Letters to The Editor

by teenybirdy

Summary

Andy walks away from Miranda in Paris. Will a letter to the editor fix everything or could it be too late?
This fic has not been beta read.

Notes

A/N: This is my first attempt at Fanfiction. I woke up with the idea in my head after inhaling so much DWP/Mirandy fanfic. This is not beta'd. All mistakes are my own.
I have spent some time since my last update editing this story in the hopes it would coax my muse from hibernation. There are no major changes to the storyline/plot.

Disclaimer: I do now own any of the Characters belonging to The Devil Wears Prada. These are owned by Lauren Weisberger and 20th Century Fox.
Chapter 1

Dear Miranda

I realise by now you will understand I am not coming back to Runway. In a moment of pure madness, I launched my mobile into the fountain at the Place de la Concorde. There was no saving it after that split-second decision. I am still in Paris, the City of Light. I walked many miles today to come to terms with my choices. Not such a great move when wearing Jimmy Choos.

I acknowledge I did irreparable damage today, you may black-list me across the Tri-State area but that is, at this time, the least of my worries. My biggest concern is that I didn't recognise what caused my anger and disappointment. And then there was a tidal wave of loss I experienced when I finally realised I will no longer see you every day, when I realised, by leaving you at the steps of the hotel, that I will never feel your magnetic blue eyes upon me, which in the last nine months conveyed your distaste, apathy and more recently your approbation.

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Earlier Today:

Miranda relaxed feeling victorious after having pulled one over her nemesis Irv Ravitz and Jacqueline Follet regarding her position as Editor and Chief of Runway Magazine. She may have decimated someone else's dream, the one person who she could call a friend, but she will not allow herself feel bad about it. She knows Nigel will remain loyal to her and to Runway.

As the car moved away from the James Holt luncheon, she turned to speak to her assistant. 'You thought I didn't know?' Miranda asked. Andy nodded. "I've known what was happening for quite some time. It just took me a little while to find a suitable alternative for Jacqueline, and that James Holt job..." Miranda sighed. "...it was so absurdly overpaid; of course she jumped at it." Miranda laughed. "And so I just had to tell Irv that Jacqueline was unavailable. Truth is there is no-one who can do what I do, including her. Any of the other choices would find the job impossible and the magazine would have suffered."

Miranda looked towards the brunette sat beside her. "I was very, very impressed though, with how intently you tried to warn me." Miranda studied Andy. "I never thought I would say this, but I really do see a great deal of myself in you. You can see beyond what people want and what they need and you can choose for yourself."

Andy looked at Miranda in disbelief. "I don't think I'm like that. I...I couldn't do what you did to Nigel Miranda, I couldn't do something like that."

"Mm, you already did..." Miranda stated, "...to Emily."

"That's not what I..." Andy stuttered. "No no...That was...that was different. I didn't have a choice."

Andy declared.

"Oh no, you chose, you chose to get ahead. You want this life, those choices are necessary."

Miranda told her softly.
"But what if this isn't what I want? I mean, what if I don't want to live the way you live?" Andy asked.

Miranda snorted with derision. "Don't be ridiculous Andréa, everybody wants this, everyone wants to be us,"

With that Miranda placed her Sunglasses on and as the car stopped, she exited the car and entered the milling press. Andréa stepped out the car, looked towards Miranda and turned away walking in the opposite direction. Looking back, Miranda scanned the crowd for her assistant, a frown marring her forehead. A wave of panic engulfed her until she could spot Andréa across the street near the fountain at the Place de la Concorde. Pulling her cell out she pressed the speed dial, turned her back on the press once again and entered the Hotel.

Upon reading the caller ID and seeing Miranda's name Andy did the unthinkable. She declined the call, sending it to Voicemail, and launched the cell into the nearby fountain. She experienced a momentary sense of freedom and then the tears started.

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Earlier today I was walking along Rue Lamarck towards the Sacré-Cœur when I spotted a vacant table at a cafe and sat down to coffee. For a change, I decided against my usual Hazelnut Macchiato for something different. To be closer to you, I chose a hot, skim, no foam latte. The request was made to the waiter for coffee. "Chaud comme le centre du soleil."

Upon the first sip of the Centre of the Sun hot coffee, I stopped myself from crying out at the blistering heat against my lips and tongue and I wondered to myself how can the Ice Queen herself drink something so hot? Surely coffee this hot should melt that iciness?

I hope you understand that was a joke, right? You are distinctly nothing like the names provided by Page Six and the other gutter press. People would understand that if they looked close enough. Your barriers are high but they aren't impenetrable.

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Earlier Today:

Allowing the coffee to cool slightly she reflected on her initial thought about the coffee and laughed at her errant thoughts about Miranda. The laughter was short as tears formed again.

Andy remembered the last conversation she had with her now ex-boyfriend Nate.

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New York - 1 Week Earlier:

"You hate Runway Miranda and you think fashion is stupid. You've made that clear..." Andy stated angrily.

"Andy...I make port wine reductions all day, I'm not exactly in the Peace Corps." Nate hissed. "You know I wouldn't care if you were out there pole dancing all night as long as you did it with a little integrity. You used to say this was just a job; you used to make fun of the Runway girls. What happened? Now you've become one of them," He told her.

"That's absurd..." Andy declared.
"That's okay, that's fine, just own up to it. Then we can stop pretending like we have anything in common anymore." Nate stated sadly.

"Wait...you don't mean that..." Andy stammered.

"No, I do," Nate stated.

After a brief pause, Andy said; "Look maybe this trip is coming at a good time, maybe we should take a break?"

Nate attempted to walk away as Andy called to him, "Nate..." The Phone rang with Miranda's distinctive tone "I'm sorry...just one second..."

Nate turned back and stated "You know, in case you were wondering, the person whose calls you always take, that's the relationship you are in. I hope you two are very happy together."

Andy took Miranda's call.

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To get to the reason I am leaving Runway. The last nine months were the hardest I have encountered, I tried to meet each challenge head-on, and while my professional life has been so vastly rewarding my personal life has gone to Hell.

Those closest to me think I changed beyond all recognition, into someone they dislike and will never understand. I moved to New York with my closest childhood friends and my boyfriend of five years. Nate left me before we came to Paris and my friends no longer want anything to do with me.

My parents washed their hands of me a few months ago, they hope I see sense and move back to Ohio, so they can push me back into Stanford and into the family law business.

Nate's final words before he left me were; "The person whose calls you always take, that's the relationship you are in." I only ever missed one call from you. The one today when I threw a tantrum worthy of the most spoilt toddler and ensured I lost my way back to you.

You claimed today I can see beyond what people want and what they need and that I can choose for myself.

But surely by my actions today you've also seen what happens when I felt I have no choice? When what I feel is so far beyond my control I cannot see a future? When I realise my dreams and reality have no way of matching?

What happens if in my evolution from Andy into your Andréa I lost some of my unique identity? The good that people used to notice in me is no longer good enough.

Did it disappear when I gave up that Cerulean sweater and become a Runway Clacker? When I decided to take Paris from Emily? When I elected to walk away?

Have the choices I made in the last nine months done irrevocable damage? I hope not!

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Mentioning her hope she reflected on the conversation with Nigel as the announcement about James Holt International was made.

"She's given me everything I have Andy. When the time is right, she will pay me back." Nigel told her. Upon asking if he was sure he responded. "No, but I hope for the best, I have to."

What was it about the fashion industry and hope?

Thinking of Nigel's words brought up a memory of Miranda.

 Office - A Few Months Earlier:

"Do you know why I hired you? I always hire the same girl- stylish, slender, of course... worships the magazine. But so often, they turn out to be- I don't know- disappointing and, um... stupid. So you, with that impressive résumé and the big speech about your so-called work ethic- I, um- I thought you would be different. I said to myself, go ahead. Take a chance. Hire the smart, fat girl. I had hope. My God. I live on it. Anyway, you ended up disappointing me more than, um- more than any of the other silly girls."

You once told me you lived on hope. Do you remember that Miranda? I had disappointed you then too. The smart, fat girl couldn't do the impossible by flying you out of a hurricane (the one that was just a drizzle) in Miami to attend a recital for the twins. Your demands were ridiculous really.

At the time I didn't realise you were showing me your human side. You showed me that your girls came first, always. You are a mother before you are Editor-in-Chief. I assumed you hated me, but I came to recognise that you were pushing me to become the best I can be. I ended up asking Nigel to do that makeover on me. That was a defining moment for me.

You looked me up and down as you entered the office the next day and I noticed a brief look of approval. I wanted more of them. I watched you closely after that. I could read you, meet your unspoken requirements. I actually cared, not just about the job, but about you. I wanted to make your life easier. I wanted to catch more glimpses of the woman behind the editor.

Andy looked up from her letter and remembered every glance that Miranda had provided the small smirks of approval, the occasional licking of lips. Those lips, which when pursed, could cause even the most highly sought after fashion designer to break down and change a season's worth of designs in an instant.

Miranda's approval in the Fashion world was everything and what Andy now knew Miranda's approval was everything in her life too. Those looks, the smirks of approval, the occasional licking of those lips, when combined with the burning fire held within those steel blue eyes had become Andy's entire world.

I lived on hope. I hoped I wouldn't disappoint you again, but alas after today's debacle I
believe I have failed in that. I live with the belief when the time is right, you will show Nigel that you see his worth. He knows he has you to thank for his career, and that one day you may provide him with the opportunity to shine in his own uniquely brilliant way.

While you may have his loyalty to Runway, I do not believe his loyalty to you personally is un tarnished. He has been in your inner circle for over 20 years. He believed, although your walls are high, that he was your friend, someone you trusted. And today he was hurt beyond measure.

Nigel was the one who showed me that in my initial arrogance and continued ignorance I wasn't trying. He helped me to see I was screwing up by not seeing just how phenomenal you are at what you do.

I will not berate you for the distinct lack of trust in him. You could have informed him about Irv's plan to oust you from Runway and replace you with Jacqueline. He would stand by you with the unfailing loyalty he has shown you since day one. As would I, Emily and anyone else who has worked in proximity to you.

You are Runway. You make it what it is. Because of you, Runway is, in fact, greater than art.

I am sorrier than you will ever realise about how I walked away. It was unprofessional of me to walk away from you the way I did. And it is possibly the most reprehensible way to behave. I may leave Runway but I will never leave you. I hold the hope I can find my way back to you. I live in the hope that I can meet you one day in the future as your equal, not as a lowly ex-assistant. But that also depends on your next steps towards me.

Understand this Miranda; you hold the key to my future. Will it be a recommendation or the black-listing? Whatever you decide I will continue to respect you for the person you are...the Woman, the Mother and the Editor-in-Chief.

Yours

Andréa

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As Andy popped the letter in an envelope and looked around the hotel room ready to pack, she heard a quiet knock on the door. Walking up to the door she held her breath and opened it hesitantly.

Nigel bounded into the room and asked, "So Six, you are alive. When do you plan on leaving?"

Andy shrugged and replied, "My flight's tomorrow at 6:45 am,"

"And were you by any chance going to say goodbye?" He asked.

"I didn't see the point Nige. I know I really fucked up today." Andy told him softly.

Nigel looked at her sadly and asked, "So what now?"

Andy shook her head. "I have no fucking idea. I wrote this letter to Miranda, trying to explain...I dunno..."
"Don't you think you'd be best doing that in person?" He asked.

"Oh God, no! Why the fuck would I submit myself to that?" She asked.

Nigel shook his head in disbelief. "Are you going to let me look at that missive?" Nigel asked holding his hand out. Shocked Andy passed it along and held her breath as Nigel read. "You're brave I'll give you that, but why not just come out and tell her you love her?" He asked.

"I told you it's not like that. I care about her but I'm not in love with her..." Andy fired back.

"The lady doth protest too much," Nigel stated. "Why won't you tell her?"

"Cause she'll say it back and we'll date, after a time we'll move in together, eventually get married and live happily ever after with the Spawn of the Devil right?" Andy says derisively.

"There's no need to be so sarcastic, Six. Do you realise she cares too? You have been so wrapped up in yourself that you have failed to realise you get away with far more than any of her other assistants. The twins like you, they haven't pranked you since you did the impossible with that Harry Potter manuscript. And I know you certainly missed the look of panic that crossed her face as she saw you walk away."

"She panicked?" Andy queried.

"Oh yes, and she's been a royal nightmare all afternoon. Even Valentino noticed how out of sorts she is and he mentioned to me how calm Miranda had been since Miranda's Andréa came along." Nigel smirked.

"She's calm 'cause I get shit done rather than run around like that hyper headless chicken called Emily. It isn't a calm brought on by my presence alone..." Andy trailed off as Nigel interrupted her.

"Do you really know that? You missed it this afternoon when Christian made a scathing comment to her about you and she had to be restrained from hitting a certain part of his anatomy with a very well placed Prada heel, this was before he was not so politely escorted from the premises by Valentino's security." Nigel grinned at the woman.

Once again hope flared in the young woman.

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Miranda was furious. Pacing across her suite her thoughts were of one person. How dare Andréa walk away like that? Didn't she understand just how important this week was to Runway, to her? Didn't she realise that with the news of the divorce from Stephen about to hit the press that her presence was needed more than ever? Her behaviour was deplorable. It was unforgivable. How could Andréa be so selfish?

Hearing a quick knock at the suite door she stopped pacing and held her breath, making the quick decision to ignore whoever it was daring to disturb her. As quickly as that thought entered her head another quickly followed. What if it was that silly girl at the door?

Miranda stalked across to the door, flinging it open she found Nigel leaning against the door frame, an envelope in hand. "What do you want Nigel?" Miranda demanded.

"Well, hello to you too Miranda," Nigel responded flippantly. "Are you going to keep me standing here all night or can I come in?"
"If this is about the announcement at lunch, I must tell you that now is not the time to discuss it," Miranda stated vehemently.

"I know, I know." Nigel sighed. "When you're ready to explain I'm sure you will deign to advise me of the reasons behind your decision, after all, you excel at explaining yourself, I am aware just how much it thrills you to do so."

Miranda blew out a frustrated breath and rubbed the bridge of her nose, fighting against an oncoming headache. "What can I do for you, Nigel?"

"I come bearing a missive from the elusive Six." he quipped.

"And why do you think I want to read whatever babbling nonsense that ungrateful little girl has to say?" Miranda asked.

Nigel threw the envelope onto a nearby table. Looking at the editor he said. "Miranda you will do what you want, as always. I did what I was asked. Six is still in Paris, actually, she's down the hallway packing as we speak, and she leaves Charles de Gaulle tomorrow morning at 6:45 am heading God knows where. Read her letter; see what she has to say. Take another chance on the smart, not-so-fat girl."

"Why do you insist on using that ridiculous nickname?" Miranda queried.

Nigel smiled warmly. "The nickname fits her just as well as the beautiful couture I've been dressing her in for the last few months. I'll never tell her but those clothes fit better on those delicious curves of hers better than they ever will on our size zero models,"

A sigh escaped Miranda as she was launched back to the first time she saw Andréa, not as the smart yet frumpy, fat girl but as the beautiful woman she actually is.

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Office - A Few Months Earlier:

Andréa was in Miranda's office going through the usual morning ritual, placing the morning newspapers, magazine subscriptions, an icy cold glass of Pellegrino and the usual morning Starbucks on her desk in preparation of the day.

As Miranda walked from the elevator into the reception area of Runway, she launched her coat and purse on Andrea's desk while continuing her phone conversation with Donatella.

As she entered her office, she stopped dead in her tracks. Her heart jumped in her chest as she caught sight of the beautiful woman in her inner sanctum. Her breath caught, and she momentarily lost the thread of her conversation.

She couldn't take her eyes off Andréa, her eyes raked up from the tips of those beautiful knee-high Chanel boots, over the DKNY mini-dress that hugged each delectable curve, taking in those full smiling lips, the expressive hazel eyes and the beautiful chocolate hair that framed that beautiful face perfectly.

Miranda felt her mouth go dry and became flustered. Attempting to bring moisture back and to regain some semblance of normality she licked her lips and attempted to continue her conversation as she walked to her desk. As Andréa sauntered out of her office Miranda couldn't help but turn and watch the sway of Andréa's hips and that pert backside as she walked away.
Miranda was pulled from her thoughts by Nigel leaving the room. Her anger had somewhat
dissipated with her recollections and she became increasingly curious as to what Andréa has to say.
Picking up the envelope, addressed to her in Andréa's beautiful handwriting, she tapped it against
her lips. Tossing it onto the sofa she stalked to the mini-bar and poured herself a scotch. Moving
back towards the sofa she took a small sip of the amber liquid held within the glass. Sitting down
she picked up the letter.

Opening the envelope she hesitated briefly before pulling out the contents, she was apprehensive.
Sitting back she sighed and started to read. As she read the opening of the letter which explained
the reason her calls to Andréa were sent to Voicemail she shook her head in disbelief, the disbelief
turned to a frown upon reading about Andréa's sense of loss and the reasons behind it. Could the
silly girl really mean what she had implied?

"Will she actually miss me?" Miranda thought.

She continued to read, sniggering to herself about the Centre of the Sun hot coffee comment
knowing although she likes her coffee hot, it is usually needed that way due to it cooling
considerably before she's even drunk half of it. She pursed her lips as she continued to focus on the
letter.

Trust Andréa to be brave enough to write about one of the many monikers handed down by the
press. The Ice Queen, really? She found herself relieved as she read that her Andréa could see
beyond that particular epithet.

Miranda felt guilty about Andréa's life outside of Runway. She knew that she could be demanding;
it was one of the many reasons she had so many nicknames pertaining to the fact she's cold-
hearted. She knew she could be seen to be indifferent and somewhat obdurate but she had always
assumed she had to be as a woman in power within a male-dominated world.

Looking back on the Andréa before the makeover and the Andréa who walked away Miranda
could see the changes. Andréa was clearly more confident now than she had been in her initial
interview, although the spark of bravery, even then, had generated Miranda's admiration.

Nine Months Earlier:

Miranda stalked into the office, she was perfectly put together, 4" Crocodile Louboutin's, a Chanel
jacket draped elegantly across her shoulders, hair perfect, white Hermes scarf around her neck. In
all her glory she was magnificent. Miranda stopped firing instructions at Emily as she took off her
coat and dumped it on Emily's desk. She walked past Andy without a second glance but asked.
"Who's that?"

Emily's annoyance that Miranda had noticed Andy was evident as she responded. "Nobody.
I...I...well Human Resources sent her up for the new assistant job and I was sort of pre-
interviewing her for you and she's hopeless and totally wrong..." Emily stammered.

Miranda continued into her office throwing her reply over her shoulder to Emily. "Well, clearly I'm
going to have to do that myself. Because the last two you sent me were completely inadequate...so
send her in...That's all."

Andy walked into Miranda's office hesitantly. Behind her, she could sense Emily radiating
nervousness. Taking a better look at Miranda's office she noticed the photographs from Testino, Demarchelier and Bourdin. There was an iced Pellegrino on the desk alongside every current issue of relevant magazines, fanned out precisely.

Who are you?” Miranda asked.

"My name is Andy Sachs, I recently graduated from…” Andy tried to hand her resume to Miranda which was ignored. Miranda finally looked up and gave Andy her usual once-over, top to bottom. Dissecting every molecule. "...Northwestern University." Andy continued.

"What are you doing here?” Miranda queried.

"Well, I think I could do a good job as your assistant and...um...” Andy hesitated before continuing. "I came to New York to be a journalist and sent letters out everywhere and finally got a call from Elias Clark and met with Sherri up at Human Resources and basically it's this or Auto Universe,"

Miranda was pleased with the honesty. "So you don't read Runway?” Miranda asked.

"No,” Andy said.

"And before today you had never heard of me?” Miranda queried.

"No,” Andy's nervousness was now evident.

"And you have no style or sense of fashion." Miranda declared.

"I think that depends on…” Andy stammered.

Miranda raised her eyebrow, "No, no...That wasn't a question." Finally picking up Andy's resume she glanced at the information.

Andy attempted to explain points on her resume. "I was Editor-in-Chief for the Daily Northwestern. I also won a nationwide competition for college journalists with my series on the janitor's union..."

Miranda held up her hand. "That's all!"

Started with the abruptness Andy kept talking. "...that uncovered the exploitation of…” Miranda stared at Andy who took the hint and walked away. As she reached for the door she spun around. "Okay, okay you're right. I don't fit in here. I am not skinny or glamorous and I don't know that much about fashion. But I am smart I learn fast and I will work very hard and...” Miranda said nothing as Nigel entered the room at full speed discussing the latest photo shoot. "...Thank you for your time...” Andy left quickly.

"Who is that sad little person?” Nigel asked curiously. "Are we doing a before and after piece I don't know about?"

Miranda called to Emily and sent her after the girl.

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Miranda continued to reflect on the changes she had seen within Andréa. She had always firmly believed life taught necessary lessons, which you grow from. Andréa had evolved, as she should, from the experiences she had been through, and not just at Runway.
She experienced an overwhelming sadness she too had not knowingly appreciated the changes until now. Miranda knew the continued growth of Andréa would take her far. She would be a force of nature wherever she went. She was already Miranda's equal, if not yet professionally then as a fellow woman.

Miranda decided to respond in kind to the letter.

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Andréa,

I understand that this letter is probably the last thing in the world you expected from me but for some strange reason, I feel the need to explain myself to you. Why do you think that is?

It is probably best to do this in writing rather than in person. Having been on the receiving end often enough, you know I am somewhat acerbic and this can come across as me being vicious and intentionally cruel. I do not want to be cruel to you Andréa. As funny as this may sound to you I don't want to hurt you any more than you already have been.

When you walked away from me this afternoon, I realised immediately I had pushed you too far. My decisions and behaviour gave you no option but to leave. Part of me wanted you to leave.

I cannot make excuses but with the stress of Fashion Week, Stephen's decision to divorce me and Irv's attempts to undermine and oust me I was more vulnerable than ever. And in that time you were there, while I fell to pieces, seeing me in the middle of all that mess. It was like you just wanted to make it better and I just didn't know how to react. I don't know how to be vulnerable around you without you breaking down all of my usual defences.

I am after all the Devil in Prada, the Ice Queen, and the Dragon. Those are the names given to me by people who do not understand me, and the names fit in with what I want people to see. But you have stated you see past that, to the woman behind the names. How do you recognise that when those who have known me 20 or more years still cower in my presence? How can you look past the barriers I erected when my Husbands have failed to do so?

Since reading your letter I have been wondering how those closest to you cannot recognise the beautiful soul that has graced my presence daily for the last nine months. The innate kindness, generosity and stubbornness have always been present within you Andréa but obviously, the strong, graceful, confident woman you are becoming isn't appreciated by those that should celebrate your growth.

The only option you have now is to continue to grow, I learned a necessary lesson many years ago when I found you cannot go back to who you used to be.

When you feel you have no choice, recognise deep down you always have choices.

When you think everything is beyond your control remember that you are the master of your own destiny.

When you believe your dreams and reality have no way of matching that is when you look
inside yourself and you create a new dream.

After-all to dream is to hope.

Regarding my behaviour towards Nigel, I realise I should have confided in him. I do have plans for his future I will discuss with him once the debacle of Fashion week is over and we have a handle on the next issue. Regardless of his future career plans, I need to build bridges and resurrect our friendship. I have not been a good friend to him over the years and I plan on changing that, Nigel has been the one constant in my life since joining Runway, he's been more consistent than either of my Husbands.

I am extraordinarily disappointed you have left Runway and without proper notice. But that disappointment is not due to you, or the fact that there's now a company phone at the bottom of the Fontaines de la Concorde. My disappointment is in having to attempt to find a replacement for you. Do you realise how impossible that feels right now?

I don't want you to leave, but I also don't want you to stay if that means putting your dreams on hold. I care too and I can see your future is shining brightly ahead of you. When the time comes, you will receive the recommendation you deserve. As one Editor-in-Chief to another, and you will be in that position again one day with the drive and dedication you show, I want you to know that you have always been my equal.

M.P

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Miranda called down to reception to request the bellhop deliver the letter to Andréa.

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Dear Miranda,

Thank you for responding to my letter. I was thrilled to receive it but also very confused. I expected nothing back from you.

Somehow it is easier to put my thoughts down on paper, maybe it's the writer in me but then again maybe it's because your presence throws my equilibrium totally off balance. Sometimes just one look from you with your eyebrow arched stops any coherent thoughts and speech patterns. I either end up babbling, stuttering or shocked into silence. I realise how annoying that must be for you.

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Miranda received the letter at around midnight as she was settling in for some much-needed sleep. Forgoing sleep she found herself excited and yet nervous to discover what the young woman had to say.

She snorted elegantly at the thought of her presence causing Andréa's inability to form logical speech or thought patterns. She had always assumed the inability was derived from something deep within Andréa's psyche.

Andréa had started off life as her assistant with an innate clumsiness that was endearing, adorable really. She had found Andréa quite eloquent in her initial interview, upon thought it was possible that this was due to frustration at being dismissed so abruptly from the interview.

Over time though, with her transformation, she had found that Andréa seemed to lose the clumsiness yet become ineffective at communicating clearly, a standard response to her being 'Yes Miranda'. As she got better walking in designer heels she became more graceful, but she also thought her approval over Andréa had caused a shift in their relationship, whatever it was had caused Andréa to blush furiously over nothing, stutter more frequently and she lost the ability to make direct eye contact.

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There's so much that I am unable to communicate. I just felt the need to escape. It wasn't a decision based on what you said to me. It was purely instinctive. You say it's possible for me to break down of your defences but I don't possess an arsenal of defensive manoeuvres available to me. My fight-or-flight response purely depends on the day. I admit to having a tendency to flee when I am overwhelmed.

With everything that has happened over the last week, Christian, Irv, Nigel, You, I felt an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. I couldn't protect you from Irv, I found out too late what was being planned. I couldn't make you feel better about Stephen's actions, you let me in briefly and then your walls came up higher than ever.

You told me to do my job but part of my job was to ensure that your life runs smoothly and I failed. I allowed that inadequacy to push me into Christian's arms. A drunken mistake I cannot undo though from what Nigel told me, he got more than he bargained for this
afternoon.

Thank you for defending me. I don't know what he said to you but it must have been pretty bad for you to react so forcefully, especially after I'd just disappeared on you.

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Miranda was happy Andréa realised her night with Christian was a mistake. Christian had a reputation in the New York publishing world, which was far smaller than people thought, his chasing and bedding young, beautiful women was legendary. His usual modus operandi was to lavish the young women with praise and plenty of alcohol. The praise caused them to think he actually cared, and the alcohol loosened their inhibitions enough for him to get what he wanted.

If Miranda had known of Christian's attention towards Andréa, she could have provided a gentle warning about his reputation. As far as Miranda was concerned Christian Thompson was pond scum. She hoped Andréa was not eaten away with self-loathing for because of the actions of that cretin.

Looking back on the afternoon she was embarrassed by her loss of control but also slightly proud.

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Earlier Today:

She had been asked to make a speech for Valentino, which she had prepared for, but after Andréa had walked away her thoughts were scattered, she felt nervous and panicked.

She somehow fluffed her way through it sufficiently, making people smile where expected and being applauded at the end.

As she descended the steps from the stage she halted as she looked up to find Christian in her personal space, smirking at her.

"Where's Andy?" He demanded.

Miranda arched her eyebrow and threw him a look of contempt. Attempting to brush past him she found her way blocked. How dare he? "Move!" she seethed at him.

Pushing further into Miranda's personal space Christian lowered his face towards her ear and whispered, "She wanted me last night and I gave her what she wanted. She was exquisite, sensual and sexy as Hell. And I will have her again and again in every possible way."

In that instance, with Christian gloating about his time with Andréa, Miranda became furious.

She snarled at him. "Is that why she ran to me this morning? She ran to me to warn me of your folly in siding with Irv and Jacqueline, told me about that silly little mock-up of an inferior Runway. You honestly believed you could work for Runway? As an editor of all things? Your writing is substandard at best. It isn't fit enough to grace even page six..." Christian lost his smirk. "...As for Andréa, she will always be mine before all else. She is loyal to me, and if you go anywhere near her again I. Will. End. You!" she spat.

Christian grinned widely at that. "So the Ice Queen has melted, over her assistant of all things. How inappropriate. I never realised Miranda Girl was actually Miranda’s girl, though that explains quite a lot."
"Move!" Miranda snarled at him

Refusing to back down Christian snaps. "I'll move when I'm done saying what I have to say. She may be loyal to you but she will never be yours. I had her in ways you never will. You will live knowing I was there first...she wouldn't want someone old, frumpy and bitter like you when she's had me."

At his sneer, Miranda stepped back and swung her open palm against his cheek with as much force as she could muster. Hard enough for his head to snap back on his neck. As he took a step, backing away from her, she could see she had caused his lip to bleed where her ring had caught it. She lunged forward again ready to strike out with her foot but found she was being held back by arms wrapped around her waist.

"Let. Me. Go!" she demanded.

Nigel held onto her as she struggled against him. "No Miranda. Let me deal with this."

Christian smirked again as Miranda seethed. Nigel nodded to Valentino, who caught the attention of his security and waved them in the direction of the altercation.

"Andy will leave you like everyone does..." Christian spat as the Security team swept in. "...And when she does, I'll be waiting for her."

Miranda's heart dropped as Security dragged Christian out of the room and launched him into the busy Paris Street.

xxxxxxxxxx

I will attempt to answer the questions in your letter.

I cannot provide definitive answers why you see the need to explain anything to me. However, I think maybe you trust me enough to recognise that I will never judge you, even when you are at your most vulnerable.

I can see the woman behind the nicknames because you allowed it. I consider myself blessed to have seen behind the facade. There's more to you than those nicknames imply. I saw it in the softening of your face and voice when you speak to Cassidy and Caroline and when someone says something witty, you try to hide your amusement, your eyes sparkle and your lips quirk a little before your mask falls back into place. And it is a mask. I recognise when you have a headache you rub the bridge of your nose when you are frustrated you run your fingers through your beautiful hair and when you are contemplative your finger or the item in your hand brushes across your lips. I noticed all that and more. Those unconscious gestures held me captivated on more than one occasion.

Your husbands must have been blind not to see the caring, generous woman behind the editor. I am not so blind. I learned to see you when I learned to read you so I could meet your needs and try to make your life easier.

Regarding my growth; My parents know I came to New York to be a journalist and right now they're pushing me to go against my dreams. They were against me moving away initially, due to moving in with Nate, and the last year has provided them with enough ammunition to believe I made a mistake. They think I would not have lost Nate, Lily and
Doug if I had gone into law or if I hadn't worked for Runway. Their reasoning is that my dedication to you and to Runway took up too much of my life that could be spent with them in Ohio and with my friends and Nate in New York.

My friends just want the old Andy back, the Andy who would not have shut them out when faced with their lack of understanding of my work. The lack of comprehension that doing my job effectively and building a career, that I found highly rewarding, was justifiable. That my job was more important than partying hard.

I understand I can't go back to the old me, plus I believe Nigel would find me and kill me if I promptly forgot everything I learned over the last few months. I possess a new appreciation for fashion and its place in the world.

I am certainly not the naïve young woman who walked into your office with no knowledge of you or Runway. The contacts I made and the chance working for Runway could open doors within publishing was a bonus I didn't expect when I interviewed for the position as your assistant. But even without those doors opening, I will always give it my best shot to succeed.

I honestly don't know if journalism is the career for me, but I want to follow my dream of writing.

I have no idea where I am headed next, and that's kind of scary but also exhilarating. I have been thinking tonight of spending time travelling across Asia or Europe and writing about that, I'm unsure yet where I'll end up.

Given time I'll grow and progress into the person I am meant to be. There's not much reason to go back to New York except to pack up the things in the tiny apartment I can no longer afford now Nate has gone, and I can't face going back to Ohio. I have enjoyed my freedom away from the constraints of my family who, although I love dearly, can be quite suffocating.

Knowing you see me as an equal has me quite dumbstruck, knowing you see the potential in me is baffling. All I have done for you is what my job entailed, to the best of my abilities...and as I stated I believe I failed at this entirely. I am replaceable Miranda. That's part of the reason behind me leaving. Life at Runway will continue on without me. I am not nor will I ever be something special.

Wherever I end up I will miss the people I have met at Runway, I will miss the hustle and bustle and the beauty that surrounds each issue. I hope that people will stay in touch. I would especially like to remain in touch with you if that is what you also wish. You have my personal email should you decide to contact me.

I will always be there should you need me.

Yours

Andréa

As Miranda read she experienced the sting of tears which she couldn't stop from flowing. She would miss the young woman's presence more than she had thought. Knowing she may not be in
New York when she returned from Paris was heartbreaking. She acknowledged the world was just opening for Andréea and that she needed to find her place in it.

As much as Miranda wanted to fly down the hall to Andréea and beg her to stay she would never dream of holding her back. She had grasped the fact her feelings for Andréea ran far deeper than she could comprehend,

Without realising she had fallen in love with the beautiful brunette. There were too many factors that couldn't allow for a relationship to grow. She was still married, and she had the twins. She was also double Andréea's age. In her head, she thought her feelings weren't likely to be reciprocated. In her heart, she knew endless possibilities. Miranda had spent the last 30 years allowing her head rule her heart. It was time to follow her heart even if it led to heartbreak.

She now hoped that Andréea would find herself in her travels and would come back when she was ready. Miranda would wait forever if that's what it took.

xxxxxxxx

Andy had left New York. She had packed up her belongings and shipped them to her parents in Ohio keeping the basics of travel in one suitcase and a rucksack she started her travels two weeks after leaving Miranda in Paris.

Miranda and Andy had made a plan, deciding to keep in touch. Miranda exacted a promise from Andréea to send occasional emails, postcards or letters to the Townhouse.

Almost three weeks into her travels she finally accessed her email, finding her Inbox full. Deleting the junk she found one from an unknown email address.

Date: October 23, 2007
Sender: devilspawn
Recipient: andys82
Subject: Where are you?

Hi Andy

Mom has been sad since coming home from Paris and we don't think it's because of Stephen, he is a massive douche. He's plastered the divorce over Page Six so we're stuck with a Security detail until the paparazzi disappear back under the rocks they crawled out of.

We've never seen her so angry, not even when we pranked you to come upstairs to give her the book. And boy she had steam coming out of her ears that night.

When we asked about you she told us you had decided to travel. She said you needed time to grow into the person you're meant to be and that Runway wasn't the place for you to do that. We're calling B.S on that though. You're perfect the way you are, and we know mom agrees.

You scored major cool points with us when you got us the Harry Potter book before release and it even impressed mom. She was sure she would fire you.

You're way cooler than Emily, who's probably running around Manhattan like her butt's on fire as we type this.

Mom overheard Emily attempting to bad mouth you about leaving her in Paris. From what
we have been told from Roy she royally chewed Emily out and then had to deal with her snivelling for 7 hours straight. No-one dares say your name at Runway now in case they get the same treatment.

Mom continues to despair over the "incompetence she is surrounded by". She still hasn’t found a suitable 2nd assistant yet. At the last count, she was on Emily number 5. She's called none of them Andréa yet.

Why did you leave her? We thought you loved her!

Where did you go? When are you coming home? We miss your face.

Love

Caro 'n' Cass xox

xxxxxxxxxxx

Andy shook her head as she noticed the twins email address. They knew many of Miranda's staff called them the Devil's Spawn but she saw past that in the same way she saw past the nicknames that were given to their mom. The twins were a handful and obviously full of mischief but they were beautiful children and they had gotten to know each other well over the months she delivered the book. She wondered how they secured her email, smiling as she acknowledged the twins had somehow snuck into Miranda's personal email to find her.

Continuing to remove unnecessary emails, marking much of it as spam, she found the email she had been waiting for.

Date: November 03, 2007
Sender: m.p
Recipient: andys82
Subject: Are you safe?

Andréa

Why have you not been in touch? It has been two weeks with no contact.

This is unacceptable.

Of all the ungrateful...silly…Let me know you are safe!

That's all.

M.P

She shook her head again thinking of the old proverb; the more things change, the more they stay the same. She thought back to that night in Paris. The letters swapped, and the decisions made.

xxxxxxxxxxx

Five Weeks earlier:

Having sent the second letter to Miranda she continued to pack everything up. The clothes she had
received on the trip were being sent to Nigel's room to stock the closet and to give to Emily. She had no need for them where she was going.

Her decision was made, she would travel and find herself. She would chase her dream and would get over her feelings of failure and find happiness.

Finding one of Miranda's Hermes scarves and smelling her signature scent she experienced the loss of Miranda as strongly as she had when she walked away that afternoon. "I have to get a grip!" she told herself as tears formed again.

She knew she shouldn't be feeling like this about her boss...well ex-boss to be precise. It was hopeless. Somewhere along the way she knew she had fallen in love with the silver-haired editor and in a way she knew she was running from the feelings that couldn't ever possibly be reciprocated. Miranda was a straight, twice divorced (as soon as the next one was completed) mother of twins. Andy had nothing to offer such a woman.

Finishing her packing, she folded up the scarf and placed it in her pocket against her heart. Looking at the clock she realised it was close to 1 am. She didn't see the point of attempting sleep now when she had to leave the airport in just a few short hours. She left the room in search of a much-needed caffeine fix.

Having walked a block from the hotel Andy found a 24hr cafe that was almost empty. Slipping in the door she looked around, noticing there were only two other people inside. Walking to the counter she requested coffee and a muffin from the lone barista. After taking her order he shooed her away from the counter. Turning around she looked around for a seat. At the back of the room, there was a lone figure of a woman that looked slightly familiar, the poor lighting couldn't provide discernible answers who it was.

Shrugging she walked across the room but halfway across she stopped as the woman looked up sharply, blue steel meeting warm chocolate. "Shit!" Andy muttered as with a flick of her head Miranda invited her over.

Miranda stood up as Andy sauntered over, she pulled out a chair for Andy and promptly sat back down holding her coffee lightly between both hands. She looked at Andy closely as she moved around the table to sit. "I see you're dressed to blend with the masses," Miranda stated.

Andrea smirked. "Well, I can't see myself backpacking across the world in couture. I doubt it would be suitable. I think my ripped Levi's and Vogue t-shirt is fitting for that at least."

"So you have made your decision to leave?" Miranda queried.

"Yeah. I just need to get away, you ever wanted to do that? Just disappear into the world?" Andy asked.

"This afternoon." Miranda sighed sadly.

Andy looked at Miranda, saw her eyes glazed over with unshed tears and held out her open palm to her. Miranda looked down before tentatively clasping the offered hand.

They spoke simultaneously.

"Thank-you..." Andy stuttered

"Your letter..." Miranda started.
They both sighed, and the waiter interrupted with Andy's order.

Miranda smirked. "You don’t seem to be having difficulties with speech now Andréa, why is that?"

Andy sighed again. "I've had a bit of time today to come to terms with certain stuff."

Miranda's eyes twinkled. "Stuff? Really Andréa?"

Andy grinned at the editor but the smile faltered when she realised Miranda's thumb was caressing her palm. Her hand twitched and Miranda ceased their contact by grabbing her coffee cup. Andy faced the loss of contact and closed her eyes briefly. Thank you for your letter. I cannot even explain how much it meant to me, for you to take the time to respond"

"Please..." Miranda replied grasping Andy's hand again, "...there are no thanks necessary. You don’t realise just how much I needed to do that, to make you see you aren't just another of my minions. That I see you as much as you see me."

"I doubt that somehow," Andy muttered under her breath before taking a drink of her coffee.

Miranda raised her eyebrow at Andy having heard the mutter but decided to leave the matter. "I would like to keep in touch Andréa," Miranda tells her.

"But...but why?" Andy stammered.

"I want to know the person you are and who you will become. I want you to know I will be there for you as you claim you are for me. I am not good..." she waved her hand around "...at connecting with people but I feel connected to you. I don't understand it Andréa, I just..." Miranda stopped there not knowing what else to say.

Andy leaned in whispering, "I sense that connection too." She put down her cup and caressed Miranda's cheek lightly. Miranda leaned towards her sighing.

"Your letters just confirmed everything I thought about you. Your kindness and empathy. Your strength and your growing confidence. I will cherish every word you have shared with me. Write to me? Letters, postcards, emails...just don’t disappear, please."

Andy's eyes glistened with tears and she pulled her hand back from Miranda's cheek. "Of course, Miranda."

Taking a sip of her coffee Miranda grimaced at its coldness. Looking at her watch she sighed. It is almost 3:15 am, and she has realised her time with Andréa is about to run out. Ordering more coffee to go they walk towards the hotel.

"Let me call the car for you," Miranda said as they reach the hotel foyer.

"Thank you but my taxi's already booked. It'll be here for me at 4 am." Andy confirmed.

Miranda stopped walking and pulled Andy's arm forcing her to look at her. Seeing once again the tears in her Andréa's eyes she stepped closer. Holding her arms out, Andy stepped into her embrace and she pulled the young woman closer, hugging her tight and inhaling the scent of the young woman in her arms. "I'll miss you." Miranda declared. Kissing Andréa firmly on the cheek she turned and walked away from her.

"I'll miss you too, Miranda," Andy whispered to the retreating editor.
She fired off a quick response to ensure that Miranda knew she had received the email.

Date: November 6, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: m.p
Subject: RE: Are you safe?

M

I am safe. There will be a letter in the post for you shortly. Just breathe, okay?

I miss you.

A xox

November 6, 2007

Dear Miranda

By now you will have received my email and now know I arrived in India safely. It has been such a culture shock. This place provides a sensory overload and personal space is non-existent.

I was in Delhi to start with. I visited the Red Fort, the India Gate (Which reminded of Paris L'Arc De Triomphe), Humayun's Tomb and the Akshardham Temple. I have been trying to get as close to the breathtaking beauty and grandeur India offers amidst the trash piles in the streets. It is so dirty here, it is something you just cannot comprehend until you have seen it. I spent the day at the National Zoological Park, they have recreated the natural habitat of the animals to give the inhabitants a resemblance of their native home, which is allowing the breeding of endangered animals in captivity.

The Indian people I have encountered are friendly and hospitable, the only time I felt overwhelmed by travelling solo was when people were trying to sell me stuff or beg. People shouting in your face to get in their rickshaw, buy their wares or give them money initially left me feeling extraordinarily harassed.

The culture is diverse here in North India. I have fallen in love with the clothing, the Shastriya Sangeet (classical music) is to die for and I have learned to dance the Giddha (Woman's dance).

The local people I have met on my travels have a lot of questions for me but they are respectful. I celebrated Diwali with a woman I studied with at Northwestern. As part of the festival of light the surrounding buildings were illuminated with oil-burning bowls called dipa lights, and with strings of artificial lights. Diwali celebrates a multitude of things. The Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped, and I was lucky enough to watch a procession where her statue was carried throughout the streets. As the Goddess of wealth, happiness and prosperity and with the festivities symbolising the victory of righteousness, the lifting of
spiritual darkness and the awareness of the inner light. Being at the festival seemed right.

I moved from Delhi to Shimla, I spent a few days visiting Jakhoo Hill, Chadwick Waterfall and the Tara Devi Temple. Shimla offered an incandescent beauty I've rarely seen in a place before.

As I write this letter to you I have just completed the Chadar trek and am resting overnight in Leh where I started this adventure. From Leh, we drove to Tilad Do via Chilling. We hiked between 10-15kms a day across steep mountains for over a week. Staying in tents is not such a fun idea when it's so bitterly cold but I wanted to complete this before the trek becomes inaccessible due to the winter snowfall. The trek allowed me to walk over a frozen river, which is confined within a steep canyon between Chilling and the Zanskar valley. I have to confess that the idea of walking over a frozen river of ice was too great an adventure to miss. We drove the 65km back to Leh this morning and I fly to Nepal tomorrow.

My mom sent me an email yesterday, it made for compulsive reading when I arrived in Leh and finally accessed my email account. She explained what an ungrateful soul I had become. How I wasn't doing anything with my life and how much of a disappointment I was to the family. Once again my mom is trying to pull me home with a job offer at a minor league tabloid in Dayton. She was spectacularly furious after my last email when I refused to fly across the world to spend Thanksgiving with them.

I wrote a feature about my travels in India. I will send it across to the NY Times, Rolling Stone Vanity Fair. Keep everything crossed for me.

How is everything with you and the girls? Are you prepared for Thanksgiving and Christmas? Tell Cassidy and Caroline that I will email them soon and send them some photos of my travels so far. I have one photo I am especially pleased with. I captured a sea of vibrant colour and light against the backdrop of India Gate. It's stunning.

Writing of the incandescent beauty of Shimla I find myself missing you, you are the person who, for me, is intrinsically beautiful. I hope that doesn't make you feel too uncomfortable.

I would love to have you here experiencing the beauty and colour that is India. I think you'd like the clothes too. There's an elegance to the Salwar Kameez that's hard to define.

Yours as always

Andréa

xxxxxxxxxx

Andy sealed the envelope with a kiss and walked out of the lodge to post it. She had no regrets about leaving Runway but she missed the silver-haired editor. The absence was unbearable but she saw no other way than distancing herself from the heartbreak of loving someone who couldn't love her the same way.

xxxxxxxxxx
Happy Thanksgiving Andréea.

Your letter arrived yesterday, and I was waiting for a rare moment of peace to be able to give it my undivided attention.

I was pleased to learn that you are writing about your travels and look forward to potentially reading your articles. Although they may not necessarily be suitable for Runway, I would be happy if you let me assist in having them published elsewhere. As you know I possess many contacts within the publishing world. Have you heard anything back yet? Please know you are welcome to send any further features to me and I will ensure they are sent to suitable publications.

I am happy to learn that you are still enjoying your travels whilst experiencing the vibrant cultures offered. I can clearly picture you dancing the Giddha, you certainly possess the energy, creativity, feminine grace and elegance required for the dance.

I need to tell you I am unimpressed with your adventure across the Chadar trek. Do you realise people die on that expedition? How do you think the people who care about you would react if something happened to you? You really need to stop taking unnecessary risks with your life Andréa.

I would love to visit India one day. I think a four-page spread on Eastern fashion would be an excellent idea, though getting the approval from Irv would be impossible at this time. Once again he's threatening to cut my budget. I do not understand how he cannot see that the profits from Runway far outweigh the cost accrued. Once again we hit the highest level of sales from the last issue which covered the losses from Auto-Universe.

We are working towards the January issue at the moment but the incompetence within the book each night is astounding. I am working with Nigel to take on more responsibility as creative director. He seems pleased with the changes I am attempting to implement and I hope that by giving him more responsibility it will open my own workload and allow me to spend more time with the twins. We organised a night for drinks and dinner this weekend in the hopes we can resurrect our friendship.

Are you still in Nepal or have you moved on? What adventures and delights will you describe to me next?

Regarding your mother's emails, I would never suggest you ignore them but she needs to realise you are an adult now and are able to make your own life choices. Your parents should see the amazing woman they so obviously nurtured. As for going back to Ohio, would that truly make you happy or would you be happier in L.A or New York, somewhere you can
continue to grow? I personally hope to see you stomping around New York again very soon.

My girls stayed home with me this year even though it was their year to spend Thanksgiving with Gregory. We had a quiet family day today celebrating our many blessings, the best is that the press is finally leaving us alone after the divorce. What are you thankful for?

We are having Christmas together; I received their Christmas lists and found that some of their wishes just cannot be bought or given easily; it is the first time they have requested the impossible.

Gregory doesn’t seem too disappointed about spending Thanksgiving or Christmas without the twins as he has himself a new girlfriend, Charity. I’m sure his girlfriend's get younger every year.

As you would expect the twins have been delightfully mischievous and started their usual pranks on her. I believe the last prank involved a gluey flour water-based concoction, some water balloons and duck feathers. There was some issue with the mixture causing havoc with Charity's hair extensions. Greg was less than amused but I frankly found it hilarious.

Cassidy and Caroline are enjoying receiving the occasional emails from you along with the photographs. They especially enjoyed the photo of you eating something obviously spicier than you intended, where you were captured with tears streaming down your face, looking like you were about to blow steam out of every orifice. When the twins forwarded the photo to me at work I didn't think about what the email would contain and opened it. I snorted with laughter in front of Emily, Jocelyn, Serena and Nigel, not a sound you generally hear within the depths of Runway, and especially not from me. I thought Emily was going to faint at my unexpected explosion of mirth and after I stopped laughing I told her to eat some cheese and sent them all away. I look at the picture even now and it makes me smile greatly.

It has been a long time since someone told me I am beautiful. Thank you for the wonderful compliment, although it was unexpected and caused me to question your sanity or if you had smacked your pretty little head on the frozen river of ice, it did not make me uncomfortable.

I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Take care

M.P

xxxxxxxxxx

Andy was taking the time to write a new travel piece about her travels in Nepal when the email came through from Miranda. Minimising the article she was writing she took the time to focus on Miranda.

She shook her head in disbelief at the offer held in Miranda's email. Although there was no need for Miranda's help in getting published, she appreciated the offer all the same.

She found herself bemused at Miranda's thoughts about her learning to dance. She certainly hadn't ever thought the words elegant would be an adjective the editor would use to describe her, she somehow felt that Miranda still saw her as the clumsy assistant of the past and even though
Miranda had used the word graceful to describe her in her letter in Paris, she had assumed she editor was just being...well polite.

She laughed out loud at that thought. Miranda and polite rarely went together. Miranda was well known for her bluntness and honesty.

She grinned at the sternness and concern expressed in Miranda's admonishment about her adventures on the Chadar trek. Miranda would be shocked about her most recent adventures through Nepal.

She was happy that Miranda's guard seemed to be slipping, and that Miranda believed she could share her daily struggles and her wishes for her friendship and working relationship with Nigel. There was a lightness in the email which was providing glimpses of the woman behind the editor. The woman was certainly an enigma.

Miranda's words about her parents offered very little comfort. Andy experienced a continued sadness at her failing relationship with them.

She smiled at the knowledge that Miranda hoped for her return to New York. Laughed at the twin's pranks on their dad's new girlfriend. She imagined the snort of laughter ringing out down the silent halls of Runway and wished in that moment she had been there to hear Miranda's unexpected joy and her reaction to Emily.

She wrote a response by email rather than Miranda having her wait two weeks for a return letter, after all, she understood how moving at a glacial pace just delighted her silver-haired editor.

xxxxxxxxxx

Date: November 22, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: m.p
Subject: RE: Thanksgiving

Namaste Miranda

Happy Thanksgiving!

This is just a quick update to tell you I am still in Nepal, I will, however, be leaving for Thailand in the next day or two.

I wanted you to be the first to find out that my feature on my travels in India will be included in the January issue of Rolling Stone. I'm thrilled. They requested the first pick on any future features so between answering emails I am presently trying to write about the amazing experiences I am getting here. I am exceedingly grateful for your offer to assist in getting my work published.

I love everything about Nepal, from the simple hand gesture of the palms together in greeting one another, Namaste literally means "the divine in me salutes the divine in you." The respect the Nepalese hold for their elders is phenomenal. Once again I've found the locals are eager to share their culture and traditions with visitors.

You'd be okay here, although the tap water is disgusting there's a wide range of bottled water and your usual Pellegrino is readily available. It's necessary to make ice from the bottled
water though so you don't end up drinking the contaminated water supply.

I made the mistake of eating/drinking something that was not prepared well and was ill for a few days but I'm better now. Tell Nigel I am definitely no longer a six. Do you think he'll change my nickname as my weight changes?

The best part of being in Nepal has been the fact that the country offers an action-packed adventure. I went white-water rafting and completed the second-highest bungee jump on the Bhote Koshi River. From Kathmandu I took a scenic flight over Everest from gathering photos of snow-capped peaks, and views of the spectacular lakes, glaciers, rivers and gorges below.

I am spending a lot of time visiting the three holy cities in the Kathmandu Valley, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan.

Patan, known locally as Lalitpur, held the beautiful Krishna Mandir Temple in Durbar Square. Each of the three floors enshrines a different Hindu god: Krishna in the first, Shiva in the second and Lokeshwor in the third. I spent the day at the Park Gallery which allowed me to view the Modern Art of Nepal.

Bhaktapur has been a favourite from my time in Nepal as it is free of motor traffic allowing you to wander the cobbled streets and travel amidst the temples.

I checked out the Ason Tole Market in Kathmandu, visiting the temple of Annapurna Ajima, the goddess of prosperity and abundance who presides over the neighbourhood.

I spent a leisurely day walking among the Garden of Dreams allowed for the escape of a crowded Kathmandu. I found a spot to sit, read and to reflect on the changes in my life.

About a week into being here I caught the bus from Kathmandu to Budhanilkantha, I purchase my entrance ticket to Shivapuri National Park and completed a 3 hour hike to the Nagi Gompa monastery. I went for the day and ended up spending a week there. Like the nuns that come to meditate and study the Buddhist scripture in search for enlightenment, the reason for my extended stay was to work out where my life is going, to do some soul-searching and to hopefully generate some inner peace and come to terms with certain aspects of my life now.

I never really explained honestly why my mom has been so adamant I go home. When I returned from Paris, they were just going on about how Nate and I could get back together now I'd left Runway. There was not a single chance I could let that happen. Nate's lack of support was the final nail in the coffin of our relationship for me. I finally told my mom and dad I was attracted to someone else, someone unexpected, that I had deeper feelings for someone that wasn't Nate, someone female.

I've never questioned my sexuality before. It has been a lot to come to terms with but I never really thought my parents wouldn't support me in any way. They always claimed they wanted my happiness and now I believe they have turned their back on me, all because of something I cannot control. My dad has refused to speak with me since and mom...well the less I say about her the better.
I am pleased that you are trying to rebuild your friendship with Nigel. He cares about you and as I am finding out you can never have too many people fighting your corner. When you go for dinner and drinks get Nigel something blue and toxic from me.

Regarding Cassidy and Caroline, I think Greg may be fighting a losing battle in trying to curb their puckish behaviour. He should be happy they choose to spend time with him even if it means allowing them to act in their usual mischievous way. Their prank on Charity sounds epic.

I’m pleased they spent Thanksgiving with you. They are a blessing in themselves and hopefully, things will settle now.

Regarding Christmas presents for the girls, you once told me I could do anything. If I have that superpower then you certainly will. Nothing is impossible. Reach for those stars Miranda and give the girls what they want.

I am happy that the girls are enjoying my emails so far. I didn’t mean for you to see that photograph specifically, it was so embarrassing. As a joke, the chef, someone I had become friends with, laced my meal with green chilli knowing after a day travelling I wouldn’t consider what I was putting in my mouth. The wait staff grabbed my camera to capture the moment, and I thought the twins would appreciate it. I certainly didn’t mean for it to cause you to drop your usual mask, especially in front of your staff. I would love to hear your laughter though.

You ask what I am thankful for. I am thankful Rolling Stone are happy with my writing and will actually pay me for my experiences. I am thankful you spent time this Thanksgiving reaching out and writing to me.

There’s so much to feel blessed about. Your friendship, if I can call it that, is the biggest blessing in my life at the moment. Thank-you.

Trust me when I tell you I am completely sane and I haven't fallen down and smacked my head recently.

Once again Happy Thanksgiving Miranda

Yours as always

Andréa

xxxxxxxxxxx

Sitting alone in her study working on the book was one of Miranda’s many ways to let her brain sink into exhaustion before she let her body follow.

She’d had a wonderful day with her girls and had found time to sit and read her letter from Andréa and believed she posed an acceptable response.

As she looked at the clock on her computer, she noticed the email icon showing unread messages, sighing she realised she had one more thing to do before bed. If she left the emails, they would multiply overnight, and she’d get nothing done in the morning.
Opening her email she smiled seeing Andréea's name lit up on her screen. She experienced a sense of joy reading about Andréea's adventures. The joy itself was laced with a fear that the young woman could be hurt, she'd never considered her Andréea was such an adrenaline junkie.

She was shocked that Andréea had spent part of her stay in a monastery. Everything she had ever seen in the young woman had shown an excess of energy, she was a constant whirl of movement, the young woman from before couldn't be still and even when sitting she fidgeted uncontrollably, tugging on her fingers or bouncing her leg. Miranda wasn't able to comprehend a moment where the Andréea she knew could just sit back and meditate.

Reading Andréea's words into the reason behind her parent's disapproval she was saddened that they could judge their daughter based purely on her questioning sexuality. Miranda herself recognised that if Cassidy or Caroline followed that path she wanted them to be as open and honest about it with her, and she would be accepting. All that mattered is that her girls find that elusive love. Something she herself hadn't yet managed.

She experienced a stab of jealousy that Andréea's admittance of feelings towards another woman. Attempting to push those feelings aside she realised that Andréea could break her heart, which left Miranda frightened.

Thinking about the twins Christmas list she identified there was just one thing she couldn't give them, Andréea's presence. For once she was powerless to give her Bobbsey's and herself their heart's desire.

Maybe it was time for her to step back from this relationship.

XXXXXXXXXX

For three weeks Miranda had thrown herself into her work in the hopes she could bury her feelings. She had backed off from contact with Andréea and although she received multiple emails she had made the conscious decision not to answer them.

She told herself that she was just too busy. It was coming up to Christmas, the twins were about to break from Dalton for their school vacation and Greg had once again missed two of his weekends with them in favour of spending time alone with Charity.

As much as Miranda told herself that a break away from Andréea was needed to protect her heart, every day was spent with her mind looping over one question; how much longer could she stop herself from reaching out to the brunette?

Over the three weeks she had ceased contact she had fired half of the art department and two second assistants, and yet her inner dragon was not appeased.

Now it was now the Saturday before Christmas and she was alone at Runway. Everyone had been sent home early having laid the foundations of the next issue, all surprised and pleased that they all had a five-day break over the Christmas holiday.

Hearing her mobile she checked the caller ID and answered the call from Cassidy. "Hello, Bobbsey."

"Hey mom, there's a letter here from Andy. Do you want us to bring it over when we meet you for lunch?"

"I suppose so," Miranda responded.
"Great, we'll see you in an hour." Cassidy declared and disconnected

Miranda shook her head, Andréa had not given up easily on their unlikely friendship. Her emails had continued to come through regular as clockwork on a weekly basis and she had queried the lack of response, expressing increasing concern.

Miranda looked back on the previous three emails she had received.

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Date: November 30, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: m.p
Subject: Thailand

Hi Miranda

I arrived in Thailand a couple of days ago and it is nothing like I expected.

I landed in Chiang Mai just in time for the Yi Peng lantern festival, which happened tonight. After chanting and meditation led by some monks, thousands of paper lanterns were lit to be released simultaneously into the night sky. I was told to make a wish and release the enormous paper lantern I had been given. It was amazing to stand among the lanterns as they were being lit. The temperature rose in the space between lanterns as we waited for enough hot air to build up to allow the lanterns to float. It was such an amazing experience, at that moment I felt like I could also float away. I imagined I could float right across the ocean and back to New York.

Chiang Mai is an old city ringed with over 300 temples and surrounded by jungles, there is a nearby elephant sanctuary which I plan on visiting before I leave for Bangkok.

I visited two of the local temples in Chiang Mai. Doi Sutep has a cable car which grants access to a vista of the whole city and Wat Chedi Luang. I spent my first night at one of the ladyboy cabarets. All I had to do is buy a drink to gain admission. Next time I know not to sit in the front row. I am grateful I wasn’t one of the unlucky few to be pulled onto the stage although the lap dance I received was a bit of a shock.

Yesterday I hired a motorbike and drove 2.5hrs to Pai, the drive took me along winding mountain roads. Once I reached Pai I continued to drive around finding waterfalls, canyons, and curious little spots that surround the village. There’s some gorgeous landscape that took my breath away. While spending the evening in Pai I gained the chance to learn how to spin fire poi at the circus school.

From Pai, I travelled to see the White temple at Chiang Rai. It's a psychedelic wonderland mixed with the bowels of hell. It was absolutely worth seeing even though I could only devote a day to it.

I've not heard from you since my last email and I'm missing hearing about your life. I realise the run up to Christmas can be busy but hopefully, I'll see an email from you soon.

Are you all keeping well?
Hi Miranda

One thing that excited me the most about visiting Thailand was the prospect of interacting with elephants. I wanted to get up and close with those beautiful, regal creatures. I spent my last few days in North Thailand at the Elephant Nature Park in Chiang Mai. It is a wonderland sanctuary for rehabilitated elephants, those that have been injured in the logging industry in neighbouring Myanmar, badly treated in tourism, have been used for begging for money from tourists, or were left to fend for themselves after the logging industry ended. They have time to really be elephants again, socialising, forming groups, and sometimes giving birth to babies. Since ENP does not put their elephants through the domestication process, those babies may eventually be given the chance to return to the wild. I had an amazing experience volunteering for the few days.

I'm now in Bangkok having caught the day train from Chiang Mai, and while it has absorbed Western influences, it has maintained its own rich heritage, it is quite an intense experience. Like India, Thailand is providing sensory overload. Whether visiting a busy morning market or experiencing a night out.

From what I have seen so far gleaming temples and golden Buddha's frame both the rural and modern landscape around me. Ancient banyan trees are ceremoniously wrapped in sacred cloth to honour the resident spirits, fortune-bringing shrines decorate humble homes and monumental malls, while garland-festooned dashboards ward off traffic accidents.

I was horrified to learn just how bad Thai roads and traffic are. Phone-wielding monks and a dog weaving through traffic astride a 50cc scooter might seem like an amusing sight but the danger outweighs the laughter. It is reported there are 80 lives lost every day from R.T.A’s.

The Thais are a proud people, with great respect for king and country. The National Anthem is played publicly every evening at 6 pm, bringing any/all activity to a one-minute halt. On my first proper night, you could tell I was the obvious tourist, wandering confused through the stationary crowds, oblivious to that nightly protocol.

Thailand serves a decent cup of Coffee which nearly caused me to dance with joy. I was rejoicing having missed my daily Starbucks fix way too much. Home-grown beans are produced here under Royal Decree.

I've spent the last 3 days wandering around Bangkok, it isn't my favourite destination on my travels so far but I don't hate it like many people seem to. You've got to love a country where
rubber thongs are acceptable footwear.

I spent that first day visiting the Grand Palace and Wat Po. Within the Grand Palace is the temple of Wat Pra Kaeo which house the 15th century Emerald Buddha. Wat Po to holds the famous golden reclining Buddha statue.

I spent my first Bangkok sunrise at Wat Arun (The Temple of Dawn). You'd think after 9 months of rising before the sun I would want to experience a lay-in but I can't bring myself to just lie there wasting my days away. Wat Arun is a gorgeous Buddhist temple on the edge of the Chao Phraya River opposite the Grand Palace. It has one main spire and four small ones depicted on Thai money. From the top of the main spire, I saw stunning sweeping views of the city, allowing me to take some amazing photographs.

After watching my first Sunrise I walked along the Khao San Road to Wat Saket, the Temple of the Golden Mount. I think this may be one of my new favourite places because of its exquisite golden temple, the stunning setting, and wonderful views of the city from the top. Walking back along the Khao San Road from the temple I ate great food, experienced great shopping, did tons of people watching and kept myself amused well into the night.

I am spending the tomorrow visiting the Chatuchak Weekend Market. I've been told that this is the best place to get gifts, find knock-offs, barter, or eat some good food. On Sunday I will experience the Taling Chan Weekend Floating Market.

I haven't decided where I am going next. It is a choice between Koh Chang and the South Islands. I plan to move on soon. I want to visit Lumpini Park which is cited to be Bangkok's version of Central Park. I doubt anything could come close to Central Park, no park could ever be the same without a galloping Saint Bernard charging across the path to pounce on her favourite assistant.

Earlier this evening, while enjoying a glass of wine, I discovered a song called Chasing Cars, it's by a band called Snow Patrol. While I was listening it brought you into my mind. Just one verse made me remember our conversation in that tiny cafe in Paris. I asked you at that time if you ever felt like you wanted to just disappear into the world, I was amazed you actually answered me.

"If I just lay here, would you lie with me and just forget the world?"

You're never far away from my thoughts Miranda. I look at the world around me attempting to find the words to describe to you how I see it.

I hope you find the time to answer this email. You are the only thing holding me to my old life in New York. Send my love to the twins.

Yours as Always

Andrée

xxxxxxxxxx

Date: December 14, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: m.p
Subject: What the Hell?

Miranda

Please just either let me know you are alive, safe and well or I'll be forced to ask the twins or Nigel, and you know how Nigel loves to gossip and prone to hyperbole. I can't imagine he knows we've been swapping emails and letters.

I think I honestly preferred it when you were making ridiculous demands of me as your assistant than surrounding me with this blanket of silence.

If my claim on Thanksgiving of friendship between us has been misconstrued on my part then just tell me. If I made you uncomfortable or offended you I send my sincerest apologies.

You were the one that requested I write. I didn't understand then why you felt the need for me to keep in contact, I honestly thought you hated me, and yet you said you wanted to know who I am and who I'll become. I certainly don't understand why suddenly the things we were sharing has disappeared.

You told me not to disappear from your life but you haven't offered me the same courtesy. You told me you care and that you'd miss me. Were you feeding me a blatant lie or did I mistakenly told you too much?

Are you judging me like my parents are?

Why do people do that? They pull someone in and then toss them away when they don't fit into a neat little box of their design. Nate did it. My friends did it. My parents are still doing it. Do I have to add you to that list too?

I am so fucking angry Miranda...I am so lonely.

*Lying, thinking*
*Last night*
*How to find my soul a home*
*Where water is not thirsty*
*And bread loaf is not stone*
*I came up with one thing*
*And I don't believe I'm wrong*
*That nobody,*
*But nobody*
*Can make it out here alone.*

- Maya Angelou, Alone

Travelling solo has given me the time I needed to reflect on my life's changes and what I have learned from this is that I need to find the courage to follow my heart.

Yours as Always

Andréa

xxxxxxxxxxx
Thinking of Andréa being lonely was the one thing Miranda couldn't stand. She wanted to fly to whichever country Andréa was currently backpacking through, scoop her up and bring her home. She wanted Andréa to know how loved she was. Miranda wanted the chance to let herself worship the beautiful young woman who had made her heart ache like never before.

She realised she couldn't go on ignoring Andréa. Her work had been affected by the lack of contact. Her office was running with a distinct lack of efficiency. Her focus had been shot.

From Andréa's words, she knew she had a choice to make. Could she follow her heart and trust someone else enough to keep it safe? The answer was there blazing in front of her...always Andréa. That was her trigger to breach the distance she had caused.

Date: December 14, 2007
Sender: m.p
Recipient: andys82
Subject: RE: What the Hell?

Dearest Andréa

Please know there is no need to feel lonely in this world, you have people fighting in your corner.

I want you to know whenever you are ready to return from your travels, there is a home here in New York, if you want it, with me and the girls. There would be no ulterior motives other than knowing you are safe and are thriving in this harsh world, and to let you feel secure knowing you are not, nor will you ever be alone.

"Those who pass by us, do not go alone, and do not leave us alone; they leave a bit of themselves and take a little of us."
- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

I need you to know wherever you go I am there with you Andréa.

I don't know what to say to you about my lack of contact these past few weeks. My focus hasn't been what it usually is and I've struggled for inspiration and due to this we nearly missed the deadline for the first time since I took over as Editor-in-Chief. I fired another 2nd assistant last week and have yet to find a suitable replacement. I am thinking of taking a chance again on someone totally different to the usual poor excuses that enter my realm, the fashionista's who worship me as if I am some Deity with Runway as their bible of choice.

I took a chance on someone different once before, which worked beautifully, and I'm hopeful it could work again.

I often look out at the desks flanking my office and am saddened by not seeing your smile. I found that you are irreplaceable after all, despite what you told me. Could I find someone like you again? Doubtful. There will only ever be one Andréa Sachs.

I know that the excuses I am providing are poor but they are all I can offer, along with my apologies for the lack of courtesy towards you.

I told Nigel we remained in touch. As our friendship has blossomed once again over weekly
dinner and drinks I realised I have missed his companionship and his dry wit. I trust him implicitly.

He sees more than I could ever imagine and has teased me often and quite mercilessly about you, the assistant I just can't forget. He knows how unusual it is for me to let someone in the way I have with you. But he also sees just how special you are and understands my need to know you are okay, that you are alive in the world and making a difference.

When I first placed a blue, sticky, toxic concoction in front of him on that first night we attempted to reinstate our friendship his bright smile almost rivalled yours. He shared the story about how you earned his trust, his respect and his ultimately his friendship. We compare stories about you often.

Everyone you ever come into contact with at Runway has asked after you, no-one asks me anything directly as everyone seems to think I don't want to speak of the assistant who had the nerve to leave, but I've heard the hushed questions. You are a legend in the fashion world as the one that got away. I had to chuckle to myself when I heard someone refer to you as the dragon slayer.

How can you not see just what a profound effect you have on people? Your presence is sorely missed.

I honestly think the only person you did not manage to nurture an easy camaraderie with is Emily. She worries me greatly. She is loyal to a fault, and I have done nothing to deserve it. Is it hero worship or more? She gets so jealous when she feels her position is being threatened and she could easily see you were her biggest threat. She is so guarded that she is blind to what is right before her. I hold high hopes that Serena can push past Emily's defences and offer the nurturing love she needs to blossom.

Please realise that you would receive no judgement from me. If Caroline and Cassidy questioned their sexuality, I would like to think I am accepting enough and approachable enough, even as their mother, to have an open and honest discussion with them. I just hope they manage to find the love I have so far found elusive. I know that sexuality is not black and white, there's a whole rainbow between.

As a society, we are hard-wired to fit people into neat, perfect little boxes with a label to identify who you are. Life, however, is complex and inherently messy, we should focus more on acceptance of individual traits rather than dividing people into specific categories. This is true of fashion choices too, and in this respect I am guilty. I believe people should be allowed to express their individuality through fashion without the fear of being judged. That cerulean jumper of yours though...well, there's a whole rainbow between.

