

Chapter 1

Alex sat in her chair, her eyes wide, staring at the screen. She loved the Veronica Becker Show and was a faithful viewer. During her lunch hour at work she would rush to the break room to turn it on. Veronica had viewer contests every week. Alex had never won anything but that didn't prevent her from signing up each week in hopes, knowing full well the likelihood of winning was minimal at best.

"Today one lucky viewer will win a trip for two to visit New York and my show. An all-expense-paid weekend!" announced Veronica Becker, touted as the "Every Woman's Woman" by national magazines.

Veronica Becker had become a household name, a chef for the everyday woman: quick, inexpensive meals that were tasty, too. Veronica had taken her love of cooking to television and added a bit of fashion, some down to earth chat with the audience, and interviews with the latest stars. She was health conscious and wanted the women in her audience to look their best at any age. She also loved to give things away. Coming from a modest family, she believed in giving back. Generous to a fault, if there was an earthquake somewhere, a typhoon, or tornado, Veronica was there to help out.

"Our winner is Alexandra Daniels of Plano, Texas! Congratulations! We'll be giving Alexandra a call today!"

Her co-workers were staring at her. Had she really won?

"Alex! That's you! You won!" they all shouted.

"Oh...my...God! I can't believe it! I won!"

Alex had the hardest time concentrating the rest of the afternoon. As a customer service rep for a marketing company, she was usually swamped with work but couldn't concentrate. Two o'clock rolled around and Alex's cell rang, a number she didn't recognize.

"Hello?"

"Is this Alexandra Daniels?"

"Yes, it is"

"Alexandra, this is the Veronica Becker show. I am pleased to tell you that you are the winner of a trip for two to New York City and tickets for the show."

"I can't believe it! Are you sure?" Alex was still in shock. She wanted to make sure there was no mistake. Josh would never believe her.

"Yes, you've won! We will send your tickets out next week. Your trip is for April 15th to 17th. Can you make it those dates?"

"Oh yes! I'll make it work! Thank you so much!"

"We'll get back to you Monday to finalize the details. Have a great weekend!"

"Oh, I will now!" Alex was amazed! It was true, she actually won! She was already mentally packing when reality hit. Josh would never take off work to go. Maybe Mattie could go with her...no, she had school. She could ask Kathleen, her best friend and co-worker, but they couldn't take off at the same time. Kathleen was her back up so one of them had to be there. No, she'd have to go alone. Well, it was about time she did something adventurous. This was probably the most exciting thing that had happened to Alex in a very long time.

Chapter 2

The Plano sun beat down mercilessly on Alex's black Honda Civic. Sweat trickled down her forehead. Inside the car it had to be 100 degrees; hard to believe the air conditioner was on. All it seemed to be doing was blowing hot air. By the time she got home there might be a cool breeze coming from the vent.

The gym was Alex's solace, but in the heat it was hard to feel refreshed after her workout. She had been overweight all her life, sometimes more so than others. At forty-four, Alex wanted to look better than she ever had before. She didn't want to reach mid-life and look like a frumpy mom. So she hit the

gym five times a week and it was starting to pay off. Even her husband, of twenty-two years, Josh was starting to notice.

Alex had tried exercising at other times in her life but could never stick to a regime. This time was different. She was starting to feel the effects of aging, stiff knees, sore back, in bed early every night, and she wanted to ward it off as long as she could. The weight lifting and aerobic classes were paying off. Not only had Alex lost 40 pounds but she had never felt more alive. Josh noticed the changes in Alex and enjoyed watching her move in her new found body. She was sexier now than she was when they got married. She was thinner, too. Alex was aware of Josh, as well as other men, noticing and it made her feel young and alive, motivating her to continue her routine.

Alex attributed her commitment to fitness to Veronica Becker. Veronica routinely had fitness gurus and the “before and after” guests constantly motivated her. If they could do it, she could, too. Alex watched Veronica’s show every day to catch the latest fitness news and see which “unobtainable” guest she had snagged. Veronica also had great contests for her viewers. She gave away designer clothing, appliances, trips to her show, as well as vacations.

