For my mother, Cathy Schwarzkopf Wolfson, who knew me first.
When provided with every practical support option and no logistical restraints, women may inhabit motherhood wholly, but without compromising their relationship to their work or themselves.

—Tessa Callahan, The Seahorse Solution: A New Approach to Motherhood
On day one of the Seahorse Trial, Tessa Callahan awoke at 4:45 a.m., eased into consciousness by the dawnlike glow of the KindClock on the nightstand. Her husband, Peter, slept on his back beside her, wearing only plaid boxers, his rib cage rising and falling in slow measure. Outside, it was dark, the streetlamps of Atherton still haloing the sidewalks, dew just beginning to form on the wide lawns of houses as perfect as designer cakes. Tessa’s own was a five-bedroom Georgian neoclassical, which she’d purchased and renovated four years ago, after Loop Industries had gone public and made her rich. She’d married Peter that year also, the year they’d both turned forty, and they’d turned the property into a suburban oasis: two gardens—succulent and vegetable—infinity pool, guesthouse/“Zen den” in the backyard.

Peter had trepidation about living so well—he’d been in a railroad apartment in the Mission District of San Francisco since finishing grad school and was a minimalist by nature—but Tessa was unconflicted. She’d worked hard, harder than most people she knew, even here in Silicon Valley, where a forty-hour workweek was considered part-time. She’d put herself through business school without racking up a cent of debt; founded two hit biotech startups, both of which had released products that improved the world; and was currently running
a third—Seahorse Solutions, her most ambitious project yet. Part of Tessa’s stock portfolio went to cause-based investing. She gave generously to charity, ate low on the food chain, volunteered at a nonprofit that taught young girls to write software code. She’d earned her life.

Tessa sat in bed and raked her fingers through her “new” hair, which her stylist had recently transformed from the blunt bob Tessa had worn since college into a cap of choppy layers. The stylist had also insisted on lightening Tessa’s natural auburn locks to a blonder, “more approachable” shade. The change somehow made Tessa feel both younger and more authoritative. It also showed off the aloe green of her eyes and her good skin, which was still relatively porcelain, while minimizing what her stylist referred to as Tessa’s “strong nose.” Ever since Tessa’s PR people had assigned her a RAW (relatability, accessibility, warmth) quotient of four out of ten, every one of her handlers seemed hell-bent on raising her score.

Secretly, Tessa was proud of her RAW number. It aligned with the ideas she’d promoted in her book, _Pushing Through: A Handbook for Young Women in the New World_. Don’t be pleasers, she instructed her readers. Embrace your unlikability. Practice confrontation. Banish your guilt. (She’d even banished it from her book itself, referring to it only as the g-word.) Her imperatives resonated intensely with young women all over the country and the world; _Pushing Through_ was an instant bestseller and went on to spend thirty weeks on the _New York Times_ list.

Across the bed, Peter moaned softly in his sleep and shifted from his back to his side. Their golden retriever, Python, raised his head from his fleece-covered bed on the floor and stretched his nose up toward Peter. Then he tucked it back down by his tail and returned to sleep. Animals loved Peter; he and Python had a near-telepathic connection. Python had been Tessa’s when she and Peter met, but now she could hardly remember the last time she’d taken the dog on a walk. He was completely devoted to Peter, in a manner so pure it made Tessa reflect
on her own devotion. She knew how much she loved Peter, but did she show it enough? Did he have enough evidence to believe her?

It had been so easy in the beginning. He’d been her coach in preparation for the annual Tech Tread in San Francisco, a charitable fundraiser in the form of a swim race in the Bay. Historically, all the big Silicon Valley execs participated, and hordes of spectators turned up to watch the well-known billionaires compete against each other in the frigid water. Tessa was a weak swimmer and had never participated, but the year after Sheryl Sandberg won the race, beating a field of mostly younger men, Tessa felt compelled to sign up, to the delight of her PR team. To help her prep, they’d hired Peter Grandwein, a longtime member of the local Polar Bear Club with a great reputation for teaching open-water swimming to beginners.

Swimming in the Bay, it turned out, even sealed in a wetsuit, terrified Tessa. The water was freezing and opaque, and absurdly, she could not stop thinking about old photos of the Loch Ness monster that had thrilled her as a child. When she looked out to the Alcatraz and Farallon Islands and imagined being alone in the water, far from shore, her heart beat so fast she felt she might hyperventilate.

