



FREE READ

FOLLOW
THAT
Dream

Shelley Munro

Follow That Dream

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Chapter One

Sean MacNamara watched the woman from the moment her Mazda roared into the parking area of the reserve. She drove her car like a tank on battle maneuvers. Aggressive. Hunched over the wheel, with an air of total concentration, and a manner that warned anyone with a scrap of sense to *back off*. The scrapes and dents on the old tan-colored car bore mute testimony to the attitude. As he watched, she climbed from the car and stretched her hands above her head. Sean's hormones stuttered and jumped to attention with a crisp salute.

Curvy. Feminine. *Very nice*, he acknowledged in a silent whistle of appreciation.

A real woman. The sort Sean wished he'd meet but never found amongst the endless parade of fashionable beanpoles in the music business.

She opened the rear door and dragged out a huge cane picnic basket. Sean wondered if she intended to camp out in the reserve for the day. As much as he was enjoying the visual feast, he craved solitude, and this spot overlooking the ruffled waters of Auckland harbor appealed to his need for space.

He didn't want to share.

Sean twitched the black coat around his body, checked his black wig sat straight and observed her progress through narrowed eyes.

The woman attacked the hill at a steady pace. She hadn't seen him yet because every now and then, she stopped to sniff the air and stare at the view. Now that she was closer, she appeared older than his initial guess. Close to his own age of thirty, maybe a year or two older. A cap of dark brown curls danced about her head in the slight breeze, and he heard a soft chuckle as she paused to watch a tiny bird flit from branch to branch.

Sean slouched on the wooden bench and closed his eyes, still reluctant to share this peaceful oasis with anyone. Maybe she'd take the hint and leave him alone.

A feminine shriek of surprise jerked him to full alertness. He straightened, his eyes now wide open. The cry could only have come from the woman. Where the devil was she? He couldn't see her, but he could certainly hear her. Interesting turn of speech the little lady had.

A head poked into view, and his lips twitched. He glanced down at the patch of fragrant mud decorating the hem of his woolen coat. She must have fallen face first in the mud in the same way he had, in almost the same place. Cautiously, he sat upright to check she was okay.

The first thing he noted was the length of slender white leg, then his eyes lit on one pale buttock cheek. He sucked in a hasty breath.

Good God! The woman wasn't wearing underwear.

Sean wondered about the protocol in a situation like this. In two minds whether he should offer to help, he was relieved to see her roll to one side. His gaze remained glued to the woman's butt.

Round and soft.

Long fingers flexed with the need to touch, and he sighed. Sean thought hard but couldn't remember the last time he'd held a woman or lost himself in her warm softness. He grimaced. Not that the public would ever believe he'd been celibate for so long. Not with all the stories about his alleged lovers in the press. Yeah, experience had shown Sean fame had a flip side, with sharp teeth capable of inflicting serious wounds to the unwary so celibate he remained.

The woman kept up a constant stream of low muttering. A pity he sat too far away to overhear. He caught a flash of red when she pushed to her feet.

A G-string, he thought in enlightenment. His gaze flew upward to study her ample chest. What would a G-string wearing woman have under her close fitting jumper? Besides the obvious, of course. He grinned at the direction of his thoughts, sighing when the woman flicked her skirt down, hiding the shapely legs from sight.

She glared at the slight hill, and Sean hurriedly slouched back on the bench, shoved his dark sunglasses on and closed his eyes. He found he didn't object sharing his bench after all, not with this fascinating woman. He didn't mind one bit.

* * * * *

Someone occupied the bench.

Her bench.

Rose Tramfield slid a mutinous glare toward the interloper, pulling up short when she realized he was asleep.

Bother.

This was her bench.

Her eyes narrowed with an uncharacteristic flash of temper. A homeless person, judging from his scruffy appearance. Was nothing going to go right today? Her mouth flattened with determination. There was no way on earth she intended to relocate.

No way.

He'd have to go.

Determination etched into her face. Rose stomped the short distance in record time. She thumped her picnic basket onto the middle of the wooden bench and planted herself on the remaining space.

The man didn't wake. He didn't budge so much as an inch. Rose eyed him uneasily and wondered if he was alive.

Then to her relief, a sharp snore erupted from the scruffy man.

"Men," Rose muttered. "Every damn problem in my life starts with a man."

