Into Your Home Into Your Heart
by Bmce

Summary

AU - Andy is a homeless artist, Miranda is well....Miranda.

Notes

Still not a native english speaker....:(
“Mom! Mom!” Miranda winced, as her little “angels” excitedly stormed into her study calling out for her. The loud shouting and stomping did not meet the editor’s liking nor the unfamiliar white dog following close.

“Turn down the volume girls. I’m quite capable of hearing. Care to explain that?” raising her eyebrows questioningly, she pointed at the dog.

Her identical twins Caroline and Cassidy were good kids contrary to popular belief. Although there was hardly anything Miranda would not do for them, somehow she found a balance and did not raise spoiled children. She loved them dearly but sometimes their ideas just pushed her to her limits. She supposed glancing at the dog - bull terrier, maybe – that this was one of those situations.

“Mom this is Bruno. Our friend can’t look after him during the holiday season, due to an unexpected illness in the family.” Caroline glanced at Cassidy who nodded reassuringly.

“Sooooo, we thought we’d help her out and take care of Bruno for a while.”

Miranda took off her reading glasses and tiredly rubbed the bridge of her nose.

“You thought?” her voice was neutral, giving nothing away about her thoughts on the matter.

“Mom,” Cassidy joined in the conversation “Andy is a very good friend of ours and she really, really needs our help. We promise to feed him, take him for a walk and clean-up after him. He’s a very well behaved dog, you won’t even notice him, you’ll see. Plus, he’s already good pals with Patricia.” she added pleadingly.

Bruno, understanding that the white haired woman needed a little more convincing to give her approval, trotted over to Miranda and put his bulky head on her knee. He gave out a piteous whine and looked up at the woman, his sorrowful brown eyes full of longing.

Miranda amused by the dog’s actions chuckled and scratched him behind the ears.

“You don’t play nice, do you?”

She leaned back in her chair and sighed. They had the space and all the necessary things for one more dog and if the girls kept their promise, she wouldn’t have to deal with him.

“All right he can stay.”

The girls shrieked and hugged their mother. “Mom you are awesome! Thank you, thank you!”

Miranda smiled fondly at them and gave the dog one last pat.

“Now go and finish your homework. Dinner will be ready in thirty minutes. I have to go through the Book but we can watch a movie when I’m done.”
“I’m really sorry, Andy.” Lily sounded miserable, so Andy dismissed her apology with a casual shrug.

“It’s not your fault that old Mrs. Rinsky’s mother got ill and that now she has to close for the holidays. Don’t worry, I’ll be ok, I’ve been through worse before. Three weeks will fly by fast and we will get back to our usual routine.” The lanky brunette squeezed the short African-American woman’s shoulder reassuringly.

“Besides,” she added, “the twins took Bruno in, so at least I don’t have to worry about him. And Doug from the coffee shop on the corner lets me sit there for hours, if I buy a cup. I can afford it now, as I don’t have to feed my little guy and the shop is a perfect place for drawing. I can finish the Christmas cards and the portrait for the girls in no time.”

Andy looked around the small storage room that had served as her nightly sanctuary for the last ten months and gave Lily a warm smile.

“I’d better hit the road before the old woman gets here. Happy Holidays, Lily. See you soon.”

“No, wait Andy, you could stay with me. Nat and I can figure something out. Let me call him.” Lily said, reaching for her phone.

Andy appreciated the offer, and she expected nothing less from her friend, whose heart was so big that she was risking her job, letting Andy sleep in the shop, without her employer’s knowledge. However, there was no way she could stay with Lily. Lily lived in a small one bedroom apartment, with her husband, Nat, and three children. There was hardly enough room for the five them, let alone a sixth person.

Andy grabbed her portfolio and the backpack that held everything she owned.

“Lily, you’re the best, but you know that’s not going to work. Please don’t worry about me. Trust me, everything’s going to be ok.”

Giving her friend a quick hug, Andy hastily left the store, leaving a forlorn Lily behind.

This year winter had arrived early. The weather was unusually cold at nights, with the temperature dropping well below zero, and the days were not much better, with heavy wind and rainfall that had turned to snow in the last few days. Andy pulled her coat closer to her body and shivered, as the chilly air found its way under the thin material.

I need a warmer coat if I’m serious about surviving, she thought and did the math in her head. She knew without a doubt that no matter how hard she tried to rearrange her non-existent budget, the result would be the same. No new coat. Period.

Holding the portfolio in front of her, as a shield against the wind, she headed toward the coffee shop hoping that she could spend some hours there before trying to get into one of the shelters.
Chapter 3

Miranda Priestly was known for her high standards and expensive taste. Malicious rumor said that every day she dined as a queen in her grandiose dining room, surrounded by a horde of servants. In truth, unless entertaining, she hardly ever used that room. She preferred the cozy kitchen, with its relaxed atmosphere, where according to Caroline, she looked more like a mom and not the editor-in-chief of a glamorous magazine.

Since her previous - and she believed last - divorce she had been trying hard to spend more time with the girls. Having dinner with them every night was one of the few rules she kept, no matter how impossible it seemed to fit it into her schedule. The girls were grateful for the extra attention and their relationship had improved a lot.

They sat at the kitchen table and Miranda listened to the girls’ excited chatter about the cutest boy in the whole world. Patricia, their St Bernard, lay at the doorway, while Bruno settled down at Miranda’s feet. The new addition to the family, was a few shades lighter and his hair color now matched the editors’, following a bath that he received from the girls.

“So girls…this very good friend of yours, Andy, I don’t remember you mentioning him before.”

Caroline glanced sideways at Cassidy and answered their mom with typical teenage exasperation in her voice.

“Mom, we already told you about HER remember? We met her and Bruno in the park, when we were out walking Patricia. She helped me with my school newspaper project and she taught Cass a lot about art.”

“Yes mom.” Cassidy joined in, “Andy is sooo cool. Even though she’s older than us, she always listens and helps us with school stuff.”

Miranda raised her eyebrows disapprovingly. “Stuff?”

Cassidy blushed and corrected herself. “Sorry mom. I mean things like projects and homework. Stuff, is Andy’s favorite word. She uses it a lot.” Giggling now, Cassidy added, “Once we told her that you would be sooo annoyed if she used it in front of you.”

Miranda vaguely recalled a conversation about Andy but couldn’t remember many details. The girls had many friends and as typical teenagers the list changed quite often, making it difficult to follow. One day besties, the next day sworn enemies and two days later BFF’s again. Perhaps, this Andy person wasn’t pinging Miranda’s radar, as she had noticed Cassidy’s improved marks in art class and Caroline had won an award for the article she wrote for the school paper. So thus far this Andy person wasn’t proving to be a bad influence, requiring closer scrutiny.

Pushing those thoughts aside, Miranda stood and loaded the dishwasher. The girls helped her clear the table and then ran upstairs to choose a movie they could watch before bedtime. Miranda finished cleaning up, checked the locks and went after the girls, silently praying for a miracle, so that she would not have to watch Harry Potter again.

Unlike the girls who enjoyed every second of Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince, Miranda hadn’t considered the movie entertaining any of the last three - or was it four – times the girls had subjected her to it. However, miracles were not to be had this night, and she settled down to re-watch their favorite movie.
Even if the movie provided little entertainment, sharing the experience with her girls was always amusing, with the girls arguing back and forth about some thing or the other. When the closing credits came up, they heartily debating who was cuter, Harry or Ron, before finally going off to bed, allowing Miranda to retire to her own bedroom.

After going through her usual nightly routine, she slipped into a satin nightgown and emerged from the bathroom to face an unexpected guest.

“I was told I wouldn’t have to deal with you. Yet here you are. Why is that?” Miranda looked at the white terrier, with what she believed was her most intimidating stare. Bruno who had taken advantage of the fact that the bedroom door had been left ajar, flopped onto his back, offering his belly for a rub. Miranda rolled her eyes at the dog’s antics and murmured

“Just like my employees. Always the drama.”

She climbed in under the sheets and glanced at the dog, who was still laying in the submissive position.

“Fine. You can stay. But don’t get used to it.”
Chapter 4

Five days had passed since old Mrs. Rinsky had closed her non-stop, dry cleaner shop and Andy had begun to lose the optimism, which had helped her during the last ten months. The first three days had gone fairly well. She’d spent the days at the coffee shop, finishing the Christmas cards and the portrait for the girls and at night she had been lucky enough to get into one of the better - or less awful - shelters. However, on the fourth and fifth day, she was wandering the streets, trying to sell her beautifully drawn cards with little success. This caused her to get to the shelter too late on both days, whereby she was not able to get in and had to spend the nights in the subway. Although city shelters are neither safe nor comfortable, Andy still found them to be more acceptable than any of the other few options she had.

Mrs. Rinsky’s shop had its perks. Andy could keep herself and her clothes clean, so that her appearance did not scream homeless and that made it easier for her to hang out in same places as the “normal” people. Usually she arrived at the shop at 10:00 pm, when Lily’s night shift started and was out by 6:00 am, before Mrs. Rinsky’s usual arrival time. Andy considered herself more than lucky for having this opportunity and for never running into the old witch. Mrs. Rinsky was not a pleasant person. If she found out about Andy, not only would she have fired Lily but pressed charges as well. Regardless of how risky the situation was, it was still heaven compared to the shelter, subway or the not too satisfactory wash-ups in a public bathroom.

“I don’t know Doug. I only sold three greeting cards and for that I had to walk what felt like thousands of miles. My socks are soaked. I believe these boots are not waterproof anymore, if they ever were that is. Not to mention my coat. I’m freezing.” Andy said with a resigned sigh, as she sat at the counter in the coffee shop. Her hands were wrapped around a steaming hot cup of tea but the bone-deep cold she felt, showed no signs of mercy and stubbornly stuck around.

Doug smiled at her reassuringly and put a slice of carrot cake in front of her. “Eat this. You’ll feel better. My treat.” he added, before Andy could even open her mouth to protest.

“Thank you, Doug but I’m not hungry. I feel a bit under the weather. Do you mind if I just take it with me and eat it later?”

Doug shook his head and placed the cake into a paper bag.

“I have a suggestion about your greeting cards, Andy. Why don’t you leave them here? I might be able to sell some to the customers.”

“That’s a kind offer, Doug but it could get you into trouble. I’m certain your manager wouldn’t appreciate it.”

“He wouldn’t dare say a word.” Doug winked at her mischievously. “Unless he wants me to inform his wife about his little storage room encounter…with me.”

“You’re such a dog, Doug.” laughed Andy. “You know what? Let’s give it a try.”

She took the greeting cards out of her backpack and placed them on the counter.

Walking towards the back of the coffee shop, Andy threw over her shoulder, “They’re all yours, Dougie. Sell them all. Make me rich and famous. And while you are doing that I’m going to pay a visit to the little girl’s room.”
The doorbell signaled the arrival of a customer. Doug finished arranging the cards and smiled at the fashionably dressed, skinny redhead and her companion, a modelesque blonde.

“What can I get you ladies?” Doug inquired politely.

“A grande skinny vanilla latte for me.” answered the redhead, her English accent unmistakable. She looked at the blonde questioningly, “Serena?”

Serena’s attention was focused on the greeting cards in front of her, so she missed her friend’s question and replied instead, “These drawings are magnificent. The artist must be a real talent. Are they for sale?”

“Yes they are. Twenty dollars per card.” said Doug, flinching slightly since he hadn’t yet discussed the price with Andy and was afraid he would mess up the sale.

“Twenty dollars? Bloody hell!” shrieked the redhead, “Are they made of gold or platinum? I could buy ten greeting cards at Hallmark for that price.”

The blond shook her head disapprovingly at her friend and gave the barista an apologetic look.

“Emily, these are spectacular drawings. My opinion is the artist actually underpriced them.” she countered.

Going through the pile one more time, Serena choose five cards. “I’ll take these, thank you. When you talk to the artist, please tell them their work is unique and they should raise the price.”

Doug accepted the proffered hundred dollar bill with a wide grin. “Thank you ma’am. I’m sure our starving artist will appreciate your generosity.”

He turned towards the still huffing redhead and handed her a tall paper cup.

“Here is your latte ma’am. That will be $2.95. Would you like anything else?”

Before Emily could answer, Serena dropped a five dollar bill on the counter. “This is on me, Em. Let’s go, we’re already late.” Waving goodbye, Serena headed out of the shop, dragging Emily with her.

Andy returned from the bathroom and sighed wearily.

“I must leave now, Doug. I don’t want to spend another night in the subway.” She looked suspiciously at the barista, who was grinning like an idiot. “What?”

Doug flashed the hundred dollar bill.

“Guess what…I sold five of your pieces. The woman who bought them was drooling all over them, and she paid hundred dollars.”

Andy stared at the money in disbelief. It was a lot of money for someone like her and it could not come at a better time. Tomorrow, she thought, I’ll go to a second-hand shop and buy a nice, warm, winter coat.

And for a second Andy did not feel that miserable.
Bruno was smitten by the soft, yet commanding voice of the white haired human. He liked the two smaller ones all right enough but they were a bit too noisy for his taste. The aura of the older woman reminded him of his favorite human and he missed that brown haired woman terribly. So he glued himself to his new friend’s side and followed her everywhere inside the house.

On the second night Miranda ordered Bruno out of her bedroom and rather reluctantly he was forced to leave. He didn’t go far, however and in the morning she found him curled up at her doorstep. Because he seemed so lonesome, Miranda let him come into her room that night and didn’t try to get rid of him after that.

Every morning, after Miranda left for work, Bruno settled down at the main door and did not move, until she got back in the late afternoon. He refused food and stubbornly resisted all of the girls’ attempts to take him out for a walk. As soon as Miranda stepped into the house his whole demeanor changed. He paraded around with his leash in his mouth, trying to catch the woman’s attention.

At first Miranda was annoyed that the girls weren’t keeping their promise to look after the dog and handle the dog walking duties but she soon found out from her housekeeper, Carmen, about Bruno’s weird behavior. On the fifth day, as Miranda was about to step out the door on her way to work, she heard his pathetic whimper behind her back.

Opening the door she looked at him.

“Want to come?”

At the Elias Clark building, no one dared to bat an eyelash when Miranda showed up with a dog in tow. Bruno didn’t seem to be affected by the crowd around him. His eyes were only on Miranda and he casually followed her into the elevator, as if it had been their usual daily routine for the last ten years.

Reaching her office, Miranda dropped her coat and bag on the second assistant’s desk and raised an eyebrow at the hesitant girl, who instead of jumping up and presenting Miranda with her lava hot coffee, was starring wide-eyed at the dog, forgetting to move.

“One would think you’ve never seen a dog before.” Miranda said coolly.

“Call Nigel. I want him here at nine. Cancel my meeting with Irv and I want a cerulean blue Hermes scarf, preferably by yesterday.”

Striding into to her office, Miranda called back to the girl. “When Emily gets back from the photo shoot send her in.”

The morning was spent peacefully. Miranda stayed in her office and didn’t burden her assistant with impossible tasks. Around two in the afternoon, the atmosphere suddenly changed, when without notice, ignoring the second assistant’s protest, Irv Ravitz burst into Miranda’s office.

“How dare you cancel our meeting again, Miranda! That’s the third time this week. Shall I remind you that I’m still your boss and you can’t do this to me?” he spat the words, with a menacing tone.

Miranda shot a bored glance at the red faced man and asked smoothly. “Irv, I’m delighted to see you. How is your wife?”
Irv’s face reddened a shade deeper and he huffed like a bull. “Miranda I’m warning you…”

He couldn’t finish his sentence because the editor cut in. “Irv. I would lower my voice and watch my tone, if I were you, because you really make Bruno jumpy. As I see it, my boy doesn’t like you at all.”

Stepping back one step, Irv shook his head. “Really, Miranda. I can’t believe you’re trying to threaten me by mentioning your lover?”

Irv was referring to the gossip that was circulating recently, about the alleged affair between Miranda and one of the board’s most influential member’s, Bruno Elsworth.

Miranda laughed out loud, visibly amused by Irv’s accusation. “Oh Irv. I’m not talking about that Bruno. I’m talking about him.”

She pointed behind him.

“Irv, this is Bruno. The one and only Bruno that I have ever had any relations with, if you must know.”

“Bruno would you please say hello to Mr. Ravitz?”

Irv froze in place when he heard a low growl emerging from behind him. He slowly turned and found himself face to face with an all muscle, bull terrier, who did not seem too fond of his presence. The dog growled again and Irv jumped back bumping into Miranda’s desk.

“I…I think I better leave now, Miranda.” he stuttered. “The meeting can wait. We’re all busy during the holiday season after all.”

Miranda nodded approvingly, and beckoned Bruno. Bruno trotted over to her and with a satisfied sigh, nestled at her feet.

Miranda smiled at the heavily sweating man with feigned sweetness. “Thank you, Irv. My assistant will call your secretary sometime soon. Please give my regards to your wife.”

Irv nodded silently and rushed out of the door without another word.

Miranda leaned down and patted Bruno’s head gently. Straightening the scarf around his neck, she cooed, “Did I mention that cerulean is definitely your color?”
Chapter 6

Miranda was strolling back from the Art Department, with her faithful friend Bruno trailing behind her, when she overheard her first assistant’s agitated voice.

“I’m telling you Nigel, this is ridiculous. They asked twenty dollars for a bloody greeting card. Just a piece of paper with some graphite doodling on it. Frankly, if they want to eat, the “starving artist” should be happy with three dollars.” she said mockingly.

Serena tried to calm the complaining redhead. “Emily, get over it. I’m worried about you. Your new diet makes you almost unbearable. You’re usually not this cantankerous. “

Nigel who was preoccupied with the greeting cards studied Emily for a split moment.

“I agree with Serena. These drawings are beautiful. You my dear, Emily, need to put something into your mouth because you’re turning into quite the Grinch.” With a wink at the women, he added, “And I’m talking about food this time.”

Miranda was familiar with what it was like to be starving. She had not always been rich and famous. She’d had her fair share of struggling days, when she had gone to bed with an empty stomach more times than she had not. She always remembered those days and that’s why she spent a lot of money on charity every year. Most of her donations were anonymous, to avoid the media’s speculation. Those hyenas would only question the sincerity of her actions, while looking for some ulterior motive behind it.
She stepped into the room, her unexpected entrance interrupting her employees’ conversation.

“They’re right.” she addressed Emily. “Your lack of empathy is amazing. There are actually people out there who are less fortune than you. People who are not starving themselves to stay a size zero but who are starving because they cannot afford food. Think of that the next time you feel the need to make fun of someone in need.”

Miranda’s eyes briefly fell on the greeting cards in Nigel’s hands, before she drew her attention back to Emily. “Tomorrow, first thing in the morning, you will go back to that shop and buy all the greeting cards. Pay double what they asking for and use my personal account. That’s all.”

Dismissing Emily, Miranda turned to Nigel. “I need your opinion on something.”

Taking Nigel’s arm and pulling him into her office, she wasted no more time on the gaping redhead.

Emily stood there, stunned. Her undernourished brain unable to catch up with the events. She was certain that her eyes had failed her too, because there was no way that Miranda bloody Priestly was accompanied by a dog in a cerulean scarf.

“Have you seen that dog, Serena? The one with the scarf?”

Serena shook her head, lowering it slightly to hide the impish glint in her eyes, “You need to eat querida. You’re starting to see things.”
Chapter 7

“Andy, you should follow my example.”

Lifting her throbbing head from the counter, Andy peered at Doug through half closed eyelids. The morning had not only brought more snow and heavy wind but a blinding headache, sore throat, and a sharp pain in her chest that came with every breath she took. She felt weak and was possibly running a fever, as despite sweating heavily, she still shivered almost violently.

“And how exactly should I do that?” she groaned, reaching for her portfolio, reviewing its contents.

“You need a sugar-daddy. All your problems would be solved in a heartbeat.”

“Dougie…” Andy groaned again “…I’m already sick. Please don’t make it worse.” She pulled out two larger size drawings and laid them on the counter.

“I’m finished with the portrait the girls were asking for and I also drew a self-portrait. They had mentioned it ages ago and I’d promised them that I would do it one day, so the self-portrait is my Christmas gift for them.”

The twins had asked Andy to draw a portrait of their mother, using a photo that Cassidy had taken without the editor’s knowledge. It captured a rare moment when Miranda was completely relaxed, leaning against a tree at their house in Hamptons. There was a small playful smile at the corner of her mouth and her eyes were closed, as her face was turned to the sun, clearly enjoying the peaceful moment.

Andy loved that photo. All of the other photos she had seen of Miranda were from the newspapers or from the internet, and they painted a very different picture of the Queen of Fashion. In those photos, the editor always appeared poised, cool and aloof and the accompanying articles portrayed her as a savvy and ruthless business woman.

The public image of the editor had not impressed Andy, so she had been overly surprised when she found out that her little friends from the park were actually the famous editor’s daughters. Through the stories the girls shared with her, she got to know another Miranda Priestly. A person so very different from the one in the papers that Andy knew not to believe half of what she read.

Doug studied Andy intently, as oblivious of the world around her, she was caressing the older woman’s image with her eyes.

“I see. You don’t need a sugar daddy…a sugar mama, perhaps?” he teased.

“I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Gigolo.” Andy blushed and abruptly stashed the drawing into an envelope.

“Yes, she’s a successful icon…and beautiful…but more importantly she’s Cassidy and Caroline’s mother…a wonderful one at that. Those little munchkins are special. She really did a great job raising them. Besides, just for the record, I’ve learnt my lesson from that bastard. I won’t make another mistake like that. I don’t trust anyone anymore and I don’t think I ever will, even if they were someone like Miranda Priestly.”

“All right, all right. I won’t tease you about that anymore.” Doug said, lifting his hands in a sign of surrender. “Although, one day you will meet someone who’ll make you trust again. Someone who will love you, as you deserve to be loved. Your luck is about to change. I just feel it.”

Dougie’s face suddenly took on an interesting expression. “I also feel that my morning coffee is
doing wonders…so watch the store for me, will you?” With that he hurried towards the bathroom.

Andy closed the envelope and pulled out another one to place her self-portrait in. Her arms and legs felt heavy. The slightest movement she made sapped her energy. The pain in her chest had become permanent, complete with a stabbing back ache as well. Something was seriously wrong. She had to find a place where she could rest for the next few days and get over this sickness. The hundred dollar bill she earned yesterday was still untouched. That should be able to cover a day or two in a cheap motel.

There goes the new coat, she thought with a resigned sigh, which appeared to be the wrong thing to do, as it caused her to break out into a full-blown, wracking coughing fit. The sudden dizziness was a new, unwelcomed addition to her condition and she grabbed the counter to steady herself. The violent coughing stirred her stomach and Doug came back, just in time, for her to run to the bathroom.

The weather was getting worse and there were no customers in sight. Doug rearranged the cups and refilled the cookie jar while he waited for Andy to come back. He was worried about the brunette and seriously considered inviting her home. Then dismissed the thought because his current sugar daddy would most likely kick him out too, if he showed up with a guest.

The sound of the door chimes roused him from his musing and the grumpy redhead from the previous day stumbled in.

“Good morning ma’am. How may I help you today?” asked Doug, with the wide smile he reserved for complicated customers.

The redhead was still not in a better mood from the previous day. “I want all the greeting cards.” she barked.

Doug’s mouth fell open and his eyes widened as big as a saucer. “All of them?”

“Are you bloody deaf or what? Yes, all of them and move it along already, I don’t have all day.” snapped the redhead impatiently. “Put them into a folder or something” Her eyes fell onto the envelopes laying on the counter. “One of those will do.” she gestured.

Doug nodded, quickly enclosing the greeting cards into an envelope, his eyes never leaving the annoyed redhead. Somehow she made him nervous. Despite the fact she was buying all of Andy’s cards, he wanted her out as soon as possible.

Handing the envelope to the woman, he swallowed hard. Still not quite believing that she would actually pay, he slowly said, “That will be four hundred dollars ma’am.”

The woman counted out eight hundred dollars, placed the money in front of the barista and was out of the door before he could ask for an explanation.

Andy dragged herself back from the bathroom and began to pack her things not noticing Doug’s overly excited behavior.

“Doug there were two envelopes here and now I can see only one. Have you seen the other one?”

“Oh I gave it to the woman who just bought all of your greeting cards. Don’t worry I have plenty in the office.”

Doug grabbed Andy’s shoulders, “Woman, you’re missing a very important detail here…I…sold…the greeting cards. All of them. For eight hundred dollars!”

He handed the money to Andy. His words finally sinking in, she collapsed into a chair wordlessly, starring at the money. Eight hundred dollar meant she could stay in a motel until Mrs. Rinsky reopened her store. Plus buying a new coat was on the table again.

Losing her self-portrait was a small price, right?

She just wasn’t sure.
Due to an unexpected maintenance issue, the heating stopped working in the Elias Clarke building during the night. A notification was sent out and everyone welcomed the extra day of paid vacation, as it was the last workday before Christmas.

Miranda was sitting at the desk in her study, deep in thought. She did not mind staying away from the office, as it was becoming more common that she worked from home. She still loved Runway, it was her third baby after all, but her priorities had changed and she valued spending more time with the twins over anything else.

Miranda thought about how the girls were growing up fast and that soon they would be off to college, while she – the old woman that she was - would be alone, because she was unable to maintain a relationship and keep someone interested for long run.

