

Rachael  
Sommers

Never Say  
Never



# CHAPTER 1

CAMILA EVANS PRESSED HER FOREHEAD to the cool glass of her town car's window while the skyscrapers of New York rolled by unseen, her mind occupied with pilot pitches.

She had spent another late night at her television studio. The clock struck nine as she finally stepped out of the car into the warm summer air and entered the lobby of her apartment building. Her heels clicked on the marble floor as she made her way over to the elevators and pressed the button for the penthouse.

As always, she was impatient to be home, to get back to the son she knew would already be tucked in bed, fast asleep.

She hated missing Jaime's bedtime and tried to limit her late nights at work—which wasn't always easy to do, being at the helm of a television network.

She had been told more times than she could count that it wasn't possible to be a good mother while having a successful career.

Jaime hadn't been planned, but he was a beautiful, perfect being in a world filled with bitterness and hate, and Camila loved him with all her heart and soul. Every time she looked at him, every time she heard him laugh, she just became more determined that she could have it all, *would* have it all, and not a damn thing was going to stand in her way.

She couldn't do it alone, though, and Camila was glad she had a nanny who kept an eye on Jaime for her so he wasn't forced to spend long days in her office.

Camila tried not to worry, but it was difficult. Amelia was no Eleanor,

though she was the best so far of the nannies Camila had hired and fired since Eleanor had left to care for her sick mother. Still, Amelia was a pretty recent hire, and Camila was eager to get home and see how well she had had gotten on.

Inside her apartment, the lights were dim and the television echoed from the living room. Camila kicked off her heels in the foyer, but her greeting to Amelia quickly morphed into a squeal when a glance over the back of the couch revealed a bare ass bobbing up and down in the air.

“What the *hell* are you doing?!” Camila’s voice cracked with anger. It was loud enough to startle the pair on the couch into action. The owner of the ass scrambled off the woman that Camila had entrusted to look after her son.

“You didn’t put the chain on the door?” Amelia’s boyfriend asked, ignoring Camila entirely as he yanked up his jeans.

“I didn’t think I needed to!” Amelia’s voice was high, her cheeks pink as she pulled her dress down into place. “And anyway, *you* could have done it when you—”

Camila’s mouth dropped open at what she was hearing. She saw red, snapping her fingers to draw their attention. “Are you two quite finished?”

“I...I’m sorry, Ms. Evans.” Amelia at least had the grace to look apologetic, but it did nothing to ease the fury pulsing through Camila’s veins. “I didn’t think you’d be back yet.”

“Clearly.” Camila injected her voice with as much disgust as she could manage. “Get out of my sight, both of you.”

The boyfriend, only too happy to obey, scurried for the front door.

“Ms. Evans—” Amelia started, but Camila held up a hand.

“Oh, save it,” Camila snapped, and Amelia quailed under her glare. “Is this the first time you’ve invited him over here? Actually,”—Camila decided she didn’t want to know—“don’t answer that.”

“I waited until Jaime was in bed—”

“Because that makes it *better*?” Camila asked, exasperated. “For God’s sake, what if he woke up and wandered out here?” She’d never been more relieved that her son was a heavy sleeper. “Just get the hell out of my apartment, Amelia. And needless to say, you’re fired.”

Amelia dropped her head as she skirted around Camila and headed for the front door.

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“And I’ll be docking the cost of the dry cleaning bill from your pay!” Camila called after her, eyeing the white leather with distaste—she certainly wasn’t planning to sit on it for a long time, that was for sure.

She wished that had been the *first* time she’d walked in to find someone with their pants down in her apartment.

She made her way down the hall with a sigh and cracked open the door of Jaime’s bedroom. He was sleeping peacefully, blond curls spread out across his pillow, completely oblivious to the drama that had just taken place.

She tiptoed over to the side of his bed and leaned down to kiss his forehead, inhaling the scent of his shampoo. He never failed to calm her down even after the most trying of days. She watched him sleep awhile before she continued down the hall to her study because, even now, her work for the day was no longer complete.

She needed to hire a new nanny.

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Emily’s phone rang just as she was about to shove the last bite of her breakfast croissant into her mouth.

She scrambled for the buzzing device, cursing when she got pastry crumbs all over the screen. When she saw the unknown number she frowned but pressed the green button anyway. “Hello?”

“Emily Walker?”

The voice was unfamiliar, and Emily wondered if the caller was just another person trying to sell car insurance. She hovered her thumb over End Call. “Yep, speaking.”

“I’m calling about a nanny job.”

Emily gasped—she’d only been in New York City for two weeks and hadn’t expected any calls about a job so soon.

“You sent in your résumé. My boss would like to talk to you about filling a position.”

“Seriously?” It sounded too good to be true—she was living in her dream city just two streets over from her sister *and* she was already being considered for a job she was reasonably sure she wouldn’t hate.

Maybe she would have graduated from college earlier if she’d known this was waiting for her on the other side.

“Seriously.”

Emily heard the smile in the other woman’s voice.

“Would you be willing to meet for an interview the day after tomorrow? Say, eleven o’clock?”

“Absolutely,” Emily agreed. “What’s the address?”

“The CEBC building, floor thirty.”

Emily’s stomach flipped. “CEBC as in *the* CEBC building? As in Camila—”

“Evans?” The woman filled in. “That’s correct. The interview will be with her.”

“The job ad never mentioned that...” She definitely would have noticed—Camila Evans had been Emily’s celebrity crush since she was a teenager.

“As a precaution,” the woman explained. “Is that a problem?”

“N-no, not at all.”

“Excellent. When you arrive, let them know at the front desk what you’re there for, and if there are any problems, call me back on this number.”

“O-okay.”

“See you then!”

The line clicked. Emily pulled the phone away from her ear and stared at it, wondering if it was all a dream. Because surely, *surely* there was no way that Camila Evans would have read *her* résumé out of the countless others she must have gone through, and decided that she was the one for the job.

Her.

Emily Walker.

