

Holiday Fling to Wedding Ring by Narelle Buxton

Short introduction: Tom's life revolved around his family's hotel empire and he is not interested in marriage or kids. He was in charge of a new resort development, which he wanted to do his way, but his grandfather and father weren't happy about this and gave him an ultimatum - marry an acceptable woman and build his dream hotel, or conform and build it their way. Tom doesn't have time for marriage, but it was either get married or give up his dream.

Exhausted didn't even begin to cover how Sophie Foster felt, especially after the disastrous morning she'd had. She needed a coffee – or maybe three – and a lot more sleep. At least she had several hours to herself now that she'd dropped her vivacious three-year-old daughter off at the hotel's kids club.

Turning the corner towards the main building of the luxurious Hawaiian resort, she wiped tears of fatigue from her eyes, and of course she chose that moment to not look where she was going. Suddenly, she was on her hands and knees on the stony path. Heart racing and breathing heavily, she looked around, taking stock of herself and her surroundings as she got over the shock of the fall. She hadn't broken anything, but by the sting in her palms, she'd be surprised if she hadn't taken chunks out of her skin.

Big warm hands were around her waist, lifting her up as a deep Australian voice caressed her. “Are you alright? I'm so sorry.”

“It's fine. I'm fine,” she assured him as she looked down at the red suitcase that she'd tripped over. Wobbling on her feet, the warm hands held her tightly. She tried to push him away, realising too late that she had blood on her palms and he now had blood stains on his pristine white shirt. “Oh, no! Now look what I've done! I'm so sorry,” she gasped, horrified. She was really not having a good morning.

“It's nothing, it's just a shirt,” he dismissed. Her eyes drifted over the rolled-up shirt sleeves and open collar, up to the gorgeous man in front of her. His dishevelled brown hair and the light dusting of stubble on his strong jaw gave him a sexy, just climbed out of bed look. She felt the intensity of his gaze, even with his eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses.

She didn't usually cry. But tears started leaking from Sophie's eyes anyway. She didn't know whether it was from jet-lag, embarrassment, his intensity or her exhaustion. This holiday was supposed to be relaxing. So far it was anything but. First, it had been Jasmine waking her up at dawn, then tipping milk all over the bench, putting all of the toilet paper in the toilet, then spreading soap all over the bathroom. Now this. All she needed was sleep. Or a bucket of coffee. Or both.

Before any of that though, she had to clean herself up and apologise to *him*. That thought had her tears turn into sobs.

"Hey, it's not that bad. We'll get you cleaned up in no time," the man said as his arms wound around her.

Her head rested against his solid chest, covering his white shirt in her tears as well. Once her crying had subsided into deep shaky breaths she stepped back, forcing space between them, absolutely mortified at the state she was in in front of a complete stranger.

"I'm Tom, by the way," he murmured, looking down at her.

"Sophie," she sniffled, dabbing at her face with the immaculate white handkerchief he handed her. "Sorry about that. Again," she muttered.

"It's nice to meet you, Sophie," he smiled, exposing his perfect white teeth. Then he lifted his sunglasses, and she got her first look at his beautiful slate-grey eyes. She could get lost in them. He grabbed her arms as her knees turned to mush. "Hey, are you sure you're alright?" He held her still as his gaze skimmed over her like a caress.

Sophie looked down at where her hands gripped his strong forearms, resisting the urge to run her fingers along his hairy skin. "I will be, thanks," she dismissed and glanced up, taking in the serious set of his jaw and the dark hair falling over his forehead before she dared look in those disturbing eyes again. They were full of concern and she felt naked and exposed.

Swallowing hard, she pushed back from him and immediately felt the absence of his warmth under her fingers. "I'll just go back to my room and get a Band-Aid or two." Then she could collapse on the bed in embarrassment and hopefully sleep.

"Can I at least buy you a drink?" he asked politely.

She meaningfully looked at her watch, then back at him. "It's a bit early for a drink." Even still, she was wavering, if only for some adult company.

"My body clock is a bit out," he murmured, a grin on his face. "Besides, it's five o'clock somewhere," he teased and she was seriously tempted by the offer. "Coffee, then?"

Editor's Critique:

Narelle--

Well done as this is a fun meet and quickly convinces the reader of the appeal of these main characters. The scene is set so that I know where the characters are and what's going on. These are all key points to crafting a scene and great to see here.

Perhaps to make the scene really special, though, it might benefit from a bit of a push. For instance, there's a strong opening sentence, but could it be stronger and grip the reader's attention more? And try not to state the obvious. The line, "She was really not having a good morning." at the end of the fourth paragraph isn't needed; you've shown us that and that's almost always the more preferable way.

Also, avoid overstating things. It's impossible for the heroine to see the intensity of the hero's gaze if he has on dark sunglasses, yet she's able to do it anyway? Again, it's not needed as you've demonstrated via other points how the hero is powerfully handsome.

Credibility of the scene or a character can sometimes be lost when a point is overstated. For instance, in paragraph six a list of Jasmine's bad behaviours that morning is given, but it begs the question where was the heroine while her three-year-old was wreaking all of this havoc in the hotel bathroom? Unintentionally, it makes it seem as if the heroine is a not so great mother. Likely only half of Jasmine's actions would be necessary to explain why the heroine is so tired and not thinking clearly. Another example is the description of the hero's looks and attitude. With his perfect white teeth to his perfect manners and everything else perfect in between, this character may be in danger of starting to sound unreal, and quickly go from hunky good guy to a cliché. Though heroes should dress and talk the part--they are meant to be fantasies after all--it's still something to bear in mind.

Be on the lookout for repeated words and phrases. Try to avoid these as well.

Thanks very much for submitting this excerpt to SYTYCW. It was a treat to read. You're definitely heading in the right direction with your writing. Keep up the good work!