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PROLOGUE

SCOTTIE

“FUCK OFF, ASSHOLE!”

“No, you fuck off.”

“Eat shit and rot!”

God, I love New York City.

There’s nothing better than waiting for your breakfast burrito at the corner bodega and witnessing a fight almost break out between a taxi driver and a Postmates runner on a motorbike. Truly chef’s kiss.

And it’s not just the kerfuffle on the roads that has me tingling with joy. I love the palpable high blood pressure of the collective whole during the morning commute.

The summer humidity, an added obstacle that you slice through during a brisk power walk to your destination.

And the pungent smell of the human race sharing the overworked streets of Midtown.

Spectacular.

Honk.

“Watch it, you dick!”

A smile passes over my face as I take a sip of my coffee.

I’m home.

Can’t beat New York in the summer.

“Scottie, your order,” Vincent calls out as he places my order on the take-out corner.

"Thank you," I say and then point at him with a finger gun as if we're long-lost friends. "Same time tomorrow, my man?"

Completely ignoring me, he goes back to work, scrambling eggs and cooking bacon. It's fine. He'll get to know me soon enough. I plan on stopping by every morning and establishing a rapport, one where I walk up to his storefront, which is decked out in pictures of bagel sandwiches, and he says, "Morning, Scottie. The usual?"

And I'd say, "That would be great, Vincent. How are the kids?"

And he would say something silly, like, "Eating me out of my own house."

We'd chuckle. I'd pay and then stand off to the side, patiently waiting for my burrito while I popped my earbuds in and a classic song like "Dreams" by the Cranberries would start playing.

It would be the perfect opening scene to any New York City-based Nora Ephron romantic comedy, where love is waiting in the wings.

But instead of formulating the well-executed meet-cute where I run into a man in front of an office building, spilling my coffee all over myself only to have him dab at my bosom with his solid-blue tie, I'm going to change the story. This isn't a story about me falling in love with another human.

This is a story about me falling in love with myself.

Yup, being a twenty-nine-year-old divorcée will do that to you.

The only person I want to be in love with right now is me and me alone.

And being here in New York City, the place where I always wanted to live out my early twenties after college, walking the concrete streets, cup of coffee in hand, on my way to my—

"Watch it, bitch." An elbow slams into my cup of coffee, sending theAmericano temporarily into the air, only to land smack-dab in the middle of my cream-colored silk blouse.

"Oh my God," I say, pulling my searing-hot blouse off my skin while

early morning commuters spare me a wince before continuing on to their occupations.

I glance around, checking for any oncoming men ready to dab my breasts clean, but when not a single person stops to help, I realize I'm shit out of luck.

What was I saying about New York?

Oh right... I love it.

I'm going to keep repeating that to myself over and over again as I carry my burrito in one hand and fan out my shirt with the other. I'll change when I get to work. My company has more than enough polos to spare. I should know; everyone I work with wears one almost every single day.

The only sad thing about getting coffee on my shirt is that I won't be able to drink it now. But hey, it's all part of the experience, right? The New York City experience. Consider this my initiation. My rite of passage. Being a girl from upstate New York, I've always dreamed of living in the city. Not just in my dorm room but on the Upper East Side, so now that I'm here again, nothing is going to stop me from enjoying it.

Not a single thing.

Because this is my new start.

I moved to the city to be closer to my friends, got a job with Butter Putter editing their ad copy and editorials, and now I'm living the single life, trying to regain the confidence I lost when I was married to Matt.

And sure, coffee down the blouse is not the way to start building up confidence, but it's not the worst thing that could happen. It's a conversation starter. Common ground.

Something I can talk about to my new coworkers that I share nothing in common with.

Like I said, nothing, and I mean nothing, is going to stop me from enjoying this new chapter in my life.

Scottie Price is thriving.

She is single.

She's smart, she's charismatic, she's charming.

And she's living out her best Nora Ephron life, falling in love with herself.

Yup, nothing is going to take that away.

Nothing.

CHAPTER ONE

SCOTTIE

"MEETING IN TEN," DUNCAN SAYS while knocking on the casing to the door of my office.

"Well aware," I mutter as I press my fingers into my brow. I don't need the reminder.

Another freaking Thursday morning meeting where obnoxious blowhards like to hear themselves speak while absolutely nothing is accomplished.

Great.

It's been three months at this job, and it's like clockwork. We shuffle into the conference room. Brad S carries around a putter like he's King Arthur at the Round Table and talks about the eighteen holes he plans on playing this weekend while Brad F—or Finky—and Chad cheer him on from the sidelines like a bunch of fanboys, frothing at the mouth for the attention of their leader.

Yup, Brad, Brad, and Chad.