Josh was tall, blonde, and a bit arrogant. As a financial advisor for a large firm, he worked long hours and tried to pay attention to his wife when he was home. He loved her and tried not to take her for granted, but Josh knew he had gotten the better end of the bargain when he married Alex. The other men he worked with complained constantly about their wives, the nagging, inattention to their sexual needs and how much money they spent. Josh was a blessed man and he knew it. Alex’s job appreciated her hard work, and paid her handsomely for it. That was their play money. His check went for the bills and the necessities of raising a child. Their daughter, Mattie, now twenty-one, took classes part-time at the local community college and worked part-time at the school computer lab. Her expenses were low and Josh knew it would be no time before she would be moving out on her own. He knew he had the ideal family and tried very hard not to assume it was by happenstance.

Josh and Alex had endured some rough times, too, mostly over the raising of their daughter. Alex was too tough, Josh too lenient. Then they would swap. It kept Mattie on her toes, never knowing which parent might be on her side. Sometimes backing each other up caused more arguments once Mattie left the room. When she started college, life around the house had become less chaotic. Mattie became absorbed with school and work and was home less and less, giving Alex more time for herself. Alex had let her appearance go over the years, concentrating on rearing Mattie. Josh didn’t seem to mind, his career was kicking off and the less distraction the better. And so their lives plowed on at an average speed in an average direction in no particular fashion.

Now that Alex had more time to herself, she began to realize the disadvantage of marrying so young. She had never done anything for herself. From eighteen years old, Alex had put someone else before her, first Josh and his career, then Mattie and her rearing. She had a full-time job as a customer service rep for a marketing company. She spent eight hours a day in a cube talking to customers and vendors. She enjoyed her job and liked the people she worked with. She spent a minimum of five hours a week in the gym, usually getting closer to ten. She kept to herself at the gym and was extremely focused when she worked out. At home, she still made dinner each night for Mattie and Josh. If they came home late, or in Mattie’s case, not at all, they both knew leftovers would be in the fridge waiting for them. Now, for the first time in her life, Alex was trying to take more time to focus on herself and become more independent.

Josh arrived home from work later than usual and Alex was having a hard time containing her excitement. She couldn’t sit still while waiting for him. She rearranged the living room trying to distract herself.

“You’ll never guess what happened!!!”

Josh was exhausted and barely noticed the change. She seemed more fidgety than usual. Just watching her sucked up what little energy he had left. “Tell me.”

“I won a trip for two to New York! To the Veronica Becker show! Can you get away?” she asked expectantly, but Alex already knew the answer.

“When?” Josh was snowed under at work and knew it didn’t matter when it was, he couldn’t leave the office.

“April 15th through the 17th,” she replied in a hushed tone.

“That’s the end of tax season and things will be crazy at work. No, I can’t get away.”

Josh and Alex hadn’t had a vacation in four years, since Mattie was in high school. “See if Mattie can go,” was Josh’s response, even though he knew that was not what Alex wanted to hear.

Alex was disappointed but wasn’t surprised. She knew Mattie would have work and school, and not be able to travel with her, either. On Monday, when the rep from the Veronica Becker show called to finalize the details, Alex had decided she would travel alone. Although she really didn’t like venturing to new places on her own, she was not turning this opportunity down. Time to try this independence she was looking for.

April 15th arrived and Alex could think of nothing else. Josh’s usual day was ten hours or more, but during tax season, he could be at the office up to twenty hours, barely sleeping or eating. Mattie was excited for her mom but school projects had her weighed down. So Alex shopped alone for a new outfit and worked out more at the gym to look good on TV. Her plane tickets arrived and her seat was in first class. She looked on-line at the hotel she was to stay in and couldn’t believe the luxury. This was the trip of her dreams.

When her plane landed at JFK, she navigated through the maze of corridors to the escalator, following the signs to “Ground Transportation.” She prayed she could find the car that was sent from the show to pick her up. To her amazement, a driver stood at the front of the crowd holding a sign stating:

Alexandra Daniels

The Veronica Becker Show

She could hardly contain her excitement! She was really here, New York City! And riding in a limo!

