

DADDY'S PERFECT PRINCESS

THE SHAPE OF LOVE BOOK ONE



STELLA MOORE

BLUSHING BOOKS

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Stella Moore
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*For every woman who's ever looked in the mirror and felt 'less than'.
You are beautiful, and amazing, and worthy.*

CHAPTER 1



As far as Mindy Kirkman was concerned, there was little in life more satisfying than finding the perfect outfit for any given occasion. Twisting to the side to study the red dress she'd just donned, she felt the rush of excitement and satisfaction that came with such a find.

She turned to face her partner in crime. "What do you think?"

Jenna Sykes, Mindy's college bestie and loyal shopping buddy, tilted her head to the side. Mindy held her breath and mentally crossed her fingers. Part of the reason she shopped with Jenna was her brutal honesty. When a girl had more than a few pounds to lose, every clothing choice was vitally important. Mindy could trust Jenna not to let her out of the house looking like she'd just run away from the circus.

"I think," Mindy squeezed her eyes shut when Jenna paused dramatically, "it's perfect!"

Mindy's eyes popped open and she squealed with delight. "Oh thank God! You're sure the neckline's not too low?" She turned back to the mirror, tugging at the hem and her cleavage. With breasts like hers, even the most conservative neckline could be a little racy, so she hadn't been sure about the plunging V-neck.

“Nonsense. Is there such a thing?” Jenna asked, grinning in the reflection.

“And it hides my pudge? You know how Todd gets.”

She didn’t miss the eye roll, or the way Jenna’s nose scrunched up at the mention of Mindy’s long-time boyfriend. “Yes, it hides the so-called pudge. Should I even bother with the lecture about how you’re beautiful the way you are and Todd’s an asshole for not seeing that?”

“Nope.” Satisfied with her decision, Mindy unzipped the dress and pulled it up over her head. “He’s a good guy, Jen. He just wants me to be healthy.”

“He wants a trophy wife, and he gets off on making you neurotic about it.” Jenna blew out a breath and held her hands up in mock surrender. “But I’m not going to ruin your big night. I will be by your side from the moment he puts that ring on your finger to the moment you decide to leave him at the altar.”

It was Mindy’s turn to roll her eyes. “Ha-ha. Let’s go pay for the dress so I can get home and change.”

“Okay, but I’m serious. Whenever you’re ready to cut and run, just let me know. I’ll have the getaway car ready.”

The dress was a little over what she’d budgeted, but she figured it was worth it. After parting ways with Jenna in the parking lot, Mindy headed home. She had exactly two hours to get ready, and she hoped it would be enough. When she got to the little bungalow she’d purchased the year before, she hurried inside and hung the dress up on the door to her bedroom.

She stripped down while the tub filled with hot water, and pinned her long blonde hair in curlers before sliding into the lavender-scented warmth. Grabbing the remote from beside the tub, she switched the radio on and settled in with a deep sigh. With the lilting strands of Mozart filling the room, she gave herself ten minutes to soak and clear her mind. When the ten minutes were up, she carefully shaved the necessary bits, then exfoliated every square inch of her body.

It was another twenty before she deemed herself acceptable to begin getting dressed. Rinsing off, she climbed out of the tub and wrapped herself in a large, fluffy towel, then took her seat at her vanity. It had been an impulse buy—unlike ninety percent of her purchases—but she considered it well worth the investment. How was a woman supposed to feel put together if she didn't have a space where she could relax and enjoy the process?

She took a moment to study her face, searching for new signs of the aging process she was so desperately trying to fight. Over thirty and not married had most certainly *not* been the game plan. Every wrinkle, every mark was a reminder of her fading youth. And fading marketability.

Slathering on her moisturizer (carefully selected after months of research and personal trials) she began the ritual of making herself pretty. Concealer first, to hide any imperfections. Foundation for a smooth base. A smoky eye, with hints of purple to make the blue of her eyes pop. Contouring, making sure to use a light hand so she didn't come out looking like a circus clown. And finally, a slick of bright bold lip stain. Every bit of her makeup for tonight had been selected and practiced weeks in advance. It was bad enough she hadn't found the perfect dress until the last minute. She wasn't about to take chances with anything else.

On to her hair. Pulling the curlers out one by one, she gently finger-combed each spiral. By the time she was done, her face was framed by a mass of perfect curls that she lightly covered with hair-spray. Slipping off her robe, she carefully hung it in its designated spot before pulling on the black, lacy underwear and matching bra she'd selected for the evening.

And finally, the dress. She gave herself a moment for a little victory dance before calmly sliding the dress off the hanger and over her head. When it was zipped and settled in place, she studied herself in the mirror. Earrings. She needed earrings. Beside her vanity stood a tall jewelry box. Opening the side door, she studied the selection hanging neatly inside.

“Perfect,” she murmured, selecting a pair of ruby earrings dangling from a thin rope of white gold. Understated and classy, they were the perfect final touch for the outfit.

