



moguli

*new york times* bestselling author

**katy evans**

# Mogul

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

Katy Evans

# CONTENTS

[TITLE PAGE](#)

[PLAYLIST](#)

[ROOM 1103](#)

[AFTER THE O](#)

[I NEED A DIVORCE](#)

[ROOMIE](#)

[NOT THE CALL I EXPECTED](#)

[NAME](#)

[PARK](#)

[STARS](#)

[FOUND](#)

[WORKING GIRLS](#)

[WORKING MAN](#)

[MRS. FORD](#)

[PRINCE STREET](#)

[FLESH AND BLOOD](#)

[LAUNCH](#)

[CAUTIOUSLY](#)

[NEWS](#)

[FURNITURE AND FILMING](#)

[PAPERS](#)

[AUDITION DAY](#)

[FINALISTS](#)

[CLUB](#)

[BROADWAY](#)

[HOT WORKAHOLIC](#)

[DEAR READERS](#)

[COMING SOON](#)

[TITLES BY KATY EVANS](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT](#)

[COPYRIGHT](#)

# PLAYLIST

“Haunting” by Halsey

“Stitches” by Shawn Mendes

“Strangers” by Halsey

“Turn Me On” by David Guetta

“Heartless” by The Fray

“Body Party” by Ciara

“Skin” by Rihanna

“Faithfully” by Journey

“I’m Gonna Getcha Good!” by Shania Twain

“Story of My Life” by One Direction

“Wait for You” by Nelly Furtado

“She (For Liz)” by Parachute

“This Time Around” by Tove Lo

“Steal Your Heart” by Augustana

“Burnin’ Up” by Jonas Brothers

“The Scientist” by Coldplay

“How Deep Is Your Love” by Calvin Harris and the Disciples

“All In” by Lifehouse

## ROOM 1103

*Sara*

*“Four Seasons concierge, this is Sara speaking.”*

*“Sara, this is the gentleman from room 1103.”*

*“Oh, yes. How can I help you, sir?”*

*“I’d like your panties in a little wad in my pocket and you thrashing in my bed.”*

Blush. *“Right away, sir.”*

*“Sara, did you manage to get those tickets for *Hamilton*?”*

“Yes, I sent them over,” I tell my coworker Viktor as I lower my head to keep him from seeing how flushed I got after the phone call. Keeping my loose hair falling in a curtain over the sides of my face, I log out of my computer and grab my cell phone. “I need to take something to one of our guests and am stopping at the ladies’. Be right back,” I tell him.

I step out from behind the concierge desk in the lobby, already starting to perspire from what I’m about to do. I head to the restrooms and hurry into a stall, lock myself in, and take off my panties. I wad them up in a tiny ball.

“Damn!” I have no pockets to stash them in.

I grit my teeth and slide them back on, then I head outside and wait until the elevator bank is empty so that I can ride upstairs alone.

At the last minute, a guest joins me in the elevator. “Good evening,” she says.

“Good evening, ma’am,” I say.

*Sara, what are you doing?!*

I can’t believe I’m riding the elevator up to his room. Every floor my heart pounds harder and harder. And when the woman steps out, I can barely suppress my excitement. My whole body trembles with adrenaline and desire as the elevator doors close, and I slip my hands beneath my skirt and take off my panties again. I wad them in my palm and stare anxiously as the floor numbers keep creeping upward.

If I’m honest with myself, I will admit that my body hasn’t felt normal since I met him. It hasn’t felt at peace. Oh no, it’s felt sort of shivery, a little too warm, and a little too amped up with female sex hormones.

I arrive at his floor, step out, and walk toward room 1103. I knock twice and then wait, glancing around in paranoia of getting caught.

The door opens—and tall, dark, and decadent stands on the other side—and I’m absolutely breathless.

The kind of breathless you get when you’re at the top of a rollercoaster about to dive down—when no matter how much you want to breathe, you can’t. Not really. Only to let out a scream—if you can find your voice at all. It’s an odd, uncomfortable feeling, but there’s something about this guy that has been pushing all my buttons.

The button that says: I haven’t had sex in a while.

The button that says: I like unavailable men even though I don’t want to.

The button that says: I think men in suits are hot.

The button that says: When I meet a guy that makes me feel fireworks, I’m not going to be a pussy about it and run away. No! I’m going to light up a match and see how high the flames can go.

And so here I am, staring at a hotel guest, unaware of his name—not that it’s important. The room is booked under a Californian corporation. They

regularly send executives here, but this is the first time that I've seen this particular executive.

The first time I'm lighting that "match."

For some reason, it's easy. It's so easy that I can't believe how quickly I blew off work when he called and asked for me, and how fucking eager I am to drop my panties in his pocket.

I smile up at him as I brush past his shoulder and let myself into his room. He grabs my wrist to halt me, tugging me around to face him. The surprised breath that surfaces gets caught in my throat. He looks down at me, slowly shutting the door with his other hand.

The guy looks gorgeous in a suit. He looks just as gorgeous without the suit jacket, in only slacks and a white shirt. So what? A lot of men look great in suits.

But this one makes my heart pound so hard that I can't stop feeling it in my rib cage.

This guy is supernova. And his whole look screams workaholic. Now Hot Workaholic's eyes land on the pulse at my throat, and he raises his arm and curls his hand around my neck, stroking my pulse point with his thumb.

"Are you turned on already, Sara?" he asks.

His face is a little arrogant, his expression reserved, revealing nothing. His shoulders are wide and proud, the kind of shoulders that can hoist you up all day. His lashes are prettier than a girl's. Not that I'm jealous or anything.

There's pure inky blackness in his eyes.

As black as his hair.

His features could not be more symmetrical or captivating.

The guy looks so comfortable in his skin, you'd have to wonder if he knows he's this attractive. He'd have to be blind not to know. But does it even *matter* to him at all that he is?



He looks like a Suit, the hottest Suit you've ever seen, and I wonder if he does anything but work.

His mouth is curled as if he's on the edge of laughter, and he smiles a little more, flashing me straight, even teeth.

As I press closer, he grabs me and boosts me up to the console by the foyer of the suite, and I realize he can definitely get more stuff done than work.

He ducks his sooty head and his lips barely—barely—caress mine. A thousand tingles rush down my body. My lips open—waiting. Eager. He inhales, growls, and then opens his hot, hard, made-for-sex mouth and presses it fully to mine. Our mouths dissolve in a crazy-as-hell kiss, and his tongue flashes out to set mine on fire with a lick. With one pull of his strong arms, I'm squished against the flat plane of his body and against the wonderful, toe-curling evidence of how freaking hot and *stiff* this man is for me already.

“Do me hard,” I whisper, unable to stop kissing him, sliding my fingers into his hair.

“I'm doing you hard.” He shoots me a look so full of sexual innuendo that I expect to turn to cinders any minute. “And repeatedly.”

The man takes my lips again and gives my tongue the best massage it's ever gotten. A massage that promises my whole body a happy ending.

I stroke my fingers along the front of his slacks, and I cannot even measure how big he is, because he's huge, and something about him being this well endowed, and about him being ready to give it to me, makes me wetter and wetter. I stroke up and down and feel myself pant, my whole mind on fire with thoughts of him—how good he feels, smells, kisses, because this is so lit.

He is *LIT*.

## *Sara*

*The day before...*

I'm back in New York after a delay in Houston and a storm above Manhattan that kept us circling for an extra half hour. I'm beat and moody, but glad to be home, as I head out the terminal with my suitcase rolling beside me.

I'm ready to fill up the tub and forget this weekend entirely, including the fact that my family has broken apart in what feels like a blink.

I never saw it coming.

I thought my parents would age together, right to the end. I thought they were happy. I thought they were one of the precious few couples in the world still in love with each other.

But it turns out that my dad no longer loves my mom. I don't know who's more devastated, my mom or me.

Distracted by the thoughts, I realize too late that I've walked down the taxi line—a line that indicates at least an hour wait—to the front. “Line's back there,” a moody older man grits out through his teeth.

Startled, my eyes scan to the back of the line and my heart sinks. I pull out my phone and open the Uber app. Last time I tried grabbing an Uber at the airport, it was hell. The guy couldn't find me and I couldn't find him, and I still got charged. Nobody likes to get charged for a service they never enjoyed, so I hesitate.

Scanning the area, I notice a man in a suit about to board a taxi. I approach, wondering if I can ask where he's headed and if I can share a ride.

The man is bubbling hot, and he knows it, but I try not to get caught up in

that. I am too exhausted.

As the taxi driver loads his suitcase into the trunk, the man's gaze slides to me. He lifts his brows expectantly and I open my mouth and quickly blurt, "Nolita. Going anywhere near?"

He steps back and purses his lips as if annoyed, but motions for me to board.

I bristle in defense, a New Yorker's instant reaction to the hostility we face on a daily basis, but I hastily pass my suitcase to the driver and quickly hop inside the cab. The man slides in behind me and shuts the door while I tell the driver my address.

My defenses begin to drop once we're on our way and fantasies of my hot tub return to my mind. I turn to thank the man, but he already has his phone to his ear. He speaks with a deep voice and his answers are a series of curt grunts.

He seems like a bit of an asshole. Like the type of man with expectations who isn't used to hearing the word *no*.

During my years at the NYU dance academy, a lot of the male performers I ended up dancing with expected to go to bed with me. I became an expert at fielding them off. I even had a special move I used when they went in for the kill—I'd push my arm out, palm up, and quickly turn my head. I called it the "hell no." It was enough to get the message across so I thankfully didn't need to say it; the hand move was far more subtle.

Will I need to use the hand move with this guy?

*Excellent question, Sara.* Though something about him is making me think of a *different* kind of hand move. I shiver as I stroke my gaze up his hard body.

"Yes, and FedEx a copy to the hotel," he barks.

I shift, and his gaze drops to my miniskirt.

I feel my brows rise in disbelief, but he's too intent on staring at my thighs to notice. When he speaks into the receiver again, I feel as if he's speaking to me. "I'm telling you just open it up, pull it out, and get it to me as soon as possible."

I squirm in my seat.

His eyes lift and his lips curl at the corners.

I try not to audibly pant when his eyes trail downward again. I swear I see a glimmer of lust in his eyes, but his expression is unreadable.

"Thanks. And have Roberts call me when she gets in."

He cuts the call and pockets his phone.

He glances at me in silence.

He looks like business, but underneath his suit is an appeal so raw I can only wonder how it would feel to claw my nails under that white button shirt, undo his tie, grab him by the collar, get that perfect black hair mussed, and feel his damn gorgeous hands on me.

He narrows his eyes when I lick my lips; then he looks away, out the window, and sighs, dragging a hand over his face. He curses under his breath, shaking his head and twisting his lips sardonically.

I start to wonder if I hallucinated the sexual looks between us when he curves his lips higher and knowingly says, "Come closer."

I start and let out a small laugh. "Does that usually work for you?" I whisper.

"I don't know. Does it?" He shoots me a lazy look, and his inky black eyes reveal a glimmer of mischief.

He sighs, tugs on his tie to loosen it a fraction, and leans back against the seat of the car. "Had a long day." He kicks his feet out and looks at me as if expecting me to massage him or something.

"Yeah? And I had a long flight."

Despite my better judgment, I'm running my eyes over his rather gorgeously wide, flat chest and his handsome boy-next-door face mixed with porn star smile and the elusiveness of some workaholic that clings to him like that damn hot black suit.

He sighs in exasperation. "Come closer," he says again.

I'm debating whether to offer him a sassy comeback or shock the hell out of him when I do as he asks, but my phone rings, and I wonder if it's my roommate confirming he's finally vacated my apartment.

"Hello?" I answer.

"Is this Sara Davies?"

"Yes, this is Sara."

"Sara, this is Carly. You know, the new girl? I was wondering if you could cover my shift for me tonight at the hotel."

"I just got back into town, and I'm exhausted, and my shift doesn't start until tomorrow—"

"Oh, thank you so much for doing this for me! I know it's a lot to ask," she squeaks as if I just agreed and hangs up.

*Ugh.*

I glower at my phone. I'm not ready to go back to work. And what about my bath? Ugh.

"Sara, huh." He watches me as I tuck my phone back into my purse.

"Do you have something against my name?"

"Nope. Just pictured something more exotic." He fiddles with his phone, tucks it back into his pocket, and says, "I want to fuck you in the back of this car, Sara."

"Yeah? And I want to fuck up your filthy mouth with my fist." I smirk, but my body clutches and shivers inside. I hate the idea that he might be able

to see through my smart remark and intuitively know the effect he has on me.

I tap the glass and tell the driver, “Change of plans. Drop me off at the Four Seasons Hotel downtown.”

The stranger in the car next to me seems to bite back a smile as he reaches out to touch a bit of my loose dark hair. My heart begins to pound. I want him to touch more of me.

We ride like this, for minutes. Hours. The guy simply twirling a strand of my hair around his index finger. His long, thick, tanned index finger with the perfectly trimmed, really short nail.

I don't know why. But maybe it's because I know that we're arriving very soon. Or maybe because I want to shock the hell out of him because the guy looks unshockable.

I slide down the seat, inching closer to him, and once our hips meet, I shift sideways and, ever so slowly, swing my leg out and straddle him. I hold my position, our eyes locked, considering the boldness of my move while something very hard presses prominently between my legs.

I swallow, bend my head, and whisper in his ear, “Maybe I do want to get fucked in the back of this car, too. Problem is... we're about to arrive.”

I rock my hips against him, causing his erection to grow more pronounced. His hands possessively lock onto my ass, his fingers biting into my hips.

The car halts. We've reached my destination.

I swallow again, trying to cover my panting desperation for more.

“I hope that improved your day a little,” I taunt with a smile as I slide off him.

He laughs and watches me narrowly as I grab my carry-on.

“Thanks for the ride.”

“That's my line,” he says, and shifts his position as he adjusts himself in

his slacks and follows me out.

Wow. What a gentleman.

He heads to the back of the trunk and removes my suitcase. “That’s really not necessary. But thank you,” I tell him, taking my bag.

He grabs his own case, and my eyes widen when he pulls out a bill and pays the driver. I gape at him. “Umm, what are you—”

“Sara, thank goodness!” Carly interrupts, coming up behind us. “Here, I’ll bring this in for you.” She grabs my bag while eyeing the hot motherfucker I rode in with.

“Who is he?” she gushes, shooting a look past my shoulder as we shuffle inside.

“Nobody. And you’re going to owe me big time,” I growl under my breath.

As I settle in behind the concierge desk, my gaze follows his movements. I watch him check in at the VIP counter. Then he walks across the lobby toward me. When I realize where he is headed, my heart starts drumming crazily again.

He reaches my desk and leans forward. I didn’t think it was possible, but he looks hotter and taller from where I am standing.

“You’re an interesting discovery, aren’t you?” he says, unsmiling but obviously curious.

“I’ve existed for a long time; you didn’t discover me.”

“Oh, but I have. Or you me.”

Maybe he’s right. It feels like my existence was all so dull and monotonous until I climbed into the back of this guy’s cab.

“I’m tired. Had a long day. I was going out to get a glass of wine and a light dinner before heading off to bed. Would you join me?” He raises his brows.

“I’m on the clock until midnight.”

“I understand. What time do you have free tomorrow?”

“I’m covering for a friend, so not until 9 p.m.”

He nods and walks off.

*Boo.* He must not be as interested as I thought. Suddenly I want to wail.

Instead, I pull myself together and get busy behind the desk. I field a couple of calls regarding tickets to Broadway, directions to a restaurant, and in-room Netflix access.

I am finishing up with a family when the phone rings. I’m the only concierge on the night shift tonight, so I leap up to answer.

“Concierge, this is Sara speaking.”

“Here’s the thing. At 12:01 a.m. sharp I want you upstairs, in my room. Pantyless. Braless. And with that sexy smile of yours. Oh, and wear your hair down.”

“I’m sorry, Mr.... Who is this?” I know exactly who it is, but I want to tease him. And I want to know his name.

“Just be there. Dinner and drinks will no longer do.”

“Oh, I’m sorry your evening has been—”

“I’ll allow you to appease me in my room.”

“I apologize, but I’m swamped.” In my panties. “But there’s room at the hotel restaurant if you’d like to come down for dinner,” I say as professionally as I can and hang up with trembling hands.

When he walks down to the lobby ten minutes later, he is bathed and dressed in a navy blue button shirt and dark slacks. Our eyes lock, my nipples pebble, and my mouth waters.

“Hello. Directions to Daniel, please.”

His features are chiseled to perfection, more noticeable now that he has



slicked his hair back behind his forehead.

“Of course,” I say, impressed by his dining choice there. He watches me as I take out a map and mark the restaurant’s location with a red X. It’s been a while since I’ve given out a paper map. With GPS so prevalent, it’s allowed concierges to focus on other things.

Like how truly dark his eyes are, and how deeply I sense them watching me from under his lashes. He leans forward as I hand him the map, and the cologne on his skin teases my lungs into breathing a little faster. His hand fully covers mine, and crackles race up my arm and somehow down my legs.

He acts as if he doesn’t notice my reaction and casually pockets the map.

“Tomorrow then, at nine.” He shoots me a look that promises every single wicked delight reflected in his eyes to happen *tomorrow at nine*.

I clench my legs behind the counter and try to keep my heart from kicking in my chest. Damn, I wish I weren’t working tonight so I could work on *him* and his gorgeous body right now.

“If you can manage not to have fun without me until then. That means no coming by yourself or with anyone else,” I whisper at him surprisingly.

The guy gives me the merest smile and leans even closer.

“Consider it done... if you can assure me the same.” His eyes are dark and penetrating as I bite down on a smile and nod.

I feel crazy with need as I watch his broad back and gorgeous ass walk away.

## *Ian*

I've got papers from the World Films takeover strewn across the room, and my focus is about as lax as my cock is hard.

I plunge my hands into my pocket and wait by the window.

I scan the buildings downtown, not for the first time, wondering why the fuck I'm here. I have a home in New York, so how do I keep ending up in hotels every time I'm in town?

Doesn't matter right now.

Because she's coming. Pun intended.

Oh, sweet Sara will be coming all right.

I dial the hotel concierge from the phone by the bed.

*"Four Seasons concierge, this is Sara speaking."*

*"Sara, this is the gentleman from room 1103."*

*"Oh, yes. How can I help you, sir?"*

*"I'd like your panties in a little wad in my pocket and you thrashing in my bed."*

There's a slight hesitation, and then her answer, not quite steady: *"Right away, sir."*

I hang up and stand, my dick stiffening under my slacks, knowing she's about as ready to get it from me as I am to give it to her.

I smile as I remember asking her for directions to Daniel. Like I need directions for anywhere in New York.

Daniel couldn't appease the kind of hunger I'm grappling with.

I'm ready for it. I keep checking the minutes, keenly aware that it takes her exactly eight of them to finally knock.

I open the door, and she stands before me with a look of anticipation in her eyes. I stare for a beat, absorbing her. She's slender and a medium height, with a delicate face and skin like the moon. My gaze moves from a set of silver-gray eyes to lips like a plush, perfect red heart. A heart my dick wants to puncture.

For a moment I want to kiss her, all fucking night. I can't remember a woman ever looking at me with such anticipation before. Too many years fucking for fucking's sake to remember what it's like to taste or touch.

I don't remember ever feeling this damn starved for someone.

I seize her neck with one hand, stroking the flutters of her heartbeat that vibrate against my fingertip at her pulse point.

I ask her if she's already turned on, and she hesitates in silence. I can tell she's younger than me by decades of experience, even if our age is only a few years apart.

She eases into my grip, and I lift her by the ass and drop her down on the entry table. *Take it easy, Ford. Damn, you're acting like a crazy man.*

I try to be gentle as I duck my head and taste her, but she wants it. Her desire, her confidence is even more of a turn-on.

I suck and savor her, my hands digging into her ass as I open her mouth.

I clench her tight enough to push her tits into my chest.

She asks me to do her hard. I tell her exactly what I'm going to do with her. The need to feel her hot and wild around me burns bright as I take another taste.

She strokes her hand along my shaft.

I feel unhinged. I flip her around. It's less intimate this way.

I lift her dress. I drive in.

She cries out.

I plunge my fingers between her thighs and tease her clit, biting into the back of her neck to pin her in place as I thrust. She moves back, wanting it harder. I grip her hips and catch a glimpse of her in the mirror, of me inside her. I watch her move, the expression of lust on her face. I flip her back around. Suddenly I cannot look at anything but her damn face.

I clench it in one hand and drive back in. Animal sex. Not the kind a mature man would have with the woman he loves. The kind you imagine you'd have with sluts, or strangers.

She bites my lip and I throw her on the bed. I strip her. I strip, too.

This time when I fall back on her, I don't give her my dick. I won't last and I don't want it to be over yet. I suckle her tit and wander my mouth lower. My balls tighten against my shaft when I taste the cream between her thighs. I didn't know a taste could be so intoxicating.

I finger her as I lick up her clit, around it. There's nothing sweet about the way she comes—she's too wild for that. She dives straight in like an adrenaline junkie would dive off a cliff, without a second thought as to whether or not her bungee string is attached. She rides the waves with uncontrollable movements and a gasp in her throat, her mouth on my neck as she clutches me to her.

She's still coming when I flip her to her stomach, lift her ass up, and drive into her.

She groans deep in her throat and another contraction hits her, tightening her pussy walls around every hard inch. I pump her hard and fast, unable to keep a lid on my groans. I stroke a hand down her spine. Cup her ass. Her tits. Bite her neck. Grab her by the hair.

The smell of her shampoo is in my nose. Her hip bone is in my hand. Her pussy grips me. Pretty soon I'm rocketing to the edge. Flying past it. I press

her down on the bed and bury myself to the hilt, groaning as my release takes over me. I start jetting off, so full that I can't stop my dick from jerking, the waves from crashing.

She likes it. Likes me holding her pussy in my palm and caressing. Likes me pinching her clit. I set her off a second time. Set her off so hard she buries her moans into my pillow, shaking beneath me for another five... ten... fifteen seconds.

“Oh my God,” she groans as she flips around.

We're both breathing hard and coated with sweat as I sit back and try to reassemble what's left of my brain.

She snuggles to my chest, and I ease my arm out from beneath her. I dread seeing her look up at me with stars in her eyes. I'm still too fucking drugged. It takes effort to step away and head to the bathroom to clean up.

I splash my face with water and meet my gaze in the reflection.

*You fucking happy with yourself, Ford?*

I brace my arms on the sink and exhale, then shove back and head to the room—not to the bed. No. To the desk. Where the majority of my papers are.

# AFTER THE O

*Sara*

I need to leave, but I'm lingering, dressing at a tortoise pace. I slowly ease my panties back up my legs and fix my hair using the mirror above the entry table.

He's scanning my ass, hungrily, as if I didn't just give him a very big O. I'd never felt a man come for so long. He was filled to the brim. Yum.

"Your name?" I ask as I turn to face him. He stands bare-chested in slacks behind the desk. His gaze alternates from me, to the papers on the desk, back to me.

"I think its best that we leave it like this. I don't do..." He motions between us. "I don't do this."

"Sex?"

"Clearly, I do that." He smiles briefly. It's a rather regretful smile, and it doesn't last more than a second. But that second is all it takes to cause my last breath of air to get trapped in my throat.

I swallow. He means a relationship. Do I look desperate to him?

As casually as I can, I smile back at him, still not breathing quite right. "Well then, goodbye, stranger," I say, starting for the door.

"Sara." His voice stops me, and when our eyes meet again, there's something dark and intense in his gaze. "I enjoyed you. And that hot little body of yours. Very much."

“My pleasure, sir. Please consider staying at the Four Seasons on your next visit,” I say, trying to make light of the situation as I step out. I board the elevator, sigh, and lean my head back against the wood panel behind me, swooning inside.

Have I ever been bitten this much?

Have I ever been fucked this hard?

I thought my teeth would break, and I fucking loved it. I wanted to sink in my nails and drag them down every inch of his glorious, taut, tanned skin. The way he looked into my eyes when he ate me up, I get chills remembering. And when he had me on all fours, I wanted to scream from the pleasure of the wild, hungry way he drove into me. He tangled and pulled my hair. Why was that so hot?

I have never felt so full, or seen such a glorious dick in my whole life. My knees wobble thinking about it.

*Aren't you glad you shared that cab, Sara? Went upstairs? Let him get you off twice and get himself off on you?*

Yes, yes, yes to it all.

I walk into my apartment an hour later, listening to the noises of my next-door neighbors playing video games. “Shut up!” I bang on our shared bedroom wall, sigh, and slip into bed with my laptop, checking the advertisements for anything Broadway related. There is...

Nothing.

I'm stuck as a concierge for now. I set aside the laptop when my neighbors start screaming at their video game again, and I groan and cover my head with my pillow, deciding noise-canceling earphones will be the first thing I buy when I have extra money. I keep telling myself this, but I always manage to spot a nice pair of shoes I want instead.

Thoughts of money lead to thoughts of my impending rent payment. My roommate has moved out and I'm finally alone, but now I have to cover the

entire bill. I sit up, open my computer, and start drafting a want ad. Dark eyes flash in my mind. My heart stops for a beat before resuming. God. What a yummy motherfucker he was.



## *Ian*

*Two days ago...*

The droning sound of her voice over the telephone goes on and on and fucking *on*. I exhale and growl, “Talk to my lawyer,” and I slam the receiver into the cradle.

I glare at the phone and grind my palms into my eyes before exhaling and dropping my hands to my lap.

What the fuck happened?

We dated all through college and, after graduation, took the next logical step and moved to New York. I made money. I kept making money, giving her more than she ever dreamed we would have: a four-bedroom West End Avenue penthouse with views of the Hudson, generous shopping sprees at Bergdorf, exotic vacations via chartered private jets. I thought only of earning more, providing more—until the day I walked into our apartment to find a pair of cufflinks that weren’t mine.

I asked if she’d been fooling around.

She denied it.

Like a fool, I believed her story about buying them as a gift for me. I ignored the fact that they were already open and there was no empty package. I took them. I even wore them to our next event. Like a goddamn fool.

Eight months later, I walked into our apartment to find two glasses of wine in the sink, her shoes on the floor, and a string of underwear leading to our bedroom. I stood by the door, listening to them.

THEM.

My wife, and someone else.

My whole body trembled as I yanked the door open and charged at him.

I grabbed him off her, turned him around, and sent him flying to the wall.

“We’re done,” I spat at her, gathering the man’s shit and shoving it into his chest. “And *you*—never, ever step back here if you know what’s good for you.”

He was some young accountant who worked for the firm *my* film company hired, who was helping my *wife* with her personal expenses. *Ha!*

“Ian,” she begged, “you’re never here.”

“*You*,” I snarled, “are *here* because of me.” I motioned to the apartment, every luxury she could ever want on display. “You’re fucking here because of *me*, Cordelia.” I looked into her eyes, once so innocent and sweet, a girl who used to bake me cakes she served with homemade ice cream when it was my birthday. What happened to her? What happened to *us*?

“You’re never here,” she sobbed. “I’m twenty-five years old, Ian. I have needs!”

I shook my head, the disappointment in me, in her, in us crushing me to the point that my lungs could hardly pull in air. “You could have talked to me.”

“I’ve tried.” She covered her face and lowered her gaze.

I grabbed a suitcase and started packing my bags.

“Where are you going? Ian, please.”

“Out. I’m not coming back. You’ll hear from my lawyer.” I zipped my suitcase shut in record time. It was always something I did with a shade of reluctance when I had to leave on another business trip. This was the first time I packed a bag without a moment’s thought.

“It doesn’t have to be like this!” She chased me to the front door and froze unexpectedly when I faced her.

“No. It didn’t,” I said, glancing down at her clothes on the floor and her naked body as proof of her betrayal, and I walked out.

It’s been over a year and our divorce is still not finalized. I told her to keep the apartment—all I want is her signature. I want to be free of her and the reminder of how goddamn stupid I was.

I can’t believe I have to go back to fucking New York tomorrow.

I press the intercom button to my assistant. “Make sure you don’t book my room under my name. I don’t want her to get even a whiff of me being in the city,” I growl. “And don’t put her through to me next time she calls.”

I release the intercom button, exhale, and lean back in my chair, scraping a hand across my jaw.

Twelve and a half months since that fateful night, and it still looms over me like a cloud. She said all I did was work. It wasn’t true, but her words were prophecy and that’s all I ever do now. All I ever am. Work and bitterness and distrust, and money, lots of money. Lately I wonder if there’s anything on this damn planet that’ll get me to feel human again.

I shoot an email to my divorce lawyer and ask to meet him in New York.

# I NEED A DIVORCE

*Ian*

*Present day...*

“I need a divorce. *Now.*”

“So you’ve said.” Mattias Wahlberg sits across the lunch table from me, just another day for my divorce lawyer. “But I have to state once more that without her consent, and without proof of her affair, it’s going to—”

“I have proof,” I say, cutting him off.

Leaning down to my briefcase, I enter the combination, click it open, and pull out the cufflinks. I drop them on the table. “These cufflinks. I’m sure they’re his.”

“You’re sure? How? We have no proof of him wearing them.”

I drop them back into my briefcase in a quick, frustrated move and drag a hand across my face. “Look. I need this done.”

“She doesn’t seem to want to divorce you.”

“Nobody wants to divorce me—my name opens doors.”

“Cut her credit cards.”

“And have her starve?” I growl, shaking my head.

“Ian, we’ve known each other for a long time. Talk to her. See if you can appeal to the heart inside.”

I exhale and lean forward. “Give her whatever she wants. The West End

apartment. The Cabo house. Half my cash. But the company stays with me—give her anything else. And get me that damn divorce,” I growl and shove away from the table.

I climb into a cab and head back to the hotel. I need to finish my paperwork and deliver it to my New York office before my 5 p.m. flight back to LA.

And yet, while the driver wades through traffic, it's not work I'm thinking about as I stare out the window. I see *her* in every woman walking down the sidewalk. Some have her hair; some have her legs. I lean closer to the window when I spot one that I'm sure is her. She's nicely shaped like Sara, with the same long, elegant neck, her dark hair held back in a ponytail. She's wearing a knee-length black dress, and it hugs her body just right when she bends to pick up something she's dropped. I drink her in.

The taxi halts in the middle of traffic, and I curve my fingers around the door handle, ready to leap out. The woman lifts her head and stands again. It's not Sara.

Not her eyes. Not her face. Definitely not her lips.

*Jesus, man, get over it already.*

I exhale and drop my hand to my knee, drumming my fingers restlessly. I fucked her—a one-time thing. But it opened the gaping hole that makes me crave human touch, human connection. A woman's scent, a woman's voice... This girl may be the key to open me back up.

I consider it for a minute. But only a minute.

*What for, Ford? There's nothing good of you left.*

I walk into the lobby and head straight toward the concierge desk. She's not there.

“Sara?” I ask.

“She's home. I'm covering for her because of the day she covered for me.

Do you want me to call her, Mr...?”

I pull out a card. “Ask her to call me.”

She flashes a rather coy and flirtatious smile, which I ignore, and I ask her for an envelope and write a message on the back of the business card.

***It's Ian.***

***I'm taking care of personal things. Maybe soon I'll have more to offer than what I did last night.***

I drop the card into the envelope and seal it shut as the concierge tends to a family. By the time she's done, I've had a full three minutes to rethink the whole thing. As she waves the family off, I grab the sealed envelope and jam it into the front pocket of my coat. I walk away, and behind me, the concierge calls out, “Sir, are you going to leave that with me?”

I lift my hand without turning.

Obviously not.

There's no point in leaving her a one-way ticket to nowhere. Better to leave what happened where it is. A one-night stand, nothing more.

# ROOMIE

*Sara*

I posted an ad looking for a roommate and pray that the right person applies, because the roommate-from-hell nightmare has been nonstop. My first roommate was a guy who was always lazing around in the apartment, a fucking slob I had to pick up after who was always late paying the rent. I kicked him out. The next was a young student who came to NYU and left after one semester; she didn't feel like it was the right fit and wanted a more traditional college, with a campus. Once again I was left paying the rent on my own and desperate to find the right roommate.

“Third time's the charm,” I assure myself.

I reread the ad I placed two weeks ago, make sure it's still there, and slap my laptop shut. Then I continue looking for gigs in the paper. I've always seen myself on Broadway, but I guess the universe didn't see me there. I broke my ankle the first week I was rehearsing for my first big break. They gave me a pat on the back, a thank-you, and sent me on my way, with my cast, a boot, and my soul and heart crushed. Still having to cover the rent, I applied as a concierge to a trendy four-star hotel downtown that caters mostly to businessmen—and thankfully got the job.

Still, I can't shake the feeling that I want to do something more with my life. Something I'm passionate about and also happen to be good at. Sometimes it's hard to marry both, and you end up with a career you're good at and a hobby you're passionate about. I'll take anything, but the restlessness I feel whenever I think of my old dreams of performing for an audience won't

let me stop looking.

Sighing, I set the paper aside, head to the bathroom to fill the tub, and once it's ready, I dip my feet, and then the rest of me, inside. My mind wanders as I scrub myself. It's strange—but every time I hop into the tub now, I think of him. Maybe because I desperately craved to slip into the tub the night he and I met. Or maybe because he's always popping into my mind.

It happened over two weeks ago and I still haven't been able to figure out his name. But that's all right. I bet he can't top it a second time. If I can't find him, then I'd rather keep the memory.

I run the sponge over my body and the awakened slut in me clamors for more and more. I haven't had sex since him. What's the point? It won't compare. It can't. I'm saving myself for him again—but how on earth am I supposed to find him?

“Where are you, you sexy motherfucker?” I groan as I dip my finger under the water, down between my legs. Oh yes. I've made myself come thinking of him more times than I can count.

Maybe I should go out and have some actual sex. You know, with a partner.

But a replacement man holds no appeal, so I close my eyes and go for it. I'm not hurting anyone, and who knows? Maybe the fact that I want to see him again, so very desperately, will make him materialize at the hotel one of these days.

\* \* \*

“Sara, the man in 1103 wants a reservation at—”

I nearly fall. “Excuse me?”

“Mr. Thackery. He wants a reservation at Mr. Chow.”



I glance at the man across the concierge desk from Carly. It's not him.

*Get a grip on yourself, Sara,* I groan inwardly.

I exhale, shaking my head as I get to making the reservation. Some of our older guests don't know about Open Table and keep making us do this for them. "Done. Eight thirty, party of four, sir. Would you like directions?"

After he nods, I pull out a map and explain the restaurant location while Carly tends to another guest.

"You need to get laid," Robert, one of my coworkers, says when the guests leave.

I shake my head. "I need to dance—oops, hang on, my phone's buzzing." I get my phone out but don't recognize the number. "Hello?"

"Hi, I just arrived in the city and saw the ad saying you're looking for a roommate." A pause. "Are you still looking?"

