

Cold Feet



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First edition

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FRANCOIS KEYSER

Cold Feet

VIOLA

The Los Angeles Wedding Exhibition. The largest and most important annual wedding exhibition in Los Angeles. Anyone who is anyone in the industry is there and anyone who wants to be someone in the industry should be there.

It's the first year I've been able to rent a booth. My initial doubts about whether I can justify the cost and whether I'll recover the investment from a brand awareness and income perspective remain to be seen. So far, it would appear that renting a booth was the right thing to do.

I have had plenty of customers register with me for follow-up appointments and even a few confirmed bookings on the spot. All told, I'm on top of the world.

Then I see her. My role model in the industry. Christine Jackson. She is the number one in the industry. I have admired her from afar for so long. While we are competitors, I hold her in the highest regard. There's room enough for both of us and then some in the industry. I've never met her but today, at last, I see her in the flesh. She is as beautiful as the photos I have seen of her. Her long, straight blonde hair is perfect and seems to be magically held in place. Her voice is welcoming and soothing and her emerald green eyes sparkle. She wears a smart suit that accentuates her figure in all the right places. It has the effect of creating a professional image as opposed to a sexy one, depending on who she's talking to.

I'm sure men want to talk to her for the reason that she is so sexy while their wives or wives to be talk to her because she looks so professional and confident. It's a no-brainer for a husband and wife to agree on using her for their children's wedding or for a couple to agree to use her for their wedding even if they have different reasons for being convinced to use her.

Don't get me wrong. I don't mean to stereotype, and not everyone will fall for the trick but there is a reason why dressing sexy is one of the oldest tricks in the book to getting attention. It works.

Mentally, I take a page out of her book as I study myself surreptitiously in the mirror of the booth opposite mine. I might not be dressed as sexy as Christine but I'm not doing badly at all businesswise. So maybe I don't need to dress like her and I just need to keep doing what I'm doing.

I'm surprised by a voice behind me.

"Are you Viola?"

I turn around hastily blushing at having been caught studying myself in the mirror. It's Christine and I blush even more just because it's her. I recover quickly and nod.

"Yes. I am. You are Christine Jackson." I offer my hand but she ignores it.

"Everyone knows me," she smiles.

"You have no idea. I've been a fan of yours ever since I started in the industry. You're my role model."

"Really?" Christine's eyes flash as she takes in my remark. "I'm happy to hear that. I had no idea that someone like you was just a follower."

I'm fawning over Christine like a school girl when her first crush notices her for the first time. Before I can say anything more my assistant, Jessica catches my attention. I look at her and she holds up her mobile phone and indicates that someone wants to talk to me.

"Um... excuse me for a moment," I say. I cross to Jessica who takes me by the arm and turns away from Christine.

“Who’s on the phone?”

“No-one,” she whispers. “but take my advice. Pretend there’s someone on the phone and walk away right now. Come back when she’s gone.”

I look at her quizzically but her expression tells me she’s in charge and furious. I take the phone and press it to my ear. I start a fake conversation with no-one and walk away.

Jessica steps up to Christine.

“I’m so sorry. Viola had to take that call. Another booking.”

Christine nods and smiles. She extends her hand, “No problem. And you are?”

Jessica ignores Christine’s hand just as Christine ignored mine. “Jessica. Can I help you?”

“You are,” Christine smiles as she picks up one of our brochures. “I just came to see your booth to make sure I’m not making any amateur mistakes.”

“Well then I guess you can see that you have a lot of fixing to do,” Jessica retorts coldly.

Christine’s eyes harden and she casts one last glance around my booth. Despite Jessica’s loyalty to me, Christine presses on, “If ever you want to work with a true professional, call me. I’ll pay more. Besides, I don’t think your boss is going to be in business much longer.”

“Why is that?” Jessica asks.

“Just a hunch,” Christine says. “My offer stands as long as this joke is in business. When it’s not in business anymore, my offer will be gone. Get out while you’re ahead.”

“I am ahead,” Jessica responds. “We are ahead of you. Now, why don’t you go and be men’s fantasy at your booth before I have to call the cleaners.”

