

# ALMOST

## By Krista Dalby

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## **ALMOST**

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***At Rise: HIM and HER sit or stand side by side. Most of the time they talk directly to the audience as though the other character is not present.***

HIM: The year 2000.

HER: Once we realized we'd survived the much anticipated rollover into the new millennium, the world breathed a collective sigh of relief.

HIM: All that hording of water and batteries and canned goods and plastic sheeting. What were we thinking?

HER: Looking back it was almost funny.

HIM: Almost.

HER: 2001.

HIM: Still here.

HER: The novelty of surviving Y2K was long gone.

HIM: It was just life.

HER: But then things changed.

HIM: A September day that caught us all off guard.

HER: The world changed.

HIM: There were new things to survive.

HER: There were pictures in my head that I couldn't erase.

HIM: All I could think was 'what next?'

HER: But as the months went by the fear slowly ebbed away. More or less.

HIM: And again it was pretty much just life.

HER: Life – but never exactly the same as it was before.

HIM: 2002 had its up and its downs.

HER: I spent some time drifting. Thinking about things. 2003 was all about finding myself.

HIM: I graduated from college and wondered what exactly I was supposed to do with this really expensive piece of paper.

HER: 2004 started out cold and lonely.

HIM: January was hungover, yet surprisingly full of resolve.

HER: February was out and out depressing.

HIM: It felt like the winter would never end.

HER: In March I got an office job. It wasn't what I really wanted to do but at least my parents were happy.

HIM: I interviewed with a dozen companies.

HER: And then in April, it started to thaw.

HIM: And in May I got a job.

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HER: For the first time in a long time I felt something like hope.

HIM: Corner office, decent salary, cute secretary; what more could a guy ask for?

HER: He was good looking, but not overly so.

HIM: A guy could ask for a lot more. He could ask for a life that wasn't all about work.

HER: I'd never been able to fully trust guys that were too good looking.

HIM: He could ask for someone to be there when he gets home at night.

HER: At first I thought we didn't have much in common, but he was male and single and about the same age as me... and he was gainfully employed, which is more than I can say for most of the chumps I'd gone out with.

HIM: I'm not exactly sure how it all got started.

HER: I remember exactly how it all started.

HIM: My first day on the job was a Monday.

HER: Monday was all about Post-it notes. I gave him a tour of the supply cabinet.

HIM: I got a brand new day timer - a luxury in June, all those blank pages from the months before I started.

HER: Monday was also about pens, paper clips...

HIM: I do remember that I wore my lucky tie. The one with the dogs on it.

HER: At first he was standoffish.

HIM: At first I couldn't get over how much she fidgeted.

HER: Tuesday. I was relieved that he wasn't wearing that weird tie with the dogs again.

HIM: Was it a nervous habit?

HER: Tuesday was all about me. Well, it was actually about my feet. I wore my sexiest pair of high heels and my feet hurt so much that by lunchtime I was contemplating suicide.

HIM: Was it *me* that was making her nervous?

HER: Instead I raided the first aid kit and taped up my feet up with a few dozen Band-Aids.

HIM: If she didn't want to attract attention, she shouldn't be wearing those high heels. Besides, it looked like she was having trouble walking in them.

HER: Wednesday was all about lunch. Roti three blocks north, goulash one block east, sushi half a block to the south, falafel two blocks west. Then there was always street meat, hot dogs available on every corner, the cheap whores of the lunchtime scene.

HIM: She often ate her lunch at her desk.

HER: Thursday was all about office politics. So-and-so and so-and-so. Watch out for her and him and her. This is how I thought I'd bring

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him into my confidence; make him an ally; forge the secret bond that only backstabbing can create.

HIM: I've never been one to gossip much – but I have to admit it was very informative.

HER: But Friday. Friday's where it got interesting. Because Friday was all about the weekend. What are you up to? Big plans with your girlfriend? You don't have one? Well.

HIM: Okay, now I knew it for sure. She was flirting.

HER: Could he be gay? He was awfully well groomed.

HIM: I've always been a fan of having a crush on someone at work. Helps the time go by faster.

HER: Just about twelve hours. In the whole time I knew him we spent approximately twelve hours together. They weren't all in a row. We might have actually got somewhere if those hours had been all in a row. We would have talked about things like what you'd bring if you were stranded on a desert island, or how old we were when we stopped believing in Santa Claus or how many people we had relationships with. Instead, we talked about paper clips.

HIM: And Post-it notes. The little ones.

