

Chapter One

Twenty-five. That's the number I count to every morning before I even open my eyes. It's a meditative calming technique that helps your brain with memory, focus, and attention, but the real reason I do it is because that's how long it takes my boyfriend, David, to get out of bed next to me and flip the coffee maker on, and for me to smell the beans.

Thirty-six. That's how many minutes it takes me to brush my teeth, shower, and put on face toner, serum, cream, makeup, and a suit for work. If I wash my hair, it's forty-three.

Eighteen. That's the walk to work in minutes from our Murray Hill apartment to East Forty-Seventh Street, where the law offices of Sutter, Boyt and Barn are located.

Twenty. That's how many months I believe you should be dating someone before you move in with them.

Twenty-eight. The right age to get engaged.

Thirty. The right age to get married.

My name is Dannie Kohan. And I believe in living by numbers.

"Happy Interview Day," David says when I walk into the kitchen. Today. December 15. I'm wearing a bathrobe, hair spun

up into a towel. He's still in his pajamas, and his brown hair has a significant amount of salt and pepper for someone who has not yet crossed thirty, but I like it. It makes him look dignified, particularly when he wears glasses, which he often does.

"Thank you," I say. I wrap my arms around him, kiss his neck and then his lips. I've already brushed my teeth, but David never has morning breath. Ever. When we first started dating, I thought he was getting up out of bed before me to swoosh some toothpaste in there, but when we moved in together, I realized it's just his natural state. He wakes up that way. The same cannot be said for me.

"Coffee is ready."

He squints at me, and my heart tugs at the look on his face, the way it scrunches all up when he's trying to pay attention but doesn't have his contacts in yet.

He takes a mug down and then pours. I go to the refrigerator, and when he hands me the cup, I add a dollop of creamer. Coffee Mate, hazelnut. David thinks it's sacrilegious but he buys it, to indulge me. This is the kind of man he is. Judgmental, and generous.

I take the coffee cup and go sit in our kitchen nook that overlooks Third Avenue. Murray Hill isn't the most glamorous neighborhood in New York, and it gets a bad rap (every Jewish fraternity and sorority kid in the Tri-State area moves here after graduation. The average street style is a Penn sweatshirt), but there's nowhere else in the city where we'd be able to afford a two-bedroom with a full kitchen in a doorman building, and between the two of us, we make more money than a pair of twenty-eight-year-olds has any right to.

David works in finance as an investment banker at Tishman Speyer, a real estate conglomerate. I'm a corporate lawyer. And

today, I have an interview at the top law firm in the city. Wachtell. The mecca. The pinnacle. The mythological headquarters that sits in a black-and-gray fortress on West Fifty-Second street. The top lawyers in the country all work there. The client list is unfathomable; they represent everyone: Boeing. ING. AT&T. All of the biggest corporate mergers, the deals that determine the vicissitudes of our global markets, happen within their walls.

I've wanted to work at Wachtell since I was ten years old and my father used to take me into the city for lunch at Serendipity and a matinee. We'd pass all the big buildings in Times Square, and then I'd insist we walk to 51 West Fifty-Second Street so I could gaze up at the CBS building, where Wachtell has historically had its offices since 1965.

"You're going to kill it today, babe," David says. He stretches his arms overhead, revealing a slice of stomach. David is tall and lanky. All of his T-shirts are too small when he stretches, which I welcome. "You ready?"

"Of course."

When this interview first came up, I thought it was a joke. A headhunter calling me from Wachtell, yeah right. Bella, my best friend—and the proverbial surprise-obsessed flighty blonde—must have paid someone off. But no, it was for real. Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz wanted to interview me. Today, December 15. I marked the date in my planner in Sharpie. Nothing was going to erase this.

"Don't forget we're going to dinner to celebrate tonight," David says.

"I won't know if I got the job today," I tell him. "That's not how interviews work."

"Really? Explain it to me, then." He's flirting with me. David is a great flirt. You wouldn't think it, he's so buttoned-up most of

the time, but he has a great, witty mind. It's one of the things I love most about him. It was one of the things that first attracted me to him.

