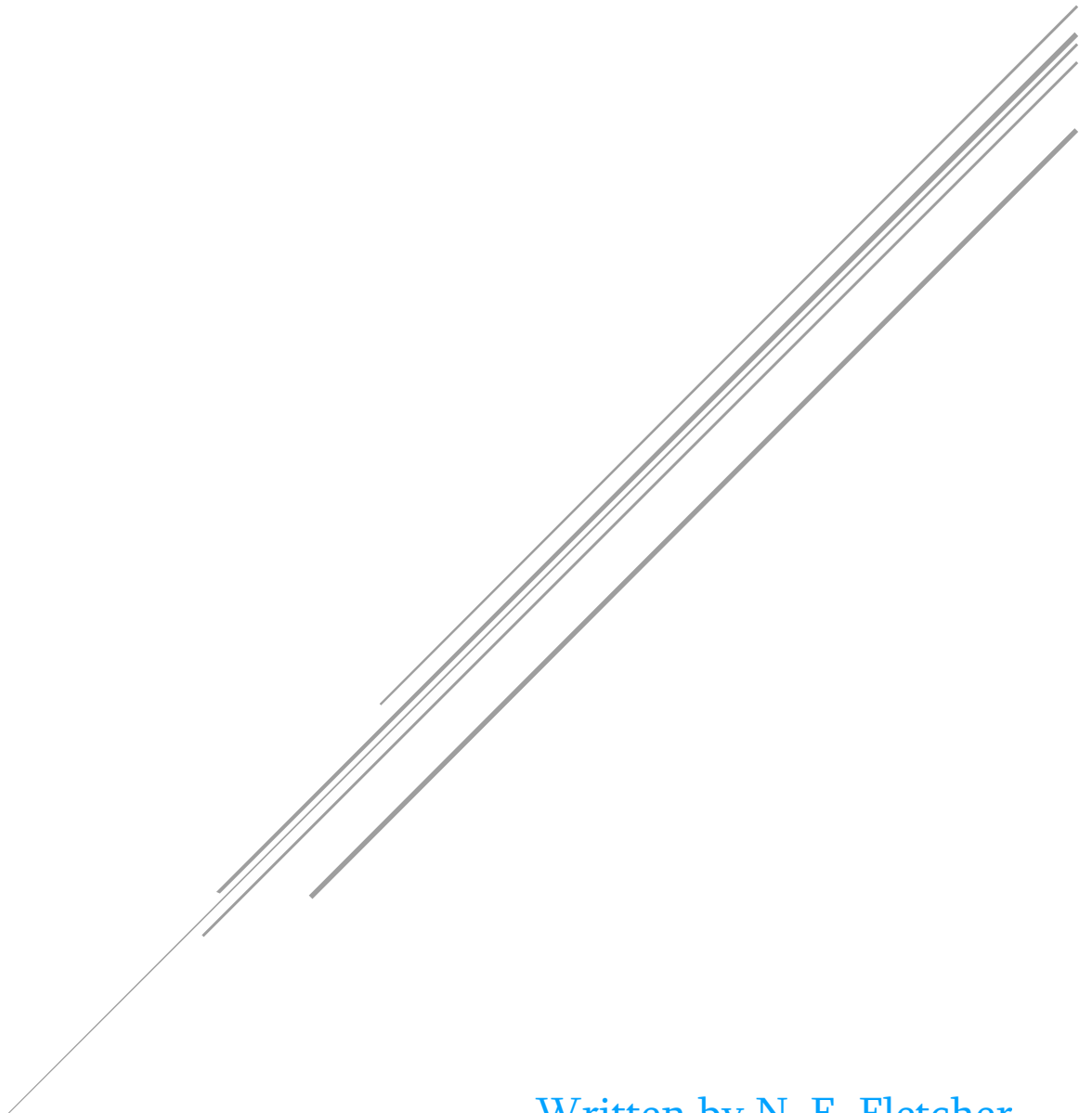


# A MY DREAM COLLECTION NOVEL:

As We Were SAMPLE



Written by N. E. Fletcher  
Shades of Us Publishing LLC

*All rights reserved.*

*Published in the United States by Shades of Us Publishing LLC.*

*This novel is a work of fiction and, therefore, a product of the author's imagination. Characters, persons (names), and or places that bear a resemblance to established entities are entirely coincidental.*

*Book Cover Designed by Orlando Mendez-Vargas*

*Erotic Romance – Mature Audiences Only*



*Thursday, July 5, 2018*

Shades of Us Publishing LLC

© 2022. All rights reserved.

