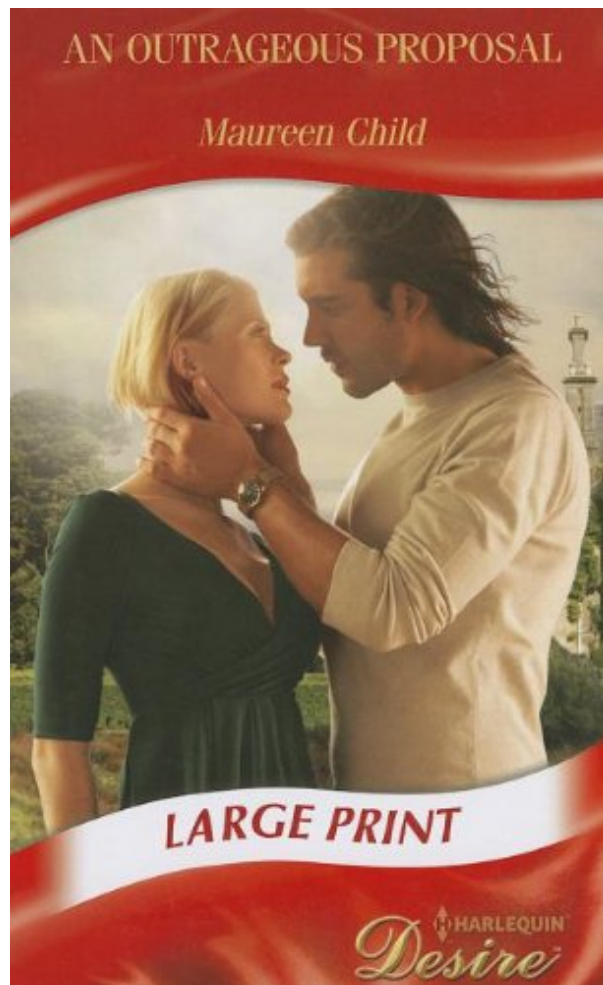


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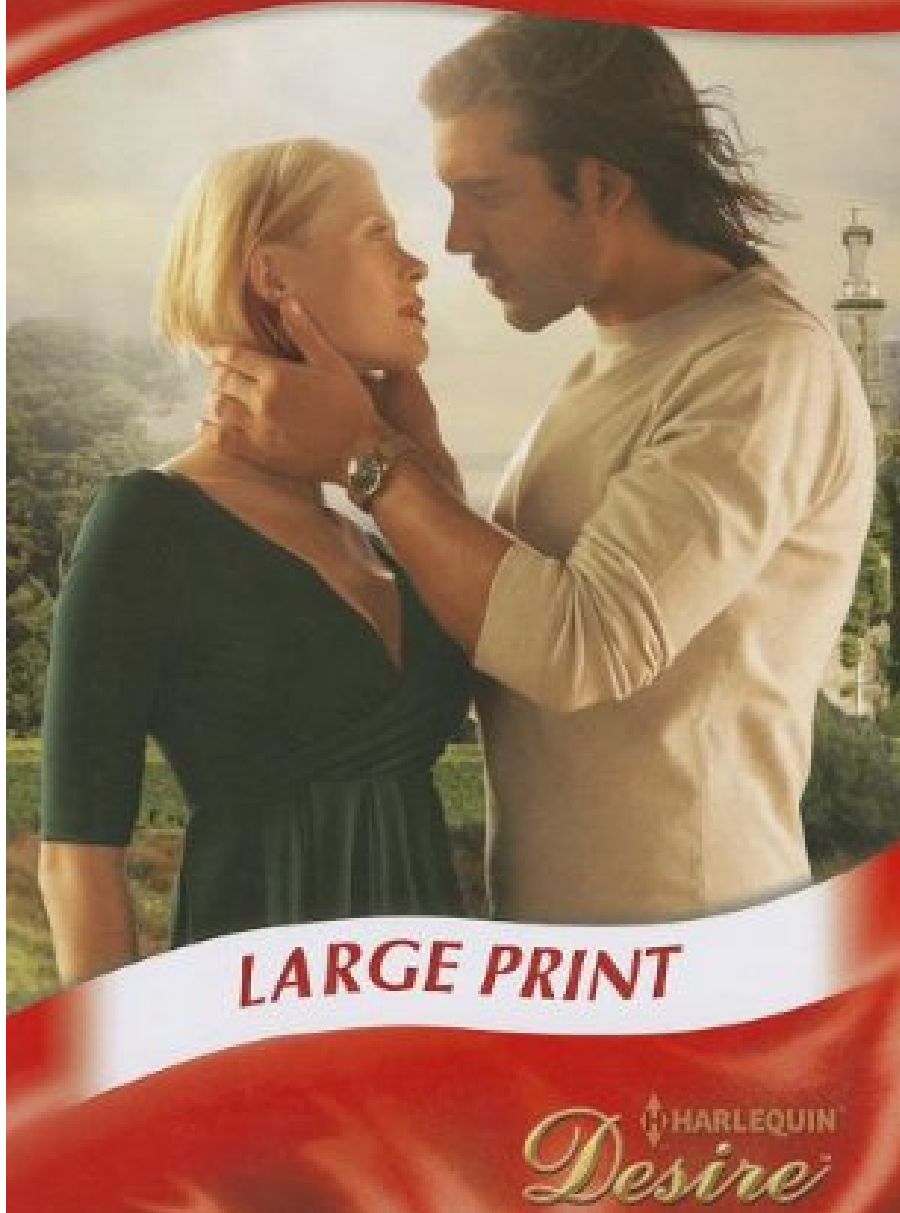