The driver dropped her at her hotel and told her he would return for her at 1 PM the next day. Alex checked in and was told all her expenses were paid and to enjoy her stay.

The room was on the forty-fourth floor. The view was breathtaking. She could see for miles. She had no idea what part of New York she was in, maybe Manhattan. The room had plush carpeting and the sheets on the bed were the softest cotton. She plopped on the bed, sinking into the plush satin comforter, and flicked on the TV. As she channel surfed, she ran across a Derek Dunbar movie about three-fourths of the way through. She finished watching it, took a relaxing shower and called for room service. Josh called at nine to wish her good night. Mattie sent a text with the same. Alex felt she was a million miles from her life.

At 1 PM the next day, Alex was downstairs and getting in her car. The trip to the studio took about forty-five minutes, traffic was brutal. Nervous about meeting her icon in person, Alex’s stomach was in knots. The studio was immense. There were people everywhere, rushing back and forth. It seemed like organized chaos. Alex was taken to Veronica’s dressing room.

“Oh, good afternoon! You must be Alexandra Daniels! Welcome.” Veronica’s smile was so genuine. Alex began to relax.

Veronica’s makeup artist was hard at work making her beautiful.

“Please, call me Alex. I’m so excited to be here! Thank you so much for this trip!”

“Alex, take a seat. Tell me about yourself. How were your flight and your hotel room?”

Alex raved about the luxurious room and gave the Reader’s Digest condensed version of her life. Veronica seemed genuinely interested, despite having the crew rush all around her.

“Alex, you’ll be seated in the front row. I’ll introduce you. And after the show you can meet my guests. Today we’ll be having fashionista Barbara Marx, and actor Derek Dunbar, as my guests. That should be fun. I haven’t met him yet. Do you like him?”

Alex’s heart skipped a beat. Could it be? This was definitely the best trip ever! “Oh, yes! I have seen all his films.”

“All?”

Alex cast her eyes down, ashamed of her fan-ness. “Yes, all. I’m quite the fan. It’s a bit embarrassing.”

Veronica was light-hearted, “Don’t be embarrassed. That’s how actors make their money. Without fans they wouldn’t last. Well, then I’m sure you’ll enjoy meeting him, won’t you! Glad we could make this a memorable trip!” Veronica giggled as Alex was rushed away to the seating area.

The show dragged on for Alex. She couldn’t wait for Derek to come out. Not only had Alex a passion for working out, but she’d also become a movie junkie. New releases, old releases, at home or at the theater. Her spare time had been filled to the brim. Watching an R-rated movie had been a forgotten luxury while Mattie was growing up. Josh and Alex focused on good quality television whenever Mattie was in the room. Now that Mattie was grown and rarely home, Alex decided to do some catching up. Since Josh spent long hours at work, Alex had a void to fill. She could only spend so much time at the gym...

In her obsession with films, she came across a movie star she was unfamiliar with - Derek Dunbar. He was handsome, tall, blazing blue eyes and had a Scottish accent. At least she thought he did. His accent varied from movie to movie. He reminded her of her first actor crush, Sean Connery, in the 70s. Even as a young girl, she was fascinated by his accent. In her west Texas town, they didn’t have accents, not compared to their relatives in Dallas or Houston. Not his kind of accent. She’d been drawn to it. She was drawn to it still.

She went on the internet and watched YouTube interviews with Derek Dunbar. He was definitely Scottish. She enjoyed hearing stories from his film sets, practical jokes, funny moments, the way he laughed. It aroused her. He seemed genuine, friendly. She saw videos of him giving autographs to groups of fans, at premiers shaking hands with the crowd. Not the typical “get out of my face, I want my privacy” star. But then there wasn’t much information about his private life. Oh, there was a biography about his childhood and how he came into acting but not much about girlfriends, dating or law troubles. Alex searched more YouTube interviews.

Derek, with his most inviting smile, talked to an interviewer about his latest movie. In an effort to ask the most unusual question of the day the reporter asked, “Have you ever written a love letter?”

