



## The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club)

By Dani Collins

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Tiffany Davis takes her first delicious step into the exclusive masquerade ball hosted by the secretive Q Virtus gentleman's club. Here, behind the mask, Tiffany can hide her scars and reveal her true self—a powerful businesswoman with an offer for the president of Bregnovia, Ryzard Vrbancic.

Astounded by her audacity, only the fire in Tiffany's eyes makes Ryzard look twice. He has no interest in her business deal, but the promise of a woman who can match his ruthless determination makes him eager to seduce from her the one thing she's not offering....

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## Editorial Review

### About the Author

When Canadian Dani Collins found romance novels in high school she immediately wondered how one trained for such an awesome job. She began writing, trying various genres, but always came back to her first love, Harlequin Presents. Often distracted by family and 'real' jobs, she continued writing, inspired by the romance message that if you hang in there you'll reach a happy ending. In May of 2012, Harlequin offered to buy her manuscript in a two book deal. She is living happily ever after.

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Tiffany Davis pretended she wasn't affected by the hard stare her brother and father gave her when she entered her father's office. It wasn't easy to let people she loved pass judgment on whether she'd used sufficient concealer on her scars. Sometimes she wanted to throw the bottle of liquid beige into the trash and scream, *There. This is what I look like now. Live with it.*

But her brother had saved her life pulling her from the fiery car. He felt guilty enough for putting her in it. He still grieved for her groom, his best friend, and everything else Tiffany had lost. She didn't have to rub salt in his wounds.

*Good girl, Tiff. Keep biting back what you really want to say. It's not like that got you into these skin grafts.*

She came to a halt and sighed, thinking it was probably time for another visit to the head doctor if she was cooking up that sort of inner dialogue. But her harsh exhale caused both men to tense. Which made her want to rail all the louder.

Being angry all the time was a character shift for her. Even she had trouble dealing with it, so she shouldn't blame them for reacting like this. But it still fed her irritation.

"Yes?" She clicked her teeth into a tight smile, attempting to hold on to her slipping patience.

"You tell us. What's this?" Christian kept his arms folded as he nodded at the large box sitting open on their father's desk. The lid wore an international courier's logo, and the contents appeared to be a taxidermist's attempt to marry a raven to a peacock.

"The feather boa you asked for last Christmas?" Lame joke, sure, but neither man so much as blinked. They only stared at her as if they were prying her open.

"Be serious, Tiff," Christian said. "Why is the mask for you? Did you request to go in my place?"

A claustrophobic band tightened around her insides. A year in a mask had left her vowing to never feel such a thing on her face again. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The frost in her voice made both men's mouths purse. *Why did all of this have to be so hard?* The touchiness between her and her family was palpable every minute of every day. If she was short, they were defensive. If she was the least bit vulnerable, they became so overprotective she couldn't breathe.

They'd nearly lost her. She got that they loved her and were still worried about her. They wouldn't relax until she got back to normal, but she would never be normal again. It made the situation impossible.

"Where is it you think I want to go?" she asked in as steady a tone as she could manage.

"*Q Virtus*," her father said, as if that one word sufficed as explanation.

She shook her head and shrugged, still lost. Did they realize she was in the middle of an exchange worth five hundred million dollars? She didn't have much, but she did have a job now. Seeing as it involved running a multibillion-dollar company, she tried to do it well.

"Ryzard Vrbancic," Christian provided. "We put in a request to meet him."

Pieces fell together. *Q Virtus* was that men's club Pau-lie used to talk about. "You want to meet a puppet leader at one of those rave things? Why? The man's a despot."

"Bregnovia is asking for recognition at the UN. They're a democracy now."

She snorted in disbelief. "The whole world is ignoring the fact he stole the last dictator's money and bought himself a presidency? Okay."

"They're recovering from civil war. They need the sort of infrastructure Davis and Holbrook can provide."

"I'm sure they do. Why go the cloak-and-dagger route? Call him up and pitch our services."

"It's not that simple. Our country hasn't recognized his yet so we can't talk to him openly, but we want to be the first number on his list when recognition happens."

She rolled her eyes. Politics were so fun. "So you've set up this clandestine meeting—"

"It's not confirmed. That happens when you get there."

"That would be the broad 'you,' right? Like the universal 'they'?"

Christian's mouth tightened. He lifted out the feathery contents of the box. It was actually quite beautiful. A piece of art. The blend of blue-black and turquoise and gold feathers covered the upper eyes and forehead and—significantly—splayed down the left side in an eerily familiar pattern. Ribbons tailed off each side.

It was like looking in the mirror, seeing that reflection of her scar. A slithery feeling inside her torso made her heart speed up. She shook her head. She wasn't going anywhere, especially in public, with or without a crazy disguise.

"You understand how *Q Virtus* works?" her brother prodded. "This mask is your ticket in."

"Not *mine*"

"Yeah, Tiff, it is." He turned it around so she could see where her name was inscribed on the underside, along with *Isla deMargarita, Venezuela*. "See? Only you can attend."

