



A BIGLAW
ROMANCE NOVEL

WINNING HER OVER

GOLDEN HEART® AWARD WINNER
ALEXA ROWAN

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Thank You!

Excerpt from An International Affair

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About the Author

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WINNING HER OVER
A BigLaw Romance Novel

Massage therapist Brenna Nakamura is struggling to keep her small business afloat, and she has no time for dating. Besides, the only guys she meets are her clients, and they're off-limits. But her newest client—a hotshot attorney who's in Boston for a two-week trial—tempts her to break some of her rules.

After eight years of nights and weekends chained to his desk, Calvin Wilcox, Jr. is up for partner at his prestigious law firm. But even if Cal kicks ass at his next trial, partnership isn't guaranteed. Some of his colleagues are sticklers for propriety, and getting entangled with a sweet, sexy masseuse is a distraction he can't afford.

But their best intentions soon unravel. Will they risk their dreams to follow their hearts? The jury's still out.

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For my husband, who always sees right to the heart of the matter.

LIKE A HEAVILY LADEN PACK MULE, Brenna Nakamura plodded down one of the long corridors of the Rajah Hotel, her footsteps muffled by the plush carpet. Her portable massage table and oversized duffel bag swung in counterpoint to each step of her slow, rolling gait.

Ah, there it was. Room 619 had a choice location near the end of the hall, on the side with a view of the Boston Public Garden's spring magnificence. She checked the hotel's folio, confirming her client's name: Calvin Wilcox.

The man inside that hotel room—most likely a paunchy, middle-aged businessman, in her experience—represented one step closer to financial solvency. For this month, at any rate.

At some point, she'd accept the inevitable and give up her dream. But if Serenity Massage closed its doors, then she'd have to admit that Gregory, her ex-boyfriend, had been right. Her shrinking bank balance was certainly damning evidence that leaving management consulting for massage therapy five years ago was... What had he called it? Oh, now she remembered. The most jaw-droppingly idiotic idea he'd ever heard.

Eh, who was she kidding. Try though she might to forget his harsh words, they still resounded with nauseating clarity every time she "borrowed" a little more from her rainy day fund.

Gregory hadn't been content with trashing her career plans, either. Dumping her immediately afterward had been his jerkhole-flavored icing on the cake. She couldn't entirely blame him for kicking her out of their shared apartment, though—after all, his

parents had owned the place, and they'd never hidden their disdain for her.

She realized she'd been staring at the room number on her client's door and exhaled a long, shuddery breath. These negative memories of the past weren't going to help her achieve her vision of the future.

And she wasn't going to give up her entrepreneurial ambitions without a fight. So no matter how tired she was as the end of this interminable day approached, no matter how worried she was about her precarious financial situation, she would damn well be wearing a smile when her client opened the door.

She straightened the loose ponytail gathered at her neck. Then she tapped on the thick wooden door. "Mr. Wilcox? It's Brenna, from Serenity Massage."

"Hang on," a husky baritone replied, accompanied by the muffled thud of footsteps approaching her.

Pasting on a friendly expression, she stepped back as the door swung inward. Only to be confronted by a broad expanse of chest, not quite encased in one of the hotel's signature white terry robes. Her gaze rose to the sturdy column of her client's neck before stalling out at his face, half a foot above her own.

Her jaw slackened as her expectations valiantly tried to catch up to reality. If she'd had a checklist for Male Aesthetic Perfection, this guy would have ticked every box, from his athletic build to his chiseled jaw and slanting cheekbones. A smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose saved him—barely—from being intimidatingly gorgeous. But his lips were flattened with tension, and his damp, sandy blond hair looked rumpled, as if he'd just run a hand through it.

Brenna could recognize a fellow stressed-out human being when she saw one, and that brought her back to the reason she was there. "Hi," she said, hoping he didn't notice how breathless she sounded.

"Please, come in." The rumble of his voice slid over her like warm honey.

