

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



# IVY

I let my gleaming blue Mini Cabrio roll to a stop between the white lines of the parking spot and turned off the engine. The monotonous hum that had accompanied me for the last three hours died abruptly. My key chain, completely overfilled with charms, jangled as I pulled it out, killing the radio as well. I took my sunglasses off my nose, threw them into my handbag and jumped out of the car.

Heavens, I'd been sitting for so long! I stretched with a groan, pulled my high ponytail tight and locked my car. Florida's oppressive heat made the air virtually shimmer, so I hurried to get into the shop. I hoped at least the air conditioning was working. The 7-Eleven looked exactly the same as the one five kilometers ago. A white box, green stripes, peeling paint and a partially broken neon sign that made the 7 look more like a 1. Five kilometers ago, I had chickened out at the last minute. I had only too distinct memories of my mother saying you could end up with far worse things in there than just no-name products. But this time, I was going to see it through.

I squared my shoulders and gave myself an imaginary kick before entering the store. I immediately felt the air conditioner blow icy cold air straight into my face. I couldn't suppress a grin as I caught a brief glimpse of myself in one of the windows and spotted my pink hair tips, curling in the damp heat. Let no one ever say again that the result never looked like it did on the package. Sure, I had stained more of my shirt than of my hair when I'd dyed it yesterday, but all the bits that ultimately did get some dye looked awesome! The dark blue Chanel suit my mom had laid out for me still lay on my bed at home. Instead, I was wearing jeans shorts from Walmart, combined with a white T-shirt featuring a ballet-dancing rainbow unicorn. I couldn't remember ever wearing such cheap clothes, but by God – I loved every single piece! Even the no-name flip flops on my feet, which my mother always claimed gave her plastic poisoning just by looking at them. But when I had seen them hanging at the cash register at Walmart, a pair had immediately ended up in my

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



already full shopping cart. The shopping bags and boxes were now piled up all the way to my Mini's closed convertible top. I could tick Walmart off my list of destination stops. Now it was the 7-Eleven's turn.

Curiously, I looked around. The store's interior was just as shabby as it looked from the outside, and my nose was immediately hit by the overpowering smell of lemon-scented cleaner. My flip-flops squeaked on the cheap linoleum as I – sticky shopping basket in hand – purposefully headed towards the shelf with the sports drinks. And there it was. The stuff I lived for. The stuff that had already made the last three hours worthwhile.

"Gatorade!" I exclaimed overjoyed, a grin spreading across my face. The few customers around me gave me pretty strange looks but I couldn't have cared less right now.

"Come to Mama!" I trilled, shoveling every blue bottle I could get hold of into my basket. I didn't even care that the sports drinks weren't refrigerated and a slight layer of dust had accumulated on the labels. It wasn't like there was anything natural in them that could have gone bad anyway. I happily patted the contents of my heavy basket and headed for the shelf with the sweets. My eyes grew large. I had never been able to buy as many sweets as I wanted. A jumbo pack of Rainbow Nerds immediately landed in my basket of sin. Followed by Twinkies, Pop-Tarts, Twizzlers, Reese's Cookies and mint-flavored Oreos. Five minutes later, my basket looked like I was shopping for the birthday party of a sugar-addicted eight-year-old. All *I'd* had for my eighth birthday were salmon canapes and sweetbread, which is why I considered the contents of my shopping basket an act of poetic justice. I decided to top it off with a few Double Chocolate Fudge Cookies. My eight-year-old self would undoubtedly have started crying tears of joy at the sight. Fine, my eighteen-year-old self was close to breaking into tears as well. But I reined myself in. I didn't want the retail clerk to think I was even more cuckoo than he already did.

"Hi!" I triumphantly set down my overflowing basket on the counter with a broad grin.

"Hey," he mumbled back, studying me skeptically. He had to be about my age, maybe a little older. He was probably a student. I couldn't think of any other reason why anyone would choose to do a job like this. I caught myself staring at him. The poor guy had an unflattering acne problem and his neck was so long and thin that I could see his Adam's

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



apple jumping. At the same time, that made him seem a lot more natural than any of the boys I had met so far. I couldn't remember the last time I had seen anyone with skin problems like this. Most people I knew couldn't even smile anymore because of all the Botox and laser treatments. But this boy seemed so ... *normal*. Maybe *natural* was the better word. It was almost as if I was experiencing a tiny cultural shock. Everything was so completely different from what I had expected. And while that was kind of sad, I also found it fascinating.

"How are you?" he asked politely as he began to scan the sweets and pack them into a green bag.

