

UNDRESS HER FOR DINNER



LIZBETH
DUSSEAU

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Undress Her For Dinner

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Chapter One

A Reinvented Life

I can hardly hear myself think once the train roars off, speeding me toward the center of the city. I figure the racket is a blessing and thus, I zone out with the turbulent sound of the chugging, grinding, screeching wheels beneath me. I am curiously comforted. Perhaps it's the gentle motion of the train car, the deep hum, and the vibration that rides inside my belly, warming it, that makes the trip inside this very ordinary railcar pleasant. The experience punctuates the beginning of my day—and the end, a sensuous redundancy that settles a host of anxious fears, which would otherwise rise up and clobber any composure I attempt to maintain. Everything in my life is so strangely new—from the wide-open fields of the Midwest to this grand city, with its hodgepodge of bungling architecture splashed across its cityscape. The language indigenous to this region, the smell of the streets, the lazy pace compared to the East Coast frenzy...I could go on with my observations, from things that matter to minute details that awaken me with surprise.

I love it all.

It's new; nothing like the world I left to come here, with its airs and mannerisms, which for me was so filled with pitfalls and booby-traps that I stumbled over my own feet with every choice I made.

I landed a job with Riordan & McCall, Designers, two months ago and swept into my new world on a magic carpet ride of excitement. Those days were a wildly wonderful whirl of enticements; temptations and spine-tingling thrills that kept me dazed for nearly two weeks. I suppose it's a very good thing that my life has now settled down to a more reasonable pace.

My routine is set. I understand my job and do it well. I have a quaint but very functional apartment north of the city. I even have a few budding friendships and causal

dinner dates that keep me from turning into a social outcast, as leery as I am of developing any close connections—just yet. All things considered, my ducks have lined up in perfect order and are moving me swimmingly into an easy, blissful sameness.

Not that I'm bored. Far from it. The job alone would keep me entertained without any further additions. And the city could keep my weekends occupied for months, shopping, sightseeing, dining in strange restaurants. Because of that fact, because the city will always be available to me, I often choose to stay home and relax on my days off curling up in my reading chair with some scintillating novel—so screams the vibrant book jacket in embossed gold lettering. After an excruciating beginning to adulthood, this is nirvana. I suppose all that I could ask for.

Though my past reeks with shame, I feel vindicated now, reborn. That secret terror may tug at me from time to time, in quiet twinges of guilt—a billboard, newscast, magazine ad suddenly ripping my gut for a few brief seconds with unpleasant reminders—but the worst of it washes over me as I remember how well I've done to put those awful two years behind me.

There's a man who rides my train with me everyday. I consider him another comforting, stabilizing feature of my life, even though I have no idea who he is. A businessman by the look of him. Tall, but not too tall, dark wavy hair, brown eyes, a slim build—nothing particularly remarkable, except his taste in reading. He consistently reads slim volumes of erotic fiction with provocative sounding names like *Slut Toy*, *Bound Virgin*, *Twins In Chains*... anonymous authors, racy covers and his stoic eyes reading line after line without a hint of any sexual stirrings in response to what must be intended to arouse. I imagine his insides furtively boiling over with lust—why else would he devour book after book, day after day? Why would this man be a comfort to me? Because he reminds me of me, with my

secret other life. This stranger seems to keep himself well-contained between the covers of his graphic reading material, which makes me believe that I can contain myself as well, that my reinvented life will not crumble all around me with that other me seeping out, like blood oozing from an unhealed wound.

I realize that my stranger is just a fantasy. That I've made up a persona for him that probably doesn't exist at all. He could be a porn king, or one of those sleazy fellows who likes to hit on women, perhaps a pervert of the crudest sort, or maybe just an average guy with a dull wife and rowdy kids; one who finds no shame in his choice of entertainment for early morning and late afternoon train rides. I prefer, however, to think of him as a 'contained' man who, like me, has his life carefully circumscribed, thought out and neatly compartmentalized.

