

If You Were Mine (The Sullivans)

By Bella Andre

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Finding forever…with you

The last thing Zach Sullivan wants is to take care of his brother's new puppy for two weeks. That is, until he meets the dog trainer. Heather is bright, beautiful…and she just might be the only woman on earth who wants nothing to do with him.

Heather Linsey can't believe she agreed to train Zach's new pup, especially since his focus seems to be more on winning her heart than training his dog. Having sworn off love, she has vowed never to fall for a charming man. But Heather's determination to push Zach away only fuels his determination to get closer—and the sensual and emotional connection between them grows more undeniable. Will the biggest Sullivan bad boy of all tempt Heather into believing in forever again?

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Editorial Review

Review
"Sensual, empowered stories enveloped in heady romance." –Publishers Weekly

"The perfect combination of sexy heat and tender heart." –Barbara Freethy, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author

"Bella Andre writes warm, sexy contemporary romance that always gives me a much needed pick me up. Reading one of her books is truly a pleasure." –Maya Banks, New York Times Bestselling author

"I can't wait for more Sullivans!" –Carly Phillips, New York Times Bestselling Author

"Loveable characters, sizzling chemistry, and poignant emotion." –Christie Ridgway, USA Today Bestselling Author

About the Author
Having sold more than 3 million books, Bella Andre's New York Times and USA Today bestselling novels have been #1 bestsellers around the world. Known for "sensual, empowered stories enveloped in heady romance" (Publishers Weekly), her books have been Cosmopolitan Magazine "Red Hot Reads" twice and have been translated into ten languages.

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Zach Sullivan stared with disgust at the bundle of fur chewing on his shoelace.

"No way." He shifted his foot to try to get the little bugger off but, for such a tiny thing, it was tenacious. It growled a little and shook its tail as it renewed focus on his shoe. His new shoe.

"Sophie loves dogs. Ask her."

He looked up to see Gabe smirking at him. Clearly, it had been way too long since he'd wiped a grin off his little brother's face.

"Sophie's got enough to deal with lately, between her pregnancy and marrying Jake," Gabe told him. "Chloe and Chase are going to have their kid any second now. Marcus and Nicola are always on the road. Ryan is practically living at the stadium for baseball season. And I wouldn't trust Lori with a dog if she was the last person on earth. Trust me, you were at the end of my list for someone to watch the puppy while we're away on vacation, but Summer insisted you *needed* to have Cuddles."

Zach almost hurled. "Cuddles?"

"Summer named her." They both looked down at the puppy. "I think the name fits pretty well."

Gabe was incredibly protective of Summer, his fiancée Megan's daughter. Zach knew better than to insult the dog's name, even if it was, hands down, the worst one ever.

"Look," Gabe said, "Summer is convinced you're the perfect person to keep the puppy. For some reason none of us can figure out, she thinks you can do no wrong. Don't disappoint her, Zach."

Zach had thought Summer was pretty great for a seven-year-old. Until now, when she was trying to stick him with a dog he didn't want for two weeks. Especially since there was no way a puppy was going to fit into his life for even two days.

His daily—and nightly—schedule was all about fast cars and pretty women. What the hell was he going to do with a puppy?

Shaking his head, Zach said, "You've really lost your touch, Gabe, letting two girls lead you around."

Zach was still surprised by how smitten his brother was—not only with Megan, but with her daughter, too. And it wasn't just Gabe who had fallen way down deep in the bottomless pit of "true love." Chase, Marcus and Sophie had tripped into it, too.

Their mother was beyond thrilled knowing there were babies and more Sullivan weddings on the way. Zach was happy she was happy. Just as long as she had no false expectations about him falling in love.

Because it was *never* going to happen.

But Gabe clearly didn't care if he'd lost his touch, or that he'd never be able to pick up a stranger at a bar for hot sex again. If anything, his brother looked disgustingly happy about it.

"I'm not asking you to dress the puppy up in frilly doggy clothes or to spend all day rolling around in the grass with her. I just need you to keep her fed and watered and walked while we're on our trip. So, will you do it or do I have to break Summer's heart by telling her she's wrong about you being a good guy?"

