

Made for Me

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PREFACE

When Danielle's father lowered his eyes and clenched his fist, she expected him to express anger over a job located half-way around the world, not his demand for her to take it. Wanting tears and a hug, she instead received an impassioned plea to make the most of the opportunity. Off-balance and sensing the inevitability a life-altering change was about to occur, Danielle got right to the point.

"What about Mom? I wasn't there for her when she needed me."

"It's time you let that go," her father said. Danielle stared at him, his once chiseled jawline now puffy from illness and age. "How many times do I have to repeat that you were on a plane when she passed, and because she was a God-fearing woman, probably waved to you as she went to her final destination? David said to go and I second the opinion. What are you waiting for?"

Danielle withheld her frustration at the absurdity of the question. "Your health to improve. What's so complicated about that?"

"Nothing. My health will never improve. I'm telling you Danielle, take the job of your dreams. Waiting around, taking care of me isn't a life. It's a living death."

Danielle sought a quick answer, a dilemma she never faced at the office. She cursed David, her managing director, for calling her father and telling him about the extraordinary job offer. MRD, the world's most profitable gold-trading firm wanted her, in Zurich, in three weeks. She'd make multiples of what she earned at Russelz and for poaching her away, MRD offered an override on what she earned for a year. She could pay off her father's bills, keep up with the new ones and put money away for investments or retirement. The money was enticing. It was also irrelevant.

“Dad, I can earn money anywhere, but I only have one family, and its here.”

Her father pursed his lips. “You are so stubborn.”

“All you,” she retorted.

“Danielle, David is right. You could move mountains at MRD, not just change the course of a river here and there by staying in Portland.”

He held his hand up when she opened her mouth to interrupt. “Let me be clear Danielle. You either take this opportunity or you will find yourself without a father to worry about. I won’t have you wasting your life, and if that takes ending mine to help you get on with yours, then so be it.” The finality of his words stunned her into believing he was serious. “Now that we have an agreement, I suggest you start packing. Every day you arrive early is fifty-thousand in your pocket, and that’s in francs, not dollars. Well? Don’t just stare at me, get going!”

In a daze, Danielle walked to her room, examining what had become of her life since leaving New York and returning to Oregon. Computers. Trading. Dating older men who didn’t want emotional attachment, an arrangement perfect for her family situation. The only extracurricular activity she had was sailboarding on the Columbia River, the dissection line between Oregon and Washington.

She sat motionless on her queen bed. Living with the guilt of not being by her mother’s side when she died had eroded the joy of working in a high-paying, intellectually satisfying job. She’d devoted herself to being with her father, taking him to church, making his meals, being his caretaker, and now she was being ordered to leave. The thought her father might die of kidney failure crossed her mind but it was a worst-case scenario. For the time being, he had stabilized, but dying by his own hand, because of her...

“What choice do I have?” she spoke softly. Either way, she’d be emotionally ripped apart and alone.

Danielle stood, opening the top drawer. At least she had Lani and Stephen, a fact David pointed out. They lived not far from the restaurant she’d heard about regularly for the last year. She wouldn’t be entirely without friends.

With a bit more enthusiasm, she moved to the second drawer of clothes. Only a year, she thought, tossing clothes on the bed. I can do anything for a year.

CHAPTER 1

Six days later, Danielle arrived in Zurich at four in the afternoon and was in the city by five. The water glimmered off Lake Zurich, sparkling in a way that felt welcoming. She arrived at her new apartment and the owner, a female physician, took extraordinary care to explain the four-inch thick metal door with five locks, the remote controlled metal blinds and the use of the private lift. Danielle thought the locks were overkill, but then, the flat wasn't a first floor apartment. It was the penthouse, replete with an indoor sauna, baby grand piano and panoramic decks overlooking the lake. Nothing but the best for a gold trader at MRD Danielle had been told.

An hour later, a bubble of anticipation pushed against the walls of her chest when she saw the black Helvetica font spelling out Monroe's, the name Lani and Stephen had chosen as an ode to the famous American actress. Lani wasn't expecting her until tomorrow night and Danielle anticipated a look of shock, a few screams and a massive hug before Stephen gave her a sedate smile and brotherly embrace.

Danielle gripped the brass handle on the black door of the restaurant and pulled. Her heart gave a bounce, and for a second she doubted she was at the right eatery. The room was empty save for one couple who were rising from their seats. Then Stephen came around a corner, his look of shock lighting his fair skin.

Danielle immediately put her index finger to her mouth, smiling wide.

