

SHE'S TOO PERFECT TO IGNORE  
AND TOO FORBIDDEN TO BE HIS.



# PRAISE

SALACIOUS PLAYERS' CLUB

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Acknowledgments

Also by Sara Cate

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*For all the good girls.*



## PROLOGUE

Seven Years Ago

Emerson

o, I had a fistful of her hair in my hand, and we were both in the moment when I looked her right in the eye and said, ‘Suck my cock like  
“S a good little girl.’ The next thing I knew, she reared back her fist and clocked me right in the face.”

“Oh shit!” Garrett curses with a grimace.

“Damn!” Hunter bellows.

Across the table, Maggie, the only woman in our group, looks horrified.

I wince, poking at the raw purple bruise growing around my eye socket.

“I don’t think she liked that,” Maggie adds with a light chuckle, before taking a sip of her white wine.

“You think?” I burst out, grabbing my beer and holding the cold glass against my face to quell the throbbing ache pulsing around my eyeball. It hurts only half as much as my pride. The humiliation from getting my first real shiner from a pretty little brunette I had been flirting with for weeks and was beyond eager to stick my dick into being the worst of my injuries.

“I mean...I thought we were getting along great. She seemed kinky enough, and she definitely appeared into it, but I guess I was wrong. Not a fan of a little sexy degradation, apparently.”

The table grows silent for a moment. My three co-workers and I have made these Thursday night happy hours at the bar a little tradition. We collectively hate the entertainment company we work for. When we took these jobs, we did it for the excitement and love of the industry. Now we meet for drinks once a week to rant about how we would run the company differently and how much better we'd do on our own. But we're all talk. None of us are ready to leave our steady positions to start new ones.

And more than occasionally, we talk about sex, each of us dishing out our dirtiest bedroom secrets like a bunch of old men sharing epic war stories. Even our modest Maggie joins in. Aside from Hunter and his long-term girlfriend, Isabel, we're all single, and we all intend to keep it that way. One of the perks of working in the entertainment industry is that we work nights, parties, and drunk soirees, which means we get laid fairly consistently, giving us ample conversation topics, so we don't have to spend *all* of our time together bitching about the company we work for.

"Fuck, man," Garrett replies with a contemplative look. "It's bullshit that there isn't a way to match people up by the kinky shit they like to do in the bedroom."

Immediately, the table breaks out in laughter. Because this is what Garrett does. He makes jokes and expects a roll of amusing reactions after every sentence that comes out of his mouth, something we've come to anticipate.

"I'm fucking serious. How nice would it be if you could meet up with someone who likes the same twisted shit you do? You wouldn't have to hide it or be embarrassed by the kinks that get your panties wet."

"You're fucking crazy, Garrett," Hunter replies, but by the time I set my empty glass down on the table, I can't get the thought out of my head. Why don't dating apps match people by their kinks? Or better yet...what if you could hire someone to fulfill those desires?

And a safe place to indulge in them.

It dawns on me at that moment that a group of people with experience in the entertainment industry might have the right skills to pull something like

this off. If only we had the guts to take the leap. It could start with a dating service, for more than just booty calls and hookups—but something serious where people didn't have to feel so ashamed for what they enjoy.

It could only grow from there. An app to a service...and then someday, a real kink club.

"I am not," Garrett argues. "Who here doesn't have some freaky bedroom desires you've always wanted to do but are too afraid to ask? I mean, obviously, Emerson isn't afraid to ask."

They laugh again, and Hunter elbows me in the ribs, but I don't reply because I'm still thinking about this idea.

"Come on. I'm serious," Garrett says. "Out of all the shit you've done, what is the one thing you wish you could ask for? You know you have something. So let's hear it."

"You first," Maggie replies with a smug grin. As the only woman, and a slightly reserved one at that, Maggie has mastered the art of spinning conversations around on us, keeping the attention off of her whenever she can.

"Fine," he says.

