

Sinfully... Seriously...

By:

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A night of rebellion...

She had seven shots of tequila. Seven shots of insanity. And she felt she has accomplished a great deal for herself in just one night. She loved the way she felt. She was tipsy, but she felt more like floating away. She has never known a more enjoyable night out. She didn't even imagine that it would be the night she went on her own. She felt that she was wearing a mask all the time... living someone else's life... stealing someone else's identity. If Justin didn't know her previously, she would have given him a different name.

"Thanks for the drinks." She told him. And then she turned to hail a cab. She didn't wait for him to ask for her number.

Fat chance! She thought. Guys like Justin Adams engage in flirtations for a moment and forget about the girl the next.

She doesn't want to make him to think that she was not immune to his charms. That she was expecting more than a sexy dance, or a hot kiss. She wanted to dump him before he dumps her.

"Hey." He called. "Need a lift?" He asked.

She stared at him and lifted a brow.

“In what?” She asked.

He pointed at his Ducati motorcycle.

“No thanks! I’m not too drunk. Have a great evening.” She said and turned away from him.

“Come on. It’s not like Mommy’s going to see you or something.” He teased.

It was the right joke to get her to do anything he wants her to do now. She stared at him coldly. God! Can he read her mind? He sounded like he knows exactly which buttons to push! Does he have a flaw at all?

She thought, this would be a perfect ending to her perfect rebellion. Dressing up wildly. Drinking bravely. Flirting sinfully. And riding freely.

Maraming Salamat:

Sam – for listening to my ideas and playing with your PSP to give me time to catch up on my writing (or the other way around.)

My parents – for all the support and the love (and for reminding me to print my novel in 6 x 9 size so it doesn't look like a coloring book.)

My sisters Kathie and KC – for the inspiration to move forward, and all the laughter (even though most of the time, we are laughing at me.)

My best friends Adrian, Karen and Chris – for enduring me after everything else (and not kicking me out of the circle of trust.)

For Ralph – for being like a real little brother (although you are not so little at all.)

For my foreign friends who translated some stuff for me:

Silvino – From Portugal

Hemendra – From India

Mo – From Jordan

Nick – From the US, who's known for his fluency in Spanish

It's so much easier to ask you guys than finding a dictionary.

The next Shisha will be my treat.

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*Heroina:**Latin. Etymology of the word: Heroine.*

Adrienne Miller smiled thoughtfully while sitting in her balcony. She has just finished unpacking her clothes and putting all her furniture in place. Her new apartment is clean and tidy and shows every bit of her personality. From every vase, to every painting and every jar. She just loved it.

She was very tired having spent the rest of day tidying up her new haven, but she was contented. She didn't ask the help of her friends in decorating. She has employed the services of an interior designer. She gave them a budget and a contemporary theme, and told them that she preferred the colors red, beige, white and brown. She preferred nature and abstract paintings, and elegant, silver and glass vases.

She was quite happy with the results. She intends to have her friends over in the next weeks and she was proud of the delivery of her interior designer. She paid her a fortune but she thought that she only need to do it once. And what is

an expensive apartment if it didn't look exactly the way you want it to?

Finally, she was able to mortgage her own place. It was not cheap but it was everything she ever wanted. The area is quite classy and it is just five blocks away from her office. It has a big balcony, where she has placed four steel chairs and a glass outdoor table. It's got a big living room, a mini bar, two big bedrooms, her own full bath, and walk-in closets.

It was enough for her. It was expensive for a two-bedroom apartment, but the moment her broker showed her this place, she knew this is where she would live. This is where she might be spending the rest of her life in. And as per her friends, this is where she will weary away her virgin years.

Yes. She was twenty-six years old and still a virgin. She just felt that the time is not right yet. She has a boyfriend. Although they have been together three years, they do not see each other every single day. For her, he was a wonderful guy. He was a gentleman. He never suggested they go to bed together and she was thankful, because she knew that when she does go to bed with a man, it would have to be an intense experience. Something she doesn't

want to forget for the rest of her life. So, the moment and the person had to be right. She wouldn't go to bed, just for the sake of losing her virginity.

Her boyfriend, Troy, is going to medical school with her older sister, Kimberly. His parents were friends of hers. They met at a party. He was cute but not really handsome with his blonde hair, and dark brown eyes. Her friends thought he was plain. She thought she didn't need a handsome boyfriend who will only fool around with prettier girls.

"Come on, Adrienne." Her best friend, Yuan, once told her. "You really should think better of yourself. I think there are better fishes in the ocean."

Her friends thought that Troy was too plain and too proper for her. They seem to believe that she deserves someone grander, someone with energy, and more importantly, someone with better looks and a sense of humor. Troy on the other hand, can't tell a joke and can't accept the simple deviations in human behavior. He doesn't even know that she smokes like at least a pack a day, and that's not even counting the times her boss breathes down her neck.

“He’s like the fireman who will always water your fire!” Her other best friend Jill said. “You have a wilder spirit than you’d like to think. Having a guy who puts a stopper to all these flair that you have will not help you spread your wings wider.”

But Troy was going to be a surgeon one day. Her parents were both doctors. And her sister is going to be one as well. She was the odd one out. So she figured, if you can’t be one, then marry one. And her mother was perfectly happy with her relationship with Troy. As far as she can remember, it was the only time she made her happy.

She had a broken relationship with her mother. She never remembered having her love. She grew up with a mother who always takes the side of her elder sister. She grew up trying her best to win her over... even for just once.

But she never did. Not even when she got into the best schools in the country. Not even when she graduated with honors. Her mother said... oh right, she said, “It’s not a difficult course.” She has a double degree in journalism and mass communications. She had a talent for writing. She was the only one in her family that has the knack for it. Her sister couldn’t put together a paragraph together. Her

mother couldn't understand the context of metaphors. She thinks that her father barely has a sense of humor.

Her mother was excited to introduce Kimberly to Troy at that party. But it was she who took home the trophy. She didn't even know what she did. She just stood there, looking bored. But Troy couldn't seem to take his eyes off her. He tried to strike a conversation with her. He tried medical terms, she didn't know any. He tried sports, she doesn't play one. Then he mentioned CSI. *Ahh...* they have something in common. But while she dwelt on the action and he dwelt on the technicality of the show. He said that some scenes and findings showed there seemed too sophisticated to happen in real life. Her first reaction was *Duh! You think too much!* Her impression of him is that, he's a dork, a nerd, who thinks he is above everybody intellectually, and he has the need to prove it all the time, in every conversation and every topic he discusses with strangers. She bit her tongue to keep herself from retorting, *That's why it's a television drama, not a reality show*, in front of her mother.

Her mother must have really liked Troy, that it doesn't matter which daughter he asks out. At first, she didn't know what her mother saw in him. But she was too bent

up on pleasing her that soon, she found herself enjoying Troy's company. She did love him. She wasn't sure it was really what she wanted but she didn't have a boyfriend before and she was happy to indulge in his attentions.

Since she worked in New York, she doesn't see much of Troy. They often talk on the phone, but they only see each other once a month, sometimes, once in two months. Adrienne was looking for that feeling inside her that says she couldn't stand a minute without him by her side. That thrilling feeling that she was supposed to feel when he is in New York for break or when she comes home and knows that he will be in town too, so she could see him, get her hands on him, get his hands on her... but it wasn't there. No wonder she's still a virgin. And she realized, maybe she just isn't like Jill or other girls she has met, who were enjoying sex and sleeping with men on the second date. Maybe she is old-fashioned and would rather wait and save herself for the right man at the right time. Her friends may think this is hypocrisy, or sour-grapping. But what can she do? She is dead curious about sex. But she would rather explore it when the time is right. And the all-too-formal dinner dates she had with Troy, coupled with series of boring medical terms, which sometimes includes topics such as HIV and abortion, just *don't* set the perfect mood

to bring up going to bed together! And she'll be damned if she ever makes the first move.

She sighed. She realized that there is much more she could do with her life. There is much more that she wants to do with it. Getting this fancy apartment is the first step in asserting her independence and exploring on what *she* wanted to do for herself.

Troy doesn't exactly worship the land she steps on. He doesn't approve of her job. For him, it is too dull to be called a profession. But she loves her job, and she reckons that she is good at it. For Troy, on the other hand, writing falls short of what he can consider a real job.

She shook her head. She was happy ten minutes ago. Now, she thought about Troy and her mother. Even if she showed them the place she is living in now, they would most likely not approve of her independence. For her mother, having a place as grand as this, will be a waste. She doesn't exactly approve of New York, either. She thought it was too temporary. And if one is thinking of having a family, New York is not really an option.

She looked at the balcony beside her. She hasn't met her neighbors yet.

Her balcony is huge. It extends from her living room to her bedroom. She is sharing a bedroom wall with her neighbor. Not only that, her bedroom window is parallel to his and there's a huge platform connecting them. She figured, she needs to keep her windows locked all the time. Otherwise, if she got a rapist neighbor or a serial killer, she's too easy a prey! She wasn't happy about it at first. She thought that was the only thing that she didn't like in this apartment.

But she is hoping her neighbors will be nice. She always thought it would be great to invite and be invited over for dinners. It is always good to feel at home even when you just stepped into the lobby or elevator of your building.

She scanned the steel chairs and glass table on the balcony beside hers. It is almost the same as hers. Good to know that she and her neighbor had the same taste. Only theirs were steel black. Hers was white. She noticed an abandoned bottle of Heineken and an ashtray half full of cigarette butts.

She guesses that her neighbor was not a family. Therefore, no kids. No babies. Not that she doesn't like kids. It's just that it's good to know that no one will complain if she holds parties or let her friends sleepover and Yuan decided to play *Betty Davies Eyes* over and over again.

She put out her cigarette butt and went to her room. She has just taken one step into her room when she caught something out of the corner of her eye.

Her neighbor went out. She was staring at a perfectly and gorgeously tanned torso with the perfect set of abs. His body was muscular, but they weren't bulging. He's got perfectly toned slender arms. He was staring at the New York city view, with a cigarette on hand. He was wearing only a pair of faded jeans. His hair was jet black and even from afar, she can see that his eyes were framed by long dark lashes.

Her breath caught in her throat.

It can't be! She knew him. He was... the city's most wanted. The most notorious playboy, so to speak.

Justin Adams.

He was the prodigal heir of Adams Industries. Her father was a steel and mining magnate. Their family is filthy rich but instead of living in the shadows of his father, he was determined to draw his own map, his own future. He graduated with a double degree in Harvard, straight As, but made his father quite mad when he announced that he will not work for their company right away. Not only that, he spent a lot of working on his hobby, which is photography.

He works as a freelance photographer for the magazine she is working for. That is how she knew him. He was a celebrity in Blush. There is not a single girl in her office who do not drool on him... well maybe just her.

She finds him intriguing, yes. But she doesn't understand what the fuss was really about. She thought those girls were overreacting. Even her best friend Jill can't stop talking about him... like he is God's gift to women... or finally there was one guy worthy of being called one.

As she stared at his profile, she drew a deep breath.

Okay. He really isn't bad. No! She mustn't kid herself. He is as handsome as the devil himself. Although, she can't

really say for sure without looking through his eyes, which were always covered by a pair of pitch black shades. But right now, staring at his profile alone, along with the toned muscles and the perfect set of abs... she thought that the fuss could actually be worth it after all.

She shook her head. She didn't go out of the terrace. Instead, she pulled a chair near the side of her sliding door, so she could have a view of him without him seeing her. She watched him thoughtfully. He just stood there. Made some calls for a while. He looked quite serious although she couldn't hear what he was saying. Then he lighted a cigarette and just stared at the view thoughtfully... the same thing that she was doing fifteen minutes ago. After a few minutes, he put out his light and went inside his room. She looked over her window to see him go inside. He put on a white shirt, grabbed his leather jacket and then went off.

She smiled to herself.

She thought she's going to love her apartment even more.

* * *

She was rushing through a deadline Monday evening. Jada, her boss was on her back. She was making an article about a newly-opened restaurant in Fifth avenue. The food was not so great, and the price was not so cheap. The service was a bit unorganized. She ordered for piñacolada, and twice she was given margarita.

She doesn't want to be known around the block as a bitch who can shut down a decent restaurant, but she doesn't want to compromise her professional point of view as well.

She couldn't concentrate on her work. The music from her neighbor's house was far too loud, and the fact that *he* was on the balcony, playing poker with his friends, and she can hear him laugh makes it even harder for her.

She sighed, and went out to the balcony and lighted a stick of slim lights. She noticed that they fell silent. She felt self-conscious. She took a deep breath. She's a confident woman, and she has a boyfriend. Just because she thinks Manhattan's rakes are surveying her long legs and her figure is not a reason for her knees to go jelly.

Plus, she is dire need of a cigarette, and she doesn't want to smoke inside her apartment.

Her mobile phone rang.

Thank God! She is also in dire need of a distraction now.

“Hi honey, how are you?” It was Troy.

“I’m good...” She replied.

“What?”

Damn it!

“I’m good. I said I’m good. How about you? How are you?”

“Not too bad. I was out with Kim last night. She is my designated tutor now.” He chuckled.

“She’ll be happy to help you. My mom likes you.”

“And I’m a lucky guy, aren’t I?”

“Hmmm...”

Troy went on about his study date with her sister and she couldn't quite concentrate on what he is saying. She's hearing medical terms, and she doesn't need to know them. She's got too much on her head... the awful food and restaurant, whose existence she was about to end in a few hours, and *damn!* She can't seem to get a dark-haired devil out her mind.

She groaned.

"What?" Troy asked. "What are you doing? Are you with someone else?"

"No. I'm alone!" She said. She must have sounded too defensive, because Troy didn't believe her... and she wasn't even lying.

"Then you must be going out of your mind! Don't take me for a fool, Adrienne." He said sharply.

"I'm not with someone, Troy. Please, give me a break. I just remembered this restaurant I was about to close down in a few hours because of an awful review I am thinking of writing and I didn't want to do that. That's why I groaned."

Troy fell silent for a few minutes. Then he said, "Are you sure?"

She sighed. Then she put out her cigarette and managed to walk to her living room.

Now, that she knows no one can see her, she found her focus.

"Yes, I'm sure. Come on. Why do you always think I would cheat on you?"

It is true. She always felt that Troy doesn't trust her enough. Like he didn't know he was her first and only real relationship. Like he didn't know she didn't sleep around in college, and she was nobody's groupie. When she was out with her friends and he can hear the background music, he would always ask her who she was out with, short of asking Jill and Yuan too to swear on dead relatives' graves that there were only the three of them.

At first, she thought it was pretty sweet that he shows her that he can be jealous and possessive of her because he wanted her only for himself. But recently, it is becoming

too much for her to handle. She had to explain every single thing and make headcounts of friends she go out with.

“It’s not that... it’s just... I don’t know. Let’s just drop it.” He said. And then he went on with his medical monologue. She thought she fell asleep on her couch listening to him.

Then finally, he said goodbye.

“Love you, hon.” He said.

“Love you too.” She replied, and somehow, she asked herself if she still meant it.

At the end of the night, she managed to write a not-so-bad review of the place. She highlighted their strengths, the great ambiance and the expensive china, but also mentioned that they could do better to be less angry with spices and salt and a smile on the waiters could raise the tips. She was proud of herself knowing that she has accomplished all that amidst Collective Soul’s whining in Justin Adams’s bedroom.

The next day, she had lunch with her best friends. Yuan works on the building next to hers and Jill's, and all of them work on flexi-time, so it was quite easy for them to get together for lunch and coffee breaks.

"How was Troy?" Jill asked Adrienne.

She shrugged. "Having study dates with Kim."

Jill raised her brow.

"They deserve each other you know." Yuan said blatantly.

"Yuan!" Jill hissed.

"What?" He asked nonchalantly. "They are both boring. Come on, Yen. It's not that I want you to be jealous or hurt. It's just that I think you deserve a more exciting lovelife than seeing your boyfriend twice every quarter and hearing him sing your sister praises! You have been keeping up with this for three years and it's not good for you."

"I can't say I don't agree with you, Yuan. I mean, come on, Yen! You deserve to have more life! Why don't we get to that makeover thing! You could use more makeup and

clothes hotter than your square pants! And for God's sake! These are reading glasses!" Jill said flicking on her eyeglasses.

"Ouch!" She said irritably. Somehow, her friends have this illusion that she can be hot and she has a face of a goddess.

Adrienne doesn't think she is ugly, but she doesn't think she is fabulous either. She's got dark brown hair with some red highlights and green eyes. She is slim and slender. She does take pride in her curves. Somehow, she doesn't have to go through the ordeal of dieting and exercising on a strict schedule. She's never been overweight. She's never too thin either. She was well-endowed, according to her friends, but for her, her breasts were just the right size. Not small, and not too big either. But she never thought herself to look above the ordinary. She found no reason to flaunt her features. According to her mother, Kimberly was a beauty. She, on the other hand:

"Well... Adrienne is not ugly. But Kim is the beauty and the brains in the family." These were her mother's exact words.

If your own mother can't think you are beautiful, who else will? She was glad that she got Troy's attention though. And this made her mother extremely proud of her. Maybe that is why no matter how her friends tell her to drop Troy, she just can't bring herself to do so. He could be the only achievement she's ever had, as far as her mother was concerned.

"By the way guys, I saw Justin Adams in the office this morning. What a snob that guy is! I was trying to look him in the eye as we pass each other in the hallway, and it's like he didn't see me at all. But God! Was he devastating!"

"How could you look him in the eye, when he always had those pair of shades on?" Adrienne asked her matter-of-factly.

Yuan chuckled to Jill's dismay. Adrienne smiled. "I'm not... I'm sorry. Do go on with your story. I was just being a brat."

"There's nothing more to it. I'm just saying that I saw him this morning. That's it."

“Don’t try to catch that guy’s attention. You can faint all you want in front of him, and I don’t care he’ll have a care for us mere mortals.” Adrienne said.

She tried to tell her friends that Justin Adams lived across her, but then she decided not to. She didn’t know why exactly. But somehow, she remembered how excited she has been to go home just so she could prepare some nachos while she sit on her spot in her room, just beside the sliding door, when she can watch Justin in the balcony smoking, doing nothing but stare at their New York view.

She has been doing that for a couple of days now. She doesn’t know why she found it exciting. She sounded like a lunatic! But it is not everyday that she does something out of the ordinary. Something exciting and out of the propriety.

Justin sleeps until twelve noon time on weekends. On weekdays, she finds him busy on his cellphone long before she was up. He will be in when she comes home by seven in the evening, sometimes he has his buddies in his place, playing poker or just simply drinking and smoking in his balcony. Oftentimes, he will be out by nine in the evening, and there were times she would read a book until he comes

home around one in the morning, sometimes later than that. He would smoke in his balcony, take a shower and go to bed. He takes a shower more than three times a day. She knows because she often sees him parading around his bedroom with just a towel wrapped around his waist. Then she would see him in his balcony with his hair still wet from the shower.

She smiled in her desk. She stared at her laptop and decided typing. Soon she found herself composing a plot. She drew a picture of him with words. Her rebel was a dark-haired knight, who was a duke banished himself from his inheritance and his legacy to escape the gallows of his monopolizing father. Her heroine was a red-haired princess, the second daughter of a king to a maid, with an evil queen stepmother and charming but vile stepsister.

She juggled between writing her novel and writing the work stuff. She was progressing on her novel even during office hours, she even missed the coffee breaks she usually have with Jill and the other girls in the office. She figured, she can do away with more Justin Adams talks. All the information she needs about him for now is a balcony away from her at home.

She was in Chapter Three. By then, her raven-haired rebel had already met each other for the first time, in a ball they both went to, where her Princess disguised herself as a lady's companion of her dear friend.

She sighed. Her eyes were tired but her mind was still reeling with words to add to her novel. She decided to stretch out a bit and stood up from her seat. Her eyes caught a dark-haired figure walking in the aisles towards to Jada's room. He was wearing a pair of Oakley shades and a leather jacket. For a while, she thought he looked her way and an eyebrow shot up. She blinked and when she looked again, he disappeared into Jada's room.

She took a deep breath. She must be out of her mind. The last thing she wants is to be obsessed with a guy who is already being obsessed about by half of Manhattan.

She continued to work on her novel when she went home. All the while, she is sitting beside her sliding door, looking over at Justin's balcony, watching him. He was inspiring her writing. She has molded her character perfectly in his image.

“How come Justin Adams doesn’t have a girlfriend?” She asked her friends when they had coffee later that night.

Jill shrugged. “He’s too snob.”

“I think he thinks no one is worthy of him. One must be royalty first.” Yuan said.

Adrienne raised her brow. “What is he doing in New York then? He must go to England if he wanted to meet some royal girl.”

“Well, we know he is constantly available. He’s dating around. He has been seen with models, and some members of the elite class. His name won’t be linked with these girls for more than two weeks. He would then walk out. He would be gone. After two weeks, he’ll be seen with another woman of higher class and the same will happen.”

“He is a playboy. He can’t commit. Like he dumps all these women after two or three dates. Then he would move on to the higher mortals.” Jill said.

Adrienne sighed. In her mind, she thought about her novel.

“Maybe that is why he was known to be as a rake. He doesn’t commit. And yet we know he doesn’t go without a woman for long. He just... drops them so soon.” She said.

“Well, you know he’s the ultimate commitment-freak!”

“But he won’t stay uncommitted for long. Guys like Justin Adams must already have been engaged to someone by his father. Maybe that’s the reason why he doesn’t want to go back to his family.”

An idea formulated in Adrienne’s mind. Her dark-haired knight would have a betrothed somewhere that her heroine wouldn’t know about. That would present a very interesting conflict in her novel.

She smiled at the thought.

“She must be royalty or an heiress. These would be the type of girls his father would have in mind for him.” Jill said.

Her heroine’s stepsister! Adrienne’s smile went wider. She can’t wait to go home and start writing again.

They went home around twelve midnight. She got inside the elevator and pressed her floor number. The door closed and after a split second, it opened again. She sighed in annoyance. Just then, a dark-haired guy entered the elevator. Her breath caught in her throat.

He smelled of aftershave. Musciline and fresh. He was still wearing those damn shades! She wanted to know what the color of his eyes are. She has drawn out his character in her book, and left out her rebel's eye color. She pushed her glasses up her nose. He was a snob. She must be a fool if she thought that for a moment he looked at her in Blush.

After two weeks of seeming like a stalker of Justin Adams, she was halfway through her novel. She found time to make it through her articles.

She was in the middle of a conflict between her rebel and her heroine when she got a call from Jada.

She rolled her eyes.

"Can you come to my office, darling?" Jada asked sweetly.

She groaned as she stood up her seat.

What does the Devil in Prada want now? She thought.

“What is it?” She asked her as soon as she stepped into her boss’s room.

She handed her a ticket.

Gypsies: An enlightening. Come join us in our grand opening.

“What is this?”

“A new trance or whatever bar. They are opening tonight. I want you to check it out. Since you are our events and features editor, and I can’t possibly go, darling. Unless I can salsa in there.”

“And you think I would enjoy going to a trance bar?” She asked. She looked down at the one ticket in her hand.

Exclusive Gathering. It says.

“And I have to go alone?” She asked more irately.

Jada raised her brow. “Well, that is all the ticket I can get.”

“Or this is all that is left?” She asked under her breath.

“What is it, darling?”

She shook her head. “You don’t expect me to dance, do you?” She asked.

Jada shrugged her long straight hair off her shoulder. “Well, I expect you to say something about the bar, the drinks, the crowd, the music and the dancefloor.”

“You mean, I will dance alone since you only gave me one ticket and I cannot purchase another one for one of my friends to join me because the event is exclusive for invitees only. So you’re telling me, that I need to say something about how the music sounds from the dance floor, and how glaring or discreet the spot lights can be if one wants to make out in the middle or corner of it, and for me to be able give a professionally accurate opinion in my review, I have to dance... alone?”

“You will if you have to.” She said.

Adrienne rolled her eyes and turned her back on her boss.

“And Adrienne dear.” Jada called.

The thing about Jada is that she can be a bitch to the other employees, but Adrienne has her ways with her. Jada needs her more than anybody else, since she is the only one she trusts enough to come to the meetings, appointments and interviews that Jada should be doing herself.

Adrienne let out a sigh before turning around to face Jada again.

“Yes?” She asked.

“If you will dress up tonight the way you usually do, you *will* be dancing alone.”

Her brows shot up and then she looked at herself. She was wearing a beige square pants and black turtleneck. Her hair was tied up in a ponytail and she was still wearing her reading glasses.

“What type of bar is this anyway? I’m not going to a strip bar, am I?” She asked irritably.

Jada let out a sultry laugh. “No, darling, no. I will have Jacob send something for you to wear tonight.”

“It’s really not necessary.” She said.

Jada shook her head. “Come on, Adrienne, darling. I don’t want you to look like you just went there to write an article about them. I want you to blend. Trust Jacob’s taste darling.”

She rolled her eyes again and dashed out of Jada’s office, shaking her head. In her haste, she ran straight into a hard surface that smelled familiarly masculine and fresh.

“Hey, easy.” He said, and she felt a strong pair of arms wrap around her waist to balance her.

She stared up and found herself staring at a devastatingly handsome face that made her knees instantly turn to jelly. Good thing, he was still holding her. Otherwise, she knew she would have collapsed on the floor.

His brows shot up and his lip was half-curved in amusement. That brought her back to reality.

“Sorry.” She said curtly and then she pulled away from him and walked towards her desk.

She was thankful that she could still walk a straight line. She was shaking and she realized that all her nerves have spun back to life the moment her body touched his and his arms went around her.

She didn’t look back. Had she done so, she would have seen that he followed her with his eyes, smiling sheepishly before he shook his head slowly and then entered Jada’s room.

2

Cimarrón

Spanish. Meaning Wild or Untamed.

“Hi Adrienne, this is mother.” Her Mom said on the other end of the line.

“Hi Mom. How are you?” She asked cheerfully. Everytime she gets a call from her mother, she tries her best to sound most cheerful. It was a defense mechanism probably, because she always feel glum after she puts the phone down.

“Wonderful, Darling! Wonderful! Kimmy just got into Massachusetts General. And you know it isn’t easy. You have to be very smart and very good to be accepted there. She got in! I am so proud of your sister.” She said.

“That’s good for her. That will be nice credential for her.” She agreed.

“Yes. But I am worried about you, Adrienne. Kimmy I know I didn’t have to worry much about. She’s got everything going for her. I know she will be successful wherever she goes. But what about you? Are you not rethinking the career path you took? I mean, you can write anywhere, anytime, but to make a career out of it... it’s not really a cash cow.”

She sighed. She has been in this conversation before. In fact, she has always been in this conversation whenever she talked to her mother.

“Just because Kimmy is the smart one in the family doesn’t mean you have to give up your hopes of making it big in the future too. You could start as a secretary of a big firm. Or you could look into broadcasting.”

Again Adrienne fell silent.

“Everytime my friends ask me what you do, I can’t tell them that you were scouting around New York for restaurants and bars, and making an essay, being paid per word for it.”

“Mom, I’m doing fine. And I am not being paid per word in my job. In fact, I think I’m earning well enough.” She

defended. She loves what she does and she has always been proud of her job. However, her parents never saw that. For them, her writing for the magazine is not a career. If it is, then it isn't a good one to start with.

"You have just bought yourself a fancy apartment you said? Who knows? Your career is not stable. You might not be able to afford that next month if your subscription went down. I am not saying that you are not good at what you do? But I can't just seem to think what you are going to be in ten years. You are not even working for a newspaper. It's a magazine! You have to pray that there will be enough vain and brainless women in Manhattan so you can keep your job. And I can't particularly be proud of that in front of Troy's parents. I mean, if you had something going for you like Kimmy does, I wouldn't be embarrassed towards my future in-laws."

"Mom, I need to go. I am running late for a... meeting." She said.

"Alright, dear. It was nice talking to you. Call Kimmy one of these days. Congratulate her for her. And I'm sure Troy will get a into a good hospital as well since he is spending

time with Kimberly a lot. Kimmy will give him a lot of pointers. Alright. Goodbye.”

She cried when she hung up the phone. She felt that she has been trying all her life to win an affection and respect from her mother. And she still hasn’t managed to get any. She felt that no matter how hard she tries, she will never be as pretty and as successful as Kimberly.

She dialed Troy’s number.

“Hi, Yen. Have you heard the news? Kimberly just got into Massachusetts General. That is so wonderful! I am so proud of her.”

“Yeah, I heard.” She said glumly.

“My parents were so surprised. They didn’t know how smart she really is until now. They kept telling me what a lucky guy her boyfriend is going to be.”

She took a sharp breath. She didn’t know whether she is feeling jealousy or shame. After a few seconds, she decided that it is jealousy she is feeling.

“Troy, do you wish that she was your girlfriend instead of me?”

Troy didn't answer for a while.

Ooopppsss! It's not a good time to take a deep breath and think, is it, Troy?

“What are you talking about, Adrienne? Are you jealous of Kimberly? Is it because she's getting a lot of attention and you are not? If you are, then don't let it out on me! It's not my fault that your sister is doing great in med school and that she might have a better career than you! What are all these questions about, anyway?”

“I'm just asking, Troy. I just don't particularly feel that you see the best in me!” She argued.

“What is there to see?” He said blatantly. “I love you. But if you want my honesty, yes, I am not particularly proud of your chosen career. And I think you could do better. Alright? I'll talk to you when you're in the proper frame of mind.”

Then, he hung up.

Adrienne stood there for a while, crying. She wanted to hurl the cordless phone across her living room.

She felt that nobody appreciates her, and yet she has done nothing but try her best to please them. She has been goody-two-shoes because she thought that would make her mother proud. Because she thought that is what Kimberly is going to do.

Troy was her boyfriend because it made her mother happy. Now, standing there in the middle of her living room, she began to ask herself, did she really agree to go out with Troy because she found him interesting and funny and nice? Is he her type of guy in the first place? Does he make her happy the way she deserved to be? Or was he her boyfriend because he fits the whole make-your-mama-proud charade that she has been keeping up with for more than a decade of her life?

Now, she realized that she never did anything much to make *herself* happy. She was always looking out after other people's happiness. People who seemed like they do not give a shilling about what pleases her. All her efforts seemed futile though.

She look at herself in the mirror. She was dressed in a pair of skintight jeans and a white Sabrina blouse. She tied her hair in a ponytail. Her glasses were tear-stained.

She didn't wear what she brought home from work. Jacob arranged for something for her to wear to Gypsys. He took it from the collection of expensive clothes they use for their photo shoots.

She took off her pants and her blouse. She opened the box that Jacob gave her. She took a pair of black Armani skirt. It hugged her hips to perfection. It fell six inches above her knees and highlighted her long legs. Jacob packed in a red halter top for her. It clings to her body through five narrow strings. One is tied around her neck and the other four crisscrossed on her back. She didn't wear any bra. The blouse didn't allow it. She put on a pair of boots that goes all the way up under her knees. She stared at herself. She looked different. She had to admit that Jacob has flair. She looked hot as hell. She got rid of her pony tail and combed her long straight hair. She put on black eye shadow and mascara. She accented her high cheekbones with a rosy pink blush and put on red lipstick. She took the big white gold hoop earrings and the glittery bracelet and matching

necklace with a long dangling pendant that Jacob arranged with the outfit.

When she was done, she smiled at herself. She looked like a she-devil out to hunt for blood. She looked hot and for the first time, she felt beautiful. She placed some bills, her phone and credit card in the glittery red purse that Jacob sent along with the rest of her costume.

She hailed a cab and went to Gypsys. She decided that she doesn't care anymore. She has tried her best and so far her mother and Troy have never looked at her differently. She will never be as great as Kimberly, and they will never respect her as much as they respect her, so why die trying? For now, she want to feel free. She wants to do something adventurous for herself. She knew that she had spirit when she was in her teens. Her mother was quick to water the fire in her. Now, she wants that spirit inside her and will it to come out. Even for just one night.

She decided she doesn't want to be prim and proper just for tonight. She wanted to explore. Be free. Be wild! She decided to unleash the spirit she had that is screaming to be free. She doesn't want her mother screaming in her ears telling her that she should be like her sister. She doesn't

want her boyfriend to tell her that she is nothing like her sister.

She went to Gypsys on a mission. She silently thanked Jada for insisting she wear something daring. She wanted to kiss Jacob for knowing the perfect timing and the perfect outfit.

She danced, she drank. She didn't care that she was alone. She felt free. She felt beautiful. She is not just doing this to come up with the perfect article for Gypsy's grand opening. She is doing this for herself.

Just when she was ordering her third tequila shot, a handsome guy paid for it at the counter saying, *"I didn't know you were a tequila type."*

Her eyes went wide. She knows him. In fact, she felt that she knew him well somehow. And now, he doesn't have his shades on. She saw instantly that his eyes were crystal blue. Just like she thought they should be.

"I'm not." She said nonchalantly.

"What happened to your eyeglasses?" He asked coolly.

Her eyebrow shot up. "Excuse me? Do we know each other?" She asked him pretending that she has never seen him before in her entire life.

His lips curved in a half-smile. He extended his hand, "Justin Adams. You almost crushed me this afternoon when you were going out of your boss's office."

She just stared at his extended hand. "Nice to meet you Justin Adams." She said and turned away to drink her tequila straight up. She felt the world shake a bit, but she was too proud to show it. It was her first tequila trip and she doesn't want to make a fool of herself in front of Justin Adams.

He pulled back his hand and motioned the waiter to get him a beer. Amusement was all over his face.

"Nice to meet you too, Adrienne Miller." He said without looking at her.

She stared at him in disbelief. *He knew her name!*

"Excuse me! How do you know my name?" She asked.

He turned to her with a feigned bemused look on his face. “One. I like your name. Two. You were the snobbest girl in Blush. Three. You’re my new next door neighbor, who never had visitors, never watches TV, never played loud music in the house, least of all dance across her living room, and turns off her lights at exactly 10PM.”

She was shocked! Now, she felt like *she* was being stalked! By the most eligible bachelor a.k.a the most notorious rake of New York, no less! Does he know that she was watching him all the time? Has he seen her?

I would die if he did! She thought, thankful that she already felt tipsy and could already be having a pinkish complexion due to the tequila that he wouldn’t be able to tell that she was blushing to death.

He had his eyebrows raised, in pure amusement. She could see that his eyes were dancing in laughter.

“Oh yeah! You’re that guy who always parties at your house, turns on your plasma and home theater so loud as if you were the only tenant in the building, and when your house is quiet, it means poker night, and I cannot tell

exactly when your lights will be on or off!" She said squarely.

"See? So you do know me." He smiled smugly.

"Hardly!" She said irritably.

He took one gulp of his beer.

"Wanna dance?" He asked.

She almost gasped. He introduced himself to her, told her what he knows about her, so far, they have exchanged more than ten sentences to each other and now, he is asking her to dance!

She raised a brow at him, then she stood up from her seat and went to the dance floor.

He followed her. She smiled to herself and thought that her night of freedom couldn't be more exciting. What could be a better addition to her rebellion than flirting with the city's most eligible, most sought-after, and most notorious bachelor?

Their dance went sexier. There was no need for words. Before she knew it, she had her arms around his neck and her body close to him the way it had never been close to any stranger before, except earlier that afternoon when she bumped into him.

She was drunk and practically throwing herself at him. He put his own hands in her naked back and she could barely contain electrifying thrill that radiated from his fingertips to her spine.

She left him at the dance floor without a word for another shot of tequila. He followed her and ordered another beer. They sat on the bar, this time closer to each other. She drank her tequila without taking her eyes off him. He took a gulp of his beer staring at her like she was her latest prey. She didn't care. Now, she realized why her friends said that flirting is a mind game. They sat there staring at each other. Their eyes holding out unspoken challenges.

She laughed and went to stand between his legs as he sat in the bar stool. He pulled her closer by her waist. She put her arms around his neck. The world is really reeling! He

leaned down his face on hers and stopped to see if she will meet him halfway.

Oh what the hell! She thought. This is her night of fun. Her night of assuming an identity that is not really hers. And the fact that Justin Adams is flirting with her on the night that she decided to explore other territories unknown to her made everything perfect. And so she did meet him halfway.

He kissed her gently—which almost shocked her. She didn't expect Justin Adams to kiss gently. He was a rogue. A rake! He was not built to be gentle. But he took her lips softly... it was more romantic than passionate, much to her surprise. Then he looked at her deep in the eyes, drowning her, while his hands caressed her spine. It was electrocuting.

She giggled nervously. Then she went to the dancefloor again where he followed her as if she was his latest pursuit.

When she got tired of dancing, which looked more like flirting anyway, she took another tequila spin.

“I need to go to the ladies’ room.” She said and she left him on his seat. She went to the ladies’ room without looking back at him. She doesn’t want to feel that she was too eager or flattered towards his attention. She doesn’t want him to think that he is one of those girls drooling for his attention.

She was flushed when she looked at herself in the mirror. Her hair was straight and wild behind her back. Her eyes were glittering. Her lips were red. Her cheeks were flushed. She liked the way she looked. It was like she doesn’t recognize the girl staring back at her. She looks foxy! And Justin Adams just kissed her!

She went out of the ladies’ room smiling to herself. For the first time in her life, she felt that she was sexy. She felt that her colors were unleashed. She was glowing! And Justin Adams just showed some interest in *her*!

She was surprised to see Justin outside the ladies’ room. He was leaning on the wall, with his arms crossed on his chest.

Was he waiting for her?

“What are you doing?” She asked.

“Waiting for you.” He replied curtly.

“Why?”

“Just wanna make sure you make it back.” He smiled almost angelically.

“I got here by myself. Of course I can make it back!” She said in the haughtiest tone she could manage.

He shrugged and smiled innocently. “Just wanna make sure that you make your way back to me then.”

Major flirt! She thought. But when she turned around she was smiling widely. She was a novice in this game of flirting. But nevertheless, she thought, he couldn't eat her alive! She can even win this!

They went back to the dance floor, and most of the time, they were hugging each other. Many times, he would brush his lips to hers. Provoking her. Teasing her. Until she gave in and he gave her one deep kiss.

She felt that things are getting hotter. She hadn't thought about her mother nor Troy. As the evening wears on, she is becoming more and more sinful! And she is enjoying every single minute of it! She knew she will always have a smile on her face when she calls this memory to her mind.

He wasn't touching her lower than her spine. It was just caressing and kissing, which made him more attractive that night. She thinks she would be turned off he touched her lower than that. It was as if he knew she needed to feel a little bit loose, but still she had to keep that level of respect to herself. And he was slowly easing her, guiding her in her flirtation, until she would feel comfortable and trusting. God, he was a pro!

She had seven shots of tequila. Seven shots of insanity. And she felt she has accomplished a great deal for herself in just one night. She loved the way she felt. She was tipsy, but she felt more like floating away. She has never known a more enjoyable night out. She didn't even imagine that it would be the night she went on her own. She felt that she was wearing a mask all the time... living someone else's life... stealing someone else's identity. If Justin didn't know her previously, she would have given him a different name.

“Thanks for the drinks.” She told him. And then she turned to hail a cab. She didn’t wait for him to ask for her number.

Fat chance! She thought. Guys like Justin Adams engage in flirtations for a moment and forget about the girl the next.

She doesn’t want to make him to think that she was not immune to his charms. That she was expecting more than a sexy dance, or a hot kiss. She wanted to dump him before he dumps her.

“Hey.” He called. “Need a lift?” He asked.

She stared at him and lifted a brow.

“In what?” She asked.

He pointed at his Ducati motorcycle.

“No thanks! I’m not too drunk. Have a great evening.” She said and turned away from him.

“Come on. It’s not like Mommy’s going to see you or something.” He teased.

It was the right joke to get her to do anything he wants her to do now. She stared at him coldly. God! Can he read her mind? He sounded like he knows exactly which buttons to push! Does he have a flaw at all?

She grabbed the helmet from his hand and went beside his bike.

He mounted it and she mounted behind him making sure, her skirt doesn't go all the way up to her waist.

She placed her hand on his shoulders and braced herself for the ride. He started the engine. But before he took off, he took her hand and placed it in his abdomen.

"It's safer this way, okay?" She heard him say, so she hugged him from behind as they took off. They were driving fast and she felt nervous. She held on to him tighter and she rested her head on his back. She thought, this would be a perfect ending to her perfect rebellion. Dressing up wildly. Drinking bravely. Flirting sinfully. And riding freely.

She may be scared at first, but she felt safe no matter how fast they went. This is her first motorcycle ride. And she rode it with Justin Adams no less.

He parked his motorcycle in front of their building. He took her hand and guided her to mount off the bike. She waited for him to get off and they went inside the elevator together. Justin pressed their floor number. She stood on the corner opposite him. She was just staring at him. Her hands on her side. She was gripping her purse tightly, nervously. He was looking at her deeply with his crystal blue eyes, which, she thought has strangely turned a darker shade. His arms crossed on his chest.

Her world was spinning. Because of the tequila trip and the motorcycle ride, perhaps. But most importantly, she knew it was because of the stare he is giving her now, drowning her in the blue of his eyes.

And then it happened. They met each other halfway. Both of them lunged forward at the same time, where lips met lips in one passionate, head-spinning kiss. This time, he wasn't very gentle anymore. This time, he was demanding. He was the rake he was known to be. And yet something about him and kisses made her feel like she doesn't need to

be scared. It was like she felt cared for and lusted for at the same time. And that made her feel drawn to him even more.

They heard the *ting!* That told them they are on their floor. They didn't stop kissing each other. He held on to her and kissed her as they both head towards their flats.

It was three in the morning, they didn't care. The world stopped and they can't seem to get enough of this kiss.

He pinned her between a door and his hard body. She didn't know which door that was and she hoped the owners didn't hear the slam of her body against it.

He kept kissing her. One hand went to the small of her back and the other caressing her nape.

She felt like all of the veins in her body are alive with thrill and emotion. She had her arms around his neck. She is kissing him back. And enjoying it! She is matching his kisses with her own, teasing him with her tongue.

The door opened behind her and she almost fell over but he was already holding her by the waist. Kissing her, he led

her inside. Their lips never left each other. He began kissing her on the neck where all sorts of sensations shot up from her spine. She let out a moan of pleasure.

He kept kissing her, holding her, at the same time, she felt herself walking backwards to where he was leading her. He was nuzzling her neck when she felt something soft hit the back of her knees and she fell backwards. He let her fall into his bed. And he fell on top of her pinning her between the soft cushions and his hard body.

She had completely lost her senses. She wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back.

She didn't feel him undressing. All she could think about are his arms and his kisses.

When she put her hands against his chest, she felt his skin. Smooth. Hard. Male.

"I want you." He whispered hoarsely against her lips.

She was completely lost. She wasn't thinking. All she could think about is this glorious Adonis, whose arms are

around her, whose lips are kissing her and sending shivers down her spine.

She didn't know when she lost her boots. All she knew was that she was pushed up further into the bed. And when Justin fell on top of him again, she felt the shock of her own skin touching his. Her pink tips touching his hard chest, followed by his kisses. She felt intoxicated, drugged out of her senses. She didn't know that this is possible at all.

He continued kissing her neck and he went down further until he felt his lips brush one pink tip. She moaned. When he took in the whole peak, she almost screamed. She experienced emotions she didn't know she was capable of. For twenty six years of her life, she felt caged. Like she has been hiding herself in a box that never allowed her to feel anything beyond normal. And now, she felt free. And she thirsts. She hungers.

Justin kissed her again on the lips. Drugging her even more, until she demands more, to feel more, to have more.

"I want more..." He whispered in her ear, as if he had just read her last thoughts.

“Justin...” She whispered his name.

“I want you...” He said in a hoarse voice.

She moaned once again.

“If you want this to stop, now is the time.” He said.

She opened her eyes, and she realized that he’s stopped kissing her. He was looking at her face in eyes drunk with passion and wanting.

She was still pinned between his soft mattresses and his hard body. He is giving her a chance to turn back. To stop what is bound to happen. Or to go further and be lost...

She reached up and touched his lips with her fingertips. He turned sideways and kissed her palm. And then he looked back at her, waiting for her to make that decision.

She stared at his handsome face. His crystal blue eyes are dark with passion. He is devastatingly handsome. She knew just by looking back at him that she couldn’t utter the word *no*. Because right now, she feels that if going to bed

with this devil is the prize to claim, then she would blissfully live as a sinner.

She does want to feel more. And she wants this dangerous man... those devilish eyes... nothing less!

She giggled and nuzzled his ear, and then she whispered, "I want you..." before she could stop the words from coming out of her lips.

And the world turned upside down. As soon as the words were out, he took her mouth again in another passionate kiss.

He was out of his pants in less than one minute. She felt her own nakedness when she felt him touch her in her most intimate part. Her eyes widened when she felt her own wetness. Her own arousal.

A moan of pleasure escaped her lips.

He fished a condom somewhere and she felt cold when her own body lost contact of his. She yearned for more.

"Justin, please..." She begged.

Then he was back on top of her. He kissed her, as his knees nudged her thighs to open wider.

She took a deep breath. She was ready. She was waiting. She was yearning.

“Open your eyes, Adrienne.” He said softly. She opened her eyes.

“I want you to look at me when I make love to you.” He said.

She nodded, excitement shooting from every part of her body.

And slowly, she felt him at her entrance. She took a deep breath. There is no turning back for her. And she knew that this could be a sin she would never regret committing.

Her family and Troy, even her friends, are miles away from her mind. She anticipated what is going to happen.

And then it did.

She closed her eyes and a squirm escaped her lips as she felt a tearing pain. Her arms flew to his neck and she hugged him to her, as if the pain will go away, with the feel of him close to her.

“Oh shit!” He cursed softly.

He knew. She forgot. They were caught up in a web of passion and he tore into her maidenhead without knowing that it was still intact. And she didn't know how they could go on without the pain that seemed unbearable.

He looked down at her. There were tears rolling down her cheeks. He wiped them with his thumb and then he hugged her to him, kept her closer and warmer. Then he kissed her in the lips gently.

“I'm sorry.” He said. Then he felt him withdraw very gently. The pain is still there. He reached down and she felt him touch his own arousal. She didn't know why. And then he kissed her again very passionately and yet with so much care.

She felt warm and at the same time, still aroused. And then she felt him again at her entrance and slowly he entered her.

She felt another tearing pain, but it was very gentle compared to the first one. And looking at her deeply, he thrust slowly... she was surprised that the pain was ebbing. And she felt more excited. He kissed her. Until she felt the urgency and the yearning she felt a while ago... this time stronger. Like a tide that is sweeping her away from the shore. She felt his own urgency. She felt the madness taking over him... and she realized it has taken over her as well. He thrust faster and faster, all the time trying hard to be gentle... until she felt unfamiliar sparks shooting from everywhere. And she let out a scream of pleasure that she hasn't experienced before. She shivered. He caught her mouth and swallowed her screams in his kisses. When it was over, he thrust faster until she felt him pull himself out of her and he buried his face in the mass of her hair and she felt his body rock.

When it was over he looked down at her deeply. His lips curved in a half smile and then his mouth descended towards hers.

After the kiss, neither of them said a word. He stood up and turned on his bedside lamp. For the first time, she saw him fully naked. She swallowed. She realized, as well, that

for the first time, she was naked in front of a man. Hell! She's never even been naked in front of Jill.

He went to his closet. When he returned he was holding a blanket in his hand.

She was uncertain of what is going to happen next. For the first time that night, she felt a little embarrassed. She felt her confidence wavering.

He took her hand and pulled her up and caught her by the waist. He kissed her again, passionately, drugged her again, until there was no choice for her but to wrap her arms around him and kiss him back.

Then he pulled away the blanket they made love in, which she noticed to her horror was filled with blood and something else—she knew what it was. She took a deep breath. The world was still reeling. She still wasn't thinking straight. She was still drunk from the seven shots of tequila she took and the drug of his lovemaking.

He threw the new set of blankets over the bed and then he laid down on it and pulled her to him.

They laid there for a while. Not saying anything. Her head was resting comfortably in his shoulders. He had one hand rested on her waist. The other under his head.

When she looked up, he was staring at her with his crystal blue eyes that seem to drown her every time she stares at them.

“What?” She asked.

“I’m sorry.” He said gently. “I didn’t know...”

She put a finger in his lips. “Sshh!” She said. “It’s okay.”

“Do you still hurt?” He asked.

She shook her head.

They were quiet for a while. Each of them lost in their own thoughts. She looked up at him again. He looked back at her. Then he smiled.

“It was an amazing night.” He whispered. “I’m... I’m sorry I caused you pain, though.”

She smiled. "One man is bound to do so one day."

He chuckled softly. "Then I feel so damn lucky it had to be me. But trust me, honey, that's the only pain I will be causing you."

You're right! Because I don't want anything to do with you after tonight! You couldn't hurt me when I walk out that door and never look back, she promised herself.

"Good night, Adrienne." He said, and then he leaned down and kissed her lips gently. He turned off the lights and wrapped his arms around her.

She closed her eyes, thinking, this was a dream... a dream she would call to her memory everytime, she will feel very low in self-esteem. She would treasure this night... even if it will be but just a dream.

A minute later, she was sound asleep. He kissed her on the forehead and closed his eyes.

When he woke up, she was gone. He looked around his room looking for any sign of her. There was none.

He sat on his bed, naked. She didn't leave anything. Except for her memory, and her scent that he still can smell when he laid back on his bed, right in the spot where she slept. The same spot where she lost herself for the first time with a man... and that man was him... He looked at the blanket on the floor. It was tainted with her blood. Lost innocence.

He smiled.

She was a virgin. She just did a one night stand. He couldn't understand why he spent the whole night with her. Why he didn't send her home. He has never spent the night with a woman in his entire life. It was one of the things that he thought usually leads to expectations and commitments. He doesn't need that in his life. He didn't know why he waited for her to sleep first and then he allowed himself to sleep with her in his arms, breathing in the scent of her skin, and her hair, which smelled like wild strawberries. He didn't understand, but he felt drawn to her.

3

To lapse morally; To drop to a lower level, as in one's morals or standards; To revert to a worse condition.

Translation:

Backslide

She woke up before dawn, quickly got dressed and took off from Justin's apartment across her own. Then, she washed her face and soaked in a hot bath to clear her head.