Camila Evans could probably hire the most expensive, experienced nanny in the city, so why was she interested in her? And tomorrow she was going to meet the woman herself—to potentially *work* for the woman herself, the woman who had been her idol when she was growing up, the woman who had almost singlehandedly helped Emily realize she was gay when she was fourteen when Camila herself came out as bisexual in a time when few in the public eye would have dared and—oh God, she was going to throw up.

Camila’s talk show had been the highlight of Emily’s weekdays when she was younger, and it was no surprise to anyone when the woman went on to found and run her own television network. She should probably

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do some research before the interview tomorrow. Her laptop sat on the breakfast bar. Emily opened it with trembling fingers and typed Camila's name into the search bar. Almost every article that popped up was about her messy divorce from her third husband in twenty years. Emily sighed. Camila ran a television empire, but the only thing the news focused on was her relationship with a man.

She clicked on an article about Camila accepting an award, taking in the sight of her wearing a black dress that clung to every curve. Her blonde hair curled around her shoulders and her green eyes sparkled under the bright lights. She was gorgeous, and Emily was *pretty* sure she was going to make a fool out of herself tomorrow morning.

Her front door opened, interrupting her reverie. Emily turned and grinned at her sister Cassie and her girlfriend Maia striding into the apartment wearing matching smiles, their hands clasped.

"You eat pastries for breakfast?" Maia asked as she looked down at the croissant Emily had abandoned on the dining table. "And still manage to be that skinny? That is so not fair."

"I'm waiting for it to catch up with her in a few years," Cassie said, bumping her hip against Emily's. "One day she'll wake up *huge*."

"I will not." Emily rolled her eyes, but she smiled. Seeing the two of them together always made her day. Cassie had spent so many years guarded and alone before Maia lit up her life, and Emily couldn't be happier for them.

"Will so," Cassie argued, then glanced at Emily's computer screen. "Why are you stalking Camila Evans?" she asked, and Emily's cheeks warmed at being caught with Camila's photo on-screen. "Is it still 2010?"

"Oh, shut up," Emily muttered, quickly closing the cover.

"You think you might have a shot with her now that she's divorced?"

"No!" Emily's cheeks burned, and when she glanced up, Maia was watching the two of them bicker with an amused smile. "If you *must* know—remember those résumés I sent out about nanny jobs last week? Well, I just got a call from a woman who's presumably Camila's assistant. I have an interview with her tomorrow."

"No *way*. You have a job interview with the woman you've had a crush on since you were fourteen?" Cassie grinned. "You couldn't even *write* this. Oh, my God. You're going, right?"

“Duh.”

“There is no *way* you can keep your cool in an interview with her.” Cassie’s grin changed to a wicked smirk. “Not without stammering and blushing every five seconds.”

“Can so.”

Cassie raised an eyebrow, and Emily huffed before reaching for the coffee she had forgotten about. It was lukewarm, and she set the mug down.

“That’s crazy, though. You used to watch her show every day.” Cassie turned to face Maia. “And I do *mean* every day. It was all she talked about. ‘Did you hear what Camila said yesterday?’ ‘Camila is *so* clever’ ‘Camila looked so good to—’”

“Cassie!” Emily slapped a hand over her sister’s mouth. “Stop embarrassing me in front of your girlfriend.”

“But that’s no fun.” Cassie said when Emily let her go. “Half the fun of *having* a girlfriend is that now I have someone to tease you *with*.”

“I don’t know, Cass.” Maia looked at the sister with affection. “I’m with Emily on this one. Camila Evans is *hot*.”

Cassie covered her mouth in mock horror, and Emily snorted before sliding off of the stool to brew a fresh pot of coffee. She had inherited a fancy Black & Decker coffee maker from Cassie—along with the entire apartment—when her sister and Maia made the decision to move in together.

She had always loved this apartment. It was small for a one-bedroom, but the open-plan layout and minimalist furniture made the space seem larger, and the wooden floors lit up in the soft glow of the morning sun trickling through the large windows that offered a view of the Hudson River. She was incredibly lucky to call this place home.

“You think Camila’s hot?” Cassie asked.

“Well, not as hot as *you*, obviously,” Maia draped her arms around Cassie’s shoulders, kissing her cheek. “But I do have eyes. And she was my crush growing up too, Emily.” Maia turned her head. “I get it.”

“I can’t believe you’re siding with Emily instead of teasing her mercilessly about this.”

“Hey, I’m new to the family. I gotta keep your little sister on my side.”

“Wanna know who Cassie’s crush was when we were growing up?” It

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was only fair for Emily to get her own back. She grinned as Cassie's eyes widened in horror. "Cause that's a real doozy."

"Emily, don't you dare—"

"I also have six years' worth of embarrassing childhood stories saved up, Maia, if you'd like to hear those. Oh!" She glanced at the stack of boxes she had yet to unpack. "And I have an album full of photos right over there." Emily grinned as she grabbed three coffee mugs.

"Now *that* I would like to see," Maia said, and they both laughed as Cassie groaned and thumped her forehead onto the bar.

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"Ms. Evans?" Jessica knocked lightly on Camila's open office door and hovered, waiting to be acknowledged.

Camila wasn't an easy boss, firing assistants quicker than she fired nannies of late, but Jessica was up to the challenge and eager to please.

"Yes?"

"Two things. First of all, I reviewed the résumés you gave me and set up four interviews for tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, Jessica." Camila waited. Whatever was coming next, she probably wasn't going to like it.

"And second of all"—Jessica looked down to avoid Camila's eyes—"Sophie is on the phone, and she needs to speak to you immediately."

Camila groaned. A call from the head of human resources could only mean bad news. "The internal investigation?"

She had suspended production of one of her newest shows after allegations of misconduct had surfaced against the leading actor. She had been waiting for the results of the investigation ever since.

"I think so."

"Wonderful." Camila pressed her palms to her temples. A PR disaster was the last thing she needed right now.