“Oh, Sloan, we have absolutely got to stop meeting like this,” Amari is in my face again.

“Hmm,” I do not smile at her. She would probably want my head if she ever found out that I’ve been sleeping with her husband. Speak of the devil; he enters as if on cue.

“Here he is,” she smiles brightly, “This is his favorite cafe.”

“I know that.” I was the one that introduced him to it.

I am irritated today. And I am not in any mood to deal with her shit.

Although Ian and I had decided to stop sleeping together, I didn’t say no when he came by last night, and I am annoyed at myself for it. I need to have more self-control, so I’ve spent my morning in regret and shame. And a further realization that I cannot resist him is absolutely annoying. No wonder I left Rosewood, no wonder I cut him off. Had I once reached back out to him after I got pregnant, we would have probably been together and raised Slader together. But instead, he married this plastic . . . *witch*. And it’s all my fault.

“Sloan,” Ian’s eyes burn into mine. Much like they do each time we’ve had sex. I shift my weight from one foot to the other at the thought of that.

“Baby, can you get us two lattes? Please?”

I raise an eyebrow at Ian, who turns without a word and heads over to the counter. Ian doesn't like lattes. We do a bit of small talk before he returns, handing me a latte and a coffee muffin and her a latte. He got some water.

“No latte for you, baby?”

For whom is she putting on a show?

“Ian doesn't like lattes, Amari,” I say.

Ian looks pointedly at me. Fine. I won't be rude, but in my defense, he was mine first, and I know him better. We were best friends for years! My phone rings suddenly, and I answer after mumbling an 'excuse me' to the couple. I turn my back.

“Hello?”

On the phone is a frantic Stephanie, explaining how Slader ate cookies that mom made, and they had nuts in them. *Slader is severely allergic to nuts.* I try not to have a heart attack as she tells me they are in an ambulance and headed to the hospital. I almost fall to the floor in panic; I have to hold on to the back of one of the chairs.

“Leigha!” Ian is there to catch me, and his arm comes around me, “Hey,” he says softly.

“What did you just call her?”

Both of us ignore Amari.

Stephanie is still hysterically crying over the phone; she rants on about how sorry she is and how worried she is. She got flustered and freaked out when Slader went into anaphylactic shock. Does this girl want me to have a heart attack?

“Stephanie, please slow down. Just get him to the emergency room!”

“What’s the matter?” Ian’s brows furrow.

I have to catch my breath and fight back my tears, “Slader had an allergic reaction.”

“To what?” The concern is evident in his voice, but his grip loosens on me. We are in public, after all, and his wife is standing right here. I blink at his beautiful grey eyes, how they crinkle with concern.

“Nuts.”

I realize that I am admitting that when it's too late.

“Slader is allergic to nuts?” He asks, curious.

I search his eyes to see if there is a light bulb that goes off.

“Who’s Slader?” Amari asks.

“Her son.”

“She has a son!?”

I imagine the dots would connect, but I don’t think they do. I don’t have time to panic about that. I have to get to the hospital.

“Let me drive you to the hospital,” he says, his arm sliding from around me.

“No! Stay with your wife.”

I didn’t mean to say it badly, but it came out wrong and shocked him. It’s not just that I can’t ever have him around Slader; it’s just that Slader is my everything, and I don’t share the challenging moments with others. Also, he is a distraction, and I can’t have him distracting me when Slader needs me. In addition, he’s not mine and doesn’t need to be concerned about my kid. He can be concerned with his wife. Not my child. I walk briskly from the cafe to my car, shaking my head to clear it.

“Leigha!” Ian chases after me. I didn’t expect him to do this, but I can’t with him now.

“Please. Not now. I have to go to him. Please.”

“Let me take you.”

“I’m still not ready, Ian. Please, stay away. I mean it.”

My words sting, even coming out of my mouth. My tears spill as I get into my car and drive away from him.

