

Everything to Nothing

A novel by Mark Henthorne.

Sequel coming soon!

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Chapter 33

While Sarah was spending her thirtieth night in a row sexually pleasuring another random stranger, Michelle was at Sally's mansion the night before they were due to fly to Nice on Sally's father's jet. It was a gloriously perfect early summer's evening and they were sat on a balcony overlooking the gardens, sipping champagne, chatting idly about anything and everything.

'Just remind me Sally, where are we going?'

This was the fifth time one of them had asked this question to the other in the last hour but neither of them was tiring of answering it. 'We're flying to Nice in my dad's jet. From there we are going to get a helicopter to Saint-Tropez where my dad's yacht is moored.'

'Bliss.'

'I haven't finished yet! We're spending two nights cruising around the Med before returning to Saint-Tropez to pick up my dad. Then we're making our way to our berth right next to the track in Monaco harbour just in time for practice on Friday!'

'Bliss!'

'I haven't finished yet! Friday we have access to the garage so we'll meet the drivers. Friday night we have numerous parties to attend. Then on Saturday we have access to the garage again and then Saturday day, after qualifying, we get to drive sports cars around the track! Saturday night, yes, you've guessed it, more parties and then a private function in the Casino where I'm going to persuade my daddy to let me blow a million pounds on black!'

'Bliss!'

'I haven't finished yet! On the Sunday we have track access to the grid and then before the race we will whisked back to the yacht and we'll watch the race from the comfort of my luxurious yacht! Sunday night we'll attend the after-race party and be surrounded by the drivers and all the teams!'

'Bliss! Put your father's jet on standby and let's go now!'

'Minor problem. The jet is still in Madrid where my father is and only gets back early tomorrow morning! Sorry honey!'

'Damn! I can't wait, I can't wait, I can't wait! Let's buy another jet and we can go now!'

'My dad does allow me some leniency with my bank account, but even he would draw the line at me buying a jet!'

'Damn again! Remind me, where do our respective boyfriends think we're going?'

'Your aunt's hen party in Benidorm!'

'Suckers! I almost feel guilty about lying to them. Almost!'

'Me too. More champagne darling?'

'Oh go on then darling, you've persuaded me!'

Sally topped up both their glasses and as they relaxed back into their loungers they both let out a sigh of contentment while they watched the sun slowly sink below the distant horizon. The night descended so they both reclined even further and in the clear evening sky they watched for shooting stars and passing satellites

while sipping their champagne and dipping fresh strawberries into fresh whipped cream.

Soon though the temperature dropped and even the cashmere wool blankets that a maid brought them could no longer keep them warm, so they retired to one of the rooms in the mansion where they finished the bottle of champagne, both feeling tipsy when they had finished it. Stumbling and giggling their way through the house, they reached their respective bedrooms and called their respective boyfriends before eventually they both fell into a restless, excited sleep.

Early the next morning a maid woke them both who helped them finish packing and preparing for their journey. Exactly on time Alfred summoned them down to the Rolls-Royce which took them on the short drive to the private airfield where the jet had just arrived back from Madrid.

It was being refuelled and from a window of the car Sally saw her father walking towards the waiting helicopter. As he saw the Rolls approach he stopped and started to walk towards them. Before the car had stopped moving Sally and Michelle both leapt out and ran the short distance to where he was stood. 'Daddy!' shouted Sally and she leapt into his arms. He swung her round a few times as she kissed his cheeks. When he put her down Michelle threw her arms round him and planted a few kisses on him too.

'Thank you so much for allowing us to go with you Mr. Gallagher!'

'Nonsense. I couldn't think of two people I'd rather spend my time with!'

'Thank you anyway daddy. We can't wait to see you in Saint-Tropez!'

'Me too angel, but I need to go now and close this deal or I won't be able to come at all!'

'Sod the business and come now!' Sally stamped her foot and for a fleeting moment the I-want-line appeared on her forehead.

'If I sodded the business there would be no trips to Monaco because we'd be bankrupt!'

'Good point! Well hurry up and fly out soon Mr. Gallagher!'

'I will ladies. You enjoy the yacht and the cruise. It will be beautiful out there. I'll see you soon!'

'Bye daddy!' Sally placed a few more kisses on his cheeks.

With that he walked quickly away to the waiting helicopter and the girls watched his pilot take smoothly off. Sally and Michelle waved as he flew away from the airfield, then they turned and walked towards the jet as their luggage was being transferred from the car to the aircraft. Soon after that they heard the engines being turned on, and the pilot instructed them to their seats as they began the taxi.

With a rush and a roar of engines the jet thundered down the runway and with a whoop of delight the girls watched the land disappear away from them. Quickly the jet banked over as the pilot turned the plane towards the south-east and the French coastline.

*

During the flight the young ladies were treated to a gourmet breakfast prepared for them on the flight by one of Mr. Gallagher's chefs. While eating the meal they

also drank freshly squeezed orange juice and watched a movie. After a couple of hours they began their descent into Nice airport and they were treated to a glorious view of the city and the deep blue of the Mediterranean as the plane dropped down to Aeroport de Nice-Cote d'Azur.

Quickly their luggage was offloaded and they were whisked across the Aeroport to the helicopter terminal where they transferred onto a Bell-Ranger. The aircraft lifted off and headed south-west along the French Riviera. Sally and Michelle could not take their eyes off the passing beautiful coastline as they were flown over Antibes, Cannes and soon, almost too soon for them, they descended into the heliport. As soon as they stepped off the helicopter a man was waiting for them and he led them to a large Mercedes that drove them through the streets of Saint-Tropez to the Nouveau Port. Here the Mercedes pulled up alongside a boat that surprised Michelle with its size. 'Oh, it's quite big isn't it?'

'This is just the tender sweetheart.'

'The tender?'

'Yeah, it floats under the main yacht in its own storage compartment.'

'Huh? It floats under the yacht?' asked Michelle.

'You'll see when we get there.'

'When we get where?'

'Out to Samurai, the yacht.'

'So this isn't the yacht?'

'No, of course not.'

'But it's a big boat'

'No, trust me, it's a small boat.'

As they walked from the car to the tender, two crew members leapt from the boat to help them onto the deck. When they were settled into the comfortable seats a man approached them from the bridge. 'Miss Gallagher, so lovely to have you onboard again.'

'Thank you, Roger. It is good to be here. Roger, this is my friend Michelle. Michelle, this is Roger, the captain.'

'Hi Roger. Nice to meet you.'

'You too Michelle. Are you ready to leave straight away Miss Gallagher?'

'Yes.'

'Perfect. It will take five minutes for us to approach Samurai. Please relax and of course please instruct the crew should you require anything to drink or eat but lunch will be ready for you fifteen minutes after we arrive.'

'That's fine Roger. Please depart when you are ready.'

With a smile he left them and returned to the bridge. The crew cast off the lines and smoothly the boat left Saint-Tropez harbour on the approach to the yacht. As they rounded the breakwater they could both see a yacht moored a short distance away. 'There she is. Samurai!' exclaimed Sally.

'I stand corrected! This is a small boat!'

'Told you.'

'My word. It's huge!'

'One of the biggest in the world!' exclaimed Sally again.

'Wow! It looks it! How big is it?!'

‘One hundred and seventy meters long and all ours for two days!’

‘It would take two days to see it all!’

‘I don’t think I’ve seen it all and we’ve had it for two years now! It is usually in the Caribbean but my dad had it brought over.’

The yacht was indeed huge. It was in fact one hundred and seventy-five meters long, with a beam of twenty meters and a draught of five meters. The superstructure of the vessel was white, but the hull was a deep, royal blue. Its maximum speed was thirty knots and had another four smaller tenders held in various berths on each side of the vessel. Usually the yacht housed a helicopter in a hangar in the rear, but this was away for essential repairs.

Along with the helicopter and tenders, there were numerous jet skis and other watercraft held at various point in the yacht. On one of the decks of the yacht there was a large pool and spa area, surrounded by a large bar. There were also two other bars and spas, one located on the port side, one located on the starboard side. These were hidden behind large watertight hatches when the yacht was moving, yet when they were needed the hatches dropped down giving another access point to the sea.

In order for the yacht to function smoothly when it was full of passengers, it needed a crew of fifty, but while it was only Sally and Michelle who would be using the yacht for the next couple of days, the crew was merely thirty.

The tender approached and it drew alongside the yacht. All that Michelle could see was the deep, royal blue of the hull, and as she looked up the side of the vessel she could see one of the two massive radar beacons that she was sure were bigger than her house. Reducing its speed, the tender turned wide around the rear of the craft and was held here while a massive section of the aft of the yacht was lifted to reveal the docking station for the tender.

Expertly Roger guided the tender; its name was Katana, into the storage berth underneath the main superstructure, between the port and starboard bulkheads of the hull. Slowly it came to a stop, and as the ladies stepped from Katana onto the teak deck that ran around the tender’s berth, they were greeted by the Chief Steward. ‘Miss Gallagher. Miss Walmesley, welcome aboard! Please, allow me to guide you to your cabins.’

They followed him through Samurai, up two levels until they reached the sumptuously decorated residential area of the yacht. With a flourish the steward opened one of the cabin doors and Michelle could not help gasping as she looked into the cabin.

‘Miss Walmesley. This is the Princess Suite. I hope you will find it satisfactory for your needs.’

‘It’s perfect! Thank you.’

‘Please, feel free to settle in. We have lunch ready for you in fifteen minutes which will be served in the pool area.’

‘I don’t know...’

‘I’ll come and get you in ten minutes honey. Freshen up. Oh, and change into your bikini, but underneath something less revealing while we eat.’

‘Right, will do. See you soon.’

Sally left her and Michelle turned to study the room. The first thing she noticed

was the bed. It was huge, it was similar in size to two king size beds next to each other. She kicked off her sandals and her feet sunk into the thick carpet which she ran across and dove onto the bed with a squeal.

Bouncing off the bed she ran across to the windows and opened the curtains which gave her a view of the sea across to Saint-Tropez. With another squeal of delight she found the refrigerator which was full of bottles of expensive champagne and snacks such as caviar and truffles. Turning around she looked into the bathroom and a sigh of contentment left her lips as she saw the large marble Jacuzzi bath then quietly she heard a discreet knock on the door and one of the crew called her name. 'Miss Walmesley. Your luggage.' Michelle opened the door and one of the crew members carried her bags into the room. 'While you are at lunch I can unpack them for you. Is there anything you need now?'

'Erm, yes. My bikini and cotton shawl. They are in that bag.'

'Please feel free to freshen up why I find them for you.'

'Thank you.'

She went into the bathroom and had a quick rinse in the shower until she heard another discreet knock on the bathroom door and the member of the crew stated that Miss Gallagher was here to take her to lunch. Quickly Michelle threw a towel round her and skipped into the bedroom to find her bikini and shawls out on the bed. The crew member was making good work unpacking the rest of her clothes and Sally was lounging in one of the chairs looking out of the window. 'Are you ready?'

'Two seconds honey.' Michelle grabbed her bikini and shawls and skipped back into the bathroom to put them on. A short time later she was ready and Sally stood up from her chair.

'You look good Michelle.'

'So do you.'

'Thank you.'

