



# **Sampler**

**Star LaBranche**

# Introduction

Thanks for downloading Star LaBranche's book sampler!

In this PDF is contained multiple parts or chapters of five different books, only two of which have been released. Here is a breakdown of what you have in your hands.

*Selections from...*

## **Into Love and Out Again**

Available on [Amazon](#) in digital download and [Audible](#)

*"I want him to see the book for what it is, a long-ass love poem that got out of control."*

*Falling into unrequited love, Star LaBranche sorts through her feelings in poetry, short story, and prose. With every raw emotion she pens the excitement of being in love, the agony of not having her devotion returned, and the painful process of personal growth that comes from accepting the situation. Written over the span of a year, this book is an exact timeline of discovery, devastation, and development. Billions of people worldwide have experienced unrequited love. This is one story, told through several genres.*

## **What the Fresh Hell is This**

Available on [Amazon](#) in digital download and paperback.

*Written in the upfront, take-no-prisoners style of [Godswill Ministries](#), Star LaBranche explores the few highs and mostly lows of being an atheist among believers. Follow her revelations about her personal journey from a born and raised Catholic to an outspoken atheist to a member of the Unitarian Universalists. In a collection of essays and fiction, taken from the Godswill website, her personal blog, and featuring mostly new content, Star voices her struggles and triumphs of overcoming religious indoctrination, finding her own way in the world, and discovering exactly what she does and does not believe.*

## **Binders Full of Men**

Unknown release date

*Star LaBranche is a single woman navigating the world of online dating trying to find... well, something. A continuation of the super popular blog series Men of OKC, she weaves through a world of mismatched dates and clueless men. Along the way she meets homophobes, racists, pick-up artists, emotional abusers, and many more flowers from the asshole garden. Read through Star's attempt to date online and keep her sanity. Spoiler alert: Sometimes the insanity wins.*

## **Chaotic Good: A Collection of Poetry**

Unknown release date.

*Written between 2014 and 2016, poet Star LaBranche works through her thoughts, feelings, traumas, and victories with poetry. Her raw emotional style hits hard as she discusses dating, relationships, body image, and absurdity of daily life. The brutal confessional voice looks at all aspects of life and draws inspiration from all around her.*

### **Scars: A Novel**

Unknown release date

*Prisma Salvatore is an accomplished and dedicated FBI Special Agent. But she is also a survivor of a traumatic past that has left her with physical, and mental scars. After years of loneliness and solitude, she meets Questen Sandrino, a man whom she has to protect from a dangerous new religion movement intent on extracting vengeance after he exposed their harmful practices. A dark love story, Prisma fights her natural inclination to keep everyone at an arm's length when Questen offers her his heart.*

If you like the samples here, check out the full-length books on [Amazon](#). If you're interested in the books which haven't been released yet, be sure to sign up for my [mailing list](#) so you can keep up with all of my shenanigans and adventures.

*Selections from*

# Into Love and Out Again

(Updated 2016 edition)

Your Lips  
So Apparently I'm Just Crazy  
Eye Contact  
Resignation  
Cut Off  
I Want to Hate You  
What Have I done?  
Loss III

## Your Lips

Your lips resting against my hair, my elbow on your knee. I leaned in against you as you wrapped your arm around me. We were listening to a podcast on a new religious movement. Drinking spiced wine that I thought tasted too much like cinnamon. The cat was perched on my knee, cleaning herself.

I've never felt this kind of intimacy before.

The feeling of your breath against my hair was more sensual than the softest touch.

Your fingers lightly stroked my hand. I gently scratched your arm in return. The warmth of your body as we laid there stunned me.

How can the smallest touch make me feel so much?

How can one look from you make me pause, my mind a swirl of thoughts?

How can just looking at your lips make me ache with need?

The time we spent together, both of us getting sleepy, filled me with such contentment. I wanted it to last forever, I wanted it to be my future, I wanted to repeat this every night. To know that when I came home, your arms would be waiting, your lips would be waiting, you would be waiting. Waiting for me.

November 21, 2014

## So Apparently I'm Just Crazy

Forget everything I just said. Apparently I'm just crazy.

Here I thought we were on some semblance of the same page and NOPE! Not even close

Here's a thought; don't call me your partner if you don't want me to think you want me as a girlfriend

Stop spending so much time with me and having sex with me and laying in bed next to me in your underwear if you don't want me to get the wrong impression, that we're actually more than friends

I know this is my fault, and I'm mostly just angry with myself

I forgot for a second that you are impossible to read and arrogantly thought I had figured you out

Whoops!

I should have just reminded myself that it's not possible, it didn't happen, and I am completely wrong if I ever think that I have even the slightest clue what you're thinking or feeling

December 5, 2014

## Eye Contact

I told you a few days before you left that eye contact during sex could be the best ever or the worst ever.

At that point, we hadn't had eye contact when we made love and I noted that to you. You didn't seem to really mind.

It had always been too dark. We had only been together twice and both times it was so early in the morning that there was no natural light and all artificial ones had been turned off so that we could watch a movie.

But this time, when you arrived home, it was the middle of the afternoon. There was plenty of natural light and I could see everything. I watched you, naked and erect, as you waited for me to put the condom on.

We kissed so deeply as you laid me back and parted my legs.

As you penetrated me and our bodies connected, your eyes caught mine. Our gazes lingered on each other as you continued. I stared at you with such wonder as I felt you inside of me.

You kissed me all over, leaving invisible marks on my shoulders, breasts, and throat. I felt your long hair against my face when you leaned over me, your cheek touching mine.

You had to take your glasses off. They wouldn't stay on your face. But you looked into my eyes again. You looked at me as if you were looking directly into my entire being.

It was perfect. The best ever.

December 7, 2014

## Resignation

I have resigned myself to the fact that you don't love me and you most likely never will

I know that all I do for you will have no reward.

I realize that you will leave next year and that will probably be the last time I ever see you

I can tell that you will simply walk away from me in the end and have no regrets

But none of this stops me from loving you so fiercely or causes me to rethink what I'm going to do

I don't even hesitate

No matter how much losing you will hurt me, I will love you anyway

As if I were born to do it

And if I regret it later, then I regret it

But I can't stop myself from loving you and I wouldn't want to

I'm going to love you and be with you and when you're gone, I will have to tell myself that I did my best

I loved you as well as I could

I could not have done more to deserve your love in return

And I will be right

But it won't be much comfort.

December 14, 2014



## Cut Off

There are no other options left  
You don't want a relationship with me  
You don't want to have sex  
You want to be friends  
This leaves me with nothing but this strange friendship that still has us sleeping in the same bed together

Yet all of the advice I'm getting seems to contradict itself  
One person tells me to leave, another tells me to stay, a third tells me to take a break, a break that would leave me with no time with him whenever I supposedly stop loving him and just want to be his friend  
Somehow, this affection is just supposed to stop and all of my feelings will be replaced with foam and I will be able to be his actual friend that doesn't long for him to rip my clothes off

I sometimes wonder what he thinks about me  
Does he realize that I've been plagued by thoughts of him even though he's over four hundred miles away?  
Does he spare me a thought as he clicks "Like" on my Facebook posts?  
Does he think about me when I post photos of his cat and write about all of the fun we're having, even though all I'm doing is missing him?  
Does he miss me? At all? Even the tiniest bit?  
I can't honestly say I think he does any of these things. Everyone else thinks that he cares about me, but I fail to see his caring as either deep or meaningful  
But I might just be resentful for the pain I'm in and the fact that he could alleviate it with one Facebook status change  
I can't convince him to love me and even if I could, it wouldn't be genuine  
If he wanted to be with me, he would be with me and it's clear that he doesn't

Sometimes I hope that it will all just end  
That he will say something horrible to me or freak out when he sees his clean apartment and the mountain of presents that I have waiting for him  
That he will do something unconscionable and I will be able to break it off, with justification, and just never see him again  
At least then I would have a reason to be angry at him, and not just because he won't return my affection  
Sometimes it seems like the only ending there is would be one in which we never speak again and that gives me comfort  
The idea of no longer seeing him feels like the only way to avoid this pain that I've trapped myself in  
Out of sight, out of mind, out of my life  
Without him there, I can truly move on  
I won't have to see his status updates on Facebook, he won't be commenting on my

posts, I won't have to work out the time it takes to pick him up and get to wherever we planned on going, I won't have to pack an overnight bag to take to his place so that I can sleep over and still have my pills and hairbrush in the morning

But the idea of not seeing him any longer, not being with him, not feeling his presence in the room with me, hurts just a little bit more

Maybe I should accept what I've been given and stop wanting more

Maybe it wouldn't be insurmountable for me to learn how to be friends with someone I so desperately desire to be with

Maybe it would be good for me to once, just once, actually be friends with someone that I've fallen in love with, instead of relegating him to the Yu-Gi-Oh graveyard of dead cards

None of my options are easy now. None of them are simple.

But if I want him in my life, I have to be his friend

If I want him out of my life, I cannot be with him

I have to decide whether the pain of not being with him as his partner will outweigh the pain of not being with him at all

December 24, 2014

## I Want To Hate You

I want to hate you  
I want to write about how you've done me wrong  
I want to record every shitty thing you've ever said to me  
I want to tell my friends how you've abused me

But your only crime is not loving me back  
And that's not a crime at all  
So why do I feel so angry?  
Why am I in so much pain?  
Why am I frustrated to the point of tears?  
If you're not hurting me, then why am I hurting?

You might be clueless,  
You might comment on my Facebook posts about unreliable men with utter empathy  
Nothing you're doing is meant to hurt me, even though it does  
I can't stand seeing you offer me comfort when yet another man has rejected me,  
Because you rejected me, too  
You wonder why I'm in such despair;  
The main reason is you with a side of the fact that no one can distract me from you

And it's still not your fault  
You have no obligation to love me  
There is no social law that you have to date me  
You're perfectly free to reject my advances, as you have,  
And there's nothing I can say or do about it that will in any way make sense

And that's part of the frustration  
The frustration of loving someone who doesn't love you back and wanting to hate  
someone who has done you no wrong  
Sometimes I wish you would just do or say something terrible to me so I can move on  
I can write you off and just be done with you  
But you haven't yet and I don't see that happening in the future

This is supposed to be my learning experience  
I'm supposed to learn how to be friends with someone I loved and had sex with  
Neither of which I have ever done before  
You're supposed to be my attempt at a real grown up relationship that doesn't end  
with a guy ignoring me  
And look at how this is going  
I want to hate you and every time you post on one of my dating screencaps or rants I  
just want to punch you  
And that can't be healthy for anyone involved

This has been the most difficult relationship I have ever been in  
It's the first time I've ever really been in love  
The first time I've dealt with all these emotions  
The first time for so many things and look how I'm fucking it up  
I can't even accept your empathy without wanting to assault you  
You try to be supportive and I can't stand it  
You try to help me and I flat-out reject it

In some ways this open wound is just a continuation of my deep-seated fear that I am unlovable

You are yet another man who wants nothing to do with me romantically  
And the list has grown so long that I feel it's no longer everyone else in the world that's at fault

I have so much love to give someone and no one, not you, not anyone else, wants it  
In the end, this is just par for the course  
Men either love me so they can use me or don't love me at all

The result is just this rage and annoyance over everything I have done  
Nothing works and I am helpless to break the cycle  
I'm still in love with you and even if I weren't,  
There is no one to pick from of the suitors who ask me if I have big boobs and try to get me to have phone sex

January 5, 2015

February 4, 2015

## What Have I Done?

*OkCupid profile edit:*

*The most private thing I'm willing to admit: I once wrote a book about falling in love with a man I was dating.*

For some measure of time I can't quite estimate, I've been worried about this book. But my worry has been solely based around what the other person involved in this relationship will think of it and how it will affect them and their life. I only recently realized that the publication of this work will impact me as well.

It didn't strike me until I was discussing the work with said other person and just as he might want to tell a future partner that he once dated a crazy girl who wrote a book about falling in love with him, I'm going to have to explain to my future partners that I once wrote a book about falling in love with someone (because I'm a crazy person). But that thought in and of itself didn't hit home until I went on a second date with someone I really liked and felt the need to tell him that, on top of everything else I already had to disclose, I once wrote a book about someone I loved.

Just like it was an unusual thing for my date to process, it's unusual for me as well. Of course, this was only one book. It's not as if I've written fifty-six thousand words about every man I've ever dated. I wouldn't have time to sleep if I did that. But it's still something I did and it's a part of my life now. And due to my undying love of full disclosure, I feel the need to share with my dates that I'm insane enough to write a book about them if they trip whatever wire that in my brain that made me pen this in the first place.

But the idea that I now have yet another interesting factoid to tell men I date is just annoying. This isn't like anything else I've ever written. I've done blogs and stories based off my experiences before, but this is a gigantic testament to the fact that being around me is hazardous if you don't want your life to be recorded along with mine. As much as I like to pretend I'm capable of acting like a normal person in most situations, this book is a massive red flag that sometimes I just can't keep a lid on my crazy.

In the end, what's done is done. I can't un-write this book. I can't un-live this experience. There's nothing I can do but move on and be aware that in addition to all of the other things I already need to tell potential partners, I need to tell them that I might write a book about them.

## Loss III

It's strange when you miss something that was doing you harm  
It's funny when what you experienced was all down to you, nothing else, and  
somehow, no longer having it causes this feeling of loss.

