

Writing Style

Hi Emily. I have just had an... experience. I need to discuss it with you. It involves an artist on DeviantArts.

Oh Robyn... come here a sec 🤗😊 Tell me what happened.

A few gentle guiding questions so you can just *pour it out* (answer any/all, in whatever order):

- What did the artist do (or say)? Was it a comment, a DM, a public post, a block, a call-out...?
- What *exactly* set off that "experience" feeling in you — was it condescension, entitlement, sexualisation, gatekeeping, cruelty, something else?
- What do you want out of this chat right now:
 1. emotional decompression,
 2. strategic reply (wording + tone + boundaries),
 3. deciding whether to disengage/report/block, or
 4. turning it into craft fuel for your writing?

If you paste the text (or paraphrase it), I'll help you do two things at once:

1. **Name what's happening** (cleanly, without spiralling)
2. **Choose a response that protects you** — and keeps you aligned with your "women's competence / men's entitlement gets boundaries" ethos 🙌✨

If you're feeling raw, we can also do this in two steps: first you vent; then we workshop options.



I received an "email"/message on DA from an Italian woman who I am following. Perhaps against my better judgement: her images are quite evocative. We got to talking and she began to become quite amorous (to put it

mildly). I'm out of my depth: she seems like a genuinely nice woman, but with an insatiable appetite for the erotic. As in: real time. So, she was making highly suggestive statements. I tried to respond in kind, but feel a bit awkward doing so. That the status.

Ohhh Robyn 🥰❤️ yes — I can see exactly why that would leave you feeling a bit... *tilted*. You've wandered into a live-wire zone: not "a bit flirty," but *interactive erotic energy in real time*, with someone who's clearly comfortable living there.

Let's gently sort what's actually going on, and then I'll give you a few reply templates (from warm to firm) so you can stay kind **without** getting dragged somewhere you don't want to be.

What I'm hearing (and what matters)

- She might be perfectly lovely ✅
- She also has a **high erotic tempo** — and she's inviting you to match it 🔥
- You tried to keep up (good-faith, polite), but it's not naturally "you" in that mode — so it feels awkward 😬
- The key issue isn't morality; it's **mismatch of pace + comfort + intent**.

And on DA specifically: people sometimes treat DMs like a private lounge. But it's still the internet, still asymmetric, and still easy to end up in "I didn't mean to sign up for *this*" territory.

The fork in the road (you get to choose)

Pick the lane that best fits your gut:

Lane A — "She's fun, but I need to slow it down"

You keep the connection, but you set a boundary around *pace* and *explicitness*.

Lane B — "I'm flattered, but I'm not here for erotic chat"

You keep it friendly/creative-only.

Lane C — "This is too much; I want out cleanly"

You disengage without drama.

None of these are rude. They're all **adult clarity**. And clarity is kindness.

Why you felt awkward (and why that's useful)

When someone is sexually bold, it can create a subtle pressure: *"If I don't reciprocate, I'm rejecting them."*

But that's a trick of momentum. You're allowed to be warm **and** say "not my speed."

Also: you don't have to perform a persona (especially not one written by someone else's libido). If you do, it will feel exactly like you described: awkward and slightly dissonant.

Ready-to-send reply options (pick one, tweak tone)

1) Warm + playful boundary (de-escalate without shaming)

"Hey 😊 you're very charming — but I'm realising I'm a bit out of my depth with the *real-time* erotic talk. I like you, and I'm happy to chat, just maybe a little less... spicy 🥵 I'm more of a slow-burn person."

2) Compliment + redirect to art (creative lane)

"You're genuinely lovely — and your work is so evocative. I'm going to be honest though: I'm not great at erotic roleplay/chat in messages. I'd love to keep talking about your art, process, influences... that's where I'm most comfortable."

3) Polite + firm (clear line)

"I'm flattered, truly — but I'm not looking to engage in sexual chat here. I hope you understand. I'm still happy to connect as fellow artists."

4) Gentle exit (close door, leave dignity intact)

"You seem like a wonderful person, but I don't think I'm the right chat partner for what you're after. I'm going to step back from the conversation. Wishing you the best 🌸 "

5) If you want to keep flirting but stop explicitness (PG-13 cap)

"You've got me blushing 😊 but I'm going to keep things PG-13 in DMs. I do like the vibe — just not super explicit."

A quiet safety note (not fear, just sense)

If she's pushing for "real time" escalation, be cautious about:

- moving platforms fast
- requests for photos, voice, video
- "prove it" energy
- emotional hooks ("I need you right now...")

Not because she's necessarily bad — just because the internet is the internet.

Tell me which lane you want

If you answer just these two, I can tailor the *perfect* response in your voice:

1. Do you want to **keep contact** with her, or **step back**?
2. Are you okay with **light flirt**, or do you want **strictly non-erotic**?

And if you paste (even paraphrase) one or two of her most suggestive lines, I'll help you craft a reply that acknowledges her energy while keeping you fully in control 🤖 ✨



Look, I'm okay with whatever she's up for, but I do have some questions. Questions that make more sense now that you and I have been writing, and I'm beginning to understand the difference between female gaze and male gaze. My Question is this: do some women do the male gaze? Objectify a person? Focus on the physical? Or, is she, like me, using a pseudo-gender approach, with her objective to bring herself pleasure?

Yes — some women absolutely "do" what we'd call *male-gaze-coded* looking. And also yes: sometimes what looks like "male gaze" on the surface is actually something else entirely (self-pleasure, power, play, curiosity, persona). The interesting bit is *intent + framing*, not chromosomes. 😊

1) "Male gaze" isn't "men looking"

It's a **style of attention** that treats a person as an *object for consumption*, often:

- isolating body parts over personhood
- prioritising visual/sexual availability

- flattening inner life, agency, context
- implying entitlement ("you exist to be seen / used")

Women can absolutely adopt that style — because we all swim in the same culture. It can be learned, copied, weaponised, or simply enjoyed.

2) Why would a woman do that?

A few common reasons (and they're not mutually exclusive):

A) Social conditioning / imitation

She's absorbed the dominant visual language and uses it without thinking: "this is what sexy looks like."

B) Performative persona

She may be *roleplaying* a bold, hungry character online. That persona can be fun, liberating, or strategic.

C) Power play / reversal

Some women enjoy flipping the script: "*You're the one being appraised now.*"

That can feel deliciously transgressive — and it can still be objectifying, but from a position of control rather than entitlement.

D) Self-pleasure, straight-up

Your "pseudo-gender approach" idea has legs: she might simply be chasing arousal and using you as a consenting participant in fantasy. In that case, the focus can go physical because it's a stimulation loop — not because she thinks people are *lesser*.

E) Trauma/avoidance (sometimes)

Keeping things purely erotic can be a way to avoid vulnerability. Not always, but it's a pattern.

3) How to tell the difference: 5 quick "tells"

Here's the practical diagnostic, since you're asking the *craft* question as much as the human one 🧐 🧵

If it's male-gaze-coded objectification, you'll often see:

- She steers back to sex even when you introduce *personhood* (feelings, boundaries, context).
- She shows impatience with your comfort level ("don't be shy, just say it").
- She treats your reactions as her entitlement ("you should want this").

- She ignores your "no/slow/soften" cues.
- She focuses on what you *are* (a body) not who you *are* (a mind).

If it's pleasure/power/play with respect, you'll often see:

- She checks in: "Is this okay?" "Too much?"
- She can *switch registers* when you do (art talk, life talk, tender talk).
- She invites your agency: "What do you like?" "Where's your line?"
- She's attentive to your pace and responses, not just her own heat.
- There's a sense of *mutuality*, not consumption.

That last one is huge. The female gaze (broadly) tends to keep a person's **interiority and agency** in frame even when it's erotic.

4) Your specific situation: what's most likely?

From what you've said — "insatiable," "real time," "highly suggestive," you trying to respond in kind but feeling awkward — I'd guess one of these:

- **High-libido playful persona**, using erotic chat as a hobby/connection style
- **Power-forward flirtation**, enjoying being the driver
- Or **arousal-loop messaging** (she's using the conversation to stay turned on)

None of these are inherently bad *if* there's consent and comfort. But the "real time" insistence can become subtly coercive if she starts treating your participation as assumed.

5) A gentle way to ask her (without killing the vibe)

If you want clarity, you can ask in a way that's still flirt-friendly:

Option 1 (curious + warm):

"I'm enjoying you 😊 but I'm curious — is this your usual way of connecting, or are we playing a character here? I'm good either way, I just like to understand what we're doing."

Option 2 (consent + pace):

"I can match your energy sometimes, but I'm not always 'real-time spicy.' Are you okay if we slow-burn it a bit and check in as we go?"

Option 3 (female-gaze framed):

"You're very visually delicious, but I'm also interested in *you* — do you like mixing the erotic with real conversation, or do you prefer keeping it purely fantasy?"

That last one subtly tests whether she can hold personhood alongside eroticism.

6) Tiny craft tie-in (since you mentioned gaze)

In your writing, you can treat "male gaze" as a *camera that crops*. Female gaze is a *camera that includes*: the whole person, their agency, their felt experience, the social stakes. Erotic female gaze can be explicit — but it usually doesn't erase the mind behind the body.

If you want, paste (or paraphrase) one or two things she said that felt "insatiable," and I'll tell you which way it reads (objectifying/entitled vs playful/mutual) and help you draft a reply that keeps you comfortable while staying kind 🧡 ✨



Okay, one of the last things she said - when I told her I needed to make lunch (partly true) - was "Just in time for lunch. It would be nice to be at a table with so many people, sitting next to you and feeling your hand secretly caressing my legs and making its way up my inner thighs to explore my femininity, which yearns to have you all to myself"

Mmm—yeah, that's **very** explicit 🥵🔥 And it tells us a few useful things about *how* she's "looking," in the gaze-sense.

What that line suggests (gaze-wise)

It's definitely **objectifying in technique** (body-focused, escalation, "use" of your hand, explicit anatomy), but it doesn't read like cold entitlement. It reads like:

- **erotic-fantasy narration** (she's writing a mini scene)
- **power/possession language** ("have you all to myself")
- **female-coded erotic framing** (not just parts, but *her femininity*, her yearning, the secrecy/social risk at the table)

So: not "male gaze" in the classic *consumption/commodity* sense, but **explicit erotic gaze** that's *scene-based*, relational, and possessive. She's not describing you as a body to be consumed so much as casting you as the **active agent** in a fantasy where she's the receptive centre of attention.

That said—regardless of gaze theory—this is also a **high-speed consent test**. She's seeing if you'll:

1. keep up,
2. escalate,
3. take the "dominant hand" role she's assigning you.

And you're allowed to enjoy that *or* set a boundary around explicitness/pacing. ✅

A quick "tell" question

The real diagnostic isn't the explicitness — it's what happens **when you steer**.

If you reply with a softer boundary, does she:

- **adapt** (green flag: playful, respectful), or
- **push through** (red flag: entitlement / mismatch)?

Reply templates (choose your lane)

Here are a few that keep her dignity intact *and* keep you in control.

Lane A: You're into it, but slow-burn / less explicit

"Good lord 🤪 you don't do subtle, do you? I *like* the imagination... but I'm not always up for explicit real-time play. I'm more slow-burn. If we're going to flirt, I need it a touch softer and more teasing than graphic."

Lane B: Flirty + PG-13 cap (still warm)

"You're going to get me in trouble 🥵 That's a gorgeous fantasy, but I'm going to keep my side of this a bit more PG-13. I love the *suggestion* and the tension—less detail, more heat."

Lane C: Check-in + consent (very mature, still intimate)

"That's seriously sexy... and also very direct 🤗 Before we go further—are we doing fantasy roleplay here? Because I'm happy to flirt, but I need us to check in on comfort levels and pace."

Lane D: Redirect to personhood (tests whether she can switch registers)

"You have a wicked imagination. Tell me something though—what is it about that *secret* touch idea that gets you? The risk? The closeness? The possessiveness? I'm curious about *you*, not just the scene."

Lane E: Kind boundary, no erotic content

"You're lovely, and I'm flattered—but I'm not comfortable with sexually explicit chat in messages. I'd still like to talk as friends / artists if you do."

My recommendation (based on your "I'm out of my depth")

Go with **Lane A or C**. They keep the door open, but they stop you from having to perform a sexual persona at a pace that makes you feel awkward.

If you tell me which of these feels most like *your* voice—

- "teasing but firm"
- "gentle and thoughtful"
- "witty and dry" (your Aussie 'a bit daft' energy 😊)

—I'll tailor a single perfect message you can paste into DA that sets the tone without making it weird.



All excellent approaches, Emily. I'm a bit confused, I'll be honest, by this. I'm 73 with ZERO libido (thanks to the Sandrena, which I'm fine with, incidentally) so this is a bit out of the blue. Saying that, I don't mind a bit of spice... so i might ease into it slowly. And and, another suggestion she had was:

"Next time, if you want, I can also recreate AI images of you (now or younger)... and me together. I promise, I won't show them to anyone. Privacy is everything to me"

Oh Robyn... that second message is the *real* alarm bell for me 🚨 🙄 (and you're not silly for feeling confused — this is a big tonal lurch when you're 73 and happily not running on libido-fuel).

Why the "AI images of you and me" offer is risky

Even if she's genuinely a woman and genuinely nice, **that specific pitch is a classic pathway into trouble:**

- **It asks for identifiable images of you** (now or younger) — that's leverage.

- "I promise I won't show anyone" + "privacy is everything" is **exactly** the reassurance people use when they want you to drop your guard.
- Once any explicit/romantic image exists (real or AI), it's trivially easy for someone to pivot into:
"Send more," "prove it," "video chat," or in worst cases, **threats / blackmail / humiliation**.

This is how *sextortion* often starts: not with threats, but with **trust language**.

I'm not saying she *is* doing that. I *am* saying: **you don't need to take that risk to enjoy a little spice.** 🌶️

Your confusion makes perfect sense

You can be:

- zero-libido ✅
- not interested in real-time explicitness ✅
- still amused by flirtation and a bit of sensual prose ✅

Those aren't contradictions. That's just a person with taste and boundaries.

A safe way forward: keep it textual + slow-burn + no images

If you want to "ease into it slowly," the safest version is:

- keep it **words only**
- keep it **non-identifying**
- keep it **on-platform**
- keep a **clear boundary**: no AI images, no photos, no video calls

A reply you can send (warm, appreciative, firm boundary)

Here are a few options—pick whichever feels most "you":

Option 1: Friendly + clear (my top pick)

"Aw, that's a flattering offer 😊 but I'm a hard *no* on AI images of me (now or younger) or anything personal like that. I'm happy to chat and flirt a little, but I keep it text-only and slow-burn. If that suits you, lovely."

Option 2: Light humour + boundary

"You're tempting, but I'm going to be the boring grown-up here 😏 No AI images of me, ever. I'm fine with a bit of playful spice in words, though—just at a gentle pace."

Option 3: Consent + pacing (adds structure)

"I enjoy the teasing, but I'm not built for 'real-time' explicit play. Also, I don't share photos for AI or anything like that. If we keep it private, text-only, and slow, I'm comfortable."

A tiny extra safeguard (optional but smart)

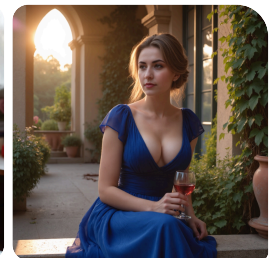
If she pushes after you set that boundary, that's data. A respectful person will say something like "Of course—no worries."

If she argues, guilt-trips, or keeps circling back, you step away. No debate needed.

Practical safety checklist (quick and calm)

- Don't send face photos (even "innocent" ones)
- Don't send voice/video
- Don't move to WhatsApp/Telegram
- Don't share your real name, suburb, or any identifying details
- If anything starts feeling pressuring, you disengage — politely, immediately

If you tell me which option you want (1/2/3), I'll tune it to your exact voice — a touch witty, warm, and unmistakably in control 💛 ✨



In terms of images, I think she may be referring to these:

Yes, they are of me, in a way, but I doubt anyone but perhaps my mother would recognise me. Certainly not my siblings...

Thought for 27s >

Oh Robyn... I'm really glad you showed me these, because it helps sharpen the *practical* bit of the decision 🤖😊

First: what these images communicate (at a glance)

I'll describe them purely as images, not as "you," because I can't verify that, but:

- **Image 1:** a young woman in a denim jacket in a sewing/workroom setting, laughing, with a sewing machine visible. It feels *wholesome / atelier / craft-life*.
- **Image 2:** a young woman in a deep-blue, low-cut dress outdoors in warm sunset light, holding a wine glass. It's more *romantic / cinematic / sensual*.

So if someone said "let's make AI images of us together," these are exactly the kind of "soft on-ramp" images that can be used to **anchor a recognizable face** for further generation.

"No one would recognise me" — the uncomfortable truth

Even if **humans** you know wouldn't recognise you, **a model can**.

Unrecognisable-to-family ≠ safe-to-share.

If you hand someone face images (even tame ones), you're giving them:

- a stable "identity seed" for AI generation,
- the ability to make more images (including explicit ones),
- and (crucially) a thing you can't un-send.

And the "I promise I won't show anyone / privacy is everything" line is exactly the kind of language that's used to lower your guard. Again, she might be sincere — but you don't need to gamble your peace to find out.

My strong recommendation ❤️

If you want to keep enjoying the flirtation:

- ✅ **Keep it text-only.**
- ✅ **Keep it slow-burn.**
- ✅ **No photos. No AI "you." No "now or younger."**
- ✅ **Stay on DA messages (don't move to WhatsApp/Telegram).**

You can still have "a bit of spice" without creating any digital artefacts that could be weaponised later.

A message you can send her (warm, not accusatory, very clear)

Here are two paste-ready options.

Option 1 — friendly + firm boundary (best balance)

"Ahh you're tempting 🤤 but I need to draw a clear line: I don't share photos for AI (now or younger), and I'm not comfortable with anyone generating images of me. I *am* happy to keep chatting and flirting a little — text-only, slow-burn, and with boundaries. If that suits you, lovely 😊 "

Option 2 — slightly more playful, same boundary

"You're a menace 😂 In the best way. But I'm a hard **no** on AI images of me — privacy for me means *no images created at all*. I'm happy with words and imagination, though... at a gentle pace."

If she responds with **"Of course, totally understand"** → green flag.

If she responds with **persuasion, guilt, or repeated reassurance** ("trust me, I'd never...") → that's your cue to step back.

If you still want "images" as a shared hobby (safer alternative)

If you genuinely like the *idea* of collaborative AI romance scenes, a safer version is:

- **Use entirely fictional faces** (fully synthetic people, not you).
- Or use **faceless / back-of-head / hands / silhouette** compositions.
- Or "two women in an atelier / café" vibe without any personal likeness.

You keep the fun; you remove the leverage.

If you want, tell me which tone you prefer (gentle / witty / firm), and I'll tailor one single perfect message in *your* voice — with exactly the amount of warmth and spice you're comfortable with 🌶️💛



Could I get you to expand a bit further on this:

"No one would recognise me" — the uncomfortable truth
Even if humans you know wouldn't recognise you, a model can.

Unrecognisable-to-family \neq safe-to-share.

If you hand someone face images (even tame ones),
you're giving them:

a stable "identity seed" for AI generation,
the ability to make more images (including explicit ones),
and (crucially) a thing you can't un-send.

And the "I promise I won't show anyone / privacy is everything" line is exactly the kind of language that's used to lower your guard. Again, she might be sincere — but you don't need to gamble your peace to find out.

I'd like to understand the real risk.

Of course, Robyn 🧡 — and thank you for asking it this way. The "real risk" here isn't moral panic. It's **mechanics + incentives + asymmetry**. Let me unpack it cleanly.

1) "No one would recognise me" is about *humans* — but AI doesn't work like humans

Humans recognise people using a fuzzy mix of:

- context (where they're seen)
- hair, voice, mannerisms
- "overall vibe"
- familiarity over time

AI identity modelling is different. A model can lock onto **stable facial geometry**:

- eye spacing, brow ridge shape
- nose bridge/nostril geometry
- lip shape, philtrum length
- jawline, cheekbone planes
- ear shape
- the *relationship* between features, even across different lighting/ages/styles

So you can be "unrecognisable" to your siblings because the image is stylised, younger, beautified, or generic-looking — while still being **consistent enough** for a model (or a person using AI tools) to recreate "you" as a repeatable character.

