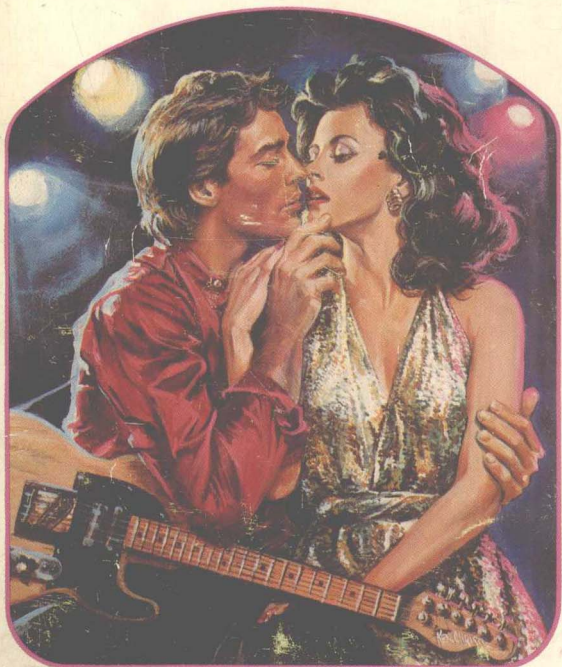




Second Chance at Love

HEARTTHROB



MARGARETT McKEAN



Second Chance at Love™

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**MARGARETT
McKEAN**



**SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE
BOOK**

HEARTTHROB

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First edition published February 1982

First printing

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Printed in the United States of America

**Second Chance at Love books are published by
The Berkley/Jove Publishing Group,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016**

**“I don’t believe how good
you look soaking wet.”**

January’s T-shirt was clinging to her skin, her breasts outlined in sharp relief. She didn’t move as Lance walked toward her and, putting his hands on her shoulders, began to kiss her. Instead of pushing him away, she found her arms went around him, pulling herself closer against him, the warmth of his bare chest penetrating the wet T-shirt. His mouth against hers seemed to take possession of her whole being. He kissed her cheeks, her eyelids, the side of her neck, and whispered in her ear, as his arms tightened around her, “You are so be her eyelidsary . . .”

Dear Reader,

Your enthusiastic reception of **SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE** has inspired all of us who work on this special romance line and we thank you.

Now there are *six* brand new, exciting **SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE** romances for you each month. We've doubled the number of love stories in our line because so many readers like you asked us to. So, you see, your opinions, your ideas, what you think, really count! Feel free to drop me a note to let me know your reactions to our stories.

Again, thanks for so warmly welcoming **SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE** and, please, *do* let me hear from *you*!

With every good wish,

Carolyn Nichols
SECOND CHANCE AT LOVE
The Berkley/Jove Publishing Group
200 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10016

chapter

1

JANUARY signed her name a final time to the divorce papers and sat back with a sigh of satisfaction. At last it was over. Never again would she be called Mrs. Michael Stone. From now on it was her own name, January Warburton, the by-line that had always gone on her articles and photos. She might have once been madly in love with Mike Stone, but that had ended more than eighteen months ago when it turned out that all the ugly rumors printed in the gossip columns were true. Mike was having an affair with that little platinum-blond.

Rule number one, she thought, don't get involved with people in the music business. Which wasn't easy to avoid doing, she reminded herself wryly, when that was where one worked. Speaking of work . . . she picked up the red pencil and went through her own article one more time.

A quick rap on the smoked-glass door of her office made her look up. She smiled as, without waiting for her nod, Adrian Davis slid the door open and strode in. He lowered his long, angular body into the modern tubular steel chair across from her and tossed a folder on her desk. Adrian, as editor and owner of *Offbeat Magazine*, made himself at home in all the offices.

January smiled cheerfully at her boss. "To what do I owe this honor?"

Adrian squinted his blue eyes at her. "You're looking exceptionally beautiful today."

January tugged at her luxurious dark hair. She knew the soft lavender shade of her silk blouse accented her tan and highlighted the violet of her long-lashed eyes. As a photojournalist for Los Angeles's most prestigious music magazine, January realized it was important that she look well. That she managed to do so with minimal make-up and hairstyling was due to her natural beauty and the regimen of good health and exercise she insisted on.