She stared at her own body. Almost every inch of it, she thought, has been touched by the city's most wanted bachelor—Justin Adams. She couldn't believe that she went overboard last night. She looked for fun. For oblivion. Losing her virginity on a one night stand with a hotshot playboy is way over what she had in mind when she started out last night.

He was sound asleep when she left him this morning. She woke up and she was locked in his embrace. She moved inch by inch so she won't wake him up. He moved a bit when she was out of his arms. And then she quickly dressed up, took her boots and marched barefooted across the hall.

She still felt a bit sore. But she didn't feel guilty at all. She didn't feel like she didn't have any values. She didn't even feel that she cheated on Troy. She felt that none of the emotions and thrills that she felt with Justin last night, she felt with Troy.

It was the first time in her life that she felt alive. That she felt appreciated and adored. And when she felt the pain of the impact of their lovemaking, she felt his concern. It felt genuine. She felt cared for. She felt that she mattered.

She remembered when pain was visible in her face, concern and guilt were in his eyes as he wiped away her tears and kissed her. Now, she realized what he did. He took off the condom when he realized she was a virgin. Probably he thought, it will hurt her more. Her body is not yet accustomed to sex. He thought it will be gentler if he didn't wear condom. Probably, he also thought she was safe. He need not wear protection. And when he entered her again, he was so much gentler, until it didn't hurt at all anymore.

She felt okay when she went to bed after the bath. And this caused her to worry. She spent the night in sin, but all

that was left were memories that she knew she would not mind dwelling on for some time in the future.

She was awakened by a ring of her phone. "Hello." She said sleepily.

"Wake up!" It was Jill.

"It's too early!" She said grumpily.

"What time did you sleep last night?" Jill asked.

"Why?"

"Because you're still sleeping and it's past twelve. You never sleep past twelve noon."

"Well, I decided to break the habit." She said.

"You slept late last night, that's what it is." Jill said.

"I don't know what time I slept." She said standing up going to her bathroom. "Hold on. I'm just going to splash some water in my face to wake myself up."

Jill waited for five minutes as Adrienne washed her face and brushed her teeth.

“Alright. What’s up?” Adrienne asked when she finished.

“How was Gypsys?”

That was enough to wake her up. “Ah... great. Nothing different. The same as the others.”

“Did you leave early? Tell me you didn’t leave early!”

“Why?” She asked.

“Well... one of the girls I know from my neighborhood said that Justin Adams was there. And he was with some redhead. They didn’t arrive together. He approached her and then they were dancing, then they were kissing and then they left together.”

Now, her heart was pounding. How popular can Justin Adams be? She must remember not to go to Jill’s apartment for two months for risk of being recognized.

“So what?”

“Well, Justin isn’t known for picking up girls at the bar. And he has a reputation of a playboy, but you will never see him holding hands with a girl in public, least of all kissing.”

“And the point is?”

“Well... she could be special. Justin likes to keep his reputation of being single. He doesn’t go steady with any girl. He doesn’t go to public with a girl alone. And that’s what makes him more attractive! Like he is ice king or something. He doesn’t pursue and he walks away easily.”

“Wow! How can an ice king be a playboy? I thought playboys are supposed to be hot!”

“Yeah, and that’s what makes him different! That’s what makes him a god! He is never known for pickup lines! But supermodels would just approach him. And last night, it seemed he broke his rules. He picked someone up!”

“Jillian, why are we talking about Justin Adams? You called me to talk about Justin Adams? Why is everybody obsessed with his lovelife?”

“He doesn’t have one.” Jill reminded her.

“Alright. Why is everybody obsessed about his sex life?” She corrected herself. “So what, he sees a girl? He could have known her from the past or something. Could be an old girlfriend.” She surprised herself there. She didn’t know she could lie with so much conviction.

“Nope. He never had a girlfriend! That’s the point.”

She heard her doorbell ring.

She opened the door without asking who it was.

Surprise of all surprises. The man of the hour himself is at her doorstep.

What does he want now?!

He was about to open his mouth to say something when she cut him off.

“Shut up!” She told him, and his eyebrows shot up in his Juliet Oakleys.

“What?” Jill asked.

“I mean... let's not talk about him. I'll go take a bath or something and I'll call you back later.” And she hung up without waiting for Jill's answer.

She faced Justin, who looked amused. He held out a cup of Starbucks coffee in his hand.

“For the hangover?” He asked, smiling.

She opened the door wider without saying a word and turned her back on him. He followed her inside and closed the door behind him.

He placed the coffee on her table.

“Thanks.” She said.

“No sweat.” He said. “You didn't give me a chance to make you one this morning.”

She turned red. She was now very sober and was reminded of everything that happened between them last night.

“Yeah... last night... It was... it never should have happened.” She stammered.

He didn't say anything. He just stared at her with his crystal blue eyes, quizzing her... and for reasons she couldn't understand, drowning her.

After a while, he said, “But it did happen, honey.”

“Yes. And I hope we can just forget about it. Like we don't know each other.”

“But we do know each other now.” He said. “Intimately, I might add.”

“Yes, damn it!” She was really irritated now. She doesn't need this. She doesn't want this. Sure, she would feel very insulted if she met him in the hall or the elevator, especially if he had another woman in his arms, which is most likely to happen. It would be much better and much more comfortable pretending she doesn't know him than exchanging *hi's* and *how are you's* with him.

“But I was not myself last night. I needed an outlet or something. I needed to explore. You were there! And I was drunk more than half the time... and it... it got completely out of hand...”

He smiled. “I knew that.”

She waited for him to say something more. But he just stood there. An eyebrow shot up.

“Damn it, say something!” She said.

He smiled. “Alright. You’re cute. And you’re cuter when you get mad.”

She took a deep breath. “What do you want, Justin?”

He shrugged. “Actually, I’m not sure.” He admitted.

Then he walked a step closer. She walked a step back, her heart pounding in her chest. He looked so divine in his black jeans and leather jacket. His hair still looked wet, which means he went to Starbucks straight from the shower.

He kept walking towards her and she kept backing down, until she hit the wall of her living room and Justin pinned her between it and his body. She stared at him squarely.

He tilted her chin up and she almost panicked when his face descended towards hers. He kissed her. Once. Softly. Then his arms went around her waist and he deepened the kiss. Her knees went soft and she felt her nerves come to life. She doesn't need that coffee he brought. She was already awake with his kisses. No, not just his kisses. The idea of sleep evaded her the minute she opened the door and found him in front of her. She wrapped her arms around him and she kissed him back. For a minute, she was almost lost.

He leaned his forehead against hers, his eyes closed and he took a deep breath. Then he looked back at her. His face no more than four inches away from hers.

His lips were curved into a half-smile. She bit her lower lip, and then she started smiling. He was smiling too. A real smile, which showed her that he has perfect set of teeth and dimples at each side of his lips. He looked more charming and more handsome this close than he did

whenever she saw him around her building submitting his works for the Blush.

He pinched her gently in the nose.

“You better take that coffee of yours.” He said.

She nodded. She started to move towards the table. But both his hands were on the wall beside both her ears, caging her.

“Hey, you said coffee.” She said.

He raised his brows. Then he gave her a quick smack before getting out of the way.

He took his own coffee.

She drank her coffee and took out a pack of cigarette. She went to her balcony. He followed.

They sat there quietly for minutes.

When she looked at him, she saw that he was looking at her direction.

“What?” She asked.

He shook his head. “Nothing.”

“I can tell you were staring at me. Like you were sizing me up or something. What?”

He shrugged. “What’s the deal with you?”

“What deal?”

He shrugged again. “You said you were looking for an outlet last night. For what?”

“Nothing. I just didn’t want to live by the rules for once in my life.”

“Rules of?”

“My parents. The whole mundane values they taught me the rest of my life... Like everyone expects me to be goody-two-shoes... and yet I still wasn’t good enough. So I thought, who cares? Screw up for one night. Well... I wasn’t literally thinking screw!”

He laughed. "I'm sorry. I wasn't planning to *screw* someone when I approached you. I knew you and you looked different last night... yeah sort of not what anyone would expect you to look like and behave. I came alone for a drink. I realized you were alone too... So... I just want to introduce myself to my next-door neighbor."

She laughed. "And you knew her too well now!" She said sarcastically.

He shrugged. "Not at all. I believe girls like you have layers in your personality. And you don't see that too often nowadays."

"Girls like me have secret identities hidden in our closets. You met my alter-ego last night, by the way."

He laughed. "I have a feeling you want to forget what happened to us last night."

She stared at him seriously. "You're not exactly a nobody you know. Honestly, you're the last guy I expect to be involved in a one night stand with."

He raised an eyebrow. "So that's what it is. One night stand."

She looked down on her fingers nervously. "Yeah... I guess so. It was not supposed to happen. But it did. I got caught up in the moment and my curiosity made me go overboard. I'm the last person you would want on your list anyway."

"My list?" He asked, quite surprised.

She stared at him. His face is devoid of any emotion.

"You know... the long line of girls wanting a piece of you. I didn't want any of that. It just happened. It was a mistake. Cross me out of the list of girls who expect you to return their calls."

He laughed. "I guess you know my reputation more than you know me." He said.

"I don't know you at all." She said squarely.

He nodded. "You know me more intimately now."

She turned red. He laughed.

“And you can get to know me on a personal level. For all it’s worth, I hope we can be friends.”

She shook her head. “No. I don’t move in your circles. It would be so hard to keep that friendship going. Plus, you live in a world where everything you do almost make it to the newspapers or gossip columns. You’re one of Manhattan’s most sought-after. It would be very hard to be friends with you. I don’t want to be named. I don’t want my girlfriends to be asking about what’s happening in your life. I’m not interested in that.”

He laughed. “Boyfriend?”

“What?” She asked.

“I’m thinking you have a boyfriend.” He said.

She stared back at him. *So he really is a smart ass! Harvard straight A's. It seems that part wasn't a rumor.*

“What made you say that?” She asked.

He shrugged. "Nobody trashes down an offer for friendship if it won't cause havoc to something monumental in their lives."

She stared out at the line of buildings that make up her wonderful New York view.

"How long have you been with this guy?" He asked.

"Three years."

He almost choked on his coffee.

"I know. How did I manage to lose my virginity just last night? And not to him?"

"I didn't ask the question. You did." He said.

She stared at him. "I asked it so I wouldn't have to say the answer out loud."

"Your call." He said coolly. But if she could see his crystal blue eyes beneath those pair of Oakleys, she knew they were dancing with laughter.

“Shit!” She said.

“What?”

“What is wrong with me? I don’t even feel guilty about it!”

He shrugged. “You don’t love him. Maybe you’re keeping him because it seemed like you were taking the righteous path.”

She stared at him. “One more psychoanalyzing, you’re out of here, mister!”

He laughed. “Come on, get dressed. Let’s go have lunch.”

“What? Why?”

He shrugged. “I’m asking you to go to lunch with me. And why not? That answers both your questions?”

“Where?” She asked again.

He smiled, and she saw again how deep the dimples beside the corners of his lips were. “Somewhere no one knows

both of us. Since you don't want people to know we know each other."

"Great idea! It's easy for me. I can eat at Burger King and no one would notice. But it's kinda hard for you."

He raised a brow. "Who do you think I am? Brad Pitt?"

She laughed. She stood up and went to her room.

She realized that she has just accepted his offer for lunch without protest. With questions, yes. But not protests.

She slipped into her white Capri cargo pants, and a white mini T-shirt. She tied her hair in a pony tail. No need to put anything on her face. She doesn't need to impress Justin Adams. She already slept with him! And she wasn't planning to sleep with him again. In fact she doesn't have any idea why she is going to lunch with him when she should have seen the last of him when she left his apartment this morning.

When she got out of the bedroom, she knew he was staring at her behind his shades.

“What?” She asked.

He just shrugged, and then leaned forward and gave her a gentle smack on the lips.

On the elevator, he took her hand in his. Her heart pounded at the touch of his skin. What is it with this guy that makes her feel like she's being electrocuted. This could not be from the tequila anymore. She never felt this way with Troy. Not even when he kisses her goodnight.

When they got to the ground floor, she pulled her hand away from his grip.

He looked at her.

“Bad idea. You: Celebrity. Me: Supposedly spoken for.” She said.

He smiled. “Alright. Miss Miller.” He held out his hand and motioned for her to go out of the lift first when the door opened. “After you, Miss Miller.” He said, his voice full of laughter.

She raised a brow at him squarely, and to her surprise he mouthed, "You're a fox!" Which made her blush even more.

He led her to his Red Ferrari.

"Great! Maniac tint!"

"Good for your plan, right?" He said and he opened the door for her and she hopped inside quickly.

He took her for a drive. They chatted more about themselves on the way. Somehow, she was able to relax in her seat, not having a care where he is taking her.

"How long have you been with Blush?" He asked.

"Almost like forever. It's my first job." She replied.

"I heard you were good."

She shrugged. "I'm getting a bit bored sometimes you know. I needed more action. More thoughts, more opinions. And here, I do more events features."

“Judging by the way your colleagues talk about you, it seems you’ll be destined for more soon.”

“I can’t believe Justin Adams engage in gossips.” She rolled her eyes.

He chuckled. “No. I have ears. Guys in your office talk about you a lot, you know.”

She looked out the window. “Probably because I was the most boring girl in Blush. Smart but boring.”

He looked at her and then he turned to look back on the road.

“No. Try, smart, snob and undeniably gorgeous.” He said.

She almost laughed. “Don’t think so, Mister. The *smart* part is partly flattering. The *snob* part is probably true. The *undeniably gorgeous* part is undeniably a lie.”

He chuckled. “No. Clearly, you are mistaken. You should think more of yourself. The undeniably gorgeous part is undeniably true. Take it from the guy who approached you

at a bar, ended up spending a wonderful night with you, and made amazing love to you.”

She stared at him. She knew she turned so red, she could be turning violet already.

“Must you always bring that up?”

He looked over at her for a moment and then he shrugged. “I’m sorry. I forgot. You wanted to forget last night. But hmmm... the woman I made love to last night was confident... and foxy. I wonder if she’s just sleeping there somewhere inside you.”

“I tied her up so she could never come out in the open again.”

“Hmmm... it’s a pity. She’s a fox.” He said.

She didn’t say anything. She didn’t know what to feel. Flattered? Because Justin Adams is saying that she’s gorgeous. Embarrassed? Because he knows that he was able to unleash a spirit within her that she didn’t even know existed. Scared? Because she knows his reputation and she

suspects that she is currently tangled in his web and she was his latest prey.

After lunch, he took her hand in his and led her to a small shopping center. She stared at him in alarm.

“Outside New York. We don’t need to pretend we don’t know each other here.” He said with a raised brow.

She rolled her eyes but did not pull her hand away. They went around, holding hands, asking each other questions about themselves, like where they grew up, what courses they took in college.

“Wanna watch a movie?” He asked.

She shrugged. “Alright. I’m not too busy. Plus, you have the car. And I don’t even know how to get home.”

He chuckled and led her to the movie house. He bought popcorn and soda.

In the middle of the film, Justin reached out for her hand and held it in his.

There was a time that he brought it to his lips and kissed it. She stared at him. His features were illuminated by the lights from the screen. He looked just as her friends described him. Divine. He didn't have his shades on. She could see his long eyelashes and perfect straight nose.

He looked at her and their eyes met. He smiled boyishly. And then leaned forward and kissed her gently on the lips. He released her hand, raised his arm and put it around her shoulders. She rested her head on his shoulder.

After the movie, she was feeling brand new emotions. She doesn't exactly understand what is coming her way. She didn't ask for it. Least of all, she didn't ask for Justin Adams to barge into her life and... take her to the movies and hold her in the middle of the film. Something Troy would never do. He firmly believes that movie houses are not meant for cuddling.

He led her to another restaurant where they had dinner.

She must have fallen asleep on the way home. But she remembered that before she drifted off, Justin reached out and held her hand in his.

They were still holding hands when he woke her up with butterfly kisses on her cheek. When she opened her eyes, she was staring at his blue eyes.

“We’re home, Princess.” He said softly. And leaned forward and kissed her passionately this time.

After the kiss, she was left breathless. He went out of the car and opened the door open for her. She realized that they were in his parking slot.

He put an arm around her as he led her to the elevator. She was too giddy to protest. Inside the elevator, he put his arms around her waist and again took her in a drugging kiss. The lift stopped at the third floor where they immediately stayed on opposite corners, as if they didn’t know each other. An old couple got in.

She counted almost an eternity before the old couple got out of the lift on the fifth floor. As soon as the doors closed, they met each other at the center, pulling each other, finding each other’s lips, locking each other in an embrace. She felt desire starting to take over her senses once again.

They half-ran to her room. As soon as the door closed behind them, they began undressing each other. Their clothes piling up on the floor leaving a trail to the bedroom. When the back of her knees hit the edge of her bed, all that was left on her was her white thongs.

He undid her. Everything she said about what happened between them being a mistake that should not happen again...she realized was a lie. A product of the real Adrienne Miller who wouldn't do anything to disappoint her mother and her boyfriend. He drugged her with his kisses. He intoxicated her with every touch. Until her mind was blank except for one word that she kept saying in her moans of pleasure—Justin.

She didn't know how long it took. All she knew was that it left her senseless. When they finished, they cuddled in the dark. They talked more about each other. Learned about each other. Adrienne realized she was having her first pillow talk. She giggled softly.

"Why?" Justin asked looking down at her.

She snuggled closer to him. "Nothing. I just realized that I am... having a pillow talk for the first time in my life."

He chuckled. "And how do you find it?"

She shrugged. "Not bad. I feel like I've known you all my life."

He laughed. Then he said to her, "Your boyfriend must be blind or mad... or... impotent."

She stared at him curiously. "Why do you say that?"

He shrugged. "You're a beautiful woman. I just couldn't understand why he didn't get you to bed. Is he gay?"

She shook her head. "We just don't see each other often, I guess. And he's... probably as conservative as my mother. We don't even kiss in the cinemas."

"Really? I wouldn't be able to resist kissing you somewhere dark."

"Well, he's like that. Plus he doesn't live in New York. It has been more a long distance relationship." *And he didn't make me feel the things you made me feel,* She wanted to

add, but she decided against it. Justin Adams probably knows that he is a cut above the rest of the male species.

“Well, unfortunately for him, he just lost the chance to be able to steal your innocence from you.” He said teasingly.

“You didn’t steal it.” She argued. “I gave it to you.”

“And I thank you, *cherie*. I will never forget that.” Then his face descended and kissed her thoroughly.

She prepared for a bath and he joined her. It was the most sensual bath she had ever had in her entire life. It was the first one she shared with a guy. And even up to that moment, she couldn’t believe that she was sharing it with Justin Adams.

After the bath, they towel-dried themselves and he led her immediately to bed where he finished what he started in the bathroom.

By midnight, she was exhausted. She slept with her head rested on his shoulders and his arms wrapped around her. She was having the sweetest of dreams indeed.

4

Dipendenza:

Italian. Translation in English: Addiction.

Adrienne had a smile on her face when she woke up the next morning. Justin left her apartment quite early. When she opened her eyes, he was gone. She was naked in her bed. In her bedside table, a cup of Starbucks coffee sits, with a note:

"You're a fox!"

She smiled to herself. She put a pillow in her face and she screamed. She doesn't know what is happening to her. She was shagging the city's most notorious rake. Well... she shagged the city's most notorious rake, that is. For two consecutive nights. She doesn't know when she will see him again... if he will even remember her name. She doesn't care. That morning when she woke up, she felt beautiful. She felt adored from head to foot.

How many times did he tell her that she is foxy? How many times did he tell her that she was smart and gorgeous? How many times did he kiss her and touched her in places that made her feel all-woman... a divine woman?

She stretched out in her bed, still drunk with the passion of his lovemaking? Then she got up and took the cup of Starbucks coffee he left for her. It was still hot, which means that he left a few minutes before she woke up. He must have woken up earlier than that, went to Starbucks and slipped in the coffee in her bedside table.

She had a smile on her face all day. When she met with Jill and Yuan that night, she was dressed in a silver halter top, a black skirt and a high-heeled sandal.

"Way to go, Adrienne!" Jill cheered when she saw her.

"Va-va-voom!" Yuan agreed.

"I see, someone got drunk before going to the party, huh!" Jill teased.

"I'm perfectly sober!" Adrienne protested. "I just felt like dressing up."

“Is this the way you dressed up when you went to Gypsys?”

Adrienne shrugged and looked away from her friends. She knew she was blushing. She remembered the night that Justin Adams introduced himself to her and took her virginity away with him before the night was over.

“Well, shall we go in?” Adrienne asked them, changing the subject.

“Come on.”

The minute she stepped into Gypsys, the memories of the shocking night flashed back to her mind. The hot, sultry dance they had that led to two nights of passion and mindless lovemaking.

If he was the devil... she wouldn't mind burning in hell for the rest of her damned life... that was the thought that kept ringing in her head. Because she knew if she had to do it all over again, she would not change a thing. She could not resist laying with him over and over again.

To hell with Troy. To hell with her mother and the mundane standards of propriety.

For the first time in years that they have been the best of friends, Yuan and Jill saw Adrienne order beer. Normally, she would order iced tea. She smiled to herself. That Adrienne wore long-sleeved turtleneck shirts and plaid pants, with reading glasses whenever she went with her friends to bars. This Adrienne is showing her curves and legs that go forever for all the men in the bars to see. And light beer with a slim cigarette in hand does not go bad with the outfit at all.

"I am loving you tonight, dear!" Yuan said. "If I was a man... I mean, if I were straight, I would go out of my way to hit on you."

Adrienne laughed. "Then you have to be thankful that you are gay. Because I am not to be someone's prey tonight."

The minute that went out of her mouth, she caught a glimpse of jet black hair, and a familiar pair of shades.

She had to blink twice to make sure that she wasn't seeing things. But she saw the curve on his lips, she knew in that instant that he was staring at her before he went to the bar with his friends.

"Oh my God!" Jill breathed. "Justin Adams is here!"

Yuan looked at the direction that Jill was looking at. "Right! Manhattan's rakes are here!"

"And what a handsome crowd they make! Look at them. Three guys, all drop-dead gorgeous." Jill said. "But add the two guys multiply them by ten, they still would not be equals one Justin Adams."

"You guys talk as if they are a bunch of God's gift to women!" Adrienne rolled her eyes.

"They could well be." Yuan said. "Look! Half of the girls in this bar are practically staring at their direction. More than half of them women here would like to catch their eyes."

“What is the deal with that guy? It’s dark in here for Christ’s sake!” Jill said. Adrienne raised a brow at her. “He had to wear those shades all the time?”

Adrienne shrugged. “Maybe it is part of the package. He doesn’t want people to see his eyes.”

“I hope he’s not cross-eyed or wall-eyed.” Yuan said.

“It would be a pity. But I don’t think God would be cruel. He makes one individual perfect, He will see it through.” Jill sighed.

“Yeah, I think you are right.” Adrienne agreed. But she was not just thinking that Justin Adams is physically perfect. She *knows* that he is. Even *without* clothes.

He was not looking around. It seems like even though girls were trying to catch his eyes, he was just chatting with his friends, seemed to be oblivious of the attention that he’s been getting. It’s like he feels that he is above every female in the room.

A couple of girls even dared to approach their table with probably a very lame excuse to talk to them, or a very

daring line out of desperation. Justin just nodded when a girl said something to him, and then he stood up and patted his friend in the back and left the bar.

Adrienne smiled. All the more did she feel proud of herself. *He* pursued her. He approached her at the bar and introduced himself to her. She did play hard-to-get, albeit, her efforts proved to be futile, but she was still proud that she didn't even have to look his way for him to notice her, and more importantly, flirt with her.

In the sinful game of flirting and lust, she felt she has accomplished a lot more than these girls, in spite of her lack of experience.

"Sweetie, I think your phone is ringing." Jill shouted at her over the music.

"You heard that?" She shouted back, fishing her phone from her purse.

An unregistered number appeared.

She sighed. This could be Jada's doing again. She has the

habit of giving her number to people who are trying to get an advertising space or a feature with Blush.

“Hello!” She shouted over the phone, while covering her other ear.

“Go out!” A male voice said on the other line.

“What? Who...” And somehow her instincts told her something that excited her every nerve.

She stood up.

“Guys, I have to take this call outside.” She said to her friends.

When she got to the reception area where the music wasn't too loud, she put the phone back to her ear.

“Hello.”

“Go out.” The guy said again.

“Who is this?” She asked.

"I'm hurt. You forgot or perhaps I've just kissed you senseless last night?" He said smugly.

Her heart skipped two beats instead of one, if that was possible at all.

"How did you get this number?" She asked.

"I was a boy scout." He said. "Now, get your cute butt outside because I'm waiting for you in my car."

"Why would I do that?"

"I don't know. But when you do maybe you'll find out why."

Smug! She thought. But she knew what he was trying to say. She *was* dying for a taste of him again. To look at him straight in the eyes once more and convince herself that she didn't dream him.

She hung up and sighed. She counted one to ten to see if the feeling would still be there after ten seconds. When she opened her eyes, she realized that the feeling *is* still there.

“Damn!” She cursed softly and walked out of the bar.

Justin’s Ferrari was parked in front. He opened the door from inside without getting out of the car, much to her relief. Although, she was dallying with him, she still doesn’t want to be associated with him.

She quickly got inside his car.

“What do you want?” She demanded.

He smiled mischievously and drove off.

“What? Where are you taking me?” She asked. “I can’t leave... my friends are inside! They will be looking for me!”

He smiled at her. “Relax, okay.” He said.

He went to the parking lot and parked on a secluded area. Then he stopped the engine and turned to her.

“I just want to kiss you.” He said.

Her breath caught in her throat as she watch him lean over to her and kissed her senseless. Her own arms came to life and wrapped them around his neck. It was a deep and passionate kiss. When he pulled away, her world was spinning.

“You look wonderful, by the way.” He told her. “I wanted to say hi, but then I remembered, you don’t want anything to do with me, so I figured you didn’t tell your friends about me either, and I wouldn’t take the risk.”

“Good. Because I don’t know what lies I will spin to them when they ask how I met you.” She said.

He raised a brow. “You could tell them we met at Blush.”

She shook her head. “Jill works at Blush too. She will ask exactly how, and I wouldn’t know what to say.”

“So you’re telling me you’re not a liar?” He asked seriously, but it seems she could see laughter in his eyes.

She shook her head. “I’m saying I am not a good liar.”

“Well, if you put it that way.”

“And the longer I stay here with you, the more difficult it is going to be for me when I get back. The more messed up I am going to be.”

He chuckled. “You’ve only been gone a few minutes. You could always say Jada asked some people to call you up and arrange for some interviews and you can’t agree on the date and place and they really have to finalize it now.”

“And they would be calling me at twelve midnight?” She asked.

“It’s a bar. It’s only open at nights.” He replied.

“And what bar would that be?” She asked.

He laughed. Then he pulled her close to him and kissed her again thoroughly.

“You know what, Ms. Prim and Proper... you think too much.” He said smiling. Then he sighed. “As much as I wanted to dally with you more, I don’t want to spoil your night out with your friends and make you invent the story

of the year to convince them why you have been gone for approximately... twenty minutes.”

He gave her one final kiss on the lips and then he drove back to the front of the bar to drop her off.

Before she got out of his car, he said, “You’re a fox.”

She stared at him and then she quickly got out of his car and headed straight to the ladies’ room. She locked herself inside the a cubicle, where she combed her hair and retouched her make-up.

She composed her lines and herself before she went out of the cubicle and headed towards her friends.

“My God!” Yuan complained. “You took forever in that phone call!”

“We thought you’ve gone home!” Jill said. “Who was it anyway?”

Adrienne shrugged and looked away. If she will lie, she will not look at her friends straight in the eye.

“It’s... Troy.” She said. “He... I don’t know. Nothing that will interest you anyway.”

“Sweetie, if you want to talk about it...”

She shook her head. “Negative. Let’s talk about... men... Other men.”

Jill’s and Yuan’s stare immediately went to the table where Justin and his friends were sitting.

Justin has just gotten back to his seat, it seems.

“I actually heard he was here at the opening and he picked up a girl.”

“I wonder where she is now.”

“Well, you know Justin Adams. He doesn’t stay with one girl exclusively. He beds them and then he moves on. He’s a rake, we all know that.” Yuan said.

“Well, one night with him is worth a lifetime shag.” Jill breathed. “I haven’t heard of anyone complaining. Except

for, maybe those who were thinking of being the first lady of Adams Industries.”

“He’s not the marrying type. That table over there, is full of guys who will take mistresses for life. I doubt they would want to share their wealth to a woman... I doubt they would risk splitting their worth.”

“Oh well, haven’t you heard of pre-nuptial agreement?” Adrienne pointed out.

Yuan shrugged. “Oh yeah. You’ll be worth a million dollars after the divorce... nothing more. That’s all you’re going to get, and a thousand heartbreaks for learning that they only married you to get a legal heir.”

“I wonder if Justin Adams grew up away from his parents... his father having mistresses in every country, and his mother, caring for nothing but saloon appointments, limitless shopping, and tea room chit-chats with her other rich friends.” Adrienne said.

“Probably. It’s a good explanation though.” Jill said. “That’s why he grew up heartless.”

After tiring of the Justin Adams talk, they all went to the dance floor. Adrienne decided she should have the time of her life. She danced and laughed with her friends. She didn't spare a single look on Justin Adams's way. She didn't want to see if he was sitting there flirting with another woman. She doesn't want the memory of kissing him secretly in his car be tainted with the memory of seeing him flirting with another woman the same way that he flirted with her when they first met.

They decided to call it a night by two in the morning. Adrienne was tipsy and exhausted. But she felt wonderful... beautiful.

Justin and his friends were still at the bar when they left.

"I can't believe I didn't see some action." Yuan said.

"What action?"

"You know... I was hoping to see him flirt with some girl so I could know what his type is. Does he like brunettes, or redheads or blondes." Yuan said.

"With Justin's history... all of the above." Jill laughed.

When they hailed a cab, her phone beeped.

She recognized the number as Justin's. She read the message nervously.

Are you going straight home?

She replied: *Yes.*

After a minute, she received another response: *Don't lock your door. ;-)*

Her heart thumped nervously in her chest.

When she got home, she hopped in the shower quickly.

What is wrong with her? She barely said goodbye to Yuan and Jill when they dropped her off in front of her building. She ran to the elevator and almost slipped on her front door.

Her heart is beating faster than ever. After she showered, she put on a pair of sleeveless silk cami, and a matching silk

shorts. She towel-dried her hair, and finally went out to the front door to make sure that it isn't locked.

She lied on her bed, hugged her body pillow and closed her eyes. But she knew she wouldn't be able to sleep. She is waiting for him, and the fulfillment of his promise for another dalliance.

Her heart skipped another beat when she heard her front door open and close. She turned to her bedroom door and found Justin Adams standing there, wearing a white shirt and a pair of jeans. He still even had his shades up on his head. He must have gone straight to her flat when he got to the building.

He smiled at her wickedly. And then he moved over to her and lied next to her. Without a word, he leaned over, kissed her passionately and started a wild ride of passion that Adrienne thought she could almost not contain.

She was woken up by the sound of the answering machine.

"Wake up! Wake up! Hangover or not we are going up!" She heard Yuan's voice on the phone.

She panicked. She stood up immediately from the bed and got hold of her bathrobe. She saw that Justin had gotten up already and began to dress up quickly.

“Oh my God! It’s Jill and Yuan! My best friends!”

She ran across her bedroom to gather her clothes in a panic.

“Honey...” Justin grabbed her by the arms gently and gave her a kiss on the lips. “Good morning.” He smiled.

She realized she hasn’t said good morning to him... after a night of tiresome and yet quite wonderful lovemaking.

She reached up to kiss him. “I’m sorry. Good morning.” She said to him. “It’s just they will see you and they can’t...”

“I know.” He said. He kissed her on the forehead. “I’m going. I’ll see you later.”

He crossed the hall only dressed in his pants, carrying the rest of his clothes and his shoes with him. She gathered her clothes on the floor and quickly dressed before she threw

herself back into bed, waiting for her friends to ring the doorbell.

After barely three minutes, Jill and Yuan arrived. She opened the door, pretending she just got out of bed.

“Wake up, wake up!” They said.

“What have you been up to lately, girl? You seem always tired?” Yuan asked.

“Comes with the job description. She’s been writing articles about more and more places around New York.” Jill said.

“So I heard. And Look at this gorgeous apartment of yours!” Yuan grimaced. “Nice taste! It is so you!”

“Coffee?” Jill handed her a Starbucks coffee.

She took a sip, trying to relax herself. Her heart is still pounding and she knew that she still looked flushed.

What was she thinking?

She firmly said it was a ONE night stand. And what? THREE NIGHTS STAND now? And in the second and third nights, it happened more than once?

Jill and Yuan headed for the balcony and she followed bringing her coffee with her.

“Gorgeous view!” Yuan said.

“You had a visitor, honey?” Jill asked.

“No, why?” She asked. Immediately, alarm signals are shooting from everywhere.

Jill pointed at the two Starbucks coffee cups the other day. She forgot that she hasn’t cleaned up her balcony yet. Somehow, she stared at the two coffee cups on the table, and it made her remember that Justin Adams was sitting there with her. And she wanted to convince herself that it wasn’t a dream.

“Oh... yeah. Troy brought some coffee for me.” She lied.

“Is he here?”

Adrienne shook her head. "The other day, he was here. I just... haven't cleaned up yet."

"So you managed to fix your problem?" Jill asked.

She shrugged. "It started out... ah... okay... and ended up right where we... started..." She said, sipping coffee in between the sentence so it isn't obvious that she was struggling for the lie. "That's why he called last night. But it was useless."

"Oh, sweetie! What is new? Come on!" Yuan said.

"Yeah. Perhaps we should tell Mrs. Miller that Troy is not the right guy for her second child. But what is the point? She thought that Troy was the only achievement Adrienne ever had." Jill shook her head.

"But still... honey. You already said you were tainted in their eyes. What else is there to lose? Drop that zero! There are plenty of guys who want to go out with you!" Yuan said.

"True!" Jill agreed. "Plenty of guys in the office had a crush on you. They just see you as this snob girl who thought

none of them is good enough. And they knew they were up against the likes of a future top surgeon... but honestly, Troy is cute and all... but other than the great eyes, he's... geeky!"

She raised her brow. It's like Jill was confirming that some guys in the office think she is cute. But then she told them, "Come on. I'm not the most fashionable girl in the office, so I doubt anyone notices me like you said they do. And don't be so hard on Troy. I've been with him for three years."

"And you have gone out once a month? That makes it thirty-six times? How many times did you kiss? My God, did you ever make out at all?" Yuan said brutally.

"That's it! That's the reason why you haven't gotten laid yet. That's the reason why you are going to die a virgin!" Jill threw her hands up in the air.

Adrienne almost choked on her coffee. If they only knew what she has been doing these last three nights! But she doesn't know how to tell them. Will they look at her differently? Will they think she's loose?

Amidst the questions, she decided she would be more comfortable in just not saying anything to her friends for the meantime. And besides, who knows when she will see Justin Adams again?

She never imagined she would sleep with him again after she went out of his apartment that night she lost her virginity to him. She never imagined she will spend last night with him either.

“Come on, Yen. Look at you! You look great! I wish I have those long legs, that straight hair, which makes it hard to determine whether you are a brunette or a redhead. Those dimples! You are absolutely divine! But the way you dress up... Come on! You work for Blush! You have to be as stylish as your magazine!” Jill complained. “And those glasses you kept wearing at work... my God! I told you many times before, they’re reading glasses. You don’t have to wear them all the time! Didn’t you know that they have invented contact lenses already? It’s not like you can’t see perfectly without them! You should always be the woman you were last night! Do you know that guys were checking you out? You were a bomb! You should be like that when you go to work! And maybe Troy will see that he needs to wake up!”

Yuan nodded. "Come on. Dress up! I will treat you ladies for a spa and salon. This girl needs a permanent makeover. If she can show up looking like a hot chic last night, it means she's not hopeless. She just needs a little more push!"

Adrienne moaned. "Come on, guys! I haven't written the Gypsy's thing yet. It has to be perfect and ready in Jada's table by ten o'clock sharp tomorrow."

"Yes. And you're a gifted writer, you know that. It's piece of cake!" Jill said as she hauled Adrienne out of her seat and tucked her inside the bathroom.

Adrienne took a quick shower. Each minute she spent there, reminded her Justin's presence. It was as if he is still there with her. Touching her. Rubbing her skin with lather. Kissing her.

She decided to shake the memory out of her system.

She went to her closet and dressed in blue jeans and for once, she wore a Sabrina blouse that hugged her body to perfection.

When she went out of the closet, Yuan and Jill were staring at her.

“Now, that’s what I’m talking about!” Jill said.

“I’m dressing up for your little game girls.” She smiled.

“Adrienne, did Troy stay here the other night?” Yuan asked.

She shook her head nervously. “No why?”

Yuan lifted a pair of Juliet Oakleys that was seated in her bedside table.

“Juliet Ducatis?” Jill said. “I didn’t know he was the type to wear these?”

Adrienne carefully got the shades from them.

“Well, some people find something they like that is different from what they normally like.” She said. “Just like right now, I am going to the spa with you!”

“Justin Adams had a pair of shades just like that.” Jill sighed dreamily.

Adrienne swallowed hard. If they only knew that they were referring to the *same* pair of shades.

“Juliet? If Troy would fancy an Oakley, he should get Monster Dog!” And Jill and Yuan launched into a laughing trip about Troy.

Adrienne shook her head. But she was relieved that the topic was on Troy now and not on Justin. She hated lying to Yuan and Jill.

“Come on, guys, you’ve had enough fun already.” She said.

“My God, Adrienne! Do you know how connected you were with the flat across the hall?” Yuan said staring at her window.

“Look! Your bedroom windows are facing each other. And there’s a platform that can enable you to cross and enter that flat through the window!”

“Really?” Adrienne asked nonchalantly. “I didn’t notice before. And why would I want to do that?”

“You may not want to, but what if your neighbor is killer or a rapist? It’s the worst way to lose your virginity, my dear. They could just go right through your window and ravish you and then they can even kill you!” Jill said.

Adrienne laughed. “My God, Jill! You should have been a novelist!”

“Who lives in there anyway?” Yuan asked.

Adrienne turned her back on them and swallowed hard again. “I don’t know. I don’t spy on my neighbors.”

Yuan and Jill kept looking on the door and then they shrieked! “Oh my God!”

“What?” Adrienne asked nervously. It seems she has been jumpy since Justin left this morning. Guilt, she thought. She’s guilty of keeping something from her friends. Something as monumental as losing her virginity! To the city’s most notorious playboy, no less!

“Torso! Perfect abs! Perfect body!” Yuan was drooling, looking over the window.

Adrienne squeezed in between her friends to see what they were drooling about.

She saw a body she has known well for three nights. A body that not three hours ago, had been touching hers.

“Who is that?” Jill asked.

Adrienne shook her head and turned away from the window.

“I have no idea. I don’t stalk my neighbors.” She lied.

“God, this guy is worth stalking! From the looks of it! God! You gotta love that body! Not the wrestle-mania types, and yet, perfect abs, tough... hard...” Yuan said, obviously drooling.

“Guys! Just get out of there! Don’t drool in front of the window. You don’t live here! I do! I don’t want my neighbors to think I’m a complete freak or something.”

“Balcony, balcony!” They screamed and hurried off to the balcony.

Oh God! She should call him and tell him to stay away from the balcony!

Yuan and Jill lighted a cigarette on her balcony, waiting for the *torso* guy to come out.

“What are you doing?” Adrienne hissed.

“Nothing! We just want to see his face!” Jill whispered.

Adrienne groaned. She was about to haul her friends away from the balcony when her phone rang.

She ran to answer it before the machine could get it.

“Hello.”

“Hey...” A guy said on the other line.

“Who’s this?” She asked hastily.

“Me. Remember? We just spent three amazing nights together?” Justin said with a chuckle.

“How did you get my landline number?” She asked.

“I told you I was a boy scout. And I have photographic memory.” He replied.

Adrienne stared at her landline phone. She remembered that her number was written on the bottom part of it. Justin must have seen it.

“Okay, whatever you do, stay away from your balcony!” She hissed.

“Why?”

“Because my friends saw what a gorgeous torso you have and now, they’re waiting to see your face.”

He laughed. “So what if they see my face?”

“They can’t! They can’t know you live across from me.”

He didn't say anything. "I see. You're too embarrassed of our acquaintance, huh. You won't let people know you know me?"

"God, Justin, this isn't a time for argument! I am inside my closet and I'm whispering! And I am mad right now!"

He chuckled. "Alright. Stay away from the balcony it is!"

She sighed. "You left your shades here."

"It's okay. I can get it later. I have a spare."

Later? Was he planning to see her again?

"Alright! I have to go. Why did you call by the way?"

He paused for a while and then he said, "Forget it."

"Justin. What is it?"

"Dinner tomorrow night?" He asked quickly.

She sighed.

“Justin... I thought it was just a one night thing.” She said softly.

He didn't answer for a while. “Three nights thing. And now, I'm asking you out for dinner.”

She sighed. “I have a boyfriend. I shouldn't be seeing anyone...”

“You aren't. We're secret friends remember?” And there was a trace of laughter in his voice.

She took a deep breath. “Friends don't do what we did the last two nights.”

“So I'm a friend who allows you to fool around once in a while behind your other friends' and your boyfriend's back.”

She sighed. She heard Jill calling her. “God, I have to go. Just send me an SMS. The time and place.” She hung up on him quickly as soon as she heard footsteps coming her way.

“What are you doing?” Jill asked behind her.

She shook her head. “Nothing. Just trying to find a phone number for my sister. I thought I must have placed my dentist’s calling card in one of my bags here. But I didn’t. So, how was the torso hunting?”

She shook her head.

“He didn’t go out. He just disappeared.”

“Come on, let’s go!” Yuan said. “Let’s just hope that face of his will give justice to that torso and abs he has!”

You have no idea! She thought.

They took a trip to the saloon where Adrienne had a hair cut. She had her hair layered, which turned out gorgeous since it highlighted the red strands of her hair. Then they had their nails done. And then they went shopping.

Adrienne was beaming while she tried on some clothes. Instead of the conventional pants she used to wear for work, she decided to try on some more clothes that would accent her curves and highlight the colors of her hair.

At the back of her mind, she had Justin Adams. And everytime she thought about him, she would smile. Even if only to herself. She doesn't know why she was haunted by him. If all the girls he's been with feel like this, then half of Manhattan must be heartbroken by now!

And that scared her! She wants him out of her mind! Otherwise, she was bound to be disappointed and hurt by him! He is far too charming and far too dangerous!

Her phone rang.

"Hello." She answered.

"I'll pick you up at your apartment tomorrow. Say sevenish?" Justin asked on the other end of the line.

"I normally work late." She replied.

"Alright. Then I'll pick you up in your office."

"No! Wait!" She said. Jill turned towards her and raised a brow. She walked away from her slowly so she won't hear her.

“You can’t do that. Seven-thirty, my place.” She said.

“Alright. I’ll see you then.” He said.

“Justin...”

“Yes?” He asked.

“Why are you doing this?” She asked.

“Doing what?”

“Can’t you just drop me? Like I want you to? Like what you normally would do?” She asked.

He didn’t answer.

“Justin. Are you still there?”

“Yeah. I’m here.”

“You are making my life complicated.” She said giggling desperately.

“Well, maybe we’ve been following the same path for all our lives. And it’s time for a change.”

“I thought you’ve been living this life all along.”

“My reputation precedes me.” He said quietly.

“What do you want?” She asked.

“Nothing.” He said. Then he sighed. “Well, maybe... just you.”

Her heart skipped a bit. She knew that she was being handled by a professional in the game of flirting and heart-breaking.

She sighed.

“Alright. Seven-thirty tomorrow then.”

“Okay. Take care. If you need a ride or anything at all... you know my number.” He added.

She smiled. That was actually sweet. “I’ll remember that. Bye.”

She was still smiling when she hung up.

“Who was that? Troy I suppose?” Yuan asked.

She just nodded because she thought she might scream if she opened her mouth to speak.

“Boy! This is something different! Troy? Making you smile like that? Is he in the brink of proposing—that you go to bed?” Jill said sarcastically.

She raised an eyebrow.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” She asked.

“Your relationship with Troy is completely extraordinary... extraordinarily boring!” Yuan said.

“And it has never made me smile like this before?” She asked.

They nodded. “So the tides could be changing. Probably, someone in Med school, gave him a Viagra or something!” Yuan said brutally.

She shook her head. Yet she can't believe she was smiling like a teenager. And she's hasn't done that with Troy ever?

Justin Adams is turning his world upside down.

They headed to Starbucks for coffee.

"I still cannot believe that you didn't see Justin Adams in Gypsy's. I mean the place is not really a labyrinth. You can stand by the bar and you will see everybody in there. And you can't miss Justin Adams." Yuan said.

"Well, maybe I did but I just didn't care." Adrienne said.

"Why wouldn't you care for a god like that?" Jill said.

"There are other cute guys in the city? Why are you obsessed with just one?" Adrienne asked. She is getting tired of Justin Adams conversation. Especially now, that she has something to be guilty about.

"Because he is different from classic playboys. This one... I don't know. He seemed... the smuggest of them all! And

he seemed like he got more class than any other playboy!" Jill said.

"What?" Adrienne said. "Playboys have classes now?"

"Look at his profile! Rich kid. Heir of Adams Industries. Harvard degree. Graduated with distinction. Rebellious personality and yet still contained. No drugs, no gambling in his profile. Refused to work for his father. Instead he took a play on the stock market. And I heard he was actually making really good there. Making his millions of his own. His hobby—Photography. Never had any girl attached to his name. He's straight. He just didn't have a steady relationship. He's clean. He was sought-after. He doesn't pursue. He's a mystery. And would you look at that gorgeous thing? He is absolutely divine!" Yuan drooled.

"Divine? Have you even seen how he really looked like? Doesn't he have like a pair of shades on or something all the time?" Adrienne said.

"Yeah. So smug!" Yuan giggled. "But still, the whole package! Him with the shades! It is absolutely divine!"

That black hair that keeps falling on his forehead. I would take that, even if he is was cross-eyed!"

"I wonder what his eye color is." Jill thought.

"Crystal blue." Adrienne thought out loud. The moment she realized what she just said, she turned red. She took a gulp of her coffee, hoping to hide the redness in her face.

"What?"

"Well... I... ah... think it would be nice if his eyes were blue." She said.

"Yeah. Like a black-haired Ken doll!" Yuan agreed.

Adrienne swallowed.

Just then, a group of guys sat at the table next to them.

"Don't look now, but it's the man of the hour!" Yuan whispered and took a sip of his coffee.

Adrienne and Jill looked at the same time, and it is indeed, Justin Adams with two of his friends. He was seated

opposite her, wearing jeans and leather jacket. He was wearing another Oakley shades. She looked away and pretended she didn't see him.

What is he doing here? How can her life be entangled with his like this?!

"Oh my God!" Jill hissed.

"Come on girls. Time to change the topic. I am fed up talking about this." Adrienne said.

"Honey... we always talk about hot bachelors, and this is our favorite topic. You didn't seem to hate the topic before." Jill whispered.

"Well, I got fed up now!" Adrienne hissed back. "There are other cute guys around."

Her phone rang. She answered it, relieved to be busy with something else.

"Hi." Justin said.

She looked at his direction. He didn't seem like he was looking at her beneath those shades of his.

"Am... excuse me?" She said.

"I just wanna say hi. Didn't want you to think I was a snob or something." His lips curved into a half smile.

"Alright. Okay. Bye now."

"Bye." And this time, he smiled.

She was blushing, she swore.

"Cousin of mine. Reminded me to pick up a book that was nice. Well... where were we?" She said.

"Still there. Still with hotshot, himself." Jill said.

"I wonder who he picked up at the bar the other day." Yuan said.

Adrienne sat quietly while Yuan and Jill discussed about boys, more often, about Justin. She was lost in her own thoughts. She isn't sure what is happening. In fact, she felt

self-conscious. She didn't know if Justin is looking at her. She feels so uncomfortable having him sit across him on the next table, wearing those pitch black pair of shades, which makes it quite impossible for her to tell if he was staring at her.

After a while, Justin and his friends stood up and left. She didn't look his way.

She received an SMS after a minute.

Justin: *See you. I'll just go around with these guys. It's poker night tonight.*

She replied: *Okay. You didn't have to tell me that.*

Justin: *But I did... and by the way, you look perfect in your hair.*

She didn't reply anymore. She wondered how she could take it all back. Their paths have crossed and now it seemed like it was being tangled. She sighed. She doesn't even know if she would want to take it back. He has a reputation, alright. But he is actually sweet. She doesn't know why he's doing this to her. Maybe he is bored with

his own life. And she is bored with her life. Maybe he is right. Time to take a different path. For all it's worth, she can pursue her alter-ego. Explore that different side of her with him. Have fun behind the back of the old boring Adrienne.

Then she smiled to herself. As long as she keeps her heart intact, he couldn't do her any damage, right? In fact, it might even do more good than bad for her to play this game. She doesn't need to wait up all week for Troy to call. Or die of insecurity because she thinks that Kimberly is the right girl for her boyfriend and that she could never measure up to her.

She could have fun on her own. This time, she could be her real self. She could unleash her spirit and discover if Jill and Yuan were right. If she was a much more beautiful creature being who she really is.

5

Amizade

Portuguese, meaning: Friendship

She was wearing a white skirt that goes all the way down to her knees, a white turtleneck sleeveless blouse that hugs her body to perfection, showing her perfectly flat tummy and flatteringly-shaped breasts. She had tied her hair in a bun and put on very light make-up, a pair of white gold hoop earrings, and a pair of white high-heeled strappy sandals.

She was quite satisfied with herself when Justin rang her doorbell. He stared at her for about ten seconds. He didn't say anything.

"Too much? Too less?" She asked uncertainly.

He chuckled. "For a woman perfectly confident of your writing skills, you are quite not confident that you can make heads turn even if you were on your pajamas."

She blushed. "Then I trust that I look okay."

