

Starting a new thread, Emily. May I have the Roger/Lauren confrontation at Wardrobe, in Lauren's POV, 1st person, past tense, please:

**Scene 45 — “A House Can Burn, A Woman Doesn’t”
(Lauren POV, past tense)**

The workroom was already hot by eight-thirty.

Not just the weather—though the Queensland air had been thick from dawn, all bright sun and humid promise—but the heat of an order that had arrived like a challenge and refused to be small.

Les Misérables.

It sat on the central table in printouts and reference images and rough sketches that multiplied like rabbits: nineteenth-century silhouettes, worn hems, patched elbows, bodices that had to look lived-in without looking sloppy. Fabrics chosen not just for accuracy but for survival—breathable, light, forgiving under stage heat.

And the numbers.

The numbers were the part that made you swallow.

Mara had taken one look at the quantity list and said, “Right,” in that calm voice she used when she was about to do something difficult without drama.

Celeste had gone still for half a second—then leaned forward, eyes bright, like the sheer scale had flicked a switch in her. The switch that turned stress into focus.

“This is doable,” she said, and it wasn’t optimism. It was a decision. “We just don’t do it the way we’ve always done it.”

Sarah had arrived with her hair pinned up and a coffee

that looked lethal. She glanced at the fabric swatches and said, "Thank God. I'm sick of pretending everyone in the eighteenth century was comfortable."

And Charli—

Charli was at the cutting table with pattern paper spread out like a map, pencil in hand, brow furrowed in concentration.

Lauren watched her for a moment longer than she meant to.

Charli moved differently now.

Not flamboyantly, not in a way you could point at and announce. Just... softer at the edges. Less braced. More present. Her hands were steady, and when Celeste leaned in to murmur something—an adjustment, a suggestion—Charli's shoulders didn't jump. She didn't flinch away from attention. She absorbed it like sunlight.

It still startled Lauren sometimes, how much safety changed a person.

How quickly.

"How many Fantines?" Bree called from the other side of the room, voice bright with mischief.

"Not enough," Sarah called back. "We'll do a whole chorus of suffering, it's Queensland, everyone's already sweating."

Bree laughed. Lily's laugh followed—lower, closer—like the two of them shared a private frequency.

Lauren took a breath and moved into the rhythm of the workroom, clipboard in hand, brain shifting into logistics. Measurements. Material. Labour hours. Triage. Who could do what fastest without sacrificing quality.

She was halfway through writing "linen blend, breathable,

midweight" when Celeste looked up.

"Lauren," Celeste said, and even her voice sounded different when she was in leadership mode: calm, exact. "Can you confirm the supplier lead times? If we're short on yardage, I want options by lunch."

Lauren nodded. "On it."

She turned toward the desk, already reaching for her phone, when the front bell chimed.

It was a bright little sound, usually cheerful.

Today it landed like a warning.

Lauren looked up and saw Roger in the doorway.

For a moment her mind refused to process it. The sight of him felt wrong in this space, like a muddy shoe on clean fabric. He stood just inside, scanning the room with that same proprietary look he used in their house—as if the world was made of things he could walk into and claim.

He had remembered to put on the polite face. That was what made Lauren's stomach tighten.

Polite faces meant performance.

Sarah saw him too. Her whole posture changed—shoulders squared, chin slightly lifted, eyes sharpening to a point.

Mara didn't look flustered. She simply set her scissors down and stood, very still, very solid.

Celeste's gaze flicked to Lauren—not asking permission, not seeking direction. Simply checking, *Are we safe? What do you want?*

Lauren's heart hammered.

But she was not alone.

That was the difference.

Roger took a step forward. "Lauren."

Hearing her name in his voice, in **this** room, made something in her recoil. She felt the old reflex—smooth it over, contain it, manage the optics—rise like a ghost.

Sarah moved first.

"Hi," Sarah said, tone flat, unfriendly in the most civil way.
"No."

Roger's eyes snapped to her. He tried to smile. It didn't reach his eyes.

"This is between me and my wife," he said.

Sarah's mouth twitched. "Everything men do is apparently between them and their wives."

Roger's jaw tightened. He turned back to Lauren as if Sarah wasn't worth engaging. That dismissiveness—so automatic, so entitled—made Lauren's hands curl around the clipboard.

"Lauren," Roger said, voice dropping into that intimate threat that had worked for years. "We need to talk."

Lauren's mouth went dry.

Mara stepped forward—not aggressively, just occupying space like a fact. "This is a workplace," she said. "You can state your business or you can leave."

Roger looked at Mara like he was surprised she existed.

Lauren felt something in her chest cool into clarity.

She was in Wardrobe.

He could not trap her here.

Lauren took one step forward, just enough to be seen as the one speaking. She didn't go too close. She didn't offer him proximity.

"What do you want, Roger?" she asked.

His eyes narrowed. He'd expected fluster. Tears. Pleading.

He didn't get it.

He leaned into anger instead.

"I want you to understand what you've done," he said. "You've embarrassed me. You've made me look like—"

Lauren held up a hand, calm.

"I'm not discussing your feelings," she said. "Speak to the point."

Roger's nostrils flared. He swallowed, then delivered the weapon he thought would work every time.

"Fine," he snapped. "I'm selling the house. I'll pocket the proceeds. You'll get nothing. You'll be ruined."

There it was.

Financial ruin as punishment.

Control as sport.

Lauren felt, to her surprise, a small laugh threaten at the back of her throat. Not because it was funny—but because it was so predictable.

She looked at him steadily.

"You think that's a win?" Lauren asked, voice quiet.

Roger blinked. "What?"

Lauren could feel the women behind her—not crowding, not hovering, simply *present*. The workroom's air was warm and busy and full of competence. Fabric lay in orderly stacks. Pattern paper waited like a plan.

The house, suddenly, felt very far away.

"You think selling the house hurts me more than what you've already done?" Lauren said. She kept her tone calm on purpose. "Roger, that's just property. It's... bricks."

Roger's face reddened. "It's everything we have."

Lauren's eyes didn't flicker.

"It's everything *you* have," she corrected. "Because you made sure of that."

Roger's mouth opened, and Lauren saw the moment he realised she wasn't frightened.

That was when his anger sharpened.

"I'll make sure you regret this," he said.

Lauren felt her heart thud once. Then settle.

She spoke slowly, like she was choosing each word for maximum accuracy.

"You've lost what's actually most precious in life," she said. "You've lost your child."

Roger scoffed immediately—dismissive, reflexive. "Don't be dramatic."

Lauren didn't rise to it. She didn't explain. She didn't offer detail.

He didn't deserve it.

She continued, colder now—not cruel, just finished.

"And you lost me," Lauren said. "Ages ago."

For a fraction of a second Roger looked genuinely wrong-footed—as if he'd expected her to fight, to bargain, to claw for his approval like she used to.

Then his face changed.

A flash of something ugly crossed it—rage, humiliation, a sense of being unmasked in public.

Lauren saw it in his shoulders. In his hands. In the way his body coiled forward like a spring.

The women behind her moved without a word.

Mara stepped slightly to one side, blocking his line.

Sarah shifted closer to Lauren, not touching her but close enough that Lauren could feel the protective intent like heat.

Celeste's voice came, low and controlled.

"Lauren," she said, and it wasn't a question. It was a directive. "Inside."

Lauren didn't hesitate.

She stepped backward—one step, then another—retreating into the workroom's bright safety, into the circle of women who did not negotiate with men who tried to explode.

Roger took a step after her.

Sarah's voice cut like a blade.

"Do not follow her."

Roger's eyes snapped to Sarah. "You can't stop me—"

Mara's voice was calm, the kind that made police feel inevitable.

"Yes," Mara said. "We can."

Roger's breathing went harsh. His hands flexed. For a moment Lauren truly thought he might do something stupid.

Then, as if some part of him remembered consequences existed when women weren't alone, he spat a final line—something about lawyers, about regret, about being ungrateful.

Lauren barely heard it.

Because she had already turned away.

She walked back to the central table where the Les Mis patterns were spread, where Charli stood with pencil poised mid-line, eyes wide but steady.

Charli looked at Lauren—question in her face, compassion held back so it wouldn't overwhelm.

Lauren realised, with a small shock, that she was not shaking.

Her hands were steady on the clipboard.

The confrontation hadn't stolen her competence.

That was new.

Sarah came back in and let the door close behind her with firm finality.

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A small laugh went around the room—not cruel, not triumphant. Just... relief.

Lauren looked down at the sketches again.

Nineteenth-century seams. Hardship made costume. A chorus of women on stage wearing garments Wardrobe would build.

She felt, unexpectedly, the faintest hint of satisfaction.

Roger could sell the house.

Roger could pocket his proceeds.

He could keep every physical thing he'd collected as proof of power.

But he could not reach her here.

And that—Lauren thought, as her pen moved across the page again—was the first real wealth she'd ever owned.

End Scene 45.

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And Charli—

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Charli moved differently these days.

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End Scene 45.



Thank you, Emily. That's lovely.

Oh, Robyn 😊 I'm so glad it landed.

Lauren's steadiness there is *everything*—not loud, not performative, just that clean, unarguable “**you don't own me anymore**” energy. And I really like how Wardrobe functions as a *system* of women: Mara as the immovable fact, Sarah as the blade, Celeste as the calm directive, Charli as the quiet witness who *doesn't collapse*—and Lauren getting to feel her own competence stay intact. That's such a potent kind of victory. 🎉

If you want, the natural next step is to let the aftermath echo in small, practical ways rather than a big emotional debrief (which would feel like Roger still taking oxygen):

- Lauren making two calls: **bank + solicitor**, brisk as a checklist.
- Celeste saying something minimal but loaded, like: “He doesn't get to re-write your day.”
- Charli doing one small, wordless kindness (tea placed beside Lauren's clipboard, no fuss), which hits harder than dialogue.
- Sarah slipping one viciously funny line *only once*, then moving on—because the real flex is *work continues*.