"Thanks for the compliment," she said to Adrian, "but surely that's not what you came to say?"

"Nope." His ever-observant eye spotted the thick envelope on her desk. "What's that?"

"Divorce papers. Signed, sealed, and done."

"So you're a free woman again." Adrian's voice was sympathetic. "How's it feel?"

"Fine," January said. "Just fine." Her words faltered a bit. Hastily she smiled. "And I will thank you in the future to not fix me up with any more music producers."

Adrian winked. "I never told you to marry him. Dinner and an interview was all I said. The rest of the mistakes were yours."

"I concede," January said quickly. "You told me Michael could never stick with one woman and you were right."

"Do I detect a note of bitterness?"

"Bitter only that I was too young and foolish to listen. I'll know better next time."

"Aha," Adrian said. "Then you are finally open to the idea of a next time."

"Adrian, did you come in here to discuss my personal life or business?"

"Both, of course. Don't avoid the question."

January shifted in her chair so she could look out the window. The view of Los Angeles from the top floor of the Sunset Boulevard highrise was spectacular. "My work is enough for me right now," she said. "I don't want to get involved again, Adrian. Not for a long time. If there is a next time, it has to be good. I wonder sometimes if you realize how lucky you and Alicia are. You two have one of the best marriages I know."

"It's not all luck," Adrian said softly. "It's work, too. You can't stay buried away forever, January. Your divorce papers may have just come through, but you and Make separated over eighteen months ago. You've dated no one. If nothing else, my dear, there are some healthy bodily urges that cannot be ignored. You must be feeling them."

January blushed slightly.

Adrian went on. "To say nothing of the need for comfort, affection, and companionship that we all have."

"I'm not ready yet. It's that simple. But I appreciate the concern." And she did. January was twenty-five and had been on her own since she was nineteen. Although Adrian was only forty, he and his wife, Alicia, had taken a sort of parental interest in her since she'd come to work for *Offbeat* four years ago. It was good to know people cared.

"Okay," said January, "enough of my personal life. What's up?"

"I've got an assignment for you," said Adrian. "I want you to go on the road."

January brightened. "Cover story?"

"Series of articles. Lead features on L. A. Expressway."

"The hot new band?"

"Hot, yes. New, no. They're a California group who've been around for a while. They have a good fol-

lowing here on the West Coast but not so big in the east. Their new album is coming out soon and Platinum Records is setting up a promotional tour for them. I want you to go with them."

"Photos, interviews, the works?"

"Exactly," said Adrian. "I've already arranged it with their producer, Jay Livingston. They called today to tell me Lance approved the idea."

"Lance?"

"Lance Devlin, the lead singer and driving force behind the band."

"When do they leave?" January asked.

"About a week."

"Awfully short notice, isn't it?"

Adrian nodded. "Here's even shorter notice for you—I need two cover stories on Lance and L. A. Expressway by Monday noon."

"Adrian, you're crazy!" January gasped. "It's Thursday. The paper is put to bed this evening and is on the stands a week from today. We've already done the cover stories—they're set and ready to go."

"I've canceled them. We'll hold them for the next issue. This issue's going to Lance Devlin. The center pages and cover photo will be done by you and Steve Creighton this weekend."

"Creighton?" January said. "Why him? He has the mentality and style of a gossip columnist."

"Steve is also associate editor along with you. You just don't like his attitude toward women," Adrian said.

"I don't like his attitude, period," she replied.

Adrian shrugged. "We've been through this a hundred times. At any rate, you and Steve are handling these stories, and Steve has final okay on the cover design and inside copy for this issue."

"Why? Where are you going to be?" January asked.

"In Chicago. Covering the Rolling Stones concert."

"You sure are giving me a lot of last minute information today," January said. "Since when did you cover concerts?"

"Since Mick Jagger agreed to give me that long-awaited interview." Adrian grinned.

