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MAYA RODALE

WHEN  
JANE  
KISSED  
DUKE



The Fake Engagement Trilogy 2

# WHEN JANE KISSED DUKE

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THE FAKE ENGAGEMENT TRILOGY #2

MAYA RODALE



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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*For Tony. I bet you think this book is about you.*

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## PREFACE

Dear Reader,

This book was originally published as *The Bad Boy Billionaire's Girl Gone Wild* in 2014. Please note that in the year 2014 the following things were cool: Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Foursquare and billionaires. Tastes and times have changed, but I think Jane and Duke's love story is one for the ages.

XOXO,

Maya

BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

*When Jane Met Duke*

*When Jane Kissed Duke*

*When Jane Loved Duke*

And the anthology *At The Summer Wedding* with Caroline  
Linden, Katharine Ashe and Miranda Neville



## PROLOGUE

### *New York City*

**H**ere's what you need to know about my crazy love life: I could start with the day I lost my job as head librarian at the Milford Public library, which was the same day I got dumped by my high school sweetheart and boyfriend of twelve years. Or, I could start when I impulsively moved to New York City. Or when I had a random hookup at a party with some scruffy guy who turned out to be Duke Austen, the billionaire tech entrepreneur. Things really got crazy when my friend Roxanna posted an announcement on Facebook saying that Bad Boy Billionaire and I were engaged.

Crazy was when he said yes.

Crazy was when I said yes.

Crazy was when our grand fauxmance turned into something else entirely. My feelings for him were strong, raw, and completely real. And when he touched me, I nearly exploded from the pleasure of it. He was a brilliant coder, a charming salesman, a tech entrepreneur, the best lover I ever had, and totally inscrutable.

It's all fun and games until someone starts falling in love . . .

## CHAPTER ONE

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*Park Bar*

*New York City*

What the hell had just happened? I stood there, teetering on four-inch heels with the traffic of Tenth Avenue speeding past. Glancing back, the party raged on without me. Everyone was celebrating Duke Austen's startup, Project-TK, snagging 150 million dollars of investment funding.

I had helped him secure that money by posing as Duke's Good Girl Fiancée; as a prim, proper, librarian who tended to wear sweater sets, I fit the bill. He had a bad reputation and an engagement with the likes of me demonstrated that he was reformed, responsible, and someone you could trust with hundreds of millions of dollars. In return for my, ahem, services rendered, he was going to be my hot, successful date for my looming high school reunion so that I seemed hot and successful instead of the failure that I felt like when I lost my job, my boyfriend, and my future.

Duke and I—we had a deal.

But now, that deal might be off.

The front of the bar was completely open to the street. I could see Duke inside, surrounded by beautiful women ready to put out when he said the word. Admirers, sycophants, and tech industry titans fawned over him and were now ready to welcome him into their ranks even though they had mocked

and doubted him before. Everyone wanted a piece of him. Including me. But while they wanted Duke Austen, brilliant and successful entrepreneur, I wanted Duke Austen, the man whose kisses made me melt.

Our gazes locked. Was that longing? Or was I projecting? I had this awful habit of reading too much into everything.

So I turned and walked away, reminding myself that our “engagement” was totally pretend. Or it was supposed to be. It was a great idea in theory—until our lips locked and I was hooked.

My phone vibrated with a text message.

Sam Chase: I snagged two seats at the bar for us.

I quickened my pace as much as I could while walking in stilettos on the cobblestone streets of the Meatpacking District. Sam was my high school sweetheart and the man I thought I was going to marry. When he texted earlier tonight, Duke told me to go see him.

The thing was—I wanted to stay with Duke. I wanted it with an intensity that left me off kilter because for so long a life with Sam was everything I had ever wanted.

Ever since senior year, I had our entire lives planned—the wedding, the babies, the house on Brooke Street in the town where we had grown up. I had been expecting a proposal; he dumped me instead because we hadn’t experienced much besides each other.

Now he was in the city for the night and wanted to meet for a drink and Duke was telling me to go see him.

*Why* did that piss me off so much? Well, I knew why and I didn’t like it. Because our relationship was as real as the cubic zirconia “engagement” ring on my finger, but my feelings for him were true.

I also have to point out that I looked *hot*. If there was ever a night that I wanted to meet the ex-love-of-my-life, it was when I looked like this. I wore a short, sexy dress with killer

heels and a blowout that would put Kate Middleton's to shame.

So with one last glance behind me, I tottered off into the night.

### *Employees Only Bar*

I strolled through the madness of the Meatpacking District, slowing down as I passed by the entrance to Soho House, where Duke had “proposed” to me. I glanced up to the roof—I could just make out all the fabulous people lounging around, sipping cocktails and enjoying the stunning view of the city. I kept going until I hit Hudson Street, and then I headed south until I found the bar—Employees Only.

There was a fortune-teller in the vestibule. I lingered for a moment, considering it. Remembering that Sam was inside and waiting, I pushed through the door. The room was warmly lit and had a classic New York speakeasy vibe. Sam was at the bar, nursing a beer.

I paused for a sec, taking in the sight of him. If my life were a movie, Sam would be played by Ben Affleck. God, I had loved that man (Sam, not Ben). He was a boyishly handsome, broad-shouldered guy who could have been a Ralph Lauren model if he weren't so brainy. No wonder I'd crushed on him since freshman year. No wonder I did everything I could to hold onto him. No wonder I cried for weeks after he broke up with me. A girl doesn't find a guy with looks, smarts, and sensitivity like his every day.

As if sensing me, Sam looked up. His smile took my breath away. I stepped carefully through the crowd of people on my way over to him.

There he was. Sam. Love of my life.

“Jane . . . wow. You look . . .” He stood and looked me up and down. I smiled because I had left him speechless.

I looked gorgeous, fierce. More to the point, I looked utterly different from the small town girl he'd known. And

loved. And dumped.

“It’s good to see you, Sam.”

“You’re all done up,” he said. There was an appreciative, almost possessive, sparky gleam in his eye. It’d been a while since he looked at me like that.

“I was out at a party,” I replied, twisting my “engagement ring” round and round my finger.

“With that billionaire fiancé of yours?” Sam asked, lifting an eyebrow as I climbed on the bar stool beside him.

“There was a party celebrating Duke’s startup. They just secured a 150 million dollar investment,” I explained.

“If he has a billion bucks, why does he need investors?” Sam asked.

“It’s complicated. Duke explained it to me one night. Thanks to his previous companies, he was a billionaire on paper—but he lost it all. This time, he wanted to seek an investor before he personally bankrupted himself to fund the company.”

There was no doubt in my mind he would have. Duke wanted Project-TK to be a record-breaking success more than *anything*.

“Let me get you a drink,” Sam said.

“Champagne, please.”

“No more chardonnay?” Sam asked, remembering my usual drink of choice.

“Tonight I’m celebrating,” I said, smiling.

As Sam flagged down the bartender, I took the opportunity to check in on Foursquare because that’s what I did now, after Duke had introduced me to all of the Internet beyond Facebook. I also checked in just in case Duke decided “See you later, Sweater Set” weren’t going to be his last words to me tonight and he felt like dropping in to enact some devastatingly romantic scene.

You know, in case my life suddenly turned into a romantic comedy.

Sam said something.

“Mmm. Sorry, I’m just checking in,” I murmured.

“Look at you. All tech savvy,” Sam remarked. I saw his gaze drop to the iPhone in my hand and the giant diamond on my ring finger.

“And look at that engagement ring. Wow.” He took a swig of his beer.

Correction: it was a giant cubic zirconia ring that I bought from a hotel gift shop when we flew out to San Francisco to meet with investors—and convince them we were engaged and that Duke was reformed.

For a second I worried that Sam would know that it wasn’t a real diamond. But then again, what did he know about buying diamond rings? *Nothing*. Because he had never bought one for me.

I caught myself inhaling sharply at the cruel thought.

That wasn’t like me. This was *Sam*. I had known he was The One For Me since I first laid eyes on him in Mrs. Travelluci’s third-period chemistry class during sophomore year. I had always thought so—even when he didn’t. I had even assumed that this ruse with Duke would show Sam that I was desirable again so I could win him back. The thing was—now that the plan might actually be working, my heart longed for Duke.

But I was getting ahead of myself, as I tended to do.

“So what brings you to the city?” I asked. Our hometown of Milford was a short drive from the city—but far enough so that we didn’t come too often or just on a whim, but close enough.

“There’s a conference on the use of pronouns in *Ulysses*,” Sam said. “Riveting stuff.”

“Indeed,” I replied. We were both book lovers—just different kinds of books.

“I’m also teaching at Montclair University while I interview for positions elsewhere.”

“Really? But you had always planned on Montclair.” Or had that been my plan for him? For *us*. Along with that house on Brook Street, the Blanc Sur Blanc china, and the couch from Pottery Barn.

“Plans have a way of changing,” he said softly.

“That they do,” I remarked. The uncomfortable silence that followed was mercifully interrupted by the bartender arriving with our drinks: a champagne for me and a pint of Sam Adams for Sam.

“Cheers,” he said, raising his glass to mine. My gaze locked with his familiar brown eyes. “Cheers,” I murmured. We clinked our glasses together and took a sip and I thought about how strange it was to be near him again.

I imagined this moment a thousand times while I rode the subway on my way to work at the New York Public Library, or as I window shopped along Bleeker Street while eating a Magnolia Bakery cupcake or as I lay in bed at night listening to the sound of taxi horns blaring and sirens wailing.

The last time I had seen him was an awkward encounter in the kitchen of the house we rented. The lease was in his name and I had made an absurd, grief-induced declaration of moving to New York City, so I was the one packing up my things and the life we shared. I’d just gathered the last of my stuff and had bit back sobs as I left my key on the middle of the kitchen table when he came home unexpectedly.

“I thought you would be out until later,” I had said, wanting equally to run to the comfort of his arms or run out of the house.

“Plans changed,” he had replied.

Here we were—late at night in New York City and I was looking fabulous when he dropped the bomb.

“Actually, Jane, one of the positions I’m interviewing for is at New York University.”

“Really?” I hoped my voice sounded light, and politely interested. I hoped he couldn’t hear how my heart started beating faster. “We’d be neighbors then.”

My fiction writer’s brain immediately started spinning stories of us getting back together, sharing an adorable one-bedroom apartment in the West Village, visiting cafes together on Saturday where I would write novels and he could correct term papers. Then we’d head off to catch the latest exhibit at the Met (never mind that I’d lived here for months now and hadn’t gone once), followed by dinner at the hot spot of the moment.

Then my brain came to a screeching halt. My plans and determination to settle down into a quiet routine of domesticity are what sent him running before. And my life had gotten a hell of a lot more interesting once I started acting first and dealing with the consequences later. As I took a sip of my champagne, I realized that for the first time in my life I was really living in the present rather than in some abstract, never-to-be-realized future.

“How are things at the New York Public Library?” Sam asked. “Are you enjoying your work?”

“It’s a step up from the Milford Library,” I answered, declining to mention that my position was not and my small salary didn’t go too far in the city. What was more important right now was the way Sam looked at me, as if I were impressive. A catch.

Was it really so wrong to enjoy that over drinks? I decided it wasn’t.

“Wow, Jane . . .” he said dreamily, looking me up and down and smiling faintly. “I just can’t get over how you’ve changed.”

“I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing,” I answered. He had loved me for years—until he didn’t. And now?

“It’s good. If I had . . . If you had . . .” He shook his head, chasing away the thought. “Never mind.”



“If I had dressed like this and lived the fabulous life in the city, we might not have broken up?”

We both seemed shocked that I had actually said that.

But four glasses of champagne had a way of disabling my filter and shutting down my inhibitions. Plus, I had changed. I was no longer cautious, play-by-the-rules Jane. I had already lost Sam—and possibly Duke, too—so what did I have to lose now? It was time to just be *me*, whoever that may be.

The way Sam was looking at me did nothing to steady my nerves. He hadn’t looked at me like that since high school. Under the stadium bleachers. Across the classroom. In the back of his Ford truck after school senior year.

“It’s funny,” he said, smiling slightly. “You’re not the girl I broke up with. If that makes sense.”

“I am. Just in high heels and a short skirt.”

In a few hours I would go home and put on an oversized T-shirt and boxer shorts before watching an episode of whatever reality TV show was on. I kept that to myself so I could perpetuate his idea that I was a different girl now.

“Fabulous girl living in the big city,” Sam mused. “Engaged to a billionaire tech guy.”

I sipped my champagne. If Sam really knew the truth, he wouldn’t gaze at me with that mixture of wanting and thwarted desire. The engagement was a sham. The hot heels and mini skirt were a distraction. I was still plain Jane who freaked out at uncertainty, wanted to be loved, and was desperate for everyone to like her.

“How is the book going?” he asked.

I smiled. I *might* have told everyone back home that I was moving to New York to write a novel. I thought it would sound less like I was running away from the wreckage of my life, and more like I was starting a fabulous new chapter. But it wasn’t until Duke and I kicked off our fake engagement that I had an idea of what to write.

“Historical fiction, right?”

“A historical romance novel,” I corrected.

“Like one of those bodice rippers you always kept under the bed?” Sam asked, grinning.

“You knew about that?” I gasped.

“Of course.” Sam said with a laugh. “How is it going? Are there lots of heaving bosoms and throbbing members?”

I rolled my eyes. Comments like that were why I had always told him I was interested in historical fiction. It sounded much more respectable and less likely to be mocked for, say, heaving bosoms and throbbing members.

“Oh yeah,” I whispered.

“So tell me all about the research for one of those naughty books,” Sam murmured, leaning in close. I took a deep breath. I had missed his scent.

“Ladies don’t kiss and tell,” I replied demurely.

“And the inspiration for the hero?” He leaned in closer. Instinctively, I leaned in close, too. His lips . . . a familiar kiss . . .

I couldn’t tell him the truth: The novel was about a heroine desperate to win back the love of her longtime suitor who may or may not have been inspired by Sam (ok, totally was). So desperate that she agrees to a sham relationship with the Duke of Ashbrooke (who was inspired by Duke, obv). With whom she falls in love.

Though Emma, the heroine, is damn tempted when her longtime suitor rolls back into the picture. Or she would be, when I got home. I’d gotten stuck in my book and now knew what I had to write next.

“You’ll see when it’s published,” I replied, feeling quite flirty until I imagined, for a moment, what would happen when I published it. What if Sam read it? I felt a wave of embarrassment, which didn’t compare to the horrified feeling when I imagined Duke reading it.

Then again, boys didn’t read romance novels. Everyone knew that.

“I know writing a book has been a longtime dream of yours,” Sam said. “I’ll take you out to celebrate when it’s published.”

“Are you asking me out?” I asked coyly, flirtatiously tilting my head.

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” Sam replied with a grin and fleeting touch on my leg.

“Remember when you did ask me out for the first time?”

“Junior year. In the library after you had checked out *War and Peace* for me, which of course I never intended to read. I only wanted to impress you,” he said, and I burst out laughing. “God, I was so nervous.”

“Really?” I was incredulous. “But you were so popular and —”

He was good looking, kind, made the honor roll, and played for the football team. One of those rare, perfect guys.

“You were the pretty and brainy girl who I kept encountering in the stacks,” he said. “And it was the first time I had asked someone out.”

“Ah, memories,” I sighed, taking a sip of my drink, hoping it would chase away all the bittersweet feelings.

“But I guess it wouldn’t be a date now, if I asked you out. What with your engagement and all.”

*About that . . .* I twisted the ring around and around.

Should I take it off? Duke and I had left everything so vague tonight. I wasn’t sure if we were still pretend-engaged, or if we’d truly broken up, or if we were in some weird, endless, grey area.

“Are you seeing anyone?” I asked, even though I knew full well that he was. *Curses to Facebook.*

“Yeah. It’s not really serious or anything,” Sam answered, now looking grim.

