

# Sold Above Asking



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# Prologue

Julie



I knew not everyone picked up and moved across the country on a whim when something traumatic happened. I understood that my choice was unique to some and foreign to most, but that was precisely what I was doing. I'm moving across the country to California. I love New York, don't get me wrong, but after living my whole tumultuous life here, I needed a change, and I needed it badly. It was not an easy decision, this move, but it was one I felt was necessary.

Up until two months ago, I thought my life was moving in the right direction. I felt like I was finally getting away from my childhood and making a life and a name for myself. I was happy with where I was for the first time. Then I came home early one fateful Tuesday morning and caught my fiancé Rob in bed with my stepsister Clara. I didn't see it coming, and I am sure some would say I am naïve for that.

You see, my stepsister and I have been arch enemies since we were kids. I know this sounds dramatic, and it was. It wasn't us that started it. It was my dad and Clara's mother. My dad lives in upstate New York and owns a large construction company. He married my stepmom when I was five. I was shuttled between my mom and my dad's place every second weekend, like a lot of kids, are when their parents are no longer together. My mom and I lived in Manhattan on the Lower East Side before it became the trendy and gentrified place that it is today. My mother was poor and struggled to make ends meet the same way a lot of single mothers struggled for their kids. She shouldn't have, considering my dad's financial success, but she did because he never gave her the support she was due. In fact, he barely acknowledged me as his flesh and blood, which does not explain why he insisted that I make an appearance in his life every second weekend.

His house was a sprawling affair in one of the more affluent areas of the state. In the beginning, before Clara came into my life, the weekends up there weren't horrid. I spent most of them eating expensive name-brand food and watching television with more than two channels. Then along came Macie, my stepmom, and Clara, my stepsister.

My dad met Macie at a strip club called the Pussy Cat Club. I'm not supposed to know that, but I do. Macie tends to talk a lot after a few cocktails, and she told me one evening when I was ten about how my dad was the most handsome customer she had ever given a lap dance. Clara was her four-year-old daughter, the product of a one-night stand. My dad moved them both into the sprawling house shortly after their first meeting, and nothing in my life was ever the same again.

My dad doted on them hand and foot. Macie was almost twenty years his junior, and Clara was just two years younger than me. My dad never even warned me when he moved them in. One weekend it was him and me, me watching cartoons and him drinking wine on the veranda and then boom, next time there was a child in my room. I was moved to the smaller bedroom since I wasn't there full time, and she got the pretty fully decorated space.

I thought about how my mom worked three jobs, and we only had a torn-up couch in our tiny one-bedroom apartment in the village and wondered what kind of terrible place Clara had lived. Turns out, she didn't have it that bad. She had been living with Macie's mom and their nanny since birth. Her father was famous, I am told, but I have no idea who he is. He forced Macie to sign documents saying that she would never disclose his identity. In return for keeping his dirty little secret, Macie got a handsome allowance. Moving in with my dad was probably a step down for her if you want to know the truth, but Macie was a free spirit, and she did what she wanted. And she wanted a father for her beautiful little Clara. My dad took on the role like a fish takes to water, despite already having had me. He doted on Clara. Before long, there was a ring on Macie's finger, and I was all but forgotten.

He still insisted I visit once a month after the wedding. Those visits were long and tortuous. My dad moved on from mom and me, his attention was solely on Macie and adorable little Clara. I hated every minute of my time there. I despised Macie and Clara. Did I try not to? At first, of course. What little kid naturally dislikes someone for no reason? It wasn't long though before dad was talking nonstop about Clara, her achievements, her gorgeous locks of hair, and her adorable little smile. I was only a visitor in his perfect life with his princess of a daughter. Macie wasn't terrible to me, but she didn't care if I was there or not. For her, my dad was a means to an end. I don't think she was ever exceptionally loyal to him, but she liked that Clara was taken care of in a way that a generous but anonymous allowance never could take of her. Clara had a daddy in her life, even if that meant she had stolen him from me.

