

# IF WE WERE PERFECT

IF LOVE #4

## ANA HUANG

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Cover designer: Vanessa Mendozzi

Editor: Shelby Perkins, Moonwake Editorial

**Proofreader:** Krista Burdine

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#### IF WE WERE PERFECT

## Two exes, one house. What could go wrong?

Olivia had a plan: MBA, Wall Street VP by thirty-two, marriage and two children (preferably twins because #efficiency).

Not in her plan? Losing half her belongings in an apartment flood and being forced to turn to her ex for help.

Definitely not in her plan? Moving into said ex's house and watching him walk around shirtless, bake her cupcakes, and look at her with those smoldering—

Wait, what was she talking about again?

<del>\*\*</del>

Between his bakery and meddling family, Sammy had enough on his plate without bringing the ex he'd never been able to forget into the mix.

But when Olivia asks for his help, he couldn't say no. He could, however, make her regret breaking his heart—as long as he doesn't do anything foolish, like sneak into her room and kiss her senseless...

As passion slowly replaces their dislike for each other, Sammy and Olivia discover their past isn't what it seems and their future is anything but certain. Can they overcome their pride and give love a second chance, or is history doomed to repeat itself?

### CHAPTER ONE

"He tried to give me a lap dance, Farrah. In the middle of a four-star restaurant." Olivia Tang paced the length of Ishikawa's black-marbled bathroom, her heels clicking against the tile floors in agitation. "I like this place. The sushi is great, and it scores at least an eight out of ten on everything else I require from my favorite dine-out places—service, ambiance, decor, location, clean bathrooms. I refuse be banned for my momentary lapse in judgment in agreeing to dinner with a guy named Wesley."

Her best friend, Farrah Lin-Ryan, laughed, the silvery sound tinkling over their transcontinental call in a wash of familiarity. Olivia hadn't heard that laugh in person in months—not since she, Farrah, and their other friends, Courtney Taylor and Kris Carrera (soon-to-be Kris Reynolds), flew to Miami for a girls' trip in February. She missed having her best friend in the same city, but a phone call was better than nothing, especially when she was on yet *another* disaster of a date.

"Say you have an emergency and cut the date short," Farrah suggested.
"I'll call you in a few and pretend I'm a close family member that got rushed to the hospital."

"I would, but I want to try the dessert." Olivia ran a hand through her sleek, just-below-shoulder-length black hair and examined her reflection. She'd been optimistic about tonight and had run out of the office so she had

enough time to get ready. Two hours later, her hair was perfect, her makeup accentuated her bright dark eyes and rosebud lips, and her elegantly provocative black dress clung to her slender frame. Comfy but sexy heels added an extra three inches to her five-foot-five frame.

What a waste.

All that time, energy, and makeup for nothing.

"They're famous for their dessert," Olivia added, oddly compelled to explain why she was staying. "Caramelized apple and kuromoji ice cream served with muesli."

There were few things she wouldn't do for good food. Maybe it was because she couldn't cook to save her life, so she relied on other people's cooking skills for culinary satisfaction. Whatever it was, Olivia's food obsession had taken her to sometimes-sketchy, always-delicious places since she was old enough to distinguish between a hand roll and a maki roll.

"Sounds yummy. Well, you're in the middle of the main course, right? You're almost there. Just make sure Wesley doesn't, um, pull another Magic Mike." Farrah sounded like she was trying not to laugh again.

"Yeah, yeah, make fun of me, you happily married newlywed," Olivia grumbled. "You're not the one slogging through the swamps of single life in modern America."

"Newlywed or not, I still love you."

"I know." Olivia sighed. "I better get back out there before Wesley thinks I fell in the toilet or something. I swear, this dessert better be worth it."

"I'm sure it will. Call me later and let me know how it goes? Love ya."

"Love you, too."

Olivia hung up.