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"And all we did was wait."

"I think the waiting is the hardest thing of all."

Georgia laughed. "And I think Laura would disagree."

Ruefully, he nodded. "You've a point there."

Georgia sighed, stepped up to Sean and threaded her arm through his. "Ronan will be a great father. And Laura...she wanted this so much." She sniffed and swiped her fingers under her eyes.

"No more crying," Sean said, giving her arm a squeeze. "Already I feel as though I've been riding a tide of tears all day. Between the new mother and father and you, it's been weepy eyes and sniffles for hours."

"I saw your eyes get a little misty, too, tough guy."

"Aye, well, we Irish are a sentimental lot," he admitted, then started for the car park, Georgia's arm still tucked through his.

"It's one of the things I like best about you—"

He gave her a look.

"—the Irish in general, I mean," she qualified.

"Ah, well then." He smiled to himself at her backtracking. It was a lovely afternoon. Soft rain, cold wind and new life wailing in the hospital behind them. "You've been to Ireland so often in the last year, you're very nearly an honorary Irishman yourself, aren't you?"

"I've been thinking about that," she admitted. They walked up to his car, and Sean hit the unlock button on his keypad.

"What's that then?" he asked, as he opened the passenger door for her and held it, waiting. Fatigue clawed at him, but just beneath that was a buoyant feeling that had him smile at the woman looking up at him.

"About being an honorary Irishman. Or at least," she said, looking around her at the car park, the hospital

and the city beyond, "moving here. Permanently."

"Really?" Intrigued, he leaned his forearms on the top of the door. "And what's brought this on then? Is it your brand-new niece?"

She shrugged. "Partly, sure. But mostly, it's this country. It's gorgeous and friendly, and I've really come to love being here."

"Does Laura know about this?"

"Not yet," she admitted, and shifted her gaze back to him. "So don't say anything. She's got enough on her mind at the moment."

"True enough," he said. "But I'm thinking she'd be pleased to have her sister so close."

She flashed him a brilliant smile then slid into her seat. As Sean closed the door after her and walked around the car, he was forced to admit that he wouldn't mind having Georgia close, either.

A half hour later, Georgia opened the door to Laura and Ronan's expansive stone manor house and looked back over her shoulder at Sean. "Want to come in for a drink?"

"I think we've earned one," he said, stepping inside and closing the door behind him. "Or even a dozen."

She laughed and it felt good. Heck, she felt good. Her sister was a mother, and Georgia was so glad she had made the decision to come to Ireland to be present for the baby's birth. She hated to think about what it would have been like, being a half a world away right now.

"Ronan's housekeeper, Patsy, is off in Dublin visiting her daughter Sinead," Georgia reminded him. "So we're on our own for food."

"It's not food I want at the moment anyway," Sean told her.

Was he flirting with her? Georgia wondered, then dismissed the notion. She shook her head and reminded herself that they were here for a drink. Or several.

As he spoke, a long, ululating howl erupted from deep within the house. Georgia actually jumped at the sound and then laughed. "With the rain, the dogs have probably let themselves into the kitchen."

"Probably hungry now, too," Sean said, and walked beside her toward the back of the house.

Georgia knew her sister's house as if it were her own. Whenever she was in Ireland, she stayed here at the manor, since it was so huge they could comfortably hold a family reunion for a hundred. She opened the door into a sprawling kitchen with top-of-the-line appliances...

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