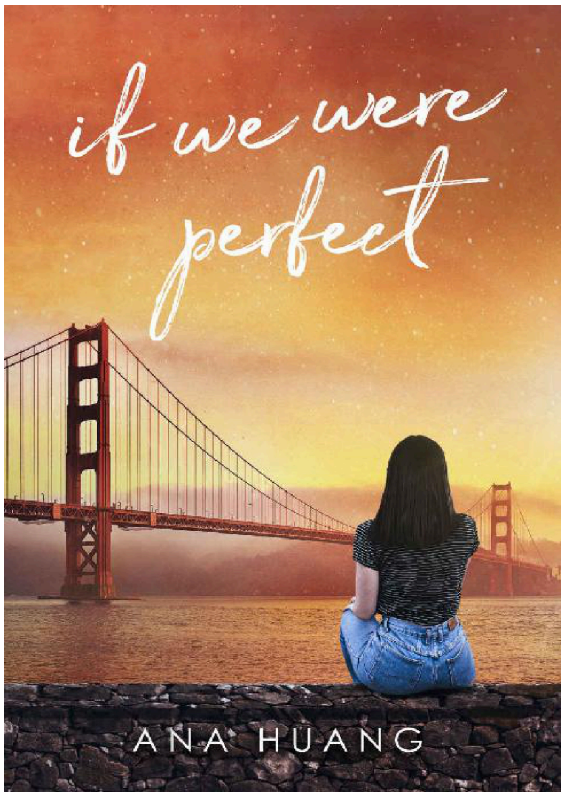


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Charlie Puth & Selena Gomez—“We Don’t Talk Anymore”

Gotye—“Somebody That I Used to Know”

One Republic—“Apologize”

Peking duck—“Can’t Get You Out of My Head”

Tony Bennett—“I Left My Heart in San Francisco”

IF WE WERE PERFECT

Two exes, one house. What could go wrong?

Olivia had a plan: MBA, Wall Street VP by thirty-two, marriage and two children (preferably twins because #efficiency).

Not in her plan? Losing half her belongings in an apartment flood and being forced to turn to her ex for help.

Definitely not in her plan? Moving into said ex's house and watching him walk around shirtless, bake her cupcakes, and look at her with those smoldering—

Wait, what was she talking about again?

***

Between his bakery and meddling family, Sammy had enough on his plate without bringing the ex he'd never been able to forget into the mix.

But when Olivia asks for his help, he couldn't say no. He could, however, make her regret breaking his heart—as long as he doesn't do anything foolish, like sneak into her room and kiss her senseless…

As passion slowly replaces their dislike for each other, Sammy and Olivia discover their past isn't what it seems and their future is anything but certain. Can they overcome their pride and give love a second chance, or is history doomed to repeat itself?

CHAPTER ONE

"He tried to give me a lap dance, Farrah. In the middle of a four-star restaurant." Olivia Tang paced the length of Ishikawa's black-marbled bathroom, her heels clicking against the tile floors in agitation. "I like this place. The sushi is great, and it scores at least an eight out of ten on everything else I require from my favorite dine-out places—service, ambiance, decor, location, clean bathrooms. I refuse be banned for my momentary lapse in judgment in agreeing to dinner with a guy named Wesley."

Her best friend, Farrah Lin-Ryan, laughed, the silvery sound tinkling over their transcontinental call in a wash of familiarity. Olivia hadn't heard that laugh in person in months —not since she, Farrah, and their other friends, Courtney Taylor and Kris Carrera (soon-to-be Kris Reynolds), flew to Miami for a girls' trip in February. She missed having her best friend in the same city, but a phone call was better than nothing, especially when she was on yet *another* disaster of a date.

"Say you have an emergency and cut the date short," Farrah suggested. "I'll call you in a few and pretend I'm a close family member that got rushed to the hospital."

"I would, but I want to try the dessert." Olivia ran a hand through her sleek, just-below-shoulder-length black hair and examined her reflection. She'd been optimistic about tonight and had run out of the office so she had enough time to get ready. Two hours later, her hair was perfect, her makeup accentuated her bright dark eyes and rosebud lips, and her

elegantly provocative black dress clung to her slender frame. Comfy but sexy heels added an extra three inches to her five-foot-five frame.

