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For those who have ever worked in the customer service industry; I salute you.

No fictional people were offended during the writing of this book.

Chapter 1

Trippa: [tree-pah]

1. Tripe. Stomach of a pig, cow, or sheep.
2. Uhm. Ew.



I blinked, wondering if I looked like that cartoon owl from the old Tootsie Pop commercial. “Say again?”

My boss leaned back in his office chair and said, “I’ve got to let you go, Sibby. Hate to do it, and it’s not personal. It’s the economic climate. Things have changed; things have slowed down. So we have to downsize.”

Economic climate?

I thought only uppity financial spokespeople used that phrase. “Ed, please don’t do this to me,” I pleaded. “I’m good at editing text book copy. I know how to format e-books. I can do more, really. I’ll even work for less!” I sounded desperate, and at that moment, I really didn’t like myself.

But Mama had to eat. And pay rent. And fly to Boca to visit her grandparents. They played shuffleboard. What the hell was shuffleboard, anyway?

“I’m sorry. I know you’re really good at your job.”

“Then why is this happening? Is it how I dress? I can start wearing boxy suits and clunky heels if that helps.”

I looked down at my scuffed, grey Converse sneakers and skinny jeans. I didn’t have to deal with customers face to face, so it never really mattered how I looked. Or so I had thought.

“I’m not letting you go because of how you dress. There’s nothing wrong with dressing like a college student.”

“Hipster,” I muttered, gently pushing up my jet black Spencer Tracy frames.

“I’m gonna to miss your sense of humor,” he said, shaking his head like he deeply regretted firing me. “You can use me as a reference.”

“Reference? You made me put on real pants and trek from Brooklyn so you could *fire me*? On a *Monday*? Who does that?”

“I needed the weekend—I was trying to think of a way to keep you on, but I just can’t. And I didn’t want to fire you over the phone. I owe you that much, at least.”

“Oh—thanks? I guess begging at this point is just a little pathetic?”

He gave me a sad smile. It only made me feel more inadequate.

I stood, feeling all the blood rush from my head. Passing out would sink what little pride I had left. “Guess that’s it then, huh?”

“Take care, Sibby.”

I snatched my messenger bag off the back of the chair and promptly dropped it, spilling its contents all over the floor.

Awkward.



I stepped outside into a hot, humid, overcast July afternoon and started sweating immediately.

Sexy.

Okay, time to go home and regroup. I walked to the subway, found a seat on a Brooklyn bound train, and marveled at the lack of people. During rush hour, it was nearly impossible to get a seat, and I was almost always forced to stand with my face in someone's armpit.

Being short sucks.

When I got off the train, I tried to call my boyfriend Matt. No answer. Not shocking since he kept his cell in a desk drawer so he could get work done. Oh well, he'd be home around six. I'd vent about my day and then we'd get tanked. In the meantime, I'd eat a lot of ice cream. Maybe I'd stop by a bakery and get a box of donuts. Eating my emotions sounded pretty good.

I trudged up the fourth floor walk up, mentally whining like I was climbing Mt. Everest. I sank my key into the lock, walked into the one bedroom apartment, and tripped over Matt's shoes.

Dress shoes.

Shoes he only wore to work.

So why were they by the door?

I heard a deep, masculine chuckle.

Approaching the bedroom, I heard the laugh again.

I pushed the door open—

And saw my live in boyfriend of two years in bed with another man.

Oh. My. God.

"Sibby!" Matt exclaimed, scrambling to cover himself. "What are you doing home?"

I glared. "Wrong question." He was naked from the waist up, showing off his impeccably muscled chest. He was hairless and tan. He hadn't always looked like that. I should've known something was up when he started drinking protein shakes and working out all the time.

His companion unfolded himself and got out of bed, grabbing his boxers off of the floor. Before he put them on, I got a full view of his package.

Yowsa!

I'd been clobbered once already today, what with getting fired. Now, I had to walk in and catch my boyfriend cheating on me. With a dude.

Worst. Day. Ever.



I slid my phone out of my pocket and called my bestest friend in the world Annie.

"What up?" she answered.

"Can you meet me?"

"Meet you? It's two in the afternoon. Aren't you at work?"

“No.”

There was a pause. “Where are you?”

“At a bar on the Upper East Side.”

“You’re drinking before sunset. In my neighborhood? You never trek up here.”

“It’s bad, Annie.”

“How bad.”

“Bad bad.”

She sighed. “Give me fifteen minutes. I’m cleaning up lunch at Heather’s and then I’m all yours.”

“I’m at O’Brien’s.” I hung up. “Another tequila pineapple please,” I said to the bartender.

“You shouldn’t drink alone,” he said. He was cute, with an Irish lilt.

“I’m waiting on a friend.”

He peered at me with sympathetic eyes. “You wanna talk about it?”

“Nope.”

