

SUSHI AND SEA LIONS by Rachel Corsini

EXCERPT

I glanced over at . . . Billy? I think his name was Billy. If it was, he'd be the third one since the walking boot came off. Like the Three Billy Goats Gruff. Trip trap, trip trap right into my bed. Especially after one too many pinot grigios. Groping in a dark bar before stumbling to my Upper West Side apartment.

He filled up my time like he filled up my bed, a temporary Band-Aid. Screwing third Billy didn't make me feel better, neither did f**king first or second Billy. It didn't matter who I gave myself to.

It seemed stupid that I'd held out for something special when none of it was special at all.

Standing at the edge of my bed, goosebumps on my skin from hitting the cool air, the click click of the radiator echoing in the nearly empty room, I was surrounded by my life scattered in cardboard boxes.

Billy murmured in his sleep and turned his head away from the light streaming in through the window.

I stretched; arms raised above my head before looking at my foot. Tiny incision scars marred skin balanced by a pitch-black pedicure. I grabbed a hairband from my nightstand and twisted my long brown hair into a bun.

Yawning, I pulled a sweatshirt over my head, covering me to my knees. I sat down on the window ledge and spied a stray quarter against the grainy wood floor. Ms. Nettie, my first ballet teacher, used to test her bunheads to see if we were ready for pointe work. She'd put a quarter in front of our bare toes and say, "Pick it up." The first time I did it I was eleven and was in my first pair of pointe shoes the following week.

I slid my foot out toward it and curled my toes against the rippled edge of the quarter, pressed tight into the ball of my foot. *Still got it.* I brought my leg back toward me, without bending it, before retracting it toward my body, bending my knee inward, *envelope.* An entire vocabulary memorized over two and a half decades of training rendered useless.

I spread out my toes and released the quarter into my open hand. "Tada."

Billy number three cleared his throat. He'd caught me with my toes by my eyes. I could have kissed them if I wanted to. I dropped my leg to the floor like a hammer driving down a nail.

He needed to go. This wasn't some magical experience where two strangers met, shared a night together, and ended up happily ever after. I didn't want happily ever after. There was no point. I wasn't that kind of girl. I wanted to be left in my perfect little void. I'd have a few Billys and be done with it. I had to protect myself. Nobody else would.

"Breakfast?" Billy sounded hopeful. What an idiot.

"No."

This was my new cycle. Do something that made me feel alive in the moment and after feel like a piece of my soul was torn out. A hunter impulse to conquer and destroy, fill up and pour out, like a good glass of Pinot.

I felt the brush of fur against my hand and Regi my cat pushed her wet nose against my fingertips. I stroked her head before she hopped into my lap. I rubbed my fingers against her chin when she sat down and purred.

Billy climbed out of bed. Oh Jesus, I'd f**ked the Lucky Charms leprechaun. Though it was magically delicious, I was mortified. "It was fun."