8 Years in the Life
by Kimarmot

Summary

This story starts a year after season 7. Rory is on the campaign trail and is looking for another job when she runs into someone from her past.
This is my first fan fiction and English isn't my first language not even my second, so please be a little indulgent with my grammar, misspelling and the poor vocabulary.
Rory was still on the Obama campaign trail, but as it began to get to a close, she didn't know if she would keep on working for Hugo afterward. Therefore, she was applying for jobs. Things were going quite well for her, and she had been requested by the Boston Globe to write some articles as their reporter was on extended maternity leave. She met the Obamas several times and bonded with Michele Obama and her staff. She loved being a journalist. It wasn't the Yale Daily News anymore, it was the real world. She had been used to the constant traveling and her goal to become the next Christiane Amanpour was still wandering in her head. The people on the campaign trail were quite nice, and she had made some good friends that she was pleased to hang out with to avoid the homesickness. She only had been home once but even though she'd miss Stars Hollow and her mom it wasn’t as painful as she'd expected.

Moreover, she didn't think of Logan that much anymore. At least she didn't have ample time to. For a while, she hoped that he would have tried to reach back to her like he always did after their few breakups, but after a few months, she came to the conclusion that he had moved on and that this page has been turned for her too. Of course, she had thought of calling him, but maybe her pride or the care of being rejected prevented her from simply press the phone button. She also cut off from any relations with all the Yale friends that they had together. It was way too painful of a reminder, and anyway, they were his friends first.

Furthermore, they were scattered everywhere. Colin stayed at Yale for law school, Rosemary entered the Sotheby's Institute of Art and Juliet the Cornell MBA program. Finn got into his family's company, GMO a global investment management firm. Robert and Stephanie graduated a year before Logan as they hadn't taken time off during their college years. Robert went to grad school to follow the Harvard political science program, and Steph worked in a public relations agency in New York. For a while, she attempted to keep pace with Rory, but they finally lost touch. Sometimes she would get some crazy texts from Finn whenever he was too wasted. The only person from Yale that she still had regular connections with was Paris, who was at Harvard Medical School, still living with Doyle who got a reporter job at the Boston Herald.

Rory was finishing her piece in her hotel room in Portland when she heard her phone ring. She looked at the caller ID and saw it was the Boston Globe chief editor. She wondered why he was calling. Usually, she was contacted by Carol, the section editor... She cleared her voice and took the call.

"Rory Gilmore."

"Hi Rory, it's Bill from the Globe."

"Hi Bill, is everything okay with my piece?"

"Sure, everything is fine. It's not the reason why I'm calling. I've just got out of a meeting with the editorial board, and we are thinking about offering you a regular reporter position. Would you be interested?"

"Sure!" The wheels were turning insanely fast in her head. Oh, my God!

"We thought you could come to meet us by the end of the primary campaign in June."
"I'm sure I can manage that. I'm looking forward to meeting you. Thanks, Bill, for this opportunity!"

"Don't thank me yet, we are meeting other candidates, but you're definitely among our favorites."

"Wow, could you offer me any details? Do I have to prepare anything?"

"Well, it's not definitive yet, but we need another person to handle the interviews in the New England area, and we really liked the one that you did for us the last couple of months. It's a regular reporter job on politics in the Metro area, but you might have to work a bit still to help on the campaign at least until the elections."

Rory was over the moon. Looked like all this hard work was ultimately paying.

"It would be great. I'm very excited".

"I'm very confident you can get the job. My assistant will provide you with the details. So, see you next week, Rory".

"Thanks, Bill"

Rory was so excited and started to wonder who she should tell the good news first.

"Hey, Paris do you think I could crash at your place around June 4th?"

"When? Why? Of course, you can. Even if I have a night shift, Doyle should be home. Anyway, I'm done with my finals."

"Great I don't have the details yet, but I have a job interview for the Globe on the 4th."

"Boy! Do you mean next month? We could even be roommates again!"

"We'll see, I don't have the job yet, and I don't think that Doyle would be willing to have a roommate again. See you in two weeks then."

Paris has always been there for Rory. She helped Rory a lot to get over Logan. Of course, for most people, Paris was hard to handle, but she was a rock to Rory, and paradoxically since they left Yale they'd become even closer to each other. When she felt down and depressed on the road in the lousy hotel rooms, she used to call her friend even more often than her mother probably because she didn't need the cheering up, just someone to listen or telling her stories that involved unknown people. She now became very well acquainted with all Paris' teachers and classmates even if she has never met them. She still has a tight relationship with her mother though and used to call her quite often.

"Hey kiddo, what's up?"

"Hi! Mom, you'll never guess. I've got an interview for a job at the Boston Globe."

"Wow! It's great, would you be traveling?"

"Only in New England so I would be living in Boston."

"Oh! My baby is coming back!"

"Not yet, mum, I have to pass the interview next week."

"And when will you start?"
"I don't know; I still have to talk to Hugo."

"I'm so happy, at least you're starting to get job interviews. Will you be able to come to Stars Hollow after your interview?"

"I don't know yet mum, it depends on Hugo. I'll do my best, you know I miss you."

"I know hun, me too, it's been so long." 

"I have to leave. Bye mum. Love you"
Rory texted Paris

R- On my way to the Globe.

P- I'll finish my shift at 2 pm, but I have to pick some samples at the Harvard Science Center for my research lab. Meet me at the Starbucks on Harvard Square at 3:30?

R- Okay I'll be there.

Rory arrived at the Globe just 5 minutes before 11 am and headed for the reception.

"Good morning, I'm Rory Gilmore. Bill Avery is expecting me."

"Yes Miss Gilmore, 2nd floor. His assistant will be waiting for you."

In the elevator, she breathed deeply to focus her brain. Maybe it will be the following step to her journalist life. When the doors opened, she took a deep breath again, came out of the elevator and went to the nearest information desk.

"Good morning, I have an appointment with Bill Avery," she said politely.

"His office is right at the end of the hall, on the left." the woman answered.

"Thank you very much"

Following the directions, she found the office and was informed by his secretary that he was still in a meeting. She sat there struggling to cool her nerves so she could make a good impression. Suddenly, a tall blond guy stormed out of the office with a desperate expression. He looked frantically all over the place when their eyes met.

"Good luck," he said and walked away in the hallway. Taking her eyes away from the guy she saw a man in his fifties, little taller than her, with some gray hair, definitely a charming, standing in the door frame. She guessed it was Bill, the editor-in-chief. He started walking towards her and she got up to greet him properly. She actually never had met him in person.

"Hi, Rory, nice to finally meet you in person. Hugo had a lot of nice things to say about you." Bill said smiling with a handshake. "Please enter and have a seat"

"I'm also very pleased to meet you" Rory replied.

"As I told you on the phone, we would like to hire you for a metro reporter position to cover politics. You really did a great job for us while filling in for Syl when she was on maternity leave. Nevertheless, in the meantime, the editorial board wanted to do a special summer series of more in-depth articles of comparative politics. We would like to begin with the European Union. Then, if it works it would mean Israel, Canada, Australia, South Africa. So, this will require traveling all around Europe first. We don't have a European correspondent so you will be by yourself over there. I know that you don't have any experience abroad, but you are used to traveling with the campaign trail. Such a series of articles would be a significant impulse for your career. Now, if you think that you're not cut for such an overseas experience we can still offer you the original position as a metropolitical reporter" He finished and smiled at her waiting for her answer.
She couldn’t believe her ears she was offered an opportunity to report from overseas. Of course, it was temporary, but it was a chance that she was willing to seize.

"Thank you, Bill, that's an incredible opportunity, I'd love to" she finally answered. "Just a question, once the series is done, will that metro reporter position will still be available for me?"

"Well, maybe not this precise one, but depending on how these articles will be received, we'll induce other series of that kind but not necessarily overseas. I know it sounds vague in the long-term just keep in mind that it's a reporter position. So, could you be interested?"

"Absolutely, I'm interested in either position with a huge preference with the European one of course"

"Great, I still have to see another candidate but as I told you, you're definitely are my favorite. I just have to run my conclusions through the board tomorrow morning and then I'll be able to give you a contract so that you can have your lawyer to look over if it's alright with you. Are you applying for other jobs?"

"Yes, I did but nothing as definitive as your offer has kicked in yet. Anyway, I still work for Hugo for the moment but I don't know for how long as the primary campaign is ending." Rory replied excitedly.

"OK, great. I'll call you tomorrow" Bill shook her hand and led her to the door.

"I'll wait for your call" she answered and beamed at him.

She couldn't believe what just happened. Once she exited the building, the spring sun hit her face and it was just like if life was smiling at her. She had a few hours to kill before meeting at Paris. She decided to call her dad to see if he was able to grab a bite with her. Her relationship with Christopher was good even or maybe because they didn't see each other much. He was a terrific dad to Gigi and sometimes she wished she could have had the same connection with him when she was a child. Nevertheless, she liked the way they were together now. They met at a small restaurant nearby his office. When she arrived, he was already sitting at a table by the window. He stood up to give her a hug.

"Hey kiddo, I really like when you surprise me like that"

"If you're lucky we will be able to do that more often" She grinned at him.

"How long are you staying in Boston?"

"The trail is done now but I have to be in DC the day after tomorrow for the speech of Hillary Clinton and depending on this job offer, I'll follow the fundraising events until the democratic convention or I'll go to Europe"

"Wow, I'm really impressed. Let's order first because I have to be back at the office for a meeting at two."

Once they'd put their order, Rory shared stories of the campaign with her dad. He asked her to stay with him and Gigi until she left for DC but she said she would do it next time she'll be in town.

"Maybe you can help me in another way though."

"Sure, anything for you, kiddo."
"The editor said that if I got the job, I should have my contract looked at by a lawyer. Do you know one here that could do the job? Otherwise, I could ask Grandpa"

"Consider my lawyer is yours. With all the business I give him, it's absolutely isn't a problem for him to look over a contract"

"Thanks, dad"

When they left the restaurant, her father hugged her.

"I hope you'll get the job. If you do, the offer to stay with us still stands."

"Thanks, dad, I'll think about it" Christopher left to his office and Rory headed to find the coffee shop in Harvard Square to wait for Paris.

Robert entered the coffee shop and ordered a triple espresso to go. He really needed that after a couple of sleepless nights to finish his dissertation. He was absent-mindedly scanning the room while waiting for his coffee when he saw her. He was struck speechless, she was sitting there, in a red dress, more beautiful that he could remember and as things could never change, she was reading exactly like when he found her years ago in the Brantford dining hall.

"Robert" the barista called.

"Thanks" he took his coffee and when directly to Rory.

"business or pleasure?"

She had already heard this line before. She raised her head and was immediately struck dumb.

"Robert!? As I live and breathe" she beamed, stood up and hugged him. "So good to see you."

"It's good to see you again Rory" Robert was a little surprised by the affectionate gesture that it took him a second to hug her back. Man, it feels good.

"What are you doing here?" Rory asked excitedly.

"Harvard grad school, poli sci" Robert answered "What about you? I thought you were working on the Obama campaign trail?"

"I am, but I had an interview at the Boston Globe this morning and now I'm waiting for Paris. Have you ever run into her? She's at Harvard med school."

"No, I knew she was at Harvard but you know, their campus is located on the other side of the river. Listen, I would love to catch up with you but I have an appointment with my thesis advisor. Are you free for dinner tonight?"

"Sorry, I was planning to spend the evening with Paris."

"Well, maybe I could join you if you don't mind?" he raised an eyebrow at her expectantly.

"Sure. Here is my card, text me and I'll tell you when I'll know where we'll meet"

"awesome, sorry I've to rush" and he stormed out.

While she watched him running through the door, she saw Paris walking toward the coffee shop. It was a surprise to see Robert, and surprisingly a good one. She never thought that running into one of
Logan's friends could make her feel good and not hurting.

"What is buzzing in that head of yours, Gilmore?" Paris said sternly.

"Paris! I'm so happy to see you!" They had a big bear hug. "I missed you so much!"

"I can't believe that I'm saying that but, me too Gilmore. So, care to tell me the reason for such a big beam?"

"Just feeling weird happy to run into Robert Semple. Did you know he was in Harvard grad school?"

"You're hanging with the wealthy Yale dumb snobbish boys again? Pfffff... Haven't you learned your lesson?"

"You know I'm not. I've been on the campaign trail for more than a year and I cut everything off with them. I needed to" Paris was already regretting what she'd said. She knew how hard it was for Rory to get over from Logan and that anything that could be linked to him was taboo.

"Maybe Robert isn't that dumb as he ended up in grad school. What surprised me is the fact that it wasn't awkward and actually I was glad to see him. Maybe it tells me that I could be over Logan..."

"Great that we should be celebrated"

Rory's phone pinged.

< Don't forget me Reporter girl. Looking forward to catching up with you. Robert>

Rory smiled "Can he join us tonight?"

"Sure, why not" Paris answered.
The girls arrived at a French bistro recommended by the Boston Herald reporter of the trail. Rory wanted a nice restaurant to thank Paris for having her. Robert made his way inside to the maître d' two minutes later and immediately saw the girls. He smiled and walked toward them.

"Hi! Rory, Paris, Robert Semple, we met at Yale, sophomore year"

"Hi, I do remember you now" Paris shook his hand with her usual unfriendly intense gaze.

The waitress just began to bring the menu and ask if they wanted drinks when Paris phone rang.

"Paris Gellar" she answered with a professional tone. "OK, I'll be there in half an hour"

"Is everything okay Paris?" Rory asked.

"It's the hospital. I have to cover for a student who called in sick. Sorry, Rory. Here's the key. I don't feel too bad as you have company" She glanced at Robert. "I'll see you in the morning, try not to wake Doyle when you'll come home". Paris exited quickly, leaving Robert and Rory a little astounded and mildly embarrassed.

"I guess it's just us. Not that I'm complaining" Robert smirked at her.

"So, grad school huh? I would have thought that you would stop after college. I didn't know you like that much studying. Didn't you want to get into your family company?"

"Jeez no! I'm lucky my family company can run by itself. There are plenty of much more competent people than me working there. My brother and my sister chose to work there though, but at their own free will. So, tell me about the job at the Globe"

"Actually, I have been offered two jobs, one to report on politics in the New England area, the other one to write on comparative politics with other democratic countries and I would have to report from these countries starting from the European Union"

"Really? I'm impressed" Right in my field "And which one did you choose?"

"Well I would prefer the second one, but the first one is more for a long-term"

"I'm sure you'll do great on either job. I have to say I'm quite impressed that you'd manage to get this job in a major newspaper just a year after your graduation" Robert pursed his lips and nodded. Rory blushed and attempted to switch the conversation.

They enjoyed a nice meal: the food was amazing with excellent wine pairing and the conversation didn't lag, far from it. Rory had never realized how much they had in common. It wasn't as awkward as they had both anticipated.

"So, political science. I never thought we shared that much."

"More than you know. I've read all your articles. You're really good at this, smart and witty" He raised an eye to look at how she was reacting. Rory blushed.

"Wow, I didn't remember you were such a smooth talker. What about your parrot?"

Robert laughed "God, you remembered that! By then, I was so nervous trying to impress you that I
thought that being a self-absorbed cynic guy could get your attention. You know, just being different so you could get interested in me. After all, I was competing with the number one Yale player. Why are you so dumb to bring Logan up? He carefully watched her reaction.

"It's okay, you can mention him. Are you guys still in touch?"

"Yes, we are. We only met 3 or 4 times since his graduation but we talk to each other or text quite often. He was devastated after your break up so we had shifts to stay with him that summer to try to limit his destructive behavior. Colin and Finn are his closest friends but they also asked for help because it was too difficult for them to manage the distance with their work. During that summer, Steph also went there. Colin even considered to be transferred to Stanford to be closer to him but his dad wouldn't pay for it. Finn is seeing him more often as he's frequently at his San Francisco office. He still lives in Palo Alto. We were not allowed to mention you though."

"It's nice that you guys still have each other"

"What about you? Are you over him?" Robert whispered. He wasn't sure if he could ask the question...She looked at him and saw deep concern rather than curiosity.

"It was tough at the beginning but having to adjust to my new job kept me focus and helped me a lot. It's when I saw you this afternoon, it dawned on me that my healing process is over now" She slightly smiled at him.

The conversation never faltered until Robert felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and took a quick look.

"It's Finn. Hey, Finn what's up?"

"Hey mate, I just landed at Logan's airport. Can we meet for a drink?"

"Sure, and I'll maybe have a surprise for you. Meet at our usual bar?"

"Deal, see you there in twenty"

"I think it's your lucky day Reporter girl, what about another of your favorite Yale man for you tonight?"

"Sure, let's have a crazy Finn night". Just then the waiter brought the check and placed it on the table, they both reached for it but Robert managed to snatch it up. "Please, my treat, I insist. You know I can't let you do that" he grinned at her.

"You know you don't have to do that, but thank you. I'll offer you guys the drinks at the bar". Robert laughed "Don't be such a feminist, let us enjoy treating you right, for old time sake". Robert settled the bill quickly and pulled Rory's chair.

Since Yale, Robert and Finn got closer as the Aussie worked for a year in Boston. It was an unexpected match as Robert was the most down-to-earth of the group and Finn the most delirious one, but it actually worked pretty well. Robert was able to loosen up while Finn became a little more grounded. They had their habits in a bar not far from Robert's apartment. They used to hit on the same girls and waiting which one of them she would choose. Mike the bartender kept the score. In the beginning, Finn's score was higher, but when Robert discovered that speaking fluent French was a catch, he quickly even the score. Finn already was at the bar talking to Mike when they arrived.

"It seems that Robert is about score tonight," said Mike. Finn turned around and saw Rory with Robert's hand on the small of her back.
"Holly shit! Love!" Finn walked to Rory, brought her into a tight hug, twirling her around.

"I guess you're happy to see me" she grinned.

"Let me look at you," Finn said taking a step back from Rory. "Kitten you're even more gorgeous now. Robert, where did you find her?"

"I ran into Rory this afternoon at a coffee shop. I'm the one who got lucky today" he winked.

"Let's get drinks and grab a table so that we can catch up"

Robert showed Rory an empty booth and the guys sat by her sides.

"So, tell me, Finn, what are you doing now?" Rory asked.

"I'm a portfolio implementation manager at GMO, my family company."

"Wow, I don't have any clue of what that means, but I'm impressed. So, you're in Boston too?"

"After Yale, I spent almost a year at the Boston office, then at the San Francisco office and now I travel between Boston, San Francisco, London, and Sidney. I'll be in Boston for the next week."

They spent an amazing evening. Rory felt right, safe and happy with them like she hadn't been for a long time.

"Guys I had a wonderful evening with you but I'm exhausted, I had to wake up very early this morning, I think I'm gonna call it a night"

"Allow me to drive you to Paris," said Robert.

"Don't be stupid Robert, you live just around the corner, I can take a cab. Besides I don't think neither of us should be driving"

Finn looked at Robert "I'll call my car service and we both take you to Paris', sounds good?"

Rory was already too tired to argue with them so she gave in. She knew too well how exhausting it was to go against Finn. Anyway, it felt nice to be taken care of after this whole year all by herself. When they arrived in front of Paris' building, Rory felt a little sad. She hadn't had that much fun for such a long time. The guys walked her to the front door.

"Thank you guys I had an amazing night" she kissed both of them on the cheek.

"Don't forget to tell us if you get the job and now that you have my number, call me whenever you're in town?" Robert said.

"Promise" she closed the door slowly trying not to wake Doyle. She was glad to have run into Robert. Rory had a wonderful night and she thought that it would be good getting this job and stay here in Boston. For a year it had been only just the bus, sleeping, listening, writing, never time for fun. It wasn't that far from Stars Hollow, she had her dad and Gigi, Paris and the guys. The Globe was not the New York Times, but it belonged to the New York Times Company and was the most important in the New England area. She also had always admired their spotlight team, it was definitively a very good paper.
In the morning, Rory woke up with the sound of Paris talking to Doyle. They were having breakfast at the kitchen counter.

"Hi, sleepy head! I didn't hear you come back last night. Need some Advil?" Doyle asked with a sympathetic tone.

"Yes please, with coffee. I think I definitely forgot how it was to drink with these guys." Rory stood up painfully and walked toward them.

"These guys? Who was with you besides Robert?" Paris asked.

"After dinner, we joined Finn for drinks."

"He's in Boston too?"

"Well, if I understood correctly his family company has an office here so he's part-time in Boston but it seemed he used to live here for a while."

"So, tell me, Gilmore, what is the Globe offering you, Paris didn't want to tell me"

"They proposed me to write a series of articles about other democratic countries starting with Europe. Kind of comparative political systems and I would be able to go over there to interview people."

"Nice! And you know just the right guy to help you through it for your research."

"I do?" Rory looked at Doyle with a raised eyebrow.

"Semple. Well, I guess he's even better now, but when we were at Yale, he received the Clark Prize for the best senior essay on comparative politics and got the Patterson grant to do the research for his senior essay in France. He's fluent in French. I think he lived in France for a while. You know the guy graduated summa cum laude and is a Phi Beta Kappa, right? He wrote for the Yale Daily News when he was a freshman but he stopped because he needed more time to double major"

"Well, it seems that I don't know him that well. He applied for a grant? I don't think he needed the money"

"No, but this grant is really prestigious and it opens doors that you couldn't go through otherwise. So, when will you know for the job?"

"Bill told me he'll call me today, I guess this afternoon. What about you Doyle, how do you like the Herald?"

"I guess I'm OK, I'm now a junior editor for local politics but I still have to write which is good. So, I was just waiting for you to wake up so I could say hi but I have to go. Hope to see you soon then."

He hugged Rory, kissed Paris and left.

The girls spent the morning drinking coffee and chat. It was like being college roommates again and it was good. Rory tried not to think too much about the job. After all, she had time as she was still working for Hugo at least until the democrat convention in August. While Paris was in the shower, she called her mom to keep her posted on the job but avoided telling her about Finn and Robert. She
wasn't ready for a lecture about how they were unfitted for her world. Actually, she was pleasantly surprised how grounded they became and in particular by Finn. He appeared to take his job very seriously and she was impressed that he was climbing the ladder of the company step by step to learn the work. In Yale, they always looked as if partying was all they could do. She only knew Robert for a year as he graduated with Steph a year earlier than the Stooges. Although raised in a wealthy high society family, Robert always had trouble to fit in with his classmates. Maybe because he lived in Asia and Africa where he grew up with kids from different countries. His best childhood friends were French so when his parents went back definitively to New-York City, he asked to go to boarding school in France with his pals. His family agreed only until his junior year of prep school. They thought his chance to get into an Ivy League college would be better if he would attend Trinity School in Manhattan. There, he quickly learned that straight-A students weren't the most popular guys. So, he always was very low profile regardless of the fact that he graduated valedictorian. At Yale, he didn't have to study much: he was a very fast reader and he didn't have to do it twice for remembering everything. That also helped him a lot with poker. He used to win all the time except that night when he was introduced to Rory at Logan's. He was so distracted by trying not to stare at her that he couldn't concentrate on the game.

Rory was packing her bag to leave for Washington when her phone rang. She nervously answered.

"Rory Gilmore"

"Hey Rory, it's Bill. If you're still OK the job is for you"

Rory kept herself from squealing.

"Thank you so much Bill"

"So, when do you think you could start?"

"Well I just have to talk to Hugo and I'll let you know. I was supposed to leave for DC to cover Hillary Clinton speech"

"Ok so in the meantime I'll send you the contract by email and I'm waiting for your call. Welcome to the Globe Rory"

"I'm really thrilled Bill, thank you for trusting me"

Rory was overwhelmed to start a new era in Boston. She was leaving the loneliness of the campaign trail and the smell of cheap hotel behind her. She started to make a mental list of what she had to do in order to start this new life. She first called Hugo. He was quite comprehensive and she only had to cover the Hillary Clinton event for him, which meant that in three days she would have the freedom to start her new job. She then sent a text to Paris, her dad, Robert, and Finn and called her mother while she was in the cab taking her to the airport. In the plane, she started her to do list on which the first point was to find a place to live. Paris and Doyle's couch couldn't be permanent. While finding a place, she could also stay with her dad. She definitively wanted an apartment of her own where she could come back to and find her books, have her clothes in a closet and not a suitcase, somewhere she could call home. She was also excited to go to Europe and started to think about the research she would have to do. In her hotel room in DC, she ordered room service to be able to start to work right away. When she opened her email, she had already received her contract. After a brief look at it, she forwarded it to her dad. Then she dove deeply into some research for her European assignment when the buzz of her phone broke her concentration.

"Rory Gilmore"
"Congratulations Reporter Girl!" she heard from two voices. She glanced at the clock 9:30 pm.

"Thanks, guys. You sound buzzed" Rory laughed.

"Just a little, we were celebrating your new job and that we are happy that you came back into our lives"

"Shouldn't you wait for me to do that?"

"Promise we'll do it again when you'll be back kitten. When will that be?"

"I should be in Boston on Monday to meet my editor and sign the contract."

"Okay so celebration dinner on Monday with Finn and myself. Text me your address and we'll pick you up. See you Monday!"

"Okay bye" Rory smiled. It was definitively fun to have reconnected with them.
Chapter 5

Everything seemed to be settling easily. Rory arrived in Boston and took her father offer to stay with him while looking for an apartment. Christopher's lawyer did not find any problem in her contract, so she went straight to the Globe to sign it. She had a long talk with Bill and the section editor to establish the scope of her work in Europe. They worked for a couple of hours and she felt really excited when she left. Now, she only had to find a place to live, which made her in an excellent mood for her evening with the boys.

"So basically, I just have to find an apartment, move my things in it and I'm off to Europe for the summer. I've considered waiting until I'll get back and just stay at my dad's but after a year of stinky motels I really wish I'll have a place I can call my home, not going back to my parents"

"OK that might seem weird, but I have a proposition for you," Robert said.

Finn and Rory looked at Robert with raised eyebrows.

"Rory, why don't you move in with me, just at least until you can find your own place? My former roommate moved out a month ago I haven't found someone else yet. I was just about to put an ad on Craig's list. Plus, it will help me with the rent"

Rory stared at Robert eyes wide opened.

"That is not such a bad idea, his place is very nice Love, trust me you might like it"

"I don't know Robert, it's very sweet of you, but now that I'm not a student anymore I kind of thought I would live by myself"

"It's up to you, but it will save you time. It would mean that you could leave for Europe very soon without worrying where to come back and when you'll do, you could still move out if you wish. Just come see the place, it's halfway between Harvard and the Globe and Finn are close by. You can still turn me down if you find it's too crappy for a girl. No big deal"

"Why don't you go look at the place after dinner? Then we could go to our bar just after" Finn suggested.

"OK, let's go have a look at it to get you guys out of my back".

As Finn had pointed out, Robert apartment was actually pretty nice for a graduate student, even if she could have guessed knowing the boys back in college. Money really can help sometimes. It was a huge two bedrooms two bathrooms flat, with a very nice living room, an open kitchen, situated on the top floor of a small two stories building.

"So, as you already know, our favorite pub is a block away and you can take the subway to go to the Globe to avoid traffic. Even Finn takes the subway" Rory stared at Finn surprised. She remembered he used to love cars like Logan.

"True Reporter girl, I'm tired to get stuck in traffic."

"What's your verdict?"

"I'm actually quite amazed by the interior design, the room and the bathroom are very, very nice and cozy"
"Well for the interior design I don't get any credit, it is all my sister doing, she's attending the Pratt Institute and she did it for one of her freshman project. To close the deal, look at the espresso machine, but sorry, in case you're wondering, George Clooney, doesn't come into the room when it's on"

"So love, I don't want to rush you but what do you think? I'm getting thirsty here"

"Well, I guess I can move here until I'll find time to get a place of my own. It's still better than to live with my father or on Paris' couch"

"Great, let's celebrate that" and the guys both draped an arm around Rory's shoulder and moved her to the pub.

"OK, now that you're moving in, let me introduce you to Mike our favorite bartender" Robert smiled to a thirty-something dark hair guy with a stubble beard. "Mike, this is Rory Gilmore, my new roommate. She has full access to our tab"

"Nice to meet you, Rory. First drink is on me, what would you like? Tonight, it's Mojito party" said Mike with a heavy Irish accent.

"Then Mojito it is. Please to meet you, Mike. You guys have a tab here?"

"Well, when Finn was living in Boston, we used to come here a lot... It's very convenient to have a tab"

"How do you guys manage to drink so much and have your work done?"

"Well actually, we don't drink that much anymore, but it's nice to come here to let off some steam, there are really nice people here"

Finn smirked "What Robert is trying to say is that it's a very good place to hook up" Rory looked around the place and saw many young women.

"Oh! I see..."

"So, tell us, love, what about you, are you dating anyone?"

"Nope, you know it's kind of difficult when you change cities every three days. Anyway, to be honest, I wasn't quite in a mood for dating."

"Sure, but you know that sometimes, getting laid can be invigorating. We all need that. Abstinence is not healthy at our age. I can't believe that there were no men on this trail who'd hit on you." Finn said very seriously.

"Maybe..." Robert sent a gaze trying to tell Finn to change the subject.

"Look at Robert and me, to stay healthy we have a little game. We used to spot a lovely lady, hit on her both and see which one of us she would choose to enjoy herself"

"I can't believe it!" Rory stared at the two of them with eyes wide opened.

"Believe it, it's a very healthy game, Mike here is keeping the score"

Rory looked at Mike who nodded.

"Rory, you've got to know that in the end, everybody needs to get laid, just the way to get there is
different. Like, in bars, there are two categories of ladies. The first one, which includes yourself tonight, comes here to have a nice evening with friends. Of course, it's much more challenging to get directly into their pants. Then there is the second category, the one with the ladies who would like guys like us to ravage them with our amazing skills in the bedroom department. The bottom line is that everything before sex is just foreplay, only that with some people, foreplay can be very long and that some of them call that love or courting. Don't underestimate casual sex, it's liberating and self-preservative."

"How long did it take you to have this theory?" Rory asked laughing. She had forgotten how entertaining life could be with Finn and she really had missed this non-sense craziness over the last years.

"It's very serious kitten, not a theory. These are facts I gathered over the years. Again, I do believe that our human needs have to be fulfilled regularly, and seriously, do you really think a vibrator can do all the tricks?" Finn paused and waited for her answer.

"Are you seriously talking about my sex life? No way Jose, I'm not drunk enough" Rory shook her head.

"OK, as you wish, but one last fact. After a breakup, everyone needs a fuck to unclog their brain otherwise it will be very difficult to move on" Finn stated. "I'm very serious kitten" He looked at her sternly.

"Noted, now why don't you explain what are the rules of the little game you two are playing?" Rory was trying to deviate the conversation.

"So, depending on the time that we have, we pick a lady in one of the two categories. We get 3 points for the former category, 1 for the other one" Rory shook her head again and snickered.

"So, Mike which one of this guy is winning this contest?"

"Actually, they're even" Rory stared at Finn and Robert stunned.

"Hey why do you look so surprised?" asked Robert a little offended.

"Sorry Robert, I didn't know you were such a player too. Are you sure you want me to be your roommate?"

"Don't worry Rory, I rarely take ladies home and anyway our rooms are at the opposite sides of the apartment"

"It's fine Robert. I'll be traveling a lot so I won't be bothered" she smirked "I think we will be excellent roommates. Tequila shots?"
Chapter 6

"Hi! Robert, what's up?"

"Hi Logan, how are you?"

"Fine man. What can I do for you?"

"Well, just wanted you to know that I ran into Rory a few days ago"

"Really? Where?"

"Here in Boston, she was in a coffee shop on Harvard Square"

"And did you talk to her?"

"Of course, I did, she just got an overseas correspondent position at the Globe"

"I thought she was on the Obama campaign trail?"

"She was but the primary campaign trail is done now"

"Well, thank you to let me know."

"There's something else... She's moving in with me"

"What?? Are you shitting me??"

"Cool down, man, everything went so fast for her, she got the job and had to start right away so she was looking for an apartment, as my roommate just left I offered her the room until she finds her own place. Anyway, it's not as if I'll see her a lot as she's got this assignment in Europe so basically, she will just drop her things off and then leave for a while."

"Oh... Sorry I jump to conclusions"

"It's fine man. It's momentary and when she'll be back from Europe she will find her own place."

"Okay, how is she?"

"She looks fine, she's really thrilled about this new job, you know she always wanted to report from overseas and she's still stunning"

"Robert!"

"What? That's the truth. Ask Finn. You know I always had a crush on her. Don't worry man I know she's off limit. You know Finn and I don't date. About that, just so you know, I even the score with Finn." Logan laughed.

"Sorry man, you're right. It's the past. It's just ...Wait Finn saw her too?"

"Finn and I had dinner and drinks with her. It's OK Logan, we know that the break up was tough for you, remember? I was there. But I think it was for her too."

"Thanks, man. I guess I'm still on edge when I think about her. So, since we're talking, what are the plans for this summer?"
"I don't know, I've been kind of busy with my dissertation. I think that Colin and Steph are on it. I guess the main problem is to get everybody at the same moment. Would you be free on the 4th of July weekend?"

"It should be fine. I'll call Colin. And Robert, thanks for letting me know"

"No problem Logan. You're okay? I mean with her being my roommate"

"Sure, it's fine, I guess. It's not as if I have to see her. By the way, I took your advice and I started running with the guys from the office. You were right. It's kind of liberating and I appreciate the endorphins shots. I also ride now. If I keep on like this I'll soon be ready for the triathlon"

"Wow, I won't go that far with you but we'll run with Finn when we'll meet on the 4th of July. See you, Logan."

Although they all had in common to be from wealthy families, Finn and Robert were quite different from the other three of the gang. First, they weren't from Connecticut society. Colin and Logan met Finn during their senior year in Switzerland. The Americans were already used to boarding schools but it was the first time for the Aussie to be so far away from home. He was homesick and threw himself into pranks and drinking parties, which were the activities the guys were the best trained at. It didn't take long for him to decide to apply to Yale to follow them.

Before Yale, Robert only friends were the ones that he made when he was living in Africa. He grew up there with expatriates from different countries but mostly from France. He then met Logan, Finn, Colin, and Stephanie at the Life and Death Brigade event during their freshman year. First, they were intrigued by this trust fund kid, who on contrary to them, seemed to be down to earth. Then, they found that by hanging on to him, it could keep them from drifting too far. Sure, they were all privileged kids, and from the outside, they looked like they could do whatever they wanted just because of their names and money. Everybody seemed to ignore the downside which was mainly the family obligations. Altogether they had learned very young that when you had money, people often wanted to be friend with you not only for yourself. Therefore, even though they could get along fine with anyone, they always end up together. What they appreciated in the Life and Death Brigade was the secrecy which allowed them not to be judged.

When the three stooges took a year off to Fidji, Stephanie got to spend more time with Robert. He didn't have to try to keep pace with the guys and she discovered a totally different person. She sensed that becoming friend with them was his way to fit in his American life, and that deep down he didn't care much for the superficial acts that being in society could involve.

"I know the apartment is huge but do you really believe we can fit all these books in it?" Robert smiled wryly while dropping the tenth box of books in the living room.

"Don't worry. I've got a lot of practice. I need them around me to feel at home. I'm not sure you can make fun of me as you've already filled almost all the bookshelves with yours"

"Hey, I'm still a student. I need books to study!"

He went to the kitchen, made two espressos and brought one to Rory.

"Time for a break"

"Thanks, Robert" They sat on the couch to relax a bit after this morning of moving Rory's boxes.

"So, when are you leaving for Europe?"
"I haven't decided yet. I have to finish my planning. I wish I could leave next Monday. Actually, Doyle suggested that I ask you for some help"

"He did? Well, if Doyle thinks that I can be of any help I guess I can have a look at your planning and lend a hand with the French part. I'm supposed to be in Paris at the end of the month and I'll be back in the States on the 4th of July weekend with the guys"

"You'll be in Paris?"

"Yeah, I used to spend my summer time in France every year to visit my friends and pick up some wine. I'll not stay long this year because I'm trying to finish my Ph.D. thesis next year as my PI told me that I would be able to graduate before next summer."

Rory arched her eyebrows "You're working with a private investigator?"

Robert smiled "In research, PI stands for Principal Investigator, he's my thesis advisor if you prefer"

"Oh! Doesn't it usually take more time to complete a Ph.D.?"

"Yeah, but let's say that I got lucky with the subject. OK, so let's see your planning and what I can do to help you."

They worked all the afternoon and Rory was totally amazed by Robert's skills on the subject. Doyle was so right, her new roommate had an unbelievable mind and knowledge when it came to politics. He narrowed the research so that she could focus on the most significant parts. He helped her to prep for the interviews and found interesting angles.

"I would also suggest you go to Spain. Things are changing very quickly over there. They have a central government kind of similar as a federal government combines with a monarchy. Right now, they have a left-wing prime minister, but it will probably change soon. The unions are becoming stronger and people from Catalonia want their independence. It would be interesting to investigate how the central government in Madrid will react. I would suggest that you try to decipher the rise of populism that has a different face in each of this country. In France, they have a far-right party, the Front National for instance"

By the end, her planning was fixed and she had made an appointment with her editors to submit it for approval.

"I've got to say, I'm quite impressed, Robert. Thank you so much. If I knew I would have asked your help to study when we were in Yale"

"I don't think Huntz would have agreed" Robert gave her a wry smile "About that, I called him to let him know that we are now roommates."

"Oh... and how did he take it?"

"Well quite strongly at the beginning but, I told him that you won't be home that much and that you were planning to move out once you'll be back from Europe. I guess he's not totally over you, but he's working on it. Rory, you're our friend too you know. Don't worry too much. He'll be fine" Robert gave her a sweet gaze. "Ok, so I'll manage to meet you in Paris and in the meantime, I'll write to my contacts to make appointments for you. Let me be your PA on this. With Nicolas, I'm sure we can manage a perfect schedule and he'll get you the interview with Michel Barnier as he interned for him. Most of the people working for the EU speak English but if you need a translator, try to fit these interviews when I'll be in France and I'll go with you, it'll be fun."
"How well do you know this Nicolas guy? Because you ask me to rely on him a lot"

"Don't worry, he's like a brother to me, we spent all our childhood together and I was in a boarding school with him. I'm even closer to him than to Finn, we just don't hit on the same girls, even if we did once date the same one" he smirked.

"Robert, are you worse than Finn and Logan?"

"I'm kidding, we were eight"

"Still, you were already dating at eight?"

"I promise I didn't sleep with her but we kissed and since then we're friends. Just like you and me"

"I never kissed you, and you only kissed me on the cheek"

"But the friend part is still true, right? OK let's go out and grab something to eat"

"My treat Semple, I really owe you a lot for today"

That evening, Rory had a really good night. It was so delightful to sleep in sheets that didn't smell like cheap detergent and having the feeling of fine accomplishments.
Chapter 7

Rory started with a week in Berlin to attempt to figure out how this country became the backbone of the European Union. Moreover, she wanted to find out how it was functioning since the reunification. She then spent time in London to decipher the reluctance of Great Britain to be involved entirely in the EU. She subsequently arrived in Paris where Robert was already there to pick her up at the arrival of the Eurostar at the Gare du Nord. She was happy to see a friendly face after two weeks by herself and hugged him. He looked relaxed and tanned which brought out his icy blue eyes.

"You look good Semple, holidays in France suits you." He beamed at her, he thought that his vacation couldn't get better.

"Glad to see you too Reporter girl. So, how were your first two weeks as a foreign journalist?"

"Very productive. I'm eager to follow up with the French part. I think I understand a lot of things now. Do you think you could be able to read my first drafts?"

"Sure, first I'll drop you at your hotel, then we can review your planning. Do you think you'll have some time for entertainment? Nicolas is working too, but his evenings are free. Unfortunately, the third musketeer is in Oxford"

"The third musketeer?"

"That's how our parents used to call us because we were inseparable when we were kids. You know, the girl we were in love with when we were eight."

"It depends on how I can work during the day. Where are you staying?"

"At Nicolas', it's not far from your hotel. We can work on your planning and drafts at his place"

"So, tell me, how come you're so tanned?"

"We went sailing during the weekend. We got lucky the weather was just perfect, sunny and windy. Couldn't have been better"

"I didn't know you could sail"

"There're a lot of things you don't know about me, Gilmore. It's not because you've seen me naked with my underwear on my head that you know everything."

She laughed "Then tell me, Semple, I would love nothing more than to know you better now that we're roommates."

"Well, my mother's family is from Newport, so sailing is in my blood. I also was on the Yale sailing team. If you have time this summer, Finn and I can take you sailing there. It's less than two hours from Boston"

"I'd love that"

They worked all afternoon. As promised, in addition to the Michel Barnier interview, Nicolas pulled out some of his family strings and got Rory an interview with Emmanuelle Mignon the "Directrice de Cabinet" of the French president Nicolas Sarkozy. On his side, Robert organized a meeting with
his former tutor, Olivier Duhamel who was a specialist in the Fifth French Republic. They also prepared her trip to Brussels. Once again Robert help was huge and Rory was amazed by his knowledge of the EU and all its institutions. It was just like having a private lesson and made her wondered if she should also have attended grad school. Moreover, she was hit by his confidence. As he had pointed out, she actually didn't know him that well, she had been very familiar with his partying side at Yale, but not his intellectual side, which turned out to be quite impressive. She used to think the dislike that Logan had sometimes demonstrate toward Robert was only jealousy because he had asked her out for Finn's birthday party, but now she wondered if it could also have been because he was irritated not to be the smartest guy in the room.

"Thanks a lot, Robert, your help is priceless. You made me gain so much time"

"It's my pleasure Ror, nothing you couldn't have done by yourself, you really are a fast learner." She blushed a little, she had to learn how to better take a compliment.

"Thank you but you don't have to butter me up. I already know that I owe you a lot" Rory smirked.

"Then you're spending the evening with us" Robert stated.

"OK, let me get back to my hotel. How do I have to dress?"

"Nothing fancy, just be your pretty self. You're only going out with two poli sci grad students."

Rory had fun spending her evening embedded with young Parisians. They first had dinner in a small French restaurant with excellent wine on a lovely square. Nicolas was charming and she felt good having two devoted knights.

"Nicolas, thank you so much for all the strings that you've pulled"

"Nothing I wouldn't do for Robert's friend. I'm sorry I missed you when I visited him at Yale."

"I only met Rory when I was a senior, that's why you haven't met each other"

"Oh yeah, that's right, you were Logan's girlfriend"

"You know Logan?"

"Well, I met him at Yale and I also saw him with Colin and Finn when they made their European tour. I never thought he could keep a girl like you."

"Well, it didn't last so you were not entirely wrong. What about you, what are you studying?"

"I just finished the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, where I attended the program to become a civil servant in embassies. In clear, I would like to be a diplomat"

"So, do you know where you will be appointed?"

"Not yet, but they should let me know soon"

They then took her rue de Lappe for drinks. When they entered the bar, she could see Robert and Nicolas scanning the room smirking.

"So Robert, are you having the same contest with Nicolas as you have with Finn?"

"Oh no, I cannot compete with him here, French girls dig the American accent way too much, coupled with his deep voice tone, it won't be a fair game," Nicolas said. "Anyway, I don't give you
five minutes before a guy flirts with you," Nicolas smirked at her and went to the bar to order drinks. Immediately two fellows smiled at Rory and came to talk to her.

"We couldn't help to hear that you weren't speaking French, are you visiting Paris?" The guy was quite cute.

"I'm in Paris for work" she answered.

The guy extended his hand to her "I'm Christophe. What do you do?"

"I'm a journalist for the Boston Globe"

"Nice. I actually know Boston a little because I have a collaboration with a lab at Harvard"

"And what do you do?"

"With Michaël here, we are post-doctoral researchers at the "Institut de la Vision". We're actually with some people from the lab to celebrate our friend Barbara over there, who just got an article accepted" He pointed to a pretty young woman. Robert eyed at the girl and was suddenly more interested in the conversation.

"Hey Rory, I see that you didn't wait for me to make new friends. Hi, I'm Robert, I'm a grad student in Boston" The French guys were very friendly and they got introduced to the group. Robert very quickly started to talk to Barbara who was a Brazilian Ph.D. Neurobiology grad student. People from this lab were coming from around the world such as Canada, Australia, Italy, India, Costa Rica, Spain and Rory thought that it should be really fun to have workmates from all around the world.

The evening went by very fast and even though she was having a good time, she decided that it would be wise to have some sleep.

"Hey Robert, I think I'm gonna get back to my hotel, I will have a long day tomorrow. But you can stay, I can find my way to my hotel"

"It's OK Rory. I'll take you to your hotel. Anyway, I don't think Nicolas will come with us" Robert gazed toward his friend who was really close to a tall brunette with amazing green eyes. Her hotel wasn't very far so they decided to walk to take fresh air.

"So, any interesting French guys?"

"They were really charming and I got myself three phone numbers. They seemed to do an astonishing work. What about you?"

"She had a boyfriend, a very nice guy actually"

"Poor Robert, what about the other girls? I thought the brunette Chloé was your type?"

"She was, but I wasn't in the mood. I only have three days left in Paris"

Rory wrinkled her nose "Are you sick?"

"No, I'm fine" He laughed. "I'm not in a smash and dash kind of mood. I do believe in love, you know, just haven't found the right girl."

"So why do you play this skirt-chasing game with Finn?"

"To meet new girls" he shrugged.
"You really think you could fall in love with one of them?"

"Sure, we always pick pretty girls you know."

"With brain?"

"Yes, of course, legs, boobs, arms, hair, brain. OK, sometimes I give you that, they have trouble using it. However, how do you want us to meet new ladies? I dated some girls from Harvard but the problem is when it ended. It can be kind of difficult to run into them every day. Then it leaves match making society parties or online dating."

"Well, who am I to question your MO? It's an interesting way you two have, hope you will be able to find love"

"So, tell me, how did you find love?"

"I haven't been in love with that many guys. I assume you already know how it happened with Logan. I met Dean and Jess in Stars Hollow, randomly... It's a small town, all teenagers know each other. Oh... I see your point"

"You see, just imagine that our bar is our Stars Hollow. I presumed that they made the first step? We guys have to do that if we want something to happen."

"Maybe you could take your time to know them before getting in their bed?"

"Would they be more lovable if we didn't sleep with them? It's important too to know if you're compatible physically with a lady. It's not because I sleep with a girl that I have no respect for her you know. My mother taught me to behave with a woman. We are in the twenty-first century, not in a Jane Austen novel when two people find each other attractive, it's OK to have a little fun under the sheets. After that, it's fine either way if things go further or not. May I remind you that I have two sisters, trust me they coached me on how to behave with the ladies"

"I guess you're right" They arrived at Rory's hotel.

"For instance, I always take the girl to her door, just like I'll walk you to your room"

"It's OK Robert, I think I can find my room"

"I insist, with only the most honorable intentions"

"Okay, I'm too tired to argue with you" When they arrived in front of her room, she gave him a peck on his cheek. "Thank you, Robert"

"Good night Rory. See you tomorrow"

During the following days, Robert was Rory's perfect assistant. He taught her that it was much more efficient and convenient to use the metro than to take a cab during daytime in Paris. He took her to all her appointments, was her interpreter whenever needed, explained to her all the different French institutions. He also prepared her meetings and her next travels to Brussels, Strasbourg, Madrid, Barcelona, and Rome where he got her an interview with Emma Bonino and Enrico Letta. When he left, she was a bit sad, but she discovered that he had organized her a very detailed daily planning. He even left a memo for each interview, which made her feel he was still by her side and helped her gained confidence.
Finally, the Yale gang met at the Semple family Newport house for their summer gathering. Besides Robert and Colin, they were all working now so they didn’t have many vacation days besides the three days holiday weekend. Therefore, staying on the east coast was the most convenient. Only Logan had a long flight but he didn't mind as long as he didn't have to run into his family. That's why they excluded Marta's Vineyard and the McCrae residence.

Logan was happy to be able to see his friends. He flew to Boston where Finn waited for him at the airport and they drove together to Newport. Life wasn't that bad in California and he got along quite well with his partners but he missed being able to let his guard down and he could only do that around very few people. They only graduated two years ago, but they all had changed significantly. They weren't as carefree and reckless as they used to be. What was engraved in the stone since they were born was now happening, even if some of them had decided not to follow their legacy, they were still wearing their family name. None of them were complaining because they were all too well aware that they were over privileged young adults.

When Logan and Finn arrived at the Semple residence, Colin, Steph, Rosemary and of course Robert were getting the dinner ready while sipping wine. They hugged each other, they haven't seen Logan for a year and they were happily surprised that he didn't look as miserable as the last time.

"It's really nice to see you all guys. I missed you a lot" Logan said.

"Wow. I never thought I could see the day Huntz could turn to mush" Steph laughed.

"Shut up Steph, I think you're the only one I didn't miss" He sat next to her, put an arm around her and kissed her on the temple.

"Be careful Logan, don't go any further with her" Colin scowled.

"Don't be ridiculous Colin and pour me a glass of wine. Is it because Robert is hosting that we don't have any beer?"

"There's plenty of beer in the fridge if you prefer" Robert retorted.

"Actually, I'm surprisingly fine with wine, California is starting slowly to agree with me, but I still need to get better at the circling and sniffing stuff. I was actually hoping for a lesson from you"

"That could be arranged, but what will I get in return?"

"A crate of Monte Bello?"

"Sure, that could definitively do the trick, have you tasted it?"

"We just landed a contract with them"

"Go Huntz! You're doing well! "

"Hey, you guys started without me?" they all turned around to see a beaming Juliet walking toward them.

"Juliet! Finally, we're all there!" Not completely. Most of them thought in their mind not daring to say it out loud. They had a delightful evening, needing to feel carefree and cut loose. During the
dinner, they were all dying to talk about Rory's return but they held back because of Logan. When Robert got in the house to get some more wine, the girls followed him with the plates.

"Is it true, you two are sharing your apartment?"

"Yes, it's temporary until she gets back from Europe. After that, she's supposed to find her own place"

"How is she? I feel bad that I lost contact with her"

"Don't, she actually tried to avoid us. It was tough on her too"

"Do you think we can meet her?"

"Of course, if she's fine hanging out with Finn and me, I don't see why she wouldn't be OK. Just avoid seeing her with Logan. I don't think he's ready to be near her, at least not yet"

"Sure, we'll plan a girl's thing"

In the morning, Robert and Finn took Logan for a jog. Running on the beach was a blast. While they were stretching before going back to the house Logan suddenly dropped the matter.

"So, how is it going with Rory?" Robert and Finn glanced at each other not knowing whether they could answer freely.

"I guess she's fine, she's somewhere in Europe and won't be back before August" Robert answered.

"She'd really moved in with you?"

"Yeah, her stuff is now in the apartment." Logan shook his head. He couldn't help but feel jealous. He knew that there was nothing between Rory and Robert, but just the idea that they were sharing an apartment was driving him crazy.

"Logan, you said you were OK with that, and anyway she's not even in the flat"

"And I am fine, I guess... But even if I don't get to see her, since your call, she's back in my head again"

"Logan, maybe Rory coming back in our lives is a sign. If you want her back, it's time" The two friends stared at him but they couldn't tell if Finn's words had hit a cord.

"Had she said anything about me?" Robert sighed.

"The first evening I saw her, she told me that your break up was tough on her and that work helped to get her through it. She told me that she was getting better. She does work a lot"

"And she hasn't dated anyone since then" Finn added.

Logan shook his head "Thanks guys, let's go eat breakfast"

He then ran toward the house. Robert and Finn looked at each other and shrugged.

During the rest of the weekend, no one mentioned Rory, not even Logan. They went clubbing, sailing, swimming, they tried the restaurant of a young new chef. The last evening, they had a bone fire on the beach. Everybody was buzzed but at some point, Steph noticed that Logan was missing. She scanned the beach and saw him standing right in front of the sea, throwing stones in the water.
She pointed at him to Colin and walked toward her blond childhood friend. He didn't even hear her arriving and she softly put her arm on his back and lay a peck on his cheek.

"What's wrong? We haven't seen each other for almost a year and you here by yourself pouting" She said softly.

He didn't turn but smiled a little. Since they were kids, she always was the one who would talk to him when he was down. The non-Huntzberger sister.

"I can't get her out of my head. I thought I was fine again and then Robert called."

"Are you jealous?" She knows me too well.

"Please, don't lecture me, I know it's irrational. I can't stand the idea of any man around her beside me, above all Robert. And before you say anything, I do actually like him now, but not if he's around her" She tried not to laugh.

"Why don't you try to talk to her? Have you called her since..."

"I can't handle a rejection Steph, not another time"

"You do know it's wasn't full rejection, right? You gave her an ultimatum and took her by surprise. Now she had a year to think about it, a year to mature. The guys told me she had been miserable too."

"But she didn't call either."

"Maybe because each time you two broke up you were the one that came back to her. How do you know she's not waiting for your call?"

"I only know that I won't be able to handle another “no”.

"Then you have to move on."

"I was almost succeeding you know, you would have been proud of me"

"Then keep on the good work, big boy. Look how well you're doing by yourself in California. I'm very proud of you. When you'll be able to see the amazing accomplishment you made, you'll have the strength to face the situation."

He finally had the courage to look at her and appreciate her soothing smile. She hugged him and wasn't surprised to feel his tears on her shoulder. They stayed there for a few minutes until he let go his embrace. He wiped his tears with the back of his hand and put the other one on the small of her back.

"Let's join the others. I'd spoiled your evening long enough. So, still with Colin? I didn't know you could keep a guy that long" She smacked his arm and laughed.
Chapter 9

It was a Monday evening so the pub was uncrowded. Robert and Finn were just enjoying their drinks at the bar when a pretty classy blonde with long hair and beautiful slender legs reached the counter. Finn had trouble not staring too heavily. Robert noticed his friend eying and slowly turned around to witness this new addition. He raised his hand to Mike.

"Mike, I'm confident that a gentleman like you is not willing to make this lady wait"

The blonde spun a tad, slightly smiled at Robert and nodded. The guys scanned the bar. She seemed to be there by herself. Finn arched an eyebrow to Robert to seek approval and when his friend pursed his lips and nodded a little. He then moved to stand on her other side.

"While you're waiting for your friend, we could maybe keep you company?" Finn said with his best smirk.

She gazed at both of them and had to admit that she could get much less charming company.

"Why not? But to set everything straight, I'm waiting for my boyfriend. He's just running a little late," she smiled.

"His loss," Robert commented with a wry grin.

"I'm Finn and this is Robert, to whom do we owe the pleasure to highlight our dull evening?"

"Carolyn"

"So, Carolyn are you new in the neighborhood? I would have recalled if I had already seen you here"

"I'm new in Boston"

"Then welcome in town. Where are you from?"

"San Diego"

"Oh! Winter is gonna be hard for you. Maybe you should take our numbers in case you need any help"

"I think I'll be able to manage, I came here to move in with my boyfriend" *This is a three points score.*

"Trust me, the first winter will be tough, I'm from Australia, my ass froze during my first one in Connecticut, you wouldn't want yours to feel the same" Finn smirked. Robert thought that if she would laugh at this lame line, Finn would be in a position to gain some points, and she did. *He's good.*

They chatted for about ten minutes, telling jokes to make her laugh and it worked. Over their time in Boston, they had mastered their gaze. It was focused on the lady just enough to make her feel she was the only woman in the room, but not too heavy so she wouldn't feel played. Carolyn surprisingly felt comfortable with these fellows. She was standing with her back against the counter, Robert and Finn on each side giving her all their attention when a guy arrived, clad in a suit, walking as if he had a stick up in his ass and looking pissed when he saw her with company.
"Hey! Honey..." The guy stared at Finn and Robert with furrowed eyebrows "What are you doing?" She looked a little uncomfortable, mainly feeling a bit guilty because she actually was having fun.

"Well, you were late so I was just talking to these guys, Robert and Finn," she said with a low voice.

"I'm sorry" the guy muttered in a not very convincing tone "Why don't you grab us a table, and I'll get us some drinks"

"Sure" she answered and she left a little embarrassed. "See you guys"

"We were just talking," Finn said.

"Seriously, nothing else" Robert added.

"Excuse me," the guy said trying to ignore them raising his hand to get Mike's attention "A scotch and a gin tonic"

Finn turned back to Robert "Are you still seeing Sylvia?"

"From time to time, she's still pissed at me though"

"Do you still get any?"

"Sure"

"Wow, angry sex is good. Is her roommate Amanda still making a pass at you?"

"She does, but I can't jump into that, I still see them almost every day at Harvard, it could get ugly, Sylvia is very territorial even though we're casual"

"Yeah, but Amanda is smoking hot"

"Sure, she is" Robert smirked. "What about you? Did you have your way with Rosemary in Newport?"

"I was only teasing her, she's with this Ryan guy now. What a jerk. Did I tell you Logan and I ran into him last time I was in San Francisco? I swear he was hitting on a girl but when he noticed us in the bar he left."

"Did you tell Rose?"

"Just that we ran into him. I didn't want to hurt her" Finn eyed at Carolyn and was happily surprised that she was checking him out while her boyfriend was talking on the phone. Apparently, he had trouble hearing his interlocutor so he stepped out of the bar. Finn quickly reached for a sticky note from behind the bar, scribbled his phone number on it, went to the bathroom and discreetly put the paper in her hand while passing next to her. Robert saw her put the note in her purse and smirked. It would be only a matter of days until Finn would get her phone call.

###

When Rory got back from Europe she began to look for an apartment but didn't really throw herself into it, and without noticing it, she slowly quit searching. First, it was due to bad timing. She had to finish writing her articles so she worked long hours, even during weekends. But after a while, she realized that she liked to be living with Robert and that it was actually an ideal situation. She needed that, not feeling alone. She added some personal decoration in the den and it felt cozy for both of them. Life with Robert was easy and they slowly worked into a routine. He was always awakened
first and therefore he was the one who brewed the coffee before going for a run. After sometimes, she began to run with him at least once a week. Of course, Gilmore girls didn't exercise, but he explained to her how it was a shot of endorphins that kept him going to work the long hours. So, she tried and she had to admit that he was right. On weeknights when they happened to be home together, they would watch a movie. Rory would bring the snacks, Robert the wine. That was part of the many aspects that she discovered: Robert was a wine lover and collector. He had chosen his apartment for the wine cellar that was located in the basement. He used to travel to France and Italy to discover new vineyards. The Stooges were more into scotch and as usual, he never bothered them with his passion. He wasn't the jerk that Logan used to describe, probably out of jealousy. Most of all, he became the best male friends to Rory. His intelligence spawned a myriad of areas from history to jazz or science. She learned that at Yale, he'd graduate double majored in cognitive science and political science. This led them to lively debates when their positions didn't match and they both certainly enjoyed that. She liked that she was never bored with him and that it even challenging her.

Robert never asked Rory about her apartment hunting. Every evening, he was looking forward to getting home to see her. He had fun trying to get her laugh or scowl, but the best part was to make her squabble just for the sake of an argument. She was the first girl he knew who could do that endlessly. He definitely enjoyed having her. Who wouldn't be? Even though he never was a playboy like Finn, he dated girls, but each time he tried the girlfriend thing, it didn't last. There were two different reasons: Some girls were just looking for a society wedding. He always gave them credits at the beginning, but after a few days of wild sex, he missed having a meaningful conversation. They were always asking for shopping, clubbing, parties while what he needed were a nice chair, a glass of wine and a book. He would immediately end things when they began to ask to meet his parents. The second reason was that he was a workaholic. He could work for days with only a few hours of sleep. He loved what he was doing. He was about to graduate soon, much earlier than expected. He was also interning for IMPAQ International office in Boston, which probably will offer him a job after graduation. So, the girls always felt as they were second to his work and at the end, they always broke up with him. That was how he came to the conclusion that the hitting game he was having with Finn at the bar was the perfect balance for him, as well as a perfect boost for his ego.

That evening, Rory and Robert were both back home at a reasonable hour so he decided that he would cook for dinner. Rory was setting the table and turning on some music.

"Hey Robert, you never told me what's your family business"

"Investment banking, more precisely venture capitalism, they are specialized in tech companies"

"You were never interested in joining it?"

"Nope, never. My parents wanted us to be independent adults so for them it meant that we had to find our way by ourselves, but they were also opened if we wanted to join them and that's what my brother and my sister did. My mother always said that we could do whatever we wanted, but we had to do it extremely well and that we had to give something back to society. When I started Yale, my father asked me to major in economics though and that's why I started to double major with Poli Sci, but after a semester when my parents saw how miserable I was, they allowed me to change and I switch from econ to cognitive science."

"Your parents appear to be very cool and attentive. Is your mother also working in the company?"

"No, she teaches biology in high school in Queens. I agree, my parents are very cool. Plus, I never have to attend functions and they never bother me with matchmaking. I only have to go to the annual group event as it's organized by my father's family, and some board meetings."

"How come your family is so different?"
"You mean from the Huntzbergers? I guess the only difference is that my mum is working. She did have to change her career plans though. She wanted to do a Ph.D. but after college, my father was sent abroad so after her master she followed him. Not all the wealthy families need an heir to take over. Finn grew in a very close-knit family, he entered his family company by his own free will and he's the only one of the siblings. For instance, your grandfather never asked you to follow his steps either."

"True, but he doesn't own a business. In your case, your brother is going to take over, right?"

"Maybe, him or my sister. They do work at Semple Brothers but they had to work their way up just as any other executive. Sure, nobody will deny that it helps to be a Semple in the company, but he does work his ass off to gain the trust. You know, just like Finn has to do at GMO. We're in the twenty-first century, companies have boards, shareholders. To become CEO, you have to prove yourself competent to do the job. That's why they're working their ass off just like Finn."

"Have you ever met Finn's parents?"

"Few times. Once you've met them you understand everything about Finn. His parents are wild, I don't know if it's typical Aussie, but they're great." 

"How long have you known the guys?"

"I only met them at Yale, at the Life and Death Brigade. I used to have econ class with Finn and Logan, well, when they actually got to class" he smirked. "Both of my parents are Yale alumni. They attended while Mitchum was there. He was a senior, they were freshmen. Actually, my parents met each other at Yale".

"And you were friends with Logan before Yale?"

"Nope, as I told you, my parents never bothered us with society, plus I lived abroad until my junior year of high school when I came back to stay in New York. Logan was in boarding schools stateside."

Robert poured them a glass of wine and tasted it. She could see him smell the wine, moving the wine in his mouth, slightly closing his eyes and then swallow it.

"Try this one Rory, I think you'll like it" he handed her the second glass.

"Mnh... You're talking to me, Semple. This is my stuff, what is it?"

"It's a 2002 Chablis from Domaine Laroche"

"I was never into white wine until you came along"

"You just have to taste the one that suits your palate. I guess you're more a Chardonnay girl than a Sauvignon"

"If you say so, from now on, I'll always let you choose my wine"
October 2008

Rory's phone went off while she was deeply sleeping. She didn't bother looking at the caller ID and answered.

"Rory Gilmore," she responded half asleep.

"Are you okay, Rory, you're still sleeping at nine?"

"Hello Grandma, I finished late yesterday, I thought I could sleep a little on Saturday morning."

"Nonsense," Emily said in an exasperated tone. "Rory, you never bothered answering if you're coming next Friday?"

"I promised you I would unless if I have a late assignment abroad, you know I'm still new I cannot let someone cover for me."

"Don't disappoint me, Rory, this is an important event for your grandfather. Please be there."

"Don't worry, Grandma, I'll do my best."

"See you Friday then. Have a good weekend."

"Goodbye, Grandma."

Argggh! Now she was awake. The last thing she wanted to do was to wear her fake society smile and make small talk with people she didn't care for, and plus having to bear the matchmaking that most certainly her grandparents had organized. She could smell the coffee so she decided to step out to get a cup. Robert was getting ready for his run.

"Hey, beautiful. The coffee is brewing. Care to join me for a run?"

Rory arched an eyebrow "Not today. The wakeup call by my grandmother is all I can take for this morning," she answered grumpily. Gazing at Robert, she suddenly had an idea.

"Okay! I'll come running with you if you do me a favor."

"Anything for you, Ror."

"Be my plus one at my grandparents' party on Friday, please?"

"Oh! no. You know I don't do society parties Ror, plus it will be difficult for me to get out of work soon enough to be in Hartford on time."

"Please Robert, I'm not used to those parties anymore. I won't know anybody and you'll be my knight in shining armor to protect me from all the matchmaking. Please?" and she looked at Robert with her big Bambi blue eyes.

"Gosh, don't look at me like this, it's not fair," I swear it's a lethal weapon. "Okay get your butt in your running outfit and I'll manage to go with you on Friday."

"Yesss! Thank you so much! You're the best!" She put a peck kiss on his cheek and got back to her room to change. Robert sighed. I think I'm losing my sanity.
They decided that Rory would pick up Robert at his office and that they would drive directly to Hartford. Friday morning while Rory was editing papers before leaving, her phone rang. It was Robert. *Shit, he's bailing out.*

"Hi Robert, you're not canceling on me, are you?"

"No, don't worry. I promised you. I'll do my best but I'll be late. The professor I'm assisting just ditched a pile of papers that I've to grade today. I can't be ready for four. Just go and I'll do my best to be at the party by eight. I'm really sorry."

"OK but you're still coming, right?"

"I should be done by 6 pm, I just have to grab my stuff at home, shower and then I'll go directly to your grandparents'. Just text me the address."

"Okay. Thank you so much, Robert, see you tonight"

As she didn't have to wait for Robert, Rory left earlier than originally planned so she could have a little time with her grandparents before the guests arrived. When she came in her room, an amazing dress was lying on her bed. Emily had bought the Tom Ford dress that they saw together when they were shopping at Bergdorf during her last visit in Boston.

As promised, Robert arrived at eight. The party was already in full swing. He scanned the room to find Rory but he was soon interrupted.

"Semple! Man, what are you doing here?"

"Archer, good to see you, man." He wasn't surprised to find a Yale alumnus at this meat market. "Let's get you a drink" and they headed to the bar. He was still looking for Rory and suddenly it was like if he was hit by a train. She looked stunning in her red dress and seemed to possess an aura of grace and elegance. Her grandmother was introducing her to some people, probably a couple of friends and their son.

"Robert! Nice to see you, son, are your parents here?"

"Hi, George! No, I don't think so, I'm just here with a friend" George was a board member of his family's company. *Shit, it will be difficult to get rid of him.* He had to make at least five minutes of small talk if he didn't want to be rude.

When Rory finally saw Robert, she was struck by surprise. It was the first time that she'd seen him in a tailored suit and he sure looked good in this dark blue one with a crisp white shirt. He seemed really confident talking to these people. She was still conversing with this guy that Emily had introduced when suddenly she felt a hand on the small of her back.

"Sorry I'm late hun, the traffic was awful." Robert kissed her on the temple extending his right hand to the guy who was talking to Rory "Robert Semple, thank you for keeping my girlfriend company"

"Kevin Fairchield. I'm sorry, girlfriend?" the guy stared at Rory taken aback.

"You didn't know? We've been living together for four months now," Robert smirked.

"Sorry, what I'm doing here?" Then the poor guy left.

"You're mean," Rory giggled.
"You looked like you needed a little rescuing. Wasn't it why you asked me to come?" He leaned to her ear "You look absolutely fabulous" she blushed and felt weak on her knees feeling his breath and smelling his scent.

"You're not bad yourself."

"Thanks, this old thing? I've got that for years" She laughed putting her hand on his chest.

"So, how is it going so far? Have you found a husband yet?"

"Well, I've been already introduced to three guys and two of them asked for my number, but no serious proposal yet."

"Good score, your grandparents must be very proud, I'm not surprised though. Have I told you that you look totally stunning tonight?"

Rory blushed again "Yes, and for the record, you can consider it counts."

Robert laughed at this souvenir when he took her to Finn's birthday party "You do remember everything don't you?" They only have been talking for five minutes when they heard someone calling.

"Rory, you have to keep making rounds," Emily said from behind them.

"Grandma. Grandpa, this is Robert Semple, a friend from Yale," she introduced him with a reassuring smile for Robert.

"Good evening son, are you related to Semple Brothers?" Richard said extending his hand for Robert.

"Well it's my family's firm but right now I'm attending Harvard graduate school. I believe you know my father, Henri Semple" Robert said shaking his hand.

"Yes of course, a Yale man. I'm still doing business with him. It's always interesting to deal with Henri."

"I'm sure. Mrs. Gilmore, you look exquisite," Robert finished turning to Emily and kissing the back of her hand.

"Oh! What a charmer you have here Rory, please call me Emily," she said with her best society smile "Have a nice evening you two and don't forget to mingle with guests once in a while" she winked at Rory.

With that they left and Robert led them to the bar for a drink. Emily had chosen a Glen Miller style orchestra.

"So, do you think they can consider me as a potential prospect?"

"I'm pretty sure my grandmother is already wondering when she should invite your parents."

"So, just to be sure of course, what about a dance?"

"If you care for your feet, I have to warn you, I'm a terrible dancer, in particular with that kind of music."

"Okay, I'm willing to try anyway."
"You seem quite confident. I think I've never seen you dance when we were at Yale."

"That's because back then you only had eyes for Huntz."

"Or that's because you only bothered to drink yourself silly at parties," she teased.

"That also," he laughed. "Come on, I promise you, it won't be too bad."

He looked quite confident and it worried her.

"You aren't going to do anything extravagant, are you?"

"Not if you let me lead. I know, that would be a first," he smirked. He put a hand on her back and took the other one. She barely put her hand on his shoulder fearing her reaction as her leg bones were already turning to jelly from feeling his hand on her body. They started to move and he locked his eyes with hers. She was startled by his self-assurance and she let herself follow his lead without noticing. Robert was actually a pretty good dancer and Rory was amazed how effortless he was leading her.

"How come you're such a good dancer?"

"I had to take dance lessons with my sisters. It was part of society grooming. I have to admit that back then, I never thought it would turn out that helpful." He smiled while spinning her.

"Well, you haven't forgotten anything. Seriously Robert, thank you for doing this."

"Don't mention it, I already got my part of the deal." She gazed at him lifting her eyebrows.

"You came running with me, remember?" Robert smirked and they both laughed.

They spent a really good evening staying in their own bubble. There were only a few guests left and they still were slow dancing with Rory resting her head on his shoulder. He thought he had developed an addiction to her smell. When the band started "I've Got a Crush on You" Rory and Robert had been dancing for over an hour, but it was like they couldn't be apart.

"Ror, I think it's time for me to go back to my hotel" he whispered to her, very barely touching her ear with his lips, causing her body to shiver which caught Rory by surprise.

"So soon..." she pouted. So Robert kept on dancing. He couldn't let her go.

"I think that your grandparents are watching us." Emily was staring at them with a big grin. Finally, all these parties were paying off. When the song ended, they walked toward her, his fingers lightly grazing her hand.

"Emily, Richard, thank you so much for this wonderful party."

"It's our pleasure Robert, you're welcome anytime. Give our best to your parents."

"I will."

"Let me walk you to your car," said Rory. Emily was ecstatic. He wasn't a Hunzberger, but still, a Semple could do.

When they got to his car she looked deeply into his eyes.

"Thank you, Robert, I had a wonderful evening. I know you don't like these parties."
"My pleasure, Ror. Keep it to yourself, but I actually had a wonderful time," he whispered. She closed her eyes while his words were spreading in her head. She liked his deep voice, which sounded even deeper when he was murmuring.

"When are you coming back to Boston?"

"Sunday, I'll go to Stars Hollow tomorrow to see my mum. Would you like to come?"

"No, thanks, I'll let you have a private time with your family. Plus, I have to work."

"Don't work too much," she whispered, and she kissed him on the cheek leaving her lips a little longer than usual. Robert's heart nearly skipped a beat.

"See you Sunday then," he said, and he got into his car. *Fuck I'm falling for her! It's college all over again. Remember Semple, she's off limits!*

A/N: I know, this chapter is a little *déjà vu*, but it wouldn't be a Gilmore Girls story without a little matchmaking by Emily Gilmore ;-).

It seems that the story gained new readers this weekend thanks to Claudia.

This chapter is also special because it had been edited by anonymousgg16 who very kindly offered to help me.

Therefore, I had two good reasons to add a new chapter today. Hope you liked it.
Rory hadn't been in Stars Hollow since she came back from Europe. She loved her mum, absolutely no doubt about that, but they weren't as close as they used to be since the campaign trail, maybe because they mostly talked on the phone. Her mother was supposed to attend her grandparents' party but bailed out at the last minute because of a crisis at the inn. Rory arrived around 11 at the Crap Shack.

"Mum! I'm home!"

"Upstairs!" *Weird, she doesn't even come down.* Rory went up to see her mum buried under piles of clothes.

"What happened? A hurricane ran across your closet?"

"I'm rearranging."

"I can't even get to you," Rory said. Lorelai finally rose up and hug her daughter.

"How are you, kiddo?"

"Fine, happy to be home for the weekend, it's been too long."

"Yep, I thought you forgot I even existed."

"Don't be so melodramatic, we talked or texted on the phone constantly. So, do you need any help?"

"Nope, I'll figure this out later. Let's go down and have a cup of coffee and you'll tell me everything that happened in your life since you moved to Boston."

"It's gonna be long. Why don't we start with last night? What was that problem at the inn that prevented you coming?"

"Michel freaked out because his dog was sick, so I had to stay with him."

"How is the dog this morning?"

"The vet said she was okay, just pregnant. So back to last night, did your grandparents try to match you with anyone interesting?"

"Well they did try but at some point, I was saved by Robert."

"They invited him?"

"Nope, I asked him to come with me to save me from the matchmaking."

"And?"

"It worked perfectly and Grandma and Grandpa loved him."

"Of course, they did. What about you?"

"Huh." Rory was taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"Do you love him?"
"He's just a friend and my roommate," Rory blushed.

"Nothing else? Do you realize that you're blushing right now?"

"There's nothing else but friendship between him and me, I swear."

"Yet..." Lorelai looked at her daughter with a doubtful gaze "What were you wearing?"

"Grandma bought me this amazing Tom Ford red dress that we saw at Bergdorf last month."

"So, you were looking like that and the guy didn't make a move?"

"Nope, I told you we're only friends."

"Is he gay?"

"No!"

"Would you like him to make a move?"

Rory wondered if she should share with her mother the new feelings that arose yesterday. Maybe it could help them bonding again.

"I don't know. He was quite attractive in his suit and I do feel very good around him."

"Oh Rory, are you falling for the same type of guy again?"

"He's not like Logan, Mum."

"How is he different? Don't you remember how devastated you were? You can't fool me, honey, I know how these families are. Do you really want to get into that?"

"He's not like that, Mum."

"Not right now, he's still a student but in a few years, he'll need a trophy wife just like Logan."

"His mum works, she's a high school teacher, his family is different. She's nothing like Shira Huntzberger."

"So, you've already thought about that?"

"No, we just had time to get to know each other. I invited him to come this weekend but he had to work."

"So, the guy just came to Hartford to be your plus one for an evening and there's nothing between you?"

"No, it's just a favor I asked."

"And what did he get in return?"

"I went running with him."

"Oh! that is a big favor from a Gilmore girl."

"You see, we just help each other." Rory started wondering about her relationship with Lorelai. She felt that she could not have the friendship without the mother judgment. Lorelai wondered if it was
still her place to give her opinion on Rory's love life. She actually sensed that the connection was loosening since Logan.

"You don't exactly have a good track record with pretty rich boys from society."

"You're saying that as if I've dated all Hartford society bachelors. I only dated one. I love you, Mum, and I'll always need you in my life, but I do in such a different way than when I was sixteen."

"It's like you're turning into a different person, hun."

"Mum, of course, I'm a different person; I'm twenty-four, not twelve anymore. I have a job, I'm independent and that's how you raised me to be. You don't even listen, you're only focused on the fact that Robert comes from a wealthy family, of course, he is, but he didn't get into Harvard grad school because of the money, just because he's good at what he's doing. He graduated valedictorian from high school just like me. He was a double major at Yale and he'll probably get his Ph.D. earlier than expected. Moreover, I was just expressing that maybe I had feelings for him. Nothing happened yet."

Rory looked at her mum and felt guilty.

"I know that I only have what I have today because of everything you did for me, and how you raised me. But now I'm raised and I have to start living on my own. I understand that you just want me to avoid the same mistakes that you did, but I also have to make my own experience. Don't worry I'm not his kind of girl anyway. He likes outgoing girls, in particular, the ones who are into sex and I don't fall into either category."

"Honey, I just don't want you to get hurt."

"I know Mum, right now there's nothing to worry about. I promise."

For the rest of the weekend, they managed to avoid the subject. Rory spent the afternoon with Lane. In the evening, they had a movie night trying to recreate their mother-daughter bond but they both knew that they had to rethink their relationship. When Rory got back on Sunday, Robert wasn't home. She saw a note on the fridge saying he was at the library and not to wait for him.

Robert was also struggling with his new feelings toward Rory. That's why he decided to avoid her as much as possible. He thought that these new emotions could disappear if he couldn't see her. Anyway, he got consumed in his work between his internship and the research for his thesis so he was used to burning the midnight oil. Nevertheless, when they were seeing each other at home, they were totally oblivious to the outside world as if they were living in their own bubble. They liked to let each other in on everything. Rory asked for Robert's comment on her drafts, he shared with her new ideas for his thesis. They thought that if their interactions were only work related they would be safe.
"Rory are you home?" Robert asked just opening the door "You would never guess who I met today." Rory exited her room putting her hair up and smiled at him.

"David Axelrod!" Robert looked like a little kid who'd just met Santa. "We had an incredible discussion. The guy is brilliant! We had an incredible discussion about the elections and what would be the smartest first move if Obama was elected."

"My god, Robert, you can't be a Democrat," Rory joked. "It would kill your father."

"Seriously, the guy is brilliant. If Obama were elected, I think a good part of the credit goes to Axelrod."

"What do you think he did that would convince people to vote for a black democrat president?"

"Well I think they didn't emphasize Democrat vs Republican, but succeeded showing that Obama is the "non-Bush" candidate which means new in politics and not like Hillary Clinton. Axelrod always said that America is looking for a remedy, not a replica. We'll see next week, but I'm quite confident Obama will win the elections. Talking to Axelrod was a total blast. I wish he could be on my thesis committee but he won't have time."

"Are you sure?"

"Actually, he's friend with my thesis advisor, that's how I met him. When Franck saw that we were getting along so well, he asked him but the timing isn't good. He will likely be at the White House by that time."

"By the way, you have a FedEx package, I left it on the kitchen counter". Robert looked at the box.

"Oh, it's a birthday present from Odette."

"It's your birthday?"

"Day after tomorrow" He pulled out a bottle of "Habit Rouge" from the box and smiled. "She always remembers," he smiled.

"Your birthday?"

"That and what cologne I'm wearing. We don't see each other much anymore but she never forgets my birthday or what I like." Rory felt a little pinch in her heart but ignored it.

"Who's Odette?" Rory asked.

"One of the musketeers, remember the girl I shared with Nicolas when we were kids?"

"Oh, I just connected the dots. It just dawned on me that the third musketeer is a girl. So, what are we going to do for your birthday, big boy?"

"Nothing, I'm not much into birthday celebrations," he answered absent-mindedly while reading the card.

"What's with you guys and birthdays? Logan didn't use to do anything for his birthday either."
"I don't know when I was a kid my mother used to bake a cake but since I left for boarding school I don't think I have ever celebrated my birthday besides having drinks." Robert shrugged and walked to his room to drop his present and the card.

"Isn't Finn back in Boston tomorrow? We could do something together." Rory tried to keep the subject on.

"If you want. What's your plan?"

"Don't know yet, but keep your evening free of work that day OK?"

Rory shook her head

"What's wrong, why are you shaking your head?"

"I don't know much about you, do I?" Rory asked. She seemed bothered but Robert was oblivious to her mood.

"Yes, you do know a lot about me, actually more than most of the people. You know what music I listen to, that I need to run in the morning to have a good day, my favorite authors, that I like nouvelle vague movies, my favorite comfort food, my favorite wine. Anyway, why does it matter?"

"Because we have been roommates for four months now. I didn't know when your birthday was. I don't even know if you have a nickname."

"That's easy because I don't have any. Sometimes the guys call me Rob. Not everyone has a nickname."

"We all have one Huntz, Finn, Steph, Rose, Jules, Col plus most of the Robert are Bobby or Bob."

"Well I don't know what to say, I guess my parents were not into nicknames. You can call me Rob like the guys if you want to."

Rory didn't really get why she was upset but also, why Robert wasn't interested in celebrating his birthday. He didn't even look at her and only focusing on his present and that stupid card. So, he wasn't used to birthday parties, did it really matter? So, what if he was a cutie... Okay, he's really smart. Then her heart pinched again. What was that? She made a mental note to maybe get her heart checked.

The following day, Robert was coming back home after doing some errands when he ran into Finn in front of his building.

"Hi, Finn! How are you?"

"Fine man, I was supposed to meet Rory at your place."

"Come on up."

They entered the apartment but everything was quiet.

"Ror are you home?" he asked, but there was but no answer. Robert went into the kitchen to unpack the groceries and Finn followed him. He helped him and opened a bag with a box of tampons.

"You bought tampons for Rory??" Finn asked more than surprised.

"Sure, they're not for me," Robert shrugged.
"Did I miss something when I was in San Francisco? Are you guys together?"

"No! She wrote that on the grocery list that she'd left on the fridge."

"And you know which kind to buy?"

"Of course, I do." He answered as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Finn looked stunned at his friend, but Robert seemed totally oblivious to his reaction.

"And what is it with your birthday? Why did she call me? You usually don't want to do anything, we just go to the bar as usual and I let you choose the lady."

"Ask her, she discovered yesterday when my birthday was after I received a present from Odette and she decided that she had to do something about it."

"I'm asking again, is there anything going on between you two?"

"Nothing, nada, bro. I swear and she has never sent any vibe that she had feelings for me."

"But you do."

"No, no, I know she's off limits." *Am I lying to Finn or to myself? "I give you one thing though."*

Finn arched an eyebrow "Which is?"

"We're are very close, and around her, I had let my guard down and it's scary."

"She's good, I never thought I could see that day," Finn pursed his lips nodding.

"It's not a big deal, I don't have any defense around you either."

"Yep but I'm not part of your dirty dreams."

"Arghh, you're sick Finn, can you ever be serious!" He threw a dish towel at him.

When Rory came back from the Globe, she went out to have dinner with Finn. Robert stayed home because he wanted to work on his dissertation. Rory got back around ten and saw the light under Robert's door.

"Robert? Can I come in?" Rory opened the door.

"Sure. You came back early." Robert was at his desk with piles of books and papers on it, with just enough space left for his laptop. He was wearing round frame glasses. Something in her stomach flopped. Weird, she didn't eat that much at dinner.

"New glasses?"

"They're my spare ones, I sat on the other ones," Robert yawned "Think I'm done for tonight."

"I brought you back a piece of chocolate cake."

"You're a sweetheart. So where did you guys go?"

"The new little French bistro near the subway station. Not bad at all."

"I'm gonna have some tea with my cake. Want some?"
"No thanks, I'm just gonna have a last expresso."

They sat on the couch with their feet on the coffee table.

"So, what did you plan for tomorrow evening?"

"That's a surprise birthday boy, you'll get the Gilmore treatment. Just be happy that Finn will be there to share it with you." Suddenly they heard a phone buzz.

"Not mine," Robert said.

"Rory Gilmore." He couldn't hear who was on the other end, but it was probably work. He finished his cake and went to brush his teeth. Five minutes later he saw her on his doorframe.

"I'm so sorry Robert, I have to go to DC tomorrow morning. The Globe DC correspondent broke his arm so I'm going to take over until the end of the elections."

"It's a great opportunity Rory, you should be thrilled. I would kill to live these elections in vivo."

"I am but I wanted to do something special with you for your birthday," She pouted and his stomach curled a little.

"We'll do it when you'll come back, no big deal. I usually don't do anything."

"Sure" She looked sincerely disappointed "I'll let Finn know" She put a peck on his cheek and he felt an odd pang on his chest.
The comparative politics papers were done, so for two months now Rory was sent to different countries in the world wherever the news was hot. But the two weeks she just spent in Somalia were by far the most difficult. She had to cover the Somali civil war in southern Somalia. On the plane back to Boston, she couldn't sleep. Every time she closed her eyes, she could see the famished children, the multiple bodies wrapped in sheets in the middle of Mogadishu streets. She even felt guilty to be able to come back to the US safely. That was the most difficult part of reporting. She had met several people from NGOs, the UN people, a guy from the European Union and got an interview with Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, the Somalian President. She was sure she would be able to write a good article and knew she would be proud, but all she could think of were the Somalian civilians and the tragedy that was going on over there. Above all, her mother was worried sick and she didn't like that her loved ones had to be so anxious because of her. Whenever she had phone service, she would make a quick call to her mum. It wasn't the fun traveling that she had last summer in Europe anymore. It was the real stuff that she wished for such a long time. The job was dicey, everybody knew that, and most major media outlets couldn't afford full-time war correspondent and relied on freelancers. She was then twice lucky to be based stateside and also to be sent abroad without worrying if her work would be picked up, but it was grueling even more for the mind than physically. It reminded her that she should be grateful to Robert for making her run twice a week to improve her stamina. The Gilmore girls' motto about exercise definitely wouldn't work when you had to run from shootings. The plane finally landed and she walked absent-mindedly to the baggage claim area. Once she got her bag, she headed toward the customs then to the exit when she heard someone calling her name. She looked up and saw Robert walking toward her. She dropped her bag and hugged him tightly. "God, it is so good to see a friendly face." Robert's heart pinched when he saw her, she'd lost weight, and had dark shadows under her eyes.

"How was your flight?" He asked trying to hide his emotions.

She knew she had to let go her embrace before it got too weird, but she really needed to feel a little affection in this crude world. She finally ended her grasp.

"I'm so happy to see you. The flight was long, too long. Please, Robbie, take me home" His heart clenched a little again, it was the first time that he heard her call him that. He took her bag and smiled at her.

"You look good Semple".

"You look like hell, but it's good to see you too, Gilmore. Call your mum, I promised her that you would as soon as you landed."

"That's how you knew I was coming back today?"

"Indirectly, she wanted your dad to pick you up but he was on a business trip so he asked me." She called her mum. They walked to the car while she was talking. Robert was watching her quietly. He was so relieved that she was finally safe and sound back home. During the two weeks, she was gone, it had been difficult for him to concentrate. He was hooked to the news 24/7 as if he would be able to have a glance of her even if the Somalian conflict wasn't the main subject on the American news channels. He hated knowing that she could be in danger and that he couldn't do anything to prevent it. He knew her mother didn't like him much, but he was grateful that her anxiousness led him to pick her up. If she would be sent again in a dangerous country, he wondered if it would get easier to wait for her to come back. He wasn't supposed to be worried, he was just the roommate, but
he couldn't help it. *Get over it Semple, be a man, she's not even your girl.*

When they arrived, she went straight to take a shower. He started the coffee for her, ordered Chinese food and opened a bottle of wine for him. He sat on the couch, put on his glasses and started checking his email on his laptop. She opened her room door and saw him focused on his computer. Her heart skipped a beat. *It has to be the sleep deprivation.* It dawned on her that being in this apartment, with Robert around, was now what felt like home. She went to the kitchen and saw that he had already put her mug next to the coffee machine. She poured herself her life elixir and slumped next to him.

"Thanks for the coffee."

He raised his gaze to her and nodded. "I ordered Chinese, it should be there soon."

"You're the best, are you drinking alone?" she turned her eyes to his stemmed glass.

"I didn't know what you were up to. Do you want some?"

She smiled at him. "Yes please." He stood up to reach for another glass. He handed her the glass of wine and sat back just next to her. They stayed silent for a few minutes, both enjoying feeling the warmth of each other simply sitting next to each other. He was trying to concentrate on his emails, and she was only getting pleasure from being home.

"Robert, would you mind watching a sappy movie with me tonight?"

He turned to her with raised eyebrows.

"Please, Robbie?" she asked in a slight begging tone.

"Sure, but only one, I really have to work after that. And please, not *A Walk to Remember.*"

"Deal." She beamed at him and he suddenly felt weak. *She's going to be the death of me.* The intercom buzzed. *Maybe I should try to consider her like a little sister?*

"Okay, pick the movie and I'll get the food," he said trying to get his senses back.

He settled the food on the coffee table with the wine bottle and sat on the couch. He shook his head when he saw the opening credits for *Someone Like You.*

"What?" She said looking at his disapproving gaze. "You're too peaky Semple, you like Hugh Jackman, he's our second favorite Aussie"

"Don't try to pull me into this, I'm fine with the first favorite Aussie and I know it's because you like to watch Hugh Jackman's bare chest." Rory rolled her eyes.

By the middle of the movie, Rory was asleep with her head on Robert's lap. He waited a moment and when he was sure she had totally dozed off, he carefully pulled out of the couch. He went to her room, pulled her quilt aside and came back to carry her into bed. He cautiously closed the door and came back to the living room to clean up. Definitely, he should try to think of her as a sister and he would be fine. Then it struck him that he also used to worry about his sisters. He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. When did his life become complicated once again? He had trouble sleeping at night. He had been doing just fine for a while, everything seemed to be in order, no more drama, just his thesis, friends, and a few ladies for the fun. He couldn't pinpoint when he got derailed from his tracks, but if he was true to himself, it slowly started after Rory moved in.
Colin had to attend the annual Harvard Law conference for two days, so he decided to kill two birds with one stone. Steph would join him on Friday night so that they could have a weekend with Finn, Robert, and Rory. Colin crashed at Finn's and it was fun for them to be roommates again.

"So, Finn, how is life treating you, man?"

"Pretty good actually, I never thought that I would enjoy the working way of life, but I'm ashamed to say that I think I do."

"Weird huh? The more I get into studying law, the more I enjoy it. Please, don't tell my father. Do you think we're becoming adults?" They both laughed.

"So, tell me what's the score between Robert and you? Last time I checked I was kind of surprised that he even the score with you."

"He's not playing anymore."

"Why? He realized he couldn't measure up to you?"

"Don't think so, my guess is that he's falling for reporter girl but he doesn't know it yet."

"What?? What about her?"

"I think she likes him too but again, I don't think these two know what they are feeling for each other. It's difficult to explain. You'll see tomorrow and we'll talk about it afterward. It's like they can read each other's thoughts. If you talk to them about it, they are totally oblivious to the situation and they deny everything. They truly believe they're just roommates."

"Wow. Does Logan know about that?"

"It's just something that I'm feeling is happening. I may be wrong, and nothing happened really, so there's nothing much to say. I do think we're all at a turning point. When we graduated, who would have thought that Logan would break up with Rory or that you would seriously be dating Steph? You two knew each other since diapers and you waited until after college to start dating. You never told me how and when you started seeing each other? I noticed that you missed her during our senior year but it didn't dawn on me that it was so serious."

"Well actually, I always had a huge crush on her but I thought that she only considered me as a good friend. When we were kids I spent so much time at her house some people thought we were siblings. You're right, when she graduated and left for New York I started to miss her a lot, like dreaming about her constantly, it was like she'd invaded my brain. Still, I didn't act on it. The summer after our graduation, when I was traveling with my father in Greece, we ran into her in Santorini. She was with a guy and I got insanely jealous. The guy was constantly touching her and I wanted to kill him. It dawned on me that I was territorial when it came to her. So, I began to rethink my position when I got back and decided to ask her on a proper date. Finally, as I'm at Yale and that she's in the city, it started slow but I think we needed that to switch from our long-term friendship to whatever we have now."

"Oh my god, are you still not able to say that you love her? How long have you been dating her? Three years?"
"Give me a break Finn, get back to me when you'll have a relationship longer than... What? A week? What's the longest you've been with the same girl? And we'll see what you'll be able to verbalize."

"Hey! I didn't say it was easy. I'm aware that I'm not able to commit to anyone, at least not yet. Maybe someday, but probably not in the near feature. I'm perfectly happy single but seeing how it happened to you and Logan, I'm fully conscious that maybe it could occur sooner. Until then, I'm enjoying my life with my friends and the ladies who want to share my bed."

Colin shook his head smiling. "Same old Finn, but we wouldn't like you better if you were any different".

The following evening, Stephanie arrived at Robert and Rory's apartment where they were all supposed to meet before going out. The guys arrived first and were already enjoying some wine.

"Hello beautiful," Robert hugged her.

"Sorry I'm late the traffic in New York was terrible. You look good, Semple."

"Hey, what about me?" Finn asked.

"Always in desperate need of attention, Aussie?" Steph hugged Finn and went to sit on Colin's lap and kissed him deeply "So happy to see you."

"Hey, you're not alone! Get a room!" Finn said.

"Shut up, Finn," Colin replied. "We haven't seen each other for a week."

"Erkk... I don't want weird noises! Remember that I'll be in the next room tonight."

Rory entered while Robert was still by the door pushing Steph's suitcase in the corner. She kissed him on the cheek and move forward to the couch to greet her friends. They were staring at her dumbstruck and glanced at Robert who was walking to the kitchen to take two stemmed glasses for the girls. Finn glanced at Colin who couldn't believe it.

"I'm so glad to see you guys. Have you made a reservation somewhere?"

"Not yet, where do you want to go love?" Finn asked.

"Don't know, but to be completely honest, I'm exhausted, so I wouldn't mind if I didn't have to dress up."

"Same here, would you mind if we ordered take out and just hang out here?" Steph said.

"Deal," said Robert. "We have enough booze."

"In that case, it's fine with me," Colin approved.

"Would you mind if I take a quick shower and change?" Rory asked.

"Sure, and I wouldn't mind if I could too," Steph said.

The three guys stared at the girls with excited gazes.

"Wow, girls you can't do that to us."

"Idiots, I didn't mean together!"
"Steph, you can use my bathroom if you want, there are towels in the closet," Robert said, "Oh Rory, I have your laundry in my room." He went to take the basket.

Again Colin, Finn, and Steph stared at the two roommates. When the girls were in the shower, Colin jumped in.

"So, Robert, what is going on with you and Reporter Girl?"

"What do you mean?"

"Come on! You do her laundry, she kissed you when she entered the apartment, Finn told me you're buying her tampons! Jeez, I don't even do that for Steph."

"You don't live with Steph."

"We've been together for more than two years. But it's not about me. So?"

"We're just roommates." Colin rolled his eyes and gazed at Finn.

"Told you," Finn shrugged

"What about how she kissed you when she arrived?"

"French greetings," Robert answered.

"Because you two are French now?"

"So, what are we ordering, Chinese?" Robert tried to change the subject.

"Do you have Indian? I would kill for samosas," Steph said entering the room. "For the record, I totally agree with Colin. What is going on between you two?"

"Don't even bother, nothing will come out of these two, they are in their bubble, it's like they don't have any clue about what we're are pointing out. Trust me, I already tried," Finn shrugged.

"I have to borrow something from Rory," Steph said and headed into the other room. She actually was dying to talk to Rory about the Robert situation.

"Indian it is," Robert said and picked up the phone.

"Hey Rory, can I borrow somebody lotion?"

"Sure, the bottle is on the dresser."

"So, tell me, how long have you been sleeping with Robert?"

"What?" Rory widened her eyes "We're not sleeping together! What makes you say that?"

"Come on, your body language can't fool me. The way you kissed him when you arrived. He looks at you like there's no one else in the room and he would like to sweep you off your feet. I can't believe that there's no sex between you two."

"I swear to God we're not sleeping together."

"Then how come you two act like a couple?"

"Non-sense."
"He's doing your laundry!"

"We thought it was more convenient to share the same laundry hamper as we're using the same washer, it would be stupid to run our laundry separately. It's better for the environment."

"If you say so. You don't mind him folding your underwear? That's a lot of intimacy for people who don't sleep together" Steph smirked.

"Before he had a cleaning lady who was doing it and he didn't have to sleep with her." Steph shook her head and the two girls entered the living room. Colin gazed at Steph and she gestured her hands to signify that she didn't succeed in getting any information.
Chapter 15

Rory was staring absent-mindedly at her computer screen that morning. She needed to write about next year's Massachusetts gubernatorial elections and the possibility that the actual governor, Deval Patrick, could be running again. Saying that she wasn't inspired was an understatement, no words could find their way to her mind. She was helping the metro politics section while two of their reporters were on maternity leave. The only motivation was that it would be her last assignment before going to Brussels and Paris and cover the future European Union elections. She decided to go to the break room to get a cup of coffee when Bill stepped out of his office and called her.

"Gilmore! Can you come in my office?"

"Sure, I'll be right there just let me grab a cup of coffee." *Crap, I hope he doesn't cancel my trip to Europe.*

She entered Bill's office.

"Please, close the door." *Oh, oh, it's serious.* She closed the door and sat in front of his desk.

"Rory, the editorial board wants to continue the changes they initiated since last year. In that line, they are looking for an experienced journalist with strong writing and organizational skills who would like to be involved in investigative reporting and other long-form projects. I remembered that once you told me that if there was an opportunity you would be interested in joining the Spotlight team. Am I wrong?"

Rory raised her eyebrows.

"You're absolutely right, I have been an absolute fan of the spotlight team since high school. I wrote an article about them in the Franklin, my school paper."

"As you were the Yale Daily News editor, you're not reluctant to do some editing, are you?"

"No, it's not a problem for me," she answered cautiously still wondering what was going on.

"Then, I guess you could be interested in a position of deputy projects editor whose job would be to directly supervise some investigative reporters and work with the Spotlight Team editor on investigative projects involving politics? This editor would also have to share oversight of projects throughout the newsroom."

"I'm more than interested. What do I have to do to apply for that position?"

"Well, the board asked if I knew someone in-house, a fast thinker with strong writing and organizational skills who could be interested. I have to submit some names."

"Please count me in."

"You do realize that the job involves a little management like helping guide reporters and shape the narrative? You would also have to find ambitious stories and no more traveling. You'll be the one staying in the newsroom."

"It sure is a huge challenge but I'm still definitely in even if it I have to stop traveling. How many other candidates do you have?"
"I'm planning on asking Hector Ramirez and Steve Jacobson."

"Wow, tough competition, I do love their work."

"The board wants this project to start soon because the Spotlight team is already on a high-profile story so you should know by this evening. If I were you, I would finish anything that is on-going"

"Got it, boss."

"Rory, you're very talented. I think that you're an excellent writer and that's why I'm considering you for the job because these particular skills that you have are very important to wrap up investigative reporting. Don't be too disappointed if you don't get the position though. You're from far the youngest of the candidates. I'm pretty confident that you would be perfect for the job, but the decision is up to the board. I'm sure there will be other opportunities soon."

"Thank you for the vote of confidence. Don't worry boss, I understand."

Rory just couldn't believe it. She wanted to share the news, but was it too soon? Even if she didn't get the job, she had been chosen among all the reporters of the newsroom, that wasn't so bad. No, she had to concentrate on writing her article first. She was dying to share the information with Robert, a little teasing wouldn't kill. She texted him.

<What time will you be home? I may have something to celebrate...>  

Robert was starting his last week of internship at IMPAQ. He was going to graduate in the same week but he hadn't decided what he was going to do after. He had applied to several post-doctoral positions and IMPAQ had offered him a job, but none of these opportunities were totally satisfying, mainly because he felt that he would do something that he had already done and that he wanted to try something new. After all, he was only twenty-seven so he had plenty of time to try out different jobs. He was seriously considering the post-doc in Oxford as he thought it could solve the Rory situation, but was it a good enough reason to spend at least two years in exile on the other side of the pond? He was coming back from his lunch break when his phone went off. He didn't recognize the number.

"Robert Semple."

"Hi Robert, David Axelrod."

"Oh... What can I do for you, sir?"

"I'll get right to the point, I'm calling to offer you a job on my team at the White House. We're dramatically understaffed. I need sharp, brilliant, fast thinking people and I remembered when we met a few months ago and I think you could be a good fit. I called Franck and he told me that you're defending your thesis this week and that you haven't got a job yet. So, I started vetting you to gain time as it is the procedure for the White House."

"But what do you need me for exactly, sir?"

"As you know, I've been appointed senior advisor to the President, which means that my team is doing the political consulting for the White House. We have to implement the ideas that we proposed during the campaign. I don't make any administrative decisions and I only hire people for my team. You would report to me, but we are working very closely with the other White House staff. I know that you're young and that you've never been a political executive but that's kind of what I'm looking for, someone who can have a fresh eye but who has a strong knowledge in politics. I liked how you defended your point of view when we met and Franck confirmed that you could be a good fit. Where did you intern?"
"Right now, I'm interning at IMPAQ."

"Have you ever worked in public service?"

"No, sir."

"Did they offer you a job?"

"Yes, but I haven't answered yet, I was still considering my options. I also applied for post-doctoral academic positions."

"Well then you have another option, with more hours, in a cubicle in a windowless room and probably less well paid than by IMPAQ, but you will work with the team that will craft the White House policy. How does that sound to you?"

"The best offer to date. When would you need me to start?"

"ASAP. If the vetting turns out okay, would June 1st be too soon?"

"Like in two weeks?"

"Yeah, I know, but did I stress that we are awfully short-handed? In order to gain time for the vetting, will the Secret Service find something bad?"

"I don't think so, besides drunk parties in college, I'm a wine collector, I spent most of my youngest years abroad and I'm on the board of my family company, but I can't think of anything I'm ashamed of even if I guess this is a matter of standards. Maybe it's not the time to be a smartass, Semple."

"Well, it's possible that you could be asked to step out of your family company for a matter of conflict of interest. Would it be a problem?"

"No, I don't think so, I'll have to talk to my dad."

"So, would you be interested?"

"Definitely, I think your offer has reached the top of my list. I was looking to something different than what I'd already done."

"Do you think you could give me a definitive answer soon?"

"Is tomorrow soon enough? I have to see what I can do for the Semple Brothers board issue."

"As you will not have a majorly decisive position, I'm not even sure that they will ask you to do that, but it's always better to be careful. So, you'll call me tomorrow? I hope that by then the vetting will be done."

"I'll call you. Thank you, sir."

"Robert, when you call me tomorrow, please call me David."

