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RESCUED BY LOVE

Anne Marie Duquette



“Why couldn’t you get married in a church instead of outside?”

Mrs. Marlowe glanced around, shaking her head as she straightened her son’s tie. “How you convinced Andrea’s parents here to go along with this crazy scheme of yours, I’ll never know.”

Kurt pulled away from his mother’s fussing and took Andrea in his arms. “We do have a minister, Mother,” he said wryly, his whole attention focused on his bride.

Andrea thrilled to Kurt’s touch as his fingers adjusted her veil, tugged astray by the breeze. Her long white gown swirled around her ankles in the gentle wind.

“And we have *this*.” Kurt gestured behind him toward the Grand Canyon, which formed the backdrop to their wedding party.

The cloudless sky was a brilliant azure blue. And the sun shone down on the Canyon’s rainbow of colors with a special radiance Andrea knew was just for them.

Dear Reader,

Harlequin Romance's Bridal Collection provided a very special opportunity for me, because in many ways, this story parallels my own prewedding romance. My hero and heroine can't seem to agree on *anything*, and for a while it seemed as if my future husband and I couldn't, either! Roger wanted to marry me after *two*—yes, *two*—dates, while I couldn't even spell his last name. I was trying to discourage my old college flame from proposing, and meanwhile my new suitor was pestering me with annoying regularity! For six hair-pulling weeks, he was forever showing up at my home, my job and my favorite haunts. He even used his car to block mine in the parking lot so I'd have to seek him out.

Needless to say, his proposal was entirely unconventional. My military suitor said, "I have orders to leave. Are you coming with me?" Talk about do or die!

I finally came to my senses and gave him the answer he wanted. It wasn't hearts and flowers, it wasn't candlelight dinners and violins, but whatever it was has lasted fifteen years. To me, the best romances happen when all the conventions are thrown out the window. To my everlasting gratitude, my husband still lives—and loves—by his own rules.

And so do my hero and heroine. They aren't exactly conventional characters either, but I think you'll enjoy Kurt and Andrea's courtship. *Rescued by Love* is their story—and yours!

Sincerely,

Anne Marie Duquette

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RESCUED BY LOVE

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CHAPTER ONE

"A STEWARDESS! I CAN'T believe you hired a damn stewardess!"

Andrea Claybourne fumed at the outrage in the man's voice. She adjusted her skirt, crossed her legs, and listened intently to the argument going on behind Personnel Director Jim Stevens's open door. She couldn't see the two occupants, but she could certainly hear them.

"I believe the correct term is flight attendant," was Jim's calm response.

"Call her whatever you want, Jim, but give me a break!" The nameless man made no attempt to lower his voice. **"You can't possibly expect me to train a woman who's spent the last five years mixing cocktails, applying makeup and using a can of hair spray a day!"**

Andrea's blood boiled at the insult. Despite herself, she raised one hand to check her smooth honey-blond hair as she listened for Jim's response.

"Andrea Claybourne knows more than how to mix a drink," he said. **"She went back to school during her airline career. She's a registered Emergency Medical Technician."**

"An E.M.T. without experience is no good to the ranger staff," the other man protested. Andrea didn't like the sound of his brusque, dismissive voice. **"This is the Grand Canyon, Jim, not some cushy airline hop! During the summer this park gets over forty-thousand visitors a *day*! You *know* how many people end up on medivac flights. We have**

six to seven serious injuries every working shift! This woman won't be able to handle it."

Andrea thought grimly of the plane crash she'd walked away from two months ago. *I can handle more than just cushy hops, mister.*

"Look, Kurt..." Jim began in a conciliatory voice.

So, Mister Rude had a name.

"...I assure you that Andrea Claybourne's qualified for the job."

Andrea heard a loud snort, and then papers rustling.

"There's nothing on this application that says so. All I see are a couple of class clinicals and a short internship at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital. It's bad enough that she has no ranger background, let alone no E.M.T. experience!"

Wrong again, mister, Andrea silently corrected. I have experience, and I earned it the hard way.

She could still smell the fuel from the wrecked plane and hear the cries of injured passengers calling for help. She remembered screaming for Dee, the other flight attendant. But Andrea's dearest friend couldn't help evacuate those injured people, because Dee was a "fatality"—ironically, the crash's only death. And the cockpit with the flight crew lay on the other side of the runway. Andrea was on her own.

She'd evacuated all her passengers, survived the fire, and then taken care of her personal life. Andrea had turned in her resignation, put the house she'd inherited from an aunt on the market and updated her résumé. Her parents had been alarmed by her actions.

"Andrea, are you sure you should quit your job?" they'd repeatedly asked. "After all, you've been there for five years."

"And I've been looking for a change for the last two. That's why I went back to school."

“But I thought you wanted to work in a local hospital,” her mother had fretted. “Arizona is so far away! You never said anything about a job as a park ranger.”