Jessica's eyes fell on Jaime. "Do you want me to keep an eye on the little one?" Jaime had entertained himself for most of the morning watching cartoons. He was old enough not to need constant supervision, but it couldn't be fun for him, cooped up in her office all day while she worked. Jessica would be able to keep him entertained.

"Would you mind?"



“Not at all.”

Jaime followed Jessica out of the office, and Camila watched them go before lifting the phone to her ear.

“Sophie. You have the results?”

Camila listened. The allegations were true, which meant that she had yet another employee to fire, not to mention a major recast, possible reshoots, and a statement for the media to draft. She was going to have a much busier day than usual, and as she watched Jaime giggling at something Jessica was doing, she knew she couldn’t ask her assistant to babysit for the rest of the afternoon.

Reluctantly, she dialed her ex-husband, tapping her foot as she waited impatiently for him to pick up the phone.

“Camila. What an unpleasant surprise.”

Camila was used to his acid tone—their relationship hadn’t exactly ended amicably after Camila had walked in on him screwing his secretary.

“What do you want?”

“Can you watch our son this afternoon?”

Jaime had not been planned. Camila was fairly certain one of the reasons Chris had married her was because she didn’t want kids, and when she found out she was pregnant, he wasn’t exactly thrilled by the news. Which wasn’t to say that he didn’t make an effort to be a father to Jaime. He might be an asshole, but at least he tried. Still, Camila was amazed that he hadn’t bolted as soon as Jaime was born.

“That’s short notice even for you, Camila. *And* this is the second time this week.”

“Oh, because God forbid you spend time with your son when it’s not on your terms,” Camila snapped. She wasn’t in the mood to deal with him today. “Can you do it or not?”

“Yeah,” he sighed, after hesitating a moment. “I’ll take him. But I can’t keep doing this, Camila.”

“I’m interviewing for the nanny position tomorrow, so you won’t have to.”

“You know, if you’d let me help you look—”

Camila scoffed, cutting him off. She knew that if she let him within an inch of those résumés, he’d choose the first girl under twenty-five. “What, so you can start screwing the nanny now that your secretary resigned?”

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“She didn’t resign.” Chris’s voice turned cold. “You forced her out.”

“Then maybe you shouldn’t have bent her over the kitchen table,” Camila hissed.

“I’m not doing this again.” Chris sounded weary. “I’ll have my assistant swing by and pick him up within the hour. I can work from your apartment, if you’d like.”

Their custody arrangement had been the easiest part of the divorce: Jaime was to live with her and have the occasional weekend with his father. So far he hadn’t spent any time with Chris outside of the penthouse apartment they used to share, and that suited Camila.

“Fine. I don’t know what time I’ll be home.”

“I can hang around until you get there.”

“Thank you,” she said begrudgingly.

“I mean it though, Camila. This is the last time.” He hung up without giving her the chance for a comeback. Camila dropped the receiver back on the phone.

The tasks of the day loomed endlessly in front of her. Camila retrieved her son, knowing that a quick cuddle with him would soothe her.

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Camila finished work well after seven, her mood sour. She stepped out of her town car onto the sidewalk outside her apartment and glanced up. The sky was clear, not a cloud in sight as the sun began its descent on the horizon. Soon the stars would twinkle brightly.

It was the perfect night for stargazing, one of Jaime’s favorite activities. Camila decided to take him out onto the balcony before putting him to bed. She couldn’t wait to see the look on his face whenever he looked up at the sky, wide-eyed and amazed, like he was seeing it for the very first time. It was the kind of childish innocence that made Camila fall in love with him all over again. Jaime made her want to be something more, something *better* than the cynical and jaded person she had become.

She tapped her foot impatiently as she rode the elevator up to the penthouse, ready to be home so she could wrap Jaime in her arms once more. The elevator doors opened, and she walked the few steps down the hall to her front door.

Before she slipped her key into the lock, though, Camila paused and took a deep breath.

It was a routine for her, a way to let go of the cool, calm—and some would say cold-hearted—woman who had built up a television empire and allow herself to become the mother that Jaime needed.

This time she was also preparing herself for the sight of the man she'd once agreed to spend a lifetime with, the man she could now only look at with contempt. They had been happy once, but Camila's devotion to her work had pushed him away. Chris was unable to deal with competing for her time—an issue that was exacerbated once Jaime had been born, dividing her attention even more—and she knew he blamed her for driving him into the arms of another woman.

Sometimes Camila even agreed with him.

As she unlocked the door and pushed it open, Camila reminded herself that she didn't need Chris or any other spouse. She had her network, she had her son, and that was enough for her.

She had barely slipped out of her coat before her beautiful boy ambushed her, bounding toward her with a grin on his face and his favorite action figure clutched in one hand.

“Mama!”

“Hi, sweetheart,” she said as she bent down to sweep him into a hug and kiss the top of his head. “Were you a good boy for your father?”

“He was perfect,” Chris called from the living room. Camila kicked off her shoes and stepped inside to find him on the couch, watching a football game on TV. He stood up and stepped toward her to ruffle Jaime's hair. “Weren't you, big guy?”

He looked at their son with affection. He might not have wanted Jaime but he did try with him, one of the things about him that Camila was grateful for. It was moments like this when Camila saw the man she had fallen in love with seven years ago. But then he locked eyes with her and his expression changed, hardening to become the man that Camila now knew.

The one who couldn't stand her.

“Thank you for today,” she told him, hoping he could see that she meant it.

“No problem,” he replied, already reaching for his coat. “But—”

“—this is the last time,” Camila finished. “I know.” She vowed that

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it would be, that she would find a solution sooner rather than later—one that worked for them both. “You can stay for dinner, if you want.” It was a half-hearted offer because she knew he wouldn’t accept, but she asked anyway for the sake of her son, a little worried what effect their fractured relationship might have on him.

“I already ate,” he said, and Camila was relieved. “And I should really get going.”

She didn’t ask why. She didn’t want to know if he was running off to meet a woman—she might not love him anymore but she still didn’t want to think about him with anyone else.

