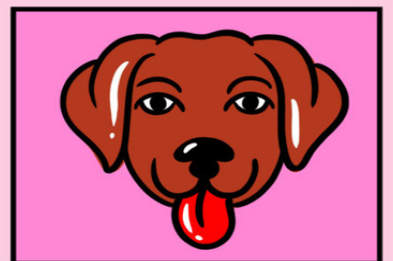
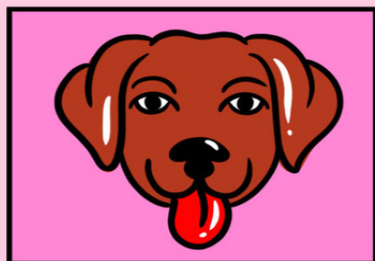
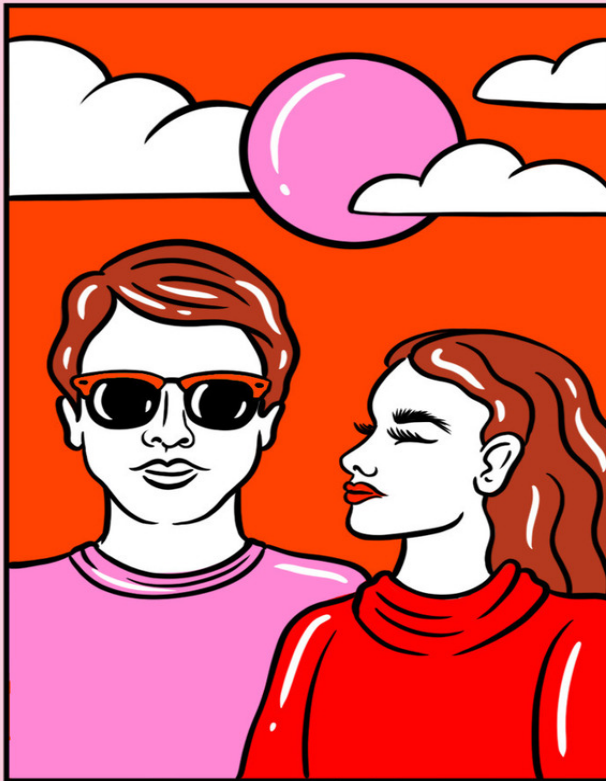


FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK



ELISSA SUSSMAN

PRAISE FOR

Funny You Should Ask

“You will absolutely devour this book. It’s filled with delightful banter, hot romance, and a love story that’s worthy of the big screen. To put it bluntly, I freaking loved it and couldn’t put it down.”

—Kate Spencer, author of *In a New York Minute* and host of *Forever35*

“*Funny You Should Ask* is a smart, sensitive story full of love and longing—and not to mention a totally swoonworthy hero. It’s also a page-turning peek into the celebrity machine. Framed by one infamous weekend and its fallout, the book goes beyond the glossy surface to thoughtfully tackle questions of perception versus reality, and which can hurt more: the limitations other people place on us, or the ones we place on ourselves.”

—Heather Cocks and Jessica Morgan, bestselling authors of *The Royal We* and *The Heir Affair*

“*Funny You Should Ask* is the kind of fascinating, intimate character study that feels like reading about real people. A breezy, addictive romance—I couldn’t put it down!”

—Rachel Lynn Solomon, author of *The Ex Talk*

“Elissa Sussman’s adult debut promises a glamorous celeb romp, but offers a double-whammy with thoughtful, emotional depth. As the narrative jumps back and forth in time, the truth of what happened between Gabe and Chani unfolds and a romance blooms—cautious, sweet, and sizzling with tension.... A beautiful, fun, heartfelt love story that I couldn’t put down.”

—Maurene Goo, author of *Somewhere Only We Know*

“I loved this book! Smart, funny, and crackling with the most delicious sexual tension, *Funny You Should Ask* is exactly the kind of book I am always wishing there were more of. I’ve already recommended it to all my friends.”