It wasn’t that there weren’t any candidates. There were gold diggers who thought that in return for their youth and good looks, Miranda would share her fortune with them; ambitious youngsters who just wanted someone with endless social connections; and of course the ones who had their own wealth and importance and regarded the relationship as a successful business merger. She was sick of them all. She wanted something meaningful. A partner who would see her and not the merciless business tyrant.

Someone who would understand that Miranda, the woman, was different from Miranda, the editor-in-chief of Runway and who could handle both with patience and love.

Love. Yes, she was missing love.

She wanted someone who would love her…her and not her money. Someone who would not care about her social status. Someone she could love without questioning their honesty. Someone she could trust and grow old with.

Someone who does not exist, she muttered and reached for her phone. She dialed her first husband’s number and he answered on the second ring.

“Hello Jeremy, may I speak with the girls?”

“Miranda. I wanted to call you. Was it really necessary sending both dogs here? You know that Michelle has a fur allergy and when she is not happy, no one is.” He sounded miserable.

“Oh I thought that was the other flavor of the month who had an allergy.” answered Miranda with a lopsided grin. “I’ll keep that in mind next time. Now where are the girls?”

“They aren’t here. I’ll have them call you when they get home.” With slight hesitation, Jeremy added, “I hope you didn’t forget that I’m bringing them back on Sunday afternoon.”

Miranda took a deep breath before answering, “No Jeremy, I did not forget that once again you have broken your promise.”

“Miranda I…” Jeremy started.

Not letting him finish, Miranda interjected, “No Jeremy, I don’t want to hear it. I’m waiting for the girls’ call. Goodbye.”

She dropped the phone and leaned back in the chair. Jeremy was supposed to take the girls on a week-long vacation to the Bahamas right after Christmas. Yesterday he had canceled the plan claiming that something unavoidable had come up. It did not take Miranda long to find out the unavoidable occurrence, was just something, or rather someone, he deemed to be more important. He had received an ultimatum from his girlfriend, Michelle, and not for the first time, he had followed his dick, rather than chose his daughters. Sadly accustomed to this, Caroline and Cassidy had taken note on the change of events and fortunately were able to arrange alternate activities for the holiday. Miranda grabbed her phone again and called her first assistant.

“Emily. I assume you’ve already collected the girls’ mobile phones at Dalton. The laundry can wait until after Christmas. Also, I hope I don’t need to remind you that I want those greeting cards, preferably before noon. When you’re done, just put everything on the table in the hall and go home.”

She ended the call before Emily could answer.

“Yes, Miranda. Of course, Miranda” hissed the redhead, after she made sure the editor was not on
line anymore. She was ten minutes away from the townhouse and could hardly wait to finish her
tasks for the day. Everyone else was enjoying the extra day off, while she was stuck in traffic thanks
to the little monsters and a “nobody” artist.
The previous day, the twins and their classmates had gotten into trouble because despite the ban on
using mobiles during class, they were sending funny videos to each other. The consequences were
simple. When the kids left for home at the end of the day the mobiles had stayed behind in the
headmaster’s safe.
Andy was only two blocks from the townhouse, where the twin lived. She was trying to reach them
on their mobile but every time she called she had gotten voicemail, so she had decided deliver the
portrait, before looking for a motel in which to stay. As it was the first day of the school holiday, she
expected the girls to be at home.
Tugging her coat more tightly against her body, Andy tried to reposition the backpack over her
shoulders and keep a firm grip on her portfolio, which the wind was trying to wrestle out of her
hands. By the time she got to the townhouse, all her strength had gone. Climbing the few stairs to the
door, she felt like she had conquered the endless stairs at the Great Wall of China. She rested her
forehead on the door before knocking feebly.
Emily was just about to leave the townhouse when she heard a faint knock on the door. She swung it
open and stared at the young woman standing there.
The woman smiled at Emily. “Um…hello. I’m looking for Caroline and Cassidy Priestly? Is this the
right address?”
Emily took in the visitor’s appearance. She was wearing shabby clothes and a pair of worn boots. A
beat-up, black case of some type, was in her hands and a hideous, dirty backpack adorned her
shoulders.
“Listen, I don’t know how you got this address, or who told you to come here, but you better leave
before I call the police.” Emily said and started to shut the door.
“Wait please, I’m a friend of the twin. I just brought them something. Would you please just give it to
them?” Andy dropped her pack onto the doorstep, preventing Emily from closing the door and
started to reach inside her portfolio.
Emily didn’t wait for her to finish her move and with her foot tried to kick the bag away. In a raised
voice she cursed Andy. “You dirty beggar. You have no business here. Take your bloody things and
get the hell out of here!”
Before she could go on with her ranting, a calm, yet commanding voice stopped her.
“Emily. Care to explain what is going on here?”
“Emily. Leave. Now!” Miranda’s voice was colder than the icy wind that was raving down the
streets.
Emily knew that tone pretty well and she did not want to wait for the next phase, when the editor
would lower her voice until it was barely audible and someone would get fired. Playing it safe Emily
fled the house, careful in her exit, so that she would not graze the beggar.
Eyeing her visitor, up and down, the editor looked at the younger woman, who had not said a word since the older woman’s arrival. Miranda’s eyes missed nothing. Yes, her clothes were well worn and screaming second-hand but she did not look like a beggar. Beyond the clothes though, Miranda noticed the brunette’s breathing was heavy, that she was unsteady on her feet and that despite the freezing cold and the fact that she was shivering, a layer of sweat covered her pale face.

The woman looked completely vulnerable standing at the door, staring at Miranda. Her deep brown eyes expelled sorrow and hurt and tears were starting to form in them. That is until they abruptly rolled back into her head, and she crumbled.

Miranda leapt forward, just in time, to catch the young woman, who collapsed unconscious into her arms.
“Dr. Westwood.” a sleepy voice uttered, after answering the call on the fourth ring.

“Yvonne, it’s Miranda. I need you at the townhouse immediately.”

Dr. Yvonne Westwood, Miranda’s friend and personal physician, sat up in her bed and tiredly rubbed her eyes. She had just finished a thirty-six hour shift at the Presbyterian and she was tired and cranky.

“Good morning to you as well, Miranda. It’s always a pleasure.”

Ignoring her friend’s sarcasm, the editor interrupted her impatiently, “Yvonne, I don’t have time for pleasantries. It’s not a social call. I have an unconscious young woman in my bed, so it’s a bit of an emergency.”

“What happened there, Priestly? You kissed her and she passed out?” the doctor snickered. “Quite the comedian, aren’t you, Yvonne?” the editor said drily, far from amused.

Hearing the tightness in Miranda’s voice, Yvonne switched into doctor mode, tiredness forgotten. “All right. I’m on my way. Be there in ten.”

Miranda ended the call and turned to her housekeeper who was standing at the door, holding a bowl of water and a washcloth.

“Carmen, Dr. Westwood is coming over. Please show her up, as soon as she gets here.”

“Yes, Miranda.” Carmen handed Miranda the washcloth, put the bowl on the nightstand and retreated from the bedroom.

Miranda sat on the bed and gently touched the young woman’s cheek with the back of her fingertips. She was burning up with fever and still hadn’t regained consciousness. She’d been out cold since Miranda had been lucky enough to catch her, preventing a very unfortunate collision with the floor. Holding the surprising light body in her arms, Miranda had acted without a question to the rightness of her decision and carried the still form upstairs, to her bedroom and not one of the guestrooms.

It never occurred to her that by calling an ambulance she could have fulfilled her expected duty to humanity, gotten rid of a complete stranger and been able to enjoy the rest of her day without drama.

Deciding it was probably best to rid the girl of her many layers of frigid clothing, Miranda undressed her gently, until she was left in just a top and her undies. She bundled her up, covering her with a warm blanket and a comforter. Wetting the washcloth, Miranda then placed the cool material on the young woman’s forehead.

With that action, eyelids fluttered and ice blue consumed warm chocolate once again.

A long moment passed before Andy tore her eyes away, looking around the luxurious bedroom, in an effort to catch her bearings.

“What happened?” she asked hesitantly.

“You fainted.” stated Miranda matter-of-factly, adjusting the washcloth on the girl’s forehead. “I already called the doctor. She should be here any minute.”
“No…Please…I don’t need a doctor…Really…Just give me one minute and I’ll be out of your hair.” Andy tried to sit up but a firm hand stopped her in mid motion.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You don’t go anywhere unless the doctor clears you. Considering your condition, I don’t see that happening.”

Completely exhausted, Andy tried without success, to push against the hand holding her back. “No, you don’t understand. Please let me go. I can’t afford a doctor right now.”

“I wouldn’t argue with this woman, if I were you.” The third voice joining the conversation came from a tall, well-built, woman in her late forties, who had just appeared at the door.

“Yvonne.” a sigh of relief escaped Miranda’s lips, as the editor stood to greet her friend.

“What happened here?” inquired the doctor, looking at the young woman whose eyes were closed again.

“She fainted. She was out for several minutes but came around shortly before your arrival. She has a fever and her breathing is heavy. It reminds me of the way Caroline was breathing when she had that respiratory infection last year.”

Yvonne nodded understandingly. “Yes, I remember. Why don’t you let me examine her and I’ll come find you when I’m done.”

Miranda hesitated for a second. “Yes, of course. I’ll be in my study.” She was reluctant to leave but ultimately her reasonable side took over and she hurried out of the room.

Once in the study, her eyes fell on an unfamiliar envelop on the desk. The envelope was closed but not sealed, so she lifted the flap and peeked inside. Inside were two mobile phones and a stack of paper. She recognized the twin’s mobiles and assumed that the papers would be the greeting cards, she’d asked Emily to deliver earlier.

She poured the contents of the envelop in front of her and in addition to the greeting cards and phones, a larger piece of paper fell out. At first she thought it was some kind of extra protection for the cards but when she turned it over, her eyes widened in surprise.

It was a portrait of a beautiful young woman. Not just any woman - the one in her bed.
Hey guys thank you for the kudos and the kind reviews :)

Engrossed in the image, Miranda almost failed to notice the dedication on the bottom, right corner. Adjusting her reading glasses, she leaned closer and read the tidy handwriting.

To my besties, Caroline and Cassidy. Love you guys.
A.S.

Staring at the drawing in her hand, Emily’s earlier words popped in to her mind.

This person claims to know the twins and she says she’s brought something for them.

Miranda pinched the bridge of her nose between her fingers and shook her head in disbelief. Who was this woman? A.S.? Could she be that Andy person the girls described as the cool, older, very good friend? If she was Andy, why would a woman, in her mid-twenties, befriend two teenagers? Was she some type of con–artist using her girls’ naivety to get close to their famous editor mother?

It wouldn’t be the first time, she muttered to herself, as disappointment swept through her.

Still, she had always been a good judge of character, spotting the weasels from afar and preventing trouble before it occurred. While it was true that she didn’t know this young woman, when she looked into those warm chocolate eyes she didn’t detect any underlying intent.

Was she overreacting? Was her general distrust based on her earlier experiences?

Before her brain could convert the new pieces of information into an acceptable answer Yvonne’s entrance interrupted her pondering.

“All done, Miranda. She has a pneumonia. A mild case I would say. However, what could make it potentially more dangerous, is her general condition. She’s underfed and underweight, where her body has been insufficiently nourished for the past few months. Needless to say, such a condition weakens the immune system, making her susceptible to more serious illness. Therefore, it’s very important that she gets her strength back. For now, I’ve given her some medicine intravenously, but ultimately, she needs to increase her calorie intake and the nutritional content of her food. Supplements can also help with this.”

Pulling out a pad, Yvonne began to scribble, “Now here’s the antibiotic she must take once a day, and something to help with the fever.” Handing over the prescription, she looked at the editor, questioningly.

Miranda, slowly nodded in agreement. “Yes, of course. Anything else I should know?”

“She is sleeping now. The cocktail I gave her helped with the fever but if it goes up again and the medication I prescribed doesn’t help, a cold bath or shower should.”

Yawning, the doctor stretched her muscles. “I really should go now but not before you tell me what’s
going on here, Miranda.”

Shrugging nonchalantly Miranda replied, “I don’t know what you mean?”

Yvonne raised her eyebrows, “That’s bullshit, Priestly and you know it. You have a sick, homeless, young woman in your bedroom, whose name, if I guess correctly, you don’t even know. Oh, and did I mention that she is in your bedroom? Not in the living room, or one of the guestrooms. Your Bedroom. Plus, you actually look worried about her. I have never seen you worried about anyone on a personal level, other than Caroline and Cassidy. So, I’m asking again. What’s going on? How do you know Andrea?”

“Andrea? How do you know her name?” a surprised Miranda queried.

“Because I asked. Her name is Andrea Sachs but she goes by Andy. She is a very intriguing young woman. However we didn’t talk too much, given the less than ideal circumstances. Before you ask, she also told me that she lives on the streets. She was very worried about my fee but I reassured her that the bill was already taken care of. So, once again Priestly. Care to elaborate?”

Miranda sank into her chair with a deep sigh and closed her yes.

“I don’t know what to say, Yvonne. I’m doing things I can’t explain. When I saw Andrea on my porch this morning, under the heavy fire of Emily’s harsh verbal attack, I just felt something… something very unusual, I can’t even describe. When I looked into her eyes a sudden urge to protect her hit me. When she passed out and I held her in my arms, it felt so natural, like it wasn’t the first time…I….I don’t know.” Miranda looked uncertain and pretty much out of her comfort zone. “Does that make any sense?”

The question was rhetorical, because before Yvonne could answer, the editor went on.

“I just found out that she might not be the person I thought she was. Well, I mean, I don’t know her and I don’t get any malicious vibe form her but she’s somehow befriended my girls and I can’t shake the suspicion that she has an alternate motive”

Miranda handed the portrait to Yvonne and got up to pace the room. “Read the dedication.”

Yvonne studied the drawing for several minutes and hummed appreciatively. “If this is her work, I must say she’s very talented. If someone who knows the right people helped her with the first steps, she could go far.”

“Exactly. That’s why I believe she’s just using my girls.” Coming to a halt, Miranda lifted her head, her eyes flashing dangerously, her voice lethal, “You know what I’d do with those who try to harm my babies.”

“Don’t run so far ahead, Miranda. Why don’t you ask the girls first and draw conclusions after?”

As if on cue Miranda’s mobile started to ring. She glanced at the screen and showed it to Yvonne.

“It’s Jeremy. Probably the girls are calling me back.”
“We need to tell mom.” Cassidy exclaimed, looking at her sister expectantly. “She would know what to do.”

“I don’t know Cass…You know how she is. She doesn’t tolerate dishonesty and we’ve been lying about Andy the whole time.”

“We didn’t lie Caro. We just didn’t tell her everything.” Cassidy qualified.

Caroline rolled her eyes and snorted. “Seriously Cass. This is mom we’re talking about. For her it would be pretty much the same. She would be furious and we could spend the whole holiday season, if not the rest of our lives, in confinement without mobiles, television or any other entertainment.”

“Maybe…but we need her help to find Andy and for that I would gladly sacrifice my freedom.”

One week earlier when Andy asked them to temporarily take Bruno, they had not thought anything was out of the ordinary. Andy was her usual cheery self and explained that there was some pest controlling going on in the laundry shop and she didn’t want Bruno to eat something he shouldn’t. The girls had no reason to doubt that story and took the dog without any further question. They were taken aback when they passed the laundry shop the other day, and noticed a sign in the window, which read Closed. Reopening in January.

“She should have told us about the shop.” sighed Caroline, typing something on her Mac. “The weather is getting worse. Do you think she went to one of these shelters? There are many in New York. How will we find her?”

“Mom would know.” Cassidy said with the upmost blind faith in their mother.

Of the two girls, Cassidy firmly believed, without any doubt that their mother would go above and beyond to help her little angels. Caroline, however, was a bit more realistic, knowing how hard and cold their mother could be. Caroline just couldn’t picture their mother setting aside everything, to coordinate a search party for a homeless person, just to win the Mother of the Year prize.

Cassidy countered, “Let’s suppose you’re right and mom will help. What happens next? We ask her to provide room and board for Andy? Andy wouldn’t want that. We tried to convince her before remember? And why do you think she didn’t tell us about the laundry shop?”

Caroline was becoming more and more agitated as she spoke, while Cassidy remained silent, tears welling in her eyes. “Cass, mom is cool but not that cool, if you know what I mean?”

Seeing her twin’s discomfort Caroline sat down next to her and put an arm around her shoulder.

Cassidy wiped her eyes and repeated desperately, “Mom will know what to do. Andy is our friend and we are going to help her whether she wants help or not.”

“All right Cass.” Caroline said patting her sister’s thigh, “Let’s call mom but I’m telling you this is going to be a mess. So you’d better like boarding school mom will send us to.”
Chapter 12

The conversation with the girls was brief and one-sided. Miranda did not say a word, just listened to the girls, her expression passive. After a short minute she said goodbye and ended the call.

“They’re coming home now. They said something has happened and I’m quoting, only the bestest mom in the whole world can help them solve the problem.”

Rubbing her forehead, Miranda tried to ease the headache, which had been forming for the last hour. “With that grammar I wonder about Dalton being the right school for them.” she added earning an unladylike snore from Yvonne.

“Well ain’t dat something.” Yvonne winked at the editor and suppressing a yawn dropped the prescription pad into her bag and clasped it. “As much as I’d just love ta hear bout dat, I gotta go now. Will call ya tonight. See ya.”

“Yes, you better leave now. My headache and your cheesy jokes don’t get along well.”

Miranda laid back in the chair and closed her eyes. The throbbing in her temple was beginning to make her lightheaded. She hoped this wasn’t the beginning of a migraine and just the events of the day catching up to her, as she suspected she would need all her wits for the serious conversion that she was soon to have with the girls.

The doctor laughed lightly at the editor’s crankiness. “I’ll say goodbye to Carmen before heading home. Would you like a coffee or something from the kitchen? I can pass on the message.”

Miranda’s eyes popped open and she stopped the doctor just before she could exit the room. “Yvonne. Carmen has been working for me for the last 20 years. She is more like family than an employee and I don’t want that to change. I love you dearly but you’re a player and I don’t want you anywhere near my housekeeper. Stay away from her.”

Yvonne laughed again, good-naturally, not taking offense to Miranda’s words. She was indeed a player and had never made a secret of it. Women loved her impressive physique, easy going manner and being a well-known, successful doctor also didn’t hurt. She’d had many conquests. However, to her credit, not as many as people thought and she never dated someone more than twice or more than one woman at the same time.

Miranda was aware that Carmen had an eye for the doctor but she knew an encounter between the two of them would end with at least one broken heart.

“I’ll show you out before you get lost in this big house and end up in a wrong place. I need to make some arrangements in the kitchen so I’ll pass your goodbye message to Carmen.”
Chapter 13

The girls managed to slip into the house unusually quiet, confirming Miranda’s suspicion that their conversation was indeed going to be serious. There was none of the thumping, stomping, shouting or any of the other highly inappropriate noises usually associated with the over-energized teenagers. Sensing the storm, Patricia went straight to her usual hiding place, with the intention of sleeping through whatever was coming. Bruno was the only one totally oblivious to the situation. He trotted into the editor’s study but before he could greet his new human friend, something stopped him.

The smell.

He could faintly smell his other human’s scent in the room and as he got closer to the white haired one, the smell got stronger. He sat down in front of Miranda and whined. Confusion took over his doggie brain, as he tried to solve the mystery.

Miranda leaned down and patted Bruno’s bulky head. “Hello sweet boy” she whispered. “She’s in my bedroom. Go.” Bruno stampeded out the room, almost knocking the girls, who were hesitantly standing outside the study, off their feet.

“Come on in Bobbseys. We may as well get the something you mentioned on the phone over with.” Her voice, just as her expression, was neutral and of no help to the girls in figuring out what mood she was really in.

Miranda sat down behind her desk, then changed her mind and took a seat on the couch. She wanted to make sure the girls knew they were about to talk to their mom and not the editor-in-chief.

Cassidy glanced at Caroline and nudged her, indicating that she should be the one to start their confession. Taking a deep, somewhat shaky breath, Caroline stepped forward and sat next to her mom. She didn’t dare to look up and her eyes were fixed on her own clasped hands.

“So Mom. You…you remember our friend Andy, right? Well, it’s not like we lied or anything… but…well…the thing is…we might not have been completely honest about her.”

“Is that so?” No matter how determined Miranda was not to slip into editor mode, her tone was hard and cold. It was the tone she used when her employees failed to meet her expectations.

Realizing that it was probably best to get straight to the point, as her mother was not too fond of rambling, Caroline swallowed hard and continued. “Well, it is it true that she’s our friend but when we said she was older, we forgot to mention an important detail. She is not our age-age…she’s a bit older…she’s twenty-seven…and she lives on the street and is homeless.”

“Pardon me?”

“She’s homeless mom. She used to spend the nights at a laundry-shop but it is closed now and we don’t know where she is. We’re really worried about her and would like to find her. We need your help.”

“Let me see if I understand this correctly. You two have befriended a homeless person, fourteen years your senior…made me believe that she was someone from your school circle…made me take in her dog, for god knows what reason…and now you want me to help find her, because the shop she usually sleeps in is closed and you don’t know where she is.”

Cassidy nodded eagerly, missing the warning gleam in Caroline’s eyes.
“Girls, I must say I’m disappointed. You shouldn’t have lied to me. You need to understand that when you belong to a wealthy and well-known family, you have to be more cautious, so as not to be taken advantage of. The world is full of those types of people, who would do anything just to get close to us…to me. I’ve learnt how to avoid those types of people but perhaps you’re not old enough to spot those who are approaching you with bad intentions. Those people will use you, even befriend you, just to reach their goal. How do you know that this friend of yours is not one of them?”

“Mom...” Cassidy tried to intervene but Miranda was too heated to stop.

“How do you know that she was not just using you to get to know me? She’s a homeless artist, probably desperate enough to try anything and everything to find someone who...”

“Mom!” Cassidy shouted. The raised voice surprised Miranda, stopping her rant.

“Mom,” repeated Cassidy, this time more quietly. “She didn’t know.”

“What do you mean she didn’t know?” Miranda asked tentatively.

“Thanks to you and your influence in publishing, they don’t dare put our pictures in the papers. While you’re on Page Six all the time, we can walk around without anyone recognizing us. As long as people don’t know our last name, no one can make the connection…and we didn’t tell Andy who we were until last month.”

“Really?” Miranda was taken aback, the fury leaving her body, as she visibly relaxed in her seat.

“Really.” Cassidy kneeled in front of her mom, taking hold of her hands.

“Mom, you didn’t raise fools. We aren’t little kids anymore. We know that the world isn’t a pink, fluffy, cotton candy. We met Andy in the park, in March. We were walking Patricia and somehow she got unleashed and run into her, knocking her into a puddle. Although she was soaked and muddy, she just laughed and thanked Patricia for sparing her portfolio. She refused to accept our offer to pay for the laundering of her clothes, and even reassured us that she wouldn’t bother to speak to our parents about the accident.”

“Yes and actually that’s when we came up with the idea.” continued Caroline. “We told Andy that we were dog walkers for our mother’s employer and that Patricia belonged to a real snob, who would fire us if she found out about the incident.”

“Wait a minute. You lied to her?...and you called me a snob?”

Caroline blushed. “We lied a little at the very beginning, yes. Later on, we just didn’t clarify things. Everything we told her about our life…school…you…was true. She just didn’t know that we were the Priestlys.”

“I see.” the pounding headache eased, as the girls went on with their story but Miranda’s eyebrows shot into her hairline, at Caroline’s next unexpected statement.

“The real irony of the whole situation is that we found out that even though she doesn’t personally know you, she is the number one protector of your honor.” Caroline gushed.

“I can’t see how that would be possible.” Miranda was skeptical. It wasn’t a secret that she wasn’t well liked. How could someone who didn’t know her, be the number one protector of her honor. Caroline was being overly dramatic.

“Honest mom. The three of us were in the park and overheard the conversation of the couple sitting
on the bench next to us. They were reading a newspaper and the woman made a nasty comment about you being on Page Six again. I think it was the gossip about you and that young Italian model and the woman was being all snarky about it. When Andy heard, she told the woman that she shouldn’t believe everything she reads, especially if she read it on Page Six. She said that the article had to be a hoax because a classy woman like Miranda Priestly would never put up with a pompous good-for-nothing like him.”

Miranda was unable to maintain her cool façade after that comment and just had to laugh. Guido Farrelli, was undeniably an arrogant little prick. He’d come onto Miranda hard and fell flat on his face even harder, when his advances were rebuffed. His pride hurt, he’d leaked a fabricated story to the press. The reckless action bought him fifteen minutes fame, and took away his opportunity to work with Runway ever again.

“Yeah” said Cassidy, rejoining the conversation. “She was sooooo cool. She said that she admired you for being so passionate about what you do, and that you are a great role-model and inspiration. She mentioned some lecture you had given years ago at Columbia University. Something about fashion...”

“The History of Fashion.” murmured Miranda, shaking her head in disbelief.

“Yeah that one. She was there. She said she thought it was her most amazing experience at university.”