He nodded and then pulled her close to him. "More than okay. You're a fox!" He said and then leaned down to kiss her on the lips.

He took her to a French restaurant. He's reserved a cubicle for them. It was perfect. No one except for the waiters could see them.

"Do you find the place suitable?" He asked her smiling.

She nodded. "Yes. I don't know what I will do if Jill's date decided to take her here as well."

"I see, you haven't told even your best friends that you know me."

She stared at him. Then she shook her head. "No. I don't even know what I'm doing."

"You're having a dinner date with me." He said coolly.

"Yes. And I don't know why."

He took her hand in his. "If I were not me... would you tell them about this?"

It was a difficult question. She didn't know what to answer.

"I don't know." She admitted. "It's bad enough that I cheated on my boyfriend. Five times for three consecutive nights, to be exact."

"I'm just a guy, Adrienne." He said. "I hope you could see me as me, and not as Justin Adams. I wouldn't like that."

"Why? Justin Adams has a secret identity as well?"

He smiled. "Justin Adams is a name. A name I sometimes don't like to carry at all. The person behind the name is different from what you hear about him... at least I hope."

"We'll see about that, won't we?" Adrienne managed to wink.

He nodded. "Yeah... we'll see."

It was perfectly fun and relaxing dinner date. When he walked her to her door afterwards, he kissed her softly. He

stared at her. And then he kissed her again... passionately, this time.

He took a deep breath. "You better go in before I lose my control." And then he smiled.

She smiled back. "Good night. Thank you for dinner."

He nodded. Then she closed the door behind her and leaned against it. She was smiling. It was a perfect date. He was a gentleman. It was like they started out on a one-night stand and he's trying to prove that he's not just after the sex. It was like he's trying to prove himself to her... that he's not all what his reputation says. That Justin Adams is just a name. And the man inside is just human.

And yes... He isn't the notorious rake she thought he was. He didn't ravish her. He was actually gentle and sensitive. And he's surprisingly sweet.

She took a shower and got dressed in a lavender pajamas and a white spaghetti strap blouse.

Her phone rang. It was Troy.

“Hey. Surprised you still remember me.” She said sarcastically.

“I’m sorry, honey. I was stupid.” He nodded. “I know it’s hard to cope up with the pressure you receive from your mother. And I shouldn’t do the same thing to you. Maybe I could come visit you sometime.”

“Okay. That would be good.” She said. She tried so hard to feel excited at the thought of Troy visiting her. She waited for that nerve to tick, for the thrill to flow... but there was none.

“So, what were you up to this week?” He asked her.

The first and only thing that came to her mind was Justin Adams. She waited for the guilt to start gnawing her. But it didn’t.

“Well, I went to Gypsys. It’s a bar. There was an opening. I had to write about it.”

“Who did you go with?” He asked.

“Just myself. Just checked it out.”

“Did you drink?”

“No... of course I drank! Soda!” She lied.

“Adrienne, aren’t you thinking of making a career change? I’m sure you are good at what you do. But... Girl magazine writing... going to bars and fashion shows... honey... that’s not a career! I mean... I mean... you could try at least a newspaper. And now, you’re telling me that you had to go to some bars to check out the place? What kind of bar is that. I don’t even think that it’s safe.”

She took a deep breath. *Didn’t he just say sorry for pressuring her like her mother?*

“I hate to agree, but sometimes, your mother is right. Look at your sister. She’s in med school. I know you’re smart. But why take on a lower level of career? You could at least be a manager of some company. But writing about bars?”

“I told you before. I am not into medicine.”

“I know. I just hope we can have a more intellectual conversation sometimes. I talked to Kim last week. She

gave me a lot of pointers for my internship. She is a god! She is so good. Come on, Yen. I'm not comparing you to her like your parents were. But I have to agree with them sometimes. You deserve a better job. Kim is going to be a head surgeon of some hospital someday and you will be like at home writing a novel you may never publish. You're still young. It's never too late, sweetheart."

She sighed. She realized that Troy sounds like a lovesick twelve-year old when he talks about Kim. This infuriated her, actually. There was a time in her life, that she thought herself in love with him.

"I have a deadline to meet, Troy. Let's talk about this some other time." She hung up.

Now she was really mad. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. Now, even her boyfriend is nagging her about Kim! Can't anybody see that is doing extremely well on her own? And even if she was not, does Kim always to be the measure of her achievements?

She cried harder and then she wiped the tears away from her eyes. She took her keys and went out of her apartment.

She wasn't sure what she was doing. But soon, she was ringing the doorbell of the apartment across her.

Justin answered after two rings. He was wearing pajamas and naked on top. One look at her softened his expression.

"Hey, what's wrong?" He asked.

She shook her head. He pulled her to him and gave her a hug. She cried silently in his shoulders.

He was caressing her head. Giving light kisses on her temple.

When she finished, she pulled away and stared up at him. He wiped the tears in her cheeks.

"Wanna talk about it?" He asked.

She shook her head.

He stared at her for a moment and then nodded. He pulled her inside and closed the door behind them.

"Did I disturb you?" She asked.

“No. Not at all.” He replied. “I was... just about to... well, call you.”

This surprised her.

“Why?”

He shrugged. “I have nothing to do. I was just about to see if you’re up for a chat. But your line was busy, so I figured I’d try again after a few minutes. And here you are.”

He took her hand in his and led her to his bedroom. He pulled the covers away and laid on it. He pulled her by the hand to motion her to lie beside him.

He put his arms around her and she nestled her head in his shoulder.

“Parents?” He asked quietly.

She shook her head.

“Boyfriend?” He asked again.

She shrugged. "All of them. It's like my life is made up of one mundane thing. My sister who is overshadowing me. I am happy for her. But can anyone just be happy for me?"

He caressed her head. "No one likes what they don't understand." He said. "They don't know you that well. Just stop living your life the way other people wanted you to live it. Live it for yourself."

"Like you?" She asked.

"I don't know. Yeah. Maybe. My parents wanted me to be someone else as well. And I know I can't escape that path. So I'm trying to learn as much from life now. So I'll be more ready when I take that path."

"You were doing good by yourself." She said.

"Yes. But I can't live in photos and stocks all my life. And who's going to take over the family business? My cousins from the mother side? No, I wouldn't want it that way. It wouldn't be right. My father's father started the empire. It has to be his blood to continue growing it."

“So when do you intend to start learning the ropes that you should have been learning for years now?”

He shrugged. “After this year. I’ve made well for myself. At least people can’t say, I became rich because I had a rich dad. That’s just the stereotype I wanted to escape.”

“At least your future is brighter than mine.” She grunted.

“What do you really want to do with your life?” He asked.

“I love what I am doing now. I love writing. I mean, it’s my passion. It’s not just a hobby. But I also want to invest in something. I want to earn money somewhere else.” She said.

“Like what?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. Stocks maybe. But I have no idea what to do. So I couldn’t possibly play.”

“You’re serious?” He asked.

She shrugged.

"I can show you. I can teach you how. You don't have to invest that much. You can start with five hundred bucks. See where it gets you. If you feel that you want to do it... we'll increase the investment. I'll guide you all the way."

"Really? Five hundred grand?" She stared up at him.

He nodded.

The idea actually excited her. And she felt like this could work. She can write and she can invest somewhere.

"Okay. What do I have to do first?" She asked.

"Look up Wallstreet numbers and find a company you like. Read about how they're doing in the past year and in the previous months. That's how you decide first which company to play for."

She smiled. "I could do that."

He nodded. "Yes. Don't worry. I teach how to call the shots, if I screw up on my advise and you lose money, I'll cover your losses."

“Why would you do that?”

“Because it will teach me how to be a better teacher.”

She giggled.

“Then it’s a deal then.” She said.

They went silent for a while. “Thank you, Justin.” She said. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have bothered you. But...” she sighed. “You live closer to me than Jill and Yuan.”

He chuckled. “See? You can even joke under distress. That’s the Adrienne that should always be out in the open. I think it’s the real Adrienne all along. Don’t try to be someone that other people want you to be. The real Adrienne is wonderful and beautiful just as she is.”

“That’s the Adrienne you met at Gypsy’s.” She said.

“The Adrienne that has a long, happy and colorful life to live.” He said.

For a while, they just lied there. Not saying anything. Then he tilted her chin up and kissed her. After the kiss, he pulled up the covers to her chin and turned off the lights.

He felt him enclose her in his arms.

“Good night, Adrienne.” He said.

“Good night, Justin.” She whispered.

He's really going to sleep now? Part of her was happy that he didn't suggest that they make love tonight, that he seems content to just sleep with her in his arms. But part of her is disappointed, because deep inside she knew she craved him with every fabric of her feminine being.

She looked up his face in the dark, illuminated by the light that comes from the window.

He really is handsome. He's got perfect nose, thin lips, strong jaw. And she is lying on his arms. Without need to say that she'll spend the night, knowing that she just had a bad moment, and she needed company, he is holding her, and he pulled the covers to keep her warm.

She reached up and traced his chin with her fingers. She was surprised when he suddenly shifted and pinned her between the bed and his body.

She shrieked and laughed.

He was looking at her in that devilish look of his. He was half-smiling.

“Didn’t you think that I could just be holding on to the last string of whatever control and chivalry I have in my body?” He asked her wickedly.

She shook her head. “Come on. Let’s go to sleep.”

He shook his head. “You had that chance a minute ago. You didn’t take it.”

She laughed. “Please, Justin...”

She watched helplessly as his face descended towards hers and he took her lips in one head-spinning kiss.

Then he nuzzled her neck and she moaned in pleasure. She wrapped his arms around his neck and caressed his hair. He kissed her on the lips and she kissed him back.

In a minute, they were both naked. They made love slowly. He caressed her. He kissed every inch of her skin. He made her feel adored. He made her feel beautiful. She realized it was when she is with him that she felt appreciated. Troy made her feel she wasn't good enough. Her parents made her feel she will never be good as her sister. But with Justin... she felt she could be the best she can be.

She felt exhausted when they finished. They cuddled, locked in each other's embrace. He was caressing her hair.

"You okay?" He asked.

She nodded. "Hmm... tired... aren't you hungry?" She said.

He looked down at her. "Are you?"

"Suddenly... I feel a bit hungry." She smiled.

“Dinner wasn’t good enough?” He asked smiling.

She giggled. “It was. But the...” She trailed off. She was going to say *sex* but not sure how to say it.

“Lovemaking was better?” He suggested smugly.

She jabbed him gently on the ribs.

“How smug!” she said.

She stood up and quickly got dressed.

Justin followed her to the kitchen where she raided his fridge and he sat at the counter.

“Hmm... you have microwaveable pasta?”

He smiled sheepishly. “What do you expect? Living life on the fast lane. Everything had to be on the go.”

She raised a brow, sort of like scolding him silently.

He held his hands up. “Alright. Maybe sometime you can cook for me. Can you cook?”

She raised a brow at him. "Alright Mister! What do you want? Thai? Chinese? Japanese? Mexican?"

He laughed. "Whoa! Never challenge Ms. Miller on her cooking skills."

She decided to fry some patties.

"Beer? Soda?" She asked.

"Let's have beer." He said.

"You have beer. I'll have soda." She asked.

"Not a beer person, huh?"

She stared at him. "Not a drinking person."

"Come on. Time for change, remember?" He said, his eyes filled with challenge.

"Alright. I'm with Justin Adams." She smiled.

"We both learn something from each other." He grinned.

They went to the balcony where they ate the patties and drank beer.

“How old is this sister of yours?” He asked.

“Twenty-eight. Two years my senior.”

“So, what is she? Miss thing?” He asked.

She shrugged. “At least that’s what my mom and my boyfriend think. They thought my writing is just a lame excuse to make a living.”

He looked over at her apartment. “I’d say it’s a hell more than that for you to afford that apartment of yours. Have they been there?”

She shook her head. “They don’t even know my address.”

“Well, I’d say don’t think too much about that. We’re not so different, you know. My father thinks I will live on the streets and won’t be able to sustain the lifestyle I grew up in unless I worked for him. But I think I’m doing fairly well. I have money and time in my hands. I can sustain my vices.”

“Vices?” She asked.

He shrugged. “Cars. Gadgets.”

She nodded. Honestly, she felt relieved. He must have noticed because he took her hand in his and laughed.

“No, Ma’am. Don’t do drugs, no gambling, no white slavery or dealing with terrorist acts, not even prostitution or encouraging of such.”

Then he kissed her hand gently.

After they were done eating, Adrienne insisted she wash the dishes, while Justin cleared the bottles in the balcony.

“So, are you serious about the stocks thing?” He asked.

She nodded. “I will give it a try.”

He smiled. “Alright! You’re learning to risk more now.”

Her eyebrows shot up. "Yes. And it started the day Gypsys opened. That damned place should be shut down! I should have written a nasty review."

He laughed. "Don't blame the place. It was in you. You have a free spirit dying to get out. You sound like you've never had fun in your life."

"Well, you didn't have the parents I have."

"I have worse. But still, it didn't stop me from doing what I want."

"At least they spoiled you a little."

He shrugged. "Maybe. But that didn't stop me from having sense either."

"Yeah... among other things. You were known to be a snob. And you..." She stopped.

"What?" He asked.

"And you were known to play around... with women..."
She said putting the last plate in his dish dryer.

He was quiet for a while.

She thought she must have hurt his feelings. She felt guilty and scared at the same time.

"If you thought that was true about me... how come you're here?" He asked quietly.

That ticked something inside her. That was the same question that she has been asking herself. If she knew who Justin Adams was and his reputation, then why is she still here? Why was she here in the first place?

She sighed. Anger was reeling inside her. "You know what? You're right! Why am I here?" She snapped.

She turned on her heel and hastily headed for the door.

He ran after her and grabbed her by the arm. She struggled to get away from his grip but he didn't let her go.

"Damn it, Justin! Let me go! And you won't expect to see me ever again!" She said.

He wrapped his arms around her waist.

He didn't say a word. He just hugged her. Tightly. Tears were rolling down her cheeks but she refused to let a whimper escape her.

"Honey, help me out here." He whispered in her ear, very gently, it made her cry more.

She didn't answer.

"I'm sorry." He said. He tilted her face to him, and she turned away. "I just... think it's unfair. You have been looking at me based on my reputation from day one. For a moment, I believed that you could see me the other way. You could see the man beneath the Justin Adams coat."

She stared at him. She saw in his face that he was struggling.

"Why does it matter what I think about you?" She asked him squarely.

His expression softened and he smiled sheepishly. "It just does." He wiped the tears in her cheeks.

“I have to go.” She said.

He shook his head. “Let’s please not leave it like this.” He seemed to be pleading.

Then he realized that he was right. And anyway, it shouldn’t matter if Justin was the asshole his reputation says he was. She promised to keep her heart intact. Why does it matter? And it is unfair to think of him that way, because she has been given a chance to see him underneath the Justin Adams coat.

And he is actually great. He does have a soul. What she said was unfair. She wasn’t looking forward for this thing to end in happily ever after. It never will. This is the breather she needed. Justin Adams is giving her a chance to live her life the way she should have lived it. He is giving her the courage to try out the things she has never tried out before. This thing they share—the temporary insanity... the mutual but short-term passion... is turning to do her more good than bad, anyway. And she was being unfair thinking that he was an ass, when she was the one playing games here.

She felt sorry now. She felt guilty. She reached up and touched his cheek gently.

“I’m sorry.” She whispered. “I was out of line. I don’t care what your reputation says. I mean... it doesn’t matter to me. It wouldn’t have an impact on my life. I’m the one who’s cheating on my friends and my boyfriend here. I’m sorry.”

He smiled. “We’re teaching each other how to live.”

“Yeah... I know. I guess we should leave it for what it is.”

He nodded. He kissed her passionately. She responded with the same passion.

He bent down and carried her in his arms.

“Hey... I said I had to go.” She said.

He grinned. “Oh no. You were set out to spend the night here two hours ago. You’re going to do just that.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“You’re impossible! You’re too smug!”

He laughed as he set her down on the bed.

“I’m gonna need to brush my teeth.” She said.

He smiled and pulled her up on her feet and led her to the bathroom, where he took out a brand new Electric toothbrush and handed it to her.

“You’re not giving me any other choice, are you?”

He shook his head.

She laughed and put toothpaste on her new toothbrush.

After brushing their teeth, they both went to bed and slept in each other’s arms.

6

*Ferveur : intensity of feeling or expression; intense
heat. Synonym:*

Passion

When she woke up, she was lying flat on her back and Justin was still sound asleep on her side with his arm around her. She looked at the clock on the bedside table. Eleven o'clock.

"Shit!" She said and quickly stood up.

Justin woke up and sat up the bed.

"What's the matter?" He asked.

"It's eleven o'clock! I work at nine!"

He smiled. "So what? When was the last time you took a leave?"

She stared at him. "I don't know. A year ago."

He shrugged. "You're too much of a workaholic. One day rest wouldn't hurt."

"Justin... I can't..."

He grinned and pulled her by the hand for her to sit on the bed beside him.

"Ms. Workaholic!" He teased. "I think you are in dire need of a vacation. Learn to lighten up a bit. You are doing good with everything you do. You're more passionate and smarter than that sister of yours. You can't prove yourself book-wise all the time. You know what I believe in? The person who had more life out of life is the more successful one. Chill okay?"

Looking at him saying those words, made Adrienne realized that she never had given herself much of a break because she always felt that she was chasing after her sister's accomplishments. And every single day counts.

Maybe Justin is right. She has to learn to let things go. Some things at least. She doesn't have to be tight all the time.

She sighed. "Alright." She smiled at him and then she leaned forward and gave him a kiss on the lips.

He smiled at her.

"What about you? Don't you have to go work today?" She asked. She wasn't even know if he works at all.

"Done." He said. "I woke up about nine in the morning and I did some trading."

"Really? That easy? Did you make money?"

He nodded. "I got lucky today. Fifty thousand bucks."

Her eyes widened. "Fifty thousand bucks? How is that possible?"

He shrugged. "I worked hard for it to happen. It took a great deal of investment and patience. It was risky and it took a whole year to wait for the right time. And today, things turned my way."

“My God! My five hundred bucks sounds like a... tip or something.”

He laughed. “I have been trading since I was twenty, honey.” He said. “And besides, I’m not asking you to start on five hundred bucks to make money. It’s just for trying to learn how it works without having to invest a lot.”

“You were awake at nine and you didn’t wake me up? You know it’s Monday!”

He smiled. “I know you slept late last night. So I decided not to wake you up.”

She sighed. “Alright. Then you better treat me for lunch or something.” She said.

“Done. Anywhere you want, honey. We can go to Paris for lunch if you want!”

She laughed. “No. I wouldn’t want to go that far. And besides one lunch in Paris wouldn’t be enough for me. I gotta stay there for at least a week!”

He smiled. “Alright. Where do you want to go?”

She shrugged. "Can we just have it here? Or in my apartment? Delivery probably?"

He just stared at her and then he nodded. "Alright. Can't be seen with Justin Adams on the streets." He muttered.

She felt guilty. She hugged him. "Can't be seen anywhere on the streets if I will call in sick."

He smiled. "If that's the case... what do you want then?"

"Chinese?" She asked.

He nodded. "Okay. Let's eat in the terrace. Myla, my housekeeper will be here in thirty minutes."

"Who, what?" She asked.

"My maid?" He asked back.

"You have a maid?"

He nodded. "Comes here Monday, Wednesday and Saturday."

She panicked. "Tell you what, let's just go to my apartment. I better check my mobile and my answering machine anyway. Jill would be screaming in it already since I didn't tell her where I was."

He shrugged. "Okay. You can go ahead. I'll order from here and be there in fifteen minutes."

Back in her apartment, the first thing she headed for was the answering machine. Twenty messages.

Hi Yen, it's Troy. I'm sorry, baby. It's just that you know my brother just got married last year. And Lisa is a top-notch lawyer.

"She's ten years older than your brother!" She muttered.

I know you have a game plan. Let's talk things over. When I have time, I will come to New York so I can see you. I love you.

She sighed. Each day that passes, she realizes that her relationship with Troy is becoming more and more hopeless. She has come to a comfortable place where she

knows she couldn't care less if Troy was gone. So what if her mother gets disappointed? She's been disappointing her forever. No matter what she does to get a single thread of affection from her mother, she will never see her in a different light. Why can't she just make her happy doing her own thing, doing what she thinks will make her live a complete life in spite of being a failure to her mother's eyes. At least she doesn't have to be a failure in her own eyes.

There was another message on the answering machine.

Hey Yen... it's Jill... lunch tomorrow with Yuan? He'll pick us up.

Her hand went to her mouth. She panicked.

The next messages came from Yuan and Jill all asking her where the hell she is.

She dialed Jill's number.

"Damn it, where are you???" Jill demanded.

"I'm home. I overslept and I'm not feeling quite well."
Adrienne replied.

“My God, sweetie? Are you alright?” She asked.

She nodded.

“Hello?”

“I’m nodding.” She said. She felt guilty to be lying to her friends. They sounded so concerned. They knew that she is not usually feeling sick... or she was never too sick to go to work.

“Want us to come down there?” Jill asked. At the same time, Justin entered her apartment, without so much as a knock.

“No! Don’t. I’ll be fine. I just want to have a rest.” She lied.

“Honey... are you sure you’re okay?” Jill asked.

“Yep. I’ll be fine.”

“Alright. I’ll tell HR now. I’ll call you after work okay?”

“Sure. Bye.”

Justin raised a brow.

“My friends. Jill and Yuan. They wanted to come down here and check on me. I said no.”

He smiled. “Alright. Good idea. I think I’m going to head out the window if they knock on your door.”

She smiled. “You can actually do that, I think.”

He nodded. “I checked that the morning they called saying they were on the elevator already. That would be the last resort if you want to keep this little secret of ours.”

She went to him. She wasn’t quite sure if he meant it was okay with him not keep this a secret. It was as if she was the one who clearly doesn’t want the world to know that she is in any way associated with him.

She gave him a hug. He hugged her back.

“I’m starving.” She whispered.

He chuckled. "Food will be delivered in fifteen minutes, don't worry."

And true to his word, it was. Justin ordered spicy beef, noodles and dimsum.

After lunch, she cleared the table and joined Justin for a smoke in the balcony.

"You know, you are a bit ironic." He said.

"Why is that?"

He shrugged. "You seem to be so prim and proper most of the time. And yet, you smoke."

"Like you said... MOST of the time." She smiled. "I didn't start smoking until last year. I was in a worse relationship with my mother. And that time, Troy was acting like a jerk because he wasn't doing too well on one of his subjects. And I had too many deadlines, I needed a breather and think clearly and get something done."

"And the habit just proved to be useful that time." He suggested.

She nodded. “And then it proved to be addicting as well.”

“And I figure, Mommy doesn’t know.” He said.

She nodded. “Yep. It’ll be another stain in our relationship.”

“Why is it like that?” He asked.

She shrugged. “I remember, she started comparing me to Kimberly when we were both in highschool. She was two years my senior. She was always bookish, always at home. I was always out with some friends. I started dating ahead of her. But I was getting straight As. And my Mom never liked it. She always said that I should be like my older sister whose life is school and house, school and house. Kimberly never liked me very much. She always bullied me, as far as I can remember. When I was trying to learn electric guitars, she was already having piano recitals. I used to be rebellious. I never did the right thing. Whenever Mom scolds me, it would be like... *look at Kimberly... Kimberly never gave me these problems...* When Kimberly made it to UCLA, my mother was ecstatic. She was so proud of her, short of telling me that I will never make it as

big as Kim someday. Kimberly will get anything she wanted in life, and I could always end up being a secretary of some company... if I don't get pregnant on my teens... I remember going so mad that night. Then I went on a date with this jerk, who's a senior. I thought it was cool because I was dating a hotshot older guy. But I almost got date raped. I used pepper spray on him, and had to phone my father to pick me up in the middle of nowhere. I was so scared. And Mom was so mad. That's when I started going the other way. Trying to earn her trust instead of rebelling against it. I stopped dating in highschool. I almost didn't go to prom. I use to dye my hair dark brown, to hide the red highlights. I used to love it 'coz I thought it looked cool. But my Mom always made me feel like a harlot because of it. So I have a whole stock of dark brown hair colors. I was still a straight A student. I did much better in junior year and senior year. I got accepted in all universities I applied to. I took communication arts in Stanford. I have always wanted to write. My mother still thought it wasn't good enough. Kim went to med school and she was doing well. I was happy for her. I did a lot of her English term papers in college. She would just email me whatever she needed. It seems like all my life, I was trying to live up to my Mother's expectations. And I still can't make her love me as much as

she loved Kim..." She didn't realize that tears were already rolling down her cheeks.

Justin took her hand and pulled her close to him.

"But you are doing well." He said softly.

"I thought so too. Three years of working and now... events and feature editor for Blush. I thought it was big. Blush is big. And I made it to that position in three years. My mother never saw that. She said, Blush is a magazine that is being read by models and other girls who were obsessed with their looks and never cared much about their brains."

"I don't think that is true. Women read a lot of these magazines for empowerment. Because it's a magazine that holds secrets for your gender."

She smiled. "I don't know Justin. I went there because I have passion for it. I love to write. And Blush is prestigious. But I also wanted to do other things. I want to invest. I want to make a whole lot more money than what I am earning now."

“You’re still young. What are you? Forty?” He joked.

She pinched him on the side.

“Ouch!” he laughed. “Alright. Twenty-six. You’re doing great in Blush. You could do more. On the side, you can invest on some things. You could even put up your own business if you want to. When the business turns great, you can choose whether you want to go on with full-time writing or do a contribution for Blush or another magazine or write your own novel or book.”

She pulled back and stared at him. “You know what? I wanted to do that. I have always wanted to do that. And I swore I will when I had more time or if things get to be more stable.”

He reached up and pushed some hair away from her face.

“Do it. I know you’ll do just great. And surgery... it can be learned in school. I think you could be a better surgeon than your sister if you just chose that profession. But writing... not everyone can be a writer. You have to have a skill for it. It’s a gift. You have it.”

She smiled and then reached up to give him a kiss on the lips.

“Thank you for saying that. I wish my mother thought of it that way.”

“What about your father?” He asked.

“I always think I was Dad’s favorite. My father is the *Yes Dear* kind of guy, if you know what I mean. He’s quite smart, but he loved all of us too much. Especially my mother.” She said. “I never felt my father to be unfair. There were also many times that I know he stood up for me. But there was nothing he did that changed my mother’s opinion of me. I don’t know. Maybe that’s just the way it is.”

“Well, at least it’s not both of them. And hey... you turned out okay. Sometimes, it’s the challenges that stood in the way that forced us to be better persons. If you ask me, you are great. You’re perfect, just as you are, honey.” He said.

“No one is perfect.” She rolled her eyes.

He shook his head and looked at her deep in the eyes. "You're smart. You've got a good heart. You've got savings for yourself. You've asserted your independence. You've got a classy apartment of your own. You've got a stable job, and have climbed up the promotion ladder at a short span of time. You've got friends who love you. You've got a guy who's crazy about you."

She laughed sarcastically. "I don't think Troy is crazy about me at all."

He stared at her for a moment. He didn't say anything. His eyes were narrowed a bit and an eyebrow was raised.

She stared back at him.

Shit!

"You mean..." She started.

Could Justin Adams really be crazy about her at all?

"I'm sure this Troy character *is* crazy about you. Otherwise, he wouldn't be sticking around like he is." He said nonchalantly.

Shit! She just ruined that perfect moment, didn't she?

The moment was perfect a minute ago. Now, it was awkward. And she didn't even see that moment. It passed by, her eyes were closed and she knows she can never will it to go back.

"Justin..." She started. She stared at him.

He stared back at her for a while.

"Do you mean... Troy?" She asked bravely.

He shrugged. "He *is* the current and official boyfriend, isn't he?"

What kind of answer is that?!

She stared at him. She didn't know what to feel. She knew she didn't have any right to get mad.

It's only been a few days! Could he really say that he was crazy about her? But he is Justin Adams!

He nodded and then lighted another stick of cigarette.
“What’s his story, anyway?”

She stared at him. She tried to make out the expression on his face. He had none. He was staring into the view of the city.

“Well... I met him when I first started working for Blush. It was my parents’ anniversary party and they were friends with his parents. We chatted and he asked me out. To tell you the truth, I didn’t know if he was actually my type. But he sounded so serious in life and so mature. And when he picked me up for our date, it was the only time my mother was ecstatic for me. As if it was the only time, I brought good news to her. Troy was okay. We got along just fine. And the relationship became stable. He went to med school and still we manage to keep things going. We had our problems... things that we can’t understand each other for... but all in all the relationship was stable. Sometimes, I think it was all that mattered. That I know it was going somewhere. We’ve been dating for three years. He was the only trophy I ever brought home to my mother.”

He nodded but didn’t say anything.

She fell quiet after that. Again, she wished she could be a mind reader. She wanted to know what he was thinking. She didn't want to answer his question... but he asked. It was weird talking about the Troy with Justin. It's way too complicated. Especially after he just pointed out that some guy was crazy about her and she automatically thought about Troy. It was like she was telling him that she has no regard for the last nights they spent together. But she doesn't even know what they are! And it is hard to hope for something stable with a guy like Justin Adams... and harder to believe that a guy like him can be crazy about her!

Her phone rang. She went inside the apartment to answer it.

"Yen... how are you?" Yuan asked.

"I'm okay. I'll be able to go to the office tomorrow."

"You're falling sick, sweetie. You need a vacation. You work too much!"

"I'm okay. Really. I just didn't feel too well to go to work this morning. Yeah... maybe stress. And one day rest took care of it. I feel better already."

"Alright. Why don't we drop by tonight?" he asked.

"No need for it, guys. And I would sleep early tonight. I want to make sure I go to work tomorrow."

"Alright. It's just that... I ain't used to this falling sick thing of yours. You never do that!"

She laughed. "First time in many years."

"Yes... oh well... call me if you need anything, sweetie."

"Will do. Cheers."

She put the phone down. When she turned around, Justin was sitting on her sofa. He was pretty quiet. Now she really feels guilty about talking about Troy. He can't be jealous! He's Justin Adams! But how come she has a feeling that she's hit him when she said that it was Troy who's crazy about her... and hit him again when she said

that Troy can keep a stable relationship, which is almost the same as saying that *he* can't?

She rested her head on his shoulder. He didn't budge. She wanted to ease him in her own way. But she didn't want to say anything because it would be assuming and hoping that she meant something to him.

He didn't say anything for a whole minute. But then, she felt him wrap an arm around her shoulders and caressed her shoulders.

She smiled to herself. All these unspoken affection that he shows her is driving her mad! She feels that he somehow has grown fond of her for the last couple of days they spent together, but for a guy like Justin Adams, she just can't believe it is possible. The signals he's sending her is driving her out of her skull. She doesn't know what to feel. And she is so afraid to hope. She knows she can't nail a guy like Justin Adams. What they have right now, is just a moment passing by. And she didn't know when it will be over. She promised herself she would keep her heart intact. It is just too darned easy to fall in love with him! She can't distract herself with yet another heartache. When Justin leaves her,

she doesn't think she would be able to take it if he takes her heart with him.

But then she'll need to see after two weeks right? Justin's reputation says he drops a woman after two weeks. If he is like this to everyone of them, then he's leaving a trail of heartaches at least twenty-four times a year. And she doesn't intend to be part of that trail.

"Do you like to watch DVD?" He asked mildly.

She looked up at him and smiled.

"Yes."

He smiled back, stood up and pulled her up on her feet.

"Let's go to my place." He said.

They watched *How to Lose the Guy in 10 days* in Justin's plasma television and home theater in his bedroom.

"My God! Even I would drop this girl like a hot potato if I were her boyfriend!" Adrienne said watching the film.

He laughed. "Hey... there are girls like that. They demand too much."

"But not all, mister." She argued.

"Yeah. I said there are *some*."

"But you guys... I don't understand why some guys run off when a girl leaves something in your place. I mean, you're too non-committal. Girls don't mind if you leave something in our place. You guys... immediately think we're marking you as our property or something."

"No. It's just that, we like to have our own place. And our time. And sometimes you can't get that."

"Leaving something of ours in your place doesn't necessarily mean we are marking it as our territory. As if we want to move in with you or something."

"You can leave some of your stuff. But you don't have to write your name all over the place."

“What? Write our names? Leaving our stuff in your place is like writing our names on it? What are we? Cats?” She asked, her voice raised.

He laughed. “Honey... chill, okay? I’m not generalizing women. And I’m not saying it’s all true for men, as well! I don’t mind if you leave some things here. You have a toothbrush here, remember? And I gave it to you. You didn’t leave it here.”

She realized that she sounded so furious and she laughed herself.

“It’s just that some things... for guys... take some time to get used to. And bachelors, who are used to doing their own thing at their own time, take more time to get used to the fact that they can’t do it the same way anymore. Like toilet seats, for example. We can just leave it up all the time. And girls don’t like it up, because you use it. Hey... you’re the one using it. So why don’t you put it down yourself. We don’t complain if you leave it down. And we grew up being taught by our mothers... *this is a toilet seat. Put it up when you are using the toilet. Flush. And then put it back down.* And you grow up and realize that you were doing it for the girls.”

“That’s like etiquette or something!”

He laughed. “Come to think of it, honey, I’ll bet that rule was made by a woman! Were you ever taught... *this is a toilet seat. Put it down when you are using it. Flush and put it back up?*”

“No. Because that is not the way it was supposed to be.”

“Come on. What’s the rationale? Because there might be a girl who will use that one time and it’s proper that it’s all ready for them to sit in.”

“Chauvinist pig!” She snapped.

He laughed and then pulled her to her in a hug. She pulled back, refusing.

He laughed harder. “Honey... I was just raising that point. Look in the bathroom. The toilet seat will always be left down for you. I’m not arguing.”

“Okay. From now on, always leave it up. If I am in need of using it, I will put it down myself.”

He pulled her again and hugged her, laughing. "No. I will not break the rules of my mother and of the society that dictated this mundane principle."

She jabbed him lightly on the ribs. "You're impossible. You do one thing and yet you make fun of it."

"I'm not. There are some things that you just can't change."

She pinched him.

"Ow! What was that for?" He protested.

"For being a chauvinistic jerk!"

He laughed. Then he tilted her chin up and kissed her.

The kiss deepened, became more passionate, and then suddenly, raging. Before she knew it, they were both naked, Justin on top of her, spreading her legs with his thighs and she felt him, taking her in a wild ride of passion.

When it was over, they were both catching their breaths.

Justin lied on his back and pulled her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder. After a minute, they were both asleep.

When she opened her eyes, she found herself still in Justin's arms, all naked, with a blanket tucked to her chin. She looked up. Justin was already awake. He was watching a movie. The volume was low and the subtitles were on, sort of like he was careful not to wake her up.

She was just staring at his profile. His perfect nose. The cleft on his chin that was barely there at all. He was very handsome indeed. He looked down at her.

"Hey beautiful." He whispered.

"How long have I slept?" She asked.

"Two, three hours? It's already seven."

She closed her eyes for a moment, she then stretched her arms and sat up, tucking the blanket under her arms.

He caressed the side of her waist.

“Do you want to go out?” He asked.

“Where?”

He shrugged. “Just dinner. Anywhere your friends do not normally hang out on so you won’t have to worry about anyone you know seeing you with Justin Adams.”

She stared at him. He was actually smiling.

“Okay. Just let me shower first.” She said.

He nodded. She got dressed. Then she kissed him on the cheek.

“Pick me up at eight?” She smiled.

“You bet.” He smiled back.

She took time getting ready. She wore a white Capri pants and a red sleeveless blouse that accented her curves, which she never paid much attention to before. She put on very light make up and tied her hair in a half-pony. Finally, she slipped into her white high-heel sandal. She smiled at the sight of her reflection.

How come I never wore these clothes before? She asked herself.

The doorbell rang at exactly eight. Justin stared at her for a whole minute when she opened the door.

"I should change?" She asked consciously.

He shook his head. "I'm thinking, let's not go out at all. Let's just stay here."

She laughed. "Justin!"

He smiled. Then he pulled her close to him and whispered in her ear, "You're a fox!" And he kissed her on the side of her neck.

She giggled. "Come on. Let's go before you think of going farther."

"Oh trust me, honey. I'm already thinking it."

She pinched him on the arm and laughed.

“We’ve just done what you were thinking about.” She said.

He shook his head. “That was five hours ago.”

She pulled him towards the elevator.

“Come on. Let’s go. I don’t sleep with a guy before a date.”

He laughed. “You’ve never slept with a guy before me.”

She turned red. He laughed again and wrapped an arm around her waist.

“And that makes me so darned lucky!” He whispered and kissed her on the temple.

He took her hand in his. He led her to his Ferrari, and they drove around to Casa Mexicana.

After dinner, they took a joyride. Most of the time, he would take her hand in his and kiss it.

When they went home, he walked her to her door. They kissed passionately. She felt drugged. Excited. Like her world turned upside down. And yet there was a sense of

knowing. She knew the man... Justin... she felt comfortable at the same time. The excitement was the same as ever, but the fear was gone.

When he pulled away, he looked as lost as she was. He smiled and kissed her on the forehead.

“Goodnight.” He said.

“Goodnight.” She whispered. She felt disappointed. She was sure as hell that she will miss sleeping in his arms tonight. And she didn’t want to break the magic.

Then she dared to ask him, “Do you want to come inside?”

It was as if triumph glinted in his eyes. He replied, “Honey... you know if I come in, I would stay the night.”

She smiled and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Then stay the night.” She whispered.

When she pulled back, he was smiling at her.

She turned around and opened the door. He followed.

She went into the bathroom to take a shower and change into her pajamas. When she went out, Justin was lying on her bed, watching news, his foot on the floor.

“Hey...” She called.

He smiled at her and then took off his shirt, which exposed the torso and abs that melted her knees when she first looked at them... and they still do.

“Toothbrush?” He asked.

She went into the bathroom and took a brand new toothbrush head and placed in her electric toothbrush.

“Sorry. I don’t have the whole brush. But I have spare heads.”

He laughed. “That’s fine. I don’t care.”

After brushing, he took a quick shower. Adrienne placed a clean towel on the towel bar and closed the bathroom door behind her.

When Justin got out of the bathroom, his hair was wet and he has a towel wrapped around his waist.

She smiled at him.

“What are you watching?” He asked.

“Nothing interesting.” She replied.

He sat beside her and kissed her.

“I can think of something interesting to do.” He whispered mischievously.

She laughed.

“You! You sound like you’re not tired of me yet.”

He shook his head. “How could I? You’re a fox!”

His face descended to hers and gave her a soft kiss that turned passionate and deep.

He nuzzled her neck and she moaned in pleasure.

After they made love, she was panting, and so was he. She felt senseless... woman...

He wrapped his arms around her and they both fell asleep.

She was comfortable in his arms. She felt adored. She felt safe in their passion. Somehow, it tells her that she is adored when he is with him... she is safe with him.

She smiled in her sleep. She thought, from the day she walked into Gypsys, she will never be the same.

*Junpu manpan**Japanese. Translation: Smooth Sailing.*

It was true. She was never the same.

Her spirits were so much higher when she went to work. She doesn't dress up in boring square pants and skirts anymore. She was executive looking and yet... *foxy*!

She doesn't wear glasses anymore. She just has them with her whenever she's reading or writing. Her hair was frequently down, straight or in perfect waves behind her shoulders. She actually loved its red highlights. It makes her look smart and naughty at the same time.

She was a little worried though. On the fourteenth day that they have been seeing each other, she was already expecting Justin to walk away. Two weeks. This is his reputation. After two weeks, he can just disappear like a bubble.

She sighed on her desk and promised herself that she will not get hurt. That she will accept things as they are. When he walks away, she will still be the same Adrienne that she is now. She will not go back to her old wardrobe or her eyeglasses. For what it's worth, the whirlwind thing that they have has done a great deal for her confidence and self-respect. Regardless of how sinfully she got her self-love back, she will not regret a single moment of it.

"Are you okay?" Jill asked her.

No! He hasn't called me or sent me an SMS yet! And it's after lunch! It took all her effort not to scream that. Instead, she said. "I'm fine. Whatever made you feel that I'm not okay?"

Jill shrugged. "You looked tense."

You think?

Adrienne sighed. "Too much work, I guess."

Since the seventh day since Gypsy's Justin has been sending her messages throughout the day.

You're a fox. It says. It never failed to bring a smile on her face. Now, it's their fourteenth day and he is acting like he didn't exist. She doesn't want to swallow her pride and call him. Not at the end of the two weeks, when he is rumored to lose interest in a woman.

She composed herself and went back to work.

"Ms. Adrienne Miller?"

She looked up and saw a guy dressed in a Khaki uniform in front of her.

"Yes?"

He put a large bouquet of red roses in her desk.

She looked up at him.

"From who?" She asked.

"There's a card, Ma'am. Please sign here." The delivery guy said.

She signed the paper. When he was gone, she scanned for the card nervously.

Jill went to her side excitedly.

“My God? From who?” She asked. “Troy?”

“I don’t know.”

She read the card. Hoping against all hopes that it’s from Justin, but also hoping that it wouldn’t say so in the card because Jill is in front of her and she will definitely snatch the card from her fingers after she reads it.

The card says, *“You’re a fox...”*

She sighed in relief. She smiled to her ears.

Justin.

She was only waiting for an SMS. He gave her more than that. He gave her roses! First time she ever received a bouquet of roses from a guy. And he was discreet enough not to put his name in it, but he left no doubt that it is from him.

Jill snatched the card from her.

“Oh my God! Who have an admirer! Do you know who it is?”

She shook her head. She didn't say anything. She is afraid she will scream if she opens her mouth just now.

“So sweet! And mysterious! I can say some guy is gaga over you here! I told you! You are great! You know why Kim had to be prude and had to pretend she is smart? Because it's so evident that you have the looks!”

“Jill!”

She shrugged. “And now that you're coming out in the open, see what happens?”

With all Jill's wailing excitedly, soon, some of the other girls crowded in her cubicle, talking about who could possibly be the admirer. There were some *suspects* and names that came up, which surprised Adrienne.

“Jake from Marketing, he was asking about you.” Cynthia said.

“And oh... Matt from Accounts, also asked if you had a boyfriend, the other day.”

She was just half-listening to the conversation. She wasn't interested. She was quite thrilled. This is the first time she received flowers in her life. Yes! Her relationship with Troy can be that pathetic!

Then somebody went, “Sssh!!!!” And then they all fell silent.

When she looked up, she saw Justin walking past her cubicle. An eyebrow raised and a corner of his lip was curled in a half-smile.

She knew he was looking at her. And she felt good. When all of these women were drooling, and staring at him, she knew his eyes were on *her*.

She bit her lip and just stared at him. And then he was out of sight.

The girls sighed in unison.

“Alright. Back to work ladies. Jada will have my neck if she finds out I’m causing this commotion.”

She brought home the bouquet of roses, and placed them in vase. She was in cloud nine.

After five minutes, the doorbell rang.

When she opened it, Justin wrapped his arms around her waist, lifted her off her feet and carried her inside her apartment. She shrieked and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Did you send them?” She asked.

“Did you like them?” He asked back, his crystal blue eyes sparkling.

“I loved them!” She said and then she leaned down to kiss him.

They had Thai food delivery and afterwards, they watched DVDs in Justin’s apartment. She fell asleep in his arms.

He was staring at her while she sleeps. He had a smile on his face. Then he gathered her closer to him, turned off the lights and held her tighter as he sleep.

* * *

It's been running one month and a half since that night she went to Gypsies and met Justin Adams, who is now, turning out to be monumental in her life. They spend almost every night together. When he and his friends would have poker nights, he would slip into her apartment and into her bed by one in the morning, and when she wakes up, she was nestled comfortably in his arms.

She started trading stocks as well. She found it quite exciting. Her five hundred bucks paid twenty percent. Well... it was Justin who called the shots. He was trading on some blue chip and she just put in five hundred bucks. And it was a good investment.

Now, she was learning the ropes herself and she liked it. She invested more money. An amount she thought she could do away without. The important thing is that she is learning how to risk some things. And she's having fun, at the same time, earning money. Every move she makes,

Justin would tell her if he thinks it was good or not. He also advised her to take a risk. He was a genius in this game. No wonder, he made his own millions.

Troy would call her at least once a week. She would indulge him in his med talks, and when it would normally freak her out to hear him say Kim's name more than once, in every phone call, it didn't matter to her now.

Okay, so Troy admires Kim now too. Who cares? She actually finds it amazing that she doesn't give a damn at all.

Whenever he'd say *I love you*. She would reply Goodnight or she would not reply at all. She actually found herself looking at the door when Troy was going on his monologue, hoping Justin would walk in. And he always would.

And that's the time her face would brighten with a smile.

"Kimberly gave me another pointer today... blah... blah... blah..." Then he went on and on.

She raised a brow, fiddled with the telephone cord, let out a yawn while she let him talk to himself.

She was in high spirits that day. Before she went home, Jada called her and she was given another column again. And she was promoted as Assistant Editor-in-chief. The raise they gave her was fifty percent. But she figured Troy wouldn't be interested in hearing that. Even if she becomes a major stockholder for Blush, she doesn't think he would be proud of her.

Justin opened the door. She smiled at the sight of him. He smiled back.

He was holding a bottle of wine and a bouquet of roses.

"What?" She mouthed.

He shrugged. He didn't say anything. He knew she was talking to someone on the phone. If he knew it was Troy, he never asked. In fact, he never asked about Troy anymore, and how her relationship with him is going. It was like when they are together, there was only the two of them.

"Hey... I gotta go... My boss just paged me. I need to go back to the office. Something came up." She lied to Troy.

“Sweetie. What kind of a profession does that? Pays so little and demands so much of your time. You gotta have time for yourself you know.” He said.

“And what? Being doctor is an eight-hour job?” She snapped at him.

“But at least it pays a lot more...” He started.

“Look Troy, you do your thing, I do mine. I don’t fancy being doctor, and you can’t be a writer! Now, I have to go. Goodbye.” She hung up on him.

She took a deep breath.

Justin went close to her but he didn’t say anything for a while.

She looked up at him.

“I should remember not to argue with you, honey.” He smiled.

She sighed.

"I'm sorry. Let's drop that." She said.

"You want to talk about it?" He asked.

"Why would you want to hear about Troy?" She asked him.

"I don't. But if you want to talk about it, I could endure it." He said softly.

She smiled and shook her head. Then she threw herself in his arms and gave him a hug.

"I don't want to talk about it. I just want to be with you." She whispered.

"Hmmm... what are you doing with a guy who gives you a lot of problems anyway?" He asked quietly.

She shook her head. "It's complicated, Just. And I don't want to think about it now."

He nodded. "I just wish you would think about it someday." He murmured and hugged her tighter.

She didn't answer. Then she sighed. She looked up at him. She couldn't make out any expression in his face.

"You could be a shrink you know that?" She teased.

He raised a brow. "I don't think my Dad would name me his heir if I choose to be a shrink though."

She laughed and then reached up and kissed him on the lips.

"Now, what's with the wine and the flowers?" She asked and pulled away from him.

He handed her the roses.

"For you." He said.

"Hmmm. I didn't know that Justin Adams is romantic." She said giggling.

"Not every impression proves to be true." He said. "And we've been together for more than a month now, you should know that."

She nodded. "So it seems. And what's with the wine?"

He placed the bottle of Chardonnay on her table.

“Somebody has just been promoted. I thought there’s a reason to celebrate.” He smiled.

She was touched. She didn’t tell him about the promotion yet. How did he find out?

“Oh thank you. How did you know?”

He shrugged. “I work part-time in Blush, remember? I have ears. Your friend Jill was talking about it with the layout artist when I came in to the guy’s office.”

She smiled. “Thank you!”

“That’s a good step forward for you, hon. I’m really proud of you.” He said.

She hugged him. She thought, how is it that Justin Adams is actually more her boyfriend than Troy is. Come to think of it, everything she would want Troy to be, is Justin. From his points of views, to his spontaneity, to the way he treats

her and the friendship and concern he gives her, the way he appreciates her... for the way she is.

She served dinner. Earlier, she cooked beef and pasta, thinking Justin might want to have dinner. And now, it was better. Not only did he have dinner with her, he even brought wine.

The continued drinking the wine in her balcony, while they talk and smoke.

"I have something for you." He said.

"Yeah? What?" She asked.

He didn't answer. He took out a box from the pocket of his jacket and gave it to her.

"What are these?"

"My congratulations gift to you." He smiled. "Go ahead, open it."

The box was Tiffany's. Her heart pounded. She took out the ribbons, and slowly opened the box.

She lost breath when she stared at what is inside.

A pair of diamond dangling earrings. The diamonds looked like raindrops, and about a centimeter in length. It was absolutely gorgeous.

“Justin...” She breathed.

“Come on, I want to see them on you.” He said.

“Justin... this is expensive. You didn’t have to...”

He reached forward and silenced her with a kiss.

“But I want to, okay?” He whispered. “Did you like it?”

She nodded. “Yes... but you didn’t have to get me something expensive... not this expensive! Don’t indulge me this way.”

He chuckled. “It doesn’t matter, honey. I walked by the shop, saw it on the window and I thought it would look gorgeous on you. I was indulging myself.”

She leaned forward and gave him a kiss.

“Thank you.” She whispered. Her eyes were wet with tears. She wanted to cry.

He smiled. “You’re welcome. Now, let’s see them.”

She put the earrings on and pulled back her hair so he can see them.

He was staring at her for a full minute. Not saying anything. Just staring at her intensely.

“What? They’re bad? The store can take it back, right?” She asked.

He chuckled. “They’re gorgeous. Fifty times more gorgeous than when they were sparkling on the window.”

She smiled at him, released her hair and leaned forward to kiss him. During the kiss, she tried to remember a time when Troy gave her something extravagant. She can’t. In fact, he never gave her anything. Two out of three birthdays of hers that they were together, he didn’t even

remember. He never gave her a flower as well... not a single one...

Réaliser

French. Etymology of the word: Realize

She woke up that morning with the sound of the doorbell.

“Shit!” She panicked. She realized that she was naked and lying in Justin’s arms.

“Who is that?” Justin asked, lazily sitting up from the bed.