You possess a beautiful heart Andréea and it pains me to know you are hurting and that my actions have caused you further pain. As I told you in our conversation at the cafe, I am not good at connecting with people. As I've also mentioned I don't know how to be vulnerable with you, I lose my sense of self. And that frightens me more than I care to admit. I don't know how to be the Miranda you see and Miranda the Editor-in-Chief.

Please know I value you and the relationship we are building.
Miranda hoped she hadn't messed things up too drastically with Andréa. It had been 8 days since she had given in and emailed back with no response. She’d been living in the hope that Andréa would email, and each night with no response had diminished the spark of hope she held onto tightly. Now there was a letter she was nervous. She needed to know her actions had been forgiven by the person who held her heart in their hands.

The twins arrived 15 minutes before they were due for lunch and Miranda met them at the car. Roy opened the door promptly to allow Miranda to enter the back seat. "Hello, Bobbsey's."

"Hey, mom. Here's your letter from Andy." Cassidy passed her the letter which she put in her purse.

"Aren't you going to read it?" Caroline asked.

"Not right now Bobbsey, I'll read it later. This is my time with you."

"We wouldn't mind." Cassidy clarified.

Miranda wondered if the twins had heard from Andréa in the last week. As the car moved swiftly through traffic, the twins babbled incessantly about their morning at the Park.

"Have you…" she asked as the car pulled into a stop at Smith and Wollensky.

Roy opened the door, and the twins scampered out before Miranda had time to finish her question. She rolled her eyes and exited the car gracefully. She nodded to Roy in thanks and followed the twins into the restaurant where the maître d' was waiting patiently to walk them to their usual table.

"Miranda, how lovely to see you again. Your usual table is ready and your guest is already seated." The maître d' stated.

Miranda shot him a look of confusion as the twins giggled. Giving them all a baleful glare, she stalked towards the back of the restaurant.

She halted in her tracks when she came into sight of the table. As her eyes met pools of deep chocolate, she felt like time stood still. Her breath hitched, and she felt her heart start to pound. "Andréa…" she whispered as she experienced the blinding smile she had missed every day for the last 3 months. Miranda couldn't help but return the smile with once her own as she continued to walk to the table. "What are you doing here?" Miranda asked breathlessly.

Andy's smile widened. "Following my heart." she declared.
Chapter 4

Miranda found she couldn't stop staring at the beautiful brunette sat opposite her, the genuine smile gracing her face hadn't disappeared since she first spotted her Andréa across the room. She was however confused. Why was she here? What had made her come back to New York? Where was she staying? What were her plans? What did she mean by following her heart? She had so many questions needing answers and didn't know where to start.

"I can see the wheels turning, just breathe and relax and let's eat. I'm starving!" Andréa told her.

Rolling her eyes at the brunette she caught the attention of the waiter, signalling him over. "Well, I know what I'm having. How about you three?" Miranda queried.

"Wollensky's Burger for me," Cassidy said.

"Me too…" Caroline confirmed

Everyone looked at Andréa who bit her lip as she decided. "The Cajun Rib Steak for me, living off a mainly vegetarian diet for three months has me craving red meat."

Miranda nodded her approval. "Would you like wine?" she asked nervously.

"Wine sounds good. Whatever you recommend." Andréa responded casually as she looked down at the table in an attempt not to stare at the editor opposite her.

After finalising the food order and ordering two glasses of red wine, the waiter disappeared.

The twins looked at the two women and smiled at them. "Isn't this…" Cassidy began."…brilliant?" Caroline ended the question.

"Yes, yes this is quite acceptable," Miranda stated.

Andy looked up at Miranda and snorted, she giggled uncontrollably causing Miranda to quirk her eyebrow at her.

"And what's so funny Andréa?" Miranda asked, her lips twitching again with a smile.

"Nothing, I just…it must be the jet lag."

"When did you arrive?" Miranda asked softly.

"This morning, early," Andy confirmed

"Mm. I'm glad you are here." Miranda confirmed.

Andy noticed a blush forming on the editor's neck and leaned forward whispering, "I missed you." She winked at the silver-haired woman opposite causing the blush to spread to her cheeks.

"We'll talk later," Miranda stated.

Miranda's initial nervousness passed quickly as lunch arrived and they ate. Miranda sat with a second glass of wine, entranced as Andy regaled the twins with stories of her travels. The twins were more than amazed at Andy's experiences with the Elephants and had lots of questions for her. She answered each of them patiently and with a passion that Miranda had forgotten she possessed.
She was amazed at how easily Andréa interacted with her girls, and how fond the girls obviously were of her Andréa.

After lunch was finished, and they were exiting the restaurant Miranda was amazed to find hours had passed. It was now mid-afternoon, and she had no idea what would happen with the rest of her day.

Roy was waiting patiently for them but as she moved to the car, the twins grabbed a hand on each side of her.

"Can we go to get ice cream?" Cassidy asked with a smile.

"Don't you think it's a bit cold for that Bobbsey?" Miranda queried as she noticed snow had fallen. Cassidy looked crestfallen. Pulling her coat closer around her neck Miranda looked down at the twins and then to Andréa. Gently she continued her train of thought. "We could go home and drink hot chocolate, eat popcorn and watch movies. And then later we can order dinner. Does that sound suitable?"

"Sounds great mom," Caroline said shooting her twin a look.

Cassidy readily agreed to the plan. "That sounds so much better."

"Would you like to join us Andréa?" Miranda asked her softly.

Looking at Miranda and the twins Andy replied. "Only if you're sure."

Raising her eyebrow again she asked, "When have you known me to make offers I don't mean?"

"Never," Andy responded quickly. "Of course, I'd love to join you." She clarified.

She was stunned at the blinding smile she received from the editor.

"It will give us that chance to talk," Miranda told her.

"Yes, Miranda," Andy replied.

When they arrived at the Townhouse Andy exited the car quickly holding her hand out to assist Miranda. As Miranda stepped out of the car, she squeezed the hand in hers gently before letting go to open the door.

Upon entering the Townhouse Andy felt every memory of her previous visits while delivering the book hit her at once. She remembered clearly the night she walked up the stairs to interrupt Miranda and Stephen’s argument and blushed furiously. From that night she learned just how inherently private Miranda was about her home life. She found her hand grasped and squeezed again gently, it seemed as if Miranda understood what was going through her mind.

The twins shrugged out of their coats and stormed upstairs bickering among themselves about movie choices.

'Let me take your coat Andréa." Miranda requested. Letting go of the hand she shook her coat off and passed it over. Miranda placed it on a hanger in the closet and turned to her guest. "Would you like a drink? More wine perhaps?" Miranda asked.

"Water would be great or that hot chocolate you promised," Andy replied cheekily with a smile.
Miranda nodded once and cocked her head indicating for Andy to follow her down the hallway and into the kitchen.

The kitchen was large and warm. Andy sat down on a high stool at the breakfast bar as Miranda opened the fridge to grab some Pellegrino, juice for the twins and milk. She moved gracefully to the pantry to grab the popcorn she'd promised her girls and the marshmallows, sugar, cocoa, and salt needed for the hot chocolate. Once she had everything needed, she laid out on the kitchen counters she moved back towards the breakfast bar.

Sitting opposite the young woman Miranda spoke nervously; "May I ask you something...well a few things actually?"

"Anything," Andy responded. "You can ask me anything and I will answer as honestly as I can." she clarified.

Miranda looked at her, Andréa looked tired and drawn, and her clothes were oversized and comfortable. "When I asked why you are here you mentioned following your heart but I need you to tell me why you came home?"

"I was emailing the twins, as you are aware. Before you stopped emailing, I asked them what it was that you thought was impossible for them to have from their Christmas lists, I imagined I may be able to help. They didn't want to tell me but after your emails stopped, I kept pushing for an answer. Cass eventually told me they asked you to bring me home and since I don't seem to be able to deny the three Priestly women anything, here I am."

"And the following your heart comment?" Miranda queried.

"Well, my heart seems to belong with those two imps upstairs and…" Andy stopped speaking and closed her eyes. "...I told you in that last emails I needed to find the courage to follow my heart, I did that but somehow didn't realise I would need the even more courage to speak it. I assumed I'd have more time,"

"Please tell me." Miranda requested.

Closing her eyes Andy fought the tears forming. "My heart belongs here with you Miranda. You are the first thing that crosses my mind in the morning and my last thought at night. My world starts and ends with you and it has for such a long time...and I didn't realise until I walked away in Paris and then there was just this huge sense of loss from leaving you…but..."

Miranda closed her eyes at the words the young woman was saying. Her heart beating furiously in her chest. She held onto the breakfast bar to stop herself from fleeing, she needed to hear the words Andréa was speaking even if they ended up breaking her heart.

"...I don't really understand how you feel about me, I accept you care and that we started this friendship but I can't help but want...more, which is stupid. I assume you're straight...I mean you've been married twice...but that was the same for me...until you! I have never questioned who I am at such length, but I cannot hide anymore, I can't continue to run away...I'm sorry…"

Miranda marvelled at Andréa's bravery.

"And I recognise that however unlikely, even if you considered this, you're in the middle of a divorce from...and there are your girls to consider. Then there's the age difference, which I don't care about, and there's the fact that because of what you do people recognise who you are the press would have a field-day. I realise right now you're probably questioning my sanity and I don't blame
you...I should just leave..." As Andy finished speaking and turned to walk away the tears flowed.

"No...You said...Don't leave." Miranda trailed off. "Are you aware I panicked when you walked away from me in Paris, Andréa?" Miranda queried softly.

Miranda's words stopped her in her tracks. Andy turned back around to face her and noticed the tears in the editor's eyes. "Nigel might have mentioned it that night in Paris when I asked him to give you that first letter, but you appreciate how prone to exaggeration he is...I had hoped, but...well, with everything that went on I didn't dare believe you would actually consider anything akin to what I was." Andy told her.

"Yes well...that man sees far too much into things, he has an uncanny ability to see beyond what others would." Miranda sighed. As they gazed into each other's eyes Miranda fidgeted, something she didn't normally do.

Andy wiped the tears from her eyes. "Do you want me to do the hot chocolate before the twin terrors arrive down demanding sustenance?" She asked.

"I'll do it," Miranda stated. "I'm just...overwhelmed. I can't believe you are here and I have so many questions and don't know where to start or how to..."

"We have all the time in the world Miranda, but there are things to arrange. Somewhere to live is foremost. I booked a hotel this morning so I could attempt to sleep but that didn't work too well. I ended up walking through Central Park, which is where the twins saw me and demanded I come to lunch." Andy smiled at the remembrance.

"So if the lunch offer wasn't forthcoming or if my terrors hadn't seen you when would you have advised me you were here?" Miranda demanded.

"Probably Christmas Day...I was meant to be a surprise for those little imps after all." Andy replied.

"Mm well, that would be three days wasted. Will you stay? I don't think I could cope with having you leave again so soon, even knowing you are once again in the same city." Another tear slid down Miranda's face. Looking down to hide her vulnerability she missed the movement and before she realised Andy had cupped her face in her hands and was wiping away the tears with the pads of her thumbs. Then she was being pulled close to the brunette in a tight hug. Wrapping her arms around the brunette's waist she realised they fit together perfectly

Relaxing into the embrace she welcomed the shiver down her spine at Andréa's whispered words. "Miranda I have told you I will never leave you. If you want me here, then I will happily stay for as long as you want me."

Miranda sighed and Andy heard the faint whisper in return. "Forever."

They held onto each other until they heard a small cough coming from the doorway. Releasing themselves from the embrace Miranda smirked at the child stood in the doorway and raised her eyebrow in a silent question at Cassidy.

"Hey mom, hey Andy, the movies ready to go. Are you going to be much longer or are you going to hug it out all night?"

Andy flushed bright red and attempted to suppress her laughter as Miranda shooed her daughter out of the kitchen with a glare. She moved away from Andréa to put the popcorn in the microwave and placed the milk into a saucepan to heat. While waiting for the milk to warm Andy watched as
Miranda pulled out a large bowl and whisked together the combination of sugar, cocoa, and salt. She mixed 10 tablespoons of her chocolate mix into the warm milk allowing it to dissolve before pouring the hot chocolate into mugs and adding the marshmallows. She offered the bowl of popcorn to Andy and placed the mugs, juice and water on a tray and looked towards Andy.

"Are you ready?" Miranda chuckled.

"You have no idea," Andy said as she followed Miranda upstairs into the living room.

The girls had made themselves comfortable on beanbags in front of the T.V as they hit play on the DVD Player the Simpson Movie played. As the movie rolled, they laughed at Homer's antics attempting to save Springfield from disaster.

Once the movie ended they discussed dinner options. It was decided that Miranda would order a pizza and upon delivery, they made their way back to the kitchen to eat. The atmosphere was relaxed, and the twins chatted happily.

After dinner, they returned to the living room and to what had become their spots. Cassidy placed Hairspray in the DVD Player and hit play. The girls fell asleep as the movie rolled on in the background.

Miranda looked at her girls and smiled before glancing at Andy who she noticed was deep in thought. "What are you thinking about?" She asked the brunette.

"Nothing much, I'm just tired. It's like this is the first time I've stopped and let myself relax and be calm in such a long time."

"I'm glad you are relaxed here Andréa. But I think there's a lot more going on in that head of yours that you may or may not want to discuss." Miranda said.

"So maybe we should continue that talk," Andy stated.

Miranda sighed. "Not yet, let's get the twins to bed first and then we can talk."

They woke the girls who sleepily made their way to their bedrooms and got into their pyjamas.

Upon entering Caroline's room Miranda found her asleep on the bed, lifting her up she positioned her against the pillows and tucked her in with a kiss on the forehead before leaving the room. Cassidy was awake and talking quietly to Andy when Miranda entered the room. Both of them looked towards the door and smiled happily as she walked towards them.

"Time for sleep now Bobbsey," Miranda told her.

"Okay," Cassidy replied. "Will Andy be here tomorrow?"

"If she wants to be, yes." Miranda looked towards Andy for confirmation.

"I'll be here, but I must leave to grab clothes at some stage," Andy told the young girl.

"Yay! Hopefully, mom will make pancakes for breakfast. She's the best at them."

"We'll see Bobbsey." Miranda tucked the girl in and kissed her forehead before whispering, "Goodnight my darling."
"Night Cass, Sleep tight and don't let the bedbugs bite." Andy grinned at the young girl.

Miranda held her hand out for Andy and pulled her from the room. They made their way back to the living room and Miranda picked up the glasses and mugs. "Let me help." Andy requested.

Miranda smiled as she replied. "There's no need, I just need to put these in the dishwasher. Cara's off for the next few days and I wouldn't want to have her comeback to an excessive mess. Would you like another drink?"

"Only if you're having one," Andy replied.

"Well it's too late for coffee, does a glass of wine sound acceptable?"

"Sounds heavenly," Andy responded with a smile.

As they made the way into the kitchen again Miranda pointed to the wine rack as she stacked the dishwasher. Grabbing two crystal glasses and an open bottle of Sauvignon Blanc Andy poured two glasses and placed one of them beside the editor.

Andy sat down at the breakfast bar again and watched Miranda intently. Taking a large drink of her wine she found the courage to speak to the editor's back. "Did you receive my last letter?" Andy asked.

"I received it today, and the girls brought it to me when they met me for lunch...It's in my purse. I was going to read it this afternoon however you were there at the restaurant and…" Miranda tried to explain.

"I think you should read it before we continue this discussion, Miranda. There are things I've said in there that you need to understand." Andy told her

"Like what?" Miranda queried.

"Please just read it. Then we will talk, all night if that's what you need." Andy gave her a sad smile.

"If you insist. I'll be in the study" Miranda picked up her wine and stalked from the room. She grabbed the letter from her purse and walked to her study. She sat at her desk heavily staring at the letter in her hands as if it was a venomous snake about to strike. Biting her lip she slipped her letter opener through the top of the envelope, took the letter out and read.

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December 15, 2007

Dear Miranda

As I've sat alone, pondering on where I've gone wrong, the world has turned dark and I'm no longer able to see it in all its glory. I made plans to move on to Australia, even as far as applying for the visa I needed, but then your email arrived last night and now I don't know.

My judgement isn't what it should be and I'm struggling to decide what to do.

I miss New York, it is my home, and part of me wants to return but I don't know what I have to return to. I don't know if the three features I have written for Rolling Stone will give me enough experience to continue freelancing. You've offered your home to me but for how
You offered me excuses for the silence but no real explanations. I thought by writing to each other and forming a non-professional relationship we could get past that. As your assistant and inferior I was never in a position to demand them, but you said I am your equal but if you actually believed that I think you would realise that I deserve better than the poor justifications you have offered.

Tell me why? Do I mean so little to you that you can just ignore me on a whim?

Your distance has made me look at things in a different light and I have been left wondering what kind of relationship you really want from me. Are we to become friends? I can deal with just friendship but I know there will be times I won't be able to be near you because I'll want more. I wouldn't be able to stand by and watch you love someone else.

In that three weeks between your emails, I tried not to lose the hope I held that I still had one person in the world, and in my life that still cares about me. I have been trying to believe the lack of contact is not due to having something inherently wrong with me that disgusts everyone that comes into my life. But it's hard not to think that way sometimes. It's difficult not to sit back and wonder if the reason everyone leaves is due to me lacking something necessary.

You say I am special, that I am irreplaceable, that I am unique (there's only one of me after all) but your actions of the last three weeks tell me otherwise, they tell me that whatever relationship we are building potentially means more to me than it obviously does to you.

You say you have found love is elusive. Just like Emily you are also blind to so much.

If you only opened your eyes, Miranda you would see you are in fact loved, and not for your position or your wealth but for the woman you are, the passion you have, the strength of your character, your protective nature and the vulnerability you try so hard to hide.

I know you are frightened of more than you show the world Miranda, but please understand you have nothing to fear from me. I would never intentionally hurt you.

I know I am not perfect. I let your dismissal of me in that Parisian hotel room throw me into someone else's arms, but in that final moment with him I thought of you, wishing it was you there inside me. I called out for you! I have never experienced so much self-loathing than in that moment.

I love you, Miranda. I love you in the knowledge I have nothing to offer you except my heart. You are the one with the ability to make my heart smile and my soul sing but I also appreciate you could just as easily crush both.

I apologise for dumping all this on you. Since Paris, it's like I spend half of the time with the entire world sat on my chest. I struggle to breathe, to focus and to know anything but despair...and then I think of you and my heart soars and I feel so much.

I know I need more time to work out the things going on in my head because I'm so confused. My heart and my head are at war and I don't know which one will be victorious.
Miranda felt the tears streaming down her face, once again she was overwhelmed with the feelings the young brunette caused in her, she had never been this emotional before and she was fearful.

Deep down she realised she had an immense distance to cross to show Andréa just how much she loved her. She was hurt that the young woman hadn't yet realised the depth of her feelings towards her but was aware of her faults, she hadn't actually explained what was in her heart. Her shoulders sagged as she gave into her emotions. She recognised she would need all her strength to speak for her heart.

Andy watched Miranda from the doorway as she became overcome with emotion. She walked across the room silently and knelt before the editor, placing her hands on her thighs to get her attention. "Miranda?" She whispered. "Talk to me sweetheart, tell me what's on your mind?"

Miranda looked up into the eyes that haunted her dreams and cupped Andy's cheek in her palm. "I don't have the words..." Miranda stuttered. "...you'll want to leave again..." She shuddered at that thought.

"No Miranda!" Andy declared hotly. "I will not leave you. I came back for you. Can't you see? My heart won! I can't explain the connection between us. I gravitate towards you, Miranda. How can you not see that? I felt the distance over the last few months but it was always as though there was a force pulling me toward you and the closer we are, the more powerfully I feel it."

Miranda looked up at her, resolved to share everything with Andréa. The love, care, tenderness, warmth, passion, desire and devotion. "I feel it too Andréa, the longing, desire, the determination to have you. It has pulled my soul in a direction I couldn't help but move toward. You are the Moon to my Sun Andréa. Just like the Sun I have a tendency to burn. I'm aware my view might seem surprising, considering that the Moon revolves around the Earth but do you know the Moon always has a positive acceleration toward the Sun? The Earth's moon is the only moon in the solar system that is always falling toward the Sun."

Andy was surprised at Miranda's words. Placing her hand under Miranda's chin, tilting her face upwards she searched the blue eyes. She saw the love and tenderness shining through the tears. "I didn't realise..."

'You make me feel so much...the last month has been a nightmare. I distanced myself because I was scared. I was trying to protect my heart." Miranda explained

"I will keep your heart safe, Miranda," Andy told her. "But right now I want to kiss you,"

Miranda answered with a smile. "Kiss me then, you know how much I love to be kept waiting."

The genuine smile made Andy's heart flutter, and she couldn't help but return it with a wide one of her own. Andy leaned towards the older woman and pulling her closer brushed her lips against Miranda's gently.

"Andréa..." Miranda whispered breathlessly. Andréa's lips were warm and soft beneath her own. She deepened the kiss, hands tangling into the chestnut hair as her waist was circled by Andréa's arms. A jolt of pleasure ran through her as she was pulled closer to Andréa who was returning her kiss with just as much passion.
Both hearts were pounding rapidly. Miranda ran her tongue over Andréa's bottom lip softly and slowly, and as her lips parted their tongues entwined.

The need to breathe had Andréa pulling away from Miranda panting hard. She couldn't catch her breath. She stared at Miranda for a moment.

"I... we...Miranda...What are you doing to me?" she asked quietly. 'My God...that was..." Andy struggled for words as Miranda smirked at her.

"Andréa..." The sound of her name sent a quiver of need throughout her body and she heard herself whimper slightly, "...That was divine." As Miranda laughed, she found her lips captured again. Moaning into her mouth as their tongues grappled for dominance. Miranda's legs parted instinctively allowing Andréa to come closer and her legs wrapped themselves around the kneeling brunette.

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Chapter 5

Like Icarus, Andy felt like she had flown too close to the sun and was about to crash and burn. Having Miranda wrapped around her was a test of her limits. "We need to stop…" Andy panted as they broke for air. Miranda continued to trail a blaze of kisses down Andy's jaw and neck. "...Miranda please…" Andy begged as she pulled away holding Miranda's face between her palms.

"Why?" Miranda looked at the brunette before trailing her hands back along Andy's waist

"Miranda I love you, you know that. This is just...fuck!" She hissed as Miranda trailed her nails across Andy's abdomen. "...It's too quick, it's overwhelming." Andy told her.

Miranda pulled herself away, ice filling her eyes. "My apologies. I thought this was mutual." She waved her hands between herself and Andy.

Andy sat back on her heels and stared. "It is...Jesus Miranda! How could you think anything else...I just...I want..." Andy stuttered in an attempt to placate the woman in front of her. Closing her eyes, she whispered, "I just want this to be perfect. I don't want to rush this and have you regret it. I don't want our first time to be up against your desk. I want to lay you down and make love to you. I need the time to know this is real and not just another of my dreams."

Miranda stood and walked to the window, embarrassed with herself. Getting up slowly Andy moved to press herself tightly against Miranda's back, kissing the skin beneath her ear. Miranda sighed and turning ran her fingers through the brunette's hair, "I want you, Andréa." she whispered, "I can't remember ever wanting anything more. I want to be able to show you just how much I love you..."

"Trust me, Miranda, I want that to happen too. But tonight I would like to take you to bed, hold you in my arms and sleep." Andy explained gently.

"Come then Andréa." Miranda grabbed Andy's hand and they walk side by side out of the room.

Bigger than the apartment she had shared with Nate Andy was awe-stricken at the gold and cerulean accents among the predominantly white setting of the master suite. It somehow highlighted Miranda's taste and personality beautifully. "Wow," Andy muttered as she took in the room.

"En-suite is through that door. Help yourself to anything in there. There's a spare toothbrush in the 2nd draw on the right." Miranda told her.

"Um, thanks..." Andy stuttered as she walked through to the bathroom. Looking around Andy saw the bathroom was a place in which to linger and luxuriate. The bathroom had underfloor heating, a free-standing claw-foot tub and a smoky glass shower enclosure towards the back. As she stepped out of her jeans and shirt the realisation hit her that she had nothing to wear to bed. Her attention was caught by knocking on the bathroom door. Rolling her eyes she crossed her arms over her chest and called out; "Come In."

Miranda entered the room holding out sleep shorts and a vest. "I brought you something to wear, will these do?"

Smiling shyly at the woman stood in the doorway Andy said; "They're perfect, thank you."
Miranda's breathing hitched as she noticed the expanse of flesh as Andy uncrossed her arms and walked over to take the offered clothes. "Beautiful," Miranda whispered unable to take her eyes off the lace-clad breasts on show.

Grinning even wider, as Andy reached the other woman, touching her chin, tilting it upwards she muttered, "I'm up here, sweetheart." As they locked eyes Andy noticed a playful expression in Miranda's eyes.

"Yes well...mm" Miranda spoke but was cut off by Andy's lips in a delicate kiss.

"I'll be right out." Andy smiled as she took the clothes.

"I'll be waiting," Miranda confirmed as she left the room.

Andy smiled widely before turning to the vanity and finding what she needed to remove the small amount of makeup she was wearing. Making quick work on her face and after brushing her teeth she decided a quick shower was required. Walking to the back of the en-suite she was flabbergasted at the size of the shower with its eight adjustable massage jets. Shaking her head, she showered quickly.

After drying off and getting dressed she wrapped her hair in a towel and walked back into the bedroom. She found Miranda sat on the edge of the bed in a mid-thigh silk nightgown, her face free of makeup and Andy noticed immediately that she looked softer and had an unguarded expression in her eyes. Walking up to the older woman Andy brushed her thumb across her cheek. "You look exquisite Miranda," Andy told her breathlessly.

Looking up Miranda noticed the towel wrapped around Andy's hair. Grasping her hand she pulled Andy towards the bed forcing her to sit. As she sat down Miranda knelt behind her, unwrapping Andy's hair she dried it gently with the towel. "I didn't realise you had such a profusion of curls," Miranda told her. "Your hair is glorious."

Andy showed her surprise. 'Well I usually straighten it, it makes it more manageable." They sat in silence as Miranda worked. Andy welcomed the soft touch as Miranda's nails lightly scraped her scalp.

Feeling lips on her neck, sending shivers of delight down her spine she heard Miranda whisper, "All done." As Miranda scooted back on the bed patting the side next to her, Andy lay beside her.

Turning she looked at the older woman, scarcely believing she was in her bed. Extending her arm she pulled Miranda closer towards her and held her in a loose embrace. Miranda nuzzled her neck as Andy placed a soft kiss on her forehead. "Sleep now my love," Miranda whispered.

Feeling safe and secure in each other's arms they fell asleep quickly.

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Miranda woke with a start, unaccustomed to the heat of a warm body pressed against her. Shifting slightly she noticed the abundance of brunette curls and smiled to herself. She had never felt so safe or slept so well with another person.

Snuggling in more to the woman beside her, arms wrapped themselves around her tightly. She heard the whispered words of her bedmate. "Mm morning beautiful. What time is it?"

"Good Morning Andréa, it's still early you should try to sleep some more," Miranda told her warmly.
Opening one eye Andy looked at the older woman in wonderment. "I never thought I'd wake up like this, with you." She whispered reverently.

"I never hoped..." Miranda whispered back. "...Loving you is so different from anything I've ever experienced."

Andy softly brushed her lips against Miranda's and was pulled closer as their kiss deepened. Their passion ignited, the space between their bodies disappeared. Shifting slightly Miranda found her leg coming to rest between Andy's pulling a gasp from the younger woman.

"Don't stop." Andy moaned lightly as she found herself rolled onto her back with Miranda's weight against her. She arched into Miranda's touch as hands roamed freely over her body, each touch leaving a blazing trail of fire in their wake.

With a swift movement, Andy found her hips straddled and Miranda tugging at her vest to remove the barrier of clothing between them. As the vest was flung onto the floor Miranda looked down amazed at the body she had exposed. "You're perfect, Andréa" Miranda whispered breathlessly.

Blushing profusely Andy tugged to the hem of Miranda nightgown. "I want this off...now!" Andy demanded as she pushed the nightgown up around Miranda's hips. Feeling Andy's hands roaming to her thighs Miranda gasped as they moved to cup her ass pulling her even closer.

In once sensual movement Miranda grasped the hem of her nightgown and pulled it over her head, dropping it to the floor, leaving her naked on top of Andy. Astonished, Andy looked up to see Miranda looking down at her with a smile. "You are magnificent." She told the editor before her lips were captured again in a searing kiss that seemed to stop all time.

Breathlessly Miranda left Andy's lips to trail kisses down her neck and her collarbone, nipping the flesh gently with her teeth. The moans coming from Miranda indicating the older woman enjoyment, sending waves of pleasure right to Andy's core.

As Miranda reached Andy's breasts she gave them her focused attention, laving one nipple with her tongue she brought her hand to the other gently pinching it between her thumb and finger. With Andy arched into her once again at the pressure and sensitivity, Miranda bit the nipple between her teeth and twisting the other nipple, increasing the pressure slightly with each bite and twist.

Miranda unexpectedly released her attention from Andrea's breasts, moving down Andy's body she pulled off her sleep shorts causing Andy to gasp her surprise. "Tell me you still want this." Miranda insisted as she kissed the inside of Andy's thigh.

"Oh god...please!" Andy whimpered at the closeness of Miranda to her aching centre.

"Tell me," Miranda demanded again.

"I want this. Please, Mir..." Words failed Andy as Miranda settled between her legs. With a sweeping motion, Miranda licked her gently and gasped at the flavour of the young woman. She was Heavenly. She continued to lick and suck the dripping folds, delighting in the flavour and the mewls of pleasure from the woman below her.

Andy was writhing, babbling incoherently at Miranda's ministrations. Within minutes she was clutching at Miranda's silver hair as her hips bucked against her mouth. She cried out her orgasm sobbing Miranda's name at her release. Hearing the siren call as Andy came sent Miranda spiralling into her own orgasmic bliss.

"I love you," Miranda told her as they came down from their combined high.
Climbing back up Andy's body Miranda kissed her, allowing Andy to taste herself on Miranda's tongue. Finally, at peace they snuggled in each other's arms, their bodies still thrumming delightfully as they sank back into a peaceful sleep.

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When Miranda woke again, she was alone in her bed. Looking around she could see light streaming through the window, looking towards the en-suite she noticed the door was open. Checking the time she realised it was after 8 am. She never slept this late.

"Andréa?" She questioned panicking. "...Andy?" She took another quick look around, seeing Andy's clothes from the night before she realised the brunette couldn't have gone far. She spotted a note on her bedside table under her glasses. Picking up both she sat back and read.

M

I just wanted you to know how much I love you.

I half expected that I would return home, give you my heart and have it returned to me in pieces. Instead, you gave me yours in return. I can promise you that I will cherish it eternally.

Falling asleep in your arms last night was like having a little piece of Heaven right here on Earth, I woke up today holding you close and I was safe and content.

I hope we share many more moments like this morning, it was the most breathtaking experience of my life so far. Regardless of what life may throw at us, I think we can continue to find happiness together.

I see my future in your eyes.

Your Andréa

PS: There's coffee on - Come get it while it's hot!

At the postscript Miranda laughed uproariously, the laughter travelled down the stairs to where the twins and Andy were sat in the kitchen discussing breakfast options.

As the three young women looked at each other and then towards the ceiling at the unexpected noise coming from above them, each knew that this was a defining moment of their lives.

Hope sees the invisible, feels the intangible achieves the impossible.

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Miranda walked down the stairs of the Townhouse fully dressed and made up for the day. Hearing laughter coming from the Den she followed the noise. She found Andréa, Cassidy Caroline rolling around on the floor, both her girls jumping all over Andréa in an all-out tickle war in front of the TV. All three of them were still in their pyjamas. The sight of this horseplay made her heart ache.

Leaning against the door frame she smiled at the sight. Attempting to school her features she mock-scolded. "This is not a zoo, you are not monkeys. Keep your natter to a minimum."

Looking up at the woman in the doorway Andy saw the twinkle in her eyes and grinned at her before being overcome again as the twins continued their advanced warfare on the brunette.
"Stop...stop...Enough! I give in!" Andy chortled as Cassidy managed an extra poke in her ribs. Caroline rose off the floor walking over to her mom. Putting her arms around her and hugging her tight. "Hey, mom. Did you sleep well?" She asked.

"I slept exceptionally well Bobbsey," Miranda told the young girl as she ruffled the red hair.

"Can we go to Rockefeller today? We have some last minute shopping to do." Cassidy asked looking up from her position sprawled across Andy's legs.

"Two days before Christmas?" Miranda queried.

"Well, we have an unexpected guest," Cassidy said poking Andy's ribs eliciting another loud burst of laughter. Miranda rolled her eyes at the antics of her youngest daughter and lover.

Looking up at the older woman at the door Andy smiled shyly. "I can take them if you don't want to brave the crowds. I need to stop and get clothes at some point and my hotels on the way." Andy told Miranda.

"I could do with braving the crowds too. Looks like it's a girl's day out." Miranda couldn't help smiling. "First thing's first though, breakfast and coffee." Both girls squealed and Cassidy jumped off Andy and ran to hug her mom.

Looking up at Miranda Cassidy smiled and flicked her head towards Andy and stage whispered. "I think we should keep this one."

At Andy's laugh, Miranda bent down to cup her daughter's face whispered back. "Me too Bobbsey." Loosening her daughter's grip on her waist she sauntered over to Andy, looking down at her she smirked and held her hand out to help her off the floor. "Someone promised me hot coffee." She quipped as Andy grasped her hand and she pulled the laughing brunette to her feet.

As they entered the kitchen Andy said. "Sit down Miranda, the girls and I have breakfast prepared."

Miranda looked up at the young woman who had her daughters hanging off either side, "You're spoiling me." She told them as she sat at the breakfast bar.

"Right kiddos. Caro, will you please grab plates and cutlery? Cass, will you please pour the juice and the grab the fruit from the fridge? I will start the waffles and get coffee." She smiled at the two redheads.

"Right chief." Cassidy grinned.

"Yes boss," Caroline smirked.

Miranda laughed with joy. "It looks like you may have charmed all three Priestly women." She told Andy.

Andy turned to smile at her. "That goes both ways." She told her. "The three Priestly women have bewitched me."

Miranda's took a deep breath at the words and shook her head against the tears forming. She was experiencing so much happiness at the moment that she couldn't quite believe her luck.

Turning back to the waffle batter Andy placed it into the hot waffle iron. Pouring two cups of
coffee she walked over to Miranda and set one down in front of her as she placed to kiss her cheek. The girls finished their small chores and sat grinning at each other.

Miranda was delighted as she took the first sip of her coffee. "How is it you're the only one who can get my coffee right?" She asked Andy. She watched as the young woman shrugged as dished up the waffles.

"That's classified information." She said grinning as she placed the waffles on the breakfast bar. "Tuck in."

As the four of them ate, the twins held the conversation together between demolishing the waffles. The two older women locked eyes across the breakfast bar and they lost themselves in that gaze.

"Mom!" Cassidy shouted grabbing Miranda's attention.

"Yes, Bobbsey?" Miranda queried becoming flustered when she realised she hadn't heard Cassidy the first time.

"I asked if we could be excused." Cassidy huffed.

"Oh yes, of course. I'll call Roy and ask him to pick us up in an hour." She told them.

As they left the room, she heard Caroline snigger as Cassidy said. "Wow. They can't take their eyes off each other. It's kind of cute."

Looking towards Andy Miranda rolled her eyes. "I've left some clothes on the bed. I do believe we may be the same size these days. I noticed you've lost more weight."

Andy blushed. "I think it was the mainly vegetarian diet, all the travelling, and I lost my appetite for a while there too."

Miranda pursed her lips at that final admission. "Are you still hungry darling?" she asked.

Leaning towards the editor Andy whispered, "Only for you." She felt lightheaded as she saw the woman blush.

"Andréa...I...I want you to stay with us. Check out of that hotel and bring your things here. You can have one of the guest rooms if you want it or if you need space, you can stay with me. Anything." Miranda looked down biting her lip.

"Miranda, look at me," Andy asked gently. "Please sweetheart." As Miranda looked up to meet those expressive brown eyes, she saw Andy's smile. "I would love to stay with you and the girls. As I told you last night, I will stay as long as you want me here. Okay? Now I should go get dressed before those twin tornadoes hit."

"I'll call Roy." Miranda sighed as Andy trailed past her brushing a kiss against her cheek.

Andrea

Andy found clothes placed neatly at the bottom of the bed. Miranda had laid out a few choices which included a pair of True Religion jeans and a black Ralph Lauren polo that she thought would be ideal for today's activities. They would also go with the converse sneakers she had been wearing the day previously.

Thinking of the day before she shook her head at the fact Miranda hadn't commented on her outfit.
Baggy Levis, Converse and a white Northwestern t-shirt were accompanied by a Saint Laurent leather jacket which she kept from her days as Miranda's assistant at Runway. When the lunch invitation was given, the twins had told her not to worry about her clothes but she had half expected a look of disapproval from the fashion maven. Instead, the editor seemed to have barely noticed what the young woman was wearing.

Going to the bathroom she scowled at her reflection, her mass of curls was seriously dishevelled and looked unmanageable. As she brushed her teeth, she noticed the products laid out that would allow her to define her curls and remove the frizz. She smiled and got to work on her hair, deciding to leave it, as much as possible, in its natural curly state. Deciding only a touch of lip gloss was required she turned back to the bedroom to get dressed.

As she looked around the room, she saw a piece of paper folded in half with her name on it.

Darling

When I woke up this morning and found you missing from the bed, we shared I thought it was just a dream. I found myself in a moment of panic, even calling out for you using that ridiculous nickname you insist on.

You said I am the one with the ability to make your heart smile and soul sing, and I want you to know that every moment with you over the last 24 hours has been the happiest I have spent in a long time. I look at you and am unable to do anything but smile. I don't actually think I have ever smiled so much.

Having you and my girls in the one place leaves me feeling at peace with the world.

Part of me is scared that this will end, I feel I am constantly overwhelmed. I don't want this to end.

I want forever with you if you'll let me.

I love you.

M

Andy found herself overcome at Miranda's words. She was amazed at the way the older woman was comfortable enough with her to let her guard down and her emotions to show, especially her vulnerabilities. She knew she wanted forever with the woman too and would do anything to ensure the relationship would only grow stronger.

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In a matter of 15 minutes, she was bounding back down the stairs where she found Miranda waiting for her in the den with a fresh coffee. Sitting by the woman's side she looked towards her.

"I got your note," Andy told her as she took her hand and entwined their fingers. "You know you can call me Andy anytime, I do however love the way you call me Andréa, no-one says my name the way you do." She beamed a huge grin at the woman next to her.

Rolling her eyes Miranda squeezed the hand in hers and looked at the young woman sadly. "We need to talk some more Andréa. I need to know that you're aware that once this relationship goes public, your life will never be the same. You will be a person of interest to the press and to the
fashion world as my chosen partner, more than likely known as the 'dragon tamer'. You've already
described to me how your parents and friends have reacted to working for Runway, what will
happen when they find out about us?"

Andy's face fell at Miranda's words. "I thought you wanted this." She said.

"I do." Miranda was adamant. "I want this more than I've ever wanted anything. But I don't want
this relationship to hurt you, for it to become too much for you to handle, for it to adversely affect
your life. Although I try to keep my home life private, I am a public figure. I don't care what they
say about me but I do care about what they may throw at you and my girls."

"Miranda, I just want you and those two mischievous little imps. If you decided, even after last
night and early this morning, that this wouldn't work I would fight to keep you all in my life.
Regardless of what I said in my letter I would try to stand by you all even if that meant watching
you happy with someone else. I would try, I may fail spectacularly, but I could not voluntarily
leave you again." Andy cried. "I'm willing to face anything head on knowing I'll have you by my
side. I don't care what anyone says, even the press and especially my family and friends. The press
doesn't know me and the others haven't been so supportive of my decisions, it will be their loss, not
mine. This is my life and I want to spend it with you." Andy sobbed as she covered her face.

Miranda scooted closer to the young women beside her, putting her arms around Andy she pulled
her close and ran her fingers through the chestnut curls. "Darling please...hush now. I just had to
make sure, I'm sorry. Don't cry, my love." Miranda whispered

"I'm sorry..." Andy hiccupped through her tears.

Miranda held her tighter. "There's no need for apologies my darling. Never apologise for your
bravery."

Wiping her tears Andy scoffed. "I feel far from brave."

"You have so much courage Andréa and it amazes me. You gave me your heart knowing I might
break it. You show kindness and generosity in a world that focuses mainly on the material. You are
one of a kind and it makes me grateful for that day you stomped into my office in that hideous skirt
those Doc Martins." Miranda smiled at the young woman in her arms.

"Ha! I'll remember that comment next time Donatella or James Holt attempt to make you wear one
of the hideous feather monstrosities they're so keen on." Andy sniggered back at her.


Andy sniggered and said, "Roy should be here soon, I should go clean up" Extracting herself from
Miranda's arms, she placed a chaste kiss on her lips before walking out of the room.

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Chapter 6

"Oh My God that has to be the largest Christmas tree I've seen in my life," Andy whispered to Cassidy and Caroline as they hit Fifth Avenue and she spotted the annual Rockefeller tree.

'Instead of powering thousands of standard bulbs, 30,000 multi-coloured LED's were used to light it up this year." Caroline told her.

"It's more environmentally friendly," Cassidy said.

Miranda smiled at the three of them as they discussed the decorations and as Andy explained that although the use of LED's was much more energy efficient, it wasn't an affordable option for everyone.

Cassidy and Caroline hit the shops like a whirlwind dragging the women from store to store on a whim.

"My girls like you," Miranda told her as they followed the twins from shop to shop with their arms linked.

"I like them too, they're gorgeous. Cassidy told me I had to stay and Caroline has demanded I take her with me should I travel again." Andy shook her head and smiled at the older woman as she smirked.

"I think you may struggle to get away from us," Miranda said as they entered Anthropologie.

"Who says I want to get away? I like this...Us." Andy whispered to Miranda as she took in her surroundings.

"Mm, that's good," Miranda whispered back as she let Andy go to wander through the store.

Andy lost herself in Anthropologie's two-story branch, initially with the books and stationery. The art gallery blew her mind. This provided Cassidy, Caroline and Miranda time to find the items they wanted from some neighbouring shops.

When they met back up Andy had purchased a new journal. She knew it would be needed to write the new memories she was creating. She did not want to forget a single moment.

They dashed over to Macy's where Andy bought herself an over-large NY Yankees t-shirt too much eye-rolling from the three Priestly's. She grinned at the three of them and shrugged.

As they made their way out of Macy's, Andy's attention taken up by Miranda asking what they wanted for lunch, she walked into someone, finding her shoulders grabbed to stop her from falling.

"I'm so sorry. Excuse me." She said flustered. As she looked up, she saw the wide expression of disbelief on Nigel's face.

"Six?" he questioned.

"Nige!" She squealed happily hugging him hard and placing a kiss on both his cheeks.

Pulling away from her he held her at arm's length, still holding her shoulders. "God, I've missed you. You are radiant and so thin. That tan does wonders for you and your hair is amazing. When did you get back?" He asked.
Laughing Andy told him quickly of her return the previous day. As she looked away from him to the three Priestly's behind her he followed her glance and finally noticed Miranda and the twins looking on amused.

Releasing Andy he walked over to Miranda grinning. Brushing a kiss on her cheek. He said. "Hello Miranda, it's wonderful to see you." Leaning over to ruffle the twin's hair he asked. "And you two, are you being good to your mom and keeping out of mischief?"

"Yes, Uncle Nigel." They said in unison.

He looked at the twins and raised his eyebrow in disbelief.

"We had a good morning. We helped Andy make mom breakfast and kicked her butt in a tickle war." Cassidy explained.

"And now we've just finished our Christmas shopping," Caroline told him.

Laughing he looked towards Andy in amazement. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

Catching Miranda's eye he said. "I know you said you didn't want to come to the Runway Christmas party tonight but I hope you'll be there." He leaned in to whisper dramatically. "It's a plus one event as I recall."

Smirking Miranda shook her head slightly. "We'll see." She breathed, noticing Andy looking at her with a twinkle in her eyes. Grinning, she told him. "I may show my face for a short time. I will have to determine if I can find myself a plus one. I do hate going to these things alone."

This caused Nigel to chortle. "I'm sure you'll find someone." He winked at Andy. "Anyway, I should be off. I have to find a Secret Santa gift at Irv's insistence." He rolled his eyes. "Irritating little man." This caused laughter all around. Turning back to Andy, Nigel grabbed her into a bear hug and said. "If I don't see you before the festivities call me, okay? We need to do drinks."

Smiling Andy answered. "Sure thing Nige." She watched him leave, weaving his through the foot traffic on Fifth Ave. She looked back towards Miranda. "So lunch?" She asked smiling.

After much deliberation and even more pouting from the twins and Andy they made their way to the Tick Tock Diner where they all ordered Club Sandwiches and Frosty Shakes.

Arriving back at the Townhouse by mid-afternoon all four of them were ready to relax. As they removed their coats Cassidy and Caroline grabbed Andy's bags, which they had picked up from the hotel on their way home, and dragged them up the stairs.

"Hey! Careful with those." Andy called after them.

Smirking Miranda grabbed Andy's hand and dragged her down to the kitchen. Pushing the young woman up against the counter she captured her lips in a kiss as she curled her fingers around Andy's waist. "Oh God! I can't get enough." Miranda husked as they came apart.

Pulling Miranda back to her she hugged the older woman close. Sighing in her contentment as Miranda returned the embrace fiercely. "We should go on up before we're caught hugging again," Andy told her.

"Too late," Caroline smirked as she entered the room. "Cass told me about the hug-fest last night."
Now it's my turn." Walking up to the two older woman Caroline wrapped her arms around both of them and squeezed tightly.

"You okay, Caro?" Andy asked gently as she brushed the young girl's hair back out of her eyes.

Caroline looked up into the chocolate eyes and smiled. "Of course. We are glad you're here. You make our mom happy. She smiles more now. That's something both me and Cass love. So thank you."

Andy blushed and held the young girl tighter as Cassidy ran into the kitchen. Observing the three hugging she threw her arms around the three of them. "Group hug!" She squealed causing Andy to laugh.

Untangling herself from the embrace Miranda looked down at her daughter's smiling. "Was there a reason you both barged into the kitchen Bobbsey's?" She asked.

"Juice." They both replied in unison as their grip tightened on Andy.

Andy moved towards the fridge without letting go of the twins, causing them to wrap themselves around her legs and erupt into laughter. Miranda laughed with them. "Juice for the limpets." Andy grinned as she released her hold on them as she opened the fridge. Looking at the choices she asked, "Orange, Apple or Tropical?"

"Tropical." They both declared unanimously.

"Right then, if you could find it in your hearts to release me I will get you your drinks," Andy told them happily. Looking up at the young woman both twins grinned at her and let her go, moving to their mom they wrapped her hands around her instead. Andy looked towards Miranda. "Coffee?" She asked.

"Mm yes please," Miranda responded.

Andy set up the Jura coffee machine and poured juice into two glasses for the twins. Placing the drinks on the breakfast bar the twins finally let go of their mom and grabbing their drinks left the room and made their way to the den.

"About tonight, would you like to join me at the Runway Christmas party?" Miranda asked hesitantly.

"Are you sure?" Andy queried. Raising her eyebrow imperceptibly she looked towards the brunette. Andy smiled. "I know, I know you never make offers you don't mean."

Andy laughed.

"I'm glad you have taken notice," Miranda smirked.

"What about the twins?" Andy asked her.

"The twin's father will be here at 6 pm to take them for the night. As they are having Christmas day with me and spent Thanksgiving here, he wanted to have them for Christmas Eve." Miranda explained

"Oh dear. Poor Charity." Andy laughed out loud. "I wonder what mischief they will inflict."

Miranda snorted. "Whatever it will be will be legendary knowing my girls." Miranda looked at
Andy eyes sparkling with amusement. "And now Nigel has put the idea in my head, I cannot wait to observe everyone's face when I arrive with you on my arm, especially Emily's."

Andy giggled. "Oh my God you're so wicked, now I know where your daughters get it from."

"Oh yes," Miranda whispered as she caught the brunette in another blistering kiss.

They spent the afternoon watching the twins play Wii, occasionally joining them for a game of bowling, Mario Kart or Dance Dance Revolution. Andy laughed at Miranda's blatant competitiveness but she held on to her mantle of reigning champion of Dance Dance Revolution. Andy became the title-holder of Mario Kart much to the twin's horror.

As the afternoon wore on Miranda took Andy back to the kitchen where they prepared enchiladas for dinner. "It's been a good day," Miranda told her as they stood side by side chopping meat and vegetables.

"It's been a perfect day." Andy smiled. "The girls are beautiful Miranda. I understand why you are so proud of them. They're amazing."

Miranda laughed. "Well, they are their mother's daughters after all." Andy sniggered, and they continued to prepare dinner in companionable silence, moving around each other as if they had been cooking together for years. "Are you worried about tonight?" Miranda asked quietly as she finished prepping the meat, covering it and placing it in the fridge.

"A little," Andy told her honestly. "People will say what they want to say but I don't want this relationship to affect your professional career."

"By people, I assume you mean Irv?" Miranda stated.

"Well yeah. He's a major ass-monkey and I don't want him making your life any more difficult because of me." Andy told her.

"I may have to use that description. It is so very apt." Miranda chuckled. "To be honest, darling my personal life has no effect on my professional one. I have worked hard to be where I am, and I could retire tomorrow and have enough money to be comfortable for the rest of my life, if not my children's and grandchildren's lives. There's also the fact you no longer work for me, however, if we had started this relationship while you were employed at Runway then it would have been reported to HR and that would be that. There's nothing in my contract that states I cannot form a relationship with an employee, or ex-employee in this instance. And to be honest, if I receive one hint of discrimination based on my relationship with you I will sue. It would also be the one and only time I hand-feed a story directly to the associated press."

"Are you worried?" Andy returned her question.

"Not at all." Miranda clarified as she moved to embrace Andy from behind resting her cheek against Andy's shoulder. "I am happy, I feel loved beyond measure. There's nothing more I can ask for."

"That's all that matters then," Andy replied gently as she finished chopping the vegetables. Turning in Miranda's arms she looked down at the editor and brushed her fingers gently through the older woman's forelock. "I love you, Miranda." She whispered.

"I took a while to realise what these feelings are but I love you too my darling, more than I can
express," Miranda told her.

"So what should I wear tonight?" Andy grinned. "As you know most of my things are back in Ohio and although you haven't said a word against yesterday's outfit I doubt something similar would be ideal for tonight."

"What would you be most comfortable in my darling?" Miranda questioned.

"Well..." Andy's eyes twinkled mischievously. "...That NY Yankees top would be great with a pair of Levi's, and I have my converse."

"I don't care what you wear," Miranda told her honestly. "You'll be beautiful, regardless. I would like you to keep your hair natural though."

Looking at the older woman she asked. "Do you really like it this way?"

"Of course I do, it's stunning. So wild and luxuriant. When the light hits and I see how sun-streaked, it is and I can see the red undertone. It gives it that glossy chestnut colour that reminds me of beautiful autumn days." Miranda told her as she ran her fingers through it.

"Wow," Andy said breathlessly as she gave Miranda one of her megawatt smiles. "I can see why you're an editor. You certainly have a way with world Priestly."

"So I've been told, however, it's not usually a good thing." Miranda snickered as she let the brunette turned back to cook.

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Dinner was a lively affair with lots of chatter and laughter between Andy and the twins as Miranda looked on happily, occasionally commenting with an observation or opinion on whatever was being discussed.

Miranda lost herself in thoughts of a brighter future surrounded by love, laughter and lots of noise. She was amazed at the difference the last two days had brought to her life.

As dinner was demolished, and the twins stacked the dishwasher with plates Miranda was roused from her thoughts by one of her daughters.

"Mom, are you going to the party tonight with Andy?" Cassidy asked.

Responding with a smile Miranda said. "Yes, Cassidy. I asked Andréa to escort me and luckily for me, she agreed."

"So is this like your first date?" Cassidy asked Andy, mischief lighting up her blue eyes.

"Well...I...I...I have no idea. I suppose so." Andy stuttered. Miranda laughed hard at seeing the reaction on Andy's face that tears sprang in her eyes. All three of the women turned to her as she attempted to get her mirth under control.

"Well if this is your first date what are you going to wear?" Caroline asked curiously as she turned back towards Andy. "I read in Cosmo that you should always make a good impression on a first date."

"I don't know, Caro. Your mom's seen me at my best and my worst so I think she's may already have an opinion on my style. Anything's got to be better than a hideous skirt and Doc Martin's
right?" Andy laughingly replied. The three Priestly women laughed with her. "Why don't you both help me choose?" Andy asked the twins with a wide grin.

"Awesome." They both grinned at the brunette as they grabbed her hands and dragged her from the room.

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Miranda took herself up to the master suite shortly after to find Cassidy and Caroline lying on her bed. The door of the bathroom was closed. Glancing over at the twins cuddled together she said. "Bobbsey's did you help Andréea find something to wear?"

"Yes mom," Cassidy answered.

"She will look awesome. She's going to rock the show." Caroline told her mom grinning widely.

Miranda lay down next to her daughters and pulled them close. "Are you ready to go to your fathers? He will be here shortly and I need to get ready."

"Yes, we have a big night planned," Cassidy told her.

"Don't tell me," Miranda warned smiling at her daughters. "We will want to hear all about it tomorrow though."

Hearing the doorbell the twins clambered off the bed. Caroline rushed from the room, after hugging Miranda quickly, to answer the door as Cassidy ran to the bathroom door banged upon it twice "See you tomorrow Andy." She shouted. Hearing a muffled response she launched herself at Miranda and hugged her tight. "Love you, mom."

"I love you too Bobsey," Miranda told her young daughter. "Tell your father hello."

"Will do. See you tomorrow." Cassidy replied as she charged from the room thundering down the stairs.

Shaking her head Miranda walked to the bathroom door and knocking lightly requested entry. Hearing the confirmation she opened the door to find Andy sat at the vanity wrapped in nothing but a towel attempting to tame her hair.

"I shouldn't be too much longer," Andy told her as they locked eyes through the mirror.

"Take all the time you need," Miranda told her breathlessly, eyes roaming the expanse of tanned skin on display. "I'm going to shower." Miranda stepped towards the woman and placed a soft kiss on her temple. "You are exquisite." She hummed.

Spinning around Andy took hold of Miranda's hips and pressed her forehead into her chest. "Thank you for today," Andy muttered.

"No darling, thank you," Miranda responded running her fingers through Andy's hair before letting go and walking towards the shower.

She showered quickly and as she walked out caught Andy's staring at her in open admiration. She caught the other woman's eye as she wrapped a large bath towel around herself and winked.

"Oh, my God," Andy whispered to herself as she felt a surge of heat in the pit of her stomach.

Miranda quirked her eyebrow upon hearing the younger woman's words. "Is there a problem
Andréa?" She purred.

Catching Miranda's eye she blushed. "Nope, no problem at all sweetheart," Andy told her.

Miranda smirked and sauntered over to the woman, pushing herself up against her back she wrapped her arms around her. "We could stay home," Miranda told her. "If you're not ready for this."

"Sweetheart I am so ready. I've waited three months and more." Andy breathed. "And we have the house to ourselves tonight, we don't have to stay all night."

"Okay then. I need to do my hair and makeup" Miranda replied squeezing the younger woman again.

"Time to get ready to rock this show," Andy told her. Miranda snorted in laughter as Andy untangled herself from Miranda and walked from the bathroom.

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When Miranda entered the bedroom, hair and makeup complete, still wrapped in a towel, she found Andy in a pair of black Sass Bide skinny-legged jeans, paired with Junya Watanabe's 'Romantic in Black' fall collection boots, a red scoop-neck t-shirt and a black Dolce Gabbana waistcoat.

"Do I look okay?" Andy asked hesitantly.

Looking the young woman up and down Miranda exhaled a breathy "Acceptable" to her which caused Andy to give her one of her brightest smiles.

"I was worried I may be a bit too casual," Andy told her.

"Nonsense, you look lovely. It is a staff Christmas Party with, knowing Irv, cheap booze and unacceptable finger food. You will outshine everyone else with your smile alone. Now I see a hint of writing on that t-shirt, show me." Miranda requested.

Unbuttoning her waistcoat she offered a small smirk as she showed Miranda. The t-shirt held the Runway logo in bold white with the words "Does it best" written in italics underneath. Behind the logo was a silhouette of a woman.

Miranda let out a loud chuckle and pulled Andy in for a hug. "I love it! I have to say I prefer this to your Vogue t-shirt from Paris."

"Ah that Vogue t-shirt. I will remember it with fondness." Andy giggled. Grinning down at Miranda she explained. "It was destroyed by a wayward goat in Nepal."

Miranda snorted and Andy caught her muttered, "good riddance," under her breath as she let go of Andy and moved towards her closet. "I will make space in here for your clothes," Miranda noted.

"I can always put my things in the guest room closet," Andy told her.

"Nonsense. That would be unacceptable. If we are sharing a bed, then we share closet space." Miranda told her determinedly as she looked for something to wear. Finding what she was looking for she slipped on a new La Perla thong and strapless bra and pulled on a red strapless Nina Ricci dress. Choosing understated jewellery she walked out of the closet and asked. "How do I look?"
Andy was sat at the end of the bed, eyes closed. Upon hearing Miranda's voice her eyes opened and the flash of astonishment on her face delighted Miranda. "Wow...you look...just wow!" Andy exhaled breathlessly.

"I'm glad you approve," Miranda smirked. "We have time for a drink before Roy gets here. Come." Miranda held her hand out for the young woman who grabbed it lightly and was guided from the room.

Andy and Miranda arrived at Elias Clarke around 45 minutes after the Runway party started. As Andy exited the Town Car, she held her hand out to assist the editor. Miranda stalked through the foyer and was waved through Security by Eduardo. As Andy attempted to follow her she was stopped.

"Sorry, Andy I can't let you in," Eduardo told her sadly.

Andy rolled her eyes. "Seriously? Did you see who I followed in?" She asked incredulously. Andy looked behind Eduardo to see Miranda walking back to see what the hold-up was.

"Andy, I'm just doing what I was told off that frosty redhead upstairs," Eduardo explained. "She said it was ordered from above."

Overhearing the final part of the conversation Miranda hissed at him. "You will give Andréa a permanent pass unless you want to lose your position in the next five minutes. She has full access to Runway regardless of what any of my Personal Assistants may advise. In the future, I require all security requests concerning Runway brought to my attention."

"I...I...Yes, Ms Priestly." Eduardo stuttered as he allowed Andy through the turnstiles. "I will have the permanent pass ready by the time you leave." He confirmed.

Andy thanked him quietly as she moved towards the elevator banks with Miranda. Looking at Miranda Andy could see her jaw tensed, she was obviously fighting her anger. "Miranda?" Andy questioned as they entered the elevator. "Em was probably just doing what she thought was right. I never really explained the whole Paris thing to anyone. Everyone assumes I just upped and left you and they would conclude you'd be angry with me."

"You shouldn't have to explain yourself to anyone. Don't think I haven't noticed you gave her 80% of the clothing you accrued in Paris, as my first Assistant they were by right yours. It was a gesture she should be extraordinarily grateful for. The closet gained the rest. What she did was based on spite. And to say it was ordered by me is unforgivable." Miranda seethed.

Andy cupped Miranda's face forcing her to meet her gaze. "Sweetheart please let's forget it." She requested.

"If you insist darling." Miranda concurred, capturing Andy's hand against her face. "You're too forgiving sometimes," Miranda told her smiling before letting go.

"So where are they holding this shindig?" Andy queried.

"Well, they've opened the conference rooms. As you know the walls fold back allowing for a larger open space." Miranda rolled her eyes. "I was hoping Irv would let us have it externally but with his infinite penny pinching it wasn't to be. She sighed heavily. "Next year I will pay for the blasted thing out of my own pocket." As the doors of the elevator dinged they stepped out of the elevator and Miranda turned to Andy and told her. "I need to go to the office. I'll meet you in
"Are you sure your guard dog won't throw me out?" Andy giggled.

"Well, I know how tenacious you are though so I doubt she would be successful. I promise I'll be right there." Miranda said and smiled. Pressing Andy's hand softly Miranda turned and walked in the opposite direction.

Walking towards the location Andy was hit with a nervousness. As she neared the door leading to the room, she heard the quiet thrum of music and chatter. "Time to gird your loins, Andy." She mumbled to herself as she entered the room. Eyes scanned the room looking for Nigel knowing he would ease any tension. He was nowhere to be seen.

As people recognised her a hush fell over the room and she threw out a tentative smile.

A disturbance came from the far side of the room followed by a screech in a strident British accent. "Oh no! You fucking didn't?" Emily hurled herself towards the brunette. "You need to fucking leave now." The voice demanded.

"Hiya Em." Andy smiled at the redhead. "So lovely to see you as always."

Attempting to pull Andy towards the door Andy stood firm. Emily looked back at Andy placing her back to the doorway as the temperature of the room changed.

Andy smiled happily as Emily continued her tirade. "Move your fat arse. You can't be here. Leave now before Miranda arrives." Emily demanded. "If I find out who let you in their job will be gone." She seethed, stomping her foot in frustration.

"Em, I..." Andy tried to explain.

A cold, calm voice hit Emily from behind. "Oh do shut up Emily, you do not have the power to release any personnel from their positions, and frankly I'm finding your behaviour towards MY guest quite tedious."

"Miranda..." Emily exclaimed as she looked towards the door where Nigel and Miranda stood. Nigel was nursing a scotch and grinning at Andy. Miranda held a bottle of Macallan and two glasses in her hands. "I was just trying..." Emily stumbled over her words in a rush to explain.

"I am well aware of what you were trying Emily. Insulting and manhandling Andréa, however, is not, nor ever will be, part of your job description." At those words, Nigel leaned in and whispered in Miranda's ear causing both of them to lean into each other chuckling.

"But...but..."

Miranda waited for an explanation and when it wasn't forthcoming she rolled her eyes. "Go enjoy yourself, Emily," Miranda told the Brit exasperated, she moved past her and handed Andy the glasses. "I think it's time we got this party started," Miranda stated.

After watching Miranda lead Andy and Nigel to a table and pouring the whiskey things returned to normal by Runway standards. The alcohol flowed, and the food wasn't touched and as things relaxed more people came over to say hello to Andy before disappearing.

Serena was the first to arrive and sit herself down. Smacking a quick kiss on Andy's cheek she said. "It is good to see you querida. You are glorious."
"Thanks, Serena. You're looking pretty amazing yourself." Andy told the Brazilian blushing profusely.

"Hey, Six if you've stopped with the mutual appreciation you should show me and Serena your t-shirt. Miranda told me about it and I know she thinks it's brilliant." Nigel piped in.

Looking towards the editor and receiving a slight smile and a nod of approval Andy grinned and fumbled with the buttons. "Okay then, here you go." Peeling her waistcoat apart Serena and Nigel took in the Runway logo with the silhouette and smiled.

"You know those would be great for advertising," Serena said quietly to Andy.

"Oh, it was just done as a bit of fun in Thailand at a design your own shirt store at one of the markets. I had just lost that Vogue t-shirt to a goat and needed something to replace it. The colour just goes with the dark jeans and vest I'm wearing tonight." Andy told Serena shyly.

Nigel snorted. "You lost your t-shirt to a goat? You have to tell us that story."

As Andy launched into the story, she had Nigel and Serena laughing uproariously, Miranda sat stifling her laughter but held a wide twinkle of amusement in her eyes. The Runway staff looked at the scene with disbelief. As Andy finished her tale, she noticed ice filling Miranda's eyes as she looked beyond Andy.

"Irv..." Miranda said coldly.

"Ah, Miranda. I heard the laughter from the corridor, I never expected it to be coming from a table where your presence was so abundant." Irv leered nastily at her. "And to my further shock, the laughter was brought on by your disappearing assistant." He glanced at Andy before looking away, dismissing her entirely. "I'm surprised you allowed her back in your presence."

"Aha! Did you hear the insane rumours about Andy's disappearance? All that nonsense, Assistant slays the dragon and takes flight." Nigel said before gulping down his Macallan and pouring himself more. "As always Paris was a crazy week, as you're well aware. It's funny how the rumour mill works, it's perfectly obvious there was nothing sinister in her disappearance in Paris. She is here at our request which shows she left on good terms and that her relationship with most of the people here at Runway remains as good as it always was."

Miranda and Andy looked at Nigel in disbelief while Serena excused herself knowing things were about to get heated.

"Andy here had the opportunity to travel Asia and write about the experiences, she's to be published in Rolling Stone in the next couple of issues," Nigel told Irv happily. "Miranda recognising talent when she sees it gave her blessing and away the little bird flew. And I must say the experience has left her glowing. Doesn't she look fabulous?" Nigel asked him.

Irv huffed at Nigel and muttered. Miranda caught the trailing end of the sentence. "...she's nothing special."

"That's where you are wrong Irving," Miranda stated as fire replaced the ice in her eyes. "Andréa was always worth more than the position she held in my employ. As my assistant she was the best at what she did, doing the job with absolute determination and unfailing grace all while maintaining her integrity, her genuine generosity and unwavering kindness. She left Runway, and she conquered the world on her own terms while gathering her own life experiences. She is extraordinary. Anyone who truly knows her should be proud of her."
Irv was flabbergasted, he had never heard Miranda speak so highly of someone. Unable to form a cohesive retort he spun on his heels and stalked away.

"Good bloody riddance," Andy muttered as she poured herself a drink. "That man is an insufferable ass-monkey." She smirked at Miranda as she placed a hand on Miranda's thigh under the table causing the older women to gasp slightly the hand moved. Leaning over to Miranda Andy whispered. "Is it home time yet?"

"Oh yes," Miranda responded breathlessly.

After their run-in with Irv, the trio found the spark of enjoyment they had been experiencing had diminished.

Andy kept her hand on Miranda's thigh under the table as they finished their scotch, she could see that Miranda was still tense. She had agreed upon going home, Roy had been sent a text and was on his way.

Looking towards Nigel Andy asked him the question that had been running through her mind since Miranda's arrival at the party. "Nige? What did you whisper to Miranda before when Em was doing her guard dog act?"

"Six, everyone saw Emily's reaction when you walked in and they expected fireworks. When Miranda arrived and saw what was happening, she started breathing fire. I thought Em was done for, so after Miranda told her it wasn't her job to insult or manhandle you I thought I'd try to take the heat out of the situation. I laughingly reminded my friend here that it was now her job as your girlfriend to manhandle you correctly. It worked." Nigel smiled at them both.

Miranda raised her eyes to Nigel and offered him one of her real smiles. "You're a good man Nigel. Thank you for tonight. I don't know why you said what you did to Irv, but it was wonderful to realise you have my Andréa's back and are ready to fight her corner." Miranda sighed.

"I said what I know to be true. I saw how both of you were that night in Paris, how much it hurt you both. And I never told you but I witnessed that final hug in the lobby of the hotel as you said goodbye. You two have always connected on a level that's inexplicable. Em knew it and if tonight's pouting is anything to go by, she is jealous." He told them rolling his eyes. "I know for a fact that if Six had gone the right way about things, told you she wanted to leave to travel and had given the correct notice you would have given your blessing but I don't believe you would be together now, your barriers would still be up in full force. I know I may have embellished a little with Irv, as I am prone to do on occasion, however it was to ensure you didn't eviscerate him entirely and I was hopeful that it would allow you both a bit more time together without outside interference."

"I don't know if that will have worked tonight Nige," Andy told him.

"Why ever not, my darling?" Miranda questioned the young woman.

"Sweetheart, your speech after he said I was nothing special was proof enough of stronger feelings than an ex-employee should have for an employee. The only time you ever get that defensive is towards your twins. Irv left this table confused and angry, he'll be thinking of your words of praise and he'll work things out, he was unable to get the last word in, which for a megalomaniac like him is unacceptable." Andy told her giving the older woman a smile that made her heart sing.

Miranda snorted. "Well if he is going to work things out we should really give him something to
Nigel smirked. "You really do make a beautiful couple. This one will keep you on your toes, Miranda. You've certainly been missed Six." Nigel heard the text tone indicating Roy was here. "And on that note ladies, I should also be off. The night is still young and I hope to spend it dancing in strong arms and God willing I'll manage to grab myself a cheeky Christmas kiss under the mistletoe."

Miranda and Andy laughed as they got up from the table with him. As they followed in his wake Miranda entwined Andy's fingers into hers and swept them from the room, as every single pair of eyes in the room observing their clasped hands.

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They made good time getting back to the Townhouse. Snow had started to fall slowly as they travelled and there was a sprinkling on the townhouse steps as Andy guided the editor to the door.

"Be careful my love," Andy said as she tripped over her own feet giggling.

"I'll take your warning to heart darling, but it's not myself I am concerned about. Please try not to fall and smack that pretty little head." Miranda told her laughing.

Managing to open the door Patricia came to greet them, tail wagging she made a bee-line for Andy offering kisses and covering her in drool.

"Hey beautiful girl, you miss us?" Andy asked the dog as she patted her before perching herself on the lower steps of the stairs and removing her boots. Looking towards Miranda, who was stood at the bottom of the stairs watching her, she gave the woman a smile. "Everything okay?" She asked.

"Everything's wonderful. Thank you for tonight." Miranda told her.

"I didn't do anything Miranda, it should be I thanking you. Your words to Irv were incredible."
Andy looked at her in wonder.