* * * * *

Sean heard footsteps over the lazy drone of insects, then a pause, probably when she spotted him. A gusty sigh sounded, and not a happy one. The thump of the picnic basket on the bench beside him confirmed his thought. He wanted to peek but forced his body to stillness and quashed his inclination to laugh. Somehow, he didn't think this feisty little lady would appreciate the humor of the situation — certainly not as much as him.

The warmth of the sun helped Sean relax more than he had for months. A few hours ago, he'd moved into Falconers, the small, exclusive bed and breakfast in Parnell owned and run by his two aunts. He'd promised to help with the heavy chores while he considered his future. Maybe, he mused, he'd meet a woman, someone normal who would love him and not his bank balance. A snort escaped. *Now that would make a change.*

A wife. A child or two. A home. He smiled at the old-fashioned idea. Dreams for now but not impossible.

He choked back a laugh of real amusement. He'd have to clean up a bit before he looked for a wife. So far, his disguise had worked a treat. He looked...eccentric to say the least. The people he'd met so far this morning had scuttled out of his way like frightened beetles, careful to give him plenty of space. Apart from this little lady.

"Pregnant! I can't believe he was so stupid."

Sean started and cracked his eyelids open in surprise. Interesting. From the quick glimpse he'd seen, she hadn't looked as though she expected a child. A surge of disappointment replaced his surprise. He realized that stupidly he'd visualized this woman at his side, with his child. Just like that, even though he didn't know her. His spirits drooped momentarily before he decided jet-lag had done a number on his brain.

Who was stupid? he thought belatedly.

"Everything was planned." Her voice contained a mixture of hurt, fury and resignation that called to him and made him want to offer comfort.

The woman stirred, and Sean thought for a moment she knew he was awake. Instead she opened the picnic basket and pulled out a chocolate bar.

"I swear I'm going to murder him. I explained the facts of life to him. Clearly. Concisely. But did that stop him opening his zipper? No!"

Murder? Zipper? Sean's mind flirted with the possibilities and realized he hadn't enjoyed himself so much for ages.

The woman attacked the chocolate wrapper and appeared to have forgotten his existence, so he surveyed her at leisure through narrowed eyes. Not that tall. She would reach up to his chin at a push. Light blue eyes were set in a pale face and framed by dark brown curls. A wide, vulnerable mouth attracted his attention and made Sean crave to touch, to see if it felt as soft and luscious as it looked. A pair of slender, shapely legs. *Oh yeah.* How could he forget the delectably rounded butt and the interesting taste in underwear? And the wide vocabulary. Colorful too. In short, she seemed a bit of a spitfire. The stir of interest in his mind matched the unexpected arousal in his body.

"I gave him condoms," she muttered. "Bloody hell! This is the worst birthday ever."

Sean came to a decision. He opened his mouth in a huge yawn and stretched like his mother's Persian cat. "Did I hear right? Is it your birthday? Happy birthday."

"Did I wake you?" She fluttered her eyelashes in a pretty apology, but the mutinous glint in her eyes told him the little lady wasn't one bit sorry.

Amusement surfaced and his lips twitched. She might want him to leave but possession gave him rights. He refused to budge.

"No problem," he replied easily. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"You're American."

"No kidding," he drawled, shooting a grin in her direction. "How did you work that out?"

She sniffed and looked him up and down. Sean tensed as her gaze skimmed his body. He willed his muscles to relax, and his breath eased out when luck smiled with cooperation.

"You're homeless," she said. "Why aren't you homeless in America?"

Sean couldn't help laughing. He knew he didn't look his best; he'd done that on purpose.

"Well?" she demanded.

He looked her straight in the eye. "My father was born in New Zealand. I have dual citizenship."

"So?"

He sighed and tried again. "I'm in disguise."

She sent him a suspicious look and edged away, putting an inch more between them. "You're not a bank robber or something, are you?"

"No, I'm a pop star."

This time she laughed outright, her dark brows flying upward in disbelief. "Yeah, right."

Sean shrugged. He'd tried. He'd told the truth, and she didn't believe him. He grinned back. A normal conversation, even if it was with this abrasive-tongued woman, was a gold nugget to treasure. He'd suffered more than his share of stuttering, red-faced fans who had difficulty stringing more than two words together in his presence. This chatter made a refreshing change.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Rob..." Damn! A *slip*. Had she noticed his hesitation? "What's yours?" he asked hurriedly.