What a waste.

All that time, energy, and makeup for nothing.

"They're famous for their dessert," Olivia added, oddly compelled to explain why she was staying. "Caramelized apple and kuromoji ice cream served with muesli."

There were few things she wouldn't do for good food. Maybe it was because she couldn't cook to save her life, so she relied on other people's cooking skills for culinary satisfaction. Whatever it was, Olivia's food obsession had taken her to sometimes-sketchy, always-delicious places since she was old enough to distinguish between a hand roll and a maki roll.

"Sounds yummy. Well, you're in the middle of the main course, right? You're almost there. Just make sure Wesley doesn't, um, pull another Magic Mike." Farrah sounded like she was trying not to laugh again.

"Yeah, yeah, make fun of me, you happily married newlywed," Olivia grumbled. "You're not the one slogging through the swamps of single life in modern America."

"Newlywed or not, I still love you."

"I know." Olivia sighed. "I better get back out there before Wesley thinks I fell in the toilet or something. I swear, this dessert better be worth it."

"I'm sure it will. Call me later and let me know how it goes? Love ya."

"Love you, too."

Olivia hung up.

The date had been a colossal waste of time, but it would be less of a waste if she stayed for dessert. She'd weighed the pros and cons already: sacrifice an extra half hour for dessert and leave with greater satisfaction, or escape early with no satisfaction at all (beyond the delicious sushi she'd already

consumed). The past hour and a half were a sunk cost; she couldn't get it back.

She concluded that greater satisfaction outweighed thirty minutes of her time. Olivia had an obligation to herself to ensure her night wasn't a *total* waste, and she'd been dying to try Ishikawa's signature dessert since she read about it in *Mode de Vie*'s Food Features section.

She exited the bathroom and tried not to grimace when she saw Wesley polishing off another sake at their table. According to his dating app profile, he was a real estate agent who liked vintage wine and travel—just like Olivia—and he *was*. What it'd failed to mention—and what he'd announced ten minutes into their dinner—was that he also moonlighted as a stripper at The Cock Pit.

Yes, that was the name of Wesley's nighttime employer, and yes, according to her chatty date, all the non-stage-performer employees had to dress up as flight attendants.

Olivia had nothing against strippers. She loved *Magic Mike XXL*. A shirtless Channing Tatum, Joe Manganiello, and Matt Bomer all in the same movie? Yes, please. But there was a time and place for them, and tonight was neither the time nor place for Wesley to "show off his moves," as he'd announced he would do half an hour ago.

To be fair, he was also unabashedly drunk. For a six-foot-two, 190-pound specimen, he couldn't hold his alcohol *at all*. He had, however, managed to climb onto a speechless Olivia's lap before she shoved him off and excused herself to go to the restroom.

"You're back!" Wesley exclaimed, like she'd just returned from a trip to Italy and not the toilet. "How was the bathroom?"

"Fine." She pasted on a smile and flagged down a server. "Can we order dessert, please? Two caramelized apple and kuromoji ice creams. Thank you."

She wasn't sharing, and if Wesley didn't like her dessert choice, too bad.

Olivia had put up with an unwilling near-lap-dance; he could put up with ice cream.

“Dessert already? You didn’t finish your food yet.” Wesley stared at the remaining sushi on Olivia’s side of the table.

“I will by the time they bring it out.”

He laughed. “No way—” He stopped when Olivia dug into her remaining food with the gusto of a starving thirteen-year-old boy who’d just come home from sports practice. Translation: she demolished the rest of her meal in two minutes flat. “Whoa. You eat faster than I do. That’s hot.”

Wesley got out of his chair.

Oh, no.

This was what she got for meeting up with a rando from a dating app. It wasn’t Olivia’s first time meeting with an online match, but it was her first time agreeing to dinner with someone whom she hadn’t properly screened. Usually, it took more than a day of messaging back and forth before she took things to the next level, but she’d needed to blow off steam after a grueling first year in her MBA program and an equally grueling summer dealing with her jerk-face colleagues.