"Yes. Who's this?"

"It's Bryn. Heyworth. Can we meet today? I sort of... don't have anywhere to sleep tonight and was hoping—"

"I'm heading out in a half hour. Meet me in Nolita in an hour." I give her the address of my building. "We can talk and see if we'll be a good fit."

"On my way," she chirps, and I hang up. Damn it. She's not from here. Outsiders are a pain. More than a roommate, some want a tour guide, and I don't have time to take anyone around the city. Still, when I wrap up, I head to my apartment and tell myself I can't afford to be picky. Without a roommate, my salary, minus the rent, will leave little for food and nothing for fun.

When I arrive, it's not hard to spot her. There's a young woman, about my age, standing by the building entrance with four suitcases surrounding her and a laptop bag slung from her shoulder.

"Bryn?" I ask drolly, rising my eyebrows.

“Sara?”

I nod, almost laughing to myself as we eye each other. I’d planned to interview her, but there’s a puppy-dog look in her eyes that gets to me. God, I’m a sucker for lost ones. Plus, the last thing this girl looks like is a criminal. Nope. She’s fashionably dressed, wearing little makeup, with her soft chestnut hair held back, and I’m suddenly struck with the fact that she’s the one.

The one I’ve been waiting for.

“Well? What are you waiting for? Bring those up!” I tell her, motioning to the luggage and grabbing two of the bags for her.

“Does this mean I’m your new roommate?” She sounds incredulous, but ecstatic, as she grabs the bags and follows me into the building.

“No, this means I like to take in strays,” I say as we climb into the elevator. At her confused silence, I nudge her. “Of course you’re my roommate. We’ll talk a bit upstairs.”

“Oh.” She laughs, and we haul the suitcases out of the elevator and down the hall to my apartment.

Setting my cargo down, I open the door and motion her in. “Say hello to your new home.” I switch on the lights and help her roll the suitcases inside.

She glances around, a smile on her lips.

“It’s not a lot, but it’s comfortable and in a great location,” I say as I lead us to her room. “This’ll be your room. Did you bring your own sheets?”

I flip on the light switch, and she nods and glances at the stripped bed in the middle of the room.

“Great,” I say as I pull open the drapes. “The mattress could use a little vacuuming.” I move around the room, switching on the nightstand lamps and showing her the bathroom. “It’ll be nice not to sleep alone here tonight. I like the company,” I say as Bryn happily examines her room.

“Okay, so rules—” I clap and move onto the serious stuff. “If you bring

guys, please lock the door and do it in your room. Don't use my couch. Also, we split groceries and every other bill. Otherwise it's a hassle to have to label everything in the fridge. As for cleaning, one of my roommates was a slob. Don't be a slob."

I head to the door, adding, "You clean your room. I clean mine. We alternate the common areas."

"Sounds good. Hey, do you have an extra towel? I forgot mine."

"Sure." I bring her a towel and toss it into the air, and she catches it and carries it to the bathroom, where she neatly tucks it into the towel holder. "So where are you from?" I ask.

For the next hour, we get to know each other. I learn that Bryn is from Ohio. That she's thirty, two years older than I am, and is in the city looking for her big break. Aren't we all?

By the time she settles in and I cook us some pasta, I feel like I've known her forever.

"So this start-up. You design the clothes..." I ask over wine and my special spaghetti carbonara.

Bryn is midway through a forkful of pasta and makes an *mmm* sound as she slurps up the string that dangles from her lips. She laughs a little, pats her lips with a napkin, and sets it aside. "I design them and sometimes utilize old, vintage clothes and fabrics nobody uses, mixing it up with something fresh and new," she says, eyeing her empty glass of wine mournfully. "I am not yet sure of how to market all this; I just like fashion but I'm not great at business—something I'd need to be good at in order to take it to the next level."

"Which is why you want an investor?" I prod, pouring her more wine.

"Yep."

"I'm sorry I can't help there." I shake my head as I pour myself a second glass too. "I love the designs you just showed me on your phone, but I'm in much the same situation as you are."

“You are?” Her eyes spark up in interest. “Don’t tell me you’re also a designer—”

“Oh no. Hell no.” I wave that off, then take a sip of my wine and set it aside. “I’m a concierge at the Four Seasons. But my real dream is to perform on Broadway. I’ve been a dancer my whole life. Even after I broke my ankle, I used to dance in my head for hours while I lay in my bed with a cast.” I smirk, remembering those rather hard and dreary days. To prove my point, I grab our now-empty plates and dance my way to the kitchen, hoisting the plates in the air as I do.

Her laugh makes me feel light and happy. “You’re good!” she says.

I can tell she means it. And something about the honest encouragement in her voice makes me feel more confident. As confident as I used to be when I was young and thought I’d be the queen of Broadway one day.

“Oh, you haven’t seen anything yet,” I assure her with a wink, twisting on the faucet and soaping up a sponge. I start scrubbing the plates, growing thoughtful.

“I’m sure you’ll find something. Have you been looking, at least?” Bryn cleans up the place settings and stores them in a kitchen drawer, then she comes up to help me dry the plates.

“I have,” I admit, but I grow thoughtful again, and hear myself admit something I’ve known for a while. “Though I suppose a part of me has given up before trying harder. Almost like my heart couldn’t bear another rejection.”

She dries the wineglasses artfully and then passes me the towel so I can dry my hands. “You shouldn’t decide for the world, Sara. The world is fickle and doesn’t even know what it wants. Isn’t it better to let others reject you than you *yourself* rejecting possibilities before even exploring them?” She frowns at me in question.

I think about it for a moment and shoot her a dry smile. “You’re right.” I

lean back on the counter and regard her with new eyes. There's so much more to Bryn Heyworth than meets the eye. Sure, she's sweet and pretty, but she's actually smart and driven, too. "Wow. You're a good roomie. I didn't know I'd have a therapist available twenty-four/seven when I took you in," I say, nudging her as we head toward our rooms.

"Likewise. And hey, that's what friends are for. And I do hope that we can be that. Friends," she says hopefully, as we each turn to our bedroom door.

For some reason, after hearing about the dream start-up company she's hunting funding for, I'm reminded of my own dreams. When I'm finally back in bed, I can't seem to sleep. I paint my fingernails and toenails, and while waiting for my toenails to dry, I skim the ads for Broadway auditions on my laptop rather vigorously. Determined to find something.

I may have found the roommate of my dreams. Now if only I could find the job of my dreams, too, I'd be over the moon with happiness.

And if only I could find the guy I'm crushing after...

*Don't be greedy, Sara Davies. You cannot have it all.*

But suddenly today a part of me wants to believe that I can.

# NOT THE CALL I EXPECTED

*Sara*

“There’s another Suit, Sara.” Carly nudges me behind the concierge desk.

I glance at the door and watch the tall, blond businessman walk in.

“Nope. Sara likes the dark-haired ones,” Robert chimes in behind me.

“Ugh. You two.” I shake my head and try to ignore them, hating that they’ve noticed me ogling every dark-haired businessman that has walked into the lobby over the past month.

I’m a smart, young, good-looking, independent woman. I don’t need him.

“How’s the new roommate? Does she know about your crazy manhunt?” Carly asks.

“Okay, first of all, I am not holding a *manhunt*,” I tell Carly determinedly, rolling my eyes. “And she’s fabulous. The stars are definitely smiling down on me.” I wink at them both, feeling positive.

“Did you get the tickets for *Wicked* for room 511?” Robert asks as the phone rings.

I hand him the envelope with the tickets as he picks up. “Concierge, this is Robert speaking.” There’s silence before he slides his gaze in my direction. “Sara, it’s Walter.” Then Robert hangs up the phone.

“Huh? *Walter* Walter?” I ask, confused.

Walter never calls for me. I doubt he knows my name. He’s a short little man who likes to gather us all in weekly meetings to tell us how we’re doing

and how we can improve our jobs, while he skims his eyes down our skirts. He's only ever *looked*, but the girls and I still like to wear pants on the days he schedules the weekly meetings.

"That's right. Walter, the hotel manager. He wants to talk to you. Now," Robert adds.

"On my way." I run my hands down my uniform and head to the private offices in a secluded section of the hotel's lobby floor.

Honestly, this can't be good. I'm trembling so hard I need to press my lips together as I rap on Walter's door. His name—engraved on the plaque—stares ominously back at me before I hear his voice from within the office saying, "Come in."

My hand twists the doorknob and I force myself to stride inside with confidence.

I spot Walter behind his desk and instantly think, *I'm getting fired.*

He's not making eye contact.

He's not looking at my skirt.

Instead, he stares at a paper as he says, "Take a seat."

*You are so fucking fired, Sara.*

Or maybe I'm getting a promotion?

Maybe I've done an outstanding job and am getting an employee-of-the-month award.

*No, dumbass. You got caught fucking a hotel guest in room 1103 and now you're doomed.*

*Well, he was a hot hotel guest!* a part of me chirps in.

*That is irrelevant, my bitch of a conscience insists. You fucked him at the hotel and you got caught. Now you'll not only never see the guy again and never know his name—you also won't have a job.*

My whole body feels as taut as a bowstring. I'm so tense, if I move too fast or too brusquely, I might break. *God, please don't let Walter know about room 1103*, I think, as I sit down.

"We're letting you go."

I swallow.

*Fuck.*

He really fired me.

He actually just fired me.

I am being let go.

Out of a job.

Completely and utterly... fucked.

Oh... my... God.

It's hard to respond to him. This is the second time I've been fired in my life. And I've only had two jobs. What does that say about me?

I suddenly don't like myself very much. I feel like a worm. A worm who's scared shitless now that I'm going to be all alone, in a big bad city, job hunting again.

"I... is it something I did?" I wring my hands.

"Not really. More like didn't do. We don't feel you're as passionate as some of your coworkers. We're also making cuts, and when it came down to it, I believe you're the weakest member of the team." He pushes his glasses back up his nose and stares down at my file. "You can finish your shift and pick up your check on your way out."

*Wow. That's it?*

No "Have a good life, Sara." Or "It was great working with you."

No "Thanks for the tie you got me for my birthday." Or, at the very least, "Sara, thanks for bringing us donuts out of the kindness of your heart all those



times.”

Wow.

I’m surprised I manage to walk steadily to the door, because it feels as if my world is spinning like a carousel that is going faster and faster by the second. What am I going to do?

I stumble into the ladies’ room and quickly hide myself inside a stall. I exhale a very effusive “Fuck!” and put my hands on my temples and review my conversation with Walter. I’m an absolute wreck. My dad always said I’d turn out this way. My dad, who is divorcing my mom and seems to think we’re no good for him, was right; I’m apparently not good for anything.

Picking dancing as a career would lead me nowhere.

I’d end up with a dead-end job and no “decent” college degree to save me from it.

I groan and lean back against the stall door, blinking my eyes as I fight back tears. Maybe I deserved to be fired. Walter wasn’t wrong: I wasn’t in love with this job. I wanted to love it like I love dancing, but I don’t. It must have shown in my work.

I gather my shit and leave the restroom feeling drained and defeated, and like I’m the biggest loser on the planet. *Don’t cry*, I tell myself, as I head back to the concierge desk. *You can cry all you want when you get back to your apartment. Focus on getting your shit and doing what’s left of your job until your time is up.*

“What did Walter want?” Robert asks.

I swallow hard before squeaking out, “He fired me.”

“What? He fired you?” The flare in Robert’s eyes reveals his complete shock.

Carly doesn’t look nearly as surprised, though. “That’s sad... Oh, Sara, I’m so sorry,” she says.

“I know. Who’ll cover for you next time, right?” I snap, my self-defense mechanism bubbling out to hide my hurt.

Carly ignores my attitude. “You know who else got fired? Bert, one of the guys from the front door. Also a shit ton of the cleaning ladies...”

I tune Carly out as I let Robert hug me and tell me he’s there for me if I need anything. I nod, pry free, and scan the concierge desk for any items that might be mine that I’d need to take home with me.

There’s nothing for me to pack. That’s what happens when you’re a concierge. I don’t have drawers full of stuff or pictures on my desk. I go, I work, I leave.

And today it’s really hard to leave. I can’t believe this is my last day. God, I never thought I’d miss being a concierge. *Say goodbye, Sara*, I think, as I say farewell to my colleagues and return home, with no job, no dream, and without my mystery man’s name.

\* \* \*

“What happened?”

Bryn finds me bawling into a tissue when she arrives at the apartment. I’m so relieved to see her, I begin to cry harder.

I guess it’s like they say. Man plans, and God laughs. Wow, he must be laughing pretty hard right now.

“I got fired. I had no idea they’d start making cuts and I’d be the first to go. What am I going to do?” I blow my nose and toss the tissue aside while Bryn grabs a waste basket, tosses in all the tissue balls and the empty box of tissues, and sets a fresh box before me.

“You’ll get a new job.” She sits down beside me.

God, I knew I shouldn’t have kept looking for dancing gigs. I got my

hopes up and my dreams distracted me from my real job. I should've stayed focused. "It's not that easy—"

"You can walk dogs with me," Bryn interrupts.

"That's *your* gig."

"I'll split it with you," Bryn insists. "I won't be able to dedicate as much time to it as I want to—I'll be too busy working on the start-up."

"Really?" I eye her. "How are you so confident you'll get the money?" I hate being the party pooper, but we need to be realistic here. Honestly, I think it's a pipe dream. She's really smart and great at designing clothes, but no matter how much talent you have, I know that to be successful, luck has to somehow play a part as well.

And luck doesn't seem to like this zip code.

"Because I saw him again tonight, and I'm hoping I can wear him down," Bryn says optimistically.

Okay, so "*him*" is Bryn's equivalent of my Hot Workaholic. His name is Aaric Christos. Manhattan bachelor soon to be wed. Billionaire investor tycoon. How Bryn got a meeting with the man recently is a miracle.

"It's not wishful thinking?" I ask. Because how many miracles can one girl in Manhattan expect in her life? "Sorry to break it to you, roomie," I say softly, "but half of the city wants the man's backing. Everyone thinks they have a genius idea or wants someone who'll help them make their stupid idea *genius*."

"Maybe. But I still mean to wear him down." Clinging to her positivity, Bryn heads to the kitchen to pour us some tea. "You okay?" she asks with concern as she returns and hands a cup to me.

"I don't know," I finally admit, wishing I could feel as positive as Bryn does right now. "I can't figure out what's gone wrong with my life." I pass a crumpled tissue along my nose, wad it up tight, and pull a new one from the box as I recite my failings. "I went to Tisch School of Arts here, in NYU. But

I broke my ankle during my first big break. Two years went by, and recovery was a bitch, but even once healed, nothing. No leads, no successful auditions. So I became a concierge, and even then, doing something supposedly easy, I fail.”

“You didn’t fail, Sara. It wasn’t your endgame, it was your in-the-meantime job.”

“Yeah, well.” I think about it for a moment, but that doesn’t make me feel better. Because being a concierge was at least something real. Not some dream. It at least fed me, clothed me, and kept me busy. “I’m starting to wonder if most of us aren’t destined to be stuck in our in-the-meantime.”

“I might agree... but then you see someone, someone who had it worse than anyone, and who made it big. Not because he got lucky—he worked for it. It makes sense that if we work hard enough, we can go somewhere, too.”

“You really like this guy,” I say.

I feel a pang of worry all of a sudden. Aaric Christos is as hard-to-get as hard-to-get can get. And he’s in a relationship with some spoiled society darling. Does Bryn have a death wish or what?

“No. I... I *admire* him,” she counters. “We were in high school when we met, and I admired his gumption. I suppose I liked him, too,” she admits, “but I could never understand how he made me feel. I guess I liked him enough that it confused me.” As if she’s jinxing herself by admitting that, she quickly shakes her head. “But enough about that. I’m excited about the start-up. If this takes off and you don’t have a job, I’ll hire you.”

“When do I start?” I smirk.

“Who knows? Call God’s number and ask.” She flashes Christos’s card and I try to snatch it out of her hand.

“Give me that,” I say as she pries it away. I need it more than she does.

“Over my dead *booty*. It’s my golden ticket and I’m not giving it up, even to you. I’ll give you some of my chocolate, though.” She disappears for a

second and returns to toss a Godiva chocolate bar in my lap. I groan. Chocolate is my weakness, dammit, and my roommate didn't take long to figure it out.

"Do we have any ice cream?" I ask.

She brings an ice-cream tub from the freezer and two spoons. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Can I adopt you?" I straighten up in my seat and watch her settle down by me.

"Come on. I'm only two years older than you," she says as she pries the ice cream open, winking.

"I know what else I'm missing. Confidence. I seem to have lost it somewhere," I admit to her as I stare at the silent TV across our living room.

I think of Bryn and her start-up dream, still so far out of reach.

I think of myself and my own dreams, the dreams that, no matter how amazing, are still getting in the way of me making a solid foundation with what I currently have to work with.

And I think of my mom and *her* dreams, and the heartbreak she's enduring at the hands of my dad. Her biggest dream, that of a loving husband and family, shattered.

God, it fucks me up every time I think about it. Knowing my mom is hurting hurts. But it's not like she can hold my dad back. He doesn't love her anymore.

Now my mom needs to learn how to be on her own again, and be comfortable like that.

*Just like you need to go out there and look for what you want, rather than keep settling. Because the option of settling is no longer on the table, Sara. You're jobless. So now—do you want to do what you love? Or do you want to go for average again?*

“I have confidence in you,” Bryn says as she helps me scoop up a spoonful of ice cream.

Suddenly I’m tired of feeling sad. Today has been a wreck. I just want to focus on the good things, the fact that I have someone to share a good tub of vanilla ice cream with. Someone who has her own dreams. “Good, ’cause I have confidence in you, too. Boss.” I grin, feeling a little better as we attack the ice cream, eating little pieces of the Godiva chocolate along with it.

## *Ian*

“And it’s a wrap.”

Cheers and claps erupt around the set as both the cast and the production team of my latest documentary call it a wrap. My thirty-third production. I should be proud. I suppose I am. But I always put a lid on the celebration because there is always more I can do. More that I want.

“Congratulations, job well done,” I tell Jake Myers, my director, as I slap his back and hop to my feet from my chair beside his.

I take a moment to congratulate our actors, narrators, and film crew. Just a moment to pause before jumping back on the hamster wheel and doing it all over again.

“Before you leave,” Jake calls after me, bringing over a bottle of champagne he promptly opens. My assistant, Pepper, quickly appears with over a dozen plastic wineglasses that she distributes to the group. Jake raises his glass, and we all do. “To Ian fucking Ford,” he says.

“He means, to all of you,” I counter, shaking my head with a smile.

We all drink to a job well done. I toss a gulp down, enjoying the flavor for a hot second, but before my champagne glass is empty, I set it aside and plunge the script back into my briefcase.

“We’re going to miss you, Ford,” Georgiana, our female narrator, says.

“Won’t be gone permanently,” I tell her with a wink.

“But you’re still moving back to New York?”

“Gotta get that next documentary done. Easier if I stay there until it’s wrapped.”

“Good and tight as a burrito,” Jake adds, closing in on us before Georgiana gives me a hug and thanks me.

“For letting me work for you. For all the opportunities you’ve brought my way,” she tells me.

I’m always touched whenever one of my team shows gratitude. To be honest, I’m more grateful to them—well, most of them—for putting up with my need for perfection and retaking shoots to the point of exhaustion.

“It’s a pleasure, considering each one of these things is well deserved,” I tell her.

Jake watches her as she leaves, respect shining in his eyes before he turns back to me. “About New York. Wouldn’t have anything to do with that lady who brought you back with a smile last time?” He sounds genuinely curious. Anticipatory, even.

“Maybe. We’ll see. She was one bold kitten.”

We start crossing the set toward the exit. Jake is one of my closest friends in Los Angeles. We’ve worked together on eleven of my blockbuster films and the full eighteen documentaries I’ve produced. You could say we’re like brothers, and considering I’ve never had one and barely remember having a family except for my grandmother, I value him like one.

“Sounded more like a cat,” he says.

“Cats betray you. Kittens can still learn to love you.”

“Cannot teach a kitten loyalty; it’s still a cat,” he warns.

I know he means he doesn’t want another Cordelia in my life, and though I appreciate the gesture, I can take care of myself just fine.

“Mr. Ford, I’ve printed out your flight information as well as your room reservation,” I hear Pepper say as she rushes up behind us.

“Four Seasons, our usual room?” I inquire as she hands over the papers.

“Yes, sir.”



“Thanks.” I turn to leave. “Call me if you need me. I’ll probably have Wi-Fi on the flight as well.”

“Oh, and Mr. Ford,” she calls as I turn back to the door. She hesitates when Jake lingers by my side. Jake takes a hint and slaps my back and wishes me a safe flight before he gives us a moment alone. “Thanks for the wedding gift—it was very generous,” Pepper finally says.

I shake my head ruefully. “Glad you liked the home sound system. And I apologize I won’t make it to the wedding.”

She laughs and waves it off as if I’ve just said something completely crazy. “Oh, I never expected you to.”

“You didn’t?” I’m confused for a second.

“You’re generous with your money but quite a pinchpenny with your time, Mr. Ford. Oh! And I meant no offense.”

She flushes beet red, and I stare at her for a moment.

Jesus. Is this me? Am I known to be this... cold? I shake it off, granting her a smile. “I wish you all the happiness, Pepper. I’ll see you when you return.”

I mean my well wishes. I’m jaded, that’s true, and maybe even bitter over what happened with Cordelia, but I hope that the happiness can still be true for someone. Especially Pepper, who’s worked her butt off for me for years. I’ve never met anyone more loyal.

I head out of the studio to find my Mercedes sports car parked at the curb. The top is down, so I swing my briefcase into the passenger seat and then settle behind the wheel.

“Good day, Mr. Ford,” my personal valet says.

“Same to you, Pedro. Don’t miss me too much.”

“Will try not to, sir. And this beauty, either.” He roves his eyes lovingly across my car.

I laugh at that and hit the pedal. I head straight to my Bel-Air home, ready to get packed and catch an early flight to JFK tomorrow. As I drive, I remember Sara that day in the cab—and a part of me even fantasizes about finding her right where I saw her that first time. In the damn taxi line. I'm surprised how much I want her ass in my hand and her tongue on mine. How much I want this bold girl to come for me again.

I avoid complications at all costs. Even my assistant, Pepper, is older than me by a decade and a half. Not because I don't trust myself with a woman, but because I was married and never wanted Cordelia and me to have unnecessary misunderstandings. Especially with me traveling so much.

Sara is a complication. The kind I prefer to avoid. Especially since my divorce is far from settled. And I'm far from open to emotional entanglements at the moment. Still, the idea of being in the same city has me restless. Wired.

I've worked myself to the bone these past months. Trying to forget that night we fucked each other senseless. It's no use. The more I try to forget, the more the memories come back to haunt me.

I might as well dive in. See her again. Know her full name, her likes, what makes her tick—figure out why I'm so obsessed with her. That's the only way to get her out of my mind.

For the first time in over a year, New York holds strong appeal. The memory of her has only made me crave to go back for more and more. She's the first thing that's made me feel alive in too damn long. Her pussy was great, but her brazenness and that saucy mouth are what keep me awake at night.

Tonight is no exception. I wander the halls of my Bel-Air home at midnight. It's a three-bedroom that I bought after I moved out of my West End apartment.

I'd thought to make a life here, in Los Angeles. And though business has flourished, I eye my spacious rooms and the palm trees out in the perfectly manicured lawns and it's not me.

I'm still a Manhattan man deep down. It's time I let my wife—soon to be ex-wife—stop ruining my life and driving me away from what I want.

I love fucking New York City—it's my home, and always will be.

Time to seal the deal, start over, and hell, yes, if it's what I want, take Sara to Daniel for dinner.

I punch my lawyer's number as I climb into my silk drawstring pajamas for bed.

“Wahlberg. I've been thinking.”

“When *aren't* you thinking? You're a machine. You need more feeling and less thinking, Ford.”

“I've been *feeling*,” I announce, a bit exaggeratedly, “really desperate here. And I've reconsidered the plan you mentioned the other day.”

“Ahhh, the hardball plan. I tell you, with a woman like Cordelia, you need to—”

“Let's do it,” I say, cutting him off.

“Come again?”

“Let's do it. I can't play nice anymore. I'm sick of her credit card bills, her phone calls, and getting jet rental invoices as she traipses around the world with any boy toy she can find. I'm not this man, Wahlberg. I'm not the one who's been made a fool of for more than a fucking year.”

“Well, Hallelujah, he's pissed now.”

“Not pissed. Just ready to do this on my terms. Get it done.”

After that last instruction, I hang up.

It gives me no pleasure to play hardball. Usually people respect me enough not to push me to the limit or encourage me to go there. But I'll never be free if I don't do this with her; and no matter how many wrongdoings I committed in our marriage, I fucking loved her. I tried my best. I deserve a

shot at being happy again and I plan to pursue whatever gives me a glimpse of that feeling. And when I find it, I'm never letting it go.

# NAME

*Sara*

Bryn was right. She landed Christos. He's funding her start-up. Now she gets temporary offices in Brooklyn while we get the warehouse store ready for the big launch.

She wants me to be her personal assistant while I look for something I love. So I have been going to auditions along with attending my regular dance classes, walking dogs to pay rent, and being her PA. I love the variety. And Bryn loves the help.

"Christos. I can't get him out of my head."

"You two have been spending a lot of time together for this launch, haven't you?"

"Well, aside from the fact that he vetted me head to toe... we're looking forward to bringing this vision to fruition."

It's the weekend, and we're chilling out after breakfast in our pjs in our small living room.

"Your designs walking around Manhattan—hell, the whole country. Getting worn and adored. How does it make you feel?"

"Amazing doesn't cover it. But why is it that no matter the success, we always want more?"

"What more could you possibly want? Things are going great!"

In very little time, she's turned her whole life around. From homeless and

penniless in Manhattan to having a fabulous roommate (that's me) and getting a cool million for her business.

“Christos.”

“Oh.” I smile. “Well, it's the dream. Finding the one who makes your heart go pitter-pat. Makes me sad I found one who really lit me up. Makes everything seem drabber once they're gone and you have no way of finding them.”

Bryn sighs and scans her phone. “You got another review.” She peers into the screen. “*Sara was wonderful. Our Boston Terrier adores her. She's even taught him to walk on a leash without pulling. So glad to have discovered her!*”

She's reading the review left for me on a dog-walking application, and I can't help but feel warmth all over as I listen.

“It's odd how much I like walking these pooches,” I admit, pulling my legs up on the coffee table of our living room. “Will you miss walking pooches now that your start-up is moving along so nicely?” I ask her.

“Oh, definitely.”

She smiles, then Bryn continues fiddling with her phone, looking distracted.

“Spit it out, Heyworth,” I demand after a minute of silence, dropping my feet and leaning forward. “You're on cloud nine.” I roll my eyes, pretending to be disgusted when in fact, all this does is make me wonder why, why, why I haven't found out the name of my Workaholic. I've checked the hotel logs since the night he left, but all I have is that California corporation name. And nothing else.

“Not cloud nine! But... ten.” Bryn giggles, then pulls up a horoscope app on her phone.

I watch her skim her horoscope, biting her lip thoughtfully as she reads her fortune—the stars—whatever you want to call it.

“I do enjoy reading these suckers, though I never pay attention to any negative things they have to say. I only run with the good ones. This time, though, it’s way off.” She sighs. I peer at the screen and realize they’re predicting that she should be ready for business and pleasure, both. Has Christos broken up with his girlfriend? Seems to me like maybe that’s what’s going on with Bryn and her Christos lately.

“Read mine,” I suddenly say, excited about hearing it. “Wait—you read it first before telling me what it says. Shit, don’t tell me if it’s bad.” I don’t want it to jinx me, or to make me feel hopeless about things.

“What’s your sign?” she promptly asks.

“Taurus. Ruled by Venus, I apparently like very beautiful and expensive things.” I take a peek as she searches up my sign. “What does it say?”

“Don’t peek and don’t talk—I can’t concentrate on reading with noise around!” She starts reading in silence.

“What does it say?” I ask.

“Dear Taurus,” she begins after a moment’s hesitation. “If you still love him, go for it. Don’t wait for an astrologer’s permission, don’t wait for me to give you a safety net, just do it!”

“What?” I take it and start reading stuff like *“If a relationship has felt the rough and tumble of the stars, remember the universe always helps us with course corrections to fix what’s broken, or learn to let go...”*

Damn Bryn, that little liar. I hand back her phone.

“Bryn, you are a lousy astrologer. You’d die poor.”

She giggles and sets the phone aside. “No, really. You’re hooked on him, Sara. I do think you need to find him. Why wait? You can be waiting forever. Why do we give our power away?” She frowns now. “I mean, we’re bombarded by all these marketers telling us what to think, how to feel about ourselves; we wait to see what others think about our clothes to determine if we really like them. We wait for an astrologer to tell us the coast is clear to do

something we've been wanting to do. It's wrong."

She chews her nails thoughtfully, while I mull over the same things.

"Let's do something we really want to do. Let's finally do something for ourselves, take our own advice," she proposes.

"Okay then." Suddenly, I think, why not? I won't end up worse off than I already am, and I could end up far, far better. Like, with my Workaholic's hands all over me. But how can I find his name when I haven't been able to so far?

I consider this for a second. And then it hits me. How did I never think of this before? *Because you were too busy jerking off to him in the tub, Sara. Duh.* Impulsively, I dial the number for the maître d' at Daniel's direct line and pray that he remembers me when he answers with a curt French accent.

"*Oui. François.*"

Hardly believing I'm doing this, I get straight to the point because I know François doesn't like to dally on bullshit. "Hi, I'd like to see if you can do me a favor and check back on your guest list for me. I need the name of one of your guests that stayed at our hotel recently."

"Sara Davies," François purrs with a chuckle, recognizing my voice, and then he asks me what date, and says he'll look into it.

"Really? You'd do that for me? Thank you!" I hang up, suddenly wide-eyed. Hell and holy shit, how did I not think of it before? My Workaholic will have had to write down his name at Daniel. Pay with a credit card. Check his coat. Something.

I'm nearly breathless with excitement, suddenly glancing at an inquisitive-looking Bryn. She looks so interested she's nearly falling off her chair. "He's helping me find him. Your turn," I finally tell her, recovering myself.

"Did you really call?" She sounds doubtful.



“Do you want to call back to verify? Come on. Your turn. Go after him, Bryn,” I encourage, suddenly excited for her to do something empowering and maybe a little reckless, too.

And Bryn suddenly grabs her phone and shoots off a text, and I know who she’s texting.

So Bryn texts Christos, and as I watch her start flushing and getting all nervous, I know that this isn’t a joke. This is us, and these are our lives, and sometimes you just need to go for it.

And when Bryn suddenly heads out, looking all guilty and excited, I just know that, at least for her, business and pleasure are definitely mixing tonight.

*What do you have in store for me though, stars?* I wonder without daring to hope. Then I stand at the window and look out at the city, and I can’t help *but* hope.

I stare out the window at New York City, the city that never sleeps, where something crazy happens every day, numbing you to the hustle and bustle. It’s a city not everyone could live in, but I can’t imagine living anywhere else. My earbuds are as permanent as me, walking everywhere. Thanks to walking, my legs have been lean and toned all these years, looking as good as when I spent the better part of my childhood and teen years dancing.

*God.* It was magical, to move my body to the music. I would be the instrument that the music moved, and the happiest moments I remember happened when I was lost in that music, my mind a blank, simply completely immersed in the sound and how it made my body sway to it.

Sex with him felt like that, where no thought came in, only me moving to the pace he set.

Men never have that control over me, usually I would think I only satisfied my lust and that was that, but with this one, one night wasn’t enough. It was a taste that only made me crave more, and now I don’t even look at other men because they’re just not... that guy.

The guy whose name I'll find out very, very soon.

# PARK

*Sara*

It's the audition I've been waiting for, and I'm holding nothing back. I'm in my last pose—a damn fine split, sweating to the tips of my fingers and catching my breath as the music ends. And a deathly silence settles in the room.

“We'll call you,” the woman in the perfect bun says after a long moment.

She's stoic, with her legs crossed, as she sits in one of the chairs lined up at the side of the dance floor where I just leapt, twirled, twizzled, and split, did pirouettes, grand jetés, and fouetté turns, and I had my best run with this piece since I can remember. A man sits next to her who is just as stoic as she is. Neither of their expressions reveals the one crucial thing I want to know: whether they liked my piece. My moves. *Me*.

And whether my performance was good enough to get me into the show.

“Thank you,” I answer as formally as I can, and then I get to my feet, grab my towel, and step out of the room. I pick up my duffel from the waiting-room sofa, exchange my dance shoes for my running shoes, and head out in leggings and a tight, long-sleeved tank top, draping a sweater around my shoulders.

I'm trying not to feel defeated and assume the same thing that always happens will happen—that I will never get the call. I need to stay positive, because good thoughts bring good things.

When I head home to find an empty apartment, I remember that Bryn was

out dog-walking this afternoon after work. I'll be alone with nothing but my damn thoughts for a few more hours. I toss my duffel onto the couch, then throw myself next to it. I wish I'd told Bryn to wait for me. I need a distraction. Without one, I'm going to either eat my nails raw or eat Bryn's secret chocolate stash. Neither of which is a good option.

I'm drumming my feet on the carpet and nervously surfing my phone when I decide to freshen up. I'm barely out of the shower, still wet and drying off, when my phone rings. Bryn's name appears on the screen, and I almost squeal with relief. Nearly tripping on the bath mat as I step out, I grab the phone to answer.

"Bryn, thank God!"

"What? Why? What happened?"

"Nothing, but I can't stay cooped up in here much longer. Can I meet you at Mrs. Ford's?"

"Actually, that's why I'm calling. I'm stuck in Central Park, and I desperately need you to change places with me. Since you've filled in for me with Mrs. Ford before, would you mind helping out again? I need to rush home to change for a date with Christos tonight."

Damn, that Christos is moving fast.

I don't know if I want to award the guy with a medal or get mad for stealing my roomie from me so many times.

Smiling to myself, I put the phone on speaker as I yank out a pair of jeans and a cropped white sweater. "I'll take the train up there right now. Send me your location." I quickly dress and comb my hair back before I give it a quick blow-dry. Then I grab my MetroCard and keys and head out.

*Thank you, God.* At least I won't die from the anxiety yet. This will distract me for a while, at least until I find another audition that will lessen the blow if I'm denied.

I take the train to the Upper East Side, head west, and walk several blocks

down the park until I spot Bryn sitting on a bench with Mrs. Ford. My favorite golden retriever, Milly, sits beside them as the two chat away. The widow seems to enjoy talking so much that sometimes I wonder if Bryn and I are the only people she interacts with. Today, she is wearing a flashy teal outfit and has her hair arranged in a fancy style, as if she is meeting someone important later.