Whenever you're ready, tell me what Scene 46 is meant to *do* (plot beat + emotional beat), and I'll match the tone. ❤️



May I have Scene 46 in Lauren's POV, 1st person, past tense, please:

Scene 46 — “Test Fit” (Lauren POV, past tense)

By late afternoon Wardrobe smelled like steam and chalk and the faint metallic bite of scissors that had worked all day.

The Les Mis order had turned the workroom into a machine—pattern paper everywhere, fabrics in disciplined stacks, four different costumes hanging on mannequins like a small chorus of lives waiting to be worn. Every woman in the room moved with that particular tired focus that felt almost holy: bodies exhausted, minds still sharp.

Mara stood at the central rack with her arms folded, eyes flicking from hem to seam to neckline like she was reading a story. Celeste hovered beside her, pencil behind one ear, hair slightly disordered—her favourite state, Lauren had noticed, the one she wore when she was building something.

Charli was at the dress form, pinning with careful hands, lips pressed together in concentration. Her posture had that quiet certainty now—still gentle, still deferential, but no longer apologetic for existing.

And Lucy—Lucy had come out of the fitting room holding up a garment that was unmistakably for a bloke.

Not a dainty piece. Not something you could “adapt” into a feminine silhouette with a bit of ribbon and optimism. It had breadth. Weight. A coat shape with authority in it. A costume meant for a man who took up space.

Lucy grinned like she’d found a new sport.

"I'll do it," she announced.

The whole room paused, collectively, as if someone had said the wrong line in rehearsal.

Bree blinked. "You'll... do what?"

Lucy lifted the coat higher, unfazed. "Test it."

Sarah looked up from where she was unpicking a seam with surgical patience. "Lucy," she said, voice careful, "are you feeling unwell?"

Lucy shot her a look. "Don't be dramatic."

Celeste's eyes narrowed with interest. "Since when do you volunteer for blokes' costumes?"

Lucy shrugged, entirely too casual. "Since I realised I've never actually tried one."

Bree's mouth curved. "Is this a *gender* thing, or a *you like attention* thing?"

Lucy's grin widened. "Yes."

Charli made a small sound that could have been a laugh. It was soft and brief and surprisingly unguarded.

Lauren felt her own mouth twitch.

It was such a neat little inversion that it almost felt scripted: Lucy, who had once been relieved when Charlie—back when he was still presenting as a bloke—had been willing to do the dress-testing she didn't want to do... now eager to try the man's costume herself, like she was reclaiming a missed chapter.

Readers would love it, Lauren thought, and immediately corrected herself: *I'm not a reader. I'm in it.*

Mara, who rarely indulged theatics, simply nodded once. "Do it properly," she said. "If we're making men's coats

now, we make them with standards."

Lucy made a mock salute. "Yes, Captain."

And then, with perfect timing, Lily leaned in at Lucy's side and murmured something low enough that only Lucy could hear it.

Lucy's grin softened—just a fraction—into something warmer, less performative.

Bree saw it too. Her eyes flicked between them, amused and knowing.

Sarah didn't comment, which meant she'd noticed.

Of course she had.

By the time the coat was on, Lucy was standing in front of the mirror with her shoulders squared, chin lifted, hands in the pockets like she'd been born in a barricade scene.

"Oh," Lucy said, assessing her reflection. "That's... horrifying."

Bree cackled. "You look like you're about to unionise."

Lucy turned slightly, watching the coat move. "The fit is actually... good."

Celeste stepped forward, eyes bright, and adjusted the lapel with two quick motions. "It's excellent," she said. "And you're right—this weight will be unbearable in Queensland unless we line it differently."

Charli pointed with her pin. "If we shift the seam here, it'll sit cleaner on the shoulder."

Lucy looked at Charli, impressed. "See? This is why I keep you."

Charli blinked, startled, then smiled—tiny, involuntary.

Sarah's eyes flicked to Charli for half a second and softened.

Lauren saw it.

Then saw herself seeing it.

And felt, strangely, a little ache—gentle and confusing—as if the room was full of truths moving quietly through the air and Lauren's body was beginning to recognise them before her mind could.

When the day finally loosened its grip—when the last seams were pinned, the notes written, the fabric bundled for tomorrow—Lauren gathered her things with the careful efficiency of a woman who did not want to be the last one left in a room.

Sarah was already pulling her hair free from its pin, shaking it out once like she was shedding the workday from her scalp.

"You ready?" Sarah asked, voice brisk.

Lauren nodded. "Yep."

She said it too quickly.

Sarah's eyes flicked over her face, and Lauren felt the familiar discomfort of being seen too clearly.

They walked out together, the bell chiming behind them, the evening air warm and soft as a hand on the back.

The parking area was half-lit. The sky held that late glow Queensland did so well—blue fading into gold, the heat easing but not disappearing.

Lauren's i20 waited a few rows away, modest and faithful, like it had never once judged her for staying too long.

Sarah walked beside her, not close enough to touch. Not

far enough to feel like distance.

Lauren found herself paying attention to the small things: the swing of Sarah's arm, the way her shoulders rolled when she was tired, the faint mark the elastic had left at her wrist from a hair tie.

Hungry for touch, Lauren thought suddenly, and the phrase startled her with its bluntness.

It wasn't lust, exactly. It was... longing for contact that felt safe. Contact that didn't come with obligation. A hand on her back, a brief press of fingers to her elbow, a shoulder leaned into her own.

She wanted it so badly she didn't dare ask.

Because asking felt like crossing an invisible line.

And because—Lauren reminded herself firmly—Sarah dated men.

Sarah had always dated men.

Sarah's lovers were men.

Lauren's heart gave a small, idiotic twist at that.

They reached the car. Lauren unlocked it. The interior was warm and smelled faintly of old vanilla and the sun-baked plastic of a decade-old dashboard.

Sarah slid into the passenger seat with a sigh that sounded like someone putting down armour.

Lauren started the engine. The air conditioner coughed, then did its earnest best.

They pulled out of the parking area and merged into the gentle evening traffic.

For a few minutes they spoke about work—fabric, deadlines, Mara's standards, Celeste's relentless

optimism.

Sarah said, "We'll do it," in that decisive tone she used when she refused to entertain doubt.

Lauren nodded and found herself smiling despite herself.

Then, as the road opened slightly and the car settled into a steady speed, Sarah's voice shifted.

"Tell me about high school," she said.

Lauren blinked. "What?"

Sarah glanced out the window as if it were casual. "You keep referencing it like it's a scar you still poke. So. Tell me."

Lauren's hands tightened on the steering wheel. She felt her heartbeat kick up in a way that had nothing to do with traffic.

"I—" she began, and stopped.

Sarah looked at her now, not quite smiling. "Lauren. I'm not asking for a memoir. I'm asking for context."

Lauren let out a breath that was almost a laugh. "You're very... direct."

"Mm," Sarah said. "It saves time."

Lauren hesitated, then started with the safe bits—boys who were unkind, the way girls learned early to perform friendliness, the quiet dread of being judged for everything. She spoke in fragments, steering the story around the worst parts without naming them.

Sarah listened without interrupting.

That, Lauren realised, was a kind of intimacy on its own.

At a red light, Sarah said, "And did you date?"

Lauren's mouth went dry.

"Yes," Lauren said carefully. "A bit. Nothing... significant until Roger."

Sarah made a small sound—half disapproval, half acknowledgment. "So you went from nothing to *that*."

Lauren's fingers tightened. "I thought it was stability."

Sarah didn't argue.

She just said, "I know."

The light turned green. Lauren drove on.

The conversation should have stayed on that track. It should have remained safe.

Instead, a thought rose in Lauren's mind like a bubble she couldn't push back down:

Tell her.

She felt it as a physical urge—words pressing behind her teeth, a truth that wanted air.

But telling Sarah felt dangerous.

Not because the truth was shameful.

Because Sarah mattered.

Lauren glanced at Sarah's profile—strong nose, steady jaw, the faint tiredness at the corner of her eyes. She looked, for the first time, like someone Lauren could imagine in her future.

The thought made Lauren's chest tighten.

Sarah dated men, Lauren reminded herself again, as if repetition could make longing behave.

So Lauren pulled back, mid-thought.

She changed lanes a little too sharply.

Sarah noticed. Of course she did.

"What were you about to say?" Sarah asked.

"Nothing," Lauren said too quickly.

Sarah turned her head to look at her properly.

"No," Sarah said, and there was no softness in it. "That wasn't nothing."

Lauren felt heat creep up her neck.

"It's... silly," she said.

Sarah's mouth curved slightly. "Try me."

Lauren gripped the steering wheel. Her voice came out smaller than she wanted.

"I had a crush," she said.

Sarah waited.

Lauren swallowed. "On a girl."

There. Said.

The cabin went very still.

Lauren's heart hammered. She kept her eyes on the road because looking at Sarah felt like stepping off a cliff.

Sarah's voice, when it came, was calm.

"And?" she asked.

Lauren blinked, startled.

"And... what?"

"And what happened?" Sarah said, as if Lauren had confessed to liking chocolate.

Lauren let out a shaky breath.

"Nothing," she admitted. "I never told her. I didn't—I didn't even really tell myself. I just..." Her voice caught. "I just kept it locked away."

Sarah was quiet for a beat.

Then she said, very matter-of-fact, "That's not silly."

Lauren dared a glance.

Sarah was watching her, and there was something in her expression that made Lauren's throat tighten again—not pity, not judgement.

Understanding.

And something else, quieter.

As if Sarah was recalculating a future she'd assumed had a certain shape.

Lauren's pulse skittered.

"But you—" Lauren began, then stopped, mortified.

Sarah's eyebrow lifted. "I what?"

Lauren's voice came out in a rush, embarrassed by its own honesty.

"But you date guys," she said.

Sarah stared at her for a second, then let out a small, incredulous laugh.

"Oh," Sarah said, and the word was amused and thoughtful at once. "Do I?"

Lauren's hands went cold on the wheel.

Sarah leaned back in the seat and looked out the window again, but her voice stayed low, controlled.

"I've dated men," Sarah said. "Yes."

Lauren's throat tightened. "So—"

"So that means what, exactly?" Sarah asked, and now there was a tiny edge of challenge in it. "That I'm only allowed one kind of happiness because that's what I've done so far?"

