

All the Wrong Reasons

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1.

Heroína

Latin. Etymology of the word: Heroine.

Adrienne Miller sat in her balcony, one October afternoon. She just finished unpacking her clothes and putting all her furniture in place. Her new apartment reflected every bit of her personality. Every vase, every painting and every jar showcased her style.

She felt very tired, having spent the rest of the day tidying up and decorating her new haven, but she was happy. She employed the services of an interior design team. She paid a fortune, but as she admired her white, gray and pink minimalist-designed haven, she thought that it was all worth it.

Her apartment stood on the middle floor of a luxurious building in a high-end area in Manhattan, just five blocks away from her office. It was a two bedroom that had two en-suite baths, a huge balcony, and walk-in closets. She placed a glass table with matching white steel chairs on her balcony which had a breathtaking view of Manhattan.

The moment her broker showed her the apartment, she immediately fell in love with it. It was expensive, but it was one of her dreams. She never indulged in other expensive material things. For quite some time now, she had been saving for this apartment, a place where she would spend the rest of her life. According to her friends, this is where she will waste away her virgin years.

Yes. She was twenty-five years old. Never been touched and infrequently kissed.

Her boyfriend, Troy Williams, lived a thousand miles away from her. They had been together for three years now, but he lived in Massachusetts. While he went to medical school, she worked as an editor in Manhattan.

Troy was old-fashioned. Traditional and quite a gentleman. He never suggested they go to bed together and she was thankful about it. Adrienne had been fantasizing about her first time all her life. She wanted it to be an intense experience. The man, the time and the place...every single thing had to be perfect.

She wanted no regrets. It had to be unforgettable. She didn't hold on to it for so long only to be disappointed. She wouldn't have sex just for the sake of losing her virginity. She wanted it to be electrifying and memorable, so that when her hair turned gray, she'd go back to that particular moment and remember it only with a smile on her face, nothing less.

Maybe she'd do it with Troy someday, but until they're both ready, Adrienne felt satisfied given the way things were.

She met Troy at a party she attended with her family. His parents were friends with hers. Adrienne thought he was cute and comfortable to be with, but not exactly her type. She usually preferred guys with a dangerous edge, cool façade and a devil-may-care attitude. But she knew too well that there's a high price to pay to be with a guy like that. There's too much risk involved and Adrienne didn't see herself as a risk taker. The last thing she wanted was to lose herself to a guy who would easily fool around with other girls. So, she settled for safe, cute and comfortable. And Troy, with his dark blonde hair and dark brown eyes, tan skin and deep dimples was as secure as a security blanket.

She recalled one of the many conversations she had with her friends about Troy.

Her best friend, Yuan Davis, once told her, "You should really think better of yourself. I think there are better fish in the ocean."

She met Yuan in college and they've been BFFs ever since. He was half-Japanese, half-American and full-on fabulous.

Her friends thought of Troy as too prim, too proper. In other words, too boring for her. They believed she deserved somebody way cuter than him. Someone who could make her laugh, challenge her mind, and encourage her to explore her wilder side.

Adrienne could understand them perfectly well. She never heard Troy tell a joke or laugh at one. And he couldn't seem to tolerate simple foibles in human behavior, even temporary things like getting wasted, occasional smoking, miniskirts or highlighted hair irked him. He was unaware that Adrienne herself had found refuge with a cigarette once in a while.

"He's like the fireman who will always water your fire!" Her other best friend, Jill Durmont said. "You have a wilder spirit than you'd like to admit. Having a guy who puts a stopper on all your flair won't help you spread your wings."

Like Yuan, Adrienne met Jill in college too. She's a petite blonde who writes gossip columns for the magazine Adrienne works for.

Troy hoped to be a doctor one day, just like his parents. Adrienne's sister, Kimberly, goes to the same medical school as Troy.

Adrienne could never be a doctor, no matter how smart she was. She couldn't stand the sight and smell of blood. She was the odd one out in a family of doctors. Well, maybe if you can't be one then marry one. And maybe that was the reason why she dated Troy in the first place.

She had a broken relationship with her mother. Somehow, she felt that her mother never loved her the way she loved her sister. And all her life, she tried her best to win her over. But she never did. Not even when she got accepted by the best universities in the country. Not even when she graduated with honors.

Instead of being proud, her mother said, "It's a very easy program!"

Adrienne earned a dual degree in journalism and mass communications. She possessed a talent for writing. She was the only one in her family who had a knack for it. Her sister couldn't put a paragraph together, her mother couldn't understand the context of metaphors and her father never showed interest in any form of literature. But no matter how good she was, her family brushed off her achievements like they were insignificant.

At the party where she met Troy, her mother introduced him to her sister first. But Troy couldn't take his eyes off her. He tried to strike up a conversation with her every chance he got.

Her mother must have really liked Troy for it not to matter which daughter he asked out. At first, she didn't know what her mother saw in him. But she became too engrossed in pleasing her that she eventually found herself enjoying Troy's company too.

But she lived in New York and he was in medical school in Massachusetts. Her odd working hours and his heavy load made it impossible for them to see each other often.

They often spoke on the phone, but they only saw each other once a month, sometimes less than that. However, she got used to their setup and thought that the phone calls and video chats were enough to keep her secure with their relationship.

What else could she ask for? He loved her. She loved him. Her mother strongly approved of their relationship. When the time felt right, maybe he'd propose to her and she'd lose her virginity on their wedding night. What else could be more perfect?

Maybe she wasn't like Jill or the other women who enjoyed sex and sleeping with their boyfriends. She accepted feeling old-fashioned and would rather wait for the right guy or for marriage. Her friends might argue that she just said this because Troy never triggered sexual feelings in her, but what if she wasn't a sexual person? What if she just felt incapable of succumbing to intense passion? Moreover, her conversations with Troy always drifted into topics like HIV, teenage pregnancy and abortion. If those weren't mood-killers for sex, she didn't know what might be.

Like her parents, Troy didn't approve of her job. Getting this apartment offered a way for her to show them that she could manage well on her own, even though she wasn't a doctor. She found a way to assert her independence and stand up for herself, regardless of what they wanted her to do or who they wanted her to be.

