

The doorbell rings and echoes off the thick plaster walls of my brownstone just as I'm spicing up the Bolognese sauce. I have two sets of leaded-glass and mahogany French doors at the front of the house. I can make out who is standing on the outside stoop through the first pair of wavy-glass doors and suck in my breath. Predictably, I have the same reaction every time I see him and hope, no—pray for the day I won't be a slave to it. He hadn't alerted me he'd be stopping by. But I guess when the hot new star of the year's second highest grossing movie plans a visit to Brooklyn, it's best for everyone to be kept in the dark—including me.

So yes, Sullivan Pearce is my secret and I am his. We've been together since we were teenagers—before all of the crazy. Lest you think the illicitness of having a movie star lover is thrilling I can tell you it isn't. Maybe if I were a different kind of person, I could romanticize the situation. But here's the thing about secrets—they occupy your mind and cause you to jump at shadows and suspect innocuous gestures as your big reveal come to life. Secrets aren't sexy or mysterious. They are messy, and in some cases potentially harmful. I open the doors quickly and he steps in, fixing me with a beatific smile. People pay good money to see that megawatt smile on screen, and I get to have it in the privacy of my own home.

Lucky me.

He closes his eyes and breathes in deeply as he leans against the foyer wall. The bright green orbs that line every teenage girl's room have gone dim. I hate how he turns my insides to mush, rendering me in the same category of every faceless fan, the only difference being I saw him first. On my bad days, when we haven't been together for a couple months, I vow to rip off the band-aid and tell him to stop coming by. But, of course I don't. And when he does show up—the emotional part of me—the part I keep under wraps, threatens to overwhelm me. In a reflex borne of muscle memory, I fully blossom only when he's near. It sounds corny and unlike how I've portrayed myself, but it's true. The whole thing is a heady rush, one that is all-consuming, made more powerful because he is as addicted to me as I am to him.

He pulls me toward him and kisses me deeply and thoroughly. With a regretful sigh, yes, I even know his mood by the way he sighs, he whispers in my ear: "This is my life and I'm missing the whole thing. How did this happen?"

I close my eyes because I'm trying to decide if this will be the time I tell him we can't keep doing this like he's the cheating husband skipping out on his family's holiday dinner. I want to say this thing happened because you chose this absurd out-of-control-over-the-top-life rather than a sedate one with me.

I step out of his embrace. "You didn't say you were coming."

"I didn't know until a few hours ago. The director is fanatical. The crew staged a mutiny to get off for the weekend."

I nod. "You hungry?"

"Always," he whispers.

"I was just about to eat, come join me," I respond, deliberately ignoring the look in his eyes.

He may stop by for the occasional booty call, but we are two people that started out as friends who fell deeply in love. I won't cheapen that by falling into bed with him before reconnecting.

I made a big pot of pasta Bolognese when I got home from work because my gut told me he might be stopping by. It's scary how in tune I am with him. Dictatorial director notwithstanding, no one works on Thanksgiving. He comes and sees me at every opportunity, and I figured this time would be no different. I fill two bowls with the savory mixture of sauce ladled over rigatoni and bring them to the table. I hand him the corkscrew and a bottle of Pinot. We stand hip to hip while he's pouring the wine into our goblets. Here's one of the things I've always liked about Sully, besides the obvious. He has an easy confidence. He never rushes in and fills a void with stupid patter; he knows when to be quiet and just feel. On the other hand, he is so in sync with me that words can be superfluous. I've opened myself to him in a way that is dangerous and makes me vulnerable because I know I will never feel this way about anyone else. We've been this way from almost the moment we met twelve years ago and when it all goes sideways, which it will, I don't know if I will survive it.

He sits down and stabs at the pasta. "Fantastic. Is this a new recipe?"

"Sebastian gave me some pointers."

He laughs. "Ah, Sebastian. I would sure love to go to one of his famous brunches. They sound fascinating."

“I met a Hasidic man at one a couple weeks ago. He asked for my number.”

He frowns. “Evie, I don’t like the idea of you being...out there and available.”

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that.”

He shakes his head. “No, I can’t hear it. Let’s will the world away for the next twenty hours. Can you do that with me?”