“Anyone I know?”

“I’m afraid so.” He looked pained.

“You sound weird,” I said. “Like when you have news you don’t want to tell me. Like that time you broke the porcelain cat sculpture I inherited from my Grandma.”

“I’m sorry about that,” he said. “And it truly was an accident. Even though it was the ugliest thing I’ve ever seen.”

I grinned and rolled my eyes. It had been ugly but it had sentimental value. “Who are you seeing, Sam? Don’t tell me it’s Kate Abbott,” I joked.

He didn’t say anything.

Involuntarily, I flexed my hand, remembering the time she slammed a door on my fingers so I wouldn’t be able to do the piano solo in our middle school recital. She got the part instead. She got everything—blonde hair that could be featured in a shampoo commercial, a gorgeous figure that would never need to be photoshopped, and the adoration of everyone. More than once I heard her say she just didn’t get what Sam saw in me. Of course, she had wanted him for herself.

His silence was answer enough. It seemed she finally got him.

Of all the girls in the world . . . . Sam *knew* how I felt about her. More to the point, how she always made me feel terrible about myself.

“Wow. I was kidding,” I said dryly, sipping my champagne.

“You’re the one marrying a billionaire,” he remarked. My head snapped up. Was he dating my worst nightmare as some sort of *revenge*? Had I hurt him with my relationship with Duke?

Suddenly, things felt tense. What if we were with the wrong people? What if we were revenge-dating and were actually meant to be together? Such were the inevitable thoughts of an avid reader and romance novelist.

But why was I so attuned to my phone, desperate to hear from Duke?

“I never imagined this. Never ever,” I said.

“Me neither,” Sam said. He took another sip of his beer. “It feels intense to see you again. I thought I wanted something new. But I’ve missed you. And here you are, like the best of both worlds. Strange and familiar all at once.”

The love of my life was sitting here delivering the words I’d ached to hear. And all I could think about was Duke.

“But you’re with someone else,” Sam said.

Our gazes locked.

Was I? Or wasn’t I? Was I going to throw away a second chance at happiness with Sam because Duke may or may not want to keep up our grand fauxmance? *Was* this even my second chance, or was it just a case of a boy wanting what he can’t have?

Here’s what I knew: I had started falling for Duke.

Here’s what else I knew: To my great surprise, Duke was *here*, weaving his way through the crowds and looking around until he saw me.

Here’s the other thing I knew: When our gazes locked from across the room I felt it everywhere, body and soul.

“Hey,” Duke said with that grin that always made me think of the kind of rogue that made smart girls forget all sense and reason. He stood next to us.

“Hey,” I managed to say as two worlds collided right in front of my eyes.

“Hi, I’m Sam.”

“I’m Duke.”

“The fiancé. Congratulations.” Sam downed the rest of his beer. Duke rocked back on his heels and said, “Thanks.”

“I thought you were at your party,” I said to Duke.

He shrugged. “It got boring.”

I looked at him like he was daft. The biggest night of his life so far and *it got boring*? An hour ago “he just wanted to fucking enjoy his party.” Well, there was just no pleasing some people.

“All those people fawning over you. How tedious,” I said.

“Who knew that got old?” Duke asked, with one of his heart-melting grins.

I laughed. Sam smiled tightly as he looked from me to Duke and back again. Suddenly everything was super awkward, like there was a question hanging in the air of which guy I would go home with. Sam stood, and I watched the two guys size each other up.

“Well, I have an early morning,” Sam said. He signaled to the bartender for the check. He paid for our drinks and we exchanged awkward goodbyes. As soon as he could, Sam bolted.

“Do you want another drink, or do you want to get out of here?” Duke asked.

“Let’s get out of here.”

His driver and car were waiting outside of the bar to take us back to Duke’s spacious, modern penthouse apartment on the Bowery.

“I thought you were breaking up with me,” I said as the car slid off into the city night.

“I thought you were breaking up with me,” he replied.

“We say that as if we’re actually together.”

“Do you really want to talk tonight, Jane?” His voice was low, rough with desire, and it sent shivers dancing up and down my spine. I thought about it for a moment. More specifically, the four glasses of champagne I had drunk, considered the matter and determined a response.

“No.”

His mouth crashed onto mine. We kissed until the car came to a stop in front of his building. Once the private elevator

doors closed behind us, Duke demonstrated that he wasn't just a brilliant computer developer or savvy businessman. He could add expert lover to the list of his accomplishments.

Weak knees.

Feeling dizzy.

Forgetting to breathe.

The way he touched me set my body on fire. Once we were in his apartment, my little blue dress was pulled over my head and dropped on the floor, only to be joined by his Project-TK T-shirt. I toyed with the band of his jeans and he growled.

My black satin bra was unfastened with one quick movement. That hit the floor, too, adding to the trail of discarded clothing that stretched from the entryway to the king-sized bed in the master bedroom down the hall. His hands found my breasts, cupping them possessively. I moaned, arching my back.

We stumbled together, a mess of tangled limbs and a passionate kiss, until we hit the mattress.

He was my rebound guy. My pretend fiancé. Our entire romantic history was a series of Photoshopped Instagram pictures, fabricated tweets, hacked Foursquare check-ins and fictional Facebook statuses. Nothing about us was real . . . until my back hit the mattress and his weight pressed down on me. That was the greatest feeling in the world.

How could we be fake when this felt *so good*?

Duke pressed a hot, open-mouthed kiss against my neck. My legs parted and I felt his hot, hard cock pressing against me. He could be aloof, unreadable, and totally inscrutable, but when we were alone in the dark, there was no denying he wanted me.

Still, I had questions. The sort of annoying questions about feelings and where is this going. I may have only been with one other guy, but I knew that talking about Big Questions was a mood killer. Call me wanton, wicked, or just normal, but the

only thing I wanted more than answers was him, inside me, and the intense orgasms that were going to follow.

After a quick pause for a condom, he was inside me with one strong thrust. I forgot about my questions and just allowed myself to get lost in all the sensations: his weight atop me, the slick heat of his skin, his mouth closing around my breasts to tease my nipples until they were unbearably stiff, the hot, hard length of him filling me up inside.

And then the orgasms: one after another, I couldn't stop them if I wanted to. I cried out, calling his name and God's until I was sure I'd lose my voice. I felt myself close around him, bringing him to his own climax. He shouted my name.

This *was* real. On some level, this was Something.

The next morning, my questions remained unanswered. We hadn't exactly done much talking during the night.

"So now what?" I murmured, rolling over to nestle up against him. I pressed my cheek to the smooth skin on his muscled chest. The early morning light filtered through the floor to ceiling windows in his bedroom.

"Shower, breakfast, work," he said. But he pulled me closer.

"No. With us. You have the money now . . ."

"And you've got your ex thinking about getting back together."

"While that may or may not be true, it doesn't clarify anything with us," I pulled away and propped up on my elbow so I could look him in the eye. "Is this for real, Duke? Or is it time to give up the ruse?"

He just grinned. God, that grin of his.

"If I remember correctly, I promised you a hot date to your reunion. So until then . . ."

He pulled me into a tight embrace and rolled us over until he was on top of me, inside of me and I forgot all about those pesky questions because I had much more exquisite sensations to dwell on.



## CHAPTER TWO

---

*258 West 15th Street, Jane and Roxanna's apartment*

About a week or so passed between the night of Duke's party and the Friday night that I walked into the apartment I shared with Roxanna and found her reading my book. She had curled up on the couch with a bowl of popcorn and a stack of the three hundred double-spaced printed pages I had written of a historical romance novel based on my whatever-was-happening-with-Duke-Austen. Some were on a pile beside her, others were strewn about the floor, and still more were in her hand.

"Hey! What are you doing?" I rushed in and started picking up the pages, even trying to wrench away the ones she was holding.

Roxanna looked up, not even faking a guilty expression.

"Jane, this is just wicked." She grinned. "I had *no* idea about you! You seem all prim and proper and dress like you live at a country club. But the things you write about . . ." She fanned herself with the pages.

"Are private. The things I write about are private!" I dropped my bag on the floor and clutched a random assortment of pages against my chest. "It's a rough draft. It's not *finished*."

The story had a beginning, middle and end. By "not finished" I meant that I hadn't revised it a thousand times (just

a hundred). By “not finished” I meant that I wasn’t ready to share this part of myself with the world.

Roxanna shrugged and said, “Well, then you shouldn’t have left it on your desk for anyone to read.”

I froze, mouth open, speechless. On the tip of my tongue there was a speech about respecting privacy and private property but I just couldn’t deliver the words.

“What were you doing in my desk?”

“The point is, I just glanced at the first page and then I got kind of sucked in,” Roxanna said. “So tell me, how much of these sex scenes are based on real life experiences?”

“Roxanna!” I could feel my cheeks turning red.

“You’re right. I don’t really want to know. Major TMI. So when are you going to publish it?” I opened my mouth to reply, but she cut me off. “Do not tell me you’re not going to publish it.”

“First I’d need an agent, and then a publisher, and then I’ll probably have to do revisions. It’ll be *years* before it’s published, *if* I decide to publish it,” I said with a sigh.

“Or you could self-publish it this weekend,” Roxanna replied. “I’ll get some wine and whiskey. We’ll order take out.”

“Because copy editing under the influence is the best idea ever,” I said, picking up more pages and not even bothering to put them back in order.

“At least we won’t be driving or operating heavy machinery,” Roxanna quipped.

“I don’t know . . .” I said. I hadn’t really considered publishing it anytime soon. The main goal had been to just write the darned thing. Of course, I had fantasies of a bigwig editor at a New York publisher taking my agent and me out to lunch to discuss the terms of the huge advance and the national publicity tour they would arrange and pay for. I also knew that *never* happened to people like me. There was also a more

plausible and terrifying situation to consider: “What if he reads it?”

“Duke Austen reading a romance novel?” Roxanna echoed. Then she burst out laughing. It has to be noted that Roxanna has one of those loud, throaty laughs that the neighbors could probably hear.

“Or Sam? What if Sam reads it? He’s a literature professor. And he was talking about my book the other night. He might read the book,” I said. “And that will be embarrassing and weird and awkward and a million bad things.”

“Or it’ll show him what he’s missing,” Roxanna remarked.

“What if my mother reads it?” I asked in a horrified whisper. “My mother can’t know that I know about sex.”

“OK, never mind the fact that you’re twenty-eight years old and the Victorian era ended some time ago, Your mom only reads the inspirational self-help books recommended by her book club and it’s doubtful they’ll pick yours. So you don’t have to worry about that.”

“You just have it all figured out, don’t you?”

“I’m a terrible influence, I know. But Jane, you wanted to write a novel and you wrote a damn fine one. Why not share it with the world?”

Because what I wrote could destroy whatever Duke and I had if anyone in the tech world read it. But then again—he’d gotten his huge investment. Did he really need the charade anymore? Or was I too pleased to hear my novel was “damn fine” to consider anything else?

Roxanna could also be very persuasive. And when she wasn’t being persuasive, she was downright devious. Roxanna was known to, say, take someone’s phone and post an engagement announcement on their Facebook page when said people were not engaged.

She also immediately developed this really annoying habit of reading sections of my novel to me.

*“His eyes, dear God, his eyes. When his gaze rested on her, it felt like sunshine on her bare skin,”* she said, while I was attempting to eat my take-out dinner of pork lo-mein, brown rice and vegetable dumplings.

*“But she was aware—too aware—of the stupid wager he had made. She was aware that this wasn’t true desire, it was just the Ashbrooke Effect and legions of women had been similarly afflicted. It wasn’t special,”* she read, while I rinsed out the take-out containers and put them in our recycling bin.

*“I have been haunted by fantasies, wishing to claim you, to ravish you, to possess you, to show you such pleasures you have never even imagined,”* she said, as I was brushing my teeth in our tiny bathroom that *really* was not designed for two people, one of whom was holding a three-hundred-page manuscript.

It wasn’t that I was opposed to publishing the book. I just kept thinking about Duke reading it. Or Sam. There was too much of *us* in it; it wasn’t purely fictional. That was the problem with drawing inspiration from real life.

Roxanna, being intrusive and freakily able to read my mind, came into my darkened bedroom later that night and said, “Stop thinking about what the boys think, Jane. Jeezus. This is the twenty-first century. What do you want?”

I turned on the light beside my bed.

“What do I want? I’ll tell you what I want. I want Duke Austen to walk in here right now and say that he wants our relationship to be real. But I also want Sam to ask me to get back together and say that I’m the one and he was a fool to let me go. I want to publish my book and I want *everyone* in the world to buy it and read it—except for Duke, Sam and anyone I’m related to. I want it to get rave reviews and hit *The New York Times* bestseller list. At the heart of it, what I really want is to be liked and to be successful and to stop feeling like my life ended the day that Sam walked out on me.”

Roxanna, being Roxanna, did not bat an eyelash at my outburst.

“It’s a romance novel set in 1820’s England,” she said with a shrug. “I’m sure they won’t read it. What with them having penises and all.”

“Nine percent of romance readers are men.”

“And zero percent of them are your ex-boyfriends. Probably.”

“I want to care less about what people think of me,” I muttered, a soft and sad finale to my dramatic speech.

“I’ll get the whiskey,” Roxanna said. “And let’s get started.”

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We worked all through the weekend to polish, copy edit and format the manuscript. Fortunately, my new best friend and roommate happened to be a gifted and eagle-eyed writer who had no trouble with formatting and all other Internet-y things. She used her Photoshop skills to make a cover with an image we snagged off Shutterstock for a few bucks. And then at my insistence, she made one without Duke’s face superimposed onto a bare chested model. However, the one we kept did feature a hot guy with his shirt off, rippling muscles to be exposed and drooled over.

Let’s just say we took a moment to appreciate it.

“Let’s call it *The Duke Belongs With Me*,” I suggested. “Like the Taylor Swift song.”

“Ok, if you want to be lame and/or obvious,” Roxanna replied.

“What about... *Wedding the Wallflower*?”

“Cute,” Roxanna chirped. Since she never chirped, I braced myself for more. “It’s the perfect title if you want to pretend the women’s movement never happened and you’re eager to perpetuate the myth that marriage is the end all, be-all of a woman’s existence.”

“I like the word *Wallflower*. It’s how I feel so much of the time—like I’m standing on the sidelines wanting to participate in the world but just...can’t.”

“You’re waiting for permission. Or someone to ask you to dance.”

“Yes. That.”

“But your heroine...she’s a bit wicked,” Roxanna said.

“The Wicked Wallflower?”

“YES,” Roxanna said, turning back to the computer to add the words to the cover.

Next she added my name, Jane Sparks, in a really large font. I hesitated. If I really didn’t want Duke or Sam to read it, publishing a book online under my real name was probably not the best idea.

“I think I need a pseudonym,” I said. “Just in case.”

“Because of what the boys think?” Roxanna asked.

“It’s a story about two people faking an engagement in order to get a ton of money. It would cause major problems for Duke if anyone were to read it. I want to publish this, but I don’t want to get in the way of his dreams.”

“Awww. How noble of you. What are we changing your name to?” Roxanna asked.

I paused for a moment. “I’ve always liked the name Maya.”

I glanced around the room, looking at the names on the spines of books for inspiration for a last name. My gaze settled on the thick, red leather volume on my desk: *The Synonym Finder* by J.I. Rodale.

“Maya Rodale,” I said. That was a pretty name. I could be that girl.

“I like it,” Roxanna declared. She deleted “Jane Sparks” and replaced it with “Maya Rodale.”

“Oh wow!” I gushed when I saw the finished cover: A woman ripping off a man’s shirt, revealing *lots* of his chest, all against a stunning hot pink background. “It’s real!”

It was really real sometime long after midnight on Sunday, when all the files were formatted and uploaded and we clicked “Publish!” at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, iTunes and Kobo.

