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*Marigold*  
And The  
**MANAGER**

Angela Sargenti

Marigold and the Manager  
*Baseball Brides – Book Three*

By  
Angela Sargenti

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# Chapter One

*Marigold*

Here's the deal. I'm at my good friend Miranda's engagement party, and I've just made a date to go out with Josh Bright, the new Right Fielder for the Quails, but while I'm standing there talking to him, I totally spy this good-looking older guy across the room, a late arrival to the party. I sort of have a thing for older guys, so when Josh goes to talk to some other people, Miranda comes up to talk to me and I ask her who he is. She tells me he's Bob Heath, the actual manager of the Quails.

"Oh my God, no way," I tell her.

"Yes, it's true. He's the boss of the whole team. But not the boss of the whole organization."

An older man, in power? I say, "That's cool. He doesn't need to be."

"What, you like him?"

"Totally."

"I think he has a daughter our age."

"Yeah? A complication?"

"I believe she lives in St. Augustine, Florida, so I guess she can't throw too much of a wrench in the works."

"Ever met her?" I ask.

"Yeah, she's kind of a snot, but he knows it, so he doesn't pay much attention to her."

"Hmm. So, do you think it'd be all that bad if I blew Josh off and went out with manager boy instead?"

"Well, maybe you should go out with Josh like you planned, but make it a big yawn fest. With any luck, he'll blow you off from now on and then it'll be nothing to go out with Bob. But I don't think I've ever seen him date a girl our age before."

Both of us glance in his direction. He and Jason, Miranda's fiancé, are laughing their heads off and I can't help smiling.

"He looks pretty nice," I say.

"He is, but he can also be quite stern when he needs to be."

"Ooh," I tell her. "Maybe he'll give me a lecture. Let's go over to them and sort of feel him out on the subject of older men and younger women. What's his name again?"

"Bob Heath."

"And managers, they get health care and all that?" I ask Miranda.

"Of course. They get all the benefits the players get and then some."

"Wow. That's awesome."

"Health insurance really turns you on, doesn't it?" she asks.

"Yes. I'm sick of dating a bunch of boys who couldn't provide for a wife and kids if their lives depended on it."

"A wife? Are you ready for something like that?"

“I sure am. This will be our last year in school, and I’d like to have my life all dialed in by the time we graduate.”

“What will your mom say?”

Without thinking I say, “She’ll think it’s a great idea. She’s always urging me to get with someone more worthy of me.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

We weave in and out between the many party-goers, and a few seconds later, there we are, standing with Bob Heath and Jason. I air-kiss Jason, and he puts his arm around Miranda and she introduces me to Bob.

“This is our friend, Marigold,” says Miranda.

Bob turns toward me, smiling, and shakes my hand. “Marigold?”

“Yes,” I say, rolling my eyes. “Get it out of your system.”

“No,” Bob tells me. “I was just going to say, that’s a beautiful name for a beautiful girl.”

Of course, that makes me smile. How could it not?

“Thank you,” I tell him.

I glance down. We had a fashion show in Miranda’s kitchen earlier, and I’m still wearing the brand-new dress I bought for school. It’s light and airy and colorful, unlike Miranda’s plain, gray dress with one of her mourning necklaces around her neck. Her hair’s up in some old-fashioned do, whereas mine is just long and straight. But Miranda can pull stuff like that off. I swear to God, if I went to class wearing her Wednesday Addams dress, they’d probably laugh me out of the place, but on her they think it’s hot. But anyway, Bob seems to think I’m the hot one right now, so I’ll take it.

We stand there and talk for a little while longer, and I take Bob’s phone and put my contact information in it. When I hand it back his hand brushes mine, but then he sees what time it is and decides he has to take off. Miranda walks him to the front door, and after he leaves, everyone else pretty much does, too.

“How was that?” Miranda asks, once the door’s shut on the final group of guests.

“Awesome. I love impromptu parties.”

“No, I mean about Bob.”

“Oh, yeah. I totally hope he calls me.”