The date had been a colossal waste of time, but it would be less of a waste if she stayed for dessert. She'd weighed the pros and cons already: sacrifice an extra half hour for dessert and leave with greater satisfaction, or escape early with no satisfaction at all (beyond the delicious sushi she'd already consumed). The past hour and a half were a sunk cost; she couldn't get it back.

She concluded that greater satisfaction outweighed thirty minutes of her time. Olivia had an obligation to herself to ensure her night wasn't a *total* waste, and she'd been dying to try Ishikawa's signature dessert since she read about it in *Mode de Vie*'s Food Features section.

She exited the bathroom and tried not to grimace when she saw Wesley polishing off another sake at their table. According to his dating app profile, he was a real estate agent who liked vintage wine and travel—just like Olivia—and he *was*. What it'd failed to mention—and what he'd announced ten minutes into their dinner—was that he also moonlighted as a stripper at The Cock Pit.

Yes, that was the name of Wesley's nighttime employer, and yes, according to her chatty date, all the non-stage-performer employees had to dress up as flight attendants.

Olivia had nothing against strippers. She loved *Magic Mike XXL*. A shirtless Channing Tatum, Joe Manganiello, and Matt Bomer all in the same movie? Yes, please. But there was a time and place for them, and tonight was neither the time nor place for Wesley to "show off his moves," as he'd announced he would do half an hour ago.

To be fair, he was also unabashedly drunk. For a six-foot-two, 190-pound specimen, he couldn't hold his alcohol *at all*. He had, however, managed to climb onto a speechless Olivia's lap before she shoved him off and excused herself to go to the restroom.

"You're back!" Wesley exclaimed, like she'd just returned from a trip to Italy and not the toilet. "How was the bathroom?"

"Fine." She pasted on a smile and flagged down a server. "Can we order dessert, please? Two caramelized apple and kuromoji ice creams. Thank you."

She wasn't sharing, and if Wesley didn't like her dessert choice, too bad.

Olivia had put up with an unwilling near-lap-dance; he could put up with ice cream.

"Dessert already? You didn't finish your food yet." Wesley stared at the remaining sushi on Olivia's side of the table.

"I will by the time they bring it out."

He laughed. "No way—" He stopped when Olivia dug into her remaining food with the gusto of a starving thirteen-year-old boy who'd just come home from sports practice. Translation: she demolished the rest of her meal in two minutes flat. "Whoa. You eat faster than I do. That's hot."

Wesley got out of his chair.

Oh, no.

This was what she got for meeting up with a rando from a dating app. It wasn't Olivia's first time meeting with an online match, but it was her first time agreeing to dinner with someone whom she hadn't properly screened. Usually, it took more than a day of messaging back and forth before she took things to the next level, but she'd needed to blow off steam after a grueling first year in her MBA program and an equally grueling summer dealing with her jerk-face colleagues.

Okay, fine, her last final had been five days ago, and she'd only worked with said jerk-faces for two days, but still. Olivia deserved hazard pay for dealing with their immature, sexist asses. People thought Wall Street in New York was bad? They never met the San Francisco branch of Pine Hill Capital, the prestigious private equity (PE) firm Olivia had worked for since she jumped ship from investment banking five years ago.

"Wesley, sit," Olivia ordered, unconsciously using the same tone she used on dogs.

"I never finished showing you my moves earlier."

"I don't want to see your moves." Olivia flashed a tight smile of thanks at the server, who returned with their ice cream and shot a strange look in Wesley's direction but didn't say anything.

The top two buttons of Wesley's shirt were unbuttoned, revealing a sliver of muscled chest and spray-tanned skin. He wasn't bad-looking, but if he didn't sit down in the next two minutes, she couldn't be held accountable for where she might lodge her shoe.

Olivia scooted her chair closer to the table so he couldn't climb into her lap again. She spooned some ice cream into her mouth and—*Oh. My. God.* 

All thoughts of sticking her heel where the sun didn't shine flew out of her head as she focused on the cold, creamy mound of heaven in her bowl. It was *amazing*. Definitely worth thirty minutes of her life, but once she finished dessert, she was hightailing it out of here—Wesley could take care of the bill—and she'd never have to see him again.

