

Mothers,
Fathers &
Lovers

Ruby Soames

Hookline Books

To Jon, Bluebell, Edison and Elvis (1999-2014)

Ever wonder what it's like to date an actor who hits the big time? Intrigue, jealousy, resentment – and that's just your closest friends. When Sarah Tyler's boyfriend shoots from penniless waiter to Hollywood star, she sinks from city lawyer to homeless, lovesick dog walker.

After a bizarre encounter in a London park, Sarah's convinced that she's found the father who abandoned her at birth. She follows the rich, old man and his brash, young, fiancée to Barbados where she becomes their friend – even their bridesmaid – all the time, waiting to confront her dad.

On the paradise island of Barbados, Sarah learns that if you don't own your history, you become its slave. When a storm hits the island, this is the moment to fight for who she really is and for the man she really loves.

A bad place to start...

There. Stop right there. That's the *restore point*. The place and time before it all happened: 7:56, Wednesday, 12th September, 2013.

The moment when everything was perfect. That was me – that girl dressed in a new white shirt and peacock-blue pencil skirt with orange-painted toenails, wedged up against the door on the underground train on my way to work. Sleepy, complacent. Smart but relaxed, hugging the designer handbag my boyfriend had given me for Christmas. Running late, employed, busy, perfumed and so stressed. But that was before I had any idea what stress meant.

'California has dolphins, natural hot water springs, deserts, wildlife sanctuaries and open-all-night cupcake bars,' Joseph had said at the weekend when he was trying to convince me to move to Hollywood. We'd been lying on our makeshift roof terrace in Stoke Newington, a summery weekend in early autumn, with Elvis, our dog, curled up between us. Elvis had just licked our lunch plates clean when Joe's agent, Rebecca Hobson, called saying she'd found him a beautiful five-bedroomed house in Westwood with a pool, gym and landscaped garden.

'Move to LA?' I'd said, 'I don't want to move to LA! We live here – we've only just finished doing up the flat.'

'Babe, I know, but it's where the film business is. This is it for me – it's now... and it's there. Rebecca says we have to capitalize on this moment if we really want to make it big.'

'Make what "big"?' I sat up, put my hand on his shoulder so he'd look at me. 'Joe?'

He'd closed his eyes earlier because of the sun's glare but now they were closed because he didn't to be challenged.

'You always said you didn't want to "make it big", you just wanted "to act" – did you change your mind or did Rebecca?'

He took my hand. 'Sarah, for some bizarre reason people are fighting to give me ridiculous amounts of money to do what I love – I might never get the chance again.'

He wasn't such a good actor that he could hide the fact that he'd already made up his mind.

'I don't want to look back on my life and have regrets. Sweetheart – all I'm saying is that we could go and live there...for a bit. An adventure, just to see, if we don't like it, we can come back.'

‘But what about me? What about my dreams? There’s a chance I might be offered a partnership. Joe – all our friends? Elvis? The campaign for rescue animals? My mother? Kamilla? Your family, my clients...my life. What might my regrets be when you dump me in ten years time for some hot, young starlet?’

Joseph, who’d recently been voted the World’s Sexiest Man, lifted himself up to sitting position in one move – just one of the benefits of his personal trainer’s fitness regime.

He drew me against him. ‘I know it’s a huge change...’ He brushed his lips with my fingers. ‘I love you, Sarah, and I want you to be my –’

I jumped up fast and carried our plates to the kitchen. ‘The car will be here any minute...let’s get you packed.’

That muggy, crowded Wednesday morning on the tube a few days later, I admit it, California was starting to seem a better option. Most of the passengers were crammed against each other, shuffling from foot to foot, wondering whether it was safe to raise an arm and expose dark, blooming sweat patches as they grappled for the udder-like handles overhead. The girl next to me tapped out text messages as if she’d only a few seconds left to live. Two Japanese tourists puzzled over the ads for language schools while the rest of us gazed at the offers for faraway holiday destinations. We all wanted to be somewhere else, and that’s why I was coming around to the whole Hollywood idea.

Joseph had left that day for Delhi. After we’d said our goodbyes, his driver had squared his cap onto his head and closed the Bentley’s doors. Joseph’s words to me were, ‘Please, Sarah – just think about it,’ and he’d glided away.

So I was now thinking about starting a new chapter with Joseph in Tinsel Town.