That was true; she hadn’t. Strange how she’d ended up outside the Grand Canyon Personnel Office . . . You could almost call it fate.

The last passenger she’d rescued had been a nine-year-old by the name of Emily. The girl had been flying alone from Denver to the Grand Canyon to vacation with her grandparents. Emily was a lovely child who made Andrea’s baby-sitting task a delight. That delight had ended when an injured Emily was taken from Andrea’s arms and placed on a stretcher.

Andrea had stayed close to Emily, first by riding with her to the emergency room in the ambulance, and later with visits to the pediatric ward at Denver Children’s Hospital. With a child’s typical resilience, Emily had soon bounced back from her frightful ordeal. She’d even regretted the cancellation of her long-awaited trip to the Grand Canyon. Emily had solemnly told Andrea that she’d get on a plane again in a minute if it meant she could go see her beloved grandparents.

Andrea admired the child’s courage and devotion to her family. In an effort to help ease Emily’s disappointment, she’d made a special effort to buy her a book on the Grand Canyon. So it wasn’t surprising that a newspaper ad for Grand Canyon park rangers with E.M.T. certificates had caught Andrea’s eye.

On a sudden, inexplicable whim, she’d submitted an application for one of the ten posts offered.

The more Andrea thought about it, the more she coveted the job. She wanted a change of scene; a change from the dull routine of her hometown. She was willing to work anywhere—as long as it was outside. The last thing Andrea wanted was a job indoors. She’d had enough of cramped

plane cabins to last a lifetime. Still, she'd never thought anything would come of her application.

To Andrea's amazement, Jim Stevens had called her shortly after for an impromptu phone interview.

His first question was right to the point. "Are you the same Andrea Claybourne who rescued those passengers at Stapleton Airport a few months ago?"

"Yes, I am," Andrea admitted. "How did you hear of that?"

"It made national headlines, Ms. Claybourne."

"Oh. I...I didn't keep up with the news after the crash."

She'd been in too much turmoil, and too much pain at Dee's death. She and Dee had grown up together, they'd attended school together and then they'd joined the same airline. They were inseparable, especially since Andrea was an only child and Dee had no sisters. Dee's death had hit Andrea hard.

"That's understandable," Jim said with sympathy. "Nonetheless, I did read about you. I'd like to know if you're serious about a job as a park ranger."

"I certainly am." Andrea sensed Jim's interest. "I was planning to leave the airline anyway. That's why I went back to school. I'm single, and other than my parents, I have no permanent ties to Denver."

"So your career change isn't a reaction to the crash?"

"Oh, no. Working as an emergency medical technician is a carefully thought-out decision."

"You don't have any problems with flying?" Jim asked. "If we hire you, we'd eventually want to groom you as an E.M.T. for our medivac helicopters."

Andrea paused. "I wouldn't be telling the truth if I didn't admit to having some bad memories associated with flying. But the airline sent me for professional counseling before they'd accept my resignation, and that included getting back on a plane for a short flight. I received a clean bill of health

from the counselor. I'm perfectly willing to provide you with his report."

"I'd like that, and I appreciate your candor." Jim sounded pleased. "As a ranger, you'd have to learn the foot patrols, the river patrols and the road patrols before we put you up in the air. You'll also have to get an Arizona driver's license. Does all that sound like something you can handle?"

Andrea felt a growing sense of excitement. "Oh, yes. I'm a good driver and a good swimmer. In fact, my parents own a boat. We spend our summers water-skiing at Sloans Lake."

"I'm glad to hear it. Boating skills are something you'll definitely need. Do you ride? We also have the mule trips down into the Canyon."

"I had equestrian lessons when I was young." Andrea paused. "I've never ridden a mule. It's just the same, isn't it?"

Jim chuckled. "Not exactly, Ms. Claybourne, but it's close enough. Would you like the job?"

"I'd love it! But—" Andrea restrained her enthusiasm. "Mr. Stevens, why me? I'm twenty-six years old with no ranger's experience and only a two-year college degree. I really want this job, but surely there must have been others more qualified?"

Jim Stevens remained silent for a long moment. Then, "You've been honest with me, Ms. Claybourne. I'll be honest with you. A few years ago one of our female rangers died during a river rescue."

"How awful!"

"Yes, it was . . . quite a shock. This particular ranger had the most impressive credentials. She'd been in search and rescue in the military for a while, then worked as a paramedic for the fire department in her hometown. Sarah Wolf's track record was impeccable. But when it came to

that river rescue—” Jim sighed “—Sarah didn’t make it. Neither did the three tourists she was trying to save.”

“That poor woman,” Andrea whispered. Life could be cruel. Sarah had drowned, and Dee had died in that crash. Even though she’d been sitting only one seat over, Andrea had never had a chance to help her friend. It seemed no one could help Sarah, either.