He backed a few steps into the room's foyer before leading her into the sitting area, which boasted the Rajah's trademark opulence. Rich fabrics and leather impeccably complemented the modern mahogany furniture. The heavy drapes were already drawn across the floor-to-ceiling windows she knew hid behind them.

She set down her massage gear next to the coffee table, then lowered her duffel onto the sofa. Meanwhile, her client stood near the pristine king-sized bed, looking anywhere but at her.

He wasn't the only one who was nervous. Clients as good-looking as he was didn't cross her path often, but they'd never fazed her before. This guy, on the other hand, sent her pulse all thready.

"So, where do you want me?" he asked.

She dug deep for her professionalism and kept her voice low and calm. "It'll take me a few minutes to set up, so you can just make yourself comfortable for now, Mr. Wilcox."

He sat on the edge of the bed. "Please, call me Cal. Mr. Wilcox makes me think of my dad." His attempt at a grin didn't quite reach his gray eyes, which were pinched at the corners with strain.

She frowned in empathy. "Do you spend a lot of time working on a computer?"

"Way, way more than I'd like," he replied with gritted teeth. Then he began kneading the back of his neck with one of his big, strong hands. "My head is fuh... reaking killing me right now."

His tone piqued her interest, even as his word substitution had her hiding a smile. He sounded a lot like she had, before her career change. "What do you do?"

"I'm an attorney. I'm up here for a trial that starts tomorrow."

"Ah." That explained a lot. "Let me get set up and we'll see what I can do for you."

Brenna shrugged off her belted fleece jacket and laid it across the sofa's arm, next to her duffel. Underneath it, she wore a silky, purplish-gray tunic and matching pants. The wrap-around top was stylish—for a uniform—but for a fleeting moment she wished she'd had the Serenity Massage logo emblazoned on tailored spa dresses instead of the flowing, practical styles she'd chosen.

Not that it mattered what she was wearing, she reminded herself, so long as her appearance was professional. The Rajah Hotel had called her to Cal's room because she was a licensed massage therapist lucky enough to have been added to their referral list. Remaining on that list was far more important than trying to make herself more attractive to one of their guests, no matter how much of a hunk he might be.

Right now, she needed to focus on adjusting the height of the massage table, and on setting her newest client at ease. "Have you had a massage before, Cal?"

"Not a professional one."

Brenna glanced up at him, but he didn't seem to be insinuating anything by the

remark. At least, nothing was evident in his facial expression. Though she'd be surprised if a guy as hot as Cal had never gotten a massage from a girlfriend or lover.

She studiously ignored his gaze, as he watched her stand the table upright and cover it with sheets and a lightweight blanket. Sticking to the task at hand, she gave him her new-client spiel.

“When I’m done setting up, I’ll step into the bathroom to wash my hands while you disrobe to whatever extent you feel comfortable with. You’ll be covered by a drape at all times.” She paused, making sure her expression was as neutral as possible. “The less you’re wearing, the easier it is for me.” *To appreciate your spectacular body.* She gave herself a mental wrist-slap before continuing. “I can work with anything, though.”

Frowning, he grunted noncommittally.

Brenna let out the breath she hadn’t realized she was holding. “We’ll start with you lying on your front, then I’ll have you flip over.” She inserted a doughnut-shaped face cradle into one end of the table, then lined it with a soft cloth. “There we are.”

She turned around, zeroing in on Cal’s lips, this time. They looked...rather delectable. She swallowed before meeting his tired eyes. “Any questions?”

He shook his head.

“Is it okay if I turn up the heat? I don’t want you to get cold while I’m working on you.”

“Yeah, that’s fine. Whatever you need.”

“Great. I’ll knock to let you know I’m coming back in.”

She pulled her cosmetics bag out of one of the duffel’s outer pockets. Then she adjusted the thermostat by a few degrees, turned down the lights, and escaped into Cal’s bathroom, shutting the door behind her.