Suddenly, Adrienne felt glum. Ten minutes ago, she was happy and content with her life, but now, she couldn't help but feel disappointed. Thinking about Troy and her parents had that effect on her. No matter how posh this apartment seemed, her mother wouldn't approve of it. She would think Adrienne wasted her money. True, it put a huge dent in her savings, and she would require years to pay off a sizable mortgage, but when did she ever do anything risky in her life?

Her eyes drifted off her neighbors' balcony. She hadn't seen them yet, and she hoped they'd be nice or at the very least, trustworthy. She shared a bedroom wall with them. Not only that, her bedroom window ran parallel to theirs and a wide platform connected them, the kind that would allow them to break into her apartment through her bedroom window. This was the only thing she didn't like about her place. Every day she prayed that she hadn't become neighbors with mobsters.

She scanned the steel chairs and glass table on the balcony beside hers. They seemed almost the same as hers, only theirs were black. Good to know that she and her neighbors had the same taste.

She noticed an abandoned bottle of Heineken and an ashtray with cigarette butts. She guessed that at least one male lived in that family. And most likely, no babies. She believed either she lived next to a couple or a bachelor. It's comforting to know no one would complain if she held parties or let her friends sleepover and Yuan decided to play "Bette Davis Eyes" over and over again.

She turned around and started going back into her living room. Just before she could completely go inside, she caught something out of the corner of her eye.

Her neighbor stepped out to his balcony. He wore only a pair of jeans. She stared at his perfectly tanned torso. His biceps were well-toned and she figured he had at least a six pack.

He lit a cigarette and stared at their gorgeous city view, lost in his thoughts. His jet-black hair was disheveled and even from afar, she could make out his long, dark eyelashes.

As she stared at his profile, a sense of familiarity filled her.

Ohmigod! It can't be!

Her heart pounded loudly inside her rib cage.

She knew him. He was... NYC's most wanted bachelor... a.k.a. the City's most notorious playboy.

Justin Adams.

Her mind raced with information about him, she didn't even know she had.

Prodigal heir of Adams Industries, son of a steel and mining magnate. Filthy rich. But instead of living in the shadows of his father, he desired to draw his own map, his own future. He graduated with a double degree from Harvard, straight As, high distinction, but he made his father quite angry when he announced that he wouldn't work for their company right away. Instead, he chose to play in the stock market and opted to use his hobby, photography, for gainful employment.

He worked as a freelance photographer for *Blush*, the magazine that also employed her. He was a celebrity in her office. Every single girl there fancied herself in love with him. Even Jill couldn't stop talking about him like he was God's gift to women, or finally one guy deserved being called one.

Adrienne was probably the only one who didn't want to go to bed with him. She found him intriguing, yes. But she didn't really understand the fuss about him.

She hid behind her curtain and continued to watch him.

Okay. He isn't bad. No! Who am I kidding? He looked as handsome as the devil himself!

She sighed to herself. *Maybe he's worth the fuss, after all!*

He fished his phone out of his pocket and made some calls while standing in his balcony. After a few minutes, he put out his light and went inside. She continued watching him through her window. He put on a white shirt, grabbed his leather jacket and left.

Adrienne couldn't help smiling to herself.

My apartment just got even more interesting!

* * *

A few weeks later, Adrienne rushed through a deadline Monday evening. Part of her job was to write reviews about establishments around the city. Today, she needed to write an article about a newly-opened restaurant on Fifth Avenue. The food wasn't so great, the prices not so cheap, and the service a bit unorganized. She ordered a Piña Colada, and twice she received a Margarita.

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

She couldn't concentrate on her work. The music from her neighbor's residence was far too loud. Moreover, the fact that she knew he sat on the balcony, playing poker with his friends, and that she could hear him laugh made it even harder for her.

She went out to the balcony to light a cigarette. She badly needed a smoke and she didn't want to light up inside her apartment. The minute she stepped out, she noticed that the guys in the other balcony all fell silent. She suddenly felt self-conscious.

Deep breaths. Deep breaths.

She needed to calm herself. She's a confident woman and she has a boyfriend. Her knees shouldn't turn to jelly just because she thought that Manhattan's playboys had started to survey her long legs.

Just then, her phone rang.

Thank God!

She needed a distraction. She craved thinking about anything other than her devilishly handsome neighbor.

"Hi honey, how are you? It's Troy."

“I’m *groud*...” She replied, unable to decide whether to say ‘good’ or ‘great’.

“What?”

Damn it!

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

“Not too bad. I was out with Kim last night. She’s my designated tutor now,” he said with a chuckle.

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

“And I’m a lucky guy, aren’t I?”

“Hmmm...”

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

Absent-mindedly, she let out a groan.

“What?” Troy asked. Apparently, he didn’t think that his monologue on chlamydia deserved a groan.

“What are you doing? Are you with someone?”

“I’m alone!” she replied. She must have sounded too defensive because Troy didn’t believe her...but she hadn’t even lied. She was alone. Yet the closest living, breathing human beings sat about ten feet away from her.

“You sound distracted. It didn’t seem like you were listening to me at all.”

“Troy, please, give me a break. I just remembered this restaurant I likely will close down in a few hours because of an awful review I’m thinking of writing and I don’t want to do it. That’s why I groaned.”

Troy fell silent for a few seconds. Then he added, “Are you sure?”

She let out a frustrated sigh. Then she put out her cigarette and managed to walk back to her living room. By putting herself beyond anyone who could see her, she found her focus.

“Yes, I’m sure. Come on. You’re my first ever boyfriend. I didn’t even date anybody seriously before I met you. When did I ever give you a reason to doubt me?”

She always felt that Troy didn’t trust her enough. Like she had this reputation of being a slut that everybody knew about except for him.

Whenever she went out with her friends and he could hear the background music, he would ask her who she was with, short of asking Jill and Yuan as well to swear on their dead relatives’ graves that only the three of them were together. No one else.

At first, she considered it rather sweet that he felt possessive or jealous. After all, that could signal just how much he didn’t want to lose her. Recently, however, she decided that it had become too much for her to handle. She needed to tell him where she was at all times, and do headcounts of the friends. It had started getting under her skin.

