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August



SHOTGUN  
BRIDE

LEANN HARRIS



## *What had he been thinking when he nearly devoured Renee in the hall?*

Hawk wondered

When he'd grabbed her to prevent her from falling, and plastered her body against his, that was all he'd needed to touch off the inferno he'd been fighting this past week.

Being near her in the apartment had slowly driven him mad. Every moment, he'd had to pretend he wasn't affected by her, didn't remember their time together. He'd thought he would die if he didn't hold her once more.

His reaction wasn't so uncommon when it came to Renee. That was one of the things that had worried him when he and Renee were dating—his uncontrollable reaction to her.

Why was it so difficult to keep himself detached? After the fiasco of his first marriage, he'd learned his lesson and managed to stay away from any emotional ties. He hadn't had any trouble until he'd met Renee, but then everything changed....

Dear Reader,

What is there to say besides, "The wait is over!" Yes, it's true. Chance Mackenzie's story is here at last. *A Game of Chance*, by inimitable *New York Times* bestselling author Linda Howard, is everything you've ever dreamed it could be: exciting, suspenseful, and so darn sexy you're going to need to turn the air-conditioning down a few more notches! In Sunny Miller, Chance meets his match—in every way. Don't miss a single fabulous page.

The twentieth-anniversary thrills don't end there, though. A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY continues with *Undercover Bride*, by Kylie Brant. This book is proof that things aren't always what they seem, because Rachel's groom, Caleb Carpenter, has secrets...secrets that could break—or win—her heart. *Blade's Lady*, by Fiona Brand, features another of her to-die-for heroes, and a heroine who's known him—in her dreams—for years. Linda Howard calls this author "a keeper," and she's right. Barbara McCauley's SECRETS! miniseries has been incredibly popular in Silhouette Desire, and now it moves over to Intimate Moments with *Gabriel's Honor*, about a heroine on the run with her son and the irresistible man who becomes her protector. Pat Warren is back with *The Lawman and the Lady*, full of suspense and emotion in just the right proportions. Finally, Leann Harris returns with *Shotgun Bride*, about a pregnant heroine forced to seek safety—and marriage—with the father of her unborn child.

And as if all that isn't enough, come back next month for more excitement—including the next installment of A YEAR OF LOVING DANGEROUSLY and the in-line return of our wonderful continuity, 36 HOURS.



Leslie J. Wainger  
Executive Senior Editor

Please address questions and book requests to:

Silhouette Reader Service

U.S.: 3010 Walden Ave., P.O. Box 1325, Buffalo, NY 14269

Canadian: P.O. Box 609, Fort Erie, Ont. L2A 5X3

**SHOTGUN  
BRIDE  
LEANN HARRIS**

*Silhouette*   
INTIMATE™ MOMENTS®

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Any errors are strictly mine.



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SHOTGUN BRIDE

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*Trouble in Texas* #664

*Undercover Husband* #719

*Temporary Marriage* #821

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## **LEANN HARRIS**

When Leann Harris first met her husband in college, she never dreamed she would marry him. After all, he was getting a Ph.D. in the one science she'd managed to avoid—physics! So much for first impressions. They have been happily married for over twenty years. After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin, Leann taught math and science to deaf high school students until the birth of her first child. It wasn't until her youngest child started school that Leann decided to fulfill a lifelong dream and began writing. She presently lives in Plano, Texas, with her husband and two children.

# IT'S OUR 20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY!

We'll be celebrating all year,  
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## *Chapter 1*

“You want me to what?” Renee Girouard asked the old man lying in the hospital bed.

Emory Sweeney looked haggard and lifeless. “I want you to marry Hawk.” He turned his head and nodded to the corner of the room where the other man stood, staring out the window.

Renee’s gaze went to Matthew Hawkins. He glanced over his shoulder and met her stare. She searched his face for some clue to explain her employer’s bizarre request, but Hawk’s expression gave nothing away. Her mind flew back to the last time they’d talked. It hadn’t been a good parting. Had he told Emory about their relationship...or what was left of it? But that didn’t make sense.

