

HART & COLE BOOK 1



*Climbing*  
THE WALLS

SACHA T. Y. FORTUNÉ

**Climbing**  
**The Walls**

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## *Climbing The Walls*

Kris fell, head over heels over hormones,  
for the damaged bitch who became  
his power-woman sex-goddess wife.

All Nicole wants is to be a better mother,  
and a wife more worthy of the husband  
she loves with every fibre of her body,  
but she is constantly yanked away by her job  
and her overbearing boss Darren Hart.

But Darren has marital problems of his own –  
and, when he confides in her, Nicole realises  
just how easily a happy marriage can crumble.

...Can she keep her own from doing the same?

Told from both points of view, “Climbing The Walls” explores the fibres that hold a marriage together – love, trust, forgiveness... and of course, the earth-shattering sex that will not be denied.

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### **“HART & COLE” SERIES:**

*The books in this series share characters and events, and should be read in chronological order. “Climbing The Walls” is Book 1.*

~1~

Kris

**30<sup>th</sup> September**

“Wake up, Daddy... Daddy, wake up!”

My four-year-old daughter is bouncing up and down on my stomach. It’s Tuesday morning, and I’m afraid to open my eyes because if it’s not there, it’s going to be a bad day.

“Daddy, Daddy, wake *up!*” Nikita insists.

Finally, I open one eye and roll my head to the side. A grin slices across my face. It’s there: a white rose, on the pillow beside mine.

“Hey, sweetie.” I sit up, holding her above my head. She kicks her legs wildly and squeals.

“If Nikita vomits, I’m *not* cleaning it.”

I lower her to the floor. “Go get Daddy some juice, Kiki.” She runs off in her little pink bunny bedroom slippers, and I look up at the doorway from which the voice came.

I want to tell her I love her, and I’m sorry for last night, and it should’ve been my rose, not hers – which after hours of restless sleep, I actually believe. I want to say I love every inch of her: every dimple, every smile, every laugh, every single thing about her; my heart is bursting, and my dopey-looking smile is all because of her. “You’re... still here,” I say. I hope she understands the rest by telepathy.

“I’m late,” she replies, pulling on one side of her strappy, high-heeled shoes. As she leans against the doorway with her leg in the air, I see the scratch by her knee where the neighbour’s cat mauled her. In my giddily-happy state, I think even *that* looks beautiful.

She returns the rose to its spot in the closet beside our wedding albums. It's fake, but it represents the fibre that's sewn our marriage together for six years. I love it more than ever today.

"Don't go yet," I say. It's 6:04 a.m. and she won't actually be late for two hours... but no, not my overachiever power-woman wife.

"Late. Have to." She picks up her handbag from the floor, where it was discarded during last night's heated argument. "Look, Darren arranged a meeting with sponsors this evening... he'll need me there."

"So I have to pick up Khai and Kiki today?" My brain screams: *Mayhem. Ulcer. Migraine. Mayhem. Migraine. Ulcer. Mayhem. Mayhem.*

"Yes." For once, there's no snarky addendum. Our emotions are still raw and tender like open wounds after a car accident – which, fundamentally, is what last night's argument was.

"Then you owe me," I say.

"It's my rose; let's call it even?" she offers.

"Deal." I'm feeling generous today.

She kisses my forehead. Her lips are soft and wary; it may be awhile before they return to their usual passion. "Bye..."

"Bye." I close my eyes and smile. When I open them she's gone, and Nikita is handing me a cup. I take it, mussing up her hair.

"Daddy, you get me today!" She throws her arms around my neck, and hangs on as I sit up.

"You're choking Daddy," I grumble, putting the cup on the bedside table, so that my arms will be free to roll over on top of her, and in perfect tickle position.

"Daddy, Daddy!" she squeals. She loves Daddy's days. I get up at 6:00 and have two hours of Kiki-time before work. Nicole leaves by 6:00 on both her 'Khai' and 'Kiki' days. She also moonlights a second job, so even when she *is* home, she's never really actually *home*.