“I blame myself for hiring her,” Jim went on, his voice harsh. “But how was I to know? She looked great on paper. You may not have much medical or search experience, but thanks to the newspapers, I know you can handle yourself during emergencies. The Grand Canyon Park Service needs people like you—people who don’t fold under pressure. We can teach you everything else you need to know, but we can’t teach you courage.”

At first Andrea didn’t know what to say. Finally she spoke in a quiet, measured voice. “I never considered myself particularly brave, Mr. Stevens. I just did my job, the best I could.”

“I know that, Ms. Claybourne. And that’s why I’m offering you the position. How soon can you start?”

That was two weeks ago. Andrea had packed her bags, given family, friends and little Emily a forwarding address, and loaded her car for the one-way drive to Arizona. It felt strange to be leaving the familiar sights of home, but Andrea welcomed the start of a new chapter in her life.

And now here she was at the Grand Canyon, listening to the shouting inside Jim’s office. Well, at least Jim wasn’t shouting. Only Kurt was, and his present comments weren’t any more flattering than his earlier ones.

“You asked me for my opinion on this batch of trainees, and I’m giving it. They’re all acceptable, except for the stewardess.”

“That’s flight attendant,” Andrea corrected loudly, but of course Kurt didn’t hear her. He was too busy yelling.

“Jim, I’d never hire a Barbie doll as a ranger!”

Andrea’s eyes sparked at the latest insult. The Claybourne women were blessed with a classic beauty. With their Viking heritage they were a striking family, as attested by the fact that two of Andrea’s cousins were professional models. Andrea’s mother had won a beauty pageant in her own youth, and Andrea herself had been approached by her cousins’ employer.

With her tall, willowy figure, blond hair and blue eyes, she was used to men misjudging her because of her looks. But the Claybourne women could also outthink or outfight any man who dared judge them only on appearance. Andrea was no different.

This job was hers. No one was going to take it away from her, especially not a man who was condemning her without a trial, without a chance.

“Come on, Jim, level with me,” Kurt insisted. “Is she a relative of the governor or something? Just give me a reason—one good reason—why you hired her, and I’ll shut up.”

Andrea froze in her seat. She’d asked Jim to keep private the knowledge of her “heroics,” as the newspaper labeled them. Her coworkers had saved the clippings for her. Andrea finally looked at them during her required sessions with the airline counselor.

One of the newspaper pictures showed her barefoot in the runway’s snow, with Emily bleeding in her arms. The other showed Dee’s motionless, white-sheeted form being removed from the burned airplane.

Andrea was embarrassed by the heavy-handed praise accompanying the first photo. As for the latter, it provoked gruesome questions from the morbidly curious. Andrea was deeply disturbed by the sensationalist portrayal of Dee’s last minutes by the media, and she’d made a point of telling Jim so.

“Dee and I grew up together, Mr. Stevens. We were like sisters.” A fact the media capitalized on, she painfully remembered. For weeks they’d hounded Andrea unmercifully—and unsuccessfully—for details. “I don’t want to talk about Dee to strangers. It’s been two months now, and I doubt anyone remembers my name from the crash. I’d like to keep it that way, if you don’t mind.”

To Andrea’s relief, Jim had agreed.

Would he break that promise now?

“I’m waiting for an answer, Jim,” Kurt demanded. Andrea could hear the impatience in his voice all the way out in the waiting area.

“I’m sorry, Kurt, but you’ll just have to trust my judgment as personnel director here for the last twenty years.”

Andrea breathed a sigh of relief. It was quickly cut short as the two came into the lobby. Her attention wasn’t on the older man, but on the younger. He approached her chair, his brown eyes full of disdain.

“Jim, I trust you, but I don’t know about *her*.”

Andrea rose to her feet. She met his gaze head-on as he said, “Let’s pray she doesn’t end up another Sarah Wolf.”

CHAPTER TWO

THAT REMARK HAD BEEN made a week ago. Kurt Marlowe, as Andrea discovered was his full name, had stormed away without another word.

Jim was quite reserved. He quickly sent her to the secretary to start the paperwork required by any new job. Andrea suspected that an embarrassed Jim was eager to avoid any questions.

She kept her eyes open, intent on meeting Mr. Marlowe again and giving him a piece of her mind. But not once did she come across the deeply tanned man with the disdainful eyes and mahogany-brown hair. Perhaps it was just as well. She had her hands full learning a new job and settling into her assigned on-site quarters. The last thing she needed as a new employee was to start fighting with her coworkers, no matter how great the provocation. And from the look of the man's strong chin and broad shoulders, he'd probably fight right back.

A few days later, Jim apologized for Kurt's behavior. "You'll have to forgive him, Andrea. Kurt speaks his mind, but we overlook his outbursts for two reasons. One, he's our best floater."

"Floater?"