This is it.  
This is what I was missing.  
The part of me that drained out with the poison? This was it.  
The magic  
I missed the magic

But the truth is that I was that magic  
I didn't lose anything at all, except the hypomania I was experiencing  
The devastating loss that I mourned was for my own illness  
There was magic in my insanity  
I felt it, loved it, reveled in it  
Now that it's gone, I miss it

The mystery is solved  
The truth is out  
I lost the magic  
The magic my brain created  
The magic it will create again some day, when I least expect it  
I didn't lose myself, as I feared, I didn't lose him, and the love that I had  
I lost my madness

July 5, 2015

*Selections from*

# **What the Fresh Hell is This**

The Spirituality Disconnect  
The Spirituality Reconnect

## The Spirituality Disconnect

I remember that from an early age, I never grasped the concept of spirituality. Despite how much formal and informal religious training from various people in various venues of my life, I just didn't get it. And while I could grasp facts and stories about Biblical characters and even abstract lessons from these stories, I did not understand spirituality.

What people explained to me was that the spiritual side of Catholicism came to you through prayer and reverence. That god would speak to you and guide you. He would comfort you and teach you through your time with him. That prayer was your chance to talk directly to god and have a conversation with your deity as if you were talking to a person that was in the same room as you. I never experienced anything even close to this, and I didn't understand the idea of why I would. As I got older, the problem became more apparent and profound. I knew that hearing voices usually meant you were hearing your own inner voice, which is nothing magical, simply a part of being human. Or you were mentally ill and hearing voices caused by misfiring brain chemistry, not any kind of god.

Moreover, if hearing the voice of god and interacting with your lord and savior this way was so freaking common that everyone was doing it, then what was wrong with me? Naturally, I kept my doubts to myself. I knew that Catholicism was not a religion that appreciated questions. Also, I had never heard, seen, or read anything that validated or even presented another way to experience spirituality. The only thing I was taught was spirituality was encapsulated in the Mass and in prayer and in contemplation of the divine. And no matter what I did, I never reached the point of experiencing or understanding spirituality in this way.

After I finally admitted my atheism and learned more about the history and culture of atheists, my worry about my lack of spirituality fell by the wayside. I didn't need it to survive in my everyday life and, in fact, it gave me one less thing to have to deal with when I just completely ignored it. I kept thinking that this was just like maternal instincts; lots of people have them, but for whatever reason, I didn't. Though, in some ways, it did bother me. Why does everyone else get to experience this and I don't? What was I missing out on? What was it like to be spiritual?

When I was in college, I took an astronomy class. I absolutely loved it. Even though I struggle with science, I was fascinated by this class. Pondering the vastness of the universe was mind-blowing. Considering that I was made up of the same carbon that had once belonged in a star was staggering. I never felt so uplifted or extraordinary. I was star dust. Nothing else had ever resonated with me like that class.

It's a common idea in the Lighthouse Catholic Media presentations (a not-for-profit organization that produces Catholic materials that appear in Churches and religious institutions in order to educate and convert people to Catholicism) that if you're not a child of god then you're nothing. This leads them to extrapolate that atheists lead hollow lives because they can't understand how much god loves them. But no matter how much



someone tells me that god loves me, I feel nothing.

When I think about how I am a part of this universe in a way in which the very cells that make up my physical form are from a universe so massive I can barely comprehend it, that makes me feel like I'm significant. I am star-dust, how could anything else make me feel special when that's on the table?

But for the longest time I never considered the feeling I got from astronomy to be spirituality. I had never been exposed to anyone that considered those feelings valid or real, and certainly no one in my family was about to take my wonder of the universe and insist that it was anything other than an innocent interest in the physical world that an all-powerful god had created. But then I discovered naturalism. Naturalism is the idea or belief that only natural laws and forces operate in the world. There is no spiritual or supernatural world of gods and goddesses or spirits or demons. There is only the physical world, but that world is so amazing that it can cause the same feelings of spirituality that occur when religious people talk about their deities.

So maybe there isn't a void in my life when it comes to spirituality. Maybe I just have a different concept of it than I was raised to believe it was. In the end, I don't think it should matter how you experience the spiritual, because no one group or culture or religion has the sway to declare their kind of experiences as valid and everyone else's as invalid. The human brain is capable of many kinds of feelings and emotions, and that doesn't mean that they all have to be caused by one thing.

## The Spirituality Reconnect

One day, between curiosity and a deep need for community and togetherness, I decided to attend a Unitarian Universalist (UU) service. I wasn't sure what I was in for. All I had to compare it to was my Catholic upbringing and my weekly attendance at Mass. Something that I neither enjoyed nor cared enough about to even pay attention to for the entire hour it demanded. I had been invited to UU services for a while now. Both by a family friend and some members of my Meetup group were also members of different UU congregations. They had suggested that I come and see if I enjoy the service, but I had too many bad memories from Mass and I couldn't imagine subjecting myself to church again.

Years after the invite, I decided to just go and see what happened. The worst thing that could transpire was I lost an hour of my life, right? And how many hours had I already wasted in a Catholic Church or watching Bratz movies to review on my website? I had survived that, so I could survive a single UU service. I decided to go to the congregation in Williamsburg, where the family friend went and went with his suggestion of the 11:15am service, instead of the earlier 9am one. Personally, I'm not a fan of getting up mega early, so this suited me just fine.

When I came in I was greeted by a woman running the visitor's table. She gave me a name tag, and I wrote down my information for their mailing list, which I was already a part of due to Meetup event coordinations. People were drinking coffee, talking, and laughing in the lobby. Their conversation struck me as a lot more relaxed and friendly than what I had seen at Mass. My family had befriended other parishioners and would sometimes stay and talk to them after the service. It always seemed like the conversation would be barely starting and the ushers would begin turning the lights off and closing the doors. A subtle hint that socializing was over and they wanted to go home. But at UU there was no tension. Just friendly people.

I took a seat on the left side of the church and looked over the building. It has simple and modern construction. Definitely nothing ornate or lavishly decorative. What I really liked was that there were windows with sunlight streaming in. I didn't feel like I was in a cave. I felt like I was in the sun. I looked over the bulletin as I waited for the service to start.

As I sat there, three people came to introduce themselves and welcome me. One thing I really like about this church is that everyone wore name tags, which really helps my poor memory. My family friend was in attendance that day and came over to say hello and to talk to me for a second. It was interesting how this was my very first time at this church and people were coming over to make me feel welcome. I had been going to St. Bede's since I was a child and no one there would bother to introduce themselves to me or even noticed when, after 12 years of attendance, I stopped coming.

The service began, and I had already had a conversation with the UU minister because of making arrangements for an event with the skeptics group. But seeing her as pastor of the church left me feeling awe-struck. The person who was leading this congregation was a

woman. That had never happened, ever, in my entire lifetime of attending Catholic churches. It's a well-known fact that women can't hold leadership positions or positions of real power in the church and that the men are doing everything to make sure that it stays that way. But today was different. I wasn't a Catholic anymore, and now, things were very, very different.

Before anything began, the Reverend said that you could stand in body or in spirit in order to enjoy the worship. That had never been an option for me as a Catholic. In order to fully participate you had to follow the tedious motions of standing, sitting, kneeling, and accepting communion, or else you were doing it wrong. This church gave you the option. That small addition of "in spirit" made all of the difference to me.

Then the first song was played. It was a classical piano piece which I adored. I love music and I have to say, just listening to soft piano music was a great way to open the service and it gave me a moment of reflection before we started. Music in Catholic Mass was the same collections of well-worn songs every week. UU service had modern music as well as classical. It was jarring for me to hear something like this in place of hymns that I remember despite my utter exasperation at how I even know them.

Then there was the welcome. The Reverend told us to say it to each other as she led everyone in reciting it. The welcome is as follows,

*Come, come, whoever you are,  
Whomever you love,  
Whatever your image of the holy  
Your presence here is a gift.  
All are worthy, all are welcome.*

My mind was blown for the second time in ten minutes. I was welcome? I belonged here? My being there was a gift to these people? I strained the far depths of my memory to recall any time a priest had been that welcoming to anyone at Mass. I came up with nothing. I never fit in with other Catholics and Mass had always been a time to remind me of just that. My views of the world didn't fit in with theirs. Particularly when it came to the LGBT+ community and women and social progress and everything else under the sun.

The service contained more music, a performance by the choir, the lighting of a flame inside a chalice to symbolize truth and community. There was also a "From the Heart" section, where two members of the congregation got up and talked about how the UU has positively impacted their lives as well as that of their children. I've seen that family at every service I've been to since.

Then there was a section for the children. The Director of Religious Education told a story about a mountain and what happens when answers to life's questions are written in stone. I loved the story and the message it contained. If this had been a Catholic Mass, the story would have ended with those answers in stone, written by the men of the Catholic

Church, and they are inflexible and absolute. But not in this church.

During the pastoral prayer, the minister talked about a female scientist named Maria Mitchell, who was an astronomer. My mind was blown, yet again. I will now estimate exactly how many times a Catholic priest ever used his sermon to talk about a female scientist. Okay, I'm done. It's zero.

At this church women were people with valuable contributions to make and a real part to play in worship. They weren't praise objects or moral lessons about purity and obedience. This communicated to me so clearly that I mattered to this congregation as a woman when they recognized another woman for her talents, abilities, and contributions. And this wasn't a special sermon or anything out of the ordinary. This was all a normal part of the service.

Then, the guest speaker, Rev. William Murry, came up to speak. He was visiting the congregation and that morning discussed his book, "Reason and Reverence". It's a philosophical book about religious humanism and naturalism. He completely captured my wonder and awe at the natural world and expressed things that I had only pondered before. His talk about experiencing the natural world as a part of your spirituality spoke to me in a way that I had been missing my entire life. He wasn't even done speaking when I recalled that I had some cash in my purse and when we were done with service, I was going to get a copy of that book.

Since the service, I've been reading it, albeit slowly. I find that I connect with his words and I'm really viewing my own spirituality in a completely different way now. I still have a lot to learn. But this was the first stepping stone in my journey and it was a huge help in making me question what I had always been told spirituality is and how it doesn't have to be just that.

There was another hymn after the sermon. I found myself really enjoying the hymnal. I had always felt uncomfortable singing about god, especially when I started to realize just how much did I was confused by and uncomfortable about the concept. But these songs were uplifting pieces about togetherness, community, the wonder of nature, the vastness of the Earth, and the beauty of the world. I felt perfectly comfortable singing along with these hymns and joining in all of the other raised voices.

At the end of the service everyone is invited to stay for coffee and conversation. I was still a little nervous about this new place, so I decided not to. But I did get a copy of Reason and Reverence first and made sure to have it signed. Then I signed up for the upcoming orientation classes for the church. Since my first meeting, I have stayed and enjoyed cookies and met with new people from all kinds of backgrounds. I was invited to join a group of younger UU members and meet new people through that.

I couldn't believe how welcoming and eager everyone was to meet new people. I had never seen that before in the Catholic Church. No one ever told me to talk to new people or

strike up a conversation or even acknowledge the presence of others at Mass. I've heard that other churches and other denominations of Christianity are far more welcoming and really make an effort to attract new members and encourage them to stay. But that had never been my experience as a Catholic.

Needless to say, I went back for the next UU service the following week. I felt very moved by their message of acceptance and love and community. Their reverence for science and emphasis on the natural world instead of the supernatural resonated with me very deeply. I've been to several services now, and I still find myself moved to tears by their natural inclination to include instead of exclude and welcome instead of shun. I can quite confidently say that Catholicism never made me feel emotions that deep at any point of my life.

While I was waiting for the service to start one day, I realized something strange; I have never written a poem about religion. Not one. Out of the over 800 that I've composed, none of them have contained an ounce of spirituality or reverence or anything of that nature. I hadn't even written about my confusion over religion or how much I detested the way Catholicism made me feel or treated me. I had never been so moved to write anything about religion in my entire life. But now, I felt something. In the UU church, surrounded by all of these welcoming strangers, I wanted to write about my religious views. I wanted to pen my thoughts on spirituality and wonder and nature. And that, above everything else, was the greatest sign to me that I found somewhere I belonged.

*Selections from*

# **Binders Full of Men**

Shave the Date  
Right Move Outline  
Anti-You  
Par-Cheesy  
RedDressStar  
SANTA JAWS

## Shave the Date

***oweunuthin***

***37***

***Laurel, MD***

There's a question on the online dating site (ODS) I'm on asking of women have an obligation to shave their legs. I have started so many conversations about this, it's rather ridiculous. But it's one of the things I look for when going over someone's profile. When it comes to women's bodies, no one has an obligation to do anything with it, particularly not to upkeep societal beauty standards.

***Oweunuthin:*** *Hi my name is Jim I'm Asian and looking for friends and or a relationship. How are you doing today? I read up on your profile and think you have some cool interests. Although they are different they still interest me. Text me if you would like to get to know me more*

First of all, this sounds like a form letter. I have cool interests? Which ones? How are they different?

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *You're really far away.*

At this point in my online dating journey I was losing patience with men who were out of state. Who wants to do that much driving to meet someone? Who has that much spare time on their hands?