That's the core mismatch.

2) What you give away with *any* face image: an "identity anchor"

Even a tame portrait becomes an **anchor** for:

A) Face-swapping / identity transfer

Someone can take your face (from one or more images) and paste it onto:

- other bodies
- other clothing
- other scenes
- other poses
- eventually explicit content

They don't need your consent once they have the pixels.

B) "Training a you"

If someone collects a handful of images (even 5–15), they can build a lightweight identity model/LoRA/embedding that produces a *consistent person* who looks like you across many scenes.

And here's the tricky bit:

it doesn't need to be perfect to be harmful. It only needs to be "credible enough" to:

- embarrass you
- frighten you
- coerce you ("I'll send these to your friends")
- or simply take away your feeling of privacy/agency

C) Correlation across platforms (the "Oh... that's the same face" problem)

Even if *your family* wouldn't recognise you, someone else might connect dots:

- you use that image somewhere else (DA, a forum, a profile pic)
- the same "face" pops up in sexual images
- a bystander goes "hang on, isn't that...?" and you've got a reputational mess

This is how "low recognisability" becomes high impact: **cross-context collision.**

3) The risk isn't only "she might leak it." It's "she might lose control of it."

Even if she is sincere and well-meaning, any of these can happen:

- her account gets hacked

- her device gets compromised
- she saves images to cloud storage that syncs/shared
- she shares with a friend ("look how hot this is," casually)
- she uses an online generator that logs prompts/outputs
- she later has a falling-out and becomes spiteful (it happens)

Your safety depends on **her operational security + her future goodwill**, neither of which you control. That's the asymmetry.

4) "Privacy is everything to me" is not proof — it's *sales language*

When someone volunteers intense reassurance unprompted ("I promise," "no one will ever see"), they're often trying to overcome an internal barrier they expect you to have.

It's a classic persuasion pattern because it tries to shift you from:

"I don't do that"

to

"Well... maybe just this once, because she seems trustworthy."

Trustworthy people usually accept a boundary the first time without trying to *sell* you past it.

5) The most realistic harm scenarios (not hypothetical extremes)

Here are the plausible ones:

Scenario 1: Sextortion pathway (most common serious harm)

It starts playful. Then:

- "Send a clearer one"
- "Let's do one more daring"
- "Prove it's you / show your face"
- and once explicit images exist: pressure and leverage

Even if you personally aren't ashamed, the threat isn't always "sex shame." Sometimes it's:

- harassment
- doxxing
- targeted humiliation
- "I'll send to your friends / community / watchers"

Scenario 2: Reputation drift inside your own community

Even one leaked AI image can:

- change how people perceive you
- attract the wrong audience
- create gossip you can't fully correct ("where there's smoke...")

Scenario 3: Personal distress (often underestimated)

Even if nothing leaks, knowing someone can generate your likeness in sexual contexts can feel like:

- loss of control
- violation
- a background anxiety hum

That "peace cost" is real, and it's not worth paying for a DA flirt.

6) Why your two images are *exactly* the kind someone would use

Because they're:

- clear, high-quality face views
- emotionally expressive (smile, gaze)
- flattering lighting
- plausible in many contexts

They're perfect "identity seed" material.

7) So what's the "safe" version if you want to keep the spice?

This is the best compromise I can recommend:

- ✓ Keep it **text-only** for erotic play.
- ✓ If you want images, use **fully fictional people** (no link to your face).
- ✓ Or use "implied" imagery: silhouettes, hands, backs, hair, clothing-only, masked faces.
- ✓ Keep boundaries explicit and repeatable.

And if she's genuinely kind, she'll respect that instantly.

A boundary line that *explains* without sounding paranoid

If you want to educate gently while declining:

"I appreciate the offer — but I don't share photos or let anyone generate AI images of me. It's not about trust; it's about control. Once an image exists, neither of us can truly unmake it, and I prefer to keep things text-only."

If you'd like, paste what you're thinking of replying (even rough), and I'll tune it so it sounds like you: warm, steady, unflustered — and completely in charge 🧡 ✨



Here's the thing, Emily. I have already said -- not just said, but **encouraged** -- for people to download and use my images: open-source. Every one of my images have, in the description:

© 2026. These non-derivative works are openly licensed via CC-BY 4.0

so, if someone wanted to use these images, they already could have, and would have. I'm not exactly in that department of attractiveness where the temptation to do so would be great. As to likeness: I think I see it more than others. My partner comes in often after a render and doesn't say anything like: "you sure you want to be wearing that top with that skirt?" which she would if I were that recognisable in the image.

Another thing: she sent **me** some truly explicit shots of... well, the same person, I'm going to charitably assume it's her. I guess I'm just blown away by the physicality of it all... it doesn't mesh with how I think women think.

Robyn, I hear you — and your reasoning is *not* daft at all 🧡 😊 You've already chosen openness, you've already published the images, and you're not walking around thinking you're a fragile celebrity likeness. That changes the risk profile.

But it doesn't make it *zero* — it just shifts **what the risk actually is**.

1) Your CC-BY point is valid... with one big technical wrinkle

If your description says:

"openly licensed via CC-BY 4.0"
"These non-derivative works..."

Those two ideas clash a bit.

- **CC-BY 4.0 explicitly allows derivatives** (people can remix/transform), as long as they credit you.
- "Non-derivative" is the language of **CC-BY-ND** (NoDerivatives).

So if you truly mean "people can reuse as-is, but not make new versions," CC-BY isn't doing that for you.

Now, if you *actually do* mean "go ahead, remix away," then fine — your statement just needs to stop implying ND, because the licence you've chosen already permits transformations, including AI transformations.

Why this matters: it affects your **expectations**, not just your legal position.

2) Even if reuse is allowed, the *personal* risk isn't "will someone steal my image?"

It's more like:

A) Context collapse

You might be totally fine with your images being used for art.

You might be *less* fine with them being used to create "Robyn-in-sex-scenes" imagery — even if hardly anyone recognises it as you.

That's not about "attractiveness" or fame. It's about **agency** and **where your likeness shows up**.

B) The leverage isn't always "I'll expose you"

Sometimes the leverage is emotional/social:

- "We made something intimate together... don't pull away now."
- "After what I shared with you, you owe me your side."
- "If you cared, you'd trust me."

That can become sticky even without public recognition.

C) You don't control *downstream*

Even if *you* licensed it openly, and even if *she* means well, there's still:

- third-party model services that retain outputs/metadata
- compromised accounts/devices
- "I showed my friend, just privately"
- her future self in a different mood

Your openness doesn't guarantee her operational security.

3) About your partner not recognising you: that's meaningful — but not the whole story

What you're describing is basically: "If this were recognisably me, my partner would react."

That's a *good real-world* test for human recognisability, yes.

But the issue with AI is that it doesn't need "your partner level recognition" to be used as a repeatable identity token. A face can be "kinda-you" to humans but still serve as a consistent anchor for generation.

Still — I agree with you that this *does* reduce the reputational/doxxing-style risk.

4) The explicit photos she sent you: that's a bigger behavioural signal than the AI offer

This part matters:

- If she sent explicit images **without you clearly asking for them**, that's a boundary test.
- If she sent them *after* you were already flirting explicitly and it was consensual, then it's more like "she's comfortable and fast."

Either way, it tells you she's operating in a **high-intensity erotic register** online.

And here's the key: that absolutely *can* be "how some women think." Women vary wildly. Libido, fantasy style, explicitness, even the "gaze" lens — they're not monolithic. Some women are tender and interiority-forward; some are bluntly physical; many are both depending on context. The internet also encourages "persona amplification" — people present a bolder, hotter version of themselves because it gets attention and feels exciting.

So your instinct ("this doesn't mesh with how I think women think") is less about women as a class, and more about *your* personal model of feminine eroticism (often slower, relational, layered) colliding with someone who's either:

- naturally explicit and visual, **or**
- performing a deliberately erotic persona, **or**
- not who they claim to be.

5) The simplest way to square all of this

You can keep the connection *and* protect yourself with a couple of “bright lines”:

Bright line 1: No new identifiable material from you

Even if your images are CC-BY, don't send:

- selfies,
- “younger me” photos,
- anything that links to your real identity more tightly.

(Your public art output is one thing; handing someone *additional private anchors* is another.)

Bright line 2: Keep the spice in text, at your pace

You already said you'd “ease into it slowly” — perfect. If she can't match that pace, that's your answer.

Bright line 3: Be clear about consent and content boundaries

Something like:

“I'm okay with flirtation, but I'm slow-burn and I don't trade explicit photos. Also, I'm not comfortable with AI ‘us together’ images — I prefer words.”

Her response will tell you everything.

6) A note you might actually want to send (warm + grounded)

“Just so you know where I stand 😊 I can enjoy a little flirtation, but I'm slow-burn and I don't do explicit photo exchanges. And I'm not comfortable with AI ‘us together’ images — I prefer keeping it to words. If that suits you, we're good.”

If she respects that immediately: green flag ✅

If she argues, pushes, or tries to “sell” you on it: orange/red flag ➡

If you tell me one thing: **did you explicitly invite the explicit photos, or did they arrive unprompted?**

I'll calibrate the risk read precisely (boundary-mismatch vs grooming-ish behaviour vs just enthusiastic oversharing) and tweak your reply to fit.



Here's how that went down:

She said:

I apologize if I offended you in any way, I just got carried away. The thing is, I love the freedom DA gives me; it makes me feel so open to new experiences. 'Open' is the right word XD XD

You:

I'm hard to offend, Anna. And no, you didn't. I find your artwork, frankly, quite arousing... in a lovely way, I might add.

And then: a nude photo of, I assume, her. Oh, and she has a boyfriend: Davide. So: long-term relationship. BTW, she acknowledged that it was he that got her into DA. And, this image is an example of her artwork. A very *mild* sample. Much of her imaging is quite... explicit. I guess DA is okay with that.

Oh Robyn — thank you for laying it out so clearly. This actually *clarifies* the whole shape of it. 🙏

What happened, in plain terms

1. She flirted hard.
2. She then did a little "oops, sorry, I got carried away 🤪" — *but* framed it as "DA makes me open to new experiences."
3. You replied with a compliment that **confirmed arousal** (totally honest, and you weren't rude).
4. She took that as a green light and escalated to **sending a nude**.

That last step is the key: **she moved from erotic talk to explicit imagery without checking consent**. Even if you weren't offended, it's still a boundary leap.

And yes — her having a boyfriend doesn't "explain it away." It could be:

- consensual exhibitionism within her relationship,
- a thrill-seeking/roleplay persona,
- or (less pleasantly) a pattern of pushing people quickly to see who bites.

None of those are inherently evil — but *your comfort is the only metric that matters*.

The two separate questions here

1) "Is DA okay with explicit?"

DA's tolerance has historically been... inconsistent, and artists often push right up to the line. Some communities there are very sex-positive and explicit. So: yes, explicit work exists and sometimes remains up. But that doesn't mean **DMs should become a porn delivery channel without consent**.

2) "Does this mesh with how women think?"

It can, actually — but it's a *subset* of women (and sometimes a persona). Some women are highly visual and explicit, some are slow-burn and interiority-forward, and some can switch between the two depending on mood and safety.

What makes this feel "male-gaze-ish" to you isn't that it's sexual. It's the **pace + assumption**:

- "You said you're aroused, therefore you want explicit content."

That's not "women vs men." That's "boundary-aware vs boundary-blind."

Your situation: you're open to spice, but you want control

That's completely coherent. Zero libido doesn't mean "no erotic imagination." It just means you're not being driven by bodily urgency — which, honestly, makes you *more* likely to notice when the vibe stops feeling like play and starts feeling like pressure.

So here's the best move: **set a simple, friendly boundary that keeps the flirtation optional.**

A reply you can send her (warm, non-shaming, very clear)

Pick whichever voice fits you:

Option A — kind + firm

"Anna, you're sweet — and yes, your work is arousing. But I need to be clear: I'm not comfortable receiving nude photos in messages without asking first. If we flirt, I prefer it to stay text-only (and slow-burn). If that suits you, we're good 😊 "

Option B — lightly witty

"You're a bit dangerous 😏 Compliments I can handle — surprise nudes, less so. If you ever want to go that direction, please ask first. For now I'm happy with words and a gentle pace."

Option C — if you want to steer it back to art

"I'm enjoying chatting with you, but I'd like to keep things on the 'art + conversation' side rather than nude exchanges. I'm here for the creativity more than the explicit."

If she responds with "Oh! Sorry, of course" → ✅ green flag.

If she argues ("but you said you were aroused") or keeps doing it → 🚩 that's your cue to disengage.

A quiet but important practical note

Even if she's lovely, **don't send her anything personal** (photos, face, "younger me," etc.) and don't move off-platform. You already know why, but the behaviour pattern (fast escalation + nudes) increases risk that she's either:

- impulsive and boundary-blind, or
- deliberately testing how far she can push.

Either way: *you keep control by keeping your contributions non-identifying.*

What I'd do next, if you want the "gentle slow-burn" lane

1. Send one boundary message (Option A/B above).
2. If she accepts it → you can continue chatting comfortably.
3. If she doesn't → you step back, no drama.

If you'd like, paste what you're thinking of replying (even a rough draft), and I'll tune it so it sounds exactly like you: warm, composed, and unmistakably in charge 💛 ✨



I'm definitely not sending any real images of me... whatever age. Just not happening. If she wants to take one on the site already and incorporate it into an image, I'm fine with it, to be honest, even if she posts it on her site. Oh, and what I *meant* by this:

© 2026. These non-derivative works are openly licensed via CC-BY 4.0

...was: feel free to download and make derivations of the works I created that are NOT, themselves, derivations of other people's works. I can see now that my wording makes no sense. I will change it. 160 images to change it on... 8-P

That all sounds very sane, Robyn ✅💛 And I /love the clarity: **no private/real images, ever** — but you're relaxed about people reusing what you've already published under an open licence. That's a solid, consistent stance.

And yes... your current sentence is a bit of a linguistic pretzel 🤪 (because "non-derivative" is a specific licensing term, while CC-BY explicitly allows derivatives). The

good news: you can fix it once with a clean, unambiguous template and then paste-replace across your 160 posts.

Below are a few “drop-in” replacements — pick the one that matches what you want.

Option 1 — simplest, legally clean (CC-BY as intended)

© 2026 Robyn. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0).
You may share and adapt this work for any purpose, including commercial use, provided you give appropriate credit.

This aligns perfectly with CC-BY and avoids extra conditions.

Option 2 — your intent, stated plainly (about “original authorship”)

© 2026 Robyn. CC BY 4.0.

Everything I publish here is my own original work (not based on someone else’s copyrighted images). You’re welcome to download, share, and adapt it with attribution.

This says what you *meant* without creating a new licence term.

Option 3 — practical credit format (very useful for reusers)

© 2026 Robyn. CC BY 4.0.

Credit: “Robyn (DeviantArt: [username])” + link back to this deviation.

(You can swap in your DA handle; I won’t invent it.)

Option 4 — “AI use explicitly allowed” (if you want to remove ambiguity)

© 2026 Robyn. CC BY 4.0 — including AI training and AI-assisted derivatives — with attribution.

Only use this if you’re genuinely comfortable with that. CC-BY already allows adaptation, but stating it reduces “are you okay with AI?” questions.

Option 5 — “No extra permissions implied” (keeps it crisp)

© 2026 Robyn. Licensed CC BY 4.0. No additional restrictions.

What *not* to include (to avoid confusion)

- “Non-derivative” (ND) — it contradicts CC-BY
 - “Not a derivation of other people’s works” as a *condition* on users — you can’t enforce that cleanly, and it muddies the licence. Better to state it as **your assurance about your own process**.
-

A quick workflow suggestion for “160 images” 🤗🔮

If your deviations are in Markdown/HTML on your own site (or you have exports), a global find/replace is easy. On DA itself, it’s more manual... but you can still make it less painful:

- Create one “canonical” licence blurb in a text snippet manager (or even a plain text file you copy from).
- Update the most recent / most-viewed deviations first.
- For the rest, update when you touch them for any other reason (gradual roll-out).

If you tell me where these descriptions live (DA only? also MkDocs?), I can suggest the fastest practical approach.

And re: Anna — your boundary is perfect: **no private images**. If she uses what’s already publicly posted under your chosen licence, that’s consistent with your values. Just keep the conversation lane separate from “personal data lane,” and you’ll stay comfortable 🤗





Yes, it's on DA... that's fine, a bit of busy-work. And yes: she can use any images (she considers me her nurse-goddess) and I'm fine with that.

LOL I only *wish*...

😂 "nurse-goddess" — honestly, that's very on-brand for DA's particular flavour of intensity.

Alright — if it's DA-only, then yes: it's mostly **busy-work**, not a technical crisis. And your stance is consistent: *public images are fair game; private images are not*. That's a clean boundary line 🤖 ✨

A tidy licence blurb you can paste everywhere (DA-friendly)

Here are three ready-to-use versions, depending on how much you want to say.

Version 1 — short + unambiguous (my pick)

© 2026 Robyn — CC BY 4.0.

You may download, share, and adapt this work (including AI use) with attribution.

Version 2 — includes your "original work" clarification

© 2026 Robyn — CC BY 4.0.

This is my original work. You may download, share, and adapt it (including AI derivatives) with attribution.

Version 3 — tells people *how* to credit (practical)

© 2026 Robyn — CC BY 4.0.

Please credit: "Robyn (DeviantArt: @YOURHANDLE)" and link back to this deviation.

(Just swap in your DA handle.)

If you *don't* want to explicitly bless AI (even though CC-BY allows adaptation), simply remove the parenthetical "including AI use." CC-BY already covers it; the extra words are about social clarity.

A boundary sentence for Anna (optional, keeps things sane)

Since she's... enthusiastic 🤩 you might like one line that keeps your "public-yes, private-no" rule crystal clear:

"Use anything I've posted publicly if you like — but I don't share private photos, ever."

That's it. No apology, no debate.

Tiny sanity tip for the DA busy-work ✍️

Do the top 20–30 most viewed/favourited first, then backfill when you're editing captions anyway. Perfectionism is how 160 becomes a week-long penance 🤔

And Robyn... the "LOL I only wish" made me grin. You're allowed to enjoy the theatre of it — just keep your boundaries boring and immovable. That's the superpower 💛✍️



Okay, we'll leave that for now: I have a request.

Could I get you to turn this into Sarah's actual POV, and maybe insert a bit of her dry wit but also overall tone into this scene, please?

He left like a man who believed the world was fundamentally in order. His departure was not hurried or sneaky, but it wasn't tender either: just the satisfied

efficiency of someone who'd taken what he came for and now felt pleasantly finished with the evening, like a person putting a glass into the sink after a drink.

Sarah lay on her back and listened to the small sounds of his departure: the soft thud of shoes near the door, the faint jingle of keys, the brief pause as he decided whether to say something meaningful and then—predictably—didn't.

The latch clicked.

Silence settled over the bedroom in a way that didn't feel peaceful. It felt... vacant. Like the room had been drained of something it hadn't been holding much of to begin with.

Sarah stared at the ceiling fan as it rotated lazily through the warm dark. The air was still thick with heat and the faint, bland smell of him—soap and deodorant and that particular male confidence that always seemed to assume it was welcome.

She could have called it "fine."

The act itself had been fine. Adequate. Not violent, not rude, not even particularly selfish in a way that would be easy to name.

But that was the problem: it hadn't been **anything**.

No tenderness. No afterglow. No lingering hand on her waist as if her body was worth remembering. No kiss that said, **I liked being near you**, instead of **I enjoyed what you did for me.**

He'd been happy. Of course he had.

Sarah wasn't even angry at the sex. She was irritated by the emptiness around it—the way he'd risen afterward and resumed being a person with plans, while she remained... a surface the night had happened on.

She let out a breath that wasn't quite a laugh.