Away from his compelling presence, she grew less flustered. After three long years with little time for anything except keeping Serenity Massage afloat, she could be forgiven for finding him appealing. Couldn’t she?

The humid air was scented with a pleasant soapy fragrance, and droplets still clung to the sides of the glass shower recess. A towel was spread out on the heated rack. *Do not imagine your hot client in the shower!*

Instead, she rummaged in her cosmetics bag until she found what she was looking for—lip gloss. Being mostly a non–makeup-wearing kind of girl, it was the best she

could do under the circumstances.

She unscrewed the cap and faced her reflection in the mirror, lip gloss at the ready. Then she straightened, looking herself in the eye. Her lips were fine the way they were. She was there to do her job, not doll herself up. She put the lip gloss away, unused.

Brenna washed and dried her hands before folding a couple of clean hotel towels across her arm. Inhaling deeply, she turned back to the door. Showtime.

She knocked twice, then opened the door a crack. “Cal? Are you ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” he quipped.

She pulled the door all the way open, illuminating Cal’s tousled hair and powerful shoulders. The rest of his body was outlined underneath the sheet and blanket, which now hung askew.

Ignoring the temptation to ogle her client, she stepped through the doorway. Then she shut the door behind her, returning the bedroom to its dimly lit state.

She tucked her cosmetics bag back into its duffel pocket and laid the towels on the coffee table, within easy reach. All that remained was to dig out her pump-bottle of massage oil and its nylon holster from the nearly empty duffel, and strap the holster around her hips.

After sliding a pillow under Cal’s shins, she adjusted the covers. And then it was time to touch him. She was supposed to be calming herself in preparation for the next hour and a half, but her heart wouldn’t stop racing.

Faking tranquility, she moved to his side and started her usual routine. “Okay, Cal, are you comfortable? The headrest is adjustable if you need me to move it up or down.”

“I’m good.”

“Then let’s begin. Let me know if the pressure is too heavy or too light, or I’ve reached a sensitive area.”

Brenna rubbed her hands together, warming them. Then she folded the blanket down from his waist, leaving the sheet pulled up to his shoulders. She could do this. She’d done this thousands of times since graduating from massage school almost four years ago.

It was just that she hadn’t even wanted to touch a man with more than purely professional intentions in ages. And now that a guy had finally piqued her interest—a

guy who didn't even live in Boston, she reminded herself—her professions' ethical limitations chafed in a way they never had before. Life was so unfair sometimes.

But her hormones had waited this long; they could suck it up and wait a little longer. Forever, if they had to. She wasn't going to do anything to jeopardize the referral relationship she'd painstakingly developed with the Rajah. The dozen or so outcall clients the hotel sent her way every month often made the difference between barely scraping by, and being able to save a little toward next month's expenses.

She rested her hands at the base of Cal's spine, on top of the sheet. Then she began a series of long strokes that smoothed the sheet against him from the top of his glutes up to his shoulders and down again, until he started to relax. Only then did she undrape his upper body, folding the sheet across his firm butt and tucking it in under each hip.

It was like unwrapping a long-anticipated present. Cal's broad, beautifully muscled back greeted her, a few little freckles scattered here and there along his V-shaped torso. His well-defined traps and delts gave way to heavy triceps. She was looking forward to the pure sensuality of smoothing slick fingers and palms across warm skin and taut muscle. At least *that* was well within the bounds of propriety.

She warmed some oil in her palms before placing her hands between his shoulders, at the top of his spine. Pausing, she savored the first moment of skin-to-skin connection. She visualized healing energy passing through her tingling palms into Cal's tense muscles. With her pulse beating heavily in her throat, she began a series of long effleurage strokes, up and down his back.

Then, forcing her attraction to him into abeyance, she started on his shoulders in earnest. A pained sound escaped him as she began to knead the twin knots where his neck met his torso.

"Cal? Is this too much?"

"Ohhhh, God. I can take it. It's okay." Each burst of words came out in a rush, as if she were squeezing them out of him with every press against the bunched-up muscles.