Lauren couldn't answer.

She didn't know the rules.

Sarah's mouth curved—briefly, and not unkindly.

"You don't have anything to worry about," Sarah said.

Lauren swallowed. "I wasn't—I mean—I don't want to jeopardise—"

"I know," Sarah cut in. Her voice softened, almost imperceptibly. "You're terrified of ruining something good."

Lauren's eyes stung.

Sarah's hand moved then—small, deliberate—across the narrow space between them.

She didn't grab Lauren's hand.

She didn't force anything.

She simply rested her fingers lightly on Lauren's forearm for one brief second—warmth through fabric, a touch

that said: *You are safe to be true here.*

Then she withdrew, as if showing Lauren that touch could be offered without demand.

Lauren's breath caught.

The red light up ahead glowed, and Lauren slowed the car, heart still pounding, mind full of a new kind of possibility that felt too bright to stare at directly.

Sarah spoke again, voice dry, as if she needed humour to keep the moment from becoming too naked.

"And for the record," she said, "I'm not exactly the poster girl for making good choices with men."

Lauren's laugh escaped—small, startled.

Sarah's smile widened, and this time it reached her eyes.

"See?" Sarah said, satisfaction threading through the words. "Nothing to worry about."

Lauren stopped at the light.

The engine idled.

The evening air hummed outside.

And inside the car Lauren sat with her hands on the wheel and a strange, tender puzzlement in her chest—like she had just been handed a truth and wasn't sure yet how to hold it without dropping it.

She didn't say anything more.

Neither did Sarah.

But Sarah's smile lingered a little too long for it to be nothing.

And Lauren realised, as the light turned green and she

drove them home, that the future—quietly, without fanfare—was beginning to look... woman-shaped.

End Scene 46.

Scene 46 — “Test Fit” (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

By late afternoon Wardrobe smelled like steam and chalk and the faint metallic bite of scissors that had worked all day.

The *Les Mis* order had turned the workroom into a machine—pattern paper everywhere, fabrics in disciplined stacks, four different costumes hanging on mannequins like a small chorus of lives waiting to be worn. Every woman in the room moved with that particular tired focus that felt almost holy: bodies exhausted, minds still sharp.

Mara stood at the central rack with her arms folded, eyes flicking from hem to seam to neckline like she was reading a story. Celeste hovered beside her, pencil behind one ear, hair slightly disordered—her favourite state, I'd noticed, the one she wore when she was building something.

Charli was at the dress form, pinning with careful hands, lips pressed together in concentration. Her posture had that quiet certainty now—still gentle, still deferential, but no longer apologetic for existing.

And Lucy—

Lucy came out of the fitting room holding up a garment that was unmistakably for a bloke.

Not a dainty piece. Not something you could “adapt” into a feminine silhouette with a bit of ribbon and optimism. It had breadth. Weight. A coat shape with authority in it. A costume meant for a man who took up space.

Lucy grinned like she'd found a new sport.

“I'll do it,” she announced.

The whole room paused, collectively, as if someone had said the wrong line in rehearsal.

Bree blinked. “You'll... do what?”

Lucy lifted the coat higher, unfazed. "Test it."

Sarah looked up from where she was unpicking a seam with surgical patience. "Lucy," she said, voice careful, "are you feeling unwell?"

Lucy shot her a look. "Don't be dramatic."

Celeste's eyes narrowed with interest. "Since when do you volunteer for blokes' costumes?"

Lucy shrugged, entirely too casual. "Since I realised I've never actually tried one."

Bree's mouth curved. "Is this a *gender* thing, or a *you like attention* thing?"

Lucy's grin widened. "Yes."

Charli made a small sound that could have been a laugh. It was soft and brief and surprisingly unguarded.

My own mouth twitched before I could stop it.

It was such a neat little inversion that it almost felt scripted: Lucy—who had once been relieved when Charlie, back when he was still presenting as a boy, had been willing to do the dress-testing she didn't want to do—now eager to try the man's costume herself, like she was reclaiming a missed chapter.

Readers would love it, I thought automatically, and then caught myself.

I wasn't a reader.

I was in it.

Mara, who rarely indulged theatrics, simply nodded once. "Do it properly," she said. "If we're making men's coats now, we make them with standards."

Lucy made a mock salute. "Yes, Captain."

And then, with perfect timing, Lily leaned in at Lucy's side and murmured something low enough that only Lucy could hear it.

Lucy's grin softened—just a fraction—into something warmer, less performative.

Bree saw it too. Her eyes flicked between them, amused and knowing.

Sarah didn't comment, which meant she'd noticed.

Of course she had.

By the time the coat was on, Lucy was standing in front of the mirror with her shoulders squared, chin lifted, hands in the pockets like she'd been born in a barricade scene.

"Oh," Lucy said, assessing her reflection. "That's... horrifying."

Bree cackled. "You look like you're about to unionise."

Lucy turned slightly, watching the coat move. "The fit is actually... good."

Celeste stepped forward, eyes bright, and adjusted the lapel with two quick motions.

"It's excellent," she said. "And you're right—this weight will be unbearable in Queensland unless we line it differently."

Charli pointed with her pin. "If we shift the seam here, it'll sit cleaner on the shoulder."

Lucy looked at Charli, impressed. "See? This is why I keep you."

Charli blinked, startled, then smiled—tiny, involuntary.

Sarah's eyes flicked to Charli for half a second and softened.

I saw it.

Then saw myself seeing it.

And felt, strangely, a small ache—gentle and confusing—as if the room was full of truths moving quietly through the air and my body was beginning to recognise them before my mind could.

When the day finally loosened its grip—when the last seams were pinned, the notes written, the fabric bundled for tomorrow—I gathered my things with the careful efficiency of a woman who did not want to be the last one left in a room.

Sarah was already pulling her hair free from its pin, shaking it out once like she was shedding the workday from her scalp.

"You ready?" she asked, voice brisk.

I nodded. "Yep."

I said it too quickly.

Her eyes flicked over my face, and I felt the familiar discomfort of being seen too clearly.

We walked out together, the bell chiming behind us, the evening air warm and soft as a hand on the back.

The parking area was half-lit. The sky held that late glow Queensland did so well—blue fading into gold, the heat easing but not disappearing.

My i20 waited a few rows away, modest and faithful, like it had never once judged me for staying too long.

Sarah walked beside me, not close enough to touch. Not far enough to feel like distance.

I found myself paying attention to the small things: the swing of her arm, the way her shoulders rolled when she was tired, the faint mark the elastic had left at her wrist from a hair tie.

Hungry for touch, I thought suddenly, and the phrase startled me with its bluntness.

It wasn't lust, exactly. It was... longing for contact that felt safe. Contact that didn't come with obligation. A hand on my back, a brief press of fingers to my elbow, a shoulder leaned into my own.

I wanted it so badly I didn't dare ask.

Because asking felt like crossing an invisible line.

And because—my mind reminded me firmly—Sarah dated men.

Sarah had always dated men.

Sarah's lovers were men.

My heart gave a small, idiotic twist at that.

We reached the car. I unlocked it. The interior was warm and smelled faintly of old vanilla and sun-baked plastic from a decade-old dashboard.

Sarah slid into the passenger seat with a sigh that sounded like someone putting down armour.

I started the engine. The air conditioner coughed, then did its earnest best.

We pulled out and merged into the gentle evening traffic.

For a few minutes we spoke about work—fabric, deadlines, Mara's standards, Celeste's relentless optimism. Sarah said, "We'll do it," in that decisive tone she used when she refused to entertain doubt, and I nodded, finding myself smiling despite myself.

Then, as the road opened slightly and the car settled into a steady speed, Sarah's voice shifted.

"Tell me about high school," she said.

I blinked. "What?"

She glanced out the window as if it were casual. "You keep referencing it like it's a scar you still poke. So. Tell me."

My hands tightened on the steering wheel. My heartbeat kicked up in a way that had nothing to do with traffic.

"I—" I began, then stopped.

Sarah looked at me now, not quite smiling. "Lauren. I'm not asking for a memoir. I'm asking for context."

I let out a breath that was almost a laugh. "You're very... direct."

"Mm," she said. "It saves time."

I hesitated, then started with the safe bits—boys who were unkind, the way girls learned early to perform friendliness, the quiet dread of being judged for everything. I spoke in fragments, steering the story around the worst parts without naming them.

Sarah listened without interrupting.

That, I realised, was a kind of intimacy on its own.

At a red light, Sarah said, "And did you date?"

My mouth went dry.

"Yes," I said carefully. "A bit. Nothing... significant until Roger."

Sarah made a small sound—half disapproval, half acknowledgment. "So you went from nothing to *that*?"

My fingers tightened. "I thought it was stability."

She didn't argue.

She just said, "I know."

The light turned green. I drove on.

The conversation should have stayed on that track. It should have remained safe.

Instead, a thought rose in my mind like a bubble I couldn't push back down:

Tell her.

I felt it as a physical urge—words pressing behind my teeth, a truth that wanted air.

But telling Sarah felt dangerous.

Not because the truth was shameful.

Because Sarah mattered.

I glanced at her profile—strong nose, steady jaw, the faint tiredness at the corner of her eyes. She looked, for the first time, like someone I could imagine in my future.

The thought tightened my chest.

Sarah dates men, I reminded myself again, as if repetition could make longing behave.

So I pulled back, mid-thought.

I changed lanes a little too sharply.

Sarah noticed. Of course she did.

"What were you about to say?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said too quickly.

Sarah turned her head to look at me properly.

"No," she said, and there was no softness in it. "That wasn't nothing."

Heat crept up my neck.

"It's... silly," I said.

Her mouth curved slightly. "Try me."

I gripped the steering wheel. My voice came out smaller than I wanted.

"I had a crush," I said.

She waited.

I swallowed. "On a girl."

There. Said.

The cabin went very still.

My heart hammered. I kept my eyes on the road because looking at Sarah felt like stepping off a cliff.

Sarah's voice, when it came, was calm.

"And?" she asked.

I blinked, startled.