“I don’t know. It must be Jill or Yuan or both of them.” She said, hurriedly getting her clothes and getting dressed.

“How will you hide?” She asked.

“What if I just don’t?” He asked squarely, getting dressed himself.

“Justin... this isn’t the time okay? I need timing to tell them about us. I’ve kept it too long and they would hate

me if they find out I didn't share something this monumental with them." She explained.

"Do you realize that everyday you don't tell them is keeping it from them longer? They are your best friends. And besides, I want to meet your friends as well. I know Jill, but I had to pretend I don't know her because you didn't want her to know about us."

She sighed and went to his side.

"I need more time. I need the perfect timing. And the perfect spiel." She said desperately.

He stared at her. "Why didn't you tell them in first place?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. I just didn't... and I wanted to... but..."

"You didn't imagine it would last this long, did you?" He asked her seriously, his voice a little louder than normal.

She stared at him. "Justin, please?"

He sighed. "Alright. Alright. I'm going." He said.

“How? You can’t go out the door! They are there!” She said.

“Who said I was going out the door?” He muttered, and then he opened the window of her bedroom. She watched worriedly as he crossed the platform that is about one and a half meters wide and six meters long to the window of his own bedroom.

When he was safely in, she hurried towards the door.

“What took you so long?” Jill asked entering her apartment immediately.

“I was asleep?” She asked sarcastically.

Yuan gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“Good morning, Sunshine.” He said, mimicking an early morning talk show host.

“What the...” Jill started.

Adrienne realized that the bouquet of roses that Justin gave

her is still sitting on her table and there were wine glasses on the table in the balcony.

“Oh my God, is Troy here? Did he finally stay the night?” Yuan asked.

Adrienne shook her head. She felt so guilty. And she felt bad about having an argument with Justin after last night, which was perfect. He was wonderful. He has made her feel more special than anybody has in her entire life.

He sounded so dead serious about not keeping this thing at least to her best friends. She knew she should tell them. But she can't quite find the right time. Because it would mean she lied to them from day one.

“Where is he?” Jill whispered.

Adrienne shook her head. “He... ah... left last night. Had to rush off. Just had a wine and dinner with me.”

“How sweet? Because of your promotion, isn't it?” Yuan asked.

Adrienne nodded. She wanted to lock herself in her room

and cry. It gnaws her that Troy is taking credit for Justin's thoughtfulness. She knows it isn't fair.

"And what is happening south of your earlobes?" Jill exclaimed.

Yuan checked it out. Too late. She forgot to take off the earrings that Justin gave her last night.

"How gallant! My God, he must have been struck by lightning! He had suddenly gone romantic!" Yuan said.

"Are these Tiffany's?" Jill asked.

Adrienne nodded.

"This costs a fortune you know! It's a carat! He must love you so much to spend all of his medical school allowance on a trinket!" Yuan said.

Adrienne went to the balcony and lighted a cigarette. She was biting her lips to stop herself from crying. She was melting with shame and guilt.

What has she done now?

“I have something to tell you, sweetie!” Jill started. “I was talking to Garry, the layout artist yesterday, and guess who walked in?”

She knew who walked in. And the thought made her feel even more guilty.

“Justin Adams!” She exclaimed. “He looked absolutely handsome. But as always, he had those shades on, which makes him more handsome. Like he just stepped out from the covers of the magazine or something. And this is the story. When he walked in, he said, *Hi Garry*. And then he looked at me and said, *Hi Jill*. He knows me! He knows my name! My God! Unbelievable. We’re on first-name basis now!”

Adrienne looked at Jill. She was practically drooling. She felt and more and more ashamed of herself. She didn’t say a word. And what would she say? *Of course he knows you! He’s been hiding from you guys for almost two months now because I didn’t want you to know that he was shagging me! And yes, I’ve been sleeping with him almost every night!*

She closed her eyes for a moment.

“Sweetie, you’re still sleepy? What time did Troy leave last night?” Yuan asked.

“No. I read some book, which is why I’m still sleepy.”

“My God, when I see him again, what will I say to him? I’ll say, *Hi Justin*. Do you think it’ll be weird?” Obviously, Jill isn’t ready to give up the Justin Adams episode.

“You can try. And then tell us about it. My God, that guy is known for being a classic snob! But he’s got every right to be. He’s rich by birth, he’s rich on his own right, he looks divine! What do you expect?” Yuan said. “And speaking of divinity, I wonder when Torso god on the other side would show himself.”

“Yes, have you seen what he looks like, Yen?” Jill asked.

She shook her head in disbelief. She couldn’t concentrate. She still couldn’t get Justin out of her mind, their conversation before he left.

She sighed. Then her phone beeped.

She read the message.

Justin: *I'm going to Chicago for a week. Duty calls. I mean, my father. I'll catch the twelve noon flight. Obviously, I can't come over to kiss you goodbye. So see you when I get back.*

She was too confused to answer. And worse, she felt sad and guilty.

“What’s bothering you, Yen? You don’t seem like yourself lately. Well, you did change a lot lately, but for the better. But now, it seems like you didn’t want to talk at all. Are you okay?” Yuan asked.

She shrugged. “Troy. I want to... I don’t know... it seems like this thing with him is not going anywhere. We argue a lot lately. And I don’t seem to care anymore. That isn’t a good sign, is it?”

Yuan and Jill stared at her. None of them could say a word.

“I mean, we were so incompatible. And we still *are*. And that’s not good. And... well... everytime we talk these days, it’s not complete without an argument. I want to

experience more out of life. Yes. I did change a lot. And I feel good about myself. It's like for the first time in years, I felt like I'm great. I'm an amazing person. And I didn't have to live in someone's shadow all the time. And I want to experience magic with someone. Someone who doesn't have to love me. But just make me feel adored. Admired. Like I'm good enough just being myself." *Like Justin! And I want to be fair to him! But only God knows until when our thing is going to last.*

Yuan reached for her hand. "We've been trying to tell you that for years, sweetie. But you love the guy..."

She shook her head. "Now, I don't anymore. I liked him, yes. But I realize that maybe I am with him because he fits this whole *trying-to-please-Mommy* charade I've been keeping up for years. And I give up. Mom will never love me as much as she loved Kim. And it's okay. As long as she loves me. I don't care."

"Think about this, honey. When a guy brings you wine and roses and a very extravagant gift, it means, you mean a lot to him. If he did that, it means he wants you in his life, no matter how incompatible you are. He's trying to make it work." Yuan said.

“Are you guys trying to change my mind on this?” She asked.

Jill shrugged. “We hated him before, sweetie. But lately, you went through this transformation, and you had stars in your eyes. And now, we see that he’s been spending quite some time here in your place. And recently, you looked so happy. We thought, things probably have changed. So, why are you giving up now?”

Adrienne felt more guilt. And the more guilt she felt, the surer she is that her relationship with Troy is going nowhere, and there are a lot of things in life that she wanted to experience. So much more out of life that she wanted to feel and see. Justin opened the window for her. She wanted more of that.

“Think about it, hon.” Jill smiled uneasily.

And she did. For two straight days. That was what Justin told her the last night she was with him. Think about her relationship with Troy. It did last for three years but it doesn’t mean it will last forever. Come to think of it, she

never had very much good memories with him, if ever she has memories of him at all.

Adrienne can't do anything right. More often, she was staring into space in nothing. She was always jumping everytime her mobile phone rings or beeps. She was waiting for Justin to call or send a message. He didn't. She didn't hear from him for three straight days.

She threw herself in her bed that evening. She didn't realize that tears were rolling down her cheeks. She hated to admit it but she misses him like hell.

She decided to take a bath before bed. She just lied there on her tub thinking.

She remembered every moment she was with Justin. She remembered each day she had a smile on her face, going to work, confident, like she never felt before in her entire life. She realized that for each and every minute since he met her, she was floating on air. Walking on cloud nine. She felt adored. Cherished. She doesn't love Troy anymore. He has been out of her heart for months. It wasn't going anywhere. And she didn't feel for Troy anything she felt for Justin.

And worse... she realized that she can't be in love with Troy now... she has already fallen in love with someone else...

She changed into her pajamas and went to bed. Before she turned off the lights, she took her cellphone and sent Justin an SMS, before she could stop herself.

Her: *Hey... I hope you're okay. Take care... I miss you.*

And she pressed SEND before she could either erase the whole message or add *I love you* to it.

She waited for a whole hour. He didn't reply. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

She blew it for sure. First, she made him feel like she wasn't proud to be associated with him in any way. And now, she realized she has just given him the first sign of what she really felt for him. She might have blown it there as well. Guys like Justin... she was good for him, because she wasn't demanding anything from him. She was just having fun. And maybe so was he. Yes, he is definitely fond of her. The flowers he sent her said so, and so did the

Tiffany's earrings. But he's filthy rich. The amount of those earrings is not even one tenth of what he earns everyday. It says they are okay. But it doesn't say he loves her too. It says he's fond of her... for the moment, but not forever.

She cried herself to sleep that night. She hugged her pillow tight, remembering the moments when it was Justin's body she was hugging and he was hugging her back.

She must have cried for hours. And then finally, she fell asleep. In her dream, he was holding her in his arms. She was whispering his name.

Her alarm went off seven-thirty in the morning. She had a bad headache. She was still hugging her pillows, but something wasn't right. A pair of strong arms are draped around her.

She spun around and found Justin sleeping beside her. She blinked to make sure that she was awake and wasn't imagining things. She wanted to cry. She prayed, *If this is a dream, don't wake me up! 'Cause this is just too darned romantic right now!*

She watched him sleep. He wasn't wearing any top. He was just wearing a pair of pajamas.

How could he be here? He said he will be in Chicago for a week. It's only been four days.

She took her mobile phone on the bedside table. She didn't have any messages. She sent a message to Jill, saying she cannot go to work today.

Headache. Bad one.

She stared at Justin again. And then she leaned forward and kissed him on the lips.

He tightened his hold on her. "Adrienne." He whispered.

She smiled to herself, closed her eyes and went back to sleep.

She woke up again an hour later. When she opened her eyes, Justin was staring at her lazily.

"Good morning." He said.

She touched his cheek with her fingertips.

“Morning.” She smiled lazily. “What are you doing here? I thought you’ll be gone for a whole week.”

He smiled. “I finished business early. And besides...”

“Besides what?” She asked.

“You said you missed me.” He smiled.

She blushed and looked away.

He tilted her chin up so she could look him in the eye.
“Well? Did you?” He asked.

She smiled shyly and then nodded. “And did *you* miss me?”
She asked back.

He leaned forward. When his lips were just an inch away from hers, he said, “Like hell.” Then he kissed her deeply.

After the kiss, he leaned his forehead to hers.

“You have to go, you’re going to be late for work.” He said.

She shook her head. “Not today.”

“Really? Why?” He asked.

“I missed you like hell too.” She smiled boldly.

He chuckled. “Really? Show me.” He said.

She pushed him flat on his back and she leaned forward to kiss him passionately. She started it, and he finished it.

When it was over, her world was spinning.

They lay there naked for a while, their legs tangled, their arms wrapped around each other.

“Hon...” He started. “I’m sorry I raised my voice the last time we spoke before I left.”

“I’m sorry, we argued in the first place.” She said.

He smiled. “It’s okay. I understand. I know you’re not yet ready to tell them this. And I’m sorry if I put pressure on

you. Sometimes, I just don't understand why you can't tell at least your friends. I mean... they are your best friends. Do you really think I'm an asshole that you don't want them to know that we're seeing each other?"

She sighed. "First of all, you're not asshole. I thought you were, though."

He looked down at her with a raised brow. "You thought I was?"

She smiled. "Don't get mad. I just thought you were conceited and giving women false hopes... it's not so good."

"I don't give women false hopes. It was just me. I was like that. I was non-committal. If some of the women I have been with in the past thought I was going for something serious and long-term, I don't think I could be faulted for that. From day one, they should know, I don't want complications and there's no strings attached. I wasn't looking for a girlfriend then."

"They should have known that because of your reputation?"

He nodded. "Probably. I usually get out after two dates. If I know it isn't what I was looking for, then I would slip out."

"Yeah... asshole." She rolled her eyes.

He laughed. "You're unfair! You thought that and yet you still went home with me when we met at Gypsies?"

She smiled wickedly. "Well, the Tequila made you look like a god! It's been whispering in my ear, *Go on! Lose your virginity to this asshole! At least he looked divine!*"

He laughed. "Tell me you didn't mean that!"

"Which one? The Tequila made you look like a god thing? I think I mean that. But the kisses you gave me made me lose myself all the way. The whispering was there, but I'm not so sure."

He laughed harder. "I picked up the wrong girl that night then? I thought you would really think I look like a god."

"So conceited! Just because the whole of New York think that, doesn't mean I do too."

“And you were the one that mattered.” He shook his head.
“Damn! I should have taken home the waitress that night!
At least she would worship me like a god!”

She raised a brow. “Okay, so you’re sorry now? Alright. I won’t put up a fight!” She snapped and started to stand up from the bed.

He pulled her back and pinned her between his body and the mattresses.

“You... have a hell of a temper. You get mad easily. I was just kidding. I would never, ever, ever trade you for the waitress that night, okay? Not even for any girl in that bar.”

“Yeah... since we’re having this conversation, why did you pick me up that night anyway? Of all the girls there, why me? Did I look like I would sleep with you?”

He smiled and shook his head. “Because you were the only one who looked like you won’t. And it made me want you even more.”

“You’re a bundle of conceit, you know that?” She said irritably. “And now you know that I would sleep with you. Does that mean you don’t want me as much as you wanted me that night?”

He chuckled and pressed closer to her. She felt his masculinity pressed in her abdomen. It was hard and wanting.

“Does it feel like I want you less than that night?”

“Justin... we just...” She stammered.

He nodded. “That’s how I want you.” He whispered and his face descended to take her in a kiss that led to another wild ride of passion.

Couldn't lie straight in bed ; lie through one's teeth
Idioms found in Adrienne Miller's Book of Lies

Jada was certainly the devil-wears-Prada type of boss. But good thing, she is nice to Adrienne. She doesn't say nasty things to her like she does to Jill and the other girls. Adrienne thinks that she actually believes in her talent. But that doesn't stop her from giving her assignments that are just crappy, or make her fill in for her whenever she has Yoga classes or salon appointments at the only time convenient for her to do her job.

"Sweetie, I need you to check this spa for me. I personally committed to Candy, the manager, that I would go. But I can't. I'm in the middle of a board meeting. Go meet Candy at her spa, I'll give you the number and interview her, see the facilities. Bring Jacob or his assistant with you. Take some photos of the thing. Find good pictures. If possible with people on it. Ask Candy for the shots... but I forgot... she's an elephant! Just find someone there to take

photos of. Alright?" Then Jada gave her Candy's business card.

"Wait, wait, wait!" She wailed, but Jada hung up.

She sighed. She checked her schedule and realized that, as always, she has finished her work two days ahead.

Maybe that's why Jada always calls her! Maybe that is why she's conveniently made her Assistant Editor in Chief.

She called the number of Exalta Spa and asked for Candy.

"Oh, it's too bad that Jada can't make it. But we are quite glad we will be doing this. We've schedule your session this two o'clock. You know our address?"

After confirming the location of the spa, she gathered her stuff and went to find Jacob. But Jacob's studio is in a chaos. Models are scattered everywhere.

"What is this?" She asked him.

Jacob rolled his eyes. "Last minute touch ups! The photos from the other shoot didn't come good enough for Jada.

You know her! The only photos she never rejected are the ones from Mr. Hotshot himself.”

“But what’s to reject with photos of nature and buildings?” She asked him. Justin submits photos of the buildings and sceneries. They use that for their columns on places and people. He doesn’t work of the fashion part of the magazine. He takes the shots, edit them in his laptop in his apartment, and then sends the disk to one of his friends to print out before he submits them to Jada.

“You do have a point.” He smiled. Jacob is one closet faggot. She remembered talking with the other girls in the office about how Jacob was so obsessed with his looks and his taste in clothes... fuchsia-retro-fashion? *Hello! Gay!*

“Hey what’s up, Jacob?” She heard a very familiar voice say behind her.

“Hey, Hotshot!” Jacob said smiling at the figure behind her.

“Anyway, Jake, I need you. Come with me, I’m doing this feature on the latest hot spa downtown.”

“Darling... do you see the chaos I have in here?” He asked pointing at the models and make up crew busying up his studio, wearing an expression in his face that says, *Are you blind?*

”But Jada had this last minute request. I have to be there in like thirty minutes. The interview is set for now. I have to get these done with the pictures, all touched up day after tomorrow to make it to next month’s issue.”

“I really can’t. With all the mess of things, I can’t go. And my understudy, Gareth is also working with me. You’re gonna have to just reschedule it. Maybe tomorrow.” He said.

“Oh Christ! This spa is always booked. And it isn’t nice for our rep to be canceling and rescheduling interviews and appointments with these big establishments. You know we can’t work that way!” She argued.

“Not my fault, honey. It’s that witch of a boss of yours.”

“What? No photographer, no interview. It’s not worth it. And we want establishments to advertise with us. I can’t just do a feature without the shots.”

"I'll take you." You heard Justin say behind you.

She turned around and stared at him.

"I can actually shoot some photos, you know." He said, smiling.

"No way, Hotshot. The board doesn't pay a dime for extra work done by our freelancers." Jacob said.

"But I'm just bored, Jake. And besides, Miss Miller here looks desperate. She's too pretty to be in distress, don't you think?" He said. She knew his eyes were dancing with laughter.

"Well, then that's absolutely great!" Jacob said. "It's settled. You two can talk about this, now I have to roll!"

And then Jacob left them. Adrienne and Justin stared at each other. He was half-smiling.

"Let's do this." He said.

"Are you sure? You're not busy?" She asked.

“You know I do my living in the mornings...” He said.
And then he mouthed, “*Hon.*”

She turned red. He smiled mischievously.

“Let’s go.”

She smiled and followed him out of the building. They didn’t say a word to each other. But all the time, she knew he was staring at her. They stood opposite each other in the elevator. She felt conscious. There were other people in the lift. If they were alone, she would have told him to cut it off. It seems that he was utterly enjoying himself.

They headed for the parking lot. He opened the door of his Ferrari for her. She went in. Once he was inside. He sighed. And then he reached out and kissed her thoroughly.

“What are you doing?” She asked him, taking his shades off his eyes and putting it up his head.

“What? Same thing I do to you everyday. Kissing you.” He smiled.

“No, I mean, why are you offering to go with me for this?”

He shrugged. “You needed help. I stepped in. And besides, don’t you think it would be fun to work together?”

She smiled. “You’re wonderful! Yes, I thought so too.”

“Do you have to go back when you finished from there?”

She shook her head. “No. But I don’t think we would be able to finish early. It’s a spa, you know.”

“It’s okay. I was just thinking of going out tonight. Dinner, park, whatever.”

She leaned forward and kissed him. “Okay. But...”

“I know. Keep it low profile. Some place where your friends don’t normally hang out in. I know that phrase for quite some time now... by heart!” He smiled.

They headed for the spa and Candy welcomed them. She was actually not fat, the way Jada mentioned. She was just a bit overweight. But she looks pretty.

“We are giving you two complimentary spa treatments on everything you would like. We want you to experience first hand what we do here.”

Adrienne looked at Justin and smiled excitedly. Justin shook his head and chuckled.

“So I guess, I have to thank Jada and Jacob then!” She whispered to him.

He laughed. “They’re in my Christmas list now.” He whispered back.

“Candy, why don’t you show us around first and then we’ll take some shots of the place and at the same time, I will interview you. If you don’t mind, I will put this on tape recorder.”

“Excellent.” Candy beamed.

Candy showed them around. While they talk, Justin walked around finding the perfect view and took shots.

After they have seen all the facilities and the interview was over, Candy asked them if they wanted to do the spa now.

They smiled at each other.

“Yes.” She told Candy.

“Would you like to have the couple’s package then?” She asked.

“What couple?” She asked quite surprised.

“What’s in it?” Justin asked calmly.

“Well, you could take the sauna and steam bath together. You could also choose to have the milk or petals bath together, and the massage.”

“Sounds great. Could we take pictures while we are in there? For the magazine, I mean?” Justin asked. No emotion could be seen in his face.

“Of course. Not a problem at all. As long as you make it look good.” She smiled at them.

“Alright, we’ll take the couple’s package then.” He said.
“But I trust we can keep this a secret as well?” He
whispered to Candy, sensing Adrienne’s discomfort.

“Of course. That wouldn’t be a problem.” She said.

Adrienne was silent all the time. She didn’t know what to
say. She knew she was turning red.

“Alright, this way, please?” Candy led them to the shower
rooms. She gave them keys to their lockers.

When they were alone, she faced him. “Why?”

He smiled at her. “Because I couldn’t resist the idea of a
couple’s spa.”

“Justin...” She started.

“Honey... She’s a manager. What does she care if one Blush
writer’s boyfriend is their photographer. It’s not banned to
have relationships in the workplace. It’s okay. Besides... I
think this would be fun.”

“But what if she knows you?”

He chuckled coolly. "I'm just Justin Adams. Not Brad Pitt."

She stared at him for a while and then she lightened up and smiled. *Boyfriend!* She would have loved for Justin to be her boyfriend. Does he think of himself as that? But then she remembered, he said, he wasn't looking for strings to attach to himself. She sighed and decided to let it go.

They took a shower and then they hit the sauna together. It was private. Just the two of them—naked! At first, she felt conscious. But she knew the man with her. The man behind the Justin Adams veil. And she knew she is in safe hands.

"I thought there were going to be other people here. I didn't realize they set the interview outside their operating hours." She said.

"Why?"

"Because I thought we could have people in the shots as well. That would be great, wouldn't it?"

“Yeah. But if we get good shots of the place, it would be fine as well.” He said.

She closed her eyes for a minute and relaxed.

“Honey... do you mind putting a towel on for a while?” He asked.

She opened her eyes and looked at him. “Why?”

“Trust me.” He said mischievously. His eyes were dancing.

She stood up and wrapped herself in a towel. Justin asked her to lay on one of the benches, flat on her stomach, her cheek resting on her hands.

Then he went out of the sauna room and came back with his camera.

“My God, no way!” She said.

“I want to take a shot. This is not for the magazine. I won’t submit this. Let’s just see how it will look like. For us.” He said.

She sighed and went back to the position he asked her to do. He took six shots, three angles.

Then when he came back, he pulled her up on her feet and kissed her.

“Don’t be mad. Didn’t anybody tell you, you look extraordinarily beautiful? I can’t think of a sexier shot I made. You looked divine and I couldn’t resist. You’re a fox!”

She smiled at him.

They hit the steam bath afterwards. And then they went for the petal bath. The huge tub was filled with rose petals.

“You want to take a shot?” She asked boldly.

He smiled. “Shoot!”

She was naked when she went into the tub. Justin asked her to rest both arms on the edge of the tub and to lay her head back a little tilted to the left. He took her long hair and smoothed it away from her face and then placed in her left shoulder.

He told her to close her eyes.

He took several pictures. She was liking it. Justin has an artistic vision. That's why he loved photography. And she trusted him. She felt like a model out for her first photo shoot. And none of these, she would experience if it weren't for Justin, if she didn't meet him at Gypsies. She was looking at herself in a different light.

After a few minutes, he joined her. They made out in the bath. He kissed her thoroughly and put his arms around her. He pulled her to him, until he was sitting on the tub, and she was mounting him, her legs spread apart. She could feel his arousal in her own femininity.

"I never thought this would be this good." She whispered.

"Sexy as hell!" He whispered hoarsely against her neck.

"Justin... we can't do it here." She giggled.

"I know. Let's go home!" He said.

She laughed. "I am so glad you volunteered for this job."

He smiled at her. "I am so glad your boss pushed you to do her job. And Jacob is being the bitch he is."

She laughed. "You knew he was gay?"

He rolled his eyes. "Who doesn't?" And then he smiled and kissed her again.

After the bath, she wore her robe, Justin asked her to take her robe and dry her hair a bit. Then he asked her to sit on the edge of the Jacuzzi, her feet flowing lazily with the water. He asked her to look down thoughtfully on the water, her head slowly tilted to the left. Then he pulled the bathrobe down to reveal her naked shoulders.

She actually enjoyed being photographed by him. She felt adored. It was only with Justin that she felt that way. Maybe that's why she fell in love with him. And even if this thing that they have, doesn't allow for commitments and a long-term promise, it doesn't matter. Because even if it ends, she would always remember that she felt appreciated and adored, the way Troy or her mother never made her feel.

After that, they had a massage. It was glorious. They went out of the spa, thanking Candy. Adrienne felt fresh and happy.

“Please Candy, don’t talk about the couple’s package with Jada or anyone from Blush. None of the people at the office knows we were seeing each other.” She said.

She giggled. “You youngsters! Yes, no problem. Good luck with your man. You’re very lucky. He’s very charming and handsome! And it looks like you’ve got him wrapped around your little finger.”

She just giggled and shook her hand.

Wrapped around my little finger! I wish! She thought.

When they got into Justin’s Ferrari, they started kissing each other all over again. Then he turned on the engine and drove away for home fast.

“Justin... slow down... I don’t want to die.” She giggled nervously.

He slowed down and then smiled at her. "Sorry, hon. It just feels that if we don't get home faster, *I* will die."

She laughed. "You're unbelievable!"

True to his word, when they got home, he quickly fished the keys to his apartment as soon as the doors were closed, he grabbed her. She laughed. Then her laughter was drowned by his kisses, and they rode the tide of passion together.

Her phone kept ringing that night.

"Details! Details! We want details!" Jill said.

"Of what? The spa? Oh you should go there! Really! Go there! It's bliss! I recommend it!" She replied.

"No! Not the spa! Justin! We heard he came with you to shoot some pictures."

She sighed. "Yes. We sat in his car. I gave him the address, I interviewed the manager, he took the shots. Candy gave us complimentary spa, we went on separate ways. I

enjoyed every minute of it. After I'm done, I took a cab."
God! She's getting better at lying!

"That's it? You didn't even introduce yourself to each other."

"What for? I know his name. And like you said, ultimate snob!" She lied again.

"My God! It's your chance! You could have made your moves! What does he smell like?"

"I don't know!"

"What do you mean you don't know? Does he smell like Calvin Klein? Or Ralph Lauren? Or Hugo Boss?"

"I don't know. He smells good. He's wearing perfume but I don't know what it is!" She lied, but she knew exactly what perfume or aftershave he wears on each day!

"Oh, you're boring! If it was me, I swear, I would have indulged him on a one night stand!"

“What makes you think he’ll do a one night stand?” She asked nervously. The details of her first encounter with Justin Adams at Gypsys came vividly in her memory.

“He’s male! He’s divine and he knows it! Hell, he can do a one-night stand with Cindy Crawford!”

She sighed. She didn’t know whether she’ll be flattered or worried. Justin can go on a one-night stand. That’s how they got together. What if he meets somebody? Knowing that *he* is Justin Adams, with all the package that he is, that girl is bound to make a move. Will he get tempted? Will he cheat on her? Could he be faulted for cheating on her, if he was not her official boyfriend at all?

She shrugged the thought off her mind and changed the topic.

“How’s your regular DJ coming?” She asked about the disk jockey that Jill is currently dating.

“Still the same. We go out once in a while. But really, no strings attached.”

“He’s not your boyfriend yet?” She asked.

"Nope. Don't really want him to be. We live in different worlds. But he's just too darned attractive!"

"What were you looking for anyway?" She asked.

"I wouldn't mind someone like Justin Adams." Jill replied.

She didn't reply.

"I don't know. Somehow, Justin is already successful on his own. I know that he was passionate about things. But he is just not obsessed with the idea of having a girlfriend. And I wish I could meet someone as juicy as him, and as successful and passionate. You know... Justin Adams is your regular ideal man... who you never imagine exists in real life."

"But don't you think it is nice if there is security as well?" She asked. "I mean, you said that he was not known to commit. Commitment is important to us girls."

"He is a playboy. A rakehell, so to speak. That is because he doesn't have a steady relationship. But come to think of it, he wasn't known to be cheating around as well. We

can't really say. How could you accuse a guy for cheating and playing around if he never was committed in the first place? "

"How can you cheat on somebody you were not committed to? Who could blame you?" Adrienne asked, almost to herself.

"I have this feeling that if a guy like Justin Adams finds his ideal girl, she could wrap him around his little fingers."

That's the second time she heard that phrase today!

"How can you say that? No one was known to have caught him yet." She said.

"We don't know for sure. He's been pretty quiet lately, right?" Jill said.

"What?"

"Well, we used to have this Justin Adams hype. You see him everywhere. He's out clubbing, he's in every bar launching, every party. Surprisingly, I only see him in Blush these days."

“You mean, you don’t see him clubbing anymore?”

“Yep. And you know me. I have connections in other newspapers.”

“Yeah... you’re pretty good friends with gossip columnists.”

Jill laughed. “Yes. And you guys love me for it! You get the news before it even hit the papers.”

Adrienne tried to remember her days with Justin. Since Gypsys, she has seen Justin almost everyday. On the evenings that they are not together, he will be having poker nights with his friends over his apartment. He went out a couple of times to drink some beer with his friends. All those times, he would be out until midnight. Most of the time, he would slip into her apartment through her window, and when she wakes up, she would find herself locked in his arms.

Was Jill right? Could Justin Adams be committed? Was he committing himself to her without her realizing it?

10

Looney

Variant: Loony

Etymology: by alteration or shortening of the word

Lunatic

Adrienne made her review with Exalta. She was quite satisfied with the results. She highlighted all of the services that they offered. She couldn't find any fault. It was a haven for the socialites. A refuge for the yuppies.

Then Justin suddenly appeared in front of her desk, which made her freeze. He pushed up his shades to his head and he winked at her.

"I've got your pictures, Hon." He said.

She glared at her and he chuckled.

"No one's here." He whispered.

“But still!” She hissed.

He shrugged and showed her the folder. He sat on the seat opposite her while she scanned through them.

He’s really good. He’s got good angles and pictures are just great.

Then she saw her own pictures in there. She must admit, they were *Great!* Capital G! She looked awesome in them! Her hair was wet, her face looked so relaxed, glowing and looked quite fresh!

She looked amazing.

She stared at her photo in the sauna. It just showed her face resting on her hand. Sweaty. Her eyes were closed. And yet the expression on her face looked sexy!

Her photo on the rose tub was absolutely divine! It didn’t show much of her skin. Only her naked shoulders and her arms. Her eyes were closed. She looked like she was having the time of her life.

Her favorite was the one on the Jacuzzi. Her expression was thoughtful. Justin put some effects on the shots. He darkened the background, and that the only light in the picture is coming from the Jacuzzi itself. She looked fresh. One shoulder is bare. She looked sexy as hell, she must admit.

“What do you think?” He asked.

She breathed. “You’re good!” She said.

“You liked your pictures?” He asked.

“Enough to print them big, frame them and stick them on my wall! Where did you get these printed?”

“The usual. I take the shots, I work on the effects at home and then I get Mike to print it in his photo lab.”

“So, one of your friends has seen it?”

He nodded.

“You tell your friends about me?”

He shrugged. "Nope. You didn't want any association with me. I just told him it's a shot that one of the Blush guys took and wanted me to work on improving. He said you were gorgeous, though."

She raised a brow. So, he's keeping *you* a secret to his friends as well. That's only fair. You were the one who wanted this to be low profile in the first place. And it's good to know that Justin is not kiss and tell.

"Damn! I was trying my best not to punch Mike's teeth down his throat when I saw the look on his face, drooling over you."

She turned red. *Could Justin Adams be jealous? Is he trying to tell you that he feels that you are his?*

"I liked the one on the Jacuzzi." He continued. "You 're a fox." He whispered.

She stared at him. "Want me to autograph it?" She laughed.

“Honestly, Adrienne. You look great! You should be a model. These... these are great! You should show one to Jada.”

She shook her head violently. “No way! Absolutely not!”

“But you’re good! I think Exalta should make you their official endorser!”

She wrinkled her nose. “That’s too ambitious, don’t you think?”

He shook his head. “It’s brilliant!”

“Shut up! I’ll submit the rest of the pics to Jada now, along with my review. I’ll keep my own shots for myself. But thank you very much.”

Justin stood up. “Alright. At least I get to keep a copy of it with an autograph and a kiss?”

She giggled. “We could do that when I get home.” She whispered and looked around to make sure no one is within earshot.

He nodded. "Looking forward to it, Hon. So now, I'll go meet with Dad's associate."

"Really? You're working for him now?"

He shrugged. "Time to start."

"Good luck. I know you'll be brilliant!"

He smiled. "I'll pick you up at eight tonight? Let's go out."

She nodded. "Can't wait." She whispered.

When Justin left, she was smiling from ear to ear. She was happy. She was contented with what they have. She feels sparks. She feels adored. She is head over heels in love with him, and why wouldn't she be? He is perfect! He's such a gentleman, and he shows her that she matters to him. He doesn't say it, but she feels it. And just now, hearing him say that he wanted to put a shiner on someone who drools on her, makes her feel positive that she really does mean something more than a shag to him.

It was Bliss.

She was shagging a god! She was in love with a god!

She had a smile on her face, like nothing would go wrong.

She has submitted the photos and articles to Jada. She told her that it was great. Too bad she missed it.

“Yes! If Justin Adams was the one who went with me, I would have cancelled my appointment! If only I had known!” Jada said. “But he’s too young for me. How is he, dear? Did he show interest?”

“What?” She can’t believe her boss was asking her this.

“Well, look at you! You are pretty! You’re single. Did he show some interest?”

“Hell no! The guy is a snob!” She rolled her eyes. But she knew she was blushing. Then she excused herself and went to work. Women like Jada can smell fear... and guilt! She doesn’t want to hang around any longer. She knew she would mess up and show her the stars in her eyes.

Friday morning, she arrived late. She wasn't sorry. The last minute orgasms made the guilt go away! She was beaming and her face was glowing.

"You! Jada has been running all over the place looking for you!" Jill said.

"And what are you smiling about? You look like you're walking on cloud nine? Are you not telling me that Troy has been coming down and you are already shagging each other?"

"Jill, shut up!" She giggled.

She turned away from Jill's suspicious look. She marched to Jada's office.

"You were looking for me?" She asked, a bit nervously.

Either Jada has some last minute tasks for her, or she is in trouble. Either way, it can't be good.

"Yes. Close the door."

Now, her knees are shaking! She couldn't stand a minute with Jada on normal days. Now, she's asking her to close the door! *This is not good!*

She sat on the chair in front of Jada's table.

"Exalta." She said. "I told you there should be people in it! Something animate that would indulge people to go there. Because we actually want to get them to advertise with us in the future."

"Yeah, I know. There aren't people at the time you set the interview. It was outside their normal operating hours. And you told me not to use Candy!" She reasoned.

"I know! And I didn't foresee it. But you... you were brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!"

What? Jada must be on drugs!

"What? I don't understand."

"I didn't see you have such potential! We should have been using you before! How come that faggot Jacob didn't see it before?"

Adrienne was lost. She didn't get what her boss was trying to say. She sat there thinking Jada has gone looney.

"You lost me, Jada." She said nervously.

She fished something out of the folder in front of her. She showed her an A4 size photo. It was very familiar. *It was her photo! On the Jacuzzi!*

"Oh my God, Jada!" She whispered. She didn't know what to say. She turned red. So red, she knew that she's turned violet!

Jada was staring at her.

"How did that get in there?" She asked trying to calm herself.

"Well, you submitted it to me." Jada said. "And it was brilliant! That Justin Adams is really good. He doesn't charge us much, and yet he brings the best photos here. Rich kid with a hobby. And you said he didn't show interest? I can't believe it! You look like a goddess in this shot!"

“Hey, Jada, when Justin showed me that shot, I changed my mind about being on the photo. I was supposed to keep it for myself.”

Jada shook her head. “No, honey. We should use this. In fact, we should use you more! You have potential! This shot makes Exalta look like... paradise! Bliss! They will love it! And I want to get Exalta to advertise with us badly. Our readers are their target market.”

She tried to argue but she didn't win. She was white-faced when she went back to her desk.

She tried to point out to Jada that it's her right not to have that picture published, but Jada pointed out that she had specific instructions to take photos of the place with people in it. And unless she can show another picture with someone else using Exalta's facilities, she's not going to win with her boss.

How could this go wrong? She doesn't want to appear in a magazine so the whole Manhattan can see her... *bare shoulder!* Her mother might chance upon the magazine,

and for sure she would think that she's turned into a harlot for real!

She can hear her mother now.

"What a disgrace, this is! This is almost like posing for Playboy! How could you bring this embarrassment upon our family name! And what would Troy's family say?"

Honestly, she doesn't care a fuck about what Troy would say! But the fact that she's caused her father and mother shame because she was less than prudent is unbearable for her.

"What's wrong?" Jill asked.

"Nothing. You'll find out anyway." She told her.

"What? Better to hear it from you."

She took a deep breath. She should tell Jill. But she still had to lie. She can't tell the whole story of why Justin ended up taking her picture in the spa in the first place.

“Well, Justin took some shots in Exalta. And one shot was actually taken with me in it. And Jada wants to publish it and I don’t want her to. But I can’t do anything about it now.”

“Why? Were you naked in it?” Jill giggled teasingly.

She stared at her with a raised brow. She turned so red, and it was too late to look away. Jill saw her expression.

“Oh my God! You got naked in front of Justin Adams and you didn’t tell me!” She said, her voice higher than normal.

Oh I did more than that! She thought guiltily.

She shook her head. “No, no. I was wearing a robe. Well, it was no big deal really. I just didn’t want it published, that’s all.”

“But why did you have a picture taken in the first place? Did you and Justin plan it? Did he ask you for a shot? Did you ask him for a shot? What? Tell me the details!”

She sighed. “No. Jada said she wanted shots with people actually taking the spa. There weren’t anyone there because

the interview was set outside their normal hours. Justin said that I could be in it. At least we have *one* shot with a person taking the spa or something. I saw it when Justin gave me the pictures, and I decided not to go through with it. I made the biggest mistake of not taking it out when I gave the shots to Jada. And now, she's making a big fuss out of it. She wants it with the feature I made."

"And you didn't tell us about this because?" Jill asked.

She shrugged helplessly. "Because it was nothing. I was more worried of how I'd look like in the picture. I didn't think it was worth mentioning."

"Anything that has to do with that guy is worth mentioning!" Jill said.

"Jill don't make it worse! One week from now, the whole office and the whole of Blush's reader population will see me in a bathrobe! My God! My mother would kill me! If your boss was not such a lunatic, I wouldn't have this problem now!"

And then, it did come out.

Half-page, banner photo for the Exalta feature. Although she was Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Jada didn't bother to ask her to edit this part. She was as surprised as everyone else. She saw herself when she went over at Jill's desk and looked at the latest issue.

Yes, she did look sexy as hell. Yes, she did look like a goddess.

Everyone was raving about it. Everyone seemed to love it! Including the Exalta people. They absolutely loved the feature she did, and the photo that went with it. She even received a call from Candy.

"It was lovely, darling." Candy said. "You were awesome. We didn't think about having people in the shots. You and your boyfriend were brilliant! Thank you for doing this for us."

Justin was beaming at her when he knocked on her door that evening.

"I know what you're smiling about." She said. "Don't give me that look! You're supposed to be on my side!"

He laughed. He put his arms around her waist, lifted her off her feet and carried her inside her apartment.

“I am on your side, honey.” He told her. “That is why I am smiling! Because you were great in that shot! You were beautiful! And I’m sure everyone at Blush told you that.”

He set her down on her feet.

“Yes. I’ve been receiving too many flatteries today to last me a lifetime.”

“They’re not flatteries, honey. They’re compliments. Maybe it’s time you take a good look in the mirror, and start appreciating yourself.”

“I don’t know, Justin. I... I’m not... I’ve never been glamorous. I’m not used to this. And Jada is crazy to threaten me with performance evaluations if I don’t agree to having those pictures printed.”

He leaned forward and kissed her gently on the lips.

“But you are glamorous. Maybe Jada is also just trying to get you to open up and see yourself in a different light.

You didn't have to make a career out of your good looks. Just take it this way. For a whole month, you were in a beauty magazine."

However, it did not end there. It did not end after Blush's latest issue. The next month, Exalta have, in fact, asked her, Jada and Justin for the rights to have it printed in banners and posters.

They offered Adrienne a hefty amount for it, since she's practically modeled in it.

"Why not?" Justin asked her that night when they were getting ready for bed.

"Because..."

He laughed. "The money is good. You didn't sell your soul for it. You didn't bare anything except for the shoulder."

"If Jada couldn't get me to disagree on it because we are trying to get leverage with these guys, you can just tell them that nope, it's work, it's your property and they cannot get you to sell it. You could have said *no* for me."

Justin raised a brow. "But I didn't want to say *no*."

Adrienne sighed desperately. She stared at Justin's face and saw that his eyes were dancing again.

"Don't mock me!" She said irritably.

He laughed. "I am not!" He pinched her nose playfully. "I'm all for getting you out in the open. I'm all for making you find your renewed confidence."

"Mom would kill me!" She murmured.

"You're twenty-six, honey. Not six. Plus, her daughter is practically an endorser of an elite spa treatment club. She's freaking beautiful! She should be proud of you!"

She sighed helplessly. If she were Kimberly, her mother would be showing those brochures to all of her friends, being the proud mother saying that her daughter not only have brains. She's got a degree to prove she is smart, and an endorsement to prove that she is hot.

But she was the second daughter. She was Adrienne. She was the black sheep, the disgrace in her family.

“One more rule to break. You said she never expected you to do something right. What’s one more thing? At least this one is good for you. For all you know, you could be made out for doing this thing on the sidelines. Don’t blow this chance.”

She sighed again and nodded. Justin turned off the lights, gathered her in his arms and they both fell asleep.

For a whole week, Jill has been pestering Adrienne about how she couldn’t believe that she did that shot with Justin and nothing came out of it.

“We’re both professionals, just there for the job!” She lied.

And what should she tell her? *That was nothing compared to what is happening to us in the bedroom!*

“How did you shoot that anyway? Were you all naked under the robe?” She asked.

Adrienne’s face reddened.

*The truth is I was naked **until** he asked me to put on a robe!*

“Oh my God!” Jill wailed.

“No! I had my panties on! Why do I have to be naked?”
She lied.

“And still that guy didn’t engage you in any conversation that is outside of your somehow tangled professional lives?”
Jill asked.

Adrienne shook her head. “Nope. We discussed the spa, the pose, the lighting, the camera, the resolution, the angles. But... no... nothing else. Sorry. And I’m not interested anyway.”

God help her for lying to her best friend and looking at her straight in the eye!

“But still... if Justin Adams showed interest in you, do you think you would ditch Troy for him?”

She stared at Jill for a very long time. Jill doesn’t know that she *is* tangled in that situation currently and Justin *is* clearly interested in her, has been for the past two months, she *is* head over heels in love with him, and she *is* deciding to give

up Troy for what she has with Justin, in spite of the high risks that goes with it.

“If my relationship with Troy is like before, if I still feel that he actually sees me the way I want to be seen, for what I really am... then, I don’t think I would give it up for a taste of a glorious forbidden fruit that Justin Adams is. Eternity for one night stand? Take your pick? But now, it seems I have nothing with Troy! Nothing for nothing? Hmm... Let me decide? Tough choice! One way or another, I end up losing.” She murmured.

“My God, Yen! Lighten up! I think I would give anything to taste the forbidden apple!” Jill said. “And if the other choice is someone like Troy? Hell, I would even shag Jacob!”

She laughed. “I don’t think I could do Jacob.”

“Honey, you haven’t done anyone in your life! And you’ve wasted hundreds of potential orgasms because your boyfriend is so prim and proper!”

Broken

*Etymology: Middle English breken, from Old English
brecan; akin to Old High German brehhan-to break*

One week later, she was doing another pose for Exalta.

This time, it was grander. There were make-up artists as well as high-resolution cameras, and lights were all over her. It was not even half as sexy as the first time she did this.

And they did make her go on that rose tub in a two-piece suit with a strapless top, so when she dips in the tub, all that will show are her naked shoulders, her arms and her head.

She didn't like it. She felt self-conscious but she tried her best to look relaxed. She tried to feel the same as when she was with Justin during the first time she did that shot. She felt confident and adventurous then. But now, she feels like all of New York will see her—naked shoulder! God! She feels pathetic!

But on the other hand, she thought about all the attention that she has been getting. She smiled to herself wondering why the hell she hid in a cave all this time and suddenly came out to find that there is light outside and she could shine.

This that made her love Justin even more. He brought out the best in her. *In the two months that they have been together, she lost her virginity, lied to her friends non-stop, ended up in the pages of a beauty magazine, bared her shoulders in brochures and promotional materials of a premiere spa and ended up having her own spot in a billboard in Sixth Avenue.* That's what you call a colorful life, isn't it? Her life might just be a little sinful at the moment, but it's most definitely exciting.

The people who see her on the lobby of her building recognize her as the girl from the Exalta billboard, and more and more guys from work are trying to start conversations with her. Yuan is telling her that his colleagues couldn't forgive him for not telling them he had a best friend who looked like a naughty angel and will end up on a Sixth Avenue billboard.

She felt like a butterfly, just coming out from her metamorphosis.

She could do whatever she wants anytime in Exalta for the rest of her life. They gave her a good paycheck for the brochures and twice that amount for the billboard. Her claim to fame is not bad for her bank account as well.

“Everybody is raving about you!” Jill said excitedly. “All the guys in this office are interested in you! My God! You’re like the female Justin Adams of this office!”

“Come on, Jill. It’s no big deal. They just haven’t seen me bare-shouldered yet.”

“No sweetie! You are absolutely awesome! I’ll bet Justin Adams *is* interested now! I’ll bet he was thinking, *Shit! Was I blind that day?*” Jill giggled.

She smiled. She hated the feeling of guilt that is gnawing her. She hated lying to Jill and Yuan, especially with something as big as this. And this is huge! She: Falling in love with New York’s most eligible bachelor; losing her virginity with the city’s rakehell on a one-night stand.

She doesn't know if they can forgive her if they find out! Hell! She thinks they can't even forgive her if they find out that he lives across her apartment and she didn't tell them!

She sighed and went to see Garry for the layout of the article she wrote. She was surprised to see Justin there.

She didn't even say hi to him. She pretended that she didn't notice he was there at all. She told Garry everything she needed to him to do. She was trying to muster all the confidence. She felt so nervous and excited at Justin's presence. He was sitting on the couch, wearing those pitch black shades of his, but she had no doubt that he was staring at her.

Her knees were shaking when she turned on her heel and went out of the room. She saw Jill and some of the girls chatting on the corridor. She stopped by to join them. After a few minutes, Justin passed by them. They all fell silent. When she looked up, he had an eyebrow up and he was looking at their direction.

When he was gone, the girls sighed.

“My God! He looked at us!” Meena, the girl from Circulation, said.

“I think he’s looking at Adrienne.” Gina from Administration said. “Of course! The model. The most gorgeous woman in Blush!”

“Oh yeah.” The other girls agreed.

“Hey girls, I’m not interested in him and neither is he. We’ve worked together in Exalta. We didn’t say much to each other before, during and after.” Adrienne said. God, she is getting better and better at lying.

She shook her head and went to her own post. But inside, she was smiling. She knew he was looking at *her*. The other girls were drooling on him and she knew he has his eyes on her. Sometimes, she thinks she’s just been dreaming. And she just hasn’t woken up yet.

After fifteen minutes, she received an SMS from him.

Justin: You're a fox! Let's go out Friday night? Let's break this rule of yours a little and go somewhere. I promise, minimum risk of being named.

Adrienne sighed.

How could they not be named when he is Justin Adams and she is the girl on the billboard of Exalta?

Things *are* getting more and more complicated.

Friday night, she got ready for her date with him. She wore a pair of white skin tight pants, and black sleeveless blouse, that is short enough to almost show her belly button. She tied her hair in a pony, and she put on light makeup.

She smiled at her reflection. Each day that passes, she is seeing in herself, what Justin has been saying to her more than once a day. She is a fox. She is feeling more confident. She knew she grew up always being overshadowed by a prettier and smarter older sister. Maybe she really could shine enough on her own. She doesn't need to be as pretty and as smart as Kimberly. All she needs is to be just as confident.

The doorbell rang.

He is early. Fifteen minutes. Normally, he is exactly on time, which she loved, because she doesn't pressure her to hurry up and at the same time, he's not making her wait either.

She got her tiny purse and headed for the door.

When she opened it, she was shocked to see Troy and Kimberly on the door.

"Shit!" She muttered.

"What's that sweetie?" Troy asked.

She stared at him. "I said *shit!* *Holy shit!*"

An eyebrow shot up. He was about to say something, when Kimberly cut in. "Expecting somebody else?" *God! Was she right!*

"No. I just didn't expect to see you." She said. "Come in. I was just on my way out... I was supposed to dine in this place I will feature in our next issue."

They came in. Immediately, both scanned her flat.

“Nice place.” Kimberly said.

Kimberly lost weight. She was wearing a skirt that goes all the way to her knees and a long-sleeved blouse. Her blond hair is blonder. Adrienne had to admit that she looked prettier than the last time they saw each other. But still, so prim, so proper. So angelic.

“What are you wearing?” Troy asked.

“Yes, I’m fine too, Troy. It was so nice to see you!” She smiled sarcastically. “Yes, you can sit down for a moment and I will go get something to drink.” She motioned for them to sit on the sofa.

She took a deep breath. She took out two cans of Pepsi on her fridge.

“Bad news, Kimmy. I didn’t have diet.” She said.

“You never needed to diet.” Troy said. *Good! He can say something nice to her for once.*

"It's okay." Kimberly said. "Sorry, to disturb you. You were heading out to do that work you do."

She nodded. "I will write a feature for this place in Sixth."

"Exciting job!" Kimberly beamed too enthusiastically. But she knew her better. Kimberly never had much affection for her. She always tried to put her down to uplift herself. And Adrienne was so used to it! There was no use in trying. No use in fighting.

She sighed. "What about you guys, what are you doing here? This is such a surprise."

"Well, we have a medical conference here for a week. We decided to surprise you." Troy said.

And I was shocked! She thought.

