

The Tycoon's Marriage Exchange

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Chapter 1

Kallista Papadelias shook her head, her eyes wary as she faced this large, intimidating man who was waiting patiently for her answer. "Surely there's an alternative. I really don't want to marry you." She braced herself, her muscles tense and guarded as the powerful man sitting across from her absorbed her rejection. Goose bumps rose up on her arms and she knew that the shivers running through her were due more to the man's darkening eyes than the cold air blowing down from the ceiling's ventilation system. She wrapped her cold, shaking fingers around the coffee cup in front of her, trying to gain some warmth but she was too nervous.

"Have you heard a thing I've said?" Hector Christophe asked digging deeper to find more patience. This woman sitting in front of him was lovely, but he wasn't sure how much was going on inside her pretty head. He'd thought she was exceptionally intelligent but she wasn't displaying any right at the moment. "Your father's business is in jeopardy. He is going to lose everything if I don't help him. And he won't accept my help because of his pride."

Kallista tried to focus, truly she did, but the way this man was watching her unnerved her, made her stomach quake and her muscles tense. Unfortunately, if his irritated look was any indication, she'd obviously missed something significant during this discussion. "What does me marrying you have to do with that?"

Hector was proud that he didn't grind his teeth in frustration, knowing that would only make her more nervous. "Don't be obtuse, Kallista. You know how our culture works," he replied heartlessly. "If we are married, I would be family. Your father would accept help from a family member. As it stands now, he won't even acknowledge to me that there's a problem. But I can see in his eyes when I try and talk to him about some of the issues I've discovered, and I know that he's fully aware of the dangers to his company and all he's built over the years. He's trying to fix this himself but he doesn't have the resources so he's making a bigger mess of the situation. I'm already working behind the scenes to help, but I need to become more out in the open to deter the takeover."

He watched carefully as the woman with soft blue eyes and pale, porcelain skin listened carefully. She was tall for a woman at five feet, seven inches but he still towered over her and he couldn't help his size. It was scaring her and he shifted to give her more space, but there was only so much he could do. He was six feet, three inches tall which made him loom larger than most of the men she was probably used to.

She smelled good, he thought, then banished that from his mind. Her scent, no matter how lovely, had nothing to do with this conversation. There was a crisis and he could see her occasional shivers so he had to ignore her allure and focus on saving her family's reputation, and her father's company.

Kallista's hands squeezed tightly together under the table. She loved her parents and they'd done so much for her. How could she not do this if it would help them? Hector was right, her father wouldn't accept help from a friend but in her culture, family was not only allowed to help when needed, they were expected to help however possible. Families stuck

together, they worked together, lived, laughed, fought and loved together. And when things got tough, they all came together to find a solution to whatever problem was facing them.

Her father, bless his soul, had more pride than sense sometimes, Kallista thought angrily. She pulled the complicated reports and colorful charts closer, trying to understand the immense data this man was attempting to impart to her. "Okay, so please explain all this to me one more time and let me try and absorb the situation. Surly there's a less drastic way to deal with this horrible situation other than the two of us marrying."

Hector sighed and pulled the files together. He'd gone through all the information himself and tried to come up with an alternative but every time he'd approached Demetrius Papadelias with a solution, Kallista's father, the man had simply shut down and changed the subject. Unfortunately, whenever Hector visited his old friend, he saw that the valuable paintings that were slowly leaving the walls of Demetrius' once regal home, he recognized the slow deterioration and the dust intermingled with the missing valuables. Kallista's mother no longer wore even her beautiful engagement ring, which led Hector to suspect that she had sold the ring to try and raise needed money to counter this latest threat to their company.

It wasn't that Kallista's parents were in a bad situation. Hector's information told him that Demetrius Papadelias, and more than five thousand employees, were about to be swindled horribly, the entire company and all of its employees and their families will lose their life savings and their pensions if someone didn't come in and stop this takeover threat. So it wasn't just Demetrius and Kallista's family who needed to be saved. It was the life savings of thousands of innocent families who could be completely destroyed if someone didn't step in and stop the insidious problem this takeover presented.