—Katie Cotugno, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Birds of California



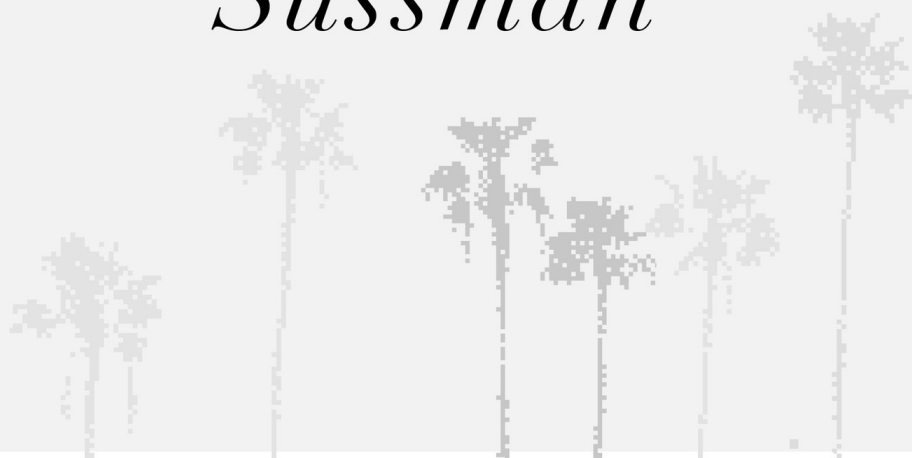
D E L L

N E W Y O R K

*Funny
You
Should
Ask*

A N O V E L

*Elissa
Sussman*



Funny You Should Ask is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2022 by Elissa Sussman

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Dell, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

DELL and the HOUSE colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

NAMES: Sussman, Elissa, author.

TITLE: *Funny you should ask* / Elissa Sussman.

DESCRIPTION: First edition. | New York: Bantam Dell, [2022] |

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2021014019 (print) | LCCN 2021014020 (ebook) |

ISBN 9780593357323 (trade paperback; acid-free paper) | ISBN 9780593357330 (ebook)

CLASSIFICATION: LCC PS3619.U84 F86 2022 (print) |

LCC PS3619.U84 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021014019>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021014020>

Ebook ISBN 9780593357330

[randomhousebooks.com](https://www.randomhousebooks.com)

Book design by Barbara M. Bachman, adapted for ebook

Cover art and design: Kasi Turpin

ep_prh_6.0_139683237_c0_r0

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Friday](#)

[\(Gabe Parker: Shaken, Not Stirred—Part One\)](#)

[Then](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Now](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Saturday](#)

[\(Gabe Parker: Shaken, Not Stirred—Part Two\)](#)

Then

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

Now

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

Sunday.

[\(Gabe Parker: Shaken, Not Stirred—Part Three\)](#)

Then

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

Now

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

Monday.

[\(Gabe Parker: Shaken, Not Stirred—Part Four\)](#)

[Then](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Now](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[*Dedication*](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

*“The course of true love—”
“—gathers no moss.”*

—THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

Prologue

“H E REQUESTED YOU,” ALEXANDRA SAYS.

It’s a good thing we’re on the phone because I’d bet the editor in chief of *Broad Sheets* magazine would not appreciate the death glare I’m giving my screen. And I *know* she wouldn’t understand why.

“Bullshit,” I say.

I’m half hoping she’ll prove me wrong, and I’m embarrassed to realize that I’m holding my breath while I wait for her answer.

“Okay, okay,” she admits. “His people requested you.”

That makes sense. The article I did on Gabe Parker ten years ago had been a PR team’s wet dream. It gave Gabe the kind of publicity that people would buy if they could. Which is, in essence, what they’re attempting to do now.

I can’t blame them. Hell, I’m sure my own publicist is kicking herself for not thinking of it first. Stars aligning and all that.

That article is the reason that ten years later, no matter what I’m promoting, no matter what I’m being interviewed for, I still get asked the same, exact question.

And I always offer the same, exact answer.

“Nope, nothing happened,” I’ll say with a big smile. “Don’t I wish, though.”

My ego still takes a hit when people accept that answer with an easy, relieved nod. But I get it. That’s my brand. Being the kind of woman who spends a platonic weekend with a Hollywood heartthrob in his prime. Readers didn’t have to be threatened by me. Instead, they could sympathize

with how I—a “regular girl”—had gotten a chance with someone like Gabe Parker and whiffed it.

It also helped that Gabe’s immediate reaction to the article’s release—running off to marry his gorgeous, former-model co-star—proved emphatically that I wasn’t his type.

A bruising but necessary public rejection. One that had done wonders for me professionally.

It made me lovable. Accessible. Relatable.

It sold articles.

It sold books.

It made *my* career.

“They want you two to re-create as much of your weekend as you can,” Alexandra says. “He arrives in L.A. in a few hours.”