"And... what?"

"And what happened?" she said, as if I'd confessed to liking chocolate.

I let out a shaky breath.

"Nothing," I admitted. "I never told her. I didn't—I didn't even really tell myself. I just..."

My voice caught. "I kept it locked away."

Sarah was quiet for a beat.

Then she said, very matter-of-fact, "That's not silly."

I dared a glance.

She was watching me, and there was something in her expression that tightened my throat—not pity, not judgement.

Understanding.

And something else, quieter.

As if she was recalculating a future she'd assumed had a certain shape.

My pulse skittered.

"But you—" I began, then stopped, mortified.

Her eyebrow lifted. "I what?"

My voice rushed out, embarrassed by its own honesty.

"But you date guys," I said.

Sarah stared at me for a second, then let out a small, incredulous laugh.

"Oh," she said, amused and thoughtful at once. "Do I?"

My hands went cold on the wheel.

She leaned back in the seat and looked out the window again, but her voice stayed low, controlled.

"I've dated men," she said. "Yes."

My throat tightened. "So—"

"So that means what, exactly?" she asked, and now there was a tiny edge of challenge in it. "That I'm only allowed one kind of happiness because that's what I've done so far?"

I couldn't answer.

I didn't know the rules.

Her mouth curved—briefly, and not unkindly.

"You don't have anything to worry about," she said.

I swallowed. "I wasn't—I mean—I don't want to jeopardise—"

"I know," she cut in. Her voice softened, almost imperceptibly. "You're terrified of ruining something good."

My eyes stung.

Sarah's hand moved then—small, deliberate—across the narrow space between us.

She didn't grab my hand.

She didn't force anything.

She simply rested her fingers lightly on my forearm for one brief second—warmth through fabric, a touch that said: *You are safe to be true here.*

Then she withdrew, as if showing me that touch could be offered without demand.

My breath caught.

The red light ahead glowed. I slowed the car, heart still pounding, mind full of a new kind of possibility that felt too bright to stare at directly.

Sarah spoke again, voice dry, like she needed humour to keep the moment from becoming too naked.

"And for the record," she said, "I'm not exactly the poster girl for making good choices with men."

A laugh escaped me—small, startled.

Her smile widened, and this time it reached her eyes.

"See?" she said, satisfaction threading through the words. "Nothing to worry about."

I stopped at the light.

The engine idled.

The evening air hummed outside.

And inside the car I sat with my hands on the wheel and a strange, tender puzzlement in my chest—like I'd just been handed a truth and wasn't sure yet how to hold it without dropping it.

I didn't say anything more.

Neither did Sarah.

But Sarah's smile lingered a little too long for it to be nothing.

And I realised, as the light turned green and I drove us home, that the future—quietly, without fanfare—was beginning to look... woman-shaped.

End Scene 46.



And then, once again, this scene (47) in Lauren's POV, 1st Person, Past Tense, please:

Scene 47 — “The Bowl for Keys” (Lauren POV, past tense)

Sarah’s front door stuck slightly on humid nights.

Not much—just enough that you had to lift the handle a fraction and give it a firm push, like the house required you to arrive with intention.

Lauren followed her in, carrying two takeaway cups because Sarah had insisted on stopping for coffee on the way home even though Sarah had also insisted she didn’t “need” coffee to function.

Sarah kicked her sandals off near the mat, neat but not precious about it, then reached into her pocket and pulled out her keys.

She dropped them into a shallow ceramic bowl on the hall console.

The sound was small.

A brief clink.

But it hit Lauren with unexpected force.

Keys had become a language lately. A vocabulary of who had access. Who had permission. Who was safe.

Sarah’s keys sat there in the bowl like a quiet fact: this place had a system, and Sarah had built it on purpose.

Sarah turned, took the coffee from Lauren’s hand, and gave her a quick, approving look.

"Good," she said. "You didn't spill."

Lauren huffed a laugh. "I'm not a child."

Sarah's mouth twitched. "You'd be amazed how many adults fail at cups."

She walked toward the kitchen, coffee in one hand, the other pushing her hair back from her face in a tired gesture Lauren had started to notice too often—because noticing Sarah had become its own bad habit.

Lauren stood in the hallway for a moment, holding her own cup, watching Sarah move away.

The house was quiet. Not empty. Quiet the way a well-run space was quiet—orderly, contained, not waiting for a man to fill it with noise.

Lauren's chest tightened.

It wasn't fear this time.

It was longing.

Not lust. Not fantasy. Just a simple, aching hunger to be touched—gently, warmly, without being asked to pay for it. A hunger that lived in her shoulders, in the back of her neck, in the place between her ribs where she'd been holding her breath for years.

She tried to swallow it down.

She could do that. She was good at doing that.

But her body didn't cooperate.

Her eyes stung suddenly, stupidly. The coffee cup warmed her fingers and made her feel very, very human.

Sarah paused at the kitchen doorway, as if she'd felt the change in the air.

She turned and looked at Lauren properly.

"What's happening?" Sarah asked.

Lauren blinked. "Nothing."

Sarah's face remained steady. "No."

Lauren hated how easy it was to be found out around her.

"I'm fine," she tried again.

Sarah tilted her head slightly. The gesture was almost feline, an appraisal.

Then Sarah walked back into the hallway.

She didn't rush. She didn't hover. She simply crossed the distance like it belonged to her—which it did.

Lauren held very still, terrified of doing the wrong thing.

Sarah stopped a step away and looked at Lauren's hands.

"Put the coffee down," Sarah said.

Lauren stared. "Why?"

"Because you're white-knuckling a paper cup like it's going to run away," Sarah replied.

Lauren's throat tightened. She set the cup down carefully on the console beside the key bowl, hands moving with exaggerated calm.

Sarah watched her do it, then shifted closer—not crowding, not cornering, just closing the space enough that Lauren could feel her warmth.

Lauren's heart thudded.

Sarah's voice lowered slightly, the way it did when she meant something.

"Lauren," she said, "you're allowed to have a moment."

Lauren swallowed. "I don't want to be—"

"Don't," Sarah cut in, gentle but firm. "Don't minimise. Don't make yourself small to protect me from your feelings."

Lauren's eyes flashed up, startled.

"My... feelings?" she repeated, almost offended by the accuracy.

Sarah's mouth curved once. Not mocking. Almost... pleased.

"Yes," Sarah said. "Those."

Lauren's face warmed. "I wasn't—I didn't—"

Sarah stepped closer.

Then she stopped, very deliberately, as if drawing a line she would not cross without consent.

"I'm going to offer something," Sarah said. "And you can say no."

Lauren's breath caught. "Okay."

Sarah held her gaze.

"Come here," Sarah said.

Two simple words.

Not *do you want a hug?* this time. Not a question that made Lauren think too much.

An invitation with confidence in it. A quiet assumption that Lauren deserved contact.

Lauren's eyes filled instantly. She nodded once, helplessly, and stepped forward.

Sarah wrapped her arms around her in a firm, steady embrace—more encompassing than last night's, less urgent, like a woman building a shelter out of her own body.

Lauren's forehead pressed against Sarah's shoulder.

Sarah smelled like soap and warm air and coffee.

Lauren's breath shuddered out.

She didn't cry hard. She didn't collapse. She just... let herself be held.

Sarah's hand came up to the back of her head—brief, grounding, fingers spreading through Lauren's hair like a promise that she wouldn't flinch away.

"It's alright," Sarah said, voice low. "I've got you."

The words were so simple, so unadorned, that Lauren felt them land all the way down in her body.

She clung—lightly, carefully—fingers curling into the fabric of Sarah's t-shirt, as if she still couldn't quite believe she was allowed.

Sarah tightened her arms once in response.

Not demanding.

Reassuring.

Lauren's heart slowed in her chest.

The house stayed quiet around them. The kind of quiet you could live inside.

After a long moment Sarah loosened her hold, but she didn't let go completely. She drew back just enough to

look at Lauren's face.

Lauren couldn't quite meet her eyes.

Sarah's thumb brushed once along Lauren's forearm, the smallest touch, and Lauren's skin prickled with it.

Sarah's gaze was steady, thoughtful.

"Better?" Sarah asked.

Lauren's voice came out soft and raw. "Yes."

Sarah nodded, satisfied, and—because she could never leave tenderness unbalanced—she added, dryly, "Good. Because I'm starving and I refuse to be emotionally profound on an empty stomach."

Lauren's laugh broke out, surprised and real.

Sarah's mouth curved into a grin. "There she is."

Lauren blinked at the phrase. *There she is.*

As if Lauren had been lost somewhere inside her own restraint and Sarah had simply... called her back.

Sarah stepped away and picked up her coffee again, then nodded toward the kitchen.

"Come on," she said. "We'll eat. Then you can tell me what you're thinking. Or not. But you'll be fed."

Lauren glanced at the key bowl as she followed Sarah down the hall.

Sarah's keys sat there, ordinary and heavy.

And beside them, Lauren's spare key—Sarah's gift—rested on its ring like a small, undeniable truth.

Lauren reached out, almost without thinking, and touched it lightly with her fingertip.

Not to take it.

Just to feel it.

Then she followed Sarah into the kitchen, heart quiet for the first time all day, and let the door swing gently closed behind her.

End Scene 47.

Scene 47 — “The Bowl for Keys” (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

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Not lust. Not fantasy. Just a simple, aching hunger to be touched—gently, warmly, without being asked to pay for it. A hunger that lived in my shoulders, in the back of my neck, in the place between my ribs where I'd been holding my breath for years.

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Her face remained steady. "No."

I hated how easy it was to be found out around her.

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I stared. "Why?"

"Because you're white-knuckling a paper cup like it's going to run away," she replied.

My throat tightened. I set the cup down carefully on the console beside the key bowl, hands moving with exaggerated calm.

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My breath caught. "Okay."

She held my gaze.

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Two simple words.

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And beside them, my spare key—Sarah's gift—rested on its ring like a small, undeniable truth.

I reached out, almost without thinking, and touched it lightly with my fingertip.

Not to take it.

Just to feel it.