Christine’s face flushes with anger. She opens her mouth then closes it again before walking briskly away.

I watch Jessica and Christine from afar but can’t hear what is said. After Christine leaves, I return to the booth.

“What was that about?” I ask Jessica.

“Jesus, girl! You were fawning all over that tart!” She mimics me, “*You’re my role model*. She’s probably telling the guests at her booth that she’s your role model. She even offered me a job and said that you won’t be in business much longer.”

“*What?*” I ask astounded.

“Yeah, so much for your role model,” Jessica says.

“Let me go over there and give her a piece of my mind…”

Jessica stops me. “Leave it, Vi. There’s no need to make this any worse. She’s just jealous because we’re better than her and she knows it. Take the high road and let it go. There’s more than enough room for both of us in this game.”

I sigh. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. Thanks, Jessica.” I enter the booth and sit down. Inside I am still fuming. I had nothing but respect for Christine but with what Jessica just told me, I have lost all respect for her. I’m hurt too and finally take a walk to calm myself down.

The rest of the exhibition passes without further contact between Christine and myself. The clients we have gained from being present have made the exhibition well worth it and help me to forget about the disappointment of what happened with Christine.

CHRISTINE

I've been a wedding planner for a long time. I'm the best in the game and I'm not about to let a young upstart challenge me for my crown. There's one person who I come up against more and more and it's her. Viola. I've lost a lot of business to her. I'm still doing great numbers and growing but I could grow so much faster if she wasn't fishing in my pond.

Who the hell does she think she is? I know this business inside out. There isn't that much to it when you're an expert. It's easy to pinpoint the weak points in any wedding planner's business. Hell, they're the same weak spots as mine and that makes it even easier to take her down. Her assistant didn't want to take my offer but that's okay. It's just one point of attack.

When I'm finished, they'll both be crawling to me.

I look at the brochure I took from their booth and start to formulate my plan of attack. I boot up my laptop and am soon on Viola's website looking for the information I need. I can't find what I'm looking for so I try another angle. I go to the gallery and testimonials.

Bingo! I make notes of the information I am looking for and then close the site.

I pick up the phone and dial Viola's office number.

The phone is answered promptly.

"Hi, this is Mrs. Anderson."

"Yes, Mrs. Anderson. How can I help you? This is Jessica."

The assistant. "We're having a party soon for Mr. Anderson's office and he asked me about the band that we had at the wedding. I thought I'd give you a call and find out if I could contact them to see if they're available. Would it be possible to give me their number?"

"Sure, Mrs. Anderson. I'd be only too happy to. Hold on while I get the details."

I wait a few moments and then Jessica comes on the line again. "Here you go, Mrs. Anderson."

She gives me the contact name and number for Steve from the band called 'Plastered'. I thank her and hang up.

I smile and mentally congratulate myself. It's that easy.

When Steve answers the phone I arrange to meet him to discuss hiring the band for a party.

Steve is already waiting when I enter the coffee shop. He recognizes me from the clothes I told him I'd be wearing and waves to me. I cross to the booth and slide in opposite him. I feel his eyes appraise me as I sit down. I've worn a short skirt and a tight, white cotton blouse that accentuates my breasts. It's unbuttoned just far enough to reveal a glimpse of my bra which is visible through the soft material of the blouse anyway. I shake Steve's hand.

"How can I help you?" Steve asks.

"I have a confession, Steve," I reply conspiratorially.

"What's that?" Steve asks, intrigued.

"Well, when I said I need a band for a party, I wasn't being totally honest. I'd like your band to play for all my parties unless my clients insist otherwise."

"All your parties?" Steve frowns. "I don't understand."

"I'm a wedding planner, just like Viola who you work with regularly."

Steve nods as the penny drops. “Well, you know we go back a long way. I mean I’d be happy to support you when you have a wedding if we don’t have a wedding booked with Viola.”

I smile and shake my head. “I thought you’d say that Steve, but I have to say I’m looking for a reversal of that proposed arrangement. You play all my weddings and fit her in where you can. I’ll pay you one and a half times what she pays you per wedding.”

