



A Moment on the Lips (Working It)

By Kate Hardy

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Dante Romano may be dark and delectable, but Carenza Tonielli will never sell him her family's ice cream empire. Only she *needs* him—to help her learn how to run it! And when Dante looks at her as if she's the next decadent sundae on the menu, even wary Carenza just can't resist mixing business with a bowlful of pleasure....

Cue one red-hot fling that's blowing her mind! But, unlike Carenza, her ice-cool Italian is adept at keeping his emotions well under wraps, so she decides to turn the tables on Dante and prove that sometimes living in the moment is sinfully good for you!

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kate Hardy always loved books and could read before she went to school. She always knew that she wanted to be a writer, and her parents bought her a proper typewriter for her sixth birthday. She discovered Mills & Boon when she was twelve and decided this was what she wanted to do. When she isn't writing Kate enjoys going to the beach, playing games, cooking, reading and watching films. You can contact her via her website: www.katehardy.co

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It was her shoes that gave her away.

Her business suit was fine. Professional. Like her pristine leather briefcase, barely there make-up and the way she wore her long hair in a simple yet elegant twist. But the heels of her shoes were much too high and much too delicate. They weren't office shoes: they were do-me heels. And Dante Romano had known enough princessy types in his time to recognise that these were *expensive* do-me heels. The kind that only a rich, spoiled woman could afford.

Closing this deal was obviously going to be much less time-consuming than he'd feared. So much for his sources telling him that Carenza Tonielli was serious about taking over the family business.

'Thank you for coming to see me, Signorina Tonielli,' he said, standing up. 'May I offer you some coffee? Water?' He indicated the bottle and glasses on his desk.

'Water would be lovely, thank you.'

'Please, have a seat.' He gestured to the chair on the far side of his desk and waited until she'd sat down before pouring them both a glass of water and sitting down again himself.

She picked up her glass and took a sip of water. Beautiful hands, he thought. And shook himself mentally as a picture flashed through his head. Oh, for pity's sake. Yes, Carenza Tonielli was beautiful. Probably the most beautiful woman he'd ever met. But she was also very aware of it, and he wasn't interested in doing anything other than business with a spoiled princess.

Liar, his libido corrected. *You were thinking about what those hands would feel like against your skin. And that mouth.*

That beautiful mouth. A perfect rosebud. Well, he might be thinking about it, but he certainly wasn't going to act on his thoughts. He didn't have the time. Not if he was going to hit the targets for his business plan. Until the franchise was off the ground, his social life was taking a definite back seat. And he wasn't about to indulge his libido.

'So why did you want to see me?' she asked.

Was she really that clueless? Poor Gino. He'd made a huge mistake, handing over the business to his wayward granddaughter in the hope that she'd come good. The girl who'd left Naples to party her way round the world—and it had taken her ten years to come home. Was she really going to exchange *la dolce vita* for one of sheer hard work to turn the business around?

From what his sources in London had said, Dante was pretty sure that all Carenza Tonielli was interested in was having enough money to buy herself a new designer outfit for every party she attended, drink the very best champagne, and drive the very latest sports car.

None of which she'd be able to do, given the state Tonielli's was in right now.

Well, he wouldn't cheat her. He'd give her a fair price, the same as he'd offered her grandfather. She'd get the cash she needed to finance her lifestyle, and he'd get a brand name that would help make his business grow. It was the perfect win-win situation for both of them. And hopefully she'd see that, too.

'I was negotiating a deal with your grandfather. To buy out Tonielli's,' he said.

'Oh.'

'So, since he's handed the reins over to you, I assume that you're the one I need to negotiate with now.'

She looked at him. 'I think there's been some kind of mistake.'

He blinked. 'You're not in charge of Tonielli's?' 'Oh, I'm in charge, all right.' She folded her arms. 'But the business isn't for sale.'

He looked shocked. As well he might—a shark in a business suit, who'd planned to buy her grandfather's ice-cream empire at a rock-bottom price.