Olivia wondered if she could eat Wesley's portion of dessert, too. The poor ice cream was melting, and he didn't seem like he would stop "showing off his moves" anytime soon. Saving that perfectly flavored scoop from dying a useless death was practically a moral imperative.

"Olivia, look," Wesley said, sounding suspiciously whiney for a twenty-nine-year-old. "You're not looking. This is my booty pop. Women love it."

Someone kill me now.

At least they were in the back corner of the restaurant, away from the kitchen and most other guests. The nearest diners—a handsome couple in their mid-forties—shot Olivia and Wesley the same strange look their server had earlier, but Wesley hadn't done anything *too* egregious yet, like take his shirt off. The couple soon got distracted by their food, while Wesley bootypopped to his heart's content.

"Sit. Down," Olivia repeated.

He didn't.

*Fuck it.* She finished her ice cream and swapped her empty bowl with Wesley's full one. He didn't deserve dessert.

"I can't believe you don't like my moves," Wesley slurred, sounding offended. He sidled closer, and she realized he'd unbuttoned several more buttons until half his chest was showing. If a restaurant staff member saw him, he'd be thrown out for public indecency. "I'm the star of The Cock Pit. Women *specifically* request me for their bachelorette parties. I make over a thousand dollars a night. I can squeeze a penny with my—"

Olivia never found out what he could squeeze a penny with—thank God—because she chose that moment to turn her head to the left. Just a few inches, really, until she could see over Wesley's shoulder. In the grand scheme of things, the small movement was nothing.

Or it *would've* been nothing, had her gaze not collided with a pair of familiar onyx eyes that sucked her in like a black hole. Nothing escaped—not light, not sound, not the painful beats of her heart. Just like that, everything disappeared except for the man her younger, naïve self had thought held her universe in the palms of his hands. Even Wesley ceased to exist, and he was practically on top of her.

Olivia's breath rushed out in a shaky gust of exhilaration, embarrassment, and loathing.

"Olivia?" Her name fell off Sammy Yu's perfect lips like a long-forgotten love song, evoking memories of golden days and beautiful nights.

Those dark eyes darted from her spoonful of ice cream—frozen halfway to her mouth—to Wesley's bared chest before finally resting on her face. She spotted glints of confusion and amusement, and it was the latter that fueled her with the strength to level a glare at Wesley so menacing he immediately backed off.

"I'm going to the restroom," Wesley announced, indignation oozing from every pore. "It's clear my booty pops are not appreciated here."

He stalked off, his half-open shirt flapping in the breeze. He didn't spare Sammy a glance.

Sammy's mouth twitched. "I wasn't aware booty pops were on the menu."

"Funny. We—I was just leaving," Olivia said with as much dignity as she could muster. She set her spoon down. The ice cream had melted anyway, and there was none left in the bowl. She could bolt right now while Wesley was in the restroom.

Usually, Olivia would never do something so rude, but she was fed up with this day. It kept going from bad to worse—and running into your exboyfriend while on a terrible date definitely counted as "worse."

"You mean you don't want to go home with that fine, booty-popping specimen?" Sammy feigned shock. "Say it ain't so."

She glared at him. "Sarcasm doesn't suit you."

The Sammy she knew wasn't sarcastic unless it was in a fun, playful way, but the man standing before her *wasn't* the Sammy she knew.

He was still tall and handsome—so handsome the mere sight of him sent a pleasurable shiver through her body. Same eyes, same high cheekbones and strong jaw, same dark hair—though he wore it shorter now than in college. But his lean frame had filled out with more hard-hewn muscles, his eyes sparked with more cynicism, and he possessed a self-assurance one only gained with age.