Steve looks at me and says nothing. I can tell his mind is working overtime and I can tell where it’s headed so I cut it off.

“This is a one-time deal. Right here, right now. There’s no going to Viola and bargaining with her. I’m not into horse-trading.”

“Well, what about if I call the band and discuss it with them?” Steve asks.

“Why would they care? A gig’s a gig. Doesn’t matter who you play for or where you play. Right?”

Steve sighs. He’s tempted but his loyalty is still to Viola. “When’s the first gig?”

“Saturday.”

“Saturday? That’s two days away!”

“And?”

“We’re booked for a wedding with Viola. We can’t just drop her at such short notice. It’s not ethical.”

“Look,” I say hardening my tone. “You guys have a good name out there. It’s why I came to you first. But you’re not the only band. I’ll say this too, and I don’t mean to sound like I’m bragging but when it comes to wedding planners, I. Am. The. Best. So, you can decide if you’re going to be loyal to number two or three or whatever the hell Viola is, or you can come along with me. Success breeds success. You know that as well as I do.”

Steve ponders my words. I can tell he’s not happy. Then he shakes his head. “We can start next week. Not this weekend. I just can’t do that to Viola or her client.”

I look at Steve. He’s serious. “Well, I guess I’ll have to find another band then,” I say and begin to gather my things to leave.

“No deal?” Steve asks.

“I offered you a deal,” I say firmly.

“A deal’s only a deal where both parties are happy”

I pause. “And what wouldn’t make you happy about the deal? One weekend? *One* weekend when you could be earning one and a half times what you get now every weekend from now *on*?”

“You know, I think this isn’t so much as our band being paid more as it is a personal issue between you and Viola. Am I right? Because if that’s the case, the band isn’t going to make a difference. If you don’t have what she offers she’s always going to be one ahead of you...”

“...and pray tell me, Steve, what does she have that I don’t have?”

“Aside from the band, she’s got a great assistant...”

“...got one,” I say.

“...rapport with clients...”

“Got it,” I add.

“...Wedding Whisperer...”

“A what?” I ask frowning.

Steve smiles. "See. You're not close to what she offers."

I ignore his remark. "What is a Wedding Whisperer?"

"A person who encourages the bride or groom to work through their fear of getting married at the last minute.

You know, 'cold feet'?" He makes inverted commas in the air with his fingers.

I sit back. "Oh, that! Who doesn't have that?" I lie. "I just don't call it that."

"Well, I have to be going. It's been a pleasure to meet you but I guess we won't be doing business," Steve says.

"Well, remember I did try to help."

"Thank you for that," Steve says as I stand. He stands too and we shake hands. I leave the coffee shop and he sits down again and takes out his cellphone. I know he's going to try to horse trade anyway. Maybe I'll let him do it. I'll see how I feel later. Right now, I'm more interested in the 'wedding whisperer' concept that he mentioned to me.

I think of the cancellations I've had when the wedding has been about to kick off in church. Not many but it happens. It's ingenious and I'm even more adamant to shut Viola's business down than before.

VIOLA

“Steve, this is really difficult. I can’t just increase the band’s fee. You know this wedding was booked months ago. I calculated the fee based on what I was paying you then. Whoever is offering you this, obviously has the budget to pay what they’re offering.”

“I’ve spoken to the band,” Steve replies. “They want extra pay.”

“Look, let’s talk about extra pay for the wedding after this one and all future weddings. Just not this one. I’ve cut my profit a lot already just to get this wedding. It’s important to me. Having this wedding is good for my resume.”

“Well, it’s not good for our pockets,” Steve replies firmly.

“Steve, c’mon. Where is this coming from? We’ve always been able to negotiate. Why the big push now?”

“I only have a few hours and then the offer’s off the table.”

“Well, can I ask who it is that’s making this offer?”

“Does it matter? It’s not going to change anything,” Steve replies.

“Sure, but I’ll find out anyway.”

“Christine. Christine Jackson.”