By the time I reach the hospital, Slader is in stable condition and already talking about Black Panther. I cry in his little, tiny chest. This attack happened once before when he was around seven months old. I was so devastated, and I was in New York all by myself. Luckily this time, I have my parents, Hank and Trace. I must admit that I am grateful; I will always have them when I am home in Rosewood.

“What’s the matter, mommy? Why are you crying?”

“I’m just glad you’re ok. Remember when mommy said that sometimes people cry when they're happy?”

“This is one of those times?”

“Yes, baby.”

“Oh,” he smiles big, “I am happy you are happy, mommy.”

“I am so sorry, Miss. Castiel. I did not know he would go into the jar for those cookies. I didn’t even know there were cookies,” Stephanie’s cheeks are tear-stained.

“It’s ok, Stephanie. He’s fine.”

The doctor has ordered Slader to stay in the hospital overnight in case of more sudden attacks. Mom and dad got here several hours ago. Mom stopped crying a few minutes ago, even though Slader is okay, like a brand-new bouncing baby boy.

“Sloan,” mother comes through the door now, after grabbing a coffee from below, “you have a guest.”

I raise an eyebrow and go outside to see who – Ian, of course; relentless as always.

“I came anyway. Even though you said, you didn’t want me here. To make sure he was ok.”

I am momentarily stunned; my heart swells so big as I look at his handsome face.

“You could’ve called,” I say, but I close the distance between us anyway, hugging him. I don’t care how inappropriate it is; it’ll always be nice being



in Ian's arms. I hear crinkling as he wraps his arms around me entirely now. I inhale his cologne before counting to ten, then pull away abruptly. He smells too good. I am getting . . . addicted. He hands over the flowers he brought, and I smile. That's what the crinkling was, from the wrap around the gorgeous flowers.

"I don't suppose this warrants a meeting?"

"Maybe you'll get to meet him on that very last day before your flight."

He frowns, "Are you kidding?" I shake my head, "Is he an Alien?"

I laugh out loud, "No, although sometimes he pretends to be one."

"Hmm. I am delighted he's ok."

"Thank you," I look up into his eyes. His liquid grey eyes bore into me.

Wanting to say so much, but he just doesn't. He brushes the back of my hand with his fingertips, and my stomach twists. I frown at him. What the hell is he doing to me?

"You're staying here tonight, huh? They're keeping him?"

"Yeah, so don't show up at my doorstep tonight."

He chuckles softly, "What are you even talking about? You called that off two nights ago."

Shades of Us Publishing LLC

© 2022. All rights reserved.

I laugh, "But you're still showing up."

"Guess I can't get enough . . . but you don't say no."

How can I ever? Ugh. The man is irresistible.

"He's allergic to nuts, huh?"

My cheeks heat as I find a chair against the wall. I stare at the beautiful flowers, not making eye contact.

"Yes, he is."

"What are the odds? I could be best friends with this kid. I'm also allergic to nuts."

"Maybe it's God punishing me for hurting you that he made you so similar."

"Oh, so we're similar?" He chuckles.

I look up at him. Does he really not know? I will him to know. He probably thinks there's absolutely no way Slader could be his because of my shutting down all his questions and inquiries. But if he did the math, he could figure it out. I lean on him as he sits next to me.

"Why would God punish you?"

“What I did was wrong,” I lean back to look at him, “I am so sorry for hurting you, Ian, I really am.”

He runs a hand through my hair, “Hmm.”

He wants to say more. He doesn't.

“What?” I ask, trying to get him to talk.

The corners of his lips twitch, “Nothing.”

“What is it?”

“Nothing.”

“You're lying.”

“I am.”

I raise an eyebrow, “Tell me.”

“I'm embarrassed.”

I stare at him. What could it be?

“Tell me. You don't have to be embarrassed with me about anything.”

He sighs, “I am thinking what it would be like if I stayed in Rosewood and continued with us.”

*Holy fucking shit.*

I look down at the flowers again, frowning. What? How can he even . . . that's insane! I would have to confess, and I am not ready. I am not prepared for him to hate me. I can't think of a more horrible idea.

"Hmm, just the response I expected from you."

"I am sorry, Ian; I keep hurting you."

He shrugs, "It's just sex, right?"

*Incredibly amazing, mind-blowing, life-changing sex. Yes.*

I start to shake a little bit. What the fuck is even going through his head to think that would be an option?