"Wonderful, thanks! How about you?" I gushed, eliciting a restrained grin from him.

"Not too bad. Pretty hot today, hey? Are you on your way to college?" he asked.

"Yeah. To UCF, I'm starting in a few days. How did you guess?"

The guy laughed, dimples flashing. "Oh man. First semester," he said, bundling my goodies into the bags. He had started to fill number three by now. "You can always tell the newbies. Everything's so different and exciting to them. At that point, they still believe they'll have a life outside of studying. That's why they buy all the things they weren't allowed to eat at home." He raised a mocking dark eyebrow as he demonstratively chucked one of the electric blue Gatorades into the bag. I could feel my cheeks grow hot. "Trust me, at the end of the semester you'll be begging your mom to make you a green salad."

Never!

"So ... you're at UCF as well?" I asked him, trying to come across a little less new and excited. Which wasn't easy because until yesterday – the caffeine, you see – I hadn't even been allowed to drink black tea. If my mom knew about my borderline excessive Gatorade consumption, she would probably have a heart attack, disinherit me and put me in a Caffeine Addicts Anonymous clinic. Not necessarily in that order.

My attempt to act cool must have pretty much failed because his smile grew even wider.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



"Third semester, teaching degree, English and Art. If you end up having a subject with Mrs. Garcia, run as fast as you can before she can get her hands on your soul, too."

I snorted with laughter. "Thanks for the encouragement. Should I bring a stake as well?"

"No, holy water should do the trick for now. At least to buy you some time," he replied completely seriously, handing me the rustling bags. Five in total. "That's 90 dollars and 58 cents."

"One sec!" I dug around between undefinable items in my handbag until I eventually found my wallet. I counted the notes off in cash and pushed a hundred dollars across the counter. "Keep the change, and thanks for the advice."

I heaved the bags over my shoulder and was about to stagger back to my Mini when to my surprise a large hand took two of them off me again. "Hang on. I'll help you carry those."

Perplexed, I looked up and for the first time saw the white name tag pinned to his chest. "You're being served by: Jeff," I deciphered the spidery handwriting. "Thanks ... Jeff, but that's not necessary. I'm a big, strong girl."

"Happy to. And *of course* it's necessary. You're a few inches too short for a big, strong girl, you know," he teased me.

I hesitated. There weren't enough customers here that he would have to serve someone immediately, but I found this much spontaneous helpfulness a little uncomfortable. The words I had heard from my father and Harry again and again over the last few years had definitely left their mark. *Don't get into strangers' cars, don't accept anything, don't divulge anything personal.* Too great was the danger that someone would recognize me and the press or even worse would turn up a moment later. This time, I didn't have any bodyguards with me to escort me through the chaos like they usually would. I was on my own. My knees were shaking with nerves, but I couldn't just keep standing here because Jeff was already outside. I took a deep breath and hurried after him.

After the pleasant chill inside the 7-Eleven, the heat outside was like a slap in the face. Breathing in Florida was about as easy as it was at the bottom of the sea. With a groan, I

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



took the car keys from my handbag and unlocked the Mini, its lights flashing briefly. Jeff headed straight towards it and was about to open the boot when I stopped him with a yelp.

"Don't!" I ran over to him and pressed the hatch down again, something behind it already rumbling suspiciously. "If you open it now, everything's going to fall out."

Jeff raised his hands defensively. "Sorry! Where do you want the bags then? On the back seat?"

"No! That's also ... um ... full. Hang on ..."

With a smile, I opened the driver's door and squeezed myself and my rustling bags behind the wheel. I carefully placed the bags on a heap that was already blocking all lines of sight on the passenger seat before turning back to Jeff so he could hand me the remaining bags. Since the passenger seat was now completely full as well, I unceremoniously shoved them between my things on the back seat. Both of us flinched when we heard the rumble of Gatorades tumbling into the footwell. Oops.

"Thanks for your help, Jeff," I said quickly, closing the door. I had just started the engine when Jeff softly knocked on my window. Oh dear, he was starting to get a bit pushy. I wound the window down a fraction anyway, giving him a questioning look.

Jeff grinned. "No problem, I'm happy to help. I'd ask for your number, but I'm guessing my chances of seeing you again are higher if I offer you tutoring instead ... in case you need any in the coming semester."

"Really?" I smiled weakly. "I'm not sure I'll need any, but if I do, I'd be happy to take you up on your offer." As if I'd need tutoring.

"Happy to."

"That's really kind of you."

"Yeah, that's me. Knight in shining armor for pretty first-year students. You'll find me in the Delta Phi fraternity if you're interested. Just ask for Jeff, the others will send you to me." Jeff cleared his throat, knocked on the roof of my car and took a step back.

Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)

Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)

By Stella Tack

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



"Delta Phi. I'll remember that. See you." I slowly drove off the parking lot. Glancing into the rearview mirror, I saw Jeff waving me off before strolling back into the store with a grin.

Okay, he'd been kind of cute. And incredibly nice. But even better: he'd had no idea who I was. And that put a grin on my face, too.

## RYAN

*Ivy H. Redmond.*

*18 years old.*

*Blonde.*

*Blue eyes.*

*Freckles.*

*5 foot 3.*

*Blood type O.*

*Shoe size ...*

I lowered the file and raised an eyebrow. "Seriously? Her shoe size?"

"You'll be spending the semester with her, son. At some point, you'll thank me for all this information." Harry clapped me on the shoulder with a laugh.

Fuck! The man might be over fifty but that clap was anything but gentle. I forced myself not to grimace in pain and once again skimmed the *raw facts* about my new client. Even if some of the information struck me as completely unnecessary. I mean, seriously? Why did I need to know she secretly drank Gatorade? But Harry – aka my dad – wasn't going to leave me in peace until he was sure I had memorized every last detail. I knew Harry much

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



too well for that. A pissed-off Harry wasn't a good Harry, which was why I went back to studying the file.

"What does the H. in Ivy H. stand for?" I asked.

My father dismissed this with a wave of his hand. "She has a middle name, after her grandmother or something, but that's not important. Keep reading."

I was hard pressed not to roll my eyes in annoyance. Instead, I summarized the next paragraph like a model pupil.

"Ivy was born in Florida and grew up here. An only child. Heiress of an estimated thirty billion dollars of the RedEnergies corporation, including various subsidiaries. Outstanding grades in all subjects. She turned down Harvard and Princeton for a scholarship at UCF. She ... Why the hell would you turn down Harvard?" I stared at Harry, lowering the file again.

"Ivy is a tad stubborn," my dad muttered, scratching his neck. "I've been working for the Redmonds for... what, fifteen years now. Long enough to remember she was always hell-bent on doing things her way, even as a young child. Her dad is a Harvard graduate and also invests in some faculty departments if I recall. Similar for her mother and Princeton. I believe that's why Ivy felt like she wouldn't enjoy the same anonymity there that UCF offers her."

All I could do was shake my head. Typical rich kids. I focused back on the file in my hand, skimming the next line: *Likes to eat Froot Loops for breakfast.* I snorted. What kind of eighteen-year-old did that? And why the hell did I need to know? Shouldn't she be eating gold-dusted caviar or something?

I couldn't help but think of those reality TV shows about the rich and the famous that my mom loved to watch, where the kids kept smashing champagne against boats and splashing more money around in night clubs in an evening than I made in a year. Undoubtedly Ivy Redmond was just like them.

I sighed. Somehow, I'd imagined my first job a little different. I had trained my heart out at the IBA, the International Bodyguard Association. Had had my nose broken twice and broken a total of five noses back. Plus/minus one arm. But that had been an accident.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



When I had finally graduated, my idea of potential jobs revolved more around protecting important politicians. Not keeping spoiled eighteen-year-olds from snorting coke through a rolled-up hundred-dollar bill.

"This says she is enrolled at the university under a pseudonym. Ivy Bennet. Who came up with this crap?"

"I did," Harry grumbled.

"Of course you did, you creative genius." Laughing, I continued to read. "She's allergic to celery and dog hair and also gets sunburnt extremely quickly, which is why I need to make sure she always uses enough sunscreen. Harry, seriously? I'm her security, not her babysitter!"

"Oh yes, my boy, that's exactly what you are. That's what you're getting paid for, and if it says that you need to knock on her door every morning until she gets out of bed so she doesn't miss her lectures, then that's what you'll be doing. It's all in the fine print," Harry grumbled good-naturedly, taking one more look around the narrow dorm room we had just checked for security.

I glanced at the fine print. It really did say so. Apparently Ivy Redmond wasn't a morning person.

I folded up the file with a sigh and tried to shove it into the back pocket of my pants as best I could. Then I took another look around the room as well. It was as good as empty. The mattress was lying bare on the slats of a rickety bed frame. The desk looked simple but at least like it was solidly built. I slowly walked to the other end to check the windows. They looked exactly like those in any other room in this dorm – except they were bulletproof. The dormitory upgrade for Ivy Redmond, so to speak. Though I doubted she knew what kind of extras her Daddy had had built in.

