

Touch Me When We're Dancing

—MinervaDeannaBond

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For Valentine's Day, here's another slice of Jesslitt wedded bliss. Jessica and Seth each have a surprise planned for the other on Valentine's Day. Who will guess first? You'll have to read on to find out.

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February 14, 2004 - Valentine's Day

"You are up to something, woman."

Jessica narrowed her eyes at her husband over her glass of water. "What makes you think I'm up to something?"

"I *know* you. I know that look in your eyes and that quirky little grin that's playing with your lips. There are two times you get that look. One is when the cops tell you a murder investigation is none of your business. The other is when you're planning a surprise for me. And since today is the fourteenth of February, *Valentine's Day*, and you haven't yet shown any hints about a gift, I'm assuming you have something big planned for tonight."

Jessica set her glass down, shaking her head at the man who was now taking another spoonful of butternut squash soup. "And *I'm* supposed to be the sleuth in this relationship." She threw her hands up in surrender. "All right, I'm caught. You got me. I do have a surprise planned for you, and I *have* bought you a gift. You're just not allowed to see it yet."

"Oh, really?"

"Really. And while we're on the subject of being up to something, do *you* have something planned for me?"

Seth gave his wife a teasing grin as he scooped up one last spoonful. "I do, I do," he drawled, the Southern accent of his family coming out. "Would I *not* get a gift for my wife on Valentine's Day, especially our *first* Valentine's Day?" He chuckled and put the spoon into his mouth. "You're cuttin' me to the quick."

"And you're making me itchy."

"Itchy, huh? You scratch my back, I scratch yours? Is this your way of nosing for hints?"

"Oh, Seth!" Jessica groaned in frustration. "I'm not nosing for hints! I'm just curious. Since it's our first Valentine's Day together, I'm wondering what on Earth you could have put together for me."

Seth rolled his eyes. "*Nosing*." He rose from the table, rinsed his now-empty bowl, and stuck it in the dish drainer. "You're not gonna get me to dance around the truth, Jessica."

Jessica met his stare evenly, putting her hands on her hips. If he wanted to challenge her, then challenge accepted. "And you're not going to get me to see red, either," she fired back. The look on his face told her that her guess was correct. He'd deliberately dropped a veiled hint, and she just matched it with one of her own.

"Easy, Jess," he returned, never missing a beat. "I haven't lost my touch, you know."

"Well, I certainly hope not. It'd be pretty hard for you to dress me down in that case."

As they were firing off their verbal joust, the two of them had progressed closer and closer toward each other until they were standing close enough to kiss. Golden green met sapphire blue as they stared into each other's eyes. "Is that a challenge, Madame Detective?" Seth asked, his voice a near-whisper.

"Oh, yes." Jessica put a finger to his lips just as he leaned in to kiss her.

"Ah-ah. Wait until tonight. You'll want to save it for the surprise." Feeling extra wicked, she pecked his cheek and grinned. "I'm heading into town to do some errands. I won't be back until dinnertime."

Seth glared after her as she got her coat, scarf, and purse. "Siren. You tell me no kisses and then you plant one on my cheek to torture me."

"Not true, Seth. If I were a siren, I'd sing you into submission."

"Good luck doing that."

"Challenge accepted." Jessica blew him a kiss and stepped outside, leaving her flustered husband behind.

The instant the door closed, Seth blew out a sigh. True, he was a little disappointed that he hadn't kissed Jessica, but another part of him was rejoicing in the fact that they had just begun a game. First the hints, then the teasing, and now a challenge? Oh, this was going to be a great Valentine's Day.

Based on the hints Jessica had dropped, he was assuming that she had bought a red dress. Some would say that that was it; she had spoiled the surprise. Seth knew better. He knew that Jessica would want him to think about what kind of red dress she had bought. Well, if her previous gowns and formal wear were anything to go by, he knew already that it would be long-sleeved. Jessica was smart enough to wear clothes that concealed the effects of time on her arms, even though Seth himself thought she

looked fine. Aging evidence be hanged, her arms and shoulders were still lovely to him.

Would the skirt be mid-calf or floor-length? And what about the neckline? Low-cut or up to her clavicle? Seth knew he could drive himself stir-crazy pondering these questions and more, but he put them aside for the time being. Right now, he needed to get everything ready for tonight. Whistling "Whistle While You Work" to himself, he put on one of Jessica's aprons and set about tidying up the kitchen, as well as the rest of the house.

Once the place was shining like the Chrysler Building, Seth made his way upstairs to the guest bedroom. After a quick fumble in the closet, he found the box containing his supplies for Jessica's surprise, as well as his attire for the evening. Smiling to himself, he went back down to the living room to set everything up. *Just you wait, honey. Just you wait.*

Jessica's mind was working overtime by the time she returned home. What had Seth meant by those hints? *Dance* was pretty obvious; it meant that his surprise involved dancing in some way. *Touch*? That could mean anything from holding hands to making love. Either way, she felt a thrill slither down her spine. And if Seth did indeed plan to dance with her as she thought, she had the perfect present for him.

The second she opened the door, garment bag slung over her shoulder, she was greeted by the smell of a tropical beach. Jessica closed her eyes and inhaled the scent, savoring the delicious aroma of pineapple, white sand, and ocean rolled into one. *Candles. I guarantee it.* She looked to the left and gasped. Sure enough, the lights were dimmed and the room was illuminated by the light of no more than two dozen candles, all strategically placed. The coffee table, couch, and chairs were all pushed out of the way, making enough room for a dance floor. And there, in the middle of the floor, stood Seth, dressed in the tuxedo he'd worn at their wedding. His silvery hair was neatly combed and his hazel eyes were glowing with love as he beamed at her. "Seth..."