“It’s not that...I just...I miss you. And you’re beautiful, Adrienne. I’m sure plenty of guys would be hitting on you.”

“And that means, I would sleep with every guy who actually shows interest in me?”

“No. I know you’re not like that. And that’s what I liked about you. You’re...old-fashioned,” Then he went on with his medical monologue again. She thought she actually fell asleep on the couch after thirty seconds. Then, finally, he said goodbye.

“Love you, sweetheart,” he said.

“Love you, too.”

After she hung up the phone, she thought, “*Troy is good for me. He’s going to make a good husband someday. We’re going to be happy. We’ve been together for three years, he’s not getting any, but he didn’t cheat on me and didn’t break up with me.*”

By the end of the night, she managed to write a not-so-bad review of the restaurant. She highlighted their strengths, the great ambiance and the expensive china. However, she had no choice but to mention that they could do better to lay low on soy sauce and a smile from the waiters would go a long way. She finished the one-thousand-word article amidst Collective Soul’s music blasting from Justin Adams’s bedroom, like he didn’t know he had any neighbors.

The next day, she had lunch with her best friends. Yuan worked at the building next to hers and Jill’s, and all of them worked flexible hours that they could get together for lunch and coffee breaks quite easily.

“How’s Troy?” Jill asked.

She shrugged. “Having study dates with Kim.”

Jill raised her brow at her.

“They deserve each other, you know,” Yuan said blatantly.

“Yuan!” Jill hissed.

“What?” he asked nonchalantly. “Come on, Yen. It’s not that I want you to be jealous. I just think you deserve a more exciting love life than dating a guy who spends more time with your sister. How long are you going to keep this up?”

“Yuan has a point, Yen. I think you deserve better, too. And you are in dire need of a makeover! You could use some makeup and better fitting clothes. And for God’s sake, haven’t you heard of contact lenses? Or lasik?” Jill flicked on her eyeglasses.

“Ouch!” Adrienne gave Jill an annoyed look. She had started to get annoyed with them telling her that she’s beautiful, but she could be way prettier if she only put more effort in her looks.

She thought she wasn’t butt-ugly, but she wasn’t supermodel-pretty, either. She had dark brown hair with some reddish highlights. She looked like those girls who went to the salon to get red highlights, only hers were natural. She had expressive green eyes. She didn’t diet or exercise regularly, but she possessed curves in the right places. She was all right, and that’s how she wanted it.

She gave up hope trying to look pretty. After puberty, she did make some effort, but according to her mother, *“Adrienne is not really ugly, but Kimberly has the real beauty and brains in the family.”*

Well, if your own mother didn’t think you’re pretty, who else would?

In fact, the only person who ever made her feel beautiful at all was Troy, when her mother introduced him to Kimberly, hoping they’d hit it off. Yet he asked for Adrienne’s number because, he said, he couldn’t get her beautiful face out of his mind. When she started dating Troy, she made her mother proud – for the first and last time.

Maybe Adrienne couldn’t break up with Troy for this very reason, no matter how many times her friends told her to do so. No matter how many times she felt that they may actually be right. Troy seemed like the only achievement she’d ever had, as far as her mother believed.

“By the way, guys, I saw Justin Adams in the office this morning. What a snob that guy is! I tried to look him in the eye as we passed each other in the hallway, and it was like he didn’t see me at all. But God! Did he look delish!” Jill said dreamily.

“How could you ever look him in the eye? Doesn’t he always have that pair of shades on?” Adrienne asked her matter-of-factly.

Yuan laughed and Jill glared at him. Adrienne smiled at her guiltily. “I’m sorry. Go on with your story.”

“Well, there’s nothing more to it. I’m just saying that I saw him this morning. That’s it.”

“Well, I’m sure, you can faint in front of him, and he still wouldn’t look at you,” Adrienne said. “Gods don’t mingle with us mere mortals. And Justin Adams thinks he’s a god.”

“Well, he’s not the only one who thinks that,” Yuan grinned proudly. “There’s many of us who wouldn’t disagree.”

Adrienne rolled her eyes and groaned. She wanted to tell her friends about her new next-door neighbor. But after hearing how obsessed they were with him, she decided not to inform them. At least not yet. She knew the minute she told them, they would have a stakeout in her apartment. Not that she minded having them over. She didn’t want Justin Adams to realize that his neighbor and her friends watched him in his own private refuge like he was a goldfish in a fish tank.

She didn’t want him to be aware of her presence, the way that she had become so aware of his. And she hated feeling this way. She had a boyfriend. He loves her. Their relationship was safe and smooth-sailing. The last thing she wanted was to fall prey into a player’s web and risk him breaking her heart in the process.

But somehow she found herself watching him whenever they’re both home. Even if she hated to admit it, she found it exciting. She reminded herself that there was a thin line between watching and stalking...curious versus crazy.

Within a few weeks, she realized that Justin slept until twelve noon on weekends. On weekdays, he’d be busy on his cellphone long before she’d be up, and he’d return home by seven in the evening. Sometimes he would have friends over, playing poker or drinking on his balcony. Other times, he would be out by nine p.m. and return at around one a.m. Either way, he would take a shower and then go to bed. Justin probably showered

three times a day and Adrienne found that too adorable. She wondered what he smelled like.

After her lunch with Yuan and Jill, she returned to her desk feeling inspired. She started typing on her laptop and found herself composing a plot. She drew a picture with words. She created a dark-haired rebel with a gorgeous body, well-sculpted like a marble statue masterpiece. She made her heroine a green-eyed, copper brown-haired princess with an evil queen stepmother and a charming but vile stepsister.

Adrienne felt excited about her new project. It had been a while since she wrote a story. When she was younger, she'd written several romance novels. That's how she knew she would be a writer and make a career out of it.

She juggled between writing her novel and meeting her deadlines for *Blush*. She skipped coffee breaks with Jill and other girls in the office. All they talked about was Justin Adams anyway. And she didn't need to hear about him. All the information she needed at that time could be found next door to her.

