

Excerpt from

Dog
Sitters

BY HALF PAST three her nerves were shot. It was time for a complete change of pace; a brief expedition to the Stanhope Hotel in Manhattan was what she had in mind.

If Jack still had something going on with his ex-girlfriend she wanted to know as soon as possible, before she allowed feelings to take root that had begun even before she'd woken up in his arms.

Her former almost-fiancé had left for Shanghai in August of the year Hint had turned twenty-nine. He'd said he had a question to ask her when he returned at Christmastime. But in the ensuing months, via e-mail he'd told her he thought he knew who he was but Asia had shown him a new side to himself. She'd done some research with colleagues of his who'd also been sent out to start up the Shanghai office and discovered the personal sightseeing guide who'd help Tim discover his new side. A stunning Chinese girl had attached herself like a limpet to whichever side of Tim that had forgotten he'd spoken of a future together with Hint before he'd left.

In November she had confronted him on the phone about the other woman. His response had changed her feelings for him in an instant. He'd said he loved Hint, but had also developed feelings for someone he'd met locally. He'd thought he'd been sure of a future with her but when he'd gotten to Shanghai everything had been different and he didn't know who he was anymore. The conversation had confused her until it had totally turned her off. At that point the fact that he didn't know who he was anymore helped her figure out exactly who she was. No man with divided affections would ever again cross the threshold of her heart.

"I don't know what to do, Hint," he'd moaned into the phone.

"Are you asking me to tell you?" she'd asked, disgust welling up from somewhere deep in her stomach.

"I don't know what I'm asking," he'd waffled. "Can you give me some more time?"

"Tim, do you remember the plans you said you wanted to make with me before you left?"

"Yes, of course."

She sensed he had no idea what she was talking about. "What were they?"

"They were . . . they were plans we hadn't made yet," he answered sophistically.

"And what were the actual plans you were planning?"

“I hadn’t planned them yet.”

“But your company did have plans. Did those plans change yours?”

“I had no choice, Hint. It was a great opportunity.”

“I’m sure it was. But what about your own plans for yourself?

Wasn’t I part of them?”

“Yes, of course,” he’d stammered.

“But I’m not now.”

“Of course you are. It’s just that so much has happened,” he whined. “I, uh, need some time to sort it out.”

“You need to make a decision,” she’d told him. It struck her that this was a man who had room in his heart to entertain two women. If she fought for him and won, all she’d end up with was a fiancé then a husband with a track record of divided affections.

“I can’t,” he’d moaned, sounding like a cross between Hamlet and a two-year-old.

“Well, I can.” Suddenly Hint knew this revelation of Tim’s character would help her better define her own. “Let me ask you one thing.”

“What’s that?” His voice had sounded muffled, thin.

“Were we engaged to be engaged?” She might as well know for the record.

“Yes. Something like that,” he’d replied.

“Well, now we’re not.” She hung up.