“What’s going on here?” she asked, directing her question to Hawk.

Hawk’s brow arched, and he turned to face the other man. “Emory, you’d better tell her the reason you want



her to marry me. From her expression it looks as though she's not too taken with the idea." He leaned back against the wall.

Unfortunately, Matthew Hawkins was handsome as sin: six foot two; wavy dark brown hair; deep, penetrating brown eyes; and a mouth that could be tender and seductive.

Renee pushed aside her thoughts and turned back to the older man. "Are you going to be okay, Emory?"

The colon cancer that had sent Emory Sweeney, the founder and president of Texas Chic to the hospital for surgery had worried everyone in the firm. Renee had visited St. Luke's hospital numerous times this last week.

Emory took Renee's hand. "There are some things I need to tell you."

A chill swept over her, and she had the awful premonition that this man, her boss for the past three years, was going to tell her something that would forever change her life. Maybe she didn't want to know what was going on. She'd heard a rumor that swindling had recently been uncovered within the company. But what did that have to do with the request Emory just made? And why ask her to marry Hawk?

A look of regret filled Emory's eyes. "When you came to work for me after your parents were killed in the car accident, you thought it was a lucky twist of fate."

The turn of the conversation surprised her. She'd been expecting talk of missing money or the reason why she needed to marry Hawk, but Emory was recalling the time he hired her.

"Yes," she slowly answered. She'd often commented how fortunate it was that she'd gotten the internship with

Emory's company four years ago, after the accident as Emory's assistant. The job had given her enough money to finish her schooling. Then when she graduated from Texas A&M, she'd been offered a permanent position with the firm. "Of course I remember."

"Well, it wasn't a coincidence."

Her heart beat faster.

"I knew all about you and the tough situation you were facing, and I wanted to help you."

"I'm glad you did." She glanced from Emory to Hawk. Their expressions were dark. There was something more here that she wasn't getting.

"You'd better tell her the rest, Emory, because I don't think she's going to marry me if you don't," Hawk urged. He moved away from the window and came to the bed.

Renee's heart caught at the sight of him. He'd always had that effect on her. She thought she'd found the love of her life until—

Emory cleared his throat. "I've always known about you, Renee."

She frowned. "You knew my parents before I was born?"

"I knew your mother."

*But not your father.* Although it wasn't said, the words rang through the room, carrying with them a dark shadow.

She cleared her throat. "Do you want to explain?"

"You're my biological daughter, Renee."

Denial sprang to life in her brain, but he continued.

"I met your mom at market in Dallas. At the time, my wife and I had separated. Your mother was young, vivacious and heartsick after being dumped by her fi-

ancé. We had a brief affair. We shouldn't have, but..." He paused, his memories obviously painful.

"I went back to my wife, and Carolyn went back home. She married your dad after you were born."

Renee wanted to yell denials at him, but his words made some mysteries in her life fall into place. After her parents' death, she'd discovered the date of her birth predated her parents' wedding. That discrepancy had bothered her.

"Show her the birth certificate," Emory ordered Hawk.

Hawk walked over to a briefcase, retrieved the document and handed it to her. She stared down at the paper. There on the line for the name of the birth father was Emory's name.

"When Francois Girouard adopted you, the birth certificate was reissued," Emory explained.

Her mind tried to comprehend the truth that had been revealed to her. "That can't be true."

"It is in the state of Texas," Emory replied.

"Tell her the rest, Emory," Hawk urged. The intensity of his voice set her nerves on edge.

Her gaze met Hawk's. Had he known the circumstances surrounding her birth? Was that the reason he'd acted the way he had? Her brow furrowed. But that didn't make sense. If he'd known who she was, wouldn't he have wanted to marry her?

"I didn't interfere in your life because it would've been wrong," Emory explained. "You had parents who loved you. And if I had tried to be part of your life, too many people—my wife and son, your parents—would've been hurt. Now..."

"I always kept up with you, Renee. When your folks died, I wanted to be sure you were taken care of."



