

NO ONE LIKE YOU

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CHAPTER 1

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Sara Lewis looked at the clock on the wall for the fiftieth time, wondering if it had stopped. How could it be only 6:00? She still had two more hours until the end of her shift, and she had already finished all of her work. The men's suits in her area were in order, every bit of dust had been removed from every shelf and corner, and since she hadn't had a customer in hours, she had already counted the money in the cash register.

She decided to rearrange the ties on the table again. As she was contemplating which one to put on the top of the little pyramid she had made, suddenly she felt tingly all down her head, neck and back. The hair stood up straight on her arms. She felt a presence in the room before she heard the voices of people coming from the elevator. Her head seemed like it was too light for her body, about to float away. She swayed, then she caught her balance by grabbing the edge of the table. She turned to see who – or what – had entered the room.

A group of five young men seemed to roll into the room, bouncing from one display to another, laughing and joking with each other. They looked as if they may be brothers, all with dark hair and dark eyes and tan skin. Sara immediately locked eyes with one of them, drawn to him by a supernatural force. She leaned against the table so she wouldn't collapse, unable to look away from this distinctive man. As the group came closer to her, she could hear them speaking a different language. Sara realized she had lost her words; she did not know what to say to them, she could not think of words in English. In some part of her mind she knew she had a job to do, but she couldn't make herself move or speak. Her own will to act had been captured, as she stared at the man with the black shiny hair like a lion's mane.

"Ingleezi," one of the men said to the others, as they approached her.

"Do you work here?" one man asked her.

"Of course she does," said the man who had entranced her, leaning close to her so he could read her name tag. She felt her strength leave her, as the

top of her head began to feel so tingly it was becoming numb. Her brain was already numb. "This is Sara," he told his companions.

"Good evening, Miss Sara," said one of the other men. "We are here to pick up our suits for a wedding. Alameddine?"

Sara knew she was expected to respond. She tried to snap herself out of her daze. These men were speaking to her and waiting for her to act.

"Are we in the right department?" the tallest man asked.

"Are we speaking in English?" another asked, and they all laughed, all except the one who had caused her to lose control of her mind and body. He stayed in complete control of himself while keeping his eyes directly on her.

"Sara, I would like to introduce myself to you. I am Sammy Samson," he said politely, speaking with a British accent. The others had some other kind of foreign accent. "This is my cousin, Hassan, and these are his nephews, Essom, Imad and Jihad. We were told by our friend, who is getting married next week, to pick up our suits here for his wedding."

"Don't be afraid of us because we are bloody foreigners," Hassan told her.

Sara managed to smile at them as she remembered how to speak. "No, I'm not afraid," she said, then immediately regretted that those were the words she had spoken. "What can I do to help you?" she asked, attempting to regain control of herself and the situation.

"Suits, for a wedding?" Sammy reminded her. He smiled kindly at her and she felt her insides melting. His deep brown eyes were tugging at her pounding heart.

"Oh, yes, of course," Sara answered, finally able to move, reluctant to take her eyes off him. She forced her feet to take her to the holding area where the suits were kept. She concentrated on each step. As she reached for the receipt to confirm the name, she noticed that her hands were shaking. She felt faint, and fell against the wall.

Breathe, breathe, she told herself. What is wrong with me, she wondered. Who is this guy, this Sammy Samson, and what is he doing to me?

She transferred the suits to a rolling rack and brought them out to where the men were waiting. She kept her eyes on the rack so she could keep her composure.

“Do you need to try them on?” she asked, brushing at the suits with her hands, in an attempt to do something besides stare at Sammy Samson.

“Yes, we do, Miss Sara,” Hassan said. His nephews laughed. She felt Sammy looking at her.

“The dressing rooms are over there,” Sara said, pointing.

“How do we know which one is which?” Imad asked. “They all look the same.”

“Of course they look the same, Mr. Brilliant,” Essom said. “They are for the wedding, they have to look the same.”

“The only difference is the sizes,” Sara said, noting that all five men were of various sizes. Hassan was the tallest, well over six feet, Sammy was the second tallest, and Imad was the shortest. The other two were about the same height, but Jihad was very thin. They all had black, curly hair and dark brown eyes, but they did not look alike. They examined the suits and each chose one. They took their suits to the dressing rooms. Sara watched them go, and just a second later, Sammy emerged and strode over to her.

