

FROM *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

FREIDA
McFADDEN



"A relentless mix of
secrets, lies, and jaw-
dropping shocks."

—RILEY SAGER

THE
TENANT

CHAPTER 1

BLAKE

Six months ago, someone stood in this exact spot—on the twenty-fifth floor of the high-rise building that houses Coble & Roy, the Manhattan marketing firm where I work—and tried to jump.

Unfortunately (or fortunately) for him, the window only tilts open to allow a gap of about three inches, which isn't enough for a grown man to squeeze through. He attempted to wrench it open enough to contort his body into the space, but it didn't quite work. Security stopped him before he plummeted twenty-five stories to his death, and now he's at some retreat in upstate New York, picking daisies or singing songs or getting shock therapy or whatever crap they do at those places.

And now I've got his job.

I wanted the job. I've wanted it since I started working here. It's a *great* position. Everyone was vying for it after Quigley tried to take that nosedive. And now it's mine.

And my new office? It's phenomenal. The leather

desk chair perfectly contours to the shape of my spine and cost more than my first car. The brown leather sofa matches the Peruvian walnut bookcase, which in turn is the same shade as the desk in the center of the room, like someone built them from wood harvested from the same tree.

But the best part of all is the nameplate on the desk, spelling out in gold lettering:

Blake Porter, Vice President.

I stare out the window at the view of the skyline of New York City, dotted with its legendary skyscrapers. When I was a kid growing up in Cleveland, I wanted to see the Empire State Building more than anything, and now I get to look at it every day. Then I drop my gaze to the street below, where, twenty-five stories down, people mill around like ants and the vehicles look like the toy cars my mother used to snag for me at neighborhood yard sales.

What kind of chump tries to jump out the window when he's got an office like this? What an idiot.

He couldn't handle the pressure. I can.

My phone buzzes from where I left it on my desk. I swivel my head so I can make out the name *Krista Marshall* flashing on the screen, and I snatch it up. There are calls I duck and calls I take, but I *always* answer when Krista is on the other end of the line.

"Hey, babe," I say.

"Hello, Mr. Vice President," Krista giggles.

Man, I won't get sick of that for at least another week.

"So how are you holding up?" she asks.

I eye the piles of paperwork on my desk, which are only rivaled by the hundreds of emails waiting for me

in my inbox. If I take a bathroom break, I've got twenty messages waiting for me when I get back. And I piss fast.

But you know what? That's perfectly fine. I landed the promotion to VP of marketing last week because I could handle it. Because I *earned* it. You got a week's worth of work I need to blow through in an hour? Great. Bring it.

"I'm good," I say.

"Will you be home in the next few hours?" she asks me. "Do you want me to grab Chinese food?"

It's nearly six, and no, I'm not anywhere close to finished. But also, I've been stumbling home at bedtime to eat cold takeout or a protein bar every night for the last month. I close my eyes and imagine my fiancée waiting for me in the living room of our Upper West Side brownstone, her strawberry-blond hair pulled into that sexy, messy bun she always wears piled on top of her head, her black leggings fitted to her waist just right.

I popped the question two months ago with a diamond that I hoped would make her head spin, and I've barely had a minute to catch my breath since then. We haven't had the engagement party she wanted; we haven't even had an engagement *dinner*. She deserves much better than this.

"No takeout tonight," I say. "I'm leaving early."

"Really?"

The fact that she seems so astonished tugs at me. "Yes, and I'm taking you out to dinner."

"Blake," she says softly. "You don't have to do this. If you need to work, I understand..."

"You're more important." My voice is firm—it's the voice people don't say no to. "We are going out to dinner,

and it's going to be someplace really nice, so save your appetite. I'll be home by seven thirty."

She sounds so happy. And all this work will be here tomorrow. Also, I've got a laptop I can crack open after she's gone to sleep.

I'm loving domestic life with Krista. When I was twenty-five, the idea of living with a woman would have been unthinkable, but it's been great. It's been going so well we even decided to get ourselves a pet, which we tacitly agreed was a practice run for when we have a child together. We thought about getting a cat or dog, but we couldn't handle that much responsibility, so we ended up with a goldfish. Her name is Goldy. Granted, I know goldfish aren't particularly cuddly, but I'm already attached.

But I need to learn to balance my work and home life. I needed this promotion to give Krista and me the life we want—the life she *deserves*, which will hopefully be better than what my mom had. I needed it to pay for the brownstone, because the mortgage was eating up my whole paycheck.

I came from nothing and hated it. My dad owned a small hardware store and was always struggling to keep it afloat, so I've taken steps to ensure that *my* life is going to be different. I never want to have to worry about the lights being shut off.

I shove my phone into the pocket of my crisply tailored pants. I'll tie up a few loose ends here, and then I'll take off. But before I turn back to my desk, I take one last look out the picture window. I can vaguely see my own reflection in the glass—I'm on the taller side, close to six feet, with brown hair that I always keep clipped very short because it has an annoying tendency to curl, the hint of a

cleft in my chin, and dark brown eyes that are a little too close together but have been called "intense," which I take as a compliment.

"Blake?"

I tear my eyes away from the window. My boss's secretary, Stacie, is standing at the open door to my office, her fist poised to rap on the doorframe to get my attention. And she's got my attention. In that skirt—yes, holy crap, she has my attention.

"Hey," I say. "What's up, Stacie?"

"Wayne wants to talk to you."

I glance back at my watch again. It's late in the day for a meeting. "Now?"

"Right now, he said."

She's not meeting my eyes like she usually does. She's looking down at the oriental rug on the floor, like it's the most interesting thing she's ever seen. And I think to myself, *That's strange*.

"Okay," I say. "I'll be right there."

As I turn away from the window and follow Stacie out of the office, it doesn't even occur to me that in the next five minutes, my whole life will come crashing down.