I raise my eyebrows at him and he downshifts. "Of course you'll get the job. It's in your plan."

"I appreciate your confidence."

I don't push him, because I know what tonight is. David is terrible with secrets, and an even worse liar. Tonight, on this, the second month of my twenty-eighth year, David Andrew Rosen is going to propose to me.

"Two Raisin Bran scoops, half a banana?" he asks. He's holding out a bowl to me.

"Big days are bagel days," I say. "Whitefish. You know that."

Before we find out about a big case, I always stop at Sarge's on Lexington. Their whitefish salad rivals Katz's downtown, and the wait, even with a line, is never more than four and a half minutes. I revel in their efficiency.

"Make sure you bring gum," David says, sliding in next to me. I bat my eyes and take a sip of coffee. It goes down sweet and warm.

"You're here late," I tell him. I've just realized. He should have been gone hours ago. He works market hours. It occurs to me he might not be going to the office at all today. Maybe he still has to pick up the ring.

"I thought I'd see you off." He flips his watch over. It's Apple. I got it for him for our two-year anniversary, four months ago. "But I should jet. I was going to work out."

David never works out. He has a monthly membership to Equinox I think he's used maybe twice in two and a half years. He's naturally lean, and runs sometimes on the weekends. The wasted expense is a point of contention between us, so I don't

bring it up this morning. I don't want anything to get in the way of today, and certainly not this early.

"Sure," I say. "I'm gonna get ready."

"But you have time." David pulls me toward him and threads a hand into the collar of my robe. I let it linger for one, two, three, four . . .

"I thought you were late. And I can't lose focus."

He nods. Kisses me. He gets it. "In that case, we're doubling up tonight," he says.

"Don't tease me." I pinch his bicep.

My cell phone is ringing where it sits plugged in on my nightstand in the bedroom, and I follow the noise. The screen fills up with a photo of a blue-eyed, blond-haired shiksa goddess sticking her tongue sideways at the camera. Bella. I'm surprised. My best friend is only awake before noon if she's been up all night.

"Good morning," I tell her. "Where are you? Not New York?"

She yawns. I imagine her stretching on some seaside terrace, a silk kimono pooling around her.

"Not New York. Paris," she says.

Well that explains her ability to speak at this hour. "I thought you were leaving this afternoon?" I have her flight on my phone: UA 782. Leaves Newark at 3:48 p.m.

"I went early," she says. "Dad wanted to do dinner tonight. Just to bitch about mom, clearly." She pauses, and I hear her sneeze. "What are you doing today?"

Does she know about tonight? David would have told her, I think, but she's also bad at keeping secrets—especially from me.

"Big day for work and then we're going to dinner."

"Right. Dinner," she says. She definitely knows.

I put the phone down on speaker and shake out my hair. It will

take me seven minutes to blow it dry. I check the clock: 8:57 a.m. Plenty of time. The interview isn't until eleven.

"I almost tried you three hours ago."

"Well that would have been early."

"But you'd still pick up," she says. "Lunatic."

Bella knows I leave my phone on all night.

Bella and I have been best friends since we were seven years old. Me, Nice Jewish Girl from The Main Line of Philadelphia. Her, French-Italian Princess whose parents threw her a thirteenth birthday party big enough to stop any bat mitzvah in its tracks. Bella is spoiled, mercurial, and more than a little bit magical. It's not just me. Everywhere she goes people fall at her feet. She is the easiest to love, and gives love freely. But she's fragile, too. A membrane of skin stretched so thinly over her emotions it's always threatening to burst.

Her parents' bank account is large and easily accessible, but their time and attention are not. Growing up, she practically lived at my house. It was always the two of us.

"Bells, I gotta go. I have that interview today."

"That's right! Watchman!"

"Wachtell."

"What are you going to wear?"

"Probably a black suit. I always wear a black suit." I'm already mentally thumbing through my closet, even though I've had the suit chosen since they called me.

"How thrilling," she deadpans, and I imagine her scrunching up her pin small nose like she's just smelled something unsavory.