Meanwhile, I take Miranda’s advice and go out with Josh Bright and pretend like I’m totally boring. As boring as I can be without being downright rude, and he takes me home early with the excuse that he has to go do some baseball stuff. Hopefully he and my friend Allison, who was also at the party, will hook up in the near future, because I know she likes him, too.

A couple of days later, I’m hanging out in my room when my phone rings.

“Yes?”

“Marigold, this is Bob Heath.”

“Oh, hi,” I say, smiling. “How’ve you been?”

“Not bad. And you?”

“All right.”

“Listen,” he says, “the reason I’m calling is to ask if you’d like to go with me to an art exhibit.”

“Oh, sure. That sounds fun. Where at?”

“The Legion of Honor.”

“Ooh, I love that place.”

“Do you? So do I. What’s your favorite thing?”

“The sculptures, where they carved the lace and all that. It looks so real and delicate. What about you? What’s yours?”

Bob answers without hesitation, “The Monet.”

“Oh, yeah, that thing’s amazing. I’m surprised you like art.”

He chuckles. He’s got a nice laugh. “I’ve got to have something besides just baseball to think about.”

“I can see that. I can totally see that. Do you have a lot of art at your place?”

“Yes. I like hitting up the auctions and estate sales.”

“Oh, me, too,” I say. “Maybe we can go to one together.”

“Sure. I’d love that.”

“Cool. No one else I know likes to do that kind of stuff.”

And Bob says, “Well, we’ll just have to change all that.”

I so like him better than Josh Bright, who, honestly, was just as boring as I was pretending to be. All he did was blab about baseball, which I don’t mind in general, but he went a little overboard with it.

“When are we going to the museum?” I ask.

“How about next week Thursday? Pick you up at ten a.m.?”

“Okay, but I have to warn you, I still live at home, so you might have to meet my mom.”

“I’ll be glad to meet your mom.”

And he might’ve been glad to meet her, but she was less than thrilled to meet him. When he drops me off after our date, my mother has a talk with me.

“How old is that man?”

I lie. “Forty-two, I think.”

“You’re dating a forty-two-year-old man?”

“Looks like it.”

“He’s old enough to be your father.”

“Mother, I know what I’m doing.”

“What happened with that nice boy who took you out the other week?”

“The date went nowhere. We weren’t compatible. This date, though, this was a nice one.”

My mother folds her hands over her belly like she always does when something’s troubling her.

“Where’d he take you? Denny’s for supper at three in the afternoon?”

“Why, is that what you did? You’re older than he is.”

“Not by much.”

“Well, I’m tired of the boys I’ve been dating. I guess it won’t hurt me to try something new.”

“What’s your father going to say?”

“He’ll be overjoyed, considering the way he feels about the guys I usually date. He’s always telling me what a bunch of jackasses they are.”

Of course, my mother finks me off as soon as my dad gets home, and instead of feeling overjoyed like I thought, he just gets mad.

“I forbid you to see that man again.”

“Au contraire, Father. I’m seeing him again next week.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes, I am.”

So, the whole conversation deteriorates into an argument, and pretty soon, my dad tells me if I can't abide by his rules, I have to get out.

"You mean out out?"

"Yes. Out out."

And I have a real stubborn streak, so I march my little butt up the stairs and go pack myself some bags.

"I'll come back for the rest of it later," I tell them, on my way out the door, and then I throw my stuff in my car and bail. The only problem is, I don't know where else to go, so I go to Miranda's to cry on her shoulder.

"Don't worry," she tells me. "I know just how you feel. Uncle Tommy kicked me out one time, and I was a wreck. Luckily for me, I had Jason to turn to."

"I haven't been going out with Bob long enough to impose on him like that, so what am I going to do?"

"You can stay here," she says, just like I was hoping she would. "I'll put you in the bird room."

"The bird room?"

"Yes. It's got this awesome blue wallpaper with the prettiest birds all over it. Come on, I'll show you."