Derek’s eyes looked to a faraway place, melancholy, “Yes, I have. A long time ago.” Then laughing it off, said, “Who writes when there is texting?”

The reporter laughed, too, but wasn’t dissuaded. She wanted a story.

“Do you want a wife, kids, the white picket fence?”

Derek smiled, “Sure, someday. But where’s the time?” And he laughed it off.

His laugh was contagious but his eyes were not laughing. The interviewer was finished but had not seen the depth of the question. Did she hit a nerve?

In other interviews, Derek was accused of womanizing that he neither acknowledged nor denied. He laughed the questions off. He was branded a playboy, unable to settle down. Photos of him encouraged the reputation. Shirtless, pensive, an Adonis. Rumors of dates with various starlets circulated the gossip magazines in the grocery store and the internet.

Alex watched every movie he was in. She discussed her interest in Derek as an actor and found the other women she worked with lusted after him, too. He was obviously in running for the “Sexiest Man of the Year” by the way women talked about him. Alex felt her obsession wasn’t so bad after all. She shared it with half the women on the planet.

Finally, Veronica introduced Derek. Alex was giddy but tried to contain herself. She didn’t want to appear the crazed fan, even if she felt like it inside. She couldn’t believe how excited she was. Now she understood her mother’s fascination with Elvis Presley and how thousands of women could swoon over a man.

Derek came out and was just as Alex had expected. He was warm, friendly, funny, and made eye contact with her. At least she thought he did. This portion of the show seemed to fly by and was over too soon for Alex. She waited hesitantly for Veronica to call her up to the stage.

The show ended and Veronica invited Alex to come up and meet Derek. Alex took a deep breath and tried to steady herself.

“Hello, Alex! I hear you’re a fan of mine,” Derek stated teasingly, admiring her blush.

“Yes. I really have enjoyed your movies.”

Derek invited Alex to have a seat next to him and asked, “Which one do you think is the best?”

Alex thought a moment.

“Best movie overall or the best movie you were the lead in?” Alex had many favorites, but there were a couple that stood out to her.

“You tell me.” Derek was surprised Alex actually had a real opinion.

“I have really enjoyed the period pieces you’ve done, *The Great Queen* and *The Hun* are my favorite of those. Of the more modern movies, *The Stranger* and *Judgment* I thought were very good scripts and the acting was great in them. Which was your favorite to make?” Thrilled she was able to put two coherent sentences together, Alex was felt calmer.

Derek thought about it, “*The Great Queen* since it was my first, but *Judgment* was a great movie, and the first I produced and directed, although *The Stranger* is very dear to me. I love that story. I think you’ve picked my favorites, too.”

As the crew began closing down the set for the day, Veronica thanked Derek again for his appearance and congratulated Alex on her good fortune. As she excused herself to prepare for another show, an assistant began escorting Alex and Derek down the back hall.

“Do you have dinner plans?” Derek asked her as they paused at the exit door.

Was Derek inviting her out? Alex held her breath and placed her hand on a nearby wall. Her mind was a blank. She heard her mind telling her to say something.

“No, I don’t. I don’t have any plans.”

As Alex and Derek walked out the stage door, the paparazzi swarmed them. He tried to open a path to his car. Derek grabbed Alex’s wrist and dragged her behind before she was engulfed by the crowd of cameras. There was a frenzy of shouted questions about Alex. Who was she? Were they dating? Is it serious? Is she a future co-star? Derek tried to be polite, refusing to acknowledge any questions while asking the crowd to back away a bit while they tried to make their getaway.

Derek Dunbar wasn’t just any actor, but one of the busiest actors in Hollywood. He had sandy brown hair, bright blue eyes, a strong square jaw with a hint of five o’clock shadow and an alluring Scottish accent. He wasn’t just good looking; he was a good actor, versatile, playing comedy, drama, or action. Women found him sensual and sexy, men admired the way he made women feel. He could have any woman he desired, and he most often did. His career, only 12 years in the making, was gaining strength and he had his pick of scripts.