I feel my anger rise instantly. The woman who I idolized and held as a role model until recently. My heart tells me this is deliberate. It’s not a coincidence. I almost swear but I bite my tongue.

“Vi?” Steve asks.

“Yes. Okay, look. I’ll pay you fifty percent more this weekend and from now on. Just don’t do this to me again, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Promise me, Steve,” I say firmly. “I can’t afford these kinds of problems so late before a wedding.”

“Okay,” Steve says. “I’m sorry.”

“Do me a favor please.”

“What’s that?” Steve asks.

“Not a word of this to anyone okay? If this gets out, everyone else is going to demand more money and I can’t pay it right now. Okay? Will you tell your band?”

“Sure. We can keep it quiet.”

“You better,” I say.

“Um, Vi,” Steve says.

He wants to tell me something and seems hesitant about doing so.

“What is it, Steve?” I ask.

“I let it slip that you use a wedding whisperer,” Steve says.

“What is a wedding whisperer?” I ask, confused.

“Ashley,” Steve replies.

I hang my head. I don’t know what to say. I have always thought of Ashley as a counselor. And I’ve kept her a secret for so long. Everyone in my team knows about her but that’s as far as it goes. It’s something I don’t advertise not even to my clients. No-one else in the game uses one, at least not that I know of and now the cat is out of the bag.

I want to scream at Steve but I hold back.

“Vi?” he asks prompting me to break my silence.

“I’m here,” I reply.

“Look, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make any problems or let your secrets slip. I was just trying to tell her how much better you are than her.”

And yet, you’ll go and work for her because she’s offering more money, I think to myself. I immediately feel guilty for the thought. I have known Steve for a long time. We have worked together for a long time too and I would have expected that he would approach me in a more professional manner about increasing their income.

“I appreciate that, Steve,” I say. “Just don’t say another word about it to her or anyone okay?”

“Sure. I’m sorry,” Steve says.

We end the call and I pace my living room angrily. I am livid. I want to call Christine and give her a piece of my mind but I resist the urge to do so. I’m even angrier that she knows about the wedding whisperer. I’m angry at her and I’m angry at Steve.

For some reason, I have a bad feeling about the fact that Steve has told Christine about my ‘wedding whisperer’. I never advertise it to anyone as I don’t think it’s something to advertise as something that sets me apart from other wedding planners. Sure, I charge for it but the fee is built into other fees when I provide a breakdown to clients.

It’s not about the cost because I’m still cheaper than people like Christine. It’s about the fact that I don’t think people will feel it’s nice to feel like they’re being pushed into a wedding if they’re having second thoughts at the last minute about getting married. The truth is that many people do have second thoughts at the last minute and it’s a silly thing really since they usually go ahead anyway and get married.

But if they don’t, just in case they don’t, they stand to lose a lot of money which is non-refundable. Money paid for the caterer, the MC, the venue, the band and so much more. There is my reputation to think about too and I’m not about to have a wedding canceled because someone’s having second thoughts. I do have a reputation to uphold. So, is it ethical? My own jury’s still out on that but so far, it’s worked and everyone’s been happy.

I’m sure Christine will be quick to copy the idea now that she knows about it. Especially since I’ve managed to prevent Steve from leaving. She’ll be pissed about that and will surely be looking for the next thing she can come at me with.

I guess she’s taken a dislike to me because I’m her competition. I can’t imagine why though other than that I might have taken a client that she dearly wanted. A client like the one whose wedding I am doing this weekend. Well, she can go after my band and whatever else she wants but it’s too late to take this client.

Better luck next time, bitch, I think to myself. I am quite amazed at how fast my view of her has gone from idol and role model to stomach twisting anger when I think of her or hear her name.

I wonder if she’s going to go after my other resources as well now that she has failed with Steve. Rather than sit and fume, I decide to start finding alternate resources to step in at short notice if necessary. That’s the right thing to do.

CHRISTINE

I'm angry. I failed with Steve and his band.

I take a few deep breaths and begin to relax. Getting a wedding planner's band is just one part of their business. There are many other parts to go after. However, I push the thought of other parts of the business aside as I think about the concept of the 'wedding whisperer' that Steve let slip to me.