He kissed Jaime before he left, leaving her in an apartment that felt too quiet, too empty.

Camila played with her son until it was dark enough to take him outside to look at the stars, completely in love with the pure joy on his face. Afterwards, she put him to bed, and then she sat at the breakfast bar, picking at her warmed-up food, the TV on too loud, trying to feel less alone.

## CHAPTER 2

EMILY PAUSED ON THE SIDEWALK to glance up at the impressively tall CEBC building, the logo visible on the side of one of the upper floors. Her stomach fluttered. She swallowed hard, wracked with nerves, wondering whether she was cut out for this job after all.

How could she possibly impress a woman like Camila Evans? A woman who worked in a building like this probably lived in a penthouse where a single day's rent was more than Emily paid in an entire year for her apartment.

She already felt like a fish out of water, and she hadn't even set foot inside.

"Wow." Cassie, who had agreed to walk with her so she wouldn't get lost, stopped beside her and let out a low whistle. "I know you can see this building from nearly anywhere in the city, but it's even more impressive up close. Are you *sure* you wanna work for someone in there?"

"Pretty sure." Emily nodded, trying to convince herself. "I can do this, right?"

"Yeah, you can." Cassie bumped her shoulder into Emily's. "You've got this."

"You think?"

"For sure. Just, you know, don't think about how hot she is."

"So not helping my nerves." Emily groaned.

"Right. Sorry." Cassie wrapped an arm around Emily's shoulders and hugged her. "But seriously, you'll be fine. She'd be crazy not to hire you; you're great with kids."

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That was true. She had earned the money for a car from babysitting jobs in high school, and it had been her main source of income in college too.

“I don’t know how you do it.” Cassie scrunched up her nose, and Emily grinned—she and Cassie had very different opinions about spending time around children.

“Kids are great.”

“Kids are *messy*. They’re messy and they scream and I just—” Cassie shuddered. “I don’t know how you do it.”

“You work as a CSI,” Emily reminded her. “Your job *literally* involves dead people and analyzing bodily fluids.”

“While wearing *protective clothing*. And speaking of work”—Cassie glanced at her watch—“I should be heading back to the lab. You gonna be okay here?”

“I’ll be fine,” Emily assured her, though her stomach flipped whenever she remembered she was about to meet Camila Evans.

“You wanna meet for lunch? You can tell me how the interview went.”

“Yeah, sounds good,” Emily agreed, because at least then she had something to look forward to if the interview was a disaster.

“Place down the street from the station?” It was Cassie’s regular haunt, being so close to where she worked. She and Emily had met for lunch there a number of times.

“Sure. One thirty, right?”

“Right.” Cassie pulled Emily into a tight hug and kissed her cheek. “Good luck.”

“Thank you.” Emily squeezed back just as hard. “I’ll see you later.” She watched Cassie make her way back to the moped she had parked down the street earlier, waving one last time as Cassie slipped onto the seat.

That was her cue to move. She turned back to face the imposing building and, taking a deep breath, forced herself to push through the revolving doors and step inside.

The cavernous lobby was bustling with activity. Emily felt like she was out of her element, but she gathered her courage and weaved her way through the harried workers to approach the front desk. She almost expected the receptionist to look at her in her bright blue dress and tell her she must be in the wrong place, but instead he smiled pleasantly. Emily

rested her hands on top of the counter, barely refraining from bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“May I help you?”

“I have a job interview with Camila Evans.”

Was that a look of pity that flashed across his face?

“The nanny job? Well, I hope you do better than the girl who went before you because she came back crying.”

Well, *that* didn't settle her nerves.

“Elevators are there.” He indicated the left side of the lobby with a grand sweep of his arm. “Thirtieth floor. The receptionist there will show you to Ms. Evans's office.”

He smiled. Emily almost wanted to ask for more details about the crying woman but decided it was better if she didn't know.

She squeezed onto an already full elevator, clasped her hands in front of her, and tried not to tap her foot nervously as the floors slowly ticked by, people trickling out at each stop. She was the last person on the elevator when it got to the thirtieth floor.

She stepped out and faced another long counter. The bored-looking receptionist waved Emily down the hall when she explained why she was there. The wall along the outer hallway was glass, offering her a glimpse inside executive offices, and Emily looked around wide-eyed, taking it all in.

It was a world away from the labs of her college days. She dodged people rushing up and down the hall as she approached the door at the end. A plaque on the wall beside it bore Camila Evans's name.

Camila's office walls were glass too, although they were frosted to give the illusion of privacy. But the door was open, revealing a pair of black leather couches on either side of a glass coffee table and a plush white rug stretched out across the center of the room.

The huge wooden desk was dominated by a row of four monitors. Emily glimpsed Camila between two of them. Her dress was a mix of different shades of red, a statement necklace hung around her neck, her hair was perfect, as it always was, and oh, she was even more gorgeous in person than anyone had a right to be.

Emily's knees wobbled, butterflies erupting in her stomach.

“Where is my eleven o'clock?” Camila called, voice carrying clearly

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through the open door. Emily's mouth was dry because Camila looked and sounded annoyed as if being ten minutes early was late in her book.

Maybe this hadn't been such a good idea after all.

She almost turned around and bolted, but at the last minute, she straightened her spine and stepped into Camila's office.

\* \* \*

"Where is my eleven o'clock?" Camila asked again, well aware that it wasn't yet eleven, yet entirely convinced that when her next appointment showed up, she could pierce them with a withering glare and berate them because, as the saying went, early was on time, and on time was late.

Her first three interviews had all been disasters, and Camila was in a sour mood. She almost felt sorry for the last unlucky soul who had interviewed. She was starting to wonder if she was going to have to give up her search and keep bringing Jaime to work with her. At least it was only another year before he started school, and she could probably make it work, if she had to.

She just didn't *want* to.

She didn't want to spend another second interviewing a terrible candidate either. She was about to ask Jessica what the hell she'd been thinking selecting these goons when a young blonde woman stepped through the door.