She moved to sit next to the young woman. Taking her hand and entwining their fingers she placed her head on Andy's shoulder. She said. "I spoke the truth Andréa. Nothing more. You said in one of your Paris letters that you weren't special nor would you ever be and even back then I disagreed. I wasn't about to let that pathetic little man make you feel less than your worth. I had already done that when I stopped writing. I will not allow it to happen again."

Andy turned her head to place a gentle kiss on Miranda's head causing Miranda to snuggle in further and give a hum of contentment. "Are you hungry or thirsty darling?" Miranda asked.

"Nope, I'm good. Do you want to move from these steps?" Andy responded gently.

"Yes. I'm just going to get some water." Miranda told her.

"I'll put Patricia out back for a moment and get it. Okay?"

"Yes, darling." Miranda placed a kiss on Andy's cheek as she got up off the steps and made her way up the stairs.

Andy walked to the back of the house. Calling Patricia to follow. Opening the back door she stepped onto the patio as Patricia ran off into the darkness of the garden. Leaning against the balustrade she looked up at the sky and spent time expressing her thanks to the universe for the blessings of the last few days.

Hearing a noise behind her she spun around to find Miranda leaning against the door frame smiling softly. "Hey," Andy whispered.

"What are you doing out here barefoot and without a coat?" Miranda queried. "You'll catch your death."

"I'm giving my gratitude to the universe," Andy admitted. "I love nights like this. Snow falling, the city becomes so quiet. It's peaceful."
Miranda shivered and crept closer to Andy. "You're icy." She exclaimed as she wrapped Andy up in a tight embrace.

"Well, I was waiting for Patricia," Andy muttered into Miranda's hair.

"Patricia came in five minutes ago, she's currently in her bed all toasty and warm, just like we should be." Miranda sniggered.

"Oops. Okay then, let's go get warm..." Andy grabbed Miranda round the waist and picking her up gently walked her back into the house as Miranda held on tight and let out a peal of joyful laughter. "I love it when you laugh like that," Andy told her, lifting her on the kitchen counter.

"It's so easy to laugh and smile when you're here with me. You bring such delight and a lightness to my world Andréa." She explained as Andy made her way to the fridge and poured two glasses of Pellegrino. "There I was thinking it was my job to manhandle you and yet you pick me up with so much ease." Miranda laughed again.

Andy looked back at her. "Ah, that would be my fat arse giving me the extra strength." Andy sniggered at her attempt to impersonate Emily.

"I could have throttled her for saying that to you..." Miranda seethed. At Andy's arched eyebrow Miranda looked away guiltily and whispered. "If I could take back every one of the hateful words, I spewed at you I would. In a heartbeat."

Andy walked towards the woman, placing the glasses of water on the counter beside her she cupped the editor's face in her palms. Smoothing out the frown line on the older woman's forehead she noticed when Miranda shivered at the touch and removed her hands. "Sweetheart that's all in the past now. I've forgiven it all. How could I not?" Andy told her.

"You're too good for me." Miranda declared. At her words, Andy shook her head and rubbed her hands together. Looking up at the young woman she saw her attempting to warm her hands. "You're freezing darling. Come on upstairs I'll run you a bath." Miranda jumped off the counter gracefully and grabbing both glasses of water she passed one to Andy and using her free hand pulled her from the kitchen and up to the bedroom.

Placing her glass of water on her bedside table she pushed Andy gently onto the side of the bed. "Wait here," Miranda said smiling as she took the glass from Andy's hand and moved around the bed to put it down. She turned down the coverlet and stalked towards the closet coming out with a wrapped box. "I have a gift for you," Miranda told her shyly.

Andy looked up surprised. "Sweetheart you don't have to get me things." She said.

"Well, this will be useful for us both. Open it." Miranda smiled as Andy gently shook the box before tearing the paper. Looking down she saw the new Apple iPhone. "My personal and work numbers have been programmed in it already, the shared number Cassidy and Caroline have is also in there at their insistence." Miranda smiled as Andy pulled her towards her and placed a soft kiss on her lips.

"Thank you." She breathed, tears glistening in her eyes.

"You're welcome my darling, I'll just go and prepare that bath." Miranda kissed her again before walking into the bathroom. Once there she started running hot water into the tub, moving around the room she found the oils she wanted to add. She mixed Ylang-ylang, Cinnamon, Sandalwood and Jasmine oils with Argan oil and added it to the water, swirling her hand through to test the
temperature. "Perfect." She hummed as she switched the water off. Walking back to the bedroom she found Andy exactly where she left her. Walking towards the brunette she noticed her looking pale, biting her lip and pulling her fingers in agitation. "Darling, what's the matter?" Miranda asked in a panic.

"This," Andy whispered showing Miranda the email open on her iPhone. Sitting beside Andy she reached for her glasses and looked at the iPhone screen.

"It's from your mother? I shouldn't read it." Miranda told her looking up.

Andy scoffed. "Then I'll read it out to you. 'Andy, it has been brought to our attention that you are back in New York. You were seen today arm in arm with that woman and her spawn. You will not embarrass us in this way. We expect you on the first flight home. No arguments.' They enclosed a fucking ticket. As if I am some wayward child in need of correction. They have the nerve to judge you and your beautiful girls." Andy was furious.

Miranda pulled her close and rubbed circled on Andy's back soothing the woman in her arms. "Darling, I promise we'll work this out."

Andy pulled back, looking at her with determination shining from her eyes. "I'm not leaving you now we've found each other Miranda. I am 25 years old. They cannot enforce this."

"Hush, I know my darling. Come on, your bath is ready." Miranda pulled the young woman to her feet and guided her to the bathroom. Taking her time she started to undress the woman. She unbuttoned Andy's waistcoat and shrugged it off her shoulders, unbuttoning the top button of the jeans she pulled the t-shirt from the waist and up over the brunettes head and tugged the jeans over Andy's hips until they pooled around her feet. "Step out," Miranda told her as she walked behind and unhooked her bra. Looking down she saw Andy was wearing boyleg briefs, she pulled them down Andy's long legs breathlessly. Once divested of all clothes Miranda guided her again to the bath. "Now relax." She demanded.

"Aren't you getting in?" Andy asked.

"Are you sure darling?" Miranda queried softly.

"Totally. Get in here." Andy insisted as she moved her legs to make room.

Andy watched as Miranda stripped quickly. Red dress coiling itself around the pile of clothes Miranda had removed from Andy. Shucking off her bra and thong she stepped in front of Andy and lowered herself into the warm water. Laying back on Andy's chest she closed her eyes and took a deep breath as arms encircled her.

"Mm, this is heavenly," Miranda whispered as she welcomed Andy's hands move up to her shoulders where she massaged them, taking her time to iron out any knots and ease the older woman's tension. As Miranda reclined deeper into Andy's chest as she relaxed the hands moved over her shoulders, skimming her collarbone and down to her breasts, cupping them with her palms. Miranda arched into the touch letting out a moan as Andy caressed them. "Oh, God." Miranda exhaled. Andy's hands continued to circle her nipples slowly while placing kisses along her neck and jaw.

"You are so beautiful, Miranda," Andy whispered as she placed a kiss on her temple. "There's no place I'd rather be than here."
As the bath cooled Miranda moved away from Andy's touch. Looking over her shoulder at the young woman she smiled. Standing up she stepped out of the tub and held her hand out to her love. "Bed?" She asked hesitantly.

Rushing to stand Andy gripped Miranda's hand, launched herself out of the bath and dragged her laughing from the bathroom. As they neared the bed Andy became nervous. "Sweetheart." She whispered. "I want to make love to you," Biting her lip she eyed the editor.

Miranda stepped closer and guided her to the bed. She laid herself down on the cool sheets and pulled Andy down beside her. Turning to face each other Miranda pulled Andy into a searing kiss that ignited their passion for one another again.

Andy rolled herself on top of the older woman, legs straddling one of the older woman's thighs as her hip met Miranda's aching core. Breaking their kiss she rained kisses along Miranda's cheeks, behind her ear, then her jaw and neck. Kissing her way down the woman's chest she finally arrived at her breasts she lavished them with attention.

"Oh my God you're so soft," Andy whispered as she took an erect nipple into her mouth. Moaning at the intensity of Andy's hot mouth Miranda curled her fingers in Andy's long hair and pulled her closer. Arching her back Miranda knew more desire than she'd ever had in her life. "So gorgeous?" Andy said watching the older woman unravel beneath her. "Tell me what you need." She whispered as her tentative hands roamed over Miranda's hips and thighs.

"I need you...inside." Miranda hissed as Andy slowly trailed her hand over the older woman's stomach and then down, cupping her mound she gently parted her folds and made contact with her throbbing clit. "Jesus." Miranda cried out in a lusty moan.

Andy was amazed at the glorious sound of Miranda's pleasure, the heat and wetness radiating from her. Pressing firmer she heard Miranda moan again before moving her fingers lower. Circling softly without penetrating "Are you sure?" Andy asked breathlessly.

For the first time in her life, Miranda Priestly wanted to be taken, she needed to be owned by this young woman. "Oh, God! Yes..." Miranda confirmed in a deliciously husky tone. "Please." She whimpered. "Make me yours."

As Andy gently thrust two fingers into Miranda, she groaned as she moved slowly inside the older woman. Moving her lips back up she captured the older woman's mouth in an urgent kiss and thrust harder, Miranda's hips rising to meet each thrust. "Mine," Andy growled as she rubbed herself against Miranda's thigh as she thrust deeper and harder.

"Oh, God! Yes...Andréa..."Miranda cried out as her orgasm hit. Sliding down the older woman's body Andy kept her fingers inside as she kissed across the scar on Miranda's stomach. "Don't," Miranda whispered embarrassment showing in her eyes.

Raising her eyes to the woman below Andy said. "It's beautiful, its proof you carried life within you, proof of those two beautiful little girls. Don't be ashamed, sweetheart. I love you, I love all of you." Moving down further Andy nuzzled against her. "I really need to savour you." She muttered as she parted Miranda's thighs and blew carefully at the hot wetness, flattening her tongue against her clit she swiped attentively, savouring Miranda's flavour she let out a hum of pleasure. She started to move her fingers inside in sync with the movement of her tongue, driving Miranda to dig her heels into the mattress. Feeling Miranda getting closer, as her walls clenched around her fingers, she covered the clit with her mouth and sucked it into her mouth.

"Andréa...Oh my God...Oh!" Miranda cried as her body convulsed and she pulled Andy closer
second orgasm hit. Grinding herself against Andy's warm mouth and fingers she rode out the waves of pleasure. As Miranda relaxed Andy moved her fingers from Miranda smoothly and made her way up Miranda's body and held her close, faced pressed into Miranda's neck. As Miranda snuggled in, her contentment evident, she lifted Andy's chin and pulled her into a passionate kiss. "Mm, I can taste myself on you," Miranda told the young woman.

Pulling away slightly Andy made to move away. "Sorry." She whispered embarrassed.

"What on Earth are you sorry about?" Miranda asked her lightly pulling her back towards her.

"I didn't think that kissing you...I wasn't sure if you'd want to, well after..." Andy trailed off.

"After cunnilingus?" Miranda giggled seeing the woman in her arms blush, she told her, "Darling I wouldn't have initiated the kiss if I was in any way concerned about how I would taste mixed with your usual intoxicating flavour. This morning as I kissed you after I made love to you, what did you think?" She asked curiously.

"It was the most erotic experience of my life," Andy admitted. "Nate would never..." She tried to explain.

"I would prefer it if you didn't bring the fry-cook into our bedroom and most intimate moments," Miranda told her wryly. "However I must tell you that whatever it was he never did was his loss."

"He didn't go down on me, no matter how much I asked, I think he was scared," Andy told her.

Miranda looked up at the brunette in wonder. Placing a tender kiss on her lips she whispered. "Definitely his loss, you are heavenly. I am sorry for his future partner's, poor girls. I don't know how he could he deny you anything you asked? He obviously wasn't deserving of your love."

"Do you think you are?" Andy asked.

"No, not at all. I think you are decidedly too good for me, I, however, will ensure I work hard to become worthy of you, of your love." Miranda told her as she rolled the young woman on her back. "And my first act of salvation is to worship every single delicious inch of you," Miranda smirked down at the woman below her.

Andy reached up and cupped the older woman's face. "I love you." She whispered reverently.

"I love you too my darling. Let me show you just how much." Miranda asked. Observing the nod of acceptance she swooped down giving Andy a heart-stopping kiss. Miranda angled her hip between Andy's thighs pushing against her wet centre as they continued to kiss, tongues entwining. As their kiss broke Miranda trailed her lips across Andy's smooth, strong jaw, to nibble and lick and kiss the sweet spot behind Andy's ear causing a shiver of pleasure to course down her spine.

"Miranda please..." Andy begged.

"Shh," Miranda told the young woman as pushed both her hands above her head.

"Keep them there, hold on to the headboard" the editor requested. Spreading Andy's knees further she settled between them. Trailing kisses down the young woman's body she captured a nipple between her teeth and bit down before soothing it with her tongue. Andy moaned at the pleasure-pain sensations the attention caused. Moving down she pressed open-mouth kisses on Andy's stomach, the scent of the young woman's heavy arousal thick in her nostrils as she breathed in. Miranda blew gently on Andy's exposed sex, causing her to tremble. "So wet, darling."
"It's all for you!" The brunette told the editor, her hips bucking, trying to make contact with Miranda's mouth. She was certain that the first touch would make her climax.

"I want to watch you come undone," Miranda told her softly as she moved back up Andy's body. Settling herself once again between the young woman's legs she let her hand trail over wet curls and slipped her fingers deep into the dripping wetness of Andy's arousal. The quick but gentle motion causing Andy to cry out loudly. Letting go of the headboard and pulling a pillow across her face Andy attempted to smother her cries as Miranda's fingers worked their way in and out as her thumb circled Andy's clit. Miranda removed the pillow from Andy's face as her mouth trailed kisses along Andy's jaw and neck. Miranda could sense just how close Andy was to coming undone. Seeing Andy's eyes closed Miranda demanded. "Look at me." Slowing her thrusts as Andy's eyes swirled open as she looked at the woman above her. Locking eyes Miranda told her. "I love you."

Losing herself in gentle blue eyes that conveyed all the love and tenderness the older woman felt Andy move furiously against Miranda's hand, Fighting against her impending orgasm Andy leaned forward to capture Miranda's lips in a searing kiss.

"Come, my darling," Miranda whispered against Andy's lips.

Letting go Andy let out a moan as her climax overcame her, lips caressing and still moving against Miranda's fingers it took a few minutes to ride out the waves of intense pleasure that had overtaken her and allowed her to fall into a warm haze of contentment. Still kissing Miranda's removed her hand from Andy's core. As Andy's hands released the headboard, she pulled Miranda closer and roamed all over the older woman.

Breaking the kiss Andy looked into the blue of the editor's eyes and stroking her fingers along her face whispered. "I love you more."

Laughing joyfully Miranda rolled off Andy and pulling her closer said. "We must agree to disagree my darling. Now sleep, my love." Snuggling into the brunette's arms Miranda felt a sense of peace overtake her and allowed herself to luxuriate in the happiness of the moment.

Miranda woke up early tangled in a pair of arms and legs, welcoming Andy's heat surrounding her she smiled happily and stretched. She felt wonderful. The arms around her waist tightened as she nestled in further.

"Mm good morning beautiful," Andy whispered in the older woman's ear.

"Good morning my darling," Miranda whispered back. "Did you sleep well?"

"Wonderfully well. You?" Andy questioned.

"One of the best night's sleep I've ever had," Miranda admitted as she turned towards the brunette offering her a genuine smile. "What would you like to do today?" Miranda asked.

"Anything. As long as I'm with you." Andy told her.

"There's work I must do so the next few days free, but it would just be an hour or two, and I need not go to the office to do it. Would you mind terribly? We could go for a walk and to lunch afterwards." Miranda said hesitantly. "The girls aren't due back until around 5 pm."

"Sweetheart you must do what you need to, I don't want my presence here to impact your work, I
understand how important it is to you. I'm happy to sit and write, There are a few days of my journal I can catch up on, emails to respond to and I have an article idea I want to work on too.” Andy told her gently looking down at her with a smile.

Reaching up Miranda tilted her head and captured Andy's lips in a kiss. "I adore you. You make me so happy." Miranda whispered against Andy's lips.

"Mm likewise. I should get up and make us some coffee." Andy said with a grin as she attempted to untangle herself from Miranda.

"Later," Miranda said pulling Andy closer and kissing her passionately.

As they broke the kiss Andy pulled Miranda against her fully and rolled them both so Andy was under Miranda as she confirmed. "Oh yes, later."

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They spent a blissful few hours entwined in each other's arms, making love and talking about everything and anything. They laughed together as Andy related some of her adventures overseas and Miranda described some of the more useless assistants to enter Runway.

By the time they showered and made their way downstairs, Miranda was in work mode. Moving towards her study she grabbed the newspapers before entering the room and sitting down at her desk. Andy entered behind her placing her new iPhone and laptop on the couch under the window and then made her way to the kitchen and put the coffee on. Moving to the fridge and helping herself to some yoghurt she ate quickly before pouring two steaming mugs of coffee and making her way to the study.

She noticed Miranda frowning, jaw clenched tightly and with teeth grinding as she read the Post. "Miranda?" She questioned quietly. "Sweetheart?"

"This is just fucking ridiculous." Miranda seethed as she threw the paper on the floor. Moving quickly towards the editor she placed the coffees at the corner of the desk before bending over and seeing the headline on Page Six. Picking it up, she read;

Is sapphism the newest fashion statement?

Which fashionista Editor In Chief is about to come out as a lesbian, complete with a much younger girlfriend?

Runway's Miranda Priestly did nothing to stop the rumour mill when she left the Runway Christmas Party at Elias Clarke hand in hand with her 25-year-old ex-assistant Andy (Andrea) Sachs last night.

It's understandable that a 50-year-old may find comfort in a younger person's arms but what could this beautiful 25-year-old woman see in the Ice Queen?

Sources close to the editor state that this is not a new development, believing the relationship started before the divorce proceedings between Miranda Priestly and Stephen Tomlinson.

When we approached Mr Tomlinson about the allegations he said.

"Nothing about that woman would surprise me, she always had an unnatural fascination with that girl. I am sorry for the young woman in question being entangled with that frigid bitch and
Andy snorted. "If they actually investigated properly, they would find I haven't been in the country for the last three months. It's poorly written, hack journalism at its best." Andy smirked.

"You don't seem particularly phased my darling." Miranda was seething.

Andy knelt before Miranda. "Why would it phase me? I adore you and your girls, plus I realise that all this will blow over when they get their next bit of juicy gossip. Lindsay Lohan is bound to be found DUI again or maybe it'll be Paris Hilton that shaves her head." Andy smiled. "They are using an old photo of us from the benefit at the Met, they hold nothing on us. If you want to deny it, I would understand. I understand how much you value your privacy."

"I will not deny it Andréa. We have nothing to be ashamed of. Stephen, on the other hand, will regret his comments about my girls." Miranda was furious.

"Sweetheart I hate to say this because you married him after all, but Stephen is a moron. He wants his 15 minutes of fame. Let him have it, it will come to bite him on the ass, eventually." Andy gave her a small size.

"I need to speak with Leslie," Miranda said as she picked up her cell and dialled. As it was answered she put it on speaker. "Leslie. I take it you saw today's Post?"

"The phone's been ringing off the hook at Runway but there's no one there to answer." Leslie laughed.

"Hm yes. I don't know what else they'd expect on Christmas Eve." Miranda smirked. "Anyway, I'm sure the news today was a surprise..."

"Not so much, no. I should advise you that Irv is up in arms about the press." Leslie warned.

"Of course he is. However I believe it may have been Irv who fed the story to the press, I possess ways and means to find out and if it was him, I will make him pay." Miranda declared. "Irv and I had a slight disagreement regarding Andréa's worth as a person."

"Ah, I heard rumours about you flying to her defence, on more than one occasion. Is it true then? Leslie asked.

"Well yes. As you know I am protective of the things I care about. That insufferable little ass-monkey deserved it and more." Sitting back on her heels in front of Miranda Andy snorted trying to suppress her laughter at Miranda's use of her insult.

"She's there with you now?" Leslie laughed in her surprise.

"Of course she is. She's been here for the last two days upon her return to the States, I am using one of her more delightful insults for that vile little man." Miranda told her as Leslie snorted in laughter. "I need a statement released."

"You're going to deny it?" Leslie questioned trying to calm her prior amusement.

"No, we will not deny it. I want the truth told. Andréa has been overseas since Paris, there was no relationship other than professional before her return from Asia, despite what anyone says. Due to having formed a wonderful professional relationship we stayed in touch and wrote and emailed
each other. We found we have more in common than we ever expected and our feelings developed
from there. This is a very new turn of events, and quite unexpected. The story printed today is
filled with half-truths, I will have defamation charges drawn up against the writer and Stephen will
regret his comments about my girls."

"You're taking legal action?" Leslie groaned.

"Of course. Unless they retract the part where they state this relationship started before the divorce.
I have Andréa's reputation to consider. This could adversely affect her future career prospects."
Miranda stated.

"But Mira..." Andy spoke quietly.

"Darling, I will do what I have to ensure your reputation remains untarnished. I don't care what
they say about me, but you and my girls mean the world to me and I will not have your names
dragged through the mud." Miranda told her. "Leslie, ensure that this is handled immediately.
That's all." She disconnected the call as Andy lay her head in Miranda's lap. Miranda ran her hands
through Andy's hair gently massaging her scalp. "I'm sorry about this. I thought we would have
more time." She whispered.

Looking up at Miranda Andy gave her a bright smile. "I regret nothing, my love. I am happy to be
here with you and if that means dealing with the press for a while so be it. I will go get us fresh
coffee. Okay?"

"Acceptable." Miranda smiled as Andy got herself up, bent down to place a soft kiss on Miranda's
lips, took the mugs off the desk and moved out of the study and back down to the kitchen.

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After she poured the cold coffee away she rinsed the mugs and started a fresh pot. Running her
hands through her hair Andy realised this was really happening, her and Miranda were now out to
the public. Tears formed in her eyes, she felt guilty that the press would hound Miranda and the
girls once again.

Entering the kitchen Miranda found Andy hunched over the counter, head in hands. From the door,
she could see the young woman's shuddering with her sobs. Walking towards her she panicked.
Wrapping her arms around Andy's waist from behind. Miranda soothed her. "Darling, it's alright,
it's all going to be okay, I promise."

Turning in Miranda's arms Andy looked at her. "I've attracted the fucking press back into your life.
How are Cass and Caro going to react? They will hate me."

"My girls wanted you here with us. They adore you almost as much as I do my darling. They knew
this would happen once our relationship became public knowledge, we didn't realise it would
happen this quickly, but that isn't your fault and to be honest I'm happy it has happened. I don't
want to hide away, Andréa. That would demean what we are building. I need you to know this is it
for me. You are my person. My soul resonates with yours." Miranda hid her face in Andy's chest
embarrassed.

Andy pulled Miranda closer and placed a kiss on her head. "Don't hide from me, Miranda. Look at
me, my love." Making eye contact Andy saw the love shining through Miranda's eyes and smiled.
"I love you, I have never been more certain of anything. Now the coffee's done, it's time for us to
work." After placing a brief kiss on Miranda's lips they broke apart and Andy poured their fresh
coffee and followed Miranda back to the study. Placing one mug on the desk she stalked over to the
couch and sat down, opening her laptop she sat back sipping her coffee as she waited for it to boot up.

She heard Miranda sigh and looked up to find her staring at her. Offering her a wide smile Miranda blushed once she realised she had been caught staring. "You okay?" Andy asked.

"That laptop seems to have seen better days," Miranda told her.

"I know it's a bit battered, but it still does what I need it to, it's been around the world with me. It hasn't failed me yet." Andy grinned as she pulled it onto her lap and opened her email client. "I'm about to respond to my mom. Shall I send your best wishes?"

Miranda snorted. "If you think you must." Miranda put on her glasses and focused on her Desktop, tapping away furiously as she responded to emails.

Andy concentrated on her email to her mom.

Date: December 24, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: rgsachsofcinci
Subject: RE: Flight home

Hi Mom and Dad,

Unfortunately, I have to decline your offer for the first available flight to Cincinnati. I have no interest in being anywhere near Ohio in the foreseeable future. Obviously, you are aware you are unable to enforce my departure from New York as I am 25 and ceased to be under your rule when I reached 18 and legally became an adult. (Pre-law was good for something at last)

Before I left the States, I told you why I walked away in Paris. Your incapacity for acceptance darkened my world to a point I couldn't see any way forward. You are my parents, you are supposed to offer unconditional love, but you have proven you only offer your love when it suits you. As soon as you found that I didn't fit into the tiny little package of your design you tossed me away. Miranda helped me to understand that life is inherently messy, we are not meant to fit in but to stand out.

I am happy to be back in NYC although I enjoyed my travels. I booked into a hotel but upon encountering Miranda's twins and then Miranda herself shortly after my arrival I was invited to stay at their home, an offer which I accepted wholeheartedly. They have all made me very welcome. There's a lot of love in this house that brings a new lightness to my heart. I found the courage to tell Miranda how I much I care about her and she feels the same for me.

I love you both very much but I need you to let me be who I am, to live my life how I see fit and to love with all my heart.

Regarding the items you are storing, you can send them to me, give them to goodwill or burn them...whatever...I don't care. It may take me time but it's all replaceable.

Andy

PS: I should inform you that Miranda and I made Page Six this morning. If you experience
the need to speak to the press about us, I will ensure there is not a single chance of reconciliation and I will not stop Miranda from enacting whatever punishment she believes is warranted for any breach in our privacy and that of her Children.

Andy sat back as she read through her reply and hit send before she could talk herself out of it, closing her eyes she fought her tears once again. Opening her eyes as she noticed the sofa dip next to her, she turned her head as Miranda offered a shy smile.

"Come here," Miranda said as she held out her arms. Andy moved into the embrace and buried her face in the crook of her neck, inhaling deeply she was calmed by Miranda's signature scent. "Do you want to talk about it?" Miranda questioned gently.

"Nah, I was just responding to my mom's email from last night. Part of me just wanted to cuss her out, but I tried to explain everything again.

"May I see?" Miranda asked.

"Sure." Andy pulled up her sent emails and brought up her reply to her mother, angling the laptop to a position where Miranda could easily read she sat biting her lip as the older woman scanned the email.

She smiled gently at the brunette. "It is concise and heartfelt. I hope they learn to be more accepting my darling." She pulled the young woman back into her arms as another email pinged in her mailbox. Looking down she saw it was from Rolling Stone. "You should answer that." She said to Andy.

"It can wait a few minutes, I'm happy here in your arms." Andy smiled up at Miranda.

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Chapter 8

Andy sat in silence, comforted by the warmth of Miranda as she held her close. Shifting away slightly she looked across at the older woman and smiled. "You should go finish your work," Andy told her.

"Are you feeling better now?"

"Yes, much better. Thank you, Miranda." She whispered softly. "I'll continue going through my emails."

Miranda stood and stretched. "I will grab more coffee and a snack. Would you like anything?" She asked.

"No, I'm good for now, since we missed breakfast once we're done here I'll take you to lunch." She grinned up at the woman.

"Sounds perfect," Miranda told her. As she moved from the room Andy watched the sway of her hips and smiled happily.

Looking back at her laptop she opened the email from Rolling Stone and read the email, shaking her head in disbelief she re-read the email contents. She was astounded at the offer they were making. Getting up she moved out of the room and down to the kitchen, she needed to talk to Miranda. "Sweetheart, do you have a minute?" She questioned hesitantly.

Miranda spun around with her yoghurt in hand, spoon hanging from her mouth. Removing the spoon she looked at Andy in concern. "What's wrong my darling?"

"So that email from Rolling Stone was from their Editor-in-Chief, who I've never spoken to directly. After seeing Page Six he is requesting an exclusive story about us."

"So that email from Rolling Stone was from their Editor-in-Chief, who I've never spoken to directly. After seeing Page Six he is requesting an exclusive story about us."

Miranda rolled her eyes. "So did Marc mention who would write this exclusive?"

"Well...Christian Thompson's name was mentioned." Andy told her nervously.

"No! That is not happening, not after Paris." Miranda declared adamantly. "I should blacklist him. I wish I'd done it when I had the chance."

"I don't know what happened in Paris, I was told you had words and had to be restrained." Andy was hesitant.

"I slapped him Andréa, I nearly knocked his smug head off his shoulders, and if it wasn't for Nigel one of my pointy little Prada's would have knocked his bollocks into his throat."

Oh my God Miranda, you hit him?" Andy barked with laughter and enfolded Miranda in a bear hug. "You're truly amazing." Letting go she said. "I will tell them we will politely decline their request," Andy said still laughing.

"If I may suggest an alternate solution." Miranda raised her eyebrow. "You write it, you are the one in the position who possesses the most knowledge of both sides if our story, you are the only person who could get it across to the public in a way that is suitable. Tell them you will give them first option on the article but unless they allow you to write it then it will be given to whichever alternate publication wants it, for the right price." Miranda grinned at her wickedly.
"Really?" Andy was dumbstruck.

"Well you need to earn a living my love, you want to write, you already proved yourself to them, and they accepted your writing into their publication," Miranda explained her logic. "If you want to freelance, we should create a website for you. It's good advertising and it can allow you to blog and hold all your contact details.

"I actually possess web skills, I picked it up at Uni while editing the newspaper, and we created an online edition for a while. I will reply to Marc. Thanks, sweetheart." Andy gave her one of her brightest smiles before bounding from the room.

Picking up her laptop she responded accordingly.

xxxxxxxxxxx

Date: December 24, 2007
Sender: andys82
Recipient: eicrollingstone
Subject: RE: Exclusive

Hi Marc,

Thank you for expressing your interest in an exclusive article regarding the relationship between myself and Miranda Priestly.

Within your email, you advised that you wanted to arrange an interview with Christian Thompson. Miranda and I discussed this in length and both of us are in agreement we do not consider Christian to be a good fit to tell our story, we are unsure of his ability to remain impartial. Unfortunately, we have both experienced unpleasantness in some of our previous encounters with him.

Miranda has expressed her immense distaste you are using him as a potential interviewer as she considers his writing style is distinctly average. Obviously, doing an interview with someone she dislikes and has no professional respect for will never happen.

As you may already be aware Miranda does not readily allow any intrusion into her personal life and I hold no prior experience with this amount of public interest. I must take Miranda's comfort into account, and that of her children.

At this time, I am planning to write an article myself. This is my relationship and I am in the best position to write the truth and tell both sides of our story.

Due to my current relationship with Rolling Stone, I will give exclusive rights to you but I will require full control of the editing and content. If this is not something you are able to provide then Miranda and I will find an alternate publication to work with.

If I do not hear from you before, I leave this with the express wish you have the very happiest of holidays.

Kind Regards

Andy Sachs
She sent the response as Miranda walked back to the study coffee mug clasped between her hands. Looking across at the women she gave her a bright smile before reopening her sent emails and forwarding a copy of her response to Rolling Stone to Miranda's email.

Pulling herself from the sofa she walked towards the older woman as she sat at her desk. Looking down at her she grinned and brushed her finger against the tip of Miranda's nose causing it to twitch.

"You had yoghurt on your nose love, I assumed you ate it, not snorted it." Andy laughed.

Her words made Miranda smirk. "You've obviously been doing it wrong for the last 25 years my darling."

Laughing loudly Andy made to walk from the room, seeing Miranda's raised eyebrow she explained. "I'm just going to grab my journal and my iPod. I write better to music. I'll be right back" Launching herself upstairs she entered the master suite and rummaged in her bag for her old journal and her favourite pen. Pulling her new journal from the Anthropologie bag she made her way back down to the study. Curling up in the armchair she pulled her iPod out and selected her playlist, opening her old journal she flipped a few pages and opening her new journal she wrote quickly glancing occasionally at her old entries.

They had been sitting in companionable silence for over two hours. Miranda was working diligently on the electronic version of the book and answering occasional emails and Andy writing furiously, the scratch pen over paper soothing the editor. Working through her Inbox Miranda smiled seeing Andy's response to Rolling Stone, amazed at her protectiveness about the intrusion into her private life, and moved the email into her private folder.

Looking over at the young woman she observed her frowning in concentration as she attempted to blow a strand of curly hair out of her face while writing quickly. As she continued to watch the young woman, who had turned her life upside down in such a short time, she watched her put her pen down and concentrate on her old journal, seeing her shake her head and mutter quietly. "Damn him!" She slammed her journal's shut and removed her earbuds. Looking up she caught Miranda's gaze and smiled. "Hey sweetheart, are you finished with work?" Andy asked.

"I finished about five minutes ago. I've finally cleared my Inbox, and the Book is as good as it can be for now." She smirked. "The Art Department will have their work cut out for them on Thursday."

Andy laughed. "Poor guys. It's good there's a reasonable break, hopefully, they'll hit the ground running and surprise you."

"Well, I can only hope." Miranda smiled. "Now someone offered lunch, do you still want to go out?"

"I could do with some air, and we're kind of out there now, there's no reason to hide," Andy said gently.

"Does Sushi, Italian or a Burger sound good to you? We could walk to Sasabune, Via Quadronno or EJ's." Miranda voiced her choices.
"Whichever you prefer. I'd honestly be happy with a grilled cheese or an omelette." Andy gave her a smile.

"EJ's it is then." Miranda smiled back. "They have a varied selection. It's somewhere I take the twins for brunch occasionally. The food is acceptable."

Andy laughed. Looking down at her faded Northwestern t-shirt and ripped baggy boy-leg jeans she said. "I'll just get changed, give me fifteen minutes and I'll be ready to hit the road."

Miranda looked over at her and smiled. "You realise you need not dress up for a casual lunch." She said.

"The most beautiful women in New York will be on my arm, and I don't think ripped jeans that show my ass are appropriate. Although my small wardrobe no longer contains the same amount of beautiful clothes of my Runway past, I can still make myself semi-presentable," Andy explained. "I don't want to embarrass you, Sweetheart. You're the Queen of fashion and you always look amazing. The least I can do is seem worthy enough to be seen with you."

Miranda walked over to the brunette, straddling her thighs she leaned in to kiss her softly and whispered. "It is I who is not worthy, my Andréa. You could wear a burlap sack and still take my breath away."

"How about a lumpy cerulean sweater?" Andy whispered back teasingly as she deepened their kiss.

"Mm, even then I would be the lucky one to have you on my arm." Miranda beamed.

"Well, you don't have to worry about that. I know you deemed it was a monstrosity, and lucky for us both that sweater's in Ohio and I don't expect we'll be seeing it anytime soon." Andy leaned back in the chair and smiled up at her love. "I should go get changed unless you want to stay here, you have placed yourself in an extraordinary position." Andy wrapped her arms around Miranda's waist and nuzzled into her neck before blazing a trail of kisses from her neck to her sternum causing Miranda to gasp. As Andy placed a fierce kiss on Miranda's lips she heard her stomach growl which caused Andy to laugh loudly. As Miranda flushed in embarrassment Andy cupped her face. "I think it's for the best I feed you." Picking Miranda up she spun and sat her in the chair. As she straightened, she leaned in and gave her kiss before moving from the room.

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Within ten minutes she was ready to leave. Wearing her Converse, a pair of low rise dark wash jeans and an oversized navy blue Michael Kors men's shirt over a white t-shirt she looked relaxed. Giving Miranda one of her mega-watt smiles she held her hand out for the editor and as it was taken she pulled the older woman from the chair. Miranda smirked as she pulled Andy's shirt apart. Seeing the writing she rolled her eyes. 'The bags under my eyes are Designer'

"Really darling, don't you have any plain t-shirts?" Miranda questioned amused.

Shrugging Andy looked at her and grinned mischievously. "Yes, of course, but where's the fun in that?" She snatched her iPhone off the coffee table as she was pulled from the room.

Standing at the closet Miranda handed her into her leather jacket. "Will you be warm enough my darling?" Miranda queried.

Pulling a navy blue beanie and scarf out of her back pockets Andy smirked as she put them on. "I'll think I'll be fine my love. Now let me help you into your coat." Miranda handed her coat and as she
held it open Miranda slipped her arms in as Andy pulled it up over her shoulders and smoothed it around her neck. Fastening the coat tightly Miranda pulled a Hermes scarf out if her coat pocket and wrapped it around her neck. "You ready?" Andy asked her softly holding her hand out.

"Oh yes, come along darling I'm famished." Entwining their fingers she opened the door, caught in a blaze of flashes and questions Miranda schooled her features into one of polite indifference. Looking back at Andy and saw her look of shock quickly move to panic. "Darling?" She queried quietly. "If you aren't ready, then I will understand."

"No Miranda, I am not running away from these vultures." Taking a deep breath she forced a smile onto her face and stepped up beside Miranda, assisting her down the townhouse steps the only thing belying her nervousness was the firm grip she had on Miranda's hand.

"Hey, Andy." Someone shouted. "How did you tame the dragon lady?"

Andy spun around towards where the voice came from letting go of Miranda's hand. Miranda placed a placating hand on her upper arm. As Andy looked towards her she advised: "Ignore them."

"Sweetheart, do you trust me?" Andy asked quietly. Miranda nodded her assent. Turning back towards the journalist she pointed to one of them. "Was it you that just asked me a question?" She glared at a nervous young man.

"N...n...no." He stuttered as he pointed to one of his peers.

Turning a ferocious glower on another young man she spoke quietly and forcefully. "If you have a question you expect to have answered please do me the courtesy of not showing blatant disrespect towards myself or Miranda. My first request, if I have to put up with you, is that you never refer to Miranda as Ice Queen, Snow Queen, Devil in Prada or Dragon Lady in my presence." She looked around at the crowd of reporters and paparazzi. "My second request is that you move on. Unless you get the hell away from these premises, I will call the police and ask for you all to be forcibly removed for disturbing the peace of the neighbourhood. I am sure the neighbours would be in favour of such a move as you are obstructing easy access to the front of quite a few private properties. If you think Miranda is the dragon lady, you haven't seen my fire-breathing capabilities. Now I would like to take Miranda to lunch without your presence bothering us excessively. Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus." Spinning around, she smiled at Miranda and gently linked their arms. "Come on Miranda, I'm hungry."

"Really Andrée, did you honestly just quote the Hogwarts motto at them?" Miranda smirked.

"I simply gave them a friendly warning." Andy gave her a large smile. "Now they know they should never tickle a sleeping dragon."

"I think I like this protective side," Miranda whispered as they made their way towards 3rd Avenue.

xxxxx

Miranda and Andy had been enjoying a relaxed lunch, talking quietly and taking delight in each other's company. The paparazzi hadn't followed them to EJ's which surprised Miranda but she was grateful. Hearing her message tone Miranda pulled out her iPhone, giving Andy an apologetic look she looked down to find a text message from the twin's father.

Miranda

I saw Page Six. I don't know what the fuck you're playing at but I now have the press camped
out front of my house. The girls have thrown water bombs at them and Charity saw Cassidy flipping a few of them the bird. Tell me it's not true! For Christ sake, you are not gay, and this woman's half you're fucking age. I am NOT having our girl's part of this madness. They're staying with me until further notice.

"Oh for God's sake." Miranda seethed as she read the message. "If that stupid man thinks I will give in that easy he has another thing coming." Seeing Andy's look of confusion mixed with concern she told her about Greg's message.

"Fuck that!" Andy hissed. "Come on sweetheart, we'll go pick them up right now." Throwing cash down on the table Andy stood up and shrugged on her jacket. Looking at Miranda she raised her eyebrow. "Do you want me to run on home and grab the car?" She asked.

Miranda smiled gently. "I think we can take the time to walk back together." Standing she pulled her coat on and moved towards the door. As they hit the street Miranda tugged Andy's hand in hers and entwined their fingers. "He can't keep them, darling. I gained full custody after the divorce; he surrendered his parental rights. He was too busy chasing every pretty young woman silly enough to give him the time of day."

"I always assumed you had joint custody. He's had visitation as long as I've been around." Miranda smiled sadly. "About eighteen months before you worked for me the twins expressed an interest in getting to know their father properly. I had to push him into making the effort with them, I think that's why he feels he can skip his weekends with them as he sees fit..." She sighed. "...They so very much wanted a father figure, a second parent. I think that is why I settled on Stephen, on paper he was everything we were looking for, but when it came down to it he really had no interest either. Once we were married he told me they would never be his children, he had no intentions of being a father figure to them, of assisting me with parenting."

Andy looked furious. "Jesus Miranda, that makes me so angry. Those two beautiful little ones are incredible. Anyone would be lucky to have them look up to them as a parent."

"You really mean that don't you?" Miranda was surprised at Andy's intense response.

"Of course. I was so happy to hear from them while I was in India. I missed them, those little moments we shared occasionally as I dropped off the book or when I was helping them with their homework or random school projects. Like with you I could see beyond their masks. They are very much like their beautiful mother." Andy smiled. "Did you know they tricked me to get me upstairs that first night with the book? They wanted me to disrupt your argument with Stephen. I had words with them about that when I met up with them to give them the Harry Potter manuscripts the next day. They were genuinely sorry about it and, well, sort of bonded after that. They could see how much I honestly liked you, how I wanted to do what I could to make your life easier."

Miranda looked at her in disbelief. "You bonded with my girls after they almost got you fired?"

Andy looked at her. "I think they were very impressed." Andy laughed. "I have a sneaking suspicion their mom was too."

As they turned the corner towards the Townhouse Miranda stopped walking bringing Andy to a standstill. Turning towards the younger woman, hand still entangled she said. "Andréa, you
astound me at every turn." Cupping the side of Andy's face with her free hand she pulled her in for a brief kiss. They broke apart as Andy's iPhone buzzed with an incoming message. Pulling the cell out of her pocket she saw Cassidy and Caroline's name flashing on the screen.

"It's the twins." Andy pulled up the message and scanned it quickly.

**Dad went crazy when he saw Page Six.**

**He's told us we are staying here permanently.**

**He told us we aren't allowed to call Mom.**

**We don't want to stay here; we want to be home with you and Mommy.**

**He doesn't know we have the cell with us.**

**Please come and get us.**

Cass xx

"Is Greg homophobic?" Andy asked Miranda as she took her hand and pulled her towards the house.

"No, well not that I'm aware of. His parents were conservative, but he's lived in New York for over 25 years, his best friend in college was gay. What's going on Andréa?" Miranda asked breathlessly, she was almost running to keep up with Andy's stride.

"He's told them they aren't coming home; he's refusing to let them call you. They want to come home." Andy looked back and explained quickly. "I'm going there and getting your daughters back. Do you have a copy of your custody agreement?" Andy asked.

"Yes. But the twins don't know he surrendered his parental rights away. I never wanted to hurt them with the fact he didn't want them." Miranda said heart-brokenly.

Andy stopped as she reached the house. Shuffling from one foot to the other she let go of Miranda and looked at her as she opened the door. "Sweetheart." She whispered. "You know I would never voluntarily hurt them, I will not disclose that if I can help it. I can hopefully make him see reason if I go there armed with copies of the legal documents."

"I'm going with you. Let me get the documents and I'll call my lawyer." Miranda said quickly as she rushed to the study.

Grabbing her iPhone she fired a message back to the twins.

My little imps

Your mom and I will be there as soon as we can.

Get your things together, but don't make it obvious.

No matter what you will come home with us.

We love you both so very much. xox

xxxxxxxxxx

As Andy drove them out to Harrison in the Porsche Miranda told her of her talk with her Lawyer. "Maxwell reminded me of how difficult it was to Greg's Parental rights terminated, the courts didn't want to proceed with it as I didn't have another adult who was ready, willing and able to fill the void. The law prefers Children to have a right to a parental relationship and a right to receive financial support and care from two parents. I never received a penny from Greg. I didn't need it or want it. If he takes this back to court, the girls would have to stand up in front of the judge." Miranda was saddened by the turn of events.
"I know how to fix this, my love. Trust me." Andy placed her hand on Miranda's thigh. "You know how Max asked to speak with me?" Miranda nodded once. "Well, he knows my dad," Andy shook her head. "My dad deals in corporate law, my mom in probate, my sister Jill is joining the business, and she has chosen criminal law. They were hoping to expand into family law once I joined the business." Andy explained. "Well, Max asked me if we were serious. I told him it was a forever thing." Miranda's eyes widened as Andy continued to explain. "He told me that as you have sole physical and legal custody, you are the only one able to make important decisions about your children's care. You allow visitation with Greg, it is not his legal right, and it was never discussed as part of the custody agreement due to him surrendering his rights." Andy smiled softly. "I have the perfect fix for this but it'll take some bluffing on both our parts."

"What on Earth are you thinking darling?" Miranda asked curiously.

"Well as sole custodian for your girls and the fact Greg terminated his own rights willingly...well...oh fuck! This is so not how this was meant to be...well it means you can have your children adopted by a second parent without his approval. I suggest we tell him this process has already started."

"You want to adopt my children?" Miranda asked breathlessly.

"It could be Nigel, Emily, anyone you deem would be a suitable second parent. I love the girls Miranda; I would do anything to keep them and you safe and happy." Andy was hesitant, unsure of Miranda's reaction. "It also means that, God forbid, should anything happen to you they would be taken care of."

Miranda was dumbstruck. "Andréa my darling, how are you able to just suggest this? I could be struck down by a Town Car tomorrow and you would be stuck parenting..."

"I wouldn't be stuck doing anything, I would be honoured to act as a parent to two very precocious, incredible little girls. They would be a continual reminder every day of the most beautiful woman I have ever met, the woman who has made me happier in three days than I have ever been." Andy was blushing. "I understand your concerns Miranda, this is all so quick and so far out of left field, but what I told Max was true. I want forever with you if you'll allow it. I want to watch those two little imps grow into the wonderful women they will become."

"Andréa..." Miranda's words stalled as Andy interrupted.

"Just think about it, Miranda. It is not something that has to happen right now, Hell, it doesn't even have to happen. I just hope putting the idea in your ex-husbands head will be enough for Greg to back off from whatever madness he's been hit with."

They sat in silence until they arrived in Harrison. Looking briefly towards Miranda she saw the editor deep in thought. "Sweetheart we're almost there," Andy told her gently.

Miranda shook her head and looked at the brunette in wonder. "Darling." She whispered. "Are you sure this will work?"

Andy flitted her eyes at the older woman, seeing her concern she spoke softly. "I have no idea, my love." She said honestly. "But right now it's the only thing I can think of without involving the authorities."

Miranda shuddered. "Oh, God! Can you imagine the press?"
Andy sighed. "It won't come to that." Andy pulled up to the house and got out of the car, walking around to the passenger side she opened the door for Miranda and handed her out.

"This has to work Andréa. I can't lose them." Miranda whispered. Squeezing her hand gently Andy walked them past the press and up to the front door. Taking a deep breath she knocked.

The door was opened quickly by Caroline who squeaked when they saw her mom and Andy. Pulling them into the house she launched herself at Miranda crying. "Mommy he found our cell and saw Cassie's texts to Andy. He threw me and Charity out of the room and shouted at her. I hate him." Caroline sobbed.

Andy knelt on the floor in front of the little redhead. "Baby, listen. I will sort this out but I need you to stay with your mom, okay? Can you take her somewhere quiet, the kitchen perhaps?"

Seeing Caroline nod she stroked her hair. "Where are they, sweetie?" Caroline pointed to a door down the hall. "Give me a few minutes, I'll send Cass to you straight away." Andy smiled sadly as she got up and moved down the hall.

As she approached the door, she could hear Greg raging within the room. Taking a deep breath she opened the door and walked into the room. Greg spun around and fell silent in shock as he saw Andy. Cassidy seeing the young brunette launched herself into her arms. Rubbing circled on the young girl's back she attempted to soothe her. "Shh baby, it's okay," Andy whispered softly.

"Get the fuck out of my house." He demanded. "You're trespassing, I'll call the police."

"Do that Greg. And I will tell them how you are forcibly keeping Miranda's daughters from her. And watch your language."

"They aren't just Miranda's daughters." He seethed. "They're mine."

Andy raised her eyebrow. "Do you really want to go into technicalities now, with your daughter present?" Andy asked. Seeing him hesitate Andy looked down at the girl in her arms. "Cass baby, go on to the kitchen and send your mom to us. I need to speak with your dad. Okay?" Cassidy nodded and ran from the room.

"Now you look here, you can't just barge in here and throw your weight around." Greg sputtered.

"I was invited into this house by your other daughter. Frankly, this is the last place I want to be, it's cold in here. This place lacks the warmth and happiness of Miranda's." Andy smirked. "As for the technicalities, and the reason I am here, you have no rights over those girls Greg."

"What the fuck would you know?" Greg declared indignantly.

"Everything." Andy pulled out the copy of the custody agreement and Greg's Statement of Consent for the surrender of his parental rights. Andy walked past him and placed them on his desk.

"According to this custody agreement, and I've seen my fair share of them over the years, you rescinded all rights to decide anything involving the twin's upbringing, and this includes their education, medical treatment or religious upbringing. Miranda has legal and physical custody; you voluntarily surrendered your parental rights to their mother. You're actually extraordinarily lucky Miranda has allowed visitation."

"You...you...but..." Greg sputtered as Andy looked at him with burning anger blazing in her eyes. Hearing the door snick open she unleashed her fury.

"I have major concerns over your parenting skills Greg," Andy told him, her anger colouring her tone of voice. "I heard you screaming at Cassidy as I came into this room. She does not need to be
frightened in that way. She deserves unconditional love and emotional support from both parents. I know when I adopt those beautiful girls they will get whatever they require from me a second parent. I will gladly give them the world."

She could see Greg turning puce, the vein in his temple was throbbing as he attempted to get himself in control. Turning slightly he saw his ex-wife. "Miranda." He bristled. "You're honestly not going to let her get away with this?"

"Actually Gregory I am. Andrée loves my girls, they love her. We all want her in our lives. To be honest, you are a hypocrite. It's okay for you to have a much younger lover, Charity at the moment, Rebecca before her, Anna before that, numerous women that seem to get younger every year. But when I do the same, it's wrong? Would it be the same if Andy was a younger man or is it the fact I have found love with a woman?" Miranda asked gently.

Seeing him look embarrassed Andy knew the reason behind his anger. She sighed. "It's neither of those is it Greg?" Andy asked lightly. "You simply hate the fact Miranda has found someone she can love completely. You've finally realised what you lost, what you threw away all those years ago."

Shame filled Greg's eyes as Miranda looked at him curiously. "But Stephen?" She queried confused.

Andy caught her eye. "Stephen was never a threat, was he Greg?" She asked him blandly.

He looked down muttering quietly. "No, no threat at all. You didn't love him."

Miranda rolled her eyes. "Gregory, I will always be grateful for the gift of our children but what we had...that love...well you destroyed that." She offered him a sad smile. "I'm taking my girls home. You should try to apologise to them but after today I don't expect they'll want to speak to you for a while." She turned and walked out of the room calling for the twins.

Greg caught Andy's gaze and tried to stare her down. Unwavering she offered him one of her brightest smiles. "That won't work on me Greg, I spent most the last year dealing with your ex-wife and frankly she's a lot more frightening than you."

Greg snorted. "Andy, isn't it?" Seeing her nod he continued. "I think she's met her match in you. Good luck with that, I think you're both going to need it." He handed her the twin's iPhone.

Andy's smile widened even further. As she turned to walk from the room, she called over her shoulder. "Merry Christmas Greg, no doubt we'll see each other again."

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Chapter 9

The twins were quiet as Miranda drove them back to the City. Caroline and Cassidy were holding
hands and peeking glances at Andy.

"Andy?" Caroline said.

"Yes, Caro?" Andy replied with a smile.

"Do you love us?" Cassidy asked nervously.

"Yes Cass, I love you both very much." Turning in the passenger seat she looked at the twins.
Seeing their look of disbelief she whispered. "Why are you asking me this my little imps?" Cassidy
cried as Caroline looked on with tears pooling in her eyes. "Sweetheart, please stop the car," Andy
asked Miranda breathlessly. Her heart beat fast as she fought against her rising panic. She had
never seen the twins so hurt or upset.

As Miranda found a safe place to stop Andy launched herself from the front of the car, pulling her
seat forward she clambered between the twins and pulled the seat back in place.

It was a tight squeeze with her long legs so she picked Cassidy up and pulled her onto her lap.
Gesturing Caroline over onto her lap as well she stretched out across the back seat and wrapped her
arms around them both as they lay across her chest.

"Hush babies, it's okay. I'm here and your mom is too." Andy whispered hoarsely, fighting against
the lump in her throat from her unshed tears. As they both settled in against her Cassidy continued
to sob. She held them tightly placing a soft kiss on each of their heads.

"Dad said you don't really want us, that you're just putting up with us because of Mom and that
you're only with her because of who she is and what she can give to you," Cassidy admitted as she
snuggled into Andy's neck.

At the young girl's words, Andy's tears flowed. "Your dad's right in a way. Your mom has a lot to
offer someone." She told them.

As Cassidy attempted to move off Andy's lap, anger clear behind the tears Andy pulled her tighter
to her chest.

"Cass, please let me finish what I was saying." She asked quietly. Seeing Cassidy's small nod she
continued to speak to the twins softly. "As I was saying your dad's right when he says your mom
has a lot to offer. Other people will form a similar opinion, they will see the age difference between
your mom and I and they'll believe I am after her money or her position of power. Your mom has
done amazing things with her life and they will think I am trying to gain an advantage from it.
They, however, don't know me like you do, they do not know what's in my heart." Andy sighed
sadly.

"I didn't know who your mom was before I worked for her, they sold the job as one a million girls
would kill for, I, however, never saw it that way, it was a job to pay the bills. Along the way my
view changed, I was working for an exceptional woman who had two very precious children.
Somewhere along the way, I fell in love with all three of them. I love your mom, you know I have
for the longest time. You two probably knew it before I even realised what it was I was feeling.
Once I realised the depth of my feelings, all I wanted was to be able to love you all and have my
love returned. I couldn't see how that could ever happen though, your mom is beautiful and
accomplished and I'm so terribly ordinary."

Caroline raised her head, seeing the tears flowing down Andy's face, stroked her face tenderly before settling back into her previous position. Cassidy followed suit. Placing another kiss on both head's Andy hugged the young girls to her as she caught Miranda's eyes. Miranda also had tears streaming down her face as she offered Andy a small smile.

She looked at Miranda as she continued to speak. "I ran away in Paris. I didn't know how to handle the feelings I had. Running away hurt though, I missed you all so very much. Part of me wanted to cut off all contact, to lessen the ache I felt from our distance, but I couldn't do that to you. I remembered the promises I made to each of you I would always be there for you. I meant it my loves. As soon as I heard you wanted me here, I planned, and I came home."

Andy looked down at the twins and gave them a smile as she spoke. "I have nothing to offer you but my heart, it's yours. I've knowingly given it to the three of you, and each of you can break it or keep it safe. And I trust in you, that you will guard and cherish it, as I do yours." Andy swiped her tears. "Now my imps, I need you to believe me when I tell you I love you girls like you were my own children."

"I believe you, I can see it in your eyes," Caroline told her softly as she looked up at the brunette. "If I am ever blessed with babies, I can only hope they are half as amazing as you two are," Andy told them both softly. "I want you all to know I'm not going anywhere, I promise. It won't always say or do the right thing and I'll no doubt drive your mom crazy, but I want this, the four of us muddling through life, a family. I will always love and protect you." Andy told them.

"I'm sorry." Cassidy sobbed as she wrapped her arms tighter around Andy.

"There's no need to be sorry." Andy soothed.

"We automatically believed what dad said, we didn't think about how you feel," Caroline confirmed.

"My loves, you will never hear me speak poorly about your father but he doesn't know me, he made an assumption about me based on a poorly written article in a tabloid newspaper, many people will do it. But I don't care as long as the three of you know the truth." Andy confirmed.

"You love us," Cassidy whispered.

"Yes, I do," Andy confirmed.

"And we love you," Caroline told her.

"I hope so," Andy said.

"And you'll never leave," Miranda said.

Looking across at the older woman she caught her eye and said. "I'll never leave you again. I promise."

"Acceptable." The three of them chimed simultaneously causing the young woman to burst into a fit of giggles.

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They pulled up at the Townhouse an hour later, the twins fast asleep against Andy's chest. Stroking their hair Andy whispered. "C'mon my loves, we're home. Miranda smiled at the sight of her beloved daughters snuggled in her love's arms as she got out of the car. Pulling the seats forward she hoisted Caroline into her arms with a small grunt as Cassidy snuggled in further. "Honey, we're home now, time to move," Andy whispered again to the sleeping redhead.

"Don't wanna, warm," Cassidy mumbled sleepily. Pulling the young girl closer Andy gingerly extracted herself from the car, holding her precious cargo securely.

Miranda fumbled with the key as she attempted to hold her daughter and unlock the door. Rolling her eyes she finally managed to get it open and entered the Townhouse and made her way upstairs to the den as Andy followed slowly behind.

Placing Caroline on the wide sofa Miranda stood and stretched as Andy walked into the room. Noticing the tight grip her daughter had on Andy she tried to untangle her hands from the front of Andy's t-shirt. "Bobbsey, you need to let go of Andréa so she can put you down." Miranda attempted to coax

"No! Not lettin' go ever." Cassidy mumbled. With a sigh, Andy sat herself down on the opposite side of the sofa to Caroline, the weight of the sleeping child against her chest.

"Cassidy do you want to bake cookies?" Andy asked gently. At that Cassidy sat up straight and let go of Andy's shirt. Rubbing her eyes she looked around.

"We're home?" She asked.

"Yes, my love. You were doing a rather amazing impression of a comatose sloth as I brought you upstairs." Andy smiled at her as she stroked the wild red hair out of the young girl's face.

"Did you say cookies?" Cassidy asked eyes wide. Miranda snorted out a laugh.

"Yes. Would you like to help me bake some? It's not really Christmas without warm gingerbread cookies."

"Yes!" Cassidy jumped off Andy's knee and shook Caroline awake. "Wake up sleepyhead, we're making cookies with Andy."

Miranda and Andy grinned at the twin antics as Caroline woke up and happily launched herself at Andy. "Hey, I only just got untangled from one baby monkey." Andy smiled at the redhead in her arms.

"I think you likened my other daughter to a comatose sloth." Miranda deadpanned, a twinkle of amusement shining in her blue eyes.

Andy smiled up at the older woman. "Are you going to help too?" At Miranda's answering smile and a nod of agreement, Andy said. "C'mon then kiddo's, go wash up and meet me in the kitchen." Caroline jumped off her knee and dragged Cassidy from the room as Andy looked on happily.

"You were truly wonderful with them in the car," Miranda told her as she sat by her side and entwined their fingers.

"I couldn't bear to see them hurting Sweetheart, it was like someone had punched me in the chest. My heart ached when I saw the disbelief in their eyes. I could throttle Greg for putting that doubt in their head but I understand where he was coming from."
"You are much more understanding than I would be in your situation my darling. I'll admit that I was scared Greg would keep my girls away from me but I had faith you wouldn't let that happen. You handled it marvellously, you continue to astound me," Miranda told her.

"You and the girls mean everything to me, Miranda, I won't let anyone or anything hurt any of you, including their father. After you left the room, he attempted to stare me down, he's not quite as frightening as you though and I told him so." Andy smirked. "His parting words were that he believed you had met your match."

Miranda laughed. "You really are a sleeping dragon."

"And don't you forget it." Andy gave the woman a bright smile as she heard the thundering of little feet down the stairs. "We should go down, God only knows what mischief they can get up to unattended in the kitchen."

Walking into the kitchen hand in hand Andy and Miranda found the girls raiding the pantry and fridge. "What are you terrors looking for?"

"Ingredients, I have flour, baking powder and sugar, what else do I need?" Cassidy asked.

"Well, we will also need baking soda, salt, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, molasses and Vanilla," Andy told her. "What do you have Caro?"

"Eggs and butter," Caroline responded happily.

"Ah that's great, the only thing I need now is a lemon."

"Lemon?" Miranda questioned as she sat at the breakfast bar.

"Yes a lemon, I use the zest," Andy explained with a smile as Miranda grabbed mixing bowls and utensils.

"Right Cass, do you have everything? Andy asked.

"I think so." She replied hesitantly as she placed the final items on the bench.

Andy looked at the ingredients happily. "These cookies will be epic." She said happily. "Right who wants to measure and who wants to mix?" Andy asked the twins. They glanced at each other formulating a plan.

"I'll measure," Caroline said happily. "Cass will mix."

She winked at Miranda as she handed her a lemon and a small bowl. "If you could zest this lemon it would be much appreciated." Looking at the twins she fired off instructions. "Okay Caro, I need 3 cups of flour, one and a half teaspoons of baking powder, three quarters of a teaspoon of baking soda, a quarter teaspoon of salt, one tablespoon of ginger, 1 and three quarters of a teaspoon of cinnamon and a quarter teaspoon of ground cloves put into that bowl," Andy explained.

"On it boss," Caroline said happily as she measured ingredients.

Andy grinned. "Cass when Caro has finished with that I will need you whisk the stuff together until it's well blended."

Pulling out the Kitchenaid Andy beat butter, brown sugar, and egg on medium speed. She added
the molasses and vanilla as she waited for the lemon zest, which she added once Miranda had completed her chore.

Miranda got up from the breakfast bar and left the room leaving the zest on the counter.

"Is this good?" Cassidy asked after a few minutes.

Looking at the mixture Andy smiled. "It's perfect. Come over here and help me mix it. It needs to be done slowly." Andy asked.

"Yes, chief." Cassidy grinned wickedly. They poured the dry ingredients into the Kitchenaid slowly as they blended it all into a smooth dough before switching the Kitchenaid off.

"I need two sheets of plastic wrap," Andy told Caroline. As she pulled the wrap from its roll and laid it out on the bench Andy divided the cookie dough into two. "We need to leave this for an hour or so, two would be better now," Andy explained as Miranda re-entered the room with a smile on her face.

"Movie?" She asked them happily.

"Yes!" The three of them said unanimously.


Andy grabbed her journals and pen from the study as they moved towards the living room, smiling at the raised eyebrow on the editor's face.

"Do you have much more writing to do?" Miranda asked quietly as she followed the young woman.

"Just a few more pages and I'll be done," Andy told her. "You don't mind?" She asked hesitantly.

"No." Miranda smiled. "I'm grateful just to have your presence in the room," Miranda said.

"I love you," Andy whispered as she pulled Miranda into a hug.

"And I love you, my darling," Miranda said smiling brightly. "Now let's see what movie my terrors have chosen?"

Andy grabbed Miranda's hand and led her up the stairs to the living room. Making their way to the sofa each sat in the same spots as before. The twins rather than sitting on their beanbags snuggled between the women.

"What are you writing?" Cassidy asked as she wrapped herself around Andy.

"Just my journal," Andy explained. "I want to get everything down while I remember it." Andy smiled at the young redhead. "So what have you chosen to watch?" She asked.

"Miracle on 34th Street. It's the 1947 original, it's mom's favourite Christmas movie." Caroline grinned across at her from Miranda's side.

"It's one of mine too along with It's a Wonderful Life. I like the new one too." Andy sat back as Miranda started the movie, a gentle smile forming on her face.

Pulling her feet underneath her Andy rested her journals open on the arm of the sofa and scribbled on a new page as she occasionally glanced at the writing within her old journal and occasionally across to the TV. Cassidy lay curled up with her head on Andy's thigh and occasionally Andy ran
her fingers through the young girl's wild red curls.

About an hour into the movie Andy's attention was captured by a question. "Andy what did you want for Christmas when you were our age?" Caroline asked curiously.

"Mm, that's easy. A Sega Game Gear or Nintendo Gameboy. They were expensive though. I think it was the year I got a new Super Soaker, my first leather bound journal and some Troll Dolls." Andy grinned happily at memories of her ten-year-old self. "It was different back then, the advances in technology over the last 15 years has been amazing."

Miranda snorted back a laugh. "I can picture you at ten with a big grin and unruly curls soaking everyone with freezing water."

Andy laughed. "I'm pretty sure that was the case, I'll have to ask..." Andy stalled as she realised she couldn't ask her parents to share their memories of Christmas past. Tears sprang to her eyes. "Anyway I bought myself my first handheld console aged twelve, I saved birthday and Christmas money from aunts, uncles and my grandparents and the cash made from doing odd jobs." She swiped her eyes and focused in her journal until she gained control of her whirling emotions.

"Why did you have to save?" Cassidy asked. "Didn't your parents give you what you wanted?" She looked up at the brunette curiously.

"They gave me everything I needed Cass. I was brought up in a middle-class family. My parents are lawyers but my mom only worked part-time hours, she spent a lot of my childhood as a stay-at-home mom. We weren't poor but there wasn't always a vast amount of money floating around for luxuries." Andy explained gently. "You girls are extraordinarily lucky. Your mom works like a crazy lady to provide you with this life. To give you the best education, to give you whatever you want and need." Andy smiled at the young girl.

"Will we meet your parents?" Cassidy asked gently.

"I don't know Cass. They're not really supportive of some decisions I've made over the last few years." Andy said hesitantly. "I hope you get to meet them one day, they always wanted grandchildren."

"Well, you have us. We'll always support you." Cassidy told Andy as she wrapped her arms around her.

Extracting herself with a quick apology Andy closed her journals and made her way from the room and to the bathroom. Leaning her back against the door she let her tears fall. She felt she couldn't let the twins see her fall apart. She took her time to get her emotions under control before splashing her face with cold water to remove the telltale tear marks.

Opening the door she walked straight into Miranda and was pushed back into the room. "The girls are worried. Are you okay my darling?" Miranda queried softly as she brushed an errant curl out of Andy's eyes.

"I'm fine, or I will be. I just...you know...I just...I didn't want to break down in front of them. They've already had such an emotional day." Andy explained as she fought against a fresh onslaught of tears. "I can't believe my parents are being so..."

"They want what is best for you Andréa, as do I. Right now their views may not be in alignment with yours but they will come around my love. They will be there to celebrate your successes in life, which I am positive will be many. Just give them time." Miranda told her gently as she swiped
at the single tear that had made its escape from her words.

"I want to believe that, I want to hope. How do you do it, sweetheart? How do you continue to find that ray of hope in the darkness?" Andy asked.

"It is only in the darkness we can see the stars." Miranda sighed sadly. "I learned a long time ago that hope isn't pretending that our troubles don't exist my darling, it is knowing they won't last forever. You have me and our girls supporting you at every step and you will heal and overcome your difficulties, coming out of this pain stronger and more resilient." Miranda told her. "May I ask something?"

"Anything," Andy whispered.

"When you came home you said you were following your heart, but what pushed you? Was it the feeling that happiness might come from your choice?" Miranda asked.

"Yes, with a healthy dose of fear I may be rejected," Andy told her softly.

Miranda pulled her in and held her close as she whispered. "That feeling pushing you was hope my darling, and hope is the only thing stronger than fear." Miranda pulled back and gave her a bright smile. "You have hope within you Andréa, it may be well hidden but you simply have to search for it, find the courage to grasp it and not let your fears overwhelm you. You are one of the bravest people I have had the pleasure to meet, you are amazing." Placing a soft kiss on Andy's lips Miranda stepped back and made to leave her. "I will leave you to do what you need. We will wait for you my darling, we will be there when you are ready to return to us."

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Andy returned to the living room fifteen minutes later armed with juice, diet soda, coffee and a family bag of Cheetos. Squealing the twins launched themselves towards her to grab the snacks. Cassidy ran back to the sofa Cheetos raised triumphantly over her head.

"Well I know how to get around you two, all that's needed is a well-timed Cheetos run." Andy smiled happily at the twins.

"Where did you go?" Cassidy asked.

"Have you been crying, your eyes are red?" Caroline asked softly.

"I went to get snacks, make coffee for your mom and check the cookie dough. Should be ready to roll and bake once the movie's over." Andy said thinking she had successfully dodged Caroline's question.

Caroline stood looking up at her, blue eyes, so much like her mothers, gazing up at her with affection before wrapping her arms around Andy. Holding her tight she mumbled into Andy's stomach incoherently.

"What was that Caro?" Andy asked softly.

Stepping back she looked back up at her and smiled. "I said we love you. We want you to be happy with us."

"I am, my gorgeous girl, I promise. There will be occasional things that make me sad and I may sometimes need a few minutes to get myself together but it's not because of being here with you." Andy explained. "Come on let's finish watching this movie, we have about 30 minutes until the
dough has settled enough." Leading the young girl to the sofa she placed the cold drinks on the table, handing Miranda her coffee with a brief smile, she picked Caroline up and sat her on her lap as Cassidy snuggled back in. Placing a soft kiss on both heads she whispered. "I love you all."

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The movie ended and Andy led the twins back to the kitchen. Miranda followed behind and attached her iPod to the Bose speakers and played Christmas songs as she perched herself at the breakfast bar.

"Right my little imps, as you can see the oven's preheating I organised the baking trays. I need cookie cutters, more flour and rolling pins." Cassidy ran to the drawers and pulled out a range of cookie cutters as Caroline grabbed the flour and two rolling pins. Grinning, they both made their way back to Andy.

"I want to do Gingerbread people," Cassidy said.

"Well, I want Santa and Christmas trees," Caroline said sticking her tongue out at her sister.

"Okay, no arguments. Caroline, please give your sister a rolling pin and we'll get started." She sprinkled flour in two spots on the worktop at either side of her and placed the doughs in each spot. "Right sprinkle a light coating of flour on top of your dough and on your rolling pins and roll your dough until it's an even 1/4-inch. If it sticks use more flour. okay? When that's done cut out as many cookies as you can and place them on the baking trays."

"Yes, Andy." They replied together.