With a patience Hector didn't realize he had, he straightened and once again went through the data, trying to explain to Kallista Papadelias what had happened and what impact the crisis could mean for everyone involved. "Six months ago, stock in your father's company started getting bought up. The price has remained relatively stable..." he explained, showing Kallista the charts and graphs his staff had generated to explain the takeover attempt. Unfortunately, it wasn't just a takeover. The man who was slowly, secretly buying up stock in her family's business was known for purchasing troubled companies and liquidating everything, sometimes even draining the pension funds if there was a weak pension manager. There were stories that he even denied final paychecks to employees after some sales when he took over a company. The man in charge operated both above and below the law, uncaring if anything he did was legal. Since he'd done this so many times, the man was a relatively wealthy and had a team of unethical lawyers who sometimes provided bogus cover or slammed the opposition with inane but expensive litigation to protect him from any repercussions.

Kallista rubbed her forehead, a headache forming as she tried to understand all this data. "Who is this man that is doing all of this and how can he operate in this nasty manner?" she asked, going cross eyed from all of the financial information. She didn't understand most of it but didn't want to admit that to Hector Christophe who was reportedly a financial genius. She might have joked that he thought he controlled the world to her parents one evening, but the

reality was that his holdings internationally were so broad, so far flung, that the man really might control the world. Or at least a very large part of it. He was so powerful, she still didn't understand why Hector and her family were friends. Although he'd always come by her parents' house when he was in town, she'd never really understood the friendship Hector had with her father.

Kallista had avoided these intimidating meetings whenever possible, but was polite when her parents insisted that she be present for the occasional dinners when Hector was in town and had time for a meal at her parents' house. It wasn't that her parents were poor. They were definitely what most people considered wealthy. Even the elite, some might say. But they weren't even close to the stratosphere where Hector reigned. He was the top dog in a pack of some of the most powerful men in the world. And he'd done it all from nothing according to the vague news reports that had come out over the years.

As a reporter, she was fascinated by his incredible rise to power. Her mind might not be able to absorb the technical financial issues he was explaining, but she had a great mind for digging into an issue and finding the story. Her fingers were itching to write up her impressions of the man, ask him questions and interview him for an article. Maybe, after this latest investigation she was working on, she might tackle the great and famous Hector Christophe and see if she could discover how he'd really made his first million. Or all the subsequent billions, she thought with irritation. The man had never granted an interview with any reporter, so he was a mystery she would enjoy tackling.

One challenge at a time, she admonished herself and re-focused on the spreadsheets in front of her, not daring to look up at the man in front of her because, each time she did, she lost her train of thought. Those intense, grey eyes didn't relent as he tried to make her understand. There was so much more behind those eyes, something she didn't understand, something shocking in a way she didn't comprehend and yet, the feeling was still somehow alluring and tempting.

"Everything ties back to this man," Hector was saying and he pushed the grainy picture of a thin man with a Roman looking nose and receding hairline closer to her. "Somehow, your father and he met and they started investing together. It's from that moment that your father's business started to decline."

Kallista smothered the gasp of horror as she stared down at the man in the picture. He was the man she was currently investigating! She had a whole story surrounding this man who she suspected was controlling drug distribution at many of the ports along the Greek coastline.

And what was worse, Kallista had introduced her father to this man! It had been an accidental meeting about seven months ago. She and the man in the picture named Rolf Peterson were having coffee one afternoon. Kallista had pretended to run into him one day and she'd "accidentally" dropped the contents of her bag on the sidewalk in an effort to gain his attention. Acting like a flighty klutz with her short skirt and high heels, she'd gotten Rolf to suggest coffee, which was exactly the opening for which she'd been aiming. It was a horrible

coincidence that her father had run into her that day. There had been nothing she could do but invite her father to join them for coffee and introduce him to Rolf.

Her father hadn't stayed long, but it must have been long enough for Rolf to get an idea on how to infiltrate her father's company. Her father hadn't told her that he'd contacted, or been contacted by, the man she'd introduced to him that day.

So this whole business was her fault? She'd done this to her family?

She stared at Hector's face as he continued to explain but she didn't hear the words any longer. She was trying to figure out an alternative, not wanting to sacrifice her life by marrying a man as cold, frightening and unfeeling as Hector Christophe. She reacted to this man in an elemental way that, in her mind, was shockingly unsuitable. Her stomach muscles tightened as his male scent drifted to her nostrils, making her head swim in an inappropriate way.

He wasn't handsome, but she had to admit that there was a certain bold, earthy appeal to the man. He was extremely tall and he definitely had a good tailor because his shoulders looked very broad and muscular. Good padding, she thought.

