

# FLAWLESS MISTAKE

a novella

RACHEL WOODS



# *chapter one*

## **Houston, Texas Townhouse near Downtown**

He was kissing her again.

He moved his mouth over hers delicately, slowly, but commanding and insistent.

Eagerly, she opened her mouth, and he slipped his tongue between her lips. She felt his erection, and her heart slammed. His hands moved from her breasts to her neck, his fingertips like fire against her skin, his thumb pressing into her throat, and his nails digging into the back of her neck.

She gasped into his mouth, arching against him.

He moved his head back and stared at her.

His dark eyes were glazed and luminescent, hypnotizing, terrifying.

He tightened his hands around her neck.

She opened her legs, and he entered her, thrusting into her, his hands still around her throat. She couldn't breathe. She wrapped her legs around his, rocking her hips. He thrust faster, deeper into her. Trying to breathe, she bucked desperately against him, and—

Spencer Edwards sat up, heart thundering as her head whipped back and forth.

Eyes opened wide, she struggled to see in the

darkened room, trying to catch her breath as the haze dissipated from her mind.

She'd been dreaming. Having a damn nightmare, she realized as her heart slowed, returning to normal. Some kind of crazy sex-and-torture nightmare.

As her gaze adjusted to the darkness, she was able to discern the shapes and shadows surrounding her as they came into focus. Bureau drawers, armoire, dresser, full-length mirror, and two love seats separated by a small coffee table.

She was in a bedroom, between the damp, twisted sheets of a king-sized bed.

And she wasn't alone.

Spencer turned her head and stared at the man lying next to her.

Ben Chang.

Good-looking and sexy, he had a complexion as smooth and dark as the coffee grown in the mountains of Jamaica, his birthplace, and features that were unmistakably Asian, the Chinese ancestry dominant in the nose, cheekbones, and almond eyes.

Involuntarily, Spencer touched her throat, remembering the hands tightening around her neck in that strange nightmare.

Why the hell had she been dreaming about Ben choking her, trying to kill her as he made love to her? What the hell was that about? And what did it mean that she felt a slight ache between her legs, a sly swirling that aroused her?

Spencer glanced at Ben again, still sleeping, his back to her.

Maybe she'd dreamt about him because they'd had sex for the first time tonight.

Explosive, mind-blowing sex that took her breath away and left her dazed and trembling, yearning for more.

Since meeting Ben, Spencer had given serious thought to maybe seeing what could happen between the two of them.

But the rational, independent part of her knew that love and romance were concepts she didn't really trust, though not for the reasons most people assumed.

Spencer didn't have a string of bad break-ups to be bitter about, and there weren't any horrendous romantic disappointments to blame for her reluctance to take a chance on love.

Instead, she had the example of her mother, who regularly and willingly lost her mind over men. Being a witness to her mother's self-inflicted heartache, Spencer had decided she would not be tricked into believing she had some soul mate ready to sweep her off her feet; she would not waste her time searching and longing for love and happiness, two illusive constructs that only led to despair and destruction.

But, for some reason, Spencer had begun to feel differently about love since she'd met Ben Chang, as if she might abandon some of her old defenses.

Maybe.

The day she'd met Ben had been bright and sunny, one of those beautiful spring days, with both a trace of lingering coolness from winter and a hint of the humidity that would soon blanket the city.

She remembered thinking it was too pretty a day to be so frustrated and sad. And yet there she was, sitting on a park bench in front of the reflecting pool at City Hall, trying to figure out how the hell she'd blown the

job interview she'd had earlier that morning.

After her disastrous interview, she'd left the glass and chrome skyscraper and walked out into piercing sunshine, feeling as though she didn't even matter, convinced that nothing good would ever happen to her, and she would have to continue manipulating and deceiving men to make ends meet.

Although, the phrase "manipulating and deceiving" was a bit rude, a little too real, too mercenary and shameful.

The preferred term was "dating," according to her older half-sister, Desarae Bedard, who had designed the repugnant scheme after falling on hard times.

As explained by Rae, "dating" was a creative way to pay the bills, to put food on the table, and keep a roof over your head.

Scamming dirty old men out of their luxury goods had been Rae's "profession" for the past year and a half, and she'd pretty much mastered the art of it. She was serious enough about it that she'd created the "Dating Protocol," a set of rules that had to be followed if you wanted to be successful at "dating."