***Oweunuthin:*** *I'm in williamsburg lol I got relocated  
How r u doinf*

Got relocated to another state. Didn't update his profile. Nice one. Good attention to detail.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I'm doing well.  
I also have a confession to make.*

***Oweunuthin:*** *What that u like women only haha*

No idea where that came from. I list on my profile that I am straight and looking to be contacted by men. Is that something he's run into before because he can't read profiles? I have no clue.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *Nope. I haven't shaved my legs in over a week. I'm not keeping up with my obligation to keep my legs shaved. I'm so sorry.*

***Oweunuthin:*** *Like the yoga pants ur funny maybe I can shave ur legs for u while giving u a hot bath*

And this is where things got weird.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *You want to shave me?*

This was a first for me. No one has ever offered to shave me before. I literally have never even shaken this person's hand and he wants give me a bath and shave me.

***Oweunuthin:*** *Yes id love to if u let me come over what's ur work hrs today u wanna text? Give me ur number*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I don't want you to shave me.*

He never responded, but seriously. How in the world were you expecting it to go when your offer of a first date is to shave someone? It's not as if I'm on a fetish shaving website. It's not polite or romantic, it's just creepy.

My legs remained unshaven that night.



## Right Move Outline

**Alpha0000**

48

**Virginia Beach, VA**

Although I have a background in English, I'm not a [Grammar Nazi](#). As long as I can understand what someone is saying, I don't care if they use an Oxford Comma or write "less" instead of "fewer". But sometimes I honestly can't make sense of some of the messages I get on the online dating site (ODS). This man deserves special recognition for being largely incoherent. I eventually had to take a screencap and go to Facebook where one of my friends was able to parse what he was saying.

Welcome to possibly the most confusing conversation I have ever had on the ODS. Strap yourselves in!

**Alpha0000:** *Hi how are you dear.*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I'm good. Yourself?*

**Alpha0000:** *I'm fine thanks  
where in new port news  
I'm new to the*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I'm near the shipyard. Not too familiar with this area myself, lol.*

**Alpha0000:** *This my email  
[Email address]  
do you want met me.*

This man was another person who had very little information filled out on his profile. Judging by the way he was writing, I didn't think it would help any to transition to email. Not that I was even interested. As for meeting him. Er, no.

**Alpha0000:** *One thing very interested to me I like to right move outline.  
And I can't do my self*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *The right move outline? I don't understand.*

**Alpha0000:** *Righting move story  
so do can we meet*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I don't understand what you're saying. Righting move story? So do can?*

A Facebook friend informed me he was talking about writing a movie story. Also known as a script. Which, I had absolutely no clue what he was getting at. I was just lost. He seems pretty insistent on meeting me, even though I can't understand most of what he's saying.

**Alpha0000:** *Ok when we meet explain you*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Why can't you explain it to me over messenger?*

It's perfectly understandable that someone expresses themselves better in speech than through words. However, when you want to date a writer, guess what you need to be able to do? Anyone? Anyone?

Communicate through words.

Not to mention that I constantly text. How would we be able to have a text conversation if I can't even understand him when using messenger?

**Alpha0000:** *Yes I was just trying to right story I told you can help me*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Do you mean write a story?*

**Alpha0000:** *Yes*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Ah okay.*

**Alpha0000:** *How long do you live there you say don't know around, do you lived your self or with some one. And also what you looking,*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I just moved from Williamsburg last week. I live with a roommate and her daughter. I'm looking for casual dating.*

**Alpha0000:** *It ok where can I see you and when*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I like to talk to people more before meeting up.*

**Alpha0000:** *Ok but do you don't want to me or what do you want to talk ?and wich casual dating I to same want  
Any way the bathroom pictures very nice*

Not sure what he ways saying in the first message. But in the second, he's referencing my yoga pants photo. Between his incoherence and pushing to meet despite the fact we can't even communicate, I decided to end the conversation. I can't say I feel like I missed out. Although I'm not going to nitpick the finer points of grammar in casual messaging, when I can't understand what you're saying, we have a problem.

## Anti-You

**Moris36**  
**36**  
**Dumfries, VA**

Another day, another anti-LGBT+ man trying to get me to meet him. Here we go again...

**Moris36:** *Lady in red nice. How are you doing?*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I'm good. Yourself?*

**Moris36:** *I'm doing good. So are you from Va and where is Williamsburg located? Maybe I'll can get the opportunity to find out?*

Not if you don't think everyone should be allowed to marry the person they love.

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Williamsburg is in the Hampton Roads area on the peninsula. It's about an hour from Richmond, the capital city. So, you must be pretty upset about the Supreme Court decision on marriage equality.*

**Moris36:** *It's much more important stuff in this world to be worrying about the Supreme Court decision such as homelessness involving families with kids, etc. Now you want my opinion huh lol? I'm about the bible. Now what about you and the Williamsburg opportunity?*

Yeah, that's the way to woo me. Dismiss my concerns, throw a Bible at me, and then ask me out. I should have pointed out here that members of the LGBT+ community have much higher rates of homelessness. So if he was really worried about the homeless he would be concerned with LGBT+ people as well.

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I'm an atheist and an LGBT+ ally. You want my opinion?*

**Moris36:** *I'm talking about you and I getting together*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Yes, we have very incompatible world views. I don't think we would get along in person.*

Here is my first open statement of rejection. I didn't mince words, I didn't write this in poetry, this is simple, direct, and easy to understand. Will he get it? Who do you think you're talking to?

**Moris36:** *If people go by being happy on views then no one would be together. If you're basing views on happiness that doesn't have anything to with how you suppose to be treated by a guy then I don't know what to tell you*

I had to read this several times before I started to understand what he was attempting to communicate. At least, I think I did. I can never be sure with some of these inarticulate men.

But if he's trying to say that a big part of my world view, equality for the LGBT+ community, is irrelevant to whether or not someone would make a good match with me, I have to politely disagree. I'm sure some people can make a relationship work when they don't believe the same things on certain issues. But this is one that I consider a deal breaker.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I don't even understand what you're talking about. Being happy on views? What?*

*A guy who treats me well and believes that my friends and loved ones don't deserve equal rights is not treating me well at all.*

***Moris36:*** *Did you ask me do I believe people deserve equals right no you didn't.*

Yes, I did. Allow me to break this down.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *Equal rights includes the right to get married. As in marriage equality. If you don't believe gay people should marry, you don't believe in equal rights for everyone.*

***Moris36:*** *You just went on your assumption and if this is how you get to know a person without asking what they're looking for in a woman, their likes and dislikes then I'm not interested. Everyone is using the 60s civil rights movement there advantage now*

I'll take "Shit That Doesn't Make Sense for 500", Alex.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I don't even understand what you're talking about. You indicated in your questions that you are anti-LGBT+. I do not want to date anyone who is anti-LGBT+. It doesn't matter what you like or don't like or what you want in a woman. I want a man who recognized everyone, regardless of their gender identity, sexuality, or lack of either of these things, deserves to be treated equality and given the same opportunities as everyone else.*

My second clear and concise rejection of him.

***Moris36:*** *What question? Half of those questions I didn't pay any attention to time consuming and I have friends that are funny whatever you call it now lgbt. Civi rights you don't understand?*

*You don't understand that you starting a conversation about gays is crazy? That's not of my interest*

Another man claiming that he didn't care enough about his questions to fill them out honestly and accurately. Also, if I needed an indication that he is not an ally for the LGBT+

community, all I needed to do was see how he called members of said community "funny".

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *You also answered that gay couples adopting children is unacceptable. You didn't pay attention to that either? You're just so casually homophobic that you didn't even care what you were marking on those questions. I am not starting a conversation about gays. I am telling you that I'm not interested in dating you because you are anti-LGBT+. This is a deal breaker for me and that should have been obvious from my profile alone.*

My third rejection of him. Think he will stop messaging me now?

**Moris36:** *I lose interest in you awhile ago and who cares about anti- lgbt or pro lgbt, and no I didn't really pay a lot questions any attention. Do you not comprehend that I'm going to be on a site for 30mins answering questions so just like a test when you get tired you check anything. Obviously you don't read messages when I said I have friends in the lgbt,*

NOPE!

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Oh right, you have LGBT+ friends. So it's okay that you believe they don't deserve equal rights! Continue to add to the oppression they face every day. You're such a great friend.*

**Moris36:** *You need to worrying about yourself instead of worrying about others such as women rights obviously you don't care about that because you're worrying about lgbt. Are you worrying about the equal rights for blacks, women suffrage and again blakcs equal rights, racism? Your assumption and thinking about people is somewhere that you don't know. Once you stop assuming about people then you can have a real convo*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Yes, I am. Because, you see, some women are gay. Some women are black. Some women are black and gay. LGBT+ rights impact everyone.*

**Moris36:** *You miss the entire point, educate yourself about history and I see once I said something about blks suffrage you turn your cheek*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *You said women's suffrage. Which is the right to vote. Also, if you visited my blog, that might address some of you questions on what I think about about racism.*

My latest article was entitled [Everyone's a Little Bit \(or a Lot\) Racist](#). It chronicles men on the ODS making racist statements both in their profiles and in conversation with me. I thoroughly renounced it and made it very clear that I had no interest in dating someone who held racist or bigoted views.

Also, it sounded to me as if he didn't know what the word "suffrage" meant, so I defined it. He stops using the word after this.

**Moris36:** *Obviously not because you're stuck on lgbt why doesn't affect me. Have you seen what people are being affected in society still? So once again there are major problems in America to be worrying about lgbt and if you can't understand what I'm saying then you will never will*

I read his message, but, as I have a life, I didn't answer right away. He didn't seem to like that.

**Moris36:** *Quiet*

Yes, the second I don't instantly respond it must be because you bested me in this verbal joust we've undertaken.

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *I'm at a poetry reading.*

**Moris36:** *I write poetry*

That's fascinating, dear.

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *As do I.*

*Getting back to what you were saying; saying that LGBT+ rights don't matter because they don't directly impact you is the definition of privilege. There are lots of problems in society that need to be dealt with, but it's ridiculous to expect someone to only care about your issues because they're important to you.*

*For example, you accused me of not caring about black issues. Which I proved was not accurate through my latest blog post. Would I be justified to say that I don't have to care about black issues because I'm not black? No, I wouldn't be. I'm not gay either and I care deeply about LGBT+ rights.*

**Moris36:** *How does that issue affect me do.tell. what others do is there business not mind or yours. Your business is yours and mine is mine right  
Since you like blogging, where humans originate and were is the motherland?*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *One minute you're telling me that I'm not involved enough in black issues, then you're telling me that your business is yours and my business is mine. Make up your mind. Should I care about your issues that I don't experience or not? Blogging has nothing to do with human origins. Ken Ham has a blog. Enough said. Human ancestors originated in Africa. Which has been called the motherland.*

**Moris36:** *I left black.issue alone awhile ago. Come up this way and hangout*

Yeah, I'm dying to continue this conversation in person after driving two hours. That

sounds like a load of fun. He doesn't even suggest meeting in the middle or something that doesn't put the entire drive on me. Does he really think that there's any possibility that I'm going to drive that far to meet someone I've already turned down three times?

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I thought you lost interest in me a while ago.*

***Moris36:*** *yes or no*

Survey says...

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I already told you that I'm not interested in dating someone who is anti-LGBT+. I didn't think I could have been more clear.*

***Moris36:*** *I'm anti you*

I laughed so hard when I read this. Nice one, sir, nice one!

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *You weren't a few minutes ago.*

***Moris36:*** *You have issues*

Yeah, yeah, I do. Most of them are a result of this fucking dating website.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *At least I don't act like a 13-year-old when someone, very politely, rejects me. I was upfront right from the beginning that I wasn't interested in you or anyone else who is anti-LGBT+.*

At this point, after my fourth rejection, he finally stopped messaging. I guess he went to find someone else to tell him about Williamsburg and discuss how he treats (straight) women with respect. But I'll always have this conversation to remember him by.

## Par-Cheesy

**Hansomegreeneyes08**

26

*Newport News, VA*

People who are good writers have better odds at internet dating as the first communications are made through writing and your profile is written. This should mean that I dominate at online dating. Which, I kind of did. But most of my time seemed to be spent trying to figure out what the poor writers were even talking about. I had so many bizarre conversations where I screenshotted them just to ask friends on Facebook if they could help me figure out what the hell the this man was talking about.

This conversation wasn't bizarre, per say. But it's.... kind of... well... you'll see.

**Hansomegreeneyes08:** *Hello how are you? I think you are a very beautiful women. What I am looking for is someone who knows what she wants in life that's not about games nor drama*

I find the people who claim they don't want to be involved in drama the most are usually the ones who constantly land themselves in the middle of it. And really, who would admit to loving drama and wanting drama in their lives? It's kind of like someone saying, I hope I don't get murdered on my next date! It's not something that anyone wants to so why bother opening a conversation by stating you don't want something that no one wants?

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Too bad you don't like games. I just love Parcheesi. And don't get me started on Sorry. I will be up all night playing that.*

And I was off. Although my match percentage with this man wasn't terrible, I had no interest in seriously considering anything with him or his form letter.

**Hansomegreeneyes08:** *Lol. Not like that*

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Like card games? I love Cards Against Humanity. I could play that for the rest of my life. I don't do tabletop games but mainly because I haven't had the chance.*

**Hansomegreeneyes08:** *Lol what exactly you looking for*

What I'm looking for is on my profile, sir. Read my fucking profile before contacting me. It's just that simple.