I follow her up the grand staircase and onto the second-floor landing. We pass her bedroom, which is at the top of the stairs, and continue on until we come to the fourth door on the right, to a room I've never been in before. She reaches out, turns the knob, and then she swings the door open for us to enter.

The room is perfectly enchanting, and the wallpaper is just as pretty as she described it, with multi-colored birds on a robin's egg blue background. The beautifully ornate brass bed is big, with a fluffy-looking yellow duvet on it. The nightstands are simple, made of brass and glass, with matching crystal lamps atop them. The drapes are a light yellow, and they must be black-out drapes, because no sunlight is coming in. Miranda notices me looking and hops to it, pulling the cord to open them. Now, with the sun shining in through the window, the room really comes alive. I step over to the window to look out. There's a nice view of the sparkling blue pool, with its waterfall and hot tub, and an even better view of the rose garden off to the left.

"You guys have such an awesome place," I tell Miranda, thinking of my own home which is decent-sized for a middle-class house, but nothing to compare with this. All we have are three bedrooms and a rectangular pool, and a concrete patio where my mom sits and suns herself.

"Thanks," she replies. "I hope you'll like it here."

"I'm sure I will."

"Well, I'll let you get settled, and then when you're ready, come on down to the kitchen. That's where we mostly hang out. Well, you know that."

"Yep. I didn't bring a ton of stuff with me, so I shouldn't be too long."

Miranda leaves me there alone to unpack. The closet is large and spacious, and there are enough hangers to hold all my clothes. I go ahead and hang them before they get too wrinkled, and then I place my socks and underthings in the dresser. I go check out the bathroom. It's as nice as any five-star hotel's is; light, sunny yellow and done up in marble.

All in all, Miranda's given me a cheerful refuge, away from my nagging parents. I head downstairs to the kitchen and find Miranda and her uncle's girlfriend, Vanessa Roberson, kicking back with a glass of wine.

"You never told me," says Miranda. "How was your date with Bob?"



“Pretty good. I think he really likes me. At least I hope so, considering my parents kicked me out for dating him. It would suck to get kicked out for nothing.”

“Don’t let that bother you,” Miranda tells me. “I’m glad you stood strong. You’re a grown woman. It’s not up to them to decide.”

“You’re right, Miranda. And I’m totally grateful you’re letting me stay over.”

“No problem. Think nothing of it. But I still have to tell Uncle Tommy. He’ll be cool with it. Maybe not at first, but he will. Won’t he, Ignatius?”

“He’ll be thrilled to death,” he answers.

“He won’t kick me out in the street like my parents did, will he?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. He’s very good-natured. I wasn’t out of the house for ten minutes before he started regretting it.”

Instead of putting my mind at ease, these statements only serve to make me nervous.

“Come have a glass of wine,” Miranda tells me. “You’ll feel better if you do.”

I nod and join her at their awesome bar. It’s circular and made of some kind of beautiful stone with fossils embedded in it. Miranda gets another glass and pours me some wine. She’s got amazing glasses, thin and light. I take a sip of my wine, feeling all elegant and stuff.

“Ooh,” I say. “It’s kind of dry.”

“Yeah,” she agrees, “but it’s got that leathery aroma. Let it rest on your tongue for a moment.”

I take another sip and try out her theory. “Oh, yeah,” I say. “I see what you mean. I like it better now.”

“It might be an acquired taste, but I took to it right away.”

“You’re so smart. You should’ve stuck with business.”

“That’s what Jason says, too. Maybe not the smart part, but the sticking with business for sure.”

“What, he doesn’t think you’re smart?”

“Yes, he does, but he says I’m a dilettante.”

Ignatius laughs in the background, and Miranda turns toward him.

“Shut up. It’s not funny.”

“Either dance well or quit the ballroom,” he tells her.

“I totally am,” she says. “I really plan to do well in English Literature.”

“You should’ve stuck with it,” I say again. “The math part will be done after this semester’s over.”

“Yes, but I didn’t like it. Boring business. I never should’ve started.”

“If you didn’t, we never would’ve met,” I remind her.

“Oh, yeah. That would’ve sucked. I’m so glad we met. You really understand me.”