“Tomorrow is my birthday,” he said. “Would you like to go to dinner with me, and help me celebrate?”

“I – we – I –” Sara stammered.

“I will be 24 tomorrow,” he said. “That’s something worth celebrating, don’t you agree?”

Although Sara was 19, she had never yet been on a date. She didn’t know how to respond to this first invitation.

“I can’t,” she said. She hoped he didn’t see that the hair on her arms was extending, reaching towards him.

“Is it because I’m a foreigner?” Sammy asked.

“No—” Sara began.

“Because I’m not really a foreigner. My parents came to the United States from Lebanon, and I was born here in Seattle,” he explained.

“You don’t sound like a Seattle-ite,” Sara said.

“I went to school in England,” he said, as if that explained everything. “So, what time do you get off work tomorrow?”

“I’m sorry, but I really can’t go out with you,” she said, daring to glimpse at his eyes, his piercing eyes, the eyes that could see inside of her.

Sammy stood solidly facing her without speaking, as if he were reading and memorizing her. Sara wondered if he could hear the deafening pounding of her heart.

“Not tomorrow,” he finally said. He smiled at her. “We will go out another time.” He returned to the dressing room as Sara flopped down in a nearby chair.

She had wanted so badly to say yes, she would go out with Sammy Samson to celebrate his birthday, but she had so many reasons why she had to say no to him. She had never been on a date. He was over 21, and she was only 19. According to store policy, she wasn’t allowed to date customers. She had just met him! She didn’t know him, and he hadn’t met her dad. She couldn’t ever go out with a guy until after he had met her dad, and she wasn’t ready to introduce them yet. How could she introduce her dad to Sammy, a man she had just met, who wanted to take her on a date?

She also had her Christian standards to consider. Was he a Christian? She could not date a man who was not a Christian, and she could not date a man that she would not consider marrying; which meant that she couldn’t date someone she just met until she knew more about him and he had passed her Basic Standards Test. She wasn’t like so many girls she knew who dated a variety of men to ‘try them out’ to see if they liked them, or if they were compatible. Sara would have to know a guy first, he would have to be her friend, and then possibly they would graduate to dating, if their relationship moved in that direction.

Sara smiled to herself. She had her whole dating strategy planned in her mind, but she had never been on a date; and now, the moment she had met an interesting man, she had lost her senses and her ability to function in his presence, except to tell him no, she couldn’t go on a date with him.

“Hey, Kid, about time to close up!” The shrill voice of Sara’s supervisor, Kelly Garby, brought Sara back to the present.

Sara glanced at the clock and was surprised to see it was nearly 8:00. “I have customers in the dressing rooms,” she said.

“I’ll get them out for you,” Kelly said, heading across the floor.

“No, they’re trying on suits for a wedding,” Sara said, then lowering her voice, “already paid.”

“Well, have you reconciled your cash?” Kelly asked.

“Yes, I have,” Sara said.

“I want to get out of here on time,” Kelly said. “I’m meeting Harvey at the Oasis Lounge, so get these guys out of here as quick as you can.” She marched out of the department.

Kelly Garby was not an easy person to please nor to like. She was demanding and rude, and rumor had it that she had only gotten the job of floor supervisor because she was dating Harvey Maggers, one of the store supervisors. Kelly didn’t really do anything except to tell Sara and three of the other salesgirls on the floor when it was time to close. Sara knew Kelly was only 19 – their birthdays were just days apart – but Kelly had no problem passing for 21. She looked much older than 19, with her ironed-straight hair and caked-on makeup. Sara had known Kelly since the seventh grade when they had been in school together, but apparently Kelly didn’t remember Sara. Kelly had been sent by her parents to St. Elizabeth’s School for Girls in an effort to reform her, but her truancy and constant breaking of the rules had caused her to be expelled before her six month trial period had ended. Sara and her friends at St. Elizabeth’s had been shocked by Kelly’s behavior.

The men emerged from the dressing rooms in their suits, examining each other. They had been transformed from ordinary guys in jeans to dashing young men in matching black suits with bright blue ties.