"Ms. Evans?" She sounded so *chipper*, a bright smile and a goddamn *spring* in her step. And she looked barely old enough to be out of school herself.

Camila stared at her and almost dismissed her out of hand. It was childish, she knew, but she was just so *tired*, and there was no way in hell this woman was the right nanny for Jaime.

"Auditions for the next season of *Love Island* are two floors down." Camila waved the woman away and reached for her tablet to check her emails.

"I...I'm not here for that." Camila glanced up again. The girl looked a little uncertain, her smile slipping from her face, and Camila wondered if this would be the second candidate to burst into tears and flee the room in the space of ten minutes.

She wouldn't be surprised. The girl was so bright and sunny that it



would take no effort at all to dash her hopes and dreams, and then Camila could go about the rest of her day.

“I’m here for the interview. For the nanny position.”

Camila studied the girl for another moment. She may as well give her a chance, seeing as she was there.

And she *was* early.

“Okay, then,” she drawled, leaning back in her chair and adopting a bored-looking expression. “Tell me why you want this job. What can you offer me?”

“Well, I’m a hard worker, and I’m reliable, and—”

“That’s all very well.” Camila cut her off, folding her arms across her chest, her eyes never leaving the girl’s face, impressed when she didn’t look away. “But I didn’t ask for your résumé. I already have that. Why are you *here*?”

“I just... I want to be useful, Ms. Evans.”

The girl fiddled with her hands, as if to stop her fingers from trembling. She looked terrified, which was a trait she normally relished in a potential employee but not in someone who was going to spend a lot of time with her son. She needed someone confident enough to communicate with her, not someone who might sidestep.

“And I think I could be useful to you. I would *like* to be useful to you. I’m new to town, and I saw the job advertised, and I thought a nanny position would be a worthwhile way to spend time while I save up for my master’s degree. I think I can do this job and do it well, if you’ll take a chance on me.”

The girl’s sincerity piqued Camila’s interest, but she didn’t want to make it too easy for her.

“Look”—she squinted at the name on the résumé—“Emma, I—”

“It’s Emily, actually, Ms. Evans.”

The correction was timid, but it was *there*, and Camila reappraised her original assessment—maybe she had a backbone after all. For the first time, she studied Emily fully, tried to look past the hideous sweater, glancing up into brilliant blue eyes, and tried not to think that the woman was beautiful because *that* would be dangerous.

“Oh, my gosh!” Emily cowered under Camila’s scrutiny. “That was so rude. I’m so sorry—”

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Camila raised her hand to silence her rambling and studied her with renewed interest.

“Perhaps I underestimated you, Emily.” No one interrupted her or stood up to her, *ever*, and it was—well, it was kind of exhilarating. “Look, I’m not going to lie to you. I expect complete and utter devotion to this job, to my son. I’m a busy woman. I work long, sometimes unpredictable hours, and I expect you to do the same. As you can tell, I am also not an easy woman to work for. You need to think carefully about the kind of commitment I’m expecting before we go any further.”

“I have thought about it,” Emily said firmly. “I knew who you were before I came here, Ms. Evans. I know what you do and I know you’re busy. I can’t imagine how hard you must work, but I’m willing to put in the time, if you’ll give me a chance.”

“Even if it means having no life of your own?” Camila asked. “You’re young—how old are you, exactly?” She didn’t look old enough to have graduated from college.

“Twenty-three. I graduated a few months ago, but I took a year off to do some charity work in Africa before my senior year.”

Of course she did—the girl was practically a Girl Scout.

“And like I said, I’m new to town. I don’t have much of a life to speak of at the moment. I want this job, Ms. Evans.”

“What do you have in the way of experience?”

“I’ve never been a full-time nanny,” Emily said. “But I...I spent some time in the foster system”—Emily looked away briefly—“and I spent a lot of time looking after younger children, keeping them safe and out of trouble. I also did a lot of babysitting in high school and college.”

“Mm.” Camila stroked her chin thoughtfully, but she had already made her decision. “Very well. I’m going to give you a chance, Emily. And you only get one”—her warning cut Emily off in mid-squeal—“so use it wisely.”

“I won’t let you down, Ms. Evans,” Emily gushed.

Camila held up a hand. “Don’t get carried away,” she said, and reaching for a piece of paper, scrawled her address on it. “You need to meet my son first. He’s with my assistant right now, but I’d prefer you meet him in an environment that’s familiar to him. I need to get to know you a little better too, make sure you’re the right person. Can you come over for dinner tonight?”

“I...I’d love to.”

“This is my address,” Camila waved the paper at Emily. “I’ll notify the front desk that you’re coming, and they’ll let you up. Be there at seven sharp.”

“Yes, Ms. Evans,” Emily said, turning to leave.

“And Emily?”

Emily turned around.

“Let me be clear—if my son dislikes you, you’re out. Understood?”

“Yes, Ms. Evans.” Emily nodded meekly before sprinting from the room.

Camila pursed her lips, watching her go, unsure what to make of her.

Emily was eager to please, a quality that Camila appreciated in new hires, and she’d shown that she was not afraid to stand up for herself when push came to shove.

But she was also *bubbly* and so very, very young. Camila wouldn’t be surprised if she buckled under the pressure a few days in.

She hoped that wouldn’t be the case. There was something about the way she had surprised Camila that made her want Emily to succeed.

It didn’t hurt that she was nice to look at too. She could be a swimsuit model if she stopped hiding behind those god-awful sweaters.

Camila shook her head—it wasn’t appropriate for her to think of Emily like that, not when she was potentially about to hire her, not to mention the fact that she was half her age.

Satisfied with her decision, Camila went in search of her son, hoping that her days of bringing him to work with her would soon be over.

\* \* \*

“So,” Cassie asked the second she dropped into the booth opposite Emily, “how’d the interview go?”

“No Maia today?”

Cassie was a crime scene investigator for NYPD and Maia was a detective. The two of them usually had lunch together, and Emily didn’t want to start telling Cassie about her interview if she was just going to start over when her sister’s girlfriend arrived.