Bartenders tended to be cheaper than psychologists, but far less effective.

Twenty minutes later, Annie walked in. She had an enviable rack and a blonde, tamable mane. She loved sports and didn’t get attached to guys. Our friendship went back to freshman year in college and we were intensely loyal to each other.

Without saying a word, she plopped down a bar of dark chocolate in front of me.

The good, organic, 80% cacao kind.

“You get me,” I stated.

“What number are you on?” she asked, hanging her purse on a hook underneath the bar.

“I don’t know, ask him,” I said, gesturing to the bartender with my drink, liquid sloshing over the rim of the glass.

“Vodka tonic please. And what number is she on?”

“Three.” Only it sounded like he said *tree* because of his accent.

“Three?” Annie raised her eyebrows. “How long have you been here?”

“An hour,” the bartender answered for me, grabbing a highball glass and filling it with ice.

“So, what brought about this day-drinking?” Annie asked.

“It hits in threes,” I said. “Or *trees*.” I couldn’t do an Irish lilt to save my life.

“What does?”

“Tragedies.”

“Oh, boy. Start with the first one,” Annie stated, taking a sip of her drink.

“Well, I got fired this morning.”

“What? Why? You’re good at your boring job!”

“Hey,” I protested. She looked at me and my shoulders sagged. “Yeah, all right, but it was still a job—my job. I’m a fan of money. It pays for things like, you know, rent and food.”

“And tequila pineapples.”

“Exactly. Then I go home and catch Matt in bread with someone.”

“Bread?” Annie asked.

“I think she means, ‘bed’,” the bartender offered.

“I got that, thanks,” Annie said sarcastically.

“Just trying to help,” he said.

“Can you not listen?” I demanded of him. “You’re hot and Irish, but I really, really don’t need a stranger witnessing my drunken misery.”

“I respect that,” he said stepping away to the other end of the bar.

“What did she look like?” Annie asked.

“Who?”

“The woman you found Matt in bed with.”

“I never said it was a woman.”

Annie’s eyes opened wide. “No.”

“Yes.”

“Matt’s gay?” both Annie and the bartender said in unison.

“Little bit.” I looked at the bartender. “I told you not to listen!”

He shrugged, but said nothing.

“Holy shit on a stick!” Annie said.

“Don’t say ‘stick’.” I rested my head on the wooden bar. “I refuse to go home tonight. I can’t face Matt.”

“You can stay with me. We could be roomies!”

“You live in a teeny tiny box and your bed is lofted. There’s barely enough room for *you*.”

“Okay, so you’ll have to go home. Eventually. But tonight you can crash on my futon.”

“One less thing to worry about. What am I gonna do about the other stuff?” I moaned.

“About Matt and the job?”

I lifted my head and nodded.

“Don’t do anything for the time being. We’re going out tonight.”

“I don’t want to go out.”

“You’re already out.”

“Oh, yeah. True.”

“Matt is a total wank.”

“Thank you for that,” I murmured.

“I’ll take you to all my favorite bars, we’ll play pool and flirt with guys who wear polos.”

“I hate the Upper East Side.”

“This is my terrain, Sib, I got ya covered. Now, drink up so we can get to our next stop.”

“What’s our next stop?”

“Falafel. You need fuel if you’re going to go out like I go out.”

“I can’t party like you. I’m not frozen at nineteen.”

“That might be the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me,” she teased. “Now drink up.”



I munched on a falafel that was as big as my face, my tongue numb from the spicy sauce. “I think I’m feeling a bit better about Matt,” I said.

Annie raised her eyebrows. “It’s been like ten minutes. And you were a beard for two years —that doesn’t just go away because you eat a falafel.”

“There’s something I’ve been keeping from you.”

“Go on.”

“Put your pita down first,” I said. “I don’t want you to drop it in shock.”

She rolled her eyes, but my best friend humored me. She was good like that.

“Matt’s not that good in bed.”

Annie blinked. “You thought the solution to ‘bad in bed’ was to move in together?”

“Well, now I know why he’s bad in bed. I’m missing a vital piece of anatomy that turns him on.” I shook my head. “It was stupid. We’d been together a year, and we were at that point...”

“Gun point? Because that’s the only way I’d ever move in with a guy.”

“Doesn’t the endless bout of one night stands get old?” I demanded. I was secretly jealous. Or not so secretly jealous. Annie didn’t do relationships and she didn’t care; and neither did the guys she regularly slept with.

“You should try it,” Annie said. “And now you can.”

“Ah, the bright side. Never date a guy who waxes his chest.”

“Noted. So, you’re feeling okay about Matt. Is that the tequila or are you just really fast at processing stuff?”

“Tequila. It numbs everything—even feelings. Truth be told, I think I’m sadder about the job. I got to wear jeans and Converse to work.”

“I know.”

“And even though it wasn’t very creative work, I was still writing.”

“I know.”