Not that the damn rules worked all the time.

Anyway, Spencer didn't want to be successful at dating. She wanted a real job at a real company. She wanted a career.

She was tired of "dating," sick of smiling at geriatric perverts with rheumy eyes and gnarled hands.

Despite the horrific interview, she was still determined to break the cycle of "dating" and had been thinking about how she might do that when Ben sat next to her on the park bench and said hello.

Not in the mood to talk to some strange guy, even if

he was tall and good-looking, she'd mumbled a reply and contemplated moving to another bench.

"You okay?" he'd asked, his tone familiar, as if he knew her and was concerned.

"Not really," she'd admitted, finding herself unable to lie to him, somehow wanting to believe maybe he did care and wasn't just trying to hit on her.

"I didn't think so," he told her.

Sighing, she looked away for a moment and then back at him.

"You've been crying." It was a statement, not a question, more like an observation as he stared at her.

"So what if I have?" Spencer challenged, wishing there was more venom in her tone. "What the hell would you care?"

Had she asked him to care? Did she need him to care about her? Who was she to him except some girl he didn't know, sitting on a bench, near tears, wallowing in self-pity? She was just a dumb girl trying to figure out her life, which was steadily spinning out of control.

"I might care more than you think," he'd told her. "If you allow me to."

His response was annoying, and yet alluring, and Spencer found herself interested. Maybe not necessarily in him or his fake sympathy, but definitely in those diamond cuff links and the Rolex.

Her sister could get a lot of money for those items. Maybe even enough to cover this month's rent.

The way their arrangement worked, whatever Spencer stole, she gave to Rae, who fenced the stolen goods and then gave Spencer a cut.

But given her luck, her sister wouldn't get a tenth of what they were worth.

Despite her natural instinct to protect herself and her feelings, Spencer was intrigued by him, and a little entranced by his Island lilt, so she didn't turn him down when he asked her out to dinner.

She figured a good-looking Jamaican in a three-thousand-dollar suit was a decent prospect for fleecing. Even though she didn't want to "date" anymore, she had to, because the rent was due.

Although, if she "dated" him, she couldn't tell Rae.

The Dating Protocol rule stated that you could only "date" senior citizens, men over the age of sixty.

But Rae was always bending and breaking the rules, so what the hell?

Spencer's "date" that night with Ben Chang had been conflicting, a bit disturbing because Ben wasn't a typical "date."

Normally, she was never able to enjoy dinner and would push her food around the plate and sip seltzer water, which did little to calm her nervous stomach.

With Ben, she'd enjoyed the duck confit, microgreens, and sweetbreads and had eaten with relish, even allowing herself to indulge in a decadent chocolate mousse for dessert.

Their conversation had been easy and engaging. Talking to Ben was like talking to an old friend. He listened to her, and really seemed interested in what she cared about.

During a normal "date," the food and wine and boring conversation were something she had to suffer through, and while the "date" was enjoying her company, and probably thinking how he might coax her into bed later, Spencer was busy trying to remember if she'd brought everything she needed to "accomplish the

goal,” as Rae would say.

Oversized purse, to put the stolen goods in.

Latex gloves, so she wouldn't leave fingerprints.

Bear spray, in case the “date” got too aggressive before she could subdue him.

And most important of all, the small bottle of GHB, the elixir of oblivion, guaranteed to keep the target unconscious until the next day.

But she didn't “date” Ben that night, or the next time they went to dinner, or during their many impromptu picnics in Hermann Park, or when he surprised her with a weekend trip to the Cayman Islands. She kept reminding herself that she was supposed to “date” him, but she couldn't bring herself to go through with it.

And now two months later, she and Ben were in a strange, reluctant situation—not exactly a friendship, not quite a romantic relationship.

He was like a friend, but more than that; and yet, they weren't together.

Ben had respected their undefined relationship and still hadn't tried to seduce her, although she wouldn't have been adverse to a bit of coaxing, gentle or otherwise, especially when he kissed her goodnight.

Lots of goodnight kisses later, and now she was in bed with Ben Chang.

And maybe a bit in love with him, too.

Only a little bit, though, not too much in love.

But enough to make her realize that she had to put a stop to these feelings.

She couldn't risk falling more in love with Ben; she wasn't going to end up like her mother.

This past week, she'd realized that she had to end

things with Ben. What she hadn't known was how she would leave him, or if she even could.