Brenna couldn't tell if he was trying to convince her or himself, so she eased off as she compressed the trigger points that riddled his back and shoulders. She'd had clients as tense as Cal before, but not many of them.

His breath escaped on a pained hiss when she tugged against one of his shoulder

blades, working her fingers into the knots hiding underneath. “Do you ever talk with your clients while you’re working?” he asked.

“Sure. Need some distracting?”

“Yeah.” The word sounded almost like a groan. “Something to take my mind off these knots. I had no idea I had so many.”

Sports was always a safe topic. “Have you watched any Red Sox games while you’ve been in town?”

“Yesterday’s game was unbelievable,” he said. “Did you see it?”

“I didn’t get home until the eighth inning, but I caught Pedroia’s two-run homer in the ninth.”

“You’re a Sox fan?”

“I’ve lived here for nine years,” she said drily. “It’s kind of hard not to be to some degree.”

“Where are you from originally? You look like you’re from an island in the South Pacific or something.”

Brenna stiffened, then forced herself to relax. Maybe he didn’t mean anything by it. Not everyone was like Gregory’s awful family. She would operate under that assumption until Cal showed his true colors, whatever they might be.

“California.” Then she steeled herself to answer the question he was really asking, the question she’d been asked more times than she could count. “My dad’s Japanese. His family came to the US when he was two. My mom is your quintessential blonde and blue-eyed California girl.” As she spoke, her hands continued to press and glide, homing in on areas of tension—which was pretty much all of him. Lord, did this man need bodywork.

“Ah, that’s cool,” he said. “Do you speak Japanese?”

Her concern faded. “A little. My dad didn’t really speak it except with my grandparents. I actually speak more Spanish. Some French, too.”

“I wish I spoke another language. I took French in high school, but it didn’t stick.”

“*Quel dommage*,” she teased him.

“I remember that one! ‘What a shame.’”

She imagined his grin—lopsided and adorably sexy. Too bad he was lying on his stomach, so she couldn’t see it.

“I’m a Sox fan too, actually,” he said after a moment.

“Because they’re playing well?”

“No, I’m legit. Grew up in New Hampshire.”

“Local boy makes good, eh?” She smiled, even though he couldn’t see her.

“Something like that.”

The tension ebbed from Cal’s upper body as he underwent her ministrations, and they both fell silent. Brenna enjoyed this aspect of her profession the most—helping her clients find peace, both physical and emotional. Cal’s breathing began to slow and even out, and her own gradually matched it.

She moved to his lower back, applying deep pressure as she slid her hands a little way underneath the sheet, then around to the back of his hips. He stiffened up again; this area was plagued by trigger points as well.

“Cal? Would you like me to work these knots in your hips and glutes?” The question was part of her standard routine, but on him it felt way more sensual than normal. And not just because the man had a tremendously fine ass.

“Mmm. Yeah. The knots hurt a bit, but it feels so good when you’re done with them.”

His thick, sleepy voice sent an inappropriate shiver up her spine. *Down, girl!*

She laid one of the towels across his upper back so he wouldn’t lose too much heat through his oil-slicked skin. Then she redraped him, exposing his right leg and most of the right side of his chiseled butt.

Warming another generous dollop of oil between her hands, she set to work. One hand rested atop the other, so the weight of her body pressed down through just her right palm.

He let out a groan.

Brenna paused. “Everything okay?”

“Yeah, sorry. I couldn’t help it,” he murmured, sounding embarrassed.

“No, that’s fine. You do what your body needs to do.” She circled once again up to his lower back before starting another deep glide across his firm glutes.

After a few minutes, he shifted on the table. She thought nothing of it until she became aware he was tensing in cadence with her massage strokes. His breath, she now noticed, was also hitching almost imperceptibly as her hands rounded the curve of his butt to his hips.

In fact, both his repetitively tensed muscles and his increasingly ragged

inhalations were getting more obvious. It was almost like...