We're both stubborn, but it's usually Nicole's rose because she needs me to pick up her slack with the kids. I know it was mostly there because of her boss' dinner, but I don't care. The rose means I won't spend another night alone, and I'll likely get some make-up sex soon.

"So, what's for breakfast?" I hoist Kiki up into a piggy-back ride.

“Waffles, sardines, eggs, pizza, and ice-cream...”

In the kitchen, I make her usual – a cereal medley of Captain Crunch, Frosted Flakes and Cheerios, with way too much milk. I hope it’ll help her grow; she’s already a bit small for her age.

She’ll be five in December, and it was a big decision whether or not to wait another year before kindergarten. She was already reading and writing stories about a princess named Kiki for Prince Khailam, so we realised preschool was pointless. It’s been a month, and we’re still worrying about the consequences of pushing her into school early.

I look down at this little genius who’s shovelling cereal into her mouth at a speed that outdoes the limit of my Peugeot in the garage, and I smile. It’s going to be a good day.



The rose ritual began on our honeymoon. Fresh out of college, we fiercely believed that everything would work out fine – although we had sparse things in common, and my dad thought she was a slut. He never wanted me to marry one of ‘those girls’.

The mistake I made was opening my mouth in that post-coital moment. Sex before marriage was playful, gentle and sweet. We didn’t break into the wild, mind-shattering sex until our honeymoon. After our seventh time that day, we were sprawled across the bed in a little villa hotel in Italy, naked except for her silver anklet and our wedding rings. I’m smiling my dopey smile, and in the midst of exhaustion, the stupidest thing comes into my mind and I say it.

—*Maybe my dad had a point after all. Girls like you... you’re trouble. Another round, and that’ll be the death of me.*

—*Girls like me?*

Shit. It was supposed to be a compliment, but I’ve insulted her.

—*Oh... I’ve told you before, y’know, how he thought you were a bit... risqué. I just meant... that was amazing. Forget I said anything. Please, babe...*

But she's alert now.

—*Risqué? What's that supposed to mean?*

—*He just thought you weren't ready to settle down... that we were just a passing thing, casual sex, whatever... but he was wrong, obviously...*

—*Casual sex?*

I don't want to admit my dad called her a slut, so I don't answer.

—*Was that casual to you? We're married. Sorry, I didn't know that 'no sex' was part of the contract. But no problem, fine. Last time it'll ever happen.*

Nicole always had a fiery mouth on her. Bold, sexy and sarcastic. That's what stole my heart away when she walked up to me in her cute waitress miniskirt, and said to stop staring at her tits before they fell off and were no longer of any use to her for getting tips.

—*I didn't mean...*

—*Of course you didn't.*

—*Nic...*

—*I know your dad hates me.*

—*He doesn't hate you.*

—*He doesn't like me.*

—*He doesn't know you. Yet.*

—*He doesn't want to know me.*

—*He'll get around to loving you, just like I do.*

—*When? When I fuck him, too?*

—*Nic—*

—*I'm not a waitress anymore, Kris. I'm officially starting my journalist job the day after we get home. I'm no longer flirting with random guys for a living*

—*Aren't you?*

I can't believe we're arguing on our honeymoon, so I'm trying to turn this into a joke. Unsuccessfully.

—*What's that supposed to mean?*

—*Yesterday, when the pool boy asked if you wanted more towels or suntan lotion, and you said: 'Hot stuff, if you had an hour free, I'd ask you to rub a little lotion on my back... but I'll just have to settle for my new husband here.'*

—*Kris, he's like sixteen. Don't tell me you were jealous.*

—*He was ogling your rack and your long brown legs. You made his day with that comment. He blushed and almost fell into the pool. He probably went home and jacked off to that. You're very sexy, Nic... want me to remind you?*

—*Well, if you want me to say I'm sorry, you'll be sleeping alone for the rest of these two weeks of wedded bliss.*