“Stop saying ‘I know’!” I yelled.

Annie looked completely unfazed by my outburst. “When life hands you lemons...”

“Rub them all over my open wounds and laugh?”

“Whoa, with the drama.”

“Stick it in a memo and fax it,” I groused.

“What’s a fax?”

“Really?”

“Oh, that was a boring office job reference, right?”

After our falafels, we stepped out onto 1st Avenue and she linker her arm with mine. “You don’t have to have anything figured out tonight.”

“Good, because I plan on drinking a lot of tequila and you know I can’t think when I drink tequila.”

“Let’s just get plastered and pretend we’re still in college. We can muddle through your crappy life tomorrow—with colossal hangovers.”

“My life isn’t that crappy,” I protested weakly.

She sighed. “Yes. It is.”

Chapter 2

Grappa [grah-pa]

1. Distilled fermented grape skins, seeds, and stalks left over from the winemaking process.
2. Italian moonshine. It's like drinking rocket fuel.



I didn't remember the name of the bar we were in, but we were somewhere on 2nd Avenue, still on the Upper East Side. I knew this because the bartenders recognized Annie and we got drinks fast and the pool table even faster. Even though I was already swaying, I pounded tequila like it was coconut water.

"New life plan: professional tequila drinker," I said, trying to form words with a heavy tongue.

"That's not a thing. Another game of pool?" Annie asked.

"Sure. I'm so gonna beat you this time," I stated.

"Doubtful. Despite what you think, tequila does not give you super powers."

"Oh, yes it does," I said, dropping the plastic triangle on the floor. Annie laughed as she scooped up the triangle and racked the balls.

Ha. Balls.

"Am I more or less coherent than you?" I demanded.

"Less."

"How is that possible? You've been matching me drink for drink."

"I've been drinking Bud Light."

"Ooooooh. Maybe I should slow down?"

"That might be a good idea."

"I'll go get a water." I sifted through the crowd towards the bar and a few minutes later I was back at the pool table.

Annie broke and sank a color ball in the corner pocket, and then leaned over to take another shot.

"Ugh, I'm gonna have to update my LinkedIn profile."

"LinkedIn is stupid and worthless."

"Not if you work in the office environment. Oh, man. What do I say?"

"You can't tell people you were fired, that's for sure."

"I didn't get fired; I was laid off. There's a difference."

"Okay."

"And I have to change my Facebook relationship status to 'single'. I'm a failure on so many levels," I wailed.

"Facebook: almost as worthless as LinkedIn. Who says you have to update anything?"

I could hear the eye roll in her tone. "Am I as pathetic as I sound?" I demanded.

"The truth will hurt."

"Sad. How am I gonna get another job if I don't update my LinkedIn profile?"

"Your turn," Annie said.

“I need another job. Did you hear me?”

“Yeah, I heard you,” she grouched. “The whole damn bar heard you. Now take your shot.”

I set my water down on the corner of the pool table. I tried to line up my pool cue, but I was having difficulty, since I was seeing the blurry outlines of things.

“Need some help?”

I looked over my shoulder at the voice.

Oh. Wow.

Six foot something guy. Dark shaggy hair. Scruff. Because of the dim bar, I couldn't tell the color of the eyes. And not wearing a polo. Flannel. He wore flannel.

My sluggish mind wondered if I'd been transported to Brooklyn before remembering I was on the Upper East Side playing pool. Or trying to.

“No,” I rebuffed his offer, trying to focus on the shot.

I scratched.

The guy laughed. “I think you need a lesson in pool.”

I straightened and glared at him. “Actually, I need another drink.” I took a step towards the bar.

“What are you drinking?” the guy asked.

“Tequila pineapple,” Annie piped up from beside me.

I shot her a glare, but the guy smiled and left. “What are you doing?” I hissed at her.

She shrugged. “Time to get back on the horse. And the horse is hot. And he just went to buy you a drink. And he's wearing a flannel saddle! Totally your type!”

“He's not a horse.”

“You're right—he's a *stallion*.”

I scowled at my best friend.

“Rebound guy,” she went on. “He could be your rebound guy.”

“I want nothing to do with guys. I'm not ready for that.”

“Why not? Matt moved on while you guys were still together—with a dude. Tit for tat, I say.”

“Two guys don't make a right.”

“Two guys makes a gay couple,” she fired back.

I continued to glower at her even as the horse, I mean, hot guy came back from the bar, carting a draft beer and my tequila pineapple.

“Thanks,” I said, taking it.

“No problem. You can make it up to me by losing to me in a game of pool.”

I tried to sputter a witty reply, but after the day I'd had, along with what felt like an entire bottle of tequila, my neurons were no longer firing.

Annie to my rescue. “Sibby would love that.” She handed the guy her pool cue, took her drink, and moved away to sit on a bar stool, throwing herself into conversation with a guy wearing a Red Sox hat.