Brenna bit her lip. *Oh, shit.* Cal was getting turned on. And a tiny, secret part of her reveled in it.

CAL LAY FACEDOWN on the padded table, immensely grateful to his boss for insisting he get a massage. Their client's trial started tomorrow, and Cal had been working his ass off for the past four months getting them ready for it. A lot was riding on the outcome, and not just for their client, Conovan Industries. He was up for partner this year, and a strong performance here could clinch the decision. He needed to be in top form.

Besides, the masseuse was hot, and the massage itself was incredible. Sensual, skirting but never crossing the line to sexual. He had never before been so conscious of his skin as a sensory organ, but now he was hyperaware of every stroke, every press on his back.

The experience was turning out to be surprisingly emotional as well. It had been far too long since anyone had touched him with such complete focus and dedication. Friends-with-benefits and casual relationships—the only kind he'd allowed himself in the past six years—just didn't go there.

He was sort of regretting he hadn't kept his boxer briefs on, though. Especially after he stupidly agreed to let her massage his hips and butt. Lord knew he needed it after being chained to his desk for months on end, but he'd never realized his hips were such an erogenous zone. Until now. He was sporting a hard-on that all the baseball statistics in the world couldn't deflate, and it was both uncomfortable and embarrassing.

Thankfully, she soon covered his back again and shifted her focus farther down. First to one leg, then the other, giving his erection a chance to disappear so he didn't tent the sheet after he turned over.

His reprieve didn't last long, though.

The masseuse raised the sheet and blanket between them to shield her view as he awkwardly rolled over, lowering them only after he settled onto his back. She slid the pillow out from under his calves, then arranged the covers once more.

Cal could hear her removing the doughnut cushion, and he opened his eyes. Immediately, he regretted it. And not just because he almost certainly had unflattering lines on his face. The sexy masseuse was standing behind his head, her attention focused on his body. Her sun-kissed ponytail had drifted across one shoulder while she worked him over. The tip of her pink little tongue poking out from between her lips was the cherry on top.

She leaned forward to fold the covers across his chest. He slammed his eyes shut again, but it was too late.

An image flooded his mind, of dusky nipples close enough for him to lick, of the lightning strike of pleasure that would jolt her if he did. Cal couldn't suppress a slight shudder at the thought.

He swallowed hard. She was only massaging his shoulders and the tops of his pecs, but the desire that lanced through him still went straight to his groin.

The masseuse paused. "Are you cold? I can turn up the heat, if that would help."

Was she serious? "No, thanks. I'm fine," he gritted out. He was hot enough already. More than hot enough. It didn't matter where she touched him now. Every nerve ending in his skin was at full attention and clamoring for more.

He inhaled, filling his lungs as she moved to his right side and started on his arm. Then he exhaled in a slow, even stream, trying to relax. Or at least trying to give her the impression he was relaxed. He concentrated on breathing as evenly as possible while her fingers twined silkily with his, her thumbs rubbing little patterns into his palm.

He did a fair job at maintaining the pretense of disinterest as she switched sides to attend to his other arm and hand. But the facade—and his breathing—grew a little shaky when she began to massage his pecs. Her thumbs grazed his nipples, which immediately tightened into traitorous little nubs. He wondered how much more he'd have to bear before his ninety minutes were up.

When she covered his torso again with the sheet and blanket, he nearly sighed in relief. As frustratingly pleasurable as her touch was, the absence of it for a few

moments was a blessing.

Though her next move ratcheted his arousal right back up. She tucked in the covers on either side of his waist, then pressed inward, bracketing his hips with her palms. The small circles she made alternately pulled the blanket taut across his rapidly swelling erection and loosened it again.

Cal stifled a groan, hoping his calm exterior belied his inner turmoil. He didn't even want to strike up a conversation again because he'd just imagine her urging him to let it happen, let her make him feel good—

Okay! Enough! He forced his tense muscles to loosen. That strategy sufficed until she shifted her hands to his upper thigh, working it through the covers, and all he could feel was her fingertips scraping against the edge of his pubic hair through two unwanted layers of material. Just a couple more inches, and she'd be palming his cock.