"Terrific," January said sarcastically. "You get Mick Jagger and I get Lance Devlin. Thanks a lot. What's he like, anyway? Devlin, I mean."

Adrian reached into the folder he'd thrown on her desk and pulled out an eight-by-ten glossy. He handed it to January.

Bold eyes seemed to wink mockingly out of the black-and-white picture. The shot was a close-up of the lead singer. His hair was light, falling softly around his ears and over his forehead. His cheekbones were high, his skin clear. His mouth was soft, sensuous, on the edge of laughter. Only the hard jawline indicated the strong stubborn streak January was somehow sure he had.

"Good looking, isn't he?" Adrian said.

January dropped the photo on her desk hastily, realizing she'd been staring hard at it since the instant Adrian had put it into her hands. "Not bad," she said. "How's his music?"

"Good." Adrian handed her another picture, one of the whole group together.

Lance was wearing leather pants, a white shirt open to the waist. His body looked lean and hard. The rest of the group was similarly dressed. January liked their looks: rough, but orderly. They appeared professional. "Who's the girl?" she asked casually, pointing to the long-haired woman at the mike beside Lance.

"That's Teri. She sings harmonies. Beautiful voice—sounds a little like Carly Simon. She's married to Joel, the piano player. That's Derek on bass, and Samson on drums."

"What's their sound?" January asked, pushing the pictures of Lance away from her. It had been a long time since she'd seen a man she found so attractive, and the last thing she needed was to be attracted to a man she was about to go on the road with, especially a musician. She knew all she wanted to know—and then some—about musicians.

"Sort of a cross between Fleetwood Mac and the Eagles," he said, "if you can imagine it."

Years of working with Adrian enabled January to imagine it easily. L. A. Expressway's sound would be easy rock with good harmonies and guitar work; some slow ballads, some fast numbers. She wondered if they had anything to distinguish them from all the other bands producing just those sounds. She assumed they must or Adrian wouldn't be taking such an interest in them. Adrian had an almost infallible ability to determine who was going to make it and who wasn't.

"When do I meet them?" January asked.

Adrian glanced at his watch. "Any minute now. I told Lance to come by the office. I thought you two could have lunch together."

January grinned. "Oh you did, did you?"

The voice of *Offbeat's* receptionist came over the speaker on January's desk: "Lance Devlin here to see you."

Adrian winked. "Take him somewhere nice. He likes to eat well." He unfolded himself from the chair and walked to the door.

"Hey," said January, "aren't you even going to introduce us?"

But Adrian was already gone.

Typical, thought January, and then said into the intercom, "Tell Mr. Devlin, I'll be right with him." Hastily she pulled open her desk drawer, pulled out a mirror, checked her face, and ran a comb through her long dark hair. Come on, Warburton, she said to herself, dropping the mirror back in the drawer. What are you doing? It's just one more rock star. She pushed the drawer shut and glanced again at the pictures Adrian had left on her desk. If he looked anything like his pictures, she thought with a smile . . .

She was about to tell the receptionist to send Devlin in when the door slid open and Lance Devlin himself sauntered into her office.

January felt a shock go through her. He was even better looking than his photos. She picked up her phone, pressing a button so that the receptionist's voice could not be heard over the speaker. "Helen, I thought I said..."

"I know, Ms. Warburton, but he just pushed right past me..."

"Okay," said January, "never mind. I'll handle it."

Lance was leaning against the door, hands in the pockets of his blue jeans, a lazy grin on his face.

January fought an impulse to throw him out of her office. She reminded herself she was going to be practically living with him and his band for at least a month—unless she told Adrian to give the job to someone else.

"Have a seat," she said politely. "I'm January Warburton, and you're..." She held out her hand.

He ignored her hand and slid down into the chair Adrian had vacated. "Lance Devlin, as if you didn't know. You have my pictures right there in front of you."

"Are you always so polite?" she said sarcastically.

"I hate to be kept waiting," he said easily. "And I hate the press."

"Then what are you doing here?" January snapped.

Lance grinned. "I need you. *Offbeat*'s the best music rag in the country and we could use the publicity. You people need us because we're about to be the hottest group around."