Seth smiled and held out his arms. "Surprise, Jess. Happy Valentine's Day."

Jessica draped the garment bag on the stairs and ran straight into his embrace. "Oh, Seth, this is beautiful! You planned a dance for us?"

"Ayuh. No one but us two. I'm pretty sure you guessed it was a dance, just like I'm pretty sure your surprise is a red dress."

Jessica grinned. "Yes, it is. But what kind, now *that's* the surprise. Oh. That reminds me." She retrieved another, smaller package and opened it up for him. "A white carnation for your lapel, my darling."

"Aw, woman." Seth plucked the flower from the box and carefully placed it in the slot of his jacket lapel. "There. Now I'm perfect."
Jessica looked down at her jeans and sweatshirt. "But I'm not."
Seth took her hands in his and squeezed them. "Go put your dress on. I wanna see my Valentine's surprise. And Jess..." She stopped and turned to look back at him halfway up the stairs. "Don't be too long."
"Keep bossing me around and I'll take my sweet time." She winked at him and disappeared upstairs.

Seth shook his head after her. Even now, she was still playing the game, and he was still getting a kick out of it. At least she hadn't guessed the other part of his surprise. While he waited for her, he turned the little radio he'd bought on and got his CD out. It was a mix of Carpenters love songs that Adele Metzger had burned for him, the first of which would be the answer to his second hint. He put the disc in just in time, for a creak on the steps told him that Jessica was coming down.

"Ready or not, here I come," she said, her footsteps slowly descending.

"I'm ready. I'm ready as I can –" Seth's words were gone with the wind as he caught sight of his wife. "Oh, *wow*, Jess..."

The red dress was even more beautiful than he'd imagined. Made of red silk with a shimmering draped bodice, the sleeves tapered down her arms and the skirt swept the floor, revealing red satin pumps peeking out from under them. The fiery color intensified the gold in Jessica's hair and made her glow from the inside out, and its fit... *wow*, he thought again. The gown emphasized both the fullness and slenderness of her figure, hugging every beautiful curve perfectly. *Oh, honey...*

"Wow?" Jessica repeated, clearly pleased by the one word of praise.

"Wow," Seth said again, taking her hands as she strode over to him.

Jessica laughed, adding a red flush to the rest of her red appearance. Seth now noticed that diamond earrings dangled from her earlobes and the dove brooch he'd given her for Christmas years ago was pinned to the dress.

"One word's as good as a thousand, and that's worth a thousand plus some. I'm glad you like it."

"Like it? I *love* it," Seth said emphatically, running his hands down the length of her figure and resting them on her hips. "Woman, do you have any idea how sexy you look in this dress?"

"I do now, if your blush is anything to go by," Jessica chuckled, wrapping her arms around him. A heady cedar scent reached her nose and she buried her face in his neck, craving more. "Ooh, you smell wonderful."

"So do you. Like roses." Seth waited until she came up for air and then leaned in like he was going to kiss her. Just inches from her lips, though, he threw her own trick back at her and put a finger to her mouth. "We're gettin' ahead of ourselves. Have you figured out the other half of the surprise?"

Jessica frowned. "No."

Seth grinned. "Then I've finally gotten one over on J.B. Fletcher." He leaned over and hit the Play button on the radio.

Soft, mellow electric guitar rhythms filled the room and Jessica laughed softly. Now it all made sense. She knew this tune very well, and it was perfect for an intimate Valentine's Day setting like this. "'Touch Me When We're Dancing.' I should've known."

"Well... now you know." Seth smiled and held out his hand. "May I have this dance, Mrs. Hazlitt?"

Jessica shot him a sly grin and sank into a deep curtsy. "Yes, Dr. Hazlitt, you may," she said, accepting his hand. She leaned into him more fully as he swept her into a dance that was half waltz, half rumba, the perfect slow dance. His hands gently caressed her hips, the small of her back, and her shoulders as they danced, and hers whispered touches all over his back. Urgent, loving little touches that cried out for more. Souls soaring so high on love that they flew coast to coast. Words of love whispered in each other's ears. Jessica's voice finally joining Karen Carpenter's and filling Seth's heart. There was just one thing missing...

Their heads descended at the same time, lips meeting tenderly in the middle. When they finally pulled apart, Seth grinned at his wife. "So who wins?"

Jessica leaned her head against his shoulder. "I think we should call it a tie. We've both won."

"I'll say. I surprised you and you sang me into submission, like you promised." Seth shifted his hand off her hip and slightly over, rubbing her belly gently. His mouth turned upward when she mimicked the motion, her own hand massaging his stomach as they danced. "I love you, Jess."

"I love you too, Seth." He moved his hand over and she quickly placed it back on her tummy. "No. Don't stop. That feels wonderful."

He was only too happy to oblige. "You love being touched."

"It's my love language. And yours."

"Ayuh. Sometimes just saying 'I love you' isn't enough. You've gotta show it with a touch, too." Seth gave her a mischievous grin. "Can I show you just how much I love you?"

"In our own special dance? Oh, yes," Jessica said, smiling as he led her upstairs. "Yes, my darling, yes." And that was how they were during that

whole Valentine night, touching each other, whispering *I love you*, and stealing kisses as they danced and fell in love all over again.