"Come on, Yen. Let's go out for lunch. We're celebrating!"

"Why?"

"Jada's sick! And that lady's endured flu, cough, fever and all sorts of things. She's a tough one. And now, finally, she filed for a sick leave."

"I'm sorry. I don't like Jada as much as you do, but no, I don't feel like having a party just because she's under the weather. But you girls have fun, okay?"

Jill rolled her eyes. "You're no fun," she said. "All right. I'll bring you back a waffle."

As soon as Jill left, Adrienne started working on her novel once again. There was a scene in her head she couldn't wait to put into words.

Soon, her eyes fell tired of staring too long at her screen. She stood up from her seat to stretch her arms. Just then, she caught a figure walking from the graphic artists' room towards the corridor in front of her. He was wearing a pair of shades and a leather jacket over a white shirt. He turned towards her and an eyebrow shot up. Then the corner of his lips slightly turned up. Adrienne blinked. When she opened her eyes again, he was gone.

Did he actually smile at her?

Adrienne looked around her once again. She seemed pretty sure she was alone. No one occupied any of the other cubicles around her.

His mouth turned up when he looked at her. *That's a smile, right?*

She groaned.

So, what if he smiled?

The last thing she wanted was to be obsessed with a guy half of Manhattan already fawned over. She's already writing a character inspired by him, for Christ's sake!

Later that night, she met Yuan and Jill for dinner. She needed a break from writing and waited for more ideas to come into her head and the inspiration to write to strike again.

"How come Justin Adams doesn't have a girlfriend?" She popped the question during dessert.

Jill shrugged. "He's playing the field?"

"He's too snobby," Yuan suggested. "Nobody's worth committing to—unless she's royalty, of course."

"Then what is he doing in New York? He must go to Europe if he wanted to meet some noble girl."

Adrienne said.

"Well, we know he makes himself constantly available. He's dating around. He has been rumored to date models, and some members of the elite class. But his name won't be linked with these girls for more than two weeks. After that, he walks away. Gone. Then after a few weeks of being single, he'll be seen hanging out with another woman, usually prettier or richer, and the cycle starts all over again," Yuan said.

"He's a playboy," Jill began. "He can't commit. Like he would dump these women after two or three dates. Then he would move on to higher mortals."

Adrienne paid attention to what they said. She wanted to pick up some ideas to use in her novel.

"What if he's not really a player?" Adrienne asked, thinking out loud. "What if he doesn't commit because...he *can't* commit."

She cannot make her male character sleep with everything that walks in a skirt because he couldn't control his urges. One, because, *hello herpes!* And two, what woman would actually fall in love with a guy who sleeps with a woman and then forget about her after a few humps? And who would buy a book if the male protagonist feels like a hopeless case? If there is no hope for him to ever fall in love, the plot cannot lead anywhere good, can it?

“You know, maybe you’re right,” Yuan reflected. “Maybe it’s not Justin’s fault he didn’t have a steady relationship. Maybe he’s secretly engaged to an heiress. You know those business arrangements. I think the rich and powerful still do that.”

An idea popped in Adrienne’s head. What if her male character had already been previously engaged via a marriage arranged by his parents? A marriage for convenience designed to merge two empires and keep the fortune within their families.

Adrienne’s smile went wider. She couldn’t wait to go home and start writing again.

She went home at midnight. She went inside the elevator and pressed her floor. The door closed but after a split second, it opened again. Then a dark-haired guy entered the elevator. Her breath caught in her throat.

He smelled of aftershave. Masculine and fresh. He wore a pair of stylish yellow-tinted glasses. Justin always wore shades even at night time, like he intended to keep his eyes a secret to the world. The ones he donned tonight appeared lightly yellow-tinted, designed to reduce glare during night driving. Still, they successfully hid his eye color.

Adrienne desperately wanted to know what his eye color was. She had drawn out her rebel after Justin’s physical appearance. She left out her character’s eye color because she had no idea what color his eyes were. Even now, she couldn’t see what’s under those tinted shades.

As the elevator ascended to their floor, Justin didn’t even turn towards her or acknowledge her presence in any way. He stared ahead like he was alone the whole time. She must have imagined that he smiled at her at *Blush* earlier that day.

When the elevator door opened though, he held it and motioned for her to go before him, but she doubted he was even aware of her presence.

Well, at least he is a gentleman.

Adrienne walked fast ahead of him and never looked back.

After two weeks of acting like a psychotic stalker, Adrienne had progressed halfway through her novel. She found time to write in between the pieces she had to submit for *Blush*.

She was writing a steamy scene between her rebel and her heroine when Jada, who recently returned to work, asked her to come to her office.

She groaned as she stood up from her seat.

What does the Devil in Prada want now?

“You called?” She asked as soon as she stepped into her boss’s room.

Jada handed her a ticket.

Gypsies: An enlightening. Grand Opening.

“What is this?”

“A bar?” Jada said, looking at her like she was out of her mind.

“O-kay. What do you want me to do?”

“Since you’re in-charge of features and events, I want you to go and write about them in our next issue. Or... is that not what you do?”

“Do you think I have something to compare this to? Do I look like I go to clubs?”

Jada stared at her long skirt and knitted blouse. Then she shook her head, “No, sweetheart. You look like somebody who would *never* be allowed to enter clubs.”

Adrienne bit back a venomous response. What was the point, anyway? There was no arguing with Jada once she puts her mind to something. Adrienne stared at the ticket on her hand.

The caption read, *Exclusive Gathering.*

“And I have to go alone?”

Jada raised her brow. “Well, I only got one ticket.”

“You don’t expect me to dance, do you?”

Jada shrugged her long straight hair off her shoulder. “Well, I expect you to say something about the dance floor, the lights, the music, the crowd. If you could write about that standing beside the bouncer, then knock yourself out.”

Adrienne let out a frustrated sigh, “You mean, you want me to go to some club and write a very accurate

review of my experience, and for me to do that, I should dance...alone, since you only gave me one ticket?"

"There you go. You were always one of my brighter employees. Now, off you go," Jada said.

Adrienne rolled her eyes and turned to leave.

"Adrienne, dear..." Jada called.