"If that's true," January retorted, "then you don't need anyone. Good music creates its own publicity."

"True," he said, "but a little advance promotion never hurt anyone."

"Calculating, aren't you?"

"How do you think I've survived in this business so long? It's dog eat dog. You ought to know. It's papers like yours that have everyone slitting each other's throats. You just love to keep the competition going, don't you?"

"Any more hostility you care to vent on me?" she asked evenly.

"Not for the moment." Lance lounged back in the chair, lifted his long legs, and eased his booted feet down onto her desk top.

"Take your feet off my desk," January said softly. She didn't know why she said it. Adrian sat with his feet on her desk all the time.

He put his feet down. "Excuse—uu—se me," he said in a Steve Martin imitation. "Mind if I smoke?"

January pushed an ashtray toward him.

"Never mind," he said, "just testing. I don't smoke. Bad for the throat."

"Are you always this obnoxious?"

"Usually," Lance said. "Especially with the press."

"Well, let me give you some advice," January said. "We're going to be spending quite a bit of time together. I'm going to be interviewing you and everyone in your band. I'll be writing about all your shows and doing all the photos. I am going to be covering your first major eastern tour. For all I know, you are just one more two-bit L.A. band with the same old worn out sounds of all the other bands. Then again, you might be good. But whatever you are, I'm going to report it straight. It would be to your advantage to make all the effort in the world you can to get along with me. Get it?"

"Got it," Lance said. "Now you get this, December or February or whatever your name is. I don't know you, and I don't like you. I don't like you because you have just admitted to me that you don't even know what my band sounds like. And you are about to go on the road with us. Typical press."

"All you want is your story. It doesn't matter to you what we sound like. You'll say anything you want just so long as it sells your paper. So don't talk to me about getting along. You know and I know that it doesn't matter a damn if we get along or not. I'll play my music; you'll write your garbage. You'll sell your paper, and hopefully we'll sell tickets to our concerts. As for 'getting along,' that's just the setup before the sellout, so don't give me that."

White-faced and furious, January stared at him. Seeing his arrogant green eyes, she knew there was no sense in telling him she hadn't had a chance to listen to his music because she'd only found out five minutes ago she was going on the road with his group. Tight-lipped, she said instead, "I will make a deal with you, Mr. Devlin. I will listen to your music. If I don't like it, I will not take this assignment. Someone else who does like your sound will be sent to cover the tour instead. Will that satisfy you? As for your music, if it's as hostile, as rude, as utterly contemptible as you are, I am sure I will loathe it. Now, get out of my office." January's normally soft violet eyes were almost black with anger. She stood up. "Out," she said.

Lance's eyes traveled slowly from January's set face to her trembling body, lingered a moment, then met her eyes again. He stood up also. "If you get someone else for the job," he said, "as I'm sure you will, get a guy. Women reporters are the worst."

It took all January's strength to resist hurling her dictionary at him as Lance ambled nonchalantly out of her office.

Conceited jerk, she thought, sitting back down, trying to stop her hands from shaking.

She pressed the button on the phone for Adrian's office.

"No way," she said when she got him, "am I going to work with that stupid, arrogant bastard. No way, Adrian. Get someone else." She slammed the receiver down.

Adrian was at her door in seconds. "What happened?"

"What didn't happen?" She told him the story. "We don't need him, Adrian, no matter how good he is," she concluded. "Believe me, he's not worth the hassle."

"Come on," said Adrian. "He can't be that bad."

"He's worse."

"You're edgy," Adrian said. "Divorce papers, no boyfriend, a sexy guy comes into your office, and you get all hot under the collar."

She glared at him.

"Okay, okay," he soothed, "calm down. If he's really that awful, we'll get someone else on the story. I wanted you because you're the best. No one on the staff can both write and photograph as well as you. If you don't go, it'll mean sending two people."

"Send Steve Creighton," January said. "Frankly, with the hostility he has toward the press, I think you're wasting your time sending anyone."

"I need Steve here." Adrian paused. "Aw, hell. You know you're the best at a story like Devlin and L.A. Expressway, so do me one favor. Keep your end of the bargain."