With his camel coat, black dress shirt, and hard expression, Sammy couldn't have looked more different from the good-natured, math-punloving, lived-in-a-T-shirt college boy she once knew. He was all man now, and not one that had any love lost for her.

"What are you doing here?" Olivia demanded. He hadn't responded to her sarcasm dig, and the silence was bugging her. She almost wished Wesley were here so she'd have a buffer. What was taking him so long, anyway? Did he fall in the toilet?

Then again, Olivia had holed herself in the restroom for a good twenty minutes talking to Farrah, so she couldn't throw stones.

Sammy's eyebrows rose a fraction of an inch. "This is a restaurant. I'm here for dinner, same as the rest of the patrons. What are *you* doing here?"

"Uh, you answered your own question. Dinner." The "duh" was implied.

"You don't live in San Francisco."

"I do this summer. I'm working at the SF branch of my company instead of going back to New York." Olivia wasn't sure why she was telling him all this. They weren't friends anymore. Unfortunately, they had tons of mutual friends from their college study abroad program, and they were constantly forced into the same space thanks to said friends. Farrah's wedding, Kris's upcoming nuptials, group trips, and reunions...things Olivia couldn't back out of because of either loyalty or a strong sense of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). Sammy's thoughts must've run along the same lines, because he showed up at almost every event, too.

As a result, they'd settled into an uneasy, somewhat civil truce that consisted of them ignoring each other and parking themselves on opposite sides of whatever room or table they found themselves in.

"Hmm." Sammy appeared displeased by the revelation that she would be in San Francisco for the summer. Thanks to Farrah, he knew she was working on her MBA at Stanford—Olivia had almost killed her for letting that piece of info slip, to which Farrah merely responded, "Why? Are you afraid he'll show up on campus and you'll have hot, sweaty makeup sex?"

Ha! As if. Eight years was a little too late for makeup sex.

As for Sammy's displeasure, too bad. He didn't own the city. She could *move* here if she wanted (she didn't, but she *could*).

"Olivia? Is that you?"

Olivia stiffened when a familiar blonde sidled up next to Sammy. Golden hair that fell past her shoulders in shiny waves, red lipstick that matched her Ted Baker sheath dress perfectly, a face that would make a supermodel weep.

Jessica.

"It is you!" Sammy's girlfriend grinned. "Sam didn't tell me you were in San Francisco."

She called him Sam? *No one* called him Sam.

But Sammy didn't so much as blink an eye at the moniker.

"I'm here for the summer." Olivia forced a smile and repeated her explanation. "I just finished my first year of business school at Stanford, and I'm working at my company's SF branch until classes start again."

"I didn't know she was in the city until we ran into each other here." Sammy slid an arm around Jessica's waist, and Olivia fought the urge to upchuck. She'd only met Jessica twice before—once at Sammy's Fourth of July barbecue in New York three summers ago, and once at Farrah and Blake's wedding. Funnily enough, she'd wanted to upchuck both those times, too. "She was just leaving. She has to go before her date comes back." A tiny smirk tugged at the corners of his mouth.

Olivia glared at him; he stared back with one infuriatingly arched brow.

Jessica, to her credit, didn't press on why Olivia was leaving her date high and dry. Instead, her smile widened. "We should all have dinner sometime. There's a bunch of great restaurants in the city I'm sure you'll love."

Ugh. Why did she have to be so *nice?* It would be easier to hate her if she were a total witch. Not that Olivia had a reason to hate her ex's current girlfriend or anything. She didn't even like Sammy anymore.

"I'm sure Olivia's busy." Sammy's voice contained a note of warning.

"Too busy for dinner?" Jessica shot her boyfriend a look Olivia couldn't decipher.

"Thanks for the invite. And yeah, let's grab dinner sometime." Olivia would rather roll around in a puddle of sewer water than eat dinner with Jessica and Sammy, but this was the twenty-first century. People made vague plans with no follow-up all the time. "Listen, I have to go. There's an emergency at my apartment."