"Such an American thing to do," Stephen murmured, his arms wrapping around her. Striking in his dark, grey suit, his full head of blond hair slicked back and smooth, she kissed him back, feeling every ounce of affection for her best friend's husband. In quiet tones, he asked about her trip, if she was settled and whether she was hungry.

"Uneventful, yes and starved!" she replied. "Is she in the back?"

"Of course, and hasn't had a good night's sleep since you called."

“Sorry ‘bout that. It was short notice for all of us.” She glanced around. “I don’t want to cause a distraction.”

“You already have. I’ll close the place after they leave.”

Danielle looked around the quiet room, taking in the white-linen covered tables and subdued sconces with soft-yellow lights shooting skyward. She was grateful she’d arrived on a slow night.

A shriek made her jump. Lani came towards her, the white chef’s apron smudged, her matching hat hiding a mane of obsidian-black hair.

“And a day early, you dog,” exclaimed Lani, giving her a bear hug and kisses.

“I only had one chance to surprise you,” Danielle retorted, giving her a friend another look up and down. She’d lost a little weight and the circles under her eyes were darker than she remembered, but other than that, her nails were just as long and skin as toned and wrinkle free as it had been a year before at their wedding. Only a woman of Hawaiian and Puerto Rican descent could look glamorous after a long day in the kitchen.

“They must have wanted you ba—ad,” Lani said, slurring out the last word as she ushered her to a corner table.

“They wanted the money bad,” Danielle corrected.

Lani sat across from Danielle and immediately fired off questions about the trip, her new apartment and first impressions of the city. Danielle did her best to give succinct answers, recalling the neon blue walkways at the airport, the motion detection water fountains and a metro service so clean she could eat off the seats.

“Just wait until you use the metal bathroom stalls at the parks,” Lani added mischievously. “You’ll think you’re in a spaceship they are so high tech. The seats fold when you stand and the water goes on to encourage a good hand-washing—”

“And look for the needle holders on the right,” added Stephen as he walked over holding plates of food. At Danielle’s look of confusion, he continued. “Free disposal centers right at eye level.” Danielle’s eyes opened wide with disbelief. He nodded. “If you are going to do drugs, we Swiss want you to be clean about it,” Stephen said dryly.

Danielle shook her head and laughed. “Welcome to Switzerland.”

Thirty minutes later, the plates were mostly clean of food and the tenor of the conversation moved from frivolous to serious.

“Danielle, I’m so excited to have you here I can barely talk, but...are

you really sure this was—and is—the right thing?” Lani’s fork hovered over her plate and Danielle instinctively felt the worry behind her expressive eyes. Lani had been in her life since their sophomore year in college. She’d witnessed Danielle’s mother’s declining health after graduation and attended the funeral along with her parents. Only Lani knew of Danielle’s constant struggles with loneliness, seeing through her illusion of working long hours to fill the time.

“Was it the right thing?” Danielle mused aloud, pulling out the clip in her hair and massaging her scalp. “According to both my father and David, it was the only thing to do. Dad told me career advancement takes sacrifices, and he did so in a way that made me feel like a bird being heaved out of the nest.”

Lani cocked an eye at her. “Maybe you needed more shove than invitation.”

“There is a reason he always loved you,” Danielle said in her driest tone. “The unspoken opinion being that a fresh start might open my mind to men and a relationship, although he didn’t say the words.”

Lani glanced at Stephen. They’d both seen what dating had gotten her during their time at college.

“But you still weren’t going to come?” he asked. Danielle replayed her father’s demand and corresponding threat. “How long do you think you’ll stay then?”

“The length of my contract, twelve months. If I want retirement money, they have to let me trade currency.”

Lani shook her head, dismissing the financial jargon as she always did. “Talk in English girl.” Danielle started to explain but Lani raised her glass. “I was kidding. I don’t need or want to know what trading currency means. Here’s to you, in Zurich, with us, because we will take you for as long as we can have you.”

Back at her apartment, Danielle unpacked only enough to get her through the week before she called her father. She updated him on Lani and Stephen, the restaurant and did her best to describe the lake and her apartment in relation to the rest of the city.

“Finally,” he said tritely. “Top floor, getting what you deserve: a place with a view of your favorite part of nature. Now,” he said, abruptly changing his tone. “Don’t be calling me every night. You have better things to do.”

"Please," she growled in mock severity. "Being a phone call away gives me every right to check in on you."

"Checking in is different than checking up on. I'm an adult, just in case you weren't aware. Besides, Sheila has already been over, set a schedule for taking me to dialysis and arranged home delivery for food."

