

# **FOLL CIRCLE SIN**

**Priscilla Law**

**---PREVIEW CHAPTERS---**



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## Chapter 1

“Rick! Pleeese!” Saara pushes her aroused boyfriend away as he reaches his hands under her skirt. Their heavy petting is starting to go further than she wants and she’s beginning to feel uncomfortable.

Rick concedes and then lets out an exasperating sigh. “Saara, I can’t take this anymore. Don’t you see what it does to me?” He takes Saara’s hand and places it over the fervent bulge beneath his zipper, as if hoping that at least this time she will succumb.

Saara quickly pulls her hand away. “Rick, you know that I’m celibate,” her voice raises to an agitated pitch. “I explained this to you when we first started dating.” She begins rearranging her disheveled clothing. “You said you were okay with it. So why do we always end up at this point?”

“Yeah, I know, but I thought that I would be able to deal with it. No! Actually, I knew I wouldn’t be able to deal with it. I just thought that over time, our relationship would become stronger and you would *want* to be closer to me.” Rick rubs his hands across his face frustratingly. “I love you Saara; I really do.” He stands up from the sofa and begins adjusting his mussed clothes as well. “But I’m a man with needs and I just can’t go on like this. You’re an extremely beautiful and desirable woman. How do you expect me to be content with just holding you? I want you so badly right now I’m about to explode.”

“Rick, I just...it’s just that I...” Saara struggles to find the right words.

“Don’t worry, its okay,” Rick interrupts her. “I’m not going to try to pressure you anymore. I respect your celibacy but I just can’t continue on like this. He reaches down and lifts her chin up to face him, then kisses her lightly on the forehead. “I really do love you Saara and I wish the best for you, but I have to move on. He reaches for his keys lying on the coffee table. “I’m sorry,” he whispers softly then walks towards the door.

Still sitting on the sofa now in a state of anguish, Saara can feel tears beginning to well up in her eyes. A lump forms in her throat as she tries to mutter a response.

As Rick opens the door to exit, Shannon; Saara’s best friend, is standing on the other side with her fist in a knock position. “Heeey,” Shannon acknowledges him in her typical high-spirited nature.

“Hey,” Rick mumbles coldly as he brushes past her; making very brief eye contact.

“Oookaaay!” Shannon gives him an offhanded look and then walks inside, closing the door behind her.

“Heeey sweetie,” she approaches Saara, who’s still sitting motionless on the sofa.

“Hey,” Saara mumbles, not bothering to look up at her overly cheerful friend.

“Well damn, isn’t *anyone* glad to see me?” Shannon plops down on the sofa beside Saara. “Uh oh, something’s wrong.” Shannon suddenly becomes concerned as Saara glances up at her with a pained expression. “Did you two have a fight?”

“No. We had a breakup. Rick just broke up with me.” The tears welled up in Saara’s eyes are now rolling down her cheeks.

“*Rick* broke up with *you*?” Shannon sounds as if the mere thought of this happening is inconceivable. “What could possibly be his reason? Surely you weren’t cheating on him. And I know he’s not interested in someone else; the boy’s crazy about you. So what’s going on sweetie?”

“Shan, I really don’t want to talk about it right now. I just can’t. Okay?” Saara’s voice begins to crack.

“Ok sweetie. It’s okay, I understand.” Shannon politely backs off. “Actually, I just got back from getting my hair done from that fine guy in the salon around the corner from you.” Shannon tries to sound cheerful, in an effort to lighten up the mood. “Since I was in the neighborhood, I dropped by to see if you wanted to go have a liquid lunch with me. Now that I’m here, I see that you actually *need* one. Come on, let’s go get a margarita. It’ll be better than sitting here feeling miserable.”

“Thanks Shan, but I need to be alone for a while. I’m not feeling very sociable right now. Can I give you a rain check for tomorrow? I’ll be better company by then, I promise.” Saara’s words are now more controlled as she tries to conceal her pain. She hopes that her well-meaning friend will just leave so she can have a good cry.

“I really don’t feel right leaving you while you’re like this, but if you insist. If you’re sure you’re going to be okay.” Shannon hesitantly decides to not push the issue any further.

“Thanks Shan, but I’ll be fine.” Saara forces a faint smile. “I appreciate your concern.”

The girls then simultaneously stand up. Saara takes the lead and quickly walks towards the door.

“Well, I’ll pick you up tomorrow, at 12 o’clock; and I mean Eastern Standard Time, so please be ready.” Shannon teases as she walks outside. She then turns slightly and gives Saara a sisterly hug. “Call me if you change your mind and decide that you want to talk. Okay?”

“I will...promise.”

Shannon turns and begins to walk away, but then immediately doubles back before Saara can close the door completely. “Saara, you didn’t tell me how my hair looks,” she pouts playfully.

“I’m sorry. It looks fine,” Saara states nonchalantly, obviously not the least bit interested in Shannon’s new hairdo.

“Ouch! I guess that’s what I get for being so selfish. I knew I should’ve waited and asked you tomorrow when you’re feeling better; at least I would have stood a better chance of getting a compliment,” Shannon jokingly makes light of Saara’s bland compliment. “But seriously Saara, promise me you’ll call me if you need anything...regardless of the time.”

“I will! I promise! See ya tomorrow.” Saara quickly closes the door; with hopes that Shannon doesn’t double-back again.

Finally alone, Saara expects that she could now have herself a good hard cry but surprisingly finds that she no longer feels the urge. “He actually broke up with me?” She begins talking to herself. “He couldn’t have meant it. He’s just upset...again. He’ll calm down; remember how much he loves me and he’ll call.” She walks towards the sofa and plops down; in the same spot that only an hour earlier she and Rick had engaged in what may have been their last passionate moment. She places her cordless and cell phone both within close reach. “Now where’s the damn remote?” She reaches down between the cushions and retrieves the remote control. She turns on the television and begins scrolling through the channels. “Great! The Andy Griffith marathon is on. So I guess I’ll be spending my evening with Andy and Barney.” Saara lets out a faint smile. After checking to make sure the ringers on both phones are on, she positions herself comfortably on the sofa.

Each time a phone rings, Saara anxiously checks caller ID. Though she gets many calls, none are from Rick. Finally, after midnight, she realizes that Rick will not be calling. “Something tells me this is going to be a very long night.” Saara turns off the television, picks up her cell phone and heads off to bed. “Please let there be a couple of sleeping pills in there,” she mutters as she heads toward the medicine cabinet.

## Chapter 2

“Hey sweetie, how ya feeling?” Shannon makes her way in as Saara, answering her knock, opens the door. “I know I’m early, but I was concerned about you all evening. I tried calling you a few times but figured you were screening your calls and ignoring me.”

“No. I wasn’t screening my calls. I went to bed early,” Saara lies, as she had seen Shannon’s name on her caller ID at least four times. She knows Shannon means well so she doesn’t want to hurt her feelings by admitting that she simply wasn’t in the mood to talk to anyone other than Rick. “Let me grab my keys and purse,” Saara intentionally closes the subject then walks off toward her bedroom.

“I’m surprised you’re ready. I mean, I am nearly a half hour early,” Shannon teasingly yells out to her.

“And I’m surprised that you’re just getting here. I’m dressed because I expected to see you a lot earlier,” Saara dishes out a little tease of her own.

“Well, it’s good to see that you *seem* like you’re feeling better. Are you feeling better? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. I’m fine. I promise you that I’m fine!”

“Well, speaking as your best friend...and I can comfortably say this because I am your best friend...let me tell you that you don’t look fine.”

“For the last time Shan, I’m okay. Oh damn! Shannon do you see my keys out there anywhere?” Saara yells from the bedroom. “Never mind, I got ‘em,” she continues before Shannon can respond. “Okay, I’m ready.” Saara exits the room and heads towards the door.”

“Wow, that’s a record! Sure you don’t need ten more minutes; or five perhaps?” Shannon continues to tease as she follows Saara out the door.

“Fun-ny!” Saara gives her sarcastic friend a playful push as she locks the door.

“Come on Saara, even you have to admit that you’re never on time. How many times have I called you to say I was on my way and still had to wait ten, twenty, thirty minutes for you? Not that I’m complaining. You are my best friend and you know that I never mind waiting for you, but you do have a punctuality problem.”

“Well please accept my sincerest apology for not being perfect.” Saara jokes back.

The girls banter back and forth all the way to the car however, once inside, they both go into silent mode. Shannon is now hoping that Saara will initiate conversation and tell her what happened between her and Rick. And Saara is hoping that Shannon won’t bring up the subject.

After a few long minutes that seem endless, Shannon finds that she can no longer endure it. “Oh for crying out loud Saara, since you’re not offering any information and since I am your best friend, I guess its okay for me to break this ridiculous politeness and pry!”

“You know Shan; if you say you’re my best friend one more time I’m literally going to puke. Besides, you’re not my best friend, you’re my only friend.”

“Now don’t I feel special?” Shannon jokes. “Well, since I’m your *only* friend and it’s obvious that you need to talk, please then, tell me what happened. You said Rick broke up with you so that means he wasn’t cheating or it would’ve been you doing the dumping. And I know you weren’t cheating, so why the break up?”

“No, neither of us was cheating.” Saara takes a deep breath. “We had a fight about sex.”

Shannon is now pulling up to the valet in front of Tiara’s; their favorite drinking pub. “You had a fight about sex? The two of you broke up over a fight about sex?” She lowers her voice to a whisper as the valet opens her car door.

The girls exit the car and walk toward the restaurant. A smiling hostess stands holding the door open for them. Shannon lowers her voice even more as they get closer.

“Saara, the way it’s supposed to happen is, you have the fight, *then*, you have great make-up sex. You don’t fight about sex and then break up!” Once inside, Shannon pauses as another hostess greets them and leads them to their table.

“Actually, the fight was about him wanting to and me not,” Saara reluctantly explains as they take their seat.

“He wanted to and you didn’t?” Shannon gives Saara a puzzled look. “Saara, that doesn’t make any sense. Rick breaks up with you because,” Shannon suddenly stops in mid-sentence, leans in toward Saara and whispers in a hushed voice, “Saara, you mean he wanted to have kinky sex, like anal or whips and...*stuff*?” Shannon displays a disgusted frown as she looks Saara directly into the eyes bracing for Saara’s response.

“No, it was nothing like that!” Saara stares back at Shannon with an even more disgusted expression. “Shan, I never told you this but I’m celibate.” Saara breaks eye contact with Shannon and drops her head. “Rick came into the relationship knowing this. I guess he thought he’d be able to eventually change my position...well, I mean, my mind.”

“Celibate!” Shannon interrupts. “Saara! Are you telling me that you and Rick have never...”

“Never!” Saara then interrupts Shannon before she can finish her statement.

“Saara, please tell me how on earth can you date a fine and sexy guy like Rick and not once wrap your legs around...” Shannon suddenly stops and holds her chest playfully as though she’s going to pass out. Before Saara can respond, the waitress approaches them.

“Hello. What are you ladies drinking today?”

“Two top-shelf margaritas on the rocks; one with salt, one without, and please make them grande-sized,” Shannon places the order for both. Once the waitress is out of hearing range, Shannon turns her attention back to Saara. “Saara, you know I gotta ask.” She leans in towards Saara. “How long have you been practicing celibacy; and *why* for heaven’s sake?”