I smile. “Yeah. I think I do. More than that, though, I respect you as a person.”

She leans over and gives me a hug and says, “I respect you, too. You’re totally going somewhere.”

“Aw. Thanks.”

“Now, back to Bob. How are we going to make him want you more?”

“Keep your hair that way,” says Ignatius, leaning over on the counter, “but try to lose some of that hippie stuff.”

I look down at my toe ring and sandals, and then at my long, flowing peasant shirt.

“What should I wear?” I ask him.

“Mini-skirts more than jeans. You’ve got great legs, you ought to show them off. And go get a mani-pedi, for God’s sake. Think of all the women he could get. He’s going to want someone who’s pulled together.”

“Well, I did feel a little underdressed at the art museum.”

“Would you think it’s charity if we went to the mall and I bought you a few things?” Miranda asks.

“Like what?”

“Like some high-heeled sandals instead of those flat ones.”

“You don’t wear high heels too often.”

“No, but I’ve got a different style going on. A different vibe.”

I heave a big sigh. I want Bob to fall in love with me, and I don’t want him to see me as just a college girl or anything. On the other hand, I’m not used to high heels and mini-skirts all the time, but I’m willing to give their ideas a try, since they obviously know what they’re talking about when it comes to snagging men.

“Okay. Let’s do it.”

“You’ve got a date coming up, don’t you?” Miranda asks.

“Yes. He’s going to take me to an estate sale.”

“Well, for that you can wear flat sandals, but nice ones, not those grungy old ones you have on. Oh, and a nice pair of slacks and a sailory-type top.”

\* \* \*

When the men finally get home from playing golf, Miranda doesn’t drop the bomb on her uncle right away. She gives him a chance to unwind, but this backfires as he sits with us and jokes around for a while before disappearing upstairs with Vanessa.

The next morning, Miranda and I have a quick breakfast before heading off to the mall. I’m hoping she doesn’t spend a ton of money on me, because I feel guilty already.

“Most of your clothes are pretty good,” she tells me, “but you need some mature clothes. And more accessories.”

I can see the validity of her point, so I go along with it, even though I don’t know if the new clothes will be quite my style. We ride the escalator up to the second floor, but instead of going to the juniors’ section, she leads me to Misses.

“Oh, look,” says Miranda. “Linen pants. Perfect. With rayon so they don’t wrinkle as much.”

They are nice, with their natural color, and they feel nice, too. But they kind of look like something my mother would wear.

“Look. They also have white.”

She pulls the white ones off the rack and makes me hold them. We go to a rack of tops, and Miranda finds me a blue and white striped tee with a bateau neckline and adds it to the pile.

“Now we need something to go with the beige ones,” she tells me. It takes her a little longer to find what she’s looking for, but she finally chooses both a black silk shirt and a Polynesian print shirt.

“In case he takes you to a barbecue or something,” she explains.

Once I try on the clothes and decide I like them, Miranda takes me around to find a jacket or sweater that looks sort of nautical. She ends up finding me a white windbreaker. With that done, we go back downstairs to the shoe department for some sandals. On the way, she spies the perfect belt to pull my nautical outfit together. We find a pair of white sandals, but she worries over what to get for the other two outfits. In the end, she chooses a pair of penny loafers.

“We’d better go back to the belts” she tells me. “You need a black one to pull that silk shirt-beige pants combo together.”

After that, she decides I need some jewelry. She finds me a kind of clunky necklace consisting of navy blue beads of diminishing sizes for my nautical outfit, and a pair of plain pearl earrings for the black and beige.

“Do you have a good watch?” she asks.

“Yes.”

“Good. Oh, Marigold, you’re going to look so pretty.”

“You’re not spending too much, are you?”

“I just got my allowance for this quarter, so no. We’ll have to do a mini fashion show for Ignatius when we get home. Oh my God, I almost forgot about the purses.”

I protest, but it falls on deaf ears. She buys me a designer clutch in white and a small shoulder bag in black. After these purchases are made, we finally leave the store.