Still holding a dress on a hanger, Danielle felt slightly deflated. He sounded completely comfortable, but her surly, teenage-self wanted him to miss her, or at least pretend. "I'm going to suggest talking once a week on Sunday nights. You have to work and your research always takes precedence, plus there's the time difference. That good for you?" Danielle was about to argue but thought better of it.

"I miss you dad," she said abruptly.

"Good. You should." His trite response made her laugh and with that she said it was time for her to get to bed.

"Tomorrow starts early."

"Don't forget to keep an eye out for a nice young man to date," her father remarked.

She rolled her eyes. "Dad, I'm here to work, not get involved with some guy."

"Don't make it so complex Danielle. You don't have to fall in love to have a good time. Plus, you think you'll only be there a year. Make the most of it."

Danielle put the phone between her ear and shoulder as she slipped a St. John knit dress on the hanger. "Sure Dad. I'll make the most of having a fling that won't interfere with work. Love is completely optional. How's that?"

Her analogy produced a deep, hearty laugh which turned into a hacking cough. "See what you've done to me?" he choked out. "Now go before you kill your old man from half the world away."

Danielle said good bye and put the sound of his torn up lungs out of her memory. She finished setting out her clothes for the next day, put on her pajamas and got into bed with her laptop on her thighs. Research and analysis would be her two bed-time companions for the foreseeable future, and that was all the fun she was going to imagine until something better fell into her lap.

CHAPTER 2

The following morning, Danielle sat in the conference room of MRD in the heart of the city, her back facing the lake. She pretended to read the words on her tablet as she waited for the head of human resources, surreptitiously observing those who walked by, a mix of men and women ranging in age from late twenties to early forties. She replayed her conversation with David when she accepted the offer.

To say her former managing director was exuberant was like saying the deceased had come to life. He confided to her that MRD had been watching her since her Goldman days and had contacted him twelve months prior with a buyout offer. He'd said no, twice.

"It took me three years to get you away from Goldman. I didn't want to make it too easy for them." Since Danielle knew David didn't need money any more than Midas needed gold, she wanted to know what finally made him change his mind. "Every commodities firms wants the bragging rights for having the trader with the best numbers, and in gold, you're it. But honestly, Danielle, it wasn't the money or the ego. If you were my daughter, I'd want you to jump at the right moment. It was time to let you go for bigger things. That's why I went around you and called your father."

That day, he'd arranged for her to get on the phone with two of the partners at the new firm: her immediate boss, Ulrich Bodmer, the metals desk lead and the managing director of the firm, Lars Egle—pronounced like the bird. The paperwork was emailed over and a day later, attorneys from both firms watched via Skype as Danielle signed her name on dozens of pages covering poaching, persuading, pursuing and maintaining any sort of professional contact with those for whom she'd made millions over the last few years.

“And please note the obvious clauses around dating, cavorting or otherwise becoming involved with clients in the future,” intoned the attorney for MRD who was on teleconference video from Zurich. When Danielle pointed out that meeting with clients was a part of business, MRD’s attorney clarified. “As long as you aren’t engaging in a non-professional relationship, then it’s fine.”

Non-professional is rather broad, thought Danielle, as she tapped her pen on the table before her. In any case, it wasn’t the client who was the temptation, it was invariably the friend of the client. With her mother’s death, then her father’s ill health and keeping the family afloat, she had neither the time nor interest to engage in more than an occasional night out.

Danielle took a sip of sparkling water and glanced at the reflection of the lake on the glass wall behind of her. This morning the lake was as smooth as glass, but she had read that evening winds could change that almost instantly. It was going to be awesome to sail on that body of water, and the summer was just starting.

Winds of change, she thought, recalling David’s last bits of advice.

“Don’t be impressed,” he cautioned. “No awe. Just keep your head down and beat the numbers. Kindness is not your friend until you prove yourself.”

Danielle saw a pear-shaped woman wearing a tailored grey pant suit and high heels coming towards the door. She sat up straighter, subtly smoothing her top. She’d chosen a blue, pin-striped outfit with a wide belt synched at the waist, and black, Ferragamo heels and had pulled her thick, shoulder-length dark brown hair into a messy bun, with one single curl hanging to her cheek. Elegant but contemporary, just like her surroundings.