"Yes?"

"If you dress up tonight the way you usually do..." she looked at her from head to feet and added, "You *will* be dancing alone."

Adrienne looked down at her clothes. Her long skirt and knitted blouse looked very business-like. Her hair was tidily tied up in a ponytail and she wore her glasses. What's wrong with looking smart and serious?

"What type of club is this anyway? It's not a strip club, is it?"

Jada let out a sultry laugh. "Of course not, darling. And no worries. I will have Jacob send something for you to wear tonight."

"It's not necessary," she argued.

Jada shook her head. "Come on, Adrienne. I don't want you to look like you just went there to write an article about them."

"But I am going there just so I could write about them."

Jada shook her head. "I want you to blend in. You have to trust Jacob's taste, darling."

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

"Take it easy, hon," a male voice said, and Adrienne felt a strong pair of arms wrap around her waist to balance her.

His brows shot up and then slowly he gave her a crooked smile. "So-sorry." She said curtly and then she pulled away from him and walked towards her desk.

She felt thankful that she could still walk a straight line. She started shaking and she realized that all her nerves had sprung to life the moment her body touched his and his arms went around her.

She suddenly felt heady. That had never happened to her before. Like she'd been electrically charged. Her pulse was racing and her heart pounded inside of her chest. But at the same time, the memory of his arms around her seemed warm and comfortable.

She couldn't explain the feeling, but somehow, something suddenly came alive within her.

Cimarrón*Spanish. Meaning Wild or Untamed.*

“Hi Adrienne, it’s Mom.” Adrienne’s mother said on the phone.

“Hi Mom. How are you?” She asked cheerfully. Every time she got a call from her mother, she tried her best to sound her most cheerful. It was probably a defense mechanism because she knew how these conversations always ended. In misery.

“I’m wonderful, darling! I just received the best news. Kimmy got into Massachusetts General,” Adrienne could tell her mother was over the moon. “It’s not easy, you know. You have to be very smart to be accepted there. I’m so proud of your sister.”

“That’s great! That will be a nice credential for her.” Adrienne agreed.

“I know,” her mother said. “But I’m worried about you, Adrienne. Kimmy is going to be set for life. She’s got everything going for her. But you...you should start rethinking your career path. Writing is not really a cash cow.”

Here we go again!

“Just because Kimmy was the smart one, doesn’t mean she was going to be the only one to have a bright future. Why don’t you start out as a secretary in a big firm? Or you could look into broadcasting.

Adrienne fell silent.

“Every time my friends ask me what you do, I don’t know what to say. I mean, I can’t really tell them you go around Manhattan fast foods and bars, and write essays to get paid per word.”

“Mom, I’m not being paid per word. I’m actually doing fine. I think I’m one of the highest paid magazine writers in the world!” She rolled her eyes. She wasn’t sure if that was true though. But she was paid quite well and she loved her job, even with Jada being her boss. Unfortunately, her family didn’t see it that way.

“And what’s this I heard about you buying an apartment? Kimmy said you got something located in a high-end street? What were you thinking? Do you think you can pay off the mortgage being paid per word for it? Your career’s not stable. You’re not even working for a top newspaper. You have to pray that enough vain women stay in Manhattan so you could keep your job. That’s not something I’d be proud to talk about with Troy’s mom.”

A tear rolled down Adrienne’s cheek.

“Mom,” she swallowed hard, trying her best to calm her voice, like she wasn’t affected by what her mother just said. “I’m running late for a meeting. But it was nice talking to you.”

“All right, dear. Call Kimmy one of these days. Congratulate her. I’m sure Troy will get into a good hospital as well since he’s spending time with Kimberly. She’ll give him a lot of pointers. Okay, bye.”

It was pointless to fight back the tears as soon as she hung up the phone. She’s had tried her whole life to win the love and respect of her mother. But no matter what she said or did, Kimberly was all she saw. She didn’t want to compete with her sister. But was it too much to ask for just a little bit of approval from the woman, who should have counted as her biggest fan?

She dialed Troy’s number.

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

“Yeah, I heard.”

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

Adrienne took a sharp breath. She felt like it was a mistake to call Troy. Now, she felt even smaller than she did a minute ago.

“Troy, do you wish that she was your girlfriend instead of me?” She couldn’t help asking. After all, her mother introduced Troy to Kim first, hoping they would hit it off.

Troy didn’t answer right away.

Oooppss! That wasn’t a good time to take a deep breath and think, was it, Troy?

Finally, he asked, “What are you talking about, Adrienne? Are you jealous of Kimberly? Is it because she’s getting a lot of attention and you’re not? Well, don’t let it out on me. It’s not my fault your sister’s doing

great and that her future's going to be brighter than yours."

"Fuck, Troy! I was just asking. I just don't particularly feel that you see the best in me! You don't make me feel like you appreciate me. News flash! That's what boyfriends do!"

"I love you, Yen. But if you want my honest opinion, yes, I'm not particularly proud of your chosen career. I think you could do better. All right? Is that what you wanted to hear?"

Adrienne couldn't respond even if she wanted to. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. She expected him to apologize and take back what he said. But instead, he said, "Let's talk when you're in the proper frame of mind!"

Then he hung up.

Adrienne stood in the middle of her living room, speechless. She felt the need to throw stuff across the floor, starting with the cordless phone.

Nobody appreciated her, and yet she had done nothing but please them. She had always been a goody-two-shoes because she thought that would make her mother proud.

She dated Troy because it made her mother happy. Now, she began to ask herself, did she really agree to go out with Troy because she found him interesting? Did she really fancy herself in love with him? Or was she in love with the idea of being in love with a guy that her mother totally approved of? Was Troy her boyfriend because he fitted the whole make-your-mama-proud charade she'd staged for over a decade?

Has she ever done anything to make herself happy? Or had she wasted away years of her life trying to please the people around her, who had no idea who she was and didn't care at all about what would make her happy?

She looked at herself in the mirror. Her eyes appeared swollen and she had tear marks on her cheeks. She still wore a pair of skintight jeans and a white Sabrina blouse.