My eyes lock on a third figure sitting with them. As I near, the man glances my way before quickly shifting his gaze. I continue to stare at him as I approach, and it doesn't take long for his gaze to return to me. His large figure rises to full height as he stands to greet me, and I feel a bolt of electricity hit me in the chest as familiar eyes stare back at me.

He's tall. Dark-haired. Gorgeous. With deep, thick-lashed eyes you want to sink into. And lips to suck on like they're all that exists between you and heaven. I stop walking, stop breathing, because... *he* is here.

A moment passes and Bryn seems to notice my shock.

But shock doesn't come close to it.

Because never in my whole life has my heart leapt so far and fast. It feels as if it's ripping out of my chest. I can barely force my legs to move for fear of hearing my knees knock together. I struggle for air, but it feels like someone cut off my windpipe connecting my nose and lungs.

He wears a white dress shirt and black slacks, and his face is chiseled and brooding. The real shock lies in the intensity brewing in his dark eyes as they stay locked on mine. My heart speeds up as I hold his gaze. The city bustles around us. Making eye contact is not something I do often, living in a city of millions, but I can't take my eyes off him.

The memory of having him inside me returns with a vengeance.

Bryn begins to introduce us. "Um. Ian, this is—"

"Sara. We've met," Hot and Dirty Workaholic interrupts with a stiff smile.

Our eyes meet, and for a moment it feels like nothing else exists.

His name is Ian.

Fucking Ian, with his serious, handsome face and shiny, black hair. He's as lit as I remember. Straight out of a *Suits* episode, and I am dying from the happiness of staring into his hot-as-fuck face.

Suddenly too nervous to be so obvious, I turn my attention back to Bryn, feeling like I'm going to vomit, my stomach is clutching so tight.

I feel a little light-headed and a lot self-conscious, and I would hate for him to notice, so I try my best to act otherwise. Confident, that's me.

Except when I'm caught off guard by my sexy Workaholic.

I can tell by the expression of total shock in Bryn's eyes that she's just had a light-bulb moment. She *knows* I've just found my one-night-stand man. And she seems as shocked about who he turned out to be as I am. But she looks excited to get us talking, and to be honest, I'm just as happy to get this man to myself and shoo off Bryn to her Christos.

"Ian is Mrs. Ford's grandson," she explains to me. Then she tells Mrs. Ford, "Sara is going to take over so I can prepare for tonight. I'll talk to you guys soon," and I watch her leave.

So *now* what? What do I say? He's Mrs. Ford's *grandson*. I can't just grab his dick and tell him how much I've dreamed about it. And him.

Milly barks and I realize Ian, too, is looking at me. With a thoughtful frown and a wicked, devious glimmer in his eyes.

Is he thinking of our evening in 1103 too?

"Here, give me that," he gruffly tells Milly, and he grabs Milly's toy and tosses it relatively close and tells her to fetch.

I become aware of Mrs. Ford looking at us in interest.

I give her a smile, hoping that it looks innocent, and quickly occupy myself with Milly.

"Do you two want to walk Milly around while I relax?" Mrs. Ford asks

Ian and me. “You can get to know each other. Sara is one of my favorite girls, Ian, and Ian is my favorite grandson, Sara. There is no other man in the world for me.”

“I’m your *only* grandson, Gran. And I’d love to get to know Sara more intimately.”

He winks at her, looking charming and much more of a good guy than the guy I fucked in room 1103. Mrs. Ford chuckles and pulls out a book, as if that is that. As if the word *intimately* didn’t mean a whole other thing to me than it probably does to Mrs. Ford.

Ian—my Workaholic, my one-night stand, my perfect lay—watches me daringly while he takes the leash. His gaze meets mine as he motions me forward. I start down the path with wobbly knees, aware of him and Milly stepping in beside me.

“How have you been?” he asks, voice low.

“Good. I’m glad to see you.” I smile.

He smiles too, and my eyes almost hurt by looking at the Face of My Dreams up close again. “Can’t say I wasn’t disappointed when I checked in today to see you gone,” he says.

I’m shocked to hear this, something his dark gaze seems to easily drink in.

“Yeah, Sara. I noticed.” He leads Milly to a shady area surrounded by trees. “Did I have anything to do with you leaving?”

“No.” I really don’t want him to worry, and I’m pretty sure he wouldn’t like having affected my job that way. “They’re making cuts and I was probably the worst concierge they had, so they let me go.” I roll my eyes as if they’re so silly to have done that.

“That’s not accurate.” Ian tuts and shakes his head. “You went above and beyond for their customers.”

“Not really. Just one of them.”

As my words fill the air around us, suddenly we're both staring at each other, the chemistry between us so on fire I worry for the trees nearby.

"I should change hotels," he says mischievously, a twinkle in his dark eyes.

"No. You shouldn't."

"Absolutely I will. If they can't value you, then I'm not interested."

"Your company sends you to that hotel. You and other execs."

"You don't think I can persuade my company to change hotels?"

"I'd hate to lose you and your company's business if I were them. But!" I reach out and steal Milly's leash from his fingers, then twirl around and face him, backing away from him as I narrow my eyes. "I think you're bluffing to make me feel better. I'm fine, though. Trust me. I've got this." I point toward a sniffing, tail-wagging Milly. "I also have a job helping my roommate with her new business."

"You find that rewarding?"

"I find my salary rewarding."

There's a slight quickening in my pulse when he smiles. "And the job?" he asks, tilting his head in curiosity.

"I'm grateful for it. I can't say I don't still look at casting calls in the city, but... it'll do."

"Shouldn't be hard to find plenty of those. This is New York, after all."

"I know." There is more to my story, though, and I'm surprised when I say it out loud. "I was so close to landing the gig of my dreams years ago. My body failed me terribly. Bad body," I chide.

"What happened?" He frowns, but the look he gives my body isn't exactly one that agrees with me about my body being bad.

"Shit. A *lot* of shit. I ended up as a concierge."



“Can’t say I regret that decision or turn of events.” There’s that smile again.

“Really. Our one-night stand was that profound to you.”

“I’m about to make it two.”

As I keep backing away and he keeps walking forward, I catch him glancing at my lips.

He doesn’t even try to hide it.

It turns me on.

My hungry body recognizes him as the last guy to pleasure me, and my hormones are flooding my system in response. I start feeling my heart pound and I can barely suppress my crazy, out-of-control reaction. I can almost taste him on my mouth, can almost feel his touch, like I did in room 1103.

Exhaling, I spin back around so that Milly and I are walking a few steps ahead of him, and I tuck my hair behind my ear and try to ignore my erratic hormones.

Seeing him again, his gorgeous face, his sexy designer slacks and that crisp white shirt, inhaling his intoxicating scent, I’m reminded why I haven’t stopped thinking about him since that night.

This guy makes me hungry. Hungry like someone who hasn’t eaten for days and is standing before a chocolate buffet, and chocolate is her favorite.

He catches up with us, stealing the leash back from me. His fingers brush over mine and he tugs on the leash so slowly that I know it’s on purpose.

“So this is how I find out your name.” I tut and shake my head.

“I seem to have one.”

“And it’s a fairly easy one to spell. You definitely could have shared that with me,” I add with a raised brow.

“It wasn’t relevant at the time.”

“And is it relevant now?” I fish.

We pause in the middle of the path.

He loosens the leash while Milly sniffs around a large tree trunk, and we stare at each other. He eyes my lips, and I eye his.

“Maybe.”

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe it’s relevant. Maybe it’s not.”

I wait.

“Ian...” I test his name out loud. “I like it.”

His eyes darken, as if hearing his name is the most effective aphrodisiac for the man. I curse myself for saying it in the middle of Central Park. Not that I can do anything about quenching our thirst now.

I wonder if he’s going to take a cab back to the hotel.

I can straddle him again... tease him again... turn him on so much he’ll fuck me hard and fast. *Again.*

Suddenly Ian’s phone seems to vibrate in his pocket, and when he pulls it out, he scans a message.

“Gran needs to head back. Apparently she forgot a massage therapist is coming over in thirty minutes.” He tucks his phone into the pocket of his slacks as he tugs Milly back onto the path.

“You’re good with your grandma,” I say.

“I’m better in bed.” He grins.

I laugh, but feel a telling flush on my cheeks. What is this guy doing to me? I’m flushing on our way back to Mrs. Ford. We hand over Milly, and after Ian puts her in a cab and I’ve waved goodbye to her, I stand before him with my veins boiling in anticipation.

He seems to hesitate, just staring at me with something I can’t quite

decipher. A mixture of frustration and something else.

“Well. Goodbye.”

Wow, did I misread him? Probably I did. Hating that the flush is coming back, I turn to head for the train.

One second, I’m walking forward, trying to ignore the whacking of my crazy heart and the fact that Ian Ford—my one-night stand—is standing only a few feet away from me, and the next his arm flies out and his hand curves tightly around my wrist.

“Sara.”

I turn.

I can hardly take the flames in his eyes.

With his free hand, he hails a taxi, and when it stops before us, he opens the door for me.

I know what’s happening, and I want it to happen so much that I quickly climb into the back of the cab.

Ian climbs in behind me.

“Where to?” the driver asks.

“The nearest five-star hotel you can find.” Ian looks at me with a frown.

“Four stars will do just fine,” I add urgently, and Ian’s frown turns to a look of interest. He grabs my waist and drags me toward him, and before I can take another breath, he’s got his hands—oh, gosh, his hands—on me, and he’s shoving his tongue into my mouth, and oh *crap*, I hadn’t been hallucinating. My memory didn’t fail me. In fact, it failed only in the sense that I didn’t remember the exact way he tasted, kissed, but what I never forgot was that it was heart-stopping, toe-curling, panty-melting, and a little bit soul-wrenching—the way he eats at my mouth, the hunger and the latent passion there. I didn’t remember that he was *this* irresistible.

My panties are soaked, and my lungs are working overtime trying to find

a breath. I grab the back of his head as aggressively as he's grabbing mine and push back at his tongue. Ian drops his head to nibble and bite at my neck when I drag my lips to kiss and lick his ear. And, as New York passes by the window, we cling to each other like we will never have another chance.

# STARS

*Sara*

My mouth feels raw by the time the cab halts before a fashionable hotel just a few blocks away. Ian drags me out of the cab, holding my hand as he leads me inside. I linger around the lobby as he goes to check in, watching him walk back to me with a key in hand.

“Ford!” someone calls. “Shit! You’re in town?”

Ian sets his hand on my elbow as a tall, blond guy approaches. His friend seems shocked by the sight of me standing next to him, and something about that makes my stomach constrict.

I mean, I’m fucking a stranger. How much do I know about Ian?

“I’d better leave,” I whisper, rethinking this whole thing, but as I speak Ian catches my fingers to halt me. He leans to whisper in my ear. “Don’t leave. Or I’ll find you.”

I go up on tiptoes to whisper, “Please don’t. I really don’t think we have anything in common except chemistry and I flunked that in high school—not my favorite subject.”

He just stares. At my mouth.

“Okay, bad joke. But you get it.”

He turns back to the guy who greeted him. “I’ve got to bolt, but I’ll catch up with you later.”

“I... hell yeah. Let’s do lunch,” the man replies.

“Will do,” Ian tells him. Then he turns his attention back to me.

“The exit is that way.” I point nervously behind me.

“The room is that way.” He glances at the elevators.

I shoot him a haughty look and pry free of his grip. Ian grabs the loop in my jeans and twists me back in the direction of the elevators. I kind of like it that he’s not letting me go. It’s nice to see he’s as interested in fucking me as I am in fucking him. Then I hear the deepest, sexiest voice speak behind me. “You always run in the opposite direction when you see something you want?”

I am not going to answer that. I’m not going to admit that my nipples are beaded and that my panties are wet. Almost as if jealous of the other panties that once were in a little wad in his hands months ago. “You’ve got it all wrong, buddy. Just leaving room for your ego.”

“My ego likes it just fine with you close.” He’s almost purring now. “The way you’re looking at me, it could not like it any better.”

“Full of yourself much?”

“So full of it I have enough to spare and get you full of me too, in a matter of seconds.”

I raise both my eyebrows.

“Just say the words—and we’ll break the news to all the other girls here. They’ll be devastated.”

I glance at the women in the lobby. Obviously most of them have noticed him, and I hate that he seems to have noticed.

“They’ll send me thank-you notes,” I say.

“Well, then... I hope you have a big mailbox.”

“You’re dreaming.”

“Of you.”

I sniff when I see him reach out to press the elevator button behind me. His arm brushes against the top of mine, and my skin tingles from the contact.

I hear the terrible, exciting, unnerving *ding*.

My whole body tightens in anticipation.

Ian lifts his hand and presses it against the small of my back, leading me into the elevator. We're the only ones inside. He presses the button for the top floor and uses the key to access it.

Wow. A penthouse suite?

His hand remains on the small of my back, his thumb caressing my skin below the fabric of my top.

His eyes hold mine, and something pulls inside my stomach.

The heat of his stare spreads under my skin, like a lick of fire between my legs.

The way the guy stands there, all confident and with an unreal mix of elegance and rawness, his stare direct and shameless, an air of authority surrounding him.

God, I want another piece of him tonight.

I don't think anyone could ever compete with this guy, so I never even went out with anyone who asked me ever since our encounter. Sometimes I've wanted to see him again so much that my chest hurt. And it's not fair, is it?

When we arrive at our floor, he takes my hand and leads me down the hall to open the suite door. Yes. It's a humongous suite.

What does it mean that he went for the best for this?

Does it mean he wants to impress me?

And what does it mean that I mumble "give me a moment" and race to the bathroom to freshen up?

That I want to impress *him*?

I take a long time scrutinizing my hair, my face, and the rest of me in the bathroom mirror. Does he like what I see? My pupils are dilated, my eyes gleaming with desire. My cheeks flushed. I look like a girl who just had the living daylights fucked out of her... or is about to. By the time I have loosened my hair and freshened up, Ian is sitting on a bar stool at the far end of the suite. The view of New York, and even a glimpse of Central Park, framing the windows behind him.

He slowly comes to his feet as I reach him. I melt under his smile as he grabs me by the waist and yanks me to his chest. Dominant. I like it.

“I should be gentle. You do walk my gran’s dog, after all.” He scans my features as if savoring them.

“I should have mercy on you. You’re my customer’s grandson, after all.” I scan his features in return.

His eyes begin to darken, his expression unreadable. I press forward, grabbing a fistful of his shirt. He smells so good that I feel dizzy, my brain completely out of order as I go up on tiptoe and graze his lips with mine.

He shifts his mouth, and my lips end up scraping along his jaw as he whispers in my ear, “Are you in it just for the orgasm of your life?” He holds me by the back of my neck.

I nod, and his expression changes.

He says, “Come here.”

He tugs me forward and motions to the hall of the suite, and I walk past him.

“Down the hall.”

I do as he instructs and when I glance past my shoulder, I catch those beautiful eyes of his inspecting my butt.

He smirks when I shoot him a look, and I hurry down the hall.



“Last room.”

I head to the master bedroom and open the door, then reach the bed and turn around.

“I don’t need a bed. Or a big suite, Mr. Ford. What I want from you is right here.” I reach out to grab his shirt and pull him to me, stroking my hand along his cock.

Oh God. He’s so hard. I want this so bad.

He grabs me by the hips and pulls me even closer to him, his eyes scanning my face. “You changed your mind fast.” A smug smile touches his lips as he grabs a handful of my hair, lifts it above my head, and leans forward.

“I’ll go if you don’t want it,” I grind out. Desire clutches my body as he skims his lips along my neck.

I can’t seem to say “want *me*”—it’s too personal, and I don’t want to get personal with him. Just physical.

My thighs are shaking as he tsks softly, shaking his head as he drags his thumb down my temple, along my jaw. “What would ever give you the impression I’m not into this?” He pulls my arms up above my head and flattens me to the window with his hard, sexy, blatantly muscular body. I don’t know which is harder, him or the window, or the gigantic erection pressing into my stomach while he lets his eyes roam my body as if deciding what he wants to taste first.

My lips, my throat, my shoulders, my...

“You feel incredible, Sara,” he rasps as he cups my breast in one hand, massaging it.

An unintelligible sound rises up my throat. This man does things to me. I’m suddenly afraid he’s going to break me, somehow, some way. The first time hooked me; what will the second do?

“No talking,” I say, pressing my mouth to his.

My lips end up crushed beneath his. The sound I make is swallowed by his mouth—his moving, hot, demanding mouth. “God, you taste good,” he rasps.

“So do you,” I croak.

My lips sting from his lips.

I press up on tiptoes and brush them again over his with a moan. “Kiss me again.”

He does more than kiss me—it’s like he’s waging a fucking war, his tongue charging into me, subduing mine, sucking mine.

Desperation grabs me like a living thing, causing me to arch my body against his. He’s hard like crazy, and I want more of his strength and his taste and his flesh and his passion.

I wiggle one hand free and he releases me, only to tear at my shirt. I hear it rip as I pull open the button of his shirt.

This franticness—I’ve never felt it before. It’s as though I’ll die if I don’t feel him inside me right now. I shudder and cry out when his hands cup my bare skin and free my breasts, and when he grabs one in his hand and lifts it to his mouth, I grab his hair and press him to me as he smothers one tight, sensitized nipple with his mouth.

He sucks. The pulling sensation makes my stomach constrict pleurably, my pussy gripping with need.

“You ready?” His question is just a rasp.

Breathless, I answer. “No foreplay. I’m ready.”

He ignores that request.

He sucks my breast again, as if he can’t stop himself. The pleasure is exquisite—racing in my veins, constricting my muscles, tickling my bones, firing up my sexy parts.

“I’m not. I want this to last.” He presses his lips to my neck and I don’t get why his warm breath on my skin melts me, why his words melt me—how this hot, melting-hot, stranger can have this effect on me.

“I want your dick, Ian,” I groan, caressing him through his pants again.

“And you’ll have it, Sara.”

My stomach contracts as our tongues meet again in my mouth, and suddenly my fingers are roaming over his chest, over his partly open shirt, feeling the muscles there as our tongues frantically sample each other, rub and touch and twist around one another.

He grabs me by the hips, his kiss becoming more aggressive as he backs me up against the bed and unzips, unbuttons, and yanks down my jeans, his mouth never leaving mine.

I kick my shoes and jeans off, and he eases his hand between my legs and a shiver of heat rushes down my spine as he tugs down my panties and cups my sex, murmuring into my mouth, “Here you are. So warm and wet, waiting for me.” He inserts one finger inside me. “Fucking soaked for me. Burning up for me, Sara.”

He pushes two fingers in and I groan against his jaw, a garbled sound leaving me as I thrust my hips out for more. “More.”

My hands shake as I reach out and loosen his shirt from the waistband of his slacks. “I want it now,” I rasp, swallowing audibly when he helps me tug open the rest of his shirt buttons. He shrugs his shirt off—and his chest is glorious. Holy shit, so glorious I gape at him, ripped, tanned, and smooth—so lickable, I immediately press my mouth to his skin and go lick one of his nipples.

He pulls off his pants and boxers and his cock jerks free, a drop of cum at the tip.

When he finally pins one of my hands to my side and grabs one of my legs to hook it around his hips, then guides that huge, thick dick inside me, I

scream. I scream and scream, pressing my mouth to his shoulder blades to quiet myself as he thrusts and thrusts and fucks me harder than last time. Harder than I've ever been fucked in my life.

My nails rake into his back, my pinned hand fisting in pleasure.

I see stars as I come in his arms, gasping his name out in nearly religious fervor. I don't even realize that I've screamed it until I have, and he groans mine back to me, in my ear, quieter but just as hot.

I didn't think anyone could ever compete with that night we spent. But of course—he goes on and improves it. Yummy motherfucker.

## *Ian*

She comes like a rocket and I can't stop watching her. I stop kissing her until she settles down to catch her breath. Her lips are raw from mine. Wet and pink. Even the bow at the top of her mouth is reddened from the force of my mouth on hers.

I should feel guilty.

I don't.

I didn't know exactly what I planned to do to her when I saw her. Maybe I'd planned to look her up at the concierge desk and ask her out to Daniel. See if she was available this time. Talk a bit. Get to hear about her life. Tell her about mine.

Maybe I even allowed myself to fantasize too much about things leading us back to room 1103. Or maybe I didn't plan to do shit.

Except I didn't imagine she'd be gone from the concierge desk—or the crushing disappointment I'd feel when I checked in yesterday and found out.

I especially didn't expect to see her in Central Park today. See how kind she was to my gran. And to Milly. How fucking sexy, confident, and still so damn bold.

Now she lies naked beneath me and I'm hard as stone. I can think of little else but getting my hands all over her again.

I don't know if she's been with anyone after me, but I sure as hell don't want her to have been touched. If there's been anyone, I want my hands to erase him from her. I want my touch to be the last one on her skin.

Moments ago, when we walked through Central Park, I told myself I

wouldn't lay a hand on her. Not tonight. She was no longer just any woman. She was my gran's dog walker.

I reasoned with myself that I had time. I could stay here while filming and get my shit together. Eventually pursue things slowly. But after helping Gran into the cab, Sara was heading off, and the thought of losing sight of her again was not an option.

Thinking I'd lost her when she left her job at my usual hotel made my gut twist. This time it churned because I was watching her walk away, in the opposite direction of where I wanted her to be heading.

I want her, and I don't like letting go of what I want.

Here we are now.

I reach out and her skin is silky soft. One touch and I realize I won't be able to stop myself from fucking her again. I want to eat her up this time. Maybe even ease my dick into her mouth. I clench my fingers around her hair and groan as her fingers feather across my dick.

"You minx," I growl, pulling her closer. "I've thought of you."

I'm leaking pre-cum and I can't remember a woman, any woman, who's ever done that to me in my adult years.

*Pull yourself together, Ford. This isn't what she expects.*

But I see the sudden spark of thrill in her eyes, and I almost bite my tongue, reminding myself I cannot give her more than this even as she slips her hands around me and curls closer. Close enough that her pussy nudges my dick again. I hate that I don't have the courage to stop her.

I'm in an odd, entranced state where I will do anything she asks of me, anything she says, just to hear her come screaming my name again. Feel her body twist beneath mine.

"Do you want to do this again?" I taunt huskily in her ear, nibbling her earlobe. I'm hungry. So hungry.

“I don’t just want to, I mean to.” Her whisper feathers into my ear as she slips her tongue in next.

My blood boils and simmers as she starts stroking me with her fist.

I exhale, fighting for control, and ease my hand back between her legs. I massage her clit with my thumb, rubbing in circles.

She shivers, groaning and grabbing my dick harder. I growl as I feel it jerk in response, too damn happy to see her. Throbbing to get those fingers of hers right on it—on me. Then her pussy. Then her mouth.

I push two fingers in and she groans against my jaw, an unintelligible sound leaving her as she thrusts her hips out for more. “God, Ian, that feels amazing.”

She’s loving it. Can’t get enough of it.

I’m loving it even more.

I’m impatient. I pull open her legs and dive between her thighs, sucking, licking, and tasting her.

I could pass out from how horny I feel. Sara glances down at me, at my damn size, my cock swollen to the limit as I suck her off.

“Flip around. I want you in my mouth.” She’s begging me, her voice cottony with lust.

I roll to my back and bring her up with me, her butt on my face, her pussy in my mouth. Sara bends down and next thing I know, she’s got my full length in her mouth.

“Fuck.” I groan. My hips swivel; I clench her ass in my hand and bury my tongue in deeper. “I want more of you. I want you screaming my name.” My voice is muffled by her lips, her ass. I don’t care. I’m saying it to myself. To whoever hears it. Even if she doesn’t.

I withdraw my tongue, then drive back with equal force, but faster. Her teeth clamp down on the base of my cock, and pleasure shoots up my spine as

she drags them to the head.

I groan, driving my dick in deeper and harder into her mouth as she spurts in my mouth. I come too.

She can't be still, and I like it.

"Ian."

We freeze for a second, breathing hard in unison.

Then I flip her to her back, straighten her beneath me, and thrust inside. A surprised gasp leaves her. She doesn't expect me to still be hard after coming in her mouth. Hell, neither do I.

I pull her hands up and set a pace, relentless as I drive into her, unleashing the hunger I've harbored, nurtured, for months.

I remembered how good she was, how good it was.

Hell, I didn't remember shit.

Mind-blowing...

She comes all over me again, thrashing beneath me. I follow and let the waves take over.

Even a minute afterward, I'm off-kilter. I exhale, and look at her, stroking my fingers down her bare arms as I try to come back to myself.

She glistens with sweat, about as perfect as a Venetian painting. She looks satisfied and even sleepy, a damn kitten, that's for sure. I remember Jake's and my conversation back in LA and I wonder if she really is the kind of cat to claw and turn its back on you. Or if she's the kind that curls closer, wanting more of the plate of milk you offered.

*You're offering nothing, not even milk. Just sex, because you're legally not even available.*

The heat in my veins cools down at that thought.

Last time I fucked her in room 1103, I pulled away. She seems to expect



that. She seems to gasp in surprise when I bend and run a slow circle around the raw, reddened tip of her left breast. I suckle her, gently now, cupping the bottom of her breast with my hand. Then I do the same to the other, hearing her sigh, feeling her fingers ease around the back of my head.

I suck her for a while, then suck my way up her neck. I groan in her ear, “I can’t seem to get enough of you, kitten. Should we go at it all night?”

She slits her eyes as she looks at me, a greedy little smile appearing on her face as she licks her lips.

# FOUND

*Sara*

That's it, I'm dead. He's fucked me all night long, and now I'm dead. And it seems like I'm not such a bad human being, because I landed in heaven.

I don't want to go home. I just want to drink in the feeling of this guy's big, warm body tangled with mine and his delicious scent all over my skin. My sexually satisfied body spoons his as he relaxes against me. He asks what I've been doing since I left the concierge job, and listens when I tell him about Bryn's new business. I'm surprised Ian hasn't pulled the same stunt he pulled the last time, where he wanted me gone the instant after we came. This time, we actually slept for a few hours—something I've never done with a guy—before I woke up to feel his mouth doing wicked things between my thighs. Now I'm spooning his side and it's *sooo* nice.

“I'm acting as her PA, and I sometimes model for her online catalogue. It's only temporary until I get a big break, but she needs all the help she can get to launch her business and I like having something to offer.”

He scrutinizes me in silence, his hands linked behind his head. “What's this business called?”

“House of Sass.” I grin, stroking a finger along his chest, down the line of hair that leads to my happy place.

“Your idea?” he asks, brows raised.

“No.” I laugh. I prop up to my elbow. “But I like it.”

He reaches out, stroking his thumb along my bare arm. My body tingles.

God, I've never had sex this mind-blowing in my life. I've never craved a guy the way I crave this one.

"I'm getting us coffee before round two." I grin sheepishly and rise from the bed, stealing the sheets away from him and leaving him with only the duvet. "How long are you staying in New York?"

He lifts his brows.

"So I can make time to see you again." I smirk. "Get a little more out of you."

He shifts forward in bed, his expression darkening.

"I can't offer you more than this."

I stare. "I know," I whisper. Do I?

"Do you really, Sara?" He watches me.

"Yes. I mean, you never called. But I know you wanted to." I wink. "You just showed me in numerous ways how very much you wanted a redo of our night at 1103." I smirk again and turn back for the coffee.

"I'm in the middle of a divorce."

I freeze, my fingers clutching the sheet so tight my knuckles turn white. My eyes fly back to his dark ones, and though his are narrowed, mine are wide and round. My vision blurs. I can barely breathe.

I look at my Dirty Workaholic, his mussed-up hair. Mouth reddened by me. Hell, he's got claw marks of mine on his biceps and shoulders. And he's... taken?

"What? You're married?"

I drop the sheets, my body going lax with fear and horror. Because am I this girl? Am I the girl who sleeps with other women's men? Oh my God!

He kicks the duvet off and starts to stand. "Only technically. Not in any way that counts. Not for a year and a ha—"

“You’re fucking *married*?” I repeat, storming forward.

I make out to punch him somehow, but he catches my wrist and halts me, his voice a warning. “Sara.”

I turn away, so hurt I feel an instant sting in my eyes.

He squeezes my wrist, gently, tugging my face back to his. “I’m sorry,” he says, his voice low, rough, and apologetic as he turns me around. His eyes glimmer with regret and frustration. His forehead hovers over mine as he tugs me closer. “Actually, I’m *not* sorry,” he says, searching my eyes as if hoping to find that I am not sorry, too. “I’m not sorry about that night at the Four Seasons. And I’m not sorry about tonight, either.” He takes my chin and rubs my lower lip with his thumb when it starts trembling with panic.

I remember how elusive Ian was when we met. How he didn’t “do this,” he’d said. I admire that he didn’t make any false promises. I still like him. But I’m scared.

“What am I doing here?” I ask, suddenly pushing at his chest. Mad at him. At myself. At this whole situation.

“Fuck,” he swears behind me as I start getting dressed.

“I can’t do this.” I shake my head. “I don’t have torrid affairs with married men.”

“I’m not married—not in any way that counts.”

“Wow. I’m such a stupid... ugh. Now it all makes sense. Why I never, why *you* never...” I look at him, and he looks distraught. His jaw clenched tight, his eyes gleaming in frustration, hands fisted at his sides.

I don’t know why, but I just stare at him. Ian. He has a name now. And why does that just make it worse? He’s the guy I’ve dreamed of for forever, it feels. I wanted to know more of him, everything about him. But I’m not sure what the hell has happened that ended up with me here, drinking in my last glimpse of him, because my parents are going through a divorce, and I don’t want to be the woman on the sidelines.

“I’m sorry I never reached out. I can’t offer you more. I didn’t want to give you false expectations.”

My eyes sting a little, but I blink back the tears. “I had no expectations. Or actually, I had plenty, but you fulfilled all of them exceedingly well.” I smile and finish dressing, hating how emotional I’m getting. This isn’t me.

“Goodbye, Ian,” I whisper, fetching my purse.

“Sara.”

I quickly grab my bag and head out, praying that he doesn’t come after me. He didn’t after the first time we had sex, so I’m sure this time it will be no different.

I’m probably just his way of getting over another woman.

I’m trembling on the ride back to Nolita, feeling him on my skin. On my taste buds. In my sex. In my stupid heart. No matter how much of a cynic busy city life makes a girl, I guess there’s always that tiny little romantic inside of us that survives.

Well, survived. Past tense. Courtesy of Ian Ford, who just confirmed what everyone knows. If it’s too good to be true, it probably is.

Hot. Hardworking. Interested. And available?

Oh yeah, I was dreaming for sure.

\* \* \*

I find Bryn awake when I arrive at our Nolita apartment, and I don’t even know what to do with myself, I’m so confused and restless.

“What happened? Did the whole city get lost last night?” Bryn rants, pacing the living room when I shut the door behind me. She looks at me expectantly, and I can read the question in her eyes clearly.

She wants to know if I found my one-night-stand guy. I jump into the shortest explanation I can, because I can't bear to talk about this out loud.

"We got a hotel room. We fucked, okay? End of story. He's gone again."

I can't bear to give her the details, but Ian is definitely gone from my life now. Unless I'm a masochist, which I suppose is a possibility. But nope. Not today. I'm fixing my life, remember?

"Sara!" Bryn says in excitement as I stomp determinedly to my room. She sounds hyped about me having found him. "You have his name now: Ian Ford."

"Yes. And I couldn't resist him, but it's done with."

Trying my best to push him out of my mind, I stop at the threshold of my room and regard Bryn more closely. She's dressed for clubbing, or at least a fancy dinner, and yet there are circles under her eyes as if she either didn't go or spent all night there. "What happened to you?" A frown pinches my forehead, and something about this feels odd. Didn't she have a date last night?

"I got... I got stood up." Her smile fades and she almost chokes on the words. "God, I can't believe he stood me up." Bryn is distraught, more than I've ever seen her affected by anything before. "Something is wrong. I can feel it." She whispers her concern and clutches her stomach.

"You're just paranoid. He'll call," I softly assure her. I know that a guy doesn't pursue a girl the way Christos has pursued Bryn just to drop off the face of the earth in a second.

Or do they?

Fuck all of this. Why does love and romance need to be so damn complicated? I walk into my room and slide back in bed only to punch my pillow into submission, the only thing that apparently goes my way.

\* \* \*

The next day, things don't improve. Bryn heads off to see Christos while I head to work, and when she comes to the office, her eyes are red and she won't talk to me for about half an hour. No matter how much I demand she tell me what happened.

She tries to focus on work and to check the latest designs, but when I say, gently, "Bryn. Talk to me," she whirls around, clutches me tight, and bawls her eyes out. "We broke up."

Fifteen minutes later, after she's had a good cry, we're both in her office, sitting morosely at the edge of the desk.

"How are *you*?" she says as she tries to turn her concern toward me. "When I saw the way you two looked at each other in Central Park, I just knew you'd found your guy."

"Found. Past tense. I'm not keeping him. I can't." I sigh and try to arrange the design folders scattered on Bryn's desk.

She reaches out to take my hand and stop me. "While we were waiting for him, Mrs. Ford started telling me all about her grandson and how he was going through an ugly divorce. She basically implied his ex is a total bitch. He gave her his place on West End Avenue."

"No wonder he stays at the hotel." I squeeze her hand, then continue fixing the papers before I store them in her drawer and rub my temples.

"She dotes on him," Bryn says.

She's not the only one. But I can't let myself know him. He didn't even say that he wanted more from me. Though he looked frustrated when I left, I can't be sure if he wants me for *me* or he just wants someone to take out his frustrations on.

Suddenly I feel the hickey on my neck. My hot Dirty Workaholic's hands

somehow lingering over me.

“Enough about Ian,” I whisper, reaching out to take her hand. “Want to take work home instead of being here so close to...” I don’t even want to mention his name.

Bryn’s eyes water again. “It’s really over.” She pushes the heels of her palms to her eyes for a second before dropping them. “I walked into his office, asking why he stood me up last night without a *fucking* word, and he broke up with me. His ex is pregnant.”

“Bah! I could just...” I shake my head, too shocked to say anything else.



# WORKING GIRLS

*Sara*

“You’ll get through this, Mom,” I insist as I talk to her on the phone that evening. “It’s not because of you. It was that fucking strumpet.”

An image of Ian fucking Ford making love to me with his hot mouth and blazing dark eyes takes over my mind, and I shake it off with a vengeance. “Tell me what you’re doing for yourself,” I insist.

Because I know my mom. My childhood was spent eating her homemade meals, and with my mom braiding my hair when I did my homework. She lives for her family. Being an only daughter, she nearly broke when I rented an apartment in New York. All she had was Dad—and making a warm and welcoming home for him.

Now, even that is gone.

“What do you mean?” Mom asks, as if the concept is alien to her.