"And I was so surprised!" She said instead, smiling. She caught a glimpse of the time on her wall clock. Exactly eight. Justin has synchronized his watch with hers, which she actually thinks is quite sweet, but that's not the point now. Right now, she knew that he will knock on her door any second.

"Shit!" She murmured.

Troy stared at her.

She smiled. "Let me just go to the lobby to check whether my editor left me the passes I was supposed to get tonight. Be back in a sec."

She dashed for the door praying Troy will not follow her.

When she opened the door, Justin was just about to ring her doorbell. She pushed him gently and closed the door behind her.

"Quick! Inside your apartment." She hissed.

He quickly fished his keys without asking and then they went inside.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

She screamed in frustration. "Kimberly and... Troy are in my apartment."

He didn't say anything.

"My God! What did I do today to deserve this ordeal?" She asked desperately.

"Troy... the current and official boyfriend?" He asked quietly.

"Troy, the ghost of a boyfriend, and Kimberly, the ghost of a sister, yes."

"Alright. Go out there. I'll just call some of my friends tonight then?"

She stared at him. She could not make out any expression on his face.

"I didn't want to go out there, Justin. I really don't." She said.

"She's your sister. You can't do anything about that. The boyfriend... you could ditch anytime... actually, should have ditched a long time ago... but still, for now, you have to go out there." He said.

“Are you sure it will be okay with you?” She asked him.

He smiled. “Positive. If you can’t endure it, give me a call. I’ll think of something.”

She smiled and reached up to kiss him on the lips. “I’d probably do that, just to see what you could come up with.”

He laughed.

She headed for the door. “You look great, by the way. Foxy!” He said to her.

She looked down at herself. “Yeah... but I didn’t dress up for them.”

He went closer to her. “Just make sure you mean that.”

“Mean what?” She asked.

“You dressed up for me. Not for him.” He smiled sheepishly.

She giggled. "Positive. If I were meeting him, I would have worn a pair of trousers, long-sleeved, ruffled blouse, and a pair of eyeglasses."

He kissed her again and then she went out of his apartment. She took some time and then opened her door.

Troy and Kim were still sitting on the sofa.

My God! They were like the king and queen of conduct and behavior! She found them right where she left them! They should be together, she thought. This is not her! Troy is not for her!

She knew that a long time ago. And she knew that she should do something about it now.

She remembered that there were many times in her life that she actually felt intimidated by Kim because of Troy. Because she thought that the only way that she could keep Troy is to be like Kim.

But now, she's not even sure why she wasted three years of her life, trying to be something and someone she is not.

When she could have been herself. Free-spirited. Fun.
And according to Justin, foxy!

“Want to go have dinner instead, guys?” She asked them.

“What happened to the work you need to do?” Troy asked.

“My editor couldn’t give me the passes. I called her up and told her that I could do that tomorrow.”

Kim just smiled.

“But you have to change your outfit, honey.” Troy said.
“You can’t go out in that!”

She stared at him crossly.

“Oh jeez, Troy! Grow up!” Kim said. “It doesn’t show much of a flesh! Come on, I’m starving.”

Troy didn’t argue. Like he regarded Kimberly as his teacher.
Ma’am Yes Ma’am.

They went to Casa Mexicana.

Troy and Kimberly talked about their convention, their escapades at Med school. It seemed that they have been members of the same clubs and crowds. Adrienne sat there wondering, how many hours a day do Kim and Troy spend with each other.

Since Justin came into her life, she felt happy about herself. She isn't Kim. She is Adrienne. And she no longer feels this tinge of insecurity. This awful feeling inside her that she couldn't keep Troy because she is not good enough is absolutely gone. And listening to Kim and Troy talk make her realize that she can't be Mrs. Troy Williams! The relationship wasn't going anywhere at all.

When their order were served or when their drinks were being refilled, Adrienne noticed that the waiter kept looking at her. She felt self-conscious. Like she felt there *was* something wrong with her face.

"Excuse me. What is your problem?" Troy asked the waiter.

"Troy, please?" Adrienne pleaded. She doesn't want to cause a scene.

"I'm sorry." The waiter said.

"No. Tell me. Why were you staring at my girl?" Troy asked.

The waiter looked at him squarely. "Because I was thinking how lucky you are, Sir, to be dating the Exalta girl."

Kimberly laughed. "What?"

"Exalta, the premiere spa. She was the model."

Kimberly and Troy stared at Adrienne.

She just shrugged. "Thanks, sweetie. Now, could you get me my margarita?" Then she smiled at him sweetly.

He nodded. "I'm sorry. Right away, Madam."

"What was he talking about?" Troy asked him.

She shook her head. "Don't mind him. He must have recognized me from the magazine. I featured this spa in one of my columns. So, back to the pep squads you do at med school. And how long are you going to be here?"

Luckily, Troy and Kimberly didn't dig deeper on the incident. She hasn't told her family or Troy that she posed in a photo shoot and the end results are standing somewhere in Sixth Avenue. Her father would be proud of her. But if her mother knew that she bared a *shoulder*, she would immediately think that she has sold her soul to make more money to afford the mortgage payments of her apartment.

Her phone beeped.

Justin: *How are you holding up?*

Her: I'm still surviving. But God! I miss you!

Justin: *I'm at the Oxygen, with Mike and James. We're waiting for my cousin, Ian. Vacation from college.*

Her: At least your night sounds more fun.

Justin: *I'm not with you, where is the fun in that?*

She smiled.

“Everything alright, Sweetheart?” Troy asked her.

She nodded. “It was just Jill. Another one of her escapades.”

Troy raised a brow. She thought she didn’t believe him. She smiled at him sweetly, hoping he will not ask anything else.

Kimberly and Troy stayed the night. Troy slept in her guest room and Kimberly in her room.

Before she went to bed, Troy wrapped his arm around her waist and kissed her. She closed her eyes. She didn’t kiss him back. She felt weird. She felt... like cheating on Justin. And another thing came to her head, *Bad kisser*. She didn’t know that before Justin. The hair at the back of her head raised.

God what is wrong with her? She doesn’t feel guilty about sleeping with Justin behind Troy’s back, but she feels terrible about being kissed by Troy behind Justin’s back. Troy is the official boyfriend, wasn’t he? And Justin was... well, he was Justin... and she’s in love with him.

“Good night, Troy.” She said and then closed the door behind her. She didn’t stay to talk to him. She knew it would be awkward. And she is craving so much for a cigarette and a dark-haired rake who should have been with her this night.

She didn’t say much to Kim either. They were never close anyway. It was a pity. She sighed and sent an SMS to Justin.

Her: They stayed the night. Kim is in my room. Troy stayed in the guest room.

Justin: *I’m coming home in a while with my cousin. Want to come to my place? I could introduce you to each other.*

Her: I would love to! But the thing is, they will get suspicious. And knowing Kim, if she smells something, I would have one of my dreaded conversations with my mother.

Justin: *Alright. Sweet dreams. I’ll miss you tonight. It’s been a while since I slept alone. ;-)*

She smiled to herself. She turned her back on Kimberly. She doesn't want her to see that she was blushing from head to feet. Knowing Kimberly, she can see things in the dark. And even if she can't see them, she can still smell them!

When she woke up, Kimberly was already dressed and Troy was making coffee.

"We have an early start. We'll just grab coffee and then we'll go." Troy said, smiling at her.

She nodded then headed for the bathroom.

When they left, Troy whispered to her. "I missed you, Yen. You look good! We have some time off before we return to Boston. Let's go somewhere."

She didn't answer. She realized that that could be the perfect time to break it up with him then. After the convention. When he's not too busy and before he leaves.

"We'll see you after the convention, Yenny." Kim said sweetly.

She took a shower, wore a pair of shorts and a sleeveless shirt and then rang Justin's doorbell.

No answer. She tried again.

The door opened. She was ready to throw herself in his arms. She has missed him so much. Last night was the first night she spent without him in many weeks. And she was happy last night when he said he will miss her too.

But what she saw made her stop. Wet Blonde hair. Perfect skin. Blue eyes. Barbie doll in the flesh. And she's wearing one of Justin's robes.

"Excuse me, can I help you?" She asked. *God, even her voice was a perfect pitch!*

She bit her lip. She didn't know what to say. She couldn't find her voice.

"Who is that?" Justin appeared behind her. He was just wearing towel around his waist, his hair dripping wet. Like he has just gotten out of the shower.

No! It looked like they have just gotten out of the shower.

She took a deep breath and summoned all the strength she had left in her body just so she could raise her chin and say something.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t realize you were busy.” She said to him sharply. Then she quickly spun around.

“Honey, wait!” Justin shouted and ran after her. She slammed the door in his face refusing to give him a chance to either spin lies for her to believe, or break it to her gently that they never had a commitment in the first place and that she was the one who had a boyfriend. He was just a fling. A one-night stand that went beyond.

Remorsus

Medieval Latin. Gave birth to the word Remorse.

“*A*drienne, this isn’t what you think. Could you open the door and let’s talk about this?” Justin said on the other side of the door.

She didn’t answer. She turned on her stereo so loud so she couldn’t hear his voice. She knew that she should find the strength. It was the first night she spent without him in more than a month. The first night that she was not with him. And he did what he normally does. His usual one-night stands!

She felt like she cheated on him when Troy kissed her! That same night, Justin was shagging somebody else in his room! In the bed where she has slept in in many nights.

She went to her room, locked her windows and closed the blinds. She threw herself in her bed and cried. She felt

pain... hard, pinching pain in her chest. Her stomach is like tying itself in knots. She cried hard and hugged her pillow tight.

What did she expect? Guys like Justin Adams... do not want to commit... were never known to commit. A rakehell! Did she really expect playboys like him to be loyal and faithful to only one shag? Of course not! She kept her hopes too high without realizing it.

She loved him... So much! And it does hurt. Yes, he was the guy on the sidelines, but he was also the guy she loved. And he knew she had a boyfriend from the start.

This... this is different.

He kept calling her. He left messages on her answering machine. He sent her text messages. She didn't listen to a single message. She didn't read a single SMS. She didn't need to hear anything. It was clear. She didn't need to hear him lie.

The thing that they have... it was good for both of them... for a while. From the start, it never spelled ever after. There were some things that you just take for the moment

until they last. After that, it was over. You just have to thank your stars that it ever happened. And remember the good things that it taught you. Because there are some things that don't give you bad memories at all until they are over.

She fell asleep. When she woke up, it was already six in the evening. Her house was quiet. She erased the fifty voice messages in her answering machine without listening to them. She erased all the text messages that she received from Justin without reading them.

Then she packed a bagful of clothes and sneaked out of her apartment, hoping she wouldn't run into Justin in corridors, elevator nor in the lobby.

She hailed a cab and went to Yuan's house.

When he opened the door, he was shocked to see her expression. "What the fuck is wrong with you, girl?"

She shook her head. "Can I crash over here for a week or so? I don't want to be alone in my apartment."

"What happened?"

She shook her head.

“Nothing. I just need time to clear my head and think. Last night, Kim and Troy went to my apartment and spent the night. I don’t know. I don’t love Troy anymore and I’m trying to decide when and how I will call it quits. I just need to think for a while, that’s all.”

Yuan didn’t ask any more. He just nodded.

She was trying her best not to cry. If she looked so overdramatic he would grill her for the details. Jill came over and slept over that night, as well. Her phone kept ringing. Justin keeps on looking for her.

“Are you gonna get that?” Yuan asked her. “Must be Troy.”

She shrugged and then turned her phone off.

She tried to concentrate on her work on Monday. She was sure she looked like hell. She had worn her eyeglasses again to hide her red swollen eyes that said she stayed up all night, crying.

Even Jada knew she was busted. She didn't say anything. But to her surprise, she wasn't the bitch from hell that she used to be. *Oh! She does have a heart after all!*

She was staring at the blank page on her screen when she realized that Justin was standing in front of her.

She stared at him nervously.

For a handsome guy, who looked so playful and carefree, Justin looked like shit as well. He hasn't shaved and it looked like he didn't get much sleep.

"What are you doing here?" She asked him sharply, but trying to keep her voice down so no one can hear.

He shook his head. "Honey, don't do this. Please... listen to me first."

She shook her head. She took a deep breath. She always believed that a woman is allowed to be fooled only once, and she could still be called smart. There should be no second time around. Because the next time around, she would be regarded as either a martyr or just plain stupid.

"I don't want to, Justin. It was the way it was supposed to be. Leave me be for a moment, okay? I need to clear my head. I need to think about what I need to do. The thing we have... let's just be thankful it lasted that long. And it made us happy for a moment. It was just supposed to be a one night stand anyway. We keep our own pieces. I can't tie you down. And I have too much excess baggage. I can't keep on lying to my friends and cheating on my boyfriend. I'm not some loose woman who can keep playing around, seeing two people at the same time. I made my mistake. I have to make things right this time. I'm not your regular one-night stand, Justin."

She didn't know where she got the courage to say those words, without even blinking.

She stared at him. His eyes narrowed a little and for a moment, she thought she couldn't contain the cold fury she saw there. She was almost scared.

"So, just like that?" He asked coldly.

She nodded.

He looked down on his shoes and then he shook his head slowly. Then he turned away. "See you around, Adrienne." And he left.

When he was gone, tears rolled down her cheeks. She headed to the ladies' room and locked herself in a cubicle.

When she returned to her desk, Jill was waiting for her.

"What did Justin Adams want?" She asked.

She shook her head. "Some layout question. He was asking about my next assignment. I have asked Garry for some shots."

"Are you crying still, sweetie?" Jill asked.

"I'm okay." Adrienne lied.

"Is this still about Troy?"

She shrugged. "I'm just too darned confused right now."

"But I thought you've already decided." Jill said.

“You guys don’t like Troy.” She replied. “You would easily understand me. You want the best for me. My mother adores Troy. And she wants what’s best for our family.”

Jill smiled at her apologetically. She Jill sat on the chair opposite her.

“Alright, lighten up a bit. I’ll tell you the latest rumor I heard.” She said. “Tara Lambert, that hot lingerie model... on an interview with her, she was asked who she would like to go to her lingerie line’s grand ceremony. And you know what she said? Justin Adams.”

She stared at Jill. Pieces of her already shattered heart are somewhere on the floor and Jill is stepping all over them.

“Even the supermodels have their eyes on him. What chance do we mortals have now?” Jill sighed.

“How could she ever hear about Justin Adams?” Adrienne asked trying to disguise the pain in her voice.

Jill shrugged. “Well, Tara used to be lady bartender. You know, those Coyote Ugly types. She was discovered there.

Probably met Justin Adams in a bar since he hangs out in these elite places.”

Adrienne shook her head. What Jill said only made her feel worse. Long legs, big boobs, perfect body, all bared and paraded in fifth avenue... what does the girl with a bare shoulder in the Exalta billboard have to say to that?

Wednesday, she was feeling better. She tried to look better too. She wore a pair of white snug-fit Capri jeans, white and black Sabrina blouse, and high-heeled white sandal.

“Hey, Ms. Thing.” Jill called. “Come on, get your butt off your seat and let’s interview this guy in Jacob’s room.”

“What guy?” She asked.

“Didn’t you read your email? Jada has decided to put another column. She wanted to try something. Hello! Assistant Editor-in-Chief! She doesn’t ask for your opinion in these things? We’re doing a bachelor of the month feature every month now. And our guy is in Jacob’s room for the pictorial already. He’s waiting for us now.”

“Well, you know Jada. I do my thing, she does hers. If she knew I would object, she wouldn’t ask for my opinion at all. But I have a lot of respect for her ideas.” She grabbed a pen. “Okay, you know I’m not myself lately, so you could just flag in the questions, I could just make the follow ups, okay?”

Jill nodded and they hurried to Jacob’s studio.

Her heart did flip-flops when she saw Justin there. He was wearing his usual jeans, white shirt and leather jacket. He’s got his shades on as always.

“Come on, Jill. Let’s do this and get it over with.” Adrienne managed to say.

She grabbed a chair. “Where’s the guy?” She asked.

“Justin, could we do this now?” Jill asked Justin.

Her eyes went wide.

“Fuck!” She muttered under her breath.

Justin sat on the chair in front of her and Jill.

“How are you doing, Justin?”

“Not bad.” He said. “You might like to excuse me for not taking off my sunglasses though.” She didn’t look at him but she feels the weight of his stare on her.

“You got a shiner there?” Jill teased nervously.

“No not really. But I haven’t had much sleep lately.” Somehow Adrienne felt like that statement was for her, which made her heart do somersaults, but she reminded herself that she caught him having another woman in his apartment. And they just finished having a shower together!

Jill asked about his credentials first. His Age. Education. Work. Nothing Adrienne didn’t know about. Then Jill asked him about his hobbies and where he hangs out more often.

“I just go out with my friends to some bars.” He replied. “We have our little boy talks, drink a bit.”

“What’s your idea of perfect date or night out—with a girl, I mean?” Jill asked.

“Hmmm... tough one. But normally, I just like to hang out with her at home, cuddling and being with each other. Nothing grand, really. But that’s the point. If you like being with a person, it doesn’t matter where you are. You don’t have to go to Paris or Rome to have the time of your life.”

His voice was so sincere that Adrienne felt like crying.

“Best date you ever had?” Jill asked again. Adrienne was so thankful that Jill didn’t mind taking the floor all to herself. She knew she wouldn’t have the courage to ask Justin all these questions.

He laughed. “I would have to say, couple’s spa.”

She stared at him sharply and glared at him. He raised a brow at her as if challenging her.

“You know the rumor that Tara Lambert is interested in you, what do you have to say to that?” Jill asked boldly.

Justin laughed again. "Who is Tara Lambert?"

"Between the two of us? The girl bold enough to show her C cups on Fifth Avenue." Jill said seriously.

Justin laughed. "You're not going to print that, are you?"

Jill giggled. "Of course not." She winked at him. "Okay, back to Tara Lambert now that you know who she is. What do you have to say?"

Adrienne rolled her eyes.

Justin shrugged. "Well, rumors are rumors. I am not sure that it is true though. But I'm not really looking for anything right now."

Gees! That's embarrassing for Tara! But Adrienne wondered if she weren't there, what would Justin have said?

"Really?" Jill asked. "Does that mean you have a relationship with someone now?"

Justin sighed. And then he turned to Adrienne. "I was deeply involved with someone. It's a little messed up now, but I still feel deeply involved. If only she would be interested in what I have to say."

Adrienne cleared her throat. "Excuse me, I don't mean to be rude, but I have another meeting to rush to. Jill, I think you take it from here."

And she walked out on them.

She cried in the ladies room. It was just too hard for her to see him, to listen to his voice, to hear him say that he isn't interested in Tara Lambert right now because he was involved with someone else. She doesn't know if he was saying it because she was there, or because it is true! And God! She wished it was true!

But how could she go back there when he has failed her trust? When she has whole-heartedly loved him only to find out that he could betray her? That he could stomach having someone else when he knew he was deeply involved with her?

She saw him again that afternoon in Blush. She looked up from her computer screen, but he didn't look at her direction at all.

She missed him. Every single day. Every single moment.

They passed each other more than once everyday at Blush, but everytime she looks up to see him, he was not even looking her way anymore. She felt like vapor.

It hurts her but she knew she's got to move on. She had to be strong. She isn't the most blessed woman on earth, when it comes to love and relationships. She doesn't have to fool herself that she could be happy with Troy. She doesn't have to fool herself that she could make Justin happy.

The article on him went out. People, especially the girls, were raving about the article. She knew Jill did great. But she didn't read it.

"Lucky girl, that one." Jill said when she came to her office that day.

"Who?"

“The one that Justin is dating. He really seemed into her. I mean, that’s a first. Justin Adams admitting to the world that he’s not really that cool and unattached playboy the world believes him to be. He can fall in love... that is just romantic.”

“But I thought he said it was over.” Adrienne said quietly.

“Oh Pooh! He’s trying his best. I can see that she’s got him wrapped around her little finger. He just needed his chance to explain, though. It seems to me that the reason of the fight was pretty lame. My God, that girl is just stupid! Good thing, he doesn’t want to say her name. Otherwise, I would have hunted her down just to say to her, *Thanks for making him single again, stoooooppidd!!!*”

“What? What did he say the reason was?” She asked curiously.

“Well, this is the part I left out. I pestered him for the reason why they broke up. You know me. He said, *alright I will tell you. But you can't print it.* I think we’re friends now.” Jill said.

“Jill! What was the reason he said?” Adrienne asked again.

“Well, his cousin who is in college went to New York for an overnight stay. She opened the door and saw her in a bathrobe, female instinct, which is not really always right, made her assume that he was doing another girl. You know, good guys with bad reputation. Too bad for him because it seems that this was his first time to be serious in a relationship. He said she doesn’t want to talk to him anymore. Wouldn’t return her calls. Wouldn’t listen to him no matter how hard he tried to explain. Gosh! I felt like his confidante already!”

“Excuse me? Who was that girl?”

“Cousin. His younger cousin who is in college? Sophomore I think. But don’t tell anyone. He asked me not to print it. He doesn’t want that part to be public. Technically, it was just between him and me.”

She stared at Jill’s dreamy expression. She felt like fainting. She didn’t listen to him. She just immediately assumed that he was shagging somebody else. Defense mechanism. She was trying to protect herself from getting hurt by him by immediately assuming that he will.

She felt like throwing up. She felt like crying. And she knew she would. Right then and there. In front of Jill.

“Honey, are you okay?” Jill asked.

She nodded. She excused herself, took her bag and went home, telling Jill that she forgot something her mother asked her to do. Resigned to the fact that her knees go shaky at the sound of her mother’s voice, Jill was happy to let her go without further interrogation.

She cried in her bed. She hugged her pillow. She remembered all the days when Justin would just walk into her room and brighten her day with just the sight of him.

Now, she remembered everything he did for her. He has been great. He’s treated her far better than Troy ever did.

She fell asleep thinking about all the memories she’s had with him, trying so hard not to feel remorse at what she has done. He tried to explain. He did actually. She knew that he explained in her answering machine and in the SMS he sent to her. She turned a deaf ear and a blind eye. She was so convinced that he was the cheating type. That nothing

good can come out of what they have anyway. That it was bound to end someday. Better end it earlier.

Next day, she saw him in Blush. There was not even one look at her. She tried so hard not to cry. She wanted to run to him and throw herself in her arms.

But somehow she knew it wouldn't be hard for him to recover. He was, after all, Justin Adams.

And true enough, his recovery came faster than she thought.

"You know what? A friend of mine saw Justin Adams in Oxygen last night. Clubbing with guess who? Tara Lambert." Yuan said to her Thursday night when she finally went out with them for dinner.

And he said he didn't know her? Adrienne thought glumly.

"Well, girls like Tara Lambert have a certain advantage. And my God! Look at her! Nobody stood a chance." Jill said.

“But didn’t you say that he had a girlfriend somewhere and that he looked really attached to her?” Yuan asked.

Jill shrugged. “She probably decided to stand by her stupidity. She doesn’t want to listen to him. He must have tried his best. What do you say? One girl’s loss is another girl’s gain. In this case, it looks like Tara Lambert is on the winning end.”

That made things even worse. Adrienne tried to endure thirty minutes of another Justin Adams conversation. Most of it, much to her pain, included how he is compatible with Tara Lambert.

“They would look good together, don’t you think?” Yuan said.

Jill sighed. “Yeah, with her legs that go forever. Perfect curves. I don’t think she is really pretty though. Her facial features are too strong, if you ask me. Justin’s face is aristocratic. If you ask me, features-wise, he would look great with someone who looks like a cold and yet angelic princess.”

“Sometimes, I think Tara Lambert’s face looked too boyish. But she’s got that appeal. Maybe that’s why she’s hot these days.”

Adrienne hated the feeling of not being able to tell her friends to shut the fuck up! Because she is affected. Because she is in pain of ending things with Justin Adams for one stupid reason! She didn’t even have the gall to end things with Troy, which she should have done a long time ago. And she had all the courage to end it with Justin, who’s been so monumental in her life.

She received a call from Troy. Even though she knew she was facing another problem, she was happy with the distraction. She doesn’t know where she is getting all the courage to endure the Justin-Tara loveteam talk.

“Hi Yen.” He greeted. “The convention is done. We were thinking let’s go to the beach and unwind.”

“When?” She asked.

“Tomorrow, of course!” He replied. “We’ll pick you up at your apartment early in the morning.”

“Where do you plan to go?”

“Bahamas.” He replied. “I’ve already booked two rooms at The Westin and the ticket.”

“Bahamas? For the weekend?”

“Yes. Are you okay? Seems like you aren’t yourself.”

She sighed. “I’ve got... deadlines.”

Yuan raised his brow at her.

“Let’s go!” Jill mouthed. “We’ll go with you!”

She stared at her friends. Then she figured this could be a good way to end things with Troy. She could talk to him during the weekend. At least, he won’t have too much pressure and he’s got his *Sensei* Kim to tell him what to do. And knowing Kim, she would support her in this decision. She was never happy with her relationship with Troy. And Kim was Troy’s mother’s first pick anyway. God! She was their own mother’s first pick for Troy.

“Alright. What time?” She asked.

“Seven AM. Be ready.”

“Okay. See you then.”

“We’re going to the Bahamas!” Jill wailed.

“They’re picking me up at seven. They’ve got my tickets and they’ve booked the room already.”

“Great! I will call my agent. I’m sure they can book us. But we might go there later. Probably noontime. Which hotel are you staying at?”

“Westin.” Adrienne sighed. “This will not be good.”

Yuan shrugged. “Come on. Now, that you are sure that you have to spread your wings and explore greener pastures, you have to find the courage to stand by your decisions, sweetie. No one said it is easy. But eventually, this should make you happier.”

“Yes. And we will go with you! Don’t worry, sweetie. You have all the support you will need.”

“Look at you! Since you got that apartment of yours, you have changed so much.” Yuan said.

“You’ve stopped wearing your reading glasses. You’ve started re-evaluating your wardrobe. You let your hair down often. You’ve become Assistant Editor-in-Chief.”

“You’ve modeled for Exalta. You’ve been in a magazine, on the brochures and you have a billboard! You have made tons of extra money on this modeling thing. What else have you not achieved?”

“Made some money on stocks as well.” Adrienne added.

“You invested in stocks?” Yuan asked.

She stared at them. She realized that even her playing the odds on Wallstreet was unknown to her friends.

“I gave it a try. And I had beginner’s luck. But it was fun and liberating, thinking I can earn so much more in some other ways. And I know I am doing so good financially. I thought I was going downhill when I signed the mortgage papers. But I was luckier than I thought. Except for my

mother, Kim and Troy, I can't say that I have any right to complain about my life."

"And you've got an opportunity of meeting someone perfect for you."

"You need not die a virgin! And you can have your first time with someone who will wake up every single nerve in your body!" Jill said with a mischievous smile.

I already have and I just lost him. Adrienne thought sadly.

"Alright. Jill and I are going to meet you there by noontime. I need to go to the office to sort out some things." Yuan said.

"Yeah, me too. I need to submit something to Jada first thing tomorrow."

Adrienne felt nervous. She knew that she has to go through with it. She might not have enough courage now, but tomorrow, she'll know when the time is right. And she will be braver than she needed to be. Or at least she hopes.

*Verraten**German. Meaning Betrayed in English*

“Come on, come on. Get ready, we’re leaving in thirty minutes.” Kim announced when she and Troy appeared in her doorstep.

“I’m ready.” Adrienne said a bit sleepily. She was not able to get enough sleep last night. She was thinking of ways of how to tell Troy that she’s ruining their Bahamas getaway. If he’s on the same boat as she is, then he wouldn’t mind. But if he really still loves her like he says, then it’s going to be a nightmare weekend. And worse, thoughts of a black-haired, crystal-blue-eyed rakehell is still haunting her—regardless of whether she is asleep or not.

Will she chance upon Tara Lambert on the elevator now?
Is she the one warming his bed now?

Troy took her hand and led her to the terrace.

“What have you done, Adrienne?” He asked.

“What?” She blinked, clueless of what Troy was quite furious about.

“The billboard. I saw it. That was the reason that waiter was staring at you! What were you thinking? And worse, did you consult your family or me about this? I had to find out that way!” He said.

It took a moment for Adrienne to realize that he was referring to the Exalta billboard. He’s in New York. He was bound to find out.

“What the fuck, Troy?” she fumed. “I did it, because they wouldn’t want any other girl to do it but me, okay? I was a one-time model! Could you just cut me some slack? It’s not like I showed some breast!”

She could use this anger... to get enough courage to say what she really needed to say to him.

“You know, my roommate Kjell saw it when he dropped us off here. He told me that it looked like you! Hell! It is you!”

“I am not denying it!”

“You’ve embarrassed me, you know! How could you not tell me something like this! I nearly punched Kjell for drooling over that picture!” He said angrily. “He just thought the girl looked quite familiar! He’s seen your photos in my laptop! It was too late when he realized it was you! He looked like he’s just had a hard-on just by looking at you naked underneath that robe!”

“I wasn’t naked underneath that robe!” *Although I was the first time I took that shot... when I was having a spa with the city’s most notorious playboy!*

“You weren’t! But you looked like you were!” He fired back. “And that’s the idea you were conveying in that billboard! It wasn’t obvious! But for a man... trust me! It works in different ways!”

“I can’t be faulted for any man’s fantasies, Troy! I was not selling a sex house! It was a spa for Christ’s sake! And an elite one! I got paid well enough for it and I didn’t show more than a shoulder! If you guys have such dirty minds, I

can wrap myself mummy-style and you would still be having a hard on!"

She turned her back on him and went to her bedroom to get her bags. She didn't talk to Troy for the rest of the trip. Kimberly was happy to indulge him anyway. And she couldn't care less. Troy looked like he was ready to punch somebody anytime. But couldn't do so, because his *sensei* Kimberly is present.

Troy checked them in to the hotel while she sat with Kimberly in the lobby.

"Kim, you'll be in Room 204." He said when he returned.
"Adrienne, we'll be in room 313."

What??? Adrienne felt the first pangs of panic. This cannot be happening.

"No, Troy." She managed to say. "I can stay with Kim."

"Why?" He asked sharply.

"Why not?" She asked back.

He raised a brow. "I'm your boyfriend, Adrienne. Your job is to stay at my side whenever you can." He whispered to her madly.

She raised her chin. "No. I'm your girlfriend, Troy. I am not your bodyguard!"

He threw his hands up in the air.

"Alright. Do whatever you like! You are so good at that anyway!"

She rolled her eyes and looked over at Kim.

Kim's room is a bit small. It's got a double bed though and a big couch.

"I can sleep in the couch, don't bother." She told Kim. "I guess Troy didn't anticipate that I won't be rooming with him."

"What was the fuss anyway, Yenny? It's not like you're still a virgin! We actually sleep with our boyfriends, you know!"

She couldn't believe she was hearing this from Kim. The prim, the proper, Kim.

And yes, she knew that! A girl can sleep with her boyfriend! God! She can even sleep with someone else! And fall in love and get heartbroken! Kimberly doesn't need to lecture her on the world's favorite sins!

"While you are still not married, you should have all the fun you like! You used to sleep around when you were young. You changed and became boring!" She said.

"For the record, Kim, I never slept with anyone in highschool... or college. It is a pity we never talk much. You could have shown me some pointers since you sound like you normally do this sleeping around thing." She said with a tang, trying to sting Kimberly for once.

To her surprise, Kimberly laughed. "Come on, Yenny. Lighten up. Just because you receive too much pressure from mother, doesn't mean you have to do what she says all the time. You just have to show her what she needs to see. And then when you are out of her sight, you can be free! You never learned the rules of the game!"

“Well, I don’t want to room with Troy either. So I don’t think it matters. This is not about pleasing Mom. This is about me and what I want and don’t want to do.”

“Then I don’t think you will keep Troy for long, dear.”

Adrienne sighed. She doesn’t know if Kim was just being sisterly now and giving her an advise or if she just want to provoke her. But she doesn’t care.

Her phone rang.

“We’re here.” Yuan said. “We’re just going up to our room.”

“Alright. See you, guys.” She said. She turned to Kim. “I’ll go change. I will see Yuan and Jill.”

She decided to put her stuff together, took out a pair of one-piece suit and a sarong. She tied her hair in a pony.

Kimberly was watching TV when she went out of the bathroom.

"I'll catch you guys later." She said to her and went out.

She was shaking her head when she waited for the lift to go up to Jill's and Yuan's room. She was still confused about Kimberly's words. Was that what she was doing? Was she just trying to please her mother and doing good in front of her eyes and then going wild behind her back? But she knew Kim was doing good in med school anyway, so it doesn't really matter. And what has been done is done. This sort of information could have been useful to her when she was younger. Now, she knew that no matter what she does, she was still the black sheep in the family. She couldn't change that. What she can do is to just make sure that she doesn't fail herself in life.

When the elevator opened, she was shocked to see Justin in it.

What the hell is he doing here?

He was wearing his Oakleys and she doesn't know if he was looking at her. She sighed. She wanted to touch him. She wanted to throw herself in his arms. She wanted to feel him. To know that one time in her life, he existed. He was real. She didn't just dream him.

Just one word, God. Please! Just one word, I will throw myself in his arms no questions asked.

The elevator door opened. He went out without even a look at her. As if she didn't exist to him at all.

Tears rolled down her face. She wiped them before she met with Yuan and Jill.

"When will you do it?" Yuan asked.

"Honey, my piece of advise? The sooner the better. Before you start having doubts. Before you receive another call from your mother and you change your mind." Jill advised.

"Justin Adams is here." Yuan said all of a sudden. Why is it that he just appears out of nowhere? When she doesn't expect him to be in this island and in this hotel, he was here. When she doesn't expect him to be brought up in any conversation, his name just keeps popping up.

"Yes! I saw him in the lobby as well. He must have arrived the same time we did. I just ran into him at Blush this morning. I told him that we were going here and I had to

rush out. He's nice really. He smiles at me when I run into him. He does not snob me anymore since that interview."

"Well, lucky you! But sorry dear, you are up against a lady with big breasts and is not afraid to show herself in a lingerie all over Fifth avenue." Yuan teased.

"I am not after Justin Adams! I know he is way out of my league! But it is nice that he knows I exist!"

Adrienne didn't say anything the whole time. The whole problem with sleeping with the guy your friends dream about is that you get to hear about him all the time after you part ways! Especially hard if you just fell in love with him and drove away a once in a million chance because you decided to be stupid.

"Was he with someone? Was he with Tara?" Yuan asked.

"I don't know. Didn't see any girl with him. I saw him chatting with some guys in the lobby. But no sign of Tara. But knowing the likes of her, she will be here by evening. God! I think she would follow him to the ends of the earth! That billboard comes in very handy for her!" Jill said.

“Yeah. But I don’t think you can get *the* Justin Adams to commit to a girl who used to work as a bartender, and now parades around in lingerie in a catwalk. She could be good for a month’s shag, but knowing Justin’s dating history, or lack of one, she would be picking up the pieces of her heart this time next month.”

She swallowed hard but didn’t say anything. She wanted to tell them that Justin deserves a better impression than that. That Justin is human! And he can be considerate and sweet.

She had lunch with Jill and Yuan. She felt guilty about not bothering to go to lunch with Kim and Troy, but she needed to clean her head first and find enough strength, so that the next time she sees Troy, it would be to break up with him. Jill was right. The earlier the better.

After lunch, she went out to find Troy. She didn’t need a script. She will just tell him right out what she needed to say.

She knocked on his room. No answer. She must have knocked for a whole five minutes. But it looked like he

wasn't in. She decided to go back to her room. He must have taken a late lunch with Kimberly.

When she opened the door, she was shocked by the sight in front of her.

First she saw Kimberly. She had her back on her, her head pulled back, she was naked, her legs were spread apart, she was on top of... Troy. Troy had his hands in her waist. They were moaning...

She stood there. She swallowed hard and watched them. Anger and embarrassment eating her up. She wanted to puke at the sight in front of her. But she knew this will happen only once and she doesn't want to go back in her history and remember that at the moment when she should have held her head up high, she lost it and ran to the bathroom. No. She will be strong. She will stomach this!

Suddenly, Troy realized that she was standing there.

"Oh shit!" Troy muttered, then immediately pushed Kimberly off him. He stood up, not minding that he was all naked. His sex in full display.

Well, at least she had a peek before they break up. God! Troy would never make *her* as happy as Justin did.

She smiled sarcastically.

“Oh, I just came to find you to say something important. I was quite worried how you would take what I was going to say, but it seems that you’ve been quite busy yourself. You made it so much easier for me to break the news to you, Troy, that we’re over. Goodbye!” Then she looked at Kimberly, who is hugging the blankets to herself. “Mommy’s going to be happy about this! Her favorite daughter is shagging her perfect son-in-law candidate, no matter if he was her other daughter’s boyfriend!”

And she stormed out of the room.

She was shaking when she hit the elevator button. When the door opened, she found herself eye to eye with Justin.

Shit! Could things get any worse???

She tried hard not to cry. She pressed Yuan’s and Jill’s floor. Seeing him at this time, when she needed refuge, made her want to break down and lose herself in his arms. His phone

rang before they chance upon the very awkward silence that she knew was coming.

“Who’s this?” He asked the person on the other line.

“Tara? Tara? Lambert?” He asked.

Shit! Apparently, things could get worse!

“Oh hi. Yeah. I’m cool. I was...” She didn’t wait to hear the rest of what he will talk to Tara about. The elevator doors opened and she immediately stormed out and headed to Jill’s and Yuan’s room.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks when Yuan opened the door. She knew it was because of the mixed anger, embarrassment and pain that she was feeling. All for Kimberly, Troy and Justin.

She wasn’t heartbroken. She felt betrayed. She doesn’t expect much from Troy, but it was Kimberly’s betrayal that is eating her up.

It was just like when they were young. Every little thing she had, no matter how cheap, no matter how small, if she

seemed happy with it, Kimberly would try to get it from her. And worse, their mother would always take Kimberly's side.

"Holy shit!" Yuan said she told them what she came to discover. "You were so worried about how you were going to break up with him. He just gave you the perfect reason. But my God! Kimberly is a classic. God only knows what a bitch that sister of yours is!"

Adrienne was lost in thought. She doesn't want to go back to her room. Now, she felt that aside from her job, Yuan and Jill, her world was crumbling down. Her mind is messed up. With thoughts of Justin, with the image of Kim riding Troy madly.

"I don't know guys. I don't know whether I will be mad or happy. Mad because they must have thought so little of me to do what they did. Happy because the blame of this breakup didn't have to be a burden on my part."

"You could use this, you know. You could use this to blackmail Kimberly." Jill said wickedly.

She laughed in spite of her pain. "No matter what I do,

Kim has my mother's love and my mother's trust. And I don't think I would need something from Kimberly bad enough to blackmail her!"

"So did they say anything?"

"I think they were dumbfounded." Adrienne replied. "I don't think they were able to recover fast. I was standing there for more than a minute, watching them ride each other. My God! It is disgusting!!!"

Jill laughed. "No, sweetie! You're a virgin! You would think it is disgusting. But not for long. With the right guy, you would think that sex is God's gift to women."

"What does Troy want? I mean, look at you , Adrienne. You are so pretty, sexy and smart! You have done so much for yourself. You are independent and you are decent! You were not even talking to some other guy, you were turning down guys who ask you for your number, you're being a classic snob because you were taken! You are so perfect! What was he looking for? Kimberly is not even half as attractive as you are! What was he thinking?" Yuan said.

“Guys, let’s not forget, I was going to break up with him.”
Adrienne said.

“Yes. But he doesn’t know that! He doesn’t have any
reason yet to look somewhere else.” Jill said.

“Adrienne. He was a fool!” Yuan said.

“Even Justin was a fool!” Jill said, which alarmed Adrienne.

“What? Why? What’s Justin got to do with this?” She
asked and she hoped she didn’t sound too nervous.

“I still cannot believe he didn’t notice you when you
worked together. Didn’t even engage you in a conversation.
What was he thinking?”

“Maybe he did. But he’s such a snob, he really won’t do
something. Maybe he’s really the type of guy that don’t
pursue girls. He lets them come to him.”

Adrienne sighed.

“Can’t we just not talk about Justin Adams?” She said
desperately.

"I'm sorry, sweetie." Jill said. "Alright, let's go to the beach."

"Don't feel like going." Adrienne said. "I think I'm just going to sleep for a while. Maybe when I wake up, I was back to my original plan. I was able to break up with Troy first."

"And then that's the time he went to your room and humped your sister." Yuan said sarcastically.

She must have slept for three hours. When she woke up, Jill and Yuan were having a cigarette in the balcony.

She felt guilty. She must have ruined their Bahamas getaway already. It was already four in the afternoon, and they haven't been in the sun yet.

She stood up behind them.

"I'm really sorry, guys. I dragged you into this." She said.

Jill hugged her. "Sweetie, that's what we are for. We're your best friends. We are here when you need us the most."

Yuan nodded. "So now, we can go out in the sun and catch the sunset?"

Adrienne smiled and nodded.

As she watched the sunset while they are swam on the beach, Adrienne knew that she will be okay. She's lost Justin for good. But one thing he has taught her is that she needs to love and appreciate herself. She is more than what she gives herself credit for. She is beautiful. She is strong. She's a fox. She will get through this.

*Vapas Kara**Hindi. Translation: To take back*

Adrienne bought a new pair of bikinis. She decided to go with a black two-piece suit. Now that she's relieved herself of Troy's chains, and Kimberly has just shown her that she is not entirely prudent like she appeared to be, Adrienne realized that what would wearing a perfectly decent two-piece suit do to hurt her? When she put it on, she was contented to see that it highlighted her flat tummy, her curves and her long legs. Jill lent her a very sheer white capri pants. It looks decent, but shows too much hint of her bikini underneath. But she felt sexy and stylish.

They went down to the restaurant to have dinner.

She chose a secluded corner with her back on the crowd. If Kimberly, Troy or Justin walked in, she didn't want to see any of them.

Fortunately, heaven left her alone in peace all throughout dinner. She was able to eat a full meal, without even thinking of any of them. All Jill and Yuan talked about are their latest dates and escapades. They also planned a *girls'* night out the following week, where they would go bar hopping.

"The best way to meet guys!" Jill said.

"Both straight and the other way around." Yuan agreed.

After dinner, they hung out by the beach front. Yuan got them some beers.

"Alright, Adrienne, whatever pain you feel, let's talk about it. Now. Over some beers! Don't go Ms. Prudent on me, Darling." Yuan said, handing her a bottle of hard beer.

She took a gulp. It was very cold, thus, she didn't mind the strong taste.

"Will you ever forgive Kim?" Jill asked.

She shrugged. "I don't expect anything from Kim. She doesn't have an affection for me. But I never expect her to

shag my boyfriend either. I mean, Troy is barely a boyfriend already but still, I mean, if she had the decency, she wouldn't do it with Troy. Or at least wait until we break up before she does something like that. It's disgusting!"

"Have you ever thought about seeing somebody else aside from Troy?" Jill asked.

She stared at them. Has the time to be honest finally come?

She nodded. "Yes, of course. My relationship with Troy was absolutely less than perfect and I do... feel the need to be with someone who lights my fire." She said.

"Have you ever cheated on Troy? My God, what a question!" Yuan said, as if realizing that he already knows the answer. "I meant, did you ever go out with somebody else, while Troy was your boyfriend?"

She took a deep breath. "Yes. Yes... I did." *Cheat on Troy*, she wanted to add. But the words never came out.

"What?" Jill asked, quite surprised. "And you didn't tell us?"

She shrugged. "Sometimes, I couldn't believe what I was doing. Like one time, I went to Gypsys. I was so mad at my mother. I dressed up in this very sexy outfit that Jacob picked for me. I went to that bar like a vixen in search for my latest prey. And... sometimes, I think I just imagined it. Like it was a dream. Or it wasn't really me. Like it was somebody else."

Yuan and Jill were silent for a moment. When Adrienne thought they were silent for too long, she looked at them. They were staring at somebody behind her.

She turned around and found Troy staring down at her.

She stood up and faced him. "What do you want?" She asked.

"Can we talk?" He asked.

"There is nothing to talk about, Troy. Everything is clear to me." Adrienne replied.

"No. It's not like that. I won't let you think that."

“You shagged my sister... while you were on a getaway with me. How will I think about it differently? No matter what angle I try to look at it, there is no other interpretation.” She said. “Troy, it’s over. It’s been over before this. The truth is, I was looking for you, to tell you that it’s over. That there is no happily ever after for the two of us. We don’t suit. Now could you please leave me be?”

Troy took a deep breath. His face turned red. Then he said, “Can we just please go to my room, so I can talk to you?”

What does he take her for? A fool?

“Troy, I won’t. What would you say to me to make things different?” She asked.

“Just please go with me. I’m sure as hell going to change your mind about this. I can show you what we are lacking. And I think we can make things right.”

She shook her head. “Please just let me be.”

He took a deep breath then without warning, he took her by the forearm and pulled her away.

“Damn it, Troy! Let me go!” She said, struggling to pull away from him.

He started dragging her away, not listening to her pleas.

“Let me go!” She said angrily.

He turned to her and grabbed her other forearm. He was bruising her arms now.

“Listen to me! I will not let you go, unless I said what I needed to say! Unless I did what I needed to do!” He said sharply.

His face was only a few inches away from her and he smelled of beer. Troy was drunk! She panicked when she realized that he leaned forward to kiss her on the lips! She struggled but he was too strong for her.

She could hear Yuan and Jill screaming. With all her might, she launched a slap on his face that made him fall back.

“You bitch!” He roared. And before she could see what was coming, she felt a sharp pain on her cheek, too strong that it made her fall to the ground.

Yuan launched a punch at Troy, but he jabbed him on the ribs and he too fell to the ground.

Jill screamed again.

Adrienne started to get up. She saw what could be the scariest thing she has seen in her entire life. Troy’s face, filled with fury, as he started for her again.

But just when he was just about a meter away from her, he pulled back. The next thing she saw is Troy on the ground being beaten up.

There were two other guys, and they pulled Troy’s assailant to stop him.

“Shit man, stop it. You could kill the guy! He’s down already. Stop it!” One blonde guy said.

It took her a moment to realize that it was Justin. He has stopped punching Troy. His face was red and Adrienne

realized that she has never seen him raging like this. His friends had to hold him back to make sure that he doesn't launch one more punch at Troy, who was now sitting up from the ground, holding his jaw in pain, and looking like he doesn't know what had hit him and why.

Justin bent to pick up his shades that fell to the sand.

"What the fuck?" Troy shouted at him, when he found the voice to speak. "What's your freaking problem?"

Justin didn't answer. He turned to Adrienne. The minute their eyes met, she knew he saw the terror in her face. She was pale. He went close to her.

"Justin." She whispered to him.

He didn't say anything. Instead, he put an arm around her waist and tilted her chin up to see the damage that Troy's slap did to her. Troy had hit her harder on her lower lip, and it is bleeding lightly.

"Oh, honey..." He said very softly. Amidst all the terror that she has just gone through, Adrienne wanted to break down and cry. Not because of the fear she just felt, but

because of the gentleness in Justin's voice. And because she heard him call her *honey* again.

Justin bent down to touch her lips with his, on the part that it was bleeding. She realized that he sucked the blood that was coming out of it.

"What the fuck..." Troy said when he was on his feet again and he saw what Justin just did.

Justin turned to him. Fury and rage returned in his face.

"Didn't your mother tell you not to raise your hand to a girl, Troy?" Justin said coldly. But it was obvious that he was fuming.

He released Adrienne and started for Troy again.

"And guess what? You picked the wrong girl to mess up with, asshole!" And then he punched him in the jaw one more time. Troy fell to the ground again.

"Justin, man, stop it!" His friends said.

“Justin, please?” Adrienne pleaded softly. He looked at her and nodded slightly.

He went to her again and seeing how terrified she was, he enclosed her in his embrace, as if telling her that it is okay. She is safe with him now.

“I’m sorry, honey. I’m sorry, I didn’t come early enough.” He said to her as he caressed her head. “I wouldn’t have let him hurt you.”

She shook her head. She cried. She didn’t know whether it’s because of relief, or because of the fear she felt, or because she felt so happy being in his arms again.

She felt him kiss her on the temple. She closed her eyes and prayed that it wasn’t a dream. That he was here for real. That she was back in his arms again.

“Justin, man...” His friend Mike called him. “One minute?”

Justin nodded and pulled away slightly from her.

He stared at her for a moment and then kissed her on the forehead. “Wait a second, hon. I will be back.”

She nodded and Justin went to talk to his friends.

Yuan and Jill went to her in obvious awe. She realized that this is a moment of revelation to all of them. Fifteen minutes ago, she was thinking of being honest with them. Of slowly telling them of the mischief she just did two months ago. And now, before she was able to say her piece, to tell them the whole story, with sincere apologies, they came to her with all questions and accusations in their eyes.

She stared at Troy, who was sitting on the sand. Kimberly has appeared on his side. She faced Yuan and Jill.

She sighed. She couldn't begin to tell them the whole story.

"Honey?" Jill asked. She stared at her. "He calls you honey?"

She opened her mouth to say something in her defense but no words came out.

"What is going on, Yen? I mean, clearly, Justin Adams came here to rescue you from your lunatic ex. That part we get. But... him hugging you, kissing you, and calling you

honey, with so much familiarity... it doesn't add up." Yuan said.

"And you were right. His eyes *are* blue. That wasn't a guess, was it? You knew that before. I remembered you saying crystal blue. The exact color of his eyes. It was a mystery to us. We barely see him without the shades. But it looks like you've looked into his eyes more often than anyone else." Jill said shaking her head.

"I... started telling you something before Troy came. I was trying my best to do so. But somehow, I wasn't able to. And I want to explain everything to you guys. From the top. But I can't do that now. Not after what happened. I hope you could understand me and give me time." She pleaded to them.

They didn't say anything. They stared at the figure standing behind her.

Justin reappeared on Adrienne's side and wrapped an arm around her waist.

"Hey, Jill. Yuan." He greeted them casually. Finally, he has met them. And this was not the way she imagined

introducing Justin to Jill and Yuan, *if* she ever thought of introducing them.

Jill and Yuan nodded at him.

