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Two of a Kind (Fool's Gold Book 12)

By Susan Mallery



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New York Times *bestselling author Susan Mallery welcomes readers back to Fool's Gold, where a onetime fling could become the real thing....*

Felicia Swift never dreamed she'd hear a deep, sexy voice from her past in tiny Fool's Gold, California. The last time Gideon Boylan whispered in her ear was half a world away...on the morning after the hottest night of her life. Her freaky smarts have limited her close friendships, and romance, but she came to Fool's Gold looking for ordinary. Gorgeous, brooding Gideon is anything but that.

Black Ops taught Gideon that love could be deadly. Now he pretends to fit in while keeping everyone at arm's length. Felicia wants more than he can give—a home, family, love—but she has a lot to learn about men...and Gideon needs to be the man to teach her.

As these two misfits discover that passion isn't the only thing they have in common, they just might figure out that two of a kind should never be split apart.

If you're a fan of Fool's Gold, you'll love Ana Raquel and Greg's delicious romance, featured in *Susan Mallery's Fool's Gold Cookbook*, along with her favorite recipes from the land of happy endings.



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Two of a Kind (Fool's Gold Book 12) By Susan Mallery Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #101467 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-07-01
- Released on: 2013-06-25
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"There's a little fun, a little sizzle, and a whole lot of homespun charm."

-Publishers Weekly, on Summer Nights

"Mallery infuses her story with eccentricity, gentle humor, and smalltown shenanigans, and readers...will enjoy the connection between Heidi and Rafe."

-Publishers Weekly, on Summer Days

"If you want a story that will both tug on your heartstrings and tickle your funny bone, Mallery is the author for you!"

- RT Book Reviews on Only His

"An adorable, outspoken heroine and an intense hero...set the sparks flying in Mallery's latest lively, comic, and touching family-centered story."

- Library Journal on Only Yours

"Mallery...excels at creating varied, well-developed characters and an emotion-packed story gently infused with her trademark wit and humor." One of the Top 10 Romances of 2011!

- Booklist on Only Mine

About the Author

New York Times bestselling author Susan Mallery has entertained millions of readers with her witty and emotional stories about women and the relationships that move them. Publishers Weekly calls Susan's prose "luscious and provocative," and Booklist says, "Novels don't get much better than Mallery's expert blend of emotional nuance, humor and superb storytelling." While Susan appreciates the critical praise, she is most honored by the enthusiastic readers who write to tell her that her books made them laugh, made them cry and made the world a happier place to live. Susan lives in Seattle with her husband and her tiny but intrepid toy poodle. She's there for the coffee, not the weather.

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Rational thought and a working knowledge of hand-to-hand combat were useless when faced with the villainous power of the American house spider.

Felicia Swift stood immobilized in the corner of the warehouse, aware of the web, of the arachnid watching her, no doubt plotting her downfall. Where there was one female American house spider, there were others, and she knew they were all after her.

The logical part of her brain nearly laughed out loud at her fears. In her head, Felicia understood that spiders did not, in fact, travel in packs or scheme to attack her. But intelligence and logic were no match for a true

arachnophobe. She could write papers, prepare flow charts and even do experiments from now until the next appearance of Halley's Comet. She was terrified of spiders and they knew it.

"I'm going to back away slowly," she said in a soft, soothing voice.

Technically, spiders didn't have ears. They could sense vibration, but with her speaking quietly, there wouldn't be much of that. Still, she felt better talking, so she kept up the words as she inched toward the exit, always keeping her gaze locked firmly on the enemy.

Light spilled from the open door. Light meant freedom and spider-free breathing. Light meant—

The light suddenly blacked out. Felicia jumped and turned, prepared to do battle with the giant mother-of-all-spiders. Instead she faced a tall man with shaggy hair and a scar by his eyebrow.

"I heard a scream," he said. "I came to see if there was a problem." He frowned. "Felicia?"

Because the spiders weren't enough, she thought frantically. How was that possible?

Fortes fortuna adiuvat.

She tried to rein in her unwieldy brain. Fortune favors the brave? That was helpful how? She had spiders behind her, the man who took her virginity in front of her, and she was thinking in Latin?

Felicia sucked in a breath and steadied herself. She was a logistics expert. She'd never met a crisis she couldn't organize her way out of, and today would be no exception. She would work from big to small and reward herself by doing the Sunday *New York Times* crossword in less than four minutes.

"Hello, Gideon," she said, bracing herself for her hormonal reaction to this man.

He moved closer, his dark eyes filling with emotion. She had never been all that good at reading other people's feelings, but even she recognized confusion.