That was when there was a ‘Joseph and I’, at around 7:47 that morning.

That was when I caught his face on the second page of the newspaper a tube passenger was reading.

My Joe – and *Sylvia*.

Sylvia Amery was Joseph’s current co-star. He’d already told me what a nightmare she was – how her food had to be prepared by a Brahmin dietician, how her dog had a designer wardrobe and his own masseuse, how she had a permanent suite in America’s most expensive rehabilitation centre. What now? I wondered, waiting for my fellow passenger to lift his paper up so I could carry on reading.

The train doors were closing on the passengers getting off at Tottenham Court Road. That's when I saw the headline:

Joe West meets Hot Love in the East!

The train jiggled through a tunnel. The lights flickered. Now there were three people between the headline and me.

Pushing my head against someone's crotch, I read more:

Joseph West took Sylvia to the Taj Mahal at sunrise to propose. 'My love is even bigger than this,' he'd said before pulling out an enormous diamond and sapphire engagement ring and asking the 24-year-old, America's 'Rear of the Year', to marry him. The couple have been...

Joseph? Engagement ring? To the yappy-little-dog woman?

I must have read it wrong.

I elbowed a pushchair mum out of the way so I could hold the newspaper steady. I trained my eyes over the next paragraph despite the man trying to shake the paper away from me.

I read:

...enough to make any princess swoon! Sylvia's mother spoke from her ranch in Wyoming: 'They have so much respect for each other as artists and as human beings. I'm thrilled we're going to have a Brit in the family!'

I blinked over the words again willing the names and the facts to change.

There was an aerial shot of the home Joseph and Sylvia were buying in Beverly Hills. Valued at \$12.5 million.

The train stopped. The man jerked the paper out of my fingers, folded it and pardoned his way off the tube.

8:03am, I staggered out of St Paul's tube station with my phone listing 22 Missed Calls while a *Pop-Alert!* announced Joseph West's engagement to Sylvia Amery. I didn't recognize any of the numbers apart from my mother's.

At the newspaper stand I bought a selection of magazines and newspapers and tore through them. I learnt that Joseph had proposed to Sylvia after they'd fallen in love on the film set. Her Chihuahua saw

him as a positive male role model in her life. In one magazine there was a picture of them holding hands at an elephant sanctuary where she'd named an orphan elephant, 'Ellie'. Another showed a photo of Joseph with his arm around Sylvia at a spice market. I could argue with the words, but not the photo of the two of them together, standing like-like two people...very much in love.

2

Stumbling around on the pavement, scrolling frantically through my phone to find something from Joseph, I was aware of a group of people hovering outside my office. It looked like a mini demonstration but when I saw the men holding cameras and phones, notepads and pens and the way they were jostling each other, I knew they were journalists and that most probably I had something to do with it.

I had to speak to Joseph. If anyone knew where he was, it would be Rebecca Hobson. His agent was only a few years older than me but her reputation for being tough and ruthless was already legendary. Joseph was her hottest client and the one tipped to break the American market.

I hid in a shop doorway, found her telephone number on her website and waited while a chain of PAs connected me to Rebecca's mobile phone.

'Hi, Rebecca? It's Sarah, I need to speak to Joseph and I –'

'Sarah? Sarah who?'

'Sarah Tyler. I live with Joseph. Joseph West.' I was on the verge of sliding down the wall and giving in to the tears building up inside me. 'Joseph, the actor. I'm his girlfriend. I can't seem to reach him. I need to –'

'Sorry, why are you calling?'

'I need to speak to –'

I heard a loud pop as she turned off the speakerphone. Her voice went from a garbled echo to a sharp pinging in my ear.

'He's in India. Filming. There's a time difference, you know.'

'Yes I know that, but this is kind of an emergency. The press seems to think he's engaged to –' I couldn't say her name, '– someone on the set.' I threw in a little laugh to mark the ludicrousness of such a story. 'There are reporters outside my work. I don't know what to do.'

'What do you mean, you "don't know what to do"?''

‘I need him – or you – or whoever – to stop this story. You have to tell them –’

‘Listen, Sarah. I shouldn’t be the one to tell you this but, when it’s over, it’s over. What you “do” is, move on – I’ve another call waiting.’

The phone clicked off.