Michelle watched as Sally left the cabin and all she could do was dream of ever looking as good as her friend. Sally had been to London recently and dyed her hair a deep copper red. It cascaded down her back to just under the strap of her bikini top. Sally must have felt that Michelle was not following her and she turned in the doorway to beckon her friend to follow. The bikini top fitted snugly around Sally's large breasts, slightly smaller though than Michelle's. But it was the stomach, hips and legs where Michelle really lost out. Sally's were toned with no fat on them at all. Faintly you could make out her stomach muscles under the translucent shawl, and her hips and legs also slender but with toned muscle on them too. No matter how long Michelle spent in the gym, no matter how hard she tried she could never look as good as her friend did.

She looked into Michelle's eyes and smiled which lit up her emerald green eyes. 'Are you coming?'

'Yeah, sorry. Thank you Sally so much for letting me come with you.'

'Nonsense! It is my pleasure, well our pleasure. We'll both enjoy your company. Now come on and stop being silly! Lunch is ready. I've heard a rumour that it's one of the chef's specialities; a delicious seafood salad!'

'Sounds even more perfect!'

Sally held out her hand which Michelle took and she led them through the yacht, along the corridors that looked like they had been lifted straight out of the Gallagher's mansion, to the large pool area.

*

After the seafood salad lunch, the yacht began its journey. It turned away from Saint-Tropez and made its way out into the Mediterranean heading east towards the north shore of Corsica. While they were sailing, Sally and Michelle relaxed around the pool area, swimming or enjoying the jacuzzi. During this time they were served with delicious exotic fruits and a limitless supply of ice-cold fruit juices to help keep the Mediterranean heat away.

It took five hours to reach the north coast of Corsica and they moored two miles off the island. When Sally told Michelle that they could take the jet skis across to a secretive cove that could only be accessed from the sea, Michelle let out a scream of excitement and they both ran through the yacht down to the starboard hatch that had been lowered for them. While they waited for the jet skis to be brought round from the rear hangar, they relaxed in sun loungers and drank more juice that was served to them from the starboard bar.

Soon enough the skis were ready to go and they were moored next to the starboard hatch. Both the women had used this exciting medium of transport before, so they were quickly away, blasting across the perfectly calm Mediterranean Sea towards the cove. Quickly they arrived at the beach and they both dragged their skis onto it and took their prepared towels and sunshade from the storage compartments on the skis.

The rest of the day was spent swimming and relaxing, with no one around them. The sheer cliffs of the cove stopped anybody seeing them from above and the yacht was far away, so the young ladies were comfortable enough in each other's presence to bathe and swim topless. Within one of the compartments were light refreshments so at one point during the day they lounged in the sand to eat the sandwiches and fruit.

All too soon though the day was over and reluctantly they both loaded the skis back up and made their way back to Samurai. As they disembarked from the jet skis at the starboard hatch the Chief Steward met them and informed them that dinner would be served around the pool area at eight o'clock. When they walked towards their respective cabins Sally could not help noticing a sense of heightened activity on the yacht so she approached one of the crew. 'What's going on? You all seem very busy?'

'Oh, nothing Miss Gallagher. Just cleaning and preparing.'

'Preparing for what?'

'Your father's arrival.'

'But he doesn't arrive until the day after tomorrow?'

'Yes, we know ma'am, but we have a lot to do.'

'Okay. Whatever. I'm going to have a rest now so please keep the noise to a minimum around my cabin.'

'Of course, Miss Gallagher.'

As they left the steward Sally expressed her thoughts with Michelle. ‘Strange. They always start to run around like headless chickens only on the day my dad is due to arrive.’

‘I wouldn’t think about it. They’ve obviously started early.’

‘Yeah, maybe. Never mind. Right, here we are. I’m going to go to the bridge and call David off the satellite phone. Do you want to come with me and you can call Simon?’

‘Yeah, good idea. I wanted to call him but I guess our mobiles won’t get a signal out here?’

‘Yep, they won’t work out here. We’ll go up now.’

‘Can we change into something a bit less revealing first?’

Sally turned and looked at her friend. She noticed how her breasts seemed to be defying any known laws of physics by somehow remaining in her bikini top. Catching a glimpse of herself in a nearby mirror she also concluded that it would probably not be a good idea for her, the daughter and heiress of a billionaire, to be surrounded by sailors dressed the way they were. ‘Probably a very good idea honey,’ stated Sally. ‘Meet you here in five?’

‘Perfect.’

Ten minutes later, both dressed in shorts and t-shirt, they stepped onto the bridge where in a fluster they were approached by the Captain. ‘Miss Gallagher. A pleasure. Can I be of assistance?’

‘Can we use the satellite phone to call England?’

‘Of course, of course.’

‘What’s going on? Everyone seems very busy?’

‘Nothing, nothing at all. Just keeping busy running some safety drills.’

‘Oh. Do you want us to come back later?’

‘No, no. Now is fine. Please, you know where it is.’

Sally nodded and wandered through the banks of computer screens and aviation style chairs to where the satellite phone was housed. They both phoned their respective partners, both expressing how much they were missing them and how Benidorm was rubbish without them. Neither of them talked for long so they both made their way back through the yacht back towards their cabins. ‘Right, I’m going to have a sleep I think so I’ll see you here at eight and we can both go up to dinner,’ said Sally.

‘What should I wear?’

‘Just one of your cotton summery dresses will be fine. Nothing too revealing, nothing that’s going to make you hot either because it’s going to be a balmy night.’

‘Sounds great!’

‘Yeah, it does.’

‘Are you okay? You seem distracted?’ Michelle asked.

‘There’s something going on.’

‘Do you think he’s coming early?’

‘I doubt it. He sounded like he was very busy to get everything in a fit state to leave it for a few days.’

‘He doesn’t like to leave it does he?’

‘No, because whenever he does someone messes up. He doesn’t have

anyone he trusts implicitly to control things when he's away, hence why he's always trying to persuade me to join him.'

'And are you going to?'

'I doubt it. I don't want to live like he has done, never seeing my future husband or children, working every hour and every day. There's more to life than that isn't there?'

'Of course there is. But remember, I'm sure he didn't enjoy being away from you or your mum, but he made the sacrifice. Without that sacrifice we wouldn't be stood on this massive yacht.'

'I suppose you're right. I'm still thinking about it. Anyway, I'm tired after all the travel and swimming so I'm going for a rest. See you later.'

'Okay. See you later.'

*

At seven o'clock that evening Sally's alarm woke her. After a few more moments of resting her eyes, she leapt out of bed and did some light pilates exercises. Once these were complete, she felt more awake and started to prepare herself for dinner. It was while she was applying a little makeup that she heard the distant noise of a helicopter.

Used to hearing helicopters come and go through her life, she did not pay it much attention. Then she thought about where she was. The north coast of Corsica is not renowned for its plethora of heliports. She also noticed it was getting closer and when she listened harder she thought she recognised the tone and beat of the engine. 'Oh my! That's the Flying Star!'

With a shout of delight, she threw her mascara onto the dressing table and raced out of her room, banging on Michelle's door as she passed. Michelle jumped as she heard her door being hit so vigorously and she flung it open without thinking that she was dressed only in her lingerie.

'Get some clothes on quick! He's here, he's here!'

'Calm down! Who is?'

'My dad, my dad! Hurry up!'

Quickly Michelle flung on her dress and followed the now sprinting Sally through the yacht. As they reached the rear of the vessel they were just in time to see the yacht's helicopter touch down on the helipad. They both tried to approach, but the beat of the rotors beat them back, but it was not long before the passenger door was opened and Mr. Gallagher exited the helicopter. 'Daddy!' Sally screamed, but he could not possibly hear her over the roar of the settling engine and rotors.

Instead he waved at them both and ducking low he walked over to where they were stood, to be greeted by big hugs and kisses on the cheek. Pointing down, back into the body of the yacht, he took both their hands and led them down into one of the lounge areas of the yacht. Once they were away from the noise of the aircraft, Sally flung her arms around his neck again. 'I can't believe you've come early! I can't believe it! I'm so happy to see you!'

'Me too Mr. Gallagher!'

'And I'm happy to see you both. Hot damn it's good to be back on my yacht!'

‘Why? Why have you been able to finish early?’

‘I pulled out.’

‘What?! I thought this was the deal of the year for you?!’

‘It was. But they annoyed me. We’re making a deal with the more expensive company instead. I’ll pay a little bit more to be treated the way I should be treated.’

‘Fair enough. We’re glad you decided to do that!’

‘Left it with the lawyers and a couple of directors to sort out so no doubt when I get back I’ll have to sort out the mess!’

‘Well it’s about time you gave them a bit more responsibility. I thought the helicopter, the Flying Star, was broken?’

‘Amazing how quickly something can get fixed when you threaten to cancel the contract!’

‘Indeed! It’s so good to see you!’

‘It’s good to see you too darling, and you of course Michelle. Now, where can an old man get a drink around here?’

‘Which old man?’ retorted Sally, looking over his shoulder. ‘Come on. Let’s go up to the pool area. Dinner should be ready now. And you’re not old!’

‘Hmmm, perhaps you’re right. I’d still give you a run out on the squash court I think.’

‘I know you would. Come on! Let’s go and relax by the pool and we can talk about anything and everything so long as the anything and everything does not concern the company!’

‘Sounds good to me!’

Taking both their hands he led them up a level. When they arrived he gave a quick glance down onto the helipad to make sure the crew were storing the helicopter away straight away. Sally pulled him away. ‘Come away and relax. They know what to do.’

‘I doubt it. That’s the reason it broke you know?’ he replied, turning to face her. ‘They left it out overnight in a storm!’

‘Yes, I know daddy, you told me. You also told me that you don’t think that they will ever do it again after the roasting you gave them! Trust them to do their job.’

‘That’s one of my biggest problems Sally. I don’t trust anyone apart from you.’

‘I’m glad you do trust me, but let’s forget about everything and relax!’

‘Okey dokey boss. Lead me to the bar!’

‘Come on!’

Sally dragged him to the bar where she dismissed the offers of the attendant and made her father his favourite cocktail, a mojito. For the rest of the evening and into the night, they talked and talked about anything and everything; from the hopes and aspirations of the Sally and Michelle to how much they all missed Sally’s mother.

Eventually though, after many freshly made cocktails, a few yawns were exchanged and both the women announced that they were going to bed. They both gave him a goodnight hug and kiss, after which they both retired to their respective cabins.

Mr. Gallagher though was not tired. After all the years of creating his fortune,

he only slept for a few hours each night and he was quite comfortable to go for several days without sleep. He quickly called James from the satellite phone on the bridge to make sure that nothing had gone wrong in the short time he had been away. James politely informed him to not call again until he returned to England and that everything would be handled while he was away.

Not believing him for a moment, still he made a mental note though to try and resist the temptation to call again, so he returned to the pool area where he dismissed the bar attendant, who he noted looked shattered, and made himself another cocktail. He then remembered that he had forgot to tell James about a small matter and before he realised what he was doing he was halfway back to the bridge.

When he did realise he cursed himself, spinning back round and returned to the bar area where he slammed his cocktail glass onto the bar then stripped off his clothes down to his underwear. He let out a quiet shout as he ran to the pool, leapt into the air and tucked his knees into his chest which allowed him to bomb into the water with an almighty splash. Spluttering and coughing he returned to the surface chuckling to himself and then with a kick he rolled onto his back and spent some time floating effortlessly in the pool watching the stars that hung in the clear Mediterranean sky.

