



A Ring to Secure His Heir

By Lynne Graham

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Discovering she's pregnant, she goes to confront him, but no one at work has heard of "Alex Kolovos." They do, however, know Alexius Stavroulakis, the CEO, and he has a glittering proposal for her!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lynne Graham lives in Northern Ireland and has been a keen romance reader since her teens. Happily married, Lynne has five children. Her eldest is her only natural child. Her other children, who are every bit as dear to her heart, are adopted. The family has a variety of pets, and Lynne loves gardening, cooking, collecting allsorts and is crazy about every aspect of Christmas.

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'I need a favour,' Socrates Seferis had said and his godson, Alexius Stavroulakis, had dropped everything to fly thousands of miles to come to his aid. Socrates had been strangely mysterious about the nature of the favour, declaring that it was a highly confidential matter that he couldn't discuss on the phone.

Alexius, six feet one in bare feet and built like a professional athlete, was a very newsworthy billionaire of only thirty-one years of age with a fleet of bodyguards, limousines, properties and private jets at his disposal. Famed for his tough tactics in business and a naturally aggressive nature, Alexius never danced to anyone else's tune, but Socrates Seferis, although he was almost seventy-five years old, was a special case. For many years he had been the only visitor Alexius had had while at boarding school in the UK.

A self-made businessman, Socrates was a hardworking multimillionaire with a string of tourist hotels round the world. Alexius's godfather, however, had not been so fortunate in his private life. The wife Socrates adored had died during the birth of their third child and the old man's kids had grown into adult horrors, who were spoiled, lazy and extravagant and who had on many occasions shamed their kind-hearted, honourable father beyond bearing. Alexius considered Socrates an excellent example of why no sensible man should have children. Children were often disloyal, distressing and difficult and he had no idea why some of his friends were so keen to have the little blighters cluttering up lives that, childfree, could have remained blessedly smooth and civilised. It was not a mistake that Alexius planned to make.

Socrates greeted Alexius from his armchair on the terrace of his luxurious home on the outskirts of Athens. Refreshments arrived before the younger man even got seated.

'So,' Alexius prompted, his lean, darkly handsome features serious, the silvery-grey eyes that made women melt shrewd and cool as always. 'What's wrong?'

'You never did learn patience, did you?' the old man quipped, his bright dark eyes sparkling with humour in his weather-beaten face. 'Have a drink, read the file first...'

Impatience bubbling through his big powerful frame, Alexius scooped up the slim file on the table and opened it, ignoring the drink. The head and shoulders photo of a pale, nondescript girl who looked barely out of her teens was uppermost. 'Who is she?'

'Read,' Socrates reminded his godson doggedly.

His breath escaping in a slow hiss of exasperation, Alexius flipped through the thin file. The name Rosie Gray meant nothing to him and the more he read the less he understood the relevance of the information.

'She calls herself Rosie,' Socrates mused abstractedly. 'My late wife was English too. She was christened Rose as well.'

Alexius was baffled by what he had gleaned from the file. Rosie Gray was an English girl who had grown up in care in London and worked as a humble cleaner, living, on the face of it, a very ordinary life. He could see no possible reason for his godfather's interest in her.

'She's my granddaughter,' Socrates supplied as though Alexius had spoken.

Alexius shot him an incredulous look. 'Since when? Is this woman trying to con you or something?'

'You're *definitely* the right man for the job,' Socrates informed his godson with satisfaction. 'No, she's not trying to con me, Alexius. As far as I'm aware, she doesn't even know I exist. I'm curious about her...that's why I asked you here to talk to me.'

Alexius's eyes skimmed back to the photo: a plain Jane if ever he saw one, with pale hair, big empty eyes and no visible personality. 'Why do you think she's your granddaughter?'

'I know it for a fact. I've known she existed for more than fifteen years and she was DNA tested then,' Socrates admitted grudgingly. 'She's Troy's child, conceived while he was working for me in London—not that he did much work while he was over there,' he added with a humourless laugh. 'He didn't marry the girl's mother either. In fact, he had already abandoned them before he died. The woman contacted me looking for financial support and I made a substantial settlement on her and the little girl, but for whatever reasons the girl herself saw none of that money and the mother left her to grow up in foster homes.'

'Unfortunate,' Alexius remarked.