“Nope. She’s out investigating a lead for one of her cases. Come on, Em, I’m dying here. How was it?”

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“Um... Okay,”— Emily’s voice wavered a little because she really had no idea how she had done. —“I think.”

“You think?” Cassie’s lips twitched with amusement. “How can you only *think* it was okay?”

“Because Camila Evans is hard to read and more than a little scary.”

Cassie chuckled. “Not got a crush on her anymore, then?”

Emily vehemently shook her head. “Oh no, I definitely still do.” Emily thought again about Camila in that dress and sighed. “She can be scary *and* hot. Scary hot. *Anyway*. We got off on the wrong foot. I’m pretty sure she’d already written me off before I even opened my mouth.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah.” Emily took a sip of her iced tea. “So then she called me the wrong name, and I corrected her—”

“You corrected Camila Evans”—Cassie looked at her wide-eyed—“and lived to tell the tale? Damn.”

“I think it impressed her.” Emily had seen the flicker of interest in Camila’s eyes when she had stood up for herself. “Or something did because she said she’d give me a chance.”

Cassie raised an eyebrow.

“I’m having dinner with her tonight so I can meet her kid. If he likes me, then I’m hired.” She paused. “I think.”

“What?! Congratulations!” Cassie grinned. “Why aren’t you happier about this? You’re having *dinner* with your long-time crush.”

“I know. But it’s still—I have to impress her. Camila Evans. How the hell am I going to do that?”

“Just be yourself,” Cassie told her, reaching across the table to squeeze Emily’s hand. “That’s all. You go in there, and you charm the hell out of her, and you make that little boy fall in love with you. She won’t be able to turn you down.”

If only she had Cassie’s confidence. But she hadn’t made a fool out of herself earlier, and now she just had to get through dinner with Camila.

Alone. In her apartment.

She felt like she was going to be sick.

## CHAPTER 3

IF STANDING IN FRONT OF the CEBC building had been intimidating, it was nothing compared to standing on the sidewalk outside of Camila's apartment block.

Emily squinted up at the top floor, the penthouse where she would be spending her evening, and let her breath out slowly, wondering when going from one skyscraper to another had become her life.

This lobby wasn't quite as busy as the CEBC building, but it was still intimidating, and Emily approached the security desk hesitantly.

"Emily Walker?" Emily looked at the guard suspiciously at the familiar greeting. "Ms. Evans gave me your description," he explained. Emily wondered what that description was—probably nothing complimentary. "You need a key card to get to the penthouse floor. I'll swipe you in for now, and we'll get you a card if things go well. Follow me."

She stepped into the elevator when it arrived and watched him press PH. "Good luck," he said as the doors closed.

The elevator whizzed to the top of the building, and the doors slid open to reveal two doors, one on each side of the hallway. Emily checked the time. She was ten minutes early, but she didn't think Camila would have a problem with that, so she rapped on the door.

When it opened, Camila stood in the doorway wearing black jeans and a fitted red sweater. Emily held her breath, thinking the sight of a dressed-down Camila might be the death of her.

"Emily. Come in." Camila stepped aside to let Emily pass. She wandered uncertainly into the apartment, trying to act cool as she took it all in.

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Camila's apartment was an open-plan living room slash dining room slash kitchen with floor-length windows that looked out onto the concrete jungle beyond. The sun had just started to descend on the horizon, lighting the whole city with an orange glow.

It was beautiful, just like the woman who came to stand beside her.

Emily felt like she should say something. "This place is really nice." She thought she heard Camila hum, maybe in agreement, but she couldn't really read her. Maybe she'd get better at it the more time they spent together.

As Emily turned to take in more of the apartment, her eyes fell on Camila's son sitting cross-legged in the corner wearing pajamas covered in tiny spaceships. He stared up at Emily.

"I thought I'd get dinner ready while you spend some time with Jaime. Do you like carbonara?"

"Sounds great."

"Jaime." Camila addressed her son. He shifted his gaze from Emily to his mother. "This is Emily. She's going to visit with you while I make dinner."

He looked back at Emily shyly. She was going to have her work cut out for her to coax him out of his shell.

"New nanny?" he asked, looking back at Camila. His voice was soft but his words were clear.

"Yes, sweetheart."

Emily approached Jaime, sitting on the floor opposite him. The corner of the room was set up as a play area with a tiny table and chair, paper and crayons on top, a stack of books and a dozen toys scattered around it.

"I'll be in the kitchen if you need anything." Camila glanced at Emily, leaving the unspoken "I'll be watching your every move" hanging in the air.

Jaime eyed Emily warily without returning her smile. He wouldn't be the first kid she'd had to win over.

"Hey, buddy. I'm Emily. And you're Jaime, right?"

He blinked.

"Okay." Her first task was to get him to speak. "I'm really excited to meet you, Jaime. I like your pajamas."

Still nothing, just a withering stare that reminded Emily of his mother.

"Can I see some of your drawings?" she asked, nodding toward the stack of paper on the table behind him. "No? Okay, then."

He was proving to be a tough nut to crack, but she would have expected nothing less from Camila Evans's son.

Jaime turned around and crawled over to the chest of toys in the corner. Emily glanced inside and spotted some familiar shapes. The kid had just handed her a lifeline.

"You like dinosaurs, huh?"

Jaime's hand closed around a T. rex. He turned his head to look at her, letting on that he was interested.

"I like them too. What's your favorite?"

Silence.

"Mine is the stegosaurus. Do you have one of those?"

Again no answer, so Emily glanced over his shoulder and reached past him into the toy chest. Jaime watched her the whole time.

"This is a stegosaurus," she told him.

"I know." The words were so unexpected and came out so haughtily, so undeniably reminiscent of his mother, that Emily broke into a wide smile.

"You know, huh?"

He nodded.

"Do you also know that, even though they were really big, they had really tiny brains?" She watched him struggle—half of him wanted to ignore her and wanted her gone, the other half *really* wanted to know more dinosaur facts.

"Really?" he asked eventually.