After floating for fifteen minutes he swam a few lengths of the pool before leaving it. Not bothering to dry, he padded through the yacht to his cabin where he flung open the door to his balcony and sat in one of the loungers allowing the cool night breeze to dry his body. Eventually, with a relaxed sigh of happiness he left the balcony closing the door behind him. Giving a glance to the clock he muttered that this would be the earliest he had been to bed for thirty years so he decided to read some financial papers on his computer that had been emailed to him earlier that day. He became so engrossed in them that it was only when he felt the need for the toilet that he looked around him and noticed it was dawn. 'Bloody hell!' he muttered out loud. 'So much for relaxing!'

When he had visited the bathroom he lowered himself onto his bed and slept for two hours before being woken by the distant shouts and screams of his daughter and her friend. With a smile he leapt out of bed, put on his swimming shorts, and raced through the yacht to the port hatch where he dived into the refreshing sea and promptly dragged both young ladies deep under the water. With a cough and splutter they all surfaced, Mr. Gallagher laughing.

'Daddy! You nearly drowned us!'

'Rubbish! Right, last one to the rear of Samurai is a rotten egg!'

With a couple of strong strokes he swam away from Sally and Michelle, who both laughed at his antics and quickly followed him towards the rear of the yacht, to the lavish breakfast that awaited them.

*

Back in England, Sarah had just bought some fresh drugs off an acquaintance of Peter's. Her breakfast that morning was a syringe full of heroin.

The veins in her arms had long since collapsed so she simply injected the

breakfast into her leg.

Chapter 34

To the sound of the yacht's horn, Samurai docked at Monaco harbour two days after Mr. Gallagher had arrived. The previous day had been spent relaxing on the yacht as they cruised towards the state of Monaco, arriving just in time to watch the start of the practice session for the Grand Prix.

After the yacht was docked they made their way around the circuit in a car supplied by the team he sponsored until they reached the pit lane and the team's garage. Here they were met by the Team Principle who introduced them to the drivers.

Michelle could not help noticing and chuckle to herself how both of these multi-millionaire drivers' eyes nearly popped out of their heads as they saw Sally for the first time. From that moment, they both never left their side, showing the young women around the garage while Mr. Gallagher had a meeting with the Team Principle in the hospitality section behind the garage.

Michelle was sure that the distraction of Sally was the reason why both drivers underperformed during the practice session, both of them coming ninth and tenth respectively. One of the drivers seemed especially smitten with Sally.

As soon as he arrived back at the garage he was back by her side, showing and explaining to her the telemetry of his laps on a computer screen. Without realising that Sally could pay his wages from her own personal bank account, he invited her to the after-race party as his personal guest. With a smile she stated that considering her father was one of the main sponsors of the team, that she also had a boyfriend and that she personally knew his girlfriend, she did not think it would be a good idea. Obviously not used to being rejected, with a blushed face of thunder he stated that he hoped they both enjoyed the race and he stormed out of the garage.

'He didn't seem very happy,' chuckled Michelle

'Well, honestly. They think that just because they're well paid and slightly good looking that they can ease their way into any woman's knickers. Really annoys me. Same with those flamin' footballers from my dad's team who always hassle me.' She rolled her eyes. 'They don't seem to realise that in a blink of an eye I could pay their wages and buy their houses and cars which they are always so eager to flaunt!'

Michelle laughed. 'Well forget about him for now and let's go and find your dad.'

'Good idea.'

Linking arms they strode out of the garage, the passes around their necks allowing them access straight away into the hospitality suites behind the garage. 'There he is. Oh and bugger. Look who he's talking too!'

'Never mind Sally. Let's go over anyway and make him feel really awkward.'

Smiling, they both strolled over to where Mr. Gallagher was sat talking to the driver, and Sally casually draped an arm around her father's shoulder. With another deep blush he muttered an excuse of having to speak to his engineer and he quickly walked away.

'Now, how are my two favourite ladies?'

‘We’re fine.’

‘Did you enjoy looking round the garage?’

‘Yes, it was good.’

‘It will be a bit more exciting tomorrow when the qualifying starts and of course you’ve got your special treat as well!’

‘Oh yes! We’ve been having such a fantastic time we’d both almost forgot about it!’

‘Tomorrow, after the qualifying is finished, they’re going to let us drive round in a new Mercedes sports car!’

‘Sounds brilliant daddy!’

‘Yes, I’m sure we’ll enjoy it! Right, I’m done here. I’ve cleared up sponsorship issues so we can go back to the yacht and relax. Tonight we have a function we have to attend.’

‘Oh, I thought we were going to parties?’

‘We were. But an invite has come through that we can’t say no to.’

‘Fair enough. Well let’s go back to the yacht and we can relax there for a while.’

‘Okay. I’ll get someone to bring us transport back to the yacht.’

They waited in the suite for a short time while a car was prepared for them which took them back to the harbour and Samurai. They all spent the rest of the warm day lounging around the pool. Mr. Gallagher’s phone never stopped ringing, and for the first time that Sally could ever remember he directed all the callers to a member of his executive board.

Eventually though, after a mutter and a curse, Sally heard him record a message for the phone’s answer phone and in what was an absolute definite first he turned the phone off. A little while later he was approached by a member of the crew who informed him that there was a man waiting in one of the lounges to speak to him. Mr. Gallagher strode into the yacht and came back quickly holding three pieces of paper.

‘Right ladies. We’ve been invited to a function tonight. It’s black tie for the men, ball gowns for the women.’

A look of panic flashed across each of their faces and Sally informed him, ‘Daddy, we didn’t bring anything that formal.’

‘Did you not? Why not?’

‘We thought we would just be attending parties, not events that require ball gowns.’

‘Sally, you’re the daughter of one of the richest men in the world and you’re in Monaco with your father during a Grand Prix weekend. The first things that should be packed are ball gowns!’

‘Sorry daddy. I didn’t think.’

‘Right, not to worry. Rob,’ he said, calling to one of the crew, ‘get me Boutique Adrienne. Make sure that they know it is me who is calling.’

‘Yes Mr. Gallagher.’

They only had to wait a few moments for Rob to return holding a phone which he passed to Mr. Gallagher.

‘Hello.’

‘Mr. Gallagher. It has been too long!’

‘Adrienne. So lovely to speak to you.’

‘You too Mr. Gallagher. How can I assist you today?’ Adrienne spoke with a sultry French accent.

‘We have a bit of a ball gown catastrophe. Can you help?’

‘I am very busy today but I will take care of this personally myself. Who are the gowns for?’

‘My daughter and her friend.’

‘Your daughter? But Mr. Gallagher, I am confused. As you know, we don’t stock gowns for children?’

‘I think it has been longer than you realise Adrienne. My daughter is seventeen now.’

‘No, she cannot be! I remember her with your mother. She was no taller than my waist!’

‘Well, she is now. Can you help?’

‘Of course. Which hotel are you at?’

‘I’m on my yacht in the harbour.’

‘Ah, perfect! I will come now.’

‘You’re coming yourself?’

‘Of course. I need to measure the ladies.’

‘Excellent. How long will you be?’

‘Five minutes, if that. You know my Boutique is only a short walk from the harbour.’

‘We’ll be waiting for you.’

Just under the stated five minutes, a member of the crew led a woman out to the pool area. She was dressed simply in dark jeans with a simple white top. Her long dark hair cascaded down her back and as she saw Mr. Gallagher she smiled and removed her sunglasses showing her shining brown eyes.

‘Adrienne! So lovely to see you!’

‘And you Mr. Gallagher.’

‘Thank you for fitting us in at such short notice.’

‘My pleasure. Now, we must hurry if the gowns are to be ready for this evening. I presume you’re attending the ball with Pr...’

He quickly interrupted her. ‘Yes, yes. Quite true.’ With a look of confusion on her face, Mr. Gallagher then whispered quietly into her ear that their destination this evening was a surprise for the girls.

‘I’m sure you will all have a lovely time. Now, where are my two subjects?’

Sally and Michelle walked up from their cabins where they had been to quickly change. Adrienne looked at Sally and gasped. ‘Sally! So lovely to see you!’

‘Thank you for seeing us at such short notice.’

‘My pleasure. Your mother was one of my favourite and most loyal customers. You must miss her greatly, yet you are her image.’

‘Thank you. We do miss her, but she would be happy to see us still holding together as a family and enjoying life. This is my friend Michelle.’

‘My darlings,’ and she kissed both young ladies twice on the cheek. ‘Now, we must be quick. Just glancing at you I know we have two beautiful gowns that will

suit and fit you, but we must measure you and get them to suit and fit you perfectly! Now, where can we go to measure? Somewhere private, of course.'

'That's fine,' replied Sally. 'My cabin will be best.'

Sally quickly led them to her cabin where they both took it in turns to strip in the bathroom and be measured by Adrienne. As Sally entered Adrienne gasped again. 'If you ever want to model for me let me know. You have the most amazing figure and you have your mother's looks.' She fluttered round Sally with a tape measure, recording the figures on a notebook. 'Did you know that before she married your father, your mother modelled for all the leading fashion houses?'

'My dad might have mentioned it.'

'She was a stunning woman, just like you.'

'Thank you.'

'Right, we're done. Please send in Michelle.'

After Michelle had been measured they all made their way to the pool where he was waiting for them.

'Mr. Gallagher, you are all in luck! I have two perfect gowns for tonight that would nearly fit without alterations, but I want all my clients to look perfect so I will have them changed slightly and have them back to you, well, when do you leave?'

'The limousine is coming at six.'

'Then give me two hours and I will have them here for five.'

'Thank you so much Adrienne. Sorry about the short notice.'

'Not a problem. Just remember though ladies, next time you need a gown you know who to call!'

'We'll always be grateful,' replied Sally. 'Thank you so much.'

'I will send the bill to your office in London as usual Mr. Gallagher.'

'Please. I will see you off the yacht.'

With that he took the designer by the arm and led her off the yacht. The rest of the afternoon the girls spent getting ready. Mr. Gallagher acquired the services of two top hairdressers to attend to them on the yacht, paying a large amount of money for them to come at such short notice. Also, he arranged for some makeup specialists to come to help perfect the women's look for the night.

At exactly five that afternoon each of the women received their gowns at their cabins. Almost as soon as Sally had closed the door Michelle knocked loudly on it and Sally told her to enter.

'Have you seen yours?! Have you seen yours?!'

'No, it's only just come. Hang on.' Sally unzipped the protective case and it was her turn to let out a gasp. 'Oh my, it's beautiful!'

'Mine is too. Mine is red though, a really deep red!' Michelle replied.

'No wonder my dad asked her for the gowns. We're both going to look amazing!'

'You'll look amazing, I'll look okay.'

'You'll look amazing too silly!'

'I hope so.'

'Well, I'm going to finish getting ready. I'll see you upstairs at five to six.'

'Sounds good! This is going to be a great night. Do you know where we are

going to yet?’

‘No. He won’t tell me.’

‘Well if we need gowns like this I’m sure it is going to be amazing!’