I sort of tune them out for a minute while they each share their deepest, darkest sexual fantasies because, like Garrett predicted, everyone has one. And they're not all that weird really.

It has me thinking...if everyone at this table has their specific kink they're too afraid to talk about...then does everyone at this bar? Everyone in this town? The country? The world?

"All right, Emerson," Hunter says, nudging me in the shoulder. "Your turn."

"Oh, that's easy," Garrett cuts me off. "Didn't you hear his story? Emerson likes to degrade and get punched in the face for it."

The crowd erupts in laughter, and I join in, but I don't respond. With a smile around my glass, I take a drink, but I don't indulge any more. Because they may think degradation is my style, but that's not it at all.

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The next morning, we get the call that the company we work for is going under. They're filing for bankruptcy and we're all out of a job, but before any of us can file for unemployment, we have a business plan. I head the company. Garrett handles the clients. Hunter works with the developers. And Maggie manages all of us. And it's that easy.

Salacious Players' Club is born.

RULE #1: NEVER PUT UP WITH A  
DOUCHEBAG BOYFRIEND—DUMP  
THAT LOSER.

Charlie

hat the fuck is wrong with you, Charlie?” Beau snaps when he sees me pull up with my windows down. My jaw clenches as I climb out my car and slam the door behind me. I glance back at my little sister, watching from the passenger seat, and swallow down the humiliation at her hearing my stupid ex-boyfriend berate me on the front lawn of his new house. I don’t even bother asking what I’ve done because, with him, it’s always somehow my fault.

“Fuck off, Beau,” I mutter through clenched teeth. “Just give me my half of the deposit so I can be on my way.”

He stops in his tracks between the pickup truck and the front door of his house with a moving box in his arms. “I wish I could, but you weren’t at the final walk-through with the landlord, so they sent the money to my dad. You’ll have to pick it up from him.”

“Your dad? What? Why?”

Beau carries the box labeled ‘X-Box shit’ into the house and drops it on the floor next to his TV before returning to the truck. He’s renting a new place with his best friend, and it would seem he’s still holding a grudge against me for breaking up with him. Beau and I dated for fifteen months, six of those we spent living in a shitty rental where we quickly learned that

we actually hated each other. Apparently, we could date and sleep together casually, but being in a mature live-together relationship was a no-go.

It only took three months in the apartment for him to cheat on me—or to get caught, I should say.

“Yes, Charlie. My dad. He was listed on the lease as our co-signer, and when you weren’t around to pick up the deposit, they sent it to him.”

“Fuck,” I mumble. “Well, I’m sorry I wasn’t here, Beau, but I was busy *working*.” I make sure to emphasize the word, since I’ve been the one carrying two jobs while he can barely hold down one for more than a month.

“Frying corndogs at the skating rink hardly makes you the responsible one in this relationship.”

“At least I could pay the bills.”

“Let’s not do this again,” he shouts as he slams the tailgate of the truck closed. Beau doesn’t have *anger* problems, per se. He’s just an asshole.

“You started it.”

I glance back at Sophie watching from the car. She has a tight-lipped expression with her eyebrows pinched together. A look that clearly says she hates everything about the interaction between me and my ex.

I’ll give her credit. Since the beginning, my fourteen-year-old sister has been the biggest Beau critic. Of course, back then I was starry-eyed and blinded by love. And, at only fourteen, she’s still immune to the sorcery of guys with sandy brown curls, piercing blue eyes, six-foot frames, and abs for days.

“So, what am I supposed to do?” I ask, when Beau continues on with his unpacking while ignoring my presence.

“Well, if you want your half of the deposit, I guess you’re going to have to get it from my dad.”

“Can’t you just get it for me?”

For some stupid reason, I feel like *I’m* the one being a pain in the ass. Beau was always like this. He just had a way of making me feel worthless and desperate for any positive attention from him, so much so that I spent more time trying to please him than actually being happy—something that became

abundantly clear after we broke up. Sometimes we really can't see the forest for the trees, as they say.

