



Façades

A Novel by Alex Marcoux

FAÇADES

Alex Marcoux



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If everyone sends *the light* instead of darkness,
bliss would be reality.



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Chapter 1

Sidney Marcum sat in her fourteenth-floor office, scheduling her week. Distracted by the sound of the rain beating against her window, she got up and stood looking down at the busy New York City street below. She watched the pedestrians as they hurried along Broadway. *People are always in such a hurry*, she thought. *They never take the time to do what really matters. . . . Then it's too late.*

The buzz of her intercom interrupted her thoughts, forcing her back to reality. The softness in her eyes disappeared and was replaced with coolness, as if something solidified her heart. "Sidney, Mr. Jacobs from Global Records is on line two."

"Thank you Michelle." Sidney hesitated as she reached for the phone. She had not heard from David Jacobs in a long time. *Why is he calling?* She picked up the handset and candidly greeted the caller, "Did you know that I've been fired by two people in my life, and I don't talk with the other guy. How are you, David?"

"Great Sid," the man laughed. "Are you still holding that against me? I thought you forgave me for canning you, after I gave you *the Gang*."

Sidney kidded her long-time business associate, "My ego has never completely healed. To what do I owe the honor of this phone call?"

"I heard you're in the market for a new client. I have another lead for you."

Sidney was curious. The lead she got on *the Gang* literally put her in business. "Well, I am looking right now. I have two prospects. What do you have, David?"

"A once-in-a-life-time opportunity."

"I've heard that one before."

"No really, it is a great opportunity. It's an established artist."

"You know I don't get excited about established artists."

"But Sid, trust me, she's bigger than big. She's having some problems with her existing manager, but his contract is up next month. She also has some minor PR problems. Sid, you're the best. I recommended you for the job and she wants to talk with you."

"Who is it?" Sidney asked.

David hesitated. "It's Anastasia."

"Some *minor* PR problems? Anastasia doesn't need a new manager; she needs to use a little discretion."

"Sidney, at least talk with her before you dismiss the idea." There was silence. "Sidney?"

"Of course I'll meet with her, but I won't make any promises."

"That's all I can ask, thank you." David added, "Jerry Benson is my top A&R person now. He's not as good as you were, but he's good. I'll have him call your office to arrange a meeting."

Sidney hung up the phone and once again approached her window. The glass reflected the tall and slender build of the 38-year-old. With her long fingers she brushed the bangs of her short brown hair away from her face. For those few who were fortunate to really know Sidney, they knew she had a natural beauty. When she smiled, her energy could light up a room. Her eyes could be beautiful, yet at times equally haunting; a small scar flawed her face near her right eye. Very few of her business associates ever saw the genuine side of Sidney. Most in the music business knew Sidney Marcum as a powerful woman who should not be crossed.

The walls of her office were lined with awards, plaques and pictures of herself with various entertainers. It was a spacious office, harboring a small bar in the corner of the room, along with a Bang & Olufsen sound system. A sofa was placed conveniently opposite her desk. As with many workaholics, her office supplied the essentials, including a private bathroom with shower to help her through those long after-hour sessions.

Sidney was the founder of Marcum Promotions, Inc. (MPI), which was approaching its tenth year in business. Her business had

grown tremendously over the years. She attributed her success to good old-fashioned hard work, good connections and being in the right place at the right time. Through the lead of her former boss, David Jacobs, she became the personal manager of a pop group called *the Gang*. David knew the young group of boys had talent and needed a manager. He suggested that Sidney consider managing the group. To this day, Sidney believed that David passed the lead to her out of guilt after firing her from Global Records.

Personal managers function as the general managers of an entertainer's business. Generally, their responsibilities range from negotiating record company deals and coordinating tours and publicity campaigns to hiring and supervising personnel. Sidney had a talent for dissecting a market and identifying what was really wanted. Then she would re-package the entertainer or entertainers to meet market demands. She had the ability and the connections, and she successfully pulled it off. Although she enjoyed the challenge of making a star, she recognized that stars were different from hungry, young artists. Once the star was born, Sidney was happy to step aside and delegate the day-to-day interactions of her performers to her managers.

As Sidney stared out her office window, her thoughts returned to Anastasia. All her success stories did not compare to Anastasia's achievements. But Sidney knew that Anastasia's career was plagued with public relation problems. Apparently Anastasia was a lesbian, and in the last year she had made little effort to conceal it. It was Sidney's belief that the country was not ready for a lesbian superstar, certainly not the way Anastasia had been marketed to the public. Sidney searched her CD collection until she found Anastasia's second album, *Lovers*. This production secured her superstar status. The cover of the CD portrayed a beautiful, light-skinned black woman with long dark hair, dressed in a white T-shirt. She was kneeling on a beach with a suggestive sensual expression. To Sidney it was obvious that a large percentage of her following was young and male. A young man who found out that his goddess was gay would probably stop buying her music.

