

# Prologue

Cam's cell phone rang. It was eight in the morning. It could only be one person that early. She glanced at the name on the screen and smiled as she tapped the answer button. "Good morning, Mom."

"Good morning, daughter."

Margaret Baker was always up by seven in the morning. She woke chipper and ready for the day. While Cam was definitely a night person. She snarled and grumbled for a good hour before her second cup of coffee kicked in.

She pressed the speaker icon on the phone and placed it on the bathroom counter. "What's up?" She'd been doing her makeup before work when the phone had chimed.

"I just had to call you to tell you what your Aunt Blair bought me for my cruise."

The excitement in her mom's voice couldn't be missed. After her parents' divorce six years ago, Cam had worried about her mom's mental state, but hearing her excitement now filled her heart with warmth. Her mom had always wanted to go on a cruise but the opportunity hadn't come up until recently.

"I can't wait to hear. Although it has to be something outrageous if it came from Aunt Blair," Cam replied. Her aunt never did the expected.

Her mom snorted. "A dildo. And not some normal-sized dildo either. This thing is a monster. Can you imagine me taking something like that with me?"

She choked back a laugh. "Mom, that's not an image I need in my head. Ever."

"Well, it doesn't matter because I'm not packing that thing. Besides I'm hoping to meet a single hot billionaire. I won't need the dildo."

Hearing her mom talk about her hopes of shipboard romance did Cam's heart good. "If you do, then can you please make him adopt me? I've always wanted to be an heiress."

She laughed. "You got it. Anyway, have a good day and remember to stop by later. I need help deciding which outfits to take along. I'm off to the gym now. I need to be fit for my billionaire."

Cam rolled her eyes. "Of course. And I'll grab dinner at Rio's deli for the two of us too."

"Perfect. Love you, honey."

“Love you, mom.”

## Chapter One

Three days later...

“What are you doing here, Dad?” Cam asked. Her father had visited her at her apartment exactly zero times. Or more accurately she had always refused when he’d asked to visit her. Cam hadn’t forgiven the man for the way he’d treated her mother.

“I’m still listed as the emergency contact on your mom’s health insurance,” he explained. He peered around her to see into her apartment. “Can I come in?”

Cam held the door tighter. “No, just say what you need to say, Dad.”

He sighed. “I’m sorry. Your mom...I don’t know how to say this except to just say it.” He paused, looking at her with sympathy. “She had a heart attack at work. She’s gone, Cammy.”

A sick feeling settled in the pit of her stomach. She couldn’t have heard him right. “W-what?”

He took hold of her upper arms, keeping her from falling. “You need to sit down, sweetheart. Please.”

Cam backed away from the doorway and let her father steer her to the big, overstuffed couch along one wall. He sat next to her and placed a reassuring palm on her knee. “She passed away an hour ago. They called me and I called you right away but you weren’t picking up.”

Cam couldn’t be hearing right. Things like this didn’t happen in real life. Her mom was the healthiest over-fifty-woman Cam knew. Nothing kept Margaret Baker down. Cam shook her head. It had to be a nightmare. A sick, twisted nightmare. “How? I-I don’t understand.”

Her dad leaned forward and to Cam’s surprise, there were tears in his eyes. “I’m not sure about the details, but I know that heart problems ran in her family.” He looked down at the floor and swiped a hand over his face. “You know how she hated going to the doctors.”

Tears filled her eyes. “But mom wasn’t unhealthy. She exercised like a madwoman if she had one chocolate chip cookie!” She jumped off the couch and backed away from her father. “I don’t accept this. I won’t.”

Her father stood and came toward her, holding out his arms. “I’m sorry, honey, but it’s true. She’s gone.”

“No!” She slammed a hand over her mouth as a wrenching sob tore from her throat. Her knees gave out, but her dad caught her before she hit the floor. He helped her over to the couch where Cam curled into a ball.

“I’m so damn sorry,” her father said, his voice gentle.

In her mind, she saw her mom’s smiling face, her pretty green eyes that always sparkled with mischief. She had such a wicked sense of humor. God, Cam had just spoken to her that morning. They talked every morning before their days got too busy. She’d seemed fine then. Even talked about how jazzed she was about the cruise she was scheduled to take with a group of her friends. How can it be possible that only a few hours later Cam’s life would be turned upside down? She’d never hear her mom’s chipper hellos. Never get another text message before bedtime asking if she was all locked up for the night. Cam was twenty-eight and had lived on her own since graduating from college but her mom still worried about her safety. Someone screamed and it took her a few moments to realize the agonizing cry was coming from her.