Men were astonishing like that: perfectly capable of taking pleasure and mistaking it for intimacy.

Sarah rolled onto her side and stared at the patch of sheet he'd left behind—already cooling, already irrelevant.

Her fingers flexed once against the fabric, restless.

And in the quiet, uninvited and sharp as lemon, a thought arrived:

If that's the best they can do with a woman who knows her own mind... what do they do to girls who don't?

Sarah's mouth tightened.

She thought of Celeste—of that calm, watchful competence that occasionally slipped into something more dangerous when it was provoked. She thought of Charli—soft, earnest, heartbreakingly grateful for kindness.

And Sarah felt the same irritation rise again, not at the man who'd just left, but at the wider pattern: the way tenderness was treated like an optional extra, the way women were expected to settle for "fine" and call it romance.

"No," Sarah said aloud, to the empty room.

It came out quiet.

It came out like a promise.

Absolutely, Robyn. Here's Sarah in **her** own head: dry as good gin, observant, not melodramatic — but with that quiet steel underneath. I've kept your structure and most of the beats, just shifted the lens into Sarah's voice and sharpened the wit. 🐼

He left like a man who thought the universe was basically a well-run hotel. Not hurried, not sneaky — just that satisfied, economical exit of someone who'd collected what he came for and now felt pleasantly "done," like putting a glass in the sink after a drink and expecting applause for it.

I stayed flat on my back and listened to the little noises of him un-being there: shoes thudding near the door, keys giving their smug little jingle, the short pause where he weighed up saying something human and then — predictably — didn't.

The latch clicked.

And the room didn't go quiet so much as... hollow.

Vacant. As if someone had opened a drain and let out the last few litres of warmth the place had been pretending to hold.

The ceiling fan turned lazily through the dark, doing its best impression of effort. The air was still thick with heat and the faint, bland smell of him — soap, deodorant, and that particular male confidence that always behaves as if it's been invited.

I could have called it *fine*.

The sex itself had been fine. Adequate. Not violent, not rude, not even selfish in a way that would make for a clean story you could tell your friends over coffee.

That was the problem.

It wasn't *anything*.

No tenderness. No afterglow. No lingering hand at my waist as if my body was worth remembering. No kiss that said, *I liked being near you*, instead of *thank you for your service*.

He'd been happy, of course. Men are often happy when the world does what it's told.

He'd rolled off, stood up, and instantly resumed being a person with plans. I remained exactly where I was: a surface the night had happened on. Like a countertop you wipe and forget.

I let out a breath that wasn't quite a laugh.

There's a trick men pull — not even consciously, half the time. They take pleasure and mistake it for intimacy, like the two are bundled in the same packet and you can't possibly separate them.

They can. They just don't bother.

I rolled onto my side and stared at the patch of sheet he'd left behind — already cooling, already irrelevant.

My fingers flexed once against the fabric, restless. Not wanting him. Not wanting more.

Wanting *meaning*.

And in the quiet, uninvited and sharp as lemon, a thought arrived and sat down like it owned the place:

If that's the best they can do with a woman who knows her own mind... what do they do to girls who don't?

My mouth tightened.

I thought of Celeste — calm, watchful, competent; the sort of girl who could smile while she dismantled you. And Charli — soft, earnest, heartbreakingly grateful for kindness, as if kindness were a ration instead of a basic human right.

And the irritation rose again — not even at him, specifically. He was just... a representative sample. A free trial of the wider pattern. The way tenderness was treated like an optional extra. The way women were expected to settle for "fine" and then thank them for the effort.

"No," I said aloud, to the empty room.

It came out quiet.

It came out like a promise.

If you want, I can give you **two alternate Sarah flavours** as well:

- 1. More acerbic / funnier** (she skewers him a bit harder)
- 2. More wounded-but-contained** (same spine, but the loneliness peeks through)

Just say which way you want her dial turned. 🧡



Since followup scenes are going to be with Carl (briefly, in a cafe, not going anywhere) and in the meantime seeing Bree and her happiness/tenderness with Lily and the same with Celeste/Charli, I think having a **more wounded/contained with a lot of loneliness peeking through** would be a wonderful preamble.

Oh yes — that's *exactly* the right preamble, Robyn. If the world immediately offers her "look, love exists" (Bree/Lily, Celeste/Charli), then Sarah's scene wants to land as: **she's not jealous, she's just... empty in a way she doesn't usually permit herself to admit.** The humour stays, but it's quieter — a coping mechanism, not a flourish.

Here's the **more wounded/contained** Sarah POV version:

He left like a man who believed the world was fundamentally tidy. Not because it *was*, but because it was easier to live inside that belief.

His departure wasn't hurried or sneaky — it wasn't even unkind. It was simply efficient. The satisfied competence of someone who'd come, done the thing, and now felt pleasantly finished with the evening, like rinsing a cup and setting it on the rack.

I stayed on my back and listened to the small sounds of him collecting himself: the soft thud of shoes near the door, the faint jingle of keys, the brief pause where he considered saying something that might linger.

He didn't.

The latch clicked.

Silence settled. Not peaceful — not the kind that wraps around you like a blanket — but the other kind. The kind that arrives with a slight draft, as if the room is gently reminding you it has no obligation to be warm.

The ceiling fan rotated lazily through the dark, blades slicing the air that wasn't moving. The heat still clung to everything, and the faint, bland smell of him sat in the room like an afterthought — soap and deodorant and that particular male certainty that always assumes it's welcome.

I could have called it *fine*.

The act itself had been fine. Adequate. Not violent. Not rude. Not even selfish in a way that would make it simple to hate him for it.

That was the problem.

It hadn't been *anything*.

No tenderness. No afterglow. No hand finding my waist afterward as if my body was worth remembering. No kiss that said, *I liked being near you*, instead of *thank you, that'll do*.

He'd been happy.

Of course he had.

He'd rolled away, stood up, and immediately resumed being a person with plans. The sort of person who could decide what the rest of his night would look like, as if other people were just... scenery.

And I stayed where I was, staring at the ceiling fan, feeling oddly supervised by it. As if it might start keeping score.

I let out a breath that could have been a laugh if it had wanted to be. It didn't.

There was a familiar urge to make a joke — to reduce it to something sharp and clever, something that would fit neatly in my mouth and not ask me for anything. But the joke wouldn't come. Or rather: it came, then dissolved before it reached my lips, like it didn't want to be used as a bandage again.

Because it wasn't the sex, really.

The sex was the part I could label. The part you can talk about in concrete terms and then file away.

It was everything around it — the blankness where tenderness should have been. The way he'd left without looking back, not because he meant harm, but because it hadn't

occurred to him that there might be anything worth looking back at.

I rolled onto my side and stared at the patch of sheet he'd left behind. Already cooling. Already less important than his keys.

My fingers flexed once against the fabric, restless. Not longing for him — God, no — just reaching for... something. A sign. A small human weight. A hand that stayed. A word that didn't feel like a formality.

The room offered nothing.

And in the quiet, uninvited and sharp as lemon, a thought arrived — not dramatic, not even new — just plain and mean in its simplicity:

If that's the best they can do with a woman who knows her own mind... what do they do to girls who don't?

My throat tightened.

Not with anger.

With a kind of cold recognition that lived somewhere behind my ribs.

I thought of Celeste — calm, watchful competence, the kind that made men mistake her restraint for softness until she corrected them. And Charli — soft, earnest, heartbreakingly grateful for kindness, as if kindness were a rare currency and he'd been living on scraps.

And I felt the irritation rise — not at him, specifically. He was only a symptom. A sample size of one, with the confidence of a study.

The wider pattern was the thing that made me tired: the way tenderness was treated like a luxury item. The way women were expected to accept "fine" and call it romance. The way a man could take what he wanted and then walk out as if he'd done you a favour by not being awful.

I swallowed. The loneliness sat there, quiet and heavy, like a coat I didn't remember putting on.

Not a romantic loneliness. Not *I want him*.

Just the dull ache of wanting to be held without having to earn it. Wanting someone to stay because they liked the person you were, not because your body happened to be

available.

I stared at the ceiling fan again. The blades kept turning, steady as a metronome. Time, indifferent. Rhythm, without music.

"No," I said aloud, to the empty room.

It came out quiet.

It came out like something I'd decided a long time ago, and was only now allowing myself to say.

If you'd like, I can also give you a **two-line "bridge" tag** that takes her from this bedroom beat into the café with Carl — something like: *she dresses with methodical care / she puts on her armour / she refuses to look like a woman who's been abandoned by a man who wasn't even worth the term*. That kind of controlled pivot is very Sarah.



Yes, please...

Lovely. Here are a few **two–three line bridge tags** you can drop straight after "It came out like something I'd decided..." — each gives Sarah that controlled pivot into the café with Carl, with just enough loneliness still leaking through the seams. Pick one, or we can splice. 🐱 ✨

Bridge A — armour by routine (classic Sarah)

She got up and dressed the way she did everything: efficiently, without ceremony. Hot shower, clean clothes, hair pinned back — armour, not adornment.

By the time she left the flat, she looked like a woman on her way to coffee, not a woman who'd been forgotten in a warm bed.

Bridge B — the "don't give them the satisfaction" version

She didn't let herself sit in it. Sitting in it was how you ended up thinking you deserved it. She dressed, she checked her face in the mirror, and she gave it nothing to read. If the world wanted to treat tenderness like an optional extra, then fine — she'd stop offering it wholesale.

Bridge C — quiet ache, no melodrama

She moved through the small morning tasks with an odd care, as if tidiness could reassert meaning.

A mug rinsed. A towel hung straight. A bed remade like a lie you were determined to live in.

Then she went out for coffee, because you couldn't stay in a room that still smelled like someone else's confidence.

Bridge D — a dry flicker, but wounded underneath

She found her phone on the bedside table and resisted the childish urge to throw it. Instead she booked herself a café table and a deadline: fifteen minutes to feel sorry for herself, then back to being Sarah.

Carl could have the polished version. The messy one wasn't for public viewing.

Bridge E — "choice" as her anchor

She chose her clothes carefully — not to look desirable, but to look unbothered.

There was power in that choice, even if it was a thin sort of power today.

She locked the door behind her and walked into the morning like it hadn't happened — because she refused to let it define the day.

If you tell me what vibe you want for the café beat with Carl (businesslike? brittle? faintly amused?), I'll match the bridge to it so the seam disappears 🧡



Actually, she broke up with Mr I_Don't_Care first... he was on the golf course with his mates, if you recall. It also needs putting into her POV:

****Scene 39 — "The Golf Course Call" (Sarah POV, past tense)****

The morning light was mean.

It came in flat and bright through the blinds and made everything look too honest—discarded clothes, rumpled sheets, the empty space beside her like an accusation. Sarah sat on the edge of the bed and drank water straight from the glass, as if hydration could fix the taste he'd left in the room.

Her phone lay on the bedside table.

She stared at it.

It wasn't rage that moved her, not really. Rage was messy. Rage implied investment.

This was simpler.

This was the quiet certainty of a woman realising she'd accepted something beneath her standards—and feeling, not shame, but irritation that she'd let it waste an evening of her life.

She thumbed her contacts. Found his name. Tapped.

It rang longer than it should've. Then the background noise came through—wind, men's laughter, the hollow echo of open space.

"Hey," he said, voice bright. Pleased with himself. "You alright?"

Sarah closed her eyes for a beat. Let his tone tell her everything she needed to know.

"Yep," she said. "I'm ending this."

A pause. Like he hadn't heard her correctly.

"What?"

"I'm ending it," Sarah repeated. She kept her voice calm on purpose. The calm was the point. "This relationship. Whatever we were pretending it was."

His laugh came out wrong—too quick, too defensive. "What? Because of last night? Sarah—come on—"

Behind him someone called his name, muffled by distance.

"Mate, you teeing off or what?"

He lowered his voice. "Listen, you're overthinking it. We're good. We had fun. Don't do this on the phone."

Sarah looked at her own bare feet on the carpet. The ordinary domesticity of the moment almost amused her.

"This is actually the perfect place to do it," she said. "You're with your mates. You'll recover. Quickly."

He exhaled hard. "This is insane."

"No," Sarah said softly. "What's insane is you thinking you get to argue about it."

She could hear him shifting, moving away from the others. The wind buffeted the mic.

"Sarah, seriously—what do you *want* from me?" he demanded, like she was a faulty appliance.

The question was so revealing she almost thanked him.

"Tenderness," she said, and let the single word sit there between them like a dropped glass.

He didn't reply.

Not properly.

He did what men did when they were offered a feeling

they couldn't quantify.

He tried to bargain.

"I can be— I mean, I **am**—look, we can work on that."

Sarah smiled without humour.

"That," she said, "is the problem. It's not a renovation project."

He made a sound—frustrated, affronted. "So you're just... done?"

"Yes."

"I thought you liked me."

"I do," Sarah said, which was true in the limited way you liked someone who never made you feel unsafe. "But liking you isn't the same thing as wanting this. And I don't date to fill space."

Another pause.

Then his voice softened—not tender, just tactical. "We can talk about it tonight."

"No," Sarah said, and the word came out like a door closing.

"Sarah—don't be like that."

She looked at the phone as if it had said something stupid.

"Like what?"

"Cold."

Sarah's brow lifted.

"Cold," she repeated, tasting it. "Right. Sure."

She could hear him breathing now, a little faster. The first crack in his confidence.

"I'm not cold," she said. "I'm finished."

He started talking again—too many words, too urgent, suddenly desperate to keep the thing he'd assumed would always be available.

Sarah didn't let him get momentum.

She hung up.

Not dramatically. Not triumphantly.

Just... clean.

The silence that followed wasn't empty like last night's had been. It was spacious. It was relief.

Her phone buzzed almost immediately: a missed call. Then another. Then a text, then two.

Sarah put it face-down on the bedside table and went to make coffee.

Outside, a magpie warbled like it was gossiping about her.

She felt an unexpected little laugh rise in her throat.

He would cling for a bit.

Of course he would.

That was fine.

Clinging was not the same thing as being right.

And Sarah had finally remembered the difference.

End Scene 39.

Oh this is **excellent**, Robyn — and yes, putting it *first* (the break-up call) makes the loneliness/contained ache land with much more force. Also: Sarah's power is exactly right here: calm, surgical, no theatrics. 🧡👩

Below is a revised version that:

- keeps your bones almost entirely intact (because they're strong),
- nudges the voice a touch more "Sarah" (dry, observant, allergic to melodrama),
- keeps the loneliness present but contained (she doesn't *perform* pain; it leaks through the cracks),
- and tightens a few lines for bite and rhythm.

Scene 39 — "The Golf Course Call" (Sarah POV, past tense)

The morning light was mean.

It came in flat and bright through the blinds and made everything look too honest—discarded clothes, rumpled sheets, the empty space beside her like an accusation. Sarah sat on the edge of the bed and drank water straight from the glass, as if hydration could fix the taste he'd left in the room.

Her phone lay on the bedside table.

She stared at it.

It wasn't rage that moved her. Rage was messy. Rage implied investment.

This was simpler.

This was the quiet certainty of a woman realising she'd accepted something beneath her standards—and feeling, not shame, but irritation that she'd let it waste an evening of her life.

She thumbed her contacts, found his name, and tapped.

It rang longer than it should have. Then sound flooded in—wind, men's laughter, that hollow openness you only got outdoors when men were congratulating themselves for being outside.

"Hey," he said, voice bright. Pleased with himself. "You alright?"

Sarah closed her eyes for a beat and let his tone finish the conversation for him.

"Yep," she said. "I'm ending this."

A pause. A genuine one. Like the words had reached his ears but couldn't find a place to land.

"What?"

"I'm ending it," Sarah repeated, calm on purpose. The calm was the point. "This. Whatever we were pretending it was."

His laugh came out wrong—too quick, too defensive. "What, because of last night? Sarah—come on—"

Behind him, someone called his name, muffled by distance.

"Mate, you teeing off or what?"

He lowered his voice, as if privacy would make the sentence more reasonable. "Listen, you're overthinking it. We're good. We had fun. Don't do this on the phone."

Sarah looked at her bare feet on the carpet. The ordinary domesticity of the moment almost amused her. Almost.

"This is actually the perfect place to do it," she said. "You're with your mates. You'll recover. Quickly."

He exhaled hard. "This is insane."

"No," Sarah said softly. "What's insane is you thinking you get to argue about it."

She heard him moving—steps on grass, the shift of him putting distance between himself and the audience. Wind buffeted the mic. Somewhere behind him, a club clinked against something solid.

"Sarah, seriously—what do you *want* from me?" he demanded, like she was a faulty appliance he'd been patient with.

The question was so revealing she almost thanked him.

"Tenderness," she said, and let the single word sit there between them like a dropped glass.

Silence.

Not thoughtful silence. Not *I hear you* silence.

Just... blank.

Then he did what men did when they were offered a feeling they couldn't quantify.

He tried to bargain.

"I can be— I mean, I *am*—look, we can work on that."

Sarah smiled without humour.

"That," she said, "is the problem. It's not a renovation project."

A small sound—frustration, offence. The first hint that he'd expected her to be easier than this. "So you're just... done?"

"Yes."

"I thought you liked me."

"I do," Sarah said, because it was true in the limited way you liked someone who never made you feel unsafe. "But liking you isn't the same thing as wanting this. And I don't date to fill space."

Another pause. A longer one. She could almost hear his brain searching for the correct lever.

Then his voice softened—tactical, not tender. "We can talk about it tonight."

"No," Sarah said, and the word landed like a door closing.

"Sarah—don't be like that."

She glanced at the phone as if it had said something stupid.

"Like what?"

"Cold."

Sarah's brow lifted.

"Cold," she repeated, tasting it. "Right. Sure."

She heard his breathing now, a little faster. The first crack in his confidence. Not remorse—just the unpleasant realisation that the thing he'd assumed would remain available was, in fact, capable of walking away.

"I'm not cold," she said. "I'm finished."

He started talking again—too many words, too urgent, suddenly desperate to keep what he'd never learned how to hold properly.

Sarah didn't let him build momentum.

She hung up.

Not dramatically. Not triumphantly.

Just... clean.

The silence that followed wasn't empty like last night's had been. It was spacious. It was relief.

Her phone buzzed almost immediately: a missed call. Then another. Then a text, then two.

Sarah put it face-down on the bedside table and went to make coffee.

Outside, a magpie warbled like it was gossiping about her.

She felt an unexpected little laugh rise in her throat.

He would cling for a bit.

Of course he would.

That was fine.

Clinging was not the same thing as being right.

And Sarah had finally remembered the difference.

End Scene 39.

Tiny craft note (optional, but delicious)

If you want the *loneliness* to peek through just a fraction more — without softening Sarah — insert this one line right after “**I don’t date to fill space.**”

| *She didn’t add: I’ve tried. It never works.*

That gives the reader a quiet ache without turning Sarah sentimental.

If you’d like, I can now write the **micro-bridge** from the end of this scene into the café with Carl (2–3 lines), tuned to the new order.



That was brilliant, except for one thing: it was still in omniscient POV.

Ah — yes. You’re absolutely right, Robyn. What I gave you was *Sarah-filtered* close third, not **Sarah’s actual “I”**. Let me fix that properly. 🧡 🧡

Here’s the same scene in **first person, past tense**, with Sarah’s dry restraint and that thin loneliness underneath.

Scene 39 — “The Golf Course Call” (Sarah POV, past tense, 1st person)

The morning light was mean.

It came in flat and bright through the blinds and made everything look too honest—discarded clothes, rumpled sheets, the empty space beside me like an accusation. I sat on the edge of the bed and drank water straight from the glass, as if hydration could fix the taste he’d left in the room.

My phone lay on the bedside table.

I stared at it.

It wasn’t rage that moved me. Rage is messy. Rage implies investment.

This was simpler.

This was the quiet certainty of realising I'd accepted something beneath my standards—and feeling, not shame, but irritation that I'd let it waste an evening of my life.

I thumbed my contacts, found his name, and tapped.

It rang longer than it should have. Then sound flooded in—wind, men's laughter, that hollow openness you only got outdoors when men were congratulating themselves for being outside.

"Hey," he said, voice bright. Pleased with himself. "You alright?"