Michelle skipped out of Sally’s cabin into her own cabin and when she entered she could not help stopping to stare at the ball gown. She thought to herself that she had never, and would never again, wear anything so perfect. Picking up the gown, she slid into it and then turned to contemplate herself in the mirror.

Her hair had been left to fall naturally, however it had been lightly curled into ringlets. The beautician had only applied the lightest of makeup to her face. Her most striking feature were her lips which had been coated in a deep red gloss that matched her dress to perfection. The gown curved over her large chest which was being pushed up to form a delightful large cleavage and cascaded down her body, flowing out to cover the bulges on her stomach and hips. To finish off her appearance she wore a pair of new black *Prada* shoes that had been supplied with the gown which added a few inches to her height. She was very happy with the way she looked, but she also knew that as soon as she was stood beside Sally she would feel inadequate and plain next to her perfect friend.

*

A short time later, Mr. Gallagher stepped off his yacht and held out his hand to help the young women step off the gangway. With a woman on each side of him linking an arm each, they walked the short distance to where the limousine was parked. While they walked a few people stopped to look at the three people, each of them laughing and joking as they walked along. A few passing tourists took photographs and as their cameras zoomed in to focus on their faces they were disappointed to see that they were not anyone famous.

When they neared the limousine, the chauffeur opened the rear door for them and they entered the vehicle. Sinking down into the luxurious leather seats, Mr. Gallagher reached to the cool box and poured them all a glass of champagne from the cold bottle of *Krug*.

Sedately the limousine cruised through the streets of the Principality until the large car came to a brief stop. Through the window Sally could see police and guards checking the limousine and the underside of the vehicle for any kind of explosive device. Quickly they were waved through and shortly after they stopped again where the chauffeur exited the car and opened one of the passenger doors.

Michelle was sat next to this door so she exited first. As soon as she placed a leg out of the car she was instantly dazzled by the flashes from cameras. Blinking, she stepped onto the red carpet and stood up. Instantly the cameras stopped as the journalists realised it was not anyone famous, and then they started again as Mr. Gallagher stepped out of the car. Once again most of the cameras stopped, but a few of them recognised him and carried on taking pictures. With a wave to the crowd he reached back into the limousine and took the hand of his daughter.

As she stepped out of the car the cameras clicked and stopped. Then the photographers, upon realising how beautiful this unknown woman was, like a ripple through them the cameras started again. Flash after flash dazzled the three

of them, and then one of the photographers who had recognised Mr. Gallagher realised that this stunning young woman must be his elusive only daughter. ‘Miss Gallagher!’

Surprised, Sally turned towards the man who had called her name and was instantly dazzled as the flash went off. Taking up the cry of her name, more of the photographers struggled to catch her attention for that special photograph where she was looking directly into their lens.

‘Miss Gallagher!’

‘Please Miss Gallagher!’

‘This way Miss Gallagher!’

With plenty of smiles, they stayed there for a few more moments, Sally responding to as many of the cries of her name as possible by turning this way and that way. Slowly her father started to edge them away from the front line of camera men, towards the gap between the two phalanxes of photographers. Still they called her name as they walked along the red carpet, but now she ignored them, eager to get away from the limelight that she did not wish for. She speeded up, and they both took the hint, quickly following her to clear the group of photographers.

After clearing the gathering of journalists they were able to view for the first time their intended destination. Michelle let out a small whistle through her teeth. ‘Is that what I think it is? That’s the Prince’s Palace. Oh my Sally, we’re going into a Palace!’

Which is where they headed to, passing the security guards who waved them under an archway into the courtyard at the front of the Palace. Upon entering the haven of the courtyard Mr. Gallagher turned and studied them both. ‘You both okay? That was a bit intense. Sorry, I thought there might be a bit of paparazzi, but nothing like that!’

‘It’s okay dad, don’t worry. You okay Michelle?’

‘Yeah, I might get my sight back in a minute!’ They all laughed at Michelle’s joke as they continued to walk across the courtyard towards the entrance.

‘Right, ladies, stop walking for a moment. In a moment, as you can see, we are going to enter the Palace. We are here as guests of Prince Albert the Second of Monaco himself. In a moment you are going to meet him. He knows me, so he’ll address me by my first name. I’ve met him before, so I will refer to him as Sir. You must refer to him on introduction as Your Serene Highness. If he likes you, he’ll say you can address him as Sir. If he really likes you he’ll allow you to address him as Albert, although I’ve only ever heard him say that once and that was to your mum Sally. Shake his hand, give a slight curtsy and simply say “It is an honour to meet you Your Serene Highness”’

‘Oh goody, a prince!’ exclaimed Michelle.

‘Don’t get too excited, he’s round about my age! Do everything as I say and you’ll be fine. He’s quite relaxed when you get to know him, but he cannot stand not having the proper respect shown to him in public.’

‘Okay dad, we’ve got it. Can we go in?’

‘Of course. Shall we?’ He offered an arm to each lady which they took, and he led them to the entrance of the Palace.

*

‘Ladies and gentlemen, Mr.,’ the microphone crackled as the announcer stated his first name, ‘Gallagher accompanied by Miss Sally Gallagher and Miss Michelle Walmesley.’ And then they were introduced to the Prince. ‘Please may I introduce you to His Serene Highness Albert the Second, Prince of Monaco.’

‘Mr. Gallagher. So good to see you again.’

Taking the Prince’s hand in a firm handshake he replied, ‘Sir, it is a real honour to be invited into your Palace.’

‘It is my pleasure.’

‘May I introduce my daughter Sally, and her friend Michelle?’

Michelle stepped forward first and gave a small curtsy. ‘Your Serene Highness. It is an honour to meet you.’ He nodded and smiled at her and the smile turned into a positive beam when his eyes met Sally’s sparkling emerald eyes.

‘You Serene Highness. It is a pleasure to meet you,’ and she also gave a small curtsy.

‘I thought for a moment that an apparition of your mother approached me. Please, I insist, call me Albert.’

‘Of course, erm, Albert. Thank you for inviting us into your home.’

He gave a light laugh. ‘It is more of a tourist destination and government building than home now Sally, but it is a pleasure to have you here. I must attend to my other guests, but I insist you save a dance for me later this evening.’

‘Again, it would be an honour Albert.’ Sally gave him his best smile, which unknowing to her made his heart skip a beat. With another pair of curtseys and a shallow bow, they walked away from the Prince through the throng of fellow guests.

‘Well, you both made an impression on him to say the least!’

‘I think you could marry a Prince if you wanted to Sally!’

‘Don’t be silly. He only liked me because I reminded him of my mother. I’m sure he won’t even remember my name by ten tonight.’

‘I doubt that very much.’

Mr. Gallagher distracted them by placing a glass of champagne into their hands, and then he led them through the guests, stopping every now and then to speak to people he recognised. All the men, even if they were stood next to their own stunning wife, could not take their eyes off Sally. Some of them tried to take her away from her father’s side, asking her whether they wanted to come onto the balcony and look at the view, or if she wanted a tour through the State Apartments which they had exclusive access to. To each and every offer, Sally politely declined and stayed close to her father’s side.

After mingling and networking their way through the crowd, Mr. Gallagher spent quite some time chatting to another man who was trying to persuade him to invest in their new computer system. Quickly the ladies grew bored with the conversation so they wandered away from him and took up position next to a large ornate stained-glass window. Almost instantly they were approached by two men who were old enough to be their fathers. Politely Sally and Michelle chatted to

them until Sally asked Michelle did she know where their boyfriends were. Thankfully the two men took the hint. They chatted amongst themselves for a few moments until mid-sentence Sally stopped speaking.

‘What’s up?’ Michelle asked.

‘Oh my word.’

‘What’s up honey?’

‘I suppose I should have guessed he would be here.’

‘Who?’ asked Michelle again, looking around.

‘The guy. Behind you. Over your left shoulder. Tall. Dark.’

Michelle slowly turned and looked across the room to where two men were stood, both of them were indeed tall, dark and very handsome. ‘Crikey! They both look gorgeous from here! Who are they?’

‘The one on the right as you look is his friend. The one on the left is Mo.’

‘Mo? I’ve never heard you talk about a Mo before. Who is he?’

‘Prince Sheikh Mohammed.’

‘He’s a prince? You know a prince?’

‘I know lots of princes.’

‘Is he rich?’

‘He makes daddy look like a pauper.’

‘Crikey! You don’t seem too happy to see him?’

‘I’m not. Let’s just say we didn’t depart from each other on the best of terms.’

‘Why? What happened?’

‘Shit! He’s noticed me. Double shit. He’s coming over.’

For the next few moments Sally and Michelle watched the two men walk over to them, watched as the women they walked past turned to look at them.

‘Miss Gallagher. It is a pleasure to see you again.’ The Prince held out his hand which Sally accepted.

‘Prince Mohammed. An honour to meet you again. May I introduce my friend, Michelle Walmesley.’

He took her hand and lightly shook it. ‘Miss Walmesley, a pleasure.’

‘The pleasure is all mine Your Highness.’

‘Please, Mo is fine. Miss Gallagher, I believe you’ll remember my friend Ashraf.’ Sally smiled politely but neither of them offered a hand to shake. ‘Okay, this is slightly awkward. As an icebreaker, can I offer you both some champagne?’

‘No, we’re fine thanks Mo. How’s your partner?’ With a flush of his cheeks the Prince stated she was fine. ‘Well shame you weren’t single last year then maybe this meeting wouldn’t be so... awkward.’ For a moment there was some feet shuffling and more awkwardness. ‘Come Michelle, I need to powder my nose. Nice to see you again Your Highness.’ Without waiting for a reply, Sally brushed past the Crown Prince and walked quickly towards the toilets, throwing open the door.

‘Sally! You can’t speak, and treat, a Prince like that!’

‘Well he shouldn’t have treated me like he did last year. And as for the sleazeball Ashraf...’ Sally placed her fingers in her mouth and made a retching noise.

‘What on Earth happened?’

‘Ohhh, last year. We were at his palace in his country, sorry, one of his many palaces. I was single, and he told me he was. He’s quite a few years older than me, than us, and me being the naïve daughter of a billionaire I fell for him, big time. He swept me off my feet. I was due to leave with daddy, but I begged the Prince to let me stay at the palace with him. I stayed there for a month. Every day we went sailing in his yachts, swimming in private coves, staying on his private islands out in the Gulf. He treated me, well, he treated me like a princess.’

‘Last year? Last summer?’

‘Yes.’

‘You told me you were away with your dad on business, keeping him company?!’

‘Sorry, that was a lie.’

‘I’d say! I thought you told me everything?!’

‘Usually I do honey, but not about last summer. He’s the first and only guy to see me naked and I was very content on the last night we were together for him to take my virginity. On the penultimate night though, I heard a commotion coming from along the corridor, towards the Prince’s room. It sounded very heated, and apart from staff, I didn’t think there was anyone else staying in the palace apart from us. So I put my gown on and walked quietly towards his room. His door was open and I stood in the doorway watching another woman throw ornaments, books, anything that came to hand, at the Prince, to which he casually batted away with a pillow.’

‘His girlfriend?’

Sally nodded. ‘If it had been any other circumstance it would have been quite funny, watching the Prince naked using his pillow as a bat. Of course, I quickly put two and two together and came up with three, and we all know that three doesn’t go too well in a relationship. Apparently she had been studying overseas and had just got back and heard about the woman the Prince had been seen with so many times.’