“And now a glass of alcohol to celebrate,” Roxanna declared as she stepped away from the computer and stretched out her arms. She wandered into the kitchen and reach for a bottle of chardonnay, which was my usual drink of choice.

“No, this calls for whiskey,” I said, reaching for the bottle of Bulleit Bourbon, which was her usual drink.

“Look at you. Demure librarian by day. Bad ass, sexy book writing, whiskey drinking girl by night.”

“Look at you, an amazing editor with mad Photoshop skills and a lack of fear about the internet,” I said. “I would have *never* managed this without you Roxanna. Thank you.”

“Don’t get all sappy on me now,” Roxanna said. We toasted with our glasses of whiskey and then caught an episode of a reality TV show before heading off to bed.

I had done it: written and published a novel with a little help from my fake fiancé and my good friend.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### *New York Public Library*

For a moment there, it seemed like my life was coming together perfectly. I lived in the greatest city in the world with an awesome friend and roommate, I had published a novel like I said I would, and there were even rumors about the possibility of a promotion at work when another librarian planned to quit to be a stay-at-home mom. For a moment there—that night at the bar—it seemed like I could have my pick between Duke and Sam.

I agonized over which guy I should give my heart to—and for nothing. Duke didn't call (or text, or tweet, or Snapchat, or IM or Facebook message or any of the thousands of forms of communication guys like him had invented)—other than a quick text to say he was slammed with work. Apparently, Project-TK wasted no time in using the investment money to get bigger and better, *fast*.

Also, Sam posted something on Facebook about “a sexy and chill weekend getaway with my girl,” otherwise known as the loathsome Kate Abbott.

While on Facebook, I happened to notice that Kelly Valdastono was pregnant, Leslie Jackson was engaged, Lisa Webber got a promotion and everyone else's life was moving on while I was spinning my wheels in the city.

As I was monitoring the reference desk at the library, I tried not to think about Duke, but I just ended up trying to



convince myself not to take his radio silence personally. I knew he was working like crazy. It seemed the whole Internet was abuzz with news of a new, top secret product that they were prepping to launch any day now. Thanks to his updates on Twitter, I knew that he was hiring a ton of new staff now that they were flush with cash—all the better for them to grow quickly enough to IPO sooner rather than later.

I also tried not to think about how many copies my book had sold. More to the point: how many copies it hadn't sold. Roxanna told me I had to do more to promote it, so I had planned to make that my project for the weekend. You know, since I apparently wasn't going out with my pretend billionaire boyfriend.

When Roxanna called that afternoon, I was grateful for the distraction. In a whisper, I told her I'd call her back when I got outside. I took a seat on the front steps of the library under one of the lion statues, shrugged off my cardigan to better enjoy the sunshine and called her back. She launched right into her news after the first ring.

“So Jane, remember that bitch Karen from my office?”

“I've heard you complain about her.” She and Roxanna had an ongoing professional rivalry in which they constantly vied to have the articles with the highest traffic.

“Well, she was jealous because my story about you and Duke's engagement had so much more traffic than her stupid post on twerking. So when she found out that you wrote a book . . .”

I inhaled sharply and then forgot to exhale. The only reason a site like Jezebel.com, which Roxanna wrote for, would care about a book like mine was if they exploded the whole Duke-Austen's-possibly-fake-fiancée angle.

“How did she find out?” I asked.

“I told my friend, Molly, that she should read it. And Karen overheard me.”

“Tell me there's not a scathing story about it online right now,” I said. Roxanna fell silent. I knew she hadn't hung up

because I could still hear her breathing. Finally, after a moment in which her point was made, she said, “So there’s a scathing story about it online right now.”

“How bad is it?” I asked, switching the phone from one ear to another.

“Could be worse. Probably.”

“Tell me no one’s reading it,” I groaned.

“Let’s look on the bright side. It’s really hard for shit to go viral on the Internet,” Roxanna said optimistically. “So in a way, this is kind of an accomplishment for you.”

Roxanna’s logic often baffled me. This was no exception.

“How horrified am I going to be when I read it?”

“Immediately after you finish it, check to see how many copies you sold. I bet that’ll make you feel better.”

A second later I clicked the link Roxanna sent me and started to read.

## **Did the Bad Boy Billionaire Fake His Engagement?**

### **His “Good Girl” Fiancée’s Bodice-Ripping Novel Suggests They Did**

Just when you thought bad boy billionaire Duke Austen had reformed and settled down to blissful, boring domesticity—depriving us all of his outrageous antics (remember the time he lost a billion dollars? Or that time he was photographed with the naked supermodel and topless Oscar-winning actress on a yacht in the Mediterranean?), this happens. THIS being one of *those* books found at the supermarket—bare-chested rogues, throbbing members, trembling maidens, heaving bosoms, and strapping men—published under the pseudonym Maya Rodale otherwise known in real life as Jane Sparks aka the future Mrs. Duke Austen, or so we’re led to believe. With thousands of these smutty books pubbed each

year, it wouldn't be that remarkable—except this one, *The Wicked Wallflower*, is about a couple faking their relationship in order to score a ton of money.

And people have been asking questions—given the whirlwind nature of their “relationship” which took the tech world by surprise, one can't help but wonder if this is a case of art imitating life. And if it is a case of art imitating life, one has to freaking marvel at lines like this:

*“Allow me to confirm that I am understanding you correctly,” Emma said slowly. “You would like us to pose as a betrothed couple to swindle your wealthy, elderly aunt out of her fortune.”*

ARE YOU READING, AUGUSTUS GREY? Do you want your 150 million dollars back? I want you to have your money back because I bet you just got played.

Since we're all busy ladies, here are some choice excerpts with an emphasis on the smutty bits. Because smutty bits:

*He kissed her hard. And she . . . she kissed him back. Her tongue, tangling with his. Frantic breaths, hers and his. He couldn't breathe. His heart was pounding. He couldn't taste her or touch her enough. This kiss . . . they would not stop with this kiss. There was not enough time in the world for this kiss . . . it would take a lifetime.*

GAWD.

*Claiming her mouth for a kiss, he slowly eased in, inch by inch until he no longer knew where she ended and he began.*

I'm blushing.

*But then she tightened her legs around him and dragged her fingertips down his back, and kissed him hard. But she was quite a minx.*

TMI.

I sat on the dramatic front steps of the New York Public Library only vaguely aware of the city happening around me. My whole world had suddenly been reduced to this snarky article that hit a little too close to the truth. OK, way too close.

And, God, it had been one thing to write those sex scenes and quite another to read random excerpts taken out of context. And besides, my book was more than just sex! It was about love, and a woman's confidence, and a man recognizing a great woman when she's pretending to be his fiancée!

I groaned and rested my head on my knees. *Everyone* was going to read this stupid article. And then everyone—read: Duke—was going to know how I felt and then . . . I groaned again and hit my head against my knees repeatedly until my phone chimed with a text message.

Roxanna Lane: Remember to check your sales numbers

I logged into one of my self publishing accounts. And then I dropped my phone.

“Holy shit,” I muttered to myself. I picked up my phone and zoomed in.

Yup, that number was there. Before this article was published, I had sold maybe 10 copies, and two of them were to Roxanna and myself. And now . . .

I had sold waaaaay more than ten.

I felt a bit of pride. I felt a surge of relief and joy when I saw the royalty statement I was due. But any feelings of triumph were tempered by the awareness of what damage that bitch Karen might have inflicted on Duke's career because of her article. I had only wanted to write. I didn't want to hurt anyone in the process.

Maybe he didn't see the article. Or the book! And really—Augustus Grey wasn't the type to bother himself with self-published romance novels or news blogs for women.

But I couldn't help but wonder: had Duke bought one of those copies?

I checked Twitter to see if he had, say, mentioned it. My attention was immediately drawn not to a tweet from Duke but a tweet about him from TechCrunch. Warily I clicked the link and started to read the article.

### **Duke Austen's Product Launch Overshadowed by 'Fiancée's' Smutty Self-Pubbed Novel**

The launch that has all of the Internet talking isn't the much-anticipated reveal of the new product and plan to monetize by Duke Austen's newly funded Project-TK. He and his bold (and loaded) investor, Augustus Grey, had high hopes for the product which they hoped would revolutionize their market, capitalize on their massive user base, and lay the ground work for a \$20 billion IPO. Instead, the Internet is buzzing about his "fiancée's" bodice-ripping romance novel that suggests their whole engagement was a giant ploy to score a fortune.

Everyone was surprised when the bad boy billionaire suddenly settled down with a demure librarian after what has been described as a "whirlwind" relationship. But given the premise of Ms. Spark's book, *The Wicked Wallflower*—published under the pseudonym Maya Rodale—people are wondering if the Duke + Jane relationship is fake, too. Lines like this make it hard to believe otherwise: *"Allow me to confirm that I am understanding you correctly," Emma said slowly. "You would like us to pose as a betrothed couple to swindle your wealthy, elderly aunt out of her fortune."* His aunt, by the way, is named Agatha Grey.

Investor Augustus Grey is furious. Sources say he's outraged that Duke misled him about his integrity—apparently the "couple" and Grey had a long dinner in

San Fran where they charmed him into closing the deal. “This is exactly what Grey was afraid of,” says a source. “Austen’s personal life is once again overshadowing his professional products.”

In order to appease Grey and the hardworking staff at Project-TK, here is our coverage of Project-TK’s new product and plan (though according to Chartbeat’s analytics, everyone but the super nerds will stop reading right . . . now.)

I stopped reading at that point and texted Duke.

Jane Sparks: Is the TechCrunch article true?

Then I sat there waiting and drumming my fingers on the steps, counting the yellow cabs that drove by and marveled at all the people whose lives were not currently collapsing around them.

Finally the screen lit up with a new text.

Duke Austen: Yes.

Curses. Crap. Hell and damnation.

I felt awful. But *awful* as a word didn’t convey the magnitude of the outrageous guilt I was feeling. I had screwed things up big time, for someone I cared deeply about.

I wanted to enjoy my success but that was impossible now. And then came the deluge of stupid girl questions. What does this mean for us? How did he feel about it? I was pretty sure he’d be pissed. Would he break up with me? Were we really even together?

I texted him back with just one question instead of the 4,765 questions on my mind.

Jane Sparks: Can we talk?

Knowing I had to get back to work soon, I didn’t wait around for his reply, which might or might not come. On my

way back in, I was caught behind a dark-haired woman in a boxy pantsuit questioning the security guard.

“I’m looking for Jane Sparks. Is she working today?”

Julius, the guard, looked over her head at me. I shook my head *no* and hurried off to seek refuge in the rare books room. Who was that woman? And why was she looking for me at work? It couldn’t be good.

All afternoon, I suffered from phantom phone syndrome—I kept thinking I got a text, but it was always my imagination. Except for one—Roxanna suggested we head out to dance, drink, and celebrate. With everything up in the air, there was only one thing to do: pour a drink, let my hair down, and let loose.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### *Cielo*

“Cheers! To your first book!” Roxanna exclaimed. I grinned and clinked my glass of Veuve Cliquot against hers.

“I can’t believe how many copies I’ve sold already!” I shouted because the club music was so loud. “Thanks to that bitch Karen’s article.”

“Words I never thought I’d hear,” Roxanna shouted back. “Have you heard from him?”

“No.”

“Screw him,” Roxanna yelled.

And then, even though Roxanna probably couldn’t hear me, I shouted out all the things that had been on my mind at work that afternoon:

“I wanted to publish my book. He didn’t make me sign any non-disclosure agreement. He got his investment money. And I might not even need him as my date for the reunion. It felt like Sam wanted me back. There’s no real point in keeping up the charade any longer. I can do whatever I want.”

They were all justifications. I was so happy with my success but terrified about the cost to Duke’s career. There ought to be a word for this feeling. Perhaps happy + awful = hawful. Perhaps that was the champagne talking.



“I didn’t hear most of that,” Roxanna yelled back. “But I hope what you want is to hit the dance floor.”

“It is my dearest wish,” I said. The words were lost in the thumping bass line.

We hit the dance floor. When that became too crowded, we stood up on the banquettes to dance like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan, circa the year 2000.

The champagne and the booming music made the rest of the world melt away. We kept dancing, moving to the beat and in time with everyone else in the club. I was glad I wore a mini skirt and slinky top. I danced until the sweat slicked across my skin. I danced so much that I couldn’t feel my feet. I knew as soon as I stopped, the pain of dancing in three-inch stilettos would kick in. So I had another sip of my drink and spun around and almost fell off the banquette except Roxanna grabbed me and kept me from falling on my face.

We stumbled out of the club around one in the morning.

“Well if it isn’t the bad boy billionaire,” Roxanna remarked.

Duke was there, waiting outside wearing dark jeans and a T-Shirt that said Stylr —another one of his freebie startup T-shirts, I supposed. He looked insanely hot as he leaned against his Tesla and checked his phone.

“I’ll see you at home,” Roxanna said before she stumbled off and hailed a cab. I concentrated very hard on walking toward Duke in a straight line. When I tripped and pitched forward, he was there to catch me in his strong, muscled arms.

### *Minetta Tavern*

Duke and I slipped into one of the intimate red leather booths in the back. The restaurant was small, dimly lit and decorated in the style of an old school steakhouse. Duke ordered a glass of Macallan 18 and I could tell I annoyed the waiter by ordering only water.

“So are you feeling faint?” Duke asked, apropos of nothing.

“What are you talking about?” That champagne and dancing from earlier had gone to my head.

“The Ashbrooke Effect,” he explained. When I looked at him blankly, he explained: “As in the duke of Ashbrooke. As in the hero of your novel. I’m assuming he’s based on me. Vain, I know. But tell me, Sweater Set, am I making you weak in the knees?”

“I’m sitting down,” I replied, as I started to get his references to my novel. Oh dear God, he had obviously read my novel and figured out that it was based on us. Suddenly, my knees *did* feel weak, even though I was sitting, because I had been counting on the fact that billionaire boys don’t read romance novels. Of course, Duke had to be the exception to every rule.

“You look a bit flushed,” Duke continued, and I could feel the blush of mortification flaming across my cheeks.

“I’ve been drinking,” I said, and took another sip of water. Frantically, I tried to recall the things I wrote and—I closed my eyes. This wasn’t supposed to happen.

“Feeling breathless?”

“I’ve been dancing,” I replied. But really, how was I supposed to breathe when this guy had read the novel about us—that I had poured my heart into?

“Is your heart pounding with anticipation?” His voice was real low now because he had cuddled up next to me in the booth and wrapped his arm around my shoulders, pulling me even closer.

“Yes,” I gasped. “Yes.”

My heart was pounding; I was breathless, and a little bit dizzy.

“You weren’t supposed to read it,” I said, taking another sip of water. “That’s why I published it under a pseudonym.”

“I had to know what everyone was talking about,” he replied. “And then I had to be able to converse intelligently about it with the author.”

“I didn’t think you’d read it,” I muttered.

“So you never thought that I would find out that you described me as ‘so handsome that he sucked all the attention in the room toward himself, as if he possessed his own personal force of gravity.’”

“No, of course not.” Otherwise I wouldn’t have published it.

“Or that you described yourself as a plain wallflower?”

“Nope. And this is embarrassing,” I said.

“It’s a good book, Jane,” Duke said. “No matter what happens, know that. If it didn’t—”

“If it didn’t what?” My brain snapped to focus.

“It complicates things,” Duke said reluctantly, shifting so he wasn’t holding me so close anymore.

“Because of Augustus?” I remembered the articles I read about their big and overlooked product launch because everyone was talking about my book and the anger of the big and overlooked investor.

“Yes,” Duke said grimly. “But not just him. I’m a private person, Jane.”

I couldn’t help it—I burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny about that?”

“You share everything about yourself online! You’re on all the news sites, the blogs, on Twitter, Instagram, and on social networks I’ve never even heard of!”