“We’re going to get some answers, I promise. When I was called to the hospital the only thing I could think about was you. I didn’t want you hearing from someone else.”

Cam wasn’t capable of words at that moment. All she could do was nod. How would she go on without her?

\*\*\*\*

One month later...

“I realize you’re still grieving the loss of your mother, Cam, but I need someone who isn’t going to be so distracted. I need someone reliable.”

She couldn’t have heard her boss right. There was no possible way. “Wait, you’re firing me? Because my mom died?”

He rolled his eyes, which made Cam want to punch him in his round, pimply face. “Of course it’s not because your mom died.”

“But you are firing me,” she asked, needing the clarification. For some unknown reason, Cam thought Roger did indeed possess a heart. It might have been small, but there had to be one there somewhere. He’d waited until Friday at the end of the day to get rid of her. After she’d put in a full week, extra hours and all. Asshole.

“We’re letting you go.” He paused. “Effective immediately.”

Cam laughed. A full-on belly laugh. She couldn't be sure if it was because she thought the entire scenario was funny or if it was because she was having a nervous breakdown. Either way, there was no stopping the laughter spilling out of her. Her boss's face turned red and Cam laughed even harder. Tears were trailing down her cheeks as she stood up, flipped her boss the finger and walked out of his office. He was still yelling her name as she gathered up her purse and coat from her desk and headed toward the elevator. A few of her co-workers looked at her with pity, but she ignored them. So, they already knew before her that today would be the last day she ever worked at Sedexa Wholesale, Incorporated. Well, wasn't that the icing on the cake. Nothing like a room full of people knowing you're about to be canned and not one of them bothering to warn you ahead of time. When the elevator dinged and the doors opened, Cam stepped inside. After they closed, leaving her alone, her laughter dried up and she stared at the mirrored wall next to her. She looked done in. From her messy bun to her wrinkled white blouse. "Stick a fork in me, life, you've managed to burn the happiness right out of my soul." She leaned closer and saw that her mascara had run. Black trails traveled down both cheeks. "Waterproof my ass," she grumbled as she reached the lobby and the doors opened. Two middle-aged men in suits stood on the other side, their expressions went from smiling to instant alarm.

"Miss, you okay?" One of them asked.

"Couldn't be better, thanks," she muttered as she pushed past them and headed for the double doors. She didn't look back. She'd never see the ugly brick building again and she was glad for that at least. The job sucked and her boss had been stingy with pay and vacation time. She'd given him three good years of her life and for what? To be tossed out like yesterday's trash. What a joke.

She reached her car and unlocked the door with her key fob. It wasn't until she got in behind the wheel that the tears started up again. It was times like this that she missed her mom the most. Cam would've called her. More than likely her mom would've cracked some ridiculous and inappropriate joke about her boss and it would've made her feel a thousand times better. She thought of the next best person.

She fished around in her purse and located her cell phone. She hit number two on her favorites list, then pressed the call button. Beth answered on the second ring.

"Cam, how are you?"

Her best friend in the entire world, that was Beth. They'd been through thick and thin together since grade school. Beth was the type of friend who would help her bury a body if she asked. Those funny Facebook memes that went around on the internet were true when it came to her best bud. Oh sure, Beth would encourage her to turn herself in, but if it came down to life in prison? Yep, Beth would grab a shovel and start digging.

"I was fired," she blurted out. No longer sad. Uh-uh, now she was steaming mad.

"Your boss fired you? A month after losing your mom?"

“Yep, the fat little weasel.” She stared out her windshield, watching people walk past her car. “Sometimes life sucks, B. It just fucking sucks.”

“God, Cam, I’m so sorry. He’s such an asshole.” Beth paused and Cam heard someone in the background talking. “Maddox says to come here. Take a few weeks and stay with us. You can stay in the guestroom.”

Cam was tempted to say yes. It’d be so easy to just pack a bag and leave her troubles behind. But she didn’t want to just tuck-tail and run. She needed to figure out her life. Her writing career was doing pretty well, but was it going to be enough to pay her bills now that she no longer had a day job?