Miranda closed her eyes trying to clear her mind. The information coming from the girls bemused her, yet it was a liberating feeling to have her worst fears dispelled. She remembered that one-time lecture at Columbia. She’d done it as a favor to Yvonne, whose sister worked for the university and was in a desperate need of a high profile guest lecturer. Talking in front of hundreds about her passion was not a big deal and Miranda enjoyed herself. Her audience was attentive, they loved her dry humor and were cheering the sarcastic comments made about the fashion faux pas she discovered in the crowd. No one took an offense. Even that girl wearing that hideous cerulean sweater had…”

Oh my god – Miranda thought - the girl in the cerulean sweater.

How could she not have recognized her? Yes, her hair had been longer at that time and she’d probably been two sizes bigger, all smiles and full of life - compared to now - but those soulful beautiful brown eyes were the same. She should have remembered those eyes, since she had been captivated by them the first time she saw them.

“That’s where the familiarity comes from.” she whispered almost inaudibly.

The twin looked at their mom questioningly, feeling the sudden change in her mood. Glancing at each other, they saw the same thought reflecting in each other’s eyes – perhaps this wouldn’t end badly, after all.

Bolstered, Caroline carried on, “So you see mom. Andy is great and she would never take advantage of us. After we told her who we really were, we offered to help her. We know that you’ve supported others before and Andy is so talented, so we just knew if you could see her work you’d love it, but she refused.”

Miranda stood and walked to her desk, trying to collect her thoughts. She leaned onto the mahogany furniture and looked thoughtfully at the girls. They were waiting nervously for the final verdict.

“I’m not saying that I’m happy with how you handled this whole situation but you did mean well. As
you said, I didn’t raise fools, did I? However, next time I expect more honesty from you. I don’t need to know every little secret of yours, as I respect your privacy but no more lies...and yes, the omission of the truth – lying by omission - is still a lie. You must understand the potential threat of situations like this.”

She opened her arms and the girls flew into them, their relief evident. It was true that her Bobbseys were not kids anymore. They’d grown into considerate young ladies. Somehow I did not screw it up after all, Miranda thought, pulling the girls a bit closer.

The moment of peace broke a second later, when Caroline’s gaze fell on the table and she spotted something that caused her to cry out in shock.

“Mom! Where did you get that portrait?”
“Andrea.”

Gentle fingers caressed her cheek and she leaned into the soft palm, enjoying its coolness on her heated skin.

“Andrea. You need to wake up.” The voice calling her name was warm and full of concern. Andrea...No one called her Andrea and the way this voice pronounced it was…perfect. She slowly opened her eyes. The hand withdrew and she immediately missed the comforting contact. She looked at white haired woman, sitting on the side of the bed, her hands now folded in her lap. Miranda. Andy gave her a weak smile and shakily sat up against the headboard.

The editor came to her help, adjusting the pillow behind her back. “How do you feel?”

“I…I don’t know.” Andy’s voice sounded a bit hoarse. “Better I…I think.” She still felt dizzy and weak but whatever the doctor had given her had definitely helped. “How long was I asleep?”

“Good. Your fever’s reduced a little and you’ve only been asleep for a couple hours. Now it’s time for some more medicine though and you need to eat something. I brought you some chicken broth. If your stomach can handle it, then you can have something more substantial later.”

“I’m not really hungry.” Andy took the pills from Miranda’s outstretched hand and dry swallowed the pair.

“No, no that won’t do.” Miranda scolded her and raised a glass of mild juice to Andy’s lips. “Drink this. Doctor’s orders.

Andy obediently took a gulp. A drop of juice escaped and dribbled down her chin before she could catch it. Miranda wiped it away with the pad of her thump. It was not a conscious act on the editor’s side but even with her dulled senses, Andy picked up on the intimacy in it. She cleared her throat and gently pushed the editor’s hand away. “Maybe I should try the soup now. I actually haven’t eaten much lately.”

Miranda nodded in agreement and handed her the mug, full of the golden chicken soup. “You lost a lot of weight since I last saw you. I bet your favorite blue sweater would look even more hideous on you now than before.” she added teasingly.

Andy’s eyes widened and she smiled shyly at the editor. “You remembered?”

“No. Not at first. You were just a stranger who happened to faint at my door. Later I found out who you were by talking to my daughters. They had a long tearful confession about an unusual friendship with an artist whose circumstances, for some unknown reason, are not very ideal right now. We have to talk about that but not now, you’re not strong enough for a serious conversation and it can wait.”

A silent understanding passed between them, as Andy once again sank into the crystal blue pools of Miranda’s eyes. A warm fuzzy feeling generated in the pit of her stomach, which she doubted had anything to do with the soup. Being so close to the woman, who before she had admired from a distance, confused her. Miranda was everything the girls claimed her to be. She was kind and gentle. She’d opened her home to a stranger and…Stop it! Andy said to herself. It’s not about you. She’s doing it for her daughters. Reluctantly she tore her gaze away from Miranda and busied herself with the almost empty mug.
Miranda stood, walked to the window and peered out. “I’m glad you ended up here, Andrea. The weather has turned even worse.”

Returning to collect the tray from the bedside table, she took the mug from Andy. “Good. You almost drank all. You really should sleep some more now. I’ll check back later and if you’re up to it, the girls would like to pay you a visit as well.”

Miranda was headed to the door when Andy stopped her.

“I’m sorry.” Andy said softly.

“For what?” Miranda asked quizzically.

“I turned up here uninvited and totally messed up your and the girls’ whole day…I’ll be out of your way, as quickly as possible…as for the doctor’s bill and other costs I’ll…I’ll pay you back every last penny…I promise.”

Miranda tensed. All the warmness vanished from her. Even the temperature of the room dropped several degrees. The editor sounded cold and distant when she addressed Andy. “You are my guest Andrea. I usually don’t charge my guests for staying over. Now, if you want to get out of here with such haste, then you’d better get some rest. Excuse me, I have other things to attend to.”

Andy, perplexed by the sudden change in the editor’s attitude, tried to ease the new tension in the room.

“I’m sorry if I offended you, Miranda. I don’t want to sound ungrateful. Please don’t leave like this. Stay. Please.”

Not understanding why she’d snapped at Andy, and not really wanting to leave either, Miranda acquiesced. “All right. I can stay a bit longer. I’ll stay until you fall asleep.”

Hours later Miranda awoke with a jolt. She had settled into an armchair and at some point had dozed off, waiting for Andy to fall back asleep. She was rubbing her neck, trying to loosen the stiffness in it, when she heard a whimper coming from the direction of her sleeping guest. She jumped up and hurried toward the bed. Andy was restless in her sleep. Having tossed around, she had kicked off the comforter and the blanket. Her body was glistening in sweat. Her top and the sheet under her, were drenched and she was shivering violently. Without checking, Miranda knew that Andy was running a high fever again.
Chapter 15

Miranda filled the tub with lukewarm water. She thought back to the previous year when she had to give Caroline a cold bath to reduce her fever. Her daughter had not been a happy camper about it and despite her poor condition, she’d put up a good fight, soaking Miranda and the bathroom. Miranda hoped that dealing with Andrea would be less traumatic for both parties.

Stepping back into the bedroom, she carefully pulled the half conscious brunette up into a sitting position. Then, putting an arm around her waist, she lifted her until she was standing. Andy’s body was limp and she leaned heavily into the older woman. Fortunately, after many hours of yoga and Pilates, Miranda was stronger than she looked but she knew she couldn’t succeed without the younger woman’s cooperation.

“Work with me, Andrea.” she murmured into Andy’s ear.

Miranda was holding Andy with one arm and gently patting her face with the other. “Your fever is high again. I know you won’t like it but I can’t see any other option - a cold bath, that is.

“Nooo… I don’t want to. I’m already cold.” whined Andy, leaning even closer to the editor, as if seeking her body heat.

For Andy, the few steps to the bathroom felt like a thousand miles. She was breathing hard and sweating profusely and had she been more aware of her surroundings, she would have been horrified at the way she was staining Miranda’s expensive designer clothes.

Eyeing the huge tub Andy shook her head and whined again. She was freezing and just wanted to crawl back under the blanket. “It’s cold. I’m not getting in.”

Sensing that kindness wouldn’t work this time, Miranda released her hold on the younger’s woman waist. Steading her, by gripping her shoulders, she looked deeply into slightly hazy brown eyes and switched to her no nonsense tone. It was the tone she used when the girls’ stepped over the line.

“Yes, you are getting in, Andrea. Either that or the hospital. Your call.” she stated firmly.

Andy’s foggy brain tried to catch up with what the woman in front of her was saying. Did she just say hospital? No she couldn’t go to hospital. She shook her head and slumped forward, dropping her head on the editor’s shoulder.

“No.” she whispered against Miranda’s neck. “No hospital.”

“All right, no hospital, but you have to help me, Andrea. You need to get rid of your clothes. Do you think you can manage that?”

The answer was a tentative headshake and an unintelligible rumble against Miranda’s neck.

As Andy’s hot breath caressed the editor’s sensitive skin, it sent shivers through her body, making the whole process slightly difficult for Miranda. Working in the fashion world, Miranda had dressed thousands of women in the last thirty years but undressing them was not something she was good at. Actually, she had never undressed a grown woman in her life and starting now, with this young woman, who had stirred her world in just a few hours, was throwing Miranda out of her element.

She sat Andy down on the edge of the tub and tried to pull the girl’s top over her head. It was not an easy task to do, as Andy showed no real signs of cooperation. Instead, her head was rested against Miranda’s sternum and she was mumbling incoherently.
Lifting Andy’s chin Miranda asked, “What did you say?”

Andy’s eyes were closed and she was smiling dreamily. “You smell nice,” she slurred. Then she scrunched her nose and the dreamy expression was replaced with a grimace. “I stink.”

“Yes you do, darling,” chuckled Miranda, “But don’t worry we won’t mention this to anyone.”

Andy’s innocent comment broke the tension in Miranda. She kneeled in front of the younger woman and grabbed the hem of her panties. “Up.” she commanded and Andy lifted herself with a groan.

The panties slide down easily and Miranda stood up relieved. As much as she wanted to respect the younger woman’s dignity, her glance involuntarily swept over Andy’s naked body. Although she was painfully thin, her creamy white skin covered in sweat, and her brown hair looking less than lustrous, as it stuck to her head, Miranda found her gorgeous.

Miranda had seen her fair share of naked and half-naked women before - models were not known of their modesty after all - but she had never been affected by them.

Miranda reached under Andy’s armpits and smoothly lowered her into the tub, just to be faced with another challenge. Although the younger woman sat with her back against the basin, she looked so faint, Miranda was afraid she would slip under the water any second. Adding more cold water to the tub, her mind worked through the logistics of keeping Andy above the surface. Then, as though bidden, Andy went completely limp and started to slide down. Reacting without hesitation, Miranda climbed into the tub, slid behind Andy and secured the younger woman in her arms.

It wasn’t until Miranda was in the cool water, holding a naked woman against her own fully clothed body, did she think of the absurdness of the situation. This would be a hit on Page Six she thought, moving her legs a little, trying to ease the cloying feel of the wet clothes. The action nestled Andy’s butt more firmly against Miranda’s groin, causing her to freeze in place. The cool water did nothing to abate the slow heat that started to creep up Miranda’s body.

Deciding it best, to keep as still as possible, long minutes passed in complete silence, as Miranda held Andy, with her arms crossed in front of the younger woman’s stomach. Andy had put her hands on the top of Miranda’s and had rested her head on the older woman’s collarbone. She was quivering but hadn’t said a word since she got into the tub. Wanting to check Andy’s temperature, but not wanting unsettle her by moving her hands, Miranda pressed her cheek against her temple and found it less hot than before. It seemed the bath was working.

“Andrea.” she whispered. “How do you feel?”

“I’m cold.” came the immediate response. Andy sounded more alert, the earlier slur gone. “I’m sure my fever’s down. Do you think I can have a nice hot shower now?”

“Absolutely not.” Miranda rolled her eyes and suppressed a laugh. “Do you feel strong enough to stay in the tub a bit longer on your own?”

“Yes.” nodded Andy and slowly sat up.

Miranda reluctantly let her go and climbed out. Opening the long cabinet, where she kept the extra towels, she grabbed one for Andy, rested it on the toilet seat, and then ducked behind the cover of its door, to quickly remove her wet clothes.

Peeking out to keep an eye on Andy, she quickly averted her eyes, when the younger woman, started to rub the washcloth over her body. Reaching for her grey bathrobe, which hung at the back of the bathroom door, she left the bathroom, determined not become some type of voyeur.
Leaving the door slightly ajar, in case Andy needed something, Miranda changed the sheet and beddings, and disposed of the laundry outside the bedroom door. Then, not hearing any noise from the bathroom she hustled back, calling out, “Andrea? You should get out now. Do you need any help?”

Miranda, pushed open the door.

“That’s ok. I’ve got it.” Andy said, her head bent, as she held onto the sides of the tub to support herself, as she got out.

Miranda watched as the water cascaded down Andy’s back and legs. The slow burn she’d felt in the tub, returned with a vengeance, and her body heated. Like a moth to a flame, her gaze was drawn to the long legs, as they stepped over the tub, before she caught herself and looked up to see Andy staring at her.

Flushing, Miranda quickly pointed out the towel. “I left a towel out for you. Let me give you some minutes to settle down, while I go check on the girls. If you are up to it, we’ll come back and bring you something more to eat.”

Not waiting for Andy’s reply, Miranda hurriedly left the room, almost tripping over Bruno, who had shown up out of nowhere. The faithful guardian had stayed with Andy when she was alone but departed as soon as Miranda had appeared. Now that the white haired woman was leaving, he was back again reporting for duty.

Miranda closed the door behind her and leaned heavily against it. She couldn’t deny it any longer.

She was attracted to this young beautiful woman, twenty years her junior.
Chapter 16

“…and that was when I saw your portrait on mom’s desk. I was soooo surprised.”

Caroline’s comment pulled Andy back from her musing. The girls had arrived shortly after their mom’s hasty departure and had ambushed her with hugs and kisses, expressing joy at the turn of events. Talking all at once, their excited, flighty behavior had been enough to make Andy a bit dizzy. Smiling she’d leaned back listening to the pair, until her thoughts had started to wander. She still couldn’t believe that she was in Miranda Priestly’s home and that the famous editor was taking care of her. Miranda could have just called the ambulance and let them deal with the uninvited “guest” fainting at her doorstep. She couldn’t understand what made Miranda open her house to someone like her. Yes, she had heard from the twins how caring their mother had been but surely that type of affection was only reserved for the family.


“The portrait of you, Andy. You made it for as didn’t you? We read the dedication.” explained Caroline with a huge smile.

“Um… yes. But how did it get into your mom’s possession?”

“Mom said that she purchased some greeting cards and the portrait was in the envelope.”

Gosh thought Andy, so it was Miranda who spent eight hundred dollars on her drawings. Suddenly she knew what needed to be done. She just had to give the money back to Miranda. That would help pay off some of her debts. Miranda had been adamant that she would not charge her guests but a doctor’s bill was not an ordinary cost incurred when you invited someone over. Comforted by this thought, Andy was lulled back to sleep by the sound of the girls’ rambling.

The following day came and went and Miranda stayed away. Andy’s sleeping sessions were only interrupted by Carmen who brought her food and made sure she took her medicine. The girls also visited her few times but they didn’t linger too long, as their mother had warned them to let Andy rest. The next day, Christmas Eve, was a repetition of the previous one - sleep, food, visit from the girls and no Miranda. Despite the fact that she knew she was probably not the editor’s number one priority, she felt disappointed by her absence.

“You stupid girl!” Andy berated herself, “Miranda Priestly is a busy woman. She has more important things to do than sit around and play nurse for a stranger.

Strangers. Yes, technically that’s what they were to each other. No matter they’d had that brief encounter ages ago at the university, or that she was friends with the older woman’s daughters. No matter how kind and hospitable the editor was, or how safe Andy felt in her arms. They were still strangers. Nothing more.

Around 5 o’clock in the afternoon, a light knock interrupted Andy’s restless slumber. Her hope flared, then subsided just as quickly when instead of Miranda, she saw Yvonne standing at the door.

“Oh. Dr. Westwood.” Andy smiled, trying hard to cover her disappointment.

With a wink at the brunette, Yvonne greeted Andy. “Hey there. I told you to call me Yvonne, remember? How do you feel? You look much better now.”

“I feel much better thank you. It seems all I needed was a good long sleep.”
“Yes. In your case my main concern wasn’t the pneumonia but your general condition. The antibiotics will deal with your illness and as for the rest, I’m pretty sure Miranda will take care of it.”

It did not escape the doctor’s attention how the mention of Miranda’s name made her patient blush. Deciding to test the water a bit, she sat on the edge of the bed and nonchalantly asked. “I’ve learnt that you are friends with the girls. How do they feel about this situation? You being here in their mother’s bedroom…”

“Miranda’s bedroom? This is HER bedroom? Andy looked around bewildered. Why would Miranda give up bedroom? If Miranda’s actions were a mystery to her before, then this was a further complexity that just made no sense.

Yvonne studied Andy intently. “Yes this is her bedroom. I thought you knew that.”

“Um…no. Miranda never mentioned it and it did not come up when I talked to the girls. I guess the girls are just overly excited that I’m here. They’ve been nagging me since ages to come here and get to know their mom. They don’t think there’s anything she can’t do and that she would help me with my art.”

“Yes, your art. I’ve seen your drawings. You’re damned good girl. Miranda thinks the same, actually. She loved your greeting cards, not to mention your portrait.”

Andy blushed and nervously fidgeted with the blanket. “She liked my stuff?”

“No. She loved it. Surely she’s mentioned it?”

“I…I haven’t seen Miranda since Friday and we haven’t really talked much. I understand that she is very busy. The girls said she hasn’t been out of her study in the last two days.”

Yvonne patted Andy’s leg and stood up.

“Yes. She must be occupied otherwise. The end of the year is always eventful in publishing…I guess. You take good care of yourself Andy. Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas Dr. We…Yvonne.”

Yvonne looked back at Andy before she closed the door and saw the young woman swiping tears off her face. She shook her head and murmured. “What have you done this time you old fool?”

She was headed toward Miranda’s study when she spotted Carmen doing the same from the other direction. Putting on her most charming smile, she called out to the curvaceous woman.

“Hello there beautiful. I was thinking of you and our date last week. You know, I wouldn’t mind a repeat.”

Carmen took a deep breath and answered coolly. “I’m not going out with you again Yvonne. That one time made me realize that we’re not in the same league.”

“Come on Carmen. We are not in the sixties. It’s not a shame for a doctor to date a blue-collar worker.” As soon as she said it, she knew she’d made a mistake. She sounded arrogant and degrading and she was none of those.

A flame flared in Carmen eyes and she hissed. “You and your big ego. I meant just the opposite. You are the one who’s not good enough for me.” Grabbing gloves from her coat pocket, she tugged them on fiercely. “I deserve more than dinner and a night of meaningless sex, Yvonne. I deserve
someone who loves me and wants a life with me. You are a nice, easy-going person but you’re unable to commit.”

None of them realized that during their conversation Miranda had opened the door. Standing in the doorway, her expression betrayed that she had probably heard everything.

Carmen looked at Miranda apologetically. “I’m leaving now, Miranda. Dinner is in the oven. The timer is set. Everything is prepared for tomorrow’s lunch, just as you asked. Have a Merry Christmas.”

Miranda nodded and answered without taking her eyes off Yvonne. “Merry Christmas Carmen. Have a good time with your sister’s family.”

“I will Miranda, thank you.” With that Carmen turned and without another word, she left.

Miranda eyed her friend, noting the crestfallen expression on her face. She motioned her inside the study.

The doctor followed and slumped into one of the armchairs. She knew Miranda well enough not to be surprised when Miranda addressed her in her best editor-in-chief voice.

“What the hell was that Yvonne?”

Yvonne shrugged and tried to act casual. “You heard it. Your housekeeper refused to go out with me. Not a big deal. Nothing to be concerned with.”

Miranda was incredulous, “Seriously, Yvonne. You must be kidding. I specifically asked you to leave her alone. Just tell me why?”

Yvonne jumped up and started to pace in the room. “It’s not what you think Miranda. I like her. Really, really like her. But I fucked it up and have no idea how to mend it. Knowing your circumstances you are not the best person to go to for help anyway.”

Miranda was lost. “Now wait a minute, Yvonne. What the hell are you talking about? What do you mean by that? What circumstances?”

“There is a young woman in your bedroom, Miranda. Someone who is crying her heart out, because a certain person has abandoned her two days ago. That should be your concern. Not me and Carmen.”

Miranda sank into her chair, uncertain. “She’s crying? Because of me?” Lowering her head she rubbed the bridge of her nose.

“Yes. She is. What happened? You seemed to like her at first?”

Miranda leaned back in the chair and muttered. “She’s the girl from Columbia. The one with the cerulean sweater…”

“The girl you couldn’t stop talking about? The one who made you question your sexuality, after only a brief contact?”

Miranda nodded. “The one and only.”

“Shit.”

Miranda nodded again. “Yes. Shit.”
Chapter 17

The old fashioned grandfather clock – yes, Miranda Priestly had one in her bedroom - and Andy’s tummy signaled that it was dinner time. Carmen had hinted earlier that she was preparing something special for her and Andy was ready for any meal the housekeeper would provide. She didn’t want to overstep any lines by wandering around the house but she did not think it would do any harm if she tried to find her way to the kitchen. She put on the grey bathrobe she found hanging in the bathroom and exited the room. It was the 24th of December and her thoughts went back to the past, when she would have sat with her grandmothers in the kitchen eating their traditional Christmas Eve meal, Irish beef stew and corn bread. The memory was so real that she could actually smell the heavenly stew in the air. Her mouth watered when she realized that it was not her imagination. Following the smell she got to the kitchen and there it was. A huge pot of beef stew and a basket of corn bread in the middle of the counter.

“Oh my god.” she sighed and stepped closer to the counter, her eyes fixated on the meal in front of her. She hadn’t had any Irish stew since her Grandma Connie’s death ten years ago.

“I was informed that this was something you would appreciate on Christmas Eve, so I asked Carmen to prepare it for you.”

The voice that called out behind Andy was soft but unexpected, making her jump. She turned too fast, dizziness rushed through her and she lost her balance. Had it not been for the editor’s good reflexes she would have ended up on the floor. Instead, as had seemingly become the habit in the last few days, she found herself in the older woman’s arms. Instinctively, her own arms went around Miranda’s neck, as the editor held onto her waist.

Andy dropped her head onto Miranda’s shoulder and murmured embarrassed, “I’m sorry Miranda. I’m just too clumsy I guess.”

Miranda strengthened her hold for a brief second before pulling back and looked at Andy who was blushing and trying to avoid any eye contact.

“It’s quite all right. I always seem to make people jump. However, I must admit that you are the first one who has ever ended up in my arms.” she added teasingly.

Andy released Miranda and stepped back, adjusting her bathrobe. Being close to the older woman had an effect on her, and it wasn’t the first time she felt it. Her heart was pounding so hard she was sure it would have been visible if she hadn’t been wearing the thick robe. She cleared her throat and motioned to the stew.

“It was very thoughtful of you, Miranda. Irish beef stew was our Christmas Eve meal when I lived with my grandmothers.”

Miranda raised an eyebrow questioningly. “Grandmothers?”

Andy shrugged and gave her a half smile.

“Yes. Well they were not really my grandmothers per se. Grandma Eleanor was my father’s aunt and Grandma Connie was her partner. I was four years old when my parents dropped me off at their house and forgot to come back. I haven’t seen them since then. Not even when Grandma Eleanor died. Their lawyer just sent me a letter claiming the inheritance but they backed off quickly enough when they learnt there was no inheritance, just unpaid hospital bills and other debts.”
Miranda shook her head and muttered bastards as she took out bowls and cutlery. She looked at Andy who was now sitting at the table, absentmindedly fidgeting with the belt of the bathrobe.

“Are you well enough to eat here, or should we take this upstairs to the bedroom?”

“I’m ok here, Miranda. It’s good to be out of the room.”

Miranda nodded approvingly and put a bowl of stew in front of Andy. She served a smaller portion for herself and sat at the opposite side of the table. She pushed the basket toward Andy.

“Don’t forget your corn bread. Although I have no idea how the masterpiece of the green isle met the southern kitchen’s essential product.”

Andy laughed out loud and inhaled deeply. The wonderful smell of the stew warmed her up and suddenly, sitting in the kitchen of one of the most influential woman in New York, felt like home. She glanced at the editor who had not touched her food but was looking at Andy intently. There was something in those blue eyes that made Andy blush again. Tenderness. She saw tenderness in Miranda’s eyes and thousands of unspoken questions. She knew that sooner or later she had to tell the older woman how she ended up on the street. She knew that she wanted to tell her. She knew that she wouldn’t be judged. She knew she would be comforted because those blue eyes watching her right now were full of understanding. She didn’t know where all this affection came from, but instead chose to simply enjoy the moment.

Finally, tearing her glance away Andy grabbed the fork. However, before tasting the stew she looked around, as though searching for something.

Knowing what she was looking for, Miranda reassured the younger woman, “Bruno is already fed, Andrea. You don’t have to worry about him.”

Andy froze in her place and stared at the editor.

“How...how did you know...?”

Miranda leaned back in the chair and tilted her head.

“It’s pretty obvious, Andrea. Bruno is in great condition. He’s healthy, his fur thick and shiny, he looks like a dog well-cared for. I assume you feed him first and make sure he has everything he needs, and put your needs second. It’s not cheap to keep a dog fit and healthy, so my guess is that you spend most of what you have on him.”