I know there's something important in it. It hovers just beyond my mental grasp like a carrot on a stick for the time being. I have to admit it's a genius idea and I should be thinking of doing it myself. But there's something else about it that I think is much more important than simply copying the idea.

I grab the brochure that I took from Viola's booth and study it. There's not a word in the brochure about a wedding whisperer. Nothing that even alludes to it as a service.

I check her website again. Nothing. Nowhere. The testimonials say nothing about it. How can she keep it secret? Surely the clients should be impressed with the added value?

Why would clients keep it secret? It's not possible. Unless...

Unless what? I know it's there but I just can't grasp it. Frustrated, I finally try to push it away and focus on other work I have to do.

My assistant enters my office and I decide to bounce the idea off her.

"Lacy?"

"Yes?"

"I want to bounce something off you. An idea to possibly improve our service and differentiate us from other wedding planners."

"Okay," Lacy says as she sits down opposite me. "What is it?"

"A wedding whisperer."

"A what?" Lacy asks not understanding what I'm talking about.

"A wedding whisperer. A person who I employ to encourage the bride or groom to put their last-minute fears of getting married away and go through with the wedding anyway."

"Why on earth would you want to do that?" Lacy asks.

"Because clients fork out a lot of money on a wedding. Money they lose if the bride or groom decides to stand the other up at the altar. This person would help them get through their fear and walk down the aisle anyway."

Lacy shakes her head. She's conservative and I know I've done the right thing asking her. If anyone will have a negative objection it's her. As much as her objections are negative, they do make sense most of the time.

"No way. That's asking for trouble."

"Trouble? From who?"

Chris," she says using the shortened version of my name. "It's dangerous. A good idea but dangerous. Too dangerous."

"Why do you say it's dangerous?"

She leans forward, crosses her legs, and rests her elbow on her knee. In turn, she rests her chin on her hand as she always does when she's about to make a very important point. "What happens if this wedding whisperer talks the bride or groom into getting married and a few months or years later, they get divorced?"

"I'm not sure I follow you, Lacy."

“Well, people get pretty bitter when they get divorced. They need people to blame. They need to put their anger on someone else and if they can say they got married because they felt pressured to do so by a wedding whisperer, I’d say you’re going to have lawyers kicking down your door very quickly.”

I absorb what Lacy has just told me. I know she’s right and in my mind, the donkey finally gets the carrot on the stick.

I nod my understanding. “Thanks, Lacy. That makes sense. I can always count on you.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” she smiles.

“That’s all for now.”

Lacy gets up and leaves my office.

I almost jump for joy. I can’t believe I didn’t see the possibilities of what she just told me. I look at the brochure again. Nothing. Not a word about a wedding whisperer.

And now I know why. It’s a bomb looking for a detonator and a place to be set off. Any wedding could be the place and the detonator.

I laugh with joy.

I know what I need to do.

END OF SAMPLE

THANK YOU

Thank you for your interest in my Romance Novel, ‘Cold Feet’.

I really appreciate your interest.

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<https://books2read.com/u/brPP7e>

If you do buy the book, please leave a review as it will be a great help for other people that might consider buying it.

Reviews for 'Cold Feet'

Please see the following reviews for "Cold Feet":

Instagram: @jessica_bookpedia - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSO1IS8JA-O/>

... the characters are it's power and their professions and thinking are the biggest source of entertainment.

'...I loved the story throughout, it was entertaining and engaging. The author has carried out a very gripping narration. At no point you'll be bored. The characterization is amazing, the dialogues and description are fascinating...'

'...I would definitely recommend you read this book, the story flows in a light mood which will definitely engage you...'

Instagram: @officialtanishq – <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQktddpj2rZ/>

'Overall, a really interesting and engaging story...'

'... a page turner and I wasn't able to put it down once I started reading the book. The use of words is amazing and the story is developed in a great manner. The narration is really smooth and the detailing is done perfectly where required. I really enjoyed reading this one. I'll highly recommend this book...'

Connect with the Author.

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