With no real choice, I said to the horse, “You can break.”

“I'm Aidan,” Hot Guy said.

“Of course you are,” I muttered.

Hot name for a hot guy.

“Sibby.”

“Nice to meet you, Sibby.” He grinned and took a swig of his beer, then set it down so he could rack. He lined up his shot to break and maybe it was the tequila, or maybe it was because

he was really hot, but I found myself getting a bit warm.

He looked over at me and grinned. Without taking his eyes off me, he broke.

Jeez. Really? *Really?*

Two balls found their way into pockets. “You’re solids,” he called.

“Okay.” I stepped towards the pool table, moving around it to try and find a decent shot.

There wasn’t one. I leaned over, trying to angle my pool cue.

“You’re doing it wrong,” Aidan said with an insufferable grin.

“I am not,” I clipped. In frustration, I let my pool cue rip and missed the ball completely.

“Told ya.”

“What, are you a pool shark or something?”

“Yes.” He walked close to me and whispered, “Excuse me.”

“Huh?” I said stupidly. My brain went to a dopey place when Aidan’s hand gently settled on my waist and moved me out of his way so he could bend over and take his shot.

I was still in a fog as he sank two more balls.

He grinned at me. “Offer still stands.”

“What offer would that be?”

“Pool tips.”

“Can you commence beating me quickly so I can get back to my night with my friend?” I looked over in the direction of Annie who was no longer speaking to the guy in a Red Sox hat—she was making out with him.

“Great,” I muttered.

“Are you always this cheerful?” Aidan asked me with a lopsided grin. It would’ve been adorable if I hadn’t had such a shitty day. Who was I kidding? That smile was cute with a capital OHMYGOD.

And I wanted to steer clear of it.

“I had a rough day, okay? So, I’m sorry if I’m not Miss Congeniality tonight.”

He continued to grin.

“Are your friends mad that you ditched them to hang out with an angry hipster girl?”

Aidan laughed—I’d thought his grin was adorable, but it had nothing on his laugh.

Damn it.

“My friend is the guy in the Red Sox hat making out with your friend.”

“Then he’s definitely not upset that you ditched him,” I said.

“It wouldn’t appear that way, no.” He cocked his head to one side as he rested his pool cue against the table. He went to one of the stools in the corner and took a seat. “Why are you having a bad day?”

I wasn’t going to shout across the table to him about my pathetic existence, so I had no choice but to move to the vacant stool next to him. Something inside told me I was never going to see Aidan again, so I figured what the hell, might as well spill my guts.

“I got fired this morning—on a Monday—and when I went home, I walked in on my boyfriend cheating on me!” I took a long sip of my drink, and then followed it up with another couple of swallows. Buzzy tequila head felt like such a safe place.

“Hence the tequila.” He set his beer down on the ledge behind us and stood up.

“Where are you going?”

“Tequila shots. Pool can’t help with that kind of day but more tequila can.”

Like I needed more tequila.

Before I could say anything, Aidan left and a few minutes later came back with a tray of

shots.

“All for me?” I asked sarcastically. There were at least ten shots.

He laughed. “Caleb!”

The guy in the Red Sox hat managed to pull himself away from Annie’s mouth just long enough to look at his friend. “What? I’m busy.”

“Shots,” Aidan said. “Sibby’s had a bad day. You in?”

“Yeah!”

“What about you?” Aidan asked Annie. Caleb and Annie slid off their stools and joined us. We all lifted shots and downed them.



“I kinda can’t feel my face,” I slurred as I pressed my fingertips to my cheeks.

“Really?” Aidan breathed.

“How many shots did we do? I’ve lost my ability to do math.”

“Four each.”

I looked over at Annie and Caleb, now a tangle of arms, legs, and mouths, like a weird sea creature with many tentacles. “They’re not coming up for air any time soon,” I said. “And I’m supposed to sleep on her futon. I can’t go home. Matt is home. Matt and that guy. They were doing it on my brand new fucking sheets!”

“Wait, what? He was with a dude?” Aidan asked in surprise.

“Yeah. Did I forget to mention that part?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Shouldn’t matter,” I stated. “Cheating is cheating, but catching him with a guy adds a whole new layer of complexity to my emotional issues.”

“I get it.” Aidan looked back at our friends and shook his head. “You can stay with me. I live just a couple of blocks from here.”

“I don’t even know you.”

“We’ve done shots. I think that makes us friends or something.”

“Or something. I’m not having sex with you just because you bought us shots. Which was— thanks.”

He grinned. “Did I ask you to have sex with me?”

“Dude—I still can’t feel my face and I have no idea where this conversation is going.”

“Caleb is my roommate. I really don’t want to hear him going at it with your friend.

Solution: you come home with me—he goes home with her.”

“That makes a strange sort of sense.”