"You know I don't talk to that asshole anymore."

"So, you're not going to get your half of the deposit back?"

"Not worth it," he snaps. I follow him back into the house.

"Well, I can't afford to lose that money, Beau."

With a long, annoyed sigh, he spins on me and rolls his eyes. "Fine. Here." He pulls his phone from his back pocket and types something quickly with a furrow in his brow. A moment later, my phone vibrates from my purse. "That's his address. Take it up with him."

Then, he just walks away, leaving me with my jaw hanging open. "Seriously? That's it?"

"If you really wanted the money, you should have met with the landlord yesterday."

"You're an asshole," I mumble, before turning and leaving him to unpack his shit in his new place. Walking down the driveway toward the car where my sister waits with her AirPods in, I do my best to not appear as bothered as I am. But as I climb into the driver's seat and shut the door, I feel the intensity of her sympathetic eyes on me. My forehead drops to the steering wheel as I fight the urge to cry.

"Beau's a dick," she says quietly, and I laugh. Letting Sophie cuss around me is sort of the big sister deal. My mother has a fit when she hears either of us swearing, so I let Soph do it when we're alone. And in this case, I can't really argue with her.

"I know."

"At least you broke up with him."

"Yeah. Too bad I still don't have my money." Fishing my phone out of my purse, I open the text from Beau.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm an idiot and messed up. So now I have to go pick it up from his dad, and I'm willing to bet that asshole didn't fall far from the asshole tree."

“So, let’s go get it,” she replies, looking a little too pumped to go pick up money from a complete stranger.

“I have no clue where this guy even lives. I’m not taking you to the ghetto.” As I click on the address in the text, it pulls up the map app and shows a red pin on a street directly next to the oceanfront. “That can’t be right.”

“What is it?” she asks, leaning over.

“It says his house is over in the Oceanview district.”

“Let’s gooooo.”

I laugh again and ruffle her short, faded blue hair. It’s still growing out from the buzz-cut she gave herself last summer, so now it hangs just below her ears.

“Nice try, little Smurf, but you have piano lessons, and Mrs. Wilcox will have my head if you’re late again.”

Sophie rolls her eyes and gives me a dramatic pout as we pull out of Beau’s driveway and head across town to the high school where Sophie gets her lessons. The entire way, I replay every moment of the fight with Beau, his harsh tone etched into my memory. And a feeling of dread settles in my gut as I think about having to confront his dad.

Beau rarely spoke about his family when we were together, and whenever I asked about them, he would just change the subject, as if he was ashamed or embarrassed. Getting his dad to co-sign for us last year was hard enough, but shortly after, there was a rift between them and Beau stopped talking to him altogether. At first, we bonded over our mutual disdain for our fathers. And if Beau’s dad is anything like mine, the whole interaction is sure to be a fucking blast.



## RULE #2: NO POUTING.

Emerson

*hy is she giving me that look?* The Bettie Page lookalike with blunt black bangs and quite lovely curves is kneeling on the floor next to my desk, and she's...pouting. Her ruby red lips are pursed, and she's just gazing up at me as I drink my coffee. Everything that she should *not* be doing.

This is a cry for attention, which makes sense, considering *my attention* is exactly what brought her here in the first place. I'm literally paying her to earn a soft pat on the head or a little affirmation—*earn* being the operative word. So far, this girl has done nothing but patronize me with all the fucking theatrics, and I'm about two seconds away from tossing her out the door. Literally.

If you want my attention, you have to earn it first. Behave. Do as I say. Otherwise, stay silent. That's not me being a dick, that's literally the scene we're playing, but this girl isn't playing by the rules. She knew exactly what she was signing up for when she took this job.

"Stare at the floor," I command without looking at her.

There's a disgruntled sounding huff that escapes her lips before she turns her gaze down to the floor. I sure hope she's not interested in being a brat because that is definitely not my style, and it said so quite clearly in the application.

