

An excerpt from *Crosstown Crush*, © Cara McKenna

First stand-alone book in the Sins in the City erotic romance series,
out now from Signet Eclipse in trade paperback and ebook.

Samira's plotting officially kicked off two evenings later, when Mike was out on a bust that might take three hours or thirty. After a couple days' soul-searching, she'd decided to give the first stage of planning a shot as a treat for him; a bit of wicked news to keep him buoyed through his rough assignment.

Step one was creating a post on a kinky personals site.

Bull Wanted for Cuckold Scene, Greater Pittsburgh

Even typing that one line had her heart pounding, pleasure and fear mingled in every beat. It felt as though somebody were behind her, reading over her shoulder. But she'd already given herself permission to bail—if she got replies and they creped her out across the board, she'd hit the abort button. If she received replies and they didn't *all* creep her out, but her intuition wasn't happy, she'd still abort. Though maybe she'd print out the more intriguing replies, in case they gave Mike a thrill, and further deepen the unlikely groove they'd been steadily etching into his libido.

But the more she reread the subject line, the less it intimidated her. She took

a fortifying sip of wine, and a half hour later she examined her composition.

Me: married female, midthirties, professional, pretty, curvy, Persian roots, great skin and smile.

My husband: late thirties, calm, submissive cuckold fetishist, indulged in role-playing only, so far. That's where you come in.

You: can pass for early thirties/late twenties. Single, safe, handsome, tall, built, and hung. No race preference, brunets a plus. Open-minded and kind on the inside, gruff and cocky on the outside. No penetration during the first visit or two—we can build up to more explicit stuff if things feel right. Ultimately my husband wants to watch us together and should be made to feel belittled and outmanned, and generally have his nose rubbed in how much manlier you are than him.

We're fun, sane, childless, and STI-free. Ideally we'd love to find a man we have chemistry with, for a longer-term, casual arrangement. Please, no leather/rubber/intense BDSM stuff. You will pretend to be my normal old piece on the side, who just happens to be gorgeous and bossy.

If interested, let's chat via e-mail. Please send a photo, including face. If it feels like a good fit, I'd love to meet for a drink. Then if the chemistry's right, we can flirt and kiss while my husband watches from afar, pretending I'm meeting up with the guy I'm cheating on him with. We won't take you home on the first date, but if it feels natural, the sky's the limit for the future. Be warned, we will require your real name before

we invite you into our home, and we will run a background check as a formality.

—S

“Not bad,” she decided aloud.

She fussed with the wording for another hour—and another glass of wine—and was shocked at the confidence with which she hit POST.

Her nerves tingled, but her curiosity far outweighed her fear. She wouldn’t get her hopes up—the fact that she was genuinely rooting for the ad to result in some candidates was thrilling enough. There was no deadline, after all. It would happen if and when it was supposed to.

The next morning, Sam sat with her coffee mug hovering near her chin, blinking, shocked by the e-mail flood that greeted her. Shocked and terrified and flattered and excited.

She was at her desk in the corner of the living room, and Mike was pattering in their tiny kitchen, beyond the breakfast bar. He’d gotten in around four a.m. and had to leave again in just a few minutes, but maybe this would give him a boost. The coffee alone probably wasn’t enough on three hours’ sleep.

“Honey, come here a sec.”

“What is it?” He rounded the counter with his own mug in hand, and peered over her shoulder at the subject lines. “Whooooaaa . . .”

“I know.” She’d opened a new e-mail account specially for the task, and it looked like a big old in-box full of sin, staring at her with accusing messages

titled *Bull found!* and *Can't wait to meet a hotwife* and the like.

"Forty-three messages," Mike said.

"In about twelve hours. And here I thought you were an outlier."

"Wish I could stick around and see what the hell they say." But instead he kissed her cheek with a mischievous little grin. "Another late one tonight."

"I figured."

"But maybe you'll have some developments to share with me when I get in."

"Here's hoping."

But the number dwindled as Sam filtered out men who lived halfway across the country, ones whose pictures turned her off, ones who claimed to be "a very youthful fifty," and some plain old creepers. It ruled out a *lot* of candidates.

"We're down to six viable options," she told Mike when he got in at eleven that evening. She slid his dinner into the oven. "Is it unreasonable of me to also get rid of the guys who didn't bother punctuating or capitalizing their messages?"

He came up behind her, wrapping his strong arms around her waist and planting a kiss on her neck. "We're shopping for a man we think deserves to sleep with you. Be as picky as you want. It's not the kind of decision you should rush or force yourself into."