The Brads and Chad.

I stare off into the pit of the office. Rows of glass desks, all stacked right next to the other, placed on top of puttable AstroTurf flooring. Bobbleheads showcasing a variety of sports heroes are perched atop said desks, jouncing while penis after penis walks by.

Yes, you read that right. . . penis after chino-encased penis.

To tell it to you straight, I work surrounded by a real sausage fest.

And not just any sausage fest but the worst kind.

It's what the youth are calling...the finance bros.

Shudders

Sure, they're not actually "finance bros" given they work for a golf company, but they sure as hell have the aesthetic down to a science.

Every day, I'm subjected to an agglomeration of company-embroidered vests, khaki chino shorts, boat shoes, and polos, all entwining with early morning bro hugs and gentle razzing.

Why does this bother me? Well, besides the fact that they are impossibly annoying to be around, I'm the only woman at the company besides the CEO. She, however, is barely in the office, especially with the launch of a new brand of Butter Putter mini golf courses.

But what really grates on my nerves and has me breathing into my desk drawer like it's a paper bag at least once a week: they're all married.

Every last one of them.

And sure, that's not a bad thing, but if I'm honest, it's not that they're married that's the issue. I'm the issue. It's me. Because I too was once blissfully married.

And at the beginning of my marriage, there was love between me and my ex, there was excitement, there was passion. But as time went on, year by year, I could start to see my husband's interest in me slip. His passion to hold my hand, cuddle, kiss me good night—no longer there. And the love diminished until the last year of my marriage, when it came crashing down after my husband forgot my birthday, leaving me to eat a piece of cake I bought for myself alone at the dining room table while he played video games.

So being in an office building surrounded by men who are happily married...it's...it's just hard. Makes me think of Matt, makes me think of how inadequate I am, how I wasn't good enough to hold his attention.

Not to mention I have nothing in common with them, unless they want to hear about the gum that got stuck on the bottom of my shoe while on a single-lady walk through Central Park over the weekend.

Nor do they care about my Sunday night girl dinner, which consisted of two dill pickles, one single Triscuit, and a cup of applesauce that I ate alone while watching the Menendez brothers documentary on Netflix.

There is a marriage cult, and I'm on the outside, looking in. Heaven forbid they ever find out I'm divorced. I can't imagine the clutching of their embroidered vests, the horror that would wash over their freshly shaven faces.

Scottie Price, the single one, sequestered in her office, not to go near in case she's contaminated with the "divorcées," a rare condition that could spread if one comes in close contact.

"You coming?" Finky asks, nodding toward the conference room.

My nostrils flare. "Yes, on my way."

"Good, don't want to be late. Ellison is here today."

My estrogen sonar perks up.

"Ellison is here? Really?"

"Yes. And you don't want to be the last one in the conference room."

No, I don't.

I quickly grab a notepad and pen, secure my coffee, and then head out into the pit and across the office to the conference room, where the men are already gathering. As I move around the table and find a seat, I scan the room, my mind picking them out one by one in my editor brain.

Brad S: never uses an uppercase T when writing *T-shirt*, despite how many times I remind him.

Duncan: can't remember to cite his sources, ever. I'm constantly chasing after him.

Finky: funny, but if he has to describe a putter, might as well settle for *hard and gray* as his description.

Chad: oh, Chad, the resident artist. I have to go over his mock-ups with a fine-tooth comb because he'll even spell his name wrong.

Then there are Kyle, Ben, and Shawn, all righteous idiot interns who I think are here for the free swag rather than the experience in business.

And that's only to name a few.

"What are your plans this weekend?" Finky asks Chad as we wait for Ellison to show up.

"Taking Danielle out to Fire Island for a concert. She has the whole thing planned. What about you?"

"Wine tasting upstate," Finky answers. "Lindsey told me this morning that she plans on getting drunk and not remembering a thing."

"Who does?" Ellison says, coming into the conference room, looking stunning with her long blond hair tied back into a pony and her power suit tailored expertly for her frame.

Okay, it's happening; everyone stay calm. She's here.

If there's anyone in this office that I want to impress, it's her.

Finky moves aside and says, "My wife. Taking her up to the Finger Lakes this weekend for a wine tasting."

"I was just there with Sanders," she says as she takes a seat at the head of the table. God, look at her poise. Beauty and grace. Shoulders back, an air of confidence surrounding her, demanding respect. "Stayed at a really nice bed-and-breakfast. The cinnamon rolls were to die for."

"Was it the place I recommended?" Brad S asks, hope in his eyes.

"It was," Ellison says. "We did the lovers special like you said, and it was fantastic."

Freaking lovers special.