His eyes were grey and sharp, intelligent was the best she could describe if she were being generous. But she didn't want to marry a man like that. She wanted a man who was warm and comforting, someone she could cry to when she needed help or who would listen when she was stuck on a problem. She was fairly certain that Hector Christophe wouldn't listen. He'd just fix everything and tell her in a patronizing tone that she was a good girl for coming to him with the problem, then carry on with his own business issues.

Kallista put her hand over the pile of papers, stopping him from continuing. She had no idea what he was saying, nor would she even if he tried to patiently explain it all over again. Her mind was too consumed with the fact that, at the bottom of all of this, she'd started the ball rolling. If she could stop it simply by marrying Hector and saving her father's pride, she had to do it.

"I'll marry you," she said softly, looking away and trying to hide her tears and confusion. Wasn't she a good daughter? Hadn't she been raised to think of marriage as a union between two people who loved and respected one another? So why was she entering into this marriage with cold deliberation? And, if she were completely honest with herself, secret admiration for a man she didn't understand.

Hector looked at the lovely woman with the soft hair and blue, alluring eyes. He wanted to pull her into his arms and tell her that everything would be okay, that he would fix this problem and maybe they could be happy. But he wasn't sure he could do that. He could definitely fix the problem with her father, but there was so much more to happiness and he couldn't promise her that. Not with his history.

As an orphaned child, left on the streets to rob and steal, to scrounge in the garbage and gutters for food, he knew that happiness was elusive. If it weren't for Kallista's father, he might still be in the gutters. The day Hector had tried to steal from Demetrius, and been caught, had been the day his life had become worth something. Demetrius hadn't allowed the police to take Hector. Instead, the gentle, elderly man had brought him to a restaurant and fed him. He'd

been kind, patient, ignoring the shifting eyes of a young boy who was looking for his next victim and told that young boy that he was better than this. That he could be so much more if he wanted.

Demetrius had saved Hector's life and now the tables were turned. There was no way he would allow Demetrius, nor the other employees of his company, to fall victim to Rolf Peterson's activities. Having lived the life of a gutter rat, Hector knew how to play with the worst of them. He'd never break the law again. That would be letting down the man who had given him so much. But Hector had quickly learned how to use the laws to his advantage.

As he watched Kallista's gentle features, he knew instinctively that he wanted to protect her again. So many evenings he'd sat across the table from her at her parents' house, watching her, knowing that she was out of his league, that she was too good for him. He'd honestly tried to come up with an alternative to this predicament with her father, but when it came down to it, marriage to her was the best he could do and would allow him to move in quickly and fight Peterson with everything in his arsenal.

With a stern nod, he stood up. "I'll stop by your house tonight and we'll tell your parents the news."

Kallista also stood and followed him, trying to get her mind to focus but she wasn't sure that was possible anymore. This had been a crazy morning and she was off kilter, needing some way to ground herself. The thought occurred to her that his shoulders were definitely wide enough and strong enough to give her a place to cry out her fears. But she squashed that thought, knowing that Hector Christophe was not the kind of man who would endure tears with fortitude. "I'll meet you there then."

"What do you mean?" he asked, his hand resting on the door to his office but not opening it.

Kallista smiled slightly, realizing that Hector probably thought that she still lived with her parents. She was a single woman in his eyes and therefore, he probably assumed she would be living at her parents' house until she was married. "I have my own place," she said, staring at the center of his red silk tie, unable to look him in the eye.

"Why aren't you living with your parents?"

She laughed softly, even though his comment wasn't the least bit amusing. "Why don't you live with your parents?" she asked softly. When she received no response, she took that to mean that she'd explained her point. "Everyone needs their own space. I grew up, graduated from university and thought it was time to stand on my own two feet. I've had my own apartment ever since I finished college."

Since there were double doors, she reached out for the knob of the other door and pulled it open, walking out without bothering to say goodbye, leaving him with a small smile which she hoped conveyed her thanks, but she suspected that it might just give him a hint as to how frightened she was of being in his presence.

At the elevator, she pressed the button and thought about all she'd just committed herself to. Would her parents even approve of the marriage? She wasn't sure she could hide her fear of

Hector from them. He was so different from the other men she'd dated, surely they would see through the lie and call her on it. He was a large, domineering man who frightened her in some elemental way that she didn't understand.