Andy made her way over to the older woman. Stroking the side of Miranda's face she looked at her and offered a sweet smile. "What would you like for dinner?"

"We could order out. I'm sure the girls wouldn't mind. How about Thai?" Miranda asked.

"I can cook if you like, I have a few recipes for a Thai dishes. There's a superb Thai beef and broccoli stir-fry dish I learned, it pairs really well with coconut rice." Andy smiled happily.

"That sounds delicious," Miranda whispered as she placed a kiss on her cheek. "Do not feel you have to do this for us, Andréa."

"Maybe I want to, my love," Andy told her.

"Well, who am I to refuse you anything?" Miranda questioned softly causing Andy to grin.

"I best go back to the terrors before they take it upon themselves to start a flour fight." Hearing a snort coming from behind her she turned and rolled her eyes as the twins gave her a faux-innocent look before pelting her with flour. Andy playfully growled as she stalked towards them causing them to squeal as she picked up a handful of flour and blew it over them before they all laughed.

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A few hours passed since Andy and the twins had baked their cookies and she had helped them to decorate them. They'd all settled back in the living room to watch movies and play board games.

Andy was relaxed, she'd spend the rest of the afternoon and early evening laughing with the twins and teasing Miranda. She had found the editor was a poor loser after a game of Scrabble ended with Miranda tipping the board over and declaring the game quite ridiculous. She had cooked an early
dinner of Thai Beef with Broccoli with coconut rice for the Priestly's who had raved about it, and they'd extracted promises she'd cook for them again soon. After dinner, they had made their way back to the living room.

Getting up from her seat she made her way to the bedroom she had been sharing with Miranda and searching through her luggage found the packages she had set aside for them all. Smiling, she made her way back to the living room.

Entering the room she found three pairs of blue eyes on her sparkling with curiosity at the gift-wrapped packages in her hands. "We had a tradition when I was growing up I wanted to share with you," Andy explained. She handed the gifts over. "Every Christmas Eve we got to open one gift, it was always the same thing. Please open them." She smiled at the expression of excitement on the twins face as they tore at the wrappings.

Opening the gifts they looked down to find brightly coloured silks.

"What is it?" Miranda asked softly.

Cassidy shook out the purple silk in her hands and gasped at the intricate design of the kurta and churidar custom pyjamas in her hands, she traced the silver embroidery around the neck of the kurta. "Wow! They're beautiful." She whisperered reverently. "What colour did you get Caro?"

"Mine's green with silver embroidery," Caroline said happily. "What about you, mom?" She asked.

Miranda gently opened her package and looked down. She saw the matching silver embroidery emblazoned on blue silk. "Cerulean." She whispered her eyes blazing with happiness. "I see you have a similar package, what colour did you choose for yourself?"

Andy smiled and opened her package. "To be exact, it was violet for Cass, emerald green for Caro, cerulean for you my love, and I requested a fire engine red for myself." Andy smiled happily as she shook her pyjamas out of their packaging. Miranda snorted her laughter causing Andy's shoulders to shake with her own silent laughter. Getting herself under control she told them. "I had them custom made at a shop I found in Delhi. When I knew I was coming home, I asked them to ship them to the U.S. I picked them up the morning of my arrival, even before I had booked into that hotel." Andy grinned happily as the twins launched themselves at her and wrapped their arms around their waist.

"Thanks, Andy," Caroline whispered.

"You're welcome honey," Andy told her gently.

"I can't believe you remembered our favourite colours," Cassidy said.

"I remember everything you have ever shared with me my little imps," Andy said as she gave them a tighter squeeze.

Releasing themselves from Andy they scooped up their new pyjamas and stormed out of the room and upstairs declaring a pyjama night was needed.

Andy walked over to Miranda who was smiling gently at her. "Thank you Andréa, they are beautiful."

Andy blushed. "It was just a little something."

"Handmade to exact specifications, hand embroidered. A lot of work went into the choices and into
"That's the second time you have referred to them as ours, Miranda," Andy said as tears sprang to her eyes.

"You offered yourself up as a second parent. I assume you have not changed your mind." Miranda said with a smirk.

"Never," Andy whispered. "You're all mine and I'm never letting go." Pulling Miranda close she gave her a soft kiss. "Let's go on up, I can't wait to see how your eyes sparkle when you are wearing my favourite blue."

Miranda rolled her eyes. "Come on then, you know how our daughters love to be kept waiting."

"Just like their mother." Andy giggled as she was pulled out of the room by an impatient Miranda.
Fifteen minutes later Miranda walked back into the living room to find Andy and the twins curled up together on the sofa in a similar position they held in the car that afternoon. Pulling her iPhone out she snapped a few photos as they laughed, talked and cuddled and sent them to Nigel. Her cell buzzed quickly causing Andy to glance up with a smile.

nkips: OMG how cute are those three. Donatella wants to know why you're not in the photo. I'm sure that woman's brain is in her ass xox

m.p: Donatella's with you? Don't tell her I'm home, last time it took hours to get rid of her and her usual entourage x

nkips: Too late, she's just called her driver. Pull out your shittiest wine that'll prompt her to leave quickly. xox

Miranda frowned. "Goddamnit."

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" Andy asked softly as Miranda sat beside her.

"It looks like Nigel, Donatella and whatever entourage she has in place is about to descend," Miranda told her.

"Oh, well how bad can it be?" Andy asked. "She is one of your closest acquaintances," Andy smirked.

"You used the correct term there. She is an acquaintance. I struggle with the whole friendship thing. I have Nigel and now you. And I'm happy with that. Donatella's just a bit full on." Miranda told her. "And we are settled for the evening, I'm in my pyjamas for Christ's sake."

"And you are beautiful my love," Andy told her with a smile. "Should we go get changed back?"

"Not a chance, this is a new tradition for our family, if they don't like it they can leave," Miranda stated firmly.

"I like Donatella mom, she's so outrageous." Cassidy grinned happily.

"And she calls us the devil's children 'because of the red hair." Caroline giggled.

"No?" Andy exclaimed in horror. "She better not do so in front of me."

"Watch out for any Italian words including Diavolo or Demonio then," Cassidy told Andy mischief lighting up her eyes as she looked up at the brunette.

"It's not funny Cass. I know a few people in school who were bullied because they had red hair. One of my friends was told that she had no soul because it, it made her feel awful. I have to admit that frequently when dealing with Emily, I came to the same conclusion, I think it may just be her, though."

Miranda chuckled at that and shook her head. "Tell Andréa what I told you all those years ago." She asked.

"Mom told us that having red hair is like having a natural superpower because the ginger gene is a
natural mutation. And as our hair keeps its natural pigment a lot longer than other hair colours, it will fade like moms did to that gorgeous silvery-white." Caroline grinned happily.

"Well, your mom's hair is a beautiful colour." Andy grinned. "I love your unruly red hair, I think you're both beautiful."

"I like your hair, it's wild," Cassidy told her. "And Caro loves your eyes, they were the first thing she noticed. She said they were kind."

"Shut up..." Caroline hissed at her sister blushing with embarrassment.

"Hey, no arguing," Andy told them gently offering them a grin and another hug.

"If we are having guests, I suppose we should move," Cassidy offered.

"You can sit with me or on me as long as you like. My lap's available for all three of you anytime." Andy told them.

"Nah it's okay. If Donatella's coming she'll expect us to perform something on the Piano, she always says something about mom raving about our piano skills. We'll go arrange snacks." Caroline smiled at Andy as she and Cassidy moved off her lap and out of the room.

"So your lap's always available?" Miranda asked with a smirk. Seeing Andy nod she moved across and perched herself on it happily, snuggling into Andy with a sigh. "I'm sorry we're about to get bombarded with unexpected guests."

"It's all right, sweetheart. I can always unleash my pet dragon if things get too out of hand." Andy grinned happily as Miranda chuckled. "Seriously though, I will not allow for anyone to disrespect you or the girls in your home."

"Our home," Miranda told her. "I want this to be your home too. I want us to continue to make memories here, like these." Miranda showed her the photo's she'd taken and sent to Nigel. "I adore this one of you laughing as the girls kissed your cheeks. It's beautiful." Miranda smiled. "All we need now is one of us."

"Well, that's easy enough." Andy grinned widely. "Give me your cell." She asked. As the cell was handed over she extended her hand and looked at Miranda. "Smile my love." She smiled happily as Miranda poked her tongue out at her. Capturing it on camera she pulled her arm back and viewed it. "This here's a perfect one for Page Six." Andy laughed.

Miranda peered at the photo and smiled as she sent it to Andy's cell. "I think we can do better than that." Straddling Andy's lap she put the camera on. Extending her arm outwards she caught Andy's lips in a gentle kiss and took a photo. Dropping her cell on the sofa beside them she pulled her arm back and viewed it. "This here's a perfect one for Page Six." Andy laughed.

"Bella Miranda...Ah, I'm so sorry to interrupt..." They broke apart at the softly accented voice coming from the doorway, as Miranda glanced over her shoulder she met the shocked gaze of Donatella and Nigel who was grinning widely.

"Hi Donatella, hey Nige," Andy said with a bright smile over Miranda's shoulder.

"Miranda, you should greet your unexpected guests." Andy reminded her with a smirk.

Miranda turned back to the brunette and rolled her eyes. Giving her a brief kiss she slid off her knee
and stalked across the room. "Good evening, what an unexpected pleasure," Miranda said, her tone showing it was anything but.

"Sì, Nigel received a photo. I thought you would be at the Hampton's house for the holiday." Donatella said, her disbelief clear in her tone.

"Well, things surprisingly changed three days ago," Miranda said waving in Andy's direction. "My Andréa came back from Asia and well as you can see there's been a significant change in our relationship."

"You are in your pyjamas?" Donatella was shocked.

"Yes, I am," Miranda said. "We were not expecting guests and were settling in for a night of movies with the twins." She offered a cold smile. "Would you care for a glass of wine or something stronger, perhaps?"

"Who designed these?" Donatella demanded as she stroked the silk and silver embroidery at Miranda's wrist.

Pulling her wrist back Miranda appeared disgusted by the touch. "They were custom made in India..."

"But who designed them?" Donatella asked again.

Andy stood and stalked across the room and clasped Miranda's hand entwining their fingers. "I did." She said, blushing at the expression of shock and amazement on the other women's faces and the confusion on Nigel's.

"You? I saw you when you first arrived in Runway, in your ugly skirts and blouses. True, you became better dressed to a certain extent, but what gave you the impression you could design something and have one of the greatest women in fashion wear it?" Donatella hissed at her in disbelief.

"My love for her did," Andy told her, unable to mask her anger at the Italian woman's words. "I provided something comfortable for my Miranda to wear after a long day filled with incompetence, something as beautiful as she is, something that can offer a multitude of magnificent colours to delight the senses and an intricacy in design you know was achieved with nothing but love and dedication by those blessed enough to have the creativity to do so." Andy looked over at Donatella's canary yellow dress, perfectly moulded to her skin, a thigh-high split allowing movement, feathers aligning the shoulder strap and smirked. "A design so simple in execution it doesn't look like a Sylvester has vomited Tweety Pie's feathers all over it." Andy smiled with fake innocence as Nigel and Miranda fought against their laughter and Donatella sputtered, unable to find a comeback. "Now if you'll excuse me, I must go find the twins."

"They're in the kitchen with Emily and Serena. I'll walk down with you." Nigel told her with a chuckle. "We'll go on a wine hunt while we're at it. Come on Six."

"Lead on Nige, I think wine may be a necessity tonight." She brushed a kiss against Miranda's cheek and gave her a wink. "I'll see you very soon my love."

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Nigel led Andy down the stairs holding back his laughter. As they reached the ground floor he sat on the bottom of the stairs and let his laughter run free. Wiping his eyes with his handkerchief he said. "God Six, I forgot how proficient you were at providing a barbed comment when necessary.
You could seriously give Miranda a run for her money. The only difference is that you do it with a smile leaving the recipient in doubt as to the meaning."

"That damn woman is infuriating. How dare she have the audacity to say what she did?" Andy hissed. "And that dress is fucking hideous. I adored her yellow spring/summer ready-to-wear collection and then she ruins it with feathers and unnecessary embellishments."

Nigel guffawed. "She's jealous Six, she's been trying to dress Miranda for years, and it is a very rare occurrence when Miranda allows herself to be dressed by the House of Versace, having always preferred Valentino." Nigel looked at her. "Any other designs up your sleeves?"

"No, not really, it was just something that came to mind in India. The vast array of silk in a multitude of colour was breathtaking." Andy said with a small smile.

"You've grown some taste at least." This came from across the hall. Upon looking up she saw Emily leaning against the door frame of the kitchen. "Those twin terrors seem almost angelic dressed in their silk pyjamas."

Andy gave her a wide smile. "Where are they?"

Emily nodded her head in the direction of the kitchen. "They're busy regaling Serena with tales of the awesome Andy, it's quite nauseating. I should go say hello to Miranda."

Andy made her way towards her and as they came abreast at the door Andy whispered. "Be careful up there. Donatella is less than amused with the awesome Andy." She grinned at the redhead.

"Well, I'll be in good company then. You realise that you'll have made things at Runway quite difficult. The press had just died down after the divorce." Emily fumed.

"Ah put a sock in it Em, you're such a party pooper," Nigel told her. "Seeing Miranda happy will be worth it."

"And on that note now it's definitely time to find the wine," Andy said as she entered the kitchen.

Andy spent time in the kitchen gathering snacks with the twins and Serena as Nigel looked through Miranda's selection of wine.

After making his choices, Nigel made his way back upstairs with the twins following, leaving Andy and Serena. Serena was laughing as Andy explained that the twins had declared it to be a pyjama night after being handed their Christmas Eve gifts.

"Well, you look delightful querida, red suits you well. And the twin's look happy." She told the brunette. "The whole house seems lighter."

"It's been a crazy few days Serena, it's been an emotional rollercoaster. We're happy though." Andy explained.

"Well as long as you are happy and there is love then nothing else matters," Serena stated. "I am wooing Emily, slowly."

Andy grinned. "That's fantastic, how's it going so far?" She asked.

"It's requiring much patience. She is not always easy to love, I sometimes feel like I take one step
forward and two steps back." Serena sighed. "I should go find her and stake my claim."

"I do not understand how she could she refuse you, you're glorious. Go get your woman sweetie."

Andy gave her a megawatt smile.

"Are you coming too?" Serena asked as she walked away.

"Yeah, I should. I left Miranda with Donatella after I insulted her." Andy grinned as she stepped beside Serena.

"What did you say?" Serena queried.

"Just that her dress looked as if Sylvester had vomited Tweety's feathers all over it." Andy sniggered as they climbed the stairs.

"Ai meu Deus!" Serena exhaled before letting her laughter flow. "You've been missed, Andy," Serena told her exuberantly as they walked into the living room.

Smiling Andy looked around the room to find Emily on her knees with her open journal and loose papers in hand. With two strides she was in front of the redhead, placing the snacks on the coffee table she extended her hand to Emily, anger and disappointment filling her dark eyes. "I'll take those thank you." She stated softly.

"It's not what it looks like..." Emily stuttered. "I knocked them off the armrest and..."

Seeing the look in Andy's eyes she hastily shut the journal and handed everything over. "Your drawings are beautiful Andy," Emily told her softly.

Andy spun on her heels, picking up her new journal from its resting place she stalked from the room.

"What on Earth Em? What was in those pictures?" Nigel whispered curiously as Miranda listened intently zoning Donatella out as she babbled incessantly.

"Miranda, you, the twins, Serena and even me...and some of the most beautiful designs I've ever seen." She whispered to him as she closed her eyes. "My God they were exceptional."

Miranda stood quickly with a tight-lipped apology to Donatella. Walking over to the twins and whispered in their ears. "Mommy has to go check on Andy, I'm sure everyone would love it if you played them some Christmas songs."

"Okay Mom, give Andy a hug and bring her here, she promised she'd sing Hallelujah for us, badly." Cassidy grinned and Miranda returned her smile.

As she made her way from the room, she saw a loose piece of paper on the floor, bending she picked it up and gasped at her likeness on the page, an exact sketch of her as she descended the stairs at the Met Gala.

Nigel saw the picture over her shoulder. "Wow! That's sensational." He whispered. Looking at him over her shoulder Miranda nodded once in agreement. Catching sight of the tears forming behind the look of amazement in her eyes he told her. "Go find her and show her just how incredible she is."

"I had no idea..." Miranda told him.
"I think Six may continue to baffle and surprise us all Mira." He told her with a smile. "Go on now!"

Miranda checked the study before walking upstairs to the bedroom, entering the room she exhaled a sigh of relief at the sight of Andy sat crossed legged on their bed entangled with Christmas gift wrap. Andy looked up and blushed. "Hey, sweetheart." She whispered.

"Hey yourself," Miranda whispered. "I've been looking for you." She smiled softly.

"I needed five minutes. I kind of overreacted with Em." She muttered.

"No, not an overreaction, you came in and saw what you thought was someone going through your journal, it's understandable that you'd be upset, however you remained calm." Miranda walked towards her. "What are you wrapping?" She asked curiously.

"Oh, just a final gift." Andy smiled softly. "I was just about to clear this away and come back down."

"This was on the floor." She sat beside Andy the drawing still in her hand. "I didn't know you could draw," Miranda told her.

Andy blushed furiously. "It's just a hobby, it's not like I'm any good."

"No, you're exceptional." Miranda moved the wrapping paper and laid the picture out between them. "This is mind-blowing my love. Just when I think I know you, how amazing you are, it seems like you give me more to admire about you."

Andy smiled at Miranda's words. "I did that one while I was at the monastery in Nepal. I couldn't get the vision of you from that night out of my head."

"Will you show me the rest?" Miranda asked carefully.

"You really want to see them?" Andy queried stunned. "Like I said, it's just a hobby. It's not like I'm a serious artist or anything and it's obvious you know real art, you have a Picasso in your study."

"You have a natural talent my darling. Even Emily could see your drawings were extraordinary. Please show me the rest." Miranda asked again.

"Okay." Andy got on her knees and reached over to the bedside table. Picking up her journal she pulled the loose sheaths of paper from the middle and handed them to Miranda, her nervousness obvious to the older woman.

Miranda viewed each drawing with a smile, seeing ones of Emily and Serena separately and together. Pointing to one of them both Miranda smiled. "Maybe you should give this one to Emily. You've captured the love in Serena's eyes beautifully. I've seen her give Emily that look in the office many times. Emily is often oblivious."

"Serena is trying to court Em as we speak." Andy grinned. "She says it is not always easy."

"What is with Emily?" Miranda's sigh turned into a wide smile as she flipped to the next drawing. "Oh, I love this one." The drawing she was smiling at was of Nigel, head back laughing while a fashion shoot was going on in the background. "Where did this come from?"
Andy smiled. "That was the Urban Jungle shoot in Central Park. I'd had to run over to the park with an outfit, I was bitching about one thing or another and Nigel told me to adjust my attitude or he'd feed me to one of the models."

Miranda gave her a knowing smirk. "Whatever could you have been bitching about?" The next picture had Miranda gasping. "Oh Andréa, may I have it?" She stared down into the twinkling eyes of her twins drawn on the page, laughter clearly written on their faces, a moment of pure joy captured with the gentle brush of a pencil. "I would cherish it greatly. I would love to have it sat in my office."

"Of course, I'll have it framed for you." Andy smiled at the woman sat beside her as she flipped through more of her drawings, smiling happily at the sketch of Patricia and laughing at her drawings of Irv as a toad and Jacqueline with a skunk tail.

Miranda reached the ones focused on her. She was stunned at Andy's ability to capture her in various moods, from the contemplative as she brushed her pen across her lips as she sat deep in thought behind her desk at Runway, to one where she was leaning against the window as it rained, her cell against her ear with a soft smile on her lips.

"That's one of my favourites, you were talking to the imps." Andy smiled softly.

"How do you capture these moments, my darling?" Miranda asked breathlessly.

"From memory." Andy shrugged. "I watch people, certain things just seem to become ingrained in my mind."

The final drawing really captured Miranda's attention, a self-portrait, she saw the sadness captured in dark eyes even behind the brilliant smile. "This one...this is beautiful but that look in your eyes...that look makes my heart ache," Miranda whispered.

"I did that one in Thailand. After I left Bangkok, I went to Koh Chang. I drew that as I sat on Hat Tha Nam, it's known as the Lonely Beach. It was after you stopped emailing. It wasn't a particularly happy time. I found myself in a dark place." Andy explained.

Miranda clasped her hand. "I am sorry my darling, I did what I thought best." Miranda looked at her tenderly.

"I know, and I understand," Andy told her as she squeezed the hand in hers.

"One day I hope to see a new self-portrait with the happiness you feel expressed in those beautiful eyes." Miranda smiled softly at Andy. "You are incredible my love, you have so many hidden talents. Now, will you show me your designs?"

Andy sputtered. "How...what...how...How do you know about them?"

Miranda smiled. "Well, you admitted to Donatella you had designed these beautiful pyjamas. Emily saw your sketches as she picked up your journal. I understand if you do not wish to show me." Miranda was curious why her love was so hesitant. "Maybe another time though?" She shrugged. "We should go join our guests. Cassidy mentioned something about a promise to sing a song." Miranda stood up and stretched. Andy followed slowly, moving to pick up the gift wrap and other items she had been using prior to Miranda's arrival in the room.

"Miranda, I want..." She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "...I will show you my other sketches. Let's get rid of everyone and get the twins to sleep first. Is that okay?"
Miranda gave her a wide smile. Walking three steps towards Andy she pulled her in for a kiss, whispering. "I love you my Andréa. Thank you for being willing to share this side of yourself with me."

"I want to share everything with you, I want you to know me, Miranda. I love you." Andy told her. Turning away she swiped a tear away and scooped the picture of Emily and Serena up. Rolling it she found a piece of red ribbon leftover from her wrapping and tied it around in a bow. Taking the scissors off her bedside table she scored the ends to create curls. "I think that's Em's Christmas gift sorted." She said with an attempt at brightness. "Come on, the quicker we go down the quicker everyone will leave."

"God I hope so," Miranda whispered hopefully.

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The rest of the evening passed without incident. Donatella often gazing at Andy, curiosity in her eyes, but she refused to speak with her directly. Andy shrugged at Em's raised brow and spent her time talking with the twins and Nigel.

The twins had delighted everyone with renditions of different Christmas songs and carols before moving on to popular hits. Andy shocked everyone by singing Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah accompanied by Cassidy on the piano.

At around 9:30 the twins started yawning. Andy stood up and walked over to the twins, smiling she knelt in front of Cassidy and Caroline. "Right kiddo's bedtime." Hearing multiple protestations about not being tired she laughed. "Well, you'll need a good night's rest to be awake enough to open your presents in the morning." She told them. "Right one on the back one on the front." Cassidy jumped on Andy's back, wrapping her arms around her neck and shoulders causing everyone to smile at the scene unfolding. Holding her arms out to Caroline she smiled. "Come on my love." Caroline moved towards her and she picked the young girl up and stood up quickly causing both girls to giggle and hold on tighter.

Miranda stood and walked over and gave her girls a kiss. "Goodnight my Bobbsey's, sleep well."

"G'night mom." They said simultaneously.

Andy made her way out of the room and up the stairs. Depositing the girls on Cassidy's bed she tucked them into the same bed and lay down next to them. She told them stories about Christmas in other countries until they fell asleep. Kissing their foreheads she left the room and made her way back to Miranda and their guests.

Their guests left shortly after Andy's return to the room. As they made their way out Andy pulled Emily to one side and gave her the drawing of her and Serena. In a moment of sentimentality, Emily pulled Andy into a hug. Andy used it as a chance to whisper encouragement in her ear about Serena. "Just give this thing with Serena a chance Em. Love is precious, it's the greatest gift someone can bestow on you." Emily pushed her away gently blushing furiously.

"I'll take it into consideration," Emily muttered.

"Well, that's certainly a better response than 'shan't'!" Andy grinned at the redhead and was greeted with the rolling of eyes. "Be happy Em and Merry Christmas. I'm sorry about before." She shrugged.

"Be happy yourself Andy, you've been missed." Leaning back in for another hug Emily whispered.
"By Miranda most of all, you better not hurt her."

"I promise," Andy told her breathlessly.

"We must meet up for those drinks, Six." Nigel interrupted them with a wide smile.

"I'll call you Nige or better yet give me your cell and I'll give you my new number." Andy grinned at him as he handed his cell over. She inputted her number quickly and handed his cell back. "Have a good day tomorrow." She told him.

Nigel shook his head. "I'll be heading out to New Jersey first thing in the morning. I can't not see the mother on Christmas Day. It's just a shame my brothers will be there with all their manly chest beating."

"Well, try to enjoy yourself." Andy laughed at him and pulled him in for a hug and kissed his cheek before turning to Serena. "Feliz Natal Serena." Andy grinned.

"And to you Andy. I hope for many blessings to you and Miranda." Serena told her softly. "It's good to see you both happy." Serena pulled her into a hug and kissed both cheeks.

"I hope you can find the same happiness," Andy told her softly. "Don't give up on Em. She's guarded but I think she'll be worth the effort." Pulling back she smiled at her three ex-workmates. Catching Donatella's eye she smiled. "It was a pleasure seeing you again Donatella."

"Likewise," Donatella told her coldly. Kissing Miranda's cheeks enthusiastically she said. "Ciao Bella." She swept from the Townhouse as the others followed calling out their Christmas wishes.

As Miranda closed the door she leaned against it with her eyes closed taking a deep breath. Opening them her eyes blazed as she looked at Andy. "I don't think Donatella is too impressed with you," Miranda told her amusement shining in the depth of her blue eyes.

"To be honest, I wasn't too impressed with her either. Her comment at the start of the evening was unnecessary." Andy told her. "I am already very much aware that there is a vast difference in status between us. I also know I have nothing to offer. I didn't need her input to make me feel even more worthless and unequal to you than I already do."

Andy spun around and stalked to the kitchen as Miranda looked after her in shock. Following slowly Miranda saw Andy stacking the dishwasher. "I'm sorry if I have not made you feel as if you are my equal," Miranda whispered to Andy's back. "It was never my intention..." Miranda trailed off as Andy spun around.

"It's not you Miranda, never think that. I know to you I am your equal and you have treated me as such." She closed her eyes fighting more tears. "To the rest of the world though I'm just some fresh-faced kid who is playing the big leagues, punching well above her weight with an exquisite, highly accomplished, professional woman." Andy took a deep breath as her tears trickled down her face. "She made me uncomfortable tonight. Did you see how she looked at me like I'm some specimen under a fucking microscope? Fair enough, I insulted that horrific dress of hers but she insulted me too. And before you say it I know it was childish of me to retaliate." Andy swiped at her tears and turned back to the dishes.

Walking towards Andy Miranda rested her hand on Andy's back. "While you were in the kitchen with the twins, Nigel and Serena I told her she was wrong in what she said to you. She has never heard me defend someone the way I did you. Her comments to you were inappropriate, she knows
of that. She also knows should you wish it she will not be welcome in our home. She is aware I will not socialise outside Runway if she continues to treat you with a lack of courtesy because by disrespecting you she disrespects me.” She wrapped her arms around Andy's waist. "I will have no one treat you with anything but civility in my presence darling, and if you hadn't answered her so eloquently and insulted her so brilliantly, and with such a beautiful smile, then I would have asked her to leave."

Turning Andy pulled Miranda closer and kissed the crown of her head. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I can't seem to get a grip on my damn emotions."

"Things will settle for us, Andréea. And we'll show the naysayers how wrong they are about us. Now if you've finished with those dishes, I want you to take me to bed." Miranda told her

"But I thought you wanted to see..." Andy's words were cut off as Miranda captured her lips in a penetrating kiss.

"I want to see you...all of you...in our bed," Miranda whispered against her lips. "The rest...well there's always later..."

Andy smiled against the lips, picking Miranda up and welcoming the older woman's legs wrapping around her, she walked out of the kitchen, flicking lights off as she moved them through the house she made her way back to their bedroom as Miranda trailed kisses along her jaw and neck. Kicking the door closed behind her she fumbled one-handed with the lock before moving them towards the bed. Putting Miranda down in the centre she smiled down at the editor as she stepped back.

"Now you mentioned wanting to see all of me..." She pulled the kurta up and over her head, dropping it on the floor, in one swift move she had also removed the churidar and was stood in only her panties.

Miranda's breath caught in her throat at the fire burning in Andy's eyes as she moved towards the bed and straddled Miranda's thighs. Cupping the older woman's face she placed a gentle kiss on her lips as Miranda's hands grabbed her ass and pulled her closer. Andy continued to press her lips softly against Miranda's as her hands stroked her from her ass to her hips. She brushed Miranda's moist lips with hers and felt them, they were soft and warm against her own. Miranda found herself intoxicated with the delicacy of the kiss.

The mutual pressure they applied grew steadily harder until she felt Andy bite her bottom lip between her teeth. The slight pain this caused only seemed to heighten her pleasure, and she moaned. She wanted Andy to envelop her. She gently swept her tongue into the brunette's mouth, moaning again as Andy's tongue moved gently against hers as their kisses grew more passionate.

Miranda moved her hand from Andy's hip stroking upwards until she could cup her breast, she worked Andy's nipple, through gentle massage between her thumb and forefinger as Andy arched into her touch. Quickly she switched her attention to the other breast. Bending forward, Miranda placed her mouth over Andy's areola and licked causing the young women to shudder with pleasure.

"Oh God," Andy moaned. "I want you so much."

"And you will have me," Miranda whispered as she gazed at the young woman hovering above her. "I'm yours, Andréea."

Moving slightly Andy took hold of Miranda's pyjama shirt and pulled it swiftly over her head. Pressing herself closer again she felt the older woman's satin soft hair against her chest as they
embraced. "I hope I'm not squashing you," Andy told her gently.

"No, my darling, and don't you dare move. I love the sound of your heart beating against my ear." Miranda told her.

"You are overdressed, sweetheart and although I love the feel of silk between my thighs, I infinitely prefer the silkeness of your skin pressed against mine," Andy whispered as she moved back slightly causing Miranda to let out a whimper at the loss of contact.

"Maybe you should finish divesting me of the rest of my clothes." Miranda husked her desire glowing in her eyes.

"Yes, Miranda," Andy said cheekily as she slid off the editor's lap and stepped back. Placing her hands on Miranda's waist she let out a deep breath. "Now lift," Andy told her. As Miranda raised her hips Andy pulled off her pyjama bottoms and panties in one fluid movement, leaving her naked.

"Now it is you who is overdressed, my darling," Miranda stated breathlessly. Pushing herself forward Miranda captured Andy's hips in her hands. Placing her fingers under the elastic of her underwear she pulled them down her long legs until they pooled at the brunette's feet. Raising her eyes to Andy's she smiled. "Come here." She requested. As Andy stepped forward Miranda used her index and middle finger and caressed Andy's aching core causing her to shudder as waves of pleasure erupted in the pit of her stomach. Miranda gently slid her fingers across Andy's clit before moving her fingers down and thrusting them into her gently.

Andy stumbled slightly towards Miranda who captured her waist in her free arm. Pulling her closer she held her tightly as she continued her gentle thrusts as Andy's breaths became more erratic and her desire grew.

Miranda fitted her face between Andy's open legs and removed her fingers. "I will take my time with you tonight," Miranda told her before licking her slowly. Her taste buds were activated in an instant and she hummed her pleasure, the vibration sending intense waves coursing through Andy.

"Oh, God." Andy moaned breathlessly.

At the swipe of her tongue against Andy's clit, it became hard and full. she continued to tease her by working her tongue all around it without adding pressure to the engorged nub. She kept her rhythm and pressure constant, pressing subtly every when she felt Andy relax. She was bringing Andy towards her climax slowly. She could feel and smell the beginning of Andy's orgasm.

Andy could feel the energy of her rising orgasm moving as Miranda licked and nipped at the flesh around Andy's clit. Making her movement less constant and more careless she took Andy beyond the point of no return.

Moaning throatily Andy came with an explosion. Calling out as Miranda continued to press against her prolonging the orgasm. "Oh my God!" Andy husked. "I'm...I'm...God don't stop!" Her voice sounded gravelly as the orgasm continued to hold her in its grasp and she continued to moan her pleasure. Collapsing as her knees gave out she fell against Miranda who sat back and pulled her close holding her lightly on her lap.

"You are breathtaking, my Andréa," Miranda whispered.
Chapter 11

Andy and Miranda were wrapped around each other. Miranda had manoeuvred them both towards the head of the bed as Andy recovered from the intensity of Miranda's ministrations.

Stirring Andy moved her hand around where Miranda lay on her side and cupped her ass. "I love this, you wouldn't believe the number of times I watched this as I walked two steps behind you." She whispered as she trailed her hand upwards to her hip. "I love these too, the way they sway as you move, so absolutely delicious." She continued to trail her hand around to her stomach, trailing her fingernails delicately along the faint stretch marks and caesarean scar. "This stomach, which almost hides the fact you carried the lives of two very exuberant girls, so beautiful." She continued her whispered words the reasons she loved each of the areas she touched until she reached the editor's breasts. Cupping one she ran her thumb over Miranda's nipple, smiling as her gentle touch caused it to react and harden. "Your breasts, a perfect handful." She said. "Just waiting for my touch." Her hand moved across to provide the second one with the same attention.

Miranda moaned at the soft touches on her breasts. Andy had touched the outside, underside, and top of the breasts, bypassing the nipples. Gradually she worked her way towards them and paying attention to Miranda's responses she continued pressing and massaging.

Pinching the nipples she watched them becoming harder. Andy increased the pressure as Miranda arched and moaned into her touch. Bending her head she laved her tongue around one nipple, nipping it softly as Miranda squirmed and panted beneath her. Releasing the nipple she blew a warm breath over it creating waves of pleasure.

The build-up of pleasure was gradual but quite powerful. "Oh God I...I'm going to come..." Miranda told her breathlessly. "...I've never..."

"Shh and let it happen," Andy told her as Miranda became tense. "Relax my love!" Andy whispered encouragingly as she continued her gentle treatment. "Breathe in and out and just let yourself feel."

As Miranda relaxed, her orgasm crashed over her in a strong burst leaving her breathless. Her skin was flushed with the signs of her arousal.

Andy allowed the fingers, on one hand, to trace back down to the neatly clipped silver triangle as the other moved around her back. As she cupped her and pulled her close their passion took over. They were all over each other, lips clashing as they intertwined and Andy rolled them so Miranda was underneath her.

When Andy found herself skin to skin with Miranda, it was as if they became melded together. Andy's fingers stroked inside her folds as Miranda moved her hips to allow deeper access.

Miranda experienced a sense of wonder, her entire self-focused on Andy's hand stroking her causing her body to burn with a need fiercer and more urgent than any other she had ever experienced. "Inside please darling." Miranda husked. "I need you inside."

Andy smiled at the woman writhing below her. "Your wish is my command, my love." Andy entered her deftly with two fingers causing the editor to gasp. She alternated between short thrusts of her fingers and deep strokes that caught the older woman's sensitive spot.

"Oh, God..." Miranda's hips moved in time with Andy's thrusts. "Oh, my love..." Miranda called
out as her orgasm took over, the inner walls clenching tightly around Andy's fingers as she slowed the thrusts. As Miranda settled Andy removed her fingers gently and hovered over Miranda breathing deeply before moving to her side and pulling Miranda closer. As they lay in each other's arms Miranda ran her nose against Andy's collarbone. "I've never had an orgasm like that." She admitted. "I never concerned myself with the fact that sex left me feeling uninspired, I've always had the feeling like I was missing something, but now I understand."

"What do you understand, my love?" Andy asked sleepily.

"That I was missing you," Miranda told her. "Wrapped up like this I feel loved, happy and secure. I trust you implicitly. I can't get enough of this, of you." Miranda husked.

Andy felt a tear hit her chest as Miranda cried quietly in her arms. "Shh, don't cry, sweetheart. I'm here, I'm not going anywhere."

"Marry me?" Miranda asked quietly.

"What?" Andy was shocked. Leaning back she was wide awake again. She saw the determination in the blue eyes.

"Marry me, Andréa. Make me the happiest person in the world," Miranda asked again catching the brunette's eyes.

"But...but...It's not legal." Andy stuttered.

"Not yet it isn't, but it will be," Miranda told her. "We could go to Massachusetts."

"I...you...You're still married Miranda," Andy said.

Miranda bit her lip. "True, my divorce is not yet finalised but it will be soon. Maxwell advised it should be done by the end of January at the latest." Miranda told her, smiling softly.

"Don't you think it's a bit soon?" Andy asked, nervous about Miranda's reaction to her hesitation. The last thing she wanted was for Miranda to think she was being rejected.

"Maybe you're right about it being a little soon, I am not always so impulsive. I want this though. I want you to be mine always. I know this is forever." Miranda said as she placed a kiss on Andy's collarbone.

Andy moved closer to Miranda, tilting her chin up she caught her eye. "I will always be yours, my love, a bit of paper won't change that." Miranda nuzzled her neck as Andy continued to whisper. "One day I will marry you, my answer is and always be a resounding yes. It would be the greatest honour in the world to call myself your wife." Miranda kissed her sternum as she continued to speak. "I won't rush into this though, sweetheart. I need to ensure this isn't something you'll come to regret. And when it happens, I'll gladly sign whatever prenup you want."

Miranda bounded from the bed a large smile adorning her face. Hurrying to her closet she pulled out a gift wrapped box and held it against her chest before returning to Andy's side. Catching Andy's eye shyly she held out the present. "Merry Christmas my darling. Open it." She whispered.

Andy shook the box with a smile before unwrapping it. Finding the ring box she was amazed. "Miranda?" She questioned hesitantly.

"Just open it and let me explain, please." Miranda said nervously.
Opening the box she found a Platinum French Cut Pavé Eternity band set with Black Diamond's and Morganite. "Oh wow, it's beautiful," Andy whispered enthralled.

"It's not an engagement ring, my darling," Miranda explained hastily. "It's a promise ring. This eternity ring symbolises my never-ending love, a demonstration of my commitment to you and to the life we are building together. Turn it over."

Andy looked closely and saw the inscription in Miranda's familiar cursive handwriting and her tears flowed.

Would you lie with me and just forget the world? M x

"You remembered?" Andy's voice was husky as she became overcome with emotion.

"You told our girls you remembered everything they had shared with you. I remember each moment with you, every word spoken, and every word that has been written. This song, the beautiful love song you quoted gave me a glimmer of hope when I listened to it." Miranda told her smiling gently.

"How did you interpret the lyrics?" Andy asked.

"To me, it was about being scared to say I love you, you want to say it and for it to mean something but the fear comes because you've had it said to you and it came to mean nothing." Miranda took a deep breath. "It's about being frustrated because of your inexperience in articulating your feelings, the insecurity that your words can be misinterpreted, and the terror that perhaps you are spoiling everything. But regardless of all that you also just want them by your side, to forget the world and all the doubt and fear and just be."

Andy smiled. "I think it's about finding a better way to tell someone just how passionate you are about them. Not just that you love them, but you want nothing more than to be with them, to hold them, for the world to shrink down just to you and them. It's more than just 'I love you.'" Andy explained. "It feels like a reminder that life is too short. It shows how a person's entire existence and sense of purpose can be encompassed in their love of another, and this love surpasses death. It's forgetting about everything else in the world, all the negativity people have about your relationship and just being, just concentrating on the love and seeing all the beautiful and positive things the world has to offer."

"Will you wear my ring Andréa?" Miranda asked, her nervousness clear in her eyes. Seeing the brunette's nod Miranda took the ring from her and placed it on her ring finger.

"I'll never take it off," Andy whispered as she pulled Miranda in for a kiss.

Miranda deepened the kiss again as she wrapped herself back around the young woman laying them both down. "We should sleep, my love."

"Mm, maybe we should get back in our pyjamas and unlock the door." Andy grinned.

"Later," Miranda told her softly. "I have to be up early to organise the presents."

"Wake me when it's time," Andy asked as she yawned and closing her eyes snuggled into Miranda.

"Of course, my darling. I love you." Miranda told her.

"Love you more," Andy mumbled sleepily.
Miranda's alarm woke them at 5 am. Hearing the vibration Andy turned over and put her back to Miranda. Miranda heard the faint grumble under her breath as Andy pulled her pillow over her head, her behaviour causing Miranda to smirk. Switching off the alarm she turned towards Andy and pulled her back to her chest. "Darling, you asked me to wake you." She whispered in Andy's ear. "The twins will be awake in an hour or so. I need to organise their gifts."

"Mm'ok, am awake," Andy mumbled sleepily.

"So it seems," Miranda whispered cheekily as she moved away. Climbing out of bed she grabbed her pyjamas from where they were thrown on the floor the night before and shrugged them on. Making her way towards the door Andy's voice halted her progress.

"Hey, you forget something?" Andy asked her as she rolled onto her back. Miranda looked over her shoulder to see Andy pouting as she stared at the editor.

Smiling she walked over to the bed. Bending over the brunette she brushed a kiss against her lips. "Good morning my love. Merry Christmas" Miranda said.

Andy pulled her closer as she deepened their kiss. Breaking away she said. "Good morning to you too beautiful, I have a feeling this will be the best Christmas."

"I must say, I love our morning greetings," Miranda told her softly as she untangled herself and stepped back. "I will get organised for the day. If you're not down in five minutes, I know where to find you." Miranda grinned at Andy as she watched her scramble out of bed and put her pyjamas back on.

"If you promise to greet me like that every morning I shall be one very happy wife," Andy said lovingly as she looked at Miranda. Miranda's breath caught at Andy's words before she offered her a beautiful smile.

Making her way to her bags Andy pulled out the gifts she had wrapped and filled her arms. "I should really take the time to unpack." She shrugged. "Ah well, I'm ready when you are, sweetheart." She told Miranda with a wide smile.

Miranda led the brunette silently down the hall towards the stairs. As they passed the twins bedrooms Andy giggled at Miranda's exaggerated tiptoeing. Miranda stopped and looking at Andy placed a finger to her lips and smirked. "Shh." She whispered. Feeling Andy nod she continued to move until a floorboard creaked. Rolling her eyes she continued to move steadily down the stairs and into the living room.

Andy smiled as Miranda took gifts from her and placed them under the waiting Christmas tree. Once Andy's arms were empty, she clasped the brunette's hand and pulled her down to her study. Walking them to the desk she pulled a key out of her drawer and moved to a closet at the far side of the room. Unlocking the door she opened it and Andy was amazed to see piles of gifts.

"Wow." She muttered. "How long did it take to wrap those?"

"I have no idea, the two Emily's did some, the others I had Emily organise a professional gift wrapping service," Miranda smirked.

"Ouch, I can only imagine the paper cuts." Andy smiled.

"Yes well, last time I wrapped something the gift fell out of the bottom as I handed it over."
Miranda grinned. "It's not exactly my strong suit."

Andy laughed. "Mine's never pretty but at least it's generally secure."

Miranda smirked. "Now if we can move these quickly and quietly we can go back to bed," Miranda promised.

"I'm on it, sweetheart," Andy claimed as she stepped across to grab an armful of gifts.

After four trips between the living room and study, the cupboard was empty. They stood side by side in the study looking at the empty closet.

"Do you want coffee?" Andy asked as she stifled a yawn. Looking down at her watch she saw it was nearly 6 am.


Andy grinned widely. "Okay. But no funny business once we're there Priestly." Andy's smile widened as Miranda rolled her eyes and laughed.

"I'm sure I can keep my hands to myself, Sachs," Miranda quipped.

"Good. The last thing I want is to scar my imps with any age-inappropriate images," Andy claimed as she stepped into Miranda's personal space and pulled a sprig of mistletoe out of her pocket. Holding it above their heads she brushed a soft kiss against Miranda's lips.

Miranda sighed into the kiss wrapping her arms around the taller woman. "I love you my darling." She whispered as she broke the kiss and hugged her fiercely. "You have made me happier these last few days than I remember ever being. Thank you for coming home."

"There's no place in this entire world I'd rather be, sweetheart. Thank you for...well...for everything. You're really something special." Andy told her. "Come on upstairs. We can wait for the imps to wake up and I'll make us all some breakfast."

Clasping Miranda's hand she entwined their fingers and pulled her from the room and back up the stairs as Miranda muttered. "While I may keep my hands to myself, I can't promise to keep my lips to myself."

Grinning widely at the woman by her side she whispered. "Wow, how did I get so lucky?"

"I am unbelievably blessed to have you in my life my darling. You're not like anyone else I've known, you are so much more..." Miranda whispered breathlessly as they reached the bedroom.

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They were back in bed, cuddled side by side in companionable silence. Looking at the older woman Andy shifted slightly and pulled a ream of papers from the back of her journal. "Here." She whispered nervously. "My other sketches."

Miranda scanned through many of the sketches a small smile gracing her face until she came to an evening gown that captured her attention. Her eyes widened. "Describe this to me?" Miranda asked softly.

"It's a floor length column gown. It would be highly suitable for a petite woman," Andy smiled softly. "It is sleeveless with an illusion bateau neckline bodice enforced by the pleated empire
"waist," Andy told her.

"And what material would you use and colour?" Miranda asked.

"I believe it would work with either chiffon or charmeuse in navy blue or black."

Miranda smiled. "I would wear this dress."

"I sketched it with you in mind," Andy admitted shyly. "All the evening gowns I have sketched have the women of Runway in mind. This one was done for Serena." She pulled out a sketch and pointed to a floor-length halter sheath dress. "It would be in red lace. And this for Emily in emerald green chiffon and lace. Both would have beading incorporated." She found and showed her a sketch of an empire scoop neck floor-length ruffled dress.

"These are exceptional. What prompted them?" Miranda asked her.

"I missed Runway, the general hustle and bustle, watching designs come to life from the initial sketches and then to the preview and then to what you see on the catwalk. And I can draw, so I thought to myself why not? I never expected them to see the light of day." Andy explained.

"Which one would you wear?" Miranda asked.

Andy looked through her sketches and showed Miranda an A-Line Princess off-the-shoulder asymmetrical dress. "I love this one. it would be layered organza." She held out a different sketch of an A-Line Princess scoop neck Floor-Length dress with a split front. "Or this one which would be made from chiffon and lace. They would be in either purple or burgundy."

"You have thought about the colours, the materials and the shape of the women wearing them. All very acceptable and they would be extremely flattering. You have an eye for this." Miranda told her. "I want you to let me bring these to life my darling."

"No, please Miranda. I have no interest in designing clothes for a living." Andy told her hesitantly. "It's fun to draw them, but the rest...well I really have no idea."

"That's what a tailor or dressmaker is for." Miranda grinned. "Please let me have them made." She asked breathlessly.

Looking into the pleading blue eyes she couldn't resist. "Okay. You can have those sketches, have the dresses made but I have a few conditions. I do not want to see them or hear about them until they're finished and I don't want anyone to know they're mine." Andy told her.

"Acceptable." Miranda exhaled happily as she moved the sketches onto her bedside table and snuggled into Andy further placing a soft kiss on the brunette's lips Andy deepened the kiss pulling Miranda closer before pulling away and giving Miranda a wide beautiful smile. As she settled back onto Andy's shoulder there was a tap on the door. "Come in, Bobbsey's," Miranda called out.

The twins barrelled into the room looking sleep-tousled, their hair in wild curls. Jumping onto the bed Cassidy settled herself against Andy, who pulled her in for a hug, as Caroline walked over hesitantly. She waited for Miranda to pull the covers up and pat the space by her side. Smiling Caroline pushed herself into the bed and snuggled up with Miranda. "Merry Christmas." They said simultaneously. The two women returned their greeting enthusiastically.

Cassidy settled in laying her head on Andy's stomach. "You make a good pillow Andy. You're all warm and soft." She muttered happily.
Snorting out a laugh Andy poked the young girl in her tummy. "Gee, thanks." She chuckled as Cassidy squealed and bounced away almost toppling off the bed,

Caroline looked at Miranda grinning. "Are you sure Cass and I are related, mom? With her behaviour, she could have been Andy's." Caroline smirked.

Miranda sniggered. "I was just thinking the same Bobbsey, they're both incorrigible."

Andy looked over at Caroline and Miranda and smiled widely. "She's my doppelgänger. She doesn't look a thing like me, luckily for her she's like her beautiful mother, but behaviourally she's all me." Andy smiled across at Cassidy.

"Well, there are worse things that could happen than her being exactly like you my darling. However, a little restraint wouldn't go amiss." Miranda quipped.

Andy raised her brow. "Yes, Miranda." She smirked and inched away.

"What on Earth are you doing?" Miranda queried confused.

"I'm giving myself the space required to have a little restraint." Andy quipped.

"Don't you move one more inch, my darling," Miranda warned her with a smile.

Andy returned the smile before pulling Cassidy over her and between her and Miranda. "There we are," Andy said happily as Miranda scowled at her.

Cassidy giggled as Caroline crawled over her mom and settled in between them. "Will you show us your drawings, Andy?" Cassidy asked quietly.

"Sure," Andy said happily. Pulling her portraits back out of her journal she handed them to Cassidy as Caroline watched her flip through them intently.

"Whoa, that one of Nigel is brilliant," Cassidy mumbled causing both Andy and Miranda to smile.

"I'm surprised mom has let you keep the one of us," Caroline told her smiling.

"She hasn't. I'm having it framed..." Andy told them. "It'll go in her office. It means I'll have to do another one." She grinned.

"I'll probably claim that one too," Miranda admitted with a bright smile as she cuddled into her daughter's side.

"When can we go down?" Cassidy asked.

"Well you climbed into bed with us, we would have been up and unwrapping gifts by now if you hadn't used me as a pillow Cass," Andy told the young girl mischievously.

Seeing the twinkle in the brunette's eye Cassidy smiled. "I like seeing you here with Mom. It just seems...I don't know...normal. It's obvious you love her, and you didn't tell me off for coming in here and jumping on you, you pulled me close and let me lie on you. It made me happy." She explained.

Andy teared up at the young girl's words. "Why would I tell you off? You knocked politely and your mom invited you in. This is where your mom is, don't be scared that because I'm here, you cannot do whatever you would usually do."
Caroline spoke. "Well we don't usually knock if Mom's on her own but we know adults need time together, Stephen told us that. It's nice having you here with us, you're not planning on leaving us again, are you? You haven't unpacked."

"No, I'm not going anywhere Caro and you are welcome in here with us anytime, your mom may have different rules," Andy told her.

"Well if we don't want company the door will be locked girls," Miranda told them with a gentle smile.

As Andy wiped her eyes Cassidy's eyes focused on Andy's hand. "What's that?" Cassidy asked pointing to her new ring.


"But it's on your ring finger," Caroline stated. "Are you two getting married?"

"No" Andy sputtered as Miranda declared. "Yes."

"One day." They both said together and grinned.

The twins smiled at each other before Cassidy wrapped her arms around Andy. "Does that mean I can call you mom now?"

"Well, that would get confusing quickly." Andy giggled.

"Yeah, mom's either mom or mommy." Caroline smiled. "You could be Ma or Mama. Or we could just name you bonus-mom."

"Or Ohm, short for other mother." Cassidy grinned cheekily.

Andy laughed. "No, no. Andy's fine. Now up with you. I promised your mom breakfast and coffee."

"Yes!" Cassidy handed the pictures to Caroline as she jumped off the bed and grabbed Andy's hand in an attempt to drag her from the bed. "Pancakes or waffles?" She asked as she tugged.

"Whichever you all prefer. You've already had my waffles, I can do pancakes too." Andy told her. "And I made a decent omelette."

"Oooh decisions, decisions." Caroline uttered sarcastically as she lay wrapped around Miranda.

Andy grinned and got out of bed. "C'mon my loves, there's food to prepare and presents to unwrap."

Miranda smiled up at Andy. Taking the drawings she leaned over and placed them on her bedside table. Untangling Caroline's arms from around her waist she said. "Come on Bobbsey. It's time to go downstairs now."

Caroline looked at Miranda and pulled her into a fierce hug. "We love you, mom. All we want is for you to be happy."

"I am. I have you and your sister and now I have my Andréa. I love you all very much." Miranda told her young daughter with a smile.

Caroline got out of bed and held her hand out to Andy hesitantly while looking down. Squatting to
be at eye level with the young girl she spoke softly. "Caro honey, look at me." At the raising of blue eyes, so much like her mother's, Andy entwined their hands. "Don't be worried about asking anything from me. If you need a hug or want to hold my hand I am here. If you are scared, then I will chase away your fears. I am not just here for your mom but for you and Cass too. Trust me."

"Do you love Cass more than me?" Caroline asked.

"No honey. Why would you think that?"

"Well, she's so much like you. She's lively and artistic whereas I'm..."

"You are perfect the way you are Caroline." Andy interrupted. "Never doubt that. You are beautiful and so crazy smart it blows my mind. You are so much like your mom." Andy smiled and pulled the young girl into a hug.

Caroline wrapped her arms around Andy's neck. Picking her up she held her free hand out to Cassidy. "Come on Cass. I'll need my imps to help make breakfast worthy of my Queen and two Princesses."

Smiling cheerfully Cassidy took her hand and led them out of the bedroom.

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Breakfast saw the four of them sat in their pyjamas around the breakfast bar. Miranda was picking at a chocolate chip pancake delicately, having already eaten an omelette filled with mushroom, spinach and cheese. Andy was telling them about the chocolate banana pancakes her Grandma used to make for her and her sister on summer vacations.

"Can you make them for us?" Caroline asked.

"I can try it, the banana has to be well and truly ripe though, so you would have to leave me at least one my little monkey." Andy grinned at Caroline knowing she was the fruit lover of the pair, banana's being a particular favourite. Getting up from her seat and cleared the table as Caroline and Cassidy talked among themselves. Walking over to the coffee machine she poured another two cups and handed one to Miranda. "Are you okay?" She asked quietly. Seeing a small smile grace Miranda's face she waited for a response.

"I can't quite believe how fortunate I am, after everything," Miranda told her. "You came home to us, you somehow love us, you've agreed to a future with us. It feels like all this is too good to be true, and I'm just waiting to wake up from this dream. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"It's no dream, my love, this is real. This is part of your journey, a new adventure. You haven't lost time or wasted opportunities because what you have experienced, including all the pain, has been exactly what has brought you to today." Andy smiled softly. "Come on, the girls have been patient enough to wait for breakfast, let's see what Santa Mom has brought them." Andy grinned down at the editor as Miranda stood and pulled her into a brief hug.

Making their way up to the living room coffee in hand Andy marvelled at the twin's enthusiasm and energy. Sitting on the sofa she sat back with her coffee and watched the twin's unwrapping gifts with abandon. Exclaiming over the games and books received, they had received clothes, accessories and new beauty products. They both had a new Apple iPod Nano and Nintendo DS, Cassidy had received a digital SLR Camera and Caroline a Kindle.

They came across Andy's presents and grinned at each other. Opening these gifts gently they found they had multiple gifts from each country Andy had visited. They both had a Rajasthani puppet and
a wire replica of a Rickshaw from India. Andy told them softly about how she found the Rickshaws outside Raj Ghat, the Gandhi Memorial, and how her transaction with the street vendor was overseen by a nearby group of street monkeys. From Nepal she had brought Cassidy a Handmade singing bowl and Caroline had an ornate Prayer Wheel. From Thailand they each had a sky lantern known as a khom loi and she had hand-carved soaps made in their favourite colours. The last gifts found the twin's opening a jewellery box each. Cassidy's held a silver bracelet with a greenstone heart, Caroline's was a silver necklace with the same heart.

"The silver came from Nepal, the charm from New Zealand. The Māori's call this stone Ponamu, it's Mountain Jade. It's all handcrafted." Andy explained.

As the twins hugged Andy and expressed their delight Miranda looked at her in disbelief. "You were in New Zealand? You didn't mention it." She said.

Andy nodded. "I made my way there after Thailand. It's a beautiful country, I was there for almost a week before I came home."

"I want to hear more about your travels, I think you missed out far too much in the letters and emails." Miranda requested softly.

Andy smiled gently at her and whispered. "You'll come to know it all."

The twins looked at the two women. "There's still presents under the tree. They are for you mom."

Miranda looked at Andy who grinned sheepishly. "Open then my love. It's not much but..."

"I didn't expect anything." Miranda was subdued, having seen the care Andy had taken with the gifts for the twins she knew a lot of thought and attention would have gone into gifts for her.

Cassidy and Caroline picked up the four gift-wrapped presents and placed them gently in front of their mom. Leaning forward she pulled a large square package towards her. Opening gently she found an ornate hand carved Sandalwood box.

"The box was made in India. Open it." Andy told her.

Opening the box she lifted out a blue and white Thai silk scarf with a butterfly motif.

"It's a Jim Thompson." She was amazed.

Andy grinned. "I know your signature look is to always have a Hermes scarf incorporated into your outfit but I couldn't go all that way and not get you Thailand's best."

Looking down she saw another Sandalwood carving resting at the bottom of the box. Lifting it out she found an intricate Elephant in full regalia, amazed she turned it in her hands until she spotted a baby elephant at either side, trunks entwined with that of the larger animal. "This is beautiful, so detailed," Miranda said with a smile.

"It reminded me of you and the twins," Andy told her gently.

"How so?" Miranda was curious.

"Elephant families have a matriarchal head. Basically, an older, experienced lady elephant leads the herd. The family usually comprise of a mother, daughters and, when the time comes, their babies, sometimes there are sisters too. Occasionally a non-related elephant joins to form a larger family and strengthen the herd." She points to herself causing the twins to giggle.
Miranda smiled and turned to the next, much smaller gift, and unwrapped it. Seeing a small ring box she gasped.

"This is from Nepal," Andy explained nervously as Miranda opened the gift.

She stared down into the box disbelieving. Inside sat a silver eternity ring with two dragon heads protecting a heart faceted Kyanite gemstone. "It's beautiful." She put it on her ring fingers and looked at it as it sparkled in the sunlight. Opening another small gift Miranda looked down at another jewellery box. This one held silver necklace with a swirling shell pendant of intense blue, purple and green. "Gorgeous," Miranda whispered softly.

"It's a Paua shell, from New Zealand. The symbol is Māori." Andy smiled.

"What does it represent?" Cassidy asked curiously.

"Soulmates," Andy admitted apprehensively.

Miranda's breath caught at the admission and she gave the brunette a breathtaking smile. Pulling the final gift towards her she opened it to find a leather bound journal. "What's this?" She asked

"My journal," Andy told her. "I want you to know what I saw and where I went after I left you in Paris. This seemed the best way to show you. It has an account of everything and it was written just for you." Andy smiled shyly at the look of shock on the editor's face. "I have nothing to hide from you Miranda. This is my way of showing you how much trust I have in us." Standing quickly Miranda stalked from the room.

"What did I do? I didn't mean to make her angry." Andy asked, panic clear in her voice.

"Oh boy." Cassidy grinned. "She's not angry with you, she's overwhelmed by you."

"You should go after her, she'll be on the roof," Caroline advised sagely. "Go give her a hug. They always make me feel better."

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Chapter 12

Andy had left the room and moved down to the kitchen. After preparing two coffee's she moved back up the circular staircase to the fifth floor. Having not been to this part of the Townhouse she took in her surroundings. She was amazed by the natural light from a skylight above the stairs and located the stairs to the roof. She stepped up to them carefully.

Upon reaching the top she found herself amazed. Glancing around she found herself in a bright room with a large glass wall comprising of a large floor to ceiling windows. Andy noticed one of the large windows open to a 90-degree angle and as she walked past the industrial style hand-wheel crank that opened the windows she smiled.

Stepping onto the roof she spotted Miranda stretched out on an outdoor recliner. She was wrapped in a fleece blanket and staring out into the distance; the journal clasped tightly against her chest. Rushing towards the older woman Andy stepped loudly to ensure she didn't startle the woman. "Sweetheart?" Andy queried softly. "I brought coffee" She sat down in the recliner next to Miranda and handed her a steaming cup of coffee.

"Thank you, darling," Miranda breathed as she took a sip.

"Why did you come up here Miranda? Talk to me, please." Andy requested.

"I forgot how difficult navigating a new relationship is," Miranda admitted. "This, being with you is so different. I've never been overwhelmed by good experiences before. It seems much harder to talk about it when all things are good, so I'm trying to tell myself there's nothing to be anxious about, there's nothing negative happening here and being with you, having you here, well it is bringing so much joy."

"I'm so sorry that this whole thing is overwhelming you. I know how much you need control." Andy said. "It's not surprising you are affected by this. The last few days have been really intense."

"I'm scared I will sabotage this Andréea," Miranda whispered. "But that doesn't mean I'm not happy."

"It's perfectly understandable that you feel this way, Miranda. This is unfamiliar territory for us both. You are always so focused, you try to give everything your full attention." Andy let out a sigh as she sipped her coffee. "You are allowed to experience good things, my love, you are worthy of the good things happening in your life." Miranda turned and looked at the brunette, tears shining in the blue eyes. Andy placed her coffee down and stood up, taking two steps she knelt in front of the older woman and placed her head on Miranda's lap. "Maybe we're moving too quickly, we should take a step back," Andy whispered.

"No!" Miranda was scared that her behaviour had caused Andy to change her mind. "Don't say that."

Andy turned her head and raised her eyes slowly to catch the shining blue of Miranda's, seeing the fear she explained. "I don't mean I want to step back from this relationship or leave you, my love. I've told you I'm not going anywhere, and I meant it." Andy closed her eyes briefly "What I am trying to say, poorly, is maybe we should take a step back and just enjoy us, make meaningful memories and savour this experience together. Forget the past, forget that journal." She went to take it from Miranda only to find her grasp on it become tighter. "None of it is important. What is important is us now, today and all our future days." Andy explained. "And when you get
overwhelmed, I want you to know it is okay not to tackle every single thing in your life alone because you are not alone now. I am here to help you, to support you and to celebrate every success with you. What we are building, this is for keeps. We need to focus on the long-term which will include that wedding you were so keen on last night."

Miranda smiled sadly. "What happens when I unleash the Ice Queen, which will invariably happen sooner than later?"

"I fell in love with her too Miranda. I experienced your worst and still see the most amazingly complex but beautiful person." Andy lifted her head off Miranda's lap. "I know you can be highly strung. I'm not that easy going all the time either, I admit to being overly sensitive, moody and often petulant. And I have my fire-breathing capabilities too." Andy grinned at Miranda rolling her eyes before turning serious. "I firmly believe you can't kill good things, and this is a great thing, Miranda."

"Get up off that floor," Miranda told her. "When will you learn to put warm clothes on?" Miranda smirked.

"Come back inside my love." Andy requested. "Or let me share that blanket of epic fluffiness, my word it's so soft."

Miranda smiled and scooted off the chair to allow Andy to sit. As Andy sat and reclined the seat Miranda placed the journal on the floor with her coffee and sat on Andy's lap. Wrapping the blanket around them both, Andy wrapped her arms around Miranda and pulled her closer. "I feel secure and wanted with you," Miranda admitted. "This is all so new and I can't help be scared of what might happen."

"Ghost worries." Andy breathed. "I get them too. If I am awkward during a conversation, I then worry they'll never want to talk to me again. It's like when you miss an important meeting at work and the ghost worry tells you you're fired but the truth is your meeting was about a promotion. I've always been that way, but I learned to only worry about the things I can control at that moment, the rest is left for later. The biggest thing these ghost worries do is to convince us we're not as lucky as we really are, and right now my love I know I am the luckiest person in the world."

Miranda settled into Andy further and shivered. "We should go in soon." She whispered.

"I left the twins playing their new games. They were setting up Rockband or Guitar Hero on their XBOX when I came up from the kitchen." Andy smiled softly. "When I asked if they were planning to get dressed they stated they're too comfortable in their pyjamas to bother with normal clothes. Caro told me to get up here and to give you a hug, hugs make everything all better, apparently."

"Your embraces do." Miranda turned and smiled shyly up at the young woman. "I love you my Andréa."

"I love you too beautiful. I love the fact you call me yours. That will always be true." Andy whispered quietly.

"I have a question for you," Miranda stated quietly. "If someone gave you a box with everything you had ever lost what would be the first thing you would look for?"

Andy grinned. "That's easy. Those thigh-high Chanel boots. It would be so worth the discomfort to get that attention from you again, your eyes were incandescent, magnetic. That expression has haunted my dreams." Miranda's eyes widened at Andy's words. Turning around she straddled
Andy's hips and leaning back let her blue eyes rake over Andy appraisingly, devouring her beauty. She bit her lip subconsciously as her eyes caressed the curve of breast and up to full lips. Sweeping her eyes up she met Andy's hazel eyes and was mesmerised by the swirling emotions held within them. Searching the depths she found love and desire evident in the gaze.

"As soon as I had seen her, I was lost. For Beauty's wound is sharper than any weapon's, and it runs through the eyes down to the soul. It is through the eye that love's wound passes, and I now became a prey to a host of emotions..." Andy quoted breathlessly.

Miranda's breath hitched at the words. "Achilles Tatius?" She queried. Seeing Andy's small smile and a nod she leaned in and brushed her nose against Andy's in a gentle Eskimo kiss. Seeing the smile widen she brushed the curls out of Andy's face and placed a delicate kiss on her forehead. Continuing her worship. she let her lips move to the bridge of Andy's nose before sweeping them across her cheeks and trailing a light kiss on waiting lips. In a final act of devotion, Miranda raised Andy's hands and placed a chaste kiss on each palm.

Leaning back again she was amazed at the fire burning within the young woman's eyes, pupils dilated and breathing heavy her desire was obvious. "My God you're beautiful," Miranda whispered. "You said before that you felt like the luckiest person in the world, it is I who am lucky my darling. You make me feel alive in a way I never experienced before, when we are together like this it feels like time stands still, and there is just you and I." Miranda raised her eyes as something caught her attention. Looking over Andy's shoulder intently she called out. "Bobbsey, don't just lurk there, come here and tell us what you came up here for."

Cassidy walked hesitantly towards the two women. "Andy's parents are here." She whispered before turning around and haring back into the house.

"Oh fuck!" Andy muttered as Miranda scrambled off her knee.

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Andy and Miranda made their way through the house. Stopping off at their bedroom Andy pulled her hair into a quick ponytail and changed into jeans and a t-shirt quickly. Grabbing her cell she made her way downstairs leaving Miranda to shower and dress. Checking the den and living room she found them empty. Moving down to the ground level she saw the door to the formal living room open and voices coming from within.

As she stepped towards the door, she heard Caroline sobbing and Cassidy's raised voice. "You can't take her, she belongs here with us now. She's ours."

Walking into the room she saw the face of her Mom looking at the twins with disapproval. "What the hell is going on here? What the fuck did you say to her?" She looked at her parents and Caroline, who was curled up in a ball in the chair, inconsolable. Stalking over she pulled the young girl into her arms and attempted to soothe her. "It's okay baby, I'm here now." She glared at her parents.

"You should watch your language in front of the children Andy." Her mom, Virginia, sniffed huffily. "I see that woman has already been a poor influence if that is how you're speaking to people, towards your parents especially."

"Miranda rarely, if ever, uses profanity. You can thank Nate for this delightfully colourful language." Andy hissed back. "And the twins are smart enough to know not to repeat anything less than appropriate for their age. Now, what did you do or say to upset Caroline and to make Cassidy raise her voice?"
"We told them we are taking you home." Andy's dad, Richard, grumbled.

"He speaks!" Andy stated sarcastically. "It's only taken three months."

"Andy, moderate your tone." Virginia was getting angry.

"Not going to happen." Andy seethed. "And like Hell are you taking me anywhere. You made it perfectly clear months ago what a disappointment I am, how lacking I am. You have another daughter, rule her life if you want to control someone so badly, I'm sure she'll be overjoyed." Andy was still rubbing soothing circles on Caroline's back as she paced the room like a caged lion and Cassidy continued to glare at the older couple. Looking up at Andy she saw the shirt and smiled as she read the words on the front;

"My parents wanted me to be a lawyer, I became a disappointment instead."

As Andy turned her back she saw the words,

'Close enough.'

"I like your t-shirt, Andy," Cassidy stated cheekily.

"Thanks, my little love." Andy looked down and grinned back at the mischievous redhead as her mom's scowl deepened. "It wasn't an intentional choice." Taking a deep breath she sat herself down in a comfortable chair. Cassidy walked over and clambered up onto her knee and wrapped her arms around Andy and Caroline. Placing a kiss on both the girls' heads she looked across at her parents with an eyebrow raised in inquiry, waiting for them to speak. When nothing was forthcoming Andy talked. "So you are here to drag my butt back to Cinci? As I've said multiple times that is not happening. You're sat there glaring at me in silence, that's just showcasing your petulance."

"Well, at least now I know where your admission of such behaviour come from." Miranda stalked into the room offering Andy a gentle smile. She looked beautiful in her black Bill Blass Pants and Red Donna Karan wraparound blouse, 5" black, snake heel, red bottom Louboutin's finished her ensemble. "Have you offered our unexpected guests a drink, darling?" Miranda queried with a smirk.

"Nope, I was hoping they'd take the hint and leave. Plus my baby monkey and comatose sloth seem to be attached to me." Andy smiled up at Miranda as she brushed Caroline's hair out of her face. "You look beautiful Miranda," Andy told her with a bright smile.

"Thank you, my darling." Holding her hand out to Caroline she said. "Come here, Bobbsey."

"No. If I let go they will take Andy away." Caroline stated through her sobs. "She promised me she wouldn't leave us."

Ice filled Miranda's eyes as she glared at the elder Sachs. "I see that your behaviour disrupts not only your eldest daughter's life, now you come here and upset mine too. Does it make you happy that you made my ten-year-old daughter cry? It's Christmas day for crying out loud." Looking at Andy's face she saw the tears forming from Caroline's words. "Do you take pleasure in causing your own child to cry too? Does it leave you content knowing Andréa wonders if she's good enough to be loved, that she questions if she's worthy? Does it concern you she feels she's inadequate?" Miranda questioned in a deadly tone.

