

HOLLY-JANE RAHLENS



Sample Chapter

How to Really Kiss

The afternoon I caught my mother in bed with Sammy Rosetti, I was sure things could only get worse. How could she? How dare she? What gave her the right? There she was, sprawled across our hotel bed, the quilt disheveled, her shoes flung off, legs bare, her hair in disarray. I was shocked.

Actually, when I stepped into that hotel room of ours, I didn't realize at first that it was Sammy she was holding. Why would I think that? Sammy belonged to me.

I took another step or two into the room, expecting her to look up, but she stayed put, her breathing heavy, practically clawing the object of her affection. Curious, I watched as her right hand released Sammy for a moment, then greedily pounced down and . . . turned a page.

I remember thinking, What the hell's she reading? What book can be so riveting that she doesn't even hear me come in? when the page in the open book in her hands came into focus. It was highlighted in blue magic marker with squiggly neon pink lines running down along the side. I immediately recognized the pattern because I had made it. My mother was reading my book. How to Really Kiss by Samantha T. Rosetti. Sammy. My sex guide!

I even knew what page she was on. Fifty-three. It was in the chapter called “Hip Tips for a Strip.” I knew the highlighted paragraph practically by heart. “If you’re both a little shy,” it began, “why not get undressed in the dark?” I had made a circle with an exclamation point around a box with a tip at the top of the page: “If you own one of those cute flashlight pens, you may want to consider taking turns pointing it at your partner’s body, illuminating a teensy-tiny area— here a belly button, there a big toe, an earlobe or an elbow. Make a game out of it. It’ll break the ice. And it’s very sexy.”

My stomach caved in. Oh no! Now my mother knew why I bought that flashlight pen yesterday!

My body went hot. And then cold. One second I was going to implode, burst apart with the fierceness of my rage, but then the next I felt like withering away into nothingness, mortified.

My mother raised a pencil, its point sharpened, and turned toward the window, probably to write something down in a steno pad I saw by her side, and that’s when she noticed me, a blotched reflection in the glass. She literally jumped out of her skin. “Oh!” she gasped. “My goodness, you scared me, Renée! I didn’t hear you come in.”

My legs were voice-activated. I lurched forward and grabbed the book. “That’s mine!”

My mother sat up straight, tucking her knees under her skirt. “You’re back already?”

“What are you doing with my book?”

My mother raised her hands and opened her mouth as if to say something, but nothing came out. Well, what could she say? She was guilty. As charged. Period.

“So now you’re poking your nose through my suitcase?” I said, gesturing with the book for emphasis.

My mother was looking at me with that ever-patient expression of hers, her “now let us please be mature and rational adults” look. “It was in your laundry bag,” she said evenly. “You said you wanted your underwear washed.”

Oh no! How could I? How could I forget that I hid the book in my laundry bag?

“I had no idea it was in the bag,” my mother went on, tugging her top down around her hips and then smoothing out the fabric. It was cut loose like most

everything she wore these days. “The maid brought it down to the laundry room with your underwear. And then the housekeeper brought it back up and—”

“And kindly asked you to please read it!”

I pulled off my backpack and threw the book in. Nothing was safe from this woman! Argh!