



Holiday by Design (The Hunt for Cinderella Book 9)

By Patricia Kay



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She was like a fresh breeze to his all-work, no-play life. And though Marcus appreciated her carefree lifestyle, he knew Joanna would have to change to fit into his world. Yet by asking her to become someone she was not, would Marcus lose the things he cherished in her the most? Or would he finally learn to loosen his tie—and open his heart?

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Holiday by Design (The Hunt for Cinderella Book 9) By Patricia Kay Bibliography

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Formerly writing as Trisha Alexander, Patricia Kay is a USA TODAY bestselling author of more than forty-eight novels of contemporary romance and women's fiction. She lives in Houston, Texas. To learn more about her, visit her website at www.patriciakay.com.

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"Happy birthday, dear Joanna...happy birthday to youuu."

As the Spinelli family raised their glasses in a birthday toast, Joanna smiled at the gathered clan and hoped it didn't show that her heart wasn't in it.

Thirty years old.

Today she was thirty years old, and on this milestone birthday, instead of being well on her way to a successful career in fashion design, married to the man of her dreams and—at the very least—pregnant with her first child, she was still struggling for recognition in her chosen field, still employed as a part-time assistant to her former lover—who had dumped her less than two weeks ago!—and she was so far from being pregnant with any child she might as well forget about ever becoming a mom.

My life needs a major overhaul. Oh, who am I kidding? My life needs a miracle.

And tonight, adding insult to insult, she didn't even have a date. But her state of woe wasn't her family's fault, was it? So she had been doing her best to look cheerful and happy to be here with them tonight. And heaven knew, they'd tried to make her feel good. Her mom had knitted Joanna a gorgeous, dark red, oversize cashmere shawl—perfect for chilly Seattle fall weather—and her dad, always generous toward his one and only daughter, had given her a hundred-dollar gift card, while her four brothers had pitched in to buy her an iPad, which was incredibly sweet of them.

In fact, she still couldn't believe they'd done it. She could hardly wait to buy some design software she'd been eyeing. Now she'd be able to work no matter where she was without having to lug her heavier laptop.

And then there was Granny Carmela, her dad's mom, who had tucked a check for five hundred dollars into her card. Bless Granny, Joanna thought as she gave her eighty-six-year-old grandmother an extra hug. Such a loving, generous gift. If only five hundred dollars would solve Joanna's financial problems...but that was another story, one Joanna didn't want to even think about today. She subscribed to Scarlett O'Hara's philosophy that anything bad could be thought about tomorrow.

Her family was a good bunch, for all that she complained about her dad's controlling ways and her mom's seeming subservience and the way her brothers sometimes acted like neanderthals. But what were families for, if not to bear the brunt of complaints? Who better to blame when your life went offtrack?

"Who wants a slice of cake?" her mother asked with an eager smile.

"Make mine a wedge," said Tony, Joanna's oldest brother.

"Tony," his wife, Sharon, warned, looking meaningfully at his waistline.

"I know, I know." He grinned. "German chocolate's my favorite, Share."

"Everything's your favorite," she grumbled.

"I'll be good tomorrow. I promise."

They all laughed. Tony's promises concerning food were rarely serious. Or adhered to.

After cake and their favorite MORA ice cream had been consumed, Joanna figured she'd stayed the obligatory amount of time and could now leave without hurting her mother's feelings.

"Oh, honey, I thought you were going to spend the night," her mother protested, dark eyes filled with disappointment.

Joanna's parents lived in the same small house in Georgetown that they'd lived in since the day they bought it. Located south of Seattle, their area was the oldest residential neighborhood in the city and had been a great place to grow up in. "Can't, Mom. I need to get an early start tomorrow."

"But, honey...tomorrow's Thursday. You're off on Thursdays."

Joanna had an arrangement with her former lover/ boss. She only worked four days a week. She would have preferred having her three days off in a row, but beggars couldn't be choosers, and her job not only paid well but gave her full benefits. "Yes, but."

"Ann Marie, give the girl a break," Joanna's father said.

"But, Tony, she is off, and I thought we could—"

"I meant I have to work on my collection," Joanna said, interrupting her mother. She desperately needed to have at least twelve designs ready to show, and possibly more—if she could find a place to show them, of course—and right now she only had nine completed and had only just begun to work on the tenth.

Of course, if she didn't manage to raise more money—that five-hundred-dollar birthday gift would barely pay a third of what she already owed on her Visa card—she was gonna be dead in the water.

Pushing her dismal thoughts out of her mind, Joanna managed to keep a smile on her face as she said her goodbyes and gathered up her gifts. The drive to her small apartment in Tremont, a convenient area she loved for its eclectic atmosphere, only took about twenty minutes.