The next three hours of her shift are practically insufferable, but I'm a gentleman, so I let her stay. She brings me my lunch, rests her opulent tits on my thighs when I kick my feet up during a boring conference call, and even earns a good stroke of her cheek when she manages to be completely silent while I write out an email.

But she's growing restless, and I can tell. Out of the corner of my gaze, I catch her pouting again, and I glance down to see her roll her eyes. That's it. Reaching down, I grab her jaw in my hand and turn her to face me. Her eyes go wide—she's nervous.

"Did you just roll your eyes at me?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"No, Sir," she murmurs, and I catch a hint of excitement hidden under the delicate tremble in her voice. Yep, she's definitely a brat.

If punishment was my thing, she'd have earned it by this point, but even I know punishment is exactly what she wants. So instead of laying her over my lap or making her suck my dick for her blatant disrespect, I say, "Stand up. Gather your things. Have a good day."

"But—"

"Goodbye, Rita."

Turning away from her, I focus on my computer, dismissing her entirely.

With a scoff, she marches away, slips on her shoes, grabs her coat, and slams the door as she leaves. The moment she's gone, I dial Garrett's number.

"Let me guess. You didn't like her," he says by way of greeting.

"She just kept pouting. Do men really like girls who pout so much?"

Garrett laughs on the other end of the line. "We don't like what most men like, remember? It makes my job hard, sure, but I'm just trying to find you the right girl, Emerson."

"Apologize to Rita for me, and never send her back to my house."

"You got it."

The line is silent for a moment as I look over the emails from Maggie on the new app update from the developers.

“That’s not true, you know,” I mumble as I scroll through her messages. I can hear the white noise in the background, which means Garrett is in the car.

“What’s not true?” he replies after a moment.

“When you said we don’t like what most men like. I think our tastes are very much in line with the majority. We’re just unique in that we’re not afraid to pursue them.”

“We aren’t afraid to pursue them in a healthy way.”

“Exactly.”

“I’ll send a new girl for you tomorrow,” he says after a moment.

“Don’t bother.”

He lets out an exasperated sigh. “Are you sure? You seem stressed. We’ve got the club opening next week and investors to please and the state breathing down our necks.”

It’s true—I am stressed. On top of everything Garrett just mentioned, my son has not returned my phone calls in four months. But the idea of meeting a new pouty sub only stresses me out more.

“I don’t think you even know what you want,” he says absently, and I glance at my phone on speaker.

“I thought I did. These girls want praise, but they don’t want to earn it.”

“Negative attention is still attention,” he replies.

“And you know I don’t like brats.”

“I know, Emerson. But you’re going to have to give someone a chance to impress you before you toss them out. Let me send you another one tomorrow. There are plenty of girls willing to do whatever you want.”

“Maybe next week. Keep the application open.”

“You got it.”

After hanging up with Garrett, I sift through the pile of letters on my desk. It’s mostly junk, but there’s a handwritten envelope that grabs my attention. Cutting it open, I find a check. It’s for two thousand dollars from a name I don’t recognize. In the memo portion of the check it says, Security Deposit for Apartment 623.

It takes me a minute to realize this is Beau's address. Or at least it was. I had no idea he even moved, let alone had the security deposit sent back to me. Didn't he move in with that girlfriend of his?

*The one he never even let me meet because he was too ashamed of me, I think grimly.*

This could be good. If he needs the money back, he'll have to come to me to get it. Picking up my phone, I type out a quick text, trying not to sound as desperate as I feel.

*Your landlord sent me your security deposit. I'll hold on to it for you. Come over whenever you need it.*

Naturally, there's no answer. The entire screen of texts are all outgoing without responses. I have confirmation from his mother that he's at least alive and doing okay, so I can sleep at night. I just wish he'd talk to me again. Too bad disappointment seems to be the theme of my week.