As he approached, she was aware of the size of him—the sheer broadness of his shoulders. His T-shirt seemed stretched to the point of ripping across his chest and biceps. He looked lethal but still graceful. The kind of man who was at home in any dangerous part of the world.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

By *here*, she assumed he meant in Fool's Gold and not in the warehouse itself.

She squared her shoulders—a feeble attempt to look larger and more in control. Similar to a cat arching its back and raising its fur. But she doubted Gideon was going to be any more intimidated by her than he would be by a hissing tabby.

"I live in town now."

"I knew that. I meant what are you doing in this warehouse?"

"Oh."

An unexpected response, she thought, suddenly less sure of herself. A result of the spider encounter. Their powers were far-reaching. She'd planned to avoid any contact with Gideon for several months. Here it was less than five weeks into her plan and they'd run into each other.

"I'm working," she said, returning her attention to his question. "How did you know I was in town?"

"Justice told me."

"He did?" Something her business associate hadn't mentioned to her. "When?"

"A few weeks ago." Gideon's mouth curved into a smile. "He told me to stay away from you."

His voice, she thought, trying not to get lost in the memories of what the sound meant to her. While olfactory recollections were thought to be the strongest, a sound or a phrase could also shift a person back to another time. Felicia had no doubt she could easily be transported by Gideon's scent; right now she was most concerned about his voice.

He had one of those low, sexy voices. As ridiculous as it sounded, the combination of tone and cadence reminded her of chocolate. Now his voice was a vibration she was sure the spiders could get behind. She should—

Her chin came up as her brain replayed his statement.

"Justice told you to stay away from me?"

Gideon raised one powerful shoulder. "He suggested it was a good idea. After what happened."

Outraged, she planted her hands on her hips, then thought hitting Justice was a far better idea. Only, he wasn't there.

"What happened between you and me isn't his business," she said firmly.

"You're his family."

"That doesn't give him the right to get in the middle of my personal life."

"I didn't see you trying to find me," Gideon pointed out. "I figured you were comfortable with his.. intervention."

"Of course not," she began, only to realize she *had* been avoiding Gideon, but not for the reasons he thought. "It's complicated."

"I'm seeing that," he told her. "So you're okay?"

"Of course. Our sexual encounter was over four years ago." She had no idea if he'd guessed she'd been a virgin or not and didn't see any reason to mention it now. "Our night together was...satisfying." An understatement, she thought, remembering how Gideon had made her feel. "I'm sorry Justice and Ford broke down the hotel room door the following morning."

Gideon's expression changed to one of amusement. It was a look Felicia was used to seeing, and she knew it meant she'd somehow missed an obvious social cue or taken a joking comment literally.

She held in a sigh. She was smart. Scary smart, as she'd often been told. She'd grown up around scientists and graduate students. Ask her about the origins of the universe and she could give a fact-based lecture on the subject without having to prepare. But interpersonal interactions were harder. She was so damned awkward, she thought glumly. She said the wrong thing or sounded like a space alien with bad programming, when all she wanted was to be just like everyone else.

"I meant are you okay *now*," he said. "You screamed. That's why I came in."

She pressed her lips together. For possibly the thousandth time in her life she thought how she would gladly exchange thirty IQ points for just a small increase in social awareness.

"I'm fine," she said, offering what she hoped was a reassuring smile. "Couldn't be better. Thank you for coming to my rescue—however unnecessary that was."

He took a step toward her. "I'm always happy to help out a beautiful woman."

Flirting, she thought, automatically monitoring his pupil dilation to see if it was real or simply politeness. When a man was sexually interested, his pupils dilated. But it was too dark in the warehouse for her to be sure.

"What made you scream?" he asked.

She drew in a breath. "I saw a spider."

One eyebrow rose.

"It was large and aggressive," she added.

"A spider?"

"Yes. I have issues with them."

"Apparently."

"I'm not stupid. I know it's not rational."

Gideon chuckled. "You're many things, Felicia, but we're all aware that stupid isn't one of them."

Before she could figure out what to say to that, Gideon turned and walked away. She was so caught up in the way his jeans fit his butt that she couldn't think of anything to say, and then he was gone and she was alone with little more than her mouth hanging open, a herd of American house spiders and their plans for her.

Gideon Boylan knew the danger of flashbacks. They could come on suddenly and disorient him. They were vivid, engaging all his senses, and when they were gone, a man had no way of knowing what was real and what was imagined. After being held captive for two years, he'd been ready to give in to madness. At least it would have been an escape.

His rescue had come just in time, although too late for the men who had been with him. But even being out of the hands of tormentors hadn't given him any sense of freedom. The memories were just as painful as the imprisonment had been.