“A long time. And it’s just a choice,” Saara responds nonchalantly; ignoring the deeply embedded frown on Shannon’s face.

Shannon draws her face closer toward Saara’s; the puzzled look is now more pronounced. “When you say a long time, just how long are you talking?”

“Come on Shan; stop making it sound like a bad thing. It’s really not a big deal.”

“What’s not a big deal? Sex or your amazing ability to abstain?”

“Okay, who’s having the one with salt?” The waitress returns; interrupting them.

“Salt for me.” Shannon smiles as the waitress stands before them with two very large glasses.

The moment the waitress leaves, Shannon quickly delves back into the conversation. “Saara, I don’t mean to make it sound like a bad thing, it’s just that sex is such a powerful, pleasurable and wonderful thing, so it’s hard for me to comprehend how anyone will *choose* to go without it. Umm, this is good.” Shannon takes a large slurp of her drink.

Without responding to Shannon; Saara takes a sip of her drink as well.

“You don’t want to talk about it do you? Not even to your best and only friend, huh?” Shannon continues to pry.

“No, not really, since there really isn’t anything to talk about. I simply choose not to have sex. It’s not a big deal!” Saara takes another drink, this time in a deep gulp.

“Okay, okay, so we’ll change the subject.” Shannon pauses for a moment as though trying to find something more interesting to talk about. “So! How do you like my hair?”

The girls both break out in laughter as the tension is now broken and a lighter subject ensues.

“Are you ladies ready to order your meal?” The waitress is back now with pen in hand.

“Actually, we’re having a liquid lunch today. You can bring us another round of margaritas when these get low, the regular size the next time,” Shannon again speaks for both.

“Now that we’ve both agreed that my hair looks fabulous what else are we going to talk about? So, do you think that your and Rick’s breakup is final or do you think he’ll come back?” Shannon lifts her glass and licks some of the salt from the rim.

“I really don’t know. I’ve pondered that question all night. Of course, I don’t expect him to continue to practice abstinence just because I do.”

“Does it matter to you? I mean do you want him to come back or would you rather just let it go?” Shannon’s questions are finally starting to sound serious.

“Shan, I love Rick and we’re great together, but I just don’t see how it could work. If our relationship is going to be a constant battle about sex, I guess it’ll be better if he doesn’t. Oh, we’re getting back on the subject again.”

“Okay, we’ll change the subject...for now. So, after giving more thought to the guy who did my hair yesterday, I’m no longer interested,” Shannon frowns.

“Why not? You drove clear across town to my neighborhood just to have *him* do your hair. Why now are you no longer interested?”

“Saara! Do you really have to ask? Just look at me. Any guy who can whip up hair like this has to be gay.”

“Shannon, that’s an awful thing to say. Why is it that a guy who does women’s hair has to be gay but a woman who does men’s hair is considered sexy? Where do these stereotypical attitudes come from?” Saara takes bigger gulps of her grande-sized drink as the waitress approaches with their second, smaller glasses. “And when did I say your hair looked fabulous? It does look good, but I don’t recall saying that I thought it looked fabulous.”

“Girl, you know my hair look fabulous, stop hating,” Shannon teases.

“Shan, your hair looks nice. It always looks nice. But fabulous? Fabulous is such a strong word, I don’t know if I’ll go that far,” Saara teases back.

“You ladies sure you don’t want anything to eat, an appetizer perhaps?” The waitress places their smaller glasses of margaritas before them and places the empty larger glasses back onto her tray.

“No, this is going to do it for us. But you can bring our tab when you get a moment,” Shannon requests.

“Your tab has been picked up by the gentleman over there.” The waitress points to a most distinguished gentleman sitting at the bar. “He also asked me to give this to you.” The waitress hands Saara a slip of paper with a phone number and a ‘please call me’ request written below.

“Damn! Now that’s a fine man. You sure he asked you to give that note to her and not me?” Shannon teases the waitress.

Without responding, the waitress smiles at Shannon then walks away.

Saara and Shannon both look over at the generous stranger and smile appreciatively.

He nods his head in an acknowledging gesture then focuses his attention back to his drink.

“I don’t believe it. I don’t dammit believe it!” Shannon complains jokingly. “I spend three hours and eighty-five dollars in a salon beautifying myself and you simply pull your hair back in a bun and *you* get the guy! What the hell is wrong with this picture? Oh my God! Can it be that I don’t look as fabulous as I think I do?” Shannon jokes. “Oh, now I’m being ridiculous, I know I look good so that can’t be it. So it must be those damn eyes of yours. You’ve been sitting there batting your eyes at him behind my back haven’t you?”

“Oh Shannon calm down. I didn’t *get* the guy. Maybe he wants to ask me about you.” Saara lets out a devilish smirk as she takes a sip from her drink.

“Yeah right! If he knows what’s good for him, that would be the case,” Shannon licks more salt from the rim of her glass.

“What’s that’s supposed to mean?” Saara asks.

“I mean, what are *you* going to do with him? He doesn’t appear to be the type who’ll go along with this whole celibacy thing, serves him right! He might be getting the cuter girl, but little does he know, he’ll have a lot more fun with me,” Shannon laughs.

“So you’re saying that he wouldn’t have any fun with me?” Saara playfully flicks her straw at Shannon, lightly spraying her with margarita.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. I’m not the one who’s on a sexual sabbatical.” Shannon laughs and playfully pokes her tongue out at Saara.

“*Sexual sabbatical?* Girl, you are a nut. You know that?” Saara chuckles at her humorous friend. “Let’s get out of here. I think you’ve had enough to drink.”

As the girls exit the restaurant, they glance toward the area where the mystery man had been sitting, only to notice that he has already left.

“Hum, didn’t even bother to wait around to get a formal thank you,” Shannon remarks. “So Saara, are you going to call him?” Shannon hands the valet her ticket as she glance her eyes across the parking lot.

“What are you looking for?” Saara asks. “Your car is right over there.”

“I know my car is *right over there*. They always park the nicer cars up front. I’m looking to see if I can catch your boy driving off...see what kind of car *he* drives. You can tell a lot about a guy based on the kind of car he drives.” Shannon continues to scan the parking lot.

“Shannon! The kind of car a guy drives doesn’t tell you much of anything.”

“Sure it does, the nicer the car the more money he has.” Shannon continues to scan.

“Girl, what the hell kind of comment is that? Just because a guy drives a nice car wouldn’t necessarily mean that he has lots of money. How do you come up with these ridiculous notions?” Saara scolds.

“It shows that he has class and good taste. And most guys who drive nice cars *do* have money. I should know. Take it from me, a self-proclaimed, certified gold-digger. I won’t even look at a guy who doesn’t drive a nice car.”

“Shan, you are one bougie little snob. What am I going to do with you? Come on, your *Jag-u-ar* is here,” Saara teases as she turns and walks toward the car, where the valet stands holding the door open.

Shannon approaches the driver’s side and hands the valet a five-dollar tip as he has now made his way to the other side and is holding the door open for her.

“Oh, that’s already been taken care of,” the valet smiles. “You ladies have a nice day.”

“By whom? Oh never mind,” Shannon fans her hand. “I’m sure I know.” It has already registered with Shannon that the guy who picked up their tab has also tipped the valet for them. “Girl, let me rephrase my earlier question to you of, *are* you going to call him, to ‘*when*’ are you going to call him?” Shannon straps on her seatbelt then glance at Saara. “Now that’s a man with class. Trust me, he drives a nice car.”

“I haven’t decided if I’m going to call him, nice car or not. I mean, it hasn’t been a full day since Rick and I broke up. I can’t be focusing on someone else this soon. It’s only fair that I leave an opening for Rick, in case he decides he wants to come back.” Saara straps on her seatbelt as well, and then reaches for Shannon’s CD case.

“Well just call him anyway and make him our friend. Something tells me that he’ll be a nice friend to add to our collection. And by the way, only a few moments ago you said you didn’t want Rick to come back.”

“Shan; my best and only friend, you really are too much! You know that?” Saara frowns at her materialistic friend. “I know your mama didn’t raise you like that.”

“Honey, I learned my ways *from* my mama. My mama has been married four times, each time to a man with money and each time she divorced one she took everything but the tears he shed when the judge handed down his decree. So actually, my mama is quite proud of me. Now, I don’t plan to be married that many times, but when I do marry, it will be to a man who has a whole lot that I can take should he ever piss me off and I have to divorce his ass,” Shannon continues babbling in her typical, self-centered manner. Suddenly, she’s interrupted by the ringing of her cell phone. “Oh, that’s Brock. He’s still trying to get us tickets to the jazz explosion.” Shannon turns down the radio and plugs in her earpiece. “Hey baby, hope you have good news. Oh that’s great! I’ll have to buy a new outfit. Yeah, I know,” she lowers her voice, “Saara’s with me now. No, we went out and had lunch. I can’t talk about that now. Call you later. Love ya.” Shannon releases the phone and turns to Saara. “I guess you know what that was all about. Rick’s already called Brock and given him the male version of your breakup.”

“Why does that surprise you? They are best friends and you and I both know that guys talk to each other about their relationships just as much as we girls do.”

“Gosh Saara, it just dawned on me. If you and Rick truly are broken up, that will mess up our foursome. You guys can’t break up; we do everything together. Brock just said that he got the tickets for the four of us. You are still planning to go, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know now. You and Brock have known Rick a lot longer than you’ve known me, and Rick and Brock are practically brothers. So I think it’s only fair that I step aside and let Rick go. I’ll simply reimburse Brock for the ticket he purchased for me.”

“Saaaaara! No one is reimbursing *anyone* for *anything!*” Shannon fusses with a raised voice. “We’ve been planning this concert for the past two months. We’ll have to work this thing out. I mean you and Rick don’t hate each other. Can’t you two still just go as friends? You’re probably going to get back together anyway.”

“I don’t know Shan; I’ll just have to wait to see how things play out within the next few days. But I don’t want to talk about that now, it’ll just give me a headache. Wanna come in?” Saara asks, as Shannon pulls her Jaguar in front of Saara’s condo.

“No sweetie I can’t. I have to head down to the Law library. I have a deposition on Monday; the domestic abuse case from hell.”

“Oh yeah, I’d been meaning to ask you about that. How’s it coming along?”

“Let me just say that I don’t justify abuse at any level, but in dealing with my client, I can see why her husband bounced her around. Hell, I’m about ready to smack that bitch myself. But anyway, I won’t go into it right now, it’ll kill my margarita buzz. Gotta go. I’ll call you later. And you go inside and call that guy!”

### Chapter 3

When Saara goes inside, she doesn’t call *that guy*. Instead, she calls Rick. Getting voicemail on both his home and cell phone, she doesn’t leave a message. He’ll see her number on the display and know that she’s trying to reach him. She goes to the fridge to make herself a sandwich to absorb some of the tequila from her over-indulgence of margaritas. Just as she’s about to take her first bite, her cell phone rings. “Rick,” she whispers and rushes to answer it.

“Miss Stevens, I’m calling about the house you have listed on Taylor’s Court. My wife and I are very much interested in it. Is it possible that you could show it today?”

“Ahhh...yes, of course. What time is convenient for you?” Saara hopes the disappointment in her voice doesn’t convey to her potential client. Although she had so hoped that it would be Rick calling, this call is important as well. As a real estate agent working strictly on commission, she welcomes all the business she can get. “Oh well, a call from Rick would have warmed my heart, but calls from clients pay the bills.” She mumbles.