"When are you back?" I ask.

"Probably Tuesday," she says. "But I don't know. Renaldo might meet me, in which case we'd go to the Riviera for a few days. You wouldn't think it, but it's great this time of year. No one is around. You have the whole place to yourself."

Renaldo. I haven't heard his name in a beat. I think he was before Francesco, the pianist, and after Marcus, the filmmaker. Bella is always in love, always. But her romances, while intense and dramatic, never last for more than a few months. She rarely, if ever, calls someone her boyfriend. I think the last one might have been when we were in college. And what of Jacques?

"Have fun," I say. "Text me when you land and send me pictures, especially of Renaldo, for my files, you know."

"Yes, Mom."

"Love you," I say.

"Love you more."

I blow-dry my hair and keep it down, running a flat iron over the hairline and the ends so it doesn't frizz up. I put on small pearl stud earrings my parents gave me for my college graduation, and my favorite Movado watch David bought me for Hanukkah last year. My chosen black suit, fresh from the dry cleaners, hangs on the back of my closet door. When I put it on, I add a red-and-white ruffled shirt underneath, in Bella's honor. A little spark of detail, or life, as she would say.

I come back into the kitchen and give a little spin. David's made little to no progress on getting dressed or leaving. He's definitely taking the day off. "What do we think?" I ask him.

"You're hired," he says. He puts a hand on my hip and gives me a light kiss on the cheek.

I smile at him. "That's the plan," I say.



Sarge's is predictably empty at 10 a.m.—it's a morning-commute place—so it only takes two minutes and forty seconds for me to get my whitefish bagel. I eat it walking. Sometimes I stand at the

counter table at the window. There are no stools, but there's usually room to stash my bag.

The city is all dressed up for the holidays. The streetlamps lit, the windows frosted. It's thirty-one degrees out, practically balmy by New York winter standards. And it hasn't snowed yet, which makes walking in heels a breeze. So far, so good.

I arrive at Wachtell's headquarters at 10:45 a.m. My stomach starts working against me, and I toss the rest of the bagel. This is it. The thing I've worked the last six years for. Well, really, the thing I've worked the last eighteen years for. Every SAT prep test, every history class, every hour studying for the LSAT. The countless 2 a.m. nights. Every time I've been chewed out by a partner for something I didn't do, every time I've been chewed out by a partner for something I did do, every single piece of effort has been leading me to, and preparing me for, this one moment.

I pop a piece of gum. I take a deep breath, and enter the building.

Fifty-one West Fifty-Second Street is giant, but I know exactly what door I need to enter, and what security desk I need to check in at (the entrance on Fifty-Second, the desk right in front). I've rehearsed this chain of events so many times in my head, like a ballet. First the door, then the pivot, then a sashay to the left and a quick succession of steps. *One two three, one two three...*

The elevator doors open to the thirty-third floor, and I suck in my breath. I can feel the energy, like candy to the vein, as I look around at the people moving in and out of glass-doored conference rooms like extras on the show *Suits*, hired for today—for me, for my viewing pleasure alone. The place is in full bloom. I get the feeling that you could walk in here at any hour, any day of the week, and this is what you would see. Midnight on Saturday, Sunday at 8 a.m. It's a world out of time, functioning on its own schedule.

This is what I want. This is what I've always wanted. To be somewhere that stops at nothing. To be surrounded by the pace and rhythm of greatness.

"Ms. Kohan?" A young woman greets me where I stand. She wears a Banana Republic sheath dress, no blazer. She's a receptionist. I know, because all lawyers are required to wear suits at Wachtell. "Right this way."

"Thank you so much."

She leads me around the bullpen. I spot the corners, the offices on full display. Glass and wood and chrome. The *thump thump thump* of money. She leads me into a conference room with a long mahogany table. On it sits a glass tumbler of water and three glasses. I take in this subtle and revealing piece of information. There are going to be two partners in here for the interview, not one. It's good, of course, it's fine. I know my stuff frontward and backward. I could practically draw a floor plan of their offices for them. I've got this.