“Tequila does that. I’ll take the couch and you can have my bed. No funny business, I promise.

I looked at Annie and the last thing I wanted to do was interrupt the face sucking. “Okay, let’s go.”

Aidan took my hand and led me outside. “I’ll send Caleb a text. He’ll show it to Annie and then she won’t worry that you went off into the night with a stranger.”

“You’re a pretty nice stranger,” I commented. He didn’t let go of my hand, but I found I didn’t care.

Tequila was swell.

“Sometimes, you just need someone to be really nice to you,” Aidan said.

“Amen.”

“So this job you had, what was it?”

“I edited text book copy.”

“That sounds...”

“Boring,” I finished for him.

He smiled. His adorable, cute smile. “Boring, yeah. Was it your dream job or did you stumble into it?”

I shrugged. “Tripped into it, I guess. When I moved up here after college, I worked at a temp agency. One day I was sent to Hanlan and Sons and three months later, they hired me on full time.”

“And the boyfriend—was he your dream boyfriend or did you trip into that, too?”

“I don’t want to talk about him.”

“Okay.”

We walked a few blocks in silence until we arrived at an old brownstone. He unlocked the front door and let me into the vestibule before opening the second door. I followed him across the black and white tiled lobby floor to the back stairs, which he took two at a time, his long legs moving faster than mine. By the time we got to the sixth—and final—floor I was winded. Maybe I should start jogging. Or do Crossfit. Yeah, right. I’d rather do cross *sit*.

“Sorry, things are a bit messy,” Aidan said, pushing open the front door.

“It’s not so bad,” I murmured as I looked around. Old brown couch, white walls, rock and roll posters. Cluttered, but clean—way cleaner than I expected from two guys.

“Want something to eat? Or drink?” He kicked off his shoes and threw his keys on the coffee table.

“Water would be good,” I said, starting to regain feeling in my face.

Aidan headed to the kitchen, and a moment later I heard the faucet being turned on. He returned and handed me a full glass. I took a few swallows and then clutched it in my hands.

“This is the part where I show you my room,” he said.

“Oh. Yeah, sure.”

His room was big enough for a double bed and not much else. There were a few pieces of clothing on the floor, but Aidan didn’t make a move to pick them up. The walls were lined with classic movie posters: *Casablanca*, *The Godfather*, *Scarface*.

“Bathroom’s down the hall,” he said, going to his dresser drawer and pulling out a white Hanes undershirt and some boxers for me to change into.

“Thanks.”

I went to the bathroom, put on Aidan’s clothes and then quickly finger brushed my teeth to remove the taste of tequila pineapples. Turning off the bathroom light, I went into the living room and saw that Aidan was making up the couch. He’d stripped down to his boxers, showing a defined, lean build.

He was being a gentleman, but I so didn’t want to be a lady.

“You should sleep in your own bed,” I said.

He looked up from unfolding a blanket. “I don’t mind crashing on the couch.”

“That’s sweet, but really, I don’t feel right about kicking you out of your own bed.”

“Well, there is another option.”

“Yeah?”

“We could share my bed. If you promise to keep your hands to yourself.”

“Me?” I choked out. We laughed and some of the awkwardness dissipated. I sighed. “I guess that would be okay—sharing your bed.”

We headed back to his room and got comfortable on our designated sides, careful not to touch each other. I settled onto my back and stared at the ceiling. “Aidan?” I whispered.

“Hmm?” he asked sleepily.

“Thanks for making this shitty day not so shitty.”

“Welcome,” he muttered before falling asleep.

Chapter 3

Prosecco [pro-sek-oh]

1. A sparkling white wine from the Veneto region of northeast Italy.
2. Italy's version of champagne. Not a fan.



The moment I woke up, I knew two things. One, Aidan was wrapped around me like a candy wrapper. And two, even my teeth were hungover.

I'd never done the wake-up-with-a-stranger morning and all that awkwardness. At twenty-seven, I didn't really want to learn. I gently removed Aidan's arm from across my stomach. Thankfully, he didn't stir. He looked good when he slept. And I meant so good that I was having to stifle the urge to lean over and stick my finger in one of his cheek dimples.

Yeah. The dude had *dimples*.

Before that feeling overtook me, I got up, changed back into my clothes, and tiptoed out into the living room. Everything was quiet and I wondered if that meant Caleb hadn't returned yet. Knowing Annie, she'd kick him out as soon as she woke up. At least she let her conquests stay the night. Nice of her.

Rifling through my wallet, I found \$38.43 and left it on the coffee table. I scribbled on a piece of junk mail, '*Thanks for the tequila*' before slipping out of his apartment.

I had a bajillion missed messages and voicemails. All from Matt. I continued to ignore them. Some time around eight the night before, I'd turned off my phone. Unfortunately, my silence hadn't been a deterrent to him.