—*I don't want an apology—*

—*Good, cuz you're not getting one.*

—*I was just saying—*

—*Oh, I heard what you were 'just saying'... I'm a slut, your father hates me, and I'm trying to seduce an adolescent boy on my honeymoon.*

—*Nicole...*

—*I'm taking a walk. Do not follow me.*

—*Nicole...*

But she's already pulling on a t-shirt and her mid-thigh slacks. No underwear. In the dim light from the bedside lamp, I can see the rounded contours of her ass cheeks. I want to pull her back into bed and say we shouldn't fight, but I let her walk away.

Eventually I fall asleep. Sometime later, I roll over and fall off the bed. As I'm getting up, I notice a flower on the bed: a white rose.

When we'd first walked into the honeymoon suite, Nicole had screwed up her face and announced:

—*Geez... check out the fake flowers galore. They could have gotten real ones.*

—*I kind of like them.*

—*Well, I do not.*

I didn't want to look at empty vases for the next two weeks, but I eventually stopped protesting, deciding to choose a more sensible battle for our first squabble of wedded bliss. She'd thrown them all out; where had this one come from? I can't help but smile.

—*It was worth it, to see your face.*

I turn around. She's sitting cross-legged on the desk.

—*What was worth it?*

—*Searching the entire hotel for the stupid roses, and finally begging one off of the night clerk, who stole it out of someone's room.*

My smile is splitting my face now.



—*I love you, Nic. I wouldn't have married you if I had the slightest doubt.*

—*But... I fuck like a hooker.*

—*No... you make love like my wife. I'm looking forward to our beautiful kids, growing old together, and to many more nights exactly like tonight.*

—*Fighting, sleeping alone... then falling off the bed, practically onto your dick?*

—*Well... maybe not exactly like tonight.*

In the darkness, I see the glimmer of her teeth, and then she says:

—*Look, I'm not apologising for the pool boy... but I thought about how I'd feel if you'd said that to a woman...*

—*Still, being married doesn't mean you can't flirt. I don't expect you – or want you – to change. I shouldn't have even mentioned the stupid pool boy.*

—*Yes, but I overreacted because you brought up your dad. Who – let's face it – will never accept me. He's like one of those douchebags at the restaurant, who would tip big and then ask what time I 'get off', y'know... the asshole-in-a-business-suit type who figures sex is a given. I'll never be good enough to be his daughter-in-law.*

—*My dad's always going to be that asshole. But who cares? You're my wife. My incredibly beautiful, sexy wife. C'mhere, Mrs. Gellar.*

—*Mmm, I like the sound of that, Mr. Gellar. Let's not mention our parents at all, at least till we're back home. We're supposed to prove them all wrong... and here we are, four days into marriage and fighting. Gimme some kids, baby.*

—*So... kids, you say?*

We hadn't mentioned it before the 'I Do', and we'd gotten married young; I wasn't expecting to seriously discuss it for at least a few years. But I'd said it in passing, and now she's repeating it.

I need to not sound too eager – especially when I've just been reamed for mentioning my dad didn't think she was the marrying, mommy type.

—*Yeah, Kris... kids... didn't you just say that?*

—*Kids... plural?*

—*Sure, why not? I could do that whole... mom... thing*

—*Seriously?*

—*Hell, yeah. Why not?*

It was more flippant than I'd have preferred the conversation to go that first time, but I was deliriously happy all the same. Not to mention – horny, at that particular moment.

—*Well, you're gonna have to take those clothes off if you want the kids, Nic. I'm talented, but not that talented.*

Her laugh makes me want to kiss every inch of her body and then lick it, from head to toe. She strips slowly, flinging each item languidly across the room. I inhale sharply as she presses her now-nude body up close to mine.

I snagged this beautiful sex-goddess with the sexy laugh. *Me*. Me who got beaten up, more times than I can remember. *Me*. The eccentric, skinny, clumsy kid with the goofy grin – courtesy the front tooth I chipped during a scuffle with a bully as a kid – and the hair that never grew in the right direction.