"I'll do that. Goodbye."

Robert walked to his desk and sat completely stunned. He couldn't believe the conversation he just had. His life had just made a huge turn in just a few minutes. First, it didn't take him more than a second to accept the job in his mind, but while the afternoon was passing, he started to realize that it would mean moving to DC and leaving Rory. Of course, they weren't an item, just friends, but he
loved every moment he was spending with her. He pondered for a while and came to the conclusion
he had to ask if she was having the same feelings. After all, Logan and she were over for two years
now. Maybe it would not be too hard on Logan. He knew that his friend was seeing someone now,
nothing serious though. But what if Rory was reciprocating his feelings? Would he turn down the
White House job to stay with her? And what about the text that she sent him? With his work and
trying to get his dad on the phone, he hadn't had time to text her back. He remembered that she
turned down Logan's proposal to follow her dream career. Why would it be different with him? Of
course, they lived together, but they were just roommates as far as he knew.

When Robert opened the door, Rory was already home. As soon as she heard him she jumped
toward the hallway.

"Robert! You won't believe what happened to me today!!" She was standing in front of him
fidgeting like a four-year-old dying to spill out a secret.

"I have news too, you first," he smiled at her amused.

"Bill offered me the opportunity to be deputy project editor."

"Wow! Congratulations that's a hell of a promotion just after a year! You totally deserve it. I'm truly
happy for you." Shit, she won't leave her job.

"What about you? What's your news?"

"Well, I also got a job offer...from David Axelrod to work as a political consultant in his team at the
White House."

"Oh, My GOD!!!! It's so incredible!!! Congratulations." She hugged him. They stayed for seconds
lost in their embrace neither wanted to let it go. Jeez, she smells so good.

"I was so happy I lost my shit and went crazy in my head all the afternoon," Robert said still in the
excitement of his job offer.

"When do you have to go?"

"I haven't accepted yet because they still have to vet me, but I would start June 1st," he answered
looking carefully at her reaction.

"You mean in two weeks..." Rory trailed off. Then it dawned on her that it would mean that they
will be apart in two weeks.

"Yes." Robert kept staring at Rory. Say something, Semple. "I'll pay the rent until you'll find a
roommate, don't worry." Really, Semple, that's all you could say? What about "if you need me I can
stay" or "I love you like crazy?"

Her rogue bangs, as usual, had bolted from her ponytail. This time, he didn't refrain himself and
pushed them away behind her ears.

"I wasn't worried about that... I'll miss you..." she whispered with a lump in her throat.

"I'll miss you too, Rory."

"Adult life sucks, we get our dream job but we lose friends."

"You're not losing me, we'll still be friends just not roommates anymore. I'll be at a phone call
away." Robert pulled Rory close to him and kissed her on her forehead. "Please don't be sad. You'll still have Paris here, and Finn still comes in Boston regularly. Our roads crossed once, maybe they'll cross another time, who knows?"

"You're right, you're going to work at the White House for god sake! We have to celebrate our new jobs!" She tried to put on a brave face.

They went out to celebrate but during all the evening Robert wasn't in the mood to. He was physically with her, but his mind was pondering about what he should do. His reasonable thoughts were asking him to let her go. First, she just got offered a promotion that she fully deserved. She was a damn good young journalist and her editor knew that. She'd manage to get to the heart of her job without being jaded that was very rare in her line of work. Second, this work will keep her out of war zones and that was priceless. Last but not least, she was still and always would be Logan's ex. However, there were his emotions or feelings, whatever one called them. Were they one sided? They were getting worse now. Every time he happened to touch her, a jolt of electricity would be running through his spine. It was growing to be torture. He had to run every day at least five miles if not ten, to be in a position to get rid of this tension and muster his self-control. Sure, being roommates didn't help and maybe going in DC will do. Anyway, they were both too young to already clip each other's wings, he had to let her get the job and he had to go to the White House, it was a one-time opportunity that he couldn't miss.

When they got back from their dinner, Rory went to her room to call her mom.

"Hi kiddo, very good timing, I was getting bored, please entertain me," Lorelai said with a cheerful voice.

"I got promoted to deputy project editor."

"Congratulations! How long have you known? You never told me that you were being considered?"

"It all happened today, this morning Bill called me in his office and the board decided this afternoon."

"I'm so proud of you Rory, but you don't sound happy, is there a problem?"

"I'm thrilled mum, it's just... Robert is probably moving in two weeks in DC, he got a job at the White House."

"Wow, when did that happen?"

"He wasn't hiding anything from me, he also got the call this morning and he's waiting for the green light from the Secret Service."

"It's a good thing for him, right?"

"Yes, it's his dream job, working with David Axelrod."

"So, then what's the problem?" Lorelai was afraid to ask the question.

"Just... I think I'm going to miss him, Mum."

"Of course, you're gonna miss him you guys have been roommates for a year. Rory, don't tell me that you fell for him."

"No! Of course not, we're just friends, very good friends, but I kind of got used to being with him."
"What do you mean, you got used to living the wealthy life?"

"Really Mum, aren't you fantasizing about the life I'm living? We do have a totally normal life. We never go to society parties, we don't fly in jets, I still drive the same car, most of the time Robert takes the subway. We're doing our own laundry in the washer in our apartment."

"Okay, okay. I just remember that some months ago you thought that maybe you could have feelings for him."

"Well, I guess I was developing a friendship and I misunderstood the signals."

"Well, then let him go and you'll see again who you really are. You're living in your little bubble because right now he is still a student, not yet indulging his family, but as soon as he's into the working life, everything will change. Maybe he's not going into the family business, but if he's into politics, people like him often end up running for office and then you'll be the society wife. You'd better stop right now when nothing has happened yet."

"Don't you trust me? Don't you think that I can keep on being myself? I did turn down Logan, didn't I?"

"I do trust you hun, but you know, sometimes when you're already involved, it's much more difficult than the theory. Moreover, you get stuck in the situation and it's very hard to keep perspective."

"Mum, even if you're right, you also have to let me live my own experience. Isn't it the best way to learn? I didn't do that bad until now don't you think? Of course, I made mistakes, but at the end, I got back on my feet."

"Yes, you did, and I'm just trying to help you."

"I know you are. Love you, Mum. It's getting late."

"Good night, kiddo, and congratulations again, I'm so proud of you."

* * *

"So, cut to the point, Gilmore," Paris started.

That morning, Rory had woken up still feeling weird after the rough exchange with Lorelai. Luckily her day was busy moving her stuff to her new office and getting to know her new team. She already had worked with some of them. She was briefed on the new investigations so the whole day passed really fast. In the evening, she went to Paris's with a pizza and a champagne bottle.

"All right, no small talk, no 'how are you, Rory'? "

"Come on, Gilmore, you know me better. Sit down."

"Okay, first I brought champagne to celebrate my promotion. You're looking now at the new deputy project editor of the Boston Globe."

"Wow! Congratulations, Rory, that's amazing!" Paris hugged her friend. They opened the champagne and drank to celebrate.

"Somehow, I'm guessing you didn't come for a drink to your success, am I wrong?" Paris asked.

"I came for your advice or opinion."
"On what matter?"

"Do you think there could be something more than friendship between Robert and me?" Rory asked.

"Come on Rory, are you still there? It's been months that you've been in love with him and he fell for you almost the minute you moved in with him."

"That's not true, we're just friends," Rory said and put a huge piece of pizza in her mouth to make sure she wouldn't be able to speak for at least the following two minutes.

"If you're so sure why are you asking? In the beginning, you started as friends. I think he already had a soft spot for you though, since Yale, but then you both changed toward each other. Every time he looks at you, he lights up like a candle. The guy is madly in love with you. Now if you're asking me, you're already have fallen for him."

"No, I'm not."

"Suit yourself, whatever makes you go through your day." Paris rolled her eyes and gulped her second glass of champagne.

"The thing is that he got a job at the White House and he's moving out there in two weeks," she blurted. She still couldn't believe that the perfect life that she was having will have to come to an end.

"Oh... Then what advice do you need?"

"Don't know, I was wondering if I should tell him..." It dawned on her that she didn't even know what she was actually feeling for him. Maybe it was just the fear to lose her roommate? She had never been living alone. Could she just be afraid to be by herself? "My mum thinks that I should let him go."

"Of course she does. Are you willing to start a long-distance relationship with him now?" Paris asked with an arched eyebrow.

"You're right, it's too late or too early. And I still think he sees me as a friend or like a sister. We do like each other a lot, but not like that. He never flirts with me, even Finn seems more interested."

Paris shook her head and sighed. "Gilmore, you still are so naive. Of course, he doesn't show you any signs. He's typically the kind of guy who follows their stupid bro code. He'll never do anything unless Logan gives him the green light which I'm sure blondie will never do."

"Everything is so confusing." Rory hugged her knees and put her head on them.

"I guess it's not the best moment to start something, but I have to say that with time, I kind of like him now. He's much more down to earth than his brainless spoiled friends," Paris said with a more calming tone.

Rory smiled. "He's so much more than that Paris. He's smart, sharp, caring, funny, sweet, reliable and I have to admit, he has an incredibly cute butt," she smirked.

"All that you still haven't slept with him?"

"Why does everybody think that we're are sleeping together?"

"Because maybe you should?"

Rory blushed at the idea. She wasn't ready to face Robert. "Paris, can I sleep here tonight?"
"Sure, I'll get you sheets and a blanket".

Robert heard his phone buzzed and read the text

"Sleeping at Paris's house. Sweet dreams see you tomorrow." He exhaled heavily and kept on preparing his thesis defense.
The movers took Robert's last box by 5 pm when Rory came back home. He only took the furniture from his room and his books.

"Wow, it's looking quite empty," Rory said while looking at the living room shelves. She promised to herself that she wouldn't feel sad.

"Now you can put away all the books that are still in boxes at your mom's." It was difficult for him to be cheerful.

"What do you want to do for your last night in Boston?" she asked.

"Honestly, I'm exhausted. A pizza, a glass of wine and a good night's sleep - that's all I'm willing to do."

"Ok, works for me, let me shower, get into more comfortable clothes and I'll order the pizza, you take care of the wine."

"Okay, I'll do that after a shower too." They both get into their rooms.

Once back in the living room, Robert opened a 2000 Pauillac, not a good pairing with pizza but it was from the only crate he had left in the apartment. He poured the wine into two stemmed glasses, sat on the couch and put his feet on the coffee table. He sipped the wine and exhaled a heavy sigh.

"Oh, it's almost heaven."

Rory stopped at her doorframe and checked Robert out. He had his eyes closed and was wearing dark blue jeans and a grey t-shirt. He was slightly tanned. She felt like her heart was speeding up. She will miss him, all of him. Rory plopped on the couch next to him and tasted the wine.

"Oh my God! This is soooo good."

Robert stared at her. He wanted to memorize her. She was just wearing jean shorts and an oversized t-shirt but he thought she was the most attractive woman on earth. Her damp hair, her slender legs and everything in between. Is she not wearing anything underneath her shirt? He shook his head to get rid of the thought and turned some music on.

"Okay Semple, I ordered the pizza but it seems that you're more in the mood for music than a movie."

"It depends, is it chick flick night?" he smirked.

"Only if you want it to be, I told you it was your night, so whatever you're in the mood for, it's your last night in Boston."

"You're too good for me, Gilmore. Let's just sit, sip the wine, chat, and listen to some cool jazz."

"You're so easy, Semple." She smiled at him and he melted.

For a moment, they were quietly listening to the music, sprawled together on the couch, enjoying their last evening together in this apartment. Robert leaned toward Rory to grab a piece of pizza but at the same moment, she was straightening to take her glass so their faces became very close, just an inch apart. Whether it was the wine or the attraction between them that was pending for months, they
stared at each other and Robert could see Rory begging. Was he misreading her expression? She bit her bottom lip and he looked into her eyes before cupping her cheeks and slowly brushing her lips against his. She closed her eyelids and felt dizzy. He smelled so good, she didn't want to give up the contact. Her desire for him suddenly invaded her brain and every inch of her body.

Being this close to her was intoxicating. His senses were suddenly on high alert. His tongue started to caress her lips tenderly asking her to open them. Part of him, the wise part, was telling him to stop right away. She's off limits man! But as Rory was deepening the kiss and pressing her body against his, his sane thoughts took off while her hands were already roaming his back. Before he could get back to his senses, she gently bit his lower lip between hers teasing him with her tongue. They explored each other's mouths and she moaned into his. It made her realize that it had been too long since she had been kissed that way since she had felt flickers like these. She opened her eyes and saw nothing but desire and lust in his intense gaze and it was the major turn on that lifted any hesitations that could have been left. His fingers were finally touching her, not in his dreams, for real. He wanted to make it last forever. He was slowly driving her out of her mind but he needed to be sure that she was aching for this as much as he was. Take your time, man; it will only get better. He started by running his fingers on the nape of her neck and slowly running them on her collarbone leaving a trail of goosebumps. A soft whimper came out of her mouth. Even though she had waited for his kiss for months now, she wasn't prepared for the sensations it had elicited in her. Her hands played with his hair on the back of his head. Then he started to put butterfly kisses on the side of her neck, reaching her pulse point and eliciting erratic breathing. His hands carefully roamed under her shirt starting gently on her back, running his fingers along her spine. Fuck, I was right, nothing underneath the shirt. He groaned feeling her hands roaming under his shirt. She pulled him up to kiss him and her tongue swept his mouth which triggered a massive jolt of electricity spreading along his backbone. He reacted by pulling her to him as close as possible. In a second she turned to straddle him which sunk them deeper into the couch and started to grind on his already hard erected penis.

"Rory, do you know what you're doing to me?" Robert's voice had lowered an octave which turned on Rory even more.

"Not as much as what you're doing to me." That was it, he couldn't think anymore and he grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it out.

"Damn." He was so attracted to her that it hurt. Suddenly she stood up and stared at him straight in his eyes, darkened by lust.

"Why don't you get condoms and join me in my room?" she said with a devilish smile.

His mouth was dry, not able to speak. He muttered "Okay" and ran into his bathroom. He was already back in her room before she had time to reach her bed. She turned around, starting to strip him naked while covering him with butterfly kisses and pushing him on her bed. She straddled him and kissed him on his chest, swirling her tongue around his nipples, working up to his neck while rocking her hips on his waist.

"Fuck Rory, you're killing me."

He put his hands on her sides and pulled her to reverse their positions. He unbuttoned her shorts and pulled them off along with her panties and dropped them by the bed. He then put feather kisses on her inner thighs while caressing her breasts. She moaned and gripped her hands in his hair while he moved up his mouth to find her nipple making her inhale deeply. While he reached her other nipple with his finger, they both hardened. Her skin under his hands was even softer than in his dreams. She wrapped a leg around him while his hand was finding her folds. She reacted by clutching at him. His mouth left her breasts which made her whimper in frustration, but rapidly found her clt. Her eyes
rolled back while his warm tongue flicked her button and he inserted a finger inside making her buck. She was panting and cursing which made him lose his mind.

"Please, Robert, I want to feel you inside me."

Who was he to deny what she wanted? He reached for a condom but she grabbed it from his hand ripped the package open and slowly slipped on him, generating a deep groan from her partner.

"Enjoying teasing me, Ms. Gilmore?" he whispered while turning and leaning to kiss her. Her arms tightened around him and their tongues started battling for control while he positioned his rock-hard erection in front of her slit. She wrapped her legs around his waist and gulped as he entered as slowly as he could. She squeezed tight around him to pull him deeper.

"Jeez Rory, you feel so good," he whimpered in her ear.

"I can't believe we're finally doing this," she whispered with a breathy moan. He started at a gradual pace, his hands on her hips while she moved instinctively along with him. Her orgasm was building up and she couldn't bear the slow motion anymore.

"Faster, Robert," she commanded. He obliged and thrusted her going crescendo, each time hitting her G-spot. She cried his name again and again, and finally clenched around him which in turn made him cum and left both of their muscles convulsing. He cursed and collapsed on her, panting. He rolled on his back and reached for her hand. They both stayed silent trying to regain a normal heartbeat rate. He looked at her, her eyes were half closed.

"Rory, are you okay?" he whispered.

"It was... Earth shattering, I'm waiting for my heart stop pounding in my ribcage," she slowly answered not moving, eyes almost closed. When he came back from getting rid of the condom, he kissed her gently on her temple and shut his eyes to fall asleep, his hand holding hers. He knew he was a goner. He had never felt such strong feelings and emotions with any other woman.
Robert woke up and his mind was suddenly filled with thousands of questions. What now? He had never felt connected with a woman as he was with her. But was he allowed to even be with her? How will Logan react? Could he be with her when she was in Boston and he's moving to DC in the morning? How will she react to their night? Was it just a one-time thing for her? Did this incredible moment change anything between them? Robert looked at Rory sleeping, hoping to decipher what she could be feeling. He watched her breathing peacefully and he thought she looked like an angel and he wished he could lay there with her forever. How would he be able to live without seeing her every day? Now that he knew how making love to her felt, he wasn't sure of anything anymore. He had never been that conflicted in his life. He feared the morning when he would have to say goodbye to her. He got out of her bed silently and went back to his room and took a quick shower. While the water was running on his head, he realized he wouldn't be able to leave if he had to face her. So, without putting any more thought into it he put his clothes on and hit the road, just like that, without a note, nothing. Not because he didn't care, just because he couldn't face the situation, the what ifs were running through his mind at light speed. What if it was a mistake? What if she doesn't feel the same? He wasn't able to think straight; his head was a mess and he hated that feeling. Maybe a little distance would allow him to gather his thoughts and know what to do. The sun was starting to rise and he cranked up the music in the car and drove. Art Blakey was definitely a good choice.

While he was driving he couldn't stop himself from over analyzing the situation. Of course, over the past few months, he got vibes that Rory could be interested in taking their relationship to another level. Nevertheless, he was too good at compartmentalizing and even if he decided to act as though he was oblivious to the situation, he never indulged. He had managed to set mental boundaries between them, they were friends, roommates. Nothing else, but now, everything was crumbling down. Facts, he had to go to the facts. Rory was his best friend's girl. Not just a girl, THE girl, the one Logan wanted to marry, the one who shattered his heart into billions of tiny pieces. She was Logan's, not his, and he'd betrayed his friend. On the other hand, the break up was two years ago, Logan and Rory haven't had any contact since then. Even if they could have a relationship with Logan's blessing, how would they manage their jobs? They were just starting something that they both dreamed of. Even if Rory would follow him in DC, he wouldn't want her to go to an overseas war zone. At least as an editor she was safe. So that would mean having a long-distance relationship. Was it viable to begin something with both of them starting such time-consuming activities? Jeez!! This situation was driving him insane.

A little while later, Rory woke up and even without looking felt the emptiness of the sheets beside her. She opened her eyes and saw that indeed she was alone. She called out his name but didn't get an answer. Then she smelled the coffee. She put on her robe and got to the kitchen, the coffee was brewed, her cup beside it as usual, but Robert was nowhere in the apartment. She walked into his room and switched on the light. It was painfully empty, but it smelled like him. She went into the bathroom, a wet towel was hanging there, but all the toiletries were gone. He had left. She leaned her back on the wall and slid down to sit there on the floor, holding her knees. Saying that she was miffed was an understatement. What now? She stayed there for a few minutes and all in a sudden stood up to get her phone. When Robert's phone buzzed, he pondered but decided to answer.

"Hello?"

"Where are you?" Her voice was weak, almost trembling.

"On my way to DC," he whispered
"Why didn't you wake me to say goodbye?" Rory asked in disbelief.

"I freaked out," Robert answered sheepishly. "I got scared, panicked. I'm so sorry. I... I've never felt something like that. I don't know how to handle the situation - whatever we're having. I thought... I wouldn't be able to leave you if I had to face you." He couldn't believe what a jerk he was.

"Okay. You'll call me once you're in DC?"

"Sure, I'll do that." Love you. It dawned on him that he'd probably hurt her and he hated himself for that. He had to restrain himself not to make a U-turn and come back to her, hold her and never let her go.

*                    *                  *                *                   *                  *

It had been four days since Robert had left. Rory had dived headfirst into work to stop thinking about the situation. Why was it so difficult? Why hadn't she realized before how much she was close to him? She genuinely thought that what they had was only friendship despite Paris' input. She was always amazed how her former roommate could be so perceptive. However, was she also right about Robert being in love with her? Of course, there was this evening at her grandparents where she discovered that Robert could induce new emotions in her, but nothing happened afterward so she thought she had a slight moment of weakness. Nevertheless, the feelings that emerged that last evening were overwhelming. What was that? And now she missed him like crazy. She couldn't deny that everything seemed right when he was around her. She hadn't been that happy and alive in a long time. When she closed her eyes, she could remember his hands on her skin, and that she felt tingles in her stomach when he caressed her on her inner thigh. Since he left, she was off-centered, imbalanced. So okay, she might have misread her emotions but on the other hand, he had never shown her any feelings other than friendship.

That evening she got home exhausted by 10:00 pm. There had been a sudden volte-face during the investigations her team was working on, so they had to re-think their strategy completely. She took her clothes off and put on a yoga pant and Robert's grey Yale hoodie that she used to wear for running. It's still smelled like Habit Rouge. She sat on the couch and flipped through the channels suddenly stopping on NBC News when she saw David Axelrod on the screen and burst into tears. Then she heard her phone vibrating. Finn.

<I just landed. I know it's a little late but if you're still up we can grab a drink>

She pressed her phone button to call him but she could barely speak. "Finn?"

"Hey Love glad you called." All he could hear was crying noises "What's wrong?" He couldn't hear any answer, just sobbing.

"Hold on love, are you at your place?"

"Yes," he hardly heard.

"I'll be there ASAP." What was that? When he left three weeks ago everything was fine. He knew that Robert leaving would be a little harsh on them as these two clearly got along very well, but she seemed really happy for him. He tried to call Robert but it went to voicemail. Instead, he got a text.

<Can't talk right now. Bit of a crisis here> It seemed like Robert was already diving deep into work.

When Finn arrived at the apartment, he could hear her weeping through the door. He knocked and when she opened he saw that her eyes were bloodshot and her entire body was trembling. Finn felt a tightening in his chest.
"Oh Finn, he's gone," she said, and she started crying again.

Finn hugged her and held her tight in his arms then slowly moved Rory to the couch.

"I know, love." He waited until she'd stopped sobbing. "Why didn't you tell him how you felt?" He asked.

"Because I didn't know until he was already gone. You know it was his dream job. First I thought I was just being selfish."

"And now?"

"It hurts like hell, I miss him so much it feels like I can't breathe when I think about him for too long. It's stupid because we're not even together," and she buried her face in his chest and started crying again. Finn couldn't understand how his two friends managed to mess up the situation in just three weeks. Last time he saw them, they were still both in denial but they were managing pretty well. He had almost convinced Robert to play their game at the bar. If love could lead to being so miserable, it was definitely not for him.
Chapter 18

She finally dozed off on Finn's chest from all the crying. A few hours later, she slowly woke up, still in the same position with his arm resting on her back. God, it felt good to be in his arms. He smelled like... Finn. Safety, peacefulness, serenity. His breathing was slow and she could hear his heartbeat. His flexing bicep looked perfect, a vein showing slightly under his tanned skin. She started to lightly and gently run a finger on this vein back and forth. Finn slowly moved his head, opened his eyes and smiled. Without realizing what she was doing, Rory met his gaze and softly brushed her lips against his. He was pleasantly surprised and deepened the kiss. Rory closed her eyes and gently soaked in the sensation. She opened her mouth, inviting his tongue inside and he gladly accepted causing her to moan in response. She started to roam her hands on his back under his t-shirt, while he put both his hands and her cheeks to hold her face even closer. She then understood completely where Finn's reputation came from as he kept on kissing her in that delicious, defined, confident way of his. Finn thought if they stopped now, it would only be a make-out session, and it wouldn't have any weird consequences. However, to his surprise, Rory stood up and grabbed his hand to pull him into her room. He followed her without really understanding what was happening.

"Love, are you sure?" She looked straight into his deep blue eyes, pushed him onto the bed and lay on top of him gently trailing kisses down his neck. Her deep blue gaze under her long eyelashes was enough for him to discard all rational thoughts. He turned her around and nibbled her earlobe, which triggered a moan from her. He could feel her shiver. At that moment, all she knew was how incredibly good it felt. She put her two hands under his t-shirt and he moved closer to help her take it off. It wasn't the first time that she had seen his bare toned chest, and she was wondering how come that she'd never noticed how hot he was. Finn noticed she was staring at him and she could quickly feel his arousal.

"Love, are you sure you want this? Because you have to tell me to stop or I'll soon won't be able," she said firmly. As if Finn wasn't turned on enough, her bossy tone raised the temperature in the room to the roof within the second. He skimmed his lips down her neck while sliding his fingers on her sides underneath her shirt. He was generating goosebumps all along. Her hands were running down his chest and she licked her lips as they felt the outline of his abs. His nerves were already on fire as he pushed her gently on the bed, and pulled up her shirt letting it down on the floor. He was pleasantly surprised that she wasn't wearing a bra underneath. His hands moved to cup her breasts, his thumbs brushing her nipples, her eyes fluttered open. Surprisingly, she moved him on his back to straddle him which gave him a provoking view of her breasts.

"You are so gorgeous," he muttered.

She leaned over him and then began to place hot, open-mouthed kisses on his neck. He clenched at her hips and closed his eyes as she kept on covering him with teasing kisses. Then she could see his desire growing as the blue of his eyes turned darker. As she slid down the length of his body, trailing her lips down his chest, he shivered as he felt an electric shock going straight to his groin. Encouraged by his response, she did it again and then continued her travel downwards. Her lips slightly brushed over his skin, peppering a trail to his navel. She was surprised how soft his skin was. His breathing became heavier and he closed his eyes enjoying her actions. He felt her wrench at his pants and he lifted his hips to enable her to take them off. She slipped his pants and boxers off at once, her palm brushing against his noticeable arousal, causing him to groan. Her proximity and that amazing smell of hers was clouding his brain, he was aching to touch her. His teeth tightened as her
delicate fingers ran up and down his length. Their eyes locked and he smirked at her mischievous blue gaze. Their faces were an inch apart, their noses barely touching.

"God, you're good at teasing," he whispered as her other hand ran trailed up his chest slowly. Then she started to stroke him gently making him curse. She smirked and covered his mouth with her lips. His eyelids were shut, while he was concentrating on her hands moving over his length with just the perfect amount of pressure. His own hands were clutching the sheets. Her strokes were becoming firmer generating guttural moan as his shaft twitched in her hand, sending a stream of sensations burning down between her thighs.

"Oh God," he groaned loudly when he reached a point when her hand around his erection wasn't quite enough.

"Okay, your turn," he said firmly, suddenly rolling her on the bed. She smirked at his impatience. Her hips bucked up as she felt his hand between her thighs finding her clit and starting to rub it not losing eye contact. She moaned gripping his forearms when he eased his index finger inside her. He leaned down to kiss her. "You're soaking wet," he murmured.

He nibbled on her nipple with his teeth, while keeping rubbing her engorged clit with his thumb.

"Oh jeez," she whispered.

He then switched to her other breast and slid a second finger in her vagina, making her moan. She bucked her hips against his hand wanting to feel pressure, to feel him inside of her.

"Finn, condom, I want you now." He opened his eyes back to reality.

"Right." He immediately reached for his wallet in his pants.

"Let me?" She asked taking it from his hand. She ripped the package open and slowly slipped the condom on his erection, causing him to groan. He grabbed her waist gently and turned her back to the bed while she put a leg on his shoulder making it easier for him to guide himself into her.

She let out a loud moan, her back arching away from the bed, as he entered her, firmly releasing a sigh that powered her desire even more. He filled her up entirely, her tightness around his erection making his mind go wild. She grunted his name while he sped his pace up, her hips meeting his with every thrust. His thumb found his way back to her bud, slowly rubbing it as she slowly went toward the edge.

"Finn, faster," she panted louder as his strokes reached even deeper. He obeyed willingly and she felt her body dissolve into the sheets. She tightened around him so he thrusted harder until her whole body started to tremble before all her muscles went stiff. She shuddered beneath him and he delivered a last push into her before his own body started convulsing while he came which lead to a loud moan escaping his mouth. He collapsed on her, both of their heartbeats speeding irregularly. He finally rolled on his back and they stayed silent for a while waiting for their breathing to return to normal.

In the morning, when Rory opened her eyes, she saw Finn watching her grinning.

"Now I understand why Huntz is so hung up on you. You're... simply amazing." She blushed.

"Come on, Finn, you've been with hundreds of women, I'm sure I'm not that good."

"Love, have I ever lied to you? Believe me." He then turned to her closer.
"Don't get me wrong but I'm kind of surprised you chose me to get back in the game, I would have thought that you'd pick our friend Robert," he said but then he saw her eyes closing and guilt washing over her.

"Love, what's wrong?" he asked worriedly. She could hear the concern in his voice.

"Do you think we should let Robert know?" Rory stammered.

"For the sake of our friendship, I think we do, before anyone gets hurt. Look at how you are because you two didn't talk to each other. I'll do it first if you want."

"You always say that sex is liberating but all I see here is that it's Chilton junior year all over again," she mumbled.

"What?? And yes, sex can be liberating when you take it only for what it is, two people enjoying physical intimacy."

"It's a long and stupid high school story, but it seems like it's repeating again. To make a long story short, just after I broke up with Dean, I kissed Tristan but then I dated Dean again and I had to tell him that I kissed Tristan before Tristan told him," she ranted.

"Okay, okay slow down kitten. I'm not sure I'm getting everything here. Who besides me, do I have to factor in the 2009 version of your story? Are we talking about Logan or Robert? I guess you meant Robert but then it means that I need an update on your relationship with him. And, are you referring to the same Dean that broke up with you when we met at Yale?"

Rory felt a lump in her throat. He saw tears escaping her eyes and wiped them away with his finger but wondered what he had said. He pulled her to his chest.

"What's wrong, Love? I thought we had stopped the crying."

"Well, the day before he left...." she sighed, "when the movers took the last box, we were having a pizza on the couch and at some point, he was reaching to grab a piece and... his face was so close to mine, he gazed at me and all of sudden we were kissing and... we had an amazing night but when I woke up he was gone without a word, a note, nothing."

Finn was taken aback. "Love, maybe you should have told me that before, don't you think?"

"Yep. I'm sorry. It sucks."

"No, it doesn't. You're not in high school anymore. Robert and you can make it work if you both want to. Robert is not Dean, and I'm not whoever the other guy was."

"It's like I'm back to square one again."

"Rory, you're only twenty-four, it's not like your life was over. You're exploring. So, what do you think you needed me for? Scratching an itch? Don't worry kitten, I won't be offended."

"No, I don't think so, I felt like I was driven by need... to feel better," she stammered. "When I'm with you, it is as if I were...carefree, all my worries are lifted up and I'm feeling emotions that I'm not used to. Oh... I'm sorry Finn, I don't really know why I did that, I really like Robert you know."

"I know, kitten. It's okay, I like when you get bashful. You see everything is totally natural."

"You see Finn, that's the sensation I was talking about, I think because you're comfortable and secure
in yourself, I feel safe and relax with you, and sleeping with Robert, it was as if he'd opened the Pandora's box and all my emotions were out and everything was confused. I do like you too, you know, a lot."

"Then I'm your therapy and there's nothing to feel bad about."

"Do you think he'll resent me?"

"I don't know darling, but I'm sure it's gonna be okay. I'll talk to him, but you have to help me here. Have you two talked since he left?" he asked gently.

"Briefly. He told me that he freaked out but that everything was OK and that he had to get settled in DC and then he'll get back to me."

"And did he?"

"Not yet but it's only been four days."

"I got a text from him yesterday that he was handling a crisis at work. Okay, let's make today a "feel good day" for you." Finn looked at her in the eyes and stroke a bang behind her ear.

"What do you mean? I get to wallow?"

"Nope, darling, no wallowing. I think you've been doing that for four days now, it's time to get to the next level which means that you're going to shower while I'll prepare breakfast and then we are going to do some yoga."

"What??? Yoga? Are you delusional?" she stared at him in disbelief.

"Why? I promise you will feel better after that. Robert never took you to yoga with him?" Finn asked arching an eyebrow.

"Nope, he knows me too well. He asked me once but I thought it was a joke. He really did go to yoga?"

"Of course he did, we used to go together."

"So, every time he'd told me he was going to yoga, he actually did go to yoga then. All this time I thought it was a code name for something he didn't want me to know."

"Like what?" Finn asked intrigued.

"I don't know, it was often on Sunday morning so I was asleep a hookup?" Finn laughed.

"What have you done of my college buddies Finn?"

"We're not in college anymore if you haven't noticed, we haven't changed that much though, just doing new stuff."

###

When they arrived at the yoga studio, Finn slid his card in the card reader and proceeded to the lockers where they left their shoes. The practice room looked very soothing with brick walls and white curtains to filter the sunlight. Several people were already in the room setting their yoga mats on the hardwood floor. Finn headed to a gorgeous woman in her fifties.
"Hi, Denise."

"Hello Finn, it's been a long time, good to see you."

"Yes, I've been out of town for a while. Can I introduce you to my friend Rory, I convinced her to come and try yoga."

"Nice to meet you, Rory."

"Me too, this is very new to me, I hope I'll be able to do something, I'm not a very... athletic type of person"

"Don't worry, in this class we're only doing relaxing yoga, the goal is to improve feelings of calm and reduce your stress. Just do whatever you can, it's not a competition."

"I guess I can do that," Rory smiled shyly.

"Let's get settled, love."

Finn handed her a yoga mat and they found a place in the room. Rory couldn't help noticing that several young women seemed to know Finn. The class started and Denise talked with a soft and soothing voice, explaining how to position and Rory just had to follow her instructions. Sometimes, Denise would gently re-adjust Rory's pose but for most of the time, she seemed to do pretty well. Her mind was focused on Denise's voice and she could feel the tension fleeing out of her. By the end of the session, she sensed it was indeed pretty relaxing.

"So how do you feel now?" Finn asked while rolling his yoga mat.

"Pretty good actually, I have to admit that you were right"

"Hi, Finn," a cute redhead winked at Finn while passing in front of them "You still have my number, right?"

"Hey Molly, I was out of town. I'll call you," Finn answered when a leggy blonde came along.

"Hey Finn, I haven't seen Robert for a while. Do you know if he's around?" she asked.

"He moved to DC last week so I guess he won't be coming to yoga anymore, sorry."

Rory smirked. "Okay, Finn, she's been at least the sixth woman who seemed to... know you. Is there something other than yoga here?"

"Okay, to tell you the truth the first time Robert and I hit yoga was to hook up. That morning we were at the coffee shop and we noticed a lot of beautiful women were going in and out of the yoga center. So, we thought it was a good change from women we used to hit on in bars, but then we started to indeed like yoga."

Rory laughed.

"That's more like my college buddies, you should have started with this story, I would have believed it right away."

They had lunch together and then Finn went home. He was relieved he did have to study for his Chartered Financial Analyst exam that was coming at the end of the week so he didn't have to find a lie to avoid Rory, but he definitely had to talk to Robert. Why did everything suddenly become so fucking complicated?
Chapter 19

Finn just got out of a meeting when he felt his phone vibrating in his pocket. Finally, Robert was calling him back.

"Hi man."

"Sorry I couldn't call you before. It is madness here, I haven't left the office for two days so I had to sleep a bit before anything else. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, nothing to worry about anymore."

"So, was there a specific reason that you called?" Robert asked.

"Well, have you talked to Rory?"

"Not since the day I left. She's my next call. Why?"

Finn sighed, entered his office and closed the door. This was going to be a tough one. "When I called you that night, I had just hung up the phone with her and she was crying so I was wondering if you knew what was going on."

"Why, why was she crying?" Robert started to feel the guilt invading his brain.

"Come on man, you seriously have no idea?" Finn sighed.

"Well okay, we slept together but...." Robert admitted.

"She was devastated, man!" Finn yelled exasperated.

"She was? Why? I was never my intention to hurt her, but she never said anything, you know. She told me to take the job so I thought she didn't have the same feelings and I was kind of relieved anyway because she's off limits, you know, Huntz..." Robert rambled.

"I know man, but once you left, it seems that she realized that she cared for you more than she would admit." Finn cooled down. He felt bad for his friend who was probably hurting.

"Holly shit."

"Mmm-hmm. There's more."

"More?" Wheels were turning insanely quick in Robert's head. What could be worse than hurting Rory and having missed that she cared that much for him?

"I don't know how to tell you this..." Finn trailed off.

"Come on, spill it, Finn. I've never known you to beat around the bush. It can't be worse." Robert sighed.

"I slept with her," Finn said barely audible.

"What???? Are you kidding me?"

"I'm sorry man, even I still don't understand how it happened. One minute she was crying and I was
hugging her, then we fell asleep on the couch and the next thing she was touching me, kissing me and I lost control. At that moment, I wasn't aware that you two had slept together. *He's going to kill me.*

"I know man, it's impossible to resist her," Robert muttered.

"You're not mad at me?" Finn was dumbstruck, without any doubt, Robert was the most forgiving friend ever.

"Of course not, she's not my girl. I know too well that it's absolutely impossible to get close to her without wanting her," Robert whined.

"We have to stop seeing the same girls man, it's getting weird."

"I know. So, what do we do now?"

"You have to talk to her seriously and figure out what you two want to do."

"Okay, you're right, I'm calling her right away. Thanks, Finn."

"For what? Sleeping with her? It was my pleasure man."

Robert laughed. "No, smart ass. For being a friend and not judging me," Robert said, truly grateful.

"I could say the same. Now hang up and call her." Finn shook his head.

Robert couldn't believe the mess he was in. How was he going to get out of it without hurting anyone? He took a deep breath and called Rory. It rang four times before she answered leaving him too much time to think. *Pick up please or I'll lose my shit.*

"Hi, Robert," she answered with a small voice.

"Rory, I would like to apologize for my stupid behavior. I shouldn't have left like that, please forgive me," he said sheepishly.

"It's okay, Robert, don't beat yourself up. You know what they say, it takes two to tango."

"I wasn't talking about what we did together. That, I don't regret any bit of it. I'm referring to me leaving like a thief. I freaked out. I've never had such strong feelings for anyone, I couldn't think straight. It's so not me, I always thought that I had everything under control, until now all the decisions I had to make were clear-cut, but what I felt for you that night was completely unexpected, totally mysterious to me and I was unable to understand. It had never happened to me, I didn't know how to react, what to do."

"Stop, Robert. I said it was okay, enough rambling, you're scaring me, I'm the one who used to ramble, don't you remember? Not you, you're supposed to be the rock." *My rock.*

"I'm sorry Rory, I shouldn't have left like that. And... I talked to Finn."

"Oh, and...?"

"He told me. I was surprised but I'm fine. It's not as... well I understand that the situation was confusing. You two are my best friends and I totally get it. I'm in DC now, he'll probably be in Boston more often and well, he's Finn."

"Oh my God! Robert! It's so not like that!"
"It isn't?"

"Okay, I was bewildered, I do like Finn a lot, but nothing like what I'm feeling for you, idiot. Do you really think that what we shared can be compared to what I had with him? It was just a spur of the moment in my confusion after you left, I'm not very proud of myself about it. I know you two are very good friends."

"Don't worry about Finn and me. We talked, we're fine, I trust him when he said that nothing was planned, and I do believe you too."

"Well, I'm kind of surprised."

"You are? You'd rather see me mad?"

"No, I'm pleasantly surprised. I'm just used to jealousy and yelling. Well, I guess the rock is back." He could feel her smile over the phone.

"Maybe talking to you put me back on the ground."

"We still have to talk about us though."

"Right, I guess we've passed the friendship level."

"I suppose we could say that, but where do we stand from now? How do you see where it's going as we both started a new job and we're more than four hundred miles from each other?"

"Thanks for straightening the facts. What about we get a hold on this and try to talk about this face-to-face? Work is kind of crazy here, but as soon as I have a free weekend I can fly to Boston. What about you? You often come to DC for work."

"I'll see what I can do. I guess you're right; we have to see each other."

"Okay, I have to go now. I miss you, Rory"

"I miss you, too." She hung up and sighed.

Finn was right, she thought, it seemed they could work on their situation. When did he become the wise guy? Was it yoga again? Now that Robert and she acknowledged that they were more than friends, they could figure something out. Nevertheless, they haven't talked about the Logan issue. Now she also had to decide if she wanted to date Robert. Was it time for a pro/con list? Was she in love with him? Rory was completely lost. How did she end up in that situation? Finally, sleeping with Robert didn't look anymore as the worse unsolvable situation but falling in the arms of one of the Yale Casanova was. Everybody thought she was a smart woman but over just in a week she had proven to be just as brainless as any bimbo. She used to believe that she could be in total control regarding men. She got that from her ability to turn down the King of Chilton and she happened to be proud. Nevertheless, looking back, maybe she was saved by Tristan leaving to military school because in college, she fell for the other Yale Casanova. Now that she was supposed to be a grown woman, she'd reached rock bottom. Finn didn't have to do anything, just feeling his body against hers, smelling his intoxicating scent, she was a goner. Was she experiencing the power of lust? Just thinking about him and his gorgeous self, his gaze just before they kissed, made her shiver. How did this happen? A week ago, she was fine and now she couldn't be more confused. She hadn't had sex in two years and now in only a week, she had slept with two men. She was probably in love with Robert and was aching for him but also slept with his best friend. Not mentioning that she was their ex-best friend. Was she two-timing Robert? The only explanation that came to her mind was that she had lost her head. Should she see a shrink? She needed help. She couldn't share this problem with
her mother, definitively not. Paris had a double shift and lately wasn't receptive to her woes. It was too late to call Lane, the twins were probably asleep. Maybe Sophie from work? No, they weren't close enough for this kind of story. She was too ashamed to be sharing with anyone else. She needed to take a step back and put some perspective. Maybe she was too dramatic after all Finn and Robert didn't make such a big fuss about what happened and perhaps she shouldn't add more tragedy where they didn't see any. She just had to consider what happened with Finn for what it was, two consenting adults having fun, no strings attached. She hadn't cheated on Robert as they weren't together. Therefore, she had to stop beating the crap out of her and worry about what really mattered. In the end, she always ended to the same question: Did she want to start a relationship with Robert?
A week later, Rory was assigned an interview of the majority leader Harry Reid in DC in order to complete an investigative article. She decided it was the sign she needed to see Robert again and talk face to face.

Robert was in his office and saw the caller ID. He hesitated to answer but when he finally decided to take it the call was already through voicemail. No message. Five minutes later the team assistant buzzed him.

"Robert, there's a Rory Gilmore from the Boston Globe on the phone. Do you want to take the call?"

"Okay, pass me the call." He heard the line connect. "Hi, Rory."

"Robert, please don't avoid me."

"I'm not avoiding you, I wasn't just fast enough to pick up my phone."

"I'll be in DC tomorrow; I have to interview Harry Reid in the morning. Do you think you'll have time to see me in the afternoon?"

Robert gulped. I have to take my head out of my ass and face the situation. "Sure. When would be convenient for you? When do you have to be back in Boston afterward?"

"I can email my article and stay over the weekend but I have to be back for the Monday morning meeting at 8...."

Come on Semple, man up. "Okay, call me when you're done. Do you want to crash at my place? Don't worry I have a guest room." She didn't answer. He could hear the wheels turning in her head.

"Don't overthink this, Rory, if it doesn't go well you can still leave," he said with a confident tone that surprised him.

"Okay, let's do that. I'll call you tomorrow."

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While she was waiting for Harry Reid, Rory texted Robert.

<Waiting for Reid right now. Should be ok for lunch>

<I'll wait for you in the Congress lobby at 1 pm>

The interview went well so Rory was kind of relieved that she could focus on meeting Robert. She was a little nervous and started fidgeting in the elevator. She checked her look in the mirror and she thought she was dressed for an interview, not to meet... who was he now? A potential boyfriend, her ex-roommate? Her best friend? Her casual lover? She was brought back to reality by the "bing" signaling that she had reached the lobby. When she exited the elevator and scanned the lobby, she saw that Robert was already there talking to a tall guy, kind of cocky, very DC type. Since her grandparents' party, it was the first time that she could see Robert in a suit, so formal with a tie and properly shaved. He wasn't the student anymore, but a political executive of the White House. Even though she had just interviewed the majority leader, she couldn't help being a little impressed by the assertiveness emanating from Robert. While she was approaching, she could hear that they were
talking seriously about the government policy on private fund advisers.

"Hey, Ror," Robert smiled at her, put his hand on her back and gave her a peck on the cheek. "Rory Gilmore from the Boston Globe, Greg Metrack from Holland & Knight."

"Nice to meet you," she said with her most professional tone.

"Already dealing with the press, Robert? The pleasure is for me Ms. Gilmore," he gazed at her.

"Rory is an old friend from Yale and the deputy editor of the investigative team. She was there to interview Harry Reid."

"I'm impressed, Ms. Gilmore" Greg nodded pursing his lips. He then turned to Robert "Maybe we can have a drink next week and tell me whenever Charles is in town."

"Sure Greg, see you."

Once he had left, Rory relaxed and smiled shyly at Robert.

"Also working with lobbyists?" she asked.

"Not really, he's just a friend of my brother," he answered dismissively. Then Robert swiveled to Rory.

"Let's grab some lunch; I'm sure you're starving." He grinned at her. "I missed you, Gilmore," he whispered in her ear, which sent shivers all along her spine. "Let me take your suitcase."

At the restaurant, the embarrassment they felt at the onset of their meeting quickly faded and they rapidly fell back to their old habits, just like how they were in Boston just two weeks ago. They caught up on what was going on with the gang, Colin graduating from law school and taking the bar, Juliet who landed an amazing job in Seattle, Rosemary being promoted at Christie's. They weren't the carefree brigadiers anymore, they had all stepped into real life.

"Do you mind if I get rid of my tie?"

"Of course not, but don't you have to get back to the office?"

"Nope, when I left David told me I could take my afternoon off as I worked 24/7 since I arrived."

"Even during the weekend?"

"Yep, they were short of people that's why I was hired. So, how long do you need for your article?"

"I guess three hours tops."

"How about I take you back to my place so you can work in my study and then we'll have all the weekend for us? While you'll be writing, I'll go for a run. I haven't gotten the chance since I arrived."

"Sounds good." She smiled at him. It was difficult to know how to engage in THE conversation, maybe it'll get easier once she had the article out of her mind. Anyway, they still have the whole weekend.

In the cab, he got a phone call. She couldn't hear what was the person saying on the other end of the line, but the voice sounded panicked with a baffled line of questions.

"I understand, yes I can handle this," he said simply, cool and confident. "It'll be done by four."
voice seemed to calm down, he hung up and pocketed his phone. She realized that she loved that self-assurance, that refusal of opposition.

"Work?" She guessed.

"Yep. Don't worry, it won't change our plans. I'll just have to drop by, fix a few things and I'll come back. You won't even notice that I'll be gone." He smiled gently at her. Boy, I missed that smile so much.

They arrived in front of a small brownstone in a quiet tree-lined street. Robert opened the door of his apartment and let her in. There were still quite a lot of boxes piled up but the apartment seemed nice.

"Sorry for the mess, I haven't had much time to unpack since I arrived. Thankfully, the apartment was partly furnished. I didn't know where we stood so I prepared the guest room for you," he said sheepishly. "You can use my study over there, the Wi-Fi code is on the box, help yourself to the fridge, and as the weather is pretty nice if you like there's a little patio in the back with comfortable chairs."

"It's really nice and cozy," Rory stated looking around.

"Yeah, it is, even if I mostly chose it because it's not far from the White House. Okay, this a key for you if you need to go out. I promise I'll be back by five at the latest."

"See you later." He wanted to kiss her but he refrained himself and left.

**********************

It was a warm evening and they had dinner in a nice patio restaurant recommended by Robert's colleagues. He was telling her about his job and she loved listening to his enthusiasm. He was clearly enjoying his work even if he had to burn the midnight oil constantly. She had the impression he was living in reruns of The West Wing. Whether it was the warmth of the summer, the sunset light, or just being there with her, all he could think was that he felt happy. The wine started to show its effects. He had momentarily forgotten that they weren't living together anymore, that they haven't yet discussed their situation, he wanted to enjoy the moment and pretend that they were only there for each other. He was drifting from reality and dangerously pretending that none of their issues mattered. He was also slowly losing control of his body and emotions. He was captivated by her and thought that the candlelight reflection on her face had the most gracious effects on her facial features. He was mesmerized by the reflection of the flame in her eyes. Could she be more beautiful? They started to eat their dessert, but soon Robert's gaze was caught on her mouth instead of his plate. She turned her spoon over inside her mouth, and licked the chocolate on it, while she slowly pulled it out between her lips. The slight moan she made turned him on. Just looking at her almost drove him over the edge to insanity, and the sexual tension between them was building up fast. In vain, he tried to get rid of it by gulping a glass of ice water. He was staring at her but she seemed oblivious to his flutter. She put another spoon of her chocolate soufflé in her mouth and closed her eyelids.

"This dessert is an absolute pure pleasure," she whimpered.

He nearly got a hard on just like that. When she spotted his stare, she gave him a gritty smile and arched an eyebrow.

"What? Do I have chocolate on my face?" She tilted her head.

"No, I'm just dying to be able to kiss you right now," he said in disbelief. Was she that innocent? She grinned back at him.
"Then maybe we should go back to your place."

"Thank god!"

Robert took care of the bill in no time. He pulled her chair, put his hand on the small of her back to head out of the restaurant and she felt weak in her knees just feeling the warmth of his touch through the light fabric of her dress, but tried to keep her composure. They then arrived at the car and he leaned to open the passenger door, her smell intoxicated him and all he could think of was pushing her back on the car and kissing her wildly. She smirked noticing him trying to keep his self-control. She wondered why he hadn't kissed her yet, but she decided to let him take the lead. In the car, she looked at his hands, she wanted to touch them and suddenly, she felt that she too had trouble restraining herself. What was this game they were playing? They were quiet in the car keeping their concentration. It was like if they were testing who would have the strongest willpower to resist their desire for each other. Even though not a part of their bodies was touching, she could still feel the sexual tension getting thicker. They got out of the car and walked to the apartment still in silence. Robert opened the door, but they kissed as soon as they had closed the door. The make-out session was hot, their tongue battling, their hands needing more and more skin to touch. Suddenly Robert took over, pushed Rory against the wall and pinned her hands above her head.

"No more touching, Ms. Gilmore," Robert whispered in a commanding tone with his deepest voice which turned her on. She was a little short of breath and her eyes were sparkling, surprised by his new reaction.

"Now spread your legs." He locked eyes with her. They hadn't switched on the lights, so they were staring at each other under the street lights through the windows. While keeping a hand holding hers, he slowly ran the other under her dress. She moaned when he started to play with the hem of her panties. He rested his forehead on hers and she could see that his eyes had considerably darkened with lust. He talked to her with his huskiest voice.

"You were trying to tease me at the restaurant and you think that you have the lead, don't you?" She did her best to maintain her composure, but she knew deep inside her that she would give in very soon.

"I wasn't trying to do anything, mister, that was all your imagination," she smirked.

"Is it also my imagination that you're soaking wet?" His thumb was gently rubbing her clit while his index finger was playing with her folds. She needed him to stop talking and to be able to feel him under her hands.

"Uh-huh," was all she could make come out of her mouth. He was driving her insane and her legs were turning into jello. Suddenly, he pulled out his hand causing her to open her eyes surprised and whined at the loss of contact. He grabbed her calf so that her foot was resting on the wall and re-entered her with two fingers. He moved them to the top wall of her vagina still stimulating her bud with his thumb. Then he stopped looking satisfied.

"Here it is," he smirked. He began to rub her inner rough spot eliciting loud moans this time. Her breathing quickened and he finally kissed her, open-mouthed and heated, his tongue playing with hers only for a short instant.

"Tonight, I'm going to drive you over the edge like you've never had." At that precise moment, she had absolutely no doubt about that, because her legs were already trembling, her whole body arching up and he felt her walls clenching around his fingers. He immediately covered her mouth while she was screaming his name. How did he do that? Her heart was still pounding hard when he grabbed her butt and she automatically wrapped her legs around his waist. He carried her and put her on the
kitchen island. She threw her arms around his neck, raked his hair with her fingers and claimed his lips while he was unzipping her dress. She sucked his lips and her tongue explored his mouth. He gasped at the passion she was giving, it seemed that she could never cease to surprise him. He unhooked her bra, shed it on the side and roamed his hands to her breasts. He played with her nipples for a moment and then switched with his tongue. Her hands ran through his hair keeping him close. In the meantime, he grasped her panties and she moved so he could pull them off. Feeling him, all of him, over her sent multiple shivers through her body. On his side, her soft and smooth skin, her incredible scent drove him so hard he had to get rid of his pants. He took a condom out of his wallet and put it on the island. He started to unbuckle his belt when he felt her hands and he let her do the job. As soon as his pants dropped on the floor, he felt her hands reaching for his cock, caressing his balls.

"Holy shit," he cursed at the sensation. She smirked feeling that she too could make him lose control. She then took the condom out of its wrapper and rolled it on him. He gently laid her down on her back, slid his hands under her thighs and lifted her legs to rest them on his shoulders. He then pulled her butt to tilt her pelvis upward in order for their bodies to meet. The feeling of his rock-hard member made her grind on him begging for friction. He groaned placing his hands under her hips so he could hold her close and enter her in a single firm thrust filling her up completely and generating a satisfied squeal from her. She felt unbelievable, tight, warm, pure bliss. He would never want to get out of her. He then started to slam into her relentlessly, at a regular pace, until he was satisfied with her progress. Her nails were digging in his back. Each time he was hitting inside she would moan a little louder. He thought he never had such a need to please a woman.

"Harder Robbie, harder!" Hearing her command him made him snap and he just pushed even harder into her. She cursed and climaxed, her pussy clenching on his cock drove him over the edge and with one last assault he emptied into her. Her heart was bouncing hard in her rib cage but she didn't try to stop it. Instead, she was lying still amazed by the orgasm she just had, just trying to breathe. She felt Robert coming back after discarding the condom and he carried her to the couch. He snuggled and put his head on her neck. **What could feel better?**

They kept on pleasuring each other multiple times christening different part of the apartment to finish in his bed. Even though they had made love together only once before, it was like they knew all the moves that would drive them to the edge.

Sometime later, after they'd both collapsed of exhaustion, he turned on his side to look at her. Feeling his gaze, she also spun to face him and lock eyes with him. They were both grinning without a word. He stroked a lock of hair behind her ear and kept sliding his fingers along her side. They fell asleep smiling at each other.
Chapter 21

On Saturday morning, Rory opened her eyes, feeling light-hearted and rested despite her intense nocturnal activities. She was lying on her side, Robert spooning her, his arm resting around her waist, breathing slowly on the back of her neck. She intertwined her fingers with his and she felt him squirming to be even closer.

"Good morning beautiful, how are you today?" He softly kissed the back of her neck.

"Good morning, Robbie. I'm feeling amazingly good." She couldn't help smiling and pulled his hand to brush his knuckles with her lips. He started to put butterfly kisses on her shoulders which made her giggle.

"Don't tell me you're already good to go," she snickered.

"You know I'm a morning person, Gilmore. I understand you're not, but it's worth trying, right?" She could feel his mouth smirking on her skin.

"We still have to talk, Robbie, we're not having sex all day long," she said wiggling to feel all of him over her body.

"If I agree to talk now, could we get back to bed afterward?" he tried.

"Well, see, it will depend on what will come out of our discussion, don't you think?"

He sighed. "You're right," he deadpanned, caressing her side. "I'm going to take a quick shower. Do you prefer to have breakfast here or at the coffee shop? Here, if it's warm enough outside, we can have it on the patio." She turned to face him and kissed him.

"It's up to you, as long as I have coffee I'm fine." He smiled at her, brushed his lips against hers and got out of bed.

"Meet me on the patio in thirty minutes." She checked him out as he was exiting the room. Such a nice ass.

**********

"So, how do you want to do it?" She asked. They were sitting on the little patio of Robert's apartment, warmed by the late morning sun. Rory was cupping her coffee mug with her legs folded on the chair, while he was spreading cream cheese on a bagel half.

"Why don't we start with the facts? I know that's the researcher in me talking." He smiled handing her the bagel. He didn't have a god damned clue how they were going to solve their inextricable situation but he was willing to do everything he could. This amazing woman was generating unknown feelings for him and he just couldn't let her go.

"Well, I guess we could say that we like each other and that we have a lot of fun in bed together." She giggled. Robert was pretty certain he could even say that he loved her, but he wasn't sure they were ready to go that far.

"But the problem being that we live four hundred miles from each other." He sighed. "So, what are we now? Not roommates anymore."
"Do we have to put labels?" she asked starting to feel uneasy, more than afraid that their discussion wasn't going anywhere and that they would end up concluding that they couldn't be together.

"We're still and always be friends," he deadpanned.

"Friends with benefits?"

"It's the least we could say after what just happened," Robert smirked.

"Robert, I thought I would be fine with you leaving to DC, but I'm not," she said not looking at him, just ripping small pieces out of her bagel. Robert tried to catch her gaze. Is this her way to tell me that she needs me?

"I thought my feelings were just one-sided," he whispered. He slowly raised his gaze to her and having his icy blue eyes on hers made her heart race.

"I didn't mean to confuse you, I just didn't know what I had until you left," she said sheepishly. He was glad that he was seated because his legs wouldn't have been able to hold him. Of course, she had shown that she had a physical desire for him, but now she's clearly admitting that at least she liked him enough to be needing him.

"I should have said something, but I always had the Logan factor in my head."

"I know. Can we not talk about him just for today? We've only got a day left together." She looked up at him with her doe eyes and once again he gave up. He always felt helpless when she did that.

"Are you going to pull your secret gaze every time you want to get something from me?" He grinned at her.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Robbie."

"Sure, you don't," he sighed.

"One more thing, Robert."

"Sure, anything you want."

"I know we're not really together yet, but if we're trying to work something out, I need you to trust me."

"But I do trust you" He looked at her in disbelief.

"I mean, I would like you to trust me enough to be honest with me and tell me what you feel, not to freak out alone by yourself and leave me in the dark."

"Oh! That... sure, I'll try to work on that. All this... it was so hypothetical for so long, it was very new to me to deal with reality and I know my reaction was more than crappy and again, I'm sorry it hurt you. I'll promise I'll work on that, but you have to know that you're dealing with a rookie here, so it's likely that I'll make mistakes again."

"You're a smart guy, Robbie, you'll manage. So, we're admitting we like each other, but where does that lead us?"

"It's still better than when I left, don't you think? But I know what you mean. It's difficult to say that we're committed to each other not knowing how to handle the long-distance. Do you think we should consider finding a job in the same city?"
"Robbie, our work is our life, it's how we both grew up from our childhood. We don't even know if we could last together. I think it's too soon.” Ouch! He knew she was right, but it hurt to see his high hopes discarded just like that.

"You're probably right. Maybe we can agree that if we meet someone else we have to tell the other?" Why did he say that? He knew perfectly that he wasn't going to meet anyone.

"I don't think I would like anyone else but you," she blushed.

"What about Finn? Maybe you don't know that, but as close as we became, and since we used to do a lot of things together, I would like to make sure that you know that Finn and I we don't come as a package." He smirked. She blushed and hit him on his arm.

"Don't make fun of me, of course, I know that. I don't know why it happened. I guess I was derailed, all my senses were misled."

"Are you trying to prove Finn's pheromone theory?"

"What? What theory?" she asked a quizzical look on her face.

"He never told you about it?"

"I'm sure I would have remembered."

"Well, when I told him that animals recognize their mate using pheromones, but that until now, nobody had identified if humans indeed are using the same system. Our dear Finn, you know how he loves making theories about human reproduction, has developed his own hypothesis concerning the subject. He thinks that we also have pheromones and that they are very accurate. An individual can recognize his mate. He used our bar game to try to prove his theory, we made some experiments like he chose the lady and we would see if she would go with him or me. So, in our case, that could be interpreted differently. It could be that Finn and I are releasing the same pheromone or that we do not generate pheromones. What Finn didn't factor in his hypothesis, is that animals have a vomeronasal organ specialized to recognize pheromones and that it seems that adult humans had lost this organ." She stared at Robert dumbfounded.

"God, you two are really unique you know!" She snorted, "You're the only ones who can make me laugh about science. You're insane but absolutely hilarious." She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him with an intensity neither of them had experienced. They hadn't resolved anything but he didn't care at the moment. All he knew was that life was amazing when they were together.

****************************************************************

They decided to take advantage of what DC had to offer and visit the National Gallery of Art. Rory wanted to see the Van Gogh self-portrait and Robert the Fragonard. As they were proceeding in the gallery, their hands were brushing several times before Robert started to softly touch the back of Rory’s hand with his finger. She closed her eyes and intertwined her fingers with his. They kept going through the paintings holding hands avoiding looking at each other. Robert felt electricity pulsating through his body and was dying to kiss her. He was for the first time experiencing having an intense desire for a woman, and instead of immediately satisfying the urge, just wanted it to last even longer. He wasn't able to focus on the paintings anymore. All he could think about was them. Were they a couple? What do people think they were while looking at them? Just two lovebirds having a romantic weekend in the Capital?

When they got out of the museum, it was a beautiful sunny day and Robert put his sunglasses on.
She stared at him and couldn't help thinking that he was sexy as hell and that she wouldn't mind going back to the apartment to repeat their nocturnal activities. It wasn't only that she wanted him, every time she felt his gaze on her, it made her insides gooey. She reached for his hand, and he turned to her with a huge grin. He was sure he looked like a stupid enamored guy but he couldn't care less.

"What do you want to do now, Gilmore?" She pulled him, cupped his face and gave him a sensual passionate kiss. He was startled at first, he thought that Rory wasn't the kind of girl that was keen on public displays of affection, but apparently, he was wrong. He replied by grabbing her butt and pulled her closer to him. When they broke the kiss for air, he kept his forehead on hers. They were drawn to each other, all these months ignoring their feelings had left them control less.

"Do we need to have you fed before going back home?" She nodded.

"Restaurant, take-out or home cooking?" She arched an eyebrow.

"Take out, I prefer that you keep your energy for me rather than cooking," she smirked and blushed at her boldness.

"And then I thought you could find it romantic that I could cook for you," he winked.

"I know you don't want to do it yet and that I'm probably shooting myself in the foot right now but I need to bring up the Logan issue." He cleared his throat feeling uneasy. They were sitting on his patio having Thai food. She raised her gaze to him with pleading eyes but he seemed determined to continue.

"I agree with you that this is our weekend and we should not let anyone take it from us. You have to understand that I never felt that happier in my adulthood than I am right now with you. Nevertheless, you also know that I'm awfully grounded and I won't enjoy our last hours if I don't get this off of my chest." She nodded.

"I suggest that for the rest of your time here with me, we pretend as if we don't live apart of each other, that we do not have time-consuming jobs that we love, and that Logan is not one of my best friends and the guy who wanted to spend his whole life with you." She gulped at hearing the facts thrown in front of her. "But once you're back in Boston, we won't do anything toward each other before telling him." She stared at Robert in disbelief.

"How do you plan to talk to him?"

"I don't fucking know. I don't have time to go to Palo Alto for a one to one discussion so I'll most likely call him or skype. I can't say that I'm looking forward to it, but I won't be able to look at myself in the mirror if I don't do it." She was stunned that he was acting as everything was on him.

"I could call him, it doesn't necessarily have to be you."

"I don't think so. You didn't see him last summer. He acted as if he was cool you were back in our lives, but Steph confided me he had a hard time."

"You never told me that." He sighed knowing too well that he should have mentioned that to her.

"I didn't want to bother you because I learned that when you were in Somalia..." As much as she was trying to deny that they were already so deeply into each other, all his acts, his words were drawing her back to it.
"Okay then," she said, pulling herself together "Let's do what you say, from this moment, there's nothing else but you and me." He beamed at her, took her hand and led her inside. That evening, they reconvened again. They had been making love for more than a day now, the first night was raw, almost rough, but now that they had talked they were both calmer. They were exploring each other, taking their time but nothing could distract them. It was as they were two parts of a magnet and that he couldn't be anywhere else but inside her, where he fit perfectly. Just as she was made for him, and only him. He had this ability to drive her to the edge so easily.

Robert was floating on air, he had never been that happy. When he woke up, Rory was deeply sleeping, her head resting on his shoulder. The daylight through the curtains laid a beautiful color on her skin. The warmth of her breath on his skin, the feeling of her hand on his stomach, all these sensations were totally a pure blast. If this was love, then he was undeniably in love with Rory Gilmore. He pulled out of her embrace as slowly as possible. He decided to go for a run and to get some pastries for breakfast. If she hadn't changed in the last two weeks, she should still be sleeping when he'll come back. Because he had already learned from his mistakes, he left a note on his pillow, just in case.

<Left for a run. Be back soon>

The last thirty-six hours had been simply amazing. If they were an inkling of what his life will be from now on, then he was convinced that he will share it with her. They had breakfast in bed, reading papers. Actually, he pretended to read, instead, he was just trying to memorize their last moment together, feeling her beside him, in his bed. For an entire weekend, she had been his and only his. It was becoming clear to him that even though he was not experienced in the matter of love, just like Logan, she was the woman he wanted to spend his entire time with. Nevertheless, he had absolutely no idea how they will be able to work out their situation, and even less how Logan will handle it, but he had only very few hours left. So, he gently took the paper off her hands, discarded it on the floor, delicately pulled her to him and because it could be a while before he would be able to make love to her again, he did his best to make it last.
Rory had barely left for an hour and she wanted to see him again already. She was ecstatic. The memories of her weekend were constantly invading her mind. When she closed her eyes, she could still feel his lips and how with only one of his kisses he could leave her on a high. They had been separated only for a few hours but she was already missing him - his touch, his presence, his voice. Of course, they hadn't actually solved anything but she was more than optimistic. For once, she wasn't overthinking the situation, she was confident that together they'd be able to overcome their issues because they were so good for each other. Sure, they would probably have to manage a long-distance relationship for a while, but she had done that with Logan and they had an ocean between them. Four hundred miles wouldn't be able to ruin their feelings toward each other. She was so ecstatic she had to share her happiness and as soon as she arrived home she brewed some coffee and called her mother.

"Fruit of my loins, I thought you had disappeared."

"I was in DC for the weekend."

"Work or pleasure?"

"Definitely both."

"Oh? Is there something you have to share with mommy?"

"Do you promise not to freak out?"

"Why do I have to do that?"

"Because I would like to tell the whole story before you lecturing me."

"Okay, what happened?"

"I really did go to DC for work, I had to interview Harry Reid, but then I stayed for the weekend with Robert."

"I already guessed that hun, it's what you did next that I'm worried about."

"You see, you're already not in the right mood to listen to me, I promise mom, everything is fine. He's fantastic mom, like you wouldn't believe."

"So, he's that good in bed?"

"Mom!"

"You're telling you're on cloud nine but you haven't done the hula hula with him yet?"

"Okay, we did it," she deadpanned.

"And he's that good?"

"Mom! You're missing the point, we like each other and we want to make it work."

"How well do you know Robert? His family?"
"I know him perfectly, we were roommates for a year, we had plenty of time. We can live together, we're getting along perfectly. I don't see what his family has to do with it."

"Have you forgotten what happened when you met the Huntzbergers?"

"Robert is not the Semple's heir or anything like that, and he gets along with his parents just fine."

"You know how people from society are. They make you think that we can all disagree and smile, go home and pretend it's all some big tennis match. But at the end, if you're not part of them or behave like them, you get rejected."

"It's not as if I'm not from society. What do you think? Do you think I shouldn't be happy? Because when I'm with him I'm so happy, amazingly happy, and it's all his doing."

"Hun, do you really know who this guy is? You only know your roommate which means that you were sharing a kitchen and a couch. You haven't brought him home for me to meet him yet. I just want to make sure that your love could survive outside the bubble. Right now, all you see is that he gave you multiple orgasms."

"Mom!" Rory felt a little desperate. Was she going too fast? Maybe her mother was right, they were only good fuck buddies? No, no, what they felt for each other was real, she couldn't have imagined everything. They had a special connection, he was too caring to be only interested in sex.

"Anyway, let's say I'm wrong, how do you guys plan to manage the long distance?"

"We don't know yet, we have decided that we have to tell Logan first."

"What?? Are you asking him his permission?"

"Of course not, just letting him know first and, well... I guess they have a kind of bro-code that they're not supposed to date each other's exes."

"But you haven't talked to Logan for two years now, don't they have a limitation period or something? This is so ridiculous."

"Then at least we agree on that, but it seems very important to Robert that he should do things right with Logan and he feels awfully guilty already that we started something before telling Logan."

"What about you? Are you sure you're over Logan?"

"Well, I think so." Rory wondered where her mother was getting at.

"Are you sure that Robert is not your rebound guy?"

"My rebound guy? Of course not!" *Maybe Finn is, but definitely not Robert.* "I'm sure that what we feel for each other is genuine."

Could her mother be right?

Around midnight, she heard her phone vibrate and looked at the screen.

<"I'm here, lying in my bed trying to find sleep, but all I feel is the emptiness just by my side. Miss you. Sweet dreams."

<"Miss you, too. Close your eyes and just think that all my heart is with you."
He smirked. Does she really think that her text could help me sleep?

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On Monday Rory started with her team meeting. They'd gotten to the tedious part of investigative journalism. Revising the different parts to get to the same standards, checking with the sources to ensure they agreed on how their words were transposed. The chief editor decided that it would be in the next morning's edition because he wanted to be sure that they would be the first on this story. There were too many days of work at stake. The team even skipped lunch to have everything done. When her editor told the team that it was good to go, she had a satisfied feeling, it was her first accomplished work as a deputy editor. She was surprised that her first thought was that Robert would be proud of her. Then she realized that it would be her first piece that he wouldn't have read or discussed before it was printed. Since her first article for the Globe, she always asked for his feedback. Of course, back then it was because it was the comparative politics pieces, but after that, she got used to having him review her work, just like he always ran his new ideas with her. She even edited his own research articles and his thesis. It dawned on her that they actually had become a couple for work. Then it struck her that she could never have shared this particular piece with him, not because he had moved to DC but because he was working at the White House. The team had discovered that two democratic Representatives had used Congressional office staff for their last re-election campaigns. That's why she interviewed the Majority Leader, to get his statement on that matter before they published it. Maybe her mother was right. They shouldn't be involved, he wasn't right for her, but not because of his family, because of their jobs. She was pulled out of her thoughts by Sophie.

"Come on Rory, we're going to this new bar to celebrate! Liam reviewed it and said it's amazing." Rory smiled at her friend, she wouldn't mind some tequila shots to get all her conflicting thoughts out of her head.

That same day, Finn was back in Boston. Since their last encounter, he couldn't stop wondering if he could or should see her again. He didn't know where he stood in this but maybe it was better not to talk about it. He refrained himself from calling her and he felt confident that he would be able to behave, but to be safe he decided not to get in touch with her and to avoid their favorite bar. Instead, he joined some colleagues who dragged him in a new bar. He was quietly listening to the conversation, enjoying his scotch when his eyes were caught by a familiar silhouette. What were the odds? He couldn't believe it, the woman he was trying to avoid was just in front of him, laughing with a bunch of people. She was turning her back at him, but he knew it was Rory, he could hear her voice and anyway, he was able to recognize her from any side and anywhere. She looked tipsy and he could hear her laugh loudly. He pondered for a moment if he should let her know that he was there, but he relished watching her. Suddenly, part of her group headed to the small dance floor. They swayed together, laughing and clearly enjoying their time. Then, one of the women who were with her started to glance at him and talked to Rory. She turned around and saw him. Busted. He walked to her and put a peck on her cheek.

"Finn! I didn't know you were back in town." She couldn't help thinking that Sophie was right, he looked... breathtaking. Damned. She was still attracted to him. This time she couldn't blame her abstinence, she just had a whole weekend of lust. He had discarded his business suit jacket and his tie, rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt. His tanned skin did wonders to his amazing blue gaze.

"Just arrived this morning. You guys look like you're celebrating something." He smiled and she had to quench the impulse to kiss his lips.

"Exactly, we just finished our investigations and the articles will be out tomorrow morning, so we're celebrating. Finn, this is my friend and coworker Sophie, she's the one that noticed that you were
staring at us." He nodded at her friend.

"You seemed a little tipsy, Love," Finn smirked.

"Yes I am, why don't you dance with me, Finn?" He arched his eyebrows but let her pull him to her. She started to move and got closer to him. He tried to keep a reasonable distance between them to be sure he would be able to control himself. He had seen her buzzed multiple times before, but not at that level recently and he wondered why she had let herself get to that point. But suddenly his worst fears came in the form of a long, sensual slow song. Within seconds, she draped her arms around his neck and laid her head on his shoulder. Resigned, he splayed his hands around her. He could smell her intoxicating scent, and feel the warmth of her body just through the light fabric of her summer dress. The song was painfully long for him to be able to restrain from touching her. Was it the tequila losing its effect? All of a sudden, she became aware of the feel of Finn's firm body against hers, one of his hands on her bare shoulder and the other on the small of her back, his mouth in her hair and his heart pulse against hers. She slowly pulled her head back and locked her sapphire eyes with his dark blue orbs. His gaze dove to her mouth and his heart pulse quickened when his tongue licked her lips in an involuntarily tempting gesture. He took his hand off her shoulder and gently cupped her cheek and slowly pulled her face to his mouth to brush her lips.

"Oh! Damn it!" She cried out. It was like all the alcohol had flushed out of her brain and she realized she was again drawn to Finn. "No, no, no! It can't happen again! She ran out of the bar. What are you thinking, you don't do that! What's wrong with you? Oh my God! Then she heard him call her name. She tried to run faster. Damn those heels. Why did she have the stupid idea this morning to wear her high heels strappy sandals? He grabbed her arm to stop her.

"Rory, stop, I'm sorry, don't run away like this."

She wasn't supposed to be like this, she wasn't supposed to kiss his best friend, again. Could she blame it on the tequila? She felt awfully guilty, and also angry with herself for not being able to resist this powerful attraction he had on her. Her body wasn't listening to any admonition her brain was delivering.

"I'm sorry Rory, it's all my fault," Finn said sheepishly. He felt awful seeing her struggling.

"Oh! Finn, it's all on me, it's like I was a boat lost at sea without a compass." He hugged her and she decided to let go.

"Let me take you home, and I promise to refrain myself from touching you if you tell me why you seemed so conflicted." She nodded.

When they got back to her apartment Finn made some coffee while she took a shower to get her ideas straightened. Then she told him all about her weekend in DC, the discussion she had with her mother and the conflict of interest that could interfere with their jobs. She looked desperate and he just wanted to hug her again.

"Love, do you need a hug or it would feel too weird?" He asked gently. She looked at him and nodded. He sat next to her and opened his arms for her to settle on his chest.

"What I'm going to do, Finn? I'm so lost. I don't want you to think that I'm playing with you. I do find you extremely attractive but I'm not in my right mind now."

"I know, Love, I shouldn't have tried to kiss you." He knew that he could be falling for her and that he had to do something before the situation would be inextricable.
"Before anyone gets hurt, I'm going to pull myself out of the equation. At least for a while until we sort everything out. Believe me, it's killing me inside to say that and if we were the only two involved I wouldn't mind, but two other people that we both love are in this," Finn said softly trying to handle this as gently as possible.

"So anyway, tomorrow I'm leaving for London, but when I'll get back stateside I won't try to see you because I'm not sure I'll be able to control myself around you. I don't know what you did to me, love, but I have to put some distance between us to be thinking clearly. Right now, the damage control is still bearable. I'm not worried about Robert and me, we have been very close since Yale and I think we can work it out. I'm more concerned about you and Logan so until you and he are sure you've moved on, we really have to stop."

"Wow, who would think that you would be the most reasonable of us two?" Rory answered, stunned by the rational Finn.

"You know that I'm always full of surprises," he gazed gently at her.

"That's what makes you so attractive," she said embarrassedly.

"You see, that's what I'm talking about, I absolutely haven't any control of myself when you stare at me with those eyes of yours." He kissed her forehead.

Oh, My God, I'm a whore
...

What was the title of this 60s French movie that he made me watch?
Yes, "Jules et Jim". But for her, it was even worse because they were also the best friends of her ex. Finn had left her to go back to his apartment. Of course, this evening she'd miraculously stopped before the inevitable, but she was undeniably attracted to him. She liked Finn's confidence, his craziness, his sense of humor and mostly the fact that she felt safe in his arms. Nothing was forced with him. He was relaxed and fun and he always had her back. With Robert, it was a total blast, she loved that he was so challenging with her, that every day he opened her to new discoveries, that they shared so many passions. Most of all, whenever she was freaking out or only rambling, he just had to look at her with his soft gaze and she always cooled down. Last but not least, he could always keep up with her, no matter what. Actually, it was even more than that, she admired him. He was the smartest guy she had met.

I'm supposed to be levelheaded, the one who does the reasonable things. What was the appraisal of these past crazy few weeks? She had mind-blowing sex, the kind that she never had before, with two incredible guys. Now that she'd pulled out her head from the hole, she was clearly falling for one of them, absolutely no doubt about it. With the other one she had an amazing sexual chemistry but even though she liked him a lot, she wasn't in love with him. In crude words, he was a fun bedmate, a good friend, but not a boyfriend. Finn made it clear that he would be able to remove himself out of the equation without too much damage for him or Robert. One would have said that the situation was pretty clear but when you add in that these two were best friends with her ex, it became inextricable.

Why couldn't life be easy for a change? Now wouldn't that be nice? Why did Robert have to be Logan's friend? Why does her mother dislike him so much? Why is he in DC? Why did she sleep with Finn? But above all this, why was she so messed up? Geez, she was having a mental breakdown...

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Robert understood that the feelings that he was experiencing with Rory were what other people called love. Of course, he had heard about that, read about that, but he realized that it was actually the very first time for him. Naturally, he had felt love for his siblings, his parents and for his friends, but never of that intensity for a woman. He had crushes, liked some ladies, but had never totally
fallen in love like how it was described in novels or movies. That what his friend Logan had felt or maybe is still feeling for Rory, the same woman. How could they end up loving the same woman? Moreover, love was not easy like in a Disney movie. It wasn't only two people reciprocating the same feelings, it seemed that all the planets had to be in the same conjunction or just living in the same city.

Robert felt conflicted toward Logan. The more he considered the situation the less he knew how to talk to his friend. He thought he could feel now how Logan fell for Rory and understood why so long after their break up he couldn't let her go in his mind. He wondered if the ultimatum wasn't one of Logan's poker moves but he still couldn't comprehend why he never contacted her again, why he hadn't just crawled back to her. The problem now is that he had the feeling that by telling him he would just stab his mate in the back.

On Tuesday morning, Rory's article on the Globe was out. Robert was reading it in his White House office because he knew that he would have to talk about it in the staff meeting. He could see Rory's editing all along, everything was treated to the point. From the White House point of view, it wasn't that bad, no one from this administration was involved. Then he heard his intercom buzz.

"Robert, David would like to see you in his office."

"Okay, thanks, Carrie."

When he entered David Axelrod's office, he was surprised that he was the only one there. They usually meet with all the team every morning.

"Hi Robert, have you read the piece in the Boston Globe?" Robert nodded.

"I haven't had time to read everything, is it bad?"

"No, just a couple of congressmen who won't get away very easily, but Reid and Pelosi did a pretty good damage control."

"Good, so come with me to see the President, he wants an update."

"Okay." Robert cleared his throat, it will the first time since he arrived that he would have to address the President directly or even be introduced formally to him.

The meeting was fast and efficient and Robert became in charge of dealing with Nancy Pelosi, the Majority leader of the House of Representatives, on the communication of this issue with the deputy chief of staff of the White House and Robert Gibbs, the press secretary. He couldn't help thinking of the irony of the situation. He was getting even more work as the result of his girlfriend, and as a result, he wondered when he'd be able to call Logan.

"Do we know the reporters who pulled out this story?" David asked.

"It's a new investigative team the Globe has set. They're all in-house journalists, some are on the Spotlight team," Gibbs answered.

"I actually know the deputy editor of this team, she was my roommate for a year in Boston and we were at Yale together. She had been on the campaign trail between 2007 and 2008." Robert tried to stay professional.

"Okay, so Semple, see if Robert and his team need your help to find out if the Globe is doing a follow-up or if they have other stuff."
Great, as if the situation wasn't complicated enough, she was now also part of his work. He left the oval office with a bitter taste and followed the press secretary to his office. That day, he went back home exhausted by eleven. It had been two days since Rory left and he still hadn't call Logan.
Chapter 23

Finn wasn't the kind of guy to overthink. Nevertheless, he couldn't say he wasn't surprised how his friendship with Robert had changed since his graduation. Their relationship had slowly shifted from prank buddies to a deep brotherhood. Maybe it was because they almost lived for a year in the same city without Logan and Colin, but it was weird to admit that he now felt much closer to Robert than to his oldest mate. Therefore, it was an understatement that he didn't understand why he was stuck in this awful situation.

"Seriously man, I think I've been spellbound by her eyes. I haven't been bedding anyone since I slept with her."

The two friends were sitting in a bar in DC. Finn had jumped at the chance when GMO sought for someone to visit prospective clients in the capital. He had to talk to Robert before everything got out of control.

"Me neither, but for me, it's since she moved in with me. I didn't realize it until I left for DC." Robert was circling the scotch in his glass, eyes in the void. "I can't believe that we've put our friendship with Logan in jeopardy. We should come clean with him," Robert whispered.

"And tell him what? Can you put words on what we have with her? Casual dating? Friends with benefits, the three of us? Aren't we pathetic..." Finn shook his head.

"Hey, it's not that bad. It's not like if we were having threesomes altogether." They both laughed.

"How did we end up in such a mess? God, the adult stuff is hard. Dating in college was so much easier..."

"Of course, but that's because in college you never dated anyone Finn, all you did was redhead hunting," Robert smirked.

"And it worked pretty well for me, I think that besides Rosemary I had a pretty good score."

"Yeah between you and Huntz I think you two had covered almost all the pretty girls. Have you ever thought that what she had with Logan had ruined every following relationship for her?" Robert asked, looking at his glass and turning it on the table.

"Maybe, or maybe it's only because they never got closure," Finn answered.

"Do you think she's still hung up on him?" Robert was hurting just thinking about the idea.

"Don't know, but I think he's still hung up on her though, even if he doesn't want to admit it. Sure, he's not as miserable as he used to be, he's been dating a girl for a few months now."

"So then maybe she has to meet him again so that at least one of us can have a chance?" They both sighed heavily and emptied their glasses.

Suddenly Finn spoke out. "You are right man - we, she, they need to know. We can't be on standby forever. Let's manage to get them together."

"Are you sure? We might lose her for good"

"Nahhhh. At least we'll still be friends, better friends than ever, that, we will never lose. Is it really
"worse than not knowing?"

"You may be right." Robert raised his hand to the waitress asking for another drink.

Finn cleared his throat which caught Robert's attention. "There's another thing you didn't take into account."

"Which is?"

"You're in love with her," Finn stated matter-of-factly. He could see the wheels turning at light speed in his friend's head. Robert pondered if he should lie again to his friend. "It's me, Robert, it can stay between us." Robert exhaled.

"And you're not?"

"We're talking about you right now, but no, at least not yet. That's why I tried to stop everything with her, I saw myself diving into it, so I pulled the brakes before it was too late. In your case, you were a goner before sleeping with her anyway."

"I'm screwed, Logan is going to hate me and she just sees me as a friend, a friend with benefits."

"Do I know her better than you?" Finn shook his head.

"Why don't we ask for Colin's help? Anyway, right now he's the only one of us in any kind of a relationship."

"And that makes him a specialist?"

"Not really, but he's still our mate. We skirted this problem for too long now and we need someone with a little perspective and he's the only one who hasn't slept with her."

"Okay, but we have to talk in person."

"Let me text him."

Finn <I'm with Robert. Could we get together this weekend, just the three of us?>

Colin <I'm kind of swamped with my internship and the bar exam. Could you guys come to the city? I wouldn't mind some distraction.>

Finn <OK. Will Steph be there?>

Colin <No, she has an event in Philly.>

Finn <So we can crash at your place?>

Colin <Sure, let me know when you'll arrive>

Finn <Thanks, man. We'll let you know if we'll be there on Friday or Saturday.>

Colin <No Logan?>

Finn <No.>

Colin had just graduated from law school but he still had to take the bar exam in July. He finally decided that he wouldn't join his father's firm and started as a junior associate in the department of
entertainment and media law firm of Latham & Watkins in New-York and would move in with Stephanie. His father was at first in a state of absolute rage that Colin wouldn't join the family firm but underneath, he was proud that his son would try to have his own career.

Robert and Finn arrived around 9 pm on Friday night at Colin's place, almost at the same time. Finn got five bottles of scotch and Robert brought six bottles of his best red wine. Colin looked at all this booze and gazed at them.

"Well, should you guys spill out, then we drink or do you need the booze to be able to tell me what is bothering you?"

"Get the glasses first."

They sat around the coffee table and Colin put three scotch glasses and three wine glasses on it. Finn looked at Robert "Shall we go together?"

Robert took a deep breath "We slept with Rory," they burst out at the same time. Colin stared at them in shock.

"You guys really spend too much time together. You have to stop this game of hitting the same girls. See where it led you to? Do I have to remind you that our best friend proposed to her, which means that he wanted to spend the rest of his life with her?"

"We know." Finn poured scotch into their glasses and Robert opened a wine bottle.

"Robert I kind of understand, living all this time with her like a couple, it was a matter of time until it happened. But Finn? Do you sometimes think that some of the things you do are unbecoming?"

"In my defense, she kind of started it.... but I agree I didn't ask her to stop."

"And do either of you two like or love her?"

They both exhaled a long heavy sigh with eyes that betrayed internal conflict.

"Holy shit, you guys are sooo screwed. And how long has this ... thing been going on?"

"Since I left for DC..."

"I'm scared to ask the question: Does Logan know?"

"That's the reason we came to see you. We need to ask for your advice on that matter," Robert answered.

"You guys know that he's going to go totally mad and hate you, right? Anyway, he has to hear from you guys."

"Technically they weren't together anymore, for two years now."

"Sure, but on the other hand, you two!!! Among billions of women, you chose her! Are all the women you two have been picking up in bars and yoga class or wherever not enough? You have to pick up the one girl that broke your best mate's heart."

"Don't you think we don't know that! She's not a one-night stand! You know very well that we both had a soft spot on her from the very moment she entered our lives at Yale. Logan was first, we backed out. If he wasn't our best friend, we wouldn't have had any problem and one of us would have already dated her. Anyway, we didn't come here for judgment but for help." Finn was upset,
and it was an understatement. He felt bad for Logan, he really did, but he was more worried for Robert and Rory. Academically, Robert was the smartest of them without any doubt, but he had this habit of always letting the others take the lead outside of that like he was neutral, the Switzerland of friendship. This side of him had been even stronger after he graduated and Finn had always wondered why.

"Sorry, I think you have to tell him before one of you have her name tattooed on your butt. Have you considered that she could be with you two because it's a way to remind her of Logan?"

Finn and Robert looked at each other.

"No... That's bullshit" Finn stated. "I'm pretty sure she's over him. Okay, how do we spill it to Logan?"

"I would say face to face but I guess Robert don't have time to get to Palo Alto."

"No, I really can't afford the time to go to California," Robert agreed. "Phone call it is, or Skype?"

"I don't think he would like to see our face if he can't hit us," Finn deadpanned.

"Okay then, phone call tomorrow morning. Now, I think I need to be hammered to be able to sleep." Robert downed his glass.

Because of the time difference, they decided to wait until the midday to call Logan. Moreover, it would give them time to sober up. They woke up and went for a run to make sure to get all their toxins out. After a shower and two cups of coffee, Robert and Finn sat on the couch.

"Ready?"

"Ready, let's do it."

Robert took a deep breath, scrolled through his cell phone, found Logan's number, sighed and hit the button. He was focused but he could feel Finn's tension. While the phone was ringing Finn whispered. "We're doing the right thing, man."

"Hi! Robert, you know it's a little early for me over here? I thought you guys were meeting Colin?"

Robert cleared his throat "We're at Colin's but we needed to talk to you, I put Finn on speaker."

"Is everything fine? You sound serious," Logan asked worriedly. Finn early on a Saturday morning that was definitely weird.

"Look, Logan, there's no easy way to say this, but we have to come clean with you for the sake of our friendship. So, try to listen until the end and then we'll deal with the consequences," Finn started.

"Finn, you're scaring me."

"The day I left for DC, after the last box was in the truck with the movers and I'd packed my car, I shared a pizza with Rory on the couch. Despite my best efforts to keep things friendly as a roommate, when I reached for a piece we kissed and I lost control and we ended up sleeping together. I'm sorry man. I was so confused that when I woke up I left her without a note and drove to DC."

"Did I hear it right? One of my best friends and my ex-girlfriend? Wasn't she supposed to stay at your place just until she found an apartment?"
"That was the deal, but time passed and she stopped looking and I didn't say anything because it was nice to spend time with her," Robert said sheepishly.

"Fuck Robert, I always knew you were an asshole! I felt guilty for a while because Finn and Colin told me you were a loyal guy, but in the end, I was right, you were just waiting for the moment to screw me up! I'm sure you wanted that to happen from the beginning!" Logan yelled so loudly they winced.

"The story is not finished yet," said Finn "A few days later, I arrived in Boston and texted her to see if she wanted to hang out but she called me crying so I got to her place. She was devastated because she missed Robert and realized that he meant more than just a friend to her so I held her on the couch and she dozed off. When she woke up she kissed me and it was my turn to lose control..."

"Geez!!! Please, Finn, don't tell me that you slept with her."

"I'm sorry, Logan, I really lost my shit when she was so close to me and looked at me with her doe eyes..."

"This is a nightmare... I thought we were friends. How could you do that to me?"

"I know man, we're weak we should have asked her to stop..."

"Then she came to DC for an interview and wanted to talk to me and..."

"And you slept with her again..."

"Yes... I'm so sorry man."

"What about you Finn, was it a one-time thing?"

"Yes, well almost, I saw her another time but that time we just...kissed... You know that we both had a crush on her and while your two were still together it was easy to keep our hands and mind of her. We both knew in our deep recesses that it could hurt you, but it has been two years now, and she's back in our life and man, she's damn irresistible."

"I still don't understand, why Rory? There's no lack of women who are willing to go out with you guys. What happened to your hook up competition?"

"Because she's the incarnation of my ideal woman. You know better than us, it's impossible to get her out of your system," Robert deadpanned.

"The thing man is she's now totally confused, even more than we are. Maybe what she sees in us is only a reminder of you. We think that perhaps being with us made her realize that she's not over you yet," Finn tried to explain.

"So, what do you propose guys, that we three dates Rory altogether? All the four of us in different cities and she traveled all around the world to visit her lovers?" Logan said irritated.

"Of course not."

"Then where precisely does this damned mess leave the four of us?"

"We think that you have to see her again and that you guys should be together or get closure otherwise neither of you will be able to totally move on in your life."

"And what's in it for you?"
"Not losing your friendship and helping the two of you."

"I really don't know what to say, guys, I need time to process all this and try to understand where I fit in."

"Colin suggested that we could all meet for the 4th of July weekend, Rose, Juliet, Steph, Ror and we four. We know it's short notice but do you think you can get off work that weekend?"

"I'll be in San Francisco the week before so we could fly together," Finn said.

"It's all a bit much to take in. I'll think about it and I'll get back to you."

"Thanks, Logan, call us when you're ready." And then they heard the line went dead.

Logan just couldn't believe it. Finn and Robert with Rory, his Rory. Damn, I'm going to be late. He was dating Laura, a biotech executive that he met at a business meeting five months ago. He really liked her, they were good together and above all, she didn't know that he was the Hunzbergers' heir. For her, he was the business manager of a tech company, just like her. He hadn't even introduced her to Finn when he came to San Francisco. She was part of his new life, the one that he built from scratch after his 2007 disaster. She had almost succeeded in making him forget about Rory. This weekend they were supposed to spend their first getaway together in the Napa Valley. He was really looking forward to it. He knew that what he was living with Laura was nothing like what he had with Rory, but they were getting better. She was great, hot, they had fun in bed. She really cared for him and it was nice to go back to her in the evening when he had a shitty day at work. Nevertheless, he always had the secret hope that Rory was as miserable as he was and that one day, she would come to her senses and realize that he was the love of her life just like she was his and that she would come back to him. He tried to sort all the information that Finn and Robert gave him. First, they were falling for her but could he really blame them? She had this ability to draw everybody to her, they were just as helpless as he was in front of her. Then they told him that she was confused. Maybe she still would come back to him? Or did they say that to him to calm his anger? Because how could they dare touch her? Fuck, she was his, his everything! Okay, he'll go to the Vineyard, he had to see her, see if there was still a possibility to get back with her. Would she quit her job to join him in California this time? Will he agree to do long-distance? Damned, two years now and still no answer to these fucking questions.
Colin asked Steph to organize this emergency meeting. The Yale gang hadn't been reunited all together for a year now. They were thrilled to see each other, even though the unexpected circumstances made them feel awkward. Because of the short notice, that the 4th was on a Saturday and Robert had only the weekend, she finally opted for her parent's Martha's Vineyard estate. The Vanderbilts, as well as the Huntzbergers, were at THE society wedding of the year, in the Balearic Islands, so Logan was sure he wouldn't run into his parents. Stephanie was worried about her friends and in particular Logan and Robert, mainly because she always had been very close to them. She developed a special bond with Robert when the Stooges left to sink a boat in Fiji. She had this quality of listening that make people able to share their deepest thoughts with her. She knew that he was extremely sensitive and that behind his womanizer ways that he got spending time with Finn, he was just a soft teddy bear, not armed to deal with a jealous Logan. Her childhood friend was loyal, generous, caring but was terribly territorial concerning Rory. Therefore, she feared the reunion between the three enamored guys.

Rory drove by herself to the vineyard. If Paris hadn't had to spend the weekend with Doyle's family, she would have asked her to tag along. She didn't know what to think about meeting Logan after two years. She was madly in love with him back then, but so many things had happened and now she was going to see the three last men she had slept with. She cursed herself, how could she let herself get into this awful mess? She hadn't talked much with Robert since her visit in DC. They texted, but neither of them had the opportunity to talk and moreover, they had promised each other not to do anything before they could talk to Logan. Now that Finn and Robert had done it, the situation was even worse. Robert had called just to ask her to book her Independence Day weekend when they would see each other and said that Steph would let her know all the details. Except that it wasn't just the two of them, but all the Yale gang including her three last lovers. She then thought about her mother being overly protective. Lorelai had always been a role model for her. The way that at sixteen she took her life in hands and decided to raise her daughter by herself which she successfully did as well as developed her own career from the bottom. She, in turn, was sheltered from any difficulty, so what did she know about life? Was her own experience being enough to make a wise decision? Could her mother be right when she said that their feelings might not survive in the outside world? After all, that's kind of what happened with Logan. They were truly in love but when they had been confronted by his family and their jobs, everything blew up and their commitment wasn't enough anymore. Was it possible that with Robert the same story would be repeated? She wondered if her inexperience in men was showing its limits. She was almost twenty-five and only had three boyfriends and slept with four men, a very low score for a millennial. The appraisal wasn't good at all. Three failed relationships and she was far from being an innocent bystander.

Colin, Steph, Rory, Juliet, and Rosemary arrived early on Friday afternoon. Finn and Logan flew directly from San Francisco and would arrive later in the evening. For the past year, everybody had the opportunity to reconnect with Rory except Logan. When Colin left for the airport to pick Robert, the girls sat with Rory who looked worried and tried to calm her mind.

"It will be okay, Ror. It could be worse - you have three of the most eligible bachelors on the east coast pining for you. Can you tell us how do you do that?" Rosemary asked wanting to lighten the mood. Rory's face turned pale, she knew her friend was joking, but she was so tense she couldn't think straight. A tiny lump had formed in the pit of her stomach while waiting for Logan, and over the course of the evening, it had gradually grown larger.

"I'm sorry Ror, I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable." Rose sat next to her and put her arm around her shoulders.
"It's fine Rose, I'm the one that should apologize for ruining your holiday weekend."

"Are you kidding? If it hadn't to help you guys sort out your love square we would be with our families."

"We need drinks!" Juliet was arriving from the kitchen with a pitcher of margaritas.

"So, do you know if you're willing to go back to Logan?" Steph asked handing her a glass.

"I really don't know, for years, it was him and only him, that I could see myself with, but then I let my guard down. It was so easy living with Robert, I didn't see it coming. It just happened and then he left for DC..."

"What about Finn, how did you get into that? Trust me I know he's easy on the eyes and extremely difficult to resist," Rosemary said and they all laughed.

"Oh please, I didn't mean all that to happen." She buried her head in her hands.

"So, you're the only one of us who had sex with the three of them. Woman to woman, who was better?" Juliet asked, always prying.

"And that's supposed to make me feel better? Oh my God, you're not seriously asking me that!"

"Why not? I think they would even like to know. We're just curious if you had to rank them, where would they fall?" Juliet stared at Rory waiting for her answer.

"I love you guys and I'm more than happy to see you all but this isn't a topic up for discussion, not when I'm about to meet the three of them." Rory shook her head.

"Okay then later when we manage to get you hammered enough," Juliet shrugged.

"Well, besides them I only had sex with only one other guy..." She looked so embarrassed that they felt guilty for teasing her.

"More seriously, don't worry too much, at the end of all this, none of them want to hurt you and Finn and Robert felt very bad." Steph attempted to reassure her.

"That's the point, I messed up their friendship, everything was fine before I had contact with them again."

"You know it's bullshit, right? They're all consenting adults. You didn't make them do anything they weren't willing to do. Logan never called you in two years, he can't claim anything. Their supposed bro-code is just an excuse. And since when do these guys are following any rules? Anyway, the cards are in your hands this weekend. You have to choose between them. Do you know what are you going to do?"

Rory put her head in her hands and sighed. "I wish. I don't think I can go back with Logan, though. I guess last year it would still have been an option, but since Robert left, it made me realized that I had moved on."

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In the car from the airport, Robert was silent. Colin could see that he was clearly worried.

"As I don't think we'll get another chance to be by ourselves again during the weekend I wanted to run something with you that crossed my deviated new lawyer's mind."
Robert turned to his friend with knitted brows. "Sure, but you sound a little scary."

"Well, maybe there's nothing to worry about. So, what exactly does Rory's new job entitle?"

"She's deputy editor of an investigative team at the Globe."

"On what kind of subject?"

"I think anything worth digging."

"Politics?"

"Yes of course."

"Then couldn't there be a conflict of interest if she was dating a White House executive, like... you for instance?" Robert's face blemished. He wasn't the only one worrying about that, even Colin figured it out.

"Let's not worry about that yet. Have you thought what will you do if she goes back to Logan?"

"Wish them the best, empty my wine cellar and bury myself into work," Robert sighed, "or become a monk."

"Don't you want to fight for her? She looks happy with you - she opened up, her career is on track."

"She did that all by herself, I didn't do anything. She's the most intelligent woman I've ever met."

"Maybe, but you realize that you two are good for each other, right? I mean Logan and Rory were in love, but he gave her that stupid ultimatum and stood by it. You're both my friends so I'm not supposed to take sides, but he left her two years ago and I remember too well that he was hurting but he also decided not to get her back."

"At least she's right for me. Man, you wouldn't believe how great I feel with her. I've never shared such an intimacy with a woman. And before you say anything, I don't mean sex, well, not only sex." Robert sighed watching the landscape passing.

"You're talking about love, buddy. It hits hard, I know. We were groomed for a lot of things, but I'm not sure we were prepared for that. Come on, if she gets back with Logan, his family will destroy her. He's trapped in his family duty. My father is a pain in the ass but he's not half bad as the Dark Lord. And let's not talk about Shira and his grandfather. Even Logan wouldn't be able to protect her from that. He's doomed. I think that's why he won't fight to get her back because it's the only way to protect her from all of this."

"It doesn't matter if they still love each other."

"In theory, but deep down he knows that at some point he'll have to go back to Huntzberger Media and take over his family legacy. Maybe he will change it for the next generation, but right now, I don't believe it."

Robert exhaled. Colin could be right, but at the moment, that thought wasn't even comforting. His friend was trapped in a dynastic plan, and the girl he loved was in total confusion.

Colin and Robert arrived first and found the girls on the patio sipping margaritas. Robert immediately spotted Rory and shivered. She looked nervous just like him. He greeted the girls and when he got to her, he put his hand on the nape of her neck and kissed her cheek. He needed to touch her, to feel her
skin. She responded with goosebumps rising up along her arms. He was relieved that at least he could still induce a physical reaction from her. Colin took him into the house to show him his room. When he got out to join the group he ran into Rory in the hallway, they stared at each other for a few seconds, hesitating at what should be their reaction, then he stepped to get closer, put a hand on her cheek and kissed her gently on her lips, closing his eyes to be able to capture all he could from her. She put her hands on his chest to feel his heart but also to keep her from throwing them around his neck and sunk into him.

"I'm sorry, Robert," she whispered.

"About what?"

"Oh! I don't know what I'm not sorry about," she said keeping her hands on him but not looking at him "but I'm..."

He put his hand under her chin to have her look up at him. "It's life, we're in constant danger of running off the road. You'll find your way, whatever it is."

"I'm just lost," she started but then they heard Finn's voice from outside.

"Here you are!" Finn smiled and hugged them. He put an arm around each of his friend's shoulders and whispered in Rory's ear "Everything will be fine," he said softly, and he gave her a peck on the cheek. They then headed out in the patio.

"Let's celebrate that we're are finally all together, beautiful, successful and alive!" Finn launched.

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They all had spent the first twenty-four hours like they were still the carefree college students. None of the four main protagonists made any move, they just watched each other from the corner of their eyes. Steph, as the skillful lady of the house, managed to keep the mood light and they enjoyed a carefree evening. The following day, Robert and Finn took them sailing and they had fun being the crew under these two captains. Nevertheless, Rory's three suitors kept their distance from her.

