

Excerpt from *Brazen* by Cara McKenna

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*[mid-book excerpt]*

I dress in a cashmere turtleneck and a layered crepe skirt and flats, and I wander upstairs at my leisure. I pour two glasses of wine and find him in the den, the television droning softly, reading lamps glowing. He's watching an old movie on TV, probably just the last channel I left it tuned to. I hand him the glass.

"Join me," he says, as if this were his home.

I glare at him again but I sit and we drink, and we watch the movie for a few minutes. I know what's going to happen between us and it frightens me, so I drink more. He takes the glasses after a little while and sets them on the coffee table, ignoring the coasters. I fix this transgression and then he pulls me back into the cushions and kisses me.

It's been forever since I've kissed anyone. Since well before the divorce, and even before the sex dried up in my marriage. My husband and I still fucked long after we quit bothering to be affectionate toward one another. The last time I did this, it turned my stomach. This time, it's wondrous. Behind the wine, I can taste him. The faintest trace of salt and some elemental human flavor. His hands cradle my jaw, and he's in charge. He starts with nips, little bites on my lower lip. Then suckling. His tongue traces the seam of my mouth then penetrates—just as it did to my pussy four nights ago, except this moment is a hundred times more intimate and personal and raw.

I study his handsome face with my hands, feeling his cheekbones and his temples, pressing my thumb against the shallow cleft in his chin, brushing my fingertips over his closed eyelids.

I pull my mouth away and ask, "How old are you?"

"How old do you want me to be?"

"Between twenty and twenty-eight." I'm nervous now, hoping he'll lie if need be. I study him harder. He has little signs of wear, a hundred tiny things that combine to create something the other boys don't possess. Dignity. Experience. Substance and wisdom.

"I'm going to disappoint you again," he says.

"My assistant is going to get a stern talking to. Didn't he check your ID?"

"He did," Sean says. He kisses me. "He said you'd forgive him."

"So how old *are* you?"

"Thirty-two," he says, and I feel something cold drop into my stomach—danger. He's young, but not young enough. It has nothing to do with the fetish, the taboo, the harem, the rules. It has everything to do with reality. In reality, I could never be with a man who's twelve or fifteen or twenty years younger than me. It's an impossibility and a relief. That Sean is only seven years my junior is scary. That I could be seen with him out to dinner at a restaurant and not be judged is terrifying.

"This isn't going to work," I say. I pull away from him and I feel chilly.

"I wasn't suggesting it would."

"What do you want from me?" I ask again. "From this?" I wave my hand to mean the room, the house, the scenario. Us.

"What do *you* want from this?"

"I think it's pretty obvious."

"Let me stay for the evening," he says, "and I'll show you what it is you really want. Just let me stay, and watch you with the others and you'll see."

"You watch and I'll see?"

He nods.

"You're a cocky little shit," I say, and I smile at him, amused. "Let me pour you another glass."