Macie made sure that Clara went to the best schools and had the newest, latest designer clothing to wear every day. Meanwhile, I lived in second-hand clothing. My mom had to beg, borrow, or steal for me. There were days that I ate dinner, and she didn't because we couldn't afford both the rent and us to eat. My mom worked her ass off to provide for me and still managed to fall short in the cruel and unfeeling concrete jungle that is New York City. Dad could have stepped up and helped, and mom even asked him to, but he never did. He made false promises and displayed bravado in front of people, but he never put his money where his mouth was. It all went to Macie and Clara. He tried desperately to buy their love, and although he succeeded with Clara, he never did with Macie. She left him the second Clara turned eighteen, for a well-known musician she met at her job. My dad was devastated, but he did what was right by Clara. He let her stay and live with him while she went to university. She was in her final year when I caught her in bed with my fiancé Rob.

Clara is a bombshell, even if some of it was the result of plastic surgery. She is slim, with blond hair and blue eyes like me, but she had a breast augmentation to further showcase her best assets. She was tanned to roughly the color and texture of shoe leather by the time she was eighteen. She has big full lips that every man pictures wrapped around their man bits and come-hither eyes that drop many to their knees, wallets wide for the taking. She takes after her mother all the way, learning all sorts of tricks from Macie on seducing and keeping a man. She dresses to the nines, in stilettos and skinny jeans, even during the blistery winter days of New York. She is a classic shallow princess, and she knows it. She could have had any man she wanted, but somehow, she ended up in bed with mine.

Rob and Clara first met at my mother's funeral, the year after I started my career in real estate. Clara and I were not close. I wasn't even sure why she attended the funeral, to be honest. She had met my mom all of once, I think when we were small. My mother died a year after I became an agent. The cause of death was officially heart failure, but I knew it was from heartache. When she died, I had already moved us to a better apartment with no mold or bugs for her to deal with, but she was tired by then. She hated that I worked so hard because of her perceived failures. I never felt that way, but she sure did. I only wish she had lived long enough to see me succeed. But then, I might not have made this bold jump across the country if she were still around. I guess we will never know.

I was tenacious and had been a real estate investor and agent since the tender old age of nineteen. I studied hard and worked even harder, determined to never live like my mom had. I owned a modest brownstone in the Upper Westside and had made a name for myself in New York by the time I decided to pack up and leave. I rented my brownstone to my best friend, Angel. I packed up everything I could fit in the small van I rented. I drove across the country, determined to make a name for myself in SoCal, and to leave Rob, Clara, and the misery I had endured behind.

And so, on one sunny Monday morning, that is exactly what I did. I took my time driving across the country. I had never been anywhere before, so seeing the sights on the way was a must for me. I went out of my way to spend time in Virginia Beach and to hike in Utah before I made my way into California. It took me three weeks in total. I had no set agenda for the first time in my adult life, and I enjoyed every second of it.

I already had a plan for when I arrived in California, you better believe I did my research on that one. I wanted to be the best agent SoCal had ever seen. I was determined to live my days in the sun in Laurel Canyon or some other equally chic neighborhood. I was going to forget all about the tiny cockroach-infested apartment I grew up in, once and for all. Mostly, I set the goal to make my mother proud, and for my father to wish he had been nicer to me.

It took me a long time to research the location where I wanted to set up shop. I wanted something in a prominent neighborhood with lots of options for big sales. I wanted something sought after and competitive. After all, I wasn't going to become the best sitting on the sidelines. And that is how I ended up with a small office just off El Camino Drive in Beverly Hills, right down the street from Markus Redenburg.

Markus is a big deal in the real estate world. He is the best in California and has already started to make his name in other cities for himself as a specialist in the sales of luxury houses and rentals. He is the real estate agent to the stars and the elite in the business. He also has the reputation of being an asshole, although I have never met him in person. I didn't care to meet him, all I cared about was taking his crown away. I knew it was a lofty goal. I mean, I was established as an agent in New York, and I sold multi-million-dollar properties regularly, but I wasn't his caliber. Not yet, anyway, but I wanted to be. I knew that the only place to do that was in California. And so, I left my agency in the capable hands of my assistant Joanne, and I moved across the country to open a new one.