

## Ride Home

"I came with Anderson, can you give me a lift?" Cruz asked her frustratedly as they got outside.

"I'm not going your way."

"You didn't even ask where I'm going. When we rst got here your mom said you bought a condo downtown on Cordova. I moved into my place in Coal Harbor a few weeks back. The bit of renos I needed done are complete now. You said you were going home to do laundry, so I presume we're heading in the same direction."

"You said you needed to leave because your tech guy said there was an emergency."

"I need my laptop which is back at my place. I can go from there once I get home. Come on. Save me from having to call a rideshare. Please?"

She'd never heard the word from his lips before and decided it would be torture for him to squish his big frame into her tiny car.

"Fine." She clicked her key fob and almost laughed as he was forced to crunch himself into the small sedan. She didn't drive very often, and the car spent more time in the parking bay assigned to her in the condo building than anything else. Living downtown, she was able to walk almost anywhere without issues and the Skytrain went virtually anywhere she needed to go if necessary.

She was snickering as he reached under the seat and pushed the seat back as far as it would go and reclined it too and his knees were still touching the dash. Sliding into her seat she started the car and shot him a look as he reached for the seatbelt.

"Try not to get into an accident on purpose?" he let the belt go when he realized he couldn't get it into the slot in the position he was in.

"Only because I'd hate to pay for a new windscreen." She snorted as she put the car into gear.

They were quiet as they drove through the streets and then Cruz spoke interrupting the silence.

"Are all the brunches you have with Odin so volatile?"

"Yes."

"He wasn't simply putting it on for our benet?"

"No. Jesus no. He's got a chip on his shoulder like you wouldn't believe. He's your best friend. You know him better than anyone."

"He isn't like that," he waved in the direction they left, "when it's the three of us. I haven't seen him in person though for nearly a year. He came to Toronto last summer for a couple of weeks. He wasn't angry like today."

"Well, he saves it for us, I guess." She shrugged. "What is he like when you're out? Like at a bar or a club?"

"God, I haven't been clubbing in about ve years but at bar he's normal." Cruz laughed.

"Really? You remind me of someone who parties and goes on exotic trips all the time."

"I haven't even taken a vacation since I moved east. I've been working sixteen-hour days seven days a week most of the time and the time I do take off, I play rugby. I was playing in a league back in Toronto. I need to nd one out here. It's a good outlet when I need to blow off steam or else I'll end up with my employees all quitting on me. I go to the gym and stuff, but work is where my head has been since I left school."

"You don't go clubbing? No dancing?"

"Two left feet. I'm not built for being smooth. Anderson has moves. He's all sleek like a meerkat. Sidles up to women at the club and does this move which any other man on the planet would try and get punched for. I was with him once in Montreal where he was working in IT. We were out for dinner at this bar restaurant place and the music was playing overhead. He saw this girl having a drink at the bar alone and honestly, he did this shimmy shue thing all the way to her, and I swear he left the bar with her panties in his pocket. If I tried what he did, I'd have crashed into every table and chair on the way and probably have gotten arrested."

She giggled in spite of herself. "Anderson and Sloane are the same. Sloane walked up to a guy in one of the departments of the company she is working for on Thursday last week and said," she put on Sloane's voice "you and me, coffee, Sunday eleven o'clock, don't be late."

"He went?"

"Yup. He's there. He recently started working in her company. She found out he was single and made her move. No guts no glory is her motto."

"What's your motto? How do you get the guy?"

"As if." She gave a shake of her head. "My last boyfriend I met at the gym when he corrected my yoga position. He made the move. He continued to correct me on every single thing for the next six months. It was when he corrected my orgasm, I knew he needed to go."

"He did what now?"

"Corrected my orgasm. See, he felt I should only have an orgasm with him and not with a toy. When he failed to give me an orgasm during a very brief but typical episode, I grabbed my toy to nish the job. He told me my failure to have an orgasm was because my body was dependent on devices. He then said my orgasm would be better and more fullling if I didn't masturbate. He was wrong. It was much more fullling when he wasn't present for it."

She stopped at a red light and shot Cruz a look only to see him holding his chest in horror.

"He did not say such a thing."

"He sure did."

"How brief was brief with him?"

"Under two minutes. I'm not one of those girls who needs to go for two hours every night with multiples and rutting like animals. I'm quite content with an orgasm or two and then a good night's sleep."

"Why would you stay with him six months?"

"The rst three months he put effort in. I actually enjoyed the s\*x until I didn't anymore."

"What was your longest relationship?"