"Does she know we're in neighboring rooms? I can't imagine she'll have been particularly thrilled by this news," I asked Harry who was inspecting the hidden security system behind the wardrobe. After all, I hadn't been thrilled either. But hey, it was part of the job.

"She does know she will have a security escort. However, we haven't told her to what extent, or the arguments would have been even *more* exhausting for all involved."

I leant back against the doorframe, raising an eyebrow. "Just a friendly casual question: What kind of security escort does she think she's getting? Does she know I'll be sitting next to her in class like a stalker?"

Harry hesitated and I actually saw something like guilt flit across his angular features. "Um, as far as that's concerned, I'm going to have to ask you a favor ..."

"Oh no."

Harry made a face, sheepishly scratching at his neck. "She does know that a security guard will be watching over her, but maybe you could carry out your constant ... surveillance a little more subtly and act as if ..."

"... I'm the nice student next door? Harry!" I snorted derisively. "For real: the only way that can go is wrong. Once I insist on accompanying her even to the toilet, she will know who I am. Provided her IQ exceeds that of a peanut."

At least Harry had the decency to blush. "I'll leave it entirely to you how you wanna do that, son. But be nice. I think she could use a friend. Ivy is a nice girl. I'm sure you two will get along or I wouldn't have chosen you for this job."

I crossed my arms in front of my chest. "No, you pushed this job on me because you're hoping I'll throw in the towel and go back to uni so I can take over your security company one day, Dad."

He sighed, shrugging his broad shoulders in resignation. "I still think studying would be best for you. You're young. Enjoy your life. It's not like active field work won't still be an option later."

"You know my opinion on that." I demonstratively looked away from him. I couldn't remember how many times we'd been over this already.

Harry seemed to be thinking along similar lines because he just nodded and strode from the room. "Fine, if you really want to do the job, be my guest ... Stick with it for one or two semesters and then we'll see."

Pushing energetically off the doorframe, I followed my father out of the dormitory.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



It was only just lunchtime and we were already done with all our preparations to guarantee Ivy Redmond's safety. In silence, we walked to the black SUV in which Dad had driven me and my moving boxes here this morning. The air inside the car was practically stagnant with heat as Harry hauled himself inside.

"You need anything else, son?" he asked, frowning as he tapped around on his GPS. The man might be the head of a security company and capable of successfully foiling an assassination on short notice, but he could be a bit hopeless where the most ordinary technology was concerned. Resigned, I took the GPS from him and entered his route back to Miami.

"Don't worry," I said, handing the GPS back to him, and clapped him reassuringly on the shoulder. "I'll be fine. The girl will only arrive the day after tomorrow. I'll even have enough time to take a good look around before I mutate into a babysitter."

"Great. You have all mobile numbers in case anything goes wrong? "

"Yup. All here."

"Remember to hand in your report every week."

"I'll even add small post-it notes and draw a couple of hearts for visual emphasis."

"Haha, you and drawing? You've made better jokes, my boy."

"Maybe I should study art. Would be a pity to waste my talent."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Very funny. Don't forget to call your mother," he said.

"Will do. And tell the twins to keep their hands off my shit. Just because I'm not home doesn't mean they can go into my room."

My dad laughed. "I can do that, but we both know they're not going to listen. Okay. Take care, Ryan."

"Bye, Dad," I said, closing the car door.

Harry didn't waste any time on chitchat and tearful goodbyes. He didn't need to. We had gone over the Ivy Redmond case exhaustively over the last hour. I knew what to do. And I would be reporting to him weekly anyway. I stared after the SUV deep in thought, unconsciously playing with my lip piercing. Well, here I was. Alone on a campus that was

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



famous for its frat parties and its pretty girls. Which meant I had thirty-seven hours left to fully take advantage of exactly those things before my client turned up and I had to prove how damn good I was at my job.

## IVY

I had arrived. Holy Moly! I was so happy and excited, I almost spilled my Gatorade. I stared at the fraternity houses of the University of Central Florida in fascination as I passed them at a crawl. A warm wind blew into my face through the half-open window. The fraternities all exuded the typical Southern flair: green, perfectly cut lawns, verandahs and Greek characters on the front and – even though the semester hadn't officially started – already quite a few students bustling about outdoors despite the suffocating midday heat. Somewhere, a party must have been going on, because the music was hard to ignore.

As I slowly drove up the access road, my gaze jumped from one fraternity house to the next. I didn't know where to look first. On the left was a fraternity called Gamma Sigma Eta. And next to it, painted entirely in blue, was Alpha Tau Omega, with girls lounging on the verandah who all looked as if the sole admission criterion was a perfect hourglass figure. I slowed down even further because to my right, a few boys – some of them shirtless! – were laughing and tossing a football around.