“Cam, say you’ll come. I’ve missed you and you could use a friend right now. Please?”

Titanium panties, her mom would tell her. It was time to pull them on and get to work on figuring out what to do with her life. “I’ll be okay, B, but thanks for the offer. Tell Maddox I said thanks, as well.”

“Cam, I know you think you have to do everything for yourself, but you don’t. It’s okay to lean on a friend.”

She smiled, loving the wonderful woman all the more. “You’re the bestest bestie ever, B. But I’ll be okay. I just needed to hear your voice.”

“Fine, then I’ll come there for a visit. I’m not leaving you alone right now.”

Cam sat up straighter in her seat and started the car. “No, B, you were here after Mom died. You sat with me while I balled my eyes out. I seriously would’ve hit rock bottom if you hadn’t been around to get me out of bed every day.”

“We’ve been there for each other,” she softly replied. “It’s what we do.”

“It’s what we do,” Cam repeated. “I love you, but I’ll be okay. I hated working for that ass hat anyway.”

“I know you did. And hey, maybe this will give you the chance to push out more books. You can write twice as much now that you aren’t forced to only write in the evenings.”

“That’s exactly right. This is an opportunity to make it on my own as a writer.”

“You’ve got this, Cam,” her friend replied, her voice steady and filled with confidence. “I have faith in you. And if you change your mind about coming for a visit just give me a ring. I promise it’s no trouble. The guest bedroom even comes with a bathroom.”

“Thanks, but I’ll be okay. I just need a bottle of wine and a tub of ice-cream. I’ll feel right as rain tomorrow.”

“I’ll call you tomorrow to check on you. Love you, Cam.”

“Love you, B,” Cam said as she hit end on the screen of her cell and put it back in her purse.

She pulled out of the parking space with a new outlook. “This is the universe telling me to get my ass in gear and become a full-time writer,” she mumbled. Her mom was in heaven right now and she was watching over her. Cam wouldn’t fail. Her writing time was no longer hindered by the crappy nine to five. Her boss had been slowly sucking the life out of her anyway. She always got home late sapped of all her creative juices. Now, she could be at the computer tapping away at nine and not stop until she damn well felt like it. In her PJs, if she wanted. There’d be no one around to stop her. No time constraints. Yes, this could be a good thing. Life might’ve seemed bleak a few moments ago, but she would fucking turn this shit into lemonade if it killed her.

After her mom’s death, Cam had been so depressed that she’d barely functioned. She hardly remembered going to her mom’s funeral. It’d all been a blur. Dealing with her mom’s house—the house Cam had grown up in—and going through her things had helped. There had been a lot of tears. A lot of stories being shared. Even some laughs. Cam had saved things that were sentimental to her. Her Aunt Rita and Aunt Blair had helped out quite a bit. They’d boxed things up and put a lot of things in storage. Even now her dad was attempting to put the house up for sale. Cam hadn’t been able to consider doing it. Too many childhood memories. Letting it go would be hard but keeping it didn’t make sense either. She had to admit, her dad really had stepped up through the entire process. Cam hadn’t expected that from him. But she would’ve been lost if she’d had to do it all alone.

Her dad had bailed on her mom six years ago after he’d met another woman online. It had nearly destroyed her mother. She thought she had the perfect marriage. She had no warning at all. Cam had been floored when her mom called to give her the news that they were getting a divorce. Cam and her aunts had rallied behind her. Taking turns staying with her at the house and helping her find an attorney. It’d been ugly and messy, and Cam still hadn’t forgiven the man for hurting her mother so deeply.

Cam pulled into her apartment complex and parked in her slot, then shut off the engine. She grabbed her keys and purse and got out before locking the doors behind her. A ding sounded from inside her purse signaling that she’d received a new text message. She opened her front door and locked up behind her, then took out her cell phone. She tossed her purse on the couch and looked at the name notification preview on the screen. Garrett. Her heart thumped faster in her chest. That’s all it took, seeing his name, and she was heart-poundingly excited. She drew the pattern to unlock the phone and opened her texting app.

HEARD ABOUT THE JOB. YOUR BOSS IS A DICK.

Leave it to Garrett to get to the heart of the matter. She smiled and texted back.

I CAN’T ARGUE WITH THAT :)

Cam waited, hoping he'd text her, but knowing it was a foolish move. What would she do if he did? Nothing. He lived in Silverlake. She lived in Columbus. End of story.