“Yeah, but notice I never tell them anything really personal or revelatory about me. It’s all about Project-TK or the industry.”

“It’s true, isn’t it? You don’t tell anyone what you’re thinking or feeling. No one really knows you, do they? Even

me.” I remembered being so frustrated knowing which articles he’d read, or having seen pictures of meals he ate, but having no idea how he felt about me, or us, or anything deeply personal.

“I told you things, Jane, that I never told anyone else. And now I see them published for everyone to read and make assumptions,” Duke said. “All that stuff about your Duke and his aunt brings up stuff about me, and my aunt who raised me.”

I glanced up at him. His expression was inscrutable, but I saw the tension in his jaw. He took a sip of his whiskey.

“Ashbrooke . . . he’s just made up,” I said. It wasn’t a total lie. Ashbrooke was fictional. He was just inspired by Duke.

“And Benedict Chase?” Duke turned to face me. Sam Chase might have been reinvented as Benedict Chase.

“Alright, so I used a bit from my personal life.”

“Did I ruin your date with Sam the other night?”

My heart was pounding again as I whispered, “What if I said no?”

“Everyone thinks you’re mine,” he said. “And I’m starting to believe it too.”

“You say that as if it’s a bad thing,” I said.

There was something he was keeping from me. I could tell. It was there in the way he refused to meet my gaze and instead took a long sip of his expensive whiskey. It was in the way I had a sudden tremor of fear. All teasing aside, the success of my fictional book was causing real problems with Duke and me.

“Duke . . .” I rested my hand on his arm and tried to soothe away the tension I felt there. “I just wanted to write. I had something to prove to myself and to everyone. You understand that. I know you do.”

He gruffly agreed.

“I could unpublish it, I guess.” As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I regretted them. Because I could do it didn’t mean I wanted to diminish my accomplishment in order to raise up his.

“No, I wouldn’t ask that of you,” Duke said strongly. “It’s just that Grey is pissed that all the media attention was focused on my fiancée’s “smutty bodice ripper”—his words, not mine—instead of our new product launch.”

I looked into his eyes and there was no denying the truth.

“He’s not the only one pissed,” I said softly. “You are too.”

Duke set down the now-empty glass of whiskey hard on the table making the cutlery clink and the candle flicker.

“I just worked so damned hard to build Project-TK. It was a huge risk and everyone was skeptical but I believed and I made my team believe, too. And now . . . for what? People aren’t talking about it, which means they’re not using it, which means my monetization plan is going to fail, which means my chances at an IPO are blown.”

“I’m so sorry.” I was. I positively ached with remorse. “I just never thought anyone would actually read my book, let alone people in the tech industry. Just in case they did, I published it under a different name. If it weren’t for that blogger overhearing Roxanna talk about it and exposing me, this wouldn’t be an issue. I didn’t plan this. I wouldn’t ever plan this. I am so sorry.”

“It complicates things, Jane. The reason we got together is so that your good-girl image can make me seem like an upstanding, responsible guy. And now you wrote this book that has everyone thinking we’re liars. And then there are pictures of you dancing on a banquette.”

“What?” I gasped. He grinned wryly and handed me his iPhone. The picture was dark, but light and clear enough: I was standing on a banquette with Roxanna beside me, we were both singing, waving our arms, and sipping our glasses of champagne. We looked drunk and wild and up to no good.

“That was from two hours ago!” But it was already all over the Internet.

“I don’t want to do this, Jane but—” There was a tense moment of silence when the waiter arrived with another glass of Macallan, which Duke immediately sipped from. I had a sinking feeling about the bad news that was inevitably coming next.

“You’re going to pick your company over me,” I said flatly. Why, why, why did my heart ache to say the words? I knew from the start that things between us were just pretend. Except somewhere along the line, my feelings for him became all too real.

He gazed down at me, blue eyes full of sadness. That was what started to undo me—he did care. But I had fucked things up.

The champagne buzz was starting to wear off and a headache was taking its place.

“I want you both,” he said softly. “But things can’t go on like this. I can’t ask you to give up your work for mine. But I can’t slack off on Project-TK now. We’re prepping for the IPO, Jane. Twenty billion dollars are on the line here. This is bigger than me and you.”

“I get it,” I murmured. And then, gazing into his eyes, I confessed: “I just don’t like it.”

This was the closest we’d come to talking about our feelings. What remained unspoken, but was finally understood, was that this was no longer just an act for either of us.

I could see it in his eyes. This guy liked me. Wanted me. Was tortured because of it. I could also see that his brilliant, billion dollar brain was coming up with an alternative course of action.

“Or . . .” he murmured, eyes lighting up. “We put the word out that we’ve broken up.”

Telling people we had broken up wasn’t the same as *actually* breaking up.

“Just thinking as a novelist here and not a jilted pretend girlfriend—do you think a breakup right now will really quiet all the rumors that we faked a relationship so you could score a 150 million dollar investment?”

“You wouldn’t be a jilted girlfriend. We could still see each other in secret.”

“A secret romance,” I murmured. “I’m the one who’s supposed to come up with that stuff.”

“Fodder for your next book,” he said with a grin. “What do you say, Jane? Want to be my secret lover?”

“Ha,” I said, rolling my eyes. “That’s just the best of both worlds for you, isn’t it? Me, at night, on the DL. And your company every waking moment.”

“Hey, you get something out of this, too. You can promote the hell out of the book without it impacting Project-TK. And you get me at night. So what do you think, Sweater Set? Should we keep this just between us?”

I was tempted. Because a girl didn’t find guys that could kiss like him every day. And guys with his brains and body weren’t exactly common. In spite of his flaws, he was a catch. Even more tempting, he was showing me the world and showing me myself. I did want to be with him.

But I didn’t want to be anyone’s secret bit on the side.

So it was with not a small amount of reluctance that I said, “I think that if we’re going to break up, you might want to sit on the other side of the booth.”

“But then I can’t do this . . .” Duke ducked his head to kiss my neck and I couldn’t help but sigh and tilt my head to give him more access. His every little touch just affected me from the tingling of my skin to the deep heat unfurling within. It was pure, raw desire.

But was it more? Would I ever know? The more pressing question was whether I was going to give up my newfound success for a guy who wasn’t really my boyfriend anyway.

I reached for my glass of water.

Duke stopped kissing me.

“I guess you’re not digging the idea of a secret romance.”

“You’d think it would be something I’d be into.”

“I don’t really like it either, Jane,” he said, voice rough. “I want you. Not in a pretend way but in a real way. But I’m so fucking close to succeeding where I’ve failed before, but—”

“You want the success more.” He nodded. Sadness in his eyes.

“I’ve been working ever since my parents died and Ada taught me to code,” he explained. “This is everything I am.”

“And you’ve only known me a few weeks. I get it, Duke. Really, I do. Because for the first time in my life, I’m tasting success and it’s good.”

“But is it better than this?”

His lowered his head and claimed my mouth. The instant our lips touched I felt the sparks. My heart got all excited and beat in a wild, uneven rhythm. I threaded my fingers through his dark, tousled hair and cupped my palm against his strong jaw covered with stubble. I tasted him and the whiskey he’d been drinking. I drank him in. What if this was our last kiss?

As if he had the same thought, he pulled me closer and our kiss deepened. This was real. Whatever else about us was fake, an act, or pretend, this was real. I could feel him not just where he touched me, but in my soul.

I sighed, leaning in to him. If we kept this up, it’d only be a matter of time before I was back in his bed. And if it was hard to end a kiss, it was damn near impossible to leave his bed.

So I gave up all thoughts of more and got lost in the moment. My world was nothing more than his mouth and mine, the heat building inside of me, and the mad beat of my heart.

“I don’t know,” I murmured, totally frustrated. “I just don’t know. There’s what I want to do. And what I know I should do.”



He rested his forehead against mine, pressed one last kiss upon my lips.

“What are we going to do, Sweater Set?”

“So the options are that I go back to being Miss Goody-Goody Sweater-Set while you work like crazy. Or we break up and I go wild and be your secret lover.”

“Or?”

“Or . . .” I took a deep breath and couldn’t believe what I was about to say. “Or we really split up. You work on Project-TK without the distractions of a wild and scandalous romance novelist, who might just have an idea for her new book that you’re not going to like.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

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Duke and I both changed our relationship status on Facebook to “It’s Complicated” which was the fastest and easiest way to let the world know that the story was over. Of course, the chatter didn’t die down immediately.

The comments on my status update were . . . numerous.

Miranda Sparks: Poor baby, what happened? I tried calling, why don’t you ever answer when your mother calls?

Jane Sparks: Sorry, mom. I’ve been busy with work. I’ll call you this weekend.

Sam Chase: I’m here if you want to talk.

View 98 more comments.

The conversation continued on Twitter.

**@DukeAusten: 24/7 devoted to my new mistress: <http://bit.ly/JEpVK1>**

It was a link to Project-TK’s new product.

**@TheAtlantic: Maybe Women Can’t have it All? The significance of the breakup btw Duke Austen & Jane Sparks over her wildly successful book. <http://bit.ly/1hi0Yzi>**

**@Jezebel: Women who fancy a billionaire workaholic rejoice: Duke Austen and his pretend fiancée have reportedly split up for realz.**

And then this happened to my inbox:

*To: Jane Sparks*

*From: Sam Chase*

*Subject: You*

*Hey Jane,*

*Would love to take you out to dinner to celebrate your new book. Saturday night in the city?*

*Sam (Or should I sign this Benedict?)*

## CHAPTER SIX

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*258 West 15th Street, Jane and Roxanna's apartment*

Saturday night found me stumbling around my tiny bedroom wearing one shoe and a grey silk dress unzipped in the back. I was searching for my other black satin heel.

“Ow!” I stubbed my toe on the foot of my bed.

The shoe was still at large when I spied the earrings I meant to wear. Then I realized they didn't go with the dress, so I took it off and chucked it overhead. It landed on my laptop, which I had left open on my bed, a Word document of the new manuscript I was working on was open on the screen.

*Wallflower Gone Wild*

*By Jane Sparks*

*“It so happens that there are worse fates than remaining unwed for Lady Penelope's ball,” Olivia declared. Catching a glimpse of herself in a mirror she saw that her eyes were bright with anger and her cheeks were uncharacteristically flushed.*

*Emma (once a wallflower and now a duchess) and Prudence (still London's Least Likely to Be Caught in a Compromising Position) fell silent, sipped their tea and considered the possibilities of what could possibly be worse than the worst thing in the world.*

This novel was about a good girl who realizes she has to break all the rules if she wants to find true love. Her scandalous antics were causing problems for her hero, who was busy building a new, revolutionary machine. Eventually I would write my way to happily ever after, but for now it was all about a girl finally allowing herself to follow her heart, to hell with the rules or what anyone thought.

I pulled my black jersey dress off the hanger and slipped it overhead. The fabric clung to my curves and the ruching along the sides and under the bust emphasized them. The skirt hit just above the knee, the neckline was low.

Taking a deep breath, I turned around and picked up the other dress from where it was draped across my laptop. I glanced over and caught a line I had written the other day:

*“I have been the perfect lady,” Olivia said slowly, stating the obvious. “We were led to believe that ladylike behavior would be rewarded with good husbands and happily ever after. We were gravely misled.”*

I knew I’d made the right choice with Duke. I couldn’t just be his back-up girl or secret lover, and I couldn’t stop living my life so he could live his. That wasn’t fair, or equal, or the kind of love I wanted. And while I couldn’t get him out of my head, and I still craved his body, I knew just the sex wasn’t enough. I wanted true love. The kind of love that makes each person stronger. The kind of love where you can grow together instead of grow apart.

Duke needed me to be a girl I no longer was.

Whereas Sam . . . . I had a date with Sam. And he seemed to like the new me.

I was just putting my phone, wallet, lip gloss and keys into my vintage black sateen clutch when Roxanna knocked on the door and leaned against the doorjamb.

“Do you need me to call with a dire emergency that requires your immediate assistance?”

I laughed and said, “No. I’ll be fine.”

“He’s going to ask you a ton of awkward questions about your book.”

“At which point I will faint so as to avoid answering. Obvs.”

“Is that what you’re wearing?” She eyed me up and down, from the heels, to the dress, to my hair pulled back in a messy bun.

“Was planning on it, why?” I glanced in the mirror—I looked hot. But not like I was trying too hard. Or so I thought.

“It just says ‘ravish me.’ Are you sure that’s the message you want to send to him?”

“Yes.” I exhaled. “I don’t know if I want to follow through, but I want the option.” Was that wrong, I wondered? But then how could it be wrong for a girl to have choices?

“But what about Duke?”

“What about him?”

“He’s still into you.”

“Maybe. But not enough. I think he’s mainly interested in a girl on the side while he works 24/7.”

“You would get something out of it, too. Orgasms.” I blushed. Roxanna continued. “And I bet he’ll provide lots of material for a new book.”

“It’s fiction, not autobiography.” Yet I was shamelessly drawing from my real life experience now. Something a girl just couldn’t make up.

“Keep telling yourself that,” Roxanna said. “Where is Sam taking you for dinner?”

“Balthazar.”

“Interesting choice,” Roxanna remarked, with a mildly approving nod of her head. “Classic New York, but now mainly the domain of out-of-towners and the unimaginative. However, dinner at Balthazar is not just a casual night out.”

“I’m going to pretend I didn’t hear anything you said after ‘classic New York.’”

*Balthazar*

“And then remember how we caught her spying on us when she nearly fell out of her window?” Sam and I both burst out laughing at the memory of our crotchety and meddlesome old neighbor, Mrs. Baldwin.

“I used to take such care to keep the curtains closed, but now in New York, I don’t even bother. I’ve seen my neighbors and I’m sure they’ve seen me,” I said. We were halfway through our plateau de fruit de mer and having a really lovely time when I got a text message. I felt my phone vibrate in my clutch, which I kept on my lap.

Duke Austen: How is your date going?

I didn’t need to ask how he knew I was on a date—I had checked in on Foursquare out of habit. But I might have, perhaps on purpose, tweeted about my dinner companion.

“What is it?” Sam asked.

“Oh, nothing,” I replied. “Just a quick question from Roxanna.” I quickly typed “fabulous!!!!” and slipped the phone back in my purse.

“I had an interview at NYU today,” Sam said. My heart sort of stopped, not just by what he said, but by the question, warmth and hesitancy in his brown eyes. This wasn’t about NYU or his career prospects at all.

“Really? How did it go?” I took a sip of my cocktail.

“Good. Really good,” he said, smiling. God, he looked handsome when he smiled like that. “I hit it off with the dean, and I have another batch of interviews with other faculty members tomorrow.”

“Are you interviewing any other places?”

“A few. UC Berkeley wants me to come out for a meeting.”

“California?” But that’s so far!”

Once again, I was faced with the prospect of losing Sam. If he moved to California we would almost never see each other. He’d no longer be just an hour’s drive outside of the city—or just a few blocks away in the village, if he landed the NYU job. Just when I thought I had recovered from losing him, and just when I thought we might have a chance again.

“I know it’s far,” Sam said, “But it’ll be a big opportunity if I get it. And it’ll be a fresh start.”

“What about Kate? How will she feel about you moving across the country?”

“We’re not that serious, Jane.” Sam took my hand in his. I lost myself in his warm brown eyes. My gaze drifted down to his mouth. My memories of his kiss were hazy—and I thought I would never forget. I wondered what it’d be like to kiss him again. Would it be like old times, or new and wonderful and thrilling? I noticed Sam’s eyes drop to my lips, which curved up into a coy smile when I realized we were probably thinking the same thing.

My phone vibrated again, jolting me out of this moment with Sam. When Sam ordered more drinks from the waiter, I took the opportunity to check.

It was a Snapchat from Duke. He was smiling that roguish grin of his. Also, he was shirtless. Also he had written, “Miss Me?” over the picture of his bare chest.