Thoughts of this strange companion in my railcar initially amused me, but since those first few weeks, since the brief titillation over his trashy novels wore off, I haven't thought about him much. We ride the same car together as a matter of habit and there is no other reason for me to spend more time contemplating who he is. I did see him walking through my neighborhood the other day, and presumably discovered where he lives—the basement level apartment in one of the many old brick apartment houses in our district. I live three blocks away, on the third floor of a similar building. Where he lives should hardly surprise me. But as similar as our lives might be at seven-thirty in the morning and five at night, we otherwise diverge into what is most likely very different lives.

I have been so busy with my new job, that while at work, I've hardly had time to notice the people around me, with the exception of those few I work with directly. There is Stephen Dunfey, with a wife and three children, head of the department and a first-class architect, Jeanette the department secretary, a part-timer, Joe, and Phil, a designer

who has been with the firm three years—thirty, gay and always good for a laugh when tensions start to rise. His easy wit would save most any dicey moment from complete disaster. Phil appears to do nothing but mosey from one office to another collecting gossip; you'd wonder if he ever works at all. I thought he might work at night, but he's routinely gone every evening before the rest of us have turned out the lights and put on our coats. When I attended our first departmental meeting, Stephen, Jeanette, Joe and I were sitting around the conference table going over layouts when Phil popped in the door late, a broad grin on his face.

"Here it is!" he announced, as if everyone should stop what they were doing and pay attention. Of course, everyone did. He laid out an entire sketchbook of drawings, a dozen layouts, then stood back and smiled, quite self-satisfied.

I sat there stunned, my mouth agape, while the rest of the group took his smug entrance in stride. This was how Phil worked. I doubt even he could explain the process he uses to create his masterpieces of creative genius. Envious, I sulked a bit, with the attention in the room taken from my well thought out, but less than spectacular, design.

"Don't worry, kiddo," he said to me as we were walking out together. "You're just getting started and you're good. Otherwise Harry would never have hired you."

Harry is Harry McCall, owner, CEO and workaholic, who would appear to pluck his employees from a massive number of good applicants on hunches alone. He never conducts interviews, or even bothers, as far as I know, to review portfolios. He spotted me at a New York designer's conference, where we talked for five minutes about a painting on display. Apparently he liked what I said. He hired me the next day.

Not a word was mentioned about my own design work, my college training, or my noteworthy background. This

last was a particular relief to me. I'm not talking about the dirty little secret background that no one here will ever learn about, if I can help it, but the Mid-Atlantic pedigree the Dickinson name normally inspires—that particular Dickinson family with two powerful brothers—my father the Anglican Bishop and my uncle the US Senator serving his second term. Harry McCall never put the two together, but, of course, why should he? I avoid that association wherever possible. And no Dickinson that I've ever known has taken my career path. We're typically a more 'in your face' sort of family with a love of politics and big institutions. Not that I don't love my family. I'm proud of them, and indebted to them for saving my skin when my life moved from one disaster to the next. I'm grateful that I am part of this distinguished family. But it does have its price, and I decided after my great mistake at nineteen, that I will no longer ride aboard their coattails, gaining favors because of my name.

Sounds smug, perhaps self-righteous, doesn't it? Well, it's not. I was nearly the cause of my family's ruin. I've given them enough trouble and will not be that troublesome black sheep again. I left them in their fancy East coast mansions, with their religious fervor and political causes, and will be happy here in Chicago, keeping my nose clean and to the grindstone. I'm sure they are happy for that, too.

Harry McCall has been a bit of a savior to me, as much as he is an eccentric in the design world. Every few days, he brings me into his office and we chat. But don't bring to mind the typical picture of a suave, sophisticated, worldly, suited executive behind a polished rosewood desk. That's not Harry. He's usually dressed in baggy pants, sweaters or even torn and stained T-shirts he wears for oil painting, which is nearly as lucrative a passion as his design agency. For a man of such distinct tastes and creativity, his physical presence is unimpressive—wild, curly gray hair, a sallow

complexion, small but sometimes piercing pale gray eyes, a thin and gangling build. He's all creativity and inspiration. Right brain. Obvious when observing his work space: easels along the windowed wall of his high-rise office, mobiles dangling from the center with little cardboard cutouts of buildings he's working on and a paper-strewn desk shoved off to one side. He can't find his telephone. But then, he's not one for doing business on the phone. He's never touched a computer.