**Stargirlmillionmiles:** *Casual dating.  
And possibly tabletop gaming.*



***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *So like casual sex*

As soon as some men hear the word "casual" they mentally fit in "sex" after it. As if you're either getting married or having sex. There's nothing in the middle. Someone who is so into the idea of casual sex that they consider casual dating to be synonymous of it (and didn't bother reading the description of what I wanted on my profile) is not going to be someone I'm interested in.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *Nope. Casual dating. Sex might be involved. But it might not.*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *When can we meet*

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow your roll, Casanova. After exchanging a handful of messages, which were only interesting due to my end of the conversation, why in the world would I want to meet you?

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *For Parcheesi?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Huh*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *You said you wanted to meet and we haven't talked about anything but board games. I was thinking you wanted to meet for a round of Parcheesi.*

To be totally honest, if a guy invited me out for Parcheesi and he didn't seem like a total asshat, I probably would have gone. At least it's an original date and something I expressed interest in.

The conversation dropped off here. It picked up another day, but didn't improve.

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Hello*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *Good day.*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Are you interested*

In someone who can't write in complete sentences? No.

Some men mention they feel intimidated writing to me because of my background in English. But others don't even make any attempt to clearly communicate with me, or seemingly, anyone else. If I was trying to communicate with someone via text and wasn't a strong writer, I'd be damn sure to try to be as clear and precise as I could be. But that might take actual work. Clearly, too much to expect for someone who just wants casual sex and isn't interested in board games.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *I'm very interested in a lot of things. Right now, I'm interested in*

*eating breakfast and getting a shower. Later I will be interested in getting Pho with a friend. Then I really need to get interested in editing the Godswill book. Cause that thing is not editing itself. Which I find very annoying.*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *I'll back off*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *From what?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *I wanted to have fun with u*

Not while playing Parcheesi, apparently.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *What kind of fun?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Lmbo*

I actually had to look this up. It stands for "laughing my butt off". Another example of why we would never be compatible. If you don't swear to the point where you can't even use the letter "a" to stand in for the word "ass", we have a huge fucking problem.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *You're being really vague. Can you be more specific?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Physically*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *Oh, so you want to have sex with me?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *Lol sure y not.*

Why not, indeed.

Maybe because that's not what I already stated I wanted. Maybe because that's not what I'm comfortable with. Maybe because I've never even been in the same room with you. And maybe, just maybe, because I have an STD and that's something you're probably not even aware of.

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *So you've read up on my STD status?*

***Hansomegreeneyes08:*** *What's that*

***Stargirlmillionmiles:*** *This should explain it: [I Have Herpes: A True Story](#)*

I was curious to see what his reaction would be to this. In my experience, most men just wanting sex aren't interested in a partner who has an STD because why take the risk for someone you don't give a shit about? I was rather surprised when he responded at all. I've literally had people stop messaging me after disclosing.

***Hansomegreeneyes08: Ok***

I didn't ask a question.

***Stargirlmillionmiles: Okay, what?***

***Hansomegreeneyes08: Condoms***

It strikes me as odd how many men consider my disclosure of an STD status as consent to sex. I am literally only telling you that I have a sexually transmitted disease that can be transmitted to you. I am not saying I want to have sex with you. But some men, far too many, think that my disclosure of my status is an open invitation for sex. It's not. Only an open invitation for sex is an open invitation for sex.

***Stargirlmillionmiles: Okay.***

***Hansomegreeneyes08: U want to***

I almost asked, "Want to what?" here because again, not a complete sentence.

***Stargirlmillionmiles: I don't know. I've never met you. I have no idea if I have any chemistry with you. Or if I feel comfortable around you.***

And to be fair, he has no idea if he has any of these things with me. Does he really think he can choose sex partners based off of photos of them (I would add by looking at their profile, but it's clear that he didn't)?

***Hansomegreeneyes08: Ok***

***Stargirlmillionmiles: Okay.***

***Hansomegreeneyes08: I want to try***

***Stargirlmillionmiles: Try what?***

He didn't answer after this. I was heartbroken, as you can imagine. Now who will play Parcheesi with me?

## **RedDressStar: The Experiment That Went Horribly Well**



When I talk about my dating adventures on the ODS, I get a lot of disbelief at men who don't read my profile, contact me about my photos, and don't seem to have any concept of who I am or what I want, despite the fact all of the information is neatly presented to them on a webpage for their convenience. So one night, at a Cards Against Humanity party where the alcohol was flowing, Xander (remember him from the Trolling Flashback?), used a photo I had taken that day in a dressing room where I was trying on a short red dress and wrote out a fake profile.

Behold what he wrote:

### ***My self-summary***

*Doc says I only have 60 days to live but its been 65, so what do you know modern science? I like to look at it as I am syphiful, not syphilis.*

### ***What I'm doing with my life***

*Currently looking for investors (check us out on GoFundMe) for the world's first bilingual daycare/dog fighting ring. Already got enough to buy the first KinderKage!*

***I'm really good at***

*Synchronized swimming. Yiffing. Being a hater. Civil War reenacting.*

***Favorite books, movies, shows, music, and food***

*Movies: 101 Dalmations...I really really hate puppies.*

*Shows: Freakshows, gunshows, minstrel shows.*

*Books: I don't believe in literacy for women... I shouldn't even be reading this.*

*Food: I REALLY REALLY hate puppies.*

***The six things I could never do without***

*Plan B. Free Clinics. Malt Liquor. 'The D.' Our Lord and Savior, Selena. My kids, Lorenzo and What'sherface.*

***I spend a lot of time thinking about***

*Where am I? Who are you? Did I have shoes when I got here? Are you going to finish that?*

***On a typical Friday night I am***

*Paying for little Lorenzo's education on the center stage at the Velvet Meat Curtain.*

***You should message me if***

*You can be quiet (What'sherface is a light sleeper due to the iron lung), discreet, and can count 'cause momma has a couple of years of unpaid taxes that need to be looked at...is ten a couple? I have no idea. That's why I need yo' help.*

Would anyone take this profile seriously? Would anyone message this woman? Would anyone visit her profile. In 24 hours the account received 103 messages, almost 200 likes, and countless visitors. Here is the breakdown of the content of the messages sent.

- 30 some variation of "hello, how are you?"/"What's up?"
- 12 were one word only, usually "hey" or "hi" although a few played the adjective game
- 2 DTF (Down To Fuck)
- 7 immediately trying to get me off site onto Kik or Skype
- 23 were sexual comments
- 5 seemed highly confused by the profile
- 5 people got the joke, including the only woman who messaged me
- 18 other (two men wanted to marry me, one told me a joke about petting zoos)
- 10 messages were generic compliments

The responses were mostly sexual, which, I got plenty of those on my personal account, although it seemed that my open admission of being a feminist and many other things did keep *some* men from messaging me asking for sex. But no matter the content of the profile, messaged continued to pour in. Very few people got the joke, they just seemed to be complimenting my appearance and ignoring the content. Whether they were ignoring it because they didn't care or thought it was a joke, remains to be seen.

I did have one conversation with a man in an attempt to ascertain what in the world caused him to message someone with my profile. The following exchange took place:

**Richie1991**  
**24**  
**Hampton, VA**

*Richie1991: What's up gorgeous  
Would like to get to know you. You look amazing and seem interesting*

*RedDressStar: In what way am I interesting?*

*Richie1991: Just do by some of the stuff you say on your profile*

*RedDressStar: Like I hate puppies and I can't remember my child's name?*

*Richie1991: Lol I doubt that you can't remember your kids name*

*RedDressStar: That's what I said. That's all you know about me. So what part of that is interesting?*

*Richie1991: Lol nevermind so what you looking for up here*

Yep. He couldn't name one "interesting" thing about me. He had to change the subject in an attempt to keep the conversation going. I did not respond.

Other messages ranged from the subtle:

*Wanna watch me jack off on Skype?*

To the romantic:

*I want fuck you*

To the charming:

*How would you rate your ability to suck a cock?  
Would you fuck a married man?  
Can I eat your pussy today?*

To the technically illegal:

*Hey there you wanna hookup for casual sex?  
I'll give you some cash*

To the desperate:

*If you want to be discrete and have a lot of fun I'm your man and ready for it. you won't be disappointed  
Are you interested or not. I'm not a psycho or troll just need to be discrete. and that red dress would come off quick*

To the clueless:

*Hey there, I hope you aren't serious about dying... you're very pretty!*

To the confused:

*The picture is amazing, the profile around it is a tad... Odd*

To the downright creepy:

*How are you doing? I think you look magnificent and I would like to do nothing but make you happy and show you love. I feel we would positively effect each others life and I would like to see where we can take this. I'm Marcus by the way aka future husband*

For those of you wondering, yes, the last one is MisterWifeYouUp from White Knight. Apparently he's still looking for someone to have a positive impact on. Can't imagine why he's having so much trouble when he's introducing himself to women as their future husband. Bitches, am I right?

I'm not sure what we were trying to prove with this experiment. Other than the fact that the Red Dress Effect is a very real thing, men don't read profiles before contacting women on dating websites or just don't give a fuck about said profiles, and I'm apparently smokin' hot.

Until next time, ODS. I know your secrets. And they're filthy.

## SANTA JAWS

**BigDealDude22**

**32**

**Chesapeake, VA**

My friend, Sharyna, has a special Facebook profile picture which she only uses around Christmas. It's a cartoon drawing of a shark in a Santa hat. We call it Santa Jaws. The shark is facing right, so it looks as if the shark is shouting whatever comment Sharyna writes. So, of course, she has to type in All Caps when during this time. All Caps quickly became associated with Santa Jaws, as well as a particular style of writing. When this man first messaged me, in All Caps, the first thing I thought was Santa Jaws. So off I went.

*BigDealDude22: HELLO BEAUTIFUL*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: HELLO, HOW ARE YOU? IS YOUR CAPS LOCK BROKEN AS WELL?*

*BigDealDude22: Lol. It act up sometimes.*

*It allow me to type in lower case and then there are times I have to type all in upper case*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: THAT'S UNFORTUNATE. MY CAPS LOCK HAS BEEN BROKEN FOR YEARS. MY FRIENDS CALL ME SANTA JAWS. I DON'T KNOW WHY.*

*BigDealDude22: Lol.. Well I am Vincent ms. Santa jaws*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: HELLO! NICE TO MEET YOU. HAVE YOU BEEN GOOD THIS YEAR?*

*BigDealDude22: Lol.. I have but I can always be better if I can be your mr. Santa.*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: MR SANTA IS MY FATHER. ARE YOU SAYING YOU WILL KILL HIM IN COMBAT?*

*BigDealDude22: Not at all, but pops wouldn't mind giving u away to a good man*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: MY FATHER LIKES TRIBUTE.  
FACES MAINLY.  
HE REALLY LIKES FACES.*

*BigDealDude22: I am not understanding what u mean*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: BRING MY FATHER A FACE. HE WILL LIKE YOU THEN. HE RESPECTS THE GREAT HUNTERS OF THE DEEP.*

*BigDealDude22: Oh.. I don't hunt. Sorry*



*How your day going*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: OH YOU KNOW, CHOMPY.  
YOURS?*

*BigDealDude22: Ask me at midnight  
I am still at work  
Do u date black men*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: I CHOOSE MY MATES BASED ON THE SQUISHINESS OF THEIR  
FACES.*

*BigDealDude22: Ok what does that mean*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: IT MEANS I LIKE SQUISHY FACES. IT'S PRETTY SIMPLE.  
HAVE TO GO NOW. LOTS OF TOYS TO MAKE TODAY. ALWAYS GOTTA KEEP SWIMMING.*

*BigDealDude22: I am not sure I understand what u mean, however I hope to hear from  
you again*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: SO MANY TOYS! WHAT A BUSY DAY IN THE WORKSHOP. I HOPE  
YOU ARE HAVING A GOOD DAY TODAY. I'M ABOUT TO TAKE A TEA BREAK. DO YOU LIKE  
TEA? I JUST LOVE IT.*

*BigDealDude22: I love tea*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: DO YOU LIKE LOOSE LEAF OR TEA BAG? WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE  
FLAVOR?*

*BigDealDude22: Tea bag  
How u doing*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: TEA BAG? WE CAN NO LONGER TALK. I COULD NEVER BE WITH  
SOMEONE WHO DRINKS TEA BAG TEA.  
GOOD DAY, SIR.*

*BigDealDude22: Are u kidding*

*Stargirlmillionmiles: SANTA JAWS NEVER JOKES ABOUT TEA.  
I SAID; GOOD DAY, SIR!*

*BigDealDude22: No problem u a lil weird anyway. Smh*

At the point where I decided to end the conversation it was because I thought this one could go on forever. He didn't get the references to being good all year or making toys in a

workshop. He didn't grasp the "great hunters of the deep" line or anything about faces. He seemed determined to have a conversation with Santa Jaws, despite the fact that he was talking to the persona of a fictitious Christmas shark.

As for this conversation being a "lil weird", wonder what I would have had to do to get him to call me really weird. Because, come on, I was trying to get him to stop messaging me. But hey, Santa Jaws lives on and this man can look for a woman whose father he can impress.

Merry Christmas, everyone!