I texted Annie. *Diner? Now?*

A few seconds later, my phone vibrated. *Corner of 86th and 1st. 10 minutes.*

I was close to the diner, and when I arrived there was a lull in customers, so I managed to score an empty booth right away. I ordered two cups of shitty, watered-down diner coffee, sipping mine while waiting for Annie. She strolled in a few minutes later, wearing large Old-Hollywood sunglasses. She slid into her seat and said, "You look like I feel."

"That good, huh? At least I didn't throw up."

"I'm surprised. You were blitzed."

She took off her sunglasses and set them aside, exposing bloodshot eyes and reaching for her cup of coffee. "So what happened with you and Aidan?"

"Nothing. What happened with you and Caleb?"

She grinned. "A lady doesn't kiss and tell."

"You're not a lady."

"Damn right. We hooked up."

"Did you exchange phone numbers?"

"Nope. Did you exchange numbers with Aidan?"

I shook my head. The waitress came over, snapping her gum. We ordered without even looking at the menu. Diner food was standard in New York City. After my third cup of coffee, I was beginning to feel a little less zombified. I started thinking about my game plan for the day.

“I have to go back to Brooklyn and deal with the apartment and Matt. But I don’t want to deal with Matt.”

“It’s a Tuesday—he’ll be at work.”

“That’s the hope. Wouldn’t it be nice if I could wave a magic wand and all of that cheating bastard’s stuff would be out of my place?”

“That would be nice, but what are you actually gonna do about him?”

The waitress set down a stack of pancakes in front of me and eggs in front of Annie. I picked up my fork and said, “I really have no idea.”



I walked into my apartment and listened for any unusual sounds. There were no laughs coming from the bedroom, which made me thank my unlucky stars.

Matt’s clothes were still in the drawers, his shoes still by the door. My first order of business was to call a locksmith. The apartment was a perfect one bedroom, rent controlled, and had been mine before Matt moved in. He cheated, so he would be the one to move out.

While Matt was at work and I waited for the locksmith, I loaded up all of his stuff and shoved it haphazardly into suitcases and boxes. I stripped the bed of sheets now stained with betrayal... and something else.

YUCK.

Matt could have them.

By four in the afternoon the apartment was fairly cleaned out, all of Matt’s belongings were in the hallway, the locksmith was gone, and I was nursing a glass of wine. Now that I was unemployed and boyfriend-less, there was no one to care if I became a lush. Becoming a lush was rapidly turning into my new life goal.

I heard a stream of curses as Matt saw his belongings in the hallway, followed by an attempt to use his old key in the new lock.

“Sibby? Are you home?” Matt called, pounding on the door.

“Go away!” I shouted. “You don’t live here anymore!”

“Come on, Sib, open the door!”

“No! Take your crap and go! I gave you and your new boy a present. Enjoy the sheets, you tool!”

I continued to drink and turned on the TV, cranking the volume when the knocking on the door increased. Eventually, Matt got bored and gave up, and I got drunk enough to pass out.

I woke up around 11:00 PM. My mouth was a bit dry, but I seemed to have slept off any oncoming hangover. I got myself a glass of water and went to the front door. Without removing the chain, I opened the door and peered out into the hallway. No sign of Matt or his stuff. I gave a sigh of relief. I wouldn’t have to deal with him if I didn’t have to see him.

There was no food in the fridge, so I put on my skull and cross bone leggings and grabbed my purse. I headed to the corner bodega and nabbed some staples.

By which I mean junk food. Lots and lots of junk food. Epic sugar coma here I come.

I shoved the Matt situation back into a closet and closed the door. I’d deal with the butt load of issues from his betrayal later. I hadn’t given much thought about the job I’d lost. It was a paycheck, but not much else. I’d been a theater major in college with a creative writing minor,

but when I moved to New York, I needed a job that paid. Editing psychology textbook copy wasn't very fulfilling but it was steady income. End of story.

I got back to the apartment and made myself some dinner. My phone buzzed and I grimaced, thinking it was Matt. I had deleted all his messages and voicemails. There was no point listening to them. What could he say? Sorry I cheated? Sorry you caught me? Sorry you don't have a penis?

Man, I needed shoes to go with all my baggage.

It wasn't Matt, it was Annie.

"Hey."

"Where are you?" she demanded.

"My apartment."

"Come out."

"What? Are you crazy? It's almost midnight."

"Come on. You're single now."

"I'm tired."

"You're not."

"I am," I insisted. "I started drinking early and already passed out once. I made some food and then I plan on going back to bed."

"Wow, that's what I call depression."

"I'm not gonna even deny it."

"You hear from Matt?" she asked.

"He came by earlier, but I had already thrown his stuff out into the hall and had the locks changed. He's gone now."

"Way to be proactive. You sound remarkably composed. Shouldn't you cry over your broken heart?"

I paused. "You'd think so, huh? I still don't really know what to think—or feel, for that matter."