‘What a bastard.’

‘To say the least. I was heartbroken Michelle, fucking heartbroken. He saw me in the doorway and she noticed that he was looking at something else so she turned and saw me. She walked towards me; I can only presume swearing at me in Arabic. I panicked and ran off to my bedroom, locking the door behind me. For ten minutes she battered the door, screaming. I sat on my bed and prayed that the door held. I swear that if she had got through that door she would have killed me; she wasn’t rational. Eventually, a few members of staff pulled her away and I can only presume locked her in another room somewhere in the palace.’

‘So he didn’t even come to stop her?’

‘No. He had to rely on his staff. He didn’t have the balls to confront her himself, which I suppose says a lot really. That night I didn’t sleep, and I didn’t sleep for a week. The next morning, early, I snuck out of my bedroom and begged one of the staff to take me to the airport. I had nothing but my passport, some cash and my bank card. I got on the first flight out of there. Turned out it was a flight to Bangkok. I spent a month on my own in a hut on an island, crying my eyes out.’

‘Oh Sally, I’m so sorry. I had no idea. I thought you were with your dad, jet

setting around the globe.’ She put her arms around Sally and hugged her while Sally wiped away the tears that were now rolling down her face.

‘He totally broke my heart and as a man who is older than me, a Prince no less, he should have known better than trying to take advantage of a young woman, innocent in her naivety.’

‘Yes, he should have. You should have told me, I could have come and supported you.’

‘Thank you honey, but it was something I had to get through on my own. Anyway,’ she turned away from Michelle, ‘I’d better fix my makeup before we go back out there.’ As Sally was fixing her smudged makeup, Michelle asked about Ashraf. ‘Well, one night the Prince had to attend a function, men only, no way I could go, so he asked Ashraf to look after me. He was quite nice at first, then as the night went on he started to get really sleazy, saying that the Prince and him shared everything. They had slept with the same women lots of times and they weren’t bothered about it and other such things. When we were in the limo coming back from a party we had been to, he tried to hit on me and he tried to hit on me strongly. I swear if I hadn’t kneed him in the bollocks he would have raped me!’

‘You kneed him?!’

‘Yeah, he was pissing me off. It was quite amusing watching him roll about on the floor of the limo in the foetal position!’

‘I bet it was!’

‘I didn’t see him again after I had told the Prince. He was not amused.’

‘So you had no idea he had a girlfriend?’

‘She wasn’t his girlfriend. She was his betrothed.’

‘Oh my God! What an absolute bastard!’

‘Yep. Right, how do I look.’

‘As usual, sickeningly perfect!’

Sally laughed and took her friend by the hand, exiting the toilet and leading her across the room in the Palace. As they walked towards the bar they both noticed that the Prince was now dancing quite erotically with a woman who might as well not been wearing any clothes for she was not leaving much to the imagination.

When they were served at the bar, Michelle was surprised when Sally ordered a glass of red wine, cheap red wine at that. ‘Red wine? We’re in a palace in Monaco and you’re drinking red wine, cheap red wine?!’

‘I have no intention of drinking it Michelle. Order us two glasses of the best champagne and I’ll be back in a moment,’ stated Sally who picked up a glass of the wine.

As Sally tried to walk away, Michelle grabbed her arm. ‘Sally, where are you going?’

‘Stay here darling; you don’t need to be a part of this.’

‘No, Sally don’t, think about where we are, who is watching!’

With a smile and a wicked glint in her eyes, Sally shrugged off Michelle’s hand and walked towards the edge of the dance floor where she stood waiting for the music to stop. The blood was racing through her body, fuelled by adrenaline

and she struggled to stop her hand from shaking. As the music stopped, she stormed onto the dance floor, speaking just below a shout. 'Hi Mo. How's your fiancée?'

With a flash of anger across her face, the woman he had been dancing with turned to confront him. 'You're engaged?!' He did not reply.

'Yes, he is. This is for breaking my heart, and for all the other women you've taken advantage of!'

With those words, Sally threw the red wine into his face and watched with pleasure as it drained down over his white jacket and shirt. She jumped as the woman delivered a slap to his face and smiled as she watched him wipe the wine out of his eyes.

With a flourish she turned on her heels and looked straight into her father's eyes who was stood next to Prince Albert. Her father did not look shocked, he did not look surprised; his face was totally impassive. With another smile, she winked at her father, did a quick curtsy for the Prince, and walked off the dance floor towards where Michelle was waiting. 'And on that bombshell darling,' she spoke into Michelle's ear as she linked arms with her and walked towards the door, 'I think it would be a good idea to leave!'

'I think that would indeed be a very good idea!'

*

The next morning Sally was up early, just after dawn. She had not slept well, not because she was upset, but because she could not get the glorious image of a wine-soaked Prince out of her mind. From her bed, she watched the sun rise and with another smile she leapt out of bed, put on her bikini and headed to the pool for a refreshing swim.

Discreetly he watched her from the bar as he sipped a fresh orange juice. He was impressed with her technique and speed and thought that she could have made a good swimmer but persuading his daughter to get up at five in the morning for swimming training would have been a futile exercise.

Eventually she stopped at the far end of the pool and spent some time looking out to sea. As she turned a look of surprise flashed across her face as she noticed her father sat at the bar. With a few powerful strokes she powered to the other end of the pool and lifted herself out of it, her shoulder and arm muscles flexing as she effortlessly left the pool. With a couple of steps she was by his side and kissed him lightly on his cheek. She then took the towel and wrapped it round her body then sat next to him at the bar. For a few moments neither of them said anything until he broke the silence. 'Do you want to talk about last night?'

She smiled at him, and the early sun caught her red hair and lit up her green eyes. For a moment, he thought he was speaking to his wife again, young and beautiful, full of life. 'Not really daddy, no.'

'I suppose you remember the status of the person whose face you threw wine into last night?'

'Of course I do. We were in his country with him last year.'

'And you begged me to let you stay there for some retail therapy and an

extended holiday? You stayed in the *Burj Al Arab* hotel. I know you did because I saw the bill. You stayed in a suite, for a month, at about, if I remember rightly, three thousand five hundred pounds a night.'

'Before we go on, ask yourself after what you saw last night whether you want to know the real story?'

'I don't, but I'm intrigued as to the reason why you threw red wine into the face of a Prince, a Prince who is in control of numerous contracts that we are bidding on and numerous contracts that are currently ongoing which I'm now expecting to be cancelled.'

'I stayed with him at the palace for a month.'

'He's engaged.'

'Yeah, you could have told me that before I stayed with him for a month.'

'Well, if you had told me the truth I would have told you!'

'You probably would have, and I would have been on the first flight back to London.'

'True. So what happened? In fact, I take the question back. I can imagine what happened. She found out?'

'Yes.'

'But you were only in Dubai for a month. So where did you go afterwards? You told me you were doing some volunteer work in Africa?'

'Not exactly. I was in Thailand on my own crying my eyes out.'

'Oh Sally. I'm sorry. I had no idea. What a slimeball taking advantage of my daughter like that!'

'We didn't sleep together daddy.'

'I didn't need to know that, nor would I have asked. What an absolute... Well, I'm not going to give him the chance to cancel the contracts. I'll cancel them all this very day!'

'No daddy, don't. They're worth a fortune to you!'

'And you think in a situation like this I care about the money?! To be perfectly honest, I'm absolutely furious! He should know better than to have done that!'

'It is your choice, but don't think you have to do this for me.'

'I'm doing it because he is clearly an unethical idiot!'

'Well, I can confirm he's an idiot.'

'I'm going to call James now to set the ball rolling. How dare he treat a member of my family like that!'

Without saying anything else, he stormed off into the yacht and Sally resigned herself to the fact that she had probably just cost her father about five hundred million pounds. With a sigh she walked over to the jacuzzi, picking up a copy of *Vogue* to read while she soaked in the hot, bubbly bath. Soon Michelle joined her and they spent the rest of the day relaxing by the pool until Mr. Gallagher told them that the qualifying was about to start.

They watched this from the comfort of the yacht, all of them cheering as they saw one of the cars from the team he was sponsoring go flashing by while sipping from a seemingly endless supply of fresh fruit juices. After about an hour and a half Mr. Gallagher let out a loud shout of joy as he saw on the big screen opposite the yacht that both cars were on the front row of the grid. 'Yes! Now that makes

the sponsorship worthwhile! Lots of television coverage, lots of media coverage as a whole! I wish I had a bigger section of the car now!’

‘Well done daddy!’ Sally shouted, planting a kiss on his cheek.

For a few moments they watched the replays on the screen and they all celebrated again. Soon after this Mr. Gallagher was approached by a member of the crew. ‘They’re ready for us on the track!’

‘That was quick!’

‘Well, it’s not just us who have this honour. Quickly! You’ve got five minutes before the car leaves to take us round!’

The young women ran off to their cabins, both quickly getting ready. Within the allotted five minutes they were back by his side and they all scampered off the yacht to the waiting car. It took them slowly around the track to the pits where they were greeted by a professional driver who explained the plan for the next hour.

Mr. Gallagher went first. The driver took him around the track three times before pulling back into the pits and they switched places. With a roar and a squeal of tyres the powerful Mercedes-AMG GT supercar powered down the pit lane. The girls stood on the pit wall screaming every time there was a flash of silver whizzing past them and a roar of the engine. After five laps he pulled back into the pit lane. The girls ran over to the car and helped him out of the car. ‘Wow! That was an experience!’

‘If I can have Michelle next please,’ asked the driver.

‘Oh Sally, you go next.’

‘No, it’s okay darling. You go. Enjoy yourself.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes! I’ll enjoy watching you. Go on!’

‘Okay!’

Michelle climbed into the passenger seat of the car and again after a few laps she swapped with the driver and she thoroughly enjoyed her drive as she blasted round and one lap was even completed in a faster time than Sally’s father. ‘Younger reactions are the only reason you were quicker!’ Mr. Gallagher joked as Michelle learned of her times.

‘I can’t believe I went that quickly!’

‘You know,’ said the driver, ‘that’s actually a quite impressive time considering that was done on only your fourth lap around here.’

‘Impressive or lucky?!’ Michelle jokingly replied.

The driver laughed and asked Sally whether she was ready. Sally nodded and clambered into the car. Her three demonstration laps were quickly over and she took the wheel of the six hundred horsepower, two hundred miles per hour supercar.

Sally safely navigated the infamous Sainte Devote corner and blasted along uphill through the kinks of the ‘straight line’, and round the famous Casino corner. She quickly negotiated the Mirabeau Haute and blasted round a few more corners to the slowest corner on the circuit, the Grand Hotel Hairpin. After a couple more turns she entered the tunnel section of the circuit and she loved the sound and roar of the engine as it reverberated around the enclosed track. Her speed increased

rapidly as she accelerated ferociously through the tunnel and then without warning the steering wheel started to judder. As they exited the tunnel Sally was dazzled by the sunlight and without warning the car broke right, clipping the wall as it approached the Nouvelle Chicane.