LISTEN TO BETH. COME HERE.

Oh, God, that should not turn her on. Yes, she wanted to go there. She wanted to walk right up to the man and plant a kiss right on that sexy mouth of his. Would she? No, because deep down she was a total sissy. Especially when it came to men she was attracted to. And she'd been attracted to Garrett from the moment she saw him across the room of the Silver Dragon Nightclub. He was the brother of the man Beth would someday marry. He'd flirted with her, even asked her out. She'd turned him down, but not before giving him her number. Why had she done that? Oh, to torture herself of course. So that whenever he sent a text she'd start imagining all the things she desperately wanted to do with him, to him. And all the delicious things he could do to her. She kept her response to him simple. No need to start pondering the 'what ifs'. Like, what if she were braver and able to send back something teasing and sexy. Again, not that brave.

THANKS FOR THE OFFER, BUT I'M OK.

There, boring and to the point. No beating around the bush. No room for argument. The disappointment settling in her gut as the minutes ticked by without a response from Garrett wouldn't be dismissed. Damn. She'd wanted him to argue with her. To cajole. To tease. To tempt. Instead, Cam got exactly bupkis.

She tossed her phone onto the coffee table and headed for her bedroom. "This calls for my polar bear pajamas." She quickly located her cozy flannel pants, admiring the ratty tears around the ankles and the coffee stain on the knee. She'd had them for six years, ever since her dad left her mom. Beth had purchased them for her, along with a box of donuts from her favorite bakery in town. They'd vegged on the couch and watched Sons of Anarchy until the crack of dawn the next day. Now, her polar bear pajamas were her official go-to PJs for when she was having a particularly shitty day.

Cam quickly changed out of her work clothes and pulled on a black tank top and the flannel pants then left the bedroom. She smiled as she grabbed her phone and clicked on the camera icon and snapped a picture of her in her pity-party pants, then sent it to Beth with the caption:

LET THE PITY PARTY BEGIN! :)

She was about to set her phone back down when a new message popped up.

IF I WERE THERE YOU WOULDN'T NEED PJs ;)

Her heart nearly stopped and her breath caught in her throat. Garrett? But how...She scrolled up on the message thread and realized she'd sent the picture to Garrett instead. She'd done it before, sent a picture to her mom that she'd intended for Beth. Her mom had told her that she had a hair-trigger when it came to hitting the send button. "Shit, shit, shit! I'm an idiot." She plopped onto the couch. "Can a hole swallow me up now?"

I MEANT THAT FOR BETH.

Duh, like he couldn't figure that one out for himself. Still, she felt compelled to point out the obvious. The embarrassing pajama picture so wasn't the way she wanted Garrett imagining her. Rather more along the lines of her looking all cute and sexy in a Victoria's Secret bra and panties maybe. Stained and ripped PJs? Nope.

SEND ME A DIFF PIC. MAKE ME FORGET ABOUT THE PJS, SWEETNESS

She both hated and adored the endearment. He'd started calling her that the first time they'd texted each other. There'd been a lot of flirting between them in the beginning, but Cam had backed off when Garrett started to get serious. When he'd asked her to go to dinner with him, multiple times, she'd held off. There was just something about the man that got her engine running. She was a romance writer, of the steamy variety, but she'd never truly experienced anything wild. Her limited experience with men wasn't anything earth-shattering and certainly nothing she'd bother to write about. She had a feeling that one date with Garrett would send her right over the edge of a volcano and into the scorching lava below. The man was just too damn yummy with his black hair and brown eyes. And those muscles that made her pant like a hungry puppy. The remodeling business he owned with his brother kept him in excellent shape. She hadn't seen him without a shirt, but she'd bet her last chocolate bar the man had a six-pack hidden under all that cotton.

As she stared at the screen, Cam started to smile. Did she dare? What could it hurt? He was two hours away. A sexy picture wasn't a commitment. It was called flirting for a reason. She could flirt, right? And Garrett wouldn't see it coming either. She'd turned him down flat enough times that he probably expected her to be a total smartass and send him a picture of a moose grazing. She walked back into the bedroom and pulled open a drawer on her dresser and searched until she found what she was looking for. She pulled out the black satin nighty with the spaghetti straps and the lace detailing along the hem. "This is so dumb," she mumbled. It could blow up in her face. Sort of like dangling a steak in front of a hungry lion. Not smart.