On Saturday evening, Finn was preparing the drinks, spritzers for the ladies, scotch for the men. Logan was on a lounge chair by the pool. Finn smiled at Rory and moved his head at the direction of Logan to encourage her. She decided to go sit next to him.

"Hey, Ace."

"How are you, Logan?" He looked at her and knew they'd reached the moment everybody was waiting for.

"I'm better now, but the first year was tough. I reached rock bottom. When you turned down my proposal, all I heard was "NO" and I wasn't able to consider that it could be something else. I totally freaked out."

"You know that I didn't reject you, only your proposal. It didn't mean that I didn't love you. I needed some time to process that," she paused to ponder how much she could say. "Obviously, you thought about it for days before proposing. I was too young and I think I wasn't ready for that kind of commitment. I needed time to think and you denied it to me and left. I waited for you but after a while, I came to the conclusion that you'd moved on." Tears were dropping from Rory's eyes.

"So, you didn't love me enough to be committed to me."
"Do you really think that? I loved you so much that not being with you wrecked my heart into tiny pieces. I thought you had given up on me, scraped me off your world. I threw myself into work because it was all I had left. I became a work machine. I haven't allowed anyone near me, much less being intimate with anyone before..."

"Robert and Finn..."

"They were there for me. Never asked for anything. It just... happened, slowly"

"Do you love them?" The silence was deafening with two elephants by the pool.

"I honestly don't know exactly how to label my feelings but I do have very strong ones for Robert. I feel as if he's becoming a part of me. I guess that's why they pulled out this gathering. For us to figure out if there is still an "us" for you and me, before it gets too... messed up. They think we didn't get closure."

"I've been seeing someone for five months now," whispered Logan.

"Is it serious?"

"It's still new, nothing like what we had, but I do like her. She's great." Logan stared at the pool, avoiding to make eye contact. "So, why them? Aren't there other guys? I'm sure that there are plenty of guys. They aren't that different from me, I mean we all come from wealthy families."

"For god's sake, we're not at a point that I have met their family. Maybe if I hadn't run into Robert last year I would still be by myself. You know I didn't plan it. I never had the intention to hurt anyone." She shook her head, it wasn't easy having to verbalize their feelings after not speaking for two years. "Now that we have established that we were both miserable, the right question is, are we willing to try again after two years?"

"I loved you like crazy, Ace, and there isn't a day when I don't regret walking away from you. But I'm not sure if I'm ready to be hurt again, I wouldn't be able to handle it. On the other hand, my company just got two merging offers, one from Huntzberger Media. You're kicking ass in the news world, living your dream. So, look at the bright side: I don't know if we'd been where we are today if we hadn't been apart to do it."

"It seems that we are trying to tell each other is that we loved each other, probably still do, but that the odds won't put us together. We can't deny that we did love each other but are we right for each other? Have you seen "The Way We Were"? Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford loved each other madly but they just couldn't be together. Maybe we're just like them."

They stayed silent for a while. He had felt so humiliated when she refused his proposal he had promised himself that he would never be in the same situation again. But yet, he was there, two years later in front of her considering getting back with her. Despite the more than awkward circumstances that reunited them, he was happy to see her, to have alone time with her. Of course, he knew that everyone was somewhere staring at them but who cares? They always had been in the front row of his love life for better and for worse. Nevertheless, if he was true to himself, they had both moved on. Of course, he hadn't found love again yet, just a caring life partner, but he was healing. What was still hurting was his pride, and the fact that she was falling for Robert was definitely not helping. He couldn't help competing with him even though it was one-sided which irritated him even more. Since he met his rival for the first time at Yale, the guy always made him lose his balance, his self-confidence and he had never pinpointed why. However, with time he learned to appreciate the guy, not the way he loved Finn and Colin, but enough to accept him in his inner circle. The bloke was loyal, trustworthy, smart, and had a unique sense of humor. If he hadn't always won at poker he
would have been almost perfect. Deep down, Logan knew that he was jealous of how Robert was so easily proceeding through what he felt was the burden of their family. He didn't have any pressure from his parents other than succeeding in the path he had chosen, which he did effortlessly. Robert wasn't more intelligent than Logan, he just lived it without the need to hide it behind pranks or outrageous gesture. The difference was that Robert had the most wanted privilege in Logan's eyes, the liberty to choose his future.

"You know, we cannot rewind what we did back then, and the guys had pestered me endlessly to rethink my ultimatum that summer, so I never was at peace with that decision. But it was two years ago and we're are here to decide if we want to erase that and give us another chance, right?"

"I think that I still love you but you're not my whole world like you used to be." She whispered. He was snapped out of his thoughts by her words. What? "Back then I had to think if I wanted to move to California with you, but two years later, I'm sure that I don't want to leave my job. Maybe things would have been different if I didn't like my work so much."

"I understand what you mean because right now I won't leave my job either because it's what had kept me alive and I'm still not willing to do long-distance." Logan took her hands, closed his eyes and kissed her knuckles. "We have to move on." He kept holding to her hands. They locked eyes and they could see nothing but sincerity in each other.

Robert and Finn were quietly watching them from the patio. They couldn't hear anything, but the body language was loud enough.

"No hard feelings?" Rory asked softly.

"Not right now, it will heal with time, right?" Logan stood up and walked to the house. When he passed in front of the guys, he stopped and whispered, "She's all yours, gentlemen," and went to the car and drove away. Steph gazed at Robert and Finn, Rory still lying on the chair.

"Ask Colin to make sure Logan is fine, I'll take care of Rory." The guys nodded and looked for Colin. She decided to join her and sat by her side silently. Rory swept a tear and smiled at Steph.

"Are you okay, hun?" Steph asked warily.

"Nope but I will be, right?"

"Of course, you will be. You're a strong girl. You may think that you're in a deep dark hole right now, but you'll crawl back."

"Thanks, Steph. Where's Logan?"

"I don't know, he took a car and left. Don't worry, Colin will make sure he's okay. He too has to grieve."

"Why is it so difficult? You know I never intended to hurt anyone, right?"

"I know, Ror, but you know everything can't be perfect, everybody has their own issues and weaknesses. For Logan, it's you and Robert. There constantly had been a rivalry between these two and Robert always managed to let Logan win, or at least made him believe he did, except at poker. You know, let Logan be the alpha male of the group. Except that this time, you're at stake."

Rory stared at Steph astounded shaking her head.

"It's not only because Robert is kind and generous because he is, it's just he knows how it works in
families like Logan's and that he's lucky enough that he's not living the same situation. In that way, Logan can feel that he has some control over his life as opposed than being the Huntzbergers' heir crap. Don't worry, they both know that in your situation, you're the only one who has the power of decision. You know, Ror, it's not in our power to make everyone happy even if we wish we could. You're here to figure out if you still have a future with Logan, I guess you talked, now you two have to heal and move on." Steph hugged Rory, she was relieved not feeling judged by her friend.

"You'll get some perspective and you'll see that the situation is not as bad as it seems, you'll get some closure and they're all great guys, so whoever you'll pick, it'll be a good choice." Steph held Rory's shoulders at arm's length and winked at her.

That evening, they split into groups. Logan and Colin got hammered in a bar, the girls took Rory out clubbing. Finn and Robert stayed home with the Play Station and all the booze that was left.

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On Sunday, before he had to leave, Robert asked Rory to have a walk with him on the beach. He had watched her after Logan had left and it was killing him to see her so torn.

"Before I go, I wanted to make myself clear so that you could make your decision. I don't want to go through life wondering if something didn't happen because I didn't state what I felt undoubtedly. I didn't see it first, and I'm sorry I got lost and scared when we finally...let's say... got to the other level together. But right now, it's totally obvious to me that I fell in love with you. You don't have to say anything right now, I just wanted you to have the facts, you know me." He shyly smiled at her. He stopped and turned to face her. "I know you need time to process everything that was said this weekend, and in a few minutes, I won't be in your way anymore. When we were in Paris, you advised me to get to know the girls better before going to bed with them. You can't say that I didn't listen to you, I learned to know you for a year before losing myself to you. So now, I'm absolutely certain that I'm in love with you, Rory Gilmore"

"Robert..." He stopped her, pressing his lips to hers while cupping her face with his hands. He gave all the passion he had in him through his kiss to make sure they would remember this moment. Then he kept brushing against her lips for a few seconds and leaned his forehead on hers.

"I'll miss you like crazy," he whispered in his deepest voice. Her knees were trembling but she didn't have time to open her mouth to talk before he had already left her standing there, gazing at him. It took all his strength not to turn around. He went into the house, everyone was staring at him but way too scared to say a word.

"Bye guys" he exited the house and got into the cab that was waiting for him.
Chapter 25

Closure was a tricky thing. It was never guaranteed and it should never be taken for granted. So, they all got back to their life and thrown themselves headlong into their work. The boys were right. At least Rory finally got some closure with Logan. That ship had sailed. He was able to protect her from everything, her comfortable person, her rescuer, her partner in her young adult life. Now, she had gained confidence and even if Logan will always be her first true love, she was now in a position to move on. Now, what about Robert and Finn? She was still in Boston, Robert in DC and Finn all around the world. So, she decided that keeping the distance between them would be the best thing until she made a decision. She was not going to set them all up for more heartache. Even though it wasn't intentional, too many people that she cared for got hurt and it had to come to an end.

Logan had a headstrong and always gave a hard time when things didn't go his way, but this time he felt that he was part of the decision so he let go and went back to California and Laura. At least she was drama free and he could use that for a while. His father was now beginning to be back in his life so he had to keep his head clear to think about his offer.

Finn attempted to avoid Boston as much as he could. He had met her for drinks once when he was in town but was carefully leaving her at her door. Robert who usually at least texted Rory every day, slowly lowered the frequency to finally stop. He still kept contact with the boys but was always careful not to talk about her. In the end, Steph was the one who stayed in touch with Rory.

She'd got into this predicament all by herself and she had to sort it out. What was the right decision? That summer she realized how difficult it was to answer that question. Why can't I take a decision on my own? Rory was struggling and nothing seemed to be helping. No matter what would be her verdict, someone would get hurt in the end. Nevertheless, she had to admit that the friendship between Finn and Robert was unbelievably strong and that it would probably survive this turbulence. Even her pro/con list miserably failed. None of the answers were binary. Above all that, when she was trying to factor her loved one's opinion, everything got messier. For instance, without asking, she already knew that her mother would suggest forgetting about all three of them. Emily always was a Logan fan, but eventually, she could convince her that Robert could be the right choice. Then it struck her that she could seek an experimented male opinion and decided to share her dilemma with her father. After all, just like the boys, he was coming from a wealthy family and he had a perfect knowledge of the Gilmores. She had never been closed to him, but over the last year, they were sharing quality family time together, sometimes with Gigi who absolutely adored her elder sister. Rory had always missed having a father when she was a child, and she had to admit that even if this new relationship with Christopher would never make up for it, she was indeed enjoying it.

That evening, once Gigi had been put in bed, her father handed her a cup of coffee and sat next to her on the couch.

"So kiddo, are you ready to tell me what has been bothering you these past weeks?"

Rory stared at her father. When did her father become that perceptual?

"Are you ready to listen to my love life?" She smirked at him.

"As long as you don't get into sexual details, I'm up to anything for you, kiddo"

She smiled at him. She definitively liked the new Christopher. She took her time to tell him the ins and outs of her little drama. He listened attentively, regularly nodding and encouraging her to keep talking. At the end of her story, he first hugged her and then kissed her on the cheek.
"I can't tell you what to do, it's your life, just that I'll be supportive of any decision given that it's yours. I can only offer you this advice that I learned badly at my expense. You have to be happy first with yourself before being able to fully commit to a relationship. At least I think that's why it never worked with your mother despite that she's the love of my life."

Rory's eyes got saucer-wide. She'd never heard her father confessing that way about his feelings for Lorelai. She could see he was emotional and she realized that their relationship had reached another level.

"I'm impressed, what you did with Logan was very matured, I wished I had done that with your mother. It took us twenty years to get closure and we hurt so many people in the process including you. Like most things in life, love stories also come to an end. Yours with Logan had reached this point, you have now to move on. Of course, things are never gonna be the same kiddo, but you're young and you're going to build new things with a new guy it can be Robert, or Finn or maybe another one and you'll be happy again."

"But how did you know you loved mom?" Christopher beamed at his daughter.

"For me, I just felt it, she had invaded my brain even my whole body. She had, and she still has, this ability to draw me to her. I guess everyone is different, and when I was sixteen for me it was love."

He paused for a few seconds trying to find the right words.

"Kiddo, to make a decision, any decision love, work or whatever, of course, you have to ponder, weigh your options, but you also have to trust your guts and not over think, in particular at your age. You're only twenty-five, keep in mind that you are perfectly allowed to make mistakes and it won't be the end of the world. Twenty-somethings screw up, it's normal. I know you like to make pro/con lists and I'm sure it helps, but remember that even the best-laid plans sometimes can go wrong."

It was the first time that she'd share such a deep conversation with her father and she liked how profound he had become. She beamed at him and hugged him.

"Thanks, dad"

"You're welcome kiddo. Just for the record, I don't know him much, but I have the feeling that Robert has been falling for you for a while now. When I called him to ask him to pick you at the airport after your trip to Somalia, I could hear how relieved he was to get news from you and how happy he was to be able to see you again."

After this father-daughter discussion, she wondered if she had the ability to be happy. The only decision that she made was to take her time.

Since Robert left, she had stopped running, but to her surprise, she went back to yoga. That evening she was on the couch with trying to read while her thoughts drifted. She remembered the long talks that she used to have with him, right there on this sofa while they were sipping wine. He would chat about his work, College and his memories from Africa and Asia or France, keeping her amused and bewildered at the same time. It was those talks that turned the cynic and irritating college student of her memories into the enthralling and dense man that she fell in love with. After the Logan debacle, the campaign trail, the reporting in war zones, coming home to Robert made her feel having roots. She needed permanence. However, was it him that she needed or the situation?

She sighed. Suddenly tears came to her eyes and she began to feel angry. Once again, she was abandoned by herself, hurting, mistrusting her decision. Why did they give up on her? Logan never reached to her after his stupid ultimatum and now Robert told her that he loved her, but left her to
make the decision by herself. She knew it was unfair to believe that of Robert. She closed her eyes biting back the sobs as her emotions took over. She felt selfish, silly and messed up. She knew she was handling the situation poorly, but she didn't feel she had any other options without hurting more people. She genuinely thought she couldn't do it in another way.

###

Months went by and Rory immersed herself into work. At least it was the field where she excelled at and she needed that to compensate what she felt as a failure in her private life. The only positive outcome was that her relationship with her mother went back to the usual. She returned to Stars Hollow for the fall festival and Thanksgiving. She even had a week vacation in Connecticut at the end of December, her first real break since she started at the Globe. Steph was also visiting her parents in Hartford so they decided that they would have a girl's night at the Vanderbilt residence. They were having wine in the entertainment room watching "Love Actually" while Steph phone vibrated.

"It's Colin," she told Rory.

"Hey, darling. How are you?"

"I know you're having a girl's night with Rory, but can I come?"

"You're sure you want to watch a Christmas romantic comedies marathon with us?" she glared at Rory. Rory smirked and nodded at Steph.

"I can't bear my new stepmother. She keeps calling me kiddo and has an even smaller intellect than the redheads Finn used to date at Yale. She's barely older than me and my father is driving me crazy. Please baby. I could kill myself if I can't get out of here. I promise I'll behave! Spare me another evening with them. I swear I'll make it up to you. Please!" Colin begged.

"And what will you do?"

"Whatever you'd like, I'll do it"

"Okay then, bring your booze because we're not sharing our wine with you, it's too good" she blinked at Rory.

"Like you two know how to choose wine," he giggled.

"It's Robert's Christmas gift to Rory. He sent her two crates of her favorite wine"

"Oh..."

Steph hanged up and asked Rory "Are you alright with that?"

"Sure, we can't leave the poor guy. You're tough on him, we can share the wine with him you know. Where are the other stooges for the holidays?" Rory hadn't mentioned them for a while.

"All three of them are spending the week in Australia."

"Colin didn't go?"

"His father wanted him to spend Christmas with the family... And I'm working on the New Year's Eve so I kind of asked him to stay with me..."

"It's nice, you guys are really serious now"
"Yes, I guess we are" Steph beamed.

"Colin has always been very sweet"

"Can I ask you a very personal question?" Steph said carefully.

"Sure"

"Why didn't you get back with Robert after the Vineyard weekend?" Rory sighed.

"I don't really know, it's too complicated. I have the impression that I messed up their friendship. To be totally honest, I'm totally over Logan, but it's like I have still trouble moving on. I do have feelings for Robert, strong ones but it's like I was numb, paralyzed. Then you add the long-distance and the politic conflict of interest. We're not investigating the Democrat Party right now, but in American politics, everything is linked to the White House."

"I totally understand what you're saying, but you need to know that Robert is hurting, just like you. At least you and Logan are really over now. Do you think you would be able to allow being with Robert?"

Rory sighed again.

"Maybe, but right now it's too soon. I feel we're in a weird place. Sometimes I don't even know what I'm thinking. Anyway, we're still not living in the same city. I learned that he's doing pretty well at the White House. The Globe correspondent already knows him. Which one of us would leave his job?"

"It's just bad timing. You could start long distance. We did it with Colin, you did it with Logan, it's not like if we were married, we're still at the beginning of our relationships, there's no rush, the clock is not ticking if you know what I mean. It's not that bad. At least, when we're together it's quite intense"

"New Haven is not that far from Manhattan. You two could commute every day if you felt like it. You know, I think that with Robert we started the wrong way. We never actually dated."

"You lived together for a year, it was like dating without being physical. And it's not like you two didn't know each other before. You did date once." Steph smirked, "how was the sex though?"

"Incredible, absolutely mind-blowing" Rory blushed just thinking about it.

"So then, what is stopping you?"

"I don't want to ruin their friendship. I felt so bad and guilty"

"It's not like if you would date all three of them. You don't have to answer but although I totally understand that you slept with Robert, but why Finn?"

"To be honest, I don't even know myself." Rory hesitated. She wasn't sure she was able to share so intimate feelings. "When I slept with Robert I hadn't been intimate with a guy since Logan"

"Really?? During two years? Are none of the guys you've met worse it?" Steph was stunned.

"I don't know, I shut myself down, I believe it was my way of protecting myself from thinking of Logan. Being attracted to someone would open again all my feelings for him. Then when I had this amazing night with Robert, I guess every physical emotion that I'd buried surfaced up, I became
aware of that and it was a little difficult to control them. So, when I woke up that night, I was lying with my head on Finn's chest and I could feel the warmth of his body, he smelt incredible and all my senses became so... responsive..."

"Okay, I get it now. Don't worry Ror, it's totally natural. We girls all know how attractive he is"

"Did you...?"

"No, I think that until now, you're the only one from our group that had been intimate with him. He's eccentric but he also knows not to mess up things in the group. You know, 'don't shit where you eat'.

"I just don't want to hurt Finn or Logan"

"Finn is a big boy, and not dumb either. Everybody including Finn knows that you had something special with Robert. It was just so obvious when you were living together. Only you two were oblivious to that"

"Have you seen Robert since the Vineyard?"

"No, but Colin talked to him a few times and I understood he's doing nothing else but work. He was preparing the State of the Union speech before he left for Sydney. He's not dating or even bedding anyone. You know that the ball is in your court, right?" Steph eyed Rory trying to decipher what was going on in her friend's head.

"I guess, but even if Logan agreed that we were over, I have the feeling he'll resent Robert if we would start dating"

"Probably because he's insanely jealous when it comes to you and that's why you need to make the first move, and anyway he made his decision, twice and he's in California now. I can't believe you'll pass on an amazing relationship just to not mess up their friendship"

"They were friends before I came along" Rory shrugged.

"So? It's not first come first serve. Friends also come and go. A lot of people don't keep their friends for life. We lost you during your time in the campaign and nobody resented you. It's life, not everything is under our control."

"They have a particular friendship. Logan is closer to them than to his own family. They are his emergency contact even before Honor. They stayed with him after our break up until he could get on his feet. Of course, he's by himself now in California, but I know that he speaks to at least one of them every week."

"Yeah, they are very close. It's also like the bond that you have with Robert now. I think one of the reasons you two got along so well is that just like you, although you two are coming from society families, you weren't raised in society, you in Stars Hollow, he abroad. The bottom line is that they're all bound to each other now, nothing will tear them apart definitively. Just like you and Robert, even if you two don't end up together, you have a unique connection between you now"

"You're probably right, but I need time," Rory said sheepishly.

"Your call, but I think it's a pity for Robert and you."

"Can I give you a small advice?" Colin suddenly popped into the conversation. Both girls turned to him surprised. He had listened silently to the end of their conversation.
"Honey, we didn't hear you come in" He moved toward them, kissed them on the temple and sat in front of Rory.

Rory gazed at him curious about what her friend was going to say.

"You act too much like a woman, I mean you think too much about the pros and cons, the consequences and the feelings. Why don’t you try the more masculine way, just act and tell him? In particular, if you decide not to pursue, you have to set him free. Anyway, he’ll still be in love with you for a while after that. Trust me, the kind of love he has for you, he won't be getting out of it easily, I know what I'm talking about."

Stephanie stared at her boyfriend a quizzical look on her face. They had known each other almost their entire life, but he never ceased to surprise her. As a lawyer, he could make incredible defense speeches, but when it came to personal feelings, it was like he had lost all his words. She knew that what he just did, was the best way he could deliver that he loved her unconditionally. Most women would have missed that, but Steph and Rory had learned to know that under his thick cover of coldness, was the sweetest shy man.

Rory smiled at them. They were such good friends.

"I think I'm going to hit the hay and leave you guys alone."
"5, 4, 3, 2, 1 HAPPY NEW YEAR!!"

Finn side hugged and kissed Robert on his temple, then turned to Logan to do the same. The three of them were seating feet in the infinity pool with their slacks rolled up to their knees, overlooking at the Pacific Ocean waves. The view of the moon reflecting on the sea was breathtaking and they were oblivious to the party that was happening around them.

"I love you guys!" Finn stated loud and clear.

The two Americans laughed at their friend’s antics. Finn was so wasted he had reached the point of no return. He always was the best person they come to cheer them up when they were down, except that this time he was too. Well, not as much as the other two, nevertheless more than he had ever been with a woman. At the beginning of their vacation, it was like they had an unspoken agreement not to talk about Rory, and it lasted a week but it was meant to happen. They had spent an amazing holiday week in Finn's family beach house in Palm Beach. For seven days they had forgotten everything, well almost everything. At least they had a real break from work.

"Are you over her yet?" Logan asked his two friends.

"I can't man, she got under my skin for life" Robert answered.

"How do you know that you're over someone?" Finn enquired.

"If you start dating again, not bedding, dating," Logan replied.

"Then I can proudly say that I'm not, even though I have never dated anyone even before" They laughed and Finn raised the bottle of Champagne he was holding and gulped the remaining.

"She got closure but we didn't" Logan sighed.

"She got closure from you Logan. That was the whole point of our trip, but it didn't work well for any of us." Robert was the one that had the clearest head at that point.

"Welcome to the Gilmore heartbreak club. One thing is sure, trying to get over her is much easier said than done. " Logan stated.

"Can you believe that we got friend-zoned by reporter girl, just like Marty? Robert and Colin are used to that, but I've never been before" Finn said.

"Hey! Should I remind you my score at the bar? And you will be unable to rely on your accent anymore now that you're back in your homeland" Robert mocked.

Actually, he was feeling sad. Finn had learned that he was considered for the position of chief investment officer of the GMO Sydney office. It would be a great promotion and he was kind of stressed but also knew that he wouldn't be able to spend as much time in the US as he used to. He had lived more than nine years states side and even though he would be more than happy to be back home, it would mean that a huge chapter would be over. The Yale foursome would be now spread over the world, even though they had become his brothers for life, but the drunken nights, the pranks, the bar games all his youth activities would be over. As the son of the CEO of the company, at such a position he wasn't allowed to mess it up. After the 2008 financial crisis, as all the investment management firm, GMO had suffered huge losses and couldn't experience more
damages. Of course, he had proven to be competent, since he entered GMO he always had the best performance reviews, but reaching this level at less than thirty, he would have to show that it wasn't only due to his name.

Robert was truly glad for his friend who deserved this promotion, but he knew that they wouldn't be able to see each other much anymore and added to the Rory debacle, he felt a huge pang in his heart.

"She inherited that from her mother" Logan suddenly declared, bringing their thoughts back to the brunette.

"What do you mean?" Finn turned to his friend.

"Lorelai has also a very good track record. For instance, Christopher Hayden, Rory's dad had been a goner for a while."

"You mean that Gilmore girls like to friend-zone rich men?"

"Not only society guy, all guys. The apple didn't fall far from the tree."

"Well I agree they are heartbreakers, but they don't do it on purpose. I can't help thinking about what Colin told me when we were at the Vineyard"

"So Colin is the expert now?"

"Well, he's with Steph for almost four years now, it's better than anyone of us can pretend" Robert stated.

The two other guys shrugged.

"What I mean is that he told me that we were groomed to be leaders, to be able to evolve in society, how to be a gentleman with the ladies, but never how to be in love and handle this huge amount of emotions from a woman or toward her. So, it's true, maybe we can brag that we were able to hook up with a fair number of ladies, but we absolutely haven't any clue how to keep such an amazing one like Rory" Logan and Finn were speechless.

"Robert, don't you think we feel bad enough? I need a drink" Finn stood up and walked to the bar.

"I see what you mean Robert, and you're probably right. I guess that besides to never propose to Rory in front of a crowed and don't issue her an ultimatum, we can add to give her time" Logan said while staring at the bottom of the Champagne bottle he was holding trying to see if there was anything left in it.

"She already had six months, how much longer does she need? I think she has given up on us." Robert had stopped hoping.

Logan looked at his friend and raised his bottle of Champagne. "To the Gilmore Heartbreak Club!"

They suddenly Finn came back and looked at Robert.

"Robert my friend, I had an epiphany" The two Americans stared at him curious of their Aussie friend choice of words.

"You're absolutely right. My inability to settle with a woman is explained by my lack of education in the love department. I could be an excellent boyfriend but I just don't know how to do it. The
problem is that I absolutely don't have time to learn, so I'll stay free as a bird for any lady wanting some enchanting time in bed with a gentleman lover.

Logan and Robert shook their head and laughed. Despite everything, Finn was still the best person to come to when you were down. Just by being himself, he could cheer you up like no-one.

Just before leaving for Australia, Logan's company got an offer from Huntzberger Media. It wasn't surprising that a huge media company made a proposal because they had got several in the past few months, but it was more unexpected to receive another one from his father after the first rejection. They haven't been on speaking terms since he left for California but this time the dark lord had come himself to Palo Alto to present the offer. With his partners, they decided not to make a hasty decision, let the Holiday period do its magic and wait until the new year to discuss it.

Robert was preparing himself for 2010 because it would probably be a rough year for the White House. The fight over the healthcare program combined with the recession was dominating everything and it undoubtedly would hit hard on the popularity of the President. Add in that, unemployment rates remained high despite President Obama's recovery measures. Finally, even with the energy-reform bill of 2009, the tri-partisan coalition was falling apart. Therefore, the financial reform bill scheduled for 2010 was essential and David had told him that he would have to study all the possibilities to make it pass with minimum damage. He felt proud to be assigned such a task and convinced himself that he wouldn't have been asked if they didn't feel he was competent, but it was still quite overwhelming. He wondered if one of the reasons for appointing him wasn't that he was from a family evolving in American financial sector for four generations now. He had spent an afternoon with Finn and his dad to gather their thoughts on the subject and planned on his way back to the US to stop by New-York and talk to his father. Besides the care system reform, this bill would be one of the biggest legislative achievements of the Obama era and he had to give everything he could to make it a success. He was determined to work on finding strong arguments for the Democrats to pass over objections from the Grand Old Party who would likely say that this bill won't adequately address the problem. Added to all that it was an election year and it was likely that the GOP would take over. In brief, his 2010 first semester would be intense but he was surprisingly looking forward to it, probably because he was becoming addictive to the adrenaline.

# # #

That Saturday morning, Robert was in the shower after a long run and was planning to go back to the office when he heard the buzz of the intercom. He groaned, put a towel around his waist and walked out of the bathroom to open.

"Hello. Who is it?"

"Aubrey your sister" He let her in. *What is she doing here?*

"Hey big bro, your little sis is here!" She looked at him "Looking good bro"

"What are you doing here?" He stared at her slightly irritated.

"Your sister can't visit you?"

"Sure you can, I'm just surprised. Usually, people call before bursting at other people home. Don't you have to work or something? A boyfriend to hook up with?"

"Will you let me in?"

"Sure" He sighed. *It's going to be a long weekend.* He bent to grab her suitcase and gesture to allow
"Charly told us you were down and that you were not doing anything but work. I came to take care of you" Robert rolled his eyes. *Damned Charly.*

"I just came back from a run. Did you have breakfast?" She rose her hand holding a bag probably containing food.

"The kitchen is over there, can you make the coffee while I put on some clothes?" Aubrey nodded.

"So, tell me why are you burying yourself into work?"

They were sitting in the kitchen and Robert had cooled off. He loved Aubrey, she was his baby sister and she always used to look up to him. When they were kids, she followed him everywhere and among the four siblings, she probably was the one that knew him the best.

"It's the work which implies that, not my state of mind. Anyway, I don't have any friend here and I love my work, remember? I work at the White House for God sake"

"The Stooges didn't come to visit you?" Aubrey adored Robert's Yale friends, she often came to visit him when he was in college just to play the little sister.

"Colin came once, but he has to work too you know, we're not in College anymore".

"What about Finn and Logan?"

"Finn lives in Sydney now and Logan in London"

"I knew for Finn, but when did Logan move to London?"

"It's new. He finally sold his firm to a major internet company for a huge amount of money. I don't really know if it is related, but not long after, his father wooed him back to Huntzberger Media. Logan negotiated and finally agreed to return to lead the company expansion in Europe."

"Then you need a girlfriend, are you dating anyone?" She obviously knew the answer, but she had to start with something. He wondered how much Charles had shared with Aubrey. When his older brother came in DC, they had a drunken night and he'd spilled all his heartache to him.

"No, but I don't need a girlfriend or to get laid, I already had this conversation with Finn, and I don't want to discuss my sex life with my baby sister, or any sister. You didn't talk to Natalie, did you?" He arched an eyebrow but deep down, he knew the answer. Natalie was an overprotective big sister, even now with her management position at Semple brothers, a husband and a kid.

"She would have killed me if I hadn't. You know her. Beside you, all the family is in the City now, so we get to see each other quite often and you being away from home is one of the favorite family topics. You know how Mum never misses an opportunity to change the subject whenever they talk about Semple Brothers at home. By the way, we have to pick up Natalie at the airport" Robert sighed. *It keeps getting better.*

"You know you two will have to share the guest room, right?"

"I can live with that, she doesn't snore." Aubrey shrugged, "I'm more concerned about you." Robert rolled his eyes.

"So, what do I have to do to get you two out of my back?"
"Convince us that you're fine in DC by yourself and stop being crabby"

"I've been living by myself away from home for ten years now, I don't see the problem"

He pondered if he should let them know the truth. That he was madly in love with a girl living four hundred miles from him but who didn't seem to be sharing the same feelings. That this girl was dancing in his head for two years now and that he just couldn't get rid of her. Of course, she was beautiful, smart, intriguing and probably not the only one. He had met others, that was what Ivy League schools were for, but this one, for no apparent reason struck a deeper chord in him. One that plays in his heart a soft and unique tune.

On the contrary of what he thought, he actually spent an excellent weekend with his sisters. He even decided that he had to go visit his family more often because he missed them. Aubrey and Natalie had been a little overwhelming, but it was nice to have them at home. His older sister had rearranged his kitchen cabinets, the youngest changed the interior design of his apartment but after all, it was her job. It wasn't that bad to be taken care of, and anyway, he needed a feminine touch in his home. The girls had to agree that even if their brother didn't seem overly happy, he did enjoy his work and that he would probably get better once adjusting to his new life. Before spending this weekend with their brother, they hadn't realized what his job implied and above all, how skilled he was at it. They were so proud of him and understood that he was heartbroken and not ready to get back in the game. Therefore, they agreed to give him a break and just covered him with sisterly love.

# # #

Robert became friend with Jim, the White House deputy chief of staff. They had to work so many long hours together and Robert happened to help him several times to fix multiple difficult situations. That evening, they were at a bar just trying to blow off steam after a tough day. Jim noticed that a cute blonde woman was checking out Robert.

"Are you aware that for about fifteen minutes a hot blonde is checking you out?" Jim said smirking at Robert.

Robert didn't even move his head and empty his glass.

"Are you dating anyone?" Jim asked.

"Nope"

"So why don't you go and talk to her? She is absolutely what you need to cut loose, so then I can go back to my wife. If you don't do it for you, do it for me and you'll thank me in fifteen years when you'll be happily married and have no regrets about how you lived your twenties"

Robert laughed and glanced at the blonde. She was pretty attractive actually.

"Yeah, she's all right, but I'm not into blondes at the moment"

"Oh, so you have somebody in mind?" Jim asked curious.

"More precisely someone I can't get out of my mind"

"Do I know her?" Robert pondered.

"Actually, maybe you do know her. You'd worked on the primary campaign trail, right?"

"Yes, I did she was on the campaign staff?"
"She's was a reporter on the campaign trail, she worked for a website, Rory Gilmore"

"A veery cute blue eye brunette, right?"

"That's Rory"

"A bunch of guys from the trail tried hard to hit on her but I don't remember any of them succeeded. You know her?"

"We were at Yale together and we were roommates for a year just before I took the job here"

"Roommates? You dated her or just roommates?"

Robert sighed heavily "It's complicated, we were roommates but we slept together the day I left, then again when she came to DC to interview Harry Reid"

"And?"

"And she works for the Globe and I'm in DC"

"You were not willing to do long distance?"

"It's... She is my best friend ex"

"I think that the keyword here is "ex"

"I don't think she's into me as much I'm into her"

"And you know that how? You're a very smart young man, a bright political analyst but I'm not so sure that when it comes to women psychology you've already passed level 101"

"Anyway, there's no point, she's in Boston, I'm here, I love my job here and I don't have time to go back and forth to Boston even if it's not that far"

"I don't see why she couldn't come here"

"She's only twenty-five and is already a deputy project editor at the Globe, she would be crazy to leave her job"

"She could find plenty of jobs here, do I have to remind you that she's in politics and we're in DC? If not at the Post, she could easily work as a media consultant with her experience. She could also do some speech writing or press inquiries."

Robert smiled at Jim.

"Robert, you have killer political instinct, you're very required here, so I don't see you leaving DC anytime soon. You need to get her here and keep the focus on your work" Robert was staring at his glass smiling at the idea of having Rory by his side. A wave of warmth just flashed into his body.

"There's still the conflict of interest issue. She can't be a national politics journalist and me at the White House. You remember the congressmen that were caught last year using congress office for their campaign? It was her."

"Then she could be a consultant, speechwriter or press secretary. There's no shortage of job for people like her. In particular, if she's connected with you"
Robert smirked "She would hate that, having to owe anything to her boyfriend's position"

"It's just networking, you're not that powerful, nobody would give her a job just to satisfy you. Okay, think about that. Now that I've solved your problem, could you please go talk to the blonde girl? I need a reminder of how it was to be in my twenties and no strings attached"

Robert drank the rest of his drink in one swallow and set across the room. The closer he got, the more his stomach grumbled. He hadn't hit on a girl for more than a year now, how hard could it be? Shit, I miss Finn. What was the pick-up line again? He gave her his best smile.

"Hi, I'm Robert, can I get you another drink?" She beamed at him.

"Sure, I'm Donna" It wasn't that hard.

"Donna, what are you having?"

"Martini, one olive"

"Can I have a Martini one olive for the lady and a scotch neat?" he ordered and turned back to her. "So, Donna tell me, what a pretty young woman like you is doing in DC?"

Jim winked at him, downed his drink and headed home.
Fearing meeting each other, Robert and Rory became highly skilled in the art of dodging social engagements. It wasn't as if they used to attend these kinds of events that much, but now they didn't do it at all. They could only be seen in their workplaces. Some days Rory missed Robert so much that she would go to Neiman Marcus, where she knew she could find Guerlain perfume in Boston, to get a spray of Habit Rouge on her wrist in order to feel he was there with her. Besides needing him physically, she also missed his insatiable appetite for learning. She loved that they had this common need for reading first editions. He had this amazing collection of French twentieth century authors first editions. Of course, she wasn't able to read French, but they were beautiful books and had a unique smell that she was able to differentiate from English books.

The official reason for not getting back with Robert was that their jobs were incompatible. At least that was what she told her mother and that she was not willing to do long-distance. Deep down, the main reason was that she had come to the conclusion that if she hadn't reached Robert it was because she was too scared to put herself out there. It was far too hazardous and she was all about damage control. She trusted Logan and at the end, when he didn't get what he wanted, he left her high and dry. She definitively couldn't put herself out there for another time, for another guy and risk to have a heart shred into pieces again. Just thinking about that brought tears up to her eyes and she already hated that. Sure, it was irrational, but what was rational about love? Lane had tried to show her that maybe she was repeating what happened when Dean told her that he loved her for the first time. Of course, the similarity struck her, the guy proclaimed his love and she just ran away. Nevertheless, at some point when she felt ready she'd manage to tell Dean that she did love him as well. Right now, she wasn't ready to begin a new relationship, moreover a long-distance one, and even if all parts of her body were craving him. She convinced herself that at some point, she would know when to go to him.

Just like the man she loved, she immersed herself into work because it was just the easiest way to put him aside of her thoughts, but also, she was good at it and she needed to feel rewarded for something. The Spotlight team had been working for several months on a huge scandal of corruption in the Massachusetts Probation Department. The team had revealed that the Commissioner granted precious positions with significant salaries and benefits to people supported primarily by his political partners. Just like any kind of investigative journalism, they, of course, couldn't get any help from people implicated in the story and they even had a lot of pressure to stop them. Nevertheless, nobody could be more stubborn and hardworking than a lovesick Rory. She was endlessly motivating her team and her bookworm skills helped them a lot in digging all the trail of mistakes that were left over the years. She spent weeks digging in publically-available contribution information and participated in the thorough analysis of family relationships among Probation Department employees, politicians, and judges, while the reporters found multiple examples of people shielded from termination. They had to develop a strong case before being able to publish it, because not only the Commissioner was involved, but also his deputies, which meant that it could lead to an investigation by the Supreme Judicial Court. When the Boston Globe published the story, they made follow up for months to answer the critics point by point and that was what Rory was best at. In November, their ultimate victory was materialized when the state's highest court released a report that led to the Commissioner's removal from his job as well as his deputies.
"Thank you for letting me crashed here Rory," Paris said while dropping her overnight bag in the living room.

"You know you're always welcome Paris" Rory was curious to know why Paris wanted to get away from her apartment, but she knew better not to ask and wait for her friend to share whatever was in her mind.

"I really needed to avoid Doyle. I brought a bottle of wine. It might not be as good as the ones Robert used to treat us with, but that should do the trick"

Rory stared at her friend while getting two stemmed glasses and put them on the coffee table with the corkscrew.

"What are we drinking to?" Rory asked while opening the bottle.

"Doyle proposed to me"

"What?? What did you answer? And why are you here and not with him?"

"I haven't answered him yet" Paris muttered sheepishly.

"What? Can you rewind please, I don't think I got everything" Rory said dumbstruck.

"We were fighting this morning. I was tired, I had too many night shifts in a row and Doyle was complaining we couldn't see each other much, plus my applications for my residency. You know, the same problem as when I applied for med schools. Will he follow me? Do I have to factor him in? So, I ranted and I didn't notice that he was trying to talk to me and then I blurted that it wasn't as if we were married because I was stuck with the only guy who would never consider getting married and then I heard him yelled and told me to stop and smashed a velvet blue ring box on the table in front of me and left to the paper" Paris put the box on the coffee table. Rory gazed at her friend.

"Did you look at it?" Rory asked. From the beginning, Paris and Doyle's relationship was uniquely neurotic. Over the first years, Rory wondered multiple times how the two of them could still be together, but she knew now that it was their way to love each other.

"Yep, it's beautiful" Paris opened the box to a gorgeous diamond engagement ring.

"Paris, can I ask you what are you doing here instead of being with Doyle?"

"I'm ashamed Rory. I'm a bitch. How can he want to marry me?"

"Don't be stupid Paris, you guys have been together for six years now, you wouldn't be living with him if he wasn't your significant other. You still haven't told me why you haven't answered him yet."

"He's in Baltimore, he got an interview for a job"

"Huh, so he thinks you'll get John Hopkins?" Paris nodded.

"If I get it, I would like to choose this residency"

"You don't want to call him to put him out of his misery?"

"I can't tell him that I'll marry him over the phone!"

"So, you do want to marry him and you prefer to leave him in the dark while he's having a job interview to follow you once again?" Rory shook her head in disbelief.
"Okay Gilmore, you win. I'm texting him"

Paris pulled out her phone while Rory ordered some food and pulled out another wine bottle.

"Let's talk about you. How are you dealing with the Robert situation or should I say the non-Robert situation?"

Rory sighed. "How can I be over him as we were never really together?"

"Huh. You like to speak about semantics?" Paris raised an eyebrow.

"Seriously Paris, we never broke up because we were never in a relationship"

"You were on a verge of one though. It's just label Rory and it's not because you two lived oblivious to your feelings that they didn't exist. Plus, you've tested sex with him, which we both know that for you, it means something. Wasn't that good?"

"To be honest, above amazing. Never felt like this before," she grinned.

"Better than Finn or Logan?" Paris asked with a lopsided grin.

"Oh my God, why is everyone keeps asking me this question? It's not up for discussion"

"Don't be a prude Gilmore, all Yale girls know the reputation of those two and you're the only one I know that has been with both of them."

"Well they have something in common that is a huge turn on," her lips raised on one side mischievously. Paris raised an eyebrow waiting.

"Their voice deepened when lust reaches their mind and at least to me, it's a huge turn on," she blushed.

"They all do that" Paris said disappointed.

"Okay, then I'll just answer for Finn as I have to admit, even if I really like him a lot, he's just a friend. Well, he totally deserves his reputation in this department, he's an amazing kisser. With Robert, the difference was that the connection was not only physical, and his tongue should be registered as a national treasure" Rory went crimson red, but sometimes bluntness was necessary with Paris.

"So, this leads us to the same conclusion. Why you two aren't talking to each other anymore? You do know that it's not that easy to find this kind of someone, right?"

"You're talking as he was THE One"

"Isn't he?" Paris looked really serious.

"I thought that my true love was Logan remember? One of his best friend"

"Are we going back again to this conversation? Logan is in the past now. Let me rephrase it: Who do you think you could be in your future? The keyword here is future."

"You're right, I don't see Logan anymore. I don't think I'm ready for someone else though"

"Okay then why did you freak out after Robert left, why did you go see him in DC?" Rory stared at Paris begging her to stop badgering her.
"Because I'm so screwed up, Paris." Tears began to fill her eyes.

"I know, the men in your life really screwed you up" Paris pulled her friend into a hug strong and comforting. "You're the most rational person I know, but when it comes to happiness you're the most illogical"

"I'm lost Paris, I used to turn to my mother in that kind of situation, but now... She seems so irrational. I want to control my fate, but it's like that everyone around me has something to say about that, and in particular my mom. I feel like her issues are becoming my issues. You know, her persistent rejection of her privileged childhood, it's like it's the only rule in her life and now my life. The thing is that I didn't grow up in that universe, just got into it at sixteen. Most of the things that I got from it were and are still good to me. I met great people like you, I got to have an amazing education. I love my mom so much I don't want to disappoint her."

"Wow, one of your best rant Gilmore. You know, you're an adult now, at some point you're the only one who decides what is ruling your life. If your mom agrees it's great, but she doesn't have to anymore. Maybe you're just overwhelmed by your emotions and you forget that you're so much more than that."

"Things are back to normal with my mother, it's such a relief, I don't feel like rocking the boat again. She gave up so much for me and I'm good at it even if at some point I felt a little trapped in her goals for me"

"Never underestimate the power of parental guilt."

"It's also me, I've been on this path for so long, it's scary to get off. Finally, it's not so different from the guys having to carry on with their family business. It's still what you feel you owe to your parents. I knew that being the only child had to have a burden at some point."

"Maybe you should trust your instinct a little more? Give Robert a chance, I don't see how it could impair everything else. You'll still be a reporter, no you're already more than that, an editor in a major newspaper at twenty-five"

"Not that simple, what if my mother was right? And my job is awesome, should I leave it?"

"Giving him a call doesn't immediately imply giving up your job"

"But if we get closer, I'm afraid I'll be too attached to him and it would be too difficult if I want to stop"

Rory felt like she was back being her college-self, the one when she did the no-strings-attached with Logan and waiting for him to call. She felt lost but the worst thing was that the solution wasn't the same. She didn't want to go to Robert and tell him that it was over because she knew he was in love with her. This time it was she who felt she couldn't handle the consequence to be with him. Her mother's wrath, the long distance, wrecking his friendship with Logan and maybe, being deeply in love again and taking the risk to have a heart shred into pieces. She was over Logan, but she still wasn't ready to be heartbroken. She knew that Robert was a nice guy and that he would never hurt her on purpose, but Logan as well and still it happened. No, she couldn't fall in love again being head over heels again, over the moon in love, because that would imply that state could be ending badly in a way that she wouldn't be able to recover. She did it once, but she wasn't ready to do it twice. So, until she learned how to have damage control on her love life, she will stay on standby. Finally, she spoke.

"I'm not ready Paris. I'm not ready to be heartbroken again, and nobody, you, Robert, nobody can
give me the guarantee that it can't end badly. I loved Logan, God I loved him so much, he loved me, but it wasn't enough. My father loved my mother, but they hurt each other. I know that sometimes love works, but I won't be able to survive to another heartbreak."

"Where's your sensible side, Rory? How long will it take you to be ready? And if it's the only reason why you won't date him, maybe you should tell him because you cannot keep on living like that, walking around in life like a zombie, all you do is work and then hide in your den. I just want you to be happy, I know it sounds corny, but isn't it the main goal in life?"

"There are more important things in life than just being happy," Rory said not really believing her words.

"Oh of course, what was I thinking!" Paris stated sarcastically.

Sometimes she couldn't believe how well Paris really knew her. Her plight was plain for her friend to see. Deep down Paris wondered if the bottom line wasn't that Lorelai didn't like the idea that Rory could be with another rich society brat and that her friend just couldn't go against how she was raised. She remembered her valedictorian speech when Rory said that the person she always wanted to be was her mother. She was expected to be an even better version of her mom. Was it still Rory's goal?

###

There she was on her first date since the Martha's Vineyard fiasco. Lorelai, Emily, Steph, Paris and Lane, everyone had been on her for months to convince her to come back in the game. Among their arguments, she had picked that maybe if she was always ending in the same situation it was because she would pick the wrong guy. Was Robert really the wrong guy? Was she neurotic? After the probation department story, she sure needed a change. It was an election year so Rory had to reinforce the politics reporting team working on the campaign. Since her arrival at the Globe, she had been covering local politics on and off and began to make a name. She then wasn't surprised when she got a call from Elliot Gardner, the campaign manager of Mike Capuano, the congressman of the Massachusetts 8th district.

"Hey Rory, how're you doing?"

"Fine Elliot, do you have something for me?"

"Actually, my call is not campaign related. I was wondering if you would have dinner with me?" Rory was a little surprised. She had picked the slight flirting but thought it was his way to handle the press. Apparently not.

"I'm surprised that you have time to have dinner"

"Every man has to eat. Why not do it in a charming company" The wheels were turning fast in her head. She could not deny that the guy was attractive. It couldn't hurt.

"Ethically are you allowed to date someone from the press?" she tried to get out of it professionally.

"It's only dinner right now, and I promise we won't talk shop."

"Okay, why not?"

"Great, Friday 8 pm at 'Le Passage'?

"Sure"
"Do you need me to pick you up?"

"No, that will not be necessary, I live two blocks from it, I'll walk"

"Great, see you then".

Sophie, from the cubicle next to her, saw the grin on the face of her colleague.

"Business or pleasure?"

"You tell me, Elliot Gardner asked me out"

"I hope that you said yes"

"I did, but I still wondered if we're allowed to mix with the campaign people"

"Who cares, nothing happened yet, if you feel something, just ask not to be assigned to his pieces. It's not if you're covering only local politics. Plus, he's smoking hot, it can't be bad for you to have some good time," she smirked. Sophie had become her friend at the paper and she probably wouldn't have made it without her since Robert left. Sophie was the opposite to Paris, she knew how to keep things light. They bonded since Rory's first day at the Globe.

Robert entered the restaurant while talking to Franck, his former PI. They were seated at their table where two other former students were already waiting. She saw him first when he was in front of the maître d'. Rory was struck by surprise and wondered if she had to go see him. Why hasn't he call her if he was in Boston? She followed him with the corner of her eye, in a deep conversation and she could see the passion in his gaze. She always liked when he was that intense. When the waiter handed him the menu, he pulled out his glasses. Damned his glasses. Her stomach churned and she thought she needed food.

Robert was ordering the wine with the sommelier when she caught his eyes. Fuck. Among all the restaurants in Boston, he had to run into her. His heart was racing so fast he thought he was having a heart attack. He wasn't supposed to stay overnight, that's why he hadn't called her, but the day before Franck had convinced him to overstayed to get his input on a new research project. She was obviously on a date, with a cocky blond guy. This is turning into a pattern. Maybe that's why she never called me back, I'm not her type. He couldn't think straight anymore and wasn't listening to the conversation that was going on at his table. All he wanted to do was to deck the guy, and he didn't know he had this aggressiveness in him.

He got up, excused himself and walked to her table. His heart was still beating fast and he felt like a fifteen-year-old. She saw him coming and smiled at him. She was relieved to be seated because she felt weak on the knees. He was as most of the time, wearing dark jeans, and blue crisp shirt. She'd always liked his gait.

"Hello Rory, it's nice to see you" He leaned and put a peck on her cheek. God! I love her smell. A warm tingly sensation spread on her skin just where he had put his warmed soft lips.

"Robert, I didn't know you were in town" He had his hand on the table and she was dying to put hers on his. She just wanted to touch him, feel his skin again.

"I wasn't supposed to stay overnight, but Franck convinced me to stay to catch up with some old friends from grad school. That's why I didn't' call you to tell I was in town" He couldn't help it, so he turned to the guy. Rory looked at Robert and tried to convey in her gaze that it wasn't as it looked like.
"I'm sorry, this is Elliot Gardner, Robert Semple my old roommate when I arrived in Boston."  Ouch, that's all I am, a roommate. Robert extended his hand. 

"Nice to meet you, you seem familiar, do I know you?" He couldn't let go, he had to find out. 

"Maybe, I'm Mike Capueno campaign manager" He made a mental note to look for this guy. 

"Robert works at the White House with David Axelrod" 

"Then at least we're on the same side," Robert said. He could feel that Rory was uncomfortable so it took all his strength to show that he was the bigger man. 

"I'll let you two have your date and go back to my friends. Rory, call me whenever you're in DC." He gazed at her one last time trying to read her thoughts, but he was a wreck and couldn't think straight so he just gave up. 

"Sure Robert" She felt awfully embarrassed and flustered. If she had to follow her instinct, she would have raised from her chair, kissed him and left the restaurant to have alone time. However, the other side of her told her to keep her self-control and she remained seated in front of this guy all the evening, ogling Robert whenever she could. Her brain was invaded by his blue gaze, his Habit-Rouge scent was getting to her and she had trouble focusing on her date. Because let's face it, it was supposed to be a date. But now that Robert was in the room, she wondered how could she believe she would be able to be with another man than him? 

On the opposite side of the restaurant, Robert was trying hard to concentrate on the conversation. Frank was giving hints to test if he could be interested in working on new research with him. His former student was by far the most talented he had worked with and he just couldn't make his mind that he had left a bright future in an academic career. What he didn't know was that this brilliant young man was caught in the midst of desperate love.
The college life was really over for the Yale gang now. They were all working now and was it the Ivy League education, the good genes, or high society connections, but they were surprisingly good at it. They were still in their twenties, but pranks were already behind them. Moreover, they were scattered all over the world, they didn't even see each other that much. Sometimes Steph regretted that she hadn't taken a year off from college like the guys did to go to Fiji. At that time, she was eager to get out there, be independent, but now that she had been working for five years she sometimes wondered if she hadn't missed something, even if she was pretty proud of what she had already accomplished. She got offered a senior account executive position in her firm. Nevertheless, the consequence to that was that she worked like crazy as much as Colin, which meant that they barely see each other, even though they lived together.

That morning, her boss entered her office handling her a cup of coffee.

"Thanks, Beth," Steph said with interrogative eyes. It wasn't that often that her boss came with a peace offering.

"I heard that Semple Brothers are not satisfied with their PR agency and that they are shopping for a new one. It's a huge account. Steven is already in contact with them but I kind of remember that you've got some connections with them, haven't you?"

"Well, Robert Semple is a very good friend of mine, I know him from Yale but he doesn't work for the company, he's at the White House."

"But do you know the family?" Beth pried.

"I met his parents several times, I was his plus one once or twice at the company functions when we were at Yale, just as friends. I'm also familiar with his brother Charles who does work for the company as well as his sister."

"Then would you be interested to work with Steven to land this account?"

"Sure, I guess I can give Charles a call and see what their needs are."

"Okay then, I let you handle this with Steven."

This was again a huge step, but Steph had to be careful. When she was a freshman, Charles was a senior at Yale and hit on her shamelessly. She was glad now she'd never given in, even though she had been tempted and wondered if Charles was dating anyone but he probably wasn't married or she would have known. As usual, she dove into her new task right away and asked her assistant to find his number and called him.

"Stephanie, I have Charles Semple online for you," her assistant told her through the intercom.

She picked up her phone "Hi! Charles, Stephanie Vanderbilt."

"How is the most gorgeous Yale blonde? To what do I owe the pleasure of hearing your voice?" Charles answered with his flirting tone.

"I'm fine Charles, it's always a pleasure to talk to you. So, if you don't mind, I won't beat around the bush, I've heard that Semple Brothers was looking for a new PR agency." She thought keeping it professional would be the smartest way.
"You've heard right Steph, we're reaching the end of our contract with Prosek and we're thinking of changing." Charles had been a player, but he always knew when he needed to keep his head.

"Well how about working with Linn Partners?"

"If that would mean working with you, I'm in," he answered, never missing an opportunity to flirt.

"Seriously Charles, what do you guys are looking for?"

"Okay, let's talk about it over dinner."

"I don't think dinner will be appropriate. I'm with Colin now, we live together."

"McCrae? Good for him, are you free for lunch then?"

"That I can do." Stephanie felt relieved.

"Okay, do you like Japanese?"

"Works for me."

"Okay, 12:30 at Cocoron on Delancey. I'll ask my assistant to make the reservation and she'll confirm with you. See you later, I gotta go, I have a meeting," and Charles ended the call.

The lunch went pretty well. Charles behaved himself, which was a relief for Steph, and gave her all the information she needed to prepare an offer with Steven. When the coffee was served, Steph noticed a change in Charles' face.

"Steph, would you mind if we can have a more personal conversation?" he asked with a slightly worried tone.

"Sure, what's on your mind?" she answered slowly, wondering what kind of personal talk she could have with Charles Semple besides flirting.

"Have you been in touch recently with Robert?" He had a concerned look that she had never seen him with.

"Actually, Colin has a conference at Georgetown next week so we're going to spend the weekend there with him."

"Oh perfect, my sisters are pestering me because they're worried about him, and I have to admit that I'm too now. I know he's not naturally outgoing, but I think it takes him way too much time to recover from his heartbreak and..." Charles paused and again gazed at Steph with his concerned look. He hesitated, took a deep breath and kept talking.

"I think you know what happened to him the summer of his graduation?" he raised an eyebrow.

She nodded and knew Charles was seriously worried about his brother.

"And I think that the Yale guys don't, right?" he kept asking.

"No, he made me promise not to talk about it to them. Even if I didn't understand why he wanted to keep that secret, regarding the situation I didn't have much choice."

"What gives me hope is that he's doing a hell of a good job over there. My father came across Jay Jacobs, the chair of the Democratic party in New York, who told him that Robert was considered for
running for the House of representatives. Apparently, he has the whole combo, money, the name, the charisma, the academic record blah blah blah."

"He's considering that?" Seph was stunned, it was so not like him.

"Of course not, but my point is that I'm wondering if that... inability to recover isn't an aftermath of his lack of mourning that summer. I've never met the girl and I only have his version, but what's is keeping them from each other? Is it really an ethics thing and the long distance? If he's so hung up on her, why doesn't he do something?"

Steph sighed. "I wish I knew how to help them but you have to add to that his fear of hurting Logan and that is actually what could be related to what you're mentioning."

"What does Logan have to do with that?" Charles was shaking his head wondering why at over thirty he was there talking about his brother's love life instead of trying to charm the pants of this blonde.

"You didn't know? Logan proposed to Rory four years ago and obviously, she declined."

"Oh... The bro-code..."

"Not you too!" Steph hated this supposed guys rule like girls were their propriety.

"Well, at least now I understand why he's not making a move."

Steph shook her head. She hated that both her friends were struggling and that the odds were against them. She also loathed having to keep that secret from her boyfriend and reassured herself that it was a promise she made to Robert before dating Colin.

"Thanks, Steph. Hug Rob for me, will you? And tell him he should come home more often."

"Will do Charles. Regarding work, I'll send you our proposition ASAP."

Steph went back to her office seriously worried for Robert. She actually had forgotten that effing secret, but now that Charles had mentioned it, Robert's concern about Logan totally made sense. Clearly, the only way to get out of this mess was in Rory's hands.

###

Colin started to work in the media law department of Latham & Watkins but was slowly shifting to patent law for tech companies. He had found himself several times in the courtroom second chair of one of the senior partners who became his mentor. He had been able to identify key trial issues early and avoid wasteful litigation and therefore earned his colleagues' trust.

"Why don't you call Rory and ask her out? Try to get back with her." Colin asked. They were having dinner with Steph at ENO. He wanted his friend to enjoy a nice night out with his favorite elixir, but he was clearly failing. Charles was right, Robert wasn't himself. Maybe people here in DC couldn't see that, but his college friends could perfectly identify an out of character Semple. He seemed even worse than last time they saw him.

Robert sighed. "So many reasons, the main one is maybe because I'm scared that she won't be interested anymore but also, I can't be involved with someone from the press. In this administration, they really make a point that we should be independent and I think it's totally fair."

"So, you mean that you're considering never giving a try with Rory?" Steph asked in disbelief.
Robert exhaled again, pondering if he should say out loud what he was cogitating for some time now. Maybe it was an opportunity to test this idea, after all, they were two of his closest friends.

"I'm studying going back to research. Franck, my former thesis advisor, has already offered me a junior lecturer position at Harvard."

"Wow, it's a huge decision. But you like what you're doing in the White House right? Charles said that you were considered for the House of Representatives?" Steph asked, stunned by Robert's change of mind.

"I'm not running, it's really not for me, they keep bugging me but it's really not the life I want to get into. Let's face it, I'm too much of an idealist or not enough. It's not dedicating my life to public service that is bothering me, it's just not what I want to do on an everyday basis. You're supposed to work on laws that would help people, but instead you're dealing only with emergencies, how to handle people and mostly your enemies. At the White House, I'm there to think for the executive people not because they're dumb, but because they have to handle so much crap that they don't have time left for doing their actual work. I'm not sure I would do that for another president, though. Also, I miss being able to focus on the same subject for a long time. Here, I have to switch subjects all the time, I'm not sure I can work like that all my life."

"So are you doing it as a way to go back to Rory?" Steph asked.

"No, I just don't see myself doing political strategy all my life. I know now that I want to go back to what I left, research and teaching. I need to be able to think on the same subject for more than a few months, to write about it for more than two thousand words."

Colin smiled because he wasn't worried about his friend anymore. He knew Robert was not in such a bad place after all. It will take time, but he had his goal in his mind and he wasn't the kind of guy that would be derailed. Sure, the love issue wasn't tackled yet, but he was confident it would be the next step when he'll be ready because they were so much alike, fast as a hare in their professional life, but slow as a turtle concerning relationships.

###

Colin had a meeting at the Broad Institute in Cambridge. Since he'd handled their last patent without a hitch, he had been asked to be their main outside legal counsel. He usually never stayed overnight, but they fast had become his main client and therefore a single day wasn't enough anymore. Steph and he hadn't heard from Rory for a long time so he decided to see if he could see her when he would be there.

<Hi Ror, I'll be in the Boston area on the 15th will you be there?>

<Yes will you have some time for me?>

<Do you still have a guest room?"> Rory actually never got a roommate since Robert left.

<Sure, come crash at my place so we can catch up>

<It's a date, I'll take you out for dinner, pick your restaurant>

Rory was glad that Colin had called. She was immersed in a new investigation about judicial leniency for Operating Under the Influence cases. With her team, they were monitoring trials in district courts across Massachusetts, pouring over thousands of pages of police and court records, and listening to scores of recordings of trials from the past two years. She definitely could use a distraction. She still loved her job and was kind of surprised that she didn't miss the traveling but the
writing. She was a deputy-editor, but she felt she was doing more managing and organizing than actually editing. Nevertheless, she had to admit that rummaging court records was a very good way to have Robert out of her brain.

###

"How are the guys doing? I have to admit that I miss them, as friends," Rory asked while perusing the menu.

She didn't mention it, but she chose Robert's favorite restaurant, a French bistro that they often used to go to. Rory had stopped going there since her roommate left, but she felt it would be fine to eat there again with Colin.

"You know, friends only lose touch if you let them. Are you dating anyone?" Colin went straight to the fact.

"Nope," she answered her eyes not leaving the menu.

"Why not?"

"Is he dating anyone?"

"Who?" He raised an eyebrow at her. That at least made her glance back at him.

"Don't play dumb with me, Colin, or I'm kicking you out," she looked at him sternly.

"No, I don't think so. At least he'd never say anything about it. He works too much to have time for that. Right now, he's preparing the G8 summit in France and the trip to Europe for Obama."

"He's doing well, isn't he?" she closed her eyelids for a second to picture him. It was that easy because no matter how hard she tried, in the evening when she was letting her guard down, he was always back in her mind.

"Yes, I guess he is. His security clearance has even been upgraded for him to get involved at higher levels. He's now considered as Axelrod's right arm and even refused to run for the House of Representatives. He's thinking about leaving the White House though, he got offers from universities."

"Do you talk to him often?" She needed to know how he was doing. She still missed him and wondered if it would ever stop.

"It depends. Almost every week or two weeks. You could call him you know, he would be happy to hear from you."

"How is it going with Steph?" Rory asked casually, sitting back in her chair, her eyes studying the man that caught her blonde friend's heart. He hadn't had time to change so he was still in his corporate tailored suit but he'd lost his necktie and left the first two buttons of his shirt opened. She thought he looked good, better than when he was in college. He still had his sweet gaze and his soft smile, but he had lost his stuck-up demeanor for a confident one that suited him.

Colin stared at Rory with frowned eyebrows. "So, we are changing the subject?"

"I love how perceptive you are Colin," she smirked. "You have to make another move toward her Colin. Do you love her, I mean are you in love with her?"
"Of course, I am, how can you doubt that?" he stared at her in disbelief.

"I don't, but she's is starting to wonder where you two are going. You've been dating for years now."

"But I moved in with her, what more can I do?"

"Sure, but you see each other less than when you were in law school. She didn't say anything but I know she feels like you're in a dead-end routine. You guys have to think about your workaholic way of life. Just make a nice gesture once in a while. Nothing big, just a little thing showing that you care."

"You're giving me advice but you can't even talk to Robert." Colin shook his head.

"Touché. It's different. And I want you two to be happy, you two have to show us that we can be in love and work it through."

"You know that since I didn't join my father's practice I have to prove I'm good at what I'm doing, maybe harder than a random guy. Everywhere people look at my name and challenge me. Same thing for Finn and Logan, there are two sides. Sometimes I wish I would have been in engineering or a nurse, never have to be compared to my father." He gazed at Rory and decided to move the conversation back to her.

"Rory, maybe I'll overstep my boundaries and you'll think that we're not close enough to answer my question. Are you happy? Because... you don't look happy."

Rory sighed and looked at him. She noticed his warm caring blue gaze and realized he wasn't even a friend now but more like a concerned brother.

"You're right. I work all the time. I rarely see anyone who matters. I have superficial friends who I spend superficial time with. I don't have any friends here anymore since Paris left. The only close people are my father and my eight-year-old sister. Even if my relationship with my father has never been better, my life is all about the next story, then the other next story. That's it. And I am unhappy. I'm not even sure I love my job that much anymore. I'm in a weird limbo phase personally and professionally."

"Wow, and then I thought you wouldn't answer me. Paris left?"

"She's at John Hopkins now for her residency."

"Impressive, Yale, Harvard, John Hopkins. Nothing can stop her. What about you, why don't you look for a job in New York? Then you'll have Rose, Steph and me. It could be great."

"You might be right. I'll think about it."

On the plane back to New-York, Colin felt surprisingly happy with his interaction with Rory. He never had such a long one-on-one time with her. Even if he had never doubted that she was an amazing girl, he now understood why his three friends got hooked. She had this unique quality, a remarkable human being. Nevertheless, something dimmed in her but he couldn't pinpoint exactly what had really changed. He had caught her lost gaze several times and he found a little less spark than usual. He remembered that he had noticed the same wistfulness in Robert's eyes last time they'd met. He still couldn't understand why she had distanced herself from Finn and Robert. She looked so happy when the three of them were living in Boston. Maybe she was becoming an adult just like they were all and that all the excitement and the fun they used to encounter was just fading.
Saying that Robert was stressed was an understatement. He was in the team preparing the President's trip to Europe and of course in particular in charge of the France part for the G8 summit. As a France lover, he made it a point to do the best he could for the President's visit to his favorite country. Everything had to go off without a hitch and he was trying hard not to overreact. He had several contacts with the French president's cabinet director, Emmanuelle Mignon that he'd met with Rory. The French were glad to have a counterpart that was fluent in French but also so at ease with their protocol. It was the last year of the term for the French President and he wanted to show off in contemplation of his reelection. For that, he got help from Nicolas. Over the years, the huge amount of American security details always had been a problem, but Robert managed it smoothly. Spending so much time in Nicolas' family made him an expert on French diplomacy. Surprisingly, what he was looking forward was the two days in London preceding the French summit. He would be able to spend some time with Logan, whom he hadn't seen since their Australian vacation. Logan enjoyed his new life in London and had numerous workmates, but none were real friends. Because of the time difference and their workload, his Yale buddies were poorly available on a day-to-day basis and he wished he had a more trusted social network. His situation wasn't that different from what Robert was living by himself in DC. Therefore, the two men were excited to spend some time together like two toddlers for a playdate. They started with a dinner in a hip restaurant even if neither of them really care anymore for this kind of place, but Logan wanted to show his old friend what was considered the best in London. What they enjoyed the most were the looks they got from the ladies, and what they relished, even more, was not hitting on them. Logan did smirk back once or twice at a gorgeous black woman but didn't bother going any further.

"So, Robert, Colin told me that you were considered for the House of Representatives?"

"Well, I was, but it's really not my kind of gig. From the inside, American politics has become just another team sport, and I know what they saw in me was just my family and everything that goes with it, you know, money, all the connections and add to that my academic education. Maybe because I'm young so they think they can mold me into what they want. They just thought that with my background, campaigning would be a piece of cake. I'm just not cut out for that."

"I know it's not your thing. So you're thinking of quitting the White House?"

"Well, I got offered a junior lecturer position at Harvard and I'm considering it, just don't want to leave David and the President so maybe I'll wait until the end the reelection."

They enjoyed their dinner making small talk and then moved to a bar where they finally let go and tried several single malt scotches. They were on a 16-year-old Lagavulin when they got past the drunken state and hidden feelings were coming out as if they thought that everything would be erased in the morning. Logan gazed at his friend and decided it was time to talk about the one person they hadn't mentioned since the beginning of their evening.

"You know, I always thought that after the Vineyard, you would take the leap and start something with Rory right away, and I have to admit, I'm pretty relieved you guys didn't. I'm absolutely sure I wouldn't have been able to handle you two together. I know she's over me, I let her go and I'll never get her back, but I can't help feeling that she's still mine. Sometimes, I still think I would be able to hear her heartbeat from miles away. I know, I'm not supposed to tell you that, but on the other hand, you're the only one who could understand what I'm feeling. She got under our skin, in our brains, and we're both screwed, aren't we? Who would think that out of us, Finn was the smartest and got out of it in time, but we poor bastards, we're still here pinning on her?"
Robert was just nodding, the alcohol had numbed his brain. He was just able to listen to the words that his friend was burping out. After all, maybe Logan was right, it had been too long and there was no way Rory and he would be together anymore, he was finally at the same place as his blonde friend. He finally was able to speak.

"Have you figured out how she does that? You know, I never saw it coming, I had this crush on her since Yale, but nothing major, and then it turned on me, I became addicted to her smell, her presence, her skin, her voice, her... everything."

"That's what I'm telling you, man, we're screwed because we can't do anything about it, we can't even blame her. And you, you're the best friend ever, I know I was unfair to you, but I have to say, and I promise I'll deny it if you repeat this, I've always been jealous of you."

"Are you kidding me? You, Logan Huntzberger, jealous of me?" Robert gazed at his friend stunned. He'd never imagine that Logan Hunztberger, the most confident guy he knew, the epitome of the alpha male, could be jealous of someone.

"Come on, Robert, we both know you're the smartest of us all, but overall, you have one thing that we didn't get, the most precious thing. I would give anything to have that - you're free, a free spirit, free of your family, you just don't care what people think of you."

"Logan, I didn't free myself, my parents are just open-minded people and just raised us like that. I didn't do anything."

"Yes, precisely, why did you get that and not me? Why did I get the Huntzbergers? Oh, I have to tell you something, I think I'm gonna get my revenge for the Rory thing."

Robert barely raised an eyebrow and gazed at his friend. What now?

"I'm gonna have the one girl that you couldn't get."

"Huh, I don't know what you're talking about, there are a lot of girls that got this particular characteristic."

"I met Odette de Valmy."

Robert laughed. "How is she? When did that happen? And I very much doubt that you're her type."

"Mitchum introduced me to her at the private preview at the FIAC in Paris, you know, this boring contemporary art thing at the Grand-Palais. He wants to do business with her father. She's incredible, I thought I was going to have a dull evening but jeez, she's brilliant."

"She's so much more than that, Logan, don't play with her. Although I'm sure she won't fall for you," Robert smirked. There was no way that his smart French friend would fall for a cocky American, she was much too clever for that.

"So that's what you think, I'm not good enough for women like Odette and Rory?"

"You perfectly know what I think, you messed up with Rory because of your dumb ultimatum. She was madly in love with you, she would have done anything for you even bear your parents, you just couldn't wait a little while for her."

"I know, I know." Logan gave an apologizing look to his friend "Sorry. Back, to Odette, so you guys are friends, aren't you? You guys never hooked up?"
"Nope, we've known each other since we were five, it's kind of like you, Colin and Steph."

"Yep and Colin is with Steph now, you see, when the girl is worth it, love can take over friendship."

"Seriously Logan, you're interested in Odette?"

"I'm messing with you, I think she's an amazing woman, the kind we don't mess around with, so I won't try anything because I'm not ready for anything serious. She speaks so highly of you it's sickening. Just wondering why you hadn't tried anything with her, you're more her type, you know the Ph.D. type."

"I did, we were eight, she had to choose between Nicolas and me, she picked him but even with him, a few months later, she moved to Alexandre Denoyer though."

"So you've got a track record of hitting on your best friend's girl?"

"You can see it like that, but at the end, she dumped both of us for Alexandre and I'm still friend with her and Nicolas when the winner is now out of the picture. Robert was happily talking about his French friends.

"Yeah, we've already been through this, you're already got the award of the most loyal friend ever. But now I get it, you're actually the best at being friend zoned by girls, not just by Rory."

They both laughed. Robert had missed this friendship, just like Logan, he was doing well in DC, made friends but nothing like what he had with the Yale gang.

"Why don't we call it a night, as much as I enjoy our male bonding thing, I've got to get to Deauville tomorrow and I'm supposed to have all my neurons wired properly."

As planned, the President's trip to Deauville went without a problem and Robert was relieved. Nevertheless, he couldn't see the point to this kind of summit. It was such a debauchery of wealth for so little result. On the plane back to the US he thought about his talk with Logan and it struck him that maybe he was thinking too much of his past, how he missed his Yale friends as much as his French childhood ones. And that was without considering his inability to move on from Rory. It wasn't that bad considering that Logan was still hung up too. He felt bad for him and decided that he had to pull himself up and do something.

# # #

Rory was assigned to report on the "Media and Politics in Times of Crisis and Change" conference that was held at Harvard. The program was pretty interesting and she was looking forward to listening to several of the speakers and in particular to David Axelrod.

At the beginning of the morning session, the chairman made a brief introduction and announced that due to an emergency, David Axelrod wasn't able to attend the conference and that Robert Semple would speak instead. Her heart pounded a little harder and instantly Rory searched for him in the room, to finally found him in the second row. She could only spot the back of his head covered by his dark locks but she knew that this neck, this white collar, and dark blue jacket were his. He had a laptop in front of him and was checking his power point presentation. She wondered if he knew that she was in the room. She looked down at her dark blue pantsuit and wiped out imaginary crumbs. She sighed, she knew she should have worn a skirt this morning and she pulled out her lip gloss from her purse.

His talk was brilliant and the audience seemed to have really appreciated it. He had numerous interesting questions which he tackled smartly. She'd always found him talented, but his years at the
White House had clearly changed him to an exceptionally accomplished speaker. She could perfectly see why he had been proposed to run for office. His ability to address the public, his calm demeanor, as well as his natural charm and good manners made him appear as a confident winner. At the end of the session, several people were talking to him and she wondered if she would be able to approach him. She was going to give up and heading to exit the room when she felt his gaze on her back and turned around to see that while he was still conversing with two people, he was looking for her eyes. She slightly raised her hand and started to slowly walk down toward him. She could hear him trying to close the conversation. He finally handled his business card and dismissed them. He smiled at her and walked to her.

"What a nice surprise," he said with his deep voice tone. Rory suddenly launched herself at him, hugged him and let his scent reel in her. He closed his eyes and realized that he was sniffing her hair. 'That isn't awkward' he thought to himself.

"How long are you staying in Boston?" She asked barely loud enough to be heard. She was actually slightly impressed by this new Robert. He had always been confident, but this time she was witnessing him in his professional environment.

"I'm going back to DC this afternoon, as you heard I wasn't supposed to attend the conference so I have to get back to the White House. Do you have time for a quick lunch?" He looked at her expectantly.

"Sure, the next session doesn't start until 2 pm."

It had been two years that they hadn't see each other besides the awful encounter in the restaurant, but the weirdness almost instantly left for their closeness to take back its place.

"How are you?" He smiled at her. "Everything's good?"

"Everything's good," she answered beaming at him. He had his look in his eyes and at the same time, they were serious with sparks that would make people think he was about to burst to laugh.

"You? How is life treating you? You look well. Do you still run?" She did find him even more attractive and he had not pull out his glasses yet...

"Yeah, I guess you know... It's not easy to lose a bad habit. I now have to get up at 5 to run my ten miles before getting to the office. It's the only moment that I get for myself, after that I'm at the office by 7:30."

"You were wise to choose to live not far from the White House. I'm still at the Jamaica Plains apartment, but I never took another roommate," she reported. He probably knew that, but she felt that as it was the first time in two years that they were talking face to face, she wanted to start fresh. "I didn't think I could share it with someone else, so now I have a very nice guest room if you ever come to Boston. Colin has already used it." Robert beamed at her and put his glasses on. She exhaled and looked back at her menu.

"I'm sure he did." He felt the awkwardness of their encounter slowly lifting up. Still, he was perusing the menu, not looking at her, too scared of his emotions.

"So, how do you like your life in DC?" she tried to have him talk about him.

"You know, there are lows, but the highs more than make up for the long stressful working days, the panic intrinsic to deadlines and possible derailments. Even if I don't, I can see how some people could become addicted to the adrenaline."
They ordered and once he had locked eyes with her, he wasn't able to move them away anymore. He told her that he was always reading the Globe before the New-York Times or the Washington Post and that his workmates were making fun of him and never forget to leave him the paper version on his desk. He knew by then that his resolution to move on from her had vanished. Reading her gaze, he could see that something was bothering her. He had developed this skill when they were roommates and she knew she wouldn't be able to get past him.

"Rory, we don't have much time left before I have to catch my plane, so if you wanna talk..."

She pondered for a few seconds but after all, who could be a better listener?

"Sure... Actually, I would like to run something by you." she gave him a quizzical look.

For the first time, Rory confided to someone that she was starting to have doubts about working in a newsroom. The presidential election campaign had started but Rory sensed that she didn't feel the same excitement as she used to have whenever she was assigned to a new story. Most of the time she was in autopilot mode. Apart from some special investigations, it always was the same process. She felt guilty not feeling the same passion anymore. The only satisfying moment was the writing. Thankfully, she loved the editorial part of her work. She came to the conclusion that she still needed to write, but not as a reporter anymore. Nevertheless, in her head, it wasn't very clear yet.

"What about politics? Do you still like politics?" he asked trying to decipher what was going on in her mind.

"I do," she answered wondering where he was heading.

"Have you ever thought about speech writing? I know numerous politicians that would kill to have someone like you. The bottom line is that you're a born writer and an amazing storyteller. I'm not surprised that you're not that excited about reporting anymore. To tell you the truth, I've always thought that your true calling was to write fiction, but knowing you, I guess you wouldn't like to take the risk to only be a writer, at least not right now. Then I would suggest that you find a job as an editor in publishing. A lot of writers started as editors. Use the network that you already have in politics to be an editor for political books or nonfiction. Do I have to remind you that we have a very good friend that could help you?"

"I don't want to ask Logan for anything."

"Why? He'll do it right away you know, not because you guys dated, but because he knows that you're an amazing editor. You used to be his." Robert smirked at this memory.

"It's not because of Logan, well not only him, it's Mitchum."

"I see, I can ask for names around me if you need me to. Would that be okay with you? Just names, I won't ask anyone to put a word, don't worry."

She nodded. "That would be nice, thanks, Robbie." His heart clenched hearing her nickname for him. He remembered too well that she used it only when they were by themselves.

"Rory, one last advice that I got from others, never leave a job without another, and I would add, above all when you got a good one like yours."

"Thanks, Robert, don't worry, I won't leave my job on a whim, you know me," she smiled at him.

"I'm sure you won't. Rory?"
"Yes?"

"Keep me posted? Don't be a stranger, I'll always pick up your call. I'll send you some names." He smiled and put his hand on hers. Electricity instantly went all over her body and she closed her eyelids just to keep this moment a little longer.

"I promise I will," she answered.

She was so shaken up that she didn't even notice that he had taken care of the bill. They walked to the conference center, their hands slightly brushing. Once they were in front of the building, he put a peck on her cheek and held her fingers. They couldn't say a word, but was it really needed?

After he left, it dawned her that they'd only talked about her. Damned she'd missed him, he was the best listener, but moreover, he was the only person she could felt so at ease with.

He thought that maybe he should have told her that he was planning on leaving the White House, that he could eventually be coming back to Harvard for teaching, that maybe they could be in the same city again. But he didn't. They only had an hour and she needed to talk and he loved that she asked him for advice. When they were roommates, they could share everything without judgment, fear, awkwardness. He knew that she had confidence issues, in particular about her creativity and that's why she always preferred reporting or editing to creative writing. But when he worked with her on her comparative politics pieces, she had shown him her incredible writing skills. She had told him that since she could read, her deepest dream was to be a novelist. Nevertheless, she was so rational that she never allowed herself to do it, thinking that there were so many good authors that it wasn't worth it adding another book that would be covered with dust in libraries. Actually, when Jess wrote his first novel she thought again about it but quickly shoved the idea under the rug.

He looked at her heading back to the conference then hailed a cab. Before the car left, he searched for her one last time and saw her entering the building. He sighed. *I'm fucking cursed in wanting her.*

This little hour that they had spent together had been maddening to her. All her thoughts were upside down, about him, about her job and she was more confused than ever. She thought that, again, his scent of Habit Rouge had clouded her brain. She had trouble concentrating on the afternoon session. She put her hand on her cheek where he had laid his lips and closed her eyes.
February 2012

"Rory, you're a single woman in Manhattan now, you absolutely have to change your wardrobe. What worked for a reporter in Boston, doesn't for a single woman editor in Manhattan," Steph said sternly.

Rory sighed. She hadn't been in New York for a week before Rosemary and Stephanie had already taken her under their wings. After Robert's suggestion to apply for an editor job, it hadn't taken her very long to send resumes to different publishing companies. First, she got several rejections arguing that she was lacking a master degree, but then he sent her some names that he had gathered from David Axelrod and other workmates and suggested that she modify her CV in order to better highlight her political and editorial experience. A week after, she had an interview at Oaks Books, an imprint of Rodham Publishing specialized in nonfiction books, for an editor position. It went so well that two days later, they called her to offer her a job as editor-at-large of their politics section. So there she was, starting a new year with a new job, on a Saturday morning in a coffee shop sitting in front of her two Yale friends.

"I don't want to date and my clothes are just fine, I don't need anything," Rory stated.

"Rory, we'll give you time to adjust to the City, but you're also going to a wedding in Hartford without a plus one, you have to be stunning there. Or find an escort. Why don't you ask Robert to go with you? Maybe he's even already invited," Rosemary pried. She and Steph were actually worried and trying to change their friend's mind. The brunette had been obsessing on her career adjustment in a slightly freaking way.

"He's not, but Logan was. Doyle wanted to invite both of them but Paris only accepted Logan. Anyway, he already RSVP'd, he won't go. I prefer to go by myself, the maid of honor stuff is hard enough as it is. At least she let me choose my dress for the wedding." She was actually a little disappointed that she wouldn't be able to see her ex-boyfriend, and that feeling surprised her. He had called her when he found out she was looking for a job in publishing. Yet, she was careful not to apply in a Huntzberger Media company, but they had just acquired one of the imprints she had applied to. They talked for a while, he asked her why she was leaving the Boston Globe and offered his help for her job hunting which she declined. She no longer had romantic feelings for him, but she was glad to have a friendly conversation with him without hurting. They always had this strong connection and she'd consistently valued his opinion.

"Okay, it's up to you, but then you have to be smoking hot from the rehearsal dinner until you leave," Rosemary said adamantly. "Please Rory, trust me, Hartford society must not be considered lightly if you want to keep holding up without a hunch all along the wedding"

"I don't need to get laid, I just want to be happy for my longtime friend who is tying the nod with her college boyfriend," Rory answered, tired of arguing.

"Exactly, that she dated while you were with Logan. You will have to face people from Yale and Chilton. Your high school reunion combined with your college reunion. You have to show that you're at the top or they will eat you alive. It's a tough world, Rory," Steph stated matter-of-factly.

"Alright, but nothing too flashy please," the brunette finally gave up.

"Sure, just sexy enough to knock them dead," Rosemary added, thrilled that her friend was finally
resigning herself. "You've got to get back in the game. All you do is work."

"I'm starting a new career, I have to catch up. I'll think of dating when I don't need to work 24/7 anymore, promise," Rory rolled her eyes, she was fed up having this conversation. Nobody seemed to understand that she wanted to focus on her new job. Her grandmother kept setting updates with various guys almost every month she was starting to wonder if she wasn't becoming a professional matchmaker. Actually, only one person was supportive and just thinking of him generated a grin on her face. Since their meeting at Harvard they had been talking again, nothing personal though, and each time she hung up she was light-hearted. It was like when they used to help each other when they were roommates. They submitted their new ideas to each other, he coached her for the job interviews, she would review his non-confidential memos.

"Rory? Are you with us?" she had spaced out and the girls were guessing who was in her mind.

"Listen, it's been three years now, and look at you, you're still so smitten. What are you waiting for? To be in the same city again? Why don't you do something, at least start to talk about something else other than work? You can't stall like that forever. You two are young, beautiful, attractive - it's the best period to have fun and what you do is only work, work, work. What a waste of time!" Steph shook her head unable to understand what was the game these two were playing.

Rory stared at her friends knowing that they were right, but she was incapable of explaining her fears. She had realized that her feelings for Robert were so strong that they just scared her, that she was terrified to start and then it would blow up in her face like it finally did with Logan. She thought that she wasn't good at relationships and that's why it didn't work despite her love for Logan. She didn't think she would be able to recover this time, and what was even scarier is that she could perfectly see herself with Robert, loving him all her life, growing old with him, a world of him and her. She even dreamt once that they were having two kids, a girl and a boy, and when she woke up in the morning, it felt real but above all, right.

March 2012

The guys were all thriving professionally. The young Huntzberger was now trusted enough to make decisions without having to ask his father first, but he still felt shackled to him, sensing that the older man had hidden motives. Moreover, he was still missing having a true friendship on a regular basis and Odette was the closest to a friend that he had. They didn't see each other that much, but he now had the habit of asking her to be his plus one at important work functions because he knew she was able to light up a dull evening with her conversation. They appreciated each other's company and it was as if they had an unspoken agreement in needing to have their parents off their back. It has been several years now that she used to accompany her father since her mother didn't want to attend parties anymore. Having Logan to talk to, even make her look forward to these evenings. Hughes de Valmy, her father, was a French newspaper mogul who in addition owned a publishing company that had spread worldwide. Logan could sense that just being Robert's friend had earned him credit with the French man but he just thought that his Yale friend was appreciated thanks to his outstanding academic records always valued by parents.

Colin had been promoted to non-equity partner in his firm after winning two huge patent deals for the Broad Institute.

Robert had finally accepted the junior lecturer position at the Harvard Kennedy School and started for the spring session. If he had stayed in DC he knew he would have become a senior political executive because everybody said he was good at it. He spent so much time with the White House deputy chief of staff that they became close friends. He struggled a bit to make a decision but he missed teaching, being able to work thoroughly on the same topic and improve his knowledge. Sure,
as a political executive he was able to challenge ideas or decipher a problem, but it was always on a short-term basis.

Finn had become the senior executive of GMO for the Asian-Pacific region and therefore was living in Sydney for most of the time. As they were swamped by their work and their family obligations, they concluded that they should meet at least once a year. For 2012, for spring break they gathered in Australia again, which was also the grape harvest season. Finn organized a food and wine tasting weekend in the Canberra region.

"Robert, are you okay?" Colin asked trying to catch his friend's gaze.

Robert had met Colin in New York so they could fly together.

"Yeah, why?" Robert answered with an interrogative look.

"Well, I asked you what you thought about the compromise I got in the Chumhum case and you said 'yes'."

"Oh... I'm sorry." Robert shook his head intertwining his fingers in front of him, "I'm distracted. Life is... complicated, isn't it?"

"It can be..." Colin trailed not understanding where his friend was heading.

"I don't know what I want," Robert stated.

Colin looked at his friend quizzically, but Robert was still staring blankly in front of him, "I'm very good when I know what I want, but when I don't... I suck."

"Are you talking about work?" The lawyer asked.

"Nothing," Robert said, trying to dismiss the conversation while glancing at Colin slightly simpering.

"Oh... Are you two still talking?" The New Yorker hadn't seen Rory since she had moved in the city, only Steph did.

"Yeah kind of, lately we're mostly texting," Robert sighed.

"You know she's in New York now?"

"Yep, I move to Boston and she leaves town. What does it say about us?" Robert raised an eyebrow.

"She didn't know, you told her to find a job in publishing, she did and found a pretty good one. You never told her that you might take the Harvard job."

"Maybe it is kismet. We aren't meant to be together. Anyway, it's for the best. Logan is still not ready."

"Bull shit. And nobody uses words like 'kismet' anymore. Can't you be like everybody and speak modern American English? Since when do you believe in fate? Your life is not driven by kismet, karma or fate, it's what you make it. You're scared that she could reject you, that I can understand, but Logan..."

"He hasn't really moved on yet, the other day he called me loaded, it probably was around 2 a.m. for him, he'd just hooked up with a girl in a bar or something like that, and he rambled for fifteen minutes about how there was no woman compared to Rory. Since I saw him last year, it's the second time that he's doing that to me. You know the worst part? I'm not sure that it's because he's lovesick
anymore, but because the dark lord is eviler than ever, he's not able to face him and it reminds him that last time he could do it, it was for Rory. For her, he could find the strength to fight Mitchum. If he loses all hope, I don't know what he would do. It wouldn't be fair to him, we're good now, I don't want to go back to him resenting me."

"I still don't understand, that doesn't mean you can't date Rory. You know he's like my brother, we're all friends here, he broke up with her five years ago now. Isn't there a statute of limitations? He can't hold a grudge eternally. Nowhere does it say that you can't fall in love a second time," Colin stated.

"Would you let me date Steph even five years after?" Robert asked.

"I'm not stupid enough to let her go. He had the opportunity to get her back at the Vineyard. After such a long time, it's not loyalty, man. I can see you're suffering, she's hurting too, you can't carry on like that, it's been three years now, it's just madness." Colin shook his head and decided to drop the topic. He sure couldn't understand how Robert and Rory couldn't be together and why they were always finding the lamest excuse.

A few days later, while Robert was out of the room taking a phone call, Colin took the opportunity to straighten things with Logan.

"You have to let go with Rory and let her get back with Robert. Aren't you over her? You were dating again even before the Vineyard. They are not."

"What do you want me to say? We definitely broke up when we were at the Vineyard, what they are doing together is not of my concern," Logan answered slightly irritated.

"Come on Logan, you can see that he's still in love with her but he won't do anything because he can see you're still hurting. You can't even talk about her."

"So, what? I can't control my feelings. I can't help the idea that we could get back together," Logan admitted.

"You're only jealous, he's your friend. Don't be a selfish jackass," Finn added.

"Damn right I'm jealous and I never said they couldn't get back together. I just can't understand why it could work with him and not with me," Logan said harshly.

"The problem is not your jealousy, it's your pride and your selfishness, why can't you accept that they can be together? You lost her, man. She didn't dump you but you were dumb enough to give her an ultimatum even though she was in love with you. You can't hold everyone responsible when it's your mistake." Once again Finn was the wise one.

"Why are you saying all that to me? You want her back too?" Logan looked at Finn.

"No, I'm over her, unlike you, but Robert and Rory deserve to be happy. They won't say it but he's holding up because he's afraid to lose your friendship and if you keep doing that, I'm starting to think that you don't deserve his loyalty or that you still hope that she could return to you."

"I'm sorry, man. You're right, I'm over her and I know I lost my chance. Not that I believed that I deserved a second one. I guessed that I liked the idea that I could still have one."

They had to stop as Robert was coming back. He was typing on his phone so he didn't notice the upset looks on his friends' faces.

None of them talked about this issue during their stay and tried to have a real break from their work.
Finn's family had acquired a huge estate including a vineyard. Robert was excited to take part in the harvesting and the others finally went along with him. They appreciated the healthy exhaustion at the end of the day, it was good to just collapse in their bed, close their eyes and lose themselves to sleep without having to think about work issues. They were kind of proud of the multiple small cuts on their hands showing that they weren't only office worms. A few months later, Finn even decided that the new wine produced from this vineyard would be named "In Omnia Paratus" in memory of his friends.

May 2012

The first three months in New York had been awfully exhausting for Rory. It was a small imprint but still, she was responsible for maintaining its general philosophy and tone, but also had to manage the editors. Before starting, she even made a point in reading all the politics books they had published during the preceding years. It wasn't that difficult for her as she was a fast reader, but added to deal with the moving, she didn't have much time left. Then, when she started, she had to overcome her youth, having to manage editors older than her, and the only way she found was to show how competent she could be. Therefore, she always was the first in the office and the last out in the evening, constantly available, never complaining. Her reviews were thorough, her comments perpetually relevant. Needless to say, her social life was then reduced to zero, but at least she had the satisfaction of a job well done.

Paris and Doyle's wedding was her first social event since the holidays. In the end, she was thankful for Rosemary and Steph, who had taken over her wardrobe issue, and the grooming from her grandmother for that kind of society event. The girls were right, it was like going back years ago and having her Chilton years meeting her Yale period minus the LDB. Rory met Tristan Dugrey for the first time since he had left Chilton for military school. Paris had told her he was going to be there, so she had prepared herself for his arrogance, but instead, she found a placid, composed guy. He actually was also attending John Hopkins where he was doing his residency in ophthalmology. They spent almost the whole evening together, catching up, chatting. Since she had started her editor job, she hadn't had a meaningful conversation about anything but work, so it was nice being able to talk with such a cool listener. It felt like if they always had been close friends. What was even more unexpected was that suddenly while they were doing small talk, she started to spill her whole story with Robert to him, from their time as roommates, him leaving to DC, to their inability to be together. Maybe she needed an unbiased person to hear out her temporizations, or just a male point of view.

"I don't know the guy, but it seems that if three years later you're still hung up on him, then maybe you have to see it a different way," he said, with his confident style. She raised an eyebrow to him, so he kept talking.

"Let's put it like this. As long as you're running after something, there will be obstacles in your practice. If you're not happy, you're suffering, sad, and you have the impression that you can't avoid them, you have to ask yourself if they aren't on your mind and not in your environment."

"Did you become a Buddhist monk or something like that?" she asked, staring at him stunned by his words.

He laughed a little. "Just do a little more introspection and I'm sure you'll find your way, Mary. You just have to find the courage to go over your fears and to answer your question, I learned that in military school so if I could do it, you can too."

She was even more surprised. "I never thought of military school that way"

"I just had a lot of time to think over there," he smirked. Tristan enjoyed his time with Rory. They both had changed a lot since high school, but she was still amazing, she was definitely the most
interesting girl at this wedding and still his best memory of Chilton. When he ran into Paris the year before, he was surprised to learn that the two girls had become such good friends, but having talked with them now, he could see how they did well to each other.

**November 17th, 2012**

Like every year, Richard and Emily attended the Yale-Harvard football game with their alumni friends. As a young Harvard faculty member, a Harvard and a Yale alumnus, Robert was strongly encouraged to go, but he felt weird as he used to go with the LDB members. During the halftime period, he went to look for some Yale friends when he heard his name and turned around to find Emily Gilmore dressed as a Yale supporter. He walked to her and cleared his throat.

"Hello Mrs. Gilmore, it's a pleasure to see you," he smiled at her.

"Robert, what a nice surprise and remember, it will always be Emily for you. Isn't it a little weird for you to be both a Harvard and a Yale alumnus?"

"Even more now that I'm a Harvard faculty member," he answered.

"You are? You quit the White House?" she asked quite stunned.

"Yes, I started at the spring session this year."

"You're just like Rory, exploring all your possibilities?"

His heart skipped a beat at the mention of her name, but his attention was caught by her grandmother who was looking at him weirdly.

"Can I be straightforward with you?" she asked, raising his curiosity.

"Sure."

"What is going on with you and Rory?" she asked directly, making him gasp. Clearly, her granddaughter hadn't inherited her bluntness.

"Well, we're friends, I'm not sure what you really want to know," he answered embarrassed.

Emily sighed and understood that she had to be more explicit.

"Well, I had a feeling that you two were getting along quite well so I'm wondering what is stopping you from being together?"

Robert snorted and tried to find the right answer.

"Well I can speak for me, I do like your granddaughter very much, but I guess that we haven't been living in the same city for some years now, plus we both having very time-consuming jobs. Since I started at Harvard I'm not sure I've seen the light of day very much."

"Nonsense, that's a technicality, young man. If you have strong feelings that shouldn't be an obstacle. You should learn to overcome these kinds of things, I know you think you're young and that you have all your time, but life is short."

"Emily, it's not that simple," he trailed "Do you have any advice on how to tackle the situation?"

Thoughtful, Emily's gaze met Robert's and sighed. She wondered why this bright young man needed her help.
"Just don't give up on her, she always had trouble knowing what was best for her when it came to boys, her mother used to have a strong influence on this matter and you're definitely not her favorite. But I seem to share my granddaughter's soft spot when it comes to you, Robert. I can't tell you how to proceed, but I've seen how she looked at you, trust me, your feelings are mutual. Does the fact that a lovely girl like her hasn't been dating anyone for more than a week since Logan give you any clue?"

Robert beamed at Emily. At least he had someone of her family on his side.

"I'll think about it, Emily. I have to meet my friends before the game starts again, it was really nice seeing you again."

Talking to Emily Gilmore definitely made him think about his favorite brunette a lot more, like he needed that. Since he started at Harvard, it actually helped him a lot to not to have her invading his brain. They were still in contact, texting or talking but it was becoming less and less frequent as their work took over their time. Beginning for the spring session was good because he had only undergraduate and master students while he had to work on all the new teaching. He was used to burning the midnight oil, and he was a graduate student there not so long ago so he knew how to navigate, but as a perfectionist, he didn't have much time for anything else. He took only two weeks during the summer to re-energize in France to be sure he'd be ready to start two research projects with the Ph.D. students that he had selected.

At least he was handling his work pretty well, but his personal life, if he had one, was a mess. He was lovesick, but it wasn't only that. He needed her, he was incomplete without her, unable to be happy. The worst was that she used to help him with testing his new ideas. He was a good debater, but with her, he had to work harder than with most people and he loved that, it was just exhilarating. He couldn't believe that it had been already three years and he was still pining for her. He was wondering if this feeling wasn't starting to have repercussions on his work. He had trouble trusting others and was always feeling insecure deep inside him. Since they were apart, he used to have a recurring dream. He was in a kitchen cooking dinner and she was sitting at the island, sipping some wine. They would be chatting about their work day and he would let her taste the sauce and then lean to wipe the remaining at the corner of her lips with his finger and kiss her. Sometimes the dream would then lead to him taking her right there on the kitchen island. With this kind of fantasy still present three years after, he was very confident that he had to move on. He tried, really hard. Finn and Colin set him up with a few women, even Frank, his former thesis advisor did. He took them on dates but never followed through with either of them. Even if he'd never said anything to the guys, he knew that the bottom line was that at the end, they just were not Rory. He was crestfallen until he ran into Amanda that evening while he was grocery shopping. She always had a crush on him when they were in grad school and he wasn't insensitive to her charm, but at that time, he was dating her roommate. Promptly, it dawned him that she was just what he needed to get Rory out of his head and he decided to take her to the Semple Brothers Christmas party.

December 2012

Steph spotted Robert entering the room with a pretty brunette on his arm and elbowed Colin.

"Robert's got company. I thought he told you he was coming stag?"

"He did, I guess he changed his mind." Colin stared at the woman and waved at his friend.

"Hi, you two." Robert kissed Steph on the cheek and hugged Colin briefly.

"Stephanie Vanderbilt, Colin McCrae, my dear and old friends from Yale. This is Amanda Percey."
“Nice to meet you, Amanda,” Colin said shaking her hand.

“Well Robert, it has been a long time since you have introduced us to a lady friend, how did you two meet?” Steph asked always curious.

“Robert was dating my roommate when we were at Harvard.”

“Oh! that glorious time,” Colin said. “And you were dating Finn?”

Amanda smiled. "I wished, but it was during the period Finn was in San Francisco. So, Robert was dating Sylvia but then he broke her heart."

“And yet another one," Steph sighed. "And you're here seeking revenge for your friend?"

“That’s about it. I’ll toy with him first, make him think he's funny, charming."

“My jokes aren't funny?” Robert asked feigning serious surprise.

Amanda gazed at him winking an eye.

“Robert, finally you're here.” Charles put an arm around his brother's shoulder.

“Hi bro, this is Amanda, Charles my brother.”

“Nice to meet you, miss., I'm sorry to be rude but I have to borrow my brother and Steph here but I'm sure Colin will be more than happy to keep you company”.

“Sure, let's go to the bar, Amanda.” Colin put a hand behind her back and gestured toward the bar. Once they got their drink, they found a table.

“So, you were at Yale with Finn and Robert?” Amanda asked trying to make conversation.

“Yes, but I'm here because Steph is handling PR for Semple Brothers now.”

“So, you're a plus one too?”

Colin smiled. "We've been doing that for each other for a while now. How do you like it?"

“Being a plus one? Well, it's my first time with Robert.”

“So, you and Robert?” Colin was amazed that Robert had been able to pull out such a fine lady out of his pocket. Last time they'd talked, he was swearing off women out of his life.

“Yep, me and Robert. I don't know though, he's got issues," she said sipping her champagne.


“No, not him. It's what I used to like about him. When we were at Harvard, he was fun, you know the confident male kind of guy. A couple of weeks ago we literally ran into each other but I found a different guy, he's kind of mushy now.”

Colin gazed at her with furrowed brows, "Why?"

“He's in love,” she stated slightly pouting her lips.

“With you?” he asked snooping.
"Nope. Not me." Amanda shook her head reaching for a salmon puff. "Do you think people can change who they are in love with?" she gazed at Colin nonplussed.

"Sure, people fall out of love all the time," the lawyer paused and scanned the room for Robert, "and then, they fall in love with somebody else."

"Like a change of address?" she chuckled. "Concerning Robert, I'm not sure he has ever been in love before."

Colin tilted his head. "Not that I know of." This conversation was turning too personal for his taste.

"Do you know the girl?" Just at that moment, Charles arrived at the table. Saved by the bro.

"Hey Colin, come with me, I would like to introduce you to someone. Amanda, sorry again, my brother will be back with you in a sec." He gazed at his brother who was talking to a group of men. Robert turned around to make a sign to Amanda.

A young man came to invite her to dance and Robert looked at her with desperate eyes. Her partner made her spin and she seemed to have fun making him think he was glad he came with her. She gently smiled at Robert and as soon as he could, he went to Amanda and asked the man if he could have a dance with her, which made her grin at him.