Seeing Mr Sachs evident nervousness she rolled her eyes. "For my girls, I will do anything to protect them. Andréa is included in that, and if that means I let my inner dragon out to play so be
it." Miranda gave them a glare, the look in her eyes was cold with determination. "What I really want to know is if you are satisfied that your daughter, who you nurtured and watched grow into this amazing woman in front of us, experienced nothing but darkness and despair as she travelled the world? The knowledge that her parents and friends found her so lacking eating away at the confidence she had built. You may have felt the need to invalidate her feelings over the last three months, I, however, will not undermine her feelings or mine by denying them now she has returned."

Virginia sputtered angrily as her husband looked on in disbelief. "How...how dare you...to say..."

"Oh, I dare. And I will say whatever I please, I am not well known for holding back when everything I love is threatened, and you being here, looking to strong arm your daughter into returning to a place she does not want to be, to a career she has no interest in, well that is endangering the peace of my home, the joy of being with my daughter's and having Andréa back in my life." Miranda was calm in the face of the Sachs disbelief and anger. "Now you seem to be under the impression you can coerce your daughter into going back to the Midwest with you. If you believe that, then you are mistaken. She has made her choice in where she wants to be, New York is her home"

"And if she wanted to come?" Virginia hissed. "How do we know what she wants while your daughters cling to her as if she is the most important person in their lives?"

"Have you thought of asking her? Haven't her emails been enough to show her preferences?" Miranda shook her head incredulous. "I'm sure you're aware that if she did not want to be here, she would not have returned to New York. She is under no obligation to stay here even if my daughters and I wish for her to remain indefinitely. Andréa had a room in some Midtown hotel organised before the invitation was made for her to stay with us, and if she decided she wanted to leave tomorrow I would not stop her, in fact, I would assist in helping her find a permanent home and provide the recommendation for the job of her choice. She would have received such after leaving in Paris if she had not travelled. As to the fact my daughter's hold on to Andréa so fiercely, she is important to them, they love her."

"Do you?" Richard asked. He was quietly impressed by Miranda's words regarding his daughter, her protectiveness.

"How I feel is between Andréa and me. However if you insist on knowing then yes, I love her very much. She is an impressive human being, she consistently amazes me." Miranda admitted. "You have raised an extraordinarily talented, beautiful, kind and generous woman."

"Then I will say good day to you. Ginny?" He called hesitantly as he held his hand out to his wife. "It's time to leave this family to enjoy the rest of their day."

"But...but..." Virginia sputtered. "I'm not leaving without her."

"Then you will wait a long time love, I think the term is until Hell freezes over." Richard let out a small grin at Miranda's raised eyebrow. "Our Andy is happy here, that's obvious. I know you believe this is a sin, but look at them." He asked. "Look at this family, open your eyes and heart to the love that is so clear here and then tell me it is wrong?" Richard was pleading. "Love, the persevering truth that the Christian faith is based upon, is never wrong Ginny. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails."

"But..." Ginny trailed off.

"But what? I won't lose my daughter over this Ginny, and we will if we don't adjust. Personally, I
am content now I've seen Andy and Miranda together. My faith in God has never been as strong as yours is, and although I may not understand this thing between our daughter and Miranda, I cannot in good conscience condemn."

"Richard please..." Virginia trailed off at the look of resolve in her husband's eyes. The stubbornness she had seen over the last 35 years visible, the same stubbornness that her eldest daughter held in abundance. Nodding her agreement he stepped towards him and clasped his hand.

Miranda looked towards the woman and her husband. "When do you leave?" She asked softly.

"Tomorrow evening." Richard told her.

"We should have lunch tomorrow, or come to dinner tonight." Miranda offered.

"Miranda?" Andy questioned. "You don't have to do that." She stated.

Smiling at Andy her eyes twinkled with devilry. "Really Andréa? Anyone would think you don't want me getting to know my future in-laws." Hearing Virginia gasp she smiled widely and winked at the young woman. "On that note, I should check the bird is in the oven. The offer is there should you wish to take us up on it. Dinner will be at 6 pm." Miranda stalked from the room calling over her shoulder. "Bobbsey's, come with me, there are vegetables to prepare."

As the twins jumped to do Miranda's bidding Andy ran her fingers through her hair. Looking up she saw the eyes of her parents focused on the ring on her finger.

Blushing, she stated. "It's not what it looks like."

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Virginia let go of Richard's hand and paced as Andy tried to explain. "It's a promise ring, it's not like we are planning on running off to Massachusetts tomorrow to have ourselves a wedding."

"Promise ring?" Richard asked gently.

"Yeah, Dad. A promise for the future we hope to have with one another. A promise to continue to nurture a relationship full of love and mutual respect." Andy explained.

"Do you want to marry her? She doesn't exactly have a good track record going off what the press says." Richard asked his daughter.

"The gutter press doesn't know her, and her last husband was an ass who was bitter that his wife was more successful than he could ever be, that she wouldn't bow-cow to him and become the dutiful little housewife he wanted. So he handed half-truths to the media making Miranda and the twin's lives Hell." Andy told them. "And just so you're aware I would be happy to call her my wife one day. It's still early days though. I'm not rushing this."

Virginia spun around and glared at her daughter. "You'd be happy calling that... that...woman your wife? Have you lost your senses? She's still married."

"She's legally separated and the divorce will be completed in the New Year. It would be an honour to have Miranda as my wife. How dare you of all people sit in judgement?" Andy stood, her hands clenched as she seethed. "You need to leave. Now! I don't want you here infecting my life and that of my new family with your negativity and ignorance. You claim to be a good Christian, I call bullshit! I've had about as much as I can take from you. We are done."
Richard could see that his wife was about to lose her temper. "Ginny, before you say anything further stop and think." He warned. "Don't say something you can never take back." Virginia spun on her heels and stalked from the room. Andy winced as she heard the front door slam. Richard looked at Andy and smiled softly. "She'll come round Andy. I'll talk to her."

"It doesn't matter if she doesn't. I can't change how I feel Dad, I tried. I fought so hard against this, I ran to the opposite side of the world to escape my feelings. Miranda told you the truth, I emailed and wrote to her in the depth of my pain and she offered me reassurance, she let me know I'd always have one person fighting my corner, that I wasn't alone in the world. She was the light in my very dark world Dad." Andy tried to explain. "I thought walking away from her in Paris was the hardest thing I had ever encountered, but it was staying away that broke me. Even before I left for India I missed her, and she was in New York then, in the city I was in. I ached for her, and for the twins."

"They are your chosen family. Those little girls are beautiful, and it's obvious they adore you. The one doing the shouting at you mom, Cassidy? She called you her bonus-mom." Richard was gentle with his daughter having finally realised the damage caused by his and his wife's behaviour. Seeing his daughter smile he continued to speak from his heart. "For all it's worth, I'm sorry...about how I reacted. It was wrong. I couldn't see how this could work, now I cannot see how it could not. You have a deep connection with Miranda, you gravitate towards her. When she is in the room, you light up in a way you never did with Nate. All I've ever wanted is for you happy Andy, it's the same with Jill."

"I am happy," Andy confirmed. "This, being here with Miranda and the twins...I am home." Richard pulled his daughter into his arms and embraced her tightly. Andy closed her eyes as memories of childhood encompassed her as she was surrounded by her dad's familiar scent. "You smell like cigarettes, I thought you'd quit?" Andy said.

"Your mom's been full on recently, it was just a couple of sneaky ones," Richard admitted with a smile. "Have you quit your occasional habit?"

"Yeah, I've not had one since Paris. Don't let mom catch you at it, it's not worth the added earache." Andy lifted her head from her dad's shoulder and grinned up at him.

"I best go." He sighed heavily as he stepped back.

"Wait, give me your cell, I have a new number," Andy told him. He handed her his cell, and she edited her contact to reflect her new number. "I'd ask you not to give it to mom but..." Andy shrugged.

"I have a lock on it when it's not on me." Richard grinned. "It's annoyed her but what can she say?"

"It was Mom that cheated on you, Dad. Christ only knows why she now treats you like the guilty party. I honestly don't know why you stayed." Andy told him as Miranda walked back into the room.

Hearing the last part of the conversation Miranda stalled. "Sorry, I assumed you had left Mr Sachs." She told Richard.

"Please call me Richard. It was Ginny slamming her way out, she can be hot-headed, my apologies for the disruption." Richard smiled sadly. "I was just spending a few extra moments catching up with Andy."

"Would you like to stay to lunch? It will only be soup and a sandwich but you're welcome."
Miranda asked nervously.

"Thank-you for the offer Miranda, but no. I best catch up with the wife." Richard stated.

Andy grinned. "Happy wife, easy life."

"I wish," Richard mumbled. Looking down at his daughter and seeing the twinkle in her eyes he gave her a genuine smile. "Cheeky girl."

"I'll walk you out, Dad," Andy said.

"I'll do it." Miranda offered.

"Thanks, sweetheart." Andy offered her a bright smile. Stepping back up to her dad she wrapped her arms around him and muttered. "I've missed you poppa bear."

"I have missed you too honey bear," Richard told her gruffly. "It is fantastic to see you happy."

Pulling back he placed a soft kiss on her forehead. "I'll call you, okay?"

Andy nodded mutely as she watched Miranda leading her dad out of the room. Sitting back in the chair she had vacated she closed her eyes. She heard the quiet conversation before the door closed softly. Hearing Miranda's light steps making her way across the room she opened her eyes to find Miranda stood before her watching silently. "Come here," Andy asked offering Miranda her hand. As it was grasped she pulled Miranda onto her lap.

"I'm sorry for winding up your mother, I couldn't resist." Miranda apologised.

"No apologies. She knows what I want from our future now, the balls in her court, she either accepts it or she loses me." Andy smiled sadly. "I told her to get out, that I didn't want her here infecting my life and the life of my new family with her negativity and ignorance."

Miranda looked at her, her eyes gentle. "I cannot promise you an easy life or that I will never disappoint you my Andréea, I cannot promise that when it happens, I will be the perfect wife...But I can promise you I will love you every single day of my life my darling."

"I don't want perfection Miranda. I want you, flaws and all. You hold my heart in your hands and I trust you not to break it." Andy told her softly as she brushed Miranda's signature forelock out of her eyes.

"I'll cherish it. I promise." Miranda twisted the ring on Andy's finger.

"You're making a lot of promises my love," Andy said.

"I don't want you to regret the decision to be with me," Miranda told her softly.

"The only regret I have right now is that my parent's disturbed our time on the roof and I had to get dressed," Andy smirked. "Are my imps dressed?"

"No, they're refusing to get out of their pyjamas." Miranda rolled her eyes causing Andy to chuckle. "Cassidy told me she wanted you to take her shopping for t-shirts."

"Yes! My mini-me has my taste." Andy grinned as Miranda snorted. "Do you have a problem with my clothes my love?" Andy asked in mock outrage.

"Mm, no comment." Miranda smiled. "I do infinitely prefer when you are wearing nothing but your glorious birthday suit though," Miranda whispered the words close to Andy's ear, her warm breath
firing Andy's imagination.

"I may have to change that idiom I used on my dad for you. It shall be, happy life, naked wife."
Andy grinned cheekily and Miranda chuckled.
Chapter 13

They sat in silence together in the chair for a short time until Miranda stirred. "Come with me my darling, I have something to show you." Miranda slid off Andy's knee and grabbing Andy's hand pulled her to her feet she walked them out of the Formal living room and up the stairs to the guest room opposite their bedroom.

Opening the door, Andy's eyes met twin sets of blue eyes. Her eyes scanned the room, and she spotted the stack of gift-wrapped presents on the floor. "Miranda?" Andy queried softly.

"You didn't think I'd stop at the ring did you, darling?" Miranda smirked as Andy nodded. "I couldn't very well make you carry your own gifts downstairs this morning."

"Miranda it's too much...the cell phone too..." Andy trailed off.

"My darling, please hush. Open your gifts. We'll start with the ones from Cassidy and Caroline." Miranda smiled softly as Andy sat on the floor in front of the stack of presents.

Turning her head she looked into their faces she gave them a bright smile. "C'mon then my imps." Cassidy and Caroline jumped off the bed as they pulled their gifts from the pile and placed them in front of Andy. Miranda sat on a chair in the corner of the room where she could happily watch.

Andy was amazed at the gifts in front of her. Pulling a rectangular package towards her she shook it. "Well, it's not chocolate." She grinned. Looking at the tag she gave Caroline a wide smile and opened the gift. Two books fell out and looking down she saw Caroline had given her two titles she'd been itching to read. A Thousand Splendid Suns and Thirteen Reasons Why. She looked at Caroline and offered her a bright megawatt smile. "These are amazing Caro, they were on my to-read list. Thank you." Caroline went pink and smiled back shyly. Looking down at the thinner rectangular package she saw it was from Cassidy. Opening it she laughed when she saw Pride and Prejudice and Zombies and its sequel Dawn of the Dreadfuls. "Trust you, Cass."

Cassidy smiled widely. "You mentioned P and P was a favourite. This is just the classic with a twist. We bought ourselves copies of each book too."

"You two are amazing. I look forward to reading all four" She was thrilled with her gifts so far. Pulling another gift towards her she unwrapped it and was stunned to find a personalised leather bound journal with her name and the year embossed on the front. "Oh God, this is so beautiful. Part of me never wants to spoil it by writing in it." She stroked the soft leather and smiled happily. "Thanks, Cass." Opening another gift she found a solid pen case from Cross. When she opened the case, she found two pens with her name and the year engraved. "Oh wow." She felt tears spring up in her eyes.

"Why are you crying? Don't you like it?" Caroline asked nervously.

"Caro this is an amazing gift, and these are happy tears. I love all my presents, my little love. They're all so very thoughtful. I'll use the pens all the time and each time I hold one in my hand I'll think of you, of how much you mean to me, both of you. Thank you so much." Andy told her softly.

Caroline launched herself at Andy and gave her a tight hug. "Love you," Caroline whispered before letting go, and running up to Miranda and climbing on her knee. Looking at Caroline and Miranda she saw their happiness.
Smiling she stood and stretched. Holding her arms out to Cassidy she following her sister's footsteps threw herself into Andy's arms. "Love you, Andy," Cassidy whispered as Andy placed a kiss on her head. Untangling herself she also ran to clamber up on to Miranda's knee, elbowing Caroline in her rush. "Move Caro." She hissed.

"You move. I was here first." Caroline stated her eyes, so like her mom's, filling with ice. Miranda winced as the girls fidgeted.

"Girls, your mom has two knees and you two are fighting each other on them. Please settle down and be considerate of one another and your mom." Andy told them softly.

"Yes, bonus-mom." They said together grinning. Turning to their mom they said. "Sorry, mom."

"So that's the one that will stick?" Andy smiled at them. "Any preference where I start with the rest of this pile of gifts?" Andy asked Miranda.

"There's a large rectangular box at the front." Miranda smiled.

Walking over Andy looked at the large stack of gift-wrapped items and sighed softly as she pulled the box Miranda suggested and got to work unwrapping her gift. Looking down she saw the iconic Chanel logo on a black box. "Oh, my God," Andy whispered. Looking towards Miranda she saw her smirk. Opening the box she looked down to find Chanel black lambskin leather thigh high boots. "Miranda sweetheart..."

"Before you say a word, I got them before our conversation earlier, obviously. I remember very clearly the day you wore the ones from the closet." Miranda smiled softly.

"Thank you, my love," Andy whispered. She unwrapped in earnest, amazed at the number of clothes. A vast array of t-shirts from Armani, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Versace, Alexander Wang and Gucci. Jeans from Rag and Bone, True Religion, 7 for All Mankind and Levi's.

There were items from the Paris shows that Miranda believed would suit her Andréa and some that she'd noticed had caused Andy's eyes to sparkle with interest. As Andy unwrapped a tie-dye dress from the Balmain show that was showcased by Angela Lindvall she knew she'd chosen right. Andy's eyes expressed her bewilderment. "You noticed what I liked."

"Mm." Miranda hummed noncommittally.

Andy moved on to find a short, strapless shift dress from Valentino in black with a flower print and the vibrant Valentino red one-sleeved evening gown. She opened more gifts to find shirts, skirts, dresses, and pants from DKNY, Lanvin, Versace, Elie Saab, Oscar de la Renta Gucci, Zac Posen, Calvin Klein, Armani, Phillip Lim, Christian Dior and Stella McCartney, she lost count of the different designer labels she had encountered. She shook her head in disbelief.

Looking up she saw Miranda watching her intently, both twins had disappeared without her realising. She was about two thirds through the items when she got to the shoes, Louboutin's, Jimmy Choo's, Manolo Blahnik's, ankle boots from Michael Kors and Chanel, a pair of UGGS. There was also two new pairs of Converse Chuck Taylor's, red low-tops and black hi-tops. She opened more gifts to find accessories from Hermes, Prada, Chanel and Louis Vuitton. "Sweetheart this is too much. There's enough here to see me well into the next five years." She smiled at the older women in the hope no offence would be taken.

Miranda stood and walked over to where she was sat crossed legged. Sitting down next to her with her legs outstretched she explained. "Yesterday morning, when the story broke I was inundated
with emails. Everyone knew you were back from Asia and they wanted to know if the story about us was true. Many people expressed their delight, some their disbelief. Valentino was effusive in his joy." Miranda grinned. "So many were asking what they could do to welcome you home. I explained to a select few that when you left New York, you shipped everything off to Ohio, to travel as lightly as you could, I told them you had given Emily and Runway all you had received in Paris. You garnered so much goodwill and respect in the industry when you worked for me this was the result." Miranda offered her a beautiful smile. "I was as shocked as you are but upon reflection, it is not overly surprising."

"This was all done in the space of a day?" Andy was stunned.

"Well yes, by late yesterday afternoon. When I left you and the twins baking Roy and Nigel arrived and we quickly and quietly moved everything up here. The jeans, t-shirts, UGGS and Converse, well they're from me. It's what you are obviously comfortable in and I want you to be comfortable my darling. The two Valentino and the Balmain dresses and the Chanel boots are from me. There are other gifts within what is left to unwrap that are from me and our girls too. If you have had enough unwrapping, for now, we can go eat lunch, it is all prepared."

"Lunch sounds good." Andy grinned. "Thank you for all of this Miranda. It was unexpected. I was happy with the ring and iPhone."

"I know you said you do not want to benefit from my position in the world, my wealth, but I will want to buy you things, knowing I'll experience the joys of your beautiful reactions, Andréa," Miranda told her.

"But I can offer you so little?" Andy mumbled.

"I have worked hard in my life Andréa, to ensure I can possess everything I required. A good home for my family, a great education for my children. I would gladly give you and my Bobbsey's the world if I could." Miranda spoke quietly. "You unknowingly give me so much my darling. And your gifts today were wonderfully thoughtful and uniquely you. In all honesty, the best gift I received this year is that sketch of my girls and knowing it will sit on my desk or on the wall in the New Year. I do not require material possessions, and what I get from you, from your presence in my life, well that cannot be bought." Miranda tried to explain.

"I love how generous you are Miranda and I wouldn't change it for the world. I have seen so much beauty in you over the last year, but this side you are letting me see now, the side you share with me and our girls, that has to be the most beautiful." Andy told her softly. "It is everyone else's generosity that has me dumbfounded."

Miranda stood gracefully. "My darling Andréa, one day you will realise just how spectacular you are. You are the best kind of person to know." She held her hand out for the brunette. "Now I should feed you before you waste away to a size zero."

"I thought you'd be happy the smart fat girl was not so fat." Andy grinned cheekily. "Being a size two isn't so bad."

"Size two is acceptable, however, I miss those delicious curves of yours in couture. You told me the last night how you watched my backside as I walked in front of you, I can happily admit to doing the same every single time you walked out of my office, your long legs in skirts was another focus for my attention as you sat cross-legged opposite me, notebook in hand." Miranda smirked. "Come with me, my darling, we shall eat and then come back for the rest of your gifts."

"Maybe I should allow the twin tornadoes in here. I'm sure they'd make short work of all this
"stuff." Andy grinned as she unfolded her legs and stood tall.

"Maybe I should invest in a thesaurus for you." Miranda smiled up at her love as she entwined their fingers. "Stuff." She sighed shaking her head. "That word will become the bane of my existence."

Grinning happily Andy pulled the editor from the room and led them down the stairs to the kitchen.

Miranda spent lunch taking Andy into unpacking. Andy sulked that it was not how she expected to spend her Christmas Day, her attitude causing the twins to grin at her as they left the kitchen to play more Guitar Hero. Miranda and Andy cleaned up their dishes before heading up to the master suite.

As Miranda made room in her closet and drawers for Andy, she looked at the brunette she smiled at the sight of her holding her new t-shirts and placing them away neatly. Andy was taking a lot of care with the clothes she had received and it made the editor's heart smile to see the young woman making herself at home. She wanted Andy to feel as if she belonged.

Spotting a silver toiletry bag on the floor Miranda scooped it up and stalked towards the en-suite before Andy could realise. Within less than a minute she was walking back out of the bathroom clutching the bag and laughing warmly. Andy looked up and saw what Miranda held in her hands and blushed. She stood quickly.

Miranda stood in front of her attempting to get her laughter under control. "My darling, I expected to find a toothbrush, not...not..." She wheezed out another bark of laughter.

Andy felt tears of mortification spring into her eyes and covered her face. Sobering quickly Miranda stepped into Andy's personal space and pulled her into her arms and her hands away from her face. "My darling Andréa, do not be embarrassed with me. May I show you something?" Andy nodded wordlessly.

Miranda led the young woman across the room and sat her down at her side of her bed. "Open the second drawer my darling." Andy did, to find a similar sized purple bag. "I should have spotted the similarities." She chuckled. "Ann Summers produce a wonderful range for women." She grinned. "Thank God for International delivery and discreet packaging."

Andy giggled, still slightly embarrassed. "I found the shop in London, on Oxford Street. I'd walked past a few in Soho, they were sleazy looking. It was the window displays that captured my attention, they had some lovely lingerie." Andy smiled.

"You were in London?" Miranda queried.

"Only for the one day. I decided against the direct route back to New York when I was planning to leave Paris, at the time I wasn't sure if I wanted to come back here. The thought of returning to the empty apartment was a little off-putting. I'd never lived on my own before." Andy was nervous admitting her fear.

"What did you think of old Blighty?" Miranda asked. "I possess an innate fondness for my home city."

"I enjoyed the little I saw, I loved the architecture. The sound of Big Ben was the second most amazing sound I'd ever heard."
"What's the first?" Miranda asked curiously.

"Your voice, especially when you're saying my name. It gives me butterflies every time I hear it." Andy admitted shyly.

Miranda grinned and closed her drawer. Walking around to the other side of the bed she placed the bag in the drawer of the bedside table on that side. Biting her lip she looked towards the brunette. "Would you let me watch you Andréa?" She nodded to the bedside table.

Andy blushed even more furiously and stuttered. "Um...I...Well...I...Sure..."

Miranda stalked around the bed and sat by Andy's side. Entwining their hands she said. "You don't sound too sure, my darling. I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"You don't Sweetheart, not really. You make me feel surprisingly at ease." Andy blushed again. "God, I feel so gauche. I've just never, well, you know, talked about this, never mind let someone watch me. It's always been a private thing. An outlet at times I'm excessively stressed or exceptionally frustrated."

"I've never watched anyone; it is not something I ever contemplated," Miranda admitted. "With you though, seeing the contents of that bag, it has lit the fire of my imagination. I would return the favour if it was something you wanted to see, we could share the experience."

"You would?" Andy whispered. She was thunderstruck by the offer. Thinking about Miranda stretched out on the bed fucking herself made her breathless. "That would be so hot." She let out a deep breath as Miranda brushed an errant curl out of her face.

"We should finish unpacking your things. It doesn't look like there's much more but there are other presents to get through." Miranda smirked.

"You've spoiled me," Andy said lightly. "I would have been satisfied today just being here with you and the twins. I don't need all these things."

"I know that my darling." Miranda offered a small honest smile. "You are one of the few genuine people I have met that expects nothing from me. Are you afraid that having any expectations may hurt or disappoint you?"

"No, I live by the one motto, appreciate everything and expect nothing. I love you but never expected you to love me back. When I found my feelings were returned, I allowed myself to become invested in our future." Andy struggled to find the words. "It's like dealing with Em, I always attempt to act towards her with kindness, but it cannot be expected for her to return that kindness. I can't really explain it."

"I always had the mentality of not expecting anything from anyone as you can only rely on yourself. I've struggled to trust and communicate with others, I struggled with intimacy. Maybe that's why my marriages failed. I instead invested my energies into establishing high levels of security and self-sufficiency while ignoring my loneliness. I can make demands on others without the fear of rejection because I have the Dragon Lady to fall back on." Miranda explained.

"With my relationship with you I have no fear about being disappointed, I am content with what we have together. I have expectations from this relationship though, Sweetheart; they are things I will also freely offer you." Andy told her.

"Tell me what you expect from us," Miranda asked as she moved against the headboard.
Andy offered her a small smile. "I expect affection; I don't care how it is expressed. Physical affection, such as hugging, kissing, or holding hands is especially important for me. That's a deal breaker. I'm a fairly tactile person. I won't, however, do anything in public that could be an embarrassment to you." Andy explained. I expect intimacy too. I'm not just talking about sex. I doubt after the last few days we'll ever have difficulties in that department." She grinned. "It means letting you know me and allowing yourself to be known."

"What else do you need from this, my darling?" Miranda asked gently.

"I expect compassion. If I hurt, I will need you to be the soft place I fall. I will, at times, need your tenderness. I expect respect, for me as a person and for my boundaries. I'll need you to be gracious about any weaknesses you may find in me. I expect consideration, you don't have to do everything I want all the time but occasionally I will expect you to look at things from my point of view."

Andy looked up at Miranda and finding her looking relaxed took a deep breath before continuing. "I expect time. We will need to make time for each other. It can be ten minutes at the end of the day for all I care. I don't want to end up asking myself how much of my time I'm willing to spend waiting for you to fit me in."

"Have there been any expectations I have already met?" Miranda asked teasingly. "It is a fairly thorough list." She grinned at the brunette who blushed.

"In some ways, you have met each of my expectations and even some I didn't know I had," Andy told her with a small smile.

"Explain please." Miranda requested.

"I didn't expect you to have such an interest in me. I'm just Andy Sachs from Cinci, Ohio. I'm an average person, yet you seemed thrilled to learn more about me, about my artistic side. You seem interested in my opinions, thoughts and feelings. It wasn't something I had even considered that I should expect from you." Andy swallowed. "I didn't expect you to be so generous."

"It would be a reasonable thing to expect. If I wasn't interested there would be no point in continuing this relationship, my darling." Miranda spoke softly. "And by generosity, I assume you don't mean my gifts?" Miranda questioned.

Andy shook her head in response. "No, I do not mean the material generosity. It is the way you have helped and soothed me through all this. You have given yourself fully and that feels like the ultimate gift. It has been the definitive act of generosity."

"I will always try to meet your expectations in our relationship Andréa. I do not wish to take this for granted. It has been so easy being with you the last few days and I don't want to become complacent. I will fight for us..." She was interrupted by her cell chiming. "Sorry." She said. Looking down she sighed as she read. "It's Gregory, he would like to come and see the twins."

"You should go on down and ask them, after yesterday..." Andy shrugged. "...I don't want to see them upset Miranda, more than they have been today. My mom was ridiculously puerile earlier. How she thought I'd just leave with them is beyond my comprehension." She shook her head sadly.

"I will say nothing bad about your mother my darling, I hope she can get over the issues she has regarding our relationship, for your sake. Will you come down with me?" Miranda stood and stretched.

"I will join you in the den after I've finished putting everything away," Andy said. "It shouldn't take too much longer. We kind of got side-tracked with our deep and meaningful conversation." She
grinned up at Miranda. "When I'm done here would you like coffee?"

"That would be glorious. Thank you my darling" She bent over and placed a kiss on Andy's forehead before stepping from the room.

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The doorbell rang an hour later Andy was making her way down the stairs. Caroline charged past her running down the stairs quickly. "Hey kiddo, take it easy," Andy called after her.

"Dad and Charity are here," Caroline explained.

"Ask them if they want coffee, I'm just going to make some for your mom and me." She grinned at the young girl as she walked into the kitchen. Hearing the young girl greet her dad coldly she was amazed at how similar she could be to her mother. Shaking her head, she smirked. Hearing the tread of footsteps making their way up the stairs she was shocked to hear the chirpy voice coming from the doorway.

"Good afternoon Andy. Happy holidays." Spinning around, cups in hand she was smiled at warmly by a petite, tanned blonde.

"Hi, Merry Christmas. You must be Charity?" She watched the blonde nod enthusiastically. "It's nice to put a face to the name." Andy offered a small smile.

"Ditto. Tales of Andy Sachs are legendary in our home; I heard they're just as legendary within Runway too." Charity offered her a wide smile.

Andy grinned and pointed to the coffee machine. "Do you and Greg want one?" Andy asked.

"That would be amazing. Thank you." Charity said. "So, I'm not known for beating around the bush, may I ask you something?" Seeing Andy nod she continued. "Are you really going to adopt the twins? They're a handful and Greg is concerned."

"Charity, that decision is not mine alone to make. It is something that Miranda, Caroline and Cassidy have a say about too. What exactly are Greg's concerns?" She asked as she continued to prepare coffee.

"Your age, then there's the fact that you have only been with Miranda such a short time. We are aware you have been travelling; the twin's talked about you a lot."

"My age is not a problem; in fact, I believe it will allow for me to understand the girls better. I believe I have a good three years on you, you're 22, right?" Charity stuttered out a quick yes. "The twins are quite a handful, as you have said, but they respect me, they stopped playing serious pranks on me a long time ago. Greg is correct when he states Miranda and I have only been together a short time, however, I have known Miranda for over a year now and as new as this relationship is I have loved her for a long time."

"How can you love her? Greg always says how impossible she was." Charity asked.

Andy spun around and leaned against the counter frowning at the young woman. "Miranda can be impossible. In her professional life she demands excellence, she expects perfection. But she never asks for anything she doesn't give herself." Andy grinned. "I will not discuss how I can love her. That is between me and her. I am content in knowing she allows me to express it, and that she returns my feelings, we fought against them for so long." Andy sighed. "I don't know what happened between Greg and Miranda, but I know whatever it was hurt her deeply. With any
relationship you build there are expectations, I believe she may have been left disappointed when they weren't met. You and Greg see the person she portrays to the world, I have always been able to see beyond that. I see the ways her eyes sparkle with amusement or dismay even when her face reflects no other emotions. I've seen the way her lips quirk when she's amused and she's trying to hide it, or the way she purses her lips holds different meanings. I have been able to read Miranda since shortly after I began to work with her."

"Wow. Your face really lights up when you speak about her." Charity exclaimed clapping her hands happily. Andy rolled her eyes and turned back to the coffee.

Pouring four mugs she set them on a tray and moved to the fridge. She poured cream and grabbed juice for the twins. Turning slightly she asked. "Do either of you take sugar?" Seeing Charity shake her head she lifted the tray and made her way out of the kitchen. Meeting Charity's eyes she nodded for her to follow and they made their way up the stairs.

Entering the den Andy sensed the atmosphere was tense. Cassidy was studiously ignoring the adults and banging away on the Guitar, focusing solely on the screen as Knights of Cydonia rolled in the background. Placing the tray on the coffee table she added cream to her coffee and picked up one of the juices. Walking towards the TV she sat crossed legged next to Cassidy placing the juice in front of the young girl. "You okay honey?" She asked softly. Seeing a small nod she sat and watched as Cassidy missed a string of notes and muttered darkly under her breath. "Hey Cass, may I have a go?"

Cassidy handed her the guitar and offered a small smile. "Let's see how well you do." She said cheekily. Andy flicked through the songs in quick play grinning when she saw Hit Me with Your Best Shot by Pat Benatar. She changed the difficulty to medium which caused Cassidy to laugh. "You will go down in flames Andy."

Arching her eyebrow at the young girl she played, keeping time with the notes as they moved up the screen, humming along to the music. She was on a 200 note streak when Caroline sneaked over and shoved a handful of ice cubes down the front of her t-shirt. As she missed notes, laughing as she squirmed against the cold and wet the performance meter fell rapidly, sound effects moved from cheering to boos' and the song ended in an epic fail.

Andy laid the guitar down and pounced on Caroline capturing her in her long arms as the young girl giggled. "Gotcha my little imp. I'll teach you for ruining my perfect streak." Caroline squealed as Andy picked out a few stray ice cubes and shoved them down her back. Andy was tackled and tickled within an inch of her life as Cassidy continued to poke and tickle the brunette. Laughing hard she struggled to catch her breath and wheezed. She stuttered. "St...Stop Cass..."

Cassidy backed off fearfully seeing Andy red-faced and wheezing and coughing, her laughter had disappeared only to be replaced with rising panic. Miranda stood and stepped towards her concerned. Caroline made her way to Cassidy as they watched hands entwined. "Darling, look at me." Miranda requested as she knelt before the brunette. Andy continued to wheeze as she struggled to speak.

"Move Miranda," Greg said impatiently, lifting her out of the way. Hearing Andy's squeak of protest at him manhandling Miranda he rolled his eyes. "Miranda sit next to Andy. Andy, look at me." She glared at him angrily. "I know right now you probably want to cuss me out again, to do that you need to breathe." He waited for Miranda to sit down next to Andy and continued to speak. "You have the choice to sit up straight or lie down but you need to follow my lead." He saw her
struggle to sit up straight. "Now breathe in slowly through your nose." He looked at her as she took a slow deep breath. "And exhale...slowly." He stood over her while she closed her eyes and concentrated on his voice. "And again." He told her.

He made her repeat the action until she got her breathing under control. She looked at Miranda and croaked. "I'm sorry."

"No need for apologies my darling. Will you be okay?" Miranda questioned gently clasping her hand.

"I'll be fine." She looked at Cassidy and Caroline and saw their fear. Holding out her arms she whispered hoarsely. "C'mere my little loves."

They charged into her arms causing her to let out a large breath. Miranda looked at her daughters. "Please be careful with Andy." She told them.

"I'm not that fragile Mira." She grinned at the older woman who rolled her eyes at the use of a nickname. She held the twins lightly on her lap and explained hoarsely. "When I was younger than you two are now me and my sister played a prank on my Grandpa. We were in the barn at their farm and we dropped a big pile of curdled cow's milk and hay over him." She grinned. "I saw he looked like a scarecrow and burst into an amazing fit of laughter which brought on an asthma attack. When my mom and dad took me to the E.R they diagnosed me with laughter-induced asthma, I also have hay fever which can make it worse. What has confounded my doctors over the years is that it's rarely affected by exercise, as you know when the weather permits, I like to jog. If I keep on top of my symptoms, it is not a problem. Now and then I forget and a burst of laughter nearly empties my lungs and then I struggle to catch my breath."

"Is it scary?" Cassidy whispered.

"It can be, yes honey. I carry an inhaler in my purse or jacket. I can't stop from laughing for the rest of my life, and I wouldn't want to. That would be ridiculous." Andy told her.

"I'll be gentler in the future," Cassidy told her.

Andy shook her head. "No my little ones, there's no need for gentleness, as I told your mom I am not breakable. What your dad did to help regulate my breathing works. Sometimes, at that moment, I panic." She looked at Greg as he sat back on the sofa and smoothed his hands down the creases in his trouser legs. "Thanks, Greg."

"You're welcome." He blushed.

"How did you know what to do Gregory?" Miranda asked.

He looked at Charity who nodded. "Charity is asthmatic. I had to learn to help her regulate her breathing. To ease your mind Miranda I can confirm what Andy said about her symptom's being fairly mild. They could be much worse." He looked at the brunette and offered her a small smile. "Now about that cussing out?"

"I'll let you off, just this once," Andy told him with a grin. Greg and Charity laughed. "Please do not manhandle Miranda again in my presence though."

Miranda scoffed at the warning in Andy's tone. "I should call Elizabeth." She stated. Andy looked at her in confusion. "Dr Henry, my personal physician."

"No sweetheart, there's no need for that. I'll be fine now." Andy said. "There's no need to fuss."
Miranda stood and gestured to the twins to get up off Andy's lap. Before they did, they both placed a kiss on her cheeks and gave her a hug. "I'm sorry for scaring you, my imps." She told them.

"As long as you are okay, that's all that matters," Caroline told her. Seeing Andy's eyes drooping she and Cassidy looked towards their mom.

"Come on my darling. Up off that floor." She stepped forward and held her hands out to Andy. Grasping them she pulled herself to her feet. Miranda led her to the large comfy chair she had vacated and pushed her into it. "Do you need anything?"

Andy shook her head and whispered. "No, I'm good thanks, my love."

Cassidy stepped up to her side and placed a throw over her. "Can I sit with you?" She asked hesitantly.

"Sure my little love, get up here." She yawned as Cassidy settled on her knee. She covered them both with the throw. Caroline sat at their feet wanting to be near Andy and her twin. "There's room for you too, Caro," Andy told her sleepily. Caroline grinned and climbed up onto her and the three of them snuggled in.

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Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

So today's my 35th year on this Earth and what better way to celebrate than to gift you wonderful people with another chapter of my first fanfic. I was so late entering the fanfic world that I feel I've maybe missed a wealth of potential prompts/fic-a-thons/other people's creative genius etc etc but hopefully with my reading/reviewing/writing I can help continue to keep this wonderful fandom alive.

Miranda watched Andy and her twins with a soft smile on her face. Turning to Greg and Charity she waited for them to talk. When nothing was forthcoming, she sat in another chair and rolled her eyes. "Greg, it's a fair distance from Harrison, why are you here?"

Charity grabbed his hand in an offer of support. "I wanted to see the twins, to apologise for yesterday. Cassidy won't even look at me, I'm sure her head's been filled with nonsense about me."

She looked towards Andy and saw she had fallen asleep. All three of them had their eyes closed. "If you believe Andrèa or I would fill either of the girl's heads with hatred for you then you are sadly mistaken. However, my children informed us it was you that attempted to do so, telling the girl's Andrèa did not want them and that she was in fact just putting up with them because of me. It's funny she is apparently only with me for what I can give her, yet she hasn't asked for a damn thing, not even the return of her feelings." Miranda was furious. "She came back from her travels because the twins wanted her here for Christmas, she came with no expectations regarding a relationship with me."

Charity attempted to soothe the situation. "Greg, I spoke to Andy in the kitchen, she loves Miranda and going off Miranda's reaction it's obvious she loves Andy. Look at the twin's, they adore her too. She is so good with them, full of love and laughter."

Greg huffed. "I want you to reinstate my rights as their father."

"You have got to be kidding me?" Miranda hissed. "You cheated on me throughout my pregnancy and then issued me with divorce papers when they were barely six months old, by that time you had already moved out to live with...oh God I can't even remember her name...Zoe? Heather? No, it was Amy."

Cassidy cracked one eye open as she listened to her parents. Cutting her eye at her sister she knew she wasn't asleep either. Andy's arms tightened around them both showing she was awake too.

"It was stupid of me to surrender my parental rights, I didn't realise what it meant until yesterday." Greg tried to coax.

"You knew exactly what it meant Gregory. Your lawyers ensured the request to renounce your parental rights was approved even though the judge was against it. Your legal team were very thorough; my lawyers haven't been able to find a single loophole. You are nearly ten years too late to have a change of heart."

"I'll take it to court." Greg sputtered.
"And you will lose. But this time, your daughters will know you didn't want them, they will know I had to cajole you into taking an interest in them. You know I would give my girl's anything, they wanted their father." Miranda shook her head in exasperation. "They will have to stand up in family court, do you honestly think after yesterday, they will tell the judge enough good things about your relationship that he overturns an existing ruling? Along with the corresponding evidence of your lack of interest, and trust me, Gregory, over the years I have sent my lawyers every proof of cancelled weekends, parent evenings and recitals. Every voicemail, email and text message is documented. Not to mention the fact that if the twins are in agreement Andréa will be legally adopting them. They've started to call her bonus-mom."

Cassidy looked up at Andy. Seeing her soft smile she snuggled in further. Caroline hugged her tighter. Under the throw the twins held hands across Andy's stomach, communicating silently.

A slight movement caught Miranda's attention, as her gaze fell on the brunette she noticed her smile and guessed the young woman was awake. Looking closer at the twins she realised they were in fact just comfortable rather than asleep. She swallowed hard and tears formed. She was concerned that after hearing what they had, then they would hate her. She watched as Andy bent her head slightly and brushed a kiss on Cassidy and then Caroline's head.

Greg turned slightly noticing where Miranda's attention was held but he couldn't see that they were awake. "Think of the press Miranda, they already make your life hell. Think of what they would say if they believed you were keeping a father away from his children." He smirked in his belief that Miranda would do anything to keep her children out of the press.

"I will hand feed the press the story myself." Miranda hissed furiously at his threat. "In fact, I live with an amazing writer, who is about to have her work published in a major magazine. She can write my story. Who better than her, who loves me and the children she is willing to raise with me?"

Greg looked stunned. "You would feed the story to the outside world?" He was appalled. "How could you?" He asked.

"How could I not when you make the same threats to get what you want?" Miranda counteracted. "My daughters are awake over there, resting with the woman they love as a second parent. Thank you for helping Andy before, but I believe you should leave, right now." Miranda stood and crossed her arms.

Opening her eyes fully Cassidy looked at Greg. "Dad..." She called out.

"Yes, Caroline?" He looked at her and gave her a fake smile.

"You should leave now and don't expect a call from us..." She told him.

He was stunned. "But...but...Caroline!" He exploded.

"God, you're useless," Cassidy told him rolling her eyes as she clambered off Andy's knee. "I'm Cassidy...I can't believe you can't even tell us apart. It's never been as obvious, although it's not the first time you've mistaken us." Greg sputtered incoherently at his daughter as she looked at him with ice-filled eyes as she stepped by Miranda's side and placed her arm around her mom's waist. "At least Andy can tell us apart, at least she wants us. We are not a pawn in whatever mind-fuck you're attempting with our mom."

"Cass, language," Andy said attempting and failing to stifle a giggle.
Caroline looked at her sister and grinned widely. Looking at Greg she turned serious as she stated. "We don't need you, dad. All we need is right here."

They all watched as Greg stormed from the room, hearing his footsteps clatter on the stairs his departure was met with the slamming of the front door. Charity looked up. "I'm sorry." She whispered as she followed Greg slowly from the townhouse.

Miranda attempted to sequester herself on the roof after Greg and Charity left but was followed by the twins. Andy made her way up after them slowly, feeling an ache in her chest, and sat heavily on the recliner, as soon as she sat down the twins clambered up onto her lap and snuggled in.

As they sat quietly, watching the clouds pass in the sky, Caroline and Cassidy attempted to reassure Miranda.

"We understand you would do anything for us, mom," Cassidy stated.

"He's the one at fault, not you. You didn't ask for this. I'm glad he left." Caroline added.

Miranda pursed her lips. "You, my terrors, were pretending to be asleep as Andréa dosed." She looked at Andy. "And what woke you? You needed the rest after your asthma attack."

"You woke me, sweetheart, you never raise your voice, you never need to, but I am attuned to certain tones of your voice." Andy grinned. "Even now if my cell rang at 2 am, I'd probably pick up with a 'yes Miranda'." Andy smiled.

Miranda rolled her eyes and smirked. "Silly girl." She gazed at Andy affectionately. She looked at the twins curled up with Andy and her smile faltered. "Bobbsey's, if you have questions about your father and I then now is probably the best time to ask."

Cassidy and Caroline looked at each other and with a quick nod, Cassidy spoke quietly.

"Why did he give up his rights to be our parent?"

Miranda shook her head sadly. "I don't really know, he would never tell me. I was older than most new mother's when I got pregnant with you. I don't think your father ever expected us to have children. Early in our marriage, we both concentrated on our careers, children was the thing we would do 'one day'. After many years suddenly we found out that our little family of two was about to double. That was the best day of my life and also the scariest. Your father distanced himself afterwards." Miranda sighed. "I wasn't a good wife, not really. I moved up through Runway quickly while your father struggled to make his mark on Wall Street, I missed dinners and worked long hours and we were apart more than together. Neither of us took the time to focus on each other and connect and your father found solace elsewhere."

"He cheated on you?" Cassidy questioned. "He must have been crazy." Cassidy looked up at Andy and whispered. "I bet you think he's crazy too."

Andy looked down at the redhead and chuckled. "Certifiably insane my little love." Miranda scoffed and rolled her eyes as she heard Andy's words but she couldn't stop the smile that formed and the joy spreading through her at the words.

"So you got divorced, and he asked not to be our dad?" Caroline asked.

Miranda nodded. "Yes. When he handed me the divorce papers, he also had his lawyers draw up
paperwork for him to relinquish his parental rights and responsibilities. I tried to talk to him about it, to tell him it would be a decision he regretted. I swore to him I would not ask him for a single cent, but believed you had a right to two parents. He didn't listen. He argued about his lack of paternal feelings to the judge. I was granted sole legal and physical custody and he got his wish to surrender his parental rights to me, due to that there was nothing to allow him any kind of visitation like a lot of children have when they have parents who are divorced."

"So what changed?" Cassidy asked.

"One night as I was tucking you into bed you asked about him, you told me you wanted to see him and get to know him. How could I refuse you anything, especially that?" Miranda swallowed a lump that was forming in her throat, "I tried so hard to be both mom and dad but I failed, so I called him and asked him to try, just a few visits here and there, but then you seemed to enjoy your time with him so I let it continue. I wanted him to be a presence in your lives, and when he cancelled I tried to make up for it. I married Stephen in the hope he could be a father figure when your father wasn't around." Miranda swiped a tear from her eye and looked at her daughters.

"Well, we have Andy now." Cassidy grinned at the brunette who smiled back widely.

Caroline moved off Andy's lap and moved towards Miranda. Pulling her daughter on to her knee she wrapped her arms around the young girl. "Mommy, Cass and I were talking and we don't want to see him anymore. He separated us and then frightened Cass."

Andy heard Cassidy mutter. "Bonus-mom to the rescue." She kissed the young girl on the crown of her head and attempted to stifle a chuckle.

"Your father may attempt to make things hard, if he takes legal action you are old enough now to stand up and speak to a judge."

"Well I will just tell the judge he may be my biological father but he's not my dad." Cassidy declared.

Andy looked down in confusion. "What's the difference, Cass?"

"I heard your dad with your mom after he left the townhouse, he was really upset with her. Your dad told her you would always be his little girl. He reminded her he was the one to get the tweezers to remove the splinters out of your fingers when you built a cubbyhole in the back garden and who practised pitching with you for your softball games. He carried you off the field on his shoulders and celebrated with you over ice cream when you won. He took you out for your first drive, smoked half of your first cigarette and took you for your first beer." Andy nodded confirmation at Cassidy's words.

"Any man can be a father but a dad is someone who would come to cheer me on at my soccer games and who would watch Cass's plays and come to both of our piano recitals. He would take us for ice cream or hotdogs or to a ballgame or a concert. He'd be able to tell us apart." Caroline explained. "We wouldn't come second to whichever new girlfriend he has and he wouldn't be angry at us for wanting our mom."

"You're right Caro. Those things you said a dad would do aren't things only a dad can do."

"We know that. It's just..." Cassidy shrugged. "...Mom tries, and you made it easier for her to be with us when you worked for her and she's made more time since Stephen left. You came to Caro's first soccer game, and you saw me in Oliver Twist, I saw you at the back of the auditorium as I sang Consider Yourself. You, as our mom's assistant, were more present than our own father."
"You made a superb Dodger." Andy smiled down at her.

"You were there for those occasions." Miranda was stunned. "Why?"

"Because you couldn't be. The day of Caro's soccer match Lagerfeld had flown in and arrived unexpectedly at Runway. When Cass did Oliver Irv called that budget meeting at the last minute. You were furious on both occasions and all attempts to get Greg to Dalton were met with a wall of silence, so I went." She shrugged nervously. "I wanted the twins to appreciate how much you wanted to be there," Andy explained.

Miranda sat and contemplated. Her initial thought was to be angry at the brunette for taking liberties with her girls but deep down she recognised it came from caring, from the pure and loving heart of the young woman.

"Don't be angry at Andy mom." Caroline requested as she stroked Miranda's frown line away. "We were happy to see her there. If it had to be anyone but you then Andy was the best person. She explained why you weren't there rather than leaving us disappointed."

Miranda was dumbfounded. Looking at her daughter she smiled. "I'm not angry Bobbsey. I'm just shocked, I had no idea." She looked at Andy and offered her a tender smile.

Caroline kissed Miranda's cheek and got down from her lap and walked towards Andy and her twin. "Come on Cass, we'll play Mario Kart."

Cassidy grinned and jumped off Andy's knee. "You will get your butt kicked Caro." She claimed.

"As if," Caroline stated as she grabbed her sister's hand and dragged her towards the house.

Watching the twin's head indoors Miranda shook her head as their bickering continued as they made their way indoors. Looking at the brunette she saw her looking concerned.

"I never meant to be presumptuous regarding the twins. I wanted to offer them some reassurance. They were so excited about their extra-curricular activities and..." Miranda raised her hand.

"Do not apologise for caring." Miranda looked at her and smiled. "Do you know what prompted me to get Emily to go after you when I dismissed you on the day of the interview?"

Andy shook her head. "No, I always wondered."

Miranda smirked. "You showed a large amount of chutzpah. It was refreshing. Most people come into an interview with me knowing who I am, they bow down in supplication as if I am a Goddess." She rolled her eyes. "You were fierce, you came across as arrogant and self-confident despite how you looked. You were a walking contradiction."

"Nige once told me he asked if you were doing a before and after piece, he wasn't aware of. He was sure that's why you sent Em after me." Andy snorted. "It seemed after a time the enormity of working for you made me lose my ability to fight back."

"I think there's more to it. You said in those letters in Paris that one look from me had the ability to throw your equilibrium out of balance." Miranda breathed. "I never truly understood what you meant. All I know is that when you went through your makeover although you became more stylish and graceful you seemed to grow socially awkward and inarticulate, you were nothing like the person I interviewed."

Andy chuckled and rubbed her chest as it tightened. "You have no idea, do you? After that
makeover, there were times you looked at me like you could devour me whole. It used to throw me off balance, but it also left me wanting more. I didn't realise what wanting more meant." Andy admitted. "There was a fire in your eyes that is hard to describe. I saw it this morning when you straddled me in that seat you're sat in." Andy smiled lightly.

"So when did you realise what you felt was more?" Miranda questioned.

"It was the night before we left for Paris that it was made abundantly clear to me what it meant. I told you what Nate said, about the person's whose calls I always take, being the relationship I was in. The moment he fired that pearl of wisdom at me I kind of stood and thought 'You know what, he's right'. I wanted more but couldn't see how it could ever be. Looking back that night I realised I had been fighting my attraction for you for months, perhaps even the whole time I had been at Runway.

Miranda shook her head and stood holding her hand out to Andy. "Come inside my darling. This cold can't be good for you. Don't think I haven't noticed you rubbing your chest."

"It always aches for a few days after. It's like I've done a chest workout at the gym." Andy looked around the roof space as she clasped Miranda's hand and stood.

Miranda entwined their fingers. "When was the last time you had an attack?" She asked.

"A few months ago, I'd stormed out after an argument, and well...It didn't interfere with work so..." She continued to look around. "I appreciate this is your haven, Miranda..." Andy spoke only to find herself cut off.

"What happened to Mira?" Miranda quirked her eyebrow at the young woman.

Andy grinned. "Well Nige calls you Mira sometimes, but when I did it earlier, you rolled your eyes." Andy grinned. "I assumed it was a no-go."

"Mm, nothing is a 'no-go' for you my darling." Miranda grinned.

"So if I change my usual sweetheart to babe..." Andy giggled as Miranda scowled.

"Don't you dare?" Miranda sputtered before realising Andy was teasing. Smirking she asked. "So what were you saying about my haven babe?"

Andy giggled. "Well, there's a lot that could be done up here, to make it a beautiful space." She was hesitant to provide her input into Miranda's sanctuary.

"If you had free reign what would you do?" Miranda asked.

Andy blushed. "I'd make it somewhere you can luxuriate in. I'd put in more plants and possibly put decking or turf down. Make it into a real rooftop garden. The recliners are great but it's open up here, which makes it cold. I'd install one of the outdoor heaters. I'd leave the view unblocked. I love how you can see across to the Park." Andy stalled as she saw Miranda's lips curving into a large smile.

"It was always my plan to do something up here, I started with the sunroom and then life got in the way. I like your rooftop garden idea. If I asked you to draw up plans could you?"

"Su...sure...I think so...yes!" Andy decided it would be her project to make the roof, which Miranda obviously loved, into a space she could relax and reflect in. "Why do you like it so much up here Mira?"
Miranda looked at her. "It has been the one space that has been purely mine. I bought the
townhouse just before the twins were born, we lived in an apartment on Fifth and Lexington before
then. Greg never really moved in, some of his things, but he was absent more than anything.
Stephen hated heights, so he never came up here."

"If I design this roof garden, this will still be your space Sweetheart," Andy stated.

Miranda shook her head. "No my darling Andréa. This will be our space. This was where I used to
find peace, these days that peace is found in your presence."

Andy grinned down at the older woman, pulling her close she bent and placed a soft kiss on her
forehead. "Have I told you lately how much I love you?"

"Mm maybe. I have one thing to say though..." Miranda smiled up at her, her eyes twinkling with
mischief.

"What's that then?" Andy asked curiously.

"I love you more," Miranda smirked as Andy chuckled.

"Once again beautiful I think we must agree to disagree," Andy told her with a megawatt smile.
"Now come on inside and I'll make us a coffee."

"You'll do no such thing, you will rest while I make coffee," Miranda told her. Seeing Andy about
to reply she placed a finger against her lips. "I do not want to hear one argument out of that
gorgeous mouth of yours Andréea."

"Yes Mira," Andy smirked as she pulled the older woman into the house and watched as Miranda
cranked the window closed behind them.

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The rest of the day moved quickly. Their Christmas dinner was eaten with gusto and seeing the
leftovers Andy happily claimed she could live off turkey sandwiches for the foreseeable future.
She especially adored the Key Lime pie Miranda served for dessert and had a second helping much
to the shock of the twins. Miranda smiled indulgently and ushered everyone upstairs when the food
was consumed. Their evening passed with music, movies and lots of chatter and laughter between
Andy and the twins. Miranda spent most her time quietly observing Andy, concern obvious in her
blue eyes.

As the twins bid the two women goodnight Andy pulled herself off the floor and sat on the wide
comfy couch next to Miranda. Stifling a yawn she looked at the older woman and smiled
softly."Wanna make out? She asked cheekily.

Miranda snorted and kicking off her pumps tucked her legs up and rested her head on Andy's
shoulder. "I would like to just sit and relax if that is okay?" She mumbled.

"That's fine sweetheart." Andy sat back and wrapped her arm around Miranda pulling her closer.
"Well, today's been interesting."

Miranda chuckled. "That is the mother of all understatements my darling. The start of the day was
wonderful and then...well..." She stilled.

"Yeah, then my mom and dad happened and there was that thing with Greg. It's been one hell of an
emotional ride." Andy stated.
"That doesn't concern me, that thing before, with your asthma attack, well that scared me more than I care to admit. Why didn't you say anything about it? It wasn't in your Runway file." Miranda asked.

"Sweetheart, it rarely impacts my life except in emotional circumstances, my attacks are caused by the changes in my breathing patterns from laughing, crying, yelling and even anxiety and stress, that's the worst of it, because it causes even more emotional stress which makes recovering a longer process. I usually manage my asthma well. If you've ever paid attention, I breathe through my nose a lot, it warms the air before it hits my lungs."

"Why is that important?" Miranda asked curiously. "I heard how Greg demanded you breathe through your nose."

"When you breathe rapidly through your mouth it pulls in cold, dry air. That is one of my triggers, it causes the tightening of my chest and the coughing," Andy explained. "Do you think I haven't noticed you watching me closely this evening Mira?" Andy arched her eyebrow at the older woman who looked down.

"I had to reassure myself that you were okay," Miranda admitted quietly. "Watching you unable to breathe was terrifying."

"No Mira, I am here for good. I realise what happened earlier was scary for you and the twins and I'm sorry that I didn't tell you before, but what was I meant to say? How do you bring something like that up in passing conversation? For the last four days we've spoken about our feelings and attempted to navigate this...and it's been emotional..." She trailed off attempting to gather her thoughts. "...but we still have a lot to learn about each other. I know how you like your coffee and what kissing that little spot behind your ear does to you. I know you prefer gowns by Valentino over Holt and Versace and that you were raised in London and the small titbits that the internet tells the public. I understand that you would do anything to keep our girl's from hurting and how protective you are, how you have a vulnerable side, a softness you try to hide. I know you have been left disappointed by your previous relationships." Andy faltered as she attempted to get her emotions under control. "I want to be with you and I want this to last, no matter what life throws at us or how hard things get. I don't want you to experience hurt, confusion or disappointment due to my presence in your life. The rest, well we can figure out more about each other as we go along."

"Acceptable," Miranda whispered raising her head to catch Andy's eyes. "Now maybe making out will help us figure this out..." Her lips curled into a large smile as Andy tilted her head downwards and raising her hand to Miranda's face, lifted her chin ensnared her lips in a searing kiss. Hearing the moan coming from the older woman Andy allowed the kiss to deepen.

After a few minutes, Andy broke this kiss and taking a deep breath and smiling whispered. "Kissing you takes my breath away, it's the best kind of breathlessness."

"Bed." Miranda declared.

"Acceptable." Andy offered the older woman a bright smile, and standing up, pulled Miranda to her feet.

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Chapter 15

Boxing day morning was more of the same as the previous four days they had spent together at the townhouse. They relaxed over a good breakfast and enjoyed each other's company.

The night before Miranda had taken the young woman to bed and ran her a bath. By the time Andy returned to the bedroom dressed in a Northwestern t-shirt and boxer shorts she was tucked up and feigning sleep. She had held off on any attempts to be intimate. Andy climbed into bed she pulled the editor close and ran a hand up her thigh beneath her sleep shirt. Miranda had to fight the urge to roll over and take what she craved from the brunette but found her concern over the afternoon's asthma attack far outweighed her own desire. Within a few moments, Andy stopped her movements and with a sigh rolled over and away from Miranda.

Over lunch, the girls asked if they could visit a friend and Miranda agreed. They stormed from the room and stampeded up the stairs quickly as Andy cleared their plates.

"Have you checked your emails for a response from Marc at Rolling Stone?" Miranda asked.

"No, I didn't want to spoil our time together by having to work. Whatever his response is, it can wait." Andy said as she stacked the dishwasher.

Miranda stood and wrapped her arms around Andy's waist from behind. "Do you want to go for a walk this afternoon?"

Andy grinned. "Yeah, why not? It will be good to get some fresh air?"

"You've been extraordinarily quiet today, are you sure you are okay?" Miranda asked quietly.

Andy tensed at the words. "I'm fine." She muttered.

Miranda untangled herself. "Don't lie to me, Andréa, one of your most redeeming features is your inability to lie and your body language speaks volumes." Her tone of voice was icy cold.

Andy turned and Miranda saw the sorrow in the expressive brown eyes. "I'm sorry Mira, I just..." She shrugged. "...I didn't mean to upset you...It's just...Why did you pretend to be asleep last night? You could have just said...Well, you could have said anything."

"I didn't want to hurt your feelings," Miranda admitted. "It's not that I didn't want to, that I don't want you, I did, I do. Never doubt that."

Andy grinned at Miranda's words. "Promise me something," Andy asked looking down into Miranda's eyes.

"Anything," Miranda said.

"Please don't hold me at arm's length or treat me with kid gloves Mira," Andy said softly. "If you don't want...well you know..." Andy blushed. "...To be intimate well I would be happy just holding you in my arms." Andy told her. "Now I realise what happened yesterday afternoon scared you but I'm here, and apart from the occasional asthma attacks I'm also really healthy," Andy said pulling her closer. "But if it makes you feel better, I will make an appointment with your physician."

"You'd do that?" Miranda asked nuzzling Andy's neck.
Stroking Miranda's hair Andy whispered. "I'd do anything for you, my love. If there is something I can do to ease your mind, I will gladly do so. You and the twin's mean the world to me." Andy's cell went off, and she stepped back. "Sorry." She said. Pulling her cell out she checked her messages. "Dad's outside. I think he's come to say goodbye."

Miranda frowned. "I thought their flight wasn't until this evening?"

Andy shrugged. "I don't know, sweetheart. But I'll find out." Andy stalked from the room, within a few minutes she was dragging Richard into the kitchen. "Dad sit down. Please tell me what's going on?"

He paced. "She left. I woke up this morning to find her gone. I've been trying to call her for hours." He stopped and frowned. "She answered 20 minutes ago. A text message telling me she was back in Cincinnati and that she'd be gone by the time I got home."

Andy sat heavily and gasped causing Miranda to step from the room quickly. Rushing to the closet she searched Andy's jacket for the inhaler she'd admitted to carrying. Stalking back to the kitchen she saw Andy breathing deeply. "Andréa?" She queried. "Your inhaler is here should you need it."

Andy shook her head."I'll be okay, give me a minute." She continued to breathe deeply through her nose.

Richard looked at Miranda curiously. "She told you?" He asked.

Miranda shook her head. "No, she had an asthma attack yesterday afternoon, it was quite the shock."

Richard chuckled. "That sounds like my stubborn Andy, the silly girl has always seen it as a weakness." He sighed. "Do you mind if I ask what caused it?" Richard said. "As far as I'm aware it's been a while between attacks."

Andy snorted. "We haven't exactly been on speaking terms dad. There could have been multiple attacks and you wouldn't know." Andy stated.

Richard blushed. "Jill keeps me informed about the things you may not tell me or are unable to tell me," Andy huffed. "Now don't blame her. I realise I've been absent but I do worry." He sat down opposite Andy and Miranda busied herself at the Jura.

Turning she leaned against the kitchen counter. "She was trying to cheer the twins up. Their father paid us an unexpected visit." Richard gazed at Miranda uncomprehendingly so she attempted to explain. "Unfortunately he reacted quite badly to our relationship and the Page Six nonsense on Christmas Eve and upset the girls in the process. Suffice to say, they were less than thrilled to see him."

"Oh." Richard gasped.

Miranda looked down. "It's not what you think. Gregory surrendered his parental rights to me as part of the divorce, it was his choice. I, however, arranged visitation after the twins requested to get to know him. Anyway, Caroline decided yesterday it would be fun to place ice down Andy's shirt as she played Guitar Hero with Cassidy. Andy retaliated and as she did so Cassidy jumped on her back and started tickling her."

"That would certainly do it." Richard gave his daughter a small smile which she returned before looking at Miranda. "Andy frightened the life out of me when she had her first attack. It's why I put my foot down with Ginny yesterday, I understand how much emotional upheaval can affect her."
Miranda nodded her understanding. "In a way, I am glad Gregory was here. He knew what to do whereas I..." She looked down. "...Well, I found myself quite out of my element."

Looking up she smiled widely as she heard the clattering of feet in the stairs. Looking at her Richard was amazed by the change in the editor as the twins barrelled into the room. Both stopped when they spotted Richard. Looking between the adults Cassidy could see Andy struggling and trotted towards her and wrapped her arms around her waist. "Hey Andy, are you okay?"

Andy nodded. "I'm fine my little love." She said softly. "My chest is still aching a little after yesterday." She grinned in an attempt to reassure the young girl. "I've agreed to see the doc to put everyone's mind at ease."

"Bobbsey's say hello to Mr Sachs." Miranda reminded them of their manners.

"Sorry, mom," Cassidy muttered. Turning towards the older man Cassidy said "Good afternoon Mr Sachs."

"Hello, Cassidy," Richard said with a smile.

Caroline looked at him shyly, unable to stop herself she asked. "Mr Sachs, how do you know I'm not Cassidy?"

Richard turned towards the door and looked at the other twin. "Oh well, that's easy Caroline." He said offering her a wide smile. "Although you look very much alike there are small differences. Cassidy has a few more freckles on her nose and cheeks. Your cheekbones are slightly higher and your chin a little rounder. Personality wise it is clear too. You seem a little more reticent compared to the boisterous little girl that just ran towards Andy and who told us off yesterday."

Miranda smiled at Andy gently. "You must get your perceptiveness from your father." Turning to Richard she smiled shyly. "Andréa has been one of few that can tell the girls apart from shortly after meeting them. Caroline is apparently very much like me. Cassidy is more outgoing."

"Like Andy." Richard grinned.

Miranda nodded. "In many ways, yes, they have a very similar disposition."

Andy grinned down at Cassidy. Holding her arm out to Caroline she said. "Come here, Caro."

Offering Andy a wide smile Caroline walked over and wrapped herself up in Andy's arms. "Hey, bonus-mom." She whispered.

"Hey, baby. You ready to go to Hunter's?" Andy asked. Seeing Caroline nod happily she stood and looked at Miranda. "Sit down Mira, I will finish the coffee. Do you want one dad?"

"No, no. I should get ready to leave soon. Checkout at the hotel is at 3 pm." Richard stated. "I'm sorry about barging in and disrupting your family time again Miranda." He looked at his daughter and smiled sadly. "I wanted to see you, Andy."

"Richard, as Andrea's father you are now part of the family. If you should wish to stay with us, well you are welcome." Miranda grew flustered in her attempt to put Richard at ease. "If you need to check out, then I can drive us to the Hotel after the twins have left to visit their friends."

Richard looked at Andy and Miranda. "You really wouldn't mind?"

Andy grinned. "Miranda says nothing she doesn't mean. Isn't that right, my imps?"
"Yeah." Cassidy grinned, looking at Richard she smirked.

"So now Andy's our bonus-mom does that make you our Grandad?" Caroline asked hesitantly.

Richards' eyes widened in his shock as Caroline looked down embarrassed. Pulling himself up he walked towards the redhead and knelt down. "Please look at me, honey." At the raising of blue eyes, he offered a wide smile. "Can I tell you something?" He asked. Caroline nodded. "I always wanted grandchildren. I think you and your sister will fit into that role perfectly." Caroline's smile widened happily at Richard's acceptance. "I have one proviso though," Richard told her smiling. "I always wanted to be a grandpa rather than a grandad. Is that okay?"

"That's acceptable Grandpa," Caroline told him as Cassidy grinned at him.

Andy didn't realise she was crying until a soft hand reached out and stroked the tears away. "Gimme a minute okay?" Andy husked catching Miranda's eyes. She moved from the room quickly and heard her dad chuckle upon hearing Caroline mutter exasperated. "Mom, she's crying again?"

Miranda looked down at Caroline as Richard stood and stretched. "As I explained the other night Andréa is an emotional person Caroline, it is not something to be concerned about or something to roll your eyes at." She looked at Richard. "I appreciate she feels things deeply, she has a tender heart."

Richard smiled. "She takes after my side of the family, we are all practical when it comes to our work, but love...Well...I know they will be happy tears, trust me on that."

Miranda let out a breath she didn't realise she'd been holding. Looking at Richard she saw he looked tired, she poured him a coffee and set it in front of him as he grinned. Turning to Cassidy she said. "Is Hunter's mom coming for you?"

"Yes, they should be here anytime now." Cassidy grinned as the doorbell rang and charging from the room she ran straight into Andy as she reached the front door.

"Hey, slow it down, kiddo." Andy laughed. "I think it's a good job we don't live in Australia, I'd have to rename you Taz."

Cassidy grinned as Andy opened the door. Spotting the milling paparazzi she frowned. Looking up she met the gaze of a tall blonde and her daughter. "Hi, I'm Andy, the twin's are just getting their things. Would you like to come in for some coffee?"

"Oh no thank you. We'll just wait here for the twins." She grinned nervously. "My apologies I seem to have forgotten my manners. I'm Amanda and this is Hunter."

Andy smiled and leaned against the door as Cassidy and Caroline exited the house. "It's lovely to meet you both."

Cassidy turned and gave her a hug followed quickly by Caroline. "See ya later, Andy." They chorused as they jumped down the townhouse steps followed quickly by Amanda and Hunter.

"I'll see you guys later, have a lovely afternoon," Andy called after them.

As she turned around to enter the townhouse, she heard one paparazzo call out after the twins. "Hey girls, how do you feel about your mom being a dyke."

Andy spun around. Seeing Cassidy about to say something she sputtered. "Cassidy do not dare answer that!" She watched as Cassidy flipped the journalist the bird as she got into Amanda's car.
She spun around to see the question had come from the same paparazzi she'd provided the previous warnings. Stalking towards him she caught the movement of the door opening in her peripheral vision. She continued to move slowly as she came face to face with the journalist she prodded him once in the chest. "You are a piece of shit..." She spat. He backed up with Andy following step by step. "...You are a vile, repugnant little man and an absolute disgrace to your profession." He continued to back up until he hit a tree. "You should be ashamed of yourself, not only for your behaviour towards those children but also for your obvious ignorance..."

She felt a hand on her arm. "Andy, come on inside, honey." She heard her Dad speaking as if from a distance.

Holding up one finger she gestured for one moment. Breathing in deeply she continued to speak. "...Now I have asked you once before to move on, you will be finding nothing out from us. You can take our photos and print your lies and the assumptions you make about our relationship but we will continue to live our daily lives as planned. We will not be providing any of you with any comments about the relationship." She exhaled deeply before continuing. "Like the rest of the world, you can read about it in whichever publication offers the most cash for me to write MY story. Now fuck off!" She spun around and as she walked back to the townhouse, she saw Miranda's small smile as the editor held her hand out to Andy and led her slowly into the house.