“Is it always like this?” Alex was surprised how vulturistic the paparazzi were.

“Yes, it is. I’m sorry about all that. I should have expected they’d have the car staked out. I’m sure you’ll be in a few tabloids tomorrow. Try not to think about them. Have you been to New York before?”

Alex couldn’t believe what was happening. “No, I haven’t. This is my first visit.”

“Let me show you around. We’ll need to lose these cameras. You don’t mind fast driving, do you?” Derek has a mischievous smile on his face. It made Alex smile, too.

“No, I’m used to it. Show me what ya got!” Alex was getting comfortable and brave. This ought to be fun.

Derek didn’t lie; he drove fast, really fast for the traffic in New York. He stopped at a deli on a quiet street, out of the way of the busy traffic. Away from the paparazzi for a moment, too, Alex imagined.

Chapter 3

Derek’s career had moved fast. He had loved acting as a child, but when it was time for college, the performing arts was out of the question. It wasn’t the kind of career a gentleman chose. Besides, what oppor-

tunities were there in Scotland? None. His mother, Gillian, a traditional proud Scot, insisted he pick a respectable profession, so Derek chose law. Since he made honor roll in high school and excelled at debate, becoming a solicitor seemed the perfect choice.

Gillian wasn't well-to-do; average middle class better described her upbringing. Her father had been a welder and her mother a housewife. Gillian had married young to a fisherman, had three children and then was left to care for them on her own. While out on a fishing trip, the boat capsized and Derek's father was never found. Gillian did her best to raise the children and pay for their needs. She had been a good cook and worked in restaurants as a chef while Derek, his older brother Carl and his older sister Fiona were growing up. Once the children had all left the nest, Gillian opened a bakery of her own in Inverness in the Highlands. She was self-sufficient and enjoyed her new found freedom.

Law school didn't agree with Derek, or one might say he didn't agree with Law school. He didn't agree with the early hours, endless chapters of homework or lugging around the heavy books. But Derek loved his mother and decided he would make her proud. He worked hard and was unparalleled in his studies. He had honors and was president of the Law Society. At first glance, you couldn't tell Derek's passion wasn't law.

Upon closer inspection, it was apparent that Derek would not become a lawyer. Many nights were spent at the local pub, drinking and singing with the band and barely getting home before dawn. Derek enjoyed liquor in any form. Along with the liquor were the many women in his life. He was with no one in particular, the more variety the better. The women knew there were others and they didn't care. To be on Derek's arm, even just for one night was a privilege in itself. He was popular, dashing, and so irresistible. He oozed charm and finesse; he had a gift for saying the right thing and sounding like he meant it. It was powerful stuff and Derek knew how to use it.

His last year of school Derek finally came to the realization that law was not going to fulfill him. All the women were not going to fill the void. The most difficult task was to tell his mother. What would he say and how would she react? She had always been so supportive of Derek as he grew up. She really loved telling her friends her son was going to be a lawyer. Worse still was to tell her what career he really wanted...acting. He had to have a plan.

Derek decided after graduation and his internship he would give Gillian the bad news. Fate had a plan of her own. Derek headed to London to his internship to find the office abandoned. The company had had a run in with the police and decided to close its doors and sneak out of town. Derek saw this as a great way to end his law career. The celebration ended two weeks later in an alley between a dumpster and an abandoned crate. Derek couldn't remember how he got there or who he had been with. He'd lost his wallet, his keys and his underwear. His head felt like it had cracked open and his brains would spill onto the pavement. He knew he couldn't go home like this. So Derek called a friend.

Craig had been Derek's buddy since childhood. Tall, lanky and with a gift of gab, Craig was very creative. His parents were artists and encouraged him to pursue screenwriting. They'd grown up together and had few secrets from each other. Craig had moved to London just after high school. His dream had been to be a playwright. Craig had acted in plays with Derek in grammar school and had written plays for Derek in high school. Craig's parents had been products of the 60s and felt his "free spirit" needed to soar. He worked hard in London trying to sell his plays to the theater, but he was an unknown and no one was interested. So Craig worked backstage at the playhouse part time and at the local TV station the rest of the time. At the theater, Craig worked on sets and lighting. At the TV station he learned how to use the cameras and teleprompter. In his spare time, what little there was, Craig still wrote plays.

