



Hidden Pleasures (Forged of Steele Book 8)

By Brenda Jackson



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And when the man is gorgeous Galen Steele, what woman could possibly say no?

Brittany Thrasher has her own hidden motives for accepting Galen's proposal. Only the savvy businesswoman draws the line at actually falling for the sexy playboy. Even if he *is* the incredible lover of her most taboo fantasies....

The moment their paths crossed again at an auction, Galen knew Brittany was special. If she wants the house he just won so badly, how far is she willing to go to get it? That's when the Phoenix entrepreneur makes her an offer he fully expects her to refuse.

But once their passion heats up, the bidding really begins. And Galen *will* uncover Brittany's secret. Because this determined man of Steele isn't about to let the woman of his dreams get away....



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Editorial Review

About the Author

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"Holy crap!" Galen Steele muttered as he turned away from the bank of elevators and raced for the stairways of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Manhattan. A high school soccer team was checking out and filling all the elevators going down to the lobby. Galen could not be late for this wedding. His cousin Donovan would kill him if he were.

All the other groomsmen had left for the church a good thirty minutes ago, but he'd lagged behind when a woman he'd met at the bar last night had unexpectedly knocked on his hotel room door just when he was about to walk out. Not one to turn down a booty call, he'd thought he could make it quick. He had no idea Tina What's-Her-Name didn't believe in a quickie. A smile split his lips as he recalled how she'd made it worth his while.

And now he was late. He'd heard of weddings being held up for the bride or the groom, but never for a groomsman.

He vividly remembered Donovan's warning last night at the bachelor party. His cousin, who'd been engaged two months shy of a year, had made it clear that he'd waited long enough for his wedding day and he intended for it to go off without a hitch. And that meant he wanted all twenty of his groomsmen to be at the church on time. As he spoke, he'd looked directly at Galen and his five brothers—not so affectionately known as the "Bad News Steeles from Phoenix."

Hell, it wasn't Galen's fault that his father, Drew Steele, had actually gotten run out of Charlotte over thirty years ago by a bunch of women out for blood—namely his. Drew's reputation as a skirt chaser was legendary, and although the old man had finally settled down with one woman, his six sons had been cursed with his testosterone-driven genes. Galen, Tyson, Eli, Jonas, Mercury and Gannon didn't know how to say no to a willing woman. And if she wasn't willing, they had the seductive powers to not only get her in a willing mood, but to push her right over the top. Or let her stay on the bottom, depending upon her favorite position.

Galen glanced at his watch again as he reached the main floor. Hurrying toward the revolving doors, he prayed a taxi would be available. This was New York City, the Big Apple, and yellow cabs were supposed to be all over the place, right?

He smiled. One was pulling up as soon as he exited the hotel and he ran toward it, thinking he might be on time to the wedding after all.

Not waiting to be assisted by a bellman, he opened the cab's door, slid in the seat and was about to direct the

driver to the church when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He looked up and his gaze collided with a face he could only define as gut-grippingly beautiful. Eyes the color of caramel, naturally arched brows, a cute little nose and a pair of too-luscious lips.

The beauty he'd finally gotten out of his room less than ten minutes ago had nothing on this woman. It was like comparing apples to oranges. Both were good fruit, but one was sweeter.

He found his voice to speak. "Yes?"

"This is my cab."

He couldn't help but grin when he asked, "You own it?"

Her frown gave him a warning. It also gave him one hell of a hard-on. "No, I don't own it, but I called for it. It's here to take me to the airport. I have a flight to catch."

"And I have a wedding to attend and I'm late."

She crossed her arms over her chest, and the shapeliest pair of breasts he'd ever seen pressed tight against her blouse. The sight of them made his mouth water. "Sorry, but your lack of planning does not constitute an emergency on my part," she said in a haughty voice.

"The proper thing for you to have done was to allow yourself ample time to reach your destination."