I mentally scoff. I’ve never had an interview like this happen when it was supposed to. Even that first weekend had been rescheduled at least twice. Still, it’s surprising how quickly they’re trying to pull this together. It doesn’t give me any time to research, to prep.

I guess they assume that, to a certain extent, I’ve been preparing for this for ten years.

They’re not wrong. Because the truth is, I’ve spent those years simultaneously profiting and running from that Gabe Parker interview.

From Gabe Parker.

“You have the paperback coming out,” Alexandra says. “He has a movie coming out.”

She didn’t need to remind me of either.

The professional benefits are clear.

The personal ones...

It’s impossible to ignore Gabe, and his career trajectory. The adage about car wrecks and being unable to look away has been true of him for the last five years or so. Everyone knows that he got fired after his third Bond film. Everyone knows that his marriage to Jacinda Lockwood reached an embarrassing, pedestrian conclusion. Everyone knows that he’s been in and out of rehab centers.

Everyone says that this new movie could either revive his career or end it for good.

“I can send over the screener,” Alexandra suggests. “See what you think.”

I bite my tongue, holding back what would have probably been a caustic, unwelcome response. I know Alexandra is being helpful. I know she wants this interview to be as successful as the first.

I know I’m being ungrateful to even consider turning it down.

But the thought of sitting across from Gabe Parker after all these years, pretending I haven’t replayed that weekend over and over in my head, pretending I don’t *still* think about the moments we shared, pretending that what I tell everyone is the truth and that nothing really happened between us...

Well. It makes me feel more than a little unsteady.

“I’ve heard the movie is good,” Alexandra says.

It’s a remake of *The Philadelphia Story*. My favorite movie. One of ten dozen things Gabe and I had talked about.

Back then, Gabe would have been perfect as Mike Connor, the struggling writer vying for the heart of socialite Tracy Lord. Now, at forty, he’s playing the ex-addict ex-husband, C. K. Dexter Haven.

There have already been a dozen think pieces about the choice—about how it’s so close to Gabe’s real life that it’s not really acting at all. How it’s nothing more than stunt casting. How Gabe is washed up and doesn’t deserve another chance.

No one thought he deserved to be Bond either.

I don’t need to see the movie to know he’s probably perfect in it. Just like I know that trying to fight my editor, Gabe’s management, and (if I told her about it) my therapist would be futile.

“He’ll be waiting at the restaurant at one,” Alexandra says. “But if you really don’t want to, I can send—”

“I’ll do it,” I say.

I’ve chickened out on only one interview in my career—I won’t do it again.

Instead, I swallow back the taste of impending doom. It tastes a lot like a really good burger and a perfect sour beer. It tastes like Jell-O shots and popcorn.

It tastes like expensive mint toothpaste.

I know that by accepting this assignment, I'll get the answers to every unasked question I've had for the last ten years.

No matter what, everything that Gabe and I started that weekend a decade ago in December will *finally* get a proper ending.

Friday



BROAD SHEETS

GABE PARKER:
Shaken, Not Stirred—Part One

BY CHANI HOROWITZ

Gabe Parker is shoeless, shirtless, and holding a puppy.

“I’m sorry,” he tells me. “This place is a rental. Do you mind holding her for a moment while I deal with this?”

The *her* in question is his ten-week-old black rescue mutt. The *this* is the mess she’s made on the floor, which he’s now mopping up with his T-shirt.

I’m standing in his kitchen, holding a squirming fluffy dog, watching Hollywood’s biggest heartthrob clean up puppy pee.

It’s not a fantasy. It’s real life.

Usually, I’d have to pay twenty bucks (plus another forty for popcorn and a soda) to get this good of a look at Gabe Parker’s abs and lats. Today, however, *I’m* the one getting paid to spend a couple of hours with those body parts—as well as the rest of him.

“Gabe is just so *likable*,” his co-star Marissa Merino has been quoted as saying.

“A guy’s guy,” Jackson Ritter, another co-star, claims.

That’s the company line—that Gabe Parker is exactly as gregarious and charming as he appears on the big screen.

I know you’re reading this secretly hoping that I’m going to tell you it’s all a lie—that it’s the Hollywood machinery working overtime—that Gabe Parker is a womanizing creep who has an exceptionally effective PR team to build this image of a man so good that he can’t possibly be real.

But he’s real. And he’s spectacular.

He finishes cleaning up after his pooch, dropping his shirt into the trash before coming over to me, taking the puppy's face in his hands, and cooing at her.