“We’re in front of the house now. If you can meet us here within the next hour we’ll stay in the area.”

Being nearly an hour away from this property, Saara knows that getting there in a timely manner will be a stretch however the caller seems very enthused so she knows she’d better try.

“I can meet you there in an hour and a half. Would that be okay for you?”

“Sure. We’ll go have lunch and meet you there at 3:30,” the caller agrees.

Saara takes a couple of bites from her sandwich, freshens up and rushes out the door. She returns home hours later, totally exhausted, but, with a signed contract.

Rick has not called her on her cell phone so the first thing she does is check for a blinking red light on her answering machine. It’s flashing and she becomes hopeful. There are three messages, but none from Rick. Two are business calls and the other is from Shannon.

“Hey girl, I’m calling to see if you’ve made a decision on the jazz explosion. Brock has already spoken with Rick. He’s being a hard-ass and has decided not to go. But you should still go. Please say you’ll go. Did you call that guy? Give me a call when you get in.”

“So, he’s being a hard-ass is he? Then I guess I can forget about him returning my phone calls anytime soon, and perhaps never. Oh well, if he wants to be a hard-ass, let him,” Saara talks to the answering machine, as if responding directly to Shannon. She then walks off into the restroom, undressing along the way. “What I need now more than anything is a long, hot shower.”

After her shower, Saara fixes herself a sandwich and plops down in front of the television. Then she reaches for her purse and takes out the slip of paper given to her in the restaurant, and this time she does call *that guy*.

“This is Ashton,” a deep, sexy voice resonates through the receiver.

“Ahh, hello this is Saara. I was at Tiara’s earlier having drinks with my friend and I, ahmm, I’m really not sure who I should be asking for but..”

“You have the right guy,” Ashton, sensing her tension, interrupts her. “Thanks for calling.”

“Oh! Well, hello.” Saara lets out a nervous chuckle.

“Saara? A, uniquely beautiful name for a uniquely beautiful lady.” Ashton compliments.

“Thank you,” Saara blushes. “I also want to thank you for paying for my friend and my drinks and our tip for the valet. That was very kind of you.”

“It was my pleasure. I couldn’t help but notice you when you walked in with your friend. You look like someone I would like to get to know,” Ashton goes straight to the point. “I would love it if you would do me the honor of having dinner with me. I’ll pay the valet the next time as well,” he teases.

Saara feels uncomfortable agreeing to make a date with a guy only one day after her and Rick's breakup. Still wanting to leave an opening for Rick in case he's just blowing off steam and has plans to come back, she decides to decline Ashton's request...temporarily.

"Ashton, I would love to but my schedule is limited for the next few days, I'm studying for the Broker's exam and I really need to buckle down," Saara apologizes.

"I understand," Ashton replies. "It doesn't have to be this week. How about next Friday?"

"Ahh, could you hold for one moment?" Saara places her hand over the receiver. "Yes!" she whispers excitedly. "I was hoping he would say that. This should give Rick enough time to think about what he wants. If he hasn't come around by then, I'll just move on as well. And if he should come back before then, I can still keep my date with Ashton but not see him anymore after that" Saara quickly works out an entire scenario in her mind.

"Thanks for holding," Saara comes back to the phone. "Next Friday sounds great."

"Then it's a date. Since I don't have your number, how should we work this?"

"I'll give you a call next Thursday, if that's okay." Saara knows that Ashton's hint about not having her number is an underlying request for her to give it to him, but she's not ready to give it out just yet.

"Sounds like a plan. I'll wait to hear from you then." Ashton doesn't sound at all disappointed. He wishes her a good night then politely releases the call.

When Saara agrees to the date with Ashton, she is well aware that this is the same Friday as the jazz explosion and she knows that Shannon is going to put up a big fuss. "I better just call her now and get it over with," Saara speaks aloud as she picks up the phone and returns Shannon's call. She knows how Shannon can get when she doesn't get her way, so Saara prepares herself for a fight.

"Hey girl. I called you earlier. Where have you been all day?" Shannon pouts.

"I'm sorry Shan, I got an unexpected call to show a property; I just got in a few moments ago."

"I was calling to see if you'd made a decision about going to the concert. Rick is still being a jerk and insists that he's not going but I still want you to come."

"No Shannon, you're going to have to count me out. Rick's not returning my calls but should you speak with him, please tell him to go. He was looking forward to it a lot more than I was anyway."

"Saaaara! You guys are messing everything up!" Shannon begins to whine, as she typically does when things don't go her way. "Please, will you just be the bigger person? I wouldn't be able to enjoy myself knowing that you'll be sitting home alone."

"Well, actually I won't be sitting home alone. I'm going on a dinner date with the guy who bought our drinks at Tiara's."

"You called him! So how did it go?" Shannon's voice is now at an excited pitch.

"We didn't talk very long. All I know at this point is that his name is Ashton, he *seems* nice and has a very sexy voice."

"That's it? Hell, that's nice for starters I guess," the excitement in Shannon's voice quickly dissipates as she realizes that Saara doesn't have more to tell. "Since I was fighting a losing battle trying to get you to change your mind about the concert, it makes me feel better to know that at least you won't be sitting at home in front of that damn television eating those cold ass sandwiches that you love so much."

"Wow! That was easy. You know, this is the first time I've known you to give up without a fight. And here I went and prepared myself to do battle for nothing," Saara teases.

"Had you not made other plans, I would have put up a fight. But really Saara, I just didn't want you to be sitting home alone just because Rick's being a jerk. And you know that I'm going to call you as soon as I get back from the concert to get a full report."

"You wouldn't be your nosey self if you didn't," Saara teases some more.

## Chapter 4

**F**riday comes seemingly within a blink of an eye. The concierge rings Saara's buzzer at 7:30 sharp. Ashton has arrived, exactly at their agreed upon time.

"Well he gets an A for promptness." Saara grabs her purse and heads out.

Ashton is the only one in the lobby when she arrives. There he stands dressed in a dark suit; his legs spread slightly apart, hands folded in front of him, donning dark glasses, looking like a secret service agent.

"Damn! Shannon was right, this boy is fine as hell," Saara whispers.

“Hello Saara.” Ashton smiles as he approaches her and gives her a hug and a light kiss on the cheek. “You look beautiful.” He takes her by the hand and leads her out the door already being held open by the doorman.

A suited driver standing next to a stretch limousine smiles at Saara as they exit the lobby.

‘Wow, I wonder who’s riding in that!’ Saara thinks as she smiles back. “No, this can’t be.” Saara whispers under her breath as Ashton steers her toward the limo where the driver is now holding the door open for them. “Well, damn, I guess it is. Impressive.” She mutters to herself as she steps inside.

Ashton tucks himself in next to her. “I hope you like champagne.” Ashton reaches for the bottle of *Krug, Clos de Mesnil* and pours the two of them drinks without waiting on a response from Saara.

Saara, without hesitation, takes the flute. “Thank you.” She takes a sip. “Umm, this is incredible.”

Ashton takes a few sips then places his flute on the champagne holder. He then rests his head on the back of the plush seat, closes his eyes and doesn’t speak another word

After a few minutes of silence, Saara is starting to feel uncomfortable. Since Ashton has now tuned her completely out, not knowing what to do with herself, she decides that if she keeps her flute in her hands, she can run her fingers around the rim and take more sips; this at least would give her something to do until he decides to channel back in.

As Ashton sits next to her motionless and soundless, Saara takes the opportunity to glance him over. Brioni suit, A. Testoni shoes, top of the line Breitling Bentley. “Huum, Mr. big spender,” she whispers. Having worked in upscale men’s shops on Rodeo Drive, Saara is fully astute to the attire of the wealthy. A slight smile suddenly brushes her lips as she thinks about Shannon. ‘My dear Ashton, Shannon would looove you,’ she thinks.

Just as the limo comes to a stop, Ashton tunes back in. Saara breathes a faint sigh of relief. Ashton’s odd behavior has her feeling tense, and she has grown tired of rubbing her fingers around the rim of her flute, and taking solo sips.

Saara takes the extended hand of the chauffeur as he reaches down to help her out of the car. The instant she stands fully erect, she feels Ashton’s arm wrap around her waist. ‘So, he’s back,’ she thinks sarcastically. She has become a little salted with him for ignoring her in the limo, but when she finds herself standing in front of the *Westin Peachtree Plaza* she lightens up. Her favorite restaurant, the *Sundial* sits on top of this seventy-two-story hotel and she knows that is where he’s taking her. As they make their way up the glass elevator that’s not for the faint of heart, she feels Ashton gently slide his hand around hers. She takes notice that his hand is unusually warm and, although soft, it’s large and strong.

“This is an amazing view,” Ashton finally speaks. The first words since his champagne offer.

“I agree. I can ride this elevator every night and never get tired of this view.” Saara responds.

As they step off of the elevator and into the restaurant, a smiling host greets them. “Good evening, Mr. Da’Vied.” The young man, all of twenty, grins from ear to ear as though Ashton is some sort of celebrity. “Good evening, ma’am.” The host then pays his respects to Saara as he escorts them to a table with a most spectacular view.

‘I absolutely hate it when people call me ma’am.’ Saara suppresses her displeasure and smiles politely instead as she follows the cheerful host.

“Good evening sir. Good evening ma’am. I’ll be taking your drink orders. What may I start you off with?” A waiter, just as cheerful as the host, is now standing over their table, with a mile-wide smile.

“Bottle of *Blanc de Noire*,” Ashton requests.

“I’ll get that for you right away sir.” The waiter smiles, nods his head in a slight bow then rushes off.

Saara suspects that Ashton is probably a regular patron since he was greeted by name. And judging by the way the staff was dotting over him, tells her that he is probably also a very good tipper.

The couple polishes off half of the bottle of champagne, devours their appetizers of prawns bedded in sautéed spinach and starts on their entrees, and through it all, Ashton has not spoken a word.

“So are you from Atlanta?” Saara finally decides to break the uncomfortable air of silence.

“No.” Ashton responds as he cuts a chunk from his filet mignon and takes a bite.

Saara expects him to elaborate more once he finishes chewing but he doesn’t; he simply cuts another chunk of steak and continues on with his dining.

“I consider Los Angeles home since I’ve lived there most of my life. I like Atlanta but I really miss living on the coast,” Saara tries again to initiate a dialogue.

Ashton looks up at her briefly and gives her a slight smile, without uttering a word.

‘Damn, are his vocal cords damaged? Does it hurt him when he speaks? This is one strange individual,’ Saara thinks. Again, she finds herself frustrated with her date and decides to just follow his lead for the rest of the evening.

After their meal, Ashton tips big and they ride the glass elevator back down to the lobby in silence. Ashton escorts Saara back to the limo. Once inside, he takes her hand. 'Did you enjoy your meal?' He squeezes it gently.

'Did I enjoy my meal? What the hell do you think? Had you talked to me while we were dining you would know if I enjoyed my meal or not. You strange person!' Saara wants to say this, however, she digresses and simply smiles and says, "yes, very much so."

