

POLLY CARTER

DANNY'S

*Secret*

DESIRE

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

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## Chapter 1

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**T**he old, green Bentley purred effortlessly along the A12 in the balmy summer early evening. Behind the wheel, Daniella Ravenshaw was in heaven, relishing driving a car she could only dream of owning.

In the passenger seat, her best friend and the car's wealthy owner, Sara Woods, fiddled with the camera on her lap, periodically raising it to peer through the viewfinder at the passing countryside.

"Not long now, Danny," she enthused happily as they reached the outskirts of Colchester. "This is just going to be the best weekend ever! I'm so glad you agreed to come tonight instead of tomorrow."

"Well, you hardly gave me a choice, did you?"

"No. You're right," Sara admitted with no remorse. "But it's only a day early, and how could I have got there tonight if you didn't drive me? It isn't my fault I lost my license."

"Actually, it is, Leadfoot." Danny laughed. "You'll stop getting speeding tickets if you stop speeding, you know."

"Hmmp, I think they just like picking on me because I'm a

young woman in a beautiful car. And it really is a gorgeous car to drive.”

It is,” Danny agreed. “And, call me heartless, but I’m not sorry you’ve lost your license if it means I get to drive it all the way to Henry’s and back. Even though if I’d had my druthers, I’d rather have come tomorrow so I could’ve finished my work first.”

“Work shmurk. Just you wait.” Sara prodded her friend’s arm with her finger to add emphasis to each word. “Just. You. Wait. By the end of this weekend, I bet you’ll be on your knees thanking me for making sure you didn’t miss a moment.”

Glancing away from the road, Danny fixed her huge green eyes on her friend. She narrowed them, squinting through her impossibly long, ginger lashes, darkened with a light brush of mascara.

“If I was a betting lady, which I’m not, I believe I would take you up on that!” She turned her attention back to the road, tossing her head, causing her voluminous bright copper curls to bob and bounce agitatedly as if trying to escape from the loose ball in which they’d been imprisoned atop her head.

Sara glanced across at her, a small frown creasing her brow.

“You’re not really going to be mad at me all weekend, are you?” she asked with a hint of sincere concern. “I wouldn’t have been so pushy if I thought you’d really mind coming today.”

“Well, I am dying to get out of these clothes! You might at least have let me change.” Danny wriggled to emphasise how uncomfortable she was in her knee-length beige skirt, cobalt blue tailored jacket and stockings.

“I would have...” Sara adopted an innocent and earnest expression. “But we just didn’t have time.”

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Two hours earlier, Sara had been watching out of her Grove

House window. Once a quite big, two-storey family residence, the building, now belonging to Sara's father, Lord Woods, had been converted into three apartments: two on the ground floor, and one, Sara's, occupying the entire upper floor.

Danny leased the tiny one bedroom flat on the ground floor, and the other, bigger one was used by various members of the Woods family when they stayed in London, mostly Sara's older brother, Crispin, who was currently overseas.

Despite their very different backgrounds, Sara's wealthy and titled, Danny's meagre and hard-working, they had taken to each other from the day Danny moved in, and had quickly developed a close friendship, spending so much time visiting each other, it hardly felt like they lived in separate apartments.

That afternoon Danny had been to an interview for a contract to rewrite a small business' website. The minute she'd arrived home, Sara had clattered down the stairs carrying two overnight bags of her clothes for the weekend, and one large gift bag containing a joint engagement present from her and Danny. She caught Danny unlocking the door to her flat.

"Henry just called to say they've got some extra guests coming for the weekend and, oh my God, they're expected tonight, so grab your things. We have to leave immediately. This exact minute. Are you packed? I'll help."

Danny had blinked as Sara rushed into the flat ahead of her and plonked her bags down.

"I can't go tonight. We agreed we'd go in the morning. I've got to finish my column and get it to Sam by lunchtime tomorrow."

"Yes, but that's changed. Oh my God, Danny; you'll never believe... Come on. Don't just stand there. Grab your bag."

Sara had dashed into Danny's bedroom, taken an overnight bag from the cupboard and put it on the bed.

"Quick. What do you need? Dress. I'll get that. Is it hanging in the wardrobe? You'd better get your undies and pjs. Oh, and

your bathroom things. Come on. It's getting on for six o'clock. We won't be there till midnight if we don't get going."

"It's not five thirty yet, and it's a ninety-minute drive. What's the rush? What about my column? What do you expect me to tell Sam if it's not finished on time?"