Looking at Andy she could see her shaking and pulled her into her arms. "It's okay my darling Andréa."

"N...No! It was wrong of me to react like that." Andy stated. "I should have ignored it." She took a shaky breath.

"Do you think Cassidy would have ignored it if it wasn't for your warning?" Miranda smirked as Andy shook her head. "I must say, watching you unleash your dragon is something to behold my darling. And the fact it was in protection of our girls means more than I could ever say," Miranda whispered. "Please do not worry about those vultures," Miranda told her.

Richard stepped back into the house and cleared his throat. "They've cleared off." Miranda looked at him curiously. "I'm sorry Miranda. It seems Ginny may have said some quite damaging things to the press, which will be reported upon tomorrow. Please understand, I had no idea. I wouldn't bring harm to you, Andy or the twins."

"We should sit and discuss this. The more I know the more damage control I can put into place." She led them to the den and sat down, pulling Andy down beside her, on the wide couch. Looking across at Richard as he sat in an armchair she asked. "So what exactly has your wife told the press?"

Richard swallowed hard against the lump that had formed in his throat and tugged nervously at the collar of his shirt. He let out a deep breath he explained. "Ginny and I didn't create a sense of openness at home when Andy and Jill were growing up, but I didn't think either of my daughters would be uncomfortable discussing their sexuality with me. I admit to making the assumption both my daughter's would be straight, it was always about the boys they liked rather than being more gender-neutral. I'm not a homophobe by any means. I believe what two adults do in the privacy of their home is their business. Ginny however never hid her intolerance, there are numerous occasions I have heard her making derogatory comments that would have potentially made my beautiful child uncomfortable in expressing who she is." Andy settled deeper into Miranda's side and was pulled into the older woman's arms as Richard continued to speak. "Andy, I would never say I love you no matter what, that would suggest that being who you are is something to be
"I know Dad," Andy breathed.

"I didn't react well when you told your mom and I you were gay; I'll admit I was hurt more than anything that you felt you had to hide who you are for so long. I made myself think I couldn't trust you because you had been hiding this huge part of yourself from me. I tried to run away from the perceived problem of your sexuality, and I let myself get swept away by your Mom's views. We made your heartbreaking confession all about us, and that was wrong. For Ginny, it went against everything her church taught her. She wanted to shove those words back down your throat, but she couldn't. Our child had admitted she was gay. She wondered where she went wrong as a mother; she kept asking me why you were doing this to us until I finally told her it wasn't about us. It was always about you being true to yourself." Andy wiped her eyes as her tears flowed. "I understood that once you told us it was obvious, you were so sure of what you were saying, but I needed to give myself time to consider the journey you had been through to reach that point, I realised that I needed to love my child. My faith needed re-consideration, because no matter what I am proud of you Andy, of the woman you are."

"What made you change your view?" Miranda asked softly having put the ice queen to sleep.

"I thought about the courage it took for Andy to tell us about her sexuality, especially when she would know it contradicted mine and her mother's core beliefs. I'll admit I was flooded with fear, doubt, anger, disappointment and shame. I didn't let myself consider the emotions Andy would need to deal with. I wasn't kind to my child and left her to flounder in darkness." He looked down ashamed. "I forgot that my job as a father is to show my children the unconditional love of a parent. My child is more important than others people's opinions. I don't want either of my daughters living with self-loathing. I am aware my child is strong and capable, but I want to be there for her every step of the way. I have realised the problems we may have with this are nothing compared to the difficulties you'll have or will face Andy."

"And Virginia?" Miranda asked. "What has she said to the press?"

"She told them that Andy just hadn't found the right man yet. That one day, when she was out from under the spell you had cast upon her, she'd find herself a good husband. Ginny believes Andy is blinded by what you can offer her and told the press as much." He closed his eyes. "She told them Andy was with you for what you could provide her. Her comments made Andy sound like she was a gold digger. She told them she hopes you both realise how unnatural your relationship is, and that you will consider the effect it will have on the children, regardless of how much they seem to adore Andy. She said your relationship is opposing God's design for humankind and that she would continue to pray for Andy's salvation from the path of destruction and humiliation she has chosen."

Andy giggled. "So she will pray the gay away?" Miranda snorted out a bark of laughter.

"You know your mom Andy, she says things without thinking, she acts foolishly. She'll regret it eventually, but I'm scared for her, that she'll have burnt every bridge before that happens." Richard said.

"She burnt bridges with me a long time ago Dad, you know that. She had me lie to you for a year from when I was 13 years old, placing excessive fear into me I would be the one that broke our family apart if I uttered a word about her and..." She trailed off seeing the hurt flash behind Richard's eyes. "If you remember that was the year my asthma got unmanageable. After that, I found I couldn't respect her in her hypocrisy." Andy stated softly.
Richard sighed heavily. "I haven't made your mother happy for a long time Andy. We stayed together for you and Jill. It is only now I am seeing what damage her betrayal and my acceptance of it caused. When it all finally came out, I was about to leave, and she asked; 'What about the children?' So I stayed. We did not set a good example for you and your sister. That's why I let myself recognise how special your feelings for Miranda are. I thought I'd be the one to teach you not to settle for anything less than spectacular, but you somehow realised it for yourself."

Andy offered Richard a bright smile.

"I would like to know how did you get the press to leave?" Miranda asked.

"I told them to investigate Timothy 5:8." He grinned at Miranda's blank look.

"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever," Andy explained.

Miranda grinned as Richard spoke to Andy. "Jill's moving to New York next month; she was offered an internship at Max's law firm. She's refusing to speak with your mother over all of this. And you're here with your new family and, from what I gather, you have started writing. I always knew you wouldn't want to settle back in Cincinnati."

"What's keeping you in Ohio Dad? You stayed there for Mom, she didn't want the big city living, but you did at one stage." Andy asked. "Max has been trying to tempt you here for as long as I remember, but you always said no."

Richard grinned. "It wasn't the right choice. I was hoping to see Max before I left, it's been a while." He looked at Miranda. "What will you do about the press?" He asked softly.

"Nothing. Your wife has shown her ignorance. She's probably done us a favour. Many people feel like she does about the LGBT community but New York is a progressive state the fashion industry especially." Miranda explained. "I will discuss it with my publicist, but I see no point in commenting back. It would make things extraordinarily uncomfortable if Andréa and Virginia ever mend bridges."

Andy snorted. "That's not likely." Miranda saw Richard nodding his agreement and chose not to say anything further. Looking across at Andy's father she saw his shoulders slump. "My offer stands Richard. If you wish to stay longer, you are welcome. I can make up a guest room easily enough, and it will be good for you and Andréa."

"Thank you, Miranda, that is very generous, and I accept. Do you know, you're not half as scary as Andy painted you to be when she first started at Runway." He grinned widely.

"My dear Richard, you haven't seen the worst of me yet," Miranda smirked, and she raised herself off the couch. "I'll bring the car around. Will you be joining us my darling?" She asked Andy smiling widely.

"Sure, will we be taking the Porsche? Can I drive it again?" Andy grinned.

"I thought we'd take the Land Rover." Miranda smiled as Andy gaped at her and swept from the room.

She heard Richards final words. "How many cars does she have?"

"I have no idea, Dad," Andy admitted breathlessly.
Chapter 16

Richard settled into his room on the second floor. He was happy to find the twins would share the floor with him, even with Miranda's warnings of the immense noise they generated. He had organised an early dinner with Max and had spoken to Jill at length about Ginny and Andy. Jill was thrilled he and Andy had overcome their differences but unamused by her mom's behaviour. He had sent the one call his wife had attempted, after he sent her a text telling her he was remaining in New York for a few days, to voicemail.

He looked up he saw a pair of blue eyes looking shyly up at him from the doorway. "Hi, Caroline." She said with a smile.

"Hey, Grandpa. Do you need anything?" Caroline asked.

"No honey, I was about to shower and dress for dinner with Max." He watched Caroline closely as she shuffled from foot to foot. "What is it, honey?" He asked gently.

"Will you and Mrs Sachs be getting a divorce, is that why you're seeing Max?" She asked hesitantly.

"Come here," He said. Caroline stepped into the room; she sat on the side of his bed as he knelt in front of her. "You can see how happy your mom and Andy are, can't you?" She nodded and offered a wide smile. "Well, I haven't been happy for a long time, but when I got married, I always swore it would be for life. I never pictured that 30 years later my wife would leave me. I am not having dinner with Max to talk about divorce proceedings; although I know he's great at his job, I am seeing him an old friend. Max and I studied at Stanford together, and we have kept in touch over the years." He smiled.

Caroline grinned up at him. "How well does Andy know Max?" She asked.

"Max is Andy's Godfather," Richard told her. "He has known her since her birth; he celebrated many a 4th July with us on my parent's farm."

"Oh," Caroline whispered. "So he's like what Nigel is for Cass and me?"

"When Andy and her sister Jill were born, I chose Max as their Godfather because he is a good man. I knew he would take an interest in my children's upbringing and their personal development; he would offer advice, understanding, support and encouragement when I could not. Is that what Nigel does?"

Caroline nodded. "Uncle Nigel is funny. He calls Andy Six."

"Why does he do that?" Richard was confused.

"Because that's what size I was when I started at Runway, and Six was apparently the new 14." Andy grinned as she leant against the doorframe.

"Is that why you lost weight? You are skin and bones, honey." Richard asked.

"No Dad. I lost a little weight with all the running around in heels I did, I became more toned. The weight loss happened while I was overseas. I lived off a primarily vegetarian diet, and I was sick for a little while. I also found I lost my appetite; I think I was a little depressed." Andy walked into the room and sat beside Caroline. "Please don't worry about me, Dad."
"It's just that, well, you see all these young women in the magazines and they're all so thin. I just thought..." Richard trailed off.

"Those women are thin and with reason; they showcase the designs they are wearing. I know right now I'm probably as close to their size as I'll ever get. I realise I was a healthy weight before I left for Asia, Miranda has also shown her displeasure at the weight loss." She saw Richard and Caroline's look of surprise and grinned.

Caroline smiled at Andy. "She said nothing when you ate two pieces of pie last night. Cass wondered about that because she always tells us not to overindulge."

"What kind of pie?" Richard asked. He knew his daughter had a fondness for dessert.

"My favourite, Key Lime. I wonder if there's any left..." Andy trailed off as Caroline laughed. "What?" She asked the little redhead.

"Mom and Cass just finished it," Caroline told her.

"Ah, not fair!" Andy exclaimed as Caroline let out a burst of laughter at Andy's look of horror.

"I was just teasing. Mom saved you a slice for dessert. We have ice cream too." Cassidy giggled as Andy grabbed her and tickled her.

You. Are. An. Imp." Andy told her as laughter erupted from the little girl. She let Caroline go and stood up as Caroline got herself under control. "Come on my little love; we should let Grandpa get ready for this evening, we'll find Cass and torment her for a while." She grinned at Richard as Caroline grabbed her hand and pulled her from the room. "See ya later Poppa bear, say hi to Max from me."

"Will do, honey," Richard called after them as they made their way hand in hand down the stairs.

Andy and Caroline entered the den to find Miranda and Cassidy planning a dance-off on the Wii. Sitting down together, they watched as Miranda took the victory in the three bouts.

"You could let me occasionally win Mom," Cassidy stated.

"And what would that teach you Bobbsey?" Miranda smirked. "You play to win and accept both victory and defeat with grace. You must roll with life's triumphs and punches, Cassidy." Miranda imparted her wisdom.

Andy snorted out a laugh at Miranda's words. "So Scrabble the other day was you accepting defeat graciously, Miranda?"

Miranda mock glared at her before smiling. "Mm, maybe I showed poor sportsmanship when I tipped the board over. That it is certainly something I must work on. Maybe over a game of Monopoly."

"You don't want to play Monopoly with Andy, she cheats." Richard's voice came from the doorway as he entered the room.

Cassidy smiled up at him as she switched the Wii off and changed over to XBOX and Guitar Hero. "Mom does too, Grandpa." She told Richard as she passed Caroline the second guitar.

"I do not cheat..." They both sputtered. Looking at each other, they locked eyes and grinned.
They broke the connection as Richard sat in the chair and spoke. "Max will be here for me momentarily."

Miranda smiled. "Where is he taking you for dinner?"

He mentioned Pastis. I've heard good things about it." Richard told her.

"Mm, an acceptable choice. I highly recommend the Seared Organic Salmon or Escalope De Veau."

Richard grinned, "Is it a French restaurant?"

Miranda nodded and offered a small smile. "Yes, it is a favourite of mine. Their breakfast and brunch menu is divine. We must have brunch soon. I'm back at work tomorrow, but my schedule should be fairly flexible until after the new year."

Andy heard the doorbell and made to move to let Max in. "I'll get it," Richard said. We will have a drink nearby before dinner.

"Tell him to take you to Harry's or Connolly's," Miranda smirked as Andy laughed and Richard left the room with a wave.

"Well, I never expected you to know of Connolly's. You don't seem the type to be frequenting Irish Pubs." Andy was surprised.

Miranda sat beside Andy on the couch and placed her head on her shoulder. "They have a delicious Irish Beef Stew and a great range of cocktails, and it is somewhere I have taken the twins occasionally for lunch." Miranda smiled up at the brunette. "Have you been?"

"Yeah, I had a quick Friday night dinner with Nigel there just before Paris. The shepherd's pie was one of the best I'd eaten." She looked down. "I'd never say that in front of my Grandma though, she'd kick my ass."

"Your grandmother is still around?" Miranda asked.

"Mm yes, my dad's mom. Ellen Sachs is very much a formidable woman. My grandparents gave up their farm when I was 15, and my uncle and Aunt took over. Dad built an accessory dwelling unit at the back of our house, and they moved in. Grandpa died back in 2000, and within a year Grandma had moved into one of those retirement communities. She plies all her visitors with cake and cups of tea." Andy grinned.

"So why did she move out of her granny flat?" Miranda asked.

"Ah, she butted heads with my mom quite a bit, she wasn't too impressed with Mom's continual interference in mine and Jill's lives. I was studying at Stanford and found I wasn't quite fitting in. I advised every one of my desire to move to Northwestern. My mom expressed her displeasure I was willing to give up a full scholarship at a top-ranking University and was especially furious when Grandma told me to follow my heart and gave me the incentive I needed to make the transfer to Northwestern."

Andy grinned at Miranda's gasp. "You had a full scholarship?" Miranda asked.

"Yeah. My SAT scores and 4.0 GPA helped. Stanford and Harvard were my parent's choices. I also applied for Columbia and Northwestern. Stanford offered the best scholarship so seemed like the most logical solution."
"Do you regret not going into law?" Miranda asked.

Andy shook her head. "No, that was my parents dream for me, it is also Jill's dream, it was never mine. When I was a child, I dreamed of being an artist, and I've always wanted to write."

"Well, I am extraordinarily proud that you are trying to follow your dream and I will do what I can to assist, even if it's just to offer encouragement." Miranda looked up and smiled softly. "Now, what shall we do for dinner?"

"We could go out..." Andy trailed off as thoughts of the press entered her mind.

"Acceptable." Miranda smiled widely. "Bobbsey's, what would you like for dinner?"

"Serendipity 3." They both claimed.

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Dinner was a happy event for the four of them. Only Miranda declined Serendipity 3's famous dessert, choosing instead to pick at everyone else's; Caroline's banana split, Cassidy's Peanut butter ice cream and Andy's Forbidden Broadway Sundae, even with Miranda's help none of them could finish their enormous desserts. Andy and the twin's had Frozen Hot Chocolate's, and the three of them had been hit with brain freeze much to Miranda's delight, it was a moment that had caused much laughter from the four of them and their server.

The twins were asleep by the time they had made their way back to the townhouse and Andy, and Miranda had to pick up the sleeping redheads and carry them into the townhouse in front of the few milling paparazzi as their camera's flashed brightly.

Kicking the door closed behind them they gently carried the twins up to their respective bedrooms. Andy quickly laid Caroline on her bed and straightened. Pulling the sneakers and socks off the young girl, she pulled the blankets over her and placed a soft kiss on her forehead as Miranda entered the room looking flushed.

"You're letting her sleep in her clothes?" Miranda queried.

"I didn't want to wake her by manhandling her," Andy admitted shyly.

Miranda rolled her eyes. "Watch this." She stated. Sitting Caroline up, Miranda pulled her t-shirt over the young girls head and replaced it efficiently with a nightshirt. Laying Caroline back down against her pillows, she tugged at the button and zip of her jeans and pulled them down. As Miranda removed the jeans, Caroline grumbled incoherently and rolled onto her side. "The twins could sleep through the apocalypse." She shook her head and offered Andy a smile. "Now I know they'll be up early as Cara is due back. They miss her when she has time off."

Andy grinned and stepped towards Miranda. "What will she say about my presence here?"

"Knowing Cara something like 'about effing time'." Miranda smiled. "Come with me darling, we'll get a glass of wine and settle in the den, I'll light us a fire, and you can choose a movie."

"Don't you need to work?" Andy asked hesitantly.

"Work will be there tomorrow. I would rather focus on my time with you." Miranda admitted.

"Wow, okay." Andy clasped her hand and led her from the room and down to the den. Leading Miranda to the couch Andy looked down as Miranda sat. "I'll go get us that glass of wine. White
okay with you?" She smiled.

"Mm, yes." Miranda smiled one of her rare genuine smiles.

"What? No 'acceptable'?' Andy asked cheekily. Watching as the older woman rolled her eyes, she chuckled and left the room quickly.

Andy returned to the den a few minutes later with a bottle of wine and two glasses. She found Miranda sat on the rug in front of the now roaring fire with her feet curled up underneath her. She was staring contemplatively into the flames. Andy sat crossed legged next to her and waited for the older woman to speak.

Andy poured them each a glass of wine and handed Miranda one. Miranda looked at her and spoke quietly. "If Rolling Stone doesn't give you full editorial control of the exclusive they want, the editorial team at Runway have advised me they will," Miranda told her. "I initially said no. As Editor-in-Chief, the magazine has always been about fashion and lifestyle, not my private life. I do not want to be accused of promoting my own personal agenda or of nepotism by publishing you in Runway. I know you are talented and I'm sure your writing will reflect that but..." She trailed off.

"I'll not say no to the to the possibility of ever publishing an article in Runway, but I would prefer this not to affect your professional life," Andy said. "Why would they want to publish such a thing, anyway?"

Miranda sighed. "Over the next year we have been discussing putting the focus of each issue on the under-represented minorities in fashion, plus-size and women of colour were two of our ideas. We have been toying with some ideas, of promoting how the LGBT community influences the fashion industry."

"I could understand that it aligned with Pride month but..." Andy trailed off as Miranda snorted.

"My thoughts exactly," Miranda stated. "But as Nigel, Emily and multiple others have advised Pride is not just something to celebrate one month a year. And according to the emails, I have been receiving; as a figurehead of the fashion world, people seem to believe our newly gained relationship status could be the focal point of that issue."

"So, are you saying you want me to write our story for Runway?" Andy queried gently.

"No, just to consider it, if, for any reason, Rolling Stone cannot meet the requirements you laid out." Miranda looked at her. "I know you offered the exclusive to them due to a sense of loyalty for the relationship you have built with their editorial team..." Miranda trailed off and closed her eyes as Andy cupped her cheek.

"Haven't you realised by now that my loyalty is to you, and by an extension of that, to Runway," Andy stated softly.

"I would never voluntarily ask you to go back on your word, and I am still unsure if it would be suitable," Miranda admitted. "It may be best going to an alternate publication and focusing on the LGBT issue idea for the June edition."

"I don't know if writing about us is such a good idea at all." Andy shrugged. "But people are, for whatever reason, curious." Andy sighed as she took a sip of her wine. "I just hope the press presence eases soon, for the twins sake rather than my own. I can well handle myself but the girls..."

Miranda snorted. "You missed it when the press was at its worst at the start of the divorce. My
terrors pelted the paparazzi outside with water bombs filled with poster paints."

Andy grinned. "And I'm sure Cass was flipping them all the bird from the balcony too."

"Mm perhaps." Miranda smiled sadly. "Unfortunately our girls are well versed in dealing with those vultures, probably more so than you."

Andy nodded her agreement. "True, I won't stand for them having their lives disrupted more due to my presence here. Those comments today, they don't deserve that Mira, and I will do what I can to protect them, and you."

"You can't fight the entire world for us my darling," Miranda stated softly.

"Wanna bet?" Andy grinned widely at the editor before pulling her into her arms. Placing a light kiss on Miranda's cheek, she settled in behind the older woman as they continued to watch the flames.

They finished their glass of wine watching the flames of the fire together before Miranda turned in Andy's arms and had placed an urgent kiss on the brunette's lips. Their kisses deepened and Andy laid Miranda down in front of the fire hovering carefully over her. "Mira, you are beautiful," Andy whispered as she broke the kiss. Her breathing was ragged and her face flushed.

Miranda smiled up at her. "As are you, my darling." Miranda's eyes flitted between Andy's lips and eyes, and she bit her lip. Slipping her hands over Andy's back she gripped her ass and pulled her flush against her. "Now I have you where I want you, what are you going to do about it?" Miranda husked throatily in Andy's ear.

Andy moaned as Miranda's hands squeezed her ass cheeks. "Wh...what do you want me to do?"

Andy hissed as she placed her elbows on either side of the woman under her and rested her weight on them.

"Right now, I'll settle for finishing the kiss I started." Miranda nared Andy's lips in yet another searing kiss and moaned as Andy cupped her face and teased her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Andréa, please. Do not tease me so." Miranda pleaded as she moved slightly, causing Andy's leg to fall between hers. She gasped at the contact before moving against Andy's strong thigh.

"Mira, I..." Andy moaned as the front door slammed and she heard her Dad throw an apology up the stairs. She heard the closet door close, followed by a heavy footfall. "...Fuck!" Andy hissed as she pushed quickly away from Miranda and tried to straighten herself.

"That's what I was attempting, darling." Andy could hear the laughter in Miranda's voice. Looking across at Miranda she saw the small smirk on the older woman's face.

"It's not funny, Mira." Andy tried to keep a straight face as her lips twitched. Rolling her eyes she gave Miranda a wide smile. "You're incorrigible." She muttered.

"Come sit down with me," Miranda told her. "You realise it will look suspicious you being on the other side of the room if he pokes his head in."

And took three large strides and sat crossed legged beside Miranda. Pouring them both a fresh glass of wine she grinned as Richard stuck his head around the doorframe nervously. "Hi, dad."

"Hey, ladies." Richards smile was initially wide but turned into a frown. "Um, I wanted to let you
know I was back, and..." He rubbed his hand along his jaw. "...I'll just...yeah...um..." He faltered slightly. "...I'm off to bed."

Andy faced him fully, confusion lighting her eyes. "Dad?" She queried as he stepped back through the door.

"Um...I'll just leave you to do...um...whatever..." He turned and rubbed his jaw again before grinning at the two women. "Miranda's lipstick looks good on you honey. You should wear it more often."

Miranda's laughter followed him from the room as Andy's hand flew to cover her mouth and she blushed furiously. "At least I now know where that wide smile and the babbling comes from." Miranda leaned into Andy's side.

Andy looked up into Miranda's laughing blue eyes. "You knew, didn't you?"

"I didn't think he'd notice," Miranda mumbled.

"Oh, God. My dad knows we were making out." Andy was embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sure he does," Miranda stated. "However, I do not believe it was an issue, you lived with that boy before Paris." Andy looked up into Miranda's face. "Surely he knows his little girl is not so little anymore?" Miranda smirked at Andy's small nod of agreement. "Now, I believe we should finish our wine and then you can take me to bed. I aim to finish what we started."

Andy grinned. "Yes, well. Drink up." She watched as Miranda sipped her wine until the glass was empty.

"Ready?" Miranda husked.

"Oh, yes," Andy breathed. Standing she helped Miranda back to her feet and led her hand in hand up to the master suite, flicking off lights as they moved through the house.

Entering the suite Miranda moved to the bed and switched on the lamp on the bedside table as Andy locked the door behind them and leaned against it. Watching Miranda move lightly through the room she was amazed that she got to see this side of the older woman. The softness and vulnerability was something that blew her mind.

Miranda turned and watched Andy looking at her. "What?" Miranda asked nervously.

"You take my breath away, Mira," Andy admitted. "I feel blessed to be with you, like this."

Miranda stalked over with a smirk and stood in front of Andy, looking up into hazel eyes she offered Andy her hand and led her towards the bathroom. "Get ready for bed, my darling."

Miranda rarely allowed herself to dwell on her past relationships but as Andy left the room, leaving the en-suite door ajar, she let her thoughts roam. She sat on the bed and let her thoughts flicker to her relationship with Gregory. The hurt she had experienced in finding him in their bed with a younger woman when she was six months pregnant and feeling particularly ugly. She'd stupidly forgiven him for that misdemeanour after he promised it was the first and last time. Seven months later divorce papers landed on her desk at Runway and he moved in with the young woman who had been pleasuring him that afternoon she had caught him. Letting out a deep sigh she closed her eyes as memories of arguments with Stephen forced their way into her mind.
Six Months Earlier:

"You married me, Miranda. To love, cherish and obey. You seem to have forgotten your vows, honey. How disappointing." Stephen's voice was raised. "I do not feel particularly loved nor cherished. It's like sleeping with an iceberg when you actually deign to sleep with me."

"Stephen, I...I..." Miranda stuttered, swallowing her apology. She was furious at his words, at his lack of understanding.

"You left me there, Miranda. I was sat in that fucking restaurant, waiting." Stephen continued to rant.

"What did you expect me to do, walk out in the middle of a cover shoot?" Miranda asked.

"Well, I rushed out of an investment committee meeting...and I sat there waiting for you for almost an hour." Stephen's tone was whining and irritated Miranda.

"I told you the cell phones didn't work. Nobody could get a signal out," Miranda explained yet again, her frustration palpable. "You know my position at Runway is precarious. Irving is baying for my blood."

"I knew what everyone in that restaurant was thinking..." Stephen stated. "...There he is, Mr Priestly. Waiting for her again." He spat.

"Stephen, please. Don't..." Miranda lowered her eyes to be caught in Andy's expressive hazel eyes, which showed her concern and embarrassment. She had been disturbed that Andréa had witnessed their altercation with her husband. She had heard her pleading for his understanding.

Stephen followed her gaze and smirked at the retreating form of the young brunette. "Well, well. So that is your Andréa? I must say, she is exquisite." His smirk widened. "And now she knows just how pathetic the great and powerful Miranda Priestly really is." Stephen gloated. "She most probably sees the ugliness inside you. Look at her, running away from the Devil."

Miranda bent and picked up the book from where Andréa had placed it at the top of the stairs. Looking up, she saw her daughters scampering away and sighed. Schooling her features she turned to her husband. "This conversation is over, Stephen." Miranda's tone was deadly. "The guest room is made up, don't bother attempting to join me tonight, I wouldn't want you to get frostbite." Miranda spun on her heel and made her way to her study. She'd deal with Andréa in the morning.

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Andy moved from the bathroom to find Miranda lost in thought. She walked over and brushed the forelock out of Miranda's eyes. "Miranda?" Andy whispered. Getting no response, she knelt in front of the older woman and leaned in to tilt Miranda's face up to meet her eyes. As the older woman raised her eyes, she saw the glistening tears trailing down her face. "Where did you go?" Andy asked softly.

"Memories." Miranda husked. She thought of how easy it had been having Andréa with her. How she had come to rely on the tender expression in the dark eyes of the younger woman, even when battling her desire and the passion as they made love. "I was thinking of my marriages. How they started and ended."

Andy wiped the tears from the older woman's face with the pads of their thumbs. "The death knell of my marriage to Stephen was the argument you witnessed that first night you delivered the book.
I sent him to the guest room, and I was relieved more than saddened. He stayed there until he left. Miranda admitted looking down.

"What made you think of that, sweetheart?" Andy asked. She wanted to know why Miranda's mind had taken her back to those times.

"I don't know." Miranda husked. "I do not dwell on the past but tonight, for a moment..." Miranda bit her lip. "...Stephen told me you would see how pathetic I am, how ugly inside...I'm broken, Andréa, that's why everyone walks away, that's why Gregory left me. No one can fix me."

"No, Miranda." At Andy's firm tone Miranda looked up sharply causing Andy to sit back on her haunches. "No, I do not see ugliness inside you. I see so much beauty in you that you often try so hard to hide. I see it in the passion and gentleness for the things you love, for me and our girls and for your work. It can be seen in your sensitivity and the vulnerability, caused by thinking you are not good enough when you are, Miranda. You are good enough. You are worthy of love. You are beautiful inside and out." Andy told her. "There's nothing to fix. You are whole. You are you, and Christ, Miranda, I wouldn't want you any other way." Andy took a deep breath and watched as Miranda's eyes widened at her words. "You are not pathetic. It is the men who have called you such, those that have made you feel as if you are broken, that you are at fault for the failure of your relationships, that you are incapable of creating happiness or loving with your whole heart, they are the ones who are pathetic because they could not admire the strength of the fire burning brightly inside you. They could not handle your success, your fantastic mind or your sharp tongue."

Miranda snorted at Andy's final words and her eyes held amazement. "You really believe that, don't you?" She asked.

"Of course, I do. Because it's the truth." Andy grinned up at the woman before turning serious. "I will tell you every single day if that's what it takes. And if it takes the rest of your life for you to believe it, you will believe it one day. I'll make sure of it." Andy reassured. "Now go get ready for bed, you have an early start tomorrow and will no doubt face an excess of incompetence."
I want to thank the those that continue to provide encouragement by commenting on my fics. This chapter comes with a shout-out to all the Mirandy Dandies, may your love of the fandom continue to push it to flourish and especially to XVnot15 for providing us with so much Mirandy goodness with her unending enthusiasm and the Mirandy Fun and Frolics.

She had returned to Runway on that Thursday after the Christmas holiday in a good mood. Her children were happy, and she had her Andréa back. Her future looked brighter than ever. What had made the morning spectacular was waking up entangled with the glorious woman she loved.

Upon sitting at her desk she came face to face with an email from Irv and the day went downhill rapidly from there. Everyone was filled with incompetence and the layouts being provided were nothing short of lacklustre.

Irv had taken delight in informing her that the board wanted her to account for her actions, something she loathed to do, but in this instance, it seemed like a necessary evil. Stalking to the penthouse offices that housed Irv and the other Elias Clarke board members she prowled through the corridor's until she reached the boardroom. This room provided wonderful views of Manhattan and Miranda usually delighted in this.

Today felt different. Stepping into the room she was amazed at the sight before her. Every board member was sat in his or her place with Irv at the helm of the table. The gentlemen stood and waited for Miranda to sit at the far end of the table from Irv and she was graced with a few smiled from the women present.

"You are late, Miranda." Irv seethed through his teeth.

Miranda snorted elegantly and raised her eyebrow at the little man. "I have it in my email, just here, that you wanted me in this godforsaken meeting at 12 pm." She waved her cell slightly. "Since it is only 11:45 am, I am in fact not in fact late, everyone else is simply early, Irving. Now I suggest you don't attempt to make me out to be a fool or you will be the one that ends up looking foolish." Miranda smirked as Irv's jaw dropped. Watching the man's reaction she had to stifle her laughter. Sitting gracefully she placed her cell on the table in front of her and clasped her hands on her lap. "Now would you like to explain why I am here?"

"You have brought the press to our door again, Miranda." Irv sputtered accusingly. "First the divorce now this...this...lesbian fling."

"Ah yes, but who was it that fed the story to the press? No-one at Runway would dare, their NDA's stop them from disclosing any detail regarding my personal life." Miranda's tone was soft yet cold.

"I would also like to know that." Thomas Clarke added. "Only someone who was at the Runway party would have known about Miranda's party guest." He smiled at Miranda. "How is Andy, Miranda?"
"She is very well. She seems to be happy to be home and her father is in New York at the moment. They are spending the day with the twins." Miranda smiled happily. "It was Ice Skating this morning and I believe they have plans to visit MOMA this afternoon."

"And her writing? A little bird told me she's due to be published in Rolling Stone?" The questions came in rapid succession from Diane Truman, one of the major shareholders.

"Her writing is coming along well. She has completed four pieces for Rolling Stone about her travels through India, Nepal, Thailand and New Zealand over the last three months. She was waiting for a response from Mark about an exclusive regarding our relationship, but as of this morning that was not forthcoming." Miranda smirked.

"Why aren't we requesting an exclusive?" Charles Elias asked hesitantly. "It would be good for OutinNY."

"Claire in editorial has asked that Andréea submits pieces for Runway. A fresh perspective of designs showcased in Paris, the impact of the LGBTQ community in fashion, An exclusive about our relationship, etcetera." Miranda waved her hand around dismissively. "I, however, believed there may be some who would try to accuse me of nepotism." She glared balefully at Irv when she mentioned this and the three people who had questioned her followed her gaze as he flushed angrily.

"She is an assistant, not a very good one if her behaviour in Paris is anything to go by..." Irv trailed off at Miranda's expression of fury. Swallowing hard, he continued. "...half dressed, banging on the door as we held a meeting."

"Ah, the meeting where you attempted to oust me from my position?" Miranda smiled coldly. "The meeting where I provided the list of every photographer, editor, writer, designer and model that would follow me if I left Runway? That meeting? Yes, she banged on the door enthusiastically and with good reason." Miranda smiled. "She wanted to warn me of your betrayal. That kind of loyalty was not something taken for granted. So when she requested to leave after the luncheon, I allowed it, as Nigel advised at the party. You saw us leave hand in hand and then hand-fed the story to David Poole over at the New York Post."

A few heads popped up at this and there was a consternation on some faces. Charles Elias turned to Irv and his face was filled with horror. "Who?"

"Who, what, Charlie?" Irv spat.

"Who was to replace Miranda?" Charles asked.

"I think the idea was that Jacqueline Follet would take my place, she instead moved to James Holt. The ridiculously high salary was too great an opportunity to miss." Miranda smirked.

"Do you have proof of Irv leaking your story?" Diane asked.

"Yes, it was confirmed by David Poole himself after I threatened to sue for defamation of Andréa's character. He printed a retraction this morning after receiving the communication from my legal team." Miranda spoke coolly. "I have also ensured one of his reporters was fired after he harangued my children to the point that Andréa had to physically intervene. I noticed a step-by-step report had landed in the New York Mirror this morning." Miranda sighed "Frankly, I do not see how my private life has anything to do with the job I do at Runway. I work hard to create a thing of beauty every month and that in turn lines your pockets, and my own, with the profits. Those profits come from my hard work and commitment. A dedication that I have allowed in the past to take time
away from my family." Miranda shook her head. "No more. With Irv at the helm, undermining my work, I will give the bare minimum to ensure the magazine gets out each month. That's all."

Miranda stood quickly causing Charles Elias and Thomas Clarke to rush to their feet. "If there is nothing else, I have a magazine to run." She spun on her feet until she heard a voice calling out to her.

"Miranda, one last thing." Miranda sighed and turned to see Diane Truman on her feet.

"Yes Diane," Miranda asked. She liked this woman quite a lot, she was no nonsense and was a ball-breaker in her professional life.

"How can you say you provide profits when over the last year they have fallen," Diane asked.

"Have profits fallen?" Miranda queried. Seeing a few nods she frowned. "Have I increased the expenditure outside of my budget so adversely?" Miranda knew the answer to this question.

"Your budget has been raised twice in the last year, and yet every quarter you go over it," Diane explained.

"No, my budget has not increased, not that I have seen or been made aware of, anyway." She looked at Irv who shifted his eyes away. Pulling out her cell she whispered. "Emily, come to the boardroom with the expenditure files for this last year." She disconnected the call quickly and sat back in the chair. "My assistant will be here shortly with my budget reports for the last fiscal year."

After a few minutes of awkward silence, there was a timid knock on the door before it opened. Andy walked in hesitantly. "Hi, sorry to interrupt, um, I ran these up for Emily, she ended up on a call with Demarchelier regarding the shoot next week." Miranda turned at her voice and offered a wide smile.

Standing she grabbed the folder from Andy and handed it to Diane with a smirk. "This should tell you all you need to know." She turned back to Andy. "Hello, my darling." She husked watching as Andy shuffled from foot to foot, blushing furiously.

"Um, I'll just go, I only popped in on the off chance to see if you had time for lunch, but you're busy and..." Andy trailed off at Miranda's smile."...I didn't mean to interrupt."

"Sit down for a few, we're nearly done here," Thomas stated as he, Charles and Diane looked through the figures.

"You were the first assistant for a time, just before Paris weren't you?" Charles asked Andy as he stood and pulled a chair up next to Miranda's.

"Um, yes, just for a short time, before I left and Emily was incapacitated." Andy's voice showed her nervousness as she sat.

"Please don't be nervous. I know as Miranda's first assistant, you are entrusted with the responsibility for the budget reports." Charles was curious.

"Yes, it is something that Emily or I did as standard each month. At the end of the quarter, the report was given to Miranda, who checks it over before signing off on it. She then has copies made before sending it to Mr Ravitz." Andy clarified.

Charles looked up and smiled. "You and Emily have done well with these Andy. They're extraordinarily detailed."
"Um, thanks. It's mainly Em's doing." Andy stuttered. "I just followed what she did."

"Well thank you. These are clear and explain a few things we have been concerned about." Thomas looked up at Andy and smiled widely. "Go on now and take Miranda for lunch, time with family is important."

"Thanks, Tom." Andy grinned as she stood. "It's nice to see you all again. Charlie, give that beautiful grandbaby a big smooch from me."

"Will do Andy, and I'll tell Ellen you said hi." Charles smiled up at her.

Miranda smirked at Irv's look of shock as Diane whispered. "She's such a nice young woman, and I know first hand she's quite the talented writer."

Andy linked her arm through Miranda's as she led them from the room. As she closed the doors behind them she whispered. "Don't worry Miranda, it was copies of the copies I gave them."

"Oh, I'm not worried. I also have copies at home." Miranda smirked up at the young woman. "Now let me look at you." Miranda stepped back and let her eyes trail up Andy's slim body, taking in her new red Converse, the dark 7 for All Mankind skinny jeans and Ralph Lauren t-shirt. She was wearing her soft leather St Laurent jacket and had a pair of Gucci sunglasses on her head. Running her fingers through the smooth hair of she pursed her lips.

Andy chuckled. "It's not like you'll never see it curly again, Sweetheart."

"You are beautiful, my Andréea," Miranda whispered as they moved along the corridor to the elevator. Stopping at the doors she turned to see Andy blushing. "What?" She queried.

Andy exhaled deeply. "Your voice, when you say my name as if you're purring." She spoke through gritted teeth. "It makes me want to devour you."

"Mm, as wonderful as that sounds, I'm hungry for food," Miranda admitted.

"A raincheck then?" Andy grinned as Miranda shivered at the promise held in her voice. The elevator arrived, and they stepped in.

"Now tell me, my darling, how did you come to be on a first name basis with three of the major shareholders of Elias Clarke?" Miranda was curious.

Andy giggled. "My natural charm, obviously."

Miranda snorted. "Yes, which you have an abundance of. However, that doesn't tell the full story."

"There's not much to tell. Charlie stopped the elevator door for me one day after I ran through the lobby. He saw me juggling coffees, about a dozen bags from different designer's and my cell as it rang. It was Em was demanding my presence. Anyway, he had an Orchid in his hands and I politely told him it was a beauty. We got talking, and I found out about Ellen's love of Orchids. She was upset as she was struggling to get a second bloom. I gave him some tips, and they worked." Andy grinned.

"And Thomas and Diane?" Miranda queried.

"I interviewed Diane when I was at Northwestern, she recognised me when I worked here. Tom overheard my conversation with Irv at the Met Gala." Andy bit her lip. "He told me afterwards I handled the situation beautifully."
"Well, that is something." Miranda breathed. "They are a force within the publishing world, greater than even I."

"I don't need their help, Miranda. I have achieved what I have on my own and I will work towards my dreams in my own way. I don't look to them for support, I know I will get that from you should I need it." Andy looked at the older woman and smiled at the happiness in her eyes. "I didn't set out to charm the founding family of Elias Clarke or one of their major shareholders. Frankly, I go out in the world and treat everyone with kindness and respect. It seems to generate it back with only a few exceptions." As they exited the elevator side-by-side Andy mumbled. "What do you think the board will do with Irv?" Andy was still seething about her run-in with the paparazzi the day before and was aware it had been Irv who had unleashed the press.

"I have no idea, but I believe we will find out soon enough," Miranda smirked.

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Lunch had been a pleasant diversion, with much comfort being found in each other's company as they ate their soup and sandwiches at the local deli. Andy had explained that Richard had taken the twins out for an afternoon of fun.

As they walked back to Elias Clarke, they saw Irv being led from the building by Security and handed a box of items. Andy stopped as Irv glared at Miranda and her fist clenched at the hatred in his eyes. With a small shove, Eduardo moved Irv towards the waiting town car. "Mr Ravitz, you need to move from the front of this building." He turned away, a scowl highlighting his face, as he stepped into the waiting car and was chauffeured away.

"Well..." Miranda said lightly. "...It looks like there may be changes ahead."

"If you need to work late, just text me and I'll organise some dinner to be sent," Andy responded. "Between me, Cara and Dad we can keep the twins amused." Andy smiled softly as Miranda turned to face her. Lifting her hand she brushed Miranda's forelock out of her face. "Thank you for taking the time to have lunch with me."

"Will you walk up with me?" Miranda asked.

"I should go do some writing or something. I've sat on my butt long enough." Andy grinned.

"At least let me call Roy for you," Miranda stated.

"Miranda, sweetheart, the subway's just a block away." Andy grinned at the older woman's shudder. Stepping closer she leant and brushed a kiss on Miranda's cheek. "I love you, Mira. Now go, rule your minions with an iron fist and ensure you scare the best out of them." She stepped back and saw Miranda's small smile.

"I love you, my darling. All being well I'll be home before six." Miranda cupped Andy's cheek in her gloved hand before spinning in her heel and entering the building. Andy couldn't help but chuckle as the clacker's scattered to avoid Miranda.

"You really love her, don't you?" The voice came from behind her and she spun around to find Diane Truman looking at her curiously.

"Um, yes. Yes, I do." Andy shrugged.

"I must say, I was shocked to read the news on Sunday. I assume it has been hard for you and Miranda." Diane spoke lightly.
"I don't care what the press says about me, but Miranda feels differently. She wants to protect me and the twins." Andy admitted. "The paparazzi followed us this morning as we walked through the Park, that's the reason for the sunnies on my head. It was the twins idea to save me being blinded by the flashes." Andy grinned

"Miranda seems happy. It's good to see." Diane uttered. "Will you join me for coffee?"

"Sh...sure." Andy stuttered. Diane gestured towards the Starbucks down the street and Andy walked beside the older woman quietly as they made their way out of the cold. "What will you have?" Andy asked.

"I'll get them. Let me guess..." Andy nodded as Diane smiled. "...You look like a hazelnut Macchiato kinda girl?"

Andy grinned. "How did you know?"

"It's what you ordered when you interviewed me. I never forget something as important as a coffee order." Diane laughed at Andy's look of disbelief. "Grab a seat, Andy. I'll join you in a few minutes." Diane moved away to get coffee from the counter as Andy's eyes scanned for a table. Spotting a table with two seats by the window Andy sat nervously, pulling at her fingers.

Diane sat, placing a coffee in front of the brunette. Looking at the young woman she was curious. "I remember you from the interview at Northwestern after I gave that speech to the business graduates. Your questions were well thought out, and you somehow got me to open up in a way I never have before." Diane grinned ruefully. "I was surprised to see you at Runway, I thought you were made for better things."

Andy looked up sharply, a frown marring her forehead. "I initially believed the same, but I had bills to pay. I realised eventually I was not too good for Runway, in fact, it was a position that brought me down a peg or two." Andy grinned. "I needed it, I had a serious chip on my shoulder. I learned a great many things as Miranda's assistant."

"I didn't mean to sound rude, Andy." Diane really didn't want to offend the young woman, with Miranda's support they could make life awkward for her.

"No offence was taken." Andy breathed. "What's this about Diane?" Andy waved her hand airily.

"We want you to write for us," Diane stated. "After the meeting with Irv ended, I spoke to Marc at Rolling Stone." She smirked at the young woman. "He is pissed you will not allow Christian Thompson to interview you and Miranda, and he is not willing to give you full editorial control."

"It's his loss." Andy shrugged.

"He also said he would counteract your request with one of his own, either you give the exclusive, with Christian, or your other articles will be pulled from future editions," Diane spoke softly. "It's too late to pull the first article, but he meant what he said."

Andy shrugged again. "I wrote them for me, a way to channel my creativity as I travelled. It was something I didn't always have time for when working at Runway. If Marc chooses not to use them, that's on him."

"You really don't care, do you?" Diane was amazed.

"Nope." Andy grinned. "I realised something a long time ago when Miranda was taking me to task for something or another, I have nothing to prove to anyone but myself. Rolling Stone has paid me
well for the four stories. It's his loss, not mine. I will not work with Christian Thompson, and if Miranda had her way, he'd be wearing his own balls as earrings."

Diane guffawed loudly. "I heard about her run-in with him in Paris. He must have really riled her for her to lose control like that."

"Christian has a certain way of pushing people's buttons. He's an arrogant ass-hat," Andy claimed hotly. "So writing, is that for Runway or Elias Clarke as a whole?" Andy asked.

"As a whole. We will have a new C.E.O coming on board shortly, things will be changing. We need people loyal to Elias Clarke." Diane raised an eyebrow at Andy's look of disbelief. "I know your loyalty is with Miranda, not Runway. But we were impressed by Miranda's recounting of how you tried to warn her about Irv's manoeuvring against her, we have found out some of the board were in agreement of the takeover, however, it was due to the false information we had. Charles, Tom and I believe you would make a good edition as an all round staff writer. We'd set you up with your own office, and any writing you take on for any of our publications and those issued externally relating to Elias Clarke news would give you full editorial control."

"I need to talk this over with Miranda. It's a wonderful offer, so thank you." Andy was amazed.

"What are your concerns, Andy?" Diane asked.

"I wanted to freelance," Andy admitted. "To be free to come and go as I wanted, to choose the stories I write and not be bound to somebody else's whims."

"Do you plan on leaving New York?" Diane asked.

"No," Andy was adamant. "I am here for as long as Miranda wants me." Andy looked down. "This is all so new, and with the press interest..." Andy trailed off and shrugged. "...It is something that will affect the whole family."

"I remember you mentioning you wanted to write a range of articles on women in power. When you interviewed me it was to be the start of a range of articles delving into women's place in business. Why did you stop at my interview?" Diane queried.

"Northwestern was your Alma Mater. So the university allowed me to publish your story. When it came to the women of Brown, Stanford, Columbia and Harvard they had little interest. It was an idea I had to let go." Andy smiled sadly. "My mom said it was a pipe dream, why would these extraordinary women take the time to talk to me?"

"I did. And it was enlightening. I went home that evening, thankful for the opportunity to put my story out there, albeit for the Daily Northwestern. If it changed one person's perspective it would be worthwhile." Diane grinned and sipped at her expresso.

"It changed mine," Andy admitted honestly. "You seemed like a force of nature. Miranda has the same effect. It's astounding what women like you do to succeed."

"What will you do to succeed, Andy?" Diane asked. Andy looked up into warm green eyes and grinned.

"Well, that all depends." Andy's smile widened. "How would you feel about another interview?"

xxxxx

Andy made her way back to the townhouse slowly, she thought about the offer Diane had made.
The older woman had said she would courier contracts across within the day. She wanted Miranda's feedback on the offer before deciding but it sounded like a good step towards the future she wanted.

Arriving at the townhouse she frowned at the milling press as she made her way up the stoop. Unlocking the door she saw Cara wiping her hands on a dishcloth as she made her way towards Andy.

"Hey, Cara." Andy grinned. Cara’s reaction to her presence as she'd entered the kitchen had been just as Miranda predicted.

She'd pulled Andy into a tight hug and whispered: "Thank God you’re here." Bet fire lettings go, slapping her arm and whispering "It's about fucking time you came home."

Andy noticed Cara bitings her lip nervously as she helped Andy out of her jacket and hung it in the closet. "What's up, Cara?" Andy asked suddenly wary.

"Miranda's home and two sets of documents were delivered to you. I had to sign for both." Cara whimpered.

Andy heard the faint call of her name and bit her lip. "Thanks, Cara. She picked up the envelopes and made her way quickly to Miranda's study. "Hey sweetheart," Andy called from the doorway.

Miranda turned in her chair and Andy could see the ice filling Miranda's eyes. Stepping up to the older women she was shocked by her tone. "Where have you been?"

"Coffee with Diane," Andy told her truthfully.

"Really, so that's why I received this?" Miranda pushed a photo towards her. Looking down she saw it was a photo of her and Diane saying goodbye outside Starbucks. Diane was kissing her cheek.

Andy laughed. "Oh shit. Is that the best people can come up with?" She looked at Miranda and saw the hurt flashing in her eyes before she turned away. "Miranda, seriously? You can't believe this is anything other than innocent, surely?"

"It looks far from innocent, Andréa." Miranda hissed, keeping her eyes averted.

Andy felt the sting of tears. "Fuck you, Miranda. I can't believe you could even contemplate I'd do something like that to you." Andy clenched her jaw. "It's been just five days since I returned, to you Miranda." Andy thundered as she turned away. Her tears flowed freely. Dropping the envelopes on the floor she made her way to the door.

"What is to stop me from thinking it is not more than this kiss, Andréa? I have been trying to call you and..." Miranda faltered as Andy spun around and glared at her furiously. "...You slept with Christian in Paris."

"I did not cheat though, Miranda. Nate and I had finished when I was drunkenly taken advantage of. I was incapable of saying no." Andy was furious. "And for your information, the reason Nate had I had finished was because of you, he could sense my growing feelings for you, Miranda," Andy yelled angrily.

"You have dropped your mail," Miranda whispered her eyes closed against her heartbreak in Andy's eyes.
"None of it is important, not anymore," Andy spat through her teeth. She left the office slamming the door behind her. She saw Cassidy poking her head over the bannister as she moved through the house. Making her way to the back garden and sat looking up at the grey sky, her arms wrapped tightly around herself as she cried.

She felt a blanket wrapped around the shoulders as her sobs ceased. "She didn't mean it," Cassidy whispered. "Please don't leave us again."

"I can't stay if she doesn't trust me, my little love. Without trust, there is no basis for a relationship." Andy looked at the little girl as she sat beside her and wrapped thin arms around her waist.

"Mom loves you," Cassidy told her.

"But that doesn't mean she trusts me. I have given no reason for her to doubt me." Andy husked rubbing her chest. She felt in her jeans pocket and pulled out her inhaler. "This sucks."

Cassidy watched her intently as she removed the cap and shook her inhaler. Breathing out gently Andy put the mouthpiece between her teeth and closed lips around it before pressing down as she continued to breathe. "Are you okay?" Cassidy asked quietly.

Holding her breath Andy nodded and removed the inhaler and fitted the cap back into place. She breathed normally again and husked. "I'll be fine. Go on in, honey. You don't want to get cold."

Cassidy stood up and looked down at Andy sadly. "I hate mom sometimes. She pushes everyone away."

Andy frowned. "Don't say that, Cassidy. Your mom loves you and Caroline more than anything."

Cassidy bent quickly and kissed Andy's cheek. "We love you, Andy."

"I love you too, Cass," Andy said.

Cassidy ran into the house. Looking up her eyes met swirling blue, and she sighed. "Just leave me be, Miranda," Andy asked.

"We need to talk," Miranda stated softly.

"Why? So you can accuse me of fucking someone else? So you can push me away?" Andy asked sadly. "Consider me pushed."

"No," Miranda exclaimed. "Don't say that." Miranda sat beside her and looked down to see Andy fidgeting with her inhaler.

"This has shown me exactly how little you think of me. Thank you very much for your lack of faith." Andy fought against a fresh wave of tears.

Miranda was panicked. "I'm sorry Andréa. I do trust you, with my life and my heart. Please, I was angry and..." Miranda trailed off as Andy shook her head against the words. "...I know about the job offer. Charles and Diane emailed me. Diane's partner also received a photograph." Miranda sighed. "It seems someone may have it in for us." She tried to explain.

"I don't know if there is an us, Miranda," Andy stated. Standing quickly she dropped the blanket. "I need space to think, Miranda. I can't fucking breathe. Just leave me alone."
Miranda watched panicked as Andy let herself out if the back gate and ran in the direction of the park. "What the hell have I done?" She sobbed.

Miranda turned from the retreating brunette to find Richard looking at her, his eyes gentle. "She'll be back." He told her.

"For how long though? How long before I push her away for good?" Miranda fought against the tears.

Richard stepped beside the older woman. "Andy's angry and hurt right now, but it never lasts long. She'll come round and she'll forgive you."

"I don't know if I deserve her forgiveness," Miranda whispered. "Not this time."

Richard shook his head. "You know how she feels about what her mother did, she was perfectly clear on that yesterday. What were you thinking accusing her of the same?"

"I wasn't thinking, I just reacted," Miranda admitted. "And if I lose her, I don't know if I could forgive myself."

"She simply needs time, Miranda. Give her that much." Richard spun on his heel and moved away. "By the way, her cell died, that is why she didn't answer your calls." He left the woman looking toward where Andy had run off.

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Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I want to thank the those that continue to provide encouragement by commenting on my fics. This chapter comes with a shout-out to all the Mirandy Dinosaurs, may your love of the fandom continue to push it to flourish.

An hour had passed since Andrée's rapid departure and Miranda was sat on her roof terrace, a hot cup of tea in her hands clasped against her chest, offering the smallest amount of warmth. Andrée's journal was in her lap.

She realised now she had reacted badly with Andrée. The brunette had been right when she stated Miranda had shown her a distinct lack of faith, and for that, she was horrified. She'd let her innate vulnerability flair up when the photo had landed in her email and her knee-jerk reaction was to push the young woman out of her life before it would hurt more. Printing it quickly she had demanded her bag and coat and had stormed out of Runway.

She had no excuses, but her mistreatment at the hands of her previous husbands still affected her greatly. Deep down she understood it was highly unlikely that her Andrée would cheat, but she knew how inadequate her previous partners had found her, and now she had proven to the young woman how true it was. She had believed pushing the brunette away wouldn't hurt, their relationship was so new. She was wrong, her heart ached the moment she looked into Andrée's eyes and observed the heartbreak in those expressive pools of chocolate. She realised at that moment how irrational she had been. She did not want to live with those old fears any longer. She needed to show Andrée just how much she was trusted. She needed to make amends, to correct her mistake, but Andrée had run.

Taking a deep breath she placed her mug on the table beside her and opening the journal she continued to read.

10/06/2007 - Paris

This is my new journal, one place I can put down all my thoughts without fear. Nate found and took it upon himself to read my last journal, and it did not go well. He recognised the truth hidden behind my words and the small sketches I had made as I gathered my thoughts each day. I can't believe he read my deepest thoughts and judged me for them, but I can't say I'm surprised.

Nate will have gone now. Lily and Doug followed. My parents have expressed their continued disappointment, but I could cope with that, as long as I had Miranda and those occasional fleeting glances that showed her approval but...

...I walked away from her today, my Miranda, and I feel like my heart has been torn to shreds.

I had to leave. For my own sanity and before I acted on my foolish feelings for a woman who could never see me as more than a silly little girl. A woman who has somehow captured my heart and soul so fully that I hurt people I care about to stay by her side.
Today I watched as Miranda dashed the hopes of her longest-serving colleague, the one person, other than myself, who somehow sees past the Editor-In-Chief, to the woman beyond. Nigel was hurt, and my heart ached for him, but it ached for Miranda more. She may have kept her position, but she has lost something greater than that. Without realizing she has lost the person who was loyal to her. Losing a husband who is not loyal is nothing in comparison.

And knowing that, I wanted to kiss her. I wanted to make her aware she still had one person who cared. As I looked at her, sensing her pleasure in her victory over Irv, I leaned towards her, just slightly, as she told me how impressed she was with me, but then I remembered last night, with Christian, and I hated myself. I can acknowledge she would hate any move I made towards her, I am tarnished now, tainted by his touch as I closed my eyes and thought of her.

Last night I asked her if there was anything I could do for her. I was told to do my job, nothing more. And I can no longer do that effectively. I can't protect her from those that would do her harm. I can't...she won't...

...But I can protect her from me. I have no choice, loving her the way I do, but to leave. But I will explain the best I can, apologise for my abandonment at the steps of the Petit Palais. I'll write her a letter and hope...I have to keep hope alive...without it how am I supposed to live?

Miranda rubbed the bridge of her nose and sighed. That afternoon in the car in Paris she had sensed it when the brunette shifted towards her and told herself the young woman was trying to read her facial expressions, something she had noticed her doing with more frequency. She observed the moment Andréa had licked her lips, but as she continued to speak the other woman had drawn back and her eyes had closed. She had assumed it was due to what was being said not the thought process going on in Andréa’s beautiful mind.

Grasping her cup of tea she raised it to her lips and grimaced as the cooling liquid hit her tongue. Placing the cold tea back on the table she frowned as her cell chimed. Reaching for it she noticed Emily's name flashing on the screen and opened it half-heartedly. She had told the redhead she was not to be disturbed under any circumstances.

echarlton: I received a call from the Presbyterian. You need to be there ASAP. It's Andy, there's been an incident in the park.

Miranda stood swiftly dropping Andy's journal in her haste. Bending to scoop it up she moved towards the house, quickly picking up speed with her cell attached to her ear. "Roy, I need you at the house. Five minutes. That's all." She disconnected quickly as she charged into her bedroom and grabbed her shoes. Catching her reflection in the mirror she noted the panic highlighted in her eyes, her face was flushed with two splotches of colour on her cheeks. Shaking her head, she charged down the stairs and skidding into the den where Richard and the twins were sat watching a documentary about Lions. "Andréa..." She gasped. "...Hospital. Will you stay?" Miranda asked breathlessly as she bent, hands on her thighs and tried to catch her breath.

"What happened?" Richard asked, untangling himself from the twins as they looked at each other in panic, he stood and stepping towards the silver-haired woman he placed a warm hand on her bicep. "What happened to Andy?" He asked gently.

"I don't know, Emily messaged me and said I needed to be there. Please stay with the twins. I will call you as soon as I learn more." Miranda tried to get her whirling emotions under control. Looking up at the man she let him witness the fear in her eyes before closing them and pulling herself together. Her cell chimed. "Roy is waiting, please. I will be in touch shortly."
"Go, Miranda. Take care of my girl." Richard spoke softly as Miranda pivoted quickly and moved down the last flight of stairs, and grabbing her coat and purse, made her way out onto the street and to the waiting car.

As she slid into the backseat, she looked down into her hands and noticed she was still clutching Andy's journal and her cell. Catching Roy's eye in the rearview she whispered her requirements. "Presbyterian, quickly."

Roy nodded once and pulled out into traffic making his way swiftly towards the hospital.

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Andy was cold, her teeth chattering as she laid curled in a foetal position on the hospital bed. The paramedics had strapped her to a board before they moved her quickly to the ambulance and cut away her wet clothes. They had dried her off, starting with her torso and legs before moving to her hands and feet, warming her up gently. They had then wrapped her in insulated blankets, including her head, before placing warming pads under her armpits and on the groin, neck and abdomen.

Upon arrival at the hospital, they hooked her up to warm IV fluids and fed her warm milk. As she struggled to breathe they gave her oxygen.

She was confused. She couldn't remember how she ended up in hospital, just the piercing cold that had surrounded her before she had sensed her body shutting down. Her head ached. She recalled she had argued with Miranda but from there everything was muddled. As she tried to remember, her eyes closed, she heard the faint click of heels from the corridor and the raised voice of a nurse. Opening her eyes she noticed Miranda's silhouette against the backdrop of the light from the hall.

"I will go in there, she is my..." Miranda trailed off. "...fiancée."

"Ms Sachs has no one listed as a next of kin. She has Runway listed as her Emergency Contact but..."

"And how do you think I am aware of Andréa's accident? I am Editor-In-Chief of Runway. I demand to be told what happened." Miranda was seething.

"Ms Priestly, my apologies. You are, of course, Ms Sachs emergency contact. Our records show that somehow Ms Sachs ended up in the lake in Central Park. The police will want to question her as she was seen in an altercation before this happened. We are treating her for mild hypothermia and she has had difficulty breathing..."

"That's all." Miranda waved the nurse away before spinning on her heel and entering the room. She stepped towards the bed and frowned the at the sight of the young woman curled up on the bed shivering. Kicking off her heels, she shrugged herself out of her clothes, folding them efficiently. She curled beside the young woman, pulling the blankets away, and settling behind Andy's naked body, sharing her body heat.

The nurse squeaked at the sight as Andy relaxed into Miranda's loose embrace. "Please don't rub..." Thet nurse trailed off as Miranda rolled her eyes.

"I understand what it is like to suffer hypothermia," Miranda stated coldly. "I spent many a cold winter as a child in London. I appreciate that my Andréa needs warming up gently. The best way to do so is through shared body heat."

The nurse nodded her acceptance and left the room quickly to page the doctor and to take a few calming breaths. She had seen the articles in the Post regarding the editor, but experiencing the
Dragon first hand was something she was not equipped for.

Miranda brushed Andy's hair behind her ear gently. "Can you tell me what happened, my darling?" She whispered.

"I don't know." Andy husked as she shivered against the older woman. "I remember leaving the house and making my way through the park, but then nothing until the paramedics arrived. I remember being so cold, and I couldn't breathe."

Miranda frowned and ran her hand gently over Andy's head. Feeling a lump she was concerned. "It seems you may have smacked your pretty little head," Miranda whispered gently. Running her hands softly along Andy's arm she entwined their hands. She noticed immediately Andy's ring was missing. "My darling, where is your ring?" She sat up slightly, resting on her elbow and watched as Andy frowned.

"I don't..." Andy choked back a sob. "...I wouldn't take it off, not on purpose." Tears flowed from Andy's eyes as she remembered their argument.

Miranda laid back down and secured the blanket around Andy more firmly. Pulling the young woman closer she nuzzled into the brunette. "I know you wouldn't, Andréa. It's okay, my darling. I will ensure it is found or replaced." She reassured. They lay together for a while, comforted by each other's presence and Andy stopped shivering and fell into a deep slumber as Miranda held her gently, trying to keep herself together. She needed to be strong for the young woman.

The doctor walked into the room followed by a young police officer. Spotting Miranda he gestured for her to remain when she untangled herself, suddenly embarrassed. He switched on the overhead light and checked Andy's temperature before offering Miranda a gentle smile. "She's coming back up to normal temperature." He assured her. "You have done a wonderful job getting her warm."

Miranda scoffed. "I would like to know how Andréa ended up in the lake."

The doctor gestured to the young police officer. "Would you like to explain to Ms Priestly what information you have?"

"Miranda," Miranda explained. "I prefer to be called by my given name."

The officer sat beside Andy's bed and pulled out her notebook. "Miranda, witnesses state they saw Ms Sachs having an argument with a Caucasian male and African American woman at around 3:30 pm. There was a tussle and something was thrown into the lake. As Ms Sachs looked in the direction of the lake, her hand was grabbed and as she tried to pull away, she lost her footing and landed in the water, fully submerging. Someone dived into the lake and pulled her to safety."

"Who?" Miranda demanded.

"A young man named Nathanial Cooper. He's quite the hero." The police officer stated.

Miranda frowned, she recognised the name from Andy's personal files. "Nathanial Cooper is Andréa's ex-boyfriend. I would check witness descriptions of the Caucasian male and see if they match those of Mr Cooper." Miranda stated softly. "Regarding their tussle, Andrea's engagement ring is missing, and she is asthmatic." She turned to the doctor. "Was her inhaler in her pockets?"

The doctor gasped. "No. Her wallet and a few coins were gathered once they cut her clothes off. Can I ask when was her last attack?"

"Christmas day. She was upset when she left the house, we had a disagreement and she needed
time away. Since her asthma is affected by emotional upheaval, it is likely that she was suffering when they threw her Ventolin inhaler away." Miranda ground her teeth together. "She has a sizeable lump on her head, I don't know how it was caused and when I questioned her not half an hour ago she had no recollection of the events."

"We caught up with the young woman after the incident. She was holding a ring. Can you describe it?" The officer asked kindly as Andy turned and nuzzled into Miranda tangling her legs around the older woman.

Miranda closed her eyes and attempted to concentrate on not reacting to Andy's touch. Swallowing she replied to the question. "It is a Platinum eternity band set with black diamonds and morganite. There is a small inscription on the inside."

"Can you tell me what the inscription says?" The officer asked gently.

"Would you lie with me and just forget the world," Miranda stated softly. "It is signed with an M, for my name."

The police officer looked at her notes and jotted something down. "If it is Ms Sachs ring it will be returned, as soon as we are finished questioning the young woman. She tried to drop it but was stopped by a passerby who saw and it was handed back."

Miranda frowned. "She took and then tried to drop a twenty thousand dollar ring?" She was scandalised.

The police officer looked up. "Twenty thou..." She trailed off and swallowed. "We'll ensure it is made secure immediately."

"Thank you, Officer," Miranda stated as Andy stirred in her arms.

Letting out a moan Andy moved her hand to her head. "Mm, I hurt, Mira."

Miranda watched as the doctor stepped closer. "Ms Sachs..."

"Andy," Miranda told him. "She'll respond better to Andy."

"Andy, my name is Doctor Emery. Can you tell me where you hurt?"

" Everywhere." Andy groaned. "Even the ends of my hair hurts."

The doctor ran his hands over Andy's scalp and she yelped as his fingers found the lump behind her ear. "I'm sorry, I understand you are sore, I need you to do me a favour. Can you open your eyes for me?"

Andy complied and groaned, closing them again quickly. "Light hurts," Andy grumbled.

The doctor nodded, and the officer got up and shut the door quietly. He switched off the overhead light as the doctor switched on the small wall light which hung over the bed. "Andy, I turned off the main light. Can you try opening your eyes for me again and tell me where you are?"

Andy opened her eyes and looked at the doctor, confusion highlighted within her eyes. "I'm at the hospital?" She asked.

The doctor nodded. "Yes, I need to check a few things. Can you tell me what your full name is?"

"Andrea Elizabeth Sachs," Andy muttered.
"And what date is it today?" The doctor asked.

"December 28th, 2007," Andy stated, her voice hoarse.

The doctor smiled gently at her. "Do you remember what happened to you?"

Andy nodded. "I saw Lily and Nate and..." She frowned. "...they were telling me I was...because..." She closed her eyes and took a shuddering breath.

"Can you tell me what happened Andy, I need to record your statement." The officer asked.

I was at the lake, it's my favourite part of the park, I usually find it so calm. Nate and Lily spotted me as I watched the water and they came over. When they approached, I asked them to go away and leave me alone. I had things I needed to think about and I did not wish to have another argument with them." Andy sighed at the officer's look of confusion. "Nate is my ex-boyfriend and Lily was..." Andy shuddered. "...I thought Lily was my friend. We all had a falling out a few months ago when my job required me to go to Paris and within the space of that week my friends cut all ties and Nate moved to Boston." Andy sighed. "They told me I had changed, and I nodded in agreement, I have grown up a lot over the last year, I have learned who I want to be and what I want to achieve. They made it seem like a bad thing. They don't understand." Andy swallowed. "I became upset when they insulted Miranda, they were so cruel and they don't know her, they can't accept she makes me happy..."

"What happened then, Andy? The officer asked as she scribbled furiously.

"I had my inhaler in my hand as I was a little tight chested and..." She sighed. "...I told them again to go away and leave me alone. That I had nothing left to say to them. That's when Nate grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me. He demanded I tell him where he went wrong." She looked at Miranda. "He told me he could understand my need to experiment with a female relationship but kept pleading for an answer to why Miranda." She caught the older woman's eye. "I couldn't tell him it was because I love you, Mira, because I was struggling to catch my breath." She looked at Miranda's eyes and the older woman saw the unshed tears. "Why would he do that?"

Miranda was appalled. "I don't know, my darling. Will you explain what happened next, how did you end up in the lake?"

"Lily grabbed my hand and told me I was making mistakes with my life...She admitted she was the one who told my mom I was back in New York, she saw us all at Rockafeller on Sunday..." Andy was becoming angry. "...She noticed the ring and shouted at me about being blinded by Miranda, that I would be left with nothing once she tossed me away. As I pulled away from her, she tore the ring from my finger. I was losing my footing and tried to steady myself by reaching out to her and she pushed me away..."

"She pulled your engagement ring from your finger?" The Officer clarified.

Andy looked up at Miranda who offered a small smile. "Yes. After that, I remember being colder than I've ever been and as I was surrounded by the water I couldn't breathe. A hand twined into my hair and it was pulled, then it was dark."

"Nathanial was the one who pulled you from the lake," Miranda told her softly.

"But he hates me," Andy whispered. "He told me I have ruined him." She tightened her grip on
Miranda and nuzzled into her neck as Miranda's arms tightened around her. "Like Lily, he told me you'd throw me away, eventually. That you would tire of me, of my weakness."

Miranda shook her head. "I cannot take away the words those people said to you, my darling. What I can do though is to prove to you that this is for keeps. You, me and our girls." She stroked her fingers along Andy's cheek causing her to close her eyes. The doctor gestured for the police officer and they both made to walk from the room. Miranda raised her head. "Doctor, when will Andréa be able to come home?"

"She'll need warm clothes." The doctor stated. "I'd like to monitor her a little longer. Another hour, two maximum."