*Me!*



Six years, two kids and thousands of arguments later, she still makes me feel like the luckiest man alive. Most days, anyway.

And today it was her rose, not mine, so I don't even mind that she dumped her responsibilities on me. Again.

"Daddy, did you kiss Khai this morning?" Nikita asks, jarring me out of my mental flashback.

"Er... no. Mommy was late; she left with him before I could."

"You and Mommy fought last night."

"It was a slight little misunderstanding."

"You had a fight."

"We made up this morning," I concede, knowing that we could argue about the meaning of a fight all morning.

She shovels a few more spoonfuls into her mouth before she continues: "I don't like it when you fight."

"I don't either. But every couple fights from time to time, sweetie. It blows over quickly. I love Mommy, and she loves me."

"Well, don't fight anymore. You made Khai cry. I went and played with him till he was quiet."

Nicole and I were at our worst last night, screaming and dredging up monsters we both thought the other had buried years ago. Apparently, the walls aren't as thick as we'd hoped.

"We told you about climbing into Khai's crib. You might fall."

She bites her lip, playing with her spoon in the bowl. "Well, I couldn't sleep because of his crying."

"You shouldn't be playing with him at night, anyway. He needs his sleep, or else he'll be cranky in the morning. Okay?"

"I won't climb into his crib again, if you stop fighting."

Sometimes talking to her is like talking to a tiny little adult. I'm convinced that she's miles smarter than Nicole and me combined.

"Deal?" she asks. Abandoning breakfast, she comes over and climbs onto my lap, looking up at me imploringly.

"I'll talk it over with Mommy and get back to you on that, okay?"

She bends her head all the way back, and I lean forward to smack her on the nose; a 'Kiki-kiss', we call it.

She doesn't do her 'Kiki-kiss' for Mommy.

She hardly ever sits on Nicole's lap.

Nicole's lap is usually occupied by her laptop, or by the phone cradle while she chatters away to her beloved boss Darren.

# ~2~

## Nicole

I'm about to stick the key in the ignition when Kiki's words *'Daddy, did you kiss Khai this morning?'* stop me cold.

I look guiltily at Khailam, buckled up in his car seat, in his Barney t-shirt and blue-jean jumper that admittedly may not have been the best choice today. I'd been in a hurry. I know I need to go through his closet and chuck these adorable but impractical outfits, now that he's wearing pull-ups and is on his way to getting toilet-trained. Eventually.

Now, Kris is putting on his teacher-voice; the calm, this-is-the-way-life-goes voice: *"...blows over quickly. I love Mommy, and she loves me."*

Of course we do. Don't we? Ten times a day, I wonder why he puts up with my shit. We always have; we always will. Somehow.

*"...don't fight anymore. You made Khai cry..."*

My heart is suddenly pulsing crazily. We were too busy yelling to hear anything but ourselves, but sometimes Khai makes gasping sobs and clenches his fists. When he's not making noise, he doesn't want attention; he's just upset. Two-year-olds should never be just upset.

*"...won't climb into his crib again, if you stop fighting..."*

*"... talk it over with Mommy and get back to you on that, okay?..."*

He's so good with the kids; with Nikita especially, that sometimes I am so envious I want to strangle her and scream: *'Talk to me, talk to me!'* Of course she talks to me, but not like that.

She's a Daddy's girl, although she has my eyes, my nose, my smile, my wild hair of curls, and my complexion with the same chaotic blend of races in her cherubic little face. I'm afraid that Khai will also like Daddy more, soon enough. Kiki was anti-Mommy practically since birth, but she's

advanced for her age. What if Kris ‘gets’ Khai too? Dear God, isn’t one kid good enough?

It was my rose because it was my fault last night. And even if it wasn’t, I couldn’t beg Kris to take double-duty today if we weren’t talking. I need him. I always need him.