The entire ride back to Saara's condo, Ashton sits close to her and holds her hand but not a word is spoken between the two of them. Though Saara feels very uncomfortable with Ashton's strange behavior, she feels good being next to him. She finds his confidence, self-assuredness and demeanor of power very appealing. There is so much she wants to know about him and assumed that the reason he had asked her out was because he wanted to get to know her. But the date is almost over and all she knows about him at this point is his name, that he has expensive taste, seems to do things in style and he isn't big on conversation.

When the limo arrives back at Saara's condo, Ashton enters the building with her and escorts her to the elevator. Suddenly, Saara's mind is focused on whether he will kiss her or not. Or, if he does, will it be on the lips, cheeks or a light smack on the forehead? She wonders if he will say goodnight even. When the elevator door opens, and just as a wave of uneasiness sweeps over her, Ashton extends his arm across the door and motions for Saara to enter. He then enters behind her, much to her surprise.

Saara is even more uncomfortable now. She had not planned for Ashton to come up to her apartment with her. As they ride up the elevator, Saara, for the first time, regrets the mirrored doors. They had always seemed to come in handy in the past when she, on very many occasions, had rushed out to an appointment. The mirrored doors allowed her a free opportunity to get in quick touch ups to her hair and makeup as she rode down. However, this time, with both her and Ashton's image reflecting back, although Ashton seems very comfortable, she feels like a giant spotlight is shining over her. Upon its stop, the doors seemingly cannot open quickly enough for Saara. As soon as they do, she rushes out.

"Well, this is my stop." Saara stops in front of her unit, three doors down from the elevator. "I had a wonderful evening." She turns to face Ashton, simultaneously reaching down into her purse and pulling out her keys. As quickly as she takes them out, Ashton gently takes them from her hands and unlocks the door.

"Thank you." Saara finds herself again caught off guard. With Ashton standing in her doorway smiling down at her, with her keys still in his hands, she doesn't know what to do next or what he expects her to do. "Ahmm..." she nervously searches for words.

"Do you have anything to drink?" Ashton finally takes the initiative.

"Sure, sure, come in." Still nervous, Saara is glad that he at least has taken the lead, as she is at a stalemate. "I don't have champagne," she teases, "but I do have wine. Red or White?" Saara places her purse on the coffee table and heads toward the kitchen.

"Red. The drier the better." Ashton invites himself to a seat on the sofa.

Saara pours two drinks then walks over to the sofa and hands one to Ashton. She then sits on the sofa next to him, being careful not to sit too close. She had no idea that the evening would take the path that it is taking. She'd thought that she would simply go out to dinner with her handsome new suitor, then return home alone and either call Shannon with exciting news or curl up disappointedly on the couch and fall asleep. But now this handsome stranger is in her house, on her sofa and she is uncertain as to where the evening will head. "Okay Saara, as not to create an embarrassing situation, I think we'd better remain in the neutral zone," her mental voice utters.

"Thank you." Ashton reaches for his glass and immediately takes a sip. "Do you have a coaster?"

"Of course, let me get one for you. Polite. I like that," Saara whispers as she walks back into the kitchen and takes two coasters from the counter. She then returns and places the coasters on the table. When she sits down this time, she positions herself a little further away from her handsome date. Although she tries not to let her nervousness show; Saara is most uncomfortable. As each second passes, she finds herself more and more attracted to this man of such striking good looks. With a weight-proportioned height of six-foot four, dark wavy hair, chiseled features and eyes as black as a romantic night. What girl wouldn't be? Though she does have an issue with his odd behavior of tuning her out at will; it doesn't alter the fact that she is literally mesmerized.

The two of them sit, both taking light sips, neither saying anything. Finally, Ashton places his glass on the coaster. He then moves in closer towards Saara, takes her glass from her hand and places it on the other coaster. Before Saara can trigger an emotion, he gently presses his lips upon hers. Saara finds his mouth pleasing as his soft lips rest upon hers. Their soft kiss quickly escalates to passionate. Suddenly, very gently, Ashton begins pressing Saara down onto the sofa, positioning his body on top of hers. Saara knows this is the moment for her to end it. But she finds his mouth so sweet and his cologne so intoxicating she thinks she'll enjoy it for just a little while longer. Then, in an unexpected move, Ashton reaches his hands under Saara's dress and begins to tug at her panties.

This is the point where Saara has always stopped Rick. And although she's enjoying the intimacy, she knows this is the point that she must stop Ashton as well.

"Ashton, I can't." Saara, now completely aroused, begins to push him away. She should have known that Ashton was a different man than Rick. Unlike Rick, who always reluctantly gave in to this resistance, Ashton ignores her, and with one hard tug, he rips away her panties.

"Ashton, I can't, I..." Saara utters resistance in a passionate pant as she becomes aware that Ashton is now unzipping his pants.

"Ashton, I can't. I'm celiba..."

Before Saara can finish the word, Ashton thrusts his fully erect manhood inside of her.

"Oh...goosh." Saara moans as his large, hard penis pulsates inside of her. "Oh Ashton, please, I can't," her voice begins to quiver. Although she is resisting him with words, her body is responding passionately to his every action. Suddenly every inch of him is inside of her. There is even power in his lovemaking. She holds him tightly as he makes love to her as if he owns her. Then, he lifts her in his masculine arms and carries her off into the bedroom.

Laying Saara on the bed, Ashton releases a passion upon her like she's never experienced. Saara moans uncontrollably as she surrenders all her inhibitions and allows Ashton to enjoy her in all the ways he desires. She doesn't know how many times she climaxes but it feels as if all of the ones she's suppressed since her bout with celibacy are now escaping at the same time. She glances at the clock a couple of times and notices hours are passing. Ashton proves to be a truly accomplished lover; his every thrust is powerful and pleasing. Saara can feel him in every fiber of her body. What manner of man could bring her to this level of ecstasy?

Their intense lovemaking lasts throughout the night. With the power of Ashton erupting deeply inside of her, neither of them seems ready to stop. Suddenly, Saara hears the sound of her doorbell. She opens her eyes, and a slither of sunlight seeps through the Venetians. She's surprised to see that it's now morning. "Ashton!" she calls out. Jumping from the bed and grabbing her robe, she rushes into the living room. Ashton's clothes and other traces of him are gone. It is then that Saara realizes she is alone. How much of this incredible lovemaking actually happened and how much was only a dream? How long has he been gone? Did they really make love as long as Saara thought they had? Saara doesn't remember dozing off. All she remembers is the intensity of their lovemaking. As she stands in the living room baffled, the doorbell rings a second time. Hoping it's Ashton, Saara rushes to the door and presses her eye to the peephole. "Shannon!" Saara opens the door and invites her friend in. "Shan, what are you doing here?"

"What do you mean what am I doing here? Since when do I need to explain why I visit my best friend? Oh, I'm sorry is he still here?" Shannon takes one step in but then quickly steps back before proceeding.

"No. Come on in." Saara takes a deep sigh. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that."

"Oh, it's okay. You know I'm not sensitive. I just stopped by to tell you about the concert."

"Shan, you didn't come all the way over to this side of town, this early in the morning to tell me about a concert. Do you really expect me to believe that?"

"Actually, I have a hair appointment with Mr. Metrosexual and, of course, I also stopped by to be nosey. I called you last night to see how your date went, but then I *heard* how your date went." Shannon walks inside, giving Saara a sinister smirk as she does so.

"What do you mean you heard how my date went? Heard from whom?" Saara quickly closes the door and follows Shannon. "Shan! What in hell are you talking about? How did you hear about my date?"

"Well, from you and Mr. Ashton, my dear," Shannon is obviously enjoying the rife that she's getting out of Saara. "Sweetie, I called you last night and somehow I guess one of you knocked the phone off of the hook. So I heard the two of you *going at it*."

"Shannon! You're kidding me. Right? Please tell me that you're kidding!" Saara is overwhelmingly embarrassed. "Just what did you hear?"

"Why Saara, sweetie, I thought I'd mistakenly dialed one of those sex hotlines," Shannon continues to tease, putting on a fake British accent. "So, please tell me dear. Exactly when did the definition for celibate change, and why didn't you tell me? 'Cause based on what I heard last night, if that's the new meaning, I'm converting today."

"Shan, I don't know what happened. One minute we were sitting on the sofa having a glass of wine and suddenly, he was inside of me. I am so embarrassed that you heard that. I remember the phone ringing and Ashton reaching for it." Saara continues to rant. "But I don't..."

"Saara! Calm down! You don't have to explain yourself or make an apology, I'm only teasing you sweetie. You and Ashton are two consenting adults. If you enjoyed the pleasures of each other, *and I know you did*" Shannon

throws in one more tease, “then so be it. But I do want all of the juicy details.” Shannon grabs Saara by the hand and pulls her over to the couch. “And don’t leave out anything.”

“Well, all I can say is that it was the most amazing experience I’ve ever had.” Saara gets up from the couch and walks into the kitchen. “I need to make a pot of coffee.”

Shannon jumps up as well and follows suit.

“Shan, I know what good sex feels like and although I’m celibate now...well I was...well, I still am except for last night ... aw anyway.” Saara finds herself going off into an uncontrollable babble. “What I’m trying to say is, last night was simply amazing; enchanting...supernatural almost.” Saara searches for just the right word to give her experience a worthy description.

“Enchanting? Supernatural? Gosh sweetie, just what did he do to you? I’ve never had sex that I would describe as supernatural. Enchanting either for that matter.

“It’s like he was inside of me, but not just his penis. It was like all of him was in me. I literally felt him in every part of my body. It was almost as if he dissolved himself and became one with me.” Saara continues to try explaining her most pleasurable evening. “I know it sounds strange, and actually it was strange. I just don’t know how to fully put it into words.”

“Damn, you make it sound as if the man possessed you. I see he also left a few passion marks.” Shannon tugs slightly on Saara’s collar.

“Odd, but it does sorta feel that way. It feels almost as if he’s still inside of me; still making love to me. My body is literally throbbing.” Saara takes a deep breath. “I gotta go take a shower; I need to calm down from this.” Saara exits the kitchen, having yet to touch the coffee pot, and heads towards the bathroom. “I won’t be long.”

“What do you mean you gotta go take a shower? Can’t you finish telling me the story and then go take your shower?”

“Just give me a few minutes. I won’t take long.”

“Awww, okay,” Shannon fusses. “But hurry up already, I can’t wait to hear the rest of this. I got a feeling I’m going to need a shower by the time this story ends.”

“Oh damn!” Saara suddenly lets out a loud outburst.

“Saara! Are you alright?” Shannon rushes to the bathroom and finds Saara standing in front of the mirror; her body covered in passion marks.

“Oh damn is right!” Shannon walks over to Saara and begins examining her body. “Is there any spot on you he didn’t brand? Saara, these go beyond passion marks; these are territorial marks. Sweetie, I hate to say this but this is the sign of a possessive man.”

“No, that’s just a result of him being caught up in the heat of the moment,” Saara shrugs off Shannon’s concerns. “I just wish there weren’t so damn many of them.” Saara turns on the shower and steps in. “Hey Shan, why don’t you go cook us a quick breakfast while I take my shower?”

“Cook? Breakfast? Me? You expect *me* to cook! Surely you’re joking,” Shannon protests.

“Well, if you wanna hear the rest of my story you will,” Saara teases from the shower. “It doesn’t have to be anything major, just eggs and toast.”