Still, it was midnight before she fell into bed—actually, her sofa—and when the alarm went off at six, she groaned, sorely tempted to shut it off and go back to sleep for another hour or two. Tabitha, her ten-year-old gray cat, obviously felt the same way, for she burrowed under Joanna's abandoned pillow and shut her eyes again.

Still half-asleep, Joanna stumbled her way into her minuscule kitchenette and turned on the coffeemaker. After filling Tabitha's food bowl and putting out fresh water for her, Joanna headed for the shower. An hour later, dressed in jeans and a warm sweater—as usual, mid-September in the Pacific Northwest was a true

harbinger of winter—thick socks and her favorite clogs, she headed to her converted living room and her worktable where she had a gorgeous piece of sea-green velvet.

Joanna sipped at her coffee and smiled. Despite the early rising time, it was great to have a whole day to work on her designs. So what if she was thirty years old and hadn't yet met her goals? Thirty wasn't the end of the world. Depending on how you thought of it, thirty was actually a beginning. So what if she was going to run out of money soon? She'd manage. She always did. And she'd never had to ask her parents for money, although Lord knows, she'd thought about it. But they didn't have a lot, and they were getting older. Each time she'd been tempted to approach them, she'd stopped herself. They'd done enough for her in helping her pay her college and art school costs.

Soon she was so engrossed in the creation of her new design, the hours flew by. It was only when her stomach rumbled in hunger that she finally stopped working. Glancing at the clock, she was shocked to realize it was almost three. Her fridge yielded tuna salad that still smelled okay, so she fixed a sandwich and cut up an apple to go with it, then headed back to the dress form, where the velvet wasn't draping quite the way she'd hoped.

Maybe the velvet had been a mistake. For this collection, she'd chosen to work with lighter, more forgiving fabrics—chiffons, silks, laces and the like. But the velvet had virtually cried out to be made into a one-shoulder, floor-length evening dress. The moment she'd seen it, she'd pictured it worn by Prince William's beautiful wife. In fact, Joanna had a large photo of the duchess tacked onto her enormous bulletin board—a constant reminder of the effect she hoped to achieve and the kind of woman she hoped to attract as a client.

She was halfway through her late lunch when her cell rang. The ring tone announced the call was from Georgie Prince, her BFF.

"Hey, girl," Georgie said.

"Hey." Knowing a call from Georgie always stretched to at least half an hour, Joanna sank onto a kitchen chair and put her feet up on its neighbor.

"What're you up to today?" Georgie asked. "Working on that new design."

"The one you emailed me?"

"Yep."

"Oh, Joanna, it's gorgeous. You know, I wish you'd make that dress for me. It'd be perfect for the holidays. Zach and I have several parties, and I'd love to have that dress for at least one of them."

Joanna sat up. "Really? You're serious?"

"Never more. I absolutely love it."

"I'd love to make it for you. How soon would you need it?"

"Middle of November. Is that doable?"

"I'll make it doable."

"So, how'd the party go last night?"

Joanna sighed. "It was nice."

"You don't sound sure."

"No, it really was. The boys gave me an iPad. And my mom knitted me the most beautiful cashmere shawl." Joanna's mother had recently bought out her longtime employer, and now was the proud owner of a small yarn shop.

"Red?"

Joanna laughed. "Yes, red."

"Your mother never stops trying, does she?"

Georgie was referring to the fact that Joanna preferred to wear black. Even today her jeans were black, as was her sweater.

"She keeps thinking she'll change me," Joanna said.

"Just like my mom," Georgie said.

Joanna refrained from saying what she was thinking, that Georgie *had* changed, that Cornelia Fairchild Hunt, Georgie's mother, had been right all along, whereas she, Joanna, was never going to be other than who she was, no matter who might prefer her to be different.

"So, are you feeling any better about the big three-oh now?" Georgie asked.

"Yeah, I've decided I'm fine with being thirty." Yet even as she said it, Joanna knew her earlier pep talk to herself had begun to wear off. "I just wish I had more to look forward to," she added in a burst of honesty. This was not something she would have admitted to anyone other than Georgie.

"Oh, stop that. You have your whole life to look forward to."

"Said by a woman who's already got a fantastic career, not to mention a real, live Prince Charming." Joanna hated the tinge of envy in her voice, because she was genuinely happy for her best friend. Zach Prince was perfect for Georgie, and Joanna had loved him the moment she'd met him.

"You're going to have a fabulous career, and it'll be much more exciting than mine," Georgie said. "And as far as that perfect guy goes, it's going to happen for you, too, and probably when you least expect it. I know I certainly didn't expect it."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sure you're right. Don't pay any attention to me. I guess I'm just tired right now. And discouraged."