"Sorry Amanda, I wasn't planning on talking with so many people," he said with his most charming tone.

"It's fine with me, Colin kept me company for a while. I like you Robert, but I don't like when you're serious."

He slowly put brushed kisses on her cheek and she slightly moaned.

"I'll stay with you as long as it's fun," she said, "as soon as you fall in love with me it's over, okay?"

"Okay, I can do that," he answered with a mischievous smirk. He definitely could work with that.

A week later, Colin phoned Robert.

"Hi, Colin, what's up?"

"Hey, I just wanted to know if you're coming to the city for Christmas?"

"Yep, I'll be at my parents for Christmas. Will you be in New York or are you going to Hartford?"

"We'll go to Hartford only on Christmas day so I wondered if you wanted to spend Christmas Eve with us."

"Sure, count on me."

"Will you come with Amanda?" They hadn't had the opportunity to talk about the new addition in Robert's life.

"Uh, I don't think so, I guess she'll be visiting her family."

"So, you're dating her seriously?" Colin pried.

"Well, I don't know, we go out from time to time and we do sleep together several times a week, and it works for me like that."
"So, you're moving on, that's great."

"I don't know. I'm happy single and I don't feel it necessary to have a life partner. Right now, unless Rory is willing to start something with me, I'm fine by myself."

"Oh, that's a new way to move on while waiting. Do you mean that Amanda is a placeholder until you decide to get Rory back?"

"If you say so. I'm trying everything to get her out of my head, but it's true if she gives me a sign I'll crawl back to her. I know, I'm pathetic but I can live with that."

"Why don't you ask Rory on a date then?"

"She only wants to talk shop, she would ask if she wanted something else from me. She knows where I stand, I told her that I loved her and that I was waiting for her to make a decision, and I still am."

"It was three years ago; don't you think you can give her a second chance or a reminder?"

"You're telling that she has forgotten that I threw myself at her? I can promise you that I was pretty clear. I'm sure she understood, and I'm not brave enough to throw myself at her another time. I wouldn't be able to handle another rejection. I told you, I'm fine like this right now. I finally got my shit together, I don't want to rock the boat."

"Who's saying to throw yourself at her? Just ask her on a date. She's a girl, have you considered she could play hard to get?" Colin perfectly knew that it wasn't what Rory was doing, but he was running out of arguments to convince his friend.

"For three years? Do girls still do that in the twenty-first century and for that long? I thought that we were now supposed to have a healthy relationship, nothing left unsaid, women consent and so on? I did that, she decided that we were not meant to be together, I'm still in love with her but I have to move on man, I can't let her swish around in my brain forever."

"Okay, let's say you're moving on, are you coming at the Vanderbilt New year eve party? It's in Manhattan this year, it's kind of big because they're reuniting all the Vanderbilts from the east coast."

"You just talked me out of it. Will she be there?"

"Who?" Colin wanted to play dumb.

"Smart ass."

"Don't know, I guess you're coming if she's not?" Colin sighed. He was sick of their game.

"You said so. No, I think I'll pass."

"I know it's not your thing but I have to be there and Logan will be too, so that's two reasons for you to come. Plus, it has been a long time since we haven't seen each other, we'll try to convince Finn to come states side."

"Okay, but tell me if Rory is coming."

"Will you come with Amanda?" Colin wondered if seeing Robert with another woman could get Rory back to her senses.

"Don't know if she'll be back, I have to ask her."
Okay, keep in touch buddy."

Colin sighed. This situation was ridiculous on so many levels. His three best mates were stuck in a teen drama with the girl who happened to be now his best female friend and also his girlfriend's best friend. It was now impossible to see them all together. They couldn't even be in the same society function. Surprisingly, the most adult was Finn, he could actually behave himself, but he was now in Australia. The consequence of all that was that the Yale gang did not have their summer gathering all together anymore. The guys and the girls were just seeing each other separately.

###

Rory spent some days with Paris after Christmas. When the young doctor had left to attend the John Hopkins Surgeon residency program, it had been tough for the brunette. Not only they were not in the same town anymore, Paris was overworked and difficult to reach. Over the years, they had been able to keep their friendship going even though their lives changed but this one hit Rory harder.

"Are you dating anyone?" Paris asked bluntly. They were having a movie time and it felt like college again.

"Nope."

"Have you thought about calling Robert?"

"I do talk to him."

"You know what I mean, not talking about work. You two had a thing together even if you don't want to admit it."

"It didn't work, remember?"

"Time has passed now you two made mistakes stop pretending that you're too good to make mistakes, suck it up and call him. He may be your soulmate. If he's not, he's damned close to it. Remember, I was there and I could see how you two were good for each other. You both have your own mind and he challenges you as well as you do it for him, you both inspire each other. Didn't you tell me how you loved working with him when you were in Paris?"

"Okay, he's very smart and I love talking to him. We were friends and at some point, it got out of control."

"Then if you're friends why you guys don't hang out anymore?"

"Circumstances. We don't leave in the same city, overworked."

"That didn't stop you before. Come on Rory, how long are you going to be in denial? You told me that sex with him was amazing, don't you miss that?"

"I do, but what if it was just lust, passion, not love?"

"Because you're capable of that? Sex without feelings? Where's Rory Gilmore?"

"Fine, I resent him. Happy now?"

"You resent him? For what? Still waiting for you after three years? Come on Gilmore are you insane?"

"For giving up on me, just like Logan did. I know it's totally irrational and I don't understand where
does it come from but that's what I'm feeling." Her voice was slightly trembling.

"You're seriously comparing Robert to Logan?" Paris asked in disbelief.

"Stop scolding me, I'm your friend, not your daughter. I told you, I know it sounds crazy. I'm not trying to make excuses, just explaining myself"

"It doesn't only have the sound, it is crazy! I know I'm not a shrink but my explanation is that you're projecting on Robert the resentment you have for your father being out of your life. Robert didn't walk out, he told you he loved you and left you time to make a decision, but it's been three years, are you still willing to do something?"

Paris gazed at her friend waiting for a reaction. After a few minutes, Rory finally spoke up.

"You may have a lead here."

"Rory, nobody told us that sometimes people stay, but you see sometimes they do and they even do their best to love us. Look at Doyle - but to experience that you have to give them the chance to do it. You've already made a step toward him, you guys are talking again and he didn't run away. You're used to them chasing you but this time, you're the one that should take the leap."

"Sometimes I think that maybe we just aren't meant to be together, just like Logan and I weren't," she said sheepishly.

"I don't think it's written somewhere Rory, if you want a successful relationship, you have to work for it. The question is, do you know what you want?"

"Maybe not."

"Rory, you're still in love with him"

"No, I'm not, I'm just lost at sea in my personal life but I'm doing great at work I have to focus on that, then it will take over and everything will be better."  

"You sound like it," Paris mocked.

"Maybe with the memory of him, or of what I think it would have been like to be with him."

"It's not too late, you can still be with him. You're one of the biggest Christmas spirit believers so you know that there's no problem that can defeat Christmas. Reach out to him, send him a present, do something. Don't let too much time pass between you two."

Paris gazed at her longtime friend. They had known each other for twelve years now and they had learned to decipher each other feelings. Rory could be more stubborn than herself and she had to break this streak one way or another.

"Rory, listen to me. Stop referencing your life with your pop culture. It was fun when we were teenagers, but it doesn't work anymore. You're driven by too many issues. You're not in a romantic comedy, things will not solve by themselves. Just look at the bright side and try to follow your heart. Sure, it can break but, it has been more than three years now and you're still pining for him. Let's even do your damn pro-con list if you want, I'm sure you'll mostly have pros. The only con is the risk to be heartbroken. I promise I'll be there if it'll turn bad, but I'm sure it won't."

Paris moved closer to her and gave her a big bear hug.
"Paris, what's wrong with me? You know I love him, but I'm so scared that it couldn't work, it's like I was numb, I just can't move toward him, and I know he's been waiting. I can hear each time we talk on the phone that he's waiting for something from me, and it's killing me. You know, each time I fell in love, they left me. Why would it change this time?"

She cried her heart out, but at least she felt a little relief. Paris was torn, she understood that her usually so rational friend had reached love insanity, and she wasn't able to help her. She needed a love guru or whoever who could pull her out of the swamp she got stuck in.

"I know I'm in Baltimore, you're in New York and we can't talk as much as we used to do, but you still trust me, right?"

Rory nodded.

"You're twenty-eight, you're supposed to be at the peak of your fertility. I don't say that you have to get pregnant, just that's the best time for mind-blowing orgasms. You shouldn't miss that. So, if it's not with Robert, find another guy but get back in the game and stop with this BS with your work. You among all women can do both. You're an amazing editor and the best friend ever, but I think you can have so much more than what you settled for. You deserve to be taken care of, and not only by your mother or your friends but also by a man that loves you and that you'll love back."

She knew that Paris was right, at least she couldn't stay in her shithole situation. She was really scared that she wasn't good enough for him. He had become such an amazing man and she was still trying to find her way. How could she be his partner in life? Every time they talked he was there for her, always had an answer, but what was she giving him?
The coffee shop was unexpectedly full, mainly with people by themselves taking four or two people tables. By the window, Rory spotted a man alone reading a newspaper, probably a foreign one and the only physical print in the room. Everyone else was locked on a screen. She chose the out-of-time guy, walked over to him and put down her tray.

"Would you mind if I sit?" she asked gently.

He lowered his newspaper, eyed her and cracked a grin. "Sure Rory, it's a pleasure."

She looked back at him with an arched eyebrow. He had a slight charming French accent, was about her age, and clad in a dark gray tailored suit with a blue crisp shirt and dark blue tie, extremely elegant.

"I'm hurt, you don't remember me?" he asked, and then it struck her.

"Oh my god, Nicolas! I'm so sorry, it's such a surprise to see you here." She beamed at him and sat.

"Well, I work at the French consulate in New York now," he smiled at her. She hadn't changed, still had this je ne sais quoi and he could see why his childhood friend couldn't let go.

"Oh... How long have you been stateside?" Seeing Nicolas instantly brought back her Paris memories when she was still discovering Robert and started falling for him but just didn't know it.

"A couple of months," he answered, eyeing her big cinnamon roll and remembering she had a sweet tooth.

He was usually chatty but his mind was busy observing this woman that had captured his best friend's heart for so long. She had been the main subject of conversation last weekend. Robert had spent an entire evening explaining that he had this nagging thought that she was the woman he wanted to live his entire life with, that no matter what he had tried, she had weaseled in his brain. That she was gorgeous, but that what he was even more attracted to was radiating from inside, that he couldn't imagine not being able to interact with her anymore. Nicolas was intrigued, he had never felt something like that for anyone, and he knew it was the first time for Robert.

"Do you miss Paris?" she asked, pulling him out from his reflection.

"Sure, a little, but I chose this life and I'm kind of happy to be assigned in the US. Even if we're not in the same city, I got to see Robert more often." Nicolas saw Rory's face tense a little at the mention of their friend. "Do you want to talk about him?"

"There's not much to say. He lives in Boston, I live in New York since he left for the White House, we haven't seen each other much. We sometimes talk on the phone or text. The Yale gang is kind of dispersed everywhere. As I don't attend society parties anymore, I mainly only see the ones that are in the city."

"Come on Rory, I don't know you very much, but I do know him very well." Nicolas sighed. Just last week, he had tried to convince his American friend that the situation was ridiculous and that he should talk to Rory but his childhood mate was too proud or stubborn to do anything. He again gave him that lame excuse that if he'd reached out to her first, he would betray Logan.

"Okay, I wasn't going to say anything about that but I think you've got to know this for the sake of
you two. Consider it as my charitable duty," Nicolas said determined.

Rory raised an eyebrow.

"I think it will help you understand why he needs to be so...let's say loyal to Logan. Not that I don't think that the ball is still in your court, but I know that I've only got his version of the facts."

"You've caught my attention." Rory wondered what the Frenchman was talking about.

"The summer after Robert's Yale graduation, we decided to have a motorbike tour in Spain, the three of us."

"With Odette?" she asked trying to understand where he was heading.

"No, with Antoine."

"Who's Antoine?"

"Oh... He never mentioned him?" It dawned on Nicolas that his friend had compartmentalized his French and American life.

"Not that I recall."

"Antoine is...was Odette's twin brother. Let's say that Antoine was closer to Robert than I am. They had this weird connection as if they always knew what the other was thinking. Antoine was the main reason for Robert staying in France when his parents went back to the States."

"I thought there were only three musketeers, that makes four."

"If you counted d'Artagnan, they were four."

"I thought you two were already quite close?"

"We are, but you'll understand better in a moment. So, they started just the two of them and I was supposed to join them once I had finished my internship. They chose to ride on small roads instead of highways, just to take their time and enjoy the summer. To cut a long story short, a drunk driver came from nowhere and struck Antoine, who slid and hit his back head on a huge tree. He died in Robert's arms."

"Oh my god!" Rory stared at Nicolas who looked emotional despite the fact that event had occurred seven years ago now. How could she had never heard of this story?

"Robert had to handle everything by himself partly because he had trouble reaching Antoine's parents who were hiking, out of phone reach at that moment. Odette arrived as soon as possible but she was a wreck. By the time their parents got there, he had taken care of everything, the papers, the repatriation, so he didn't have time to really understand what had happened, that he lost his other half. At the end of the summer, he spent two weeks in a monastery to gather himself and mourn before starting Harvard. It was extremely tough on him and I felt that you should know because I guess it kind of explains why he's so afraid to lose Logan's friendship, which I'm sure he'll never do and if he does, it means that Logan didn't deserve it. You know, I even feel guilty because I was supposed to be with them. We knew each other since we were five."

Rory felt sad and so sorry for them. She was rewinding all the moments she had spent with him in the light of this information. How he always had given in to his friends, how they constantly came first for him.
"Thanks for telling me. It explains a lot." She felt tears coming up her eyes.

"Rory, you may think that he likes to play around with women, but it's not him. He doesn't give love to that many people, he chose you and no matter what will happen, he will stick with you. You guys are going to be together, it might not be on your calendar, but it's in the universe's calendar and I can see in your eyes that you care for him."

Rory stared at Nicolas awestruck and speechless. He could see he had hit a cord.

"I have to go now, but here's my card. Call me if you want to talk."

"Thanks, Nicolas," she said sincerely.

"My pleasure." He gave her a small grin, put his newspaper in his messenger bag and left with the feeling of a job well done.

# # #

Rory acclimated quite well with the life in the city and in particular professionally. When she came back from her Christmas break, Rodham had asked her to leave Oak books for their headquarters to manage their politics section. It wasn't surprising after two of the books she had edited at reached the 100 notable books of 2012 in The New York Times. Since she'd arrived in Manhattan, she was staying in the apartment that her grandparents had bought for her when they thought that she would be interning at The New York Times after graduation. It was quite convenient as it was at three blocks from Colin and Steph's. They often get together for brunch on Sundays. She really enjoyed their friendship. Along the years, Colin became the brother that she never had. She could see what Steph saw in him for years now. When you got past his uptight façade, he was the sweetest guy on earth, extremely thoughtful and totally trustworthy.

They were having brunch and while Colin was in the kitchen, Steph watched Rory lost in her thoughts, cradling her coffee mug in her hands.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Rory blushed a little and gazed at her friend.

"You were thinking about him, right?" Steph easily guessed.

Rory nodded.

"How long you guys have been talking again?"

"You mean regularly?" Steph nodded.

"About a year."

"But you guys only talk shop, right?"

"Yep, anything but personal."

"If you want to take it to another level I think you have to initiate it, he won't do it."

"I don't think he wants it or he would have given a sign. Anyway, Colin told me that he was seeing someone."

"Yes, he's but it's nothing serious. You know at some point they have to get laid, let off the steam to be thinking straight. He's just a thirty-year-old guy. On the other hand, how long do you want to wait? Stop making assumptions about what he wants, and overthinking this, and if you're over him,
cut him loose and start dating again. You're 28, at least get laid too."

Rory looked at her friend with knit brows and saw Colin who overheard the conversation and was standing behind his girlfriend staring at her.

"Steph is right, Rory," Colin stepped in.


"Everything. You're only dating the guys that your grandmother is setting you up with and I don't think you've even got to second base with any of them or it would have been in page six of the Yale Daily News - as I recall that she's only choosing among our alma mater alumni." They all laughed.

Colin kept talking while sitting in front of her.

"He's a guy, Rory. As brilliant as he can be in his work, he's pretty basic when it comes to relationships. Maybe it's the testosterone, but he won't be able to detect subtle female signals. You girls can talk for hours, even days trying to decipher every move from a guy, but I promise Rob, me and I think I can also speak for Finn and Logan are absolutely incapable of that. Plus, after the first debacle, the burns on his fingers are still hurting and this not mentioning the fear of jeopardizing Logan's friendship. As surprising as it can be, he still knows what he wants, I know what he wants, everyone in the gang knows what he wants, but the question is: do you know what you want?"

Rory pursed her lips and looked down. Colin was right, did she know what she wanted?

"I still think that Rory needs to get laid or better yet, a smash and dash so that she's sure. What about the new hot guy at your firm?" Steph said tenaciously.

"Who? Peter?" Colin looked at his girlfriend quizzically.

"Yes him, Rory, he's the perfect guy for what you need. Super hot, not at all interested in commitment."

"Oh! I'm so not involved in this." Colin tried to leave the room.

"Wait, Colin, you've been at the gym with him, how does the guy look naked?" Steph asked. Colin gazed at her, his eyes widened.

"Don't worry honey, it's for Rory. I promise I'll be very nice to you this evening," Steph said batting her eyelashes.

"I guess he's quite alright," Colin muttered. "Okay, I'm out of this. Robert is so going to kill me."

"Really, Steph, I'm fine," Rory tried to convince her friend.

"No, no, if you continue your abstinence streak, as Finn is not around, you'll jump on Colin and I can't let you do that," Steph smirked.

"Can we stop talking about my sex life?" Rory asked blushing. "Or my non-existent sex life.

Steph checked that Colin was in his study.

"Seriously Ror, you should get back in the game. Not necessarily with this Pete guy, just to change your mind and help you to know what you want. It's already been more than three years now. It's time to decide to do something about it. You've got to get laid so that it's not your hormones or your physical needs that are speaking."
After several minutes of silence, Steph took Rory's hand.

"You're allowed to be happy. You know how I both love you, you two cannot stay in limbo like this," she smiled.

"You're may be right, Paris kind of told me the same thing."

"Of course, I'm right. See, even Paris agrees with me. At least think about it. It could be a push to lead you one way or another."

###

Steph had always been a very stubborn girl. That Friday evening, Colin called to say that he was having drinks to blow off steam with some colleagues before heading home as all the lawyers of his department firm were going to Los Angeles the following morning for an internal seminar. She knew it was the perfect opportunity for Rory to meet Peter, but it shouldn't look like a setup. She, therefore, asked Rosemary to phone Rory in order to convince her to have drinks. In the meantime, she checked with Colin's secretary to see if the guys were indeed at their usual bar.

"Let's go have drinks, Rory, I had a really rough week and I so need to cut loose. I'd love to have a girls' night out. Steph is already on board," Rosemary almost begged.

"Okay Rose, I guess I can have a drink with you girls, but I'm still at work right now."

"Don't worry, it's just us three, we'll pick you in thirty."

Rory was already waiting in front of her office building when Steph and Rose's cab arrived.

"So where are we going?" Rory asked.

"A cool bar, nothing fancy," Steph answered. "Give me your purse."

Rory wiggled her eyebrows and handed her bag over. Steph pulled a bunch of condoms from her own purse and transferred them into Rory's.

"What are you doing?" Rory's eyes widened.

"If you get the opportunity to get laid, I want to be sure that you're safe," Steph smirked and Rory shook her head.

When they got out of the car Rory looked at the location that seemed familiar.

"Aren't we close to Colin's office?"

"Yes, he told me that they have great cocktails and single malts. Let's go."

The bar was already quite full of people but the girls found a table surrounded by very comfortable leather chairs. Rory decided that it would be faster to get drinks at the bar so she stepped directly to it. While she was ordering, a very handsome guy with dark hair, emerald eyes came next to her. He introduced himself and started to chat with her. While he was talking to her, never losing eye contact, she noticed that he had a dimple on his chin reminding her of Sam Shepard in The Right Stuff.

Steph looked at Rory and grinned. "That was fast," she said.

Rosemary followed Steph's gaze.
"Is he the guy?" she asked.

"Yep, I knew she was his perfect prey."

Suddenly she heard a familiar voice.

"Well, well, well, what are you lovely ladies are doing here?" Colin put a peck on Rose's cheek and sat on the arm of Steph's chair and kissed her forehead.

"Honey you're here? We thought we had a girl's night out as Rose needed to change her mind."

"And it's a total coincidence that you happened to choose a bar that is in the lobby of my office building?" Colin smirked, "are you two alone?"

"Rory is at the bar getting our drinks."

Colin turned his head and saw Peter talking to her "Oh! I see, Steph you're evil."

"Nope, I'm a genius," she grinned. Colin raised his hand to get Rory's attention which made Peter furrowed his brows.

"Do you know Colin McCrae?"

"Yes, he's a very good friend of mine," Rory answered.

"What a coincidence, we happened to be workmates," Peter said intrigued while they joined the girl's table.

"Peter, I see that you've already met Rory. This is Rosemary and you know Steph."

"Hi Peter, nice to meet you again," Steph greeted beaming.

The evening went pretty well, Peter never leaving Rory's side. She could see why he could be a ladies' man. He had this rugged handsomeness, his conversation was effortless, and his gaze was very expressive but not too heavy. Even if she knew he was a player, he made her feel like the only woman for him. Steph was right, he was very attractive and she could see other women in the bar staring at him shamelessly. They started to be hungry but as it was so cold outside, they decided to stay and order different plates to share together. Several times, Rory and Peter's hands slightly brushed while reaching for food on the table. She started to feel bolts of electricity running through her spine, which kind of surprised her as she'd only known him for an hour. The drinks were succeeding and they actually had a lot of fun. The more the evening was going, the more Peter was getting closer to Rory and whispering to her, stroking her hair behind her ear to reach closer. Rory thought about her discussion with Steph and Colin and that at her age, she never had a one-night stand. She could certainly try with this guy who was smoking hot. Peter was definitely a player, but a subtle one, he could feel that Rory wasn't the kind of girl that he could kiss in public in front of her friends. Therefore, after a round of drinks, he leaned to her ear and tentatively asked with a husky voice but low enough that only she could perceive.

"Wanna go for dessert?" she smirked and looked at Steph and Rosemary.

"Hey girls. I'm beat, I think I'm gonna head home if it's okay with you."

"Oh! We thought we could go to a club," Steph said but Rory knew perfectly that it was just a way to give her a free pass.
"That's alright, I'll get a cab."

"Call me tomorrow, Ror," Steph said.

Peter stood up. "I'll share the cab with you. See you tomorrow, Colin. Ladies."

"Yeah, don't forget that we have an early plane in the morning," Colin said bothered.

Once they'd left Colin frowned his eyebrows and muttered, "I really don't think this was a good idea."

"But you agreed with me that Rory had to get laid," Steph pouted.

"Yeah but not with one of my co-workers. What if they'll finally date? How are we going to explain that to OUR friend Robert?" Colin said shaking his head as he watched Rory walked out of the bar with Peter right behind her heels.

"Peter is a womanizer, not the committing type," Steph shrugged. She was hoping this would be the push or shove that her friends needed to get out from where they were stuck.

"That's what Logan and Finn were and remind me what happened once they'd slept with Rory?" Colin replied.

"Then maybe Robert and Rory were not meant to be together. After all, it's been almost four years now."

# # #

When they got out of the bar, Peter put his arm behind Rory's back and pulled her to him to kiss her, which made her knees weaken.

"Wow! This guy is really good."

"Your place or my place?" he asked with still one arm around her, the other raised to hell a cab.

"Where do you live?" she asked.

"Tribeca."

"Then my place, I'm closer."

"I like how you're thinking." He immediately opened the cab door to let her in and followed her.

The kissing they started on the sidewalk, kept going in the back of the cab. Rory wasn't sitting that far away, but very quickly, they got very close and things heated up and Peter's hand was under her skirt caressing her thigh moving up. She felt her body responding to his expert moves, showing her it had been too long. When he nibbled on her neck while rubbing her underwear, she moaned and immediately craved for his touch.

When Peter opened an eye the next morning, he searched for the time. He usually left right after sex but that night, he thought he was tired and let himself fell asleep with Rory. If he wanted to be on time at the airport, he had to leave his apartment to get his stuff. Nevertheless, this time he was wondering if he should leave a note or maybe wake her up. He chose to place a soft kiss on her neck to try to wake her up. Rory moaned a little.

"Sorry to wake you but I've to leave to catch my plane," Peter whispered.

Rory opened an eye to be met by an emerald gaze and felt his hand lightly stroking her side. The
memory of the preceding hours came in her head and she blushed but also felt butterflies in her stomach, sensing lust invading her brain.

"Really? Don't you have time for a quickie?" She couldn't believe what she'd just said.

Peter was struck by surprise, how could this woman who looked so wise and innocent, that easily sent him off his tracks? *What the fuck, I'll be late.*

"Your wish is my command," he answered and kissed her, allowing the heat to submerge them. "Shit, we used all my condoms," Peter gasped.

Gratefully, Rory recalled that Steph gave some to her and jumped out of bed to find her bag. She came back in the bed grinning, holding a condom in her hand.

"Thank god!" Peter said with relief while Rory was straddling him and opening the blue envelope.

When they were trying to regain their breath, Peter glanced at the alarm clock on the bedside table and stood up.

"I'm sorry I really have to go now, I can't miss my plane." He roamed the room to find his clothes and came to kiss Rory one last time.

"You're absolutely incredible," he muttered and hurried to the door.

Rory fell back to sleep with a smile on her face.

Peter arrived last in the plane, disheveled, out of breath and collapsed in the seat next to Colin.

"Finally!" said Colin, "I thought you'd overslept.

Peter grinned at him "Can you give me Rory's number?"

"What did you do last night? I thought you left with her?"

"I did, but let's say we were too busy so I didn't have time to ask for her number."

"Please, I don't want to know. Rory is like a sister to me, so spare me the details."

"Don't worry, my mother taught me how to be a gentleman, I don't kiss and tell."

Colin texted Rory's number to Peter.

"Thanks. Remind me to send flowers to your girlfriend," Peter added.

"Why do you want to send flowers to Steph? Is Rory not enough?" Colin said slightly upset.

"Just to thank her for taking Rory to our bar yesterday. This woman is really amazing."

Peter was beaming just like a kid opening presents at Christmas.

"Oh my God, I don't like that," Colin muttered to himself.

Rory woke up feeling amazing. Steph and Colin were right, she needed to get laid. It was hard to admit it without blushing, but she missed having sex. Sure, the guy was good in that department, he was definitely an expert and she enjoyed it, but she also was aware now that what she missed, even more, was to making love with Robert, absolutely no doubt about it. She was now able to
acknowledge that enjoying sex wasn't necessarily the same as being in love with your partner. She had great sex with Finn and Peter and she felt good now, not guilty of not being in love with them, not feeling slutty anymore. She could clearly see the difference with what she had with Robert. She missed his touch, his skin, his breath. Not Finn's touch, not Logan's touch. She hadn't been intimate with Robert that many times, but the memory of it, even it was four years ago, was still incredibly vivid. The sensation of their bare skin together, of his hands, his lips, his tongue, the heat of his breath on her neck... If she wanted to get him back, she knew that she had to take the first step toward him but she had never been the one to struggle for the attention of boys. Men had always seemed to find their way to her and she realized she was still a rookie when it came to pursuing male attention.

On Sunday, when Rory arrived for brunch at the diner, Steph was already there grinning.

"What's with the smile, Steph?"

"Look what I've found," and she handled her phone to Rory. It was an article on The Improper Bostonian listing the "Boston's most eligible bachelors".

"You want me to go to Boston to find a man?" Rory raised an eyebrow at her friend.

"Scroll down to number three," Rory slid her finger down the article to see a very nice picture of Robert. Her eyes widened.

"So, still not wanting to go to Boston? I think he looks very hot on this picture. Unless you've decided that finally, one night stands aren't so bad."

Rory sighed "Anyway who reads The Improper Bostonian?"

"Don't know, Bostonian single women? Look, they even gave the name of his favorite bar."

"Why did he agree to do that? It's not like him."

"You know how journalists can be convincing..."

"Not helping. Do you think he's moved on?"

"Don't know, what I do know on the other hand is that the only way to find out is to talk to him. Before that, do you know if you want him back?"

"First, there's no "back" because we never were together."

"Come on Rory, not that again. Whatever helps you sleep at night. Do you love him? Or do you think you could?"

"I still miss him a lot and you were right, sleeping with Peter made me see that I miss Robert's touch." Rory blushed.

"Oh hun, I'm sure he still misses you too." Steph felt bad, maybe she had pushed her friend a little too much.

"Huh. After this article, I'm not that sure. How did they find him? It's not as if he was a CEO or an actor, he's not even from Boston."

"Come on Rory, his name, in society everybody keeps tabs on bachelors. And he teaches at Harvard, you know that Boston is a college town, one of the highest enrollments in the US."
"I think I miss him more than ever, the physical part but also the friend part."

"I'm hurt, am I not enough of a friend to you?" Steph smirked

"You're the greatest, and you know where to find the best one night stand," Rory smiled.

"Told you. With good manners too, he sent me flowers"

"To you too?" Rory had the surprise of a gorgeous bouquet of white tulips.

"Yep, to thank me for introducing you, which technically I didn't. I guess if you want more than a smash and dash, it could be arranged." Steph looked at her friend straight in her eyes.

"Well, he's yummy, good in bed but I think I'll give a try to the Bostonian."

"That's my girl. And at least one of us will get some," Steph said. Rory gazed at her and saw a little sadness in her eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" the brunette asked worried.

"I had a call from Colin, his firm put him on a case of patent law involving Berkeley, Harvard, and MIT."

"And how does it impact your love life?"

"It's a really huge case, involving a potential Nobel prize. Billions are at stake. No wonder his firm loves him, they can buy a yacht just with the billable hours he charges his client."

"It's good for him, right?" Rory asked still not understanding.

"Yeah, he's doing very well, but it means working 24/7 traveling to Boston, Berkeley, Alexandria. Adding to all the other cases he's already working on, it will be like doing long distance again. This kind of case can take years to end because two inventors are claiming the patent. On the other hand, if he wins this case he would likely be asked to become an equity partner."

"Wow! Look at the bright side, your man is becoming a big shot lawyer and meanwhile, when he'll be in your bed he would do anything you want him to just to make up for his absence and he'll be horny like a dog."

"Mhh... Sure I can see it like that, less sex but much better..." Steph said pursing her lips.

"And while he'll be away you would be able to work as much as you want without him complaining and we could have girl's night more often."

"Exactly! I love sharing with you."

###

Rory was coming back to the office after a meeting with a writer. A difficult one, and that's why he was appointed to her. During the entire meeting, she had been on the verge multiple times of storming out of the room and leaving him. She knew it was going to be a shitty day when this morning she realized that she had forgotten to go grocery shopping and that she didn't have any coffee left. Then, in the shower when she was running out of hair conditioner. Now that she had successfully handled this task, she was hoping that her day would get better. She was walking fast, hoping to get to her office and be able to relax when her heel got stuck in a sidewalk manhole which made her stumble on a guy coming out from the building. She closed her eyes and sighed. **Nope, the
"shitty day is still going on. "Sorry," they both said without looking at each other. All of a sudden, they both recognized each other's voice.

"Rory?"

"Finn! you're in New York?"

"Just for the day, I'm flying back to Sydney this afternoon." They hugged tightly.

"It's good to see you." Rory said feeling a little awkward, "it has been a long time..."

"It has been love, too long. You're absolutely right." There she was, his favorite heartbreaker.

"I guess as you're going back to Australia this afternoon, we won't have time to catch up." She looked at him with her expecting blue gaze, the one he couldn't resist, not even after all this time. Finn glanced at his phone.

"If you can spare me half an hour from your precious time, we can grab a coffee over there?" The Aussie pointed a coffee shop across the street.

"Sure, why not? I just have to be back at the office in an hour."

"Okay, why don't you go order ahead for us while I give my suitcase to the driver."

She nodded and walked to the shop.

"We don't have that much time so let's get straight to the point. How are you doing love? And don't bullshit me," Finn said sitting in front of her.

"I'm fine, Finn. I really enjoy my new work. What about you?"

"I'm swamped with work but I also have to admit that even though it's sometimes tough, I wouldn't change my life. It's very stimulating. What about your love life, are you dating anyone?"

"No, nada," Rory said shaking her head.

"Before New York, I was in Boston for a few days so I saw the most eligible Bostonian bachelor. Can you explain to me why is he still a bachelor?"

"You didn't ask him? He's the one who gave the interview."

"Come on kitten, I thought we were supposed to cut to the chase? Don't you have any more feelings for him? Do I have to remind you that I was the recipient of your tears when he left? Because FYI he's still in love with you."

Rory raised her eyebrows.

"How much longer do you plan to leave him in his misery? I think that four years is more than enough," Finn said gazing at her with a stern look.

"Colin told me that he was dating," she whispered sheepishly.

"Of course, he's dating, he's trying hard to move on, it's been four years for God sake, but it's nothing serious. She's just... company. I know the girl, she's very nice and it's not fair for her either. She's pretending that their relationship is casual but it's because she's afraid that he's not gonna fall for her. What is stopping you?"
"To be honest? Right now, it's just that I don't know how to tell him. You're right, it has been too long. I can't just call him out of the blue and ask him out, can I?"

"Oh my God! You two are pathetic." He shook his head in disbelief. "Call him, just tell him that you need a moment of his time. You put on something nice and go tell him that it's been four years, that you're tired of shoving love to the side and that you can't think about anything more important in your life right now than the feeling of his breath on your neck, his hands on your breasts..." She cut him off.

"Finn! I can't do that!" she blushed.

"It's time love, and it's hot," he winked at her. "I'm tired of seeing you two moping, and all the gang is not able to get together anymore because there's always one of you asking if the other will be there. Most of the time I'm in Australia so when I'm stateside, I want to see my friends all together and happy." He looked at her sternly. "Okay, as much as we're having fun, I have to catch my plane. It's been a lovely surprise to see you, love". He affectionately kissed her on the cheek.

"I love you, Finn" she smiled. This man was just the perfect friend.

"I know kitten, but not as much as you love him," Finn smirked, "please, go get him, that's all I have to say." He left Rory nonplussed but beaming looking at him hurrying to his car.

Back at the office, she had trouble concentrating on reading the proofs of their last book when the intercom jarred.

"Rory, Lilian would like to see you if you have a minute."

"Sure, let her in."

"Hi Lilian, what can I do for you?"

"I heard that you were invited to Harvard to give a talk next Friday."

"Yes, that's true, I'm giving a talk at a publishing conference."

"Do you think you could do me a favor?"

"It depends, what do you have in mind?"

"I'm trying to convince this guy to write the Obama biography for us. My brother who is in grad school over there can't stop talking about him, how great he is, but I can't seem to be able to reach him. David Axelrod recommended this particular guy for this book."

"And who is this guy?" Rory felt she already knew the answer.

"Robert Semple, I thought you might know him as he was a Yale undergrad when you were also there."

Rory smiled "Well it's been a while now, but I used to know him indeed." Why am I lying?

"You did? So, would you mind getting in touch with him, maybe he will return your call? Because he's not answering mine."

"Okay, I can't promise anything but I'll try to meet him when I'll be there."

Back home, she sat on her couch, opened her laptop and started to read the article about Robert in
the Improper Bostonian. He really looked delicious in the picture and in the article. For sure, any single women who would read this would at least wonder if the guy was really that good. She definitely needed to know where he stood now. Finn seemed to believe that Robert was still waiting for her, but the article said otherwise. She'd resented him for what all the former men of her life did to her and she knew it wasn't fair. Then, even though she disagreed, she'd let her mother convince her that he wasn't the right man for her. After the Vineyard, she had all the cards in her hands and now, almost four years later, she had lost control of the situation and she didn't even know what to talk to him about anything but work. But since she came back from her Christmas break, it was like signs to lead her back to him were piling up. First the unexpected encounter with Nicolas and his heartbreaking revelation about Robert. Then her fling with Peter which showed her that he was the only man she wanted to touch her. Third, against all odds, she ran into Finn and finally, the opportunity given by Lilian. Against all these signs pointing toward him, there was still her reluctant mother. Things were doing so well with Lorelei, they had their BFF-mother relationship back, but the price to pay for it didn’t feel right anymore. She wasn't used to taking risks, but here, no pro/con list could help, she had to throw herself out there, despite her fears. It was time.
February 2013 Harvard

A/N: Inner thoughts are in italics

Robert was finishing reviewing an article when he startled at the sound of a knock at his door. He thought it was the teacher assistant who was supposed to bring him the papers that were collected at the end of the class.

"Come in," Rory heard.

"Thanks, Stacy, please leave them here, I'll have a look at them tomorrow," he said without raising his head, motioning his hand toward a shelf.

She entered his office and saw him sitting at a cluttered desk in front of the window, a pen in his left hand, his right one scratching the nape of his neck, his head buried between stacks of books but she couldn't see his face. He was completely absorbed by what he was reading.

"Hmm, I don't think I'm the person you were expecting," she said softly, commanding her heart to return to its normal position. During the very few seconds, while she was waiting for his reaction, she had trouble breathing. Robert lifted an eye. He had recognized her voice but wondered if he wasn't daydreaming.

"Damned those glasses," she thought looking at him while he was raising his head.

"Rory?!?" His words cut in his throat while he spoke her name. He was completely gobsmacked. It took him long seconds before he could gain back his composure. How could she still do this to him? She just had this ability to turn him to mush, even after all this time. She was standing in the door frame, staring at him with a shy smile, her coat was opened to a simple light grey knitted wool dress at mid-thigh length, hugging her curves perfectly but not ostensibly, just enough for his imagination to immediately go wild only glancing at her.

"I'm sorry, is it a bad time?" She wasn't really sure how he would respond and was fidgeting, playing with the collar of her dress. It took him several heartbeats to reply.

"No! Absolutely not. I'm thrilled to see you!" He stood to hug her. Within a millisecond, his reaction of surprise switched to his addiction of her smell as his nose brushed her hair.

Being so close to him made her weak in the knees and the familiar slight scent of "Habit Rouge" didn't help the dizziness. The warmness of his arms around her just made her feel like if she was back home.

"What are you doing here?" Robert cursed himself for not being able to say something wittier and couldn't help leaving his arms around the woman he had missed for so long.

"I'm giving a talk tomorrow morning on campus and I thought I could stop by and see if I could distract you from your work."

_How could I stay away from him for so long?_

"Anything for you. Let me grab my coat and we can go out and catch up." He scribbled on a sticky note and when he turned and walked to reach for his stuff, Rory couldn't help herself checking him out. He even looked better than in her memory. Robert was wearing brown suede boots, dark blue jeans and a grey sweater just fitting him perfectly, driving her wonder about his toned chest and abs.
He put his glasses in the drawer and caught his scarf and coat. She had to fight the urge to close the space between them and just kiss the life out of him.

"That easy? I heard it was difficult to get in touch with you," she teased him giving him a wry smile.

"Where did you get that? Oh! So, this is work related?" He realized that maybe he had put his hopes too high. Damned, she's just here for business.

"Of course not, I was worried when Lilian told me she couldn't get in touch with you. I thought you went back being a bookworm again and it's been too long since I've seen your pretty ass."

*Keep cool Semple, try to charm the pants off her and you'll be fine. You're rusty but you can do it.*

"Are you flirting with me, Gilmore? Please be careful, I'm not sure my poor heart can handle it." *Well-played Semple, now you sound like a cheezy idiot.*

"Becoming a softy, Semple?" She smiled sweetly and all he could do was grin back at her.

He took her to a wine bistro not far from the campus. The place was nice and he must have been coming here often as the waiter knew his first name.

"You looked intrigued by my order," he said still beaming at her. Since he had laid his eyes on her, he couldn't get rid of the grin which was locked on his face.

"I don't know, I figured you would pick something...healthier. You just look like you probably eat healthy or work out a lot."

"You've been checking me out?" he asked, not deprived of glee. "You know that confit de canard is my favorite, plus here they have an excellent Cahors to drink with it."

"Sure of yourself Semple? I think that your female students have considerably boosted your ego," she smirked. She didn't care, at that point, he could do anything, say anything, she had never been so sure in her life that she wanted him. That was what these damn four years were for. She could see that behind his confident demeanor, he was nervous, and if it was possible, she was even more attracted to him. She was now totally convinced that the chemistry that they had was one of a kind, the one that could sustain love in the long term. With him everything felt easy, she was just comfortable and free, nothing was bothering her as if being with him could solve anything.

Robert admonished himself to find a way to convince Rory to give him a chance. He had to be smart and think fast. If it would have been a political problem, he would have come out with a solution in no time. But here, the goal wasn't to get her in the sack but to show her that he could be her significant other. Maybe he should try to persuade her to stay over the weekend. Nevertheless, he felt he had to be careful, she'd made the first move and he didn't want her to clam up. Furthermore, he wondered if he had to remind her that he was in love with her. He sighed and loathed himself for his nervousness. It wasn't a first date, actually, they never had a date, they knew each other more than most people do, he just had to be himself, after all, if she came to him after so long that should mean that he wasn't that bad.

"So, how is it to be an editor at large in one of the most important publishing companies? You know you're impressive, Gilmore. Haven't you been asked to be in those articles about the 'Most successful women under thirty'? " Robert asked.

"Nope, that's only your privilege, mister the most eligible bachelor in Boston."

"That's what drew you back to me?" he smirked. "If I'd known, I would have accepted before."
"You've been asked before?" she asked dumbfounded.

He nodded. "Yep, I guess I'm a catch." his eyes flickered.

"So why did you agree this time?"

"The journalist was one of my co-worker's sister."

For a minute, she wondered if she wasn't too late and felt a little edgy, but very soon his dry wit and charm worked their magic as they used to do. She liked how his eyes were sparkling with mirth. His steady attitude eased her anxiety with a conversation that gradually brought up what used to draw them to each other. They spent an amazing evening just as if they'd never been apart, it was so easy, falling back into the old banter. There was something in his eyes that had changed but she couldn't point out what exactly. Still, he had this particular sparkle when he was talking about his research, clearly enjoying leading different investigations with his graduate students. She was listening to him, glancing at his lips in motion when suddenly she had a flash as if his lips were brushing her sensitive spot just a little behind her ear which made her shiver and Robert noticed her reaction.

"Are you cold? Do you want my scarf?" he asked attentively.

"No, thank you, I'm fine," she answered wondering what just happened.

He had his sweet gaze which made her grin. He was bringing his fork to his mouth and she glanced at his hand which unexpectedly made her imagine it on the bare skin of her thigh; that lead to a flush of heat all over her body. She opened her eyes wide and reached for her glass of water. What was happening to her? Thank God we've reached dessert. When she had decided to surprise him in his office, she hadn't planned on sleeping with him that evening, she even feared that he wouldn't speak to her, and there she was with her body failing her, craving for him. Thankfully, because she was the kind of person who needed to be prepared for anything, she had shaved her legs. She even packed only the kind of underwear that was meant to be touched and seen by someone other than her. She'd had those for a while now and they hadn't been used for such a long time, she'd convinced herself that there wasn't any point in having them if she couldn't use them for him.

"Rory?" She looked at him and he was smirking. "Am I boring you?" he asked.

"No, sorry I spaced out a little."

"I was asking if you wanted a dessert, they have amazing profiteroles here, and I'm fairly certain you can ask for extra chocolate sauce."

She pondered, he knew she unconditionally loved profiteroles but on the other hand, it would only delay kissing him. Just thinking of that moment sent a bolt of electricity down her spine. That was it, it was the final sign that she had to have him, tonight.

"Thanks, Robert, I'm full, I just can't have another bite."

He stared at her unsettled. He had never seen her turn down dessert, much less profiteroles.

"Are you okay? I've never seen you refuse anything with chocolate, do I have to worry?" he asked. He still remembered her eating her chocolate soufflé when they were in DC and how it turned him on.

She laughed. "Swear to God Robert, I'm more than fine."

He winked at her and just the spark in his icy blue eyes softened her muscles and made her wonder if
he knew she was at his mercy.

"I guess you've changed a little. You must be tired, let me drive you to your hotel."

He had to think fast. He had planned to ask if they could see each other the following day during dessert, knowing that the chocolate sauce always made her in a good mood, but it seemed that the evening would be shortened.

She caught Robert's heavy glaze on her while he asked the waiter for the check, and she quivered again. She had to decide what would be her next move. He pulled out his wallet to put his credit card in with the bill, so she reached for her purse and heard him tsked in disapproval.

He frowned at her. "What are you trying to do? I invited you."

"Thank you," she said, not wanting to argue with him in order to get going faster. He was kind of surprised that she had let him pay that easily, he had been used to fighting with her on that matter.

He held her coat and when she put her arm in it, he leaned to her ear and whispered with his deepest voice.

"I haven't had such a pleasant evening in a very long time, Miss Gilmore."

Her breath caught in her throat, and she lost her composure as well as her voice for long enough for them both to notice. She was in trouble and she knew it.

It took all his strength to not touching her, not to kiss her. Every bit of her was appealing to him, he had been dying to stroke her hair behind her ear, feel her soft lips with his, grab her waist, pulling her close to him. But he wanted to be a gentleman, not his horny self and scare her away.

Robert finally took her back to her hotel. During the drive, Rory was thinking about Finn's words, but she wasn't able to speak them, so they arrived without any of them have been able to say what they wanted. She thought he would have tried to kiss her, at least to hold her hand, but nothing. Was he trying to be a gentleman? Damn these society guys and their good education. Her heart was pounding, her insides started to stir. He was already out of the car opening the passenger door when he heard:

"Do you want to come for a last drink?" Robert looked at Rory his brows arched. Is she really asking me that? I wasn't that good...

"Sure, why not," he answered being glad she was giving him a second chance.

Robert tipped the valet and followed her into the hotel. He was heading to the bar when Rory grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the elevator. When they got in, as soon as the door closed, she brought her lips to his, putting her arms around his neck pulling him closer, leaving her fingers in his hair. The kiss was sound and a little furious. They'd missed each other's touch for way too long. Feeling each other's bodies was like nursing an addiction. He put his hands on her cheeks and pulled his head backward. His darkened blue eyes were smoldering while he was staring at her which only turned her legs to jelly.

"Rory, are you sure?"

The doors opened and she dragged him to her room. Her eyes had always been expressive but never had they conveyed such a rush. After years of starving for the want of each other, there wasn't anything that could keep them apart. As soon as the door closed, he pinned her hands on above her head on the wall and started to kiss her neck down to her collarbone and reach her secret point.
Chills shot through her and she started to moan.

"Wanna play a game?" she asked readily.

He looked at her stunned. "What are you suggesting, Miss Gilmore?"

The edge of her mouth upturned. "The first one naked in bed gets to take the lead."

"I really wonder what happened during the past four years. Okay, go!"

They fumbled to the bed undressing and he won just by half a second. He spent glorious hours relearning the woman he had been missing for too long. Three rounds later, they were lying on their backs trying to catch their breath and slow their heartbeats.

"Wow."

"Wow, is it me or did it feel even better than before? It was spectacular, right?" Rory asked.

"Yep, definitely exceptional sex. I didn't think we could improve in that department, but I guess we did."

Rory turned to face Robert and looked at him straight in his eyes.

"And the thing you did with your fingers. Don't ever forget to do that again." She smirked, poking his chest with her finger.

Robert laughed. "Don't worry, I could hear that you appreciated that. I'm glad you liked it, you inspired me." He pulled her head to kiss her deeply until he was sure she almost forgot her name.

"So, did I hear it right? You said that we're going to do that again?" he smiled wryly.

"Yep please, but not right now," she beamed. She had to do it right away when they were on cloud nine. Everything felt right, he was the ideal fit, regardless of everything else.

"No?" he asked disappointed.

"Now I'd like to run something by you if you don't mind." She was trying to find the right words. She knew she was far better at expressing herself via the written word than in person but now was the perfect timing.

Robert knitted his brows. "I'm listening."

"I was thinking that maybe, we could also try to improve in other departments?" Rory asked shyly.

"What do you mean?"

"That maybe we could give it another go, to see if it sticks. In other words, try to have a regular relationship?"

"Have you considered that we still don't live in the same city?"

"We are not that far and I'm sure that you and I can work out of the office sometime. Anyway, we have to start dating properly."

"Casual dating?" Robert asked. *Please say no.*
"Is that what you want?" Rory remembered that Finn and Colin told her that he was dating someone, maybe it was more serious than they had told her. "Huh, I didn't ask but are you dating anyone?"

Robert smiled "No, not right now. To be honest, last week I ended a casual relationship that I had for two months with a girl I knew from my early Harvard years. Finn tried to hook me up with one of his colleagues from Boston but I canceled at the last minute."

"Don't tell me that you two are still seeing the same girls?"

"No, not since you... What about you?"

"No, not dating anyone right now. As we're being honest, I had my first one night stand about two weeks ago. Let's say it was an experimentation," Rory said sheepishly.

"Oh, so you're are in an experimental phase? Then, am I a part of this experiment?" Robert was afraid to know where he was standing.

"No! Do you really want the story?"

"Well, I guess, as it seems that we are telling everything to each other."

"Okay, so promise that you won't be mad at Steph or even Colin."

"Why would I be mad at them? Promise." He took her hand and kissed her knuckles. He wasn't sure he even wanted to know, all he was thinking was that she was there, with him, that they were able to touch each other and that at this right moment what he just wanted to do was enjoying being with her.

"So, to cut the story short, they were kind of tired of seeing me every weekend moping so they told me that I had to get laid to straighten my ideas and decide to move on or not." Robert raised his eyebrows.

"So, Steph and Rose took me to a bar to meet one of Colin's coworkers that she thought could do the trick, which means a guy that wanted sex without commitment. Well, I did sleep with him. The bottom line is that it did help because, after that, I knew I only wanted to be with you." She smiled, moved closer to him and put her hands in his hair. "It just took me some time because I didn't know how to do that."

Robert shook his head and smiled at her "Okay, I guess I like the ending of this story much better than the beginning."

"Okay then, let's try dating exclusively, no Finn, no other girls."

"No Logan?"

She frowned her eyebrows. "What did he tell you?"

"I just know that you two met several times." Robert was scared to hear the answer. He was unsure about Rory's feelings toward Logan. Maybe because he'd always felt that Logan was the alpha male of their group. That was his explanation when they'd first met, he let Logan take the lead and didn't try to ask Rory out again after Finn's birthday party. He knew they were casually dating so he could have asked her, but he hid behind an unspoken bro-code, however deep down it was because he felt he couldn't compete with Logan when it came to girls.

"That much is true, but it was only work-related. His company would like to merge with our digital
department. I don't really deal with this kind of stuff but when he comes to meetings in the building he always stops by my office and we had lunch once. Last year his father offered me a job. That's it."

Robert was relieved. He knew he couldn't handle the whole "Jules et Jim" thing again, above all with Logan. Plus, things were good with the guys now, even if they didn't see each other as much as they used to do. Robert was truly touched that Rory made all the moves toward him.

"Robbie, we're good together, you know it." Robert smiled, only Rory called him that when they were alone together. "Logan and I, well, I know now that we weren't right for each other."

"I shouldn't have ended things," Robert said.

"We both did."

"Not to shoot myself in the foot here, I'm just surprised how forward you are, but again, I'm not complaining. I would have thought that it would have taken us a little more time before getting back in the sack. I absolutely adore when you're that unpredictable."

"Well, it seems that you don't know me as well as you think, mister."

"Then it is likely that it will get even better?"

"So, you're in?" she grinned.

"I have a single question, what took you so long?" he asked, and he gently brushed her nose with his to finally softly kiss her lips and pull her back to him.
Chapter 33

Rory heard her name softly whispered but was reluctant to open her eyes. Despite the intense nocturnal activity, she felt rested, good, warm and slowly, the memories were coming back to her brain. He could feel that she was awake as her breathing had changed, but he wished they were able to stay like this - cuddled together, her head resting on his chest, his arm around her, under the feather soft sheets.

"It's killing me but I'm pretty sure we have to wake up," he whispered.

"Can't we play hooky?" She mumbled, tightening her arm around his waist and placing a kiss on his chest.

"At what time is your talk?" He asked hoping she was speaking in an afternoon session.

"10, but the session starts at 9, I'm just before the coffee break so I have to check in before 9," she answered knowing that they did have to get out of bed.

He sighed. "I have to get up anyway to get home and change, can't really do the walk of shame or I'll hear about it for months"

"How would they know you're wearing the same clothes?"

"Because I tutored some of them yesterday for their second-year paper. When do you have to be back in New York?"

"My plane is at 8 this evening," she answered, straightening to rest on her elbow and be able to look at him.

"Can't you stay over for the weekend?" He added his best charming smile to sweeten the pot.

"I didn't bring enough clothes to stay over for the weekend." She smiled knowing very well that she absolutely didn't mind.

"My plans for us don't involve much clothing." His lips quirked up in a half smile.

"They don't?" She asked feigning surprise.

"And if you really need some, we can still buy whatever you'll need, you know it's amazing what you can find in a small town like Boston." He tucked her hair behind her ear, grinning.

"At what time will you be free?" She asked already fantasizing about the upcoming days with him.

"My last class ends at 3 pm; if you're interested I can pick you up at your conference."

"Now that I know where your office is, I'll find you there. I'll try to sneak out before the end, otherwise, the session ends at 6."

"Okay, I'll be waiting for you in my office, if I don't see you before, I'll pick you at 6."

Robert followed his clothes spread along the floor to the door and put them back on. He knew he was going to see her again this evening, but he couldn't help feeling reluctant to leave her. She could see he was bothered and walked to him. She ran a hand down his face, and gently stroked his cheek with her thumb. He rested his head on her hand and closed his eyes.
"I just don't want to leave you," he kissed her hand.

"You're not leaving me, we'll see each other again in a few hours, you have students waiting for you."

He sighed and put his arms around her waist and rested his forehead on hers.

"I'm still not realizing that we're here together, in the same room, the same city. So, you're staying the whole weekend?"

"If you're inviting me, I'll change my plane ticket."

"Just do it, Gilmore, and I'll see you this afternoon."

He grabbed her butt to pull her close to him and kissed the life out of her.

###

Her talk went well, but after that, she wasn't able to focus on the conference anymore. Anyway, the following sessions were too much on the marketing and the business of publishing. She decided that she would sneak out during the afternoon session coffee break and on the way to Robert's office she would stop by this lingerie shop on Harvard Square where Paris used to go. All she wanted was to feel sexy for him and as they planned, that was about the only kind of clothing she would need. All day long, she could barely hide her smile. It hadn't even been 24 hours since they had become reacquainted, but she felt that this time, they wouldn't make the same mistakes, that they had finally learned their lesson. She was kind of surprised at how fast they had connected. Of course, they haven't really talked about how they were going to handle the long distance, but she was unexpectedly quite confident that they would be able to work this through.

While she was sifting through the racks for something that would blow him away, she texted Steph.

"Mission accomplished"

No longer than two minutes later her phone buzzed.

"When? Where are you?" Steph asked excitedly.

"Yesterday, I'm at Harvard," Rory answered smiling at her friend's enthusiasm. "I had a talk this morning at a publishing conference here so I arrived yesterday evening and dropped by his office unannounced."

"And what did you do?"

"He took me to dinner and then we went back to my hotel."

"And? Come on, Rory, I have a meeting in 10 minutes don't let me hanging there!"

"We're dating now."

"Good, but have you? You know, kissed or something?"

"Yes, we did it, several times if you want to know."

"No! He jumped on you just like that!"

"Actually, it was the other way around, but I don't think he minded."
"Of course, he didn't, I'm proud of you, girl."

"One last thing Steph, just sent you two pictures. Which one should I choose?"

She waited for a few seconds

"Definitely the lacy bra and panty set, the bodysuit is very sexy but less easy to take off. You really want to knock him dead, don't you?"

Rory giggled.

"So I guess we won't see you on Sunday for brunch?"

"Nope, I'm coming back in the evening."

"Have fun and I want every detail at our Wednesday lunch."

She entered the dressing room and tried on the dark grey lacy bra and panty set. Satisfied by how well she felt in it and of course, sure of the effect it will probably induce on her new boyfriend, she looked at her wristwatch and decided it was more than time to see him again.

###

After his last class, Robert went straight to his office and pulled out his phone.

"Hey man, what's up?"

"Hey, Finn. Am I waking you? I know it's kind of early for a Saturday morning."

"Don't worry, I'm already awake, it's a great day for surfing I wanted to get there early."

"Are you coming states side anytime soon?"

"You're worrying me, man, is there a problem? " Finn asked worriedly.

"No, I was just wondering if we could meet anytime soon."

"Well, I'm not going back before a month so unless..."

"I'm dating Rory, I just wanted you to learn it from me," Robert burst out.

"It's fine for me, man. I'm really happy for you two."

"Sure? Things were good between us so I was worried. I didn't plan anything. She dropped by my office the other day and we reconnected, and she told me she wanted us to date exclusively and I was caught off guard, but I realized that all my feelings for her were intact."

"Stop rambling, Semple, I said I was cool, I really am. It was about time if I may add."

"Thank you, man."

"I'll be happy to see you two next month when I'll be back in the States. Thank you for telling me, though. Did you tell Logan yet?"

"He is next on the list, but I think I'll wait until she's back in New York to call him."

"You should probably be more worried about him than me, although I bet he won't dare to say
anything. So just like that, she showed up to see you?" Finn pried.

"She was invited to a conference at Harvard and dropped by unannounced in my office. We went to dinner and I drove her back to her hotel, she asked me if I wanted a last drink. I thought she meant at the hotel bar but she took me to her room...."

"Wow, I like the Rory 2.0." Finn couldn't help smiling. She'd followed his advice and he was truly happy for them.

"Tell me about it, she's even wilder than before... You know 'the absence makes the heart grow fonder' shit? Well, I found out it makes the action in the sack much better too. Trust me on that."

Finn guffawed. "Right. She's still in New York though, right?"

"Yep, so that means that we're doing long distance thing."

"So, if what you said is right, the sex will be awesome. Exclusive?"

"That's what she asked. Anyway, it's not like if I was seeing anyone. I ended the thing with Amanda and I lost my wingman."

Finn laughed. "I miss you too man, but it seems that those days are over now."

"To tell you the truth, I was getting tired of casual sex. I know that you think it can be liberating, but I just need something else. What about you, are you seeing anyone?"

"Nope, free as a bird. I gotta go, don't want to miss the good waves. I'll see you guys next month and give a kiss to Rory for me."

"Will do, man."

###

"You haven't answered my question yet?" Robert asked, drawing little circles with his finger on her bare skin just above her breasts. Rory was laying on his chest, her hair rumpled, her leg tangled with his. They were just enjoying the bliss of the moment.

"Remind me," she asked softly, turning her head to feel his skin on her cheek.

"What took you so long?"

"Apparently, I needed time to be able to trust someone again, take the leap to risk the heartache. It finally dawned me that I had to stop analyzing my past relationships and just picture myself with you, how I feel about you. I'm sorry it actually took me that long but it had nothing to do with you, but lucky for me, you're the strongest man I know."

He pulled back his head and gazed at her interrogatively.

"You know what the Dalai Lama said, patience is a sign of strength. I'm more than glad that you waited for me."

He smirked. "I like how you think of me but still, I was an idiot not being able to see it and show you that you could have faith in me, instead of hiding in my cave. You have to know I'm a newbie at this, never really had a girlfriend. I dated, but never really committed, not because I didn't want to, just never found the right girl."
He kissed her hair. "If I ever do something wrong, don't wait, just tell me and I'll try to fix it."

She smiled and turned to rest on her forearms to lock eyes with him.

"So, what did you do during the four years?"

"Basically? Work, I literally threw myself into work. I found that it's always rewarding therefore satisfying. I know I'm good at that, it never failed me. The problem is that it's pretty isolating, but in my case, it's also what I was looking for and on the other hand, it allowed me to not deal with what was going on, in particular when it was going south. What about you?"

"Pretty much did the same."

"So, how do you see us handling the long-distance stuff?"

"Honestly? I haven't really thought about it. I know I'm usually over prepared, but this time, I really didn't know how it would go and I didn't want to jinx it."

"What if I come visit you in New York for the weekend in two weeks? My Friday afternoon class will be over so I'll be able to arrive in the afternoon."

"Then it's a date. See, it wasn't such a big deal after all." She beamed at him and he melted wondering how he'll be able to handle two weeks without touching her, kissing her, smelling her.

"Can I ask you a favor?"

"Of course, anything you want," she answered running her finger over his chest.

"Would you sometimes wear the dress you had when you came on Thursday?"

"My grey wool dress?"

He nodded.

"You liked it that much? There isn't any cleavage, it's not that short." She pursed her lips and raised her eyebrows surprised.

"Are you kidding? That's the beauty of it, it leaves just enough to the imagination. See, thinking of it gives me a hard-on."

She laughed noticing he wasn't lying and rolled over him to kiss him. It was so much fun to have him so reactive to her.

They spent the whole day inside. True to his word, Rory didn't need much clothing. They screwed like rabbits, but they also did talk, after all, they had years to catch up on. She was curious about his time at the White House, he loved to hear her stories about the weird habits of some authors, he always thought only fiction writers were nuts.

In the evening, they decided to have a proper dinner. Rory took a shower while Robert changed the sheets, tidied up the living room a bit, set the table and put out the Chinese food. He was looking for candles when he heard her.

"Robbie do you mind if I borrow a shirt?" she asked.

"Sure, help yourself" he answered absentmindedly focusing on his search for a lighter or matches. His attention was suddenly caught by Rory who was standing in the doorway, wearing nothing but
one of his dressy white shirts, slightly opened on her new lingerie outfit. Robert's jaw dropped and he had to steady himself on the table. He exhaled, swallowed hard and tried to clear his throat.

"Are you trying to kill me?" he asked. "You're lucky I don't have any heart problem. Do you honestly think you need to pull this kind of thing to make me want you?" he smirked.

"I just thought of it more as a present for having me, but if you don't want it, or if you don't have the stamina..." she said with her unique trademark innocent smile.

He walked to her, put an arm around her waist and his other hand on the nape of her neck.

"I never said that, no need to worry about my stamina. Do I have to remind you that I run a minimum of 5 miles almost every day for years?"

His lips brushed against her ear "Let's go test my stamina."

His husky voice sent multiples shivers straight down her spine, her heart skipping a beat.

"But what about the dinner?" She asked.

He secured her position against him with his hand in the small of her back, gently stroked her cheek with his thumb, and locked eyes with her.

"I can wait, what about you?" he raised an eyebrow.

She gave him a wicked grin. "I'm not that kind of hungry."

Since their reunion two days ago, it had been raw, voracious, primal. Now, he wanted to show his desire for her differently and that he could be attentive, soft and affectionate. He started to draw her face with his finger, his gaze admiring the harmonious face of the woman for whom he had been waiting for so long. His mission tonight was to make love to her in a way that would ensure she would never want to do it with another man in her life.

"Are you ready for the most passionate night of your life, Ms. Gilmore?" The side of his mouth twitched into a small smile.

"Your ego has considerably inflated these last few years, hasn't it?"

"You know I'm always very accurate so before being sarcastic about my statement just experience the night and you can give me your opinion later."

His piercing blue eyes bore into hers. He lifted her and carried her bridal style to the bed and gently laid her on his bed. She was quite surprised and just slightly giggled staring at him. He quickly took off his shirt, unbelted and discarded his pants. Never losing eye contact, he unbuttoned her shirt and slowly, meticulously ran his fingers along her entire body, circling her navel, carefully avoiding her breasts and her center. Everywhere he was touching her, she felt the current running through her, goosebumps appearing in reaction. She closed her eyes and let herself dive into the sensations he was inducing, letting her desire slowly invade her body. He loved how her velvety skin was so reactive under his caresses, he could worship her that way for hours, just getting lost in her. He adored the gradual arousal, the buildup of excitement, knowing that the final outcome would be unprecedented. He perfectly knew that he would be able now to play the awfully slow game after having had their release multiple times in the last 48 hours.

Once he had thoroughly skimmed all her features, he started over but this time brushing her with his lips, alternating with peppered kisses, nonetheless this time he unclipped her bra expertly with just
one hand and came back to her breasts, which generated in her a loud and long moan. Her eyes fluttered shut at the overwhelming vibes. He moved up to start running his tongue behind her ear to her collarbone. His crescendo foreplay ministrations were turning her on in a way she had never experienced, never wanting him to stop. He laid his darkened blue gaze on her to evaluate her state of mind and she couldn't help closing the gap and kissing this man that she had missed so much. Her tongue asked for entrance and played with his first gently until he felt that they were heating up quickly and gently pulled back. He tsked smirking at her.

"Are you in a hurry, Ms. Gilmore? We have all night, and I'm far from being done with you."

He returned to her breasts playing with each of her nipples with his tongue, flicking and licking them. She was panting, considerably excited by all his gradual treatments. He liked taking his time, easing her into the slow motions.

She was torn between the amazing sensations he was generating in her with his incredible foreplay and wanting to get to next step of feeling his rock-hard member on her thigh. She started moving her hips searching for a release, her excitement, and eagerness coursing through her body, lost to the sensations Robert was invoking within her. Her blood was boiling in her veins when she felt his fingers playing with the hem of her panties and she let out a light satisfying mew that shot to his groin. He slowly skimmed his fingers along her stomach to finally hooking them beneath the elastic of her lacy panties and began to tug them down. She shivered in anticipation, knowing too well what he was going to make her feel with his expert tongue. He worked his way up and down, oscillating between percussive movements and licking her entire length, making her crave release. The flavor of her exploded against his tongue, waking up amazing senses. Her hand went to his hair not knowing if she wanted more or him to stop and finally fill her with his massive erection. Instead, she bucked towards him while he was nibbling her engorged clit and slipped his fingers in her soaking wet folds, reaching for her little walnut, pressing and playing with it, alternating with stroking his fingers inside and out. He could sense she was getting close and she could feel him smirking. After these long moments of caresses, it was more than she could handle and she chanted out his name, feeling like she was gliding as she came down from the most delicious high. She pulled him up to have his locked eyes with her, grinning at each other.

She felt incredible, but it wasn't enough, she was still unbelievably turned on. She desperately had to have him inside of her, more than ever, so she started to fiddle with the waistband of his boxers and pull them off. She reached for his cock and slid her hand along, smiling at his moan. It's been only two days but she liked how acquainted she was with it, how its light curve fit perfectly inside her to hit her G-spot, how she could perfectly sense how it would react at her touch, her tongue, her mouth, how invariably it was able to induce intense pleasure. The softness of his skin was as important as the hardness of his throbbing penis.

"Robert, please I just need to feel you inside me, now."

"You perfectly know, Ms. Gilmore, that your wish is my command. How would you like me to do it?"

"Jeez, Robbie! Stop the teasing and just do it! I'm begging you to stop the slow motion."

Just like that she took over and moved to straddle him while reaching for a condom on the nightstand and rolled it on his impressive erected penis. He smirked and put a pillow behind his back to sit so he could face her. She kissed him while sliding him into her which made them both moan at the sensation. She slightly bent backward to find the perfect angle leaning on her hands just behind her. She swayed forward and back, rubbing her clit against his groin. Her breasts were perfectly aligned with his mouth so he took advantage and nibbled her nipples, but the more she moaned, the wetter
she got, and he could feel he was getting close. She noticed it by his breathing and picked up the pace so that they could both reach their release.

"Oh! my fucking God!!" She cried out and collapsed on him. She was surprised to sense his lips on the side of her neck and that he was still incredibly hard in her. Heck, he really wasn't kidding about his stamina. In just one smooth move, he pulled out from under her and slid his arm under her stomach and pulled her ass up. He straightened himself behind her and entered his dick inside her in one long slow stroke, grunting as he felt her wet pussy around him. He held her hips with his hands and thrust into her in a steady rhythm, speeding up at the sound of her voice becoming a long single moan, sending her once again into a frenzy.

Her intense orgasm seemed to finally send him over the edge as well, tightening around him as he groaned out her name with pleasure before sinking his teeth into the soft skin of her back.

They both tried to catch their breath, eyes closed, sweating but delighted and satisfied.

# # #

They were having a late breakfast enjoying the midday light of the winter sun, chatting as if they had never been apart when Rory's phone vibrated, she looked at the caller ID and sighed. It was her mom for the sixth time since Saturday morning. Rory was trying to avoid telling her mom that she was back with Robert, or at least to delay the conversation.

"Why aren't you answering?" he asked intrigued.

"It's my mom," she sighed.

"So?"

"She'll ask me what am I doing, I'll have to tell her I'm still in Boston, then she'll ask why, then I would have to tell her that we're together and then she'll give me the rant about why you among all the guys on earth blah, blah..."

"You can tell her that I'm the most eligible bachelor in Boston." He winked at her, stroking her cheek trying to cheer her up.

When her phone vibrated for the seventh time while they were making out Robert grumbled.

"Just pick it up, you know she'll never give up until you do, she'll call the FBI, homeland security or even the CIA."

She groaned and answered, telling herself to keep the conversation to the basics.

"Hi, Mom."

"Finally! What have you been doing? Why didn't you call me back or answer my calls?"

"I've been busy," Rory answered, slightly irritated by her mother's tone which was resembling her grandmother's.

"So busy on the weekend that you couldn't even take 10 seconds to text me that you were fine? I know you have an important work, miss big shot editor, but so important that your own mom doesn't deserve a minute of your time during the weekend? It's not like if I was calling you in the middle of a workday."
"Sorry mom, I'm fine, can I call you back tonight?"

"Why tonight? What have you been doing?"

"Mum please, I have company, I'd prefer to call you back when I'll be by myself."

"Oh! Are you at Steph and Colin's? Okay, call me back tonight."

She hung up satisfied to have been able to delay the conversation with her mother. That could wait. She only had a few hours left with her new awesome boyfriend until they would be separated for two awfully long weeks. They looked at each other, their eyes sparkling from the bliss of the moment, pressing their lips to hold their happy smile. He remembered their weekend in DC and knew that this time what will happen next would be different. They both had learned from their mistakes.
Rory was staring at the lovely bouquet on her desk, sipping her coffee on this sunny winter afternoon. It was Valentine's day, but most of all, it had been just a week since she had found her way back to the man who seemed to be the most caring boyfriend on the planet. She would never have thought that he was the kind of guy who would celebrate such a tacky, cheesy day, most of all just one week after they have decided to give it a try, yet he did. When they briefly talked on the phone this morning, he hadn't mentioned anything, just wished her a good day, but when she arrived at her office, her assistant was smiling, told her that something arrived and had been put on her desk. She saw the flowers, went to look for the card and opened the envelope.

"Happy Valentine's day to the loveliest woman, who is constantly haunting my every dream"

Love, R-

She knew she was beaming like an enamored high school girl, but she just couldn't help it. She had tried to call him but she was sent straight to voicemail and just left a short message. As she began working at Rodham only recently, nobody was really close enough to her, so she didn't get any noisy questions. She finally quit staring at her flowers when her attention was caught by a familiar silhouette passing by her office with Lilian. She almost spat out the coffee she was drinking, he was just standing there, being his charming self, talking with her colleague. He was dapper, clad in a flawless well-cut black cashmere topcoat, over a dark blue jacket, white shirt, jeans and his suede boots. Suddenly, they changed direction and were walking toward her office. Her colleague waved at her through the glass wall and open her door.

"Hi! Rory, someone wanted to talk to you before our meeting," Lilian said beaming at her. God, did he say anything to her colleague yet?

"Hey Rory," he cocked his head to one side, his eyes were crinkling at the corners. "Just wanted to say hi while I was there. I see you got yourself a Valentin," he said it the French way. She'd always loved hearing him speak French. It took all her strength not to jump out of her chair and throw her arms around him and kiss the life out of him. Instead, she slowly stood up and walked up to him. 

"Jeez, he is so freaking hot."

"So, Semple, you've finally picked up Lilian's call?" she asked trying hard not to show her excitement.

Lilian mouthed a "Thank you" at Rory.

"Well, you had compelling arguments, I had to give it a try, but I still have to understand what you guys want of me." His mouth curled in amusement and she restrained herself from a sexual banter.

"Will you still be here later?" he asked.

"Sure, I'll be around, just let my assistant know if you don't see me in my office and she'll find me. See you later and Semple, be nice to Lilian."

"I'm always nice, Gilmore. I'm surprised you still haven't noticed that - in particular with lovely ladies. Have I ever been anything but nice to you?" He gave her a wolfish grin.

Rory rolled her eyes. She knew he would try to charm the pants off Lilian, just for the fun. She looked at them walking away to Lilian's office and wondered if after his meeting he would go directly back to Boston.
"As I told you on the phone, usually at Rodham, as in most the publishing companies nowadays, we only deal with agents, but here in the non-fiction department we still sometimes need to control things from the beginning for high caliber books. We want to keep the essence of publishing, what makes us proud as publishers. Therefore, every year, we pick a subject, and I'm in charge of finding a writer and working with him."

Lilian paused to gauge the pleasant young man sitting in front of her. He was too young for her, but still, she wondered if any woman had set her sights on such a nice specimen.

"That sounds interesting, but I'm still not sure I'm your man. I've never written a book, not even a textbook, just academic articles. You can't sell anything in my name."

"I know, but you have many other qualities, Professor Semple."

He clinched, he wasn't keen on the use of titles. "Oh, please, call me Robert, only my students use this title, and hopefully not all of them."

She tried to suppress a smile, she was starting to appreciate the guy and thought that her first impression never failed her. She'd liked him as soon as she'd laid eyes on him when he came out of the elevator. Everything that she had heard about him just fit with the handsome young man with a remarkable icy blue gaze.

"Well Robert, we think that it's important to have a biography of President Obama ready for the next presidential campaign. Something that will focus on how he became this iconic man, what made him a political leader."

She took her time to study his reaction. He looked younger than his age, but his sparkling gaze was fascinating and could only reflect how smart he was. Her baby brother had told her how captivating he was as a teacher and now she had absolutely no doubt believing it.

"You have a unique experience, you arrived fresh out of university at the same time the President started at the White House. You witnessed his work with the eyes of a young American with your impressive background knowledge. You worked with him on a day to day basis, he trusted you, you've shared everyday private moments with him for three years."

"You've done your homework I see."

"Didn't need to, I wasn't going to tell you this, but I was told I could do it if you were reluctant."

Robert arched an eyebrow.

"Okay, this project is an authorized biography, so we have discussed with the President's entourage and you have been picked unanimously by them and himself included."

"I don't believe you."

"Check with David Axelrod."

Robert pursed his lips. He wondered why no one had told him about that.

"Check with Rory, I don't lie and I know my job. You have the knowledge, I'm the editor, I'll be here whenever you have doubts. What you don't know about writing a book, I'll be there for you. I'll be for you what David Axelrod was for the President."
"I still do not think I'm what you need for the job. A biographer needs to have a minimum of objectivity, which I can't have as you pointed, I worked with the man and at some point, we were quite close in private. You know how people can chat with their work out partner. Of course, it was off the record, but still."

"I know that, but you're aiming to an academic career so if you want to keep your credibility, you'll keep the distance."

"You've thought about everything, haven't you?" A ghost smile appeared on his face. She was tenacious, but he liked that. If he was going to do it, she would have to gain his trust which started by showing how professional she could be.

"When you kept ditching my calls, I had time to vet you and I'm sure that you're the perfect person for the job. I don't want to sound too arrogant about it, but I'm the right editor for this project with you. I'm in publishing for fifteen years now, at Rodham for five years. Brown is my alma mater and just like you, I went to Harvard for grad school. I never give up, I always find my way, like I got Rory to pull you out from your cave."

He was starting to be interested and wondered if she knew something about their history.

"What timeline are we talking about?" He asked. "I'm only a junior lecturer so I only have a single TA to help me, my ongoing research with two Ph.D. students and a lot of classes to teach."

"The plan is to get it released for 2015 when the candidates will start to announce their candidacy, which means that we have to have the final copy in January of that year for the latest."

"Which leaves how long for the research?"

"It depends on how fast you write, if you know a student who could help you with the research, we can pay him."

"I'll have to cover all his life to the first term at the White House included?"

"That's it. As I said, it's an authorized biography, so the President is willing to give you access to his personal files and you'll get interviews with him and the first lady."

"I still don't understand why me, you don't even know how my writing skills are."

"Your writing must not be that bad, you got your Ph.D. from Harvard at 27. I've read your articles, and I'll be your editor, I promise you to keep you on the right track. Moreover, we're are talking about a high-ranking book where university press meets the general reader. You're bringing your academic writing, I'll make sure the general reader finds his way. In brief, what we're aiming at is that when the reader will see your book he will think that it will be a biography of how a man became the President of the United States, but inside, it would be more than a simple talking-point book that could be sum up in a one-liner at a dinner party."

"How long do you give me to make my decision?"

Her lips curved a little. "I think you've already made your decision, but let's talk again in a week and see where you stand."

"Why didn't you ask David to write it?"

"I told you, anyway he already has a book deal with Penguin for his own biography."
"And I'm probably much cheaper."

"It was of course taken into account. We're talking business here, we're not public service of course, but as you pointed out, we're also taking risks, but with potential big profit and the launch of a public career for you."

"Except that I'm not looking for a public career, I've already been asked to run for the Democratic party and I declined."

"We're not talking about politics here; your academic career could be considerably improved. Have you seen what happened to Siddhartha Mukherjee? First non-fiction book for him, about cancer, not the favorite topics for the readers, but still, it was a best seller and won the Pulitzer and many other prizes, he doesn't have any problem to get funding for his academic research now."

"Now you're talking to me. Tell me, how do you think it could work?"

Lilian smiled. He was hooked.

"Should I fear for my academic credibility to write for a trade publishing house? All the faculty members have their book deals with university press publishers."

"That's why I'm telling you to talk around you. Take advice from your colleagues. If you decide to do it, find an agent or a lawyer to discuss your contract. If you don't know any, I can give you some names or ask Rory, you guys seemed to have a connection. She works with a lot of agents in the field."

"I'll do it, I have a good friend who's a lawyer at Latham & Watkins, I'm sure he can do it or refer me to someone."

They kept on talking for a while, about how deep his research and analysis were expected to be. At some point, he saw Rory passing in the hallway and noticed that there was a slit in the back of her blouse, leaving a view on her porcelain skin. He felt goosebumps covering his arms and couldn't help thinking how it would feel like to have his fingers caressing her just there. Holly shit Semple, keep focus.

"So Robert, unless you have any more questions here, I think I can set you free. Thanks a lot for having listened to my proposal. I hope it gets your attention and I'm looking forward to working with you. Next time, I can go to Harvard to meet you so you won't have to make the trip."

"It's not a problem, I always enjoy some time in Manhattan, my family lives here." He smiled at his words. He perfectly knew he came here just to surprise her because it had been four awfully long days and he needed to see her. Running 10 miles in the morning wasn't enough anymore to get her out of his head. After all, it was Valentine's Day, boyfriends were supposed to surprise their girlfriend on that day.

Rory's assistant let him enter her office and asked if he needed anything. He declined, sat in the comfortable leather chair in front of her desk and pulled out his phone to check his emails. Towers of manuscripts were stacked around the office, the pages bleeding copious editorial notes made in a tiny but precise lettering. He wondered if it were her that was reluctant to work on the screen or the writers. He made a mental note to ask Lilian to give her input on the file, not on paper.

Rory was nervously hitting her notepad with her pencil. She hated these boring marketing meetings, that was the main difference with a small imprint like Oaks. Of course, now at Rodham, she had access to more authors, but she also had these darn meetings. She usually wasn't fond of them, but
what was bothering her today was that she was afraid he had to leave before she could get out of it. Knowing that he was somewhere on this floor, maybe already in her office just didn't help her focus. Instead, her mind went to the phone conversation she had with her mother two nights ago.

"I thought that this period of your life was over, that you were over these guys. So just like that, he wormed his way back to you," Lorelai said sternly.

"Actually Mom, to be honest, I went to his office, then we had dinner and I lured him to my hotel room. He was nothing but a gentleman and didn't do anything except replying to my advances. I know you don't like him, but I just know that I want him, I love him and I sincerely hope that one day you will too. He's just amazing and he loves me too, he waited for me all this time, for almost four years, Mom," Rory answered, not knowing how to make her mother understand.

"So, he took you to some lavish place and suddenly you just fall for him again?"

"You really don't know him. He's so far from the snobbish guy that you're imagining. It was just a wine bistro, nothing fancy."

"Then you aren't worth inviting you to a fancy place?"

"Oh my god, Mom! Can you hear yourself? It seems that whatever he would do, you would disapprove. You know, I really loved how we were back on the same track again, but you're just irrational here."

"So, you really want to go back in that world? You know you don't need that right?"

"What are you insinuating? I really don't like where this conversation is going, Mom. Can you at least wait until you meet him before judging him so harshly? Above all, can you give me at least some credit?"

Lorelei realized she went a little too far.

"Sorry hun, you're right. So how are you guys planning to manage the fact that you two are not living in the same city?"

"He's coming for the weekend in two weeks. We decided to see how it's fit and we'll manage as it comes. Of course, the situation is not ideal, but Mom, trust me, I really want to give it a try with him. I promise, if at the end it doesn't work, I'll let you say that you were right."

"Honey, don't get me wrong, I just want you to be happy. Since you were born, I wanted you to be able to fulfill your goals. Was it his idea that you quit journalism?"

"Of course not, I told him I wasn't as thrilled as I used to be to work as a journalist and he suggested that I try to switch to editing in a publishing company. It was only my decision, and Mom, I absolutely love my new job."

The noise of her colleagues gathering their stuff and leaving the room snapped her out of her thoughts and she jumped off her chair to beeline to her office. From far, she could see him reading in her office. God, he was so sexy with his glasses.

"So Semple, how did your meeting go?" She said walking into her office, beaming at him. He raised his gaze to her and melted. He restrained himself with difficulty to grab her and pull her to his lap.

"Hey, beautiful."
She closed her office door and stood in front of him, resting on her desk. She squirmed a little at his
gaze over her.

"How long are you staying?" Please tell me you're staying overnight.

His mouth quirked up. "I booked the 6 a.m. flight at LaGuardia. How much work do you have left
for today?"

They locked eyes and everything went fast in their head. They both felt a wave of heat invading their
bodies. How much longer would it be until they could finally touch each other? Rory noticed
Robert's smirk and knew he was enjoying this game of who has the best self-control, but she had
learned that with him, she would have to work harder to be able to win one day.

"I have to drop by McNally Jackson, the bookstore in Lower Manhattan, to check if everything is
okay for a book signing tomorrow and then I'm done," she answered, trying to think what would be
the fastest way to achieve this task.

"Here what I propose, give me your keys, I'll have our one week anniversary dinner ready, while
you go to your meeting then I'll be waiting for you. How does that sound to you?"

She grinned, "It sounds like heaven". Was he more into romantic gestures than she was? Or was it
the thrill of the beginning? Either way, it worked for her.

It took them only very few minutes to gather their belongings and head to the elevator. Once inside,
she grabbed the lapel of his coat and kissed him, first just a brush of her lips against his, then she
presssed her mouth and a current of repressed desire shot them. He was surprised again by her
forwardness, but immediately put his arms around her to feel her body on his, and ask for entrance
with his tongue but the elevator reached the lobby and they parted. While they were walking out of
the building, he bent to murmur in her ear.

"You clearly have a thing with elevators." She giggled and her smile curved on the right side.

# # #

"I wonder how any man in your office can get any work done with you around. I wouldn't, having a
constant erection is really incapacitating."

His lips twitched up into a half smile. They were enjoying their dinner. As promised, he had taken
care of it, but when she arrived, she had to have him right away. She had fantasized about it since
they'd left Rodham. He was more than happy to comply with her demand. Once their appetite for
each other had finally been satisfied, they enjoyed their dinner. Robert had ordered from his favorite
Italian restaurant and set a nice table.

"You seem to have that a lot lately," she giggled.

He reached for her hand on the table and kissed her knuckles.

"I don't know how you do that, but I'm in a permanent state of arousal when you're around."

"The good thing is that it works for me, I'm not complaining." It was such a bliss to have him in her
apartment, he fitted so perfectly in her life, she didn't want to think about him leaving in the morning.
She stroked his calf with her bare foot which generated a grin of happiness on his face.

"Talking about your work, what's your opinion about what Lilian offered me?"
"I don't want to influence your decision. How did you like her?"

"I did like her, I guess I could work with her, but even if I'm flattered, I'm not totally sure I want to do that. I don't like the business side of the project. I feel like they're buying my experience."

"Well they are, publishing is obviously a business, but editors need to fall in love with their author's work, and then they can get through with everything. Ask yourself if you can work with Lilian. She's an amazing editor, she's the reference in our department."

"And us two together wouldn't be a problem?"

"Of course not, they'd decided to ask you in January. I only help to find you, and it's Lilian's work. Sometimes she asks for my opinion, nothing more. If you decide to do it, I'll tell her, but I don't see the problem. I didn't suggest your name."

"You wouldn't mind then?"

She shook her head. "Of course not. So you'll do it?"

"I'm quite tempted, but I want to talk about it with Franck first. I would like to make sure that it won't impair my future. I'm not looking for the limelight."

He poured her some more wine and cleared his throat, which caught her attention.

"I had dinner with Logan yesterday."

She widened her eyes.

"He was in Boston because he had a meeting with MIT Press. So I told him about us."

"How did he take it?"

"Well, he didn't yell at me like the first time, but his jaw did clench. He was clearly less enthusiastic than Finn."

Robert watched her reaction. She didn't say anything but she was relieved that this time, everything was out in the open. They both had learned from their mistakes.

Even if he didn't say much, Logan took it hard. He knew his reaction was irrational so he didn't say much and kept his feelings for himself, he just couldn't feel happy for them, it was too much for him.

"Thank you, Robbie." She moved to sit on his lap. He put his arms around her waist and she rested her forehead on his.

"Nobody will be able to prevent me from being with you," she whispered. He stroked her bare leg and slightly bit her bottom lip. She let herself dive into the pleasure of being in his arms, smelling his scent, enjoying the bliss of the moment.

The beginning of this story with Robert was so unlike her. She usually didn't just jump into relationships that were undetermined, she didn't do things on a whim. She made lists damn it! What if he wasn't the same man she knew when they were roommates? No, this time she didn't want to overthink, she had to take the leap and even if it only had been a week, she hadn't any regret, it was so much better than anything she had experienced so far.
2013 was definitely her year. Everything was going well for Rory. Professionally, she was more than happy at Rodham. Once she had gotten used to the marketing aspects, she enjoyed the freedom she had with the author she was working with.

Since January, she had been the editor of the most enthusiastic writer she had ever met. His book was exploring the meaning of this powerful national myth that was the American Dream in the country. It was contemporary politics, what she was the best at, and that's why she had been designated. Candidates for public office often evoke the American dream, but he argued that these evocations were rarely consistent and the definitions were often in conflict with each other. She loved his prose that was able to reflect his eagerness to share what he had learned, resulting in a pleasant and accessible read. She was proud that the department trusted her enough to let her handle such an important book for her first assignment.

She was completely immersed in the proofs of the book that was supposed to be launched in a few weeks. Her phone kept buzzing but she was hoping her assistant would take the call. After ten rings, she finally absentmindedly picked it up.

"Rory Gilmore."

"Ms. Gilmore, there's a call from Harvard saying that one of your writers had a major health problem. He blacked out after a substantial blood flew out of his brain due to a colossal erection thinking of his past weekend's activities."

"Really, Semple? Don't you have better things to do? You're a good for nothing," she said sternly.

"I beg to differ, Ms. Gilmore, that's not what you're screaming yesterday."

She grinned just thinking of what they did.

"Go back to work, Semple. We'll talk this evening." She hung up and saw the alert on her computer for her meeting and exhaled.

Truth be told, she was discovering new feelings with him like being completely lost in him just by sensing his presence around her. He had a certain je ne sais quoi that made him different from the preceding men in her life. She was dazed at the skill he had deployed in seducing her. She was so attracted to him but it was as if he was oblivious to that. Sure, he was good-looking, but it was more than that, there was something profoundly sexy about him—more than the husky tone of his voice when he murmured in her ear. There was this instinctive nature in him that just seemed to overwhelm her when she got near him. Even the writer herself couldn't put whatever he was generating in her into words.

When Rory came back from her meeting, she found a FedEx box on her desk and thought it was just another manuscript. She opened it and found a key and a card.

"You've already found the way to my heart, I wanted to make sure you could let yourself in my home whenever you felt like it." Love, R.

She grinned and wondered how he was always able to surprise her with the cheesiest gestures.

She grabbed her phone and texted.
When he glanced at his phone and saw the text, a flash of bliss spread into him. Could he be any happier?

# # #

Robert sat on the plane and pulled out his laptop to keep on typing furiously. The trip was short and he wanted to try to have as much work done as possible before arriving in New York, to be able to dedicate all his time there to Rory. They had been seeing each other for almost three months now on a weekly basis. It had started out just twice a month, but they soon agreed that they couldn't stay away from each other that long. Even though they were living in two different cities, they got back to their previous routine pretty easily. It felt effortless, just like finding home after a long journey.

Robert realized that his world depended on her being a part of it and there was no need to fight it.

As soon as he was out of the plane, he jumped in a cab to go straight to Rory's apartment. He barely had time to knock before she'd opened the door and thrown her arms around him for a passionate kiss. He dropped his suitcase to pull her to him and closed the door with his foot. Thirty minutes later they were naked and lying on the couch catching their breath.

"Oh man, I love your dick."

Robert chuckled and turned to look at her. She would never cease to amaze him.

"I missed you," she said softly, almost shyly, resting her head on his chest.

"Me or just my dick?"

"I didn't know I had the option of only your dick. You know, actually, it's a pretty good idea." She pursed her lips and nodded.

Robert raised an eyebrow. "Cutting off my dick?"

"No, for women like me that cannot have their man every day, to have a vibrator mold out from their man's dick."

"That's an interesting concept. Do you want me to throw the idea at Semple Brothers to see if they are willing to invest money in it?"

"Why not? The first one could be based on Charles's and your penises."

"My parents would be so proud to have their sons' cocks on display."

"Well, you told me they were very open-minded people."

Robert grinned and exhaled. It had been the most incredible months of his life. Very quickly, they had matched each others' desire, need for need. He had never felt that for a woman, not at this peak point. Moreover, it was not only the sex, but he already knew that she was the perfect fit for him, he'd hoped they hadn't drifted apart too far during these four years. Apparently, they actually were closer than ever.

Rory couldn't believe how she had changed these last few weeks. She felt like a new woman. She now understood what Finn meant when he said that sex could be liberating. She wasn't her shy, prude college-self with all her inhibitions anymore. Sex was now a natural part of her life and she enjoyed how she could talk about it freely with her boyfriend. But it was not only a physical
connection. Yes, Robert was her boyfriend now and she wanted to shout it out loud to the world. She had forgotten that sharing love with a man could make her that happy. Very soon, everybody knew they were back together, everybody except her grandparents. They never knew that she had been that close to him the first time, but she was aware that she had to tell them before the rumor reached Hartford.

Once again, they'd had reached the weekly moment they hated the most. When it was her turn to be in Boston, Robert would drive her to the airport. They were kissing goodbye at the security gate at 5:30 am on Monday morning. But she wasn't an early riser, and even if he was there with her until the last minute, the separation was too difficult and she couldn't hold the tears that were filling her eyes. She hated not being able to control her emotions, she wanted to show him that she could be strong. Robert hid it, but panic hit him for a minute. He wasn't prepared to see her cry and hated being incompetent to solve the situation. He thought he had been groomed for anything, but there he was, holding her, not capable of stopping the tears that were dampening his jacket.

"It's too tiring to wake up this early for you, next time you should leave the evening before."

"But then we would miss a night together," she said sheepishly.

"I know, but look at you, you're definitely not an early riser." He smiled, wiped her tears with his thumb, and kissed her eyes.

"You'll sleep on the plane and we'll talk when you land. You'll see - the week will fly. In less than a week, I'll be there, in fact in a little more than three days, Thursday evening remember?"

She nodded and kissed him. He put his hands on both of her shoulders, turned her toward the terminal, and pushed her slightly on her butt. She walked slowly and just before he would be out of sight, she turned her head to have the last image of him and gave give a small smile.

On the plane, she thought about how their relationship had evolved in just a little bit more than three months. She didn't know if it was because she loved him, but she'd never lived such a connection where she could unleash her thoughts without any fear that he would recoil. She only had this sensation before with Lane, but never with any of her former boyfriends. Even with Logan, maybe it was because she was too young, but she always felt she wasn't good enough, even though she was a Gilmore, she always was just a small-town girl in front of the Huntzbergers. With Robert it was different, she never felt that she wouldn't live up to his expectations. Was it because since they reacquainted, they were living in their own bubble? Apart from sometimes seeing their New York friends when Robert was in the city, they used the little time they were together selfishly. Just enjoying themselves in every way they could. But they both knew they would have to change at some point and do something about the long-distance issue. She'd had a look at the publishing houses in Boston, but aside from university press, she had come to the conclusion that she wouldn't be able to get a similar job.

He knew he wasn't responsible for the situation, but he understood why some people said that long-distance wasn't bearable after a while. First, he tried to find a way to modify his class schedule but it was already set for the last term and as a junior lecturer, his love life wasn't a priority. They'd only been together for three months, but he was in love with her for four years now, he couldn't see her cry. It was also too hard on him. During the week, he used his work to be able not to live like a ghost. He had sometimes been moody and he could swear his TA once was on the verge of telling that him he had gone too far.

"Ready for the department meeting?" Franck popped his head in Robert's office to witness his young
colleague holding his head in his hands. He didn't wait for his answer and stepped in, closed the door and sat in front of him.

"What's bothering you?"

Robert raised his head and gave his former PI a half smile.

"Hochschild just stopped by and asked me if I would be interested in a more permanent position."

"And it's bothering you why?" Franck asked intrigued.

Robert exhaled. "Rory"

"She wants you to take the White House offer?"

"I haven't told her about it yet, I wasn't going to take it no matter what."

"So?" Then it struck Franck. "You want to move in with her, you've reached that step, haven't you?"

Robert nodded.

"There are only university press publishing companies here, all their editors have PhDs," the young man said.

"She's still young, she could still go back to grad school," Franck offered.

"Or I can go to New York."

Franck stared at Robert dumbfounded. Who in his right mind would turn down a Harvard position at thirty? But Robert had never been a regular guy. He had started his Ph.D. work even before getting his master's degree, had graduated in two years, declined a postdoctoral position at Oxford to go to the White House and came back three years later to successfully take a junior lecturer position. Some faculty members had bet he wouldn't be able to keep up, but he did and even had already published two major articles and gotten a book deal with Rodham. No wonder the head of the department wanted to keep him in-house.

"You would kill me by leaving, and if you tell anyone that I said this I would deny, but Colombia is going to open a call for a tenure-track faculty position. Call Robert Shapiro, you can say I gave you the intel, he's smart enough not to tell Hochschild he's harvesting on her land."

Robert's eyes brightened up and his grin reached both of his ears.

"Really?"

"Talk to Rory about it before doing anything stupid, maybe she won't take you and already found a smarter guy in the private sector earning ten times more than you who can take her out in the city every night," Franck smirked. He liked to tease his young colleague.

"Come on, let's go to the department meeting, we're going to be late."

The situation was now very clear to Robert, Rory couldn't work in Boston, all the publishing companies in her field were in Manhattan. On the other hand, he could imagine a life as a writer, a researcher, a teacher in New York. His decision was made, because the quality of the New York publishing had to take priority, and he was more than happy to do it. It was wrenching to leave the many important scientific collaborations he was engaged in Harvard, but this opening for a tenured position at Columbia University was the sign for the next step. 
She was aware of soft lips brushing down her exposed neck. She barely registered her appreciation with a grin, though it was lost on the contributor since her face was buried into the pillow facing away from him. He wasn't to be disallowed of his morning privilege so he went and settled in on this particular spot, his tongue circling around on the patch of skin directly behind her earlobe. A spot that had never failed him since he found it the very weekend she found her way back to him. His ministrations were accompanied by his fingers running on her sides.

As his soft handiwork became more adamant and teeth began tugging at the thin skin over the sensitive spot, she shifted on the bed and rolled suitably into his waiting arms.

"What took you so long?" he teased, kissing her on the lips.

"Need sleep," she answered not being able to provide a complete sentence. She had burned the midnight oil all week to be sure she wouldn't have to work during the weekend. It was too early, but her silence invited his warm lips back against hers as well. She knew her body had already given up, she just had to let her brain to follow.

His hand ran lightly around her breast causing her to slide her leg between his and press herself further into his body. She snaked a hand of her own down his stubble covered jaw-line, one of the perks of their morning ritual, and let herself dive into the sensations he was inducing in her.

They were waiting for their heartbeats to get back to normal when he surprised her, in a different way this time.

"What would you say if I had an opportunity to work in New York?"

"So, Gilmore, how are things going with Robert?"

"I come to Baltimore to see you and your baby and you want to talk about me?" Rory asked, teasing her friend. Paris and Doyle had welcomed their first born two weeks ago. Even if it was planned, and therefore prepared, Paris was overwhelmed. Having her best friend with her was soothing her even if she would never admit it. She was happy to talk about something other than diapers, burps, breastfeeding.

"I love this baby, I really do, but you can't believe how fed up I am already that everything now revolves around him. I am so glad you're here, that you don't know anything about babies. So, you and Robert?"

"Good, they're really good but the long-distance thing is becoming harder and harder."

"So, it's serious, like is this for keeps?" Paris raised an eyebrow. She actually liked Robert, she knew the guy was right for her friend.

"I guess so," Rory answer shyly.

"So how do you plan to fix the long-distance thing?"

"Well, Robert is applying for a position at Columbia."

"You know that the political science program is supposed to be better at Harvard, right?"

"I know, but at Columbia, it'll be a tenured position."
"Wow, you understand that it means that you've trumped his career goals. He obviously wants to get to another level; the guy always had a drive for excellence and he's choosing the second best just to be with you. Are you ready for that?"

"Why are you asking me that? And it's not as if Columbia was so different from Harvard."

"Stop dodging my questions with another question. I'm worried about your commitment issues. This one is the right one for you. Don't scare him off."

"My commitment issues???

"Okay maybe I didn't use the right words but you have to admit that long-term commitment has never been your thing."

"I think you're being unfair, I've never been in that many relationships and every time the guys left me."

"Robert didn't leave you."

"We were not in a relationship."

"What do you call living and sleeping together?"

"You know perfectly well we didn't do those two things at the same time and you omitted the friendship issue."

"Okay, but I guess that if he gets the Columbia position you will live together?"

"Well, we haven't talked about it yet."

"Oh my God!! What's the matter with you? What are you waiting for? Are you aware that while you're playing with his feelings there are dozens of Harvard undergrads that are hitting on him shamelessly? For them, he's still the most eligible bachelor or a good fuck."

"How do you know that?" Rory cringed. She hadn't canceled a weekend with Robert to be lectured about her relationship. "Anyway, even if he gets it, it won't start before fall next year."

"Don't you remember how we used to find our teachers attractive? I slept with Archer, you were dazzled by the guy who took over your grandfather's class after his heart attack. You don't think that a passionate thirty-year-old political science teacher with blue eyes and a great ass will do the trick? I'm sure that all his classes are full. Not to mention that you that you two are in a long-distance relationship."

"We are exclusive' he'd never do that to me," Rory deadpanned

"He's a guy!! He's sweet but still a guy. Do you think he's immune to twenty-something sexy girls throwing themselves at him all the time? It's warm again, they're showing their legs, their cleavage, their perky tits. Is there a vaccine that no one has told me about? Don't tell me that because he's doing yoga he can control himself. I'm sure that I don't have to remind you that he used to go to yoga to pick up girls."

"That was years ago, before me. He has never been a player like Logan or Finn."

"Okay, keep telling yourself that. I'm just saying that if you don't give him some guarantees he may have doubts. After all, you didn't stick with him the first time."
"Oh my God! Paris, again it was so different from now and I did make the first move this time."

"All right, I just wanted to make sure that you were aware of the situation and don't come crying on my shoulders if things don't turn out your way."

The truth was that the whole plan that she had since she was a kid was to go to Harvard and become an overseas correspondent. Well, she had to come to the conclusion that she didn't follow her plan, but also that perhaps it didn't fit her adult self. First, she went to Yale, not Harvard, and finally, being an overseas correspondent didn't live up to her dreams. Nevertheless, she didn't have a determined plan concerning her personal life. Although she believed that women could have it all, she never really saw herself married with kids. Not that she wouldn't want to be, just that she never pictured herself in that situation. Maybe that was one of the reasons she didn't jump on Logan's proposal. Now Paris maybe had a point. I do have to get to another level with Robert, don't I? Sure, they can move in together, but she's not in college anymore, it would mean at least wondering if they wanted to have a family together.

Rory wondered if she was afraid to admit to herself that she was totally in love, the sustainable love, the one that would last. Their relationship was only a few months old, of course, they knew each other for much longer than that, but they only see each other a few days in a row. During that period, the physical attraction was so strong, it took over part of the time. She was perfectly aware that what they were feeling toward each other was special. What she was afraid of, was to feel as terrible and lonely as she did after the break up with Logan. She knew that nobody could give her a guarantee that it would last forever, but that didn't mean that she wasn't scared to death to lose him, that as what happened before, their goals wouldn't meet each other and that a future wouldn't be possible. The moment she would admit that Robert was the love of her life, she would admit she had a lot to lose, and that was terrifying.
It was the first summer day of the year so, despite the early hour, the sunlight was already filling the room. They were still in bed and he was laying on his side, his head resting on his elbow, waiting for her to wake up. He was trying to capture every inch of her in his memory with this perfect luminosity on her skin. They were going to be apart for a week but it wasn't going to be as painful as it was during the first weeks. Since the end of the spring session, Robert had spent most of his time in New York. He went to DC and Chicago several times for his book, but that was never for more than two days. They had reached a stage where they were completely part of each other's lives. When they were physically separated, the presence of the other in their mind was safely there.