“Oh, all right!” Shannon concedes. “I can’t believe I’m being manipulated into cooking just so I can hear a sex story. What’s the matter with me...am I perverted or what?”

A few minutes later, Saara, adorned in a bathrobe, walks back into the kitchen and sits at the table. “I don’t smell any eggs cooking.”

“That’s because you don’t have any...thank God!” Shannon walks over and hands Saara a plate holding cream-cheese bagels, then heads back into the kitchen and returns with a pot of coffee. “So it’ll just be bagel and coffee.” She then sits across from Saara in front of the plate she’d already set out for herself. “Now, finish telling me about your little love feast.” Shannon picks up her bagel and takes a bite.

“Well, there really isn’t that much more to tell,” Saara takes a sip of coffee. “It happened so unexpectedly and, as odd as I know this sounds, I really don’t remember exactly when it ended. He was here all night...it seems. Then morning came and he wasn’t. You know, if I talk about it much more I’ll get aroused all over again.” Saara picks up her bagel and begins to take a bite. “Gosh Shan, did you use the whole tub of cream cheese on this?”

“I’m not at all pleased with this story Saara. Somehow I believe you’re holding out on me. But, its okay, I got an ear full over the phone last night.” Shannon ignores Saara’s complaint about the overabundance of cream on her bagel then takes another bite from her own. “So, tell me about your actual date. Where did you go? How was the date?”

“My date is a story within itself. It was quite interesting, I guess ...”

“Well, I just hope that your date story is going to be more exciting and detailed than your sex story.” Shannon interrupts sarcastically.

“Oh stop your pouting,” Saara teases. “I was about to say that my date with Ashton was strange.”

“Strange in what way?” Shannon refills her cup, then reaches over and tops off Saara’s as well.

“He wouldn’t talk to me. We got into the limo and...”

“Did you just say limo?” Shannon interrupts again, “Very classy. Continue.”

“Yes limo! Ms. Bougie,” Saara takes a sip of coffee. “As I was saying, once inside the *limo*, he pours me a glass of champagne, then he tunes me out. The same thing at dinner: He takes me to the Sundial, wine and dines me lavishly, but there isn’t any conversation. It was very strange. I don’t think he’s someone I’ll want to date on a regular basis.” Saara takes another sip. “I was very uncomfortable with him.”

“Sweetie, so the man’s not a talker. So what! He’s handsome, classy and, as you’ve stated, a damn good lover. Why not just enjoy that? Besides, we don’t really need a man who talks, that’s what we have girlfriends for.”

“Well *girlfriend*, I’ve got a closing in a couple of hours and you know how long it takes me to get dressed. So, we’ll have to finish this conversation in the bedroom, I need to find something to wear from that cluttered closet of mine.” Saara walks off into the bedroom.

“Sure, I need to borrow your red pumps anyway.” Shannon follows Saara into the bedroom. “Saara, didn’t you say Ashton unplugged the phone when I called last night?”

“Well, he reached for it... I assumed he unplugged it, I only know that it stopped ringing. But to be honest with you, at that moment I really didn’t give it any thought,” Saara yells out from the closet.

“Well, he didn’t unplug it. He just lifted the receiver and laid it on the nightstand. It looks as if it was deliberate; as if he wanted whoever was calling to hear what was going on.”

“Naah, I don’t think...” Saara stops in mid-sentence as she walks out of the closet holding two outfits and approaches the side of the bed where Shannon is standing. “It does look that way now that you mention it. Wonder why he would do that?” Saara looks puzzled. Then, as if she is suddenly struck with an epiphany, “God! What if that had been Rick calling last night? That would’ve devastated him. I could never forgive myself if Rick had heard that.”

“Of course he would have been devastated. To hear you moaning and groaning with another man only a few days after the two of you break up because you’re *celibate*. And Ashton *did that* because he thought that *was* a guy calling you. After all, it was after midnight when I called. This is another sign of a possessive man. Either that or he likes an audience. Kink...ky,” Shannon teases.

“I can’t think about all of that right now,” Saara shrugs her shoulders. “I need to get ready for this closing. Which one?” Saara holds up the outfits for Shannon’s opinion. Before Shannon can make her decision, Saara drops both garments on the bed and reaches for her ringing cellphone. “I don’t believe it. It’s Rick!”

“Rick?” Shannon frowns. “Now that boy has really bad timing. For more reasons than one.”

“Hello. Hi Rick.” Saara keeps her eyes focused on Shannon, making befuddled expressions. “I’m fine. How are you? Well, I guess that’ll be okay. I can’t do it today. Tomorrow at 2:00? Sure, I’ll see you then.” Saara releases the call. “Shan, he wants to meet with me.”

“So I heard. What if he wants to get back with you? What would you say?”

“I don’t know! And you’re right; he does have bad damn timing! Which outfit do you think I should wear?” Saara snaps.

“Well don’t bite my head off. It’s not my fault that you’ve gotten yourself caught up in your little love web. Seems to me your life was less complicated before you took it upon yourself to go changing the definition of words. See, if you’d just let celibate mean keeping your panties on, you wouldn’t be in this mess,” Shannon teases.

Saara is now feeling tensed and overwhelmed however; she can’t refrain from letting out a loud burst of laughter. Though Shannon is a snobby, elitist, high-powered attorney, she has a sense of humor that can lighten up any situation.

“Girl, you are too much,” Saara continues to laugh uncontrollably. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. But my situation is partially your fault. You were the one who insisted on dragging me down to Tiara’s when I should have been at home being miserable. So technically, although I weaved my own web, it was you who supplied the silk.”

“Yeah, yeah, blame it on the lawyer why don’t ya! Everyone loves to blame their problems on the lawyer.” Shannon and Saara are now both consumed in a fit of laughter.

## Chapter 5

"Hey girl, you up?" Shannon's voice cheerfully rings through the receiver.

"I am now," Saara responds groggily. "You're such a morning person. What time is it anyway?"

"Oh I don't know. Early!" Shannon responds in her typically smart-ass manner. "I'm going to be on your side of town this morning and wanted to know if you want to meet me for breakfast."

"I would love to Shan, but I can't. Rick's coming over at 2:00 and I have a ton of errands to run before he gets here," Saara declines.

"Oh...okay. Well, I'll give you a call later this evening before heading home. If you're free perhaps we can go to Tiara's for drinks."

"That sounds like a plan. Depending on how my meeting with Rick goes, I just might need a drink afterwards. You know Shan, I'm actually nervous. Now why in the hell would I be nervous about seeing Rick?"

"Sweetie, that's not your nerves. That's a major case of compunction. You're feeling guilty about sexing Ashton, a stranger after denying Rick, your man. Also, I'd planned to tell you this over breakfast but since we're not meeting I guess I should tell you now. Rick wants to talk to you about getting back together. He told Brock."

"I figured that much." Saara lets out a sigh.

"Saara you have a dilemma on your hands. Your and Rick's only problem was sex and since you're no longer celibate that matter is now resolved. But now Ashton is in the equation. And with the way you described his lovemaking, you can't tell me that you're willing to give that up."

"But Rick and I have time invested and he's a great guy. I just can't..."

"Listen Saara," Shannon interrupts. "I know Rick's a great guy. But I also know that you're now feeling something for Ashton. So my advice to you is to do what makes you feel good. I know you have this thing about always doing the right thing, but if someone is bound to get their feelings or ego hurt, just don't let it be you. It's your body and your time and it's your prerogative to share it with whomever you choose. You don't have to ever feel guilty about that," Shannon lectures Saara like a big sister with all of the answers. "And, if it'll put your mind at ease, just remember it was Rick who decided to end the relationship, not you!"

"You're right. I know. But it still doesn't calm my nerves any. And I definitely don't want to hurt Rick.

"Saara, you're not responsible for anyone's happiness but your own. Rick and Ashton are both big boys; they'll get over whatever the outcome is. I got to head out of here. Just remember what I told you. I'll call you later."

"It's 11:30 already? Where does the time go?" Saara fusses as she grabs her keys and rushes out of her apartment. I hate to admit this but Shannon is right, I do have a problem with time." She scolds herself as she makes her way down to the lobby.

As soon as Saara rushes out of the building she hears her named called out from close proximity. "Saara!"

Saara turns and is surprised to see Ashton standing out front next to a limo.

"Where are you headed?" He flashes a gorgeous smile as he begins to approach her. Upon reaching her, he gives her a full kiss on the mouth, greeting her as if they are long-time lovers.

"I...I'm going to run some errands," Saara stammers, caught off guard not only by Ashton's overly presumptuous kiss, but his impromptu visit as well.

"I was coming to take you to have brunch with me." Without waiting for Saara to accept, and completely ignoring her errand remark, Ashton takes her by the hand and leads her toward the limo.

Saara follows along without hesitation. Once inside, Ashton sits close to her and then takes her by the hand. Saara's heart begins to race. She immediately begins to reminisce about their lovemaking and is now consumed with wanting him to take her. Their ride is without conversation. Ashton, in typical Ashton fashion, rests his head on the back of the seat and closes his eyes. From time to time he gives her hand a gentle squeeze.

"Great! Here I am once again in another awkward situation." Saara whispers to herself. She sits up straight and glances out the window. "Why am I allowing this man to control my time like this? I have to meet Rick at two," she silently scolds herself.

Suddenly, the limo slows down and turns into Peachtree Dekalb Airport. Another one of Saara's favorite restaurants, *The 57<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group*, is in this airport. Saara especially loves it because the patrons can watch planes take off and land while dining. "Humm, two dates at two of my favorite restaurants. Has this guy been stalking me?" Saara whispers as the car comes to a stop.

As they exit the limo, Ashton takes Saara by the hand and escorts her to an awaiting G550. Saara now realizes that they're not going to the restaurant. She thinks about her two o'clock date with Rick, then instead of becoming impressed; she becomes anxious. "Ashton, where are we going?" She finally demands an answer.

“It’s a surprise.” Ashton replies casually as he helps her onto the plane. “Hello.” He greets the pilot on the way in.

Saara’s surprised that he answers. “But where? We’re flying there?” She protests.

“It’s not that far.” Ignoring Saara’s obvious concerns, Ashton walks her to the back of the cabin and escorts her to a large plush chair. He closes the thick black curtains, separating them from the cockpit. He then hovers over her and presses a lever on the side of her chair, causing it to recline into a lounge position.

Saara’s concerns, protests and every thought of Rick immediately abandon her as her mind diverts back to her and Ashton’s first date. Her body begins to quiver.

Ashton kisses Saara softly on the lips; he then stands. “Come here.” He reaches for her to stand as well. Slowly, he begins to undress her and then himself.

“Ashton,” Saara pants nervously. “The pilot will be able to hear us.” As she stands before him completely naked, she quivers with anticipation of what’s about to happen.

Without saying a word, Ashton lays her back onto the lounge. He then presses his lips upon hers and gives her a passionate kiss.

Saara takes delight in the feel of his fully erect penis throbbing as his body presses against hers. Although Ashton’s kiss is wonderful, Saara is now overpowered by desire. “Oh Ashton, please, give it to me now.” She moans seductively.

Ashton reaches down and touches her between her legs. “Saara! You’re amazingly wet.” He moans in her ear. This sends him into an erotic frenzy. Fervently, he lifts her legs, places them over his shoulders, and then thrusts himself fully inside of her.