"Hon, I think we better get you inside." He told her. "You're cold, and that wound of yours will need tending to."

She nodded.

"I'll talk to you guys, later. I'm really sorry." She told Yuan and Jill.

Justin put an arm around her shoulder and walked her back towards the hotel without saying anything.

They were quiet for the rest of the walk. She was too shaken and too confused. She was also quite happy. At the back of her mind, she kept asking if he was real. If this was real. That he had his arms around her again.

When they entered the elevator, she said. "Justin, I can't go back to my room. I'm sharing it with Kim and I can't stand to be in the same room with her now. I just can't."

Justin stared at her and then hugged her tightly.

“Sshh...” He said. “I never said we’re going to your room.”

Her heart pounded. She closed her eyes and savored the scent of him. He smelled of faint aftershave. The scent that used to tell her that this is where she belongs.

Justin led her to his room. He got a suite, with a king-sized bed and a big balcony.

When he closed the door behind him, she stared at him. He looked back at her.

“Thank you.” She said to him.

“For what?” He asked.

She shrugged. “Rescuing me from that dickhead. I realized Yuan couldn’t do much to him.”

“Somehow, even if you never asked, I have always felt that sense that I was supposed to protect you... to rescue you... to catch you when you fall.”

Her heart softened. She missed him so much, and now, she couldn't believe she was hearing him say these words to her.

"I don't want you to feel pity... or obligation..."

He leaned forward and silenced her with a kiss. Then he looked at her deep in the eyes.

"I feel none of those for you, honey." He said. "I feel blessed. And that is why I need to protect you in return. To give you back what you have given me. To take utmost care so I won't lose you, and I thought I did, actually."

"I have never given you anything, Justin." She said.

He shook her head. "You gave me more than you think you did, honey."

She stared up at him. She was asking him questions with her eyes. She doesn't understand what he was trying to say. Instead of replying, he kissed her deeply.

Then he smiled. "I was late. If I came earlier, this would never have happened." He touched her lip, which isn't bleeding anymore, but doubtless to leave a cut.

“Justin, you could get into trouble for that. Troy. What if he sues you for damages? You gave him the beating of his life.”

Justin shook her head. “I don’t care. He shouldn’t have touched you! He deserved what he got.”

“How did you come there in the first place?”

He shrugged. “I was in the bar and I was watching you. I saw him come to you. I didn’t know you were fighting, until I saw him grab you in both your arms and you slapped him. That’s when I made a run for it. But I wasn’t fast enough. He hit you first.”

She nodded. “Thank you.” She said. Tears rolled down her cheeks. “How can you be here? Thank God, you were here! Why are you here?” She knew she must be bubbling nonsense but she couldn’t help herself.

She looked down on her feet.

He tilted her chin up. “Why do you think I came here?”

She stared up at him.

"I knew you'd be here." He said sheepishly.

"How? Is that why you came here?"

He smiled sheepishly. "I ran into Jill this morning. I asked her why she was rushing. She said you guys are going here. Lucky for me, she was so excited about it, she even mentioned the hotel you were staying in. I don't know... I just..." He sighed. "Somehow I felt like I have to be here and make sure you'll be okay. And I wanted to see you with your friends, your sister and your boyfriend. I wanted to see you happy... to convince myself that you don't need me in your life... so I could finally get you out of my mind, out of my system."

"But you... weren't even looking at me. You acted like you didn't know me at all. Like I was nothing to you. And you don't have anything to do with me." She said, a tear slid down her cheek.

He nodded. "Because you didn't want me to... Adrienne, I tried to explain to you what happened that night. I did actually. On your answering machine, which I doubt you

listened to... or maybe you did and you just want to end what we have."

"Justin... I'm sorry... I didn't know she was your cousin."

He smiled. "Ian. She's a girl. I should have used Julia instead of Ian. Her name is Julianne, but anyway, I told you I have a cousin coming on vacation here."

She nodded. "I didn't know. I'm sorry. God! Justin, I was so stupid!"

He leaned forward to kiss her on the forehead. "I'm sorry too, honey. I should have told you the night before. I should have told you..."

"You didn't have to, Justin. You don't owe me that. You didn't have to tell me everything that you do." She cut him off.

"But I want to. I felt like the biggest asshole on earth that morning."

She wrapped her arms around his neck. He stared at her deeply and his face descended to hers and kissed her on the lips.

When he deepened the kiss, she felt pain on the wound.

“Ouch!” She giggled.

“I’m sorry, honey.” He said.

She nodded. “It’s okay.”

“Come on, let’s go freshen up.” He said.

“Justin, I have to go back to Yuan’s and Jill’s room. I was sharing a room with Kimberly. And I just can’t bear to see her right now.”

He pulled back. “Who said you were going to stay with Yuan and Jill?”

She stared at him.

“Come on, hon. After what happened, they already know about us. And I was... hoping... that you missed me enough.”

“Did you miss me?” She asked back, boldly.

He stared at her deeply. Then he leaned forward and when his lips was just an inch away from hers, he said, “It was hell!” And he kissed her passionately.

“Did you have dinner already?” He asked after the kiss.

“Barely.” She replied, her knees barely able to keep her steady.

He nodded. “I’ll call room service.”

“And I’ll shower first.” She said.

She prepared a bath for herself. After all that happened, she figured, she needed a relaxing bath to soothe her senses. She dipped in it, and closed her eyes. A few minutes later, Justin joined her. She moved over so she could lie between his legs, and rest her head on his shoulder.

He caressed her shoulders. He doesn't say anything. She was content to rest in his arms quietly. Then she would feel him hug her tighter and hear him whisper her name.

She closed her eyes and told herself that everything turned out fine.

"Are you okay?" He whispered in her ear.

She nodded.

"I'm okay now." She said. And she was. After all the terror, she felt that everything is going to be the way it should be now.

She turned around to face him. He has no expression in his face, but when she stared into his crystal blue eyes, she saw that they were dancing.

She smiled. "Oh, Justin, I missed you so!" She said and she leaned forward and kissed him in the lips.

"Really? What did you miss most about me?" He asked.

She smiled. "Your eyes."

"My eyes?" He echoed.

She nodded. "You always keep them behind those Oakleys of yours. Your face looks expressionless, sometimes, even cold. But your eyes were dancing with laughter. I love the way you can be so serious and yet your eyes are very warm."

"Really? You were the first one who noticed that." He said.

"Maybe I was the first one who looked at them too closely."
She smiled.

"Probably."

"You know... I was especially curious about the color of your eyes. I have..." She remembered the novel that she started writing before she met Justin. She hasn't thought about it until today.

"What?" He asked.

She blushed and turned away. But Justin knew her better.

He tilted her chin up to face him.

“What is it?”

She shook her head in embarrassment. But then she decided to be honest.

“Well, you were popular in the office. My friends know about you. And well, I think you were cute and all, but I never drooled on you. I just don’t understand why some girls would just lose their breaths at the sight of you. And then... I discovered that you were my next-door neighbor. And I got fascinated by you. I decided to see what the fuss was about. I was... well, I was watching you sometimes... trying to see what you were like.”

She stared back at him. There was no expression on his face. She was afraid that he would get mad at her or she would turn him off. But then she stared at his eyes. And there was laughter there again.

She smiled sheepishly. “I started writing a novel. And... I drew out the character after you.”

He raised a brow. "Really? What type of novel?" He asked.

She shrugged. "Historical romance. You were a rogue knight or duke. For sure you were a rakehell." She giggled.

He asked. "Was there a red-haired princess in distress?" He asked.

She looked at him. His eyes were sparkling. And she nodded shyly.

"And how did that turn out?" He asked.

She shrugged. "I haven't finished it."

"Why?" He asked.

"I met you. And I haven't written a single word in it again."

"How do you think they will end up?" He asked. She smiled because she felt that he was actually interested.

"I haven't thought about it yet." She said. "Any suggestions?"

“Hmmm... I would think she wouldn’t resist his charms and he would be enchanted by her beauty.”

“That’s pretty obvious, isn’t it?” She said. “Otherwise, it wouldn’t be a historical romance.”

He chuckled. “You’ve got a point. So, I guess they would elope together, and he got her pregnant and she was forced to marry him.”

“What? What kind of conflict is that? She doesn’t need to obligate him into marrying her you know.”

He laughed. “I didn’t say she was obligating him. I said he got her pregnant and *she* was forced to marry him. Like he was desperate to be with her for the rest of their lives and that was the only way he can get her to walk down the aisle!”

“A guy can be that desperate?” She asked.

“Oh trust me, honey. With the right girl, you can be.”

“And what? He ravished her?” She asked, not believing what Justin was saying.

He laughed. “He’s not a pervert! They were already lovers.”

“If they were lovers, then there is a big chance that she will be pregnant! She would know that would happen.”

“She was innocent. She didn’t know the methods of birth control!”

“What? They don’t have condoms or pills in those years!” She argued.

“But the guy can always withdraw. Or I’m sure they can try the rhythmic method.”

“I haven’t read a historical novel that is so complicated before.” She giggled. “I meant, romantically complicated.”

“Life can be complicated sometimes.” He said.

“So does love.” She murmured.

She felt him nod. And then she felt him kiss her in the neck.

"I'm glad." He whispered.

"Of what?"

"That you made a character out of me." He said. "To be honest with you, I was watching you whenever I can, as well. I know you from Blush. You were a snob. I got intrigued. And whenever you are out in the balcony, it fascinates me to see you lost in your thoughts. I see you talking on the phone and I couldn't make out the expression on your face. But now that I know you, I realized that during those times, you were talking to your boyfriend or your mother."

"You can see my frustration from afar?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. But I didn't see your happiness. That's why I was so surprised to see you at Gypsys. Looking the way you do. And God! You look so hot!"

“That night changed my life. It changed the way I looked at things. I got to appreciate myself more now.” She said. She turned to look at him. “Thank you, Justin Adams. For stepping into my life... when I wasn’t even asking you to.”

He smiled. “And thank you, Adrienne Miller. For looking at me in a different light.”

After the bath, Justin kissed her softly on the lips and then went out to answer the door.

She put on a fresh bathrobe and then towel-dried her hair.

When she went out, Justin was setting the food he ordered from room service

She realized that she didn’t have clothes to wear.

“Oh my God. I’m gonna have to go to Kim’s room after all.” She said.

“Why?”

“I don’t have clothes to wear, Justin.” She said.

He went close to her and wrapped his arms around her waist. Then he smiled mischievously. "You don't need any for tonight."

She giggled. "Jus—tinn!"

He laughed. "Here." He handed her a bag. "I had room service deliver a fresh pair of underwear."

She opened a bag and found two white panties.

"I told room service to deliver two women's undergarments. Did I get your size right?" He asked.

She nodded. "What do you think?"

He smiled. "I think I got it right. I know you, hon." Then he handed her a white long-sleeve shirt from his closet.

"It has been a dream of mine to see you wear something of mine." He smiled.

She giggled. "Thank you." And she headed to the bathroom to dress up.

“Let’s call the shop again later and have a pair of bathing suit delivered up. Then tomorrow, I could go to your room to get your stuff.”

She nodded. They had steak for dinner. Afterwards, they sat on the balcony to smoke.

“What did Kim do now?”

She giggled sarcastically. “I went here to clear my mind. And to break up with Troy. I was knocking on his door to find him. When I couldn’t, I went back to mine and Kim’s room. I found him there alright. Between Kim’s legs.”

Justin stared at her for a while. “Can your sister do any worse?” He shook his head. “Are you sure you have the same genes running in your blood?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know what I ever did to her.”

“And this Troy character? What a loser!” He said. “I don’t understand what else he was looking for. He’s got you. And you... are perfect just as you are!”

“No, I’m not. For him, I would be a disgrace to his family. His brother married a hotshot lawyer, and he somehow couldn’t accept the fact that he, on the other hand, will be marrying a vanity writer.”

Justin shook his head. “Did he expect his wife to make the living for him?”

“It was all ego for him.” She said.

“You marry for love. Not for wealth or prestige. My mother was a PR consultant when she met my Dad. He was a management trainee for my grandfather, then. But he has always been Jac Adams. He has always been the one to inherit the family empire. My grandfather never told my Dad to marry someone powerful or someone highly successful.” He caught her eye and held her gaze. “He has always told my Dad to find a woman, he would be excited to go home to. A woman he could talk to. A woman he could be comfortable with. A woman he could be content to be with. A woman who can stir his blood, affect his senses, and challenge his intelligence.”

“I bet your parents were happy.”

Justin smiled and nodded. "Very. Everyday I see them, they still look like they were newly-weds. My father adored my mother from head to foot."

"Why didn't you have any brother or sister?" She asked him.

He shrugged. "I was a twin, you know."

Her eyes widened.

"Jeffrey was fifteen minutes younger than me. I lived. He didn't." He said.

"Oh my God, I'm sorry." Adrienne gasped.

"I always wondered what he would be like. Would he be as stubborn as I am? Would he defy Mom and Dad? Would he like the same things that I do? Would he rather be a businessman like I am now destined to be, or would he like to be a lawyer or a doctor instead."

She reached out and squeezed his hand.

“You have a blessed life, Justin. You don’t know how lucky you are. Maybe Jeffrey was your guardian angel. He was always looking after you. If you were the one who lived, he made sure your life will be a blessed one.”

Justin stared at her deep in the eyes, and she thought she saw a hint of tears in his eyes. He smiled and squeezed her hand back. He nodded.

“I think you would have been better brothers than Kimberly and I were sisters.” She said. “Our relationship is a pity, really. And worse, my parents didn’t do something about it. Somehow, I even think that the root of all this is my mother. When we were young, Kim would always want what is mine. No matter how cheap or shabby my little toys are, if she sees that I am happy with it, she would always try to get it from me. And my mother will always take her side.” She looked at him. “I think Jeffrey would love you more than his life. I think that he would always be there for you. He would want what is best for you.”

Tears rolled down her face. Justin rose from his feet, pulled her up gently and enclosed her in his arms. There is where she lost it. She let him comfort her. She cried hard and hugged him tight. He didn’t say anything. He hugged her

tightly. Caressed her head while leaning a cheek against her forehead. He listened to her cries. He didn't try to ask her to stop crying. He let her pour it all out but through his embrace, he tells her that he's there for her. That he will catch her when she falls. That with him, she is adored... and she is safe...

15

Nar

Arabic. In English: Fire

They went ready for bed. By the foot of the bed, she watched him come closer to her. He took her face in both of his hands.

“My sweet, beautiful Adrienne...” He whispered.

Then he kissed her gently. He wrapped his arms around her waist. She kissed him back and wrapped her arms around his neck.

He unbuttoned the shirt she was wearing. And soon, they were kissing each other more passionately. She took off his shirt and unbuttoned his shorts. He nuzzled her neck. She moaned. She felt the familiar desire creeping in her every vein, slowly consuming her, blocking her senses.

Adrienne thought she will not feel like this anymore. For days, she thought that all she could do is to call to her mind Justin's memory, just so she could feel alive again. Because she thought it was over. That she has lost him. Now, she could hardly believe that she is back in his arms. And he is again igniting all her passions, arousing her until her mind is completely blank with need and longing.

"Justin." She whispered hoarsely. "Oh God! Justin, please..."

"I missed you, honey." He whispered hoarsely. They kissed each other, feeling the effects of the time they spent apart. They held on to each other, devouring each other in their kisses.

"I want you so badly!" He said to her, she felt the thin material of her underwear slip off her hips.

"Then take me, Justin! Take me now!" She whispered.

They fell to the bed and barely a second after, she felt him enter her with so much urgency. She moaned, as she arched her hips upward to give him better access.

He looked at her in the eyes. His eyes, now a shade of darker blue, was drugged with desire and consumed by passion.

He thrust faster and faster. She felt familiar sparks creeping in her every vein, until it took her to the brink of insanity.

“Justin!” She screamed. His lips descended towards hers and he swallowed her cries. And then she felt him thrust faster again until she heard him scream hoarsely, “Adrienne, honey!” Then he hugged her tighter. She felt his body rock, as he thrust deeper into her.

When it was over, he looked up and stared at her deeply. He was still inside her. He leaned down and kissed her gently in the lips.

“My Adrienne. Finally... my Adrienne...” He whispered.

Gently, he pulled out of her. He lied on his back and gathered her gently into his arms.

She rubbed his chest with his hand. He tilted her chin up.

"I'm sorry. I... I wasn't quite gentle." He said. "I've missed you so much, I was almost afraid that you weren't real."

She smiled. "Me too. It's okay. I wanted you as much as you wanted me."

"We've got plenty of time to catch up on the time we've lost." He said.

"I was stupid, Justin. I guess, I judged you. I guess, I was scared of your reputation in spite of knowing you better."

"I thought so too." He said. "But it's okay, honey. We're both here now."

"I'm sorry." Then she took a deep breath. "And now that we're on the subject of reputation, I need to ask, just to make it clear and to hear it from you directly."

"Alright. What is it?" He asked.

"Someone said you were clubbing with Tara Lambert?" She asked shyly.

He laughed. "I was not! I was out with my friends and she happened to know one of them and she was there at Oxygen. But no, I didn't dance with her. I didn't even exchange three sentences with her. Alright?"

"You were talking to her this morning on the phone." She said.

He rolled his eyes. "She got my number. If you heard me well enough, I even asked her first who she was. And because I think you will ask anyway, I would tell you now, that she was asking me how I was, etcetera, etcetera. She asked me where I was, and I told her straight out, I just stepped out of the elevator with my girlfriend. But you hopped out of the lift too fast. I don't think you heard that. Trust me, hon, I haven't been with any other woman since that night we met at Gypsys. Not even when we were apart this last week."

She raised a brow at him.

"Please tell me you believe me." He pleaded.

Then she smiled and nodded.

“And how could I talk to her, when all the time, I was cursing the day Ian slept over my apartment?”

She laughed. “Really? Why?”

“Because I almost lost you.” He said.

She stared at him. Somehow, she couldn't believe what she is hearing. It was like Justin is telling her he felt something for her. Just like he said during the interview, he was deeply involved with her...

She sighed. She doesn't want to ruin it. She doesn't want to make him feel tied down this early. She was just happy that they were back in each others' arms. Only God knows what's meant to happen tomorrow and the next days. But for now, she felt lucky and happy to be with him, to hear him say that he doesn't want to lose her.

He smiled. He kissed her again. And then he chuckled. “I can't believe it! You were jealous.” He said.

“I am not!” She denied, pulling away from him.

He laughed and pulled her close to him and hugged her tight. "Too bad." He whispered. "I would have liked it if you were. Because I sure as hell wanted to punch the walls everytime I think about Troy."

"Justin..." She started, but he cut her off by kissing her passionately, and they were again lost.

She woke him up with her kisses. She left a trail of kisses from his neck to his abdomen, and finally, she did one thing, she has never done before in her life. But with Justin, it just felt right. She wanted to please him. She heard him moan. And then he pulled her up and pinned her between the bed and his body. He kissed her passionately and then when she was wanting and moaning, she felt him spread her legs wide and he entered her. She gasped and wrapped her arms around him. She was drugged in their passion all over again.

She felt the pleasure igniting her senses, slowly coming to her that she was afraid it might not come at all.

"Justin... please..." She pleaded.

He kissed her gently. "Relax, my love." He said. "Let me do the rest for you." And she knew he would. Justin never

failed to please her in bed. She will trust him with her life. She would jump off a cliff if she knew he was at the bottom of it waiting to catch her.

And then it happened. Sparks of magic and pleasure erupted from her every vein, making her lose her sanity altogether.

She screamed his name and held on to him tightly only to feel his body rocking at the same time as hers. They screamed each other's name at the same time... they came together. When it was over, he was looking down at her, still holding her tight. His expression softened, as if he too, could not believe it possible.

She reached up to kiss him.

"Adrienne..." He whispered.

"Justin..." She said.

He leaned down to kiss her on the lips gently.

"Did you finish? Did I..." He started asking.

She smiled and silenced him with a kiss.

“Yes, honey. I did. Completely. You didn’t fail to please me, this time or any other time.”

He smiled. “I was afraid that I wasn’t able to hold on. That I came too soon.”

She shook her head. “The fact that you did only intensified mine even more.”

He kissed her gently again. Then slowly he pulled out of her. He fell on his back and slipped an arm under her neck to gather her to him.

“Are you hungry already?” She asked him.

He shook his head. “Not very. Do you want to go down to the beach now?”

She nodded. “It’s already ten in the morning, hon.”

“Alright. But promise me we will come up here around noontime just so I could make love to my sweet and lovely Adrienne.”

She giggled. “I’m surprised you are saying that five minutes after we just did.”

He held her tighter. “I haven’t been with you for more than a week, what do you expect? Do you think it was easy for me to run into you at Blush? To see you sulking in your desk?”

“I wasn’t sulking!” She protested, laughing.

He laughed. “Really? So the puffy eyes and the bad mood were not because of me?”

She pinched him. “Lucky bastard!”

They went down to the beach hand in hand after thirty minutes. She was wearing a two-piece suit and a sarong wrapped around her waist, which she had room service delivered to Justin’s room.

They found Yuan and Jill already having breakfast in the restaurant. She nervously approached them.

“Hey guys.” She greeted them.

“Yuan. Jill.” Justin nodded.

Yuan and Jill smiled but didn’t say anything.

“Honey, I’ll go find Mike and James. I will be back in a while.”

She nodded. Justin leaned down to give her a smack on the lips.

“See you later guys.” He said to Yuan and Jill before he left.

She sat down on the table and lighted a cigarette. Yuan and Jill stared at her.

“Alright. First of all, I wanted to say, I’m sorry. There is absolutely no valid excuse for what I did. And now, you can ask me all the questions you like.” She started.

“You were breaking up with Troy because of Justin, weren’t you?” Jill fired at her instantly.

She shook her head. “No. Because I’m not in love with Troy. I haven’t been for a very long time. And I don’t even know if I really was in love with him in the first place or if I was just in love with the idea of being in love with a man that my mother approves of. And that is the reason why I was breaking up with him.”

“You and Justin... you hooked up at Exalta? When he took your picture?” Yuan asked.

She shook her head.

“When? After that? Or before that?”

She took a deep breath.

“He can’t have met you yesterday. He calls you *honey*. And to freak out as much as he did when Troy hit you, it told us, you’ve been seeing each other longer than last night, probably longer than one week.”

She nodded. "Jill, remember you told me about some girl that Justin picked up at Gypsys?"

Jill nodded.

"That was me." She said. "I was alone. I was drinking. I was mad at the world. I was having fun. He approached me. Introduced himself, bought me a drink and we danced, and the dance got sexy and then we were kissing, and then... things got out of hand... I ended up going home with him."

"Gypsys opened more than two months ago." Jill said.

Adrienne shrugged guiltily.

"You've been seeing each other for more than two months now?" Jill said, her voice was louder than usual.

"The Oakleys in your room. The same one he was wearing now. That was him who spent the night with you. Not Troy."

She nodded. "I went to Gypsys. I was mad at my mother and at Troy. I feel like a total failure. I felt that no matter

how hard I tried, they would never look at me in a different light. I will always be inferior. The less prettier, less smarter second daughter. So why bother? The black sheep of the family. I dressed up in this sexy outfit that Jacob set out for me. I drank a bit and didn't care that I was alone. He approached me. Bought me a drink and introduced himself. I pretended not to know him. But then he said my name, and told me who I was, and I was surprised that he knows some things about me. He even told me what time I normally turn my lights off at night."

"And how would he know that?" Jill asked.

She took a deep breath. "You know the guy next door to my apartment... Torso god you called him... well, that's Justin."

"Oh my God. How could you, Yen?" Jill asked in frustration.

"Wait, Jill, I want to hear the rest." Yuan said firmly.

"Well, okay. So we danced, and flirted and it got out of hand, and I ended up going home with him." She said. "We were at the elevator and then we started kissing each other,

all the way up to his apartment. I wanted him, and he wanted me. I felt this... this sense of need that I couldn't control... that I haven't felt with Troy before. I actually forgot that I was virgin, until he... well, until he consummated the act."

"And what happened after that?" Yuan and Jill asked.

"He realized that I was a virgin. And he was so gentle... and I spent the night whole night in his bed. I slipped out of his apartment around five in the morning. He knocked on my door by ten. I made it clear it was just a one-night stand and that I have a boyfriend and I didn't want to be associated with him. But he can be a persistent little fool, you know."

"It was supposed to be just a one-night stand?" Jill asked.

She nodded. "I don't know. It started out to be a one night thing. And yet, things just happen until we've been seeing more and more of each other. I couldn't tell you. I couldn't even believe it myself when it happened. I can't seem to believe that I lost my virginity to the most notorious playboy in the city, on a one-night stand. And I thought it would just stop. After a day, he would forget about me but

he didn't. Until I got more and more attached to him. He wasn't the playboy we all thought he was. Yes, he is a snob. But he was also sweet. And caring. He brought out the best in me. He made me feel cared for. He taught me how to trade stocks. He spends almost every night in my apartment. I couldn't seem to get rid of him. Even when he has poker nights with his friends, he would cross that platform and enter my room through my window, and when I wake up, I would be in his arms."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Yuan asked.

She shrugged. "There could be absolutely no excuse for what I did and didn't do."

"He didn't want it to go public." Yuan said. "He was the one who didn't want people to know."

Adrienne shook her head. "No. It was me. Sometimes, I see him frown when I tell him I couldn't go out with him because I don't want to be seen with him. But he still wanted to be with me. And we just spend a lot of time at home. We argued once because you knocked on my door. He was with me. I told him to hide. He didn't want to. He thought I haven't told you because I never thought it

will last this long. And maybe that's why I couldn't tell you. I didn't know how to. I came to a point that I have kept it too long already. And it became harder for me to tell you." She sighed. "And then when Kim and Troy spent the night at my place, that morning, I went to his apartment and some blonde opened the door and I thought, he was with another girl..."

"But it was his cousin." Jill finished. "That was why he was looking at you intensely when he said he was deeply involved with someone. Because it was you."

"And you had a fight?"

Adrienne nodded. "Yeah. He called me up, sent me SMS, even went to my desk at Blush. He wanted to explain. I didn't want to listen. I refused to believe that he is different from his reputation, when I have been with him for two months and I know that he is a lot better person than what I hear him to be."

"That's why he told me the reason why he broke up with the girl he was seeing. He told me during that interview. But he told me not to print it. He knew I might be talking

about it with you. That was his way of letting you know what really happened that night.”

“I knew it! Guys like Justin Adams wouldn’t be that mushy, confiding cheesy details to a stranger.” Yuan said and Jill raised a brow at him.

Adrienne shrugged. “Guys, I’m sorry. I just didn’t know how to handle this thing. I didn’t know how to deal with it. It was something that I didn’t expect to last. I thought it was nothing serious. Because Justin Adams wasn’t known to be serious. But now... I don’t know anymore. For the last two months we’ve been together, I can say that I couldn’t ask for anything more in a man. He is everything I want, everything I was asking for in my prayers. And...” She sighed. “I love him guys! It started sinfully, at first! But seriously now, I am head over heels in love with him.”

“Does he love you back?” Yuan asked.

She shrugged. “We don’t talk about our feelings. But I know that we want to be with each other. I never asked him to be with me, to stay with me, but somehow at the end of each day, I wind up in his arms. I know that I’m important to him. When I got mad, I saw the efforts he

made to try to reach me and get me back. Last night, when Troy hit me, I saw the rage in his face. I know he cares about me. For now, that is enough.”

“You let us talk about him and Tara Lambert, and you didn’t even tell us that you were having a fight and that we are hurting you, sweetie.” Yuan said. He sounded so guilty for being so naïve.

“I couldn’t. But yes, I did want to cry. I was trying my best not to, so you wouldn’t ask.” Adrienne said.

“We’re sorry about that, Yen.” Jill said. “We didn’t mean to hurt you. If we had known, we wouldn’t have talked about it. But just so you know, my friends who were writing gossip columns, did confirm that Justin Adams was being evasive with Tara Lambert. She was running after him. But he was a slippery fish to catch.”

“And now, we know why.” Yuan said. “At first, we would be happy to believe that Justin Adams is just not interested to have a relationship. To be tied down to only one woman. Even if that woman is supermodel Tara Lambert. But now, I think there is a deeper reason than that. He

wants another woman. And God, you are so lucky, it is you!”

“He wants me, I know. I don’t know for how long, though. But I don’t care. For once in my life, a guy wanted me with every fabric of his soul. And he happened to be a god! And I feel good about myself. All my life, I believed I was pale and plain... that I wouldn’t attract a man that is more than good enough for me.”

“That is your mother talking, sweetie. On your own, you are a goddess, yourself. You are pretty and smart. You’ve got this appeal that draws men to your feet. But you were so bent up in believing that you are not capable of those things that you have overlooked the fact that you have your own charm.” Yuan said.

“We have been telling you that, sweetie. I always wondered why you spend too much time trying to make the Troy thing work. We never believed it will.”

“Oh, honey, if you’re happy, we’re happy. Just don’t get hurt, okay? And we’re here for you. I mean, Justin *is* known to be a playboy, yes. But he never was committed. Never been seen with one woman with exclusivity. And

look at what he was doing here with you, Yen? It's like telling the world that what we know about him were all lies. That he's human after all. And to tell you the truth, we knew it was serious when we saw his face last night, when he saw that you were hurt." Jill said, tears are beginning to pool in her eyes.

"Guys! I don't know if this is serious. I just... I'm just happy about this whole thing, that's all. I've never felt like this before. And no one has made me feel like this before."

Yuan and Jill smiled and then winked at her.

After a second, she felt Justin put an arm around her shoulders.

"I'm starving. Why don't we order? Do you mind if I join you guys?" He asked Yuan and Jill.

"Go ahead." Yuan said.

Justin ordered continental breakfast for both of them.

“Thank you for coming to our rescue last night, Justin. I realized I am too weak to stand up to that lunatic.” Yuan said.

Justin shrugged. “Thank you for trying to protect my Adrienne, in the possible way you can.”

Yuan laughed. “You are welcome. She’s our best friend. I will rise up to the occasion when needed. But still, that guy is a psycho, and the fact that he was drunk made him bolder and stronger for me.”

“The fact that he was drunk made it easier for me to put him down, I believe.” Justin said.

“No. I don’t think that is true. You have martial arts training in your profile.” Jill said.

Justin shrugged. “But I wasn’t supposed to use that to assault raging drunk lunatics.”

“You were defending something that is yours.” Yuan said boldly.

Justin smiled. "Well, in that case, I have every reason in the world and I didn't hesitate to use it."

"You studied martial arts?" Adrienne asked.

He nodded. "Since I was young. Either I master some arts and be capable enough to defend myself or my grandfather will stuff me with bodyguards. And I didn't want to look like a wimp."

"It was quite handy that you happen to be here. You didn't tell me that you were going here when I ran into you yesterday. Remember, I told you we were all going here?" Jill said.

Justin smiled sheepishly. "Actually, I didn't plan to go here until then."

Adrienne blushed and hid her face partly in Justin's shoulder. Justin squeezed her shoulder.

"I have been wanting to meet you guys, for months now. Did this girl tell you that?" He asked Yuan and Jill.

They nodded.

“We were shocked, actually. We never had a clue.”

“And you forgave her too easily?” He teased.

He received a playful pinch in his side.

“Ouch!” He laughed.

“She’s still going to pay for it. This will not go without punishment.” Yuan said gaily now.

“I’m sure.” Justin said. “But I’m glad that I didn’t have to be the other guy anymore... secretly hidden in the shadows.”

“But we trust you will not break her heart.” Yuan said.

He nodded. “Why will I break something so priceless?”

Adrienne stared up at him. He smiled at her and leaned down to give her a quick kiss on the lips.

“Where are your friends?” Jill asked.

“On the beach. Busy scouting some chic, I think.”

“Has Adrienne met them?” Yuan asked.

He shook his head. “She didn’t want anything to do with me. But now, they can meet her. They’ve been dying to, since last night when they found out.”

“Good to know we were not the only friends who were kept in the dark.” Yuan said.

“And like Adrienne, I will not go unpunished, I believe.” He chuckled.

After breakfast, Adrienne remembered that no matter how hard she tried to avoid Troy and Kim, she has nothing to wear for the rest of the weekend. And she can’t go buying stuff from the hotel shop.

“I can check out your room. You will be staying with me now.” Justin said.

She raised her brow at him thoughtfully. “Why would I do that?” She asked.

He chuckled. "Because you don't have a choice. You missed me like hell and you will not forgive yourself if you pass up a chance to spend the whole Bahamas getaway with me."

She laughed. "You are over yourself, you know that?" She said.

"Well, I feel that way, and it would be nice if the feeling is mutual." He said smugly.

Oh it's mutual alright. She wanted to say to him. Instead, she just stared at him and tiptoed to give him a kiss on the lips.

Justin checked out her room and agreed to meet her there, while she packs her things and say a few things to Kim, if necessary.

When she opened the door, Kim was not there. She started packing her bags. After a minute, Kim entered, with Troy.

She swallowed. It was quite an awkward situation.

"You're leaving?" Kim asked.

She shook her head. "No. Justin checked out this room already. It's paid up until twelve. You guys can just rebook it if you want."

"Who is he, Adrienne?" Troy asked quietly.

"None of your business now, Troy. Sue him if you want, I could always go to the witness stand and say that he just came before you beat the life out of me." She said angrily.

"I'm not stupid, Adrienne." Troy said. "I know what I did. And even if you don't believe me, I am sorry. I didn't mean for things to get out of hand. I didn't mean to get too drunk."

"So you mean to tell me, you can beat a helpless little girl and the fact that you are drunk gives the right to do so?"

She stared at him. His nose is broken, and he's got a shiner on both eyes. He does look pretty beaten up. And she didn't feel the least sorry for him.

"So all along there was another guy lurking in the shadows?" Kim asked. Even amidst of things, Adrienne couldn't

believe that there was a hint of malice in her voice. She wondered what she ever did to deserve a sister like Kimberly. And she felt fury coming back to her.

She took a deep breath before she could cross the room and haul her by her pretty blond hair.

“Just like there was another girl lurking in the shadows all along, right, Troy?”

Troy closed his eyes. “I didn’t cheat on you, Adrienne... not until yesterday...”

“I didn’t need for you to cheat on me Troy. We were nothing for a very long time. But I was still hoping we could be friends. But how? When you clearly showed you are of so much lesser character that I thought you were.”

“Who was that guy anyway? What does he do for a living?”

She wanted to laugh. “This is not about money, or profession, Troy. This is about dignity and fidelity... don’t you get that? But I guess you wouldn’t. For you it is all about prestige and fame and success. Nothing else underneath!”

Troy stared at her. She couldn't make out the expression on his pretty banged up face. And she doesn't care.

"It's over, Troy! Even before I found you humping my big sister, I have decided to end us. It was over a long time ago. And not just because of him." Then she stared at Kim. "You know I only made Mom proud, just once. And that was when I dated Troy. And you weren't happy about it. You always made sure you make the better choices than I do. Now, go ahead. You can have Troy. You didn't have to steal him so indecently, you know! You could have just asked!"

"And what will you tell Mommy? I took the surgeon away from you, that's why you ended up with that guy... who looked like a brainless model? Come on, Adrienne. I will not let you make me look bad. If you were ending things with Troy, I would not let you tell our parents that it was because I slept with him!"

She laughed. "No. I will never do that. Not even if I end up being a spinster! It's up to you tell them one day! But I never will. I'm not like you, Kim."

She finished packing her bags.

“You weren’t even sorry for what you did, were you Kim?” she sighed. “And since I have always been the villain in mother’s eyes, I would just tell her that I didn’t want the surgeon anyway. She wanted him for one of her daughters. She wanted him for you, I reckon. I ended up with the trophy, didn’t I? And I bet that was killing you! I could just tell mother that it was not working. I found the man who is a hundred times better than what she would have imagined for me.”

Troy and Kim stared at her. None of them said a word.

She took her bags and started for the door.

“Yes, Kimmy. Justin looks like a model. But he’s not brainless. He’s a straight A Harvard graduate, a Wallstreet genius, and soon to be CEO of Adams Industries. And if you ever ever repeat what you did with Troy, I swear to God, I will make sure you cannot attract a single male in your entire life again!” And then she closed the door with a bang.

She took a deep breath. She was shaking. She didn't know where she got the courage to say all the things she said. But she was glad she said them. For once in her life, she was able to stand up for herself in front of Kim and Troy.

She found herself staring at Justin. She felt nervous. She told them who he really was. It was like she was bragging that she's dating Justin Adams. She didn't know he was listening outside the door, which was left ajar by Kim and Troy when they entered.

He stared at her. "Number One, I don't find your sister half as attractive as you are. Number two, I'm not as dumb as Troy. Number Three, I may have the rep of a playboy, but I never cheat."

She looked back at him. "I'm sorry..."

He smiled at her. Then he pulled her close to him. "Sorry for what?"

"For involving you in the conversation... for telling them who you were..."

He shook his head. "It sounded to me like they were pinning the cheating thing on you, and overlooking the fact that you caught them in bed together."

She nodded. "Oh God, Justin, how could I feel this much hatred for two people who I thought were very important to me?"

"Sshh... sometimes, you have to see that your self is more important than anyone else. Especially, if you weren't being regarded with the love and respect you deserve." He said softly. "And I'm proud of you, honey. For standing up for yourself. For fighting. For putting your foot down for once."

They went hand in hand in Justin's room, now, Adrienne's as well.

Justin kissed her thoroughly as soon as he closed the door behind him. And true to his word, he made love to her again. With so much passion. She felt adored and admired, the way she has never felt before. The way she has never thought herself worthy of before."

When they went down, Adrienne met Mike and James at the lobby.

“Guys, this is Adrienne.” Justin said softly.

“Finally! I have been wanting to meet the woman who achieved something, we thought is not possible at all.” Mike said teasingly.

“You are the Exalta girl, aren’t you?” James asked.

Adrienne smiled and nodded shyly.

“You said you didn’t know her, man!” Mike said, laughing to Justin.

“Excuse me?” Adrienne asked.

James shrugged. “Mike told me that Justin did some work on a shoot. That he developed some shots in Mike’s studio, which he said was taken by a colleague. He was just asked to print them. We asked Justin if he has seen you in the photo shoot. He shrugged and said he hasn’t seen you before. It turned out he knew you better than that!”

Adrienne pinched Justin on the side again.

Justin laughed. "Honey, I would have loved to tell them, *Go bite your thumbs and don't drool on her. She's mine!* But you were so obsessed in keeping us a secret."

They spent the whole day with Mike, James, Yuan and Jill. They swam on the beach, played volleyball and pool. That night, they partied in the bar.

She had the time of her life. She felt freer than before. She loved the feeling of being able to hug Justin anytime she wanted. And it looked like he felt the same. He seemed kin on showing the world what they have. That they belong together. When she went to the ladies' room, he walked with her and waited for her at the door. Then they walked back hand in hand towards their table.

"Do you always do that?" She asked him.

"Do what?" He asked back.

"Wait for a girl outside the ladies' room."

He shrugged. "Probably. But you never gave me plenty of chances before."

She smiled and pinched him at the sides jokingly.

"Owww!" He said laughing.

That night, they made love slowly, passionately. Like they were savoring each second that they have together.

She went through the whole week with a smile in her face. She asked Jill and Yuan not to say anything about Justin to their other friends. She wants to keep it low-profile. He was still a figure. And the last thing she wants is for rumors to ruin what they have.

They spend each and every night together. She's been sleeping over Justin's apartment since the night they returned from the beach.

He takes her to the office, and picks her up everyday since they returned from the beach. Before they go home, he would take her to dinners, sometimes fancy, sometimes fastfood. He took her to the movies one time, and that Friday, they went back to Gypsys.

“Now, we arrived together. I hope you don’t mind if I buy you a drink, flirt with you on the dancefloor, kiss you and take you home with me again.” He said mischievously, reminiscing the first night they met.

She laughed. “I would love that.” She whispered.

She had seven shots of tequila again. He took her home in his Ducati motorcycle again.

“This is a very familiar night.” She teased.

He laughed. In the elevator, he took her in a passionate kiss. They half-ran to his apartment, and as soon as he shuts the door behind him, he grabbed her by the waist and kissed her again.

After a few minutes, they were in bed, naked.

She smiled at him. “This time, you wouldn’t hurt me anymore.”

He nodded. “You’re not a virgin anymore, honey. And I intend to give you only pleasure.”

And he kept his promise. When they were done, she felt completely satisfied. After two orgasms, she felt beautiful. She felt woman.

And she was glad... that she wore Jacob's outfit that very first night she went to Gypsys. She was glad that she decided not to be prim and proper for one night. That she decided to be sinful...

*Incandescere**Latin. Etymology of Incandescent*

"You seemed glowing, Adrienne. Something you weren't telling us?" Cynthia asked her when she and the girls were chatting at the corridor.

She shook her head. "No. Not really. I just feel better than any other day in my life, that's all."

At the same moment, Justin appeared in the corridor.

She looked at him. He stopped by her side. She didn't say anything, quite uncertain how she will behave with him in front of her other girl colleagues. The same ones who were drooling about him.

She was surprised when he put his arms around her waist.

"Pick you up after work?" He asked.

She smiled shyly and nodded. Then he bent down and gave her a quick kiss on the lips.

She blushed. When he was gone, all the girls in front of her were open-mouthed and wide-eyed, except for Jill.

“What the hell...” Cynthia started.

“Okay. So you’re the mystery girl?” Anna, the receptionist asked.

“What mystery girl?” she asked.

“Well, when Ivan, Garry’s new assistant asked him to go clubbing with him where he’ll introduce him to some girls, he said, *Sorry, man. I’ve got a girlfriend.*”

Girlfriend??? That word made her heart skip a beat. She’s Justin Adams’s girlfriend! When he was known not to be committed to anyone at all!

“That’s why you are in full bloom! You’re shagging a god!” Cynthia said naughtily.

“Cynthia!” Adrienne knew she was red as an apple.

“This is very interesting,” Anna said. “I never thought that guy could settle down.”

“We’re seeing each other. We’re not getting married.”
Adrienne said.

“But trust me girls. They only have eyes for each other lately. You should be with the two of them when they are together. It’s like you are painting on the wall. They just look at you, but you are inanimate and you don’t really exist.” Jill said smiling.

“Something came out from that day you worked together for your Exalta feature, huh.” Cynthia said. “And you didn’t tell us about this, Jill. I can’t believe you!”

“I didn’t know until last week, to be honest.”

“What kind of gossip columnist are you?” Annie asked Jill.

“It made me feel bad about my abilities. Both as a gossip columnist and as her best friend.”

“Forget it already, Jill. You know about it now.” Adrienne giggled.

“Yes. Along with the rest of the world. You never let me savor the moment for myself.”

Adrienne put an arm around Jill. “Don’t forget, I am treating you and Yuan big time for this.” She whispered.

“Oh right. I have a right to shut up after all.” Jill smiled.

They have talked about going to Boston. Adrienne wanted a break and try to see her father on a weekend. Yuan and Jill will go with her—on Adrienne’s treat.

“This is big!” Cynthia said. “There will be at least two guys in this office who will be broken with this information. How would they compete against Justin Adams? And it’s not just a flirting kind of thing, it seems. It looked serious.”

“Come on girls. But I wouldn’t described it as that.” And she left with a big smile on her face.

She got an email from Jill after a few minutes.

To: amiller@blush.ny
Fr: jdurmont@blush.ny
Subject: You!

Why are you saying this thing like it was nothing serious?

Come on! All of us can see that both of you are head over heels for each other!!!

Even Mike thinks so. He actually told me that Justin suddenly stopped being interested in women months ago, that they can only conclude two things. Either he's turned gay or he's got it bad for one girl. And that girl turned out to be you! You're so lucky, dear!

And to kiss you in front of the crowd like that? It's got to mean something! Knowing that Justin Adams has been slippery and evasive with women... and he's suddenly turned mushy and all the time, it looks like he just can't get his hands off you. Mike says you are all he talks about!

Don't deny what you have!

Jill

She smiled and replied:

To: jdurmont@blush.ny

Fr: amiller@blush.ny

Subject: Re: You!

Jill,

Thanks!

I AM head over heels with him, but I am not sure he feels the same for me. And I don't really care.

What's important is that we are with each other and I'm happy. I am not thinking about how this will end. Because that's how we started anyway. Not thinking how it will end and how long it will last.

I am just happy and thankful for him. And yes, I do feel lucky! I feel blessed every minute I am with him.

Happy?

XOXO,

Yen

Justin's Ferrari was parked in front of her building when she went out of the office.

She gave him a kiss on the lips when she went in.

"How's work?" He asked.

"Great. How about you?"

He shrugged. "Met with some of Dad's accountants. Made some money on stocks. I'm thinking of just keeping the blue chips now. I don't want to do some risky playing anymore. I won't be able to focus on it when I start with Dad's companies."

She nodded. "I think that's a very sound choice."

He smiled. "My priorities have changed. I'm done goofing around."

"You don't look like you're goofing around, hon. You actually made so much for yourself, just goofing around."

He chuckled. "Actually, thanks to you."

“Me?”

He nodded. “Remember we were talking at the balcony that night we got back together?”

She nodded.

“You told me that Jeffrey was looking over me. That he made sure I had a blessed life. I figured, I wouldn’t want to let him down. I thought that if he were me, he would want to help out Dad. He wouldn’t want to waste our legacy. He would feel duty-bound and honor-bound to help Dad run the business. And since I was the one who lived, I am the one who will carry that out... for both of us.”

Tears threatened to pool in Adrienne’s eyes.

“That’s why, I thank you, hon. For making me realize how lucky I am. And that in return, I shouldn’t be avoiding my obligations to my family. I owe it to my Dad for giving me the life I have now. I owe it to Jeffrey. I’m living both our lives. And I want to make it worth it. I want to make him proud.”

She squeezed her hand. “I’m happy for you, hon.” She said.

“I am happy too. And I’m lucky to have you, hon.”

“Really? As far as I know, you were doing just fine before you met me.”

He shook his head. “I thought I was fine. But when I met you, I realized that some people had to work to be appreciated. I never did. Sometimes, I really messed up. But still, I never felt that my family’s trust in me wavered. I couldn’t believe that someone like you, who’s beautiful, smart, classy and successful would think so little of herself. That you couldn’t see all the wonderful things that make you—you. Make you perfect. Without even trying. And you taught me how to appreciate what I have and made me see the things that I have been taking for granted. And it’s time to make things right. While it’s not yet too late.”

She squeezed his hand. “Thank you, Justin. For making me love myself the way I do now.”

He took her hand and kissed it. “And thank you. For making me love the things I have the way I do now.”

“So where are we going?” She asked.

“Dinner. I’ll introduce you to someone.” He said.

“Who?”

He just smiled at her but didn’t say anything.

“Come on. Who are you going to introduce to me?”

“You’ll know when we get there.” He winked.

They went to Water’s Edge. He took her hand and led her inside.

“Good evening, Mr. Adams.” A waiter greeted them at the entrance. “This way to your table, Sir.”

They were led to a secure corner, where a table was set for four.

They started with wine.

Justin held her hand in his and kissed it.

“Who are we going to meet in here?”

He leaned closer and kissed her on the lips.

“Patience, honey.” He said.

“Justin, you’re making me nervous. I don’t like being this nervous.”

He smiled. “Don’t you trust me, baby?”

She stared at him. “I do. But I’m dead scared right now. Why are you doing this to me?” She asked desperately.

He chuckled and put an arm around her shoulders to draw her closer to him.

“I’m not trying to scare you. Just breathe and trust me, okay? And why will you be scared? You’re a fox!”

She leaned her cheek against his shoulder.

Just then, a man in his fifties and a beautiful woman in about the same age approached their table.

Justin stood up. Adrienne followed his lead.

“We’re sorry, we’re late, sweetie.” The woman said to Justin and she reached out and kissed him on the cheek.

“It’s alright, Mom. I wasn’t bored.” Justin said.

Adrienne’s heart pounded and she swallowed hard.

“And who is this beautiful young woman?” The man, who Adrienne realized now, is Justin’s father, with his jet-black hair and blue eyes that is so similar to Justin’s.

Justin smiled. “Mom, Dad, this is my girlfriend, Adrienne.”

Adrienne extended her hand to Justin’s dad.

“How do you do, Sir?” She smiled shyly.

Justin’s dad shook her hand. “Nice to meet you, Adrienne.”

Mrs. Adams has strawberry brown hair, and sparkling green eyes. She was beaming at Adrienne. She reached out and hugged her. “I am so thrilled, Adrienne.”

“So am I, Madam.” She said shyly.

“Mom and Dad are going back to Chicago tomorrow. I just thought we all have a nice dinner first before they leave.” Justin said.

They all sat. The waiter poured wine in Mr. and Mrs. Adams’s glasses.

“So what do you do, Adrienne?” Justin’s dad asked.

“I’m a writer, Sir.”

“Assistant editor-in-chief for the Blush, part-time endorser for Exalta Spa.” Justin said.

“Justin.” She hissed, a bit embarrassed.

He laughed. “Come on, hon. Don’t be so modest.”

“Good one, Justin.” His father said. “I knew you were always up for beauty and brains.”

“The Blush?” His mother echoed. “I love that magazine. It makes me feel younger.” She laughed. “I wish we could

have visited that spa. I have heard a lot about it. I heard it was very good.”

“It actually is. You should go there one time. I can take you. Well, it comes with the package.” Adrienne giggled. “I can bring some guests.”

“Really? Well, we plan to go back in a couple of weeks. We should make time for it.”

“Modelling, huh.” Mr. Adams said. “It’s good that you have another profession aside from it. Many beautiful people depend on their modeling career to make it for them for the rest of their lives.”

Adrienne smiled. “I was just a writer. Actually, if it weren’t for Justin, I wouldn’t be a model at all. It was accidental.”

“Accidental?” Mrs. Adams asked.

Adrienne nodded. “I was doing a feature for Exalta. Justin was there to take some pictures. I wasn’t even supposed to submit the picture of me in there but it was accidentally submitted. And it was supposed to be Justin’s masterpiece.

He did some effects, which it turned out, my editor insisted on printing, and Exalta loved so much that they asked me to do it for them. But it was just a one-time job. I took it for the experience.”