"Tell her you had urgent business and she'll have to wait till Monday. No," Sara had spun around, all but running on the spot, her hands flapping like birds trying to take off. "Tell her you are getting a scoop interview with," she'd paused for effect then spread her arms wide, "da da da da ... Brandon Carlisle!"

She'd waited, eyes wide, mouth open for Danny's impressed response.

"Who's that?" Danny's nose had wrinkled in bewilderment.

Slumping dramatically into the nearest chair, Sara had fanned herself as if to recover from a major shock.

"Not again? Seriously? I can't believe you asked that!" She'd jumped up. "But, no time now. Come on, I'll tell you—again—on the way."

"At least let me change first," Danny had pleaded, but Sara was having none of it.

"Grab your jeans and stuff. You can change when we get there. Come on. See, I'm ready."

She'd spun around to show off her own outfit, carefully selected from her extensive wardrobe: a tight, black mini-skirt and short, multi-coloured sequin top.

"And the shoes, Dan," Sara had pointed to her big toes peeking out of a pair of bright red, ankle strap, stilettos elevating her tiny frame six inches. "Thank goodness I bought them last week, or I wouldn't have had a thing to wear! Come on; we've really got to get going."

At that point, Danny had simply surrendered to her fate. Mentally ticking off her check list, she'd collected what she'd need for the weekend: black jeans, green jumper, two shirts, jodh-

purs, cricket whites, make up, toiletries, shoes – casual and low heels for the party –, night dress, clean underwear and the dress.

She was glad Sara had sorted her party dress for her. Two days after they'd been talking about what they would wear to the upcoming party and it was clear Danny had nothing suitable, Sara had brought down a stunning, green cocktail dress and urged Danny to try it on. Surprisingly, considering Sara was pocket-size while Danny was five-foot-nine, slim and big-breasted, the dress fit Danny perfectly.

Sara had declared it was 'some old thing hanging around in her wardrobe which she didn't wear because it didn't fit her properly and Danny was welcome to it', but Danny had rightly guessed this wasn't true and Sara had specially bought it for her well aware Danny couldn't afford such a dress.

Presented with a *fait accompli*, Danny hadn't argued, just hugged her and said simply and sincerely, "Thank you, Sara. It's gorgeous."

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The dress, and all the other luggage safely in the boot of the car, they were now well on the way to Farthingale Cottage, the lovely country house in Suffolk owned by Henry Fitzworth, an old school friend of Sara's brother, Crispin, and the venue for Henry's and Semina Pires' engagement party the following night.

"So, you're not really mad then, about your column and all?" Sara asked again.

"No, it's okay. I'll just have to finish it at Henry's. I don't really mind, especially if I get to ride Bella in the morning. I've packed my jodhpurs in case..."

"More importantly, meet the too-gorgeous-to-be-true Brandon Carlisle," Sara purred, closing her eyes and leaning sensuously back into the leather seat, her camera forgotten for

the moment as her mind's eye was filled instead with the image of television's currently hottest star.

"Brandon Carlisle. Brandon Carlisle. Brandon Carlisle," Danny chided her in exasperation. "Can't you talk about anything else?"

She had a point. Sara had launched into a lecture almost as soon as they'd pulled away from the kerb and headed out of London.

"Brandon Carlisle is going to be there, Dan! Oh My God! Don't get me started," she'd begun, clearly demonstrating no help was needed. "I told you he's Constable Runcible – Bill – Arthurs in *Scullion's Pride*. You know. You must know. It's only been the biggest show this year! And he's only the hottest, most in demand star on the planet!"

"Ahh." Danny had snapped her fingers. "That's right. I remember. How could I have forgotten since you rave about him so much. Is he really the biggest star on the planet, though?" she teased, and then just sat back and concentrated on getting them out of London while Sara explained in great detail the plots and characters of each episode of *Scullion's Pride* and, more importantly, exactly how heart-stoppingly dreamy Constable Arthurs had been when he did this or said that.

'On the planet' may indeed have been an exaggeration, but in the three months since the first episode of the whimsical series about the small village and its somewhat unorthodox police constable had aired, it had regularly topped the ratings, and its formerly little-known cast had become household names, most notably Brandon Carlisle.

"I can't wait to meet him," Sara bubbled. "This is my big opportunity! I'm going to make him fall in love with me in my gorgeous red shoes and marry me, just you wait and see. I've been studying up on him, so I can sound intelligent and not like some crazy fan."

Danny laughed. "No, you wouldn't want to sound like that."