Suddenly the revelation was too much for her. She stumbled to the chair by the head of the bed and sat down. "Even if that's true, why do you want me to marry Hawk? And why tell me now?"

Hawk moved around the bed and squatted in front of her. "Because Emory's worried that when he announces you as his daughter, the person or persons who kidnapped and killed his son ten years ago might try to do the same to you."

She turned to Emory. "What's Hawk talking about? I know that whoever took your son was never caught, but why do you think I would be in danger?"

Emory's eyes filled with grief. "The police were almost sure that someone in my family was connected with David's kidnapping and death. Nothing could be proven, but I fear once I announce that you are my daughter, whoever went after David will come after you."

She'd heard the rumors that someone close to Emory had been involved with the young man's disappearance, then death, but she'd discounted it as unfounded gossip.

"So how will marrying Hawk change anything?"

"If anything happens to you, my estate will go to him, and whoever is behind this will gain nothing. My family knows Hawk's history and they know how devoted he is to me. Besides, with Hawk still being a cop—and a lawyer for the Houston PD, it makes him a double threat."

"What's to stop them from going after Hawk, too?" she asked in desperation. "I mean, cops get killed in the line of duty."

"The way I've drawn up my will. If something happens to both you and Hawk, then the entire estate goes to charity. Besides, Hawk can take care of himself."

With a sixth-degree black belt in karate and his years spent as a patrol cop with the police department, she had no doubt that he could take care of himself and could protect her. But she needed time to digest the truths she'd just learned.

"I need to think about this."

"I know this is a lot to dump on you, Renee," Emory said. "Only, with the cancer, I don't have a choice."

She stood and placed the birth certificate on the bed. "I can't decide this now." Grabbing her purse, she started for the door.

"Renee," Emory called out.

She paused at the door and looked over her shoulder.

"I hadn't planned on telling you like this."

"When had you planned on telling me, Emory?" Hurt and bitterness rang in her words, made all the worse by Hawk being there to witness it.

"If things had worked out, I would never have told you. But I've run out of time. I had hoped to ease you into the position as president."

The pain in her heart expanded. ✓

"Why didn't you plan on telling me?"

"Because I didn't want to disrupt your life. But now...my board of directors will understand my desire to give my company to my child. It will make things easier for you."

"You have other family members," she pointed out.

"And who do you propose I give it to? The person who's stealing from me or the person who killed my son or maybe the person who's being paid only to come to work and drink?"

Silence enveloped the room. ✓

Emory's explanation should've helped. Maybe it would when she got past the pain of betrayal. Why

hadn't her mother told her? If she'd lived, would Carolyn Girouard have ever told Renee the truth? She pulled open the door and raced down the hall. She didn't stop until she slipped into her car. Collapsing in the front seat, she let the tears fall that she'd been holding at bay. Now not only was her future in doubt, but her past was, also.

Hawk stared at the closed door. "I don't think that went too well." His statement fell into the quiet room.

Emory sighed. "She's a levelheaded woman. One of the best I've ever met. What we unloaded on her caught her off guard." Emory's eyes narrowed as he studied Hawk. "But I wonder? Is there something between you and Renee? Her reaction when I announced I wanted her to marry you seemed rather intense. Is there something I should know, Hawk?"

Damn, Hawk thought. The cagey old fox saw things others didn't. Hawk was surprised that Emory hadn't caught on before now about the relationship between Renee and him, but they had taken pains to keep it quiet. Too bad Emory had such a blind spot about the rest of his family. Or maybe he didn't and that's why he wanted this marriage to happen.

"Yeah, there's something you should know." Hawk slipped his hands into the back pockets of his slacks. "Renee and I have been seeing each other." He wasn't going to reveal the depth of their relationship. He didn't want to think about the Heaven he'd experienced in her arms.

Emory smiled. "Then this request I'm making of you won't be any hardship, will it?"