“Vroom, vroom,” Khai says, looking up at me with his puppy-dog brown eyes, his little blue hat tilted atop his head of thick waves. Whereas Kiki has my wild curls, Khailam has Kris’ crazy unruly waves, and he promises to look like Daddy as soon as he loses the chubby cheeks.

“Right, vroom vroom.” I turn the ignition, hoping Kris doesn’t realise I was eavesdropping. But he’s probably already romping through the house on a tickle rampage.

Kiki doesn’t romp with Mommy.

Cruising down the highway, my vision goes blurry. I pull over, reach for a napkin, and blow my nose noisily.

Khai looks at me, worried. “No cwy.” He solemnly offers me his teddy-bear Goober, and I smile through my tears.

“Thank you, sweetie.” I hold the dirty, ratty little creature in my hands, and fresh tears pour down my face because the hideous thing needs washing again. It’s the umpteenth time this week that I forgot.

“No cwy. Vroom, vroom, Mommy!” he says, urgently.

We don’t normally stop, and I shouldn’t be crying. Although he can’t really talk yet, he knows enough words to sell me out. I reach for his diaper bag, rummaging for the chocolate-chip cookie pack.

“Cookieeee!” He grins, snatching it from my hand.

*Cookie* is Mommy-and-Khai’s thing, just like I have the rose thing with Kris, and he has the Kiki-kiss and a dozen more with Nikita.

“So we won’t tell Daddy about this little stop, okay, Khai?”

He shakes his head vigorously, spraying crumbs all over.

“And we won’t tell Kiki?”

He ponders for a moment. “Ki... ki...”

I sigh, reaching for another cookie. “No Kiki?”

“No Kiki,” he repeats around the mouthful of his hush-money.

“Wanna hold Goober? Mommy needs both hands to drive.”

I look at Khailam fondly. I'm angry that he was crying yesterday. Angry that it's almost always my fault. Angry because I know that in comparison to many couples, I have the perfect marriage; the perfect husband. Angry because if the subject matter of the fight was Kris' responsibility, then Nikita would have reminded him that morning. But of course, she didn't remind me, so I forgot, because Mommy forgets everything all the time. Angry because I woke up late because I slept badly last night, and I was on the couch while Kris had the big comfy bed all to himself, because it was my fault. All my fault...



Last week Friday, we're having dinner when Nikita announces loudly, "Oh!" and she runs off to her room.

She comes back with a letter in a sealed envelope and gives it to Daddy of course, because *Mommy's not here – Mommy doesn't exist – Mommy isn't her parent too* – Mommy isn't the one that spent fourteen hours and twenty-four minutes screaming on a hospital bed to push her tiny little body into the world. "Miss sent that," she says.

Kris puts down his chicken leg and gets up to wash his hands, then dries them and sits down. Meanwhile, I'm ready to scream because my hands are clean. I can't believe he didn't just say: '*Give Mommy*' or '*After dinner, just five more minutes*' – which is what I would have said. Which, I realise belatedly, is why Kiki gave it to Daddy.

I give an innocent half-smile. "What is it?"

He slices it open with the edge of a fingernail. " 'Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gellar, the principal and I need to meet with you. We are available at 12:00 noon next Monday. If this is inconvenient, please contact me immediately at the school. Ms. Hannigan.' "

"Great. How are we supposed to reach the school before Monday?" I ask.

“Kiki.” Kris looks at her, but she’s focusing on her relatively clean plate.  
“*Nik-i-ta.*”

“Miss gave me that since Monday,” she mumbles.

“*Nik-i-ta.*” This time it’s me, and the word is a sigh.



“I’ll go,” I say, as Kris takes off the bedroom light.

As he climbs into bed, I bring my leg up so that my knee is nestled a few inches from his crotch. I’m in matching pale-pink low-rise cotton panties and a lacy sheer bralette. I know they’ll come in handy tonight.

“Can’t we both go?”