"Acceptable," Miranda told him as she settled against the brunette and let her tears fall silently.

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Andy had fallen asleep after the doctor left, closing the door behind him. Miranda had eventually untangled herself from the brunette gently so not to wake her. Dressing quickly she sat on the chair beside the young woman and made calls.

"Richard, hello...Yes, she will be fine...she ended up in the lake in the park after an incident with Nathanial and Lillian...We'll be home tonight...the experience has taken a toll on her...yes it will be dealt with...please reassure the girls...could you ask them to arrange a bag of clothes for Andréa? Underwear, jeans, a t-shirt and her UGGs, oh, and a warm sweater or coat? I will have Roy pick up the bag...Thank you...I will tell her when she wakes...See you soon."

She pressed the speed dial for Emily. "Emily, I will need my day tomorrow cancelled...yes, send the book electronically...I will let you know what's happening about next week...Will you advise the board I am navigating a family emergency and send a dinner invite to Diane Truman and her partner for Saturday evening 6 pm? Let me know immediately if it is not an acceptable date...Yes, Andréa will be fine...Thank you for your concern...I will tell her...Yes...That's all."

Miranda sat back with a sigh. Pulling out her cell she sent a text to Roy requesting the pickup of Andy's bag at the townhouse before arriving to get them from the hospital. Looking across at the brunette she saw the rise and fall of her chest and for the first time in years gave thanks to whatever deity was listening for the blessings of her life.

Pulling out Andy's journal she read.

10/07/2007 London

Most diaries start the same way, with two words; Dear Diary.

A journal often becomes a friend and confidante, a place where your thoughts can be listened to, without judgement. Sometimes there are things you want or need to say, things you may find you cannot say to a person's face.

There is just one person I want to tell my deepest thoughts to. So this journal is for her and I will address it as such...

Dear Miranda,

I left you in Paris this morning with a hug, and my heart ached as I watched you walk away. I am in London now, just until tonight, when I will catch my flight to pack up my empty life in
New York.

I must say, I love London. Part of me wonders why you ever left this beautiful city.

The whole city seems awash with creativity and history. Each area has its own unique style and atmosphere, it left me amazed. I was stunned by every landmark I stumbled across while travelling on foot through this rich city. I went on the London Eye on the South Bank and took an array of photos. As it reached the top Big Ben chimed the hour, and I stood still and took in the whole experience.

I seem to have walked miles today, but at every step, my thoughts were of you. I can imagine the rush of the final day of Fashion Week, the parties and after show events and then the last rush to pack and get your flight home.

I wish I could spend more time in London, maybe drive further north to Manchester, York and even up into Scotland. Perhaps one day.

I have found the coffee in London is amazing and I am developing a taste for searing hot Latte's, but I don't understand why the Brits have such a bad rep for food. The roast beef and onion gravy sandwich I had for lunch and the fish and chips wrapped in a newspaper I had for dinner were enjoyed immensely.

Miranda snorted at Andy's words about the food. She would take Andréea to The Spotted Pig or The Red Lion for a date. Looking up she saw a small smile on Andy's face and welcomed the sense of relief flooding through her.

"I love that snort," Andy whispered hoarsely. "For such a classy lady it's such an inelegant noise, but it suits you."

"You think I'm classy?" Miranda asked gently.

Andy opened her eyes and saw her journal in Miranda's hands. "Sure, you're stylish and sophisticated. You are well spoken and...I don't know. It's hard to define. It's how you act, how you carry yourself, how you express yourself and how you live your life." Andy spoke softly. "May I have a drink?"

"Oh, of course, my darling." Miranda stood quickly and stepped towards the bed. Placing the journal down she poured a glass of water and helped Andy raise her head as she held the plastic glass to her lips as she drank deeply. "How are you feeling?" Miranda swiped a drop of water from the corner of Andy's mouth and looked into her eyes.

"Like I took a swim in a cold place." Andy grinned slightly before turning serious. "I didn't expect you to come, I thought..."

"You thought wrong, my darling. I am here, where I need to be, with you." Miranda placed the glass down and sat gently on the edge of the bed, turning towards Andy. "We will talk about this afternoon, Andréa. I need to explain..."

"No, no explanations are needed." Andy interrupted. "As I walked, I thought about your reaction. I realise you have been hurt, and I didn't take that into account before leaving the townhouse. I don't quite know yet the full depth of your pain, Miranda, but I see some of it, in your vulnerability and even in your dragon lady persona. But you understand that I cannot reassure you if you push me away, my love." Andy reached for Miranda's hand and run her fingers across the two dragon's
"Can you explain what you thought when you saw that photo?"

"I felt overwhelmed. The little nagging voice in my head told me you were just another person who found me lacking. All it took was five days, and you were looking elsewhere for comfort, because you would leave me one day, Andréa, just like the rest." Miranda swallowed back her tears. "I didn't realise...when you walked into the study and greeted me...I didn't let myself hear the smile in your voice, I spun around and saw you frown and I lashed out. I thought it best if I got in first and pushed you away before you told me you were leaving me." Miranda entwined their fingers. "It would break me." She admitted. "You have the power to break me and I'm more frightened than I have ever been."

Andy frowned. "What can I do to reassure you? I told you on Saturday and Sunday that I can't willingly walk away..."

"But you did. You ran." Miranda whispered.

"I needed time, Miranda. Time to think and to process all that happened. That does not mean I will not come back though, Miranda. I will always come back to you, no matter what..." A knock on the door interrupted her words and Roy poked his head around the door.

"I have Andy's things." He stated softly. Looking at the editor he could see her trying to pull herself together. Placing the bag beside the door he looked away. "I will be in the cafeteria getting coffee, would you like anything?"


Roy was shocked at the editor's words, she was well known not to say please or thank you to her staff. "Of course, Miranda. I'll be back soon." He spun on his heel and softly closed the door, his face alight with a wide smile.

"Tea?" Andy was curious.

"Yes, caffeine is not good for those with hypothermia, my darling?" Miranda advised.

"You realise tea has caffeine in it?" Andy grinned as Miranda scowled.

Picking up her cell she dialled Roy. "Can you ensure Andréa's tea is decaffeinated? Thank you." Miranda caught the brunette's eye and noticed the small smirk. "You can be a real smart-arse sometimes, Andréa."

Andy's smile widened. "I know. You must admit though, I keep you on your toes and you love me for it."

"Yes, you most certainly do, my impossible girl. Please never stop." Miranda's tone was gentle as she looked at the young woman. "Now, how about we see what the twins have chosen for you to wear?" Miranda smirked as she got up and grabbed the bag from beside the door.

"Um, yeah. It will be good to get dressed. Being naked is making me a little vulnerable." Andy blushed. "Thank you for being here with me, and for climbing into bed. It means more than I can say." Andy looked down. "So what have our daughter's decided I should wear?"

Miranda pulled out clothes, "Levi's, fluffy socks and your Northwestern hoody. They have packed your UGGs." Miranda grinned as she set the items at the bottom of the bed and rifled to the bottom of the bag. "And a white t-shirt." She queried.
Andy grinned. "Look at it?"

Miranda unfolded the shirt. Emblazoned on the front was a rainbow print with the words; 'Human' woven between the bright colours. She smiled at the brunette. I want one of these. I will wear it for a new photo attached to the letter from the Editor in our Pride edition."

Andy offered a smile at the words. "That would shock quite a few people. You haven't changed your photo in years," Looking at the older woman she posed a question that had been niggling at her before her accident. "You seem okay, with all these changes, with being with me. I realise it is a big development in your life. Do you regret it?"

"I regret many things, but this?" Miranda shook her head. "How could I have a single regret when I am following my heart? How can I regret something capable of bringing me so much happiness?"

"So no regrets?" Andy clarified.

"No, my darling." Miranda stroked Andy's hair from her eyes. "Not a single one. Now, do you need my help to dress?"

Andy groaned as she stretched. Her muscles ached, and they felt heavy. "Yeah, I think I do."

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Chapter 19

Once they returned to the townhouse Miranda sat Andy down at the breakfast bar and made them both a grilled cheese. Cutting them into triangles as she would for the twins. "Here you are, my darling."

Andy smiled. "Thanks, Mira."

"You are welcome, my darling," Miranda spoke softly, unsure of what to say.

"So I'm surprised the girls haven't flown down here," Andy stated between small bites of her sandwich.

Miranda smiled sadly. "Their new Grandpa has taken them bowling. I said nothing at the hospital, too many eyes and ears, but he believes you should press charges."

"Do you?" Andy queried.

Miranda sighed and closed her eyes. Her hand came up to rub at the bridge of her nose. "They were your friends, once upon a time. I had hoped that Douglas and Lillian would observe your happiness and come around."

Andy placed her sandwich on her plate, chewing her mouthful, her eyes thoughtful. "Doug may still come around, we've been friends since Kindergarten. Lily, well, I don't suppose we would ever rebuild that friendship. The night before Paris, just before Nate walked away she told me some home truths. Christian was there and was being his usual obnoxious self..." Andy smiled as Miranda rolled her eyes. "...well she was all the Andy I know is always five minutes early and thinks Club Monaco is couture.' We'd been friends for sixteen years, we told each other everything. But she couldn't see past the clothes and the makeover or the fact I was evolving. She hated that I attended events for you and was going to Paris, but funnily enough, she had no problem with receiving gifts from Runway, the perks of being Miranda Priestly's assistant, like this season's sky blue Marc Jacobs purse."

"People aren't always welcoming of change, my darling." Miranda caught her eye and Andy caught the pursing of lips. "Part of me understands today's events would never have happened if we..."

Andy jumped up and wrapped her arms around the Editor. "You said you had no regrets. Please say you meant it?"

Miranda parted her legs and Andy stepped between them. She rested her head on Andy's shoulder and pulled her close. "No, my darling, no regrets. There are a few what if's running through my mind." Miranda swallowed the lump forming in her throat. "What if you had stayed my assistant and remained in Paris? What if we hadn't started this kind of relationship and somehow navigated a friendship of sorts?"

"But don't you see, sweetheart, these what if's would lead me down another path? If I had stayed on at Runway as your assistant and remained in Paris there was no way you would let your guard down with me enough for us to become friends, nevermind anything more. Upon our return home I would go back to my empty apartment, you to the girls. At Runway, I would continue to run around Manhattan for you, but every night I would be alone, I would have no one, Miranda." Andy raised Miranda's face from her chest and spoke from the heart. "I cannot grasp how much of that loneliness I could handle before I would run back to the familiar arms of my family or worse,
unable to fight through the darkness, ending up in that cold lake of my own accord, ..." Andy watched as Miranda shuddered and tears sprang into her blue eyes and pulled her head against her chest again.

"No, never talk about ending your life." Miranda scolded. "Promise me."

"I can promise wholeheartedly that this will not happen. I am too much of a coward, Miranda and..." Andy trailed off as Miranda's lips crashed into her own desperately.

Miranda's next words were spoken against Andy's mouth. "It is not cowardly. I can't imagine the courage it would take to do such a foolish, wasteful thing. But it takes greater bravery to continue living. Suicide leaves the people in your life with guilt, it takes away their happiness. You cannot understand the pain it would inflict on those left behind to mourn you."

"It sounds like you understand?" Andy was curious as Miranda hummed and placed another soft kiss on Andy's lips, offering her the reassurance she was not ignoring the question.

After a few moments of silent contemplation, Miranda sighed. "Yes, I do, my darling. She looked into Andy's eyes and saw the reassurance she was seeking. "You know I grew up in London, but what you wouldn't, what is not listed on my wiki page, is the fact I had a sister. She passed away when I was twenty-one, from taking her own life." Miranda sighed. "She left us with no note, no explanation. She disappeared from our lives. I was in Paris working my way up the food chain. I didn't recognise she was struggling, she seemed so happy when we spoke, which admittedly wasn't often."

"I'm sorry my love," Andy whispered.

Miranda looked down, not wanting to see the pity in Andy's eyes. "It was a long time ago, my darling. Now, will you tell me what your views are on my other what if?" Miranda asked hoarsely, her ear and cheek resting against Andy's chest, listening to her strong heartbeat.

"I thought about this one after your letters stopped. If we had kept this as a friendship of sorts it would be good, but after a time, loving you secretly from a distance would leave me jaded, feeling as if I was only living a half-life. That spark of hope I held would die as soon as you met someone new, but I would stay and break my heart in doing so. Maybe I would try to move on and to love someone else, and would most probably fail, and I'd taste the bitterness that would come from my failures. And I know that bitterness would turn me away from you, or against you, Miranda."

"That is a valid point. I would hate to see that." Miranda pulled back and ran her fingers through Andy's tangled curls, lightly scratching her scalp with her short manicured nails, careful not to catch the lump at the back of Andy's head. "Come now, darling, finish eating and I will run you a bath."

"I am not hungry," Andy admitted as she stepped away from the embrace and yawned. Miranda got up off her stool and cleared their plates as Andy watched nervously. "Mira, I should have been honest with you that night in the cafe in Paris."

"What do you mean, my darling?" Miranda was confused.

"I should have told you how much I loved you," Andy whispered. "Been brave and saved us the pain of uncertainty."

Miranda turned from the dishwasher and gazed at Andy, her eyes soft. "I hadn't worked out my feelings at that time, Andréa. I realised, after Nigel brought me the first letter, they ran far deeper
than I had realised. In my head, I couldn't see how this happened..." She gestured between them. "...In my heart though, my darling, well, my heart knew you were the one, and I was prepared to wait."

Andy's bright smile lit up the room and Miranda returned it. "That sounds awfully romantic."

Stepping back into Andy's arms Miranda wrapped her arms casually around her and squeezed. "You bring it out in me, I've never been this sentimental." Miranda smiled and her eyes were playful, trying to lighten the sombre mood. "You are my queen of hearts and I would deck you in the finest gowns and jewels, if it was something you wanted, Andréa." She tilted her head slightly and gazed at the woman in her arms. "But, that is not something you want from me. You want my heart, and I have given it to you, my darling. I offer it to you gladly in the knowledge you will keep it safe."

"If I am your queen of hearts, you are my queen of diamonds." Andy grinned. "The naked eye cannot discern the diamond's worth, but they are always precious." Andy stroked the tips of her fingers along Miranda's jaw. "Are you aware diamond comes from the Greek term 'Adamas', which means unconquerable?" Miranda shook her head amazed at the knowledge Andy possessed. "Well, you have an unconquerable spirit, my love. You aren't easily defeated, you are strong, and like a diamond, the experiences you have been through have excavated, cut and polished your soul, to reveal the outstanding brilliance within you."

"Such flattery, my darling." Andy sensed the smile in her voice, without even looking down at the beautiful woman who was nuzzling into her chest. "Anyone would think you were trying to get into my pants with such sweet-talk."

Andy chuckled. "Not tonight, my love. I'll struggle to summon the energy to do anything but wrap my arms around you and hold you close."

Miranda turned serious. "Do you realise today may have been much worse? You could have died. He took your inhaler at the start of a fucking asthma attack and threw it away. They both knew you needed it. They endangered your life." Miranda turned her face into Andy's neck. "And although I am furious at their recklessness, I understand it is, in part, my fault."

Miranda's language shocked Andy, knowing she rarely cussed, but she knew she had to reassure the older woman. "No. There is no blame attached to you. I should have been honest with Nate, about not being happy. Our life together was good before we moved to New York, but when we got here, he worked and I struggled to find a suitable position, and he wasn't supportive. I was Andy Sachs, fashion disaster, and I got a job at the world's premier fashion magazine. When I rushed to tell him and my friends, to celebrate my success, the first words out of his mouth was to ask if it was a phone interview. He couldn't even support me in my happiness. I was thrilled when you had Emily call me back, to find you were taking a chance on me. And then when I dressed for the job I had, he told me he preferred the old me, clothes and all." Andy sighed. "His dismissal of me, of the career I hoped to build, it hurt, Miranda, but looking back he hadn't supported me for a long time. I realised on Sunday when I was writing in my journal, I read extracts from my old journal and I saw it in the words I wrote."

Miranda looked up, saddened by the admission. "I used to hear you apologising to him. The night of the Met Gala I did not ask you to stay longer, although your presence there was a comfort, especially with the way Stephen was behaving. I knew you had plans, and it seemed he was upset with you, and that was because of me." She sighed and pulled herself from Andy's arms. "Now come, I will run you that bath, we shall wash that lake water off you and tame your hair. Then we shall get you into your warm pyjama's and watch a movie in bed or something. Anything you
"I'll be happy as long as I am with you," Andy told her.

"Now, I have promised forever, my darling. That is a promise I intend to keep." Miranda stated, running her hand over Andy's bare ring finger. Pursing her lips she caught Andy's eyes. "And I believe your father may be correct about pressing charges. I will have Max handle it if you wish?"

Andy caught Miranda's eyes, her own expressing her sadness. "Yeah, I think I agree. They deserve whatever charges are levied against them."

Miranda entwined her fingers in Andy's left hand and squeezed gently before leading her from the room and up to their bedroom.

The next morning passed quietly as Miranda and Andy stayed home, curled up together on the couch in her study. Richard had gone to spend the New Year in Connecticut with Max, and the twins were at their friends for the night. When there was a knock at the front door Miranda frowned and extracted herself from the sleeping brunette, careful not to wake her.

Looking through the peep-hole she saw the young officer from the night before, shuffling from foot to foot, obviously nervous of the loitering press. Opening the door she offered a small smile. "Officer..." Miranda smiled ruefully. "...my apologies I didn't get your full name last night."

"That's understandable. It's Johnston, Maya Johnston. I work over at the 19th Precinct." The officer offered a small smile as Miranda gestured for her to enter the townhouse.

"Come in, please. Andréa is sleeping, but it is no doubt high time she woke up." Miranda smirked as she was the one who had soothed the young woman into a peaceful sleep after a restless night.

"Thank you, Miranda." The officer brushed past the editor and glanced over her shoulder at the press. "Do they always loiter like that?"

"Unfortunately, yes. They'll lose interest, eventually." Miranda took the young woman's coat and hung it from the bannister. "Now, would you like coffee?"

"Yes, please. I have a few things to discuss with you both, and I have brought Andy's ring." Officer Johnston stated. "Your description helped I.D it and further investigation showed it was a one-of-a-kind so there is no doubt as to the owner." She grinned as Miranda blushed and gestured for her to follow her into the kitchen.

"Yes, I had it made for Andréa. It was a little rushed but worth it. She'll be glad to have it back." Miranda moved gracefully to the Jura and prepared the three coffees. "Cream and sugar?" She asked.

"No, thank you, unsweetened black please." Officer Johnston provided her preference as Andy came into the room, bleary-eyed. She looked at the two women but struggled to place the young one.

"My darling, you remember Officer Johnston from last night?"

Andy nodded. "Yeah, um, it's lovely to see you again." She stalked towards Miranda and placed a gentle kiss on the older woman's cheek as she finished preparing the coffee.
Andy sighed as Miranda gave her a mug, and she inhaled the aroma. "Perfect."

Miranda turned and offered the officer a mug before gesturing to the breakfast bar. "We can sit here or there's my study."

Officer Johnston smiled. "Here's fine." They sat at the breakfast bar and the young woman sipped her coffee and hummed appreciatively before putting her mug down. Reaching into her pocket she pulled out an evidence bag containing Andy's ring. She pushed it across the bench to Andy. "We have all the photographic evidence we need, plus a report from the jeweller, regarding its ownership and the authenticity regarding the value. He confirmed the ring had suffered no damage, the stones are still perfect." She smiled shyly at the brunette. "It's a gorgeous ring."

"Yes, it is. Miranda has good taste." Andy grinned and slipped the ring from the bag and pulled it back onto her left-hand ring finger.

Miranda pulled Andy's left hand into hers and ran her thumb lightly over the stones. "Thank God it's back where it should be." She muttered.

"Now we have questioned witnesses to the altercation. Three out of four positively identified Nathanial Cooper and Lillian Thomas as the people you were in the altercation with. They also advised that it was Nathanial who jumped in the lake after you didn't surface. The fourth witness watched the altercation from a distance and was unsure." She sighed. "We have questioned both Nathanial and Lillian. Lillian was fairly uncooperative until she found out Nathanial had given a full statement. The DA's office has been speaking with your lawyer and charges were issued about an hour ago."

Andy entwined her hand with Miranda's, suddenly nervous. "What charges are they facing?"

"They both charges for aggravated harassment in the second degree, disorderly conduct and reckless endangerment in the first degree. Standalone charges will also apply. Nathanial is also being charged with menacing in the third degree and assault in the third degree and Lillian has been charged with robbery in the third degree and due to the valuation of your ring grand larceny in the third degree."

Andy added the charges up in her head. "Holy shit." She looked at Miranda, stunned. "Um, excuse me a minute." Andy stalked from the room and Miranda sighed.

"She'll be back once she's processed the information," Miranda told the Police Officer softly. "I appreciated your gentleness with her last night, how long have you been in the force?"

"I'm still what they call a rookie, I was sworn in last month. I joined up after finishing college, but couldn't finish the six months academy training due to my mom becoming ill. When she got better, I reapplied and passed. My Dad's a cop, as was my Grandfather,"

"So it's a family tradition?" Miranda smiled as the young woman nodded. "My eldest daughter, Caroline, wants to work in fashion, like me. My youngest, Cassidy, wants to be a photographer. They're almost eleven so it will no doubt change."

"At that age, I wanted to be a veterinarian," Officer Johnstone told her. "Then there was the year I was insistent I would be a history teacher, I think I was fourteen." She grinned. "My parents just wanted me to be happy. Dad was thrilled when I joined the force though, he's a detective in the Special Victim's Unit."

Miranda was amazed. "That must be a hard job?"
"I imagine running the worlds best fashion magazine wouldn't be easy either." The young woman grinned as Andy stepped into the room and sat beside Miranda. "What do you do, Andy?"

"Well, I'm a wannabe writer. I have an article being published in Rolling Stone, I have just found out they have pulled the other three articles I wrote for them." Andy shrugged as Miranda scowled. "But I received a job offer yesterday to become a staff writer at a large publishing house."

"I'm sorry they pulled your stories, but the rest is amazing, you must be excited." Officer Johnston was enthusiastic, and it caused Andy to grin.

"Yeah, it's a big decision though, and now all this has happened..." Andy trailed off, watching the young officer carefully. "...Will some charges be thrown out?"

Officer Johnston sipped her coffee quickly. Putting the empty mug down she pushed it aside and caught Andy's eyes. "That is a possibility, Andy." She sighed. "Many of the charges relate to the same offence so double jeopardy rules apply."

"Why?" Miranda understood nothing of the law, but the term sounded familiar.

Andy turned to her and explained. "Most of the charges arose from the same conduct, Mira. The single act of accosting me. In Californian Penal Law when this happens they get the harshest sentence, but I'm not sure about New York. It may seem that they aren't being punished for some things that happened, but they are. If found guilty Nate will get up to a year for the assault and up to seven years for the reckless endangerment, Lily has come off a little worse. She will face the seven years for reckless endangerment and I believe the theft will be sentenced separately, that is also a maximum sentence of seven years, regardless of if it's the robbery charge or the grand larceny charge that sticks." Andy felt saddened by the events. "If found guilty, the judge may run the sentences concurrently."

"You seem to have knowledge of the law?" Officer Johnston was amazed by the easy explanation Andy had given.

"Stanford, Pre-Law." Andy grinned ruefully as the police officer looked at her in disbelief before chuckling.

"That explains your concise response. You would have made a good lawyer." Officer Johnston stated. "Anyway, my shift starts soon. She pulled a card out of her wallet and pushed it towards the two women. "If you need anything, my desk number is on there, and my personal cell too. If you have questions, just fire me a text or call." She smiled softly. "Now, would you like me to have the vermin out there removed?"

Andy grinned. "Nah, I'll just keep telling them to fuck off. They'll get the hint, eventually." Miranda chuckled. "There's also the possibility Miranda will have them fired one at a time." Andy grinned as the officer's jaw dropped. "Although they seem to have stopped with the questions, they're just hanging around like a bad smell."

"Well if they get unruly, please call the precinct." The officer stood up and grinned. "Most of the guys at the station can't believe I met you, and not one of us believes the B.S they print on Page Six." She caught Miranda's eye. "The annual contributions you make to the NYCPF are well known and..." She shrugged and blushed. "...well, they are appreciated, Miranda."

"Well, that's good to hear." Miranda was blushing. "I'll see you out." She stood and gestured for the young woman. As they walked to the door Miranda stopped the officer as she opened the door. "Will you pass my thanks on to everyone at the precinct? You have all handled this with the
"Of course, Miranda." Officer Johnston smiled. "Please get in touch if you require anything, and if you believe it would be beneficial, I can recommend a superb therapist who works with the NYPD and with victims of assault." She looked towards the kitchen and frowned. "Andy looks exhausted."

"She had a restless night, and stress affects her asthma. It has been an emotional few months, for us both." Miranda sighed. "I will discuss the benefits of therapy with her, but I will not push her into anything she is not comfortable with. Thank you again."

"Anytime. Thanks for the hospitality. Have a great rest of day and all the best for the new year." Miranda watched as Maya Johnston stepped out of the house and made her way past the milling press. She watched as the young woman whispered something to one paparazzo and a hushed whisper moved amongst the reporters, who dispersed quickly. Raising an eyebrow she smirked at the fleeing press before closing the door. The young woman had impressed her and she would ensure the Police Commissioner was aware of this remarkable young woman.

The rest of the day passed peacefully, with Miranda working on her emails and the electronic version of the book while Andy wrote in her journal and tapped away on her laptop. She was concentrating on the article outlining the start of the relationship she had built with the Editor. Saving the document and closing her laptop Andy got up out of her chair and disappeared from the room.

Upon her return ten minutes later Andy sat back down. Before she could open her laptop Miranda's deep sigh caught her attention, and she looked up at the older woman. "What's the matter, Mira?" She asked gently.

"Officer Johnston mentioned she could recommend a therapist." Miranda was cautious. "One that deals with this type of case. I thought..." She bit her lip. "...well, I thought it may do us both good to speak to someone, to facilitate open discourse."

Andy closed her laptop and stood up. Walking to the window she looked out, a small frown marring her usually smooth forehead. "Do you think it's necessary to involve a third party?"

"You know I struggle with talking about certain things, my darling. I thought, well, maybe it would be an option, and it would also give you someone impartial to discuss your feelings with." Miranda could see that Andy was considering her words carefully.

"I know what's wrong with me, Miranda. I've been scared because part of me wondered when this was all going to tumble down around my head." Andy turned from the window and stepped towards the editor. Swivelling Miranda's chair to the side she sat crossed legged in front of her, looking at her face to gauge her responses to her next words. "I let my own fears, and other people's words regarding this relationship, have too much control over me. And I admit when I was away I was in a dark place for a while, but I'm fighting that darkness, Miranda. It was overwhelming but I will not roll over and let it take over my life. I realise I've been emotional, but I do not think I need therapy to overcome this, because I have you and our girls and there is so much to be thankful for in that alone." Andy shook her head. "If you believe we need therapy, to be honest with one another, I will do so, but frankly you can tell me anything and I will listen. I will keep an open mind and heart, you will face no judgement from me and I swear on all I consider holy, I will continue to love you, no matter what."
"You're still scared?" Miranda whispered.

"Petrified. But it is no reflection on you. You have been wonderful." Andy swallowed at her admission of fear.

Miranda snorted. "Yes, I treated you so wonderfully yesterday." Miranda rolled her eyes but Andy caught the pain in the depth of blue.

"Miranda, I know you are scared too, I am not blind to it." Andy chided gently. "Your behaviour yesterday afternoon reflected that fear." Andy sighed. "Do you remember what I said to the twins after we got them from their Greg's the other day?" She asked gently.

"Every word," Miranda stated. She was confused about where this was going.

Andy smiled softly. "I told them I would drive you crazy. And I know you will exasperate me too, and when you are hurting I know you will lash out without consideration, but regardless of that, I want this. I want you and those beautiful little girls in my life." Andy's eyes reflected her love. "So all I ask is that you continue to give me a chance, to prove this is all I want." Andy sighed. "Because, the rest, Rolling Stone pulling my articles and the job offer from Elias Clarke, that's unimportant right now. What matters the most is this. Us. Our family."

"Do you mean it?" Miranda whispered.

"Look into my eyes and you will detect no trace of doubt," Andy told her. Miranda looked down into the expressive eyes she loved and saw nothing but sincerity. "If you wanted me to stay home, to be your wife and raise the twins and a handful of babies, I would do so gladly. If the last thing I ever write or have published is the story of us, I would be happy with that. Miranda whatever you need from this relationship, it is yours. Just say the word and I will give you the world. I will not be scared anymore because deep down I recognise this, what we are building together, it's meant to be." Kneeling up she traced the paua shell pendant on the silver chain around Miranda's neck as the editor swallowed at the light touch against her breastbone.

"All I want for you in this life is to be happy, Andréa." Miranda's tone was gentle. "Do you want children?"

"I have two daughters of the heart, Mira. The fact you are prepared to share those beautiful young ladies with me is the greatest gift, and if at some stage we decide we want another child, it will be as much as a blessing as my two little imps." Andy smiled as she continued to trace the tips of her fingers around the shell pendant. "Do you understand why I chose this symbol? The Pikorua?"

Miranda shook her head. "No."

"The Māori Pikorua, an eight-shaped single twist, symbolises many things; the strength of a bond between two people and their spiritual merger for all eternity. It is a powerful statement of loyalty, friendship, and love. It is a symbol of kare-ā-roto, as I explained when you opened the gift, it is a symbol for soulmates." Andy smiled when Miranda shivered as her hand moved up to cup her jaw. "Will you come with me, my love? I have something to show you,"

Miranda's flushed cheeks told the story of how Andy's words had affected her. Nodding she watched as Andy stood and held out a hand to her. Grasping it she was pulled to her feet and into Andy's arms. "Where are we going?" Miranda whispered curiously.

Andy offered Miranda a wide smile. "You'll see, come and all will be revealed."
Andy led Miranda up to their bedroom and opened the door, offering the older woman a shy smile. Stepping to one side she let Miranda take in the room.

Miranda didn't know what to think as she saw the closed curtains, soft lighting from the flickering of scented candles and the armchair at the end of the bed. "What is this, my darling? When did you do this?" Miranda husked.

"Come, sit and I will explain." Andy bit her lip and led Miranda to the chair. Swallowing her nervousness down she sat at the end of the bed and caught Miranda's eye. "I thought I could show you how much trust I have in us, so I did this," Andy whispered with an airy gesture. "The other day you asked if you could watch me as I..." She trailed off and licked her suddenly dry lips. "I...masterbate." She whispered. "I want to do that, Miranda. I want your eyes on me as I come. I want to show you how I touched myself before you."

Miranda was amazed, her throat working as she tried to find the words. "Are you sure?" Miranda could see Andy's nervousness in the twisting of the fingers and the bouncing of one leg.

Andy's eyes blazed and Miranda saw the determination in them. "Yes."

Miranda smiled. "Well, move at a glacial pace, you know how that thrills me."

Andy jumped up off the bed offering Miranda a bright smile. "Just give me two minutes. Get yourself comfortable."

Miranda smirked and untucked her blouse and unfastened her trousers as Andy moved quickly to the bathroom. As she settled in the chair her fingers drummed on the armrest. She was astounded by the offer Andy had made but couldn't stop the grin that spread across her face.

A movement in the corner of her eye captured her attention and her mouth dropped, suddenly dry at the sight before her. Andy wore nothing but a low cut cream silk peignoir that ended mid-thigh, leaving an expanse of tanned, toned leg on show. The younger woman stood nervously as Miranda's eyes blazed from the tip of her toes to meet her eyes. "Breathtaking." Miranda husked as she made to stand.

"Stay there," Andy told her. "I need you to see this, to watch me." She strode forward and sat on the edge of the bed. Spinning her legs around she scooted back to the centre of the bed, against the mound of pillows. "I will take this slow, but know this, every thought will be of you, every touch will be as if it is you touching me."

Miranda sat back and bit her lip at the words. "Acceptable." She growled.

The burning look in Miranda's eyes had Andy feeling hot, sexy and comfortable. She had made a good choice by wearing lingerie as the older woman's gaze rested on where her breasts sat in the flimsy silk containing them.

Andy tucked her hair behind her ears and ran her hands over her neck and down. Caressing her breasts through the silk her nipples reacted to her soft touch and her breathing became laboured. She concentrated on her breathing, letting her hands roam, stimulating herself as Miranda watched intently. Her hands moved lower, over her stomach and pelvic bone, skimming lightly over the area that wanted her touch. Her hands moved down to her thighs, and she swept the silk in her hands upwards, over her hips. She heard the older woman's gasp as she realised Andy wasn't wearing panties.

Andy's eyes met Miranda's and she could see the desire and love in the blue eyes, gazing back at
Taking a hold of the silk she pulled it gracefully over her head and threw it towards the older woman.

Once again she lowered her hands but bypassed her breasts. She stroked her belly, rib cage, and in between her breasts. Alternating between featherlike touches with her fingertips and a light touches with her full palms. She felt her body responding and brought her fingers up to offer featherlike touches to circle her breasts, working up to massaging them the more aroused she became. Miranda heard the small whimper from Andy, which sounded like her name, but she couldn't react. She was experiencing sensory overload as her brain tried to process the sight in front of her. Her love splayed out against her pillows as she touched herself.

Andy circled her breasts in large strokes around areola without touching the nipples, continuing to build anticipation, teasing until her body was begging for more. Unable to resist she gave her nipples a firm pinch, causing her to hiss from the momentary pain before pleasure washed over her and she moaned. Rolling the nipples between the thumb and index finger she mixed the pressure until waves of pleasure rushed through her body. Her hips rocked, and she whimpered. Letting one hand trail from her breast to her lower belly and stroked. She moved her hand down until she touched her clitoris. Using just one finger she spread her legs slightly and stroked. Her hips bucked again and as she looked towards Miranda her eyes widened to see the editor was now without her blouse and bra, stroking her own breasts and stomach.

She let her fingers slide, listening to her body. The stroking became faster, but the pressure remained varied. Moving lower still her finger was soon covered in her natural lube, slowly she pressed the tip in and out of her vagina, allowing her to slide her finger in deeper and deeper. Hooking her fingers she moved deeper in a thrusting motion. A loud moan was rent from her soul as Miranda's eyes pierced hers. Her other hand continued to caress her breasts lightly.

She heard Miranda's whispered words. "Magnificent."

Removing her hand from her breast she put it under the pillows and pulled out her little silver bag. Rummaging quickly she pulled out her classic Rabbit. Stilling her fingers, that had continued to move inside her, she switched the toy on and dragged it over her breasts and nipples. Gasping, she moved her fingers again as she ran the toy over her torso before running it to the inside of her thighs, closing her eyes as her arousal skyrocketed as her hips moved with her fingers. Teasing herself, she ran the Rabbit over the outside her labia before letting it run lightly over her clit. It was Miranda's moan that rent through the room as she stared at the brunette. Andy's eyes blazed open and letting out a small whimper, she watched as Miranda's hand moved into the fold of her trousers to cup herself.

Andy decided she needed more than her fingers could provide. Removing them she applied the tip of her toy to her dripping entrance before slowly dragging it upwards towards her clit and then dragging it back down. Her body was crying out for more but she wanted this to last as long as possible. She watched Miranda's hand moving against herself and heard the older woman's little breaths as she tried to stifle her own pleasure.

Catching Miranda's eye to ensure she was watching, she slowly pushed the Rabbit inside and with the press of a button had the ears vibrating against her clit. She moved the toy in circular thrusts, moving deeper and harder within herself as the ears pressed against her sensitive nub, widening her legs as she thrust inside she allowed her thumb to press the ears solidly against her throbbing clit. Her back arched as she pushed inside, and her hips rocked of their own accord. Her eyes fell shut as she let her arousal take over, pushing herself towards a climax. So wrapped up in her pleasure she didn't notice the dip of the bed between her spread legs. The first thing she felt was soft hair on the inside of her thigh and a soft hand covering hers as she pounded the vibrator inside.
Hearing Miranda's low voice she couldn't make out the words over the thundering of her heart in her ears. Miranda's words filtered through her brain. "Let go, Andréa." She complied and Miranda grasped the vibrator and pushed it into Andy as her tongue pressed against her clit. The answering shudder had Miranda delighted as her tongue continued to lavish Andy's clit with focused attention, she could feel the vibration against her and the legs on either side of her quivered. She realised Andy was about to come. Slowing her tongue she continued to push inside as Andy's back arched and she cried out Miranda's name. "Mine, always." Miranda husked.

"Oh God, Miranda. Yes, always!" Andy screamed as a second orgasm crashed through her.

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Chapter 20

She had stripped quickly when Andréa's eyes had fallen closed before joining the young woman in their bed and wrapping them both up under the comforter.

As the young woman continued to doze beside her, she thought back to the moments they had shared since her return, the primary thoughts being the one they had only just experienced. Miranda was astounded by the gift her Andréa had given her. To watch in those moments she was at her most uninhibited, was extraordinarily erotic and intense. It was such a turn on.

She recognised self-pleasure had always made her awkward, so she had avoided it for most of her life. It was only since Paris she had explored her sexual side, and always with the thought of Andréa in her mind. As she mastered the art of touching herself she felt empowered about her sexuality. Before this, Miranda had never considered masturbation to be intimate with a partner. Both Greg and Stephen had asked, and she had shot them down entirely. It was not something she considered should be talked about, let alone performed in front of another person.

Having Andréa touch herself, without being allowed to touch her in any way had been too much to bear. The beautiful young woman had given her a front-row seat to one of her most intimate experiences and it left her frustrated in a way she had never been before. The moment they shared had stimulated her senses, she had experienced a moment no-one else had ever seen. She couldn't stop herself from jumping in and ravaging the young woman, taking control to drive her over the edge.

Andréa's confidence was sexy, there was no other way to say it. It was also surprising really as she was often so endearingly awkward. She knew exactly what she wanted and how she wanted it, showing Miranda how comfortable she was with her body. She believed it would be a powerful experience, and it was something she intended to do herself, with Andréa's agreement. Smiling she looked towards the brunette and met the sleepy melted pools of chocolate. Her smile widened. "Hello, my darling. Did you have a good nap?"

"Mm, I had the best dream." Andy grinned, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Would you like to hear about it? Or better yet, I could show you." Her smile widened as Miranda swallowed and nodded. She kicked off the comforter, arranged the pillows behind her and patted for Miranda to sit between her legs. The older woman scrambled into position quickly causing Andy's smile to widen. "Lay back against me, my love," Andy whispered, before ghosting her tongue around the shell of Miranda's ear.

As Miranda sat back against Andy, the younger woman ran her hands across Miranda's stomach and up over her breasts, teasing her nipples with light touches. She kissed the sensitive spot under Miranda's ear causing goose bumps to form on Miranda's skin before moving her lips back to Miranda's ear and whispering. "Now I want you to touch yourself." She kissed down Miranda's jaw and neck and bit down lightly on her pulse point.

Miranda moved her hands, the tips of her fingers trailing lightly over her thighs, hips and stomach. As she trailed her fingertips towards her breasts, her fingers skirted between Andy's and the young woman stopped her own light ministrations to place her hands on top of Miranda's. The older woman whimpered quietly as wetness pooled between her legs. She suddenly felt vulnerable. "Andréa, please."

The quiet plea caught Andy's attention and her mouth moved back to whisper in her ear. "Please show me how you touch yourself."
Miranda palmed her own breasts before stroking down her body, Andy's hands still on hers. Parting her legs she trailed two fingers against her clit and gasped. "I'm so sensitive." She husked.

Andy could feel exactly how Miranda was touching herself and ghosted her fingers along with Miranda's. She now knew exactly how and where Miranda liked to be touched as their fingers moved in tandem. Miranda's hips bucked as her breathing became more ragged and their strokes became firmer. Andy sucked on the pulse point on Miranda's neck lightly, leaving a small mark as Miranda shuddered in her arms. "Do you need more?" Andy removed her hand from the top of Miranda's and swirled the tips of two of her fingers against the older woman's opening.

"Drawer." Miranda gasped.

Andy leaned away and pulled Miranda's small bag from the top drawer, licking her lips at the thought of what would happen next. Pulling Miranda's 'Platinum' Rabbit from the bag, Andy gasped at the size, compared with her smaller 'Elite' it seemed huge. She switched it on to the lowest vibration and made to hand it to the older woman who shook her head. "Don't you want this?"

"It's a little too big," Miranda admitted. "Will you...I need more before I can..." She trailed off as Andy teased it over her arms. As Miranda adjusted to the vibrations, Andy ran the vibrator across her stomach and then up over her breasts, shoulders and neck, letting Miranda experience the vibration all over her body as she continued to stroke herself. "This is not what I expected, Mira," Andy whispered teasingly. "This is far, far better than anything my imagination could come up with." She husked. She explored every inch of the woman, noting the sensitive spots and delighting as the small gasps of pleasure.

"More," Miranda demanded breathlessly as her hands roamed Andy's thighs. Andy smiled and increased the speed as she pressed it lightly against Miranda's body. "Mm, so good." Andy held the vibrator just slightly above the clit, so it was barely touching. Her other hand moved back to her breasts and teased the nipples mercilessly. Miranda's head fell back against Andy's shoulder and her hips moved of their own accord as the waves of pleasure had her seeking additional pleasure. "My darling, what part of more don't you understand?" Miranda took Andy's hand in hers and pressed it firmly to the side of her clit, letting out a loud groan. "Oh God, yes."

Andy's breath caught as Miranda once again moved the toy lower, swirling it around her opening before moving it upwards. "God, Mira, that's so damn hot," Andy whispered as Miranda arched into the firm strokes. Andy let go and watched as Miranda continued to move the toy against herself. Andy rested her cheek against Miranda's and watched intently.

"I need lubricant," Miranda whispered.

Andy moved slightly and rummaged in the bag and her hand landed on a small bottle. Pulling it loose she saw it was warming lubricant. "Let me," Andy asked.

"Hurry, I'm so close." Miranda moaned.

Andy squirted the lubricant on her hand before gripping the toy between her fingers and moving up the shaft. Squirting more onto the tips of her fingers she lightly trailed them along Miranda's folds, causing her to moan, and her hips to jump. She removed her hands, resting them lightly on Miranda's stomach and watched as Miranda pressed slowly and the tip disappeared inside her, she could not stop the little moan at the sight.

Miranda inched the vibrator in slowly. She pressed a button for the rotating beads and groaned as she arched further onto the toy. Miranda thrust the toy gently, her hips rocking with her
movements, her ass pressing against Andy's core, causing her to pull the woman closer and grind herself against Miranda's ass. "Oh God, you are beautiful," Andy growled as Miranda thrust deeper and groaned as she hit her G spot.

"It's not enough...the ears...I need..." Miranda cried out desperately.

Andy trailed her thumb through Miranda's folds and pressed it hard against her clit before circling. She kept up the pressure, with teasing touches. "Is this enough?" She asked.

"Mm, so good." Miranda cried as she moved faster as she pressed it deeper. "I'm going to..." Andy slowed the circling of Miranda's clit as the older woman chanted her name breathlessly.

"Andréa...Andréa...Andréa..." Andy slipped a finger alongside the shaft of the toy as her thumb continued to caress. "Oh God, Aaandeeeeee!" Miranda convulsed, her back arching as she climaxed with a shudder expelling the toy forcefully.

Andy was still grinding, and observing Miranda come so intensely, she soon followed suit with a low moan and shuddered as her own orgasm claimed her. "Oh God, Miranda. I love you." Andy whispered as she removed her hand and Miranda turned and hid her face in her chest.

Miranda looked up and catching Andy's eyes, she saw the love and happiness in them. She offered a wide smile of her own. "I love you more, my darling, Andréa."

Dinner time arrived with Andy's stomach growling and Miranda couldn't help the smile that rose on her face. Sitting up she smoothed the comforter over her legs as Andy leapt up embarrassed. "Um, I should make us some dinner and..."

"We shall order. How does Pastis sound?" Miranda asked.

"They don't deliver." Andy grinned and shook her head as she put her silk pyjamas on.

Miranda rolled her eyes. "I thought you knew I can do anything, my darling." She stated happily. She picked up her cell and dialled. "Hello Keith, Miranda Priestly here...Wonderful thank you...Yes, it's true. Andréa returned just before Christmas...Yes, that would be amazing. Can I have two onion soup and two steak frites?" Miranda smiled happily. "Perfect...That's all." She disconnected her cell and looking across at Andy raised an eyebrow and grinned.

"You are something else, Miranda. Do you know that?" Andy grinned and stepped towards the bed, she let her eyes roam over the expanse of skin Miranda was showing.

"My darling, if you continue to look at me like that, I will never be ready for dinner in thirty minutes," Miranda smirked.

"I only need five minutes," Andy claimed happily, jumping on her bed and catching Miranda's lips in an intense kiss. "Ten at the most." Her hands roamed over Miranda's breasts, and she took immense pleasure from the low moans coming from Miranda as she continued to touch and kiss her. The need for air had her breaking their kiss, and she looked at the woman below her, Miranda looked thoroughly tousled, her lips swollen from her kisses and her chest flushed. "So beautiful," Andy whispered as she dipped her fingers lower and teased Miranda's clit.

Miranda arched into her touch. "Andréa, darling." Her voice was hoarse. She let out a strangled cry, her arm coming up to cover her eyes as her climax overwhelmed her.

"Two down, one to go," Andy muttered breathlessly.
"Oh, God..." Miranda trailed off breathlessly. "This is not a case of quid pro quo, my darling."

"I know, I always want you to feel as wonderful as you make me." Andy smiled up at the woman shyly.

Miranda trailed her hands through Andy's curls and offered her a gentle smile. "You do, my darling. I promise." Her hands continued to run through Andy's hair. "Now, if you release me, I will get dressed."

"Okay, I'll clean..." Andy blushed furiously. "Well, you know..." She got up off the bed and picked up both toys carefully. Catching Miranda's eye she blushed. "Thank you, Miranda." She watched as Miranda raised her eyebrow. "For staying with me today and for..." She smiled softly. "...For sharing this moment with me."

"Anytime, my darling." Miranda husked. She didn't expect the young woman's sincerity, and it blew her mind. She was realising her Andréa did not realise the impact she'd had in her life and it was something she would rectify.

As Andy closed the door of the en-suite she pulled out her cell and scrolled through her contacts. "Good evening, Maxwell...No, no, we are fine...Yes, we were advised of the charges...Was the paperwork I asked for yesterday delivered?" She listened as her lawyer excused himself and heard Richard's loud laughter in the background. It sounded like he was having fun which made her happy. He was a nice man, and she could see a lot of her Andréa in him. Lost in thought she missed her lawyer's words. "What was that, Maxwell?" She sighed. "That's good. With yesterday's events, they have been forgotten...Maxwell, have a pleasant evening and take care of Richard for us." She smiled. "Yes, that's all." She disconnected the call quickly and rose from the bed.

Looking down she bit her lip and grinned. Stepping quickly she moved to her drawers and pulled a silk nightshirt out. Shrugging it over her shoulders, she fastened the buttons. She was deliciously achy after her afternoon with Andréa, but it was an ache that left her feeling alive.

She knocked on the en-suite door and entered the bathroom to find Andy staring off into space, a bright smile lighting up her face. Stepping to the twin sinks she caught Andy's eyes through the mirror. "What are you thinking, my darling?" Miranda was curious.

"Just how grateful I am to be alive," Andy admitted. "It is such a precious gift."

Miranda smiled softly. "You are my precious gift, Andréa." She turned away from the mirror as Andy did the same. Looking into the deep dark eyes of the younger woman in front of her, she spoke quietly. "Many months ago I realised I would rather know you for a moment than never at all. I swore to myself I would be grateful for the time we had, with no expectation for more."

"And now?" Andy asked teasingly.

"And now, I plan to show you my gratitude for the rest of my life." Miranda sighed. "But I am hungry, and dinner will be here soon. Will you give me a few moments to freshen up?"

"Yes, love. I'll meet you in the kitchen. Wine or water?"

"Water, please." Miranda grinned at the joy that lit up Andy's eyes at the polite request. She had noticed it happening when she provided the brunette with her thanks too. "I will be down momentarily."

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Fifteen minutes later saw them sat at the breakfast bar digging into their soup and steak frites.

Miranda had placed her robe over her nightshirt and was sat in contemplative silence as she watched Andy eat. "I will not always do or say the right thing, Andréa, I cannot change so entirely."

Miranda's words startled the brunette. "I don't want you to change, Miranda. But you have been different with me since my return." Andy sputtered.

"In what way different?" Miranda queried.

Andy pushed her soup away and dug into her fries as she thought how she wanted to explain. Finishing chewing as Miranda sat twirling her glass of water between her fingers she looked up. "You're softer with me. You have treated me with the same consideration as you do the twins."

Andy smiled. "We know La Priestly lurks beneath the woman you are at home, but you don't let us see her too often."

"My Bobbsey's understand why I have so many facades, do you?" Miranda asked.

Andy nodded. "Yes, I understand, or try to. Business is business. You command your empire in a way that ensures you get the best from those beneath you. If you were a man people would congratulate your success and achievements as a woman you are labelled adversely for having the same drive and ambition as your male counterparts."

"Wow, you really understand." Miranda was stunned. Pulling her plate towards her she cut her steak and eating.

"I tried to explain it that night in Paris to Christian. He was trying so hard to get me to bad mouth you. I drank more to shut him out. We know how that ended." Andy sighed and her regret demonstrated in her eyes.

"No regrets, my darling. Everything happens for a reason." Miranda stated softly.

They sat eating in companionable silence until Miranda sighed. "What I want to understand is why you have not looked over your contract for Elias Clarke?" Miranda continued to eat as Andy played with her plate of food. "Please, eat."

Andy put effort into finishing her steak, which had been cooked at a perfect medium rare. "I am a little worried. It is not the direction I was hoping to take my career, but with Marc at Rolling Stone being awkward and pulling my stories it hasn't left me with much of a choice. I need to do something, Miranda. I need to contribute something to our life together."

"You do not have to work is you do not want," Miranda smirked. "I assumed from our conversation earlier that you would be happy to stay at home and have my babies."

Andy looked up sharply and caught the teasing smile on Miranda's face, amazed by the editor's blue eyes, which sparkled with mischief. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Andy bit her lip, holding back her laughter at Miranda's look of confusion. "Me, barefoot, pregnant, and tied to the kitchen sink?"

"Mm," Miranda was non-committal but her eyes held pleasure.

"Admit it!" Andy teased.

"I shall do no such thing, my darling," Miranda smirked. "Though one of the three sounds
appealing. And I have all those scarves." She watched as Andy's eyes widened and heard her swallow audibly. "Mm, yes Andréa. That is an idea I believe we should give consideration. What say you?"

"I say..." Andy took a deep breath. "...I say you're limiting yourself with only scarves." She stood quickly and moved around to Miranda. Placing her arms around the older woman's waist she tugged at the belt fastening the grey robe. "This would do the job admirably." She husked.

"And...Andréa, pl...please." Miranda stuttered, her mouth suddenly dry as Andy's hands roamed across the silk against her stomach.

"Hold that thought," Andy whispered. Within seconds she was in Miranda's study and had picked up both envelopes off the side table. Moving quickly back to the kitchen she saw Miranda at the sink, clearing their plates and stacking them in the dishwasher.

She sat down and sipped her water looking at the envelopes curiously. One was postmarked from Elias Clarke and the other from Miranda's Lawyer. "Miranda, why has Max sent me this?" She picked up the envelope warily.

Miranda turned and leaned against the kitchen bench. "Well, I...I asked Maxwell to draw up paperwork for me. Just please give it a thorough reading and then we can discuss it." She bit her lip nervously. "I will be in the study if you wish to join me." Miranda fastened her robe and drifted around the breakfast bar. As she reached Andy, she wrapped her arms around her and placed a kiss on her head. "I love you, Andréa. The only thing that exceeds the strength of emotion I have for you is those that I hold for Caroline and Cassidy."

Andy leaned back into Miranda's chest. "I will look at all this in the study." She swallowed. "That way if I have questions I can ask them."

"Acceptable." Miranda husked as she stepped back and held a hand out for Andy to take.

Andy grasped it and stood. Looking down at Miranda, she offered her a shy smile before leading the Editor from the room.

Miranda sat in the armchair. Pulling out Andy's journal she looked at where Andy was curled up on the sofa already reading through the mass of documents her legal team had completed. She heard the gasp and saw the documents shaking in the brunette's hand as she turned to the next page. Andy read the legal jargon in stunned silence.

In the Matter of the Adoption of a Child whose First Name is Caroline

1. I, [specify name] Miranda Priestly, residing at 129 E 73rd St, NEW YORK, birth parent of [specify the first name of child] Caroline, do hereby consent to the adoption of my daughter who was born on [specify date] 03/14/1997 by [specify name] Andréa Elizabeth Sachs, adoptive parent.

2. The full name and last known address of the other birth parent of the adoptive child are [optional] N/A

Dated: 12/28/2007
Andy looked at the next sheet and saw the same paperwork for Cassidy. Looking up she saw Miranda's eyes move quickly down to the open journal. "Miranda, this would have taken so much time and..."

"If you do not agree, Andrée, I shall inform Maxwell. He was holding off until the first week of the new year to file them off to the courts," Miranda stated, suddenly nervous. Ever since Andy had mentioned on Christmas Eve, the fact she could be a second parent to the twins, Miranda could not get the idea out of her head. Her twins were Priestly's, having been given Miranda's surname, but if they chose, they could be Priestly-Sachs, a name she would happily take should the young woman marry her. They could be the family Miranda hoped for. She wanted this so much, but she wouldn't rush the young woman if she wasn't certain.

Andy placed the paperwork down and stood. In two steps she was in front of Miranda and kneeling at her feet. She placed her head on Miranda's lap and smiled as Miranda's fingers ran through her curls soothingly. "I am not saying no, Miranda. I'm just amazed you have decided I am worthy of this gift. I did not expect such a gesture of confidence."

"You appreciate how much my Bobbsey's mean to me, my darling. And you have shown exceptional care since the moment you met them. They love you, Andrée and they want you in our lives as much as I do. You bring so much joy to all our lives, and I wanted to make it permanent. I want our children to learn from you, to take some of that innate gentleness, kindness, happiness and laughter and make it their own. I am aware I am lacking but what they miss from me, I acknowledge you will give in abundance."

"You are an amazing mother. I don't know many who would want to fly through a hurricane to watch them play the piano." Andy grinned.

"As I advised you, they were playing Rachmaninoff," Miranda whispered teasingly.

"I've yet to hear it. I think it will suitably impress Diane tomorrow evening." Andy raised her head and grinned as Miranda rolled her eyes. "The answer is yes," Andy whispered. "Are the twins aware?"

"It was them who insisted, my darling. They want this too." Miranda stated. "If not, this would not be happening. I never contemplated it with Stephen, but you have captured our hearts. You complete our family."

Andy sighed in contentment. "Who am I to refuse my three loves anything?" She raised her head, her eyes twinkling with happiness. "Now do you have questions about what you've read so far?"

"No, but would you go on a date with me?" Miranda asked. "I'm free Wednesday evening."

Andy grinned. "Yes, Miranda. I would like that very much."

Miranda concentrated on Andy's journal as the brunette looked over her contract for Elias Clarke. Looking through the pages she was stunned to find photos had been stuck to the pages to help describe her travels. Flicking through randomly she landed on a photo that caught her attention. Examining the photo closely she saw someone had captured Andy drawing the beginning of the designs for the pyjama's she had made in Delhi. Another showed a street monkey climbing up Andy's back as she laughed. Miranda couldn't help but smile, it showed both the serious and joyous side of the woman she loved. She looked forward to reading the extracts linked to the photos, wondering just how much the brunette had left out of her letters and emails.

Dear Miranda,

It is hard to break the habit of the last nine months. Today I woke up in my little apartment and looked around, ready to spring into action, to get ready for my day at Runway. To meet every one of your impossible tasks. It was disorientating to realise I had no cause to do so. You will be home now, you would have arrived at the Townhouse in the middle of yesterday and no doubt went straight to work.

I had hope Leslie was managing the fallout of the divorce with her usual aplomb. She's good at what she does and I hoped for your sake, and that of the twins, the press would take it easy on you. I went walking this morning, unable to find peace and as I passed Elias Clarke, in the hope I may catch a small peek at you, I saw the press loitering. It makes me ashamed to have ever wanted to be one.

Upon my return to the apartment, I researched. India appeals, maybe Nepal, Thailand, Japan, China, New Zealand and Australia. I've booked a one-way flight to Delhi. I emailed an old friend from Northwestern to let her know I will be there, she moved back when she got married and I hope to catch up with her. From what I can tell it will be Diwali shortly after I arrive, it will be wonderful to experience such a celebration.

I've started packing up my life ready to send what I can to my parents. Nate took more than I thought, leaving the basics for me to make at least for a little while but it made me pause for a moment, I couldn't live alone on my salary from Runway, and I doubt any job as a cub reporter would pay much more. It has made me consider alternatives. Maybe I would be better going back to Ohio when I return to the States or maybe I could pick up my Juris Doctor.

I don't know. I wish I could see you, Miranda. Just talk to you like I did in that cafe in Paris. I've missed you today.

"My darling?" Miranda spoke quietly.

"Yes, Miranda?" Andy didn't look up, her hair in her face as she frowned over the contract.

"Do you want to study law?" Mirada asked. "You could go to Columbia."

Andy's head shot up. "No, sweetheart. Law doesn't appeal, what brought this on?"

Miranda tapped the page she had been reading. "You mentioned it was an idea when you returned from Paris. You didn't know how you'd cope trying to live off your salary."

"Miranda as your assistant my salary was $50,000 a year. My rent in that shitty apartment was almost $2,800 each month. Alone, it would have left me slightly over a thousand dollars each month to pay utilities and buy food. I would have taken a second job." Andy swallowed. "As a lawyer starting out, I could have been earning $70,000, with the potential for more. Yes, I considered it, for all of an hour, and realised it would make me miserable."

Miranda shook her head. "If you wanted to do it, I would support you."
"Thank you, but no. It is not the life I want." Andy caught her eye. "Did Charlie and Diane tell you what they were offering me?"

"No," Miranda stated. "Just that an offer would be made."

"They've doubled my salary." Andy swallowed.

Miranda scoffed. "So they will have you spinning Elias Clarke news in a good way to external media sources and writing for their publications for that paltry sum."

"Paltry? Miranda, it's more than I expected." Andy was amazed.

"They will suck you dry, and as soon as the other magazines see how talented you are they will clamber for your skills and have you working your fingers to the bone and what will you get for it?" Miranda arched her eyebrow.

"Full editorial control, for anything written for Elias Clark and its publications," Andy whispered nervously.

Miranda smirked, mischief sparkling in her eyes. "Oh really, Andréa? Does that include Runway?"

"Um, well, um. God no, you are the one that has the only say. If my work was less than stellar you'd tell me." Andy caught her eyes. Wouldn't you?"

"Mm." Miranda was non-committal. "You should negotiate, my darling."

"How?" Andy was curious and watched as Miranda set her journal down and stood.

Stepping towards her desk, Miranda grabbed a notebook, a stack of post-it notes and two red markers. Turning towards the brunette her smile widened. "Let's edit this contract shall we?" She stepped to the sofa and sat beside the brunette. Picking up the sheaf of papers Andy had looked at she tsked. "Careless." She muttered as she scribbled on a post-it. Andy looked down and saw the words. "BETTER JOB TITLE REQUIRED."

"Why a better title?" Andy queried.

"If you were a true staff writer, they would pay you more. In journalism, a staff writer by-line shows that the author of the article is an employee of the periodical, as opposed to being a freelance writer. In an advertising agency, the copywriting is the main responsibility of staff writers. In television, a staff writer is the probationary, entry-level position in the writer's room. Also, every major music publishing company has staff-writers under contract and almost every song on the charts was written by a writer affiliated with a publishing company. A staff-writer in the music industry is neither an employee nor a staff member, but a songwriter who has agreed to publish all of his or her songs only with one music publisher." Miranda sighed. "You are not working for just one magazine, Elias Clarke has 20 magazines under its belt. It is a large undertaking, Andréa." Miranda smiled. "Do not worry, my darling. We'll just give it a small tweak and let Diane see it tomorrow evening."

"Oh, goodie," Andy whispered her words as she rolled her eyes, causing Miranda to snigger as she scribbled furiously on yet another post-it.

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Chapter 21

Sitting over dinner Diane had seen Andy becoming increasingly tired as they spoke quietly and ate the wonderful meal Cara had prepared for them. The twins kept Andy engaged in conversation, and it was obvious the three Priestly's adored the young woman.

It had shocked Diane to learn of the assault against the gentle brunette sat opposite, her wife worked for the DA's office and had given her the information regarding the events and the charges laid against the two people. They now faced some serious jail time.

As dinner ended, Miranda led them all to the living room, and they settled into the comfortable chairs and couches. Miranda poured more wine for them while Andy moved out of the room. Diane watched the twins as they played the piano and glancing towards her wife spotted her amazement at their skill.

Diane couldn't stop her laughter when Andy returned and handed her the contract with post-it notes attached to the paperwork, she had called it with Charles and Tom and between them; they owed her a bottle of Macallan. She had known Miranda would make herself busy. It was a gesture she had expected knowing how protective she would be of Andy and any changes would be in her best interests. She remembered Miranda negotiated her own contracts like a pro, and she would have used the moment to teach the young woman a valuable lesson about her worth. Placing the contract down she watched as Andy walked across the room and teased the twins. Turning to Miranda, she asked. "She'll be okay, won't she?" The question had plagued her through their dinner.

Miranda sat back in her chair and nodded. "Yes, she will be. That photograph and the events of that evening brought a few things to a head. We have experienced a difficult few months, too fearful to admit what we desired from one another, and, we are still fearful that the happiness we found will be fleeting. But we are working through things and we can spend a few relaxing days at home and hit 2008 in our stride."

"And what plans do you have for the New Year celebrations?" Diane's wife, Amy asked.

Miranda gazed at the younger woman, she was around ten years younger than Diane. She was petite and pretty. She offered a small smile. "I don't know. I have an invitation to the black and white ball, but must admit I would prefer to mark the New Year quietly, surrounded by the people I love the most." Miranda smiled when Andy pounded on the piano keys and laughed as Cassidy squealed, demanding she stopped the racket she was making. "Although on further consideration I doubt very much it would ever be quiet with those three."

"Why do I get the distinct impression you're don't have a problem with that?" Diane's lips quirked as Amy chuckled.

Miranda smiled. "It has amazed me how much of an impact Andréa has had on us all. She brings us all so much happiness, and the girls absolutely adore her." She watched as Andy chased the twins from the room, shrieking over promises of warm milk and cookies.

"I can see that," Amy murmured. "I heard so much about Andy when Diane met her at Northwestern a few years ago. I was almost jealous. Her words were lovely and extraordinarily insightful, it was a shame it was only the Daily Northwestern that enjoyed them and it seems a bigger shame she will not use her talent for reading people while working at Elias Clarke writing for Auto Pornverse and the other magazines."
Miranda sniggered at the name, finding it fitting for the car magazine that insisted on draping semi-naked women across bonnets of cars and on motorcycles and yet still failing to sell. "You recognise it as a talent, reading people?" Miranda queried.

"Don't you?" Amy smiled. "Rumour has it, she reads you better than anyone. She became legendary in your world. We were at a party the other night and James Holt couldn't sing her praises more although there are one or two that seemed less than impressed. There was a blonde, smarmy asshat Diane introduced me to...Thomas or Thompson." She waved her hand. "Total douchebag and that French woman he was with, what an absolute horror."

"Jacqueline," Miranda smirked as Amy nodded. "I suppose when you put it like that, I must agree."

"You are nothing like how they paint you in the press. You've been very warm and welcoming to Diane and me." Amy stated.

Miranda sat back, steepling her hands under her chin as she viewed the two women opposite. "Can I be honest with you?" Seeing the two women nodding, she continued to speak. "I do not always easily connect with people. It is often hard to work out who holds genuine appreciation and affection, and who is just kissing arse because of my position. It gets frustrating. Andréea is, and always has been, the exception to that rule." Miranda looked at Diane. "You are also a powerful force in the business world. How do you cope with it all?"

Diane clasped her wife's hand. "Amy." The one-word answer stunned Miranda, and she sat back. Her eyes blazed with curiosity causing Diane to smirk. "I firmly believe people enter our lives for a reason, and some people come into our world with one express purpose, to love us." Diane looked at her wife. "Amy came into my world randomly. You may have heard rumours I didn't date, I was a reclusive, hard-hearted ball-breaker." Diane's smirk disappeared. "There is a reason behind that impression. I was attacked many years ago after a night out, by one of my coworker's. It was the late 70s and sexual harassment in the workplace was rife. My superiors had dismissed my reports of the man, claiming it was harmless. The fact I reported his attack and then sued my employers is something that is not spoken about openly, even after all the changes regarding sexual harassment laws. I used the pay-out to create my first company and buried myself in my work. I did not care who I trampled on in business while making my way to the top, but I always treated my staff respectfully. I created a safe environment."

"I had no idea," Miranda stated. She looked up at the woman. "I heard the whispered rumours, but paid scant attention to them."

"When I joined the board, I was vocal about how male-dominated it was. The old boys club mentality is something Charles, Tom and I wish to change, which is why I bought major shares. Now with Irv gone, it may be possible to make changes for the better."

"Good." Andy's exclamation had all three women looking towards her. She sat on the arm of Miranda's chair. "More needs to be done to push women forward rather than holding them back." She smiled at Miranda. Andy's cell rang, and she stood up to pull it from her pocket. "It's my dad, excuse me a moment." She stepped away, answering her father's call. "Hi, Poppa bear." She paused a beat. "Oh hey, Max. What's up?" Miranda watched as Andy's back stiffened. "Oooh-kaay. Yeah. I signed off on it, and...okay, I suppose I can speak to her." Andy looked back at Miranda, her eyes reflecting dread. "Hello, mom. What are you doing in Connecticut?"

Andy moved from the room but the door remained ajar. Miranda heard her ice-cold words to her mother. "I cannot fathom why you would go to Connecticut if you were just bent on upsetting dad..." Miranda stood and moved to close the door fully, but angry words halted her progress. "...I do not care if Mr and Mrs Cooper have an issue with the fact I pressed charges against Nate, he
threw my inhaler away in the middle of an asthma attack. I nearly drowned because of his actions." Cassidy and Caroline turned to the door as Andy's frustration became obvious as she listened to whatever Ginny was saying. "Yes, he dragged me out of the water, by my fucking hair..."

Things turned quiet and Miranda assumed Andy had moved away. She turned to sit when Andy's angry voice hit her.

"Just shut up, you understand nothing. I will be a second mom to those beautiful children and one day when the time is right, we will have more babies. But hopefully, that will follow the wedding you are so opposed to." Miranda caught Andy's final words. "I would do it to spite you in your ignorance and hypocrisy but I am doing it for love, no more, no less. Because I hold love in my heart, mom, unlike you. Never try to contact me again, I'm done with you. That's all."

Miranda welcomed a sense of relief that Andy had stood up to her overbearing mother. Turning she observed Diane and Amy looking at each other, startled. Miranda shook her head and sat down. "I assumed that garbage in the press was just that?" Diane whispered.

"Unfortunately, not," Miranda stated as Caroline and Cassidy clambered on her lap, showing their concern.

"Mom, she will not leave us." Cassidy tried to reassure her.

"I know, Bobbsey." Miranda smiled softly before placing a light kiss on the twin's heads. "I am not concerned about that."

"She sounds madder than a box of frogs," Caroline muttered.

"You met her mother, Caroline, it is understandable," Miranda smirked as she caught the other women's eyes. "The news of Andréa's return to New York, and to us, did not please her."

"My dad is also a little difficult when Diane and I first met he would not have her name mentioned in his presence," Amy admitted. "I've from North Carolina originally, Charlotte to be exact. My father is a pastor but his beliefs never matched my own."

Miranda nodded her understanding. "I was raised in the Orthodox Jewish faith, but I have not practised for over thirty years."

"Wow, I didn't know that." Andy stepped into the room. A blush rushed up to her cheeks at the admission in front of their guests. She brushed her hand through her hair and wincing as her fingers caught against the small, tender lump there. "Sorry about that, my mom's being a little difficult."

"You don't have to explain, Andy," Diane stated softly. "You know, I wish I had the words to make it all better, but it gets easier and as the world changes so do people's perception. Just ask Amy." Diane caught Andy's eyes. "We have been together just over eight years, and this was the first Christmas I was included in the holiday wishes from her mom and dad."

Andy tore her eyes away, looking to the twins. Catching Caroline's eyes, she grinned. "I have my own beautiful family now; my sister is accepting and my dad has come around now he's seen this for himself. It sucks that an event that has brought me immeasurable happiness has also caused me to lose people I imagined loved me, regardless."

"It's not the loss of your mom that hurts you, is it Andy?" Amy asked.

Andy looked up and shook her head. "No, my relationship with her has been tense for a long time. It's the loss of childhood friends that stings. It is like the moments we shared and the memories we
created mean nothing." She looked at the twins again. "You guys are worth it though, never doubt that." She perched on the arm of the chair again, near her three loves. "Now that's enough being sorry for myself. Imps, I believe it may be time for bed."

"Aww," Cassidy whined and looked to Miranda. "But mo-oom."

Andy looked uncertain and noticed Miranda looking curious. Squaring her shoulders, she grinned at Cassidy. "My little love, but mo-oom doesn't work on us. I have plans for tomorrow and I need you both to get a good night's sleep."

Caroline's eyes blazed at that and she turned to Cassidy, holding one of their silent talks. Nodding once she climbed down from Miranda's knee and held her hand out for Andy. "Come on then, Ma."