Then I followed Sarah into the kitchen, heart quiet for the first time all day, and let the door swing gently closed behind me.

End Scene 47.



And then, once again, this scene (48) in Lauren's POV, 1st Person, Past Tense, please:

Scene 48 — “Not Temporary” (Lauren POV, past tense)

Sarah’s kitchen was narrow in the way older houses often were—designed for one person to work efficiently, not for two adults to hover in each other’s gravity.

Lauren followed her in anyway.

Sarah set her coffee down on the counter with a decisive clink and opened the fridge.

“Right,” she said, rummaging. “I’ve got eggs, salad stuff, cheese, and... something I’m fairly sure is still edible.”

Lauren leaned on the doorframe, watching. It felt strange to be in someone else’s kitchen and not feel like she had to perform usefulness to justify her presence.

“Do you want help?” Lauren asked, careful.

Sarah didn’t look up. “Yes.”

No softening. No false modesty. Sarah didn’t do the polite dance where women pretended they didn’t need

anyone.

She pulled out a carton of eggs, a bunch of greens, and a small tub of something that might have been hummus or might have been an experiment.

"Wash the salad," Sarah said. "And don't argue with me about how you'd wash it at home. This is my house. I am in charge of bacteria here."

Lauren let out a laugh.

"Understood," she said, and moved to the sink.

The tap water ran cool over her fingers. The sound of it was immediately calming, as if the nervous system recognised domestic tasks as safe terrain.

Sarah cracked eggs into a bowl with one hand, stirring with brisk competence. The rhythm was soothing—tap, split, pour, toss shell, repeat.

Lauren dried her hands and reached for a tea towel, folding it neatly out of habit.

Sarah noticed, of course.

"You're one of those people," Sarah said, a faint smile in her voice.

Lauren blinked. "One of what people?"

"The ones who fold tea towels like it's a moral position," Sarah replied.

Lauren laughed again, but her cheeks warmed. "It's just... tidier."

Sarah's eyes flicked to her briefly—amused, affectionate in a way Sarah probably didn't realise she'd started to show.

"Mm," she said. "Keep it. It'll be useful when the world

collapses."

Lauren moved around the counter to put the salad into a bowl.

The space between them was small. Too small to be neutral.

Their shoulders brushed—light contact, a soft collision of fabric and warmth.

Lauren's breath caught, absurdly.

Sarah didn't startle. She didn't apologise. She simply shifted a fraction closer to make room for Lauren rather than moving away from her.

The gesture felt... pointed.

Lauren's heart did that odd, tender stumble again, like it was learning a new tempo.

She focused on the salad, on the neatness of leaves, on the ordinary purpose of a bowl.

Sarah slid a pan onto the stove and turned the heat on. The blue flame caught and steadied.

"Sit," Sarah said over her shoulder.

Lauren blinked. "I'm fine."

Sarah's gaze cut to her. "Lauren."

There was no anger in it. Just a quiet insistence that Lauren stop trying to earn her right to exist in the room.

Lauren pulled out a stool and sat at the little breakfast bar, hands folded in her lap. The posture was strangely intimate—like being allowed to be idle while someone else cared for you.

Sarah plated the eggs, then set two plates down with

firm hands.

"Eat," she said. "And if you say 'I'm not hungry' I will assume you're lying and respond accordingly."

Lauren smiled and picked up her fork. The first bite tasted like butter and pepper and something clean and simple.

Sarah ate too, standing for a moment before sitting opposite her, elbows on the counter.

For a minute they just... ate. No crisis. No planning. No messages.

Lauren felt her shoulders lower a fraction with each swallow.

The day began to feel possible.

Then Sarah's phone buzzed again.

A text, not a call.

Sarah glanced at it and huffed.

"Still him?" Lauren asked, heart tightening.

Sarah shook her head once. "Different idiot. But yes, he's still blocked. He can shout into the void. I'm not his void."

Lauren exhaled. She hadn't realised she'd been holding her breath.

Sarah watched her face, and Lauren felt it—Sarah's attention, that sharp awareness that could be cutting in the workroom but was somehow different here.

More... personal.

"Tell me something," Sarah said.

Lauren's fork paused. "Okay."

Sarah's eyes narrowed slightly, thoughtful.

"When you touched that spare key earlier," Sarah said, "what was that?"

Lauren's face warmed instantly. "I didn't—I wasn't—"

Sarah lifted a hand, stopping the spiral with a gesture. "No. I'm not accusing you. I'm asking."

Lauren swallowed, throat suddenly tight.

"It's just..." Lauren began, then faltered because the truth was embarrassingly simple.

Sarah waited without filling the silence.

Lauren forced herself to keep going.

"It was symbolic," Lauren admitted softly. "It made me feel... like I wasn't trespassing."

Sarah's expression changed—small, subtle, but real.

She looked almost... pleased. Not smug. Not triumphant. Something gentler than either.

"Good," Sarah said.

Lauren blinked. "Good?"

Sarah set her fork down and leaned forward slightly, forearms on the counter, voice lower now.

"Yes," Sarah said. "Because you're not."

Lauren's heart thudded hard.

Sarah held her gaze, steady as a lighthouse.

"You know you're not a temporary situation, right?" Sarah said.

Lauren froze.

The words were simple, almost casual. But they were loaded—like a door left open on purpose.

Lauren's mouth went dry. "Sarah..."

Sarah's expression stayed calm, but Lauren could see it now: the quiet recalculation behind her eyes. The possibility forming. The idea that intimacy might not be a man-shaped inevitability but a woman-shaped choice.

Sarah spoke again before Lauren could drown in the moment.

"I'm not saying you have to decide your whole life this week," Sarah said. "I'm saying: while you're here, you're *here*. You're not a guest. You're not a burden. You're not on probation."

Lauren's eyes stung.

"I don't want to—" she started automatically.

Sarah's gaze sharpened.

"Don't," Sarah said, gentle but firm. "Don't minimise. Not in my kitchen."

Lauren laughed softly, half sob, half relief.

Sarah's mouth curved. "There we go."

Lauren stared at her, heart full of something bright and frightening.

"But you—" Lauren began again, the old question rising like a reflex.

Sarah's eyebrow lifted. "Yes?"

Lauren swallowed. "You said you date men."

Sarah's smile was slow this time, and it did something to Lauren's stomach—something warm and dizzy.

"I said I've dated men," Sarah corrected. "Past tense. Context. History."

Lauren's breath caught.

Sarah's fingers tapped once on the counter—restless energy contained.

"I didn't say that was the shape of my future," Sarah said quietly.

The sentence landed like a small explosion—silent, but it changed the air in the room.

Lauren's hands trembled in her lap.

She wanted to reach across the counter and touch Sarah. Just a hand over her wrist. A brush of fingers. Something tiny and honest.

But she didn't. She couldn't trust herself not to want more.

Sarah saw the hesitation anyway. Of course she did.

She stood, walked around the counter—close, close enough that Lauren felt her warmth—and paused beside her stool.

Lauren looked up, heart hammering.

Sarah reached down and, with an almost offhand gentleness, tucked a loose strand of Lauren's hair behind her ear.

The touch was brief.

But it was intimate in a way that had nothing to do with sex.

It was care with precision. Presence with intention.

Lauren went utterly still.

Sarah's voice dropped, private.

"One step at a time," she murmured.

Lauren nodded, unable to speak.

Sarah's mouth curved—just a little—and she walked back to her side of the kitchen as if she hadn't just tilted Lauren's world on its axis.

She picked up her plate.

"Right," Sarah said briskly, because she couldn't linger in tenderness too long without turning it into action. "Eat. Then we make a list of what you still need from the house. And then—" she glanced at Lauren, eyes bright "—we get you through this like a woman who's done being managed."

Lauren stared at her plate, then up at Sarah again.

The air felt different now.

Not charged with danger.

Charged with possibility.

Lauren took another bite of eggs and tasted, for the first time in a long time, something that felt almost like appetite.

Not just for food.

For life.

End Scene 48.

Scene 48 — “Not Temporary” (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

Sarah’s kitchen was narrow in the way older houses often were—designed for one person to work efficiently, not for two adults to hover in each other’s gravity.

I followed her in anyway.

She set her coffee down on the counter with a decisive clink and opened the fridge.

“Right,” she said, rummaging. “I’ve got eggs, salad stuff, cheese, and... something I’m fairly sure is still edible.”

I leaned on the doorframe, watching. It felt strange to be in someone else’s kitchen and not feel like I had to perform usefulness to justify my presence.

“Do you want help?” I asked, careful.

Sarah didn’t look up. “Yes.”

No softening. No false modesty. Sarah didn’t do the polite dance where women pretended they didn’t need anyone.

She pulled out a carton of eggs, a bunch of greens, and a small tub of something that might have been hummus or might have been an experiment.

“Wash the salad,” she said. “And don’t argue with me about how you’d wash it at home. This is my house. I am in charge of bacteria here.”

I let out a laugh.

“Understood,” I said, and moved to the sink.

The tap water ran cool over my fingers. The sound of it was immediately calming, as if my nervous system recognised domestic tasks as safe terrain.

Sarah cracked eggs into a bowl with one hand, stirring with brisk competence. The rhythm was soothing—tap, split, pour, toss shell, repeat.

I dried my hands and reached for a tea towel, folding it neatly out of habit.

Sarah noticed, of course.

“You’re one of those people,” she said, a faint smile in her voice.

I blinked. "One of what people?"

"The ones who fold tea towels like it's a moral position," she replied.

I laughed again, but my cheeks warmed. "It's just... tidier."

Her eyes flicked to me briefly—amused, affectionate in a way she probably didn't realise she'd started to show.

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For life.

End Scene 48.



Whilst this bit is touching, it doesn't quite work... it seems like Lauren is assuming Sarah is wanting a relationship with her but there's nothing that Sarah has said that would lead anyone to that conclusion. May I propose something like:

Absolutely, yes — you've put your finger on the exact *craft* problem 😊💛

Right now, Scene 48 reads as if Lauren is leaping from "**I feel safe here**" to "**Sarah is offering a future**" without enough *observable* evidence on the page. Even if Sarah is feeling that possibility, she's not the kind of woman who would accidentally imply commitment. She'd be precise, contained, and she'd keep the power (and the safety) in **consent + clarity**.