It was getting more and more difficult to hide how turned on he was. Part of him was desperately hoping he'd make it through the remainder of the massage session without embarrassing himself. The rest of him was unrealistically wishing her hand would slip, or even that she might take pity on him and put him out of his sexual misery.

Finally, she undraped one of his legs and began to tackle yet another set of knots there, and he could stop trying to will away his hard-on. He'd done it. He'd endured, and now he could concentrate on just enjoying whatever was left of the massage. Even though his dick remained unrelentingly rigid, and was probably at this very moment painting glistening trails of pre-come across his belly. At least everything else could finally relax.

Eventually, his poor, neglected cock did, too.

At last, the masseuse rearranged the blanket and covered him up once more, and he realized the session must be coming to an end. She stroked his face with gentle fingertips, from the center of his forehead out to each side. His skin tingled as he soaked up what had to be the last moments of her attentions.

One warm hand cupped his jaw, and a ghostly impression of heat hovered just above his mouth. He knew he had to be hallucinating, yet his lips twitched, trying to pout into a touch, a kiss, that wasn't ever coming.

Before he could force his eyelids open, her hand pulled away from his face. Even

though he'd expected it, the shock of the severed connection still reverberated through him like the pure tone of a perfectly-cast bronze bell. Then, as the lingering echo of her fingers and palm against his skin died away, he slowly emerged from the haze of relaxation she'd created.

"Cal," she said, her voice quiet in the stillness, "I'm going to go wash up now. You take your time in here. I'll knock before I come back in."

"Okay." His voice broke across the word. He cleared his throat.

"I'll bring you some water, too." He heard her cross the room. A fan of light spilled out briefly as the bathroom door opened, then closed behind her.

Unable to move, he listened to the water running in the bathroom. He needed to get up and put on some clothes, before she came back. Any minute now, he would do that.

When he couldn't avoid it any longer, he mustered the strength to press his palms against the table, levering himself up as he swung his feet over the side. The masseuse had left a clean towel on the coffee table, so he wrapped it around his waist before stumbling to the closet.

Earlier, he'd laid out a change of clothes on top of his suitcase. He hurried into his underwear and jeans, then shoved his arms through the sleeves of his plaid shirt. He started to button it, but the room was hotter than an August afternoon, so he left his shirt undone and turned up the air-conditioning instead. Then he refolded the towel, placed it back on the coffee table, and sprawled out on the sofa to wait for her.

Several minutes later, she cracked open the door and knocked. "Can I come in?" she called out to him, her voice low and sensual.

"Sure." His own voice was still hoarse, and he was grateful that she was bringing him something to drink.

He sat up straighter as she approached. When she'd first arrived, he'd idly watched her set up the table while his tension headache squeezed his head in a vise. He'd thought she was attractive as she bustled through the task with an economy of movement that spoke to many hours of practice.

Clearly, he hadn't been paying attention. Attractive didn't do her justice. She was stunning.

The exotic tilt at the corners of her golden brown eyes made it hard to look away from her. Her lips were full and kissable. She had a slender frame, with the pert little

breasts he'd fantasized about earlier. The gentle curve of her hips flared from a narrow waist.

She handed over the glass, and he thanked her before raising it to his lips. As he swallowed, she said, "You should make sure you drink at least six to eight glasses of water or other clear fluids in the next twenty-four hours."

Cal finished the glass and cleared his throat. "I didn't think it was possible for me to feel this relaxed. That massage was amazing. My headache is totally gone," he said, both pleased and surprised. He gifted her with one of his trial-winning smiles.

"That's great," she said. Then she turned away to start breaking down the table and packing away her supplies into the duffel bag. A faint but unmistakable blush tinted her cheeks, making him regret leaving his chest bare. He just felt so at ease, it hadn't even occurred to him to take her feelings into consideration.