"Well, I didn't and as much I've enjoyed chatting with you, I have to go." He regretted saying so, because he would love to spend more time with her.

She dropped her arms and arched her shoulders. Once again his attention was drawn to her breasts. "This is my cab!"

"It was your cab, lady, and I really do have to go." He turned his attention to the driver and said, "I need to get to the Dayspring Baptist Church in Harlem in less than twenty minutes."

The driver shook his head, reluctant to move. "I don't know, man," he said with a deep Jamaican accent. "I was called to take a lady to the airport."

Galen took out his wallet, pulled out a hundred-dollar bill and offered it to the guy. "I'm down to nineteen minutes now."

The man almost snatched the bill out of Galen's hand and shot the woman an apologetic look. "Sorry, miss, I have a large family to feed. I'll call in and have another cab sent for you."

Satisfied, Galen reached over to close the door, but the woman—the sinfully beautiful but very angry woman—was blocking the way. He tilted his head back and looked up at her. "Do you mind?"

"Yes, I do mind. You have to be the rudest man I've ever met. Someone needs to teach you some manners."

He smiled. "You're probably right, but not today. Some other time, perhaps."

She glared at him as she moved out of the way, but not before saying, "And for heaven's sake, will you please zip up your pants."

He glanced down. "Oops." He quickly slid up his zipper before closing the door.

The cab pulled away then and he couldn't resist glancing back through the window at the woman they'd left at the curb. She was not a happy camper. In fact she looked downright furious. And he should give a damn why? Because he *had* behaved like an ill-mannered brute, which was not his typical behavior, especially when it came to beautiful women. It was definitely not the impression he would want to leave with one. If he'd had the time he would have charmed her right out of her panties and bra. It was the Steele way.

Oh, well. You win some and you lose some. And he'd much preferred losing her than his behind, and there was no doubt in his mind that Donovan would kick that very part of his anatomy all over New York if he was late for his wedding.

"I now pronounce you man and wife. Donovan, you may kiss your bride."

Donovan Steele didn't waste time pulling his wife into his arms and giving her a kiss many probably thought was rather long. And if that wasn't bad enough, when he'd finally pulled his mouth from hers, he whispered, "I love you, sweetheart."

Natalie Ford Steele smiled up at her husband and said, "And I love you."

And then she was swept up into her husband's arms and carried out of the church.

Galen swallowed to keep from gagging as he watched the entire scene. Even though Natalie was a nice-looking woman, a real beauty, he'd still had a hard time believing that Donovan had decided to hang up his bachelor shoes and take a wife. Donovan's reputation as a womanizer was legendary; in fact, he'd been so infamous in Charlotte that there were some who thought he was one of Drew Steele's sons instead of a cousin. Galen figured Charlotte wouldn't be the same without a bachelor Steele to keep things lively. Maybe he ought to consider leaving Phoenix and moving east.

He kicked that idea out of his mind real quick. His older Steele cousins in Charlotte would probably give him a job in their Steele Manufacturing Company. He much preferred remaining in Phoenix doing what he loved, which some people thought was trivial.

And his father topped that list of critics. Drew Steele believed that a man was supposed to get up at seven o'clock, Monday through Friday, and work at some job until at least five. It had taken Drew a long time to buy into the Principles According to Galen Steele, which said that a man was supposed to work smarter, not harder. That was why at the age of thirty-four Galen was a multibillionaire and was still building an empire, while working less than twenty hours a week and having fun at what he did.

Fourteen years ago while attending the University of Phoenix, pursuing a degree in engineering, he and his two roommates decided to do something to make money, something different than what their friends were doing—like selling their blood or their sperm. So they began creating video games. After their games became a hit on campus, they formed a business and by the time they graduated from college two years later, they were millionaires. The three of them were still partners today.

Their business, the SID Corporation, was represented by three CEOs, Galen Steele, Eric Ingram and Wesley

Duval. Their only employees were their art team. He, Eric and Wesley shared duties as game designers and programmers and leased a suite in an exclusive area of Phoenix's business district for appearances' sake and as a tax write-off. They preferred designing their games right in the garage of their homes. Simple. Easy. Shrewd.