"Did you go to Pacific Savings like I suggested?" Georgie asked.

"I went yesterday on my lunch hour. And I chalked up my fifteenth 'no' in as many days."

Georgie fell silent for a moment. Then she said, "Maybe I could get Harry to call Pacific Savings."

"No! Don't you dare ask him to call them." Joanna might be temporarily discouraged, but she had pride. Harry Hunt, the billionaire Seattle legend who had recently married Georgie's mother, didn't even know her. Well, he might know who she was, and that she was Georgie's friend, but otherwise, she was a stranger to him. If Joanna wouldn't even ask her own father for help, she certainly wasn't going to go begging to Harry Hunt!

"Harry wouldn't mind," Georgie said.

"Maybe not. But I mind."

"You're so stubborn. Everyone needs a little help sometimes."

"Spoken by the woman who would have strangled anyone who tried to help her in the past."

There was silence for a moment. Then Georgie said,

"What will you do?"

Joanna grimaced. "I really don't have a choice."

"You'll keep working for Chick?"

"I don't want to, but I also don't want to try to find another job, either. I mean, how many part-time jobs can there be that pay as well as mine?"

"I don't want you to keep working for Chick, either," Georgie said fiercely. "He's a total jerk."

"I realize that now. I seem to attract that kind of person. In lovers and in bosses." Joanna was grateful Georgie was a good enough friend she never rubbed Joanna's nose in the fact that she'd warned her against getting involved with both Chick and Ivan Klemenko—a designer she'd done some work for who'd stolen her ideas and passed them off as his own—from day one. And Joanna, as usual, had willfully gone her own way...and paid the price. She sighed heavily. What was done was done. And nothing was going to change the past now. "Look, that's enough about me. Let's talk about you for a change."

For the next ten minutes, Georgie filled Joanna in on the doings in the Prince household. Finally, when Joanna was about to say she'd better get back to work, Georgie said, "I have something else to tell you. But you have to promise you won't laugh."

"Laugh? Why would I laugh? What have you done now?"

"Well, after all the years I've said I didn't want children." Georgie's voice trailed off.

It took a few seconds for the import of Georgie's statement to sink in. Then Joanna squealed. "Georgie! Are you pregnant? I don't believe it!"

Georgie laughed, the sound filled with joy. "I know. I don't believe it, either."

"Oh, Georgie, that's wonderful." Joanna told herself she was not jealous. She did not begrudge this to her friend. "How...how far along are you?" Georgie and Zach had been married in April.

"A little over three months. I went to the doctor yesterday."

"Wow."

"Yes. Wow."

"You're happy, aren't you?"

"Oh, Joanna, I'm so happy I can't believe it. We haven't told anyone yet except my mom, not even the children." Zach had three children from his previous marriage. The youngest, Emma, was just four. The oldest, Katie, was eleven. Remembering how unhappy Katie had been at first, before Georgie had won her over, Joanna said, "What do you think Katie will say?"

"I don't know. I'm a little worried, to tell you the truth."

"I'll bet she'll be fine. Most girls love having a little sister."

"Except she already has a little sister."

"I know, but think about yourself. You have three younger sisters, and you once told me you were thrilled about every one of them."

They talked another ten minutes about the baby, which was due the middle of March, and about how the velvet gown could work even around a baby bump, then began to say their goodbyes. Before hanging up, Georgie said, "Hang in there, Jo."

Joanna made a face. "I will. Actually, on Monday, I plan to visit Up and Coming, that gallery I told you about. Who knows? They might agree to let me show my collection there, and then maybe one of the banks will change its mind and lend me the money I need." She made a face. "Yeah, and I'll probably win the lottery, too."

"See? I knew you'd come up with another idea," Georgie said, completely ignoring Joanna's attempt at dark humor. "And if the gallery and loan don't work out for you, Zach and I will be happy to finance the rest of the collection."

"I know. You've already told me that. But I can't let you do that, Georgie. What if." But Joanna couldn't give voice to her greatest fear, not even to Georgie.

"Do not say it, Joanna! You will not fail. Your collection will be a huge hit. Huge. Listen, I know fashion. So do my sisters. And we all love your clothes."

With that ringing endorsement still reverberating in her ears, Joanna said goodbye. But the moment the connection was broken, her spirits flagged again. Yes, Georgie and her sisters did love her clothes, but they were prejudiced.

So even if the owner of Up and Coming said yes to her on Monday, and even if one of the banks did change

its mind and lend her the money to finish the collection, she could still fail.

As soon as the thought formed, she got mad at herself. What was wrong with her? Why was she even entertaining such a negative idea? She was not and never had been a negative person. She was a chance taker. She believed in herself and in her talent.

Georgie was right. She would succeed!

No matter what it took.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Loya:

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