We talk ideas, concepts, color, shape, form, structure—whimsy. Whimsy, that's his word of the week through which he filters everything, and what our last impromptu chat was about.

"You have to be less bound by rules, Natalie. Expand, open, feel the vital energy...and whimsy, that's the little quirky stuff that will spontaneously appear in your work." He strut about the room speaking sweeping truths, while I stood gazing at him in awe. You have to stand in his office because there are no chairs. Just pillows and if you end up on the pillows—well, who knows what will happen? That's what I hear. I wonder if he plans to have sex with me?

"Be your own person, above all. Take chances."

He stared me down quizzically, as if I was supposed to say something, but I was speechless. He was prepared for that too. He strut right up to me, puts his hands on my shoulders, and looked down from his six-foot two frame to my five-foot six, saying in a fatherly way, "We can't let the world diminish who we are. It must only expand on it. Whatever befalls, we have to take it all in and own it...all the experience, all the drama, all the good, the dangerous, the horror, the mystery, the insight and the despair. You understand?"

Yes, I think I understood what he meant. He wasn't talking to me specifically, but making a general theoretical statement about life that he could have shared with anyone. For all I know, he calls all of his employees in and gives

them the same lecture. Although in Harry McCall's unique fashion, he would shape the message to the listener and to his own mood at the time. Eccentric, yes, but lovely. He made me feel unique and less finite than my current limited appraisal of myself.

"I think you need a man in your life, Natalie," was the last point of order in our last meeting.

"Really?" I smiled kindly.

"Yes. Sex. It's the sex that's missing. Your work needs the raw sexuality of your youth. The fearlessness, the experimentation."

In my opinion, I've wasted the raw sexuality of my youth on reckless behavior that only caused me a ton of grief. I wasn't sure I wanted to open up those doors again. But Harry McCall had me so enthralled that I almost spilled out the entire sordid tale of my past in order that he would understand my current reluctance in sexual matters. Thankfully, before I opened my mouth and spilled out what I was likely to regret, I managed to bite my tongue, calling a halt to that certain disaster.

Considering Harry's concern about my sex life, I wonder if my visit with him had anything to do with the unexpected event that happened a day later. I was sitting at my desk, in my office, working with as much inspired abandon as possible and forced whimsy in order to please Harry and myself, when the very handsome, blond-haired JD Barry knocked briskly on my opened door and smiled at me. I knew JD only as a client of the agency. He's ruggedly good looking, with sandy windblown hair, a rough Colorado-style tan, and chilling blue eyes the color of a clear wide open sky. I immediately gravitate to men with his physical qualities, which are far removed from the Eastern Seaboard polish I grew up with. "Hi!" JD said.

"Hi, yourself," I said, looking back at him and curious as to why he'd chosen my door to knock on. There was a bit of

a flutter in my tummy seeing his smile and all of his vibrant energy aimed directly at me.

"You're Natalie Dickinson, right?"

"I am."

"That's what I was told. Just wondering if you'd be interested in dinner tonight?"

The invitation flew right over my head like a gust of air. I stared at him for what seemed like ten minutes, though it could hardly have been more than thirty seconds. He waited, unruffled by my hesitation.

"Dinner? You . . . and me? Well, I...I guess..." I stumbled stupidly and stopped.

"I guess I can?" he tried finishing for me.

"Yes. Certainly."

"So. . . . what? You get off at five? I'll meet you in the pub across the street. The Easy Lady, you know the one?"

"Sure."

Then he was gone, disappearing into Harry's office moments later. It took me a half-hour before I could start working again without my hands shaking.