He shook his head. He and his brothers had inherited the old man's penchant for women, but they'd been born to excel. Drew's expectations for his six sons had been high, and all of them had become successful in their own right.

Seeing the other groomsmen move forward, Galen brought his attention back to the ceremony in time to stay on cue and file out with the rest of the wedding party. He took the arm of his partner, Laurie, one of Natalie's friends from college. She was pretty—and she was also very much married.

Outside in the perfect June day, he couldn't help but chuckle as he checked out the faces of his brothers and a number of Donovan's still-single friends. They had stood up there and witnessed the entire ceremony and they looked as if they were in shock. Galen understood how they felt. There wasn't a woman alive who'd make him consider tying the knot. He got shivers just thinking about it.

"You barely made it."

Galen came out of his reverie to glance over at two of his brothers, Tyson and Gannon. "Doesn't matter, Tyson. I made it," he said, smiling. "With a minute to spare."

"Should we ask why you were almost late?" Gannon asked with a curious look on his face.

Galen chuckled. He was the oldest and at twenty-nine Gannon was the youngest. Galen knew he was his youngest brother's hero and because of that he tried walking a straight-and-narrow path. Doing the role-model thing wasn't always easy, especially when you were the offspring of the infamous Drew Steele. But on occasion Galen liked pulling his youngest brother's leg. Like now.

"I'll be glad to tell you why I was almost late," Galen said, leaning close to his brothers as if what he had to say was for their ears only.

"I got caught up in a foursome and lost track of the time," he lied. And just so they would know what he meant, he said, "It was me and three women in my hotel room. Get the picture?"

"No kidding?" Gannon said, easily impressed.

Tyson rolled his eyes. "Yes, he's full of it, Gannon. Don't believe a word he says. It might have been one woman, but it wasn't three."

Galen could only smile. There were only eleven months' difference in his and Tyson's ages. A lot of people thought they were twins, but they were as different as night and day. Dr. Tyson Steele tended to be too serious at times.

"Tell him the truth, Galen, or Gannon is going to go around believing you're superhuman or something," Tyson said.

"All right." He gave Gannon his serious look. "There were two women. I took care of one and the other one

got away," Galen said, thinking of the woman whose cab he'd been forced to hijack. He could still see the anger on her gorgeous face, especially the fire that had lit a striking pair of eyes.

"Was she good-looking?" Gannon had to ask.

Galen lifted a brow. "Who?"

"The one who got away."

Galen couldn't help but smile. "She was more than good-looking. The woman was absolutely stunning."

"Damn, man. And you let her get away?" Gannon looked clearly disappointed.

"It was either that or get my behind kicked by Donovan if I was late for his wedding."

"Okay, everyone, let's go back inside the church for pictures," the wedding director said, interrupting their conversation. "Then we'll return to the Ritz-Carlton for the reception."

Galen's thoughts shifted back to the woman. The one who got away. Like he'd told Gannon, she was more than good-looking and for some reason he could not get her out of his mind.

And at that moment he thought he'd give just about anything to see her again.

Brittany Thrasher tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear after bringing her car to a stop in front of her house. It was nice to be back home after attending that seminar in New York.

A few minutes later she was walking through her front door wheeling her luggage behind her. The first thing she planned to do was strip off her clothes in deference to the Tampa heat that flirted with the hundred-degree mark.

She looked at the stack of envelopes on the table and couldn't help but appreciate her neighbor and friend Jennifer Barren for coming over every day to get her mail and water her plants. This was Brittany's busiest travel time of the year. As CEO of her own business, Etiquette Matters, she and her ten employees traveled all over the country teaching the basics of proper etiquette to businesses, schools and interested groups. Last week her students consisted of a group of NFL players who'd been invited to the White House for dinner.

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