Most girls would be able to just walk away from him, and ignore his calls and texts, but she had a feeling he would be able to break down any resistance she managed to put up, and before she knew it, she'd be back in his bed, and he would be in her heart.

Spencer exhaled.

There was only one way to get herself out of this situation, only one way to make sure that love didn't leave her broken and damaged like her mother.

She would have to go through with her plans to "date" Ben.

Staring at the tray ceiling, Spencer focused on the mural above the bed. No, not a mural, she reminded herself. What had Ben called it? A silkscreen printing. Four panels, each one telling a story, which was something about a dragon and a tiger.

Bright, vivid, and lurid, it was a bloody, gory depiction of friendship, betrayal, deception, and death.

The first panel showed a large male tiger, a small tiger cub, and a baby dragon.

The tiger and the dragon grew up together, and they were as close as brothers despite their differences.

The second panel showed how the tiger and the dragon were trained to battle their enemies, depicted as various animals—rats, snakes, and oddly, even pigs and roosters.

In the third panel, the tiger and the dragon were fully grown. There was more fighting, bloody depictions of the tiger disemboweling pigs and roosters with his claws while the dragon used his fiery breath to burn his foes alive.

The fourth panel was strange; the tiger was shown allowing a man to put a yoke around his neck and lead him away, leaving the dragon to contend with a swarm of animals.

Fighting alone as the tiger grew smaller and smaller, the dragon prevailed, but at a price, as the very bottom of the panel showed him bloodied and battle-scarred.

Ben had said the last panel was about betrayal.

Spencer had wanted to know more, but didn't ask questions. Besides, it wasn't in the "Dating Protocol" to get to know more about the target, or—

Or ... what the hell was she doing?

Staring at some gory mural, contemplating what it might mean.

She didn't have time for that.

Spencer sighed, her thoughts shifting to the strange nightmare again.

There was no reason to be spooked by it.

She'd heard someone explain that dreams were just the brain's way of ridding the subconscious of unnecessary images from various situations. Her nightmare had probably been a fusion of some soap opera she'd watched and a trashy book she'd read, nothing to overanalyze, or examine too closely.

The nightmare was nothing to worry about.

Or, was it?

What if the dream was trying to warn her?

What if her subconscious was telling her that "dating" Ben was a mistake, that she would get caught?

Although, if she got caught, Spencer knew it would be her own damn fault, because she hadn't followed the "Dating Protocol."

She was supposed to have made Ben a drink and put

a few drops of GHB in it, which would have put him out for the rest of the night.

Spencer rolled over, wondering what the hell she was going to do.

Should she cut her losses and walk away with nothing to show for her trouble? Would that be the smart thing? Should she accomplish the “dating” goal? Or, forget about “dating” Ben and maybe find out if their random meeting in front of the reflecting pool at City Hall could develop into something more, something like ...

Something like ... what?

Love, marriage, baby carriage.

Spencer bristled. No, that would never happen. Love might blossom, she supposed. Anything was possible when emotions went awry. But kids? And marriage?

Marriage was a risk she wouldn't take.

Thanks to her mother, she knew that wedded bliss could blow up in your face.

After the honeymoon ended, her mother had morphed into something Spencer thought of as “that wife”—a clinging, desperate married woman obsessed with pleasing her husband, degrading and marginalizing herself, feverishly hoping that the wedding band would remain secure on her left finger.

Spencer had decided long ago that she would never willingly walk down the aisle and into a life of quiet desperation and indentured servitude, struggling in vain to be some kind of perfect wife for a man who didn't deserve her efforts, or affection.

Spencer sat up.

Enough with the damn thoughts about marriage

and about a relationship with Ben because it wasn't going to happen.

Right now, he was her "date," not some romantic conquest, and she wasn't about to do something stupid like fall completely in love with him.

But she was going to rob him deaf, dumb, and blind.

*Thank you for reading!*

Thanks for reading this excerpt of *Flawless Mistake*.  
I hope you enjoyed the story and want to read more!

The ebook is available on Amazon for only \$0.99.

[Click here to purchase.](#)

Trade paperback copies are available at major  
book retailers for only \$6.99.

Happy reading and God bless!

**Rachel**

*Can't wait to read more?*

**[Join Rachel's Mail List](#)**

Get access to special offers, bonus content,  
Rachel's newsletters and the latest news  
on the Spencer & Sione Series.