On the other hand, he also made her feel things, emotions or shivering experiences that none of her other dates had even come close to doing to her. That both frightened her, and in an odd, bizarre way, it thrilled her right down to her belly. It made her feel feminine and....wanted?

No, she was just imagining those crazy feelings. She'd wanted so badly to fall into a crazy-in-love relationship and just because Hector scared her more than the other men she'd met to date, that didn't mean that he was the man for her.

Maybe if her parents objected to the marriage, she could then sit down with them, explain Hector's offer of help and they would finally accept it. That would get her out of a marriage that terrified her, wouldn't it?

Yes, her parents would see through the lie. They would sense her fears and she could convince them to accept Hector's help. Wasn't her whole world all about convincing people through words? As a journalist, she knew that finding the right story to tell was only part of the question. Telling the story so everyone could understand and absorb the information, that was the other half of the challenge.

Right now, she was working on a huge story, one that could catapult her into another realm of journalism and she wasn't about to let it go just to marry a man who was the equivalent of a terrifying, unfeeling cold fish. Albeit a tall fish, she thought with a chuckle. And an extremely handsome one. No chuckle this time as her body shivered with the memory of his strong, elegant hands.

Out in the street and back in the sunshine, she felt enormously better. With Hector's generous help, she could get her parents through this crisis and they would be stronger for it. She wouldn't have to sacrifice her life or her career for the problem and she might even get additional information about the subject of her investigation from Hector once they'd resolved the corporate crisis.

Chapter 2

“You’re getting married?” Aella Papadelias, Kallista’s mother, asked with an incredulous expression. Her shaking hands covered her mouth and she turned to her father. “They’re getting married!” she whispered reverently. “Oh, dear, they’re getting married.”

Kallista watched with a sinking heart as her mother and father looked at each other, the relief in both their expressions and their shoulders, in fact, their whole bodies, was evident.

Aella stood up and rushed to her daughter. “Oh, Kallista! You have no idea how happy this has made me and your papa.”

Kallista hugged her mother, looking over her shoulder at Hector who was standing stoically beside the sofa. It was as if he were aloof, not willing to be a part of their small family and the excitement the announcement had caused.

Or maybe he didn’t think he belonged. She blinked and looked back at her parents, not wanting to see the almost brutally blank expression on Hector’s features. Where that thought came from she didn’t know. Hector had a way of belonging anywhere he went, she thought as she accepted her father’s ecstatic hug as well. She was being ridiculous, she told herself firmly. Hector had enough power to crush anyone who made him feel like an outsider, even if their exclusion was accidental, so people went out of their way to make him feel welcome.

So why did she get the strong sense that he was feeling like an outcast?

Kallista didn’t like thinking of Hector as vulnerable. It made him human, gave him feelings and she preferred thinking of him as a robot, unfeeling and invulnerable to the lesser human emotions others had to deal with. But something about his face, the way he refused to allow any emotions to cross his rough features, told her that there was something more to him than she realized.

Her mother sensed Hector behind her as well and she rushed over, taking his face between her hands and bringing his face down for a motherly kiss. “I’m very honored to have you as a son in law,” she said with a great deal of emotion, tears forming on her eyes as she looked up at him with pride.

Hector was uncomfortable with her praise. He wanted to step out, to let the three of them celebrate this event on their own without his interference, but Aella wouldn’t let him even step back. She looped her arm through his, giving him another hug and making him brace himself to resist the warmth she was showing him.

Kallista’s father also came over, shaking Hector’s hand and bringing him over to the sofa so they were all once again sitting down. Hector wanted to pull the man aside and apologize for even considering marrying his daughter, to explain that he knew that he was unworthy of such an honor and he would treat her with the care and respect she deserved. But Demetrius was too vociferous in his congratulations and there wasn’t a point in the conversation where Hector could pull him aside. He was being dragged into this, even though his inclusion was wrong on so many levels.

Demetrius looked over at the two of them, his eyes alight with relief and excitement. "How did all this happen? I didn't even know you two were dating?"

Kallista cringed inside and looked to Hector for help. "We haven't really been dating so much as just seeing each other," he explained carefully. "And the idea of marriage came up pretty suddenly."

Kallista wanted to laugh at how accurate that statement truly was, to applaud his use of half truths so that they weren't lying to her parents but still protecting them from the cold reality of their relationship. Since she and Hector had just discussed marriage this afternoon, and they honestly only saw each other at some social functions even though they rarely spoke, there was no untruth to that statement at all. It was a wonderful twist on reality that made a very sweet fairy tale, something for her parents to hang onto.