“Are you seeing your friends for canasta once a week instead of once every leap year? Taking daily walks with Lico instead of having someone else do it?”

“I am. I’m walking Lico two times a day.”

“That’s good! Mom, that’s *great*. I’m proud of you. Do things that make you happy. Dad will regret it someday, and you’ll be so happy you won’t want him back. Ever.”

“It’s just that...” She pauses. “How could he, Sara? How *could* he? I did

everything right. I did everything—”

“I don’t know, Mom,” I whisper. “Maybe he was too comfortable. He never feared losing you. Maybe... these things just happen. My roomie just broke up with a guy she’s been dating, and the guy was crazy about her. Some asshole ex—” I cut myself off. *Some asshole ex turned out to be pregnant*, I think. Bryn and Christos broke up last night. Christos didn’t even make it to their date. And me? Well. I’m seriously losing faith in the universe.

And once again, I wonder if love really works out for anyone.

I’m feeling more than a little blue by the time I hang up with my mom. It’s not just Mom who worries me. It’s Bryn, too.

Christos was the boy of her childhood who got away, and suddenly they were together again and falling in love. Now, she’s walking around in silence, sometimes staring off into space. Last night she cried all night after the breakup. In the office, when she becomes distracted, I notice the way she tries to snap out of it and focus on work—but it still hurts and frustrates me not to know what to do for her. For my mom. Even for myself, to be honest.

Because I can’t help but wonder what happened to Ian Ford and his marriage that made it fall apart. A part of me hates not knowing. A part of me wishes it were over and done with so I could find out if we really have something worth pursuing.

\* \* \*

The next day I meet with Jensen, a good friend I met through Bryn who’s helping us with the upcoming House of Sass launch. He’s a graphic design artist with a fabulous basement flat in Gramercy Park that even provides that elusive key to the gated neighborhood park. He’s got a longtime boyfriend now, a thriving business, and the confidence to show for it. Makes me wonder if the bad luck we girls are experiencing romance-wise is only affecting the

women of the world.

“So. The job. You happy?” he asks as we walk down Irving Place to his neighborhood coffee shop.

It takes me a moment to catch on to what he’s saying. “It’s good. I enjoy working with Bryn. Sorry. You caught me at a moment.”

“A good moment?”

I feel my cheeks flush. “Nah. I just... I’ve been a bit in a cloud since last night.” I wave it off, shaking my head.

“What? You’re not happy?”

“Yes, with the job; it’s just that today I’m a bit... spacey.”

I pause outside the coffee shop while Jensen orders our usual coffees. Then he strides outside, hands me my cup, and leads me to a small round table.

“Okay. Spill it, woman,” he says.

“I found out my one-night stand’s name. More than that, I found out he’s the grandson of one of my and Bryn’s customers. We spent the night at a hotel.”

“Sheshus, that’s fucking killer, Sara.” He slams a hand down on the table in emphasis, clearly thrilled.

“No, it’s not! He’s fucking married, Jensen.”

“Say what?” Jensen shifts forward in his seat, shaking his head in complete disbelief. “Fuck. Okay.” He drags a hand across his face. “No matter. It’s never a mistake when you get the O, you know what I mean? And you *did* get the O. Didn’t you?”

I groan. “God! Multiple times. That guy is so good he could make me O just from kissing. But he’s married. In the process of getting divorced, but that’s what they all say, right? I’m not that girl, Jensen!” I feel my frustration rise as I talk about it, and I swallow a huge gulp of coffee to calm it down.

“Forget him. Tell him ‘thanks for the O, but that’s all you’re good at.’ And move on. Get out more. Can I introduce you to some friends? I know a few people who can take care of the sex issue, no strings. A fuck-buddy type of thing.”

“In their dreams, Jensen!” I burst out laughing.

“The wet ones,” he says, tongue in his cheek.

“You’re disgusting.”

He mulls it over, chuckling. “What happened with his marriage? Do you know?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask.” I fiddle with my coffee cup. “There’s such chemistry between us. It’s *unreal*.” I frown. “But then he told me his situation, and I said it was over and walked out. I’m jealous, you know? Just thinking that some other woman has rights to him.” *But last night he was looking at you with raw possession, Sara. Ugh. Stop it, little voice.*

“I don’t want anyone else to have him, but I am definitely not looking forward to something this complex and... complicated. I’m scared he’s working me out of his system in men’s usual ways—maybe even using me to get over the ex or whatever.” I sigh drearily.

“Is it a mutual decision to divorce?”

“I have no idea. I should’ve asked. Instead, I panicked, saw the red flags, and left.”

“Then take it as closure and move on. If not me, have Bryn set you up on a date.”

“I don’t know, Jen—things with Christos are over, and I’m not sure she can move on that easily,” I say. “This time I had a second-night stand. Give me one reason why it wouldn’t feel like closure?” I ask him, confused.

“Easy.” Jensen runs a hand through his perfect hair and leans back against the chair rest. “You want more of the big D.”

“Oh! He has a *very* nice D and I wouldn’t mind more of it. But it just...” I shake my head, suddenly angry at him. Fucking *Ian Ford*. “I want him to want me; that’s not typically me. I’m usually dreading that they’ll call again, Jen.”

“Damn, that’s a problem.”

“I know.” I sigh and glance at my watch. “Okay. I need to head to the office. Bryn must be waiting, and there’s something going down with Christos that I’m worried about. I’ll let you know when I know more.”

“Please do. I’m a hairsbreadth away from hunting Christos down and beating him up for hurting her.”

“I know you are. I know you love Bryn.” I kiss the top of his head and take my coffee with me.

“Sara. What about the auditions?” he asks.

“Still waiting for the call. Hoping something else will come up. The more auditions, the better the possibilities, right?”

“Damn right. Break a leg, princess,” he says.

“I already did once!” I yell back, glaring down at my coffee.

I’m about to board the train when I get a text from my saved number at Daniel.

**François:**

*Ian Ford, mademoiselle.*

*You’re welcome. :)*

Trembling, I’m about to text back my *thank you* when I get a call from Robert.

“Sara, you won’t believe who’s at the hotel right now. He just ordered room service.”

I shuffle onto the train and take a seat, clutching my phone tight as the image of Ian surrounded by office papers comes back to haunt me.

“Until when is his room booked?”

“Only until tomorrow, unfortunately. But he’s back in 1103. His name is Ian—”

“Ford. I know. I just found out.” I exhale. “Thanks, Robert.”

My hand trembles as I end the call and stare down at my phone, wondering what I’m going to do with this little piece of information. *He’s in town until tomorrow.* When he leaves, will he ever come back? Will I ever see him again? Do I *want* to?

# WORKING MAN

*Ian*

“Mr. Ford? Did you hear me?”

I pull my thoughts away from last night when I hear my New York assistant at the door. I turn. “I heard you.” Exasperated with myself, I motion for her to set the script revisions on my desk.

I head over and skim the pages, unable to concentrate. We’re producing a documentary on garbage. Glamorous, I know, but trust me, it’s good. I’m proud of our concept.

Can’t say I’m as proud of how things went down yesterday.

My gut roils as I remember the look on Sara’s face when I told her. Her eyes shone with terrible emotions, and *I* was the cause. I hated myself right then. I thought I was the victim when Cordelia fucked me over. But what am I doing with Sara?

When the door shut behind her, my heart was stampeding, my lungs, my legs, my arms tensing in anticipation.

Because I wanted to chase after her.

I still plan to.

I know how to get her number. My grandmother would never deny me anything. If Sara doesn’t want to see me again, I’ll understand. I’ll at least make it up to her in some way.

I’m wrapping up reading the new script when my cell phone rings and

Wahlberg's name appears on my screen. I lean back in my chair and tap to answer.

"Yeah."

"I've got good news. We've had the talk with your accountant like you requested. Threatened to remove your business if he didn't come forward with the truth. And he's willing to testify to his affair with your wife."

"Good. Finally there's something." I run my hand along the back of my neck, suddenly tense with the anticipation. I need this circus over with. "Call Cordelia. Let her know the minute details of the situation and tell her my offer for the house and half my money still stands. I just want to get this over with at last."

"I'll update you."

I hang up, almost reluctant to believe that it's finally coming to an end.

I want to be free of her and the constraints she keeps binding around me. I want her out of my life. I don't forgive betrayal easily. I surround myself with few people, but those who I keep close mean more to me than anything. I will never forget a betrayal. Nor would I ever betray or lie to one of my own the way she did me.

Pushing that thought away, I jump back to the matter at the forefront of my mind since last night, and I dial my grandmother.

"How's my girl?" I ask when she answers.

"Oh, Ian." She giggles. "Am I seeing you for dinner as planned?"

"That's right."

"I'm making meatballs, your favorite."

"I'm salivating already. Listen, Gran. How about you call the dog walker, Sara, so she and I can take Milly out for you tonight?"

"She was coming this afternoon for Milly's walk. I was planning to cook your meatballs while they were out."



“Good. Something’s come up at the office and I’ll be free early.”

“Ian Ford!” she chides before I can end the call.

Reluctantly, I raise the phone back up. “What?”

“Don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing. I want you to know that I fully, wholeheartedly, very thoroughly... approve.”

I smile, relieved, and run my hand over my jaw. I don’t want her to get her hopes up. I’m still not eager to jump back into a relationship, not after the last one I had. But I crave Sara in a way I haven’t craved anything but work for a long, long time.

I owe it to myself to find out why she has this effect on me.

I will buy myself some time with her, somehow. Some way.

If only Sara thought of me half as positively as my grandmother does, it might even be easy to ask her out for an evening.

Fuck if I haven’t looked forward to a date in a long time.

## MRS. FORD

*Sara*

I'm dog-walking for Mrs. Ford this evening, and I can't help but dread what I have to say. But there's really no choice, is there? I can't risk bumping into him. Not when I'm not certain yet of what there is between us, or if there can even *be* anything serious between us. I need space and I need to think, and one thing I know for certain is that Ian doesn't let me think at all. But the fact that I may not see him ever again fucks me up quite a bit. Guest in room 1103. Handsome and almost like some dream, gone before I could hardly remember, but definitely addictive.

It seems the guy is not only on my mind, because he's the first thing Mrs. Ford mentions when I walk into her apartment that evening. "My grandson hasn't been in town for a while. He's going through a very ugly divorce."

"Oh."

"It's been going on for a while, but that little tramp he married just can't let go." She shakes her head. "That's what he gets for marrying a woman more interested in his money than his happiness."

"What does he do?"

"He's a film producer. Mostly documentaries. He travels for work a lot. I admit he doesn't like being in the city anymore, and with good reason!"

"Mrs. Ford," I say as she moves around the kitchen in a floral caftan and enough jewels to open her own store.

"Yes, dear?"

“I don’t know that I can continue walking Milly. Bryn is about to open her business, and as her PA, I’m going to be much busier. I also do some catalogue modeling on the side, and it’s time-consuming as well.”

“You’re modeling, Sara?”

“Yes,” I say, feeling self-conscious as she turns to scrutinize me, “but I told her to cut my face off the images.”

“Why on earth?” She sounds aghast.

“I don’t know. But I would rather be doing something that stimulates my mind a little more. Posing is boring and it makes me self-conscious.”

“You have nothing to be self-conscious about; you’re gorgeous, Sara—model gorgeous, with that ballerina body and those beautiful eyes. Tell me the real reason you can’t walk Milly.”

I pause for a moment, my brain near exploding with one word.

Ian.

Ian.

Fucking IAN.

Having fucked IAN.

Wanting IAN.

“I just don’t know that I can keep coming, that’s all.” I move around the counter to help her cut vegetables as we talk. I don’t pay much attention to what I’m doing, but I need to do something.

“Is it about my grandson?”

“Excuse me?”

“He asked me when you were coming over.”

“Huh?”

The door chime rings, and Mrs. Ford raises her heavily jeweled hand.

“That must be him,” she says conspiratorially with a wink, and I stiffen on my feet when, a minute later, I hear a key being inserted into the lock.

“Ian, darling!” Mrs. Ford squeals like a girl, and I hear Ian’s voice reach and tickle my ears (among other parts).

“Gran. How’s my girl today?”

My mouth dries up as I set the knife down and turn to watch him fill the living room with his ever sexy presence.

If I thought I might get lucky and the guy would have gotten a face and body transplant today, I was mistaken. He’s still my Dirty Workaholic, the most sexual being I have ever known. His repressed energy seems to bubble under the fabric of his black slacks and white dress shirt. Just like it always does.

I’m trying to suppress my reaction to his presence, but my body parts aren’t in accord with my brain. Damn him.

Mrs. Ford envelops him in her embrace, and when Ian drapes his arms around her, his height and breadth make his grandmother look delicate and tiny. She’s cooing at him as Ian lifts his eyes, and his dark, curious gaze locks on me. My heart stutters when we make eye contact. I begin to perspire as I force my feet to move forward, get Milly, and get the hell out of here.

“I should get going,” I tell Mrs. Ford before Ian can say a word. “If you’ll excuse me. Come here, Milly.” I call her, grabbing the leash from the kitchen drawer and latching it onto her collar as the dog pads over.

Ian moves forward to take Milly’s leash from my fingers. “I’ve got it.” Close to my ear, his voice is deep and low and rumbling.

I straighten, his voice rolling down my skin like a harsh kiss. There’s something intimidating and intense about the way his eyes look *into* me. “I came here for you,” he whispers.

“I don’t see why.”

“I’m going to finish dinner!” Mrs. Ford calls from the kitchen. “Ian, don’t come on too strong; she’s not Cordelia.”

“Thanks, Gran. I think I’ve got this,” he answers with a smirk in his eyes as he leads Milly to the door.

“I don’t think this is the time or the appropriate place,” I warn the man as he opens the door.

I step out of the apartment and stupidly get tangled between Ian and Milly.

I gasp as Ian tries to untangle me. Our bodies bump in places and it only gets his scent all over me, and allows my body to remember the hardness of his.

Freed, I step away from him and maintain my personal space as we ride the elevator down. I’m praying that he doesn’t step into my bubble and make me lose my center of gravity again.

“Can I at least have the leash?” I ask him. If I sound annoyed, it’s because I am.

He hands it over, watching me with a slight smile on his lips.

I don’t know why he’s here tonight. Or why I’m feeling flutters in my stomach.

I want to pretend that this is normal. Me, walking one of my client’s dogs with her grandson. But it’s *not* normal, and neither is the way this guy looks at me.

I notice, as usual, his work attire.

Does the guy do anything else except work and fuck like a god?

“You came here from work?”

We step into the lobby and then out onto the busy streets. “I did. And you?”

I nod, glancing around at the busy cafés as we start walking, trying to

distract myself from him. It's past sunset and the shoppers that usually litter the SoHo streets are already flooding the restaurants for dinner. The streets are quieter at this hour. I can't decide if it's a good thing or a bad thing. Usually it would be good. But with Ian beside me, I need all the distractions I can get.

"Why don't you stay with your grandmother when you're in town?" I decide small talk can distract me just fine. I feel calmer now as we head toward Washington Square Park, both of us staring ahead and scanning our surroundings.

"She has her own life. I've got mine. I don't want to intrude." He scoffs. "Besides, I have a home here. I just don't use it."

I remember the West End apartment and steer off that topic. "Do you come to the city often?"

I'm just making small talk.

Or okay. Maybe I asked just for *me*.

"Once a month. Though I had a project to film in LA for the past few months that kept me away." His eyes slit as he regards me with a pointed glance, as if he means for me to know his reasons for staying away.

I gulp and pretend I don't notice the way his eyes fall to my lips for a hot moment.

"Your parents?" I press.

"Both passed away. Boating accident."

I stop in my tracks, mouth hanging open and heart crushed. "I'm sorry," I finally say. He accepts my words with a brief smile, and the way his eyes sadden tugs at my heart.

We fall silent for a while. I suppose I should have hugged him, but that would get him too far into my personal bubble. He's already treading at the margins.

“I was obsessed with death as a teenager,” I offer.

“Why?”

“Because it scared me to think of losing someone I loved and of one day that person no longer... existing. I had a friend in school who died. She had frequent migraines and they discovered a brain tumor. We lost her so fast.”

I shrug. “After she died I could only think about dying. I would have school parties and see people laughing and I’d think, what are you all laughing about? We’re all gonna die someday! I kept waiting for it to happen. It wasn’t until I turned eighteen that I finally realized we’re all heading there and thinking about it won’t stop it. I realized you might as well live your life while you’re still alive.”

“So are you a hypochondriac or what?”

I laugh. “No! But I want to leave a good mark when I go.” I lean away from him and sigh. “I read this book, *Remembrance* by Jude Deveraux, about reincarnation and how we come back over and over and find our loved ones again. That made me feel better.” I narrow my eyes. “When’s your birthday?”

“April eighteenth.”

“Aries. Fire. That explains it.”

“So you think we’ve met before?”

“I sound crazy.”

“No. Just interesting.”

I laugh. “Well. The idea of souls knowing each other before is cute, in a way, but I guess knowing it will all end takes the fun out of it.”

“I think it makes it even better, makes every moment count more. Right now, this second”—he snaps his fingers—“just gone.”

“Way to kill my party, Ian!”

I push him away in mock annoyance, and he grabs me by the wrist and

before I know it, he pulls me back to his side, breaking into my personal bubble.

Unsettled by the touch, I squirm free and regain one foot between us and tighten my hold on Milly's leash.

"Tell me more about you," I press.

"What do you want to know?"

"Tell me what you do." I sound eager, too eager, to know him. But to be honest, he sounds about as interested in me as I am in him.

"I'm a film producer. I own a couple of production companies—mostly those developing documentaries across the world."

"Any kids?"

"Nope." A slight frown creases his forehead and a short, cynical laugh rumbles up his chest. "Hell, I tell Gran that I'm not marrying again. Instead, I'm getting a dog or a big, fat cat and leaving my fortune to him and Milly."

"Oh, come on!" I laugh—but only for a moment. "I'm sure you'll find someone." I look up into his eyes and there are shadows there. In those gorgeous onyx eyes. I want to hit the woman who put them there. "I don't want you to die alone."

"It's not about wanting—you can't choose your time of death." And now Ian looks amused once again.

"But you can choose the way you're living," I counter.

He's silent.

"I'd have loved for you to meet my parents." He breaks the silence with that statement. And he almost seems as surprised by it as I am.

"I would have liked to have met them too." I smile genuinely. Why is he giving me flutters again? This is supposed to be just small talk. Now we're making imaginary introductions to parents.



“My mother would have liked you,” he says.

“I would have no doubt liked her like I do Mrs. Ford. Were they similar? She and Mrs. Ford?”

“They were alike. Like mother, like daughter-in-law, I suppose.”

“I’m sorry you lost them, Ian.”

“Me too,” he says, pausing to force me to look into his eyes. “And now I want to know about you.”

“There’s not a lot to know.” I hike up one shoulder in a casual shrug. “I’m an only child. My parents are in the middle of a divorce. You can say that’s been hard to assimilate.”

He seems surprised. Something about my parents’ situation being similar to his own seems to register, and his voice drops a decibel. “I’m sorry.”

“I guess you’d know, since you’re in the middle of one, too.” I eye him as we turn at the corner. I want to ask what happened between him and his wife, but at the same time, I’m not sure I want to know. “I guess life surprises us and not everything we plan ends up going as planned. I came to Manhattan to study at NYU. All I dreamed of was Broadway. But on my first audition, I broke my ankle, and voilà, I haven’t seen the stars smile down on me again since I...”

He looks down at me with an intense expression on his face. I feel my phone buzz, and it’s a message from Bryn’s friend Becka.

***Just landed. Will be there shortly. Is Bryn ok?***

***Yes. Meet you at the apartment in a bit.***

I turn to him. “My roomie just went through a sad breakup. Her best friend from Texas is in town to cheer her up.” I lick my lips, realizing it’s late. “We’d better head back. I should get home. Tomorrow, I’m promoting the

launch of House of Sass on Prince Street and I need my beauty sleep.”

We don't talk on our way back to Mrs. Ford's apartment. But we seem to be walking closer to each other, and it's odd that I sort of feel safe when he's invading my personal bubble.

Why is that?

Upstairs, I kiss the top of Milly's head and croon down at her for being a good girl. I straighten and realize Ian was watching me this whole time. We say goodbye. Mrs. Ford insists I stay for dinner, but I have to decline.

“About our conversation, Mrs. Ford...” I pause at the door. “I'll find someone to fill in as my replacement.”

Before she can talk me out of it, I walk out of the building and toward the train station with Ian on the brain and regret in my heart. And the more excited I feel about having just seen him, the more worried and scared I get that he'll break my heart if I let him get any closer.

# PRINCE STREET

*Sara*

We have a girls' night where we—Bryn, Becka, and I—forbid each other to talk about men. Lucky for her, Becka is the only one of us who's not a little heartbroken, and it's only because she's so focused on her fictional characters' heartbreak instead.

We hit it off instantly when we met last night. She's from Austin and has been best friends with Bryn for forever. She's a frustrated writer, slash poet, slash romantic, and is hoping to finish her manuscript while in New York. She sleeps the night on the couch, then wakes early to cook us her signature Belgian waffles.

I already hope she stays with us for a while.

Now, while Bryn coordinates the deliveries of her clothing designs to the warehouse to get ready for her House of Sass launch, Becka and I are trying to cheer her up by night, and selling samples at fifty percent discount on Prince Street by day.

Everyone who's stopped by our stand has loved Bryn's new "confession" T-shirts. Some say "Chocolate Addict" and others have a cute little slogan and logo. On the front one reads, "I Kissed a Frog" and on the back it reads, "Or twenty."

"Miss Davies?"

I'm startled to spot a man standing behind the last girl we rang up. He's a little younger than me, and he seems to know who I am, but I have no idea

who he is.

“My boss sent this.”

He extends a piece of paper, but this is New York, after all, and you just don't trust people that easily. “I'm sorry; I think you may—”

“Sara Davies?” He shakes his head. “He was pretty intent on making sure I didn't make a mistake.” He hands me back the piece of paper, which I now realize has a card inside, along with a check. I quickly read the name on the card: *Ian Ford*.

My stomach dips unexpectedly. What is he doing?

“I'm sorry but...”

“For the whole set. We're buying everything you have left in stock.”

“But why?”

“He wanted you to free your afternoon and meet him tonight on Broadway. He's got tickets for *Hairspray*.”

“Oh my gosh, really? But that show is sold out.”

He gathers all the remaining T-shirts and says, “He's good for the check.”

I seem to have lost all power of speech.

Becka is equally speechless as we close shop.

“You've got to go,” she says.

“I'm not sure where this will lead. What exactly am I getting into?” I glance at the ticket as we head to the train station.

“It's just a date—and if you want more, then it'll be more.”

“But didn't I tell you last night this guy is married?”

“He's as good as divorced already. And he's interested.”

“I'm confused. I never wanted to get it on with a divorced guy. I'm not going to go.” I shake my head, but Becka grabs my hand and squeezes.

“Sara. Do you want to wonder your whole life? Just go. Maybe getting to know him more will help you get over him. Or it’ll make it clearer that you really want this guy and are willing to wait for him.”

“Okay. You’re right.” I nod my head. “You need to help me pick my outfit.”

“Count on it.”

“Also, don’t tell Bryn. She’s got enough on her plate, and I don’t want her to worry about me.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t.”

One hour later, I walk into the theater wearing a killer red dress and look down at my ticket, biting my lip as the usher points out my seat. I scan the line of seats down the front, and I spot the back of his head. He seems to sense my presence and slowly stands, his onyx gaze trained on me, and my knees do a little knocking dance. Damn this man. He’s going to be the end of me.

Exhaling, I start heading down the steps as he comes to meet me halfway, the smile on his face a shade above gorgeous.

“Hey, stranger,” I say.

“Glad you came.” His eyes shine and I’m glad I came, too, if only because I’ve never met a guy I’ve responded to the way I do him. I said that when I found sparks I would light the match, and here I am. Stoking that same fire that began months ago in that ride back from the airport.

Ian stretches out his legs before us after we sit and I feel his knee touch mine.

I gulp and tense, wanting more.

We start to watch the show, and it’s torture to be caught between my two loves, both of which I can’t have. Dancing... and my Suit. It becomes more and more painful as the show progresses and the dancers twirl on the stage in

ways that make my legs itch so that I can barely watch without wanting to move to the music. I feel him eyeing my profile and I don't know what to do, what to say, why I'm here, or why I'm doing this to myself.

My whole body aches. I want to dance so much my arms feel heavy from the urge to move. I want to dance up on that stage. Hell, anywhere.

"They're looking for dancers," he tells me.

My eyes widen.

"I wanted you to see it first, in case you wanted to audition."

He remembered?

I lean over to his ear. "I could suck you off ten times right here," I whisper by way of gratitude.

He smiles then, his gaze wolfish.

"Let's go. It may not have been such a good idea to bring you here," he says, motioning to my moving legs.

I stand and as he leads me out, he asks, in my ear, "Where to?"

"Anywhere I can move," I beg.

\* \* \*

Ian summons an Uber to drive us to the Upper East Side. I have no idea where we're going. I don't care; somehow I trust him to take me somewhere I will like.

Half an hour later, we hop out in front of a burnt-red brownstone. I'm surprised to see Ian has the keys. He opens the gate for me and leads me up the steps to the front door.

"What is this place?" I ask as he opens the door and switches on the lights. The townhome is absolutely gorgeous, with hardwood floors and

intricate molded carvings on the ceiling. It is spacious and elegant, and it smells of lavender and tea tree, as if it's just been cleaned.

"Are you filming here?" I take in the emptiness of the space. I can even hear my echo as I speak. "There's so much room. Look at the little garden!" I proclaim, twirling happily in the empty living room.

"Move here. For me."

I realize, after a beat, what Ian means.

I gape at him from across the room for a second. My Dirty Workaholic stands with his hands in his slacks pockets and lips slightly curved.

The idea of dancing here for him is so ludicrous I burst out laughing. But he looks one hundred percent determined. And oh-so-hot right now. A part of me, maybe the part that wants to strip him down to his birthday suit, wants to dance for him, too. Wants to dance, *period*.

Excitement bubbles in my veins as Ian pulls out a fold-out chair from behind the kitchen counter. He sets it at the far end of the room and takes a seat, facing me.

My heart drums faster and faster.

"I don't pole dance, so don't get your hopes up. Ballet is my first love, then I fell for hip-hop, so I guess... I'll just dance like I know how," I finish when I realize I'm rambling.

Closing my eyes to get in the groove, I loosen my shoulders. Bend my knees. Relax myself. Then I pop. Lock. Repeat. Slide to the side. Leap, land, and slowly come up as I slowly jerk my hips side to side, thrusting my head back along with my arms.

"You get the gig." He smiles.

I smile too. "Ian." I'm giddy.

He shifts forward in his chair, something intimate in his eyes as he watches me move my body in the silent room.

“Is something wrong?” I stop dancing, my stomach clutching from nerves.

He shakes his head side to side, the admiration in his eyes intensifying.

“Not at all.” That smile again. Just a little curve of his lips. That’s all. But enough to make me tingle.

“Music,” I say, grabbing my phone. I hit “Stitches” by Shawn Mendes and start dancing hip-hop. I feel more comfortable dancing to something fun and light. I also need the movement to get rid of the nerves.

I start getting into it, leaping around the room, doing fast turns during the chorus, popping this way and that, and falling to the floor. I drop down three times, roll, then leap back to my feet before I lock and pop again and twist my head to the side.

“Bravo, bravo, bravo.” He claps slowly.

“I get the gig.”

“You get the gig.”

I laugh and head toward him, lowering myself to his lap. “When do I start?”

Automatically my arms go around his neck. Ian slides his hand through the back of my smoking red dress, easing his fingers under the fabric to touch the skin of my abdomen. I giggle. “I’m sweaty; you don’t want—”

Unexpectedly, he presses his forehead down on mine, inhaling my skin as we relax in that position. “Stay still for a second. You’re hot as fuck and I like you breathless.”

His gaze falls to my lips, and my own falls to his lips. My smile fades, and the ache I feel from wanting him intensifies.

“What happened with you and your wife? Can I ask?”

There’s a pause as we stare into each other’s eyes again.

“I couldn’t make her happy.”



“That’s impossible,” I whisper.

“Trust me, it’s possible.” He lets me go and sets me on my feet, coming to his feet, too. He drags a hand across the back of his neck, then sighs and plunges his hands into his pockets. “Apparently I worked more than I paid attention to her.” He shrugs, his jaw squaring as he stares out the window. “Somewhere along the way I fell out of love with her—and she with me. I caught her with my accountant.”

“Oh my God, that’s awful!” I’m instantly shuddering on his behalf, disgusted that his wife could do this to him.

“Yeah.” He rubs the back of his neck again before dropping his arm at his side and fisting his other hand. “I’ve been angry for a long time.”

Again, eye contact. A swift shadow of anger overcoming me.

“I’m sorry, Ian.”

“I am too. I don’t wish this on anyone.” Our eyes keep holding. “But I’m glad I walked in on them. I could’ve lived years settling for a half-assed marriage, not knowing my wife was sleeping around on me. If there’s one thing I don’t tolerate it’s being made a fool of.”

“The betrayal must have hurt.”

“It hurt just like every other disappointment hurts.”

He undoes the buttons at his cuffs and rolls his sleeves to his elbows, frowning. He has a fiery, angry look about him that’s unfamiliar to me, and it makes me want to walk over and offer him comfort.

I can’t imagine what being betrayed by the one you love and vowed to spend your whole life with feels like. I know that seeing my parents go through something similar has been devastating. Especially because neither my mother nor I saw it coming. And so the betrayal feels even worse.

I notice how my mother cannot help but wonder what she did wrong. I have done the same. Even thinking that it’s my fault, somehow, that Dad no

longer loves her.

It cannot be that different for Ian.

Exhaling in almost relief, I realize now that the situation is cleaner than I imagined it could be. Ian wasn't the instigator of the divorce; he was the victim here. I want to walk up to him and hug him, but a part of me still holds back because I don't know that I want to get involved with a guy going through something like this. Divorces are messy procedures, and you can't be sure of how things are going to go until it's all signed and really over.

"Thank you for telling me." I hesitate before I gather the courage to take a few steps closer to him. "I didn't want you to leave town without asking you about it."

"Who said I'm leaving town?"

I stare, tongue-tied, remembering Robert was the one who told me he was leaving today. I want to stick my fist into my mouth to shut myself up. "I... well... I heard it from a friend at the Four Seasons." A nervous laugh leaves me.

"Have you been checking up on me, Sara?" The shock on Ian's face turns to amusement. He's taunting me. The devil.

"Absolutely not."

"I'm not leaving anytime soon, Sara." Shaking his head, he studies me with his gleaming gaze for an extra few beats. "I'll be staying in my new place."

Confused, I watch as Ian watches me back.

God, I'm slow.

My mouth hangs open.

*This* is his new place?

"Do you like that I'm staying, Sara?"

The sexual tension intensifies as we eye each other in the empty room.

My body is on high alert from his nearness.

His eyes roam over me, a little shuttered, a lot dark.

I don't want to get myself into trouble or in a position where the first guy I actually react to breaks my heart. But God. Ian Ford. Dirty Workaholic. Hot as the hottest man on the planet. The interest in his eyes is turning my knees to mush.

I evade for a moment. "So you'll be staying here?" I glance around the townhome.

"As of today. I just closed."

"Well, if you had told me, I would have brought wine. Show me around," I demand, trying to shake the lust out of my veins.

I feel happy, truly happy for him to be getting a new start. He deserves it.

"I've got the wine covered." He pulls out a bottle from the fridge, and I'm ecstatic to see he even bought two crystal wineglasses.

Did he plan to bring me here all along?

I watch him pour the wine, and once we've both got ours, I raise my glass.

"To your new place, Ian. May you find happiness here."

"And to your future dancing gigs."

I chuckle softly and take a sip, aware of Ian watching me over the rim of his glass. "You've got real talent, Sara. I was certain I was watching something holy as you danced for me."

"You're pulling my leg."

"I'm not pulling anything." He tugs on my hair gently, teasingly, and I feel a little giddy again. "You still want that tour?"

"Of course. I love looking at homes."

He leads me around the kitchen and through the dining room. I have two whole glasses of wine nearly back to back while we tour the first floor, using the liquid to quell my sudden hunger. We haven't had dinner, and I'm usually fed and in bed by this hour.

Then Ian takes me upstairs, and I'm on my third glass and on an empty stomach. There's a guest bedroom with a fireplace and a TV room with lots of empty bookcases. Finally, we reach the master bedroom at the end of the hall. He pushes the door open, and I peer inside.

There is dark wood throughout, a stone fireplace, huge windows, and...

"You have a bed."

"A mattress. On the floor." He chuckles and sips from his wine as I survey it.

"You really haven't gone out with anyone in a while, have you? How long were you married?"

"Enough that I'm rusty." He winks, but I'm not sure that he's rusty. He's naturally attractive. Hell, this guy can attract women by standing still, by just being him. Sighing as I admire his new bedroom, I lean back against his chest, and he strokes a hand up my arm.

Shivers dance up my spine, and I bite back a groan as I close my eyes, dizzy from both the wine and him.

He frowns as he peers down at my profile. "Are you drunk?" He eyes me as if determining something important.

"No. I promise. I just had a lot to drink and very little to *eat*." I answer casually, but I wonder why it matters. "Why?" I demand.

"I want you with all five senses." His voice is rich and thick and lulling.

"For the record, I've got six, and they're all working on all five cylinders. And don't assume just because it's been an enjoyable evening that you're getting any yet." I scowl. "I'm easy with you, but I like to keep the mystery,

so don't think I'll always be easy."

"Trust me. I'm not counting my blessings just yet." He's laughing at me with his eyes, letting me stand on my own two feet.

I turn around and my toes curl over the smoldering look in his eyes. At first, when he sent the tickets, I sort of thought he just wanted to go out for us to get to know each other. I wasn't sure he intended to get sexual tonight. But now I'm nearly sure I read him wrong. Or maybe told the safer side of Sara that nothing would go down even when my inner slut has been wanting this from the start.

"I didn't know if you wanted to sleep with me tonight," I ramble. "I wasn't getting that vibe when you invited me here."

He kisses me—hard, possessive, his hand engulfing my face as he does. "You feel that vibe now?" he asks, thick and low.

I gulp.

He smiles at me, that easy, gorgeous smile that warms every cell in my body.

He lowers his head and whispers, in my ear, "Good. Stay the night then."

I shiver and face him. God help me. I really like him. Like, *really* like him. He's kind to his grandmother, smart, hardworking, and a little too proud, but I like even that about him. He's sweet to Milly, and the way a guy is with dogs tells you a lot about him. He's also great in bed, and he got me tickets to Broadway. And let me dance for him, something I've always secretly fantasized my partner would like. I do want to stay. But I'm afraid of expecting too much, too fast, from a man who's undergoing something as life-altering as a divorce.

