

## MISBEHAVING THOUGHTS



Sadie Duval was sitting cross-legged on a tile-covered concrete bench overlooking the Galveston Seawall, her tablet on her lap. It was a place she loved to come, with the salty sea air, the sounds of lapping water, the seagulls, and the laughter of happy people. It was her ‘home base,’ and many of her hugely popular, syndicated blog posts had been written somewhere along this stretch of beachfront.

Now, she typed the last several sentences of her current blog entry, turned the tablet off, and put it back into the enormous canvas bag sitting next to her on the bench. She people-watched for a few minutes and then got up to go, but just as she did, she caught sight of a little girl feeding the gulls. Photography had been a passion of hers since childhood, so she whipped out her camera and moved several steps closer to capture the action.

Finally, the little girl ran back to her mother, so, pleased with the photos she’d just shot, she turned around just in time to see a slender figure in a hoodie grab her canvas bag as he zoomed by on a bicycle.

“Hey! Stop! That’s my bag!” she yelled frantically, waving her

arms and running after him, but the rider was already well past her, pedaling quickly. "Help! Someone stop him!"

The bicycle continued moving away from her rapidly, leaving her to watch helplessly. She didn't even have her phone to call 9-1-1 since she'd tossed it into the bag when she was packing up. Damn! Why hadn't she at least thought to take his picture?

*Oh god, what am I going to do?* she thought miserably to herself. *My whole life is in that bag.* Her shoulders drooped as she sank back down on the concrete bench, still looking after the bicyclist who was barely visible. The day suddenly looked very dark.

She sat there dejected for a minute or two, trying to decide how to get home without her car keys or any money, but as she watched, she saw something amazing. Two figures were walking in her direction, one of them wearing a hoodie and the other holding a large canvas bag. Her amazement turned to disbelief as she stared at the two men, and then she jumped up and ran towards them, not at all understanding what had happened but too relieved at seeing her canvas bag again to care. A tall stranger had a large hand firmly around the upper arm of the scowling thief while the other was holding her precious bag. "Is this yours?" he asked as he held it towards her.

"Oh my god, yes!" she exclaimed, practically snatching it out of his hand and then literally pressing it to her chest. "How in the world did you get it back? Are you a policeman?"

The man laughed. "Hardly. I'm just a guy who saw a lady in distress. Would you like to call the police so they can come take this character off my hands?"

Sadie looked in amazement at the way the stranger was holding the hoodie-wearing purse snatcher by one hand only. *He must have quite a grip,* she thought to herself. *Mr. Hoodie isn't even trying to get away.* She started to rummage in her bag for her phone, but the stranger held out his. "Here, use mine. It'll be faster."

While they waited for the police to arrive, Sadie pumped the man for details on how he'd saved her bag. It seems that he'd been

in his parked car and had seen the whole drama—the purse snatching, her frantic cries, and the bicyclist pedaling towards his car. He'd jumped out and grabbed the guy as he went by, toppling him off his bike.

"You've got awfully good reflexes," she said admiringly. "I can't believe you grabbed him while he was riding."

Actually, as she studied him, she *could* believe it. He was in remarkably good condition and had muscles showing through his shirt. He was also what she thought of as 'full'—full hair, full eyebrows, full lips, and ever-so-slightly perhaps even full of himself. The look on his face said he was in control of what was around him, but today she could forgive him that last 'full' because it had saved her from a horrible inconvenience.

Finally, the police car pulled up and an officer took their statements and then carted the unlucky purse snatcher off in handcuffs. While listening to the tall stranger give his report, Sadie learned that his name was Max Orlov and that he lived in Houston. He had an interesting hint of an accent that she couldn't quite place, but it really didn't matter since she'd probably never see him again.

"Thank you so much," Sadie repeated after they were alone. "You don't know how much you saved my life!"

"I'm glad I could help," said Max, smiling down at her. "I might suggest, though, that you not turn your back on your belongings that way. In today's world, there's always some lowlife only too happy to rob you if given the chance."

"I know," answered Sadie, noticeably cooler than a minute ago. "My bad." She turned to go, throwing over her shoulder, "Thanks again."