The Easy Lady is the sort of brewpub frequented by the after work crowd. Dozen of white collar workers crushed together, fighting their way toward the bar, then fighting their way out with beer in hand, looking for a table, a smiling face, maybe even the sexy glint in the eye from a prospective one-night stand. Generally, however, picking up dates in bars is a behavior mostly reserved for later in the evening, at other, bigger bars where the blues or rock music blare so loudly and with such a beat that the only thing one can think of is fucking.

JD was sitting in the back of the Easy Lady when I arrived, and spotting me, he waved through a break in the crowd and I nudged my way to his table, practically falling into the seat beside him. We were so close that our hips touched. I instantly felt a wave of energy knocking at my sexual self, shaking it awake.

A long, rather loud, conversation began as we shared the usual mundane facts about ourselves. We stayed in the bar two hours, then moved onto the street where we walked together like casual friends, relieved to be talking softly in the quiet atmosphere of the late night. When I told him that my feet hurt, he hailed a cab that took us to his posh fifteenth floor Lakeshore apartment.

The conversation continued there, covering how he'd had his eye on me since I joined Riordan & McCall, how he admired my work...I asked him how he knew my work specifically. He told me that Harry McCall had been bragging about his new designer, who would eventually beat the pants off Phil Combs. I flushed with satisfied embarrassment.

We sat on his sofa, drinking vodka martinis—a Raspberry Smirnoff, my favorite, and his, a Absolut. In a moment of singular tenderness, he brushed back the hair that had fallen in my face. Then he reached for my lap, where my hand lay awkwardly, where I tried to control its desire to explore this ravishing man and drew my hand to his face and kissed it.

My entire body seemed to shine as if he'd gone inside and turned on all the lights that had been dim so long. I didn't want to sleep with him that first night; the idea of sex seemed to cheapen the evening that seemed headed at roller coaster pace toward romance. But then I knew I would if pressed; I couldn't resist. Lust dripped from the air, raining down like a warm shower. He kissed me with the moonlight streaming in through the bank of windows to the East. I shuddered, feeling suspended in a fantasyland thrill ride of a lusty romance palpable enough to sweep any dime store romance heroine off her feet.

I trembled warily as JD pulled me to my feet, feeling sure that we were headed to the bedroom, and was surprised to find myself led to a private patio that looked out on the lake. This was more than a mere balcony; the

space was a long, twelve-foot deep garden of exotic plants forming an erotic cocoon, a sky-high atrium that opened to the stars.

This seemed more like a movie script than real life. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, I felt transported to another land, brilliant with pulsing color, as if a camera was rolling and next year at this time, I'd be seeing our love affair on a movie screen at my local theatre. I stood at the railing looking out on the night and the dark Lake Michigan beyond, my hands held tight to the rail to keep my balance. JD stood behind me, gently caressing my breasts, running his hand down to my belly, where I was lit with such fierce need that I could already feel the orgasm in me build. Then his hand dropped lower to my crotch.

"You tell me if you want me to stop," he whispered in my ear.

"You know I think I should," I said, unconvincingly. I drank in his masculine aroma, a redolence of spicy musk that was uniquely his.

"Why? Because it's dangerous to do this on a first date?" he asked, with a hint of amusement.

"If you want a second date, it is," I answered.

"Maybe, maybe not." His fingers lit flash fires everywhere they touched. I fell back against his chest, wanting more. "But if it's a second date you want, it's not going to make any difference if we have sex now or not. I'm either the kind of guy who fucks and leaves her, or I'm not."

He had a point. No sense in wasting my time in a useless internal dialogue, weighing pros and cons. He was either a cad or a decent guy; I could see no middle ground.

And what about me? Did he care what type of woman I was?

I needed no more encouragement to keep going. JD's hands were like velvet, floating over my naked skin as he reached under my blouse. He pulled it up and over my head, leaving me standing half-naked on the balcony's

edge, facing out toward the world beyond, quivering with expectation and the naughty thrill of the exposure—even if the exposure was minimal. He held me close, massaging my breasts with surprising vigor, fingers gently pinching nipples, as if he too could feel the dark energy in me move crazily, in tiny rivers of pain flowing freely from nipple to crotch.