“Will all this stuff even fit in your car?” I ask her.

“Sure. It’s roomier than it looks. Hey, do you mind if I stop off at this one store I get my clothes at? I want an outfit, too.”

Of course I agree to it because it’s her car, and she just spent a boat-load of money on me. We go to a place that sells Goth clothes, and Miranda falls in love with a short dress with lacing up the front and bell sleeves.

“That is so you,” I tell her.

“Thanks. It’ll look perfect with black tights and my suede boots.”

She also finds a shirt with a military vibe she just has to have, with a stand-up collar, a bat’s wing-shaped hem, and a row of gold buttons up the front to close it.

“This will look so good with that poufy skirt I have,” she tells me. They ring her up and we leave the store to head home.

“They had some interesting outfits in there,” I say. “I was tempted to get something myself.”

“You should’ve said something. I’d totally pay for another outfit for you.”

“Oh, no. You’ve been so generous already, I would feel bad. We’ll come back when I have more money.”

“You know you can borrow any of my clothes and accessories, right?”

“Are you sure? Thank you, Miranda.”

We get home and model our clothes for Ignatius. He expresses his approval of all of it, especially Miranda’s new shirt. She’s wearing it with the skirt she mentioned, and it does look super cute. He also likes my nautical outfit, especially with the accessories.

“If Bob doesn’t like that, he’s crazy,” he tells me.

“Thank you,” I say. “I guess we’d better go change into our regular clothes now.”

When we get back downstairs from changing, Tommy’s girlfriend, Vanessa, is there.

“Ugh,” says Miranda. “You just missed the fashion show.”

“I know. Ignatius was just telling me about it.”

“We need to have a party,” Miranda says, sitting down and propping her elbows on the counter. “Where’s Kevin?”

“On his way over,” Ignatius tells her. “And I don’t think we’d better have a party unless your uncle gives you permission.”

“Besides,” says Vanessa, “I have to be to work by five.”

“Talk about a buzz kill, you guys,” she tells them.

“We can have our own little party, just the four of us,” says Ignatius.

“All right. Maybe Uncle Tommy can get some guys to come over after work.”

“You’d better send him a text,” says Vanessa. “He might be too tired to have a party.”

So, she does, and later on, she gets a text back. I can tell by her face and the few words she utters that the answer is no.

“What did he say?” asks Vanessa.

“He said not tonight. And he also said I don’t need to have a party every time I buy a new outfit.”

I touch her arm to show her I’m sympathetic and she shrugs.

“Oh, well,” she says. “We can always go out to the bar tomorrow night. And anyway, we totally forgot to buy you any mini-skirts.”

“We’ll go out and do it tomorrow, if you want,” I suggest.

“Okay. That’d be really cool. We need to get you something killer for the gay bar.”

“I didn’t say I’m taking you to the gay bar,” says Ignatius.

“You won’t take us?” she asks, sounding a little hurt.

“Yes, I will, but you should ask first, instead of steam-rolling over people all the time.”

She looks like a chastened schoolgirl when he says that, but she perks up instantly when the door opens and Ignatius’s boyfriend, Kevin, comes in.

“Guess what?” she tells him. “We’re going to the gay bar tomorrow night.”

“Let me guess. You got a new outfit.”

“Yes. I bought this amazing top today. It’s black—”

“Surprise—”

“With a row of brass buttons... oh, hell, let me just go put it on again.”

She skip-runs out of the room, and a few minutes later, she returns with the top and the poufy skirt back on, walking in a dignified manner. She’s got fresh lipstick on and a black velvet ribbon around her neck.

Kevin compliments her ensemble. “You totally have to wear your braids,” he tells her. “Those old queens at the club will love what you’re wearing right now.”

“You think so?”

“Yes. Especially Gus and Barry. And look, you’ve got the boots on. I told you those suede boots would go with everything. Besides, they keep it just shy of going totally Goth.”