"Rose Alice Tramfield."

She glared at him in a manner that had him worried. Had she noticed his foot-in-mouth disease or had he missed the punch line?

"Go on," she said. "Say it."

Sean didn't have to pretend confusion. "What?"

"R. A. T," she said with another glare. "For goodness sake! My initials spell 'rat'. You know – rodent. *Rat*."

"And you're telling me because?" There was something afoot here that he didn't comprehend.

"Because it's my birthday. I'm having a rotten day, and I thought I'd give you a free shot! My initials have always spelt rat. Even before I married." She paused to look at her feet. "The other kids used to tease me at school. I should have known to steer clear of the T's," she ended with a glower.

"Rose is a nice name."

Her head jerked up, and she stared at him with clear suspicion. "Thanks," she muttered.

"So, how old are you today?"

"Forty."

There was no pretence in the instant reply. Sean blinked. This woman was forty? "You don't look that old," he blurted.

"Thanks, but I really am forty. Old enough to have a grandchild. My son is pregnant."

Sean's good mood took a nosedive. Married with children. Just his luck. He forced a grin. "A medical breakthrough," he marveled.

"Don't be obtuse! Of course Mark isn't pregnant," she snapped. "His girlfriend is."

"Oh."

"Oh, is right," Rose said through gritted teeth. She glanced at her watch and waved at an elderly couple who walked past. "Bother, I don't care if it's only ten thirty in the morning. I'm having a drink. Believe me, after the morning I've had, I need it." She seized a bottle of Chardonnay from her basket and opened the bottle with a corkscrew she produced from her battered leather handbag. Then she rummaged inside the basket and pulled out two wine glasses, filling them both to the brim.

"Here." She thrust one of the glasses at him. "You have some. Doesn't look as if Julie, my boss can make it. I have loads of food." She gestured at the basket. "No need for you to go hungry today."

Sean accepted the glass, touched she would worry about a homeless man. "Thank you. How many children do you have?" He found himself wanting to know more about Rose even though she was married.

"Two. Mark is twenty-one and my daughter, Sara, is seventeen."

Sean remained silent for a while, politeness fighting with intense curiosity. Good manners lost the battle. "A child bride."

"Huh!" Rose snorted.

Sean broke into a grin. His brows rose as he waited for her to continue. What gem would she come out with next?

"I married at eighteen, right out of school. *Tony Tramfield*. I should have known the letter T stood for trouble." Rose took a hefty slug of wine, another smaller sip, then reached for the bottle to top up her glass.

Well? Sean wanted to demand. He wanted to hear the rest of the story but forced himself to wait patiently in case he frightened her away.

Rose stared off to the horizon, seeming to weigh her words before speaking. "I had so many dreams when I met Tony. I wanted to travel to Paris and train as a chef..." She shrugged, putting her entire body into the movement. Sean stared and had to remind himself not to gawk. He jerked his coat back over his lap and struggled to find a comfortable position on the wooden park bench.

"What happened?"

She laughed, but the sound contained little amusement. "In a moment of blind passion, I forgot everything my mother told me. Tony and I married a few months later, then Mark arrived." She frowned at him. "I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I have work to do." She pulled out a notebook and pen and sent him a pointed look.

It was obvious she wanted him gone, but Sean was equally stubborn. "Don't mind me. I'm going to have a sleep."

"On another bench?"

"I'm happy to share," he said, smothering a chuckle at her blatant hint for him to move. He hadn't had so much fun for ages. Why should he move? Sean lay back and closed his eyes. Initially, he tried to snooze, but in the end, he sat there with his eyes closed listening to every move she made. The scratch of her pen on paper, the clink of the wine bottle against the glass and her soft, breathy sighs.

Man, those hot little sighs pushed the right buttons. Sean squirmed inside as his body stubbornly ignored his orders to stay cool. It didn't take much imagination on his part to change the setting, twist the circumstances... Sean shook himself mentally and changed the setting yet again. *Cold*. Something very chilly, he decided. This little lady was married and way out of bounds. She didn't need to know about his fantasies.

"I can't concentrate," she muttered.

And she wasn't the only one. The wintry place in his imagination wasn't quite cold enough.

"Do you feel like something to eat?"

Sean stretched his arms over his head and feigned a yawn while he lectured his disobedient body. "Huh?"

"Do you want something to eat?"