With all her skill that she had honed on the tracks driving her father's supercars, she caught the car before it ploughed into the wall on the left, but as she corrected the car it unnaturally broke right again. Realising she was in deep trouble she slammed on the brakes, but this time the car broke hard right and hit the right wall with enough force to set off the car's airbags. With a screech of tyres and brakes the car careered across the chicane, all four wheels lifting off the track as they flew over the kerbs and with a force that drove the air out of Sally's lungs, rammmed into a wall and came to a smoking, shuddering halt.

*

With smiles on their faces Michelle and Sally's father looked down the track waiting to cheer Sally as she flashed past at high speed. Slowly though when the car did not appear the smiles slowly slid off their faces as they realised that something had gone wrong. 'She should have been here by now Mr. Gallagher.'

'I know Michelle, I know.'

With a look of concern etched on his face, he jumped down from the pit wall and jogged over to the garage with Michelle following close behind. As soon as they entered the garage they knew something had gone wrong. 'What's happened? Where's my daughter?!'

'Mr. Gallagher, I'm sorry. There's been an accident further down the track. It looks like the car has crashed although the reports we are getting from the marshals are sketchy at the moment.'

'If anything has happened to her I'll, I'll...'

'Mr. Gallagher, may I suggest we drive round. We'll get some more news as it gets radioed in.'

'Right, let's go, now please.'

They both climbed into a Mercedes saloon and with no-one saying a word they proceeded slowly around the track, through the tunnel. As they exited the tunnel and their eyes adjusted Michelle gasped. 'Oh my God! Mr. Gallagher, the car!' The right-hand side of the car was crushed and crumpled against the wall, but Michelle quickly noticed that there was no-one in the smashed vehicle.

Before the car had stopped, Mr. Gallagher leapt out of the vehicle and jogged over to the battered Mercedes supercar with Michelle following. He looked around for any evidence of his daughter and then he saw her, sat on the floor leaning against a section of the wall, her crash helmet on the floor next to her. He ran over to her. 'Sally! Are you okay? Please tell me you are okay?'

At first she did not reply, and as they approached her they could see she was clutching her ribs and tears were coursing down her face.

'Oh my! Are you okay?' With obvious difficulty she took his hand and managed to nod. 'Where's the driver?' As he spoke they both noticed each other, and the driver ran over to them. 'What the hell happened? Is she okay? She can't

speak!’

‘We’re both a bit shook up, sir. I’m more used to it, but it’s really took the wind out of Sally.’

‘Is that it? Is she winded?’ He looked down on her and she nodded. ‘Well, thank God for that!’ He leaned over and said to her to breathe to which she nodded again. Slowly, with effort, her breathing returned more to normal and she accepted some water from one of the marshals. ‘Can you speak now?’ asked her father.

Hoarsely, she managed to say, ‘Yes.’

‘What happened? Can you remember?’

‘Yes,’ she paused, and took in some more air, ‘but not sure what happened. Car broke right, clipped the wall, I caught it, braked, it broke right even more and I couldn’t catch it. Hit wall and slid to here. Don’t... don’t make me... speak anymore.’

‘Okay darling, breathe, breathe deeply.’ He turned and confronted the driver. ‘And how the hell did you let this happen?!’

‘Sir, I’m sorry, it happened in a flash. And if I’d reached over to grab the wheel it would have made things worse, a lot worse.’

‘Well what the hell happened?’

‘I agree with what she said. The car broke right, she managed to catch it like a pro after it clipped the wall, but then when she braked it broke right even more. From my experience, I think we got a right front puncture which made us move right the first time, and when she braked hard the tyre shredded forcing us hard into the right-hand wall. I’m sorry, but it was over in a flash. There was nothing I, or either of us, could have done.’

Turning back to Sally he took her hand again and he asked her a few times whether there was anything he could do. Michelle hovered around them looking very concerned.

‘Daddy, can you help me up now?’

‘Of course sweetheart. Come on, up you get.’

Slowly and gently he pulled her to her feet and for a few moments she leaned against the wall, catching her breath again. From along the tunnel there was a roar of another engine and they all turned to look. Being driven quickly a car approached them, with orange lights flashing. As soon as it stopped the Team Principle leapt out of the car, quickly followed by another man. ‘Mr. Gallagher! I’m so sorry! What on Earth happened?!’

The driver answered. ‘Blow out. Nothing either of us could do.’

‘This is the race doctor. He needs to examine Sally.’

The doctor approached Sally and led her away from the rest of them towards the car.

‘Where’s he taking her?’ demanded Mr. Gallagher. ‘Michelle, go with them.’

‘They’ll go to the medical facility where she’ll be examined.’

‘Michelle, go now please. Stay with her. I need to speak to the Team Principle about this.’

*

Gingerly Sally lowered herself into a rear seat of the Mercedes with the doctor sat next to her and Michelle took the front seat next to the driver. Very sedately they proceeded around the track until they exited the track near a building which they entered with Sally being supported by the doctor and Michelle.

Michelle was told to wait outside the examination room and Sally was gone for half an hour and in this time Mr. Gallagher had joined her. Anxiously they sat in silence, until after what seemed like hours the doctor came out of the examination room. Mr. Gallagher leapt to his feet. 'How is she? Is she going to be okay?'

'Yes, she's fine. She's shaken up, a bit beaten up and in slight shock. We've x-rayed her chest and I've given her a thorough examination and she's fine apart from some bruising. It can be quite frightening when you get the wind knocked out of you like that and you feel like you are unable to breathe, but she's fine now. I'd still like her to stay in overnight so we can keep an eye on her and examine her again in the morning.'

'That's fine. Thank you doctor. Can we see her?'

'Of course. Please.'

The doctor stepped aside and let them pass into the room. Sally lay on a bed, now wearing a hospital gown, looking very pale, and she was clearly still shaken from the crash.

'Darling. How are you?'

'I'm okay. Just, well, you know, a bit beaten up, but fine.'

'You will be sweetheart, you will be.'

'Is anywhere hurting? Do you want some painkillers?'

'No, honestly, I'm fine. Just a bit sore. I'm just thankful we were in a Mercedes with good safety features.'

'Me too. Nothing I can get you?'

'No, not for now. What happened? I don't really remember. Was it my fault? That expensive car...'

'Now stop that straight away! Don't you dare think that the car is more important than your health! It wasn't your fault. In fact, the driver said that you handled it like a pro, until the tyre shredded and then there was nothing any driver in the world could have done.'

'Oh, is that what it was, a blow out?'

'Yes, definitely. There was nothing you or anyone could have done in a situation like that. I spoke to the driver and he said that you hit the wall at quite a speed so it's no wonder you're shaken up a bit.'

'Right, okay. No wonder then. Can we go back to the yacht now?'

'No, we most certainly can't! The doctor wants you to stay in overnight and I agree with him.'

'But, but, we're going to the Casino tonight.'

'Don't be ridiculous Sally. You've just been in a serious car accident. You're staying here tonight, and that is quite frankly non-negotiable!'

Mr. Gallagher was expecting more of a fight from her and he was surprised when she said, 'I was looking forward to that, but I suppose you're right.'

'Good. Glad to see you see sense. Is there anything you need from us or the

doctors?’

‘No, nothing, I’m fine. To be honest, I just want to have a rest for a while.’

‘Of course darling, of course. Let me help you.’

Mr. Gallagher reached for the electronic device that controlled the bed and lowered Sally to a horizontal position. He plumped up her pillows and tucked the blankets around her, muttering that she needs to rest and that she will feel better in the morning. When he was done, she smiled up at him and thanked him for looking after her.

‘Sleep now sweetheart. Michelle and I will return to the yacht, get some of your things and come and see you this evening. Michelle, can you look in Sally’s bag and make sure her mobile is there. Put it somewhere she can reach it.’

Michelle followed his instructions and said to Sally, ‘Hey you,’ she leaned forward and placed a light kiss on Sally’s forehead, ‘your phone is there. Call either of us straight away if you need anything, right, and we’ll be here straight away. We’ll be back later.’

‘Thank you both for caring so much. I’ll see you later.’

With that, Sally closed her eyes and they both sat down in chairs to watch her for half an hour before they quietly left the room.

*

On the drive back to the yacht, neither of them said anything but Michelle could tell he was furious. ‘You okay Mr. Gallagher?’

‘Not really Michelle, no. To be honest, I’m far from okay.’

‘Sorry Mr. Gallagher, at least she’s going to be okay. Could have been a lot worse?’

She took his hand and stroked it and this simple act seemed to soothe and calm him a little. ‘Yes, I suppose you’re right. Thank you for being here Michelle, and I don’t just mean here in Monaco, but here in our lives as a whole. Although you may not realise it, you’re an inspiration to Sally. I could not believe before we met you at that performance what I had bred, how I had let her get so damned spoiled. After she met you and you became close friends, something changed. All Sally’s friends had been like her up to that point, daughters and sons of other well-off families. You seemed to offer her a balance, a realisation that not everyone in the world is wealthy. Sorry, that sounds terrible. I know your parents have done well for themselves, but you know what I mean don’t you?’

‘Of course I do, it’s fine.’

‘It is like when she met you, and she went to your house for the first time, the first time by the way that she had been in a house with less than ten bedrooms!’ Michelle laughed. ‘When she met you it was like she had walked out of a cave and had her eyes opened a little bit to what the rest of the world is really like, a touch of realism in her life. I know, and I know bloody damned well that the fact that she was like that was entirely my fault. I know the affect you have on her, and that is why I allowed you both to become such good friends with each other. Note I did say allowed. If I didn’t think you were right for her to be her friend then you would not have gotten close to each other. You helped balance her out, and for

that I'm eternally grateful to you.'

'I'm grateful to you for allowing me into your lives. It is like I have second family, another caring loving family and I care and love you both as if you were family.'

'That means a lot to me, thank you Michelle. I'm just so relieved that she is okay. The drive round the circuit to her was the longest couple of minutes of my life.'

'Mine too Mr. Gallagher, mine too.'

She stroked his hand for a few more moments until they stopped as they had reached the entrance to the harbour. With a flourish of security passes they entered the harbour and Michelle did not see him again until a few hours later when he knocked on her cabin door holding a large bag. 'I'm returning to the hospital to take some things for her. I presumed you'd want to come?'

'Of course. Give me two seconds, I'll just get changed.'

Michelle picked up some clothes and went into the bathroom to get out of her bikini and into jeans and T-shirt. While she was running a comb quickly through her hair she heard him speak to her. 'You know something Michelle; I don't think I've ever been in this cabin before. Well, I came in here on the viewing after it was finished being built, but I've never been in here since.'

Michelle came out of the bathroom. 'Really? But I suppose why would you when you've got your own suite?'

'But what's the point of having a yacht this size when I don't enter the rooms from one year to the next?'

'For when you've got guests?'

'I rarely have guests. Two, three times a year maybe?'

'Maybe, but the same thing could be said for the mansion. When was the last time you saw some of the rooms at home?'

'Michelle, there are rooms in that house that I've *never* been in!'

Michelle laughed. 'In that case sell it, give the proceeds to charity and live in a smaller house!'

He laughed this time and said, 'I think I'll stick with the mansion thanks, even if I only see or use ten percent of the rooms! Ready?'

'Yep, let's go.'

Another car was waiting for them which took them back to the medical facility. As they entered it the doctor was just leaving Sally's room.

'Doctor, how is she?'