I nearly spit out the last sip of my cocktail.

“Excuse me,” I murmured.

“What is it?”

“Boy drama,” I answered. “Roxanna’s boy drama.” I put my phone back in my purse and set it on the floor so I wouldn’t feel the vibration of another new message. It was so loud in the restaurant there was no way I’d hear it.



But as I sipped my wine and picked at my salad, I realized I couldn't quite forget it. I kept thinking about that picture of Duke and my mouth went dry. If I were so inclined, I could walk over to his place after dinner and have a night of multiple orgasms and outrageous pleasure. But I was nobody's girl on the side, and Sam was here, and he was my great love, and the night was ripe with possibilities.

"How did you and Roxanna meet anyway? I don't think I got the story."

"It's a long story."

"I've got all night, Jane," Sam said in a low voice. "How about you?"

I started telling the story.

"I had been searching for apartments with a broker, but anything that wasn't an absolute hovel was too far out of my price range. One day my broker got so frustrated with me that he said I should just look on Craigslist already."

"You? Meeting a stranger on Craigslist?"

"I know. But I was desperate and Roxanna had posted a really funny ad. The place was small, but clean. And she and I hit it off right away, even though we're a bit of an odd couple."

Sam shook his head. "I can't believe how you've changed, Jane. But it's like you've blossomed or something. I'm afraid \_\_\_"

"What?"

"What if I was holding you back all those years?"

Our entrees arrived just then, sparing me from having to reply. I'd never thought of us like that. After he left, I assumed I was a dead weight he had cast off. But if Sam had proposed that night instead of breaking up with me, we wouldn't be here. He'd been working at Montclair and I'd be back in Milford, planning a wedding and when I'd get pregnant. Romance novels would be books stashed under my bed, not books I wrote and published.

After dinner, I slipped off to the ladies room. As I waited in line in the darkened vestibule outside the restrooms, I gave in and checked my phone.

There was another Snapchat from Duke. I opened it up only to see a picture of him, without his shirt. This time he gave the camera the sort of smoldering look that made girls swoon. Over the picture he wrote: I miss you.

I gazed at it for five, four, three, two, one seconds before it was gone.

I texted him back.

Jane Sparks: You tease.

Duke Austen: What are you wearing?

I awkwardly took a selfie with Snapchat and added some text: "See Jane Date." I gave him just five seconds to look at it and just a few seconds after that I got a reply.

Duke Austen: You look hot in that dress. But you'll look hotter in my bed with that dress on the floor.

Jane Sparks: I'm on a date. With someone else.

Duke Austen: So come over after.

He was persistent, that rogue. He knew what he wanted and he pursued it. And I knew if I went over there I'd have a night like no other. With shaky hands, I typed my reply.

Jane Sparks: We'll see.

Duke Austen: Let's see if I can tempt you.

Another Snapchat came through, but I tucked my phone in my bag without looking at it. OK, then I took my phone out and looked. I mean, really. Another pic of Duke that made me all hot and bothered. And then, in six seconds it was gone.

“Is everything alright?” Sam asked when I returned to the table.

“Of course! Why?”

“You’re flushed.”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” I said with an awkward laugh. It was the Ashbrooke Effect or the Austen Effect or whatever you wanted to call it. My freaking phone pinged again. There was no way I was looking—Sam had ordered profiteroles for dessert and another round of drinks and I was here, with Sam. Love of my life. Right?

But I was all too aware of another guy, waiting for me—if I wanted—just a few blocks uptown.

“I think if I get an offer from NYU I’ll take it,” Sam said.

“Oh, wow,” I replied. “It would be amazing if you did.”

We would get back together then. I just knew it. Then we would get married. We would have babies, lots of books and a couch from Pottery Barn—none of which would fit in a Manhattan apartment, so we’d have to move to New Jersey.

Suddenly, my dream life wasn’t my dream life anymore.

“So we haven’t talked about your book yet,” Sam said. “I was up all night reading it, Jane. I couldn’t put it down.”

“I never thought you were the romance novel type.”

“I didn’t think I was either. But Jane . . . It was good. But what really gripped me was the story of Emma and Benedict.”

Emma was my heroine. Benedict was the man she loved and expected to marry and who never quite came through. She would have done anything for him—she did do anything for him. And in the end?

He wasn’t who she wanted after all.

“It’s just fiction, Sam.” I tried to laugh it off. It was so cathartic to write it—talking about it with the man in question was not something I was prepared to do.

“I’m a professor of English Literature, Jane. Nothing is just fiction.”

Talking about my book with a character based on my ex-boyfriend who was a literature major was something I desperately wanted to avoid. There just wasn’t enough wine in the world for that.

“Listen to you, finally finding validity and literary merit in a bodice ripper. Don’t worry, I promise I won’t tell the faculty at the places you’re applying to.”

“Jane, I just felt so stuck on the same old path,” Sam said earnestly. “We’d been together so long, and had plans to be together forever. It just seemed like more of the same. But everything is different now. Except that I still want you, especially this new version of you. Jane 2.0. Maybe this break was what we both needed.”

It was everything I’d ever wanted to hear. I had hoped for this. Prayed for it. Faked an engagement with another guy in the hopes it would lead me around to this moment where Sam wanted me back. But all I could think about were the text messages from Duke. He was so close I could walk to his place in heels.

“But what can really happen, Sam? I live in the city and you’re still back in Milford. Plus, you’re with Kate and—”

“You’re not over that guy,” Sam said bluntly. Shocked at the accusation, I stumbled over my words when I replied.

“Like we said on Facebook. It’s complicated.”

He leaned in close.

“Was it fake, Jane?”

“Sam . . .”

“You can tell me. I know all your secrets. And I know you. So I don’t think it was fake.”

At the end of our meal we lingered outside under the streetlights on the corner of Spring and Crosby. Sam pulled me close—and I didn’t pull away. Call it curiosity. Or old habits dying hard. I let him wrap his arms around me and I savored

this old, familiar and comforting feeling I thought I'd lost forever.

But that was the thing, wasn't it? In his arms, I felt the old and familiar and comforting. And these days I knew exciting, thrilling, and utterly wonderful.

I knew Sam was going to kiss me. It would be like another first kiss. I was nervous. Did I want this? Or not?

His mouth pressed down on mine before I had decided what I wanted. He pulled me closer into his embrace. But instead of feeling wanted and cherished, I just felt stifled. This was something I had wanted for so long but now it didn't feel right anymore. I tried to break free of his embrace—I need to breathe. It was a moment before he let me go.

“Sam, stop,” I said insistently. He stopped.

“I know—we're on the street where anyone can see,” Sam said, even though that wasn't it at all. “Want to come back to my hotel, Jane? It'll be just like old times.”

I felt another text message come through. I didn't have to look to know who sent it or what it said. I knew it was Duke.

“Not tonight, Sam. I'm not saying no forever. Just not tonight.”

There was something I had to take care of first. His name was Duke Austen, and I needed to personally deliver a piece of my mind. He was ruining my date, and possibly my life.

Sam insisted that I get in a cab—which I did. But two blocks later I told the driver to take me to Bowery and Bond instead of Fifteenth Street and Eighth Avenue. As he sped off into the night, I gave in and checked my phone. Another sexy picture from the bad boy billionaire that vanished before my eyes. It was time to reply. In person.

### *Duke's Penthouse Apartment*

I stormed into his apartment the second the elevator doors opened and launched into my tirade, having worked myself

into quite a state on the ride over and during the length of the elevator ride.

“What are you thinking to interrupt my date like that?”

“Hey Janet,” Duke said, looking up from his computer. “I was hoping you’d reply with a picture but the real thing is so much better.”

“My name is Jane.”

“Aw, I’m just trying to be cute. Besides, the name Sweater Set just doesn’t work for you in that dress.”

He stood up and came over to greet me, sliding his hand around my waist and pulling me flush against him. I couldn’t help it: I sighed. The man just did things to me.

“What are we doing?” I gasped as Duke started kissing my neck.

“Skipping over everything until we get to the naughty bits,” he murmured. I shivered from feeling his breath steal across the sensitive skin of my neck.

“Did you really read my book? Or just the sex scenes?”

“Yeah, I read it all,” he said, pulling back. “I couldn’t put it down. I read it when I should have been interviewing developers, meeting with my sales team and a hundred other things that would bring me closer to everything I ever wanted. You see, Janet, I thought you were a good girl but it turns out you’re all kinds of trouble.”

“Me?” I had to laugh. I’d never had a detention, or broken the law, or even gotten a speeding ticket.

“And you know what they say about me and trouble,” Duke said with that impossibly seductive grin of his. He pulled me close again and this time I didn’t resist, but placed my palms on the hot skin of his bare chest. I felt his heart beating.

“They say you and trouble are notoriously inseparable,” I answered softly.

My own heart was pounding, and I felt my blood thrumming through my veins. I felt desire taking over, too.

There was a tightness inside and heat and a driving need to feel his hands all over my body and to feel him deep inside of me. I breathed him in and his scent made me feel more intoxicated than I already was.

Old Jane played by the rules. But tonight, I was new Jane. I was trouble. And I was going to break the rules. This wasn't getting together or some meaningful and significant lovemaking, this was me in a sexy dress, having drunk some wine, and wanting to lose myself with this hot guy. Just for one night. To hell with the consequences.

My heart was pounding. Did I mention that? It set a wicked rhythm I couldn't resist. My whole world was suddenly nothing more than the bump bump bump of my heart. I felt it like I felt a thick, heavy bass line thumping in the club. Felt it in my chest, in my belly, and lower.

Duke hadn't even touched me yet.

I knew what was about to happen.

I reached out and traced one fingertip from the hollow of his throat, down along the soft skin of chest, savoring the taut planes of his muscles before dipping lower still, until I stroked along the edge of skin where his jeans hit.

He grabbed my wrist when I started to fumble with the button.

With a firm grasp, he started taking a few steps back, pulling me with him.

"Where are we going?"

He replied only with another wicked, roguish grin. No words were necessary for me to understand that we weren't going to the bedroom, but that he was still going to make love to me.

Did I mention the pounding heat? Add dizziness. And breathlessness.

Carefully stepping one foot in front of the other, I followed his lead through the large living area, around the couch. Duke

paused in the doorway to the wraparound terrace, the city all lit up behind him.

“Outside?”

“Let’s give you something to write about.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“The lady needs to be persuaded,” he mused. With a little tug of my wrist I stumbled forward on my high heels and fell against his bare chest. He slid one hand around my waist, holding me flush against him.

Then he claimed my mouth for the kind of kiss that was relentless, devastating, powerful and all-consuming. Our tongues tangled, our breath mingled, and with just this kiss we were one. This was the sort of kiss girls dreamed of—when they were drunk and uninhibited. I lost myself to him, to that kiss. I felt my bones turn to molten liquid. My muscles surrendered, and I melted against him.

He leaned against the sliding glass doorframe. I leaned against him. The wind whipped behind him, tousling his hair.

“C’mon,” he murmured, tugging me out onto the terrace, which had tons of small trees and plants in containers, making it feel almost like a garden. It was a hot summer night with a warm breeze stealing over the city, slipping between the high-rise buildings and low historic structures. All of it was lit up, and loud and full of millions of people in the midst of their own dramas. And yet, it felt like there was no one else in the world except for me and my bad boy billionaire.

Still locked in an embrace, Duke led the way over to the very edge. He spun me around so my back was to the city.

He placed my hands on the railing behind me.

“Don’t move,” he ordered.

Then he sank to his knees before me.

My panties were gone in an instant. My attention was drawn to the exquisite sensation of his open palms skimming up the inside of my legs.



“You look hot in these heels, Jane.”

“Good, because they hurt like hell.”

“You won’t notice in a minute. I promise. I’ll make you forget the pain.”

There was another kind of pain occupying my mind. The pain of searing hot and shimmering desire ricocheting through me with just the touch of his hands.

He teased my inner thighs. With his thumb, he started tracing delicate circles around my clit. The pressure was light, so light I was desperate for more.

“Please,” I whispered. I feared it was lost in the wind because he just kept tormenting me with that light touch and hot, open-mouthed kisses on the sensitive skin of my inner thighs.

And then he slid one finger inside me. I gasped. Another. I gasped again.

He stroked me, stirring the flames of desire. My head fell back and I gazed up at the New York City skyline. I couldn’t see stars, but I saw all the sparkling lights of airplanes and skyscrapers.

Duke, still teasing me like crazy with his fingers, pressed his mouth against my sex and I just about lost it, shouting out my pleasure from the rooftops.

The world was happening all around us. No one, I was sure, really bothered to notice.

And then between the wicked touch of his fingers and the even more wicked caress of his mouth, I just—I just gave up. My knees started to buckle but he held me up. Breathing—who needed to breathe? Who could draw a breath in circumstances like this? I was dizzy, so dizzy and vaguely afraid of falling off this building . . . or totally in love.

Was that the worst fate?

Duke was relentless and in the end there was nothing to do but give in to the pressure and revel in the explosion of pleasure. I cried out and the sound was lost in the sounds of

the city—the blare of taxi horns, the shouts of drunk revelers on the street, the wail of ambulances. I'd been shaken to my core and still, the city kept going.

Duke stood. I gazed up at him. His face was so stark in this light—my eyes were drawn to the sharp slant of his cheekbones, the sensuous curve of his upper lip, the darkness in his eyes, his hair, tousled by the wind. I reached up to thread my fingers through his hair. Again, he caught my wrist. Again, he didn't let go.

Instead, he spun me around so I was looking out over the edge.

“Oh God,” I gasped as I looked down too many stories to count.

“Shhh,” he murmured into my ear. “I'm holding onto you. I won't let you go.”

Duke pressed hot, open-mouthed kisses along the back of my neck. Then he shoved up my skirt. I teetered on towering heels, held steady only by the firm grasp of his hands on my hips.

He moved against me, and even though I had just had a core-shaking orgasm, I was ready to go again.

In a mercifully quick moment, he unzipped his jeans and slid on a condom. And then I felt the rock-hard length of him pulsing against my clit. Lord help me, I moaned.

Duke leaned over me, nibbling on my earlobe, pressing kisses on my neck, caressing my hip and teasing me again with his fingers. Back and forth. In and out. All around. I was going mad. Mad!

“You're so ready for me Jane,” he murmured.

“I'm well aware of that,” I gasped. “Really fucking aware.”

He laughed softly and the rush of his breath across my skin was yet another sensation that was somehow magnified until the point of being nearly unbearable.

And then, when I couldn't stand the wait anymore, he was inside of me with one smooth thrust. I gave a shout.

His cock filled me up. I turned my head—we kissed, the sort of passionate, distracted, tooth-clinking-against-tooth kiss that had happened when you were both overcome with the rhythm of in and out and in and out and in and out. His hands skimmed up my front, closing around my breasts. I moaned. It was too much. All of it—his hands on me, his cock inside me, the city all around us . . . I couldn't hold on for much longer.

He took my nipples in between his fingertips, the pressure making them stiffen into hard peaks. Oh, God. Oh, Duke.

It could have been hours. It could have been minutes. It could have been years. However long it was, I ceased to exist and he did, too. We were one, tied together with pleasure, crying out above the city.

Our cries as we came together were lost in the noise of the city. With heavy-lidded eyes, I gazed around. People . . . all around . . . living their lives on Saturday night. I looked over the edge, down a dizzying number of stories to the city street below.

“I got you, Jane,” he murmured.

“Never let me go,” I whispered.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### *Freeman's Restaurant*

#### *A few days later*

I met Roxanna after work for a quick bite to eat before we headed over to a party on the private roof deck of her office's building. It had to be noted that there was a chance Duke would be there. It had to be noted that because of that possibility, I spent a ridiculous amount of time trying to come up with the perfect outfit.