"I can stay for sex. We should try to be real about this and about what you can offer until you're free to decide if you want more, and then I'll decide if I want more."

For a second, Ian says nothing. But his gaze intensifies like a storm in the

night.

For another second, he lowers his head and takes my mouth with his again. As if he's had a little Sara Davies hangover himself.

He envelops me in his arms. The guy is hard all over: arms, chest, hands, jaw.

I feel so hot inside my palms are perspiring as Ian eases back and runs his eyes along my features, as if absorbing my reaction to his kiss.

And it was good.

His kisses are always so good.

I lick my lips, nervous, hungry.

Damn him, I already miss his taste on my tongue. His lips on my lips.

“Don't look so impatient. I'm barely getting started with you.” He smiles down at me, and my stomach flips warmly as he scoops me up. “I know why you're waffling on me, Sara.” He's carrying me to the mattress. And the whole world is spinning and I don't ever want him to set me down. “You're scared, and that's all right. I didn't expect this either. Not now. Not anytime in the future. I'm scared of the same things you are. Are you planning to hurt me?”

“No,” I gasp. “Of course not,” I say as he sets me down on the bed.

“Good. I'm not planning to hurt you, either.”

He pulls back, nostrils flaring, eyes hot as he secures my chin and tips my head back. “I know I'm in the middle of a divorce, and I know that's not fair to you. I'll be patient, Sara.”

I'm so surprised by this admission, I feel myself gape. “I... thank you.” I sit up in bed, licking my lips and tasting him on them. “But I don't know if it's worse that you take your time.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s confusing me.”

He laughs, then sobers up and studies me. “You’re confused because you’re drunk, baby.”

I shake my head, but he settles beside me and presses me back against his chest and holds me against his heartbeat, one hand on the back of my head, cradling me. “No. I’m confused because I don’t know what you want from me,” I say.

“The same thing you do, Sara.”

“What is that? It’d be nice if you told me because I have no idea,” I say, shaking my head and feeling a little dizzy again. He chuckles softly and raises himself from the bed. I groan as he leaves but feel swamped with relief when he comes back with a protein bar and a bottle of water for me.

“It’s all I’ve got for now.”

“I’m not hungry for that. I’m hungry for you, motherfucker.”

He sets it aside and gets back in bed, pulling me against him with a chuckle that rumbles deeply up his chest.

“Cordelia and I haven’t been together for a year and a half. It’s over. I have a right to start over, don’t I, baby?” he croons in my ear, tipping my head back so our eyes meet again.

“Yes.” Of course he does. Everyone does. Especially after what he’s been through. “You do, Ian, you so do.”

“Good you agree. Because you’re the only thing that’s made me want to start over—from the very beginning.”

“Really?” I gasp, disbelieving.

Ian smiles silently, a toe-curling warmth appearing in his eyes as he presses a kiss to the top of my head. “Ahh, Sara,” he part murmurs, part groans. “Looks like we’ll only be sleeping tonight, baby. Only because you’re drunk—and I do want you with all five senses when I’m inside you again.”

Gulp.

That sounds like a promise.

A very exciting promise.

I relax in his arms and shift on the mattress with all my clothes on. We have no blankets, just his arms around me and my arms greedily around his waist.

He whispers in my ear, “First thing I’m getting tomorrow is sheets, satin ones. You deserve to get fucked on the best, don’t you, peanut?”

“I’m going to let you dream about it, but that’s no guarantee that I’m coming back soon except for more of that wine.” I feign hard-to-get-ness simply because *if* things end up working out with this guy, which would be a miracle (but hey, I’m trying to believe), then I want to have a story to tell our kids where I’m not a complete slut in it.

His chuckle rumbles under my ear. “I’m still getting the sheets.”

I nod and press a little closer because he feels better than any sheet, and who would have thought I’d ever get to curl up with my Suit like this? He looks so handsome I could eat him up and lick the whole damn spoon.

“Good night, Sara.”

I stop smiling and force myself to stop the room from spinning, grabbing onto him as an anchor. “Good night, Ian.” My voice softens, and then suddenly for a tiny moment, I want to cry. I’ve always been such a sad drunk, all emotional and whiney.

Right now I don’t want to whine, though. I feel... grateful. I don’t know if it’s to him, for making me feel so alive, so hot, and so interesting, or to the universe, for giving me hope that maybe love will find a way, after all.

Not that I love him. *No*. Hey, I barely know the guy.

But there’s an odd little tug in my heart whenever I’m close to him, and I’m excited to figure out what it’s all about.



# FLESH AND BLOOD

*Sara*

I wake up disconcerted for a second until I peer through my eyelids to see him. He's still in his suit. His lashes rest against his cheekbones. His arm is around me as I spoon his side. This is really nice, I realize. I should go home, but I don't want to. I want this guy, even though there's a dull thudding in my head. I can't believe a guy who's real flesh and blood—not an image on a movie screen, or in a magazine or book—can make me want like this.

I hear him shift and turn his face to rest his chin on the top of my head. He inhales and exhales with a soft groan before easing his arm out from under me and stepping into the bathroom.

I hear the soft close of the bathroom door and the sound of the shower turn on.

I smile perversely knowing he's probably taking care of himself in there, or at least turning the faucet to cold. He was hard against my stomach most of the night and I delighted in pushing closer to him. I love that he wants me like this.

I drift in and out of sleep, and the next time my eyes pop open he is standing before me, in all his damp glory, his chest glistening wet, his dark hair slicked back, and a towel around his hips. My perverse smile fades. Now the joke's on me. I ache all over, from my breasts to way down between my legs. My heart a little bit, too.

He's gorgeous, yes, but he's more than that. He let me dance for him and

appeared to love it. He took me on my dream date to a show. He is kind to his grandmother and her dog. He's a hard worker. I even admire the fact that he's not making false promises just to get me in bed. I respect that. I respect him.

I sit up in bed groggily and push my hair from my face. "I hope you made the shower water very cold, Ford."

"I hope you will remember how many hours you tortured me with that pretty little bum when I adjust our accounts."

I laugh and lower my gaze to admire the rest of him. God, he's even got great feet. His calves are muscular and strong, dusted with fine hair. The muscles all over his body are chiseled and hard like a granite sculpture. His abs are at my eye level as he plays with his phone.

"I'm ordering us breakfast. What'll you have?"

"Breakfast in bed? For me?" I grin. When he only smiles and drags his eyes along my form on his bed, I add, "Just coffee."

"Two espressos," he says, typing up the order.

"No. No espresso. I can't take espresso in the morning. It makes my stomach hurt. Just a regular with almond milk and a stevia packet. Please."

He smiles and clicks to complete the order, then heads to the closet to get dressed.

"Your head hurt?" He drops the towel and slides into his boxers and slacks, and I blink at the sight of his muscular ass before he covers it.

"No," I answer, meeting his gaze as he turns. "Does yours?" I let my eyes linger down to where his dick is covered.

He tsks and shakes his head as he grabs a clean shirt from the closet and starts buttoning it up, his gaze once again greedy as he drinks me in. "Get your lovely ass out of bed. I'll get you something for that hangover."

When he steps out of the closet, I sigh and lie back. I slept pretty well considering he was my only sheet.

I force myself out of bed and head to his bathroom to freshen up before I meet him down in the kitchen.

“I used your toothbrush; is that okay?” I wince apologetically. “I don’t know if you’re the sort of guy who gets upset if…”

“I wasn’t sure either.” He frowns as he considers his response. “No. It doesn’t upset me.” We spot the deliveryman by the window. “My wife got upset if I shared hers,” he adds before opening the front door, grabbing the bag and the coffee carrier and bringing them back to the kitchen.

He hands me two Excedrin, grabs one of the coffees, and slides it down the counter toward me.

I take it and blow off the steam. “I had a good time last night. Thanks for being a gentleman. I’m on three senses now, so we can talk,” I say, guzzling down the two pills.

He chuckles and takes a sip of coffee as I boost myself up on the counter. He walks up to me and I instinctively part my legs to make room for him. He’s hotter than the scalding coffee.

Our eyes lock, hold. “So you think you’d like to do this again?” He sets his coffee aside and meets my gaze. “We can take things slowly.” He watches me as he speaks, and I smirk happily. “You turn me on, Sara. Get me going.”

“I know,” I whisper saucily, trying to hide my excitement.

He continues, somber, eyes intent. “I have no feelings for my ex-wife, but I do need to legally wrap things up. Let’s have a period of fun with no commitments. Just so you know, I’m not dating anyone else. I’m enjoying my time with you. Let’s see where this takes us. What do you think?”

I’m flustered, and impressed, but trying to hide it as I tease him sardonically. “Did you practice that?”

“Maybe.” He sasses me back, taking my coffee from my grip and setting it aside. He gentles his voice.

“I asked you a question, Sara.”

I meet his gaze. “I’ll think about it.” I speak softly. “I never planned to get involved with someone who’s in the middle of a divorce. I need to be sure about what I’m getting into.”

“We can keep it casual. It’s best for both of us.” He tips my face up to look at him.

I smile and reach out to set my hand on his shoulder, the muscle tight under my palm. His entire frame tightens. His eyes darken.

I’m chasing my breaths when we look at each other’s lips.

He moves me closer.

He tilts my face back and draws it to his, and when a gasp leaves my lips, he bends his head and takes it, that gasp, that moan, tasting his toothpaste on my mouth.

“Think about it fast. We’ve been waiting long enough to test this out. I don’t want to wait anymore.”

He looks intent as he eases back and I lick my lips. A sigh escapes me as I slide my hands behind his neck and raise my face for more. “Yummy motherfucker, what are you doing to me?” I breathe as he grabs the back of my head and takes the mouth I offer.

# LAUNCH

*Sara*

Did I dream the hot kisses Ian gave me this morning? Did I dream his townhouse? Sleeping on a bare mattress on the floor? With my Suit wearing... well, practically, his suit?

I didn't dream it. I lick my lips and that taste is definitely Ian. I sniff my clothes on the train ride to the House of Sass offices and that smell is Ian's cologne.

Ian is all over me except on the one part that still aches for him. My sex.

Oh well.

Maybe he doesn't know for sure that I'm interested. Maybe he believes that it was the wine talking last night. And oh yes, the wine talked quite a bit. I have a headache to prove it. But it wasn't the wine—it was me talking. I wanted him. I still do.

But this is a guy going through some very intense legal proceedings, and having my parents just go through a horrible breakup, I'm not too keen to jump into stormy waters.

When I get home, I exhale in relief realizing Becka isn't on the couch and the shower is running. She's bathing, thank God.

Nobody will know I was out giving private dances to Mr. Ford. I creep into my room and rumple my bed. I don't want to tell Bryn about what's happening with Dirty Workaholic. I feel like she will be the voice of my conscience. And I don't want her to tell me what I already know.

So I head out and pretend that I don't have the hottest guy with the biggest dick waiting on the sidelines for me to casually date if I so choose. I pretend I don't already know my answer.

I told him I had a busy week and would think about it, buying myself a bit of time, but I already crave to see him again. Bryn has gone on a couple of dates from the Match.com account Becca opened for her. If things are too messy with Ian, I can join her on there, I suppose.

But the thought makes my stomach cave in on itself. For months I haven't been able to think of anyone but Ian. It's hard to imagine anyone or anything being able to change that.

*Let's see if you can bear a few days without him, Sara. Maybe you're stronger than you think and can step back and evaluate things,* I tell myself that weekend as Bryn and I head to Brooklyn in an Uber, to the warehouse that will be formally House of Sass.

We arrive ready to work. Bryn looks like she means business, even though I heard her cry this morning, just like every other morning since the Big Breakup.

"You'll get over him," Jensen tells her when he comes in to help. He sees her bleary eyes and hugs her.

"Of course. I'm already getting hit up on Match.com." Bryn tries to wave off her breakup as if it's not important. "I'm such a good catch."

"Damn right, love bug." Jensen rumples her hair.

We start unpacking boxes, cutting open the tape with knives, pulling out clothes, and getting them up on the racks.

"You're good at this," I grumble at Bryn with playful, open resentment. She's on her third box and I'm still on my first. I tear a nail and curse. "You owe me a manicure. Pedicure too," I warn, sucking on my broken nail.

"You're not even using your feet!" She laughs. "I'm good at this because we used to do this at my parents' department store before it was sold." She

winks, but the nostalgia is clearly evident in her voice.

“And now look at what you’re going to have, all for yourself.” I motion to the huge warehouse that we’re setting up to be her modern-age clothing store. It’s going to be fantastic.

“Not just for myself. I have an investor, remember.” Her eyes shadow when she mentions Aaric Christos.

“And you could have had him, too, if it weren’t for his floozy bimbo ex —”

When Christos walks into the warehouse, I trail off.

Bryn freezes when she spots him by the door. We all stare, and though I’ve only seen him on the internet, I know this is the man who’s broken her heart by the way he’s staring at her and she’s staring at him. Oh he’s gorgeous, all right. Powerful-looking. Confident.

*My Workaholic is hotter*, I catch myself thinking, and push the thought aside.

Bryn blinks furiously and continues opening boxes, moving more awkwardly now that he’s here.

As if noticing her jumbly movements, Christos approaches Bryn and asks, “You okay?” He seems genuinely concerned.

I watch them in interest, still sucking on my nail.

“Yes.” Bryn is doing well at hiding how flustered she is, but I can tell, because she’s my roomie, that she’s battling to stay composed.

“Good. Be careful. Where do you want these?”

She swallows and avoids making eye contact as Christos points at a couple of boxes. “Over by the windows. But you don’t have to move them. I can open them here and put the clothing on the racks,” she rushes on.

Ignoring her protests, Christos scoops one up like a pro and carries it across the room. He returns and reaches for Bryn’s cutting knife and starts

opening boxes for her.

I'm shocked. He's a businessman, and businessmen don't do these things. But something about him doing filthy labor makes me realize he wasn't always a businessman.

Soon, a dozen men under Christos's command arrive to open boxes. The racks start filling up across the warehouse. We finish hanging the merchandise in a few hours rather than the expected full day.

"I suppose we'll have time for the salon tomorrow night after all," I'm happy to report to Bryn. But she's hardly paying attention or worrying about my cracked nail and desire for a pedicure and manicure. She's watching Christos.

"Thanks for helping," she tells him.

He winks down at her. "Still a hell of a box lugger."

She smiles in farewell, and I can feel the air crackle between them. I step back and grab Jensen so we can all leave. After Bryn steps out, I pull Jensen toward the door, giving Christos a black *don't-you-dare-play-with-my-friend-again* look.

Bastard.

I'm so mad that I fume for the rest of the day, wondering why the asshole keeps looking at her like he cares when he clearly doesn't care that he's broken her heart.

\* \* \*

I think about my own possible future heartbreak when I hit the salon with Becka and Bryn the next evening. I try to push Ian Sexy Suit Ford out of my mind, but he's always lingering somewhere in my thoughts. Even as I chat on the phone with another dog walker and send her over on a test walk to see if



she works well with Milly.

Now we're in Brooklyn for the launch. Becka, Jensen, and I run all over the warehouse, helping people with their orders and talking up the use of fabrics, the simple designs, and the custom features on the app. We're working it for our girl Bryn, and I know she appreciates us being here.

As I busily tend to the customers, I notice through the crowd that Christos stands with his girlfriend beside him. The woman has her hand on his back, but he doesn't have his hand on hers. Interesting.

I feel flushed when a thought of dating Ian publicly hits me. What would that be like? Instead of dwelling on the topic, I seek out another customer to distract myself.

"I saw these when they were just drawings. I can touch them now," Becka whispers in amazement as she comes up to my side.

"Better yet, you can wear them." I wink.

We share a grin, my chest swelling with pride for Bryn. She created her vision from scratch, using determination and hard work. Her success encourages me to chase after *my* dream.

*And what about your sexy Workaholic, Sara? What are you going to do about that?*

*Shut up, slut. You just want more of that D,* I grumble to myself.

"Sara," Jensen says, motioning to a jumpsuit that is starting to fall from its display.

"I'll get it." I look around. I can't find Bryn anywhere, but it doesn't matter. I'm here to help and I'm glad that I know exactly what my job is tonight. To be sure nobody leaves without placing an order. Or a thousand.

"Bryn stepped out with Christos," Becka says.

I glance at the doors—but though Bryn and Christos are outside, business keeps going at a fast rate.

I even end up ordering myself an outfit. *Workaholic will love this!* I think as I go for something sexy that won't break my bank, a tiny gold sequin dress that will show off my long, toned legs.

I don't know what I will wear it for, or when, but I know it's for stupid sexy *him*.

It's a little formal but a lot hot. I fantasize about wearing it for Ian on a night in. I could pad around barefoot in this in his hot-ass townhome. Pantyleless and ready to get nailed.

*Sara, really, you don't even know if you'll say yes to dating!*

Or do I?

Ugh. I hate to think that both Ian and I already know my answer.

\* \* \*

Hours later, Bryn is still nowhere to be seen. I spot Christos across the room, checking on everyone and making sure the iPads are working. His girlfriend is by the door with his brother and she seems to have been crying.

I march up to him and ask, "Where's Bryn?"

"She needed to be alone. I'm staying until the guests leave."

I purse my lips and shoot him another dark look, then spin around and stomp away. I want to punch him for hurting Bryn, but I slow my steps and consider the expression on his face. He looked, and sounded, miserable. For the first time, I suspect he's as messed up about things as she is.

I text Bryn to give her an update. For her to leave the way she did, something must have gone really wrong. I ask her if she's okay.

*I'm okay*, she texts back.

I know she's not.

But this isn't the moment to discuss it. We can do that later. Right now I want things to run smoothly.

Becka is on her fourth glass of champagne, and she's acting as bubbly as the alcohol she's imbibing. "He loves her. Why is he marrying that bimbo?" She signals to Miranda, who looks restless as she leaves with Christos's brother.

"I don't know. Responsibility, I guess."

She shrugs and lets out a small hiccup.

I decide I'm going to have to carry both of our weight the rest of the evening and leave her to get back to work.

When the last guest leaves and Jensen bids us good night, Christos closes shop. "Do you want a ride?" he asks us.

We both shake our heads. "No, thanks, and we don't want you near Bryn, either." I smile acidly and walk away, aware of him laughing sardonically, almost sounding frustrated, behind us.

We're not yet around the curb when we see him hop into a black car. "Where's he going in such a rush?" Becka asks.

"I don't know." I sigh.

"I can't feel my toes. I'm exhausted."

"You're drunk, momma," I tell her fondly, and she giggles.

I groan and tell her how much I want a nice, hot bath when we get home as I drag her to the train. Thinking of baths makes me think of Ian, and I let myself fantasize about taking a bath with him someday. I begin to ache.

The look Christos had when he mentioned Bryn pops back in my head, and suddenly I'm aching in places other than between my legs.

Why does that look make me think of Ian?

Why do I see him in every man, even when I'm out in the streets? As if

there's only one guy in the world and parts of him are walking around all over the place. But only one man has all those Ian Ford parts, and that's Ian Ford himself.

Sigh.

I like him. He was such a gentleman when I got drunk at his place. He spooned me and warmed me with his body. He'd been really hard—I felt it even through my drunkenness—but he never left my side and never overstepped. He's a little alpha, but damn it, doesn't that hit all my buttons too?

He sparks my sparks, all of them. Damn him.

When we reach our apartment, I open the door, kick off my heels, and stare around in confusion along with Becka.

"Where's Bryn?" we both ask the empty apartment.

As if in response to our question, my phone rings. "I'm with Christos," Bryn says. "I didn't want you two to worry. Thanks for staying until the end. It was a long... crazy night."

"We were happy to do it. But are you all right?" I ask.

"We're back together." She sounds like she's been crying, but I can hear the happiness in her voice.

I almost stumble back from the unexpectedness of it. Becka stops massaging her feet and blinks at me when she notices the expression on my face.

"Bryn, I'm so happy for you!" I burst out.

"Tell Becka. I'll stop by a little later to pick up some stuff, but if I don't see you then, I'll see you tomorrow."

"She's back with Christos," I inform Becka when I hang up.

Becka's eyes go wide and we celebrate by diving into chocolates.

After a piece too many, I push them away. “Okay, no more chocolates. I want my Dirty Workaholic to still get hard when he looks at me.”

I toss the wrappings aside and curl up on the couch while Becka hops onto Bryn’s Match.com account.

“Does this mean I should delete this thing?”

I shrug. “I don’t think a guy like Christos will want his girlfriend’s profile up on a dating site.”

Becka laughs as she clicks the few buttons to cancel Bryn’s account. “All right, that’s done. I’m going to sleep now. Good night,” she says, and she heads to bed while I remain restless on the couch.

After several minutes of tossing and turning, I pull myself up and drag myself to bed too. I lie down under the covers and close my eyes, but guess whose dark, fathomless eyes I see when I close mine.

Guess who causes my body to tingle, remembering his touch.

Guess who still—even now that I know his name and a whole lot more about him—makes me want him more and more.

I type out a text:

***What are you doing? Do you still want to see me?***

I pause and reread my message, biting my lower lip.

Shaking my head, I erase my text, power off my phone, and connect it to my charger. It was a crazy night. I need my head on straight before I get carried away like I usually do with my Dirty Workaholic.

# CAUTIOUSLY

*Sara*

I tossed and turned all night. Now it's very early for me to be up on a Saturday, and I peer through my eyelids, watching the sunlight pouring in through my blinds. I squeeze my eyes shut and flip to my other side. Thinking of Ian and wanting to kiss his gorgeous lips again. Of course my Hot Workaholic merits a full day of lying in bed dreaming about him. Wondering if he meant everything he said. If he's as obsessed with our connection as I am. If maybe we can one day have something that's more than casual.

I promised him I'd think about it.

I have done nothing but think about it.

And I think my decision will come as no surprise.

I push myself out of the bed and pad into the kitchen, surprised to find Becka all packed and ready to go.

"You're leaving? You just got here!" I say.

"I know, but..." She rubs her temples with her fingertips. "I need to have an adventure. I need to go out there and experience the city or I'll never find what I need in order to finish this book." She sighs as Bryn walks in.

We both gape at her.

"When did you get here?" I ask.

"A little while ago. I've got news. Coffee first."

We have coffee and breakfast while Bryn tells us what happened last

night, where Christos caught up with her, what he told her, and her eyes glaze with love and happiness as she relates the details to us. When she finishes and we hug her, she asks what we've been up to. While Becka groans about flying back home while hungover, I'm unnaturally silent. I don't want to tell Bryn what's been happening with Ian. I feel like she'll be my voice of conscience, and I don't need that right now. She'll worry about his situation and me getting hurt, and I'm already doing that for the both of us.

After breakfast and while Bryn checks all the House of Sass orders on her computer, I head to my phone and scan my contacts. I just can't help that my stomach jumps when I read his name. I stare at it with a pounding heart. Fucking Ian Ford. My greedy pussy even ripples at the sight of his name! Ugh. I exhale and send out a rather long, detailed text. I'm such a horny little slut.

I reread what I sent and nod. Yep. A slut. Though I'm not too sad about it and I'm pretty sure Ford might even *approve* of it. I hurry to change, already anticipating his answer.

***I want your dick in my mouth. I ALSO want it in my hands. But first I want you inside me.***

***Ian Ford: I'm open for business.***

He sends me his office address in Tribeca.

Half an hour later, I'm entering a building made of all glass and a lobby made of all marble. I ask for him at reception and am indicated he's on the thirtieth floor. At the elevator, I realize it's the top floor. I smooth my hands down my cashmere sweater dress. I'm wearing heels and no bra and all the confidence of a woman determined to seduce a man.

I let out a deep exhale when the elevator stops and opens and begin

walking down the executive floor. I realize, rather shockingly, that his office is the one at the end. The one with the big frosted-glass door.

“Um. I’m here to see Ian.” I approach the woman behind a large Carrara marble desk. “Mr. Ford, I mean.”

“He’s expecting you.” She rings me in and stands to show the way to his door. When she pushes it open, I slide nervously inside. My heart drums wildly as our eyes meet.

He’s behind a desk, with a huge Mac computer on one side and a whole lot of papers on the other. His office is gargantuan, comprised of all glass walls except for the one behind his desk.

“Nice office.” I walk toward him as I seductively tug on a strand of loose dark hair.

“Nice... shoes.” His eyes rake up and down my legs.

“You haven’t seen anything yet. My roomie is a designer, after all. I plan to be a good customer and promote her work.”

As I get all kinds of crazy feelings looking at him, I remind myself I’ll do my best not to give him my heart, just my body.

Dating casually. That’s what this will be. He has lit my fire and no one can quench it but him.

“Did you think about our last conversation?”

I nod as he comes around his desk. “I came, didn’t I?”

“And you’re coming again.”

I nod and press up against him. Ian fists my hair and holds me inches away from his mouth, staring at my face with those dark eyes. My breathing hitches as he turns my face sideways and lands a kiss on the side of my neck.

I exhale, trembling already.

“Miss me?” I reach out to stroke his cock against his zipper and love how



hard he is. He groans and pulls my face back.

“I’m sure that speaks for itself.”

I want his dick so much my mouth salivates. I want to pull it out and lick it, suck it, but I can’t ignore the heat between my legs. Ian seems to read my mind.

He pushes me against the wall and pulls up my dress, pulls down my panties, and I thrust out my butt, squirming restlessly as he undoes his belt. “Hurry!” I call past my shoulder.

I get a glimpse of him—dressed in his slacks and white shirt, with that gorgeous, lean, athletic body and that larger-than-life bulge behind his zipper—and I’m that convinced if he doesn’t give it to me now, hard and fast, I’m going to implode from wanting.

His eyes meet mine as his fingers work open his slacks, and I’m perspiring as those inky eyes hold mine for a long moment. Then, as he notices my restlessness, his lips begin to curve in delight.

“You’re fucking gorgeous, you eager girl,” he says. He steps closer and I face forward again and thrust my butt out in invitation.

“Ahh. Dancer.” His voice is near the back of my ear, the words warm on my skin as he grabs me by the hips and presses his nine-inch organ of pleasure against me. His fingers dig into my hip bones as he rubs his cock up and down the fissure of my ass. And then into my pussy.

I groan and flatten my hands on the wall.

He groans too. “God, you’re so good.”

“Give it to me hard, Ian. Just... give me everything.”

“I never hold back,” he growls in my ear. “Not with you.”

He thrusts, and I moan, and he clamps a hand on my mouth, whispering, “Keep these sounds just for me, hmm?”

“Mmm,” is my answer. I lick his palm, groaning when he slips his other

hand around me and between my thighs. He starts caressing me. And my moans turn to whimpers. He flips me around and kicks his chair aside, then lays me on his desk, looking down at me, his forehead tight with passion as he slowly... ever so slowly... excruciatingly slowly... drives back into me.

We hold gazes, unable to find words, as we race to the edge together.

I arch my back and bite back my cry as my orgasm hits. It's cataclysmic, overwhelming, shaking me so hard I think I'll snap. Ian slides his arms beneath me to keep me from getting bruised by his desk, but he never slows his thrusts.

We take a moment to catch our breaths before he helps me up. He straightens his slacks while I straighten my hair and dress.

"Did you check on the casting call I told you about?" he asks.

"I missed the audition with so much work last week. I called and they've filled the slots."

"Shame. Something else will come up."

I nod hopefully, grateful for his encouragement, and reach for the heel that fell off my foot during sex.

"Allow me." His mouth curves into a dark little smile and he boosts me up, sitting me on his desk. He bends to pick up my shoe, but before slipping it on, he lifts my leg and places a kiss on the arch of my foot.

He sets me back down. I'm breathless. Already wanting more.

"Dinner tonight."

"Dinner," I agree. "You're such a busy workaholic, you make your people come in even on the weekend?" I tease.

"Why wait until Monday when we can get it done today?" He winks.

I head out, aware of Ian taking his seat behind the desk and watching me leave. I smile in the elevator.

We're going to date cautiously. I'll do my best not to put my whole heart into it. To not overthink this, just enjoy it while he cleans up his mess. Have fun with him while it lasts. He is so hot, I cannot deny myself this opportunity.

I'm stepping out of the elevator when I get his text.

***9 pm @ Daniel***

\* \* \*

I can't believe my luck when I get home to find a box from House of Sass waiting for me. We have great service, what can I say? I hurry upstairs to find Bryn isn't in and Becka's suitcases are gone. Since I'm alone, I take a long lavender shower. I shave and oil my legs and mist my skin with a light, sweet scent. Then I slide into my slinky gold dress and a pair of heels, and I blow-dry my hair.

I'm at the restaurant at 9 p.m. sharp and find Ian standing by the doors, hands in his pockets, a pitch-black suit the color of his hair hugging his body in all the right places. I remember the night Ian had dinner here on his own as he greets me by brushing his lips across my cheek in the briefest kiss.

As Ian leads me inside, I spot François, the maître d' I texted not too long ago, and the tall, dark Frenchman's eyes widen when he sees me.

"Miss Sara?" His gaze slides and rises to meet Ian's gaze. "And Mr. Ian Ford." He smiles to himself and waves us forward. As we head to our table, I discreetly turn around and shoot a warning glare at François. "Not a word of *that*," I quietly hiss.

Ian frowns at me as a smiling François pulls out my chair.

"You two looked cozy." Ian pulls his napkin open and stretches it over his

lap.

I pull mine open too. “I was practicing my French.”

Our waiter appears, introduces himself as Jacques, and hands us our menus and describes the evening’s specials. Ian orders a bottle of wine from the sommelier, and we peruse the menu while we wait for it to arrive.

“What will you have?” Ian asks.

“I’ve never been here. I’ve made a thousand reservations but never actually come here.” I eye the place, marveling at the elegant setting.

“I’ve got you. Don’t worry.” He peers at his menu, and then he tells me something in French.

“Excuse me?”

“Practicing French.” He raises one challenging brow.

I groan. “I texted him recently. I wanted your name. And a repeat. I didn’t want him to tell you that I’d been hunting you down.”

His eyes flare ever so slightly, and the fire inside them suddenly feels too hot for the room. The city. The whole *earth*.

Shifting forward as he digests my confession, Ian’s voice drops a decibel. “You wanted a repeat of your panties in a little wad in my pocket, or what happened after?”

“Both.”

He looks at me, daring me with those dark eyes. “Why don’t we start by you handing over your panties in a tight little wad right now?” He extends his hand.

I reach for my panties beneath my dress and ease them off. I reach out and take his hand, pushing them into his palm.

He takes them and sneaks a peek before sliding them into his suit pocket.

I’m biting my lip and flushing all over, laughing inwardly. “So it seems

that casually dating also means recklessly flirting.”

“There’s nothing casual about anything relating to you, Sara.”

Our wine arrives. After Ian gives it his approval, the waiter pours me a glass. I smile and drink it, enjoying the evening. At Daniel. With the *best* wine. And the hottest man in the city.

“Watch the wine. I wouldn’t want you drunk before the first course.” He teases me after I’ve had two glasses.

“Of course not—you want me drunk by the last.”

He laughs and tuts flirtatiously, and I laugh too. A little too giddy.

“You were a gentleman that night,” I admit, then my eyes tease him. “Maybe in your own interests, too. I bet you’re so full of yourself, you don’t like doing a woman and having her forget. That wouldn’t do for your ego.”

“That’s right, Dancer. If I’ll be remembering and dedicating a few to that evening with you, the least you can do for me is remember and do the same.”

His smile is wolfish, and his stare penetrating, and I’m enjoying this far too much for it to be casual. Like Ian just said about me, there is nothing casual about this or my feelings for him. I try not to get too involved in the way he looks across the table. And the way his gaze stays focused on me.

“How are you liking your new home? Are you liking it better than the Four Seasons?” I ask him.

“I can’t say I do. No sexy concierge to lure to my bedroom.”

I smile again. How does this damn man do that?

“How was your friend’s business launch?” He sounds interested, sobering as he shifts forward in his seat.

“Phenomenal,” I say happily. “Orders exceeded our expectations and the service is spectacular. I ordered this little dress and what do you know. I found the box on my way into my apartment today.”

“Let’s have a look.”

“Like you didn’t look already.”

I blush but go ahead and stand and twirl; then I glance around to be sure I didn’t draw too much attention and sit back down. Ian smiles and takes my hand over the table. It’s so warm and large compared to mine that I feel as if he’s enveloped me whole.

“Did you purchase it thinking of putting it on, or me taking it off you?” His voice is husky now, intimate. Like the setting.

“A lady never tells her deepest musings.”

“Doesn’t she?” His thumb caresses mine as he smiles to himself, waiting for my reply.

“Who am I kidding? I’m no lady. I want you to take it off me tonight,” I admit in a sultry whisper. I lift his hand to my lips and kiss the knuckle of his thumb; then I lick it out of impulse.

I’m hungry. What can I say?

“Hands? Tongue? Teeth? How do you want me to take it off you?” He scrapes his thumb across my bottom lip, the caress causing my temperature to rise.

“All of them,” I admit.

He dips his thumb into my mouth again, extracting it when the waiter appears with our first course.

“*Bon appétit*,” says François, who accompanied him to the table. He leans close to Ian. “The lady has quite the eye for you.”

“François!” My fork clatters against my salad plate.

“I only say it, Miss Sara, because the gentleman has the eye for you. See, I know these things.” He winks.

I groan and shake my head. “Obviously that’s what we get for flirting so

openly. People think this is serious.”

“That’s their problem. Not ours.” He eyes me. “I’m serious about that dress, though.”

\* \* \*

“I enjoyed you tonight.”

“You’ll enjoy me even more in a bit,” I promise as we walk the streets of New York. It’s chilly, and I find myself pressing up against his side as he hails a cab.

“I got the sheets I promised. Pots and pans so you can make me some eggs in the morning,” he says in my ear as we walk to the curb.

“Right. You’ll be bringing *me* breakfast in bed.”

“It’s *my* bed. Little Sara.”

“That’s right and I’m the guest. That’s how guests should be treated.”

We both smile as he swings the back door of the cab open for me.

When we’re settled in the back, I run my fingers up his muscular thigh as we head to his townhome. “I want to fuck you upside down, sideways, and every way possible, Sara,” he says, turning my face to him.

I catch my breath and shift, stroking his erection as I tilt my head and press my breasts to the side of his chest. “Yes, please, and thank you,” I say in his ear.

He grabs my face to him and groans as he eases a hand between my thighs, surprising me by stroking one finger across my wet sex, reminding me that my panties are in his pocket. “I could do you right here, right now, kitten. But it’d be a shame for me not to remove this slinky little gold dress.”

We are both hot and frantic by the time he shuts the door of his townhouse

behind him. He reaches for the back zipper of my dress, letting it fall in a pool of gold at my feet.