She needed to get out of here. Wesley was going to be back any minute, Sammy was sucking all the oxygen out of the room, and Jessica...well, Jessica was making her stomach churn.

Not because the blonde was mean or had said anything wrong, but because she was there. With him. Olivia hated seeing them together, and she hated herself for hating it.

Jessica's brows dipped. "Everything okay?"

"Yes. I just have to go check on...stuff."

"You have Sam's number, right? If you need help, give him a call and we'll be there."

"Thanks." It was weird that a woman she barely knew was acting like they were best friends and even weirder that said woman seemed intent on throwing her boyfriend back with his ex, but that wasn't Olivia's problem.

Sammy remained silent, his expression unreadable.

Olivia mumbled a goodbye, paid for her dinner against her earlier plans—she didn't trust Wesley to cover their tab or tip appropriately—and hailed a cab home.

While the taxi wound its way through San Francisco's hilly streets, she tipped her head back and closed her eyes, exhaustion sinking into her bones.

God, what a night. First her ridiculous date, then running into Sammy and Jessica.

She hadn't reached out to Sammy when she moved to California last year, even though he'd been the only person she knew in the area. Stanford was a forty-five-minute drive from San Francisco, and she'd been swamped with schoolwork. Plus, while they were no longer on hostile terms, they weren't exactly friendly, either.

"Get it together, Olivia," she muttered under breath.

Dwelling on the past was a waste of time, and if there was one thing Olivia hated, it was wasting time. The average life expectancy for a female in the U.S. born in Olivia's birth year was seventy-nine years. That was 28,835 days, 41,522,400 minutes. She had an ever-present clock in her mind, ticking down those days and minutes until they reached her inevitable, if unknown, death date. Some might find that morbid, but she found it reassuring. Olivia thrived on structure, and life had a beginning, middle, and end, as all things should.

The mental clock had the added benefit of reminding her how precious her time was. If she wasn't productive, happy, or relaxed, it was time wasted.

Tonight? A colossal waste, and she wouldn't drag it out by wondering, for the millionth time, if there could've been a different ending for her and Sammy. If she'd stood up to her mother, if she hadn't lied, if Sammy hadn't said the things he'd said...

Olivia shook her head, shoving thoughts of the past back in her mental "Do Not Open" drawer where they belonged. To distract herself, she pulled out her phone and tapped out notes for Monday's meeting until the taxi rolled to a stop in front of her apartment building.

San Francisco rent was even more ridiculous than New York—and that was a high bar—but she'd gotten lucky with the studio apartment she'd sublet from a friend's friend. She was still paying a ridiculous amount of money each month for something the size of a shoebox, but it could've been worse.

Olivia unlocked the door, eager for a hot shower and sleep. She couldn't wait—what the hell?

A thick, musty smell slammed into her nose before her brain registered the scene in front of her: the floors of her apartment glistened beneath two inches of water.

"You've got to be kidding me."

Her high, shocked voice echoed off the walls and absorbed into the puddles destroying her belongings. Her mattress, which she'd placed on the floor since her bed frame hadn't arrived yet? Donezo. Her beautiful wool area rug? Unrecognizable. The cardboard boxes she'd yet to unpack because she'd been so busy at work? Half-disintegrated.

There's an emergency at the apartment.

Olivia's earlier excuse came back to her, and she wanted to throw up. She wasn't the superstitious sort, but a tiny part of her wondered whether she'd manifested this nightmare. She'd only been gone for a few hours. How the *hell* had this happened?

She pressed her palm to her temple and tried to deepen her shallow breaths.

It was nine at night, she was exhausted, half her belongings were ruined, she had no clue where to *start* cleaning this mess up, and she had no friends in the city. No one to help her.

A wild sound emerged from her throat, and it took her a few seconds before she realized she was laughing. Hysterically.

For once in her well-planned life, Olivia Tang had no clue what to do.