"He's thirty-one, but he's been acting for more than ten years." Sara ignored Danny's remark. "But mostly in the theatre; that's why we hadn't heard of him. But he's won a few awards – stage awards. *Scullion's Pride* is his first major TV project though. Lucky for us he made the switch. I hardly ever go to the theatre. I might never have seen him."

"Well, I'm sure you'll impress him with your knowledge."

"Ooh, I'm so excited!" Sara squealed, squinting her eyes shut tight. "How can you be so calm?"

"Well, you might be excited about meeting this God who walks the earth, but I couldn't give two jots about him. If he's as famous as you say, he's bound to be impossibly conceited. And why? Just for prancing around on a stage or TV set. Why do actors earn such ridiculous amounts of money and get so much fame? Are they honestly contributing anything that worthwhile? Having to be around a celebrity like the famous Brandon Carlisle is more of a reason for me to stay home with my blog and the book I want to finish before I die of old age."

Sara opened one dark-brown eye and fixed it on Danny's profile, smirking wryly at the obvious sarcasm in her friend's voice.

"You're not even a tiny bit curious to meet him?" she asked incredulously, adding with a touch of sarcasm of her own, "or have you just met so many major celebrities in the past you're totally blasé now?"

"Don't be silly," Danny laughed. "You know I haven't, and nor do I want to. I'm not even remotely interested. I have no intention of being one more gormless female shamelessly throwing herself at some guy's feet just because he's on TV."

"It's not just because he's on TV," Sara explained slowly, as though to a child. Opening the glove box, she fished around in it and pulled out a hair tie, secured her shoulder-length straight, black hair in a ponytail, then opened the window and took in large gulps of clean, country air.

“I keep telling you, he is drop-dead gorgeous – totally hot as,” she paused, pulling a soft cloth from the camera case at her feet and carefully wiping her camera lens, “as you are about to find out.”

“But what amazes me most,” she went on, “is that you live on the same planet and haven’t ever even seen a picture of Brandon Carlisle. Even if you’ve never seen *Scullion’s Pride*, *Bluestockings* must’ve done a story on him, surely. Is there a mag that hasn’t?”

“Even if they have, I wouldn’t have seen it,” Danny admitted with a slightly abashed grin. “I might write for *Bluestockings* but I don’t often see the finished edition. Sam emails me the fiction and major article each month, and that’s about all I’m interested in.”

*Bluestockings*, one of Britain’s top-selling women’s magazines, prided itself on being for the thinking woman, yet despite its weighty title, its pretences to intellectualism ran little farther than one piece of fiction by a literary author, one major article, and Danny’s opinion piece on contemporary issues, “Mouthing Off”.

It also managed a more glossily sophisticated presentation than most of its rivals, but nonetheless contained the usual pages of fashion, complete with painfully thin models, a topic on which Danny had already had a lot to say about in one of her columns.

“Even so,” Sara persisted, “how have you not seen any photos on any social media or the papers or posters or... well, anywhere? Why haven’t you Googled him? Where have you been for the last three months?”

“As I live directly under you and you drop in pretty much daily, I’d say you know where I’ve been - slaving over my keyboard earning a living and trying to write a book, unlike some people who have nothing better to do with their time than watch television.”

“Well, here. I can show you a photo.” Pulling her phone out of her pocket, Sara started tapping at it.

“Nope,” Danny shook her head. “Don’t bother. I’m driving

and if he's going to be at Henry's anyway, I can see him in person then. It'll be quite soon enough, thanks."

Sara shrugged, putting her phone away again.

"Whatever. So, the book. How's it coming along? Progress any quicker yet?"

Danny sighed ruefully. "To be honest, not really."

Sara reached over and patted her knee. "Then it doesn't matter that you're taking this weekend off, does it?" But seeing her friend's crestfallen expression she quickly added, "Aw, never mind, Dan. I'm sure you'll finish it and it will be an immediate best-seller."

"Thanks, Sara." Danny laughed. "I'm not sure you're right, but I appreciate your vote of confidence."

"Have you ever thought that not having had any actual experience of romance yourself might be somewhat of a hindrance to writing about it?" she asked, referring to Danny's oft expressed desire to be a romance novelist and the book she was currently trying to write.

"I've had romantic experiences!"

"Yeah, okay, so you went out with that guy, Tom, three times, but it was hardly a flaming passion, was it." Sara observed dryly, her comment more of a statement than a question. "And apart from him? A few scattered dates here and there in the three years since you moved to London. Nothing to write home about, eh?"

"I went out with Tom for nearly six months! And maybe I haven't met the love of my life or anything, but that doesn't mean I don't know what romance is!"