She could feel the slight breeze interfering with the warmness of his body next to her. Her eyes were still closed but he knew she was awake as she was having difficulty holding her smile.

"I think I've never told you how incredibly beautiful you are, it's like you're coming straight from heaven to dazzle me."

She giggled, raised her eyes to him and beamed. She was never bored by his words, no matter how cheesy they could be. It was his game, every morning he would compliment her and he was certainly not tired of doing it.

"I'll definitely miss this moment when you're gone," she said playing with his locks as she stretched her neck to kiss him.

He was leaving for Barcelona for a meeting and he would be back directly to Boston for the summer session. Having him almost every day these past few weeks was a blast, she was still amazed at how they got along each other. After that 2009 summer, she never would have thought that life would turn out so well four years later. From now on, it would be her new motto - "give life some credit".

"Why are you staring at me like that?" she asked.

"I'm wondering how I'll manage not being able to touch you for six entire days. What about you? What are your plans?"

"I'm going back to Connecticut for the weekend, starting with Friday night dinner at my grandparents'."

"So, it will be official then, you're throwing us into the real world?" His mouth quirked up.

"You don't want me to tell my grandparents?"

"If it were only up to me, I would have already shouted it out loud to the whole world months ago, but I have to admit that having you only for me in our bubble worked for me too. Have I told you that I met Emily at the Harvard-Yale Football game last year?"

"No, you didn't. Did you two talk?"

"Of course we did, she was very nice to me and asked me why we weren't dating."

Rory giggled. "And what did you answer?"

"That it was difficult to date someone that was not living in the same city."
"So tonight, I'm going to tell that actually, it's not that difficult?"

He chuckled. "Indeed it isn't, but that's because I'm an extremely resourceful man."

She shivered at his gaze.

"How do you do that?" she asked

"Do what?" he said, now circling his finger around her navel.

"Make me feel sexy and turned on when I have to get up to go to work."

"Easy, you're are the sexiest woman that I know. If you want we can multitask and go shower together," he winked.

She frowned her brows, pondered for two seconds and jumped out of bed pulling him with her.

She made a mental note to thank her grandmother for the remodeling of the bathroom before she moved into the apartment. The shower area was absolutely ideal for the playful activities they liked to have in with high tech shower heads, even if she doubted it was Emily's first intention.

"So, do you have any plans for the summer?" he asked while towel drying his hair.

"Besides spending the summer with the hottest Harvard faculty member?"

"You're also doing Ben Berger from Social Studies?"

She kissed him to wipe off his smirk.

"Seriously, aren't you teaching during the summer session?"

"I am, but it still leaves me three weeks in August, we can go anywhere you want." He pulled her to him.

Rory smiled. "Anywhere with you?"

"Of course with me, unless you prefer to go with Berger?" His mouth quirked up.

"I'll go anywhere as long as it's with you. Did you do your annual trip to France already?"

"Nope, how much vacation will you have?"

"I'll check this morning at the office and I'll let you know."

###

She knew she had to tell her grandparents she was dating Robert before they heard about it. Even if the Semples weren't from Hartford society, there was still a risk as her grandfather was doing business with Semple Brothers. She was sure that the elder Gilmores would be thrilled by the match, but what she was more uncomfortable with, were the following questions. Nevertheless, she had missed them, even if her grandmother could sometimes be noisy, she was glad to be back in Hartford.

"Rory we're so happy to have you, it has been such a long time." Richard hugged his granddaughter tightly.
"I know Grandpa, I'm sorry. I wish I could come visit you more often but my work is very time consuming and I often use my weekends to catch up on sleeping and reading for pleasure. And having mind-blowing sex with my boyfriend.

"You're glowing, have you been on vacation?" Emily asked while sitting in front of her in the living room while Richard was handling them their drinks.

"Nope Grandma, just the great air in Manhattan."

"So, with all this work, did you have time to meet anyone?" Emily enquired.

"Actually, that's one thing that I wanted to tell you this evening, I'm dating Robert Semple."

"That's such wonderful news. I don't know if he'd told you but we met him at the Yale-Harvard game last year. So, how long have you been seeing each other?"

"A little more than four months but we don't get to actually see each other that much as he's still teaching at Harvard."

"So, I guess that if you're telling us you two are serious?" Emily pried.

"Yes, we have hit a good groove," Rory admitted.

"So how do you plan to fix the situation? Are you planning to quit your job to find one in Boston?"

"Actually, Robert applied for a tenured position at Columbia."

"Is it wise for him to quit his job at Harvard?" Richard asked with a concerned tone.

"Well right now he has a junior lecturer position at Harvard which is very good given how old he is, but a tenured position is much better and an incredible opportunity. He'll be able to work more on his research than on the teaching."

"Sure, but wouldn't it be better for his career if he stayed in Harvard to wait for a tenured position there and that you moved to Boston?" her grandmother asked.

Rory was dumbstruck. Was she really suggesting that she should be the one to leave her job because she was a woman?

"Why should I move to Boston if he can move to New York? I'm not sure I could find a job like mine in Boston, there are only University press publishing companies there, their editors have at least a master's degree. Robert is a very rational person. He wouldn't apply to that position if it wasn't interesting for him."

"If you say so. Then, if Robert gets this position, will you two get married?"

Rory choked. Where did that come from?

"Emily, don't you think it's a little premature? They've only been dating for four months," Richard said, trying to advocate for his granddaughter even though he would be more than thrilled if these two lovebirds could tie the knot.

"Well the boy is willing to change his work plan for Rory, so I'm guessing he's quite serious," Emily answered in a chastising tone. Then it struck her, maybe her granddaughter was willing to live in sin and not get married or worse... She stared at the young Gilmore.
"Rory, please don't tell me you aren't going to say no to this man, once again." Emily stared at her granddaughter with a questioning look.

"Grandma, we're far from being there yet, but I promise I'll make sure that if one day he were to pop the question, he doesn't do it in the middle of a party and I'll be prepared" Rory answered trying to keep calm. Jeez, I want everyone to stop reviewing my life and telling me what I should do. I'm gonna do what I want. Then she couldn't help a smile and thought that she absolutely wouldn't mind spending the rest of her life with Robert.

###

Lorelai was happy to have her daughter for the weekend for herself. Since Rory had started dating Robert, she hadn't spent a whole weekend in Stars Hollow. Her mother had filled the kitchen with all possible junk food and the freezer was full of different ice creams. Multiple kinds of movies were prepared depending on the mood, she was ready for a great movie night.

Luke shook his head and smiled

"I know Rory hasn't been here for a while, but you two speak at least three times a week on the phone."

"I know but just talking is not enough, I miss the real Rory, my own flesh, and blood."

"You know she has a life of her own now, but it doesn't mean that she loves you any less."

"I know, but I miss the friend part."

"I'm sure you could still have it if you weren't constantly bashing her boyfriend. Do you realize that she has to segment her life because of that?"

Lorelai's gaze darkened with anger and Luke knew it wasn't good for him but on the other hand, he didn't like the situation. He had never met Robert but he pitied the poor guy who was the target of his girlfriend's wrath at the moment.

It was not that Lorelai disliked Robert, she never had even met him yet, but the idea that Rory could be entering New York high society was making her sick, and above all in worldwide finance. She couldn't help linking Robert with money, which for her always came with obligations and therefore loss of freedom.

Deep inside her, Lorelai knew she was a little irrational as the young Semple was teaching at Harvard, but she had seen his family multiple times in the press. She just couldn't bear the idea of her smart daughter turning into one of those fake brainless society women with their high-pitched voices, only concerned with parties, looks, and gossip. She wanted more for her offspring, she wanted what she'd missed by getting pregnant at sixteen, she wanted it all for her brilliant daughter.

Part of the reason was to get back at her parents and at the Haydens. This world which couldn't understand her when she was a teenager, this world who couldn't forget the mistake of falling in love at sixteen. Of course, in the end, everything turned out fine, she had an amazing daughter, she was now happy in her love life with an extraordinary boyfriend, she was successful, but the first years were tough, so difficult. Not because she was a maid, but because all of sudden she had lost it all, her family, her boyfriend, her life and had to start everything from scratch. Undoubtedly, it was the consequence of her choice to run away from them, but what choice did she have? She could hear her mother crying every night, that she had put shame on her family. She remembered that she had considered abortion or giving her baby for adoption, but she just couldn't. Not that she was religious,
but her baby was the result of her love for Chris. She didn't know by then that the Haydons would do what they could to separate them, that she would be left by herself. Even if Mia was there for them, she never had forgiven this world. She had promised herself that she would protect her daughter, the most precious treasure she had from this evil world, they wouldn't be able to harm her, not if she was alive. Logan had been out of the picture, she won't make the same mistake with Robert and let him destroy her. These people were evil, of course, they could be nice, but as soon as you did something that wouldn't fit in their perfect image of what should be, then they could crush you like they did with bugs.

Rory had missed her mother and really wanted to get along with her as they used to do. Therefore, she tried to avoid mentioning him. It was killing her because all she could think about was him. Lorelai also tried to control herself and ducked any subject that could involve him. It was a weird weekend but hopefully, Lane was there so Rory could have a break of the tension with her childhood friend. It was fun to share with her and it was like things were inverted, Lorelai was the mother they were hiding things from.
Meet the Semplers

"Mmmm, can we just play hooky all day? I don't want to get out of bed," she mumbled.

Robert smiled.

"Yeah, I know, your sheets are so soft," he exhaled and spooned closer to her.

"Oh! that's what you like about my bed," she smirked.

"No, I think it's also the good mattress, and you know what I'd rather do with you all day." He kissed her temple. "Messing the sheets all day but you know what we've got to do today."

"Oh no, please!" She turned her head into her pillow.

"Let's pick this up this evening, we'll have all night, I'm only leaving tomorrow."

"That's the reason why we have to stay, I don't see why we're wasting our day together to see your family."

"Are you saying my parents are not worth meeting?" He whispered in her ear still trying to make her look back at him.

"No, but I need my alone time with you more than they need to meet me."

"You're so cute when you're irrational."

The worst thing was that she knew he totally meant it. Since they had been roommates, he never had been judgmental about her Gilmore ways, he just put up with them in the most natural way: the pro/con lists, her coffee and sugar addictions, the sticky notes everywhere. She just could be herself and he even seemed to like it.

Despite what Robert would say, Rory was nervous to meet his family for the first time. She had delayed this moment for a while, but this time, Robert told her that he couldn't ditch his mother's invitation anymore and anyway it was ridiculous. As the weather was nice and that they only lived a few blocks away, they walked to the Sempler family residence.

"I don't understand why you don't believe me, my parents are really very nice people, nothing to do with the Huntzbergers. I promise you it's gonna be fine and I'm sure they are going to love you." He kissed her on the forehead and held her waist.

"It's just a barbecue party with my close family and if you really feel too uncomfortable just give a sign and we'll go back home. Aren't you curious to meet my siblings? Don't be ridiculous Ror, I thought Steph talked to you about them?"

"She did."

"And? Did she say something that would scare you?"

"She said that your brother used to hit on her when he was at Yale."

Robert laughed.

"He did, but that doesn't make him a bad guy, and he won't hit on you because if he does, he knows
that I would kill him. Besides my brother, what did she say?"

"That your mother was a sweetheart and that your father likes to cook."

"See, next time you will beg to go visit them. Here we are."

They stopped in front of a beautiful brownstone. Robert rang the bell and held Rory tight. The door opened and a grey-haired man wearing jeans, a dark blue polo shirt and a red apron with Robert's eyes smiled at them. She could picture how Robert would look in thirty years and thought that they could patent their icy blue gaze.

"Honey! Robert is here! Welcome, Rory, I'm really happy to finally meet you, I've heard so much about you." Henri took her hand with his and shook vigorously.

"Hello, Mr. Semple, nice to meet you too."

"Oh! Please call me Henri."

A tall grey-haired smiling woman in a summer dress arrived.

"Come in, kids. Henri, don't leave them outside." She pushed him aside and gestured to show them inside. "Rory, you're even prettier than what Robert said. Can I hug you?" Without waiting for her answer, Lydia hugged her warmly. Rory blushed and didn't even have time to reply.

"And please call me Lydia, all my children's friends do it." They're really are nothing like the Huntzbergers. "Robert darling, just take Rory to the patio and offer her a drink, I'll be right there with you."

They followed his father outside where Robert's siblings were already there. A woman in her thirties was setting the table, probably his eldest sister. In the backyard, a black man was playing with a toddler. She barely had the time to scan the place before a handsome man stood in front of her.

"Now I understand why he hid you for so long. How come I haven't seen you at Yale?"

She laughed and extended her hand. "You must be Charles, Steph warned me about you."

He tsked. "Follow my number one rule, never trust what a beautiful blonde says, they always lead you to trouble."

He was definitely the charmer that Steph had described. A bouncy young woman slid between Charles and Rory.

"Hey, I'm Aubrey, the little sister. I'm so happy to finally meet you." She had his mother's smile and warmth.

"Nice to meet you, Aubrey, I really liked what you did with all Robert's apartment."

"I like her, Robert, try to keep this one."

Robert shook his head, it was going to be a tough family day.

"Rory, this is my older sister Nathalie, her husband Will and their little Matt."

Charles handled her a glass of wine and they all gathered around Rory, bombarding her with questions. She was amazed how friendly they were, just as if they already knew her and she realized that apparently, Robert had talked a lot about her to his family.
"I can't believe none of you took time to say anything to me, it's all about Rory," Robert pouted. His father guffawed.

"That's because you hid her for so long, we thought she only was an imaginary girlfriend. So, Rory, how is Robert treating you? If you have any complaints, don't hesitate to tell me, I know his manners can be a little rough, he's not used to be with women."

Rory laughed, parents were all good at making their kids feel uncomfortable. Robert was usually very together, but she noticed that with his parents, he was jittery and slightly peeved.

"Are we talking about the same Robert?" She asked.

"I cannot believe it!" Robert rolled his eyes.

"Yes, the Robert Semple who is teaching at Harvard. Did you know that he was designated one of the most eligible bachelors in Boston?"

"Oh! I do know that, and I made sure he wouldn't be nominated the following year."

"Well played, Rory," Nathalie said. She liked how her baby brother looked so happy.

While the afternoon was going on smoothly, Rory noticed that besides his physique, Robert inherited his laid-back attitude from Henri. She thought she was witnessing cloning. Charles also got his father's eyes, but definitely the maternal smile. For the first time, she wondered if they had children together, how they would look.

Robert brought the plates in the kitchen where his mother was preparing dessert.

"I like her," his mother smiled gently at him and locked eye with her son.

"Join the club," the edge of his mouth upturned.

"She's a keeper, how do you plan to end the long distance?"

"I applied for a tenure position at Columbia."

"Hope you'll get it, I'm happy for you, and then you'll be back in the city."

Robert checked that everybody was outside.

"Mom, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure honey. Can you grab the plates of tuiles aux amandes on the counter?"

"Oh! You made them?" They were his favorite French biscuits.

"I did, I had to make a good impression on the first girlfriend you've brought home in what? 20 years?"

He smiled at his mother and mustered the courage to ask her for advice.

"How do I know that what I'm feeling is love?"

Lydia stared at her son. From her four kids, he was never the one asking personal questions much less about feelings. She had already sensed that he was serious with Rory, but it seemed that it was even more than that. She put down the tray and smiled at him.
"Honey, love is hard to determine. In the beginning, you can sometimes mistake it with infatuation, or the desire of companionship, or even lust. I only met it once, so I'm not an expert. I can only tell you how I knew, I just felt it. It was different than with the guys I'd been before your father. The first weeks we'd been together, I wanted him to connect with all the people in my life, I wanted to spend all my time with him, and I know now that he reciprocated these feelings. Progressively, our lives became intertwined and without noticing it, we began to think of ourselves not as separate individuals but as a couple. We turned out to be an "us". And then, we started to share our dreams, our fears, our goals, our past, our future. At some point, your father who always was a very secretive person felt he could share with me his deepest secrets that he had never told anyone before."

Robert listened carefully to his mother. Aside from the last part, everything was exactly what he was experiencing in his relationship. He was sure of his feelings, but it dawned him that he had now to mature and be able to share with Rory his own secrets. It wasn't that he didn't trust her, Geez, he had even thought to change so that she would be his emergency contact person. He just had this last guard that he couldn't let down fearing that all the sorrow and the lost feelings would invade him again. He knew he was still fragile concerning Antoine's death. He had buried those feelings for so long, hid them from his Yale friends. At that time, he thought it was the right way to be able to move on. He was starting a new life in Harvard, Steph was in New York, the guys were still at Yale, what was the point telling them? He just went back to them. His mother had once mentioned that he could maybe share the story with Finn when they were both living in Boston, and he almost did several times but always backed out at the last second.

Aubrey burst into the kitchen and immediately saw that her mother just had a serious conversation with her brother. Robert had his lost gaze that she knew so well and she walked to him to squeeze his arm.

"Hey guys, do you need any help? Bro, if you don't come back soon your lovely girlfriend will switch to Charly, he's seriously trying to charm the pants off her, you know how he can't help it."

Robert shook his head and grabbed the biscuit plate to go save Rory from his brother's claws.

She had a very good time with the Semples and couldn't help smiling while they were walking back to her apartment.

Her mother had always pointed out the downsides of society. Meeting the Semples showed her a brand new vision of this world, that they were people living in it perfectly happy without being snobbish, pretentious and smug. Though Robert's family were typical WASPs just like the Haydens or the Hunztbergers, they were nothing like each other. Was it because they were from New York and not Connecticut? Even if she had read in the New York Times a few years ago that WASP families influence on America was declining, they still did represent the old American elite. Nevertheless, the Semples were different. In a strange way, they had managed to live with the harms and the goods and turn all that to their advantage. How did they do that? She now understood where Robert's ease in every situation was coming from. He had this quality to adapt to the environment and never be out of place. She guessed it was one of the reasons the Democratic Party wanted him to run. Now that she had met his family, she knew where it was coming from.

His parents were incredible people, the most open-minded she had ever met. She couldn't believe that Henri was the CEO of one of the most (if not the most) important venture capital firm in the country and yet never talked shop during the whole meal, and he joked with his family while handling the barbecue. She was also amazed how cultured they were. It was not as if they were throwing names or quotes constantly during the conversation, but more with their ability to straighten
their arguments with the perfect example. In particular, his mother always had the Wittiest comments, Lorelai could definitely love her. And yet, everything was natural and simple there. Even their house interior design was different, there were major paintings on the wall like in the Huntzberger mansion, but she didn't feel it was crushing the atmosphere, it was just the right place. Steph was right, they were just good people, even Charles.

"My parents are quite taken with you, you know," Robert says while they were approaching her apartment

"They are?"

"Why wouldn't they be? They are able to recognize amazing people, and you, Miss Gilmore, are the most extraordinary woman on this continent."

"Oh, I've been downgraded to the continent, you used to say on earth."

"That, my dear, is because you haven't kissed me in the last hour," he smirked.

She turned to him, put her arms around his neck and kissed him with all her heart. She was the happiest girlfriend of the Universe and this wonderful man will get her undivided attention this evening.
Robert asked sternly.

"We said no work during our vacation, Ms. Gilmore, do you think I can't see that you're reading a manuscript and not an article?"

Rory sheepishly hid her iPad. It was too hot outside at this time of the day, they were in their room waiting for the heat to come down. They had been in Tuscany for five days now and were more than relishing this break from reality. Only the bells reminded them of time, they were only following their senses. Waking up in the morning to the sounds of birds chirping, the scent of the drying grass, the slight breeze and sunshine warming their bare skin. It was Rory's third time in Italy and she had to admit that each time it got better. He had found the most charming hotel in the countryside of Siena. There they had embraced the Italian art of living, mixing visits of gorgeous hilltop medieval villages, delicious meals and gelati and of course wine tasting. They were enthralled at the ingenious construction of the San Gimignano, enchanted by Sienna's beauty, charmed by the landscapes.

"I thought you were taking a nap," she answered. "Don't you have any work to do? Have you posted all the book lists for your students?"

He started to run his fingers along her calf, every time stroking a little higher on her thigh.

"Yep, all done before we left. We agreed on no work during our vacation so I managed to have everything done," he answered concentrating more on distracting her. She was wearing a slightly see-through white dress that had teased him all morning. He nudged her with his nose into her cheek, but she was still trying to ignore his ministrations and convince him she had to work a little.

"But it's not fair, you don't need as much sleep as I do, so you can get everything done on time," she pouted pursing her lips. She shouldn't have done that because he was even more aroused. He knew she wasn't that far from giving in as the hint of desire in her eyes was becoming clear to him.

"I know that, so you've noticed that I let you sleep when I go for my morning run. And you know how well trained I am." His lips had been hovering her neck to finally reach her sweet spot, the one that had never failed him in the last six months. She moaned, put her iPad on the nightstand and started to unbutton his shirt. His hands were brushing her sides while he was taking off her dress sending chills all over her body. She wondered how he was able to attract her that quickly every time.

After their afternoon wake me up, they just enjoy staying by the pool under the cypress shade, playing in the water like two teenagers, simply relishing being in this little piece of heaven on earth. Rory couldn't imagine being happier at that moment. Robert was reading a French newspaper, or more accurately trying to. He actually didn't care what was going on in the world that day. He just wanted to appreciate how gorgeous his girlfriend was in her yellow bikini. He wished they could have been alone so he could toy with the ring that was between her breasts.

After dinner, they were enjoying watching the stars in a cloudless sky. Rory was seated between Robert's legs, her head on his shoulder, on the patio of their room. She was telling him the places she had visited when she was backpacking with her mother the summer before Yale.

"Have you ever been to Spain?" As soon as she'd mouthed the words she wanted to take them back but it was too late. As he wasn't making any sound, she slowly turned her head to him and noticed the sparkling of joy in his eyes had disappeared. He had paled, like if the tan he'd got from the
summer had faded away.

"Robbie are you alright?" She whispered.

He was never about signs or fate, but maybe it was his chance to open up to her. The last six months had been nothing but pure happiness. He had thought about how his mother had described how his parents had discovered their love for each other. He met her eyes silently but he had trouble finding his words. Where to start? Anyway, he had to tell her as they were going to meet the Valmys at the end of their trip. She couldn't tell if he was upset or sad. He gulped and reached out for her hand. She felt him stiffen, his body becoming one unique tense muscle. He finally closed his eyes, taking a deep breath, mustering the courage to tell her what he was holding in him for so long.

Robert took his time to deliver the whole story. From his childhood and how Antoine and he were inseparable. They were like Siamese twins. That was why his parents agreed that he could go to boarding school when they went back to the US. The Valmys and the Semples never had an explanation for the special bond that these two had, they just understood that they needed more to be together than with their families. Nevertheless, Robert was reasonable enough to understand that at some point he had to take responsibility for his future and accepted that he had to go back to the States at the end of high school. Antoine stayed in France to study to become a pilot. He always had been fond of anything mechanical. They managed to spend their holidays together sailing, hiking, riding, skiing. Until that fateful summer.

"He died, Rory, in just a few minutes he was just gone for good. He was my kindred spirit, my unrestricted friend since we were five. We learned almost everything together, of course, friendship, but also trust, empathy, generosity. We shared our first times, first girl, first heartbreak, first hangover, first everything."

Tears were running on his face but he wasn't sobbing. She tried to wipe them with her fingers. They were now seated next to each other.

"Just after his death, I thought I was handling his loss pretty well, but I was wrong. As I had to try to reach his family, answer to the police, fill the forms all that in Spanish, it was keeping me busy. But after the funerals I had to face reality, I realized he was gone for good and it was like all my world had collapsed. I thought I would never be able to recover, I felt like an empty shell. It hurt so badly Rory, I had three weeks left before starting Harvard and I was about to quit or at least postpone or take a sabbatical. But it wasn't the time to be a chicken shit. So, Nicolas decided that we had to find a way to accept Antoine's loss so he took Odette and me to a Buddhist monastery where they teach meditation not far from Bordeaux. We stayed there for two weeks. It did the trick, at least we were able to go back to accept life again. Nathalie and Aubrey took me to Harvard. My family had found me the Jamaica Plain apartment, set up everything. The first few days, they made rounds to stay with me but you know me, my weird way of coping. As soon as school started, I threw myself into it and nothing else existed. I had the chance to meet Franck and he gave me a great subject for my dissertation. Then the following year Finn arrived in Boston, I was starting to feel better. I never told him what happened or to anyone of the Yale gang, first, because I wasn't strong enough to open up, but after a while, I just needed to move on and not talk about it. You know Finn, he's so great to be with. He didn't replace Antoine, but he was the right friend at the right time."

"Robbie," she whispered, her fingers tangling in his hair. "I'm so sorry"

He buried his face in the crook of her neck. She held him close, her heart was aching for him. She could see how the pain was still in him even after all these years, all his emotions intact as if it had happened only a few days ago. She tucked her body around his and they stayed like this for a moment. It dawned her that as they were friends for a long time before dating, they didn't have to
learn about each other's needs. Obviously, they still needed to explore this field.

For the first time since he had started speaking, he looked up at her, the blue of his eyes slowly losing their tense agony.

"It was an accident, there's nothing you could have done differently that would have changed what happened," she said, her voice shaking with emotion.

He smiled slightly, brushing back her hair.

"You would have liked him you know."

"I'm sure I would."

She locked eyes with him, her hand came up to his cheek, her thumb stroking the length of his cheekbone. She leaned and let her lips brush the same path her finger did.

He grabbed her other hand, his face remaining completely impassive as he opened his mouth, at first apparently without the ability to utter a sound. Finally, his tongue motioned with his lips to shape words.

"I love you, Rory."

It was not like he had never told her those three words, but the intensity, the moment... She understood that this time, the meaning was different, it wasn't that he didn't mean it before, just that now he had offered her his deepest secret and that he was ready to unconditionally love.

"I love you too, Robbie."
Rory was bewitched by the beautiful landscape of villages hidden on green hills, the old plane trees along the roads. It was her first time in Provence and Robert didn't exaggerate when he told her that she would love the scent of lavender and rosemary, the old stones, the colors of Luberon and the songs of cicadas. Driving in an old red Triumph Spitfire convertible seemed surreal to Rory, but apparently, it was the most natural thing to Robert. When they arrived at the Marseille airport, he went straight to the car and already had the key.

"It's Antoine's," he just said and she didn't pry for more fearing another breakdown, but Robert seemed cool and thrilled to be there. He put their luggage in the trunk and opened the door for her. She relished the comfort of the old leather seat and buckled up.

"Open roof or closed?" he asked her.

"Open," she answered enthusiastically, she actually had never been in a convertible, much less a vintage one.

"Then I would suggest finding a way to hold your hair."

While he was pulling the hood, she found a rubber band in her purse and pulled her hair in a ponytail. Robert sat in the driver seat smiled at her and leaned to kiss her.

"Ready?" he asked. He looked different but happy different. Maybe she shouldn't be apprehensive meeting people from the part of his life that she didn't know.

After a 45 minute drive, Robert turned in a small road bordered with poplars alternating with bland walls. He stopped the car in front of an ancient iron gate of a property surrounded by an endless wall of old stones. He walked to buzz the intercom and came back in the car while the gate was opening.

"I feel like we're in an old French movie and that Alain Delon would be laying by the pool," Rory said, dazzled by the beautiful garden composed of thickets surrounded by wildflower beds, a disheveled lawn, olive trees and an azure ceramic pool. It was clearly an ancient property around the main building and two guests houses, full of charm shaded by old oak and cedar trees.

Robert frowned at her.

"You know that Delon should be almost eighty now and is a huge douchebag, right?"

Rory smiled and kissed him on the cheek. They heard a woman yell from the house.

"Ils sont là !!!" [they are here]

A gorgeous tanned brunette wearing a yellow sundress burst out of the house.

"Robert!!"

He barely had time to step out of the car before she had thrown her arms around his neck and was kissing his cheeks. Robert welcomed her embrace cheerfully and squeezed her with a content smile showing he had missed her.

"Oh! Sorry, Rory," Odette walked fast to the other side of the car. "I'm so glad to finally meet you. I'm Odette." She leaned to kiss Rory on the cheek which startled her at first but then she relaxed
immediately at the friendly vibe she was getting.

"Enchantée," Rory replied trying to remember her French from high school.

"I've heard so much about you sometimes I think I already know you." Odette genuinely smiled at her.

Rory tried not to stare at her too much, but she was quite curious to meet the woman who had been for so long in her boyfriend's life and that she knew he loved deeply, but also that had developed a friendship with her ex. What immediately caught the American's attention was the fascinating gaze of the French brunette, in particular, the green of fresh cut grass, a color that she had never seen before on a person.

An elegant white-haired woman walked toward them and Robert went to hug her. Rory could see that she tightened her embrace.

"I'm so glad to see you, it's been too long," Robert said, clearly a little emotional.

"I missed you," she whispered putting a peck on his cheek and then she turned to Rory.

"I'm absolutely delighted to meet you, Rory, I'm Anne de Valmy." The woman greeted her the French way with a kiss on each of Rory's cheeks. The young American woman was impressed by the natural presence of Odette's mother, although she could sense a lot of emotions from her. Robert knew that every time she'd seen him, all her memories of Antoine were resurfacing and he wondered if one day she would be able to mourn her son completely. It had been eight years now, but he could see that the emotion was almost as intact.

"Robert, I gave you two your old room, is it okay for you to share the same room or have I assumed too much? Or would you rather be in the guest house for more privacy?"

"Maman!" Odette rolled her eyes.

"What? It's hard to keep up with you kids, what is the new hip thing for a mom? Robert, is it fine that I put you two in the same room? Because it seems that I made a faux pas last month when Nicolas came with his girlfriend."

"Nico has a girlfriend? When did that happen?" Robert stared stunned at Odette.

"Maman, she was only his plus one, not his girlfriend," Odette sighed.

"It was only the premiere of the festival d'Aix; he didn't need a plus one. It's difficult to keep up with your life you young people. At least Robert never got me mixed up with anyone so I know I'll see Rory again, even if I don't see a ring yet."

"Anne, s'il te plait!" Robert shot a pleading look. He noticed that Rory blushed and tried to hold his smirk.

"Don't pay attention Rory, it's just crazy mother talk. Since we've hit 30 it's like we have reached an expiration date and they have to marry us before we would turn into a pumpkin." Odette grabbed Rory's arm to lead her into the house.

The young Gilmore was mesmerized by the beauty of the place. She had never seen such a charming and exquisite house. The mix of French antiques and more recent furniture, the tasteful colors, made the interior design absolutely unique.
"You have the most wonderful house I've ever seen Mrs. de Valmy."

"Thank you, and please call me Anne. It has been a family house for four generations so I guess the accumulation of souvenirs gives the place a particular atmosphere. I'm sure you're dying to freshen up after a drive in that car, but after that, I can give you a tour or Odette could if you prefer." The older woman patted Rory's arm and smiled at her warmly.

"I'd love that," Rory answered and wondered where the French reputation of rudeness was coming from.

"Alright then, let's meet on the terrace for the aperitif at 7:30 and we'll plan on that."

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Rory couldn't stop being delighted by the place, maybe it was the bucolic atmosphere which reminded her of Stars Hollow a little. The dinner was taking place under a lovely wisteria arbor.

"Usually the wisteria only flowers in spring but this year it did again a few days ago."

"It's absolutely gorgeous Anne, like everything here, it's just a little paradise," Rory said.

"I'm glad you like the place, you're welcome anytime, our door is wide open, and of course you can come with Robert."

Robert chuckled. "It's nice to know that you remember me, you're like Mom and Dad, once they got to know Rory it was like I wasn't there anymore."

"Always prying for attention Semple."

They all turned to the voice that was coming from the house.

"Logan, you came! You told me you couldn't ditch your meeting." Odette jumped out of her chair to greet him. Robert couldn't miss the rather enthusiastic reaction from his friend.

"The other party called this afternoon to cancel tomorrow's meeting so I thought I would surprise you and come see my Yale friends."

The blond hadn't had the opportunity to see Robert and Rory since they were back together and he actually hesitated when Odette had invited him to join them. The obvious bond between Odette and Logan rattled Rory, or perhaps it was that she hadn't expected to see her ex, but the situation was confusing to her.

"What a nice surprise, have you eaten? I can ask Jeanne to make you a plate before she leaves," Anne offered.

"It would be nice, thank you. I'm actually starving," Logan answered.

Robert stared at Anne intrigued. He was aware that Hughes was doing business with Huntzberger Media, but his wife barely attended functions anymore and that's why he was taking Odette when needed, so he wondered how Anne got to meet his Yale friend.

"Say no more." Odette walked to the kitchen.

After greeting the elder Valmys, Logan hugged his two American friends.

Robert was unsettled. He was glad to see his friend, but the two lives that he had carefully kept apart
were colliding in front of him. He had prepared himself for letting Rory in, they became so close that he needed her to know this part of him, but he hadn't planned for Logan. He knew that his college mate was seeing Odette from time to time at functions, she had asked about him and that should have given him a clue, but his French and American worlds were so separated in his mind that he didn't see that coming.

"It's nice to see you man, it's really been too long. I'll go help Odette."

"Was Mitchum in London?" Hughes asked.

"No, he's spending some days at Martha's Vineyard with Mom."

Robert caught Odette in the kitchen where she was reheating some leftovers.

"You never told me you were that close to Logan."

"Well, we saw each other quite often since I started in Oxford in January. I thought that Rory and you would be happy to see him," she answered avoiding Robert's gaze, taking a tray to put the plate and the silverware on. Robert had talked on the phone several times with both Logan and his French childhood friend but neither of them had mentioned to him anything.

"And?" Robert pried.

"And we're friends, we get along pretty well."

"Come on Odette, I know Logan, he can't be only friends with a pretty girl."

"Well, maybe you don't know him that well," she answered a little flustered.

"What are you not telling me? You want me to believe that you invited him to Lourmarin just for me?"

Robert took the tray, not convinced that she was telling him the whole truth but he could feel that he wouldn't be able to get more information. They arrived back to the dinner table where the two men were talking business.

"Please Papa, can't you give Logan a break, what is so urgent that it can't wait?" Odette chided her father.

"You're right, and if you young people will excuse me, I'll take this opportunity to go smoke my cigar in the garden. I'll have one for you gentlemen if you care to join me later, you know where to find me. Anne?"

"Thanks, chéri, but I'll finish my dessert and try to do some writing afterward."

"I didn't mean to sweep you away," Odette said a little embarrassed

Hughes kissed his daughter and his wife. "No at all darling, I'm just taking the opportunity to smoke without disturbing anybody."

"Or you can also quit this bad habit," his wife reminded him.

"You would be bored with me if I were too perfect." He grinned and walked away, pulling his cigar out of his shirt pocket.

Logan was pleasantly surprised that the awkwardness he felt at the beginning had lifted off easily
and that the two girls seemed to get along very well. He watched them out from the corner of his eye and couldn't help notice that they had the same sparkling in their eyes when they were talking about literature. He smirked and turned to Robert.

"How are Colin and Steph? I haven't heard from them in ages."

"They are fine, working their asses off as usual. It's like if it were a competition between them. At this pace, he could be equity partner very soon."

Rory asked herself if it the enchantment of this house wasn't a little magical. She seemed to like everybody as if she always had known them. Odette was so easy to talk to she could see why her boyfriend liked her so much. She remembered the pang of jealousy she had felt when she discovered how close these two were. But now, watching them together, she could see that it wasn't that kind of love, it was the one that siblings usually shared, that sticks no matter what, the one that had been built along the years and became solid as concrete because they had experienced unbelievably difficult moments in their life. They both had an overprotective gaze filled with a pinch of admiration for each other.

"If you don't mind guys, I'm beat. I've been up since 5:30 this morning," Logan said "Odette, can you please show me my room?"

"Sure, let's go," she answered, already walking toward the house.

"You guys can leave all the stuff on the table, Jeanne will take care of it in the morning."

"That's okay we'll do it," Robert said. "Are you coming back?"

"I'm a terrible hostess but if you don't mind I'll go to bed too." Robert raised an eyebrow. He knew both Logan and Odette, just like him, didn't need much sleep but he didn't insist as it gave him more alone time with Rory.

The two lovers brought what was left on the table to the kitchen. Once he had put the dishes in the dishwasher and turned it on, he slipped both of his arms around Rory's waist.

"I've been watching you, you seem very at ease here, like a duck takes to water," he said resting his forehead on hers.

"I am, this house has a magical vibe. Did you come here a lot? It looks like you know everything around here."

"I spent a lot of time in this house over the years, so many holidays I can almost call it home. Jeanne used to babysit us when we were kids."

"I'm surprised there's only one maid."

"They were more back in the day, but now only Jeanne and her husband work here full time and live on the property. They're almost like family, they never had kids so they used to spoil us. Jacques is taking care of the garden, the pool, the cars all the handy stuff, Jeanne of the house. Anne isn't hosting much here anymore since... you know. Eventually, if needed, Jeanne asks for her sister or her niece to help."

"You never told me that Logan was that close to them."

"Because I didn't know, do you feel weary having him here?"
"No, not really, it's just a little awkward to see him with new people. I like Odette very much, she's amazing."

"I'm glad that you like her even though I hadn't any doubt that you two would get along, you two share a lot of things you know."

"Like you for instance," she said teasingly stroking the nape of his neck with her fingers. He lifted her onto the kitchen counter and started ghosting her bare legs.

"Well, sure, but there are things that only you can get, Ms. Gilmore, not her, even if I've known her for a much more longer time."

His hand was now reaching now the inner part of her thigh. Her breathing was getting louder and he could feel that she was aching for more. She put her hand on his chest trying to steady her body and not get too close to him.

"I know I told you I was feeling homey here, but not to the point of getting caught by the Valmys," Rory said, her breathing becoming ragged. He was trailing butterfly kisses behind her ear to her collarbone and heard her exhale. She took her last ounce of willpower to jump down off the counter, grabbed his hand, and pulled him to their room. He groaned but followed her trying to switch off the lights fast enough to keep her pace. Once their door was closed, she started to unbutton his shirt.

"Do we have common walls with any people of the house?" she asked.

Robert laughed.

"Hughes and Anne's room is on the other side of the house, Odette is across the hallway, I'm not sure where she put Logan, but I'm guessing in the one next to hers because it's the nicest one. Satisfied?" The edge of his mouth upturned. "I can be quiet, but can you?"

"Oh you think you're so good I can't control myself?"

"Is it a challenge Ms. Gilmore?"

She shut him up by kissing him passionately. She knew perfectly well that he could own her like nobody could, she just didn't want to say it out loud.

##

Robert exited the room as quietly as possible, holding his sneakers to avoid waking up Rory and go for his morning run. While closing the door slowly, he grinned as he remembered their nocturnal activities. He had kept his part of the bet, but Rory hadn't been able to hold off some screams. He knew she would be mortified if she realized that somebody could have heard her. When he turned around to head to the stairs, he was surprised to witness Logan coming out from Odette's room. They stared at each other for a few seconds, neither of them knowing what to say.

"You're going for a run?" Logan finally asked.

Robert nodded.

"If you give me five minutes I'll join you."

"I'll wait for you downstairs."
They left in silence but after about 40 minutes Robert stopped and started stretching.

"You want to say something before we get back to the house?" Robert finally said.

"It's not what you think."

"How do you know what I think? She's a nice girl Logan, I hope you know what you're doing, she had enough drama in her life, she needs to be taken care of, not played."

"Is there any place we can have a coffee in this village?"

Robert nodded and started running again until they got to the village café.

"It only started a few weeks ago and we just didn't want our parents to know, well in particular mine, but we guessed that if Hughes knew he would tell Mitchum."

Logan was staring at his coffee trying to think how to avoid his friend's wrath.

"Yeah, I got that part that your parents were pushing, but I didn't realize that there was actually something, last time we talked, you said she was mostly your plus one for work functions, barely a friend."

"And we were, it's just that since she arrived in Oxford we started to see each other during the weekends and I haven't had such a good time since..."

"Rory?"

"Maybe, I was going to say since I was in London."

"Weren't you dating someone when you were in California?"

"I was, but I now realize she was my rebound girl. She was nice but it wasn't a problem for me to choose work over her. Odette is the first woman I want to spend more than a weekend with, but I can't tell you that I'm ready for commitment yet. I tried dating seriously for a while, but every time after about three weeks there's a deal breaker, something I can't bear. With Odette at least, I'm never bored but maybe Mitchum is right, I'm not good enough for her."

Robert shook his head.

"Don't tell me that it's a challenge to prove the Dark Lord wrong."

"No! At first, I truly saw her as a friend and then I realized I was always looking forward to going to the functions where she would be. But you know me, seeing that it would please my parents that we could date drove me in the opposite direction. But when she started in Oxford, we got to see each other more often and I'm really enjoying her company."

Logan finally searched for his friend's gaze and tried to guess what was going on in his mind.

"Listen, Logan, if you do anything to hurt her, I'll never forgive you and I'll make you regret it for the rest of your waking days. I'm usually not involved in Odette's love life but you're both among my closest friends so you know how serious I am."

"I'll be honest, it's brand new, and we both want to start slow. To show you how I changed, even if I didn't promise anything to her, I stopped sleeping with anyone else."

"Good to hear. We're all adults here and I'm not her brother but we're pretty damn close, a bit like
you and Steph so think about what you wouldn't have allowed Colin to do and I'm sure you'll get it. Despite what people think, I'm not sure we're that different, you and me."

"Well, we did fall in love with the same girls."

"Well, I was eight for Odette and she chose Nicolas"

Logan smirked smug in the knowledge that he could best Robert this time.

"Sure, so we're cool? Because she was kind of afraid of your reaction, more than her parent's I think, that's why she didn't want to tell you yet."

Robert laughed.

"Logan I trust you, just know that if I have to take a side, I'll always choose her, no matter how close you and I are."

"I respect that, I never expected anything else from you."

They stayed silent for a few minutes. When they first met at Yale more than ten years ago, neither of them would have thought that their lives would be so intricate in the future.

"Okay, enough of testosterone talk, let's go back to our ladies." Robert stood up and slammed Logan's shoulder. "So how long are you staying?"

"I have to be back in London on Monday morning. Will you be able to bear me for that long?"

"Of course, man." Robert hugged his friend briefly. "So, only Odette could keep us from talking about Rory, right? Amazing women we have here Huntz."

Logan smiled, over the years he had learned to like Robert more and more.

"The first one at the house get to pick what we're doing today."

"Deal."

When the guys got into the house, Odette had already planned everything with Rory. They were going to see the ochres trail in Gordes, then have lunch at Isle-sur-Sorgue and do some antiquing. Both men glanced at each other and shook their heads. They could have as many man talks as they wanted, these two women would always know how to wield them.

###

After dinner, Anne asked Robert to walk with her. She put her arm in his and relished the moment. She knew he wasn't Antoine, but he represented all the good memories she had of him. No parent could recover from the loss of a child, even less such a brutal one.

"I'm happy that you'd found love, you deserve it. I like her very much."

Robert shook his head. "You're so like mom."

"Talking about being a mom, do you know what's going on between Logan and Odette?"

Robert chuckled, he pondered quickly in his head what he could say.

"You're a close friend with both of them aren't you? Well, I know for Odette."
"I am Anne, just I don't see them that much anymore, in particular, Odette."

"I'm just wondering if you knew what was going on between them. They keep dancing around each other. I know Logan's parents are pushing hard for them to be together, I want to be sure that he's serious and that's not just a business deal."

"Well, even if I knew something I'm not sure they would be happy that I'm sharing with you their personal life. Up until last night, I didn't even know that they were seeing each other that often."

"Huh." She sighed "You're useless but I'm so happy to have you here." She rested her head on his arm and they kept walking enjoying the smell of the summer night.

Rory was watching Anne and Robert from afar. She understood that Robert had taken her to the other part of his life, the former one. These people knew a side of him that he was revealing to her. It struck her that maybe it was her turn to do the same now, take him to Stars Hollow.

When Robert came back in their room, Rory was hanging up the phone. She sighed and settled into a familiar slumped-shoulder posture of defeat. Why was her mother so stubborn about Robert? Maybe it wasn't Robert himself, but her being with Robert. He noticed her disappointment and sat next to her on the bed to brush a kiss on her temple while putting an arm around her shoulders. He despised to seeing her upset.

"Don't worry, she'll come around," he said softly.

"But, don't you mind?" She asked surprised. He had never shown any discomfort knowing that her mother disapproved their relationship.

Robert shrugged, "I'm used to people not liking me."

Rory's eyes widened. How could he say something like that?

"It's very rare that people like me at first. That's why I keep my friends close. At school, most of the kids hated me and remember at Yale, they all thought I was a jerk."

"I didn't." She remembered that Logan told her that, but she knew that it was only out of jealousy.

"Because it's you, you always see the good in everyone," he smiled at her. It was one of her many traits that he loved.

"And my father liked you."

"True, but when I met him, I wasn't screwing his daughter."

"Sure, if you put it like that, but what about all these girls..."

"It's not the same thing, I just needed to get in their pants and they wanted to get laid. You want me to get in your mother's pants?" he smirked.

"No! Yerk..." She smacked him lightly on the arm. "Can't you be a little serious sometimes? Of course, it wouldn't hurt if she wasn't so much on the defensive."

"Give her time, just try not to be too upset."

"She's talking about you as if you're just a high school crush, I know we're not even living together, but we know each other very well and that I tried being without you for more than three years and I was miserable."
She laid her head on his shoulder, and he tightened the hold of his arm to get her closer to him.

"We both were."

"And even if we're not living together, I'm so happy now. I don't understand why she cannot see that, that we're good for each other. She's always judging what we're doing, how we live."

"Rory, only you and I can really know what's happening between us. It's nobody else's business. It took us almost four years and we were in the front row, so give her time and let her be closer, she's not blind, she'll figure it out by herself. How about we go together to Stars Hollow right after we get back stateside so that I can meet your mother properly?"

"You know you're the sweetest, right?" she turned and leaned to put her forehead on his.

"I'm the best, baby," he beamed and kissed her.

It dawned on Rory that her relationship with Robert was totally different from what she had lived before. She felt that he knew her, even if they were not living together, it was as if he was always with her, that he could see into her. Most of all, he understood her and that was the most amazing feeling. It used to be her mom, but now, it was him.
Rory was hoping that introducing Robert to her hometown would put a final point to her mother's disapproval of her love life. Despite their quirkiness, Stars Hollow people would be able to see the good in her boyfriend, so she just had to focus on her mom. She had prepared herself as if meeting her own mother was as going behind the enemy lines because she felt like she wasn't living up her mother's expectations. Despite that she was going to turn twenty-eight she was still afraid to disappoint her. Paris had repeatedly suggested that she was still too much under the influence of her family and she was wondering if her high school friend didn't have a point there.

Maybe Lorelai wasn't that different from Emily, she was controlling Rory's life but when it wasn't working she just shut her out. She could understand how her mother had felt stifled by the eldest Gilmore because that was what she was experiencing. Ever since she started Yale and didn't follow what her mother originally planned for her, it was getting more and more difficult. The major turning point was, of course, dating Logan. It made her grandparents ecstatic but ever since her mom kept bugging her about her relationships. Wasn't she allowed at her age to be able to choose her boyfriend without her mother's approval? And why isn't Robert good enough? The guy was one of the youngest Harvard faculty members, a Yale graduate, and a Harvard Ph.D., he had worked at the White House, and he was the sweetest boyfriend ever. Why couldn't her mother see that he was a very brilliant and smart guy, successful, but she was only focused on the old money and upper-class features? He worked hard for his position at Harvard and at the White House, his family didn't have any connection in the academic world. Of course, they had made donations to Yale just as any regular alumni, but they didn't donate to have a whole building in his name like the Gilmores did. Maybe his definitive and only flaw was that he had been blessed by the elder Gilmores.

Rory felt like her mother had projected on her everything that she'd missed and wanted to do. Why couldn't she live her own life with Luke and let Rory live her own? Then it struck her. Even if Rory was certain that her mother was in love with Luke, could it be that Lorelai still resented the Haydens, all the pressure they had put on her and that Logan or Robert just represented this blue blood society?

This thought just comforted her that she was right to live her own life and distanced herself from her mother. She shouldn't choose her boyfriend thinking about whether her mother would approve. Moreover, her mom always acted as if she knew her even better than herself. That was maybe true when she was still living in Stars Hollow, but since she left for college, she had progressively shifted away to her own thoughts and personality.

# # #

Lorelai wasn't willing to realize that the life and relationship that she had with Rory while she was still living in Stars Hollow was over. She looked up at Sookie with glassy eyes. The women were taking a break at the inn.

"She doesn't talk to me anymore. She knows how I like to be the first one to be apprised. Well, she doesn't do it anymore. When she had a problem, she used to come to me, but not anymore. Like we had this deal that she would tell me whenever she would start dating and she did it when she started with Logan, but with Robert, I know it was complicated, but it took her days. Now it has been months and I'm just going to meet him now, but my parents and even Christopher have already met him, even if they weren't dating yet, but still."

She stuck out her bottom lip, her head resting on her hand, her elbow on the table. Sookie sighed, her
Lorelai was deeply hurt and she had to find a way to see the light out of the tunnel she got herself into for the sake of the mother and the daughter.

"Lorelai," she said softly, moving closer to her. "Is that what's got you upset? You feel excluded from her life?"

"I really thought we could have our BFF bonding forever, you know," she smiled nostalgically. "It had always been her and me before anyone else. It changed so fast, she has her own life. She used to take anything I said at face value, you remember? But now she doesn't even bother telling me anything. You know she used to say she would always need me."

"How old was she, six?" Sookie tried hard to hold her smirk and not mock her friend.

"Four," Lorelai sighed, "before she started school. Then it hooked into her and she saw a whole other world open up to her and then boys came. I could handle Dean, but the change really started with Jess."

Sookie put her forearms on the table to lock eyes with Lorelai.

"She's almost 28, accomplished, thriving professionally. Just look at the big picture and try not to push her too hard to become what you want her to be and consider what she wants. If you continue this streak, you'll only push her away. Why don't you look at her as a friend that you haven't seen for a while, she still has the same background, just matured into an amazing woman. I understand the protective thing, God knows I have to work on that and let Davey breath on his own but try to be open-minded, she seems to trust the guy, you used to trust her, why don't you keep doing that?"

Lorelai stared at Sookie. She was rarely so serious and thorough, but always wise.

"It's not that I want to control her life, I just want to be part of it. What scares me the most is to have the same relationship with her as the one my mother has with me."

"Then you know that you have to let her make her own decisions and be supportive when you can. She's a very smart girl."

"Can I have some pie?" She looked straight into Sookie with pleading eyes and the chef sensed that she was on her way to opening up.

"So, will you let the two of them sleep in Rory's room?" Sookie asked while putting a plate with a huge piece of pie in front of Lorelai.

"Well, I think it would be weird to ask them to sleep in separate bedrooms at their age, but I don't know if Luke would be comfortable if, you know, he could hear them..."

"Luke or you?"

"I booked them a room in the Dragonfly, I hope you don't mind."

"Why would I mind?" Sookie smirked.


Last time she had brought a guy to Stars Hollow it was Logan, and it didn't go well. Rory pulled out her laptop and started to make a list of what she had to tell Robert so that everything would go well. As soon as they'd arrived stateside, Robert headed straight to Boston to attend the faculty meetings preparing for the academic year. Class would start only after Labor Day, but he also had to meet with
the graduate students working on research projects with him. Therefore, they planned to meet in Stars Hollow on Friday evening, Robert driving from Boston, Rory from New York.

As soon as Robert stopped his car in front of the Crap Shack, Rory burst out from the porch and jumped into his arms.

"Are you nervous?" She asked.

"Should I? I wasn't until you asked me." He squinted at her quizzically.

"Okay, let's just not make a big deal, right?" She said with an interrogative gaze.

"I'll do whatever you want babe, whatever makes you happy," Robert answered not quite understanding his girlfriend's edgy behavior.

Robert slid his arms around her waist to steady her fidgeting self and put his forehead on hers.

"Rory, calm down, we got it," he said with his soothing voice.

"You know, I'm not sure if I explained you enough how Stars Hollow people are. I mean, they are nice, even great, but they're also kind of wacky," Rory ranted uneasily.

"Ssshhh" he finally kissed her to shut her up. When he felt her muscles relaxing he finally let go.

"I thought that we had to convince your mother, not the whole town."

"Well, if the whole town likes you then it would be more difficult for her to hate you."

Robert exhaled, it was going to be an interesting weekend. They started walking toward the house holding hands when Rory stopped.

"Oh, and thank you for doing this, I know you didn't have to, in particular on Labor Day weekend before class starts."

"It's fine baby, everything at work is under control, I'm still under our vacation buzz, it hasn't worn off yet, I can take anything, even your mother's wrath."

She beamed, pecked him on the cheek and pulled him into the house. While they entered, Lorelai was coming down the stairs.

"Welcome to the Gilmore house, Robert."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Gilmore." Robert pulled out a box from his messenger bag "These are for you, I kind of understand that Gilmore women are quite fond of sweets, there are Calissons, it's a Provence specialty from where we were, I hope you'll like them."

"These are delicious," Rory said. "I ate a lot of those when we were in Lourmarin."

"Thank you, Robert, and please call me Lorelai because when I hear Mrs. Gilmore I'm looking for my mother." She opened the box and smelled the sweets. "Mmh, I think I'm going to like this."

Lorelai put the box on the coffee table.

"So, I was heading to the town meeting, maybe you two can go leave your stuff in your room at the Inn and then we meet at Luke's for dinner?"
"Sounds like a plan, you'll text me when the meeting is done?"

# # #

Robert went down the stairs two-by-two, happy to go for his run on a sunny morning. Everything went well the evening before, he'd slept like a baby with the most amazing girlfriend. He opened the inn's door to surprisingly face Lorelai.

"Good morning, Lorelai," he said disconcerted as she had told them she wasn't working this morning.

"Hi! Robert, early riser and sporty. Are you sure you're compatible with my daughter?"

He could sense her passive-aggressive tone.

"Absolutely positive. You see, she's sleeping like a baby while I work on my stamina."


"Listen, I know you don't approve of our relationship, but I do love your daughter just how she is. I wouldn't change a bit of anything in her. In theory, we're old enough not to need your approval, but I'm pretty certain it would mean the world to her. I understand that you think that Logan and I are over-privileged kids, and we are, but it doesn't make us unworthy of her. Also, because of my family, you're fearing that Rory could be hurt again. My parents are nothing like the Hunzbergers, you can be sure of that. May I suggest that you take your time to make a final opinion? Just give me a chance?"

Lorelai scanned the young man in front of her. Besides the fact that he was yummy and that she couldn't deny that her daughter had very good taste, he appeared really sincere and in love.

"I'll do that," she just said. "Go run and I'll make sure that Sookie has the best breakfast of your life ready for you when you'll get back. Tea or coffee?"

"Do I lose points if I say tea?" His lips quirked up a little.

Lorelai laughed. "In the inn, I'm a professional, no judgment. Have a good run."

The air helped to clear his head and soon he wasn't thinking about his morning interaction with the older Gilmore. Nevertheless, when he came back at the Dragonfly, Lorelai was at the desk and stared at him.

"Why don't we have coffee just us together and we let Rory sleep a little bit more?" Lorelai said quite adamantly. He felt he didn't really have a choice there. Anyway, he just had a long run which was always followed by clear-headedness and an endorphin-induced good mood. Still, he didn't think that talking to Lorelai all sweaty was such a good idea.

"What if you give me ten minutes to shower real fast and put on more appropriate clothes? I'm sure I can be quiet enough not to wake Rory up."

"Sure, I'll get the tea ready for you."

"Earl Grey?"

Lorelai nodded and smiled at him. He wasn't that bad and he was right, she could at least give him a chance.
Robert kept his promise and ten minutes later he was sitting in front of Lorelai with damp hair but smelling soapy and in a clean shirt. He felt in much better condition to face his adversary.

"I wanted to make sure that you knew she was a mess after Logan left her to go to California. It was really hard for her. She had put up with a lot for him, forgiving him the bridesmaids debacle, bearing his parents, all that for him not understanding that she needed time. The worst part was that when he left she really thought he would come back like he used to do. Do you know how hard it is to see your own flesh hurting like this and not being able to do anything?"

"I know that we've talked about it. For the record, Logan regrets it, he knows he made the biggest mistake of his life. He's my friend but he was young, he had discovered what being in love was with her, and that's another feature we have in common. I was also a frat boy in college, but it was a long time ago. I'll do my best not to make mistakes, and I learn fast. God forbid, I'll do my best not to hurt her and if I do, it won't be on purpose or I wouldn't forgive myself. The only thing I have for me is that I'm older, supposedly more mature. He couldn't wait for her, I think I have proven that I could do that. I can just tell you what my intentions are, the only thing I'm interested in is to make her happy, she's my priority in life because I can't feel good if she's not."

Lorelai looked at him sipping his tea. He was calm, forthright and genuine.

"So, you understand that I just want her to be able to pursue her goals and that you will be there for her. I understand that you're very successful at what you're doing but I also know that where you and I are coming from, guys like you are expected to marry a beautiful woman whose sole purpose in life is to tend to them, being the one next to them at events, taking care of the kids at home and so on. She didn't want that with Logan, and I don't want that with you."

She stopped to lock eyes with him, dark azure meeting icy blue.

"If you or your family hurt her only a bit like what the Huntzbergers did to her, I will hunt you down and beat the shit out of you or find someone to do it for me."

He chuckled at the thought of Lorelai hiring a hitman.

"I love her more than I could ever imagine, but as I said I'm a rookie in this department so I could make mistakes. Nevertheless, I do know that I would never be happy with the kind of life partner that you described. Neither my mother nor my sisters are like that, so I don't see why my family would ask for her to be that kind of woman. Logan has to carry the burden to be the Hunzberger heir, there's nothing like this with the Semples. I do have shares of the company like my siblings, but I only have to attend some board meetings and functions. I think I owe that to my family, but if this bothers you that much, I can give my shares back. I almost did it once, before I worked for the White House, my dad is fine with that. He gave us the same amount of shares because he wanted to be fair, but now that we're adults, he told us it was up to us to do what we wanted with them. I just need her to be happy by my side, that's my only goal in life now. All that I'm doing is for her, even my work. I do love what I do, very much, but I do also know that all that wouldn't mean anything if I couldn't be with Rory."

Lorelai was surprised by his candid sincerity and she could also sense that obviously there was something hurtful behind the unconditional love he was professing for her daughter. Though, it was refreshing to think that a thirty-year-old guy with his background could be that frank about his feelings.

"You know I raised her by myself, so I'll do the fatherly duty too and make sure you're taking good care of her and by that, I don't mean using your money. I know I raised her to be an independent woman, but I can see that she's trusting you, then show her that you earned her trust, don't disappoint
her like Logan did."

"Do you see your contradiction here? You telling me you want her to be a strong independent woman, but that I have to take care of her?"

"That's the complexity of women young man, you haven't learned that yet? While in theory, we are opposed to being considered as a possession, we thrive for our independence, but in practice, it is nice to be taken care of. We just can't say we need it. I only want what's best for her."

Robert held his smile, he could feel she was soothing.

Rory only heard the last sentence.

"The best for me is Robert, Mom," she said approaching the table. Two pairs of blue eyes raised at her. "Hi Mom, I thought you weren't working this morning?" She patted Robert's shoulder and sat next to him.

"Michel is sick and called me this morning so I'm covering for him."

Robert could see that Rory was pondering if her mother was telling the truth and decided he would try a diversion.

"These apple pancakes are to die for. Is it you chef's secret or could I ask for the recipe?"

Lorelai had to admit, Robert wasn't at all how she'd imagined him to be, a snooty, cocky brat. He was pretty decent and it wasn't possible to tell he was coming from society. She didn't have a definite opinion, but she was willing to give him a chance as long as Rory would, in turn, let her back in too.

She beamed at both of them and stood up.

"Let me go and get Sookie."

Robert was curious about the special connection that apparently Rory had with her mother and that the elder Gilmore was trying to get back. It's not that he had a bad relationship with his own parents. Compared with what Colin and Logan had, he was clearly blessed. He had parents who still loved each other, truly cared for their children and grandchildren, but they also were parents with rules and high expectations that were sometimes difficult to follow. If they hadn't been that inflexible, he wouldn't probably have come back to the US junior year of high school. But they were paying for his education so he had to obey. On the other hand, they always had given him all the opportunities he needed academically or otherwise, they understood his friendship with Antoine, with them he had discovered that people all over the world were living differently and he knew that if he and his siblings were so open-minded it was Thanks to their education. His sisters were very close to his mother, that they were having a shopping spree together as women like to have. Nevertheless, he was quite sure that none of his siblings had ever considered their parents as friends. He didn't know if Rory missed that bonding as much as her mother, but he could understand that raising a child as a single parent wasn't that easy, especially at sixteen with no money.

###

After the confrontational breakfast duel, everything went smoothly. Robert enjoyed discovering where Rory grew up and blossomed into the amazing woman he fell in love with. On Sunday, he could witness a Gilmore banter at Luke's and had to admit that it was pure pleasure. The first twenty-four hours were quite intense but after that, he relished the quirky town.

Lorelai observed the two lovebirds during the three days and even if she was still wary concerning the Semples, when she caught Robert's loving gaze on Rory, cradling her face as though she was the
most precious thing to him, she had to admit she'd melted. Her daughter was leaning into her boyfriend as if his simple presence were crucial to her life. She hadn't seen her that happy since Logan and she had to concede that being successful in her professional life didn't have this effect on Rory.

This weekend had also soothed the young Gilmore. She understood why her mom was so apprehensive in the beginning. Being Logan's old friend wasn't a great title for a man to her mother's eyes. But Robert handled everything very well and she was impressed at how he'd inverted the situation. He had stayed calm all along and she could see in Lorelai's gaze that something had changed. Even if her mom could still be apprehensive, she had changed her attitude and that was good.

What was also surprising was that Luke got along with Robert almost instantly. She even had caught them clearly bonding on the last day, Luke also giving her boyfriend a bag of ground coffee.

On his drive home, Robert smiled to himself at the advice Luke gave him while they were waiting for their girls. The diner man suggested him to always play into the Gilmore's neurotic trends before trying to introduce some reality to the situation.

"Never tell them that they're overreacting."

He seemed to know what he was saying, therefore the younger man would keep this recommendation in mind.

###

"He's not that bad, is he?"

Lorelai was sitting on a stool, her back on the counter. Even if she had opened up to the idea of Rory with Robert, Lorelai wasn't still ready to totally give up the idea that he wasn't the right man for her daughter.

"No, he's a pretty cool guy and I never saw her that happy. I think he could be the one able to crack your boyfriend-hating shell." Luke said cleaning the tables.

Lorelai tutted, shaking her head.

"You like him because he cooks and he's making her eat vegetables. Geez, she eats soup now!" She rolled her eyes. "But I agree he's not as bad as I thought"


"Aren't you setting the bar a little too high? You should be glad she found someone as good for her as him. I know you want her to be happy and to me, he makes her happy and I sure can't see what's wrong with this one. Can't you see that?"

"I want the best for her, an unconditional love from winter wonderland with snow and "forevers" and "happily ever afters", a guy that would climb Mount Everest for her. I have to admit that she's glowing, she can't be pregnant, can she?"

Luke shook his head in disbelief. He could see that it would take some time for his girlfriend to give up, but at least she had admitted that the guy wasn't that bad.

"Don't you think that women can glow for another reason than pregnancy hormones?"
"Are you thinking dirty Mr. Danes?" She smiled mischievously.

A/N: Thanks for reading and reviewing.
Robert walked into his office, dropped his messenger bag on the floor, and slumped in his chair. It had been a good day. He loved teaching and also the first weeks of the year, discovering his new students, freshmen, graduate students. He relished sensing how they were reacting. He beamed remembering the guy who asked him if he was Pr. Semple's TA and wondered how long he would still get that. Maybe he should grow a beard to look older.

He glanced at his computer screen, 4:15 pm. Fifteen minutes to check emails and then back on the book for two hours before heading to Logan airport. He was determined, his motivation was to have a mind free of work during the weekend in order to only have quality time with Rory, even if he had this faculty barbecue party on Saturday.

While the plane was landing Rory could enjoy the New England Indian summer. It was definitely the best season to be in Massachusetts. It had been more than three months that she hadn't been back in Boston. She smiled thinking of his toiletries in her bathroom with a lot of his stuff at her apartment. Even though he was still officially living in Boston, since the end of the spring session he had spent most of his time in New York.

Rory didn't want to pressure Robert about the Columbia post, but she was kind of disappointed that even if he would get it, he would still have to stay at Harvard until the spring finals, which meant eight dreadfully long months. The call for the position wasn't even officially out yet and even if he had already met the head of the department, he would still have to be interviewed in February. She knew it was also difficult for him and since the Labor Day weekend, they hadn't been able to see each other more than two days per week. She felt guilty that he was the one making the change of work even though he had assured her that it wasn't a big deal. She was amazed at how many offers he'd already gotten. They had discussed it last weekend. If he wanted to move right away, he had corporate job offers. Nevertheless, it wasn't the kind of work he would have spontaneously chosen and even if they offered him a very good salary, she was afraid that at some point he would resent her. Not only did she enjoy research and teaching very much, but also, he was good at it. Most importantly, he would lose his freedom having to deal with clients. What was waiting for another eight months as they had already waited almost four years? At least now they were together, making plans together, enjoying life together.

They were watching Friends with Benefits. Robert really didn't mind the movie as long he was with Rory, able to smell her, feel her and that she was happy. At the airport, he'd immediately noticed that something was bothering her, but she kept saying that everything was fine. If it would have been a work problem she would have spilled it. However, there was this very fine line on her forehead making her look as she was going to growl like a lion anytime. It meant that it was something that she'd buried deep down.

He was resting in the meridienne armchair facing the TV, and she was seated up against his chest. His legs stretched out on either side of her, and her upper body comfortably resting on his, as he was her giant pillow. His arms were embracing her, their left hands' fingers intertwined. She had become addicted to being burrowed in that way, feeling she could get the most of him, and it had been their favorite seating position for a while.

Robert glanced down at her protectively, relishing the intimacy of the moment. She always had found comfort in his arms because it was him, only him, that could keep her in this state of bliss. She was wearing a powder pink V-neck wrap top tie-band and matching shorts. Were these pajamas? He
didn't know and didn't care as he realized that she wasn't wearing any bra and that he would give him easy access to her skin to touch and taste.

At that point he wasn't focusing on the movie anymore, having her so close to him was just enough of a distraction. He had never been a fan of Justin Timberlake and he much preferred his girlfriend's blue gaze rather than Mila Kunis's. He had missed her, all his senses had missed her.

"You had a mani-pedi?" he said playing with her fingers.

"You've noticed that?" she asked surprised.

"Do I have to remind you that I'm a researcher? I have very acute observation skills. Hence my favorite research subject happens to be you, Ms. Gilmore," he said with a husky tone indicating his attention had switched to her.

She giggled. "So that's what I am to you, a research subject?"

He took a sniff of her hair and just closed his eyes for this intoxicating smell to invade his brain. Rory had developed this ability to make her body a magnet for his.

"What are you doing?" she asked playfully.

"Fulfilling my addiction with your scent," he whispered his lips to her ear. His warm breath soothed her and she found her eyes fluttered shut instinctively as his deep and throaty voice sent shivers all over her body. She bit her bottom lip to hold out a moan. He slowly traced her cheek with his nose just lightly brushing her soft skin.

"I missed you too much, I've developed withdrawal syndrome, I haven't reached delirium tremens but my senses were impaired. I'm trying to fill my olfactory cortex to be able to last for the next week," he whispered, his voice dropping yet another octave and he kept teasing, nipping, sucking her earlobe.

"I missed you too, Robbie," she exhaled, her hands slightly staggering. She found her breaths getting more shallow as her desire for him built.

"What did you miss, Ms. Gilmore?" He tucked her hair behind her ear to get access to her neck and brushed her skin with his lips traveling from her neck to her collarbone.

"Ohh!" she quivered, "I definitely missed that." She grabbed the fabric of his jeans and exhaled loudly. Her head leaned backward on his shoulder to give him more access. Actually, her entire body ached for him all week and she remembered that at some point she had to close her eyes and imagine him close to her to be able to keep the day going. She did that before meetings to make sure to be able to focus.

"My sense of touch was also impaired by the withdrawal syndrome, so I have to check if it's still working." His voice was huskier and it was her turn to completely lose focus on the movie.

His right hand started to run on her thigh sending a jolt of electricity all over her spine. He felt her shivering and the corner of his mouth upturned. His left-hand fingers played under the hem of the V-neck of her shirt, caressing her skin. He smirked as he felt the goosebumps, her nipples hardened, and he began to stroke the underneath of her breast. Her reaction to his touch always drove him crazy, knowing he made her feel that way. God, he loved the perfect curve of her breasts and couldn't understand why she thought they were too small. They just fit perfectly in his hands and he could play with them endlessly.
"Huh," was all she could utter while his finger was reaching a nipple and slightly circling it. At the same time, his other hand was playing with the border of her panties. She shuttered in anticipation. He had an incredible way of touching her, and the more they knew each other, the better it felt. She could feel his arousal on her backside which sent shivers going up and down her spine. It was an endless game between them: she was turned on by his arousal which was fed by her excitement over him wanting her.

"Robbie...," she breathed, closing her eyes briefly but then quickly opening them again when he bit her neck. At that point, her brain was completely clouded.

He smirked and an agile movement had his hands untying her shirt, pulling it off and dropping it on the floor. Her skin was then free of obstacles for him to kiss down her shoulder and both of his hands were now free to journey down her stomach to slip under her panties.

She couldn't help the moan that escaped her lips and arched back with her head resting on Robert's shoulder as he whimpered to himself, feeling just how ready she already was for him. He plunged a finger into her and pulled it back slowly to moisten her clitoris. He gently rubbed it, and he could feel it grow quickly under his ministrations. He had her panting hard, as he reached down and inserted his index finger into her again, while never letting his thumb leave her clitoris. He was losing his head at her moans.

"Robbie, please, I need you, I really want you inside me," she begged.

She didn't have to say it twice. He pulled himself out of the chair.

"Not yet baby." His gaze had darkened to a night blue while he sat on the floor in front of the chair and slid her so that her butt was on the front edge. He quickly took off her shorts and panties and delved his velvety tongue into her. Her legs automatically spread, giving him access, and his hands traveled under her hips to get her even closer to him. His lips found their way to her sex and she spasmed instantly while he worked his way up and down, alternating between percussive movements and licking her entire length, his index finger massaging her clitoris. He couldn't help moaning himself as he felt her clench around him, her hands found their way into his hair, desperately grabbing his tussle locks, her cries of pleasure filling the air.

"Robbie fuck me NOW!" she cried, her rush apparent. He knew that he shouldn't mess with her when she was cursing.

"Bend over the arm baby." It didn't even take her a second to do what she was told, grabbing a pillow to put under her chest to feel more comfortable while he pulled a condom out of his pants and rolled it on his rock-hard member.

She felt his hardness against her butt and squirmed against him. He straightened himself, probed her with his fingers, parting her folds, and entered her wetness in one long stroke, grumbling as he felt her tight wet pussy around him. She called out his name as he thrust firmly, filling her up completely, wanting to feel more of him as she pushed back against him.

She whined and panted as he was slamming into her again and again, his strokes long and hard, hitting her G-spot every time. His cock was buried so deep inside her giving her so much pleasure. She spread herself out on the smooth top of the armchair, his hands grasping her butt strongly as she was moaning with every one of his thrusts and as he sped up, her voice came out in one continuous moan.

"Come for me, baby," he muttered, and his words acted as an ignition signal for her to come fast and hard, her orgasm vibrating through her body, her mouth unable to hold back her scream of pleasure.
Nevertheless, he kept pounding into her as long as she was climaxing until her last scream finally sent him over the edge as well and he cried into her ear with a final thrust.

###

He opened his eyes and as usual, his instinct was to look at her. She was deeply sleeping, but she still had this very fine line on her forehead. If it was caused by sexual frustration, it should have been gone by now, he smirked. He had already noticed it when they "FaceTimed" this week. He sensed that he had to be careful not to push her, but he had to figure out what was the cause of her frustration. He pondered for a while, very lightly stroking her hair. How would he be able to make her talk about what was bothering her? It took him a few minutes and then he carefully got out of bed.

She was barely awake when a delicious smell of coffee and pancakes wafted up her nose. Eyes still closed, she felt the bed with her hands to confirm that Robert wasn't under the sheets anymore and smiled her face still buried in the pillow. Was she living in a dream? An amazing boyfriend who could cook...

She had forgotten how enjoyable it was to mutually take care of each other's physical needs and how she loved to please him. Every week the first hours were a little raw, they had to relieve their cravings of the week, but after that, they were all about learning more about each other, the discovery never ending.

A few minutes later, she heard him entering the room but still didn't move.

"Don't pretend you're still sleeping. If you don't sit up in the next 10 seconds I'm taking my apple pancakes and the coffee back in the kitchen," he said, knowing perfectly she wasn't able to resist this kind of breakfast.

She rose instantly and beamed at him.

"What did I do to deserve such a wonderful treatment?"

"I can't treat my lovely girlfriend for no reason?" She raised an eyebrow at him but the smell of the coffee brought her attention back to the tray.

"At what time do we have to leave?" She asked yawning.

"11:30? Not later than noon though" He smirked lightly as he knew she would rather sleep in a little longer. He wouldn't mind a Saturday morning wake up either, he thought, but they couldn't be late.

"Will there be a lot of people?"

"Last year there were around sixty people. Not all the faculty members are coming but this year some people from Princeton are there. Don't worry, it's very casual. You'll love Jen, the head of the department."

He didn't miss the slight sadness that appeared in Rory's gaze.

"Okay, babe, now that you've got your coffee, why don't you try to tell me what's bothering you?" He locked eyes with her well determined to make her spill out what she was obviously holding back.

She sighed and pondered. It was a matter of time for him to get the answer out of her. He had his ways with her and she knew she wouldn't be able to hold everything very long so she might as well talk about it.
"Are you sure you want to quit Harvard?" She started, which surprised him at first. Was she reconsidering their relationship? She immediately got the misunderstanding.

"Robbie, there's nothing I would like more in the whole world than to be with you, but I can see that you really like it here, so is it wise for you to give this up?"

Robert sighed. "Rory, we've been talking about this over and over. Yes, I do love the department here, but the faculty at Columbia is great too. We both agreed that it's easier for me to move than for you." He took her hand to kiss her knuckles.

"I know, but what if in two years, I realize I don't want to be an editor anymore, just like I didn't want to be a reporter two years ago? You would have quit for me..." she trailed off.

"Oh, this is about your job?" So, this was where her forehead line was coming from.

"No! Everything is great, but you have seen that since I left college, I've changed jobs so many times, what if I haven't found my true calling yet? The discussion we had about you not taking the corporate offers made me think. You know that your life is in academia; I'm not that sure I'll be in publishing all my life. I do love what I'm doing, jeez what's not to like? I'm the first reader of amazing writers, I have a privileged position in their creative process. But I can see the satisfaction I get from my work is nothing like what I can see you're getting from yours. You're so committed, it drives you completely. I know I'm good at what I'm doing, and maybe it's because it wasn't part of my plan, but I would hate that I derailed you from here."

Robert held his smirk because he knew after this kind of rant she usually had a temporary loss of sense of humor.

"First, I'm not moving to New York for you, I'll do it for me. You're wrong, my life does not depend on being at Harvard, but on being with you."

She blushed. She knew they were in love, but she still hadn't got used to hearing him say it out loud. He smiled at her, her shyness to emotions was endearing.

"You won't be an editor all your life." He paused to let her process.

"I won't?" Rory stared at him her eyes wide as saucers.

"You could because you're excellent at your job, you're already a substantive editor and very soon you'll be a developmental editor. Then, you'll mostly do politics and less work on the writing. Deep down, what you are doing since you left Yale is turning around the only thing you really want to do, that keeps you the best at what you are doing and what you love the most, which is writing - not reporting, writing fiction."

She watched him dumbfounded. He was deadly serious but also looked proud of himself. Obviously, he had thought of that before.

"You don't like the politics of being a publishing editor, or the handholding or tackling practical questions. You're there for the writing, what you like is to work with words. You know very well that soon, they will put you in charge of a department, you won't work directly with authors, you'll only get more responsibilities and less writing. You're an excellent editor because no one loves books more than you do. You've read so many books, you know where you're going. From the first time I read your articles and from our talks about literature, I'm sure that deep down inside you what you really want to do is write fiction, but that your reasonable self just can't let you. It's in your gut Rory, your deepest soul. My guess is that you'll never be satisfied by any work until you write for
He wasn't sure that she was ready to hear that yet if the reasonable part of her was able to open up to something riskier. He could see the wheels turning in her head, even almost hear them.

"Rory, you'll always have my unconditional love and support no matter what you do. You can keep your job and write during your free time. You know very well that a lot of writers are editors. You always had a voice," he said, his tone calm and cool. "One thing I learned from my White House experience is that we're lucky we're young with not many responsibilities, so now is the best time to test out the waters and find out what we want to do. Gain as much experience as you can in your field. From your past work, you know what is strong, and appealing, for it to affect the readers, make the style clean and consistent."

"Why would I do that as I have an amazing job?"

Robert sighed, maybe she wasn't ready yet.

"Do it because you love writing and you miss it. You often talk about your friend Jess, he did it why don't you?"

"He had a difficult personal history that gave him interesting matter to write about. I don't," she said, her voice shaking with anger.

"Of course you do, you were raised by a single mother who ran out from an upper-class old money family. You were valedictorian of a prep school. Anyway, what you're dreaming of is to write fiction and you have an amazing imagination. Didn't you tell me that Doyle was considering dropping his editor job to write shows?"

"How are you so sure that I'm able to write something worth publishing? You know very well that most people who write a book will never get it published on paper, and even if they do, half the writers who are published won't see the second book in print. What's more, half the titles in any given bookshop won't sell a single copy there, and most published writers won't earn anything from their book apart from the advance. I don't see why I would be the one that will get out of these statistics."

"Because you're an amazing writer and you don't have any pressure. The worst thing that can happen is that you'll never get published but you still can post your book online if you do want unknown people to read it. You know that a lot of ghostwriters are hired from these websites."

"Writing is worth it if you can come out with something powerful, deep, and meaningful."

"Why don't you think about it first? Then maybe give it a try and let others be the judge of it? If it doesn't turn into a book, at least you would have tried and you wouldn't have any regret."

She finally gazed at him and could only see caring intentions. He could draw out of her the deepest feelings. She felt she was a different person when he was around. He had this soothing energy that calmed her down.

"I'll think about it." She smiled at him. Once again, he held on his smirk as he could see the fine line on her forehead disappearing. It was a matter of time, but she'll give writing a try.

"That's just what I wanted to hear. Now finish your breakfast and get ready." He kissed her temple and walked to the bathroom while taking off his shirt.

###
Franck could see that Robert wasn't listening to the conversation, nursing his beer, his eyes wandering somewhere in the garden. He followed his gaze and the corner of his mouth turned up as he realized his protégé was staring at his girlfriend.

"What did Shapiro say?"

The name snapped the young man out of his focus.

"That he had his hands tied for the tenured position as it has to go through the official call, but if I wanted he could open a lecturer position for the spring semester but he didn't think it would be a good idea if what I really wanted was the long-term position."

He'd met Bob Shapiro, the head of the political science department of Columbia, the week before and had thought about the situation a lot. Anybody would have said that it went as best as it could, but for the young man, things weren't going fast enough to his liking. Spending almost every day for three months with Rory had changed his priorities.

"So, you're stuck with us until next summer then," Franck smirked.

Robert stayed silent. He had actually considered the lecturer position. His former supervisor frowned his eyebrows.

"You know Shapiro has a point, right?"

Robert sighed. "I know, but it seems so long to wait, not knowing if I'll even get it. I even considered going corporate."

"You did? You looked for it?" Franck stared at him dumbfounded. He didn't think that his young colleague was such in a rush to leave.

"I've been contacted by Krater & Company and SIS International Research."

"What's that?" The professor widened his eyes.

"Marketing strategy research, or something like that."

"How did they know you were looking?" Franck shook his head, such a brilliant researcher couldn't be seriously thinking to go for that. It would have been understandable if he needed money to pay off his student loan, but Robert didn't need that so why bother?

"The Krauter CEO knows my father who accidentally mentioned that I wanted to come back in the city. It's a very good position, twice what I'm earning here. For SIS, I was contacted through Phi Beta Kappa."

Franck sighed. Of course, Robert was a catch for any company and as soon as the word spread that he was looking for a job they would crawl to him. His White House and Ivy League experience were priceless and when his name was added to that, any company would kill to have him. The older man shook his head. He knew Robert wouldn't take it for the money, but he was afraid he would do it just to be with Rory.

"You know you won't be able to go back and forth, endlessly right? Not for a tenured position in universities like Harvard or Columbia."

"I know, that's why Rory convinced me to wait for the Columbia position. She said that she wouldn't be able to forgive herself."
"I knew she was the right girl for you. I'll do my best to handle the schedule for the next semester so that all your classes would be packed in three days."

"Thanks," Robert said sheepishly. He felt a little guilty to disappoint his mentor, but what was his choice in this situation?

Rory felt bad enough that he was the one to quit his job for them to be together. Academia wasn't everyone's dream job, but anyone could see that's what made him happy. He could work with such determination, such dedication, anywhere as long as he had internet access. It never seemed to be an effort for him. Even if it took nights, weekends, holidays, he was always determined and she admired that in him. Only research gives him enough freedom and independence to stimulate his brain. She admired how he had delved into the research for the Obama biography.

Jennifer Hochschild, the hostess, walked toward the two men and smiled at Robert. She relished the vibrating energy emanating from her young colleague. When he had declined her offer she was surprised and disappointed, but once he had explained the reason she wrote an outstanding letter of recommendation for his application at Columbia and doubled it with a call to Robert Shapiro.

"Have you considered Princeton? It's about 75 mins from Penn Station," she asked, eying her Princeton colleague. "Let me introduce you to Chris Achen and see if they have an opening."

Robert beamed at her. It will be hard to work away from such amazing mentors.
Rory opened the door of her apartment and smiled when she saw Robert's jacket hanging on the coat rack. They had decided that he would go directly to her apartment from the airport so that they could get ready to be on time to attend the Semple Brothers Christmas party at the Brooklyn Bowl, which could mean about an hour to get there with the Friday evening traffic. Rory thought that Steph should be pretty confident to get all these people out of Manhattan for a Brazilian themed Christmas party. The blonde wanted to spare people from another ugliest Christmas sweater contest and bring some sunny entertainment into the cold New York December.

She stopped at the room door frame to ogle her boyfriend. He was standing bare-chested, his jeans unbuckled, reading papers laying on the bed. As usual, he was so focused that he didn't hear her coming. Jeez, he was sexy! He had this *je ne sais quoi* when he was wearing his reading glasses that had always turned her on. Maybe it was the black frame highlighting his icy blue gaze. Then his chiseled muscles, in particular, the lower abs... Perhaps it was because of the five days they'd been apart but she felt an unstoppable impulse to please him, to be with him, to be wild, uncontrolled and careless, just pull down his pants and have him right now. She pondered, she just needed 45 minutes to get ready which would leave them about half an hour before the car would be waiting for them. Anyway, couldn't they be a little late?

She approached him while kicking off her pumps. It was only while she was rounding the bed that he noticed her presence. She had her cheeky look and his mouth upturned wondering what was on her mind.

"Hey," he beamed at her, but before he could say anything else, she had her arms around his neck, her lips on his, her fingers raking his hair, her mouth opening instantly and her tongue asking for permission. He groaned, allowing her access, his hands going around her back to hold her close to him and steady them. The kiss was eager, quick, and clearly took him by surprise but not as much as when he felt her hand over his boxers reaching for his penis, which was growing hard by the second. He knew then that she was determined as her other hand pulled down his pants with his underwear letting them fall to the floor, leaving him fully naked. His eyes rolled back, feeling her grasp him, and he couldn't help cursing as her hand stroked him gently, putting pressure on his crotch.

"Fuck Rory, what are you trying to do?" He uttered letting out a long groan. Over the months, they had learned how to please each other endlessly. They had both reached a very high level of expertise and obviously, their weekly separation was a very efficient teasing when they finally met during the weekend.

"Huh, remind me why I thought you were the smartest of the two of us?" She smirked.

Since they came back from Europe, a little minx in Rory had shown itself. Whether it was the trust that had set between them, or that she became more confident, they had extended to another orgasmic state, something they qualified as the stratospheric level. They thought they were pretty good when they had reacquainted at the beginning of the year, but they had discovered the existence of this new stage hidden somewhere in their cosmos.

He exhaled feeling her mouth trailing down his chest, licking the exposed and sensitive skin, letting her have full control of the situation. His eyes snapped open as he felt her tongue on his penis, licking his rapidly hardening cock.

"Holy shit," he muttered, "I don't want to pull a bullet in my foot here, but aren't we going to be late?"
"Not if you stop talking and let it go." Her affirmative and confident tone was the final touch. He was a goner when she was that bossy and she was mastering that perfectly.

"Fucking heavens!" He swore again, feeling the warm confines of her wet mouth around his dick, his hand unconsciously going to the back of her head. He was dizzy, lightheaded, the room spinning, and he had to put a hand on the wall to steady himself.

He was now breathing rapidly while she was sucking him, making him lose all conscious thoughts and grunt loudly. With one of her delicate hands grasping the base of his dick, she took as much of him as possible in her mouth. Her other hand reached his back to pull him closer, he thought it was heaven on earth and he couldn't help groaning again like a caveman.

She was alternating teasing his tip with her tongue and sucking down on him again, his cock hitting the back of her throat. His eyes wandered down to her, kneeling in front of him, but her mouth wasn't enough anymore so he pulled her off suddenly. She rose her darkened deep blue lustful gaze to him but he was faster, already unzipping her dress which fell on the floor and it was his turn to kneel in front of her, his fingers in her tights taking them down along with her panties. She giggled, unclipped her bra, and reached for a condom in the nightstand drawer. She discarded the envelope and locked eyes with him to ponder who was going to take control. This time again, he was quicker as he grabbed the rubber and rolled it on his penis. She smiled and laid on the bed pulling him with her. He ground his erection between her legs and watched her eyes roll back. The sensation of their bare skin on each other was pure madness to both of them.

"Feel what you're doing to me?" he whispered, watching her get lost in her senses. Her scent, her demanding eyes drove him crazy with want. She was so damned gorgeous, he never tired of admiring her. He lowered his gaze to her perfect breasts, and an evil smirk appeared on his face. It was payback time, she was going to beg for him as much as he wanted her. He took her nipple between his teeth, nibbling it, yielding a gasp from her when he flicked it teasingly with his tongue. She was squirming against him searching for a release but he held her waist with his left hand, while slowly descending to between her thighs with the other one. His fingers reached her already wet folds which led him directly inside of her.

"Do you feel how wet I am? I was like that all day thinking of you," she whispered. He groaned, grazing her already engorged clit with his thumb.

"No need and no time for that Robbie, I need your cock inside me, please," she whined.

So, he did what he had to do, thrust into her in full force, feeling her tighten around him.

"Robbie!" She screamed, thinking she was losing her mind, her eyes closing again, her hands instantly grabbing his strong arms for support.

He pounded into her with all the ferocity of a week of deprivation, but very soon, he grabbed her butt to lift it up and pull her closer while he sat on his heels. She immediately wrapped her legs around his waist and he stroked her again, this time harder and faster, grunting with the exertion, and she let out cries of pleasure. The angle was absolutely perfect, she couldn't possibly feel him deeper. The more she whined, the wetter she got, and he found himself picking up the pace, thrusting in and out as deeply as possible, her butt slamming on his thighs, the moans impossible to silence as they each chased their release.

"Oh! You're so good!" She shouted out while climaxing hard, just slight seconds before he, in turn, called out her name and collapsing against her entirely, breathless and his heart racing at high speed.

After they had regained a normal breathing, he turned to her and propped himself on his elbow to
look at Rory who still had her eyes closed.

"So, not that I don't love your spontaneity, but was there a goal in this? You don't want to go to this function?" He asked curiously.

She looked at him and shrugged. "Just thought we needed to get rid of the sexual tension before getting there, in order to be able to dance the lambada without you having an embarrassing hard-on in front of all Semple Brothers board members," She answered giving the most innocent gaze she could.

He chuckled and kissed her on the temple. "Thank you so much baby for being so thoughtful, and I hope you'll still feel that way during winter break, you know, five whole weeks when you'll have me every night..." A half smile lifted the corners of his mouth. He couldn't wait to be able to see her, touch her, smell her, just be with her every day.

"Faculty members really don't work that much, do they?" She winked at him.

He lightly slapped her hip playfully. "I'll let you grade the finals during Christmas, but we do have to get ready now Ms. Gilmore, I was going to shower before you decided to interrupt the process, care to join me?"

"I think we'll be more efficient if we don't go together," she answered relishing resting in bed a little.

"And now you care about the efficiency?" He arched an eyebrow and gazed at her. He shook his head, grabbed his clothes from the floor on his way to the bathroom.

Faithful to her organizing skills, she stepped out of the room 45 minutes later to find him waiting, sitting on the kitchen island sipping coffee. He was so easy on the eyes in his suit, she had to restrain herself from wandering thoughts. Despite the strict outfit, she liked how cool and relaxed he looked.

"Ready to go?" He rose his gaze to her and beamed.

"You look absolutely sensational, you were totally right to give me release. Even now I'm not sure I'll get through the evening without damage." He moved to her to slide his hand on her bare back and put a long kiss on the side of her neck. He remembered their first date at Yale and how his jaw dropped when she opened the door and he saw her in her Gogo uniform. Seven years later she still had the same effect on him.

She giggled. "Robbie, the car is waiting". He groaned and reluctantly stopped to hold her coat so that she could slip her arms in it.

Steph really had outdone herself and everybody seemed to have fun. Robert was looking at Rory dancing with his father and couldn't help beaming. She was now totally part of his family, she even went dress shopping for this party with the Semple women and that meant something. She had integrated into his pack, but he still had to join hers although it wouldn't be in the near future. After a long discussion, they had decided that they would spend Christmas separated, each of them in their own family. They already did that for Thanksgiving and even if Lorelai's feelings toward him had evolved, he felt that the two Gilmore women needed their time together. After all, it hadn't yet been a year that they were together and it just meant a day apart as he was going to pick her up the day after Christmas for some time just the two of them in Vermont. His parents were a little disappointed that Rory wouldn't join the Semple clan for the holidays, but they didn't make a fuss about it to avoid adding on Robert's disappointment.

It dawned on Robert that there was some mysterious chemistry between him and Rory, a formula
that was able to reach inside him and expose some new core he didn't know he had. Since they were together, he was just the better version of himself. He tried to get back at the conversation with a guy he couldn't even remember the name that was introduced to him by a Semple Brothers board member, but the man was so obnoxious that even his high society manners couldn't help him to keep attention. He was talking non-stop and hadn't realized that nobody was listening to him.

The first notes of Chico Buarque were playing and it was exactly what Robert needed to join Rory.

"Would you excuse me, I think there's a damsel in distress who needs me to dance with her." With that, Robert just walked to Rory. His father saw him coming and handed him his girlfriend's hand, bowing a little. The young Semple beamed and slid his arms around her waist to dive into her gaze. Her piercing blue eyes had once been his kryptonite, but now they were his boost. Five minutes into them and he was able to do anything.

They were barely dancing for ten minutes, oblivious to the party around them when they felt an arm separating their bodies.

"You guys need to have at least four inches between you, your lambada is way too indecent."

They turned their head to the intruder but his accent was quite familiar.

"Finn! Steph wasn't sure you could make it!"

They both hugged the Aussie. Robert had met his Yale friend a few times during the year when he was in Boston for work, but Rory hadn't seen him since January when they bumped into each other in the sidewalk.

"It's been too long man," Robert said patting his mate's back. "It's so good to see you!"

Finn put his right arm around Rory's shoulders and his left on Robert's.

He grinned and ruffled Robert's hair. "You look great and insanely happy. And Rory, you're more stunning than ever."

He laughed at her blushing while they walked to a table to catch up.

"How long are you staying man?" Robert asked, "I hope that now that your firm is working with Semple Brothers we'll be able to see you a bit more."

"I'm afraid to say that I'm leaving tomorrow evening. I think that the time difference will end up killing me. I give them a year and then I'll ask to be able to settle down somewhere. I'm supposed to be based in Sydney but I haven't been there more than a week in a row."

Rory saw Robert's mother gesturing for her to join her on the other side of the room.

"Sorry Finn, Lydia is calling me."

The Aussie grinned at Robert and was amused to see that things hadn't changed that much, he was still magnetized by the gorgeous brunette.

"I swear man, I think that if my parents could, they would switch and take her as their daughter instead of me," Robert joked.

"Then I assume it is going well for you two?"

"We're good, more than good, I think she's the perfect match for me. You know that I used to be a
non-believer to all the crap about the one true love. Well, you can keep this on your record, I'm disavowing my belief on this matter. What about you, at which pace do you change flavors now?"

"Am I sensing a mocking tone? You know I follow what Gore Vidal said, 'never pass up a chance to have sex', I like my life with all my options opened."

"Do you really think that's what you have? Come on, your work has taken over so much we haven't seen you in months!"

"You're absolutely right man, that's why I don't really see where I would fit a lady in this. What about you? How are you managing the whole long-distance relationship with your work?"

"The best we can... I'm finally seeing a sliver of light with this damn book. I'm done for most of the research, I'll submit the detailed outline to my editor on Monday. Otherwise, teaching has become a routine now."

Finn smirked. "I know that you have always been great at work stuff, I meant how do you manage with the lovely Ms. Gilmore?"

"Well, I guess I kind of love her more than anything else, so I'm trying to deal with that..."

Finn arched an eyebrow and tried not to smile. Even if they weren't living on the same continent anymore, he was sure that his friend wanted to share something.

"And...?"

"Okay, I won't give you any details because we're gentlemen here, but the sex man... It's so much better than what I ever had, you wouldn't believe. I know now, that's the reason why couples stay together all these years."

"Don't you think that it's just because you're separated from her five days a week so you're just so horny when you see each other? If the point for amazing sex was to find the best love partner, why are all these married people having affairs or divorcing?"

Robert shrugged. "They haven't found the right mate, because when you do, it's just unbelievable, or they have work or money problems bothering them, I don't know, I just know we're so compatible, it keeps getting better and better. It's not the novelty, it has worn off, it's really the compatibility."

"What are you guys talking about?" Colin asked sipping a caipirinha but as soon as he saw Robert's grin, he knew the answer. "Oh! The Semple theory about sex."

Finn chuckled. "So what's yours, Colin?"

"Well, I'm afraid to say that our Harvard friend has a point. Why do you think I'm still with Steph?"

"Because you're in love with her?"

"I loved her before sleeping with her, sure like a sister, but still."

"You guys are freaking me, what have you done of my college buddies?"

Robert raised his arms. "Suit yourself Finn, but don't come in a few years to tell us that we hadn't given you the tip. There's a woman somewhere out there that can give you pleasure like you never had, and any time you need it."

Finn frowned his forehead and glanced at Robert then Colin. They seemed sincere, not drunk, just
two blokes in love.

"It's easy for you two to say, in a way, you didn't have to woo your ladies, you didn't have any pressure, you knew them for years before. No date, no 'where should I take her', 'can I kiss her on the first date'. All the courtship crap. You guys had years to get to know them. The emotions could live their life. For me, it's too risky to get emotionally involved. I don't want that and I haven't got time for that." He shook his head. Talking about his nonexistent love life was the last thing he thought they would talk about with his old pals.

"But I did have to make Steph see me in a romantic way, and trust me it wasn't that easy as she knew almost everything about me..." Colin said emptying his glass.

"See, my point? It's not that simple. You were lucky guys, I perfectly know that the right lady is not that easy to find, and I'm just not ready to meet her. Don't make fun of me but right now I can only dedicate myself to work, I can't make time for what you call love. I can't let myself in the emotional entanglement of a relationship."

"So actually, you'd thought about it?"

"Of course, I did, look how happy Colin and you are, don't you think I haven't wondered if I could have that?"

Finn was slightly irritated, even though he knew that they meant well. It was difficult to confide in them such intimate feelings in a middle of a party. Yet, he had so few opportunities to talk to them lately, he couldn't blame them for seeing him like the party animal he used to be.

"Anyway, it's not that we went looking for it, it just dropped on us and we had to deal with it. I agree, I wasn't good at it and it took me years." Robert draped an arm around Finn's shoulders. "Let's go get a drink, man."

Colin and Robert were a little astounded even if they knew they all had changed a lot since Yale. None of them had gotten married yet, despite their family pressure, but they had lost their carelessness to become sensible working adults, and Finn was far from being an exception. As rebels as they used to be some years ago, they finally did what was expected of them. They still had their frankness verging on insubordination that was seen from outside as a sense of entitlement due to their origin. Nevertheless, at some point, their sense of responsibility had taken over. Colin didn't enter his father's firm, but he was thriving in his field and the older McCrae had finally admitted that it was for the best. Finn and Logan were succeeding in their family companies, and Robert had made a name in his own field.

The girls had also found their way and escaped from their initial fate. When Steph started working right after college, she didn't plan to have a career, she just wanted to test herself out there in the real world. She always thought that if it didn't work out she would find a nice husband and be a trophy wife just like the women in her family always did. That wasn't counting on the fact that she was a very smart girl, therefore all she knew from being a high-society young woman with an outstanding address book, combined with her Ivy League education and her experience in party organizing for the Life and Death Brigade had been used at best.

Then there was Colin, she could see in his eyes how proud he was of her. He had never complained about escorting her at all the functions she had organized, she even suspected him to like being her plus one while she was working. Very soon in their relationship, it dawned her that he was the man she wanted to build a family with, but she was also sure that he was far from ready for it and that she would have to wait. Therefore, she might as well keep on working. That's how she got caught in her own game, without any regret, not an ounce. She relished being in control, people trusting her, being
good at what was expected of her, and above all the success.

Steph had also been motivated by Rory who had opened her eyes. When they met at Yale, she had realized that on the contrary to how she had been raised, a young woman from a wealthy family had other options than to be a trophy wife and enjoy it. Rory was dating Logan, they loved each other not for what they were expected to be, just because it was him, just because it was her. And despite this unconditional love, Rory always knew what was best for her.
2013 Christmas holidays

Rory used to love Christmas with her mother and had never missed one, not even during the campaign trail, not even senior year when she visited Logan in London, and her mother waited for her so that they could do all their Gilmore traditions. This year they would continue their streak but she couldn't help thinking that Robert should have been there. She would have loved spending it with him, seen him with a Christmas sweater, put green and red M&M in his cereal even if he didn't eat cereal, baking cookies and as he was able to actually cook they wouldn't have had to buy them at Weston's and pretend. But instead, this one would feel a little bitter, not as bad as the one when her mother was mad at her for falling asleep after the Chilton winter formal though. After Robert's talk with her mother, Rory felt better, nevertheless she felt that her mom wasn't completely ready yet. Therefore, this time, she focused all her attention on her mother who had reminded her that she had felt neglected as, since her September visit, Rory only come back once for Thanksgiving. She had to do that if she didn’t want to hear her mother complain about how her relationship with her boyfriend was winning over hers with her mother. Besides she loved her mom and to be honest she also had missed their bonding time and her unique sense of humor, she only had to get rid of her over-protectiveness.

Since the fateful summer of her freshman year, Rory had started to understand that the mix between mother and bestie wasn’t going to work. Lorelai couldn’t pretend to be her friend while being so judgmental. Since Rory left for the campaign trail, she slowly drifted to consider her mom mainly as a parent, but it seemed that this change was only one-sided. Nevertheless, the young Gilmore promised herself that it would be the last time that she would indulge her mother and that after this holiday, she would spend all of them with her boyfriend.

She was comforted in her decision when she heard Luke batting for Robert against Lorelai’s insinuation that the young man couldn't be fully trusted because of his origins, it reminded her the fight she had with her mom after the car accident with Jess, and that the only person who got the situation right was Luke. Even if it was more than ten years ago, her mother was still as protective of her. The only stumbling block left now was the society family issue. She knew now that it was only because of her mother’s unresolved issues with high-society and she was confident if she was able to quell her anger she would change her mind.

Robert was nothing like the random society guy, neither was his family. When she went shopping with his mother and sisters she had a very good time as if she always had been part of the family. They went to a shop owned by Nathalie's friend who had gathered for them a selection of dresses, the "Miss Céline" for the Semple women with much more fun because they were drinking margaritas. It went actually quite fast for Lydia, Aubrey, and Nathalie as it seemed that Ashley knew exactly what they liked. For Rory, she just based her selection on how Nathalie and Aubrey had described her. After about 20 minutes, the five women agreed on a Galvan red halter silk dress tied at the neck and based on Robert's reaction that evening, he more than approved of that choice.

Spending quality time with Robert’s family convinced her that she had to show her mom that the Semples won't harm her in any way or at least that they didn't have the intention to. Her plan was to go along with her mother's need for their bestie relationship and show her how similar Robert was to them. He too had been raised in the pop culture, no one can banter with her like he did, even better than Logan and moreover, he was also more protective than Dean but in a more adult and discrete way. Jess and Logan had pushed her out of her comfort zone, but sometimes it was hard for her. Robert did it in a more subtle way that suited her better. It gave her time to think of it first and do it at her pace. She felt safe with him, he was always there if she needed him, but he also knew to leave her all the space she required.
Warren was a three-hour drive from Stars Hollow so Robert picked up Rory at ten. He was coming from Newport where the Semples had spent Christmas with Lydia's sister and her family. They only had three days before Rory had to get back to work to prepare a book launch for the first week of January. Anyway, Robert had to take advantage of the winter break to work on his book. Sylvia had been enthusiastic about the outline that he gave her so he had now to provide her some pages before the spring session started.