Peter never told her not to be afraid. He never dismissed her panic. Instead, he suggested she visualize the water holding her up. To pretend she was a part of it. To give herself over to it and trust her body. He was so supportive, so kind, so nonjudgmental, and so totally in control. Swimming lessons were one of the rare times Tessa felt vulnerable and actually enjoyed it. They were a reprieve from her life on land, where she was perpetually managing, controlling, fixing. Also, Peter was so different from the men Tessa worked with, with their laid-back demeanors and little-boy clothes. Her colleagues in Silicon Valley were approachable in appearance but actually entrenched in an airtight boys’ club. They were men who said one thing and meant another, who played video games with the exuberance of teenagers. Men who’d been labeled
programmers or boy-kings. Men like her co-CEO at Seahorse Solutions, Luke Zimmerman.

Peter was nothing like Luke or the rest of them. Where they were cagey, Peter was straightforward. What Tessa disliked about the men in tech was the disparity between the lassitude of their surfaces and the cutthroat ambition underneath. No one got that rich by accident.

After one swim lesson, she hadn’t been able to get Peter out of her mind: the clean angles of his jawline, the haze of stubble across his face, how his brown eyes held hers and didn’t let go as he talked about bilateral breathing, head turns, stroke angles. She nodded and did her best to imitate him, noting the broadness of his shoulders as he told her to think of herself as part of the water, as in sync with the Bay.

After four lessons, she was beginning to swim with confidence, completing the half-mile swim from the dock to the buoys and back in faster and faster times. She hit her goal of completing the route in under thirty minutes, and instead of issuing his usual high five, Peter pulled her into a hug. They stood together on the dock, Tessa shivering against him, her heart at a gallop, her mind finally, truly devoid of thoughts. All that existed was Peter’s body against hers.

After her fifth and final swim lesson, the idea of never seeing him again seemed tragic.

She asked him to dinner. Two nights later, after work on a Friday, Tessa met him at his favorite taqueria in the Mission.

At dinner, she’d asked him about his passions, and he’d talked first about swimming and rock climbing, both of which he taught for a living, and then about food. How he’d gotten his master’s at Berkeley in sustainable nutrition and had always dreamed of opening a store that reflected his vision of locally sourced, package-free products. A store that created zero waste, left no trace, carried not a scrap of plastic or paper.

“Zero-Sum-Yum,” Tessa had said, off the top of her head.

“What’s that?” Peter leaned closer to her, across the table.
“Your store. You could call it Zero-Sum-Yum.”
His face broke into a grin. “That’s brilliant.”
“So what’s stopping you?”
He’d shrugged.

Later, when they’d become a couple, Tessa didn’t think twice about giving Peter the capital to open his store. She was in love with him, and she certainly had the money. She funded his business and, a year later, accepted the engagement ring (sapphire, passed down from his grandmother) that he presented during a weekend trip to Napa, his voice quavering as he dropped to one knee.

Tessa had never regretted saying yes to Peter’s proposal, but she wished she’d thought twice about funding his business. ZSY had closed after just fourteen months, after operating at a steady loss. The loss didn’t concern Tessa much. She knew it could take three or four years, five even, for a specialty brick-and-mortar retailer to turn a profit, and privately, she’d never really expected to see a return from ZSY. Her goal had been to provide Peter with fulfillment. A sense of purpose. Instead, he’d become more rudderless than ever.

“The store is failing,” he’d told Tessa over seafood tapas and sangria on Valencia Street, after ZSY’s accountant had delivered another quarter-year’s worth of abysmal numbers. “I’m failing.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. This isn’t about money. Not yet. It’s about seeing a passion through. It’s about putting your values into action. The numbers might be modest, but you’ve got repeat business. You’ve got a base of loyal customers. What we’ve got to do now is grow that base. Build the brand. Create name recognition. ZSY needs to become synonymous with delicious, conscionable food. Its mission needs to inspire consumer action.”

Peter dropped a shrimp tail onto his plate and stared at it. “Tessa, stop,” he said, his voice just above a whisper. “ZSY is not going to make it. I’m in the store every day. I feel it.”

“Businesses don’t run on feel.”
“Fine. But I can’t live with blowing through your money this way.”
“*Our* money,” Tessa corrected.
“Whatever. I still can’t live with it.”

*Maybe you should try harder,* she thought, but she could hear he’d made up his mind.

“Okay, so you close the store,” she said, as gently as possible. “Then what? Back to teaching?”

Peter stabbed a small, sharp fork between two halves of a mussel shell and shook his head. “Most swim coaches are in their twenties. I don’t want to be the old guy.”

