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The Real Thing (Harlequin DesireThe Westmorelands)

By Brenda Jackson



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Can't get enough of the sexy Westmoreland brothers? Find out what kind of trouble Adrian's twin, Aidan, gets himself into in The Secret Affair. Available December 2014 from Harlequin Desire!



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Editorial Review

About the Author

A New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling and award-winning author of more than 100 romance titles, Brenda divides her time between family, writing and traveling . Readers may write Brenda at P.O. Box 28267, Jacksonville, Florida 32226, by email at WriterBJackson@aol.com or visit her website at brendajackson.net.

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"I understand you're in a jam and might need my help."

In a jam was putting it mildly, Trinity Matthews thought, looking across the table at Adrian Westmoreland.

If only what he'd said wasn't true. And.. if only Adrian wasn't so good-looking. Then thinking about what she needed him to do wouldn't be so hard.

When she and Adrian had first met, last year at his cousin Riley's wedding, he had been standing in a group of Westmoreland men. She had sized up his brothers and cousins, but had definitely noticed Adrian standing beside his identical twin brother, Aidan.

Trinity had found out years ago, when her sister Tara had married Thorn Westmoreland, that all Westmoreland men were eye candy of the most delectable kind. Therefore, she hadn't really been surprised to discover that Thorn's cousins from Denver had a lot of the same traits-handsome facial features, tall height, a hard-muscled body and an aura of primal masculinity.

But she'd never thought she'd be in a position to date one of those men-even if it was only a temporary ruse.

Trinity knew Tara had already given Adrian some details about the situation and now it was up to her to fill him in on the rest.

"Yes, I'm in a jam," Trinity said, releasing a frustrated breath. "I want to tell you about it, but first I want to thank you for agreeing to meet with me tonight."

He had suggested Laredo's Steak House. She had eaten here a few times, and the food was always excellent.

"No problem."

She paused, trying to ignore how the deep, husky sound of his voice stirred her already nervous stomach. "My goal," she began, "is to complete my residency at Denver Memorial and return to Bunnell, Florida, and work beside my father and brothers in their medical practice. That goal is being threatened by another physician, Dr. Casey Belvedere. He's a respected surgeon here in Denver. He-

"Wants you."

Trinity's heart skipped a beat. Another Westmoreland trait she'd discovered: they didn't believe in mincing words.

"Yes. He wants an affair. I've done nothing to encourage his advances or to give him the impression I'm interested. I even lied and told him I was already involved with someone, but he won't let up. Now it's more than annoying. He's hinted that if I don't go along with it, he'll make my life at the hospital difficult."

She pushed her plate aside and took a sip of her wine. "I brought his unwanted advances to the attention of the top hospital administrator, and he's more or less dismissed my claim. Dr. Belvedere's family is well known in the city. Big philanthropists, I understand. Presently, the Belvederes are building a children's wing at the hospital that will bear their name. It's my guess that the hospital administrator feels that now is not the time to make waves with any of the Belvederes. He said I need to pick my battles carefully, and this is one I might not want to take on."

She paused. "So I came up with a plan." She chuckled softly. "Let me rephrase that. Tara came up with the plan after I told her what was going on. It seems that she faced a similar situation when she was doing her residency in Kentucky. The only difference was that the hospital administrator supported her and made sure the doctor was released of his duties. I don't have that kind of support here because of the Belvedere name."

Adrian didn't say anything for a few moments. He broke eye contact with her and stared down into his glass of wine. Trinity couldn't help but wonder what he was thinking.

He looked back at her. "There is another solution to your problem, you know."

She lifted a brow. "There is?"

"You did say he's a surgeon, right?"

"Yes."

"Then I could break his hands so he'll never be able to use them in an operating room again."

She stared wide-eyed at him for a couple of seconds before leaning forward. "You're joking, right?"

"No. I am not joking. I'm dead serious."

She leaned back as she studied his features. They were etched with ruthlessness and his dark eyes were filled with callousness. It was only then that Trinity remembered Tara's tales about the twins, their baby sister, Bailey, and their younger cousin Bane. According to Tara, those four were the holy terrors of Denver while growing up and got into all kinds of trouble-malicious and otherwise.

But that was years ago. Now Bane was a navy SEAL, the twins were both Harvard graduates-Adrian obtained his PhD in engineering and Aidan completed medical school- and Bailey, the youngest of the four, was presently working on her MBA. However, it was quite obvious to Trinity that behind Adrian Westmoreland's chiseled good looks, irresistible charm and PhD was a man who could return to his old ways if the need arose.