When I felt his hand at my ass, drawing my skirt to my waist, I thought I'd come right then with no further stimulation. But there was more. He ran his fingers along my cleft, noting the moisture collecting at my center, his hand soon bathed in the crescendoing flood. My entire body—breasts, nipple, belly, pussy, ass—responded with arousal. To me, this man was an untried lover; I didn't know what to expect. I knew from the outset that his was a capricious and distinctive style—intimidating without being threatening. I understood he'd be in charge and I would relent. For women who dream of being swept off their feet, he would be a master of their pleasure. But for a woman with issues in the sexual arena, I feared his power over me. I might have balked if I had been thinking clearly, but my body, paying no attention to my mental torment, cooperated fully.

I anticipated a number of possible moves before the real act began, but never expected that on the brink of orgasm and without any preparation at all, except for the juices from my pussy lubricating his path, JD's rather sizable erection would be slowly, but determinedly moving into my ass. The shock of it gusted through my body like a sudden brushfire. As his cock impaled me, his right hand clutched the forward crevice of my body, with his fingers diving deep into the warm, wet pool of my vagina.

Even as I struggled with the immensity of his total invasion, JD moved unwaveringly into my rear channel as if he owned it and had been there often. He accompanied his moves with a brutal daring that allowed him this much

advantage over me on a first date without my objections. I soon dissolved inside his embrace. The night air swarmed around us—fresh and cool, as my half-hearted cries of distress lifted onto the breeze. It had been nearly a year since someone had held me, a lot longer since I'd had a cock in my ass, and as long since anyone made love to me. I was due this hour of bewildering pleasure.

I could hardly believe what happened once the orgasm crashed around me. I thrashed so hard inside JD's arms that he had to hold me down. He finished himself a few moments later, by turning me about and bending me over the back of a chaise lounge, forcefully thrusting his erection into my ass until his body issued forth and an unintelligible cry battered the space around us. Once he withdrew, he lifted my wasted body into his arms, and took me back inside where we recovered inside the dark cave of his living room.

There must have been a pained expression on my face when he finally turned me toward him and I looked him in the eye.

"Something the matter?" he asked.

I managed a half smile.

"Ah! You can't believe I just took your ass on a first date?" he speculated—yet, rightly so.

"Something like that."

"Don't worry, I'll get to the rest of you soon enough."

This made me feel slightly better.

"You don't have to confess anything to me, Natalie, but I have you figured for a tramp at heart, and honestly, I mean that in a good way." He was so sincere that I couldn't be offended. "Something you need to know about me if you haven't already figured it out, I don't settle for anything ordinary—fun, food, sex, entertainment—especially in sex. I play at the boundaries, experiment with excess. Anything else isn't worthy of my attention.

“And thus you like your women out of the ordinary, too?”
I wondered.

“I think that stands to reason.”

I loved him then. I love him now weeks later.

But how he pegged me for being ‘out of the ordinary’, when I’ve done everything I know how to be blatantly normal since I arrived in this city makes me wary of him and my efforts to hide that wicked other me. Either my methods for self-containment are not working, or JD’s amazingly astute.

Chapter Two

Elsa

I literally bumped into Elsa two months into my employment at Riordan & McCall. We were at the water cooler, she directly behind me, when I suddenly turned around and there she was. We both backed off and managed weak smiles.

"I'm so sorry," I spit out.

"Dat iz okay," she haltingly answered.

I'd seen the honey-blonde beauty on several occasions, running errands for busy account executives. I immediately saw her as the stereotypical office slut. Blonde, buxom and statuesque, with her thick German accent adding considerably to her allure. I think American men think of European sluts as mysterious and uniquely sensuous. I could see why she was hired; certainly, it wasn't for her secretarial skills. As I was soon to learn, her English was only barely passable. I doubt she could read or write a word.