Two minutes stretch to five minutes stretch to ten. The receptionist is long gone. I'm contemplating pouring myself a glass of water when the door opens and in walks Miles Aldridge. First in his class at Harvard. Yale Law Review. And a senior partner at Wachtell. He's a legend, and now he's in the same room as me. I inhale.

"Ms. Kohan," he says. "So glad you could make this date work."

"Naturally, Mr. Aldridge," I say. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

He raises his eyebrows at me. He's impressed I know his name sight unseen. Three points.

"Shall we?" He gestures for me to sit, and I do. He pours us each a glass of water. The other one sits there, untouched. "So," he says. "Let's begin. Tell me a little bit about yourself."

I work through the answers I've practiced, honed, and sculpted over the last few days. From Philadelphia. My father owned a lighting business, and when I was not even ten years old, I helped him with contracts in the back office. In order to sort and file to my heart's content, I had to read into them a bit, and I fell in love with the organization, the way language—the pure truth in the words—was nonnegotiable. It was like poetry, but poetry with outcome, poetry with concrete meaning—with actionable power. I knew it was what I wanted to do. I went to Columbia Law and graduated second in my class. I clerked for the Southern District of New York before accepting the reality of what I'd always known, which is that I wanted to be a corporate lawyer. I wanted to practice a kind of law that is high stakes, dynamic, incredibly competitive, and yes, has the opportunity to make a lot of money.

Why?

Because it's what I was born to do, what I have trained for, and what has led me here today, to the place I always knew I'd be. The golden gates. Their headquarters.

We go through my resume, point by point. Aldridge is surprisingly thorough, which is to my benefit, as it gives me more time to express my accomplishments. He asks me why I think I'd be a good fit, what kind of work culture I gravitate toward. I tell him that when I stepped off the elevator and saw all the endless movement, all the frenzied bustle, I felt as if I were home. It's not hyperbole, he can tell. He chuckles.

"It's aggressive," he says. "And endless, as you say. Many spin out."

I cross my hands on the table. "I can assure you," I tell him. "That won't be a problem here."

And then he asks me the proverbial question. The one you always prepare for because they always ask:

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I inhale, and then give him my airtight answer. Not just because I've practiced, which I have. But because it's true. I know. I always have.

I'll be working here, at Wachtell, as a senior associate. I'll be the most requested in my year on M&A cases. I'm incredibly thorough and incredibly efficient; I'm like an X-ACTO knife. I'll be up for junior partner.

And outside of work?

I'll be married to David. We'll be living in Gramercy Park, on the Park. We'll have a kitchen we love and enough table space for two computers. We'll go to the Hamptons every summer; the Berkshires, occasionally, on weekends. When I'm not in the office, of course.

Aldridge is satisfied. I've cinched it, I can tell. We shake hands, and the receptionist is back, ushering me through the offices and to the elevators that deliver me once again to the land of the mortals. The third glass was just to throw me off. Good shot.

After the interview I go downtown, to Reformation, one of my favorite clothing stores in SoHo. I took the day off from work and it's only lunchtime. Now that the interview is over, I can turn my attention to tonight, to what is coming.

When David told me he had made a reservation at the Rainbow Room, I immediately knew what it meant. We had talked about getting engaged. I knew it would be this year, but I had thought it would have happened this past summer. The holidays are crazy, and the winter is David's busy time at work. But he knows how much I love the city in lights, so it's happening tonight.

"Welcome to Reformation," the salesgirl says. She's wearing black, wide-legged pants and a tight white turtleneck. "What can I help you with?"

“I’m getting engaged tonight,” I say. “And I need something to wear.”

She looks confused for half a second, and then her face brightens. “How exciting!” she says. “Let’s look around. What are you thinking?”

I take barrels into the dressing room. Skirts and low-backed dresses and a pair of red crepe pants with a matching loose cami-sole. I put the red outfit on first, and when I do, it’s perfect. Dramatic but still classy. Serious but with a little edge.

I look at myself in the mirror. I hold out my hand.

Today, I think. Tonight.