Jacob arranged for an outfit for her to wear to the Gypsies opening but she hadn't even opened the bag he gave her.

She replayed the conversations she had with Troy and her mother. She thought she felt sad, but more and more, she found herself angry.

She was angry at her mother for not treating her fairly. She was angry at her father for not standing up for her. She was angry at Kimberly for competing with her all the time. She was angry at Troy for not being supportive, for not seeing the good in what she was and what she did.

She was mad at herself for tolerating all of them...for letting herself down...for putting up with this crap for more than half her life.

When will I start putting up a fight?

She closed her eyes for a moment.

Enough!

She clenched her fists and thought, *I've had enough!*

She stripped off her pants and blouse right there in the middle of the living room. Then she opened the bag that Jacob gave her. She took out the pair of white Armani pants and the red halter top that Jacob prepared for her. The jeans hugged her hips to perfection and the top clung to her body snugly, yet comfortably. The back of the halter top was made of crisscross strings, giving a teasing hint of her bare back. The blouse didn't allow for a bra, but the material was thick enough to make her feel comfortable. Finally, she wore a pair of red high-heeled sandals.

She stared at herself in the mirror. She looked different. She had to admit that Jacob had flair.

She got rid of her pony tail and combed her long straight hair. She put on black eye shadow and mascara and then accented her high cheekbones with a rosy pink blush and put on red lipstick. She wore the gold hoop earrings, glittery bracelet and matching necklace that Jacob arranged to compliment the outfit.

Once finished, she smiled at herself. She looked like a she-devil out on a hunt for blood. She realized that she could be hot if she chose to.

She took a cab to Gypsies. She decided that she didn't care anymore. She tried her best and so far, her mother and Troy never looked at her differently. She would never be as great as Kimberly, and they would never respect her as much, so why die trying?

For now, she wanted to feel free. She wanted to do something adventurous for herself. She remembered that when she was younger, she carried this angst-ridden, haunted spirit within her. Her mother quickly dampened down any fire within her. Now, she wanted that spirit inside to come out. Even for just one night.

Just for tonight, she didn't want to be the prim, proper, boring Adrienne her mother created. She wanted to explore. Be free, be wild! She would unleash that spirit that was screaming to come out.

Just for tonight, she would live in a way as farthest from Kimberly as possible. Because tonight, she would exist as her own woman. And she was hot enough, great enough being just herself.

She went to Gypsys on a mission. She silently thanked Jada for insisting that she come here and wear something daring. She wanted to kiss Jacob for having the perfect timing and the perfect outfit for her little rebellion.

She secured a place on the bar. Then she danced and drank. She didn't care that she was alone. She felt free. She felt beautiful. She no longer acted just for the sake of writing an article about Gypsys. She did this for herself. And she didn't care about what other people would say or think.

She ordered another shot of tequila.

"That drink is on me," she heard somebody beside her say to the bartender.

"I can pay for my own drink, chief," she responded in an annoyed voice, looking up at the guy beside her.

Suddenly, the world stood still.

The guy looked down at her with the most mesmerizing pair of crystal blue eyes that she'd ever seen.

"I know. But still, that won't stop me from buying you a drink," he asserted confidently.

She didn't reply. She just sat there and...stared.

He grinned at her, "You don't look like the tequila type."

She shook herself back to reality. "I'm not really. Besides, who are you to care?" She turned away from him and pretended not to know him.

His lips curved into a crooked smile. He extended his hand to her. "Justin Adams."

She just stared at his extended hand. "Nice to meet you, Justin Adams." She turned away to drink her tequila straight up. The world shook, but she held herself together. She didn't want to make a fool of herself in front of the City's most eligible bachelor.

He pulled back his hand and motioned the waiter to get him a beer. Amusement seemed written all over his face. Then he asked, "Aren't you going to tell me your name?"

Would she? More importantly, was he going to remember it? Guys like Justin Adams often pretended to be interested in a girl only to get into their pants. She felt a hundred percent sure he would never remember her or her name in the morning. So, it didn't really matter what name she gave him.

"Jamila McBride," she said. "You can call me... Jam."

She was laughing at her own personal joke. He stared at her for a moment and then he smiled.

"It's nice to meet you, Beautiful," he said.

"What?"

"Jamila. It means beautiful in Arabic."

"Whatever. Like I said, I prefer Jam, which means trouble or chaos in English." She took another tequila shot straight up.

He raised a brow at her in amusement. She could see that his eyes practically danced with laughter. He must have realized that she had become a bit drunk.

He took one gulp of his beer. Then he asked, "Wanna dance?"

First, he introduced himself to her and now, he just asked her to dance. Any ordinary day, she would fan-girl scream, even if she didn't want to. But she would die first before she admitted to him or herself that she was interested in him after all.

Without replying, she stood up from her seat and went to the dance floor.

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

She swayed her body to the music and let the beat take over. She didn't touch him, she didn't even look at him. It was as if she couldn't care less that he existed even as he danced beside her.

When she turned around and faced him, she noted that he was staring at her intensely. Slowly, he put his hands on her hips and gently pulled her to him. The dance became sexier. They lost all need for words. Before she knew it, she had her arms around his neck and her body close to him the way it has never been close to any stranger before.

She was drunk and feeling rebellious. She didn't care when he put his hands on her almost naked back.

The minute his skin touched hers, she could barely contain the electrifying thrill that radiated from his fingertips to her spine.

How could I feel like this?

She'd never felt anything like this with Troy. She made out with him, they'd hugged a hundred times, but she never felt this electrifying intensity before. Not even once.

Before she could make a fool of herself, she pulled away from him and walked back to the bar, leaving him on the dance floor. She motioned for the bartender to give her another shot.

Justin appeared beside her and ordered another beer. She drank her tequila without taking her eyes off him. He took a gulp of his beer staring at her like she was his latest prey.

Now, she realized why her friends had told her that flirting was a mind game. They sat there staring at each other. Their eyes held out unspoken challenges.

He reached out for her hand and gently pulled her to him. She stood up from her seat and stood between his legs as he sat on the bar stool. He put his hands on her waist and pulled her even closer. She put her arms around his neck. Her world seemed to be reeling. He leaned his face towards hers and stopped to see if she would meet him halfway.