The cozy and comfy room was just what they needed to rest and bond. In particular, they relished the fireplace. They cuddled for hours just watching the flames dancing, sharing their thoughts, their dreams, and even their fears.

“I’m so happy that we have four weeks without being apart. The long-distance really sucks.” Rory said sitting in her favorite position, in front of him, her upper body rested on his, her eyelids half closed.

“I know babe, hopefully, it will only be six more months to go. That's what keeps me going. I submitted a paper two weeks ago and I hope it will be accepted for the Columbia audition. I hate to do that but I've been networking also and I hope it will pay off.”

“You've been brown-nosing?”

“No! Just some PR stuff, remind some people of my existence, make sure they know what I’m good at.”

Rory intertwined her fingers with his. She was amazed how he could think of everything when he had a goal in mind. She started imagining how it would be when they were finally in the same city. Then a slight panic struck her. What if thinking of it would jinx it? Robert felt her tensing and wondered what on earth could do that as they were only relaxing. It was freezing cold and snowing outside so that the only thing they could do was staying in the warmth of their room. He wrapped his arms around her and bent to kiss her temple.

“Tell me about your first time,” she asked to his surprise.

“That’s why you tensed up a minute ago? Wondering if I was a stud from the beginning?”

He gave her a droll look and his lips twitched in amusement.

She shrugged. “Just wanted to know you better, how you were before we met. Fess up, Semple”

“Well, I was fifteen, it was my last year in boarding school and I was about to leave France to finish high school in New York. I was dating this girl for about five months, she was a year older and she was kind of saying that she was willing to do it as a present for me leaving. The guys were making fun of me, letting me believe that I was the only virgin left. Well, just be happy that you met me several years later.”

“What? Do I have to understand that you weren’t always the stud that you are now?”

“Are you making fun of me, Ms. Gilmore? Do I have to remind you that I’m able to make you beg anytime I want?”

She couldn’t see his face but she was sure he was giving her his lopsided grin full of cockiness.

“I feel better, you still think highly of yourself like a true society guy that you are.”

“And yet you’re still mocking us but can’t help sleeping with us.”
“I’m sleeping with you because you have this perfect butt and every time I see it, I just want to bite it”

He chuckled. “I knew it was only lust between you and me.”

“So, back to your story. How was it?” She leaned her head backward to get a glance at him.

“Well, not much to say. How do I put it? It wasn’t my greatest moment... Well, I did come, but she didn’t, so it was disappointing and also because I felt it wasn’t that better than masturbation. The worst part was that when I confided to Antoine he told me he was still a virgin.”

“So how did you get better?”

“Back in the US, I met a girl at a party, she was a freshman at NYU. You know the perk of living in Manhattan is that there were parties everywhere. With my friends, we used to crash at college parties. I saw this girl holding a copy of *The Master and Margarita* that I had just finished. You know how I love this book, so we started to talk about it all evening. When the party ended I proposed to walk her to her car which she accepted. So, we walked for about half an hour when I asked, why did she park so far, we were in front of her dorm and she told me that she didn't have a car. Let's say that she did my sex education.”

“What was her name?”

“Francesca, she was Italian. What about you?”

“Who did my sex education? I’m afraid you’ll have to thank Logan.”

He cringed.

“Babe, I know he’s my friend, and that you guys dated, but I’d rather avoid we talked about what you two did in the sack. He was your first?”

“No, but my first time wasn't great either. Well, he was more experienced as he was married.”

“Your first was with a married guy? Babe, you’ll never cease to surprise me.”

“Well, he was mine first, he was also my first boyfriend when I was 16.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

“I dated Dean for more than a year when we were 16, then we broke up. After my finals freshman year of Yale, he was working at my mom’s inn so I saw him a lot, things weren’t going well with his wife, he was nice to me, the attraction was still there. After that, he left his wife, we dated for a while but he finally dumped me. In the meantime, I met Logan and you know the rest.”

“Wow, I feel like a man whore compared to you.”

“Well, I was in love with more guys than you were with girls.”

“Does it make be better?”

“The bottom line is that we ended up together. What is it with you guys avoiding love at all costs when you were in college?”

“It’s just part of the high society game. I’m surprised you didn’t get it. You had a debutante ball, hadn’t you?”
She nodded.

"You know that the point of this thing is to offer fresh meat to society guys. Girls have to hook one of us and marry him before they reach 25 using all means possible, and we, in turn, try not to get them pregnant and keep our freedom. I was a very good player until you came along"

He kissed her hair, breathing in her smell, not being able to have enough of her. He was hooked for good this time, and he wouldn’t change anything.

She turned her face to lock eyes with him, a half smile spreading on her face. Then she moved completely to straddle him and be perfectly in front of him. She took her time before saying a word. He wondered what was going on in that pretty head of hers, her mind never ceased to amaze him.

“Robbie, I want you to listen carefully to what I’m saying now. I’m serious. I know I’ve said that before, but it was always after you and it’s been months that I wanted to do it, but it was never the perfect moment or we were interrupted and then I wanted to be sure that it felt right, that you wouldn’t think that I was saying that because I wanted something, or just because it was a way of thanking you for all the amazing things you did for me, like when you went to Stars Hollow or decided to apply at Columbia so I could keep my job, or that it’s you who comes most of the time in NY to spare me the travel. Also, I want you to remember that when in the future we hit some bumps in the road because we will, I know that, all relationships do, I’ve seen my mother and Luke, and my father, I know it can be ugly. And when I will say this, I want you to keep quiet and not say anything for at least a minute. Not a joke, not a reply, just take it and process it. Okay?"

Robert smiled, he loved when she was rambling. He wondered what all this fuss was about, but he had learned never to interrupt her flow.

“Okay, I’m all ears.”

“Robbie,” she paused to make sure he was serious, “I love you.”

He held his grin because she’d asked him to process what she said. He’d never doubted that they were in love. Yet, he had to admit that she was right. Hearing the words from her, blunt, not while they were making love, not after he had said them, it was something. Now he understood what his mother had told him last summer. What he had with Rory was LOVE, not lust, not infatuation, not friendship.

Later, Rory was comfortably cuddled with her head on Robert’s shoulder, her eyelids half closed, her arm around his stomach. She could feel him kissing the top of her head. At this right moment, she had a huge flush of love for him spreading along her body. She was amazed how just feeling his breath could sent a hum through her just like the first time years ago when she danced with him at her grandparents’ party. The bottom line of all that was that Rory was truly happy. The kind of happy that made her smile each time she saw his name on her phone. Whatever was happening, he always was the first person she wanted to talk to. Everybody was telling her that she was glowing because she wore a permanent grin on her face. When she was with him, she felt safe, protected and above all, she always had his support. They soon would be celebrating their first anniversary together and she had become a better person just because she had found a place in Robert’s heart and she had opened hers to him.

# # #

Robert heard his phone vibrating on the nightstand but decided that whoever it was that person could wait. He could see by the light going through the curtains that it was already the morning, but there was no way he was moving out of his cuddling position with Rory. He could never have enough of
the feeling of their bare skin, their bodies pressed against each other. No longer than a few seconds after the disturbing noise had stopped, it was Rory's phone which went off. She groaned but didn't move either. He smiled enjoying that they were on the same page. It was without counting that the person who was trying to reach them was very persistent. The room phone rang and this time he picked up as it was clear that this nuisance wouldn't stop otherwise.

“Hello” Robert mumbled.

"Finally! I guess by the sound of your voice you haven't got your morning treat yet."

“Colin? Why are you calling me during my vacation?”

"Well, when I saw the fresh powder and the sun I couldn't resist to join you for a little ski weekend so we jumped into the plane and here we are. We're waiting for you downstairs for breakfast."

“Rory doesn’t ski.”

“I know, Steph is more than glad to keep her company, she hurt her knee at the gym so she can’t ski either. It’s just the two of us.”

“You'll have an answer to any of my objections, right?”

“What kind of lawyer would I be if I wouldn’t?”

Robert let out a sigh. It was the same thing every year, Colin needed to avoid his family and the Vanderbilts at any cost, even his friends’ need for intimacy. It had never been a problem before, but this time it was a little harsh. The lawyer had already complained that Rory and Robert weren't giving enough to their friendship, and it was true that they hadn't found a proper balance of their time, but two days a week together wasn't just sufficient. He wasn’t glad that his initial plan was thwarted, but he thought it was the least he could do for his longtime Yale friend.

“Give us fifteen minutes, I have to wake the little marmot up.”

The brunette groaned, how could she still be sleeping will all the phones ringing? Why would she be willing to get out of this soft comfy bed where her boyfriend was fulfilling all her needs? Robert knew that the task he had at hand was nearly impossible to achieve. He started by spooning her and nibbled her earlobe.

“Babe, Colin and Steph are waiting downstairs to have breakfast with us.”

“You mean they’re here in this inn?”

"Yep, and Colin wants me to hit the slopes with him while Steph stays with you. I think he had everything planned."

Rory groaned again. She loved Steph and Colin, they were awesome friends, but not that early in the morning during her Christmas break. Then she heard a knock on the door. Robert groaned but put on a robe to open the door. He found Steph winking at him handling him two cups of coffee.

“I thought you needed that to wake her up. See you downstairs.”

Robert beamed at the blonde. He wondered how he got so lucky to have such an awesome female friend. How many guys could claim to have two real friends from the opposite sex without any romantic feelings involved?
“Thank you,” he mouthed. That would surely help.

# # #

“I was kind of surprised that you guys didn’t spend the holidays together. I thought you were getting along with his family. I saw you dance with Henri and Charles at the Christmas party,” Steph said nursing a cup in her hands.

The girls were enjoying the sun on the inn terrace drinking hot cocoa. Feeling warmth on their skin felt amazing in December.

“I do get along very well with them and I was invited to Newport for Christmas and also for Thanksgiving but I wasn’t able to split myself in two, so we decided that we would both go to our own family’s celebrations.”

“You mean Robert wasn’t invited on your side?” Steph asked.

Rory felt bad. It wasn’t that he wasn’t invited, because he was, but she could feel that her mother was still not ready.

“I don’t know how to answer that, but even if my mom has now a better opinion of him, I think she prefers to see me without him being around, and it would be a diplomatic faux-pas if he attended my grandparent's dinner and not my mom's. Fortunately, his family is not from Harford.” Rory sighed. “Anyway, I think it was a smart move because she could see that neither of us was forced into anything, and in particular nothing was expected from me by the Semples. The worst part is that although I was happy to spend Christmas in Stars Hollow, I missed them. You know that Lydia organized a family dinner just before Christmas so that I could be included and she offered me the nicest present. She didn't say it was for Christmas because she didn't want to embarrass me with presents, but she took me aside just before we left and told me to open it once I got home. It was a Hermès cashmere blanket, the softest thing on earth.”

"Don’t resent your mom, she’s just doing what she thinks is best for you. It's part of being a mother, Rory. In society, you're supposed to groom the children so that they would fit in it. That would give you the title of being the perfect society wife. Your mom escaped it, but the part of needing to groom you for the best is still in her DNA. She's deeply convinced that your happiness is out of society because that was how she found her salvation.”

“Then you think that if she sees that I won’t be sucked into high-society, she could give me a break?” Rory asked feeling that Steph had a point.

"I don't know but you can still see the bright side of what she’s given you? She taught you how to be independent, that you have your own personality. I didn't have that, and I'm learning by myself right now. Is not that easy in particular while dating Colin and having most of the people around me saying that I can have anything just because I'm a Vanderbilt sleeping with a McCrae. Don't get me wrong, I'm far from complaining and I do know I'm over-privileged, but every day there's someone wondering why I'm working while I could just stay at home going to the spa and bossing maids around. My own parents are asking me monthly why Colin hasn't put a ring on my finger yet. Then I have the talk about being damaged goods and that no man in society would be interested in me even if I'm a real blonde with blue blood and that my ancestors came on the Mayflower."

Steph smiled. She’d learned from Colin not to care about what society people think, and so far it had worked very well for her.

Both girls had one thing in common. They had experienced that it was very difficult to put their heart
out there, but now that they did and that they were experiencing an amazing love relationship, they were willing to go against all the obstacles that were in their way to keep what they had.

A/N: Thanks everyone for reading, commenting, leaving kudos, it has been fueling my writing all along. Do not hesitate to leave a comment with your thoughts. There are three more years left, that will be wrapped in twelve chapters if I don't change my mind.
It was a freezing rainy Saturday morning of January, even Robert couldn’t run. Instead, they were enjoying breakfast and reading. He looked up from his newspaper, a half smile spreading on his face seeing her so focused on her book. It was obvious she was missing her favorite activity only for her own pleasure.

“Babe, I would like to take you shopping,” he said casually.

“Shopping?” She raised an eyebrow at him.

*Robert hates shopping.*

“What’s the matter? What do you need?” she asked intrigued.

“For you, you’ll need a new dress,” he answered with an affirmative tone.

She shook her head smiling, “I’ve got plenty of dresses, thank you, babe. No need to freeze our asses out there for that.”

“You will need an evening gown next month, February 11th to be precise, and make sure your evening is cleared of work that day, we’re invited to the White House.”

“We are? I guess it would be more accurate to say that you are invited, not me. How come you still have to go to White House events? Is it for your book?”

“It’s the state dinner for the French president François Hollande. You don’t want to come? I don’t absolutely have to go, it’s just a favor to them because I handled a lot of issues with the French when I was there and I still know a lot of people at the French embassy. Nicolas works there now. I’m kind of liaison. Anyway, I can also go stag like Hollande.”

“So, you do have to go,” she said trying to decipher what was really going on in his mind.

“Mary J. Blige will be performing. I’d love you to come with me, but if you can’t it’s fine too, I'll just tell Jeremy that I don't have a plus one. I know you don't like social events, but it's a work function. I thought it could be an opportunity for you to see the Obamas again, and it would allow me to show off my gorgeous girlfriend. I was quite a lone wolf back then, just an opportunity to show that I'm not a hermit as they thought I was. And I’ll also buy the matching shoes and accessories for the dress...”

Rory grinned at him, he was cute trying to convince her while avoiding her questions.

"Are you trying to buy me out, Professor Semple? I thought you knew better of me. Anyway, if I were going, I could wear the dress your mother bought me for the Semple Brothers Christmas party.”

He glanced at her with pleading eyes.

“Please…”

She climbed out of her chair, walked to him, ignoring his incredulous look as she sat on his lap. She put her arms around his neck and sighed exaggeratedly.

“Okay, I’ll go, mister.”
“Shopping or to the White House?”

“Both, and to enjoy seeing you in a tux. But why a new dress? I thought you liked the red one I wore at The Semple brothers Christmas party?”

“Oh! I sure do, and I vividly remember what I can do to you with it, but check with Steph or my sister, I’m pretty sure that the fashion protocol requires you to wear a different dress for big events.” He arched an eyebrow to search for approbation.

"It's the White House, not the Met Gala," she stated.

“Okay, you got me, I just know it’s black tie and I admit that it’s simpler for men, we just have to wear a tux.”

He was so cute with his glasses and his coy way to ask her out, she could not resist him very long, even to tease him. She smiled and drew him into the biggest kiss. He moaned, returned the kiss, and carried her to the bedroom. Just imagining her in that infamous red dress had turned him on.

A while later, they were both lying on their backs, trying to regain a normal breath. She was grinning thinking that no one else could touch her body like he could, that no one else could drive her in that state of bliss.

“Mmmhh, I like this kind of morning workout, much better than running. I wish it would rain every Saturday morning,” she said happily.

“Okay, but if I stop running would you still like my ass as much?”

She leaned toward him and groped his butt.

“Are you sure you’re doing that for me or because you like your students checking you out?”

“They have no interest in me. I’m already too old for them.”

“Are you kidding me? When I picked you up the other day they were definitely some cuties who were giggling while ogling you.”

“Do I sense a little bit of jealousy? You really don’t have to worry you know, I only have eyes for you. Do I need to prove it to you again?” He arched his brow not really waiting for an answer and went directly to her sensitive spot.

“Hey Mister, if you want me to go shopping you maybe have to stop.”

She giggled wondering if it was wise to have another round.

“Are you sure?” He smirked, “so, we’re good?”

“We’re good,” and she pushed the comforter aside and left to take a shower.

"Because otherwise, I can still join you in the shower you know!”

He could hear her laugh while he was putting his boxers back to go into the living room, grab his laptop, and start to work on his book. He had to send a new chapter soon. During the past week, he had been mostly dedicated to his students. Rory saw he was concentrated on his writing and decided to go shopping with Steph instead.

<I need to go shopping for an evening gown. Care to help?>
<Sure, what’s the event?>

<French president at the White House>

<I’ll pick you in 45>

Rory kissed Robert on the temple.

“No weekend for the wicked?”

“I just wanted to go through the stuff I wrote yesterday, give me five.”

He was so focused, he hadn't even lifted an eye at her.

“No worry, I’ll let you work and I’ll go shopping with Steph.”

“Really? I wanted to go with you.”

She could see in his eyes he was sincere and she couldn’t help wondering how they got so lucky to have found each other. She leaned on his back and slid her arms around his neck to kiss him on his temple.

“I know you do, but I also know that you have to finish your chapter for Wednesday.”

Robert sighed.

"Here, take my card, it's my treat as you're going for me."

“You know you don’t have to do that, right?” She frowned her brows and looked at him sternly.

“Please, can you let me take care of you sometimes without you arguing? I thought we’d already established that you're a strong, confident, and independent woman.”

His eyes were begging and she felt instantly guilty for giving him such a hard time.

“Sorry Robert, old habits,” she pressed her lips and kissed him.

“It’s okay babe, love you.”

# # #

The girls first had stopped to get a latte. Steph knew that their task wasn’t as easy as it seemed. They had to find something classy, not too gaudy, and in which her friend must feel comfortable not having to check every five minutes if everything was at the right place.

"Dating a Semple has its perks, he texted me to say he gave you his black card because he wanted you to have the best and that he trusted me on that."

Rory sighed. "You know I don't like to spend too much money on clothes that I will only wear once. He said I couldn’t wear the dress I had for the Semple Brothers Christmas party.”

“Well, you could as I don’t think the same people are attending both events, even though it’s not the Met Gala, it’s still a state dinner so it’s a pretty huge deal. I think it’s been two years that they haven’t organized one. If you prefer, I’m sure I’ll be able to find a designer to lend you a dress because of the huge media coverage. It’s the kind of political functions with style reporters, not a place for a fashion faux pas.”
Rory exhaled, she hadn’t realized it was such a big event. “I’m just the girlfriend of a Harvard Faculty member, not the First Lady.”

“Sure, but a faculty member whose family evolves in society for multiple generations. I’ll be damned if you two won’t end up on page six. The press loves young gorgeous successful couples.”

"Thanks, Steph, now I feel the pressure. I now understand why my grandmother had Ms. Céline for that. What you mean is that I have to be at my best, but not too revealing neither too sexy, not drawing all the attention, but enough so that my boyfriend doesn’t regret taking me."

Steph smiled at her, she liked how her friend was always feeling she wasn’t belonging to this world, but actually fit so well.

"Why don't you see it as a regular shopping spree with me, we'll just have some fun and I'm sure we'll be able to find something that will drive him nuts. Let me do my job. You know he could go stag, but he's just so happy to be able to take you with him. It's also good PR for you to attend such functions. Don't worry about the price, give me the card, I'll take care of everything."

“Fine, I promise not to be a pain if you’ll stay reasonable.”

Rory spread a half-smile and gave the blonde the card. She felt that her friend was obviously the best expert for the situation.

###

It was the first state dinner of the President’s second term and during the week preceding it, Rory read in the press what Robert had prepared her for. She was quite impressed to attend an event with so many prestigious people but most of all, that her boyfriend was invited not for the decorum, but for his political negotiating skills. She had witnessed him exchanging phone calls and emails with the White House since the weekend he had announced they were invited. She wondered how he could be so dedicated to something that wasn’t his work anymore. Even during the weekend, he had spent a lot of time writing while she was sleeping. On a Sunday morning when he was coming back from his run, she heard him talking on the phone with Ben Rhodes, the foreign security adviser of the President. They were discussing Syria and how the US would intervene despite the opposition of the GOP. She found him overtasked, under-rested and had asked him how he could do so many things at the same time. He just shrugged and said that he considered it as helping him to understand the President for the biography which was enough of a motivation.

Actually, Rory knew Ben Rhodes from the campaign trail. He was already writing foreign policy for Barack Obama and she could see why he got along with Robert. Both were idealists and shared a distaste for the corrupt. Robert had told her how excited they were when the President sided with them at the beginning of the Arab Spring. They had timeless discussions with the senior staff who was much more cautious. Despite these exciting moments and the great people, Robert had chosen to leave politics without any regrets. He didn't want to take a chance ending up a cynic even though he would miss the long working nights with Ben and Jim eating Chinese takeout, sometimes with excessive scotch drinking. Nevertheless, even for these moments, he felt it wasn't worth operating in this crass political era.

Rory was actually glad to attend this event, in particular being able to see people from her time in the campaign. From afar, she had followed their ascent, how Mrs. Obama had smartly and gracefully embraced her First Lady function. Moreover, she would witness Robert working. He had been at Rodham many times but she only had a glimpse of him once or twice at Harvard with his students. Moreover, they didn't have many interactions during his White House period, and she never understood what made him quit and go back to research.
A/N: Sorry for the late update but the next chapter will be posted soon. Do not hesitate to let me know what do you think, good or bad, I'm always fond of your comments.
Chapter 45 – The State Dinner

Robert had booked a suite on the 8th floor at the Hay-Adams in DC, thinking that it would be more intimate than staying at Nicolas' as he used to do whenever he was in DC. Even if it wasn't their one-year anniversary, it was still their anniversary week. A year ago, she had dropped by his office and since then, he wasn't the same man anymore. His life had taken a totally different turn. He wouldn't have said that four years ago when he ran into her dating that campaign manager guy, but maybe they needed the time apart of each other to start fresh, without all the drama and Logan's shadow over them. They still weren't living in the same city, but they were insanely happy. Slowly, they were learning that to be in love was not trying to change each other, just to be along for the ride no matter what, having each other's backs. He was starting to think that they were fashioned for each other.

He had chosen this hotel because the view from the rooms was amazing and she would like that even if it was too lavish for her taste. He wanted a romantic touch despite the fact they were there for a work function. When they arrived in the room Rory was indeed amazed by the view. Nevertheless, they had been stuck in the traffic from the airport so she hadn’t had time to enjoy it and had to rush to get ready. Robert was on the phone, his gaze on the illuminated White House, when he heard Rory came out of the room.

"Robbie, this suite is just sumptuous, but was it really necessary?"

He turned around to her and his jaw dropped. How could this woman that he knew for ten years now be more beautiful every day? She was wearing an off-the-shoulder red Mikado gown, slightly ruched around her waist, with a sweetheart neckline and a V’d back. Red was definitely her color. Her delightful hips were hugged perfectly and gave her a very alluring gait. It was worth every penny. It wasn’t that he usually didn’t find her gorgeous, but she was surprising him constantly.

"This room is nothing compared to you, Ms. Gilmore," He said staring at the wonderful creature in front of him with awe, taking in every inch.

Rory blushed at his reaction but also at her naughty thoughts of ogling her scrumptious boyfriend in his perfectly tailored tux. He smiled at her loss of words. That also hadn't changed, Rory was still not very good at accepting compliments.

"That’s quite a dress, you look absolutely sensational. François Hollande won’t be able to refrain hitting on you. You know his reputation."

"Thank you, you’re very handsome too. Can you help me with my shawl?"

When he got close to her, she noticed that actually, his tux wasn't black but a very dark blue and gave a slight smile. He always had to find a way to show that he wasn't totally conventional. She took his arm and felt like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman when they walked through the hotel lobby to the exit door.

When they arrived at the White House, Robert was at ease and seemed to still know quite a lot of people. Rory was pretty stunned, she was surrounded by people she usually only saw in the media.

"Come on Ror, I have to greet the President."

He was holding her hand and she wished that a little of his confidence could transfer to her through their skin. Here again, he impressed her as they were allowed to enter the private room where the
two presidents were having their drinks before dinner.

“Good evening Mr. President, thank you very much for inviting me,” Robert said.

"Good evening Robert, you know that this invitation is also work-related, right?"

Barack Obama hugged Robert, which surprised Rory. She'd never realized that Robert was that close to the President.

“Mr. President, let me introduce you to Rory Gilmore, my girlfriend,” Robert proudly said with his hand on her back.

"Very pleased to meet you, Ms. Gilmore, you look familiar, do I already know you?"

Rory smiled, she hadn't expected that he could have remembered her.

“I was a reporter on your primary campaign trail, Mr. President.”

“That’s right, and are you still a reporter?”

"I'm now a non-fiction editor at Rodham."

“Oh! Are you editing Robert's book?"

“Of course not, but he works with a colleague of mine.”

"I'm sure it'll be great. Robert, we really miss you on the team.”

"Which one, Sir?" Robert smirked.

The president smiled. “Both, son.” He saw Rory’s surprised look.

“Robert played on my basketball team and sometimes was my running partner, he was much more fun than my coach. Okay, more seriously now, Robert can I count on you to smooth things up with the French? I made sure you’re seated next to Macron. We need to improve our relationship with France, for the TAFTA and the foreign policy, and we still don’t have an ambassador in Paris and they’re not very happy about that.”

“Of course, Sir, I’ll do my best but even if we get the French to go along with us, their bureaucracy is pretty challenging and they’re pretty linked with the European Union. Don’t you want Josh who’s in charge to do the job?”

“I think that you could handle this in a more casual way as you don’t work here anymore. It’s all about diplomacy here, you have the connections that we need. About that, the proposition that Denis made you still stands, do you think you could reconsider your decision? I really appreciate your independence and integrity. You showed me that you knew how to serve the American people. I know I only have three years left, it’s important to have a smooth transition, but I absolutely haven’t any doubt you can make your way through DC afterward.”

"Thank you, Sir, but I've got everything I need in the academic world," Robert answered.

"I had to try." The President was patting Robert's shoulder. "Okay, see you later. If we can’t see each other, make sure you debrief with Jim or Ben.”

Rory couldn’t believe what she just heard.
“They offered you another job?” she asked once they were out of ear reach.

“Yes, they did, a senior strategist position a few months ago,” Robert answered her casually.

Rory looked at him dumbstruck.

“Why didn’t you jump on it, it’s incredible!”

“I prefer research and teaching, you know that,” he answered in a dismissive tone. “I see Nicolas, let’s talk to him before we have to seat at our table. I hope you won’t mind I’ll have to talk shop in French.”

She knew he was trying to divert the subject, but it wasn’t the time to argue with him.

“Don’t worry, I know you’re here for work,” she answered shaking her head, they would have to talk about that later, she wouldn’t let it go.

"Rory, Robert! Rory, you're absolutely fabulous, are you sure Robert is the right man for you? I can show you what French can do, just give me a sign,” Nicolas winked at her.

“Salut, Nico” Robert hugged his friend. “Can you stop bull shitting my girlfriend?”

The Frenchman kissed Rory on the cheek and whispered in her ear, “I’m dead serious.”

She laughed “I’ll keep that in mind,” but her attention was captured by a blonde woman kissing her boyfriend.

"Hi! Robert, I'm so glad to see you here, we miss you so much.”

Nicolas smirked, rolled his eyes, and coughed to get attention.

"Me too, Joanna. Let me introduce you, Joanna Rholsom, the First Lady’s press secretary, Nicolas Dermerliac, premier conseiller at the French ambassador, Rory Gilmore from Rodham publishing.”

"Nice to meet you. Ms. Gilmore, I actually came to see you.”

Nicolas smirked and leaned over his friend's ear. "You're losing your touch, my friend."

"Mrs. Obama saw your name on the guest list and asked if you could have a word with her."

Rory was stunned by the request. She had bonded with Mrs. Obama and her staff during the campaign trail, but it was six years ago, she would have thought that she wouldn’t be a priority.

“Of course, now?”

Joanna looked to see that the First Lady was just a hundred feet away ending her conversation.

“Yes, if you don’t mind,” she answered already walking toward the President’s wife.

“Good evening, Mrs. Obama”

“Rory! It was such a nice surprise to see you on the guest list! And with Robert Semple nonetheless.”

The First Lady winked at her.

"We were at Yale together," answered Rory, not sure what was expected of her.
“You really have very good taste, we all miss our Robert here.”

“Your Robert?” Rory was a little lost here.

“When he was working here, he was the attention of many ladies of my staff, and from the White House in general. You know, young, single, sharp, athletic, great sense of humor, easy on the eyes and so sweet.”

“I guess he’s all that.”

It was weird discovering a new part of her boyfriend’s life. From what he told her he only worked his ass off while he was here, but she wondered if he knew he was the attention of so many ladies.

“What about you? Last time I heard you were working at the Boston Globe.”

“I left the Globe, I’m now a non-fiction editor at Rodham.”

“You know I’ve been pestered to write my memoirs after we leave the White House, I’ll ask my agent to consider you as an editor, I would love working with you again. Would that be okay with you?”

“Of course, I wouldn’t even dream about saying no!”

So that’s what Steph talked about when she told her that she couldn’t miss this kind of event, the high scale networking.

There were so many guests that the dinner was served in a heated tent on the South Lawn. Rory was seated at the same table but at the opposite of Robert, nevertheless, she really enjoyed the casual chit-chat. Who wouldn’t? She was between Andrew Tobias, the writer, and Charles Abrahams, the representative of the Americans abroad. While relishing the conversation with her neighbors, she could observe her boyfriend’s casual negotiations and wondered why he left politics. Everybody seemed to think that he would have been an incredible asset. It looked so easy for him to navigate in this environment, maybe that was what the societal ease was for. He was talking about the TAFTA almost during all the first courses just as if it was the last movie he had seen. Rory had to admit that Robert’s self-assurance, his quiet confidence, were kind of an aphrodisiac to her. His opponent wasn’t much older than him and it was surprising to see these two young men had in their hands such an important mediation. Although, it wasn’t supposed to be a working dinner. What was even more surprising was that both were switching from French to English constantly.

The only regret she could have had was that she didn’t have the opportunity to dance with him. At some point, Robert had disappeared with Ben and Jim and she was swept on the dance floor first by Nicolas and then by a French Minister whose name she didn’t even know. While spinning, she caught a glimpse at him amidst other tux-clad men raising their glasses, but that was about what she could grab from him after dinner.

Finally, while Nicolas was handing her a glass of water and she was trying to regain her breath after a wild dance, she felt his hand on the small of her back.

“Ready to go?” He whispered in her ear. She shivered at his deep voice and turned to smile at him.

“You’re done?” She asked with so much spark in her eyes that he was dazed and had to steady himself on Nicolas’ arm.

He just nodded, winked at his childhood friend and pulled her by her hand. Here again, there was something about the way he took her hand and pulled her out of the crowded room, that turned her
It dawned on her that she actually liked when he was leading her, despite all she had worked for being an independent woman.

While they were waiting for their car, he leaned to her.

“I spent all the evening thinking of the moment when I would be able to take this dress off you. I was smart to choose a hotel so close to the White House,” He murmured in his low tone that inevitably made her quiver.

She chuckled while he was opening the car door.

“I wondered why you guys ask us to buy a nice dress if the only goal is to get it off,” Rory smirked.

“It’s not the only aim, part of the game is to see other men drooling on our girl and to know that we’re going to be the lucky bastard to take the lady home. I know, it’s totally childish, but I can live with that,” he replied while sitting, kissing her knuckles, and raising his gaze full of lust to her.

He was glad to be able to control himself in the car as it was only a five-minute ride. Nevertheless, when he helped her out of it, he had a wandering hand on her butt and frowned his eyebrows. While they were walking to the elevator he couldn’t help asking, so he tried to lower his voice.

“Seriously Rory, did you lose your underwear somewhere in the White House?”

"You wouldn't want the investment you made in this dress to be impaired by unwanted lines, would you? Anyway, Steph said it was a rule when it looks better without panties. What would you have said if people had commented about your girlfriend with panty lines?"

“My girlfriend has the most perfect ass, I’m certain nobody complained about it. Remind me to talk to Colin about this rule,” he groaned. They had to stop their conversation as another couple joined them to enter the elevator.

As soon as they entered their suite, he pulled her to him, his mouth was hot and hard on hers, a kiss she had grown used to since it was the one they had every time they meet again at the end of the week. Their four hands weren’t fast enough and they groaned loudly, discarding all their pieces of clothing one by one. To his delighted surprise, his task was the easiest because as soon as he had found the zipper of her dress, the red silk fell on the floor revealing her bare body to him. He shook his head and assisted her in finishing undressing him.

"If I had known that, we would have never stayed that long,” he breathed the words into her ear.

“That’s why you didn’t, for the sake of our country,” she smirked.

He chuckled.

Once they were finally at an equal state, she pushed him on a chair and straddled him. Her hands moved to his face and held him as their mouths opened to deepen the kiss while she slowly rubbed herself on him. He nipped at her ear, grabbing her butt with both of his hands going along with her delightful moves. Her hands were quick, demanding, and devastatingly tantalizing.

He leaned his forehead against hers, his eyes dark with lust.

"Hang on to me."

He walked to the window, the illuminated city was spread in front of them.
“Look at the beauty of this view, it’s nothing compare to you,” he whispered in her ear.
“Did you know that our girls had a rule about panty lines?” Robert asked Colin, putting the menu down on the table.

The two old friends were having dinner. The following morning Robert would spend the day at Columbia for his interview. Both girls were out of town, Rory on a promotion tour in California with one of her authors and Steph in Philly.

“The rules that they won’t wear panties to avoid lines?” Colin said not even blinking while still perusing the menu.

“Yes, exactly, can you believe that it applied to a State Dinner?”

Colin smirked and decided it was time to inform his friend how those things worked.

"Steph would tell you that it's even more applicable at this kind of event where you have style reporters. It's driving me crazy because now, every time she wears a dress that is a little tight I'm wondering all evening if she's wearing any underwear. It's okay when I'm the plus one because it gives me a goal for the evening, but when she's my escort it's very difficult for me to concentrate if I have to talk shop."

“I guess it’s the price to pay for having hot girlfriends,” Robert concluded.

“You’re right, we shouldn’t be complaining. Anyway, I’m glad that you’re aware of this issue. I couldn’t share it with Finn because I didn’t want him to picture Steph without underwear.”

Robert laughed.

“And you’re not afraid that I would picture her naked?”

"You have your hands full with Reporter Girl. Look at the bright side, we could have a worse problem to worry about," Colin added.

"You're right. Do you think we should ask them to wear looser dresses though?"

“And miss the surprise of what is underneath? Are you serious? What would be the perk of being their plus one at their work functions? It’s a very healthy occupation at boring parties when you’re the escort. For instance, finding a strategy to cup her butt without being caught."

Robert shook his head and smirked. Obviously, Colin had thought about it already.

“You’re right, it’s a stupid idea.”

Robert was actually glad to spend the evening with Colin and not Rory or anyone else. Only his Yale friend could understand that he needed to talk about silly things but absolutely not about what was at stake the following day. He wanted this position very badly but he also perfectly knew that the competition for the job was tough. Academic job search had never been a rational procedure designed to yield the best candidate for the position, that would have been too easy. He considered that it could be a good thing regarding his non-standard resume. It was his first in the process of tenure-track jobs but he had been able to observe the process during the preceding year in Harvard, having been in the search committee for a comparative politics position. That's why he underwent a thorough preparation, starting by evaluating who were the people he was trying to entice.
The head of the department, Bob Shapiro, had told him that they had selected three candidates for the final on-campus interviews but didn’t give him the names of the other two. He only knew that he was the last one to audition. On paper, he was fitting quite well with the job announcement, except for the level of experience expected as his first post-doctoral experience was in the White House and not in a University. He had spent many hours reading the job ad and considering what Bob Shapiro had discussed with him trying to divine the true meaning and how to decode the hidden messages that will allow him to uncover exactly what they really wanted. Of course, the job description was more likely a reflection of expedient political compromises necessary to get it past the administration than an accurate description of what the department "really" wanted, but he was pretty sure that crossed with the intel he got from the head of the department, he had a pretty good idea of what they needed.

“So, you cut your hair short, I think I’ve never seen you like that. Aren’t you afraid that you’ll lose your strength, you know like David against Goliath?” Colin asked trying not to tease his nervous friend too hard.

"On the contrary mate, I did it to clear my mind, look more serious. I want a fresh start, something that will symbolize my new kickoff, building the rest of my life with Rory. My strength is coming from her and me, together we’re a rock. With each other, we’re stronger and happier."

Colin smirked and gazed at his passionate pal. These two were really meant to be together. He felt sappy to feel that way but he was happy for them. Before Rory left for California, she had pestered him to be nice to her sweet bear and take care of him. It was funny to watch these two always there for each other.

“I thought you wanted to keep the evening light? Not that easy to let go with a low alcohol level in your blood, right?” The lawyer asked.

“You’re right, I have to rest my brain to kick ass tomorrow. So, do you have any news from the guys? I haven’t heard from Logan in a while.”

Colin clinched and Robert felt right away that something was wrong.

“If you want to keep it light, we should switch right away to Finn. All I can say is that the Dark Lord has pulled some shit again and Huntz is trying to figure out how to deal with it. Let’s postpone this part until you’re done with your interview. The good news is that Finn is now CIO of Quantitative Developed Equities at GMO which mean that he’ll be back in Boston soon.”

“He texted me to ask if he could crash at my place until he found an apartment. It’ll be fun, we’ve never actually been roommates. Anyway, if I get the Columbia job, he could keep my place.”

They continue talking about the gang, making fun of Ray. Rosemary's boyfriend. Since she was dating him, they had tried as much as possible to hide their dislike for the guy and thank goodness they didn’t have to see him that much as he was often reporting on location. They had never understood if it was a Princeton-Yale rivalry or if he was just a moron, but most of all, what Rosemary could have found in him. They even had acknowledged that it wasn’t easy to get into such a close-knit group, but it wasn’t only that, Ray was an overweening schmuck. He was a local news TV reporter but when listening to him you would have thought he’d already won the Pulitzer twice and dug out three Watergate stories. The only time he had set a foot outside the US was to go to a hockey game in Canada, and yet, he was talking about foreign policy as if he was Kissinger. Over the years, mostly Finn and Juliet had brought some people into their gatherings without any issues. Rosemary was such a nice girl, over the years she had blossomed out, off the claws of her strict WASP Bostonian family. Their final conclusion was that the guy was probably good in bed otherwise they couldn’t explain how such a good girl like her could bear an egomaniac like him.
Robert woke up at five and got out for a jog even if it was dark and cold. Nevertheless, he knew it was hard to run and feel anxious at the same time, besides, the endorphins that it would generate would last at the minimum all morning and if he was lucky, until the end of the interview. At least, he would get rid of the fear of failing. Anyway, he couldn’t be more prepared than he was. First, Jennifer and Frank had submitted him to a mock interview. They had grilled him for two long hours with the nastiest questions they could find. For instance, why did he want this job? He couldn't only answer because his girlfriend was in the City, but he had to find arguments that he found Columbia more appealing than Harvard. As a Harvard graduate, it wasn't that easy. They would ask him if he had been offered a position at his alma mater. He chose to show them how they would benefit from having him on their team. Therefore, he had thoroughly studied the strength and weaknesses of all the faculty members.

He had discussed a lot with Rory about the White House position the week after DC. She wanted to be sure that he wouldn't regret his decision. They were both huge fans of the Obamas as they felt they were ahead of their time. It took him all his strength to find compelling arguments that it was a mature decision not based only on wanting to live in the same city as his girlfriend. She even looked for jobs in DC and tried to convince him she could go work in one of the multiple think tanks that were based in the capital. Seeing her so determined to follow him made him want the Columbia position even more.

It was a whole interview day, everything was packed from 8 AM to after dinner. Robert personally had already met some of the faculty members at various conferences. The day began early with a breakfast meeting and then the marathon started with a series of appointments with members of the department. Some were interesting so it was easy for him as he was very well prepared. Others were merely going through the motions, so he managed to turn to internal politics, how the administration was annoying. It was a common issue for all faculty members all over the world.

After a quick lunch, again with the faculty members of the department, he had to give a talk about his research, then, to show the panel his teaching skills, a short lecture on the causes of democratization. After that, the interview per se began in front of a committee of ten people, a mix of internal and external people.

The introduction by Bob Shapiro was quite nice and he pointed out the outstanding recommendation letters, referring probably to President Obama’s specifically. Robert was afraid that they would find him conceited and first thought that a letter from David Axelrod was more than enough, but his Harvard colleagues pointed out that as he was writing a biography of the President, it could only show that he was trustworthy. The letter had been sent directly to Columbia so he didn’t have any clue of what was in it. The questions were cordial, non-aggressive, but tough and thorough. Nevertheless, he managed to maintain his focus and sense of humor.

Following, he had individual meetings with the Dean of College and the Dean of Social Sciences. Even if these were simple formalities, he was already pretty tired by the committee. Luckily, neither of them kept him too long so he could proceed to the dinner with the junior faculty. The atmosphere was much more casual and relaxed. He talked a lot with an Italian lecturer whom he had worked with when they were both graduate students at Harvard. He was surprised that she hadn’t applied for the job, but she told him she was still considering going back to Italy. She mentioned that she’d overheard the committee talking about him and got the impression that they were quite impressed.

Rory felt bad that she wasn't in New York right at the moment he was there for his interview. Of
course, he didn't need her, but she wanted to be there for him at this key point of their relationship. He was making this big move, for them. They had discussed a lot and he had told her that his overachiever resume had a double-edged aspect. They could resent the non-academic part and even that his first book wouldn't be a University press publication. Nevertheless, he had never let her doubt that he would get it. To her, he seemed the most down to earth of men, but in key ways, he was also an optimist.

Her phone went off and a quick glance at the caller ID made her smile. He was probably done with his interview at Columbia. She looked at Denis, “her” author, who was reading a section of his book. She probably had five minutes before he would have to answer questions from the audience, therefore she got out to take the call. She needed to know how it went.

“Hi Robbie, I don’t have much time before I have to get back. How did it go?”

“I think I pulled it off. You can call me later, I’m going to have a drink with Colin.”

“I’m so proud of you Robbie, did they say anything about when they’ll let you know?”

“In about 6 weeks.”

“Okay, I have to go, love you!”

She was on cloud nine. Her boyfriend was just amazing, who wouldn't want him? Unfortunately, Denis Wyndham had decided to make her life miserable that day. When she came back into the room, the question session had just started. A young woman asked for his opinion on Harry Hecht, the writer who won the Pulitzer prize in 2013 and was still on the New York Times bestsellers list since then. Rory clinched because she knew that they didn't like each other much. Alas, it was almost the end of the tour and Denis had gained confidence as he had been praised at every event. Therefore, he decided he could speak without any filter and just said Hecht was narcissistic, selfish, self-destructive, esthetically illiterate, and conceited. What he hadn't considered was that there were book critics in the room. That's how Rory's evening had become an ordeal. She did her best to make up for him but deep inside her, she just wanted to leave him there. Wyndham was so full of himself he thought he was God’s gift to humanity while he was just another pretentious jerk.

“Hello!” Rory answered the phone harshly without checking the caller ID, kicking out her pumps while entering her hotel room. She was still mad.

“Wow! Am I calling at a bad time?”

Robert quickly reviewed in his head if he had missed something.

“Oh! Sorry, Robbie, I had an awful day, Wyndham just pissed me off again.”

He could picture her frowning and pacing just by the tone of her voice.

“You want to talk about it?” He asked carefully.

“I’m his editor, not his agent, I’m not supposed to babysit him and do all the marketing shit, my job is to help him make his writing better, understandable, readable. He’s just an obnoxious prick and I’m fed up having to fix and polish up all the BS that is blurring out of his mouth. I don’t want to spend another second of my life for him. The guy is so infuriating. I wish you were here, that you could hold me, to help me get my mind out of it!” She whined.

In a day like she just had, she simply needed him. They had become essential to each other. The truth was that without him, she felt a little unhinged, but nothing she couldn't handle usually. There was a
kind of power in Robert's quiet strength, his even-tempered mood that was necessary to her 
equilibrium. But this evening, nothing was going right, of course, nothing life-threatening, but just 
things piling up to make her lose her balance and make her feel that he was indispensable to her. She 
needed to feel his mouth against her, to feel him holding her and sensing that they were merging to 
be a unique entity. She could kill just to have a make-out session, the teenage kind that makes you 
forget about everything related to her adult life.

His heart clenched. He hated to be helpless.

“I know babe, just two more days. You know, bad publicity is still publicity. People will be curious 
and buy his book.”

“I’m sorry, I know I’m not reasonable, I just feel so frustrated,” she muttered feeling ridiculous.

“I think we need to go away together,” Robert said trying to find something to lighten her mood.

“Good! Like a week in Italy or in France for spring break?” She asked enthusiastically.

“Sure, that too, but I was thinking about something sooner, more like when you’re done with the 
book tour.”

“What do you mean?”

“We can go somewhere during the weekend before you have to get back to New York, I don’t 
know, Palm Springs, Carmel, Catalina, Napa Valley, somewhere with a spa, you name it.”

“But I already have my return ticket for Friday.”

“We’ll change it for Sunday. Where will you be on Friday?”

“San Francisco”

“So, where would you like to go? Napa?”

“Anywhere as long as I get to be with you.”

“It’s a deal, I’ll check with your assistant and I’ll let you know.”

“But how will you organize this on such a short notice and with all your workload?”

“Don’t worry about that, and don’t forget, for Memorial Day weekend we’re going to the Semples’ 
Games, this year it’s in the Keys.”

“The what? I thought it was a joke when I heard Aubrey and Charles talking about it.”

“No, it’s very serious, every year all Semples reunite and we play games all weekend.”

“But you didn’t go last year? And I don’t remember about anything like that when we were 
roommates.”

“No, in 2009 I had my Ph.D. dissertation and last year I didn’t because remember, you wouldn’t 
meet my family so I stayed with you, but now you can’t hide anymore. You’ll see, it’s fun.”

"You know I don't do any sports right?"

"It's all sort of games, outdoor, drinking games, board games, poker, Pictionary..."
“And how many Sempres are going?”

“It depends, never less than thirty but I already RSVP that I had a plus one, so if you’re not coming I’ll have to find someone else and I don’t think that would make my parents happy. You wouldn’t want to upset them, would you?”

“I’ll only go because of your parents. Robbie, is your family crazier than my mother?”

“They’re not crazy, they just know how to enjoy life. And I know, before you say it, I didn’t get all those genes.”

“Oh, you got more than enough for me, you’re just perfect.”

He chuckled, maybe he wasn’t perfect but at least she wasn’t pissed anymore.

“Again, I’m sorry I didn’t call you back, he drove me so mad I wasn’t able to calm down. Why aren’t you sleeping yet?”

“I’m in bed, just couldn’t find sleep without hearing your voice.”

She could picture him rubbing his eyes under his glasses like he always did when he was tired but still trying to read in bed.

“I feel bad, so tell me, what did they ask you?”

“Nothing that I wasn’t prepared to answer, what about you, weren’t you supposed to have lunch with Marty?”

“I did.”

The silence from Robert’s side was deafening. He wasn’t actually jealous, but when she mentioned that she was going to meet her college enamored friend, all those years when he was pining for her came back to his mind. He knew too well how she could be oblivious to the effect she had on men.

"Robbie, he's an old friend from Yale, you know that. I never see him anymore, we only exchange greetings during the holidays. Being here was just an opportunity to see each other.”

“Is he still hung up on you?”

“Of course not, it’s been what, seven years? He is engaged now.”

She was convinced he trusted her, so she couldn’t understand where this was coming from.

“But still, she didn’t have lunch with you two.”

"No, but that doesn't mean that he has the hots for me either. He looked happy, he's been over me for years. Jeez, I think last time I saw him was during the campaign trail.”

She could feel he was shaking his head.

“Rory, don’t worry, I can handle it, I trust you. I just mean that I’m pretty sure he’s not over you, but I’m convinced he loves his fiancée too.”

Rory groaned, she hated when he was describing her as a serial heartbreaker.

“I know you’re tired but I don’t want to end our conversation on this note.”
She sighed, she would give anything to be able to fall asleep on her boyfriend’s arms tonight.

“It’s OK babe, we’ll see each other in two days. I…”

“What are you wearing,” she cut him off.

He chuckled.

“Actually... Nothing.”

He smirked and all of a sudden, his exhaustion lifted off.

"Oh… Are you trying to tease me, Mister?” She asked lowering her voice with a sensual tone.

"Don't try to fool me, Ms. Gilmore, you perfectly know it's the other way around and that it's working, it will be in two very long days, but you're going to get some, don't worry about that.”

She snickered, it was so easy to get him in the game, but she was caught in it too, feeling he was turned on just with her words. Being in a long-distance relationship, they had become masters at phone sex.

“I'm closing my eyes and I can feel your skin against mine, your lips brushing behind my ear, going down slowly on my collarbone while your fingers are running on my body.” She whispered slowly.

She heard him whimper.

“I'd give anything to be able to do that to you right now,” he took over, his voice dropping a notch, “being able to cup your beautiful breasts, feeling their round shape, their softness, how they fit perfectly in my hands, how they react to me.”

While listening to him, it was like her hand was following his orders and she was caressing herself. He could hear her breathing heavily.

“Are you going to do the thing you do with your fingers?” she asked, her heart already racing in anticipation.

“You’d like that, huh? But I’m sorry babe, I’m only able to guide you now, but you know where to go, right?”

She nodded even if she knew he couldn’t see her.

"Please, let me just hear your voice, babe," he said huskily, his tone thick with arousal which made her feel her juices pool between her legs. She slowly slid her fingers inside her labia and was amazed at how his words had turned her on.

"I am slipping my fingers into my vagina, imagining that you’re moving your tongue at the same pace in my mouth,” she went on and listened to his ragged breathing.

It was his turn to close his eyes, to be able to have the memory of her scent invading his brain, her wonderfully soft hair washing over him.

“Can you feel your tight walls, how your fingers are wet, how it makes it easy to move in your slick juices and reached your G spot, but don’t forget your clit babe, I’d love to be able to flick it with my tongue for you.”

"Robbie, you're doing that so well," she panted, "but what I need right now is you to thrust in me
with your big hard dick because what you do with it is magical,” she cried out.

"Fuck! Rory!” he exclaimed, getting close to his goal.

She always had loved the fact that she could have such an effect on him just by talking.

“Yeah, so you need my thick dick inside of your pussy, don’t you? Slamming into you hard …and endlessly…” He whispered in his low voice amplified by the phone.

He heard her moan to his words and it lifted all the restraint he could have left.

“I’m gonna cum, Robbie!” she dropped her phone on the bed having her orgasm spreading all over her body. She could hear him curse on the line, grunt and then only his breathing.

Of course, it wasn’t as good as being physically together, but at least it gave her release.

"I still miss you so much, Robbie,” she murmured as if she was ashamed.

“Me too, babe.”

A/N: Sorry for the late update but I took a week of vacation in Spain… I hope you’re still there able to give me your comments.

Thanks to anonymousgg for the editing.
Rory entered the restaurant and made a beeline to the table where Steph and Rosemary were already seated. Since she’d arrived in Manhattan two years ago, they used to meet every Wednesday for lunch. She noticed that the blonde was beaming widely, squirming on her chair, which made Rory raise an eyebrow to Rosemary to enquire for an explanation. The auctioneer shrugged showing that she wasn’t aware of what was going on.

"Now that you're here, I would like to show you girls something," Steph said mysteriously, still grinning. Swiftly, she spread her left hand on the middle of the table letting a breathtaking pear shape engagement ring shine out on her ring finger.

"Wow! He did it!" Rosemary squealed.

"Finally!" Rory cried, "I'm so happy for you two."

They both hugged the blonde enthusiastically.

“I can’t remember, how long have you guys been dating?”

"8 years, I know he loves me, but I have to admit that some days, I doubted he would ever pop the question. He's so scared to become a serial husband like his father."

"You've been living together for five years now, I don't think his father ever stayed married that long!" Rosemary said.

"You're right, the thing is, I hope he won't back up with all the wedding plans my mother is pulling. She has already called his father, and they agreed to something huge, like the society wedding of the year. Even I'm scared and on the verge of asking him to elope."

The girls chuckled but they knew Steph would never do that, she was dreaming to tie the knot with Colin for way too long, she already had the perfect dress in mind.

"Of course, girls, I hope that you'll be my bridesmaids and I'll ask Juliet too. My sister will be my maid of honor."

"I'll be glad to be your bridesmaid but more importantly, tell us, how did Colin propose? How did he muster the courage to finally do it?"

“Okay, promise that you won’t make fun of him?”

The girls nodded, too eager to know the details.

“It was after a hot love session. We were regaining our breath and I heard ‘Marry me’.

The girls giggled.

"So, you're that good in bed?"

"Let's say we're very compatible," Steph answered, the right corner of her mouth lifting up. "I have to admit that I thought I misheard him at first and just stared at him trying to rewind his words in my head. I wondered if it wasn't just post-coital daze, but then he got up to his socks drawer and pulled out a blue Tiffany box, and my heart was pounding so hard I thought it was going to explode out of my chest. Then he got down on one knee, still naked and said the sweetest things."
"What? What did he say?" The girls blurted out together hanging on the blonde’s words.

Steph closed her eyes reliving the scene.

"With you, I’ve learned that love is an ever-evolving experience, it constantly shifts, changes and sometimes needs a reset. I know it took me forever and I would never be thankful enough because obviously, you understood what I needed before I knew it myself. You never pressured me, let me proceed at my own pace because you’d realized that what we have will last as long as there will be stars in the sky. Stephanie Adele Vanderbilt, thank you for waiting for me but now, will you please marry me?"

The three girls were weeping when the waitress arrived to take their order.

"It’s damn romantic but you might have to muster a rated G version of the proposal, though."

They chuckled and gave their order to the staring waitress who was getting impatient.

"Yeah, we definitely have to think about that," Steph winked.

“So, if he had a ring, he must have thought about it for a while?" Rory asked.

“Obviously, but I haven’t asked him. Maybe Robert knows?"

"I'll try to find out."

They kept chatting about the wedding but at some point, Rory and Steph noticed that Rosemary was awfully silent. She looked worried and even sad.

"Rose, is there something wrong?" Rory asked putting her hand on her friend's.

“I’m sure it’s nothing, I don’t want to spoil your moment,” Rosemary answered in a small voice.

"Don't be ridiculous, we have been talking about Colin and me for years, there's isn't much that your girls don't know. Is it work or personal?"

Rosemary sighed.

“I’m sure it’s only in my head, but I think Ray is avoiding me. He’s away much more often shooting on location or working late. He’s a local news reporter so it’s weird, right Ror?"

Rory smiled, she wasn’t sure what to say.

"Did you ask him, maybe his job has changed? Fewer reporters so there may be a larger workload for him?"

“You’re probably right, but I’m on the impression I’m in a long-distance relationship but without the wild sex, when we get to finally see each other.”

Rory blushed, it was clearly the best perk of a long-distance relationship.

"I'm sure he's just overworked and exhausted but if you spice your game a little his flame will light up again. Colin has a thing for garter belts, I’m sure Ray has a weakness too."

“I already tried that,” Rosemary whispered.

Steph cringed, that wasn’t good. The girls weren’t very fond of Ray, but their friend was in love with
him and until now, it seemed reciprocal so it was a good enough reason to try to like him. The main problem was that their boyfriends were always complaining about how insufferable the guy was. Could they be right about him?

# # #

“To Colin McCrae who finally did it!”

Robert and Finn raised their glasses and gulped down all the contents. The Aussie immediately poured some more scotch and was ready again.

"To the lovely future Mrs. McCrae!"

Robert chuckled and cheered again. Obviously, the Aussie needed some time to get used to that harebrained idea that Colin and Steph were getting married. He remembered vividly how at Yale he used to be Colin’s better half and that they had sworn multiple times that they would never tie the knot, that men like them weren’t cut out for anything resembling self-sacrifice or high-mindedness.

“Did you know he was going to pop the question?” Finn asked.

"Well, I ring-shopped with him but it was more than a month ago. It was the day before my Columbia interview. I stayed discrete as I didn't want to jinx it. He told me he wanted to be ready in case…”

“In case of what? An epiphany?” Finn laughed. “But you two picking the ring… I hope she liked it…”

“Come on, we’re not that bad, anyway at Tiffany, they have saleswomen specialized to help dudes like us.”

“Two wealthy trust fund kids?”

“I hate to disappoint you but we’re not kids anymore, he was in his lawyer tailored suit and silk tie, his $100 haircut that all were screaming MONEY.”

"Added to you with your Berluti boots. You might think that you're low key but these women, they can spot a rich man just by looking at their shoes."

Robert chuckled.

“You guys wear tailored suits every day, I just change my shoes.”

The American gazed at his roomie. It was really good to have him back in Boston, they were enjoying their time together even if Robert’s ultimate goal was to end up in the City in a few months. It was like living a sneak peak of the past, knowing they weren’t kids anymore, at least for Colin and him. For the first time in their life, their romantic partnership was prioritized to a friendship.

Finn was genuinely happy for Colin and Robert, he wasn't jealous, as for him his pals were showing him the way. He had realized that he had convinced himself for too long now that changing flavor every week was what was right for him. Of course, it was easier to enjoy the company of ladies he wasn't considering seeing again, be the life and soul of the party, just enjoying what he thought was the real life. But with the years passing, it was becoming harder to withstand. He was still relishing working, but partying endlessly wasn't as much fun. He was climbing the ladder in the company, but something was missing in his life and he just couldn't pinpoint what. He had vaguely tried to date seriously, some setups by his mother, but even if these young ladies had an impeccable pedigree, he
couldn't feel any spark in him slightly resembling what he could see in Robert’s or Colin’s eyes when they were talking about their girls. He just had to be patient and work on opening up.

Recently, he had started wondering why he wasn't able to allow himself falling for a woman. He almost did for Rory because she entered his heart through the back door when he wasn't expecting anything. Luckily for him, he immediately sensed that it was just a misrouting and that she was already meant to be Robert's, even if it took them 4 years to end up together. Some people were slower than the others, but who was he to judge. It only helped him to work on his feelings, that loving somebody can, of course, lead to a heartache, but not always.

A few months ago, he had a long talk with one of his sister's friend at a beach party in Sydney. He didn't know if it was the alcohol, the atmosphere, that she was an awfully good listener, but he confided to her that there was something invisible that was holding him from allowing himself to have romantic feelings for a woman. He could have female friends, but the liking could never become amorous and that he was tired of hiding that behind his womanizer ways. She only asked him a single question, the typical one from Psychology 101. Did he have a painful separation from his parents during his childhood? Then it all became clear to him. When he was three, his mother had spent two very difficult years fighting uterine cancer. She had been on and off the hospital, his father was a ghost of himself. Therefore, during this period, he was entrusted to the care of his aunt. She was sweet and loving and did the best she could to shield him, but what a toddler could understand? Only that the person he loved and trusted the most couldn't see him. And now here he was, 32 and still unable to give his heart to a woman. Yet, even if the incredible person who was his mother had beaten the awful disease and came back to him, it seemed that the young boy inside of him was still hurting and unable to show his capacity to love.

"So, mate, it's your turn now," Finn said staring at his drink.

"May I ask you what you’re referring to?"

"Get down on your knee and ask the lovely Ms. Gilmore to share your life until death will tear you apart?"

Robert chuckled at his drink.

"Why is everyone is talking to me about this? We're not even in the same city yet."

"Come on man, I won't believe you if you tell me you never thought about it."

"You're right I did, just I don't think we're there yet, even if I know if I had to marry anyone it would be her."

"Who else had asked you the question, your parents?"

"The President."

"Why aren’t you like anyone else?" Finn asked shaking his head with a half-smile “You’re discussing your love life with the President of the United States?"

"It was last week, I was at the White House for the book, at the end of the interview I was packing my stuff, he asked me about my future plans. You can imagine that as a Harvard alumnus he asked me why I was leaving my alma mater. So, I told him that I’m doing that so I can finally live with Rory."

Robert paused and a grin spread on his face.
“Then, he asked me if she was the one and imparted his wisdom on the matter.”

“I’m curious, is it classified or you can share it with a regular dude like you mate?”

“Well, he said that I should ask myself three questions. First, is she’s someone I find interesting?”

Finn was a little baffled by the question, “What?”

“I know, he explained to me that she’ll be the person I’ll spend more time with than anyone else for the rest of your life, and there is nothing more important than always wanting to hear what she has to say about things.”

“Oh! That makes sense,” Finn nodded.

"Then the two other things are if she makes me laugh and if she could be a good mum, of course, if we plan to have kids."

"Do you?"

"We've never talked about that yet, but I can picture myself with a mini-Rory in my life."

"Even I do, the world would be so much better. So, man, you've got your answers."

"I know, but you're forgetting that she has a word in this too. You know how she has to ponder everything, make her pro/con list. I don’t say I’m much better than her, but we both know that she needs time and that’s what blew out on Huntz's face. She has to find me interesting, funny enough and to consider that I could be a good dad."

Finn chuckled, "Your dad is amazing, you had a perfect role model growing up, I don't see how you couldn't be the best father to a mini-Rory."

“This conversation stays between us, right?”

“Sure, but what are you afraid of? That someone finds out that you’re madly in love with her? I’m sorry to tell you that it’s already public knowledge.”

Robert threw a cushion to Finn's head who discarded it easily.

“You know, a few years ago, I got a much better advice which could be more useful for you.”

“Still from the President?”

“Nope, from Rory. When we were in Paris during her tour for the Globe, she told me that if I wanted to have more meaningful relationships, I had to get to know the girl before sleeping with her. And involuntarily, that’s what I did with her.”

“So, you’re telling me that I have to be friend with a lady before knowing if we’re compatible sexually?”

Robert chuckled. "That's exactly what I answered to her, but you've got to admit that at the end, she was damn right."

A/N: Thank you so much for your reviews and kudos, they're very helpful to stimulate my writing. I hope to be more productive in the following days as I'm child-free unless the heat brings me down.

The part of the discussion of Robert with the President was an adaptation from a real one that Dan
Pfeiffer had with Barack Obama and described in his book *Yes, We (Still) Can.*
If Robert wasn't in class, he dedicated his mornings to student mentoring. Sometimes it was his favorite part of the job, some other times it was the worst. Even at Harvard, not all students were motivated or skilled. That day was a pretty good one, and he was smiling to himself while his last student was closing the door, and his phone rang. If Robert wasn't in class, he dedicated to student mentoring. Sometimes it was his favorite part of the job, some other times it was the worst. Even at Harvard, not all students were motivated or skilled. That day was a pretty good one, and he was smiling to himself while his last student was closing the door, and his phone rang.

"Robert Semple."

"Hi Robert, it's Bob Shapiro from Columbia. Can I have a moment of your time?"

"Oh, Good morning Professor Shapiro. Of course, what can I do for you?"

"Congratulations Robert, I'm glad to welcome you as a Columbia faculty member, if you're still interested, the assistant professor position is yours."

"Of course, I'm more than interested! Thank you so much, Professor!"

"You were our first choice by far. We were all very impressed by your answers for such a young fellow; we really appreciate your unique experience. I'm convinced that you'll be an incredible asset."

"Thank you, Sir. What about the conditions?"

"Well, unless you want to discuss any more requests other than the ones we've talked about during the interview, we found that what you've asked is acceptable regarding your skills, and I requested to draw up the contract accordingly. Now that you're a faculty member call me Bob. Kay will send you your contract so you can review as such with your lawyer if everything is to your convenience. Of course, nothing is final yet, so you can still amend it. When do you think you would be able to join us?"

"Well, I have to wrap everything up here, and I hope to be with you at the latest towards the end of July so that I can get ready for the start of the Fall term."

"Don't worry, your courses will begin only for the winter term, but you'll be assigned to tutor some graduate students and help them for their fall dissertation proposal. Maybe if you could come by the end of the month at our faculty member meeting, it would be great."

"Sure, I'll be there."

"Okay, see you then."

"Thanks again Bob, I'm really thrilled." They then disconnected the line.

Wow. Change of life Semple. Time to find an apartment and ask her to move in together.

At the very moment he was picking the phone to call Rory, he saw that he had a new mail from Columbia. It was the first draft of his contract.

That was fast.
He decided to call Colin first instead.

"Hey man what's up?"

"Hi Colin, would you have time to have a look at a contract for me?"

"Sure, what contract?"

"I got the Columbia position."

"Wow, congratulations man! Send it to me, and I'll gladly run through it for you."

"Are you sure? If you don't have time, I can ask one of the family's lawyers."

"Are you kidding me? So, are you moving in with Rory?"

"I haven't told her yet; I just received the phone call and the contract immediately after so I called you first."

"You guys have talked about you moving in together in New York, right?"

"Well, we've never talked about me moving into her apartment per se, my position at Columbia was always referred to as hypothetical, you know I didn't want to jinx it."

"Jeez, I can't believe you two. You both are among the smartest people I know but when it comes to relationships, you're by far the dumbest. How come you never talked about it? What do you do when you see each other?"

"Erm, you know..."

Actually, he had thought of that moment a lot, he was just afraid of the answers to the questions he had in mind. What if the incredible connection they had every weekend was just due to the physical need they had accumulated during the week? What if the seeing each other on a daily basis will reveal her that it was just elaborated lust, not love? That he wasn't the man, she wanted to spend her life with? Because he didn't need to live with her to know that she was under his skin, that he couldn't be anywhere without her. No woman had had such effect on him, she was his life fuel, with her, he had wings, superpowers, he felt invincible.

Colin sighed, "I know you jump onto each other like rabbits, but you do breathe and eat from time to time, right? If what you two have is only physical release, why did you wait four years before getting back together? My grandfather always said that you never know when the rug might get pulled out from underneath you. So, just live your life and get what you want."

"Okay, stop lecturing me. You make it sounds as if it was easy and obvious. Remind me how long it took you to propose to Ms. Vanderbilt?"

"I never said it was easy, but as soon as I graduated from Law School, I moved in with her in the City, remember? Even though I had the bar exam, you've got to take the leap, Rob. Jeez, why are you so efficient at work and so slow in your personal life?"

"Because it's work, no emotional feelings involved, that I can do. Whenever she's concerned, I'm like a kid again, I have to learn everything. So, practically, I just move into her apartment? I mean, it's HER apartment, I would pay her rent?

"Gosh! I'll be damned if she'll ask you to pay her rent, but if you feel more comfortable, just say that
you'll move in with her until you two find a place that you'll both choose together."

"That I can do, have you thought about being a couple counselor? I'm calling her right now, and I'll let you know. I just forwarded you the contract. Thanks again bro, but Colin?"

The lawyer could sense what was coming next because he had the same questioning with himself in his head over and over.

"What if it doesn't work? What if she realized that I'm not the guy she wants to share her life with?"

Robert asked sheepishly.

Both men have been taught that they were powerful because they were coming from high society, but that wasn't of any use when you have to open your heart. It doesn't give any protection for heartbreak.

"It's a risk you have to take, man. I won't say it's easy, but I'm not sure you have an alternative here. Do you think it would be any better if you were not living together? Come on! Even I did it! Talk to her man, take these shadowy internal conversations out into the open and de-mystify them. And if it doesn't work, then at least you'll know, but Rob, I really doubt that she's going to kick you out."

"I know you're right, and I'm sure I want to be with her, I'm just scared that she'll figure out that I'm not the guy for her."

"You know, man, being a couple, we have first to know each other, so you two already had part of the job done. Even before you dated, you knew you were compatible. Then the work is to evolve in the same direction, and that's the tricky part. I guess that people split up when they're drifting apart. Go get her cowboy! Next time we see each other, I want you two to tell us that you two live under the same roof."

"Is that why it took you so long to propose to Steph?"

Colin chuckled.

"Yes and no. I'm a McCrae, they've been two generations of broken marriages. I want a real marriage, not a McCrae or a Huntzberger kind of marriage. I've avoided the Huntzberger one because I chose Steph, but I wanted to be sure I wouldn't mess up."

"Your father never really loved his wives, you do love Steph, that's the difference."

"You're probably right. Rob, don't worry too much. We're not doing that bad, at least we're trying hard to do our best, we can't be that wrong, can we?"

"You're right. Maybe we should have this kind of conversation with a higher alcohol level in our blood."

Colin chuckled.

"Quit stalling man and call her!"

Robert was undefended and vulnerable when it came to Rory, but he knew since they were back together that despite his old fears, this time he didn't need any security. He just had to admit to himself it was his destiny and there was no point in trying to shield himself. It was written that his place on earth was with her no matter what. It's not that all his old feelings had evaporated, it was just that since he had finally shared with her all his deepest secrets, his heart had lightened up and it was like the world had opened up to him. Hel felt strong, and everything felt possible. He wasn't still very
good at talking about their future together, but at least he was a little bit more confident, and he was working on not always letting her guess what was on his mind.

Rory couldn't help smiling reading the caller ID in her phone.

"Hey handsome, done with the final's papers?" Rory asked, always glad to hear her boyfriend.

"I've got the Columbia position."

"You did? Wow! It's wonderful, babe!" Rory squealed.

"They already sent me the contract, Colin will look at it, so now we have to find a place for both of us, what do you prefer Upper West Side, Village, Tribeca?"

"You're not moving in with me?"

"Uh...We've never really talked about it. Of course, maybe I could crash at your place instead of my parents. Are you fine with me moving in with you?"

"Of course, I am, idiot! Seriously, you've considered we living in the same city and going home in the evening in two separate spaces??"

"No, that's why I asked you where you would like us to live, but I didn't want to impose until we have a bigger place."

"I would like my home to be our home so that we are a completely us together, once and for all. We'll see right away if we need a bigger place then we'll figure out. I just can't believe we'll finally be in the same city! I was starting to get sick of the shuttle. I'm so happy!"

"I am too babe." That was easy "I can't believe that I will be able to wake up next to you every morning," he said sheepishly.

She was always surprised at his insecurities when it came to their relationship. He was generally so self-assured, and she loved that about him. She wondered if this lack of confidence was only related to her.

"Move your ass to my apartment as fast as you can Semple, or I'll promise I'll reconsider and find a new boyfriend."

"Wow! Okay! Don't get mad at me, you're scary."

But you're so sexy when you're bossy.

During the following weeks, every weekend he would leave some stuff and started to fill his drawers. In the meantime, he was using the dining room table as a desk and it became clear to Rory that they had to find a way to fit a desk somewhere for him.

That evening, she saw him take out of his messenger bag a box of condoms and put them on the nightstand drawer. Since they were together, he always had taken care of that, making sure they would always be fully equipped.

"I just still can't believe that very soon I'll get to kiss you every day whenever I want, just because I can." He said seating next to her and pulling her to him to kiss her temple.

"Robbie, as we're starting a new episode in our story, maybe we can change something else?"
Robert raised an eyebrow.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Maybe we could stop using condoms?"

"You want to have a baby??"

"One day sure, of course not right away, just stop using rubbers. We're exclusive, aren't we?

"Sure of course, you're aware that your shots are not 100% sure, aren't you?"

She nodded. "If you're willing to take the risk, I am."

"Don't you want us to be tested first?" Robert didn't know if he was more excited to make love to her without condoms or that she had thought about having a family with him.

"You do? I know I'm okay, I asked to be tested when I've been prescribed the shots"

He smiled, she was always thinking ahead.

"Actually, I got tested for the new insurance from Columbia so I know I'm clean, we can stop giving money to Durex right now."

Robert smiled and welcomed her into his arms, letting her rest her head on his chest, his hand absentmindedly going to stroke her smooth hair. She never ceased to amaze him.

"Mmh, does it also mean that you have thought about us possibly having a family together?"

She nodded but not daring to look at him. He grinned. He did too, just never muster the courage to talk to her about it, too afraid to scare her away. He could see themselves with two kids, a boy and a girl just as beautiful as her mother.

"And may I ask when you see it happening?"

"Whenever we'll be ready?"

He laughed and pulled her chin to be able to look into her eyes.

"Don't worry, I thought of it too. We'll know it, don't you think? Just like you knew when to come to get my stupid self."

She kissed him and let the warmth of his arms around her invade her body. How did he know to always have the perfect answer?

"Robbie, I love you. You're everything I hope you would be."

"You know, there's one thing that I'm going to miss."

He rested his forehead on hers.

"That at the end of every weekend when you kiss me and leave, you would immediately come back and kiss me again."

A/N: Keep the comments and votes coming, I'm on a good writing streak.
Logan pulled the chair out for Rory and sat watching her squirming uncomfortably, under his gaze. A few hours earlier, they had both run into each other in the hallway of Mairisch-Verlag, a German publishing house. Rory was there with a colleague to negotiate the translation and publication of two of her author’s. After a few minutes, they had recovered from the surprise of their unexpected encounter and decided to meet for dinner. On his way to Rory’s hotel, it dawned Logan that it had been exactly seven years since her graduation and that since then, they never had been the two of them by themselves.

“Ace, do you want me to call Robert to see if he's fine with us having dinner together?” Logan asked.

“No need to bother him, he’s at Columbia this afternoon. I can behave myself around you,” she smirked.

“Sadly, I know you can, besides I’m engaged now.”

“You’re engaged? Like going to be married engaged?” Rory asked stunned.

He nodded. “Just like Colin and Steph engaged.”

“I thought you guys wanted to take it slow? Staying under the radar. It’s Odette, right?”

“We did, but I got pressure from my father, he thinks that it’s the best way to keep Hughes from taking over Huntzberger Media.”

“I didn’t know Hughes company was that powerful.”

Rory tried to catch Logan’s gaze, she used to be able to read him.

"It's one of the big five publishers who dominate the world. Odette and I were doing just fine until my dad came along. Now, it's like we're turtles, we're hiding inside our shell and wait for the storm to stop. She's avoiding me, maybe not on purpose, but she's back in Paris now and whenever she comes back, she goes straight to Oxford."

Rory could see that Logan was hurting. Once again, his father was messing with his life and he was torn between his family duties and his love life.

“What does Odette think of the situation?” Rory carefully asked. She had bonded with the French girl during the few summer days they had spent in Lourmarin. She relished the witty girl, with an incredible sense of humor, how they both shared a passion for Jane Austen and a similar taste in men.

Logan had found in Odette an understanding that others did not - could not - comprehend. They were both living their own personal battle against a faceless enemy, their family obligations. From the outside they were beautiful and rich, people couldn't see their wounds, but they both had deep scars. That's how they had found each other, each of them could comprehend the other. They were living in the same world, they both knew what their positions entailed. Odette didn't have direct pressure, anybody would understand if she wouldn’t work in her father’s company, but everywhere she was going she was the daughter of Hughes and Anne de Valmy, the media Mogul and the philosopher. Now that her brother was gone, there was an unspoken expectation that her love for literature, her Ph.D., her blood would lead her to the family business at some point.
"To be honest, I don't know. I'm not even sure if we're together anymore, even if officially, we're dating."

"Oh! Logan, why do you let your father meddle in your life?" Rory asked deeply concerned for them.

Odette and Logan were self-preserving each other, that was their kind of love. Together, the social conventions they had to live through were much bearable. In her world, she had noticed that the couples that last, like her parents or the Semptes, were the one where the individuals were complementary to each other. One was messy, the other one tidy, one was talkative the other a listener, one was outgoing, the other low key. If it was indeed the rule, then she and Logan wouldn't work. They were both lost in a world with too many requirements; due to their families. She never talked about what happened after Antoine was gone. Her parents were too broken, in particular, her mother and Nicolas and Robert were both on the other side of the pond now. She'd witnessed them throw themselves into their work, so she tried to do the same. The first months with Logan were blissful when no one knew they were an item. But now that it had been decided to build the biggest media conglomerate, Mitchum had come out with the idea of this union and she couldn't decipher what was business from what is real anymore.

"You know Ace, it's not that simple. Hughes' company is expanding fast, and on our side, I still need some more time to convert to digital media. We didn't think he could be a threat as his first plan was only magazine publishing in the States. He is a board member of Huntzberger Media and has been for almost a year now, and he owns a lot of shares. But everything is going so well for him, he's starting to look into the news business too. Mitchum is afraid to lose Huntzberger Media to Hughes so he thinks that if I marry Odette, her father won't overtake the company or at least just do a merger and keep me in it."

Rory didn’t know what to say and just put her hand gently on his. He tried to smile.

"I do like her very much you know, in my own way. I'm not seeing any other women, she’s the only one in my life since we started our thing. It's just that we're not ready for this dynastic plans. I'm afraid she'll back out and I'll lose her."

"Does Robert know about that?"

Logan shook his head.

"I don’t think he does, because he would kill me if he knew she was hurting. I promised him I wouldn't harm her."

"But you didn't, your father is."

"But I’m letting him, just like I couldn’t protect you from him."

"I'm fine Logan, we were kids and we've moved on. We talked about it all at the Vineyard. You should think about you and Odette now. Don't be scared of falling in love again, you're a very brave man so if I could do it, I'm sure you can."

"You know the irony of the situation? It's even worse for Odette, she's from old French nobility. Part of her family thinks than marrying an American is beneath them. In the prenup, it had been asked that our future children would be wearing her name too, so that they wouldn’t lose the name as Hughes only has sisters."

Mitchum was the one begging, but it was Logan who had to swallow his pride. Nevertheless, if he
succeeded, Shira will be bragging that her precious son would enter an old European family.

“Hughes is asking for that?”

“No, his father. He still owns the majority of the shares even though he’s not officially doing business anymore.”

“So, when will it be official?”

“Soon, shortly after the prenup negotiations.”

Rory shook her head, she felt bad for Logan and Odette.

"And what do Hughes and Anne think about the situation?"

“They seem happy, they think I’m a good guy because I was dubbed so by Robert Semple.”

“Logan, you have to woo her back to you, I know you can do it. Don’t let your father mess with your life anymore. She’s just a wounded little animal, but last summer, there was definitely something nice and real between you two. Show her that she’s not a business deal for you, let her see the trustworthy man that you are.”

"You know I'm not."

Rory was surprised and stared at him to search for an explanation.

"Don't look at me like this Ace, yes, I finally learned my lesson, I made a huge mistake."

"Quit beating yourself, I also could have called you. You're smart Logan, you never make the same mistake twice."

“This conversation is getting too heavy for me, what about you two? When is the Semple heir moving in with you?”

“Robert is not the Semple heir, his brother and his sister are.”

"Of course, he is, in his family all the siblings play a role. Of course, he's not bearing the entire company on his shoulders and Nathalie and Charles are working in the company but still, even if he rarely attends, he's a Semple Brothers board member."

“I never realized that."

“He never talks about it, because he considers that his brother and his sister are handling things, but if anything happens he could be sucked into the family business.”

“God! I hope not, I’m sure he would be miserable.”

"You know, our families’ duties are the reason we became friends at Yale. We could talk about it together. How are you getting along with the Semples?"

“Very good actually, we were at the Semple games last weekend, and I really had the time of my life.”

Rory smiled at the eccentric relaxing days she had spent with Robert’s family.

"I don't know for how long they have been doing that, but I think they changed the rules after we
attended it freshman year."

"You went to the Semple Games?"

"Who would miss that? Finn, Colin and I tagged along with Robert that year, and we had the most memorable paintball game. But after that, each Semple family member was only allowed a plus one. I think Finn went again once. You should have seen Henri as the team Captain, that man knows how to have fun! Have the Semples met Lorelai yet?"

"No, but Robert and I planned it for Christmas."

"I wouldn't be worried, I'm sure Lorelai will love them."

"Not that sure, you know her problem with wealthy people."

"She'll come around, they're not regular rich people, they don't show off, they have a regular way of life and an extraordinary sense of humor."

"That they do. I really like them."

"Rory, Lorelai will always be your mother, but you're not a teenager anymore, you're supposed to make your own choices, your mistakes, have your own life. Don't allow her shit-ass judgmental attitude to cloud your mind. You can't take on her issues. She still thinks that we're selfish trust-fund kids unworthy of you? Yet, you've chosen another one of us. Indeed, we're over-privileged guys, but I think that all of us have now proven ourselves professionally. You know us better than anyone. How are things going between you and Robert?"

"What do you mean?" Rory raised an eyebrow curious to understand what her ex-boyfriend meant.

"Are you happy?"

"Very, why are you asking? Did he say anything?"

"The guy can't stop bragging that you're the best thing that ever happened to him. It's kind of annoying, he can't talk about anything else. I would have thought that a freshly nominated Columbia professor would have a little more conversation."

Rory blushed. It was nice to hear that he was reciprocating her feelings. She relished how they were bonding together in every aspect of their life. She felt alive with him, hypersensitive to him, her brain was constantly on full alert with him. She loved his complexity, his intelligence, his sense of humor, his loyalty and of course, his butt.

"Can I give you some advice?" Logan asked. Rory lifted her eyebrows.

"Cut him some slack when he wants to treat you right."

"What do you mean?" Rory wondered.

"When he wants to spoil you, take care of you, or have a housekeeper, just appreciate the gesture and be happy, don't come up with "I can afford it, I want to share, or it's not the right way of life". He was raised to please the woman he loves like that, just like I was. He doesn't expect you to become a trophy wife, he's very proud of what you've accomplished. He knows you're not with him for his money or his family, and if it's possible, he loves you even more for that, but that doesn't mean he cannot use it for you, right? What is money for if we can't use it? You know, he also donates a lot to charities."
“Did he complain to you?”

“No, absolutely not, but I know how much of a pain in the ass you can be when it comes to that. You clearly have issues with allowing someone else to take care of you because you think that you could lose your independence. It might not sound feminist, but it’s already a part of what we are, it doesn’t mean that we think less of a woman. Maybe we need that for our self-confidence because women are better than us?”

“It’s not only the money. I don’t want people to think that I got my position because of who I’m dating.”

“That could have been true for us because you were fresh out of college, but now you already have a good position as an editor, and Robert or his family have nothing to do with it. It can be the other way around though, people could say that Robert used you because his book is edited by Rodham.”

“You know that’s not true, they asked him before we were together.”

“I know that, but most of the people don’t, and it doesn’t bother Robert, why should it bother you the other way around?”

“You're probably right. I'll think about it. But Logan, why are you telling me all this? Are you sure Robert didn’t say anything to you?”

“No absolutely not, but I wanted to make it up to him and you. Do something nice.”

"To make it up to us?" Rory furrowed her eyebrows.

“I feel bad, I know that after the Martha’s Vineyard weekend you two didn’t get back together because I was hurting.”

Rory was completely dumbstruck.

“I feel that I owe that to Robert. He has been nothing but a loyal friend to me, and still, I was a jealous prick.”

“What made this sudden turnaround?”

“I was planning to say something when you two got back together. Actually, Colin talked to me because he was tired to see Robert pining for you.”

“But we got back together more than a year ago.”

“Yes, I know. But… You know I’m bad at losing. It took me that long to accept that I lost you for good and that Robert won. It was tougher than to lose a poker game. Do you remember how hard it was for me at Finn’s birthday party? We were not even exclusive. I know how insane it sounds, and how actually the guy is nothing but loyal to our friendship. Then again, he told me this time almost right away, so I wouldn’t hear it from someone else that you two were back together, and it hurt so bad. I told him I was good, even though I wasn’t, but I knew that otherwise Colin and Finn would never have forgiven me.”

“So… Why now?”

“Because I finally got my senses back. I'm truly happy that you two are getting along. I want to make sure that you know that he's the one for you, despite my insane jealousy and inability to lose to him.”
Rory had tears coming to her eyes.

“It means a lot to me coming from you, and I sincerely hope that you'll find a way to build something with Odette. You know, when looking back, these four years apart are maybe what we needed to appreciate what we have now. Time can do wonders.”

On the plane back to New-York, Rory thought a lot about her talk with Logan. She always thought that her life rules were the perfect way to become an adult woman and bending them was always out of the question. But how had that worked for her up to now? She absolutely had no doubt that Robert was her one true love. After all these years, she’d realized that Shira was right, as much as she had loved Logan, she wasn’t the right wife for him. Not that she couldn't handle social events or the DAR, just that she wasn't willing to do it all her life, it just wasn’t her. One thing was sure. Her feelings for Logan were long gone and this was felt reciprocally. It will make things easier for the future. Robert will be able to feel that and maybe be less insecure about their relationship.

A/N: Thank you so much for your kudos and comments. I’d love to know what you think Logan should do.
Finding a home.

Rory felt the bed empty beside her and glanced at the clock. She grabbed his shirt that she had tossed on the floor the evening before and padded to the living room. He was in his boxers, typing on his laptop set on the dining table surrounded by sticky notes, piles of papers, and books. She always had been amazed by how focused he could be when he was working. She gently put her hand on his shoulder and kissed his temple.

“Why aren’t you sleeping? It’s three in the morning.”

“The right angle finally popped into my mind and I had to write it down before I forgot. Sorry babe, did I wake you?”

“No, it’s too hot, I felt thirsty,” she answered taking a bottle of water out of the fridge. “You’re right, we have to find another place to live, you need a study to work at home otherwise you’ll never come back in the evening.”

He raised his gaze at her. She was rubbing her eyes with the back of her hand, looking irresistible just clad in his shirt the hem just skimming the curve of her butt. He wondered why his clothes fitted her so nicely. She had a point, she was too much of a temptation for him to focus on his work.

In order to diversify his assets, his financial advisor had suggested him to buy an apartment in New-York since he was going to stay in the city. Therefore, he had suggested that if Rory didn’t want to move out, he’ll buy something by himself and rent it, but that they could also think about someplace bigger with a guest room. Anyway, he was much too busy at the moment to think about real estate investment.

“Can we keep this conversation for the day? I’d like to finish this so I can come back to bed with you.”

“You do that, but we won’t need to discuss that matter, just call the realtor Nathalie talked about. I’ll sale my apartment to cover my half.”

She winked at him then turned back to the bedroom. Just like that, she’d settled the situation. He shook his head and looked at his computer screen. Why bother arguing with her, he’ll do what she said, finish his paragraph and let the realtor do the job she’ll be paid for, so he can ravish his girlfriend. With the moving, the finals, the book and his new job, he needed to sort his priorities.

A week later they had their Saturday morning booked to visit different propositions that could match their requirements: a patio, a minimum of 2 bedrooms, a study and an appropriate wine cellar. They’d considered Tribeca, the Village, Chelsea or a townhouse not far from Central Park where they could go for a run. Staying in the Upper East Side would mean to be close to Colin and Steph, and Robert’s parents. The first meeting was for a condo in a Tribeca red brick recent construction. When they arrived in front of the building, a guy was exiting the front door and looked at Rory surprised.

“Rory? Are you coming to see me?”

Robert stared at Rory then at the bloke.

“Hi, Peter! We’re visiting an apartment in this building with my boyfriend. Robert Semple, this is Peter Avery he works with Colin.” Robert shook his hand wondering if this was the guy Rory had a one-night stand with. He only knew he was someone from Latham & Watkins.
“Nice to meet you.”

Peter felt the awkwardness.

“I guess it’s the apartment with the roof patio. It’s really amazing. It would be great to have you as neighbors. So, see you soon?”

*Keep dreaming asshole there’s no way you’re gonna be around her any time soon.*

“Sure, we’re already late,” Rory smiled and walked inside pulling Robert by his hand. He wondered if he should already ask to move to the next visit. She glanced at him and understood right away that he’d connected the dots. When they got in the elevator she leaned and kissed him softly. The elevator door opened to find a well-dressed, perfectly-coiffed blond woman with a fake grin.

“Good morning Robert, nice to put a face on a voice.”

“Hi! Christine,” he answered cheerfully.

Rory was taken aback, she wasn’t expecting a 30-year-old model who was eating her boyfriend alive just by gazing at him.

“Rory, this is Christine Baron, she was highly referred to us by Nathalie.”

“So glad to meet you!” The blonde said with a high pitch voice that wrecked Rory’s ears.

“According to Nat, Christine is one of best realtors in the city. She can negotiate like no one else.” Robert said warmly. He had been used to women openly hitting on him once they knew how much he was worth, and even if it could have been fun some years ago, he never paid attention anymore.

"You’re too kind, I’m doing mostly corporate transactions, but for a Semple well…” she said looking straight in his eyes. “By the way, I just got a unique opportunity that will only in the market next Monday, I know it’s in the top range of your budget but you’re the ideal couple for that, it’s a three bedrooms 4,300 square feet duplex apartment in River House. There’s no patio but it’s very rare, the co-op is quite difficult but your credentials are unbeatable.

Rory noticed Christine touching Robert’s arms, how she leaned in close to him and ignored her presence. She frowned her eyebrows.

“I don’t think this apartment is what we’re looking for, maybe we should move straight to visit the townhouse in the Upper East Side.” Rory blurted out of nowhere.

Robert and Christine turned to stare at Rory taken aback. He smirked. *Is she jealous of Christine? It’s nice that I’m not alone in this feeling.*

“What about the River House apartment, are you guys interested? You know it has its own clubhouse with a swimming pool, tennis and squash courts, a screening room, a spa and a wine cellar?” Robert looked at Rory and recognized her upset demeanor and knew he had to take the lead before she burst and ate Christine alive.

“Thanks, Christine, we’ll pass on the River House, maybe a little too lavish for us though it’s a beautiful building.”

“Okay, so let’s go. I have a car waiting downstairs. We’ll have to move fast for the upper east side townhouse, it’s a gem.”
In the car, Christine briefed them through the characteristics of the house who had a spectacular, lushly vegetated roof terrace, four bedrooms, and bathrooms. When they arrived, she let them roam around it and they immediately fell in love with it. The particular feature that made their mind wasn’t even the amazing patio, but the two studies with each had an entire oak built-in bookcase wall and the hardwood floor. They already saw each other working from home. After a thorough visit, their minds were made up. They stopped their tour in the kitchen which was bigger than Rory’s living room. She watched Robert looking at the built-in wine cellar.

“So, Robbie, do you see yourself cooking in this?”

She saw him smirked and felt the need to straighten his mind.

“You know that no matter how good the kitchen looks, my cooking skills won’t likely improve much, don’t you?”

“I know, I never counted on that. I can do the cooking, I like it. I know I just have to make sure that we have the right coffee maker to have you in the kitchen.”

They saw the blonde popped her head.

“It looks really good Christine. I think this is at the top of our list,” Robert said.

“I know the Upper East Side is not the most convenient to go to Columbia, but if you guys plan to raise a family, it’s still the best neighborhood for schools. So, I’ve also got another townhouse on the upper west side, do you want to see it?”

“I don’t think it will be necessary, I feel really good in this one. I doubt anything can beat it. What do you think Robert?”

“I can just ride or run through Central Park to go to work.”

They looked at each other and he could see right away that they both wanted the house. “Okay Christine, we would like to put in a bid on this one.”

“Sure guys, I’m on it, I let you know ASAP.”

They left Christine in the room speed dialing and stalled a little in front of the house. Rory snaked her arms around Robert.

“Maybe it’s a bit too much just for the two of us, but I think it’s a good choice,” she stated smiling.

“I have to admit, I’m kind of surprised that you didn’t argue with me regarding the price of the house,” Robert replied.

Rory pondered if she could share the talk that she had with Logan.

“I guess that we’re at a point where I have to come clean with you.”

“Rory, you’re scaring me, don’t tell me you had another talk about living in sin with your grandmother.”

She shook her head.

“When I met with Logan in Hamburg he kind of lectured me about... How I can make it hard when it comes to money and especially when I was with him.”
“He did?”

“Well, he tried to convince me that I should cut you some slack on that matter.”

Robert stared at her in disbelief.

“So, I have to thank Logan for soothing our relationship?”

“He said it was his way to make amends for the four years we were apart and that he owed you that regarding your loyalty.”

“Huh!” Robert pursed his lips and nodded.

He had to admit that lately, Logan was full of surprises. When Rory came back from Germany and told him about the situation, he was worried for Odette and his Yale friend. He tried in vain to reach his childhood crush and decided to ask Hughes as Anne wasn’t answering either.

“Robert, can I ask you a question about Logan?”

“Sure, Hughes”

“Can I trust him?”

“What do you mean?”

“I know he’s your friend, but right now our media division is negotiating with Amazon and it’s not going well. Logan came to me with an intel and suggested to me a way get out of this. The problem is that his solution is risky. He’s still the Huntzberger Media heir, so whom is he working for here?”

“Yet, you’re arranging a marriage with him and your daughter, your only child.”

“Oh, you know? Did Odette tell you anything?”

“No Logan talked to Rory, they met in Hamburg. I was actually calling you because Odette is not answering her phone.”

“She’s with Anne in Lourmarin, that’s where they’re hiding. Call the landline because they both turned off their cells.”

“Can I ask you why you did that to her? You among all people, why are you doing that to Odette?”

“I don’t see the problem, they were dating and to what I could see, they looked happy, for now, it’s just an engagement, she can still pull out of it. I thought they liked each other and when Mitchum suggested it, I thought it was a good thing to pull him off of my back. I don’t like him very much. Henri warned me before I started to do business with him, but I thought that if we kept it just at the business level it would be fine”

“And yet you gave your daughter’s hand to him.”

“Not to Mitchum, to Logan, I thought he was a nice kid, but to tell you the truth I got pressure from my father.”

Robert sighed. He still couldn’t get why Hughes agreed to that, he who when younger, had to fight his family to be able to marry Anne.

“Logan is a good guy Hughes, but Mitchum treats him like his puppet. Do you know how we call
him? The Dark Lord.”

“So, do you think I can trust Logan?”

“I’ve never done any business with him, or with anyone else. I just know that he wouldn’t do anything to hurt Odette on purpose. I would suggest you talk to him frankly, he respects you. He made a big mistake business wise when he started working for Huntzberger Media, that’s how he got out of Mitchum’s claws, but the Dark Lord lured him back in playing the family card once he saw how Logan was doing well. If he can see a way out again, maybe he can turn his back to his father again.”

# # #

“Ready Ms. Gilmore?”

She raised her head and beamed at Robert. He had been in Boston for a few days trying to wrap up everything. They had decided that he would pick her up at her office after his monthly meeting with Lilian.

“How did it go?” she asked while grabbing her purse.

“Great, Lilian is very satisfied with my work and we’re still on schedule. I almost don’t feel any pressure.”

“Don’t brag Semple, it’s not becoming.”

She kissed him chastely and he put his hand on the small of her back, to guide her to the elevator. He had picked up the keys of their house at Christine’s office on his way from the airport to Rodham. In the subway, they were fidgeting, holding hands like two teenagers about to be able to have some alone time.

“Aubrey told me the painters will start tomorrow which means, Ms. Gilmore that in the meantime you have time to pack your stuff. I booked the movers for you next Friday. My stuff will arrive from Boston the following Tuesday. The bad news is that next week I’ll be mostly in Boston so I’m sorry I won’t be able to help you much. I need to have as much work done as possible with my graduate students before I leave and we’re wrapping up two papers.”

“It’s fine, I’ll ask the girls to help me. This is going so fast, I can’t believe we’re moving to our new house so quickly. How did you manage that?”

“I didn’t do anything; cash purchase makes thing a lot easier and lawyers love that. Real estate in Manhattan is just crazy, you sold your apartment the very day it was on the market. Is it fine that I’ll leave with you with Aubrey to deal with the interior design? She knows me better than I do, so I’m sure it’ll be much more efficient”.

Rory smirked.

“Very nice way to put that you don’t want to take care of this part of things, but I think it’s just fair, you dealt with the realtor and the lawyer.”

He kissed her before they got out of the subway. She marveled at the touch of his lips, how they turned her on and soothed her all at the same time.

He turned the key, opened the door to let her in when suddenly he changed his mind.
“Wait!”

She gazed at him wondering what was wrong when he slept his arms behind her thighs and back and swept her bridal style to step in.

“Isn’t it a custom for newlyweds?” She giggled.

“It’s our new home as a couple so I consider it’s the equivalent.”

The house was still empty, but the evening summer lighting was gorgeous on the walls. Rory spotted an inverted crate in the middle of the living room with candles, wine glasses and a Champagne bottle in an ice bucket.

“When did you do that?”

“Just before I got to Rodham, I had everything prepared last week at my parent’s. Should I open it?” He asked a huge grin spreading on his face.

She nodded beaming at the most thoughtful boyfriend when they heard the doorbell. She gave a quizzical look.

“Can you open the door while I’m taking care of the drinks?”

She smirked wondering what the next surprise was. At the door, she found a delivery boy with a huge pizza box.

“Pizza for Semple?”

She tipped the guy and came back to find Robert handing her a Champagne glass.

“I know it’s not the perfect pairing but it’s the best I could manage on such short notice.”

“It’s absolutely perfect Robbie, I couldn’t dream of anything better for our first day in our new home.”

They sat on the floor their back on the wall beaming widely. She slipped off her sandals and leaned her head on his shoulder.

“So, did you finally talk to Odette?”

“Nope because she was in Aix for the day with Anne, but I had a chat with Jeanne who told me the situation was not that bad because she’s smiling again, even though she still doesn’t take his calls. Jeanne thinks that there’s some progress because she beams when he calls and every day she gets a new present.”

Robert felt relieved. He was afraid that Odette would have gone back to heavy brooding just like the year after her brother’s death. At that period, he wasn’t able to help her, but now, maybe he could be more helpful.

“Oh! Same old Logan style. How did he know where she was, did you tell him?”

“Technically, Colin did. As he’s handling the prenup, it didn’t seem unlikely that he could have the intel.”

“Oh, you’re meddling!”
“Just a little, but he needs it, there’s something much bigger than this bull shit dynastic plan.”

“What are you talking about?”

“He called me, he wanted to keep me posted, our man has a big plan.”

Rory stared at Robert waiting

“He’s trying to prove Hughes that’s he can be a worthy man by helping him against Amazon. This way he hopes that Odette won’t see the dynastic plan anymore, that she would see that he’s doing that to woo her back. Because the problem is now she thinks that he wants her only for her money. Ironic isn’t it?”

“Do you think it will work out?”

“With Odette or his work plan?”

“Both.”

“His work plan is brilliant. For Odette I don’t know, they both have to allow themselves to free their feelings, acknowledge that there’s something between them. Only they can figure it out.”

While she was listening to him she was absentmindedly stroking his thigh which reminded him that he had a last surprise for her in the house.

“I took the liberty to buy the first piece of furniture for our new home, do you want to see it?”

She lifted an eyebrow and wondered what would it be? She knew that the furniture of both their apartment could largely fit in the house, but what could they need more? He took her hand and pulled her upstairs to their future bedroom and opened the door.

"I pondered for a while and I finally sprung for the king," he said grinning widely before tugging her in the room feeling resistance from her, stopped in her tracks by the beautiful grey and white linen sheets on a huge bed. He tried in vain to decipher what she was thinking, he knew she wasn’t that much a fan of surprises.

“It’s fine if you don’t like it, don’t try to spare my feelings, we can always move it to another room and chose another one together.”

"A king-sized bed?" was all she could mutter.

"I know you like being close to me,” he winked at her impishly, “but look at the bright side, we could use the space to move around a little."

She had trouble containing her smile. She finally closed the space between them and snake her arms around him to put a peck on his lips.

"Should we break it in?" She said patting the sheets.

A/N: Thanks again for your kudos and comments. They helped me to figure out how Logan will manage to get out of the dynastic plan. I'm not sure though that I'll add it to this story which is already way too long. Maybe I'll add it in a one-shot sequel? Tell me what you think.
“You’re already in your new house? That was fast! Luke and I could have helped you to move, why didn’t you ask for our help?” Lorelai inquired surprised.

As her mother was quite busy because of the summer season, it took her time to be able to talk to her.

“It’s fine mom, the girls helped me packed and I had movers, it was very fast. You can come anytime, we have guestrooms now so you can stay and we can plan a shopping day. It’s been such a long time we haven’t done that.”

“Sure hon, I’ll see what I can do with my schedule.”

Rory couldn’t say she was taken aback by her mother reaction, but she still sometimes missed their old dynamic, their movie nights, their endless banter.

“So, last month you were moving in together and now you’re buying a huge house. That implies another level of relationship permanency to me. It’s a long-term decision, the kind that people who are thinking about marriage make. Moreover, you didn’t tell me the price but I’m sure he’s putting in more money than you do, so how much of the house do you legally own?”

“Mom, is that your way to tell me that you still disapprove of our relationship? Robert just had money to invest and he thought to buy a townhouse in Manhattan was a good investment for us. You’re right, he put more money but he made sure that we’re equal owners.”

“Hon, I see that you two are in love, I’m just worried about the way you’re doing things. Did it dawn on you how many salaries can be out of it?”

“Are you trying to make me feel guilty because we have money?”

“Money he didn’t earn.”

Rory groaned, her mother was so frustrating.

“He does earn money from his job and that’s why he doesn’t use his trust fund, just like me. The money that’s in it comes from his family that is not the mafia, they invest so that tech companies can be created and these companies hire a lot of people. You know, having money doesn’t make people bad. Just so you know, he used his money to fund a fellowship for underprivileged kids to go to college and now that he’s back in New-York, he’ll be teaching and tutoring for his mother’s foundation.”

“Okay, he’s a saint.”

Rory rolled her eyes to her mother sarcasm. She was wondering if they were not reproducing the relationship her mother had with her grandmother. What was her mother afraid of? That she could turn into a brainless socialite just by living with Robert?

“Mom, I thought that you liked Robert, that all this crap was over.”

“I do like him, and I can see that he’ll do anything to make you happy.”

Rory couldn’t understand why her mother was still so judgmental about anything Robert was doing.
Was she jealous of the influence he had on her?

“So why are you giving me a hard time with the house? Mom, he’s good for me, he’s always there for me, he helps me put things into perspective, I don’t think there’s a better man for me out there. Didn’t you used to tell me that I would choose my own path in life?”

“T’m sorry hon, you’re right. I did say that. I’m just trying to make sure you’ve considered every aspect. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings, you know that, right?”

Rory could hear that every word seemed to be an effort for her mother, but at least she was trying.