Here’s another thing about Sully, and why he’s so well-suited for acting. He can play make-believe like nobody can. He thinks if he believes something hard enough, he can conjure it up. It’s a coping tool he embraced when he lost his father at fifteen and was wrenched from Edinburgh, the only place he had ever known. His mother had brought him to the States, moving back to the neighborhood where she’d grown up, seeking stability there.

I chalk up part of his appeal—besides his strapping physique and soulful eyes—to his lilting Scottish speech. Girls are suckers for guys with accents. Ever since he turned up at York Prep as the new kid, fatherless and hopelessly lost in the grid of Manhattan streets, I’ve taken care of him.

“Yes, the next few hours are yours, and after that the chariot turns back into a pumpkin.” I could give into my frustration, but there would be little point.

He nods, knowing me well enough that my agreement is only a stay of execution. The topic will be brought up again—as it has been numerous times. He runs his hand through his hair. It falls sexily over his left eye. Hollywood has since done away with his natural color, having employed their best team of colorists to render his halo of hair into six or seven shades of perfectly-blended, orgasm-inducing blonde.

At some point, we gravitate toward my bedroom where he does all sorts of spectacular things to my body. I’m almost ready to join him on his magic carpet ride to Neverland, mixed fairytales notwithstanding, except my parents raised a practical child. Afterward, when I’m spooned up against him, he strokes my back languidly.

“Arianna Bonet thinks I’m gay.” He laughs. “And that rhymes.”

“Your co-star? Well, I can attest that you’re definitely not. Why would she think that?”

“Because I won’t sleep with her,” he says. “That’s the kind of rampant egotism I’m up against. Save me from all of it and come back with me.”

“No. That’s your life. I want my own.”

“You would have your own. There’s plenty of work there for you.”

“L.A. isn’t a real place. You’ve said that yourself many times.”

“I need you to stay in my life,” he whispers.

“At what cost?” I sit up. “How much is it worth to you to keep me in your life?”

“Everything...anything...name it. I’ll make it happen.”

I run my fingers through my tangled hair. “Do you hear yourself? Remember when we would make fun of my grandfather for speaking that way?”

He sits up too. “I don’t mean it in the grandiose way he would say it. I only want you to know that I will do anything to have you by my side. Let’s just go public with this. At tops, it will be a couple of days the media finds the story interesting and then they’ll be on to the next thing. It’s a fickle group.”

“You see, Sully, here’s the thing that you don’t realize. The price will be mine to pay. You’re already in the spotlight. You’ve made the decision to share your days with paparazzi, agents, managers, and any number of Yes men who will tell you exactly what you need to hear.” I rub my hands over my eyes. “Do you have any idea what would happen to my life if word leaked that I even know you, much less am your lover?”

“You’re much more than just my lover.”

“Yes, but even knowing that, it still isn’t enough.”

“So, let’s get married.”

The night is chilly and the heat clangs its way up the old pipes, protesting and hissing mightily. I feel much the same way but I swallow my protest because he just doesn’t get it. I jump out of bed because if I lay there I will scream and DuPont women don’t scream. He’s too naïve for words, and I don’t want to waste the next precious few hours angry. I grab a pair of pajama pants and a sweatshirt and bolt downstairs as I hear him call for me.

I pace the kitchen, trying to calm down and stop in front of the pantry looking for something that will stop my teeth from grinding down to nubs. I choose a sleeve of Oreos, unwrap them, and stack them up in formation on the counter. I pour a glass of milk and sit down on a stool at the island. I hear the creak on the floorboards above my head and am on my third cookie when he joins me. He takes one from the pyramid and

dunks it in my milk.

“There’s more milk in the fridge.”

“I want your milk.”

I press my palm into my forehead to rub away the throbbing there. “Michael thinks what we’re doing is unhealthy for me.”

“Is he really the best one to be getting advice from?” he asks with a raised eyebrow. “And besides, you haven’t given me the full twenty hours you promised. Let’s go back upstairs.”

I take a bite of the cookie without tasting it and wash it down with milk. I need the time to think and choose the easy route. I nod and follow him upstairs where we resume our spooning. He’s asleep within minutes while I stare at the wall for a long time, wondering when I can ease myself from his arms without waking him up.

Turns out I’ve gotten used to sleeping alone.