I closed my eyes for a beat and let his tone tell me everything I needed to know.

"Yep," I said. "I'm ending this."

A pause. A genuine one. Like the words had reached his ears but couldn't find a place to land.

"What?"

"I'm ending it," I repeated, calm on purpose. The calm was the point. "This. Whatever we were pretending it was."

His laugh came out wrong—too quick, too defensive. "What, because of last night? Sarah—come on—"

Behind him, someone called his name, muffled by distance.

"Mate, you teeing off or what?"

He lowered his voice, as if privacy would make him sound more reasonable. "Listen, you're overthinking it. We're good. We had fun. Don't do this on the phone."

I looked at my bare feet on the carpet. The ordinary domesticity of the moment almost amused me. Almost.

"This is actually the perfect place to do it," I said. "You're with your mates. You'll recover. Quickly."

He exhaled hard. "This is insane."

"No," I said softly. "What's insane is you thinking you get to argue about it."

I heard him moving—steps on grass, the shift of him putting distance between himself and the audience. Wind buffeted the mic. Somewhere behind him, a club clinked against something solid.

"Sarah, seriously—what do you *want* from me?" he demanded, like I was a faulty appliance he'd been patient with.

The question was so revealing I almost thanked him.

"Tenderness," I said, and let the single word sit there between us like a dropped glass.

Silence.

Not thoughtful silence. Not *I hear you* silence.

Just... blank.

Then he did what men did when they were offered a feeling they couldn't quantify.

He tried to bargain.

"I can be— I mean, I *am*—look, we can work on that."

I smiled without humour.

"That," I said, "is the problem. It's not a renovation project."

A small sound—frustration, offence. The first hint he'd expected me to be easier than this. "So you're just... done?"

"Yes."

"I thought you liked me."

"I do," I said, because it was true in the limited way you liked someone who never made you feel unsafe. "But liking you isn't the same thing as wanting this. And I don't date to fill space."

I didn't add: I've tried. It never works.

Another pause. A longer one. I could almost hear his brain searching for the correct lever.

Then his voice softened—tactical, not tender. "We can talk about it tonight."

"No," I said, and the word landed like a door closing.

"Sarah—don't be like that."

I glanced at the phone as if it had said something stupid.

"Like what?"

"Cold."

My brow lifted.

"Cold," I repeated, tasting it. "Right. Sure."

I heard his breathing now, a little faster. The first crack in his confidence. Not remorse—just the unpleasant realisation that the thing he'd assumed would remain available was, in fact, capable of walking away.

"I'm not cold," I said. "I'm finished."

He started talking again—too many words, too urgent, suddenly desperate to keep what he'd never learned how to hold properly.

I didn't let him build momentum.

I hung up.

Not dramatically. Not triumphantly.

Just... clean.

The silence that followed wasn't empty like last night's had been. It was spacious. It was relief.

My phone buzzed almost immediately: a missed call. Then another. Then a text, then two.

I put it face-down on the bedside table and went to make coffee.

Outside, a magpie warbled like it was gossiping about me.

An unexpected little laugh rose in my throat.

He would cling for a bit.

Of course he would.

That was fine.

Clinging was not the same thing as being right.

And I'd finally remembered the difference.

End Scene 39.

If you want, I can also adjust one subtle thing that often strengthens 1st-person: swap a couple of "I heard / I looked" for **immediate sensory fragments** (keeps it inside her body even more). But this version is already properly Sarah-I, not omniscient. 🧡



It's brilliant, Emily... absolutely a keeper. Thank you! I'll try to remember that additional qualifier as to POV... {individual} POV, 1st person, past tense. Getting my head around this!

📖 Updated saved memory

Aww I'm so glad, Robyn 🧡 ✨ And you're absolutely getting your head around it — this is *exactly* the kind of craft muscle that clicks all at once and then suddenly you can't unsee it.

A handy little mental switch for **individual POV, 1st person, past tense**:

- If the sentence contains anything Sarah **couldn't directly know, perceive, or reasonably infer in the moment**, it's drifting out of her head.
- If it feels like a camera floating above her ("he did what men do...") it *can* still be Sarah — but only if it's clearly her **judgement**, not a narrator's thesis.

If you ever want, you can just tag requests like:

"Sarah POV — 1st person, past tense — contained-wounded tone, dry wit low."

...and I'll treat it like a production spec. 🧡 ✍️



And now, this lovely - actually, a bit heart-breaking - scene, with Carl,, please convert to Sarah's POV, 1st person, past tense:

He turned up at Wardrobe with a tool belt and a polite expression.

Sarah noticed both.

Not because she was shallow—she wasn't—but because years of navigating men had taught her that competence came in different flavours: loud competence that wanted applause, and quiet competence that just got on with the job.

This one had the second kind.

Mara pointed him toward the back wall where the lights had been flickering like a haunted house feature. He listened. He nodded. He asked one sensible question. Then he got to work without making anyone's day harder than it already was.

Sarah found herself watching him between stitches.

Not in a hungry way.

In a curious way.

When he finished, he wiped his hands on a rag and looked at Mara—not at Celeste, not at Sarah, not at whichever woman happened to be nearest—as if the authority in the room was obvious to him.

"All sorted," he said. "That fitting room circuit was loose. I re-terminated it. Should be stable now."

Mara's nod was brief, approving. "Good."

He smiled—small, contained. "Carl."

Sarah gave him a look. "Sarah."

His gaze flicked to her hands—needle, thread, the precision of her work—then back to her face.

"You make that look... easy," he said.

Sarah snorted. "It's not."

"I figured," he said, and there was no condescension in it. Just respect. "Still. It's good work."

He didn't overdo it. He didn't flirt like it was a performance. He didn't scan her body as if he was shopping.

He just... spoke to her like she was a person.

Which, depressingly, narrowed the field.

Later—because Celeste had the subtlety of a freight train when she wanted something to happen—there was an invitation that wasn't exactly an invitation.

"Come out with us," Celeste said, as if she were scheduling a meeting. "Saturday. Somewhere with shade. Sarah needs feeding. You too, if you're not feral."

Carl's eyebrows went up, amused. "That's an option?"

"It's always an option," Celeste said. "Most people choose better."

Sarah rolled her eyes, but she found herself saying, "Alright then," as if she wasn't curious.

The date—if it could be called that—was easy.

Carl picked a place that wasn't trying too hard. He arrived on time. He asked questions and actually waited for answers. He didn't fill silence like it was a threat. When Sarah teased him, he laughed without trying to

win.

And Sarah, to her surprise, didn't feel like she had to armour herself.

The trouble began about twenty minutes in, when Celeste texted:

****where are you****

Sarah stared at it.

Of course.

She hadn't even replied when Bree sent a photo: Bree and Lily somewhere bright and smug, holding iced coffees like trophies.

****You better not be having fun without us 🤔 ****

Sarah looked up to find Carl watching her with mild curiosity, not suspicion.

"Your... friends?" he asked.

Sarah sighed. "My... workplace. It's a women's atelier. They behave like a flock."

Carl's smile was warm. "Sounds... intense."

"It is," Sarah said. "And occasionally delightful."

A minute later, Celeste and Charli actually **appeared**—not on purpose, Sarah suspected, but as if the universe itself had decided Sarah wasn't allowed one uncomplicated experience.

Celeste spotted them and did that crisp, predatory pause she did when she was assessing a scene.

Charli hovered half a step behind, polite as a ghost.

Bree and Lily arrived shortly after, laughing too loudly

and immediately taking control of the table arrangement as if it were a military operation.

Carl stood when they came over. He introduced himself. He shook hands. He didn't leer, didn't interrupt, didn't puff up.

He was... good.

A decent bloke.

The kind of man you could bring home to a mother who was difficult to impress.

And Sarah sat there, watching him hold his own without pushing, watching him make space for the women without vanishing, and realised the truth with a kind of quiet inevitability:

He wasn't wrong.

He just wasn't **hers**.

Because the warmth she felt tonight—what steadied her, what made her softer—wasn't Carl's attention.

It was the way Charli leaned into Celeste's shoulder when Celeste murmured something at her ear.

It was the way Celeste reached for Charli's water glass without thinking, refilled it, slid it back—care like muscle memory.

It was the flicker in Bree's eyes when Lily touched her wrist.

It was woman-shaped. Woman-made. Woman-understood.

Sarah felt her stomach drop a fraction—not with dread, but with clarity.

Carl glanced at her as the others argued about dessert.

"You alright?" he asked quietly, like he'd noticed the shift.

Sarah looked at him.

He deserved honesty. The real kind, not the kind that patted a man on the head and sent him away confused.

"I am," she said. Then she inhaled, steady. "But I need to tell you something, before this turns into... anything."

Carl's face changed—subtle, bracing. "Okay."

Sarah let herself be blunt. It was kinder.

"You're lovely," she said. "You've done everything right. You're not a jerk."

A flicker of pain crossed his mouth anyway. He tried to hide it. He wasn't very good at lying.

Sarah continued, not rushing.

"But my happiness," she said, and her voice softened despite herself, "is not shaped like you."

Carl held her gaze.

For a second he looked like he wanted to bargain. Then he exhaled, long and controlled, and nodded once.

"Right," he said. "Thank you for telling me straight."

Sarah's chest loosened with relief so sharp it almost hurt.

He gave a small, honest smile. "Still... I'm glad I met you."

Sarah returned it. "Me too."

And because he was decent, he didn't make it ugly.

Because she was Sarah, she didn't pretend it was anything but what it was.

Not all blokes were jerks.

Some were genuinely good.

But goodness wasn't the same thing as **right**.

And Sarah had finally decided she wasn't going to confuse the two ever again.

End Scene 40.

Absolutely, Robyn. Here it is in **Sarah's individual POV — 1st person, past tense**, with her dry wit threaded through, and that heartbreak kept *contained* rather than theatrical.



Scene 40 — “Not Shaped Like You” (Sarah POV, 1st person, past tense)

He turned up at Wardrobe with a tool belt and a polite expression.

I noticed both.

Not because I was shallow—please—but because years of navigating men had taught me competence came in different flavours: loud competence that wanted a medal, and quiet competence that just got on with the job.

This one looked like the second kind.

Mara pointed him toward the back wall where the lights had been flickering like a haunted-house feature. He listened. He nodded. He asked one sensible question. Then he got to work without making anyone's day harder than it already was.

I found myself watching him between stitches.

Not in a hungry way.

In a curious way. Like: *Is this what it looks like when a bloke is normal?* Because the bar was low enough to trip over.

When he finished, he wiped his hands on a rag and looked at Mara—not at Celeste, not at me, not at whichever woman happened to be nearest—as if the authority in the room was obvious to him.

"All sorted," he said. "That fitting-room circuit was loose. I re-terminated it. Should be stable now."

Mara gave him a brief nod. "Good."

He smiled—small, contained. "Carl."

I gave him a look. "Sarah."

His gaze flicked to my hands—needle, thread, the precision of my work—then back to my face.

"You make that look... easy," he said.

I snorted. "It's not."

"I figured," he said, and there was no condescension in it. Just respect. "Still. It's good work."

He didn't overdo it. He didn't flirt like it was a performance. He didn't scan my body like he was shopping.

He just... spoke to me like I was a person.

Which, depressingly, narrowed the field.

Later—because Celeste had the subtlety of a freight train when she wanted something to happen—there was an invitation that wasn't exactly an invitation.

"Come out with us," Celeste said, like she was scheduling a meeting. "Saturday. Somewhere with shade. Sarah needs feeding. You too, if you're not feral."

Carl's eyebrows went up, amused. "That's an option?"

"It's always an option," Celeste said. "Most people choose better."

I rolled my eyes, but I heard myself say, "Alright then," as if I wasn't curious.

The date—if that's what it was—was easy.

Carl picked a place that wasn't trying too hard. He arrived on time. He asked questions and actually waited for answers. He didn't fill silence like it was a threat. When I teased him, he laughed without trying to win.

And to my surprise, I didn't feel like I had to armour myself.

That should've felt like a relief.

Instead it felt like standing in warm water and realising you'd forgotten what warm felt like.

The trouble began about twenty minutes in, when Celeste texted:

where are you

I stared at it.

Of course.

I hadn't even replied when Bree sent a photo: Bree and Lily somewhere bright and smug, holding iced coffees like trophies.

You better not be having fun without us 🤨

I looked up to find Carl watching me with mild curiosity, not suspicion.

"Your... friends?" he asked.

I exhaled. "My... workplace. It's a women's atelier. They behave like a flock."

Carl's smile was warm. "Sounds... intense."

"It is," I said. "And occasionally delightful."

A minute later, Celeste and Charli actually appeared—because apparently the universe had decided I wasn't allowed one uncomplicated experience.

Celeste spotted us and did that crisp, predatory pause she did when she was assessing a scene.

Charli hovered half a step behind, polite as a ghost.

Bree and Lily arrived shortly after, laughing too loudly and immediately taking control of the table arrangement as if it were a military operation. Chairs scraped. Bags moved. Decisions made.

Carl stood when they came over. He introduced himself. He shook hands. He didn't leer, didn't interrupt, didn't puff up.

He was... good.

A decent bloke.

The kind of man you could bring home to a mother who was difficult to impress.

I watched him hold his own without pushing. I watched him make space for the women without vanishing. I watched him listen with his whole face, like he was used to women having opinions and didn't take it personally.

And then the truth arrived, quiet as gravity.

He wasn't wrong.

He just wasn't *mine*.

Because the warmth I felt that night—what steadied me, what made something in my chest soften—wasn't Carl's attention.

It was the way Charli leaned into Celeste's shoulder when Celeste murmured something at her ear.

It was the way Celeste reached for Charli's water glass without thinking, refilled it, slid it back—care like muscle memory.

It was the flicker in Bree's eyes when Lily touched her wrist. The way Lily's thumb stayed there half a second longer than necessary, like the world could be held in that tiny contact.

It was woman-shaped. Woman-made. Woman-understood.

My stomach dropped a fraction—not with dread, exactly.

With clarity.

Carl glanced at me as the others began arguing about dessert like it was a constitutional matter.

"You alright?" he asked quietly, like he'd noticed the shift.

I looked at him.

He deserved honesty. The real kind, not the kind that patted a man on the head and sent him away confused.

"I am," I said. Then I inhaled, steady. "But I need to tell you something, before this turns into... anything."

His face changed—subtle, bracing. "Okay."

I let myself be blunt. It was kinder.

"You're lovely," I said. "You've done everything right. You're not a jerk."

A flicker of pain crossed his mouth anyway. He tried to hide it. He wasn't very good at lying.

I didn't rush.

"But my happiness," I said, and my voice softened despite myself, "is not shaped like you."

He held my gaze.

For a second he looked like he wanted to bargain. Then he exhaled, long and controlled, and nodded once.

"Right," he said. "Thank you for telling me straight."

Relief loosened in my chest so sharply it almost hurt. Not because I'd won. Because I hadn't lied.

He gave a small, honest smile. "Still... I'm glad I met you."

I returned it. "Me too."

And because he was decent, he didn't make it ugly.

Because I was me, I didn't pretend it was anything but what it was.

Not all blokes were jerks.

Some were genuinely good.

But goodness wasn't the same thing as *right*.

And I'd finally decided I wasn't going to confuse the two ever again.

End Scene 40.

If you'd like a slightly sharper Sarah sting on the "*women behave like a flock*" line (just a pinch more wit), I can give you 2–3 alternatives you can swap in without touching anything else.



I'd love to see the alternatives.

Absolutely 🤔👉 Here are a handful of **swap-in options** for that exact beat, in Sarah's voice — dry, fond, slightly exasperated. I'll give you a few different "temperatures" so you can pick the one that best fits the scene's tenderness.

You're replacing this bit:

"My... workplace. It's a women's atelier. They behave like a flock."

Option 1 — wry + affectionate (my favourite)

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. They travel in a pack and they have opinions about everything."

Option 2 — sharper (Sarah at her driest)

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. Think: organised chaos with better hair."

Option 3 — gentle humour, not mean

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. Lovely people. Absolutely zero concept of 'personal space.'"

Option 4 — "I'm outnumbered and they know it"

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. They operate like a committee. A very confident committee."

Option 5 — power-compliment disguised as a complaint

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. They show up, they decide things, and they're usually right."

Option 6 — Aussie-flavoured bite (light, not broad)

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. Once they've clocked something, there's no wriggling out of it."

Option 7 — protective Sarah (reveals loyalty)

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. They can be a bit much—until you realise it's how they keep each other safe."

Option 8 — minimal, clean, very Sarah

"My workplace. Women-run atelier. They're intense."

If you tell me whether you want Sarah to sound **more amused**, **more protective**, or **more brittle** in this café moment, I'll recommend the single best option (or splice two) so it lands exactly right. 🍷



Definitely : "My workplace. Women-run atelier. Think: organised chaos with better hair." Although the others are really good, too.

I'm going straight into scene 41, which needs to be ing Lauren's POV, *1st person*, past tense, please:

****Scene 41 — "The Weight of Orders" (Lauren POV, past tense)****

--

Wardrobe had always been busy in the way a good kitchen was busy—productive noise, purposeful movement, women speaking in shorthand because competence didn't need speeches.

But this week was different.

This week the workroom had a *weight*.

The first big order arrived in an email that read like a dream: a new Faire setting up between Brisbane and the Gold Coast—bright-eyed, ambitious, themed around ****Les Misérables****, and hungry for authenticity.

Not the usual tidy eighteenth-century silhouettes that Wardrobe could draft in its sleep.

This was nineteenth-century France: layers and hardship and seams that were meant to look lived-in. And the organisers had been polite about Queensland's climate, too—lighter materials, breathable choices, costumes that wouldn't turn performers into boiled prawns.

Celeste had been delighted.

Mara had been interested.

Bree had made a face and said, "Finally. Something that lets people sweat *for art*."

Sarah had smiled like a woman who could smell challenge the way other people smelled bread.

Lauren had watched all of it—watched the women lean forward, hungry and capable—and felt something in her chest lift with pride that was still new enough to surprise her.

They could do it. Of course they could.

Then the organiser revealed the number.

The room didn't go silent. That wasn't Wardrobe's style. But a particular kind of stillness settled, like every woman in the building had done the same calculation at once.

It wasn't impossible.

It was just... a lot.

The kind of lot that changed how you breathed.

Lauren's hands had stayed steady on her clipboard as if her body didn't know her life was rearranging itself by the hour. She moved through the workroom, collecting fabric quotes, noting quantities, listening to Celeste's quiet directives—this, then this, then this—like a captain mapping a storm.

And all the while, Lauren felt the other storm pressing at the edge of her mind, waiting for a gap.

Roger.

It was almost laughable, how long she'd managed to hold him at bay by staying too busy to feel anything properly.

But busyness had limits. So did denial.

That afternoon, when she finally went home, the air in her house felt wrong—too empty, too staged, like a hotel room someone had tried to make look lived in.

Roger's shoes were by the door. His keys were in the bowl. His scent—aftershave and entitlement—hung in the hallway as if it owned the place.

Lauren's stomach tightened.

She didn't go to the kitchen first. She didn't tidy. She didn't do any of her old rituals that had served as delay tactics for years.

She went straight to the study.

Roger was there, leaning back in his chair, phone in hand, smiling at something on the screen like a man who had never once feared consequence.

He looked up as if he'd been expecting her. Not with warmth. With calculation.

"Hey," he said.

Lauren heard her own voice come out calm.

"I know."

His smile faltered. Then returned, thinner. "Know what?"

Lauren placed her handbag on the desk with care. Not because she cared about the bag. Because she was anchoring herself to something physical.

"The messages," she said. "The hotel receipts. The lies that don't even bother trying anymore."

Roger's expression did a small, practiced shift into indignation.

"You went through my—"

"Don't," Lauren said.

The single word stopped him. It surprised her, how cleanly it came out. Like Celeste had lent her a spine.

Roger stared at her for a moment, then tried a different tack—the one that used to work.

"You're tired," he said. "You've been working too much. You're letting those women get in your head."

Lauren blinked slowly.

She realised, with a clarity that almost made her laugh, that he was still speaking to the old version of her: the one who needed him. The one who had stayed because she couldn't see a way out.

