do with it.

For an instant, the memory of dinner with her sister Meg last night flashed into her head.

Meg's shabby, cubbyhole apartment in outer Sydney, the sounds of ear-splitting verbal abuse from the quarrelling couple next door interspersed with the ranting of rival street gangs outside her window. The

threadbare furniture, the stack of unpaid bills on the kitchen counter, the lack of groceries in the fridge.

And Prue, her adorable seven-year-old niece, the only person who managed to draw a smile from her weary mum these days.

After what she'd been through, Meg was doing it tough yet wouldn't accept a cent. What if the money wasn't part of her savings that Meg refused to touch? Would that make a difference to her sister's pride?

'Healthy prize, huh?'

Kristi didn't like the maniacal gleam in Rosanna's astute gaze. She'd seen that look before. Ros lived for Endorse This; the company wasn't Sydney's best PR firm for nothing. While a fun and fair boss, she was a corporate dynamo who expected nothing short of brilliance from her employees.

And every time she got that gleam, it meant a new client was up for grabs, someone whose promotion would add another feather to Endorse This's ever-expanding cap.

Deliberately trying to blot out the memory of Meg's apartment and the unnatural hollows in her niece's cheeks, Kristi handed the flyer back.

'Sure, the money's impressive, but not worth shacking up with some stranger for a week, and having the whole disastrous experience filmed.'

Rosanna's injected lips thinned, her determined stare brooking no argument.

'You're doing this.'

Kristi's mouth dropped open and her boss promptly placed a finger under her chin and shut it for her.

'I had a call from Channel Nine last week. They're checking out PR firms for a new island reality show, Survivor with a twist, they said. That's why I entered you. If you do this, we're set!'

Oh, no. No, no, no!

If the gleam in Rosanna's eyes had raised her hackles, it had nothing on the sickly sweet smile reminiscent of a witch offering Hansel and Gretel a huge chunk of gingerbread.

'And, of course, you'll be in charge of that whole account.'

'That's not fair,' she blurted, wishing she'd kept her mouth shut when Rosanna's smile waned.

'Which part? The part where you help Endorse This score the biggest client this year? Or the part where you're virtually assured a promotion because of it? Discounting the chance to win a hundred grand, of course.'

Kristi shot Rosanna a death glare that had little effect, Ros's smugness adding to the churning in the pit of her stomach.

She had no choice.

She had to do this.

If the promotion wasn't incentive enough, the chance to win a hundred grand was. Meg deserved better, much better. Her sweet, naïve, resilient sister deserved to have all her dreams come true after what she'd been through.

Forcing an enthusiastic smile that must've appeared half grimace, she shrugged.

'Fine, I'll do it.'

'Great. You've got a meeting with the producer in a few hours. Fill me in on the details later.'

Rosanna thrust the flyer into her hands, glanced at her watch. 'I'll get back to Channel Nine, let them know the latest.'

As Rosanna strutted towards the door Kristi knew she'd made the right decision, despite being shanghaied into it.

She'd worked her butt off the last six months, desperate for a promotion, and landing Channel Nine as a client would shoot her career to the stars.

As for the prize money, she'd do whatever it took to win it. No way would she accept anything less than Meg using every last brass razoo of it.

The promotion and the prize money; sane, logical reasons to go through with this. But a week on an island with a stranger? Could it be any worse?

As she rifled through the paperwork, Rosanna paused at the door, raised a finger.

'Did I mention you'll be stranded on the island with Jared Malone?'

Stranded Survival Tip #2

Be sure to schedule your mini-meltdown for off-camera.

Jared strode into North Bondi's Icebergs and headed for Elliott's usual table, front and centre to the glass overlooking Sydney's most famous beach.

His mango smoothie was waiting alongside Ell...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jennifer McMorris:

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Rafael Arent:

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Marianne Stromain:

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