"I don't think we need to go that far," she said, swallowing. "Like Tara suggested, we can pretend to be lovers and hope that works."

"If that's how you prefer handling it."

"Yes. And you don't have a problem going along with it? Foregoing dating other women for a while?"

He pushed his plate aside and leaned back in his chair. "Nope. I don't have a problem going along with it. Putting my social life on hold until this matter is resolved will be no big deal."

Trinity released a relieved sigh. She had heard that since he'd returned to Denver to work as one of the CEOs at his family-owned business, Blue Ridge Land Management, Adrian had acquired a very active social life. There weren't many single Westmoreland men left in town. In fact, he was the only one. His cousin Stern was engaged to be married in a few months; Bane was away in the navy and Aidan was practicing medicine at a hospital in North Carolina. All the other Westmoreland men had married. Adrian would definitely be a catch for any woman. And they were coming after him from every direction, determined to hook a Westmoreland man; she'd heard he was having the time of his life letting them try.

Trinity was grateful she wasn't interested. The only reason she and Adrian were meeting was that she needed his help to pull off her plan. In fact, this was the first time they had seen each other since she'd moved to Denver eight months ago. She'd known when she accepted the internship at Denver Memorial last year that a slew of her sister's Westmoreland cousins-in-law lived here. She had met most of them at Riley's wedding. But most lived in a part of Denver referred to as Westmoreland Country and she lived in town. Though she had heard that when Adrian returned to Denver he had taken a place in town instead of moving to his family's homestead, more for privacy than anything else.

"I think we should put our plan into action now," he said, breaking into her thoughts.

He surprised her further when he took her hand in his and brought it to his lips while staring deeply into her eyes. She tried to ignore the intense fluttering in her stomach caused by his lips brushing against her skin.

"Why are you so anxious to begin?"

"It's simply a matter of timing," he said, bringing her hand to his lips yet again. "Don't look now but Dr. Casey Belvedere just walked in. He's seen us and is looking over here."

Let the show begin.

Adrian continued to stare deep into Trinity's eyes, sensing her nervousness. Although she had gone along with Tara's suggestion, he had a feeling she wasn't 100 percent on board with the idea of pretending to be his lover.

Although Dr. Belvedere was going about his pursuit all wrong, Adrian could understand the man wanting her. Hell, what man in his right mind wouldn't? Like her sister, Tara, Trinity was an incredibly beautiful woman. Ravishing didn't even come close to describing her.

When he'd first met Tara, years ago, the first thing out of his mouth was to ask if she had any sisters. Tara had smiled and replied, yes, she had a sister who was a senior in high school with plans to go to college to become a doctor.

Jeez. Had it been that long ago? He recalled the reaction of every single man at Riley's wedding when Trinity had showed up with Thorn and Tara. That's when he'd heard she would be moving to Denver for two years to work at the hospital.

"Are you sure it's him?" Trinity asked.

"Pretty positive," he said, studying her features. She had creamy mahogany-colored skin, silky black hair that hung to her shoulders and the most gorgeous pair of light brown eyes he'd ever seen. "And it's just the way I planned it," he said.

She arched a brow. "The way you planned it?"

"Yes. After Tara called and told me about her idea, I decided to start right away. I found out from a reliable source that Belvedere frequents this place quite a bit, especially on Thursday nights."

"So that's why you suggested we have dinner here tonight?" she asked.

"Yes, that's the reason. The plan is for him to see us together, right?"

"Yes. I just wasn't prepared to run into him tonight. Hopefully all it will take is for him to see us together and-"

"Back off? Don't bank on that. The man wants you and, for some reason, he feels he has every right to have you. Getting him to leave you alone won't be easy. I still think I should just break his damn hands and be through with it."

"No."

He shrugged. "Your call. Now we should really do something to get his attention."

"What?"

"This." Adrian leaned in and kissed her.

Trinity was certain it was supposed to be a mere brush across the lips, but like magnets their mouths locked, fusing in passion so quickly that it consumed her senses.

To Trinity's way of thinking, the kiss had a potency that had her insides begging for more. Every part of her urged her to make sure this kiss didn't end anytime soon. But the clinking of dishes and silverware made her remember where they were and what they were doing. She slowly eased her mouth away from Adrian's.

She let out a slow breath. "I have a feeling that did more than get his attention. It might have pissed him off."

Adrian smiled. "Who cares? You're with me now and he won't do anything stupid. I dare him."