Once again, her train of thought was interrupted by the intercom. "Sidney, Mr. Davis is here to see you."

"Thank you Michelle, tell Scott to come in."

A strikingly handsome man entered her office. He towered over her as he hugged and kissed her.

"How's the love of my life?" His deep blue eyes sparkled as he asked.

"I'm great, how are you?"

"Good! I want to know if we're still on for the Kramer Benefit next month. If so, I need to get my tuxedo tailored." The Kramer Benefit was an annual fund-raiser held to honor the memory of Seth Kramer, a musician who had died from AIDS nine years earlier. The event was attended by people in the music business, including artists, producers, record company contacts, and agents. Sidney had attended the event every year, and Scott had been her escort the previous five years.

"I haven't decided who I want to go with yet," Sidney teased.

Scott smiled as he walked to the familiar bar and poured himself a Dewars and water. He glanced at his reflection from the mirror behind the bar and finger-combed his wind-blown hair. The dark hair was accented with graying sideburns earned from his 48 years. Then the two sat comfortably on the couch to talk.

"I heard from David Jacobs today," Sidney stated.

"Really? Why?"

"He wants me to talk with Anastasia about managing her."

Scott got excited. "Really? That would be quite a client. She's incredible. A gorgeous woman. Can I meet her?"

Sidney was surprised by Scott's reaction. "Down boy, I'm just going to talk with her." Over the years, Sidney had grown to trust Scott's opinion and confided in him. "You know, what Anastasia really needs is to exercise some common sense. She doesn't need me."

"Common sense? Regarding . . . her lover?"

"Yes."

Scott was silent as he studied Sidney, then he confronted her. "You don't want to represent her because she's gay."

"Is that a question or a statement?" Sidney asked.

"I guess an observation."

"That's not fair. Anastasia doesn't need me to dictate how she should live her life."

Scott smiled. "Isn't that what you do for a living?"

"Anastasia has already made it. She's more successful than most artists dream of being. Sure, her career will be damaged if she doesn't use some discretion, and soon. But she'll survive, just not as a superstar, and there's nothing wrong with that."

Scott was confused. "Well, then what's the problem?"

"I can't take her on as a client unless I can improve the product. I can't improve her unless she's willing to make some changes in her life, or at least changes that impact the way the market perceives her."

"What if she's willing to admit she's gay, and comes out of the closet?"

"Then I don't want her," Sidney coldly admitted. "She wouldn't be a good business venture. In this business, the more albums you sell and the more concerts you book, the more money the performer makes, and the more money I make. Believe me, the world is not ready for a lesbian superstar."

"What if she's willing to modify her image?"

"That's why I'm talking to her."

There was a knock at the door and an attractive black woman peeked into the office. "Excuse me, Sid, I heard Scott was here." The woman approached Scott and the two exchanged hugs.

"How are you, Natalie?" he asked.

"Fine." Even through Natalie's casual attire it was evident that she had an incredible build. In previous years she had competed in body building contests. Although she had stopped competing, she still could intimidate most men.

Scott turned to Natalie. "You're gay; what do you think about this Anastasia thing?"

Natalie looked at Sidney, obviously confused.

"I hadn't told her yet." She quickly filled Natalie in on her conversation with David Jacobs.

Natalie had been with MPI for about five years and was one of Sidney's road managers. She was Sidney's most loyal and dedicated employee and a good friend. Natalie listened to her friends debate whether MPI had any right to tell someone, like Anastasia, how to live his or her life.

Then Natalie responded, "I think you need to treat Anastasia as any other business venture. She could bring some serious money into this company."

After the small meeting broke up, Sidney returned to her desk to finish some work. Again, she found herself distracted with memories and started doodling on her calendar. *Ten years*, she thought as she circled the date on the March calendar. *This would have been our ten-year anniversary, if Charlie and I were still together.* As she remembered, her brown eyes softened with a sparkle.

The MPI employees, including Nelson Fryer, were excited about the possibility of working with Anastasia. "You know what this means, don't you?" Nelson asked Sidney before their meeting with Anastasia.

Sidney seemed preoccupied with documents on her desk. "No, Nelson. What does this mean?"

"If we get Anastasia, we'll be recognized as a significant player in the business. The income she has generated is incredible."

"That's the key word, Nelson, *has* generated. I just want to do what's best for us. There's absolutely nothing wrong with staying small and profitable."

Although all MPI's employees wanted to attend the meeting with Anastasia, Sidney limited the attendance to herself, Nelson and

Natalie. Nelson had taken over direct management of *the Gang* five years earlier and had become a valuable asset to MPI. Sidney had recognized his merit and had promoted him to Vice President. Natalie had become her best road manager, and if Anastasia came on board, Sidney felt Natalie would do the best job.