Focus, he told himself as he loaded the CD and checked his playlist for the next three hours. He had put his past behind him. Some days he even believed it. Seeing Felicia earlier had been a kick in the gut, but he would take a flashback of a beautiful woman in his bed every time. Still, he'd had to take a five-mile run and then meditate for nearly an hour before he'd felt calm enough to head to the radio station.

"We're doing it the old-fashioned way tonight," he said into the microphone. "Just like we always do."

Beyond the control room, the station was dark, the way he liked it. He didn't mind the dark. If it was dark, he was safe. They'd never come for him in the dark. They'd always turned the lights on first.

"It's eleven o'clock in Fool's Gold and this is Gideon. I'm going to dedicate tonight's first song to a lovely lady I ran into today. You know who you are."

He pushed the button and "Wild Thing" by the Troggs started.

Gideon smiled to himself. He had no way of knowing if Felicia was listening or not, but he liked the idea of playing a song for her.

A red light flashed on the wall. He glanced at it, aware someone was ringing the front bell. After hours, the signal flashed back in the control room. An interesting time for visitors. He walked to the front of the radio station and unlocked the door. Ford Hendrix stood in front of the door, a beer in each hand.

Gideon grinned and waved his friend in. "I heard you were in town."

"Yeah, back two days and I'm already regretting the decision."

Gideon took the offered beer. "Welcome home the conquering hero?"

"Something like that."

Gideon had known Ford for years. Although Ford was a SEAL, they'd served together on a joint task force, and later, when Gideon had been left in his Taliban prison to rot, Ford had been one of those who had risked his life to get him out.

"Come on back. I have to put on the next song."

They walked down the long corridor. "I can't believe you own this place," Ford said, following him into the control room. "It's a radio station."

"Huh. That explains all the music."

Ford took the seat opposite Gideon's. Gideon put on his headphones and flipped a switch.

"This is my night for dedications," he said. "I apologize for going digital for a second, but it's the only way to cue up quickly. Here we go. Welcome home, Ford."

The opening of "Born to be Wild" began.

"You really are a bastard," Ford said conversationally.

"I find myself an amusing companion."

Ford was about Gideon's size. Strong and, on the surface, easygoing. But Gideon knew that anyone who had been to the places they'd been and done what they'd done traveled with ghosts.

"What brings you out so late at night?" he asked.

Ford grimaced. "I woke up and found my mom hovering over me in my room. Fortunately I recognized her before I reacted. I need to get out of there."

"So find an apartment."

"Believe me, I'm looking first thing in the morning. She begged me to wait, and I figured moving back home couldn't be too hard. You know, connect with family."

Gideon had made the attempt once. It hadn't gone well.

"My brothers are okay," Ford continued. "But my mom and my sisters are staying way too close."

"They're glad you're home. You were gone a long time."

Gideon didn't know all the details, but he'd heard Ford had left Fool's Gold when he was twenty and hadn't been back much in the past fourteen years.

Ford took a long swallow of his beer. "My mom's already asking if I've thought of settling down." He shuddered.

"Not ready for a wife and the pitter-patter of little feet?"

"No, although I wouldn't mind getting laid." Ford glanced at him. "You're in trouble, by the way."

"I always am."

His friend laughed. "Felicia went after Justice this afternoon. She said he had no right to tell you to stay away from her. When she gets mad, it's quite the show. Talk about a woman who can handle the big words."

"You know her?"

"Not well. The first time I met her was in Thailand."

When both Justice and Ford had interrupted Gideon's night with Felicia. Or rather the following morning. A polite way of saying they'd busted down the door and Justice had insisted on taking Felicia with him. Gideon had tried to go after her, but Ford had held him back.

Gideon hadn't seen her again until today. When she'd been fighting marauding spiders.

"She was pissed at Justice?" he asked.

Ford shook his head. "Leave me out of this. We're not in high school, and I'm not passing notes in study hall or asking her if she likes you. You'll have to do it yourself."

Gideon was tempted. That night had been memorable. She was an intriguing combination of determined, sexy and geeky. But he knew he wasn't her type—he wasn't anyone's. To the untrained eye he looked as if he'd healed, but he knew what was underneath. He wasn't a good relationship risk. Of course, if Felicia was looking for something less serious and more naked, he was all in.

Ford finished his beer. "Mind if I bunk in an empty office?"

"There's a futon in the break room."

"Thanks."

Gideon didn't bother mentioning it wasn't that comfortable. For a guy like Ford, a ratty futon was just as good as a four-star hotel bed. In their line of work, you learned to make do.

Ford dropped the bottle into the blue recycling bin, then headed down the hall. Gideon put in a CD, then searched until he found the right track.

"You Keep Me Hanging On" began to play.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Warren Damron:

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