"Hmmm."

"That was a loaded 'hmmm'."

"I wonder if your heart is even broken at all or if it's just your ego."

"Broken ego?" I mulled over. "Yeah, sounds about right. How did I not know he was gay? Come to think of it—how did *you* not know he was gay?"

"It wasn't like he did anything flamboyant. And the guy is into sports."

"I feel like an idiot," I said. "Yeah, this is all about my pride."

She was quiet for a second. "If you change your mind and want to come out—"

"Thanks, but I think I'm in for the night. I've got an early morning appointment tomorrow."

"Oh? For what?"

"I'm going to see the gynecologist—and let me tell you, I'm so not looking forward to *that* conversation."

"Just do it before you're in the stirrups," she recommended. "It's hard to keep your dignity when your legs are spread."

"You would know," I teased.

"Bitch. I'll allow it, though. Your life kinda sucks."

"Great. Now you pity me."

"Do something nice for yourself after the doctor. Get a mani-pedi, or a massage."

"I'm getting my hair cut."

“Tell them your story and maybe you’ll get a free scalp massage. Just do me a favor. Don’t chop off all your hair. No pixie cuts.”

“I did that once and looked like a Q-tip head. No danger of that happening again.”

“What about that new hipster haircut—where half your head is shaved and half of it is long?”

“No. I’m just getting a regular haircut.”

“Promise me.”

“I promise.”

“Okay. How about I come to Brooklyn in the next few days and hang out. We can watch bad movies and eat crap.”

“You’d come to Brooklyn? For me?”

“What can I say? I’m a really good friend.”

I laughed. “Yeah. You are.”



“You should paint,” Annie said.

I looked around the living room. The walls were stark white, like I’d never really moved in. No posters or framed photos. “Yeah, I should paint.” I peeled the label off of my beer bottle. “It was weird, sleeping alone. I had to sleep in the middle of the bed at a diagonal.”

“How did that go?”

“Around 3:00 AM, I got up to take a sleeping pill.”

“I think that’s what killed Judy.”

“Great, the Judy Garland jokes have started.”

“Sorry, it was just too easy.” Annie reached for the plate of lukewarm nachos.

“Well, thanks for not wearing kid gloves.”

“One day, you’ll laugh about everything.”

“Promise?”

“Yeah. Trust me.”

“Okay.” I let out a deep sigh and then changed the conversation. “Tell me about your night out.”

Annie scowled. “I didn’t score.”

“No?”

“I spent most of my night talking to this really cute guy, and I was totally prepared to take him home. He then had to go and inform me that he’s a vegetarian. Soyfucker.” She frowned in disgust. “I have standards, ya know?”

“You’ve got a weird check list.”

“I’m a chef and bacon is my favorite food group. I’m forgiving of a lot of flaws, but not that one.”

“Fair enough.”

“So, have you started thinking about a new job yet?”

“Not yet,” I evaded.

“You need money, right?”

“Who doesn’t need money? I have a little bit in savings to get me by a while.”

“Not enough if you continue drinking the way you do.”

“Whose fault is that?” I demanded. “You’re a bad influence.”

“I’m a great influence.”

“Whatever.”

She looked at me. “What are you gonna do?”

“I don’t know. The idea of networking, calling head hunters, applying to endless jobs in the field that I’ve been working in for the past five years is giving me hives.”

“Dramatic much?”

“Hello. Theater major.”

“Yeah, I recall.”

When I was studying theatre in school, Annie had come to every one of my shows. There had been a lot of them—and most of them were pretty bad. God bless her.

“I don’t want to edit text book copy—and I don’t think I want to work in an office again.”

“All you’ve ever done is work in offices. What else are you gonna do?”

“This is a chance, Annie, a chance to do something different. What is it people say when shit goes wrong? A blessing in disguise? That’s what this is.”

“So what do you wanna do?”

“I have absolutely no idea.”

“Well, as long as you have a plan...” she teased.

“I don’t have one of those either. I’m jobless, boyfriend-less, plan-less.”

“You’re not freaking out, are you? That’s so unlike you.”

“I’m freaked out because I’m not freaking out.”

“Still no Matt tears?”

“None. It’s like, none of the water in my body will come out of my eyeballs.”

I went into the kitchen and grabbed two more beers. I handed her one and she said, “So, are you gonna sit around and collect unemployment while trying to figure out your life?”

“For the time being. But unemployment doesn’t go very far. I won’t even be able to afford Thai takeout. And besides, I think I’m one of those people that need to do something. If I don’t, I’ll go crazy.”

“You mean, being a slug doesn’t work for you?”

“Exactly,” I said. “Can I ask you a favor?”

“What?”

“Will you sleep here tonight?”

“Okay, but I’m the big spoon.”



The next morning, I sent Annie off to work with a cup of coffee in a travel cup and a full stomach. I felt like a wife in the 50’s. After I pattered around a bit on my computer, I finally got serious.