His terse tone and shooting glance toward their father made it clear they'd spent some time pondering alternate solutions. Both men showed signs of deep frustration, a level of emotion usually reserved for when approval ratings were low. To see them so bent out of shape activated her don't-make-more-waves genes.

*Your father is under a lot of pressure, dear. Do as he asks for now.*

*No, she reminded herself. She was living her life, not waiting for it to make everyone else's list of priorities. Still, she'd been raised to have civilized conversations, not be outright defiant. "I would think that taking off the mask to show your name defeats the purpose."*

"There's a chip embedded. They know which mask belongs to which person, and as you can see, they only fit one face."

"They obviously know a lot about *me*. That's creepy. Doesn't it seem weird they would know how to cover my scars?"

"*Q Virtus* has an exceptional history of discretion and security," her father said, defending it with a kind of pompous grumpiness that surprised her. "Whatever they know about us, I'm sure it's kept very well protected."

A remarkably naive comment from a man who'd been in politics and business long enough to mistrust everyone and everything. Heck, he'd dragged her in here because he thought she'd undermined him with his brotherhood of secret handshakes, hadn't he?

"Dad, if you want to become a member—"

"I can't." He smoothed his tie, one of his tells when his ego was dented.

"Too old? Then Christian—?"

"No."

She was quite smart, had always had better marks than her brother, who fudged his way through just about everything, but she was missing something. "Well, Paulie was a member. What does it take?"

"Money. A lot of it. Paul Sr. was a member and once Paulie inherited, he had the means to pay the fee," her father said in a level tone.

Of course. Therein lay her father's envy and reverence. It must have eaten him alive that his best friend and rival for her mother's affections had possessed something he hadn't.

"When you were still in the hospital, I applied on your behalf, hoping to go as your proxy," Christian explained. "I didn't hear back until today." Glancing at their father, he added, "It is kind of creepy they know Tiff has finally recovered and taken over the reins of Davis and Holbrook."

"Everyone's talking about it. It's hardly a secret," her father dismissed with a fresh heaping of disapproval.

Tiffany bit back a sigh. She would not apologize for grappling her way into running the company now that she was well enough. What else would she do moving forward? Trophy wife and having a family was out of

the question with this face.

Still, it was so *unladylike* to work, her mother reminded at every opportunity.

"I don't understand why they've accepted her. It's a men's club," her father muttered.

She eyed the mask, recalling the sorts of stories Paulie used to come home with after attending one of these *Q Virtus* things. "It's a booze-fueled sex orgy, isn't it?"

"It's a networking event," her father blustered.

Christian offered one of his offside grins. "It's a chance for the elite to let their hair down," he clarified. "But a lot of deals are closed over martinis and a handshake. It's the country club on a grander scale."

Right. She knew how that worked. Wives and daughters stood around in heels and pearls planning the Fourth of July picnic while husbands and fathers colluded to keep their money amongst themselves. Her engagement to Paulie, Jr. had been negotiated between the seventh and ninth holes of the top green, her wedding staged on the balcony by their mothers, her cake designed by the renowned chef, and all of it exploded into flames against the wrought-iron exit gate.

"This is all very interesting." It wasn't. Not at all. "But I'm in the middle of something. You'll have to sort this out yourselves."

"Tiffany."

Her father's stern tone was the one that made any good daughter spin, take a stance of dutifully planted feet, knees locked, hands knotted at her sides. She caught her tongue firmly between her teeth. "Yes?"

"Our friends in Congress are hoping for good relations with Bregnovia. I need those friends."

Because his hat was in the ring for the next election. Why was that always the only thing that mattered?

"I don't know what you expect me to do. Pitch our services while wearing a showgirl costume? Who would take that seriously? I can't go into a meeting without it, though. No one likes face-to-face interactions with this." She pointed at where her ear had been reconstructed and a cheekbone implant inserted.

Her father flinched and looked away, not denying that she was hard to look at. That hurt more than the months of screaming burn injuries.

"Maybe I could be your date," Christian said. "I don't know if members are allowed to bring an escort, but..."

"Bring my brother to the prom?" That certainly reinforced how far down the eligibility ladder she'd fallen. Her hands stayed curled at her sides, but mentally she cupped them around her tiny, shrunken heart, protecting it. *Love yourself, Tiff. No one else will.*

"Get me into the club and you won't have to leave your room until it's over," Chris said.

*Hide the disfigured beast.*

She had to close her eyes against her father's intense stare, the one that willed her to comply.

*You weren't going to let yourself be a pawn anymore,* she reminded herself.

"How long is this thing?" she heard herself ask, because what kind of family would she have, if not this one? Her friends had deserted her, and dating was completely off the table. Her life would be very dark and lonely if she alienated her parents and brother.

"We arrive at sunset on Friday night, and everyone is gone by Sunday evening. I'll make the travel arrangements," Christian said with quick relief.

"I wear this thing in *and* out. That's the deal, because I won't do this if I'm going to be stared at." Listen to her, talking so tough. She was actually scared to her toenails. What would people say if they saw her? She couldn't let it happen.