Surprised at Miranda’s astuteness, Andy nodded, “He saved my life, Miranda. My first day on the streets could have been my last, if he hadn’t come to my aid. The least I can do is keep him well. Besides having a dog like Bruno makes living out there a bit safer. Even if it means I have to skip a few meals.”

Miranda recalled the vision of Andy standing in the auditorium at Columbia. After her quip about the hideous cerulean blue sweater, Andy had risen from her seat with a good natured grin on her face. With her brown eyes dancing she’d ripped the monstrosity off – briefly exposing a lean, toned midriff when the tank top underneath rode up - and dropped it on the floor. Her uncovered arms were equally defined, as she rested them on her hips. Miranda had rolled her eyes at the action, but pin pricks of awareness had burgeoned within. Thinking back to that time, Miranda had difficulty picturing that strong, vivacious woman on the streets, struggling to survive. Although, the bathrobe was wrapped tightly around Andy, Miranda remembered the overly slender form that was hidden underneath.
“I believe you skipped more than a few meals, Andrea. So you better eat now before it gets cold.”

Andy took a bite and moaned. “Oh my god this is heavenly.” Closing her eyes she chewed the food, completely missing the heated glance from Miranda. She took another bite and moaned again, savoring the taste, oblivious to the effect her moans had on the older woman.

Opening her eyes, Andy noticed the peculiar expression on Miranda’s face. Perhaps she’d been eating too fast.

“I’m sorry, was I eating too fast? It’s just that I haven’t had something like this in a long time. My options are limited now and I’m gluten sensitive. So the cheap foods I can get my hands on are not all that fitting. Eating gluten free is expensive but this…” she said holding up a piece of corn bread, “…is great. So to answer your earlier question. That’s how the stew and the bread met. I couldn’t have wheat bread, so Grandma Eleanor made corn bread just for me, while they had the wheat bread. After a while, wheat bread or anything with gluten was banished from the kitchen. They changed their whole diet for me, so that I wouldn’t feel weird or left out of anything.”

“What happened to them?” Miranda asked, reaching out to touch the younger woman’s hand when her wistful expression turned somber.

The contact was fleeting and Andy immediately missed the comfort and thrill it provided. Andy didn’t know what it was about Miranda, but the editor’s merest touch simultaneously grounded and excited her.

“I was eighteen when Grandma Connie died. She was eighty-eight years old. Twenty years older than Grandma Eleanor. One morning she just didn’t wake up. Grandma Eleanor was inconsolable. They had been together for more than forty years. I was about to leave for university but postponed it. Not much later Grandma Eleanor got sick. Cancer.”

Soft hands cupped Andy’s again, giving a reassuring squeeze.

“Without Grandma Connie, she didn’t really have much desire to live, I suppose. She fought against it only half-heartedly but she was a strong woman and lived for three years after she’d been diagnosed. I stayed home the entire time to take care of her. When she died, I sold everything, moved to New York and started at Columbia. Graduated. Started work. Lost my job. And now here I am.”

The truth was a bit more than that but Andy didn’t want to bombard Miranda with all of her problems. Looking at the other woman’s doubtful expression, she knew that the editor was aware of that her story was lacking. She also suspected that Miranda wouldn’t push her and she’d let her set the pace.

Andy sighed and turned her hand, so that her fingers interlaced with Miranda’s long elegant ones. Before she could change her mind, she offered an explanation. “Actually there is more. But it’s not easy for me to talk about and I don’t want to ruin your Christmas mood.”

Miranda nodded understandingly.

“Whenever you’re ready Andrea. And just for the record you don’t owe me an explanation. As I told you before, you are my guest and my hospitality doesn’t depend on your willingness to share your story.”

Miranda stood, still holding Andy’s hand and gently tugged the younger woman to her feet.

“Let me escort you back to your room. We wouldn’t want you to fall again, would we?”
Andy looked at their conjoined hands. They fit perfectly.

Yes, they were holding hands. Because Andy was clumsy. There was no other reason than that.
Chapter 18

Christmas Eve had always been a silent event for Miranda. The girls, if not visiting their father, usually spent it with Yvonne and her sister’s family. Yvonne was the girls’ godmother and lived in the townhouse next to them. Caroline and Cassidy loved the easy going doctor and spending Christmas Eve with her somehow became their tradition over the years. Miranda, who could not stand Yvonne’s brother-in-law, stayed home and enjoyed a glass of shamefully expensive scotch in the peace of her study. This year however, she did not crave being alone with her fifty year old vintage Macallan. What she really wanted was Andrea’s company. She was reluctant to let the younger woman go back to the bedroom because she feared that the warm fuzzy feeling surrounding her would disappear as well.

Miranda halted her steps and looked at Andy, a bit of uncertainty coloring her voice. “Would you like to join me in my study? It’s still early and if you’re not too tired we can talk some more… maybe…”

The smile that lit up Andy’s face eased Miranda’s concern and she knew she’d made the right decision in asking the young artist. Still holding Andy’s hand she led her into the study. After her last divorce she had remodeled it and now it was more of a sanctuary than an actual study. She’d purchased a couch that was more than comfortable to spend a night on and she’d often slept there when the mood struck. The gas fireplace was a nice addition as well. She found it less troublesome than the standard wood burning hearths and it came equipped with yellow flames that burned out of faux-wood ventilation logs, so she still could enjoy the time-honored look of a wood hearth. Finally releasing Andy’s hand she motioned to the couch. “You can lay there, if you’d like. It’s very comfortable I can assure you.”

Andy nodded and lowered herself onto the plush couch, although she didn’t lie down. Rather, she sat, tucking her legs under herself and nestled back into the soft cushion. Miranda covered her with a comforter.

“May I bring you anything to drink?”

Andy pulled the comforter closer around herself and shook her head.

“No, I’m good, thank you.” She closed her eyes and let out a contented sigh. “This is heaven. You know, being hungry is one thing I can deal with, but the cold…” she shivered and opened her eyes looking sadly at Miranda. “I hate the cold. I hate being cold. If I could have one Christmas wish, I would wish to never be cold again.”

Miranda’s heart clenched at the young woman’s words. She seemed so small and vulnerable under the comforter that the editor just wanted to enfold her in her arms and promise her things. Promise her that she would take care of her and keep her safe. Promise her that she would never let her be cold again. Promise her that she would never let her starve again. Promise her anything and everything. But Miranda knew that this was not the right time to make such promises. She wasn’t in the position to make any of those promises. Not yet anyway.

Pouring herself a glass of whiskey she sat down next to Andy and laid back, resting her head on the back of the couch and slowly sipped her drink.

“I had my days, when food was lacking, but I admit I don’t know the feeling of being cold and not being able to do anything about it.”

“I thought I would be able to get used to it.” said Andy, “Apparently I was wrong. I bet you those
Miranda just hummed, not wanting to interrupt the young woman. She felt that Andy was just about to reveal the rest of her story and was afraid she would stop, if Miranda appeared too eager.

She was right, as Andy continued. “As you already know, I graduated from Columbia. Masters of Fine Arts. I was told that all I needed was a pencil and a piece of paper and I could do wonders… and I believed it. At first everything was perfect. During the day I worked at a well-known art gallery and in my spare time I drew. The owner of the gallery loved my drawings and he offered me a showing. We were in the middle of organizing it when his wife got really sick, and he decided to sell the business and retire to spend time with her. He was such a lovely old man, he made sure that the new owner kept all the employees. I think it must have been part of the deal.”

“What about your exhibition?” Miranda asked, turning her head to look at Andy. “Was it part of the deal, as well?”

“Not exactly but Artie didn’t forget about me. He sent me to Edwin Hollwin. He owed Artie a favour, so he promised to host my exhibition.”

“What happened? Edwin Hollwin is a respected and trustworthy businessman. I can’t imagine him backing out without a good reason?”

“Well he did. He canceled the showing and kindly informed me that I was blacklisted by a very influential person. He was very sorry about it but he said he couldn’t afford to have that person’s fury directed towards him. I didn’t quite believe it at first…that one person could hold such a power…but I soon found out how wrong I was on that count. No matter where I went, no matter what I tried, there were closed doors everywhere and the same explanation, if any…blacklisted.”

Blacklisted. Miranda’s mind whirled at the word. Andrea blacklisted! How could that be possible? It wasn’t as though Miranda was not familiar with the concept. After all, she’d blacklisted people before but only as the ultimate last resort, after some action on their part necessitated such a punitive action. She couldn’t fathom the woman before her doing anything to deserve such treatment. She had to get to the bottom of this.

“What do you know why and more importantly who blacklisted you?”

Andy paused and Miranda could see the gears shifting, as the younger woman debated whether to continue.

“I don’t know for sure but I have my suspicions. I think the new owner of Artie’s gallery is responsible. However, I doubt she had the clout to do it all on her own. I’d heard rumors that she had some big-gun, silent partner who financed the business and technically called all the shots. She might have gotten help from them…not really sure…just a gut feeling.”


“Yes.”

The light bulb glowed brighter. “Was your new employer Jacqueline Follet?”

“Oh…Do you know her?”

Miranda did indeed knew Jacqueline Follet. She also knew the French woman’s business very well and the big-gun behind it was no stranger to her either. If what she suspected was true and Jacqueline
used that person’s name to blacklist Andrea, the French woman was definitely in trouble. Knowing that person very well, Miranda knew there would be no forgiveness for such an abuse of authority.

“What makes you believe that Jacqueline is the one behind your blacklisting?”

“After the takeover things went smoothly for a week or so. Then I noticed that she’d taken an interest in me. Whenever she talked to me she made comments about my appearance. How beautiful my hair was, or she complimented the color of my eyes…stuff like that. After a while her compliments started to make me uncomfortable. They became more direct, more sexual. When alone together, she would always stand too close to me, or touch me without any reason. I felt her eyes on me all the time.” Andy shivered despite the warmth of the comforter. “I tried to avoid her but she was my boss…I mean what could I do?”

Miranda looked at the young woman and saw the tears forming in her eyes. She reached out to take Andy’s hand but stopped mid movement. What if the young woman took it as an unwanted gesture?

Andy noticed Miranda’s hesitation and held her hand out towards the editor. She laced their fingers together and slid closer to her, so that their bodies touched.

“Your touch is more than welcome, Miranda.” Andy blushed and shyly lowered her eyes, perhaps realizing the suggestiveness of that statement.

Miranda set her glass down and turned in her seat. She studied Andy for a split second and before her brain could catch up with her body, she slide her arm behind the young woman and pulled her into a hug. Andy melted against her and rested her head in the crack of the older woman’s neck. Holding the younger woman securely in her arms Miranda buried her nose into silky brown tresses, inhaling the sweet scent. For long minutes none of them spoke but the silence was as comfortable as the embrace.

Finally Andy’s shaky voice broke their stillness. “She fired me because I refused to sleep with her. It was right after the night when her friend tried to sneak a roofie into my drink to get me into bed.” Andy’s voice was full of desperation. “Two days later that same guy used my spare key to get into my flat and emptied it.”

Miranda felt hot tears soaking her blouse. Andy’s body was shaking, as long withheld cries erupted. She clung to Miranda, her grasp almost painful.

“He took everything. Everything I had, Miranda. Everything I had left after my grandmothers passed. Pictures and other things only of value to me. My memories. My whole life. Just because I did not sleep with him.” Andy lifted her head and looked at the editor whose face was furious. “I was a sexual object to the both of them…nothing else…what did I do to deserve that?”

Not waiting for an answer she dropped her head back onto Miranda’s shoulder, more tears flowing from her eyes.

Miranda was fuming. She still didn’t know the whole story but what she’d been told was enough to have her raging. A plan was forming in her mind but she needed some more information. Stroking Andy’s hair, she let her cry, until the tears lessened.

“Who was it? Jacqueline’s friend. Who was it? Miranda asked.

“Christian Thompson” was Andy’s barely audible response. The lateness of the evening, her still recovering constitution, and the cathartic telling of her story, all conspired to overwhelm her and exhaustion overtook her body.
Miranda’s thoughts raced. Jacqueline and Christian! This was just all so unbelievable. She needed to do something about this. Right now though, she could sense that Andy was falling asleep, as her body was growing limp in her arms. Adjusting their positions, so that they were lying on the couch, Miranda shifted Andy on top of her. She’d let her sleep for just for a few minutes before taking her upstairs, she thought. Then she would fix this. That was a promise she could keep.

Miranda closed her eyes, thinking of what needed to be done. Then despite her heightened state, she was sound asleep within a minute.
Chapter 19

The slamming of the door woke Andy from her deep slumber. The loud boom was followed by an even louder “Mom, we’re back” and the thundering sound of the girls running upstairs to their rooms.

“Sometimes I wonder if I raised a herd of elephants, rather than well-mannered young ladies.”

The slight annoyance in the husky voice made Andy smile and her lips lightly brushed the soft skin of the older woman’s neck. Miranda’s reaction was immediate. She tightened her hold on Andy and her breath hitched. Andy marveled at their position, enjoying the warmth emanating from Miranda. The editor’s unique scent enfolded her and she felt safe in her arms.

“We should get up and settle for the night.” murmured Miranda.

“Yes, we should.” agreed Andy. Yet no one moved. Instead, Andy drew lazy circles with her forefinger on Miranda’s stomach, just under her left breast, totally oblivious of its effect on the older woman.

“I haven’t slept with anyone before.” Andy stated quietly, her finger not stopping.

Miranda, who could not stand the sweet torture any longer, captured Andy’s hand and halted her movements before she answered. “I admit I prefer to sleep alone as well. However, sharing the couch with you wasn’t an unpleasant experience.”

Andy pulled away from Miranda and sat up quickly, the abruptness surprising the editor who looked at her questioningly.

Andy blushed and looked away. What had caused her to say that out loud? She wished she could blame the medication for her lucidity but knew that wasn’t the reason. Around Miranda she found it difficult to remain guarded. However, it wasn’t too late to pull back. Miranda had understandably misinterpreted her statement. She didn’t need to correct her.

“I didn’t mean that.” Andy found herself saying.

“You didn’t mean…oh…” The realization hit and Miranda sat up as well, sensing that some more serious conversation was just about to happen.

“It’s pathetic, isn’t it?” Andy’s face was burning up. Oh why had she continued with this conversation? She doubted that Miranda would be interested in her non-existent sex-life. “A twenty-eight year old virgin.” She buried her face into her palms, not able to look at Miranda who was speechless for only a second.

“There is nothing pathetic about that, Andrea. We are all different and we relate to sex differently. Some think that losing virginity is nothing, while others wait for the special one and give their innocence as a gift.”

Andy lifted her head and shrugged. “My grandmother told me the same thing. For a long time I really thought I was asexual because of the lack of sexual attraction to anyone. However, Grandma Eleanor explained that until Grandma Connie came along she hadn’t had the desire to have sex with anyone either.”

“There is nothing wrong with being asexual, Andrea.” Miranda said, resting her hand on Andy’s
knee in reassurance. “Engaging in a romantic relationship without sex is quite all right. You just have to find your match.”

“I’m not asexual, Miranda. Grandma Eleanor was right. All I needed was to find the right person to realize that.”

“Oh…I see.” Miranda said withdrawing her hand. Her expression suddenly somber, disappointment coloring her voice. “So you have a love interest then.”

Andy shook her head. “I wish. No, the person I’m talking about is someone I’ve admired from afar. I met them some time ago and one look into their eyes just awoke all of my desires. I never knew something like that could happen. Some people find them arrogant and heartless but I know better. In my eyes they are just perfect. So here I am lusting after someone I hardly know. Unfortunately this person would never have anything to do with me…and why would they…Who would want me? They’re so successful and I’m just an unemployed, homeless, vagrant, with no future.”

Miranda’s heart ached for Andy. It hurt to see the way life’s circumstances had caused someone such as her to doubt their self-worth but it also hurt to know that Andy’s interest lay with someone else. How surprised Andy would be, if she knew who actually wanted her.

“I had this dream of becoming a famous artist. Earning my fame, so I could woo this person, as her equal.” Andy continued, not noticing that she had slipped from using gender neutral terms.

The slip however, did not escape Miranda’s attention. Her? Was she talking about a woman? The possibility that Andy could be speaking about a woman, gave her a momentary burst of hope, until she reigned herself in. She would never be satisfied with being someone’s second option. Even if Andy might someday consider her, listening to her talk about the woman who’d captured her heart, Miranda had the impression that she could never live up to this mystery woman.

“You shouldn’t give up, Andrea.” Miranda said resignedly. “Although, I might not be the best person to give advice on matters of the heart…or sex.”

Andy thought she had heard wrong. Miranda Priestly had three ex-husbands and plenty of lovers, according to the press. She must know something, right? She looked at Miranda in astonishment but before she could transfer her doubts into a question, Miranda stood and held her hand out.

“It’s time to put you to bed. You must be emotionally drained. No more deep conversation today. And don’t look at me like that, I know what you’re thinking. I know my reputation, but take my word for it when I say I have been given more credit than I deserve…but that’s a story for another day.”

She pulled Andy up and adjusted the collar of the grey bathrobe. She rested her palms against Andy’s collarbone for a second, before releasing her with a deep sigh.

“I’ll go and check on the girls. See you in the morning, I believe?”

Andy lowered her eyes, her mind working furiously. She wanted to stay with the editor but did not know how to express her feelings without being too pushy or overstepping her boundaries. She gathered her courage and cleared her throat.

“I was thinking Miranda. You said that sharing the couch wasn’t unpleasant. Um…maybe we could…you know your bed is large enough for two…” She didn’t finish the sentence because she couldn’t read the neutral expression on the editor’s face. It wasn’t exactly a welcome sign.

“Um…ok…I’m going now. Good night, Miranda.” She stepped around Miranda and rushed to the
door silently scolding herself for being so stupid.

“Andrea.”

Andy stopped but did not turn around. “Yes?”

“You’d better not hog the sheets.”
“Thank you Edwin. Please give Elaine my regards. I’m looking forward to meeting her again at the New Year’s Gala.” Miranda ended the call and dropped her cell phone on the desk. Her earlier suspicion was confirmed and she was furious. Edwin Hollwin not only attested that Andrea was blacklisted but also revealed the name of the person who had been influential enough to get it done.

“Emily. Call Jacqueline Follet. I want to meet her for lunch today. Make a reservation at that French restaurant I liked the other day. Then call my lawyer. I’ll contact him from home tonight around seven, so make sure he is available.” Miranda looked at the papers in front of her and continued. “And Emily, care to explain where my coffee is? Too much Christmas cookies and your brain stopped working?”

Emily reached for her phone and dialed the second assistant who was supposed to be back from the coffee run ages ago. She glanced nervously toward the editor’s office when the call went to voicemail. Miranda was already in bitch mode and the lack of coffee would only make the whole situation worse. She took a deep breath, her mind working on a plausible explanation when the second assistant arrived out of breath and disheveled but with a Starbucks cup in hand.

“They were closed. I had to run five blocks for this.”

Emily rolled her eyes without empathy and wrested the cup from the girl’s hand. “I don’t care.” she hissed “Run faster next time.”

She delivered the coffee to Miranda who was now standing at the window, staring at the snow covered street. Without moving from her spot she addressed Emily again.

“When Groot arrives show her in. And bring me some water. I don’t feel like drinking coffee anymore.”

An hour passed without further instructions from the editor and the assistants were thankful for the break. Miranda was not easy to please but when her mood was like today she was even more impossible.

At precisely ten, Miranda’s private security consultant, Groot arrived and she was immediately ushered into the editor’s office. Miranda greeted the stocky, grim looking woman with a tight smile.

“Groot, I appreciate that you were willing to sacrifice your holiday. What did you find out?”

Groot handed Miranda a file before settling herself into the chair in front of the desk. Even on one of Miranda’s best days, no one would dare to sit before being given permission. However, Groot was not like others and sometimes she suspected Miranda appreciated her irreverent behavior. “Everything is in there but to summarize I can tell you that your girl was telling you the truth.”

Miranda raised an eyebrow. “My girl?”

Groot grinned at her and also raised an eyebrow in challenge. Miranda held her gaze for a second before she blushed and looked away. She waved her hand in a mock surrender.

“Fine. Go on.”

“Well it would appear that Mr. Thompson has gambling and drinking issues and he talks a lot when he’s drunk. About a year and half ago, Jacqueline Follet loaned him some money but he couldn’t pay
it back, so he offered her a bet. Double or Nothing. He pretty much lost the bet.”

“What was the bet about?” asked Miranda narrowing her eyes.

“You won’t like it. The subject of the bet was Andrea Sachs.”

“What?!”

“He bet Follet that he would bed Ms. Sachs within a month and if he succeeded his debt would be cleared. Apparently, your girl didn’t find him as charming as he finds himself and with time running out, he tried to drug her to take advantage. Fortunately for her, she caught him trying to slip a roofie into her drink and nothing happened. So of course, he blamed Ms. Sachs for his doubled up debt, and to use his words, to pay the bitch back, he broke into her apartment, stealing a spare key she kept taped over the door jamb. Why in this day and age and in New York someone would keep a key there, I don’t know. Anyway, he cleaned her out and sold her belongings to a fence. Now a neighbor reported seeing him around the flat but when the police investigated he had a rock hard alibi.”

“Let me guess. Jacqueline Follet.”

“Indeed. Later the neighbor withdrew his statement and no charges were pressed.”

“Fuckers.” murmured Miranda. She was pale, her anger evident on her face.

Groot stood up and stretched her back.

“The good news is that the fence still had some of your girl’s things. Mostly personal belongings he was not able to sell. There are three boxes in my car, which I can deliver to the townhouse if it suits you.”

Miranda nodded not raising her eyes from the file. Groot studied her for a long moment, not sure if she should make a comment about the editor’s tenseness or not. Finally opting for the latter, she said “All right. Like I said, all the information is in the file. So what do you want to do with those two?”

When Miranda didn’t reply she walked toward the door and was almost out of the office before Miranda reacted to her words.

“Why do you assume I want to do anything with them?”

Groot just shook her head and laughed. She didn’t bother with an answer, just waved and left without looking back.

Miranda leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. My girl she thought. Is she really my girl? Will she ever be?

They had spent Christmas in domestic bliss, talking about anything and everything - never mentioning Andrea’s last ten months, though. Miranda learnt a lot about the young woman and every piece of information just made her attraction grow. Andrea was kind hearted and sweet. Her quick wit amazed the editor, who finally found someone who matched her and was brave enough to spar with her. The girls adored the young woman and it was obvious that the feelings were mutual. Miranda had never been a touchy-feely type of person but she often had the urge – and gave into the desire - to touch the younger woman constantly. They were like two opposite magnetic poles, attracting each other. Sitting close on the couch, legs touching, holding hands during movie night with the girls, feather like touches on the shoulder while having dinner. All seemed natural for them both. If the girls noticed – they must have – they made no comments about it. And the nights. The first night Andy was sound asleep by the time Miranda finished checking on the girls and settled next
to her. She kept her distance and stayed on her side of the bed but when the morning came, it found them in each other’s arms, in the middle of the king sized bed. The second night was no different. They fell asleep on their sides, just to be tangled in a tight embrace by the morning. The third night Miranda gave up. She didn’t want to pretend anymore. When she slid under the covers, she pulled Andy into her arms. The younger woman happily complied and nestled herself against the editor’s warm body. They were asleep within a minute. Those nights were Miranda’s best nights ever. She secretly hoped many more would follow, although she had her doubts and insecurities.

Miranda rubbed the bridge of her nose and glanced at her watch.

“Emily. Coat. Bag. Call Roy. I’m leaving now and won’t be back today. That’s all.”

* * *

Everyone who had ever associated with Miranda Priestly knew the golden rule. Arrive fifteen minutes early. Jacqueline Follet must have been missed that memo because she was late. Despite herself Miranda waited patiently, coolly sipping her water. Finally the French woman arrived and not apologetic at all, she patted Miranda’s hand jovially and greeted the editor with a snotty “Bonjour.”

That was her second mistake.

“Jacqueline. How nice of you that you showed up after all.” Miranda’s sarcastic comment did not affect the French woman, who just smiled and shrugged.

Miranda turned to the waiter who quietly appeared at their table. “I would like my usual. Jacqueline?”

“Just the house salad and a glass of champagne. I feel like celebrating today.”

Miranda smirked and with a nod she dismissed the waiter. She directed her attention to the woman in front of her.

Never needing an invitation to talk, Jacqueline launched into a discussion on her day. Miranda let her prattle on, while she observed her. This was the woman who had conspired to ruin her Andrea. Smiling inwardly, Miranda thought to herself, by the end of lunch she won’t be in the mood to celebrate any longer.

Having enough of the woman’s chatter, Miranda cut her off, after the waiter placed their orders on the table.

“The reason why I asked you here, is because I found a very promising young artist whose work I believe the gallery must showcase.”

Jacqueline looked at Miranda with a feigned interest and sipped her champagne. “Why don’t you just send them to the gallery tomorrow and I’ll take a look at their work. I’m sure they’re good enough if you find them talented.”

“That sounds lovely. I believe you already know her though. Andrea Sachs?”

Choking slightly on her drink, Jacqueline visibly paled but she shook her head in denial. “No, I don’t think so. The name is not familiar.”