Jeez! What would I have to do to be that football? I would do anything to ... I hit the brakes with a shriek. The seatbelt cut into my shoulder despite the low speed. My tires screeched briefly as the guy jumped backwards in alarm.

"Fuck! Watch where you're going!" he yelled at me, angrily slapping the hood of my car.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



Breathing heavily, I flinched and lifted my hands off the wheel in apology. "Sorry! I wasn't paying attention."

"That much is obvious," he grumbled. "Stop gawking and get out of here with your Barbie Wagon!" He turned abruptly and hurried off in the direction of Kappa Sigma.

"Wha...? Hey! No reason to be so mean," I yelled angrily.

But my almost-accident victim just gave me the finger. A tattooed middle finger, to be exact. Even though it was hellishly hot, he was wearing black jeans and a matching T-shirt complete with a grinning skull. My gaze suddenly landed on his piercings. Somehow the guy looked pretty intimidating. Great, I had almost killed a member of Zeta Delta Undead. I immediately felt guilty again. I quickly called a "Sorry again anyway" after him, only to promptly see the middle finger again. What a lovely guy. I hoped we'd never see each other again. Glumly, I stared after him as he disappeared into the fraternity house from which the loud music seemed to be coming. I was off to a great start. Not.

A loud honk behind me made me jump in my seat. "Anything happening today?" a guy in a black Hummer yelled at me. I waved an apology, put the car in gear and followed the signs leading me from the fraternity quarter into the heart of the university. But as I turned towards the parking area, I was forced to realize that parking spots for student wheels were apparently in short supply at UCF. I drove around the tiny multi-story carpark for what felt like twenty minutes before finally finding a spot outside the concrete block. Okay, fine: it was nothing but a very narrow gap that two cars had left between them, and as I avoided willful damage to property by a hair's breadth, two things were quite clear to me. One, I wouldn't be able to open the doors without damaging the other cars – which meant I would have to climb out of the convertible and leave my stuff here for the time being. Two, I was never ever going to let go of this spot again – mainly because I had absolutely no idea how to get out of it again.

I turned off the engine with shaking hands and sank back against my seat with a sigh that came from deep within my chest. Apart from the catastrophic parking situation, I had finally made it. I was at UCF. I was here! By myself. Without my father. Without Harry or one of the other security people. My stomach was doing excited somersaults while my

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



brain was working overtime. What should I do first? There were so many options. It was only noon, so I had more than enough time to explore the campus, make friends with other students, maybe find out which fraternity those shirtless boys belonged to and whether they admitted girls as well, and check in with the housing office. Would I be living with another girl? Or maybe even a guy? I couldn't help but smile at the thought. It was definitely possible because only the bathrooms were separated, the rooms themselves were mixed. At least that's what I had read on the website. My imagination promptly ran wild. Maybe my roommate would be a hot sports student who wanted to teach me a few exercises on the horizontal bar. Or an acting student who urgently needed to practice a kissing scene for his next play ... My phone's ringtone was like a bucket of ice water calling my imagination to order. Heaving a sigh, I dug around in my bag for my mobile. But when I saw who had interrupted my daydreaming, I hesitated. *Daddy Doom*. My fingers hovered indecisively over the display. While I had been expecting the call, I had counted on a few more hours before anyone noticed that I hadn't just – as I had announced – made a shopping trip to Miami. I mean, I did go shopping, but at Walmart and not at Chanel. And then I had simply kept going instead of arriving two days from now – with a huge bodyguard glued to my heels. I thoughtfully glanced at my bag. I could simply ignore the call, instead grabbing only what I needed and then accidentally leaving my mobile in the car ... but who was I kidding? If I didn't at least make a brief statement that I was fine and hadn't been abducted, there would be an international arrest warrant out within the next thirty minutes. Better get it over with. I pressed the green receiver symbol with a sigh and held the phone up to my ear.

"Hey, Daddy ..."

"Ivy! Where the hell are you?" My father's voice was so loud that I moved the phone away from my ear in alarm. I quickly turned down the volume and started packing my bag.

"Oh, did I forget to mention that?" I definitely had. "I left a little earlier than planned and just arrived at UCF."

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



"You what?" I could virtually see the vein on his forehead bulge and his head turn an angry red as he paced back and forth in his office in his black pin-striped suit, yelling into the phone.

Carl Redmond was a great father. But he got worked up quite easily. Especially lately. Which was probably mostly my fault. I tried *not* to feel guilty about it.