And then, of course, something came up at work at the last minute ensuring that I didn't have time to head home and change. I went straight to the restaurant wearing my work clothes: a charcoal pencil skirt, black silk camisole and thin black cashmere cardigan. Strappy silver kitten heels. My hair was pulled into a ponytail.

First, Roxanna handed me the glass of wine she had gone ahead and ordered. Then she said, "So Duke might be there."

"Oh?" She didn't buy my innocent act and rolled her eyes.

"You know he's always invited to these things. And I bet he'll assume that because of my job and thus being practically required to attend, there's a chance that I will insist you come with me."

"I'm avoiding him," I confided.

"Is that what you did the other night? Avoided him?"

“Shut up.”

“Did you avoid him with a passion?” Roxanna asked, grinning devilishly.

“I mean it, Roxanna. I was tipsy and emotional and it just happened. But now I’m setting boundaries. I will not be his secret lover and mistress while he’s married to his work. Besides, Sam got an offer from NYU.”

Roxanna nodded politely and then carried on with her ridiculousness.

“Did avoiding him bring you to dizzying heights of pleasure?”

“Where’s the waiter?” I asked, looking around. “I’m ready to order.”

“What do you fancy? A hot billionaire and multiple orgasms?”

Roxanna laughed and I bit back a grin.

“Are you done yet?”

“For the moment.”

“So in spite of my best intentions, I didn’t avoid him. He wants me to give up my writing and just be his . . . secret mistress of pleasure.”

“There’s the title for your next book.”

“I was thinking *Wallflower Gone Wild*, actually.”

“I like it. Even better, I like the research it will require.” Roxanna then grinned and listed some historically appropriate wild behavior. “What are we going to do? Show some ankle? Spike the punch? Ravish some handsome gentlemen? You know, for research.”

“That’s what the other night was. Research. I was experimenting with breaking all the rules, ignoring my better judgment, being spontaneous and listening to my desire instead of my brain.”

“And how did that work out for you?”

“It was good at the time. The silence that has followed? Not so good. I really have to avoid him, Roxanna. And *my* definition of avoid, not yours.”

After dinner we made our way over to the party, walking slowly so that we could check out all the shop windows on Elizabeth and Mulberry streets.

“So listen . . .” Roxanna began. “If a devastatingly handsome British guy starts talking to us, I need you to disappear.”

“Who is this devastatingly handsome British guy?”

“My boss.”

“Roxanna . . .” I nudged her and grinned and she actually blushed and looked away.

“My boss’s boss, technically.”

“I suppose you have an urgent business matter that must be discussed tonight or else a global catastrophe will result.”

“I’m so glad you understand.”

“And by business matter I mean—”

“OK, stop talking. We’re here, and I cannot have anyone overhear this conversation,” Roxanna said. She pushed open a non-descript door and we started climbing three incredibly steep flights of stairs. We passed through amazingly sleek and modern offices before continuing up another flight of stairs. And then onward to the roof.

It was a warm and bright city night and we could see it all from the roof deck. Hundreds of people were crowded in. A DJ was spinning and a few people were dancing though most stood around in conversation.

We fought the crowd at the bar and got drinks—whisky for Roxanna and a vodka tonic for me. I eyed the guys standing around us. Like Duke, they all wore T-shirts advertising their startups, or plaid shirts and skinny jeans. I bet they all worked in tech and many of them were probably developers.

“C’mon, let’s go chat to hot guys with stock options,” Roxanna said, drawing us over to a group standing near the edge of the roof. They were cute. Definitely cute. I realized that I had gotten so used to being a wallflower and a nobody that I was taken aback when these guys recognized me after Roxanna performed introductions.

“You’re Jane Sparks? *The Jane Sparks?*” A guy named Adam asked incredulously.

“The one who wrote that smutty book about Duke Austen?” asked a brainy guy with thick black-framed glasses.

I hesitated. Then I answered. “Yes.”

To my surprise they all had tons of questions about what was real and what wasn’t, how much research I did, how it was selling, what self-publishing was like, and a dozen other questions about writing the book. That lasted five minutes; then they asked me questions about Duke and Project-TK. As I tried to answer, I noticed Roxanna’s gaze roaming around the roof deck.

When she stood up straighter, smiled and tossed her red hair over her shoulder, I followed her gaze to a tall, distinguished-looking gentleman. He came over toward us and Roxanna performed the introductions.

“Jane, this is Damien Knightly. This is my friend Jane.”

“How do you do?” He asked politely in a British accent. I could see why Roxanna was smitten. He was handsome, mysterious and had a sexy accent.

“Nice to meet you,” I replied. “If you excuse me, I need to find the ladies room.”

I wandered off through the crowds, trying to keep my gaze low. And then the crowd parted and there was no way I could miss him. Duke: beer in hand, wearing a black T-shirt that said “Feel my Chartbeat” with dark, broken in jeans, and chatting with a bunch of people. Then he turned, saw me, and smiled, and the sight of him took my breath away.

He stepped away from the group and walked over to me.

“Hey there, Sweater Set.”

“Hello, Duke.”

“So is your father a thief?” Duke asked, apropos of nothing.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, utterly confused. Duke just grinned and said, “Because he must have taken the sparkle from the stars and put them in your eyes.”

I burst out laughing. “Really? Is this how you chat up girls at parties?”

He just grinned and kept going with the bad pickup lines. “Hey, Jane. Can you give me directions?”

“To where?” I asked nervously.

“To your heart,” he said half sweetly, half joking. I couldn’t help but smile.

“Is it not on Google maps?” I inquired.

“I tried using Apple Maps. Maybe that’s the problem,” he said.

“I’m sure you can find the way,” I said softly.

“I wondered if I might see you here,” he said, smiling down at me.

“I’m with Roxanna.”

“Your gossipy friend.”

“She’s not the only one gossiping,” I said as I became aware of a hush stealing over the rooftop. Everyone was staring. I dropped my voice and said, “I think everyone else is talking about us right now.”

“Fuck ’em,” he muttered in that devil-may-care manner of his that I admired and envied—and that caused him a lot of trouble.

“What happened to your reputation above all else?” I asked. “What happened to Project-TK needing you to be at work 24/7?”



I was achingly aware of the distance between us—a few feet, very respectable. I was also achingly aware of how much I wanted to close that distance. “Wanted” wasn’t quite the right word, though. I had never really understood magnetism until this moment. I was helplessly drawn to him and it took all of my strength to fight the inevitable.

“So it’s not working out like I planned,” he said.

“That’s a bummer. I’ve found I sometimes need to delete a few pages.”

“Same with code,” he replied. “But I mean you, Jane, and this.” He gestured vaguely to the distance between us and I understood.

He was securing his fortune and his glory. I was writing another book that would cause another scandal when I published it. Professionally, we were both achieving more than we’d ever dreamed. This was exactly what we wanted, wasn’t it?

“Too bad we can’t cut and rewrite in real life,” I said.

“How much would you delete?”

“Hmm . . . I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about it.”

“God, I just want to touch you,” he said softly.

“If you touch me now . . .” I said warningly.

“Then everyone will start talking and tweeting about it and they’ll forget about that other thing you do.”

“But if I walk away . . .”

“Then I’ll be lonely tonight,” he said softly, with a sad smile. More than anything, I wanted to run my fingers through his dark, tousled hair and press my lips to his. “But I know, it’s for my own good. So see you later, Sweater Set.”

This time, when he said the words, his voice sounded bittersweet. We both faded back into the crowds. I wandered around looking for Roxanna, but she must have left with that guy. It was a lovely night and I wasn’t quite ready to go home,

so I got another drink. And just as I was stepping back from the bar, I bumped into Duke, spilling my drink.

“If you spill on your shirt, you should probably remove said shirt,” he suggested with a naughty smile. “Right here. Right now.”

“Or I’d have to go home immediately. Alone,” I replied.

“And then take your shirt off,” Duke said. Relentless. “So let’s condense those lines of code and get to the end result. You, and your shirt off.”

“You are ridiculous,” I said. But God, I missed him. And this is why it was dangerous for me to see him: because I forgot about love and thought only about lust. And really, I couldn’t give up on my career for a guy.

For a moment we just stood there. Gazes locked. There was so much to *say*. All sorts of heartfelt feelings and intense, relentless longing for his touch. My gaze dropped to his mouth and then I only thought of one thing.

“What were you thinking about?” Duke asked.

“Oh, silly female thoughts about feelings.”

“Is that all?” he asked, as if he could read my mind.

“And kissing,” I answered softly. Even though I was thinking of more than that: I compared his kiss to Sam’s. There was no comparison.

“Kissing is not a silly female thought,” Duke answered.

“No?”

“You should do it more often,” he said, his voice grave. “Do you know what’s even better than thinking about it?” the question was punctuated with a lift of his brow and a slight upturn of his lips.

“Actually kissing.” When I answered my voice was breathless. His gaze dropped to my mouth.

“Exactly,” he murmured.

At that moment, someone stepped in to talk to Duke—that’s how it was being out with him. Everyone wanted to be his friend, pitch their startup, inquire about a job at Project-TK or ask his advice. I remembered the way he moved through the crowd at a party on the first night I saw him—everyone reached out to talk to him and he swaggered through like he was Someone. As always, he was generous with his time and thoughts, always willing to engage in conversation with new people. I admired that.

It also gave me an excuse to wander away.

To my surprise, I stumbled into Roxanna.

“I thought you left. With that guy.”

“He left,” she said. And then, glancing around to ensure no one was listening, she said, “And I’m leaving in a few minutes.”

“Want to split a cab home?”

“You’re so sweet, but no way,” Roxanna said with a wicked grin. “I’m not going home.”

“I guess your night is only just beginning,” I said slyly. “Now remember, tonight is a school night.”

Roxanna laughed and said, “Talk to me for ten more minutes and then I’ll make my exit. And what will you do?”

I glanced into the crowd. I saw Duke. He saw me. Our gazes locked. For a moment I didn’t notice anything else—not the other people, or the city skyline all lit up. For a moment I felt like one of my heroines. Shy, always standing off to the side, and oh-so-tempted. And also stuck between my own desires, the “right” thing to do and what everyone would think.

“I’m going home, too,” I told Roxanna. A little bit later, I was just about to leave when I noticed my name. They were projecting tweets about the party up on the windowless wall of a nearby building. On another wall, they were projecting a live video stream of the party. Both were so big and bright they could surely be seen by everyone at this party as well as everyone on the street, and anyone with a view of those walls.

It was the tweets that caught my attention.

**At #GawkerRoof party with @DukeAusten and his “fiancée” @Jane\_Sparks. Waiting to see if sparks fly.**

**Amused watching @DukeAusten and his girl try to avoid each other on the #GawkerRoof.**

I turned around, back to the wall. And then I saw Duke. He was leaning against the railing with the New York City skyline illuminated behind him.

There was no denying it: The sight took my breath away. There was no one like him and nothing like this city. Together they were an intoxicating combination.

I strolled over. I blamed magnetism.

“What if I changed my mind?” Duke asked.

“Did you?” I asked.

“Did *you*?” He echoed.

“I’m writing another book,” I told him.

“What’s this one about?”

“Another wallflower. She’s been far too good for far too long. It’s gotten her nothing but this awful fiancé and she’s trying desperately to get out of the engagement.”

“Why would she want to do that?” he asked softly. We weren’t just talking about my characters anymore.

“Because she wants real love,” I explained. “True love. Shout it from the rooftops love.”

“Given that we’re on a rooftop, is that a hint? Should I shout out my love for you from this rooftop, right now?”

“Only if you meant it. Or else if you didn’t . . .”

“You know, I’ve been working like crazy. We’ve started prepping for an IPO.”

“Congratulations.”

“You don’t get what that means, do you?” There was a spark in his eye that made my heart beat faster. “Once the bell rings at the stock exchange, I don’t have to worry about what anyone thinks anymore.”

I got it. Oh, I got it. Once that bell rang, he’d be a billionaire. He’d have broken the curse. He’d be free to do whatever he wanted—like be with me. For real.

“And then what will you do?” I asked, linking my finger around the belt loop of his jeans.

Duke lowered his head. I turned my face up to his. His lips claimed mine for a delicate, tentative kiss.

If I grabbed a fistful of his Chartbeat T-shirt and pulled him closer . . .

If we didn’t have to worry about what people thought anymore . . .

I’d feel his rock-hard body against mine.

If I felt his body against mine, I’d start to lose my mind and everyone at this party would start talking about it. There would be a video online of me losing control and I’d never live it down.

Duke cupped my face in his hands, holding me gently like I was the most precious thing in the world. My hands slid down the length of his chest, down along his back to rest against his ass. Urging him against me I felt just how much he wanted me. I sighed, desperate to satiate my desire for him.

My lust for Duke had a way destroying my best intentions and annihilating my better intentions.

If I went home with him now . . .

Then I’d be breaking all our rules.

Why, why, why did that have to make everything so much more appealing? The good girl thing to do would be to

disentangle myself immediately and put myself in a cab.

“What if I do this?” Duke whispered as his hands slid under my silk camisole to caress my bare skin.

“Then I’d find it harder to say no,” I moaned.

“What if I do this?”

“You’d cause a scene,” I murmured. “We *are* causing a scene.”

“Shhh. So what if we did?” He gazed into my eyes. Our faces were just inches away. Our lips were so, so close.

“I would sell more books and get rich and more successful at your expense. You would piss off Augustus. You might lose everything you ever worked for.”

“What if I don’t want it like I used to?”

“If that were true, then I’d say take me home. Because I —” Oh my God, I almost said *because I love you*. “I don’t think you really mean it. I can’t let you mean it.”

“Just one last kiss until we IPO.”

His mouth claimed mine and for one exquisite moment I didn’t say no. I said *yes*.

And that’s when the crowd erupted in cheers. I turned around to see everyone at the party applauding, cheering and watching us. I gazed up only to see that the camera had been projecting Duke and I up onto the wall. Everyone at the party saw. Everyone on the street could see it, too. One glance at the wall broadcasting the tweets confirmed it: dozens and dozens of tweets were being posted, along with *twit.pic* links and vines. All of them include hashtags like #GetARoom, #SuckingFace or #KissMeBabyOneMoreTime.

This was a disaster. In real time.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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*The next day*

From the moment I opened my eyes and realized that I had slept through my alarm, I knew it was going to be one of those days. I had lost my mind last night. Blame it on the wine, blame it on the vodka, blame it on pheromones, an insane and potent attraction, or whatever. I had acted recklessly.

It'd been late when I got home. Even later when I finally drifted off to sleep.

Thus, I slept through my alarm. I quickly jumped out of bed, and stumbled into the kitchen. It seemed Roxanna hadn't come home, so I started a pot of coffee and got into the shower and rushed through my morning routine in an effort to get to work on time.

So I didn't see Page Six of the *New York Post* until I was waiting for the subway. The businessman next to me had the page open to my favorite gossip column and the headline caught my eye: ***Silicon Alley's Bad Boy Billionaire Makes a Scene with His "Fiancée."***

One day I would like to be his fiancée, not his "fiancée."

A girl could dream.

A girl could also, as surreptitiously as possible, lean over the shoulder of this businessman and try to read the rest of the column.

Proving he still puts the “bad boy” in billionaire, Duke Austen caused a stir at a party on the Gawker Roof last night when he was caught on camera making out with Jane Sparks, librarian by day, published romance novelist under the pseudonym Maya Rodale and “it’s complicated” fiancée of tech’s newest titan in the making.

“It didn’t look complicated,” said a source. “They kept running into each other all night and eventually they couldn’t keep their hands off each other.”

The couple broke up after Sparks’ publication of *The Wicked Wallflower*, which many took to be a confession that she and Austen faked their relationship in order to secure funding for his company, Project-TK. Many assumed art imitated life and that their relationship was fake. Until last night.

There was another paragraph left in the article when the businessman’s subway arrived. He snapped the paper shut and boarded the train. I stood on the platform tapping my high heels until my own train rolled into the station. Then I made a beeline for a seat next to someone reading the *Post*. I waited and waited and waited until she turned to Page Six and then I scanned the page to pick up where I had left off.