Oh yeah, baby – in a big, bad wolfish kind of way. Sean's lips quivered with the need to smirk. He manfully restrained it to a friendly grin. "I'm starving. I haven't eaten today."

Rose popped the lid off her basket. She pulled out a plastic plate and dumped a roast chicken leg, a spoonful of potato salad, and a large portion of green salad on it before handing it to him.

"Thanks." His stomach rumbled loud enough for Rose to hear, and he gave a sheepish grin.

"You should have said you were hungry," she muttered. "I suppose you miss a few meals, living the way you do."

Sean mumbled through a mouthful of food, his denial coming out as garble. He didn't like to lie. Deception was no way to start a relationship, but she hadn't believed him before. If he were in her shoes, he probably wouldn't believe him either. Given his appearance, he was lucky she deigned to sit on the same park bench. Sean searched his mind for a topic of conversation to break the silence that had fallen between them.

"Tell me about your children." He controlled his wince with difficulty. *Great going, MacNamara.* Trust him to pick a topic to remind him he was too late to claim Rose.

She glanced at him with defiant blue eyes. His pulse quickened while other parts of his body damn near saluted. "What did they buy you for your birthday?" he blurted. God, he hadn't felt this flustered since he was a teenager working up courage to kiss Peggy-Sue Reynolds in the back row of the movies.

"Apart from the pending grandchild?"

Sean's mouth curled into a relieved grin. "Apart from the grandchild."

“Sara gave me a basket of aromatherapy goodies and lingerie. Mark gave me movie passes and a bottle of wine.”

As soon as she uttered the word “lingerie”, his brain crashed to an abrupt halt, stuck on the concept of color. His gaze flickered over her body and flashed away before she caught him in the act. *What color? Red or some other color? What is your favorite color?*

“Sorry, what did you say your son gave you?” he asked with an air of desperation.

“Wine and movie passes.”

“That’s great.”

“Tart?”

Tart? Wearing red didn’t make her a tart. Sean blinked in confusion until she waved the lemon tart under his nose. “Lemon tart!” he said, enlightened. Huh, he’d better start paying attention. “Yes, please.”

Rose handed him a generous slice then bit into her own smaller piece. She uttered a sigh of pleasure and closed her eyes, savoring the taste. The small noise attracted Sean’s attention. His gaze lingered when her pink tongue darted out to gather a small crumb clinging to the corner of that generous mouth.

Sean’s unruly body shot to attention. Distraction. She was that all right, but he needed a different sort of diversion before he did something stupid. Like try to kiss her. Sean smothered a groan when the tip of her tongue snaked out again. She might be ten years older, but his initial interest had morphed to a major case of lust for the little lady. He’d always gotten on better with older women. He . . . communicated better with them.

“What about your husband?” he blurted.

Her attention snapped to him, and Sean was fiercely glad of the all-encompassing coat he wore.

“My husband?”

“Yeah. What did he buy you for your birthday?”

The pale blue eyes turned frosty, and her chin tilted upward in combat mode. “I’m divorced. And for the record, my husband hasn’t given me a birthday present for years. He’s too busy with his *teenage* friends.”

There was a God.

Sean forced back the triumphant shout itching his throat and studied his muddy boots. “No boyfriends?” He flicked a glance toward Rose and wondered if she could hear his heart pounding.

“No boyfriends,” she stated.

“Rose?”

“What?”

Her reply was hardly encouraging, but he forged ahead anyway. “Would you like to go out with me? To dinner?”

She tensed and looked him up and down, reminding him of his disguise. The nondescript jeans with frayed seams, the black wig, the scruffy beard, and the *pièce de*

résistance, the long black coat he'd purchased from an elderly man earlier this morning. All in the interests of disguise and deception.

Sean tried to hide the signs of panic clawing his insides. What an idiot! Any sane woman would run a mile if a man who looked as disreputable as him approached her. But no! He'd gone one better and compounded the error by asking her on a date.

"I told you before. I don't usually look like this," he said. "I'm trustworthy. My aunts will vouch for me."

Sean watched the expression on her face turn to one of distaste. A frigid glare froze him to the spot.

"Go out with you?" She shook her head emphatically. "No, thank you! *I don't go out with men.*"

Sean's jaw dropped as her terse reply registered. Surely she didn't mean she preferred women?

Please come back to download chapter two next month.

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