He frowned, annoyed at himself, and stood to belatedly do up his shirt. But it was hard to sustain any negative emotion for long when his bloodstream was rich with massage-induced endorphins. Endorphins convincing him that life was so good right now, nothing could go wrong, which led to his second misstep in as many minutes.

"After you're all packed up, would you like to get some coffee with me downstairs in the lounge? I'd love to get to know you better." Alternatively, or maybe afterward, he'd love to get to know her better right here, in his king-sized bed.

Or maybe not. Her brows had drawn together. Bad sign.

Though he could be reading her wrong. Besides, what did he have to lose? So he tried again, hoping he was correctly guessing the source of her concern. "You can leave your stuff up here if you want, so you don't have to lug it around with you. We can come back and get it whenever you're ready to go."

She straightened to her full height, which still left her well shy of his own six-foot-one. "That's not the issue," she said. "First of all, I don't date my clients. And second of all, if I did date my clients, I certainly wouldn't do it anywhere near the hotel. I have a professional reputation to maintain."

Oh. Duh. His brain must not have come back online yet.

"Right. Well," he soldiered on, as she sped up her packing, "do you have a card? I'll be here for another two weeks or so, maybe we could set up another session—"

She ignored his second attempt altogether. "I, ah, need to get going. Here's the bill for tonight." Looking downright uncomfortable now, she turned to him just long

enough to hand him a black leather folio.

Shit. It had been a long time since he'd screwed up this royally with a girl, and her rejection stung. Nevertheless, he scanned the bill and added a very generous tip—courtesy of his boss, who'd offered to pay for the massage in appreciation for Cal's hard work. Then, as she tugged the carrying case's long zipper around the massage table, he shut the folio with an authoritative *thwap*.

She glanced up at him, and he wished he hadn't drawn her attention in that way. But while he had it... "Your name is... Brenna, right?"

She focused again on her gear, zipping her duffel closed. "Yes," she said. Though the word sounded almost like a question.

So he decided to press his luck a little further. "What's your last name?"

Apparently finished with her packing, she straightened. The hesitation in her voice was as unmistakable as the pink that crept back into her cheeks. "It's Nakamura."

"Nice to meet you, Brenna Nakamura." With a smile, he handed her the folio.

"Um, thanks." She bent down to slip it into one of her duffel's outer pockets, then stood and met his eyes once more. "I'm glad I was able to help you feel better," she said before shouldering the table and duffel.

She waited for him to precede her through the foyer to the door. He was rapidly running out of ways to prolong their encounter. "I know you can manage on your own, but would you like a hand with your things down to the lobby?" he asked as he opened the door.

"No thanks, I'm fine. I do appreciate the offer though." She brushed past him, pausing to look up at him through those dark, thick lashes. "Take care."

"You too."

He watched for a few moments as she walked away, managing the burden of her massage gear with a grace that made it look deceptively easy. Letting out a breath that was almost a sigh, he retreated into his room and allowed the door to close. Might as well get some work done.

But he knew that when he eventually went to bed, he'd be thinking of her.

BRENNA'S PACE QUICKENED once she rounded the corner to the elevator and was sure she was out of Cal's sight. He and those ridged abs of his were just far too tempting. It

was a good thing he'd buttoned his shirt before asking her to have coffee with him, or he might have befuddled her into saying yes.

It would definitely be best if she never saw him again. A second massage session would probably end with the undeniable spark between them bursting into flame. She would lose the Rajah Hotel gig—and quite possibly her license and her livelihood—if she showed up at the front desk with her hair a tousled mess and her face glowing with satisfaction.

And it would almost be worth it, too.

Regret dogged her all the way down to the front desk, where it doubled when she pulled out the bill and saw the number Cal had filled in for her tip. Astonished, she handed over the folio to Crystal, the front desk attendant. “He tipped me seventy-five bucks?”

“Looks that way.” Crystal smiled. “Guess we have another satisfied guest, Brenna.”