As if to punctuate his brother's request, Cuddles finally let go of her grip on Zach's shoelace and looked up at him with oversize brown eyes, her little pink tongue licking at her whiskers as if she'd just finished a truly tasty meal.

Damn it, he'd always been a sucker for puppy-dog eyes.

He wasn't happy about it, but he supposed he could suck it up for a couple of weeks while Gabe, Megan and Summer took a European vacation to see castles and princesses and whatever else it was Summer had been going on and on to him about at the last Sunday lunch.

His reputation as a player with women was well deserved, and it was exactly how he liked things: no deep connections to have to deal with down the road, no woman to disappoint or leave behind one day. But his family was different. His brothers and sisters meant everything to him.

"Fine." He scowled down at the dog. "I'll do it. What breed is she, anyway?"

His brother grinned, not bothering to hide his evil pleasure at Zach's capitulation. "A Yorkshire terrier. Evidently, she's a big one."

"Big?" He bent and picked her up by the ruff with two fingers before putting her back down by his shoe. "She can't weigh more than a couple of pounds."

"Closer to three," Gabe said as he headed for Zach's front door and came back a few seconds later with a huge cardboard box. "Here are her things."

Zach knew what the food and bowls were for, but everything else looked as if it belonged in the toy box at a preschool. "Why does a three-pound puppy need all of this for just two weeks?"

He had a bad feeling about this whole thing, sensing how easily fourteen days could turn into way longer than that if he wasn't careful.

Gabe shrugged. "We've only had her a couple of days and Summer has mostly been taking care of her so far. Timing kind of sucks on having to leave her so soon, but I know Megan really appreciates you stepping up to the plate like this."

It grated that they all thought he would be such a pushover about the puppy before even talking to him about it. But that didn't bother him nearly as much as when Cuddles chose that exact moment to squat down over the toe of his shoe and empty her bladder.

Her surprisingly large bladder.

"You'd better be back for her in two weeks," Zach warned in a low voice, "or she's going straight to the pound."

Gabe's laughter rang out as he wisely hightailed it to his car.

* * *

Heather Linsey was just finishing up with the students in her preliminary-level dog trainer certification class when her cell phone buzzed. She pulled it out, but when she saw the name on her screen, she quickly shoved it back into her pocket.

"I can handle giving everyone the information for the next set of classes if you need to get that," her assistant, Tina, said.

Heather forced a smile. "That's okay. I've got it."

But her mind was only half on her students as she wrapped things up and congratulated them on a job well done, letting them know she was available if they had any problems setting up their new businesses. Finishing up with a quick reminder about the big Bark in the Park fundraiser at the baseball stadium that coming Friday, and the silent auction the following Saturday night, she headed back to her office with Atlas, her Great Dane, close beside her.

Heather closed the door before pulling the phone back out and putting it on her desk. She wished she could just delete the message, but she knew from past experience that it would be smarter to find out what her father wanted.

"Sweetheart, I was hoping I'd get you rather than your voice mail," he began, and she was amazed at just how strong his denial was. Didn't he realize she hadn't picked up a call from him in years? She rubbed her hands over her arms as he continued. *"I have a business trip to San Francisco next week and I'm thinking of bringing your mother with me.*

It's been too long since we've seen our girl and we both miss you."

The skin on Heather's arms started to tingle, and then burn. The sensation started at her wrists and crept up across the pattern of crisscrossed scars that went past her elbows and all around the back of her arms. Nearly ten years later, the scars were faint enough that she probably didn't need to wear long sleeves all the time. But even though the cuts were long since healed, every time she had to deal with her father, she felt this phantom pain. It was almost as if she were seventeen years old again and locking herself into her room to try to deal with her out-of-control emotions. Back then, the only way she could deal with the anxiety was by making small cuts across the surface of her skin with a razor, and then watching them bleed.

At the sound of her father's voice, Atlas hadn't gone to his huge dog pillow in the corner. Instead, he'd stuck right with her and put his big head in her lap. She stopped rubbing her arms and stroked his head instead.

"Let me know your schedule so we can plan our evening with you. Your mother sends her love."