The meeting was scheduled for ten o'clock. Sidney was irritated when Anastasia and company arrived at her offices twenty minutes late, offering no apology. Nelson escorted the trio to the conference room and offered beverages. Natalie soon joined the group.

Minutes later Sidney entered the conference room. "I'm glad to finally meet you," Jerry Benson introduced himself.

Anastasia and another woman walked around the large conference table to introduce themselves. Sidney and Anastasia shook hands. *Who does she remind me of?* Sidney wondered. Although the singer wore jeans, a simple oversized cotton top and little makeup, Sidney easily saw her natural beauty. Anastasia was quiet; she even seemed preoccupied.

"Hi, I'm Stephanie Mitchell," the other woman introduced herself and offered her hand to Sidney.

"Sidney Marcum." Sidney took Stephanie's hand, noticing the overindulgence in jewelry which went along with the flashy skin-tight leather pants and bleached blond hair.

"I'm Anastasia's partner," the 40-year-old continued. "I also write her music and lyrics," she bragged. Stephanie was a hard-looking woman. She may have been an attractive woman at one time, but now appeared weathered by the business.

Sidney quickly got down to business and started the meeting. She gave her guests some history on MPI. Ten years earlier she had started managing a young group of singers. Under her guidance *the Gang* became an overnight sensation. Within three years she formed a production company and started recording the group's music. When MPI was in its fifth year Sidney expanded the business by taking on a pop soloist, Jason Light. Once again, Sidney repeated the success story. For the last year, Sidney had

been training a new manager to assume Jason's direct management and had been searching for another entertainer to manage.

Her presentation was professional, yet warm. As she concluded, she invited the group to discuss why they had gathered. "I'd like to think of this as an opportunity to get to know each other, and to see if we can work together, or not work together for that matter. I think it's important to discuss what we expect from each other."

There was an uncomfortable pause from the group, until Jerry Benson broke the ice, and started talking about what he expected from a personal manager. Nelson followed, discussing his expectations of artists. Then Natalie chimed in with her insight.

Finally, Anastasia turned to Sidney. "Assuming we contracted with MPI, I expect that you work for me." She glanced at Nelson, then said, "I don't work with substitutes or backups."

Sidney stared back at Anastasia and unexpectedly smiled. "That's a start. What else?"

Gradually, Anastasia started opening up, initially talking about little things that may have irritated her with her previous manager. Then Stephanie joined in. Sidney listened carefully, occasionally taking notes.

The small group listened to Anastasia and Stephanie whine about minor points for about a half an hour, then they started discussing more serious issues. To Natalie's surprise, Sidney maintained her interest and encouraged the two to continue with their gripes.

"I don't know if you're aware of this," Anastasia continued, "but Stephanie has been my road manager for years. I see no reason to change this. She's done a good job."

"Does Stephanie perform any other responsibilities?" Sidney asked.

"Yeah, I told you. I write her music," Stephanie interrupted. "You know one issue we got to talk about is—us. We're lovers and I travel with her, and I don't want to be told that I sit too close to her, or I can't be seen going to our room together, or God forbid—I slap her ass. Affectionately, you know what I mean?"

This did initiate a response from Sidney. "Your public display of

... affection, isn't this what has caused your public relations dilemma?"

"Absolutely, and I'll listen to your advice, but I don't want any lectures. You're making the big bucks off of me, I expect you to fix the problems," Anastasia responded.

Natalie had known Sidney over ten years. She saw Sidney's jaw tighten and recognized the subtle sign of her irritation.

"Speaking of the big bucks," Stephanie continued, "I heard you demand a twenty percent commission. Twenty percent is outrageous for an artist of Anastasia's caliber." Stephanie seemed proud of herself as she raised the issue. "Also, in the next few years we're going to be paying a bundle to her previous manager. We're not going to put ourselves back in the same position. We'll require a sunset clause in the contract. Anastasia deserves some protection."

Sidney stood and smiled at the group. She turned to Anastasia. "Is there anything else?"

Anastasia looked at Sidney cautiously, but did not say a word.

Sidney walked toward the door and was about to leave; she hesitated, and turned to address the group. "There seems to be a misunderstanding." She could see the disappointment in her coworkers' eyes. "You see, Anastasia, I thought you needed a manager, not a puppet." She pulled the notes from her pad, "For the record, I will not allow a *key person* clause in any of my contracts. There comes a time when a change in direct management is better for the artist. For that matter, I will never sign a contract with a *sunset* clause."

Sidney approached the conference table again. "You know the expression, 'You get what you pay for'? Our commission is not negotiable. Our company is the best, and we deserve to earn top scale in this business." She hesitated again, then walked over to where Anastasia was sitting. "Anastasia, you don't need a new manager. You need to exercise some common sense.

"The way I see it, you have three choices right now. First, continue the way you're going, but you'll crash. As callous as this may seem, the world is just not ready for a lesbian superstar.