Dinner that night was festive for her parents and Kallista tried to at least pretend to be in the mood, but she was tense and worried, barely tasting the food that was served even though everyone else exclaimed that it was delicious. Her plan to try and talk with her parents was slowly disintegrating as the night progressed and they became happier, more relieved. She knew she couldn't back out of this now. She'd have to help them out and if that meant marrying a man she didn't know or love, she'd do it.

Looking at Hector across the table, she considered his profile as he talked with her mother. He definitely wasn't bad looking. He wasn't traditionally handsome but there was a definite ruggedness that was definitely appealing. He certainly had strong features, dark, intelligent eyes and broad shoulders. And he was so intelligent that it was downright scary.

Besides, the marriage didn't have to be real. Hector probably didn't think of it as a real proposal, but something he was doing out of respect for her parents, right? They could end the marriage once he'd done whatever it was he needed to do to help her father's ailing company.

Or was he the kind of man who thought of marriage as a forever kind of contract? He was reputed in the business world to be brutal, but also respected and honorable. One didn't gain that reputation without a great deal of experience behind it.

No way, she thought. Although she didn't know much about the man, she knew that he regularly escorted fabulously glamorous women to functions all over the world. He'd reputedly had an affair with one of the biggest Hollywood actresses, and several models, even a ballerina. She doubted he was the kind of man who would want to be stuck with one female for the rest of his life. Especially a female like herself who had no glamour, no fabulous career and minimal connections that could assist him in his business dealings.

"So when were you planning to have the wedding? Any ideas on what time of the year? Perhaps a spring or fall wedding?" Aella was asking, looking to Kallista hopefully.

"Soon," Hector announced before Kallista could reply. Which was probably a good thing because she might have said something like "A year or so," instead of the ambiguous "Soon".

Her mother beamed and sat up a bit straighter in her chair. "I'll have to organize an engagement party. Between the two of us, we can get that done in the next month or so, can't we Kallista?"

“We’ll be married in two weeks,” Hector announced with his deep, strong voice, surprising the whole group. “And Kallista has asked if we can have the engagement party at my house because she likes my backyard so much. I know that’s an imposition to ask, but I hope that’s okay.”

Aella was startled at first, but Kallista again saw that flash of relief in her mother’s eyes and her heart sank even lower, both at how oblivious she had become to her parents’ troubles as well as the trap that that was slowly closing around her future.

“Oh, goodness, how could I mind? Your backyard is exceptionally beautiful with all of that magnificent landscaping and stunning views of both the city and the sea.” She turned to Kallista and smiled, “It was very nice of you to think of something like that. It shows that you have a good eye for entertaining which will be important for your new role as Hector’s wife.”

And that was something Kallista hadn’t realized would be on her plate of responsibilities. A new issue to worry about, she thought as her mother started listing all the things they would have to arrange for an engagement party.

Her mother was eager, excited and deliriously happy while her father simply looked on with pride and acceptance for whatever his wife decreed.

Hector saw where things were going and stepped in to circumvent any delays. In a tone that wouldn’t accept any arguments, he said, “We’ll have the engagement party next week, and the wedding the following week. I know that’s not very conventional, but we’ll just have to insult some people’s sense of protocol since I want the wedding to take place sooner rather than later.”

Aella’s hand quickly went to her throat. She looked quickly between her daughter and the man she was going to marry, her suspicions clashing around in her mind. “Is there a reason the wedding needs to happen so soon?” she asked, looking worriedly from Kallista to Hector.

Kallista was quick to understand her meaning and pretended like her face wasn’t flaming with color. “Of course not!” she replied emphatically. She was blushing painfully and couldn’t look across the table, not wanting to see the derision on Hector’s features. “Goodness, I would tell you if that were the case.”

Her shoulders visibly relaxed with that news, but she still looked confused. “So what’s the rush?”

Once again, Hector stepped in with an easy answer. “I have business in New York and London in the next few weeks so I wanted to announce the engagement officially as soon as possible so Kallista can accompany me. I wouldn’t want her reputation to be hurt by attending these functions without my ring on her finger. And I wanted to give you time to make the announcement instead of the press seeing us together and making suppositions on their own.” He was speaking to her parents, but Kallista knew that the words were soothing to her parents as well, and would allow them to save face with their friends and neighbors. And when she didn’t show up pregnant so soon after the wedding, their suspicions would be dismissed.