“Interesting. I thought you would remember someone you had sexually harassed. Unless there were so many that is. Then it’s understandable.”
Miranda took a bite of her steak and hummed in satisfaction. She was cool and collected, as if she was discussing the weather.

Realizing that Miranda was in possession of certain information Jacqueline changed tactics. “I don’t know what that bitch told you but I can assure you I haven’t done anything against the law. She was a lousy assistant. I had to fire her. You of all people should really understand that.”

Miranda tilted her head. Her ice cold blue eyes darkening dangerously.

“No. I don’t. Firing someone you don’t want to work with is one thing. It happens. Firing someone because they don’t do their job is acceptable. As you pointed out I do a lot of that myself. However, firing someone who refuses to sleep with you is not something I would ever tolerate. And you not only fired Andrea Sachs but you blacklisted her…Using…My…Name.”

While Miranda hadn’t raised her voice her tone was glacial and her fury was evident. Jacqueline didn’t know how to respond.

“You see Jacqueline, you’ve made a mistake. One I can’t and won’t forgive. Did you really think that I would never find out? That you would get away with it? You’ve hurt someone I care deeply for. That was the worst and last mistake you’ll make here in my city. You won’t be welcomed in New York anymore. Actually, you won’t be welcomed in any city or state again...except perhaps North Carolina…I don’t care much for North Carolina.”

Miranda motioned to the waiter and handed him her platinum card.

“Lunch is on me. You can’t afford to eat in a restaurant like this anymore.”

Rising from the table she gave Jacqueline one last contemptuous glance and delivered the final blow, to a stunned French woman, who was definitely no longer in the celebratory mood.

“Our business agreement is over. Now you’ll know what a true blacklist is.”
Chapter 21

Andy was sitting at the kitchen table, a half empty coffee mug and a brand new sketchbook – a gift from the girls - in front of her. She felt much better. Her fever was gone and the coughing had eased up. She was still a little bit pale but after days of eating healthy meals and long uninterrupted sleeps, her strength was coming back. She had also put on some weight, so she did not appear to be painfully thin anymore.

She rested her chin on her hand and was listening to Carmen’s chatting, although her mind wandered elsewhere - Miranda. She smiled as she recalled how reluctant the older woman was when it was time to get out of the bed in the morning. The alarm went off but Miranda just huddled closer to Andy and murmured something about not wanting to move ever again. Sleeping with Miranda was something Andy had never experienced before. The first night the editor came to bed pretty late. She quietly tiptoed around the room thinking that Andy was already asleep. She slid under the cover keeping her distance but Andy still felt the pleasant heat emanating from her body. As soon as the older woman’s breathing indicated that she’d fallen asleep, Andy moved closer and snuggled with her. Even in her sleep Miranda’s arm protectively went around her immediately and they slept through the night without moving an inch. After months of trying to get some rest in the storage room of the laundry store where she had no bed, not even a mat on the floor, Miranda’s king size bed was a luxury. She didn’t have to worry that she would be kicked out by Mrs. Rimsky if she got caught. The arms holding her guaranteed protection and gave her a sense of safety she had not felt before.

“You love her don’t you.” Carmen’s question, that sounded more like a statement, brought Andy back from her deep thoughts. There was no judgement in her voice and as she studied Andy, her face only showed kindness. A bit confused Andy looked down at her sketchbook and realized that her hand had worked on its own and an unmistakable portrait appeared on the paper.

“Um…” Standing up, Andy blushed and carried her mug to the sink. The question was unexpected and she was not sure how to respond, or that she should respond at all. Fortunately, Carmen did not really expect an answer.

“I have been working for Miranda for the last twenty plus years. I’ve assisted her through her three marriages and divorces. I have been here when the girls were born. I have seen her at her worst and seen her happy but I must tell you, I have never seen her as content and relaxed as she has been since you’ve been here.”

Carmen paused, hesitating for a second before continuing, taking Andy’s silence as a consent.

“I know it’s not my business but I’ll only ask you one thing. If you truly love her, no matter what, don’t give up on her. She will do things you won’t understand or will misunderstand and you will want to leave. People do that to her all the time. But she deserves someone who stays. She needs someone who sees her as she really is. She needs you, Andy. And I believe you need her too.”

The doorbell rang, saving Andy from answering. Not as if she would have known what to say anyway. She hadn’t yet dared to admit even to herself how she really felt for the editor. Did she love Miranda? The answer was clear but who was she to express such a feeling toward a woman like Miranda Priestly.

“I’ll open it.” she said, relieved that she could escape from the uncomfortable situation.

There was an unfamiliar woman standing at the door. Next to her were three middle-sized paper
boxes. When the woman saw Andy, she bowed her head slightly and greeted her.

“Good afternoon, Miss Sachs.”

Andy looked at her a bit confused, not knowing how the woman knew her name.

“Um…I’m sorry…You have me at a little disadvantage here. It seems you know me, although I’m certain that we haven’t met before.”

The woman gave her a lopsided grin.

“My name is Groot. I work for Miranda. Of course I would recognize her girl.” She winked at Andy and grabbed one of the boxes. “I have to put these boxes in her study. If you’ll excuse me.” She passed Andy and headed to the study. Andy stood there dumbfounded, Groot’s words echoing in her head. Her girl? Groot was in and out in no time, before Andy could pull herself together.

“Goodbye Miss Sachs.” Groot walked towards her car, then halted and turned back to Andy.

“You know they call her Dragon for a reason. But every dragon belongs to someone who can tame them. It’s a big undertaking but she’s worth it.” With that Groot nodded and left.

Well, that was weird Andy thought. Evidently there was something in the air that caused people to interfere in her so called love life. Was there a tattoo on her forehead that said I’m in love with Miranda, please give me advice about it?

She walked back to the kitchen. Collecting her sketchbook, she called out to Carmen who was not in sight.

“Carmen. I’ll be in my room.”

“All right, Andy. I’m leaving soon, so have a good afternoon.” came the response from the pantry.

The rest of the afternoon went quietly, as there was no one around. The girls had left for the Hamptons early in the morning with Yvonne and her nieces and Miranda was supposed to join them after the New Year’s Eve Gala at Runway. And Andy…well Andy didn’t really know where would she be in the New Year. She felt much better, so there was no reason for her to stay much longer. She wondered how long Miranda would put up with her. Although the older woman had shown no sign that she wanted to get rid of her, Andy knew that sooner or later they must talk about it.

There was a soft knock on the bedroom door and a second later Miranda stepped in. Even after a long day in the office she still looked fresh and flawless. Andy’s face lit up and she greeted the editor enthusiastically, “Miranda. You’re home.”

Her cheeriness evaporated when the older woman didn’t return her smile.

“Good evening, Andrea.” Miranda’s voice was moderate, her posture a bit rigid. “We need to talk. Would you please join me in the study in fifteen minutes? I have a call to make first.”

“Of course Miranda.”

Miranda nodded and left the room. Andy was confused and not for the first time that day. Miranda had acted strange. She was almost cold and impersonal. We need to talk she’d said. According to Andy’s previous experiences that statement never boded well. She glanced at the clock, waiting for the required time to pass, her stomach clenching painfully.
“Yes, I’m perfectly aware of that.”

Miranda was sitting at her desk with her cellphone to her ear. She was annoyed with the person on the other end of the line and she didn’t try to hide that fact.

“No, I don’t care what happens to her. It would make no difference to me if she ended up in a shelter. She’s just a piece of garbage who…I’m not sure why…I just picked her up from somewhere. I’ve fulfilled my end of the arrangement but she didn’t meet with my expectations. She has to go. That’s all.”

Miranda finished the call, dropped the phone on the desk and wearily rubbed the bridge of her nose. She looked up and saw Andy standing at the door with an unreadable expression on her face. Miranda gave her a small smile and held out her hand.

“Andrea darling. Come in and take a sit.”

Andy stood there, frozen unable to move. She didn’t hear the whole conversation but what she did hear was enough to shatter her heart into million pieces. Miranda called her garbage. Miranda wanted her to leave. What cruel game was the editor playing? Andy could not move, she just starred at the older woman.

Miranda realized that something wasn’t right and rose from her chair. She approached Andy carefully and reached for her hand but Andy pulled away.

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?” Miranda asked with a frown.

“Was it a game to you? Did you enjoy it? The gracious editor of Runway saves the poor homeless girl. What a heartwarming headline!”

“Andrea what...” The editor tried to cut in but Andy wouldn’t let her.

“You made me believe that you actually cared. I trusted you. And now I must face the consequences of my stupidity. How could you?”

“Did I miss something? Because I swear I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I heard you Miranda. You want me to leave. You called me garbage! You’re sending me back to the streets. I can understand if you don’t want me here anymore. I’m nothing to you, right? What I don’t understand is why you pretended that I matter? Was it because you wanted to please the girls? Or was it out of charity, so you could check it off on your to do list? Such a pity it’s not a tax deductible.”

“That’s what you think of me Andrea? That you’re my charity case? That I used you to soothe my conscience? The Ice Queen had to do something good around Christmas after running wild all year long? We are not in a Dickens novel, Andrea. Yes, I invest in charities but...” Miranda stepped closer to the younger woman, their bodies almost touching now, “When I do, I only donate my money. Not my time. I open my check book. Not my home. I offer some of my wealth. Not my friendship and definitely not my...”

Miranda didn’t finish the sentence, just starred at Andy for a long moment, searching for some answers in her eyes. Finally, visibly disappointed, she sighed deeply and shook her head. She stepped back and walked to her desk.

Backing Andy, she started to speak again, her voice dull. “Believe what you want, Andrea. The way I see it, you’ve already made up your mind. You’re welcome to stay, or if you choose to leave...then
In that moment, the Queen of Fashion had transformed into a fragile vulnerable woman. She turned and looked at Andy, her blue eyes filled with unshed tears, her voice soft. “I thought...I hoped…” She cleared her throat and shook her head. “But it doesn’t matter anymore, does it?” she smiled ruefully.

Andy was totally bewildered now. Miranda’s reaction wasn’t what she had expected. Did she misunderstand the situation? But no she’d heard what the older woman said during the phone conversation. Suddenly Carmen’s words came to her mind – She will do things you won’t understand or will misunderstand and you will want to leave. - Oh my god. She thought. What am I doing? Why did I assume the worst? She only showed me kindness and compassion and I let my insecurities override my common sense.

Andy took a tentative step toward Miranda. “Miranda. I’m…”

“No. Please don’t. You don’t trust me and question my actions even though I’ve never done anything to earn this distrust. Your opinion is based on what you’ve heard or read about me and not your own experience.”

The editor collapsed into her chair resting her elbows on her thighs and buried her face into her palms.

“It hurts Andrea. And it scares me. Scares me because it means that along the way somehow you gained the power of breaking my heart. You, Andrea, have the power to ruin me.” Her voice was merely a whisper now.

Andy rushed to her and dropped on her knees in front of the chair. She took Miranda’s hands, forcing the older woman to look up. Andy leaned closer her forehead touching the other woman’s. She lifted Miranda’s hands and breathed soft kisses into her palms.

Miranda shivered and tried to pull away but Andy held on to her firmly. Releasing her hands she gently cupped Miranda’s face. The editor refused to look at her and closed her eyes. She couldn’t close her ears though, so she had to listen to Andy. Andy took a deep breath and poured her heart out.

“You are the one who has ruined me for anyone else. With that one look years ago, you turned my world upside down. I’ve been trying hard to break the spell you put on me. I’ve dated. A lot. I let some of them kiss me but it felt wrong every time, because none of them were you. It’s you, Miranda. It’s always been you. Can’t you see that?”

Her eyes still closed Miranda did not react to Andy’s heartfelt declaration, so Andy did the only thing she could think of that would shake up the older woman.

She leaned in and kissed her. Hard.
Despite being someone who oozed sex appeal, Miranda had never been too keen to participate in any physical activity that involved getting rid of clothes, touching, kissing and God forbid, sharing bodily fluids. Fashion provided enough of a thrill and for those occasional instances where she needed release, she was more than satisfied with using her own hands. Earning the title of Ice Queen wasn’t difficult, it referred to her business persona, as much as her dislike of any bedroom activity. Miranda never gave a serious thought as to why. She just accepted that was the way she was wired. Intimacy came from the relationship with her daughters and for a long time that was enough. However, the first touch of the incredible young woman’s lips on her own, made her understand what she had been missing all those years. The intensity of emotions sweeping through her body paralyzed her. For a second she thought of the nonsensicalness of the situation. She was the older and supposedly more experienced one. She should lead the way. However, soft, hot lips and persistent hands blanked her mind, so she surrendered, giving in completely.

“Oh my god.” Miranda was laying on the floor in front of her desk, naked, sweat glistening on her flushed alabaster skin. She was breathing heavily, as her hips rhythmically thrust forward against Andy’s eager mouth. With one hand she held on to the brunette’s head, the other one desperately seeking something with which to brace herself. The brunette dropped one arm over the editor’s stomach to keep her in place, while her tongue plunged in and out of her moist slit. Feeling the first tremor of the older woman’s building orgasm she slowed down and ignoring the protesting whimper stopped completely.

“Andrea...please…” Miranda moaned.

Smiling against Miranda’s swollen sex, Andy unhurriedly lapped it, spreading wetness all over the sensitive flesh, including the virgin territory between her ass cheeks. Probing fingers played with both of the editor’s entrances while the tip of the brunette’s wicked tongue curled over Miranda’s hardened clit. Licking and sucking, she drove Miranda to the edge, just to slow down again, making the editor beg for more. She bit down on Miranda’s clit, making her hiss, as pleasurable pain jolted through her. Another unfamiliar sensation heightened Miranda’s senses and her orgasm hit her forcefully the minute Andy filled her pussy with three fingers, while her pinkie smoothly entered her other hole.

“Oh. My. God. That was...How...I thought you had never...” Miranda tried to formulate a coherent sentence but failed miserably. She looked down at the grinning brunette who was resting her head on her pelvis and blushed when Andy licked the remains of her wetness from her lips with gusto.

“I read a lot.” deadpanned Andy, nestling against Miranda’s warm body, her fingers still buried deep inside her.

“I do too,” stated the editor, who added with a sly smile “but clearly we don’t attend the same library.”

Andy chuckled and nuzzled the other woman’s neck. She placed open mouthed kisses on Miranda’s jaw line, and on reaching the delicate ear, bit the lobe, while her tongue wandered inside, tracing the sensitive shell.

“I’m going to fuck you again.” Andy breathed hotly, as she started to move her fingers.

Miranda moaned in response, spread her thighs wider, needing, wanting more. She didn’t have to vocalize it, because Andy sensing her need doubled her efforts, her thrusts become deeper and more
forceful.

The editor was wetter than ever. Her juices flowed down to her ass, lubricating her puckered hole, so that Andy’s fingers effortlessly slide in and out.

Andy felt the older woman’s inside muscles tighten almost painfully around her digits. She speed up, whispering encouragement to the panting woman.
“Let me hear you sweetheart. Let it go. Come for me.”

Miranda grabbed Andy’s head and crushed their lips together. Her frantic movement lost its rhythm as she came, screaming her release into Andy’s mouth.

Somehow the two of them made it to the couch. They laid there wrapped in each other’s arms kissing lazily. Miranda slide her hand under Andy’s shirt, stroking the heated skin.

“Why is that I’m naked and you are fully clothed?” Miranda whispered, her voice hoarse. “We should do something about that.”

“I’m still recovering remember?” Andy stopped the editor’s wandering hand and added jokingly, “I can’t just parade around butt naked can I?”

Miranda narrowed her eyes at the weird explanation but her concerns were chased away by the sweet kisses Andy placed on her lips.

“I have a surprise for you” Miranda said tenderly. She untangled herself from Andy’s embrace and sat up. Stretching her muscles, she felt pleasant soreness in long neglected places. Glancing over her shoulder as she stood, she could see the brunette’s eyes raking hungrily over her body. Miranda shivered but resisting her reawakened desire, she wrapped a blanket around herself and motioned toward the boxes that Groot had delivered earlier.

“Those are for you. I’m not sure what you will find in them. I just hope I was able to recover some of your memories.”

Andy furrowed her eyebrows and walked towards the boxes. Opening one she peeked inside. Starring at the contents she sobbed, tears running down her face.

Concerned, Miranda reached for her but she was stopped by Andy’s palm on her chest. She tilted her head questioningly, confusion written on her face.

Andy sighed deeply and looked straight at Miranda, her voice quivering as she spoke.

“Don’t freak out, but I love you.”
And oddly enough Miranda did not freak out. Without a word she reached for Andy and pulled her into a tight embrace. The editor’s heart was pounding wildly, and it matched the rhythm of the brunette’s. Love. She wasn’t prepared for it. Or was she? She couldn’t deny the pure sexual hunger that had been awakened within her, but she already knew that her feelings toward Andrea lay deeper than simple lust. Yes, there was tenderness and protectiveness, too…but love?

She closed her eyes and inhaled the sweet scent of the younger woman. Their bodies fit perfectly. The soft skin touching hers made her tingle and a new wave of arousal washed through her. And suddenly it hit her. She wanted it. She wanted this wonderful woman, her body, her mind, her everything for the rest of her life. Possessiveness was a character trait of hers but it never involved another person before. No husband or lover was precious enough to make her stake her claim in that way. Until Andrea. Was it love? She sighed deeply and the decision was made. She jumped without a safety net and hoped that Andrea would be there to catch her.

“I love you too. You sweet, sweet girl.” she whispered hoarsely into Andy’s ear while tightening her embrace.

In response, hot lips attacked the sensitive spot at the juncture of her neck, sucking, licking on it and she threw her head back offering better access. After a joyful minute she took control and maneuvered the younger woman backwards, until her back was set against the bookshelf. The comforter fell on the floor and Miranda was naked again in obvious contrast to Andy’s fully clothed body. Sliding one hand under Andy’s sweater the editor firmly pushed her bra up, freeing the brunette’s full breasts. Her palm grazed the hardening nipples and as she peppered the younger woman’s face with feverish kisses, her other hand sneaked into her yoga pants. She knew she should have gone slow and gentle but as soon as her fingers met the brunette’s soaked panties all was forgotten and blind passion took over. One swift motion and the sweater landed on the other side of the room followed by the yoga pants. She sunk on her knees in front of Andy and yanked on her panties. The thin material gave up easily and with that the last barrier was gone. Miranda starred at the neatly trimmed hair, amazed by the amount of wetness glistening on Andy’s thighs. Her pussy was swollen and her surprisingly big clit stood erect twitching visibly in anticipation. The heady scent of the younger woman’s arousal filled the air and fired up Miranda’s passion even more. She spread Andy’s labia with her fingers, leaned in and wrapped her lips around the engorged clit, sucking on it firmly. The brunette’s hips jerked forward she grabbed the editor’s head with both hands, her fingers holding on to the silky white hair and she cried out loudly.

Emily froze in place when the cry, echoing through the house, reached her ears. She was delivering the Book as usual and when she had let herself into the townhouse it had seemed silent and empty. She was glad that the girls were not around. The little monsters always danced on her nerves, tried to prank her, called her names and made her life hard in general. She was smart enough not to hurt their feelings or, God forbid, mention it to Miranda. The editor adored her daughters and would never let anyone talk ill about them. The unexpected sound alarmed Emily at first but soon her face turned red in embarrassment, hearing the equally loud moans coming from upstairs.
Someone was definitely having sex there and despite the shrieking alarm bells in her head Emily was determined to find out whom. To her knowledge Miranda was not in any kind of relationship, she hadn’t dated since her last divorce and there weren’t any candidates around her. The rumors about the affair with the board member, Bruno Elsworth, didn’t count, as it was Emily who fed that gossip mill.

She slowly tiptoed up to the stairs, listening to where the noises were coming from. Miranda’s study. She stopped at the door that was slightly ajar and peered inside. Nothing. She saw nothing but abandoned clothes and an empty couch. The intensity of the moans increased and a woman – clearly not Miranda – started to beg.

“Oh my god. Please, please don’t tease me.”

There was a throaty laugh – could it be Miranda? – then the wet sound of licking and sucking and more moans and begs from the other woman.

“Yesss. Yesss. Right there. Please don’t stop.”

Another chuckle and this time a recognizable Miranda responded.

“Oh I can assure you darling, I don’t intend to stop. Ever.”

That was all too much for Emily. Miranda was having sex with a woman. It wasn’t the gender of the editor’s lover that shocked her the most though. She often flattered herself with the thought that she knew anything and everything about her boss. She was in charge of her schedule, handled many of her personal and business issues, so she really believed that Miranda’s life was an open book for her and it made her feel important. And now it was all shattered. She’d missed something very important. She had no idea who the woman in the room with Miranda was. In her own eyes she’d failed as a first assistant. She slowly made her way down the stairs and sneaked out of the townhouse. She had a new mission. Finding out who Miranda Priestly’s lover was.

Miranda rested her forehead against Andy’s hip, both of them panting heavily.

“I want you inside of me.” whispered Andy, her voice sultry. She pulled the editor up and captured her lips, her tongue plunging forcefully into Miranda’s mouth. No matter how powerful her orgasm had been from the sensation of Miranda’s lips and tongue around her, she wasn’t satisfied, she wanted more. She wanted Miranda’s hands on her, she was craving those elegant long fingers, wanted them to fill her, to claim her. She had been starving too long and now she was there with the woman of her dreams, and she was going to enjoy every little morsel she could get.

She whimpered as Miranda grabbed her right leg and lifted it, securing it against the bookshelf with her hip. Andy took the hint and circled the editor’s waist with her leg. She was wide open, wetness pouring out from her still swollen pussy. Gentle fingers were probing, playing around her entrance in maddening slowness, as if she was a delicate flower, but that wasn’t what she needed. She bit down on Miranda’s lower lip and hissed impatiently.

“Stop playing. Just fuck me!”

Andy reached down, and holding on to the older woman’s wrist she pushed her two fingers inside. Being so lubricated the digits slide in effortlessly. A slight sting, a reminder of her virginity, was quickly replaced by the hot sensation that Miranda’s fingers created. The editor kept a steady rhythm, withdrawing almost all the way, then pushing inside firmly, over and over again. Andy’s inner walls started to pulse around Miranda’s fingers and she dug her nails into the editor’s shoulders.
Miranda leaned in and pulled on Andy’s nipple with her teeth, and at the same time swiped her thumb over her clit. Another flood of creamy wetness poured out of Andy’s pussy, and dripped down the editor’s hand. The guttural sounds that Andy emitted, as her hips pumped in time with Miranda’s movements, spurred her on and Miranda increased the strength of her thrusts, reaching deeper inside her lover. Her mouth worked tirelessly on the full breast in front of her, sucking, licking, biting. The grip on her shoulders increased, almost painful, but she ignored it. She changed the rhythm and added one more finger, amazed at how open a wet Andrea was.

Deeper.

Harder.

Faster.

It wasn’t long before Andy lost it completely. A searing orgasm scorched through her body, and she swore that she saw fireworks behind her closed eyelids.

Miranda slowed and with a long gentle thrust, she guided Andy through her release.

All strength gone they sank to the floor, tangled in each other’s arms.

Long minutes passed in comfortable silent. Finally, Andy lifted her head from Miranda’s chest and said with a cheesy smile.

“I think you just earned a membership to my library.”
“I don’t have anything important scheduled for today, so I’ll be finished by noon.” said Miranda, as she placed her empty coffee mug into the sink. She wiped her hands and turned toward Andy, smiling lovingly at the sleepy brunette. Although they spent most of the night in bed they did not sleep at all. After years of starving, Miranda’s hunger was fed and she finally discovered that she indeed love sex, or at least she loved having sex with Andy. Their bedroom activity covered a wide scale, from making sweet love to having wild hot monkey sex. Andy’s stamina and creativity amazed the editor, whereas she was anxious at the same time, fearing that she wouldn’t be able to keep up with her younger lover. However, it appeared her fears were overrated. Not only did she match Andy but at the end it was the brunette who begged for a break. Raking her eyes over Andy’s bath-robed covered body that revealed a hint of cleavage, she felt her desire stir again.

“Unfortunately no time for that” she thought.

Clearing her throat she asked huskily. “Would you care to accompany me to lunch darling? Roy would pick you up at 11:00 am. And before you answer, let me tell you about that huge closet full of clothes, all your size in the main guest room.”

Returning the smile Andy nodded eagerly. “Yes Miranda. I would love to. It will be refreshing to leave the house now that I feel better. It was very thoughtful of you to offer me clothes. I believe it wouldn’t look too good, if your guest showed up wearing something hideous.”

“Andrea. You are not my guest. You are my love, my partner if you will. I’m not going to hide you in my closet and pretend that we are just friends.” She paused for a second “Unless this is not what you wish for.”

Andy stood, collecting her plate and mug from the kitchen table. Walking up to Miranda she gave her a playful peck on the nose. She still couldn’t entirely accept that this exceptional woman, who could have anyone, had chosen her. She just hoped that she wouldn’t be a disappointment and the editor would keep thinking that she was worth it.

“This is exactly what I want. Being yours and being open about it.” She placed another kiss on the top of the editor’s nose and added teasingly, “Let’s do this. It’s time for me to study the Dragon in her habitat.”

Miranda frowned and stepped aside turning away from Andy. Not quite understanding the sudden change in the editor’s mood Andy placed the dishes on the counter and reached for her love. Grabbing her hand she pulled the editor into an embrace. Holding Miranda’s tense body tight she whispered gently into her ear.