"My college roommate. We were together from rst year through fourth. I loved him." She said quietly. "He got an offer to take a job in Texas for an IT company. I kept waiting for him to ask me to go with him. I could write from anywhere, you know. I do a bit of editing for a small company in Vancouver as a side gig. It helps me with my own writing, but I wasn't working there yet. He never once asked me to go. Then the day he was supposed to get on his plane and go, he just did. He didn't even ask me to go to the airport with him. He said his Mom was dropping him off and that was that. Four years and three months and he walked away without a backwards glance."

"Jesus. You must have been crushed."

"I was. I wrote him into one of my stories and killed him with shrapnel to the heart from an exploding computer. It was cathartic but I still cried for a full year."

"Ever hear from him again?"

"Sloane, who if you didn't know is a wizard on a computer and makes her brother look like an amateur, hacked him one time for me after a spectacularly bad blind date. I wanted to know if he was as miserable as I was. It was eighteen months after he left."

"And?"

She smirked, "his boss hated him in Texas, and he was miserable as f\*\*k. All the men down there are big and macho, and he was not. His boss addressed every email to him as Stickman. His internet browsing was full of job searches and dating proles but when you're a man weighing a hundred- and twenty-pounds sopping wet in a city where every man carries guns and walks with swaggers in cowboy boots and hats," she gave a low pitiful whistle, "it's a sad life. One of the message exchanges on his dating prole after a coffee date was the woman accusing him of catshing her because he was only ve feet seven inches tall."

"Is he still there?"

"I don't know. I never looked again. I got it out of my system. I saw his mom a few years ago at a farmer's market and I pretended I didn't recognize her when she waved." She noted he was pressing his hands against the dash each time she touched her brake and did it a bit more violently for fun and he shot her an exasperated look. She chuckled. "You are way too big for my car."

"I have my own car, but I prefer to ride my bike. I have a Harley, and I like how I do not feel constricted and in a conned space when I ride."

"Must be hard for dating or do the girls dig it?"

"My ex-ancée hated it. She would scream at me each and every time I reached for my helmet."

"You were engaged?"

"Two years." He looked out the window away from her.

"Why'd you break up? Over the bike?"

"No. She wanted to set a date. I didn't." He gave a dry laugh, "I didn't even propose. She did. She said it was a very feminist move, and she wasn't waiting for me to do a grand proposal. She even bought me a ring to put on her nger."

"f\*\*k off." She was aghast. "She did not. And you said yes?"

"We were already living together. I loved her. Why not? Then she wanted to set a date. I was working on this huge billion-dollar project, and I was in the middle of s\*\*t, and I was sitting in my home oce trying to make heads or tales over some data and she was going on and on about dates. She snapped and said if you don't want to set it then say so and I said so."

"You said so or you said so."

"The latter and she didn't nd it funny. I came home the next day from work to all of her stuff moved out. I called her. She accused me of not being on the same page as her. I felt she didn't understand I was in the middle of something important when she was badgering me. She got pissed over the word badgering and hung up on me after telling me we were done. When I didn't go chasing after her and begging her to come home, she vandalized my car. I ended up having to get a restraining order, changing my numbers, and the lot."

"How long ago was this?"

"Two years."

"She was in Toronto?"

"As far as I know she still is, and she can rot there. It's funny how you can love someone so much you think the sun shines out their ass and the next day you want to drop them off the top of the CN Tower to watch them splatter."

She shot him a disgusted look, "how awful."

"She painted my silver Maserati with black spray paint and put photos of my d\*\*k in the mailbox of every single person of the building I was living in." He gave her an annoyed glance. "It was not fty-million dollars worth of damage, but it was enough for me to know to count my blessings she left my condo."

"Remember when I sugared your gas tank?"

"I knew it was you!" he turned and hissed at her and punched her dash. "I knew it!"

She grinned. "Ah good times. I should get Sloane to nd me the name of your ex and get some ideas off her."

"My balls still ache. Don't make me put them in the contract when we meet Tuesday."

"Never gonna happen Cruz. Never gonna happen." She put a signal light on as they approached her neighborhood. "I'm not far from here. You want me to drop you to your door or can you walk the six minutes or so down to Coal Harbor."

"I can walk. It'll be good too if paparazzi happen to catch me walking from your place."

"Nobody knows where I live."

"Aren't you a famous author?"

"I write under a pen name. Nobody would ever know my face." She pulled to the curb. "Okay, get out."

He laughed, "so f\*\*\*\*\*g polite."

"Not even a little. Bye Cruz. Until we meet again under horric and strained circumstances."

"Ditto, Ladybird." He got out of the car and slammed it a bit hard. Smacking the hood of the vehicle he sauntered away.

She couldn't help the giggle when he turned around suddenly and ipped her off before continuing on his journey.