Oh, what the hell!

She would have her night of fun, her night of assuming an identity that wasn't hers. The fact that Justin Adams began flirting with her on the night that she decided to explore other territories unknown to her made everything perfect.

So she met him halfway.

He kissed her gently. She wasn't expecting that. He was a rogue. A playboy. He wasn't known to be gentle. But his lips were soft against hers. For the first time that night, he took her by surprise. When he pulled away from her, he looked deep into her eyes, drowning her in those blue depths, while his hands gently caressed her spine.

Before she could fully burn, she pulled away from him and went back to the dance floor without looking back at him. He was hot on her heels like a predator stalking his latest prey.

This time, he made sure she danced with him. His arms encircled her and he would give her neck and shoulders butterfly kisses.

Adrienne never did anything like this before in her entire life. But she allowed him to flirt with her on the dance floor. She came alone, but now, there was no doubt about it. She couldn't call herself alone anymore.

"I need to go to the ladies' room," she said to him and then she strode away, leaving him on the dance floor again. She walked away without a backward glance. She didn't want him to feel that she had become eager for his attention. She didn't want him to think that she was one of those girls pining for his attention.

She stared back at herself on the mirror. Her eyes were glittering. Her lips were red and her cheeks seemed to have acquired a permanent blush. She didn't recognize the girl staring back at her, but she liked her a lot. She's hot! And Justin Adams just kissed her.

For the first time in her life, she felt sexy, like she had unleashed her spirits and colors. She glowed and she found herself capable of catching Justin Adams's attention.

When she left the bathroom, she discovered Justin standing outside. He was leaning on the wall, with his arms crossed on his chest.

"What are you doing?" she asked him.

"Waiting for you," he replied.

"Why?"

"Just wanna make sure you make it back." He smiled almost innocently.

"To the bar? I got here by myself, chief. Of course I can make it back!" she barked in the haughtiest tone she could manage.

He shrugged and said, "Then I wanna make sure you make your way back to me."

Major flirt!

But when she turned away from him, she couldn't help the smile on her face. She was a novice in this game. But nevertheless, she could even win this.

They went back to the dance floor. This time, they were hugging and kissing more than dancing.

He brushed his lips to hers, provoking...teasing. Then finally, she gave in and he gave her one deep kiss.

All night, she didn't think about her mother or Troy. She began to relax in his company. There was something about him that made her feel like it was okay to lose herself in him, that she could trust him. And she felt glad she decided to let go, even if it was for just one night. Someday, she'll remember this, and it would always put a smile on her face.

She had eight shots of tequila. Eight shots of insanity. She felt she had accomplished a great deal for herself in just one night. She couldn't remember having more fun than she did then. She felt like she wore a mask, lived someone else's life, stole someone else's identity.

"Thanks for the drinks," she told him when he led her to the exit. She walked towards the line of cabs. She didn't wait for him to ask her for her number.

Fat chance!

Guys like Justin Adams engage in flirtations for one moment and forget about the girl the next.

She preferred that he thought she was immune to his charms. She didn't expect more than a sexy dance, or a hot kiss. She wanted to dump him before he got the chance to dump her.

"Hey," he called her. "Need a lift?"

She stared at him and lifted a brow. "In what?"

He pointed at his Ducati motorcycle.

"No thanks! I'm not too drunk. And besides, aren't you drunk?"

"Compared to you, I'm perfectly sober," he teased. She glared at him. Then he added, "I stopped drinking two hours ago. And I only had three light beers tonight. I think I'm way below the DUI limit."

"I might be drunk. But I'm not crazy."

"Come on. It's not like Mommy's going to see you or something." His voice taunted her.

It was the right joke to get her to do anything!

God, could he read minds?

He sounded like he knew exactly which buttons to push.

Does this guy have any flaw at all?

She grabbed the helmet from his hand. He mounted his bike and grabbed her hand to guide her in climbing behind him. She placed her hands on his shoulders and braced herself for the ride. He started the engine and before he drove off, he took her hands and placed them around his abdomen.

"It's safer this way, okay?" he said.

"Where-where are we going?"

She suddenly panicked. She cannot let him take her to her apartment. He will realize that they live in the same building! And she gave him a fake name. Tomorrow, Jamila McBride will cease to exist.

"Um...maybe we can get a cup of coffee in my apartment first," he said.

Coffee? Or sex?

In any case, her heart hammered wildly in her ribcage and no matter how loud her brain screamed at her not to go, she heard herself saying, "Oh...okay."

They drove fast. She felt nervous. It forced her to hold on to him tighter as she rested her head on his back. Being close to him like this made her feel thrilled yet safe. Crashing was the least of her worries.

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

He parked his motorcycle in front of their building. He took her hand and guided her to dismount the bike. She waited for him to get off and they went inside the elevator together. Justin pressed his floor number. She stood on the corner opposite him. She just glared at him, her hands on her side. He had crossed his arms over his chest again as he stared at her with his crystal blue eyes, which, she thought, had strangely turned a shade darker.

Her world still kept spinning because of the tequila and the motorcycle trip. It whirled ten times faster as he stared at her intently, his eyes boring through her soul, making every nerve in her body tingle, and every ounce of her blood sing.

And then it happened.

They met each other halfway. Both of them lunged forward at the same time, where lips met lips in passionate, head-spinning kisses.

This time, he wasn't gentle anymore. This time, he intently demanded her affection. He had become the player he was known to be. He took his time gaining her trust, studying what made her tick. He'd been patient

all night, but at that point he began claiming his prize.

They heard a '*ting!*', which told them they've reached their floor. They didn't stop kissing. He held and kissed her as they walked towards his apartment.

It was three in the morning but neither of them cared. Time stood still. The world stopped spinning. They couldn't get enough of each other's kisses. They couldn't keep their hands off each other.

He pinned her between a door and his hard body. She didn't know which door but she didn't care, either. He kept kissing her, nuzzling her neck, eliciting involuntary moans from her.

All her veins came to life. She felt compelling emotions she hadn't felt before in her entire life. She became bolder, matching his kisses with her own, teasing him with her tongue.