How could Hawk tell the old man that they had broken up when Renee had started talking about marriage? He'd already made that mistake when he was a cop go-



ing to law school, and he didn't want to fall into the trap again. Renee hadn't been able to live with his bad attitude toward marriage and had broken off their relationship. He hadn't spoken to her since their parting argument two months ago.

"No, it won't," he lied. "I'll make arrangements for us to get the marriage license." Hawk picked up the birth certificate and put it back into the briefcase.

"I don't think any of my family will be thrilled. That's why I'm counting on you, Hawk. I'm going to call my lawyer, have my will changed. I can sign it after I watch you two get married."

"Then I need to go find Renee and see if I can convince her to apply for the license today or tomorrow," Hawk murmured, thinking out loud.

"There's a charity reception we're holding on Saturday night. That might be a good time to announce your marriage."

Hawk wondered if he could talk Renee into marrying him. She didn't seem to be taken with the idea.

"Hawk, thank you."

"You don't have to thank me, Emory. I want your company to continue to survive and grow. It won't happen with any of your relatives at the helm."

Emory closed his eyes. "I know." Defeat rang in his tone.

As Hawk walked out of the hospital, his thoughts were of Renee and this marriage. Whether or not she wanted to marry him, she was going to need him. Things were going to get rough. The reaction of Emory's family—his sister Eloise, her husband Thomas, their son Todd, and Emory's late brother's daughter Stacy—would be explosive. They were jackals waiting for the old man to kick the bucket so they could pick the bones dry. He

didn't doubt each of them had plans about what to do with the money Emory would leave them. He'd heard talk among them about selling the company. Yes, Renee was going to need help.

When Emory confided to him about Renee being his daughter, Hawk had been shocked. Emory's attitude toward Renee when she came to work for him now made sense. When Emory had asked him to marry Renee, Hawk hadn't been able to deny the old man his request. Emory had been a lifeline for Hawk since he'd been a teenager. Any success in his life had been because of Emory's support. He couldn't walk away from the old man's need.

Even if Emory hadn't asked him to do this favor, Hawk would've thought of some way to protect the lady, because she was going to be in danger.

Renee's hands shook so badly she couldn't get the key in the ignition. Grabbing her purse, she slipped out of the car, locked it and started walking across the parking lot toward the city park and zoo. Maybe she could outwalk her thoughts.

The early spring day was perfect, with flowers blooming in the cultured gardens and the smell of honeysuckle in the air. She wished she could appreciate the beauty, but her mind kept replaying the stunning revelations of the morning.

She stopped by a bench and sank down on it. Emory Sweeney was her father. Not Francois Girouard—the man who'd raised her, loved her, picked her up when she'd fallen off her bicycle—but Emory Sweeney, the brash president of Texas Chic. Emory was an extravagant, outspoken maverick who'd made his millions in

the sixties through a chain of retail stores, selling Texas chic apparel before it became popular.

How could it be true? As she thought further, little pieces of memory seemed to come together. The discrepancy between her birth date and her parents' wedding. Renee had assumed that Francois had been her father. And then there were no pictures of him holding her as an infant. The pictures only started after she was three. Her mother explained that fact by saying they were destroyed in a fire.

Thrown into this mess was Emory's request that she marry Hawk. The dynamic, handsome man had every female at Texas Chic vying for his attention whenever he showed up at company functions or visited Emory. He was the dangerous male who sent their blood racing, but Renee knew he had vowed never to commit to one woman after his disastrous first marriage and ugly divorce.

Marry a man who despised wedded bliss? When hell froze over, she vowed.

But there was something else to consider. She was pregnant and Hawk was the father. She took a deep breath. She had eventually planned on telling him, but she hadn't yet come to terms with her situation. She wanted this baby, but hadn't decided how she was going to deal with single motherhood.

Now it appeared she wouldn't have to. But darn, she didn't want to be like an unwanted rash that he'd acquired. And that's what she would be. They had talked about marriage before or, correction, she'd talked about marriage after they'd made love, but he'd grown remote and said he didn't want to go in that direction. As Renee had dressed that night, he asked why she was upset. She glared at him, asking if he had just wanted to have sex.