The ease of the agreement and the title confused Andy. "Okay, what gives?"

"Well the quicker you tuck us in, the quicker we find out your plans for us," Caroline admitted.

Andy clasped Caroline's hand as she stood and held her other one out for Cassidy. "That's wishful thinking, my imps. You'll find out tomorrow when we arrive at the venue."

Cassidy's groan of displeasure had the adults chuckling as Andy led the twins from the room as they threw goodnight wishes at the other women. They knew if they pleaded hard enough, they would get the answers from their bonus-mom.

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Miranda spent time, after saying goodnight to their guests, deep in reflection. They had made their way to bed and Andréa had dropped asleep, but her mind would not switch off. Rather than lying in the dark and possibly disturbing the woman at her side she crept out of bed and padded through the house to brew tea.

Now, sat in her darkened study, with only a small lamp casting light, she considered all that had brought her to that point.

Picking up Andréa's journal, she re-read a passage which she had almost remarked upon earlier that day after spending time reading the entries. Andréa had written it as she waited for her plane out of New York.

10/18/2007 - New York - JFK

Dear Miranda,

I'm glad you will never read this. I doubt you would ever forgive me for writing a deeply personal missive that someone could read, but I have so many thoughts I need to get out and writing has always been the best way to do that. And yet anything I write will fail to express my feelings. Language will fail me, for the first time. Such is life.

Next to the start was a sketch of her face in profile. The depth of the portrait scratched onto the paper with a ballpoint pen, amazed her.

I've been thinking back to the first time I saw you. I was a little intimidated by you because you were so self-assured, poised and smart! You spoke your mind with confidence and I sensed you were someone to be feared and respected by how everyone at Runway reacted to your unexpected presence.
What I didn't expect to see after that first day was the warmth you try to hide from the world or that you can be fun-loving. I noticed it in the slight tilt of your mouth and spark in your eyes when something amused you and by how you were with your girls. Occasionally I would hear your laughter travelling down the stairs when I brought the book, and I wanted to be a part of that.

I considered myself special because you let me view that side of you, but I never understood why no one else seemed to see you. Were they blind?

I realise you move through your world harnessing control, while I move through it by relinquishing it, by pleasing and serving and giving. Some people have said you exploited me but I never saw it that way. I wanted to please you, to make your eyes sparkle in that special way they have.

I feel like I am a better person for being around you. You made me think harder and deeper than anyone I've ever met before. You are brilliant. When I was with you, the colours were no longer just colours. they danced across my eyes and make the world a more captivating place to be. No longer was there just blue. You filled my world with cerulean, azure, cobalt, turquoise, iris, midnight, and sapphire. My favourite of all is the crystal blue of your eyes.

Every night since I left Paris I have dreamed of you and each morning I wake up with an ache in my heart. I can't stop remembering you, although we're both too prideful to say anything. To ever admit to this strange, special *thing* between us.

You mentioned, while we sat in that tiny Parisian Cafe, you struggled to connect with people. I remember realising there are so many things in this Universe we don’t understand, and that was the biggest one. At that moment I thought I understood you better than I ever had. I saw you trying to find meaning for your attitude towards me, you were gentle when you could have made my life Hell. I saw your fear, and I said nothing because I didn't want to mess anything up.

Maybe I should have kissed you when I had the chance. When your face was not even inches from mine as you hugged me in the lobby of the hotel. I almost turned my head when you kissed my cheek to capture your lips in mine. But instead of holding you and never letting go I kept my face averted and let my fear of losing you forever overwhelm me. I think I'll regret that moment for a long time.

For me, saying goodbye has always seemed so final. I couldn't bring myself to say it that night. People come in and out of our lives. I have found, however, that some people will always come back to you. I will always come back to you.

Part of me wishes I had been brave enough, to come and see you before I left the city, but I would not have stopped myself from pouring out what is in my heart and I was unwilling to experience the sting of your displeasure or disgust. Instead, I told you I was ready to leave by email, yet another cowardly move.

What is it about you that pulls me in? Fear? Rarely. Curiosity? Occasionally. Love? Always. I hold so much love, it snuck up and encompassed my heart without me even realising it. I am so irrevocably in love with you and I don't know if anything can convince me we aren't meant to live our lives together. I believe we would fit together beautifully, and even when we would have problems (and believe me, we'd have them), I appreciate we would somehow get through them.
I need time away to convince myself that these thoughts are wrong. That I could never mean to you, what I have realised you do to me. I cannot offer you what you need. It is impossible. I understand it will be a long and difficult journey to come back to you. I need to prove to myself that I am your equal because no matter how you said otherwise, right now I feel far from it. Hopefully, one day, we can become friends without me holding the impossible hope for more.

I wanted to thank you for the things you've taught me. I acknowledge I am a better person for knowing you. I give thanks to the Universe you were, albeit briefly, a shining beacon of hope in my life.

I best sign off now, they are calling the flight.

The entry raised so many questions and left her wanting to reassure the woman sleeping peacefully in her bed. She knew, should Andrèa have told her how she felt, there would have been a mutual declaration. Those initial letters in Paris had revealed to her the true nature of her feelings and by the time Andrèa had left New York, she had been ready to ask the young woman to stay.

Those two weeks, after Paris, were the worst she had encountered. She missed the woman's presence at Runway and her light, reassuring movements in the foyer of her home each night. It had been intolerable having Emily clunk her way through the house to deliver the book.

Paris had left her feeling disconnected from everyone, including her twins. Cassidy and Caroline had been vocal upon her return, expressing their delight over Stephen's absence. When Andrèa did not arrive that first night, she handled the brunt of their displeasure by handing over her email address.

No matter how much she tried to tell herself it was for the best, her world turned dark. Nigel was wary of her and kept his distance, and she could not blame him. Emily's obvious displeasure at missing out on Paris and having to train a new assistant did not ease the tension. Her staff whispered Andrèa's name in hushed tones, hoping it wouldn't catch her attention or ire.

She had caught the whispers, that she had fired and blacklisted the woman, having pushed her away for some minute misdemeanour. They bandied Christian's name around as the cause, and the mutters had her jealousy rearing its head. She fired that first replacement for stating that Andrèa was clearly a slut having dumped her boyfriend and jumped into bed with the first man that gave her any attention. Her fury that day, upon hearing those words, was beyond anything she'd ever experienced and the wave of fierce protectiveness had opened her mind to the feelings she had been trying hard to repress. She had hissed at the young blonde that her judgement of someone she had never met was deplorable and to get out of her sight.

She had searched the employment files to locate Andrèa's address but as she steeled herself to visit the young woman, she received the email advising her of her imminent departure from the city, having already travelled to Ohio to store her things. It seemed she had left it too late.

It was Nigel who made it known throughout Runway that Andrèa was travelling, laughingly telling those brave or stupid enough to mention her she was seeking enlightenment in India. She often wondered how much Nigel knew of the young woman's feelings and how much had he guessed at hers? It had been a surprise when he agreed so wholeheartedly to dinner and drinks and it was on that night she found out the true lengths Andrèa had gone to for her.

She remembered Nigel's words as she placed a blue moon cocktail in front of him.

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One month Earlier:

His smile was bright and his eyes clear. Gone was the wariness of the month's past. "She loves you, I hope you realise that?" Nigel refused to mince his words as she sat opposite.

"What makes you imagine that, Nigel?" She spoke the words quietly as he sipped his cocktail and hummed.

Nigel licked the cocktail from his lips. "She let me read her letter to you in Paris. I told her she was brave. I asked her why she didn't tell you she loved you and although she tried to deny it, I could see it in her eyes. She didn't see how you could return her feelings. I thought she'd act on the little hope I provided when I told her you had panicked as she skipped across that busy street."

"I was angry. With Stephen, Irv and Christian. With her. I wrote back, I told her not to put her dreams on hold. I told her she would be irreplaceable, but I took Christian Thompson's words to heart. Regardless of what I felt and even if for some absurd reason she gave me a chance and reciprocated my feelings she would leave me eventually as everyone does. If it wasn't him who swooped in to capture her heart, it would be someone else. Someone who deserves to hold her beautiful heart. What could she possibly see in me, Nigel?"

"I have no idea." Nigel grinned at her. "But she finds something to love, her capacity for that astounds me." He shook his head. "Do you know what made me learn to trust her?" Miranda shook her head. "I was often cutting and casually cruel, but she never responded in kind, as Emily or Serena would. She shrugged it off, gave me one of her brightest smiles and killed me with kindness. She placed her trust in me to make her over to gain approval, your approval, Miranda.

"She was positively stunning." Miranda grinned as he preened.

"You should have seen the absolute awe on her face when she saw the closet." He grinned across at her. "I remember it was little things she did that made me appreciate her. One night, we met accidentally in a bar. She saw me looking glum, another relationship had fallen apart. She offered me comfort even though she was struggling with her own personal life. She hugged me tightly and told me he must be an idiot for letting me go." Nigel smirked. "We got drunk, and she told me how her own relationship was falling apart. That night she'd stormed out of her apartment after a massive argument about her work-life balance. She was breathless with rage. That cook of hers told her he preferred the old Andy?"

"I always knew he was unworthy." Miranda hissed. "How could he think that cerulean monstrosity was better than having that beautiful woman draped head to foot in couture? Those lambskin Chanel boots alone should have made him bow down at her feet in supplication. She is a Goddess." The idiotic man's words left Miranda dumfounded. He must be a fool. "Maybe he smacked his head on a frying pan."

Nigel roared, amused that she had spun one of her usual insults around to fit the man. "I think you're right. I remember Six wanted to smack him before Paris." He looked at her. "She was the first to congratulate me over the James Holt job. She is my friend and I want her to be happy."

"I stopped writing to her after Thanksgiving, yet her emails come in regular as clockwork," Miranda admitted.

"What? Why?" Nigel thundered.

Miranda sat back, shocked at the force behind his exclamation. Leaning forward she told him her biggest fear. "She can break me like no other, Nigel."
"I think my Six is a little broken herself these days. She seems flat, lifeless. She sends me an email every so often. They're not her usual style, the free-flowing thought process I became used to seeing. The last one was so carefully constructed, devoid of heart." He caught her eyes. "What will you do to fix this?"

"What can I do? She's at the other side of the world." Miranda whispered.

"Ask her to come home." Nigel leaned across the table, placing a warm hand on top of hers. "Let her love you because having her love and trust will be the best decision you ever make. She is the reason I am here tonight, willing to give you another chance. I told her after the luncheon you would make it up to me, but frankly, I don't trust you will. What I know, thanks to her, is that you need a friend. And I care, Mira, I always have, even when you held me at arm's length. Will you let me be your friend again?"

"Acceptable," Miranda stated with a small smile as she gestured for another round of drinks. "Now, how on Earth did Andréa persuade you to agree to this?"

Nigel smirked and explained how she had worked her magic gradually. Giving him enough hints to let him eventually put all the pieces together to work out what happened in Paris, and the decision behind having Jacqueline move to J.H.I. He'd realised Miranda, in her way, was protecting him. Miranda sat back and listened to Nigel wax poetic about the young woman who had captured her heart and hoped she could find a way to bring her home.

She would not give up now she had a reason to hope.

Miranda looked up at the sound of a small cough coming from the hallway. Standing up she moved to the door and found her Andréa about to knock. She had their duvet wrapped around her shoulders. "My darling, you need not knock, this is your home too." She frowned. "You should sleep, Andréa." Miranda took her hand and pulled Andy closer. Brushing the dark curls from her face she could see she was flushed and her eyes red-rimmed. "What is it?" She asked softly.

"Just a bad dream. You disappeared and when I woke you had gone. I thought...I thought all this had been a cruel dream." Andy exhaled deeply. "I was being silly. Once I woke up properly and realised where I was I tried to settle, but I missed you."

"I am here. I couldn't sleep so I made tea and read a little." Miranda wrapped her arm around Andy's waist. "Come, I'll prepare us a warm drink and we can try to settle again."

"Okay." Andy agreed.

Taking the young woman's hand, she led them into the kitchen and sat Andréa down in her usual spot. Moving quickly, she put water in the kettle and settled it on the stove. Turning around she saw the young woman's eyes on her, watching her movements raptly. "Do you need to talk about anything?" Miranda asked. Seeing the shake of the head, she smiled. "May I speak honestly?"

Andy nodded. "I planned to find you, to take time away from Runway and travel with the Bobbsey's."

"How would you have found me?" Andy whispered. "It's not like I settled for too long in one place."

She warmed up the teapot with hot water from the faucet. "Before my marriage ended, I hired a P.I. Although I knew Stephen was cheating I needed concrete proof to ensure he did not fight our prenuptial agreement. I was thinking of retaining her services to help me find the woman who had
someday captured my heart. But then I walked into that restaurant and there you were." She added two teaspoons of loose-leaf tea to an infuser.

"Holy smokes, Batman." Andy grinned. "You'd have probably found me sunning myself on Bondi if it wasn't for Cassidy's email."

Miranda continued to prepare their tea. "A month spent in Australia sounds pleasing, maybe we could plan for Christmas and New Year there next year." Miranda moved back to the kettle as it whistled. Pouring the hot water onto the infusion of fragrant Darjeeling she turned back to face the brunette.

"You want to make plans for next year?" Andy seemed astounded.

"I want to plan the rest of my life with you, Andréa," Miranda stated. She turned away and removed the infuser before turning back to eye her.

"I realise you wanted this, me at your side, but sometimes it's a little overwhelming," Andy whispered as she watched her finish their tea with a teaspoon of honey. "But this is what I want, a future at your side." She breathed.

Miranda stepped towards the breakfast bar, the two mugs of tea clutched firmly in her hands. Placing the mugs down, she continued to move until she was in Andréa's personal space. "I would follow you to the ends of the Earth and beyond, my darling. Never doubt that." She pulled Andy down and caught her lips in a sweet kiss.

"Forget the tea," Andy husked, pulling Miranda closer and deepening their kiss. "Take me to bed, my love."

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Andy left the townhouse just after 9 am with the twins hanging off either hand, almost bouncing in excitement as they made their way to the local subway station on East 72nd Street, still demanding to know where they going. Andy smiled down at them gently and pulled them closer as they moved quickly down the steps to the subway.

Alighting after three stops, at Times Square and 42nd Street, Cassidy piped up. "B.M, are we going to Nintendo World?"

"B.M?" Andy grinned at the obvious abbreviation to Bonus Mom. "No honey, we have to walk a little towards Port Authority and get on the subway again."

"Mom doesn't usually let us ride the subway." Caroline smiled, her excitement sparkling clearly in her eyes.

"Well, it's the only way I know to get around," Andy stated. "And for me, it's easier than driving."

"I think it's cool," Cassidy stated as they reached Port Authority and managed to snag seats on the A Line.

"We have two stops, then we have to walk a little, but it's quicker than the bus," Andy stated.

"The bus?" Caroline looked up at her, and she saw wariness.

Chuckling, Andy ruffled the girl's hair. "Another time, perhaps."

The journey was quick and Andy gestured for them to stand as they pulled in at 14th Street. They meandered hand-in-hand along West 16th Street until they reached 11th Avenue and the twins slowed down as they reached Chelsea Piers, their destination.

"There are a few activities we can do today." Andy grinned as the twins cheered. "I thought we could start on Pier 61, the ice rinks, and then move to the bowling alley or the driving range," Andy advised.

"You're the best!" Cassidy claimed, fist bumping Caroline.

"I'm sure that opinion will change as you hit your teens," Andy claimed with a small chuckle.

"No way," Cassidy stated.

"Not a chance," Caroline declared.

"You're the coolest adult we know." They grinned as they looked up at her and Andy's heart clenched at the genuine love expressed in their eyes. "And you're choosing to be our other Mom."

"Come on." Andy looked around. "What do you think about hitting a few pitches at the batting cage before heading down to the rink?"

"Batting cages?" Caroline smiled happily at Cassidy.

"Yes. We can practice for the next softball season. We need to talk mom into letting us try out for the team." Cassidy looked up at Andy, batting her eyelashes adorably. "Maybe you can help us with that."
"We'll see." Andy led them into Pier 62 and purchased tokens for each of them, allowing them 50 balls each, the three of them were handed batting helmets and chose bats.

The twins insisted Andy should go up first. She entered cage two, which offered a Medium Pitched Baseball or Softball while the twins watched. She faced the mechanical pitcher which started spitting out balls and the twins laughed loudly as Andy swung wildly and missed, calling out strikes.

Andy's stride was off and her hands buzzed from the vibrations of having hit too many balls off the end of the bat. She was becoming annoyed with herself, knowing she could do this, her dad had taught her well. Taking a deep breath, Andy found her stride ten balls in and started to smash each one, swinging her bat levelly, crushing the baseball and then watching it soar. She found satisfaction in the thwack that rang out as the ball meeting the bat.

At the end of her 50 balls, Andy stepped from the cage, a wide smile on her face. "So, my little loves, who's next?"

"I will," Caroline stated.

"Have you ever done this before?" Andy asked. The twins shook their head. "Right then, I'll give you a few tips. The biggest difference between hitting in cages and hitting against a live person who is pitching to you is that you are never quite sure of the moment that the ball will be released. You can't see the windup, or the ball leaves the pitcher's hand, so, you're often a split second behind in your judgment." Andy frowned. "Maybe we should start slowly, in one of the other cages offering slow softballs, a few rounds in a slower cage will help you loosen up the muscles and focus your eyes."

"Whatever you think," Cassidy mumbled her agreement.

Andy waved them to two of the slow pitching cages and watched her new daughters as they batted, offering them the same advice, her own dad once gave her.

Miranda had taken the morning to continue reading Andréa's journal. She moved through the entries, taking her through the brunette's time in India, Nepal and Thailand. She was amazed by the vivid descriptions and photographs included with the entries and found herself amazed by the strength and easy familiarity Andréa wrote with when describing her emotions. She had seen the entries becoming darker as she travelled through Thailand, from Bangkok to the South Islands.

12/15/2007 - Koh Chang - Thailand

Dear Miranda,

I've spent the last few days in my journal describing Koh Kood and Koh Chang. From the dense jungles, hiking trails and waterfalls covering the interior of the island to the offshore coral reefs.

I chose Koh Chang as this island is nowhere near as developed or bustling as Phuket and Samui and far less well known. I loved Bang Bao, the coastal village built on Piers. Today, spent on Hat Tha Nam, the lonely beach, was strange. There is a party scene here that has attracted backpackers from all around the world and even surrounded by people I felt alone, adrift in the world I am still trying to find meaning in.

This is my final day in Thailand before moving on to New Zealand and I spent it writing to you.
after receiving your email yesterday and I did some drawing, a self-portrait to be exact.

It was a day spent in deep reflection, unable to enjoy the company of my fellow travellers, no matter how much they attempted to draw me into their company.

This evening I found out my visa for Australia was approved. I can stay for up to a year on a working holiday and I am sorely tempted to fly into Sydney, but I’m still yet to decide what my next course of action should be.

I hope to continue freelancing no matter if I go to Australia or not. If I go, I may see out the full year, move from place to place. It’s such a large country I’m sure there is a lot to see and experience.

And yet, New York seems to be calling to me more than ever though. You and the twins are calling to me. I miss you all very much...

...I love you all very much.

As I stated in your letter, you are loved, even from the vast distance between us, even though I know how improbable it is that you could ever return my feelings. I love you, Miranda and I love your precious daughters almost as much. The three of you hold my heart.

I wish I was there with you now.

I need to sleep soon, my chest feels tight and I need to be up in a few hours for my flight. Hopefully, New Zealand brings a fresh perspective. I live in hope, I have to.

Miranda glanced up at the clock and realised it was close to lunch, she stretched and stepped stiffly towards the kitchen. Moving efficiently, she made herself a sandwich and a searing hot coffee.

The house was quiet, too quiet really, especially after being surrounded by continuous noise and laughter over the last week. She marvelled over how things had changed and felt gratitude for every moment with her Andréa and the hope for many more to come.

She reflected on the love she experienced with the brunette, it was often overwhelming but she knew she did not want to be without it. Sitting at the breakfast bar, she hoped Andréa and her Bobbsey's were having fun and couldn't stop her smile at the thought she would hear all about it over dinner that evening.

Finishing her lunch, she moved to pour more coffee before looking in the fridge and pantry. Not finding anything tempting for dinner she made a decision. She would go grocery shopping and gather ingredients to make a hearty beef stew with fluffy dumplings, something to warm the cockles of her three loves after their day of fun.

Andy and the twins had enjoyed their time ice skating and were sat drinking hot chocolate.

The three of them had flushed cheeks and had spent a lot of time laughing as both Caroline and Cassidy struggled to remain upright. They had ended up making a train, with Andy skating backwards holding onto Caroline's hands as Cassidy held on to her sister's waist.

"How did you learn to skate, B.M?” Cassidy asked.
Andy grinned at the new nickname, seriously tickled by it. "My sister, Jill and I used to skate at Northland Ice Centre in Cincinnati. It was the one thing we loved doing together. Jill did ice hockey for a while, and I did figure skating."

"Whoa, that's awesome." Caroline licked hot chocolate from her upper lip. "So, what now?"

"Well, we can go to the bowling alley or the driving range." Andy smiled. "What do you prefer?"

"Bowling," Cassidy stated at the same time Caroline answered. "Driving range."

"The range is on the way out, maybe we should do that before heading home?" Andy compromised. The twins nodded their agreement and they all stood to make their way to the bowling alley between piers 59 and 60.

The alley was loud, a cacophony of sounds from arcade games, loud pop music blaring from the speaker's, balls whirling as they rolled down the lanes and pins being knocked down. Andy loved the sound.

The staff tripped over themselves to help Andy and the twins upon spotting them, after recognising them from the Page Six exposure.

The place was virtually empty, with only a few other patrons scattered about across the 40 lanes, and as they were led to their booth the overly helpful staff member asked if they needed anything further.

"Can I have a drink, B.M?" Caroline asked hesitantly.

Andy smiled down at Caroline, pleased that they both seemed to be using the nickname. "Of course you can, Caro." She looked at the staff member, noticing the badge on her shirt. "Can we please have three diet cokes, Jasmine?"

The young woman nodded and rushed away. Andy saw her gesturing in their direction as she spoke to a man, who hurried off.

They started to bowl in earnest as a waitress arrived with their drinks and set them down. Cassidy was great, while Caroline struggled and once again, Andy found herself helping the quieter of the Priestly twins and easing her frustration. "Today is about having fun, Caro. It doesn't matter about winning or losing, it's just us being here together." Andy whispered as she stood behind the little redhead. She felt Caroline relax and stepped back to watch her bowl a strike. "Well done, my beautiful girl." Andy beamed with pride.

"It's harder than Wii Bowling," Caroline admitted.

"Yes it is, but we can do this again, and it will get easier over time," Andy promised as she stepped up and bowled a split.

"Really? Do you think mom would come too?" Caroline asked as Andy turned to get another ball.

"I'm sure of it," Andy reassured her. "Although I don't think she'd like the shoes very much." She grinned ruefully as she looked down at the red and blue bowling shoes they had hired.

Their games finished with Andy barely winning against Cassidy. Caroline had continued to make improvements as the games wore on.

Andy sat down, waiting as Caroline and Cassidy played air hockey against each other and found
herself distracted by the view outside. She enjoyed the sound of the movement of the water and dock. She pulled her cell out and saw a text notification.

**M.P: I love you, my darling. I am looking forward to you all coming home to me. x**

Andy grinned and typed out a quick response to Miranda.

**A.S: How many times must I tell you, I love you more? Are you aware that our daughters seem to have reverted to calling me B.M? Although I am enjoying our bonding time today, I must also admit to looking forward to coming home to you. Only ever to you. xoxo**

The vibration in her hand had Andy looking down quickly and grinning at the one word answer.

**M.P: Acceptable. x**

xxxxxxxxxx

Miranda parked the Land Rover up outside Elias Clarke and stepped from it quickly. She was on a mission to find something stunning for her beloved to wear the following evening at the black and white ball, something worthy of her beauty, and at such short notice, there was only one place she may, perhaps, find what she wanted.

Clicking through the foyer, she saw the security guard drop a donut and gape at her as she whooshed past him. It was not her place to tell the guard not to eat at the front desk, but she would make her displeasure known next time she saw Eduardo as head of security.

Tapping her foot impatiently, Miranda waited for the elevator to land and as the doors opened, she stepped inside the metal box and winced. She hated the damn things but needs must.

She watched as the monitor showed her journey to Level 17 and as the elevator shuddered to a standstill, Miranda closed her eyes. The doors opened and she breathed a sigh of relief.

Stepping quickly from the elevator, she turned and moved sedately towards the closet, breathing in the silence of the usually hectic space. She knew she did not really have time to dally if she wanted to be home in time to greet her family and make a start on dinner. Opening the closet door and stepping inside, she felt a sense of peace surrounded by beautiful couture. The only feeling she'd ever experience that was similar was when surrounded by her beautiful Andréa.

Moving clothes on racks, she searched for suitable items that would enhance Andréa's beauty. Her eyes landed on an Alberta Ferretti One-Shoulder Grecian Gown. She pulled it off the rack and put it to one side. Continuing her search her hands met soft chiffon and she pulled a white, chiffon Azzaro column gown from the rack, she looked at the crystal embellished bateau neckline and belt and smiled. Either gown would complement her own black Valentino gown. They would look wonderful paired with the silver Christian Louboutin pumps she had given Andréa for Christmas.

Spinning around, she saw Nigel leaning against the door frame and smirked. "Good afternoon, Nigel."

"Miranda, what on Earth are you doing?" Nigel looked the two gowns critically.

"I could ask you the same thing." Miranda's voice was quiet.

"I was catching up on some work before the new year," Nigel stated. "I have a few ideas I wanted to discuss next week."
"Mm, I look forward to it," Miranda stated, pleased by Nigel's enthusiasm. "I am going to be attending the Black and White ball tomorrow evening with Andréa as my plus one. She needs a suitable gown." Miranda could see the shock in Nigel's eyes from her explanation.

"Well, either of those will work, especially the Azzaro." Nigel's smile widened. "I have always wanted to dress Six in a tux. Dolce and Gabbana did a wonderful white suit, I think it was Angelina Jolie who wore it, back in 2001 and I know we have some Yves Saint Laurent somewhere in here."

"No, no suit or tux, not this time, not with the press being what it is. Can you imagine the headlines about Andréa being the man in the relationship?" Miranda pursed her lips.

Nigel rubbed his jaw. "Maybe for your wedding then." He looked pointedly at the ring on Miranda's left hand.

Miranda's thumb ran over the blue heart unconsciously. "I would need to have Andréa agree to our nuptials first."

"She said no? But she was wearing a ring too?" Nigel was confused, sure he had not imagined it when Six visited Runway a few days before.

Miranda let out a deep breath. "She agreed but does not wish to rush headlong into anything. Something about not wanting me to realise it was a mistake and come to regret her."

"Oh, God." Nigel breathed. "Does she know you planned to follow her?" Miranda nodded and Nigel grinned. "Now she knows, you should ask her again."

"Do you think she'd honestly agree?" Miranda queried breathlessly.

"Yes, I do," Nigel stated. "Now, how about I help you bag these gowns up and you let Andy choose the gown she wants to wear?"


"My money's still on the Azzaro." Nigel gathered two garment bags and placed the gowns in carefully. "I look forward to seeing if I am right tomorrow night."

"She'll look sublime regardless," Miranda whispered, pulling out her cell as it chimed. She looked up at Nigel. "Can you help me carry those to the car?"

"Yes, Miranda." Nigel lifted the garment bags over his arm and made a sweeping gesture for Miranda to lead the way.

Both the twins had been furious after leaving the bowling alley and being photographed by paparazzi, who shouted questions at the three of them about their day. Jasmine had been apologetic as she walked them out into the flash of cameras and it had taken Andy quite a while to cajole Cassidy into not returning to the bowling alley and tearing a strip of the shift manager for advising the press of their presence at the venue. They had ignored the press, and Andy kept a tight grip on the twin’s hands in hers as she led them to the golf club on Pier 59. She had text Miranda to advise them that the press were at the Pier with them and she was waiting for a response.

"This has to be the coolest driving range on the planet!" Caroline exclaimed as she swung her driver at the little golf ball and watched it soar towards the Hudson River and onto the 200-yard, net-enclosed artificial turf fairway. She was a natural.
They had already taken advantage of the indoor putting green and had now chosen the top level driving range. The end of the range overlooked the river. To the left of them was a marina with large yachts and speedboats. The driving range itself was fully automated and each time Caroline and Cassidy hit a ball the next one came up on the end of the tee for them.

"Grip it and rip it!" Cassidy yelled as her ball soared and hit the netting. She'd heard an older man say the same thing, quoting Tin Cup.

Andy chuckled, happy that the twins were still seemingly enjoying themselves, even though it was a cold day. The heated stalls were no match for Mother Nature and although Andy felt the cold, the twins did not seem phased by it. Andy decided that it was worth braving the elements to see the girls so happy and carefree and the view of Jersey in the distance was something else. Feeling her cell vibrate, she pulled it out and saw Miranda's response.

**M.P: Just say the word and I can be there to pick you up within thirty minutes.**

Andy sighed. She didn't want to have Miranda traipsing around unnecessarily on a rare free day.

**A.S: No, that's okay. I just thought I should warn you in case something appears on Page Six. We have one or two more stop before we head on home. I love you. xoxo**

Looking up from her cell, Andy caught Caroline's eyes. "Are you guys ready to head off?" She asked.

Caroline smiled and nodded happily. "I'm hungry."

Andy looked at her watch and frowned. It was well past the twins usual lunch time and she was surprised neither of them had mentioned anything sooner. "Well, I can't have you going hungry. Come on, we shall find somewhere to eat, perhaps we can walk through the Chelsea Markets, and then we have one final stop before we head on home."

"Yes." Cassidy squealed as she drove her last ball to the back of the netted area once again. She turned to Andy and Caroline. "Did someone mention food, I'm starved." She grinned as Andy rolled her eyes.

"Come on then, my imps. Let's let you both fed." Andy held her hands out and they happily made their way out of the gold club and pushed their way through the throng of paparazzi as camera's once again flashed and questions were shouted.

Andy frowned as she pulled the twins closer and shoulder barged past one persistent reporter who shoved a Dictaphone under her nose. Giving the young reporter a glare worthy of Miranda, she was gratified to see the woman in question step back quickly.

"What are your plans for the rest of your day, Andy?" Someone shouted.

"Lunch and a movie," Andy shouted. "If you insist on following, we'll be at the Chelsea Clearview after we've eaten, we're watching Alvin and the Chipmunks" Andy smirked as many of the reporters rushed away. "Now, if you'll excuse us, it's time for lunch." She took the twins hands and continued to walk back towards West 16th Street and to the Chelsea Markets.

As they reached the markets, Andy felt Caroline tugging on her hand. "Are we really going to see the Alvin and the Chipmunks?" She asked.

"No, honey. I just thought I'd give those reporters a fake trail to follow." Andy grinned as Cassidy giggled.
"No wonder mom loves you, you’re really smart as well as pretty,” Cassidy claimed.

Andy laughed loudly as she was tugged into the Market, the home of the Food Network.

They roamed through the market easily and found many of the stalls offered tasty morsels for them to try. Andy wasn't able to resist the call of the Fat Witch brownie and purchased some to take home for their evening dessert. They finally stopped at Amy's Bread place and picked up some pizza, Andy grabbed a hot coffee while the twins enjoyed some Ronnybrook Farms choco milk.

Suitably replenished after their busy morning Andy led them once again to the subway at 14th Street. This time they jumped on the E line and got off at Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street. They walked through busy foot traffic for a few minutes, towards 60th Street and 3rd Avenue, until they reached their final destination, Dylan's Candy Bar. Looking down, Andy saw the excitement in both sets of eyes.

"This is so cool." Caroline's eyes blazed with happiness.

Dylan's was a kind of a modern-day Willy Wonka with candy as the theme. From the minute they walked in the door they saw candy of every shape and variety. The store was inviting with all the vibrant splashes of colour, there was a giant lollipop tree in the centre of the room and candy patterns on the walls and candies embedded under the Perspex flooring on the stairs. Andy found herself humming the Oompa Loompa song from the original Willy Wonka film as the twins dragged her around.

The twins were having a field day loading up bags with scoops of candy while Andy, as a fan of jelly belly, but not all flavours, found a bean dispenser where she could pick her favourite flavours, it was fantastic. Andy grabbed some Goo Goo Clusters, something she hadn't seen for ages. Andy knew her 10-year-old daughters would love the $10 giant blue gumballs and picked up one each to go with their bag of candy and then she saw the best thing, Harry Potter chocolate frogs that came with collectable wizard cards.

They all enjoyed making fruit and marshmallow kebobs to dip in the chocolate fountain and watching the Fudge-makers at work downstairs. Andy bought some fudge for Miranda. As they moved back upstairs, Andy fell in love with a red Pixi Stix tank, she just had to have it and Cassidy asked if she could spend some of her allowance on some onesie pyjamas with the footsies covered in colourful candy. Caroline grinned and picked up her own onesie to match.

Their final stop had them going to the third floor and sitting on peppermint stools to eat huge sundaes with vanilla ice cream, cookie dough ice cream, frozen chocolate cookie dough balls, caramel sauce, hot fudge sauce and whipped cream.

Miranda sat in her study, trying to concentrate on the final pages of Andréa's journal that outlined her time in Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula in New Zealand. She had finally got to the part where she wrote about Cassidy's email.

12/20/2007 - Bay of Islands - New Zealand.

Dear Miranda

Today I drove three-hours north of Auckland, to the beautiful Bay of Islands where I set up base in Paihia. The area is one of the most popular vacation destinations in the country due to the 144 or so islands dotting the bay.
Penguins, dolphins and whales live in the waters here so I spent the morning, having set off from the city at 6 am, kayaking along the coast and this afternoon I managed to swim with dolphins before visiting the Treaty House at Waitangi Treaty Grounds. Locals say it is the place which marks the beginning of New Zealand as a nation.

Tomorrow I plan to hike one of the island trails, visit Cape Brett or Haruru. I may even attempt parasailing, there's a local company offering at experience at 1300ft. It sounds awesome. I have some emails to sort through, so I'll write more in a short while.

Miranda took a deep breath and settled into the chair, crossing her legs as she turned the page to find the continuation of the entry. She was stunned to see the block capitals.

CONT FROM PREV PAGE:

DEAR MIRANDA

I AM COMING HOME!

I'M RETURNING FOR YOU, IF YOU WANT ME, AND TO MY BEAUTIFUL IMPS, WHO HAVE FINALLY TOLD ME THEY ASKED YOU TO BRING ME HOME. THEY WANT ME TO RETURN TO YOU ALL.

THIS DECISION FEELS SO RIGHT BECAUSE I'M FINALLY FOLLOWING MY HEART.

NO MATTER HOW I FEEL I WILL NEVER FORCE MY PRESENCE ON YOU IF I SEE ANY INDICATION IT IS NOT WHAT YOU WANT. I WILL BE HAPPY TO BASK IN YOUR PRESENCE FOR AS LONG AS YOU ALLOW IT.

BUT I AM ALSO ABSOLUTELY PETRIFIED.

I WANT SO MUCH TO BE ABLE TO BARE MY SOUL TO YOU, MIRANDA. TO TELL YOU JUST HOW MUCH YOU MEAN TO ME, HOW WITH EVERY BEAT OF MY HEART IT IS YOU AND THE TWINS IT BEATS FOR.

I AM COMING HOME!

I SERIOUSLY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT WILL HAPPEN FROM HERE, BUT I CAN'T STAY AWAY ANY LONGER. THIS LAST FEW MONTHS HAVE BEEN EXCEEDINGLY HARD.

THIS TIME TOMORROW I WILL BE ON MY FLIGHT AND I'LL LAND AT JFK AT 6:55 AM ON SATURDAY.

THAT GIVES ME ALMOST THREE DAYS TO PREPARE TO FACE YOU. I'LL BE THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT THE TWINS WANT, THE IMPOSSIBLE THING YOU BELIEVED YOU COULD NOT PROVIDE.

IF ONLY YOU HAD TOLD ME. YOU INFURIATING WOMAN!

OH SHIT! I AM COMING HOME!

Miranda smirked. She'd found the brunette's words and language quite colourful at times as she wrote out her deepest thoughts and fears. This showed Andréa's whirling panic after making the
snap decision to come home, booking the flight as soon as she heard her presence was wanted. It was a decisive move that showed her deepest desire.

Her head popped up when she heard the front door open. Standing quickly, Miranda laid the journal to one side and stepped quickly into the hallway. She smiled at the sight of Cassidy clinging to Andréa's back, while Caroline rested in both arms, against her chest, her mouth open as she slept peacefully. Andréa carried a handful of bags and her keys in one hand. Meeting them in the hall, she pulled Cassidy off Andréa's back, offering her daughter a kiss on her head as she settled her onto her hip. They moved upstairs and Miranda led them to the living room, where Andréa could lay her precious cargo down.

"Did you have fun?" Miranda asked Cassidy quietly as she watched Andréa remove Caroline's jacket and shoes.

Cassidy gave her a sleepy smile. "It was so cool. B.M told the paparazzi we were going to the movies and they all scattered. Instead, we went to Dylan's." The little redhead yawned and Miranda pulled her jacket off and set her down next to her sister, pulling her sneakers, from her feet. She watched as Cassidy moved to spoon around her sister's back protectively and her breathing deepened as she settled into sleep.

Miranda raised an eyebrow at Andréa, who grinned happily as she placed the bags down on a chair. "It seems you have tired my Bobbsey's out."

"It was a really good day, Miranda. The twins were great. Did you get your work done?" Andréa asked.

"It was done fairly quickly, so I spent the day reading. Come, the twins will nap for an hour. I think we can find something to do in that time down in the study." Miranda held her hand out and found it clasped warmly. Looking up into Andréa's eyes, she whispered. "I am so glad you came home to us."

It had only been a few hours but Miranda had missed Andréa. Her voice, her scent, everything about the brunette captivated her and left her yearning for more.

Butterflies in her stomach fell like a wholly inadequate description to what she felt as she led them both to her study. With her heart pounding in her chest, Miranda eased Andréa down so she was prostrate on the sofa. A smile grew on her lips without conscious thought as she hovered over her, the brunette's curves encased in denim and cotton. Miranda gazed down at her hungrily as she moved closer, slipping her own leg between Andréa's thighs. Andréa wrapped one arm around her waist and pulled her impossibly closer until they were breast to breast. Looking up into her eyes, she saw her future staring back at her.

Tilting her head, Miranda swooped in for a kiss. It was gentle at first, lips against lips, and a way of reconnecting. Andréa seemed to savour the moment with her eyes closing. There was a hunger to Andréa's lips, taking her lower lip between hers and nipping it softly. Miranda moaned into the intoxicating touch. They broke for air and Miranda's lips began to trace teasing kisses down her neck, her tongue flicking against the skin where only moments ago her lips had been. Andréa shuddered against her and let out a sigh. She continued to kiss Andréa's neck as her hands roamed under her t-shirt, lightly brushing the skin of her stomach and up to her ribs. Her mouth moved up toward Andréa’s jawline to find her lips again before slowly gliding her tongue over her lips asking permission for more.

Andréa moved her hand, cupping Miranda's cheek as she snared her teasing mouth with her own, parting her lips slightly to give Miranda what she craved. Their kisses were electric and the air...
around them seemed to crackle as their tongues danced. Their bodies moved against each other, breasts and thighs rubbing. She broke the kiss again and trailed her tongue down Miranda's neck, nipping at her pulse point. Miranda arched into her touch and moaned. She could sense Andréa's smile against her. The taste of the younger woman, the scent of vanilla as she nuzzled her skin was its own aphrodisiac and Miranda was incapable of resisting.

Andréa kissed her as if she knew everything about her. Kisses that took her breath away and made her heart race. Kisses with so much passion and meaning that if she let herself get carried away they would end up unravelling on the wide sofa they were entangled upon. Unable to stop, Miranda pushed her thigh harder into the brunette causing her to moan. Andréa's eyes held so much passion and pleasure, they left her mesmerized.

"Harder," Andréa moaned against her lips.

Miranda loved hearing Andréa moan like that, but it was her eyes that gave away how much she was enjoying the moment. They widened and she tightened her grip on the back of her neck as she tensed. Miranda felt her own body begin to lose control as she pushed them both towards orgasm. She stopped kissing Andréa and looked into her eyes. Gazing into those beautiful hazel eyes she could see all the desire and love that had grown between them. Andréa wrapped her legs around her and held her in place for a few minutes.

"God, I love you," Miranda whispered. It still amazed her that she got to tell her such things. She loved how perfectly they seemed to fit together and knew nothing in life would ever come close to this feeling. Miranda pulled back further and was provided with a flash Andréa's megawatt smile. It was the smile that made her fall in love with the brunette, the smile that brightened her world. Her hand caressed the side of Andréa's face, letting her fingers dance upon her full bottom lip before moving up and brushing a stray curl from her face. Her fingertips moved to the back of Andréa's neck. She watched as the woman below closed her eyes as she massaged gently.

"I love you more," Andréa stated cheekily.

xxxxxxxxxxx
They had spent the day of New Year's Eve quietly, watching movies and playing board games with the twins until late afternoon when Roy arrived to take the twins to a friend's house for a slumber party.

Miranda led Andy up the stairs to their bedroom and they lay together and napped peacefully in each other's arms.

Upon waking up a few hours later, Miranda moved downstairs to make coffee before heading back to the brunette. She found Andy sat up against the headboard, pencil and sketch pad in hand, her brow furrowed in concentration as she drew. Miranda saw it was a rough sketch of the roof space and knew given time the brunette would bring the drawing to life.

Miranda offered Andy the coffee and the pad was closed firmly as she took the mug from Miranda's outstretched hands.

Sitting in companionable silence, they finished their hot drinks before Miranda tugged Andy from the bed and showed her the dresses she believed would be suitable for their evening.

Andy gasped at the sight of the Alberta Ferretti white Grecian Goddess gown, her eyes showing their pleasure immediately. "That one is stunning." She whispered.

Miranda smirked. Nigel had been wrong in his assumption she would choose the Azzaro and would no doubt show his disappointment over the fact he did not know his Six as well as he thought. "You will look stunning, my darling."

They prepared for the night, taking their time to relax. Miranda ran them a bath and got in first, laying back as Andy tied her hair in a messy bun before stepping between her legs and sitting, stretching her legs out as her head fell back onto the older woman's shoulder. "Can't we just stay like this?" Andy asked quietly when Miranda placed a soft kiss on her cheek.

"Is that what you really wish?" Miranda asked. Andy hummed. "If so, that is what we will do." She was happy to do whatever, as long as she was with the woman in her arms.

Andy moaned as Miranda massaged her shoulders and her eyes fell closed. "Mm, it would be a real shame for either of those dresses to go to waste, and I know you have a Valentino gown prepared."

"They will be there for another time." Miranda grinned. "I was looking forward to showing you off though, my darling."

"Showing me off?" Andy spun around quickly. "It is I who will be the envy of all, Miranda. I mean...just...you are you and I am just me..."

Miranda chuckled. "I am aware of who I am and who you are, my darling." She teased. "And I refuse to argue with you about which one of us will generate the most envy."

Andy repositioned herself opposite Miranda, her feet coming to rest over the older woman's hips. She grinned at Miranda's pursed lips. "Tell me about tonight. Why a black and white ball?"

"The famed Black and White Ball was a masquerade ball held in 1966 at the Grand Ballroom of the Plaza Hotel. It was hosted by Truman Capote in honour of Katharine Graham of the Washington Post." Miranda grinned. "A gesture to cheer her up. Capote was at the height of his
popularity as an author following the publication of In Cold Blood, but he couldn't very well make himself the guest of honour, it would have been deemed vulgar by the society he coveted a position within."

"And why are they holding a black and white ball tonight?" Andy asked. "It's not like it's a major milestone from the original, which would have been last year."

"The idea had been recreated many times throughout the years, my darling." Miranda licked her lips. "Tonight's soirée has been organised by Elias Clarke Publications, to commemorate another year of growth." Miranda rolled her eyes and Andy knew there was more to it. Raising an eyebrow at the older woman she saw her inhale deeply and closed her eyes. "It is primarily for the fact Runway has been voted the Number One fashion magazine in the U.S for the 20th year running," Miranda admitted quickly. "And I am, for all intents, a guest of honour."

Andy sat up quickly splashing Miranda in her haste. Miranda's eyes blazed open as she swiped bubbles off her lower jaw and neck. She watched as Andy's jaw dropped as she took in that titbit of information.

Andy had no clue of the importance of the night. "And you were willing to miss it? For me? Miranda, no!" She became flustered. "You are Runway. You are the reason for its success over the years."

"Balderdash, my darling. I simply surround myself with extraordinarily talented people." Miranda sighed and gestured airily in Andy's direction causing her to grin. "At least the executives listened, it will not be a masquerade."

"Because God forbid you'd have to cover that iconic hair." Andy teased. Miranda rolled her eyes but grinned back at her. "Tell me there are no stairs at this blasted thing?"

Miranda chuckled. "No, Andréa. I'll be sure to have you in no more than two-inch heels should that ever be the case." She drawled.

"What's it like, making that kind of entrance?" Andy was curious.

Miranda lay back, settling into the warm water and described the moment she descended the staircase leading to the lobby of the Natural History Museum at the first benefit they attended. She admitted a few things that surprised Andy. Miranda knew every pair of eyes were on her, and the fact she could garner such attention still left her amazed, she often marvelled at it, but nothing was more shocking than the awareness of Andy's eyes on her, caressing her. She admitted she spotted Andy almost immediately and had taken pleasure in her appearance, knowing it wasn't the first time she had been overcome by her beauty nor would it be the last.

Andy spoke afterwards of how her eyes had trailed over Miranda as she descended the stairs, focussing on the bare shoulders and deep v of her décolletage in her dark, shimmering Valentino gown. She had found the editor mesmerising, with her hair swept behind her ears and a small smile on her face. Andy claimed she exuded sexiness and a presence that not just anyone could acquire, claiming it had to be something Miranda was born with.

The bath cooled rapidly as they spoke and when Andy shivered they made their way out. Miranda heard Andy's stomach rumble and grinned before advising her that dinner would be provided as part of their night.

Miranda wrapped Andy in a large towel and they started to get ready for the evening. She sat her down at the vanity to assist with her makeup and hair. She smiled softly as she did what she did
best, highlighting someone's beauty. This wasn't just anyone though, it was the woman she recognised she would love forever.

Miranda glanced at herself in the full-length mirror as she adjusted her necklace. For a woman in her early fifties, she still maintained a slim figure and a pleasing countenance that would hopefully complement her beautiful partner.

She had chosen a vintage Valentino multilayered, chiffon and georgette, strapless, empire silhouette gown with a back train. She smoothed the gown over her ribs and adjusted the ruched bra, nodding once. She supposed, upon reflection, she looked acceptable.

Although many would believe she should have concerns over the almost twenty-five years difference in age separating her from Andrée, she would not let her herself consider life without the younger woman. She did not want to imagine life now she'd had a taste of what it could be like.

Fastening her diamond tear-drop earrings into place, she made the decision they would celebrate their first anniversary by travelling to Australia, a country she sensed from Andrée's journal, she wished to explore. She would give the younger woman the world, travelling it by her side.

Glancing one final time. In the mirror, she spotted the focus of her thoughts hovering in the doorway separating the closet from the bedroom. She caught the expressive eyes in the mirror and held them. In those eyes she saw every emotion Andrée felt for her and her heart clenched at the pure love and desire she could see in her eyes.

"Will I do?" Miranda asked. She was not usually one to seek reassurance but there was something about the young woman's eyes trailing over her that left her feeling vulnerable.

"Oh, yes. You look glorious." Andrée's eyes continued to trail over her, taking in the vintage black gown before coming to rest on her lips. "No lipstick yet?" She queried breathlessly

Miranda shook her head and turned to face the brunette. "Not yet, no. There was one thing I wanted to do before I completed my makeup." She took the three steps and cupped her jaw, snaring her lips in a quick kiss.

"If you continue like that, we'll never get out of this room." Andrée's smile was bright. "You look beautiful, my love, truly."

Miranda stepped back and her breath caught in her throat at the sight of the brunette in the blue silk robe she had given her for Christmas, with her flawless smoky eyes and her curls framed her face, she looked heavenly. Her eyes came to rest on the two generous mounds. The robe covered Andrée fully but Miranda knew what lay under the blue silk.

"I'll go pour us some wine," Andrée stated softly. "And then I will get ready."

"Acceptable." Miranda husked, watching as Andrée stepped away.

Looking back in the mirror, she put her lipstick on and took a tissue to blot the excess away. Unable to stop her smile she sashayed from the bedroom and tripped her way quickly down to the kitchen to find Andrée pouring two glasses of wine. Stepping behind the brunette she slipped her hands around her waist and moved them under her robe, pushing aside the thong she was wearing and trailed her fingers over her outer lips.

Andrée gasped and held on to the counter tightly, she was soaking wet. Miranda inserted a finger
and started to thrust into her slowly. "I cannot seem to stop wanting you." Miranda breathed in her ear. "I need to have you right now," Andréa responded by leaning against the counter and sticking her ass higher for easier access, teasing Miranda.

"I don't think we have time for this, my love." Andréa whimpered as Miranda added another finger and thrust harder. She pushed herself further onto Miranda's fingers.

"Mm, we will always have time for this." Miranda twisted her hand causing the brunette to whimper as she clenched around her.

"Oh, you...you...I have no self-control with you." Andréa cried. "Oh, God. Mm, harder, pl...please..." She moaned. "I'm com...oh, fuck! I'm coming..." Andréa called out breathlessly as her orgasm crashed over her.

"You are so very beautiful, my darling," Miranda whispered. Pulling her hand away from the brunette, she brought her fingers to her lips and sucked Andréa's essence from them. Closing her eyes, she hummed in pleasure before they blazed open to see Andréa still tensed over the counter. "Now, how about that wine?"

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They sat side by side in the town car, barely moving through busy traffic, with their hands entwined. "Tell me about your last New Year?" Andy asked. "I'd worked for you for a month by then but you hadn't really made that much of an impression."

Miranda frowned. "As usual, the time crept up on me quickly as I pushed the issue toward the print deadline. The twins decided to stay with Gregory for the week. Stephen and I made promises to try to work on our personal relationship while the twins were away." Miranda pursed her lips. "I had an inkling he was being unfaithful but was too fearful of the consequences of raising it with him."

Andy squeezed Miranda's hand. "You don't have to tell me this, Miranda. I don't want to cause you any undue pain."

"It's okay. We will soon be in a new year again, it is a new beginning of sorts." Miranda stated. She thought back to the year before.

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December 31, 2006:

"You promised, Miranda," Stephen whined, the scotch glass trembling in his hand.

"Stephen, it was just one hour, I was needed at a Runway event. I have never hidden how important my work is to me." Miranda brushed her hand through her hair in frustration as she paced the study. She was over having the same tired argument. Why couldn't he understand? When they first entered this relationship he seemed to.

"What about me? I suppose I am just not important enough?" Stephen yelled. His arm shook and the contents of his glass spilt on the hardwood floor.

Miranda covered her eyes and pursed her lips. "Maybe if you hadn't spent the last week drowning yourself in alcohol, I may be more amenable to spending time with you. I may have asked you to escort me tonight rather than you showing up, pissed as a newt and making a fool of us both." Miranda let her frustration get the better of her. "You are just like your father, Stephen, a foolish, drunken bore." As soon as the words left her mouth she regretted them, knowing they would sting,
Stephan shook his head and laughed darkly. She had just thrown his deepest fear at him. Knocking his drink back, he gulped the amber liquid until the glass was empty then threw it against the wall. "Fuck you, Miranda. Fuck Runway and all that is precious to you. Which obviously doesn't include me."

"Stephen, I..." The apology wouldn't come no matter how much she willed it to escape from her lips.

Stephen staggered from the room and thundered up the stairs. She heard the guest bedroom door slam and winced. She was aware that he would rage within the four familiar walls with his hidden bottle of Johnnie Walker until he passed out.

Moving to the kitchen, she pulled a bottle of wine from the cooler and poured herself a glass, she supposed she could use the time to work, there was always so much work to do. She hoped both Emily's were prepared for the coming year. It was imperative, with Irv moving to replace her, for it to run smoothly.

Andy listened as Miranda spoke, stunned by the raw honesty of her words as she described what had occurred the year before. She listened as Miranda explained that she always struggled with the festive season, fighting against the ennui of the season.

Regardless of how truly blessed Miranda knew she was, how lucky she was to have her children, enjoy good health, to be doing what she loved for a living and having freedom and flexibility very few enjoyed, the holiday period always made her feel sad and alone. It was the one time she missed her family, all gone except for a sister who resented her success. She reflected on the past, sometimes lamenting about another year passing by too quickly. She considered all she hoped to achieve and didn't.

The period in the run-up to Christmas this year had seen her ruminating over her failed marriage and pending divorce, slightly concerned about facing 2008 as a single mom and wondering if she could ever persuade incentive enough for Andy to come home to her.

"But you did come home, for me and our girls, you have made me happier than I could ever possibly have imagined," Miranda smiled as she finished speaking. "Now, tell me, what did you do, before me, to see in the New Year?"

Andy grinned. "I usually stay home, eat ice cream in my pyjamas and watch the ball drop on TV, but last year was different."

"How?" Miranda was curious.

"Nate was working, Lily was on a date with her stud of the month and so Doug and I got drunk on boxed wine at his small loft and sang on his home karaoke machine. I was wearing your favourite jumper and a pair of Levi's, jumping barefoot on his sofa as the clock struck midnight." Andy giggled and started singing softly.

"I'm too sexy for my shirt
Too sexy for my shirt
So sexy it hurts
And I'm too sexy for Milan
"Too sexy for Milan
New York, and Japan."

Miranda's laughter rang out and Andy found it infectious. "Ridiculous." She breathed through her laughter. "I suppose it could be worse. It could have been that preposterous Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie song."

"It was a good night," Andy admitted, chuckling at her memories.

"You miss him," Miranda stated. "And you still cherish the memories, savouring the highs in life. It is a good trait, a positive. It will be beneficial for our girls to see it." She looked at Andy. "Our children will learn much from you, I am grateful for that, for you."

"They will learn much from you, too," Andy reassured her. "They will learn to be strong and independent, and they will carry your beauty into the world. Thank you for giving me a chance to be a part of your lives."

Miranda looked across the room at her lover, who was laughing loudly with Nigel and Charles Elias. They had enjoyed dinner and her Andréa had garnered much attention but seemed oblivious to it. She watched as the young woman charmed everyone she spoke to and noticed she was at her most confident and comfortable around those she knew, including Diane, Amy, Charles, Tom and all those from Runway attending the ball.

Andréa's dark, shining curls, bounced as she nodded at whatever Charles's wife, Ellen, was telling and Miranda smiled softly. Miranda concentrated on the inane chatter of the Auto Universe editor as he expounded on his love of the Aston Martin DB9, a car she made the mistake of saying she considered buying over her Porsche.

Her attention was taken away from the conversation and she felt a jolt of pure rage upon spotting some unknown young man snaking his arms around her Andréa's waist and pulling her off her feet.

Andréa's squeal showed her shock and she spun around with her fists clenched as she was put back on her feet. "You stupid...Doug? What are you doing here?"

Miranda released a breath and excused herself. If the young man reacted badly to Andréa she wanted to offer her support. Moving quickly her hand came to rest on the brunette's lower back as she stepped to her side and she was treated to a wide grin.

The young man, Douglas, offered them both a smile. Miranda shook her head, those beaming smiles must be a product of the Midwest or something. She looked the young man up and down and he stepped back quickly, straightening his bow-tie self-consciously.

"Um, I start work in the accounts department next week. My new boss invited me, to introduce me around and..." Douglas looked at the small group surrounding them. "...well, I saw you at the head table at dinner and...well, I wanted to say hello...Hello, Andy." He ended lamely.

Miranda rolled her eyes but her lips twitched in amusement. "That was some hello." She muttered.

She watched Andréa closely as she closed her eyes and clearly counted to ten. Andréa's eyes opened and her arm snaked around her waist, pulling her close. "Miranda, this is my old friend, Douglas Campbell." She licked her lips nervously. "Doug, this is Miranda Priestly, my..." She trailed off. They had never officially put a label on what they were.
"Future wife." Miranda clarified. "Although it is not official, yet." She couldn't stop herself from winking at the young woman in her arms. "But one day, she'll make an honest woman of me, I'm sure. Andréa agreed to wear her promise always." Her finger ran over the eternity band on Andréa's finger. "For now, if we must label this, then I suppose partner will simply have to suffice."

"Yeah, that..." Andréa grinned.

Miranda stepped from Andréa's embrace and stepped away to join in with the conversation between Charles and Ellen Elias and Nigel, while half-listening to the conversation between the two former friends.

"Long time no see, Andy. How's life been treating you?" Douglas asked.

Miranda couldn't help the roll of her eyes at the awkwardness. She caught sight of the brunette's frown as she answered. "Good, um, hectic. I start work again on the first of February. Some amendments to my contract were approved and my start date was confirmed just a few moments ago."

A sense of pride washed over Miranda and she caught her loves eyes. "Well done." She mouthed silently.

"Thank you." Andréa's smile at her was blinding and she felt an immense sense of joy.

"I'm glad to hear you're doing well. Sorry that we...you know...um, lost contact and everything."
Douglas stammered "I realise I'm not...you weren't at fault, Andy...the three of us, we didn't support you and we should have. I heard what happened at the park...I want to make it up to you if you allow..." The young man grew more flustered... "aren't you going to say anything?"

"And miss you stammering like a nincompoop? Not a chance Dougie." Andréa's tone was teasing and Miranda bit back a smile. "However, if you think I'm going to make this easy on you, you have another thing coming. You're on babysitting duty, and soon." Miranda snorted out a bark of laughter that had everyone looking at her, she was certain her Bobbsey's would make the young man rue the day he offered to make it up to their Bonus Mom. "And as you know from previous conversations, my impish daughters are full of mischief."

The emphasis on the title provided for her Bobbsey's had Miranda's smile widening and Nigel caught her eyes. "Her imps?" He leaned in and whispered.

"She's adopting them." Miranda breathed. "The paperwork is ready to be lodged in the New Year."

"Yo...your daughters?" Douglas whispered. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Deadly." Andréa countered. "Come, have a drink with me. I can fill you in, that is unless you have a problem with this?" Her tone was firm, she would not accept him back in her life if he had an issue with hers.

"Uh, no. No problem at all." Douglas seemed honest as he looked over at her and met her eyes directly. His own green eyes expressed his awe as well as his acceptance. She nodded once at him and he seemed to breathe easier.

Miranda watched them head to the bar with Andréa grabbing two glasses of champagne from a passing waiter. She focussed her attention back onto her companions but couldn't stop herself from stealing glances at the brunette and her friend.

Charles and Ellen excused themselves and moved away to mingle while Nigel followed Miranda's
gaze to where she was watching Andréa show Douglas some photos on her cell.  

"I do hope you will introduce me to that young whippersnapper," Nigel smirked as Miranda rolled her eyes. "He's quite handsome in a clean-cut Midwestern way."  

"I will introduce you if all is well, you will not chew him up and spit him out though." Miranda wagged a finger at him.  

"Aw, where's the fun in that. You are such a spoilsport, Priestly." Nigel teased as he sipped at his glass of champagne. Miranda swatted his arm causing him to sputter. Their laughter filtered through the room as they both laughed happily.

Andy finished talking to Doug and they made plans to catch up before Serena stepped up and pulled her off to a corner. Serena spoke quietly about her progress with Emily. Although no specifics were provided, thankfully, Andy learned that Emily had softened enough to let Serena kiss her goodbye as she dropped her home after a light supper the evening before. Serena was absolutely delighted by the encounter, hoping to revisit it soon.

Andy felt Miranda step beside her and saw Emily take two further steps to stand beside Serena. She had to admit they would make a striking couple if Emily unbent enough to allow it. She realised Emily was wearing one of the dresses she had picked up in Paris and offered her a wide smile.  

"You look great, Em. I had a feeling that Westwood would look amazing on you."  

"You...At least I didn't have to take this one in." Andy could see that Emily tried biting back the bitchy comment and it was only her continuing to speak that stopped Miranda expressing her ire as she bristled beside her. "It was exactly my size," Emily muttered. Realisation dawned on the redhead and she caught Andy's eyes. "You picked up various things tailored specifically for me?" She swallowed hard. "After I was such a bitch to you? Why?"

"Because Paris was your dream," Andy explained gently. "And in part, I dashed it, although being hit by a cab didn't help." She looked towards Miranda and saw the gentle knowledge the Editor still believed she had made the right choice in taking her to Paris over Emily.

Andy looked down to see Miranda extending her hand. "Come, dance with me, my darling" Miranda asked. Andy caught the opening strains of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Can't Take My Eyes off You.  

"Really?" Andy queried breathlessly. Miranda rolled her eyes. "I know, I know. You don't say or do things you do not mean." Andy smiled. "Okay, but I can't promise I won't step on your toes."  

The dance floor already held numerous people, swaying to the music the D.J played. Miranda pulled her hand and dragged her on the dance floor, moving through a maze of people before she turned around and threw her arms around Andy's neck and started to dance. Andy held on to Miranda's waist, glancing down into the older woman's eyes she became enraptured by the love she found in the depth of blue.

When happy, Miranda's eyes were the bluest she had ever seen. Tearing her eyes away she continued to let her own roam over Miranda's features, once again amazed by such beauty. Her eyes fell on Miranda's lips, which seemed to beg to be kissed. She wanted to feel those lips on her, floating over her skin.

Miranda's subtle cough caused Andy's eyes to snap again to hers. She saw the editor's smirk. "The
music and dancing will ramp up in the lead up to the countdown, but I insisted on some oldies and Motown, music one can dance to,” Miranda explained. Andy nodded and smiled and they finished the dance in silence. When it was over, Andy was loath to let her go. Miranda sensing it, kept a grip on the brunette." One more." She whispered as Dobie Grey’s Drift Away played.

They danced around the ballroom, lost in their own thoughts. Both thinking about the year ahead and the changes that would come and in many ways grateful for the year that had passed.

As the song ended, Miranda extracted herself gently and saw Andy's pout. "My darling. I need the restroom." She led Andy from the dance floor and deposited her by the bar. Leaning up she kissed Andy's cheek and whispered in her ear. "Give me a few minutes and then come find me."

Andy's eyes widened as Miranda tapped her foot, waiting for a response. Andy nodded quickly. "Yes, of course, my love."

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She caught Andréa's eyes as she washed her hands at the vanity and watched as she slipped the lock on the door into place. Miranda turned and stepped into Andréa's embrace, her nose nuzzling at the crook of her neck as she inhaled. Lifting her head her lips brushed against Andréa's, and their passion increase as their tongues touched and began to duel for dominance.

Andréa's hands tangled into her hair, gently tugging her head back to trail her lips down the column of on her neck. Her fingers swept along her scalp as her mouth migrated from the hollow of her neck to her the rise of her breasts enhanced by the sweetheart neckline of the ruched bodice.

Her soft moans seemed to urge Andréa on. She moved gracefully onto her knees and gently pushed Miranda's gown up over her hips. Looking up into her eyes, Andréa spread her legs with her warm hands. She shuddered as the young woman hummed as she inhaled deeply, before exhaling a warm air over the drenched silk covering her.

Pushing her thong aside, Andréa's tongue slid slowly against her clitoris and Miranda moaned deep in her throat as she continued to tease her with her tongue. Miranda's whole body trembled as waves of pleasure crested over her and her climax built and until she shuddered violently against Andréa's lips.

Giving herself a few moments to recover, Miranda eventually looked down to where Andréa's forehead rested against her stomach. Miranda's hands were running unconsciously through Andréa's hair soothingly.

She knew she had made the right decision to allow Andréa into her life but they had taken a risk by being intimate in such a public setting, a risk that was both exciting and awe-inspiring. Miranda had never contemplated needing someone with such intensity, but dancing with the brunette and seeing the love and desire in her eyes had left her feeling invincible.

Helping Andréa up onto her feet, Miranda snared her full lips in a scorching kiss, loving the mix of flavours. She tasted herself, the champagne they had sipped and Andréa's usual intoxicating flavour.

"We should go out there." Miranda husked. "It's just an hour until midnight."

"Okay," Andréa responded lightly. "I just need to clean up and..."

"Good idea, my darling." Miranda reapplied her lipstick and viewed herself in the mirror. Smoothing down her hair, she pulled her dress down, letting it settle at her feet and nodded. She
looked at the brunette and saw her reapplying her own lipstick and brushing her hand down her own gown. "You are perfect, Andréa. Are you ready?"

"Just give me a sec, I'll be right out," Andréa stated.

"Acceptable, I will get us a drink." Miranda stepped on her tiptoes and brushed a kiss against Andréa's cheek before stalking out of the bathroom and heading towards the ballroom.

Hitting the bar, Nigel sidled up to her. "Well, where's Six?"

Miranda shrugged. "I'm sure she's around somewhere."

Nigel leaned in. "You may want to move the trail of lipstick on your neck." He stroked the hollow of his own throat and Miranda felt herself blush.

She grabbed a napkin and dabbed at her throat. "Will you do me a favour, my friend?" Miranda asked. Seeing the man nod she pushed herself closer into his space and told him what she wanted from him. His loud laughter rang out through the room.

Andréa walked from the bathroom to find a queue forming. Looking away, she spotted Serena heading towards her, a large smile gracing her face.

"Querida, come, dance with me." Serena beamed when Andy started to shake her head. "Miranda won't mind, Andy. When I came to find you she was cutting the floor with Nigel and then Tom Clarke cut in, there seems to be a queue of men waiting for a dance."

Andy couldn't stop her own smile, this she had to see. Nodding her agreement she offered her arm to the tall Brazilian and they moved back to the ballroom.

As they stepped onto the dance floor, Diane let go of Amy and tapped Tom on his shoulder. They switched dance partners and Miranda was twirled around the dance floor by the beautiful businesswoman as Amy and Tom laughed.

Serena and Andy joined the throng and cut their way through the other dancers and Andy was aware of them passing Miranda and Diane when suddenly Amy cut loose from Emily and extended her arm to Andy.

Pulling Andy close, Amy whispered in her ear. "Your future wife was giving Serena her death glare. No wonder her minions are so fearful."

Andy giggled. "Aren't you fearful?" She asked.

"Oh no, honey. My Diane is for me, what Miranda is to you. My world." Amy spoke softly, a small, beautiful smile formed on her face at the thought of her wife. "That photo of her with you was shocking, but I am not the jealous type and I trust my wife."

"You're a lucky woman, Amy," Andy stated.

"That luck goes both ways, and I believe, more than anything, you and Miranda will continue to build an unbreakable bond." Amy smiled at someone over her shoulder and the air crackled as Andy felt the tap on her shoulder.

Spinning around, Andy met the gentle eyes of Diane and looked over her shoulder at Miranda. She
stepped to the side and let Diane sweep her wife away as she stepped back into Miranda's arms.

The music thrummed through their bodies as they moved against each other on the dance floor. Andy decided it had been the most perfect night.

They danced in silence until the DJ announced they were only minutes from the countdown. "Five minutes until the New Year everybody!" The DJ announced.

Some of the crowd cheered and the music was cranked even louder. Miranda and Andy paused, their eyes meeting. People around them also stopped dancing as servers weaved their way through the crowds offering drinks to those who wanted them.

Looking around, Andy saw her friends and colleagues pairing off. Serena had her long arms wrapped around Emily's slight waist, Diane and Amy were laughing together and follow following their eyes, and her own landed on Nigel and Doug who were making out in a secluded corner. She nudged Miranda and waved in the direction of her two friends. "Well, would you just look at that?" Andy breathed.

"It seems my introduction is not remotely necessary." Miranda chuckled throatily.

The music was lowered and the voice of the DJ could be heard clearly across the ballroom as he started to count down with the crowd. "10, 9, 8..."

It seemed the world stopped as Andy looked into Miranda's eyes and they moved closer to each other.

"... 7, 6, 5..."

Andy brushed her fingers through the front of Miranda's hair and offered her a megawatt smile.

"...4, 3, 2..."

Miranda smiled up at her, taking Andy's breath away as their fingers entwined.

"...1..."

Their lips joined and Miranda's free hand came to entangle itself in Andy's hair as they kissed. Their tongues dancing around each other.

"...Happy New Year..." The DJ hollered across the room.

A few moments passed as Auld Lang Syne played before they broke away from each other. "Mm, Andréa, my darling," Miranda breathed, looking up into her eyes again. "I want to ask you again, and if your answer is what it was at Christmas, I will wait until you are ready..." She trailed off, and let the younger woman see the hope in her eyes. "...Marry me?"

Andy saw her past, present and future in the depth of Miranda's blue eyes and could no longer think of one good reason not to give the older woman what she asked for and, if Andy was honest with herself, what she also wanted. Cupping Miranda's face in both palms, Andy shook her head and offered her a wide smile. "Sweetheart, this is the beginning of anything you want. You're on, I will marry you."

Andy let herself reflect on the final words of her journal for Miranda.

12/22/2007 - New York
Dear Miranda,

I watched you cross the busy restaurant, with your eyes flashing such an array of emotion at my presence and in the moment you met my gaze, I felt so much hope.

In your eyes, I found my peace.

In your arms, I found my home.

I love you, Miranda.

Always x

Miranda's eyes blazed with satisfaction before she snared Andy's lips in a gentle kiss. "You are my happy new year." She whispered. "My happily ever after."

FIN

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