“When the camera projected the video of them kissing on the wall, everyone started cheering,” says a source. Numerous videos of the incident are on YouTube, each with a few hundred thousand views so you can see for yourself: are they faking it?

“Whether they’re faking or it not isn’t really the issue,” says a source close to Austen. “Augustus Grey hates that Duke’s personal life overshadows Project-TK, especially when they’re laying the groundwork for an IPO. I wouldn’t be surprised if Augustus asked the board to fire him.”

When the train stopped at 42nd Street, I numbly stepped off and climbed the stairs up to street level. In a daze, I walked crosstown through Bryant Park on my way to the library.

I just wanted to love him. I tried to stay away because I wanted him to succeed. And with just one kiss I might have



ruined everything.

*Might have.* I turned to Twitter to see if there was confirmation one way or another. My heart sank when I saw the tweet from TechCrunch.

**@TechCrunch: Bad Boy Billionaire Duke Austen given ultimatum: stay off Page Six or get out of Project-TK <http://bit.ly/1hi0Yzi>**

Of course I clicked through to the article.

### **Will Project-TK IPO Without Its\_\_Bad Boy Founder?**

They called him the Bad Boy Billionaire because he lost a billion bucks and his two previous companies tanked. Now the name fits because Duke Austen just can't stay out of trouble—or the gossip columns. Last night, he was caught on camera making out with his “fiancée.”

“We all thought their relationship was fake after *that book* of hers,” says a source. “But maybe not. They looked pretty into it.”

Either way, Augustus Grey is once again royally pissed that Duke is once again making headlines for his personal life instead of the accomplishments of his company.

“Yeah, it sucks that our work doesn't get recognized,” says a member of his team, “It'd be nice to read about our products instead of his stupid romantic drama.”

Sources also tell us that Augustus Grey called an emergency meeting with the board of directors this

morning. After a tense, 45 minute meeting, Austen was called in. Word has it that Austen was given an ultimatum: stay out of the gossip columns or stay out of Project-TK.

I felt sick to my stomach as I read it on my iPhone while standing outside of the library.

After heaving a sigh, I dropped my phone into my M.Z. Wallace bag (a splurge I expected to pay off when my first royalty check arrived) and headed into work.

I had only just started shelving books when I overheard someone asking for me. Glancing up, I recognized the woman. After a moment, I placed her. She had inquired with the guard about me before. In fact, my co-workers had told me she'd come by a few times asking to talk to me. Assuming she was a reporter, I ducked behind a bookshelf and peeked out to hear how Tina, my co-worker, would respond to her.

"Jane is shelving books," Tina said with an impatient sigh, pushing her glasses up. "You'll just have to walk around and look for her."

"Thanks, Tina," I muttered.

The next thirty minutes were spent in a delicate waltz in which the reporter roamed the aisle searching for me and I tried to shelve the books on my cart while avoiding her.

In the end, it was inevitable.

She found me in the section on New York City history.

"Jane Sparks?"

I looked up at her. She was a plain woman with a peevish expression on her face. She probably didn't give a crap about me, or my romantic drama, or any of it. She was only here to get story and get out.

I debated giving her a fake name. But then I didn't, because if she was going to get a story, I wanted her to have mine. In fact, in a sudden surge of inspiration, I knew exactly what story to give her. If Duke was going to be on Page Six

after that ultimatum, it would be in a way that would save him, not destroy him.

“I’m Jane Sparks. How can I help you?”

“Nancy Andrews. *New York Post*. You’re not wearing your engagement ring.”

“Excuse me?”

She gestured to my hand. The cubic zirconia stunner wasn’t on my ring finger, but at home in my jewelry box. I stopped wearing it ever since we had declared our relationship “complicated.”

“I guess it’s gone from it’s complicated to it’s over,” she said frankly, and a little bit heartlessly. “But then again, considering what happened last night, it might not be over. Could you tell me what’s up with your relationship with Duke Austen?”

“Sure, and if *I* knew I’d be happy to tell you,” I replied.

“Hmmp.”

Not big on the humor, that Nancy Andrews of the *New York Post*.

“I just need to ask you a few questions,” she repeated.

I hesitated. Duke valued his privacy and so did I. If I gave a story to Nancy Andrews, it would be all over the *Post* and then picked up by other news outlets. He’d probably be pissed and my book sales would get another bump. Augustus Grey would be even more pissed and I might inadvertently screw Duke over with that ultimatum. No more Page Six or no more Project-TK. Hopefully this would be an exception.

Unless . . .

“Let’s see if I can answer.”

“Excellent. Tell me how you met Duke Austen.”

“A chance encounter in Central Park.” I replied without missing a beat.

“That gazebo in the rainstorm story was true?” Nancy looked at me skeptically.

“Yes,” I lied. OMG I lied! To a reporter!

“This on the record, you know,” Nancy said, frowning at me and fixing her perspicacious brown eyes on mine. And I had that feeling I had in tenth grade when Mr. Spalding wanted to know if I was chewing gum. I couldn’t just swallow it and say *no*. I had to confess and get a lecture in front of the whole class.

But not this time. This time the success of my true love was on the line. I figured it was a greater cause. So I lied. Wow, was I living dangerously on the edge or what?

“I am aware this is on the record,” I said, tipping my chin up with determination.

“And is it true you two have broken up? Or is it still just complicated?”

“Yes, we broke up,” I said, even though we hadn’t really. But this interview was my chance to save him from himself. I just had to have faith that it would all work out in the end. “When it came down to it, nothing matters more to Duke Austen than Project-TK, and he was prepared to make whatever sacrifices necessary to make it a success. Including me.”

Tears stung my eyes. They were not entirely fake. I blinked quite a few times to make sure Nancy Andrews noticed and wrote it down in her notebook.

“Did he break up with you because of your book?”

“We really just wanted to focus on our careers at the moment and my book did prove to be an unanticipated distraction.”

“Does art imitate life?”

“You mean, did Duke and I fake our relationship?”

“Glad you get my point.”

“What we had was real. And special. And beautiful. I wouldn’t give up a minute of it.”

I couldn’t help but remember the first time I laid eyes on him. It was at a party in this very room, in fact. I could tell he was Someone. I just didn’t know what a significant role he would play in my life. Sam was right—we held each other back. Duke and I—what we had was an attraction so powerful that it could either destroy us or save us.

“Who do you date now after you’ve dated the bad boy billionaire?” Nancy asked gruffly. My thoughts flitted to Sam.

“Like I said, Duke and I broke up so we could focus on our work. He and his team are building something really amazing with their new product. And I’m working on a new book, called *Wallflower Gone Wild*.”

“Way to get reporters off your back with that one,” Nancy said in a deadpanned tone that indicated exactly the opposite. “I suppose we can count on outrageous antics from you as research, right?”

“Again, it’s all fiction,” I said evenly.

“Except your love. That was real, right?”

“Was,” I said. “It’s over now. Duke Austen broke up with me so he could be 100 percent focused on Project-TK.”

And then I turned away. My hands were shaky as I returned the books to the shelves.

“Thanks for the story, Ms. Sparks,” Nancy called out over her shoulder as she walked away.

“Shhh,” I whispered under my breath.

*258 West 15th Street, Jane and Roxanna’s Apartment*

The next morning, I was on the cover of the *New York Post*. Nancy or some other photographer had caught me leaving the

library. The headline: **Jilted Romance Author Tells All About The Bad Boy Billionaire Who Broke Her Heart**

Roxanna and I read it over breakfast. By breakfast I mean coffee. I should also note that we didn't sit down—we stood side by side with the paper spread out before us on the kitchen counter.

Nancy had portrayed me as a tragic heroine who lost her true love to his work. She painted Duke as a brilliant man so devoted to his company that he would sacrifice the real love of a good woman. All in all, it couldn't have been a better article than if I had written it myself.

I only hope Augustus Grey saw it.

And Duke.

I hope he saw and understood this little Valentine.

“Way to manipulate the media, Jane. I'm so proud,” Roxanna said, pretending to wipe tears from her eyes. “First thing this morning I'll post a blog about this which will make sure *everyone* sees it.”

“Everyone being Augustus and Duke, I hope.”

“This bit is a particular gem,” Roxanna said. Then she began to read from the article. “*Ms. Sparks seems genuinely anguished, calling into question the rumors that they faked their engagement. Rumors which started, it should be noted, with the publication of her book, The Wicked Wallflower. Readers desperate to know more about the on-going drama with the bad boy billionaire and the librarian/romance novelist may want to pick up her next book, Wallflower Gone Wild.*”

“I couldn't resist a little shameless self promotion,” I confessed with a sigh. “I wonder what Duke will think.”

“If he's not a complete moron, he'll think you're the best thing that ever happened to him. He owes you waaaay more than just a date to your high school reunion.”

“Haha,” I said with a shrug. “That. I had kind of forgotten.”

Roxanna looked at me incredulously and then smacked the invitation that had been stuck to our refrigerator.

“You forgot about this? Your desperation for a date to your ten-year high school reunion started this whole drama.”

“Actually . . .” I was about to point out that she started this whole drama with her Facebook post announcing my engagement to Duke. I was distracted by a text message. “It’s a text from Duke. It says ‘thanks babe.’”

“If you love something, set them free,” Roxanna quipped. “I’m off to work. Another day, another drama to write about on the Internet. Drinks at Bar Veloce after work?”

After that, Duke all but disappeared from social media. Every morning he checked in at the offices of Project-TK, often at the unfathomably early hour of 7 a.m. or even earlier. I had to wonder if he even left at the end of the day. One night I was out with Roxanna and some other friends on the Bowery. Looked up. His windows were dark. I thought about throwing pebbles up, as if in an old-fashioned romance. But there weren’t many pebbles laying around on the Bowery and even if there were, no way was I going to throw high enough to hit the windows of his penthouse apartment.

Instead, I went home and wrote. I fell into a new routine with each day: work at the library, drinks or take-out with Roxanna, followed by late nights writing a new novel. My heroine was caught up in a relationship that forced her to choose between her dreams and happiness and her reputation. She started acting out and testing boundaries in the hopes of finding herself—kind of like me. But she kept coming back to her hero. Kind of like me.

I didn’t know how my love story would end, but I had hope I’d have the happily-ever-after I wrote for my heroine.

Whatever longing I felt for Duke, I channeled into my book.

*“What are you thinking?” Phinn asked.*

*“Kissing,” Olivia said softly. Because young ladies do not think of kissing. They especially do not compare the mouths and kisses of two different gentlemen, especially when one was not her husband.*

*“Kissing is not a silly female thought,” Phinn said in a low voice.*

*“No?”*

*“You should do it more often,” he said, his voice grave. “Even better than thinking about it . . .”*

*“Actually kissing?” Her voice was breathless. Her gaze dropped to his mouth. They hadn’t kissed. Not yet.*

*“Exactly,” he murmured, before lowering his mouth to hers for a light caress of his lips against hers. She felt a spark. This. Then he pulled back. A young lady would blush modestly and leave it at that. But Olivia was making her own rules now and she wanted to know this man she had married. Having had a taste of a damn fine kiss that was more than she’d ever dreamed of, she wanted to know if she’d ever have a kiss like that again. She wanted to know now.*

*She lightly traced her finger along his jacket before holding on to a handful and pulling him closer. He didn’t resist. Their mouths met again. Tentatively, she parted her lips, not caring if he found her wanton or forward. She wanted to kiss him deeply. This—the delicate caress of lips, a nibble here, tracing the seam of her lips there—was driving her mad . . . in a wonderful way. This tease of a kiss made that initial spark turn into a smolder. Who knows what fire might have started had the carriage not rolled to a stop?*

*Olivia looked at Phinn, dazed. He looked at her with darkened eyes.*

*Words weren’t necessary. This was not over.*



## CHAPTER NINE

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### *Washington Square Park*

*A few weeks later*

**I**t was one of those gorgeous late August end-of-Summer-almost-Autumn days that made it impossible to stay inside. So when Sam texted asking me to meet him for coffee in the park, of course I said yes. And put on a chambray cotton summer dress and nude patent sandals and went to go meet him.

We hadn't seen each other since our dinner at Balthazar a few weeks earlier, though we had kept in touch online. Today we met around ten in the morning on Saturday and found seats on a bench around the fountain. Nearby, a guy had dragged out a grand piano from God knows where and played classical music. Around us children played and frolicked in the fountain, dogs sniffed all the plants and flowers in bloom, homeless guys slept on the grass, and all kinds of people strolled by. I glanced to the right and saw the famous arch, a look to the left and the low historic buildings of Greenwich Village stretched before me.

“So I have news,” I said.

“Are you back together with your billionaire?” Sam asked.

“No. But I got a call from an editor at HarperCollins. She wants to publish my novels.”

“That’s fantastic, Jane.” Sam smiled. “Look at you: a fancy New York published author.”

“It was quite a surprise but I’m really excited about it,” I said. Part of me thought about downplaying this achievement because Sam had been the one to plan on writing and publishing books. But here I was with the three-book deal from a top New York publisher. If my heroine, Olivia, taught me anything, it was not to downplay my own feelings and achievements. So I added, “Soon my books will be in print in bookstores everywhere.”

“That’s really fantastic, Jane. I’m happy for you,” he said. But was he? I couldn’t tell. Then he changed the subject. “So I also have news.”

“Oh?” I inquired, sipping my iced latte.

I braced myself for news of his engagement to Kate Abbott.

“NYU offered me a position in their English department.”

“Oh wow, congratulations! That’s amazing.”

That’s what I said. Here’s what I felt: nothing, bordering on dismay. Was this city big enough for me and my ex? I didn’t know. I didn’t want to know. The other strong feeling currently leaving me speechless: I still wanted Duke.

It had been weeks since my tell-all interview with the *New York Post* and thus weeks since his “thanks babe” text message. And then . . . nothing.

“You didn’t ask if I accepted.”

“Did you?”

“Does it matter to you?” There was a bitterness in his voice that caught me by surprise.

“Sam—.”

“I thought we had something, Jane. You and me.”

“If you thought that,” I began slowly, “why did you break up with me?”

“The break did us good and we both know it.”

“It’s true,” I said, and as soon as I said the words, I meant them. “To be honest, I didn’t think so at first. I was devastated. But I see now that it was for the best. Even though it hurt like hell at the time.”

“But you don’t want to get back together,” Sam said, putting into words what I was really trying to say. And when I didn’t reply he turned to look at me. “You still like that billionaire guy.”

I took a long sip of my latte.

“Are you still seeing him?”

“I haven’t seen him in a while,” I confessed. “Or heard from him.”

“Well, if he’s got all that money . . .” Sam didn’t finish that thought. But I knew what he was getting at and it stung. “It’s not like I’ll ever come close to that, even if I take this job at NYU.”

“It’s not about the money,” I said. “You and I make each other comfortable. We stagnate together. But Duke and I make each other better.”

We also gave each other have the most earth-shattering orgasms, but it felt cruel to mention that.

“So what are you going to do about it?” Sam asked. “Shouldn’t you do some grand gesture or something?”

“That’s the job of the hero. Haven’t you watched any romantic comedies?”

“First of all, I’ve seen more than I ever want to, thanks to you. And second of all, it’s the hero’s job to make a grand gesture? I’m sorry, did feminism pass you by?”

“I made my grand gesture with an interview in the *New York Post*,” I retorted. “It’s his turn now.”

On the way home, I thought about reaching out to Duke. I considered giving him a chance to read *Wallflower Gone Wild* before I published it, just to give him a preview. I considered

orchestrating some “accidental encounter” which would have been child’s play, thanks to Foursquare.

I could just see us running into each other accidentally-on-purpose at a bar or restaurant. “Oh! I didn’t see that you had checked in on Foursquare,” I would exclaim innocently, while lying through my teeth.