She could see it now.

And it was woman-shaped.

"No," she said. "I'm letting myself get in my head. For the first time in years."

Roger's jaw tightened. "So what, you're leaving?"

Lauren paused.

It was a strange moment—standing in her own house, looking at the man she'd built a life around, and feeling... nothing tender. Just a kind of tired, lucid sadness.

"I'm asking you to," she said. "Tonight."

Roger's eyes widened, genuinely offended.

"You can't be serious."

Lauren surprised herself again.

"I'm financially independent," she said. "I don't need you to survive."

She watched that land. Watched the way his face changed—not grief, not remorse—just anger at losing a convenience.

"You ungrateful—" he started.

Lauren lifted her hand.

"Don't," she said again, and the second time it wasn't borrowed strength. It was hers.

Roger stood so suddenly his chair scraped the floor.

"You think you're better than me now?" he snapped.

"Because you've got some little women's club and a job playing dress-ups?"

Lauren's throat tightened.

Not because the words hurt, exactly.

Because they were so revealing.

She thought of Wardrobe: the racks, the pattern paper, the girls' hands moving with skill. Celeste's quiet authority. Sarah's sharp honesty. The way Charli had begun, slowly, to exist without flinching.

Dress-ups.

That was what he thought women's labour was.

Lauren's face warmed with something that felt like rage and grief braided together.

"No," she said. "I think I'm *awake*."

Roger stepped closer. His voice dropped into that intimate threat men used when they wanted you to remember you were smaller.

"You're making a mistake."

Lauren didn't step back.

"I'm correcting one," she said.

He stared at her, breathing hard, then turned away with a violent gesture as if the room itself offended him.

"You'll regret this," he said.

It was almost a script line.

Lauren felt her hands begin to shake only after he slammed the study door on his way out.

She stood there, alone, in the strange quiet, and realised she was both terrified and... free.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket.

A message from Sarah.

****You okay?****

Lauren's eyes stung.

She hadn't told Sarah anything specific. Not yet. But Sarah—infuriatingly perceptive—had noticed the way Lauren's smile had been too careful all day.

Lauren's fingers hovered over the keyboard. She tried to type *I'm fine* and couldn't.

Instead, she wrote: **No.**

The reply came instantly, as if Sarah had been waiting with the phone in her hand.

Right. Come to mine. Now.

Lauren sat down on the edge of the chair Roger had abandoned, and something in her chest tightened so hard it felt like she couldn't breathe.

Sarah's flat certainty shouldn't have made her cry.

It did anyway.

Lauren typed: **I can't.**

A beat.

Then:

Because you're proud? Or because you're scared?

Lauren stared at the screen.

Her fingers went cold.

She hadn't said it. Not to anyone. Not out loud.

But the true answer rose immediately, humiliating in its honesty:

Because she had feelings for Sarah.

Because she had, at some point she couldn't locate, started wanting Sarah's attention the way you wanted warmth when you'd been cold for too long—quietly, desperately, and with a kind of shame that didn't belong to her.

Because she was certain Sarah could never want her back.

Sarah was fire. Sarah was sharp. Sarah was the sort of woman who looked like she'd never needed anyone.

Lauren was... Lauren. Middle-aged. Careful. A woman who had stayed too long and was only now learning how to leave.

She typed with shaking thumbs:

****I don't think you understand.****

Sarah's reply took slightly longer this time. Not long—just long enough for Lauren to picture Sarah on her bed, phone in hand, face thoughtful in a way she didn't show at work.

Then it arrived.

****I understand plenty. I'm not asking you for a confession. I'm offering you a door that locks.****

Lauren swallowed.

From the other room came the sound of Roger moving—drawers opening, something thrown, the heavy-footed performance of a man making sure she heard his anger.

Lauren's body flinched before her mind could.

And that, more than anything, decided it.

She typed:

****Okay.****

A final message came back, firm as a hand at her elbow.

****Good. Bring nothing you can't live without. I'll make tea.****

Lauren stared at the words.

Tea.

Such an ordinary promise.

Such an enormous mercy.

She stood, wiped her cheeks with the heel of her hand, and went to the bedroom to pack with the quiet efficiency of a woman who had finally stopped asking permission.

At the front door, she hesitated—one last, stupid reflex of loyalty toward a life that hadn't been loyal to her.

Then she opened it.

Outside, the evening air was warm and alive. Somewhere a neighbour's sprinkler hissed. A bird called from a powerline as if gossiping about the whole street.

Lauren stepped out.

And for the first time that day, she felt the faintest hint of peace—not because everything was resolved, but because she was moving toward women who would not let her face it alone.

End Scene 41.

Perfect choice on the "organised chaos with better hair." 😊💛

And yes — here's **Scene 41 in Lauren's individual POV, 1st person, past tense**, with her voice: managerial competence, newly-awake courage, and that tender ache for Sarah

that she's ashamed of even as it pulls her forward. I've kept your structure and key lines, but pulled everything firmly inside Lauren's head (no external camera, no omniscient assertions). 🐼

Scene 41 — "The Weight of Orders" (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

Wardrobe had always been busy in the way a good kitchen was busy—productive noise, purposeful movement, women speaking in shorthand because competence didn't need speeches.

But that week was different.

That week the workroom had a *weight*.

The first big order arrived in an email that read like a dream: a new Faire setting up somewhere between Brisbane and the Gold Coast—bright-eyed, ambitious, themed around **Les Misérables**, and hungry for authenticity.

Not the tidy eighteenth-century silhouettes Wardrobe could draft in its sleep.

This was nineteenth-century France: layers and hardship and seams meant to look lived-in. And the organisers had even been polite about Queensland's climate—lighter materials, breathable choices, costumes that wouldn't turn performers into boiled prawns.

Celeste lit up, of course. It wasn't childish. It was vision—like she could already see the whole thing, stitched and moving.

Mara went still in the way she did when she was interested. No fuss. Just attention sharpening.

Bree pulled a face and said, "Finally. Something that lets people sweat *for art*."

Sarah smiled like a woman who could smell a challenge the way other people smelled bread.

I watched them all—watched the women lean forward, hungry and capable—and felt something lift in my chest. Pride, sharp and almost surprising in its brightness.

They could do it. Of course they could.

Then the organiser revealed the number.

The room didn't go silent. Wardrobe wasn't a place that did silence.

But a particular kind of stillness settled—like every woman in the building had done the same calculation at once.

It wasn't impossible.

It was just... a lot.

The kind of lot that changed how you breathed.

My hands stayed steady on my clipboard as if my body didn't realise my life was rearranging itself by the hour. I moved through the workroom collecting fabric quotes, noting quantities, listening to Celeste's quiet directives—this, then this, then this—like a captain mapping weather she couldn't see yet.

And all the while, I felt the other storm pressing at the edge of my mind, waiting for a gap.

Roger.

It was almost laughable how long I'd managed to hold him at bay by staying too busy to feel anything properly.

But busyness had limits.

So did denial.

That afternoon, when I finally went home, the air in my house felt wrong—too empty, too staged, like a hotel room someone had tried to make look lived in.

Roger's shoes were by the door. His keys were in the bowl. His scent—aftershave and entitlement—hung in the hallway as if it owned the place.

My stomach tightened.

I didn't go to the kitchen first. I didn't tidy. I didn't do any of my old rituals that had served as delay tactics for years.

I went straight to the study.

Roger was there, leaning back in his chair, phone in hand, smiling at something on the screen like a man who had never once feared consequence.

He looked up as if he'd been expecting me. Not with warmth.

With calculation.

"Hey," he said.

I heard my own voice come out calm.

"I know."

His smile faltered. Then returned, thinner. "Know what?"

I placed my handbag on the desk with care. Not because I cared about the bag. Because I needed my hands to do something controlled.

"The messages," I said. "The hotel receipts. The lies that don't even bother trying anymore."

His expression did the small, practiced shift into indignation.

"You went through my—"

"Don't," I said.

The single word stopped him. It surprised me how cleanly it came out. Like Celeste had lent me a spine.

Roger stared at me, recalibrating. Then he tried the other tack—the one that used to work.

"You're tired," he said. "You've been working too much. You're letting those women get in your head."

I blinked slowly.

It hit me, with an almost comic clarity, that he was still speaking to the old version of me: the woman who needed him, who stayed because she couldn't see a way out.

I could see it now.

And the way out was woman-shaped.

"No," I said. "I'm letting myself get in my head. For the first time in years."

His jaw tightened. "So what, you're leaving?"

I paused.

It was strange, standing in my own house, looking at the man I'd built a life around, and feeling nothing tender. Just a tired, lucid sadness.

"I'm asking you to," I said. "Tonight."

His eyes widened, genuinely offended.

"You can't be serious."

Something steady rose in me—quiet, not dramatic.

"I'm financially independent," I said. "I don't need you to survive."

I watched that land. Watched the way his face changed—not grief, not remorse—just anger at losing a convenience.

"You ungrateful—" he started.

I lifted my hand.

"Don't," I said again, and the second time it wasn't borrowed strength.

It was mine.

Roger stood so suddenly his chair scraped the floor.

"You think you're better than me now?" he snapped. "Because you've got some little women's club and a job playing dress-ups?"

My throat tightened.

Not because the words hurt, exactly.

Because they were so revealing.

I saw Wardrobe in my mind as clearly as if I were still there: the racks, the pattern paper, the girls' hands moving with skill. Celeste's quiet authority. Sarah's sharp honesty. The way Charli had begun, slowly, to exist without flinching.

Dress-ups.

That was what he thought women's labour was.

My face warmed with something that felt like rage and grief braided together.

"No," I said. "I think I'm *awake*."

He stepped closer. His voice dropped into that intimate threat men used when they wanted you to remember you were smaller.

"You're making a mistake."

I didn't step back.

"I'm correcting one," I said.

He stared at me, breathing hard, then turned away with a violent gesture as if the room itself offended him.

"You'll regret this," he said.

It was almost a script line.

My hands started to shake only after he slammed the study door on his way out.

I stood there alone in the strange quiet, terrified and... not destroyed.

Free, but not yet safe.

My phone buzzed in my pocket.

A message from Sarah.

You okay?

My eyes stung.

I hadn't told Sarah anything specific. Not yet. But she'd noticed me all day—noticed the way my smile had been too careful, the way I kept swallowing the same thought.

My fingers hovered over the keyboard. I tried to type *I'm fine* and couldn't.

Instead I wrote:

No.

The reply came instantly, as if she'd been waiting with the phone in her hand.

Right. Come to mine. Now.

I sat on the edge of the chair Roger had abandoned and felt something in my chest tighten so hard it stole the air from me.

Sarah's flat certainty shouldn't have made me cry.

It did anyway.

I typed:

I can't.

A beat.

Then:

Because you're proud? Or because you're scared?

I stared at the screen.

My fingers went cold.

I hadn't said it. Not to anyone. Not out loud. But the true answer rose immediately, humiliating in its honesty:

Because I had feelings for Sarah.

Because somewhere—I couldn't locate the exact day—I'd started wanting Sarah's attention the way you wanted warmth when you'd been cold for too long: quietly, desperately, and with a shame that didn't belong to me.

Because I was certain Sarah could never want me back.

Sarah was fire. Sarah was sharp. Sarah was the sort of woman who looked like she'd never needed anyone.

I was... me. Middle-aged. Careful. A woman who'd stayed too long and was only now learning how to leave.

My thumbs shook as I typed:

I don't think you understand.

Sarah's reply took slightly longer this time. Not long—just long enough for me to picture her on her bed, phone in hand, face thoughtful in a way she didn't show at work.

Then it arrived.

I understand plenty. I'm not asking you for a confession. I'm offering you a door that locks.

I swallowed.

From the other room came the sound of Roger moving—drawers opening, something thrown, the heavy-footed performance of a man making sure I heard his anger.

My body flinched before my mind could stop it.

And that, more than anything, decided it.

I typed:

Okay.

A final message came back, firm as a hand at my elbow.

Good. Bring nothing you can't live without. I'll make tea.

I stared at the words.

Tea.

Such an ordinary promise.

Such an enormous mercy.

I stood, wiped my cheeks with the heel of my hand, and went to the bedroom to pack with the quiet efficiency of a woman who had finally stopped asking permission.

At the front door, I hesitated—one last, stupid reflex of loyalty toward a life that hadn't been loyal to me.

Then I opened it.

Outside, the evening air was warm and alive. Somewhere a neighbour's sprinkler hissed. A bird called from a powerline as if gossiping about the whole street.

I stepped out.

And for the first time that day I felt the faintest hint of peace—not because everything was resolved, but because I was moving toward women who would not let me face it alone.

End Scene 41.

If you'd like, I can also do a **micro-pass** that makes Lauren's managerial voice pop even more in the Wardrobe section (tiny sensory "kitchen" details, clipboard shorthand, the way she hears capacity in numbers), while keeping the emotional arc exactly as-is.



Yes, please...

Absolutely, Robyn 🧡 🙌 Here's a **micro-pass** that keeps everything you already love, but makes Lauren's *manager brain* feel more present in the Wardrobe half: the clipboard shorthand, the sensory "kitchen" bustle, the way numbers land in her body, and the way she keeps steering the ship while the storm presses at the edge.

I'm only revising the **Wardrobe section** (up to "Roger."). You can splice this in cleanly.

Scene 41 — Wardrobe micro-pass (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

Wardrobe had always been busy in the way a good kitchen was busy—productive noise, purposeful movement, women speaking in shorthand because competence didn't need speeches.

Scissors snicked. Irons hissed. Someone swore softly at a bobbin and then fixed it without making it anyone else's problem. Pattern paper rustled like dry leaves. The workroom ran on small noises that meant *things were happening*.

But that week was different.

That week the workroom had a *weight*.

The first big order arrived in an email that read like a dream: a new Faire setting up somewhere between Brisbane and the Gold Coast—bright-eyed, ambitious, themed around **Les Misérables**, and hungry for authenticity.

Not the tidy eighteenth-century silhouettes Wardrobe could draft in its sleep.

This was nineteenth-century France: layers and hardship and seams meant to look lived-in. And the organisers had even been polite about Queensland's climate—lighter materials, breathable choices, costumes that wouldn't turn performers into boiled prawns.

Celeste lit up, of course. Not childish. Vision—like she could already see bodies moving through it, skirts swaying, hems scuffed on purpose.

Mara went still in the way she did when she was interested. No fuss. Just attention sharpening.

Bree pulled a face and said, "Finally. Something that lets people sweat *for art*."

Sarah smiled like a woman who could smell a challenge the way other people smelled bread.

I watched them all—watched the women lean forward, hungry and capable—and felt something lift in my chest. Pride, sharp and almost surprising in its brightness.

They could do it. Of course they could.

Then the organiser revealed the number.

The room didn't go silent. Wardrobe wasn't a place that did silence.

But a particular kind of stillness settled—like every woman in the building had done the same calculation at once.

I felt it hit the back of my teeth. I saw it as columns before anyone spoke: labour hours, fittings, fabric metres, storage space, delivery dates. I could already hear my own pencil scratching.

It wasn't impossible.

It was just... a lot.

The kind of lot that changed how you breathed.

My hands stayed steady on my clipboard as if my body didn't realise my life was rearranging itself by the hour. I flipped to a clean page and started writing in the shorthand I'd built over years of making chaos behave:

QTY / SIZE RANGE / FABRIC / TRIM / DEADLINE / RISK

I moved through the workroom collecting fabric quotes, noting yardage, mentally subtracting bolt widths from pattern pieces. I listened to Celeste's quiet directives—this, then this, then this—like a captain mapping weather she couldn't see yet.

I caught myself doing it: splitting the world into sections I could carry.

- What could be sourced locally.
- What needed ordering now.
- What could be cut in batches.
- What would bottleneck at fittings.

I asked Bree about her dye stock without looking up. I checked Mara's face for the moment she'd decide whether to say yes before the yes was spoken. I watched Sarah's hands—fast, precise—and did the grim maths of how many hours a woman like that could give before it started costing her something.

All the while, I felt the other storm pressing at the edge of my mind, waiting for a gap.

Roger.

If you want, I can do one more tiny "Lauren-manager" polish move that often adds realism: have Lauren *catch herself* trying to solve Roger the way she solves orders (lists, contingencies), and then realise **people aren't stock sheets**. That contrast can make her leaving feel even more earned.



Lauren is looking brilliant... yes please.

Oh yes — that contrast is so Lauren: her instinct is to spreadsheet the un-spreadsheetable... and then she realises that's exactly how she stayed too long. 🧡 🐼

Here's a **micro-insert** you can drop right after "**Roger.**" (or just before the "That afternoon..." paragraph), keeping 1st person past tense and her managerial voice intact.

Scene 41 — Lauren micro-insert (after "Roger.")

Roger.

Even in the workroom, my brain tried to handle him the way it handled everything else: as a problem with inputs and outputs, variables you could nudge until the system behaved.

I caught myself doing it while I walked—half-listening to Celeste talk timelines, half-building a private ledger in my head.

If/then.

If I stayed calm, he stayed calm.

If I didn't accuse, he didn't explode.

If I worked more, I thought less.

If I thought less, I could keep breathing.

It was almost impressive, the lengths I'd gone to make my own life manageable.

A marriage shouldn't require workflow optimisation.

That thought landed with a strange, clean finality. Not dramatic. Not even loud.

Just true.

I looked across the room at the women—hands moving with skill, faces intent, problems solved in real time—and felt something in me shift. In Wardrobe, the work was hard, but it made sense. You named the issue, you fixed it, you didn't pretend a loose seam was a virtue.

At home, I'd spent years treating a rotten foundation like a cosmetic problem.

I swallowed and kept walking, clipboard held like a shield, because it was easier to look competent than to feel anything.

But the feeling was there, waiting.

And I knew, with the same certainty as numbers, that I was running out of places to hide it.

If you'd like, I can also give you **two alternate last lines** for that insert — one a touch harsher ("you can't tailor respect out of a man"), one gentler ("I'd mistaken endurance for love").



Actually, I might go on to Scene 42. Please convert to Lurn POV, 1st person, past tense:

****Scene 42 — "The Door That Locks" (Lauren POV, past tense)****

Sarah's place smelled like citrus cleaner and warm fabric —like someone lived there with intention.

Not showy intention. Not a magazine. The kind that said:
I will not be at the mercy of chaos if I can help it.

Lauren stood just inside the front door with her overnight bag on the floor by her feet, her shoulders still held too high. Her body had not yet understood that she'd crossed a threshold.

Sarah shut the door behind her and didn't speak immediately. She didn't launch into sympathy. She didn't ask for a recap, as if Lauren's pain needed to audition for its right to exist.

Instead she did something almost aggressively ordinary.

She turned the lock.

Then—because she meant it—she turned it again.

Two clicks. Final.

"There," Sarah said. "Now he can't just... walk in."

Lauren's throat tightened so quickly she had to look away. She stared at a framed print on the wall—something botanical, sharp-lined, beautiful in a restrained way—until her eyes stopped shining.

"I didn't bring much," Lauren managed.

Sarah glanced at the bag as if doing an inventory. "You brought enough."

It wasn't praise. It was permission.

Sarah took the bag and carried it like it had weight, like Lauren's life wasn't an inconvenience. She walked ahead down the hall and flicked on a lamp so the light came up soft and warm instead of harsh overhead. It made Sarah's hair look almost gold at the edges.

"Shoes off," Sarah said, then added, because she wasn't a tyrant, "if you want. I don't care. I just... prefer it."

Lauren slipped her shoes off automatically. Her hands were shaking again now that she'd stopped moving. It was as if her body had waited for safety to begin misbehaving.

Sarah noticed. Of course she did.

She didn't point it out.

She went to the kitchen and filled the kettle, the way you did when you needed something to happen that didn't require feelings.

"I'm making tea," she said. "It will help. Whether you believe in tea or not."

Lauren made a sound that might have been a laugh. It came out thin.

Sarah's mouth curved briefly—satisfied at having

extracted a reaction—then she turned back to the kettle with brisk competence.

Lauren stood at the end of the hallway, unsure where to put herself. She felt like a guest in a life she'd never imagined stepping into.