"Uh-huh. You know what they ate?"

"Plants." He answered quicker this time.

"That's right, they were herbivores."

"Herb-vore," he repeated, and he was so cute that Emily wanted to cry. "So is that one." He pointed at another dinosaur by Emily's knee, a diplodocus.

"Yeah, it was. You're good at this."

Jaime smiled uncertainly.

"They used their tail as a weapon." She demonstrated, knocking over a different dinosaur with the diplodocus's tail, and Jaime giggled. "And their brains were small too."

Jaime pointed at another dinosaur, then another. Emily felt like this was a test, and she was glad her own childhood obsession had prepared her

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for this moment. After she'd gone through his entire collection, he watched her thoughtfully before crawling closer to her and holding out the dinosaur he'd been clutching since she first sat down.

Emily took it gently from him as if it were an honor.

"Favorite," he said, and crawled onto her lap.

"So what else do you like, buddy?" she asked him. She spoke softly, afraid she might startle him, make him run away and not come back. She peered at the stack of books. "Space?"

"Yeah!" It was his most enthusiastic response yet. "I wanna be an astronaut!"

"You do?"

He nodded, completely serious.

"It's a lot of hard work, you know. I have a friend who's training to be an astronaut."

Jaime's eyes grew wide. "Really?"

"Really," she confirmed.

He looked at her, amazed. "Can they take me into space?"

"That's not really how it works." She laughed, then seeing his disappointment added, "but maybe she could come and talk to you about it one day."

Jaime beamed at the thought.

"I'm sorry to interrupt." Emily jumped at the sound of Camila's voice because she hadn't heard the other woman approach. "Dinner's nearly ready, and Jaime"—she turned to her son—"it's nearly time for bed."

Jaime thrust out his lower lip in an impressive pout.

"Can Emily read my bedtime story?" he asked, and Camila blinked.

"Oh, I wouldn't want to overstep," Emily said, but Camila waved her off.

"Nonsense. This is why you're here." Camila leaned down to help Jaime out of Emily's lap. It was the closest she had been yet to Camila, and Emily reminded herself to keep breathing. "Jaime's room is this way." Camila headed toward the hallway with Jaime in tow, and Emily followed. "Let's brush your teeth while Emily picks out a book for you."

Jaime's bedroom was identified with his name on the door in brightly colored letters. Emily stepped hesitantly inside. The room was plastered with his drawings, and his bed was shaped like a rocket. Emily made her



way to the bookshelf against one wall, easily identifying Jaime's favorite books by the worn spines. She chose one at random.

A moment later, Jaime darted past her, Camila close behind. Emily watched Camila tuck her son into bed with a devotion that screamed how much she loved him.

"He's all yours," Camila told Emily as she straightened up, nodding at the chair beside the bed. "I'll go finish up dinner."

Emily opened the book and began reading. She was barely three pages in before Jaime's breathing slowed, and she looked up to see him fast asleep.

She smiled and closed the book, leaving it on the chair, and padded silently from the room, butterflies back in full force at the thought of having dinner with Camila without Jaime there as a buffer.

\* \* \*

Camila returned to her kitchen, amazed and unbelieving at how quickly Emily had won over her son.

She had watched the two of them closely as they played and had nearly dropped the pasta on the floor when she saw Jaime crawl onto Emily's lap.

With Amelia, Jaime had cried for two weeks whenever Camila left the apartment, and yet fifteen minutes with Emily Walker and she was his new favorite person.

What was it about the girl that was different from the ones who came before her? Even Eleanor, Camila's wonder nanny, had a difficult few days before Jaime had accepted her in his life.

It was like a dream.

She had expected Emily to be good, but not *this* good, and it was a little disarming. Camila wondered if Emily would continue to surprise her and hoped that she did.

"He's out for the count."

Emily reappeared, looking a little nervous now that Jaime wasn't with her—she was a different person with her son than the woman Camila had met that afternoon.

She finished dishing up the carbonara. "He never did have trouble sleeping." Even as a baby, Jaime slept through the night more often than not. "Here, sit." She gestured for Emily to take a seat at the breakfast bar; it

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would be less formal than sitting at the table. Camila placed a bowl of pasta in front of her. “Would you like something to drink?”

“Just water is fine.”

Even though Emily looked wildly out of place in her apartment, it was nice to have someone to share the space with. Camila filled two glasses with water, forgoing her usual red wine, then sat next to her new hire.

“Thank you for having me over, Ms. Evans. The carbonara looks amazing.”

“We’re going to be spending a lot of time together. You should call me Camila.”

“Okay. Thank you. Camila.”

It sounded good to hear Emily say her name.

Camila gave Emily a few minutes to eat before she started her next round of questioning.

“So how was it for you spending time with my son?”

“Pretty great.” Emily smiled brightly, and Camila had to look away. “He’s a really great kid.”

“I know,” Camila answered coolly. “You made quite an impression on him—he rarely warms to people so quickly. Should I be concerned about your extensive knowledge of dinosaurs?”

Emily nearly choked on her food.

“I was a dinosaur nerd growing up.”

“Mm. And do you really have a friend who’s an astronaut in training, or was that just something you said to get my son on your side?”

“I wouldn’t lie to him,” Emily said earnestly. “Although technically it’s my ex-girlfriend, but still. I know a few others too, but not anyone I’d call a friend. Comes with the territory.”

“O?”

“Did you even read my résumé?” Emily teased. It was the most relaxed that Camila had seen her yet.

“I did, along with several others. The details get a little fuzzy.”

“I studied astrophysics at Yale.”

“Wow.” Camila was surprised, though she tried not to show it. “And that’s what you want to get your master’s in?”

“Yeah. And maybe a doctorate, but I’m not sure. Haven’t really decided yet.”

She's so *young*, Camila thought. She's still trying to figure out her career path, her future.

"That's impressive."

"It's just what I'm good at." Emily shrugged. "And apparently it comes in handy when I want to charm five-year-old boys."