Saara lets out a gasp. Embedding her nails into his back, she pulls him deeper inside of her. She can hear the doors being closed and the engines starting up as the plane readies to taxi to the runway. However, she no longer cares about where Ashton’s surprise place is or how long it will take to get there. All she knows at this moment is total bliss, and in this moment nothing else matters.

Saara and Ashton make love the entire time they are in the air. Their last climax comes simultaneously, at the exact moment the wheels touch the runway. It is as if Ashton has, in some remarkable way, timed it precisely. The added sensation causes Saara to let out a passionate scream so loud she is certain the pilot hears her.

“I trust you enjoyed your flight?” The pilot smiles politely at Saara and Ashton as they exit the plane.

“Yes. Thank you.” Ashton replies.

Certain that their sexual rouse was overhead, Saara doesn’t respond and embarrassingly refrains from making eye contact.

“Hello Mr. Da’Vied.” The driver of an awaiting sedan opens the door and helps the couple inside.

As Saara glances out the window, she now knows that their surprise location is Destin Florida.

It’s a short drive from the airport to their destination. Within minutes the sedan pulls in front of a quaint beach bungalow. As Saara and Ashton enter inside, they are greeted by a Hispanic couple, both wearing uniforms with *Destin’s Finest Catering* embroidered on the sleeve.

“Buenos dias senior Da’Vied, everything is ready for you,” the man smiles. ” Hope you enjoy.” The couple then walks outside and leaves.

Ashton takes Saara by the hand and leads her out onto an open veranda. A crystal ice-filled tray with sushi, fresh fruit and a chilled bottle of Riesling sits on top of a round table adorned with a white linen tablecloth that blows gently in the breeze. The ocean waves beat upon the shore that stops only a few feet away. “So what do you think of my surprise?”

“I love it!” Saara beams. “Since leaving Los Angeles, I rarely get the chance to visit the ocean.” Saara feels as if she’s walked into a fairytale.

Ashton pulls out a chair and tucks Saara in, then sits across from her. He opens the bottle of wine and fills both their glasses.

Saara pulls apart her chopsticks and reaches for an eel and avocado roll. “I can eat sushi everyday and never get tired of it.” She dips it in the soy and wasabi sauce then takes a bite. As beautiful as the scenery is and as romantic the moment, Saara can’t shake the thought of wanting Ashton to make love to her again.

After a few bites of sushi and a partial glass of wine, Ashton, as if reading her mind, stands up and walks over to Saara. He reaches for her hand and pulls her up into standing position. Without speaking a word, he kisses her gently and then begins sliding her dress straps off of her shoulders.

Saara happily and eagerly responds by removing Ashton’s clothes as well.

The both of them now stark naked, Ashton takes Saara by the hand and leads her down to the beach.

“Ashton! We can’t go down there, someone might see us.” Initially thinking that they would make love on the more secluded veranda, Saara is now feeling reluctant.

Ashton ignores her slight resistance and walks her closer to the shoreline. He then pulls her down onto the cool, wet sand. "Its okay, this part of the beach is private." He begins kissing her.

Although she's very uncomfortable being naked out in the open, Saara doesn't resist. She closes her eyes, wraps her arms around Ashton and kisses him back. And there, on the water's edge, with the waves caressing their bodies, they make love.

## Chapter 6

"Really Ashton, you don't have to walk me to the door. I'm just going to do a quick change and head back out to run my errands." Saara quickly stops Ashton as he proceeds to exit the car with her. Their spontaneous, romantic escapade is over and they are now back in Atlanta.

Ashton gives her a suspicious glare as if he's aware that she's trying to get rid of him.

Not as sophisticated as Shannon, Saara doesn't quite know how to exit the situation without being conspicuous. Already late for her meeting with Rick, she doesn't want to waste any more time. So she quickly gives Ashton a light kiss. "I'll call you later. Okay." Saara then hurries out of the limo, before Ashton can insist on walking her up. "Please don't let him follow me." Saara whispers as she begins to walk away. Her prayer however, is in vain.

Immediately, Ashton rolls down the window and calls out to her. "Saara."

Saara takes a deep breath, then slowly turns and walks back to the car. "Yes?" She stoops down at the window to face him.

"What do you think he'll say to know that I fucked you twice today at 12 o'clock?"

Slowly, the black tinted window rolls up and the limo drives off.

Saara is left standing in her stooped position with her mouth now gaped open in a shocked, appalled gasp.

"Twice today at 12 o'clock? What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Saara mumbles to herself. Shocked and numbed by Ashton's blunt and offensive remark, Saara can only stand for a moment, completely dumbfounded. He might as well have slapped her, for it would have had the same effect. Slowly, she regains her composure and heads back toward the lobby.

"Twice today at 12 o'clock?" She keeps mumbling. "Why the hell would he say something like that to me? We just spent a perfectly romantic moment together and then he ruins it by insulting me! What the hell is up with this man?"

Saara talks out her thoughts as she makes her way up to her apartment. "Could it be that he somehow knew that I'm planning to meet Rick? Of course not, how would he know that!" She continues to try to add reason to Ashton's rudeness.

As Saara approaches her apartment she notices a slip of paper sticking out from the crack in the door.

"Damn he's been here already." Saara knows immediately that the note is from Rick. She removes the slip of paper, unlocks the door then and walks inside. Just as she turns to close the door behind her, she finds herself standing face to face with Rick.

"Rick! You scared the hell out of me. Where did you come from?" For the first time, Saara wishes she hadn't given the concierge the okay to allow certain individuals carte blanche to her apartment.

Without answering her, Rick invites himself in.

Saara suddenly notices that he's upset. She steps back to allow space between the two of them.

"I was here at two o'clock, as we agreed." Rick's voice is agitated, "and then again at 2:30. If you didn't want to meet with me why didn't you just say so? Why didn't you just..." Rick suddenly stops in mid-sentence as his eyes fixate on Saara's neck. "Passion marks? Are you seeing someone else...already? One week after our breakup?" His voice is now elevated. "Who is he?"

"Rick I, I," Saara stammers, as she tries to conjure up a response. Suddenly, she hears Shannon's voice reverberating in her mind. "*Saara, you don't have to make excuses to anyone. You're your own person.*" Saara knows that Shannon is right, however Rick has blind-sided her with his ambush-like approach so her mind hasn't had time to register a response.

"Are you fucking him?" Rick yells. He encroaches even more on her space.

Still, Saara finds herself speechless. She inhales deeply and then exhales. Ashamed and embarrassed, she lowers her eyes.

“Saara! Look at me! I asked you a question. “Are you fucking someone” Rick continues to demand, as if he’s the scorned husband. Suddenly, he rushes forward and grabs her.

“Rick, let me explain.” Saara finally speaks. She pushes against him in an effort to free herself. In her struggle, a strap on her dress rips, exposing more skin.

Rick now becomes completely enraged. He angrily rips the other strap away. Saara dress falls to the floor, fully exposing Ashton’s calling card.

Rick releases her and steps back. His face is now flushed in anguish. “So, you *are* fucking someone” His voice is now trembling, his eyes becomes watery. “Nobody puts marks on your body like that unless they’re fucking you. Six months Saara! Six months I was patient with you! Loving and trusting you! Believing in you!” Rick raises his voice to the highest pitch yet.

“Rick, I’m so sorry.” The now tearful Saara reaches down, picks up her dress and tries to cover herself. But before she can do so, Rick grabs her. He picks her up and tosses her onto the sofa. He then straddles her and begins unzipping his pants.

“Rick, please don’t,” Saara cries. “Please don’t do this.” She begs.

Ignoring her pleas, Rick forces her legs apart. But suddenly, just before he is about to penetrate her, he stops. He then rolls off of her and slides down onto the floor. Sitting on the floor, he holds his head in his hands and begins to sob.

Saara has never felt worse than she does at this moment. Not knowing what to say or do, she reaches down and place her hands on his shoulder.

“Don’t touch me Saara! Please don’t touch me.” Rick pushes her hand away. He then gets up from the floor and zips his pants. Without looking back, he walks toward to door.

“Rick, please let’s talk about this. Please don’t leave this way.” Saara rushes behind him.

Suddenly, Rick turns and grabs her by the shoulders. He then angrily shoves her up against the wall.

“Please Rick, you’re hurting me,” Saara whimpers.

“Hurting you? I’m hurting you?” Rick’s anger is now out of control. He raises his fist and aims it toward her.

Saara has never seen him this way; she’s terrified. As Rick thrust his fist towards her, she squeezes her eyes shut and braces herself for the impact. Her body trembles in fear. Suddenly she hears the sound of drywall crackling as Rick redirects his anger from her to it.

Saara is completely distraught, her heart pounds rapidly. Crying hysterically, she slides down to the floor. “Rick I really didn’t mean to hurt you. Please know that I’m truly sorry.”

Rick ignores her apology. He stands for a few minutes as if trying to regain his composure. Saara thinks he’s about to say something, but he doesn’t. He only lets out a deep sigh and then he leaves.

## Chapter 7

“Hey babe.” Shannon cheerfully answers her ringing phone displaying Brock’s name.

“What’s up with your girl?” Brock blares out.

“What do you mean?” Sensing the seriousness in Brock’s tone, Shannon ignores the fact that he didn’t bother to say hello first.

“I just got off the phone with Rick. He called me up devastated. I couldn’t make out all he was saying, but it was something about him going over to meet with Saara and something about her screwing some other guy. He was too distraught to talk clearly. I’m heading to his place now; he asked me to meet him there.”

“Brock, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Shannon fires back defensively. “I called Saara a few minutes ago but didn’t get an answer. Let me give you a call back.”

Shannon releases the call before Brock can respond. It’s obvious to her that whatever is going on, the boys have already ganged up. So she immediately calls Saara again. Getting no answer, Shannon rushes over to Saara’s apartment. Nervously, she knocks at the door.

After a third knock, a teary-eyed Saara answers, “Oh Shan.” Saara rushes toward Shannon “It’s terrible. I feel just terrible.”

“What happened sweetie?” Shannon reaches for Saara to comfort her. She enters the apartment and closes the door behind them. “Brock just called me all upset, rambling something about Rick coming here and you sleeping with...” Shannon suddenly stops in mid-sentence. “Saara, was Ashton here? Did Rick walk in on the two of you?”

“No. No.” Chocking on her tears, Saara is unable to form a sentence.

“Then how would Rick know that you’re sleeping with someone? Please tell me that you didn’t tell him about you and Ashton.”

“No. No.” Saara sobs; her vocabulary now reduced to this one word.

Shannon walks Saara over to the sofa. “Sit here sweetie. I’ll go get a towel. Shannon gently sits Saara on the sofa and walks off to the restroom. She returns with a warm, wet towel.

“Look at me.” Shannon lifts Saara’s face up toward hers and begins wiping away the tears, as if she’s the mother trying to calm an upset child. “Now tell me what happened.”

“Saara takes a deep breath. “Well, I was going to run some errands before Rick came over,” Saara’s voice crackles. “As I was heading to my car, Ashton appeared...he just appeared out of nowhere!” Saara struggles to speak taking deep sighs in between words, “He escorted me to his limo. One moment I’m here going about my day then suddenly I’m on an airplane with Ashton, making love. He said we were going to have brunch.”

“Airplane? What? Did he just show up with tickets? And how were you making love on an airplane?” Shannon interrupts, her face now riddled with curiosity.