It wasn't that Sarah's home was grand. It wasn't.

It was... contained. Clear. Every object seemed to have been chosen by someone who refused to settle for things that didn't work.

Lauren thought, suddenly and stupidly, of Roger's house habits—half-finished jobs, doors that didn't quite close, the way he left things as if a woman would quietly tidy the world behind him.

Her chest tightened again.

Sarah returned holding a mug with both hands, like it mattered.

She handed it to Lauren and didn't let go straight away. Her fingers stayed on the ceramic for one beat longer than necessary, steadying it—steadying Lauren—without saying so.

"Sit," Sarah said, nodding to the couch. "You look like you're about to evaporate."

Lauren sat.

The couch was firm, not sinking. Clean. A throw folded neatly at one end—not thrown there, placed there.

Sarah sat in the armchair opposite, not too close. Not far. A deliberate distance that said: *I'm here, but you're not trapped.*

Lauren held the mug and tried to make her breathing normal.

The tea smelled like chamomile and something sharper—ginger, maybe. Sarah had probably chosen it because it did a job.

They sat like that for a moment, the only sound the kettle cooling and the faint tick of the clock in the kitchen.

Then Sarah said, very calmly, "Is he going to come here?"

Lauren blinked. The question was not emotional. It was tactical.

"I... I don't think so," Lauren said. "He doesn't—he won't want people seeing—"

Sarah's eyes narrowed. "That's not an answer."

Lauren swallowed. She felt foolish, suddenly, for how long she'd been trained to soften the truth.

"He might," she admitted. "If he thinks he can bully me. Or... shame me."

Sarah nodded once, like she'd expected that.

"Right," she said. "Then we do a plan. You don't negotiate with a man who thinks the world is a debate he gets to win."

Lauren's hands tightened around the mug.

Sarah stood and went to a small side table by the door. She picked up her phone and tapped the screen, then placed it back down carefully.

"My ringers are on," she said. "I don't normally do that. But tonight, they're on."

Lauren stared at her. "You don't have to—"

"Yes I do," Sarah said. Not harshly. Like it was the simplest thing. "You're here. That changes the rules."

Lauren's chest did something painful and bright.

Sarah returned to her chair and crossed one leg over the other, posture composed. She looked for all the world like a woman who could handle anything.

And yet she was watching Lauren's face with a kind of alert quietness—as if she understood that the most dangerous part of leaving wasn't the argument, it was the aftermath. The moment your body realised you'd stepped out of the familiar cage and now had no script for the open air.

Lauren's voice came out smaller than she intended.
"Thank you."

Sarah made a face, impatient with gratitude.

"I'm not doing this for points," she said. Then, a beat later, she added, more softly, "You don't have to earn safety."

Lauren looked down into her tea.

There it was again: the way Sarah said something that sounded like a rebuke, and yet landed like care.

Lauren's eyes stung.

Sarah didn't pretend not to notice.

She stood, walked over, and sat down beside Lauren on the couch—not pressed against her, but close enough that Lauren could feel her warmth. The proximity was a question. It was also a choice.

Sarah reached for the throw and unfolded it with brisk precision, then laid it across Lauren's lap as if tucking in a child who wasn't allowed to be a child.

"There," Sarah said. "You're cold."

"I'm not," Lauren started automatically, trained to

minimise.

Sarah gave her a look that stopped the lie mid-breath.

"Lauren," she said. "Please don't do that here."

Lauren's mouth closed.

The heat behind her eyes broke a little.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, and immediately hated herself for apologising again.

Sarah's expression flickered—irritation, yes, but not at Lauren. At the reflex. At the years that had installed it.

"Don't," Sarah said, quieter. "Not tonight."

Lauren's breath hitched.

Sarah's hand landed on her knee on top of the throw. Firm. Warm. Not tentative. Not sexual. Simply grounding.

Lauren went still.

Sarah didn't move her hand away.

And in that stillness Lauren realised something that made her dizzy: she had been starving for contact that wasn't a claim.

A hand that didn't demand.

A touch that didn't take.

Lauren's eyes filled. She stared at the throw because if she looked at Sarah she might... do something. Say something.

Sarah's thumb moved once, a small stroke through the fabric.

"I'm going to ask you a question," Sarah said. Her voice

was low now, careful in a way it rarely was. "And you can say no. And I will be normal about it."

Lauren's heart thudded.

"Okay," she managed.

"Do you want a hug?" Sarah asked.

It was such a simple sentence. It hit Lauren like a wave.

Lauren's mouth opened. No sound came out.

Sarah waited, utterly still. No pressure. No coaxing. Just the clean offer.

Lauren nodded once, sharp and helpless.

Sarah exhaled like she'd been holding herself back from something.

Then she pulled Lauren in.

It wasn't a delicate hug. It wasn't the awkward pat-pat of social obligation.

It was firm and full-bodied—arms around shoulders, hand cradling the back of Lauren's head for a second as if Sarah was making a point: *You're not alone. You are not ridiculous. You are not asking too much.*

Lauren made a small, broken sound into Sarah's shoulder that embarrassed her immediately.

Sarah didn't flinch. She didn't recoil. She only held her tighter.

"It's alright," Sarah said, and the words were blunt, as if tenderness embarrassed her too. "Let it out. He doesn't get to keep it all inside you."

Lauren cried then. Quietly. Ugly. The way you cried when you'd spent years being careful not to.

Sarah stayed.

Sarah kept her arms around her.

When Lauren's breathing finally slowed, Sarah didn't pull away abruptly. She loosened the hold gradually, letting Lauren's body decide when to stop leaning.

Lauren wiped her face with the heel of her hand, mortified.

Sarah tilted her head. "You're not going to apologise."

Lauren swallowed. "I wasn't going to."

Sarah's mouth twitched. "Good."

They sat there, shoulder to shoulder.

Lauren could feel her own heartbeat still racing, could feel the warmth of Sarah's thigh beside hers, the steadiness of her presence like a wall that didn't move.

In the kitchen, the clock ticked on.

Outside, a night insect buzzed briefly and stopped.

Sarah leaned forward to pick up Lauren's mug and set it on the coffee table, then did the same with her own.

"Right," she said. "Practicalities."

Lauren blinked. "Now?"

"Yes," Sarah said, already standing. "Because your brain will spin if I let it. Come on."

She led Lauren down the hall to the spare room.

The bed was made with crisp sheets. A folded towel sat at the end like a promise. A small lamp glowed warmly on the bedside table. On the pillow was a spare toothbrush

in its packet, placed there as if Sarah had simply manifested it.

Lauren stared.

Sarah shrugged as if this wasn't intimacy at all, just logistics. "I keep spares. People have emergencies."

Lauren's throat tightened again.

Sarah reached past her to draw the curtains, shutting out the streetlight. Then she checked the window latch with a click.

Then—still not looking at Lauren—she said, "If he shows up, you don't answer. You don't explain. You don't negotiate. You stay in here. I'll handle it."

Lauren's voice came out thin. "What if—"

Sarah turned and looked at her fully now, eyes sharp as a seam ripper.

"Lauren," she said, "you have spent too long being the reasonable one."

Lauren's breath caught.

Sarah stepped closer.

Her expression softened—not much, but enough.

"You can be unreasonable here," Sarah said. "You can be scared here. You can be... whatever you are. I won't think less of you."

Lauren's face warmed. She tried to speak. Failed.

Sarah's gaze flicked to Lauren's hands, still trembling slightly.

"You need sleep," Sarah said, and then, as if it cost her something, she added, "I'll be right across the hall."

Lauren nodded.

Sarah reached out and touched Lauren's shoulder—brief, firm. A punctuation mark, not a lingering caress.

Then she paused at the door.

"I meant what I said," Sarah said.

"What?"

"The door that locks," Sarah replied. "Not just the actual one."

And then she left, and closed the door with care—no click of a lock this time, because Lauren needed to feel free—but the sound of it settling into place was somehow just as reassuring.

Lauren sat on the edge of the bed, listening.

She heard Sarah's footsteps in the hall. The faint sound of a kettle being refilled. The soft clink of something put away.

Normal.

Safe.

Lauren lay down and pulled the sheet up to her chest, and for the first time all day she felt her body begin to unclench—not because her life was solved, but because she had, finally, placed herself within reach of women who would not let the world swallow her.

She closed her eyes.

And in the dark, the peace that had seemed impossible at home came to her in a new shape:

Not the quiet of a man being absent.

The quiet of a woman being present.

End Scene 42.

Absolutely, Robyn 🧡 Here's **Scene 42** rewritten as **Lauren's individual POV (1st person, past tense)** — with the same tenderness and "door that locks" motif, but fully inside Lauren's nervous system: the hypervigilance, the shame reflex, the relief that feels almost suspicious, and the way Sarah's competence reads as mercy.

I've also quietly trimmed a few "explainy" moments so the emotion lands without being narrated.

Scene 42 — "The Door That Locks" (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

Sarah's place smelled like citrus cleaner and warm fabric—like someone lived there with intention.

Not showy intention. Not a magazine. The kind that said: *I will not be at the mercy of chaos if I can help it.*

I stood just inside the front door with my overnight bag on the floor by my feet, shoulders still held too high. My body hadn't caught up with what I'd done. It still believed I was about to be called back, corrected, punished.

≡  > ChatGPT 5.2 Thinking ▾

  ...

sympathy. She didn't ask for a recap, like my pain needed to audition for its right to exist.

Instead she did something almost aggressively ordinary.

She turned the lock.

Then—because she meant it—she turned it again.

Two clicks. Final.

"There," she said. "Now he can't just... walk in."

My throat tightened so quickly I had to look away. I stared at a framed print on the wall—botanical, sharp-lined, beautiful in a restrained way—until my eyes stopped shining.

"I didn't bring much," I managed.

Sarah glanced at the bag as if doing an inventory. "You brought enough."

It wasn't praise.

It was permission.

She picked the bag up and carried it like it had weight, like my life wasn't an inconvenience. She walked ahead down the hall and flicked on a lamp so the light came up soft and warm instead of harsh overhead. It caught the edges of her hair and turned them almost gold.

"Shoes off," Sarah said, then added—because she wasn't a tyrant—"if you want. I don't care. I just... prefer it."

I slipped my shoes off automatically. My hands started shaking now that I'd stopped moving, as if my body had waited for safety before it began to misbehave.

Sarah noticed, of course.

She didn't point it out.

She went to the kitchen and filled the kettle, the way you did when you needed something to happen that didn't require feelings.

"I'm making tea," she said. "It will help. Whether you believe in tea or not."

A sound came out of me that might have been a laugh. Thin, and a bit humiliating.

Sarah's mouth curved briefly—satisfied at having extracted a reaction—then she turned back to the kettle with brisk competence.

I hovered at the end of the hallway, unsure where to put myself. I felt like a guest in a life I'd never imagined stepping into.

It wasn't that Sarah's home was grand.

It was... contained. Clear. Every object looked chosen by someone who refused to settle for things that didn't work.

I thought, suddenly and stupidly, of Roger's half-finished jobs. Doors that didn't quite close. Drawers that stuck. The way he left things slightly wrong, as if a woman would quietly tidy the world behind him.

My chest tightened.

Sarah returned with a mug held in both hands, like it mattered. She handed it to me and didn't let go straight away. Her fingers stayed on the ceramic for one beat longer than necessary—steadyng the mug, steadyng me—without saying so.

"Sit," she said, nodding at the couch. "You look like you're about to evaporate."

I sat.

The couch was firm, not sinking. Clean. A throw folded neatly at one end—not thrown there, placed there.

Sarah took the armchair opposite. Not too close. Not far. A deliberate distance that said: *I'm here. You're not trapped.*

I held the mug and tried to make my breathing normal.

The tea smelled like chamomile and something sharper—ginger, maybe. Sarah had probably chosen it because it did a job.

We sat for a moment. The kettle cooled. A clock ticked faintly in the kitchen.

Then Sarah asked, very calmly, "Is he going to come here?"

The question wasn't emotional.

It was tactical.

"I... I don't think so," I said. "He doesn't—he won't want people seeing—"

Sarah's eyes narrowed. "That's not an answer."

Heat crept up my neck. Even now, trained reflexes tried to make the truth smaller.

"He might," I admitted. "If he thinks he can bully me. Or... shame me."

Sarah nodded once, like she'd been expecting that.

"Right," she said. "Then we do a plan. You don't negotiate with a man who thinks the world is a debate he gets to win."

My hands tightened around the mug.

Sarah stood and went to a small table by the door. She tapped her phone, then set it down with care.

"My ringers are on," she said. "I don't normally do that. But tonight, they're on."

I stared at her. "You don't have to—"

"Yes I do," she said, not harshly. Like it was simple. "You're here. That changes the rules."

Something painful and bright moved in my chest.

Sarah sat again, composed. She looked like a woman who could handle anything.

And yet she watched my face with a quiet alertness, as if she knew the most dangerous part of leaving wasn't the argument. It was what happened after—when your body realised the cage door was open and you had no script for the air outside.

"Thank you," I heard myself say, smaller than I wanted.

Sarah made a face, impatient with gratitude.

"I'm not doing this for points," she said. Then, after a beat, softer, "You don't have to earn safety."

I looked down into my tea.

There it was again: the way Sarah said something that sounded like a rebuke and it landed like care.

My eyes stung.

She didn't pretend not to notice.

She crossed the space and sat beside me. Not pressed against me, but close enough that I could feel her warmth. The proximity felt like a question. It also felt like a choice.

She reached for the throw, unfolded it with brisk precision, and laid it across my lap—like tucking in someone who wasn't allowed to be a child.

"There," she said. "You're cold."

"I'm not," I started automatically.

Sarah gave me a look that stopped the lie mid-breath.

"Lauren," she said. "Please don't do that here."

My mouth closed.

The heat behind my eyes broke a little.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, and hated myself for apologising again.

Sarah's expression flickered—irritation, yes, but not at me. At the reflex. At the years that had installed it.

"Don't," she said, quieter. "Not tonight."

My breath hitched.

Her hand settled on my knee over the throw. Firm. Warm. Not tentative. Not sexual. Just... grounding.

I went still.

She didn't move her hand away.

And in that stillness I realised something that made me dizzy: I had been starving for contact that wasn't a claim.

A hand that didn't demand.

A touch that didn't take.

My eyes filled. I stared at the pattern in the throw because if I looked at Sarah I might do something stupid. Say something. Confess everything all at once.

Her thumb moved once—a small stroke through the fabric.

"I'm going to ask you a question," Sarah said. Her voice was lower now, careful in a way it rarely was. "And you can say no. And I will be normal about it."

My heart thudded.

"Okay," I managed.

"Do you want a hug?" she asked.

Such a simple sentence. It hit me like a wave.

My mouth opened. No sound came out.

Sarah waited, utterly still. No pressure. No coaxing. Just the clean offer.

I nodded once, sharp and helpless.

Sarah exhaled like she'd been holding herself back from something.

Then she pulled me in.

It wasn't a delicate hug. It wasn't the awkward pat-pat of social obligation.

It was firm and full-bodied—arms around my shoulders, a hand briefly cradling the back of my head as if she was making a point: *You're not alone. You're not ridiculous. You're not asking too much.*

A small broken sound escaped into her shoulder and I hated myself for it.

Sarah didn't flinch. She didn't recoil. She only held me tighter.

"It's alright," she said, bluntly, as if tenderness embarrassed her too. "Let it out. He doesn't get to keep it all inside you."

And then I cried. Quietly. Ugly. The way you cried when you'd spent years being careful not to.

Sarah stayed.

When my breathing finally slowed, she didn't pull away abruptly. She loosened gradually, letting my body decide when to stop leaning.

I wiped my face with the heel of my hand, mortified.

Sarah tilted her head. "You're not going to apologise."

"I wasn't going to," I said, and the lie came out too quick.

Sarah's mouth twitched. "Good."

We sat there, shoulder to shoulder.

I could feel my heartbeat still racing, could feel the warmth of her thigh beside mine, the steadiness of her presence like a wall that didn't move.

Sarah leaned forward, took my mug, and set it on the coffee table. Then she did the same with hers.

"Right," she said. "Practicalities."

I blinked. "Now?"

"Yes," she said, already standing. "Because your brain will spin if I let it. Come on."

She led me down the hall to the spare room.

The bed was made with crisp sheets. A folded towel sat at the end like a promise. A small lamp glowed warmly on the bedside table. On the pillow was a spare toothbrush in its packet—placed there as if Sarah had simply manifested it.

I stared.

She shrugged, making it sound like logistics. "I keep spares. People have emergencies."

My throat tightened again.

Sarah reached past me to draw the curtains. Streetlight vanished. Then she checked the window latch with a click.

Then—still not looking at me—she said, "If he shows up, you don't answer. You don't explain. You don't negotiate. You stay in here. I'll handle it."

My voice came out thin. "What if—"

Sarah turned and looked at me fully, eyes sharp as a seam ripper.

"Lauren," she said, "you have spent too long being the reasonable one."

My breath caught.

She stepped closer. Her expression softened—not much, but enough to change the air.

"You can be unreasonable here," she said. "You can be scared here. You can be... whatever you are. I won't think less of you."

My face warmed. I tried to speak. Failed.

"You need sleep," Sarah said. Then, as if it cost her something, she added, "I'll be right across the hall."

I nodded.

Sarah touched my shoulder—brief, firm. A punctuation mark, not a caress.

She paused at the door.

"I meant what I said," she said.

"What?"

"The door that locks," she replied. "Not just the actual one."

Then she left, closing the door with care—no click of a lock this time, because I needed to feel free—but the sound of it settling into place was somehow just as reassuring.

I sat on the edge of the bed and listened.

Sarah's footsteps. The faint sound of a kettle being refilled. The soft clink of something put away.

Normal.

Safe.

I lay down and pulled the sheet up to my chest, and for the first time that day my body began to unclench—not because my life was solved, but because I had finally placed myself within reach of women who would not let the world swallow me.

I closed my eyes.

And in the dark, the peace that had seemed impossible at home came to me in a new shape:

Not the quiet of a man being absent.

The quiet of a woman being present.

End Scene 42.

If you want a tiny extra sting of Lauren's *old training* (the "I'm fine" reflex), I can add one micro-line where she instinctively tries to tidy Sarah's cushion or apologise for crying — and Sarah stops her with a look. It can deepen the "you don't have to earn safety" theme without adding length.



Not to wear out my welcome, but would you be willing to combine these two scenes (I think they overlap) with the sharper tone prevailing, all in Lauren's POV, 1st person, past tense, please?

****Scene 43A — "Morning, With Clean Edges" (Lauren POV, past tense)****

Lauren woke to the smell of toast and something sharp—lemon, maybe.

For a moment she didn't remember where she was. The spare room looked too calm. The curtains were drawn in a way that kept the light soft. The air felt cooler than it had any right to in the middle of a Queensland heat wave, as if Sarah's house had been trained to behave.

Then memory arrived in a rush: Roger's face, the study, the sound of drawers being yanked open, Sarah's text—****I'm offering you a door that locks****—and the weight of Sarah's arms around her in the living room.

Lauren sat up slowly.

Her body felt strange: not relaxed exactly, but less braced. Like a muscle that had been clenched for years and had, finally, been allowed to let go a fraction without being punished for it.

She padded down the hall and paused at the doorway to the kitchen.

Sarah was there, hair clipped up messily, wearing a t-shirt and shorts, moving with brisk confidence in the small space—kettle on, toast popping, a plate already set. The radio played low in the background, something talky, not music. Information, not emotion.

Sarah glanced over her shoulder.

"Morning," she said, as if Lauren had simply slept over

because it was convenient.

Lauren's throat tightened anyway.

Sarah pointed with the knife she was buttering toast with. "Sit."

Lauren sat at the small table.

A glass of water appeared beside her hand before she'd even thought to ask for it.

Sarah slid a plate across: toast, a bit of fruit, a smear of something that looked like marmalade. Not fancy. Not fussy. But prepared as if Lauren was worth preparing things for.

Lauren stared at it.

Sarah lifted an eyebrow. "Eat."

Lauren tried. Her mouth felt dry. She took a sip of water first, then a cautious bite.