But I didn’t. Because that was ridiculous. And because I loved him and he needed to make a success of Project-TK. And judging from the tweets and blog posts, he was closer and closer.

Every time I had more than two glasses of wine and started talking about reaching out to Duke, Roxanna calmly confiscated my phone until the next morning when I was sober.

Life went on. The news was full of sad stories and warnings about a dire hurricane season coming up. My job kept me busy from nine to five. I worked on my books.

And then one morning, there he was. Duke.

Not in the flesh, but on Twitter. I was skimming through while waiting for the subway on my way to work. Nearly every tweet was about plans to prepare the city in event of a major storm—in looked like Hurricane Geoffrey was heading toward New York City. The city was planning to shut down—subways, buses, restaurants, even bars. Even the lights on the Empire State Building were going to darken. Amongst all the storm related news, a certain tweet caught my eye and hit me like a bolt of lightning.

**@DukeAusten: When a \$20 billion IPO isn’t everything.**

I clicked through immediately. Obvs.

The page loaded painfully, agonizingly, torturously slowly. My train arrived, and I let it roll out of the station without me. And then, finally, a blog post on DukeAusten.com loaded.

## **When a \$20 billion IPO isn't everything**

It is with enormous pride, satisfaction, relief and triumph that I announce the forthcoming \$20 billion dollar IPO for my baby, Project-TK. It's been a journey that began in my aunt's garage years ago. The story continued at Stanford and with the rise and epic fall of my two previous startups. It hasn't been easy getting to this moment. This success would never have happened without the amazing team at Project-TK. It also would not have been possible without the mostly unwavering support of Augustus Grey (aren't you glad you stuck around, old chap?).

A funny thing happened on the way to the IPO. I fell in love. Yeah, you read that right. The Bad Boy Billionaire, star of a thousand tawdry scandals, is in LOVE in all caps. Shout from the rooftops kind of love.

I fell in love with a woman who caused some unmitigated disasters. She was a distraction when I never needed to focus more. She was, in a word, trouble.

She was also my saving grace.

Her selflessness as evidence in this ridiculous *New York Post* interview set me free to devote myself to Project-TK and all the people counting on me. But now that the deals are done and there's nothing left but to ring the bell on the stock exchange . . .

Now that it's safe to say it . . .

I wish I had said these words earlier when I had everything to lose . . .

I love you Jane Sparks.

I might have shrieked. I might have jumped up and down. I looked around, mouth agape. *Did no one else on this subway platform realize the monumental thing that had just happened?* With the back of my hand, I wiped the tears from my eyes. I

turned and looked from side to side. Literally no one around me was either 1) aware of the dramatic turn of events or 2) found it remarkable that a woman would jump up and down and shriek on a subway platform or 3) gave a shit.

That was the thing about New York. The city didn't care when you were down, and it didn't care when you were up. It was simply the perfect stage upon which to live out the greatest romance imaginable.

With fumbling fingers I tried to tweet a response. And then I thought, *No, I'm an old-fashioned, historical romance kind of gal. I want to tell him in person.*

It turns out that's easier said than done.

It should be so simple: boy meets girl. Boy and girl embark on fake relationship before boy and girl inevitably fall in love and live happily ever after. If only! But I knew how these stories played out—hell, I wrote those stories. There's always a dark moment before everything turns into sunshine and roses. I knew that—I just didn't think it would happen to me.

Keep reading for an excerpt from WHEN JANE LOVED  
DUKE, the next novella in the series...

WHEN JANE LOVED DUKE



## THE FAKE ENGAGEMENT TRILOGY #3

### *Bar Veloce*

### *New York City*

“This,” I said angrily, waving my iPhone. I wanted to slam *this* down on the table, like I had done with the paper invitation to my high school reunion earlier this summer. But I wasn’t about to risk breaking my iPhone over the Paperless Post invitation intruding upon my inbox.

I settled for firmly placing my phone on the bar. It just wasn’t the same.

Roxanna reached for it, her red manicure a sharp contrast against the black screen.

“No way!” I snatched it back. “I’m not falling for that again.”

Roxanna just grinned. “You’re welcome for setting you up with the love of your life.”

“Thank you,” I murmured, pursing my lips and fighting a smile. It was the polite thing to say and I was always polite. I suppose I did owe her a thank you for her prank Facebook post announcing an engagement between me and Duke Austen, infamously known as the Bad Boy Billionaire. At the point of said announcement, he and I had met (and kissed) just once. That didn’t stop us from a sham engagement, which led to a secret romance. Now we were really, truly in love.

“What is it this time?” Roxanna asked, flipping her red hair over her shoulder. She was perched on a bar stool and

sipping bourbon on the rocks. I took the seat next to her and sipped from the chardonnay she'd gone ahead and ordered for me.

“*This* is the invitation to the party celebrating the IPO of Duke’s startup.”

“How fabulous. Where is it?”

“That’s not the point. It doesn’t even matter, because it’s at the same time on the same night as my high school reunion.”

Roxanna raised one eyebrow. It was one of the traits of hers that I was jealous of, in addition to her carefree attitude, her amazing alcohol tolerance which allowed her to drink copious amounts of whiskey without getting ridiculously drunk and her ability to talk herself into restaurant tables without a reservation.

“Are you actually torn between which event to attend?” Roxanna asked incredulously. “The hottest party in the city, celebrating the hottest business launch possibly of all time, with free booze and fascinating people. Oh, and your hot boyfriend. Or a party in an old gymnasium with the same old bores you’ve known for half your life. They’ll probably just want to talk about their kids.”

“It’ll be on the terrace at the Milford Country Club,” I replied, but unenthusiastically.

“Oh,” Roxanna sighed. “The country club. Someone get the velvet rope to keep out the riff raff.”

I sighed. “I know Duke’s party will be more fabulous. But why do I have this angst about missing my stupid high school reunion? I could just go home and hit the pizza parlor on a Friday night and it’d be the same conversations with the same people.”

“Might I point out that you don’t ever have to go back to the pizza parlor on a Friday night? But I get it, Jane. This night is like some sort of finish line you have to cross.”

“Exactly,” I said. “That, and we had a deal. I would pretend to be his good girl fiancée and keep him out of trouble. In return, he’d be my hot and successful boyfriend on a night

I'll sorely need a confidence boost. But we can't be in both places at the same time. And I held up my end of the bargain."

"You could go alone," Roxanna said, demonstrating that she was ballsier than me. "Since you do, in fact, have a hot successful boyfriend *not to mention* your numerous bestselling books. You shouldn't need the confidence boost, Jane. You're fabulous already."

"Thanks," I said with a smile. "I know this is all silly."

"Have you talked to Duke about it?"

"Of course not," I replied. "That's the mature, logical thing to do."

"Are you not a mature, logical person?" Roxanna queried. I took a long sip of wine before answering.

"I am the kind of person so desperate for a date to my high school reunion that I faked a relationship."

"Point taken." Roxanna said before taking a sip of her bourbon.

My phone, still on the bar between us, buzzed and lit up with an incoming text message. I picked up the phone quickly in case it was something sexy from Duke. He was known to send Snapchats of himself without his shirt on or other flirtatious and naughty texts.

"Is that your bad boy billionaire lover?"

I frowned. "No, it's Sam. He's been texting me a lot lately. This one says, 'How do you feel about second chances?'"

"Weird. Has he forgotten that you two broke up?"

"I have no idea what's going on with Sam lately," I said with a sigh. "He was up for these two jobs and I'm not sure if he's gotten them. I have no idea what's up with him and Kate."

"Your nemesis."

"Grrrr." I growled just thinking about Kate Abbot who teased me all through high school, and then the minute Sam and I broke up, she swooped in and claimed him. Not that I was too bothered about it these days. My breakup with Sam

had nearly destroyed me, but already I could see that it was the best thing that could have happened.

“Are you going to answer him?” Roxanna asked.

“Maybe later.” I got rid of the text and looked back at my email. The invitation was still there, awaiting an RSVP. “I have to talk to Duke about this party. But he’s got a big trip to San Francisco coming up. Might not be a good time.”

He tended to be really, really devoted to his business. It could be hard to tear him away from work but once I did, that same intense focus was aimed at me. My toes curled in my black patent wedge heels just thinking about it.

“And he’s not whisking you away with him?” Roxanna asked.

“No, you don’t get the apartment to yourself,” I answered with a laugh. “He’s just going for a day or two and I have to work.”

Roxanna’s iPhone buzzed with an incoming text. Like me, she snatched it up right away.

“Is that from your mysterious millionaire lover?”

“Yes,” she said breathlessly. I tried to raise one eyebrow in an “I’m intrigued” sort of way, but I think I only managed a weird face. Either way, Roxanna was too busy smiling as she texted him back.

“Do tell,” I said, sipping my drink.

“Oh no. I won’t have my romantic entanglements serve as fodder for your next book.”

“Please?” I gave her my most sorrowful expression. “I have no idea what to write and I have a deadline looming.”

My first two historical romance novels had been easy to write, since my real life provided all the inspiration I needed. The heroines of those two novels—loosely based upon myself—had a friend, Prudence, who needed a story too. Also in my inbox: emails from readers asking when Prue’s story would be available. I didn’t have an answer for them. What I had was a bad case of writers block and no cure.

“Your own romance isn’t inspiring you?”

“Nope. My love life is wonderful, which doesn’t exactly make for a very exciting romance novel. There’s no conflamma,” I said, using our made up word for the awful mixture of conflict and drama. It was essential to any great story—the happy ending wouldn’t be as sweet without it.

“Don’t get all sappy romantic on me.” Roxanna punctuated that with a big sip of her whiskey. “You have to promise not to turn into one of those awful, smug couples.”

I laughed. “Well—I suppose there is some conflict. The dueling parties where he has to decide what matters more—his big night or mine.”

“OR *YOU* have to decide what matters more,” Roxanna pointed out. “Or which party is simply more fun.”

My phone buzzed with another text. I hoped this one was from Duke. We planned to meet up this evening but hadn’t confirmed when or where. I picked up my phone and frowned.

“Another text from Sam?” Roxanna asked after seeing my frown.

“Yeah.” This one was weird and I didn’t want to think about it so I put my phone in my bag.

“Still haven’t found your ring?” Roxanna asked, gesturing to my hands where I was absentmindedly trying to twist my cubic zirconia “engagement” ring around my finger. Except it wasn’t there.

“No,” I sighed. “I could have sworn I left it in my jewelry box. You know me—I always put things away. But it wasn’t there and I can’t imagine where I might have lost it.”

“Good thing it wasn’t real,” Roxanna remarked, with a grimace.

“Yeah. It still had sentimental value though.”

Roxanna’s mystery love texted again. She smiled as she tapped a response with her red manicured fingernails.

“I have to go. It’s for work,” she said. But neither of us could keep a straight face because it may have been her boss texting her, but it was definitely not about work. We both burst out laughing.

Roxanna and I parted ways outside the bar. She went off to meet her mystery lover and Duke texted, inviting me to join him and some of his team for drinks at a bar on the Lower East Side.

Since it was a gorgeous end-of-summer evening, I decided to walk.

I slipped on my headphones, played *Empire State of Mind* and started heading over to the bar where we agreed to meet. There was nothing like walking through New York City—letting your route be determined by red and green lights, dodging pedestrians on the sidewalk, flowing around cars stopped in the streets, moving in time to the city’s unique rhythm—all while listening to a great song and getting lost in my thoughts. Tonight, I was thinking just how far I had come.

A few months ago I had arrived here a total mess. My boyfriend of twelve years, Sam, had dumped me when I was expecting him to propose. Oh, and I had gotten fired that day, too. I had to move out of the house we shared. Rather than stay at home with my folks and tired of too many awkward conversations with meddling neighbors at the grocery store, I declared I was moving to New York to write a novel.

Madness, that. I just wanted everyone—especially myself—to think I was running *to* something instead of just fleeing the wreckage of my life.

Then I met Roxanna, whose practical joke on Facebook got me involved with Duke, and my relationship with him provided the inspiration I needed to write not one but two historical romance novels I published to great success.

With Sam I had my life all planned out. And to think . . . I would have missed living and loving in New York City if everything had gone according to plan.

I pulled open the door to the bar on Elizabeth Street and spotted Duke right away. There was just something about him—confidence, determination, drive—that declared him Someone Important even though he tended to wear free T-shirts from other startups, perfectly broken-in Levi's and sneakers.

He glanced up and caught my eye. God, that smile. So roguish. So mischievous. It was a smile that made a girl believe in once upon a time and heroes who swept a girl off her feet. It did things to me every time. He stood and strolled through the bar toward me. The crowd just melted out of his way.

If I had gotten the life I had always planned, I would have missed *this*: Duke pulling me into an embrace. His mouth crashing down on mine for the kind of deep, passionate kiss that left no doubt as to how he felt about me or what we would be doing tonight.

Later I would think about this kiss and remember it as the one sparkling moment where everything was just *right* and my biggest problem was which party to attend. It was the moment before my past reared its ugly head, making happily-ever-after seem unlikely. It was the moment before the storm hit, leaving unfathomable destruction in its wake. It was the moment before I got an idea for a new story—but at a price I didn't want to pay.

**Keep reading [\*When Jane Loved Duke!\*](#)**

## THANK YOU!

Why, hello! Fancy meeting you here at the end of this book!

Thank you for reading *When Jane Kissed Duke*. I hope you fell in love with these characters and their love story and eagerly pursue the next installment of this series: [\*When Jane Loved Duke\*](#). Hopefully you didn't miss the first book in the series, [\*When Jane Met Duke\*](#).

Spoiler alert: Jane and Duke do get married and you can all about their English houseparty wedding in the anthology [\*At the Summer Wedding\*](#), written with my fellow Lady Authors Caroline Linden, Katharine Ashe and Miranda Neville.

If you want to read the historical romance that Jane is writing, you can! It's my novel [\*Wallflower Gone Wild\*](#), about a wallflower who is determined to embrace her wild side and get out of her engagement. Have fun looking for the connections between Jane and Duke's romance and the historical romance ;-)

To stay informed about all my upcoming releases, please sign up for my newsletter: [www.mayarodale.com/newsletter](http://www.mayarodale.com/newsletter).

Lastly, as an act of love for your fellow readers and favorite authors, would you consider sharing a review? Social media posts, retailer and blog reviews, or a word to a friend are all great ways to get the word out and help people find their next story.

*Thank you for reading!*



XOXO,

*Maya*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Maya Rodale is the best-selling and award-winning author of funny, feminist fiction including historical romance, YA and historical fiction. A champion of the romance genre and its readers, she is also the author of *Dangerous Books For Girls: The Bad Reputation of Romance Novels, Explained*. Maya has reviewed romance for NPR Books and has appeared in Bustle, Glamour, Shondaland, BuzzFeed, The Huffington Post and PBS. She began reading romance novels in college at her mother's insistence and has never been allowed to forget it. Please visit her online at <http://www.mayarodale.com>.

BOOKS BY MAYA RODALE

## The Gilded Age Girls Club

*Duchess By Design*

*Some Like It Scandalous*

*An Heiress To Remember*

## Keeping Up With The Cavendishes

*Lady Bridget's Diary*

*Chasing Lady Amelia*

*Lady Claire Is All That*

*It's Hard Out Here for a Duke*

## The Wallflowers

*The Wicked Wallflower*

*Wallflower Gone Wild*

*What a Wallflower Wants*

## The Writing Girls

*A Groom of One's Own*

*A Tale of Two Lovers*

*The Tattooed Duke*

*Seducing Mr Knightly*

*Three Schemes and a Scandal*

## Anthologies

*At the Duke's Wedding*

*At the Christmas Wedding*

*At the Summer Wedding*



Non-fiction

*Dangerous Books for Girls: The Bad Reputation of  
Romance Novels, Explained*

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