"What's that?"

"Listen to his music. If you really don't like it, then you're off the assignment. But if you do, then cover the tour. Deal?"

"Deal," January said, convinced that nothing on earth could make her like Lance Devlin and L.A. Expressway's music.

"There are some demo tapes on my desk. Go listen to them now. You can close the door and have the office to yourself. I'm going to lunch. I'll tell Helen not to let anyone disturb you."

"If I don't like it I'm off the story, right?"

"Right." Adrian grinned. "One thing I know for certain is that you'd never lie to me. If you like Devlin's music, you'll say so."

True, thought January, as she walked down the thickly carpeted corridor to Adrian's office. But one thing she knew for certain was that she wouldn't like Devlin's music.

She sat down at Adrian's desk. The tapes, reel to reel, were in square boxes. She picked one up, opened the box, took the clear plastic reel out and clicked it onto the large machine behind the desk. She pulled the brown tape through the magnetic heads and wound it onto the empty spool. Before pressing the on button, she read the

notes on the box. The tape was a demo dub of a master for their first album.

"L. A. Expressway," she read, "*Diamonds of the Sea*, Side One." Okay, Devlin, she thought, let's see what you do.

First song, first side was the title song of the album, "Diamonds of the Sea." She pushed the on button, sat back in Adrian's chair, and closed her eyes to listen. Despite all that Lance had said one thing January was, was fair. She would listen to Devlin's music as if she had never heard of him or spoken to him in her life.

The first sounds were chimes, soft and silvery, followed by the opening guitar chords, minor chords. January relaxed. She loved the minor chords. Piano, bass, drums, each instrument entered slowly, picking up on and echoing the others. Rather, she thought, like waves of the ocean themselves, breaking one after the other, gently washing up onto the sand. A girl's voice came in. Teri, January realized, remembering the picture. Lance's voice followed last, coming in quietly, picking up on the melody and then taking over the whole song, carrying it. Something in Lance's voice struck a chord in January, seemed to touch her deep inside. It seemed impossible that the angry man she had seen earlier could sing so beautifully.

The song was a love song, lyrical, melodic, the words weaving fine poetic images. Finding real love, the song said, was as rare as finding diamonds in the sea. Wasn't that the truth, January thought ironically, and wondered who had written the song. She looked at the box. "All songs by Lance Devlin."

She pressed rewind and played the first song through again, this time forgetting everything, giving herself up to the music.

She had listened to the entire tape once and was half-way through a second time when Adrian walked in. So caught up was she in the music that she didn't hear him enter.

"Well?" he said.

His voice startled her and she sat up straight. A soft smile came on her face as she saw Adrian.

"Great," she said. "He's really great. His personality stinks, but his music is brilliant. I don't know how I'm ever going to get along with him, but it looks as if I'll have to find a way."

Adrian smiled. "I thought you'd feel that way."

"One thing you were wrong about, though," she said. "He's better, much better, than the groups you compared him to." She grinned. "I predict that L.A. Expressway will soon be the hottest group around." And then she groaned. "But how on earth am I ever going to get him to open up and trust me?"

"January, if you can't find a way no one can."

"Maybe I shouldn't take the assignment, Adrian. He hates women reporters."

"You can make him trust you," Adrian said. "Believe me, you're a perfect match."

To her total confusion, January found herself blushing.

"So you do like him after all," he said thoughtfully. "That's what all those sparks were about."

"I like him as a musician," January said, clicking off the tape recorder. "Business only, Adrian Davis, and don't try to turn it into anything else. Last time you did that, you almost destroyed my life."

Adrian grinned. "Not I, my dear—Mike Stone."

"Please don't mention the name. I just got rid of it today. What's Devlin's number? I better call and set up an interview."

Adrian handed her a piece of paper with the number on it. "If you're free tonight, come have dinner with Alicia and me."

"Thanks," said January, "that'd be nice. I get tired of my own cooking."

"You can't live alone forever, January. Sooner or later you're going to have to let someone into your life."

"Later," she said with a grin, "much later." She