I picture Miranda wearing this outfit to school this fall, walking through the quad on a crisp autumn day, and realize it’s not only the gay men who’ll love her in it. She also has a circle of admirers, both male and female, who’ll go crazy when she shows up dressed like this.

“It is, Miranda, it’s really pretty,” I tell her. “You should leave it on until Jason gets home.”

“Yes, do,” says Vanessa. “He won’t be able to keep his hands off you.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” we all say in unison.

After a while, Ignatius makes us some dinner. Nothing fancy, just some spaghetti and meatballs, but it’s delicious. I compliment him and think how nice it is that everybody can come together in this family without fighting all the time.

“Why so serious?” Miranda asks me.

“No reason. I’m just thinking about my parents. Have you asked your uncle if I can stay a while yet?”

“No, but I promise I’ll ask him tonight.”

Of course, hearing that makes me a little nervous since he vetoed the party, and I can't wait until he and Jason get home. As soon as they see Miranda, they stop dead in their tracks.

"Wow," says Tommy. "Is that for our win?"

"You won?" asks Miranda. "Oh my God, congratulations."

I really don't know much about baseball myself, though I suppose I'll have to learn if I keep dating Bob. Miranda turns and tells me they're inching towards the playoffs. Well, I might be kind of ignorant, but even I know the playoffs are a big deal, so I muster up all the enthusiasm I can and congratulate them, too.

"I just had the best idea," Miranda tells me. "You should call Bob's cell phone and congratulate him, too."

"Oh, yeah. Thanks."

So, I do as she suggests and call him, but it goes straight to voicemail.

"Hey, Bob," I say. "This is Marigold. I just wanted to say congrats on the win tonight."

When I hang up, Miranda's looking at me.

"Of course, if they do get into the playoffs, you'll have less time together."

"Oh, because he'll be gone? Where do they go for the playoffs?"

"Any number of places," she tells me. "It depends who they're playing and how far along they get, but usually somewhere far like Baltimore or Detroit."

"Drag."

"Maybe he'll take you with him. Or maybe he'll buy you a present. Uncle Tommy and Jason always do."

I think about her beautiful engagement ring and yearn for one of my own, but I know she means they bring trinkets home to her and Vanessa, because she shows them to me at school the day after she gets them. They're usually really old-fashioned pins and such. I'm talking the eighteen-hundreds here, but she wears them well. I love her personal style, but it's something I know I could never pull off. Even now she's got her hair down, something she rarely does, and is wearing a black stone surrounded by pearls on some kind of a broach. She explained to me once that it was called a mourning broach, saying the pearls signify tears shed for a deceased loved one, and the black stone is because widows were expected to wear black for at least a year.

"So?" she says at last. "Do you like my new outfit, or what?"

"I don't know about your uncle," says Jason, "but I love it. How about you, Tommy?"

"I love it, too, Nanda. You look like you're getting ready to lead the charge of the Light Brigade."

She smiles and then she says, in her best wheedling voice, "Uncle Tommy? Can I ask you a big, big favor?"

"What's that, brat?"

"Can Marigold stay with us for a while? See, her parents sort of kicked her out, all because she went on a date with your skipper, and now she has nowhere else to go."

He looks at me like he's seeing me for the first time. "Is that right?"

"Unfortunately, yes," I answer. "I mean, the getting kicked out part. The date itself was lovely, but they said some awful stuff to me, and I don't want to go back."

"Yeah," he says. "I can see how getting kicked out might suck. How about we let you stay for a month, and we'll revisit it when the month is over?"

Miranda squeals and runs over to give him a hug.

"Oh, thank you, Uncle Tommy. You're the best."

"Hey," says Jason. "Don't I even get a kiss?"

She goes to give him a peck on the cheek, but he grabs her and makes her kiss him for real. Everybody else is used to their displays of affection and they go about their business, so I do, too.

“Want to go upstairs?” Jason asks her.

She glances at me and says, “Maybe.”

“What do you mean, maybe?” he asks.

“I mean, if Marigold will be all right.”

“Marigold will be fine,” I answer, giving her a nudge with my elbow. “Go. Go.”