“Now let’s see what this pot of gold holds.” His rasp tickles my ear as he nibbles my earlobe and caresses my bare shoulders. He drags his hands down, down, down my bare arms, to scoop me up and carry me upstairs, where he tosses me onto his bed, where we fuck the living daylights out of each other.



## *Ian*

I wake up with a sore back, a stiff neck, and a Cheshire Cat grin on my face. I shift and crack my neck to the side and discover the reason: Sara. She looks like a wet dream, lying on my mattress, spooning my side, her head under my arm, her dark hair over my bicep. I reach out with my free hand and stroke a strand of silken hair, wrapping it around my index finger.

It's been a long time since I slept with the warmth of a woman next to me. I remember when I was a teenager, eager to steal Cordelia into my bedroom and feel her warmth, her heat, her love.

I haven't wanted her love in a long time. Anyone's.

I'm not so sure now.

This girl is into me. I can see it. Feel it.

I'm addicted to it. I'm addicted to her.

How the hell did this happen?

Was I looking for her? Did I want to get entangled with another woman after Cordelia?

No. But now her scent fuels me. Now the numbness is gone and there's only fire and hope.

Now there's Sara. Where this is going, I cannot be sure. I've been a bad judge of character before. Too caught up in work to step back and take notice of what was going on in my own home. All I know is that this is what happiness feels like.

I just didn't remember.

Didn't remember waking up with more to life than another film, another script, another project. Waking up wanting to fuck life the way I want to fuck the woman lying next to me.

I groan and shift, adjusting my dick before getting out of bed.

I can't get enough of her.

The way she flirts back, giving me fire for fire.

I've got her lying in bed and I can't wait for more of her.

I step out and phone Jake to check up on the LA projects and his upcoming flight to New York.

Leaving a message, I head to the shower. I rub the back of my neck and relax my muscles, feeling the little she-cat's claw marks on my back. I twist the knob and make the water cold, trying to cool down the hard-on I got by merely waking up next to her, sleeping naked and smelling like a goddess from above. I step out of the shower, wrap a towel around my hips, and head back into the bedroom. The sound of me shutting the bathroom door behind me stirs her, and her eyes flutter open.

Her breathing hitches as her gaze clears, her breaths becoming more rapid as we lock gazes.

I run my eyes along her lips, drinking in the way she smiles at me from my bed. That adorably innocent smile and those harmless honeyed eyes pack a punch. Fuck, it's hard to breathe at all.

"Good morning," I say.

She sits up and pulls the sheets around her. I run my eyes over her smiling lips again, addicted to the sight.

"Good morning." Her voice is raw with sleep and confusion.

Hell, I'm just as raw and just as confused by all of this.

This is casual. I'm still married—not that it'll be for long. But still.

“I’ll take care of breakfast.” I jerk my chin toward the hallway leading downstairs.

She nibbles her lip, her eyes gleaming in amusement. “Coffee, too?”

“Espresso.” I’m teasing her.

She winces and watches me dress in plain gray boxers, black slacks, and a crisp white shirt. I zip up, button up, and grab my phone from the nightstand.

“I don’t take—”

“Espresso. I remember.” I smile at her, and she comes out from under the sheets. I watch her eyes widen when she realizes she’s naked, and she quickly laughs and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “Do you have a sweatshirt I could wear, or…”

“Help yourself to my closet. I’ll watch out for the coffee delivery. Meet you downstairs.”

I head to the kitchen and decide to show off my French toast abilities.

When she meets me there, I tell her, “Considering you’re into everything French, I’ll make you French toast.”

She smiles and peers into the fridge. “Good. I’ll show off my perfect hardboiled eggs for you, too.”

I chuckle and shake my head as we get everything cooking. We serve two plates and set them on the kitchen counter and have breakfast in silence with Sara’s leg draped around one of my thighs, my hand on her knee.

“You make a badass French toast,” she says. She takes a sip of coffee and pushes her empty plate aside as she boosts herself up on the counter. I stand and wedge myself between her legs, parting them to make room for me.

Our eyes lock, hold. “So you think you’d like to do this again?” I set my coffee aside.

She seems flustered, but typical Sara, she tries to hide it behind sass. “I might if you wash the dishes.”

I sass her back. “I have people coming in to do that.”

She laughs. I pry her coffee from her grip and set it aside, gentling my voice. “Answer me, Sara.”

She meets my gaze. “I had a great time last night,” she says softly.

“So did I.” I wrap my hands around her waist. She smiles and reaches out to set her hand on my arm, and my muscles tighten.

My entire frame tightens. Hell, I’m in an odd, bewildered state where I’ll do anything she tells me.

She’s breathing fast, looks wound up and ready to be loved, and a heat rises up in me as if I were exclusively made to accommodate her.

We share a look.

I’m quiet but turned on.

I want her senseless, panting like she was last night. Our tongues twined.

The idea of some other guy being able to give her something I can’t hit me.

Images that whip through me of her together with someone else settle like an ice-cold shard at the pit of my stomach. No. Hell no.

I move her closer.

I catch her chin and draw her face to me and when a gasp leaves her lips, I bend my head and take it, take that gasp, that mouth, that moan that follows. Tasting my toothpaste on her mouth.

“I’ll see you tonight, then. Be good, Sara.”

“I’m always good except with you.” She hops off and winks at me past her shoulder, and I watch her climb the stairs to get dressed.

*You’re fucking done for, Ford.*

If it were any other girl, I might be drastically concerned. But it’s Sara. The girl who puts this smile on my face that I just can’t seem to get rid of.

# NEWS

*Sara*

“Where have you been, Miss Hot Shot?” I ask Bryn as she steps into the living room where I am painting my toenails after a blissful sleepover and morning with my yummy motherfucker.

“You’d never guess where.” She lifts her hand, and I frown because I can’t be seeing what I’m seeing.

The flash around Bryn’s finger isn’t some big, sparkly bling. Is it?

“We’re getting married,” she says, her smile a mile long.

“What the...? When did this happen?” I drop my feet to the floor and stand, shocked.

“That night. The same night we made up after the House of Sass launch. It was all so fast. I picked out a ring this week.”

Dumbly, I walk over and stare at the elegant emerald-cut diamond on her finger. It’s simple yet gorgeous. “Bryn! Oh my God!” I cover my mouth to quell my squeals of delight. “This is amazing!”

“Yes.” She’s giddy, her voice shaky as she bounces up and down on the balls of her feet.

“Does Becka know?” We pad over to the couch and settle down, where I stare at the gorgeous ring once again in bewilderment and excitement for her.

“I told her after you left that morning after the launch; you were so quiet... I didn’t want to tell you until I noticed you were back to normal. Is

everything okay? You left before I could ask.”

I sport a grin of my own. “I’m over the moon.”

“Wow... I can tell! So what’s got you over the moon and putting that spring in your step? Aside from my fabulous engagement ring, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Did you get an audition?” she prods.

“Nope. But I got fucked really good.”

“Sara!”

I laugh. “Repeatedly. My Workaholic is ravenous. Yummy fucker.” I shake my head and try to get a hold of myself, but I feel too relaxed and happy today to succeed.

Checking that my nails are dry, I pad to the window. The city will soon light up for the night and it already breathes and crackles with possibilities. I plan to take it up on that promise. The city, I mean, on the promise of adventure.

“So what’s the plan? Are you going out?” she asks me as she pulls out her laptop.

“Yes,” I answer.

“Where to and with whom? Who is this guy?”

I’m not sure I’m ready to tell her that I’ve been seeing Ian, that I haven’t been able to stop. But on the other hand, who can I talk to about him if it’s not her and Becka?

“I might be seeing Mr. Ford,” I grudgingly admit.

She stops scanning her retail order form on her computer and sets the laptop aside. “You’re joking.”

“I’m not.”

“Has the divorce gone through?”

“Not yet, but I know that he and his wife are done with each other and it’s only a matter of time. I really like him, Bryn.”

“I know you do—and does he like you?”

“He’s not the kind of man to pussyfoot around things. He wants us to see where this goes, to casually date and in the meantime have yummy sex.” I beam on that last part.

“Sara! When did this happen?”

“It’s recent. With the House of Sass launch and you and Christos back together...”

She leaps to her feet and comes over to grab my shoulders. “Don’t ever, ever not share important things with me because you think I have too much to deal with. I don’t. We’re friends; I want to be there for you.”

“And you *are*. We’re talking now, aren’t we?”

“We are! But I need the details, starting from... that day in Central Park and every instance afterward.”

I groan, but laugh and promise to catch her up. “Only if you give me the details of your and Christos’s makeup. One day you’re broken up and the next you’re getting married.”

“I know. I still can’t believe it!”

We spend the twenty minutes catching up on each other’s lives. I hear about the way Christos proposed and how excited, scared, and in disbelief Bryn still feels.

I tell her about Ian—how I’m addicted-obsessed-hooked on him really bad.

“Enjoy him, Sara. Why not? He’s into you; I could tell when I saw you two bump into each other that day in Central Park.”

I sigh. “I’m trying not to put my whole heart into it, you know? Let things move at their own pace.”

Bryn nods. “That’s a good idea. Once his divorce comes through, you’ll feel less concerned about whatever it is you have between you two. Just be careful,” she says. “And post me. I’m here for you.”

“Promise. I’ll see you soon and I’m here for you too,” I say before packing a bag and heading to the Upper East Side, where Ian and I promised to show off our dinner skills. I know I’ll be staying over. And while we innocently play house, I can’t wait to play with the man of the house himself.



# FURNITURE AND FILMING

*Sara*

I have a fabulous week shopping for furniture with my Suit. We hit up Restoration Hardware, Room and Board, Safavieh Home. They have the most beautiful lighting fixtures I've ever seen. Their chandeliers are gorgeous. The couches are heaven. I lie on one couch so amazing I decide I don't want to get up. "Yummy, I've got your perfect couch."

He drops down beside me and stretches his arms out, shifting as he frowns and surveys the masterpiece.

"Don't tell me it isn't delicious," I dare.

"What is this?"

"It's the Cloud! It's all feathers! Can't you feel how soft the cushion filling is? And it's a modular, so you can order as much as you want." I curl up on the couch and feel as if I'm floating. "It's my dream couch."

"Dancer." He rolls his eyes. "There's not a thing we have seen that's not your dream something."

"Well, it's a big house! I'm doing all this for free, you know. My taste is spot on."

Ian's phone rings, interrupting our flirtation.

He checks the screen. "I have to answer."

I sigh, trying to act irritated though I'm not. He's a busy man. He has work to do.

I watch him as he listens to whoever's talking, his expression grim, his answers short. When he finally ends the call, I ask, "What happened?"

"Camera guy's sick."

"What are you filming?"

"A documentary. Want to come?" he asks after a moment.

"I'd love to."

"I'll take you. Once we get back on track."

He turns to the Restoration Hardware designer who's helping us select things for Ian's home and asks what colors are in stock for same-week delivery.

"Your girlfriend really loves this couch."

I open my mouth to explain to the woman that I'm not sure we're there yet because he has a wife, but Ian simply smiles at me, his eyes dark as he takes me in on the couch. "She does."

\* \* \*

It's Friday when his camera guy is back in good form, and Ian drives us to the film set.

"Hey, Jake." He greets a tall, blond guy who he introduces to me as one of his LA directors.

"My director flew in to start filming," he explains as Jake sets up a new chair by the producer's chair, which I realize belatedly is for me.

They're all bending over backward for Ian, blatantly licking his balls and complimenting him, like he's some sort of big shot.

I narrow my eyes as it starts dawning on me. "Tell me something, Ford. Who are all those execs staying at the Four Seasons?"

“My employees.”

“Aha.” I’m still digesting all of this.

He’s the boss. I look at the emblems of some blockbuster movies on the back of the director and producer’s chairs. “You produced those?” I point at the action-packed thrillers.

“My blockbusters help finance my documentaries.” He gives me an arrogant, proud, lopsided smile that for some reason makes my nipples bead.

Okay. So ... you learn something new every day, right? Like the guy you’re crushing on is some hotshot movie/documentary/film mogul. What the... fudge?

“From the top,” Ian announces.

The cameraman moves from side to side as the camera rails swing him up and down and front to back.

As interviews and shots of garbage in its multiple forms appear, I see Ian hanging back, taping with his phone. I walk around the set and twirl and practice my moves for any future auditions. I’ve been doing this for a while before I realize he’s got his camera trained on me.

“Mr. Ford,” I warn him with a glare.

He doesn’t stop filming, just gives me one of his sardonic smiles from behind the phone.

I cover my face. Ian crooks a finger. I drop my hands at my sides with a sigh and walk forward and look at him in the camera eye, licking my lips seductively. He stops filming and lowers his phone, tsks, but smiles as he shakes his head. “Are you hungry?”

“Starved.”

He reaches into a cooler in the back of a crew van and hands me lunch in a paper bag.

I groan. If I thought he’d take me out of here to eat somewhere, I was

wrong. It's going to be a long day.

\* \* \*

It's evening, and I've eaten three chicken sandwiches, and watched Ian in action, and practiced all my moves, and learned a lot about garbage. I curl up on the passenger seat of Ian's Mercedes SUV as we head to his townhome.

He drives with one hand on the wheel, the window partly down, letting in the cool air. After finding a parking spot only two homes away from his brownstone, he helps me out, and I'm sleepy and tired, but I don't want to go home just yet. I enjoy being with him too much, and I crave his touch like oxygen.

He walks me in, and I almost melt when I see a brand-new couch waiting in the living room. A Cloud.

I smile up at him in surprise, and when he winks, my smile fades as my heart begins to pulse madly with yearning, and I admit, "I had a good time today."

"I enjoyed you being there." We head to the couch, his gaze running over me. "I could hardly take my eyes off you."

"'Cause I'm the only lunatic who starts dancing with no music."

"I'm the lunatic who can't get enough of it." His smile changes to a frown as he rethinks his words. "No. Not a lunatic. I feel saner than I ever have in my life."

We stare at each other.

"This feels right."

I nod, our eyes holding. The moment is suddenly too intimate for me to stand. "You mean your couch. Feels right."

He dips his head slightly, a smile ruffling his lips. We both know we don't mean the couch.

His expression turns serious, his eyes burning with smoldering intensity as he rubs his thumb across my lower lip.

"I've been hungering for this."

"Me too." I let my tongue come out, to lick his thumb.

He likes it, smiles. My insides melt under the force of that smile.

I'm not sure this casual dating thing is working for me. I think of him all the time, and not just for this—although *this* seems to be the only outlet I have for these feelings inside me.

I reach out, craving his touch, and the need to touch him is too much. I urge his shirt up the waistband of his slacks; then I push the fabric up his chest and Ian pulls it over his head with a tug. The movement messes up his hair, and it ends up tousled and gorgeous as he stands before me in nothing but his slacks.

"Here. Give me this," he says, taking my chin between his thumb and forefinger and tipping my face back to take from my lips what he hungers for. I don't know what it is he hungers for—my taste or my lips or my lust or the way I respond to him without hesitation. Maybe he hungers to simply drive me wild. But I give him everything because I hunger for all of that from him, too.

The way he tastes me like I'm a perfect morsel. The way he kisses me like he's burning up with passion and I'm the cause. The way he holds my face so that there's no escaping his kiss or his passion.

When he tears his mouth free, he's breathing hard, and I'm chasing my breath in and out. I grab his belt and unbuckle him. I trail my fingers up his hard abs and his pecs.

He tips my face back farther, for him to bend down and drop kisses all over me. I offer it with no protest, sighing softly when his kisses start a

haphazard path across my chin and cheeks and nose and forehead.

He tugs my sweater dress up my frame. He pulls it over my head and bends to flick open my bra from the front clasp.

He sets a kiss on my nose. Then my chin. Then between my breasts. Before he licks the tip of his tongue in a hot little circle around the tip of one breast. My toes curl when he cups my breast with the heel of his palm and sucks me fully into his mouth. My head falls back and his arm comes around to hold me on my feet. I tremble as he keeps sucking me, and I make a small, mewling sound.

Ian smiles at that. Gathering me to him, he backs us to the couch and takes a seat, bringing me down with him.

I'm breathless and frantic, curling my arms around his neck as I straddle him, pressing my lips to his, my tongue circling around his, pushing against his.

He slows the pace with his tongue, stroking a hand down my back, causing tingles to race down my spine.

I look up at him and into his smoldering dark eyes as I reach to dip my fingers between our bodies, under his slacks. His cock is made for sex and pleasure, and right now nothing can convince me that it wasn't made for me and only me.

I curl my fingers around him as Ian slides his own between my thighs, under my panties. "How hard do you want it?" He presses his mouth to my own, kissing me lazily between words.

I push my hips up to his touch. "Hard," I whimper.

He bends and licks one of my nipples, then the other. Then he blows air on them, the yummy bastard. And my whole body clenches and arches up as a bow, my hips thrusting for more of his fingers. "Yummy, please."

I rock them against his hardness.

He grabs the back of my head and inhales the back of my ear, then kisses a path to my breasts. “You smell good, Dancer.” His eyes twinkle greedily as his tongue snakes out to taste my nipples. I gasp and clench my fingers into his hair.

“Like garbage?” I quip after being all day on set with him.

“No, sweetheart. You smell like you.”

He rolls me over to lay me down on the length of the couch, and I can tell that he’s using his arms to keep from crushing me beneath him. I lock one of my legs around his hips and pull him down lower, wanting his weight on top of me. Wanting all of him over me.

“Take these off.” I tug at his pants.

He stands to remove them, stepping out of his shoes and taking off his boxers along with his slacks.

His skin is so warm as he spreads his body on top of mine that I mewl softly. I run my hands down the muscles on his back, feeling them flex as he adjusts himself above me to continue his assault on my body.

His scent hits me on every breath. He doesn’t seem like he’s in any hurry. He’s torturing me sexually and I don’t know if I want to hit him for it or kiss him for it, so I decide I’ll just fuck him really hard for it.

As soon as he stops licking me between my thighs, he lets my panties come back to cover my wet sex and he comes up and licks his lips, running his tongue across his teeth as if savoring me.

“I can’t get over how responsive you are. How flexible your sweet body is. It drives me crazy to watch you come undone.”

He tips my head back so that our eyes lock. His hand curls around the back of my neck, and then he cradles the back of my head with his thumb as he kisses me.

His other thumb caresses my sex lips. He’s driving me crazy with

wanting.

He reaches out and tugs off my panties, easing them down my legs. I'm quivering, helpless, watching as Ian pushes my legs wider apart and thrusts inside.

"Please!" I gasp, curling my legs around him. I clench him hard with my thighs and press my mouth to his jaw as he pulls out. "Please. Please," I ramble unthinkingly, and Ian drives back in, holding me still by the waist.

"I want this just as badly as you do." His eyes gleam as his face clenches harshly with desire.

Beautiful and untamed, he moves powerfully above me. We hold gazes as he moves, his hand on my ankle as he keeps my leg open around his hips. He manages to hit me at my exact G-spot. Nobody's ever fucked me like he does.

I groan and sink my nails into his muscular shoulders, leaving claw marks and not minding that I do. I want to leave a mark. I want him to know that he's mine now.

He looks at my bouncing breasts, my reddened breasts, groaning low when I stroke my fingers along his muscular ass.

I'm so wet he slides easily in, but I feel completely stretched and out of my mind with need for him every time he fills me to the brim. I undulate my body, clutching him for more.

"Gorgeous. You're gorgeous, Sara. I fucking love fucking you. I fucking love *being* with you. *In you.*" Watching me through openly hot eyes, Ian reaches out and flicks the pad of his thumb across my clit.

I scream as I orgasm.

It takes me like a crashing wave, drowning me.

I don't breathe the whole time the shudders take me. Ian pins me down by the hips and keeps pumping into me, watching me twist and turn and gasp. Then he reaches that edge, and I watch the flash in his eyes as he climbs over



it.

And in that moment, he grabs my face to kiss me. He kisses me hard and passionately, like he wants me to be the one who receives everything that he's unleashing as he comes.

I curl into him, the aftershocks running all over me. I feel amazing, our bodies loose, sweat coating Ian's chest and mine.

He throws his head back and sighs contentedly as he stares at the ceiling, his hand coming to stroke the back of my head.

"Hmmm," I say, smiling against his chest.

I peer up at him and notice he's got his eyes closed, a half smile tugging at his lips.

"That was nice," I say.

"*Nice* doesn't cover it." He opens his eyes and strokes his fingers along my jaw. "Let's get something to eat and get our strengths up so we can do it again." He pecks my lips, and I groan as if I don't want exactly that to happen. "Okay, but you cook us something."

He pats my ass. "Nah, that's what we've got Uber Eats for."

# PAPERS

*Sara*

*Ian, Ian, Ian*, my heart seems to beat as I step out of work and into the Brooklyn streets, ready to head back home.

It's been a whirlwind two weeks, and I can't get enough of him.

I'm standing outside, debating whether to take the train or grab a cab, when a piece of the *New York Times* flies by and sticks to my feet. I try to kick it off, but the air is pressing it around my ankle. I grab it, dust off my fingers, and read:

*Audition for upcoming Broadway musical...*

Suddenly the wind whips the paper from my fingers. I run after it and grab the paper back to me, then reread it and scan for the location. The name of the producer is one of the newer production companies—ALA Inc. And I wonder how big the company is, and what their budget will be.

*Does that matter, Sara? It's a possible part!*

What can it hurt? I already have a stable income as Bryn's PA, but I'm ready to work for what I want. I promised myself after I lost my job as a concierge that I wouldn't give up this easily. I can't reasonably expect every audition to get me a gig, but all I need is one. One opportunity to show them what I've got, and this could be it.

As I take the stairs underground to the subway station, I'm starting to bring up the Safari browser on my phone and mark down the audition date when my mom calls.

“Momma.”

She’s crying.

“Mom, what’s wrong?”

“I got the papers,” she whispers.

And my heart breaks. I blink back tears, trying to hide them with my hair.

“Oh, Sara,” she says when she hears my sobs.

I can’t respond. My dad doesn’t love my mom anymore. So many times he would kiss her in front of me. So many times he’d tell me, “I love your mother.” And so what does that mean? That he never loved her? Or that love goes away?

“He’s already signed,” she explains. “But I can’t sign them.”

I clear my throat and look around for an exit out of the train station. “You can. I’ll be here with you on the phone.”

I head upstairs and I try to find a quiet spot to talk to her, aware of the silence on the other end. I drop down onto a bench, encouraging her. “I’m here, Mom. I will never leave you,” I promise.

A silent beat. And then, “I signed. It’s over.”

The words “it’s over” resound in me like a final bell. I burst out crying. She’s crying too.

“Don’t cry, Sara.”

“I’m crying for you. And for this total... disappointment I feel.”

“Listen to me, Sara,” my mom says, raising her voice. “Never, ever stop believing in love, despite this. Never stop believing in it.”

After I hang up the phone, I take a minute to try to collect myself before returning to the train station. By the time I board, I’ve cried oceans.

When I arrive in Nolita, I find Bryn isn’t home. I sit in our living room for a moment, staring at my hands.

“Fuck it.” I grab my purse and my MetroCard and head back out. To the Upper East Side.

I don’t know why I crave to see him when he might be exactly what brings me to the same position my mother is in. Heartbroken. But there’s something about this man that pulls me on a primitive level. To his strength, his confidence. I need it right now. Bad.

And I could use the distraction.

I wipe at my eyes and fix my face as much as possible on the train ride so I am ready when I knock on his door. When he doesn’t answer immediately, I knock over and over until I hear an exasperated yell, “Coming!”

He yanks open the door with a moody frown, but when he spots me, his eyes widen and his eyebrows rise. He’s wearing nothing but silk pajama pants and has what seems to be a script in his hands.

“What’s wrong?” he asks, pulling me inside with his free hand and leading me to the couch.

“Everything. Nothing. I just wanted to see you.” I drop down on the couch, and when he sets the script aside, I curl into his chest and inhale him. He smells of a recent shower and spices, a scent I now associate with Ian Ford. “My mom just signed the divorce papers. It’s over.” *Don’t cry again, Sara! You’re stronger than this.*

“I’m sorry.” Ian strokes his hand along the back of my head, his tone low and sad.

“I don’t know why... I can’t wrap my head around...” I shake my head, wondering why it hurts so much when I knew it was coming. Did I think Dad would change his mind? That things would right themselves somehow?

I think of Ian and his own marriage disappointment, and wonder how hard it has been for him. I lift my eyes to his and feel them blur again. “Why would someone do this to the person they love? My dad loved my mother. And your wife? I would *never* want anyone else but you. I would never even look at

another guy the way I know I look at you. You didn't deserve what she did to you!" I'm emotional and I try to get a grip.

Ian takes me by the wrists and pulls me to my feet.

"What are you doing?"

His arms come around me, and he starts moving. "I'm dancing with you."

He's holding me to his hard chest, moving side to side.

Realizing what he's doing, I press my cheek to his chest and move with him. It's the most perfect thing anyone has ever done for me. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it. Only way I know to cheer you up."

I laugh and let him twirl me out and pull me back to him, my spirits lifting as my body releases all the stress and burden it's been carrying. How can he know me so well already?

"See, you know this about me." I narrow my gaze and stare up at him. His hair is disheveled after his recent bath, and I slide my fingers into it. "And I don't know this about you. How would I cheer you up?"

He seems surprised, as if I'm a dope not to know better. "You cheer me up all the time."

"How?" I demand.

"Hell, I don't know. You just do." He shakes his head, a smile teasing the corner of his mouth. His eyes shift and fill with a curious deep longing.

"I'll film you!" I decide, having a light-bulb moment. "Or film myself doing something for you. To cheer you up."

"Just stand here. It's enough." His voice roughens as he twirls me out, then back to nearly slam against his chest. "Or dance. Just like this."

A chuckle runs up his chest and his arms envelop me again. We sway to and fro, slowly and without music, only to the rustle of our clothes, and it feels as if nothing can touch me but my Suit.

# AUDITION DAY

*Sara*

I woke up nervous as hell because today is that audition I found out about the same day my mom got the papers. I've been gnawing my nails to stubs at work, and Bryn scolded me when I was shuffling around the office like a nervous wreck.

"Sara. My advice is, go easy on the coffee. And go walk. Get prepared. You won't be able to nail it when you're this nervous!"

"Fine," I tell her saucily and tilt my chin up. "I'll see if my dirty Suit wants to help me figure out a good, effective method of relaxation."

I haven't seen him since I bawled my eyes out, and then danced in his arms, but I know he planned to stay home and read for the rest of the day and finish that script.

He knows how to cheer me up and ease my nerves. He won't mind the distraction if I make a surprise visit. But I text him to be sure.

**Me: *Are you interested in a quickie break while you read? Are you still home?***

**Him: *Almost done. Still home.***

I'm reading his reply when a new one comes in:

***And interested.***

Turning to mush with just those two words, I take a cab ride to the Upper East Side, pull out the key from its hiding place (which he showed me before I left), and walk inside.

He's barking into the phone at the far end of the living area. His living area looks kick-ass with all his brand-new furniture. He's tieless, the sleeves of his white shirt rolled up to his elbows, his top two buttons unbuttoned, his hair a little ruffled, a drink in his hand.

He turns and spots me. "Right. As soon as possible," he barks into the phone and hangs up.

My stomach tumbles as I wonder if he was talking to his lawyer. About his divorce. I want to ask him, but at the same time, I don't want to get in a funk before my audition.

"I can't stay long—I have an audition in less than two hours," I say as I approach. I take his drink and set it aside.

His brows fly upward in surprise, and a wicked, wicked smile starts curving his lips as I reach out to grab the collar of his shirt. He reaches out to grab me by the hip and pulls me to his body—his hard wall of a body—and the delicious, shockingly big bulge pressing up against the zipper of his slacks. I groan at the feel of him and rub my fingers up his chest, wanting to feel him.

"An audition?" he asks, in interest.

Sinking my teeth into my bottom lip as I smile, I incline my head in a small gesture of confirmation.

He smiles down at me.

A smile that tightens my sex muscles and my tummy.

"I've got to head back to work myself. I'll drive you."

He looks incredible. My hands are shaking, and I'm biting my lip as I run my hands up his chest. He eyes my little outfit with interest, tugging my blouse loose from the waistband of my khakis and easing his hand beneath it. He runs his fingertips up my skin as I press myself closer to him, doing the same and running my fingertips under his shirt too.

"Why are you smiling like that?" I frown when he keeps smiling down at me.

"I'm happy to see you. Is that wrong?"

"No." Heat frissons through me over the look in his eyes. "It's good."

"You're good, and this"—he sets a kiss on my lips, slow and thorough—"is better," he adds as he cups my ass in his hands and boosts me up.

I twine my legs and arms around him, delighted when he sets me up on the bar top, pulls off my shoes, and starts unbuttoning me. "I don't like it when you keep your clothes on. I like looking at you too much. I don't want anything between you and me—especially when we fuck."

"You have a dirty mouth." I don't sound chiding, really, because I kind of like it and I'm actually nibbling on it quite happily right now.

"It's only dirty when it's not busy doing other, more pleasurable things. Like sucking your gorgeous tits." He removes my bra and proceeds to suckle my tits, and I clench my legs around him and pull him closer.

"What other things can this wonderful mouth do?" I whisper as I duck my head and cup his jaw, and when he stops twirling his tongue around my nipple—leaving it red, and hard, and sensitive—he kisses me on the mouth in the way that makes all my thoughts scatter. "It can go down on you. I warn you, though, if I like your taste, I'm going to go on for hours."

I already know he likes my taste. And that he can go on for hours... and hours... and hours.

My breath hitches, my heart drumming in excitement in ways it drums only when I'm near him. He starts sliding down, and I panic when I



remember my audition. Fisting my hands in his hair, I pull him back up. “I don’t have hours, you yummy man. I only have minutes to spare for you.”

“Then let’s make the most of them, shall we?” He grabs my slacks and unbuttons them, pulling them off with a yank. My panties follow. And if I thought I was going to miss out from feeling his mouth between my thighs—oh my God! Oh my God.

Groaning, my head arches back. Because Ian just buried. *Buried*. His fucking mouth. Between my thighs. And oh! Does he know how to work it. Twirl his tongue. Use it to suck. Lick. Taste. Fuck. My sex in ways I’ve never been fucked before.

I start to swivel my hips, back and forth. I’ve always loved when guys went down on me, but some seem to prefer to only fuck. I suppose they want their dick getting all the action. But this man? Oh my goodness. He tastes me as if he’s been waiting to taste me for a lifetime. As if I’m his favorite flavor. His favorite texture. His favorite scent. His favorite pleasure.

\* \* \*

“If I don’t get this interview, it’s your fault for loosening me up too much,” I tell him as he drives me to 43<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> for my audition.

“Sex is good for the nerves.”

“Sex is good before a nap, Ian. Not before an audition.”

“Are you forgetting who did all the work?”

“It’s hard work trying not to come too quickly when you’re going down on me.” I flush, and he stares darkly at me. Hungry.

I purse my lips and try to shake off the tugs in my stomach.

“Here, yummy motherfucker.” I pull him across the car to kiss him and

thank him for bringing me. “Have fun filming garbage.”

“I will. I get off on it.”

I cackle and step out of the car, walking away, swishing my hips because I want to give him a little wood to remember me by.

A woman who was entering the building pauses and looks directly at me before shifting her gaze to the car, where Ian sits staring back at us.

“Do you know Ian?”

I hear her voice but I’m distracted. It’s a part I’m excited about, a story of a girl finding herself. And there are three leads, which means better odds of landing a part. “Yes,” I say, pulling myself from my thoughts and focusing on the woman in front of me.

“Interesting.”

“How do you know him?” I ask her.

“We’ve crossed paths. What is he to you?”

I feel possessive. I bristle. “My boyfriend.” I walk past her and open the door, thinking I’ve had the last word when I hear, “Really?”

“He seems to think so.” I turn back, give her a smile, and walk forward to get ready.

“Cordelia,” someone calls her. “A call for you. It’s your husband.”

“Oh really. He doesn’t have time to answer my calls? Well, now I don’t have time to answer his.”

\* \* \*

The thing about auditions is you’re just not competing with others. You’re competing with yourself. It doesn’t matter what you have for breakfast and if it bloated you, or that you may be catching a bug. You need to be the best

version of yourself because these people don't want to settle, and they see a lot. They know when you're settling and giving them a half-assed performance. I don't want to be half-assed or perform scared as if I'm going to break my ankle again. I plan to do it all the way. As if the guy watching me is my Dirty Workaholic and my life depends on him choosing me.

Hmm. Why does that thought make my stomach flip?

Anyway. Back to business. There are forty-eight of us.

And we're all bloodthirsty for the part.

Dancers can smell fear from a mile away, and so can the directors.

"From the top," one of the casting directors says.

I took gymnastics when I was a girl. It helped my dancing in numerous ways, but it especially gave me the strength to backflip and do acrobatics that you'd never get from a normal dance class.

It turns out to be an advantage for this casting, which requires some knowledge of gymnastics.

After the auditions, the blonde I met by the door halts me with a curt "You." She comes over, her regard making me tip my chin up a little higher. I've never been stared at by someone who is so blatantly angry during a casting before. "Your name?" She raises one brow.

"Sara."

"Sara what?" she barks.

"Sara Davies."

She purses her lips and heads back to converse with the directors.

They seem to be discussing their decisions intensely for ten minutes.

"We're calling out the list of our final ten," the blonde, Cordelia, says. The guy next to her begins reading names, and my stomach sinks when we get to number ten. And there's no Sara Davies on the list.

Crushed, I am about to force myself to move my ass and get off the stage when the guy hesitates. “Eleven,” he says, looking me straight in the eye. “Sara Davies.”

What?

My eyes widen. I made the finalists?

“From the top,” he calls with a clap.

I’m exhausted by the time I’m done; even my bones feel sore. This was an emotional challenge, but I head out and take off my dance shoes and toss them into my dance bag, feeling good about an audition for the first time since I broke my ankle.

I’m supposed to be back here tomorrow.

*Please let this be it.*

## *Ian*

I'm livid with Cordelia for making this personal. Livid with life for letting Sara end up here, a lamb wandering into a lion's den.

"You called her back to have her under your thumb. Don't tell me you don't know who she is," I bark at her, knowing full well what Cordelia has planned. But Sara has no fucking clue that the show she's got her heart set on is none other than my wife's first full production, under the company founded with my money.

"I know exactly who she is, and I know exactly why you like her. She's sort of sassy, Ian."

I grit my teeth and pull my hair in frustration as I pace the living room of "our" house. "What do you want, Cordelia?"

"I'll keep her in the show. It's seriously all this girl wants—she'd pee in a bag if I asked her to. But I'll only give her a part if you forget about her and come home, Ian. Clean slate."