'She's fine Mr. Gallagher. She's young, fit and tough. She'll be fine to leave tomorrow morning.'

'Good. Thank you for tending to her. Is she awake?'

'Is she awake? She's watching television!'

'Really? Sounds like she's doing fine then?'

'Yes, she is. I will assess her in the morning presuming nothing happens tonight. We'll speak tomorrow morning.'

'Thank you again doctor. We'll speak tomorrow.'

The doctor stepped round them with a smile and Michelle knocked gently on the door.

‘Come in.’

Michelle opened the door and Sally’s face lit up as she saw Michelle and Mr. Gallagher behind her. ‘Come in, come in, please come in. I’m so bored!’ They both walked over to her bedside and gave her a hug and a peck on the cheek. ‘Trust me to end up in hospital on our special weekend away! Sorry dad, and sorry to you as well Michelle.’

‘Now, now. No need to apologise. What is most important is that you’re healthy and recovering well.’

‘I still can’t remember what happened. I remember coming out of the tunnel and being a bit dazzled, and then the next thing I can really remember is leaning on the wall really struggling to breathe. I don’t know who got me out of the car or anything. Have you heard anything daddy?’

‘The driver said you got yourself out of the car and then walked unsteadily over to the wall. He didn’t call the doctor at first because he thought you were okay. It was only when the Team Principle found out that he summoned the doctor to come and tend to you.’

‘Right, okay. I still don’t remember. Ah well, never mind. I’m sure it will come back to me.’

‘How are your ribs? Anywhere hurting that wasn’t before?’

‘No, honestly, I’m fine. A bit sore, but fine. I’m just happy I can breathe now. I never, ever want to feel like that again.’

‘Well, unless you decide to crash on the Nouvelle Chicane again you never will!’

‘Oh stop! Don’t make me laugh!’

They small talked their way through the next couple of hours until they were interrupted by a nurse who was surprised that they were still there and demanded they leave. With kisses and hugs goodbye, they both left and spent the night on their own in their respective cabins, both contemplating how lucky they had been that the accident had not been more serious and that they had both not lost someone they cared about greatly.

Chapter 35

The day of the Grand Prix dawned bright and sunny. To say Mr. Gallagher was surprised when he got to the pool for a refreshing swim and he saw Sally lounging by the pool would be an understatement. 'And what the hell do you think you're doing here?!'

'And good morning to you too darling father!'

'If you've checked yourself out of that hospital without the doctor giving you the all clear you'll be in more trouble than you've ever, ever been in!' He stood next to her, hands on hips, staring into her green eyes.

'Dad, relax.' She took one of his hands in hers and started to stroke it. 'I saw him earlier this morning. He examined me thoroughly and gave me the all clear. He said to tell you to call him or you can go and see him. He will be at the medical centre all day now.'

'Right, well, I think I'll make that call.'

'Why? Don't you believe me?'

A quick look of surprise flashed on his face, but it was gone before it had really arrived. 'Well, I suppose you're sensible enough not to leave the centre after an accident like that without the doctor's consent.'

'You know I wouldn't do that. I'm fine.'

'Well your ribs don't look fine.' Sally was dressed in only her bikini and the bruising on the trunk of her body was clear to see.

'Dad, thank you for being so caring, but honestly I'm fine. What time does the Grand Prix start?'

'One o'clock. You sure you're okay?'

'Yes! Honestly I am. Thank you.'

'Right, okay, well I'm going for a swim. Let me know if you need anything though.'

'I will.'

He dove into the pool and spent the next hour or so doing lengths and in the meantime a surprised Michelle had joined Sally on the loungers which is where they stayed throughout that morning. At around ten they both left the pool area and went to freshen up before a car picked them up to take them round to the team's garage where they would watch the build-up to the race.

For an hour or so they watched with interest from a discreet distance in the garage, watching the drivers receive their last-minute briefings and watching the cars receive last minute tuning. The cars were ready to go out onto the grid forty-five minutes before the start of the race and in the confines of the garage the young women could not believe the noise of the engines as they were started and driven carefully out of the garage to form up on the grid.

At the suggestion of the Team Principle, he led them onto the crowded grid and talked them through the preparations that were happening to the cars at this time. After a short while he left them to return to the garage and they were free to wander amongst the cars.

Sally estimated that about eighty percent of the people on the grid that day had nothing to do with the racing teams; therefore she always considered what

happened that day to be remote odds to say the least. That she would be picked out of all those people for an impromptu interview with the British broadcasters of the race.

‘Hello, may I have a quick word? We’re live going straight back to millions of people in England!’ With a look of surprise, and before Sally could dodge past him, he had her boxed in between the cameraman and a group of people. ‘Who are you and who are you here with?’

‘Hi. My name is Sally and I’m with my father, who appears to have wandered off, and my friend Michelle.’

‘Great! And what team are you supporting today?’

‘It had better be the British team because my dad sponsors them!’

‘Really? Excellent! And have you ever thought of doing some modelling?’

‘Erm no, not really.’

‘You should. By far you are the most beautiful woman here today, and there are plenty of Hollywood stars on the grid today!’

‘Thank you for saying that, but no, I haven’t.’

‘Thank you for taking the time to speak to us.’

Sally managed to quickly dodge past the cameraman and rejoined Michelle who had a look of surprise on her face. ‘Crikey Sally! You were just on television in England!’

‘Yes, I know. And I know one person who will definitely be watching the race who will be very, very surprised to see me pop-up on television...’

*

David had just taken mouthful of his orange juice as the commentator introduced the random person he had stopped to speak to. His orange juice was sprayed all over him and the sofa from his mouth as he realised that his girlfriend was being interviewed on the grid of the Monaco Grand Prix.

*

Sally felt her phone vibrating in her pocket so she took it out and saw David’s name flashing on the screen. ‘Michelle, it’s him. What am I going to say?’ They had both returned to the team’s garage after the interview, Sally’s face etched with worry and concern. ‘What the hell am I going to say to him?’

‘The truth.’

‘Right. Great help.’

‘I’ll leave you to it.’ Michelle wandered back into garage and started to chat to one of the engineers.

‘Hello David. You shouldn’t be calling me, it costs a fortune!’

‘Considering your dad has got enough money to sponsor a Formula One team you can pay me back!’

‘And here I was hoping that right at that moment you’d be making a cup of tea...’

‘Unfortunately not. You have mere moments to explain yourself before I hang

up this phone and you'll never hear from me again.'

Sally felt like a lead weight had landed in the bottom of her stomach when David said those words. She did not want to lose him. 'David, I'm so sorry I lied to you, but this is neither the place nor the time for this conversation. Can we please, I beg you, speak tomorrow about this? I'll come and see you as soon as I get back.'

'If there's one thing I cannot stand it's being lied to and being made to look foolish.'

'I lied to you yes, but I never intended to make you look foolish.'

'Who *are* you?' David's voice was beseeching, straining for Sally to give him an honest answer.

'Google my dad.'

'Your dad?'

'Yes, you know his name, google him.'

'There'll be millions of Gallaghers with his name. Don't be ridiculous.'

'Trust me. Google his name and he'll be the first one out, right at the top. You might even find my name near his.'

'This is nuts! Right, I'm going to call you back in five.'

'I won't be able to answer.'

'Why not?'

'I'll be with my dad, erm, watching the race.'

'Right, of course you will. I'll call you after the race. To say I'm disappointed is an understatement.' Without waiting for a reply, David hung up the phone and straight away went into the phone's browser and googled Sally's father.

The first link that he selected took him to a site he had never heard of before called Forbes. From what he could tell, it seemed to be a website of lists, the best this, the richest that. When he clicked the link it took him to a page entitled World's Billionaires, and there, just off the top ten was her father's name. 'Holy... shit!' David muttered to himself.

He spent the next few moments reading the summary about his girlfriend's father:-

"Born in 1952 in Ireland, Gallagher made his fortune in electronic components and telecommunications. Son of a coal miner, Gallagher obtained his first patent for an electronic component in 1970 and that component went on to become an essential part of any circuitry. From then on he has not looked back, obtaining lucrative military contracts with governments around the globe. Often referred to as frighteningly ruthless in the boardroom, Gallagher contributes to many charitable organisations. If the ongoing increases in his companies share prices continue, it won't be long before Gallagher breaks into the top ten of the World's Billionaires."

David had to read this twice more before it sunk in, after which he returned to Google and looked through other sites and his surprise and shock grew as these sites also placed Sally's father firmly in the top twenty of the wealthiest men on the planet.

With his attention totally distracted, he missed the start of the Grand Prix and did not watch any of the race. He continued to plough through the websites and

even started to google Sally's name. Sites that mentioned her were scarcer, but they were there, stating her as the sole heiress to the Gallagher fortune. Noticing some pictures, he clicked on images and pictures of his beautiful girlfriend appeared and even a few of her with her father.

As he looked at the images, from somewhere a memory scrambled to his conscious mind and he remembered where he had seen her father before, it was on one of their first dates, the night when the two men with their manic grins dressed in tuxedos approached them in the city.

He flicked through the images and some were clearly taken a few years ago, but one looked like it was recent, very recent. In the background of the photograph was a limousine, and Sally and her father were standing next to Michelle. Both of the young women looked stunning, and Sally was looking straight into the camera. To say she looked gorgeous was an understatement, and not for the first time since they had started dating David slowly shook his head and asked himself the question what on earth was she doing with him? He clicked the link which led him to a journalist's blog and David read about the many attendees to the Prince of Monaco's party. Halfway down the page he found Sally's picture, and he read about how the reclusive daughter of the billionaire shunned the limelight, how she was far removed from the typical young females from wealthy families, the so called 'it-girls', who embarrass themselves on a sometimes seemingly daily basis.

By the time he had exhausted all links and images about Sally and her father, the race had finished and indeed the program had changed. He looked on the BBC website to find out who had won and was happy to discover that the British driver had won in a pretty uneventful sounding race.

For a few moments he paced around the living room trying to collect his thoughts before calling Sally.

*

While David was contemplating what to say to his girlfriend who he had just found was incredibly wealthy, Sarah was lying in a semi-comatose state in her bedroom, her head resting on the filthy mattress that was riddled with fleas and bed bugs.

A needle was hanging out of her foot.

Chapter 36

‘Where are you?’

‘In my, erm, cabin.’

‘Cabin? Are you on a cruise now?’

‘Not exactly, but kind of.’

‘Not exactly but kind of? Please Sally, if you like me and respect me as much as you say you do then please, I beg you, start giving me straight answers!’

‘Right, okay. I came here after the race because I didn’t want to attend the after-race party because I was in a car crash yesterday and I’m still feeling a bit tender.’

‘You were in a car crash?! What on Earth is going on?! Are you okay?’

‘It’s okay, I’m fine. Just a bit bruised and battered.’

‘Well, erm well, I’m glad to hear it. How did you crash and where is here?’

‘I had a blow out just before the Nouvelle Chicane and here is on my daddy’s yacht.’

‘Your daddy’s yacht?!’

‘Yes.’

‘The Nouvelle Chicane?! Now, I’m not that much of a geek that I know the name of every corner in Formula One, but I do know that the Nouvelle Chicane is on the Monaco Grand Prix circuit so now begs the question what the hell were you doing driving on the circuit?!’