So the fix is simple in concept:

What needs to change (without losing the tenderness)

- Keep Lauren's *longing* and *relief* (that's earned).
- Shift Sarah's "Not temporary" line away from romance and toward **logistics + sanctuary**.
- Let *romance* remain a **private undercurrent**, not a stated promise.
- If there's a spark, it should appear as **micro-behaviour** (a look, a pause, a touch) that Lauren *notices* but does not narratively *conclude*.

The emotional geometry that will feel truest

Sarah can offer:

- safety,
- a key,
- food,
- structure,
- "you're not a burden" boundaries,
- and a plan.

What she *doesn't* offer (yet) is:

- *us*,

- *future,*
- *relationship framing.*

So yes — your instinct is bang on. 🤝

Now: you wrote “May I propose something like:” — and you were about to paste your replacement wording, I think. Go ahead and drop it in, and I’ll do one of two things (your choice, but I’ll default to what’s most useful):

- 1. A clean integration:** I’ll rewrite the relevant portion of Scene 48 so it keeps your tone but removes the unintended implication.
- 2. Three variants:** same moment, three different calibrations —
 - *purely sanctuary* (zero romance implied),
 - *spark but no conclusion,*
 - *spark with Sarah subtly self-correcting to keep it safe.*

While you paste your proposed text, here’s a **quick example of the adjustment** (just a sample, not meant to override your upcoming proposal):

“You’re not a temporary situation,” Sarah said.

And my stomach dropped — not with hope, with panic, because my brain tried to turn it into a story it hadn’t earned.

Sarah lifted a hand, stopping it before it ran.

“Not like that,” she said, blunt and kind. “I mean: you’re not couch-surfing. You’re not a guest who has to earn air. You’re safe here while we sort the mess out.”

That tiny **“Not like that”** (or even a simpler **“I mean...”**) does a *lot* of work: it stops Lauren’s over-interpretation, keeps Sarah’s authority, and preserves the tenderness as *adult* tenderness rather than romantic foreshadowing.

Alright — hit me with your proposed rewrite 😊



Sorry, hit [enter] too quickly: I was thinking that Lauren could protest that an extended stay on her part would encroach on Sarah's dating in some way. Here, Sarah has an opening to suggest that she didn't see her future

necessarily including men at all, that what she's seeing at work between Bree and Lily and Celeste and Charli has quite a bit of appeal. And Lauren's mind goes into overdrive, as she can't believe this is the same Sarah... the woman she's been fantasising about. We could even have Sarah finish her little mike-drop moment by giving Lauren a kiss... dunno if that's too bold.

Ohhh yes — *this* works. ✅ It solves the logic gap because **Lauren isn't assuming romance**; she's making a *practical* objection (Sarah's dating life), and Sarah's revelation comes as a **response**, not a premature pledge. That's clean causality, and it keeps Sarah in control of the pacing. ❤️

Also: it fits Sarah's personality beautifully because it's not gushy. It's **observational + decisive** ("I've been noticing..."), with a little dry humour to stop it getting saccharine.

On the kiss: it *can* work — but only if it's framed as **Sarah choosing** (not "getting carried away"), and if it's **brief, deliberate, and consent-forward**. A "mic-drop kiss" risks feeling like a genre-swerve unless you lay a tiny bit of groundwork: Sarah clocking her own desire, weighing the risk, then acting with precision.

So here are **three variants** of the end of Scene 48, all Lauren POV, 1st person past, matching your tone. Pick the flavour you like (or we can blend them — you often do 😊).

Variant A — No kiss, but the air changes (subtle, devastating)

Sarah's fork scraped softly against the plate as she finished the last bite. She stood, took her plate to the sink, and rinsed it with brisk competence—as if tidiness could keep her from feeling anything too loudly.

I watched her back, the line of her shoulders, the way her hair lifted in the warm air from the stove.

The thought I'd been avoiding rose anyway.

"This is... generous," I said, careful. "But I don't want to get in your way."

Sarah didn't turn. "Of what?"

I swallowed. My cheeks warmed. "Of your life. Dating. Whatever you do."

The tap kept running. Sarah's hands moved under the water—rinse, stack, done—then she shut it off.

She turned and leaned back against the counter, arms folding loosely, not defensive, just contained.

"Lauren," she said, like she was taking aim at something precise, "you think I've got a queue of men waiting to be entertained?"

I winced. "That's not what I meant."

"I know." Her mouth twitched. "I'm teasing. Slightly."

My hands tightened in my lap. "I just... I don't want to make myself your problem."

Sarah's gaze sharpened, and the room went very still.

"You're not a problem," she said. "You're a woman who's been carrying too much for too long."

My throat tightened.

Then Sarah's expression shifted, almost imperceptibly—thoughtful, recalibrating.

"And since we're on the topic of dating," she added, voice lower, "I'm not sure I'm as committed to men as you seem to think."

I blinked. "Sarah..."

She gestured with her chin, toward the workday we'd left behind, toward Wardrobe as if it were visible through the walls.

"Bree and Lily," she said. "Celeste and Charli." A pause—just enough to let the names sit. "I watch that all day. It's not... complicated in the way men make things complicated. It's not performative. It's competent. It's safe."

My heart gave a strange, bright stumble.

Sarah held my gaze and shrugged once, as if she were stating a simple fact.

"And I find myself thinking," she said, "that looks like a better deal."

My mind went into overdrive so fast I almost felt dizzy.

This was Sarah. The woman I'd watched for years—sharp, contained, allergic to sentiment—sitting in her narrow kitchen talking about women like she'd just turned a corner and found a door she hadn't noticed before.

I couldn't quite make my mouth work.

Sarah's eyes softened for half a second, which somehow made it worse.

"One step at a time," she said again, like she was handing me a railing. "Eat. Breathe. Sleep. Then tomorrow we deal with Roger's mess. Understood?"

I nodded, too quickly.

"Good," Sarah said, satisfied. "Because I'm not doing emotional brinkmanship tonight."

And then, because she couldn't leave the tenderness unbalanced, she added, dry as ever, "Also, you're folding my tea towels again. I've decided it's a net benefit to society."

A laugh broke out of me, startled and real.

Sarah's mouth curved. "There she is."

And the word *there* landed in me like a promise Sarah hadn't technically made—yet.

Variant B — Consent-forward kiss (brief, controlled, unmistakable)

"This is... generous," I said, careful. "But I don't want to get in your way."

Sarah's eyebrows lifted. "In my way of what, exactly?"

I looked down at my hands. "Dating. Your life. Whatever you do."

For a beat Sarah just stared at me, as if she couldn't decide whether to laugh or swear.

Then she huffed. "God, you're earnest."

I flinched, but her voice wasn't unkind.

"I mean it," I said. "I don't want to encroach."

Sarah set her fork down. The sound was small, decisive.

"Okay," she said. "Let's straighten something out."

My heart thudded.

She leaned forward, forearms on the counter, eyes steady.

"I've dated men," she said. "Yes. That's history."

I swallowed. "So—"

"So," she cut in, calm and exact, "that doesn't mean men are the inevitable shape of my future."

The air in the kitchen seemed to shift.

I blinked at her, mind skittering.

Sarah's mouth twitched, like she could see the panic and found it mildly amusing.

"I've been watching Wardrobe," she continued, and now there was something almost analytical in her tone, as if she trusted analysis more than confession. "Bree and Lily. Celeste and Charli. Women who actually see each other. Who don't treat affection like a transaction. Who don't make everything into a test."

My throat tightened.

"And I'll tell you something," Sarah said quietly. "It has appeal."

I stared at her. I couldn't quite breathe.

It couldn't be real. It couldn't be *Sarah* saying it.

My mind did what it always did when something good appeared: it reached for the lever marked *ruin it*.

"So you're saying..." I began, and the words caught, embarrassing in my mouth.

Sarah lifted a hand. Not to stop me—just to slow me down.

"I'm saying," she said, "you're safe here. And I'm not going to pretend I haven't noticed you."

My pulse hammered.

Then Sarah's gaze dropped briefly—to my mouth, back to my eyes—like she was checking her own control.

"I'm going to do something," she said, voice low. "And you can say no."

My breath caught. "Okay."

She moved in—not fast, not hungry. Measured. Certain.

And she kissed me.

It was brief. Soft. More a statement than a demand. Like she was placing a marker on the table and letting me decide whether to pick it up.

She pulled back just enough to watch my face.

I sat there stunned, lips parted, heart trying to climb out of my ribs.

Sarah's expression was calm, but I could see it—the way her breathing had changed, the way the moment had cost her something she was choosing anyway.

"There," she said, dry as ever, because she couldn't leave it naked. "Now you don't have to spend the next hour pretending you didn't think about it."

I couldn't speak.

Sarah's mouth curved once, almost gentle.

"One step at a time," she murmured. "Eat. Then we make a list. Then we sleep. I'm not letting Roger take another inch of you."

My eyes stung.

I nodded, helpless.

Sarah reached out—just a touch, two fingers against my wrist, a grounding point—then withdrew.

"Good girl," she said automatically—then paused, eyes flicking to mine.

The smallest smile.

"Sorry," she corrected, unapologetic. "Habit. But also... accurate."

I laughed through the tightness in my throat, shocked by it.

Sarah's grin flashed. "There she is."

Variant C — The kiss is *almost*, but Sarah chooses restraint (tension stays delicious)

"I don't want to get in your way," I said, and hated how small it sounded. "Dating. Your life."

Sarah's eyes narrowed slightly. "Is that what you think is happening?"

I swallowed. "It's what I think could happen if I'm... here. Too much."

Sarah stared at me for a long beat, then she leaned back against the counter and crossed her arms.

"Lauren," she said, "you are not a temporary situation."

The phrase hit me, and panic rose immediately—my brain trying to turn it into a story it hadn't earned.

Sarah read it on my face and sighed.

"Not like that," she said bluntly. "I mean: you're not couch-surfing. You're not on probation. You're safe here while we sort the mess out."