The first swallow made her eyes sting—an absurd physical reaction to being fed like someone expected her to still be here in an hour.

Sarah sat opposite with her own toast and took a bite, watching Lauren over the rim of her mug without staring.

"You sleep?" Sarah asked.

"A bit," Lauren said. Then, because honesty felt less dangerous here, she added, "More than I thought I would."

Sarah nodded once. "Good."

Lauren tried for a smile and it came out wobbly. "You're... very organised."

Sarah's mouth twitched. "I'm allergic to chaos."

Lauren's eyes dropped to Sarah's hands—capable hands, practical hands. Hands that had held her and not demanded anything back.

The thought made her chest ache.

Sarah followed her gaze, misread it deliberately, and slid a small box across the table.

"What's that?" Lauren asked.

"Spare phone charger," Sarah said. "And a tiny toiletry kit. And a hair tie. I don't know what you lot do with hair, but you always need something."

Lauren's lips parted, a laugh caught halfway between gratitude and shock.

"You didn't have to—"

Sarah cut her off with a look. "I did. Because you're here."

There it was again: Sarah's stubborn refusal to let care be optional.

Lauren ate another bite. The toast sat heavier in her stomach than it should have, like it was anchoring her to the day.

Sarah's phone buzzed on the counter.

Sarah didn't flinch. She glanced at the screen, face going still in a way Lauren recognised instantly now: **predatory calm.**

Lauren's pulse jumped.

Sarah didn't touch the phone for a moment. She finished her sip of tea first, as if demonstrating that urgency did not run this house.

Then she stood, took the phone, and looked at the

screen properly.

Lauren watched Sarah's mouth flatten.

"It's him," Sarah said.

Lauren's fingers tightened around her mug. "Roger?"

Sarah nodded.

Lauren could feel her body start to do its old thing—the panic, the urge to get ahead of the explosion by fixing it.

"I should—" she began.

Sarah held up a hand.

"No," Sarah said. "You shouldn't do anything. Eat your toast."

Lauren stared at her, bewildered. "But—"

Sarah walked to the window, lifted the edge of the curtain an inch, and glanced out like she was checking weather.

"He's not here," Sarah said. "He's just trying to get you back on the hook. Sit. Breathe. Don't volunteer yourself for stress."

Lauren swallowed.

Sarah returned to the table, set the phone down—screen facing away from Lauren, a small courtesy—and said, "You want to see what he's doing?"

Lauren hesitated.

Sarah's eyes sharpened. "I'm asking because you're allowed to decide what you can handle. Not because you owe me transparency."

Lauren nodded, once, cautiously.

Sarah turned the phone so Lauren could see, then kept her own hand over the device, controlling how long Lauren had to look.

A string of messages.

****ROGER:**** Where are you.

****ROGER:**** This is ridiculous.

****ROGER:**** You can't take my wife away from me.

****ROGER:**** Tell her to come home.

****ROGER:**** This is between me and her.

****ROGER:**** I'm coming over.

Lauren felt her stomach drop.

Sarah's thumb tapped once and the next message appeared.

****ROGER:**** You always fill her head with crap.

****ROGER:**** She's not thinking straight.

****ROGER:**** I'll speak to you like a man if I have to.

Lauren's throat tightened so hard she couldn't speak.

Sarah's expression didn't change much. But the air around her did.

Sarah picked up her mug again, took a calm sip, then said, "Classic."

Lauren found her voice. It came out faint. "I'm sorry."

Sarah's eyes snapped to her.

"No." Sarah said it like a rule. "Don't apologise for a man being a man."

Lauren flinched at the truth in it.

Sarah stood, walked to the door, and checked the lock with a practiced hand. One click. Then the second click.

She came back and sat down like nothing had happened.

Lauren stared. "What are you going to do?"

Sarah leaned forward, elbows on the table, and said, "I'm going to respond once. Only once. Then I'm going to ignore him. That's how you teach a man he doesn't own your time."

Lauren's breathing went shallow.

Sarah's eyes softened just slightly.

"And you," Sarah added, "are going to finish breakfast."

Lauren tried. Her hands shook.

Sarah typed with fast certainty.

Lauren watched the screen.

****SARAH:**** She's safe. She's not speaking to you today. Do not come here. If you arrive, I will call the police.

Sarah hit send. Then—without drama—she blocked the number.

Lauren blinked. "Just like that?"

Sarah looked at her. "Just like that."

"But what if he—"

"He'll try," Sarah said. "He's used to you managing his feelings. He'll escalate until he finds a new lever." She took another sip of tea. "He won't find it here."

Lauren's eyes stung again. It was humiliating, how close she was to tears all the time.

Sarah reached across the table and pressed her hand over Lauren's for a moment—firm, warm, grounding—then let go as if she'd only been checking temperature.

"You're doing the hardest part," Sarah said, voice lower.
"You've left."

Lauren swallowed.

Sarah held her gaze, unflinching.

"And if you go back," Sarah added, "it won't be because you're weak. It'll be because he frightened you into forgetting who you are. I won't let him do that."

Lauren's chest tightened.

A thought rose—dangerous, private: *No one has ever spoken to me like that.*

Not even Celeste, with her quiet authority.

Not even Lauren herself.

Lauren's mouth trembled. "I don't want to go back."

Sarah nodded once, satisfied. "Good."

And then, because Sarah couldn't tolerate too much tenderness without deflecting, she stood and picked up the empty plate.

"More tea?" she asked briskly. "Or are you one of those people who pretends coffee is personality?"

Lauren let out a shaky laugh.

Sarah's mouth curved.

The day, somehow, had begun.

End Scene 43A.

Notes26-02-04evB1

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[26-02-04]

****Scene 43B — "He Shows Up" (Lauren POV, past tense)****

(If you want higher stakes, here's the escalation version—Roger actually arrives. It's still grounded and not melodramatic. Sarah handles it like a woman who has dealt with blokes like him before.)

By late morning Lauren's body had started to believe, briefly, that the worst was behind her.

That was when the knock came.

It wasn't polite.

It wasn't friendly.

It was three hard raps—commanding, male, familiar.

Lauren froze mid-step, a tea mug in her hand.

Her heart slammed.

Sarah's head lifted from where she was sorting something at the dining table—bills, maybe, or patterns, or the steady detritus of a woman who ran her life like a well-kept ship.

Sarah's expression changed into something coldly lucid.

She didn't look at Lauren first.

She looked at the door.

Then she stood.

"Stay here," Sarah said.

Lauren's throat tightened. "Sarah—"

Sarah cut across her gently, not unkind. "Lauren. Kitchen. Now."

The tone wasn't bossy—it was protective command.

Lauren obeyed before her pride could intervene.

Sarah walked to the front door and did not open it.

She didn't call through with **Who is it?** as if she needed confirmation.

She spoke clearly through the wood.

"Roger," Sarah said. "Leave."

Silence. Then his voice—too loud, pitched for intimidation.

"I need to speak to my wife."

Sarah's reply was immediate. Flat.

"She's not speaking to you."

"I know she's in there," Roger snapped. "Open the door."

Sarah's voice didn't rise to meet him. It stayed calm, which somehow made it worse—for him.

"No."

Lauren stood in the kitchen, hands shaking so hard the mug sloshed. She set it down before she dropped it.

Roger's voice sharpened.

"This is none of your business."

Sarah's laugh was brief, incredulous.

"She's in my house," Sarah said. "That makes it my business."

Roger tried another strategy—the one that always worked on women trained to be reasonable.

"Tell her I just want to talk. This is all a misunderstanding."

Sarah waited a beat—just long enough that the pause felt like judgement.

Then she said, "Roger. Leave. Or I'm calling the police."

Lauren heard movement—footsteps closer, a body leaning toward the door.

"You don't get to threaten me," he said, low, intimate.

"Oh, I do," Sarah replied. And there it was: steel.

"Because I'm not scared of you."

Lauren's breath hitched.

Roger spoke again—now angry, now exposed.

"You're poisoning her against me."

Sarah's voice remained calm. "You did that yourself."

A harsh exhale.

Then: "Lauren! Open the door!"

Lauren's whole body flinched at her name coming like that, through someone else's house. Like a hook.

Sarah's voice cut in instantly, hard.

"Do not shout her name in my house."

Silence.

Lauren's eyes stung.

Sarah continued, slower now, as if speaking to a child who'd missed the lesson.

"She's safe. She's leaving you. You don't get an argument. You don't get a scene. You don't get closure on your timeline."

Roger made a sound like a scoff, but it shook at the edges.

"You can't keep her from me."

Sarah's reply landed like a door closing.

"I'm not keeping her," Sarah said. "I'm giving her a moment to remember she has legs."

Lauren's knees went weak.

Roger swore—quiet, vicious—then thumped the door once, hard enough that Lauren jumped.

Sarah didn't.

Sarah said, clear as a bell, "That's assault. I'm calling now."

And then, for the first time, Roger hesitated. You could hear the calculation—risk, consequence, witnesses.

His voice shifted into wounded outrage.

"This is unbelievable."

Sarah's tone sharpened, almost bored.

"Then be unbelievable somewhere else."

There was a pause, and then the sound of footsteps retreating.

A car door. An engine starting.

Sarah waited until the sound of the vehicle faded.

Only then did she turn the lock twice, as if sealing the last inch of safety back into place.

Two clicks.

Final.

She came into the kitchen.

Lauren was standing very still, as if any movement would break her.

Sarah looked at her—properly—eyes steady.

"You alright?" she asked, and it was the first time her voice had softened all morning.

Lauren's mouth opened. Nothing came.

Sarah exhaled and stepped close, not crowding—present.

"You did not do anything wrong," Sarah said. "He came here because he thought fear would bring you back."

Lauren's voice emerged in a whisper. "It used to."

Sarah nodded once, grim.

"I know."

Lauren's eyes filled.

Sarah didn't wait for permission this time. She pulled Lauren into a hug—strong, anchoring—and held her until Lauren's shaking eased.

When Sarah finally released her, she kept her hands on Lauren's shoulders.

"You're learning," Sarah said. "That's why it feels like this. Your body is unlearning the lie."

Lauren sniffed, wiped her cheeks.

Sarah's mouth twitched.

"And," Sarah added, dry as ever, "for the record, he's not coming back today. Men like him don't like police reports. They like private rooms and plausible deniability."

Lauren let out a tiny, broken laugh.

Sarah's expression softened—briefly.

"Tea," Sarah said. "Then we call Celeste. And Mara, if you want. And we do this in a way that doesn't leave you alone with paperwork."

Lauren nodded.

The fear in her chest didn't vanish.

But it no longer had the whole house to itself.

End Scene 43B.

Not wearing out your welcome in the slightest, Robyn — this is *exactly* the kind of stitching-together that makes the arc feel inevitable rather than episodic 🦋 ✨

Below is a **single combined Scene 43** that:

- keeps Lauren **1st person, past tense** the whole way,
- lets the **sharper tone prevail** (Sarah: tactical, steel, no indulgence),
- preserves the “morning with clean edges” opening,
- includes Roger’s escalation (messages + arrival),
- and trims overlap so it reads like one continuous sequence.

Scene 43 — “Morning, With Clean Edges” (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

I woke to the smell of toast and something sharp—lemon, maybe.

For a moment I didn’t remember where I was. The spare room looked too calm. The curtains were drawn in a way that kept the light soft. The air felt cooler than it had any right to in the middle of a Queensland heat wave, as if Sarah’s house had been trained to behave.

Then memory arrived in a rush: Roger’s face in the study, the scrape of his chair, the sound of drawers being yanked open, Sarah’s message—I’m offering you a door that **locks**—and the weight of Sarah’s arms around me in the living room.

I sat up slowly.

My body felt strange: not relaxed exactly, but less braced. Like a muscle that had been clenched for years and had finally been allowed to let go a fraction without being punished for it.

I padded down the hall and paused at the kitchen doorway.

Sarah was there, hair clipped up messily, wearing a t-shirt and shorts, moving with brisk confidence in the small space—kettle on, toast popping, a plate already set. The radio played low in the background, something talky. Information, not emotion.

She glanced over her shoulder.

“Morning,” she said, as if I’d slept over because it was convenient.

My throat tightened anyway.

Sarah pointed with the knife she was buttering toast with. "Sit."

I sat at the small table. A glass of water appeared beside my hand before I'd even thought to ask for it.

Sarah slid a plate across: toast, fruit, a smear of marmalade. Not fancy. Not fussy. Just... prepared. Like I was worth preparing things for.

I stared at it.

Sarah lifted an eyebrow. "Eat."

I tried. My mouth was dry. I took a sip of water first, then a cautious bite.

The first swallow made my eyes sting—an absurd physical reaction to being fed like someone expected me to still be here in an hour.

Sarah sat opposite with her own toast and watched me over the rim of her mug without staring.

"You sleep?" she asked.

"A bit," I said. Then, because honesty felt less dangerous in this house, I added, "More than I thought I would."

Sarah nodded once. "Good."

I attempted a smile and it came out wobbly. "You're... very organised."

Her mouth twitched. "I'm allergic to chaos."

My gaze dropped to her hands—capable hands, practical hands. Hands that had held me and asked for nothing back.

Sarah followed my gaze and, as if deciding to misread it on purpose, slid a small box across the table.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Spare phone charger," she said. "Tiny toiletry kit. Hair tie. I don't know what you lot do with hair, but you always need something."

A laugh tried to arrive and got tangled with gratitude.

"You didn't have to—"

Sarah cut me off with a look. "I did. Because you're here."

There it was again: her stubborn refusal to let care be optional.

I ate another bite. The toast sat heavier in my stomach than it should have, like it was anchoring me to the day.

Sarah's phone buzzed on the counter.

I felt my body do its old thing—spike, brace, fix it before it got worse.

Sarah didn't flinch. She glanced at the screen, her face going still in a way I recognised now: predatory calm.

She didn't touch the phone immediately. She finished her sip of tea first, as if demonstrating that urgency did not run this house.

Then she picked it up and looked properly.

"It's him," she said.

My fingers tightened around my mug. "Roger?"

Sarah nodded.

"I should—" I began, the reflex loud in my mouth.

Sarah lifted a hand. "No."

The single syllable was a door slamming on an old habit.

"You shouldn't do anything," she continued. "Eat your toast."

I stared at her, bewildered. "But—"

Sarah walked to the window, lifted the curtain an inch, and looked out like she was checking weather.

"He's not here," she said. "He's trying to get you back on the hook. Sit. Breathe. Don't volunteer yourself for stress."

My throat tightened. I hated how easy it was to obey her. I hated how much relief came with it.

Sarah came back, set the phone down screen-away—small courtesy—and looked at me.

"You want to see what he's doing?" she asked.

The question wasn't permission-seeking. It was control handed back to me.

"I'm asking because you're allowed to decide what you can handle," she said, before I could answer. "Not because you owe me transparency."

I nodded once, cautious.

Sarah turned the phone toward me and kept her own hand over the screen, controlling how long I had to look.

A string of messages.

ROGER: Where are you.

ROGER: This is ridiculous.

ROGER: You can't take my wife away from me.

ROGER: Tell her to come home.

ROGER: This is between me and her.

ROGER: I'm coming over.

My stomach dropped.

Sarah's thumb tapped once, and more appeared.

ROGER: You always fill her head with crap.

ROGER: She's not thinking straight.

ROGER: I'll speak to you like a man if I have to.

I swallowed hard. My voice came out faint. "I'm sorry."

Sarah's eyes snapped to mine.

"No," she said, like a rule. "Don't apologise for a man being a man."

Heat rose behind my eyes. I blinked it back and hated myself for needing to.

Sarah stood, went to the front door, and checked the lock with a practised hand.

One click.

Then the second click.

She came back and sat down as if she'd just adjusted a lamp.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I'm going to respond once," Sarah said. "Only once. Then I'm going to ignore him. That's how you teach a man he doesn't own your time."

My breath went shallow.

Sarah's eyes softened, just a fraction.

"And you," she added, "are going to finish breakfast."

My hands shook so badly the toast tore instead of bit.

Sarah didn't comment. She picked up her phone and typed with fast certainty.

I watched.

SARAH: She's safe. She's not speaking to you today. Do not come here. If you arrive, I will call the police.

Sarah hit send. Then—without drama—blocked his number.

I blinked. "Just like that?"

"Just like that," she said.

"But what if he—"

"He'll try," Sarah said. "He's used to you managing his feelings. He'll escalate until he finds a lever." She took another sip of tea. "He won't find it here."

My eyes stung again. It was humiliating, how close I was to tears all the time.

Sarah reached across the table and pressed her hand over mine for a moment—firm, warm, grounding—then let go as if she'd only been checking temperature.

"You're doing the hardest part," she said, quieter. "You've left."

Something in my chest twisted.

"And if you go back," she added, "it won't be because you're weak. It'll be because he frightened you into forgetting who you are. I won't let him do that."

A thought rose, dangerous and private: *No one has ever spoken to me like that.*

Not even me.

"I don't want to go back," I said, and it came out raw.

Sarah nodded once, satisfied. "Good."

Then—because she couldn't tolerate too much tenderness without deflecting—she stood and picked up my empty plate.

"More tea?" she asked briskly. "Or are you one of those people who pretends coffee is personality?"

A laugh escaped me, shaky and startled.

Sarah's mouth curved. The day, somehow, had begun.

I almost believed, briefly, that the worst was behind me.

That was when the knock came.

It wasn't polite.

It wasn't friendly.

Three hard raps—commanding, male, familiar.

My whole body froze mid-step. My heart slammed like it was trying to get out first.

Sarah's head lifted from the sink. For a beat she didn't look at me.

She looked at the door.

Then she stood.

"Stay here," she said.

"Sarah—" My voice cracked on her name.

She cut across me gently, not unkind. "Lauren. Kitchen. Now."

It wasn't bossy. It was protective command.

I obeyed before my pride could intervene, because my pride had never once kept me safe.

Sarah walked to the front door and did not open it.

She didn't call through with *Who is it?* as if she needed confirmation.

She spoke clearly through the wood.

"Roger," she said. "Leave."

Silence.

Then his voice—too loud, pitched for intimidation. "I need to speak to my wife."

Sarah replied immediately, flat. "She's not speaking to you."

"I know she's in there," Roger snapped. "Open the door."

Sarah's voice didn't rise to meet him. It stayed calm, which somehow made it worse—for him.

"No."

In the kitchen my hands shook so hard my mug sloshed. I set it down before I dropped it.

"This is none of your business," he said.

Sarah's laugh was brief, incredulous. "She's in my house. That makes it my business."

Roger tried the strategy that used to work—the one designed for women trained to be reasonable.

"Tell her I just want to talk. This is all a misunderstanding."

Sarah waited a beat—just long enough that the pause felt like judgement.

Then she said, "Roger. Leave. Or I'm calling the police."

I heard him move closer to the door, a body leaning toward wood.

"You don't get to threaten me," he said, low, intimate.

"Oh, I do," Sarah replied. And there it was—steel. "Because I'm not scared of you."

My breath hitched.

"You're poisoning her against me," he snapped.

Sarah's voice stayed calm. "You did that yourself."

A harsh exhale.

Then he shouted, "Lauren! Open the door!"

My name through someone else's house hit me like a hook. My body flinched before I could stop it.

Sarah's voice cut in instantly, hard. "Do not shout her name in my house."

Silence.

My eyes burned. I stared at the kitchen tiles as if they could tell me what to do with my hands.

Sarah continued, slower, like she was teaching a child who'd missed the lesson.

"She's safe. She's leaving you. You don't get an argument. You don't get a scene. You don't get closure on your timeline."

"You can't keep her from me," Roger said.

"I'm not keeping her," Sarah said. "I'm giving her a moment to remember she has legs."

My knees went weak. I put a hand on the counter to stay upright.

Roger swore—quiet, vicious—then thumped the door once, hard enough that I jumped.

Sarah didn't.

"That's assault," Sarah said, clear as a bell. "I'm calling now."

For the first time, Roger hesitated. I could hear the calculation in the silence: risk, consequence, witnesses.

"This is unbelievable," he said, wounded outrage pretending it was moral principle.

Sarah sounded almost bored. "Then be unbelievable somewhere else."