What does that entail? Petting each other with a purple rabbit's foot for luck while staring deeply into each other's eyes?

"I was thinking about taking the hubby there," Duncan chimes in, looking all kinds of squirrely, trying to get her attention. "Maybe I can take him there for his birthday."

"When is his birthday?" Ellison asks as she leans back in her chair and brings her cup of coffee with her.

"Next month," Duncan says.

"If he likes wine and cinnamon buns, then he'll love it." She then turns to Chad and asks, "How's Danielle?"

Chad's stupid face lights up. "She's great. Still trying to get pregnant. Taking her to Fire Island this weekend to help her relax. I think she's putting too much stress on herself."

"I think that's a very smart decision," Ellison says. "If you're looking for more assistance or outside-the-box thinking, I have a wonderful acupuncturist that can help."

"I'll send you an email." Chad winks.

I'm annoyed.

The winks, the suggestions, the palling around...

Of course they're all friendly with Ellison, because they're all married.

Like I said, a cult. A freaking cult, and I'm the lonely spinster on the outside. Even the interns are either married or engaged to be married. If I didn't know any better, I'd have assumed being paired up with a partner was a requirement to work at Butter Putter.

"Jenna made that recipe you sent the other day," Brad S steps in. "The buffalo wing dip in the Crock-Pot."

"How did it go?" Ellison asks.

Why wasn't I sent the recipe?

I like buffalo dip.

Brad S chuckles and shakes his head. "Let's just say she added a little too much sauce." He rubs his stomach like a forty-year-old dad wearing jean shorts and New Balance sneakers with tube socks. "I had quite the bellyache."

Ellison winces. "But I'm sure you ate it anyway, because that's the kind of husband you are."

"I sure did."

This is a living nightmare.

Surrounded by happy couples boasting about their weekend plans,

talking about their partners like they worship the ground they walk on. What's that like? Couldn't tell you.

And frankly, let's call a spade a spade. It makes me jealous.

Insanely jealous.

Because, I'm going to be honest with you, the rom-com life I planned on living when I made the move to the city was not the kind of Nancy Meyers dream I was looking for. Sure, I might have the apartment aesthetic with the cozy, slipcovered furniture and herbs in the windowsill, but the falling in love with myself, not so much.

My neighbor next door to me keeps pointing out that I walk as if I have a lopsided leg. She's on the younger side of eighty and holds a broom as a cane, so I don't think she cares much about what others think of her, hence telling me I walk weird.

I also caught a reflection of myself in the Trader Joe's window a week or so ago, and guess what? I looked like a crazy bag lady who feeds pigeons because they're the only beings that will give her the time of day.

It was horrifying.

And worst of all, I woke myself up in the middle of the night precisely three days ago because I suffocated myself with morning breath. Yeah, popped those eyes right open as I gasped for air, only to realize the stench *whispers* was me.

So falling in love, not so much.

"What about you, Scarlett?"

I'm knocked out of my thoughts as I look up and all eyes are on me.

Did Ellison just call me Scarlett?

"Uh..." I drag out. "It's Scottie actually."

"Oh, my apologies," she says, pressing her hand to her chest. "I don't know why I said Scarlett. I know it's Scottie."

Bet she wouldn't call Brad Bueford. Or Chad Charles.

No, just the lopsided single pigeon lady with dragon breath.

"So, what do you plan on doing this weekend?" she asks, a smile on her lips.

I glance around the table, beards and puffy vests all staring back at me, waiting for an answer, probably expecting me to talk about the yoga class in the park that I say I'm going to but actually just watch as I eat a chocolate croissant.

They'll humor me, but none of them will ask me what class. No, they'll just move on, and after the meeting, I'll skulk back to my office and sit in front of a computer to correct all their copy for every single social media post and article.

Maybe not this time though.

Maybe, just maybe, I could fit in.

Ellison's here, this is my chance to impress her, *and maybe* she'll notice me if I actually have something to connect with her on.

Maybe she'll find me so arousing that she'll consider me for a possible promotion to, let's say, the magazine, *Golf Galaxy*. Now wouldn't that be a dream? Instead of working with all these social media munchers, I could do more print work, which could give me experience to work at other magazines, like the mecca of all glossy print, *Better Homes and Gardens*.

And then instead of just living the Nancy Meyers aesthetic, I could write about it too.

I couldn't think of anything more fulfilling than that.

Then it's settled.

We've made an executive decision.

It's time to fit in.

Smiling at my audience, I cross one leg over the other and say, "Hitting up some antique stores with the husband this weekend."

The moment the word *husband* passes over my tongue and right out of my mouth, I realize the grave mistake I've made, because the shock that registers across every single face in the room is not the kind of shock you want to see.