Craig had a small flat but willingly shared it with Derek while he figured out his next move. Derek's first step was to visit the playhouse. The producer quietly listened to Derek's plea to hire him...to do anything at the theater. The producer was in the early stages of a new play and was in need of a good supporting actor. He let Derek read, expecting failure and disappointment. To his amazement, Derek was good, really good. Derek had a job! He was an actor! Now to tell his mother...

Derek's mother knew about his carousing ways and he figured she would blame that on him losing his prospective law career. Derek also knew if he was to take this new vocation seriously, and Gillian was to accept it, he needed her to know how important this was to him. Derek quit drinking cold turkey,

started going to bed by midnight, and stopped having casual sex with every woman that flirted with him. His new career needed to take precedence.

After landing the supporting roll in the current play at the London Playhouse, Derek journeyed home to give his news to Gillian. He arrived home in time for dinner. The aroma of lamb and potatoes filled his senses, reminding him of his childhood. He felt more and more like a youth coming to tell his mom about the school yard brawl he was suspended for.

“Mom, I have some important news for you”, he announced in a voice quieter than he planned.

“Derek, what’s wrong. You look like you’ve eaten something sour. Are you feeling ill?” Gillian questioned, using her best concerned parent look.

“Mom, please, sit down.”

Gillian moved to the sofa and sat down.

“Derek, you’re worrying me. What’s wrong?”

“Mom, I have quit law. Before you say anything, you knew I had no passion for it. It didn’t suit me.”

Gillian started to interrupt. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Her son the lawyer...what was going to come of him? As her mind reeled she heard him say something about not drinking and a play? Was she hearing things?

“Mom, I want to be an actor. I have a job. I’m in a play at the London Playhouse. I’m staying with Craig. I no longer drink. Please don’t be mad at me. I really want this. It’s very important to me. Please let me prove it to you,” Derek pleaded. He was in agony as he waited for Gillian to say something.

Gillian focused, hanging on his every word. She watched his face as he desperately tried to convince her of his good intentions. She knew her son had the ability to succeed at anything he set his mind to. She recognized the steel determination in his voice despite his fear of disappointing her. She took a deep breath.

“Okay. I hear you. I’m not saying I agree, yet, but I will support you and stand by you.”

Derek gave his mother a huge bear hug. He felt the weight of the world fall from his shoulders. That night he had the first peaceful sleep in years, no nightmares of failures to come, just tranquil, undisturbed slumber.

Derek did well in the theater. His first role as supporting actor garnered praise from the theatrical community. His next three roles were leads and proved he was talented and convincing in each character he played.

During his role as lead in “Tartuffe,” an American producer expressed interest in Derek coming to the States to be in his movie. Derek accepted the challenge and moved to Hollywood. Gillian was proud of her son’s accomplishments and made him promise to visit her often. His first film was nominal but the reviews were outstanding. Derek’s confidence grew. His next film garnered accolades from his peers. He was now able to pick and choose his roles, and most were high dollar flicks. Derek’s passion became an obsession. He was a dedicated professional. Other actors rallied to work with him. He was in demand and that was important in Hollywood. Derek realized as he went from film to film that his popularity was fleeting. Anytime he could fall off the pedestal and go back to obscurity.

Derek’s stunning good looks during college only intensified as he aged. By forty, Derek was considered one of the best looking men in Hollywood. With experience, he learned not to take himself so seriously and played practical jokes on set. Crews and actors enjoyed working with him. He made everyone feel at ease. Gossip rags speculated on his love life. He was a relentless flirt but Derek kept his affairs discreet. By the time the paparazzi suspected a romance it was over or they guessed wrong all together.