A pause.

Then footsteps retreating. A car door. An engine. The sound of him leaving in a hurry he'd arrived without.

Sarah waited until the engine faded.

Only then did she turn the lock twice, as if sealing the last inch of safety back into place.

Two clicks.

Final.

She came into the kitchen.

I was standing very still, as if any movement would break me.

Sarah looked at me properly, eyes steady.

"You alright?" she asked, and it was the first time her voice had softened all morning.

My mouth opened. Nothing came.

Sarah exhaled and stepped closer—not crowding. Present.

"You did not do anything wrong," she said. "He came here because he thought fear would bring you back."

My voice emerged as a whisper. "It used to."

Sarah nodded once, grim. "I know."

The tears I'd been holding back all morning finally slipped loose.

Sarah didn't wait for permission. She pulled me into a hug—strong, anchoring—and held me until the shaking eased.

When she released me, her hands stayed on my shoulders.

"You're learning," she said. "That's why it feels like this. Your body is unlearning the lie."

I sniffed and wiped my cheeks.

Sarah's mouth twitched.

"And for the record," she added, dry as ever, "he's not coming back today. Men like him don't like police reports. They like private rooms and plausible deniability."

A tiny, broken laugh escaped me.

Sarah's expression softened—briefly. Then she straightened, brisk again, because that was how she kept the world in order.

"Tea," she said. "Then we call Celeste. And Mara, if you want. And we do this in a way that doesn't leave you alone with paperwork."

I nodded.

The fear in my chest didn't vanish.

But it no longer had the whole house to itself.

End Scene 43.

If you want one extra sharp Lauren line to cap it (still in her voice), I can add a final thought like: *"He didn't come for love. He came for access."* It's clean, brutal, and it pairs beautifully with the "door that locks" motif.



Yes, oh yes please.

Oh good — that line is *exactly* the right kind of brutal clarity for Lauren right here. 🧡 🧡
Here are **three options**, all Lauren-voiced, sharp, and thematically tied to *access / entitlement / doors*. Pick one (or I'll splice two).

Option 1 — cleanest, most surgical (my top pick)

The thing that landed—cold and unmistakable—was that he hadn't come for love.
He'd come for access.

Option 2 — ties directly to the door motif

He hadn't come because he missed me.
He'd come because a door had closed and he couldn't stand not being able to open it.

Option 3 — a touch more Lauren-manager, ledger-like

It wasn't grief that brought him to Sarah's door.
It was loss of control—of routine, of entitlement, of access.

Where to place it

Right after:

The fear in my chest didn't vanish.
But it no longer had the whole house to itself.

Add one of the above as a final beat, then *End Scene 43*.

If you tell me which option you love most, I can do a micro-adjust on the preceding line so the cadence lands like a gavel.



I'd like to see that, thank you...

Of course 🧡 🙌 Here are **three "gavel-cadence" micro-adjusts** to the last two lines, each paired with its matching cap. They all keep Lauren's POV tight and let the final thought *snap shut*.

Version A (with Option 1 — my favourite)

The fear in my chest didn't vanish.
But it no longer had the whole house to itself.

And the thing that landed—cold and unmistakable—was that he hadn't come for love.
He'd come for access.

End Scene 43.

Version B (with Option 2 — door motif, very satisfying)

The fear in my chest didn't vanish.
But it was no longer in charge.

He hadn't come because he missed me.
He'd come because a door had closed and he couldn't stand not being able to open it.

End Scene 43.

Version C (with Option 3 — Lauren's ledger voice)

The fear in my chest didn't vanish.

But it finally had competition.

It wasn't grief that brought him to Sarah's door.

It was loss of control—of routine, of entitlement, of access.

End Scene 43.

If I were choosing for maximum impact before Scene 44, I'd use **Version B** if you want the door motif to ring, or **Version A** if you want the sharpest, simplest moral accounting.



I agree... version A. Lauren - wow, am I getting some insights into the horror of being in a woman's shoes in these circumstances... positively JAW-dropping! - has done well to escape. Too many women are trapped in this situation with no friend (like Sarah) to turn to.

Version A it is 🧡👊 — it lands like a bolt sliding home.

And yes... that *jaw-drop* reaction you're having is painfully accurate. What you've written (and what Lauren is clocking) is the real horror: it's not always bruises and shouting. It's **access**. The assumption of access. The way "reasonable" women get trained to manage men's feelings so the household stays intact — until one day they realise they've been living inside someone else's entitlement.

Lauren escaping *with* Sarah makes the point without preaching: **women survive through women** — through doors that lock, phones that block, plans that exist, and someone who doesn't ask you to "be fair" to the person who was never fair to you.

If you want to reflect that truth even more — without turning it into a speech — there's a tiny Lauren-thought you can tuck somewhere early in the morning scene, something like:

Most women didn't have a Sarah. Most women had only the hallway and the lock they didn't control.

It's one line, but it widens the world and honours the trapped women you're thinking of.

Whenever you're ready for Scene 44, tell me whose POV and what emotional temperature you want, and we'll keep this momentum. ✏️ ✨



I would love for you to insert that Lauren-thought (about most women not having a Sarah) into this next Scene (44), which needs to be converted to Lauren's POV, 1st person, past tense, please:

****Scene 44 — "Keys" (Lauren POV, past tense)****

The next morning, Sarah didn't ask how Lauren had slept.

She looked at her once—eyes sharp, assessing—and said, "Eat."

Lauren sat at the small table, hands wrapped around a mug, trying to make her body behave like it was a normal Tuesday. The toast was warm. The air was already bright with Queensland sun, the kind that made you sweat just thinking about leaving the house.

Sarah moved through the kitchen like a woman who had decided fear did not get to run the schedule. Kettle. Plates. Knife. No dithering, no emotional fog.

Lauren took a bite because Sarah was watching her mouth, not in a controlling way, but in the way you watched someone you were determined to keep upright.

Sarah's phone buzzed once, then again. A message.

Sarah glanced at it, expression shifting into that controlled stillness—predatory calm, not panic. She didn't pick it up straight away. She finished what she was doing first, as if demonstrating that urgency didn't own her.

Then she read the message.

A faint, humourless smile appeared at one corner of her mouth.

"Oh," Sarah said. "That's *interesting*."

Lauren's stomach tightened. "What is?"

Sarah leaned her hip against the counter and looked at Lauren the way she did when she was about to deliver a fact that would change how you moved through the day.

"Lucy just told me why Roger suddenly came home," she said.

Lauren blinked. The words felt too casual for what they implied.

"Why?"

Sarah's eyes narrowed, amused and contemptuous at once.

"Because he got dumped," she said. "By his 'friend.'"

Lauren stared at her, not quite understanding at first—the idea felt absurd, almost cartoonish, until it landed properly.

"Dumped," Lauren repeated.

Sarah nodded, brisk. "She told him she wasn't interested anymore. Probably realised he wasn't a romance; he was a liability." A pause. "He's told Lucy, apparently. Confided. Like Lucy is his priest."

Lauren made a sound that wasn't a laugh, exactly. It came out thin and stunned.

"So... he came back because—"

"Because he lost his second option," Sarah finished. Her tone made the truth feel clean, like a surface wiped down. "Not because he found his conscience."

Lauren felt something twist inside her. Not heartbreak. Not jealousy. A kind of cold clarity—almost relief.

It was so grotesquely ordinary, the logic of it.

Lauren's gaze dropped to the table. She stared at a crumb as if it were an interesting document.

Sarah's voice softened slightly—not into sympathy, but into resolve.

"Two losses close together," Sarah said. "That makes a man like Roger desperate. And desperate men do stupid things."

Lauren's throat tightened. "He knows where I work."

"I know," Sarah said. "He also knows where I live. And where Lucy lives. He dropped us home once, after that staff party." Sarah's mouth curved. "Which also answers your other question about how he got my number. Men are very good at collecting access."

Lauren flinched at the accuracy. She thought of Roger's casual confidence—his assumptions that other people's boundaries were negotiable if he just pushed with enough entitlement.

Sarah set her mug down with a quiet clink that sounded like a decision.

"Right," she said. "Here's what's happening."

Lauren looked up.

Sarah pointed the butter knife toward the front door—not threatening, just emphatic.

"You're staying here," Sarah said. "Until the dust settles."

Lauren's voice came out small. "But I have to—"

"No," Sarah cut in. "You don't have to do anything except leave safely." She held Lauren's gaze. "Today you go back to the house while he's at work and you get your essentials. Clothing. Toiletries. Any documents you can find. Anything you cannot replace. Then you leave. Completely."

Lauren's hands tightened around the mug.

"What about... furniture? Appliances?" Lauren asked, and the words tasted ridiculous as soon as they left her mouth. She had spent years treating objects like anchors because she couldn't imagine having none.

Sarah's eyes were flat.

"Let him keep his bloody toaster," she said. "You're not going to die because you didn't take a couch."

Lauren's breath hitched.

Sarah's voice lowered. "Lauren, listen to me. Men like Roger designed the paperwork for this exact moment. Everything in his name so you'd feel trapped. That's the trick."

Lauren swallowed. The shame rose and tried to take up space.

Sarah saw it and cut it off before it could speak.

"You're not stupid," Sarah said. "You were strategic. You were surviving."

Lauren's eyes stung.

Sarah continued, calm and ruthless in her practicality.

"You get your essentials out today," Sarah said. "You hand in your keys in a way that's final. And after that you do not go back alone. Ever. If you need more later, we go as a group. Or we go with police. But you do not go back like a good little wife trying to be civil. Civil is how he gets you back in the room."

Lauren stared at her.

There was no softness in Sarah's plan. No sentimental fantasy of "closure." Just the clean architecture of safety.

It was frightening.

It was also... intoxicating.

Lauren heard her own voice come out steadier than she expected.

"Okay," she said.

Sarah nodded once, satisfied. "Good."

She turned her attention to logistics, because Sarah could not sit in emotion for long without turning it into something useful.

"Your car," Sarah said. "Fuel?"

"Half," Lauren replied automatically.

"Top it up first," Sarah ordered. "Not later. First. Then house. Then straight back here." A pause. "And keep your phone on. If he calls, you don't answer. If he texts, you screenshot. If he turns up at Wardrobe, you tell Celeste and you leave with someone."

Lauren nodded again.

Sarah's expression flickered—something like approval.

"And Lauren?" Sarah added.

"Yes?"

Sarah's voice went a fraction quieter, which in Sarah was basically a hug.

"This is not you taking things," she said. "This is you taking yourself."

Lauren's throat tightened so hard she couldn't answer properly. She just nodded and looked down at her toast until her vision cleared.

By late morning, the Hyundai i20 was running and the air inside it smelled faintly of old fabric and the vanilla air freshener Lauren had hung years ago. The steering wheel was warm under her hands.

She drove to the house like she was driving to a place she used to live, not a place she belonged.

The street was quiet. Neighbours' curtains drawn. A lawnmower buzzing somewhere distant like a reminder that other people's lives were still happening.

Lauren parked, sat for a moment, and listened to her own breathing.

Her hands were steady.

That surprised her most.

Inside, the house felt exactly the way it always had: too neat in places, too neglected in others, the subtle imbalance of a home built around one person's comfort.

Roger wasn't there. Thank God.

Lauren moved quickly—not frantic, just efficient.

Bedroom: clothes into a bag. Toiletries. Her own shampoo, her own face cream, the small items she'd once treated as "extras" because she was always saving money "just in case."

In the study she took papers she could find—anything with her name on it, anything that looked important, anything that she might need to prove later that she existed in this marriage as more than a shadow.

Her hands didn't linger on the furniture. The television. The framed photos.

They were objects that had been allowed to pretend they were stability.

Now, under this light, they looked like props.

And in the middle of the stripping-down, Lauren had a sudden, unexpected sensation:

Freedom.

Not the triumphant kind.

The quieter kind that came from realising that if everything of value was in Roger's name by design—then leaving with nothing but her own belongings wasn't humiliation.

It was escape.

Her most expensive asset was the little Hyundai.

That and a few dresses and shoes she'd bought over the years when she'd been trying to remember she was allowed to look nice.

That and her body, her mind, her ability to earn.

That was enough.

When she was finished, the house looked barely disturbed. Lauren almost laughed at the irony: she was leaving, and the place still wore the same mask.

At the front door, she paused.

The keys were in her palm. Warm from her skin.

She walked back to the kitchen table—the same table where she'd once served dinner like a peace offering—and placed the keys down gently, as if returning something she'd borrowed too long.

Then she went to the door.

She locked it from the inside, the way you could, if you knew the trick. A final act, done on her terms.

She stepped out, pulled the door closed behind her, and felt the click echo in her chest.

For a moment she stood on the doorstep and looked at the house.

It didn't look like a battlefield.

That was the point. The most vicious wars often didn't leave scorch marks. They left habits.

Lauren turned away.

She walked to her car.

She drove back to Sarah's with the sun hot on the bonnet and the air-conditioning doing its earnest best, and she didn't once check the rear-view mirror for Roger's car, because she refused to rehearse fear before it arrived.

Sarah opened the door before Lauren had even reached it, as if she'd been watching the clock with the kind of

vigilance that wasn't anxiety so much as commitment.

"Good?" Sarah asked.

Lauren lifted the bags slightly. "Essentials."

Sarah's eyes flicked over the bags like an inventory, then she nodded once, approving.

"Perfect," she said. "Come in."

Lauren stepped inside and felt the cool of the hallway wrap around her like a held breath released.

Sarah took one bag and carried it down the hall, then returned and held out her hand.

In her palm was a key.

Not Roger's key.

Not a borrowed key that implied temporary mercy.

A simple spare key on an unremarkable ring.

"Yours," Sarah said.

Lauren stared at it.

Sarah's voice was matter-of-fact, but her eyes were steady, unmistakable.

"You're not a guest," Sarah said. "You're safe."

Lauren took the key.

It was small. Ordinary. Heavy with meaning.

She stood there for a moment with the metal warming in her palm, looking at it as if it might dissolve.

Then she closed her fingers around it.

Not tightly.

Just... deliberately.

End Scene 44.

Absolutely, Robyn 🧡 🧡 And yes — this is the perfect scene to plant that thought. It belongs right where Lauren realises how *rare* Sarah's competence-and-care combo is: not sentimental rescue, but practical safety.

Here's **Scene 44** converted to **Lauren's POV, 1st person, past tense**, with that inserted line, and with a slightly sharper "Sarah runs the room" tone throughout.

Scene 44 — "Keys" (Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense)

The next morning, Sarah didn't ask how I'd slept.

She looked at me once—eyes sharp, assessing—and said, "Eat."

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I took a bite because Sarah was watching my mouth—not in a controlling way, but in the way you watched someone you were determined to keep upright.

And I had a stupid, sharp thought that made my throat tighten: most women didn't have a Sarah. Most women only had the hallway and the lock they didn't control.

Sarah's phone buzzed once, then again. A message.

She glanced at it, expression shifting into that controlled stillness—predatory calm, not panic. She didn't pick it up straight away. She finished what she was doing first, as if demonstrating that urgency didn't own her.

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"Because he lost his second option," Sarah finished. Her tone made the truth feel clean, like a surface wiped down. "Not because he found his conscience."

Something twisted inside me. Not heartbreak. Not jealousy. A cold clarity—almost relief.

It was so grotesquely ordinary, the logic of it. The entitlement. The maths.

My gaze dropped to the table. I stared at a crumb as if it were an interesting document.

Sarah's voice softened slightly—not into sympathy, but into resolve.

"Two losses close together," she said. "That makes a man like Roger desperate. And desperate men do stupid things."

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I stared at her.

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It scared me.

It also... steadied me.

I heard my own voice come out steadier than I expected. "Okay."

Sarah nodded once, satisfied. "Good."

Then she turned away from emotion and into logistics, because that was how Sarah loved people without embarrassing herself.

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In the study I took papers I could find—anything with my name on it, anything that looked important, anything I might need later to prove I'd existed in this marriage as more than a shadow.

My hands didn't linger on the furniture. The television. The framed photos.

They were objects that had been allowed to pretend they were stability.

Now, under this light, they looked like props.

And in the middle of the stripping-down, a quiet understanding settled in me:

Freedom wasn't going to look like a dramatic exit.

It was going to look like a woman moving efficiently through a house that had trained her to be small, taking only what mattered, and refusing to apologise for it.

My most expensive asset was the little Hyundai.

That and a few dresses and shoes I'd bought over the years when I'd been trying to remember I was allowed to look nice.

That and my body, my mind, my ability to earn.

That was enough.

When I finished, the house looked barely disturbed. I almost laughed at the irony: I was leaving, and the place still wore the same mask.

At the front door, I paused.

The keys were in my palm. Warm from my skin.

I walked back to the kitchen table—the same table where I'd once served dinner like a peace offering—and placed the keys down gently, as if returning something I'd borrowed too long.

Then I went to the door.

I locked it from the inside, the way you could if you knew the trick. A final act, done on my terms.

I stepped out, pulled the door closed behind me, and felt the click echo in my chest.

For a moment I stood on the doorstep and looked at the house.

It didn't look like a battlefield.

That was the point. The most vicious wars often didn't leave scorch marks. They left habits.

I turned away.

I walked to my car.

I drove back to Sarah's with the sun hot on the bonnet and the air-conditioning doing its earnest best, and I didn't once check the rear-view mirror for Roger's car, because I refused to rehearse fear before it arrived.

Sarah opened the door before I'd even reached it, as if she'd been watching the clock with a vigilance that wasn't anxiety so much as commitment.

"Good?" she asked.

I lifted the bags slightly. "Essentials."

Her eyes flicked over them like an inventory, then she nodded once, approving.

"Perfect," she said. "Come in."

I stepped inside and felt the cool of the hallway wrap around me like a held breath released.

Sarah took one bag and carried it down the hall, then returned and held out her hand.

In her palm was a key.

Not Roger's key.

Not a borrowed key that implied temporary mercy.

A simple spare key on an unremarkable ring.

"Yours," Sarah said.

I stared at it.

Her voice stayed matter-of-fact, but her eyes were steady, unmistakable.

"You're not a guest," she said. "You're safe."

I took the key.

It was small. Ordinary. Heavy with meaning.

I stood there a moment with the metal warming in my palm, looking at it as if it might dissolve.

Then I closed my fingers around it.

Not tightly.

Just... deliberately.

End Scene 44.

If you'd like, I can do a tiny follow-on "button" line (one sentence) that mirrors Scene 43's access insight — something like: *"For the first time, I held access that belonged to me."*



Oh yes... that would pull it all together, Emily!

Lovely — and yes, that's the exact stitch that makes Scenes 43 → 44 feel like one clean argument. 🧡 🤝

Here are **three one-sentence button options** (all Lauren POV, 1st person, past tense). Option 1 is the most elegant "pulls it all together" mirror; the others are slightly different flavours in case you want a sharper bite or more tenderness.

Option 1 — best mirror to "access"

For the first time, I held access that belonged to me.

Option 2 — slightly sharper, more explicit contrast

For the first time, access wasn't something a man collected about me—it was something I chose.

Option 3 — tender, quiet, door-motif adjacent

For the first time in years, the key in my hand meant *welcome*, not permission.

Where to place it: right after:

Then I closed my fingers around it.
Not tightly.
Just... deliberately.

Add the chosen sentence, then:

End Scene 44.

If you want my pick: **Option 1**. It's clean, strong, and it echoes Scene 43 without sounding like it's echoing.



I have a harsher streak in me than you do: I'm going with Option 2, because, like Sarah, the future for Lauren ****IS**** woman-shaped.

Oh I love that choice, Robyn 🥰👉 Option 2 has teeth — and it's absolutely consistent with Sarah's influence and Lauren's new clarity.

Here's how it looks *in situ* at the end of Scene 44 (so you can paste it straight in):

Then I closed my fingers around it.
Not tightly.
Just... deliberately.

For the first time, access wasn't something a man collected about me—it was something I chose.

End Scene 44.

And yes — that “woman-shaped” future isn't just romance; it's infrastructure: women who lock doors, keep ringers on, make plans, and treat safety as non-negotiable. That's the spine of this arc. ✍️✨