Embarrassed, I cleared my throat while I pushed the moving boxes on the passenger seat aside to take the dormitory registration papers from the glovebox. "I'm at UCF, Daddy," I repeated calmly.

"Have you lost your mind? Do you know how scared we all were when you simply didn't come home? Your mother was about to call the police."

"Come on, Daddy, it's one p.m., not three in the morning."

"All sorts of things could have happened to you," my dad grumbled. He wasn't yelling anymore, but I could still hear him angrily stomping around his office. "I thought you were responsible enough by now to ditch these solo adventures. You know exactly how dangerous it can be if you're out and about without a security escort. What were you thinking, simply leaving like that? All your things are still here!"

Yeah, all my Chanel suits, knee-length skirts and uncomfortable high heels. Meaning all the stuff my mother had packed for me. My old life and everything connected to it was still lying on my bed at home. I had bought my new life at Walmart for just under two hundred dollars. But that wasn't something Dad would understand, so I remained silent.

"Nothing has been prepared!" my father suddenly started yelling again. "You're there all by yourself. The plan was that I would talk to your lecturers before classes commence ..."

"Daddy!" I interrupted him sharply. "I made it very clear that I wanted to drive to UCF by myself. I also don't want you to talk to my lecturers. We've been over this plenty of times. Your condition for a public university was that one of your Men in Black would accompany me, fine. But I won't allow you to rock up here like the president himself. That would be social suicide for me!"

"This isn't about social suicide, Ivy, it's about your safety!"

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



I snorted. "So far, nobody has tried to kill or abduct me, but if you yell a little louder, I'm sure a few potential murderers will come running."

"Don't get smart with me, young lady. You're in trouble up to your eyeballs."

Actually, I was up to my ankles in Gatorade, but I wasn't going to tell him that right now. I was wholeheartedly following the advice of my latest fortune cookie: *The wise know when to keep silent*. I pressed my lips together and took a few deep breaths. Since my dad and I were quite similar, he was probably doing the same thing.

"I'm fine, Daddy. I've organized everything and I'm going to register at the housing office now. Once your security guy gets here, tell him to ring the bell."

"Ivy, you won't ..."

"Love you!"

"Ivy! You'll stay where you are! I will call your bodyguard right now and tell him to ... "

"Bye!" I interrupted him mid-sentence. I hung up without waiting for his reaction. Heavens! My heart beat as fast as if I'd just run a marathon. My hands tightened around the leather straps of my handbag. At the same time, I somehow also felt damn good. Triumphant. As if I'd just won a small battle. Oh yes, there would be a world of trouble later. No doubt. But not now. Dad knew where I was. He might not be happy about it but at least there was no longer any reason to send in the US Army to save me. I had no doubt that I would have my security escort turning up on my doorstep in a few hours. So I needed to make the most of the short period of time without a babysitter. As fast as I could, I packed the rest of the paperwork into my bag and rolled the window back up. I had no idea how, but I somehow managed to get out of the Mini without damaging the car next to me. Having locked the Mini, I simply followed my nose, prudently leaving my mobile phone in the car.

**RYAN**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



My stupid phone battery was dead. At the worst possible time. I was about to shoot the last green pig, saw the red bird moving towards it in an absolutely perfect trajectory when the display simply went black.

"Fuck!" I threw the phone onto the grass in front of me and crossed my arms behind my head with a sigh, staring up into the blue sky. I wasn't sure why, but this day somehow seemed louder and harsher than usual. Even the music penetrating from the fraternity house behind me and making my eardrums vibrate was somehow way too loud. It couldn't be any later than one or two p.m., but everyone was already drunk as a skunk. Strictly speaking, the day couldn't have been going better for me. By chance, I had run into a former high school classmate earlier. Calling him a friend would be going too far because all we'd ever done in four years of high school was play a few rounds of football and nod to each other in the hallway. Yet this had obviously been enough social contact. Shane had recognized me immediately and invited me to one of those frat parties. Alfa Zeta ... whatever. Apparently the admission requirements were eating steroids for breakfast and going to bed with your dumbbells. At any rate, the members looked like they could lift the girls from across the road, Delta Dulla or whatever, with one hand. I even had a prospective date for tonight. And I had actually had a lot of fun until now.

But then that girl had almost run me over with her car. For some reason, my mood had been in the dumps ever since then. I had been sitting away from the boisterous party crowd for quite a while now, trying to distract myself with Angry Birds. But then my mobile had given up the ghost. Now I was grumpily staring at the sky, trying to shoot imaginary birds at the clouds that were crawling past. And I was about to lose. Damn.