He motioned for the waiter to bring their check. "I think we've done enough playacting tonight," he said smoothly. "Ready to leave?"

"Yes."

Moments after taking care of their dinner bill, Adrian took Trinity's hand in his and led her out of the restaurant.

Two

So how did things go with Trinity last night?"

Adrian glanced up to see his cousin Dillon. The business meeting Dillon had called that morning at Blue Ridge Land Management had ended and everyone had filed out, leaving him and Dillon alone.

He'd never thought of Dillon as a business tycoon until Adrian had returned home to work for the company his family owned. That's when he got to see his Denver cousin in action, wheeling and dealing to maintain Blue Ridge's ranking as a Fortune 500 company. Adrian had always just thought of him as Dillon, the man who'd kept the family together after a horrific tragedy.

Adrian's parents, as well as his uncle and aunt, had died in a plane crash more than twenty years ago, leaving Dillon, who was the oldest cousin, and Adrian's oldest brother, Ramsey, in charge of keeping the family of fifteen West-morelands together. It hadn't been easy, and Adrian would be the first to confess that he, Aidan, Bane and Bailey, the youngest four, had deliberately made things hard. Coming home from school one day to be told they'd lost the four people who had meant the most to them had been worse than difficult. They hadn't handled their grief well. They had rebelled in ways Adrian was now ashamed of. But Dillon, Ramsey and the other family members hadn't given up on them, even when they truly should have. For that reason and many others, Adrian deeply loved his family. Especially Dillon, who had taken on the State of Colorado when it had tried to force the youngest four into foster homes.

"Things went well, I think," Adrian said, not wondering how Dillon knew about the dinner date with Trinity even when Adrian hadn't mentioned anything about it. Dillon spoke to their Atlanta cousins on a regular basis, especially Thorn Westmoreland. Adrian figured Tara had mentioned the plan to Thorn and he had passed the information on to Dillon.

"Glad to hear it," Dillon said, gathering up his papers. "Hopefully it will work. Even so, I personally have a problem with the hospital administrator not doing anything about Dr. Belvedere. I don't give a damn how much money his family has or that they have a wing bearing their name under construction at the hospital. Sexual harassment is sexual harassment, and it's something no one should have to tolerate. What's happening to Trinity shouldn't happen to anyone."

Adrian agreed. If he had anything to do with it, Trinity wouldn't have to tolerate it. "We'll give Tara's idea a shot and if it doesn't work, then--"

"Then the Westmorelands will handle it, Adrian, the right way...with the law on our side. I don't want you doing anything that will get you in trouble. Those days are over."

Adrian didn't say anything as he remembered *those* days. "I won't do anything to get into trouble." He figured it was best not to say those days were completely over, especially after the suggestion he'd made to Trinity about breaking Belvedere's hands...something he'd been dead serious about. "Do you know anyone in the Belvedere family?" he asked Dillon.

"Dr. Belvedere's older brother Roger and I are on the boards of directors of a couple of major businesses in town, but we aren't exactly friends. He's arrogant, a little on the snobbish side. I heard it runs in the family."

"Too bad," Adrian said, rising from his chair.

"The Belvedere family made their money in the food industry, namely dairy products. I understand Roger has political aspirations and will announce his run for governor next month."

"I wish him the best. It's his brother Casey that I have a problem with," Adrian said, heading toward the door. "I'll see you later."

An hour later Adrian had finished an important report his cousin Canyon needed. Both Canyon and another cousin, Stern, were company attorneys. So far, Adrian was the only one from his parents' side of the Westmoreland tree who worked for Blue Ridge, the company founded by his and Dillon's father more than forty years ago.

At present there were fifteen Denver Westmorelands of his generation. His parents, Thomas and Susan Westmoreland, had had eight kids: five boys-Ramsey, Zane, Derringer and the twins, Adrian and Aidan-and three girls-Megan, Gemma and Bailey.

His uncle Adam and aunt Clarisse had had seven sons: Dillon, Micah, Jason, Riley, Canyon, Stern and Bane. The family was a close-knit one and usually got together on Friday nights at Dillon's place for a chow-down, where they ate good food and caught up on family matters. Dates had kept Adrian from attending the last two, but now, since he was *supposedly* involved with Trinity, his dating days were over for a while.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Steven Bourg:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you may have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love The Real Thing (Harlequin DesireThe Westmorelands), you may enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its called reading friends.

Curt Hall:

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Jerri Jackson:

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