Justin smiled at her. “You look good in it, honey. Trust me. That shot made Exalta look like paradise for the overworked, overstressed population of New York.”

Mr. Adams smiled. “But why make it a one-time job? As long as you have a full-time job, then it should be fine.”

“And you’re still very young.” Mrs. Adams said. “Honey, I tell you. You will miss the days when you look like a fox!”

Mr. Adams smiled at her. “Honey, you’re still a fox!” And he gave her a smack.

Mrs. Adams giggled. “For years, you’ve been saying that to me. When I look at myself in the mirror, I wonder if you still believe in it.”

“Of course, honey. I never changed the way I look at you.”

Something about that scene touched Adrienne's heart. She can't believe what she's seeing. Justin's parents. Mr. Adams was a tycoon. And yet the way he softens for his wife made Adrienne wish she could find a husband like him someday. And he calls her *Honey*. And tells her that she's a fox. Just like... Justin. Justin calls her Honey and always tells her that she's a fox. Her heart skipped a beat at the thought. At that moment, she felt really blessed.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Adams got into their rented car going to their hotel, Justin's mom kissed and hugged her.

"Sweetie, you should go and visit us at Chicago. I'm sure you would love the rest of the family."

She smiled. "I hope they would like me."

"Oh pooh! We're a pretty loud lot. But you'll survive us."
She smiled.

"It was nice to meet you, Adrienne. We look forward to seeing you again. And do come to Chicago."

She nodded and shook Mr. Adams's hand.

During the drive home, she was quiet. But inside, she was smiling.

Justin took her hand.

"I'm sorry." He said.

"For what?"

"For surprising you like that. Was it too much for you?" He asked wearily.

She shook her head. "No! Of course not! I could've dressed up more, and looked better, instead of looking overstressed since I just got out from work, but I like your parents. I wish my parents were like that."

"Like what?"

She shrugged. "Cool. Your father is amazing. He's a tycoon and yet, when it comes to family, he is such a sweet guy. I mean, normally, tycoons are ruthless and cold. But your Dad, may give that first impression, but when you get to know him, he's so... warm and sweet!"

“Alright. I’m officially jealous.” Justin said.

She laughed. “No. I mean, I actually realize that you have a lot in common with him. You’re smart and tough. And yet... you’re sweet and caring. Not at all the cold, ruthless heartbreaker I thought you were.”

He smiled and then kissed her hand.

“Your mother is beautiful. They’re both beautiful people. You’re not adopted are you?” She teased.

Justin laughed. “I have a video of my birth if you want to see just to make sure that I’m their son.”

She laughed. “I’m just kidding. You look exactly like your father, you know.”

“And he looks exactly like my grandfather.” Justin said. “They always say it’s because they married women who were head over heels in love with them, and not their money.”

Adrienne laughed. “Really? Probably, your genes are just very dominant.”

Justin shrugged. "Probably. How about you? Do you look like your mother or your father? You don't look like Kimberly at all."

"Kimberly and my mother look the same, I think. They both have this blonde hair. My father's hair was dark brown. So I guess, I look after my dad." Adrienne said.

"Where did the red highlights come from?" He asked.

She shrugged. "Genes skipping generations and landing on to me, I guess."

"But it looked great on you. Added a foxier effect." He winked at her.

She laughed. "I wish my mother looked at it that way. She believes it made me look like a harlot."

Justin shook his head. "It's pretty. And it's you. It's part of what makes you... you."

"Glad you liked it. Otherwise, I would dye it back to plain brown again."

Justin laughed. Then they didn't say anything for a while. He just drove and held her hand.

Then Adrienne sighed. "Your parents are still so in love with each other."

"I envy my parents for what they have. My Dad grew up with business instilled in him by my grandpa. He didn't have much fun in his life. He was always so responsible, strong and focused. But when he met my Mom, he went out of his skull."

"Who wouldn't? Your mother is absolutely stunning."

"And she's smart too. She was engaged when they met you know. And my Dad felt like she's the one for him. They ran off together. My mother has just started a career as a PR consultant. She was twenty-four years old, and my Dad was twenty-seven."

"Really? That young?"

Justin nodded. "They ran off to Vegas to get married. Mom got back and broke off her engagement with her

fiancé. She was head over heels with my Dad then. Makes sense to me as well. I don't believe in marrying at an older age. Two people in love can get married as early as they want. If they feel they are right for each other, what's the point in waiting? I don't believe that you find your soulmate when you reach a certain age. She comes, she comes. And it's up to you to hold on to her or let her go. And as far as I know, you will always regret it if you let her go."

She stared at Justin, quite unable to believe what she's hearing.

"I admire you, Justin Adams. Not all jocks think the way you do. Actually, I never thought that will be your point of view. I mean, before I met you, I thought, you were just playing around. Now, I realized that Justin Adams really is just a name. The guy underneath is ten times the man who wears the name tag."

He smiled. "That's why officially now, I am your boyfriend."

"Really?" She was practically in cloud nine. "Who told you that?" She teased.

He raised a brow. "I'm not going back to the sidelines, honey. I've waited long enough and I'm claiming my prize."

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "Lucky bastard!" She teased.

He laughed. "I'm just being honest. I've had my share of fun. I told you, I'm done goofing around. You taught me how to look at things in a different light."

"And what do your parents think about this?"

He smiled. "Quite scared that I am twenty-nine years old and they never heard me talk about a particular girl in my life, or had any relationship at all. Until now. That's why they are so excited to meet you."

She blushed. "I just hope I made a good impression."

He laughed. "My Dad was beaming, wasn't he? He couldn't have been more proud. And my Mom..."

She stared at him, a bit nervous about what he will say next.

“Well, I know what my Mom is thinking right now.”

“What?” She asked nervously.

“Her greatest dream these days is having a little one to play with. She figured she will feel younger if she had a grandchild to spoil.”

Her heart went to her throat. Her eyes went wide. He laughed.

“I know. It’s too early to think about that. That’s just her. Don’t worry.”

Justin led her to his apartment. They kissed and cuddled in his balcony, looking at the city lights. She felt comfortable. At the same time she felt blessed.

“It’s already midnight, I have to go.” She said.

“Where?” He asked.

“Home. My apartment is over there, by the way.” She smiled pointing at her own balcony.

He shook his head. "No. You're going to stay the night."

"Again?" She laughed. "You're not tired of me yet?"

He shook his head and leaned down to kiss her. "No. You're a fox!" He whispered before taking her lips in one deep kiss.

"Alright. I'm staying the night again. Just let me change."

He nodded.

He went with her to her apartment. She clicked her answering machine to listen to her messages.

One was from Jill.

Adrienne! Where are you??? We're at Gypsies! I mean, Mike and me. Maybe you and Justin would like to join us.

She stared at Justin. "Mike and me?" She mouthed.

Justin smiled and shrugged.

Another message played.

"Adrienne Miller."

It was her mother. She went still for a second. She knew she is in for a tough lashing. For which sin, she doesn't know.

"What did you do this time? What happened to you and Troy? His mother called me up, quite disappointed, actually. I didn't know that something was wrong between the two of you. That boy is the perfect catch. And what happened with you and Kimberly? She refused to talk to me about you. And she sounded very upset. What have you done this time? Call me, young lady."

She stared at the answering machine. Tears rolled down her face. She felt Justin enclose her in his arms.

"I'm always the villain here, am I not?" She whispered.

"Sshhh..." He said. "She doesn't like what she doesn't understand. You're perfect just as you are, honey. You're mother will realize that someday."

When looked up, she could see the concern in his eyes. His face descended to hers and gave her a kiss.

“Thank you.” She whispered to him. “You were the one constant good thing in my life right now.”

He smiled. “You were the best that ever happened to me.”

Her heart sang praises. It was like all the weary and all the pain were gone.

She went into her room to change clothes. When she went out from her shower, Justin was sitting in her bed and a pile of clothes were beside him.

“What’s that?” She asked.

“Pjs. Some undies, if you don’t mind some jeans and shirt.” He replied.

“Why?”

He shrugged. Then he got up and gathered her clothes in his arms.

“Come on. You don’t mind crossing the corridor in your bathrobe, do you?”

She laughed. “What’s going on?”

He smiled devilishly. “Trust me.”

She followed Justin. He went into his closet and settled her clothes in the unoccupied portion.

“What’s this?” She asked.

“I think it would be good if you left some clothes here. So you don’t have to go back and forth.” He smiled. “This area is yours. Put whatever you want in here.”

She stared at him. “Justin...”

He didn’t say anything. He went closer to her and kissed her. The kiss deepened. The next thing she knew, they were naked on the bed, panting, touching each other, sharing themselves to each other. When it was over, her head was spinning. She felt insane.

He hugged her. “Adrienne...”

She reached up and kissed him.

"I'm not contented to have you just across the hall. It's not close enough." He said.

She giggled. "What's closer than that?" Her heart pounded, as she might have an inkling of what Justin was about to say next.

He stared at her with eyes drunk with passion. "Here. With me."

"In your spare room?" She teased, trying to keep composure. She couldn't believe what is happening at that very instant.

He shook his head. "Still not close enough." He looked at her deep in the eyes. "I want you to move in with me, Adrienne."

She stared at him. Her heart was pounding. Justin Adams introduced her to his parents, told her that she was the best thing that happened to him, gave her a space in his closet,

made love to her with so much passion, and asked her to move in with him in a space of five hours.

She felt heaven.

She smiled at him.

“Alright. But, I have to pay the rent.” She said.

He shook his head. “No way, honey. Don’t give me that women’s rights or equality thing, okay? No way. I have bought this place more than a year ago. And I’m not looking for a return of my investment. I have afforded it without the help of a roommate to pay me the rent.”

“Justin, it’s not fair.” She said.

“Who said it ever was? I could never forgive myself if I do that. No. The only thing missing in this apartment is you. You were in it, but I want you to be officially living here. You know, the change your mailing address, phone number and answering machine greeting type of thing? And I don’t want you paying. If I needed a paying roommate, I could have asked Mike or James to move in with me.”

She laughed. "What if I say that I won't move in unless you agree to my terms, then?"

He shook his head. "Then I'll just make you agree to my terms then. Or I would move in to your apartment instead. I just want to be with you, Adrienne. So please... if you could just say yes and give me a kiss, it would save us a lot of time."

She smiled and gave him a kiss on the lips and then she hugged him.

"Is that a yes?" He asked.

She didn't answer. She closed her eyes. She was silent for a long time.

"Silence means yes, honey." He said.

She giggled. "Yes, Justin Adams. I'll move in with you."

*Buena Familia**Spanish, which means Good Family*
.....

The next Friday night, Adrienne flew with Justin to Chicago.

Justin's parents seemed quite happy when they saw her again.

"Hello, honey. I am so glad to see you again." Justin's mother kissed her on both cheeks and gave her a hug. "I read your article on the PR companies, I loved it! I thought you had a PR background yourself."

"Thank you, Ma'am." She said.

"Oh dear, call me Christine." She said. "I am so glad you came down to meet us. We were all so thrilled! Justin's cousins couldn't believe that he's already got a girlfriend. They all thought he was content to marry his stocks!"

“Oh well, I thought he just loves to break women’s hearts before I met him.” Adrienne giggled.

“Come on, I’m not like that!” Justin protested, laughing.

She also met Justin’s cousins. Ian was one of them. She was very ecstatic to meet her. Adrienne was surprised when she extended her hand to shake hers, Ian leaned forward and hugged her instead.

“I am so thrilled. We were not properly introduced the last time we saw each other.” Ian smiled at her shyly.

Adrienne stared at Ian, a little bit embarrassed. She remembered the first time she saw her, she thought she was sleeping with Justin. Ian is gorgeous. But she looks too young. She can’t even believe that she’s a sophomore in college already. She looks younger than that, but she’s very pretty.

“I’m sorry about that last time. I didn’t know you. He did say that he had a cousin who is coming down to visit him. I didn’t know that you were a girl.” Adrienne said shyly.

Looking at Ian, she would feel intimidated. She looked like a living Barbie doll. Her hair is perfect. Every strand was in place. Her eyelashes looked naturally long and curly. She looked so sophisticated, Adrienne thought she would really be intimidated and jealous if she didn't know that she was Justin's first cousin.

"I'm sorry too. And I'm so excited to meet you. I've been begging Justin to introduce you to us. I was very guilty after that night. I felt bad to ruin the first relationship my favorite cousin ever had."

"Don't. I was stupid. I didn't trust him that much. And I paid for it the hard way." She smiled back.

She also met some of his male cousins. Christopher, Christian and Jordan. Christopher has dark hair and green eyes. Jordan is a tall muscular guy with reddish brown hair and dark eyes. Christian, a blonde guy with blue eyes. Justin introduced him as Ian's twin brother.

"Really?"

“They are all my cousins from the mother side. It must be in my mother’s genes to have twins in the family.” He said. “Too bad, it’s normally the women who carries this trait.”

“Why?” She asked.

“Well, I would like to have twins someday. It would be really exciting, don’t you think?”

Adrienne nodded. “Yeah. It would be a complete experience in parenting. It would be very nice to dress up your kids identically.”

Justin nodded. Then he sighed and kissed her on the cheek.

“Justin is right. You are a fox.” Christian said.

“Christian, cut it out. This one is already mine.” Justin punched Christian in the arm playfully.

“No wonder he doesn’t come to Chicago on weekends anymore.” Jacob said.

“You go home every weekend?” Adrienne asked Justin.

“Yeah he does. Even for just a day, he comes here. Every weekend. Until lately.”

Adrienne raised a brow.

“Well... I actually do... until I met you.” He said sheepishly smiling. Then he pulled her close and hugged her.

“And you owe us a lot of beer, man! You know I’m still in college and Mom thinks I shouldn’t be drinking anything alcoholic until I graduate! As if I go home every weekend!” Jordan grunted.

“Come on, Jordan. You are turning into an alcoholic. This guy owes us a lot of poker nights and hockey matches.” Christopher said.

“It seems that you guys have a lot of catching up to do.” Adrienne said.

“Yep. You wouldn’t mind if we take him away from you for an hour or two, right?” Christian said cheerfully.

“Oh, go ahead! He must be tired of me already.” Adrienne smiled at them cheerfully.

“What are you saying? Why will I get tired of you?” Justin protested. Then he leaned forward to her and whispered, “You’re a fox.”

Justin’s family home looked like a palace. It’s got steel gates, guards and intercom monitor. The lawn seemed endless. They have a white two-storey house, a butler and she has seen three maids so far since she got there.

The family seemed to have anticipated Justin’s arrival. They were having a luncheon and Adrienne didn’t expect to meet so many people.

She was led to the guest room opposite Justin’s room.

“Why don’t you want to stay in my room?” Justin asked her when he placed her bags down in her room.

She wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Because it’s your parents’ house.” She said to him. “Somehow I don’t feel right. I hope it’s okay. It’s only three days and two nights.”

He sighed. "Alright. But two whole nights is too long for me."

She smiled. "Honey..."

He pulled her close and kissed her on the lips and then he smiled.

She decided to take a shower before she meets the rest of Justin's relatives.

"Rats!" She grunted when she discovered that she got her period. "Why now?"

She wasn't able to bring any tampon with her and unfortunately, there was none in the guest room as well.

She might need to ask one of the maids for some until she can go out to buy one.

She met Ian on the hall.

"Getting settled nicely?" Ian asked beaming at her. Adrienne thought that Ian has such a lively personality. She is confident and smart. She might look too elegant, but

growing up with boys must have given her that certain strength and confidence. She might look too angelic and sweet, but Adrienne knew that no man can bring this girl down.

“Yes. I have a very nice room.”

“Yeah, this house is great. And Uncle Jac probably built this house with us in mind. Each of us has a room here. He’s so sweet. He’s like a second father to us.”

Adrienne remembered why she went out to the hallway in the first place.

“Ian, do... well, I was wondering if I could borrow some tampons. My period came unexpectedly and I wasn’t able to bring any with me.

Ian smiled. “Sure. Hassle, isn’t it?”

Adrienne rolled her eyes. “Tell me about it.”

She met a lot of Justin’s other relatives. They were all nice and Adrienne immediately drew a conclusion that Justin’s family was very closely knitted.

He has two aunts from the mother side. One could easily spot the aristocracy in them. But they were all animate and jolly. They were funny and affectionate. And they all seem to like her as well.

Ian took her to a trip around the city. She insisted she treats her for a haircut and a henna tattoo.

Justin, on the other hand, went to play a game of hockey with his guy cousins.

"They were very close, you know." Ian said. "Even I am close to all of them. There were only the five of us. Justin was an only child. We grew up together. He was the eldest. When we were young, he was leader of the gang. All those mischief that we did, he was the mastermind."

"It must be really nice to have friends, who were also your relatives or your brother, in Christian's case."

"It is. Don't you have any brother or sister?"

"I just have a sister. We weren't really that close." She said. "I had relatives on my father's side. But it's been decades

since I last saw them. And I was not really close to my mother's relatives. Hell, I wasn't even close to my sister. It's really sad, actually. That is why I am so fascinated to see you guys. You have so much friendship and love in you."

"We do. We love and respect Justin so much. For us, we were brothers. It was really sad, when sometimes, we think about how it would be like had Jeffrey lived. He told you about him, didn't he?"

Adrienne nodded. "I felt sorry for him. I knew they would be really close had he lived."

Ian nodded. "Twins run in our family, I guess. When I was young, I used to fight with Chris a lot! But when I learned that Justin's twin had not survived, I felt lucky that I had Chris."

"I wish I was close to my sister as well. But ever since, we had this sibling rivalry that I don't know where started, actually. It was really sad. I hope we can fix our issues, though."

“Justin comes home every weekend. Then all of a sudden, he wasn’t coming down here anymore. We started asking, but he said he was quite busy with the freelance he was doing at Blush. Oh well, it was you, actually!” Ian giggled.

Adrienne blushed. The words that she heard from Ian was overwhelming. It was as good as Justin telling her that he’s in love with her too. But she knew she shouldn’t get her hopes too high. Yes, she is important to him. Yes, he feels something for her. But she shouldn’t be too sure that he’s in love with her, until she heard it from him straight.

It was a very fun weekend, and Adrienne felt like she doesn’t want to leave anymore. She wished she could have stayed longer.

They were due to leave Sunday afternoon. When she was packing up her stuff, Ian knocked on her door.

“Hi. Come on in.” She said.

“It was really lovely having you with us, Adrienne.” She said. “I’m glad you got back together. At least now, my conscience would stop bugging me.”

Adrienne laughed. "Hey. It wasn't your fault. I made that mistake, but I could also have listened to Justin's explanation. I was just too stubborn. Plus, I had other issues back then. It wasn't your fault."

Ian smiled.

"I've never seen Justin this happy before." She said. "The last time he was here, he was a bit off. He said he had a little argument with this wonderful girl that he's seeing and he was always out of his mind. That's when we all became so interested in you. We knew you were special. We knew that finally... he's met his match."

She smiled. "I don't know if I am his match. But I am happy to be with him."

"Alright. I won't bug your packing. You have a flight to catch. I'll visit New York again. I hope we can go out."

After an hour, she was saying goodbye to everybody, who all made her feel welcome and at home for the past two days.

Ian hugged her and then she whispered, "Promise me you'll say yes?"

"Huh?" Adrienne asked, but Ian only smiled and winked at her.

She hated to leave. She became fond of Justin's family. She envied Justin for having a family that surrounds him with warmth, friendship and love. She never had that, except from his father.

"They love you." Justin whispered in her ear.

"I love them too. I wish the atmosphere of my family was like that." She said. "If it was like that at home, I would not stay in New York. I would stay home or I would take a train no matter how long, just to be with them."

"We can always go back. They want both of us to go back home now. I remembered my mother telling me, *Make sure you bring Adrienne next time you go back. And I hope that would be next week.* My mother wanted to have a daughter ever since I could remember. But we weren't lucky. I was the only blessing they had."

Adrienne pinched him in the nose. "That's why you better make it worth it!"

"Yes, Ma'am." Justin said mimicking a boyscout.

*Bagong Buhay**Filipino. In English: New Life*

She sat in her balcony with Jill and Yuan one Saturday afternoon. Although she lived with Justin now, she still kept her apartment. When Yuan or Jill finish the year in the lease of their own apartments, she will ask them to move into hers. At least she would be close to them and she still get to keep the flat, in case her relationship with Justin doesn't work out. She hopes it will work out, but until now, she is unsure of how he really feels about her.

She was fiddling with her notes when she realized that she was supposed to have her period, one month ago. It's already been two months since she first came to Chicago, when she last had her period.

"Shit!" She said.

Jill and Yuan stared at her.

“What?”

Her heart pounded. “Oh my God... I’m late guys.”

Jill raised her brow. “A few days is okay, sweetie.” She said.

“What about thirty days?” She asked wearily.

Yuan almost choked on his coffee.

“Thirty days, dear, requires you to buy at least two packs of pregnancy test.” Jill said.

“But how could this be?” Yuan asked. “I mean you guys should have protection or any form of contraceptive?”

Adrienne swallowed hard. She blushed.

“No. Actually... I don’t know... I’ve... ever since, Justin never used a condom. He did that first night we slept together. But then he realized that I was... a virgin, he took it off. Then he has always been withdrawing. And then, that night at the resort, when we got back together, he

never withdraws anymore. He was always... well... coming inside..."

Jill and Yuan were speechless.

"I don't know. Either that guy just can't contain himself, or he is trying to get you pregnant!" Yuan said.

"Or he just doesn't care. If it happens, then he doesn't mind."

"He's twenty-nine years old guys!" Yuan said.

"And he's in love!" Jill said.

Adrienne sighed. "I don't know. He hasn't said I love you to me yet. I think he feels something for me. But I don't know it is strong enough for him to be ecstatic to have a baby now!"

"Yen, you're living together! Though he allowed you to keep your own apartment, he didn't allow you to sleep in it for weeks. Officially your house is over there!" Jill said pointing to Justin's balcony.

“Gees, guys. Before we get too worked up on this, I am going to go to the pharmacy downstairs.”

Yuan left. Jill and Adrienne stared at each other.

“What if I am, Jill?” She asked.

Jill smiled. “Then I know that Justin will be very happy. I know that he wants this to happen. I know that he loves you more than anything else in the world.”

“How come you are so positive about this?”

She smiled. “I see him, sweetie. I see how happy he makes you. I see how much love he gives you. Even Mike tells me that he’s never seen Justin this way. His world revolves around you now. He’s crazy about you. Enough to be ecstatic with the news that you are going to have a child.”

Tears filled her eyes. She doesn’t know what to feel now. She isn’t sure if she is ready for motherhood. But she is certain that if ever she will have a baby, she wants to have it with Justin.

Fifteen minutes later, she was nervously sitting in her bathroom, while Yuan and Jill stood outside and waited.

After three minutes, she stood up and turned the first strip.

Two lines.

She turned next one. Two lines.

She sighed and turned the last one. Two lines.

She almost fainted.

“Yen, can we come in now?” Jill asked.

She nodded.

“Yen!” Yuan wailed.

“I’m nodding my head!” She said loudly.

Jill and Yuan stared at the strips, which were all saying the same thing.

Jill smiled. “Oh my God! I’m gonna be an Aunt!”

“Me too.” Yuan said excitedly.

Adrienne cried. “I’m gonna have a baby, guys!”

They all cried together.

Adrienne felt happy and scared at the same time. She knew her mother will hate her more for this. She hasn’t spoken to her since the day she told them that she will be moving in with her boyfriend.

“That is disgraceful!” Were her mother’s last words to her.

“I know you know what you are doing, sweetie.” Is what her father told her.

She cried on the phone. It was the first time she heard her father speak up for her.

“Who is this young man, by the way?” Her father asked.

“His name is Justin Adams. He’s a pretty neat guy, Dad. He’s smart and quite successful. I don’t think you should

worry about whether he can take care of me or not. He has been for the last couple of months already.”

“What does he do for a living?” He asked.

“He’s working for his father now. He’s learning the ropes of their family business.” She told him. “He was trading in Wallstreet before he came to his father. He was pretty successful there too. He’s wonderful, Dad. He treats me better than anyone else. I’m crazy about him.”

“This is the guy who punched Troy to the core, isn’t it?”

“How... how did you know that?” Adrienne asked, quite surprised. Kim must have told them.

“Well, your sister told us.” Her father replied. *She knew it!*

“She said that you dumped Troy for someone else. She did say that he was a good-looking guy. A businessman, she said.” Her father continued.

She sighed, frustrated. Kimberly! Adrienne wished she had the guts to tell their father that Kimberly slept with Troy.

But she knew, she was leaving Troy before she caught them in bed together, so she decided to keep her mouth shut.

“Your mother was upset. She had her hopes up that Troy will propose to you after med school. Kimberly came home last month. She told us that Troy got drunk and couldn’t accept the fact that you were breaking up with him. You were arguing and this new boyfriend of yours came in and beat the life out of him. Your mother couldn’t believe why Troy didn’t sue for damages. I thought that it wasn’t worth going to court for. Obviously, it was a petty fight, and your new boyfriend probably came to your defense.” Her father said softly.

Adrienne was crying, but she didn’t let a whimper escape her.

“Adrienne, if you are happy, I am happy.” Her father said. “You know that. I know I am not the perfect father, but I hope that you will be able to forgive me for all my shortcomings. And I hope I can still make it up to you.”

She drew a deep breath. “It’s okay, Dad. I love you. I never faulted you for anything.”

“Do you love him?” Her father asked.

“Justin?” She asked. “Yes, Dad. I’ve never been this happy. I’ve met his family in Chicago. They were all great to me. His father was a tycoon and his mother was so sophisticated, but they never made me feel that I wasn’t good enough for their son. His mother is now a fan of my column. She has subscribed to Blush and after she reads my articles, she would call me up. Talk to me about it, offer feedbacks. She’s very sweet actually.”

“Chicago?” Her father asked. “That’s where his family is?”

“Yes. They have some offices here in New York, and Justin is training here. But inevitably, he would come down to Chicago once in a while, where their head office is.”

“Adams. Is Justin Adams the son of Jac Adams?” Her father asked suddenly.

“Yes, do you know him?” She asked.

“From the papers, magazines, yes. Adrienne, your boyfriend is a multi-billionaire!”

"I think he is. But we don't talk about our finances. I don't care how much he is worth."

"You're getting into a family of tycoons, sweetie. His grandfather started their business and I know that Jac Adams only had one son. Didn't he graduate with honors at Harvard, but disappointed his father when he started his own path, when he was the heir of their multi-billion operation?"

"That's Justin, Dad. I met him at Blush. He was trading in stocks, and at the same time, he was a freelancer for us."

"Honey... I know you were destined for greater things. No matter what your mother tells you. But I don't want you getting hurt. These tycoons, honey... they will be away most of the time, and they would have more time for their golf buddies than their wives."

Adrienne laughed. "I'm not marrying him, Daddy. I'm just moving in with him. And so far, he never missed to pick me up from work."

Her father sighed. "I love you, Adrienne. I know you can take care of yourself. And if he hurts you, I will haunt him down! I don't care if he's a billionaire or not!"

Adrienne laughed, but she was very touched. She was in tears when she put down the phone that day.

And now, she was more scared. Her mother never approved of her living with a man outside wedlock. It was a mortal sin for her. If she knew what Kimberly did, what would she think? Wasn't it worse to sleep with your sister's boyfriend? Will her mother be happier that Kimberly took matters into her own hands and take Kimberly's side again?

After an hour of talking to Yuan and Jill on how she will rip off the band-aid and tell Justin that he is going to be a father, she went back to their apartment.

Justin has just arrived.

"Hi, honey, where have you been?" He asked.

She smiled weakly. "I was just at the other apartment talking to Yuan and Jill."

“And did they do something to you? You look like they have just berated you for something.” He said.

She giggled. “No. I just don’t feel too good.”

He raised a brow and then he put his palm on her forehead to feel her temperature.

“Are you sick?” He asked.

She shook his head. She feels the concern in his voice and she smiled. Then she put her arms around his waist and hugged him.

“I’m fine. How about you?” She asked.

“I’m kind of tired. Went through a lot of reports and presentations down at the office.” He said.

“I’ll prepare something for you.” She said. “You could have told me that you were going home early today.”

He shook his head. “No. Let’s go out. I’ll treat you to a very fine dinner, and have the evening of our lives.”

Justin put his arms around her and carried her to the bedroom.

“Hey. What’s up with you?”

He shook his head.

“Do you know that we’ve been together for four months now?” He said.

“No. Really?”

He nodded. “Four months ago, Gypsies opened.”

“That place should be shut down, really. It made my life more complicated.”

He laughed. “And happier, I hope.”

She reached up and kissed him on the lips. “A million times more.”

He smiled. “Come on, go get dressed. I’ll treat you to a very fancy dinner.”

She raised a brow. "Where are we going?"

"Trust me, hon. Just dress up." He winked.

She dressed in a red sleeveless dress that accented her curves, which she thought now, was perfect. She worriedly stared at her tummy. She sighed and remembered that two months from now, she will not be able to fit into this dress. And she still has to worry about telling Justin that he should prepare for fatherhood soon. What will come out of that, she doesn't know. And that's when she realized she was thankful she didn't give up her apartment.

She tied her hair in a bun. She wore the earrings that Justin gave her, and then she slipped into her red high-heeled sandals. She had a very light make-up on. She smiled at her reflection in the mirror. She looked like the devil's mistress, herself.

He was staring at her intensely when she went to the living room.

"What?" She asked.

He shook his head. "You look... divine!" He whispered.

She smiled. "Thank you. You look good yourself."

When they got into his car, she asked her where they were going.

"You'll see." He said.

"New restaurant?"

He just smiled at her.

He parked in front of Gypsys.

"We're going to eat here?"

"Yep. Why not?" He asked smiling.

"I thought this was a bar."

He raised a brow and smiled. "You don't have much patience don't you?"

She giggled. "You think?"

They went inside.

“Hon, I think it’s still closed.” She said.

“It’s okay.” He assured her.

He led her inside. The door opened for them. She was surprised because Gypsy’s looked different. And apart from the waiters, and the band, there was no one else in there, but them.

There was only one table at the center of the floor. The waiters are waiting at the sides. When they got closer, she realized that the table was in the middle of a floor of petals of different flowers. The rest of the bar, were covered by roses and balloons.

She gasped. She stared at Justin.

“This night is ours, honey.” He told her sincerely.

She bit her lip. She wanted to cry. The band played an instrumental love song when they entered.

Justin led her to the table at the center and pulled a chair out for her.

“Oh my God, Justin.” She said. “How did you do this?”

He smiled. “I was good friends with the owner. He owed me a favor. I can’t think of anything better for payback time.”

She giggled. “I don’t think he’s going to be your friend anymore after tonight.”

He laughed. “He can never disown me.”

“I don’t understand. We could eat somewhere else. You didn’t have to do this.”

He reached for her hand from the opposite end of the table.

“I want us to celebrate the day we met.” He said. “I want it to be special. And it all started here, honey.”

She smiled.

“We’ve been seeing each other for four months now.” He said.

“Can’t believe you remembered the exact date.”

He nodded. “It was one night in my life that I didn’t know what was coming my way.”

She smiled. “It was one night in my life that changed me forever.”

“We celebrate that night after four months. Because we’re still here... and we’re still together.”

She nodded. “Thank you. You’re too sweet, aren’t you?”

“It must be my Dad’s genes.”

She giggled. “I can see.”

She didn’t feel uncomfortable with all the waiters serving only them, and the band playing for only them. In fact, she felt special. After dinner, Justin took her hand and they danced.

She smiled to herself. She felt really lucky. She felt blessed.

She rested her head on Justin's shoulder. He had his arms around her waist.

She felt a kiss on her temple.

"Adrienne..." He whispered in her ear. "I've always felt absolutely in control of my life. But since you... you are the only person who could undo me. And it's the first time in my life that I felt this way."

She pulled away slightly. Her heart is pounding.

Is he going to say he loves me? She thought.

He stared into her eyes. "I adore you... just the way you are. Contrary to what you thought about yourself these years... the real you... drive me insane. I'm crazy about you, Adrienne Miller."

Tears are welling up in her eyes. She felt happiness that she is afraid she may not contain. This is the first time that Justin is talking to her about his feelings. And he did so romantically and so wonderfully.

"I know that you've known my reputation before me. But I promise you, honey, none of those things come close to the truth. You see... you've met my parents. Their relationship is my ideal relationship. I want to find one for my own that will not end up being lost after some time. I was just very careful. That's why I never allowed myself to commit. To be drawn to someone when I have no intention of keeping it forever. But when I met you... you undid me... you made me lose control. I don't know how you did it. But when I am with you... I feel lost... and yet complete... That's why I knew you were different. That's why even though I knew I was just the guy on the sidelines, I put up a fight... I tried my best to keep a relationship going... because I knew I can't lose you..."

"Oh Justin..." She whispered.

"And I never want to lose you, Adrienne... you are my kismet, my soulmate, my match. I brought you here tonight for three reasons. One, I want to us to celebrate the night we met... the day that changed my life forever... the day I felt being drowned by forces more powerful than I am, the day that made me realize that I was done... the day that I came undone."

She couldn't say anything. She was overwhelmed by joy. Tears slowly spilled in her eyes. She kept praying that she wasn't just dreaming the words that she's hearing.

"And so... I wanted to tell you... to let you know... and that I need you to trust me... I am not the man you knew before you even met me..."

"Oh Justin... I don't..." She started saying to him that she doesn't care before... but she knew him now. That she believes he was a more wonderful person than what his reputation said.

"Ssshhh..." He cut her off gently. "I want you to know Adrienne, it wasn't easy for me... the feelings I feel for you were all new to me... but I'm putting up a fight and I'm surrendering to all these feelings... and I love the way that I feel about you... I want you to know... to trust... to remember always... Adrienne Miller, I love you... with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my being..."

She was open-mouthed. She cried silently. "Oh Justin..." She hugged him. Small sobs escaping her.

And then she stared back at him. He leaned forward and kissed the tears in her face.

“Justin... I don’t know what to say...” She started.

He smiled sheepishly. “You could always say what you feel about me in return.”

She giggled and then she hugged him tight. When she pulled back, she stared at him seriously and she said, “Oh Justin Adams... you know! I know you know...”

He smiled. “But I would rather hear it from you.”

She smiled. And with all her heart, she said, “Justin Adams, I am head over heels in love with you... I love you too... with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my being.

She saw triumph in his eyes. His face descended in hers and kissed her passionately... oblivious that they were in the middle of a petal-covered dance floor, with the band, and the waiters watching them.

When the kiss ended, she was crying and giggling at the same time. She caressed the back of his head and smiled at

him. This was the happiest moment of her life. She felt alive... she felt loved...

Then he pulled away from her. She raised a brow, not quite sure why he was pulling away from her, breaking the magic, the moment...

And then slowly, he bent down on one knee.

She felt the hair at the back of her neck raise. Her heart thumped, before it fell to her toes. Her jaw dropped before her hand came to cover her open mouth.

"Oh my God..." She whispered.

She was only praying to hear him say he loves her! Justin is indeed above all expectations!

He smiled at her nervously. He took a small box out of his pocket and opened it in front of her.

A gleaming platinum channel-set diamond ring with heart-shaped center flashed in front of her. *And she was not expecting a very extravagant ring either!*

“Adrienne Miller, I never want to let you go... I want to spend the rest of my life with you... I want to make an empire with you... will you marry me?”

She will faint, she was sure of it. Any minute now... but she stopped herself. She has to give him an answer first...

She kneeled in front of him. Wound her fingers in his hands.

“Oh Justin... you know I love you. I have loved you for months now. But before I give you my answer, I think there is something you should know, and I hope it will not ruin this moment.” She said.

She saw concern in his eyes, but nevertheless, he didn't say anything.

“I... Oh God! I don't know how to say this.” She took a deep breath.

“Justin, God knows how much I love you. But I can't... I can't marry you. It wouldn't look fair.”

“Why? What’s wrong?” He asked, confusion and worry all over his face.

Tears slid down her cheeks.

“I would say yes in an instant. But I want you to know something first... about my... situation... and then you can ask me again, if you will not change your mind.”

“What situation, honey?” He asked. Tilting her face so he could look in her eyes.

“There is something you need to know.”

“What is it?”

“I love you. With all my heart.”

“Then why don’t you want to marry me?”

“Because I... I don’t want you to think that I’m only saying yes because of my current state.”

He looked confused now. She stared up at him.

"I'm pregnant, Justin."

His eyes went wide. His jaw dropped. And then he hugged her tight. "Oh my God! Yes!" He shouted.

He stood up and pulled her up with her. He lifted her off her feet and spun her around.

"I love you, honey. And if you think I'm going to let you say no now, you're wrong. I wasn't gonna let you say no before. I won't take no for answer. How much more now?"

"Are you sure?"

He cupped her face between his palms.

"I'm going to be a father, honey. This is the best news anyone has ever given me."

Tears rolled down her face. She reached up and kissed him on the lips.

"I am not saying yes, because I'm pregnant, Justin."

“But I won’t let you say no, either.” He said firmly.

“I will say yes, because I love you. With all my heart. With all my being.”

He smiled. “Honey, say it already.”

She laughed. “Yes, Justin Adams. I will marry you!”

He smiled and slipped the diamond ring to her finger and then he kissed her and then he hugged her tight.

She was crying harder now. She couldn’t help herself. She looked up at him and saw that his eyes were a little wet as well.

Around them, the waiters and the band cheered and clapped their hands. It was the first time that she remembered that they were not alone. She buried her face in his shoulder shyly.

He wrapped his arms around her waist.

“Adrienne...” He whispered. “Soon to be Mrs. Justin Adams.”

She giggled. "It would be a very demanding job, I believe."

He chuckled. "But I'm sure you will excel at it. No one else is fit for the title."

She laughed. "It took you a short time to find me."

"The moment I laid eyes on you, I think I've known." He said.

She looked up at him, quite confused.

"Contrary to your belief that we just started on a one night stand, I would have made it happen either way had I not chanced upon you here at Gypsy's that night."

"But you didn't know me 'til then."

He chuckled. "I know who you are. You're a fox. A vixen I intend to take as mine."

She narrowed her eyes, not quite able to believe what she's hearing from Justin.

"I've wanted you from the first moment I laid eyes on you."
He told her.

"And when did you get this ring?" She asked.

"I've had that for a month now." He told her. "I've been waiting for tonight to give it to you. It's my grandmother's and my mother's engagement ring."

She gasped.

"It's the engagement ring that the men in our family gave their brides for three generations now." He smiled.

"Oh Justin." She breathed. Tears rolled down her cheeks.

"And so far, we haven't had histories of divorce." He teased.

She giggled and hugged him.

They were both smiling when they went home. They didn't say much on the way, but both of them had a smile on their faces and once in a while, Justin would reach out for her hand and kiss it.

He made love to her with all his passion, and all his love. He was careful not to be rough. He didn't want to harm their baby.

She slept soundly in his arms. He looked down at her. He gathered her tighter.

He smiled to himself. He's going to marry her. She said yes. She said she loved him as much as he loved her. And she told him he was going to be a father. He felt blessed. They were both young. He grew up alone. He didn't have a brother or a sister. He wanted a big family. At least three kids. Two boys to carry on the family name, and one girl to treasure. He bets she will be as beautiful as her mother.

He felt lucky. He was biding his time. He didn't know he can fall in love. And then he saw her for the first time in Blush. She had a certain appeal to her. She was pretty, but she was always wearing her reading glasses, that are not flattering her eyes and her cheekbones. She was a snob. But he knows she has flair and elegance in her. She is smart and sexy as hell.

He remembered how he was very excited to go to Blush. He would have given up the job. He didn't need it. He did

it as a favor to Mike's sister, who were best friends with Jada, when they needed an emergency photographer. And when he walked into Blush that first day, he has spotted her. He has been attracted to her from day one.

She looked so prim in her business suit and her glasses. She didn't wear make-up. She looked like a girl who didn't know how much beauty she has in her body. She is smart and confident. And she doesn't care if people think she isn't glamorous. She was intriguing. She was exactly his type. Just like her mother. Beautiful, elegant, smart. Even if she doesn't put anything else in her face except for lip gloss, she screams style and class.

He liked watching her. She never looked up her desk when he walks in the halls of Blush's office. She was immune to him. And she was the only one he wanted to look up and see him.

When she bumped into him that day she was rushing out of Jada's office, he had experienced being close to her, to take in her scent... so feminine, fresh... woman.

His heart skipped a beat when he saw her unpacking in the apartment across his. He smiled. He wanted to introduce

himself to her. They see each other in her office and in the elevator of their building. But somehow, he didn't know where to start. It wasn't like him to go tongue-tied in front of a woman before. But he already knew he wanted her. And he knew that she's of higher caliber than the other girls he has ever dated.

When he saw her at Gypsys, he could hardly believe it was her. She looked so different. She looked naughty as hell, and yet, that angelic face will have any man follow her everywhere. She was alone, and he didn't even imagine she could drink or smoke. He figured, this was a side of her that he could penetrate. A side of her that could open the doors for him. He drank about two bottles. All the while, watching her. He was aware that he wasn't the only man looking at her. And he knew if he didn't make his move, someone else will.

And now, after four months, she was his. Only his. He's kept up with the whole charade of being her secret *other* boyfriend for two months. He knew he has fallen in love with her. He allowed her to break into the boundaries he never knew he could let anyone penetrate before. He was falling deeper and deeper each day he is with her. Until he

wasn't complete without her anymore. Until he wants her
for himself... with every fabric of his soul.

Changier ; Cambiare ; Cambire

All gave birth to the word Change.

“Wake up, wake up!” Adrienne cried in Yuan’s intercom.

She smiled when she heard the buzz and she entered the building.

Yuan looked practically still in bed when he opened the door for her.

“What is up with you? It’s eight in the morning! And it’s a Sunday!” He muttered.

She went to the guest room where Jill spent the night in. She pulled the covers off her and as soon as Jill felt the chill, she sat up.

“What the hell!” She protested.

Adrienne laughed and then flashed her finger in front of them to show them Justin's engagement ring.

"Oh my God!" Yuan and Jill screamed in unison.

"I cannot believe this! He proposed!" Jill said excitedly.

"I told you. That's what Ian meant. She knew his cousin was proposing. That's why she was telling you to promise her you'll say yes." Yuan said.

"Did you talk to him about the baby already?"

Adrienne nodded. "Oh God! He asked me to marry him. I didn't say yes at first. I told him that he needs to know something first. I told him, and he just screamed *Yes!*"

"I told you he was trying to get you pregnant!" Yuan laughed. "He knew what will happen if you make love and he doesn't use contraceptive and spill himself inside of you!"

"He took it so well, and he was so happy about it! I was scared. I thought he might be ready to be a husband, but to be a father needed more time. But he told me right away,

that he wouldn't let me say no to him before I told him I was pregnant, how much more after?"

"You are so lucky! You really nailed the guy. For good! I told you he was in love with you!" Jill said.

Adrienne nodded. "He is! And I feel so blessed, you guys!"

"Let me see the ring again!" Jill said.

"Oh my God! This is expensive. It could be more than four carats, just the center itself." Yuan said.

"He said it was his grandmother's and then his mother's before me."

"Wow! You are so lucky, girl." Yuan said.

"You are marrying a god, and he's so in love with you. But you deserve it, sweetie. Thank God, you decided to be yourself. Even for just one night."

Adrienne smiled dreamily. "Thank you! Thank you for being with me all this time! I thought that I will not be good enough for something this great! But you and Justin

have all made me feel I was special. That I need not live in the shadow of someone I am not. That I am great just as I am. And thank you for seeing in me, what I haven't seen in myself before."

They all hugged and cried at the same time. And then they laughed.

"Come on, guys, enough drama. I'll treat you for coffee. Justin will pick me up downstairs by eleven so we can have lunch together and then we will go see a doctor."

Adrienne's life was smooth-sailing. Justin never failed to take her to the office and pick her up. He tells her everyday that he loves her. He sends her flowers to her office.

She was happy. But she knew she is going to have to break the news to her parents. One Friday, she finally called had the courage to call her father.

"How are you, sweetheart?" He asked.

"I'm good, Daddy. I feel so blessed."

"Looks like the man in your life is making you happier than ever."

"Oh yes! He is so wonderful, Daddy." Adrienne said. "We will fly to Chicago tomorrow. And then next weekend, we will go to Boston so he can meet you and Mom. He's been pestering me to introduce him to you."

"I am happy, that you are happy, Adrienne." Her father said.

"Dad, there is something I need to tell you." She started nervously.

"What is it, sweet pea?" He asked.

Adrienne took a deep breath.

"You're going... to be a grandfather."

There was silence.

Shit! Adrienne thought he was going to have a heart attack.

“Dad, are you okay?”

She heard him take a deep breath.

“Yes, I am. I know that you know what you are doing. You are a responsible girl. But this was... too soon...”

“Yes, I know. We didn’t really plan it. But he proposed to me even before finding out that I’m pregnant. It was wonderful, Dad. I felt so blessed. And I want this baby. Justin wants it. Actually, we will fly there next weekend so he can formally ask you for my hand.”

“When will you get married?”

“We will discuss that with his parents tomorrow. And then I will let you know. Justin wants it by the end of this month. I do too. Before I get too big to fit into any wedding dress.”

“Alright, honey, if that is what makes you happy, then I am happy. I am happy to know that you are in good hands. That you will be happy about your life. Let me be the one to talk to your mother first. Then next week you and your

fiancé are welcome to come down and see us. I love you, Adrienne.”

She cried. “I love you too, Daddy.”

She was still crying when she put the phone down. Justin looked at her encouragingly and enclosed her in a tight embrace.

“It’s okay, honey. It is hard, I know. But it will be alright. I will take care of you and our baby.”

She looked up at him. “Thank you, Justin. I love you!”

He smiled and kissed her passionately.

They were received in Justin’s home quite warmly. Again all of their relatives are there. Another luncheon was prepared so they can sit together and keep each other up to date.

As soon as they arrived, Adrienne was hugged by Justin’s mother.

“How lovely to see you, my dear! It’s been more than a month since you came back.”

Adrienne smiled. “It’s been pretty hectic. I am really sorry. But I’ve missed you guys.”

“And we have missed you. Come on to the tea room. The four of us have something very important to discuss, I believe.” Justin’s mom was smiling radiantly at her.

She felt a bit nervous being in the room with Justin and both his parents, knowing that they will discuss something that will change both hers and Justin’s lives forever.

“So, when is the wedding date going to be?” Justin’s father smiled.

“I want it soon. By the end of the month. I just don’t know if we can make it. I understand that there will be certain preparations.”

“Well, of course, darling. You’re our only son. This will be the grand wedding of the year!” Justin’s mother said.

“Can we make it in time, Mother?” Justin said.

“Leave it to me. I will be your wedding planner. It’s been a while since I did some party-planning job, and I miss stretching my legs. And I know some people. I’m sure things will be ready in time.”

“Where are you going to settle after the wedding?” Justin’s father asked.

“Well, I was hoping that we can stay here, but maybe when the baby comes, we will definitely stay in Chicago. It depends if this girl is willing to give up her big time job at Blush.”

“What baby?” Her mother asked, quite surprised.

Adrienne turned red. Justin laughed and squeezed her hand.

“Yes, mother. Your greatest dream of having a grandchild is coming true. About seven and a half months from now, you are going to be a grandmother.”

“This is good news!” Justin’s father beamed. “Do you hear that, honey? We’re going to have grandchildren! Our boy loves us after all!”

Justin laughed again. “I’ve always loved you, you know that!”

“Yes, but for a while, you made us think that your ultimate goal in life is to become a rich bachelor for life.” His mother said.

Adrienne was hugged by both Justin’s parents. After chatting for a little while longer, they have decided to hold a garden wedding that will happen in the family home. After their honeymoon, they will settle in New York for a while, until the baby is born and then they can move back to Chicago.

Adrienne figured it will be the best. Justin needs to be in Chicago to have more hands-on management in their head office. Adrienne needs more time to take care of her baby and she doesn’t want her kids to grow up in the hands of a nanny. She decided that if her path was to be a part-time writer and full-time mother and wife, then she would be very happy with her life.

They have announced their engagement and the pending arrival of a new Adams in the family over at luncheon. All of Justin's relatives were ecstatic about the two good news. They all hugged Adrienne and welcomed her to the family.

"Thank you, Adrienne." Ian whispered to her when she hugged her. "Thanks for deciding to become part of our family. I'm sure you will learn to love us."

Adrienne smiled at her. "I love you guys already." She said sincerely.

If their meeting with Justin's family was wonderful, Adrienne was afraid that it was not going to be as smooth as telling her own family about it.

Her father had received them very warmly. He immediately formed a bond with Justin. Adrienne's mother on the other hand, was not smiling for the entire day since she came.

When her mother had time alone with her in the kitchen while Justin played chess with her father in the garden, she wasn't able to stop herself.

“You are still young, Adrienne. Why are you doing this?”
She asked her.

She stared at her mother for a while.

“Mother, I love Justin. He loves me. He wants to marry me.”

“Well, he is a very good catch, I heard from your father. The heir of a multi-billion firm. That is hard to resist.” She said. And Adrienne just couldn’t believe that her own mother can say these things to her.

“I am not marrying him for his money, mother. Look, I know you are upset with what happened between me and Troy. But Mom, we were never meant to be. We will not work out. Better part ways now than later and just be miserable.”

“Troy was never good enough for you! But still, he chose you. You were a little ungrateful if you ask me.”

Adrienne took a deep breath. “I know that you will never see things the way I do, Mother. But just take a look at it

this way. Troy and Kimberly have chances of being together, now. I know that was your original plan. You can come back to plan A. I am out of your hair for good. I just need you to be happy for me. I am not asking for anything else.”

Things got worse when Kimberly arrived late that afternoon. Adrienne felt very uncomfortable, but she found strength when she found Justin looking at her with so much concern and so much encouragement in his eyes.

Kimberly couldn't look her in the eyes. She barely said a word to her. Adrienne didn't know what to say to her sister either. She knew that even though she didn't love Troy anymore when she found them in bed together, the impact of Kim's betrayal was far too much for her to handle.

That night, she stayed in her old room with Justin.