“What, then?”

His eyes searched for hers in the dim light of the restaurant. He seemed to be summoning courage.

“I want to be a full-time father.”

His statement hung in the air like an unidentifiable scent.

“A father to whom?”

“Well.” Peter cleared his throat. “To our child, ostensibly.”

“Our child.”

“What?”

Tessa reached for her sangria and drained the last of it. “We’ve already been over this. We’re too old. The planet is overwhelmed. We’re not parental types.”

“But maybe we are. It’s not too late to find out.”

“It is,” said Tessa calmly. “We’re in our forties now. Way past peak fertility.”

“People do it in their forties all the time.”

“True,” Tessa said. “Just not me. Even if we could get pregnant immediately.”

“Why not?”

“Because I will fail,” said Tessa.

“You won’t fail. You’d be an amazing mother.”

“No, I wouldn’t. I’d be a scrambled, exhausted, guilty one.”
“And that would be okay. That’s how all mothers feel.”

“But they shouldn’t,” Tessa said. “Our standards as a culture keep sinking to new lows. It’s no longer a question of whether women can do it all. It’s just assumed that we will. It’s assumed that we can be great careerists and mothers and spouses and still magically keep the laundry in check. Which is not only impossible, it’s mass exploitation. It’s keeping women in a permanent state of fatigue and anxiety. I can’t be a part of it.”

“Hear me out,” he said. “What if I committed to doing all the parenting? The feeding and the night-waking and the pediatrician appointments. The diapers and the spit-up and the screaming. All of that will be up to me. You could literally do nothing but hold the baby when you felt like it. I will commit to this one hundred percent.” His voice grew husky with sincerity and emotion. The din in the restaurant seemed to be growing louder.

“Why? Why did you decide this was the answer?”

“Honestly? Because of you. I look at you and how much satisfaction you get from your work, and I’m jealous. I want that level of fulfillment, but I’m never going to have a career that I love the way you love yours. Look at how I ran my business into the ground. I’m just a different type of person.”

“You didn’t run ZSY into the ground. The natural foods market is tough.”

“Still. I need something else. Something more challenging and mysterious. Something bigger. Otherwise, I’m going to be in limbo until I die.”

“Peter.” Tessa could see the disappointment claiming his face as she spoke his name, assuming rejection. This triggered a deflating sensation in her own body, like air leaking from a tire. “I . . . I wish I could give you this. There’s nothing I want more than for you to be happy.”

“But?”
“But your logic is flawed. It’s endearing, but it’s idealistic. A mother cannot extricate herself from the parenting process. It’s impossible.”

“It’s possible, Tessa. You don’t even have to breastfeed. I’ll use milk banks and wear a prosthetic.”

She almost laughed.

“Don’t laugh,” said Peter. “Isn’t this right up your alley? Practically straight out of Pushing Through?”

A server materialized at their table. “Dessert?” asked the young man brightly. “Pistachio flan, perhaps?”

Neither of them looked up.

“I’m promising you, Tessa. If you’ll give birth, I’ll do the rest. One hundred percent. We’ll be a triumph of modern parenting. You can write your next book about it while I’m at the playground with the baby. Think of the title possibilities.” He paused, thinking. “The Hands-Off Mother: Maternity, Revisited.”

Tessa couldn’t help smiling. “Not bad.”

“Fathering the Storm,” Peter went on. “Trading Places, the Sequel.”

“Have you been thinking of these?”

“Maybe.” He clasped his hands together and leaned them on the table. “But seriously, Tessa. If you would be open to reconsidering a baby—just one—I would take full responsibility. I would work my ass off without a single complaint.”

“Do I come across as hopelessly unmaternal?”

“Of course not. I just know your priorities.”

Tessa felt a dovetailing in her mind, her aversion to childbearing suddenly cleaving into the logic of Peter’s argument, reshaping her original stance—absolutely not—into something new. This was one of the reasons she’d fallen in love with him: his ability to surprise her with his thoughts. She’d had no idea he’d been thinking about stay-at-home parenting and surrogate breastfeeding. She found this oddly touching.
Whether or not it could actually work, whether such an unconventional arrangement could abate the devouring effect children had on their mothers’ lives, well. Tessa wasn’t sure. But the fact that Peter had proposed such alternatives with so much earnestness, the clean line of his jaw tense with conviction as he spoke, made her love him more than ever.