“What do you think?” Essom asked, as they approached Sara.

“They look very nice on you,” Sara responded.

“Yet the question is, do we look good in them?” Sammy asked. His cousins laughed.

Sara was afraid of how she might answer, but was saved from her unknown words when Hassan spoke.

“Perfect fit, Miss Sara,” he said. “Thank you very much.”

“It doesn’t look like you’ll need any alterations,” Sara managed to say.

Sammy’s eyes bored into Sara’s. “Why alter something that is perfect?” he asked, causing Sara’s heart to resume its thunderous pounding.

“We’ll take them now,” Hassan said.

“I can put them into suit bags for you,” Sara said.

“No, that’s okay, we’ll wear them now,” Essom said. They all laughed.

“Are you sure?” Sara asked, avoiding looking at Sammy.

“Yes, Miss Sara. Maybe you can just give us a couple of bags to carry our other clothes,” Hassan suggested.

“Oh, yes, of course,” Sara answered, fumbling behind the counter for some bags. *Think, think, concentrate*, she told herself. *What should I be thinking?* she answered herself. *Customers, courtesy, composure*, she thought, but she couldn’t relate those things to this situation.

As Sammy reached to take the bags from her, his fingers brushed lightly against hers, sending an electrifying jolt through her entire body and leaving her completely numb for several seconds. She felt him continue to look at her as he handed the bags to his companions, who carried the bags toward the dressing rooms.

“I felt it too,” he said softly. The deep, quiet tone of his voice sent Sara’s heart down to her stomach and then up to her head. She held the counter to keep her balance. She looked up to see him gazing into her eyes. “There is no one like you,” he said.

“Sammy, are you coming?” one of the men called across the room.

“You won’t go out with me for my birthday tomorrow because we just met,” he said, keeping his voice low, “so meet me on Saturday at noon at the Space Needle. Don’t break my heart.”

Before Sara could answer, he was gone, they were all gone, and she was left in the quiet of the store as it had been before they had arrived. However, the atmosphere had changed. She felt as if she had just been dreaming, the images fading as she awakened, being transported from one reality to another. Now she was at work, closing her section, moving automatically.

“You get on out of here, Kid,” Kelly’s harsh voice barked. “I’m in a hurry,” she said, as she removed the cash drawer.

“Everything is in order,” Sara said, feeling strange in this familiar environment.

“It better be, or it’s your neck,” Kelly said.

Sara picked up her rain coat and walked to the elevator.

“Sara, are you okay?”

Sara turned and saw Janet Quipporwhill, who worked in the next department, looking at her with a strange expression on her face.

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“Then why are you standing here?”

“I’m going home,” Sara said, wondering why Janet was questioning her.

“Don’t you think you need to push the button?”

“Button?”

“Sara, what’s gotten into you?”

“Nothing, I’m fine,” Sara insisted. She wondered if Sammy’s presence could be seen on her face, as it had taken over her whole body.

“How long are you going to stand here?”

“What do you mean? I’m waiting for the elevator.”

“Then maybe you should push the button, the ELEVATOR button.”

“Oh, yeah, sure,” she said, reaching to push the button.

“Did Kelly say something to you?” Janet asked.

“Um, no, I don’t think so,” Sara said, trying to remember if Kelly had said anything to her.

“Then what is wrong with you?” Janet asked, truly concerned. Janet was one of the nicest people Sara knew. She cared about others more than herself. When Kelly had become their supervisor, Janet had encouraged Sara after each of Kelly’s verbal attacks.

“Nothing is wrong with me, I just need to get home,” Sara said.

“Is your dad alright?” Janet asked.

“Yes, he’s fine,” Sara answered.

“Well, it must be something,” Janet said.

“He is,” Sara said without thinking.

“Your dad?”

“What about my dad?”

“Is he something?”

“What are you talking about?”

“What am I talking about?”

“Yeah, I’m not following you.”

“You better get home and get some rest. Do you work tomorrow?”

“Yes... no... I forget.”

“Maybe we should check the schedule,” Janet asked.

“No, I mean, yes, I do work tomorrow.”

“Is that before or after your doctor’s appointment?”

“What doctor’s appointment?”

“The one you need to figure out what is wrong with you.”