“Ms. Grant,” the woman said as she entered the room, her smile wide but professional, her hand already out. “Jacqueline Lader. Welcome to MRD.” She engaged Danielle in a short discussion of her relocation, asking if she liked the penthouse she’d found for Danielle and whether she had encountered any problems. Danielle assured the woman the process had gone as smooth as possible. Jacqueline then smiled, inviting her to bring her things. “I’ll show you your office and then introduce you to the general partners.”

An office? Nice. She’d been in a bull-pen at Russelz.

Danielle was led through a labyrinth of glass corridors. The inner spaces were secretarial pools separated by light-blue eye-height cubicles, a

combination of men and women who were occupied by their tasks. One by one, they looked up, acknowledging her presence before going back to their business. The outer rim of offices were occupied by traders and management.

Danielle kept her face placid as Jacqueline unlocked the door to a large office, equal in size to David's, boasting an unobstructed, floor to ceiling view of the lake. Jacqueline opened the wardrobe for coats, handbags and shoes. Danielle bit her tongue, thinking of her former boss. The mere notion of a trader with such an office would have made David's sphincter pinch tight.

"Would it be possible to alter the position of the desk and credenza?" Danielle asked. She wanted her back to the window. The lake view would be there on the weekend. From the corner of her eye, she saw a tall figure approaching her door.

"Ms. Grant," he said. She recognized the voice. It was Ulrich Bodmer, the desk lead for metals. He was her boss, and to a degree, her competitor. She gripped his hand with strength. "You're already changing things around?" he asked good-naturedly.

Ulrich wore a dark suit with an electric blue tie, his crisp white shirt popping against his light skin tone. His hair was sheet white, receding from a point in the center of his forehead. His lips were thin and narrow, stretching into a wide horizontal band when he smiled, his dark brown eyes more youthful than his appearance implied.

"I said it on the phone, but now that you're here in person, I'd like to express my gratitude you elected to join us." He made the statement as though there were no other place worthy of her skills and no better environment for a woman of her talents.

Ulrich motioned for her to join him and they walked down the hallway to a large office at the end, the sign on the glass noting Lars Egle, Managing Director. Ulrich rang a buzzer located by the handle. A click indicated the door was unlocked and Ulrich turned the knob. Danielle took a breath, pushed her shoulders back and entered, feeling like the preceding six days were only a lead up to this moment.

"After you," Ulrich said.

CHAPTER 3

“Ms. Grant, it’s nice to meet you in person.” Lars rose to greet her, extending his hand. It was warm and firm, without callouses, but not soft either. Danielle absorbed his face, frame and manner in one sweeping impression of power. “I’ll see you in the conference room in ten minutes,” Lars told Ulrich. His voice was a richly cultured accent, presumably a mix of his years here and abroad. He gestured for Danielle to take a seat of her choosing in his expansive office as Ulrich shut the door behind him.

“I understand from Jacqueline you brought over a sailboard.” He made small talk as he opened two bottles of sparkling water. She caught a draft of Armani cologne and recalled what she’d read about the man. Graduated first in his class from Lausanne, received his MBA from Columbia and worked for five years at the New York offices of UBS before going back to Switzerland. He was tapped to lead the new products division at UBS after getting his Ph.D. in finance, then took over as the president of the largest financial information systems group in the country. Five years ago, he became CEO at MRD and now led triple-digit growth. He was lauded. He was respected. He was also something else—intense in magnetic attraction kind of a way.

“It will be here in a few days,” she replied, dutifully quelling any interest she might have in the man. “Do you have any idea when people start swimming in the lake?”

Lars handed her a glass and sat down opposite her, his elegantly tailored suit lying flat against his chest, not a lick of extra skin exposed by his custom shirt. He was lean and handsome. He was also single, and according to media reports, had shelled out a confidential but likely considerable amount of money to an ex-wife after leaving New York. Danielle guessed he was in his late thirties, as she took in his black hair that was tinged with grey just above the ears. She realized he could look five

years older or younger depending what he wore.

“Swimmers are already in the water,” he said easily, his calm chestnut-colored eyes meeting hers, betraying none of the energy she felt emanating from his every pore. “We’ve had a warmer than normal March though.”

She refrained from looking at Lake Zurich. “The owner of the board shop said I’d still probably have to use my wet suit until June.”

He nodded. “Probably, and then again in October. When the weather turns, it does so fast and harshly.”

Danielle crossed her legs, forcing her foot still, concentrating on his eyes, not his long lashes. When she was at work, she wanted to get things done and not be distracted. Not on the first day and not by her boss.

“Tell me about sailboarding,” he asked casually. “I’ve always been interested in the mechanics of it all.”