She smiled at that, pleased to know that no matter how much he wanted this, there was no pressure. He valued their relationship and her feelings above his fantasies. Of course, she'd known that all along, but having spent her evening in

front of that intimidating screen, the reminder was welcome—as reassuring as the hug.

He left her to shower, and as Sam headed back to the computer, she gave herself permission to dismiss the messages with bad spelling and lazy capitalization.

It left only two candidates, but she liked their photos and introductory messages. She replied to both conversationally, asking if they were local, how old they were, if they had any experience with cuckolding, and what about it appealed to them. She also included a photo of herself. It seemed only fair, though she chose a long shot, one with an erstwhile haircut. It gave a sense of her body and her face, but wasn't detailed enough that the men would be able to recognize her in the supermarket, should she chicken out and abandon the mission.

After Mike ate his late dinner and disappeared to sink into a much-deserved coma, she sat down again at her laptop, intending only to shut it off. But there it was, a message in her secret in-box.

The reply was a disappointment. The guy was way too eager, with only fifteen minutes having passed between the time she'd hit SEND and when he had. His reply consisted of a rather dirty and not at all arousing missive about the things he wanted to do to her, and he was too antsy about setting a date for Sam's taste. Enthusiasm was one thing, but her gut said this was quite another. Pass.

The second reply was worse, in that it didn't arrive – not that night, nor by the time she was heading out to work the next morning. Two dozen new responses had come in from the ad, none of them especially appealing, all of them totaling discouragement.

"It's fine," Mike said when she debriefed him that evening. "What were the chances we'd strike gold the first time out?"

He was right. And having him home at dinnertime was treat enough.

But the following day, something changed.

Sam had checked her personal e-mail while her hair dried and her coffee cooled. She'd decided she wouldn't check "the dirty account," as it might just overwhelm her, the task now feeling impossible. Not a cloud she needed following her to work for the third day in a row. But even as she got her shoes on and shouldered her purse, curiosity had her crossing the floor, sitting down, clicking the bookmark, and typing in her password.

Ten or so new messages, but she didn't have it in her to tackle them beyond reading the subject lines. Then she recognized the e-mail address of the second short-listed respondent.

"You took your time," she muttered, opening the message. Though had he, really? Taking a day or more wasn't criminal. In fact, it struck her as rather encouraging that he had other things to do in a given day besides pursue his chances at playing sexual tourist in other people's marriages. A hobbyist, not a fanatic.

She sipped the last of her cold coffee and read the e-mail.

Thanks for the reply, S.

Bless him and his use of commas and capitals. She opened a new tab and found his first e-mail, wanting to confirm he was the one she was picturing. Yes. Oh, good photo. It was a shot of him in a park, crouching with his hand on a yellow lab's collar. He looked big and strong, with a fearless sort of smile and a lot of stubble, messy dark hair. Could be any ethnicity—Italian or Hispanic, or just a white guy with a summer tan. She liked the shape of his shoulders under his T-shirt, and wished this were like Zappos, so she could rotate him and examine his design from multiple angles and browse other women's reviews.

But he looked good. Not *too* wholesome, despite the park and the dog, but not sketchy. There was something in his smile, something lazy and easy, just a touch cocky. *Mischievous*. She began to wonder about his voice, then realized she ought to read the e-mail before she got her hopes up too high. She clicked back to the first tab.

To answer your questions, yes, I'm in Pittsburgh. I turn thirty-six in a couple weeks, but I think I could maybe pass for a few years younger.

Maybe. May need to bust out the Grecian Formula on my temples, but—

Dear God, prematurely graying temples? Mike might get hot over the prospect of competing with a younger man, but Sam's legs always went a bit wobbly over salt-and-pepper facial hair and the like. She liked a man with a few miles on him. A man who looked like he knew his way around a woman's body.

Yes, please.

—maybe that's negotiable.

Actually, I've got no idea what's negotiable. I've never been part of a cuckolding scene before. In fact, I had to look it up to make sure I had the right idea. I found your ad because I've got an exhibitionist streak I've been thinking about exploring. The idea of some guy watching me with his wife in the comfort of their home has more appeal than getting arrested for public indecency, and the latter seems to be what most of the people looking to be watched or get caught are after. So there was that, plus you're cute. So here I am, sleazing up your in-box.

Sam grinned. Then she glanced at the computer's clock, and realized she was going to be late. Fuck it.