He understood her. Most men only pretended to. Tessa felt it in the rote, dismissive quality of their nods, how their eyes slid away from her as she spoke about biological injustices and the unique burden reproductive capabilities posed to modern women. While many men mocked her (and they did, behind her back, or on various media platforms, or sometimes to her face), called her bitter, referred to her as a Silicon cougar, accused her of being antifamily, Peter loved her for who she was. For the things she cared about. Never mind that he’d given up on ZSY. Never mind that he was still adrift at the midpoint of his life. None of this mattered in the face of the way he loved her.

“Just the check, then?” said the waiter.

“Yes,” said Peter and Tessa, together. When he’d left them alone again, against the choppy hum of the growing crowd in the restaurant, Tessa reached across the table and cupped her hands over Peter’s.

“Look, I’m listening. I’m hearing you. But I need some time to think about it.”

She watched the change settle over his face, an easing, as if a valve had been released. He did not actually smile, but she could feel it.

“All the time you need,” he said.

In the end, she’d said yes. Peter had been elated and grateful, and Tessa had found her own excitement at the prospect of a baby growing—not as much as Peter’s, but still. They’d begun “trying.” And trying, and trying. Two years later, after the failure of IUI and IVF, after countless
hormone injections and four miscarriages, not including the ectopic pregnancy, Tessa had had enough. Their looping monthly cycle of hope followed by the dashing of hope was unacceptable. Not to mention the ongoing physical discomfort. Her body was saying no, and her spirit wearing down.

A child was simply not in the cards.

“It’s time to stop,” she finally told Peter, surprised by the lump in her throat, when yet another white plastic stick flashed the words NOT PREGNANT at her. They’d been sitting on the duvet of their freshly made bed, late-morning sunlight playing on the wood floor. They were both forty-two years old.

Peter was silent for what seemed a long time.

“Okay,” he half whispered.

“Maybe it will just happen,” Tessa said. “You hear about it all the time. The couple finally lets go, and then . . .”

“I’ve heard,” Peter said.

“So we’ll stop all the interventions, but we’ll stay optimistic.”

“I guess,” he said sadly.

She took his hand and they sat without speaking.

Then he said, “What about adoption?”

Tessa felt something turn and retreat inside her. She thought of the vast amount of paperwork adoption required, about the viewing of children’s profiles—Is she the one? Is he?—about how the agencies would favor younger applicants over Peter and her, stretching out the timeline indefinitely. She thought of the old book Are You My Mother?, which she remembered finding achingly sad when she’d read it as a child.

No. Adoption would only present a new set of major hurdles. Even if it ended well, even if they were able to adopt an infant (she did not have the confidence for an older child) in less than the year it typically took, the process would claim too much of her mind and effort. She’d gone through enough in the past two years. She needed to get back to work.
She squeezed Peter’s hand and looked into his eyes. “I’m so sorry,” she said, her voice quavering. “But no.”

“What about a surrogate?” Peter was beginning to sound desperate. “I’ve done a little reading on the process.”

“So have I,” Tessa sighed. “It’s a legal nightmare. And bringing a third person into the mix is potentially messy. I’ve read too many cases of surrogates forming attachments and wanting to be involved with the baby.” She did not add her third concern, which was the harsh public speculation that would surely arise if she paid another woman to carry her child.

The next morning, when she’d awoken, she had felt happier than she had in ages. Lighter, full of new possibility, the future suddenly bright and beckoning.

She had an idea. She went straight to her office and began drafting a proposal for what would become Seahorse Solutions, a blueprint for the revolution of motherhood.

Beside her, Peter continued to sleep. Tessa considered waking him; she had just an hour until she needed to leave for the Seahorse Solutions Center in Moss Beach, headquarters of the company she’d conceived of on that morning two years ago. Today, Seahorse would begin a clinical trial of its most radical component: a breakthrough reproductive elective called Targeted Embryonic Acceleration Technology (TEAT). Because of the sensitive nature of the Trial, Tessa and her co-CEO, Luke Zimmerman, would spend as much time as possible at the facility for the nine-week duration of the Trial. The facility had a number of residential suites, and today Tessa would move into one of them. She’d
be less than an hour from Peter, and he was welcome to visit, but still. She would be fully occupied with the Trial. She would probably not lie in bed with him again until it was fully under way, and the women of Cohort One were secure in their pregnancies.

The separation was critical to her work but would not be good for her marriage, which, it had turned out, was a thing that needed constant tending, like a garden of delicate flora. She tried her best, but it was tough to find enough time to be with Peter, and when she did, it was sometimes hard to get it right. When they had “downtime” together, she too often got the palpable sense of some invisible, soundless countdown taking place—an imposed urgency that distracted her. Then Peter would ask her if she was really present, which never helped.