The door behind her opened and she almost fell over but his arms were around her to keep her balanced. His hands went to her thighs and he lifted her off her feet. She wrapped her arms around his neck, and her legs around his waist. He walked inside the apartment. She let out a moan of pleasure when he nuzzled her neck.

She almost shrieked when she felt herself falling backwards as he dropped her on his soft mattress. Then he fell on top of her, pinning her between the soft cushions and his hard body.

She had completely lost her senses. All she could think about were his arms and his kisses.

She felt his skin against hers. It was smooth. Hard. Male.

"I want you," he whispered hoarsely against her lips.

She felt completely lost. She stopped thinking. He occupied her thoughts, as his body dominated hers.

She didn't know when she lost her sandals or her pants, or her blouse. When Justin fell on top of her again, she felt the electric shock radiating from his skin to hers. She felt intoxicated, drugged out of her senses. All these feelings were new to her, she never knew she could feel this way at all.

She didn't know that a man's touch would feel like this... could send her sanity flying out the window...could make her feel a sense of urgency that she could hardly control.

For twenty-five years, she had virtually caged herself, trapped in a box that never allowed her to feel anything beyond normal. With the release of her spirit, she thirsted, she hungered.

Justin kissed her lips again, drugged her even more, making her want to jump off the cliff of insanity.

"I want more..." he whispered against her ear.

"Justin..." Her mind went blank, only one name registered.

"I want you..." he repeated in a hoarse voice.

She moaned once again.

"If you want this to stop, now is the time," he said. He stopped kissing her. He looked at her intensely, in eyes drunk with passion and desire.

He stopped moving, trapping her between the soft mattresses and his hard body. He was giving her a chance to turn back. To return to reason. Or go further towards oblivion and forever 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 appeared dark with passion. He seemed so devastatingly handsome. She knew just by looking back at him that she couldn't utter the word no. Because right then, she felt that if going to bed with this devil is a prize to claim, then she would blissfully live thereafter as a sinner.

She wanted to feel more. And she desired this dangerous man...with those devilish eyes... nothing less!

She reached her head to nuzzle his neck, and then she whispered, "I want you..." before she could stop the words from coming out of her lips.

The world had turned upside down. As soon as the words left her mouth, he gave it another passionate kiss.

He was out of his pants in less than one minute. 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. She took a deep breath. She was ready. She was waiting. She was yearning.

"Open your eyes, Beautiful," he stated softly. She did as she was told. "I want you to look at me when I make love to you," he whispered.

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. No one had ever made her feel like this. And she's dying to know what else she was capable of feeling. She wanted to see where else he could take her.

Her family and Troy, even her friends, felt eons away from her mind. She anticipated what would happen next.

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 she thought the pain that he caused her would go away with the comfort that he could provide at that moment.

"Oh shit!" He cursed softly, as he realized what just happened.

They were caught up in a web of passion and he tore into her maidenhead without knowing that it was still intact. 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, comforting her. Then he kissed her lips gently.

"I'm sorry. I can't promise that this won't hurt any more than it already does. But I'll try."

Then she felt him withdraw very gently. He reached down and she felt him touch his own manhood. She didn't know why. Then he kissed her again very passionately and yet with so much more gentleness than before.

She felt him again at her entrance and slowly he re-entered her. She felt another tearing pain, but it seemed very gentle compared to the first one. Looking at her deeply, he thrust slowly, and she found it surprising that the pain slowly ebbed away. Then she became more excited.

Soon she felt the urgency and the yearning she possessed a while ago...but this time stronger. Like a tide that swept her away from the shore. She felt madness taking over him...and she realized it had taken over her as well.

He tried to control it, so as to not hurt her. Soon, the pain was gone and she felt unfamiliar sparks shooting from everywhere. She let out a scream of pleasure that she hadn't ever experienced before...bliss she never even knew existed.

She shivered. He caught her mouth and swallowed her screams in his kisses. His thrusts became more urgent until she felt him pull himself out of her. He buried his face in the mass of her hair and she felt his body rock.

When it ended he looked down at her deeply. His lips curved into crooked smile before 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 hard. She realized as well that for the first time, she appeared naked in front of another human being.

He went to his closet. When he returned he was holding a blanket in his hand. He took her hand in his, pulled her up and caught her by the waist. He kissed her passionately, drugging her again, until she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him back.

He pulled off the blanket they made love in, which she noticed to her horror was filled with blood and something else—she knew what that was.

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 rested comfortably on his shoulders. He had one hand rested on her waist. The other under his head.

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

"What?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," he began gently. "I didn't know..."

She placed a finger on his lips. "Sshh!" she said. "It's okay."

"Do you still hurt?" he asked.

"A little sore, but I'm all right."

They stayed there quietly for a while, lost in their own thoughts. She expected the gravity of her indiscretion to come crashing down on her with a big bang. She expected the feelings of remorse and embarrassment to overwhelm her now that the deed was done.

But to her surprise, she only remembered the intensity of the passion they just had shared and how

wonderful he made her feel. For the first time in her life, she felt wanted...and surprisingly cared for at the same time.

He kissed the top of her head. "It was an amazing night," he whispered. "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.

Jamila McBride will disappear after tonight.

"Good night...Beautiful," 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, she must be dreaming... a dream she would call to her memory every time she will feel very low in self-esteem. She would treasure this night.

Every time her mother crushed down her confidence or Troy made her feel undeserving, she would think about Justin and how he made her feel that only she meant anything for one night.

As she fell asleep in his arms, she wondered how she stayed in a relationship with Troy for three years and he never made her feel a sense of security and intense desire, but Justin Adams managed to give her all of that and more in just six hours.

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

When he woke up, she was gone. He looked around his room looking for any sign of her. She hadn't left a trace.

He sat on his bed, naked. She didn't leave anything. Except for her memory, and her scent that he still could 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. Yet 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 afterwards. He had never spent a night with a woman in his entire life. It was one of the things that he thought usually led to expectations and commitments. He didn't need that in his life. He didn't even know why he waited for her to sleep first and then 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.