Danielle stifled her internal sarcasm. He’d probably never given it two thoughts. Yet Lars’ eyes never left hers as she explained the weight to board ratios, using the intersection between the gravity of the board and the upward force of the waves against the downward force of the wind to propel speed. His gaze was mildly disturbing, like an X-ray, leaving nothing to the imagination.

When she was finished, he took a drink. “You want to get going, don’t you?”

“That obvious?” she answered, unapologetic. It was why she was here.

Lars’ eyes turned darker as his lids lowered. “Your delivery was paced such that it told me your mind was on something else. Then your foot started to bounce.”

She’d have to remember his observant ways in the future. “As much as I’d like to tell you all I know about my watersport of choice, it’s killing me to sit here and not be trading. No offense.”

Lars deposited his water bottle on the coffee table and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. She remained steady, avoiding a glance at his hair that lifted and dropped to the side, making a sexy wave.

“None taken,” he said flatly. “Danielle, I’ve spoken at length with David, and he believes you are capable of doubling whatever quota I give you, so that’s what we are going to do. You’ll begin right after we have the management meeting.”

Danielle repressed an inhale of work-driven anxiety. “I’ve never been a fan of non-trading activities during trading hours. Meetings included.”

"We do what we can," he responded, his tone implying he wanted her trading as much as she did. "But when it comes to the clients, it's their schedules we accommodate, not ours."

"Of course."

Lars was still sitting forward, like a captain ready to give the final play on the field before the break. He had something else on his mind. Something more than numbers. She held her breath.

"You've signed all the documentation regarding our personnel policies, but I am reiterating to you how I, the managing director, view certain types of interactions. This is Switzerland, not the US. We value privacy, we value freedom and we value results. What you do in your off hours is your business, but I expect your activities to be discrete, private and non-intrusive. Personally, I don't care if, or who, you sleep with in this office, as long as it doesn't affect your numbers."

Danielle unconsciously opened her lips, closing them the moment she felt air enter. She'd experienced a similar conversation when she'd first arrived at Goldman Sachs after graduate school. The difference was that the message about inter-office fraternizing protocol had come from a female peer, over appetizers after work. Lars frowned with an intensity that added to his already imposing presence.

"You read and signed contracts stipulating our position on relationships with our clients. Producing money turns to admiration, this yields to trust and intimacy and then all hell breaks loose." His wry tone of voice gave her no reason to doubt he'd seen a lot of that during his stint in New York. "We're equals within the four walls of this office and I'm going to treat you as such by being blunt. You're just as attractive as David said, and if I have one fear, it's that you are going to be relentlessly pursued by our clients and it will derail the plans I have for you and for our firm."

He stopped abruptly, awaiting her response. His words so disconcerting that it took her a few seconds to find her voice.

"What you're really saying is that you were hoping I was in a long-term relationship with a person back home so I'd be more committed to the job and not apt to fraternize with the clients?" Lars nodded soberly. "Did David indicate that extra-curricular activities were ever a problem with me at Russelz, or Goldman prior to that?" Lars shook his head no. Of course not. If she'd ever had inappropriate relationships with clients she'd have been fired on the spot. She saw this for what it was. The new boss's shot

over the bow to keep her nose clean and stay out of trouble. It was unnecessary and frankly, rather insulting. Everyone in the industry knew the standard practices and the consequences of infractions. Her thoughts about his handsome appearance and the fleeting attraction she'd had to him dissipated like the morning fog over the lake.

Danielle set her bottle down and leaned forward, placing one elbow on her knee, the position commanding yet sexy, playing on his very fear.

"Now let me be clear on why I'm here," she stated, boring her eyes into his in a way that demanded his attention. "I didn't pack my bags, fly my sailboard to a foreign country and leave my ailing father behind to find a man, get distracted or settle down," she told him, emphasizing her comments by ticking off her fingers. "I came here to earn a shit load of money, period, full-stop. And whatever is expected of me, I expect more." She paused for a moment, allowing her message to be absorbed. "So, if that's the extent of what you need to tell me, may I boldly suggest that we shorten the whole meeting-the-partners thing? I'd much rather enjoy a nice dinner out after I've made some money."

Lars' eyes were alight, the smug smile on his face conveying he was much happier with his new hire than he'd been when she entered his office. "Done," he said, and they both stood, nearly eye to eye, in her two inch heels. He extended his hand again, only this time he placed his other hand on hers, clasping it, the warmth above and below her both unnerving and reassuring. The gesture was symbolic. They had made a deal.

"And Danielle, welcome to Zurich."

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