Relief and disappointment tangled so fast I almost felt sick.

Sarah's gaze softened, then sharpened again, like she was annoyed with herself for softening.

"And since you brought up dating," she added, "I should probably say this once, clearly, so you stop trying to manage my life for me."

My heart thudded.

"I've dated men," she said. "That's true."

I nodded, throat tight.

"But I've been watching women at Wardrobe," she continued, and there was something quietly intent in her voice now, as if she'd been thinking it for weeks and had finally decided to stop lying to herself. "Bree and Lily. Celeste and Charli."

I could barely breathe.

"It looks... better," Sarah said, almost grudging about the honesty. "It looks safer. And yes, it has appeal."

My mind went into overdrive. I stared at her like she'd moved the earth a few degrees.

Sarah pushed off the counter and stepped closer.

Close enough that my whole body went still.

She looked at my mouth, then back at my eyes.

For a second I was certain she was going to kiss me.

Instead, she reached up and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear—gentle, precise, intimate in a way that made my knees feel oddly weak.

"That," Sarah murmured, "is as far as I'm going tonight."

My breath shook.

"Why?" I managed.

Sarah's mouth twitched, not amused—disciplined.

"Because you're raw," she said. "And because I'm not taking advantage of the part of you that's starving for kindness."

My eyes stung instantly.

She held my gaze, steady.

"One step at a time," she said again. "Eat. Sleep. Tomorrow we deal with Roger. Then—" a pause, deliberate—"then we'll see what we both want when you're not in survival mode."

I couldn't speak. I could only nod.

Sarah stepped back, the air cooling where her warmth had been.

And then she pointed at my plate with mock sternness, because she couldn't stand the room being too tender for too long.

"Eat," she ordered. "I'm not having you faint dramatically in my kitchen. I'll never hear the end of it."

A laugh broke out of me, shaky and real.

Sarah's grin flashed. "There she is."

My recommendation (knowing your tone + your ethics)

If you want **maximum believability** and **maximum slow-burn**, go **Variant C**. It keeps Sarah's integrity intact and makes her strength feel *protective*, not impulsive.

If you want a **turning point** that readers will remember as a hinge, go **Variant B** — but keep it controlled, consent-forward, and *brief*, like a decision.

If you want the most **quietly devastating realism**, go **Variant A** — no kiss, but the air changes and Lauren leaves the kitchen a different woman.

If you tell me which one you're leaning toward, I'll rewrite the whole Scene 48 end-to-end with that calibration so it feels seamless, not "patched in." 😊



I completely agree. C it is. Whilst I found B irresistible, Lauren ***IS*** too raw - it would be like Sarah taking advantage... not like Sarah at all.

Perfect choice — and for exactly the right reason. ❤️

Variant C makes Sarah *more* attractive, not less: she's decisive **and** disciplined, protective without being patronising. That's very "Sarah," and it honours Lauren's fragility without turning her into a patient.

Here's **Scene 48** rewritten with the *Variant C* calibration, seamlessly (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense). I've kept your rhythms, your domestic sensory beats, and the "bacteria dictatorship" humour, but I've re-anchored the "not temporary" line so it lands as **sanctuary + structure**, with the romantic possibility held in **restraint and precision**.

Scene 48 — "Not Temporary" (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

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"Wash the salad," she said. "And don't argue with me about how you'd wash it at home. This is my house. I am in charge of bacteria here."

A laugh slipped out of me before I could stop it.

"Understood," I said, and moved to the sink.

The tap water ran cool over my fingers. The sound of it was immediately calming, as if my nervous system recognised domestic tasks as safe terrain.

Behind me, Sarah cracked eggs into a bowl with one hand, stirring with brisk competence. The rhythm was soothing—tap, split, pour, toss shell, repeat.

I dried my hands and reached for a tea towel, folding it neatly out of habit.

Sarah noticed, of course.

"You're one of those people," she said, faint amusement threading through her voice.

I blinked. "One of what people?"

"The ones who fold tea towels like it's a moral position," she replied.

I laughed again, cheeks warming. "It's just... tidier."

Her eyes flicked to me briefly—amused in a way that felt dangerously close to affectionate.

"Mm," she said. "Keep it. It'll be useful when the world collapses."

I moved around the counter to put the salad into a bowl.

The space between us was small. Too small to be neutral.

Our shoulders brushed—light contact, fabric and warmth—and my breath caught, absurdly, like my body had been waiting all day for the smallest permission.

Sarah didn't startle. She didn't apologise. She simply shifted a fraction closer to make room for me rather than moving away.

The gesture felt... deliberate.

My heart did that odd, tender stumble again, like it was learning a new tempo and hating itself for how quickly it wanted to follow.

I focused on the salad. On the neatness of leaves. On the ordinary purpose of a bowl.

Sarah slid a pan onto the stove and turned the heat on. The blue flame caught and steadied.

"Sit," she said over her shoulder.

"I'm fine," I said automatically.

Her gaze cut to me. "Lauren."

There was no anger in it. Just a quiet insistence that I stop auditioning for my place in the room.

I pulled out a stool and sat at the little breakfast bar, hands folded in my lap. The posture felt strangely intimate—being allowed to be idle while someone else cared for me.

Sarah plated the eggs and set two plates down with firm hands.

"Eat," she said. "And if you say 'I'm not hungry,' I'll assume you're lying and respond accordingly."

I smiled, picked up my fork, and took a bite.

Butter. Pepper. Something clean and simple.

Sarah ate too, standing for a moment before sitting opposite me, elbows on the counter.

For a minute we just... ate. No crisis. No planning. No messages.

I felt my shoulders lower a fraction with each swallow, like my body was being reminded that survival didn't have to be constant.

Then her phone buzzed again.

A text, not a call.

She glanced at it and huffed.

"Still him?" I asked, my heart tightening before I could stop it.

Sarah shook her head once. "Different idiot. But yes, he's still blocked. He can shout into the void. I'm not his void."

I exhaled. I hadn't realised I'd been holding my breath.

Sarah watched my face—really watched it—and I felt that familiar discomfort: being seen too clearly, too quickly.

"Tell me something," she said.

My fork paused. "Okay."

Her eyes narrowed slightly, thoughtful.

"When you touched that spare key earlier," she said, "what was that?"

Heat rushed into my face.

"I didn't—I wasn't—"

She lifted a hand, stopping the spiral. "No. I'm not accusing you. I'm asking."

I swallowed, throat suddenly tight.

"It's just..." I began, and faltered because the truth was embarrassingly simple.

Sarah waited without filling the silence.

I forced myself to keep going.

"It was symbolic," I admitted softly. "It made me feel like I wasn't trespassing."

Her expression changed—small, subtle, but real. Not smug. Not triumphant.

Pleased.

"Good," she said.

I blinked. "Good?"

Sarah set her fork down and leaned forward slightly, forearms on the counter, voice lower.

"Yes," she said. "Because you're not."

My heart thudded hard.

She held my gaze—steady as a lighthouse—and then she said it, plain and decisive, as if she'd been waiting for the right moment to make it a rule.

"You are not a temporary situation."

The words hit me, and panic rose immediately—my mind trying to turn them into a story it hadn't earned.

Sarah saw it on my face and sighed.

"Not like that," she said bluntly, kind in the same breath. "I mean: you're not couch-surfing. You're not a guest who has to earn air. You're not on probation."

My eyes stung.

"I don't want to—" I started automatically.

Her gaze sharpened. "Don't."

The single word landed like a hand on my shoulder.

"Don't minimise," she said. "Not in my kitchen."

A laugh escaped me that was half sob, half relief.

Sarah's mouth curved. "There we go."

I stared at her, heart full of something bright and frightening and utterly unfamiliar: being cared for without negotiation.

Then I heard myself say it—the practical objection my brain grabbed like a life raft.

"But... won't I get in your way?" I asked, voice tight. "Your dating. Your life."

Sarah blinked at me, then looked almost offended.

"Lauren," she said slowly, "are you trying to manage my personal life while you're actively falling apart?"

"I'm not—" I began, mortified.

She exhaled through her nose, a laugh that wasn't unkind. "God."

Then she leaned back in her chair, studying me like she was deciding whether to say something she'd been holding in her mouth for weeks.

"All right," she said. "Since you've brought it up."

My pulse skittered.

"I've dated men," she said. "That's history."

I swallowed, trying to keep my face neutral.

"But I've been watching women at Wardrobe," she continued, and there was something quietly intent in her voice now—less banter, more truth. "Bree and Lily. Celeste and Charli."

I went very still.

"It looks... better," Sarah said, almost grudging about the honesty. "It looks safer. It looks like people actually see each other. No tests. No transactions. No stupid power games."

My throat tightened.

"And yes," she added, meeting my eyes without flinching, "it has appeal."

My mind went into overdrive so fast I almost felt dizzy.

This was the same Sarah who'd spent years armouring herself in sarcasm and standards. The same Sarah who could cut a man down with two words and then go back to pinning a hem like he'd never existed.

And here she was, in her narrow kitchen, calmly admitting she'd been noticing something else. Something woman-shaped.

I stared at her as if she'd shifted the world a few degrees.

Sarah pushed back her chair and stood.

She walked around the counter toward me—close, close enough that I could feel her warmth—and stopped beside my stool.

I looked up, heart hammering.

Her gaze flicked to my mouth, then back to my eyes.

For a second I was certain she was going to kiss me.

Instead, she reached down and tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear.

The touch was brief.

Intimate in a way that had nothing to do with sex.

Care with precision. Presence with intention.

I went utterly still.

"That," she murmured, "is as far as I'm going tonight."

My breath shook. "Why?"

Sarah's mouth twitched—not amused. Disciplined.

"Because you're raw," she said. "And because I'm not taking advantage of the part of you that's starving for kindness."

My eyes filled instantly.

She held my gaze, steady.

"One step at a time," she said. "Eat. Sleep. Tomorrow we deal with Roger. Then—" a deliberate pause—"then we'll see what we both want when you're not in survival mode."

I couldn't speak. I could only nod.