"Yes, well, Jaime's quite enamored by you already. I imagine he'll fall completely in love if you keep talking to him about space. He likes stargazing, but I'm not very good at pointing out the constellations."

"I'm sure you don't have much time to learn, considering your job."

Camila quirked an eyebrow.

"Your occupation isn't exactly a secret; you're pretty well-known in this city."

Camila well knew what was written about her, especially now that her marriage had fizzled out so publicly.

"Mm. So I'm sure you've heard what a hard-ass I am, and you've experienced it yourself today. So I'll ask you again: are you sure you want this job?"

"Of course I still want the job," Emily replied, setting down her fork. "And for the record, I don't listen to idle gossip, especially about women. I admire you, Camila—"

Emily's blue eyes met hers, and Camila saw her sincerity. And she wondered if perhaps there was a little hero worship too, and she basked in the attention.

"—and I have a little experience with what it's like to succeed in a male-dominated field."

"Astrophysics isn't popular with the ladies?" Camila asked, surprised to hear teasing in her voice. Maybe Jaime wasn't the only person in the apartment who Emily was winning over.

"Not really." Emily smiled.

"Well, the job is yours if you want it—subject to an extensive background check." Camila doubted if it would reveal anything outside of a parking ticket. "It's standard procedure for a prospective employee, especially for someone I'll be trusting in my home and around my son," Camila explained. "So if there's anything I should know, now would be the time to tell me."

"I...I don't think so." Emily paused, thinking. "I already told you I was

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in foster care. My parents died in a car crash when I was eleven.” There was pain in her eyes at the memory.

“Oh, Emily, I’m so sorry.” She knew Emily must have heard the same words hundreds of times before, but she smiled gratefully all the same. “You ended up in a good foster home?”

“The best.”

“Good. So,” Camila said, changing the subject, “the job is yours. It goes without saying that it’s Jaime who comes first. You looked pretty cozy with him, but should that change—”

—“I’m outta here,” Emily finished. “I get it.”

“Excellent. I have a contract in my study that I used with previous hires. Take it home with you and read it over. Follow me and I’ll get it for you.”

Camila led Emily down the hall and into the study. She rummaged through the papers on her desk, and when she turned with the contract in hand, Emily was frowning at one of the framed photographs on the wall.

“What are you doing?”

Emily jumped at the sound of Camila’s voice, looking sheepish. “I just... I recognize most of the other photos.” She pointed at the one on the opposite wall. “Like that one, when you won your first Emmy. It must have been special.”

“It was my first show,” Camila said, a little touched. “You really recognize all the others?”

“I meant what I said before,” Emily said with a shrug, looking down at her shoes. “I admire you. I was a fan of yours growing up.”

“Well, that just makes me feel old,” Camila replied, wrinkling her nose. Emily flushed.

“That’s not what I meant! I just—”

“It’s all right, Emily.” Camila cut her off, trying not to enjoy how easy it was to make the girl blush. “I know what you meant. Here.” Camila held out the contract. Emily raised her eyebrows at the weight of it. “Take your time looking through it. If everything is okay, bring it by my office tomorrow afternoon, say two o’clock. You can spend more time with Jaime while you’re there.”

“Sure. I can spend the rest of the week watching him at your office, if

you want, so you can see how we're getting along before you leave him with me here. I know it's difficult to trust someone new with your kid."

"Especially when they're barely an adult themselves."

"Hey," Emily protested as Camila led her back to the front door. "Twenty-three is adult. It's like mid-adult. Five years into adulting."

"The word 'adulting' really makes you sound mature," Camila told her, smiling. "I'll see you tomorrow, Emily. Call me if you change your mind—my number is on the contract."

"Thank you." Emily slipped the document into her bag before stepping out into the hallway.

"Would you like my driver to give you a ride home?"

"Oh no, that's okay. I can take the subway."

"All right, then. But you are not to take my son anywhere near that germ-infested thing, understood?"

"Is that in the contract?"

"*Absolutely.* Goodnight, Emily."

"Goodnight, Ms. Evans—Camila."

Camila shut the door, pleased at how the evening had gone. Emily was great with Jaime, and he would be overjoyed when he learned he would be spending more time with her tomorrow.

She returned to her study with a spring in her step. She had barely settled into her chair before the phone rang. She smiled when she saw the name on the screen.

Camila didn't have many friends—she was prickly and didn't let her guard down easily—but Jenny Hall was one of the few who had stuck by her over the years.

To the media, they were enemies at each other's throats, owners of rival networks on opposite coasts, but behind closed doors it was a different story entirely.

"Well, this is a surprise," Camila answered, relaxing back in her chair as she waited for her laptop to boot up. "Is it time for our annual phone call already?"

"Oh please, you know you miss me."

Camila did, but she'd never admit it. Jenny was one of the few people that she *did* miss about LA from her internship days. She had never made quite the same connection with anyone in New York, had never found

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anyone here who had her back in this male-dominated industry. “I miss you like a hole in the head,” she said.

“Just thought I’d check in to see how you’re doing.” Without a doubt, Jenny was sitting in her own office at home, just as much of a workaholic as Camila.

“After the divorce,” was unspoken, and Camila appreciated the concern. “I’m okay. Just trying to keep myself busy.”

“That misconduct case doing the trick?”

“Don’t remind me,” Camila said, groaning. “The media’s been on my case since the news broke this morning. You don’t know any decent actors available for a main role on very short notice, do you?”

“If I did, I wouldn’t be letting you poach them.”

Camila grinned. “It was worth a shot.”

“Yeah, yeah. And how’s that gorgeous godson of mine?”

“He’s as wonderful as always. I think I found his new nanny today.”

“You fired *another* one?”

“She rather forced my hand when I came home to find her and her boyfriend *in flagrante delicto*.”

“Oh, my God, I would’ve paid to see your reaction to that.” Jenny cackled loudly. “Well, I hope the next one doesn’t disappoint.”

“Me too.”

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# NEVER SAY NEVER

BY RACHAEL SOMMERS

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