HER: Or, rather, the absence thereof in the supply cabinet. What we had for lunch.

HIM: Falafel – again.

HER: What we were planning on doing for our holidays.

HIM: Going back home to see the folks. Maybe get drunk. Maybe go to the beach.

HER: I say we spent approximately twelve hours together because after the first day or two, I started keeping track and tabulating at the end of the day.

HIM: She was very attentive as far as secretaries go.

HER: Each morning it took him twenty-seven seconds to walk from the elevator, past my desk –

HIM: Good morning.

HER: Before he disappeared around the corner on the way to his office.

HIM: Corner office.

HER: In the winter this jumped to almost a full three minutes while he changed into shoes and hung up his coat.

HIM: I think she appreciated the fact that I was a routine kind of guy.

HER: Once a morning he'd take a bathroom break, again walking by. I tried not to pay too much attention to him then, I wanted to respect his privacy and didn't really want to consider the details of his business.

HIM: I'm a routine kind of guy.

HER: You know, when I was in college I had plenty of boyfriends. Guys were always asking me out. I turned lots of them down. I felt bad

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about it – but what can you do, right? I had so many friends that I could afford to be picky about who I hung out with.

HIM: I'd stop by her desk from time to time to say hello or ask for her assistance. But not too often.

HER: Random chatting at my desk: average of four minutes per day.

HIM: This was the beginning of my professional career.

HER: And there were a few people who I'd thought were my friends but I eventually had to cut loose. People who lied to me, people who let me down, people who treated me like crap. I refused to let anyone treat me like that.

HIM: I did not need the stigma of being the office pervert.

HER: Over the years my friends became fewer and fewer. Some got married. Some moved away. Then one day I woke up and realized that I'd spent so much time sticking up for myself that somehow, incredibly, I was pretty much standing all alone. Which was okay. Friends come and go, right? But once they were all gone I realized there weren't too many new ones signing up.

HIM: I wish we could've met somewhere else.

HER: On the subway.

HIM: At a dinner party.

HER: In line at 7-Eleven.

HIM: Somewhere without rules.

HER: And prying eyes.

HIM: And sexual harassment policies. You have to be so careful.

HER: I should have grabbed a husband when I was younger and better looking. Sure, maybe I wouldn't have backpacked around Europe or had so many boyfriends, but at least I would have had someone.

HIM: I'd gone to college on the other side of the country. It wasn't easy meeting people. Especially women.

HER: He was getting better looking.

HIM: She wore this unbelievable perfume.

HER: With the exception of that tie, he was a great dresser.

HIM: I wanted to kiss her.

HER: Corner him in the photocopier room.

HIM: So much... but it was totally inappropriate.

HER: Instead I did nothing.

HIM: What was wrong with me?

HER: I never used to feel so afraid.

HIM: Why couldn't I make a move?

HER: What was there to be afraid of?

HIM: She was just a woman, for God's sake. I'd known plenty of women.

HER: I mean, people had affairs. Or so they said. Talk shows were full of people who had affairs. I never could understand how you could

just fall into an involvement with someone, almost as if it was by accident.

HIM: It just never seemed like the right time.

HER: Maybe it was easier if you were already with someone. Like how it's always easier to get a job when you've got one. But things never happened accidentally to me. Not the good stuff, anyways. Which, once I realized it, was okay. It just meant that if something was going to happen, I had to make it happen.

HIM: I worried about my job. Her job. It was really, really unprofessional to be thinking like this.

HER: And what if it was more than an affair?

HIM: I liked my freedom.

HER: What if it was something more?

HIM: Ever notice that freedom can sometimes feel like a five star prison cell?

HER: I dreamt one night that my future unfurled itself like a long, loose red ribbon. And I knew I had to do something.

HIM: Then fate stepped in. One lunch hour I ran into her at the drycleaners.

HER: So - I followed him to the drycleaners.

HIM: I was picking up a suit jacket.

HER: However, I hadn't really thought the plan through. I didn't have any reason to actually be at the drycleaners.

HIM: I guess she was dropping off her jacket.

HER: So, I took off my jacket.

HIM: Which was kind of weird, because she was wearing this sleeveless shirt and it was getting cold out.

HER: He took his suit jacket out of the plastic bag and he put it around my shoulders.

HIM: I am – if nothing else – a gentleman.

HER: It was so sweet.

HIM: The jacket was really big on her.

HER: For a moment I felt like I'd climbed inside his skin.

HIM: For a moment I could see our lives comfortably intertwined.

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