“What’s wrong love? I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Miranda sighed deeply and looked at the younger woman.

“What if you won’t like it?” She asked in an uncertain voice.

“Won’t like what?” Andy asked not getting what was Miranda referring to.

Resting her forehead against the other woman’s, the editor murmured quietly. “Me. In my office. You know that it will be different. I am…I am not the easiest person to please when it comes to work, and I’m not sure I want you to get to known the Dragon in action.”

Andy laughed softly and hugged Miranda even tighter. “Oh Miranda. You can’t be serious.”
“I can assure you Andrea, I’m quite serious.” huffed the editor and tried to pull away but the younger woman wouldn’t release her.

“I already know the Dragon. Actually, I already know the Ice Queen, the Devil in Prada or whatever other names they call you. I know you, Miranda. I know you and adore every bit of you.”

“You do…really?” there was a hint of doubt coming through the question.

“I do. Really. I understand what being in the position of editor-in-chief of Runway requires. I also understand that your attitude outside our home will always be different and aware that sometimes you’ll bring your Ice Queen persona home. But no matter what, I do know without a doubt that you love me. Because despite what others think, or say, I have experienced firsthand how caring, warmhearted and wonderful you are. So if you want to terrorize your minions tomorrow while I’m there, just do it. I promise I won’t run away.” She seductively rubbed her pelvis against the older woman’s thigh and purred into her ear. “I might even find it sexy and ask you to punish me too.”

Miranda stared at the brunette incredulously for a long second, then laughed out loud, her body relaxing against Andy’s. All her fears and insecurities disappeared. Surprisingly enough she believed every single word this extraordinary young woman had said. The solid walls she had been building for years, to protect herself from disappointment, started to crumble and she embraced this new liberating feeling that filled her heart and made her feel alive again.

She glanced at the clock on the wall than smiled mischievously at the brunette. She had time for this after all.

“You are something else, darling. Speaking of punishment, someone forgot to close the lid of the toothpaste. I consider that a most serious offense. Someone needs to be disciplined for that.”

She grabbed the younger woman’s hand and started to pull her towards the stairs. And since you find sternness and firmness hot, you must call me Officer Miranda and follow my orders to the letter!”

Roy arrived at the townhouse ten minutes early and waited patiently for the brunette.

Andy smiled shyly as the car door was opened for her and she was greeted with a polite “Good morning, Ms. Sachs.”

“Good morning, Roy. Please call me Andy.”

Roy nodded and handed Andy a paper box. “Miranda sent this for you, Andy.”

Andy settled into the backseat and took a deep breath. She was nervous. It was one thing being Miranda Priestly’s lover behind four walls. Easy. Safe. On the other hand, accompanying the famous editor in public, openly as her significant other, well that was a totally a different ball game. Curious about the box’s contents she peeked inside. It was the newest iPhone. She opened the small envelope it came with.

Andrea.

I forgot to give this to you yesterday. I’m addicted to you, so it would be a life saver for me, if I could reach you any time I’m in need. My number and of course the girls’ are already saved.

I love you.

Miranda
Ps: I’ve heard that phone sex can be quite refreshing. Maybe we should try it.

Smiling, Andy brushed her fingers over the neat, elegant handwriting and once again she was overwhelmed by the editor’s thoughtfulness. She jumped slightly when the phone started to ring unexpectedly. She laughed out loud when she glanced at the screen. “Officer Miranda. Good morning, sweetheart.”

“Good morning, darling. I’m sorry but a last minute meeting came up and I can’t possibly postpone it. Would it be too intolerable if you had to wait on me for about half an hour?”

“Of course not, Miranda. Don’t worry about it. I’m sure I can occupy myself while you are at that meeting.”

“Thank you, darling. I gave strict orders to my second assistant, so if you need anything just ask her.”

“Your second assistant?”

“Yes, my first assistant Emily, who you’ve already met won’t be here. She’s running some important errands for me and I don’t believe she’ll be back anytime soon.”

Andy let out a relieved sigh. Her first encounter with Emily had not gone well and she wasn’t keen on the idea of meeting her again, furthermore meeting her alone without Miranda present. She wondered about the importance of those errands, suspecting that they were the result of the editor’s courtesy towards her. She also suspected that if she asked her lover she would deny it but that was all right with her. They both knew it, there was no need to declare it with words.

“I love you, you know.” Andy said.

“Love you too, darling.” Andy heard the smile in the other woman’s voice. “I must leave now. See you soon, Andrea.”

The call ended and leaning back in the comfortable seat, Andy enjoyed the rest of the ride.

The second assistant was waiting for her downstairs. Andy didn’t know what instructions the poor girl got, but she was so eager to please that after five minutes her attention became overbearing. At first Andy asked her kindly to relax but the assistant wouldn’t settle, so the brunette tried a different approach. Imitating Miranda she firmly ordered the assistant to stop fussing around her. Surprisingly it worked.

Twenty minutes passed since her arrival, so she spent some time calling the girls. It was a short call because the twins were extremely busy, as they put it. They were chatting about everything but she didn’t tell them about the changed status of her relationship with their mother. She and Miranda had decided earlier that they would talk to the girls in person, considering the sensitive nature of the subject. She dropped her phone on Miranda’s desk and sat in her chair. Looking for a piece of paper to sketch on, she accidentally pushed a folder off the table. She leaned over to pick it up but grabbed it clumsily and a paper slipped out. Looking at it she frowned and felt as if she had been punched in the stomach. It was a picture of Christian Thompson.

“Isn’t he handsome?” the second assistant’s dreamy voice brought Andy out of her momentary trance.

The young woman standing at the door motioned toward the picture and whispered conspiratorially.

“I’ve heard that Miranda is planning to hire him as a permanent employee. They say she is totally
into him, and not just as a writer, if you know what I mean.”

Andy stared at the woman blankly. She registered her words but her mind just couldn’t deal with the shocking information. This couldn’t possibly be true. Miranda wouldn’t betray her like that. Or would she? Thousands of thoughts flashed through her mind, so she did the one thing she thought was right.

She ran.
“How did it go?”

Miranda looked up as Groot sat down at the table she had just shared with Christian Thompson seconds ago. She gave a wary smile and waved absent mindedly.

“You know me, Groot. I’ve mastered the art of masking my real emotions and the years of practice paid off again. I was as charming as ever, while all I wanted to do was grab the bastard and throw him off a tall building.”

Groot nodded sympathetically. “I can understand that. He’s an arrogant little shit, who’s quite full of himself. The way he treated your girl makes it even worse.”

“You just love repeating that don’t you. My girl.”

Groot grinned, pulled out a folder and handed it to Miranda. “Of course. Your girl. I’m happy for you, although your love affair is a bit costly. ”

Miranda raised an eyebrow at her, while busing herself with the contents of the folder. “What do you mean?”

She pulled out some papers and scanned through them, nodding in satisfaction. Everything seemed perfect, just as she wanted.

Groot leaned back in her chair and confessed.

“I owe Yvonne a hundred bucks for this. She told me almost thirty years ago that you would end up with a woman. Here I thought it was just her wishful thinking but apparently she did see your rainbow colored future.”

Amused by her long time friend’s confession Miranda laughed lightly. “You two…you bet on my supposed sexual orientation?”

“Don’t be surprised, Priestly. You know us. We bet on everything. Your marriage with Jeremy cost me two hundred bucks. And now this...Do you want to send me to the poor house?”

Miranda shook her head and closed the folder. “Yes, you two were always a bit wild and carefree for my taste. I still don’t understand how I managed to survive living in the same apartment with you.”

“Oh you loved it, Miranda. And you love us. We are the sunshine of your life….well…and the twins…and now of course…your girl.” Groot winked at Miranda who just shook her head again.

“Stop that, Groot. If someone hears you my reputation is ruined. According to the press I’m not supposed to love anyone. But just for the record she is indeed my girl, and this is hardly a love affair”.

“You really do love her don’t you?” Groot smiled.

Miranda studied Groot for a brief second and softly answered. “Yes. Yes, I do. I believe that she could be my Sarah.”

A flash of pain crossed Groot’s handsome features and all the previous playfulness disappeared. She sighed heavily and clasped her hands in front of her. Miranda leaned forward and placed a hand on the top Groot’s folded ones.
“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you sad. I just always admired what you had with Sarah and for the first time in my life I’m so close to experiencing the same.”

Miranda rubbed the bride of her nose, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly.

“I want to do this right, Groot. I don’t think I have ever wanted to succeed in anything as much as I want this relationship to work. And honestly, the only inspiring example around me is your marriage with my sister.”

Groot cleared her throat and nodded, smiling faintly.

“I didn’t see this coming, Miranda. I suspected that you had feelings for the girl but didn’t think it was that serious. Do you know that you haven’t mentioned Sarah’s name since she died? I understood that silence was your way to deal with her death. I understood and respected it. We all dealt with it differently. And now the fact that you not only mention her but want to achieve something that she and I had, shows me how deeply you feel for Andrea. There is just one thing that you must consider though. You can’t keep things from her. You have to tell her what you did. You have to explain your motives and what drives you. Not just now but in the future as well. If you want to succeed you have to open up and communicate. Do. Not. Screw. This. Up.”

Miranda looked directly into Groot’s eyes and smiled reassuringly. She knew that Groot was right. In her previous relationships she always followed her own mind, and never discussed anything important with her husbands. She did what she wanted and the men either followed her lead, or were left behind. But Andrea was different. She deserved the best and Miranda intended to become the perfect partner for her.

“Thank you, Groot I appreciate your candor. And your help too. I’m planning to talk Andrea today. Actually. I’m taking her out for lunch and that would be the perfect opportunity the reveal my plans.”

Groot grimaced grimly and stood. “Speaking of your plans. Christian Thompson is up for a big surprise.” Gesturing toward the folder she continued. “You have everything there that you need. Now go and talk to your girl.”

Miranda stood too, grabbed her bag and the folder.

“Accompany me, Groot. I would love to introduce you to Andrea. She’s waiting for me at my office.”

“I’ve already met her remember?”

Miranda breezed through Groot and without turning back she said over her shoulder.

“Yes, you met her. But not as one of my besties. And if she doesn’t like what we did, then you’ll be there to blame.”

They entered the deserted lobby at Elias-Clark. Not many worked around this time of the year, with employees and employers alike, enjoying the holidays, preparing themselves for the New Year. They reached the elevator, not paying attention to the sleepy looking guard who jumped slightly when the couple passed by him.

“Miranda. Here you are. I was looking for you.”

Miranda came to a halt reluctantly and grimaced at Groot before she turned toward the annoying owner, of the annoying voice.
“Irv. I’m busy. I don’t know what you want but I’m sure it can wait.”

“Actually, it’s quite important, Miranda.” Irv said, smiling maliciously. He patted the shoulder of his company, a tall, smartly dressed, handsome man, as he went on. “Let me introduce you to our new board member Jake Ellington III. He just arrived to the city and unfortunately he lacks an escort to our New Year’s party.”

Miranda tilted her head and studied the men in front of her and smiled sweetly. “That’s indeed very unfortunate. Why don’t you arrange something with that very discreet escort agency you usually recommend to your friends?”

Irv turned red and opened his mouth to retort when the other man smoothly stepped forward and placed a hand on Miranda’s arm.

“Actually Ms. Priestly. Irv told…no promised me that you would be more than delighted to be my escort at the party. I hope you don’t disappoint me.”

Miranda narrowed her eyes and looked pointedly at the hand on her arm, then back at the arrogant man. He had the decency to remove his hand but his smug expression did not disappear.

“Groot. Would you mind going ahead and waiting for me in my office?” Miranda asked, the coldness in her voice matching her icy demeanor. “Please tell Andrea that I’ll be there soon. This…” she waved at the men, “…won’t keep me for very long.”

“Sure, Miranda.” Groot grinned and leaned in, whispering loud enough for everyone to hear. “Be nice. We had enough play for one day.”

As soon as the elevator door closed behind Groot, Miranda turned her attention back to the men who now seemed a bit uncomfortable.

“Mr. Ellington. First of all, Irv is not in the position to offer my company to anyone. Second, I doubt that my fiancé would be thrilled if a third person joined us. My time with my soon to be wife is not up for sharing, so I’m afraid I’ll have to disappoint you after all.”

With that she walked away not caring a bit about their reaction to her words.
Stepping into the elevator Miranda did not have time to fume over Irv’s antics, because her phone started to ring. Pulling the cell out of the bag, her eyes fell on the small velvet box she had purchased earlier that morning and her mood brightened instantly. Smiling widely, she answered the call.

“Miranda Priestly.”

“Mom. It’s me Caroline.”

“Caroline? What happened? I don’t recognize this number?”

“Mom. Don’t get mad. Yvonne had a little accident, so her new girlfriend is driving us home. We will arrive in ten.”

Miranda sighed deeply and rubbed her temple.

“What do you mean, “a little accident”? And what new girlfriend? Caroline?”

There was a moment of silence then a strange yet oddly familiar voice spoke.

“Hallo Mrs. Priestly. I’m Adriana Wallace. We haven’t met before, but we are actually neighbors. Dr. Westwood fell from my tree and broke her ankle. She also has a slight concussion.”

“What???”

The elevator arrived at Runway’s floor. Exiting the car, Miranda was almost knocked over by her second assistant, who ran past without looking at her. The young woman jumped into the elevator, pressed the button and finally looked up. When her eyes met Miranda’s, the editor saw pure terror. The assistant, who had turned white, frantically pressed the buttons, trying to hurry the doors closed. Shaking her head wildly, she repeated in a small voice, “It’s not my fault. I…I haven’t done anything.”

The call momentarily forgotten, Miranda froze in place. The elevator door silently closed and all she could do was just stare at the cold metal. What just happened? Her good mood was quickly disappearing again. She felt as though she were riding a roller-coaster.

“Hallo? Mrs. Priestly? Are you there?”

Miranda slowly lifted the phone to her ears. She did not understand what was going on, she felt quite lost. And when Miranda Priestly felt that way she made sure, that others would feel even worse.

“Yes. I’m here.” she stated, her voice vibrant from forced calm. “Care to explain why a complete stranger is driving my children home? Why wasn’t I notified? If anything happens to them under your care, I promise you that…”

The woman on the other side of the line chuckled softly and cut in.

“Mrs. Priestly. Miranda. I can assure you that your children are completely safe. Dr. Westwood is here with us. However, she is not in the best condition. And before you ask, we stopped for gas, so I’m not driving and talking on the phone.”
Before Miranda could answer, she heard Yvonne’s voice. The doctor was breathing heavily, sounded weak and pretty much in pain.

“Miranda. I’ll explain everything when we get home. Please?”

That was all Miranda needed. Knowing that Yvonne, who she trusted with her life, was there with her children instantly calmed her. Saying goodbye, she headed towards her office. The sun was up and bright again. The kids were coming home and while she had plans for the evening, she thought that with the girls around it was going to be even better.

Her phone buzzed and she glanced at the screen. A message from Groot. She read it and her world turned upside down again for the millionth time that day. As she turned and hurried down the corridor, she prayed to all the deities she could have think of.

***

“Penny for your thoughts?”

Andy’s head snapped up and she flashed a half-fake smile at the stocky woman, standing in front of her.

“Oh. Groot. You’re looking for Miranda? Of course, you are. You work for her after all. I’m afraid she’s not here…and I was just about to leave myself…and…”

Andy knew she was babbling but she felt so embarrassed to get caught crying like a baby. She was about to scramble to her feet, from the corner she was hiding in, but she was stopped by the other woman.

“Please don’t. Stay.” Groot sat down next to Andy and with a reserved sigh she leaned back against the wall. Closing her eyes. she said, “Actually, I was looking for you. And just for the record I don’t work for Miranda.”

“You don’t? I thought you’d said earlier that you did.”

Groot chuckled and shook her head.

“Believe me there is a big difference between working for or with her. Many work for her. I don’t. I work with her occasionally and it’s an entirely different status than being one of her employees.”

“Oh. I see.”

Andy shifted uncomfortably and glanced at the stoic woman. Why was she here? Was she sent by Miranda? Yes, she probably was. Andy could not see any other reason why Groot would have been looking for her. After seeing those pictures on the editor’s desk her survival instincts had kicked in and she had to get out of the office. It did not help, that the second assistant’s words confirmed her fears. She felt betrayed and she did what she had learnt on the streets was the best way to survive. She ran. She’d run through the corridor, and blinded by her tears, lost her sense of direction and somehow ended up in a huge room, full of clothes, shoes, bags and other accessories. She recognized it instantly. The Closet. Of all places she could have run to, she just had to choose the only one where Miranda’s presence was unmistakable, almost more obvious than in her office. She hid in a corner and let her thoughts run wild this time. It did not take her long to realize how misguided her insecurity had been. Yet she couldn’t help how she felt. She needed to get over her fears, she needed to learn how to trust again. She knew that there was no reason to question Miranda’s love and loyalty and she also knew that even though the editor loved her dearly sooner or later she would get tired of Andy’s breakdowns.
Groot cleared her throat and looked at Andy.

“I understand you Andy. I used to walk, or to be more accurate run in the same shoes you are wearing now. But one day a wise woman told me something very important. If you don’t stop running, you’ll never know if staying was worth it or not. If the answer is no, you can still run away. I listened to her and you know what? She was right.”

Her problem forgotten, Andy raised to her knees and faced Groot.

“What happened?”

“It’s a long story and right now it doesn’t matter. What matters is you and your happiness.”

“Please?”

Groot cleared her throat again and scratched her head. Andy was looking at her pleadingly and damn that girl had a serious set of puppy eyes.

“All right. All right. I came from a wealthy family. They had big plans for me and fifty years ago it meant, that I was supposed to marry a man with money and good connections. I was supposed to become the perfect housewife and mother. I did not bother to tell them about my different ideas and very different sexual orientation. I just left when I turned eighteen. I had no money. I did not know anyone. I lived on the street for a while but I got lucky and found someone who was willing to give me chance. I started to work and collected enough money to move in with three other young women in a small apartment. That’s how I met Miranda.”

“Oh.”

“And that’s how I met Sarah. She was kind, smart and beautiful. And very popular. Everything that I was not. I fell for her fast and hard.”

“Did she…?”

“Yes. She loved me too. Everything was perfect. I had a steady job, I started to attend college and I was deeply and madly in love. Then one day I saw her hugging and kissing someone else. I did not wait for explanation. I just left.”

“Why didn’t you ask her? You said she loved you. I’m sure that it was a misunderstanding.”

“You think so? A misunderstanding?” asked Groot, teasingly. Andy groaned and buried her face into her palms as the realization hit.

“Oh. I did the same thing, didn’t I? I just ran away and did not give Miranda a chance to explain. I’m so messed up.”

“No, you’re not. It takes time, but you’ll get there.”

“What happened with Sarah?”

“Miranda came after me. She wasn’t angry or mad. She just reminded me that if I did not stop running I would lose the opportunity of happiness. Talk to Sarah she said. If you want to run away after that I won’t stop you.”

“Did you talk to her?”

“I did. It was the best decision of my life. The guy she was hugging was their cousin.”
“Their cousin?”

“Yes. Sarah was Miranda’s sister.”

“I didn’t know that. Miranda never mentioned her.”

“We don’t talk about her. Losing her was painful for all of us and I always thought that keeping my feelings to myself would ease the pain. Miranda respected that, actually she pretty much thought the same. But honestly now I think otherwise. I believe that talking about her and sharing the good memories would help healing. I just don’t know how to tell this to Miranda. Too many years passed in silence.”

“You should just tell her like that. You’re friends. Communication is very important in every relationship.”

“You think so?” Groot raised an eyebrow at Andy.

“God. Again. I’m telling you what I think is the right thing to do and I’m just doing the opposite.”

Groot reached out and squeezed Andy’s shoulder.

“See. You don’t need me, you already know what you have to do.”

“Why are you so nice to me? You hardly know me.”

“Miranda is crazy about you. I have never seen her like this before and I’ve known her for ages. You are the one who Miranda loves and adores. I don’t have to know anything else.”

Andy narrowed her eyes and looked at Groot skeptically.

Groot shrugged and offered a half smile. Standing up she walked to the nearest rack and propped against it. The brunette had stopped crying but the earlier tears were still evident on her face. She seemed so lost, so fragile, Groot felt sorry for her. She hoped that Miranda possessed the magic cure that would be able to heal poor girl’s heart.

“Perhaps you haven’t realized yet, but Miranda is a package deal.”

“A package deal? I... I don’t understand.”

“She means you don’t only have to deal with me...but my kids and those handful of people I care deeply for. For some unknown reason they are the utmost faithful. They care for me too and would do anything to see me happy. And you Andrea, you’ve made me happy beyond words.”

“Miranda!” Andy jumped up to her feet but her enthusiasm was halted by the forlorn look on the editor’s face. Miranda was standing there looking paler than usual, her posture rigid and Andy saw some unshuttered tears in her eyes.

“Miranda?” Andy reached out to take her hand, but Miranda shook her head and took a step backwards. None of them noticed that Groot had quietly left, leaving them alone. Miranda walked around the room, obviously searching for something. She stopped in front of a rack and took down a golden colored evening dress. Holding the dress in front of her she talked so softly, that Andy hardly understood her words.

“I wanted to ask you to accompany me to the Gala. I wanted you to wear this dress.”

“It’s a beautiful dress.” answered Andy quietly, she did not really know where this conversation was
headed.

“Yes, it is.” nodded Miranda sadly. She hung the dress back up and faced Andy.

“I want this...”, she motioned between them with her hand, “...to work, more than anything I’ve ever wanted.”

Andy’s face lit up and she opened her mouth to answer, but Miranda stopped her.

“Please. Let me finish, first.”

The older woman pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed deeply.

“But I don’t think that this is going to work.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Just a little something. Enjoy.

27.

“I don’t think that this is going to work.”

Andy was a freshman in college, when one of her study group friends came up with the idea of attending a paintball competition. It sounded like fun. And actually it was until Andy was shot from five feet by her own teammate. It was an accident, but it didn’t make it any less painful. She remembered the jolt of pain piercing through her chest, the desperate struggle to get some air into her lungs. Time slowed around her and she laughed at the pathetic way her life was going to end. She didn’t die of course. Her temporary bruises healed. Even her busted dignity recovered in time.

“I don’t think that this is going to work.”

Miranda’s words had the same effect as the accidentally fired paintball, from years ago. The pain she felt was like a physical blow and she wondered if this time the damage would be permanent. The thought of losing Miranda froze her mind and she just stared at the editor, waiting for the next punch that she knew was coming. She understood that Miranda had had enough of her insecurities. She had gotten tired of Andy running away, doubting her whenever something unusual happened. She couldn’t blame the older woman though. She hated herself for the same reasons Miranda would possibly give up on her.

“Miranda…I…” Andy tried to speak. She had to say something. She had to stop Miranda, had to explain before it was too late and there was no salvation. There was still hope wasn’t there? Didn’t Miranda just say that she wanted what they had? But she also said that it was not going to work. It was all so confusing and she felt that her chance to settle things with the other woman was slowly fading away.

“Wait.” said Miranda, before Andy could articulate a decent sentence. “Please.” she added, to soften the edge of her previous command.

Andy nodded obediently. Leaning back against the wall, she clasped her hands together and mentally braced herself.

“We jumped into something without really knowing each other. Was it too soon? Yes, it was. Did I regret it? No, I didn’t. Will I? Maybe, we don’t know just yet. But I can assure you that we are not leaving this room until we resolve this. Whatever this is. We are going to talk and we are going to come to an agreement. At the end we either walk out that door together, or…”

Miranda’s voice faltered. She didn’t finish the sentence. The possibility of the second option petrified her and saying it out loud would have made it even more real. She held on to the clothes rack and took off her heels. Not missing Andy’s dumfounded frown, Miranda shrugged her shoulders.

“Don’t look so surprised darling.” she said dryly. “In heels I won’t stand a chance of catching you if
you decide to run away again.”

“I’m not going to run. I promise.” answered Andy. “Besides, with Groot in your team, I wouldn’t get too far, would I?”

“Fair assumption.” chuckled Miranda. Despite the seriousness of the situation the image of the stocky Groot running after Andrea made her smile. She didn’t have many friends, but the ones she had were spectacular.

“I appreciate what you told her, Andrea. However I can’t decide whether it was genuine, or you merely humored her.”

Andy was taken aback. Why did Miranda insinuate that Andy intentionally misled Groot? And how much of their conversation did she actually hear? Andy had meant every word she said. Surely, Miranda must see that. She should trust Andy, shouldn’t she? “No, you moron.” Andy scolded herself. Why should she? Andy was the one who questioned Miranda’s motives. She was the one who had run away. She was the one with trust issues.

Miranda noticed immediately Andy’s internal turmoil. The shadow of pain that colored the younger woman’s face was hard to overlook.

“I’m sorry. That was uncalled for.” Miranda hastened to reassure. “You’ve never been anything other than honest with me and I doubt you would lie to anyone. It’s just…” Miranda swept through the racks, searching for something. She pursed her lips, when her eyes fell on a bright, neon pink coat, with grey stripes. She detached it from the hanger and dropped it on the floor. Sitting down, she motioned Andy to follow her example.

“James Holt. His collection this year is a complete disaster. Let’s use this…this piece…as a blanket. It’s the best we can do with it.”