Her doorbell rang at exactly six o’clock. Mindy grabbed her evening bag and stepped into a pair of sparkling silver flats. The shoes were the one part of her outfit she didn’t consider perfect but rather good enough. She loved heels. Ever since she’d been a little girl, she’d had a love affair with any shoe that added at least three inches to her height. But Todd was only about an inch taller than her own five-foot-nine, and he disapproved of her being taller than him. So, flats it was, and she wouldn’t let it ruin her perfect night. With one last mirror check, she opened the door for the man she hoped to call her fiancé after tonight.

Todd’s eyes flicked down over her dress and a slight frown marred his perfect face. “Is that what you’re wearing?”

The excitement fled, leaving her feeling like a birthday balloon someone had forgotten about. “Oh, um, I can change if you don’t like it.”

He sighed heavily and shook his head. “We don’t have time if we’re going to make our reservation. It’ll do.”

Forcing herself to smile and not pout so she wouldn’t ruin the evening, Mindy pulled the door shut behind them and followed him to his car. Ever the gentleman, he held the door open for her. She took the few seconds between him closing her door and opening his own to settle her racing heart. She would not do anything to spoil this evening. She would not say anything or do anything to embarrass him. This was his big night, too, after all.

They barely spoke on the drive to the restaurant, and she told herself they were comfortable enough after a year together to sit in silence. They didn’t need to fill their time together with meaningless chitchat the way some couples did.

When they arrived at his favorite restaurant, he pulled up to the valet station. Her internal lecture continued, insisting that it was ridiculous to be disappointed that he hadn’t chosen something

more special for the evening. The *Whitefin* was a lovely, romantic spot. It didn't matter that they'd come here nearly once a week for the last year.

Inside, they were led to a table for two at the back, overlooking the harbor, and Todd placed their wine order. Mindy bit back a sigh when he ordered red. She hated red wine. If she were being honest, she'd much prefer a local craft beer, but she did enjoy certain whites. But Todd preferred red, so they drank red.

"How was work today?" she asked when the waiter had left.

"Productive. We had the presentation for that big client today. I think it went well."

Mindy flipped through her mental records. "The green energy firm?"

His eyes flicked up from the menu to briefly meet hers. "Yes."

She fought the urge to roll her eyes when he returned his attention to the menu. He ordered the same thing every time. Poached salmon with grilled vegetables. Without exception. Looking down at her own menu, Mindy found herself facing the same struggle she always did. The lobster mac and cheese was sinfully rich and delicious. But she was supposed to be dieting, a fact Todd was always quick to remind her of if she ordered anything heavier than a salad or grilled chicken. Setting aside the longing for the buttery, cheesy goodness, she decided on a salad.

After they'd placed their orders, Todd folded his hands on top of the table, his expression somber and serious. Mindy's heart began to race. Was this it? Was this The Moment?

"Mindy. We need to talk."

Well, that was an odd way to start a proposal. She smiled, making certain to not let any of her nervousness show. "Sure, Todd. About what?"

"As you know, we're both getting to the point where settling down, getting married, raising a family is expected of us."

Oh God. This was it! She forced herself not to grin like an idiot or bounce in her seat like a child. "Yes?"

“And as you and I have discussed, I have very specific ideas when it comes to these topics. Such as how a wife should carry herself. Keep herself... presentable at all times.”

Her smile faltered just for a second. “I know. We’ve talked about it at length. I understand what your expectations are.”

Todd sighed, and the racing of her heart became a frantic beating. What was happening? “Then perhaps this won’t be as difficult as I anticipated. Mindy, I don’t think we should see each other again after tonight.”

The rush of blood in her veins became a deafening roar in her ears. “What?” Surely she’d misheard him.

“This just isn’t going to work for me. I gave you a year, but you still haven’t shown me you’re serious about losing weight.”

Beneath the table, she pinched her leg. This had to be a dream. A bad dream, fueled by her anxiety over the Big Night and too many tacos. But the sharp pain in her thigh told her this was all too real.

“You’re breaking up with me?” Todd nodded, and her chest tightened, making it difficult to breathe. “You’re breaking up with me. Over dinner. In a restaurant. In *public*.”

He had the grace to look at least a little sheepish. “I had hoped you wouldn’t make a scene.”

And she shouldn’t. It wasn’t a large town, and the odds were good that word would eventually get around to their friends and family, possibly even their coworkers. She tried to remember all the reasons she shouldn’t make a scene, but none of them really seemed that important.

Wordlessly, she stood and gathered her purse. Lifting the glass of red wine she despised, she studied the contents—then unceremoniously dumped it over his head. “Nobody drinks merlot with poached salmon, you pretentious asshole.” Her calm words barely carried over his scream of indignation, but she didn’t care. Turning on her heel, she strode out of the restaurant and down the street.