She wanted to be more present with him. She did. But she often failed.

Last night, for example: Peter’s lips eager on her neck, his fingertips tracing the curves of her sides. Why had she stopped him? Why had she been unwilling to sacrifice a measly ten minutes of sleep? Why had she felt so entitled to that sliver of time, so impelled to claim it as her own?

She reminded herself of her own mantra.

*Never apologize for your honest desire.*

*Time is a feminist weapon.*

*Banish the g-word.*

But she couldn’t. The sight of the pile of clothes strewn across the bedroom floor—Peter’s jeans, inside out; a gray silk work shirt of hers, twisted up with her black bra—triggered the familiar, unpleasant sensation in her chest: regret. The heap suggested an urgency she’d wanted to inhabit last night. She’d wanted to be a wife who couldn’t keep her hands off her husband at the end of a weeknight dinner date. Who wanted him so much that she couldn’t bother to properly unbutton her two-hundred-dollar silk shirt.

Last night, she’d almost been that wife.
She reached over and grazed her hand over his head, enjoying the bristle of his short, dense hair against her palm. She felt desire stir inside her, a sensation of weakening. She maneuvered to Peter’s side of the bed and curled her body into his. She already missed him, preemptively, intensely.

Where had her tenderness been last night?

Their farewell at Angelini, the tiny Italian place in Palo Alto. They’d shared their ritual meal—the mushroom toast, the squid ink pasta, the bottle of Mendocino Syrah—and managed to avoid the fraught topics, as they’d agreed in advance: Peter’s unemployment, Tessa’s overemployment. Most of all, the Seahorse Trial.

Tessa had proposed the moratorium on work-talk, though the Trial was all she wanted to talk about. But lately, with Peter, the topic only led to one place: his skepticism. To his same old questions: What’s wrong with natural design? What’s wrong with human pregnancy as it is?

Tessa’s perennial answer: almost everything.

For most of last night’s dinner, they’d managed to avoid the topic, to keep the conversation light, even buoyant. His mother’s growing assortment of pet pigs. The progress of the young girls Tessa worked with at the coding academy. They’d laughed and netted their fingers together on the little table, their knees touching beneath it, candlelight throwing ghost-shapes on the wall beside them. Tessa actually felt romantic. Somehow, they’d entered one of those suspended spaces, free of context, when only the other person mattered. It hadn’t happened in a long time.

But then Peter had looked up to speak with the restaurant’s owner, Sylvio, who was a friend, and Tessa excused herself to the bathroom, where she checked her messages.

Kate Lavek: I’m a little bit terrified. Hurry up and get here.

Luke Zimmerman: OK to push up meeting time to 9am? My office.
Gwen Harris: Residence rooms are beautiful though I find the “dumb-waiter” unsettling. See you tomorrow.

LaTonya Sims: SUPERHEROINES. Just reminding myself.

The three women composed Cohort One, chosen from a pool of over a thousand applicants who’d applied to participate in the Trial. Tessa couldn’t help herself; in the bathroom stall, she responded to each woman’s text, uniquely reassuring each of them, though her hand sweated onto her phone.

To Luke, she replied only, “Y.” When she returned to the table, Sylvio was gone, the butterscotch pot de crème had arrived, and Peter’s mood had shifted. The change was subtle but Tessa detected it like a scent.

“Everything okay?” Peter said. “You were gone awhile.”
“Definitely okay,” said Tessa, too quickly.
“You seem preoccupied.”
“Just tired.”

Obviously, he knew what was preoccupying her. The Trial. Which, tonight, was off-limits.

Tessa wanted to reenter the loving, easy place where she’d been with him ten minutes ago, but found it impossible. The Cohort’s messages had reconfigured her attention. Instantly, they’d made her see Peter in a slightly different light, filtered with a colder hue. The pot de crème was untouched between them and Peter’s cappuccino still thick with foam, but Tessa was ready to leave. It was 11:00 p.m., almost officially April 4, day one of the Trial, and the Cohort needed her. As Peter spooned the dessert into his mouth with what seemed like deliberate slowness, Tessa’s impatience bloomed. He was still talking—now about his epic afternoon surfing at Mavericks—but she could no longer listen. She could barely restrain herself from reminding him that he was forty-four and thus might consider spending less time on a surfboard.
The names of the women in the Cohort began to loop in her mind with a percussive insistence: Gwen, Kate, LaTonya. Gwen Kate LaTonya. *GwenKateLaTonya.*

“Earth to Tessa,” said Peter.