"Yes. Most rangers are assigned permanent driving, hiking and river patrols. We also have rangers who fly the helicopters and those who train new rangers. Kurt's an expert at all of the above, which is why he has no permanent as-

signment...or permanent partner. We use him wherever we need him the most.”

“And the second reason?” Andrea asked curiously.

Jim’s face grew serious. “Kurt has a very senior position here at the park. Because of his experience and knowledge, his opinion carries a lot of weight, particularly when it comes to training recruits. He can be brusque, even rude, but don’t jump to conclusions. He’s paid his dues and then some. Kurt Marlowe’s a damn fine instructor and a valuable man to have around. Just put his comments out of your mind.”

Andrea had tried, but somehow Mr. Marlowe’s haughty face kept intruding into her thoughts. It was a real effort to buckle down and study the material given to her in class. Today was proving no exception.

She restlessly crossed her legs, not noticing the appreciative glances from the male recruits. Andrea wasn’t used to sitting for long periods of time. The classroom’s hard wooden desk didn’t offer much in the way of comfort, while the beige summer shorts they were required to wear, starting in May, caused her legs to stick to the seat.

This was just as bad as being in an airplane cabin, she thought irritably. The Grand Canyon, the most spectacular riot of color in the nation, was just outside. Thanks to all her classes, she hadn’t even had a good look at it. She’d expected more from her first week of the required sixty-day probation period.

But that was about to change.

The instructor walked into the room, and the recruits sat up expectantly in their chairs.

“Trainees, I’m pleased to announce that all of you have successfully completed the classroom course. Today you’ll be paired up with a seasoned veteran for your outdoor training. He will remain your partner for the rest of your probation.”

The instructor motioned toward the door. In filed a line of ten rangers, all of them men, and all clad in the same beige shirts, shorts, knee socks and boots that Andrea wore. Unlike Andrea, they also wore their broad-brimmed "Smokey-the-Bear" hats. Hers rested on her desk.

"I'll read the recruit's name first, and then the name of the veteran. You'll pair up outside and stay together for the remainder of your probation. All your assignments will come from your partner. He's your superior, and will have the final say on your evaluation, so treat him accordingly."

Andrea frowned as she saw Kurt Marlowe stride in. He stood apart from the other rangers, his arms folded across his chest. She watched him glance around at the other recruits, then openly stare at her—far longer than good manners permitted. Andrea refused to be intimidated and stared back, lifting her chin with indignation. His eyes narrowed in disapproval, and he turned away, leaving Andrea fuming.

She knew there was nothing wrong with her credentials *or* her appearance. She'd ironed her uniform with meticulous care, making sure the creases were as sharp as those of her flight attendant's uniforms. Her makeup and nail polish were light, and she'd confined her mane of blond hair in a perfectly coiffured French braid.

She noticed with grudging admiration that Kurt Marlowe's uniform was as neatly pressed as hers. He had a clean-shaven face, a military precision haircut, and boots that were polished to perfection. But there was none of the dandy about Kurt Marlowe, Andrea decided. That jawline was too strong, those eyes too calculating. She doubted she'd like him, but she wouldn't underestimate him.

"Randy Wong, your partner is Frank Williams," the instructor continued. "Ted Webster, you'll be working with Felipe Mendez."

Andrea concentrated on listening for her own name—and for Kurt Marlowe's. Under no circumstances did she want him as a partner. She had no objection to working with a man, not that she had any choice in the matter, since all the veterans were men, as were eight of the ten trainees. According to Jim, most of the regular rangers at the Grand Canyon were men. The women tended to fill the helicopter medical attendant positions, like the one she would ultimately have on a permanent basis. However, Jim assured her there were some regular rangers who were women, and Andrea already had a friendly acquaintance with Judy, the only other female trainee in her group.

“Judy Teufel, you'll be working with Dan Prior. Andrea Claybourne...”

Andrea's head immediately turned away from the line of rangers and back to the instructor.

“Your veteran will be Kurt Marlowe.”

Not him! Anyone but him! Andrea inwardly cried.

Outwardly, though, she concealed her distress, nodding coolly to her new superior. She hadn't spent the past five years dealing with travel-weary, cranky passengers for nothing. Not for the world would she show any reaction to such a cruel coincidence. Or *was* it a coincidence?

Andrea remembered Kurt Marlowe's disparaging remarks to Jim Stevens, and did a slow burn. If Kurt thought her such a poor specimen and wanted nothing to do with her, why had she been assigned to him? Jim had said Kurt held a senior position. Surely that meant he could make his own choice? Andrea was determined to find out. The last thing she needed was a hostile, rank-heavy ranger as her supervisor.

“Everyone pair up now,” the instructor ordered. “And good luck on your first day in the Grand Canyon.”

Some of the class clapped and cheered. Andrea contented herself with a smile, then stepped outside into the