‘My dad organised it for us through the team he sponsors.’

‘Right, okay. I’m really struggling to come to terms with this. I did as you asked, I googled your dad and you, and I can clearly see that your father is wealthy, and you being the sole heiress makes you, well, wealthy.’

‘Yes, it does. Look, David, it would be much better if we talked about this face to face.’

‘I’d like to talk about it now. So the old Mini you drive, is that just for show for me?’

‘No, that’s mine. I did some work for my father last summer, just admin work, and he gave me a salary. I bought the Mini out of that money.’

‘Right, but you could afford, for example, a Ferrari?’

‘Yes. I could buy a Ferrari on one of daddy’s credit cards and I doubt he would notice, but I never would without his permission because I would feel like I’m cheating and stealing from him. It would be like you going into your mum’s purse and taking ten pounds out without telling her. You just wouldn’t do it would you?’

‘No, I wouldn’t, you’re right. So how big is the yacht?’

‘Very. Google it. It’s called Samurai.’

‘I will, later. Can we go for a cruise on it one day?’

‘Of course. What are you doing next weekend?’

‘Well to be honest, I’ve got us tickets for the theatre.’

‘We’ll fly out to wherever the yacht will be on Friday instead and spend a couple of days on it. How does that sound?’

‘I don’t know Sally. This is all a bit too much for me to take in at the moment.’

‘I really, really like you David. We’ve had a fantastic time together and I don’t

want it to end...'

'Me too Sally, me too.'

'So, why don't we both sleep on it? We can both get used to the idea and talk about it tomorrow. How does that sound?'

'It sounds good, apart from you've got nothing to get used to, I have.'

'I have to get used to the fact that I've lied terribly to you when I should I have told you the truth. And I have to get used to the feeling of how I feel now when I have the horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach that I might lose you.'

'You're not going to lose me, but you'd better have some good explanations. Where and when do you want to meet?'

'Say seven at my apartment?'

'Where's your apartment?'

'The apartment we always go to.'

'That's your relation's apartment?!'

'In a way, yes. My dad bought it for me.'

'Right, okay. So that duplex penthouse apartment on the thirtieth floor in one of the richest areas of the city is your apartment?'

'Yes.'

'This is bewildering. I'll be there at seven.'

'Okay. I'm sorry David. I never, ever would have wanted you to find out like this.'

'Yeah, I bet. See you tomorrow.'

Sally tried to reply but he had already gone before she could get the words out. In a fit of anger she flung her phone against one of the cabin walls, quickly followed by a lamp and a china cup. With a loud curse she threw herself onto the bed and had what could only be described as a tantrum.

Lying on her front, her legs and arms pounded into the mattress and pillows, all the while she was cursing and getting herself into such a state that by the time she had exhausted herself there were tears rolling down her cheeks.

Furious with herself, she jumped up off the bed and threw the saucer that belonged with the cup against another wall. She then opened the wardrobe door with such force that it shook and grabbed a small bag into which she started to place a few items of clothing. With another curse, and this time a vase was thrown but it did not break which made her even madder, she walked quickly to her father's cabin, took a deep breath and tapped quietly on the door.

'Erm, yes, who is it? Please wait a moment.' Sally listened and she could hear some scurrying going on in the cabin and then from inside the cabin he started to say as he opened the door, 'I thought I told you I did not want disturbing... Oh! Sally, it's you. Sorry. Please, come in.' He could tell by the look on her face she was clearly not happy about something. 'What's wrong? Who has upset you?'

'Me. I've upset me.'

'Oh. Okay. What's happened?'

'David, my boyfriend. You were right. I should have told him the truth from the outset!'

'What? Why? Has he found out? How?'

'He saw me on the television before, in England...'

‘On the television? How?’

‘On the grid. We’d lost you. You weren’t there.’ Sally then proceeded to tell her father what had happened, how she had lied about where she was supposed to be this weekend, and how rightly upset David was. ‘So, I want to go back to England now and see him.’

‘Do you not think it would be better to let him sleep on it and get used to the idea before you see him tomorrow?’

‘I don’t know dad, I don’t know what is best to do.’

There was a moments silence and it was then that Sally noticed a distinct smell of perfume on the air. For a few more moments she tried to remember where she had smelled that perfume before and then it came to her, Adrienne. ‘Daddy, is Adrienne here?’

‘What? What on Earth makes you think that?’

‘That’s a pretty distinctive perfume she wears.’ Inside the cabin’s luxurious bathroom Adrienne winced.

‘Yes, she is.’

‘Right, well, I’ll leave you to it. Sorry for disturbing you.’ Standing up Sally asked, ‘Can I take the helicopter? Where’s the jet?’

He could clearly see the look of hurt in her eyes. ‘Sally, I’m sorry. Your mother has been gone from me, from us, for a long time now. I mourn her and I miss her and I always will, but she would not want to see me alone.’

‘Yes, I know. I told you that once, not so long ago in fact. It’s fine. Can I take the helicopter and jet?’

It was obvious to him that it was far from fine. He decided to leave it for now though. ‘Yes, take whatever you need. Go. Now. Go and see him and make this better if you like him as much as I think you do. I’ll phone ahead and make sure everyone is ready for you.’

‘Thank you daddy.’

She kissed him lightly on the cheek and left the cabin, walking with her head down to the rear of the yacht. Waiting while the helicopter was prepared she realised she had not told Michelle. Just at the moment when she was going to return to the living area of the yacht the pilot informed her that he was ready to depart so she decided to call her later.

Quickly the helicopter lifted off from the yacht and headed south-west along the coast for the short journey to Nice. They landed next to the jet and Sally transferred across. Due to the short time frame, it was not quite ready to take off which annoyed Sally even more. Cursing again, she stared out of the window and considered how someone so wealthy could have so many dramas. She then thought that even with an endless supply of money life was far from perfect.

Soon the pilot announced from the cockpit that they were ready to depart and for the rest of the flight Sally stared out of the window, staring at the clouds below the plane and the occasional flash of land below them.

From where they had taken off all excited a few days ago, Sally now departed the plane in a thoroughly fed-up state and was surprised when both her Mini and the Rolls-Royce were waiting for her. Beside the Rolls stood Alfred who walked over to greet her. ‘Miss Gallagher. I trust you had a good flight?’

‘Yes, it was fine thank you.’

‘Your father called and gave me a short synopsis of the situation. Considering that your boyfriend now knows the truth I was in a quandary as to which transport you would wish to use to go and see him.’

‘I think me rolling up in a Rolls would be a bit too much for him to handle. I’ll take the Mini. Thank you for thinking of me Alfred.’

‘It’s a pleasure ma’am. I’ll take the Rolls-Royce back to the house then. Please let me know if there is anything I can help you with. Here’s the key.’

‘I will. Thank you.’

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From the private airfield it was not a long drive to David’s house, but Sally still took her time. She tried to gather her thoughts but all too soon she was pulling onto his street and arriving outside his house. For a few moments she composed herself and then walked along the short garden path to knock on the front door. His mother answered. ‘Sally! I thought you were away this weekend? This is a lovely surprise.’

‘Yeah, I wasn’t really enjoying myself much so I came home early.’

‘Ahhh, young love! He’s in his room. He’s been moping about all day like a grumpy young teenager. Please, come in.’ Sally stepped into the house and his mum called up the stairs. ‘David? David! You’ve got a surprise visitor!’

‘I’ve got flu. I don’t want to see anyone,’ he shouted back.

‘No, you’ve not got flu! Don’t be rude and come down this instance!’

Distantly Sally heard him swear to which his mum rolled her eyes. Sally then heard his door being loudly opened. ‘Gorrrddd mum! This had better be impor...’ He had reached the top of the stairs and as he looked down his jaw opened, closed and then opened again. ‘You’d better come up.’

His mum rolled his eyes again and apologised for his attitude to Sally. She stepped away from the bottom of the stairs and beckoned Sally up. Seemingly reluctantly Sally proceeded up the stairs into David’s room. He was slumped on his bed watching the television, which was showing a re-run of the Grand Prix, but he wasn’t watching it. Instead he was staring out of the window looking quite glum.

‘You okay?’ Sally asked.

‘To be honest Sally, no, not really. Why didn’t you tell me the truth?’

Hesitantly she approached his bed and sat on it when he did not protest. He did protest though when she tried to take his hand by pulling his away and folding his arms. ‘You have to understand it from my point of view. I’ve had dates with guys before where I’ve told them about my real status in life and it is heart breaking for me when I see their faces light up as they think they could be on for an easy ride through life courtesy of my father’s damned hard work. As I look at them I can see the cogs whirling and spinning in their heads. I knew from that moment on that they would only be interested in my money, not interested in me. Do you understand?’

‘Yeah, of course I do. But it wouldn’t have been like that with me. I don’t care

about money so long as we're happy.'

'That's a good thing to say, but I don't think for one minute we would be as close as we are now if you'd known about this.'

'Does your dad know about me?'

'He knows I have a boyfriend.'

'Does he not think it strange that we haven't been introduced?'

'No. He knew the approach I was taking, and I'll just add he was heartily against the idea.'

'And Michelle and Simon? Have they been laughing behind my back on the dates we've had together? Are they in on this?'

'Of course Michelle knows, I've known her for years. I don't know if Simon knows. Depends if Michelle told him but I asked her not to tell him.'

'And how the hell did you get back here so quick?!'

'I was wondering how long it would take you to ask that question. My dad's jet was at Nice so I used the yacht's helicopter to fly to Nice...'

'The yacht has a helicopter?!'

'Yep.'

'And your dad has a jet that you can use whenever you want to?!'

'Within reason, yes. He wouldn't, as an example, be very happy if I decided to take it for a shopping spree to New York, he'd expect me to fly commercial.'

'First class commercial though I bet?'

Nodding in agreement, with a smile on her lips, Sally decided to try a different tack. 'David, look at me.' She tried to take his hand again and this time it was accepted. Reluctantly his blue eyes met her green. 'I love you...'

'Pardon?!'

'I love you, and I don't want this to destroy the great relationship we have.'

'You love me?'

'Yes. A lot.'

'Well, well, I've wanted to say that to you for a long time, I just didn't know how.'

'Try it. It's quite easy. First I. Then love. And finally you.'

Playfully he punched her arm. 'I love you Sally and I have done for ages.'

'See? Wasn't difficult was it?'

'No, I suppose not. And I suppose having the daughter of a billionaire in love with you does have its advantages!'

'David!' She started to beat his arm. 'You're not meant to think about it in that way!'

Quick as a flash he caught her hand and with a show of strength he flipped her on her back and straddled her across her waist, firmly holding her wrists. They stared into each other's eyes, Sally struggling under him. Slowly he leaned forward and kissed her lips, gently running his tongue across her full, luscious lips. 'You're not meant to think about it in that way.'

'Sally, I'll love you whether you are rich or pauper, peasant or Queen.'

'Good...'

And he did not let her finish. He kissed her again, this one lingering, his

tongue flicking against hers. Slowly he pulled away and rolled off to lie down next to her where he wrapped his arms around her, running his fingers through her long copper hair. 'What is your natural hair colour?'

'You'll find out, one day very soon...'

There they lay on David's bed until later that evening, talking, with David learning more truth about his girlfriend, the young woman he loved.