Yet, as I briefly caught her gaze and stared into the warmth of her yielding blue eyes, I had another, far different, opinion of her. She was not the haughty, bitchy femme fatale she appeared to be from a distance, but a scared young girl. I suppose she had to be over eighteen, but barely.

"I'm very sorry. I was just going on break. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

To my surprise, Elsa accepted my offer.

We moved into the employee's lounge and sat down opposite each other at one of the mahogany tables next to the atrium, nervously nursing cups of steamy, fresh-made coffee. One thing I will say of Riordan & McCall, the ambience is transcendent, a literal rainforest in the atrium center of the building and modern art artfully gracing the walls—very often Harry's work. Coffee and tea are designer brands, not the burnt- smelling swill found in most offices.

Again, Harry's doing. There are usually pastries and fresh fruit arranged on decorative platters in the break room, looking as though the spread had been set out just minutes before.

I realized as Elsa and I stared into each other's eyes that our conversation might be more awkward than I planned.

"So, you've been here long?" I asked her.

"Tree mont's."

I nodded. "You're from Germany?"

"Ya...ah, Yes." She nodded as she pronounced the English word with a deliberate smile. "I very little Anglish."

"You're doing fine. You like it here?"

She looked around, as if she was looking for someone to be staring at her, then nodded nervously. "Verry hart. But I larn . . . schnell." She seemed strangely cautious, more than I would think she needed to be. Friendly, but guarded.

"I'm sure you are learning." I smiled as warmly as I could.

I was rescued from the uncomfortable situation by Jeanette, who I saw summoning me through the plate glass window, tapping on the glass until I finally turned her way. The woman was pushy and wouldn't wait, but on this occasion, it suited my need to extricate myself from poor Elsa.

Since that day, I've looked out for her, making an informal study of her behavior and her adaptation to the office environment. She works exclusively for two executives who I find are particularly abrupt with her, as if she's their personal slave. More than once I've watched her being verbally dressed down in front of the clerical staff for some perceived infraction, Elsa nearly in tears. With her limited command of the language, the poor girl couldn't have understood half of what they told her. While I felt sorry for her, at the same time, I noticed an odd sensuality arising in these confrontations. I'm sure the feeling came from Elsa herself, as if she derived some perverse pleasure

in the verbal abuse. I imagine that Mr. Hardaway and Mr. Cain enjoyed these scenes. It seemed to me that they appeared, after some study of their boorish faces, to be peculiarly sadistic.

The same two executives employ a young English secretary, Honey, who they treat with a similarly haughty disdain. Honey, having no problem with the language, has a more responsible position. But like Elsa, she seems to quiver inside her tiny panties when the two men are around. I say tiny because she's just a bit of thing—quite the opposite of the well-endowed Elsa. She's not more five feet tall and could weigh no more than a hundred pounds. Her tits are small, but in the vernacular, quite perky, nipples nearly always blatantly hard and poking outrageously through her tight knit shirts. In the funky fashion I associate with English sluts from working class towns, her physical appearance is sexily garish—spiky red dyed hair, dark roots and purple painted fingernails. Her short skirts barely cover her ass and when she bends over, it's obvious that she wears 'tiny' panties, which cover almost nothing.

I finally had the guts to ask Jeanette about the foreign tarts, knowing that she'd have answers if anyone did.

She smiled, wryly. "That's just Hardaway and Cain for you. They imported the two, got them green cards, a place to live, the whole nine yards, like they have their own personal European Playboy bunnies running around here. I think it's pretty disgusting, but Harry would never say anything. He'd think it might interrupt the creative process," she said with degree of disdain I'd not previously heard from her.

"Hmm, interesting," I said, reservedly. I expected this kind of personal appraisal from Jeanette, who is herself a bit thick about the middle and far past her prime at forty-five, not that she would have ever looked like either Elsa or Honey. Her face is too round, her hair too ordinary in a