As they lapsed into companionable silence, Danny thought about Sara's last remark. She couldn't deny the basic truth of it – her twenty-fifth birthday was looming ever closer and she was yet to experience the thrill of a sizzling, unstoppable attraction between her and a man.

She'd been on dates, of course, and had even surrendered her virginity, but while the handful of sexual encounters she'd

had could perhaps, at best, be described as pleasant enough, complete emotional and sensual abandonment was something which she had only heard about and imagined, not felt herself. Even with Tom, with whom she'd had a somewhat lacklustre romance until it faded away through lack of interest.

She knew what she wanted, but it was a secret. A secret she'd had for a long time. She had no idea where it came from, but it was there, and far too embarrassing to tell anyone about, even her best friend and certainly none of the men she'd dated.

She wanted a man who would be loving and kind. A man who would cherish her, and care for her as though she were a precious treasure. But a man who would also make firm rules that she would have to obey.

Not pointless rules, but things which would be in her best interest, like getting her work done, exercising, not overspending, not losing her temper. All kinds of things. It excited her just to think about it, to imagine what such rules might be.

And just as exciting was contemplating what might be the consequences of breaking the rules. In her imagination, she'd had to stand in the corner for thirty minutes for forgetting to brush her teeth, been sent to bed early for a week after staying out past a designated curfew, had to write fifty lines of 'I must not lose my temper', and when a transgression was deemed sufficiently serious having to submit to an over-the-knee spanking.

She'd never told a soul, not even Sara. How could she possibly explain such an odd thing? Surely Sara would think she were completely mad were she to announce, 'Oh and I'd like a boyfriend who will spank me for being disobedient or naughty'.

Danny had never been spanked by her parents or teachers or anyone in real life, so she really had no idea what it would actually be like. And as she would never tell anyone about her secret desire and it seemed too far-fetched to be remotely possible that any man would randomly act out such a fantasy without prompt-

ing, she was certain she would grow old and die without ever finding out.

Sighing, she wondered if she should just resign herself to a permanently single, loveless life or be prepared to settle for something much less than the passion and excitement of her fantasy romance. And maybe Sara was right, she was forced to consider. The characters in the book she was trying to write felt dull and boring even to her, and the romance lacked spark. Could she write good romance when she was incapable of feeling it herself?

Sara, on the other hand, had no such concerns. She regularly dated exciting, dashing, attractive men, falling madly in love with each one, but a few dates later the passion tended to fizzle out and she moved onto another while managing to keep them all as friends.

From the corner of her eye, Danny could see her licking her lips, her eyes still closed, and there was no doubt it was not one of her regular consorts that was occupying Sara's mind. As if she had spoken aloud, Danny heard that name again: Brandon Carlisle.

"So, how come this Brandon Carlisle guy is going to be at Henry's anyway?"

"Oh, turns out he's William Russell's – Henry's BFF – long-lost cousin or something, and Henry told Will to bring him along, and they are all going tonight, so that's why we had to too."

Sara sat forward with a jolt, pointing to a fast-approaching sign.

"Here, Dan! I think this is the turn-off. Don't miss it."

Danny slowed the car down until they could read the sign – Coddendam.

"Yes, this is it," she agreed. "I remember that beautiful cherry tree over there. It was covered in flowers last time."

Danny eased the Bentley gently around the corner into a small country lane dotted with cottages and hedgerows. As their destination came ever closer, she wondered again how she'd let

Sara talk her into coming this evening, especially considering how uncomfortable she felt around people she didn't know, people who were ridiculously wealthy, and people who were famous, and together, that described almost the entirety of the people with whom she was about to spend the next two days.

She glanced over at Sara, who appeared to be completely at ease despite her excitement.

*"Trust Sara!"* she thought to herself with a small affectionate shake of her head.

"So who is going to be here tonight? I'm not really into mixing with strangers. You know that. You're the party animal."

"But there won't be any strangers, silly! Henry's practically my brother, and you've met Semina. Then there's me. And you've met Will before, haven't you? And Brandon Carlisle, and he's famous, so he's not a stranger.

"Apart from that there's just another of Henry's friends, George, who I haven't met before, but no one called George could possibly be scary, and someone called Vivienne, I believe, who tags around after Brandon. Probably some kind of PR or minder or something, so she doesn't count. So you don't have to worry about strangers."

Faced with logic like that, Danny should have felt reassured, but as she turned the Bentley into the drive leading to the beautiful, old, white cottage with its thatched roof dripping with pink and mauve wisteria she remained unconvinced.