



A Deal with Demakis (Harlequin Presents)

By Tara Pammi

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When the devil commands...

Nikos Demakis's plan is set. With his eye firmly on the CEO position of his grandfather's business he will finally lay his past to rest. And Lexi Nelson holds the key. She might resist, she'll definitely try to negotiate, but Nikos always gets what he wants.

Lexi has never met anyone like Nikos. The power that he exudes is almost overwhelming. Almost. She's determined to prove that she's more than a match for him. But as the playing field changes from power to passion, it soon becomes a battle of wills that she's not sure she wants to win!

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Editorial Review

Review

4.5* RT Book Review

Pammi's romance is a losing (but entertaining!) battle of wills, set on a jewel in the Greek Isles. It stars a know-it-all, emotionally damaged Greek tycoon and a down-but-not-out heroine, whose interludes are meteoric.

About the Author

Tara Pammi can't remember a moment when she wasn't lost in a book, especially a romance which, as a teenager, was much more exciting than mathematics textbook. Years later Tara's wild imagination and love for the written word revealed what she really wanted to do: write! She lives in Colorado with the most cooperative man on the planet and two daughters. Tara loves to hear from readers and can be reached at tara.pammi@gmail.com or her website www.tarapammi.com.

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"Ms. Nelson is here, Nikos."

Nikos Demakis checked his Rolex and smiled. His little lie had worked, not that he had doubted it. Not an hour had passed since he had had his secretary place the call.

"Instruct security to bring her up," he said, and turned back to his guests.

Another man might have felt a twinge of regret for having manipulated the situation to serve his purpose so well. Nikos didn't.

Christos, it was getting more unbearable by the minute to see his sister trail after her boyfriend, trying to make Tyler remember, and playing the role of the tragic lover to the hilt. Only instead of the usual volatility, Nikos was beginning to see something else in her gaze. Obviously he had underestimated how much power Tyler had gained over her. The announcement that they were engaged had stirred even his grandfather's attention.

Just as Nikos had expected, Savas had laid down the ultimatum. Another excuse for the old tyrant to postpone declaring Nikos the CEO for Demakis International.

Sort out Venetia and the company's yours, Nikos. Take away her bank account, her expensive car and her clothes.

Lock her up. She will forget that boy soon enough once she starts remembering what it feels like to go hungry again.

Nikos's gut roiled, just remembering Savas's words.

It was time to get the charming, manipulative Tyler out of her life. However, he had no intention of starving his sister to achieve that end. Nikos had done, and would do, anything for survival but hurt Venetia in any way. But the fact that Savas had not only considered it but dangled it like an option in front of Nikos, expected Nikos to put it into action, was unsettling in the least.

His expression must have reflected his distaste, because Nina, the leggy brunette he usually got together with when he was in New York, slipped to the other corner of the lounge.

"Ms. Nelson would like to meet you in the café across the street," his assistant whispered in his ear. Nikos scowled. "No."

Bad enough that he would have to deal with not one but two emotionally volatile, out-of-control women in the coming days. He wanted to get this meeting done with as soon as possible and get back to Athens. He couldn't wait to see Savas's reaction when he told him of his triumph.

He grabbed a drink from a passing waiter and took a sip of the champagne. It slid like liquid gold against his tongue, richer and better tasting for his sweet victory. Against Sa-vas's dire predictions that Nikos wouldn't find an investor, Nikos had just signed a billion-dollar contract with Nathan Ramirez, an up-and-coming entrepreneur, by granting exclusive rights to a strip of undeveloped land on one of the two islands owned by the Demakis family for almost three centuries.

It was a much-needed injection of cash for Demakis International without losing anything, and a long-fought chance that Nikos had been waiting for. This was one victory Savas couldn't overlook anymore. His goal was so close that he was thrumming with the energy of it.

But a month of intense negotiations meant he was at the tail end of the high. And his body was downright starved for sex. Swallowing the last sip of his champagne, he nodded at Nina. Ms. Nelson would wait.

Just as they reached the door to his personal suite, the sound of a laugh from the corridor stalled him.

He ordered Nina back into the lounge and walked into the corridor. The question for his security guard froze on his lips as he took in the scene in front of him.

Clutching her abdomen, the sounds of her harsh breathing filling the silence around her, a woman knelt, bent over, on the thickly carpeted floor. His six-foot-two security guard, Kane, hulked over her, his leathery face wreathed in concern. The overhead ceiling lights picked out the hints of burnished copper in her hair.

Nikos stepped closer, curiosity overpowering everything else. "Kane?"

"Sorry, Mr. Demakis," Kane replied, patting the woman's slender back with his huge palm. A strange familiarity with a woman he'd just met. "Lexi took one look at the elevator and refused to use it."

Lexi Nelson.

Nikos stared at the woman's bowed head. She was still doubled over, slender shoulders falling and rising. "She did what?"

Kane didn't raise his head. "She said no one was forcing her into the elevator. That's why she had me call you back asking you to meet her at the cafe."