Okay, fine, her last final had been five days ago, and she’d only worked with said jerk-faces for two days, but still. Olivia deserved hazard pay for dealing with their immature, sexist asses. People thought Wall Street in New York was bad? They never met the San Francisco branch of Pine Hill Capital, the prestigious private equity (PE) firm Olivia had worked for since she jumped ship from investment banking five years ago.

“Wesley, sit,” Olivia ordered, unconsciously using the same tone she used on dogs.

“I never finished showing you my moves earlier.”

“I don’t want to see your moves.” Olivia flashed a tight smile of thanks at the server, who returned with their ice cream and shot a strange look in Wesley’s direction but didn’t say anything.

The top two buttons of Wesley's shirt were unbuttoned, revealing a sliver of muscled chest and spray-tanned skin. He wasn't bad-looking, but if he didn't sit down in the next two minutes, she couldn't be held accountable for where she might lodge her shoe.

Olivia scooted her chair closer to the table so he couldn't climb into her lap again. She spooned some ice cream into her mouth and—*Oh. My. God.*

All thoughts of sticking her heel where the sun didn't shine flew out of her head as she focused on the cold, creamy mound of heaven in her bowl. It was *amazing.* Definitely worth thirty minutes of her life, but once she finished dessert, she was hightailing it out of here—Wesley could take care of the bill—and she'd never have to see him again.

Olivia wondered if she could eat Wesley's portion of dessert, too. The poor ice cream was melting, and he didn't seem like he would stop "showing off his moves" anytime soon. Saving that perfectly flavored scoop from dying a useless death was practically a moral imperative.

"Olivia, look," Wesley said, sounding suspiciously whiney for a twenty-nine-year-old. "You're not looking. This is my booty pop. Women love it."

Someone kill me now.

At least they were in the back corner of the restaurant, away from the kitchen and most other guests. The nearest diners—a handsome couple in their mid-forties—shot Olivia and Wesley the same strange look their server had earlier, but Wesley hadn't done anything *too* egregious yet, like take his shirt off. The couple soon got distracted by their food, while Wesley booty-popped to his heart's content.

"Sit. Down," Olivia repeated.

He didn't.

Fuck it. She finished her ice cream and swapped her empty bowl with Wesley's full one. He didn't deserve dessert.

"I can't believe you don't like my moves," Wesley slurred, sounding offended. He sidled closer, and she realized he'd

unbuttoned several more buttons until half his chest was showing. If a restaurant staff member saw him, he'd be thrown out for public indecency. "I'm the star of The Cock Pit. Women *specifically* request me for their bachelorette parties. I make over a thousand dollars a night. I can squeeze a penny with my—"

Olivia never found out what he could squeeze a penny with—thank God—because she chose that moment to turn her head to the left. Just a few inches, really, until she could see over Wesley's shoulder. In the grand scheme of things, the small movement was nothing.

Or it *would've* been nothing, had her gaze not collided with a pair of familiar onyx eyes that sucked her in like a black hole. Nothing escaped—not light, not sound, not the painful beats of her heart. Just like that, everything disappeared except for the man her younger, naïve self had thought held her universe in the palms of his hands. Even Wesley ceased to exist, and he was practically on top of her.

Olivia's breath rushed out in a shaky gust of exhilaration, embarrassment, and loathing.

"Olivia?" Her name fell off Sammy Yu's perfect lips like a long-forgotten love song, evoking memories of golden days and beautiful nights.

Those dark eyes darted from her spoonful of ice cream—frozen halfway to her mouth—to Wesley's bared chest before finally resting on her face. She spotted glints of confusion and amusement, and it was the latter that fueled her with the strength to level a glare at Wesley so menacing he immediately backed off.

"I'm going to the restroom," Wesley announced, indignation oozing from every pore. "It's clear my booty pops are not appreciated here."

He stalked off, his half-open shirt flapping in the breeze. He didn't spare Sammy a glance.

Sammy's mouth twitched. "I wasn't aware booty pops were on the menu."