



His Lover's Little Secret & Princess in the Making (Harlequin Billionaires and Babies Collection)

By Andrea Laurence, Michelle Celmer

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Two classic stories of powerful men...wrapped around their babies' little fingers

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Andrea Laurence is an award winning contemporary author who has been a lover of books and writing stories since she learned to read. She always dreamed of seeing her work in print and is thrilled to be able to share her books with the world. A dedicated West Coast girl transplanted into the Deep South, she's working on her own "happily ever after" with her boyfriend and five fur-babies. You can contact Andrea at her website: <http://www.andrealaurence.com>.

USA Today Bestseller Michelle Celmer is the author of more than 25 books for Harlequin and Silhouette. You can usually find her in her office with her laptop loving the fact that she gets to work in her pajamas. Write her at: PO BOX 300, Clawson, MI 48017, visit her website at: www.michellecelmer.com or find her on Facebook at: Michelle Celmer Author

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"You'd better get on out of here, or you'll be late to stand on your head."

Sabine Hayes looked up from the cash drawer to see her boss, fashion designer Adrienne Lockhart Taylor, standing at the counter. She had worked for Adrienne the past thirteen months as manager of her boutique. "I'm almost done."

"Give me the nightly deposit and go. I'll stay until Jill shows up for her shift and then I'll stop by the bank on my way home. You have to pick up Jared by six, don't you?"

"Yes." The day care center would price gouge her for every minute she was late. Then she had to get Jared home and fed before the babysitter got there. Sabine loved teaching yoga, but it made those evenings even more hectic than usual. Single motherhood wasn't for wimps. "You don't mind making the deposit?"

Adrienne leaned across the counter. "Go," she said.

Sabine glanced quickly at her watch. "Okay." She put the deposit into the bank pouch and handed it over. Thank goodness Adrienne had come by this afternoon to put together the new window display. The trendy boutique was known for its exciting and edgy displays that perfectly showcased Adrienne's flair for modern pinup girl fashions. Sabine couldn't have found a better place to work.

Most places wouldn't look twice at an applicant with a nose piercing and a stripe of blue in her hair. It didn't matter that it was a small, tasteful diamond stud or that her hair was dyed at a nice salon in Brooklyn. Even after she'd bitten the bullet and had the bright color removed and left the piercing at home, she'd been turned down by every store on Fifth Avenue. The businesses that paid enough for her to support her son in New York were flooded with applicants more experienced than she was.

She thanked her lucky stars for the day she spied Adrienne walking down the street and complimented her dress. She never expected her to say she'd designed it herself. Adrienne invited her to come by her new boutique one afternoon, and Sabine was enamored with the whole place. It was fun and funky, chic and stylish. High-class fashion with an edge. When Adrienne mentioned she was looking for someone to run the store so she could focus on her designs, Sabine couldn't apply fast enough. Not only was it a great job with above-average pay and benefits, Adrienne was a great boss. She didn't care what color hair Sabine had—now she had purple highlights—and she was understanding when child illness or drama kept her away from the store.

Sabine grabbed her purse and gave a quick wave to Adrienne as she disappeared into the stockroom and out the back door. It was only a couple blocks to her son's day care, but she still had to hurry along the sidewalk, brushing past others who were leisurely making their way around town.

Finally rounding the last corner, Sabine swung open the gate to the small courtyard and leaped up the few steps to the door. She rang the buzzer at exactly three minutes to six. Not long after that, she had her toddler in her arms and was on her way to the subway.

"Hey, buddy," she said as they went down the street. "Did you have a good day?"

Jared grinned and nodded enthusiastically. He was starting to lose his chubby baby cheeks. He'd grown so much the past few months. Every day, he looked more and more like his father. The first time she'd held Jared in her arms, she looked into his dark brown eyes and saw Gavin's face staring back at her. He would grow up to be as devastatingly handsome as his father, but hopefully with Sabine's big heart. She should be able to contribute *something* to the genetic makeup of her child, and if she had her pick, that was what it would be.

"What do you want for dinner tonight?"

"A-sketti."

"Spaghetti, again? You had that last night. You're going to turn into a noodle before too long."

Jared giggled and clung to her neck. Sabine breathed in the scent of his baby shampoo and pressed a kiss against his forehead. He had changed her whole life and she wouldn't trade him for anything.