“I’m just worried for you,” Lorelai finished.

“Mom, I don’t think I’ll have another boyfriend anytime soon, so you’d better get used to him.”

“I’ll do my best, hon.”

# # #

As he closed the door after his parents, Robert couldn’t help feeling happy for Rory. They had thrown a housewarming party and even if Lorelai and Luke didn’t stay long, they were there and he could see his girlfriend’s relief. They hadn’t met Henri and Lydia though, because the Semples arrived late due to a previous engagement. He had watched her all evening and nevertheless caught a glimpse of sadness in her eyes, despite all their friends had managed to come. Only Logan couldn’t make it but he had called them.

Not long after midnight, Rory looked at the room and only their Yale friends were still there slouched on the couches. She smirked and thought they were getting old. She put her hand on Robert’s shoulder who was slumped on the floor, his back on the sofa. He pulled her hand to his lips which made her slid down and rested her back on him. He immediately snaked a protective arm around her, intertwined the fingers of his other hand with hers and kissed her temple.

“Hey guys, I know it’s kind of early to talk about New Year’s Eve but as the gang is almost all here I wanted to be sure that you would all manage to come to the Vanderbilt party this year, wouldn’t it be great?” Steph asked.

“No! No society parties!” They almost all yelled.

“But why? You guys used to come every year when we were at Yale, it used to be fun. Colin is still coming,” Steph pouted.

“Because he doesn’t want to be kicked out of your bed,” Finn smirked.

“Seriously, we used to come when we were under-aged just to avoid to be carded, and for free booze and good food,” Robert said.

“And hot chicks with low cleavage,” Finn needed to add.

“There are still all of that,” Steph confirmed.

“I love you Steph, but you know that I only go to work functions, and that’s already a lot during the holidays season, anyway, I already have something planned for us this year,” Robert reluctantly said.

“You have?” Rory picked up immediately.

“Yes, but I won’t say anything even under duress, you’ll get the information when needed,” he
whispered in her ear.

Rory just beamed and snuggled a little more to have a little shot of *Habit Rouge*. Over the years, she had become addicted to his scent.

“Have anyone of you wondered if we would still be in touch when we’ll be like forty?” Rory asked with everyone staring at her with knitted eyebrows.

“Where does this question come from, babe?” Robert asked.

“Well, I watched “The Big Chill” the other night and I wondered if we could be like them, you know, friends from college, scattered everywhere and then catch up when one of them commit suicide. Of course, I hope that none of us would die.”

“Thanks, Rory,” Colin chuckled.

“Well many of us are now in the city, so I don’t see why we would stop seeing each other,” said Rosemary.

“It’s true but Finn is in Boston now, Logan in London, Juliet in Seattle, Paris, and Doyle in Baltimore.”

“Yeah, but we’re already breeding into the group Colin with Steph, Paris and Doyle, Robert and Rory, we can’t all be apart in ten years, right?” Finn stated.

They all laughed wholeheartedly.

“Hope not, it took me too long to get her,” Robert smirked.

Rory pecked him on the cheek, “don’t worry babe, I’ll be sticking to you for good.”

“Woooooh! Robert and Rory are in loooooooove!” Colin and Finn cooed.

“Seriously Rory, even if we don’t see each other as much as we used to do, that doesn’t erase the bond that we have, don’t you think? I’m the one that sees you all the less but I’m always happy when I get news from you all. Thank you, social media,” Juliet remarked.

“So, we’ve established that Juliet would come to all our funerals, but in which house will we have the party?” Finn asked.

“Steph and Colin’s!!!!!” Rose and Juliet shouted.

“Why??” Colin asked.

“Because Steph is the best party planner ever!” The girls all answered in chorus.

“If I remember the movie correctly, one of the girls wants to have a baby and had to choose one of the guys to be the genitor, so girls tell us who do you think would be the best genitor among us?” asked Finn.

“Well, Doyle has already proven that he could generate a marvelous baby,” Paris said surprising everyone.

“Hey! that doesn’t mean that we won’t be able to do it as well,” Colin said pouting.

“Hon, I wouldn’t choose anyone but you to be the father of my child, but I think that our parents
will kill us if we had a child out of wedlock, especially my mother,” Steph said softly to Colin.

“Hear that Colin?” Finn said. “Abstinence before marriage, you wouldn’t want our lovely Stephanie to go to the altar with a round belly.”

“You know science invented contraception, Finn. We’re very careful,” Colin shrugged.

“I’m very disappointed ladies, I would have thought that you would jump on the occasion to choose me. First, you would be able to outbreed with my wonderful Australian genes and last but not least, have the opportunity to experiment with my amazing skills in lovemaking,” Finn declared very seriously.

“Oh! Finn, sure we wouldn’t want to miss that,” Juliet said shaking her head, giggling.

“Okay guys I’m really exhausted, so you’re all welcome to use the guestrooms if you don’t feel like leaving but I’m gonna hit the hay. See you all for brunch tomorrow?” Rory said yawning.

“Sure, good night Rory, I think I’ll stay and share a room with Juliet if you don’t mind as Ray is in Dallas, so we can catch up,” Rosemary asked.

“Of course, you’re very welcome.”

“Finn, you still remember where’s your room, right?”

“Of course, Love, sweet dreams.”

“Colin, are we leaving?” Steph inquired.

Colin pouted. He wanted to stay with Finn and Robert but he knew there wasn’t any room left.

“What if I take you home and then I come back?” Colin tried.

“If the girls are OK, I’ll share their room and you take a couch or share Finn’s bed. How does that sound to you?”

“Yerk! I’ll share my bed with him only if he doesn’t sleep naked,” Finn joked.

“Love you, babe, you’re the best.” Colin kissed Steph and poured himself some more scotch. “So, where were we?”

“You missed me that much huh?” Finn smirked.

“We all missed you,” Robert said. Even if he couldn’t be happier to be living with Rory, he was nostalgic for the time he was in Boston with Finn.

“Doyle!!” Paris shouted.

“Okay I leave you guys, I think you need some bro time,” Doyle said while the guys were smirking.

“Good night man!”

“Can we go back to the conversation?” asked Robert.

Colin and Finn stared at him confused.

“What about? The Big Chill?”
“Yep, in the movie two of the characters who were dating in college decide to get back together again. Do you think Rory could go back to Logan?”

“Geez, bro! You cannot seriously think that?? You have to stop flapping about that. They’re over for years now, she loves you, he’s your friend!” Colin said glaring angrily at his friend.

“She loves you madly, everybody can see that!” Finn sighed. “You cannot keep on being insecure about your relationship with her, she definitely chose you.”

“You two bought this house together, that doesn’t mean anything to you? It’s not moving in together, it’s a commitment buddy,” Colin said exasperatedly. “We have been doing this for months, I know the four years have been hard on you two, but it also indicates that you two were meant to end up together. When the hell are you going to get over your insecurities?”

“Sorry, I guess it’s my girly side,” Robert muttered, “I’m so happy that sometimes I freak out that I can lose it all.”

“I think you had too much to drink man,” Finn shook his head.” It seems that you cannot handle the booze anymore.”

In the meantime, the girls had changed into their pajamas and were chatting in one of the guestrooms.

“So, Juliet are you seeing anyone at the moment?” Steph asked.

“I really don’t have the time or the only men I met were just full of shit. You girls should feel lucky you met great guys, they are not that easy to find. Like the last one was great on paper. I met him because he’s working in my company’s bank so great job, good looking, single, straight and he asked me out. I waited four dates before giving in, but I was still nervous. I had gained three pounds, I felt nervous so I had trouble getting off so, at some point, he didn’t wait and once he had done his stuff just asked me if it also took me that much time to come with my ex.”

“You’re kidding! What a jerk!”

“So, what did you do?” Rose queried.

“I slapped him and then I cried. I think I’m becoming a spinster with a vibrator. The worst part is that it broke down.”

“How could you break a vibrator?”

“Don’t know, but now I have a floppy vibrator. Even that stuff is not reliable!”

“Maybe one-night stand is easier to get some satisfaction?” Rory asked.

“Oh no it doesn’t, I also tried to hook up just for… liberating purposes like Finn would put it, but I ended up losing a 300 $ dress because he was sleeping on it and I didn’t want to wake him up. The guy was so bad at it, I couldn’t take a chance to talk to him. Do you know how hard it is to find a guy that actually knows where the clit is? Don’t they show that in porn? Wait, Ror, did you have a one-night stand? When?”

Rory looked at Steph and Rosemary.

“Just before I got back with Robert. I really recommend the guy, this one knows where everything is. If you stay in the city a little longer maybe we could arrange that.”
“See, some are lucky, I’m not.” Juliet shook her head. “You have a single hook up and you get Mr. Perfect in bed. I tried several and my floppy vibrator is still more satisfying. I thought about Tinder. Do you know anyone who’d tried? The young ones in the office are all using it, it makes me feel old. Seriously, now that you guys have all find a someone I feel lonely with my floppy vibrator.”

“Oh!!” The girls hugged Juliet “I’m sure there are plenty of great guys in Seattle, you just have to work a little less and open your eyes. I can’t believe that a girl like you don’t have any guys hitting on you.”

Robert slid under the sheets, spooned Rory snaking his arm around her waist and softly kissed her hair. He could feel by her breathing that she wasn’t sleeping.

“It was a great party, I think everybody enjoyed it and liked our house,” he said tenderly.

She took his hand and kept his arm closer to her.

“She didn’t say she liked it. It’s better she didn’t meet your parents though, with all the Elis she would have felt left out and try to fit in. It was so awkward when she met Logan at my grandparent’s and she didn’t get what a Kropog was.”

Robert closed his eyes and held a sigh. He hated that she was hurting.

“She didn’t say she liked it. It’s better she didn’t meet your parents though, with all the Elis she would have felt left out and try to fit in. It was so awkward when she met Logan at my grandparent’s and she didn’t get what a Kropog was.”

Robert closed his eyes and held a sigh. He hated that she was hurting.

“Ror, your mom is cool, she can fit anywhere and my parents would get along with her. All these anecdotes and stories about you and your mom, have you thought about writing them down in a book?”

Rory didn’t answer but the corner of her mouth lifted. She knew it was his way of checking where she was standing on the idea of writing and she admired his persistence. As she didn’t answer he kept talking.

“By the way, Luke loved what we’ve done with the kitchen. Just see the progress, babe, she came, she was nice and apparently, you liked her gift.”

Rory giggled and turned around to face him. He felt relieved and rubbed his nose on hers, Eskimo style. Thank God their house was huge, they’ll be able to hide this monkey lamp somewhere he won’t have to see it every day.

AN: I deeply appreciated your kudos and comments. One chapter left and we’ll switch to 2015.
London

Christmas lights were already shining in London. Finn exited the GMO building where he had meetings all day and decided to walk to his hotel to get some fresh air and clear his mind. He couldn't believe that he'd become a workaholic just like his college friends. Thank god they really had a good time at Yale and if he sometimes missed LDB events, this part of his life was over. Were they the heyday of his life? It's been eight years now since his graduation. He was thirty-two now, more single than ever as he had quit sleeping around, not even dating anyone.

Nevertheless, more than ever he had that disarming smile that could drive any woman to capitulate against their own better judgment. It didn't bother him that much not to have a significant other, but it was really a pain at every party to have people introducing him to single ladies. That's why he was only attending business functions that were strictly necessary and never society events. Robert was now living with Rory in Manhattan. Colin and Steph were finally engaged and will get married in a few months. Clearly, these ones had found love. Logan was doing God knows what with Odette. Maybe love was a privilege of a chosen few. Committing to anyone had never been part of his life plan, if he ever had such a project, he had considered it while witnessing his friends but he quickly gave up. Up until recently, he always felt it was easier to enjoy the company of ladies he wasn't considering seeing again, be the life and soul of the party, just enjoying what he thought was the real life. The years passed and the harder that became to withstand. He was still relishing working but partying endlessly wasn't as much fun. Moreover, his friends weren't available anymore. He was climbing the ladder in the company, but something was missing in his life, and he just couldn't pinpoint what.

In a way, he was a little disappointed in not having been chosen to be the best man, even though he knew Colin and Logan were friends since diapers. *Speaking of the devil.* He looked at the caller ID and answered the phone.

“Hey man, are you still on for tonight?”

"Hey Finn, about that. I just got off the phone with Rosemary, she's actually in London, and I told her to join us for dinner, is that okay with you?"

“Of course, why do you even ask? I'll be happy to see her, it’s been a while.”

“I didn’t know if you wanted a ‘guys only night’ if you know what I mean.”

“I can still get in Rose’s pants.”

“Keep dreaming, after all these years I don’t see that coming,” Logan laughed.

“That’s because I never tried hard enough.”

"I wonder how it looks like when you do try hard, man!"

“Okay, have you sent her a car?"

“I was going to.”
"Then don't, tell me where she's staying, and I'll pick her up myself."

"Oh, you're seriously trying to charm the pants off her?"

"Isn't that the challenge you just gave me?"

"No, no! You only do that to yourself, don't drive me into it."

At seven sharp Finn was standing in front of his car when Rosemary exited from her hotel looking for the chauffeur and saw him. He hadn't changed much since college, just dapper now that he had got rid of his colorful clothes.

"Finn?!? What are you doing here?" She smiled at him.

"Picking you up darling. I thought it would be more personal than a driver. Surprised?" He kissed her lightly on her cheek and opened the car door.

"Good surprise," she laughed. Same old Finn, such a charmer.

"You look very lovely darling," Finn said while starting the car.

"Not bad yourself either," Rosemary smiled. "So, how have you been since last September?".

They spent a delightful evening, and they all felt right. They needed that to forget about their now grown-up life, their work problems. In college, only Logan knew how tough it would be because all his life was already planned career-wise. Out of college, Rosemary didn't feel any pressure. She was a beautiful well-read society girl, so her parents were confident that she would find a nice guy. But she didn't follow the path that was drawn for her. First, she pursued a career. She was now the head of the department of Impressionist and Modern art at Christie's New-York office. Two years after college, Rosemary met Ray an NBC journalist when she just started at Christies. He was there to shoot a documentary on art auctions. The guys never really got along with Ray, but she never minded because they barely saw them. She thought that it was only a Princeton-Yale rivalry issue.

"So how is Ray?" Logan asked. Suddenly tears were filling Rosemary’s eyes, she was shivering.

"Love, what's wrong?" Finn said worriedly putting his hand on hers.

"Ray broke up with me."

"What?? When?"

"Do you want me to kick his ass? I always thought he was a jerk," Finn snarled.

"I talked to Colin yesterday he didn’t mention anything” Logan added.

"You're the first ones to know,” Rosemary answered sheepishly.

"I thought you used to have lunch every week with Steph and Rory?" Logan asked.

"I didn’t go last week because I had an auction. And talking about it makes it real."

"So, what happened? You guys were together for so long."

"Well, technically I broke up with him because I found he was having an affair with an intern at work, a twenty-something blonde, fresh right out of college. I was a fool, I didn't see anything. I convinced myself that he never proposed just because he wasn't ready, that he needed time. Even
when I confronted him, he tried to deny it. I thought so highly of him, of us. I thought that he would say it was a mistake a beg me to forgive me. And you know what? I'm stupid enough that I think I would, but it turned out he just didn't have balls to just quit me. We weren't even married, and he already turned me into a desperate woman. My mother was right, I should have picked a society guy and get married before twenty-five. Now I'm too old, and I don't have a date for Colin and Steph wedding. My mom will kill me if I go by myself at the most important wedding of the year where I'm a bridesmaid.” She kept sobbing.

Her eyes dripped with tears. The guys each put an arm around her shoulders.

"Everything will be alright love. The wedding is only in five months. Men will be throwing themselves at your feet now that you’re single again. And if you find that they’re not good enough for you, I'll promise I’ll be your plus one,” Finn said.

Rosemary grinned, “Thanks Finn, but I don’t want to be a pity date.”

"You would do me a favor, not the other way around. I don't have a date either, and I can't go to Colin's wedding with a random girl. I'm a groomsman so who would be better than the bridesmaid? Anyway, it's of good knowing that I'm trying to get into your pants since college."

They all laughed. Finn was always great at sweetening the mood.

The guys felt heartbroken for her. How could Ray treat this beautiful and accomplished woman like that after six years of dating? Sure, they were not the most exceptional gentlemen, but even back in college they never gave false pretenses to the ladies.

“When are you going back to New York?” Logan asked.

“Tomorrow night”

“Do you have to work tomorrow?”

“I have a meeting at ten in the morning.”

“Okay, so tonight we will take you to drink off your sorrows until we all lose our shit and we’ll make sure that when you’ll arrive in New-York, the girls will be ready for a weekend of wallowing. I know for a fact that Rory is a specialist.”

"Thank you, guys. You're excellent friends," muttered Rosemary. While Finn took care of the bill, Logan got out of the restaurant to call Rory.

"Hi, Logan. What's up?"

"Hey Ace, I don't have much time, so I'll cut to the point. I'm having dinner with Finn and Rose, and she just told us that Ray broke up with her."

“What???? When??”

"Last week, the asshole dumped her for a young intern, she's devastated. Tonight, we are taking care of her, but she'll fly back to the city tomorrow evening. I think she needs wallowing time."

"Okay send me her flight number, and we'll take care of her as soon as she lands. I have a meeting right now, so I have to go but don't worry, I got it. Logan, hug her for me.”

“I will. See you, Ace.”
Christmas Eve

At least they were still spending Christmas together, Lorelai thought while packing to spend Christmas Eve at Robert and Rory’s. Luke could see that she was nervous.

“Cool down, Rory said that they’re very nice people. Don’t you believe her?”

"Yes, I do, but… She has changed, and I don't know how to stop that."

Luke sighed. Although Rory was now twenty-nine, his girlfriend still saw her as a young teenager.

“You didn’t lose her, she has just grown up. Stop seeing her like when she was still sixteen. She has been a war reporter, her eyes on the world is different now, that doesn’t mean that you can’t have a good relationship with her. You two love each other so much.”

“She’s changed so much. She used to call me for everything, ask help for choosing her outfits, my opinion on her boyfriends. We were besties.”

"You girls still talk to each other several times a week, that's more than a lot of mothers and daughters,” Luke said.

Since Rory and Robert were living in their own house, Lorelai’s fears of losing her daughter had increased. She was hiding them behind high society worries. During the first few weeks, it was a little hectic, and she could feel that Rory was worried. Combined with starting teaching at Columbia, revising the articles for his Harvard graduate students Robert was hit by writer's block and spent endless hours in front of his computer. Rory had felt bad for him and didn't know if she had to try to help him or let him deal with it by himself. Lorelai had advised her to show him that she was there if he needed her but also leave him some space.

At some point, the two lovebirds had managed to make it work because while Rory was going home that evening, she called her mother and mentioned that Lilian just told her how her boyfriend was resourceful and amazing. She could hear the proud tone of her daughter and felt relieved for them. Lorelai lips curled a little. Her diner man was right, she still had a good relationship with her daughter.

“A child is not supposed to be a parent’s friend. It’s not because you’ve lost that part of your relationship that you can’t enjoy yourself together. You’re both amazing women, try to trust her like you used to do, listen to her. You’re her mom before being her best friend. Everybody can have numerous best friends, but only one mother. Why don’t you stick to that unique role?”

Lorelai was holding a dress in each hand pondering which one would look best to Upper East Side millionaires. Luke could easily see what she was thinking.

“Lorelai, having money doesn’t make people bad, no matter what you’ve chosen to believe, and it’s me who’s saying that,” Luke stated. “We’re only people who love, hurt, feel, we’re all the same no matter how thin or thick our wallet is. Why don’t you give these people some credit before judging them? Stop acting like if you know everything, try to discover them and then make your opinion. I can’t believe that obnoxious people could have raised such a good guy.”

Lorelai sighed. “Rory is not cooking right?”

Luke chuckled "No, Robert is taking care of the turkey. The Semple tradition is that everyone makes a dish for the meal. I'm in charge of the potatoes and prepared a variation. His parents are bringing
desserts, and I don’t quite remember what the others will bring but obviously, we won't starve.”

“Good, it’s important to know that at least we’ll enjoy the meal.”

She put both dresses in the garment bag then sat on her boyfriend's lap. He was the only person who could soothe her, and she was so lucky to have him around.

###

Rory was sitting at the kitchen island sipping coffee while proofreading on her laptop, keeping company to her boyfriend who was stuffing the turkey. She was amazed that he was able to perform such elaborate cooking.

“Where did you learn to do that?”

“We all had to help my parents in the kitchen at some point we’re all able to manage around the stove, even Charlie. You’ll see, his salmon gravadlax is delicious. For this exceptional evening, I thought I’d try a Jamie Oliver recipe though, so if it’s not good, I’ll blame the British chef.”

Robert glanced at her and couldn't help but marvel at how gorgeous his girlfriend looked. She was an uncomplicated natural beauty, didn't need any makeup. He was particularly fond of her freckles. What wondered him the most was her brain though. It was always on high speed, and he could see right now the wheels spinning as she was rubbing her index finger back and forth over her upper lip, her brows furrowed. She was worried about this evening, Lorelai Gilmore meeting the Semples. No matter how much she loved Christmas, tonight wasn't able to trump her fear. Even if Robert wasn't her first boyfriend, she had never been that serious with a guy to introduce the parents.

“It can’t be bad, you’re putting only good things in this giant bird. I feel useless I’m not doing anything.”

“You set the table; I didn’t even know we had so many plates and silverware.”

"It was my grandparents present, and Lupe helped me yesterday for the table, she's a doll."

Robert smirked but made sure she couldn't see him. Rory Gilmore had a housekeeper. Who would have believed that? Of course, it wasn't a maid, and she was only coming twice a week, but he knew that for his girlfriend it was a huge step. Actually, the idea came from his mother. Her foundation was tutoring recent immigrant Mexican kids so that they can catch up in an American school. Their mother needed to find work, and Lydia immediately thought about Robert and Rory who had to deal with a huge house just by themselves while both with very time-consuming jobs. Rory wasn't able to say no to Lydia as it was presented to her as a good thing to do for this family.

Very quickly she actually got along with Lupe, and she became part of their lives in no time. She cooked for them and left them meals in the freezer. Rory helped her with her papers. She had to admit that Lupe's help was really needed. Robert had been pulling late nights all semester and was a little on edge.

The beginning of the semester had been particularly hard but mainly because of a massive writer's block. First, Robert tried to vary his routine and work in different places. Even if he was a technology geek, Robert had a thing for libraries. They were out of time and reassuring as they have proven that reason, intellect and art really did tend to survive dark ages of various kinds. Most of all they were a space devoted to quiet reflection on the written word, and that was why he was spending most of his time in them instead of his office where everybody could find him.

He also squeezed an overnight trip to DC to discuss with Bill and Ben. They liked his angle that
President Obama arrived at the White House too early to be understood by Americans. They talked almost all night, just like they used to when the three of them were at the White House. In the end, Ben reminded Robert that he had for him a fantastic capacity to focus and that if he just stuck to the discipline they learned from the President, he would soon be back on track.

Rory felt bad for Robert and didn't know if she had to try to help him or let him deal with it by himself. She wasn't his editor, and Lilian had much more experience than she did. Then that early morning, Rory went down into the kitchen to find him coming back from a jog beaming. She knew he was looking for these hours of clearheadedness that follow a long run. He kissed her on her temple and went directly to his study. He was still in there when she left for work. That evening, Lilian told her that he was back on track. She remembered how proud and admiring she felt. After that, he still worked like crazy, but the tension had left off.

###

He came out from the bathroom, just wrap in a towel and pulled out a pair of boxers from the dresser. He dropped the towel, and she couldn't help but eye his butt. His Christmassy mood made her melt, that rush she got when he did something nice always came flooding back.

"You look good Semple," she informed him, unashamedly checking him out, "really good."

He moved closer to her and kiss the top of her head. She inhaled his scent of Habit Rouge and wanted to bury her nose in the column of his neck and inhale him until she got a contact high.

"We don't have time to flirt, Miss Gilmore, I have a turkey in the oven, and your mother should arrive any minute now. And stop worrying, it will be just fine, trust your Christmas spirit."

With all the workload he had these last months, he had wondered if he would be able to manage much time for his girlfriend but obviously living together made everything easier. Even if he didn't sleep much, waking up next to her was enough to keep him going. She was such a positive catalyzer to his work. He could run anything through her, and it would brighten his brain. She was so attuned to him, his moods, his needs, it was if she was able to read him even before he knew what he wanted. Most of all, he knew she was always honest with him which was what made her opinion mattered the most.

###

Rory opened the door to two jovial Semple parents. Their cheeks were red from the cold, but they were beaming, and Henri was holding a big long box.

"Lydia, Henri, come in!"

"Hello, Rory. Thanks for having all of us, it's very nice of you to host the familial Christmas eve dinner. You know, it's been a while since all the Semples haven't been altogether for Christmas Eve."

Henri put the box on the console table and hugged her.

"I haven't done much, Robert took care of the bird."

"For this nice occasion I made a Bûche de Noël, I hope you and your mother will like it, Robert told me you two were very fond of chocolate."

"You made it?"
"Of course, it's tough to find a nice bûche in New-York. I learned this recipe from Anne."

Lorelai was taken aback by this conversation. Rory was right, the Semples were definitely very different from high society people she was used to.

“Lydia and Henri, let me introduce you to my mother Lorelai and Luke her boyfriend."

“I’m so happy to meet the mother of this amazing young woman, we’re both very fond of your daughter” Henri warmly shook Lorelai’s hand.

“What the heck!” and without asking, Lydia hugged the elder Gilmore to her surprise.

Shortly, all the other Semple family members arrived, and Lorelai understood that she wasn’t the only new guest to their clan.

For the first time, Aubrey brought her girlfriend for a family reunion. She came out a few years ago but had never introduced anyone to her parents yet. Only Robert and Rory had had the privilege to meet Jenna before as she was her closest sibling. He convinced his baby sister that it was time to stop hiding her girlfriend for a year now. Lorelai watched Lydia talking to Jenna about how Aubrey had always been a chatterbox as a kid and seeking for the attention of her brothers and sister. The little Matt was asking his father if Santa would drop the gifts in this house or at his. Nathalie and Rory were making sure everybody had a glass of eggnog. With the large decorated tree in the back, it looked like a scene from a Hallmark channel Christmas movie.

When Lorelai turned around to look for Luke, he was in deep conversation with Henri talking about fishing. Apparently, they had hit the same spots in Connecticut. She now felt at ease and that her daughter was safe. She had to admit that she had never seen her daughter that happy. She was constantly laughing. Each time, the walls were shaking, it was if she could see Rory fly. Her daughter was cosseted by a loving boyfriend who would do anything for her. Everybody was buzzing around them, but he was looking at his girlfriend like she was the only person in his orbit.

“It’s amazing how these two are drawn to each other, isn’t it?” Robert’s mother whispered in her ear.

Lorelai nodded. Lydia was right, they clearly were meant to be together, deserved each other.

The meal itself was unique. Lorelai could see why her daughter was so at ease in this family. They had managed to fit quirky, hippy, in their bourgeois heritage. That gave rise to Indian, Nordic, French, British, American food mixing with laughter and bad jokes served in Limoges china. She hadn't seen Luke having that much fun in a very long time, and she hadn't heard him grunt during all the weekend.

When she saw Robert heading to the kitchen, she took the opportunity to reach out to him.

“Robert, I’m sorry,” she started.

“For what?” He glanced at her but couldn’t find anything else but sincerity in those familiar blue eyes.

"I've been a pain in the ass to you, and you didn't deserve it."

"Well, I can live with that, but I think that Rory is more deserving here. She would be so relieved if you two could be on the same page again."

“T'm not finished, I would also like to thank you. Despite my attitude, you didn't keep Rory away from me. And I'll make up to both of you. I was wrong, you two belong together. You two were
brave enough finally to take the chance to love each other, and I almost ruined it. I got the stubborn Gilmore streak, and luckily for you, Rory didn't get as much of this personality trait."

"Oh! She got it, but I can’t complain because it helped her to come back to me."

"The point is that since she was born, we built a plan for every step of her life and since Logan came up everything was derailed and then I thought she was back on track."

"And then I came along, and I wasn't part of the plan? The plan included a guy at some point, did it?"

"It did, and I realize now that the guy is you, it's just that I was blindsided from where you're coming from."

He felt sorry for her because she thought she had lost the unique connection she had with her child. Of course, he didn't have kids yet, so maybe he couldn't know what it meant, but he could relate to it through his relationship with Rory. He couldn't imagine losing her. Most of all, he knew how alienated Rory felt being torn up between her mother and him.

# # #

Robert turned off the bathroom light and slid under the comforter. This 2014 Christmas had been a huge success and would probably be a major turn point in their life. After brunch, Lorelai and Luke had left for Stars Hollow with the promise that they would come for a visit for a whole weekend in January.

She clung to him, her body feeling warm, so true to him. It felt like their heart were finally syncing entirely. Her body had ultimately found rest. He closed his eyes, easing into her hold, her head resting against his chest, the familiar softness of her hair enabling him to relax. Just like every night, his fingers were drawn and ran through her hair.

He knew that part of his insecurities was that he was afraid he wouldn't be able to live if for any reason they had to be separated. He had experienced that five years ago; watched Logan fall apart 2 years before that; She was the worst addiction to recover from, a man could have. On the other hand, he had never felt better than being with her, but he was now confident that these uncertainties would progressively lift off.

Robert had become essential in her life at so many levels. He was non-judgmental, tirelessly cheerful, but when needed he could give honest, unbiased advice especially career-wise, and he was always there for her no matter what. He was a perfect balance, protective like Dean but not clingy jealous, well-read like Jess but so much more reliable, smart and funny like Logan but without the pressure of his family. She hated to compare the two of them, but it was inevitable. The relationship that she had now combined the best of what she had before, like the perfect synthesis. Robert was enthralling, passionate and caring. In hindsight, they were building unbreakable bonds.

A/N: This is the last 2014 chapter. Only two years left. I hope you'll have the patience to wait until the end. I'll try to do my best but during the next month, it will be difficult for me to update as frequently as I did these last few weeks. My goal is still to finish the story for its one-year anniversary.

Do not hesitate to tell me what you think.
A/N: Thanks for the messages encouraging me to update. I'm profoundly sorry I haven't been able to write for so long. As expected, work and life, in general, have been hectic and I couldn't manage enough time to work on this story. Anyway, here's a long chapter. I can't promise you anything for the next update, only that I'll finish the story. When, is another question... If you're still reading, please comment, review, vote.

Juliet's wedding

In January, as all the Yale gang did, Rory and Robert had the surprise to receive a wedding invitation from Juliet.

When did that happen?

It was too early to call Juliet because of the time difference, so Rory tried Rosemary.

"Did you get it? How did I miss that? She's not marrying her vibrator, isn't she?"

"No," Rose laughed, "you won't believe it, the guy she was seating next to on the plane back to Seattle after your housewarming party."

"No kidding! So that's why she was MIA these last months? I'm afraid to ask, is it a shotgun wedding?"

"No, not at all! Apparently, the guy is so terrific, it only took him a six hours flight to make her fall for him. And now they want the whole nine yards, they're looking for a house, planning for a baby, I had to check it was her when we facetimed because I barely recognized her."

"Wow, I saw some pictures on Instagram, but I didn't know it was already that serious!"

"He proposed at Christmas, and they just didn't want to wait. So, she'll call you to ask you to be a bridesmaid, but to gain time, we've got to pick our dress. You've noticed that they have chosen to do it in Chicago, right?"

"That was the second surprise..."

Juliet Crown was coming from a Chicago old money family, but she left for college and never came back. She loved her parents deeply, but she needed to put some distance and proved herself that she could do something of her life besides getting a fancy degree that she would never use, marry a society guy, organize charity events and raise his heirs.

"I guess he changed that in her too. I'm really dying to meet this guy. Does it mean that her parents approved of him?"

"Well, he's not old money, but he's a Harvard MBA, built a sales software automation company two years ago, and he already raised millions for it. I wouldn't be surprised Semple Brothers had invested something."

"Should we expect a big wedding?"

"She asked for small and to be held in her parent's house which is huge, so we'll see. The ceremony will be at the church though. We don't have much time to prepare everything and as we don't all live
in the same city, be prepared to receive a massive amount of ‘Hey ladies’ email and try to answer fast. Due to the short notice, she agreed to have a wedding planner. Ror, we're in both wedding parties so try not to mix up the answers!"

"I think if it sticks to two, I can handle it."

"What do you mean? Are you guys planning to add yours anytime soon?"

"What? No, no, we're absolutely not there yet!"

"You wish!" Rosemary laughed, "now that you guys are under the same roof, I'm sure people have started to drop that kind of question."

Rory sighed and startled hearing the door of Robert's study opening. He wasn't in bed when she woke up, but she thought he was out for his morning run. His hair was even more tousled than usual, his stubble looking more like a beard now and he was rubbing his eyes. He went straight to the electric kettle, filled it with water and reached for the teapot where he added his usual Earl Grey. Then he reached for his mug and poured himself some coffee.

In the meantime, Rory had ended her call and put a bagel in the toaster. Once he was seated, she carefully ran her fingers through his hair and kissed his temple.

"Have you slept at all?" she asked softly leaving her arms around him.

"I just typed the last period," he whispered. "It's weird, I feel empty."

"Wow! I'm so proud of you!" She hugged him tight from behind, kissed the top of his head then rested hers on his.

"Would you read it before I send it to Lilian? I understand you can't give me an unbiased editor opinion, but I'm not able to work on it anymore, I need time to take a step back from it to get some perspective. You're the only one I'm trusting right now before it goes away from me."

She felt him so fragile at the right instant, but also an intense moment of intimacy. He was trusting her with a huge part of himself, almost two years of extreme work, the same period they have been sharing their lives. She had discovered that her man could be the most confident person in public, but also extremely vulnerable, like at this very moment. As if it was possible, she loved him even more for his complexity.

"Of course, I'll do it, I don't have a busy day; anyway it's a Rodham book so it's also my job. Do you need to go to work today?"

"Nope, class hasn't started yet and no meeting, I can work from home."

"I think you've already worked enough during the night, why don't you take a nap?"

She handed him the bagel where she had spread cream cheese on and poured the hot water in the teapot.

"Oh! By the way, Juliet is getting married next month."

Robert almost spat his coffee.

"What?"

"Prepare to go to Chicago in March."
The guys were seated on the same row watching the girls standing by Juliet. The bridesmaids had chosen emerald green dresses, but all three were different. It was difficult to say which one was more beautiful than the other. Finn couldn't take his eyes off Rosemary which didn't get unnoticed by Colin who elbowed Robert. The latter chuckled and cleared his throat to get Logan's attention.

"Since when do bridesmaids dresses cease to be ugly?" Finn asked.

"Since the bridesmaids got to choose them and not the bride," Colin answered thinking that it'll be his turn in a little bit more than two months.

"Close your mouth Finn, or I'm afraid your jaw could fall out," Logan whispered.

"I didn't remember she had legs," the Aussie said in awe.

"How do you think she could walk during all these years?" Robert asked hardly handling his laughter.

Were they thrown back ten years ago in Yale when Finn was making passes at Rosemary almost daily? She had become a myth, the one girl that Finn could never get, because, ultimately, he was always able to get any girl he was pursuing, just not Rosemary. She then became even more desirable to his eyes. It wasn't that she wasn't dating, she did, but not the playboy type as her father was one of the kinds, and she had witnessed how miserable her mother was. Then they left Yale, and she met Ray.

"Your girls are pretty too, you know." Finn trying in vain to divert the attention drawn to his attraction to the redhead.

"It's okay Finn, I absolutely don't mind if you don't undress my girlfriend with your eyes as you're doing with our friend Rosemary. Since when are you back on chasing Rose?"

"Since last December," Logan answered, "he pretends that I challenged him but I did nothing of that kind, it's all his wishful thinking."

Colin chuckled. It was fun to witness his friend going back to his college antics. They were so serious now, workaholics who needed to tame their addiction.

"Finn, do me a favor, try to do it differently than when we were at Yale. I don't want Rose to ask for a restraining order by the time of my wedding. You wouldn't want to mess up our wedding party, would you?"

The Aussie growled. It was easy for his friends, they had found their match. Even Logan seemed to be at ease. He couldn't let go of Odette's hand and was continually nuzzling her. Finn turned his gaze to the other side of their row, and it wasn't better. Colin and Robert were staring at their girl.

"Guys, you are supposed to focus on the bride and groom, not only on your women."

Robert smirked. Rory was playing with the bracelet he got her for Christmas. He had noticed that she had worn it every day which made him proud of his purchase, even if it was a sappy gesture. He was walking out of Science Po in Paris, where he was settling a joint master degree with Columbia when he saw in the window of an antique store this gold charm bracelet with the Pisa, London and Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty alternated with different gemstones. He had never been very good at finding presents, but this time, he knew right away that she would love it.
A small shudder rippled through Rory. She had caught his gaze on her. She loved the way his baby blues looked at her, the way he smiled for her and only her. It made her feel empowered. She wondered if it would always be as good with time. It's been two years, and the passion was still as strong as at the beginning.

How did Juliet know it was for the long run?

Rory looked at the happy bride tying the node, not even a year after she had met the guy. She, in turn, was now living with Robert in a house they bought together, but they haven't talked about marriage yet. Would she like to marry him? Yes, yes, yes. She could see herself all her life with him. Now, she wasn't afraid anymore. Not so long ago, even if he had proven multiple times that he was the most trustworthy man to her, she was still scared that he could bail. She wasn't proud of that, but as Paris has pointed to her, she had gone through all her life waiting for her father, needing him. Then Dean, Jess, Logan, and Robert the first time, even if it was short. So, she was sometimes thinking that she was the one inducing this behavior in men approaching her.

In the end, was Juliet the most courageous of them all? Or the most reckless? She had taken her time, but she had understood that there was never any guaranty when you open your heart to somebody that it'll last forever. You have to make a bet and throw yourself in the game. Love didn't have to be simple, but this time she was taking the risk. It won't probably be easy, but she was armed to deal with that just because they wanted to give it a try together.

Juliet's husband was a Sinatra's fan, and that's why Rory found herself dancing on "The way you look tonight" and traveling back on memory lane. It wasn't that long ago when Ms. Patty was teaching her ballroom dancing and her father telling her she just needed practice. He was partly right, he just forgot that she also needed the perfect partner. With Robert, she learned that there were activities where she relished to be led, and it didn't mean that she wasn't a strong independent woman. He could make her spin, whirl, and everything seemed easy just like her parents were doing it, never losing the spark of his icy blue gaze.

###

"How is the book doing?"

Robert was delighted to spend time with Odette, they didn't see each other very often, but every time was like they had never been apart. Their childhood bond was strong enough to overcome time or distance.

"I think it's finally done. My editor texted me that I could have my weekends back for now. I thought the revisions would never end. I never had realized that Rory's job was to torture writers."

Odette chuckled.

"I don't know if she's indeed torturing anyone, but she's damn good for you. It's like you found peace again, am I wrong?"

Robert's mouth corner upturned.

"You're very perceptive Mademoiselle de Valmy. When I'm with her, I'm the version of what I wanted to be when I was 14. She pulls out the best of me. This woman can work miracles."

"If I remember correctly, you wanted to be an adventurer-writer, I can see the writer, but where's the adventurer?"

"Still there, working through the most dangerous world, politics."
At a table by the dance floor, Logan and Finn were alone staring at Odette and Robert swaying among their friends.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?" The blond asked his Aussie friend.

"Don't know, but I do believe in lust at first sight," the dark-hair man answered absentmindedly trying to find Rosemary in the crowd.

Logan sighed, "seriously Finn."

"Come on man, you're asking me that? How the hell should I know anything about love? You're the one engaged, was it love at first sight?"

Just at that very moment, the song ended. They saw Odette walking toward them, and a huge grin spread on Logan's face. Finn chuckled.

Just like it happened with Rory, fighting for Odette gave him the strength to combat the dark lord. He felt liberated and ready to embrace happiness.

"Your fiancée is really gorgeous, man, you seem happy lately."

"I'm as surprised as you. I thought Rory was my one and only, but it seems that God is willing to give me a second chance and this time I'll try not to screw it."

"Is one of you handsome men would care to dance with me?" Odette asked standing in front of them beaming. The Aussie stared at the new addition to their group and thought that she was an excellent pick.

Finn looked at Logan grinning at his fiancée.

"Avec grand plaisir mon amour," Logan took her offered hand.

"Wow, your French is really improving Huntz," Finn laughed eying the young couple walking toward the dance floor.

"Do you ever regret not getting back with her?" Odette asked, painfully gazing at Rory and Robert. Logan shrugged, "not since I've been falling for you, which means for about a year?"

Odette pulled herself from him, her hands still on his shoulders and looked at him with her eyes wide open. His eyebrows rose and one corner of his mouth upturned.

"Seriously? Why do you think I fought so hard for this new project with your dad? Just for mine to hate me more? I needed to show you that if our engagement is a business deal for him, for me, I just need to be with you."

Odette held her smile and shyly replied, "I thought you were just afraid that Robert would kiss your ass."

Logan chuckled, "he wishes. With Rory, I learned how true happiness felt like, and with you, I am now sure I will be able to feel it again."

Odette had tears filling her eyes with emotion. It had taken them three years, but they were finally on the same page.

"You're right Logan, we'll make it work."
She rested her head on his chest and closed her eyes. She had allowed herself to fall for him for several months now, but until that moment, she thought she was the only one.

Steph snagged the bouquet.

"That's not fair we already know that her wedding is next!" Juliet's sister complained.

"But then now we know that this tradition really means something," Rose said with a pixie-cute smile.

Rory thought it was nice to see her friend smile again. After the Ray debacle, the holidays had been hard for her, and as she suspected, her mother didn't comfort her much.

After that, the four Yale girls had left the room to get some air on the terrace despite the cold.

"He had been staring at you all night, is there anything you haven't told us?" Juliet asked.

"Nope, absolutely nothing. Girls, it's Finn, the guy has been cruising the no-commitment lane since… Forever." Rosemary answered, trying not to make a big deal.

She only admitted to herself that she could be considering conceding to Finn's relentless wooing. Since they met in London, it had started with friendly texts, making sure she was okay. Whenever he was in the city for work, he always would find the time to see her even if it was for ten minutes. She didn't say anything to the girls. Was it more than what an old friend would do? Besides, it was Finn, all women were falling for him, and she definitely could see why.

"Come on Rose, maybe you haven't noticed while you were with Ray, but our favorite Aussie is very different from the one we knew at Yale, he's not determinedly single," Rory added.

"I got that, but the last thing I need is a guy mucking up my life reboot. I want to start fresh, man-free. I'm focusing on my promotion at work."

"Sure," Steph said, "you know who you remind me of? Our friend Rory here when she was convinced that she could live without Robert."

"I'm so not like that!" Rosemary replied.

"Hey, girls I'm right here!" Rory shot.

"No offense Rory, you're right, I'm in a totally different situation. I'm moving into I am an independent woman, hear me roar part of my life. Once I'll pass this phase, I'll look for a man who will be a partner, not a manipulative, cruel SOB."

"You're right, finish rebooting your life. Finn has been waiting for years, he can be patient for a few more months. Don't come with your regrets at our Wednesday lunch if you learn that he had found another match in Boston."

###

"I was surprised we used the Semple Brothers private jet," Rory said trying not to sound judgmental.

The girls had flown to Chicago on Wednesday to prepare the Thursday bachelorette party. Colin and Robert had only joined them on Friday evening for the rehearsal dinner. Therefore, Rory was a little surprised when she realized that they were taking the Semple's private jet to go back to New-York. They always had flown commercial, and she was okay with that. Were they shifting to where her
mother warned her they would, high society habits?

"I know," Robert sighed." It was the only way to be on time for the rehearsal dinner having to attend a Semple Brothers meeting on Friday. Colin couldn't leave before 2 pm either, so Charly offered to use the jet, he said nobody was using it this weekend anyway."

Rory had noticed that since he was back in New York, Robert was much more involved in the family company. Charly regularly dropped by in the evening, and they would talk for long hours in his study. She had learned to like his older brother and figured out that he womanizer ways were his manner to get away from his work stress. He had gained more responsibilities in the firm and was soon to be nominated, Chief Operating Officer. One evening after too much wine and scotch, he had spilled that he was afraid he was going to wreck the company that took three generations of Semples to build. He was scared that his decisions could wrongly affect thousands of people. He felt his ass was on the line every single day. Robert had tried to reassure him that their father was still there to train him and that Nathalie was the best scientific strategist in the market. Moreover, their uncle was the President and director of the executive committee.

Logan had told her that Robert could be involved in the company, and she now understood how he could be sucked in it.

"Are you going to work at Semple Brothers?"

It wasn't that it was bothering her, she was just curious about all these life-changing.

Robert looked at her stunned.

"Of course not, I just started at Columbia. You know I made my mind for academic life."

"So why are you attending so many meetings there, you never did that before."

"Since I'm back in the city, Dad and Charly asked for my help because there's a project on changing the regulations. Right now, everything is under the Investment Company Act of 1940. They're asking for my help to deal with the political side, how to show them what could be good or bad for asset management.

He kept explaining to her what was at stake, how he was enjoying to finally be able to help his family company, not only working with his father and siblings but also uncles, aunts, and cousins. This company was in their blood, the only difference for Robert it wasn't in his heart like Charly or Nathalie, but he still wanted to see it thrive.

She smiled at him, she had fallen in love with his uncompromising fervent way of approaching what he was passionate about. He was faithful and unconditionally dedicated to everything that was important to him such as his family, his friends, his work and now her.

She loved her mom and wouldn't trade her for anyone else, but she had missed having a "regular" family, which for her meant a dad at home and siblings. She didn't even have cousins. Her grandparents were both only children, so many it was a Gilmore feature. Hopefully, she'll break the streak with Robert, at least two kids could be great. Lydia and Henri had shown their children how great marriage could be and how being a parent could fulfill your adult life without wrecking a carrier. You just had to find the right match.

She realized that she was thinking about having a family with him more often lately, maybe it was her friends getting married that put these thoughts in her.

She shook her head and got back to the discussion.
"I just want to make sure you're not overloading work on you. When do you find time to do all this?"

The corner of his mouth quirked a little, and his icy blue gaze turned to a dark shade of navy blue. She was amazed at how he could switch within a second from work to light mood. She wondered what in her question could have triggered it.

"Are you afraid that I won't have enough time for you Ms. Gilmore?"

He tucked a strand of hair that had escaped her ponytail behind her ear, locking his eyes on hers.

"Of course not, you've been nothing but a very attentive and considerate boyfriend."

He didn't listen to her answer and rubbed his face against her hair, addicted to its silkiness. He was about to kiss her when they felt the car stop and heard the driver open the door.

"To be continued, Ms. Gilmore."
Chapter 54 - May 2015

"Why are we here again?"

Rory didn’t usually enjoy uppity restaurants, and The Odeon was apparently one of that kind. She had spotted HarperCollins vice-president and a clothing designer that she couldn't remember the name. Yep, it was a hip joint.

"Don't know, Logan picked the place, he was there for business two days ago and said we had to try it," Robert answered nodding to the waiter who finished pouring the wine.

"Maybe Logan wants to impress Odette," Rory said in a bitchy tone unusual for her.

Robert frowned. "Why are you so edgy?" He pushed the glass of wine toward her, "try this."

She swirled the wine, sniffed then took a gulp and closed her eyes. The corner of his mouth tilted up. Over the time, Robert had rubbed off his love for the grape elixir on her. They had reacquainted with what had brought them together when they were roommates. Back then, they always shared their love for books, music, movies. They were from the same generation, but probably because he was raised abroad, they didn't have the same pop culture references.

Since they got back together, just by watching him, she had slowly learned to appreciate wine more than the occasional beverage to get buzzed. To the contrary of what her mother had implied at the beginning, he'd never tried to influence her, to fit her into a mold of the perfect wife. On the other hand, he had absorbed her way to see the world positively, lose the constant sarcasm, embraced things how they were without any judgment.

Rory finally smiled. "You know me so well. What's that?"

"Corton-Charlemagne, at least they serve good wine here. They also have Pinot Grigio. I know you girls think it's trendier."

"Robbie, you're so snobbish when it comes to wine," she put a peck on his cheek to sweeten the pot.

He shrugged. "Are you going to tell me why you're so crabby?" He put his hand on hers and gently stroke it with his thumb.

Rory was pissed; she still wasn't getting along with the marketing part of her job. She had another meeting where it was told that they'd better have good arguments if their authors didn't have at least 50 thousand followers in their social media.

"They also went on and on about how Pinterest was one of the primary traffic drivers to the websites, that Pinterest was essential to get hits to Amazon... How does it concern my authors? I'm doing non-fiction, that's for fiction I guess... But I got to hear that if we don't handle the website, we got to make sure that the authors' website was built with Squarespace, blah blah blah."

She took a sip of her wine while Robert was staring at her trying not to smile. He loved how she was passionate, how there was absolutely no distance between herself and her work.

"And let's not talk about Goodreads reviews... Since Amazon bought it, it's nothing from its formal
"role of helping indie writers."

"I thought that it was mostly for fiction?"

Robert totally got what she was saying, and that's why he'd let Lilian and Rodham take care of all the marketing. They had asked him if he wanted to get an agent that could manage his interests more independently, but he thought he was fine with Lilian as he didn't plan to write another book anytime soon. At least not with a non-academic publishing house anyway.

"Sorry guys I'm late, I'm straight out of the office, the conference call with California was endless."

Logan put a peck on Rory's cheek and patted Robert's back.

"It's okay; it's nice to see you, Logan. Where's Odette?"

"Still in Paris, she'll arrive just for the wedding, after handling the finals. You know these academics, nothing can tear them apart from their students."

The blond glanced at Robert who was smirking shaking his head.

"What with the face Rory, you're disappointed to see me? I thought she told Steph that she couldn't be there for the bachelorette party?"

"She did, but I thought you had the means that I don't to convince her. I like Odette."

"You're the first one to know that as good as you think I am, I'm still not able to convince a woman to leave her work for me."

"Don't pay attention, Rory is just upset by modern publishing."

Robert diverted the discussion from Logan previous relationship with his girlfriend.

Logan smirked.

"Ace, you know damn well that a book doesn't only sell itself just because it's good."

"It should. I'm sick that there's so much attention on what's selling right now, who's BIG right now, what's trending,

"Not everyone is like Rory Gilmore, and you know I'm saying that as a compliment. Besides your family, I'm your number two fan after Pr. Semple here, but not everyone needs books to be able to breathe as you do."

"Of course I know that, and I get that people read differently now, but that doesn't change that the essence is still in the content and not in the cover."

Logan's eyes brightened.

"I have an idea. Why don't you come work with us?"

"With your dad at Huntzberger Media?" Rory stared at Logan as if he had lost his mind.

"No, the company we're building with Hughes. I think we have almost convinced Odette to join us. See Ace, that's exactly why I need you to work for us. We have to jump into the wagon and advocate for the publishing of the Twenty-first century to be for every book lover."

"I'm trying for months to persuade her to go for her true calling, writing," Robert said.
"Really? You're so right, man. Ace, don't you miss writing?"

Rory didn’t lift her gaze from the menu. It wasn’t that she wouldn’t like to write, she had thought about it a lot. The perfectionist in her was just scared she wouldn’t meet her expectations, and theirs too. Diversion, that what she needed.

"Logan, why did you choose such a trendy place?"

Both guys smirked.

"Wait until you try their crème brûlée and then get back to me."

Rory thought she got out of the subject when the waiter came to take their order but it was without counting that she was dining with two stubborn guys.

"I've seen you write Ror; it's amazing how easily the words come to you," Logan complimented.

"After what we've just talked about, you two want me to be submitted to all that crap while I have an excellent job?"

"But in some way, it will be cathartic. You're holding in so much, even if you don't publish it, putting everything in words will be liberating. It would be good for you to be on both sides." Robert added.

"I'm always on the writer's side," she grumbled.

A man sat on the table next to them apologizing to the guy who had been seating there since Robert and Rory had arrived.

"Sorry I'm late Dave, Debbie and I couldn't decide between two stories. Oh! Logan, Hi! Are you back in New-York for good?"

Logan smiled.

"Nice to see you, David. Almost, I still have to convince my fiancée to leave Europe."

"Do you know Dave, our literary editor? Logan Huntzberger from Huntzberger Media, obviously."

"Nice to meet you, I think we've been bothering him with our discussion. Let me introduce you, Rory Gilmore here works at Rodham, and Robert Semple teaches political science at Columbia. This is.."

"David Remnick editor of the New Yorker," Robert cut off, shaking hands, "I loved your Obama biography."

"Thanks, in particular coming from an academic. They aren't my biggest fan of this book."

Remnick frowned. "Wait. Semple? Aren't you the former White House advisor who's writing an Obama biography?"

"Guilty, it's pretty much done now."

"Congratulations, I can't wait to read it. So, you guys are all in the business, huh?"

"David, can I ask you how do you choose the fiction stories for the New-Yorker?" Logan asked glancing at Rory from the corner of his eye.
"Why? Are you interested, Logan? Your father told me that you used to be a terrific writer."

"He was excellent when he was there to take an assignment, I was his editor at Yale," Rory chuckled.

"I've never written any fiction, it's just out of curiosity," he smirked at Rory.

"Well, in principle, nowadays, anyone can send a story by email and the fiction team select them. But we receive a lot of stories, so it's quite a challenge to be noticed."

"We're trying to convince Rory to write again."

"I used to be a reporter," she said shyly.

"Don't be too modest Ace, she was the editor of the YDN, after that on the Obama campaign trail, and then wrote for the Boston Globe for a while where you even were deputy-editor."

"That doesn't mean I'm good at fiction writing," she said slightly irritated at Logan. She was uncomfortable at him pulling strings. David Remnick sensed the tension.

"I can't promise you anything, but if you want to give it a try, just send us your story. Anyway, we won't publish it if it isn't good, even if you're a friend of Logan. Deborah received around four hundred stories a week, we only publish fifty a year."

Robert noticed that Rory needed the conversation to switch.

"So, are you allowed to tell us what would be the major topics at the New Yorker Festival this year?"

Rory was relieved and gently squeezed her boyfriend's hand. He wasn't done yet pushing her writing, but he knew very well when to stop to give her some time, and the crème brûlée would do the rest.

Rory carefully broke the top of it with her spoon, which for her was the whole point of the French dessert and curved up the corners of her mouth.

The guys could relax now; she was back to happy and content Rory.

Robert strategy paid off. As soon as they were in bed that evening, Rory rested her head on his chest and swirled her finger with his hair.

"It's not that I don't want to write, I'm just scared that I won't be good at it."

He smiled and understood that she just needed a little pinch.

"What's the worst that could happen to you? Being a starving author? You know I've got your back, right? If you're so scared, you can write while still working, a lot of writers are doing that. Even if you quit your job, I'm sure you can find another one. Don't be afraid of the struggling, I know you can do it, of course, most people would never leap, but you're not most people. Isn't it worth it so that you can live your life like you always dreamed of?"

"I know you're right, but it's not that easy. I've been challenging myself with a new job to often since I graduated."

She sighed.
"Look how angry you are after your marketing meeting. You're exploring options, so what? It's not as if you failed anything; you were good at what you did for each job. Why not try to write what you like to write? You're starting to wrap yourself in bitterness. Do something before it'd seep inside you. It would be a pity don't you think?"

###

The following day, Rory came back home all excited. She found Robert in the kitchen fixing them dinner.

"I've been asked to edit my first fiction book!"

"Really? Did you ask to change department?"

"No, it's because is a roman à clef taking place during a campaign trail, as the author is actually a successful romance writer, they think that making it believable could widen her audience. She got her insights from her lover." Rory winked.

"Now I'm intrigued." Robert turned to her trying if he could convince her to spill the name of the mole.

"Nope, won't tell you who it is but I'm having a lot of fun!" She giggled.

"The novel, is it any good?"

"Not bad at all and I'm quite sure I identified some people."

She pulled two plates from the cupboard and started setting the table.

"Robbie, you're maybe right, I could give it a try." Just like that, fate was coming to his rescue to deliver the final touch to convince her. She hadn't mentioned what she was talking about, but they both knew very well what she was referring to.

"Rory, who better than you for a quixotic attempt? The worst thing that could happen is that you'll self-publish or on a blog or Wattpad. Do you know how many writers started like that? See what happened to Anna Todd or JK Rowling. Harry Potter, the book was rejected by twelve publishing houses before being picked."

"What if nobody likes it?"

"Then you won't have any regrets because you'll know that you've tried but also where to start from to work on doing something better. Honestly, I really doubt that. You've written before."

"It was reporting," she retorted.

"But it was amazing, the way you put everything into words. Don't let the fear to fail to deter you from doing what you love. Try the positive attitude and stop thinking about failing before you've even given a shot. I thought you talked to Jess, what did he say?"

She winced.

"Not very far from what you're saying."

His mouth held a smirk, that was the reason she hadn't mention it. She didn't want to give him another argument.
He wrapped his arm around her and kissed her temple. After all these years, he still had this ability to turn her into a puddle of mush with his affectionate gestures and talks.

"You're the smartest girl I know, your intuition is always right, but you're always excusing yourself. I know you don't trust yourself, but you trust me, right? So, believe me when I say that you have to be more confident, free your intuition and let your fingers do the job, conveying what your amazing brain can pull off."

"You're right; I'm not a slacker. I can do hard things. Writing is tough. If it were easy, everyone would do it. Writing an entire novel is even harder, so maybe I'll try a short story for the New Yorker."

A/N: I'm grateful for the support of all the readers that are still there. I apologize for taking so long to update. All your reviews and kudos fill my heart with joy and fuel me to keep on writing.
Robert was surprised the door was locked when he arrived home. He was late, so he thought that Rory would already be there getting ready for the rehearsal dinner. It was so not like her, but he wasn't worried. She was particularly joyful lately, and he was wondering what was going on.

While he was leaving his messenger bag in his study, he heard her steps from the doorway. He found an out-of-breath Rory beaming in the foyer and kissed her temple.

"Hurry Ms. Gilmore. I don't think the rehearsal dinner of our best friends is the place to be fashionably late."

"I know, I lost track of time. I found this amazing coffee shop just near the office, and it's becoming my place to write," she said enthusiastically toeing her shoes off.

He raised his eyebrows at her. "Why don't you write at home?"

"I probably will, but right now I write during lunch breaks, and I think the place inspires me. It's so cozy, with oak tables, a fireplace framed by floor-to-ceiling bookcases. And it smells coffee..." she described dreamily.

Robert laughed.

"You know we have that at home, right? It was one of the reasons we bought this house."

"I know, I know, but you're missing the point here. I'm writing. Aren't you happy for me?"

"Don't worry, I didn't miss it, and I'm ecstatic about it, but if we want to be on time, we have to start getting ready. Come on!"

"I know, I know," she said peeling off her clothes. She could feel his heavy gaze on her as they walked up the stairs. "And no time for funky stuff Pr. Semple."

To the gang surprise, the rehearsal dinner was more relaxed than what they expected. Susan Vanderbilt had kept it to around only fifty people.

Robert noticed that Finn was silent for a while. It was so not like him when alcohol was flowing. Therefore, Robert wondered what could mute his friend. It didn't take him long to find out that it was a glowing redheaded woman who was in deep conversation with his girlfriend.

"You're so besotted."

Finn groaned.

"Rob, you know you're not in front of your students, you don't have to use your pretentious vocabulary."

The corner of Robert's mouth upturned. Finn was rarely touchy.

"So, have you made any progress with Rose?"

Finn sighed.

"Can you be more discrete? I'd like to avoid being under the scope of the group. It's bad enough I'm
way behind you guys but having my dating life dissected is not helping."

"Got it. Just tell me how it is going."

The Aussie gave his friend an exasperated look. "What did I just ask?"

"But I'm your confidant!"

"You are, but you'll tell Rory who will talk to Steph and so on."

Robert resigned. "Got it."

"Thanks for the advice though, you know, taking my time, try to get to know her better."

Robert chuckled, "we talked about that when I was still in Boston, so about a year ago!"

"Well, it only means that I'm listening to you and indirectly to Ms. Gilmore, I'm taking my time."

Finn pursed his lips and nodded.

"You obviously do, I truly hope it'll work out for you both."

"I've never been that slow with a woman, and I think it's working very well for me. Rory should have given us that advice at Yale."

"We wouldn't have listened," Robert chuckled.

"Probably. Oh! And you remember the three points the President advised you to consider?"

Robert nodded.

"Check. All three items!" Finn stated, winking at his friend.

It was a beautiful classical society wedding. Steph was glowing, and Colin couldn't stop smiling. Susan Vanderbilt outdid herself. She had tried to satisfy everyone's wishes, and it turned out that nobody was complaining and moreover looked happy. There had been the slight problem of who would be the best man, but they finally played it with rock-paper-scissors, and Logan won. Anyway, he was Stephanie and Colin oldest friend, so it was just fair.

The ceremony at the church went without a hitch, and they could head to the Waldorf Astoria for the reception.

Logan looked at Rory and Robert dancing. He was truly happy for them. He no longer felt that way for her. Robert was one of his best friends now, maybe not as close as Colin and Finn, but very reliable and trustworthy. He knew that part of the reason Robert stopped seeing Rory after the Marta's Vineyard weekend was to keep their friendship, even if he hadn't asked for it. In the end, four years later, they finally got together again. They were meant to be an item; it was a matter of time. She did well for him, and he would do good for her.

Rosemary arrived at the bar at the same moment as Finn. She smiled shyly at him. Things were progressing slowly since Juliet's wedding, but it was a good pace for them. Whenever he was in the City, he would take her out on a date and make her laugh. She had to admit, she had never felt that good with a man for a very long time. It made Rose realize that what she had with Ray wasn't what she had dreamt of when she was a young girl.

On their last date, Finn's plane was late, so he'd asked her to meet him directly at the venue. She was a little early and decided to seat at the bar. As he passed the doorway, he immediately spotted her and
released a sigh of contentment. He had an awful day, but he was sure it would get better. He decided to go with a humorous touch and asked if she came here often as if he didn’t know her. She turned to him recognizing his delicious Australian accent. She watched him leaning one arm on the bar, looking all cool, only he put his elbow on one of those little cocktail napkins and ended up half sprawled across the bar when it slipped.

She laughed all heartily, and that’s how she was definitively charmed and decided not to listen anymore to her brain screaming *never again* and let him lead her to whatever they could have together, fear be damned.

Tonight, as always, Finn looked really good. Fearing that his blue gaze could read her, she avoided it, and her eyes ran on his Adam apple bobbing while he was swallowing, that was rather perfect too.

*Oh Dear.*

It was bad, very bad. Rosemary couldn't believe she was lecherous at his Adam apple.

That's how she was laughing again at his jokes when suddenly his lips met hers by surprise. His kiss was as confident as it was skilled and Rose was buzzed from the feel of him on her mouth.

"What was that for?" Rosemary asked smiling with a startled gaze.

"It's just so I wouldn't have to wonder if I can kiss you when I'll walk you to your room this evening," Finn grinned looking proud of himself.

Rosemary leaned, gave him a slight kiss on his lips, looking straight in his deep blue eyes showing him her want. She then smirked, took her glass and walked toward her table her head held high. He was caught at his own game, just like that she had sexed him up.

Since he had decided to make a different turn in his love life, Finn was enjoying every moment. Five years ago, he had told his friends that he didn't have time to learn how to love a woman, but now that his career was on track, he was dedicated to this new goal. He was the last one of the Yale foursomes, but then he was also benefiting of his friend's experience. Over this period, he had watched them struggling, but now the first of them was finally tying the knot, and the other two would probably follow soon. He could see that Colin and Robert were truly happy and he wanted that too.

Logan saw Rory seating alone and invited her to dance. Once he was securely holding her, he looked straight into her blue gaze.

"I'm sorry Ace."

"For what?" She asked wondering what he was referring to.

"Shatter your heart back then. During the last years I tried to understand why we couldn't make it, be happy together and I came to the conclusions that it was all of my doing."

Rory was dumbstruck.

"You're too hard on yourself. I don't think it is that simple."

"Oh yes, it is. I was stupid enough not listening to you asking for some time, and I lost you when I needed you the most. I was too cocky, too proud. Darn pride"

"Why are you telling me all that? I thought we were fine after the Vineyard, Hamburg. Are you
"Because I want you to feel free to live your life with Robert, and maybe I'll be able to live mine without any regret."

They both looked at the dark-haired guy that had won Rory's heart. Robert was caught in a conversation with people asking him what Obama's intentions toward Putin were. Since he'd worked at the White House, it happened to him a lot. While indulging, he glanced at Logan and Rory. He wasn't as insecure as he used to be. He could see that they didn't look at each other as they used to do back in Yale. Now, she was keeping her loving gaze for him. A flood of happiness ran into him. It was that simple now. Just thinking of her made him feel ecstatic.

"Logan, just because something ends, it doesn't mean it was a bad thing. I'll never regret what we had together, and I truly hope you don't. I discovered a lot of things with you. It's part of our lives. Now you're building a new life with Odette and me with Robert. We've all moved on."

They kept dancing silently letting Rory wondering why Logan felt the need to apologize.

"Are you in therapy or something?"

He smirked, "No, just spent a lot of time thinking after I almost lost Odette too."

"Oh! I know, it's the thing like the people in AA who have to make amends."

"Absolutely not, just the old Logan maturing."

She pondered. "Okay, I take the maturing Logan. Odette is a very lucky girl, and she knows it."

Logan mouthed a thank you and spun Rory.

Colin took pity of Robert and extracted him from the endless political conversation.

"You know what my father told me yesterday when I was telling him how long it took you to propose?" Robert asked clinking his glass to the groom's one.

"Marriage is the most important decision and the easiest one to make. I guess he tried to pass me the message."

Colin smirked.

"Funny, at his last wedding, mine told me that people weren't meant to be together forever. I hope he's wrong and that yours is right because I do want to live the rest of my life with her you know."

Robert and Colin sighed in content. They both knew they finally got to the right place and they felt lucky. Like if Rory could feel her boyfriend emotions, she came standing in front of him and pulled him to the dance floor.

Robert wondered if his life could be any better. He had this sudden urge, cupped his hand around her neck and brought her closer to him, holding her firmly. Rory was surprised during the first second, he looked like if his life depended on it. Gently he kissed first her bottom lip, then her top. Then his tongue swept in, teasing her, tasting her. With sweet surrender, the people and the music swirling around them, she opened for him. His chest tightened, his brain went fuzzy. When they stopped to grasp some air, she whispered in his ear.

"I love when you kiss me like that. No-one has ever kissed me like that".
Robert rumbled and was close to losing control. If it wasn't his best friends' wedding, they would have already been out of there.

It was the moment Rose chose to approach them.

"Ror, Steph is about to throw the bouquet, you can't leave me alone there, please."

A look of desperation flashed on Rory's face before she covered it with a bright smile knowing that she had to support her friend.

"I guess I should go over there," she whispered with a look that said more I want to stay with you.

"Try to sound a little more excited about it." He pushed her toward Steph's direction. She sighed but willingly joined the gaggle of women in cocktail dresses.

"You're staring at your girl all the time too, you know," Finn said leaning to Robert's ear.

As soon as the bouquet left Stephanie's hand, Rory took slow, steady steps backward but it was without counting on the blonde strength as the flowers fell right in front of the brunette. She had no choice but catching it.

Finn draped his arm around Robert's shoulder.

"You're next mate; the bouquet said it."

"I doubt I could get married before Logan and Odette," Robert retorted.

"It doesn't count as Odette didn't try to get it."

"You know, people can be committed without being married," Robert tried to argue, but Finn already left to dance with Rosemary.

It wasn't as if Robert hadn't thought about it. Colin had pointed out that tying the knot was a real engagement toward each other, if it wasn't it wouldn't be so difficult to ask. He didn't know why, but he didn't feel they were ready yet. He usually was quick at making decisions, for instance, to quit Harvard to live with her in New-York. He wasn't used to uncertainty. As heavy as it was for him to get used to, had become his companion that he learned to accept. He preferred that than taking the risk that she could say no.

An hour later, a limo came to pick up the bride and groom to whisk them off to a fancy hotel from where they would leave in the morning for their honeymoon.

There it was, two more of their gang that were married.

Most of the girls thought that when a guy had passed the step of movie night lounging in yoga pants without complaining, then it was a straight way to marriage. Rory had long passed this stage, and still, the sex haze hadn't worn off yet. She still felt the toe-curling euphoria from the beginning. She could also see herself raising their kids together, and of course, she would say yes if he'd popped the question. Nevertheless, she felt something was missing but couldn't pinpoint what.

She wondered if it wasn't that she was just like her mother, a free spirit that couldn't be tamed by marriage. Indeed, Lorelai almost got married, but the proposal ended with a terrible break up with Luke. Of course, they got back together but never talked about that again. Nevertheless, nobody could doubt that Lorelei Gilmore and Luke Danes were the real deal. Hadn't the pain of that breakup healed yet? The hurt of losing him had been awful for her mother, driving her to marry her dad.
which was also a huge mistake. One thing was sure, after what happened to her mom, she would never be the one proposing.

Where did her life plan go? Back when she was sixteen and just started Chilton, everything was so clear-cut, and now fifteen years later nothing was how she had designed her future. She did have a fantastic boyfriend though, but he also wasn't on the original agenda, not that she was complaining. Robert was the most steady and secure part of her life. Was it what was bothering her? That she always thought she would be one of those modern independent women that would travel, an Alexandra David Neel of the new century.

Did she trust him? Yes, she did. Did she trust herself? Maybe not, she could make pretty bad decisions. Like when she got back with Dean or no decisions at all like when it took her more than three years to go back to him. So, no she won't suggest anything to him and let him take the lead on that. It's not like if the actual situation was bad. They were very good together.

It would have to come from Robert, or it'll never be.

Anyway, maybe they weren't a regular couple. It took eight years for Colin and Steph to get there and only a few months for Juliet. There were no rules.

A/N: I'm posting another chapter in three days to make up for a long November month with so many deadlines at work that I won't probably be able to update before December.

I'm grateful to all who are sticking around for this story despite my erratic posting pace. I know it's too long to the end. I love to read your reviews, so please let me know what you think.
Rory made a beeline towards the counter and sat next to her mom. It felt good falling back into her childhood habits. On her side, Lorelai had never been so happy to have the two New-Yorkers for the 4th of July weekend. It was like everything had fallen back into place, just like what the two Gilmore women had always dreamed of. The elder one had even decided to remodel her daughter’s childhood bedroom so that the young couple could stay in the house when they were visiting. In the meantime, they were still in the DragonFly.

“Hi, Cesar!”

“Hi, Rory, nice to see you.”

“Where is my favorite daughter’s boyfriend?” Her mom asked surprised not to see the two of them glued together as usual.

“I left him at the inn with a little homework. Aren’t you happy to have some time with your favorite daughter?”

“I am hon, just not used to seeing you by yourself anymore.”

Rory frowned.

“I thought you liked him now?”

“Oh! I do, that’s why I’m asking. He’s not out running again?”

“He already did, he does that very early in the summer, before it’s too hot.”

Lorelai shook her head, that was one thing she’ll never understand. She glanced at her daughter and held her smirk. She could sense that Rory was restless.

“Don’t tell me you’re already missing him.”

“No! It’s just that… I just finished my short story, and he’s reading it right now.”

“Oh! So, did you still go with your Chilton days?”

Rory nodded biting her bottom lip.

“I have to admit I’m a little jealous, why is he reading it first? He wasn’t around at that period.”

The younger Gilmore sighed.

“I promise I’ll give it to you, it’s just like that, we’re are each other first reader.”

“It’s alright hon, I like to tease you. You two are very cute together. He hasn’t read any part of it before?”.

“No, he was copyediting his own book. He’s great, isn’t he?”

A smile stretched Rory’s lips, a sincere, genuine grin.

“And your thinking you should be meshed together for the rest of your lives.”
Rory stared at her mother. How did she do that? She always knew what was in her mind. Lately, she had to admit that she was thinking that they should get married but she couldn’t put words why she had this sudden need.

“Why did you and Luke never get married?”

“Wow… You’re very good at diversion,” Lorelai sighed. “Not everybody needs to be married, we love each other. And there was the fiasco when I proposed…”

“Do you think that women can’t propose? Because I’ve gotten the impression, men like to be initiators in that kind of matters.”

“Honey, some do like girls who know what they want. I’d like to think that women are becoming more comfortable voicing their own desires, that there’s no need for permission anymore. In my case, it didn’t work because I initiated it, but because I used marriage as a solution.”

Lorelai put her hand on Rory’s.

“I was feeling as if I was failing. You and I were fighting, and Luke was the only solid strong person in my life at that moment. But April appeared, and he lost his balance, and I couldn’t understand that, even after you and I reconciled. Luke needed time, but I was feeling he was pushing me aside, so I gave him an ultimatum. You know we Gilmores don’t do well with ultimatums, and then I made a bad decision.”

“Anyway, if I do anything I’ll wait until his book is out, he has so much on his plate right now. He’s taking over the dual graduate program with Paris.”

“Oh, fancy! I’m so proud of you two; you’re thriving at everything you’re doing”.

“Well, he’s quite stressed for his book you know, but I’m sure it’ll be a best-seller. He can think rigorously and creatively like very few people do.”

Lorelai smiled at her daughter. It was clear to her now that Rory couldn’t be with anyone else and that with the years, she will always be amazed by Robert. She had noticed that he had this ability to trigger her rants which seemed to work as an aphrodisiac for them.

###

“So?” Rory asked, her eyebrows arching anxiously standing in front of him in the Dragonfly’s library.

“Does this Tristan exist?” Robert arched an eyebrow to her.

She was caught by surprise. She had prepared herself for different kind of criticisms, but not questions about the accuracy of her story. After all, it was supposed to be fiction.

“That’s all you’ve got to say?” She asked. “Yes, he does exist he’s a medical resident at John Hopkins now, with Paris.”

“Why have I never heard about him?”

Oh, now she was getting it. Could she sense a little jealousy there? Robert had never been possessive, and she deeply appreciated that. She hated that from Dean. Her boyfriend had been a bit insecure regarding her past relationship with Logan, but that was long gone by now. He had subtler ways to show that she was his. Putting his hand on the small of her back when a guy was too flirty,
dropping some “babe” or “honey” in the conversation.

“Don’t know, maybe because last time I saw him, we weren’t dating? It was at Paris’ wedding. So, what do you think about the story?”

“I love it, I wish I knew you then,” he put the sheets on the coffee table and kissed her on the temple. “Or maybe not, I probably would have screwed it, like this Tristan. You’re an amazing writer babe, but I already knew that.”

“Do you think it’s New Yorker material?”

“Well, I’m not a specialist, but I could see it there or in the Modern love section of the NY Times or anywhere authors are publishing right now. Maybe you should get an opinion from a fiction writer. Why don’t you ask the author who wrote the campaign trail story?”

Rory slightly frowned at him. Was he ditching his own opinion? No, it wasn’t like him.

“You’re right, I’ll ask her.”

There was still a whole part of her life that he didn’t know about, but he was now convinced that he would be there with and for her from now on. Robert felt the need to remind her how good they were together. What better way than to kiss her with all his might?

His warm hands patted over her arms. His icy blue gaze fixed on her made her shiver. She glided her palms over his muscular chest, higher still until she reached his weekend scruff, something she found sexy as hell. He took a step in and cupped her cheeks, and she could feel the heat of his body as he edged in closer still. His lips touched over the side of her face, gliding down until their mouths brushed over one another, bumping against one another softly. His Habit-Rouge scent tantalized her senses. His lips moved over hers slowly at first, then hard and lingering until her mouth fell open and she let him into her.

She recognized this kiss. It was the one that inevitably turned her into a puddle of mush. The one that he was giving her when he was overflooding with his emotions, that he could only share physically. The one that made her feel that he was hers forever.

His tongue brushed over hers, and a pulse of electricity rode along each bedraggled nerve in her body. Her fingers pressed into his strong arms as her mouth drank down the mighty, earth-shattering movements his lips delivered to hers. The ferocity picked up and soon he was giving something darker, more profound than the simple peck they started with. His mouth moved greedily over hers, and she couldn’t help but moan with approval—with wanting.

“Oh! get a room you two!” Lorelai interrupted them. “I can’t believe you’re are still kissing like two uncontrollable teenagers.”

# # #

Robert slipped his head to Lorelai’s office.

“Hey! Do you have five minutes before we leave?”

“Sure, come in.”

“Do you remember Rory’s friends from Chilton, besides Paris of course?”

“Do you have someone in mind?”
“Guy friends. Tristan?”

“Spawn of Satan?”

Robert chuckled.

“An obnoxious rich guy who had a huge crush on her?”

“Yep, that must be him. He’d been sent to military school after too many pranks.”

“Why this question? Is he back in her life?”

“Sort of… Just wondering how it was to be sixteen and in love with her.”

“If you’re that curious, you should ask Dean; he’s probably in town visiting his parents too.”

“She got closure with Dean, I’m more intrigued by this Tristan, how she wrote about him fifteen years later, I’m feeling that she’s romanticizing whatever they had.”

Lorelai’s grin broke out.

“Well, to my knowledge, nothing really happened between these two. You have to realize that Rory wasn’t like any other kids, she never went through a teenage crisis. I had to encourage her to go to school dances. Even if I didn’t like them very much, she was smart enough to choose boyfriends that indeed loved her.”

“He did kiss her.”

“But it stopped there. I give you that, if she had been like any other girl, she probably had fallen for him. You know, the devilish good-looking bad boy. I know I would have. But it’s Rory we’re talking about. Besides, you convinced her to write fiction, so you can’t blame her glamorizing a teenage girl love life. You did well, I haven’t seen her that passionate in a long time. I almost think you know her better than I do.”

A smile hinted at the edge of his lips.

“You know, the two of you have weird questions this weekend. Looks like she’s writing what I wouldn’t call fiction is racking your brains. Is this ride back to memory lane rocking anything?”

“Well, lately I’ve been thinking that maybe, we should get to another level… But I’m not sure she wants that.”

These two were definitely in phase, but for writers, it was puzzling to witness their difficulty to put everything in words.

# # #

Robert opened the door.

July had passed so quickly, they both had trouble to know which day they were. It was summer break for him at the university, but he was still meeting with his Ph.D. students and had so much to do with the book. In two weeks, he’ll have to prepare for the new classes. They both were working daily nonstop from morning until dusk. Finally, he got the galley proofs two days ago, and he had to admit it looked good.

Rory had sent her short story to the New Yorker, and while she was waiting, she had decided to start
a blog, The Book Sniffer, where she would write about literature, review books. She knew that her chances to publish in such a prestigious magazine were slim, but it gave her time to decide what would be her next move.

He found Rory on the phone, but he saw right away that there was something wrong, her lips were trembling.

She hung up the phone and burst into tears. Robert immediately took her in his arms and whispered softly.

“Tell me,” he whispered to her.

“It’s Grandpa.” Her voice was tiny, barely audible, trembling.

His heart dropped. He liked the man, but above all, he knew he was the most important one in her life.

“Heart attack, for good this time.”

Her eyes couldn’t hold the tears, they just flew. After a few minutes when he kept stroking her back, she let out a shuddering breath, she felt...lost. Her fingers clenched, tangling in the fabric of his shirt. She rested her head on his shoulder and let herself remember how to breathe. She could do that, as long as Robert would be there.

“I’m here babe,” he whispered, holding her. He let her cry, never uttering stupid it will be okay insipidities. He didn’t make soothing noises.

Eventually, she managed to pull back enough to let out a massive slobbering noise, and he glanced down at his blue shirt, which was now tainted with black mascara and the faint pink of lip gloss.

“Sorry,” she muttered smiling weakly.

“It’s fine, nothing a good detergent can get rid of,” he answered, stroking her hair. “Let me go get the box of tissues, okay?”

She nodded but kept holding him, not willing to let go the warmth of his embrace against her.

He smiled, “Rory, you need tissues and a cappuccino?”

He caught a slight short spark in her eyes and felt her weight lift off him.

When he came back with her drink, he finally asked.

“When do you want to go to Hartford? We could go now. Did your mom said anything?”

“She said that I could wait until the morning to come,” she answered.

“But you’d rather go now, right?”

She lifted her blue doe eyes to him and nodded slightly.

“I’ll go pack some clothes for us and then I’ll get the car.”

# # #

It was like the loss of her grandfather had sent her into an emotional withdrawal, something very
familiar to him. Sudden deaths were the worst, it had taken Robert years to recover from his best friend’s demise, and sharing his life with her had been part of the process. She was stronger than him; maybe her convalescence wouldn’t be as long.

It was the first time he’d witnessed that her beautiful gaze was right now, lifeless. This look that could make him think about things he could never have imagined, the one that provoked incredible feelings in him. The faces of the three Gilmore women were haunted. His usually beautiful girl looked dim. Her ponytail was off-center, and messy strands framed her strained face. Her usually vivid, animated blue eyes were swollen and shadowed. His heart sunk knowing she’d cried endlessly to make them that way.

He hated feeling helpless to her sorrow. He wished he could do something, anything, to take away her pain, even to make her feel better for a few moments.

At least the funeral went well, but now they had to go through the wake reception. Even if Emily was in her best hostess mode, it was mainly for the facade. Luke and Robert organized everything, and they did their job pretty well. Luke handled the caterer while Robert welcomed all the society and corporate guests. He was a hit among the DAR ladies.

Even though Rory was doing her best—receiving people condolences, Robert could see that she was in an automated mode. He turned his head to find Luke, and in some way, he was relieved that the older man looked as powerless as him. What can you do when you can’t prevent sadness from the person you love?

Just as if Luke knew what he was thinking, he felt his hand patting his shoulder.

“We just have to be there for them, make sure they can mourn in peace.”

Robert looked at the diner man unusually clad in a suit with a tie and tried to smile while nodding to show he was on it.

“Funerals make me nervous, so I try to keep busy,” Luke said trying to justify the fact that he couldn’t stay still for more than thirty seconds. “Plus, these people are clearly not my crowd.”

“I know, let me take care of them, don’t worry. I’ve got it.”

Henri and Lydia Semple were there too, happy to help. Semple brothers had been one of Richard’s oldest clients. Moreover, it was a lot like a Yale alumni party.

Rory could hear people reminiscing her grandfather. They were talking about the businessman, the longtime friend, but none were mentioning the fabulous grandpa that she had discovered way too late. When they had reacquainted once she started Chilton, she’d found that behind the facade of this tall strict man, was the softest and loving person. But she was his only grandchild, and from now on, there’ll only be Gilmore women left.

Steph, Logan, Colin, and Finn also came to the funeral. They knew how close she was to him. Logan flew from London because he really liked the man. The guys thought that was the least they could do since they had drunk the man’s scotch and smoked his cigars countless times. The real reason was that they wanted to be there though, was for Rory. They were friends for years now, but lately, they were more like family. Since Robert had moved to New York, Colin and Steph were only living three blocks away from them. They even had each other’s house keys.

“It’s an amazing tradition, they throw you a big party the one day they know you can’t come,” Finn stated, watching Robert doing his best having business small talk. He gulped his scotch and went to
his friend’s rescue.

“How are you holding up?” Robert asked softly.

She looked up at him, closed the space between them, sliding her arms around his neck and hugged him like there was no tomorrow. He wrapped her waist and buried his face in her hair. He hated seeing her like that, so sad and deep in her sorrow, and he knew by his own experience that she needed to be able to mourn before being herself again. He had to be there for her, showing her that he was strong enough for both of them while she could grieve. Something about the way she looked at him, the way her eyes pleaded like his arms were the safest place to be, satisfied the caveman that he didn’t know was in him. He had been raised to show only refined manners, sometimes at the expense of sincere gestures.

“He was a good man. Everything will be okay Rory.” The warmth of his embrace felt so good to her, and she wondered how a few years ago she ever thought she could live without him, without his infinite kindness, his tender touch, his soothing presence.

“He wasn’t even that old. I wasn’t prepared, I needed time. I was a bad granddaughter since I’m in New-York I barely visited him.”

Her voice was weak. She cried so much he wondered if she had any tears left in her.

“You had lunch with him every time he was in the city for business.”

“Yes, but I should have spent more quality time with him, golfing with him.”

“I didn’t know you play golf.” Robert had always liked how irrational she could be when it came to her loved ones.

“Well, I tried in high school, he taught me, and we had fun at the club. I should have smoked cigar with him”

Robert withheld chuckling.

“I should have spent more weekends with him instead of being selfish.”

“Rory, losing a loved one, or other bad things in life just happen. No reason, no purpose, it just occurs. There’s nothing we can do about it.”

“I know, but my family is so small, I’ve only two grandmothers left, one that I barely know, no siblings. You’ve such a large family you can’t feel lonely.”

“You’re not alone, you have a small family, but a lot of friends and my family loves you so much, they’re like yours.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Anything you want.” He squeezed her hand a little. The warmth of his palm on hers was comforting.

“When we’ll have kids, promise we’ll have at least two.”

“We’ll have as many as you want, I can handle that.”

She remembered how at the beginning, she could feel breathless by this simple gesture. Two years later, she couldn’t imagine life without his presence.
Lorelai and Emily were watching the young lovebirds.

“\text{I think we have something we can agree on,}” \text{Emily stated.}

Lorelai stared are her mother.

“\text{He’s good for her. He worships her.”}

It was hard for her to agree with the elder Gilmore, maybe she was getting old, but indeed, Robert was a good companion for her daughter.

# # #

Back in New-York, Rory clearly needed wallowing time. Robert ordered Chinese food and went to the grocery shop to buy all her favorite junk food. He put on Willy Wonka, sat next to her and she immediately curled up into him. He couldn’t stand this movie anymore, but he knew that was what she needed.

In the morning, Robert brought coffee in bed to Rory. He was already dressed to go to work. He looked at her in the eyes.

“I have to go, Rory, I have a meeting at Rodham.”

“Okay, Robbie. I’ll be fine don’t worry.”

She tried to force a smile, but it didn’t even reach her eyes.

His heart was breaking. She looked smaller as if the sorrow had shrunk her. For her, he had developed a strength that could slay dragons, but he was helpless now. He wanted to make her feel better, swift the pain out of her.

“No, you won’t, but it’s okay. It’s going to take time, but you’ll be able to remember him without feeling that intense pain. You don’t have to put on your brave face for me. Just try to do things step by step. I’m just a phone call away. I’ll be in my office around eleven, and I have a department meeting at four. I can come home in between if you need me.”

“Oh okay,” she nodded.

He kissed her on the forehead. “\text{Love you.”}

She sunk back into the sheets and closed her eyes. She felt lifeless. No energy, no desire to rise out of bed. Maybe she’ll feel better later. Of course, she will, she thought, because she had him now and he would always have her back. He had been showing her that for more than two years. Living apart during a year and a half had been challenging, but retrospectively it was astounding for their personal growth and their relationship. It helped them figure out who they were as individuals and as a couple.

She’d never liked when people said that she’d know when she would find the right man and thought that their statement was trite. But now she understood what they meant because she had no doubt that Robert was the love of her life.

A few nights later, Robert woke up feeling the emptiness beside him. It was unusual, for them, he was the early riser.

He found her at her desk, focused on her computer.

She rose her head, and a slight grin peeked around the edges of her mouth.
“I think I have to pursue my dream because he wouldn’t have liked that I stopped living because he’s gone. I know he always supported me no matter what I was doing, well except for my first boyfriend’s choices. And sometimes he didn’t trust me, but then when he finally understood that I could make adult decisions, he was unconditional support. So, I have to do that for him, even if he won’t see it, just for his memory.”

She had concluded that despite the sadness of death, life was going on. She had to remind herself of that every day, find strength, even courage in that knowledge. She thought it would probably be hard to get past her grief, but she slowly will because she was surrounded with loving friends, family and the man who was now sharing her everyday life.

He padded towards her, put an arm around her shoulders and kissed the top of her head.

“That’s my girl. I’ll start the coffee and go for a run.”

She looked at him leaving the room and thought that trusting someone to be there for you, to be your ultimate confidante, was the only way life was worth living.

A/N: Sorry again for the late update. I’m grateful to those who are still reading, reviewing, leaving kudos. I know this story way too long but I have to finish it, right? Anyway, we only have one year and a half left.
2015, Labor Day weekend

Rory looked out of the window: clear blue sky, white sand, endless beaches with palm trees and turquoise sea. She couldn't believe how her life had changed over the summer. She had finished a short story, was writing a blog and New York Media have asked her to write book reviews for them, and more importantly, she had lost her grandfather. Since she graduated from Yale, she was changing her career orientation every two years. She officially was still a non-fiction editor, but the more she was entering the fiction world, the more she knew she was slowly switching. If she were optimistic, it was probably only a matter of time after the meeting she just had before boarding on this plane to Saint-Barth.

Jasmine, the author of the *roman à clef* she edited for Rodham, had been very enthusiastic about her short story and passed it to her agent, Catherine Targetti. And that was only last week. Today, she had spent one hour with Cath, that’s how she wanted to be called, and Rory was still processing what happened. Of course, she had been dealing with literary agents for three years now, and this one didn’t dance around the bush as she knew Rory was in the profession. Therefore, Cath wasn’t trying to butter her up, right? Anyway, Jasmine had told her that she was very straightforward.

Thanks to Rodham marketing meetings that she hated so much, Rory knew that around 80 percent of books published by New York publishing houses were sold by literary agents. They were experts in this industry and represented their client’s interests. They were the ones with inside contacts with specific publishers and knew which editors were most likely to buy a particular work. And more importantly, agents could secure the best possible book deal, and run interference when needed between the author and the publisher. She was dealing with that kind of things on a weekly basis.

All that meant that if Catherine Targetti wanted her to develop her story, she could have hope. Cath already had a reputation, even in the non-fiction world. This woman was a force of nature, and that wasn’t a simplification. In front of her, Rory had felt like a leaf on the wind.

Anyway, she could still decide to self-publish. A lot of authors were doing that now, and very successfully. Various tools for self-publishing were now available for authors who prefer to do it alone.

On the other side, having an agent taking charge of the business side wasn’t such a bad idea and totally worth the 15% commission.

It didn’t mean that she was going to be published, far from it, but at least that someone from the profession felt that her short story had potential. She still had to deliver a book proposal which meant at least three chapters and a description of her novel. Of course, she could also send her story directly to publishers.

Even if at the end should it not work with Cath, it seemed like since she started writing a short story, it was as if she was under a lucky star, the same one that was designated to Robert for the President’s biography.

She remembered what Christiane Amanpour said when she met her at the DragonFly Inn: “Just get in there, do what you can, show them what you’ve got, and the rest will take care of itself.” Since then, she had been following this advice, and it drove her just where she was now. Starting to write a fiction novel.

# # #
The girls were chatting laying on sun loungers overlooking the sea, admiring the sunset, while the guys were standing at the water’s edge nursing their drinks, the white-capped tide lapping at their feet.

Juliet raised her glass.

“To Steph for organizing this weekend in such a wonderful place. You really have done an amazing job.”

“To Steph!” The girls all raised their glass.

“What fun would have it been staying here alone? Now that I have everything settled for my work event, I can enjoy this place with my friends. Besides, we all needed a nice break before fall, in particular, Rory and Robert who had been working very hard in the city all summer.”

It was the first summer they haven’t travel to France. She’d missed this recurring trip to Paris, Lourmarin and sometimes vineyards in between. She loved the tour of bookstores where Robert would get his first editions. He had complained that some he used to go had closed, as nobody would have taken them over after the owner had retired. Rory had fit in his most personal world just like he was now no longer a stranger in Stars Hollow. As soon as they step a foot in the Connecticut quirky town, he was assaulted by Taylor’s political questions, Miss Patty’s wandering hand, and Kirk’s new ideas.

“Still, we had a great summer in New-York, we went to see movies at Bryant Park, had weekends in Stars Hollow and Newport. But I have to admit, this place is paradise, totally worth the six hours flight.”

They all nodded and admired the view of the sunset.

“Is it only me or do they look sexier than when we were in college?” Steph asked, admiring this extremely nice group of men.

They couldn’t hear what the guys were saying. Colin had an arm around Juliet’s husband’s shoulders. The two newlywed men were laughing, pointing their finger at the others.

“I totally agree, they weren’t that fit then. Though I don’t know how Nick looked like ten years ago, I admit I’ve got a very nice specimen there.” Juliet grinned, she loved how her husband got along so well with her college friends.

“It’s because they drink less and they work out now. Logan is cycling since California, and he even trained for triathlon for a while,” Steph added.

“He still runs now, and cycles when he’s in France. Each of his muscles is pretty perfect,” Odette said shyly.

“O, you’re so hooked up!” Rory laughed.

Since the McCrae-Vanderbilt wedding, the French heiress was part of the gang too. They were the same college gang, but the partners had changed. She was still a little timid around them, but it felt good to be part of Robert’s life again, her “adopted” brother.

“And a little more maturity surely helps,” added Juliet.

“Some weeks ago, Finn crashed at our home, and when I woke up in the morning, I saw him naked in the living room. Wow. I’ve seen him in his Adam’s costume multiple times in college I can
promise he’d never looked like this before. Perfect six-pack, incredible ass, amazing pecs. Not an
inch of fat. He’s lucky I’m married and that Colin is his best friend. Rosemary, I would strongly
suggest that you should have second thoughts on this matter.”

As Rosemary stayed silent, all the attention turned to her. She was beaming, sipping her drink and
staring sightlessly at her glass trying to avoid the gazes fixed on her.

“Oh my God! You’re finally sleeping with him! Since when?” Steph yelled.

“Since your wedding,” Rosemary whispered.

“And you’re telling us only now?” Rory asked feeling happy for her two friends.

“I wanted to see if it wasn’t only a fling. It’s Finn, girls, well-known womanizer unable to commit
Finn. You know since my Ray debacle...”

“And?” Juliet asked expectantly.

“Seems that we’re exclusive,” she blushed.

“It’s so great!” Steph squealed which made the guys turn around.

“Is everything okay over there?” Colin asked.

“Everything’s good, ask Finn!” the guys directed their gaze to Finn.

“Busted,” said Finn, “I guess they found out that Rosemary and I are dating.”

“Finally! It just took you about ten years,” Logan pointed out.

“Well, it took me a long time to realize that I actually like to work for things now, including ladies, to
be able to appreciate them,” Finn said looking proud as a peacock.

“All this time I thought you were the master player and finally you’re just as bad as me,” Robert
laughed.

“What about you? Are you ever going to pop the question? What are you waiting for?” Finn
retorted.

“That the ducks get in a row?” Robert answered in a low tone, not really wanting to talk about this
particular subject.

“Don’t you think they already are? You’re next man,” Colin stated.

“We’re living together, we bought a house together, I’m already committed to her. Anyway, she just
lost her grandfather, and I don’t think it’s the right moment. She isn’t totally herself yet.”

It’s not that Robert had never thought of it, they had talked about having kids, but never about
marriage. Were they that kind of couple? Was she considering marriage an option? Was it too old

“I get it, you don’t want to have a big society wedding like Colin and Logan, but you have to make
an honest woman out of her, make a vow to her for life. It’s not old-fashioned man, and it’s so you.
I’m sure you’ll both write vows that will all make us weep. Also, I would love to be your best man,
it’s my turn I deserve it after all you put me through,” Finn whined.
“I totally get where you stand, but only be careful you don’t dismiss something essential to your happiness, or even a slight moment of joy. Just grab anything you can, won’t you feel awesome to think that you can be happy your whole life together? Even with the risk that it could not last? It’s those kinds of moments that make all the bullshit we go through worth living, don’t you think?”

Robert stared at Colin furrowing his brows. Since when did his lawyer friend was dispensing wisdom?

“Everything is so magic since we’re together. I think I’m afraid to lose it if I change anything.” He glanced at Logan. “Besides, I need to keep her attention for a long time to come as I plan on spending the rest of my life with her.”

“You’ve got a point. Don’t ask if she isn’t ready. So, is that your way of saying that you’re mustering the courage to pop the question?” Logan asked.

“But how do I know if she’s not ready?”

“Man, your situation is totally different, we’re not the same people we were at Yale anymore. She was already this thoughtful, challenging girl who examined the world she was in, and I… was just a college guy dealing with my hormones and daddy’s issues. Don’t you remember how confused we guys were with our feelings? She didn’t actually turn down my proposal, she asked for time but I was too dumb to see it, all I heard was “no.” She’s not refractory to marriage. Just don’t propose in front of a whole party.”

They all laughed.

“Not taking any risks is not living, man, it’s existing. You took the risk to go to the White House, then leaving Harvard, you can do this. Look at Nick and Juliet!” Logan tapped Robert’s back.

“Well, what I learned from your story is that she’s a woman who needs to process things, so I should give her time to think about it. But…” he paused knowing that his friends will probably scowl him for thinking that, “I just can’t shake the thought that one day she will realize she could do better.”

“It’s just an excuse for you to dick around the real matter Rob,” Colin stated.

“Mate, don’t you think she already did when you guys decided to buy a house together? Don’t you two want to have kids someday? Have you ever talked about it with her?” The Aussie smirked, he perfectly knew that his friend needed to feel ready, which could take some time regarding it took them almost four years to get back together.

He was madly in love with her for years now, because she was one of a kind. So maybe she wasn’t like all the other women that were always begging for men to commit to them?

Later in the evening, Logan saw Robert by himself ending a phone call on the beach. He took the opportunity to speak to him.

“Hey, can I talk to you for a see?”

“Sure.”

“I wanted to make sure that you knew that what you have with Rory is the unique kind of love.”

Robert looked at Logan suspiciously.

“How do you know?”
“She had never looked at me the way she looks at you, and I’ve never seen you with anybody like how you’re with her. Not everybody has that chance to find the perfect match.”

Robert stared at his friend in astonishment. "Since when did you become a love expert?"
“I’m not, but it doesn’t take a genius to figure it out. I have two things for me, I’m very observant, and I know you both very well. Go ahead man, ask her, I know you don’t need my permission, and I don’t know what’s holding you. I wholeheartedly approve.”

Robert’s mouth upturned a little on the right, and he spread an arm around Logan’s shoulders to walk back to the house. Who would have thought that the great Logan Huntzberger would finally suck it up and give him the go-ahead? He knew he wasn’t mistaken having given him his friendship more than ten years ago.

The following morning, the group went surfing. More precisely, Finn surfed, the other guys tagged along, and the girls stayed on the beach to watch. Over the years, even though they couldn’t see each other very often, the gang had tightened up. They were there for one another no matter what — a network of tight-knit friendships.

“Rose, there is money at stake here, so be careful with your answer. Yesterday during dinner, when you disappeared with Finn, was it to do the nasty?” Juliet asked smirking.

The redhead stared at her friends pondering if she should tell them the whole truth, or try to keep her image of a good girl. Finn had wrecked her compass and when he was close to her, feeling his breath on her was enough for her to mix her right from her left. A small smile played on her lips.

“I knew it! Give me the money girls,” Steph exulted.

“When I see you two so happy, why did you wait for so long, why now?” Rory asked. She had noticed the loving glanced between her two friends and wondered why these feelings hadn’t appeared before.

“Well, in Yale, I didn’t want to be another notch in his bedpost, and back then, he was nothing like how he is now. He was always drunk, biggest man-whore, sure he was fun, but it was better to have him around as a friend. Then after I met Ray.”

“I’m so happy for you two, you deserve each other,” Rory said, draping a pareo around her shoulders to protect her from sunburn.

“Ror, do you guys want to get married someday? You guys look so much into each other.” Rose asked. She wondered if Rory was just like her with Ray, thinking that they were happy and that there was no rush.

“We never talked about marriage per se, but about having kids, and concluded that we'd know when the moment will be right. I’m perfectly happy, and I’m not in the place when I’m expecting he will propose and freeze until he does. If he asks, I’ll say yes, but truth be told, I’m not sure I’m there yet.”

“You’re not???? You know that he’s good for you, he brings the best out of you. Look how you’re happy back at writing.” Steph was dumbstruck and took off her sunglasses to make sure if Rory was serious.

“I love him, I do. I’m sure he’s the one. I cannot see myself with anyone but him. With you guys getting married, of course, I’ve been thinking about it. I even thought about proposing to him. But then my grandfather passed away, and I felt shifted. For me, marriage has to be when we’re both totally in sync, and I’m not sure we’re there yet. My mind is still not in the right place. Don’t know how to explain it. One thing is sure; I’ll regret my grandfather won’t be there if we do tie the knot.”
“Is it because you’re writing and you’re in the middle of introspection?” Odette asked. She too had
tried to explain why her childhood friend hadn’t moved forward.

“Maybe, I don’t know,” Rory answered barely audible.

“Ror, it’s in your nature, you always have been trying to figure out who you are, what you should
do, make your pro-con lists. You’ll always do that, but you can sometimes trust your guts too. Look
at Rose, look how she’s glowing after ditching her celibacy plan.” Juliet said.

“I understand you’re still mourning, but… Are you guys still active in the sack?” Steph carefully
questioned.

Rory blushed. Since her grandfather passed away, they were only chastely kissing, cuddling. She
knew he wanted to let her mourn in peace. Nevertheless, this morning, her body had sent her a signal
that it disagreed with the situation. When Robert was spreading sunscreen on her back, his fingers
had brushed her sides just an inch away from her breasts, and her nipples had sneakily hardened.
Moreover, she had to admit that his hand caressing made her heart beating double time.
She wasn’t opposed to it, but after such a long break, it was like if she had forgotten how to initiate
it. Rory shook her head

“It’s true I hit pause, but it’s so not about that.”

“Probably, but still, why don’t you start with that, I’m sure it’ll help to be in phase physically again. I
don’t think it would be too difficult to get back in the game. You guys used to be constantly on each
other.” Steph teased.

“No, we’re not!”

“Oh! Yes, you are. At my wedding the way you made out on the dance floor, I thought my
grandmother had a heart attack.”