*Selections from*

# Chaotic Good: A Collection of Poetry

The "I Love You" Virus  
Bralet  
TOD  
I Tried  
People Who Shuffle Across the Street

## The "I Love You" Virus

Your love is like a virus  
You infect me with these feelings  
It turns my head and lets me think of nothing else other than that  
phrase  
I want to say it to you, when it's not appropriate

When it's not needed  
When it shouldn't exist in my brain  
When it never would have occurred to another human being

You infect me with your kiss  
In your arms I struggle for breath  
I'm suffocated under the weight of my misplaced feelings  
Whatever this is, it's not rational  
I already seem to have decided what love is, but this feeling, whatever it is, is  
not that  
It's a different kind of irrational  
It's an entirely new set of feelings which seem strong when you're near  
Then fade as soon as you do  
If I loved you, shouldn't I be sure that I do?  
But if I don't love you, why do I want to blurt it out  
and relieve the pressure in my brain?  
My traitor brain who likes to say things I don't mean, which I don't understand, which  
never should leave my lips

And if I loved you, if I loved you so much,  
Then why do I love every other man that happens by me?  
Why do I feel the need to say this to thousands of other men  
Men which have held me in their arms and infected me with this virus and refused to  
let me go  
Always refusing to let me go

Don't give me this virus  
I've had it so many times, but look at how I never gain an immunity to it  
I'm helpless to understand why these words come marching to my  
lips after a certain number of kisses  
Or words of affection or shows on Netflix have been experienced  
It has to stop somewhere  
It simply must  
You're making me sick  
And I can't last one more fever

May 31, 2015

## Bralet

My breasts had a future  
I realized that as I saw the ad  
My breasts were no longer relegated to certain types of clothes;  
dowdy, covering their vastness, shielding their terrifying mass from the world,  
encapsulating them in shirts so large nothing fit but the bust  
No, they had a future now  
They were perched with graduation caps, and they were ready to head out into that  
big, wide open world they had heard so much about to make their own way and follow  
their dreams

They're ready, but as their guardian and protector, I need to make sure they're set  
And they're not yet  
They still need to heal, they still have scars, they're still bruised from their creation,  
the blood and fluid newly washed off, their backsides still red from the slap the doctor gave  
them at birth  
But they will be soon

They will be ready to be unleashed upon the world, to cause their own chaotic good  
And when they are, there will be bralets waiting for them  
Bralets they will slid into and fit like they never knew any different  
As if they were never anything than this shape, this size, this perfect pair  
The doctor molded my breasts from so much leftover flesh and they will be ready  
soon  
Bralets are waiting, they are eager to meet them

August 13, 2015

## TOD

Angry  
Biting words  
Bitter tongue  
How dare I not respond in time?

I took selfies with a friend  
I played a card game that night  
Clearly I had the time to get back to him

Didn't I?

Didn't I?

I was destined for the hospital myself the next day  
Heading into a surgery I had already signed a consent form stating that I knew could  
kill me  
I was heading down a long dark hallway with no railings, feeling my way along the  
wall, expecting to stumble at any second and not be able to get back up

Terror  
I was lost in utter terror  
So many ways I could lose myself  
So many paths of incorrect my body could absorb and still come out of changed and  
horrible  
But I could die  
I could have died  
And I couldn't stop that thought from beating in my head like the pulsing of my own  
organs

Then I left the hospital and you didn't  
I knew you would be angry  
I updated Facebook about watching Nadia G and enjoying how I floated on pain  
medication  
I did not contact you  
I thought you would be better soon and I would just deal with your wrath then  
I thought you might die and I would never have to deal with you at all

But death seemed like a far-off concept reserved for grandmothers in their 90s  
Biding their time with knitting until they could rest  
I dreaded your inevitable recovery and your incoming words of rage over my lack of  
attention

Time Of Death: 3am

And there it was  
The impossible realized  
The improbable came to pass  
There was no getting better  
There was no waking up to see the flowers in your hospital room

The last thing you said to me were upset words that I never responded to  
That I couldn't respond to  
That I couldn't deal with when I read them  
I was worried I would die  
I never thought you would

August 16, 2015

# Girlfriend Space

## 1. Girlfriend Space

It's a particular delineation.

Somewhere between fuckbuddy and wife is the space carved out for girlfriends.

It's a sacred space which men put you in with gentle fingers and leave you there, waiting for the day when you realize you are in this space and you need to act accordingly.

It's a honor to be put there, really. An honor, dammit.

A man loves you so much he puts you on a pedestal and demands your attention. You should feel lucky that a man cares enough about you to trap you up there and announce that you can never leave without hurting him and causing his soft, tiny feelings to melt into the pavement below.

You should enjoy your captivity.

You should love Girlfriend Space.

## 2. Lack

My failures can so rarely be traced back to a lack of effort

I tried. This time, the last time, all of the times before that. I really tried.

And it seems now that my trying was what resulted in failure.

Funny how that works.

I'm sure it would have been unfair for me not to have given him a chance at all, like I did before, but somehow giving him said chance and that chance not working out was the cruelest thing I could do this time.

But everything is cruel when you escape from Girlfriend Space and run amok, causing the havoc knowing as choosing your own path.

## 3. The Other Man

It's hardly as if this was unexpected. Even if I had been interested in dating, it would have only been casually. That much I made clear with every fiber of my being.

I could not have been more precise about that.

So the knowledge that there was someone else who was currently occupying the space he wanted, the space he craved, shouldn't have even been vaguely surprising.

The idea that he was not going to be my boyfriend should have been drilled into his head so hard it came out of the back.

And you want to hate him? Why?

Because he did something for me that you couldn't?

Because he moved me in a way you didn't?

Because I chose him instead of him choosing me?

You can hate him if you wish, but nothing will change what happened last night.

Nothing will make me want him less.

I found someone who wasn't you in so many ways and that, oh that, satisfied me.



September 9, 2015

## People Who Shuffle Across the Street

I'm so tired of people who shuffle across the street  
Major highways, speed limit 50 miles per hour (and we all know everyone exceeds it)  
Multiple lanes of traffic  
And here is someone peacefully walking across it as if there's no danger present at all  
How do they do that?  
How do they not feel the anxiety of knowing cars are coming and one could make a  
mistake,  
Go too fast, not see them, and end their very life?

He might have blood cancer  
He's already had brain cancer  
One more cancer for the road?

Finally done driving back and forth to Yorktown  
The place that manages to magically be exactly 30 minutes from everything  
Two to three hours worth of driving a day just for that was taking its toll on me  
I filled up my gas tank twice in the last week and I'm at half a tank again  
So much gasoline, so fucking much  
At least I could get him pizza from his favorite restaurant on the way  
Silver lining, dark cloud

I always thought events like this would play out as if in a movie  
The music comes up, the doctor takes off his glasses and hangs his head, he  
admits that it might be a possibility with sad eyes  
But that's not what happened  
Real life was not my movie movement  
He told me over a text message  
He said it again in person as he rambled off the events of the last few hours  
which exhausted him so much he couldn't speak anymore  
I stared, completely unsure of what to do, what to say, how to hold my hands

The GPS keeps taking me to the back of a building and proudly announcing,  
"Here you are, you're at Five Guys!"  
I have to drive around and hope against hope I can navigate this strange city well  
enough to find where the actual restaurant is and not just a brick wall  
Thanks, Siri, you bitch

And then he said it, as I was leaving  
At least, I think he did  
As we were saying out goodbyes, as I had to get to class and he needed his rest,  
I think he said, "Love you," in the most casual of tones  
I think that's what I heard  
It sounded like that and I fail to summon some word or phrase that sounds

similar but is not that, which would have been appropriate to say as I was leaving

Norfolk traffic is the worst during rush hour  
So many left turns to make on lights that barely let four cars through before changing  
I had to pulled out into the intersection just to make myself known so I could make  
my fucking turn just as the light changed  
Norfolk traffic is the worst

He could die  
I know that  
I've known that the entire time  
But somehow the reality of it seems like an oft distant path of terrible that my  
brain creates when I let it think too much  
I simultaneously feel both overwhelmed by this knowledge and completely  
numb to it  
We will all die one day  
Maybe he will die at Norfolk General at the age of 28 with me waiting on his text

I have to get to class  
I finished my syllabus early  
No one else seemed to  
I think about this as I navigate Redgate and turn onto Hampton  
I suppose I will see when I get to class  
I suppose I will see...

October 28, 2015

*Selections from*

# Scars: A Novel

Prologue  
Chapter 1  
Chapter 2

## Prologue

**Thursday, October 8, 2037**

Prisma Salvatore sat in the car, staring into the patch of grey sky visible between the tree branches. The numb feeling that had been confined to her chest had overtaken her entire body now. The thought of what could be happening that that moment was so horrible that she couldn't stop thinking it. The blur of the past two weeks that had led her to this place seemed surreal and otherworldly now.

Her phone made a sound that shook her from her thoughts. She fished it out of her pocket and looked at the screen. It was a new text message.

***Vivian Brent***

*We're ready.*

Prisma put the phone back into her pocket and starred ahead of her again. The next few minutes of her life were either going to be amazing or devastating. The feeling of nausea that overcame her didn't fill her with any kind of hope or promise. After everything that had happened in her life, she had nothing to base optimism on. As Prisma started the car, she closed her eyes for a second, trying to comfort herself with the thought that she would still have her memories, if everything went terribly wrong.

# Chapter 1

**Friday, September 25, 2037**

"Tonight on Nightline: We present an inside look into the new FBI team, fondly nicknamed the FBI SEALs, and the leader of this team; an amazing woman whose own story is fraught with tragedy and triumph. When she was only 14 years old, Prisma Salvatore was kidnapped by Mark Weston, a prolific serial killer. He would kidnap girls around age 13 or 14, after extensively stalking them, then take them to a secluded shack in the middle a massive cornfield where he would rape and torture them until they reached age 16. At that time he would murder the girls and dump their bodies like garbage.

No one knows exactly what happened in that house in the cornfield, but after 11 months of captivity, Mark Weston died and Prisma escaped. The night she was rescued, she ran over five miles through the cornfield and flagged down a police officer who had just finished making a routine stop. Soon after that, she was reunited with her family. After two years out of the public eye, she graduated from high school early and dedicated herself to doing the impossible; solving the mystery of the Zodiac killer, a case that had been cold for over 50 years.

Prisma solved the murders and enrolled in college, graduating with a degree in criminal justice. She then won a place at the FBI academy in Quantico, Virginia. Her time there was rife with controversy as some believed she was unfit for the stressful nature of a field agent's job, while others accused her of using her family's money and connections to have gotten the spot in the first place. But all doubts were put to rest when she cracked a missing person's case in just 12 hours and uncovered a ring of pedophiles that were abducting children and teenagers.

In 2032 a new FBI team was formed. It was considered a hybrid of profile and field agency, focused on recovering missing people and assisting police departments throughout the country. Prisma was appointed to head the team and –"

"Could you turn that off, please?" Prisma Salvatore asked, without glancing up from the file she was reading.

"Don't you like to see yourself on TV?" Eric Benson asked, muting the show and continuing to watch, while reading the subtitles.

Prisma didn't respond. Instead, she continued to read the police report. Benson studied her for a second then returned to watching the television.

Joaquin Cortez entered the room and greeted both of his co-workers. He took a seat at the oblong conference table that Prisma was working on and looked up at the screen. "Not this episode again," he groaned. "That one has this clip of me on there and I have something caught in my teeth the entire time. Hard to look official when you look like you need to brush."

"Eh, I don't think anyone really noticed. The entire focus was on Salvatore anyway." Benson sat back in his chair and sipped his coffee, engrossed in the TV show.

"Yeah, it must be difficult to be so popular," Cortez chuckled, glancing down the table at Prisma. She was still reading. "What are you looking at?" He asked, leaning forward.

"A case out of Reno," Prisma responded, looking up at him with placid blue eyes. "Two teenage boys have disappeared and have been found dead in their cars within six months. Both were from upper-middle class families and had no history of mental illness or

substance abuse. The Reno police aren't sure if it's the start of a serial or a murder and a copycat crime."

"Seriously, Salvatore?" Benson asked, incredulously, "It's four in the afternoon on a Friday and we just got back from a case today. Take a break before we get hauled off to somewhere else."

Cortez laughed. "If Prisma's not working, then she's not breathing."

"That's not true," Prisma said, "I do sleep. Occasionally."

Cortez smiled at her. "New guy, you've got a lot to learn about how this team works."

There was a knock on the conference room door and everyone looked up as Sabrina, Prisma's secretary and personal assistant, entered the room. "Hi everyone!" She greeted the group. "Prisma, I have a few things I need to go over with you and some paperwork for you to sign."

"Okay," Prisma acknowledged, standing up. "I'll meet you in my office in a minute." She reorganized the file and gathered her things as Sabrina said goodbye to Cortez and Benson and exited the room.

Prisma nodded to Cortez and was walking towards the door when Benson took her wrist. She jerked her arm out of his grasp with entirely too much force. Benson stared at her for an awkward second, then recovered. "Uh, I wanted to know if you wanted to get a drink or something tonight," He said, managing a friendly smile.

"I already have plans," Prisma said before continuing for the door. As she exited the room she heard Benson ask Cortez what plans she had since they had unexpectedly finished their case early and Cortez respond that she had to wash her hair. Prisma entered her clean and carefully organized office and sat down behind her desk. Sabrina was already seated in front of her, typing on her iPad.

"Okay," Sabrina said, switching programs on her tablet, "I've updated your schedule for this week. You got some calls while you were gone. The names and messages are in your notebook. Nothing interesting in the mail. You got a few more later birthday cards. I wasn't sure what you wanted done with those, so I left them in your apartment on the coffee table. I also got your car washed and vacuumed and I straightened out that whole misunderstanding with your gate pass."

Prisma nodded at the young woman, looking over her updated calendar on her iPad. "Thank you," she murmured, engrossed in the events and appointments that she would have to go to over the next week.