"Sabine?"

The subway entrance was nearly in sight when someone called her name from the restaurant she'd just passed. She stopped and turned to find a man in a navy suit drinking wine at one of the tables on the sidewalk. He looked familiar, but she couldn't come up with his name. Where did she know him from?

"It is you," he said, standing up and stepping toward her. He took one look at her puzzled expression and smiled. "You don't remember me, do you? I'm Clay Oliver, a friend of Gavin's. I met you at a gallery opening a couple years back."

An icy surge rushed through Sabine's veins. She smiled and nodded, trying not to show any outward signs of distress. "Oh, yes," she said. She shifted Jared in her arms so he was facing away from his father's best friend. "I think I spilled champagne on you, right?"

"Yes!" he said, pleased she remembered. "How have you been?" Clay's gaze ran curiously over the child in her arms. "Busy, I see."

"Yes, very busy." Sabine's heart began pounding loudly in her chest. She glanced over her shoulder at the subway stop, desperate for an escape. "Listen, I'm sorry I can't stay to chat longer, but I've got to meet the babysitter. It was good to see you again, Clay. Take care."

Sabine gave him a quick wave and spun on her heel. She felt as if she was fleeing the scene of a crime as she dashed down the stairs. She nervously watched the people joining her on the platform. Clay wouldn't follow her. At least she didn't think so. But she wouldn't feel better until she was deep into Brooklyn and far out of Gavin's sphere of influence.

Had Clay seen Jared closely enough? Had he noticed the resemblance? Jared was wearing his favorite monkey T-shirt with a hood and ears, so perhaps Clay hadn't been able to make out his features or how old he was. She hoped.

She leaped onto the train the moment it arrived and managed to find a seat. Clutching Jared tightly as he sat in her lap, she tried to breathe deeply, but she just couldn't do it.

Nearly three years. Jared was fewer than two months from his second birthday, and she had managed to keep their son a secret from Gavin. In all this time she'd never run into him or anyone he knew. They didn't exactly move in the same social circles. That was part of why she'd broken it off with Gavin. They were a world apart. Unsuitable in every way. After she split with him, he'd never called or texted her again. He obviously wasn't missing her too badly.

But Sabine had never allowed herself to relax. She knew that sooner or later, Gavin would find out that he had a son. If Clay didn't tell him tonight, it would be the next time she bumped into someone Gavin knew. Sitting in the park, walking down the street...somebody would see Jared and know instantly that he was Gavin's son. The bigger he got, the more of a carbon copy of his father he became.

Then it was only a matter of time before Gavin showed up, angry and demanding. That was how he worked. He always got his way. At least until now. The only thing Sabine knew for certain was that he wouldn't win this time. Jared was her son. *Hers*. Gavin was a workaholic and wouldn't have a clue what to do with a child. She wasn't about to turn him over to the stuffy nannies and boarding schools that had raised Gavin instead of his parents.

As the train approached their stop, Sabine got up and they hurried to catch the bus that would take them the last few blocks to her apartment near Marine Park in Brooklyn, where she'd lived the past four years. It wasn't the fanciest place in the world, but it was relatively safe, clean and close to the grocery store and the park. The one-bedroom apartment was growing smaller as Jared grew older, but they were managing.

Originally, a large portion of the bedroom was used as her art studio. When her son came along, she packed up her canvases and put her artistic skills toward painting a cheerful mural over his crib. Jared had plenty of room to play, and there was a park down the street where he could run around and dig in the sandbox. Her next-door neighbor, Tina, would watch Jared when she had her evening yoga classes.

She had put together a pretty good life for her and Jared. Considering that when she moved to New York she was broke and homeless, she'd come quite a long way. Back then, she could live on meager waitressing tips and work on her paintings when she had the extra money for supplies. Now, she had to squeeze out every

penny she could manage, but they had gotten by.

"A-sketti!" Jared cheered triumphantly as they came through the door.

"Okay. I'll make a-sketti." Sabine sat him down before switching the television on to his favorite show. It would mesmerize him with songs and funny dances while she cooked.

By the time Jared was done eating and Sabine was changed into her workout clothes, she had only minutes to spare before Tina arrived. If she was lucky, Tina would give Jared a bath and scrub the tomato sauce off his cheeks. Usually, she had him in his pajamas and in bed by the time Sabine got home. Sabine hated that he would be asleep when she returned, but going through his nightly routine after class would have Jared up way past his bedtime. He'd wake up at dawn no matter what, but he'd be cranky.