Nikos tilted his head and studied the state-of-the-art elevator system on his right side. One sentence from her file popped into his head.

Trapped in an elevator once for seventeen hours.

Of course she could have turned around and left. His irritation only grew, a perverse reaction because her leaving wouldn't serve his purpose at all. "She walked up nineteen floors?"

Kane nodded, and Nikos noticed that even his breathing was a little irregular. "And you walked up the stairs with her?"

"Yep. I told her she was going to collapse halfway through. I mean, look at her." His gaze swept over her, a curious warmth in it. "And she challenged me." He shoved her playfully with a shoulder, and Nikos watched, strangely fascinated. The woman unfolded from her bent-over stance and nudged Kane back with a surprising display of strength for someone so...tiny.

"I almost beat you, too, didn't I?" she said, still sounding breathless.

Kane laughed and tugged her up, again his touch overtly familiar for a woman he met a mere twenty minutes ago. As she straightened her clothes, Nikos understood the reason for Kane's surprise at her challenge.

With her head hardly reaching his shoulder, Lexi Nelson was small. Maybe five feet one or two at best, and most of that was legs. The strip of exposed flesh between her pleated short skirt and knee-high leather boots was. distracting, to say the least.

Her shoulders were slim to the point of delicate, her small breasts only visible because of her exertion. Wide-set eyes in her perfectly oval face, a dazzling light blue, were the only feature worth a second look. A mouth too wide for her small face, tilted up at the corners, still smiling at Kane.

Honey-gold hair cut short to her nape, in addition to her slim body, made her look like a teenage boy rather than an adult woman. Except for the fragility of her face.

The image of an Amazonian woman on her crinkled T-shirt—long-legged, big-breasted, clad in a leather outfit with a gun in her hand—invited a second look, and not only because of the exquisite detail of it but also because the woman in the sketch was a direct contrast to the woman wearing it.

"Please escort Ms. Nelson into my office, Kane," Nikos said. Her blue gaze landed on him and widened. "You are causing too much distraction here." Her smile slipped, a tiny frown tying her brows. "Wait in my office and I will see you in half an hour."

He didn't turn around when he heard her gasp.

Lexi Nelson snapped her mouth shut as Nikos Demakis turned around and left. He was rude, terse and had a spectacular behind—the errant thought flashed through her mind. Surprised by her own observation, she pulled her gaze upward, her breath still not back to normal. Powerfully wide shoulders moved with arrogant confidence.

She hadn't even got a good look at the man, yet she had the feeling that she had somehow angered him. She trembled as the elevator doors opened with a ping on her side. Ignoring Kane's call, she marched down the path his rude boss had taken, wondering what she had done to put him out of sorts.

She had walked up nineteen floors and had almost given herself a heart attack in the process. But she couldn't risk leaving without seeing him, not until she knew how Tyler was. She had planned to dog his New York base the whole week, determined to get answers, until she had received a call from his secretary

summoning her here. The moment she had introduced herself at the security desk and asked to see Mr. Demakis, she had been herded to the elevator which she had promptly escaped from.

Lexi came to an abrupt stop after stepping into a dimly lit lounge that screamed understated elegance. High ceilings, pristine white carpets and floor-to-ceiling glass windows that offered a fantastic view of Manhattan's darkening skyline. A glittering open bar stood on one side.

It was as if she had stepped into a different world.

She worked her jaw closed, the eerie silence that befell the room penetrating her awe. While she had been busy gaping at the lush interior of the lounge, about ten men and women stared back at her, varying levels of shock reflected in their gazes. It was as though she were an alien that had beamed down from outer space via transporter right in front of their eyes.

She offered them a wide smile, her hands clutching the leather strap of her bag.

Having realized that she had followed him, Nikos Demakis uncoupled himself from a gorgeous brunette he was leading out of the lounge.

Lexi clutched the strap tighter, fighting the flight response her brain was urging her into.

"I asked you to wait in my office, Ms. Nelson."

Her mushy brain was a little slow processing his words when presented with such a gorgeous man. Dark brown eyes fringed by the thickest lashes held hers, challenging her to drop her gaze. The Italian suit, she would bet her last dollar that it was handmade, lovingly draped the breadth of his wide shoulders, tapering to a narrow waist. A strange fluttering started in her belly as she raised her gaze back to his arresting face.

Nikos Demakis was, without exaggeration, the most stunning man she had ever laid eyes on. Easily two inches over six feet, and with enough lean muscle to fill out his wide frame, he was everything she had been feverishly dreaming about for the past few months; her space pirate, the villainous captain who had kidnapped her heroine, Ms. Havisham, intent on opening the time portal.

Her heart racing, her fingers itched to open the flap of her bag and reach for the charcoal pencil she always kept with her. She had done so many sketches of him but she hadn't been satisfied.

A real-life version of Spike, marauding space pirate extraordinaire.