"I'm not in love with you anymore."

"I know. But you have feelings for this girl—I mean come on, you drove her to the audition and kissed her like you wanted to eat her up!" She laughs, not merrily. "So if you don't do it for me, then do it for her." She raises her brows.

"I've endorsed your Broadway production company—"

"You did, but it was your gift to me, and it's in the black now. No longer needing your contributions. I'm in full control."

"You fucked me over before, you think I'm going to let you fuck me over

again? You're sadly mistaken."

"Ian." She rushes to stand before me. "She's a young little thing. Excited. Think about it. I'll give her the part—IF you give me another chance."

I take a long, hard look at my almost ex-wife, wondering what I ever saw in her. There's greed in her eyes, and very little in her heart to recommend her.

"Work may have destroyed our marriage, but my money destroyed you." I shake my head in warning, narrowing my eyes. "She has talent. She'll get her big break, and if she doesn't, at least she wouldn't have sold her soul or someone else to get it."

"Think about it, Ian!" She calls as I storm out of our West End home. "You pretend you don't care, but let's see how you feel when she's devastated she lost the part and you could have done something to help her. You're broken, Ian. I mean, let's be realistic. What can you offer her?"

I turn around and face her. Broken? I don't remember what that feels like. Not now that I have Sara. "I'm not, not anymore," I say in full honesty.

A shocked, bleak look crosses her features, as if I've slapped her. "You can't care about anything but work, it's what you know you're good at."

I shake my head. "All these years. And you don't know me at all." I fling open the front door. "I'll see you at Wahlberg's."

And with that I step out.

# FINALISTS

## *Sara*

My second day auditioning, this time with the eleven finalists, and the bitch blonde was late to arrive. Now she's been watching me dance up on stage with a pen in her lips and her eyes narrowed.

"Wonderful job, everyone. We'll call you," one of the directors tells us after we finish the piece.

Exhaling as I step off the platform, I grab my duffel and change my dancing shoes for my sneakers.

"Sara."

I turn to see the blonde bitch.

"You're our top contender for the lead. Just wanted you to know."

I blink, completely taken aback by the nearly blinding megawatt smile on her face. "I am?"

The blonde continues giving me that winning smile. "You are. I have it on the highest authority that you're in."

I'm so mind-blown, I'm pretty sure my brain is about to explode as I head outside. I got the lead. I got the lead in a Broadway show. I step out onto the streets and feel like jumping, screaming, throwing myself to the ground, and kicking in glee. But of course I do none of that. I just pump my fist in the air and then try to compose myself as I head toward the train station. That's when I spot Becka crossing the street. "Becka, what are you doing here?"

“I’m roaming the streets, getting inspiration.”

“You’re crazy. Where are you even sleeping?” I demand.

“Don’t worry—I’ve got myself the best, most unbelievably hot roommate. Some guy who missed his flight too; turns out we know each other’s families, and he’s helping me get my muse.”

“What guy?” I ask, narrowing my eyes in suspicion over the twinkle in her eye. And that’s when my gaze locks past her shoulder on to a figure behind her. A figure leaning against a black SUV. A figure in a Suit. A figure I have touched, kissed, and licked.

Ian Ford, my Dirty Workaholic Film Mogul Extraordinaire, is standing there next to a dog. Next to *Milly*. My eyes widen. I head over. “What are you doing here?”

Ian doesn’t even break a sweat. “Mills misses you. You said you’d bring a replacement. Turns out today I was it.”

“Ian.” I laugh and chide him with a shake of my head, unable to keep my heart from backflipping. “It’s so bad of me to have done that to your Gran.”

“That’s all right. I already know how bad you are.” He opens the back passenger door of his SUV. Milly hops onto the seat, and Ian opens the front door for me.

“You’re worse. You look all serious, but I know how dirty you are,” I whisper, going up on tiptoe to plant a kiss on his cheek. He lifts his head to Becka.

Shit, did I really forget she was standing there gaping?

“Does your friend want a ride?”

“Becka, get over here.” I wave her forward. “Becka, this is Ian.”

She seems tongue-tied as they shake hands. “I don’t need a ride, thank you.” She sounds all mousy and sweet with Ian, but then pulls me to the side and gives me a giddy-shocked death glare.



“Bitch!”

“I know.” I groan as I peek at Ian behind me. “He’s taken, okay?”

“By you?”

“No. He’s married, remember—but getting divorced. And I’m next.” I kick her feet with a grin, then tell her, “Now tell me about this guy.”

“I can’t, he’s waiting for me—” She points across the street, where now it’s my turn to gape at the figure leaning on a lamppost, watching us. Tall and lean, with sandy, messed-up hair, wearing jeans and a leather jacket and a silver cuff around his wrist.

“Who is he?” I murmur.

“My hero. More like antihero. You’ll read all about it in my book if I can even get my bitch muse back.” She smirks and waves me off. “I’ll be in touch, I promise.” She heads across the street to the gorgeous guy, who I almost suspect is some sort of movie star. He seems oddly familiar.

Seeing him smirk at her as she reaches him, I watch them in curiosity while I walk back to the car and climb in the passenger seat. “How’s my favorite little pooch?” I reach back and scratch behind Milly’s ear.

She licks my palm, and I giggle. Aware of my Hot Workaholic watching me with a smile on his lips, my whole body turns warm. I don’t know if this casual dating thing is working for me.

My feelings for my Dirty Workaholic have never been casual at all.

Worrying about it, especially after what my mother went through, I’m concerned his wife may be going through the same pain despite her being the one who betrayed him. I ache to know that it’s over so that I can feel more certain about Ian’s interest in me. But I don’t want my confused feelings for Ian to dampen my excitement, so I shake that out of my thoughts.

“How is your Gran and the replacement I sent?”

“She’s good. They’re both good. But I promised I’d steal you away for an

evening, and today seems as good a day as any.”

I sigh happily and stroke the back of Milly’s ear. “I’m so glad to see you two.”

“Hard day?”

“Awful. But I made it.” I grin.

He tips my chin back. “Of course you did,” he says, his eyes gleaming with pride and something else, something unreadable.

His jaw squares as he squeezes it, turning his attention to the road.

He stops me by my apartment so I can quickly shower and change out of my sweaty clothes, then we head to SoHo and have dinner with Mrs. Ford. During dessert, Mrs. Ford asks the most pressing question of all.

“How is the divorce coming along, Ian, dear?”

Ian doesn’t hesitate from shoving a forkful of apple pie into his mouth. He munches slowly, looking at her, and then at me, as he swallows and chases it with some wine. “We should sign this month.”

His dark eyes gleam at me. I feel the look all over. In my sex, my nipples, and somewhere deeper. I pull my gaze free and try not to make eye contact for the rest of the evening.

I should be happy about his divorce coming through soon, but I’m sick of hearing it’s coming and still, it’s not here yet. What if it never comes?

\* \* \*

He drives me home that evening. The air between us crackles with mutual frustration.

“Spit it out,” he says as we leave Mrs. Ford’s.

“You spit it out. I just told you I got the part of my dreams and you said

nothing! Speaking of your upcoming divorce doesn't help my mood one bit."  
I sigh.

I wanted to go back to his place and use his stupid toothpaste again. I know, crazy that doing stuff like that—sharing things with him—gets me off. But there it is. This man is making me lose it. And it's because I'm losing it that I told him I should go home and rest and wait for my call.

"The producer of that show is my soon-to-be ex-wife."

"What?" I blink. "Oh wow. That blonde bitch from hell?"

"That's her."

I stare out the window. No wonder the blonde was such a bitch to me. She knows I'm fucking her husband. I feel sick, my stomach clutching as bile rises up my throat.

"And you knew, Ian!"

"I didn't know you were auditioning for her that first time. I found out today."

"How did you find out?"

"She told me."

"You still *talk* to her?"

He shoots me a get-real look. "I haven't for a year. It's over. This was different."

"Why?" I cry. I'm jealous and confused and distraught and emotional.

"Because it was about *you*," he lashes.

"Take me home."

"I'm taking you to mine."

"No. I said take me home." I'm scowling now. Enraged, and needing some time to stew on my own. "I thought it was over between you!"

“For me it is. It’s over, Sara. But I’m afraid she’ll make your life a living hell if you take this part.”

I shoot him a frustrated, hopeless, *angry* look. “I won’t let that stop me. It’s my shot, Ian.”

He mumbles under his breath, shaking his head.

He drives the rest of the way in silence, and I ride chewing my nails. It’s only until he stops before my apartment, wedging his SUV in between the narrow streets and traffic, that I realize I don’t have my apartment key.

“I think...Fuck. I forgot my key.”

His phone rings. “Sorry I’ve got to take this.” He glances at the door of my building, which doesn’t open without my key. “Go inside, I’d rather you not freeze. Yeah?” he barks.

I head toward the door and ring my apartment number as I text Bryn. ***Hey. I’m here! Forgot my key!*** No answer. ***Bitch, open up, I’m freezing my ass!***

“That’s so odd.”

Behind me I hear a groan, and a moody, “Stop licking my balls. I’ll stop by—you owe me big time.” He hangs up and I hear, loudly, “Nothing?”

I turn around. “Nope. Run off. I can handle myself.”

“Out here in the cold.”

“Oh, I don’t plan to be out here for long.”

He heads over, exasperated.

“She may be at the office. Or with her new boyfriend. I’ll take care of it,” I assure, sticking to my pride.

Ian glances up and blinks. “Leave you out here in negative-degree weather?” He ponders it and scowls at me. “Nope.”

My teeth are chattering. His hand comes to grip my arm.

“All right, sweetheart. Let’s get back in the car.”

“No. Really. Where are we going?”

“I’m taking you with me.”

“Where?”

“Change of plans. You can come.”

“What gave you the indication that I want to go to wherever it is you’re going?”

He pauses and looks at me. When he finally speaks, his voice is whisper soft. “Don’t do that.” He frowns and shakes his head.

“Do what?”

“You know what,” he growls under his breath.

I stare past his shoulder as the cold wind slaps us both. He’s frustrated. I’m frustrated. He spoke to his wife today, and I’m so jealous I can’t see straight.

I got the part of my dreams. And his wife is the producer.

It’s all messy and complicated and I’m confused and scared. This dating cautiously thing is not working for me. I cannot stop thinking about him. I’m happy. Too happy, when I’m with him. So happy that I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. For him to tell me he still loves his wife. That he’s going back to his wife. Maybe his wife even hopes for that. I mean, look at my mom. Everything went to hell. She’d have done anything to get my dad back.

His wife knows more about him than I do. Like if he likes... to play Monopoly naked in the middle of the night or something crazy? She has an edge, an advantage over me. What if she cooked his favorite meal when they talked? Or wore his favorite color? And it makes me mad. Because I want this man all to myself and I don’t know if I could bear it if he let me go.

Will this end leaving me to spend the rest of my life comparing every other guy to him? Crushed and wanting a man who wanted someone else a little more?

But it's not his fault that I'm bad at this whole casual thing. It's not his fault that I... want more.

I sigh dejectedly. "Where are we going?"

"It's Hilton's birthday."

"Hilton?"

"One of my friends. The one we bumped into at the hotel the other day."

"Is it proper for me to be going?"

"I don't care if it's proper. You're coming with me."

# CLUB

*Sara*

The club is sizzling when we arrive. It's on the lower floor of a modern structure encased in glass, invitation only, with tons of classy cars parked outside. All the young and rich in the city are present, without a doubt. I force myself to hold my head high.

There are women in glittering white dresses, men in stunning black suits and black ties.

"I'm not dressed for the occasion."

"And yet you're easily the most stunning woman in the room," he says with a glance that reminds me of the way he made love to me very, very recently. He introduces me to the friends that come to greet him. "This is Sara."

His friends look at me in interest as they shake my hand and I shake theirs back. I can tell they're not used to seeing Ian with someone. Or maybe, with someone *else*. Especially considering he's not yet divorced.

I squirm uncomfortably, but Ian squeezes my hand and I exhale.

The only way to survive the walk deeper into the room is to hone every bit of my attention, my senses, on the connection of our hands. My legs follow him inside. When we get deeper into the crowded room, the walls enclosing us flash with shimmering waterfalls and lights, synced to the loud music. There are dancers in cages suspended from the ceiling, a fluorescent bar to the right, and a variety of lounge areas where tables greet you, leading

into the massive dance floor where there's hardly room to dance among the moving bodies. Beyond the dance floor, more tables spread out as far as the eye can see. The backdrop is a stunning pair of velvet curtains, which are partly open to reveal a terrace outside.

Ian talks to one of the guards and points toward the back. As he continues leading me through the crowd, he stops a waiter and orders us drinks. Ian greets a few friends on the way, and all the while, his hand holds mine, saying, *I got you*.

I feel safer than I thought I would. I trust him. I took a leap of faith and I trust him. I wonder if he will ever trust me after having had a bad marriage. I vow to myself that somehow I'm going to win his trust, and his loyalty, things a man like him must value.

With the whole club circling around him, I realize he must not attend these sorts of events that often, because everyone is ecstatic to see him, men and women alike. I feel myself pulled to him like my anchor and my safety and my universe. And yes, there are a thousand eyes inside this place, and a thousand eyes were on Ian as soon as we walked in. I can feel the stares on me, bouncing from him to me, me to him.

Every fantasy I've ever had of finding the right man for me... none of those included the environment. None of those included me feeling as if I don't quite fit—and yet how can it feel so right to stand beside him?

The glances are frequent and almost too heavy to stand. I feel judged, and vulnerable, but a lot of those stares—I begin to notice—aren't mean. They are curious, as though they want to know more, like why we are together. I'm trying to smile and act normal when a young hostess comes to assist us. “Mr. Ford, would you like me to show you to your table?”

“Ian!” the blond guy we bumped into at the hotel a while ago calls.

“That's Hilton,” Ian whispers in my ear, leading the way. Hilton's date is giving me a frown and Hilton is looking at me like he's seeing a vision.



“Well, well, well,” Hilton says. “What are you having?” He jerks his face to my empty hands.

“Nothing strong enough,” I admit, spreading my arms to show him I got nothing.

“How about Red Bull and vodka? Goes straight to your head.” He nods in full recommendation, blue eyes twinkling naughtily.

“I’m not having that. I want to be able to walk into my apartment, thank you.”

“Yours or Ian’s?” He grins.

I blush beet red and settle down in the corner of a banquette to leave room for Ian.

Ian slaps his friend’s back and wishes him a happy birthday. Alcohol is flowing freely, and so is the fun. There’s humming laughter, clinking glasses, and shuffling dresses, and the pounding music coming from the crazy dance floor. I’m enjoying it, drinking it all in.

“You know Ian has three sides, don’t you?” Hilton baits me. “His good side. His reckless side. And his side you don’t want to see.” He leans over the lap of the girl sitting next to him. “You better thank your stars you didn’t see him when that shit blew up,” he warns.

My heart squishes in my chest. A female voice calls, “Ian!”

A strawberry-blonde comes up to him flashing a white smile and looks up adoringly into his face. As the woman turns the full force of her charms on him, I want to be rational. He’s the hottest thing in the room, and being here with me says he is available. But he’s still got a wife. Ugh, this is not normal. But those women want a piece of my Dirty Workaholic, and I’m the greediest of them all. He stands to greet the woman and other people slap his back. Then his dark eyes meet mine and my heart swoons. I smile a little. But that’s when I overhear Hilton’s date complaining about me.

“Where did he find her? What does she have that’s so special?”

“Haven’t asked, but if you don’t want to say sayonara to being a good friend of mine, you’d better be nice to Ian’s girl,” Hilton tells her.

“Who says she’s his official girl?”

“I don’t know the specifics, but if you ask me, and I’m the birthday boy, she’s his girl tonight and by the way he keeps checking out where she’s sitting, she’ll be his girl tomorrow night, too. In fact, Loki and I have this little bet on how long it’ll last. We don’t remember Ford being this hooked on anyone for a long time,” Hilton says.

I stand and head to the restroom, where I stare at myself in the mirror. *Okay, breathe. You knew this would happen. Not everybody is going to be happy. It doesn’t matter as long as you and Ian are okay.* God, but I’d rather stick myself with a fork than endure those bitchy stares and complaints.

“He’s in the corner, but Cindy said he came in with someone,” a waitress entering the restroom tells another as she enters a stall.

“What? Who?” the voice in the stall asks.

Ducking my head after washing my hands, I head back outside and find a guy with curly brown hair at our table, sitting with a beautiful cougar far older than him. She is openly staring at Ian’s ass. Ian is standing near the table as if waiting for me. He smiles as I approach and lets me slide inside the booth, and only then does he slide back in next to me.

Loud music pulses through the exotic room. Ian’s familiar scent teases my nostrils and I relax a bit. I take a sip of my drink as we lean back, the loud music making it hard to talk. He’s loyal to his friends, I can tell, because they look at him fondly, and that’s why he’s here, but he’s got his hand on my thigh, caressing up and down, slowly, and I think that, just like me, he would rather be alone. Or working.

He spreads his arm out on the couch behind me and draws me a little closer. He breathes heavily over the top of my head and lowers his mouth to my ear. “You’re the hottest thing here, so stop scowling.”

I laugh. “I don’t know anyone. I’m trying to determine if they’re friend or foe.”

“My friends are your friends. My foes, your foes.” He winks, and I laugh as he starts pointing randomly. “Friend. Foe. Friend. Foe.”

Exhaling as I realize he wants me to know that I’m not in this alone, I scoot closer to him and breathe in his shirt, and I feel the others in the group watch us suspiciously.

Our eyes meet in the dim light—through the music, the crowd, the drinks—and I’m transported to every evening he’s looked at me like this before. In his townhouse. At his office. Even in room 1103. But there’s an edge to his stare that wasn’t there before. An underlying hunger.

In the dark his features are classically perfect. His black button-down shirt is tailored for him. He looks incredible, smells incredible; he’s flawless in this room. I keep stealing looks at him, and I inhale a sharp breath when he kisses the top of my head and calls a waiter to our table, ordering more drinks. Women flock to this table. There are a thousand more beautiful women in this room, but in this moment I feel like I’m the only one.

Hilton stands and makes a speech, thanking everyone for being here on his birthday.

“Ian! This is for you, for coming to the party!” The girls on Hilton’s side of the table wiggle their hands under their tops and take off their bras and toss them in the air, and my mouth almost pops open in surprise, but thank God I contain myself. Sounds and jeers emanate from all over the room.

His lips curl in mild amusement but his hand moves on my thigh as if telling me I’m the one, and his eyes lower to rest on me and no one else. Yet I’m entranced as the girls begin to give a little show, dancing together, shimmying their rears.

I look at them moving, seducing, the look of rapture on the guys’ faces while Ian turns to look at me almost with the same rapture. I feel his inky eyes

on my profile and I want to drive him crazy like that. “I can make them stop,” he tells me, quiet but a tad amused.

“No. I’m wishing I could dance like that for *you* right now.”

The amusement fades from his eyes. He shifts. He’s so big and his presence so overpowering, he’s an expert at helping me become invisible when he shields me with his shoulders. “You don’t need to dance like that for me here. Just blush for me the way you do,” he says, smiling at me.

He slips his hand under my dress, to the top of my thigh. I’m glad it’s dark, the light focused on the dancers, because I’m starting to color bright red. I raise my hands and stroke his hair at the collar of his shirt, caressing it. He kisses my throat and shoves the necklace I’m wearing to the side; then he dips his tongue there, to my pulse point. I nuzzle into the top of his head and melt into the sofa.

His eyes smolder.

He caresses his hand down my back and nudges me closer, until my body is nestled against his. He lowers his head to brush his lips over my mouth, then moves them to feather over my ear. “You’ve been throwing fire at me all night. I know exactly what to do to quench that.”

My arms clench around his neck and my body presses closer. His hands spread on my back and he drops a hot kiss on the back of my hair and flattens me to his chest until we’re almost one.

He lowers his hands to hold my hip bones and dips his head and kisses down my neck, to my collarbone, my shoulders, down to the nook under my necklace, and back up. His lips roam over my jaw, to my ear, and then they head to my mouth.

Aching all over, I let my hands wander up the muscles of his back, and he takes my wrists and pulls my hands up above my head to rest on the backrest of the booth. He interlaces our fingers and starts to kiss my lips, softly. I push upward to feel him, rubbing my breasts against his flat chest. “I need... God,

I..." I gasp in his ear.

He expels a breath, trying to control himself. He loves foreplay, but this time it feels like we're both too wound up. He cups my face and turns my head to kiss me, deeply and passionately, and though I can tell he's trying to be gentle, I can taste the violence in his kiss.

"Hey, girlfriend. Hey. I bet you can't do this." One of the girls shakes her ass to show me.

"Just because I'm sitting on it right now doesn't mean I can't use it," I flash back as I pull away from Ian.

"Oh, well, let's see!"

My head is spinning. Did I offer that? Hell yes, I did. After his kisses I don't feel like the black swan; I feel like the white one. Ian reaches up to sip his drink, and finding it empty, calls the waiter and tells him, "Straight up on the rocks."

"Ian can tell us how well we rate, huh?" the girls insist.

I look at him and he's leaning back, looking at me as he continues with his delicious caresses on my knee.

"All right." I stand and climb up onto the table, kick off my heels, and slowly, without looking at anyone but Ian, I start to dance to "How Deep is Your Love" by Calvin Harris.

I move a little, turn my ass one way, and then the other. I laugh and though I'm not dancing ballet, I know how to move, and I notice nobody is looking at me, they're looking at *Ian*. And Ian sits there, immobile, his eyes so fiery and bright he almost looks mad. His eyes crawl up and down my body hungrily, and the little bit of inhibition that remains is nearly gone as I feel the high of Ian wanting me. I'm putty and I don't know why, or maybe I do.

Because I love him.

Because I've loved him for a while, no matter how much I tried ignoring it.

He looks into my honeyed eyes, outlined by sooty lashes that I spiked up tonight with the mascara I used on our way here as I tried to dress up. I thought I was underdressed. I thought, when I saw the women in the club, that there was more than enough fabric covering my body, but now Ian looks like there's not enough.

"Okay," I say, dropping down. "Don't flunk me," I warn, feeling a little high and reckless. I've never done that before.

"On a scale of one to ten, Ian?" one of the girls asks.

"Whoa, Ian," the guy with curly hair, who I realize must be Loki, says.

Ian clenches his jaw and stares down at his fingers as he curls them into his hands, then uncurls them. "One to ten?" He raises his eyebrows after a few heart-stopping seconds and says, "She broke the scale." Hilton cackles and Ian leans over and spreads his arm around me, drawing me to his side in a familiar, both protective and possessive, way.

Hilton whistles. "Ian doesn't buy companies or buy the stock—he either owns it all or takes no part in it."

Ian whispers in my ear, his voice husky, "Are you going to dance like this for me in private tonight?"

The sharp, clean smell of his soap envelops me, weakens me. My senses are on Ian Ford overload. I nod, and he groans as his mouth opens on mine. I press myself to him and let him get my lipstick all over his lips.

A dozen people come talk to him, and though he scrapes the back of his hand over his lips, I love seeing the tiny feminine mark of my coral lipstick on the corner of his sexy mouth. *Ian, what's that? Ian, how about that?* A lot of them are women. *Are you filming in the city?...* Some women blatantly come up to offer to see him later tonight, but he whispers a negative and sends them on their way. I blush from where I sit.

“Men like him won’t ever marry again. Not after what his ex did. He’s looking for someone to get over the wife, don’t you think?” the cougar is telling Loki.

Ian covers my ear with one hand and draws me to his chest, his eyes concerned but comforting. “Tomorrow they’ll have someone else to skewer.”

“But tonight it’s me.”

His lips look swollen from all our kissing, and I can feel his lust for me swirling around us. “Did you know you were this popular?”

He laughs.

“Did you?”

“What does it matter?”

“I don’t understand why, when you had all these women available, you chose me to be the one to fuck in room 1103.”

He frowns. “Let’s take this outside.”

He comes to his feet and helps me up to mine, and the watching crowd steps aside as he leads me to the pair of velvet curtains that open to the terrace.

“Where are we going?”

“To be alone for a while.”

“I... I haven’t even finished my drink.” He tugs me outside and I gasp at how pretty it is, with the balcony overlooking a waterfall wall, surrounded by what could only be a forest of trees—in the middle of New York.

“This is surreal,” I say, and when he doesn’t reply, I turn to find Ian standing a few feet away, looking at me. Need explodes in my stomach when my eyes meet his onyx ones.

He eases us against a nearby pillar, fingers digging deliciously into my hip, and drags me up against him until we’re flush.

“I didn’t pick you; I wasn’t even looking for you. But here you are, kitten. And I want you.” I grab his shoulders as he slides a hand up and into my hair and opens my mouth with his. Breaths mingle. His kiss is possessive, determined.

“I...” I lick my lips when we stop. “Is this casual to you?”

He raises his brows at my question. Maybe it’s not an appropriate time to have this conversation, but I need to know if those women were right—if he’s using me. Or if my body, and my heart, know the truth. And there’s more between us than what my brain can possibly understand.

“I’m having a lot of fun with you,” I begin. How do I even phrase it? How do I say: *I don’t want you to break my fucking heart, you stupid, sexy man?*

“I’m having a lot of fun too.”

“Sex with you is amazing. Euphoric. Out of this fucking world. I’ve never been so in love with a guy’s dick. It’s perfect. Gorgeous. Thick and—”

“I get it. You like my dick. That’s not what I wanted to hear,” he says, seizing my shoulders in his warm grip and pulling my face back to his. “I know you tremble. Hell, I’ve never liked to fuck someone so much. I like fucking, yes, but with you it’s a whole other level, Sara.”

“What level?”

“What level?” He sounds exasperated. “Every fucking level. I want you, Sara. You. Not just your pussy.”

I laugh and flush, shaking my head. “I’m sorry I went on about your unbelievable—”

“That’s okay, my dick liked it, and I’m very glad you like my dick. But I want to know how you feel about *me*.”

“You?” I’m shell-shocked for a moment by the question. “Well, you’re selfish, arrogant, you need a lot of work.”

“But I’m not hopeless,” Ian says, raising one brow almost commandingly.



“No.”

He exhales, the corner of his lips moving. “Then let’s do it, Sara. Let’s have a go at it for real.”

I look away, feeling like my composure is under attack. How much do I want this?

So much it scares me.

“Look at it this way: as a bonus you get my dick.”

A soft laugh leaves me as I gather the courage to glance back into his face, and I notice his features aren’t exactly stoic. His expression is taut with passion, a living light shining in his eyes. I don’t want to admit that I like him, too, and that I am drawn to him, recklessly, like a magnet. But he’s opening up to me, and no matter how scared I am, I don’t want to shut him out.

“Look, I know you have reservations. But my divorce will come through very soon. And I want you to think about it not being so casual anymore.”

“It’s not casual for me,” I admit. “It hasn’t been for a while. But I don’t want you to hurt me, you stupid, yummy motherfucker.” I groan.

“Good that it’s not casual. And come on, Sara.” He laughs a low, sardonic laugh, tutting at me. “We both know that’s not what I want with you.”

Fuck this guy.

I want this, and I want him, and I reach out to grab the back of his neck and plant a solid, wet kiss on him so that he knows it.

\* \* \*

That night, on our way back to his home, I feel a little tipsy and know Ian has had his fair share to drink too. I feel like I’ll die if I don’t have him, and I’m desperately trying to shake my fears out of my mind. Maybe it’s too soon to

get involved with a man whose marriage just shattered. Sex is sex, but this isn't just sex here, is it?

He leads me into his home and up to the bedroom, addressing the elephant in the room.

“You know that if I had a production company, I'd hire you on the spot?”

“And I'd dance exclusively for you.” I smile and kick my heels off. The move making me dizzy. “Then again, right now, I'd dance in a corner for free.”

Ian unbuttons and shrugs off his shirt, his muscles hard as he tosses it aside. “I've been thinking, and I don't want you to miss this opportunity.”

Surprised, I unzip and start undressing down to my underwear. “I don't want to miss it either, but I've been thinking too and...”

Ian raises his brows.

I sway on my feet, laughing when I almost fall.

“Would you care who you work for? Whether it's someone you loved or hated? Would you care when you want it this much?”

“No, but...”

“But what?”

My stomach clutches in fear of my own feelings for this guy, so I press my lips together and playfully send my panties flying in his direction. “I want you more, you stupid Suit!”

“Stupid Suit.” He catches them in the air, looks at them, then straightens, narrowing his eyes as he walks forward, smelling my panties. “Stupid Suit...” he says, and I giggle and ease back as my hot Suit walks forward, shoving my panties into his slacks pocket.

The way he's looking at me decimates me. I start to pant, unsteady on my feet as I back away.

I think I've had too much to drink. We both have.

And it's been a crazy day. Ian is walking forward, and I'm backing away. My mogul starts to shake his head in warning. "Don't push me away, Dancer."

"I'm not," I say, but I start rounding the room to keep from hitting a wall. Ian continues chasing me. His gaze narrowing, a slight confusion in his dark eyes.

I'm feeling raw and exposed, so vulnerable I want to hit him for doing this to me.

"You're not the only one who's scared, Sara. I'm a man who's used to getting whatever I want. Women throw themselves at my feet. But reconcile that with being cheated on, on the infidelity spectrum?" He reaches out, seizes my arm. "I didn't know what we had between us from that first night, and I wasn't sure I wanted it, Sara."

I stand there, absorbing what he's just said, too afraid to believe in this. In this being able to happen to me, to him. Too afraid now that I know he's been fighting his own feelings for me just like, maybe, I have for him.

And suddenly all my feelings for him boil in my heart to the point where I feel like I have two choices: implode inward, or explode outward.

I exhale shakily, my voice raw. "I'm afraid nothing lasts. Nothing, not even *life*. I'm afraid of attachment and loss and love and even loss of a love such as dancing. That things that can make me happy will one day be gone. And see? You're not even guaranteed. I don't even know if you'll really want to commit once you're free. You're not even free yet! Maybe you'll never be. You're not even mine, Ford. What if by the time you're free, you're waffling..."

"I'm not waffling."

"You just said you didn't want to want this."

He sets his forehead on mine. "But I'm yours." A low growl.

“That’s not true. At the club, you said you wanted it to be serious, and then you come here and admit you didn’t want this. Admit it, Ian! You’re using me to feel better about yourself, and when you’re free of your wife you’ll be done with me,” I cry, suddenly, all my fears rising to the forefront.

“I’m not unsure about this. *Dammit!*” he growls, his gaze shooting bullets at me.

“I’m going home.” I reach for my clothes on the floor. “Don’t you dare stop me, don’t you dare.” He grabs me and pulls me up to my feet, then yanks me to his hard chest.

I start to fight him. Far stronger than I am and just as exasperated with us, Ian grabs my hand, curling his palm around my fist to halt me. “You’re scared, Sara, and that’s all right. But don’t think for a second I’m not scared too. I don’t mean to hurt you. I’m not letting you go and I am not fucking leaving. But I’m fucking open here—and it doesn’t feel very good.”

“See? You’re scared!”

“You’re fucking right I’m scared—I’m fucking *in love* with you! If I used to feel anything for my ex-wife, it pales in comparison to what I feel for you—do you get me, Sara?” He shakes me, his iron control suddenly snapping. “Do you, baby?”

My eyes sting as a raw and primitive reaction to his words takes over me, and I nod. We both fall still. Suddenly, I wind my arms around his neck and press my face to his, my eyes blurry as I press my nose into his throat. “My dad loved my mom...” I painfully remind him.

“I’m not your dad.”

I swallow. “I’m not your wife, either. You need to trust me. You need to \_\_\_”

“I do; just be patient with me, Dancer.” Radiating frustration, he grabs my face in both hands and tips my gaze up to his, his eyes roving painfully slowly over my features. “I may fuck up sometimes and one day I may not be there

on an important day, but I'll try. And if I sometimes don't have the right words, help me find them. And if you need something I'm not delivering, steer me in the right direction... please," he hisses. "Please."

"I will," I breathe, my hands clamping on his hard jaw. "Love me. I love you like I never thought I could love anyone."

"I do. Fuck, woman, I do." He lifts me up in his arms and we're kissing passionately, both a little drunk, a little too unhinged, a little too open. When Ian drops me on the bed, I claw at his slacks, needing his touch, his skin, his love.

"Hard," I beg as he drops his slacks and boxers and kicks them aside. "As hard as possible, and don't stop until morning."

Ian's tongue drags down my throat and cleavage as he spreads my thighs open, grabs his cock, and drives in so hard, I see stars. I claw at his back, bite his neck. Ian drags his hands up my sides, cupping my breasts in his warm palms, then curling a hand around my neck as he ducks to suck on my nipples. His hand stays on my throat, and suddenly he lifts his head. "Look at me. Look at me, damn you."

I look at him, my pulse fluttering against his palm. I'm so undone by this guy that I wonder if I'll ever be complete without him. "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you." I hit his chest, my eyes wet with tears.

He gentles the pace, gentles his voice. "I'm too busy fucking *you*. Huh. Who's fucking you?"

"You. Motherfu—"

He kisses me. Wipes a tear from my cheek. His face raw. "I wanted here. All fucking day I wanted here."

I stroke my fingers down his jaw, gasping and thrashing as I moan. "I want you here, Ian. Always."

"You do shit to me. I don't like it either, but it's there. It's here." He drops a hot kiss to my left breast, licking his way back to my mouth. "It's

everywhere, all the damn time, Sara. You've got me twisted up and I'm in so deep, I'm not planning to do anything about it but go deeper, baby."

I groan softly as he flicks his tongue into my mouth. He rolls his hips harder, over and over, faster and faster, the tempo of our kiss increasing in synchrony with his thrusts, my own hips pushing up to meet his.

It's a dance—and as much as I love dancing, I've never loved anything as much as I love doing this with him. Every part of my body is alive and moving, straining, *searching* for Ian, *reaching* for Ian, more and *more* Ian. Ian's movements stimulate mine, just like my touches and kisses stimulate his. I've seen dancers move on stage, but I've never felt a man move so beautifully—or dance this dance or any other dance so fiercely—with me before. We're the song and the dance, the tune and the variation, the violin and the player... the ache and the balm that heals it.

Ian's own wild hunger somehow makes this dance of ours even rawer, more primitive. A dance you can only dance in the dark, or by yourself, or with your mate, so raw and primal that you don't need lessons—you just move and follow the ache. Feed the ache. And nothing aches as much as my need for this guy.

I push him back and go down on him. He lets me, for a minute, two... then he rolls me back around and goes down on me like I'm his last supper.

I let him, briefly. Then I pull him up by the hair and straddle and ride him.

He lets me, but still needs more, so he rolls me to my back and bends my legs around his shoulders, and when he drives back in, I contort with pleasure and let out a long mewl of pleasure over being filled like this. Just like *this*.