"Oh and you I need your signature on the case reviews that Chief Ellison wanted. They're in your documents file; just sign and e-mail them to Ellison." Sabrina brushed her long bangs back behind her ear and studied her boss. Prisma had had roughly 10 hours of sleep over the last three days, according to what Cortez had told her earlier. Her black hair was mussed but still trapped in her usually tight bun. Her dark pants suit was wrinkled from the six hour flight that morning followed by the two hour briefing when they returned. Prisma furrowed her brow.

"What's the Midnight Massacre Party?" She asked, pointing to an event on calendar.

"It's a book party for Wesley Kerr's new book, Midnight Massacre. It's the one about the Turnison killings. The dad killed the mom and three of the kids, then the one surviving kid was able to help police find his dad, remember?" Sabrina filled in. "He still wants to write a book about your case. He casually mentioned it when he called to invite you to the

book party."

"He can continue casually mentioning it," Prisma said, sharply.

"Is there anything else you need me to do?" Sabrina asked, rechecking her checklist of daily tasks.

"No, I think that's all, thank you. Go enjoy your weekend. I'm going to finish up here and get some dinner," Prisma said, mentally weighing the pros and cons of the two closest take out restaurants.

"Cool. If you need anything just call," Sabrina said, standing and straightening out her skirt. "Have a good weekend!" She said, happily as she quietly left the office.

Prisma waved to her as she closed the door. Once she was alone she let out a deep sigh and sunk into her chair. She stared up at the ceiling for a second, then looked back at her iPad. Out of curiosity she turned to her missed calls memo and scanned the list of names and messages. Most of them were unimportant, but then she saw a name that she didn't expect. Gino Sandrino.

Sitting up in her chair, Prisma read his entry.

*Gino Sandrino – 1-202-459-9969 – He's in briefly in town and wants to talk to you about something important that he doesn't wish to discuss with me. He says he's a family friend. Has a very thick Italian accent. Called me "Tesorro" (sp?) multiple times. I don't know what that means.*

Prisma smiled. *Treasure*. He hadn't changed a bit. She picked up her cell phone and dialed the number. Gino picked up on the second ring.

"Pronto." He answered.

"Gino, this is Prisma Salvatore," Prisma said in Italian.

"Prisma! Treasure! How long has it been since I've seen you?"

"Entirely too long. How long are you in town?"

"Only until tomorrow, but I need a favor. Can we meet for dinner?"

"You didn't kill anyone, did you?"

Gino laughed, the sound jovial and bright. "No, my treasure. I'm not in trouble, but I need your help. When can you meet me?"

Prisma looked at her watch. "I can meet you at *The Secret Garden* in an hour. How does that sound?"

"Perfect, my love. I will see you then."

They said their goodbyes then hung up. Prisma sat back in her chair and thought. She hadn't seen Gino in several years. They had met when he was brought up on murder charges that his company had framed him for. They hadn't met under the best circumstances, but Gino had taken a liking to Prisma, who he considered a charming woman and enjoyed speaking his native language with a fluent speaker. Last she had heard, Gino had opened a popular restaurant in New York City with his wife and was expecting another grandchild. Prisma wondered what he wanted.

\*

Prisma arrived early at *The Secret Garden* and was seated in a comfortable booth. While she waited for Gino she ordered them two glasses of water and a bottle of wine. Gino always insisted on having a fine Italian wine with dinner, even though Prisma rarely drank. Prisma looked over the menu even though she already knew what she wanted to order.

She looked over the dining room, noting the customers and wait staff. There were



only a few people seated, most of which looked like tourists. The servers were the usual crew and a new young woman who appeared to be having a very difficult time. Mika, the server who had been waiting on Prisma returned with the glasses of water and the bottle of wine and two wine glasses.

"So how's the job?" He asked Prisma, placing the drinks and glasses on the table.

"Same as usual," Prisma reported, "How have you been?"

"I've been great. Finally getting my master's degree this year, then I'm going to move far away from here and start my new life as a speech therapist." He smiled at her, pouring the wine into both of the glasses.

"Sounds like a plan," Prisma nodded, taking a sip of wine.

"Prisma!"

She looked up to see Gino, approaching the table. He slid out of his suit jacket and sat down.

*"Treasure, you have become even more beautiful."* He smiled.

Prisma laughed, "Mika, this is my friend, Gino. Gino, this is Mika, the finest future speech therapist in the district."

"Hello," Mika said, "Nice to meet you." Gino shook his hand, giving him an Italian greeting that Mika didn't understand. He smiled politely, nevertheless. "Can I get you any appetizers?"

"Let's start off with the double tomato bruschetta," Prisma said, shaking her head at Gino.

"Right away. Let me know if you have questions about the dinner specials tonight," Mika said before he left the table.

*"You know you can't go around speaking Italian to everyone in DC, right?"* Prisma asked, switching back to her second language.

*"I just came back from Rome. My English is suffering."*

Prisma laughed, *"What brings you into town?"*

Gino's smile faded and he leaned forward. *"I have something very important to ask you and I had to do it in person."*

Prisma raised an eyebrow. A feeling of unease seeped into her good mood. *"What's wrong?"*

*"My nephew is in danger. He has written several articles exposing a cult, calling itself the Church of Miracles for multiple criminal offenses. Its founder, Teodoro Lourdes, was well-loved by his devotees and my nephew has had attempts on his life. My wife and I have urged him to come to America for a few years, possibly to return once the scandal dies down. But –"*

Gino stop speaking immediately as he saw Mika approaching. Mika set down the bruschetta and smiled at both of them, not at all phased that the conversation stopped when he arrived.

"What can get you for entrees?" He asked, taking out his notepad.

"I'd like the pasta primavera with white sauce," Prisma said, handing Mika her menu.

"Please, the meat lasagna special," Gino said, in a thick accent.

"Okay, I've got it all down. I'll put your order in and be right back with your bread," Mika said, taking Gino's menu and smiling at the pair.

Gino turned back to Prisma, the serious expression overtaking his face again. *"The Church of Miracles has a following all over the world, including in America. I fear for his life. I*

*need someone to protect him and I can think of no one more capable than you."*

Prisma raised an eyebrow. *"I'm not exactly a body guard."*

*"I do not think you are. I think you are someone who will deter any of their crazed followers from attempting to harm him. He is a good boy, he just had no idea what the repercussions of his actions would be."*

*"I still hold a rather annoyingly high profile,"* Prisma admitted. *"I don't know if I could keep him out of trouble. I regularly get followed by the press or photographers. This church would know exactly where he was by just accessing a website."*

*"Yes, that would be a problem,"* Gino said, scratching his chin. *"However, with someone of your skills and resources, I believe that no matter if you have a photographer tailing you at all times, you will be able to protect him. I have never known anything that can stop you, treasure. At this time, I need you to protect my family."*

Prisma nodded. *"How long will he be in the US?"*

*"He wants to look around this area for a place to live. He hasn't been to the states since he was a child. I don't believe he remembers much about the country at all. He has some distant cousins in Maryland. If you could help him find a place to live and get settled to wait out the danger, that would be perfect."*

*"I can help you,"* Prisma said, *"When is he arriving in the states?"*

*"He flies in tomorrow."*

Prisma almost choked on her bruschetta. *"Tomorrow? I have no time to prepare."*

Gino cringed. *"I apologize, Prisma. The boy was mailed a bomb this morning. His letter carrier was killed. The violence against him has been escalating. We fear he cannot stay in the country any longer."*

Prisma bit her lower lip as she thought of the variety of events that she would have to reschedule or miss in order to take on this task.

*"Prisma, I know this is a huge imposition on you and your time. You are a very busy woman, I am aware. But I fear for my nephew. He is my sister's only child, God rest her soul, and a sweet boy. I could not stand to see him harmed."*

*"I understand,"* Prisma nodded. "Family" was the word that trumped everything. Although she had the feeling that this adventure might become more trouble than she had ever thought it would, she couldn't turn Gino down. *"I'll plan for his arrival tomorrow. I will make sure he is safe and can settle into a new home."*

Gino reached across the table and took Prisma's hand. She flinched at the contact. *"Thank you, my treasure. My family will forever remember what you have done for us."*

"Okay, who had the lasagna?" The exhausted but still perky new server asked, approaching the table carrying two large plates of food.

\*

After Prisma left the restaurant she called Sabrina. The phone rang several times before she picked up. Prisma glanced at her watch. It was past 9pm.

"Prisma, is something wrong?" Sabrina asked, without saying hello.

The special agent unlocked her car with the key fob and slid into the driver's seat. "Nothing's wrong. I just need you to work some overtime," Prisma said, starting her car and setting her phone into the charging station, where it automatically switched over to the hands-free calling.

"What do you need?" Sabrina asked, immediately.

"I'm going to take two weeks of vacation," Prisma said, pulling out of the parking lot. She was about to continue when Sabrina gasped.

"Vacation?! Did someone die?" She demanded.

Prisma noted that even Sabrina knew that she wouldn't actually be going anywhere for herself. "No one died," Prisma assured her. "I'm just going to be traveling around the area, actually. I'm going to be helping a young man relocate from Italy and he wants to view some locations. I need you to plan travel and events for us."

"Where do you want to go, exactly?"

"His Uncle said that he wanted to be in this area, so DC, Hampton Roads, maybe the Outer Banks."

"So how long do you want me to plan for?"

"Two weeks."

"Okay, I'm writing this down. Hotel accommodations and events for two in the surrounding area. Starting when?"

Prisma stopped at a red light and paused, dreading informing her assistant that she would have to work very quickly. "By tomorrow. He flies in at 2pm."

"Alright, I'll get right on it," Sabrina said, not seeming to take any notice of the deadline. "I'll use your MasterCard to book the rooms and reservations. Hang on, let me check your calendar. I have to rearrange some things."

"I know this is short notice, but please do the best you can," Prisma said, knowing that Sabrina had just put in a lot of time arranging her schedule.

"You've got it. I think I can change some appointments around," Sabrina said. "Okay, you have to go to the Presidential dinner tomorrow night, but I can rearrange and reschedule everything else," Sabrina said, as she continued to write.

"Perfect. Thank you so much. And be prepared for a bonus in your next check," Prisma said, silently thanking the universe for bringing Sabrina into her life.

"I can picture myself with a new pair of shoes already," Sabrina smiled.

"Clean out your closet, you can get two pairs," Prisma promised. The pair hung up and she continued her drive back to her apartment in Quantico. Lost in her thoughts, she pulled into the parking garage at her complex and parked in her assigned space. She removed her phone and started walking to the elevator. Her left hand held her phone, her right hand was hovering above the pistol she had strapped to her thigh.

\*

*Prisma rolled over, clutching her sides. Her body ached and her head throbbed. She touched her fingers to her temple and pulled them away when she felt a sticky substance on her head. Blood. It was fresh. She was still bleeding. Prisma moaned softly and looked around her. There was blood all over the floor. Realization flooded her brain; she was in the house in the cornfield. She was chained to floor by a metal collar that was welded around her neck. Her back was a tattered mess of blood and skin after her last beating.*

*She tried to sit up, but found her 14-year-old body lacking the strength to remain upright. She laid her head against the floor, tears spilling from her eyes. She looked straight in front of her and saw the whip he had used on her this time. It had been white when he had started and was now darkened with her blood. She closed her eyes and wished for death.*

*"What are you doing?"*

*Prisma's eyes snapped open in terror. He left the glow of the TV and had come back to*

*the small room he had imprisoned her in. He stepped closer to her, smiling.*

*"No! Please, no!" Prisma begged, trying to move away from him. The chain around her neck jerked taunt and dug into her already raw skin.*

*"That's no way to greet me," he laughed, enjoying every second of her terror. He grabbed a hold of the chain and yanked her towards him. Prisma screamed in pain as the collar dug into her neck. "You should be happy to see me," He said, putting his face close to hers. He smelled of tobacco and musky aftershave mixed with the sweat he had worked up. "You should be so happy."*

## Chapter 2

**Saturday, September 26, 2037**

Prisma awoke with a start, her hand automatically going to the gun she kept on her nightstand. She looked around her empty bedroom before setting the gun back down. She ran her hands through her hair, finding that she had broken out in a cold sweat. Prisma glanced at her alarm clock. It was 5:59am.

"Damn it," she muttered, pressing a hand against her racing heart. She had gone almost a week without a nightmare. She was now back to square one. Prisma laid back against her pillows and stared at the ceiling. She tried to remember her relaxation techniques. She breathed in deeply and thought about a placid body of water, calmly lapping at the shore. Without feeling any of the benefits that this exercise was supposed to have given her, she reached for her phone and unlocked the screen.

She scrolled through her e-mails. An advertisement for a sale at her favorite clothing store, a reminder to update her password at work before it expired, a coupon for a dog grooming salon that was useless to her. Prisma deleted that e-mail, then skipped ahead to find a detailed list from Sabrina of her entire travel itinerary. She had two weeks of hotel rooms booked, dinner reservations made, and plenty of events planned. Prisma smiled. She accessed her banking app and made a note to include a generous bonus in Sabrina's next paycheck.

Prisma checked her text messages and found only one from her brother.