"As far as I know, everyone wears masks the whole time," Chris said, practically dancing, he was so elated.

"I'll be in my office," she muttered. *Searching for my spine.*

Ryzard Vrbancic abided by few rules beyond his own, but he left his newly purchased catamaran as the shadow of its mast stretched across the other boats in the Venezuelan marina. If he didn't climb the stairs before the red sky had inked purple, he would be locked out of the *Q Virtus Quarterly*.

*Story of my life,* he thought, but hoped that soon he'd be as welcome worldwide as the famous black credit card.

Security was its usual discreet step through a well-camouflaged metal detector that also read the chip in his mask. One of the red-gowned staff lifted her head from her tablet as he arrived and smiled. "We're pleased to see you again, Raptor. May I escort you to your room?"

She was a pretty thing, but the *petite q's* were off-limits, which was a pity. He hadn't had time to find himself a lover for weeks. The last had complained he spent more time working than with her, which was apparent from her spa and shopping bills. They were as high as his sexual frustration.

His situation should improve now, but he'd have to be patient a little longer. Like the music that set a vacation tone, the *petite q's* provided atmosphere. They could stroke an ego, dangle off an arm, flirt and indulge almost any reasonable request, but if they wanted to keep their job, they stayed out of the members' beds. Being smart and career minded along with attractive and engaging, the *petite q's* tended to side with keeping their jobs.

*Such a pity.*

His current escort set up his thumbprint for the door then stepped inside his suite for his briefing. "You have a meeting request from Steel Butterfly. Shall I confirm?"

"A woman?" he asked.

"I don't have the gender of our clients, sir."

And if she did know, she wouldn't say, either.

"No other requests?" He was hoping for a signal from international bodies that his petition to the UN was receiving a nod.

"Not at this time. Did you have any?"

Damn. He'd come here knowing he had a meeting request, hoping it would be a tip of the hand on his situation. Now he was under lockdown and liable to be taking a sales pitch of some kind.

"Not at present. I'll accept an introduction on that one, nothing longer." He nodded at her tablet.

"The time and location will be transmitted to your smartwatch. Please let us know if I can arrange anything else to ensure your satisfaction while you're with us."

He followed her out, confident that everything he'd preordered was in the suite. Zeus was exceptionally good at what he did. Ryzard had never had an issue of any kind while at *Q Virtus*, which made the exorbitant membership fee and elaborate travel and security arrangements worth the trouble.

Entering the pub-style reception lounge, he saw roughly thirty people, mostly men in tuxedos and masks. They stood with a handful of gorgeous *petite q's* wearing the customary red designer gowns.

He accepted the house drink for this session, rum over ice with a squeeze of lime and a sugared rim, then glanced at his watch. At his four o'clock, a collection of dots informed him the small conclave of men to his right included Steel Butterfly.

He had no idea where Zeus came up with these ridiculous nicknames, but he supposed Raptor was apt for him, coming from the Latin meaning to seize or take by force. The bones of several dinosaurs in that category had been uncovered in his homeland of Bregnovia, too.

Eyeing the group, he wondered which one was his contact. One accepted a drink from a *petit q* and handed her his watch. It didn't matter, he decided. He wasn't interested in beginning a conversation in public that he was scheduled to have in private tomorrow. He waited until he was out of range in the gambling hall to activate his identity on his own watch. This resulted in an immediate invitation to join the blackjack table.

He sat so he could read the screen mounted near the ceiling in the corner. It subtly manifested and dissolved with blurbs on presentations and entertainment to be held over the course of the *Q Virtus* Quarterly. Tastemakers, trendsetters and thought leaders were flown in to provide rich, powerful, political forces such as himself with the absolute cutting-edge information and samples of global economics and technology. Meanwhile, at tables such as this one, he would pick up the other side of the coin: gossip about a royal's addiction, a cover-up of a coup attempt on a head of state, a lie that would be accepted as truth to stem international panic.

He could only imagine what was said about him, but he didn't let himself dwell on what was likely disapproval and distrust. His people were free, his country independent. That was the important thing.

Still, thoughts of what it had cost him crept in, threatening to inject disappointment and guilt into an otherwise pleasant if staid evening. He folded his hand, left the table and lifted a rum off a passing waiter's tray as he moved outside in search of entertainment.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Whitney Obrien:**

The event that you get from The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) may be the more deep you looking the information that hide inside words the more you get considering reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) giving you excitement feeling of reading. The writer conveys their point in particular way that can be understood by anyone who read the item because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go together with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) instantly.

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#### **Tara Payton:**

Spent a free the perfect time to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their down time with their family, or their very own friends. Usually they carrying out activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic in the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you need to something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book may be option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing you ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the reserve untitled The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) can be fine book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

#### **Jesse Williams:**

Reading can called mind hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book particularly book entitled The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) your head will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a e-book then become one type conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get just before. The The Ultimate Seduction (The 21st Century Gentleman's Club) giving you a different experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful facts for your better life on this era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern here is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning an activity. Do you want to try this extraordinary investing spare time activity?

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