"*You* were the one that brought up the subject of us first, so I don't think I'm too crazy for contemplating it."

"Where is Amari?" I change the subject.

He chuckles at me before saying, "With her parents."

"Hmm."

"You weren't very nice in the coffee shop today, were you?"

"I was having a bad morning."

"I could tell."

“Hmm,” I get to my feet; I want to get away from him. I don’t want to continue to hurt him. I am hurting him. I see it in his eyes now as he looks up at me. My heart hurts. I am a selfish, cowardly girl, unable to tell the truth, but I know if I ever tell him the truth, he will hate me. I don’t want him to hate me. I want him to want to make love to me like the way he does; I want him to run his hands through my hair like he’s been doing and touching me and looking at me with those gorgeous eyes of his. The minute I confess is the minute he’ll hate me. But if I don’t confess, my son continues to live his life without his father. So Ian has to leave because this is too conflicting. I wonder if he’d accept Slader so we could be together? I throw that thought out the window because a relationship between Ian and I will never end well. It does not matter the direction this goes. “I’ve spent countless hours with you these past two days. Mostly wrapped up in sheets —

He smirks.

— But now my son needs me, so this is goodbye.”

He nods, smiling, “For now, right? I’ll see you?”

“You don’t listen, do you?”

Shades of Us Publishing LLC

© 2022. All rights reserved.

“Not really.”

I laugh, “This isn’t a good idea, Ian. Us.”

“You keep saying that. Why do you keep inviting me into your bed then?”

“You won’t stay away.”

“That’s because no matter the number of reasons why it’s not a good idea.

It’s too good not to do it.”

I huff at him. The man is relentless! But I ignored that comment because I was just saying that a couple of days ago.

“Thank you for the flowers. Slader will love them.”

“Please tell him I said hi, and to get better so mommy won’t cry anymore.”

I laugh, “I’ll tell him. Goodnight, Ian.”

“Goodnight, Leigha.”

We part.

I turn at the entrance of the doorway to watch him walking away. He’s tucked his hands in his pockets, walking briskly down the hall with his head hung low. Not the usual confident strut a man of his stature possessed. I frown. I can’t help but think his sadness is my fault. I’ve come to Rosewood to mess everything up, and I hate myself. On top of that, I

deserve the worse mother of the year award – scratch that – worse mother of the decade. Ugh.

*Sunday, July 9, 2018*

“Slader! Watch your step!”

He’s running up the stairs to take the groceries inside the house. He insists on helping, so I let him. His poor tiny arms can’t even carry that many bags. I arrange which loads to take out when a Tesla pulls up next to me. Amari exists, dressed in a chic dress with an entire glass dish of cookies.

“Hi.”

I clear my throat, watching for Slader.

“Hi, Amari.”

“I did not know you had a son. I baked him cookies. All sorts, gluten-free, peanut-free, not very much sugar.”

I hope she's not trying to poison my kid. But of course, I can't be so skeptical.

"That's very thoughtful, Amari. Thank you."

She hands me the dish.

They look and smell good even in the pan-like Tupperware.

"Ian and I want you to know that we wish him well. Ian would've come, but he has plans."

Ian is with his parents. That is what he said when we spoke fifteen minutes ago. For whom is she keeping up this facade?

"Thank you," I'm dismissive because really, why the lies? It must be so exhausting. And I can be the one to tell her how exhausting it all can be definitely. I am too distracted by my thoughts to realize Slader is running out of the house. I am not fast enough to tell him to stop. My heart flies to my throat before I realize no excuse or lie could get me out of this. Unless she was absolutely stupid. *Fucking aye!*

"Mommy!" Slader wraps his hands around my leg before hiding behind me. His hair is in a braid today, but his eyes give him away, and I see her connect the dots when Slader peeks out to say hi.

Shades of Us Publishing LLC

© 2022. All rights reserved.



I am not sure of my feelings at the very moment. But a distinctive one is relief, which I never anticipated feeling. Of course, I am scared but really, of what? Ian could reject Slader, but then he would just be a father that Slader didn't even know he had.

She is clearly shocked; I see it in her expression, and I imagine that she feels that this in some way affects her marriage. I wouldn't understand why.

This is none of her business until it becomes Ian's business. She swallows hard as she looks down at him.