With the funerals, Rory feeling so down, trying to cheer her up, the final race for the book, the
preparation of the new undergrad seminars, the dual graduate program with Paris, he hadn’t had a
second to think about sex. He wondered when his priorities had changed that much. Maybe it was
the oxytocin taking over the testosterone. He remembered when he learned that in college and
doubted it could happen to him. Maybe Logan was right again, back then they were only guys with
raging hormones taking over their brain. Was he becoming a responsible adult?

But today… Seeing her in her red bikini, laughing, enjoying life, he couldn’t think about anything
else but wipe the sand off her skin and kiss every inch square of her body. Applying sunscreen on
her back didn’t help either. God, he loved her soft skin, and if they would have been alone, he would
likely have slid his fingers further. He’d heard her sigh, but as he couldn’t see her face... How could
he know if she was ready to get back in the sack without being boorish?

During the dinner, she glanced at him continually, drinking his words. She had always loved his
deep voice, how he always spoke calmly, with chosen words. God, he was so sexy when he was
that passionate. Combine with his low and gravelly voice. She could listen to him for hours without
getting bored. This time it was about Siddhartha Mukherjee’s book “The Emperor of All Maladies.”
He was so much into science. Sometimes she wondered why he didn’t pursue that in graduate
school. He could captivate all of them talking about cancer during a holiday weekend on a tropical
island.

What was happening to her? She hadn’t been in the mood for sex for weeks, and all of a sudden,
anything from him was turning her on. Like when he bent and softly asked if she was okay. It was a
whisper, just inches from her ear. It sent shivers, the right kind of shivers, the kind that made her want to lean back into him and beg him to kiss her everywhere.

They walked back to their room, his arm around her waist. She never had a problem initiating sex with him, but it was like she had lost her mojo. Nevertheless, it shouldn’t be that difficult. She had caught his gaze several times this evening, and she could have felt his mischievous smile all the way down to her toes.

To his surprise, as soon as he closed their bedroom door, she pulled him to her, and kissed him. Soft and sweet, no tongue. Just her lips were brushing his, over and over again until they were both whimpering for more. Only when he parted his lips to invite her tongue, her mouth slightly pulled out from his.

“I missed you,” she murmured. They haven’t been apart all summer, so he understood she was talking about their intimacy.

Swallowing, he eased out of the hug and met her gaze. Jesus! He wanted her so much, he had to cool down a little, or he was going to take her there, on the door and come within seconds.

His breath played on her face, leaving her hanging, wondering if she had been explicit enough. Impatient, she took matters into her own hands.

“Do you want to slip into something more comfortable?”

“Like what?” He enquired curious, arching an eyebrow. He was only wearing a linen shirt and chino pants.

“Me?”

“Thank fuck.” A grin hinted at the edge of his lips. She was regularly able to surprise him, and he loved that from her.

His lips brushed her temple. Then he inhaled deeply as if he was smelling her hair. When his lips finally traveled down her neck to lick at her collarbone, she was ready to come apart in his hands, and they hadn’t even gotten their clothes off. It was so good to feel the physical chemistry between them again, and she felt like she was coming out of a coma. “More,” she pleaded. “Please.” He dragged his hands down her front, his palms snagging on her hardened nipples as he paused there for a moment before continuing his slow torture. He stroked up and down over her dress until she was writhing against him. Finally, finally, he slid his hands under the fabric, finding her skin warm.

“Oh! Sweet Moses,” he muttered.

It had been way too long since they had sex. Maybe more than a month? God, she couldn’t remember. The feel of his warm, wet lips traveling along her throat was turning her on beyond belief.

“Were you afraid we wouldn’t make love anymore?” she asked her eyes sparkling with lust.

“Nah… I know you enjoy it too much,” he smirked and pulled down the straps of her dress.

A/N: Thanks to you all for your support, your votes, and comments. If you have a moment of your time, tell me what you think. I’d love that.
Since they were back from Saint-Barth, Rory had never been so determined. Nothing could ruffle her, or get her flustered. As soon as she'd stepped foot in New-York, her phone had been filled with messages from Catherine Targetti. She didn't bother listening to them and just returned the call. The agent answered at the first ring. They hadn't signed anything yet, but over the weekend, she had already built a strategy for Rory. The first thing was to submit the short story to other literary magazines than the New Yorker.

Moreover, Rory had been asked that her blog been added in blog tours. She was surprised as hers was very young, but they said that she already had a name as an editor and former reporter. She'd noticed that she had an increased number of followers, but didn't know if they were reading it. Anyway, it would be an excellent way to meet other fiction writers.

When she started this blog, it felt so good writing about her passion that she posted almost daily, talking about her favorite books, or the emotions she still had from old books she read long ago. Jess’ comments were incredible, and they were getting used to banter. Sometimes Robert would chip in, but it wasn't his thing, and he much preferred to work her up in private.

She'd been reading book blogs for a long time. They were much more interesting than Goodreads or Bookbub which were now only commercial social media.

Even if she was still working at Rodham, this additional intense writing activity didn't unbalance her life. She didn't fear that her novel wouldn't reach enough readers, she just didn't want to regret that she hadn't tried. Her relationship with Robert was anchoring her on earth, and with him, she felt invincible, nothing would be able to tear her down. She understood that with her grandfather's death. She couldn't get lost because he would always be there for her, she had absolutely no doubt about it.

Rory had found this new energy. She had been compensating the loss of her grandfather by filling all the bookcases of the house. Some people would say it was hoarding, but she said that it wasn't since they were books. Anyway, what was the point to have such a big house if you couldn't fill it with what you love?

Soon she would turn thirty-one, and she had learned that self-doubt was her worst enemy. Therefore, she had decided she wouldn't let room for it and stick to what she loved and trust — her work, writing, friends and family, and of course Robert.

She felt bad because she thought she had neglected him over the last month. He'd never complained and had been nothing but a loving patient boyfriend. All these nights when she would walk up sobbing, he was there, holding her, let her sorrow spill out of her. He would handle her a tissue, listen to her rambling. He had kept the freezer packed with her favorite flavors of ice cream, the pantry with pop tarts and red vines. She sensed he was worried about his book release. Several advance copies had been sent to book critics before the official publication, and they were still waiting for the feedback. Most of the reviews will only be published on the day of the book release.

Contrary to the general belief, some men were good at multitasking and Robert was one of them. At least that was the thought until feelings were involved.

September was pure madness. He had to deal with the beginning of the academic year at Columbia
and the preparation of his book release. He had now to fit a book tour in his schedule during the worst period of the fall semester.

Robert was afraid that people would think that his Obama biography would be too sugar-coated. After all, it happened to David Axelrod's memoir. Robert was still devoted to the President; he couldn't help himself. Therefore, he'd used his researcher skills to stick to the facts. People wanted juicy information from that kind of book, in particular from someone who had worked at the White House.

Rodham was taking a considerable risk, but on the other hand, they were the only ones publishing a book on the president when the primaries were starting.

Nevertheless, all this uncertainty wasn't what was distracting him. His legendary concentration was disturbed by the gorgeous brunette who was sharing his life.

Since Labor Day, it was as if a tiger had taken over her. She was unstoppable in every domain. When she aimed that stare, that drop-your-pants-right-now look, followed by her I-want-you-right-now smile, he was a goner. Bossy Rory had come back, and he was in paradise.

He never thought it could be possible, but he became hungrier for her. He was hornier than any version of his teenage self. When they were apart during the day, he suffered from withdrawal syndrome. She had been in his blood, under his skin since the beginning, and that his life depended on that. Therefore, he had to make sure to keep her there. She had woken up primal male instincts that he never thought he had and scared the shit out of him. Where was this possessive feeling coming from? Of course, he hadn't gone caveman entirely and peed around her or pulled her by her hair, but he needed the world to know she was his.

Ever since their first date ten years ago, his love for her had grown little by little, and it was far from being only a physical need. Maybe it was a cliché for the cheesiest romance novel, but he loved everything about her. From her freckles, in particular, those on her arms, to her insistence on cooking. They had acknowledged that her participation in the kitchen should be limited to reheat the meals that Lupe had prepared and frozen for them. Nevertheless, once in a while, her need to be a perfect, accomplished woman would lead her to the kitchen, and he would have to eat her cooking until she'd accept that it should be thrown away and order a pizza.

Everything drove him to the conclusion that the well-read, intellectual, refined high society man should take the back seat, and Robert Semple had to make her his, the old fashion way. He had to show everyone that they were tied to each other for life.

He and Rory were enjoying their relationship to the fullest. And there was this feeling, like as if he had found the last piece of a puzzle and that everything was in place. Even if he didn't want to admit it out loud, he knew for a long time now that she was the one. Their relationship was what was balancing out their life. Anything could happen to them; they would be able to handle the situation as long as they were together. Today, the book would be out, and he would have more time to think, despite the promotion tour in between his classes. If he was true to himself, he had never felt happier.

He refused to look at his phone or his emails, anything that could derail him from his morning jog.
Every major decision he had made in the last ten years had been prefaced by a run, so he got up, put on his running outfit and headed to Central Park.

These past two years had driven him in an unprecedented state of bliss. He had lost the awful sentiment of emptiness that had invaded his mind after Antoine's loss. From that period, he had learned harshly that everything that a lot of people inspired for wasn't what was needed to be happy. Being a gifted over-privileged kid didn't help either. Nevertheless, a little voice in the back of his head was always there to cheer him up, and with the help of his friends and family, he had kept on living.

Now he was starting to live at the fullest just enjoying all the little perks that life was giving him, only because he had found a soul mate again — someone he could share everything with. He remembered his anthropology class where he learned that humans were mammals and that they needed to live with a mate or in a group for better survival. Rory was his life mate, she was essential. She was it for him, and he was it for her.

He had thought about proposing — a lot. More like constantly over the past few months. Were the guys right? Was the only reason he hadn't asked her to marry him was that he couldn't take the emotional risk? Let's face it, she had knocked off his world, and there was no way he could live without her. She was in his mind twenty-four/seven. He would be thirty-three next month, and it was like he was still as lustful as a teenager, except that all this energy was focused on a single woman. Weren't these raging hormones phase supposed to calm down with age? They were together for more than two years now, and she had still that helluva effect on him. Just thinking about her smooth curves pressed up against him, the smell of her soft skin, her tits filling his palms... And the sexting... They had been doing that a lot the first year when he was still in Boston. But they never actually dropped it once moving in together, because it was fun. If Rory wanted to write erotica novel, she was more than ready because she had now a sheer amount of words to describe their throes of passion. He was glad he was currently running to bring under control the horndog in him.

So why no tying the knot? Because they were above that ancient tradition? Or because he was scared as shit that she could turn him down? Because she was the poster child of an independent woman and couldn't be tied to anyone? Man-up Semple! Being married didn't mean losing your freedom, she should know that even if she was his and vice-versa. That maybe he should keep to himself if he didn't want to scare her.

That evening, on his way back from work, he dropped by his parent's house.

"Is anyone home?" he asked opening the door.

"In the kitchen," he heard his father's voice.

"Hi, son! I read the review in the Washington Post and the Times. I can't be prouder!"

Robert hugged his dad.

"Thanks, Dad."

"You're alone."

"Just me. Disappointed?" Robert smirked, his dad was so fond of Rory.

"A little. Make yourself useful, open the bottle of wine I left on the table and tell me what you think."

"I want to propose to Rory," Robert blurted out. "I don't know what is going on with me, but I can't think about anything else, every subject just keep leading me to this conclusion."
It's about time, your mother and I, we were wondering what was keeping you. You need our permission?

"No! Well, yes, I didn't think I needed it"

"Of course, you didn't, you're a grown man, but I'm glad to give it to you anyway. She's a really great girl, just don't understand what she finds in you," Henri beamed at his son. It was fun to see the younger version of himself going through the same turmoil he had been through with his wife.

"Dad, can you be serious for a moment?" Robert gave a stern look at his father. "If it were only me, I would have proposed four years ago."

Henri held off his smirk.

"Seriously, just do it, I don't see her turning you down."

His father shook his head and took the glass of wine his son was handing him.

"How do you know it's the right moment? Maybe she's not ready yet. But lately, it keeps invading my brain, and I'm afraid it would burst out. I want it all now dad, I want everything with her, I want to marry her, have babies, grow old, all of it. I know she's ready, but does she?" He looked at his father with a desperate gaze. "It was a long time ago, but she did turn down Logan because she thought she wasn't there yet and they were living together for more than a year at that time."

A small smile played on Henri's lips. Robert had always been the smartest of his kids academically wise, but he also was clumsy when it came to personal feelings. Therefore, his way of dealing with them was to shove them aside, but apparently, it didn't work anymore now that he was deeply in love.

"Come on son, I don't know the story with Logan, but they were young, trust me, what you two have is unique. Listen to your old and experienced father. Isn't what you came here for?"

"I came to ask you how you proposed to mom. I just know I can't do it in public, and that she doesn't like surprises."

"I'm not sure it would be a shocker to her if she knows you as I think she does. Maybe you've got a point, if you keep stalling, she might ask you first."

"Dad! You must have had some elaborate plan all set up, right?"

"Not really, I just had my affectation for the Peace Corps, we were in bed, and it struck me that I couldn't leave her. We had talked about marriage, but she wanted to have her Ph.D. first, I was going abroad, so we thought it was more reasonable to wait. But that morning, I felt that I couldn't wait, so I proposed on a whim, I didn't even have a ring."

Robert shook his head. His father wasn't of any help. Logan did also propose on a whim and Rory didn't respond well at all.

Henri walked to his son, sat next to him and put his arm around his shoulders.

"There's no rush here. I don't think she's going anywhere. You'll find the right way by yourself."

At that moment Lydia entered the kitchen to find her son cradling his head in his hands and her husband smirking.
"What's going on here?" She asked frowning and pursing her lips.

Henri left his place next to their son to his wife. Robert put a peck on his mother's cheek.

"Our son came to us for advice to propose to his girlfriend."

She beamed. Finally, one of her sons was willing to take the leap.

"She's gonna say yes," she whispered conspiratorially. "Trust me."

Her warm voice caused his muscles to loosen. He closed his eyes and let the relief invade him. His mother had always had this effect on him.

Robert smiled at his mom. How could he forget that she always was the person with the best words to comfort him?

"Just do it when it feels right. No matter if you don't have a ring, or you think there should be rose petals or moonlight, just do it when you feel you should. Got it?" She smiled and grabbed her son's chin to turn his face to her.

"And I don't want you two to elope, you hear me? It's maybe the only opportunity I'll get to marry one of my sons," she said sternly.

He chuckled and his mouth quirked up. She could be right. He didn't see how Charles could tie the knot any time soon, at least before that, he would have to narrow down the number of ladies he was dating.

"So, do you need help for the ring? Do you still have the name of the saleswoman from Tiffany I gave you for Colin?"

Robert nodded.

"Do you want your grandmother's ring?"

"No, thanks mom, I think I want to choose my own. Keep it for Charlie or Aubrey. I wanted to ask Steph, they're friends, I'm sure she knows what Rory likes."

"Great, are you staying for dinner?"

"No, thanks mom, Rory will be home soon."

"Robert, have you thought about asking her parents first? I know it may sound old fashioned, but some do care."

"But you didn't?"

"No, but after asking your mother, I did go to see her parents. The old way is that we should go and meet her parents and ask for her hand, but I guess you'll veto that."

"She now has a good relationship with her father, but her mother raised her, so if I had to ask someone I guess it should be her mother. I'll think about it."

"Son, you may have already guessed that, but marriage is a partnership, a friendship, a family, and a work in progress, don't take it for granted. It's the key."

"Thanks, Dad, I'll keep that in mind."
Henri noticed the worried look in his son's eyes and understood he still needed extra support.

"One very last thing. It's only as complicated as you make it."

A slow smile curved Robert's lips. His father wasn't so bad at advising after all.

When Robert arrived home, he found Rory laid on her stomach reading on her kindle, wearing nothing but her panties and a white T-shirt.

When he gave her the reading tablet, she told him she would never trade that because she loved the smell of paper too much. He argued that it was much more convenient to hold a tablet than a huge book and that within it, she could carry hundreds of her favorite books. She just kissed him to thank him and shut him up. Rory would never admit it openly, that once again he was right, but he'd missed one compelling argument. It was much better when you were waiting for your nail polish to dry up.

The corners of his mouth tipped up, no matter what she was wearing, he had trouble keeping his hands off her. Since Saint-Barth, Rory's new energy had led them to find new places, and he smirked just thinking about last Friday evening when she came to pick him up at his office and christened his desk. What was he supposed to do? She was wearing a dress that was an ode to her curves. He had tried to persuade himself to behave as they were supposed to meet Finn and Rose for dinner, but Rory's eyebrows winged up, letting him know exactly what she thought when she said that she'd noticed that he was the only one left in the department.

His lips had hovered over hers for a moment, leaving him time to decide if they could have a little treat, before capturing her mouth in a passionate kiss. His hand moved down to cup her rear end, then to look for the hem of her dress. He lowered his mouth to her collarbone, and she enjoyed his chin stubble on her skin, but not as much as the hard and thick shaft pressing on her stomach.

Her voice pulled him out of his wandering thoughts.

"What did you think of the reviews? They were good don't you think?" She asked, happy that the feedbacks for the biography were so positive.

"Yep, but I'm sure my day is about to get much better."

He bent over and kissed her temple while sliding a hand under her shirt. A pleased smile spread on her face, and he knew exactly what he had to do.

A/N: Thanks for your kudos and comments. I love them. I hope you had a lovely Christmas and you're ready to start 2019. I wished I'd finish this story in 2018, but it isn't likely. I promise you'll see the end of it. There are our chapters left and an epilogue.
Robert was going through his emails trying to sort his priorities. Everything was overwhelming him. The book had only been released last week, and until now, he hadn’t got any bad reviews. Lilian was over excited and wanted to add new dates on his book tour, but if he was true to himself, it wasn’t possible to squeeze in anything more in his schedule without impairing the teaching. He was lucky his TA was very efficient. Robert hoped Riley would do a Ph.D. so he’d keep him for at least three more years. Maybe he could ask him to take over some office hours for students? Robert liked to meet the students, in particular at the beginning of the semester, but Riley was now pretty familiar with the student’s needs.

As if the young man had a sixth sense, he entered Robert’s office.

“Okay, so I’m gonna say it because I’m sure you have a clear explanation and there’s absolutely no way this rumor is true.”

Robert raised an eye to his teaching assistant.

“Riley, what are you’re talking about?”

“There’s a rumor that you’re boning a senior undergrad.” The young man said while sitting in front of his mentor.

“What? Are you kidding me?”

Robert's eyes went wide with shock.

"I know, I know, the chick has a history though, she's a pathological liar, everybody knows it."

“What do you mean? You know there’s a no messing around with students here, it’s only my second year! Do I even know her?”

“She’s attending your introduction to comparative politics class.”

“Please, tell me I’m not her advisor.”

“No, you’re not, she’s not even a political science major. But you have to know, you have kind of a reputation among the female students.”

“What? This is getting even better.” Robert sighed heavily, shaking his head. This wasn’t what he needed. “Do you mean that people think I’m taking advantage of my female students?”

“No! Just that a lot of them think you’re hot, so they want to get into your classes, some even tried to bribe me. Since your book is out and that you’re all over social media it’s getting worse.”

Robert chuckled.

“So, I hope you’re gaining something out of keeping my reputation spotless?”

“Don’t worry about me, and leave your door open when you have a female student in your office.”

“Will do, but tell me who’s the girl spreading these rumors again?”

"I'm surprised you've haven't noticed her, Izzy Martin? Front row, very short skirt, blue-eyed blonde,
“Blake Lively vibe?”

"Nope, the class only started a month ago, so I only remember my advisees."

"You're kidding, right? Even you can't be that oblivious, well, I know Rory is hot, like Anne Hathaway beautiful with a twist of Audrey Hepburn class, but you're still a man."

Robert smirked.

“I’m not into formalities, but I’d rather that from now on, you don’t comment on my girlf... Rory being hot, which she totally is.”

It dawned on him that it wasn’t appropriate to call her his girlfriend anymore. She was so much more than that.

“Noted,” Riley answered shrugging.

Robert made a mental note to mention this issue to Bob, the head of the department. During his first year, he attended training on sexual harassment, fraternization, and ethics policies. Therefore, he knew Columbia didn't treat these things lightly. It was a matter of she says/he says and as a young faculty member, he was very easy to get rid of.

Rory and Robert’s schedule was so hectic since they got back from Labor Day, he was aching for a quiet moment with her. He spent the last two days in DC for his book tour, and now that he was back, Rory had left for Philadelphia for a publishing conference. He was missing their quiet evenings, sitting on the sofa, Rory coaxing his broody self into a conversation as they analyzed and enjoyed some wine. He missed their lazy Sundays when she would easily convince him to skip his morning run, reading in bed, his head resting on her soft thighs, making love, and finally getting out of their room in the evening for sustenance. Was it the price to pay for success? When would he find the time to get an engagement ring? Should he reconsider and get his grandmother’s? After all, it was a nice one, and she would like the history linked to it, but he thought it wasn't her style, too big. She wouldn't want to wear it every day.

###

“Hey Steph”

“Hey handsome, we saw you on MSNBC and on C-Span, you kicked ass!”

“Oh, thank you,”

Steph was surprised that Robert wasn't more enthusiastic. He had nothing but fantastic reviews since the book release.

"No seriously, remind me why I've never fallen in love with you? God, you were so brilliant, and you looked so dapper! Who picked these outfits? I'm so tired of Colin's lawyer suits. They said the camera adds ten pounds, but not on you. I'm sure ladies were swooning in the audience."

“Wow Steph, cool down. It was just an interview in Politics & Prose bookstore in DC. Only people there are interested. It wasn’t as if I was on the Tonight show.”

“Yet... So, you need PR now that you’re a celebrity?”

“Huh... Nope, but before I say anything, you have to promise it will stay between you and me.”
“Not even Colin?”

“If he can keep his mouth shut.”

“Wow, no more bro-code or you miss our alone time from when they left us to sink a yacht in Fiji?” she joked.

Robert sighed, would he be able to make her listen to him?

“I need your help to pick out a ring.”

“Holy shit!” Steph squealed “It’s about time! “Huh, it’s for Rory, isn’t it?

“Of course, who else?” Robert shook his head. “Jeez, Steph you’re still as crazy as you were at Yale.”

“I know exactly where we should go. When can we do it?”

“Rory is in Philly until Friday.”

“Could Friday afternoon work for you?”

“Perfect.”

“Robert, why didn’t you say anything to the guys?”

“Because I don’t want them to bust my balls if I don’t ask right away, I’m still figuring out how I’m gonna ask her.”

“Oh…”

“You know it took Colin two weeks once he got the ring to ask you, it’s not that easy. All this time I knew he had the ring and it was so hard not to let it slip when I was with you.”

“Oh, but you’re not afraid I won’t be able to keep it to myself?”

“I am, but you have to admit that she’s the one that should know first, right?”

“You’re right. I’ll do my best, but I can’t promise I won’t be able to say anything to Colin, okay?”

“Thanks, you’re a doll.”

Robert felt relieved. It wasn't a big step, but it was in the right direction. It was going to happen. He was convinced that they both wanted that, he only had to make a move. After all, there were many signs like she had finally given up her insistence on going Dutch every time. It meant that they were a whole and not two separate entities, so marriage was only a formality.

###

Saying Rory was in a bad mood was an understatement. First, she had to attend this stupid conference the same day Robert was back in Manhattan. Then, she woke up late, and in a hurry to get ready, snagged three pairs of tights before they made it over her knees. Lesson learned from doing anything decaffeinated. Then she found a stain on her skirt. Was it a conspiracy of her clothes?

She was trying to remedy the situation with a big coffee, but when the barista handed it to her, her phone buzzed. She glanced at the unknown number. And that was how her day got better.
Rory still couldn’t believe it. David Remnick, the New Yorker editor wanted to meet her. They had met him during the preceding weekend when attending the New Yorker festival. She’d never thought that he would remember her as it had been four months since Logan introduced them to him. What was even more surprising was that he had read Robert's book, her short story, and her blog, and he wanted to meet her. She didn't have high hopes as he said that they fiction stories planning was full until the end of the year, but he wanted to discuss this with Rory.

She marked the interview for the next Tuesday when it struck her. She should already have had her periods. She was two days late. She recounted again, but it was crystal clear, she should have had them on Tuesday. She was never late. Was she pregnant? Should she panic?

"Hey, Rory, ready to go?"

She raised her head to see Michael, a new Rodham editor who was beaming next to her and she tried to gather her thoughts.

Do not panic, do not panic.

After all, she was only two days late. Should she say anything to Robert? Or wait until tomorrow evening when she would see him? Should she do a test?

“Comin’ Michael, go ahead.”

She walked to the conference room trying to regain her composure. They both knew that the depo shots were only 94% reliable, and they willingly took the risk to stop using condoms. It wasn't as if they were still teenagers without a job, and they did want to have a family. Nevertheless, if she was honest, she never thought it would happen. She was planning on having kids, just never imagined it could be now, while she was, once again, changing the path in her professional life. She was still an editor, but if she was honest to herself, she was aiming to write mostly.

###

Steph knew right away where to take Robert. With Rory, they’d passed a thousand times in front of Stephen Russell on Madison, a store specialized on vintage jewels, and they had admired their pieces endlessly. Plus, Robert would probably appreciate the classy yet simple atmosphere of this boutique.

While Robert was waiting for Steph in front of the jewelry store, he started to freak out again. He ran his hand in his hair nervously.

What if she says no? After all, she did refuse Logan’s proposal. Maybe it’s not such a good idea, we can keep on living together. Nobody would mind except maybe Emily.

He felt a peck on his cheek.

“Don’t worry it’ll be fine, she won’t turn you down.”

“How do you know?” Robert asked Steph. The young woman seemed giddy to the excitement.

“What you were thinking, or that she won’t turn you down?”

“Actually, both.”

“Because you’ve got your typical look when you ramble in your head, the way you run your hand in your hair, you squint your eyes and that the only thing you’re not confident with has always been women.”
Robert sighed “That’s not true, I’ve proven that I can have as many women as Finn.”

“I wasn’t talking about hookups, but about actual relationships with women, and she’s not any woman,” Steph said matter-of-factly.

“And that’s is supposed to help?” Robert stared at his longtime friend with a desperate look. “God, I’m pathetic. You know these people that spend their whole life together, that could be Rory and me. She’s what I want Steph, she’s so right for me, she’s home, she’s my everything.”

“You’re not going to sing Michael Bublé, right? Come on, you've been living together for a year now, and this time it wasn’t an arrangement, you both did pick a house together. You’ve known each other for ten years, it’s not like if you’re doing that on a whim. Everybody knows that she loves you deeply.”

“I know she does, but is she ready to marry me? She was living with Logan for more than a year, but she still turned him down.”

"She wasn't ready, and he didn't want to wait, he was moving to California, they were too young… Now she's right here with you, she already has a career that she has chosen, she's so happy since she started writing again, and that’s because you knew she needed that. You’re both thriving professionally, you’re not moving anywhere soon. You bought a four bedroom townhouse together. What do you think all these bedrooms are for? How many guests do you plan on having, we both know that most of your friends don’t have housing problems in New-York? Do I have to continue?"

“That still doesn’t mean that she wants to spend the rest of her life with me.”

"Come on Robert stop fishing for compliments. All I can tell you is that she can't stop bragging about what you two have in bed and frankly, I'm kind of little jealous. Maybe you can have a word with Colin? She has been with Logan and Finn, and she chose you. If this doesn't give you a little confidence, what will? I think that you're underestimating her, she's brilliant, she knows that the connection that you two have is unique.”

Robert formed a massive grin from ear to ear. Steph's pep talk motivated him. "Okay let’s get in.”

Robert wanted a vintage ring maybe an art deco design. They found a Cartier ring from the thirties, which was just perfect elegant, original, but still simple.

"Excellent choice Robert, I'm sure she'll love it. You have an exquisite taste. It's beautiful but not gaudy. Let's grab a cup of coffee.”

They sat at a table next to the window.

“So, you talk about sex on girl’s night huh?”

Steph laughed.

"Not that much actually, but there was a time we were past drunk, I guess we were in the mood. We were with Paris, and we realized that we were all monogamists now and probably stuck with the same guy for the rest of our lives. So, we wondered if we had missed anything. Okay, probably I had more partners than the two of them together, but we sure had good stories. And then she said that if sex for the rest of her life were like what she was having now, then she’d got absolutely no problem living that until she died, because no one had ever made her lose it as you do and she didn’t see how it could be better than what you two have. So, of course, we begged for details.”

Robert smiled proudly.
“I hope you repeated that to Colin,” he winked.

“Of course, I did, it gained me amazing nights of fun. He’s still asking me when we will compare our sex life again. It’s getting interesting though now that Finn is entering the competition.”

“Geez, you girls are worse than guys!”

Once they walked away to go back to their respective office, Robert stopped suddenly and turned over.

“Steph!”, he called and trotted back to the blonde.

“You know that what I have with Rory is way beyond physical chemistry attraction, right?”

"Of course silly, I wouldn't have helped you otherwise," she winked. "You'll have an amazing life together with a lot of blue-eyed babies."

His face broke into a bright smile. He put a peck on her cheek, and all he had to do now was bright and clear.

###

**Rory:** They all dragged me to a bar. My Nehisi book got into the New York Times bestsellers list as well as yours!

**Robert:** So proud of you! Lilian asked me to join you all. Have to finish reviewing a paper. Be there in 1 hr tops. Love you.

Robert arrived more than one hour later. Bob Shapiro had dropped in his office, and it was difficult to ditch the head of the department, in particular when he had to tell him about the rumor spread by this senior college student. At least, Shapiro told him not to worry too much about that. Riley was right, she already had a reputation with the Columbia administration.

The pub was packed, but he spotted his soon to be fiancée at the bar right away. It was like his eyes were trained to find her anywhere like his brain was directing spotlights toward her so he could see that she was everything to him. She was waiting for her drink, oblivious to men's gazes upon her. He couldn't blame them, he'd known her for ten years, but every time he caught sight of her, he was powerless to look away. Tonight, she was gorgeous wearing the Ralph Lauren pleated leather midi skirt he bought her last spring under the guidance of Odette. He absolutely hadn’t any doubt. He wanted to adore her, devour her, love her for eternity.

He made a beeline to her, but unfortunately, he was cut off by Lilian.

“Robert, my man! Where were you? I can’t believe you don’t want to celebrate your entrance in the top ten bestsellers on the New York Times!”

“Hi! Lilian, I was just on my way to pick Rory up.”

"You're kidding, right? You're going to drink and celebrate with me. I'm not sure you understand how exceptional it is for the first book from an unknown author."

“But the subject is very famous, it’s the President people want to read about, I just gave the words.”

“You’re far too modest. On Monday we’re going to print one hundred thousand more copies. You know, Rodham want to assign you a publicist.”
“Please Lilian, not a publicist, you promised me that after the book tour I would be able to go back to my research, my students and Rory.”

"You two are so cute!" The editor ruffled his brown locks and gave him a compassionate gaze. “Come to our table, Rory will be there as soon as she got our drinks.”

Robert gestured to his girlfriend showing his incapacity to join her while Lilian hooked her arm with his to drag him at the table.

While she was keeping him informed, he was looking at Rory like he needed to gobble up every inch of her. They’d only been apart for three days, but all his body was craving her.

A guy Robert didn’t know was talking to her, and he was much too close for his liking. He seemed inebriated and was repetitively touching her. All of a sudden, the man leaned and kissed Rory.

What the fuck! Get away from her!

Anger raised to Robert's brain, and within the millisecond, all he could think about was to knock the guy dead, and he punched the bloke's lights out. His fist hurt like hell, but he didn't care. He had never hit anybody in his life, but he felt damn good after that. The fellow hit the floor, but Robert didn’t even glance at him.

“Robert!” Rory cried out.

“Who's this asshole! Do you know him?”

“It’s Michael, a new editor at Rodham. He drank a little too much.”

He locked his gaze on Rory’s eyes, in a fury that she had never seen before.

“That’s enough, we’re getting married! I don’t want any other douchebag laying a hand on you. End of discussion.”

He was going to add that she was his, but he was too afraid that she would reply that she belonged to anyone but her.

Rory held her chuckle but couldn't stop a little smirk. He had never been that bold, not even that ballsy with her. Until now, she thought she loved his calm composure. She was surprised that this new alpha man personality was sending heat all over her body. She'd always like his rumbly-grumbly side, but this novel caveman feature only cranked up the hot factor for her. She'd always thought she was attracted by his intellect and his chivalry, but it seemed that her ovaries were disagreeing with her brain.

His icy blue eyes moved quickly, assessing everything around them. One of Rory coworkers tried to carry Michael to the restrooms. Robert grabbed her hand and pulled her to the table where Lilian was sitting.

Her stomach rumbled long and loud, and this time they shared a laugh.

"You need food, let's go," Robert said sternly.

It was like he was only able to form short sentences. They quickly grabbed her coat and purse, said goodbye to Lilian and dashed out of the bar.

There, he’d said it. They were dicking around the matter for months, but now it was out in the open.
But was it only an outburst of anger? Should they talk about it right away?

She wanted to panic at that. They were just fine living together. Should she pick it up and ask him?

They were walking in silence, his arm around her back. She didn’t know if he knew where they were going, but they were too many questions in her head. Were they getting married? Was she pregnant?

"I'm sorry, I lost my temper," he muttered

He leaned forward and brushed his lips over hers. It was a sweet, gentle, patient kiss showing they didn’t have to hurry, that they had all their time. But did they?

“Robert, I’m late,” she said in a low voice.

“For what? Which deadline are you talking about?”

She shook her head.

"I should have had my periods four days ago."

He stared at her, his brows arching, speechless.

“I realized that in Philly but I didn’t want to tell you on the phone and process it without you.”

His brain steamed.

_Yess! It's our fate. A mini-Rory. Fuck, if I propose, will she think I just want to do the right thing. But I did mention that we were getting married, did she hear it?_

“Did you do a pregnancy test?”

She shook her head.

“Do you want to do one? We can stop at a drugstore."

"Let's wait until tomorrow morning?" she said in a small voice.

“Okay, let’s go home.”

He held her closer and kissed the top of her head. A baby. With Rory. If he closed his eyes, he could picture a toddler with dark curls, blue eyes, and a flashing smile.

The toe of his shoe caught on a knob of concrete, and he stumbled. Rory pulled his arm to keep him steady.

"Hey! Stay with me, Robbie!"

He gave her a lopsided grin. Nothing could go wrong if they were together. What just happened was proof of that.

A/N: Thank you for reading. I’m grateful for your feedback. I’m deeply sorry to take so much time between updates. Only three chapters left and you’ll see the end.
Robert was jogging back home after his morning run, holding a bag with five pregnancy tests. You could never be sure enough. They had spent all night discussing how they would deal with this unexpected baby. They agreed to find a way to balance their two demanding careers. Rory couldn't be more grateful to Henri and Lydia's education. If she had any doubts, they would have been lifted off by the conversation they had last night. Robert was a hard believer in man-woman equality and especially when concerning children. What bothered him was that at the beginning, Rory would have to deal with the "heavy lifting," which meant the pregnancy. Therefore, he planned to be the best caretaker for his wife and child, starting with breakfast in bed and lots of cuddling.

He entered their house joyfully, toed his sneakers in the foyer and went straight to the kitchen to fix breakfast. He heard her pad in the stairs and raised his head to see Rory with silent tears running on her cheeks.

Sensing that words weren’t what she needed, he dropped the spatula to rush to her and reached for her with his arms. She came quickly, her face flattened to his chest, her arms wrapping around him as she let out a sob.

"What's wrong, muffin?"

She’d noticed the new nickname but wasn’t in the mood to ask from where it was coming.

"Nothing, just hold me a little longer” she wept her head still buried in his chest. “I got my period.”

He held her a lot longer while his own heart tightened, but he felt he needed to be brave for both of them.

"That's okay Rory. We didn't plan to have a baby. We can try for real now if it's still what you want."

"I know it's stupid, but after we've talked about it, it made it real, and I started to fantasize about it."

She felt reassured by his warmth.

"I did too. It means we're ready. You can stop the shots, and I promise I'll do my best to get us pregnant this time."

She chuckled.

"What about you go back in bed, and I'll bring you blueberry pancakes," he said softly kissing her hair.

He felt her nod.

"Can I have coffee now while waiting?" she whispered. She was afraid her now fiancé would turn to Luke and ban her from coffee.

“Sure muffin, anything you want.”

The following day, they had their usual brunch with the McCraes. Steph had always been a chatterbox but this Sunday, Rory found her even more worked up than usual. The blonde was seated
in front of Robert and kept grinning at him. If Rory didn't know them as well as she did, she could have imagined that something was going on between these two. Luckily, Colin derived the conversation to his last case. Anyhow, Robert and Rory were not in the mood and happily let the McCraes take over the discussion.

The weather was still warm for the season, and Robert wanted to find something to change their mind from feeling as if they had lost a baby. What could cheer up Rory Gilmore more than books? Therefore, he took her for a walk to their favorite bookstores. It always had a therapeutic effect on her so he hoped it would work its magic one more time.

As usual, they stopped by Argosy. When Robert took Rory there for the first time two years ago, she immediately fell in love with this quiet shop its green lamps and dark wood, rife with that old book smell that she loved so much. They always went through the first edition sections. As soon as they'd passed the doorway, she made a beeline to the nineteenth-century part while he was in the politics division.

She was perusing the first edition of *Pride and Prejudice* and ran into Darcy love declaration to Elizabeth Bennet. All the emotions of the last two days rushed into her brain, and she wondered why she had waited for so long. She wanted to commit to Robert, to show him that she needed to take his heart full stop and give hers to him right back. She couldn't function without him in the center of her solar system.

“Mr. Semple, I was about to email you.”

Robert turned toward the salesman who was addressing him.

“You asked me to contact you if ever received any of the first edition in a list that you left us. Would you like to see what we got?”

“Of course,” Robert answered full of hope. Rory’s birthday was in a few days so the timing couldn’t be better. They walked toward the back office.

When Rory arrived at the politics aisle, Robert was nowhere to be seen. She walked methodically through all the sections when she spotted him shaking hand with a salesperson.

"You bought something?" She asked curious of what he was doing.

"It's a surprise, Ms. Gilmore you have to be patient," he said kissing her temple. The delicate scent of her shampoo hit him. There was something about her smell, her skin, her smile that would always make him feel alive. It dawned him that it didn't make any sense, why should he have to wait until he found the perfect way to propose?

He pulled her out of the store, took her two hands and locked his flashing dreamboat eyes with hers.

“I can’t wait, I know it isn’t the most romantic place, but I think I’ve waited for way too long now,”

At the same moment, Rory spoke out.

“Robbie, I think you were right Friday night, we should get married.”

They stared at each other, both stunned and after a few seconds, they burst out laughing.

What Rory didn’t expect was that the young man got down on one knee and pulled out a rubber band out of his pocket.
Rory couldn’t help thinking he looked endearing crouched on the ground.

“I've been wracking my brain off to come up with the perfect proposal, but I realized that love isn't about a grand gesture or the most romantic scenario. It's about luck, and I'm the luckiest man in the world that I have found you. Rory, you became my better half. When I'm with you, everything feels better, and I know I can go through anything, in the end, it will be fine as long as I'm with you. You're the star of my life, without you, there's no more sense. I want to be married to you. We have to carve out love in stone and focus on important things which mean anything that make us happy. I want everybody to know that I'm yours for eternity, and I want you as mine.”

The young woman’s eyes were watering.

“Oh, Robbie! Of course, I will. Get up so I can kiss you properly.”

She couldn’t wait for him to stand up and bent so that their lips could meet.

“Thank God!” he said his lips still on hers.

She gazed at him surprised.

"Did you think I could or would say no?" She asked smiling.

“I was pretty confident, but on the back of my mind, I was a little afraid I was not good enough for you. Moreover, so you don't think I'm cheap, there's a real ring waiting for you at home.”

“You know, after Logan proposed to me, my mother told me that one day, I'd meet the right person and I would know. She was wrong about you, but right about that. I know it's you, I do not doubt it, for quite a while now. You are so much more to me than the person who helped me get through my day. You're my everything forever.”

She was crying now, and Robert couldn't manage to wipe her tears fast enough. She rested her forehead on his.

“What do you think, maybe we should go back home? You know I’m not a fan of PDA,” she whispered.

They decided to keep their decision for themselves, at least until the following day, wanting to let it settle in their brain before being overwhelmed by their loved ones.

###

“There's one thing I'm not comfortable to say, and I don't want you to take it the wrong way. My parents advised me to have a prenup, not because they don’t trust you, or that they think we won’t last but to shield you from potentials problem with the company. Of course, I'll share with you everything that I earn with my work and my trust fund, but you know that I have some shares of Semple Brothers and that I’m on the board, so if something goes wrong I could be held responsible. A prenup would avoid you to be accounted responsible as my wife or if in the meantime something happens to me and it would also protect our kids. My parents also had one when they got married. Another way is that I can sell my shares of the company to my brother and sisters. In the end, a prenup is what we want to mention. We can skip the part if I cheat on you, you'll have this or vice versa.”

Robert looked at her feeling uncomfortable. He had made dinner for her, lit up some candles. Finally, proposing wasn't the most challenging part. All the wedding planning, listening to all the family members who, to his surprise, all had an opinion on how he should get married was tiring. If it were
up to him, they already would be in Vegas to have all this crap over.

“Stop rambling Robbie. It's OK. I'll have a prenup. I'm sure my grandmother will ask me to have one because of the trust fund from my great grandmother.”

“You’re saying I’m the one marrying for money?” He smirked.

“Well, my great grandmother left me some money but my grandfather took care of it for me, and I’ve never used it. Since my grandfather died, my dad took care of it for me until I decide to do it by myself. Maybe we can join our assets and try to do something about it?”

Although she was now thirty-one, agreeing to marry another human felt like the most adult decision she'd ever made. Picturing herself as a wife introduced a paradox: she couldn't continue to be a kid and somebody's spouse. She had to deal with being an adult, owning a substantial amount of money and not rely only on her parents. She had never been as joyful and carefree as the guys in college, but since then they caught up and were now grown-ups, facing the responsibilities inherent to their age.

“I have a financial advisor that I meet every two months and who keeps me posted. So, if you want, I can introduce him to you, and if you like him, we can use the same one. I also have an accountant mainly to be sure that everything is okay for tax purposes. Talk to your dad or ask Stef and Colin. They had a prenup, but I don’t know how they manage their money. When we were in college, they only had an allowance because I think they had to wait until they were twenty-five for their trust fund.”

Lorelai hadn't said anything negative about her relationship for a long time now and was even becoming very close to her fiancé, calling him several times on his cell. Nevertheless, Rory wasn’t sure how her mother would react to her engagement. She feared that she would get the speech about high society and everything it entailed. Lorelai got along pretty well with Robert's parents, but Rory was still weary. Therefore, she prepared herself to show how sure she was of her decision, that he felt safe and ready and committed. However, one thing was undeniable about Lorelai; she was unpredictable. Rory texted a picture of her engagement ring. About fifteen seconds after she had hit send, her phone vibrated with her mother's face flashing on the screen. She may have lost her hearing ability for a few minutes once hearing her mother's scream on the phone.

They wanted their wedding, not the one with everyone's expectations. Luckily, before they said anything, Lydia and Henri told them to think about them first, not Semple Brothers, not what they thought was expected from them. They only wanted to celebrate and share with people who knew them for who they were which meant close family and friends.

###

For Lorelai, it was never too soon to celebrate. With her outstanding party planning skills, she organized an engagement party in only two weeks. The most difficult part was having all the Yale gang gathered, but persuasiveness combined to Steph’s organizing proficiencies and Paris authority sealed the deal, and in no time everybody was celebrating their engagement in Stars Hollow.

It was unsaid, but the inn owner wanted to make up to the young couple for all these years she had given them such a hard time. After all this time, the two Gilmores had managed to be part of each other's life again. Lorelai had accepted their new mother/daughter relationship, and that she was no longer Rory’s first. The person she wanted to tell things first, the first person she’d talk to in the morning. They were still closer than what most of the other mothers and daughters she knew. They were only talking on the phone about twice a week, but there was texting and recently, some facetime. Since Lorelai had understood how it worked, she loved it. Everything was clear for her
now, her daughter was an adult with her own free will, but it didn’t mean that she was losing her, nor that they were less complicit. She wasn’t her best friend but the mother of an accomplished woman.

"So, are you sure, you want to get married in Lourmarin?" Lorelai asked trying to be supportive of this unexpected decision.

The two women were seated in the Inn library running through the last details for the party.

"We're planning to talk with Odette, but Anne already spoke to Robert to tell him that she was more than happy to offer her house for us. Now it's only up to us to decide. You know that I used to imagine myself getting married here in Stars Hollow since I was a kid and I love everybody here, but I'm afraid they'll take over everything. You've seen that Taylor wants to move the town meetings to Friday night so that Robert could come. He asked him to be in the town council, and we don't even live here. Plus, it would never be as intimate as we would like it to be, it's too close to New York. We would never be able to reduce it to what we wish it should be. We've seen how it was for Colin and Steph and Logan and Odette. Of course, Henri and Lydia aren't like Shira and Mitchum, but they'll have to shield us from the pressure. If we're doing it abroad, it'll be easier for everyone. Also, you know how nice Robert is? He said he was okay to do it here as long as it makes me happy, that we could get married in front of a judge or in Vegas he only wants to be my husband, so at the end, it's just up to me."

“Calm down honey, breathe, everything is going to be fine. If you want the South of France, then France it will be,” Lorelai said patting her hand.

“Really?” Rory raised an eyebrow to her mom.

“Of course, and for Stars Hollow, we could do a reenactment just as we planned to do for your graduation to soothe everyone.”

“You would do that?”

“Of course, I’ll do anything for you two, even talk to Taylor.” Lorelai hugged her daughter. She promised herself she would try her best to give them what they deserve.

"Thank you, mom. You're the most amazing mother."

###

Robert was used to his father stealing his now fiancée for a dance. He loved how she had managed to win his family's heart. It had taken him much more time to do the same with her mother's, but he felt that he had finally succeeded. He was making Lorelai swirl and try to guess what she was thinking. She finally unleashed her thoughts to his ear.

“Robert, you won her heart, Stars Hollow’s and also mine. I’m sorry mine was so hard to get, and if you could take this as a valid excuse, she was my whole world for such a long time, I didn’t know how to share. I needed amazing men like Luke and you to teach me that.”

A smile stretched his lips.

Even though the party started as a classic one, it was without counting her friends' imagination. Lane and Zach had managed to make everyone sing for Rory. Robert had discovered that with a little tutoring, and Hep Alien backup vocals he could manage to sing If I ain't got you. What was even more surprising, was when her mother, her fiancé and all her friends managed to sing an adapted version of Oh! Lorie transformed to Oh! Rory.
Robert told me you're freelancing for the New Yorker?" Odette asked.

The two young women were outside the inn enjoying some fresh air after dancing like Egyptians by the Bangles.

"Well, we have an unspoken deal. I can propose to them my ideas, or if they feel that something could fit me, they'll reach out for me. As I'm still at Rodham, I can't officially do both. The writing for the book and the blog is very time-consuming." Rory answered.

“Have you thought about quitting Rodham?”

“I honestly did, but I think it’s a little premature. What about you, have you decided about settling in New York?”

She had this discussion with Odette last time they saw each other in Manhattan. She hadn’t made her decision yet, the one to quit her job in Paris and work in her father and Logan’s new company. She felt she wasn’t entitled to it, that she would be there only because she was a Valmy and the fiancée of Logan Huntzberger. Logan could understand her better and didn't pressure her. Her grandfather, on the other hand, was not being that considerate. She tried to convince him that maybe their children would be willing to do it, that she would prefer to follow her mother's footstep and stay in an academic career. The only concession she was willing to do was to find a job in New York to support her future husband, and she didn't say it out loud, put an ocean between her and her family. Her parents were great, and she loved her mother deeply, but the pressure of being the only Valmy heiress left was overwhelming.

They were interrupted by the guys bursting out of the inn. Robert immediately reached for his fiancée and held her in his arms.

“Let’s talk seriously now, have you guys decided when and where we’re going to get married?” Finn asked staring at both of them.

“Nope, the only thing we know is that we don’t want a big society wedding. After meeting with my grandmother, Robert even suggested City Hall just the two of us.”

They all laughed.

"You know that nobody would forgive you if you guys elope? We all waited for too long to celebrate this union,” Colin added.

“You should do it in Lourmarin, I planned since I was a kid to marry there, now that I can’t do it, I couldn’t be happier that you two could do it. Antoine would have loved it,” Odette said sadly.

Robert reached for his French friend’s hand.

"Thanks, O, we're seriously thinking about it since Anne offered," Robert replied. "I even already talked to my parents and they were more than happy with the idea. I think my mom already spoke to Anne like it was a done deal."

Lorelai, thank you so much for organizing such a lovely party,” Lydia smiled. She was sincerely amazed by the food, the atmosphere. She could see why they loved the idea to get married in Lourmarin.
“That was the least I could do for my only daughter,” Lorelai replied.

"I know that the etiquette requires that the bride family should hold the wedding, and I can assure you that it would have been more than fine that it would have been in Stars Hollow. The Lourmarin is all their decision. I don't want you to think I'm the meddling type. I offered them to do it in my family property in Newport, but I think that they already have their history in Lourmarin. Maybe they didn't want to disappoint any of us?” Lydia wasn't sure of Lorelai's reaction. As she pointed out, Rory was her only child. "I'm already happy that Robert found Rory. She's such a wonderful young woman, of course, you know that, and you get all the credit. I cannot thank you enough for sharing her with us."

"Don't worry Lydia, I know. Rory explained to me their decision, and I'm good." Lorelai looked at Robert's mother. "I am, don't worry."

"Great! So, would you like to accompany me to France to visit the property? Anne invited us, and the kids said they were more than happy to let us organize everything. Rory told me you're used to planning weddings for the inn. What do you say to a trip in Provence?"

Lorelai was astounded by the proposition.

“Won’t I be intruding? I don’t know the owners.”

"Don't worry, they're old friends, and Robert is like their second son. They love Rory. It would be so much fun! You'll see, Anne is an extraordinary woman. I'm sure we can manage to have something great for our two lovebirds. What do you think about it if we go over there for Thanksgiving? I know it’s family time but I'm teaching all semester, and I'm afraid it would be a little too late if we wait for after Christmas as they mentioned to do it as soon as possible. Luckily for us, they can't do it before Odette and Logan, so it means June. What do you think?"

Lorelai laughed, this woman should have been her sister in another life.

"I'll see what I can do."

A/N: Sorry for the late update. I actually wrote more than what I'm posting, but it was too long and therefore a little stodgy. Don't worry, I will add it to the next chapter which hopefully I will finish soon. Thank you for reading, commenting, your kudos, I love to read how you react.
Rory may have been running late, but at least she was adequately caffeinated. She had stopped by Grounded, the coffee shop near her office where she started to write. She had her special bean mix there. That was the key dealing with any kind of news, good or bad. Cath hadn't said anything, just sent her a text to be at her office by 5:30 pm. If she could have worn body armor, she would have. She was scared to death that all the publishers would have rejected her story.

Catherine Targetti was a force of nature, and it wasn't only to state that plainly. Rory felt like a leaf in the wind in front of her, but she liked it because that woman could move anything, open any door when she believed in your work. She was exactly what she needed. She'll avoid her the confrontation and will deal with the top publishers required. Rory gladly let her take charge and be the boss of her business life so that she could be the manager of her writing life.

She was starting to love being a writer way too much and even if she knew that she would probably hit many obstacles, she didn’t feel ready for it to end it that soon.

In front of the Art Deco building, she took a deep breath and rushed to the front desk to sign herself in so she could get upstairs and not be any later than she already was.

“Please, hold the elevator!” She said loudly enough for the person who just stepped in could hear. She saw a big manly hand settling on the bumper.

She hurried across the lobby and entered the car quickly.

“Thanks,” she said noticing the very well clad tall body all rippling muscles in front of her.

“My pleasure,” the man answered with a British accent. She raised her gaze to meet Caribbean Sea-blue eyes and sharp angles cheekbones.

Oh my God! It's the guy in a tiny white speedo from the Dolce & Gabbana ad.

She hadn’t had time to utter a sound when she was pushed further inside.

“Hi! David!” she heard two voices behind her back.

Yes, that’s it, David something. She’d put him in her celebrity free pass list.

She turned around to face the door and saw two of the most beautiful women she had ever seen outside of a magazine. Of course. She remembered that there was a modeling agency in the building. The three of them talked in hushed tones, obviously knowing each other. She looked at them stepping out and strutted their way down the hall to frosted doors. At least it had been a nice distraction until she got to the tenth floor.

The girl in the front desk called Catherine and a few seconds later the beaming middle-aged woman greeted her warmly. She took that as a good sign.

"Please have a seat, Rory," the agent said pointing toward the empty chair across from her desk. "I think you're going to like what I got."

Rory plopped in the chair nervously.

“As I suspected, I’m not the only one who believes in your writing. I’m not going to beat around the

The book
bush. Five publishers made offers.”

Rory stared at her dumbfounded.

“Are you kidding me?”

“Absolutely not, and one of them is offering a three-book deal.”

“It’s good, isn’t it?”

"Oh yes, it is, but we have to take our time here. See what you really want. You'll have to decide if you want to stay on as an editor and writing on the side or if you want to write full time. For the latest, you'll also have to estimate how much you can write."

“Did you propose to Rodham?”

“I did, but I didn’t give your name. I just said you were a woman, that it was your first book and that you were a former reporter.”

“It could be weird if I’m still working there, right?”

"Probably, but it already happened. You're editing non-fiction so you won't have to deal with the same team."

"Rory, I think we can hit it big and obviously, I'm not the only one on this. Your story can be a hit for women of any age and even men, but the fiction readers are mostly women. You have what publisher call a concept, and yours hasn't already been in a book. The unique mother-daughter relationship in between a small town and high society. It will grab women readers and resonate for their own lives.”

"Do you believe that?"

“Of course, I do, otherwise I would never have signed you. I didn’t have any doubt once I read your proposal and your first chapters. Everyone was hooked after the first sentences.”

Catherine could see that Rory was still stunned.

"Go home, talk to your family, your boyfriend."

“Fiancé, we’re engaged now,” Rory said proudly.

“Congratulations! Go celebrate with him and call me when you’re ready for the next step.”

###

It was very early on a December Sunday morning, and it was still dark outside when Robert felt Rory wiggling to get out of bed finally. He barely opened his eyes to see her walk to the window. Maybe she was still excited by her book offers? He never ceased to be amazed by her figure and felt a warm wave of love for this woman running through his body.

“Rory, what are you doing up so early? Come back to bed,” he groaned.

“I can smell the snow. Finally, the first snow is coming," she answered.

He sighed, he knew she would wait for it. He tried to get back to sleep in vain, and she was wiggling, rolling, even their king-size bed wasn't big enough. She was lucky she was essential to him
and the sexiest thing in the world; otherwise he would have kicked her out.

“Okay, put on some clothes, and I'll make some coffee. Meet me on the patio.”

He reluctantly got out of bed, put on his sweatpants and his old Harvard sweatshirt and went down to the kitchen. When he arrived on the patio, the first snowflakes were dropping. He handled Rory her cup and put both arms around her waist to make sure she wouldn’t get cold. She was looking up the sky, watching the snow spreading over the city.

“Thank you, Robbie. Do you feel it?”

He nodded, his eyes closed trying to sleep standing.

“Is this real?”

“What do you mean?” he mumbled.

“What we have. Us, getting married, being crazy happy.”

"Oh yeah, it's real, as real as I'm freezing my ass off on this patio so my fiancée can feel the snow and don't you dare to try to warm your cold feet on me after that."

She chuckled. He was the best feet heater she knew.

“I’ll make sure to put that in the prenup. You can’t deprive me of that.”

They stayed silent for a moment watching the snowflakes whitened the roofs, the ground.

"I don’t think I ever thank you," she said still wrapped by his arms, her back to his chest.

His mouth dried up, despite the whole cup of coffee he’d just drunk.

"Thank me for what?" he asked, but the words were barely audible.

He saw her hands tightened around her mug.

"For believing in me, for encouraging me to do what I was so afraid to admit, for knowing what was in me," she answered quietly.

His breathing quietened for a moment as her words echoed in the cold night.

“I haven’t done anything you haven’t already done for me,” he almost whispered.

A minute later, she turned around to face him, her eyes deep and trying to catch him.

“I don’t think it was the same,” she said, her voice once again grave. "Well, thank you, Robbie."

He inhaled sharply, his brain taking her words. Her soft lips brushing against his and he closed his eyes trying to breathe, to capture every second of this moment. After all, why not believe in perfection?

# # #

"To your book, or should I use the plural, to your books!"
Rory was having lunch with Jasmine to celebrate her two-books deal. Since the young editor had worked with the middle-aged writer, they had bonded, and the woman had become a writing godmother to her.

“Cheers! I’m so glad our roads crossed,” Rory said clinking her wine glass with Jasmine’s.

“So, tell me everything. Why did you finally choose Rodham? I thought you were going for the young hip publishing house?”

“That's what I was planning, I always had the impression that they would be friendlier, like a family, that it would be comfier, but the meeting there was terrifying. The guys were too hipster for me; they looked like lumberjacks, and only referred to my story as young adult-targeted. They were trying to find a comp title for my book and constantly came to references to young adult. Cath try to tell them that even though the book started with a teenager, the themes were universal and referred to all generations. It seemed to bother them because they didn't get how to position it in the adult market. Basically, they were telling me they didn't know who would buy my book. So, you see, it wasn't that difficult to decide. At Rodham, I know exactly where I'm going.”

Catherine had been an unbelievable negotiator. It was actually a two-books deal with an option for a third one. They had worked on the contract for a month with her agent's firm lawyer, then Colin had insisted on having a look at it. Rory had first hesitated to sign with Rodham because she had the feeling of letting them down if she would decide to drop editing. However, Jonathan, the chief of copy editor and Susan had cornered her after a meeting with coffee and cupcakes to convince her that they would make an excellent trio. Rory didn't know Susan very well, but she loved Jon. They had worked on many books she had edited, and she knew that they were on the same page for writing.

Last but not least, Susan was the only editor who hadn't talk to her about comp titles. Maybe because she was an experienced editor, a real one. Not a frustrated author, but one who loved her writers with an outstanding culture.

“I think you did the right thing. Finding my audience took time, and it took more work than I anticipated at the outset. I learned that no one will care as much about your book as you do and you should never trust anyone with your success. If you want something done, you’re the one who has to make that happen.”

“I know but at least with Cath, Susan and Jon, I’ll be in good company.”

“You will. With the years, I stumbled upon the realization that authenticity trumps originality. Your story comes from your guts, combined to your writing Susan couldn’t miss that. Trust her. I know you're not there yet but when you are there, don’t read reviews. There’s a difference between feedback from an editor and/or critique partner and reviews. Reviews are for readers.”

###

All the Semples were invited for brunch at Will and Nathalie’s. It was quite unusual because most of the family reunions were usually at their parents.

Will and Nathalie had been trying to have a second child for a while. After a year of unsuccessful attempts, they went to a fertility clinic which depressed Robert’s sister. She had felt guilty for waiting so long to have kids, and the doctors weren't very optimistic. She had been on hormonal treatment, but it didn't work either. They were finally trying IVF. It was so hard for them that nobody was
asking questions anymore, but it was evident that it was a painful period.

Maybe because it was a beautiful spring day, Will was chirpy when he opened the door. Everyone had been wondering why they were gathered but hadn't there to ask as they were all walking on eggshells around Nathalie. Luckily, they didn't have to wait long because as soon as they were all seated and served, Will put his hand on his wife's and clinked his knife on his orange juice glass to get everybody’s attention.

As soon as they’d announced that they were three months pregnant, everybody jumped out of their seat to hug and congratulate them. Robert noticed that little Matt was wearing a very proud smile on his face.

“So Matty, you seem pleased to have a baby sister or brother.”

“It’s a little brother,” the toddler answered with a confident tone.

Robert was surprised and raised an eyebrow to his sister.

“Matty, I told you that we don’t know yet if it’s a baby girl or a boy.”

"Mommy, I'm sure that I'll have a baby brother because I asked Santa for a brother and I've been very nice, so I don't see why I would get a sister to punish me."

Everybody burst out laughing. Henri ruffled his grandson's hair and pulled him on his lap.

“What about you uncle Rob, are you going to have a baby with Rory?” Matt asked.

Everybody stilled to listen to his answer. He gazed at Rory who smiled and slightly nodded. Robert cleared his throat.

"Sure Matty, we'll try to do that after we are married. Now we're still training.”

Charles chuckled. "You guys have been training for a while now, I think you should know how to proceed by now. Otherwise, Mom and dad should get a refund for your Ivy league education."

"You're mean uncle Charly, they're training when they take me to the zoo or when I get to do a movie night at their house, so they know how to be parents. I had a lot of fun when we went to Stars Hollow. But you're right, I think they're ready now."

“Of course, that’s what your uncle Charly meant,” Aubrey giggled.

On their way back home, Rory couldn't help picture Robert as a father. They haven't talked about babies since last fall. She doctor had warned them that it could take some time and not to worry, but it was four months now.

She had to admit that Robert's tight family unit contrasted with the Gilmore's or any other high society families. Lydia and Henri had succeeded in keeping their four children grounded. Moreover, it was evident that they were a source of parenting inspiration.

“I think your mom and dad did a great job. You’re all amazing adults, even Charly.”

“Nathalie sure is, we still have to prove that we can be good parents. Do you realize that after the birth, they’ll just give you the baby and send you back home without any training! How all of a sudden, we could be responsible for a new human? It’s insane…”

She smiled. He didn't talk about it, but apparently, he was also thinking about that, just like her.
“I’m pretty confident you’ll be a great dad. You’ll do as billions of other men already did. You look at what everyone did well and try and put that into the parent you are going to be. You’ll also look at things people didn’t do as well and try not to make those mistakes. But of course, you’re going to make mistakes. In the end, your main model will be what you experienced with your dad, so I’m not worried.”

“You’re looking forward to it, aren’t you?”

She smiled shyly and nodded. He held her closer.

“Me too, I can’t wait to have a family with you.”

# # #

Rory was engrossed in editing an enthralling new manuscript when she heard a knock on her door. She raised her head to see it was almost 2 pm and she had skipped lunch.

“Come in,” she said.

She was astounded to see Robert appearing disheveled and breathless. He stood in the doorway holding a big manila envelope in his hand. His eyes were wide, and he was there speechless, clad in his running outfit.

“Robert, what are you doing here?” she said glancing at the envelope. Was it her book? He finally raised the manuscript in front of him.

“Your book,” he gazed at her still in awe.

“Right,” she was about to explain why she’d left it on his desk without a note.

"It's phenomenal. I thought I knew a lot about you, but I didn't, but more than that... The writing... I always had been a fan of your journalistic writing, but this... You're so talented Rory, I couldn't wait to tell you.”

She beamed at him. She thought he would have waited until the weekend to read it. Apparently, he had taken it to work to do it. When he woke up in the morning, he went to his study to check his emails and found her manuscript on his desk. He knew she’d worked on it late because he was already sleeping when she joined him in bed. He skimmed the pages for a few seconds but then decided he wanted to be able to read it in one shot, so he went to put on his running outfit and ran directly to his office at Columbia with the manuscript in his backpack. He didn't even bother to shower and put on his work clothes like he used to do and directly sat at his desk to read it from the first word to the last in one streak. He just had to tell her right away how overwhelmed he was, that this woman who he was going to tie the knot with was an unbelievable writer who could reach to the deepest of the reader's soul with her words.

“You liked it?” she whispered shyly.

“Are you kidding me? Haven’t you just heard me? It's fucking amazing!”

“You’re biased, it can’t be that good,”

"Come on Rory, I can't be that biased, I can't believe that you think I wouldn't be able to give you an honest opinion. It was so great, I've almost kicked out the students who came to my office to be able to finish it. In the end, I locked myself in and pretended I wasn't there."
Rory chuckled.

"Do you want to grab some lunch? I was so enthralled I couldn't stop reading, and now I'm starving, hungry as a bear."

She grinned. “Sure, if you don’t mind going dressed like that,” she answered pointing at his shorts.

# # #

Rory ran upstairs as soon as she spotted his jacket in the foyer. She knew it was stupid, but she’d missed him even though they had been separated only for the weekend.

“You’re already home,” she yelled entering the room and stopped in her tracks when she saw him. “Oh my God!”

Her jaw dropped. Robert was coming out of the bathroom, his hair still damp, his skin glistening everywhere. She’d never seen him hairless. Steph had said that the guys were at the spa trying sugaring just like them, but she thought it was a joke. He was standing there, beaming at her, manscaped looking soft as a baby’s butt.

“I know,” Robert said trying not to be too dramatic. “they said it’ll grow again.”

It was Finn’s idea, of course. Who could think it was a good idea to go to a spa for a bachelor party? Nicolas was a little disappointed at first as he was expecting a Life and Death Brigade shindig. Finn argued they had to have a night to remember but as they already had done pretty much everything, and that Rory would kill him if he would endanger another of her boyfriends, he had to find something original but safe.

“Finn said it would be like a drinking party and we did have wine and scotch, a lot. It was easy for him as he’s almost completely hairless. He said that as you girls were doing some pampering, we had to do the same.”

As Rory was moistening her lips and her eyes were sparkling, Robert realized it wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

The sight of Robert in nothing but a tiny towel was mouthwatering. He looked like the guy wearing a tighty-whities on the Dolce & Gabanna perfume ad, the one she saw in the elevator at her agent’s building. Who needed a celebrity free pass when you had this kind of hottie at home? The overconfident gleam in his eyes was such a turn on. She liked that confident and self-assured part of him. Discrete alpha, not the overbearing caveman that ordered women around. Her mouth tingled with a considerable urge to lick all that delicious man flesh. She nearly purred with excitement. Last winter, during the snow period, he had traded his running with workout sessions at the gym, and she had to admit that she relished the result on his upper body.

“Do you like what you see Ms. Gilmore? I thought you were fond of my big bear look?” Robert asked feeling more confident seeing the lust in his fiancée’s eyes.

“You’re just a soft bear Semple, my soft stuffed bear. Nothing is big about you,” she said teasing him. Then she noticed his hard manhood poking out and corrected blushing. “But you do have something big though.”

Robert smiled deviously. Only Rory Gilmore could still blush while talking dirty no matter how imaginative they could have been in bed together.

“I’m not against access to a bit more skin. It’s a crime to hide these nice muscles behind hair,” she
Her fingers started to quest over his chest, then she traced each sculpted pec, her hands traveled over his delineated abs, to finally stroke his V reaching and draw around his well-defined pubic hair cut. She’d wondered if, with time, their physical chemistry could wane, but apparently, they could still manage to stimulate each other.

Robert’s lips found her neck, while his deft eased her shirt over her head.

"I can't believe I'll get to make love to you all my life. How did I get so lucky?"

“I’m the lucky girl here, my fiancé is totally dedicated to my pleasure with unlimited imagination.”

He loved the sound of that that she claimed him as hers.

Then, somehow, they were rolling on their bed, tearing off the rest of her clothes. She was reeling from a familiar wave as a delightful influx of dopamine invaded her brain. She understood what it was to be addicted, why people could risk everything for crack.

A while later, they were lying on their back on their rumpled bed, their heart hammering, grinning at the ceiling, their mind wrapped in orgasmic bliss.

"Robbie, no one can own me as you do."

“That’s because making you come is my absolute favorite activity,” he grinned reaching for her hand.

“What a coincidence because I can’t get enough to make you get off. I have to admit that tonight was a new one. It’s like our inventiveness is endless. Do you think we should amend the Kamasutra?”

He chuckled. “Only you can make everything back to a book.”

They laughed heartily, invaded by a feeling of pure happiness. He turned on his side to watch her, gently pulling a few strands of hair out of her face.

“If I knew that a little trimming would lead to such a playful mood… Ms. Gilmore, I might need a repeat here to be able to write this down.”

"Will you still call me Ms. Gilmore when we are making love after we get married?"

“Oh, you like that Ms. Gilmore? You don’t think you would like Mrs. Gilmore-Semple?”

“My agent asked me if I wanted a pen name or keep mine.”

“And what would you like?”

“Right now? Showing you a few more tricks you still don’t know.”

Robert raised an interested eyebrow.

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

And just like that, she could feel his interest hardening against her thigh. How could he do that? He had just orgasmed less than ten minutes ago.

She held her smirk and dived in his gaze pushing him on his back. His eyes were cheeky and feeling
with lust. His desire for her was the most powerful turn on.

Rory spun around to face his feet and slowly slipped him inside her. He moaned taking hold of her hips.

“Better grab onto something Semple, I’m about to rock your world.”

“You already did sweet thing, that’s why I’m marrying you,”

She watched him over her shoulder as she arched allowing him to enjoy the sight of her long back curving just above her scrumptious derriere.

“Don’t ever think you know all of me, Semple. Ready for your ride?”

"Show me, Ms. Gilmore, I can't wait,” he winked at her.

“It starts with something like this…”

She twirled her hips in wide, slow circles.

“Holly shit…”

A/N: We're getting to the end... I can't believe I was able to write that much and that's thank to you readers. You fueled me with your kudos and your comments. Only one chapter left and an epilogue. I hope to be able to post them as soon as possible.
June 2016

She glanced at her future husband. Only a few spring days in the southwest of France and he was already tanned, his gaze turning even bluer. Clad as usual in dark jeans and a white button-down crisp shirt she couldn't deny that it was a good look for him. Legs knee-crossed he seemed relaxed slightly grinning.

“Have you thought about what took us so long to get back together?” Rory asked, holding her fiancé’s hand.

They were on the plane flying back to New-York. Although a little exhausting, they had a good time at Logan and Odette’s wedding.

Seeing Shira and the Dark Lord had sent Rory back to memory lane. This pair was the epitome of what she’d never wanted her couple to become. How they could still bear each other was a mystery. Even more intriguing was how Logan and Honor had become such nice people. Rory was glad to meet her again and wasn’t surprised to learn that with Josh, they had distanced themselves from the Huntzberger and moved to Stamford with their three kids.

Rory had observed Logan, the man she’d cared for so much many years ago. When he ended their relationship, she had felt for a long time that she would never be able to love anyone again as passionately. She'd been so wrong, it was indeed possible to love another man even more. Anyway, Odette was a much better match for the Huntzberger heir. It was such a blast to witness Shira tiptoeing around her daughter in law.

She reminisced her very first date with Robert at Yale. She’d felt a little guilty at the beginning, but obviously, they both knew where they were standing. They'd stay friends after that. It was possible that they were not meant to be a thing at that time. Luckily, they got another chance, even if they'd almost blown it.

"I did actually," Robert answered slightly squeezing his fiancée's hand but keeping his gaze in front of him.

“And what did you conclude?”

It had struck her that on the contrary to what happened with her preceding boyfriends, her love for Robert had taken months to grow in her imperceptibly. They had spent that time to discover each other without any pressure.

“I’d hidden behind the fact that after I told you that I loved you at the Vineyard, you had the ball in your court, but it dawned on me later that I was a coward. What I felt for you when you came in DC just scared the shit out of me. I already knew that we had a unique intellectual connection when we were in Boston, that living with you was how I wanted it to be all my life, but the physical attraction I felt for you was… Off the charts. I didn’t know how to deal with it. With hindsight, I know that it’s unusual, exceptional, but then… How was I supposed to focus on my work when my hormones were doing all the thinking? I had never desire anyone like that. I had to step back to understand what was happening.”

He paused, a small smile playing on his lips.

"When you think of it, what are the odds among billions of people to find a person who is your perfect match? That you can't desire another soul more than you want her? How scary to know that
your life depends on her? I think it's why some people do crazy stupid things, like sleep with someone else or any other dumb decision that doesn't make sense,” he added.

He pulled her closer to him and lightly kissed the top of her head.

“Then, with time, I started to doubt that you were reciprocating my feelings. There was also the conflict of interest matter, in particular for you. I knew you were big on journalism ethics. Was I supposed to quit the White House? Then seeing you with that guy in the restaurant in Boston knocked me down for a while.”

Despite the short stay in France, she was already jet lagged and wasn't sleepy at all. Therefore, she thought it wasn't such a bad idea to have a serious talk. They usually had this kind of conversation after sex, a habit they got from their first year together living apart. They had to manage the few moments face to face so getting rid of their hormonal needs was the only way to be focused on anything else.

“I’m so sorry Robbie. Everyone was pressuring me to get back in the game. I was so lost, when he asked me out, I didn’t even know why I accepted. Then I saw you, and I immediately understood that I didn’t want to be with anyone but you. I was just like you, scared by the feelings I had for you. I still hadn't healed from the break up with Logan, I was terrified that I wouldn’t be able to recover from another one. Loving you came with a shit-ton of risk, and I wasn't sure I could deal with that.”

She swallowed, trying to contain her emotions.

“Rory, don’t feel bad. It was years ago. Maybe it was meant to be like that, give us time. We’re now experienced enough not to take anything for granted. We’re aware that we should work for our relationship, evolve toward the same direction to avoid ending like those couples who married young and get a divorce at forty because on their way to become adult parents they’d drifted apart.”

“You did think about that a lot, didn’t you?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe. What do you think I did during all this time before I proposed? You know I’m not a spontaneous person, but luckily you are.”

She put her head on his shoulder and slid to be closer to him. Even though their endings had been excruciatingly painful, she didn’t regret any of her previous relationships. They all have led to making her able to reciprocate the love this incredible man was feeling for her.

###

While Rory’s book was in the Rodham editor's hands, Susan, Catherine had the difficult task to convince her author that they had to work on her book branding. Even if the agent was convinced that women could relate to both the mother and the daughter. Any female had at least been once scared by teen pregnancy, or could relate to a teenager with ambition, or wish to be charismatic thirty years old woman. Therefore, how could they not relate to these characters? Nevertheless, to get to that, they first had to find their way to Rory’s book.

Unfortunately, in the present era, everyone had to be branded, writers, models, actors, directors. Modern publishing included evaluation by writer's followers in social media. Being an editor, Rory fought against that for her authors, but she couldn't swim against the current anymore. In particular, being a new novelist with a book that didn't involve kinky sex scenes. Her agent and her editor comforted her that with her blog, she already had more than a regular beginner. She even had a piece in the New Yorker, and her short story published.
Rory had found herself daydreaming about what it must have been like a century ago when there was no social media, no internet what so ever. She'd picture herself scribbling away at her writing desk, blessedly oblivious of how readers liked her previous book. Of course, they already were reviews at that period, and authors would know if their books were selling when they’d received their royalty checks. Nevertheless, they wouldn't have to spend hours checking their ratings on Goodreads or stalking other writers on Instagram or Twitter.

After her meeting with Catherine, Rory came back home feeling down. She understood that her agent was only doing her job and that a book that didn't have readers was just printed pages.

Robert lifted his gaze from the vegetables he was slicing to find a pouting fiancée.

She glanced at the chopping board and winced. She had gotten better with healthy cuisine over the years, but right now, she only needed comfort food which included a massive amount of carbs.

“You want to talk about it?” he asked while looking for a container to store the vegetables in the fridge for another meal.

She shook her head. She was feeling childish as she remembered that not so long ago, Robert had been through the same path and handled it like a pro. Why couldn't she get over it?

“I need to process this,” she answered sheepishly.

He came around the kitchen island, snaked his arms around her and put his forehead on hers to lock eyes with his fiancée.

“How about a pepperoni pizza with extra cheese and your favorite Pauillac?”

The right corner of her mouth slightly lifted. Was he for real?

"Oh, and I had a sixth sense and brought a few éclairs at La Maison du Chocolat on my way back," he added feeling smug.

She pulled back from his arms to stare at a very proud fiancé.

“And that’s why I can’t marry anyone else,” she said beaming at him.

Robert had always known that the easiest way to a Gilmore girl was passing through her stomach.

# # #

Driving in Provence in the red Triumph Spitfire, top down, with the sun warming their skin, the wind in their hair had always been an aphrodisiac. She liked his smooth driving, the smell of the lavender in the air. Closing her eyes, she imagined herself in a sixty's Italian movie. He felt naughtier like he was her lover sneaking her out from another boyfriend. He softly stroked her bare thigh, trying hard not to slide his hand further under her skirt, impatient to get to their final destination.

This time was different though. In a week, they would be officially tied forever to each other. They didn’t want a wedding with more business associates than there were people they knew. They had finally opted for a small committee wedding, just surrounded by their circle of close friends and the closest members of their families.

As expected, the hardest person to convince had been Emily, but even Lorelai had to concede that her mother surrendered quite easily. Rory and Robert had agreed to a “business” reception in New-York that would be taken care of by a wedding planner under the supervision of Emily and Lydia.
Nevertheless, Lorelai felt that her mother's new easiness had more something to do with Jack Smith. Luckily, he wasn't attending the wedding.

Lydia and Lorelai had gladly taken over the organization with Anne’s help. Usually, it was not possible for two foreigners to marry in France without a relative living in the country. However, Nicolas remembered that they might have their marriage celebrated by the US consular authorities. Fortuitously, the American consul in Marseille had been in Law school with Colin and had been easily convinced to marry two Elis.

Lorelai and Lydia enjoyed watching the guests admiring their decoration arrangement during the aperitif of the rehearsal dinner, just being happy to be united around the bride and groom. They were around thirty people, and almost everyone knew each other. Christopher was relishing being in France with his two daughters. This country used to be Sherry's territory, and he hadn't come back since he got divorced from Lorelai. He was pleasantly surprised that these bad memories were now long gone and would be soon replaced by excellent ones. The place was gorgeous, and he understood why the kids had chosen it for their nuptials. He spotted Robert coming out of the house and walked toward him before the young man would be caught by his friends.

“Robert, I wanted to give you this.”

Christopher pulled out a pocket watch from his jacket. It had a silver cover with an intricate design.

"It's my great grandfather's. It's the only thing he had left from Ireland when he arrived in the US. It has been passed to me by my father when I married Lorelai. Unfortunately, my marriage didn't last, and I only got two daughters. Don't get me wrong, I feel blessed with these two young ladies. You're what I have closest to a son, so I'm feeling that this belongs to you now that you're going to be part of the family."

Robert was speechless. He raised his gaze to meet his soon to be father in law.

"Chris, I'm deeply honored, but I can't accept that it's too much. You could still have a son with your new girlfriend."

The corners of Christopher’s mouth tipped up.

"I don't think so. We're too old for that, take it, please. I can't imagine a better man to hold on to this family tradition. I pondered a lot to give it to Rory, you know, try to see the bigger picture, put a stop on a tradition that could be thought as sexist. But it's a man's watch, after all, so she would likely have kept it in her jewelry box. Then I remembered that my great grandfather's first name was Robert, so I guess it was a sign."

Robert reached for the watch and slowly clicked it open. The inside was elegantly worked as well. The initials R. H. were engraved inside the lid. The face was a simple, clean with crisp Roman numerals.

“I don’t know what to say,” Robert muttered. He hadn’t met Christopher that often, but they had bonded easily. After all, they both had been members of the Gilmore heartbreak club. “Thank you very much. I’m touched. I’ll take care of it fondly.”

"I'm sure you will. I've seen you with Rory, you're a good man. I wasn't a great dad to her, and I'll never forgive myself, but I'm glad that you found each other. What you two share is exactly what a parent wishes for their children. It maybe sounds sappy, but it's not as easy as it seems."

Robert was speechless overwhelmed by emotions, so he only nodded. He already knew he was a
fortunate man to have found his match.

###

“I can’t believe you guys slept in the same bed the night before your wedding,” Paris complained. “Why do you feel the need to get married if you’re not keen on traditions?”

The bridal party was getting ready on the first floor of the main house.

“Wouldn’t it be a little hypocritical? Anyway, we were short on rooms,” Rory answered.

“And that has nothing to do with the fact that you guys are in constant need to touch each other? You two are like the energizer bunnies, and it’s not a coincidence that when we go somewhere, you always get the furthest room from the others.” Rose mocked.

“That’s not true!!” Rory retorted.

“Come on hon, why do you think I remodeled your room? Once I had a guest who asked me if someone was shooting porn at the inn,” Lorelai teased.

“Mom!”

Rory couldn’t help smirking inside. The man she was going to marry today had a unique ability to make her lose any self-control and send her to such a high level of orgasm that she couldn’t feel anything but utterly sated. Every glance, every single touch between them were charged, no matter how small, it invariably triggered an intense magnetism. His mere presence was still causing her to blaze into an erotic meltdown every time they were together.

Rory rolled her eyes but at the same time witnessed Steph struggling with the zipper of her dress. She elbowed Juliet who frowned.

“Steph, is there something wrong with your dress?”

The blonde turned around her eyes watering.

“Wow, wow, what’s going on?” Rosemary rushed toward her friend with a tissue.

Steph sat on an ottoman.

"I was trying to keep this for after the ceremony, but I guess I have to tell you before it gets too awkward."

All the girls stared at her, wondering what was going on.

“I can’t close my dress because my tits are too big now. I didn’t plan for that, it fitted perfectly when I tried it last month, but I didn’t know it could change that much during the first months of pregnancy, I’m still on the first trimester,” Steph uttered.

“What??” the girls all cried. “It’s fantastic!”

All of them hugged the emotional blonde.

“Why haven’t you said anything?”

“We wanted to wait for the end of the first trimester,” Steph whispered.
“Don’t worry, I’ll get Jeanne and see if she can do anything with your dress,” Odette said holding Steph at her shoulder.

Rory tried to hold her tears to avoid messing up her make up. “I’m so happy for you,” she said putting a peck on her friend’s cheek.

Then it struck her. How could she forget? With all the madness of the wedding preparation and finishing her book, she hadn’t noticed that she was late. She sat her mouth opened.

“Rory, are you alright?” Paris asked immediately detecting that something was wrong.

“I’m late, very late,” Rory uttered.

Steph understood instantly. “How late?”

“Two weeks,” the bride whispered.

# # #

“You nervous?” Finn asked.

It was a rhetorical question. Robert had been pacing in the guest house for a solid ten minutes now. His heart was going to explode from his chest, just like when he asked her out at Yale for the first time, and the last.

“We’ll see how cool you’ll be when you get married,” Robert snapped, putting both hands on the top of his head and taking a deep breath.

“Sorry Finn, I’m a little edgy,” the groom excused himself.

“No worries,” Finn said raising an eyebrow to Colin.

“I was terrified at mine,” Logan said from his chair.

“I’m still in awe that she wants to spend her life with me. You know me, guys. I'm good at what I do, I mean work, research writing, teaching, but when it comes to feelings, relationships I can be a douche. I can make an illusion for a hookup, even a few days, but in the long run, I'm not sure. You know that, right? And she, she can illuminate a room just by her presence. Everybody loves her, and she reciprocates all of this love. You've seen how all the people in her town love her. Gosh, we all fell in love with her when she appeared in our lives. How am I supposed to keep her happy?”

"She came to get you after four years, and since then, you two have been glued to each other," Nicolas mocked.

“No worries,” Colin mocked.

“Three years and seven months,” Robert corrected mumbling.

“Look, who was counting,” Colin mocked.

Logan elbowed him and tried to calm his friend.

“You’ve said it, she loves everybody, so she won’t quit loving you anytime soon. You can’t screw it more than keeping away from her for three years and seven months, can you?”

Robert shook his head holding his smirk. He wouldn’t have been able to go through these fucking three years and seven months without them.
“You’re an asshole, you know that, right?” Robert smirked at Logan.

“I do, but I’m a chick magnet asshole, that’s why I wasn’t punished for what I did to your soon to be wife and got to married your best friend, you should thank me for that.”

Right at this moment, there was a quick knock at the door, and a beaming Odette entered the room.

“Guys, it’s time to get your butt to the altar,” she ordered.

"Hey! Aren't you supposed to be at the groom side of the wedding party?" Nicolas asked. "You're probably better than any one of us to bear the groom's whining."

“I’m here now,” Odette replied. “Il tient le coup?” She asked Nicolas how their childhood friend was holding up.

“Wait!” Robert said slightly manic. “What if she has cold feet?”

Odette stared at Robert, then turned to Nicolas and nodded. She smiled unperturbed by her friend anxiety.

“Got it.”

She hooked her arm with Robert’s and pulled him out of the house, telling him softly in French that Rory was ready and impatient to become his wife.

The guys stayed stunned by how easily the groom's face relaxed immediately.

“And this is my wife, guys!” Logan said proudly. “Isn’t she exceptional?”

Colin draped an arm around the blond shoulder.

“She absolutely is, man. Let’s go now to get this done. Three of us married with remarkable women, we’ve got to celebrate!”

###

Finn would never admit it, but he loved weddings. Since last year, he had been standing beside his three best friends, offering his support on such an important day. They already have shared so much.

Just like at Colin's wedding, he watched Rosemary walked down the aisle and closed his eyes to imagine an entirely different situation. It was only the change of music announcing Rory's arrival that pulled him out of his reverie. A smile stretched his lips, not just at the luminous bride in her elegant white dress at the arm of a proud Christopher, but also at the dopey grin on Robert's face.

“My eyes are not watering,” Steph whispered to Rose tipping her head to the side.

“I don’t think your husband can say the same,” the redhead said out of the corner of her mouth.

They glanced at the groom party to witness four emotional guys and a beaming Odette.

Rory reached the end of the aisle, pausing to hug Christopher who was trying hard to control his emotions. He kissed his daughter and handed her off to Robert before finding his seat next to Lorelai.

Rory glimpsed at the front row where her relatives were sitting. She didn’t have a big family, not even a classic one, but it was a loving one. She had lost her grandfather, but she had two fathers and, in a few minutes, a husband. It had taken thirty years for Christopher to find his place beside her, but
he'd finally succeeded. He hadn't brought his new girlfriend to the wedding because he thought it wasn't the right place to introduce her, but he had taken her to Manhattan to meet Rory and Robert.

They didn't regret having a small wedding. Otherwise, they never could have had such a loving atmosphere, everybody just seemed relaxed and happy. There was no awkwardness; nobody had to be guarded; everyone was there united by their love for the bride and groom.

Lydia and Lorelai had outdone themselves. Everything was tasteful, respecting the bucolic ambiance wish of the bride from the wedding favors, the flowers, to the tableware. Even the *groomsman* were wearing *floral ties*.

Odette had taken care of the music and hired two bands so that they could have live music from after the ceremony until dawn. A *jazz* band had started playing rat pack’s songs to the delight of the elderly. Then, a French soul band had taken over and heated the atmosphere. Hep Alien hadn’t been invited to play as Rory wanted Lane to enjoy the wedding. Nevertheless, watching the musicians having fun, Zach couldn’t hold it anymore and jumped on the stage. Not very long after, Lane toed off her shoes to join her husband. The night became a never-ending jamming session.

From the bar, Finn saw Logan sitting at the table looking at Robert and Rory on the dance floor. He joined the young Huntzberger with two glasses.

“Any regrets?” The Aussie asked.

“Not an ounce, I’m truly happy for them. We were too young, she knew it, I didn’t. He waited for her. Have you seen how he looked at her when she walked down the aisle? He would have followed her to the moon.”

“Wouldn’t we all? You’re right, the poor bastard his hooked for life now,” the Aussie agreed.

“Finn, my turn to ask you, do you have any regrets?”

"On the contrary to you two, I never really had any chance with her. I was just the rebound guy, the reliable, good old Finn,” he sighed.

“Maybe, but you were there when he wasn’t, you could have taken advantage.”

"You weren’t there man, you should have seen them together when they were supposed to be only roommates. Everyone could see that there was such a strong connection between them, only them were oblivious to their feelings. When he left, she started to realize that, and she was lost and confused. I was there for her, but her heart already belonged to Robert at that point, I knew that only she didn't. Sure, I could have fallen for her, you know her ability to attract everyone to her.”

“Too well, but she doesn’t know it.”

“I only took what I could get, few moments of happiness and wait for my time to find my other half.”

“And have you?”

"I might have, man, I'm working on it." Finn looked at Rosemary who was dancing and laughing with Colin. "You know I always have been slower than you guys.”

Logan chuckled and winked at his friend.

“Come on, let’s go dance with our girls.”
Since the ceremony, Robert was floating on air. Not only he was now married to the most wonderful woman, to his soul mate, but they were also going to be parents. June 25th, 2016 should be marked as the best day ever for Robert Semple.

“Oh, oh!” Colin smirked looking at the single women getting ready to grab the bouquet.

The guys were all sitting in lounge chairs smoking big cigars, a glass in the other hand, eyes half closed and didn't even bother turning their head.

“Finn, are you aware that your girl is the only one left for this tradition?” Logan asked. “And that lately, every girl who caught it was indeed the next one at the altar.”

Finn grumbled but glanced at Rory who was turning her back to the very few single women. Aubrey, Jenna, April, and Rosemary were giggling getting ready to catch the white bouquet. Finally, an intimate wedding didn’t seem such a good idea to him.

He gazed at his girlfriend and noticed how carefree and happy she looked. She had lost the sadness in her eyes, the one she had for such a long time and that only the people who knew her years ago could remember she could be otherwise.

Actually, they had both changed a lot over the past months. Everything was evolving very smoothly, and he had to acknowledge he had never felt so at ease with a woman. He was still living in Boston, and the long-distance relationship was a little tiring. He would have given anything to be able to share a home with Rose daily, but that would mean that one of them would have to quit their job. There wasn't any auction house as important as Christie's in Boston, and GMO main offices were in Boston and Sydney. He had turned things around in all directions, but no easy answer had come out yet.

The bouquet flew in the air, spiraled a few times and finally ended in Rosemary’s hands. Finn heard his buddies hooted.

“Do you remember what you told me when Rory got the bouquet at Colin’s wedding?” Robert asked with a snort of amusement and a crooked grin.

Finn was numb, his mouth opened. Was it still time to skedaddle?

“You’re next Finn, the bouquet never lies.”

A/N: I finally did it, this is the last chapter. I hope that you enjoyed this story as much as I did, writing it. I'm lying a little though; you'll get an epilogue as soon as possible.
Epilogue

Ellie Semple was sitting, holding her knees on her childhood bed and sighed loudly. Her parents would be home soon from their trip to France, and she will have to tell them. She couldn't hide it any longer because there was no way her aunt Steph would be able to hold such a scoop. Why was she so stupid? She used to despise people indulging in public display of affection, but he really could make her do anything as if she'd lost her willpower. That's how she was caught kissing Jan on the sidewalk in front of her house. It felt so right though, sweet even.

Of course, he didn’t see the problem, but he indulged her demand not telling their parents. After all, they were both twenty-one, responsible young adults, doing great in class. He didn't mind though, as long as he was able to see her, kiss her, enjoy every inch of her. She couldn't deny that she was relishing the undivided attention he was giving her. She was only worried about her pride.

Among the two Semple kids, she was the rebel, and she had always been proud of it. She presented herself as a free spirit aside from society. She used to make fun of her parents and their friends and most of all, the inbreeding between their gang. Her uncle Colin always joked saying they were incestuous. Jeez, she didn't go to Yale to avoid that and went to Dartmouth instead. Sure, it still was an Ivy league school, but she loved their science program, and none of their friend's kids would be there.

But then there was the junior year spring break. Ellie didn't even want to go to Florida, but Cori McCrae insisted saying that they hadn't done anything fun together for such a long time. And there he was, with his stupid friends, with their stupid smirks and their stupid abs that made Cori drool. At first, it wasn't a big deal, they knew each other since diapers. But Cori made her hang out with them, and by the end of the break, she was a goner. Dammit, she didn’t have the strength of her mother and fell for the Dugray charm or was it the second generation of Dugray who was again hooked up by a Gilmore girl? Well, maybe it was because she only was half Gilmore that she couldn’t resist. Ever since they were little, Jan was always teasing her, and she thought he was the most annoying guy ever. Her mother had once told her that it was how the Dugray men behaved when they had a crush on a girl.

The following months, they’d spent a lot of time on the I-89 between Dartmouth and Harvard. Luckily, they were both back in Manhattan since the finals. At least she had been able to hide their relationship until this fateful summer. She was interning in a lab at NYU, and he was at Semple Brothers with his uncle Charly. As her parents were in France, and her brother backpacking in Asia, they spent all their nights together at her house, and it was terrific. That's why she had let her guard down and kissed him in the street outside of the Semple residence just when her auntie Steph was walking the dog. Damnit. For sure, they would make fun of her. She had always sworn she would never date a society guy, and never, oh never, a trader or a businessman or worst a big shot awful lawyer. And there she was, madly in love with Jan Dugray, a Harvard business major, the fourth generation of Dugray of Harford. She had always wanted to be as spontaneous and free as her grand-mother Lorelai. She was constantly upset that people were suspicious that all she did and got was due to her name, connections or family money. That was one of the reasons she went into science. She was very close to going to college much further from home, but Cori convinced her to settle and stay on the eastern seaboard so they could still see each other during the weekend. After what her best friend went through, she couldn’t deny that to her. So, Cori went to Yale, and they promised themselves that they would go further west for grad school. But now, she was even reconsidering that because she had to factor in Janlan Dugray.

The apple fell quite far from the tree. Ellie wasn't the kind of daughter who confided to her mother.
In the beginning, it was hard for Rory because it was the only kind of relationship she thought could exist between mother and daughter, but to her surprise, she had developed that kind of closeness with Ethan, her second child.

Ellie Semple was a beautiful young woman, and until she dated Jan, she always had love interests that were more into her than she was into them. With the young Dugray, she was experiencing what she thought was losing her free will. She would never admit it, but she perfectly knew he could be able to make her do anything just by grinning at her.

She was addicted to his grin. He had multiple version of it. The mischievous one, the Dugray landmark, like when something naughty was popping up in his mind, and he wanted to warn her. It was different from the sexy one, which was more obvious and that he was giving her when they were in bed. He also had the happy one, that he always used with family and friends. But her favorite one was the big and sunny one he gave her each time they saw each other after a separation, the one that made her feel she was the most special girl in the world.

She wondered if what she was experiencing with Jan was the kind of love that people were referring to when they talked about her parents. Since her childhood, she’d heard multiple times how her parents were into each other. She had listened to all the details of their love story, and how despite the circumstances, they finally ended up together. Among their friends, they always were the reference of THE strongest love story. How their feelings had trumped the distance, time, their commitment to their work and even other men including her uncles, Logan and Finn.

Still, now, she had caught her parents several times staring at each other like two young love birds. She often thought it was embarrassing that they couldn't be more than a few inches apart of each other. People over forty shouldn’t be gushy. If it was this bad after more than twenty years together, she couldn't imagine how sickening they must have been in the beginning. Robert still looked at Rory like he did when they were only roommates, but so much more in his wishes. Her uncle Finn used to tease them and say that there should be a time limit on how long couples get to be gooey and that her parents had way past it.

Why couldn’t they be like any parents?

Now she was reconsidering her parent’s love story in a new angle. No other guy had never fit up against her as well as Jan did. Was it because he knew her since childhood? He was the only one who could put up with her character, who could listen to her banter and even seemed to like it. The only guy who wasn't scared by her strong temper.

Last but not least, the only one that could kiss her and make her forget about everything, even her determination to go to California for grad school. Jan had initially planned to stay in Harvard for his MBA. It wasn't such a bad school for science either, so he'd asked her to consider it. She still had all senior year to decide, but first, she had to send an application. She’d told him she’d do it if he applied for Stanford and to her surprise, he didn't even try to argue and downloaded the forms. Just like that, they were committing to go to grad school together.

Since her younger brother started college, her mother was tagging along with her father wherever he had to travel. Her folks were both best-selling authors, but her mother was clearly the most famous one. She had fans all over the world, all her books rights had been bought for movies. It could have been worse; her mother could have been a young adult books author.

Rory had become one of the most favorite writers among young women. She was glad that her mom had taken Hayden as a pen name, avoiding her to be harassed by her mother’s fans. She’d attended schools with other celebrities’ kids, but she didn’t like to be pointed as the daughter of Lorelai Hayden, in particular by the teachers. They always expected her to be a good writer, to have the
most pertinent questions. She just wanted to be a regular kid and would have given anything to be Molly Ringwald in sixteen candles.

# # #

Once their plane had landed, Rory and Robert turned on their phone to see that they both had messages from Colin, Tristan and Sarah all asking to call them back. They looked at each other wondering what was so important. While Robert called Colin, Rory tried to reach Sarah Dugray, but she was sent straight to voicemail. She then tried Tristan.

"Hey, Rory! you’re back!"

“Well, we just landed, what is so important, do I have to worry?”

“No, no! Only good news that you won’t believe!”

“Then why are you dancing around the bush?”

“Guess who’s Jan’s new girlfriend?”

“Since when is your son’s love life is of my concern?” Rory asked a little irritated.

“Because he has been dating Ellie for four months now.”

She could feel her high school friend was smirking.

“My Ellie??”

She saw Robert staring at her eyes wide opened. “Our Ellie,” he mumbled.

“Uh, uh! The dad couldn’t do it, but the prodigal son finally did get a Gilmore!”

“Did he tell you?”

"No, but Steph ran into them making out in front of your house. Apparently, since you guys left, he has been leaving there. Ellie made her auntie Steph promise not to tell you, but you know Steph. As she didn't promise not to tell us, she called us right away."

“This is so good! Did Jan tell you anything?”

“Nope, we were unable to reach him since then. It was yesterday though. I thought you guys would want to know before getting home. It seems that our youngest knew. That’s how we learned that they have been dating since spring break.”

“Four months! They kept that from us that long!”

“What??” Robert was starting to be impatient. They were now at the baggage claim area.

“Okay Tristan, thanks for letting us know.”

Once she’d broke the news to her husband, they had a good laugh together and tried to think how they would be able to make fun of their daughter endlessly. They loved Jan, he was a good kid, a little cocky sometimes but after all, it was part of the Dugray charm. Ellie had been a handful since she was eleven, contesting every decision, always disagreeing, grumpy at all family social event. Yet, she had been shielded from most of it on the contrary to what the Huntzberger or the McCrae kids had to endure.
On their way from the airport, Robert lapsed into silence, thinking that it wasn't that long ago he was walking for hours with Ellie in the baby carrier because it was the only way she would find sleep. He didn't mind because since he had laid eyes on her first day on earth, she had become the most precious thing for him in his life besides his wife. He relished feeling her breath on his chest, letting her tiny fingers grasped his pinky. He was willing to do anything for her. Yet, now, she was sharing her life with another man, one that he wouldn't be able to scare out of her like he did with the preceding ones. She was just as smart as her mother, choosing a guy that knew that he wasn't the big angry bear driving away his daughter's suitors. It had been a game between them, and that's how he knew that she'd never been serious with any of them and that he still had the pole position in her heart. He knew that if she hadn't confided in him about Janlan, it meant that new feelings for the young man were growing in her.

Rory looked at her husband. His gaze was lost in the surroundings, and she could see the wheels turning in his head. Since Ellie arrived in their life, they'd been parenting together sharing the joy, the worry, the frustration, the guilt, the protectiveness, but mostly the love for these little humans who were adults now.

A small smile played on her lips. After all these years and two kids, he still did it for her. Big time. His gruff manly exterior had taken over, hiding the immensely loving person that he deeply was. Just like twenty-five years ago, she felt a sudden swelling of love for him. However, right now, she could see that he had something else on his mind. She reached out and put her hand over his, lightly squeezing it making him automatically turned it and intertwined their fingers.

“You're not losing her you know,” she whispered.

He turned to his wife with a half-smile.

“I know, I just need time to adjust to the new situation. It could be worse, I do like Jan, he’s a nice kid.”

Ellie heard the front door open driving her out of her reverie. She wondered how much her parents will make fun of her. She decided she might as well confront them right away and walked down the stairs to greet them.

“How was your trip?” She asked.

She needed to see their eyes to guess in what kind of mood they were to adjust her words.

“Ellie! It’s so good to see you, hon,” Rory opened her arms to hug her daughter.

“I’m glad to see my sweet girl,” Robert said squeezing her tight. “So, what’s up? still having fun in the lab?”

The young Semple could see that her parents couldn’t hold their smirk. They obviously were aware.

“Okay, don’t play dumb with me. I guess that you already know.”

Rory chuckled.

“I only have a single question. Why kept it a secret?”

“Come on mom! You know why! He’s so not my kind of guy!”

“Of course, he’s not, we all know I’m your dream guy,” her father teased.
"Exactly! He's interning with uncle Charly for God sake! And he's planning to do an MBA, not even a Ph.D.!!"

"I didn't know you were such a snobbish hon. I do not have a Ph.D., is it such a shame?"

“Of course not, mom, you know what I mean, I was always aiming for a cultured guy, an intellectual or a scientist, not a guy whose only goal is to make money!"

“Isn’t that a little caricatural and reductive?” He father asked. “I’m not sure any of your grandfathers would be thrilled by your theory.”

“Oh dad, you know what I mean!” Ellie answered upset.

“Anyway, I guess if you’re so edgy on the subject it means that you’re quite serious, aren’t you?” Rory enquired.

Ellie looked at her parents with pleading eyes. She wondered which of the two would be the most understanding.

Rory and Robert both frowned out of surprise. Was it fear that they were detecting in their daughter's eyes? They hadn't witnessed this kind of feeling in her since a trip to Louisiana about ten years ago, and the little girl had come face to face with an alligator. Ellie had always been strong and independent and tackled all problems head front.

To her parent’s disbelief, she threw her arms at her mother neck and rested her head on her shoulder.

“Oh, Mom,” she said her voice low, but her tone shivering.

“Sshh,” Rory stroke her daughter’s head trying to soothe her.

“I think I’m in love.”

THE END

A/N: Thank you so much for reading the complete story and bear for my-so-not-perfect English. It’s a personal accomplishment for me that I was able to write such a long story in a foreign language.

I also deeply appreciate all your kudos and comments.

End credits

All Gilmore Girls characters belong to ASP.

All along writing this story, I made a Pinterest board to help my imagination. Here’s the link: https://pin.it/pc7si57xwtt6es.

Soundtrack: The playlist containing all the songs is on Youtube.
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!