“Roger.” Tessa mustered a smile, some eye contact.

“I can see you’re ready to go,” he said, nodding down to the inch of Syrah left in his glass. “Let me just finish this.”

This irked her. He’d already finished his cappuccino. He never returned to wine after coffee.

“Sure,” she said. “Take your time.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Peter’s voice softened. “If you do, it’s okay.” He did not need to say what it was.

“No, that’s okay,” she said. “I’m enjoying the break.”

“I’m proud of you,” he said. “You know that, right?” He reached for her hand across the table.

“Yes,” she said.

*GwenKateLaTonya.*

She tried a bite of the pot de crème; it tasted burnt.

Back home, he’d begun kissing her in the foyer while Python nosed at their legs, the silk of his fur tickling Tessa’s ankles. Peter paused to rub the dog’s head and shoo him away, then returned to kissing her, more greedily. She tried to savor the familiar sweep of his tongue against hers. Soon, he’d led her by the hand upstairs. She’d tried to stay present. *In the moment.* She’d pulled off her clothes quickly, with his help, as if she couldn’t stand to wait. But then, when they’d landed on the bed and Tessa had caught sight of her KindClock—12:09 a.m.—she’d felt official permission to stop. It was simply too late. Tomorrow would demand everything of her; she needed her sleep.

She stopped kissing him. Removed her hand from his inner thigh.

“I’m sorry,” she murmured. “It’s just . . . tomorrow.”

“It’s still tonight,” he whispered, his teeth at her earlobe.

“I need all my resources.”
He didn’t stop grazing his lips across her throat. He didn’t remove his hands from her breasts. He was not listening.

“Peter,” she said, at normal volume.
Now he stopped. Rolled off her, onto his back.
“I’m sorry,” she repeated.
He sighed. “No big deal. We’ll have another chance in a mere nine weeks.” Sarcasm—a rarity for him.
“That’s not true. We’ll see each other.”
“Maybe,” said Peter.
“Not maybe. You’ll visit the Center. I can pop home.”
“We’ll see.”
“I love you,” she said, with too much emphasis.
“You too,” he’d said, rolling over, and was asleep within two minutes.

How were men able to do this? Tessa had wondered as she’d lain awake beside him. What did it feel like to get those solid seven, eight, even nine hours, night after night? For him to have his biorhythms restored while she lay wide-awake, fending off the g-word and worrying about the Cohort. Were they sleeping now, on their high-grade mattresses in their guest rooms at the Center, or were they wide-awake also, staring into the darkness?

GwenKateLaTonya.

Eventually, Tessa had slept. A little.

Now it was 5:16 a.m. She wanted to be on the road in an hour, to beat traffic, but she wasn’t ready to get up, not just yet. Peter had half woken, draped himself around her, and fallen back asleep. It felt good to be lying against him, his breath deep and steady. At the bottom of it, she detected a faint wheeze. He had asthma, long controlled with a daily corticosteroid, but when the season changed from winter to spring, the
wheeze emerged. The sound seemed like evidence of his vulnerability, and Tessa thought of all she’d denied him. Vacations, weekday dinners. Lingering in bed in the morning. A baby. He accepted so much about her—her choices, that her career came first.

Why had she denied him last night? Would it have killed her to have gone through with it, to have given him a little more time, to have actually made love?

Tessa moved her arms across Peter’s back, massaging him awake. She looped her arms over his torso to reach his stomach, planed her hands over his taut, defined body, pulled him over to face her.

He blinked in the glow of the KindClock.

“In a better mood this morning?” He smiled. His teeth strong, white, even. He’d already forgiven her, in his sleep. Upon hearing Peter’s voice, Python awoke and hopped onto the bed in a single motion. Peter scratched him behind the ears and then pointed to the door.

“Downstairs, dude,” he said, and Python trotted off to wait by the front door for their morning walk.

“Yes, a much better mood,” she answered. “I’m sorry for last night.”

“You can make it up to me,” he said, pulling her onto him and slipping off her tank top in a single motion.

“Okay,” she said. She tightened her legs around him and lowered her face to his. She could still be in the shower by 5:50, on the road by 6:15. She raked her fingers lightly up and down the sides of his body and he shuddered. Tessa felt her guilt lighten and lift, evaporate like raindrops under hot sun.