“I thought you had the department meeting on Monday.”

He’s surprised I remembered. “Well... I can postpone it.”

“Are you really going to call thirty-six people this weekend?”

“Hmm... can’t we postpone the school thing?” he asks. “I’m sure Stacey has the teacher’s home phone number.”

His co-worker Bryan and his wife Stacey have a son in Nikita’s class, and a twelve-year-old daughter Cassidy. Stacey is the Supermom type who runs everything for the PTA. She’s a lovely person, but a part of me secretly – or not so secretly, perhaps – detests her maternal efficiency.

“I’d hate to change the date so late,” I say. “Teachers always think parents are too busy.”

He grimaces, annoyed. I’m the ultra-busy one. He hates that he will give a first impression as the bad guy if I go alone, especially since he is the one who always drops everything for the kids.

I shift my knee slightly and he winces, aroused and annoyed that he is. “It’s fine, I’ll go,” I repeat. “I’ll explain she forgot to give us it.”

“She didn’t forget. She just wanted to put off the meeting.”

“She didn’t read the letter,” I remind him. “It was sealed.”

“Yes, by her.” He sighs. “There are two tiny holes through the envelope and the letter. Our little genius unstapled it, and read it. But she doesn’t have a stapler, so she used her glue-stick.”

“Oh my God, are you serious?” I had totally missed that.

“Yes, and *this* is something serious. We should both go.”

“I told you, I’ll go.” I don’t want to beat my fists on his chest and scream ‘*Let me do this, let me do this please!*’ so I’m trying to casually insist it. **CI + SH = Y. Casually Insisting + Seducing Him = Yes.** It’s a formula I’ve mastered over the years.

“How come you’re suddenly available?” he wonders aloud. There’s no malice in his tone, just genuine curiosity.

“I’m not,” I admit. “But I have a regular day Monday, and you have an important meeting. I can squeeze it in, easier than you.”

“But it’s... Kiki,” he murmurs.

That pisses me off. He means: ‘*It’s Kiki, so I should take care of it.*’

“I know she would prefer you to come,” I say. “But you can’t, and she – and you – are just...” I rub my leg against his again, and he exhales sharply. “...Going... to have... to accept that. Okay?” I roll on top of him, dragging my fingers through his hair and snaking my tongue into his mouth as I place my hand in between us, my body arched back slightly from his. This way, we don’t knock genitals until I relax my lower torso muscles or move my hand, so I have control.

He comes up for air, pulling his lips away. “Who’s going to break it to Kiki that her plan failed?”

But we both already know it’s him. She jumps if he says ‘boo’, but she regards me with a constantly sceptical look, and keeps her eyes lowered most of the time she talks to me.

“I don’t know, Nic...” He trails off, turning his head to the side. “Maybe I should call the teacher tomorrow and postpone...”

“You think I can’t handle it on my own? Well, postpone it then,” I say, rolling off of him. “Do whatever you want. It’s your kid too.”

In the darkness I can see his eyes, dilated and hungry for my touch. “I’m just worried. I know you can handle it. And to postpone with the teacher after



she already planned with the principal... or to call everyone this weekend to cancel Monday's meeting..."

"I'm just offering to help, Kris," I say in a light-hearted tone, and I turn my body so I'm on top of him again, my long dark curls spilling over his chest and stomach. "Let me."

"Offer accepted. That kid's too smart for us."

"Mm-hm." I start kissing his chest.

Kris' smooth, sexy chest is one of the main things I love about his body. Every time he's sprawled across our bed shirtless in the middle of the day; every time he's making me breakfast in the kitchen wearing nothing but his boxers that ride low on his hips so his lower torso down-to-there V muscles are visible; every time I run my hands under his shirt so I can follow each line of the mildly-cut six-pack he's maintained since I met him... every time, I weaken a bit.

"I wonder what the urgent problem is. Maybe she's not playing with the other kids? She plays with Khai fine..."