She skimmed out of her pants and pulled off her tank, then slipped the black satin over her head and let it slide down her body. Cam had to shift it around a little to get it over her wide hips, but once she had it on she went to the mirror. She frowned at her appearance. The nighty was an improvement, but her hair was a messy bun and her face was still streaked from her crying jag. She grabbed a makeup wipe from a glass container sitting on the counter and cleaned off her makeup. She had to use three to get all the mascara. Afterward, she took out the tie holding her hair in a knot on top of her head and let the blonde ringlets fall around her shoulders. She brushed out a few tangles, then surveyed her appearance. Not bad. Not runway model, but it was at least better than coffee stains.

She flipped off the light and headed back to the living room. Cam picked up her phone and sat down on the couch. She pulled her legs up and tried for a sexy pose, but she just felt ridiculous. "God, how do women do this and make it look so sultry and effortless?" She tried another position, curled onto her side, with her legs pressed tightly together, and held out her phone to try again. This time she snapped the picture. Not bad, she decided.



“Now for the real question, do I edit or do I not edit?” She chose not. She wanted Garrett to see the real version of her, not a filter. No makeup. She opened the message thread and attached the image.

WAS THIS WHAT U HAD IN MIND?

She hit send, then waited. She didn't even count to ten when a new message appeared. Her temperature spiked and the apex of her thighs flooded with liquid heat at the words on the screen.

FUCK, UR BEAUTIFUL. COME HERE NOW, SWEETNESS. OR I'M COMING TO U. CHOOSE.

He was so demanding, telling her what he wanted and expecting her to obey. And why did she find it such a turn-on? She was no submissive. Cam liked her independence. She lived her own life by her own rules. Her parents' wreck of a marriage had taught her that. Mom had always done whatever Dad wanted. She never argued. Never put her foot down. After the divorce, her mother had blossomed into a lively, independent woman with a mind of her own. She'd grabbed life by the horns. That's the woman she admired. The woman she so badly missed.

So what was her choice with Garrett? She'd teased the man on purpose and now he was taking it to the next level. Wasn't there a saying somewhere about standing too close to the fire? Cam didn't have a decent answer for Garrett. So she did the next best thing. Stalled.

GIVE ME TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT.

I'LL GIVE U ANYTHING. FIRST SEND ME ANOTHER. SPREAD YOUR LEGS A LITTLE FOR ME. THEN I'LL BE A GOOD BOY AND WAIT. PRETTY PLEASE?

Oh God, she'd created a monster. Give the man an inch and he'll take the entire ball of string. Did she dare? Cam glanced down at her body. “I mean, I'm already wearing the nightie.”

She readjusted her position on the couch, laying on her back this time. She hiked one leg up a little, then spread her knees enough to allow it to pool around her upper thighs, just barely covering the goods. She aimed her phone at herself, stretching her arm out in front of her as far as she could then snapped the picture. Cam sat up and looked at the image. Oh, yeah, that would do it. She might be asking for trouble, but what the hell. She felt like living dangerously today.

She attached the image to the message thread, then typed out a quick warning.

THIS IS ALL YOU GET.

A few seconds later she received another text.

I'M MAKING THIS ONE MY WALLPAPER.

Her heart nearly stopped beating when she read his words.

PLEASE TELL ME YOU'RE KIDDING.

I'M TEASING. THESE PICS ARE FOR MY EYES ONLY, SWEETNESS.

And why did that send her pulse-pounding?

THANK YOU. ;)

I'LL BE WAITING FOR U

He was waiting for her? Did that mean he hadn't taken a lover since they'd met two months ago? Or was she reading too much into his words? "Fuck! I need ice-cream." Cam slammed her phone down and went to the kitchen. She located a pint of cookie dough ice-cream at the back of the fridge.

"Salvation!"

She took a spoon out of the top drawer, then went back into the living room and grabbed the remote. Something funny, that's what she needed. She settled on re-runs of Friends. "God, my life sucks."

**Buy Now!**

**Kindle:** <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07ZG3QBZ2/>

**Barnes & Noble:** <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/garrett-anne-rainey/1136816248?ean=2940162976349>

**Kobo:** <https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/garrett-10>