MAXIM ORLOV HAD COME to Galveston that morning to deliver a package to a special customer, and then, on a whim, he'd driven to

the beach. Now, he was on his way back to Houston, and as he sped north on I-45, he thought about the woman whose bag he'd rescued—Sadie Duval, as she'd given her name to the policeman. He'd have to be blind not to have noticed that she was very attractive, and he most definitely wasn't blind. Even in their brief encounter, he'd clearly noticed her hair that seemed a bouquet of warm shades—everything from pale brown to hazy blonde to golden sun streaks. Then there were her eyes, which reminded him of a piece of lapis lazuli he had on his desk—rich deep blue with golden specks. Her face was expressive, and he hadn't missed the hint of a chill that had come over it when he'd scolded her ever so slightly about not watching her bag better. He'd listened when she gave the policeman her address, so he knew she lived in Galveston. Maybe he'd call her in a couple days and see if she'd forgiven his comment.



SADIE WAS HAVING her own thoughts about the encounter. She helped pay her bills by writing about men—about how unnecessary they were, to be exact. She wasn't a man-hater or anything, and she had no problem with men as friends or colleagues, but she had no use for women who thought they weren't whole without a man in their lives. Her blog, which was called *On Being Complete* and which was popular enough to be syndicated, encouraged women to find their own strengths and be whole in themselves. She'd long ago accepted the fact that she herself might never find a man who would be comfortable with the strong woman she tried to be—a woman who knew how to support herself, to hang her own pictures, or, *shudder*, even kill a cockroach if one should have the audacity to appear.

She had a role model for her ideas, and the role model's name was Harmony. At one point in Sadie's life this role model had been called 'Mom,' but Harmony periodically reinvented herself, and many years ago she had decided that 'Mom' was too routine and

traditional, so now, she was simply 'Harmony' to friends and family alike.

Sadie parked in front of Harmony's house in Galveston's Historic District, took her precious canvas tote with her, and went to find out what was happening today. Her mother was the original free spirit, and Sadie never knew what she'd find in the house or back yard—a group of earth mothers in training, a May pole, a Wiccan discussion, primal screams, Buddhist chants, candle making, a yoga class, butter churning, rebirthing—she'd seen it all and more.

"Harmony?" she called as she opened the front door.

"In here, darling," came a voice from the rear of the house. "I'm making purity soup."

Sadie put her bag on a chair and went through to the kitchen, where every surface was covered with bowls, books, and incense holders. The air was pungent—a mixture of cooking smells and several different incenses. Sadie knew she'd regret asking, but her curiosity got the better of her. "What's purity soup?"

Harmony was huddled over her Aga stove stirring a huge pot and, it seemed to Sadie, intoning something barely audible.

"It's a soup where all the ingredients have been purified. It's supposed to be very good for cleansing both the body and the spirit. You need to stay and have some."

"Sorry, I have a meeting at the library tonight. I just dropped by for a minute to tell you what happened today." She recounted the story of the hoodie-wearing purse snatcher and of the tall stranger who had miraculously gotten her bag back for her again.

"What did he look like?" asked Harmony.

"Why does it matter? The point is he got my bag back."

"I know, but it's always more enjoyable to have an adventure with a handsome man than with a frog."

"Harmony! You don't even like men."

"I've never said that. I like men perfectly well, just not in my

house. They can be quite entertaining and even useful in certain settings.”

“Whatever.” Sadie shook her head in amusement, took a package of homemade, natural bread rolls Harmony handed her, and left again.



SADIE HAD a lot of thinking to do. If she was honest with herself, today’s happenings had bothered her in more ways than one. Of course she’d just about died when she’d seen her bag disappearing down the beach—the bag containing her life’s essentials like her phone, her wallet, and the tablet with her columns in it, but when Max had marched the thief back to her and returned her precious belongings, she’d felt more than simple gratitude. She’d felt sensations that had happened only a few times before in her life. With his dark good looks and piercing eyes, his quick reflexes and iron muscles, Max Orlov had awakened a sexual response deep inside her, one she’d been trying to ignore but which she had to admit was very much there. Max had caught her full attention, so now she had to figure out how to erase her misbehaving thoughts and put him out of her mind again.