You asked what about it appeals to me. I can't speak to the cuckolding, but as for wanting to be watched . . . Okay, I can't really speak to that, either. The idea just turns me on. And I'm not in the market for a serious relationship, so I'm not in a position to ask anyone to trust me enough to tape anything or let an outsider watch. And I don't really want to be out there on the Internet, in video format. But when I thought about what you and your husband are looking for, it made sense, especially when you mentioned a background check. I figure you're as concerned about keeping things discreet as I am. I'm not married or the manager of a day-care center or running for mayor, I just don't want to be another casualty

of the Internet's infinite memory.

Anyhow, that was long-winded. I promise I can be utterly filthy and lecherous, if that's what you guys want in bed. Just thought I'd make sure we're on the same page logistically.

Oh, logistics. Sam's heart gave a flutter. If he'd attached a spreadsheet, she just might have climaxed.

If you don't mind, could you explain a little more what your husband gets out of this? I don't quite see what's in it for him, if you and I ultimately slept together. I'm curious to know what about the idea gets him off. I know you said you've never done this before. Sorry if you're looking for a "bull" who's a bit more seasoned, to facilitate. If we end up hooking up sometime, I'll require a little breaking in, myself.

Anyway, hope to hear from you again,

Bern

"Bern?" Mike muttered when he read the e-mail over her shoulder, late that night.

"I'm sure it's short for something. Bernard, maybe? At least he's not a Bernie."

"Or a Nard . . ." Mike's gaze skimmed the message a second time. He was wearing his poker face, feigning perfect apathy. "He seems sane enough, and he wrote in full sentences. What do you think? Could you sleep with a Bern?"

"I'd like to at least meet him. I like that he mentioned wanting to be discreet.

And I like his photo. He looks kinda sexy." Kinda *very* sexy. "He's the best candidate I've seen so far. By miles."

Still, it was like ordering a dress online. It looks so good, seems so perfect, then it arrives and the color's off or it fits all wrong, leaves you feeling dumpy, and you're out seven bucks on return shipping.

"What did you say when you wrote back?" Mike asked.

"I haven't yet. I wanted to hear that you were still interested before I went any further."

"I am." He kept his voice businesslike, but Sam could sense his excitement.

"You want to maybe do what we talked about? Meet him at a bar?"

"With you there, spying on us?" For both titillation and safety.

Mike nodded.

"I think I might." A rush of fear and excitement rolled through her, the whole venture suddenly feeling very . . . possible. "Would you like to answer his questions about what gets you off about the whole thing?"

He shook his head. "No. If we're going to do this, I want him and me to be as close to strangers as possible. Since that's how the fantasy's worked, with me being oblivious to the other guy's existence. As long as you're comfortable being the liaison, I don't want to have any contact with him, outside of the role-playing."

"Okay."

"Going forward . . . even if this guy is as decent as he comes off in an e-mail,

I want to imagine he's the cocky shithead my wife's fucking around on me with. So if it's cool, I'm happy to trust your judgment the rest of the way. Plus you're better at wording stuff. You'll explain my freaky streak better than I ever could. And it'll sound better coming from a woman."

"Okay, then. And you're feeling . . . okay with it?"

"Sure."

She sighed, smiling up at him wearily. "I know you're trying to sound like you couldn't care less, so I won't feel pressured—but tell me honestly if this is exciting you or not."

Mike said nothing, just took her wrist, drawing her hand from the mouse and back to cup his cock, rock-hard behind his fly.

"I see."

He let her hand go, smiling. "If I had the luxury of staying home tonight, I'd drag you to the bedroom and listen to all your horny theories about this Bern guy. I'm just trying to be blasé so if you're not into it, you won't feel bad about pulling the plug."

She turned onto her hip and held the back of the chair. Mike smoothed her hair, tucking it behind her ears.

"Don't be blasé," she said. "I know it's my decision. And for now, I'm excited, in no small part because you're excited. So don't downplay anything." She gave his erection another quick squeeze. "At least part of you is always forthcoming."

He leaned down to kiss her temple. "You're the most amazing wife ever, I hope you realize that. Wish I could stay and ravage you."

"Me, too."

"But I'll be happy all through this damn case, knowing maybe you're right here, writing an e-mail to some guy."

"You may be the weirdest husband ever, I hope you realize that. But good. Happy to make you happy."

Another kiss, then Mike had to go out to relieve a colleague on a marathon of a drug bust. The glow of Sam's computer screen had become her most constant companion of late, but in a way, it fed the fantasy. *My husband's never home*, she imagined telling some handsome stranger. *He won't suspect.*

So after she locked the door behind Mike, she poured herself a glass of red and got comfy before the screen.