His erection is pressing into my thigh, and my nipples harden against his chest. "Kris..." I warn. "Shut up before I lose interest."

He laughs, and his whole body shakes, especially his stomach and lower torso. A delicious thrill of anticipation runs through my body.

He's the best sex I've ever had. I can't believe I married a man who's still making me climb the walls with pleasure years later. Experts say that the average couple's sex life dies down after the first year or at least by the first kid, but six years and two kids later... and still, we just let it happen and hang on for dear life, before we both go over that perilous edge and simply die in the midst of it.

That night on our honeymoon, it was the power of the sex that made me start the symbolic 'white flag' rose thing. On the beach with every pore in my skin gaping open, my body was tense and screaming for his touch. And I realised how lucky I was to land a nice guy like Kris. His dad could see right through me, but Kris believed the best in me. I'd been with a lot of men, cheated on boyfriends, and engaged in a *lot* of casual sex. Still, Kris loved me, and he let me be me. And he made love like the world had no beginning or end; like all he cared about was me.

“Lose interest?” he chuckles, yanking me out of my reminiscing. “You’re the one kneeling me in the groin. I wasn’t even interested in getting laid.”

“Really? Must be a torchlight poking me then. Oh well... goodnight.” I roll away, snuggling down and faking a light snore.

“You... little... bitch.” But his tone is low, fond and sexy.

I grin cheekily. “You’re the one who’s not interested.”

He crushes me to the mattress, grasping my hands as he pounces above me. “You’re gonna make me say it, aren’t you?”

“I’m gonna make you *beg*.”

“I’m *not* begging.”

“Then you’re *not* getting any.”

“Oh... I’m getting.”

“I think that’s called rape.”

“I’m... *not*... begging.” He yanks open the bralette, and I slide my hands down the back of his boxers.

His ass is nice to hold onto, and my second favourite part of his body. It’s hella cute: the right cheek has a little dimple, and the left cheek has a small star-shaped birthmark. In the shower we sometimes share on mornings-after, I always make sure to get a good eyeful. I can never get enough of his rounded backside.

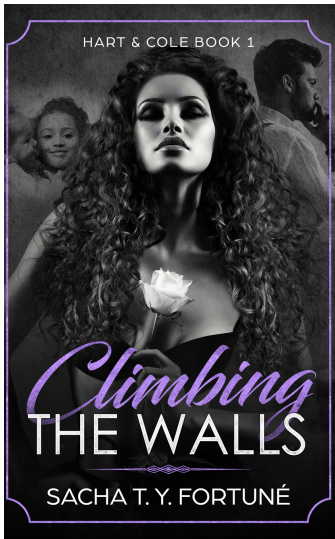
Every day, I know why I fell in love with him. Kris... he *saw* me. He saw the hot mess I was, and *still*... he’d *married* me. I still wonder why he puts up with my shit, when he could’ve had his pick from a fleet of other women. I sometimes wonder if he would ever cheat on me, but I know he won’t, and that’s why I married him – because he worships me for some unfathomable reason.

I loved him before I married him, and I’ve loved him desperately every day since. I don’t know how to tell him all the time, but I do. I hope he knows it, and that he feels the same way.

And it was *because* I love him so much that I absolutely *hated* myself when he called me on Monday afternoon at 1:17 p.m. to inform me in a cold, clipped tone that he’d received a call from Nikita’s teacher; that he’d interrupted his department meeting to receive that phone call; that not only had he rescheduled the meeting for Friday at noon, but he was going to

stomp into my office and drag me out of there kicking and screaming to accompany him; and if I complained the *slightest* bit, I was going to receive my divorce papers in the *mail* because while he didn't *mind* going to meet Nikita's principal and teacher alone because he was not a *negligent parent*, he was going to make me give a *shit* for my daughter if it cost him *both* our jobs and our marriage.

...Mommy forgets everything.



# “Climbing The Walls”

HART & COLE  
BOOK 1

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