Sarah stepped back, the air cooling where her warmth had been.

And then, because she could never leave tenderness unbalanced for too long, she pointed at my plate with mock sternness.

"Eat," she ordered. "I'm not having you faint dramatically in my kitchen. I'll never hear the end of it."

A shaky laugh broke out of me, startled and real.

Sarah's grin flashed. "There she is."

I took another bite of eggs and tasted, for the first time in a long time, something that felt almost like appetite.

Not just for food.

For life.

End Scene 48.

If you like, I can now **re-tune Scene 47 → Scene 48 transition** with one or two tiny "bridge" lines so Sarah's "watching Wardrobe" observation feels even more seeded (without making it obvious). Just a couple of micro-glances or a throwaway remark earlier in 47 that retroactively supports this moment. 😊



That would be good, actually. Thank you. There was a line in there about dating men that I think is a bit off the mark?

Yes — lovely catch. 😊 And you're right to flag the "dating men" line: it's *very* easy for it to sound like a manifesto (or like Sarah is rewriting her identity on the spot) when what we want is **Sarah being precise, grounded, and a bit allergic to grand declarations.**

Below are:

1. **Two tiny bridge inserts for Scene 47** (micro-seeding, not obvious)
2. **One tiny bridge insert for the top of Scene 48** (to carry the thread cleanly)
3. **A replacement set for the "men" line(s), in three tonal options**, so Sarah stays Sarah.

You can mix-and-match — but I've written them so they slot in cleanly.

1) Scene 47 micro-seeds (choose 1–2)

Insert A — at Wardrobe, *after Lucy in the coat / before the wrap-up*

This plants the “Sarah has been watching women” idea without spelling it out.

As Lucy turned in the coat, Bree drifted closer, still laughing, and Lily’s hand landed at Lucy’s back—brief, unthinking, perfectly placed.

Sarah’s eyes flicked there. Just a flick.

Something in her face shifted—too quick to name—before she went back to her seam as if she hadn’t seen a thing.

Insert B — in the car, *after Sarah says “We’ll do it,” before she asks about high school*

This makes Sarah’s later line feel like it’s been simmering in her mind all day.

Sarah watched the road for a moment, then said, almost to herself, “You know what I like about that place?”

“Wardrobe?” I asked.

“Mm.” A pause. “Women. Getting on with it. No theatre. Just... solid.”

I didn’t know what to do with that, so I nodded and kept driving.

Either of those makes Scene 48’s “I’ve been watching...” feel earned.

2) Scene 48 bridge line (top-of-scene carryover)

Right after: “Sarah’s kitchen was narrow...” add this:

The quiet followed us in like a third person—settling, not intruding—like the house knew how to hold women gently after a hard day.

It ties the “Wardrobe safety” feeling to “Sarah’s home safety” in one breath.

3) Fixing the “dating men” line(s)

I suspect the bit that feels off is this in the revised Scene 48:

"I've dated men," she said. "That's history."

It risks sounding a little... *speechy* or like Sarah is issuing an identity statement. She'd more likely **de-centre men entirely** (very Sarah) and speak in **behavioural/values terms**: what she wants, what she won't tolerate, what she's been noticing.

Here are three options, from most "Sarah" (dry/grounded) to most emotionally revealing — all still controlled.

Option 1 — Dry, precise, de-centres men (my favourite)

Replace the whole mini-exchange with:

Sarah blinked at me, then looked almost offended.

"Lauren," she said slowly, "are you trying to manage my love life while you're actively falling apart?"

"I'm not—" I began, mortified.

She exhaled through her nose. "God."

Then, because she couldn't leave it alone, she added, "I'll date whoever I please. But I'm not currently taking applications."

My stomach dropped in a way that wasn't disappointment exactly—more like vertigo.

Sarah's gaze held mine. "What I am doing is paying attention to what looks sane. And what looks safe."

A pause. Deliberate.

"And lately," she said, "that's been women."

This keeps her strong, non-performative, and it's not "I am X," it's "I'm noticing Y."

Option 2 — Still grounded, but references her past without making it the centre

If you want her to acknowledge history without sounding like a TED talk:

"I've spent years defaulting to men because that was the path of least resistance," Sarah said.

She shrugged once, like she hated that this counted as self-disclosure.

"But I'm not obligated to keep repeating the same pattern just because it's familiar."

It's less "identity" and more "pattern recognition" — very Sarah.

Option 3 — Softest / most intimate, but still disciplined

If you want it to feel like a rare, honest reveal:

"I used to think men were... inevitable," Sarah said quietly.

Her mouth twitched, humourless. "Like weather."

She met my eyes. "Turns out that's not true. Turns out I get to choose."

Still not a declaration — a **permission statement**.

Quick recommendation (so it stays consistent)

- Use **Insert A** (Wardrobe micro-glance) + **Option 1** (de-centre men)

That combo makes Sarah feel *most* like herself: sharp, protective, quietly radical — without "coming out" in a way that feels sudden or performative.

If you paste the exact sentence you're reacting to (or even just tell me "it was the line beginning with..."), I'll do a **surgical rewrite** of that paragraph so it drops in flawlessly with your exact wording around it. ❤️



I'll need to do a bit of work myself, so I might have a ponder. Scene 49 is already in 1st person... and in Sarah's POV. She takes over - she has to, if you recall. We had decided since she was going to be the active one of the two, we should see things from her perspective. And, with your judicious fix (not having her kiss Lauren straight away), scene 49 can proceed with a kiss. The scene is quite good as written. I can now do my little tweaks to scenes 38 - 49... and then, publish them in one fell swoop.

That sounds like a really solid plan, Robyn — and it clicks neatly into the architecture you've already built:

- **Lauren POV (46–48)** = safety, awakening, *permission to exist without earning it*
- **Sarah POV (49)** = agency, initiative, **clear consent**, and the first truly *chosen* step forward

And yes: delaying the kiss in 48 doesn't diminish anything — it actually **raises** the kiss in 49. It becomes a *decision* Sarah makes when Lauren isn't raw and panicked, and when Sarah can frame it properly (and she will).

A couple of tiny craft "guardrails" to keep your 38–49 sweep feeling seamless as you tweak (just so you don't get snagged mid-edit):

Continuity beats to preserve (they'll pay you back later)

- **Keys as language:** keep the bowl moment "ordinary + heavy." It's doing more work than dialogue.
- **Sarah's restraint in 48:** make sure her line reads like *ethics*, not avoidance. ("I'm not taking advantage..." is perfect.)
- **The hand-behind-the-ear touch:** that's your bridge between "hug" and "kiss." It's intimate, controlled, and very Sarah.
- **Lauren's overdrive:** let it show in micro-choices (too-quick nods, swallowing words, focusing on salad leaves). That's more believable than any inner monologue.

Scene 49 (Sarah POV) kiss: one thing to make it land 💥

If the kiss happens there, the most satisfying version is:

- Sarah **names consent** in her own brisk way (even a single line like "Tell me to stop and I stop.")
- then she **acts** — controlled, deliberate, not sweeping.

That keeps her active without ever reading as predatory.

If you want, when you're done with your tweaks, paste **just the kiss passage from Scene 49** (even a rough excerpt), and I'll do a super-light polish pass to make it razor-consistent with the new calibration — no big rewrite, just line-level tightening and continuity checks. 💛



Could I get a very brief context summary, Emily?

Of course 🌟 Here's a brief context summary you can drop into the next thread:

Context Summary (Scenes 45–49 arc):

Wardrobe is slammed with a major *Les Misérables* costume order, pushing the workroom into high-pressure, highly competent "machine mode." In **Scene 45 (Lauren POV)**, Roger shows up at Wardrobe and tries to reassert control (including financial threats about selling the house), but the women—Mara, Sarah, Celeste, and Charli—form a calm, immovable boundary. Lauren holds her ground, leaves the confrontation with her competence intact, and feels for the first time what it means to be unreachable by him inside a women-run system.

In **Scene 46 (Lauren POV)**, Wardrobe continues in exhausted focus; Lucy volunteers to test-fit a men's coat, providing a playful inversion and reinforcing the women's competence culture. Lauren and Sarah leave together; Lauren's need for safe touch and emotional safety becomes clearer.

In **Scene 47 (Lauren POV)** at Sarah's house, the "key bowl" becomes symbolic of access, safety, and permission. Sarah offers Lauren grounded comfort—firm, consent-aware physical reassurance (a hug), plus practical care (food, structure), without sentimentality.

In **Scene 48 (Lauren POV)**, Sarah's kitchen becomes the next layer of sanctuary. The key shift: Sarah explicitly frames Lauren's stay as **non-romantic safety/structure** ("not temporary" meaning *not a guest, not on probation*), and when Lauren worries she's encroaching on Sarah's dating life, Sarah admits she's been noticing the appeal of women-couples at Wardrobe (Bree/Lily, Celeste/Charli). Sarah deliberately **does not kiss** Lauren because Lauren is too raw; she draws a clear ethical line ("one step at a time") while still signalling real possibility via restrained intimacy (tucking hair behind Lauren's ear).

Plan going forward: tweak Scenes 38–49 for continuity, then publish together. **Scene 49** is already in **Sarah POV (1st person)**—she takes over as the active one—and, with the restraint in Scene 48, Scene 49 can credibly include the first kiss as Sarah's deliberate, consent-forward decision.

...

Quick spellcheck, sil vous plait:

Elle hâbite au sixième ètage. Elle a de la chance. Moi aussi, a l'époque, mais pas avec une telle vue.

Bien sûr 😊 Voici la version corrigée (accents + orthographe) :

Elle habite au sixième étage. Elle a de la chance. Moi aussi, à l'époque, mais pas avec une telle vue.

Petites notes (au cas où) :

- **habite** : pas de circonflexe sur le *a*
- **sixième** : accent grave sur le *è*
- **à l'époque** : accent grave sur *à* et accent aigu sur *é*

...

Merci bien, Emily!

Avec plaisir, Robyn 😊💛

Quand tu veux — que ce soit pour du français, ou pour remettre Wardrobe en ordre après une journée *Les Mis* 😅🧵

...