The relief and acceptance on her mother's face was instant and Kallista relaxed. At least until her next words. "Goodness! If we have a party to organize in a week, Kallista, you and I have a lot we need to get done. No more running around with all your friends for a while, eh?"

Her mother and father knew she worked, even to the point of accepting her choice of professions, but they thought she only did entertainment pieces or reported on social issues. Kallista hadn't told her parents about her desire to become an investigative journalist, nor had she mentioned the story she was currently working on about the drugs moving through the harbors. That would worry them too much. "I suppose you're right," she said, looking at her water glass, her heart sinking as she tried to figure out how she was going to investigate her story when she had to help her mother plan what was probably going to be a huge bash. Something her parents couldn't afford.

Hector immediately stepped in, once again to the rescue. "I have a caterer I use for business functions that is able to get food ready quickly. They do an excellent job too. I'll have my secretary send over the name and contact information."

Kallista suddenly realized what he was doing. By having the party in his backyard, and using his company's caterer, he was arranging it so that he paid for most of the party. With gratitude, she looked across at him, smiling her thanks. He nodded slightly, acknowledging her thanks without letting her parents see their silent interchange.

After dinner, Hector apologized and said he had some business calls to make. "Would you walk me out?" he asked, turning to Kallista.

She stood up immediately and ignored her parents knowing smile. Walking Hector to the door was a very odd sensation. He was so tall that her head barely topped his shoulder even in her heels. And he seemed larger, broader for some reason tonight.

Maybe she was just tired but she wanted the evening to be over so she could collapse and let her mind sift through the events of the day, try to make sense of everything.

"You did well tonight," he said and looked down at her in the dim light of the foyer. He slid his hands into the pockets of his slacks so he wouldn't touch her, wouldn't be tempted to find out what the skin on her cheeks felt like or test the softness of her silky brown tresses. "Your parents are happy and relieved."

Kallista forced a smile on her face and hid her hands behind her back. She wished she could get over this silly feeling she had every time he was close but her knees were wobbly and her mouth felt dry, her hands were shaky and she had the embarrassing suspicion that he knew she wanted to touch him, to find out what was underneath that immaculate suit he wore. "Yes. Thank you for coming to the rescue. I had no idea that things were as bad as they were, even with all those numbers you were discussing with me earlier today."

"Numbers you completely ignored," he said with a half smile as he looked down at the top of her head.

She laughed and glanced up at him, her blue eyes dancing with acceptance that she'd been caught. "Was it that obvious?"

He chuckled and shifted slightly. "A little."

She grimaced and stole another peek at his dark features. "I never claimed to be a numbers person. I always hated math."

"Don't worry," he said and bowed slightly in a formal, almost old-fashioned way. "I can now start the ball rolling to resolve this issue although I doubt your father will allow me to do much until after the wedding. Which is one of the reasons why we need to be married so soon. I'll need to move quickly to reinforce your father's company."

Gone was the fleeting tenderness she thought she saw, and back was the tough, unrelenting businessman. "I understand. I'll do what I can to help."

"You're already doing it," he said and opened the door, nodding to her slightly before he left.

Kallista walked up the stairs to her old room, glad that she still had some clothes here since she didn't have an easy way to get back to her place. She smiled slightly as she wondered if Hector thought it was better for her to be with her parents than at her own place, or if he'd just forgotten that she didn't live here any longer. Good grief, she was twenty-four years old, of course she wouldn't be living with her parents.

She wondered about the odd expression she'd seen on his face when she'd asked about living with his parents earlier today. Had she seen a flash of pain? Or was that just male dominance? Or perhaps he thought there was a difference between men and women. Maybe he thought that women should either live with their parents or their husbands, never alone or without male supervision because they were inferior, stupid, and needed male guidance.

She didn't think that was the case. He didn't strike her as misogynistic. Arrogant, opinionated, exceptionally intelligent and perhaps more than a bit domineering. Not a woman hater, though.

As she got ready for bed that night, she smiled at how thoughtful it was that Hector had realized her parents wouldn't be able to pay for an engagement party, much less the lavish one they'd like to give for their only child. He really was a nice man, she thought.

If only she could understand him!