LinkedIn.

Just to see what was out there in the way of jobs. Not that I knew what kind of job I wanted. It was overwhelming and I didn’t even know where to start or what to look for. My phone vibrated. Matt. The guy just wasn’t getting it. But instead of ignoring him this time, I answered.

“What?”

“Sibby, can we please talk?” Matt asked. He sounded desperate.

Good.

“What do you want to talk about? You wanted out of our relationship, and instead of being a man and coming clean with me about it, you had sex with someone in our apartment—on our *brand new sheets*. That we got on sale. At Pottery Barn. You know how much I love Pottery Barn!”

“I’m sorry—”

“Yeah, well, it’s too little, too late! Stop calling me.”

I hung up on him and then blocked his number, grabbed my keys, and went to go find me some paint.



Annie squinted and frowned, cocking her head to one side in confusion. “I know you said you wanted to paint, but this is not what I thought you’d do. It looks like you hired a kindergartener to throw paint on a wall.”

I’d gotten a headache from the paint fumes, so the windows were open and I had no interest in finishing the rest of the living room. That one painted wall would remain, to remind me of my day of infamy; to remind me that I needed some color in my colorless life. I was certainly feeling poetic.

“Were you sober when you did this?”

“Uhhmm,” I hedged. I’d had tequila with a side of coffee. Patron Espresso. I was wired and tipsy.

Phenomenal.

“You’ve become a tequila monster.”

“There are worse things, I suppose. So, do you like it?”

“It’s weird. But you’re weird, so it makes sense. And yes, I like it.”

I smiled and we took a seat on the couch. “I want a new bed. And new towels. New everything to replace all the stuff I bought with Matt.”

“That costs money.”

“Yeah, I don’t think unemployment will cover that.”

“Which brings me to this: you know when my boss Heather throws those luncheons and I have to hire cater waiters?”

“I don’t want to cater waiter. I hate bowties.”

Annie rolled her eyes. “Wasn’t gonna ask you to be a cater waiter. Besides, it’s way part time. You’d make more on unemployment. No, one of Heather’s cater waiters works at an Italian restaurant in the West Village, but he’s leaving to tour with a Midwestern theater company. They have to hire his replacement.”

“Huh,” I said.

“I threw out your name and history.”

“History?”

“Yeah, you waited tables.”

“In college,” I pointed out. “At a barbecue joint. I was always covered in barbecue sauce.”

“Oh... yeah. Might have forgotten about that.”

“Looked like a freakin’ extra for *Braveheart*,” I muttered. “Besides, I don’t know crap about Italian food.”

“You need money, yes?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t want to work in an office or go back to editing text book copy.”

“That’s true.”

“So, wait tables while you figure out what you really want to do.”

I went quiet.

“Is this a pride thing? You don’t want to be a twenty-seven-year-old waitress? Rachel on *Friends* did it.”

“She has better hair than me. And that was a TV show. Her life magically worked out because writers wrote that her life worked out. And, oh, yeah, she’s fictional.”

“Lots of artists do the waiting tables thing while pursuing their art.”

“Yeah, but I’m not pursuing art.”

“What are you talking about?” She pointed to the wall. “You’re a painter.”

My sigh was labored. “How does one even make a restaurant resume?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they’ll make you carry a tray of drinks. Kind of like an audition.”

“Um, I spill things. I’m totally screwed.”



Jessica, the general manager at Antonio’s stared at me. I tried not to twitch. Her brown eyes surveyed me. I was wearing my black glasses, skinny jeans and checkered shirt, and my dark, somewhat frizzy hair was pulled back into a ponytail.

“You’re a Hipster,” she said finally.

“No, I... Yes.” I paused. “Please don’t hold that against me.”

She smiled faintly. “You’re a friend of Tom’s?”

“Friend of a friend,” I corrected. “He cater waiters for my best friend.”

“You’ve worked in a restaurant before?”

“A barbeque joint.”

“You like people?”

“Sure?”

Her brown eyes flared with humor. “Do you know anything about Italian food or Italian wine?”

“I can fake anything.”

Jess raised an eyebrow. I smiled.

“You’re an actor.”

“Writer,” I amended.

“Same thing.”

“Not the same thing at all.”

She leaned back in her chair. “I like you.”

I smiled, hoping that meant I had the job.

“Can you start training tomorrow?”

“Yes.”

“4:00 PM. We’re only open for dinner. If you survive training, you’ll work four shifts a week. Got it?”

Survive training?

“Got it.”

“Jess!” a male voice called. “I can’t find the new Barbaresco shipment!”

“I got it,” Jess yelled back, standing up. “Come meet our newest employee!”

I heard someone tromping up the stairs and a tall, lean, familiar body appeared in the doorway of the dining room.

“Sibby, meet our assistant manager, Aidan.”