

Love Max Gray

A Valentine's Special from The Marriage Mistake

She was late.

Max glanced at the Waterford crystal clock, then down at Rocky who had also dressed for the occasion. The poor pit bull boasted a bright red collar with hearts around it, and looked halfway embarrassed for the canine population. The things you do for a girl, Max thought.

The door flew open.

His wife rushed through in a cloud of anxiety and an armful of bags. “I know, I’m late, I’m sorry, really sorry,” she babbled, kicking the door closed with her foot. “I worked late at the studio on this new piece—and I think it really rocks—then swung by the bookstore to finish a few spreadsheets and completely forgot we’re out of groceries for dinner tonight. Did you start cooking? I can make some pasta and keep it simple. Why are you dressed up?”

Oh, this was going down in history as a humiliating moment. He glanced down at Rocky’s face.

The dog curled up his lip in disgust and stalked off, done with the whole scene.

“Hi Rocky! Is that a new collar? It’s so cute.”

“Carina, it’s Valentine’s day.”

She blinked. The full implication of the event hit her full force, evident in the horror in her dark eyes. “Oh, no. It can’t be Valentine’s day. Tell me you’re joking.”

Caught between amusement and irritation, he studied his wife. Her wavy hair fell around her shoulders in a knotted cloud of glory. Her make-up had smudged off, and her t-shirt and jeans were stained by a variety of watercolors. Her feet were stuffed into flip flops. She was one of the sexiest women he’d ever met in his life.

Wasn’t this supposed to be a female holiday? Since it was their first official Valentine’s day together, he figured she’d be majorly ticked off if he forgot to do it in style. Instead, she’d been the one to forget. He was going to kill Michael and Nick, who both warned him if he didn’t recognize the day of love in proper form she wouldn’t talk to him for weeks. So, here he was dressed in a ridiculous tuxedo looking like a wedding waiter and she forgot?

“Not joking. Umm, no big deal. Let me get changed out of this costume, put on some lights, and we’ll eat. How was your day?”

Her eyes widened. Too late. She’d already taken in the surroundings. Candles lit throughout the dark rooms, wafting yummy scents such as vanilla, pumpkin and apple pie. He couldn’t seem to choose so lit them all. Bouquets of roses in different colors were held in crystal vases, and sprinkled petals led a pathway from the living room to the dining room.

Busted.

“You did this for me?” Her voice wobbled and she dropped all the bags onto the floor.

He winced. “*Cara*, it’s no big deal. “

“Yes. It is a big deal.” She moved forward and placed her hand in his. Even after all these months, his heart leapt in his chest when her fingers closed around his. Mine. The primitive roar beat through his bones with sheer satisfaction.

Her husky voice wrapped him in lush velvet. “Show me, Max. Show me what you did for me tonight.”

“Fine. I just made dinner, that’s all.” He led her through the massive living room and into the formal dining room. She sucked in her breath when the whole scene materialized. The mahogany table was filled with crystal, fine china, and platters of food in bite sized portions. Champagne chilled in the bucket. Rose petals adorned the surfaces of the table, chairs and highly polished wood floors.

“It’s beautiful,” she whispered. Her hand reached out to touch his label, stroking the sleeve of his black tuxedo. “You’re beautiful.”

“Men aren’t beautiful,” he protested. “Hell, baby, leave me with some pride tonight. I never even knew V day was considered an actual holiday until today.”

Her warm laugh stroked him deep in the gut and other places. Places that rose to full attention.

She sensed his immediate arousal, and pressed her full breasts against his chest, her legs tangling with his. “Do you know what this whole scene makes me want to do?”

“Eat?”

Heavy lidded eyes gazed up at him. “Later. Right now, I want to appreciate my husband. The husband who cooked dinner, dressed up, and treated me like a queen on Valentine’s Day. The

husband who never yells when I'm late, dresses up our dog to greet me, and reminds me every day how lucky I am he loves me."

The blood pounded in his veins. "How appreciative?"

She dropped to her knees. A slow smile curved lush lips. "Let me show you."

The zipper rasped in the sudden silence.

Mio dio. He loved Valentine's Day.