"Excuse me? Are you drunk, Ms. Nelson?"

Blushing, Lexi realized she had said those words out loud. There was a sly look in his eyes that sent a shiver down her spine. As if he could see through her skin into the strange sensation in her gut and understood it better than she. "Of course not. I just..."

"Just what?"

She pasted on a smile. "You reminded me of someone."

"If you are done daydreaming, we can talk," he said, pointing toward a door behind her.

"There's no need to walk away from your...party," she said, cutting her gaze away from him. *What had she done wrong?* "I just want to know how Tyler is."

He flicked his head to the side in an economic movement, and his guests moved inward into the lounge, or rather retreated from her. Even their conversations restarted, their apparent curiosity swept away by his imperious command. Her spine locked at the casual display of power. "Not here," he said, and whispered something in the brunette's ear, while his gaze never moved from her. "Let's go into my office."

Lexi licked her lips and took a step to the side as he passed her. Now that she had his complete attention, a sliver of apprehension streaked through her. She looked around the lounge. Safety in numbers. Really, what could he do to her with his guests outside the door? But the sheer size of the man, coupled with that unexplained contempt in his gaze, brought out her worst fears. "There's nothing to talk about, Mr. Demakis. I just want to know where Tyler is."

He didn't break his stride as he spoke over his shoulder. "It was not a request."

Hints of steel coated the velvety words. Realizing that she was staring at his retreating back again, she followed him. Within minutes, they reached his state-of-the-art office, this one with an even better view of Manhattan. She wondered if she would be able to see the tiny apartment she shared with her friends in Brooklyn from here.

A massive mahogany desk dominated the center of the room. A sitting area with its back to a spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline lay off to one side and on the other was a computer, a shredder and a printer.

He shrugged his jacket off and threw it carelessly onto the leather chair. The pristine white shirt made him look even more somber, bigger, broader, the dark shadow of his olive skin under it drawing her gaze.

He undid the cuffs and folded the sleeves back, the silver Rolex on his wrist glinting in the muted light.

Leaning against the table, he stretched his long legs in front of him. Whatever material those trousers were made of, it hugged his muscular thighs. "I asked you to wait."

Coloring, Lexi tugged her gaze up. What was she doing, blatantly staring at the man's thighs? "I walked up nineteen floors for a few minutes of your time," she finally said, feeling intensely awkward under his scrutiny. He just seemed so big and coordinated and thrumming with power that for the first time in her life, she wished she had been tall and graceful. A more nonsensical thought she had never had. "Tell me how Tyler is and I'll be on my way."

He pushed off from the table and she tried not to scuttle sideways like a frightened bird. Hands tucked into the pockets of his trousers, he towered over her, cramming his huge body into her personal space. His gaze swept over her, somehow invasive and dismissive at the same time. The urge to smooth out her hair, straighten her T-shirt, attacked again.

"Did you just roll out of bed, Ms. Nelson?"

Her mouth dropped open; she stared at him for several seconds. The man was a mannerless pig. "As a matter of fact, yes. I was sleeping after an all-nighter when the call came in. So please forgive me if my attire doesn't match your million-dollar decor." For some reason, he clearly disliked her. It made her crabby and unusually offensive. "FYI, you might have nothing better to do with your time than loll around with your

girlfriend, but I have a job. Some of us actually have to work for a living."

Amusement inched into his gaze. "You think I don't work?"

"Then why the sneering attitude as if your time is more precious than mine? You obviously make more money per minute than I do, but mine pays for my food," she said, shocked at how angry she was getting. Which was really strange. "Now, the sooner you answer my question, the sooner I'll be out of your hair."

He shifted closer, unblinking and Lexi's heart pounded faster. A hint of woody cologne settled tantalizingly over her skin. She stood her ground, loath to betray how unsettling she found his proximity. "You're here for your precious Tyler. No one's forcing you. You can turn around and walk down the stairs the same way you came up."

Lexi wanted to do exactly that, but she couldn't. He had no idea how much it had cost her to come here to his office. "I had a phone call from someone who refused to identify himself that Tyler has been in a car accident along with your sister." Maybe this was Nikos Demakis's response to his worry over his sister? Maybe usually, he was a much more human and less-heartless alien? "How is he? Was your sister hurt, too? Are they okay?"

His brows locked together into a formidable frown, he stared down at her. "You're asking after the woman who, for all intents and purposes, stole your boyfriend of—" he turned and picked up a file from the desk behind him in a casual movement and thumbed through it "—let me see, eleven years?"

There was no winning with the infuriating man. "I thought maybe there was a reason you were being a grouchy, arrogant prig—you know, like worry about your sister. But obviously you're a natural ass..." Her words stuttered to a halt, the bold letters *N-E-L-S-O-N* written in red on the flap of the file ramming home what she had missed.

She moved quickly, a lifetime of ducking and evading bred into her muscles, and snatched the file out of his hands. She found little satisfaction that she had surprised him.

Users Review

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