“It was his private plane...or somebody’s,” Saara responds nonchalantly.

“Private plane!” Shannon blurts out. Her gold-digger light immediately switches on.

“Shannon, please!” Saara glares at her materialistic friend; with tears still streaming down her cheeks.

“I’m sorry sweetie. You know how I get. Go on,” Shannon apologizes.

Saara lets out a sigh. “We took the plane to Destin, had lunch at his beach house and he flew me back here.”

‘Private planes, limos, beach houses! This girl doesn’t seem to be the least bit impressed. Does she not realize what she has? Why the hell didn’t Ashton choose me?’ All of these thoughts are racing through Shannon’s mind. Her gold-digger light is now flashing like a beacon.

“You know Shan,” Saara continues; unaware that Shannon has temporarily tuned her out. “When we got back to my apartment, Ashton said the strangest thing to me.

“I’m sorry sweetie, what did you just say?” Shannon manages to dim down her greed lights and focus her attention back to her friend.

“When we got back to my apartment, Ashton said ‘*what do you think he’ll say to know that I fucked you twice today at 12 o’clock.*’ Saara lets out a deep sigh. “We’d just spent a fairytale moment together then he insults me.”

“That is a damn odd thing for him to say.” Shannon agrees. “Who was he referring to? Do you think he somehow knew you were planning to meet with Rick?”

“I’m sure he suspected that I was up to something after I insisted that he not walk me to my door.” Saara is starting to calm down a bit. Although her voice still quivers on every word, the tears have ceased. “But what did he mean by twice today at 12 o’clock? “I just don’t get that.”

“Well, that’s simple sweetie,” Shannon states matter-of-factly. “It’s kinda weird but Florida has two timezones. The Eastern parts are in the Eastern timezone and the Western parts are in Central time zone, making it a one-hour time difference between here and Destin. So if you two got on the plane in Atlanta at twelve and had your little rendezvous, by the time you got to Destin, it was around twelve o’clock again. So I guess that was just Ashton’s pompous way of saying that no matter what you and ‘date number two’ had planned, it was not likely to top his.”

“Really? I didn’t know that.” Saara gives Shannon a perplexed look.

“I know it sounds weird, but just take my word for it. So, how *did* Rick find out about you seeing someone else? According to Brock, he knows you’re sexually involved with someone. How does he know that?” Shannon goes back to the matter at hand.

“That’s the worst part.” Saara suddenly closes her eyes. She takes a deep breath. “When I got back, Rick was already here. He invited himself in. When he saw the passion marks he became enraged. Oh Shan, it was awful. I’d never seen him like that. I thought he was going to hit me.” Saara begins to cry again.

“Rick? Hit you?” Saara, you know Rick would never harm you.”

“I thought...he was going...to hit me!” Saara repeats herself emphatically. “He was crying, I was crying. Shan, I never felt so guilty and ashamed in my life. I hurt him something awful.”

“Saara calm down. We’ve had this talk already. Remember?” Shannon holds her distraught friend. “We knew that someone might get hurt behind all of this. I don’t like seeing Rick hurt either. He’s is a great guy and a dear friend. But he’s also a big boy and he’ll get over it.”

“He must hate me. He’s never going to speak to me again and I don’t blame him!” Saara continues to cry.

“Rick doesn’t hate you. He’s hurt but he doesn’t hate you. Time will pass; he’ll get over it and he’ll move on. Saara look at me,” Shannon takes Saara by the shoulders, “You don’t have to feel guilty about anything. Yes, it’s

bad that it happened the way that it did, but it has happened. Nothing can undo that. But Rick doesn't own you. You can share your body with anyone you choose and you should never feel guilty about it. So stop beating yourself up over it." Shannon stands up from the sofa. "You know what? You look awful, and I know what will help. Come on!" Shannon gestures for Saara to stand up as well. "Go freshen up; we're going to Tiara's."

"No Shan, I can't." Saara protests.

"Saara, you need to get out of this apartment for a while. So get up and go get dressed; it'll do you good." Shannon demands.

"Well, I guess you're right," Saara reluctantly gives in. "But let's not go to Tiara's. If I run into Ashton or Rick or, God forbid, they're both there, I'll just die!"

"Well, I sincerely doubt that would be the case, but if it should happen that they *are* both there we'll just deal with it. Besides Saara, no crime has been committed, so you don't have to hide out from anyone. Now go get dressed already!"

"Oh, okay." Without further resistance, Saara heads off to the bedroom.

"And don't take forever." Shannon yells out after her.

## Chapter 8

"Would you believe that Rick still refuses to speak to me?" I've left him several messages but he hasn't returned any of my calls...it's been over a month now." Saara and Shannon sit out on a patio at Atlantic Station people-watching as they wait for the waitress to bring them their second round of margaritas.

"Well, I didn't want to have say this to you, but don't expect him too, at least not anytime soon." Shannon replies.

"He's been bad-mouthing me to Brock, huh?"

"No, he's not bad-mouthing you, he's just still having a hard time coping. He talks to Brock about it...a lot.

"Oh well, I suppose it's a good thing since I probably wouldn't be able to handle what he might say to me anyway." Saara shrugs her shoulders.

"Saara, as much time as you're spending with Ashton these days I'm surprised that you're still so focused on Rick. Rick is a big boy; he'll be okay."

"Yeah, I know. I'm just having a hard time dealing with the way that it ended. There was so much emotion flying around that day, I was just thinking that since things are calmer now, that we could at least talk rationally."

"Two margaritas; one with salt and one without," the waitress politely interrupts them.

"The one with salt is mine," Shannon smiles as she reaches for her drink. "Saara I would suggest that you not spend too much energy on it. Besides if Rick...cuuute shoooes. Those are *Feragamis*." Shannon quickly loses focus as a girl in striking red pumps walks past and sits at a table a few spaces down from them. "So you and Ashton are really becoming an item, huh?" Shannon continues, without completing her last statement about Rick.

"Yeah, I guess so." Saara replies in a frustrated tone.

"Why do you say it like that? I thought you were enjoying spending time with Ashton" Shannon asks curiously.

"I am. It's just that...oh, her shoes are cute." Saara suddenly glances over at the red pumps as well. "It's just that I can't figure him out. I really do love this new world he's opened up to me, but I'm still uncomfortable around him."

"Uncomfortable in what way?" Shannon is now listening very intently.

Well, his behavior for starters..."

"You mean this 'him not talking to you thing'?" Shannon interrupts. "Saara, so the man's not big on talking. Hell, Brock talks too damn much, but do you ever hear me complaining about it? No." Shannon answers her own question. "I've just accepted the fact that he simply loves the sound of his own voice." Shannon lets out a light snicker.

"Yeah, Brock does talk a lot." Saara, lets out a chuckle as well. "But seriously though, it's not only the not-talking issue that I have with Ashton?" Saara takes a sip from her drink. "It's also this whole overly-confident attitude of his. The way he shows up whenever he wants; stays as long as he wants and stays away as long as he wants. I just find it to be very pompous behavior. I feel like I'm losing control of who I am. Ashton came into my

life so suddenly and moved so quickly. I'm just concerned that he might suddenly depart the same way. Every time he goes away I can't help wondering if he'll be back."

"Have you told him how you feel?"

"No!" Saara lets out a light sigh. "I haven't."

"Saaaara! Then don't you think you're being unfair to him? And yourself too for that matter! If you don't tell him how you feel, how is he going to know that you have concerns? My suggestion is that the next time you two are together, that you talk to him. Besides," Shannon laughs out chuckle, "you said that he doesn't like to talk so at least you'll get to have your say without being interrupted." Shannon glances at her watch. "I guess we'd better head out. Brock's cooking dinner tonight and I have a few things to do before I head over." Shannon waves for the waitress to bring the tab. "You think you'll be seeing Ashton this evening?"

"I'm not sure. A couple of days ago he asked me if I had plans for the weekend. He didn't say why he was asking and I didn't bother to question him. I figured that he'd tell me when and if he chose too." Saara responds sarcastically.

"Oh, that makes for a very healthy relationship." Shannon replies condescendingly. "Saara, you sit here and complain to me about Ashton but you won't talk to him. How hard would it have been for you to simply ask him *why?*" Shannon fusses.

"I know Shan. I just wasn't in the mood to have him not respond to me. Saara ignores Shannon's frustration. "So I simply told him that I didn't have plans and left it at that." Saara takes one last sip, polishing off the remainder of her drink. "Ready when you are."

Shannon lets out an exhausting sigh. "Come on let's get out of here. I don't know what's taking the waiter so long. We'll pay at the register."

"I'll give you a call tomorrow." Shannon drops Saara off in front of her condo. "And if Ashton does come over tonight. You really should talk to him."

"Ok, ok. If Ashton comes over tonight I promise that I will talk to him." Saara gets out of the car. "Tell Brock I said hello." She heads for the lobby. She greets the concierge in passing then heads up to her apartment.

Saara is not home a full hour before there's a knock at her door. She has no doubt that it's Ashton however, ever since her debacle with Rick, she now always cautiously looks through the peephole first. Seeing Ashton standing on the other side, she quickly opens the door.

"Hello beautiful." Ashton enters and then kisses her fully on the lips. "I need you to go get dressed; I have a surprise."

"Surprise?" Saara asks in an almost tense voice. "What kind of surprise? Ashton, I was hoping that..."

"You'll know soon enough." Ashton cuts her off before she can finish her sentence. He gives her another peck on the lips. "Just go put on something nice." Ashton, in typical fashion, omits explanation. He goes into the kitchen and helps himself to a glass of wine.

Saara, in typical fashion; complies. Without further questioning, she heads off towards the bedroom.

When Saara and Ashton step off of the private elevator and onto the rooftop of the luxurious hotel, Saara is mesmerized beyond belief. During the entire limo ride she had given herself a mental scolding. "You promised Shannon that you would talk to him. Well now is as good a time as any." Saara had fussed in her mind. However, with this surprise topping even the Destin escapade, Saara quickly forgives herself for not speaking up.

Ashton has pulled out all the stops. Sparing no expense, he has reserved the entire rooftop exclusively for the two of them. Roses and orchids are in abundance, setting off a lovely aroma. Hundreds of candles flicker from every direction. A long dining table sits in the middle of the floor, draped in fine linen and accentuated with fancy Italian dinnerware and flatware. As if ordered as well; stars sparkling brightly as if in chorus with the candles, flood the sky; while a full luminous moon add an extra romantic touch.

"Oh my God! Ashton this is absolutely beautiful!" Saara gasps. "Everything is so perfect."

Without commenting, Ashton takes her by the hand and escorts her to the table. Once they are seated, two waiters, who until now has remained standing next to dining carts; as if following a prepared script, walk over and begin serving them.

The moment Saara and Ashton begins to dine a violinist enters the area and walks over to a stool situated at the far corner of the floor. Without acknowledging them, he sits down and begins playing soft romantic music.

Saara becomes even more awe-struck. "Live entertainment too! Ashton this is amazing. This is the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me." She beams.

Again, Ashton doesn't respond. He simply parts his lips into a faint smile and takes a sip of champagne. His refusal to communicate is now starting to irritate Saara.