"It's okay, honey," he says. "It's not your fault. I love you so very much."

Have I mentioned I'm still holding her? And he's still shirtless? He smells amazing, by the way. Like lumber, and peppermint, and the backseat of the Ford Focus where you had your very first kiss with the guy from Jewish summer camp who you knew had already kissed all of your friends, but had an eyebrow piercing and turned out to be really, really good with his tongue.

We're only five minutes into our interview and I'm already at a disadvantage.

Unfortunately, Gabe puts a shirt on and the three of us—me, him, and the puppy—head out to grab lunch. He has a favorite place nearby. It's not too crowded, he says, and no one really bothers him. Reminds him a little of home.

I brace myself for what I know is coming next—a big-time star rhapsodizing about the small town where he grew up and how he loves Los Angeles, but aw shucks, he really misses his hometown, where no one cared about fame or money.

This is not my first rodeo, after all.

He says it, of course, but the power of Gabe Parker is that I actually believe him.

Speaking of rodeos, I'm sorry to say that on our way to lunch, Gabe himself shatters part of the Montana Man fantasy by informing me that he'd never actually been on a horse before his role in *Cold Creek Mountain*—the first time that audiences saw him without a shirt.

"No ranches, no riding," he tells me. "I grew up in a small town."

Gabe looks like the kind of guy that should be a movie star. Heads turn when he passes, and it's not just because he's six foot

four and holding an adorable puppy. He has that ineffable quality that we'd all bottle and sell if we could.

And yes, ladies—he is actually six foot four. Not Hollywood's version of six foot four, which is closer to five foot ten, but actually a towering, tall hunk of a man. I know this for a fact because *I'm* Hollywood's version of six foot four.

We get a table in the back where there's a patio for the dog. It takes us fifteen minutes to get there, but it's mostly because Gabe himself keeps stopping and talking to the waitstaff.

You see, they all know him. He's a regular.

"Madison, honey, you look gorgeous," he says when our waitress comes to take our order.

She's radiantly pregnant, and waves off the compliment.

"I mean it," Gabe says. "Your husband should say that to you. Every. Single. Day. On his knees."

I'm pretty sure that if *I* were pregnant, my water would have broken at that exact moment.

But Madison just laughs and takes our order, giving Gabe's puppy a pat on the head before floating off to the kitchen with more grace than I could have ever managed, pregnant or not.

We each get a beer and a burger.

We talk about his childhood in Montana. How close he is with his family, especially his sister, Lauren. She's older by a year and Gabe's best friend.

"I know it's cliché," he says. "But she really is."

We talk about the bookshop. The one he bought for Lauren and his mom when he got his first big break.

"It's a bookshop/craft shop," he makes a point to say. "Lauren gets mad if I don't include that as well."

It's called the Cozy. They have a website. Gabe recommends books on it, even though he's said in past interviews that he was never much of a reader as a kid.

“My mom was an English teacher, so having a kid that didn’t like books was so embarrassing,” he says. “But I was just a late bloomer—I’m a big reader now. The bookstore was her dream. And Lauren’s always been good at making things—baking, crafting, that kind of stuff. She still knits me a sweater every Christmas.”

I bite my tongue to keep from making the obvious joke: “What are they made of? Boyfriend material?”

In case you’re wondering, he *is* single.

“Rumors,” he tells me when I ask about Jacinda. “We’re co-stars and friends.”

Jacinda Lockwood—the newest Bond girl for the newest Bond. She and Gabe have been photographed numerous times coming out of restaurants, standing close to each other on dark sidewalks in Paris, even holding hands a few times.

“She’s a sweet girl,” Gabe says. “But there’s nothing there.”

He orders a second beer. I’m a lightweight so I decline.

Remember this detail later, friends. Two roads diverge and all that.

I ask how he feels about taking on such an iconic part—about being the first American to step into the role.

“Nervous,” he tells me. “Anxious. I almost said no.”

That’s the narrative his people and the film’s producers have been pushing, and I was skeptical when I heard it. But Gabe’s entire demeanor changes when I ask. He’s been open and cheerful, answering questions eagerly.

Bond puts a somber hush on the conversation. He’s not looking at me, staring down at his napkin, which he’s twisted into a tight knot. He’s silent for a long time.

I ask if the backlash bothered him.

“I’m beyond lucky,” he says. “All I care about is doing the part justice.”

He shrugs.

“But do I worry that they’re right? Yeah, sure. Who wouldn’t?”