Derek’s career was in the fast lane, but his love life was lousy. He tried dating actresses but their careers pulled them to opposite sides of the globe. Never spending time with each other didn’t help their relationship. He tried dating women out of the entertainment industries, but they didn’t like his long hours and all the travel. So Derek stopped dating altogether. He let the gossip magazines and TV shows believe there were multitudes of women flowing in and out of his life, keeping the reputation of a womanizer. Fans loved speculating who his next date would be, so he gave them things to speculate about. In truth,

Derek was so busy with his career, acting in lead roles, directing, and producing, there was little time to fit dating in.

Derek and Alex sat at a table in the far corner away from the windows of the deli. They ordered dinner and talked about Dallas. Derek was curious what Alex did for a living, was she married and why she watched so many movies.

Alex laughed, "Because I have a boring life."

Derek replied, "I doubt that. You said you're married and have a daughter. That must keep you busy?"

"Oh please. My husband works a lot and my daughter is in school and isn't home much. I have a question for you."

Derek looked wary, "Okay, shoot!"

"You were in an interview a while ago and the interviewer asked if you had ever written a love letter. You said yes. Who was she?" Alex remembered that faraway look in his eye in that interview. She wanted to know who had stolen his heart.

"Oh, that was a long time ago. Back in college. She's married now. Why?" Derek had that same faraway look Alex remembered from the interview.

"Because it's obvious you really loved her. And with all the women you have been associated with, I'm curious who could have actually had a hold on your heart."

Derek was very somber, "Yeah, well." Then the wall went up and the jokes started. "She had a big black mole on her nose and it just wasn't going to work! Hahaha!" The mood had totally changed.

Alex tried to go back. "You've dated many women. What's your dream woman?"

"Dream woman? Hmmmm... You first, what's your dream man? Your husband? He must fit the bill? You've been married a long time." Derek was enjoying this question much better.

Alex was pensive.

"My dream man. Physically - dark hair, light eyes, 5 o'clock shadow or a thin beard, tall - over 6 foot, complicated - not easy to figure out - I like a bit of a challenge, a sense of humor - in general and about himself, and, no, this does not describe my husband."

Derek was deep in thought. Suddenly he snapped out of it.

"Hey, that's me! No fair!" He was roaring with laughter.

"It's fair. You asked!"

"But you really don't know me." Derek was still laughing, but didn't like to be on a pedestal. He knew he had a lot of faults that Alex didn't know.

"You just said I described you. So obviously I know you better than you expected." Alex was tickled she was making Derek squirm a bit. "Your turn."

Derek thought about what he truly wanted in a mate.

"She'd have to be patient and spontaneous, passionate and creative, and be able to deal with all the quirky parts of my personality. She'd be no taller than 5'8", probably have dark hair and eyes that reflect her soul. She'd have to enjoy the outdoors and be physically active." Derek had a mischievous look in his eyes.

"How old should she be?"

"Does it matter? As long as she meets the other criteria?"

"Well," Alex knew Derek was missing one small detail. "You told a reporter in an interview that you still wanted the wife, children and a white picket fence. You're not getting any younger, no offense, and your wife would need to be probably twenty-five to thirty-five if you want children."

Derek hadn't been thinking along those lines. "I think twenty-five is too young for me. At least the ones I have met so far. Why not over thirty-five?"

"Most women prefer not to have children in their forties. You could always adopt. Have you thought about how soon you'll want to have children?" Alex was enjoying this. She really had Derek thinking. He had been spending most of his time enjoying himself and working. A family had not been on his mind.

"I'm not ready for any right now! Maybe five or ten years..."

“Derek, you’ll be fifty. You’re children won’t be going to college until you’re seventy. You’ll be one of the oldest dads at graduation. I know your career is paramount right now but you need to prioritize. You could marry a woman with adult children and just go right into being a granddad.” Alex could see the visions going through Derek’s mind. She couldn’t help but smile at his expression.

“Okay, you bring up some good points. I’ll have to rethink things some. Damn! You’ve messed up my impulsiveness! Woman! Ugh!” Derek was frustrated. He loved being spur of the moment. He also knew his mom wanted him to settle down. He just wasn’t ready.