

Valerie ignored the adamant tug on the leash, watching the kid's ahead play with a long-tailed kite. There was no doubt the argument at the end of her lead was watching it too. She was practically slaving to get to it.

"Vicious kite. Gonna kill it, aren't you?" she teased the terrier. "Well get over it. I need to get you back home so I can get my next appointment."

It wasn't a glamorous job, but she made decent enough money. There was also the one side benefit. The really cute man which was her next appointment. Well, his dog was actually the appointment. But who's counting? She shrugged, walking with Josie across the park to return her to her family.

Thirty minutes later, she pushed the doorbell to the upper penthouse apartment. There was a soft scratch on the other side and it made her smile. Spencer knew it was her. She adored this little pug. Too bad her master was a clueless male with a penchant for beauty enhanced blondes. She sure would like to show him a few things about what brunettes were all about.

She sighed, and the door chain slid free.

Spencer shot out and leaped at her legs. She bent down and gave him a hug and received a tongue lashing for a greeting. A giggle bubbled up at the ecstatic welcome.

It wasn't until she was starting to rise again that she realized something wasn't quite right. The jeans looked the

same, but... That stomach seemed much tighter than John's was. Her eyes continued to rove up the stomach and chest of the man in the doorway. And she gasped.

"You're not John!"

He frowned. "You're not the pizza guy either. He just rang up."

She shook her head. "I'm Valerie. I walk Spencer during the week."

He continued to watch her. "John didn't mention you."

She stood dumbfounded for a breathless minute. John was handsome in a well manicured way, but the man who stood in her vision was making her well aware she'd only tied back her hair and that she wasn't wearing any make-up.

The elevator dinged and a pizza entered the hallway followed by the delivery person. She stepped aside while he paid, unsure of her next move.

He palmed the pizza in one hand. "Well, Valerie. I just took down Spencer."

She felt her whole face fall. "Oh." She smiled a little sadly down at the brown eyes of the imp at her feet. "I can come back on Monday. He's a part of my routine, and he's scheduled."

He seemed to catch her gaze briefly. "Are you hungry?"

She startled. "Well, yes, but--"

"Spencer, show the lady in, will you?" He turned and walked

into the apartment, leaving Spencer at her feet. He snuffled once and followed him in, stopping to see if she was coming.

She closed the door. "I'm sorry, but who are you?" she asked, staying close to the door. She dug the toe of her sneaker into the rich carpet, ready to turn out the door at a single inclination.

He gave her a devilish smile. "I'm John's brother, Dylan." He pulled out some plates. "He's never mentioned me?"

She glanced down, pushing her fingers into the front pockets of her shorts. "We haven't talked that much," she admitted. *Like at all.*

"How long have you been walking Spencer? Soda okay?"

"Soda is fine. Thank you." She took another step into the apartment so she wasn't shouting so much. "I've been walking Spencer for almost a year now."

At his name, he trotted back to her and sat near her feet. She leaned down and rubbed his ears.

"He really likes you," he said from nearly over her. He'd set the plates with the pizza and a few napkins down on a side table and was watching her with an intense gaze.

She swallowed. "Yeah," she answered a little breathlessly. Dylan was even more handsome than his brother, and apparently not a manicured man if the movement of his biceps was any indication. "I like him too." She sat when he pulled out a chair

for her. "So, um, where is John?"

Dylan shrugged, taking a huge bite of his slice. "He and Renee went to Vegas for the weekend. Said something about wanting to tie one on, or tie one over." He shrugged again. "Whatever."

"He's going to get married?" She felt her skin chill. She'd lost her chance.

"Probably. He gets married about once every two years. This makes number three."

That stopped her. "Really?"

He gave a crude laugh. "Yeah, really." He finished his slice in only a few more bites. She could barely touch hers.

So, had she missed her chance or missed making a mistake? She knew John liked to be the center of attention, and the model-like blonde he'd been dating—that he was going to likely marry—was more the type that he preferred... But if he was more known for getting married than staying married... She sighed softly. Her mind was just running in circles.

She placed the napkin she held in her hands down. "Well, thanks for letting me know." She went to stand. "I imagine with you here, and then him coming home with a wife, he won't be needing my services anymore."

He looked up at her, and she noticed how green his eyes were. Much darker than John's.

"I'm only here until they get home, which knowing my brother, will happen sometime in the future."

She blinked. "So, you think he'll want me to still walk Spencer?"

He didn't answer for several seconds and she wondered what she was expecting him to say. If John didn't need her, she'd definitely miss Spencer. If John did want her to walk his dog, she would have to ignore the lust she felt for him. Even she was smart enough to know *what* it was. She just had hoped it wasn't so one-sided.

"How about if I still want for you to walk Spencer?" he asked.

"Well, I'd be happy to. I love the little guy."

Dylan smiled, and his rugged good looks caught her attention again.

"I wasn't trying to chase you out of a job. My brother didn't say one word about you to me." He leaned back in his chair. "Or how cute you were."

She laughed a sound that was tinged with nervousness. She didn't know one thing about the man sitting so casually in front of her. "I should probably be going. I can come by on Monday for his regular afternoon out." She kept backing toward the door.

He stood, a wide-eyed look making his expression comically go through a slow motion menagerie of emotions. Her foot dragged

over something on the rug, which was then tugged, knocking her completely off balance.

She fell backward with a startled squeak and then a yelp when she landed square on her behind.

"Spencer!" He was at her side instantly. "Lord, I'm sorry. I didn't know he knew how to get the leash out."

She twisted to look over her shoulder. There sat Spencer with his leash in his little jaws. The rest was partially hidden beneath her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, offering her a hand to stand.

"Everything but my ego," she muttered. Her words brought another one of those devilish smiles to his mouth.

His hand was warm on hers, pulling her carefully but easily from the floor.

"I'm sorry if you think I'm being too forward, but you are cute." He glanced down. "I'm out of practice," he grumbled.

His grin disarmed her nervousness some. "Makes two of us, I guess."

He looked into her eyes and her breathing hitched, hard. "I know we just met, but would you like to go out tonight? A real dinner? There's nothing here to eat." He leaned back, a worried frown on his brow. "Unless you're seeing someone..."

She shook her head. "I'm not. I think I'd like to go out tonight," she told him. She glanced out the windows of the

apartment, thinking of the date. It was Valentine's Day after all, and she couldn't remember the last time someone had actually taken her out on Valentine's.

He released her hand with a tender stroke. "I think I'd like it too." He opened the door for her, but she stopped just long enough to give Spencer a final pat.

He jumped up and swept her cheek with a snuffling nose and little grumbles of goodbye. Looking over her shoulder to wave at the man in the doorway, she had to wonder if Spencer had been planning it all along.

The little instigator had just needed the right brother.