

Chapter 1 *In Camden Town*

'I know where we can go on holiday!' said Stephany. She was lying on the sitting room floor of her London flat. There were newspapers and holiday magazines all over the floor.

All the hotels Stephany liked were too expensive. And she didn't want to spend her holiday in a cheap hotel with a lot of other English people.

Max came out of the kitchen with a plate of *sushi* and a bottle of cold Chardonnay wine. He knew this was the kind of food and drink Stephany enjoyed. Stephany looked up at the tall handsome man. His good looks made her heart jump.

The first time she saw Max, she thought he was a cold, unfriendly person. She could not believe that a person could be so good-looking *and* nice as well.

But now Stephany knew that Max was just shy, not unfriendly. He also thought about other people and tried to help them when it was possible. Stephany thought he was the perfect man.

He sat down beside Stephany and touched her black hair.

'Show me,' he said, nodding his head at the pictures of white beaches in the magazines.

'No,' said Stephany. 'This place isn't in the magazines. I don't know why I didn't think of it before!'

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‘Where is it? Tell me!’ said Max. He was pouring the wine into two tall glasses.

‘Carlo’s flat!’ said Stephany with a big smile. She took her wine and bit into the *sushi*.

‘*Sushi!* My favourite! I love Japanese food,’ she said. ‘When did you get this?’

‘I went into the supermarket on Camden Road on the way here,’ said Max. ‘I knew you would be pleased. Now tell me more. Who’s Carlo, and where is his flat?’

‘Carlo’s a good friend. I taught him English five years ago when he was in London. He has a flat in a beautiful village on the Ligurian Sea in Italy, near Genoa. He said I can stay in it. I’ve been there a couple of times. It’s perfect. You’ll love it!’

‘Slow down,’ said Max. ‘If it was five years ago, do you think he still wants you to stay in his flat?’

‘Oh, yes, I’m sure. Carlo’s a very kind person. He doesn’t live in the flat now, it’s empty most of the year. He only uses it for weekends sometimes.’

‘Well . . .’ Max didn’t know much about Italians or Italian men. He didn’t know if they really were good at being ‘good friends’ with women. It would be difficult for any man to be ‘just friends’ with Stephany – she was very pretty. He watched her now as she walked into the kitchen. She was just as pretty as when he first met her one night at the Jazz Café in Camden with some friends. They had been going out for two months now. Max had had a lot of girlfriends, but now he wanted to have a serious relationship.

It was easier said than done.

Some women were too interested in their jobs, other

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women just wanted to have a good time. Some were too serious, others were not serious enough.

Stephany, however, seemed just right. She was intelligent and serious, and she liked her job. She was a language teacher and she worked hard. But she also liked to enjoy herself. She liked going to clubs and parties and doing sport. She did a lot of swimming and was very strong.

Max didn't really like sport. In fact he didn't like taking exercise. He was an architect and he enjoyed looking at buildings and paintings. But Max liked the fact that they were different and he liked her more because of it.

'I'm so pleased I thought of Carlo,' Stephany said, sitting down next to Max again. 'We'll have a great time. I love you, Max.'

It was the first time she had spoken so warmly. Although they had been going out for a couple of months now, she had never said she loved him before.

Max pulled her close to him.

'I love you too,' he said. They kissed.

Then Stephany began to describe the village where Carlo's flat was to Max.

'It's beside the sea. It's on Italy's north-west coast, near Genoa. The houses are built on the hills and are all different colours! And the country is beautiful – full of places where they grow fruit and vegetables. It's so pretty Max, and there are good restaurants with fresh fish, or you can get fresh pasta or pizza.'

'It's beginning to sound very nice,' said Max.

'We can walk, and swim, and water-ski . . .'

'Hey, slow down,' said Max. 'I can't water-ski.'

'Well, anyway, we can eat good food!'

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Max put his arm round Stephany. He thought she was lovely when she was like this.

‘OK, telephone Carlo,’ he said, ‘but not until later.’ And he began to kiss her again.