I scanned my text messages as I cantered towards the main doors of *Forrester Levine*’s. Someone shouted something from the other side of the road and, holding up their cameras, they ran – and I mean ran – towards me, poking lenses and microphones in my face. In seconds I was swallowed up by flashing lights, shouts, elbows, phones, fingers, people all speaking at once – at one point my feet weren’t even touching the ground. All I could utter while gasping for breath was, ‘No, no, no’ until Carl, our doorman, yanked me through the doors.

‘You alright?’ He asked when I got my breath back.

‘Yeah. No. No...yes, fine.’ I looked away from the faces pressed up to the doors.

He shook his head at the racket going on outside. ‘I hope your man’s worth it, Miss Tyler.’

‘They’ve got the wrong end of the stick – as usual. It’ll all be alright soon.’

‘I hope so, ’cause they want blood.’

Forrester Levine were no strangers to the media, dealing regularly as they did with high profile cases. Having said that, I don’t know how many of its lawyers had been personally ambushed by journalists. Walking down the long corridor to my office, I sensed colleagues were particularly busy, but I sympathised that no one wanted to tell me what was in that day’s news.

I hadn’t been at my desk long when Angie, the secretary I shared, stood in front of me. I could tell she was about to give me bad news because she drew out the word ‘Hi’ for a long, long time, it was even accompanied by a little wave.

I said ‘Hi,’ but she didn’t move from the doorway.

She then said, ‘Yeah...’ as though we’d been in the middle of a conversation.

‘Ange – if it’s about Joe, whatever you read, it’s a load of...OK?’

She nodded slowly, as though she’d have to mull that over. ‘It’s not. About Joseph. I mean.’

‘So, what’s it about?’

‘Yeah...’ she said looking around the room for support.

‘Ange? What?’ I smiled to reassure her I was friendly. Getting information out of her was like prizing a sock from the jaw of a playful puppy.

‘Mr Forrester wants to see you.’ She looked around for thunder to strike. ‘As-soon-as-possible,’ she threw out as she fled the room.

3

Whenever I heard the name Angus Forrester, I saw the first three seconds of an MGM film where the lion roars out of the gold frame. Angus stood at six foot six with wild blonde hair and a booming voice – no one, other than his partner, Daniel Levine, wasn’t terrified of him, so as soon as I’d been summoned, I found myself in his office overlooking the Thames, sitting in the same chair I’d been hired from.

‘Sarah,’ he said, using the arms of his seat to flex his biceps. ‘I know you’ve not encouraged the media attention in any way – but you’ve got it.’ The sun behind him caught the top of his mane so that threads of gold shot out from his head. ‘And so, now, we’ve got it,’ he growled, ‘and for us it’s an untenable situation. Of course at *Forrester Levine*, we’re used to attention, and we know it’ll all blow over but...it’s a problem for us now, young lady. I’m sure it’s not a lark for you either but we can’t have clients afraid to enter the building, staff being called up by journalists asking about you or have the firm’s name linked with a public figure and his red-carpet shenanigans. We’ve an enviable public image and this is not the way I want our company viewed.’

He’d not complained when I’d got his niece tickets to Joseph’s last première.

‘The partners and I suggest you spend some time away,’ he rushed the next bit in case I butted in. ‘The terms will be more than generous if you agree to take a short leave of absence – no contact with any other law firm, of course, no discussion of cases, businesses – you know the patter – this has nothing to do with how much we value your dedication, productivity and –’

‘You’re not giving me a choice?’

That may have been a historical moment – first person to interrupt Angus Forrester. He stretched his fingers flat against the table and aligned his hands together as though assuring me the claws were in. There was a short silence while my fury gathered into a black

cloud ready to break over his flaming halo. I was being fired even though the people we dealt with had probably never heard of Joseph West.

‘No, in this you don’t have much choice,’ he said with a smile which was the only out-of-place object in the room.

I’d been meticulous in keeping my private life out of my professional world and I couldn’t believe that, on the morning when every indication pointed to Joseph and me splitting up, I was being sacked for his alleged infidelity. Wasn’t Angus supposed to be on the side of justice?

‘I see.’

He picked up his weighty Mont Blanc pen and signed his side of the contract. He pushed the pages over for me. I pretended to read it, but the figures and terms meant nothing. *Sarah Tyler*, I wrote and dated.

‘There,’ I said.