A handsome shark—Carenza would give him that—with dark hair brushed back from his face, a generous mouth and beautiful dark eyes. A sexy shark, even. But he was still a shark. And she wasn't selling. Not to him, not to anyone.

'You're going to run Tonielli's?' he asked.

Carenza had seen that incredulous expression before. On her new boss's face, when she'd made a suggestion about running the gallery. Just before she'd walked out; no way could she work with someone who treated her like an airhead, incapable of doing anything other than giggling, answering the phone and painting her nails. And it needled her that this man—a man she'd never even met before—clearly also thought that she was an airhead. Why wouldn't he take her seriously?

Because she was blonde?

Or because she was a woman and Dante Romano was an Italian man, incredibly chauvinistic and still stuck in the attitudes of the nineteen fifties?

'I'm going to run it,' she said, keeping her voice ice-cool. He leaned back in his chair. 'How?' She lifted her chin and narrowed her eyes at him. 'Don't be insulting.'

'Signorina Tonielli, you have no experience and the business is in a mess,' he said quietly. 'It needs turning around—and I have the knowledge and the staff to do that.'

He was bluffing, she was sure. Things weren't that bad. She shrugged. 'There's a recession on. Everyone's feeling the bite.'

'The business is in trouble, and I think it's more than just the recession. And you don't have the experience or the staff to fix things.'

'Signor Romano, you know nothing about me.' She folded her arms. 'You're assuming that I'm not capable of running the business my family started five generations ago.'

'Not just running it. Taking it out of the red and moving it into this century.'

Red. Exactly what she was seeing, right now, after his smug, pompous remarks. 'You think I'm too stupid to do that?'

'Too inexperienced,' he corrected. 'And what makes you think I'm inexperienced?' she shot back.

And then she realised what she'd said. How it could be interpreted. Especially as his gaze travelled over her very, very slowly, from the top of her head down to desk level—and then all the way back again. Assessing her. Appraising her. And he clearly liked what he saw.

To her mortification, she felt the colour seep into her cheeks.

Anyone would think she was sixteen, not twenty-eight.

Sixteen, and experiencing her very first interested look from a man.

If Dante Romano had looked at her like that when she was sixteen, she would've been a complete puddle of hormones. As it was, her body was already reacting, and she was very glad she'd worn a business suit; the thick material of her jacket would hide the fact that her nipples were hardening.

This was so inappropriate, it was untrue. This was *business*. She shouldn't even be thinking about sex. A year ago, she would've done more than just think about it. But she was putting that mixed-up part of her life behind her now. She had the chance to start all over again.

Then he spoke, and it was as if he'd thrown a bucket of icy water over her. 'Have you ever done a real day's work in your life?'

What? For a moment, she was too surprised and angry to speak. He thought she was the kind of woman who did nothing but party and live off the allowance her grandfather gave her? OK, she'd admit that it had been true enough, ten years ago. But she'd grown up a lot since then. And, until Amy had retired through ill health and sold the gallery, Carenza had most definitely had a job in London. She'd worked damned hard at it.

Striving to keep her voice cool, not wanting him to know how near she was to throwing her glass of water in his face, she drawled, 'As a matter of fact, I have.'

'In an art gallery.'

He knew that? Well, of course. If you were planning to buy out a business, you'd want to know exactly what you were getting for your money. He'd obviously done his research on the business—and on her. Except he hadn't done it thoroughly enough, or he'd know that she was back for good and she wasn't planning to sell.

In the second before he masked his expression, Carenza could see exactly what he thought. That her job in the art gallery wasn't a real job—that it was a cushy number for a pampered girl from a wealthy family. That was what the new gallery owner had thought, too. And it wasn't true. She lifted her chin. 'All businesses are run the same way.'

'Are they, now.' It wasn't a question.

He clearly believed she wasn't up to running Tonielli's. Well, he'd find out the hard way that he was wrong. She was going to do this. More than that, she was going to do this *well*.

'I don't think we have anything more to say to each other, Signor Romano.' She stood up. 'Thank you for the drink of water. Good morning.' And she walked out of his office with her head held high.

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