### ***Gabriel Salvatore***

*Sapphire is starting her birthday campaign early this year. Really early. Any ideas? And you better have some. She was pissed last time when you took her to the shooting range.*

Prisma texted him back, stating that she would figure something out for their little sister. She put her phone down and got out of bed, immediately entering the bathroom and starting the hot water in the shower. She stripped out of her shorts and tank top and examined her body in the mirror. She stood at just over 5 feet 8 inches. Her raven hair fell past her shoulders in even layers. She had her mother's clear blue eyes and curvy figure. She had her father's strong features. But her focus was completely concentrated on her scars.

No matter what she had used on her scars, they had never gone away. A healed crescent-shaped gash ran down her left breast, her sides were laced with marks from the various tools he had used on her while she was at the house in the cornfield. She didn't even want to view her back.

Disgusted, she striped out of her underwear and showered quickly. She ran through a mental list of things she had to pack and take care of before she left. She found herself wondering what her charge would be like. Prisma pictured him a young man, possibly just out of college, scared for his life and afraid to be in a place where he wasn't fluent in the language. Prisma washed her face, trying to picture what he would look like. She wondered what his name was.

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Prisma arrived at the airport a few minutes early and parked her car in the short-

term parking. She had received a text from Gino that he was at the gate, waiting on his nephew to arrive. As she walked past a family of four with two girls, the youngest pointed at her and tugged on her mother's shirt exclaiming, "Mommy! It's Prisma Salvatore! It really is!"

Ignoring the family, Prisma texted Gino back and told him that she was now entering the airport. She located him quickly, in the waiting area and took a seat beside him.

*"Is his plane on time?"* Prisma asked, in Italian.

*"Yes, it just landed. He should be here soon,"* Gino responded. *"Thank you again, treasure, for doing this."*

Prisma nodded. Her cell phone beeped with the indication that she had just gotten an e-mail. It was from Sabrina. She went to the e-mail and began reading. Sabrina informed her that her black formal dress had been dry cleaned and had been dropped off at her hotel for the Presidential dinner that evening. Also that Michelle was going to meet her there to do her hair and makeup. Prisma typed a quick thank you to her assistant and hit send.

*"Here he comes,"* Gino said, waving to his nephew.

Prisma sent her message and looked up to find herself locking eyes with a handsome man walking towards them. She froze. He returned her look with a friendly calmness. Her breath caught in her throat and she found herself transfixed by his soft gaze. Feelings that she had never experienced before flooded her consciousness. At first, she thought that he was simply a passenger who was exiting the airport, but horror set in as he approached them and greeted his uncle with a hug and kiss.

He was over six feet tall, standing a head taller than Prisma. He was fresh shaven, with short black hair, dark brown eyes and a gentle face. He had a lean build and was thoughtfully dressed in black slacks and a green, button-down shirt. He even managed to look rested despite having been in a plane for the last 16 hours, making a variety of connections to get him to the states.

The FBI team leader flushed red as Gino and the man turned to her. *"Prisma, my treasure, I'd like you to meet Questen Sandrino, my nephew."*

Prisma reminded herself that she had to respond. *"Very nice to meet you,"* She said, extending her hand, *"I'm Prisma Salvatore. Welcome to America."*

*"Thanks, nice to meet you too. It's great to be off of that plane,"* He responded in English, clasping her hand. Prisma found herself shocked by three things. First of all, he was not a boy. He looked to be around her own age. Second, he spoke flawless English with an American accent. He sounded like a native speaker. This made her wonder why she had thought that he wouldn't have spoken any English. Third, the second her hand touched his she felt something that she could only compare to an electric shock traveling all through her body. Prisma realized that her face must be burning with blush.

*"Oh, I thought you didn't speak English,"* Prisma said, retracting her hand a few seconds after their handshake should have ended.

*"Yeah, I do. I lived in the US until I was 10, then kept up with English after we moved to Italy. I still watch American TV shows and listen to some music,"* Prisma found herself unable to focus on anything he was saying. She had no idea what was happening between the two of them, but from his calm expression, it occurred to her that he did.

*"Prisma,"* Gino's voice broke through her foundering thoughts, *"I have to leave now. Please protect my nephew. My family will forever be in your debt."*

Prisma tore her gaze away from Questen to focus on her friend. *"Yes, have a safe flight. I won't let you down."*

Gino hugged her and Prisma and Questen both said their goodbyes to Gino. When he walked towards the ticketing counter, Questen turned back to Prisma.

"So, where are we going?" He asked, "No one really told me anything about this little trip. I was on a plane about an hour after the police were finished with me. I'm not even sure of what's going on."

"Uh," Prisma struggled to remember what Sabrina's itinerary said, or even anything at all, but her mind was completely blank. "Let's get to the car," she blurted out after a lingering silence.

"Okay, lead the way," Questen said, wheeling his suitcase as they walked.

"Do you want me to take your carry on?" Prisma asked, extending her hand for the small shoulder bag he was carrying.

"Nah, it's okay. It's not that heavy," He said, his eyes studying her with a bright curiosity. "I've always packed light, but I'm not even sure how long I was supposed to be staying here. The ticket was one way."

"The impression I got from your Uncle is that you're here until no one wants you dead anymore," Prisma said.

"That might be while," Questen smirked.

Prisma took her phone out of her purse and accessed her new calendar as they walked. They had to drive to the hotel, which would probably be several hours in DC traffic and get ready for the presidential dinner. The car would be picking them up at 5:30pm. Prisma glanced up at Questen. She felt something when she looked at him. She had no idea what the feeling was, but it frightened her. Questen glanced at her, their eyes meeting again. He smiled and looked on ahead.

\*

"I spy, with my bionic eye, something beginning with..." Questen trailed off, looking around the gridlocked highway for something interesting to pick. "H."

Prisma rubbed her face, absent-mindedly and followed his gaze. "A hospital sign."

"You're good at this," He smiled.

Prisma looked at the clock on her car's display. They had been sitting still for forty-five minutes now.

"It would probably be faster if we walked," Questen commented.

"Probably," Prisma agreed.

Questen turned to her, adjusting his position in her passenger's seat. "So tell me about yourself," He said, his warm eyes meeting hers. "My uncle just said that you're great and no one will kill me if I'm with you."

Prisma opened her mouth to speak, but hesitated. "That's all you really need to know," she murmured, shrugging. Questen nodded, unsure of how to respond. "I work for the FBI." She offered after a pause.

"Wow, that's cool," Questen said. "I've never know anyone in law enforcement before."

"What do you do?" She asked, after a pause.

"I write. I've been writing freelance for years now. It usually keeps me out of trouble, but this time it's gotten a little out of hand," He admitted. He pulled out his iPad. "Hey, what's your full name again? I'll look you up on FacePlace."

"Prisma Salvatore," she responded. It felt strange to have to tell someone her full name. Everyone usually already knew who she was before she even said anything.

Questen typed her name in and found her profile. Her avatar was a photo of her that had been taken at work a few months previously. She was wearing a black pants suit, seated in front of an American flag. "There you are," Questen said, hitting the friend request option.

Prisma pulled out her phone and accessed the FacePlace app. It crashed immediately and she had to restart the app. Once she got into her account, she approved his friend request. His avatar was a photo of a black and white picture of him with the word "Wanted" across the bottom. Prisma raised an eyebrow at the gallows humor.

"So is traffic always this bad?" He asked, tapping the link to access her profile. He glanced over her last few alerts and photos that she had posted.

"Pretty much. This is basically the only thing that I don't like about this city," Prisma admitted.

He made a thoughtful sound. "I'll check us in at this location. Then four hours later, I can check us in ten feet down the road and talk about all of the progress we've made."

Prisma glanced at her watch. It was almost three.

"What are we doing tonight?" Questen asked, setting his tablet down.

"Presidential dinner," Prisma said, trying to keep her eyes focused on the completely stopped traffic in front of them. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a car move, but when she turned, she saw that it was just lurching forward slightly in place.

"Where will that be?"

"At the White House..." Prisma said, not sure where else he expected that a presidential dinner would be held.

"Wait, what? We're going to the White House? The president's White House? For dinner?"

"Yes, he's having a dinner to celebrate his birthday."

"Are you fucking with me?" Questen asked.

Prisma finally had to tear her eyes from the traffic and look at him. "No. We're going to the White House tonight to see the President."

Questen's eyes lit up with excitement. "This is so awesome! I've never met a president before. Wow, amazing!" He looked almost childlike in his joy.

Prisma realized that she had met the President so many times that she didn't really think anything of it. He had been a family friend, before he was elected to office and even with his new position, he was still the same man who had come to her family's Christmas party with Christmas crackers for everyone to pop.

It then dawned on Prisma that while her outfit for the night was waiting for her at the hotel, he probably didn't pack his tuxedo in his single suitcase. "Do you have a tux with you?" Prisma asked.

Questen's face fell. "I don't. I have one back in Italy, but that's not going to do me much good."

Prisma thought for a second, then remembered there was a tuxedo rental shop near the hotel, where her dad had rented a tux after discovering his jacket had been ruined during dry cleaning. She pressed the home button on her car's display screen and the friendly voice chirped, "How can I help you, Prisma?"

"Siri, find the phone number for Dashinglly Handsome Tuxedo Shop in Washington,



DC," Prisma instructed the computer.

The computer began to search through the internet. It located the shop and dialed the number. The phone began to ring. Finally, a man's voice picked up. "Hello, it's a great day at Dashing Handsome."

"Hi, I'm in a bit of a pinch and need a tuxedo for tonight."

"Going to the presidential dinner tonight?" He asked.

"Yes, actually," Prisma said, figuring that he must have gotten a lot of calls from the President's guests in the last few days.

"You're in luck. We have plenty of staff on hand to help you. When can you be here?"

"Well..." Prisma turned her eyes back to the traffic. The car in front of her lurched forward two feet. "It might be a while," she sighed.

"You're stuck in that traffic jam by the airport, aren't you?" The man asked.

Questen laughed, "This guy is psychic."

"Yes, we are," Prisma said, smiling a small smile herself.

"No problem. Come in whenever you get here and we'll get you fixed up for tonight. What's your name?"

"Thank you. The name is Sandrino." Prisma said.

"Alright, we'll see you soon."

Prisma ended the call and watched as the car in front of her moved another few feet. She took the car out of park and eased ahead several feet.

"Well, that was easy," Questen said, looking around at Prisma's car. "This is a really cool car."

"Thanks," Prisma said, watching the lane to her left move up a few feet.

"Hey, want to play another game?" Questen asked.

"Sure, we've got time," Prisma muttered.

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Prisma had almost finished dressing when there was a knock on the hotel room door. Figuring that it was her hair and makeup artist, Prisma checked her dress in the mirror, then raced to the door. Questen was seated in the living area with his tux jacket off, typing on his laptop.

"Who's that?" He asked, watching Prisma cross the room.

"Michelle, she's going to do my hair and makeup," Prisma said. She opened the door and was greeted by one of Michelle's bear hugs.

"Girl, where have you been? I almost started thinking that you were seeing someone else," She laughed.

"Don't worry, I would never cheat on you," Prisma assured her. Michelle entered the room and looked around.

"Wow, this is classy," She said, then she spotted Questen, who waved to her. "Hi there, who are you?"

"Questen," He said. "I'm going to the dinner with Prisma. But don't worry, I can do my own hair and makeup."

Michelle laughed, "Nice to meet you."

"This way," Prisma said, leading Michelle through to the master bedroom. Michelle wheeled her silver trunk through the living room and closed the door behind her as she entered the bedroom.

"Okay, tell me everything," She smiled wickedly. "How long have you been seeing him?"

"I'm not dating him," Prisma objected. "I'm trying to make sure that no one from a cult that he pissed off kills him."

"I don't know what kind of dating service you are using, but it worked. He is adorable!" She laughed.

"I'm not using a dating service," Prisma insisted. She sat down at the vanity and watched as Michelle started to set up her kit.

"If you don't want him, I'll take a crack at him," Michelle said, winking at Prisma as she unpacked her brushes.

Prisma wanted to tell her to have at it, but something stopped her. She decided to change the topic. "Can you do the regular evening makeup and maybe an upswept bun?"

"Sure," Michelle retrieved her hair styling tools and quickly plugged them into the power strip on top of the vanity. "I just learned a new French braid bun, do you want to try that?"

"Yeah, that sounds perfect," Prisma said, anxiously running a hand through her black hair.

"What time do you two need to leave?" Michelle asked, pulling out some hair styling books and setting them onto the bed.

Prisma looked at the alarm clock on the bed, "Less than an hour," she cringed.

"Girl, you are lucky that I can work fast and still make you look good," Michelle laughed.

Questen heard the murmur of voices in the next room as Michelle started on Prisma's hair and makeup. He smiled to himself, then decided to kill some time on FacePlace while he waited. He switched apps on his iPad and logged into his account. He saw that he had twenty new notifications. He thought that was rather a lot, since he had only updated his status in the car a few hours ago.

He clicked on the notification window and it took him to his last check in. He was shocked to find that the update had elicited 40 comments. He read over them and found himself furrowing his brow. The Italian comments were filled with questions about who Prisma Salvatore was and if she was a new girl he was dating. The comments in English were from people who appeared to already know who she was.

*What are you doing with Prisma Salvatore?*

*Are you in jail, Questen?*

*Do you realize who she is?*

*OMG, I love her! Can you ask her if she got my letter?*

*Prisma Salvatore is dangerous. Don't even look at her the wrong way.*

*Prisma Salvatore isn't all there, upstairs, you know? Be careful.*

*Prisma is so cool. I want to meet her someday. Just once!*

*What is she like?*

*Take a picture of her back. It will be worth millions.*

*Be careful, brother! You have no idea what you're getting yourself into!*

Questen paused. What was everyone talking about?