Once they were both settled, Miranda took Andy’s hand between hers. The young woman’s skin was cold and slightly damp. She wasn’t looking at Miranda, she stared at their joined hands instead.

“Andrea. You hear something disturbing, you don’t wait for an explanation. You run. You see something unexpected. You run. You don’t communicate too well and right now you make me feel like a hypocrite, telling you this. I’m holding you accountable for something I’ve failed to do myself.”

Andy’s head jerked up.

“What do you mean?”

“You are not the only one Groot counseled today, darling. Apparently, I am the one who needs some improvement in the communication department. As much as I would like to say she was exaggerating I have to agree with her. I’m not used to explaining myself Andrea. In my past relationships. I did what I wanted, when I wanted and how I wanted. Regardless of whether my husbands liked it or not. I didn’t care. Then again, I didn’t care about them either. This time, with you it’s different. I care about you a great deal. I love you. I am in love with you.”

She lifted Andy’s hand and planted a soft kiss on her knuckles.

“I’m willing to change my ways and make effort to share more of myself with you Andrea. My thoughts. My motivations. My actions. It won’t be a smooth ride, because being in a loving, romantic relationship with honest communication doesn’t come naturally to me. More importantly, I can’t do this alone. Communication. It’s a two way street.” Miranda smiled.
Andy raised to her knees and pulled Miranda into an impulsive hug. What she felt was so overwhelming. Listening to Miranda gave her the hope that she didn’t royally screw things up. Miranda was willing to try. She was willing to make changes. She held on to Miranda so tightly, that the older woman had some difficulty breathing. Thankfully, Andy withdrew before the editor could run out of oxygen. Taking Miranda’s hands Andy sat back and cleared her throat.

“You are everything I’ve ever wanted, Miranda. You care for me. Love me. You are my shelter. My safe house. My heart feels it. My brain knows it. Yet, the demons of my past are working hard to destroy everything we’ve built. My first instinct is to run whenever my insecurities kick in. Run first, think later. It’s the number one survival tactic on the streets.”

“You’ve never talked about that part of your life Andrea. And I’ve never asked. Not out of ignorance. I believed you would tell me when you were ready. Maybe that was a mistake on my part. Do you think it would have made any difference if we’d talked about it?”

“Being homeless and living on the streets was…hard…but it’s just part of my issues.”

Andy took a deep breath. She owed it to Miranda to continue. She owed it to herself to let some of her demons go.

“My parents abandoned me when I was four. I only know that because my grandmother told me, not because I remember. Everything that happened before I came to live with my grandparents has been erased from my mind. Or maybe my memories are still there but are somehow blocked, as I can’t recall any of it. Grandma Eleanor got uneasy every time I asked about my parents or my past. As I was getting older my questionings became more frequent and I made her rather upset on several occasions. One day I pushed the subject too far and she didn’t handle it well. She suffered a mild stroke. That was the only time I saw Grandma Connie angry. She had never raised her voice at me before, but on that day she showed a very different face. She told me that she should have never agreed to take me in, no matter how much they were paid. She called me ungrateful and a burden. She didn’t say with words that she hated me but it was in her eyes. I was shocked. Frankly, she’d never been as affectionate as Grandma Eleanor. Most of the times she acted indifferent. But hate? Grandma Eleanor recovered quickly and on the surface everything went back to normal. Grandma Connie apologized and we pretended that it never happened. But it did. I’ve never asked them about my parents again. And I didn’t ask them what payment Grandma Connie was talking about. I’ve never revealed the real reason I was so keen to get information. Maybe if I’d told them, they would had been more understanding.”

Miranda gently squeezed her hand, encouraging her to go on. Andy drew strength from the silent support and continued her story.

“I was scared Miranda. Scared that one day they would come back and take me away. I lived with that fear through my entire childhood, never feeling safe. Coming face to face with Grandma Connie’s momentary hostility increased my insecurities. Despite the truce between us, I firmly believed that she was just waiting for the opportunity to send me away.”

Miranda imagined Andrea as a little girl, alone with her fears and her heart sank. Everything made more sense now.

“College was uneventful and I was thankful for that. Then came Jaqueline and Christian and they threw me out of balance. My first day on the street was almost was my last one. I made a huge mistake of trusting someone, a stranger and it almost cost me my life. I met a homeless woman, who gave me some useful tips on how to survive. She told me about the shelters and how I should avoid going there. She recommended places to stay and because she seemed honest and nice enough, I went with her. Soon enough I found myself in a dirty alley in a company of two men. According to
their comments, she basically sold me to them.”

“Oh my God.” Miranda shivered. She felt nauseous and wondered if there was a way to hunt down those bastards.

“I was pushed against a massive dumpster and I knew it was over, I didn’t stand a chance against those men alone. I closed my eyes, waiting for the inevitable. But then I heard a deep growl behind me and something jumped over my shoulder, out of the dumpster.”

“Bruno.” Miranda thought back to their conversation on Christmas Eve. Andy had mentioned that Bruno had saved her life, although she didn’t go into details.

Andy nodded and cracked a half-hearted smile.

“He was skin and bones but fierce as hell. Fortunately those bastards ran away without putting up a serious fight.”

“I’m sorry Andrea. I had no idea… I”

“No one did, Miranda. I hope you understand now, why I kept running. I…” she paused. She weighed the words she was going to say. A lot, if not everything, depended on the next few seconds. She took a deep calming breath and continued.

“Your love is healing me, not overnight though. It is going to be a long process. Will you stand by me? Help me through?”

Miranda got to her feet and looked down at Andy.

“A long process you say?”

Andy bit her lower lip and nodded tentatively. She couldn’t read Miranda’s expression, it was somewhat impassive. That was it. The end. Miranda was walking away. And why wouldn’t she? She was Miranda Priestly and Miranda Priestly deserved the best. The best, which Andy wasn’t. She was just a poor, homeless artist, caring more baggage than one could handle. Strangely enough Andy didn’t feel anything. Emptiness filled her heart, her brain stopped functioning. No pain. No thoughts. Nothing. Maybe it wasn’t happening. Maybe it wasn’t real. Just a dream. Or more like a nightmare.

“Andrea?”

Gentle fingers wiped the tears, she had not realized had begun to fall, off her face. Soft lips captured hers, reviving her dying soul. Miranda.

“I suppose I can spare some time.” whispered Miranda against her lips.

Pulling back, Miranda sat on her heels, holding her opened hand in front of Andy.

Andy gasped. There was an exquisite, infinity heart-shaped, sapphire ring in the editor’s palm.

“How about a lifetime?”
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your kind reviews and constant support.  
I gave our leading ladies a day off, this chapter is dedicated to the supporting characters.  
I hope you still enjoy it.

28.

“What the heck happened to you?”

The sight of Yvonne, sitting in a wheelchair next to the fireplace, wasn’t exactly what Groot expected when she entered the cozy living room in Miranda’s home. The editor had called her earlier, briefly explaining the greatly improved situation with Andy and had also asked her to go the house to keep Cassidy and Caroline company. There was the promise of a tasty dinner and some wonderful, life changing news. What Miranda failed to mention, was the reason why the Hamptons visit was cut short. Groot assumed it had something to do with Yvonne’s doctor duties. It had happened before, and she braced herself to deal with the grumpy, disappointed twins. To her surprise the girls didn’t seem upset in the least. They were deeply occupied with drawing colorful motifs on the doctor’s cast covered leg. Yvonne looked up and pursed her lips, almost Miranda like. Almost.

“I fell…Duh.”

“Fell? From where?”

“From a huuuuuuge tree.” Yvonne whispered, bewildered.

“A tree? Seriously, Yvonne. What were you thinking?”

The doctor shrugged then she started to sing happily “Carmen and Yvonne sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G.”

“I see.” Groot narrowed her eyes and glanced at the girls who never stopped working on the cast. They were either completely ignoring the conversation going on around them, or quite the opposite, they were all ears. Many times in the past, the little rascals surprised her with their efficient observation and intel collecting skills. She learnt that one could never be careful enough with the twins around. She pulled a chair closer to the fire and sat down.

“So, dudettes. How was the Hamptons?”

Cassidy grinned and chanced a quick look with Caroline.

“It was great. Until Auntie Y decided to rescue a dead cat from the top of a tree.”

“A dead cat?”

“It wasn’t actually dead. Or a cat per se.” an unfamiliar voice chipped in and Groot jumped up when she recognized the newcomer stepping in the room. Adriana Wallace.
“Aha.” said Groot. “What am I missing?” she inquired when Cassidy started to giggle. Soon Caroline joined, followed by Adriana. Yvonne was still singing the silly kissing song or rather she was repeating the first line over and over again. Whatever drugs she was given in the hospital clearly worked well.

“It was an owl made of clay. For some unknown reason the good doctor firmly believed that it was in a need of a rescue.” Adriana winked at the girls and patted Yvonne’s shoulder affectionately. She caught a disapproval scowl on Groot’s face and added apologetically. “It wasn’t this funny at that time, I swear. We are just relieved that at the end it was a lucky fall. Yvonne only strained her ankle, no break, although we had assumed the worst.”

Groot’s expression did not soften. She kept starring at Adriana. The other woman started to feel like a bug under a researcher’s microscope.

“Popcorn time.” Caroline declared out of nowhere and rushed out of the door.

“What she said.” exclaimed Cassidy and run after her sister.

Yvonne dozed off, leaving Groot and Adriana in a sudden and somewhat uncomfortable silence. Groot was astonished. Being in the same room with Adriana Wallace threw her out of balance. Adriana was a world famous sculptor and potter. She was known for her detailed, realistic sculptures and vivid unusual color combinations. Groot was 14 when she first saw Adriana’s works in a gallery in New York and instantly fell in love with her art. Her friends and Sarah often teased her, calling Adriana her celebrity crush and Groot just smiled and took the teasing kindly. After her wife’s death the world almost ended for Groot too. Miranda and Yvonne tried everything possible to pull her out of the deep, dark hole she buried herself in, but at the end it was Adriana Wallace’s art that helped her through her mourning. She spent hours in the Solace gallery, taking great comfort from the colors and shapes. Soon enough the place became Groot’s safe harbor, providing what she needed most. Peace and solace. Despite spending lots of time in the gallery, strangely enough she never met Adriana and that sat well for Groot. She feared that the perfect image she created would crash if Adriana herself was not every bit of what her art suggested. Now Adriana was standing right in front of her and Groot was overwhelmed by her beauty and grace.

“Is there a problem?” Adriana asked quietly. “You’re starring.” she added. She kept her voice low, she didn’t want to disturb the doctor’s slumber.

Groot shook her head.

“I apologize. Making you uncomfortable was not my intention.” She couldn’t help but grimace when she noticed that Adriana’s hand was still resting on Yvonne’s shoulder. Adriana didn’t miss the look. She withdrew her hand and held it out.

“I don’t think we have been introduced. I’m Adriana. Adriana Wallace.

Groot slowly took the offered hand and blushed hard at the contact.

“I…she cleared her throat “I know”

“And you are?”

Groot winced. She was so lost in the sensation of meeting her idol that she forgot all her manners. She wondered what Adriana must have thought of her. “She probably thinks you are a world class dumbass.” she scolded herself mutely.

“Groot.” She muttered.
“Pardon me?”

“Groot.”

“Sorry what?”

“Groot. I am Groot.”

As soon as the words were out Groot realized her mistake. The mischievous glint in the older woman’s eyes was a definite affirmation of the set up. Groot rolled her eyes and cracked a half smile.

“But you already knew that, didn’t you.”

Adriana laughed quietly. “I hoped for an opportunity to pull that off. And I made you smile, so it was worth the effort.”

Groot was uncertain, how to take that comment. Sure she smiled. Often. Or sometimes. But she definitely smiled. She must have said that out loud because Adriana shook her head.

“No. You don’t smile.”

“I don’t?”

“According to the girls, no, you don’t.” answered Adriana. She didn’t know how Groot would react, she didn’t appear as a person who liked to be talked about. The twins mentioned her many times and the way they described their beloved auntie Groot filled Adriana’s heart with tenderness toward the woman she had never met before. In person, Groot was exactly what she imagined. The strong, silent type. She oozed confidence but not in the arrogant, cocky way Adriana hated and had unfortunately experienced with many before. She was ruggedly handsome, well built and the artist in Adriana itched to sculpt her.

“And the girls are right. You don’t smile. Not anymore.” Yvonne tried to suppress a yawn.

“Boy, these pills are dangerous.” She shifted in her seat and gestured toward the women, who were still holding hands.

“Can I join? Or this is a private hand holding party?”

Groot blushed again and released Adriana’s hand. Shit. Now she wouldn’t hear the end of this. Yvonne would make sure to rub her nose in it and would probably come up with an over the top tale that started with. “the time I caught them holding hands”.

“Your timing sucks, Yvonne” Groot murmured.

“What did you say?” asked Yvonne innocently, not batting an eyelash.

“I was just inquiring about your health and overall comfort level, Yvonne. Are you comfy enough? Need anything?” answered Groot, keeping her voice neutral.

“I’m quite content, thank you. Adriana takes good care of me. I might have to ask her to move in with me. And then who knows, marriage maybe?”

“Cool down, Doc. You are cute, but hardly my type.”

“Let me assure you, I’m everybody’s type.” And there it was, the cocky smile, Yvonne’s trademark. While Groot loved Yvonne, she despised the player in her. It was a common argument between the
two of them, they often ended up not talking to each other for days. She hoped, that Adriana wouldn’t fall for the charm, which broke so many hearts before.

It appeared that she didn’t have to worry. Adriana was more than capable of handling Yvonne’s big ego.

“Is that so? I suppose I missed that memo.”

“Why so cold, Adriana. You’ve hurt my fragile feelings.” pouted Yvonne, placing both hands over her heart in a dramatic gesture.

Adriana laughed softly.

“Why don’t you save this for that sweet girl, who is on her way here to nurse you back to life? However, she might change her mind after hearing your corny lines.”

Yvonne leaned back in her chair and raised an eyebrow.

“What sweet girl?”

“Carmen, I believe her name is.”

“Carmen? How do you know about her? And how does she know about my accident? No, no. I don’t want her to see me like this. In a wheelchair. Crippled.”

“You should have thought of that before you sent her dozen messages, begging her for forgiveness and saying other silly things that only people in love would say.”

“What?”

“You used my cell phone, Doc. I’m impressed, that you actually know her number by heart. Isn’t that sweet?” she asked, turning to Groot. Groot tilted her head and after a couple seconds she nodded in agreement.

“Absolutely. And I’m sure Miranda will also find this very, very, very, sweet. Right, Yvonne?”

Yvonne dropped her head into her palms and groaned.

“I’m screwed.”
“It’s broken. Mommy, it’s broken.”
“What’s broken Sunshine?”
“I’m sorry, Mommy. I broke it.”
“Oh Sunshine. It’s not broken. See?”

“There is an accident ahead of us, Ms. Priestly. I’m afraid we are stuck here.”

The car came to a sudden halt and the driver’s apologetic voice emerged from the speaker, waking Andy from her unsettling dream.

“Stuck?” asked Miranda, and Andy instantly recognized her tone. The editor was seconds away from verbally ripping off someone’s, in this case, the replacement driver’s head. Placing her hand above Miranda’s she gently called for her attention. When she had it, she shook her head and Miranda sighed resignedly. Pressing the com button she instructed the driver to find out how long they were likely to be “stuck”, but respecting Andy’s silent wish she didn’t scare poor guy to death.

“Happy now?” she asked Andy, who nodded gratefully and rewarded Miranda with a chaste kiss.

“Thank you Miranda. I know you’re eager to get home and share the news with the girls, but” - she leaned closer and whispered seductively - “I actually don’t mind being stuck here with you.”

Miranda looked out of the window, seemingly unaffected by Andy’s obvious suggestion.

“You don’t? Hmm.”

“Hmm? That’s not the reaction I was hoping for. We just got engaged and already heading toward lesbian bed death?”

Miranda took a deep breath and turned towards Andy. Taking her hand between hers she sighed again.

“Andrea. There is something I have to share with you. You might not like it but you must understand, it is essential to the success of our marriage. We can’t have sex.”

“What do you mean, we can’t have sex? Ever?”

“Don’t be silly. Of course we will have sex. After the wedding. As you know I am Jewish. There aren’t many rules I follow, however this one is crucial. We can’t sleep together until after the wedding. You stay in your room, I stay in mine. No kissing. No touching. And most of all, no funny business.”

She patted Andy’s face in a condescending manner.

“I hope you understand Darling.”

“I’m so glad you told me this, Miranda. As you know I’m Catholic. There aren’t many rules I follow but there is one that is crucial. We can only have sex for the purpose of procreation.”

She mimicked Miranda’s patronizing gesture and patted the older woman’s hand.
“I hope you understand babe.”

“Really?” asked Miranda still managing to keep a straight face. “How fascinating. What about our previous encounters?”

“Encounters? Are you talking about the wild hot monkey sex, you, the suddenly so religious Jewish lady enjoyed oh so much…before our engagement?”

Miranda raised an eyebrow and Andy noticed the corner of her mouth twitch.

Waving away Miranda’s question nonchalantly, Andy winked playfully.

“Don’t worry sweetie. I’ll just go to confession and we’ll be good.”

The heartfelt, unrestricted laugh was exactly what they needed. Their mutual understanding of them being friends, partners, lovers and most of all each other’s equal concluded in that goofy conversation and the laughter that followed. They laughed away the stress of the past couple hours. All the ill feelings got wrapped into that one almost never ending cascade of giggles and were washed away, wave after wave.

Miranda was amazed how that afternoon changed Andrea. Changed her and changed the outcome of their future. The young woman was literally speechless after Miranda’s proposal up until the point where the editor almost regretted her actions and was about to run away herself. At the end it didn’t happen, because Andy let out a hollow yes. Then another, louder one. And after that she broke the world record for the most yeses given to a marriage proposal. The most yeses and possibly the most kisses as well. Then they talked for hours. Andy was informed that her ban was lifted and Edwin Hollwin was still eager to arrange an exhibition for her. Albeit reluctantly, Miranda told Andy about Jaqueline Follett. How the woman used Miranda’s name to blacklist Andy. Andy didn’t blame Miranda and she seemed satisfied with the way, Miranda delivered her counterblow. The promise of an upcoming show excited and perplexed the young artist at the same time. However, she was willing to believe Miranda’s encouragement that she was more than ready for it. Andy couldn’t believe all the trouble Miranda went through just for her but by any means it was the SF project that gave her the final, most important insight into Miranda’s devotion to her. As Miranda refused to reveal the meaning of the abbreviation, Andy made a mental note to ask Groot later who the mastermind was behind the label. Andy was reading the documents, presented by Miranda and her first reaction was pure shock. By the time she finished, she was grinning like a fool and her heart was filled with joy and comfort. She could hardly wait for the Gala, where the project would be put in motion.

During those hours in the Closet, they learnt a lot about themselves and each other. Andy understood that she could freely express her needs and wants. That she could be bold and push Miranda’s limits. Miranda on the other hand learnt that being open and honest with her feelings didn’t necessarily mean being vulnerable. Miranda made a half sarcastic comment about their progress, stating that in her previous relationships years of therapy would have not delivered the same result. In response Andy whispered some of the reasons in her ears, leaving Miranda slightly embarrassed but aroused nonetheless.

Their laughter slowly died and they were sitting quietly, holding hands. Miranda traced the outlines of the ring on Andy’s finger.

“This ring suits you perfectly, darling. Stunning. Both, you and the ring.”

“Your taste is impeccable, Miranda. Both in rings and women.” answered Andy gleefully. She straightened her fingers and admired the ring for a moment.
“I’ve never seen anything so magnificent before, yet the design is somewhat familiar. I assume this is not something you can buy at any jewelry store, am I right?”

Miranda pursed her lips and gave Andy the look.

“Really, Andrea. Would I ask my girl to marry me, with a ring anyone could buy at any jewelry shop?”

“Uhm…no?”

“It was a rhetorical question, but you are right. I wouldn’t. I came across this ring last month in a charity auction. It is part of a four piece collection, called the Infinity Hearts. At first I wanted it for myself, but the ring was designed in a unique way. It cannot be resized.”

“Oh. I wonder if that was intentional.”

“Possibly. Although I couldn’t wear it, I bought it. It was for charity and there was something in this piece of jewelry that drew me in.” Lifting Andy’s hand she gently kissed her palm. “Serendipity. I found a ring then I found a girl whose finger it fit.”

“Modern day Cinderella.”

“Honestly, Andrea. You can’t seriously believe that in all of that Kingdom there was only one girl with size six feet?”

“I don’t know about that, Miranda. But you’d better believe that in this Kingdom there is only one girl with the perfect finger.”

“Oh that’s all right, darling. You don’t have to worry. I am utterly devoted to your perfect fingers. And other body parts.”

It sounded like a challenge, but before Andy could put her highly praised body part into action, the car started to move.

“All clear Ms. Priestly. Estimated arrival in ten minutes.”

It was after seven pm when they arrived at the townhouse. Getting out of the car, Andy saw a small figure standing in front of the door. The faint light from above didn’t expose the identity of the visitor until they got closer.

“Carmen?” whispered Andy to Miranda. “What is she doing here? Isn’t she on holiday?”

Miranda didn’t answer. She knew instantly why the housekeeper was there and she didn’t hide her annoyance about it. Stepping up the stairs she addressed the nervous looking woman coldly.

“She called you, didn’t she?”

Carmen nodded, didn’t she?

“Messaged. Those messages were so unlike her, Miranda. She scared me.”

“Scared you? I was under the impression, that her injury was not that serious?”

Collecting her bravado, Carmen looked directly at the editor and managed to answer without her voice faltering.

“No, it’s not about her accident. She scared me, because those messages forced me to face the truth.
To accept it.”

Miranda studied her for a long second and she didn’t have to guess what her long time housekeeper meant. It was written all over her face. Love.

“You love her.”

“I do. I know you don’t appreciate that and if it’s going to affect my employment with…”

Miranda raised a hand preventing her from finishing. The interruption increased the level of tension and Andy prepared herself to intervene if, or most likely when, Miranda expressed her displeasure. Carmen was anxiously fidgeting with her bag strap and Miranda…well Miranda tightened her lips and hummed.

“This is hardly a conversation that should take place here, at my front door, but we might as well set this straight right now.”

Carmen’s face fell as she knew what was coming. Miranda was going to fire her. The housekeeper understood that the editor didn’t want to see her friend dating an employee. She probably thought that a blue collar worker had no business with a doctor unless they were sick. She was going to lose her job and there was a chance that it was all for nothing. She was in love with Yvonne, but she couldn’t trust the doctor’s drug induced intentions. She closed her eyes, fighting to keep her tears at bay. She must have completely missed what Miranda said because when she looked up the editor was looking at her, obviously waiting for some sort of a response. Next to her, Andy was smiling widely.

“I’m sorry, Miranda” Carmen stuttered “I didn’t follow…”

“Wonderful. You know how I love to repeat myself. I said, you’d better make it work because I don’t intend to put up with not just one, but two heartbroken women in my family.”

“Family?”

“Keep up, Carmen. That’s all.”
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Sometimes we all need a little release.

30.

“I can’t believe that dude. Picking up his own kids and leaving the twins and his injured sister-in law behind. What a moron.”

“His actions are unacceptable, indeed. I’ve never cared much about him. For Yvonne’s sake I avoided any confrontation but this time he went too far. Fur allergy, my ass.”

“Did Miranda Priestly just say, my ass? Shocking.”

“Let me shock you even more, Darling. I have several prepared sentences with the word ass in them. I can also name many other, very important body parts.”

“Promising. I’ll quiz you later and reward you generously for any right or wrong answer.”

Andy grinned cheekily, when she noticed the light blush on the editor’s face, the darkening of her eyes and the hardening of her nipples, which were peeking so obviously through her white blouse. The older woman had gotten the meaning of Andy’s idea of a reward and according to her body’s reaction, she found it appealing. Reaching over Miranda, Andy grabbed the kitchen cloth from the counter and playfully shoved the other woman aside with her hip.

“I got this beautiful. Why don’t you just sit down and let me finish up.”

Miranda nodded slowly. Her eyes were roaming over Andy’s body hungrily. Mentally and emotionally she was exhausted, yet her body was vibrating with need. After they got home, they had had no opportunity to release the pent-up sexual tension which had been building since they sealed their commitment in the Closet. The family dinner was overwhelming. At first they managed to keep it low key and somewhat quiet. Yvonne and Carmen were ushered into Miranda’s study and strictly ordered to sort out whatever was going on between them, which they more or less did, as happiness was written all over their faces, when they emerged an hour later, glowing. Dinner had been delivered and their new acquaintance, Adriana, had excused herself trying to make her leave, but they didn’t let her depart. Miranda, who had felt utterly grateful for the artist’s participation in getting her girls home, insisted that she stay and have dinner with them. It didn’t escape her attention, how Groot’s mood improved when Adriana reluctantly complied. Everything went well and most importantly quiet until the second course. Cassidy discovered the ring on Andy’s finger and their dinner morphed into a chaotic, wedding planning fiesta, orchestrated by the girls. No wonder, that by the end of the evening both Miranda and Andy were toast and ready to escape to their room. The twins went to bed, dragging Adriana with them to discuss some very important artistic matters concerning the wedding. Groot helped Carmen take Yvonne home and finally it was just the two of them, quietly tidying the kitchen. Miranda cleared her throat and tore her eyes away from Andy’s oh so inviting derriere.

