

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR
SIERRA KAY

Touch

AT THE

OF *Love*

At The Touch of Love

A Novel by Sierra Kay

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At the Touch of Love

Sierra Kay

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PROLOGUE

"I don't understand why loving that girl has to equate to marriage." Rose Ellison's anger resonated in her voice, as much as she tried to control it.

She leaned forward on the salmon armchair. "You think marriage is about love and poems and romantic notions. Marriage is a financial institution. A man in your position would do well to remember that. Enjoy, but keep your exit strategy."

Rose wanted to kick the white table in front of her, but that wouldn't do. Raising her eyes to the twenty-foot ceilings, she stopped just short of rolling them. Another thing her father drummed into her. She wouldn't act pedestrian. Rose was born a Dobson. This house in Burr Ridge had nine bedrooms, eight bathrooms and most importantly, no mortgage. It was owned by the Dobson estate. If you think about it, for all intents and purposes, so was she. That's exactly what her now deceased father wanted.

This ongoing argument with her only son, Daniel, ended far too many of his visits. Rose surmised it could be because of one of two reasons. Either she really didn't like his fiancé, Telia, who was also the mother of his two children, Shelley and Rocky. Or, it could be because she loved pissing him off. Maybe both.

"Mother, I'm not going to keep going over this with you. It's a moot point. She won't say yes. So why keep rehashing?" Daniel ran his fingers through his dark brown hair, pressed his thin lips together and glared at her with the only part of him that revealed he was a Dobson—his cobalt eyes.

Rose tilted her head, assessing him. "Yes, I don't know if I should like her or despise her for thinking she was too good to marry you."

Daniel Ellison, Jr. broke out into a mirthless laugh, again sounding more like Daniel Ellison, Sr. "Well, Dad did say the only true emotion that you ever displayed was anger. So you probably despise her."

The statement caused Rose's nostrils to flare. He dared bring up that man in her presence. That man he worshipped like the second coming of Jesus, stole her money during the divorce by having the gall to demand alimony, and then he stole the favor of her only child.

"She just quit her job. She changed her mind about working. What if she changes her mind about marriage?" Rose implored.

"Mother, please," Daniel pleaded.

She modulated her voice while inspecting her nails. "You know we wouldn't have this conversation at all if you changed the terms of the estate. You can give me direct access to my inheritance, and then you wouldn't have to drop off an allowance every month, like I'm a child incapable of managing my own finances."

That was the crux of the issue. It wasn't that her son visited. It's why he visited. As if she needed him to babysit her. A house full of servants that she manages quite well, but her father left Daniel the contents of her bank account.

She shouldn't have been surprised that, Matthew Dobson, left the complete Dobson estate to his only grandson. The only positive thing he ever said about Rose was, "Well, at least she's pretty."

Rose leveraged her beauty to marry Daniel's father. Genius level intellect, handsome, but for some reason, he had an altruistic streak that refused to be motivated by money. Even the millions her father dangled in front of him weren't enough for him to give up medicine and manage the vast Dobson fortunes. Unfortunately, her son had inherited that gene. Even with millions at his fingertips, he insisted on living off what he made as a dermatologist.

Even after the divorce, Father respected both Daniel Ellison senior and junior in a way he never respected her. But ... at least she was pretty.

"Change the will?" Daniel's voice cut through her inner thoughts. "And miss the opportunity to visit with you every month? Now, what kind of son would I be?"

"If you marry her, will you at least get a prenup?" Rose implored.

"Mother it's not about the money," Daniel said through gritted teeth.

Rose laughed. Arrogant bastard. "There are a very privileged few who can ever utter that statement and mean it. And they're all wealthy."

"Mother, she doesn't even know what it means to be a Dobson," Daniel explained. "She has no idea the amount of money in those accounts. And she will never know. Money corrupts people."

An adage from his father. Daniel Senior actually thought that is why their marriage didn't last. In addition to being pretty, she was a damn good actress. She had pretended to be exactly the kind of woman he needed. Eventually, that act wore thin.

Rose will admit the one good thing about the relationship between Dan and Telia was their daughter, Shelley, possibly even Rocky, though it was too early to tell with him. But Shelley would be the prize of the family.

Even now, the six-year-old showed more promise than both of her parents. With her sharp intellect and flawless logic, Shelley absolutely had Dobson blood running through her veins.

She was beautiful now. When she grew, she'd be glorious. Mrs. Ellison would make sure of it.

"So where is she tonight? Out on a date perhaps" Rose inquired, trying for nonchalance.

"Echo's birthday is today. Telia is taking her out to dinner," Daniel explained before walking over to the intercom and calling the children. "I promised the kids ice cream tonight."

"Daniel, you may hold the reigns today," she stated. "You think that gives you power, but know, battling me isn't wise."

"Of course not, Penelope." Daniel enunciated each syllable. "Wouldn't think of it."

Only two groups of people called her by her given name: her enemies

and those soon to become enemies. Friends chose her middle name. To everyone else, she was Mother, Ma'am or Miss.

As Daniel slammed out of the front door behind his children, Christoff Lawry stepped into the drawing room. Christoff had worked for the Dobsons since Rose's teenage years. He served as the butler, bodyguard, driver, man Friday and everything in between. His razor-sharp perception missed nothing, and he found a way to solve even difficult problems. He always held Rose in high esteem and would do anything to ensure her well-being. Loyalty like that didn't exist these days. Take Daniel for example.

"Anything I can do, Ma'am?" Christoff inquired, his deep voice echoing in the near empty room.

"I'm fine." Rose waved Christoff off. He disappeared as quickly as he arrived. She needed to think without distractions.

Rose stared at the closed door. A will was only as good as the lawyer that drafted it. She stalked down the hall to the office. She'd find a way to wrench control from Daniel one way or another.