'Worse than unfortunate. The girl has grown up with every possible disadvantage and I feel very guilty about that,' the older man admitted heavily. 'She *is* family and she could be my heir—'

Alexius was alarmed by that staggering declaration. 'Your *heir*? A girl you've never even met? What about the family you already have?'

'My daughter has no children and a spending habit that none of her three rich husbands have been able to afford,' Socrates responded flatly. 'My surviving son is a drug addict, as you know, and he has been in rehab repeatedly without success—'

'But you do have a couple of grandsons.'

'As spendthrift and unreliable as their parents. My grandsons are, as we speak, under suspicion of having committed fraud in one of my hotels. I don't intend to leave any of them out of my will,' Socrates volunteered heavily, 'but if this granddaughter is a suitable person I will leave her the bulk of my money.'

'What do you mean by a "suitable person"?' Alexius asked with a frown.

'If she's a decent girl with her heart in the right place, she'll be welcome to make her home here with me. You're a man of honour and restraint and I trust you to judge her character for me—'

'Me? What have I got to do with this business? Why can't you fly over there and meet the girl for yourself?' Alexius demanded, his black brows drawing together in confusion.

'I have decided against doing that. Anyone can put up a convincing front for a couple of days. She'd soon see that it would be in her own best interests to impress me.' The old man sighed heavily, a lifetime of cynicism and too many disappointments etched in his troubled face. 'I've too much at stake to trust my own judgement—'

I desperately want her to be different from the rest of my family. My children have lied to me and betrayed me over money and other matters too many times to count, Alexius. I don't want to get my hopes up about this girl and run the risk of being fooled again. Nor do I need another scrounger hanging on to my coat-tails.'

'I'm afraid I still don't understand quite what you expect me to do about the situation,' Alexius admitted levelly.

'I want you to check Rosie out for me before I take the chance of getting involved with her.'

'Check her out?' Alexius leapt on the phrase. 'You want me to have her investigated again?'

'No, I want you to meet her, get to know her, size her up for me,' Socrates confided with a hopeful look in his steady gaze. 'This means a lot to me, Alex.'

'You can't be serious? You're asking me to get to know...a *cleaner*?' Alexius prompted in flaring disbelief.

The old man looked grave. 'I have never thought of you as a snob.'

Alexius stiffened and wondered how he could possibly be anything else with his background. After all, generations of very wealthy blue-blooded Greeks filled out his now much diminished family tree. 'What could we possibly have in common? And how could I set up such a meeting without her guessing that something strange lay behind my interest?'

'Hire the cleaning firm she works for... I'm sure if you think about it, you'll come up with other ideas,' Socrates Seferis asserted confidently. 'I know it's a big favour and that you're very busy but I don't have anyone else I could ask or trust. Do I approach my son—her uncle—or one of her untrustworthy cousins to take care of this for me?'

'No, that would not be fair. They would view another family member coming out of the woodwork as competition.'

'Exactly.' Socrates looked relieved by the younger man's quick understanding. 'I will be deeply in your debt if you take care of this matter for me. If Rose's namesake turns out to be greedy or dishonest you need never tell me the unsavoury details. I only need to know if she's a worthwhile risk.'

'I'll consider it,' Alexius pronounced grudgingly.

'Don't take too long—I'm not getting any younger,' Socrates warned him.

'Is there something I should know about?' Alexius prompted tautly, worried that Socrates had health concerns that he was keeping secret. Alexius was touched by the faith the older man had in his judgement but he still didn't want the job, which sixth sense warned him would be a solid gold poisoned chalice. 'You have other friends—'

'None as shrewd or experienced as you are with women,' Socrates countered gravely. 'You will know her for what she is. I'm convinced she won't succeed in pulling the wool over your eyes.'

Alexius finally lifted his drink and sighed, 'I'll think this over. Are you well?'

The old man gave him a stubborn appraisal. 'There is nothing that you need worry about.'

Nonetheless, Alexius was filled with concern, but the closed look of obstinacy on Socrates's face kept him

from demanding answers to that laden assurance. He was already disconcerted by Socrates's abnormally frank speech. His godfather had buried his pride and virtually bared his soul when he openly admitted for the first time what a disappointment his three adult children had proved to be. Alexius perfectly understood that the old man did not want to add another idle freeloader to his family circle, but he could not approve o...

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Irene Vaughan:

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