“I’ll make some coffee. I know it’s late, but we had an eventful day. I doubt we would fall asleep
any time soon.”

She switched places with Andy, making sure to brush her traitor nipples against the brunette’s back in the process. For a second Andy froze at the contact. The cloth fell from her hand. She spun around fast enough to catch the knowing smirk on Miranda’s face. Their eyes met and the smirk disappeared.

“Andrea. We can’t… not here.”

“Yes, we can. And we will.”

The fire in the younger woman’s eyes, the assertiveness in her voice surprised Miranda. It was something new. Something unexpected. In their short relationship it was always Miranda who led the way. She was the strong, dominant one. Until this moment.

Andy didn’t move. There was a respectable distance between them, but it still felt as though Andy was towering over Miranda, enfolding her, so Miranda stepped back until she hit the kitchen island. Unable to look away from those chocolate brown eyes, she shook her head and said almost pleadingly.

“The kids…and Groot could be back any minute…”

An unreadable, small smile ghosted Andy’s lips. She still didn’t move, just kept staring at Miranda. The editor nervously licked her upper lip and tugged on the collar of her blouse. Someone must have turned on the heat, the temperature had increased in the kitchen and she was hot. Her whole body was burning up. Or maybe she was coming down with something? She tugged on the blouse again and the top buttons popped open, revealing that she was not wearing a bra. She reached to fix it but a warm hand covered hers, preventing her from proceeding. Andy was there, pressing her against the cold marble, breathing heavily in her ears.

“No. Leave it.”

“Andrea. Not here. When we’re alone. In our bedroom.” She managed to sound confident, or so she thought. In reality it was hardly more than a weak whimper. Every cell in her body was screaming for release while her brain fought to stay in charge. They were in the kitchen, anyone could walk in on them. It wasn’t safe. It wasn’t private. It wasn’t… She couldn’t finish her mental list of why it was a bad idea, because Andy bit down on her earlobe and whispered seductively.

“Here’s the deal Miranda. I’m going to touch you. If you are not soaking wet already, you are free to go. We take this to the bedroom, as you requested. But…” She sneaked one hand up Miranda’s thigh, while her other hand slid under the editor’s blouse and roughly palmed her breasts. “if you are as wet, as I think you are, I am going to fuck you. Right here. Right now.”

Miranda closed her eyes in surrender, grabbing the edge of the island she widened her stance to give Andy better access. She hissed in surprise, when the younger woman hooked her fingers under her thong’s waistband and yanked it hard. The thin material gave in easily.

“What have we here?” Andy drew a fingertip from Miranda’s opening up to her clit, gathering a ridiculous amount of wetness. “Just as I expected. Wet. Swollen. Ready for me.”

Pulling back, Andy lifted her hand, looking at the heavily coated digits in awe. The heady scent hit her nostrils and she swallowed hard. “Exquisite. We can’t waste such a precious aphrodisiac, can we?”

With one swift motion Andy pulled Miranda’s shirt down, trapping her arms against her sides and
exposing her breasts. Miranda’s eyes popped open. Looking down at her own bare chest, she watched as Andy spread the juices over her painfully erect nipples, slowly, as if she had all time in the world. She could have moved if she had wanted. She could have told Andrea to stop this nonsense. They had a perfectly comfortable bed upstairs. But it didn’t matter. The only thing she could focus on was Andrea. Her hot lips sucking on her nipples. Her teeth biting, nipping her sensitive skin. Her long, probing fingers, parting her labia, the feather light strokes, barely touching, driving her crazy, pushing her towards an inevitable and very much needed orgasm.

“How do you want this, Miranda?” Andy asked, pressing firmer into Miranda’s bosom, tracing her puckered areola with her nose. She smelled divine. “I can bend you over the counter and take you from behind.” Taking a nipple between her teeth, she swirled her tongue around the hardened nub, her fingers mimicking the same motion between Miranda’s legs, teasing her slick opening. Miranda groaned, her hips rocking in sync with Andy’s ministration.

“Andrea…Inside, please.”

“Inside? Hmm…I bet, you could handle three no, four fingers. Or maybe five? Would you want that Miranda? Feeling my whole hand inside you? Stretching your pussy with my fist, fucking you mercilessly until you come, knowing that you have to be quiet? A gush of wetness drenched her hand as Andy increased the speed of her movement, but refused to give Miranda what she desperately wanted.

“Inside…damn it.”

Andy laughed softly but didn’t comply.

“Maybe I should fuck your ass instead Miranda. Your wonderful, tight ass. Maybe you want to be filled both ways at the same time? I can do that too. Or you can be a good girl and help me. You can spread your pussy nice and wide and hold it open while I suck you.”

Dropping her forehead on Andy’s shoulder Miranda whined pitifully. Dirty talk had never been her forte, she couldn’t imagine liking it, let alone finding it arousing. Until now. The graphic image of Andrea fucking her, using her as no one has done before stimulated her beyond words. Her pussy clenched and she felt her sticky juices dripping down her thighs. She was close. She needed to come. Surely Andrea wouldn’t want her to beg? She wouldn’t beg. No. She wasn’t that desperate.

“Andrea…please.”

“I see you don’t want to be a good girl. You want to come so bad, don’t you? You want it fast and hard. Don’t worry, I’ll give it to you.”

She plunged into Miranda, as she promised, fast and hard. The older woman was hot and tight, her pussy clenched rhythmically around Andy’s fingers. Two then three fingers slid in and out of her effortlessly, she matched the brunette’s forceful thrusts by jerking her pelvis forward. Andy’s palm hit her over sensitized clit with every plunge, her movement become more and more erratic. The burning sensation in her groin erupted into fire and she came, crying her release against Andy’s neck. Andy waited until the last tremors subsided before she eased her fingers out.

“Oh my god. Where did this come from?” Miranda chuckled weakly, her head still resting on Andy’s shoulder. Her legs felt wobbly, seemingly all her muscles had turned into jelly. A pleasant soreness had developed between her thighs, and she would certainly have a reminder of their kitchen encounter for a couple days.

Andy stepped back and gently adjusted Miranda’s blouse. Her earlier confidence had disappeared,
and she looked everywhere but Miranda.

“I am so sorry, Miranda. I shouldn’t have done…” her voice faltered. A lone teardrop appeared in the corner of her eye and she looked…ashamed?

“Andrea, what? What’s wrong?” Miranda held out her hand but Andy took another step backwards and shook her head.

“I can’t believe I did that.”

“Did what?” Miranda was totally lost, she couldn’t interpret her fiancé’s crestfallen expression.

“That I just fucked you like that. I didn’t even kiss you for God’s sake.” She buried her face into her palms and sighed shakily.

“What are you talking about, Darling? It was wonderful. You were wonderful. Something different, yes, but very welcomed nonetheless.”

Andy reluctantly looked up and studied Miranda, searching for clues of whether she was genuine or if she was only trying to comfort her. Seeing nothing but honest concern and pure love she flashed a wary half smile. Miranda opened her arms and Andy accepted the silent invitation without hesitation.

“Don’t get me wrong, I love making love with you, Andrea. I adore your tenderness, I crave your gentle touches. All the same, you just took me on a journey, I intend to repeat in the future. I am going to expect, if not demand this raw, unleashed passion. Your possessiveness. I want you to convert your words into actions.”

“You mean?”

“Yes.”

“Oh”

“And as for the kisses,” Miranda cradled Andy’s face and leaned closer “you can make it up to me, any time.”

“Any time?” whispered Andy.

“Any time.” murmured Miranda and captured Andy’s lips in a gentle, reassuring kiss.

They were so lost in the kiss, that they didn’t hear Groot’s arrival. The stocky woman walked into the kitchen humming quietly. She halted abruptly at the sight of the kissing women, who didn’t seem to be bothered by her entrance. Then her gaze fell on the abandoned panties laying on the floor and she gulped.

“Why don’t I go and check on…the dogs?” Blushing she retreated, leaving a very oblivious, happy couple behind.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Where is this going... you wonder. Don't worry, it's going somewhere.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your kind comments.

31.

“Searing hot. And decaf.” Andy placed a mug of freshly brewed coffee in front of Miranda.

“Decaf? We have decaf coffee?” Miranda grimaced, eyeing the mug skeptically.

“Apparently, WE do.” Andy squeezed Miranda’s hand affectionately. She had noticed how Miranda had started to use “we” and “us” more often and every time it happened Andy’s heart swelled with love and appreciation.

“It’s getting really late sweetheart. You don’t want to be up all night do you?”

“What’s wrong with being up all night?” pouted Miranda. She took a sip and pursed her lips.

“Decaf. Scandalous.”

Andy shook her head smiling. Reaching out, she brushed an unruly, white strand behind the editor’s ear and gave her a sweet peck on the lips.

“You’ll live, Mira.”

Miranda took another sip and glanced at her watch.

“You’re right, Darling. It’s late. I wonder if we should go and rescue Adriana. It’s past the girls’ bedtime.”

Adriana. Miranda, who normally reserved with her affection, took and instant liking to the well-known artist. She was certain, that they had not met before, yet the woman’s attitude, her gestures were hauntingly familiar. She was a witty conversationalist, radiated warmth and peace. She lacked the stuck-up, self-importance that many artist in New York suffered from. The girls adored her, Andrea was smitten as well and Groot…Groot acted like a love struck teenager, which was bittersweet to observe.

“We should give them some more time. They were very excited. They need to cool down. In the meantime, I hope they don’t wear out Adriana.” Andy inhaled the flowery aroma of her tea and poured some honey in it. “I think they’ve developed a huge crush on her.”

Miranda nodded.
“They are not the only ones, Darling. Did you know that she is Groot’s celebrity crush?”

“Adriana? Celebrity crush? That’s so cute.”

“Cute? Don’t let Groot hear that.”

“She’s a big softie, she wouldn’t mind.”

“Hello. I am sitting right here.” Groot, who was indeed sitting right there, nursing a steaming mug, waved but she was deliberately ignored by the couple. “Yeah. Don’t mind me. Just let me sit here and bathe in the glory of this overly sweet domestic bliss.”

“Speaking of cuties and softies. Who is your celebrity crush, pretty lady? Just for future reference…” asked Andy.

“Yes, pretty lady. Tell us, who your celebrity crush is?” Groot chimed in.

Leaning back in her chair, Miranda raised an eyebrow and faked a bored expression.

“Nonsense. You both should know by now that people are crushing on me, not the other way around. I am the definition of celebrity crush.”


Holding her friend tight, she confessed quietly, raw emotions coloring her voice. “I love you. I know that I don’t tell you this as many times as you deserve to hear but I am grateful for you. Gertie. My… our life would be deficient without you. And most of all, thank you for talking to Andrea today.”

Groot awkwardly returned the hug. She wasn’t used to receiving hugs from Miranda or from anyone for that matter. She couldn’t recall the last time she was embraced like that and although it was just a friendly hug it felt wonderful.

“You are suffocating me.” she said, to cover her embarrassment. In defiance of her words, she didn’t try to withdraw, instead she tightened her grasp around the editor.

“They care for me and would do anything to see me happy.” Miranda’s confident statement echoed in Andy’s mind as she watched the heartwarming scene. It absolutely made sense. Andy still had a lot to learn about these women but she understood their strong bond. She also suspected, it wasn’t typical for them to express their feelings this openly.

“So…Gertie.” Andy said teasingly. She needed to lighten the mood, before she burst into tears.

Groot released Miranda and turning to Andy, shrugged. “Yeah, that’s me.”

“Gertie? As in…?”

“Gertrude. Now, we all know my dirty little secret, can we just move on?”

“I think it suits you.” A new voice joined the conversation and Groot’s face turned bright red at the sight of her “celebrity crush” standing at the door, smiling warmly.

“It does?”

Adriana strolled in to the kitchen. She almost reached the little group when she stumbled, but luckily
she found support by gripping Groot’s arm.

Groot glanced at the artist’s shoes and frowned. Something occurred to her and she was about to speak but changed her mind and stayed silent.

Unwilling to let it go of Groot just yet Adriana continued to hold on to her firmly. Touching Groot, feeling her sturdy muscles under her palm, once again filled her with want. She desperately wanted to sculpt her, although she had no faith in scoring a yes if she ever asked.

“Gertrude means strength. And you my friend, are the perfect example of the strong and silent type I…many women long for.”

Groot didn’t seem to notice the slip, she was too busy blushing but Miranda did and smiled knowingly. Surprise, surprise. It appeared, that Groot wasn’t the only one affected.

“Adriana. I hope my daughters behaved well?”

“They are delightful kids, Miranda. I greatly enjoyed their company. They are little chatterboxes, with many stories to share. I consider myself an expert on the Priestly-Sachs family now.”

“Priestly-Sachs?” Andy asked, not daring to look at Miranda. Yes, they were engaged and all, but maybe it was too fresh to talk about combined family names.

“They love you dear.” Adriana told Andy. “Their, and I’m quoting, “utter and most important wish” is that the two of you get married, so they can have a second cool mom and an even cooler family name. Priestly-Sachs.”

“But we haven’t really talked about…” Andy shrugged helplessly “About this stuff.”

“We haven’t, Darling, although it doesn’t mean it’s not happening. When I proposed to you it was with the intention of marrying you as soon as possible. I don’t fancy a long, meaningless engagement. And as for the names, I would be honored to wear yours, assuming you would feel the same.” Miranda lifted Andy’s hand and kissed her knuckle, above the ring. Andy beamed at her lover and leaned in, resting her forehead against Miranda’s, caressing the hand holding hers. For a minute they forgot about their company, and only came around when Adriana called out softly.

“I’m afraid I cannot impose on you any longer. I should take my leave.” She let go of Groot but a flash of pain in her left leg made her reclaim her previous position. Groot reacted quickly, draping an arm around her waist.

“I’m sorry.

“I wasn’t planning to be away from home and on my feet all day. I need to lay down. I need to...”

“I understand” Groot cut in. “I’ll drive you home.”

“That’s not necessary, Groot. It’s not safe driving to the Hamptons late at night, in this weather. I call a cab and spend the night in my gallery. I have an almost comfortable couch in my office there.”

“Absolutely not.” Miranda’s voice left no room for disagreement “No one leaves the house tonight. Groot? Please escort Adriana to the guestroom on the first floor. Adriana? I trust the room will be satisfactory and if you need anything please do not hesitate to ask Groot. Her room is next to yours.”

Groot knew when not to argue with Miranda. “All right. Shall we?”

Adriana was too tired and in too much in pain to debate, so she just let Groot take over and after saying goodnight to their hosts, she allowed Groot to lead her to the guestroom. To her
disappointment, the younger woman departed almost immediately. Adriana wasn’t any stranger to loneliness. It had been her companion for years and most of the time she handled it well. But not tonight. Tonight she craved being close to someone. A definite someone with sad but kind eyes and a compact muscular body. It was not supposed to happen. She was not supposed to feel this way. Groot was a woman. No woman had caught her attention before. Groot was also younger than her. Much younger. She must have been in her late forties and Adriana, well Adriana was old. She had wrinkles and she wasn’t a size four anymore. There was a light knock on the door, interrupting her inner musing.

“Yes?”

Groot was back. She was standing there puzzled and Adriana cried out, seeing the cane she was holding.

“How?”

“If I overstepped my boundaries, I apologize. I just thought…I want you to understand, that your secret is safe with me.”

“My secret? I see. Very observant. “Adriana said bitterly. No, no, no. This wasn’t happening.

“Adriana. Please?”

Adriana sighed and stepped aside.

“Come in.”

Leaning against the closed door Adriana eyed Groot, not really knowing what to say. She had been hiding her transtibial prosthesis from the world, since her accident more than twenty years ago. It was a miracle that for all these years, no one had found out about her condition. She wasn’t ashamed of being an amputee, she just didn’t want to relive the painful past through the pages of some gossip rag.

“How do you know?” she asked at last.

“I’m an orthopedic surgeon, Adriana. I recognize the signs.”

“You? A doctor? You don’t…”

“Look like a doctor? We don’t all look alike you know. There are the tall, sophisticated ones like Yvonne and then there is my kind. The short, rugged, construction worker type. Don’t worry I’ve heard it all before.”

Groot didn’t sound offended, her voice and face remained cool and collected.

“That’s not what I meant to insinuate, Groot. I am many things but being a snob is not one of them.”

“I apologize, again.” Groot said. “I can leave if you wish me to. Or I can help you.”

“Help me?”


“Showering? Can this be any more humiliating?”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking.” Groot bowed her head and placed the cane on the bed. She readied to
leave. “I’ll have someone pick you up in the morning and drive you home. Good night, Adriana.”

Groot reached for the door handle, but Adriana was blocking the way out.

“Wait. Where are you going?”

“I embarrassed you and myself with my insensitive behavior. I don’t understand what’s happening, Adriana. We hardly know each other and I’m acting like…like I have the right to take care of you.”

“I want to sculpt you.”

“You…What?”

“I want to sculpt you, Groot.” Adriana repeated. “I accept your help, but first you have to agree to be my model.”

“I’m not exactly following you, Adriana. Why would someone like you want to sculpt someone like me?”

“Because you are beautiful, Groot. You intrigue me. And possibly the only way to have you, is to create your image out of marble.”

Adriana hadn’t meant to say out that loud, and definitely not the last part, but there it was, she had said it. The ball was in Groot’s court now.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

We are going somewhere, aren't we...

32.
Groot was not a talker. She had never been. She was a thinker. An observer. And a listener. A great one at that. What did Adriana call her? The strong, silent type? That wasn’t new, she’d heard that before. Adriana also called her beautiful. An adjective, no one else would use to describe Groot. Not even her late wife. But then again, Adriana was an artist and perhaps they see things differently from others. Groot was handsome, at least that’s how Sarah described her. And Groot was ok with that. Mostly because she was in love with Sarah and the fact that Mr. Darcy referred to Lizzy Bennet as handsome was reassuring too. Groot adored Jane Austen. Hardly anyone knew that, as she never advertised it, it was her well-kept secret. She also adored Adriana Wallace which wasn’t much of a secret. Sarah often teased her about it and there was no jealousy involved. That’s how they rolled. After the rocky start, their relationship was built on trust and mutual respect. Then five months prior to her sudden death, Sarah left Groot. She fell in love with someone, who wasn’t just handsome but beautiful and talked a great deal. Apparently, the strong and silent type had stopped being appealing. At that time they both worked for the Doctors Without Borders organization, they travelled a lot, many times separately, so Sarah’s departure didn’t raise any red flags. No one realized that the dream couple many envied had broken up. And because Groot wasn’t a talker, she didn’t tell anyone. She still loved Sarah. She couldn’t be mad at her. Instead she was angry with herself for missing the signs of a failing marriage. For being clueless. She didn’t tell anyone when Sarah called her crying, just one day before she died. Sarah had regretted her decision and she wanted to come back. She had begged Groot to forgive her but Groot couldn’t just say yes. She asked for some time to think it over. Time, which they didn’t have, as Sarah’s convoy was blown up in Iraq the following day. Groot was devastated, yet she didn’t talk about it. Sarah was dead. No one needed to know. Lately she seriously toyed with the idea of telling Miranda the truth but she couldn’t justify it. The past should stay where it belonged. In the past. Groot wasn’t a talker. But Adriana had thrown the ball in her court and she had to do something. Clumsily, she fumbled the ball and said the most ridiculous thing she could have thought of.

“I snore. And quite possibly, I am not a good lover.”

“I don’t mind sleeping with earplugs.” Adriana answered thoughtfully, without missing a beat. “And sex? It has been so long ago, that I would have to Google it to know what it means.”

“I don’t know why I said that. I’m sorry Adriana. This evening is an endless apology because I can’t seem to keep my mouth shut.”

“I appreciate the way you communicate. I’m too old and already lost too much time running around in circles. I’m interested in you, Groot.” She limped to the bed and carefully lowered herself to the firm mattress. Releasing a deep sigh, she continued.

“I wasn’t looking for romance. I was content in my ordinary, boring life. Until I met you. Is that a cliché? Yes, perhaps the worst cliché ever. But right now I don’t want to think of the future or where this is going. I simply want to take of this damn prosthesis, take a shower and eat some chocolate.
And sleep. Preferably next to you, because I’m curious how bad that snore is.”

It turned out, that it wasn’t that bad at all. It was soothing almost like a lullaby, it lulled Adriana into a deep, relaxing sleep. They kept their distance in the bed, aware of each other’s presence, taking comfort from it but there was no cuddling, no touching, accidental or intentional. Just two adults, getting a well-deserved sleep, after spending too many nights sleepless.

“Thank you, for making this almost a pleasant experience.”

Adriana touched Groot’s shoulder lightly, making the kneeling woman look up at her. They were getting ready for leave the bedroom and join the others downstairs for breakfast. Groot was attaching Adriana’s prosthesis, her demeanor casual, as if it were her every day routine. She smiled coyly.

“Almost? And here I thought I was rocking this.”

“You are. No one, other than my medical care team has seen me like this before. I should feel exposed, mortified even, and I do to some degree, but mostly I am relieved. It would have been torture getting through the night without your help. I’m impressed by your skills and extremely disappointed at the same time.”

“Disappointed?” Groot was confused. What did she do wrong?

Adriana wrinkled her nose and smiled mischievously, which made her look kind of pixy like.

“Yes. Finding out that you are not an international spy, a secret agent is a downer.”

“Why would you think that…let me guess, the girls. Although they have a vivid imagination, it’s not entirely made up. Not that I am a spy by any means, more like someone who’s responsible for their safety and handles any security issues, concerning the family. Miranda is a celebrity, you of all people can relate to the trouble that comes with fame sometimes. She and the girls have been targets of bad intentions through the years and it was, it is, my responsibility to make sure those intentions stay exactly that. Intentions. It doesn’t bother me if people only see me as Miranda Priestly’s security personnel.”

“Amazing. How did you acquire the knowledge to do that?”

“When I came to New York, I had no money and for a short period of time I lived on the street. Then I met someone who was willing to give me a chance and I started to work for him. A retired marine, who owned a security firm, employing other retired professionals from almost every field you can think of. I was his PA kind of. I learnt a lot from him and was grateful for his help but we both knew it wasn’t what I was interested in. Anyway, I still have my connections from those times. I also developed a very effective network through my recent clients. There, all done.”

Groot stood and handed Adriana a pair of trousers which, along with other perfectly fitting clothes, had miraculously appeared at the doorstep by the morning. Obviously one of Miranda’s minions had an early morning start.

“Your client? What exactly you do?”

“I have a small company. We do research, focusing on artificial limbs. Bionic prosthesis. Rarely, I will still perform surgeries but mostly research is what I do.”

“You are full of surprises. You amaze me over and over again.”

Adriana finished dressing and looked around, searchingly. She spotted the item she was looking for,
laying on the dresser. She grabbed the platinum necklace and turned to Groot.

“Would you, please?”

Groot carefully placed the necklace around the artist’s neck and clipped it. She examined the pendant, it looked vaguely familiar.

“It’s a beautiful design. It reminds me of something I’ve seen before, but I can’t place it.”

Adriana shrugged, almost too nonchalantly.

“It’s nothing unique. I would assume there are other pieces like this all over the world. I’m ready. Shall we go?”

With one last look at the pendant, Groot nodded and offered her arm.

“We shall, milady.”

The breakfast, similar to dinner, started nice and quiet. Tasty food, relaxed conversation. The dogs were chewing on their fake bones in the corner. Idyllic. Perfect. Then Cassidy made a comment about how her art class was muuuuch better than Caroline’s writing class. That led to an almost heated but definitely loud argument between the twins.

“You don’t like art.” said Caroline. “You just want to suck up to Andy and Adriana.”

“Take it back.” whined Cassidy. “I do love art.”

“You do now?” asked Groot skeptically. “The last time I took you to a gallery and attempted to explain the magic of art you ran around mimicking an airplane, shouting magical fart, magical fart. I’m still wondering why I’d thought it was good idea to take you.”

“Thanks for the support, Groot.” Cassidy turned to Adriana and explained. “I was only four and bored. Now I know my true calling. I’m going to be an artist.”


“Mooooom. Tell her to take it back”

“Caroline?” Miranda raised an eyebrow

“Fine.” Huffed Caroline “I take it back. Big deal. I’m going to be a writer. A famous one. I am going to collect art pieces.” She stuck her tongue at Cassidy and added “But nothing from you. Only valuable ones, something from Adriana. Or Andy.”

“The material girl.” murmured Miranda, shaking her head.

“You have a good taste kiddo” said Groot. “I own some of Adriana’s statues. They are marvelous. And as for the value, priceless”

“I second that.” Andy glanced at Adriana who was listening the conversation, openly amused. “She is one of the most influential contemporary artist, not only in the US but in the world. You can call yourself extremely fortunate if you own any of her pieces.”

A light blush covered Adriana’s face, she was overwhelmed by the kind words she was receiving. She was surrounded by good people, people who had the potential to become friends, one of them something more. Could she trust them? She took a deep breath and made her decision.
“Then I suppose you are extremely fortunate, dear.” She told Andy. “Because you do own something from me.”

Five pairs of eyes stared at her at once. Adriana chuckled, seeing their stunned expression. Pointing to Andy’s hand she clarified deftly.

“Your engagement ring.”

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