I kept looking at my phone as if I was waiting for a call or a message, which was of course pointless because the thing was out of juice. My mood had reached absolute zero by now. Not just because I couldn't play games anymore but also because I was usually very reliable with things like that. The iPhone was an overpriced gimmick from my dad's

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



company and came with an extra long battery life. I usually carried a power bank for emergencies as well, but it was tucked into one of my moving boxes somewhere.

I got up, walking restlessly back and forth. Maybe the transfer to UCF and my upcoming job were getting to me more than I had previously admitted even to myself. Which made no sense whatsoever. It was completely idiotic to worry about my mission at this point. Ivy Redmond would only arrive the day after tomorrow and it didn't matter whether she liked me or not. She was merely the jumping board for my career. I only needed to hold out for one semester, two at most, to prove to my father that this job had been worth dropping out of college for. To show him how damn good I was at saving lives. Much too good to rot away behind a desk like he did and only coordinate everything via statistics, data and reports. I was probably an ungrateful son but I just wanted more than that.

Shit, the empty battery was making me increasingly nervous. If there was one thing I had learnt during my training, it was to listen to my gut feeling. Often, an intuitive reaction could mean the difference between ending up with a bullet in your shoulder or not. Without looking up, I grabbed my phone and jumped to my feet. I really should charge that thing before ...

Something suddenly crashed into my back, hard.

"What the ...?" I stumbled, cursing. Pink locks filled my vision and a surprised shriek made my ears ring.

I reacted instinctively. Even though I was in the process of falling to the ground myself, I turned around lightning fast, protectively slinging my arms around the girl's waist so she would land on top of me. Pfft. The air left my lungs as a slim, warm body pressed against me. A knee was pushing quite uncomfortably into my groin, making me groan in pain. Heavens! Those were the pointiest knees in the history of the world.

"Fuck! Is there something wrong with your feet or did I simply sweep you off them?" Breathing heavily, I stared at the girl – and looked into the largest blue eyes I had ever seen. Wow.

Light-colored hair with pink tips fell around her shoulders in tangled waves that tickled my chest while slim fingers were clinging claw-like to my black T-shirt. Pale freckles danced on a cute upturned nose that wrinkled in alarm as she sat up as if stung by an adder.

"Holy Crap! I'm so sorry! Are you okay? "

I couldn't suppress a grin, especially when she started to check my arms for possible or impossible breaks. Since she was straddling me, my gaze landed straight on her breasts – and holy shit! If those weren't the hottest breasts on the entire campus. Not even the dancing unicorn on her T-shirt could hide that. I quickly looked up at her face again. But the longer I looked at her, the more I felt like I knew her from somewhere ...

"Hey, didn't you almost run me over earlier?"

The girl froze. Her mouth fell open, forming an adorable O, while her gaze wandered from my pierced lower lip to the silver studs in my ears and then to my longish black fringe that I had pinned up with a small clip because of the heat. I watched her facial expressions with amusement as they changed from concern to muted panic when she discovered the black tattoos peeking out of my V-neck.

"Uh, yeah," she stuttered, looking like a frightened bunny flattening its ears in front of the big bad wolf.

"Again, sorry about that, I wasn't paying attention."

"Same as just now?" I asked, annoyed.

She flinched guiltily. "I'm sorry," she mumbled faintly.

Was she aware she was still straddling me?

"But I didn't mean to, I got hit in the head by a football," she added with an apologetic smile, pointing at the oval thing lying next to us in the grass. What?

"Hey!" Grinning, Shane came jogging towards us. "Sorry! The pass went a bit too far. Are you guys okay?" The question might have been directed at both of us, but his gaze was glued to the girl while he reached out a helping hand towards her. I watched in amusement as she stared at Shane like he had just made an indecent proposal.

"Everything alright?" Shane asked again when she kept ignoring his hand.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



Her gaze wandered slowly to his bare chest – and stayed there. He must have been too hot and taken off the T-shirt that had been covering his over-the-top sixpack earlier.

Naturally, her gaze didn't escape Shane. "You want me to help you up? I'd love to buy you drink by way of apology," he said with a wink. "Or do you want to keep sitting on Ray? You guys are looking pretty comfy there."

"What?" She looked down at me in confusion.

I tried to suppress a grin as I pointed at her legs that were still slung around my hips. Not that I minded, but I usually knew the name of the lady who graced me with this much physical contact. At least I usually did.

"Oh, damn!"

Her cheeks turned bright red and she leaped up so fast that she promptly stumbled over my legs again. Her eyes were wide with horror.