“Yeah, but...” All she could do was shake her head as Crystal paid her. The tip was half the bill.

What exactly was Cal trying to express with this gesture? Was he attempting to butter her up? Apologize for the awkward attempt to ask her out? Or was he just grateful that she'd relieved his stress so he could get ready for his upcoming trial?

Now she wished she hadn't ignored his interest in a second session. Purely because of the boost to Serenity Massage's bottom line, of course.

Though she had to admit, it really had been lovely to work on all of those well-defined muscles. Even his infernal rippling abs.

Crystal picked up the phone. “Hang on a sec, let me see if our driver is available.”

“That's okay, you don't have to do that.” But Crystal waved Brenna's protest away.

The truth was, she was wiped out. When Crystal had called two and a half hours ago, Brenna had been tidying up one of her two tiny but peaceful therapy rooms after her five o'clock client had left, trying not to think about the dire state of her bank account. Three years into her five-year business plan, she was already way off track.

She'd worked in a high-end spa for the better part of a year after finishing her training, and she'd thought that experience had given her a good handle on start-up costs, revenue, and expenses. Serenity Massage was supposed to have been profitable

starting almost two years ago, including paying her a salary sufficient to cover the mortgage on her condo and stock her cupboards with more than cereal and dried pasta. Unfortunately, her projections hadn't taken into account an economic downturn.

To maximize her revenue until the economy picked up again, she now accepted bookings between eight in the morning and nine at night. Though she had a depressingly large amount of downtime, she almost never took a day off.

Brenna's stomach growled, reminding her it was nearly nine o'clock now, and she'd barely had time to grab a bagel and a cup of tea on her way over to the hotel. She'd taken the subway over here, and she was sure her fellow T-riders had been annoyed by how much space her outcall gear took up. But it was late now, and if the hotel's driver was unavailable, her choices were limited—lug her gear ten blocks in the dark, cut into tonight's profits by paying for a taxi, or wait for who knew how long on the subway platform until the next train arrived. The Sunday night public transit schedule didn't offer many options, as she well knew.

Crystal hung up the phone. "Paul's out front. He can take you wherever you need to go."

Brenna's shoulders sagged in relief. "Thanks, Crystal."

She scoffed. "Oh, it was no problem, Brenna. Have a great night."

"Good night."

Brenna found Paul waiting under the glass portico, wearing his monogrammed livery and leaning against the hotel's gleaming black town car. With his usual good cheer, he greeted her in his remarkably thick Boston accent. Then he stowed her gear in the trunk while she got comfortable in the back seat. Her head lolled against the headrest as fatigue descended upon her.

The driver's door closed. "New-bree and Glahsta?" Which—after living in Boston for close to a decade—she automatically translated to "Newbury and Gloucester?"

"Thanks," she said. "That'd be great." The car eased away from the curb.

Paul had been in the business long enough to understand she was too tired to make small talk, for which she was deeply grateful. He delivered her to Serenity Massage's front door less than ten minutes later. When she pulled out her wallet to tip him, he held up a hand. "No need for that, hon'. I can see that you been workin' even hahdah than me."

"You're the best, Paul. If you or your wife ever need a massage, just call me. I'll

totally give you a discount.”

“Thanks, doll. Lemme get ya things.”

After he carefully deposited her gear next to her on the curb, he circled back around to the driver’s side and waved. “Have a good one!”

“Same to you,” she said as he ducked back inside the limo.

Shouldering her gear one last time, she maneuvered it up the brownstone’s exterior stairs. She let herself inside, then schlepped everything up another flight of narrow stairs to the suite.

After storing her gear in the tiny coat closet, she changed back into her street clothes. Her uniform and the soiled sheets and blanket went into the dirty laundry bag, and the hotel’s payment and Cal’s outlandish tip went into the safe bolted into the utility closet. Only then did she shut off the lights and head home, where she absolutely, positively would not be fantasizing about Cal Wilcox and his perfectly sculpted body.