There was a sharp knock at the door. Tina was a little early. That was fine by her. If she could catch the earlier bus, it would give her enough time to get some good stretches in before class.

"Hey, Tina—" she said, whipping open the door and momentarily freezing when her petite, middle-aged neighbor was not standing in the hallway.

No. No, no, no. She wasn't ready to deal with this. Not yet. Not tonight.

It was Gavin.

Sabine clutched desperately at the door frame, needing its support to keep her upright as the world started tilting sharply on its axis. Her chest tightened; her stomach churned and threatened to return her dinner. At the same time, other long-ignored parts of her body immediately sparked back to life. Gavin had always been a master of her body, and the years hadn't dulled the memory of his touch.

Fear. Desire. Panic. Need. It all swirled inside her like a building maelstrom that would leave nothing but destruction in its path. She took a deep breath to clamp it all down. She couldn't let Gavin know she was freaking out. She certainly couldn't let him know she still responded to him, either. That would give him the upper hand. She plastered a wide smile across her face and choked down her emotions.

"Hello, Sabine," he said with the deep, familiar voice she remembered.

It was hard to believe the handsome and rich blast from her past was standing in front of her after all this time. His flawlessly tailored gray suit and shiny, sky-blue tie made him look every inch the powerful CEO of the BXS shipping empire. His dark eyes were trained on her, his gaze traveling down the line of his nose. He looked a little older than she remembered, with concern lining his eyes and furrowing his brow. Or maybe it was the tense, angry expression that aged him.

"Gavin!" she said with feigned surprise. "I certainly didn't expect to see you here. I thought you were my neighbor Tina. How have you—"

"Where is my son?" he demanded, interrupting her nervous twitter. His square jaw was rock hard, his sensual lips pressed into a hard line of disapproval. There had been a flash of that same expression when she'd left him all those years ago, but he'd quickly grown indifferent to it. Now he cared. But not about her. Only about their child.

Apparently news traveled fast. It had been fewer than two hours since she'd run into Clay.

"Your son?" she repeated, hoping to stall long enough to think of a plan. She'd had years to prepare for this moment and yet, when it arrived, she was thrown completely off guard. Moving quickly, Sabine rushed into the hallway and pulled the apartment door nearly closed behind her. She left just the slightest crack open so she could peek through and make sure Jared was okay. She pressed her back against the door frame and found it calmed her nerves just a little to have that barrier between Gavin and Jared. He'd have to go through her to get inside.

"Yes, Sabine," Gavin said, taking a step closer to her. "Where is the baby you've hidden from me for the last three years?"

Damn, she was still as beautiful as he remembered. A little older, a little curvier, but still the fresh, funky artist that had turned his head in that art gallery. And tonight, she was wearing some skimpy workout clothes that clung to every newly rounded curve and reminded him of what he'd been missing since she'd walked out on him.

People tended not to stay in Gavin's life very long. There had been a parade of nannies, tutors, friends and lovers his whole life as his parents hired and fired and then moved him from one private school to the next. The dark-haired beauty with the nose piercing had been no exception. She had walked out of his life without a second thought.

She'd said they weren't compatible in the long term because they had different priorities and different lives. Admittedly, they fell on opposite ends of the spectrum in most every category, but that was one of the things he'd been drawn to in Sabine. One of the reasons he thought she, of all people, might stay. She wasn't just another rich girl looking to marry well and shop often. What they had really seemed to matter. To mean something.

He'd been wrong.

He'd let her go—he'd learned early that there was no sense in chasing after someone who didn't want to be there—but she'd stayed on his mind. She'd starred in his dreams, both erotic and otherwise. She'd crept into his thoughts during the quiet moments when he had time to regret the past. More than once, Gavin had wondered what Sabine was up to and what she had done with her life.

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect the answer to be "raising his child."

Sabine straightened her spine, her sharp chin tipping up in defiance. She projected an air of confidence in any situation and had the steel backbone to stand behind it. She certainly had spunk; he'd loved that about her once. Now, he could tell it would be an annoyance.

She looked him straight in the eye and said, "He's inside. And right now, that's where he's staying."

Users Review

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