I was about to reassure her that there were worse things than having a slightly kooky girl sitting on you when I realized she wasn't actually looking at me. Just short of panicked, she hurried to a ginormous handbag from which a bottle of Gatorade had dropped. Shit, that stuff still existed? I thought the public health authorities had taken that poisonous mix out of circulation a long time ago. Apparently not, because the electric blue contents were quickly spreading inside her bag and across the lawn.

"Oh no, the paperwork for the dorm," she moaned, desperately screwing the bottle closed. She held up a few completely soaked registration forms at arm's length.

Embarrassed, Shane stared at the dripping pieces of paper, passing the football from hand to hand. "Uh, sorry again. The ball probably gave you quite a knock on the head. Are you feeling dizzy? Do you need an ice pack or something?"

The girl turned pale around the nose and hastily shook her head, staggering a little.

"Hey, are you okay?" Worried, I jumped to my feet to support her at the elbow.

"Yes ... no ... my registration papers!" She sounded truly desperate as she cautiously tried to wave the sticky heap dry. Gatorade was spraying in all directions.

"Don't panic," Shane said, spinning the ball on his index finger.

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



Shit, he was beginning to get on my nerves with that thing. Couldn't he put it away for *one* second?

I glowered at Shane before turning back to the girl. "He's right, if it's still legible, you can still use it. Otherwise, you'll have to go to administration and get new forms. They're for the dormitory, aren't they?"

"I ... yes ..." She looked up, nodding frantically, which made her wince a little. Looked like her head was hurting after all. "I was supposed to get my room assigned to me in an hour," she added faintly.

"Let me see!" Shane plucked the registration forms from her hand, instantly ripping apart the wet paper.

I cursed. "For fuck's sake, Shane! Leave it. I'll do it." I took the soaked papers from him and tried to decipher them. The only thing I could read was that her name began with an I. Isa? Iris? The rest was completely ruined. "I'm afraid you'll have to go see admin," I informed her.

"Shrimp! And where is administration? My campus map is completely soaked as well." Something inside my chest tightened at the sight of her dejected gaze.

"Well, I'm gonna split, yeah? Help yourself to a beer, sweetie, my treat," Shane said. "Are you coming, Ray?" He looked at me expectantly while he passed the damn football from one hand to the other again. If he didn't stop soon, I was going to end up putting that thing where the sun didn't shine.

"No, it's fine. I'll help ..." I turned back to the girl. "What was your name again?"

She bit her lower lip and looked up at me from underneath her light-colored lashes.

"I..., um, Heidi."

Heidi? And what about the I? There was definitely an I on the papers. But what did I know, maybe the Gatorade had simply etched away the rest of the H. "Great, I'm accompanying Heidi to administration," I told Shane, adding with a wink to Heidi: "We wouldn't want you to end up killing someone, after all." Amused, I watched her cheeks turn red. Cute.

"Sure, whatever." Shane shrugged. "See you later, Ray."

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Band 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**Kiss Me Once (Kiss the Bodyguard (Vol. 1): Kiss Me Once)**

**By Stella Tack**

© 2019 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com)

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister



"Sure, see you."

We nodded a brief farewell at each other and I vowed right then and there to keep any future contact limited to this very nod. I was beginning to remember why I had disliked ninety-nine percent of the other kids at high school.

"It's really nice of you to offer to help me but you don't have to. I'll be fine. And I feel a bit weird to accept help from the guy who almost turned into my first hit-and-run murder," Heidi was saying next to me.

Laughing, I looked down at her. Damn she was small. Like a fairy, except ... hotter. "Hit and run? You mean you wouldn't have stopped to check whether I was still breathing?"

Invariably my gaze lingered on her full lips. The notion of Heidi leaning over me to give me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation made me grin even more broadly.

Heidi studied me skeptically. Her eyes narrowed and she wrinkled her nose as if she knew exactly what kind of dirty fantasies my brain was currently producing. "I don't know, don't underestimate my *Barbie Wagon*. If I do flatten someone, they don't usually get up again", she needled me, crossing her arms in front of her upper chest, which ...

I cleared my throat, forcing my gaze upwards. "Well, if you had arrived with that thing in pink rather than blue, I probably would have volunteered to get run over," I teased her.

Heidi glared at me. "Okay, sure, whatever. I've gotta go and find administration. You really don't have to come. Sorry about the almost-accident and ... um ... for knocking you over." She threw her bag over her shoulder, turned on her heel and hurried off.

Perplexed, I looked after her, blond hair and pink tips flying and a pair of pale slim legs quickly gaining distance. Was she running away from me?