“They aren't married yet! Why will they stay in the same room?” She heard her mother saying to her father in the kitchen when she thought she was out of earshot.

“Stop it. She’s old enough and responsible enough to know what she is doing! And they’re going to have a baby already! It doesn’t matter. I’m sure Justin wants to stay with Adrienne to make sure she is doing fine.”

“They were living together outside wedlock—that is why she got pregnant in the first place!”

“Marina, this is not our generation anymore. How many babies have you delivered from parents who were unwed? At least, my daughter is in love with the father of her unborn child, and he loves her in return and is marrying her soon.”

Before they went back to New York, Kimberly came up to her. She was on the porch staring at Justin, while he paced their front yard, talking to his business associates over the phone.

“How you managed to get this catch, Adrienne, I wouldn’t know. I just hope you can keep up with this.”

She stared at her sister.

“What do you mean?”

Kimberly shrugged innocently. “After you told me and Troy your new boyfriend’s name, we did a research on his background. Poor Troy, couldn’t believe that you were stolen from him by one of New York’s most eligible bachelors. Filthy rich, heir of a multi-billion mining industry. If some jocks were born with a silver spoon, I heard this one was born with platinum. And he looks like a model. Troy went into a state of self-pity for a while. I just think that he was way over your league.”

Adrienne wanted to slap her. She inhaled sharply and bit back a venomous reply.

Justin turned to her direction and caught her eye at that exact moment.

I love you. He mouthed.

“How sweet! And he really is in love with you!” Kimberly said.

“Yes, he is. Even though you said he was way over my league, I got him wrapped around my finger. So go bite

your thumb if you couldn't find a man who would level up to mine!" She told her sister and walked away from her.

She didn't want it to be a competition. Because she knew, Justin didn't have to be as rich as he is now, didn't have to be as handsome as he is, for her to win. As long as he is as in love with her as he is now, she was ahead of the game. It was the only thing that matters to her. For a while, she has forgotten that he was Justin Adams. For her, he was just her Justin... her knight in shining armor.

When they were back to New York, Adrienne decided to forget that her mother thought she was the most sinful and most indecent woman in the world. She had to bite her tongue to stop herself from ratting Kimberly's own sins, which would be far worse than hers. She knew she only slept with only one man in her life. Kimberly may have slept with more than one... and slept with a one who belongs to her sister at that time.

She was just happy that she has Justin. She felt blessed that she has a wonderful man beside her, who showers her with adoration and love every single day.

She prayed that she will stay this happy. That Justin will stay this in love with her. She prayed that Kimberly and her mother could not touch the happiness that she has now. She knew that she could only love them in her own way. She should stop trying to make them love her back. They may never. Maybe it is just the way it should be.

For now, she was going to be a mother herself, and she knew that she will shower her love to her baby. And she will do it every single day of her life. She will love her children, encourage them and show them what beautiful and wonderful creations they are.

But somehow, Adrienne could well be paying for sins she didn't know she committed. Because no matter how happy she was, somehow, something always comes messing up.

For the first time, he didn't join her for dinner.

She tried calling him but he didn't answer his mobile. She thought that he could be busy with work, and she knew that she has to get used to being a wife of a magnate. Somehow, work will demand more time than it should. But she knew that he will come to seek comfort and

pleasure in her arms when he gets home every night to her, and that would make her content.

When he finally got home at one o'clock, he smelled of alcohol. He was so drunk, that he couldn't walk a straight line.

"My God, Justin, did you drive?" She asked. "You could have had an accident. My God, you could have died!"

He stared at her and for a moment, she thought she saw contempt in his eyes.

"Maybe... that will be a lot b-b-better..." He said and then he shut the bathroom door.

It took a while before he went out.

"Honey, what is wrong with you?" She asked.

He stared at her. Then he said, "S-shhhh!" And then he lied on the bed with his back to her and after a minute, he was fast asleep.

Adrienne sighed and decided to go to sleep. She will figure it out tomorrow. Maybe something at work had upset him. This would be another learning for her. It seems she hasn't seen him upset about something else. Justin always had that air of composure in him. He has a playful personality and his eyes always danced with laughter. But he was smart and responsible, and always knew how to solve life's toughest mysteries.

When she woke up the next morning, Justin was gone.

She hailed a cab to go to work. First time in months. He never missed to take her to the office since that day they got back from Bahamas. And he was extra careful with her when he found out that she was pregnant. No matter how hectic his schedule was, he found ways to take her to the office at nine and to pick her up at six-thirty.

By two in the afternoon, she tried calling him to ask if he can make it to their gynecologist appointment at three. He wasn't picking up.

She sighed sadly and sent him an SMS: *Justin, we have a doctor's appointment at 3. Can you make it? Please let me know so I can just ask Yuan or Jill to go with me.*

Come fifteen before three, Adrienne was still sitting on her desk, staring at her mobile phone, which has full batteries, and full signal, but has not received a single call, nor a single SMS.

She wiped the tears that rolled down her cheek.

She doesn't know what Justin's problem is. She felt like one of the women he dated in the past, who he has ignored and tired of after two or three dates. They never received any response from him after that. It was like he never existed at all.

But for her, it is too late. He *did* exist! And the proof of that existence is slowly growing in her womb right now.

She picked up her purse and started to leave. She can't afford to miss her doctor's appointment today. She is still on her third trimester and she doesn't want to take chances.

She avoided Jill on her way out. She doesn't know what to say to her when she asked why Justin wasn't going with her. She is far too confused and the only thing that matters to her now is making it to her gynecologist.

She had another sonogram and her gynecologist performed some other tests. She waited patiently in her office, while she came back with the test results.

“Sweetie, you are still working, aren’t you?” Her doctor asked.

She nodded.

“Do you sleep late? Or work under pressure?”

Adrienne shrugged. “I worked for the city’s best-selling beauty and lifestyle magazine. What do you think?”

The doctor checked her tests again.

“Well, I am gonna have to advise you to take a leave for a while. Maybe for the whole duration of the first trimester, at least.” Her doctor said.

Adrienne was instantly struck by panic. How she wished the Justin was here to comfort her and assure her that everything is going to be okay.

“What is wrong?” She asked nervously.

“Nothing to cause too much panic, really. It’s just that you have a sensitive pregnancy. I just want to make sure that your hormones are at the level they should be, and I do not want you to have anemia on the course your pregnancy. The more you are subject to stress or pressure, the more you risk miscarriage. We don’t want that. I am gonna have to give you medicine for your blood, hormones and to make sure that the baby holds on to your uterus. But I do advise you to eat right as well, and get plenty of sleep. Don’t push yourself too much.”

Adrienne was quite worried when she went home. She needed to talk to Justin. She must have called him more than ten times, but she didn’t get any answer from him.

She dialed Jill’s number.

“How was the doctor’s appointment?” Jill asked.

Adrienne knew that she may not want to disclose her current problem with Justin, but she can share the load of her worries about her pregnancy to Jill.

“The doctor told me that I have a sensitive pregnancy and is practically advising me not to work for a while to make sure that I don’t miscarry.”

“What? What will Jada do without you?” Jill asked. “And what is the cause of this?”

Adrienne shook her head.

“Adrienne!”

“I’m shaking my head.” Adrienne said. “I don’t know what to do, Jill.”

“What did Justin say?” Jill asked.

“He doesn’t know about it yet. He... he was busy today.”

“Well, I’m sure that he will ask you to submit your resignation by tomorrow. You don’t need to work, Adrienne. Justin can take care of you.”

“I know that Jill. But I can’t be idle you know. I can’t depend on Justin to make a living for us.”

“Honey, no offense. But Justin can take care of you and the whole empire that you will create together.”

“I know that... but what if one day, he just realized that he doesn't want me anymore?” Adrienne said sadly.

“I don't think that is going to happen, sweetie. Remember, I was dating Mike?” Jill said. “He told me that Justin is so in love with you. He said that you were exactly like his mother. You are exactly what he was looking for. And you said yourself that his parents looked like they just got married.”

Tears fell down Adrienne's eyes. She remembered that Justin is ignoring her currently.

“I'm gonna have to call you back.” She told Jill.

He went home late that night. He didn't say a word to her at all. She went inside the bathroom and cried. She felt so helpless. He's waging a cold war and she didn't know what she did to deserve it.

She took a deep breath and marched up to the balcony where he is smoking, lost in his own thoughts.

“What is wrong, Justin?” She asked summoning all the courage she has.

He shook his head slowly.

“Can you leave me be for a while, Adrienne?” He said coldly. “I need to think.”

She bit her tongue and then she spun around and decided to sleep on the guest room. She cried all night. She doesn't have any idea what was wrong. How could Justin turn so cold in less than twenty-four hours? Has he changed his mind about marrying her? Why? Does he have a problem in the office and it's affecting their relationship? Is that how he is and how he will be for the rest of their lives?

She didn't go to the office the next day. She made herself vegetable salad and a glass of milk. She drank her vitamins and then she rested.

When she woke up, she decided to scan some magazines and hoped that an idea for an essay would pop up in her head.

But after an hour, all she could come up with is how men could make you feel like a queen one day and ignore you like a stranger the next. And that is not an idea that she can work on yet. It would be too painful for her to ponder upon.

Justin hasn't called her and hasn't gone home by seven like he usually does.

She couldn't figure out anything. For her, she hasn't done anything wrong. But why is Justin acting like he doesn't know her? Like he doesn't have anything to do with her.

She fell asleep by ten-thirty. She dreamed that she was cradled in his arms. That he was kissing her... making her feel that he still wants her.

"Justin." She whispered.

Suddenly, she felt that she was really drowning in the sea of pleasure and she felt hard muscles touching her, awakening her senses.

She opened her eyes, and saw Justin's rugged face, his eyes, a dark shade of blue staring down at her.

“Justin.” She whispered again.

His face descended and he kissed her savagely. She had missed him so much. She can feel the intensity of his need, his urgency. She didn’t care that she’s got unanswered questions for him. Now, she needed to feel him. She needed his touch, his love.

She wrapped her arms around him and matched the intensity of his kisses. He made love to her with so much passion... too much that she was afraid that she might not be able to handle it.

He thrusted faster and faster, until she felt him climax and he stared at her in passion-drugged eyes.

“You’re mine, Adrienne.” He whispered before he collapsed on top of her.

She hugged him to her.

“I’m yours, Justin.” She whispered to him

He pulled away from her and lied on his back. He didn't say anything for a while. He just stared at the ceiling.

Adrienne stared at his profile. His look was dark and Adrienne itched to find out what is going on his mind.

"Justin..." She started. "Tell me what is going on."

He didn't answer. He continued to stare at the ceiling, like he didn't hear anything she said.

"What's the deal, Justin?" She insisted.

Finally, he turned to her. She could not fathom the look on his face.

"What is wrong with us, Justin? You can't just not talk to me. If you have issues, and problems, let me know. I can't go fight with you in this cold war you are launching against me. I'm not a fortuneteller."

He took a deep breath. "I know." He said. Then he breathed sharply again. I don't care, Adrienne. I realized that I love you more than anything else. That I am willing to take a chance. I am willing to do anything, just to keep

you. All the other couples... will have their own secrets. This one can be ours. I don't care."

"What?" What he just said didn't make sense to her at all.

"I don't care if this baby is not mine, Adrienne. I will love it and take care of it like my own..." He said.

She propped up on her elbow and stared at him in disbelief.

"What did you say?" She asked.

He took a deep breath. "I... I know that I came to your life as just the second guy. I don't care. I loved you. You chose me over Troy. I don't care whatever you did with Troy before we officially became together. Before I became the only guy."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" She raised her voice.

He took a deep breath again. "I got a call from... Kimberly. She told me that you and Troy slept together before you came to the Bahamas. And that, this baby might not be mine." He said miserably. "But I told you, I do not care."

You told me that you didn't want to be unfair to me when I proposed to you. I take full responsibility and I don't want to lose you."

"You don't care?" She asked him. All hell breaking loose. "I do! I do! I do!" She shouted at him. "What do you take me for, Justin Adams?"

He took a deep breath. He looked like he was struggling to say something, but couldn't bring himself to do so.

Tears stung Adrienne's eyes. She couldn't believe what she just heard. She couldn't believe that Justin could think so lowly of her.

She stood up and staggered to put on some clothes.

"Where are you going?" He asked.

She whimpered but didn't answer his question.

"Come on, Adrienne. I already said I don't care." He said. "I can't stand being close to you and not hold you. Not love you. Let's call this whole nightmare behind us and let's start over."

When she finished putting her clothes back, she took a deep breath and faced him. Her eyes were blinded by tears.

"I also said, that I *do* care!" She said angrily. "And if you cannot stand being close to me without holding me... then I would be happy to end your agony! You didn't have to be close to me ever again!"

"Adrienne..." He stared, sitting up on the bed.

"I can't have you look at me even for just a second and think that I cheated on you! I cheated on Troy, yes! But I *never* cheated on *you*, Justin Adams! But I cannot blame you for thinking otherwise, can I? And worse! I cannot have you look at your own child, and think that he isn't yours!" She said angrily.

Before he could utter another word, she took off his ring and threw it at his face. "Damn you, Justin Adams! Go to hell!" She said angrily. "Yuan and Jill will make arrangements for my stuff!"

She hurriedly walked out of the bedroom.

“Adrienne, wait!” He called. But she ran to her apartment. It took him a few seconds to dress up decently. She closed the door of her apartment just as he opened his to run after her.

She heard him bang the front door and stagger for the knob.

“Baby, please...” He pleaded on the other side.

He was gently banging his forehead on her door in plea. She leaned her back on the other side of the door, and cried her heart out.

Paroxysme

*French for Paroxysm, meaning: a sudden violent
emotion or action.*

It was two in the morning when Adrienne opened her eyes again. She cried for more than an hour. She crawled to her bed after tiring of listening of Justin's voice on the other side of her door, pleading her to open it so they could talk.

But she could not believe what he just said. She couldn't believe that he could think that the baby she is carrying was not his. She couldn't believe that Kimberly would go to such depths just to make her miserable.

She had a man in her life before. She always felt that she was not good enough for him. He never appreciated her. Had she not met Justin, she might have been convinced that that just the way life is for her. And she would be content to have known that she will always be second best. That she had to work harder than others to get the respect she deserved. Kimberly did her worse trying to break her

and Troy up. She slept with him. Had she been in love with Troy, it would have shattered her. And now, when she thought they cannot touch her anymore and make her life miserable, Kimberly had to go to extreme lengths to pop her bubble. It's like she has made it her ultimate purpose in life is to make sure that Adrienne doesn't have a permanent smile on her face.

And she cannot believe Justin could ever look at her so low. But why wouldn't he? She's been sleeping with him when all the while, she had a boyfriend. A boyfriend that she had never slept with!

She wondered what she has done. She wondered what sins she has committed to deserve all the punishment she is suffering from now.

She called Yuan. The second she said *Hello*, he knew that she was in trouble. He agreed to come immediately.

Yuan and Jill knocked on her door around two-thirty. Her eyes were so puffy, and she was still whimpering when she met them.

"What is wrong?" Yuan asked.

Again, she broke down. She must have underestimated the amount of love she felt for him. At that moment, she was torn and broken. She cried hard, and in between sobs, she told them what happened.

“Is sleeping with Troy not enough?” Jill said angrily. “What the fuck does Kimberly want from you? She’s is the evil of all sisters! Evil! Wicked!”

“I thought she has gone too low!” Yuan said.

“I’ve broken up my engagement with Justin, you know.” She told them. “I love... him... but... I can’t marry someone who doesn’t trust me. Someone who thinks so low of me!!!”

And she cried harder. All her hopes and dreams of living happily ever after with the man of her dreams... are all shattered. He was perfect. But he doesn’t trust her enough. And to deny parentage of the baby she is carrying is more than she could handle.

She hugged her pillow tightly, while Jill sat beside her caressing her back.

“Come on, sweetie. Justin loves you.” Jill said.

“But that is not enough. How can love survive without... trust?” She asked.

Yuan sighed. “Doesn’t he know that Kimberly hates you enough to make sure that she shatters every happiness that you feel in your life?”

She cried again. And suddenly, she felt some pain in her abdomen. She remembered that the doctor warned her about having too much emotional and physical stress.

“God! No!” She wailed.

“What is happening?” Yuan and Jill asked in a panic.

“My baby...”

She stood up and quickly walked to her bathroom to check her underwear. She panicked when she saw a spot of blood.

“Guys... I’m... I’m having a spotting.” She wailed.

“Are you sure?” Jill asked.

Adrienne nodded wearily.

“God! Let’s go. You need to go to the hospital.”

Jill grabbed Adrienne’s coat and they hurried to the elevator. Yuan hailed a cab and ordered the driver to go to Mt. Sinai General Hospital.

Adrienne took short breaths. She was terrified. Her heart is beating faster and she still feels the pain in her tummy. She was praying hard that it was just a spotting. That she will not miscarry. No matter if Justin turns his back on his own child, she will not. She will have this baby on her own and shield it from all the pain in the world.

She couldn’t help crying. Her hands were sweaty and she was feeling very cold.

“Oh God! Please no!” She silently pleaded.

“Please relax, Adrienne. It will only make it worse. Please relax.” Yuan said.

She was taken to the emergency room. Her gynecologist came a few minutes after they arrived. She was given a mild sedative as clearly, she cannot help panicking and her doctor told her she is just increasing the chances of miscarriage if she will not calm down.

After a few minutes, she fell asleep.

In her dreams, she was carrying her baby in her arms. She knew even if in the end it will be just the two of them, everything will be alright.

Justin was broken and miserable. He was confused. He knew he loved Adrienne with every fabric of his soul. His world revolves around her and the baby she is carrying now.

The baby she is carrying...

He didn't want to believe Kimberly. But what she had told him stirred feelings of jealousy in him. A feeling that he wasn't able to control for some time. And when he was

able to get a grip of it, it was too late. The damage was already done.

And he was afraid to lose Adrienne. He might already have.

She was so furious at him. He instantly saw hatred in her eyes when she threw his engagement ring in his face.

Didn't he know that Kimberly slept with Troy, because he was Adrienne's? Didn't he know that Kimberly always made sure that she had their mother's love and trust? Didn't he know that Kimberly can go to extreme lengths just to make Adrienne miserable? And what reason does Kimberly have to tell him *'out of concern'* that he was recognizing another man's child as his heir?

Why did he believe her? Why did he hurt Adrienne? Why did he even think for a second that the baby she is carrying wasn't his?

Tears rolled down his face. He was lost. He doesn't know what he will do to get her back. And he wanted to trust her. Before he went home last night, he has already made a decision that he wouldn't let what Kimberly told him get in the way of his happily ever after with Adrienne.

More and more, he was feeling remorse. He wanted to punch himself. He wanted to scream.

“Oh God!” He whispered. “Please give me another chance.”

His mobile rang.

“Justin Adams, if you really still love and care for Adrienne, you would come down to Mt. Sinai!” Yuan said angrily on the phone.

“What? What happened?” He asked.

“What happened? Well, she is in danger of losing the baby... that, by the way, is not yours, right?”

And Yuan hung up on him.

Panicked gripped his loins. He quickly grabbed his car keys and drove to Mt. Sinai.

“God, please.” He begged absentmindedly.

He ran to the nurse's station. He asked for Adrienne Miller and was given the room number.

Outside the door, he found Yuan, looking tired. It was already five in the morning and it looked like Yuan didn't get sleep last night. When he saw him, he raised a hostile brow at him.

"Is she okay?" He asked nervously.

Yuan closed his eyes for second and then he took a deep breath.

"So far, yes. But did you know that Adrienne's pregnancy was sensitive? Oh, you wouldn't know that! Because you missed the doctor's appointment the other day and you didn't talk to her for a whole two days!" He said furiously.

"Look Yuan, please..." He pleaded.

"For the record, Justin Adams, no one has touched Adrienne except for you! You know that. You were her first. Hell, she stopped kissing Troy the night she met you!

If you didn't want to acknowledge your own child, then don't!"

Jill emerged from Adrienne's room. She frowned when she saw him.

"Did you know that before you left Chicago, she got her period? She told us that she was so embarrassed to ask your cousin, Ian, for a tampon. Go ask Ian if you don't believe us. If you still think that the baby..." Jill said.

"The baby is *mine!*" Justin said firmly. Then he took a deep breath. "God, I know it is mine... I... I just love her too much! And the thought of her being touched by another man is too much for me to handle."

"Yes, she did cheat on Troy... with you. But she never cheated on you... not even with Troy." Yuan said. "She wasn't happy with Troy. She didn't love him. But she was happy with you... and she loves you."

Tears were peering in Justin's eyes. He felt hatred... for himself. For being gullible. For believing someone else other than Adrienne.

“Is she awake?” He asked weakly.

“No. She’s sleeping now. But I don’t think she would want to see you if she were awake.” Jill said.

“But I have to see her, you see. God, I love her! I want to make things right.” Justin pleaded.

Yuan and Jill sighed.

Jill turned the knob and opened the door.

“Try.” Yuan said, and then both him and Jill went away.

Justin stared at Adrienne’s face. She looked peaceful. He sat beside her. He took her hand in his. He brought her hands to his lips.

The moment he smelled the scent of her, he lost it.

He cried. He always thought that his life was a fairy tale. Now, he was silently praying that his princess would take him back. He knew that he loves her with all his heart. Not just her... the baby she is carrying too. *Their* baby.

Now, he knew without a doubt that the baby was his. And he was stupid! He was a fool. He was furious at himself. He was furious at Kimberly. He was an asshole, he thought. He fell perfectly into Kimberly's trap. She believed what her venomous tongue had to say.

Adrienne's father and mother flew to New York and arrived the hospital that evening. Justin was sitting outside the room with Yuan.

"What happened?" Adrienne's father asked.

He didn't say anything for a while. He stared at Adrienne's mother and he knew he couldn't stop himself from showing that he was mad.

"Why don't you ask your great first daughter what happened first." He said coldly.

"What does Kimberly have to do with this? She's in Boston!" Adrienne's mother was quick to her first daughter's defense.

“With all due respect, Mrs. Miller, Kimberly has done a lot of outrageous things to Adrienne that you were not aware about.” Yuan said, not being able to stop himself.

“Kimberly would never do anything wrong to Adrienne.” Her mother said.

“Mrs. Miller, you have no idea!” Yuan said, trying to control his anger.

“Then tell us. What would Kimberly possibly do to her?”

Yuan shook his head. Then he took a deep breath. “Did you know how Adrienne and Troy broke up?”

“Because Adrienne cheated on him... with this man!” Kimberly’s mother said pointing at Justin.

Yuan shook his head. “That’s what Kimberly told you. But if truth be told, Adrienne caught Kimberly and Troy in bed together.”

“What? No!” Mrs. Miller said shaking his head.

“And that wasn’t enough. She had to go out of her way, to call Justin to tell him that the baby she is carrying was Troy’s! For the record, Adrienne never slept with Troy... ever! But Kimberly did.”

“Yuan, please. Enough.” Justin said quietly. “What Kimberly told me, it was still up to me to believe. I did. It was my biggest mistake. I was gripped with jealousy first. And we had a fight because I was an asshole. And because of that, we almost lost our baby. My baby.”

Adrienne’s father closed his eyes while digesting everything that has been said.

“Kimberly would never sleep with someone else’s boyfriend! She’s too prim for that. And what she said about Adrienne’s baby...”

“Marina, enough!” Adrienne’s father growled. “Please, stop! Stop it! This was my mistake! I shouldn’t have... I thought that you could love Adrienne as if she was your own! But for years, you made her suffer!”

“I could never love her! Everytime I look at her, I see... *her!*” Mrs. Miller cried.

“I loved your daughter like she was my own! I have adopted Kimberly and have given her the father she needed. I thought you would do the same to Adrienne. And for years, I have watched how you and that daughter of yours crush *my* daughter’s spirit! I watched you tear her down to pieces. Little by little. Clipping her wings. Preventing her to be the person she could be.”

“The person she could be... is your ex-wife! Who you loved more than anything else! But she left you! She left you because of her dreams! Because he was bought by her father back from you, and she chose to go back to their castle and marry the man who was chosen for her by her father!”

“Shut up, Marina!” Mr. Miller roared.

“Mr. and Mrs. Miller. If you don’t mind, can we go somewhere private to talk about this?” Justin offered.
“Adrienne and I just live about a block away.”

Mr. Miller shook his head.

“No, Justin. I don’t want you to get involved in this. This is a family secret that you shouldn’t have gotten into in the first place. I am very sorry. This is all my fault. I shouldn’t have let it get this far. I am sorry. We will go back in the morning. Both of us need to talk. We will do so in the hotel.”

When they left, Justin stared at Yuan. He couldn’t believe that happened.

“Oh my God, Justin!” Yuan breathed.

“That explains a lot of things.” Justin said to him. “Why Mrs. Miller never loved Adrienne. Why she always favored Kimberly. Why Kimberly always made sure she gets the better end of the bargain and takes away Adrienne’s happiness. I am such a fool, Yuan! And I know I will regret what I did for the rest of my life.”

“You better pray that she forgives you. She loves you, Justin. And Adrienne is not a slut. She never slept around. She only slept with you. And just because you started out as a one night stand, doesn’t mean that she was planning to keep doing it. Everybody makes mistakes. The only one

she made in this case is going home with you. But when it happened over and over again, there was just you for her.”

“I know. And I’m such an... asshole!” Justin breathed in remorse. “Oh God, I love her! I want to spend the rest of my life with her on my side.”

“Even if she was carrying another man’s child.” Yuan said evenly.

Justin took a deep breath. “Even if... I made that decision this morning. But I can’t believe I was such a fool! I let something destroy us. I hurt her when I promised myself that I will not mess it up!”

Justin fell asleep sitting on the chair beside Adrienne’s bed. By midnight, she woke up and found him there. She stared at his profile. Tears rolled down her face. She loved him so much! But how can they move on when she knew his trust in her wasn’t strong enough? Did he come here because he felt guilty that she almost lost her baby? But he still believes that she could sleep with two men at the same time... or at least such a short interval? Was she so jaded in his eyes?

He was so handsome. And there was a time that he was in love with her. When he sees her for who she really was. But Kimberly has shattered all her dreams for a happy ending. What has she done to her sister and her mother for them to treat her the way they do?

If Justin will just acknowledge the fact that he made a mistake in believing Kimberly, and not doubt her anymore, she would forgive him. She knows she doesn't want to spend the rest of her life without him. She knew that no one can match Justin Adams in her heart anymore. She will not be complete without him. But how can they live a complete life when in his mind there is a shadow of a doubt that the baby she is carrying is not his? Even though he has already told her that he doesn't care. That he is willing to accept the baby as his. But she does not want that. She doesn't deserve that thought from him.

She reached out and touched his cheek gently. And then she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Justin was tapped by Jill and Yuan by seven in the morning.

"It's our turn. Mr. Miller is outside. He wants to talk to you. We'll watch over Adrienne." Yuan said.

Justin nodded. He turned to stare at Adrienne's face. She was sleeping soundly. He took her hand and kissed it.

Then he went out quietly to meet her father.

"Hello Justin." Mr. Miller said.

"Good morning, Sir."

"Why don't we go have breakfast?" Mr. Miller asked.

Justin nodded slightly.

They went to the nearest café.

Justin didn't say anything. He knew that Adrienne's father wants to say something and he decided to let him talk first.

"I am really sorry for what Kimberly did to you. She has got a lot to apologize for... not just to Adrienne, but to you, as well. You almost lost your first baby. And I know you feel guilty about it right now. But I know that it wasn't your fault. A chain of events led to this tragedy. It started with Kimberly."

"I hold myself responsible for believing her, even for a second." Justin said.

"But no one can blame you. Your only mistake is you didn't trust Adrienne too well."

Justin nodded. "Maybe I did. But I became too possessive. Jealousy clouded my brain. You see, I love your daughter very much, Mr. Miller. The thought of her being with another man just... made me furious. I let reason leave and jealousy take over. And for that, I will forever be sorry."

"But you never hurt her..."

Justin shook his head. "No. I could never raise my hand to her... or any other woman. But the emotional pain I have caused her, was still unforgivable."

"Adrienne is a special girl. I love her very much. She is the only memory that... the real love of my heart has left to me. You see... I was married to her mother. She was spirited. She is very smart. Very beautiful. Her hair... strawberry brown, with some strands redder than the others. I met her after I graduated medical school. She has

just published her first novel. She was successful. We got married too soon. We had Adrienne too soon. I didn't know her real background. Where she came from. Where her family was. I didn't care. Until one day... we were having problems in our marriage. Money didn't come easy as well. We were struggling, and Adrienne was barely a year old." Mr. Adams sighed. "She filed for a divorce sighting incompatibility as the reason. I was too stubborn, I had too much pride. I couldn't accept the fact that she was divorcing me. And then I found out that she will come back to her family. She ran away from home when she was young. Her father was a hotel magnate in France. She was born and raised in America. When she came back to France, she found out that her father has arranged for her to be married to another man she hasn't met yet. She ran away from home and I do not know how she did it, but somehow, she changed her name. But then she found out that her father was dying. She told me that she had to face the destiny that was hers... that she didn't want to accept. Because her duty to the family's legacy had to prevail. She had to marry the man she was destined to marry since she was young. And I couldn't forgive her for that. We agreed that I will have custody over Adrienne. She felt that if her father finds out that she got married, he will never forgive her. And she couldn't let him take that to his grave. And

so when the divorce papers were signed, I took Adrienne away with me. And I never heard from her since.”

“And you never told Adrienne about her mother?” Justin asked.

Mr. Miller shook his head. “I met Marina after a year. When we got married, I told her that I will give Kimberly a name, and in return, she will take Adrienne as her own. But it was a mistake... Marina realized soon that somehow, even though I have erased my first wife from Adrienne’s past, I haven’t erased her from mine. And that made her hate Adrienne. She saw a picture of Arrianna once and realized immediately that Adrienne looks exactly like her mother. I tried to calm her, I reminded her about our deal. I gave Kimberly a home and a father. She must do the same to Adrienne. But I was blind. I was a fool. Marina never loved Adrienne. And worse, she always made her feel so small. It crushed Adrienne’s confidence. Her mother was very classy... very elegant. She was very confident. Adrienne, on the other hand, grew up thinking she was dumb and ugly. It did a great impact on her personality. She grew up plain and simple, instead of the powerful, confident woman that her mother is.”

“Did Adrienne’s mother try to get in touch with her daughter?”

Mr. Miller nodded. “Yes. But I didn’t want that to shatter the peace of our family. I hid Adrienne from her mother. I hid the truth from her.”

“What are your plans now?” Justin asked.

Mr. Miller sighed. “Tell Adrienne the truth. I know she will hate me. But she has to know one day. And the time has come.”

Justin shook her head. “Can you tell her after the wedding? If she will still have me, that is.” He sighed. “By then, she will be past the first trimester of her pregnancy. She is in a very sensitive stage right now. And I’m afraid, she might not take it well and it could harm the baby.”

Mr. Miller nodded. “I will wait until then to file the divorce papers.”

“What?”

Mr. Miller shook his head. "I love Adrienne more. She is my flesh and blood. What Marina and Kimberly did to my daughter is unforgivable."

Justin nodded slightly. "It shall give you more time to think about it, Sir."

By noontime, Adrienne was ready to be discharged from the hospital. She had a heart to heart talk with her father.

"Where is mother?" She asked.

"She... well, there was an emergency at the hospital. She had to come back. But she was here yesterday. And you were asleep."

Adrienne smiled. "I thought they gave me a mild sedative. I was out most of the day."

"Yen..." Her father started. "I am sorry for what Kimberly did to you and to Justin. I... it was unthinkable."

Adrienne looked down on her fingers.

"I am sorry for Justin too. He loves you know. Very much, I can see. And the poor guy is lamenting over the fact that he believed Kimberly's lies."

"Then he will have to say that to me, Dad." Adrienne said firmly.

"I believe he will." His father sighed. "I hope you will be able to forgive me for all the things that Marina and Kimberly caused you. You deserve better, Adrienne. You deserved better from me as well. I hope you will be able to forgive me."

Justin appeared in her room after settling all the hospital bills. He smiled at her sheepishly when he saw her and for the first time, she felt uncomfortable being in his presence.

"Ready to go home?" He asked.

She nodded. She looked him in the eyes. Tears filled her eyes. *God, she loves him so!*

He went close to her, looking afraid that she will take a step back. But she didn't. She stared at him intently.

“Oh God, honey!” He breathed and hugged her tightly.

“Justin...” She whispered.

“I’m sorry, hon. I’m really sorry! I love you.” He whispered.

She shook her head. “But you didn’t trust me... I can’t be with you Justin... Not like this.”

He took a deep breath. “Then how? Tell me what I needed to do. Tell me what I should do to have your forgiveness and your love again.”

“I cannot have you think, even for just a moment that this baby...” She started.

“The baby is *mine*, Adrienne. I know that. When you told me you were pregnant, I had no doubt in my mind, that it’s mine. When Kimberly told me those... lies... at the back of my mind, I know the baby is mine! But I was a fool! I was stupid! I’m the world’s biggest asshole! I let jealousy cloud my mind. I let it defeat what I already know is the truth! And I will forever be sorry, Adrienne. You can punish me forever for what I have done. But please... do

not take yourself or my baby away from me. Give me a chance to make it right... and I promise you, I will never hurt you or our baby again."

Justin was already crying as he was hugging her tightly... as if he was afraid that when he let her go... he will never be able to get close to her again.

Adrienne just cried. Then she hugged him back. As tight as she could. Afraid to believe and trust what he is trying to tell her. But she knew she was more afraid to lose him and not feel his touch for the rest of her life.

"What do I have to do? What do I have to say? Tell me, Adrienne. I would give everything. I would do everything." He said to her.

She pulled away from him so she could look at him in the eyes.

She could see how broken he was. He hasn't shaved. He has circles in his eyes and he looked like he hasn't slept in days.

She touched him in the cheek gently.

“Tell me, honey. And I would do anything.” He pleaded.
“Tell me what I need to do so you could forgive me for what I have done to you and our baby.”

She smiled gently. Tears still rolling down her face. “You can take me home now.” She said.

It took a moment for him to realize what she is saying. To understand that she has given him the forgiveness he was begging for.

Slowly, he smiled. Then he hugged her again.

“Oh God, honey.” He took a deep breath. “I love you. I promise... I will not hurt you again. I will take care of you and our baby.”

“I love you too, Justin. Promise me, you will never doubt me again.”

He shook his head. “Never again, honey. I promise. I promise.” He said sincerely, before his face descended towards hers and kissed her passionately.

El sol brilla despues de la lluvia

*Translation in English: The sun shines after the
rain...*

Ting! Ting! Ting! Ting!

Adrienne laughed as she heard for the nth time the sound of forks being banged to the crystal glasses, as a signal for her and her new husband to kiss.

She had a dream wedding. Justin's mother went over herself and gave her her own *My Best Friends' Wedding* kind of wedding. They were at the Adams's ancestral home, which is huge. The garden was set up to accommodate more than a hundred guests.

The whole Blush office had flown in to witness their wedding. Balloons and flowers covered the walkways.

She was dressed in a pale lavender gown. Although adjustments had to be made at the last minute, because her

tummy is growing faster than she expected, she knew she looked radiantly beautiful.

When she met Justin at the altar, before he took her hand in his, he mouthed "*You're a fox.*" to her which made her giggle before the priest.

Jill was her maid-of-honor, and Mike was Justin's best man. Her bridesmaids included Ian, Cynthia and Annie.

What made Adrienne a little sad is that Kimberly was not part of the entourage. But she knew she had to be firm. How could she allow her to be part of it, when she almost caused her a miscarriage and a broken engagement?

Her mother was at the church, but she had to fly back to Boston immediately after for an emergency convention. She wanted to make peace with Kimberly and Troy, but she knew that will come in time. For now, she doesn't want feuds to ruin the happiest moment of her life.

She was happy that her father stayed with them though. For her, he was the more important one. He happily gave her away to Justin. He knew that Justin would make her happy. And that meant a lot to Adrienne.

By ten in the evening, fireworks were set out, and she and Justin watched the show with the other guests.

She stared up at him.

He smiled at her. "Thank you, Adrienne Adams. For today. For the happiest moment of my life." He whispered.

"Thank you Justin Adams. For picking me up at Gypsys... and changing my life forever."

He smiled and then he kissed her. They stopped when they heard claps and cheers from the crowd amidst the fireworks.

Adrienne sighed and leaned her head in her husband's shoulder. Her hand went to her tummy to caress the baby that is growing inside her womb.

As she looked at the beautiful fireworks that Justin's mother has set up for their wedding, she smiled and realized how blessed she was this day. Her life is complete.

Adrienne and Justin went to Hawaii for their honeymoon. Justin wanted to go to Asia, however, the doctor strongly advised that Adrienne should not have a very long flight.

It was bliss for them. There was only the two of them and after making love, they wove their dreams.

“We will live in New York?” She asked him.

“Well, I was hoping that we can relocate to Chicago when you reach the sixth month of your pregnancy. I had to transfer there soon, and I can’t be away from you and our baby. You cannot fly anymore on your seventh month, so I was hoping I could get you to agree to live in Chicago already.”

She shrugged. “I don’t care. Now, my priorities have changed.”

“You realized you’re gonna have to quit Blush, don’t you?” He asked her.

She nodded. “But don’t tell me you won’t allow me to work.”

“Well, you don’t need to. I can take care of you, hon. I have enough for both of us... and the baby.”

“But I still want to be doing something.”

“Well, you can write. Maybe it’s time for you to finish that novel you started.”

Adrienne giggled. “Right. Maybe it’s time to take it seriously. I can do that. I can be a full-time mother and a part-time writer.”

Justin nodded. “And a full-time wife, I hope. So we can have another baby a year and a half after this one is born.”

Adrienne laughed. “I will grow big you know! How many kids to you plan to have anyway?”

“I want at least three kids.” Justin said. “I grew up alone. It was sad.”

Adrienne sighed. “I didn’t grow up alone. It was still sad.”

Justin bit his lip. He remembered his talk with Adrienne’s father. He knew that when they get back from their

honeymoon. Her father is going to have to talk to Adrienne about her real mother.

He hugged her tight, as if trying to shield her from the pain that she was about to feel when she learned the whole truth about herself.

A limousine parked in front of Justin's house. Adrienne was curious.

"You or your parents are expecting someone?" She asked him.

Justin stared at her wearily.

"Come on to the tea room. We have guests to meet." Justin said.

Adrienne was confused. But then she thought this could be another of Justin's distant relatives. For the whole week since they returned from their honeymoon, distant relatives from both sides of Justin's families have come to visit them to meet Justin's new bride.

Adrienne was surprised, however, when her father entered the tea room.

“Daddy!” She wailed and rushed to hug him.

“What are you doing here?” She asked him.

Her father stood stiffly and nervously.

He stared at her, with weary in his eyes. Adrienne got confused.

“What’s the matter, Dad?” She asked him.

“Sweetheart... I want you to meet someone.” He said nervously.

Adrienne raised her brow and noticed the figure standing behind her father. She was a very elegant woman, dressed in a white Chanel suit. Her hair tied neatly in a bun behind her head. Her eyes were shining emeralds in her perfect face. Adrienne realized that her eyes were filled with tears. Confusion and panic gripped Adrienne’s senses.

She didn't know what is going on. She stared at Justin, who just nodded at her.

"I will give you time alone." Justin told his father.

Wait! I need you here! What is going on? Adrienne wanted to tell her husband. But he was looking at her with love and encouragement in his eyes.

"I love you." He mouthed before he left the room.

Her father turned to the woman behind him.

"Yen... this is... Arrianna Blanc..." Her father stammered.

Before he could utter another word, the woman launched forward to hug Adrienne and sobbed.

"My baby!" She said.

Adrienne pulled away from the woman. "What is going on, Daddy?"

Her father took a deep breath.

"I am really sorry, Adrienne. I have hidden from you a vital information about yourself... And I hope you can forgive me. I hope both of you can forgive me... Adrienne, this is... your... mother."

"My... what?" Adrienne asked.

"Honey... I... was married to your mother. When you were just a year old, we separated. And... I married Marina. Marina is not your real mother, sweetheart. She is your stepmother."

"And Kimberly?" Adrienne asked.

"She is Marina's daughter with... another man."

"Daddy..." Adrienne started sobbing. She stared at the woman in front of her. "Why? You... left me..."

Her mother cried silently. "I tried..."

"I hid her from you, Adrienne." Her father interrupted the woman. "She tried to get in touch with you, but we were living peacefully. And you were already content to know that Marina is your mother."

“Why, Henry?” Her mother asked. “It was never part of our deal. When we had a divorce, I gave you custody of our daughter. Until I can set things right with my father. But when I came back, you were gone. And when I got in touch with you... you took away my baby from me! I will never take her away from you! I just wanted to see her! I never expected that you erased me from her past!” Adrienne’s first impression of the woman, who has just been introduced to her as her mother was that, she was a strong and confident woman. But now, she looked like she is on the brink of breaking down.

And she felt sorry for her. She felt her pain. She looked like the woman, who was bruised by the fact that her precious child was taken away from her.

And for the first time, Adrienne felt a surge of emotion that felt like a first for her. It was the first time that she felt maternal love. A love that she has been craving for since she was a child. A love that she never felt from the mother she knew.

She went close to Arrianna and hugged her. They poured all the tears of pain, separation and betrayal that her father has brought upon them.

“Adrienne...” Her father said. “Please calm down. You will hurt your babe.”

Adrienne realized that she was not allowed to be too stressed both physically and emotionally. She might still be in danger of having miscarriage. So she forced herself to calm down.

“Oh my God!” Her mother exclaimed. “You... you’re pregnant, baby?”

Adrienne nodded. “Yes... Mama. I’m pregnant.”

Her mother’s eyes were filled with tears again. Adrienne smiled and hugged her again.

“I hope you two can forgive me. Especially you, Adrienne. You didn’t get the love you deserved while you were growing up. And that is because of me.”

"It's alright, Dad. I don't blame you. Now, that I met my real mother, I am happy. I love you, Dad. We all make mistakes. And Mom and I have a lot of catching up to do."

"Yes. Like twenty-six years." Adrienne's mother murmured. Adrienne felt that she might not be able to forgive her father as easily as she can forgive him.

Adrienne hugged her father.

"Thank you, Adrienne. For understanding. For being the perfect daughter a father could ever ask for." Then she turned to her mother. "I will leave you two alone."

They sat on the couch. They were both smiling. Adrienne realized how exactly she looked like her mother. Now, it wasn't a wonder to her anymore why she didn't look a single bit like the mother she knew, and Kimberly. She even starts to realize why she was never loved by Kimberly and her mother.

"You were just recently married?" Her mother asked.

She nodded. "Not two weeks ago."

“That was your husband, who was just here a while ago?”

“Yes. Justin. He’s wonderful... Mama.”

“It was sad, Adrienne. That I didn’t see you while you were growing up. I... had a very complicated life. My father is too much of a disciplinarian. I didn’t grow up with him. I was raised in the States. I rebelled against him when I met your father. But then I had to go home, and... marry the man I was supposed to marry... on his request. He had a brain tumor. I had to file for a quick divorce from your father. I had to sacrifice the family I have... you and your father... because my own father was dying. And I didn’t want him to curse me to his grave. I wanted to make peace with him. And your father and I were having our own problems at that time. I am very sorry you suffered from our sins.”

“All my life, I wondered why I never did anything right in mother’s eyes. I wondered why she loved my sister but hated me. Now, I understand. I was not related to them by blood.”

“It’s mine and your father’s sins that you paid for, my child. And I intend to make up for that.”

“Are you staying long here?”

“I can fly once in a while. I have the family business to think about. We own a hotel chain in France, did you know that?”

Adrienne shook his head.

“Of course. This was the first time you heard about me. I have dreamed about you. I have searched for you.”

“How did you find me?” She asked.

“Your father finally contacted me. He told me that he wanted to set things right for once. I came down as soon as he called.”

“I wondered why he didn’t tell me about it before I got married. You would have been there, Mama!”

“I know. But I think he had a reason. I think he didn’t want to put more pressure on you because of this while you were happily getting married. And I see, you married well. And what a handsome man, your husband is!”

"I know, Mama. I never, in my wildest dreams, thought I would marry him. We met only five months ago."

"Whirlwind romance." She said and Adrienne nodded.

"It was a wonderful wedding. It was a fairy tale. I thought it was God's gift to me... because I... didn't actually have a very happy childhood. I am hoping I will have a happy marriage."

"I am very sorry, Adrienne. For making you suffer for something that I and your father have brought upon ourselves. You should go to Paris one time. We have a lovely home there as well."

"You married the man your father wanted you to marry?"

She nodded. "And I didn't regret it. I had a happy marriage too. Pierre was a very kind man. He was a genius in business. I have learned to love him. We were blessed with a son. Jin. He is two years younger than you are. He knows about you. My husband knows about you as well. There was a time when Pierre wanted to go to court to petition your custody so you can grow up with your

brother. But then, we realized that we didn't want you to experience all of those ugly things at such a young age. I was content to keep quiet. I tried to search for your father, just so I could see you. Maybe he was afraid that I will take you away from him for good. He never responded."

"How is Jin like?"

For the first time, she saw a bright smile on her mother's face. "He is wonderful. A heartbreaker though. But he is very good-looking. As good-looking as your husband. But he never wanted to take women seriously. Never had a girlfriend. I was afraid that he will not settle down. Good thing that you are already expecting. I never had to worry that I will not have grandchildren to drool over."

Adrienne smiled back. "Don't lose your hope. My husband never had a girlfriend before me. And five months after he met me, he rushed me to the altar! Oh, he got me pregnant first, but he proposed before he knew I was already expecting."

"You seemed very happy, my child. I am happy for you."

They heard a knock and then Justin entered the room.

“Justin!” Adrienne exclaimed. “I want you to meet my mother... my real mother.”

Justin smiled and shook her mother's hand.

Justin said something in French. Her mother answered him in French as well. For two minutes they were speaking to each other and Adrienne didn't know what they were saying.

“That's not good, you know!” She said teasingly and her mother laughed. “And I didn't know you speak French quite well!” She said to her husband.

“I am multi-lingual. Came with the privilege of being an heir to your family business.” Justin said. “I'm sure your mother is in exactly the same position.”

Her mother nodded. “I was an only child. And I was the heiress to my father's hotel chains. I was sent to the States and different other countries, to study business and languages. I did the same to Jin. He can court any woman in their native tongue! And he's using his language skills very well.”

Adrienne laughed. "Justin, I have a brother! And he's my real brother! By blood!"

Justin drew Adrienne close to him. "I am happy for you honey. It's so good to know that your life will change and you have finally reunited with your mother."

Justin had lunch prepared so his parents can meet Adrienne's.

"Oh, here comes my mother." Justin said as Mrs. Adams descended the steps to join them for lunch in the garden.

"Mom." Adrienne said to her mother-in-law. "I want you to meet someone."

The minute Mrs. Adams saw Adrienne's mother, she wailed. "Oh my God, Arrianna! Is that you?"

"Christine!"

Then they hugged each other as Justin and Adrienne looked at each other in awe. Both of them are confused.

“Do you know each other?” Justin asked.

“Oh yes. Arrianna was my roommate in college. Well, she only stayed in NYU for two years. But she was my best friend then! I have lost contact of her for some years now. But just three years ago, I stayed in one of her hotels in Paris. What are you doing here?” She asked Adrienne’s mother.

“Well... I came to see my daughter, who I was parted with for years.” Adrienne’s mother said.

“Who? Adrienne? Adrienne is your daughter?” Mrs. Adams asked.

Adrienne nodded happily.

“How can this be?” Mrs. Adams asked.

And so they told her the whole story.

“Didn’t you remember, when we were in college, we told each other that when we marry, we will betroth our children?” Mrs. Adams laughed.

Justin put his arms around Adrienne's shoulders. "Well, that worked out exactly as you planned, without you having to do anything."

Adrienne laughed. "This is a beautiful coincidence."

"More like destiny, if you ask me." Mrs. Adams beamed and Justin smiled at his wife happily.

"I just learned that we will be sharing a grandchild soon." Adrienne's mother said happily.

"Oh, tell me, I couldn't wait!" Mrs. Adams beamed. "I've been dreaming of having a grandchild for some time now. I didn't think my son would indulge me soon. I was very happy when they announced their engagement and the arrival of a new member of the family."

That night, Adrienne lied in Justin's arms happily. Her mother was in the guest room across the hall. She has forgiven her father. It might take time for her mother to be in good terms with her father but Adrienne was very happy that they are at least on speaking terms. She felt bad for her father. He was quite determined to file a divorce. Adrienne couldn't blame him. She knew that her mother

had to pay for her own sins. It does not make her happy at all, but she prayed with all her faith that she and Kimberly will not be able to cause havoc to her life anymore.

“I love you.” Justin told him.

She stared up at him. “Thank you, Justin Adams. You are my four-clover leaf. Things looked up to me the day I met you.”

She leaned down to kiss him. They made love slowly. She felt all his love, all his adoration, and all his soul in their lovemaking.

When they finished, she contentedly stared up at him.

“I love you.” She said.

“I love you too.”

“I love you more.” She told him.

He shook his head. “Not possible.”

“Seriously?”

He nodded. "Seriously."

She giggled. "Will you still love me when I grow as fat as a cow? I will be very big after two or three more months. Will you grow tired of me?"

He shook his head and laughed. "How could I? You're a fox!"

And then he kissed her passionately.

ABOUT JERILEE KAYE

(Or all that I am not)

First of all my surname is not Kaye. It's my nickname.

Second of all, I don't make a living out of writing novels, although it would be nice if I could someday. It's a hobby for me and I indulge my imagination in between office deadlines (at my boss's expense) and in times when I am having a very bad case of insomnia (at the expense of my health).

Thirdly, I am not married (although I might be married to my work), but I have been with my Sam for more than a decade now.

I am not in my forties, not even in my thirties. But I am thankful to have made it to my mid-twenties with complete limbs and cancer-free (knock on wood).

I am not Arabic, although I have lived in Dubai, for almost two years now.

I am not a journalism graduate, nor am I in a publishing line of work, much to my frustration. But I enjoy building business relationships and frying my brains out during forecast weeks.