All the time he watches me.

All the time I ache, need, want, dance, hum in silent pleasure. His voice is husky and thick when he tells me I make him *hot* and that he's never been so *fucking happy* or wanted *anyone* or *anything* as much as he *wants me*. I tell him how *hot* he looks and how I *never want to be without him*.

When he rubs his thumb against my clit and continues pummeling me—watching my breasts bounce and my chest heave—I come, I come in colors, songs, movements, fabrics. I come in all ways and at the same time in no other way but this one. I come for him and *because* of him, and as if he knows this yet isn't satisfied in my complete undoing nor in taking me every which way possible, Ian pulls out and takes his cock in his hand, pumping his fist down his hard length as he climaxes with a deep groan and eyes of twilight watching me, watching me as he rains his semen all over my abdomen.

Gasping as the warm drops touch my skin, I pant and watch his muscles ripple, his eyes flash on me, his jaw clench. I lick my lips, drinking him in, weepy, drunk, scared, in love, undone like only my hot Suit makes me. But I know as he's finished and pulls me roughly, almost violently, to him, that whatever he makes me feel... I'm not alone in this.

Minutes later, I can feel his uneven breathing on my cheek as he holds me to him, the touch of his hand almost unbearable in his tender possessiveness. "Ian... did you mean what you said?" I whisper, tipping my face. "That you lo—"

He wraps his arm around my midriff and shifts me to lie over him, his breath hot and moist against my face, my heart racing when he answers.

"I mean it."

"Say it again when you're not drunk, please."

"I'm not that out of it." He eases out of bed and heads off to clean up, then comes back and slides into bed with me. "I'll say it again when we're both ready to deal with it."

"What do you mean?"

He pulls me back to his side and looks down at me with eyes that I can easily get lost in. "Questions, questions, kitten." He smiles at me, pecks my lips, then licks softly into them. "You'll see. If all goes well, you'll see very, very soon. Just don't quit on this opportunity—promise me you won't."

“I...” I’m about to tell him I cannot promise this, but the look in his eyes gives me pause. He’s never looked that determined before. “I promise. But I don’t want—”

“She won’t be a part of it,” he assures me.



## *Ian*

We've been waiting for twenty-three minutes and I'm clutching the pen like a man too eager to put his signature on something. Though the truth is, I signed the minute I arrived. *Click, click, click.*

Mattias Wahlberg clears his throat, his eyes on my pen. I smile at him apologetically and place the pen back on the table. Across from us, Cordelia's lawyer, Aaron Goldberg, is seated, an odd-looking little man but a good lawyer. I hope he knows there's no way out of this one except to get this over with.

"Is she always this late?" Wahlberg asks me, tapping his watch and sighing.

I shrug. "There's no 'always' or 'usual' when it comes to Cordelia."

I don't know why it bothers him; I'm paying him by the hour. Unless he has reservations about today's proceedings.

"I trust we're all good for today?" I ask him. "This should be it, right?"

He hesitates and the lawyers exchange glances. Goldberg smooths down the sparse amount of hair on his otherwise bald head and readjusts the handkerchief in his jacket pocket.

"One can never be certain about these things," Mattias finally says, "but we have a good feeling about today. Assuming she turns up, of course."

Right. I lean back in my chair and take a deep breath. I need to relax.

The door swings open loudly and the three of us glance at the doorway.

Cordelia saunters into the office, taking her sweet time to close the door behind her. She's wearing an expensive-looking trouser suit, and I notice

diamond earrings twinkling through her lavishly coiffed hair.

She's always spent an obscene amount of money on her appearance, but I was always genuinely happy to give her everything she ever wanted. Her infidelity, however, is a flaw I refuse to overlook.

She takes a seat at the table, offering no word of apology for being late. I'm tempted to say something, but I know better and keep my mouth shut. I can feel her looking at me and I look back in silence.

"Oh, this is what it has come to, has it?" she huffs. "You can't even acknowledge me?"

I take a deep breath. I'm going to need all the self-control I can muster for this meeting.

"Thank you for finally joining us, Cordelia," I say. I give Wahlberg a look and he slides the paperwork across the table toward her and Goldberg.

"Mrs. Ford, everything is as previously agreed, but please take your time to read over it again and then sign... here." He indicates where to sign, and Cordelia purses her lips in anger.

"Mrs. Ford..." she mutters bitterly as she peruses the papers in front of her. "I suppose I'll have to get used to being called by my maiden name again soon."

"It's one of the conditions for granting you all of the assets that we are," Wahlberg responds indifferently, handing her a pen. "Mr. Ford would like his name back."

She takes the pen, frowning, the nib hovering inches from the page. She pauses and asks Goldberg if he's read it already. Goldberg nods at Cordelia, giving her the go-ahead.

But she puts down the pen and sighs, wiping an imaginary tear from her cheek. She looks up at me, her long lashes fluttering and her bottom lip quivering. Once upon a time I would have felt something. But her act no longer fools me.

She reaches out her hand to touch mine, but I pull away before she can.

“Ian,” she whispers, “please. I know you don’t really want this. We’re good together. We can try again. It’ll be different this time.”

“It’s too late, Cordelia. There’s nothing you can say to change my mind.”

“Maybe,” she retorts, regarding me in speculation. “But that doesn’t mean I have to agree to the divorce.”

My gut tightens in frustration and we glare at each other over the table. I knew deep down that she was going to fight until the end, and I just hope that whatever Wahlberg has up his sleeve will finally convince her.

“I know why you want this so much,” she continues, her eyes narrowed to slits of contempt. “It’s what your dumb little floozy wants, isn’t it?”

At the mention of Sara, I can’t help but feel my patience slip. “Leave her out of this,” I warn.

Wahlberg clears his throat loudly. “Let’s keep this civil,” he says to both of us in his usual monotone voice. I’m breathing deeply through my nose, trying to control my rage.

He turns to Cordelia. “If you really want to take this to court, by all means we can,” he says. “However, I can assure you it will be to your detriment, financially speaking. Mr. Ford’s offer is extremely generous, given the circumstances. And we have solid proof of your affair.”

“Proof?” she snorts. Her haughty sneer makes me want to throttle her. “Going through my credit card statements doesn’t prove anything. And if Barry wants to testify, I have ways of discouraging him.”

She’s drumming her long, manicured talons on the table, looking smug, but I know her better than that and I can tell she’s nervous.

“Technically, it’s not *your* credit card, is it?” Wahlberg cuts in, matter-of-factly. “But that’s irrelevant at this point.”

She raises her eyebrow at me and her voice softens. “Ian, we could forget

about all this silliness and go back to how we used to be. Summers in Europe, winters in the Caribbean. You can't deny what great times we had."

I shake my head. I have no idea what to say. She just doesn't get it. We're past the point of no return. There's no going back.

Wahlberg retrieves a large brown envelope from his briefcase and hands it to her without a word. We watch her closely as she opens it.

She pulls out the typewritten, signed note inside, then flicks through the pages, her eyes growing wide with horror. Barry provided us with tapes and images of their affair. And it's all in there.

"How did you...?" she starts, but her voice trails off and I can't help but feel disgusted.

I hadn't been keen on getting the written testimony from Barry, my accountant, but Wahlberg convinced me it was necessary. By the look on her face, he may have been right.

She's glowering at my lawyer, and at me, her face flushed with anger. He goes to take the envelope back from her, but she grabs it from him and starts ripping it to pieces in her fury.

"There's an additional note in the settlement," he tells her, pointing to a short paragraph at the bottom of the paperwork. "All copies of Barry's testimony will be destroyed, along with the video and photographs. As long as you sign."

"Was this your idea?" she practically spits at me. "I can't believe it's come to this, Ian. Really?"

Her eyes are pure thunder as she realizes her circumstances, and even I'm surprised at Wahlberg's rather bullish methods. But I'm beyond playing nice. I've tried that for the last year and it hasn't gotten us anywhere.

Cordelia glances at Goldberg, who pushes the pen back in her direction, knowing there's no way out of this.

She picks up the pen. I can hardly breathe as, at last, I watch her sign the goddamn divorce papers with an angry squiggle that almost tears the pages.

I wait for a final outburst from her, some spiteful insult or threat. But she composes herself remarkably quickly, dabbing at her damp cheeks with a tissue. Wahlberg takes out another set of papers. “The paperwork for the purchase of the business, as discussed.”

“You’re really putting what you have left into this?” Cordelia shoots me a shocked glance.

“It’s only money. I started with less than what I have now. I’ll make do.”

“I’m jealous.”

“I know. And I don’t care.”

She signs those papers as well and picks up her handbag, stuffed with shreds of the torn papers and envelope, and storms out of the office, slamming the door as she leaves.

Wahlberg looks at me, a satisfied smile on his face. Even Goldberg looks relieved.

I shake Wahlberg’s hand, thanking him, before I shake Goldberg’s hand and part ways.

And then I breathe. Long and deep, all the stress and anxiety and angst from the last year vanishing. I’m finally taking a good, clean breath again. Finally, free.

I expected to feel weightless. Like celebrating. And yes, there’s relief, a shit ton of it. But a part of me mourns what went down in there. It mourns the girl my ex-wife used to be, the guy I used to be. Because the people who signed the marriage contract years ago were so damn different than the ones who are stepping out of this building.

I tell myself I’m not going to let myself grow apart from the woman I love again. I tell myself I’m going to hang on tight to her and never let go. Because

one thing I learned from my marriage is that, even though you think love is enough to feed on, enough to hold a marriage together, it's not. Communication, understanding, patience, loyalty—that's the stuff that makes it last.

I regret that I didn't know this before I let my work consume me, and I let my wife's ambition consume *her*.

As I flag down the first cab I see, I smell that familiar perfume once more and turn to face Cordelia. She waited for me. *Fuck*. It's typical that she can't resist a final word, but nothing she says makes any difference now.

"So, you're going to go and play house with your new little strumpet?" she demands angrily.

"I might, if you hadn't tainted the word *house* for me."

"Fuck you, Ian."

"Back at you, Cordelia."

"She doesn't know what she's getting into. You're emotionally unavailable. Even to *me*, and I've known you for years. All you want is to work."

"Maybe. Because I actually cared about your happiness and your safety. But that's long gone."

I open the cab door for her and watch my ex-wife reluctantly board, shooting me a snotty glance that I can't care less about.

"Goodbye, Cordelia."

# BROADWAY

*Sara*

I'm dreading the appearance of the blonde bitch Ian married, but she's nowhere in sight as I change into my dancing shoes and stretch out next to my new colleagues on the stage. We're all waiting to be told what to do.

Everyone is shuffling around, commenting on how excited they are to have landed their respective roles. The sound of doors shutting causes me to raise my eyes to the far end of the auditorium. A tall, dark-haired man in a business suit is walking down the auditorium room steps.

My Suit is *here*?

I can't help but stand a little straighter, in an effort to hide the way my heart just went crazy in my chest.

Ian is here...

On his way forward, the directors greet him.

I arch my brows, confused.

"From the top," Ian calls as he glances up at us, taking a seat that one of the directors vacates for him.

I blink and shoot him a *what are you doing?* look, but run to take my place at the front of the dancers.

We take it from the top and perform the variation we practiced during audition. When the music stops, Ian whispers to one of the directors. "Take five," that director calls.

I climb down from the platform and approach while Ian comes to his feet in one fluid motion, the gleam of pride in his eyes making my thighs feel watery.

“Why are they following your orders?” I whisper-ask, coming to stand next to him.

He casually tugs on my ponytail. “I had to make some arrangements to be sure Cordelia was out of the picture—for good. Out of my life, and yours.”

“What?” I swallow, trying to register what he’s saying. I’m about to ask him to clarify, because this cannot mean what I’m thinking it means.

My delicious Workaholic has enough work on his plate with his own documentary and film production company. He couldn’t possibly have bought a Broadway one to boot. Could he have?

I’m shocked—shocked enough that my question comes out as a mere breath. “What did your ex want in exchange for selling you her production company?”

“Not much,” Ian says calmly, laughing silently at my complete astonishment. “She wanted me to let her keep my name.”

“You can’t!” I cry.

He raises one brow, tugging my ponytail one more time before letting it fall behind me.

I can’t help my stupid reaction. I’m so completely taken by this guy. Body, heart, soul. Even my mind he hijacks all the time. It’s inconvenient and impractical. But I’m in love. For the first time in my life. I love everything about this guy, even his name. His name that I one day want to be mine.

“I mean... imagine if you ever married again,” I try to explain to him. “There can’t be two Mrs. Fords, *three* including your Gran, walking around New York.”

“We can’t have that, can we?” He tsks softly.



A realization dawns on me. My new boss is... Ian? My Yummy Motherfucker?

“You said, Dancer, that you wouldn’t mind who your boss was, whether it was someone you hated or someone you cared for.”

I dip my head forward slowly in agreement, realization that Ian did this for me nearly shattering my brain. I’m mind-blown. I can’t believe someone would do something so huge in order to help me achieve my dreams. Both of them. The one about having a shot on Broadway, and the one of having a relationship with my Dirty Workaholic. “Thank you.”

“Thank *you*.”

“What for?” I ask.

Ian scrapes his chin as he thinks about it, tilting his head to one side as he regards me. “I suppose a girl I know would say it’s for recovering my... faith in the universe.”

“A girl you know.” A smile begins tugging at the corners of my mouth.

“The girl I’m deeply into.”

My heart somersaults. “How deep?”

“As deep as love goes.” He seizes my chin between his thumb and forefinger, tipping my face back. “The girl I’m in love with.”

My toes curl in my dancing shoes as his burning eyes hold me. My hand curls over his as he continues holding me by the chin. “She loves you, too.”

“She said as much before. But we were both not quite on all five, and I can’t get enough of hearing it anyway.” His low voice rasps over my skin, and the slight twitch of his lips makes me breathless.

I nod frantically up and down. “Hmm. She does. Since she gave you her panties in a little wad in your pocket. She’s so easy.”

“No, she’s not.” His lips curve to shape an utterly sexy smile. “But she’s mine.”

I confirm his words with another jerky nod, and suddenly I can't breathe beneath the intensity in his eyes.

"I'm free, Sara."

"You're free?"

"I'm free."

I exhale, my whole body shuddering happily. "What's the first thing you're going to do now?"

"Take you out to dinner. Then take you home and keep you."

One second he's a few feet away. The next he's lifting my face, kissing me slow, and so, so deep, like today is the end of the world. Or, maybe, the first day of a new one. Hands on my face, tongue invading, tasting. I'm a willing party to this celebration.

"I'm going to get you," I promise in his ear before I slap a kiss on him. "Don't you worry about that." I smile as he sets me to my feet and I head back to the platform, watching Ian discuss the show with the directors before he goes to the door.

He motions that he's leaving, and I blow him a kiss and get back to work.

This is the opportunity of my life, and I've got one gorgeous Suit to impress next time he stops by to watch me.

\* \* \*

"Thinking way, way into your future, Ford. Kids. How many?" I ask later that night as we discuss everything, from practice, to the company, to our possible future together.

Thankfully he doesn't seem to have trouble picturing such a distant future. Or maybe it's not that distant, after all. "Two. A boy and a girl." He shoots me

a look that asks, “You?”

“Two as well. Two girls,” I contradict, beaming. I’m so, so glad that he’s free.

“You know, you’re not really free,” I murmur against his mouth, unable to stop kissing him. “Because you’re mine, Ford.”

“That’s right, Dancer.”

We’re not in bed, because he got his piano in. We set it in the living room, and he played “Hall of Fame” for me. I listened, leaning over and watching his fingers. I smiled happily when he was done. Ian scooped me up and shifted me onto the top of the piano, wedging himself between my thighs. I kissed him, and I’m still kissing him now.

## *Ian*

I'm free. Free and in control of my life. Things with Sara are good. Hell, better than good. I'm a different man. Her roommate is getting married, and I've convinced my kitten to move in with me. I've already given her the extra key. I'm moving fast—but I know what I want. I'm not going to start pussyfooting about it now.

Now Sara is accompanying her roommate to look at wedding dresses, and she asked me to pick her up outside the store where they'll be getting measurements. I take a cab to the corner and as I step out and feel the ice-cold New York winter wind hit me, I push my hands into my pockets and start for the store. Feels like the world is right for a change.

I'm fucking high from how good I feel when I spot my woman's dark hair as she embraces a blond guy just at the corner of our meeting place. An icy claw rakes through my chest.

Sara looks up and spots me, and I don't break my stride, her smile swiftly morphing into a frown as she takes a look at me.

"Hey," I say, my eyes on the guy.

"Hey," Sara says cautiously.

I want to punch something. No. I want to punch *him*.

"This is Jensen. Jensen, this is Ian."

"Ahh," Jensen says. "The boyfriend." He smiles.

"And you are?" I ask, a little tightly.

"I'm her friend. Her *gay* friend. I wouldn't have offered that detail if you didn't look ready to pull my skin out with your teeth. I'd rather make it to my

date tonight. *Alive.*”

“Sorry.” I’m instantly apologetic.

He eyes me.

“You won’t ever meet someone as loyal as Sara. You think she just lets any guy in the way she’s let you?” He shakes his head. “First time, man.”

I rake my hand across my jaw. “Thanks, thanks for telling me.”

“Don’t mention it. I’m glad you’re together. She looks happy.”

I watch her. She’s irritated as I head over, putting my hand on the small of her back to lead her down the block to a restaurant where I made reservations for lunch.

“What was that?” Hell, she’s not just irritated. She’s pissed.

“I’m sorry.” I roll my eyes.

“What did you think, Ford? That I was out cheating ’cause I can’t get enough dick?” She glares, pushing at me and making me laugh over how pissed she is. “Seriously, even after the first time I met you, I couldn’t bear for any other guy to touch me because it wasn’t *you*. They paled in comparison to *you*.”

My smile fades, and I clench my jaw as I run my eyes over her features. I touch her, bringing her toward me by the shoulders even as she fights me a little. “I haven’t been with anyone since that night either,” I promise.

Her eyes glisten, and she finally willingly lets me reel her back to me. “So you care. You’ve cared since then.”

I cock one eyebrow. “You thought I didn’t?”

“If you cared, you’d trust me. Jesus.” She glares again, but there’s a smile on her lips as she curls against my chest to shield herself from the cold.

“It’s because I care that I’m paranoid as fuck. You think you’re the only one who feels vulnerable?”

She seems surprised.

I raise her hand to my lips and brush a kiss along her knuckles, giving them a little bite that I know she'll appreciate. "I'll learn to trust. You'll teach me how to trust again."

"Talking about things helps. And not putting any walls between us. *Ever*. Letting our feelings free."

I scoop her up by the ass, buzzing my nose over hers as I drop kisses on her sweet face, gruffly whispering, "I love you. It seems impossible that as the days go by, I love you more and more."

"It's not impossible because I'm in the same boat. Same love boat." She rolls her eyes as I drop her back to her feet. "Okay, bad joke."

Saying the L word as frequently as I do to Sara sometimes feels like a death sentence. But you'd never meet a happier dead man.

\* \* \*

That night, I can't sleep. Sara breathes evenly beside me, her body coated with sweat from the pounding I just gave her.

Fuck, she makes the most delicious sounds as she sleeps. Sounds I feel jealous over, protective over. Because they're sexual sounds. The little kitten is having a sex dream. And I want those sounds to come alive only for me.

I rub my hand down her spine, pulling her closer. She stirs in my arms, a sultry smile on her face as we lock gazes.

I run my eyes along her lips, drinking in the way she always wakes up and smiles at me when she finds me watching her.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Her voice is raw with sleep and definitely confused.

“I like the way you look, sweetheart. Can’t I look at what’s mine?” I stroke my hands down to her butt.

She nibbles her lip, looking like she might kiss me, her eyes gleaming in amusement.

“Are you thinking of sex, Ian?” she taunts me in a roughened whisper, stroking her fingers along my arm.

My body tightens. Hell, I’m at an odd, bewildered place where I’ll do anything she tells me. Jump in exchange for more touching. Do anything for more of Sara’s loving.

I groan. “Yes.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” Her devilish eyes glitter.

“Maybe I’m waiting for someone to wake me up from this hell of a wet dream I’ve landed on.”

“And if I’m not a dream?” she taunts quietly.

I drink in her pale neck, a simple gold necklace at her throat, her hair loose—damn, I love it loose ’cause I can grab it, smell it, wrap my fingers in it.

She’s breathing fast, looks wound up and ready to be loved, and a heat rises in me as if I were exclusively made to accommodate her.

We share a look.

“Then I keep you, kitten.” I bend down and grab her closer, squeezing her ass in my palms, our tongues twined.

That’s all I want. Everything.

I catch and draw her to me and when a gasp leaves her lips, I bend my head and take it, take that gasp, that mouth, the moan that follows, the girl who’s got me.

\* \* \*

That Saturday, it's Sara's big opening night. I've got the roses, twenty dozen of them, already waiting back home. I brought a dozen more to the theater and sit in the center front row, watching her dance her heart out in front of a crowd of thousands. I couldn't be prouder of her.

She nails it. Triple threat who can act, sing, and dance. Hell, in two hours she brings down the house. Gets a standing ovation. I'm the first one to stand, clapping like I've never clapped before.

My chest swells. My dick jerks. My whole body involved with my goddamn heart. It's like a helium balloon in my chest. I'm so full I could pop.

Up on the stage, Sara strides forward, grabbing her team's hands as they bow, the widest, fucking most edible smile dancing on her lips. All those practices. Every excruciating effort. Even the days soaking her muscles in a cold bath. Every hurdle has been worth it. Every challenge has been conquered. Every test passed.

I've seen the brightest and most talented stars on Broadway. I've even seen them in Hollywood. But nothing can hold a flame to Sara, who burns more brightly than anything I've ever seen.

When the curtains close for real now, I snatch the roses and a bottle of champagne and stride backstage.

I know what to expect. Photo ops for the paper. Hell, I can already see the reviews she'll get. *A new star is born on Broadway!*

Sara's in her dressing room when I rap on the door and push it open. She swivels around in her chair and our eyes meet. She's on her feet as I cross the room and she throws herself into my arms. I set the flowers and champagne aside and pull her in tighter.

I squeeze her, then toss her into the air, catching her by the waist only to plant a firm kiss on her mouth, both of us laughing.



“I’m proud of you, kitten. You slayed it tonight.”

“I know! I know! God, did you hear the crowd?”

“Baby, I was one of them.”

She squeaks and leaps up and down, and then quickly wipes the corners of her eyes and wraps her arms around my waist, pressing herself closer. “Oh my God, I can’t believe it. Thank you, Ian.” She grabs my face and presses her lips to mine, and they taste of her tears and I can’t get enough of her. I’ll never get enough of her.

# HOT WORKAHOLIC

*Sara*

It's six months later, and I'm getting the meal ready for dinner while Ian reads a script in the living room. We're having Bryn and Christos over. I've never really hosted a formal dinner, and I want to impress my man, our friends, and myself.

Turning off the oven to make sure the brisket doesn't overcook, I peer into the living room. Ian's dark head is bent, and he's got this cute, really hot and thoughtful look on his face. A hand covers half of his jaw, his lips unsmiling as his gaze scans the page.

I do a little pirouette in the living room, then leap into the air and land stealthily back on my feet. Like a cat.

Ian's gaze slowly rises to meet mine, and his lips begin to twitch. "Do that again. I missed it."

"No you didn't." I smirk and chassé forward, loving the way he looks at me, the way my Suit makes me feel.

"You'd say anything to get me to dance for you."

"That's right," he says, setting the script aside and sitting up on the couch.

I oblige and do a sexy turn and begin dancing for him, the most seductive dance I know. Every bone and muscle in my body hurts after dancing my ass off for the past six months straight, but nothing else matters except pleasing my man.

It doesn't hurt that I love it when he watches me dance.

It turns me on.

What can I say?

Come on, this guy lights me up so bad I sometimes can't sleep for fear of waking up and finding him gone.

"Okay, enough." I stop dancing, head over, and pull him to his feet, pecking him on the lips because I just can't help myself. "We have guests arriving soon. I'm doing my best to impress, but *you* still need to pick the wine."

He squeezes my ass and plants a kiss on my temple as he heads to the small wine fridge he set up by the bar. I hear Ian rummaging through the bottles, taking out one, inspecting the year, before sliding it back in and taking out another.

Getting busy, I plump up the pillows on the couch and straighten a photograph on a small side table. I drink in the image of us—our first photo together. It was a selfie, one we took randomly when we went out to dinner one night after I moved in, and it struck me that I didn't have a picture to put up in our new place. Which we'd just finished furnishing.

Insisting he come closer for a picture, Ian took a bite out of my earlobe as I snapped the image. My eyes widened and my mouth parted as I faced the camera. I looked like I was shocked that he'd ever bite me.

He's been the best partner I could have ever hoped for. He makes it a point to come home every day at 6 p.m. so that we can spend time together. We sometimes visit his Gran, or take a walk along the park. We sometimes hit up coffee shops, wine shops, or cafés—and have even found ourselves wandering down the bank of the Hudson, cuddling in the chilly air. He still loves to work, and I love his drive and determination. His ambition, too. So as long as he makes an effort to be with me, I have no complaints.

I know that relationships take effort. Ian Ford can be too much of a

perfectionist and a little too possessive sometimes. He's a territorial man. But still I love him. What can I say? This Suit turned my world upside down. Sometimes I think I left my heart in his pocket on the same day I gave him my panties in a tight little wad.

The sound of the doorbell pulls me out of my musings, and I jerk to attention when I realize Bryn and Christos have arrived.

"I'll get it," Ian calmly says when he sees the look of panic on my face.

I rush back to the kitchen to be sure the rosemary potatoes are still in the hot drawer where I left them. Then I thrust my hand into a glove and pull out the brisket from the oven. Setting it on the stove, I hear Bryn and Christos's voices as they walk inside.

I hurry around the kitchen, trying to make sure everything is perfect.

Bryn and Christos are married now. His ex-girlfriend came clean about some secret *dalliance* she and his brother Cole had been having, and after a shotgun wedding that made the news all across Manhattan, she's given birth to his little baby boy. The two lovebirds just left for their honeymoon, and Christos and Bryn are taking care of the baby until they return.

As I watch them come in with the baby in Bryn's arms, I can tell they're the happiest uncle and aunt there could be. Christos can't stop admiring both his wife and the baby, while Bryn coos at the handsome blond-haired little boy like she'd rather talk to the baby than anyone else in the room. Even when she sounds half stupid as she does it. I step out of the kitchen and cross the living room to greet them.

"Oh. Sara! Becka asked me to give you this." Bryn peers into her tote bag, and Christos murmurs to his wife, "I've got it," as he reaches in and pulls out a large paperback.

"Is this her book?" I glance at the book that Christos hands over, and my heart swells in pride when I read Becka's initials and last name on the cover.

"Here, hold him while I help Sara," Bryn tells her husband.

I carry Becka's book to the kitchen and set it aside while Bryn and I get everything ready to take out to the dining table. I can't help but suspect the obvious. This girl is dying for a baby, or the stork might already be on the way.

"You're pregnant," I say with a smirk. "If not, you soon will be. Look at that." I nudge her to look at Christos with the baby in his arms. I laugh. "Poop and diapers. Look at you, Bryn Christos."

"Don't laugh," Bryn warns.

My smile fades when I see Christos hand the baby over to Ian. He's frowning, as if he doesn't know what to do with the creature.

My heart melts, tumbles, burns. Ian looks up at me with an expression of confusion, as if he has no idea what he's doing holding a baby in his arms. Our gazes hold. My ovaries explode. *Nothing new*. My stomach clutches wantonly for my guy.

"Sara," he says, sounding fierce.

I laugh and shake my head. "I've got my hands full of snacks; I won't rescue you from that baby, Yummy."

"Sweetheart," he warns. "Help. *Now*."

I shake my head, smiling, but set the tray aside as Christos recovers the baby with a low, rumbly laugh.

I walk over to Ian, who's looking down at his hands as if they're infected.

"You look very handsome with a baby in your arms," I whisper.

"Don't get any ideas." He drags a hand restlessly along the back of his neck, but he's smiling. And I know that one day soon, we'll get there. He and I.

"I'm getting quite a few ideas." I bite my lip saucily.

He reaches out to grab the back of my skull and leans over. "You drive me crazy."

“That’s the point. My life mission.” I drop a kiss on his addictive mouth and scoop up the baby from Christos. Now I feel Ian looking at me and Bryn waggling her brows telling me, *maybe we’ll be pregnant together*.

I love testing Ford’s limits.

“I know what ideas. I’ve got a few of my own,” he murmurs huskily in my ear, leaning down to look at me with heavy-lidded, dark-lashed eyes, and the look he gives me as I hold the baby makes my toes curl, like they did after he watched me dance on opening night.

He’s still watching me oddly when we sit down to have dinner. Bryn sets up the baby in a stroller and the baby sort of dozes off to sleep while we talk about business, movies, Ian’s next film, House of Sass, and my Broadway show.

“So does Ian go and watch you dance every night or what?”

“Not *every* night,” I say, tongue in cheek. Because to be honest, he’s been there for almost every one—missing only a few performances when work got in the way.

I still remember opening night. Ian, along with the public, watched me dance my heart out. Ian received me at the end of the show with a townhome full of red roses. He kissed me and told me how proud he was of me.

He still looks at me like that every night he watches me perform; as if it’s the first time he’s watched me dance. He looks at me like a guy in love.

*I fucking love you, you fucking hot Suit*, I think, as our eyes meet.

Giving him a private smile and feeling flutters when he does the same, I carry the dessert plates to the kitchen and set them in the sink.

I spot Becka’s book and skim through the pages. It doesn’t take me even a minute to realize she’s writing something important. Something personal about her trip to New York.

Holy shit.

Is she in love?

Suddenly, I really want her to be.

Suddenly, I really want whoever this lucky guy is to respond to her in kind.

I've learned these past months that love can be lost at any moment, but it can also be found.

It can change and grow and shine and hurt, the way sometimes beauty hurts. But its mark is permanent.

Its power infinite.

You just need to open up and let it out, because when you open those doors, love can't help but come in.

DEAR READERS,

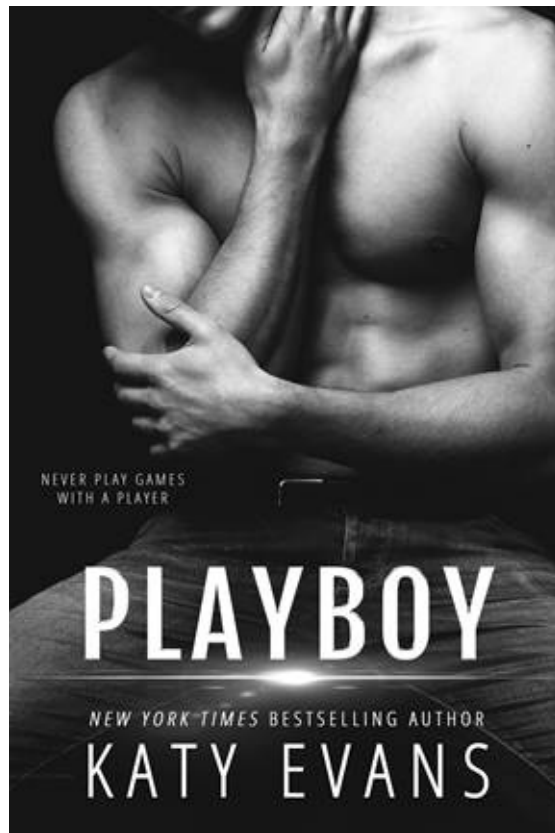
Thanks so much for picking up *Mogul*. I hope you enjoyed Ian and Sara's story as much as I did writing it. And most definitely, yes! Becca is next!

XOXO,

Katy



PRE-ORDER NOW! OUT JULY 29



**A brand new contemporary romance from  
*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*  
bestselling author Katy Evans.**

It started as a game.

We flirted. We played. Most importantly—we won.

Then I discovered who he was: Gambler. Famous playboy. Silver-eyed player who never plays to lose.

...And my best friend's soon-to-be brother in law, Cullen Carmichael.

He needed a good luck charm, I needed a distraction.

So we made a gamble and set off for Vegas—but pretty soon—I was in too deep.

My heart, soul, and body weren't supposed to be part of the deal.

But somewhere between big wins and long nights, my house of cards started to tumble.

What was this devil with those piercing eyes doing to me?

I'd given up on love, but the wicked, all-in Cullen Carmichael was upping the ante and wouldn't stop until he'd won it all.

# TITLES BY KATY EVANS

[TYCOON](#)

[MOGUL](#)

*White House series:*

[MR. PRESIDENT](#)

[COMMANDER IN CHIEF](#)

*Manwhore series:*

[MANWHORE](#)

[MANWHORE +1](#)

[MS. MANWHORE](#)

[LADIES' MAN](#)

WOMANIZER

*Real series:*

REAL

MINE

REMY

ROGUE

RIPPED

LEGEND

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although writing is a personal thing and sometimes quite a lonely profession, publishing is a whole other beast, and I couldn't do it without the help and support of my amazing team. I'm grateful to you all.

To my family, I love you!

Thank you Amy and everyone at Jane Rotrosen Agency!

Thank you to my editors, copy editors, proofer, and betas: CeCe, Lisa, Anita, Mara, Monica, Nina, and Kim.

Thank you Nina, Jenn, Shannon, and everyone at Social Butterfly PR...

Thank you Melissa,

Gel,

My fabulous audio publisher,

and my fabulous foreign publishers.

Special thanks to Sara at Okay Creations for the beautiful cover

and to Wong Sim and Mitchell Wick for the kickass image.

Thank you Julie for formatting,

to all of my bloggers for sharing and supporting my work—I value you more than words can say!

And readers—I'm truly blessed to have such an enthusiastic, cool crowd of people to share my books with. You are lit.

Katy

# ABOUT

*New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author Katy Evans is the author of the *Manwhore*, *Real*, and *White House* series. She lives with her husband, two kids, and their beloved dogs. To find out more about her or her books, visit her pages. She'd love to hear from you.

Website:

[www.katyevans.net](http://www.katyevans.net)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorKatyEvans>

Twitter:

[@authorkatyevans](https://twitter.com/authorkatyevans)

Sign up for Katy's newsletter:

<http://www.katyevans.net/newsletter/>

# COPYRIGHT

All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. The names, characters, incidents, and places are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or actual events is entirely coincidental.

The author acknowledges the trademark status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication/use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written consent from the publisher, except in the instance of quotes for reviews.

Copyright © 2018 by Katy Evans

Cover design by Sara Hansen at Okay Creations

Cover image: Wong Sim

Cover model: Mitchell Wick

Interior formatting by JT Formatting

ISBN-13: 978-0-9972636-9-5

ISBN-13: (print) 978-1986502115