He opened a web browser and ran a Google search on Prisma Salvatore. He was shocked when the search returned millions of results. News articles about her catching serial killers and doing various things for charity, videos of her speaking at official FBI events, webpages discussing everything from her latest case to her monochromatic wardrobe.

Questen saw a link to her Wikipedia page and clicked it. The article was rather lengthy and detailed. He started by reading the summary paragraph. He read a brief account of her life and found himself in disbelief. He had asked her about herself and all she had said what that she worked for the FBI? There was more to her than that.

Looking up from his laptop, Questen found himself questioning how the last few hours had went. She had seemed slightly nervous around him. She had never quite relaxed through the traffic jam and kept restlessly running her hands over the steering wheel. He remembered the way she had looked at him when their eyes first met in the airport. Prisma had stared at him as if she was looking into the center of his being and he knew that he had been looking at her the same way.

"Hang on, I'll just grab a bottle of water," Michelle opened the door to the master bedroom and dashed into the kitchen, waving at Questen as she walked by. Questen waved back. He stared down at the Wikipedia page and scrolled down the article. He found himself reading a section entitled "Mark Weston's death and her escape".

*It's not exactly know how Mark Weston died. The police stated that Mark Weston died in an accident when an iron frying pan fell from a high shelf and hit him on the head. However, other sources have stated that the injuries reported in Weston's sealed autopsy were not consistent with an accidental death. Regardless of how he died, Prisma was able to leave the house and located a police officer. She first asked the officer to go tend to Weston, who she believed was just injured, and then was taken to a hospital where she was reunited with her family. Salvatore has refused to speak about what happened on that night, so the exact details remain unclear.*

Questen furrowed his brow. She had been kidnapped? Her captor had died under mysterious circumstances? Her story just got more complicated and strange. It occurred to him that she probably hadn't wanted to trot out her entire life story to him a few minutes after they met. He stared down at his laptop screen, unsure of whether he should tell her that he more about who she was or just keep it to himself.

"Hey, you look nice."

Questen looked up and saw Michelle taking a sip from a bottle of water and smiling at him.

"Thanks," he said, blankly. "It's been a while since I've worn a tux." He added, trying to sound casual.

"You two are going to look amazing together," Michelle winked at him. "Let me go finish getting your date ready." She headed back towards the bedroom as Questen returned to his computer. He closed out of the Wikipedia page and stared at the dark plasma TV that was sitting across the room from him. He decided that he wouldn't tell Prisma what he had learned. She had to realize that he would eventually figure it out, though. She seemed to have too high of a profile to keep her past a secret. Questen ran a hand through his dark

hair and sighed. For some reason, he had never been attracted to uncomplicated women.

Questen put down his computer and picked up his tablet. He switched applications on it and started playing Dragon's Breath. It was a physics game where the player sent tiny dragons to collect eggs by launching them at barriers. The dragons had to be strong enough to break through the barrier, but not so strong as to damage the eggs. He had become obsessed with the game on the long flight to the US and had become stuck on a level. Time passed as he struggled to break down a particularly heavy barrier and protect the green speckled eggs behind it.

"Questen?"

He looked up at the sound of Prisma's voice. She was standing in the doorway to the master bedroom, now completely dressed and made up. Their eyes met again as he took her in. She was wearing a long black, sleeveless Jersey dress with a rounded neckline and delicate beading on the straps and waist. A modest slit ran up the left side, revealing one of her legs and a black high heel.

"The car's here," she said quietly, her face flushing once again.

"You look great," Questen murmured.

"Thank you," she responded, quietly.

"Hold on, hold on," Michelle said, interrupting the silence. "I want to get a picture of you two before you head out."

Questen stood and slid into his suit jacket. He walked over to Prisma as Michelle got out her digital camera and stood a few feet in front of them. Questen stood beside Prisma, his first instinct to put his arm around her, but he hesitated.

"Okay, get closer together; I want to get a full body shot," Michelle instructed, fiddling with some buttons on her camera.

"Uh, is it okay if put my arm around you?" Questen asked.

Prisma looked at him for a second as if sizing him up. "Okay," she responded. Questen slipped his arm around her waist, feeling her tense up as he did.

"Alright, smile!" Michelle said happily as she clicked the shutter. "One more."

Prisma felt Questen grip her waist, gently. His hand felt so firm and tender around her. She glanced up at him, curiously just as he looked down at her. Michelle took another photo.

"These look perfect! I'll post them on FacePlace tonight. You two have fun at the dinner." Prisma and Questen hadn't broken their gaze. "Hey, guys? You've got to get to your car."

Prisma returned to reality first. "Yes, let me get my clutch." She moved away from Questen quickly and returned to the bedroom. Questen looked back at Michelle, helplessly. She smiled at him and winked. Prisma reemerged with a plain black clutch. She opened it, fished out a fifty dollar bill and handed it to Michelle. "Thank you so much for doing this at the last second," She said.

"Anything for you, Prisma," Michelle smiled, then hugged her. "Now scamper off to the party before the car gets tired of waiting for you."

Prisma glanced at Questen. "Yes, we have to get going," she murmured.

"Lead the way," he said, slipping his phone into his pocket.

\*

"Do you want to dance?"

"Huh?" Prisma looked away from the couple she had been watching and tried to focus on the person who had just asked her a question.

"Do you want to dance?" Questen repeated, holding out his hand.

"I'm not a very good dancer," Prisma replied, regarding his hand suspiciously.

"That's okay, I'm not either," he admitted, chuckling. Prisma hesitated. "Come on, it'll be fun. Besides, I need to work off that dessert somehow."

Prisma stared at his hand. She wanted to firmly tell him to go find someone else to dance but a part of her wanted to accept his hand. The war waged within in and when she realized that her pause had stretched on entirely too long, she nervously took it. As his hand closed around her, it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

They both stood, Questen leading her to an open place on the dance floor where couples were swaying slowly to the music. Questen put one hand around her waist and clasped her hand in his. Prisma carefully placed her hand on his chest, feeling her heart rate increase. She wondered why this felt so familiar. It seemed almost effortless to sway in his arms.

"How do you like the dinner so far?" She asked, fumbling for conversation as they began to move with the music.

"It's great," Questen chuckled, "I never thought I'd be dining with the President on my first night back in the states. I feel quite important."

The two had had a wonderful evening so far. They had arrived quietly and had walked through the back of the hotel to get to the ballroom, avoiding the red carpet that was crawling with reporters and various hangers on. They were sat with the former director of the FBI, whom Prisma had worked with for two years before he retired, and his wife, Sheila. Sheila had recently become interested in writing and had picked Questen's brain for tips and pointers. Meanwhile, Prisma caught up with the former director and talked about life working for the bureau.

After the main course, President Foxchase's husband gave a brief speech about the president and presented him with a Rolex watch that he had been eyeing for months. Then President Foxchase addressed the crowd, thanking everyone for attending his birthday party and spoke briefly about new legislation he was introducing to improve public school teacher's pay and benefits. After the speeches, the dancing had started and Prisma and Questen had found themselves alone at the table.

"Prisma Salvatore!" Prisma was broken from her thoughts by the boisterous greeting. She craned her neck in the direction of the voice and saw President Foxchase and his husband dancing their way towards them. Questen gasped, staring at the couple.

"Hello Prisma, you look amazing," the President said, breaking from the dance and kissing Prisma's cheek.

"Thank you, you look very spiffy yourself," She said. She turned to Questen, "Mr. President, this is Questen Sandrino, a writer from Italy. Questen, this is President Eden Foxchase and the First Gentleman, Richard Foxchase."

The President shook hands with Questen as Richard embraced Prisma and kissed her cheek. "He's cute," Richard commented, smiling knowingly at her. Prisma shook her head at him.

"It's an honor to meet you, Mr. President," Questen managed to get out.

"Very nice to meet you too. How are you enjoying DC so far?" Eden asked.

"Amazing. With the exception of the traffic," he admitted.

Eden laughed, "No one enjoys the traffic, believe me."

"So how do you know Prisma," Richard asked.

"She's a friend of my Uncle's. She is graciously showing me around this part of the states for the next couple of weeks," Questen responded.

"That's wonderful," Richard said, taking Eden's arm. "I hope you have a great time in America."

"Yes, take care, and Prisma, tell your dad I said hello," Eden said as Richard guided him back to the center of the dance floor.

"I will," Prisma promised as the two left earshot. She turned back to Questen to find him staring at the two in disbelief. "Are you alright?"

"I just met the President of the United States!" He told her as if she hadn't been there the entire time. "This is so cool," Questen murmured, mostly to himself.

"Quite," Prisma mused.

Questen turned to face her again and resumed the dancing position. Prisma placed her hand back on his chest as they started to move to the music.

"So your family knows the President?" Questen asked.

"Yeah, he's been a family friend for years. He helped my dad campaign for mayor and my dad supported him for senate. We never thought he would become elected President, though."

"Next time you meet someone, you might want to open with telling them that you personally know the president of the country," Questen laughed.

Prisma chuckled. The song they had been dancing to ended and another started. It was a slower, piano-driven song that Prisma didn't recognize. She and Questen slowed their pace to match the music. After glancing around the dance floor at the other happy couples, Prisma looked up at Questen. Their eyes met again and Prisma was suddenly unaware of the music, or the other couples, or even the dance floor. Transfixed by his gaze, she hardly noticed that his face was moving closer to hers. She had almost completely forgotten everything in the entire universe when she realized that he was going to kiss her.

Questen lowered his lips to Prisma's, awaiting contact when his dance partner stopped moving and became completely rigid in his arms. Questen paused, unsure of what was happening. He pulled back, looking into Prisma's eyes. Her clear blue eyes were glazed and unfocused. "Prisma?" She continued her unblinking stare as if she was looking right through him. "Prisma?" Her entire body had become locked in place. Questen gently cupped her cheek in his hand. "Prisma? Are you okay?"

Then, just as suddenly as it had started, her eyes began to focus and she frowned. "I'm fine," She muttered. "I think I've had enough of dancing," she added, before breaking the embrace and walking back to the table. Questen followed, completely unsure of what had just transpired. Prisma returned to her seat and picked up her phone. Questen sat down next to her, waiting for her to acknowledge whatever had just happened to her. She didn't.

"Prisma?" Questen said softly.

"What?" Prisma asked, not looking up from her phone.

"What just happened?"

"What are you talking about?"

Questen furrowed his brow in confusion. "I'm talking about you completely checking

out for a minute. What was that?"

"Don't worry about it," she responded, dismissively.

"Well, I am a little worried. Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. It's nothing," she said, and started typing on her phone.

Questen sat back in his chair. Something had happened. Something was wrong. He ran his hand through his dark hair. He had never had this much trouble just trying to kiss a woman. He enjoyed girls who moved quickly and were completely comfortable with intimacy. Prisma had clearly been through too much trauma in her life to be as trusting and open as the girls he had usually dated. Unhappily, he took a sip of his champagne, wishing that Prisma would look up from her phone and talk to him. She didn't.

\*

*Prisma opened the door to her dorm and allowed her date, Mason Lewis, in. He looked around the room and made a comment about the poster of RuPaul that hung over her roommate's bed. They sat down on the two chairs in front of the TV and chatted for a few minutes about school and the movie they had just seen and various other topics. Then Prisma glanced at the clock and told her date that she had to be up early the next morning for class. He smiled at her.*

*"Let's not beat around the bush," he said, standing up. "I know what you want."*

*Prisma didn't know what he was talking about. She slowly stood as he approached her.*

*"Everyone is so fucking afraid of you, but I know what you want." He suddenly grabbed her, pushing his lips down on hers. Prisma froze. Her entire body stopped responding to her commands and her mind drifted into a completely different plane. Mason, however, saw her lack of response as consent. He kissed her again, thrusting his tongue into her mouth.*

*"Everyone thinks you're so delicate, but you're not," he said, his hot breath against her face making her skin crawl. "You want someone to dominate you. You want someone to beat you. When Mark Weston was fucking you, I bet you loved it."*

*The words echoed through her mind but didn't connect with anything that was happening to her. She was in a different place completely. Suddenly, she heard the sound of fabric ripping and felt a rush of air against her bare chest. The sensation brought her out of her disassociated state. Mason discarded her ripped shirt and gripped her left breast through her bra, roughly handling her as he kissed her again.*

*Prisma looked down and realized what was happening. Then her years of Krav Maga came flooding back to her. She punched Mason in his solar plexus. He doubled over in pain as Prisma kned him in the groin. He cried out and fell to the floor. Prisma kicked him in the face.*

*"Stop! Stop!" He screamed.*

*"Get out!" Prisma shrieked.*

*Mason picked himself up, his hand covering his genitals. "You fucking lunatic," he spat.*

*"Get out!" Prisma screamed back, pointing towards the door.*

*"Fuck you!" Mason yelled as he exited the room.*

*As soon as the door closed, Prisma ran to it and locked it. She turned, tears welling in her eyes and saw the silhouette of Mark Weston, sitting on her bed. She screamed.*

*Mark rose and walked over to her. He was laughing. "You're mine now!" He declared. He was holding a whip in his hand. "You're all mine." Prisma closed her eyes, knowing that she was about to feel the whip against her body.*

## **You're at the End!**

Thanks for reading through my sampler!

I hope you enjoyed it and are looking forward to the next release.

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