‘As I said, it’s only a temporary solution to disassociate us from the dramas surrounding your personal life.’

It was then that I wondered what I was doing in his office. Although Joseph West’s career was the most important matter in my life, it wasn’t of such national importance as to interest Mr Forrester who, just a few weeks before, had been to dinner with the Obamas.

‘Right! With that out of the way, let’s open some new doors!’ he roared.

I took this as an interesting way to tell me to leave but he smiled wider and purred from the back of his throat.

‘Sarah,’ he lowered his spectacles down his nose and looked over them at me. ‘We’d be very proud if you would accept a partnership at *Forrester & Levine*.’

My third shock of the morning.

‘Oh, don’t look too surprised. Your work over the last two years has been outstanding.’

‘But Deborah, Deborah’s going to be the next –’

Angus shook his head from side to side as I stammered, ‘I just thought because –’

He nodded left and right and back and forth as if his neck were loosening up from his shoulders for a prospective pounce. ‘The lawyers we have chosen to work at *Forrester Levine* are all of the highest quality – the hardest working, brightest minds – it’s rarely an obvious decision. However, we were particularly impressed by your work on some of the mobile technology cases – deals which aren’t as sexy as others, but intricate and demanding and – let’s be practical –

lucrative. We need you to keep cutting us a path forward through the wires, the fibres and the waves into our future here at *Forrester Levine*.'

On this note, all six-foot of Angus Forrester rose in his chair. His large hand gloved with its yellow down was stretched out towards me. When I didn't move, he sat down again. 'Is this not time for congratulations?'

'I'm surprised,' I said.

If I'd learnt anything about making a deal it was to close fast and move swiftly away with the winnings. But I couldn't.

He glanced at his Omega. 'Ah. I heard you were a savvy negotiator! Lincoln's office not big enough for you, eh? Even a view of the Barbican? HR will run you through how the share options work and there's a little bit of paperwork to tidy up. Let me know when would be a good time to make the formal announcement, I know you've got a lot on your plate but,' he stood up again, 'Congratulations.'

I didn't take his hand. Instead I said, 'The partnership should go to Deborah.'

This morning's news about Joseph had knocked my confidence but still, there was a piece missing about this offer.

'Maybe, she's the obvious choice, yes. Oxford Debating team, billing hours and client profile –'

'So? You risk losing her to give me the partnership.' I looked out at the Thames, 'Why?'

He leant back in his chair to view me from a wider perspective. 'I have five children,' he said, looking at the picture of his wife and their pile of cubs on an Aspen slope. 'When we were considering hiring you, we checked your background – your *provenance*. Fatherless, raised in difficult circumstances on a council estate, coming top at university and Law School – I know what that takes.'

I'd already heard this from him – but not what he was going to say next: 'It was recently brought to my attention that your mother made a paternity claim against a Henry Hardwick, QC.' He stopped to acknowledge my discomfort. 'Maybe you've never had contact with the man, but our blood drives us, Ms Tyler. Ms Deborah Myers has peaked, but I'm pretty sure that you, Sarah, you haven't even started. I'd gamble that with a little more rocket fuel under you –'

Hearing my father's name ignited a flare of childhood shame. I stood up from my seat. 'You're wrong. About all of it. Thanks for the offer. I'll just take a severance contact. Deborah Myers should have the partnership.'

The more stunned he looked, the more I went on. 'I've more to give, yes, but not to this firm. I want to get out of this world of celebrity, disposable culture, status worship and wasteful, hateful greed. We are not evolving in the right direction. I don't want a future of information technology. I want to work with animals, and grow things, and engender kindness and love.'

He chuckled. 'That's why I like you, Sarah: one never knows quite what you'll say and do next. I've touched a nerve, I see. I apologize,' he moved back in his seat. 'Clearly, bringing up your...' He smiled as he twisted the contract in front of him. We both knew he could rip it up and my easy escape route would be barred.

'You know, it was a little bit of a fight getting everyone to agree to take you on in the beginning: your unconventional background, the Thespian paramour and your...mother...but the risk paid off. So what I'm saying is, we need you just as much as the planet does.' He stood up to shake my hand. 'Take the time off. Think about our offer. Don't make any rash decisions.'

'You once said that you admired my "decision making". I have decided. This is my last day at *Forrester Levine*.'