"What is with him? Surely he did all of this to impress me so how can he expect me to not be impressed?" Saara fusses to herself again. She glances at Ashton as he casually cuts into his filet mignon; oblivious of her agitated state. "How in hell can a man with so much class be so inept in verbal skills?" She mutters under her breath. "I'll just shut up and not say another word and share my excitement with Shannon tomorrow."

The couple dines in complete silence as the wait staff stands nearby. The only sound is the soft music being played by the violinist.

"I feel like I'm in an enchanted fairytale. Ashton, I really wish you would talk to me. Just say anything." Saara carries on a silent conversation. Completely overwhelmed by the romanticism of the evening, she so much wants to express to Ashton how wonderful she feels; but Ashton is in control of the evening and hasn't given any indication that conversation is sanctioned.

After finishing their meal, the wait staff attentively clears the table. They replace the tablecloth and sit the champagne bucket back on top. "I hope everything was satisfactory," one of the waiters smile. They then wheel the dining cart away and excuse themselves from the area.

Throughout the entire evening the musician remains seated strumming his violin, one beautiful song after another.

As soon as the wait staff exits, Saara begins to feel anxious but before anxiety sets in, Ashton reaches over and takes her by the hand. "Saara, do you love me?"

Saara is totally caught off guard. They have spent the past hour in complete silence, with her wanting to speak but feeling uncomfortable in doing so, and Ashton not speaking simply because he has chosen not to. Now that he has finally decided too, Saara find that she's unable to respond.

"Saara, do you love me?" This time Ashton gently squeezes her hand as if trying to speed up a response.

Saara is now flabbergasted for she isn't sure how she feels. Although she enjoys the way he indulges her and is becoming accustomed to the lavish lifestyle he's swept her into, she doesn't know if she loves him. "I... I..." Saara stammers as she tries to search for an appropriate response.

"Perhaps I should start this out another way," Ashton interrupts her obvious awkward moment. "I'm a man of my own means. I do what I want, when I want. I've always had everything I've ever wanted or needed. I don't mean to sound pompous but that's just the way it has always been for me. I'm a man of privilege and I don't make apologies for that." Ashton's eyes never break contact with Saara's as he continues to speak. "Saara, I've enjoyed the company of many women. Some for their intellect, some for uninhibited sexual pleasure, some because they were intriguing, all of whom were beautiful. But I've never dated anyone who possesses all of the qualities combined, until you. I've never said this to you before because I felt you should know this based on my actions. But tonight I want to say this to you as well as show you. Saara, I love you and I now again, ask. Do you love me?"

Saara stares at Ashton in a hypnotic glaze. Her hands are trembling fiercely and her heart is racing. She has never seen Ashton let his guard down, and for the first time, he actually seems vulnerable. Suddenly, she feels free to say what she's wanted to say for quite some time. Ashton has, for the first time, opened himself up to her and she knows if there ever was a time to tell him exactly what she feels, this is the time to say it.

Saara caresses the back of Ashton's hand as he continues to squeeze hers. She wants to tell him how much she needed to have him open up to her. She wants to tell him how she was never sure where she stood with him. But now faced with the moment, she finds that she is unable to express herself. Saara's eyes wells up with tears. "Ashton, my feelings for you are perplexed. Being in love with you terrifies me." Her words finally come out, though in quivers.

Ashton sits quietly and allows Saara to speak. He grips her hand even firmer and his eyes soften.

"I...I..." Saara's voice begins to tremble. There is so much she wants to say but instead she feels herself beginning to lose control.

"So you *are* in love with me?" Ashton interrupts and completes her sentence.

"Yes," Saara whispers. But although she's said yes she's unsure if she truly means it. Placed in this uncomfortable position, *yes* seems to be the appropriate response.

"Then, will you marry me? Ashton gets out of his chair and then kneels before Saara. "Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?" He presents her with an incredibly exquisite diamond ring.

"Marry!" Saara gasps. "I...I..." Now stunned beyond belief, Saara is truly at a complete loss for words.

Once again, Ashton has blindsided Saara with the unexpected. She has not yet absorbed him finally opening up to her and has said she loves him when she really didn't mean it and now he has jumped ten paces ahead. "I...I don't know what to say." Saara stammers.

"Say yes." Ashton remains kneeled before the mystified Saara, waiting for her to tell him what he wants to hear. "Saara?"

"Yes." Saara hears a voice say in a very soft whisper. It is only when Ashton slips the ring on her finger that she realizes the voice of acceptance is hers.

"Saara, I'm going to make you happier than you can ever imagine." Ashton presses his face close to hers and gives her a passionate kiss. He then rises up, turns and walks away from the patio.

Saara looks in disbelief as Ashton disappears through the door. Just as her heart is about to sink, wondering what type of bizarre behavior he's is now up to, Ashton reappears, along with a gentleman in a dark suit, carrying, what looks to be some sort of book. Accompanying them is a tall, slim woman. Saara remembers seeing this same woman in the hotel lobby when they first arrived. She remembers because the woman was wearing a dress like one that Shannon owns: Shannon's favorite dress. Saara's heart begins to palpitate uncontrollably as the threesome walks toward her.

Ashton walks over and stands next to Saara. He then takes her by the hand. "Stand with me sweetheart." He motions for her to rise.

Now realizing that the book the suited man is carrying is a bible, Saara's heart races even faster. Her knees wobble as she complies and stands up as well.

The man moves in closer and stands before the couple; the woman positions herself opposite of him. He then opens the book to a page marked by a purple, silk bookmark.

Saara composes herself just enough to realize what's about to take place.

"Now? Ashton! You want us to get married? Now!" Saara is stunned beyond comprehension. Feeling her knees about to buckle, she fights to remain standing.

"Sweetheart, why wait? You *do* want to marry me don't you?" Ashton stares at her intently.

"Yes, but I...I..."

"Then why not now?" Ashton interrupts her again, in mid-stammer.

"What's happening to me?" Saara hears a voice screaming inside of her head. "Only a few hours ago you were telling Shannon how uncomfortable you feel with this man. Only a few hours ago you agreed that you should have a long talk with him, and now you're standing here agreeing to marry him. Saara how has this happened? How did we get here?" Saara's voice of reason screams loudly in her mind.

This whirlwind event has placed Saara in a state of shock. Here she stands amongst two strangers and about to become married to a man she hardly knows. This entire evening is like an ethereal dream. Saara stands frozen and awestruck as the rooftop suddenly seems to be spinning and she feels as though her world is spinning out of control along with it.

Ashton's lips are moving and the suited man lips are moving, but the only thing Saara can now hear is the silence from the musician as he has stopped playing his violin.

"Well, sweetheart, do you?" Ashton's voice suddenly becomes audible as if coming from miles away.

"Huh?" Saara is in a daze at this point. And now with everyone staring at her, she realizes that the ceremony has already begun and others are waiting for her to participate.

"Do you, Saara Stevens take thee Ashton Da'Vied to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward?" The preacher *repeats* himself.

A few short minutes later, a bemused Saara becomes Mrs. Ashton Da'Vied.

The man carrying the Bible and the witness, donning Shannon's favorite dress, leave the newly married couple on the rooftop. The musician, without having to be instructed to do so, immediately goes back to playing his violin.

"Saara, you've made me the happiest man alive. Every day is going to be a honeymoon for you...for us. I promise." Ashton kisses his wife. He then suddenly, as if the rules of the world were written by him, Ashton begins to undress his wife.

"Ashton!" What are you doing?" Saara protests.

Just when she thinks her day can't get any more bizarre and before she can even register what has just happened to her, Ashton is on to another one of his erratic behaviors. "We can't do this here! This is a public place. And the musician," Saara leans in close to Ashton then lowers her voice. "The musician is still here!"

In typical Ashton-fashion, Ashton ignores Saara's concerns. He continues to undress her and then himself. And under the brightly glowing full moon, twinkling stars, candles flickering from every direction and the aroma of the hundreds of flowers; pressing her gently down onto the tabletop, Ashton makes love to his wife as a lone musician lays witness to the consummation of their first union as husband and wife.

## Chapter 9

Saara awakens the next morning naked and nestled tightly in Ashton's arms. She doesn't remember leaving the rooftop nor does she know where she is. She begins to wonder if the night before had been only a dream.

"Good morning beautiful." Ashton kisses her lightly on the forehead. "Did you sleep well?"

"I...I don't know." Saara begins to fuss with her mussed hair. "Where are we?"

Without answering, Ashton straddles her and begins kissing her passionately. He then gently spread her legs apart and penetrates her; much to Saara's delight.

This time Saara doesn't care that Ashton doesn't answer her. More than anything else in their relationship, she favors his lovemaking the most. She embraces him and pulls him in closer. "This is the absolute best way to start the day," she whispers. They make love thoroughly and passionately and then fall back to sleep in each other's arms.

Saara awakens hours later and finds herself in bed alone. A few moments later she realizes that she's not only in bed alone but Ashton is not in the room. She retrieves her cell phone from her purse and calls him; his phone goes directly into voicemail. "Ashton, where are you? Call me."

Saara calls Ashton several times within the next hour with no success in reaching him. "Ashton? Where the hell are you?" She lets out a frustrated sigh. She decides to call him just once more but quickly changes her mind. "Oh to hell with this, I've had enough. I'm getting out of here." Saara jumps out of bed and makes her way to the shower. "If he thinks I'm going to sit here and wait for him to come strolling in at his leisure, he has another thing coming!" She takes a quick shower then heads back to the room to get dressed. Now that I'm married to him, I guess it's time that I learned to play this rude ass game of his. I just won't be here when he comes back." Reeking with anger, Saara continues to fuss out loud as she begins looking around the room for her clothes. But in her attempt to abandon the abandoner, she soon discovers that not only has Ashton pulled a disappearing act, so has her clothing. Suddenly a wave of anguish sweeps her. "What's going on?" She whispers. Her agitated state is quickly replaced with apprehension. Now, in a state of panic, Saara reaches for the phone; but this time she calls Shannon.

"Shan, thank God you answered! I don't know what's going on. I...I don't know what to do!" Saara begins ranting hysterically.

"Saara! What's the matter? Are you all right?"

"I can't go into details right now." Saara's voice is rushed and frantic. "I need you to come and pick me up and I need you to bring me some clothes." Saara can hardly speak. "Ashton and I got...."

"Sweetie, slow down a minute!" Shannon interrupts. "Bring you some clothes? Saara, where are you? What's going on?" Shannon is now becoming frantic as well.

"Shan, I just need you to listen without questioning or lecturing me. Okay?" The anxiety level in Saara's voice is now elevated to an alarming high. "I'll explain everything later."

"Okay, okay, but just tell me what's going on before I scream," Shannon demands.

"Ashton and I got married last night."

Shannon lets out a loud gasp. "Saara!"

"Shan; *please* let me finish." Saara lets out a sigh. "Ashton and I got married last night. Now he's gone." Saara continues. "He didn't leave a note saying where he went or when he's coming back. He's not answering his phone and he also took my clothes. Shan, I'm freaked out. I don't know what he's up too. Would you please come and get me?" Saara's voice is now cracked.

"Oh my God Saara! I don't like the sound of this. I don't like it a bit." Shannon is now just as upset as Saara. "Just calm down and tell me where you are."

In her emotional state, Saara can't remember where she is. She walks over to the nightstand and picks up the stationery. "I'm at the Hilton on Courtland," her voice trembles.

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