The message ended and she stared blankly at the phone on her desk, her hand absentmindedly moving over Atlas's short, soft fur. She couldn't believe how long they'd been playing this game, the one where her father acted as if everything was normal and they had a perfect relationship. Especially when he knew that she *knew* for a fact that everything wasn't perfect, that his "perfect" marriage to her mother and his "loving" relationship with his daughter was just a big, stupid lie.

A knock came at her door, jarring her out of her dark thoughts. "Come in."

Agnes Mackelroy, a pretty middle-aged woman whom Heather liked a great deal, poked her head in the door. "Good morning, Heather. I was hoping you had a few minutes." Despite Heather's smile, the woman seemed to sense something was wrong. "Is everything all right?"

Heather nodded quickly. "It's always so lovely to see you."

And it was true—she couldn't be happier to see Agnes and her dog, Joey, especially if it meant she didn't have to think about her father anymore.

Agnes had been one of Heather's first clients at Top Dog when the ink was still drying on her business cards. Over the past few years, she'd given dozens of referrals to Heather to work with her family's and friends' dogs.

Heather knelt to say hello to Agnes's chow chow. "Look at you with your fancy new knee," she said as she scratched the dog under his chin, right where he loved it. Atlas soon bumped her out of the way to say hello. "I take it he's been doing well since surgery?" she asked Agnes.

"Just splendidly! He's back to his old self, out digging up my garden morning, noon and night."

Heather had to laugh at that, even though stopping that behavior was something she'd worked on long and hard with Agnes and Joey last year. "Would you like me to drop by later this week to see if we can get him to celebrate in a different way?"

"No, I'm perfectly happy to let Joey have his fun. I didn't much care for the color of the begonias, anyway," Agnes said with a toss of her hand. "I'm actually here on behalf of a very good friend with a new puppy."

"Perfect timing. I've just finished up a group training class and have several new trainers who would love to get their feet wet. Why don't I give you a few of their numbers?"

"I was hoping," Agnes said, "that you might be available to help him personally."

Heather's business and dog-training staff had grown so much over the past three years that she spent most of her time managing the business. While she still loved to pop out of her office to play with the dogs that came in and out of her training campus, at this point she rarely took on one-on-one training clients. But she couldn't possibly say no to Agnes, who was responsible for so much of her early success.

Mentally reshuffling her busy schedule, Heather said, "What's your friend's name?"

"His name," Agnes said, "is Zach."

Something akin to a warning skittered down Heather's spine at the woman's almost-worshipful tone. Then again, she knew Agnes was happily married.

"I know how much he'd appreciate it if you could meet with him this morning at the garage where he works. He's dog-sitting for a couple of weeks, but I'm afraid the little Yorkie is running the poor man in circles."

Heather wrote down the address for Sullivan Autos, then gave both Agnes and her dog hugs as they said goodbye.

She couldn't imagine a mechanic's boss being too happy about a madcap puppy running around in an auto shop. Not to mention that it definitely wasn't the safest environment for an untrained dog.

"Ready to go play with a puppy?" she asked the huge dog lying at her feet.

Atlas's ears perked up at his favorite word. It had always amused her how much her two-hundred-pound Great Dane loved to play with puppies, even though they tended to nip at him with their sharp little teeth and use their nails to climb onto his broad back with no concern whatsoever for their own welfare.

She suspected the reason had something to do with the fact that the early part of his life hadn't been all that carefree. Once he became her dog things changed…a lot. Now he thrived on being around rambunctious puppies.

It was a warm day and Heather gathered her long hair up into a ponytail, then grabbed her training bag and headed to her car. Atlas bounded into the backseat, immediately sticking his head out of the window in anticipation of having the wind in his face, his tongue flying free.

Ten minutes later, Heather pulled up outside Sullivan Autos and slipped on Atlas's leash. She could see a half dozen men on-site, and even though her dog was worlds better around men than he had been when she'd first taken him home four years ago, she was concerned that so many big men in one place might overwhelm him. She wasn't surprised when he stuck close to her, the stiffness of his ears and tail a telltale sign that he wasn't entirely relaxed.

"Everything's fine," she soothed him, rubbing gently between his ears. "We're just going to play with a puppy, remember?" His tongue plopped out at that happy news and she grinned in response. "That's right, we've got nothing to worry about at—"

"Where the hell is that damned puppy!"

Users Review

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